

3 CHAN MASTER XUYUN

THE EMBODIMENT OF AN IDEAL, THE TRANSMISSION OF A MODEL

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For more than twenty-six years, the famous master Yunmen Wenyan 雲門文偃 (864–949) led a community of five hundred monks at the Yunmen 雲門 Monastery in Guangdong, giving birth to the Yunmen school of Chan Buddhism. Yunmen was also one of the six large, public monasteries (*shifang conglin* 十方叢林)² of the Chan tradition restored by Master Xuyun 虛雲 (ca. 1864–1959) in South China in the first half of the twentieth century. And it was at Yunmen, in 2006, that I first noticed the particular devotion surrounding Xuyun. Images and statuettes of him, with their offerings of burning incense and fresh fruits, stood next to those of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas on the desks in the monks' rooms. A photograph of Xuyun graced the Patriarch Hall, and a large portrait of him hung above the altar in the Abbot's quarters (see Figure 3.1). Over the following years, I was to find images of Xuyun in many other Buddhist sites all over China.

1. The writing of this chapter has been made possible thanks to a postdoctoral fellowship offered by the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation: I wish to express my deepest gratitude to this generous institution.

2. The general division of Chinese Buddhist establishments into “public monasteries of the ten directions” and “hereditary temples” dates back to the Song period. See Morten Schlütter, *How Zen Became Zen: The Dispute Over Enlightenment and the Formation of Chan Buddhism in Song-dynasty China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 36–41; Griffith T. Foulk, “Myth, Ritual and Monastic Practice in Sung Ch'an Buddhism,” in *Religion and Society in T'ang and Sung China*, Patricia Buckley Ebrey and Peter N. Gregory, eds. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1993), 163–164.



FIGURE 3.1 Portrait of Xuyun on the main altar of the Abbot's quarters, Baochan Monastery, Anhui (copyright by the author, 2015).

At Yunmen, I also heard for the first time the many extraordinary anecdotes about Xuyun's life that monks told and retold to visitors, and discussed among themselves. Severe ascetic and miracle worker, enlightened master and eminent abbot, authoritative teacher and political martyr—the image of a modern-day saint (who allegedly lived to the age of 120) took shape through these stories. I soon discovered that the chief source for Xuyun's exemplary

status is the authoritative account of his life, which one can find today in bookshops in the People's Republic of China under the title *Annalistic Biography of Master Xuyun* (henceforth *nianpu*).³

The portrait that the *nianpu* offers of Xuyun is astonishing in its resemblance to the template of the ideal eminent monk in premodern times. The three main themes that characterize the collected biographies of eminent monks⁴—namely, asceticism, erudition, and thaumaturgy—are all equally present in the representation of Xuyun. It is thus not surprising that Xuyun is mentioned in the opening pages of the most exhaustive monograph devoted to medieval Buddhist hagiographical ideals.⁵ In fact, whether the *nianpu* likens Xuyun to an eminent monk of the past or to a Chan patriarch, his image is always idealized. The representation is smooth and polished, and devoid of any individual personality. Xuyun never engages in extravagant or doubtful acts, he has no enemies, he does not even share the weaknesses so often ascribed to members of the Chan school, such as a superior attitude or a tendency to sectarianism. The same idealized image of Xuyun is repeated in most Chinese studies (monographs and periodicals alike) on twentieth-century Buddhism, as the *nianpu* remains the most authoritative source on Xuyun to date. Since the 1960s, when a disciple published an English translation of this text,⁶ the same portrait of Xuyun has also been available to Western readers and practitioners.

3. The edition quoted in this chapter is Cen Xuelü 岑學呂, ed., *Xuyun fashi nianpu* 虛雲法師年譜 (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 1995) [*nianpu*]. On the *nianpu* (“annalistic biography”) literary genre, see Denis C. Twitchett, “Chinese Biographical Writing,” in *Historians of China and Japan*, W.G. Beasley and E.G. Pulleyblank, eds. (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 113; on the *zishu nianpu* (“annalistic autobiography”) literary genre, see Wu Pei-yi, *The Confucian's Progress: Autobiographical Writings in Traditional China* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 32–41. For an exhaustive bibliography on the Chinese biographical genre, see Harriet T. Zurndorfer, *China Bibliography: A Research Guide to Reference Works about China Past and Present*. Handbuch der Orientalistik, partie 4, vol. 10 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 140 and Chapter Four.

4. Particularly, the *Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳, T. 2059, vol. 50) compiled by Huijiao 慧皎 (497–554); the *Further Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, T. 2060, vol. 50) compiled by Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667); the *Song Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳, T. 2061, vol. 50) compiled by Zanning 贊寧 (919–1001).

5. John Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk: Buddhist Ideals in Medieval Chinese Hagiography* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 2–3. On sanctity in China at the beginning of the medieval period, see Robert F. Campany, *Making Transcendents: Ascetics and Social Memory in Early Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009).

6. The English translation by Lu Kuanyu 陸寬昱 (Charles Luk, 1898–1978) of the 1957 edition appeared in issues of *World Buddhism* magazine in the 1960s; Richard Hunn (d. 2006),

Xuyun's *nianpu* was initially published as an autobiography. In 1951, Xuyun, already very old, fell ill at the Yunmen Monastery, where he was serving as abbot, after an accident linked to the tense political climate of the Land Reform campaign (more on this to follow). His disciples, fearing the worst, asked him to recount the story of his life. They gathered together their handwritten notes and copied them onto the backs of the pages of an old classical volume, which they had taken apart and rebound as a book. Then they secretly sent it to Hong Kong, where Cen Xuelü 岑學呂 (1882–1963), a politician from Guangdong who had become Xuyun's disciple in 1937 and had left the mainland in the 1940s,⁷ edited the text.⁸ Following its initial publication in Hong Kong in 1953, the text went through several editions⁹ before attaining its current, standardized (and to date, final) version. Although the text is only referred to as an autobiography in the title of the first edition, and although Xuyun's extraordinary age has been the subject of controversy¹⁰ and the object

an English disciple of this committed layman, published a complete edition of Xuyun's biography in 1980 and a revised edition in 1988 (Richard Hunn, ed., and Charles Luk, trans., *Empty Cloud. The Autobiography of the Chinese Zen Master Xuyun* [Dorset: Element Books Limited, 1988]). Like Cen Xuelü, Lu Kuanyu came from Guangdong. He had travelled in Europe and when he became a disciple of Xuyun in the 1930s, the master asked him to translate Chinese Buddhist texts into English. Having settled in Hong Kong in 1949, Lu published a dozen works on Buddhism in English, including the translation of some of Xuyun's religious instructions: Charles Luk (Lu K'uan Yü), *Ch'an and Zen Teaching. First Series* (London: Rider & Company, 1970. First edition 1960. French edition *La Doctrine du Chan et du Zen*. Paris: Éditions Dervy, 1992).

7. On Cen Xuelü, see *Guangdong jinxiandai renwu cidian* 廣東近現代人物詞典 (Guangzhou: Guangdong kezhi chubanshe, 1992), 204.

8. See the preface of *Nianpu*.

9. The *Annalistic Autobiography of Master Xuyun* of 1953, Cen Xuelü 岑學呂, ed., *Xuyun heshang zishu nianpu* 虛雲和尚自述年譜 (Hong Kong: Xuyun heshang fahui bianyin banshichu chuban, 1953) was followed some months later by a second, identical edition and, in 1957, by a third enriched and revised edition, entitled *Annalistic Biography of Master Xuyun*: Cen Xuelü 岑學呂, ed., *Xuyun heshang nianpu* 虛雲和尚年譜 (Hong Kong: Xianggang foxue shuju chuban, 1957). The edition that appeared in 1962 (republished in Cen Xuelü 岑學呂, ed., *Xuyun laoheshang nianpu fahui* 虛雲老和尚年譜法匯 [Shenzhen: Shenzhen yachang yanse yinshua youxian gongsi, 2004. First edition *Xuyun heshang nianpu* 虛雲和尚年譜. Hong Kong, 1962], it can also be found on numerous websites) is the most complete, because it contains the narrative of Xuyun's life up to the moment of his death in 1959. Moreover, the 1962 edition has not been censured, as has the current version.

10. On the controversy that, from 1959 on, opposed Cen Xuelü and the celebrated Chinese philosopher and man of letters Hu Shi (1891–1962), see Chen Jinguo 陳進國, "Hu Shi yu 'Xuyun heshang nianpu' de yi duan gong'an – yi 'bi hushuo ji' wei taolun zhongxin 胡適與虛雲和尚年譜的一段公案——以辟胡說集為討論中心," 2002. <http://www.confucius2000.com/buddhism/hsyxyhsnpdydga.htm>

of recent critical studies,¹¹ the autobiographical nature of his life narrative has never been questioned.¹² Even in its final version, the *nianpu* remains written mostly in the first person.

Brief accounts of visionary or spiritual experiences, written in the first person by Chan monks and destined to guide practitioners, have been published since the Song period, but it is only at the end of the Ming that Buddhist autobiographies appear more regularly and take on their full form.¹³ The best-known example is the *nianpu* of Master Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (1546–1623).¹⁴ In the twentieth century, monks began to produce an increasing number of autobiographies. Many of the most representative Buddhist figures of modern times, including Hongyi 弘一 (1880–1942),¹⁵ have left autobiographical accounts. This fondness for autobiography is not confined to Chinese Buddhism, but appears in Korean¹⁶ and Japanese¹⁷ Buddhism as well in the twentieth century.

Xuyun's autobiography thus should not be considered unique. However, if the term "autobiography" is already problematic when referring to the

11. Master Yinshun (1905–2005) had put Xuyun's age at 110 in his article "Gushan yu Xuyun heshang," quoted by Wang Chien-ch'uan 王見川, "Huan Xuyun yige benlai mianmu: ta de nianji yu shiji xinlun 還'虛雲'一個本來面目: 他的年紀與事蹟新論," *Yuanguang foxue xuebao* 圓光佛學學報 13 (2008), 169–188. See also Wang Chien-ch'uan 王見川, "Xuyun shengnian yu shiji bulun 虛雲生年與事蹟補論," in *Lishi, Yishu yu Taiwan renwen luncong (1): zongjiao minsu zhuanji* 歷史、藝術與台灣人文論叢 (1): 宗教民俗專輯, Wang Huichen 王惠琛, Xiao Baifang 蕭百芳, and Wang Chien-ch'uan 王見川, eds. (Taipei: Boyang wenhua, 2012).

12. See, for example, Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk*, 2–3.

13. On the Buddhist autobiographical genre in China, see Wu, *The Confucian Progress*, 71–92, 142–159; Raoul Birnbaum, "Master Hongyi Looks Back: A Modern Man Becomes a Monk in Twentieth-Century China," in *Buddhism in the Modern World: Adaptations of an Ancient Tradition*, Steve Heine and Charles S. Prebish, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 103–107. On Buddhist autobiographies in Tibet, see Janet Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self: The Secret Autobiographies of a Tibetan Visionary* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

14. See also the autobiographical account of Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 (1599–1655) in Beverley Foulks McGuire, *Living Karma. The Religious Practices of Ouyi Zhixu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

15. See Chapter Five.

16. See, for example, the autobiography of Seung Sahn Sunim (1927–2004): Sor-Ching Low, "Seung Sahn: The Makeover of a Modern Zen Patriarch," in *Zen Masters*, Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 267–285.

17. See, for example, Taisen Roshi Deshimaru, *Autobiographie d'un moine Zen* (Lyon: Terre du Ciel, 1995. First edition Editions Robert Laffont, 1977); on the autobiographical writings of Zen Master Shaku Sōen (1860–1919) see Michel Mohr, "The Use of Traps and Snares: Shaku Sōen Revisited," in *Zen Masters*, Steven Heine, and Dale S. Wright, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 186–187.

accounts of Buddhist monks, which were generally written by disciples,¹⁸ the situation is even more complicated in the case of Xuyun. As I will illustrate, there is evidence to suggest that Xuyun's *nianpu* was actually composed, for the most part, from already existing materials. This is more than an issue of textual authenticity; indeed, it raises the question of the very identity of the author of Xuyun's ascent to sainthood. The main objective of this chapter is to hence to reexamine the saint-making process leading to the idealized representation of Xuyun as conveyed in the *nianpu*, as well as the authors, motivations, and effects of this process. Calling into question the supposedly autobiographical nature of the *nianpu*, I will also show how this text was composed.

