

# *Buddhism under the Communists*

By HOLMES WELCH

THIS article offers a preliminary estimate of what has happened to Buddhists and Buddhist organisations in mainland China during the eleven years since the Chinese People's Republic was founded. Much of the data belongs to the year 1958 when the most rapid changes occurred. Early in 1959, the China mainland press, from which nearly all the data comes, began to give less news on Buddhism. In November 1959 the most important single source, *Modern Buddhism*, was withdrawn from general circulation abroad. Several sentences in the October number,<sup>1</sup> suggest that Peking had become increasingly sensitive to stories of a persecution of Buddhism, and had resolved that the mainland press, at least, would not supply any more evidence of it. The picture is fairly complete, however, with the evidence already in hand.

## *Changes in the Operation of the Monasteries*

There has never been any ecclesiastical organisation in China that embraced all Buddhist monks or even all the monks of a given sect. Each monastery has traditionally been autonomous, all authority resting in the hands of the abbot. So far as we know, there has been no formal change in this system. But we shall see that Peking through its local government apparatus and through the Chinese Buddhist Association (which will be discussed below), has exercised increasingly tight control over everything that takes place inside the monasteries and among lay devotees. Using this control, it has transformed the life of the monks.

Until 1950 monasteries derived most of their income from land holdings, which, in many cases, had been presented to them at the time of their foundation by the Emperor or added later by wealthy patrons.

<sup>1</sup> "Our enemies abroad are still slandering that our Party and government are persecuting the Buddhist religion. . . . What they do is merely to close their eyes and slander our great religious policy. We are not afraid of the slanders of enemies." (*Modern Buddhism*, hereafter abbreviated as M. B., October 1959, p. 22.) Compare the often defensive tone of Shirob Jaltso's article in the same issue, and Shirob's remark to the National People's Congress (NPC) in April 1960, where he exposed "the shameless slander of the liars of the western capitalist countries who clamoured that there was no freedom of religion in China" (New China News Agency hereafter abbreviated as NCNA, Peking, April 5, 1960). Curiously enough this remark does not seem to have been included in the text published by the *Jen-min Jih-pao* (*People's Daily*). Compare *Survey of the China Mainland Press*, hereafter abbreviated as SCMP, 2235/7 and *Current Background*, hereafter abbreviated as CB, 627/26, both published by the U.S. Consulate-General, Hong Kong.

For many centuries monks in China have ignored the begging rule which, in Hinayana countries, requires them to go from house to house each day with their begging bowls. Instead, pious Chinese peasants have gone to the monasteries to make altar offerings, usually in the form of produce, or offered such produce to the monks when they came to perform some religious service. The rich, besides land, have donated large sums of money for building, decoration and repairs, and smaller sums for the performance of religious services.

The social changes in China over the past ten years have completely altered this picture. Land reform has stripped the monasteries of most of their land. Chapter 2, section 3, of the Land Reform Act of June 1950, called for the confiscation of agricultural land belonging to Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist temples and monasteries; section 5 provided that monks and nuns should receive the same distribution of land as ordinary farmers. We know that in one case 109 monks received 124 *mou*,<sup>2</sup> and that in another, over ninety monks received 85 *mou*.<sup>3</sup> In each case the figure is for the number of monks in the monastery after land distribution: before land distribution their number had been much greater. One monastery, for example, which had 800 monks before land reform had 200 when it was over.<sup>4</sup> This was partly because many of them returned to lay life when it became clear that they would have to work as hard inside the monastery as outside it; partly because even for those who were prepared to face this prospect, the produce of the land allotted was insufficient; and partly because of an early propaganda drive to get the monks back into the mainstream of production. Those who stayed on in the monasteries formed mutual aid teams in 1954; in 1956 they joined co-operatives; and in 1958 communes. This time-table was not universal; there were wide variations from area to area. Furthermore, not all the monks in a given institution would join the mutual aid or production team at the same time. Some lived off their savings, or looked to their younger brethren for support. Others withheld their land from collective production, preferring to cultivate it on their own. They, however, were subjected to economic pressure, for the government provided tools, seed and other assistance only for the mutual aid or production teams.

