

8 SUBTLE ERUDITION AND COMPASSIONATE DEVOTION

LONGLIAN, “THE MOST OUTSTANDING BHIKṢUṆĪ” IN MODERN CHINA

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The title of “first *bhikṣuṇī* of the modern era” (*dangdai diyi biqi-uni* 當代第一比丘尼) was first bestowed on Longlian 隆蓮 (1909–2006) by Zhao Puchu 趙樸初 (1907–2000), former chairwoman of the Buddhist Association of China,¹ marking a formal recognition of her outstanding qualities and accomplishments. The expression “most outstanding nun” was widely accepted as a description of Longlian during the last decade of her life, and

* In terms of ethnographic data, the present study is based on information I collected in Sichuan (mainly at three nunneries: Aidaotang 愛道堂, Baitasi 白塔寺, and Tiexiangsi 鐵像寺), during three concentrated episodes of fieldwork carried out in October 1995–August 1996, July–September 1999, and July–August 2012. It also includes information gleaned from other fieldwork conducted in the same area over the last two decades (2000, 2005, 2006, 2008, and 2015). I owe a great debt of gratitude to some of the closest disciples of Longlian—nun Guoping 果平 (Baitasi), my friend and mentor, and nuns Guofang 果芳 (Tiexiangsi), Changwu 昌悟, Longhui 隆慧, Renyi 仁義, Xincheng 心誠, and Zhaoxin 照心 (Aidaotang)—for all information, material, and personal views they have shared with me. I wish to express my gratitude also to Ann Heirman, for her careful reading of this study and for her valuable suggestions. Finally, I am grateful for the grant I received in 2012 from the University of Bologna in the context of a research project on monasticism (“Fare famiglia da soli. L’esperienza monastica come riscrittura delle logiche identitarie e aggregative nella storia. Comparazioni interculturali e interdisciplinari”) directed by F. Sbardella.

1. Zhao Puchu was highly revered by Longlian, who knew him personally; in her nunneries, he is still commonly referred to as “Zhao Pulao 趙樸老,” a sign of affection and respect. Note that, as demonstrated by Ji Zhe in Chapter Nine, the extent to which Zhao Puchu was and still is respected in Chinese Buddhist milieus is a highly questionable issue.

has achieved the status of virtually unquestionable truth since she passed away in 2006.²

Some of her relics and personal belongings are preserved in Aidaotang 愛道堂, the nunnery located in the center of Chengdu where she lived for most of her life.³ Relic-beads were recovered after her cremation—“only a small amount,” as I was told by one of her disciples, but still considered enough to testify to her spiritual achievements. Indeed, there is no doubt that Longlian deserves to be counted among the most popular and widely worshipped religious personalities in contemporary mainland China (see Figure 8.1), as is demonstrated by the throngs of people who came to her commemoration ceremony in 2009 (the 100th anniversary of her birth),⁴ by the crowds attending rites for the dead and other ceremonies in front of her *stūpa* on significant religious celebrations, and by the constant stream of pilgrims paying homage to her memorial hall on the first and fifteenth days of each lunar month.

A cursory glance at her biography suggests many of the extraordinary qualities of this Sichuanese nun. Longlian was a child prodigy; her intellectual gifts were obvious at a young age. Later in life, she became a renowned Buddhist scholar, a skillful calligrapher,⁵ and a talented poet. Before taking her monastic

2. This is clear in light of the number times Zhao Puchu's declaration has been cited. Similar descriptions also appear in many treatments of Longlian. See for example the titles of books and articles about her (Hua Chuan 華川, “Zhongguo diyi biqiuni: Sichuan nizhong foxueyuan zhang Longlian fashi 中國第一比丘尼——四川尼眾佛學院院長隆蓮法師,” *Zhongwai wenhua jiaoliu zazhi* 中外文化交流雜誌, Supplement (1994), 104–106; Li Yuchuan 李豫川, “Dangjin Zhongguo diyi ni: Longlian fashi 當今中國第一尼——隆蓮法師,” *Xianggang fojiao* 香港佛教 387 (1992), 19–22; Qiu Shanshan 裘山山, “Dangdai diyi biqiuni: Longlian fashi dawen lu 當代第一比丘尼——隆蓮法師答問錄,” *Zhongguo zongjiao* 中國宗教 1 (1999), 31–35, and *Dangdai diyi biqiuni: Longlian fashi zhuan* 當代第一比丘尼——隆蓮法師傳 (Fuzhou: Fujian meishu chubanshe, 1997); and Zhao Shifu 趙世富, “Dangdai Zhongguo diyi nü gaoseng 當代中國第一女高僧,” *Yanhuang chunqiu* 炎黃春秋 5 (1993), 70–72, as well as a documentary on Longlian's life: Aidaotang 愛道堂, ed., *Dangdai diyi biqiuni* 當代第一比丘尼 (DVD. Chengdu: Aidaotang, 2009). Further proof of the identification of Longlian as the most outstanding nun in modern China is to be found on the Internet: any search including the words *diyi biqiuni* inevitably returns extensive coverage devoted to her.

3. Dating back to the Ming dynasty, Aidaotang has long been the most important public nunnery in Chengdu city, and belongs to the Pure Land tradition. Once called Yuanjuean 圓覺庵, in 1911 its name was changed to Aidaotang to commemorate Mahāprajāpatī (Ch. Daaidao 大愛道), founder of the Buddhist monastic order for nuns. See Ester Bianchi, *The Iron Statue Monastery. Tiexiangsi, a Buddhist Nunnery of Tibetan Tradition in Contemporary China* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 2001), 84–85 and *passim*.

4. See <http://mustthink.blog.163.com/blog/static/861130592009103165887>.

5. A collection of her calligraphic works was published by her students and disciples in 2003: see Sichuan Nizhong Foxueyuan 四川尼眾佛學院, ed., *Hanno foxin: Longlian fashi shouji* 翰墨佛心——隆蓮法師手迹 (Chengdu: Sichuan nizhong foxueyuan, 2003). In this



FIGURE 8.1 Worship of Longlian's relics till 2009 (Aidaotang). Courtesy of Ester Bianchi.

vows, she was the first woman ever to pass the civil service examinations and to work for the Sichuan provincial government. At the same time, she studied with some of the most important Buddhist masters and scholars of the modern era, including Fazun 法尊 (1902–1980), Nenghai 能海 (1886–1967), Sherap Gyatso (1884–1968), and Wang Enyang 王恩洋 (1897–1964), all of whom were

unanimous in expressing their praise for her exceptional brightness. Starting in the early 1950s, she worked with the Communist government, and she was the first and only woman to play an active role at the leadership level in the Buddhist Association of China. She was also chairwoman and then honorary chairwoman of the Buddhist Association of Sichuan, and a member of the National and Sichuanese Councils of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. However, she considered her most important achievements to have been the re-establishment of what she believed to be the "correct" procedures for *bhikṣuṇī* ordination (the so-called *erbusengjie* 二部僧戒 or "dual ordination"), and the foundation of a seminary for the training of a new generation of learned nuns. She fulfilled both of these wishes in her eighties, thus contributing to the evolution of the role and status of Buddhist nuns in contemporary China.

The central topic I shall address in this article is whether Longlian can be considered a "saint" at all, given that she consistently, repeatedly, and firmly opposed those who regarded her in such terms, and rejected any form of spiritual devotion directed toward her person. This is why she did not want rumors of miracles or extraordinary stories about her to spread, although a small number of such stories has nevertheless begun to circulate since her death. If we wish to portray her as a modern saint, then we must clarify the kind(s) of "sanctity" she represents. Interestingly enough, to date we lack a comprehensive, fully developed hagiography of her life. Instead, we have a number of independent narratives (mostly biographical, in some cases already hagiographical),⁶ which do not really contradict each other, but rather tend to emphasize different aspects and elements, thus resulting in quite dissimilar portraits. Some of these narratives are the products of monastic or institutional religious milieus. Contributions of common believers are considerable as well, particularly given the wide circulation of information and opinions published online on private blogs, social networks, and websites. Other accounts of Longlian's life and work, including her most widely read biography, have been written by non-Buddhists for a secular audience. The diverse character of the existing sources about Longlian—be they written or

respect, she resembles Zhao Puchu, whose calligraphic skills were much admired (see Chapter Nine).

6. In the present study, "hagiography" refers to a life of a saint, i.e. accounts of Longlian that portray her as a realized and exceptional being in religious terms, an exemplary model to be emulated and venerated, a source of blessing and inspiration. "Biography," on the other hand, refers to the more secular accounts of her life. On this issue, refer to the introduction to this volume.

oral—can be regarded as both the cause and the reflection of the multifaceted nature of the cult that has developed around her. Before delving into this topic, I will begin with an overview of her life and works.

Venerable Longlian's Life and Works

Longlian⁷ was born in Leshan city, Sichuan province, on the thirteenth day of the third lunar month in the first year of the Xuantong 宣統 reign, i.e., on May 2, 1909. Her lay name was You Yongkang 游永康, her courtesy name Dechun 德純, and her nickname Mingyan 銘燕.

Longlian came from an elite family background: both of her parents were members of well-known families of scholars from Leshan. Her maternal grandfather, Yi Shuhui 易曙輝 (n.d.), was a successful candidate in the provincial imperial civil examinations, succeeding in attaining the “supplementary group” (*fugong* 副貢) for the Imperial College. He subsequently

7. The following biography is based on the chapter devoted to Longlian in my work on the Tiexiang nunnery (see Bianchi, *The Iron Statue Monastery*, 24–43), to which I have added new information taken from her two main biographies (the bestselling work by Qiu Shanshan, *Dangdai diyi biqiuni*, and the recent Chinese-style biography or *nianpu* 年譜 by Chen Meiwu 陳沫吾, “Longlian fashi nianpu chubian 隆蓮法師年譜初編,” *Wenshi zazhi* 文史雜誌 1 (2013), 12–16) and other sources published since 2001, as well as information from interviews carried out during fieldwork conducted since 1996. Other sources on Longlian's life and works include: Chen Meiwu, “Boai tianxia pudao renjian: Wo xinzhong de Longlian fashi 博愛天下鋪道人間—我心中的隆蓮法師,” *Wenshi zazhi* 文史雜誌 2 (2004), 12–14; Chen Meiwu, “Longlian fashi de foxue rensheng yu hongfa shijian 隆蓮法師的佛學人生與弘法實踐,” *Wenshi zazhi* 文史雜誌 6 (2012), 4–10; Chen Zhonghui 陳中惠, “Longlian fashi yu Sichuan nizhong foxueyuan 隆蓮法師與四川尼眾佛學院,” *Sichuan tongyi zhanxian* 四川統一戰線 4 (1999), 18–19; Guoping 果平, “Lüeshu Longlian fashi de sengcai jiaoyu shijian 略述隆蓮法師的僧才教育實踐,” *Fayin* 法音 2 (1998), 23–27; Hua Chuan, “Zhongguo diyi biqiuni”; Lawei 拉維, “Jinri Zhongguo de biqiuni 近日中國的比丘尼,” *Fayin* 法音 1 (1982), 43–45; Miriam Levering, “Women, The State, and Religion Today in the People's Republic of China,” in *Today's Woman in World Religions*, Arvind Sharma, ed. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 217–219; Li Yuchuan, “Dangjin Zhongguo diyi ni”; Liu Qian, “Dharmacarya Long Lian: A Chinese Bhikṣuṇī with High Prestige and Respect,” *Women of China* 11 (1995), 29–30; Qiu Jian 邱健, “Sishi nian qian de nüguan xuefa wei ni: fuyou chuanqi secai de Longlian fashi 四十年前的女官削髮為尼—富有傳奇色彩的隆蓮法師,” *Jinri Zhongguo* 今日中國 5 (1986), 66–67; Qiu Shanshan, “Dangdai diyi biqiuni”; Rurui 如瑞, “Wo xinzhong yongyuan bu luo de taiyang: huainian enshi Longlian lao fashi 我心中永遠不落的太陽——懷念恩師隆蓮老法師,” *Fayin* 法音 12, no. 268 (2006), 29–32; Ruyi 如意, “Mingxin de zhuisi, wujin de huainian: daonian enshi Longlian fashi 銘心的追思無盡的懷念——悼念恩師隆蓮法師,” *Fayin* 法音 1, no. 269 (2007), 43–45; Wei Yixiong 魏奕雄, “Fomen cainü 佛門才女,” *Wenshi zazhi* 文史雜誌 2 (2007), 14–16; Wen Jinyu 溫金玉, “Ying luo Emei diyi feng: dao yidai ming ni Longlian fashi 影落峨眉第一峰——悼一代名尼隆蓮法師,” *Zhongguo zongjiao* 中國宗教 12 (2006), 19–21; Yinjun 印俊, “Yi qinjiao enshi: Longlian fashi 憶親教恩師——隆蓮法師,” *Fayin* 法音 12, no. 268 (2006), 33–34; and Zhao Shifu, “Dangdai Zhongguo diyi nü gaoseng.”

abandoned the examinations, however, and decided to take up a career in education instead.⁸ The father of her maternal grandmother, Wu Du 吳都 (n.d.), was successful in the civil examinations as well, obtaining the *xiaolian* 孝廉 grade. He later founded a traditional school which was held in high esteem in the area. Her paternal grandfather, You Xixiang 游西庠 (n.d.), was a scholar who had passed the imperial examinations at the county level and had also chosen a career as an educator. Longlian's father, You Fuguo 游輔國 (n.d.), had been a brilliant student who graduated from the Tongsheng Normal School (the forerunner of today's Sichuan University), the first university to be established in Sichuan. For ten years he was superintendent of the Department of Education of the provincial government of Sichuan, and later occupied the post of county magistrate in Gulin 古蘭, Mingshan 名山, and Jinghua 精華 (present-day Jinchuan 金川). Growing up as the eldest daughter in such a family, Longlian had the opportunity to receive a privileged education for a woman of her time.