For purposes of convenience, I have divided Xuyun's life into six main periods. For each period, I first provide an account of Xuyun's life based on the *nianpu*. I then highlight the main points where this account differs from what can be discovered through other sources and identify the different authors and motivations behind these distortions, thus bringing to light the principal stages in the construction of the *nianpu*. I also discuss one relevant limitation of the *nianpu*, which is that it does not reveal the active role that Xuyun played in the society of his time. In the conclusion of this chapter, I suggest that the *nianpu* escapes any rigid categorization according to literary genres, because Xuyun's life narrative blurs the lines between biography, autobiography, and hagiography.

The Life of Xuyun between History and Hagiography

Birth and Infancy

According to the *nianpu*, Xuyun (family name Xiao 蕭, first name unknown) was born in 1840. His family, it claims, was descended from Emperor Liang Wudi (464–549) and had lived in Hunan for many generations. Between 1838 and 1840, Xuyun's father, Xiao Yutang 蕭玉堂 (n.d.), served as assistant magistrate of different prefectures in Fujian. His parents were at this point both over forty years old and feared that they would have no descendants. One day, his mother went to pray for a child at the Guanyin temple outside the town and, noticing that the building and the temple bridge were in disrepair, made a vow to have them rebuilt. Shortly thereafter, both parents experienced an extraordinary dream announcing the conception of a child. In due time,

18. Fabienne Jagou, "Recherches préliminaires sur les biographies des maîtres tibétains et mongols ayant vécu en Chine à l'époque moderne," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 15 (2005), 275–294.

Xuyun's mother gave birth to not a child but “a ball of flesh” (*routuan* 肉團) and died almost immediately after giving birth, due to fright and regret at not being able to have children. The next day, an itinerant medicine man cut open the ball and extracted a baby, who was brought up by his father's concubine.

Xuyun was destined to continue two family lines, because his uncle, who had no children, also designated him as his heir. However, the boy showed early signs of a religious vocation and ran away at the age of seventeen, heading for Nanyue 南岳. He was caught halfway and taken back home, where his marriage, arranged when he was eleven years old, was celebrated, though, according to the *nianpu*, never consummated. Two years later, he escaped again—this time for good—heading for Mount Gu (Gushan 鼓山) in Fujian. From this moment on he sent no further news to his family. In 1858, Xuyun received his tonsure at the Yongquan 涌泉 Monastery in Gushan. The following year, he was ordained as a monk by Master Miaolian 妙蓮 (ca. 1846–1907) at the same monastery and received the monastic names of Guyan 古岩 and Yanche 演徹, as well as the personal public name Deqing 德清.

In addition to bequeathing him with illustrious ancestors and a respected family status, the *nianpu* anchors Xuyun's conception and birth in the Buddhist tradition by describing the miraculous circumstances associated with these events. In fact, the extraordinary dream announcing the conception of a child is a recurrent Buddhist theme,¹⁹ and the “ball of flesh” is a characteristic motif both in Chinese tradition in general and in Buddhist and Tantric traditions in particular.²⁰ However, these prodigious anecdotes predate the composition of the *nianpu*, which is not the earliest account of the life of Xuyun.

The first account of which I am aware, the “Succinct Biography of Master Xuyun of Zhusheng Monastery of Mount Jizu in Yunnan,” dates from 1924.²¹ A second account, the “Report on the Chan practices of Master Xu

19. For other examples of miraculous dreams at the time of conception, see the autobiography of Chan Master Hanshan Deqing: Richard Cheung, trans., *The Autobiography and Maxims of Chan Master Han Shan (1546–1623)* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Buddhist Book Distributor, 1995), 1, and, in modern times, the life of the printer Yang Wenhui (1837–1911): Gabriele Goldfuss, *Vers un Bouddhisme du XX^e siècle. Yang Wenhui (1837–1911), réformateur laïque et imprimeur* (Paris: Collège de France, Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 2001), 28.

20. On two similar stories contained in the novel *The Investiture of the Gods* (*Fengshen yanyi* 封神演義) from the Ming period, see Jacques Pimpaneau, *Chine: mythes et dieux de la religion populaire* (Arles: Philippe Picquier, 1999. First edition *Mémoires de la cour céleste*. Kwok On, 1995), 116–117; and Maurizio Paolillo, “Un ragazzo venuto da lontano. Origine, fortuna e ruolo nel simbolismo spaziale di Pechino di Nezha, fanciullo divino,” in *La Cina e il Mondo*, Paolo De Troia, ed. (Roma: Edizione Nuova Cultura, 2010), 411–426.

21. Ye Qingyan 葉青眼, “Yunnan Jizushan Zhusheng si Xuyun heshang lüezhuan 雲南雞足山祝聖寺虛雲和尚略傳,” *Foyin* 8/9 (1924), 5–6. At the time of the compilation of his account, the committed layman Ye Qingyan 葉青眼 (1876–1966) had not yet had any direct

of Gushan,”²² appeared in 1933 in the periodical *Shijie fojiao jushilin linkan* 世界佛教居士林林刊, edited by Taixu 太虛 (1890–1947),²³ and was republished in booklet form in 1936 with few or no changes. In fact, a glance at the name of the work—*A Brief Account of the Accomplishments of the Venerable Xuyun*²⁴—suffices to show that in 1936 Xuyun had already acquired the status of “venerable” (*laoheshang* 老和尚). This accorded him the privilege of a separately published biography, the first I have found. This same version served as the basis for another biographical treatment of Xuyun, the one contained in the *Representative Enriched and Revised Collection of the Lineage of Gushan Patriarchs* (henceforth *Collection of Gushan*),²⁵ which is much shorter, but contains further details and corrections.

There exist, then, two different early biographies of Xuyun: the first is the 1924 biography and the second is the account published first in 1933, then in 1936, and finally in abridged form in the *Collection of Gushan*. These two early biographies are completely separate; the latter does not contain elements borrowed from the older one. Moreover, a careful reading makes it clear that the two authors did not take their information from the same source. These accounts must have first circulated orally; their forewords and postscripts clearly indicate that the materials on which they are based originated from anecdotes recounted by Xuyun, by his comrades, or by his disciples—the earliest actors in Xuyun’s saint-making process.

The early biographies had already set down, well before the *nianpu*, the legends surrounding Xuyun’s entry into the world.²⁶ The anecdote of the “ball

contact with Xuyun (he was to meet him two years later); he thus affirms having obtained his information from Master Zhuandao 轉道 (1872–1943), who had practiced Chan with Master Xuyun at the Putuo Monastery in Singapore.

22. Wuzhu 無住, “Gushan Xugong chanxing shuwen 鼓山虛公禪行述聞,” *Shijie fojiao jushilin linkan* 36 (1933), 2–10.

23. On Taixu, see Don A. Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu’s Reforms* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001).

24. Zhu Shouzhuo 朱守拙, ed., *Xuyun laoheshang shiji jilue* 虛雲老和尚事蹟紀略 (N.p., 1936); in this small brochure edited by the committed layman Zhu Shouzhuo, the synopsis of Xuyun is followed by three new appendices and a postscript.

25. Xuyun 虛雲, *Zengjiao Gushan liezu lianfang ji* 增校鼓山列祖聯芳集 (Fujian Gushan Yongquan chansi, 1936), 35–39. The compilation of the *Representative Collection of Gushan* is attributed to Xuyun and dates from 1935; the biographical account of the abbot Xuyun (which closes the line of the patriarchs) was written by the monastic supervisor (*jianyuan* 監院), Baoguang, and dates from 1936.

26. I follow here the definition of “legend” provided in Delahaye’s study of medieval European hagiography. See Hyppolite Delahaye, *The Legends of the Saints: An Introduction to Hagiography* (1907) <http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/delehaye-legends.asp>. In

of flesh” and the death of Xuyun’s mother after his birth are related in all of the above-mentioned early accounts, a fact that could suggest their veracity. However, the rebuilding of the temple bridge only appears in the 1924 biography, while the miraculous dream and the celebration of the arranged marriage only appear in the account of 1933. This last document also contains more detailed biographical information on Xuyun: one of his monastic names (Guyan), his family name (Xiao), the first name of his father (Yutang), and the family name of his mother (Yan 顏). The *Collection of Gushan* adds a few relevant details to the account of 1933 on which it is based. First, it specifies that, during the two years of cohabitation with his wives, Xuyun never consummated the marriages. Since this document was produced in the monastic milieu of Gushan, it stresses Xuyun’s determination to remain “pure.” Second, having been composed in the very monastery where Xuyun was been ordained, this source is able to provide the complete set of his monastic names.

The collation of the early biographies reveals a process combining successive stratifications of available biographical information with the elaboration of diverging accounts of certain events. More biographical data became available as Xuyun became famous, and his celebrity inspired new legends that circulated via oral traditions. These two processes evolved in parallel fashion and mark the development of Xuyun’s biography in the phase preceding its standardization in the *nianpu*. As the last link in the chain of texts, the *nianpu* embraces all the elements in order to bring to life the “personage” of Xuyun; it then reorganizes the data to render the narration longer, more dramatic, and more “ancient.”

Why more ancient? Because the extraordinary age of Xuyun as reported in the *nianpu* (according to Chinese reckoning, he was supposedly 120 years old at the time of his death in 1959) has been overstated by about twenty-five years. Drawing on a number of sources, I have tentatively established Xuyun’s year of birth as 1864.²⁷ The overstatement of the age is also a recurrent theme in the biographies of other eminent monks,²⁸ and in religious biographies in

contradistinction to myths and tales, a legend has some historical (or topographical) connection; it presupposes an historical fact as basis or pretext, and “this historical fact may either be developed or disfigured by popular imagination.”

27. For a detailed analysis of the question concerning Xuyun’s age, see Daniela Campo, *La Construction de la sainteté dans la Chine moderne: la vie du maître bouddhiste Xuyun (env. 1864–1959)* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2013).

28. For example, the Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna was supposed to have lived for six hundred years, starting from the second or third century. See Jan Yün-hua, “Nāgārjuna, One or More? A New Interpretation of Buddhist Hagiography,” *History of Religions* 10, no. 2 (1970), 139–155. As for the Chan tradition, a well-known example of longevity is Zhaozhou

general. However, this distortion should not be attributed to the editor of the *nianpu* or to oral traditions created by Xuyun's comrades or disciples, but to Xuyun himself. If the early biographical accounts offer inconsistent information on his year of birth, Xuyun himself provided indications of his age in various writings in the 1930s and 1940s, moving his birthdate further back each time. Then, in 1952, the master gave a very precise date for his birth in a long interview to a representative of *Xiandai foxue* 現代佛學,²⁹ the Buddhist periodical supported by the Communist government. In this interview, Xuyun affirmed publicly that he had been born in 1840.³⁰

This declaration forced the modification of the chronology of his life as reported in the *nianpu* and of all mentions of his age (and that of his master, Miaolian) contained in the collection of his religious writings, the *Dharma Collection of Master Xuyun*.³¹ These two works, published the following year, have provided the sources for all subsequent studies dedicated to these two masters. With this declaration, Xuyun placed himself among the main authors of the hagiographic elaboration of his own life.

Reading between the lines of legend, it can be inferred that Xuyun was not promised to religious life by a vow of his parents, nor entrusted to a monastery by an indigent family who could not raise him, as was often the case in China. Instead, he became a monk of his own free will, and even against the wishes of his well-educated family, which he deprived of an heir by choosing a monastic life. What is left of Xuyun's writings, the *Dharma Collection of Master Xuyun*, confirms his none-too-humble origins and his literary education. This collection, also edited by Cen Xuelü, contains the Dharma speeches (*fayu* 法語) in the classical language that Xuyun used to address the monastic community, part of his religious instructions (*kaishi* 開示) in the colloquial language used to guide monks and committed laymen in religious practice, a collection of literary pieces such as prefaces, postscripts, and other compositions, codes of rules (*guiyue* 規約) which Xuyun had formulated for his monasteries, a considerable number of poems of all kinds and, finally, part

Congshen 趙州從諗 (778–897), who allegedly lived 120 years between the eighth and tenth centuries.

29. This monthly periodical, based in Peking, was founded in 1950; its editor-in-chief was Juzan 巨贊 (1908–1984), a Communist monk who, on this occasion, went personally to see Xuyun and interview him; Juzan published his article under his pseudonym of Shengyin 勝音. The publication of *Xiandai Foxue* ceased at the end of 1964.