Monks in the city were organised to set up light industries on the monastery premises (like dyeing or weaving co-operatives), or they joined such enterprises outside the monastery and then handed over the empty floor-space to local factories and welfare organisations. In both

<sup>2</sup> M. B., October 1958, p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> M. B., November 1958, p. 31. Here the number of monks is given as sixty, but earlier it was over ninety (see *Nan-yang Jih-pao*, June 11, 1958).

<sup>4</sup> M. B., October 1958, p. 27.

city and country, when nearly all the monks of a monastery had left it and yet the government considered it worth preserving as a cultural monument, two or three monks would be kept on to maintain and operate the premises as a state-owned enterprise, earning the wages of skilled workers. They were not allowed to accept donations from visitors.

State subsidies are said to have been given to elderly and disabled monks and to those who were "unable to make both ends meet" with their production resources. It is stated that all such monks in Peking have received a subsidy and it is likely that the same applies to "patriotic" monks in other places.<sup>5</sup> Most of the elderly and disabled, however, seem to be supported by the able-bodied, whom they sometimes outnumber, thus creating a heavy burden. Hence, particularly since the beginning of 1958, more and more of them have had to participate in hard manual labour, "a sight that moved some of the farmers to tears."<sup>6</sup>

The big step-up in pressure to participate in production came in 1958. That year monks all over China took pledges to achieve self-sufficiency "within one or two years."<sup>7</sup> This meant that those who had not yet joined the monastery co-operative must join it; those who were already members must work harder; and that everyone must participate in various campaigns like iron-smelting, afforestation, scrap collection, water conservancy, fertiliser production, and so on. It was also announced that "the time spent on religion must be shortened and religious life must be conditioned by productive labour."<sup>8</sup> In some cases, prayers were read and the *dharma* expounded during work-breaks in the fields. Often minimum requirements were set for working-time, like seven to nine hours a day, or 260 days a year. The stepped-up pressure to engage in production gave new meaning to the old Zen phrase (now often quoted by the Communists): "The day that you do not work, you do not eat." Formerly this meant menial work around the monastery—drawing water, chopping wood, cleaning and sweeping. It did not mean labour in the fields. Thus at the Nan-yüeh monastery only one out of the 103 monks "understood agricultural techniques" when they organised their co-operative.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *China News Service*, Peking, September 2, 1955 (see SCMP 1128/10), etc.; but compare M. B. September 1958, p. 27, where the Buddhists and Taoists of Peking pledge themselves to assist sick and aged Buddhists and Taoists who are unable to work.

<sup>6</sup> M. B., December 1958, p. 28. When the co-operative at Mt. Nan-yüeh was set up in February 1957 only twenty-two of the eighty-three monks were capable of full-time labour (M. B., November 1958, p. 28).

<sup>7</sup> e.g., M. B., June 1958, p. 24; M. B., July 1958, pp. 18, 19.

<sup>8</sup> *Kweichow Jih-pao*, July 10, 1958, p. 1. Cf. pledge of Peking Buddhists and Taoists that "personal religious life should not affect production" M. B. September 1958, p. 27.

<sup>9</sup> M. B., June 1958, p. 26. There are several inconsistencies between the account given here and that in M. B., November 1958, p. 28.

Offerings for the performance of religious services have been prohibited since at least as early as 1958 on the grounds that they amount to cheating the people with superstitious practices. Large donations from rich patrons have also ceased, since there are no more rich patrons. Monasteries are not allowed to loan money as they used to do. A few of the country monasteries continue to derive income from serving as hostels and from small-scale enterprises like the manufacture of drugs, but, on the whole, their economic situation has greatly deteriorated.

The year 1958 also saw a step-up in pressure on monks to attend political "study" classes. Some have been weekly, some two or three times a week, some daily. At these classes, as well as in "homework" periods, the monks study the works of Mao Tse-tung and other Chinese Communist leaders, the Marxist classics and the daily newspapers; they are lectured on the national campaign of the moment; they carry out "self-remoulding"; they "rid themselves of dirty things harboured against Socialism" through self-criticism and struggle; and they launch campaigns to "surrender their hearts to the Party."<sup>10</sup> The latter can lead to an impressive ceremony by which success in "self-remoulding" is given formal recognition.