When she was almost one year old, Longlian moved with her mother to the Yi mansion, i.e., the house of her maternal grandparents, because Longlian's father was away for work most of the time. Indeed, her father took another wife and Longlian was separated from him for the first six years of her life. As the only child at her grandparents' house, she was the center of attention.⁹ She did not have a private tutor, but was instead instructed by her family members, notably her aunt, her maternal grandfather, and later her father. In 1912, at the age of four, she began to read and write and is said to have been able to recite traditional Chinese poetry fluently soon thereafter. Her family thus realized that this little child was very talented and exceptionally bright, and never tried to discourage her natural inclination toward scholarship.

Her family encouraged not only her secular studies, but also her religious education. From the age of seven, Longlian began to regularly recite the Buddha's name and to chant Buddhist *sūtras* together with her maternal grandmother, her favorite person during her childhood and the one to whom she felt the closest. Her mother was also a fervent Buddhist, as was her maternal grandfather, who held the position of chairman of the Leshan Buddhist Association. She began to abstain from meat from a very young age, and often followed her grandmother on her visits to local temples to burn incense and worship the Buddhas. She was told Buddhist stories, and practiced reading and writing Buddhist texts as soon as she was able to do so. But the most

8. The famous writer Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892–1978) was among his pupils.

9. Longlian later had one sister, who was six years younger than her, and five brothers (only three of her younger brothers survived infancy).

important religious event of her young life occurred in the company of her father, after he had reconciled with her mother and returned to live with them at the Yi mansion. In 1920, father and daughter went to Wuyou 烏尤 monastery in Leshan, and on the way they met Dayong 大勇 (1893–1929), who had just entered the monastic community.¹⁰ This encounter was destined to have a profound influence on Longlian's later life: at the time she told herself that "she would put on the same yellow robe once she had grown up."¹¹ The year 1922, when she turned thirteen, was crucial. She inherited her grandfather's private library filled with Buddhist scriptures, where she found and read an introduction to Pure Land Buddhism; she was also deeply impressed by a manuscript by master Yinguang 印光.¹² From that moment forward, she became a complete vegetarian and a professed believer.

One year earlier, she had entered the female branch of the Jiading (i.e. Leshan) Superior Elementary School, whose headmaster was her maternal grandfather. During the summer, she learned English through correspondence courses from Shanghai and studied high-school mathematics on her own. When she was thirteen and her grandfather died, her school experience was interrupted, but she continued her studies at home, proving to be very gifted in all subjects. Longlian had tutored her little sister and brother for some years already. Finally, in 1927, when she was eighteen, she took her first job as a teacher in Leshan Female School. At the same time, she was preparing to enter university, as suggested by her father. She taught herself classical Chinese language and literature, history, geography, and algebra, and also took English lessons with an American pastor's wife. She never took the university entrance exams, but was believed to have reached the appropriate level.

10. Dayong was born in Baxian (Sichuan). After serving in the army, he received monastic vows from Taixu 太虛 (1890–1947) in 1919. He went to Japan to study tantric teachings but later turned toward Tibetan Buddhism. In 1925 he went to Kham together with Fazun and other students from Beijing's Tibetan Language Studies Institute and stayed there until his death a few years later. See Dongchu 東初, *Zhongguo fojiao jindai shi* 中國佛教近代史, 2 vols. (Taipei: Dongchu chubanshe, 1974), 410–411; Gray Tuttle, *Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 81 *passim*; and 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), 44c–48c.

11. See, among others: Qiu Shanshan, *Dangdai diyi biqiuni*, 43–45, and Chen Meiwu, "Longlian fashi nianpu chubian," 12.

12. Yinguang (1861–1940) was a prolific Buddhist master whose life and works contributed to the revival of Pure Land Buddhism in modern China. See Chapter One by Jan Kiely, as well as Dongchu, *Zhongguo fojiao jindai shi*, 761–765, and Yu Lingbo 于凌波, *Xiandai fojiao renwu cidian* 現代佛教人物辭典, 2 vols. (Taipei: Foguang, 2004), 284c–288b.

In 1931 her family moved to Chengdu and she was employed as a math teacher at the Chengdu Female Middle School, a county-owned institution. On September 18, 1931, following the Mukden incident (the pretext for the Japanese occupation of Manchuria), she went into the streets with her students to protest. Fearing for her safety, her father took her back to Leshan. On this occasion, she wrote some patriotic poems which were published in the *Sichuan Newspaper*. The following year her father was appointed county magistrate in Gulin and the entire family moved there. She served as his personal secretary.

After returning to Chengdu in 1934, at the age of twenty-five, Longlian took the qualifying examinations for the government civil service, and her marks qualified her for both the position for ordinary officials and that for high officials. She was then employed as supervisor and teacher of language and algebra at the Chengdu Middle School, a high school attached to the local university. Two years later, in 1936, she took part in the examinations for county magistrate held by the provincial government and once again won first place. The authorities declared that women should live in official premises and receive military training; Longlian refused to do so and thus gave up the opportunity to become the first Chinese woman to hold the post of magistrate. Instead, she was offered a position as translator-editor at the Editing and Translating Secretariat of the provincial government.

Longlian's thirst for learning continued to manifest itself during the decade she spent in Chengdu before entering the Buddhist *samgha*. She devoted herself mainly to Buddhist thought and philosophy, but also engaged in the study of poetry, calligraphy, and wash-painting with renowned scholars such as Liu Xianxing 劉咸榮 (1858–1949). She also studied Chinese medicine with Chen Yunmen 陳雲門 (n.d.), a traditional doctor who was popular in central Sichuan, and learned acupuncture with Cheng Dan'an 承澹安 (1899–1957), a well-known acupuncturist and doctor who had studied in Japan.

In 1938, some days after she had entered the civil service, Longlian took a further step toward her future religious life: she went to Aidaotang and received the Bodhisattva precepts from Changyuan 昌圓 (1879–1944),¹³ thus

13. Changyuan, a native of Sichuan, was a master of the Pure Land tradition. He was abbot of both the Jinlongsi 金龍寺, a male monastery, and the Aidao nunnery. He was also the Chairman of the Buddhist Association of Sichuan, which was located in the Wenshuyuan 文殊院, where, in 1919, he founded the Sichuan Institute of Buddhist Studies (Sichuan foxueyuan 四川佛學院). He later established the Lianzong Institute of Studies (Lianzong yuan 蓮宗院, *lianrong* 蓮宗 meaning “school of the lotus,” another name for the Pure Land school) in Jinlongsi, and the Lianzong Female Institute of Studies (Lianzong nüzhong yuan 蓮宗女眾院) in Aidaotang. See Qiu Shanshan, *Dangdai diyi biqiuni*, 102–103.

formally becoming a lay Buddhist. She missed the collective ritual because of her father's opposition; he was opposed to his daughter's taking on such a serious religious commitment, and feared that she might eventually decide to become a nun. However, when Changyuan found her sobbing outside Aidaotang, he held a private ritual for her and gave her the religious name Longjing 隆淨.¹⁴

Her editorial job at the Secretariat was not very demanding, and she found herself with plenty of time to devote to her studies and practice. She often worked in the morning and took leave in the afternoon, and became a frequent guest of the Shaocheng foxueshe 少城佛學社, the Buddhist Studies Society founded in 1916 by Gong Xueguan 龔學光 (lay name of Nenghai) and other Sichuanese laypeople. It was located in Shaocheng park (now Renmin gongyuan 人民公園), just west of the city center. This was probably the most active of the few Buddhist circles existing at that time in Chengdu, and served as a venue for lectures and conferences held by famous masters and scholars of Buddhism.

Longlian often took notes on significant teachings and later organized some of them into independent works, as was the case with the *Shedashenglun shu lüeshu* 攝大乘論疏略述 (Outline of the Commentary on the Compendium of the Great Vehicle), which she first published in 1940.¹⁵ The book was the result of the notes she had taken on a series of conferences given in 1936 by the lay scholar Wang Enyang (1897–1964),¹⁶ who was an authority in Weishi 唯識 (Consciousness-only) teachings; the core of the work is the *Mahāyānasamgrahaśāstra*,¹⁷ an anthology of Mahāyāna essays ascribed to

14. Qiu Shanshan, *Dangdai diyi biqiuni*, 112.

15. Longlian 隆蓮, *She dasheng lun shu lüeshu*. Wang Enyang xiansheng jiang 攝大乘論疏略述—王恩洋先生講 (Chengdu: Zhongguo chuantongwenhua yanjiusuo bianji, 1995; first ed. 1940).

16. Wang Enyang was born in Nanchong (Sichuan). He studied Indian philosophy at Beijing University and later went to Nanjing to study Buddhist thought with Ouyang Jian 歐陽漸 (1871–1943), whom he helped to establish Dharmalakṣaṇa University. He later founded Guishan Buddhist University in his hometown. While in Sichuan, he frequently held conferences on Buddhist doctrines, particularly Weishi thought. In 1957 he accepted the position of professor at the Beijing Institute of Buddhist Studies. See Dongchu, *Zhongguo fojiao jindai shi*, 676–679; Yu Lingbo, *Xiandai fojiao renwu cidian*, 175b–179b; and Yu Lingbo, *Zhongguo jinxiandai fojiao renwu zhi*, 601–606.

17. The *Mahāyānasamgrahaśāstra* (*Taishō* 1595, 1596, and 1597) is one of the essential *śāstras* of the Weishi or Yogācāra tradition. It gives an overview of the most significant theories and practices in the Yogācāra system, such as the eight consciousnesses, the “store consciousness” (*ālayavijñāna*), the consciousness-only and the concept of three natures, as well as the meditative path that leads to enlightenment. Longlian's *Shedashenglun shu lüeshu* is divided into eleven chapters: the first chapter is an explanation of the contents and structure of the work, while each of the remaining ten chapters is devoted to one of the “ten aspects”

Asaṅga. This is how Wang himself reported the commitment of Longlian—at that time still known as You Yongkang: “She was always there, taking notes on my teachings. From the very beginning, I was able to see what a talented woman she was. [...] When I went back to Chengdu, in September of the same year, she gave me the first part of her notes to correct and evaluate. [...] Since I did not find any mistakes, I encouraged her to continue her work. In a couple of months she sent me the complete work. [...] I think that the gifts and intellectual capacities of You Yongkang are rather unique.”¹⁸ Wang Enyang further demonstrated his appreciation for Longlian some years later, in 1944, when he engaged her as proofreader for two more of his works.¹⁹

At the Buddhist Studies Society, Longlian gradually gravitated toward Tibetan Buddhism, which was very popular in Sichuan at that time, as the case of Nan Huaijin 南懷瑾 also illustrates.²⁰ In those years she met many Tibetan *lamas* on their way to China as well as Chinese monks departing on or returning from pilgrimages to Tibet, and under their influence she chose to devote herself to Tibetan Buddhism and tantric practices. Longlian had the opportunity to study Tibetan with two Tibetan *geshés*²¹ at the home of a friend, a Mrs. Xiong 熊 (n.d.), where many of the masters invited by the Buddhist

contained in the original work by Asaṅga; for more details, see Bianchi, *The Iron Statue Monastery*, 36–38.