30. Shengyin 勝音, "Xuyun laoheshang fangwen ji 虛雲老和尚訪問記," *Xiandai foxue* 26/3, no. 2 (1952), 19, 32.

31. One current edition is the *Dharma Collection of Venerable Xuyun: Xuyun laoheshang fahui* [Fahui].

of his correspondence. The miscellaneous writings contained in the *Dharma Collection of Master Xuyun* are rich in learned quotations and written in an elegant and refined style. The breadth of Xuyun's literary knowledge also appears in the religious instructions addressed to his monastic communities and included in the *nianpu*.

Spiritual Apprenticeship

Given that, according to the *nianpu*, his father had sent people far and wide to discover his whereabouts, Xuyun (known as Deqing at this time) was obliged to hide in the caves behind the monastery for three years. This period marks the beginning of a long spiritual apprenticeship based on the austerities known as *toutuo* 頭陀 (sanskrit *dhūta*).³² Deqing lived as a hermit, sleeping under the open sky, nourishing himself on pine needles and blades of grass, and drinking water from streams. He wore his clothes to shreds, and let his beard and hair grow long. His wanderings took him to a small temple on Mount Tiantai 天台, the cradle of the Buddhist tradition of the same name. The master he met there, Rongjing 融鏡, reproached him for his anarchical conduct and gave him a Chan method of practice to follow, teaching him to penetrate the critical phrase, "Who is he who drags this corpse?"³³ After a five-year-long period of training, Deqing departed in order to perfect his knowledge and his religious practice in the most renowned monasteries of Southeast China, including, in 1880–1881, Jinshan 金山 and Gaomin 高旻.³⁴

In 1882, he decided to undertake a pilgrimage, prostrating himself every three steps, from the island of Mount Putuo 普陀 to Mount Wutai 五台, sacred to the Bodhisattva Wenshu 文殊 (Mañjuśrī). During this pilgrimage, which lasted three years, Deqing twice found himself at death's door and twice the Bodhisattva, disguised as a beggar, came to his assistance. Deqing's peregrinations from 1887 to 1894 took him to the most sacred places of Chinese Buddhism (mountains, temples, monasteries, caves, tombs, and stupas) and abroad (in Tibet, Bhutan, India, Ceylon, Burma). The year 1895 marked a

32. These are different sets of prescriptions relating to clothing, food, and dwelling, and intended to release the practitioner from worldly ties.

33. *Tuo sishi shi shei* 拖死屍是誰? It is a *huatou* 話頭, an expedient meant to help Chan practitioners to stop the stream of thoughts; if, in an initial phase, the function of the *huatou* is to counter the rising of mental representations, it has to be abandoned later on. In the 1950s, Xuyun explained this method exhaustively in his discourse "Huatou yu yiqing 話頭與疑情," *Fahui*, 160–162.

34. The Jiangtian Monastery, commonly called Jinshan, is located in Zhenjiang, Jiangsu. The Gaomin Monastery is located near Yangzhou, Jiangsu.

turning point, and the culmination of all his efforts: over several weeks of constant meditation at the Gaomin Monastery, his body deeply affected by the repercussions of a fall in a river, Deqing achieved awakening upon hearing the sound of a teacup crashing to the ground.

Thereafter, he traveled to the Ayuwang 阿育王 Monastery in Ningbo, on the Zhejiang coast, where, according to tradition, one of the most famous relics of the Buddha had been preserved.³⁵ While there, he decided to burn off the ring finger of his left hand as an offering to the Buddha, and to repay his debt of gratitude (*bao'en* 報恩) to the mother he had never known. In 1900, Deqing retired to the Zhongnan 終南 Mountains. He had already lived there from 1885 to 1887, but on this occasion, his mastery of meditative techniques brought him a renown that would only increase over the following years. The news spread that he had entered prolonged states of meditative concentration (*ding* 定, *samādhi*) and visitors became more and more numerous. As a result, Deqing decided to change his name to “Xuyun” so as to preserve his relative anonymity and avoid being overwhelmed by followers.

When applied to the period of Xuyun’s spiritual apprenticeship, the comparison of the early biographies with the *nianpu* unveils the main strategy employed by Cen Xuelü to pad out the twenty-five years or so that have been added on to the master’s life, precisely in this part of the text.

Attentive reading of the records of the *nianpu* shows, in fact, that several experiences during the period of Xuyun’s religious apprenticeship appear *twice*. The circumstances are evidently different, as are the protagonists of the episodes in question. However, Xuyun is portrayed as having worshipped the relic at the Ayuwang monastery for the first time in 1876, and again in 1897. He stayed at the Jinshan Monastery for a year in 1880, and then again for another year in 1896. Similarly, we find that he practiced at the famous Gaomin Monastery for over a year in 1881, and then again, for over a year in 1895. Xuyun went on his “first” pilgrimage to Mount Wutai from 1882 to 1884 and again in 1900; to Mount Jizu, for the first time in 1889 and a second time in 1902. He supposedly lived in a hut in the Zhongnan Mountains for

35. The history of the site is treated in Bernard Faure, “Dato,” in fasc. 8 of *Hōbōgirin* (Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 2003), 1127–1158. On the cult of relics in Asia, see David Germano and Kevin Trainor, eds., *Embodying the Dharma: Buddhist Relic Veneration in Asia* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004); Bernard Faure, “Relics and Flesh Bodies: The Creation of Ch’an Pilgrimage Sites,” in *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China*, Susan Naquin and Chün-fang Yü, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 150–189; Bernard Faure, “Les cloches de la terre: Un aspect du culte des reliques dans le bouddhisme chinois,” in *Bouddhisme et lettrés dans la Chine médiévale*, Catherine Despeux, ed. (Paris, Louvain: Peeters, 2002), 25–44.

the two-year period of 1885–1887, and then again for two years in 1900–1902, and so on.

In some instances, Cen Xuelü was able to duplicate experiences on the basis of divergent accounts of the same event found in the early biographies. A case in point is the example of Mount Wutai, the site of Mañjuśrī's cult from the sixth century forward.³⁶ Xuyun's encounter with the bodhisattva Wenshu is a *topos* of Wutai's lore, since Mañjuśrī often appears on the mountain in order to help pilgrims in trouble.³⁷ The first example of this can be found in the biography of the monk Sengming 僧明, contained in *Continuation of Biographies of Eminent Monks*.³⁸ Xuyun's early biographies provide two divergent accounts of his encounter with the "beggar" Wenshu, and these accounts represent the starting point for two distinct (as well as longer and more articulated) episodes of the *nianpu*. The editor again developed two distinct episodes starting from the two different (early) accounts of Xuyun's *samādhi* in the Zhongnan Mountains, and placed their first occurrence in the *nianpu* before 1890, when Xuyun's career must, in reality, have begun.

Cen Xuelü deployed additional strategies to combine the information from older sources and to smooth away chronological inconsistencies in the period of Xuyun's spiritual apprenticeship. For example, Xuyun's training on Mount Tiantai is briefly mentioned (only) in the account of 1933, although the name of the master he met there is not specified. To add detail to the limited information provided in this early biography, the editor availed himself of three of Xuyun's poems found in the *Fahui* and dedicated to a Master Rongjing on Mount Tiantai,³⁹ as well as other contemporary sources such as the *Journal of*

36. Mañjuśrī's cult on Mount Wutai continued to develop during the Tang dynasty and achieved great fame in the eighth century, when the esoteric form of Buddhism (*mijiao* 密教), in which this bodhisattva acquires a prominent role, was introduced to China. It was precisely during the eighth and ninth centuries that Wutai became a major destination of both lay and clerical pilgrimage. See Robert M. Gimello, "Chang Shang-ying on Wu-t'ai Shan," in *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China*, Susan Naquin and Chün-fang Yü, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 97–101. Two collections of historical information and miraculous tales are available: the *Gu Qingliang zhuan* 古清涼傳 (T. 2098, vol. 51, on the eighth century), and the *Guang Qingliang zhuan* 廣清涼傳 (T. 2099, vol. 51, on the eleventh century). On this bodhisattva, see Raoul Birnbaum, *Studies on the Mysteries of Mañjuśrī: A Group of East Asian Mandalas and Their Traditional Symbolism*, Monograph no. 2 (Boulder, CO: Society for the Study of Chinese Religions, 1983).

37. Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk*, 105–107.

38. *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, T. 2060, vol. 50, 664c–665a.

39. "Rongjing laoren zhenzan," *Fahui*, 398; "Tiantai Huading maolu jiuyu ban Rongjing fashi yezuo," *Fahui*, 325; "Dao Tiantai Huading Longquan an Rongjing lao fashi," *Fahui*, 388.



*the Visits to Famous Mountains*⁴⁰ by Gao Henian 高鶴年 (1872–1962),⁴¹ who met Master Rongjing on Mount Tiantai twice, in 1895 and 1898.⁴² The anecdote is also pushed back in time and extended over several years—Xuyun probably stayed with Rongjing on Mount Tiantai, but not in 1870–1871 and not for as many years as the *nianpu* affirms.

Other episodes have been developed pedagogically to illustrate the conformity of Xuyun's experiences to the Buddhist tradition and the Chan tradition in particular. I have already pointed out recurrent Buddhist themes in the narrative concerning Xuyun's conception and birth; another case in point is the injection of the element of water as a background to the episode of Xuyun's awakening, which Cen's text constructs on the basis of elements of earlier accounts.

Cen Xuelü has also added information gained from his long acquaintance with Xuyun: for example, none of the early biographies mentions Xuyun's burning off a finger, but he had most certainly done so at some point in his religious apprenticeship, as we can see from careful observation of photographs. This shows that not all of the information in the *nianpu* is fictitious, even if it is often impossible to separate the historical data from the legendary tales.

Like his birth and infancy, the first part of Xuyun's spiritual training is filled with mystery due to an almost complete lack of historical documentation. In the late Qing period, Xuyun was simply an unknown Buddhist monk who had started his spiritual quest. However, two elements of Xuyun's spiritual apprenticeship can be ascertained: his ascetic abnegation and his commitment to meditation. In addition to his missing finger, Xuyun's long hair and beard betray his past as a hermit. Witnesses also repeatedly described several habits deriving from his extended ascetic experience, such as his exceptional (even for those days) frugality, his Herculean strength, his remarkable walking speed, and his endurance during long-distance hiking. That he was an expert Chan practitioner can be inferred from, among other things, the frenzied circulation and repeated publication of his meditation instructions. For example, his disciples were astonished to see how, absorbed in deep concentration, Xuyun alone could remain indifferent to the swarms

40. Gao Henian 高鶴年, *Mingshan youfang ji* 名山遊訪記 (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2000, reprint).

41. For a biography of Gao Henian, see Yu Lingbo 于凌波, *Zhongguo jinxindai fojiao renwu zhi* 中國近現代佛教人物志 (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 1995), 397–409; Ruan Renze 阮仁澤 and Gao Zhenong 高振農, eds., *Shanghai zongjiao shi* 上海宗教史 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1992), 274–275.

42. Gao Henian, *Mingshan youfang ji*, 17, 26.



of mosquitoes that invaded the Meditation hall of Yunmen Monastery at dusk in early autumn.⁴³

The Beginning of the Restoration Activity

According to his *nianpu*, in 1902 Xuyun reached Mount Jizu 雞足 (Rooster Foot Mountain), a wild region situated between Yunnan and Burma. During his first visit to the area in 1889, he had already deplored the state of decadence and disrepair of its monastic community. He had found only small, privately owned Buddhist temples that refused to host itinerant monks like him. This time, however, local authorities deeded over to Xuyun a ruined site where he could establish a monastic community and welcome itinerant monks: the Boyu 鉢孟 Temple.

Having resumed his travels to solicit funds for the restoration of his temple, in 1906 Xuyun reached Peking and obtained from the Guangxu emperor both an edict certifying its official recognition and a complete collection of the imperial edition of the Buddhist Canon. The purpose of Xuyun's travels at this time was also the protection of the Chinese monastic community in broad terms. In fact, responding to a call by the famous ascetic Jichan 寄禪 (1852–1912),⁴⁴ Xuyun played an important role in Peking by presenting another petition to the court in 1906, asking for the protection of monastic property from governmental expropriation. He thus managed to obtain an imperial edict by which all provincial levies imposed the year before on monastic properties were to be abolished.

In 1911, together with other eminent masters, Xuyun established the General Association of Chinese Buddhism (*Zhonghua fojiao zonghui* 中華佛教總會) in Shanghai,⁴⁵ the first national Buddhist association. We next find him in Nanjing, in the company of Jichan, where he obtained the ratification of the charter of the association by Sun Yat-sen (Sun Zhongshan 孫中山, 1866–1925), and then again in Peking, where, after the death of Jichan, Yuan Shikai 袁世凱 (1859–1916), the new president of the Republic, finally agreed to ensure the protection of monastic properties.