With manual labour by day and study by night, the distinction between monks and laity in China has become largely historical: the communal dormitory in which the monks live and the mess hall in which they eat were once their monastery.

### *Schools and Publications*

The many Buddhist schools, clinics and other welfare enterprises that used to be attached to monasteries or organised by Buddhist laymen have, it appears, now been completely dissolved or absorbed by the government apparatus. This has resulted in part from the government's insistence on a monopoly of education and in part because the monasteries, stripped of their old sources of revenue, have not had the means to continue their traditional benevolent activities.

The only Buddhist school in China today is the Chinese Buddhist Institute, founded on September 28, 1956, by the Chinese Buddhist Association, which we shall discuss in a moment. Housed in the Fa Yuan Monastery in Peking, it offers a two-year course for monastery administrative workers and a four-year course for scholars and *dharma* masters (with studies in Tibetan and Pali, as well as in Chinese). The first class graduated in 1958. The enrolment, which has run between 110 and 120, includes monks, nuns and laymen. School fees and all living expenses are paid by the Buddhist Association. Students have,

<sup>10</sup> Peking *Kuang-ming Jih-pao*, August 8, 1958 (SCMP, 1837/39); M. B., June 1958, p. 27; *ibid.*, September 1958, p. 27; December 1958, p. 33.

like those in other schools, engaged in manual labour. Half of them belong to a "transportation brigade" that does railway loading work. Political studies presumably play a large role in the curriculum.

The picture is similar for Buddhist periodicals. Whereas formerly there was a great variety, published in various parts of China, now there seem to be only two, both monthlies: *Modern Buddhism*, issued in Peking, and *Hung Hua*, issued in Shanghai. *Modern Buddhism* began publication in 1950 and was taken over by the Chinese Buddhist Association in 1953. In 1957 it was being printed in 5,000 copies. It is circulated among monasteries and lay devotees. About two-thirds of the articles are doctrinal, without political content. The other third is either purely political (e.g., reprints of *People's Daily* editorials) or reports on the progress that Buddhists are making in carrying out the economic and political tasks assigned to them by the government (particularly participation in manual labour and production). Since *Modern Buddhism* reports various joint activities of Buddhists and Taoists, it also serves to some extent as a vehicle for the latter, who have no national organ.

#### *The Chinese Buddhist Association*

The Chinese Buddhist Association was established at a meeting of 121 delegates held in Peking from May 29 to June 3, 1953. Its objectives, according to a resolution passed at the meeting, were:

1. "To unite the Buddhists of China so that they might participate under the leadership of the People's Government in the movement to love the fatherland and defend peace;
2. "To help the People's Government thoroughly carry out the policy of freedom of religious belief;
3. "To link up with Buddhists in various places in order to develop the excellent traditions of Buddhism."<sup>11</sup>

Though these were the three objectives formally adopted, the conferees also resolved "to continue distinguishing friend from foe in thought and action, to eliminate the spies and special agents sent by the imperialists and Chiang Kai-shek's bandit clique, and to eliminate the reactionary secret society elements that try to take cover under the cloak of Buddhism."<sup>12</sup> The meeting elected a chairman, four honorary chairmen, seven vice-chairmen, a secretary-general, three deputy secretaries-general, eighteen members of a standing committee, and ninety-three directors. Three of the four honorary chairmen were non-Chinese: the Dalai and Panchen Lamas and the Grand Lama of Inner Mongolia, Living Buddha Chagangogun. The fourth was the 113-year-old abbot

<sup>11</sup> NCNA, Peking, June 8, 1953 (see SCMP 585/11-16).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

Hsu Yun.<sup>13</sup> The chairman was a monk from Chekiang, Yuan Ying, who died four months later and was succeeded by Shirob Jaltso, an elderly lama and vice-governor of Tsinghai. All these seem to have been front men; we may assume (though the by-laws of the Buddhist Association have never been published) that all executive authority lay in the hands of the secretary-general, Chao P'u-ch'u.<sup>14</sup> Nearly half of the sixty-eight monk directors were Tibetan or Mongolian. It seems clear that throughout the proceedings of the founding conference Tibetans were given a prominent role.