18. From the preface to Longlian, *She dasheng lun shu lüeshu*, 1 (already translated in Bianchi, *The Iron Statue Monastery*, 28).

19. The two works by Wang Enyang are *Xin rensheng zhexue* 新人生哲學 (A New Philosophy of Life) and *Jingang jing shilun* 金剛經釋論 (Explanation of the Diamond *sūtra*). See Chen Meiwu, “Longlian fashi nianpu chubian,” 13.

20. Given its common border with Tibet, Sichuan, and particularly its two main cities Chengdu and Chongqing, became favorite sites for Tibetan and Mongolian masters who aimed to transmit their teachings in China, as well as for Chinese devotees who desired to receive them. Many of the Chinese masters who decided to go to Tibet to study tantric teachings came from such an environment. On Sichuan as a favorite place to practice Tibetan Buddhism, also see Chapter Ten by Catherine Despeux. On the spread of Tibetan Buddhism in China during the first half of the twentieth century, and the connections of this spread to the geopolitical situation of the time, see particularly Tuttle, *Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China*; also see Ester Bianchi, “The Tantric Rebirth Movement in Modern China. Esoteric Buddhism re-vivified by the Japanese and Tibetan Traditions,” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungarica* 57, no. 1 (2004), 31–54; Martino Dibeltulo, “The Revival of Tantrism: Tibetan Buddhism and Modern China” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2015); and Huang Yingjie 黃英傑, *Minguo mizong nianjian* 民國密宗年鑑 (Taipei: Chengfo wenhua chuban, 1995).

21. Their names are Yeshe Geshé (Ch. Yuexi gexi 悅西格西) and Dongben 東本, who apparently was the former’s master (Tuttle, *Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China*, 197 and 289, n. 10). On Longlian’s encounter with the two Tibetan *lamas*, see Qiu Shanshan, *Dangdai diyi biqiuni*, 114.

Studies Society were accommodated.²² Furthermore, she had the chance to meet Sherap Gyatso (1884–1968), the well-known Tibetan monastic scholar who first gave her instructions on Gelukpa teachings.²³ During the 1930s, the Changja *qutughtu*,²⁴ one of the most important Gelukpa religious authorities, also visited Chengdu several times as a guest speaker of the Buddhist Studies Society. Longlian went to listen to his teachings and received from him the initiations of the three main Gelukpa deities (Vajrabhairava, Guhyasamāja, and Saṃvara). She then practiced with other Tibetan *lamas*, such as Ngakwang Khenpo (n.d.) (Ch. Awang kanbu 阿旺堪布), who gave her instructions on Vajrabhairava’s highest *yogatantra* practices, and a certain Xingshan 興善 *lama*, who acquainted her with Vairocana practice.

Longlian also studied and practiced under some of the most outstanding representatives of the Sino-Tibetan tradition. Most notably, in 1939 she studied the Tibetan language with Fazun (1902–1980), and the following year attended his lessons on the *Weishi sanshi lun* 唯識三十論 (Skr. *Trīṃśikā*), a fundamental Yogācāra work by Vasubandhu.²⁵ She also studied under Guankong 觀空

22. Mrs. Xiong, a lay Buddhist woman whose husband was a respected person in Chengdu, was an aunt of Qiu Shanshan 裘山山, the author of Longlian’s biography. On this woman, see Qiu Shanshan, *Dangdai diyi biqiuni*, 14–15.

23. Sherap Gyatso, or Xirao Jiacao 喜饒嘉措 in Chinese, was born in Amdo, studied in Lhasa, and was conferred the title of *geshé* at the Drepung monastery at the age of thirty-two. In 1937 he moved to China, where he was welcomed by China’s Nationalist leaders such as Dai Jitao 戴季陶 (1891–1949) and Chiang Kai-shek 蔣介石 (1887–1975). From 1949 Sherap Gyatso also collaborated with the Communist government and held a number of offices: vice-president of the Qinghai government, member of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, and finally Chairman of the Buddhist Association of China. On Sherap Gyatso, see particularly Heather Stoddard, “The Long Life of rDo-sbis dGe-bšes Śes-rab rGya-mcho (1884–1968),” in *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 4th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies*, Helga Uebach and Jampa L. Panglung, eds. (Munich: Kommission für Zentralasiatische Studien, 1988), 465–471; and, for his role in spreading Tibetan Buddhism in China, Tuttle, *Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China*, 207–212 and *passim*.

24. *Qutughtu*, also written *hutuktu*, is a Mongolian title referring to a lineage of influential Gelukpa hierarchs that originated among the Monguor, a people in Qinghai of Mongolian origin and culturally deeply Tibetanized. Since the eighteenth century, the Changja *qutughtus* resided in Beijing and were thus close to the Chinese imperial government. The nineteenth *qutughtu*, named Lozang Penden Tenpé Drönmé (1890–1957), was actively involved with the Nationalist government as “protector of the state,” thus continuing the role with which his title had been associated at the Qing court. See Tuttle, *Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China*, 76–78, 156 and *passim*.

25. Fazun entered the monastic community in his teenage years. A disciple of Taixu, he graduated from the Wuchang Institute of Buddhist Studies. In 1925 Fazun studied at the newly founded Beijing Institute of Tibetan Studies and later joined Dayong’s Team to Study the Dharma Abroad in Tibet. In 1933, he went to Lhasa for the first time, where he stayed for three years. In 1953 he was elected vice Chairman of the Buddhist Association of China; in

(1903–1989),²⁶ but the most influential master in Longlian’s life was Nenghai,²⁷ whom she usually referred to as her “venerable *lama*” (*lao shangshi* 老上師).²⁸ She met him in the early 1930s at the Buddhist Studies Society and was deeply impressed by his teachings. In 1937 Nenghai, who had been on a retreat on Wutaishan 五台山 for more than three years, returned to Sichuan, moving to the Jincisi 近慈寺, a monastery located in Sheyangchang, in the southern suburbs of Chengdu. Longlian often went to hear him preach, and became one of his closest disciples, studying both exoteric and tantric texts and tenets with him. Among Nenghai’s disciples, Longlian was the only woman to whom he

1956 he was given the post of vice director of the Beijing Institute of Buddhist Studies, and in 1980, after the Cultural Revolution, he became its director. On this master, see particularly Françoise Wang-Toutain, “Quand les maîtres chinois s’éveillent au bouddhisme tibétain,” *Bulletin de l’Ecole française d’Extrême-Orient* 87 (2000), 707–727; Brenton Sullivan, “Blood and Teardrops: The Life and Travels of Venerable Fazun (1901–1980),” in *Buddhists: Understanding Buddhism Through the Lives of Practitioners*, T. Lewis, ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 296–304, and “Venerable Fazun at the Sino-Tibetan Buddhist Studies Institute (1932–1950) and Tibetan Geluk Buddhism in China,” *Indian International Journal of Buddhist Studies* 9 (2008), 199–241; also see Ester Bianchi, “The ‘Chinese *lama*’ Nenghai (1886–1967). Doctrinal tradition and teaching strategies of a Gelukpa master in Republican China,” in *Buddhism Between Tibet and China*, Matthew Kapstein, ed. (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2009), 308–313.

26. Guankong, like Fazun, first went to Kham in 1925 as a member of Dayong’s Team to Study the Dharma Abroad. He resided in Kham for ten years, then moved to Chongqing to teach at the Institute of Sino-Tibetan Buddhist Studies, founded by Taixu and Fazun in 1930–1931. Afterwards, he went to Lhasa, where he studied under Tibetan *lamas*, among them Khangsar Rinpoché. In 1957 he was appointed professor at the Institute of Buddhist Studies of Beijing. See Chen Bing 陳兵 and Deng Zimei 鄧子美, eds., *Ershi shiji Zhongguo fojiao* 二十世紀中國佛教 (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2000), 361.

27. Nenghai joined the monastic community at the age of thirty-nine, forty-one days after the birth of his son. He went to Tibet several times (staying in Kham in 1926–1927 and in Lhasa in 1928–1932 and 1940–1941). At the Drepung monastery he studied under Khangsar Rinpoché, who bestowed on him a tantric transmission belonging to the Yamāntaka-Vajrabhairava cycle. In China he founded seven monasteries in line with the Tibetan Buddhist tradition (called *micheng jingang daochang* 密乘金剛道場, “tantric *vajra* monasteries”), some of which are still active today. When the Cultural Revolution broke out in 1966, Nenghai was in the Jixiangsi 吉祥寺, on Mount Wutai, where he passed away on January 1, 1967. On this master, see particularly Bianchi, “The ‘Chinese *lama*’ Nenghai (1886–1967);” see also Tuttle, *Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China*, 97 and *passim*; and Françoise Wang-Toutain, “Comment Asanga rencontra Maitreya. Contact entre Bouddhisme chinois et tibétain au XXe siècle,” in *Images of Tibet in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Monica Esposito, ed. (Paris: Ecole française d’Extrême-Orient, 2008), 359–385.

28. Longlian wrote an essay on Nenghai’s teaching activities and a Chinese-style biography: Longlian, “Nenghai fashi hongfa yeji shulüe 能海法師弘法業績述略,” *Sichuan wenshi ziliao xuanji* 四川文史資料選輯, vol. 39 (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1985), 49–59 and “Nenghai fashi nianpu 能海法師年譜,” In *Sichuan wenshi ziliao xuanji* 四川文史資料選輯, vol. 39 (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1985), 60–68.

transmitted the highest *yogatantra* teachings belonging to the Vajrabhairava cycle that he had received in Lhasa.

During the War against Japan (1937–1945), because of the expanding Japanese occupation, monks and nuns from the northern regions sought refuge in Chengdu. But soon the war spread to Chengdu, and many people fled to safer places. Longlian's family also moved back to Leshan; however, she refused to leave, in order to continue to study Buddhism and the Tibetan language. In 1940, she practiced medicine for a few months to earn a living, and afterwards she moved to live in Aidaotang. In 1941 Nenghai returned to Chengdu from his last pilgrimage to Lhasa; Longlian and another ten nuns and laywomen began to go to Jincisi every day to listen to his teachings. The trip took about two hours, and Nenghai's lectures usually lasted at least three or four hours. She was exhausted by this demanding schedule, and this is when she decided the time had come for her to enter the Buddhist *saṃgha*.

In 1941, at the age of thirty-two, Longlian gave up her official job and worldly life to become a Buddhist nun. Knowing that her parents wished her to keep her government job, Changyuan tried to persuade her that she could be an excellent Buddhist devotee even as a laywoman. But she had already made up her mind: she took three days' leave from work and went to Aidaotang. But because it was a public nunnery, it could not accept novices.²⁹ She then followed Changyuan to Jinlongsi 金龍寺, a hereditary monastery, where she received the tonsure. Afterwards she went to discuss her decision with her family in Leshan and eventually gained their approval. She then returned to Chengdu to receive *bhikṣuṇī* or "complete ordination,"³⁰ in the Wenshuyuan

29. In China, Buddhist institutions were divided into two categories: large public monasteries (*shifang conglin* 十方叢林), serving as models for the entire monastic community; and small private temples or monasteries (*zisun miao* 子孫廟), where tonsure was permitted. Therefore, hereditary monasteries were supposed to be the only channel through which one could enter the *saṃgha*. For the emergence of this distinction in Song times, see 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; for the situation during the first half of the twentieth century, see Holmes Welch, *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism, 1900–1950* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 3–45 and 129–141. This distinction also applies to Daoist monasteries: see Vincent Goossaert, *Dans les temples de la Chine. Histoire des cultes. Vie des communautés* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2000), 60.