43. Fanying 梵影, "Yaoyuan de jingdao 遙遠的敬悼," *Xuyun laoheshang nianpu fahui zengding ben* 虛雲老和尚年譜法彙增訂本 (Taipei: Taiwan Xiuyuan chanyuan, 1997), 993–994.

44. On Jichan, see Shi Lianping 釋蓮萍, *Tiantongsi xuzhi* 天童寺續志, in vol. 86 of *Zhongguo fosizhi congkan* 中國佛寺志叢刊, Zhang Zhi 張智, ed. (Hangzhou: Guangling shushe, 2006. 1st ed. Tiantongsi kanben, 1920), *juan xia*, 14–15; Yu Lingbo, *Zhongguo jinxiandai fojiao renwuzhi*, 13–15 (the dates in this biography are incorrect); Lai Yonghai 賴永海, ed., *Zhongguo fojiao baike quanshu* 中國佛教百科全書 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2000), vol. 2, 436–441.

45. On this association, see Ruan Renze, Gao Zhenrong, *Shanghai zongjiao shi*, 170–172.

Xuyun subsequently returned to his site on Mount Jizu to complete its restoration. The temple, renamed “Zhusheng Chan Monastery, Protector of the Country,”⁴⁶ by the emperor, soon became a model for other sanctuaries in the region, as well as a refuge for the ferocious general Li Genyuan 李根源 (1879–1965), the militarist who ruled Yunnan. According to the *nianpu*, Li had arrived at Mount Jizu with his troops, determined to exterminate Buddhism. He ordered Xuyun’s arrest, and had begun to destroy Buddhist sites, but he was finally converted to Buddhism through the wisdom of the master. Xuyun also organized local offices of the General Association of Chinese Buddhism and, starting from 1919, was invited by local authorities to officiate civic rituals in the form of Services for the Deliverance of the Souls of Water and Land (*shuilu fahui* 水陸法會).⁴⁷

With the support of the new Yunnan governor, Tang Jiyao 唐繼堯 (1881–1927), Xuyun undertook his second monastic restoration in 1920. The Huating 華亭 Monastery, situated in the western hills of the town of Kunming in Yunnan, was at this point in such a poor state that it had to be sold to foreigners and turned into a club. After many years of restoration works directed by the master, the new Huating Yunqi 華亭雲棲 Monastery became a model for religious practice in Yunnan and a refuge for the civilian population when threatened by local militarists.

Beginning in the 1910s, Xuyun’s growing reputation produced a rich stream of documents. Besides comparing the early biographies and the *nianpu*, we can now also check some of the events related in this text against available historical documents. We thus discover that, in addition to including historical inaccuracies in the work he edited, Cen Xuelü also altered the timeline of certain events.

To give just a few examples, contrary to what the *nianpu* affirms, the document from Sun Yat-sen that Xuyun supposedly helped to procure was not actually addressed to Jichan’s General Association of Chinese Buddhism.⁴⁸

46. Jishan Huguo Zhusheng chansi 雞山護國祝聖禪寺.

47. On this ritual, see Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China: An Annotated Translation and Study of the Chanyuan qinggui* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2002), 290–291, note 45; and Daniel B. Stevenson, “Text, Image, and Transformation in the History of the *Shuilu fahui*, the Buddhist Rite for Deliverance of Creatures of Water and Land,” in *Cultural Intersections in Later Chinese Buddhism*, Marsha Weidner, ed. (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001), 30–72.

48. *Nianpu*, 46. Some studies repeat these assertions (for example, Chen Yongge 陳永革, *Fojiao honghua de xiandai zhuanxing* 佛教弘化的現代轉型 (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2003), 36), but the ratification of Sun Yat-sen was addressed to the Chinese Buddhist Association (*Zhongguo fojiao hui*) of Ouyang Jingwu 歐陽竟無 (1871–1943): see

Xuyun did not participate in the first effort to protect monastic property, organized by certain eminent Buddhist representatives and rewarded by an imperial edict. This edict, which the *nianpu* dates at 1906, was in reality promulgated in 1905,⁴⁹ and the text of this document as cited by the *nianpu* is false as well. The *nianpu* gives an inexact date for this document in order to link it to the edict that Xuyun obtained for his monastery and to attribute to the master the role of protector of the Buddhist community of the country.⁵⁰ And while it is true that Xuyun met with Sun Yat-sen and Yuan Shikai at a certain point, and that he founded the local offices of the General Association of Chinese Buddhism of the two provinces of Yunnan and Guizhou, his participation in the founding of this association in Shanghai in 1912 is unlikely.⁵¹

The historical inaccuracies contained in the *nianpu* show that the historiographical concern remains secondary to the necessity of reproducing an image conforming to Buddhist criteria of eminence. However, the beginning of Xuyun's restoration activity as conveyed in the *nianpu* attests to the attitude that he had resolved to assume from this point forward: to redress what he considered to be the decline of Buddhism through the reconstruction of large, public monasteries of the Chan tradition and through the reintroduction of disciplinary rules, meditation practice, and precept transmission (*chuanjie* 傳戒). Xuyun was to re-establish, over more than five decades, six monasteries one after the other, following on each occasion the same *modus operandi*: he sought out official support, defined the layout of the buildings on the basis of geomancy, traveled in order to collect funds, and struggled to ensure the monasteries' economic autonomy.

“Sun zongli fu Fojiao hui han 孫總理復佛教會函,” inside front cover of *Haichao yin* 1 (tenth year, March 1929).

49. April 12, 1905, as one can read in the *Journal of the Historical Events of Modern China: Guo Tingyi* 郭廷以, ed., *Jindai Zhongguo shishi rizhi: Qingji (1829–1911)* 近代中國史事日誌: 清季 (1829–1911) (Taipei: Zhengzhong shushu, 1963), vol. 2, 1225.

50. Only the *nianpu* cites Xuyun as being among the authors of the petition; furthermore, in several documents, Xuyun himself affirms that he only reached the capital in 1906.

51. Xuyun is not mentioned among the monks who met in February 1912 at the Shanghai Liuyun Monastery for the preliminary meeting. See Ruan Renze, Gao Zhennong, *Shanghai zongjiao shi*, 170–172; Chenkong 塵空, “Minguo fojiao nianji 民國佛教年紀,” in *Xiandai fojiao xueshu congkan* 現代佛教學術叢刊, vol. 86, Zhang Mantao 張曼濤, ed. (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 2005. Originally published in *Wenshi zazhi* 9–10, (1944), 168–170). The source of these documents is the periodical *Foxue congbao* 佛學叢報. Nor does he appear in the list of the hundred or so participants in the opening ceremony that took place in April 1912, again at the Liuyun Monastery: see *Foxue congbao* 4 (January 1913).

If the editor borrows the episode of the dramatic encounter between Xuyun and the general Li Genyuan from the account of 1933, occasionally recopying complete sentences word for word, nonetheless there is some truth in this account. In fact, Li Genyuan intended to “erase superstition”⁵² in Yunnan (this was described as a *fait accompli* in the *nianpu*). He was interested in Mount Jizu’s heritage, and had visited it on a few occasions to edit a local monograph.⁵³ The troops cited in the *nianpu* were probably an escort accompanying him on these cultural tours. As can be inferred from Li Genyuan’s diary and poems, the general did convert to Buddhism on Mount Jizu;⁵⁴ he actually stayed at Xuyun’s monastery for ten days,⁵⁵ and appointed the master as the supervisor of the mountain.⁵⁶ In 1918, Li Genyuan also began to repair the Nanhua 南華 Monastery in Guangdong, before contributing to the full-scale restoration undertaken by Xuyun in 1934.⁵⁷ The events concerning Tang Jiyao, which the *nianpu* again borrows from the account of 1933, can also be confirmed through this governor’s writings. Starting from 1919, Tang converted to Buddhism and became Xuyun’s disciple; he invited the master to restore the Huating Monastery and to celebrate a Service for the Deliverance of the Souls of Water and Land.⁵⁸

The *nianpu* thus attests, in its own way, to the beginning of Xuyun’s long-lasting relationship with the political powers of the Republican era. As is the case for Li Genyuan and Tang Jiyao, sources independent of the *nianpu* show that a number of contemporary political figures, both at the local and national

52. Lu Xing 陸星, *Li Genyuan zhuan* 李根源傳 (Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 1997), 52.

53. Zhao Fan 趙蕃, and Li Genyuan 李根源, eds., *Jizu shanzhi bu* 雞足山志補, in vol. 117 of *Zhongguo fosizhi congkan*.

54. Li Genyuan’s conversion to Buddhism is also mentioned in H. L. Boorman, *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 307.

55. “Gan jiu liushiwu shou 感舊六十五首,” *Qu shi shi lu* 曲石詩錄, ninth *juan*, cited in Shen Jiaming 沈家明, *Li Genyuan jinian wenji* 李根源紀念文集 (Kunming: Yunnan meishu chubanshe, 2005), 199.

56. Li Genyuan 李根源, *Xuesheng nianlu* 雪生年錄 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1981), 54.

57. Shen Jiaming, *Li Genyuan jinian wenji*, 203; He Mingdong 何明棟, *Xinbian Caoxi tongzhi* 新編曹溪通志 (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chuabanshe, 2000).

58. See one of his poems in Zheng Xuepu 鄭學溥 et al., *Tang Jiyao zhuan* 唐繼堯傳 (Hong Kong: Chen Hongcheng chubanshe, 1997), 269, and his 1934 preface to the ordination register of Yunqi Monastery (Tang Huize 唐會澤, “Yunnan Xishan Yunqi chansi tongjie lu xu 雲南西山雲棲禪寺同戒錄序,” *Pinjia yinsui kan* 5 (1934), 33–34), where Tang relates his conversion to Buddhism.

levels, served as Xuyun's patrons and disciples, and granted him financial and political protection throughout his life. Like Li Genyuan and Tang Jiyao, most of these men were military and anti-Manchu revolutionaries, who had joined or supported Sun Yat-sen's Tongmenghui and had participated in the 1911 Revolution.

The Eminent Abbot

Having completed the restoration of the Yunqi Monastery, in 1929 Xuyun left the region to take charge of his old monastery on Gushan, which found itself without an abbot. Its buildings did not require extensive restoration work, so Xuyun focused on improving the organization of the Yongquan Monastery and establishing an Institute of Buddhist Studies. In 1934, it was the sixth Chan patriarch, Huineng 惠能 (638–713) himself, who summoned Xuyun to his new restoration, appearing to him three times in dreams. Huineng had himself directed the Nanhua Monastery of Caoxi 曹溪, in Guangdong province, for over thirty-five years and, even after his death, had not left it; this monastery is in fact famous for having sheltered his mummified corpse over the centuries.⁵⁹ The site was in very poor condition. As Xuyun affirms in his "Note on the reconstruction of the Caoxi sacred site of the sixth patriarch," included in the *nianpu*,⁶⁰ not only had the buildings and the monks' quarters almost completely collapsed, but:

I saw that the sacred place had been turned into a demonic hell. Cattle were bred in the Ancestral Hall and killed in the main hall; a soldiers' camp⁶¹ had been set up in the abbot's quarters and the monks' quarters had become an opium den. On the Road of Awakening, hunks of meat as well as an alcohol market were on display, and pieces of monastic robes were used in song and dance costumes. People engaged in furtive and obscene behavior; they were capable of any wickedness. At the beginning, I tried to help them through good words, which fell on deaf ears. When I displayed a little bit of authority they came after me with

59. As well as those of the Ming dynasty masters Hanshan Deqing and Dantian 丹田. On Huineng and his mummified corpse, see John J. Jørgensen, *Inventing Hui-neng, the Sixth Patriarch: Hagiography and Biography in Early Ch'an* (Leiden: Brill, 2005). On the importance of this monastery and its mummies see also Faure, "Relics and Flesh Bodies," 165–180.

60. *Nianpu*, 94–104 (originally published in 1944: Xuyun, "Chongxing Caoxi Liuzu daochang ji 重興曹溪六祖道場記," *Yuanyin yuekan* 1 (1947), 42–49).