The by-laws contained a prohibition against establishing provincial branches, which may have been due to the government's fear that they could become centres of opposition if they were established before the necessary organising work had been carried out. It should be noted that this prohibition did not extend to autonomous areas, since the Tibet branch of the Chinese Buddhist Association was formally inaugurated in Lhasa on October 6, 1956. Possibly in the case of minorities the Party's fear of opposition may have been outweighed by the desire to win over local religious leaders through giving them an important role in some national association. This would have been particularly true in Tibet, where the Communist Party's policy from 1951 to 1959 was to utilise rather than to liquidate the "upper strata." By the spring of 1957 branches had been established for two autonomous *chou* in Yunnan and a branch was in the planning stage for Inner Mongolia.

The Buddhist Association was relatively inactive during the first three years of its existence. It set up its headquarters at the Kuang Chi Monastery in Peking and, as mentioned above, took over the office of *Modern Buddhism*. Meetings were held on December 18, 1954 (of the standing committee); August 16-31, 1955 (plenary board of directors); and March 26-31, 1957 (second national conference). At this last meeting the by-laws were amended to provide for establishing, where necessary, local branches of the association in provinces and major

<sup>13</sup> Probably regarded by a majority of Chinese as the most distinguished monk in China. Though he refused to give the Communists the co-operation they wanted, he was still an honorary chairman of the Buddhist Association when he died in October 1959. Chagangogun died in May 1957, but had not been replaced as of May 1959. The Dalai Lama, though he fled to India in March 1959, continues to hold the position given him by Peking.

<sup>14</sup> Before 1949, he was a businessman who worked with the International Red Cross. In 1950 the new government appointed him Deputy Director of the Civil Affairs Department of the East China Military and Administrative Committee and, a year later, made him Deputy Director of the M.A.C.'s Personnel Department. Since he became Secretary-General of the Buddhist Association in 1953, he has been extremely active in the whole range of united front activities. He is a deputy from Anhwei to the second National People's Congress; a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) National Committee; and his position is sufficiently high so that he attended the seventeenth meeting of the Supreme State Conference on August 24, 1959. I have seen no record of his membership in the Chinese Communist Party, but he has proved himself a trusted Party supporter.

cities, though not at the *hsien* level or below. It was explained that just as in 1953 provincial branches had not been advisable, now *hsien* branches were not advisable.<sup>15</sup>

A whole series of branches was then established (Kansu, Shansi, Liaoning, Kweiyang, Nanchang, Canton, Wu-t'ai Shan, etc.). Most of them had an organisation parallel to that of the parent body. Their inauguration was usually preceded by "elevation of political awareness, exposure of rightists hiding under the cloak of Buddhism, and purification and consolidation of Buddhist circles."<sup>16</sup> Late in 1957 the Buddhist Association organised a campaign of "socialist education" which was part of the nation-wide "rectification" campaign. Five regional forums were held in the spring of 1958, which were followed by forums at the provincial, municipal, and even at the *hsien* level. At each level rightist monks were attacked and "forced to admit their guilt," while some form of "patriotic compact" was adopted, promising to accept the leadership of the Communist Party and to take the Socialist road.<sup>17</sup> In 1959 Buddhist study groups took as their central theme the Communist Party's version of the Tibetan rebellion.<sup>18</sup> This would probably not have been necessary unless there had been sympathy for the rebels among Chinese Buddhists.

### *The Remoulding of Buddhism*

The Chinese Buddhist Association has been used primarily as an instrument for remoulding Buddhism to suit the needs of the government, *i.e.*, for completing the "socialisation" of monasteries; limiting religious activities; revising Buddhist doctrine; purging anti-party elements; and mobilising Buddhists to participate in national campaigns. We have discussed the "socialisation" of monasteries. Now we shall briefly touch on the rest.

In limitation of religious activities, the particular targets have been practices that (1) are "superstitious," (2) "cheat the masses," (3) interfere with production and waste produce, or (4) "protect bad people."

The Buddhist Association has condemned the "superstitious belief in spirits and the heterodox belief in or practice of divination and healing."<sup>19</sup> It has also condemned such old Chinese Buddhist customs as burning paper-money, celebration of "superstitious festivals," and

<sup>15</sup> NCNA, Peking, March 26 and 31 (SCMP 1500/11 and 1503/10). M. B., May 1957, pp. 30-31, as quoted by *China News Analysis* 221/5.