30. "Complete ordination" (Ch. *juzujie* 具足戒) implies taking the full set of precepts that *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs* have to follow. The number of rules varies depending on each school; the *vinaya* of the Dharmaguptaka (*Sifenlü* 四分律: *Taishō* 1428), the *vinaya* tradition adopted by Chinese Buddhists, has 250 vows for monks and 348 for nuns. The ceremony where these precepts are taken is referred to as *upasampadā*. On the *Prātimokṣa*, the set of rules, in the *Sifenlü*, refer to Ann Heirman, *The Discipline in Four Parts, Rules for Nuns According to the Dharmaguptakavinaya*, 3 vols. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2002), vol. 2; also see Longlian,

文殊院, a prominent Buddhist monastery in the center of Chengdu. Changyuan found out that there was already a *bhikṣuṇī* named Longjing and changed her religious name to Longlian. This same year, Nenghai accepted her as a Dharma disciple and gave her the Dharma name Renfa 仁法; she also assumed the religious names Wenshu Jiezi 文殊戒子 (“Mañjuśrī Vinaya-child”) and Qingshi Sanren 清時散人.³¹

As soon as Longlian took her vows, Changyuan hired her as teacher of Buddhist literature in the Lianzong Female Institute of Studies; in 1942 she was also appointed dean of studies there. This was the beginning of her career as a Buddhist teacher, a role she maintained throughout her monastic life. When time permitted she continued to go to Jincisi to follow Nenghai’s teachings. At this time she also met with the already renowned painter You Yunshan 游韻珊 (b. 1912), lay name Xiaoyun 曉雲 (Huiwan in Cantonese), who was later to be one of the most influential Buddhist nuns in Hongkong and Taiwan. Feeling a deep affinity with her (they had the same lay surname, both were gifted and well educated, and they also revered the same master), Xiaoyun revealed in her autobiographic writings that she never lost her “refuge certificate,” which was penned by Longlian.³²

In 1943, Fazun gave lessons on Tsongkhapa’s commentary on the *Madhyamakāvātāra* (*Ru zhonglun* 入中論), one of the five essential *sāstras* of the Gelukpa school.³³ These lectures were the inspiration for the *Ru zhonglun jiangji* 入中論講記 (Explanation of the *Madhyamakāvātāra*), one of Longlian’s best known works. It stands as the only available complete Chinese translation

“Biejietuojie 別解脫戒,” In *Zhongguo fojiao* 中國佛教, vol. 4 (Shanghai: Dongfang chuban zhongxin, 1996, first ed. 1989), 405–411. On the procedures for *bhikṣuṇī* ordination in China, see below, note 43.

31. Chen Meiwu, “Longlian fashi nianpu chubian,” 13.

32. During her years in Chengdu (1941–1945), You Yunshan took refuge with Changyuan, who predicted that she would eventually become a Buddhist nun. When she went to listen to Longlian preach the scriptures, she donated one of her paintings and received a copy of the *She dasheng lun*. See Li Yuzhen 李玉珍, “Yunshui bu zhu: Xiaoyun fashi de biqiuni dianfan” 雲水不住——曉雲法師的比丘尼典範, in 2006 nian Huafan daxue chuanbanren Xiaoyun fashi sixiang xingyi yantaohui ji di shisan jie guoji fojiao jiaoyu wenhua yantaohui huiyi lunwenji 2006 年華梵大學創辦人曉雲法師思想行誼研討會暨第十三屆國際佛教教育文化研討會會議論文集, He Guangyan 何廣棧, Huang Junwei 黃俊威, eds. (Taipei: Huafandaxue dongfang renwen sixiang yanjiusuo, 2007), 20, and Xiaoyun 曉雲, *Huanyu zhouxing qianhou* 環宇周行前後 (Taipei: Yuanquan chubanshe, 1995), 534–535 and 545.

33. The *Madhyamakāvātāra* (Introduction to the *Madhyamakāsāstra*) was not translated into Chinese prior to the twentieth century, and is one of the essential *sāstras* within the Gelukpa order. Based on Nāgārjuna’s *Madhyamakāsāstra* (*Taishō* 1564), it was composed in the seventh century by the Indian scholar Candrakīrti and presents the Madhyamaka teachings according to the ten stages of the Bodhisattva Path.

of the original text, and it is important because Fazun never published it himself.³⁴ This text is presently part of the curricula of many Buddhist institutes of studies in China.

In 1944 Longlian had a traumatic experience, suffering a nervous breakdown that forced her to return to Leshan to recover her health.³⁵ The following year, Longlian and her lifelong intimate friend Dingjing 定靜³⁶ (1903–1997) went to live in a shelter built for themselves and other nuns in the neighborhood of Jincisi; Nenghai decided that they should live in the Tiexiangsi 鐵像寺, which was subsequently converted into a Sino-Tibetan nunnery.³⁷ In 1947 and 1949, Longlian went on summer retreats with Nenghai in Taipingsi 太平寺 (Pengxian) and in Cisheng'an 慈聖庵 (Emei shan 峨嵋山), respectively. According to her, those months spent studying and practicing with her venerable *lama* represented the two most joyful periods in her life.³⁸

In 1949, on the eve of the foundation of the People's Republic of China, the *vinaya* master Guanyi 貫一 (n.d.), from the Baoguangsi 寶光寺, was invited by Nenghai to give lectures on monastic discipline to the nuns

34. In Longlian's work, Candrakīrti's words (in bold) are translated from the Tibetan language; they are followed by Tsongkhapa's commentary translated and annotated by Fazun. The whole work is divided into ten chapters reflecting the ten stages of the path (also related to the ten *pāramitās*). The work was first published in 1984 as a series of five articles in the Buddhist journal *Fayin*. For Longlian's work, see Longlian, *Ru zhonglun jiangji. Fazun fashi jiang* 入中論講記——法尊法師講 (Hangzhou: Zhejiangsheng fojiao xiehui, 1995, first ed. 1984), and the explanation in Bianchi, *The Iron Statue Monastery*, 38–39; for Fazun on the *Madhyamakāvatāra*, see Wang-Toutain, "Quand les maîtres chinois s'éveillent au bouddhisme tibétain," 722.

35. She was persecuted by an "evil monk" who was hoping to become the new abbot of Aidaotang. In 1945 fifty lay disciples of Nenghai (including the head of the Provincial Department of Civil Affairs) wrote a letter to Longlian's father, requesting that he let her go back to Chengdu. Her father was afraid for her safety, and agreed, but did not allow her to live in Aidaotang. Accordingly, Longlian took up residence in Aidaotang again only in 1949, after the "evil monk" had been executed. This event is narrated in detail by Qiu Shanshan, *Dangdai diyi biqiuni*, 150–151.

36. Dingjing was born into an influential family from Sichuan: her grandfather had been a military governor in Tibet, her father was a collaborator of General Cai E 蔡鐸 (1882–1916), and the famous writer Ba Jin 巴金 (1904–2005) was a close relative on her mother's side. Dingjing entered the Buddhist monastic order in 1942, immediately after Longlian; her tonsure master was Nenghai. She thus lived side by side with Longlian for most of her monastic life. See Qiu Shanshan, *Dangdai diyi biqiuni*, 145–146 and 219–220.

37. Tiexiangsi is a nunnery located in the southern suburbs of Chengdu, about two kilometers from Shiyangchang. It was first built in 1590, when a statue of Śākyamuni Buddha was dug up on the spot (hence the name Tiexiangsi, or "Iron Statue Monastery"). During the War of Resistance against Japan (1937–1945) the monastery became the property of the neighboring Jincisi. On Tiexiangsi, see Bianchi, *The Iron Statue Monastery*.

38. Qiu Shanshan, *Dangdai diyi biqiuni*, 152.

living in the Tiexiangsi.³⁹ He then imparted the *śikṣamāṇā*'s six rules to the resident novices, as a step leading to their full ordination.⁴⁰ According to the rules of the “dual ordination” (*erbuseng jie*, literally “ordination conferred by the two *saṃgha*-orders”), nuns should receive the precepts of complete ordination first from ten *bhikṣuṇīs* acting as nun-masters, and then from ten ordained monks, representing the *bhikṣus* community. Guanyi explained that these procedures had been introduced into China from Sri Lanka in the years 433–434;⁴¹ nevertheless, they had been discarded in China, where precepts were usually conferred to nuns only by ten *bhikṣu*-masters.⁴² From this moment, Longlian decided that she should take up the

39. Nenghai himself had received full ordination under Guanyi at Xindu's Baoguangsi in 1925.

40. The figure of the *śikṣamāṇā*, an intermediate step between a female novice and a fully ordained nun, is prescribed by the *vinaya* texts but was never very common in China. It refers to a young female practitioner accepting the six precepts to be followed for a probationary period of two years: abstinence from sex, stealing, killing, lying, consumption of alcohol, and eating at improper times. On this issue see Ann Heirman, “Where is the Probationer in the Chinese Buddhist Nunneries?” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft* 158, no. 1 (2008), 105–137.

41. According to the account of the life of the nun Sengguo 僧果, as reported in the *Biqiuni zhuan* 比丘尼傳 (T. 2063: 939c–940a, translated in Li Jung-hsi, *Biographies of Buddhist Nuns. Pao-chang's Pi-chiu-ni-chuan* (Osaka: Tohokai, 1981), 68–70), in 433 a merchant ship arrived in China with a number of *bhikṣuṇīs* from Śrī Lanka on board. They thus permitted the transmission of the Buddhist nuns' order to China in the fifth century. On this issue, see Ann Heirman, “Buddhist Nuns: Between Past and Present,” *Numen-International Review for the History of Religions* 58 (2011), 603–631 and “Chinese Nuns and their Ordination in Fifth Century China,” *Journal of the International Association of Chinese Studies* 24, no. 2 (2001), 275–304; and Zheng Weiyi 鄭維儀, “Tracing Tesarā: The Transmission of Buddhist Nuns' Order along the Maritime Silk Road,” *Longyang xueshu yanjiu jikan* 龍陽學術研究集刊 5 (2010), 19–55.

42. In China, it often occurred that nuns took the precepts only from the community of monks, both in regards to novices' ordination (whereas according to *vinaya* rules, they should receive the ten precepts from a nun-master) and full ordination. While neither the Tibetan nor the Theravādin monastic establishments consider such ordination fully legitimate, in the Chinese tradition ordination conducted by monks alone was considered valid. The “dual ordination” is described in Shuyu's 書玉 mid-seventeenth-century work titled *Erbuseng shoujie yishi* 二部僧受戒儀式 (X. 1134). On nuns' ordination procedures and Longlian's perspective, also see Bianchi, *The Iron Statue Monastery*, 90–92; on their restoration in modern and contemporary China, see Ester Bianchi, “Restoration, Adaptation and Standardization of ‘Correct’ Ordination Procedures in Contemporary Chinese Buddhism: A Tentative Evaluation,” in *Buddhism after Mao: Negotiations, Continuities, Innovations*, Ji Zhe, André Laliberté, Gareth Fisher, eds. (forthcoming). On nuns' ordination procedures according to the *Sifenlü*, particularly see Heirman, *The Discipline in Four Parts*, vol. 2; for ordination rules and rituals in general see Isaline Blew Horner, *Women under Primitive Buddhism. Laywomen and Almswomen* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1989, first ed. 1930), 138–158, and Léon Wieger, *Vinaya: Monachisme et Discipline. Hinayana Véhicule Inférieur* (Paris: Cathasia, 1951), 203–211.

challenge to resurrect what she believed to be the “correct” procedures for nuns’ ordination—a goal which was Nenghai’s wish as well and which she finally accomplished in 1982.

In order to help co-disciples and other practitioners in their studies and practices, she continued her habit of organizing, printing out, and distributing her notes of significant teachings she had followed; as mentioned before, some of these texts were subsequently published as independent works. A prominent example is the *Sanguiyi guan chuxiu lüefa* 三皈依觀初修略法, which explains the “Contemplation of the Three Refuges,” a basic meditation conceived as a starting point for higher tantric practices.⁴³ While the majority of her works were inspired by Nenghai’s teachings given at the Jincisi or in other spots during the 1940s and 1950s, in some cases we also find transcriptions of lessons by other masters, such as Ngakwang Khenpo and a certain Miwu 密悟 *geshé*.⁴⁴

In 1952 she received further instruction by Nenghai on the Vajrabhairava practices, the highest tantric practices ever bestowed on her. This was an important year also for Longlian’s activities as a Tibetan translator, since Nenghai entrusted her with a number of translations, believing that she should cultivate her talents in this field. He first asked her to work on a *sādhana* devoted to Tārā; the text, entitled *Lü dumu si mantu yigui* 綠度母四曼荼儀軌 (Green Tārā four-*maṇḍala* *sādhana*), has been recently published for the first time in the collection *Fozang jiyao* 佛藏輯要 (vol. 19) by the Bashu publishing house.⁴⁵ Another work was the *Pilu yigui shouyin* 毗盧儀軌手印 (*Mudrā* of the Vairocana *sādhana*), concerning Vairocana tantric practices. But Longlian’s better-known translation is the *Ru pusa xing lun guangjie* 入菩薩行論廣解 (Exposition of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*), based on a Tibetan commentary

43. This practice had been passed down by Nenghai to his disciples since 1928; it was briefly described in verse by layman Jing Gaochu 景誥初, and finally discussed extensively by Longlian at the end of the 1940s: Longlian, *Sanguiyi guan chuxiu lüefa. Nenghai shangshi chuanshou* 三皈依觀初修略法—能海上師傳授 (Chengdu: Jincisi huguo jin’gang dao-chang yin, 1946). This work is still used for daily practices at the Tiexiangsi and is discussed in Bianchi, *The Iron Statue Monastery*, 122–132.