61. The monastery had also been occupied by the military of the Nationalist government, as often happened in this period.

a knife, so that my life was often in danger. In the end I appealed to the power of the protectors of the Dharma.⁶²

As had already been the case in the past, the efficacy of Xuyun's action at Nanhua was greeted by a miraculous event: the River Caoxi changed course to favor the restoration works.⁶³

In order to raise the funds for the restoration of Nanhua Monastery, Xuyun more and more frequently accepted invitations to direct religious ceremonies, particularly in Canton and Hong Kong. Economic difficulties increased when the Japanese invasion led to the War of Resistance (1937–1945). Like Yinguang, discussed in Chapter One, the master sought to relieve the population, which had been hard-hit by the hostilities, in a way consistent with the Buddhist tradition. In 1936, the site received visits from General Chiang Kai-shek 蔣介石 (Jiang Jieshi, 1887–1975) and from the head of the Judicial Council, Ju Zheng 居正 (1876–1951). In 1942, Xuyun's spiritual authority was buttressed by the invitation to direct a great Mahākaruṇā Ceremony for the Protection of the Country and the Cessation of Calamities (*Huguo xizai dabeifahui* 護國息災大悲法會), which was also intended for the deliverance of the souls of the dead, in the temporary wartime capital of Chongqing. Popular participation in this event was enormous.

By the mid-1930s, where the last early biography ends, Xuyun had already become a public figure. The contemporary Buddhist press contributed to his fame by publishing his biographical accounts, his religious instructions, his photographs, and his writings (prefaces, calls for contributions, letters, and poems). In the Buddhist press, readers could also find announcements of the Dharma assemblies and of the ordination ceremonies directed by Xuyun, news concerning the monasteries that he was restoring, and accounts written by Buddhist laymen who had met him or had attended the extraordinary events occurring in his presence. Cen Xuelü drew copiously from the Buddhist periodicals of the first half of the twentieth century to enrich his work: he transcribed entire passages from the prefaces, postscripts, and inscriptions published by the master and his disciples, often without citing his sources, or he included these documents in the form of appendices. This was a common practice in the traditional composition of biographies.

A case in point concerns, for example, the miraculous events punctuating the narration of the *nianpu*. These events are understood as manifestations of

62. *Nianpu*, 101–102.

63. *Nianpu*, 82.

“sympathetic resonance” (*ganying* 感應), namely spontaneous wonders of the natural or the divine world responding to Xuyun’s actions: sudden flowerings out of season,⁶⁴ a gigantic rock moved by a dozen monks,⁶⁵ tree spirits seeking out Xuyun to receive the precepts,⁶⁶ and fragrances perfuming the air to mark his presence.⁶⁷ The protagonists of these marvelous events were often animals. Troubled by their bad rebirth or in danger of death, they took refuge in the Law⁶⁸ and therefore refused to eat meat, repeated the Buddha’s name, and followed the monks into the Meditation Hall.⁶⁹

From a survey of the Buddhist press, it emerges that many of the appendices of the *nianpu* are faithful reproductions of articles from the Buddhist periodicals of the 1930s and 1940s that celebrated Xuyun’s accomplishments and the miracles linked to his presence.⁷⁰ These articles were authored by more or less prominent disciples of Xuyun or contemporary witnesses, at a time when the educated, urban, middle-class public typically believed in supernatural powers and phenomena.⁷¹ In other words, Cen Xuelü treated these sources as the modern equivalent of the collections of miraculous stories that provided most of the material for the compilation of the *Biographies of Eminent Monks* in the medieval period.⁷² Other *ganying* stories can be attributed to the master himself: Xuyun mentions his recurring dream of the Sixth Patriarch

64. Among others, the flowering of a plum tree and the orchard at Yunqi Monastery in Kunming around 1926 (*Nianpu*, 66–68); the flowering of two old palm trees at Gushan in Fujian in 1930 (*Nianpu*, 69–70) and of three cedars at Nanhua Monastery in Guangdong in 1935 (*Nianpu*, 78–79); and the flowering of the peach trees at Liurong Monastery in Canton in 1946 (*Nianpu*, 108–109).

65. At Zhusheng Monastery on Mount Jizu, in 1904 (*Nianpu*, 29–30).

66. At Nanhua Monastery, in 1942 (*Nianpu*, 85–86).

67. Starting from 1889–1890 on Mount Jizu (*Nianpu*, 19).

68. To take refuge (*guiyi* 皈依) in the Buddha, his Law, and his community, is the first act of engagement in Buddhism; like other Chinese Buddhists, Xuyun always gave refuge to animals.

69. See, among others, the story of the crow in 1912 (*Nianpu*, 47) and the story of a fox dating from 1936 (*Nianpu*, 80–81).

70. See, for example, Zhang Zhuoxian 張拙仙, “Yunqi shuang bai’e wangsheng ji 雲棲雙白鵝往生記,” *Haichao yin* 9. No. 1 (1928), 4–6 (republished in *Nianpu*, 55–56 as Hong Xi, “Yunqi shuang’e wangsheng ji”), and Hu Yisheng 胡毅生, “Feitao ruiying ji 緋桃瑞應記,” *Yuanyin yuekan* 1 (1947), 51 (republished in *Nianpu*, 108–109).

71. Erik Zürcher, “Middle-Class Ambivalence. Religious Attitudes in the *Dianshizhai huaobao*,” *Études Chinoises* 13, no. 1–2 (1994), 127–128.

72. Koichi Shinohara, “Two Sources of Chinese Buddhist Biographies: *stupa* Inscriptions and Miracle stories,” in *Monks and Magicians. Religious Biographies in Asia*, Phyllis Granoff and Koichi Shinohara, eds. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1994), 119–228.

summoning him to Nanhua in his “Note on the reconstruction of the Caoxi sacred site of the sixth patriarch.”⁷³

In his elaboration of Xuyun’s biography, Cen Xuelü has also chosen to omit or to smooth over elements that disturbed the perfection of the image he was seeking to create. For example, at Gushan Monastery in Fujian, Xuyun had to impose by force his idea of Buddhist orthodoxy which he conceived of as a rigorous individual and collective observance of the Chinese monastic rules. Although little reference to these events is found in the *nianpu*,⁷⁴ detailed accounts of the revolt of the monastic community Xuyun provoked in the early 1930s are found in several issues of the Buddhist periodical *Xiandai sengqie* 現代僧伽.⁷⁵ Order was restored at Gushan only through military intervention and thanks to the support of the master’s political protectors.

Another event omitted in the *nianpu* is the imbroglio that occurred at the Liurong 六榕 Monastery in Canton in 1947, when Xuyun found himself implicated in a serious dispute that blew up between his disciple Kuanjian 寬鑒 (1902–1959), who had just become the abbot of this monastery, and the Guangdong provincial branch of the Buddhist Association (Guangdong sheng fojiao fenhui 廣東省佛教分會), which was run by committed laymen and of which the master was (at least nominally) the president.⁷⁶ In the end, Xuyun had to go against his principles⁷⁷ and temporarily assume the position of abbot

73. Xuyun, “Chongxing Caoxi Liuzu daochang ji” (republished in *Nianpu*, 94–104).

74. The only mention of these events in the *nianpu* is found in an appendix written by a contemporary witness, the monk Yueyao (*Nianpu*, 74).

75. This periodical changed its name to *Xiandai fojiao* 現代佛教 in 1932. The incidents at the Yongquan Monastery, and their repercussions on the Institute of Buddhist Studies, then recently founded and organized by the master, are described in at least eight articles of *Xiandai sengqie* (vol. 4, num. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 1931) and *Xiandai fojiao* (vol. 5, n. 4, 1932).

76. The origins of this controversy date back to the end of the War of Resistance against Japan. See Juedeng 覺澄, “Guanyu Tiechan heshang yu Liurongsi ruogan ziliao 關於鐵禪和尚與六榕寺若干資料,” in *Guangzhou wenshi ziliao cunqao xuanbian* 廣州文史資料存稿選編, Guangzhou shi zhengxie xuexi he wenshi ziliao weiyuanhui 廣州市政協學習和文史資料委員會, ed. (*Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe* 10, http://www.gzzxsws.gov.cn/gzws/cg/cgml/cg10/200808/t20080825_3713.htm); Yu Qingmian 餘慶綿, ed., *Guangzhou Liurongsi zhi* 廣州六榕寺志 (Guangzhou shi Liurongsi (neibu ziliao): Foshan shi hechuang guanggao celüe gongsi yinshuachang, 1999), 87–88. Its evolution occupies many pages of the issues 7/8 (p. 49–52) and 9/10 (p. 54–58) of the Buddhist periodical *Yuanyin yuekan* 圓音月刊 (1948), a publication of the Association (its head office was at the Liurong Monastery) that served as a vehicle for the official policy of the Buddhist milieu of Canton on this subject.

77. His three refusals (*san bu* 三不) were: to not reside in towns; to not reside in small temples; and to not reside in private houses. See Feng Xuecheng 馮學成, *Yunmen zong shihua* 雲門宗史話 (Chengdu: Chengdu shi yinhe yinshuachang, 2001), p. 3 of Foyuan’s preface. In fact, Xuyun never resided at the Liurong Monastery.

of the Liurong Monastery,⁷⁸ in order to maintain the backing of the committed laymen of the provincial association. Xuyun's most aggressive accuser charged him with seeking material gain related to this rich monastery in Canton, but he provides no proof of these charges.⁷⁹

At this point, we already have enough elements to understand the aim of the *nianpu*: the idealization of this religious figure is designed to provide the Chinese monastic community with a model to follow, and to illustrate to the lay community the proof of the efficacy of the Buddhist path. It would seem that the criteria defining the Buddhist monastic ideal have changed little in modern times, since Xuyun's idealized image does not represent a new model, but rather perpetuates a very traditional one. In its choice of ideals and models, the Buddhist tradition seems to take little account of modernity.

The Yunmen Incident

In 1944, Xuyun took up his position as abbot at the Yunmen Monastery in Guangdong in order to undertake its restoration. The fame of Xuyun had by now surpassed Asian borders; Ananda Jennings, an American disciple devoted to the study of Buddhism, went to China in 1948 to take the vows and the five precepts⁸⁰ with him. The master also took up his fundraising journeys again, performing rites and directing ceremonies in Canton, Hong Kong, and Macao. When he happened to be in Hong Kong to expound the sutras in the summer of 1949, he visited Cen Xuelü who, at this point, had taken up permanent residence in the city: the Communist takeover was imminent. According to a note that the editor included only in the 1957 edition of the *nianpu*, Cen pointed out to Xuyun that the political changes would most certainly affect the monasteries in China. He tried to keep the master in Hong Kong, but Xuyun refused to abandon the continent and "his tens of thousands of monks and nuns," as he considered it his responsibility to reunite and protect them.⁸¹

78. "Xuyun heshang jieshou Liurongsi 虛雲和尚接收六榕寺," *Xueseng tiandi* 學僧天地 1, no. 6 (1948), 22.

79. Shi Yunfeng 釋雲峰, "Liurong si caichan zhengduo yu Xuyun liangdao Liurongsi 六榕寺財產爭奪與虛雲兩到六榕寺," in *Guangzhou wenshi ziliao cunqao xuanbian* 廣州文史資料存稿選編 (Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe 10, 2005, http://www.gzzxws.gov.cn/gzws/cg/cgml/cg10/200808/t20080825_3700.htm).

80. The five precepts for committed laymen are: do not kill; do not steal; do not lie; do not drink alcohol; and do not commit immoral sexual acts, such as adultery.

81. Cen Xuelü, *Xuyun heshang nianpu*, 145.

In the spring of 1951, as Cen Xuelü had foreseen, the first political campaigns began to endanger the security of the “religious and superstitious practitioners.”⁸² Even though reconstruction work was not yet entirely finished, the Yunmen monastery was by now ready to take in novices for ordination, and Xuyun organized the first precepts transmission session at the renewed site. However, an “incident” (*shibian* 事变) happened at the monastery about which the current-edition *nianpu* provides no further details. Even so, the Yunmen incident is very well known in Buddhist circles in China and abroad.⁸³ Xuyun’s near-martyrdom during these events has without a doubt contributed to his mythologization. At the time, Xuyun was supposedly more than one hundred years old and regarded as a spiritual authority and a religious model in China.

Be that as it may, as Cen Xuelü remarked in a note appended to the *nianpu*, the narration of his life as told by Xuyun to his acolytes in 1951 stopped at the year 1949.⁸⁴ From this moment and up until Xuyun’s death in 1959, the events of his life were recorded by his disciples in the third person.

It is in the third edition of the 1957 *nianpu* that an account of the Yunmen incident appeared for the first time.⁸⁵ In a note, Cen Xuelü pointed out that he had to censor the account in question before publishing it (“I will only say what is legitimate to say, and nothing more”)⁸⁶ and he also highlighted that, at this time, he himself was not entirely aware of these happenings.⁸⁷ The account in question was republished in the 1962 edition of the *nianpu*, before being entirely expunged from the latest edition. I have already shown that some elements have been omitted in the *nianpu* because they did not comply with an ideal picture of Xuyun; the case of the Yunmen incident illustrates that other elements have been censored in this text for political reasons.