<sup>16</sup> M. B., November 1958, p. 23; *cf.* September 1958, p. 9, etc.

<sup>17</sup> M. B., October 1958, p. 21; September 1958, p. 27; *Kirin Jih-pao*, June 20, 1958 (see SCMP 1834/10) etc.

<sup>18</sup> M. B., October 1959, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> M. B., February 1958, p. 32. *Cf.* *Tsinghai Jih-pao*, October 17, 1958 (see CB 549/5); October 23, 1958 (see SCMP 1932/19).

sacrifice to the hungry ghosts.<sup>20</sup> To accept donations in connection with these and other ceremonies is considered "cheating the masses."<sup>21</sup>

Chinese festivals, with their great outlays of food and decoration, constitute waste of produce, while prolonged prayer constitutes interference with production.<sup>22</sup>

Two forms of "protecting bad people" have been specified. The first is "indiscriminate recruitment of disciples" by a monk or a monastery. The second is offering hospitality to travelling monks. Monasteries are not permitted to receive as members "landlords, counter-revolutionaries, persons under surveillance, members of heterodox Taoist sects or societies, and all those who are anti-Socialist."<sup>23</sup> The abbot of one famous institution was arrested for, among other reasons, using the monastery as a place to shelter such people.<sup>24</sup> Presumably the only way in which a monk can be sure that he is not recruiting an "anti-Socialist" is to ask the Party. Those novices who are most likely to have Party approval would seem least likely to make good monks.

A pledge not to offer hospitality to travelling monks has been included in many of the "patriotic compacts."<sup>25</sup> Such monks are evidently objectionable to the government both because they are parasites, not engaged in production, and because they accept alms from devout believers. They are also independent individuals who, like fortune tellers, disturb the atmosphere of regimentation. One reference to their "suspicious behaviour" suggests that the government may believe they have engaged in espionage and such counter-revolutionary activities as, for example, telling persons in one area about conditions in another.<sup>26</sup>

As to actual suppression of "bad people" within Buddhist circles, reliable information is hard to come by. Stories have long been current about wholesale arrests and executions of abbots during land reform, the presentation of anti-Buddhist exhibits and films, and various kinds of atrocities. The Buddhist Association's proclaimed task of eliminating spies and special agents indicates that there has been some truth in all this, but the evidence to be found in the Chinese Press is rather limited. "Struggle meetings" in which Buddhist priests are violently confronted at mass rallies by individuals who claim to have been

<sup>20</sup> M. B., September 1958, p. 28.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*; M. B., December 1958, p. 33; *Kirin Jih-pao*, June 20, 1958 (see SCMP 1834/11); *Kweichow Jih-pao*, July 10, 1958, p. 1. In October 1959 Shirob Jaltsso protested that there was freedom for people to give and for monks to accept "legitimate alms and offerings," but almost in the same breath he condemned "using Buddha as a pretence for making money." M. B., October 1959, pp. 12-13).

<sup>22</sup> M. B., September 1958, p. 28; July 1959, p. 34; December 1958, p. 33; *Kweichow Jih-pao*, July 10, 1958, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> M. B., December 1958, p. 33.

<sup>24</sup> *Nan-fang Jih-pao*, June 11, 1958 (see CB 510/22).

<sup>25</sup> e.g., M. B., June 1958, p. 23.

<sup>26</sup> M. B., September 1958, p. 28; *Kweichow Jih-pao*, July 10, 1958, p. 1.

wronged by them have only been reported from Tibetan areas. Numerous "rightist" laymen and monks were "exposed" in 1957-58, but there was usually no indication of what punishment they received. In three instances, however, there were actual arrests. Pen Huan, Abbot of the famous Nan Hua Monastery in northern Kwangtung Province, was arrested in June 1958, along with one other monk, and neither of them has been heard of since.<sup>27</sup> In August 1958 the abbot of a monastery in Tsamkong was arrested as former head of the Kwei Ken Tao and sentenced to five years in prison.<sup>28</sup> A Kiangsi abbot was arrested in the same month, also as head of a reactionary Taoist sect.<sup>29</sup> The Communist Party claims to be trying to purify Buddhism of infiltrators from such sects. It is an interesting fact that, at the same time, the Buddhist Association has been promoting joint activities by Buddhists and Taoists (e.g., joint co-operatives and joint study) and even with other religions.<sup>30</sup>