44. Among the other works inspired by Nenghai’s teaching is the *Dingdao ziliang song jianglu* 定道資糧頌講記, on the preliminaries to meditation; the *Taipingsi anju jianglu* 太平寺安居講錄, a broad organization of notes taken during the summer retreat in Taiping monastery in 1947 (some explanations of *vinaya* rituals and precepts etc.). The *Xiu putixin qi yi lun jiangji* 修菩提心七義論講記, on the other hand, is based on lessons dispensed by Ngakwang Khenpo on *Lam rim* practice (an outline of the stages of the path to spiritual realization). See Bianchi, *The Iron Statue Monastery*, 39–40; for other works of this kind penned by Longlian, see Chen Meiwu, “Longlian fashi nianpu chubian,” 14.

45. See Chen Meiwu, “Longlian fashi nianpu chubian,” 14.

of a fundamental *śāstra* for the Gelukpa tradition. Her text also includes a complete translation of the original work by Śāntideva, and is thus of great importance, since the only existing previous Chinese translation was incomplete.⁴⁶ Her skills in Tibetan were well-known outside of monastic circles as well: this same year she was invited by Zhang Yisun 張怡蓀 (1893–1983), director of the Humanities Department at Sichuan University, to participate as assistant Tibetan translator in the compilation of the *Zang-Han dacidian* 藏漢大辭典 (Great Tibetan-Chinese dictionary).

The first fifteen years of the People's Republic of China coincided with the period of Longlian's most intense official activities and concrete political engagement. She was most probably encouraged by her master Nenghai, who was himself increasingly involved in the public arena and was willing and able to collaborate with the government.⁴⁷ The choice to assume formal positions in governmental assemblies and other bodies was rather common throughout the twentieth century, as the different cases of Li Yujie 李玉階 and Zhao Puchu also testify.⁴⁸ As for Longlian, in 1953 she was chosen as member of the Research Institute of Culture and History of Sichuan; her first task was to write explanations of Du Fu's poems in the colloquial style, as part of the general trend to educate the masses. In 1955 she was elected to the National Council of the Buddhist Association of China and went to Beijing for the first time. The following year she was chosen as the only woman to sit on the editorial board of the volume on Chinese Buddhism of the *Encyclopedia of World Buddhism*. Zhou Enlai 周恩來 (1898–1976), who was responsible for the project, was impressed by her achievements and expressed a desire to

46. Originally composed by Śāntideva (seventh-eighth century), it was introduced into Tibet by Atīśa (982–1054). Various translations and commentaries followed. The existing Chinese version, the *Puti xingjing* 菩提行經 (by Tianxizai 天息災, late tenth century) (*Taishō* 1662) is rather incomplete if compared to the Tibetan version. Longlian's translation—Longlian, *Ru pusa xing lun guangjie* 入菩薩行論廣解 (Xi'an: Shanxisheng fojiao xiehui, 1995, first ed. 1952)—is based on a twelfth-century Tibetan commentary. For further details, see Bianchi, *The Iron Statue Monastery*, 40–41.

47. In 1952, Nenghai went to Vienna for the World Conference on Peace. He was a member of the Permanent Council and vice-president of the Buddhist Association of China since its foundation in 1953. The following year he attended the first meeting of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. In 1955 he joined the Chinese delegation in Delhi for the Conference of Asian Nations. In 1957 he was elected Chairman of the Wutaishan Buddhist Association and in 1959 he participated in the second meeting of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. See Bianchi, "The 'Chinese lama' Nenghai (1886–1967)," 305.

48. See, respectively, Chapters Seven and Nine in this volume. This kind of choice can be read as a way to secure the leadership position in the religious field through managing relationships with the state.

meet her. Eventually, however, whether because of monastic rules (as stated in her biographies)⁴⁹ or for other reasons, this encounter never took place. Instead, she was granted an interview with Zhou's wife, Deng Yingchao 鄧穎超 (1904–1992). In 1957 she was elected to the Permanent Council of the Buddhist Association of China. In 1960–1961 she took part in the compilation and editing of the religious chapters of the *Sichuan Provincial Gazetteer* (her contributions were lost during the Cultural Revolution, however). In 1962 she attended the third meeting of the Buddhist Association of China and was chosen as a member of the Permanent Council and as vice-secretary general. Some months later she was elected member of the Permanent Council and vice-secretary general of the Sichuan Buddhist Association, and participated in the People's Political Consultative Conference of Sichuan.

Due to these official engagements, in 1956 Longlian had to move to Beijing, taking Dingjing and her elderly mother with her. She registered at the Tongjiaosi 通教寺—a nunnery renowned for its strict adherence to *vinaya* rules—and became a close friend of the abbess Tongyuan 通願 (1913–1991), who was as influential and wellknown in the north as Longlian was in the south.⁵⁰

Living in Beijing gave Longlian the opportunity to see Nenghai again: she went to Wutaishan in 1957–1958 and again in 1959, staying in a nearby nunnery and studying and practicing with him for several months.⁵¹ On the first occasion, she wrote down Nenghai's teachings on the *Gurupūjā* (Tib. *Lama Chöpa*), the most popular *guru yoga* text in the Gelukpa tradition,⁵² and on the

49. See Qiu Shanshan, *Dangdai diyi biqiuni*, 172–173; and Chen Meiwu, “Longlian fashi nianpu chubian,” 14.

50. A saying widespread in Buddhist milieus had it that, when it came to *bhikṣuṇīs*, “in the South there was Longlian and in the North Tongyuan” (Qiu Shanshan 裘山山, “Longlian fashi yu Wutaishan 隆蓮法師與五台山,” *Wutaishan* 五台山 7 (2006), 22). Tongyuan was born in Shuangcheng (Heilongjiang). Like Longlian, she was gifted and learned. In 1937 she entered the female branch of Beijing University to study economics. She took the monastic vows in 1940 and resided in Beijing's Tongjiaosi until 1956, when she moved to Wutaishan. After the Cultural Revolution, she took up residence on the mountain again. Her relics and personal belongings are displayed in a commemoration hall of the Pushousi 普壽寺, the nunnery on Wutaishan presently hosting the Institute of Buddhist Studies for nuns which she had planned to found. See Qiu Shanshan, *Dangdai diyi biqiuni*, 173–174, and <http://www.pushousi.net/>.

51. On Longlian's stays on Wutaishan, see Qiu Shanshan, “Longlian fashi yu Wutaishan.”

52. The *Gurupūjā* (Offering to the master) was composed by the fourth Panchen Lama (1570–1662) and is widely used for daily chanting services in Tibetan monasteries. Nenghai's Chinese translation (Nenghai 能海, *Shangshi wushang gongyang guanxingfa* 上師無上供養觀行法 (Shanghai: Shanghaishi fojiao xiehui, 1990) became one of the main texts used for rituals and celebrations in all his monasteries; Longlian's text (Longlian, *Shangshi wushang gongyang guanxing fa jiangji*. *Nenghai shangshi jiangshu* 上師無上供養觀行法講記——能海上師講述

Abhisamayālamkāra, one of the fundamental texts in the Gelukpa monastic curricula for *geshés*.⁵³ These notes were then published as two of her most valued works: the *Shangshi wushang gongyang guanxing fa jiangji* 上師無上供養觀行法講記 (Explanation of the contemplation techniques in the “Offering to the master”), and the more theoretical work *Xianguan zhuanlan lun biji* 現觀莊嚴論筆記 (Notes on the “Ornament for the Clear Realization”). In 1959, Longlian studied the art of molding Buddhist statues according to the Tibetan tradition with Nenghai. The following year she decided to return to Sichuan, and reestablished permanent residence for herself, her mother, and Dingjing in Chengdu.

When the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution broke out some years later, Longlian only encountered relatively minor difficulties (she was criticized for her salary as a translator and needed to defend Nenghai from some attacks); she was not publicly criticized nor was she imprisoned. Nevertheless, her life changed drastically and for the worse. In 1966, because of her position as an eminent Buddhist nun, Longlian had to participate in the criticism meetings and political classes organized for the religious leaders of Sichuan at the principal Catholic church of Chengdu. At the end of the study period, all of these religious personalities—Longlian being the only woman—were sent to a labor camp which specialized in textile production in order to be “reformed through labor.” Thanks to the help of her lifelong friend Xiong, who at that time was working for the government office of religious affairs, she managed to obtain a leave for health reasons. She was instead assigned to a sewing machine in a workshop located in Wenshuyuan. Eventually, in late 1966, she suffered a second nervous breakdown, was hospitalized, and eventually relieved from work. She suffered from chronic mental illness until the end of the 1970s.

Longlian spent most of the “ten years’ catastrophe” in Aidaotang, together with her mother and her friend Dingjing. They survived thanks to her

(Ningbo: Duobaojiangsi yin, 1995, first ed. 1957–1958) includes detailed explanations on the described practice. At the heart of this practice is the realization that one’s own root guru is identical with the Buddha. For an English translation, see Tshering Gyatso, *The Guru Puja and The Hundred Deities of the Land of Joy* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works & Archives, 1995, first ed. 1979). For Nenghai’s version, Bianchi, *The Iron Statue Monastery*, 136–165.

53. The *Abhisamayālamkāra* (Ornament for the Clear Realization) is considered to have been composed by Maitreyanātha and is essential in the Gelukpa tradition. The first Chinese translations are by Fazun and Nenghai, who also wrote commentaries on the work. Longlian’s work belongs to this tradition. On this text, see Edward Conze, *Abhisamayālamkāra. Introduction and Translation from Original Texts with Sanskrit-Tibetan Index* (Roma: ISMEO, 1954); for Nenghai’s works and commentaries, including his disciples’ notes based on his teachings, see Bianchi, “The ‘Chinese lama’ Nenghai (1886–1967),” 310.

government salary (even if it had been considerably reduced) and the financial and moral support of other nuns and common people. Longlian and Dingjing had to dress in lay garments and let their hair grow, but they maintained the right to live in the nunnery and managed to carry on religious practices in secret. As Longlian herself put it: “I am still my old self, a Buddhist monastic at home” (*yiran guwo zaijia seng* 依然故我在家僧).⁵⁴ Indeed, while Tiexiangsi was completely secularized⁵⁵ (as were other Buddhist monasteries and religious institutions), a small section of Aidaotang remained available to some of the former nuns, even if most of the halls and buildings were occupied by a book bindery and two workshops for the production of lubricating oil and mosquito nets. Holy images and religious objects and halls were badly damaged in Aidaotang, as in most monasteries. Even worse, as Longlian recounted: “The rebel faction entered Aidaotang and demanded that we monastics destroy Buddha images ourselves.”⁵⁶

Longlian, like other representatives of the “old generation” (such as the Daoist master Ren Fajiu 任法久, see Chapter Twelve),⁵⁷ can be regarded as a bridge figure testifying to the “resilience” of Chinese religions through the adversities of the Maoist era. In 1979, as soon as she sensed that there was a change of official government attitudes toward religions, she was “the first to tonsure again.”⁵⁸ Longlian’s bald head had a significant impact at the fourth meeting of the newly restored Buddhist Association of China (1980), as she was the only nun who dared to shave and dress in monastic robes. On that occasion, she suggested restoring Tiexiangsi and establishing a Buddhist nuns’ college there. Her idea was accepted, and Zhao Puchu went to Sichuan in 1982 to investigate Tiexiangsi’s situation. The Sichuan Bhikṣuṇī Institute for Buddhist Studies (Sichuan nizhong foxueyuan 四川尼眾佛學院) was officially founded in 1983: Longlian was its director, Zhao Puchu the honorary director, and Kuanlin 寬霖 (1905–1999) (abbot of the Wenshuyuan and Chairman of the Buddhist Association of Sichuan) the vice-director. By 1984

54. From a poem she wrote on her sixtieth birthday in 1969. See Chen Meiwu, “Longlian fashi nianpu chubian,” 14.

55. In 1966, the almost thirty nuns living in Tiexiangsi left the nunnery; some of them disrobed, while others moved to Aidaotang. During the Cultural Revolution, Tiexiangsi was occupied by eight farming families and by an elementary school. In the early 1980s the greater part of the monastic property was returned to the nuns’ community; reconstruction took some years but by 1985 the nunnery had begun running smoothly again. See Bianchi, *The Iron Statue Monastery*, 20–21.