To retrace the events of 1951, we must rely on the recollections (however biased these may be) of a few disciples of Xuyun who were at Yunmen at the time. In addition to the 1957 account, interviews are available, as well as memoirs and sermons destined to circulate in the monastic world—notably,

82. That is to say, all those whose income over the three years preceding the Communist takeover was derived from religious professions. See Holmes Welch, *Buddhism under Mao* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 72.

83. As it is based on the 1957 edition of the *nianpu*, the English translation of Xuyun’s biography contains the account of the Yunmen incident: see Luk and Hunn, eds., *Empty Cloud*, 138–141.

84. *Nianpu*, 129.

85. Cen Xuelü, *Xuyun heshang nianpu*, 145–148.

86. Cen Xuelü, *Xuyun heshang nianpu*, 145.

87. Cen Xuelü, *Xuyun heshang nianpu*, 148. See also Welch, *Buddhism under Mao*, 577, note 78.

the religious instructions expounded by Master Tiguang 體光 (1924–2005) to his community at the Jingju 淨居 Monastery on Mount Qingyuan 青原 in Jiangxi⁸⁸ in the last years of his life.

At the time of the transmission of the precepts at Yunmen Monastery in 1951, the authorities of the Ruyuan district in Guangdong laid siege to the establishment for almost three months—from March 31 to June 28—under the pretext of searching for gold, arms, and “counterrevolutionaries.” The campaign to suppress counterrevolutionaries, aimed at all opponents of the regime and especially former members of the Guomindang, had in fact just begun. Key moments in this complex set of events include: the first arrest made by the Hunan Public Security Bureau (PSB) of a “bad element” from Hunan who had infiltrated the monastic community;⁸⁹ the subsequent siege of the monastery, and the confinement of the monks in the Meditation Hall and the Dharma Hall, and the meticulous search of the monastery for hidden gold; finally, the registration of all the monks, the night rounds, the arrest of a dozen (or several dozen) residents of Yunmen, and the repeated violence inflicted on Xuyun by the military arm of the Public Security Bureau sent by the local authorities.

The principal target of the earliest intervention was a former Nationalist chief of the village of Chenzhou in Hunan who had been permitted to hide in the monastery and who was immediately arrested. PSB inquiries subsequently implicated other monks of the Yunmen community who, before turning to religion, had been government functionaries under the former Guomindang regime. One of these was Miaoyun 妙雲 (1911–1951), one of Xuyun’s most prized disciples at this point.⁹⁰ Xuyun apparently advised him (and other monks as well) not to tell the truth during the interrogation: Miaoyun should omit that he had studied at university and worked for the government, and just say that, before becoming a monk, he cultivated the land. However, Miaoyun replied to Xuyun that monks cannot lie, and thus he told the PSB that he had been a civil servant. According to a witness who lived next door to the police station in Ruyuan, Miaoyun was beaten to death or shot at the same time as at

88. *Tiguang laoheshang kaishi lu* 體光老和尚開示錄 (N.p., 2006).

89. The “official” version of the incident can be found in Jinghui 淨慧, ed., *Xuyun heshang fahui xubian* 虛雲和尚法彙續編 (Shijiazhuang: Hebeisheng fojiao xiehui yinxing, 1990), p. 9 of the introduction; its spokesman is Master Jinghui 淨慧 (1933–2013), a former disciple of Xuyun who was at the Yunmen Monastery in this period and who, from 1993, has been one of the vice chairmen of the Buddhist Association of China (Zhongguo fojiao xiehui). According to some witnesses, Jinghui was one of the informers against the monastery.

90. The biography of Miaoyun contained in the 1957 and in the 1962 editions of the *nianpu* has been removed from its modern edition; on Miaoyun, see also Welch, *Buddhism under Mao*, 575, note 66.

least two other Yunmen monks, “their bodies dragged to the banks of the river and thrown in for the dogs to eat.”⁹¹

In fact, there apparently *was* gold hidden in the monastery, although it was not found. These were the funds that Xuyun had started to collect at the end of the 1920s to accomplish a vow, shared with the president of the Republic, Lin Sen 林森 (1868–1943), to restore the Guangxiao 光孝 Monastery in Canton. In 1948, this vow was close to fruition and Xuyun had transferred the gold to Yunmen via Hong Kong. Moreover, anti-American propaganda was raging at this point and only one year prior to Communist takeover of 1949, the Yunmen Monastery had welcomed an American visitor in the person of Ananda Jennings—a damning event in the context of the times. This visit had already caused difficulties and certain disciples of Xuyun cited, among the reasons for the Yunmen incident, the charge against the master of having passed secret information to an enemy country.⁹²

In fact, Xuyun was seen in a very bad light by the Communist authorities of Ruyuan. This hostility derived, first of all, from his privileged connections with members of the Guomindang. Throughout his life, Xuyun established personal ties with the military commanders or the governors of this or that province who were, almost invariably, his disciples; he had always enjoyed the protection of the former nationalist government and thus it was not difficult to condemn him as a collaborator and an enemy. Secondly, this protection, which had permitted him to carry out his religious duties in (near) complete liberty, had also conferred on him an enormous prestige. However, this religious charisma was not recognized in the new China and, because of his connections and of his uncompromising adherence to the Buddhist tradition, Xuyun was the most inconvenient of saints. This had been demonstrated by a dispute that broke out in 1944, when the master had mobilized every level of government in order to reclaim land that had belonged to the Yunmen monastery and had been seized by the Ruyuan secondary school.⁹³ The resentment that his apparent victory had aroused among the cadres of Ruyuan is, no doubt, one of the debts for which Xuyun paid dearly in 1951.⁹⁴

91. According to another witness of the events of 1951, whom I met in 2006 at the Liurong Monastery in Canton, there were four victims of the Yunmen incident.

92. Personal communication (Yunmen Monastery, March 2006).

93. The document relating this dispute is only partially reported in *Nianpu*, 127–129. The full version (Zhang Jianfen, “Zuihou yi mian he zuihou yi shu”) can be found in *Xuyun laoheshang nianpu fahui zengding ben*, 1101–1105.

94. According to a former disciple of Xuyun, Master Yichao 意超 (1927–2013), this was even the principal cause of the Yunmen incident; I am grateful Bill Porter for having carried out this interview on my behalf in 2006.

In addition, the launch of the land reform campaign in 1950 had revived the age-old tensions, due to the exaggerated localism of Guangdong, between the central power and the provincial leaders. The reluctance of the Guangdong authorities to adopt a hard line with landowners had prompted the central government to send more than 1,500 members of the Northern army to compel them to implement the new guidelines.⁹⁵ Political conflict was from this point forward inevitable, and the local cadres found it necessary to correct their faults through symbolic acts: Xuyun appeared to be a perfect target.

However, Xuyun's disciple Foyuan 佛源 (1923–2009) apparently managed to escape from the besieged monastery and reach the capital, where he alerted Xuyun's disciple and political protector Li Jishen 李濟深 (1885–1959). When the news about what was happening at the monastery spread, the Yunmen incident turned into a diplomatic disaster. Xuyun was too well known to become the victim of such a violent attack at a time when the Communist Party hoped to engineer the “natural” and “spontaneous” disappearance of religion by undermining its economic basis and by educating the masses in socialist doctrines. The Land Reform was implemented in Guangdong in June 1951.⁹⁶ That same month, solicited by demands coming from Xuyun's disciples in China and abroad, the central government had to send a few members of a special commission to Yunmen, in order to investigate the incident. The local authorities were urged to release the monks who had been arrested, and the incident only worsened their already critical position in the wake of the Land reform. No later than the spring of 1953, nearly all of the main representatives of the local leadership—including the provincial governor, Ye Jianying 葉劍英 (1897–1986)—had been reassigned elsewhere.

Apotheosis and Last Years

In 1952, the government of the People's Republic decided to establish the Buddhist Association of China (*Zhongguo fojiao xiehui* 中國佛教協會,⁹⁷ BAC), to facilitate the control and instrumentalization of Buddhism. Summoned by Buddhists to support the preparations for this association, and by the government to legitimize the BAC through his celebrity, Xuyun

95. Ezra Vogel, “Land Reform in Kwangtung 1951–1953: Central Control and Localism,” *The China Quarterly* 38 (April–June 1969), 34–51.

96. On the progression of the Land Reform in the Ruyuan district, see Ruyuan Yaozu zizhi xian dang'an ju 乳源瑤族自治縣檔案局 and Ruyuan Yaozu zizhi xian dang'an guan 乳源瑤族自治縣檔案館, eds., *Ruyuan dashi ji* 乳源大事記 (N.p., 1993), 127–128, 130.

97. The Chinese Buddhist Association established in 1947 had followed the Nationalists to Taiwan.



left his community in Yunmen at the end of April 1952 (having just recovered from the Yunmen incident), and arrived in Peking after a journey of almost five months. There, he participated in a number of Buddhist activities sponsored by the government,⁹⁸ including the meeting of the promoters of the BAC that took place at the beginning of November.

At the end of the year, Xuyun declined the invitation to become the abbot of Peking's Guangji 廣濟 Monastery and decided instead to depart on a long journey to the Jiangnan area, the stronghold of Buddhism. He spent four months in Shanghai, where he directed a Dharma Assembly for World Peace lasting forty-nine days, the first on this scale after the ceremony carried out by Yinguang 印光 (1861–1940) in 1936.⁹⁹ He then oversaw two meditation weeks (*chanqi* 禪七) at the Yufo Monastery,¹⁰⁰ as well as other ceremonies such as a commemoration of Yinguang on the twelfth anniversary of his death.¹⁰¹ From Shanghai, Xuyun went to Hangzhou and then to Suzhou.¹⁰² The Buddhist press reported his movements and published his many talks, while huge crowds of devotees gathered to meet and hear him. This long southern sojourn sealed Xuyun's religious authority and marked the apotheosis of his career: from mid-December 1952 until the end of April 1953, between forty and fifty thousand people took refuge with him.¹⁰³ According to Holmes Welch, Xuyun was at this point the most eminent monk in China “among conservatives.”¹⁰⁴

98. He directed a Dharma assembly during the Peace Conference of the Asian and Pacific Region and represented the Chinese Buddhists in welcoming a delegation from Ceylon (modern-day Sri Lanka). See Jinghui 淨慧, “Xuyun heshang xingye ji. Jinian Xuyun heshang yuanji sanshi zhounian 虛雲和尚行業記——紀念虛雲和尚圓寂三十周年,” in *Zhongguo fojiao yu shenghuo chan* 中國佛教與生活禪, Jinghui, ed. (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2005), 370–383.

99. “Benshi fojiao jie qijian heping fahui yingqing Xuyun heshang li Hu zhu fa 本市佛教界啟建和平法會迎請虛雲和尚蒞滬主法,” *Juexun yuekan* 覺訊月刊 7, no. 1 (1953), 14; “Shanghai shi fojiao jie zhuyuan shijie heping shuilu fahui qijian jiangjing fahui shuilu daochang sishijiu tian 上海市佛教界祝願世界和平水陸法會啟建講經法會水陸道場四十九天,” *Honghua yuekan* 弘化月刊 139 (1952), 16.

100. “Yufosi qing Xuyun Yingci jiangjing 玉佛寺請虛雲應慈講經,” *Juexun yuekan* 7/3 (1953), 15.

101. Xuyun's discourse on this occasion is in Zhenkong 真空, “Xuyun laoheshang kaishi—laoshi nianfo 虛雲老和尚開示——老實念佛,” *Honghua yuekan* 140 (1953), 4 (republished in *Nianpu*, 141–142).

102. “Xuyun heshang li Su Hang zhuchi he ping fahui 虛雲和尚蒞蘇杭主持和平法會,” *Juexun yuekan* 7/4 (1953), 15. The talk he gave in Hangzhou is in Jinghui, *Xuyun heshang fahui xubian*, 17–18.

103. This huge number reported in the *nianpu* was confirmed to Welch by informers who had no connection with Xuyun; see Welch, *Buddhism under Mao*, 616, note 39.