The revision of Buddhist doctrine that has been promoted by the Buddhist Association does not fall within the scope of this article. It has, however, been fundamental. Buddhists have not only been urged to "oppose superstitious belief in spirits," but also to put love of country above love of religion.<sup>31</sup> They have learned that it accords with Buddhist teaching to kill counter-revolutionaries and imperialists; "we want to kill all the war-provoking devils in defence of world peace—this is the Buddhist and Taoist doctrine of genuine mercy."<sup>32</sup> Mao Tse-tung is a Living Buddha,<sup>33</sup> Socialist society is the "Western Paradise on earth"<sup>34</sup>; and "only under the Communist Party can the best traditions of Buddhism . . . be realised."<sup>35</sup> Most fundamental of all is the Party's insistence that the Buddhist must seek salvation in material progress.

### *Preservation of Buddhist Culture*

Not all the policies of the Peking government would provoke the criticism of conservative Buddhists, particularly in the field of art and

<sup>27</sup> *Nan-fang Jih-pao*, June 11, 1958 (see also CB 510/21 *et seq.*).

<sup>28</sup> M. B., November 1958, p. 34.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Kuang-ming Jih-pao*, August 8, 1958 (see SCMP 1837/39); M. B., October 1958, p. 34; December 1958, pp. 30-32; etc.

<sup>31</sup> NCNA February 4, 1958 (see SCMP 1759/20) *cf.* NCNA Peking, March 11, 1958 (see SCMP 1733/1).

<sup>32</sup> M. B., August 1958, p. 28. *Cf.* poem by *dharma* master Hsin-tao in M. B., December 1958, p. 31.

<sup>33</sup> NCNA Peking, October 14, 1959 (see SCMP 2120/9). In a not dissimilar vein, NCNA Lhasa, August 24, 1960, reported that at a harvest festival, one "former woman serf . . . went over to a field, plucked a sheaf of barley ears, and laid it before the portrait of Chairman Mao Tse-tung."

<sup>34</sup> M. B., October 1958, p. 21.

<sup>35</sup> M. B., September 1958, p. 27. *Cf.* the statement alleged to have been made in the last will and testament of Yuan Ying, Chairman of the Chinese Buddhist Association, that "participation in patriotic movements and efforts for world peace . . . are the sole foundation on which Buddhists may expect to become Buddhas," (M. B., September 1956, p. 27).

literature. Indeed one might say that the restoration of Buddhist cultural monuments in China since 1950 has been as impressive as the transformation of the practices and beliefs that originally created them. Although this work has been largely carried out by the state and at the state's expense, the Chinese Buddhist Association has presumably played an advisory role.

The most important work has been done on Buddhist buildings and caves. The restoration of at least twenty sets of buildings and five caves, all of outstanding historical or artistic importance, has been reported since it was called for in a Party directive of June 1950. The more famous Buddhist sites are probably in better condition now than they have been for many centuries.

Not many Chinese Buddhist monasteries have as immediate a significance for foreign Buddhists as, for example, the Hsuan Chung Monastery in Shansi, which is sacred to the Shinshu Buddhists of Japan: this monastery was rebuilt and enlarged in 1954-56 specifically because of its international significance.<sup>86</sup> However, all newly restored Buddhist monuments can be and have been successfully used to impress upon visiting Buddhists the flourishing state of Buddhism in China.<sup>87</sup> It is probably a measure of the Party's belief in the importance of such visitors that it has been ready to divert large sums from capital construction for repairing Buddhist monuments. Repairs at the Ling Yin Monastery in Hangchow, for instance, took six years and cost 500 thousand *yuan*. In May 1959, 200 artisans started renovating the Kumbum Monastery near Sining (although the roofs had already been regilded some five years earlier) and were not expected to be finished until 1960. The government has not merely restored old buildings, but has constructed what it claims to be the first major new Buddhist monument of this century: the thirteen-storeyed pagoda near Peking, the original of which was destroyed at the end of the Ch'ing dynasty and which is now to house the Buddha tooth relic. The government has even prosecuted farmers for "destroying national cultural treasures" when they used bricks from old temples for construction purposes.<sup>88</sup> (It does not, however, appear to have prosecuted those cadres "whose cultural level was not very

<sup>86</sup> M. B., September 1956, pp. 12-15.