56. Qiu Shanshan, *Dangdai diyi biqiuni*, 179.

57. On Ren Fajiu, see Chapter Twelve.

58. Qiu Shanshan, “Dangdai diyi biqiuni,” 35.

the first institution of higher education for nuns in mainland China began operation.⁵⁹

In 1981 Longlian went to Beijing and was received by the Minister of Culture from Sri Lanka. As mentioned earlier, full ordination for nuns was believed to have been introduced into China during the fifth century, through the efforts of a group of Sinhalese nuns.⁶⁰ Given that the Sinhalese *bhikṣuṇīsamgha* eventually vanished, authorities from both countries decided that it should be re-established by Chinese nuns. This task was assigned to Longlian, who made every effort to arrange the ordination to be held in 1982; she even translated the “dual ordination” ritual procedures into English.

Though the Sinhalese nuns did not attend, probably because of political and diplomatic complications,⁶¹ in January 1982 the ordination ceremonies took place in Tiexiangsi and Wenshuyuan. It was the first nuns’ ordination to have been held in twenty-five years.⁶² Longlian had them follow the “dual ordination” procedures taught to her by Guanyi, which she had promised she would resurrect in China. Tongyuan, whom she specifically invited from Wutaishan, headed the group of ten *bhikṣuṇīs* chosen as ordination-masters, while Kuanlin was the head of the monk-masters. In 1982, only nine *śikṣamāṇās* received complete ordination; in March 1987 it was the turn of twenty more nuns, who had accepted the *śikṣamāṇā* precepts in 1985 and

59. The Institute of Studies offered three three-year courses: a junior course (started in 1984), a senior course (1987), and a postgraduate course (1990). In 2007, the Institute was moved out of Tiexiangsi. Directed by Ruyi 如意, one of Longlian’s first students, it is presently located in Pengzhou (near Mianzhu) and has completely lost its original Tibetan “flavor,” in line with the many other seminars and schools for nuns which have developed in China over the last twenty years. On the Sichuan nizhong foxueyuan, see particularly Bianchi, *The Iron Statue Monastery*, 103–119; Qiu Shanshan, *Dangdai diyi biqiuni*, 205–227; and Yang Xiaoyan 楊曉燕, “Dangdai nizhong jiaoyu moshi yanjiu 當代尼眾教育模式研究” (MA diss., Zhongyong minzu daxue 中央民族大學, 2011), 32–49.

60. See note 42.

61. On the eastern wing of Tiexiangsi, a two-story building was built to house the foreign nuns. The cancellation of the event was never really accepted by Longlian, judging from the fact that in 1996 in Tiexiangsi they still believed that the Sinhalese nuns were waiting for the proper time. Longlian regretted this failure until the end of her life, even if she had nothing to do with its cause (“Longlian fashi tan: san guo fojiao huiyi, di si ci shifuhui he nizhong foxue jiaoyu 隆蓮法師談——三國佛教會議、第四次世婦會和尼眾佛學教育,” *Zhongguo zongjiao* 中國宗教 2 (1995), 42–43). On the revival of the nuns’ monastic order in the Theravāda tradition, see Anālayo, “The Revival of the Bhikkhūnī Order and the Decline of the Sāsana,” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 20 (2013), 110–193.

62. The last ordination of nuns before the Cultural Revolution was held in 1957 at the Baohuashan 寶華山 (Nanjing) and involved 430 female novices (in addition to 373 male novices). From 1957 on, monastic ordinations were banned. See Welch, *Buddhism under Mao*, 121–123.

had later graduated from the Institute of Studies in Tiexiangsi. Since then, the “dual ordination” rules have been followed in almost every *bhikṣuṇī* ordination in China.⁶³ In recognition of Longlian’s role in revitalizing the nuns’ order, she was invited to participate as principal nun-master in the mass *bhikṣuṇī* ordination which took place in 1993 in Baimasi 白馬寺 (Luoyang).

The 1980s saw the fulfillment of Longlian’s two long-cherished wishes: the restoration of “dual ordination” procedures; and the establishment of a female Institute of Buddhist Studies. That decade also saw her cultivate a renewed interest in official and social engagements. In 1980, at the fourth meeting of the Buddhist Association of China, she was appointed member of the Permanent Council and Secretary General; in addition, she was elected member of the editorial board of the Association’s official journal *Fayin* 法音. In 1981 she was elected Chairwoman of the Buddhist Association of Sichuan. She twice served as member of the People’s Political Consultative Conference of Sichuan (1982 and 1988) and of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (1985 and 1988). In 1987 she was elected vice-president of the Buddhist Association of China and honorary Chairwoman of the Buddhist Association of Sichuan. Her fame also crossed Chinese borders, though she never left the country (the only exception being her visit to Hong Kong in December 1992): she was twice awarded a prize by the Japanese Buddhist Association for Preaching the Dharma (1980 and 1985),⁶⁴ met many foreign delegations (from Bhutan, Burma, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and the United States), and was in contact with Buddhist nuns from Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The new era also implied a shift in her attitude as a Buddhist master. Since she had entered the Buddhist *saṃgha*, she had not taken disciples, the declared reason being that she simply could not do so because Aidaotang was a public nunnery where tonsure was not permitted. Alternatively, it can be argued that, before 1949, she was unwilling to take disciples because she wanted to devote herself entirely to Buddhist practice.⁶⁵ As a result, of all

63. *Śikṣamānās* were never very common in China (see note 41); in recent years, however, their number has increased, probably thanks to Longlian’s influence and despite her belief to have partially failed in this regard. See Chiu Tzu-Lung and Ann Heirman, “The Gurudharmas in Buddhist Nunneries in Mainland China,” *Buddhist Studies Review* 31, no. 2 (2014), 241–272. Also see Tsomo Karma Lekshe, ed., *Sakyadhita: Daughters of the Buddha* (New York: Snow Lion Publication, 1988), 54.

64. Yu Xiaoheng 余孝恆, “Longlian fashi huo Riben fojiao chuandao xiehui chuandao wenhua jiang 隆蓮法師獲日本佛教傳道協會傳道文化獎,” *Fayin* 法音 4 (1986), 44.

65. See Qiu Shanshan, *Dangdai diyi biqiuni*, 258–259, and Guoping (personal communication, September 2012).

Longlian's students—many of whom regard themselves as her disciples—only five nuns from the Tiexiangsi are, strictly speaking, her legitimate “disciples” and Dharma heirs: they can be recognized by their monastic names, which share the character *guo* 果 and identify them as members of the same Dharma lineage as Longlian and Nenghai.⁶⁶ On the other hand, in the modern era, Aidaotang has become a place where it has been possible to enter the monastic order; therefore, many of the young nuns in her nunneries received tonsure by Longlian and are thus her “tonsured disciples” (*titou dizi* 剃頭弟子). It should be noted as well that, apart from her few Dharma disciples and her many tonsured disciples or simple nun-students, her devotees also include hundreds of lay followers who call her *shifu* 師父, *shiye* 師爺, or Lian *shi* 蓮師 (“master,” “venerable old master” or “master Lian”) and recognize themselves as her *dizi* 弟子 (“disciples”). Beginning in the 1980s there were so many people wishing to “take refuge” and become her lay disciples that, at times, “she was not able to find new religious names for them, . . . she thus began to name them in numerical order, such as Hui-first, Hui-second, Hui-third etc.”⁶⁷

In the early 1990s, as her health began to deteriorate again, she resigned from most of her official positions, carrying on only those duties connected with the Institute of Studies and with the nuns' ordinations. As she told me during an interview in the spring of 1996, she could at last devote her complete attention to what she cared for most. Approaching her nineties, Longlian was still very active, shuttling between the two nunneries of which she was in charge. Normally she stayed at Tiexiangsi, where she gave some

66. The five nuns who presently manage Aidaotang (Zhaoxin, Renyi, Changwu, Longhui, Xincheng) were all close students and followers of Longlian, but are not strictly speaking her Dharma disciples. Similarly, Ruyi, director of the Sichuan nizhong foxueyuan, is undoubtedly one of Longlian's principle heirs, but strictly speaking can only be regarded as one of her closest students, not as a disciple. On the other hand, Guofang (current head of Tiexiangsi) and Guoping (abbess of Baitasi, in Chongzhou), as well as Guoming 果明, Guozheng 果正 and Guocheng 果成, have been both her students and Dharma disciples. The characters *neng* 能, *ren* 仁 (as in Renfa, i.e. the name given to Longlian by Nenghai), *sheng* 聖 and *guo* 果 are taken from an antique *gāthā* ascribed to Linji Yixuan 臨濟義玄, founder of the Linji 臨濟 tradition of Chan 禪 Buddhism, and are used to name four generations of monks and nuns belonging to the same lineage. The few nuns named after the character *sheng* (as Shengmi 聖密, Dingjing's Dharma name) represent an intermediate generation but are not direct disciples of Longlian. While usually this system was followed only in regards to Dharma names, which were meant to be secret, in Sichuan and Fujian it was also adopted for the “public” monastic names. For the particular *gāthā* used by Nenghai and Longlian, see Welch, *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism*, 279–280; on monastic names of Chinese monks, see Holmes Welch, “Dharma Scrolls and the Succession of Abbots in Chinese Monasteries,” *T'oung Pao* 50 (1963), 93–149.

67. Rurui, “Wo xinzhong yongyuan bu luo de taiyang,” 31.

of the most important courses at the Institute of Studies, and then went to Aidaotang on weekends and for important religious celebrations to preach the scriptures for the residing nuns and for her increasing number of lay devotees and followers. In fact, while Tiexiangsi—being “the only Tibetan nunnery in Han territory,” as she used to say—was conceived as a place for Gelukpa practices, Aidaotang was and remained a typical Chinese nunnery, known as the most prominent female venue for Pure Land rituals and ceremonies in the Chengdu area.

The situation changed after she suffered a stroke in 1996. She was hospitalized and was believed to be on the verge of death; eventually—and, as we will see, “miraculously”—she recovered, but from that moment on she significantly modified her lifestyle. She took up permanent residence in Aidaotang, which was located in the center of Chengdu and was thus much more convenient for an elderly woman needing medical care and constant assistance than Tiexiangxi, which was located on the outskirts of town. At Aidaotang she was looked after by her closest disciples, friends, and relatives, and seldom received visits from people she did not know well. In 1998 she went to Emeishan to worship Samantabhadra, the holy mountain’s tutelary Bodhisattva, and also participated in the *bhikṣuṇī* ordinations held in Baoguangsi (Xindu) and Aidaotang in 1999 and in 2003. All other public events of her last years took place inside Aidaotang: she participated in the consecration ceremony held in 2001, acted as principle nun-master at the tonsure ceremony in 2004, and conferred *śikṣamāṇā* precepts again in 2005, on the day of her ninety-sixth birthday. Longlian passed away in Aidaotang on the nineteenth day of the ninth lunar month, that is November 11, 2006.

Shaping and Reshaping an Exemplary Buddhist Nun

The following section will consider the evolution of Longlian’s image and the emergence, in the early twenty-first century, of a cult devoted to her. As we will see, the boundaries between this-worldly excellence and other-worldly sainthood are crossed more often than one would expect.

The remains left after Longlian’s cremation were recognized as *sheli* 舍利 (Sanskrit *śarīra*), a term which invariably refers to the relics of a Buddha or a realized being; accordingly, they had to be placed in *stūpas* in order to be worshipped.⁶⁸ Together with her bones and ashes, they were divided into four

68. On the cult of relics in Chinese Buddhism, see John Kieschnick, *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 29–52.

equal parts. One portion was sent to Mount Emei and another to Wutaishan, to be placed next to Nenghai's *stūpa* (see Figure 8.2); both reliquaries were completed by 2014. The other two portions were given to Longlian's principle heirs: the nuns in Aidaotang and those in Tiexiangsi. In Tiexiangsi a large *stūpa* in the Tibetan style is presently under construction. In Aidaotang, her *sheli* were exhibited until 2009; subsequently, on her 100th-birthday



FIGURE 8.2 The newly built *stūpa* of Longlian on Wutaishan. Courtesy of Ester Bianchi.

commemoration, they were placed inside a precious *stūpa* donated by some of Longlian's wealthy lay disciples.