104. Welch, *Buddhism under Mao*, 331–332.



In 1953, Xuyun returned to Peking for the opening ceremony of the BAC, of which he became honorary president. At the end of the year, after two failed attempts,¹⁰⁵ and going against the wishes of the Buddhist and political authorities alike,¹⁰⁶ Xuyun found a hermitage where he could retire and practice in the twilight of his life,¹⁰⁷ in the ruins of the Chan Zhenru 真如 Monastery on Mount Yunju 雲居, a hundred kilometers from the town of Nanchang in Jiangxi. At this time, public monasteries were becoming less and less numerous and increasingly at the mercy of state politics; thus, six months after his arrival, about a hundred monks had already established themselves there.

Although at this point his health was already deteriorating, Xuyun had no other choice but to start restoring the buildings of Zhenru and clearing the land in order to lodge and feed the monastic community. However, he never became its abbot.¹⁰⁸ In 1954, he gave religious instructions to the community over a period of four months¹⁰⁹ and the next year, he managed to accomplish his last transmission of the precepts, and one of the last in the entire country, employing an expedient provided in the *Brahma's Net Sūtra*,¹¹⁰ that of self-ordination (*zi shi shoujie fangbian* 自誓受戒方便).¹¹¹

As can be inferred from the uncensored 1962 edition of the *nianpu* and from other documents, the last years of Xuyun's life were marked by the tense climate of the Maoist period. In 1957, after having submitted the monks to all kinds of harassment, local authorities succeeded, in an underhanded way, in seizing the fields that the monks had cleared and cultivated over the

105. To restore Guishan Monastery (the sacred site of the Guiyang branch of Chan, in Hunan) and Baofeng Monastery (the site of the patriarch Mazu Daoyi): Qixian 齐贤, "Huiyi Xuyun laoheshang diandi 回忆虚云老和尚点滴," *Chan* 4 (2009), <http://chan.bailinsi.net/2009/4/2009405.htm>.

106. Xuyun was not invited to Yunju, as he had been in the case of the monasteries he had restored in the pre-Communist period; on the contrary, he had to reiterate his request for authorization to settle in such a remote place.

107. See Xuyun's second letter to Zhan Liwu ("Yijiuwuliu nian sanyue zhi bayue Xugong gei Zhan Liwu jushi de xin: er") in Shaoyun 紹雲, *Xuyun laoheshang zai Yunju shan* 虚云老和尚在雲居山 (Hong Kong: Xianggang yannanfei chuban youxian gongsi, 2002), 254.

108. He was its *laoheshang*, its venerable monk or retired abbot.

109. The transcription of more than forty of these talks ("Fangbian kaishi" 方便開示) can be found in his annalistic biography (*Nianpu*, 194–263) as well as being published separately.

110. *Fanwangjing* 梵網經 (*Brahmajāla-sūtra*), T. 1484, vol. 24, 1006c14–15; Kuo Li-ying, *Confession et contrition dans le bouddhisme chinois du V^e au X^e siècle* (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1994), 40–45.

111. See *Nianpu*, 263–275 and He Mingdong 何明棟, *Xuyun heshang zhuan* 虚云和尚傳 (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2000), 138. The preface of the ordinations yearbook of the Zhenru Monastery is in Jinghui, *Xuyun heshang fahui xubian*, 56–58.

years.¹¹² The next year, after having been accused of corruption, reactionary ideology, erroneous ideas, pedophilia, and other crimes during the anti-Rightist Movement,¹¹³ Xuyun barely escaped political persecution. Letters accusing him of corruption were sent to the United Front Work Department of Jiangxi province.¹¹⁴ His hermitage was searched from top to bottom and, for the second time since 1951, all official documents of the monastery, as well as the private correspondence of the master and his religious writings, were seized, never to be returned. At the end of these investigations, Xuyun was declared to be innocent; in a long discourse betraying his disillusionment and his exhaustion, he explained to the community the origin of the accusations and the truth of the matter.¹¹⁵

The monks of Zhenru Monastery, who recorded the events of these last years in the *nianpu*, affirm that Xuyun's sorrow over this incident worsened his health irreparably; in any event, in 1959 Xuyun was already about ninety-five. A photographer summoned to Mount Yunju when the restoration was finally finished took photographs of the buildings of Zhenru Monastery and one of Xuyun sitting on a rock.¹¹⁶ Granting a request from a committed Canadian layman, Xuyun wrote a phrase on this photograph and sent it to him; the phrase was: “Do not abide in anything (*ying wusuo zhu* 應無所住) – inscription by Xuyun, one hundred and twenty years old, in the summer of 1959 (*jihai*).”¹¹⁷ Thus, following a tradition originating in the “portraits of long life” (*shouxian* 壽像) of the Song period,¹¹⁸ Xuyun placed himself in the ancient tradition of eminent monks, before passing away on October 13, 1959.

112. To annex them to the State Clearing Farm of Mount Yun, recently established by the local Agriculture and Forestry Department. See Cen Xuelü, *Xuyun laoheshang nianpu fahui*, 397–398; a partial translation of this account is in Luk, Hunn, *Empty Cloud*, 203–204. See also Qixian, “Huiyi Xuyun laoheshang diandi.”

113. During a large study session in Wuhan, in which Xuyun did not take part.

114. He, *Xuyun heshang zhuan*, 141.

115. *Nianpu*, 287.

116. Some of these photographs can be seen in the 1959 reprint of the *Monograph of Mount Yunju*: Cen Xuelü 岑學呂, ed., *Yunju shanzhi* 雲居山志, in vol. 15 of *Zhongguo fosi shizhi huikan* 中國佛寺史志彙刊, Du Jiexiang 杜潔祥, ed. (Taipei: Mingwen shuju, 1980–1985. First edition Hong Kong: Xianggang fojing liutongchu, 1959).

117. See the fourteenth letter of Xuyun to Zhan Liwu and Zhan Liwu's note appended to the letter: Shaoyun, *Xuyun laoheshang zai Yunju shan*, 264. This is a citation from the *Diamond Sūtra: Jingang banruoboluomi jing* 金剛般若波羅蜜經 (*Vajracchedikā prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*), T. 235, vol. 8, 749a12.

118. Griffith T. Foulk and Robert H. Sharf, “On the Ritual Use of Ch'an Portraiture in Medieval China,” *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 7 (1993–1994), 186.

I will consider one last distortion in the idealized representation of Xuyun: the *nianpu* fails to highlight the role he played in the society of his time. There are two main reasons for this: first, the need to conform the image of Xuyun to traditional criteria of sainthood that are by definition “outside of time”; second, the lack of historical distance at the time of the composition of this work. However, Xuyun greatly contributed to the preservation and renewal of Buddhism in the twentieth century.

Several scholars, including Holmes Welch, have portrayed Xuyun as an unrepentant conservative, as his actions were always carried out in a traditional framework and, for Xuyun, tradition, or “orthodoxy,” was founded on monastic rules. This master extended his strict personal observance of monastic discipline to the communities of all the sites he restored, reintroducing long, yearly ordination sessions and composing codes of rules adapted to the different establishments and historical periods. It may well be that his insistence on the observance of the Chinese Vinaya, and his promotion of an institutional form of Buddhism firmly separated from local cults, earned Xuyun the esteem of men in power at a time when the reaction of the Chinese elites, lay as well as Buddhist, often manifested itself in anti-clerical sentiments.¹¹⁹ Master Taixu attempted to reach the same goal via an entirely different route—namely, his engagement in the nationalist cause.

However, Xuyun’s traditionalist attitude did not prevent him from showing a certain degree of open-mindedness or from adopting certain innovations. For example, he attributed great importance to the instruction of the clergy, a major concern of modern Buddhists. Not only did Xuyun establish schools and Buddhist institutes in his monasteries,¹²⁰ he also insisted that disciples pursuing higher education finish their studies before being ordained.¹²¹ Xuyun’s attention extended as well to the female minority of the monastic order, toward which he always maintained a protective attitude: an article published in a Buddhist periodical in 1935 celebrated Xuyun’s ordination at

119. Vincent Goossaert, “Anatomie d’un discours anticlérical: le *Shenbao*, 1872–1878,” *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* 24 (2002), 113–131.

120. At the Gushan, Nanhua, Yunmen, and Yunju monasteries. At Huating Monastery in Kunming and at Nanhua Monastery, Xuyun also founded a primary school for peasant children: Cornelius Osgood, *Village Life in Old China: A Community Study of Kao Yao, Yünnan* (New York: Ronald Press, 1963), 84; Jy Din Shakya, as related to Ming Zhen (Chuan Yuan) Shakya, *Remembering Master Xu Yun*, <http://zbohy.zatma.org/Dharma/zbohy/Literature/xybook/introp1.html>.

121. Zhiding 知定 (1917–2003) met Xuyun for the first time in 1934 but, following his recommendations, did not settle at Nanhua Monastery until he completed his studies in 1937: Jy Din Shakya, *Remembering Master Xu Yun*.

Gushan of a group of thirty women residing in a nunnery in Fuzhou as “an unprecedented innovation in Buddhism.”¹²²

At the dawn of the Communist era, Xuyun also understood, well before others, the necessity for monks to provide their own food. It appears that the community of Yunmen Monastery began to clear the monastery’s uncultivated land in June 1944, “thus carrying out the combined practice of meditation and agriculture.”¹²³ The English Buddhist and writer John Blofeld (1913–1987), who in 1938 lived for nine months in the Meditation Hall of Huating Monastery, recalls that he occasionally worked in the fields with other monks from the Meditation Hall to help with farming.¹²⁴ The rule below appears in Xuyun’s *Perpetual Book of the Yunqi Monastery*, which dates from 1930:

AQ: In footnote 123, is repetition of text correct? Should repeated text be enclosed in quotation marks?

Numerous austerities can counter groundless calumnies. Some speak of monks as idle people; as for the community of the present monastery, from now on those who have the motivation to get to work, will plant many trees on the mountainous lands and will cultivate the fields with all their hearts. We shall live on the fruits of our labors, in order to avoid attracting criticism from outsiders and to forestall misappropriation.¹²⁵

While the Taixu-led wing of the Buddhist modernist movement of the first half of the twentieth century has been criticized for excluding the masses through its intellectual character, Xuyun managed instead to come closer to the common people, even if his own idea of Buddhism departed from the syncretism that represented the religious identity of most Chinese. He did this thanks to the simple and direct language he formulated for the lay practitioners, and to his insistence on the efficacy of any Buddhist practice properly performed.¹²⁶ The many religious events he directed, and which were always followed by massive takings of vows, were also important in this respect. At times, Xuyun also permitted groups of committed laymen to participate

122. “Fuzhou funü sanshi yu ren jituan chujia 福州婦女三十餘人集團出家,” *Foxue banyue kan* 佛學半月刊 109 (1935), 26.

123. Ruyuan Yaozu zizhi xian dang’an ju, Ruyuan Yaozu zizhi xian dang’an guan, *Ruyuan dashi ji*, 80–81.

124. John Blofeld, *The Wheel of Life, The Autobiography of a Western Buddhist* (London: Rider, 1987. First edition 1959), 163.

125. “Yunqi chansi wannian boji 雲棲禪寺萬年薄記”: *Fahui*, 297.

126. These two characteristics describe the religious instructions that Xuyun used to address a public including committed laymen (*kaishi*). See also the recollections of a monk who was with Xuyun at Gushan in the 1930s in *Nianpu*, 76.

in some of the daily religious practice of his monasteries, something quite uncommon during his time.¹²⁷ His ability to approach people at all levels is not insignificant; indeed, it is one of the reasons that he achieved such celebrity during his lifetime.

Xuyun has not been the only twentieth-century master who devoted himself to the regeneration of Chinese Buddhism on a traditional basis. Other contemporary figures, including Hongyi, Yinguang, and Longlian, committed themselves to a religious renewal founded on the re-establishment of the monastic rules and on the reintroduction of a methodical and mindful spiritual practice, without excluding some necessary innovations. It is high time to reconsider the role these Buddhist masters known as “conservatives” played in the framework of the Buddhist renewal of the Republican period, because the long-term effects of their actions have survived the most difficult periods of the Communist regime. In fact, Xuyun also contributed in a lasting manner to the preservation of the Buddhist tradition during the Maoist period, and to its subsequent renewal, in two ways: first, through his role in the founding of the Buddhist Association of China in 1952–1953; and second, through the support and cultivation of new generations of monks.

During the four months he spent in Shanghai in 1952, the master devoted many speeches to refuting the revolutionary impulses of the new progressive monks advocating the union of the Buddhists under the aegis of the Communists, and their essentially “separatist” attitude toward traditional Buddhism. He also openly condemned the reinvention of the rules of conduct that these monks were propagating during the Communist period.¹²⁸ In the course of his southern sojourn, Xuyun committed himself to extending and asserting his authority within society and even in a political context. At the same time, he hoped to bring cohesion to the broader Buddhist community, to try to obtain its support and full legitimization. It is probably in this context that the declaration of 1952 on his birthdate must be read: his extraordinary age was one of the attributes of the authority he was soon going to claim.