<sup>87</sup> What such visitors do not realise is that most of the Buddhist buildings in China have since 1950 simply been confiscated by the government and turned into schools, nurseries, barns, factories and warehouses. Images have been melted down as scrap-metal or collected for sale as curios. Even in the case of buildings that are intact, most appear to have been preserved purely as cultural monuments. Only a very few have continued to function as monasteries and in them are collected the remaining monks from institutions that have been closed down.

<sup>88</sup> *Kuang-ming Jih-pao*, September 23, 1956, p. 1.

high" and who demolished some famous pagodas in Chekiang to get bricks for road building.)<sup>39</sup>

Buddhist scholarship has also been promoted. Work on a Chinese Buddhist encyclopedia was begun in 1956 (although its publication, scheduled for 1958, has not yet been announced) and at the same time work commenced on a section about Buddhism in China for the *International Buddhist Encyclopedia* under compilation in Ceylon. Vast numbers of Buddhist sutras, manuscripts, paintings, tablets, and printing blocks have been collected and many reproductions as well as photographs of newly restored cultural monuments have been published. The Ching Ling Text Society has been revived in Nanking.

#### *Promotion of Contact with Buddhists Abroad*

Since contact between Chinese and foreign Buddhists was first renewed in 1952, the Chinese People's Government has systematically used Buddhism to convince foreign Buddhists that China is a friendly country that has a similar culture and loves peace; and to convince them that if their own countries should have Communist governments, Buddhism would flourish as never before. Contacts have taken many forms. The commonest has been Buddhist delegations, either for purely sightseeing purposes, or to accompany the gift or loan of a sacred relic, or in connection with an international conference. Another form of contact has been work on some common cause (like the return to China of the remains of Chinese who died in Japan during the war).

There have been exchanges of Buddhist visitors with the following countries, listed in the order of the number of delegations to and from: Burma, Ceylon, Cambodia, India, Japan, Nepal, Thailand and North Vietnam. Many visitors have left China praising the Peking government for its support of Buddhism and its policy of "freedom of religious belief." A particularly striking case was that of Amritananda, Nepalese Vice-President of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, who visited China in July and August 1959, only four months after the suppression of the Tibetan rebellion across Nepal's northern border. Amritananda was given an extended tour of Buddhist showplaces in east and northeast China and, according to NCNA, responded with such statements as: "Before coming to China there were doubts in my mind: in the course of my present tour I have learned for myself not only of the rapid growth of industry and agriculture, but that there is genuine freedom of religious belief. . . . To provide a better life for the people conforms to the basic spirit of Buddhism, and this we have seen in China."<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> *Jen-min Jih-pao*, March 17, 1957, p. 8 (see *China News Analysis*, 221/6).

<sup>40</sup> NCNA Shenyang, August 2, 1959 (see SCMP 2072/35).

Most visitors, like Amritananda, stay longest in Peking, where they are shown around the Kuang Chi Monastery, the Yung Ho Lamasery and the Chinese Buddhist Institute. They see Buddhist services, impeccably performed, and often hold learned discussions of doctrine with the monks. Not a few visitors have had interviews with Mao and Chou, another indication of the importance that the régime attaches to such visits. Both in Peking and in the provinces, of course, visitors see only the showplaces, and even there the usual barriers exist to investigating the life and attitudes of the remaining monks.

Representing China at international religious conferences has been an important function of the Buddhist Association. It has sent delegates to attend the World Buddhist Fellowship Conferences. Leading monks have repeatedly made public statements, disseminated abroad by the NCNA, which have called for the liberation of Formosa, for U.S. troops to get out of Lebanon, for the establishment of normal relations with Japan, and for the defeat of imperialism in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Telegrams have been sent to parallel foreign organisations on every possible occasion. Buddhist meetings are held on international themes like the celebration of the October Revolution. All this is evidently designed to create the impression, both at home and abroad, that Buddhists are staunch supporters of government policy. It also plays a certain ancillary role in international diplomacy. Just as in 1958 the visit of a Cambodian Buddhist delegation to China preceded the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, so in 1960 the visit to Burma of a Chinese cultural delegation, whose deputy head was Chao P'u-ch'u (see note 14) preceded the Sino-Burmese boundary settlement.