On the same day, a memorial hall (jJinianshi 紀念室) was also inaugurated in Aidaotang. Longlian's personal altar has been relocated there, as a fitting representation of the Sino-Tibetan Buddhist tradition to which she belonged. Śākyamuni's statue stands between Changyuan's picture (on the left) and that of Nenghai (on the right), i.e., her Pure Land tonsure master and her Gelukpa Dharma master, respectively. In the background, behind Nenghai, is a picture of the tenth Panchen Lama; surrounding the area there are other statues and images, offerings, and ritual instruments, in both the Chinese and Tibetan styles. Moreover, inside the hall, her ritual objects and personal belongings are preserved, including her alms bowl, her Tibetan ritual hat, her monastic robes and shoes, her prayer beads, her Buddha statues and deities images, *sūtras*, *sādhana*s, and other sacred books, a skull bowl, and ritual objects for tantric practices. Among her belongings, there are also traditional calligraphy brushes and paraphernalia and some of her calligraphic works; a complete collection of her books, articles, essays, and poetry; her identity card and other official papers; a set of tea tools, a camera, fans, candle holders, an alarm clock, seals with her names, her glasses, and bag, and even a Mao Zedong 毛澤東 badge.⁶⁹

Both the *stūpa* and the Jinianshi are constantly visited and worshipped by Buddhist pilgrims. The memorial hall is open for devotions on the first and fifteenth day of each lunar month. The most significant celebrations of the nunnery take place in the Nianfotang 念佛堂 (Buddha Recitation Hall), in front of Longlian's *stūpa*. Moreover, on the thirteenth of the third month and the nineteenth of the ninth month of the Chinese traditional calendar, a four-day-long ritual is held to commemorate the anniversaries of her birth and death. Interestingly enough, regardless of the Chinese tradition followed in this Pure Land nunnery, not only does the *stūpa* have a distinctive Tibetan flavor, but also the rites held on these two anniversaries are tantric and Tibetan (*huigong* 會供),⁷⁰ thus honoring Longlian's personal practice and doctrinal affiliation.

Aidaotang's nuns also give devotees and visitors blessed images to keep and worship after they return home. The photograph which was displayed on

69. Memorial halls of this kind devoted to a former abbot or eminent master can often be found in contemporary Chinese monasteries; an example is the already mentioned Jiniantang 紀念堂 of Longlian's close friend Tongyuan on Wutaishan.

70. *Huigong* (Tib. *tsog*) refers to the offering that is presented to the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, other deities and masters during certain rituals, in order to celebrate them and gain their favor. The text and ritual procedures followed by the nuns are taken from Nenghai's translation of the *Gurupūjā*.

the first altar for her relics, portraying Longlian in her last year of life, soon became one of her most revered images. In other favorite images she wears the yellow *paṇḍita* hat which she put on for one of her last public appearances, but the most popular pictures worshipped by her devotees show the more healthy, strong, and active Longlian of the 1980s and 1990s. The same serious and dignified posture is reproduced in Longlian's statues—both the small one which was donated to Aidaotang by its sculptor in April 2009, and the more official statue inaugurated in September 2009 in the main Buddha hall of the Sichuan Bhikṣuṇī Institute for Buddhist Studies sited in Pengzhou.⁷¹

Longlian's relics constitute the most tangible proof of her spiritual achievements. Whether considered as the concrete effects of a lifetime of study and meditation (as her disciples put it), or as the concrete demonstration of her holy nature (as many commoners seem to believe), the finding of the relic-beads among her ashes was a moment experienced with intense pathos by all of her followers, and it marked a peak in the evolution of the cult of Longlian.

In fact, an escalation of her fame and influence had already begun in the early 1990s, clearly sanctioned and further stimulated by Zhao Puchu's words declaring that she was the "first *bhikṣuṇī*" of modern China. In 1995–1996, when I had the privilege to meet her for the first time, it was clear that Longlian was already very well known in Sichuan, in monastic as well as academic circles and even in more secular settings (e.g., among Chinese traditional doctors and *qigong* 氣功 masters). Certainly, a crucial milestone in the spread of her "legend" was the publication of her biography in 1997: written by Qiu Shanshan 裘山山, a female journalist whose aunt, Mrs. Xiong, was the already mentioned lifelong friend of Longlian, this bestselling work is a comprehensive account of her life; it also includes many interviews and intimate personal anecdotes which render this eminent nun more life-like and reachable to her followers. Significantly, as a sign of her fame also outside the Buddhist world, in 2004, the second issue of the *Wenshi zazhi* 文史雜誌 (Journal of Literature and History) devoted its front and back covers to Longlian, her calligraphic works, one of the statues molded by her, and images of rituals in Aidaotang.⁷²

71. This ceremony was attended by more than six hundred people, including many government authorities and Buddhist personalities from all over China, nuns from Taiwan, Daoists, Christians and Catholics. See "Sichuan nizhong foxueyuan juxing foxiang kaiguang ji Longlian fashi faxiang jiemu yishi 四川尼眾佛學院舉行佛像開光暨隆蓮法師法像揭幕儀式," *Fayin* 法音 10 (2009), 53; for an account of the ceremony including some pictures of the event, see: http://www.fjnet.com/jjdt/jjdtmr/200909/t20090926_137111.htm.

72. The same issue also included an article on Longlian: Chen Meiwu, "Boai tianxia pudao renjian."

At the same time, it was clear that an otherworldly aura had increasingly attached itself to Longlian. As her health deteriorated, she lived secluded in Aidaotang; still, followers and believers were allowed to visit pay homage to her, and I remember noticing in 1999 an apparently endless stream of Buddhist devotees lining up in front of her lodgings to worship her. These were to me the first signs of a new kind of devotion developing around her: Longlian, the first *bhikṣuṇī* of China, the highly learned and compassionate Buddhist master, was increasingly perceived by commoners as a holy being capable of granting spiritual protection. Likewise, in spite of her reluctance to speak about miracles and extraordinary events in her life, rumors about her supernatural capacities had already begun to circulate at that time: for example, in 1996 I was assured by a group of laywomen that she could see into past lives and foretell the future to the people she encountered.

Her popularity during her last years of life is also demonstrated by the documentary “The first *bhikṣuṇī* of Modern Times” (*Dangdai di yi biqiuni*), which was prepared for her 100th-birthday commemoration and includes footage showing Longlian during rituals and everyday life, up to her last public appearances.⁷³ For example, we can see the hundreds of people who gathered in Aidaotang for the consecration ritual held in 2001: she was dressed in Tibetan style, wearing her yellow *paṇḍita* hat, seated in a wheelchair, accompanied by her followers. Judging from the video, her few words of “May the Buddha light illuminate all things; may you all receive auspicious blessings” (*foguang puzhao, dajia jixiang* 佛光普照, 大家吉祥) evoked a highly emotional response among the audience. At the end, the documentary also shows her funeral service: inside and outside Aidaotang there were hundreds of nuns and monks, laypeople, common believers, governmental authorities, and even Daoist masters, all praying and bowing to bid her farewell. More lay believers were kneeling along the streets when the body was brought out to be cremated.

Since then, many voices have risen to narrate their own view of Longlian. All of them are unanimous in stating that she was “the most eminent nun.” All refer to some central themes, such as her early calling, her natural gifts, her scholarship, and her intelligence. Yet, they differ from one another in the details and, above all, in stressing one aspect more than others.

73. This documentary is available on DVD (Aidaotang, *Dangdai diyi biqiuni*) and was intended to be broadcast on national television networks. It includes some original videos which have been collected and edited for Longlian’s one hundredth birthday; some of these videos, which are available online, have been watched by thousands of people.

Longlian's achievements as a scholarly nun are genuinely impressive.⁷⁴ She wrote several books, which can be divided into works based on notes taken while listening to other Buddhist masters (one inspired by Wang Enyang, one by Fazun, and the remaining seven by Nenghai) and four translations from the Tibetan; she also translated the "dual ordination" procedures into English. Furthermore, Longlian wrote brief essays on various topics which were part of broader works such as the *Zhongguo dabaike quanshu* 中國大百科全書 (Encyclopedia of China, 1988) and the *Zhongguo Fojiao* 中國佛教 (Chinese Buddhism, 1989).⁷⁵ In addition, in the early 1950s she contributed to the *Zang-Han dacidian* (Tibetan-Chinese Great Dictionary), edited by Zhang Yisun.⁷⁶ In 1960, she helped write the chapter on Buddhism in the "Religion" section of the Sichuan Provincial Gazetteer (*Sichuan shengzhi, Zongjiaojuan: Fojiaopian* 四川省志, 宗教卷, 佛教篇), which had been abandoned during the Cultural Revolution. Finally, she also collaborated with Huang Xianming 黃顯銘 (n.d.) in the compilation of the *Zang-Han duizhao xizang dazangjing zongmulu* 藏漢對照西藏大藏經總目錄 (General Index of the Buddhist Tibetan Canon in Chinese and Tibetan).⁷⁷ In addition to her profound Buddhist knowledge, Longlian also had a sound knowledge of classical culture, which emerged particularly in her poetry, a characteristic which she shares with other modern religious leaders (such as Nan Huaijin and Zhao Puchu).⁷⁸ Longlian wrote more than one thousand poems, full of scholarly citations and references to the history and literature of China.⁷⁹ As a consequence, scholarship is a

74. Longlian has been mentioned as the nun who wrote the most in the whole history of the Chinese *bhikṣuṇīsamgha*. See Liu Qian, "Dharmacarya Long Lian," 30.

75. For a list of Longlian's Buddhist works and articles, see Appendix One, in Bianchi, *The Iron Statue Monastery*, 167–168. A collection of her works has been published in Wang Zhiyuan 王志遠, ed., *Longlian dashi wenhui* 隆蓮大師文彙 (Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 2011). In April 2014, on the day of Longlian's birthday, a symposium on her Buddhist thought was held in Aidaotang, its main objective being the publication of Longlian's collected works. As of August 2015, the collection was still in progress.

76. See Zhang Yisun 張怡蓀, ed., *Zang-Han dacidian* 藏漢大辭典, 2 vols. (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 1985).

77. See Huang Xianming 黃顯銘, *Zang-Han duizhao xizang dazangjing zongmulu* 藏漢對照西藏大藏經總目錄 (Xining: Qinghai minzu chubanshe, 1993).

78. See respectively Chapters Five, Seven, and Nine.

79. Longlian's poems, mostly written in traditional Chinese style, are both secular and religious; this connects her to the specific tradition of Buddhist poetry, which was an important aspect of Chinese poetry over the centuries. Buddhist poetry includes verses written by monastic poets (such as the Tang dynasty monk-poets Hanshan 寒山 (n.d.) and Jiaoran 皎然 (730–799)) as well as Buddhist-inspired verses by secular poets (e.g. traditional poems by Wang Wei 王維 (699–761), Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846) or Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101)). See the collection of Longlian poems in Wang Zhiyuan, *Longlian dashi wenhui*. On the figure of the

central topic which recurs in the sources.⁸⁰ However, Longlian's erudition is considered differently by various authors, some of whom present it as a sign of her being in line with the Buddhist tradition of the past, reconnecting her with the ideal of the erudite monk,⁸¹ whereas others see it as evidence of her modernity and independence.

This tension between modernity and tradition is not only a matter of secular versus religious approaches; in fact, Longlian herself favored this dual appreciation of her accomplishments and identity. This becomes clear when we recall what she considered to be her two main achievements: namely, the re-establishment of the correct procedures for *bhikṣuṇī* ordination, and the foundation of the first seminary of higher education for nuns in the People's Republic of China. On the one hand, "dual ordination" can be seen as a restoration of tradition; on the other, however, as Longlian herself suggested to me during an interview in 1996, she also believed that the restoration resulted in an improvement in the status of Buddhist nuns from a political, egalitarian perspective, thanks to the important role played by the nun-masters. As for the Institute of Studies, the curricula envisioned by Longlian were presented as rooted in ancient Buddhist tradition—both the Indian one, in regards to the *vinaya* rules and studies, and the Tibetan one, as they were inspired by the curricula for *geshé* in Gelukpa monastic colleges.⁸² At the same time, given its connections with the various Buddhist institutes founded by reforming Buddhist clergy in the first part of the twentieth century, the Sichuan Bhikṣuṇī Institute for Buddhist Studies stands out as a modern religious institution,⁸³

Chinese poet-nuns, see Beata Grant, *Daughters of Emptiness. Poems of Chinese Buddhist Nuns* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2003): 157–159 are dedicated to Longlian's poetry.