As many had foreseen, certain claims advanced by the revolutionary segment of the Chinese monastic community—¹²⁹especially those concerning

127. At Nanhua monastery, the committed laymen lived and ate in the guest quarters, participated in the morning and evening devotions and, after dinner, practiced the evening meditation with the monks in auxiliary places reserved for them. See Holmes Welch, *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism, 1900–1950* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 385.

128. See particularly Xuyun’s discourse “Fojiao tu yinggai tuanjie qilai baowei shijie heping 佛教徒應該團結起來保衛世界和平,” *Juexun yuekan* 7/1 (1953).

129. See Welch, *Buddhism under Mao*, 67–68, 128–129.

the boundary between the secular and the religious worlds—sparked heated discussion in the days preceding the opening ceremony of the BAC. Kenneth Chen mentions these debates in his 1964 work: “During the meeting, there were some unsuccessful attempts on the part of some monks to abolish the rules of ordination and discipline, so that monks could marry, eat meat, and drink spirits as they pleased.”¹³⁰

As one of the last representatives of the “old guard” of Chinese Buddhism still living, and the only one present at the meetings for the founding of the BAC, Xuyun found himself practically alone in fighting these revolutionary initiatives. However, thanks as well to the intervention of the vice president of the government, Li Jishen,¹³¹—one of the four representatives sent by the government to participate in the meetings, and who was one of Xuyun’s most devoted disciples¹³²—he succeeded in avoiding the modification of the Chinese Vinaya¹³³ (the formal preservation of the rules of Chinese monasticism has permitted its reconstruction on a traditional basis starting from the 1980s).

Another of Xuyun’s important contributions pertains to the role he played in the transmission of Buddhism. Bringing back to life many forgotten or declining sites in different provinces of South China, Xuyun embodied the basic social function of the Chan tradition, represented by the figure of the master and, by extension, the abbot of large communities of monks. This function allowed him to train new generations of Buddhists, therefore ensuring the continued existence of Chinese Buddhism. Following the custom of model monasteries of central China, Xuyun had systematized the organization and the frequency of precepts transmission sessions, as well as prolonging their duration in the establishments he had restored in Yunnan, Fujian, and Guangdong.¹³⁴ In the years that preceded and followed the Communist

130. Kenneth K. S. Chen, *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), 463–464. Richard Bush points out that, according to an unpublished manuscript by a former officer of the Religious Affairs Bureau, these propositions were not adopted because the government did not want to arouse the resentment of the older Buddhists: see Richard C. Bush, Jr., *Religion in Communist China* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1970), 329.

131. On Li Jishen, see *Guangdong jinxiandai renwu cidian*, 179–180; and Boorman, *Biographical Dictionary*, 292–295. Li Jishen was among the founders of *Xiandai Foxue* and a member of its permanent committee.

132. Zhongguo fojiao xiehui 中國佛教協會, ed., *Zhongguo fojiao xiehui wushi nian. Lijie quanguo daibiao huiyi wenxian huibian* 中國佛教協會五十年. 歷屆全國代表會議文獻彙編 (Nanjing: Jinling kejingchu, 2005), 4.

133. Zhongguo fojiao xiehui, *Zhongguo fojiao xiehui wushi nian*, 51.

134. “Chi ci Gushan Baiyun feng Yongquan chansi tongjie lu xu”: *Fahui*, 264; “Nanhuasi tongjie lu xu”: *Fahui*, 265; see also Welch, *The Practice*, 504, note 52.

takeover, he also particularly intensified the Dharma transmissions (*chuanfa* 傳法)¹³⁵ and enjoined his more motivated disciples to establish these transmissions abroad.

He thus created a heritage for the tradition of Chinese Buddhism: starting from the end of the 1950s, while some of his Dharma disciples established the first Buddhist communities in the West,¹³⁶ others in China continued to observe the precepts, sometimes even in prison or in labor camps.¹³⁷ At the beginning of the 1980s, the partial opening of the country allowed his disciples in China to devote themselves to religious reconstruction, which they were able to undertake in part due to the economic support provided by their expatriate Dharma brothers in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the United States.¹³⁸

Xuyun's *Nianpu* between Hagiography, Autobiography, and Autohagiography

Since its first official appearance in Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji* 史記) in the first century, and throughout its long evolution, the biographical genre has maintained some precise characteristics in premodern China: biographies (*zhuan* 傳) describe the life of an important individual in his official functions and rarely contain details concerning his personality. Intended to provide directives and a model of conduct to later generations of literati and government officials, Chinese biographies contain instead a great number of clichés: anything that did not conform to the established ideal was omitted. The biographical genre in China had (and still has) a didactic function.¹³⁹ Buddhist biographies—modeled on

135. This is a transmission by which a master formally recognizes the spiritual accomplishments of a disciple, names him as heir, and confers on him the authority to teach others.

136. Among others, Master Zhiding, who founded the Hsu Yun Temple in Honolulu (Hawaii) in 1956 and, in 1997, the Zen Buddhist Order of Hsu Yun; and Master Xuanhua 宣化 (1918–1995), who established the City of the Ten Thousand Buddhas (Wanfocheng 萬佛城) near San Francisco.

137. As was the case for Foyuan and Benhuan 本煥 (1907–2012).

138. On the role played by Xuyun's and Dixian's Dharma lineages in the reconstruction of Chinese Buddhism at the end of the Maoist period, see Daniela Campo, "Bridging the Gap: Chan and Tiantai Dharma Lineages (*famai* 法脈) from the Republican Era to post-Mao China," in *Buddhism after Mao: Negotiations, Continuities, Innovations*, Ji Zhe, André Laliberté, and Gareth Fisher, eds. (forthcoming).

139. Twitchett, "Chinese Biographical Writing"; see also Denis C. Twitchett, "Problems of Chinese Biography," in *Confucian Personalities*, Arthur F. Wright, and Denis Twitchett, eds. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1962), 24–39.

the life of the Buddha—were conveniently grafted in China onto the established biographical genre, sharing the didactic purpose and a few literary conventions.

According to Delahaye's definition, "in order to be strictly hagiographic, the document should be of a religious character and should aim at edification. The term may only be applied therefore to writings inspired by devotion to the saints and intended to promote it." Like Chinese biographies, hagiography or religious biography also deprives historical personages of their individuality to create ideal figures, its aim being not to entertain readers, but rather to provide edifying (religious) models. However, while biographies contained in Chinese official dynastic histories retained strong, verifiable historical references, the hagiographic genre tends by definition to decontextualize its historical subjects: "Thus robbed of their individuality, isolated in a sense from their period and their surroundings, and dragged from their natural setting, historical personages acquire, in the eyes of the people, an unreal and inconsistent character. For a vivid and clearly accentuated portrait as bequeathed to us by history, we substitute an ideal figure who is the personification of an abstraction: in place of the individual, the people know only the type."¹⁴⁰ Indeed, this is also the case of medieval Chinese hagiography, as exemplified in the Buddhist genre of biographies of eminent monks (*gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳), which, instead of providing accurate portraits of the lives of eminent monks, classified them in different types or categories according to their religious specialty.¹⁴¹

Xuyun's *nianpu* fits perfectly into the hagiographical tradition of the biographies of eminent monks, not only in terms of its themes, aims, and target audience, but also its sources and its editorial method.¹⁴² In 1951, given the circumstances, Xuyun probably recounted his life story in a very succinct or fragmentary way. However, as I have shown, the *nianpu* cannot be considered an independent, unique work, but rather should be seen as the result of a process of stratification originating in one or more oral traditions and successively written down. In the case of Xuyun as in others,¹⁴³ the saint-making process was a response to his increasing popularity. For several decades, accounts of Xuyun's life have been amplified and enriched following the criteria of the

140. Delahaye, *The Legends of the Saints*.

141. Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk*; James A. Benn, *Burning for the Buddha: Self-Immolation in Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007).

142. See Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk*, 4–15.

143. See Barend J. Ter Haar, *Practicing Scriptures. A Lay Buddhist Movement in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), 16.

Buddhist hagiographic tradition. As the main player in the last phase of the saint-making process, Cen Xuelü engaged in considerable alteration of these materials originating in oral tradition: he collated, integrated, amended, exaggerated, embroidered and reformulated all the information he had at his disposal in a *bricolage* that appears wholly harmonious when read in its entirety. We locate in this process the two standard authors of hagiographic literature: “There is, first, the anonymous creator called the people or, if we prefer to take the effect for the cause, the legend. (. . .) Beside him there is the man of letters, the editor, who stands before us as one condemned to a thankless task, compelled to follow a beaten track, but giving to all he produces a deliberate and durable character.”¹⁴⁴

The composition of the *nianpu* thus confirms the continuity of religious historiographical methods in the twentieth century. However, the analysis of the construction of Xuyun’s idealized representation as conveyed in the final version of the *nianpu* also contributes one new, relevant element to what we already know about hagiography in general, and about Buddhist hagiographic writing in particular. This analysis shows that, in addition to the “people” and the editor, the protagonist can also play a fundamental role in the saint-making process. In this sense, the *nianpu* blurs the lines between biography, autobiography, and hagiography.

Xuyun consciously determined how he wished to be perceived during his life and how he wished to be remembered after his death, and he reached this goal through two main strategies. In the first place, he deliberately tried to model his life on the ideal type of Buddhist sanctity. Xuyun was an object of veneration and a role model well before the composition of the *nianpu* and well before the overstatement of his age. This master possessed many qualities: that of self-perfection leading to the mastery of the physical world (i.e., the achievement of long life); that of erudition allowing for the transmission of the written culture; and that of persuasiveness, allowing him to impose his own authority. These qualities were the basis of Xuyun’s charisma, which he directed toward his religious entourage and Chinese devotees during his life.¹⁴⁵ The hagiographic representation that confronts us today is not so different from the one they perceived.

Secondly, Xuyun consciously participated in the hagiographic elaboration of his image. Anecdotes that he recounted to his comrades and disciples became part of oral traditions and biographical accounts. In addition to ad hoc

144. Delahaye, *The Legends of the Saints*.

145. Vincent Goossaert, “Mapping Charisma among Chinese Religious specialists,” *Nova Religio* 12, no. 2 (2008), 12–28.

declarations concerning his age, Xuyun revised and annotated, in 1956, the first edition of his *nianpu*.

Even considering his great age and precarious health, he endorsed the general lines of his life narrative. As can be inferred from recent interviews and recollections, Xuyun also induced his disciples to believe that he was capable of reading their minds and foretelling the future, and that he could avail himself of his alleged powers to instruct them.¹⁴⁶ These new miraculous accounts also show that Xuyun's saint-making process still continues after the completion of his *nianpu*, and beyond this work.

Therefore, the aim underlying the composition of the *nianpu*—to provide the Buddhist community with a model to follow—seems to have also been the aim that Xuyun had set for his own life: somehow, he decided to cast himself in the role of preserver and transmitter of the Buddhist tradition, and entrusted the transmission of this religious ideal to his biography. He was well aware of the didactic function of the lives of the saints, which are expressed above all through legends and metaphors: this may explain why, in his 1952 interview, he gave as his date of birth a day that, in the year 1840, did not exist.¹⁴⁷

146. See Campo, *La construction de la sainteté*, 347–354. An example of these new miraculous accounts can be found in Shaoyun 紹雲, *Xuyun laoheshang shentong shi xian* 虛雲老和尚神通示現 (2010), <http://www.xuefo.net/nr/article3/26218.html>.

147. This is the thirtieth day of the seventh moon of the twentieth year (*gengzi*) of the Daoguang era: the seventh moon of the twentieth year of the Daoguang era had, in fact, only twenty-nine days. The twenty-ninth day of the seventh month of the lunar calendar of 1840 corresponds to the twenty-sixth of August, the twenty-seventh of August being the first day of the eighth month of the lunar calendar: see <http://sinocal.sinica.edu.tw/>. It is probably for this reason that the first edition of the Xuyun's biography reads that he was born on the thirtieth day, while the later editions state that he was born on the twenty-ninth day: having seen that the first date did not exist, the editor modified it. Furthermore, one should note that it is on the twenty-ninth day of the seventh moon that the anniversary of Xuyun was celebrated in his monasteries; the *Dharma Collection of Venerable Xuyun* contains the transcription of at least eight Dharma talks given by the master on these occasions.