### *Conclusions*

As we have seen, the Chinese Buddhist Association, like other units of the united front, plays a role (1) as a channel for transmitting party policy to Buddhist monks and laymen, (2) as a supervisory agent for seeing to it that Party policy is carried out, and (3) as an agency for entertaining foreign visitors who have an interest in Buddhism and for convincing them that it is flourishing in China as never before. Other Buddhist organisations play no special role for, including the monasteries, they have been integrated into the political and economic life of the rest of the country.

So far as I am aware, not a single avowed Buddhist holds a position of authority in the Party or government.

The days are past when the monastery was an attractive refuge from the troubles of the world. Neither inside it nor outside it is there now the leisure for meditation and prayer. The simple pietism of the common

people is discouraged, along with the material support they took comfort in providing for the monks. Even rebirth in the Western Paradise has been officially discredited on the basis that the Chinese Communist Party is building the Western Paradise here on earth. Since the government has now forbidden the "indiscriminate" recruitment of novices, the size of the Sangha in China will probably continue to shrink.<sup>41</sup> Since novices must be politically acceptable to the Party, its quality will probably continue to fall. It also appears that Buddhists will be increasingly encouraged to join with Taoists and others both in work and study, so that in the end the followers of all religions will belong to a single group that can be conveniently processed by the state. This will give greater play to the syncretistic tendencies that have long been present in Chinese Buddhism. Not only will the Sangha decline in size and quality, but purity of doctrine will be affected on one side by the old Chinese ideal of a single, all-embracing religion and on the other side by the Buddhist Association's efforts to sift and revise the teachings of Buddha.

We should note that despite these efforts by the Buddhist Association, the basic policy of the régime is not to revise Buddhism and transform it into Marxism-Leninism, but to let it die. There have, in fact, been warnings against trying to preserve religion over the long run by finding in it elements that are compatible with the official ideology, although the tactics now employed call for utilising such elements temporarily in united-front propaganda work.<sup>42</sup> A recent article in *Modern Buddhism*, for example, asserted that Buddhism represented a democratic, atheistic and dialectical revolt by the Kshatriya caste against Brahmin domination.

What are the chances that Buddhism will survive the Chinese Communist programme for its demise? They seem exceedingly small. Chinese Buddhism is at the end of a decline that began with the rise of neo-Confucianism in the Sung Dynasty. Now, more than ever before, it faces a hostile government without and ebbing vitality within. Perhaps martyrdom is less inspiring when people feel it is for a lost cause. In any case, there is no indication that the hard-driven people of China have been turning back towards Buddhism or are any more indignant over the persecution of monks than they have been over the removal of graves and the use of ancestor tablets for building latrines.

<sup>41</sup> According to the mainland Press the number of monks in China is 500,000, with 100,000,000 Buddhist believers (*Che-hsueh Yen-chiu (Philosophical Research)*, February 15, 1958—see CB 510/11; M. B., October 1959, p. 10). These figures are, in my opinion, far too high, even considering the 110,000 monks and nuns in Tibet (as of March 1960: see CB 626/15). In China proper, excluding minority areas, I doubt that there are more than 5,000 monks and nuns who continue, so far as they are allowed, to lead a monastic life.

<sup>42</sup> See "Atheists and Theists Can Co-operate Politically and Travel the Road to Socialism" by Chang Chih-i in *Che-hsueh Yen-chiu*, February 1958 (CB 510/18).

My own belief is that, twenty years from now, Buddhist scholarship will be active and Buddhist cultural monuments will continue to be preserved. A very small number of monks will still be performing services at the best-known monasteries, principally in Peking. Inter-course with Buddhists abroad, though it will have become more difficult, will not have ceased. But Buddhist attitudes and devotion, among the remaining monks as well as among laymen, will have been virtually eliminated. Buddhism, just a little less than two thousand years after it arrived in China, will be dead.