80. For example: Chen Meiwu, "Longlian fashi de foxue rensheng"; Qiu Jian, "Sishi nian qian de nüguan xuefa wei ni"; Qiu Shanshan, *Dangdai diyi biqiuni*, 12–13; and Wei Yixiong, "Fomen cainü."

81. On the role of scholarship in the Chinese Buddhist tradition, see particularly John Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk: Buddhist Ideals in Medieval Chinese Hagiography* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 112–138.

82. See Bianchi, *The Iron Statue Monastery*, 105. The Tibetan model was also emulated by Nenghai in the Institute of Studies he founded within Jincisi; see Bianchi, "The 'Chinese lama' Nenghai (1886–1967)," 318.

83. Chen Meiwu, "Longlian fashi de foxue rensheng," 8–9. Also consider that study programs of the Sichuan Bhikṣuṇī Institute for Buddhist Studies include lessons in English, IT, politics, and psychology. On the contemporary Institutes of Buddhist Studies seen as a continuation of those founded and active during the first half of the twentieth century, see 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), 439–440.

and its curricula were clearly conceived in a modern, pan-Asian conception of Buddhism.⁸⁴

Her role as a teacher is another frequent theme in works about Longlian.⁸⁵ As a gifted and learned woman, she took up teaching well before entering the *samgha*, but it is her career as a teacher of Buddhism that is seen as exemplary and exceptional. This is how she explained her determination to teach: “Buddhism is a science of wisdom. It is very difficult to understand, so it is really important to have masters. I had many masters myself. Half of the Buddhist doctrine I have learned comes from my masters, and half from my independent study and practice. Without teachers I would not have what I have attained today.”⁸⁶ Her own students and disciples, who often refer to her as their “beneficent master” (*enshi* 恩師), see her disposition to teach as the clearest evidence of her great compassion,⁸⁷ particularly considering the life she led since the early 1990s, when she refused most official titles and commitments in order to be able to devote all her remaining energies to the Institute of Studies, also sacrificing her own practice in the process.

The image of Longlian as a modern woman in “worldly terms” is another frequent theme, found not only in journalistic or scholarly works, but also in many articles and essays written by her disciples and by Buddhist institutional circles. One of the main topics is her democratic thinking, which she developed during her youth and which inspired her management of her two nunneries.⁸⁸ In this respect, her patriotic attitude might also be mentioned, a “love of country” that she often expressed in her poetry and which she displayed

84. This reflected her general attitude toward Buddhism: while she had chosen the Tibetan tradition for herself, for most of her life she was also in charge of a Pure Land nunnery (Aidaotang); she believed that the “Buddhist Dharma has a unique flavor,” meaning that every Buddhist school is nothing but a different manifestation of the same and unique word of the Buddha; see Chen Meiwu, “Longlian fashi de foxue rensheng,” 6. On Buddhism as a pan-Asian religion, with reference to both the Tibetan and the Chinese traditions, see Tuttle, *Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China*, 68–102, particularly 74–76.

85. The most comprehensive analysis of her teaching strategy is presented in Guoping, “Lüeshu Longlian fashi de sengcai jiaoyu shijian.” On the topic of nuns’ education in contemporary China, see the MA thesis by Yang Xiaoyan, “Dangdai nizhong jiaoyu moshi yanjiu.”

86. Liu Qian, “Dharmacarya Long Lian,” 29–30.

87. See for instance Chen Zhonghui, “Longlian fashi yu Sichuan nizhong foxueyuan,” Rurui, “Wo xinzhong yongyuan bu luo de taiyang,” Ruyi, “Mingxin de zhuisi, wujin de huainian,” and Yinjun, “Yi qinjiao enshe.”

88. Qiu Shanshan, *Dangdai diyi biqiuni*, 259. Interestingly enough, Longlian once explained to me that this “democratic” spirit was actually typical of the Buddhist tradition (Longlian, personal communication, Spring 1996, already quoted in Bianchi, *The Iron Statue Monastery*, 73).

concretely as a middle-school teacher in Chengdu.⁸⁹ We might also quote in this context the many official engagements and political commitments she took on before and after the Cultural Revolution, which are viewed by most of our sources as evidence of her patriotism and of her support of the Communist Party⁹⁰ as well as her influential position in politics and her amicable connections with the government (consider, for instance, Zhou Enlai's interest in her, which is one of the most often cited examples in the literature).⁹¹

Another typical theme is her emancipation as a woman. When she was young, Longlian pursued a wide array of intellectual interests, at a time when women usually only received a very basic education. Later on, she summarily dispatched all the matchmakers who lined up with marriage proposals; in addition, having noticed that the women in her family, despite their education, "did not have a desk to write on" once they married, she decided "not to follow in their footsteps" and refused to marry.⁹² Finally she created quite a stir in society when she convinced her parents to approve of her choice to enter the Buddhist *samgha*, giving up her government job and renouncing her career in the provincial government.⁹³ She also proved to be an independent and "brave" woman as a Buddhist nun; a significant example is the impression she created at the meeting of the Buddhist Association of China held in 1980, immediately after the Cultural Revolution, when she was the first and only nun who dared to shave her head again.

In this respect, Longlian can be regarded as a solo voice within the larger choir of educated and elitist nuns who, in the 1930s and 1940s, clamored for an improvement in their social position—a phenomenon that has been linked both to contemporary liberation movements of women in civil society and to the reform of the clergy stimulated by Taixu. Even if, to my knowledge, Longlian had no direct relations with the Institutes of Studies for nuns created

89. On Longlian's patriotism see particularly Chen Meiwu, "Longlian fashi de foxue rensheng," 4–5 and *passim*.

90. She is reported to have said: "The Chinese Communist Party is our greatest and best protector Bodhisattva" (Ruyi, "Mingxin de zhuisi, wujin de huainian," 44).

91. See Wen Jinyu, "Ying luo Emei diyi feng," 21.

92. Qiu Shanshan, *Dangdai diyi biqiuni*, 49.

93. Her entrance into the Buddhist *samgha* caused a big sensation in Sichuan, where she was already renowned for being the first woman ever to have passed the civil examinations in first place. As an example, her life experience was narrated in an article entitled "There is such a woman" (*You zheyang yige nüren* 有這樣一個女人), published in the *Xinhua daily* of Chongqing. Cited by Qiu Jian, "Sishi nian qian de nüguan xuefa wei ni," 66. On the sensation made by Longlian's choice, see also Zhao Shifu, "Dangdai Zhongguo diyi nü gaoseng," 70–71.

during the first half of the twentieth century, where these ideas were being developed (e.g. the Wuchang female *foxueyuan* 佛學院), her efforts were nonetheless focused on improving the status of nuns in Chinese society and within the Buddhist community—objectives which in her view had to be carried out within the Buddhist tradition.⁹⁴

A more personal portrait of Longlian is provided both by Qiu Shanshan's work and by accounts of Longlian's disciples and followers.⁹⁵ As for her best-selling biography, it was clearly written for as wide an audience as possible; it touches on most of the main topics considered in this chapter, and provides a closer look at Longlian as a human being. For instance, Qiu dwells on details about her secular life, stresses the theme of her refusal to marry and of her parents' initial opposition to her choice to become a Buddhist nun, and describes her health problems in great detail. To Qiu Shanshan's reader, Longlian appears as an exceptional yet still relatively normal woman, strong in spite of her human weaknesses. On the other hand, private matters very rarely show up in the accounts by her students and disciples, despite their closeness to Longlian: certain sensitive topics are smoothed over, there are only a few hints concerning her nervous breakdowns and—to my knowledge—none ever mentioned her stroke.⁹⁶ Significantly, Longlian herself was asked to read Qiu's book before its publication, at the invitation of Zhao Puchu, who penned both the calligraphy of the title on the front cover and the book's preface. This seems to suggest that, in spite of certain complaints against its excessively intimate approach expressed by some of her nun-disciples, Longlian was aware of the book's contents and implicitly approved this portrait of herself.

As for miracles and otherworldly matters, they are seldom mentioned in written sources. Yet, during my interviews, not only did lay followers refer to

94. Educated Buddhist nuns, mainly from the Wuchang Female Buddhist Institute of Studies (Wuchang foxueyuan nüzhong yuan 武昌佛學院女眾院, renamed in 1931 Shijie foxue yuan nüzhong yuan 世界佛學院女眾院) as well as from some other similar institutions of the Republican period, distanced themselves from the traditional Buddhist views on women, claiming a leading role in the monastic community and in society as a whole. The movement of the Chinese Buddhist nuns during the first half of the twentieth century is investigated in Yuan Yuan, "Chinese Buddhist Nuns in the Twentieth Century: A Case Study in Wuhan," *Journal of Global Buddhism* 10 (2009), 375–412. On the role ascribed to nuns and women in Chinese Buddhism, see Zhang Wenxue 張文學, "Zhongguo dalu fojiao nüxing yanjiu shuping 中國大陸佛教女性研究述評," *Funü yanjiu luncong* 婦女研究論叢 8 (2009), 76–80.

95. Notably: Ruyi "Mingxin de zhuisi, wujin de huainian," Rurui, "Wo xinzhong yongyuan bu luo de taiyang," and Yinjun "Yi qinjiao enshi."

96. It is interesting to note that Master Hongyi 弘一 also experienced mental illness or nervous breakdown; as in Longlian's case, these events were turning points in the shaping of his religious career. See Chapter Five.

Longlian's supernatural capacities (specifically, her foresight, knowledge about past lives, and capacity to grant spiritual protection), but some of her closest disciples also mentioned a number of extraordinary and mysterious events, explaining that they could not be revealed while Longlian was alive but that "after she has passed away they can be recounted, even if they should not be over-emphasized."⁹⁷ For instance, they said that while she was on Mount Wutai during the 1950s, she devoted herself to the study, recitation, and practice of the *Prajñā āpāramitāsūtra*. She did so every day and with deep commitment, until one night the sacred book was seen emitting bright rays of light.⁹⁸ Disciples also note that after Longlian's death they have often dreamed of her in the guise of Mañjuśrī the Youth (her *īdam*, or meditation deity);⁹⁹ this same deity, according to another account, had manifested itself before Longlian on her first arrival at Wutaishan. But the most important extraordinary event happened when she fell ill in 1996 and was at death's door. A hundred thousand longevity lamps were offered for her in Aidaotang, other lamps were lit in Taersi 塔爾寺 (Qinghai), and rituals were celebrated by the renowned tantric master Jichen 濟塵 (1900–2002). She miraculously recovered: she sat up in bed and said to her two disciples, Guoping 果平 and Longhui 隆慧: "I am not going; I will stay a while longer."¹⁰⁰

In conclusion, Longlian is often compared with her own models from the past, an approach which reconnects her with a specific tradition in Chinese Buddhism: that of the exemplary Buddhist nun. In fact, despite a widespread negative image of Buddhist nuns,¹⁰¹ not only did the Buddhist canonical

97. Guoping (personal communication, September 2012).

98. This mysterious event, clearly connected with her cultivation efforts, can be regarded as a "sober" kind of miracle of the *ganying* 感應 type. On this issue, Vincent Goossaert, "Mapping Charisma among Chinese Religious specialists," *Nova Religio* 12, no. 2 (2008), 14–16.

99. Guofang (personal communication, September 2012).

100. Guoping (personal communication, September 2012).

101. In Indian canonical literature the image of the nun is essentially negative. Particularly well-known and influential in the various Buddhist countries is the account of the founding of the monastic female order, which describes the initial reluctance of the Buddha to admit women in the monastic community and his subsequent decision to set out the eight "fundamental rules" (Sk. *gurudharma*, Ch. *ba jingfa* 八敬法) that clearly define the subordination of the nuns to the monks' *saṃgha*. As for China, monastic life for a woman was often seen in negative terms, basically because it allowed an escape to women who were unwilling or unable to occupy the role of daughter, wife and mother assigned to them by the Confucian world-view. These ideas were reflected in popular literature and proverbs; for instance, at the end of the Ming a popular refrain included Buddhist nuns in the group of the "three aunts and six grannies" (*sangu liupo* 三姑六婆), along with Daoist nuns, fortune tellers, mediators, procuresses, sorcerers, brothel keepers, grocers and midwives. On the foundation of the *bhikṣuṇīsamgha*, see Horner, *Women under Primitive Buddhism*, 103–117; and Diana Y. Paul, *Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in the Mahayana Tradition*

literature already refer to some ideal Indian nuns (such as Mahāprajāpatī),¹⁰² but the Chinese Buddhist tradition created its own positive figures of *bhikṣuṇīs*, who were intended to be models of virtue and wisdom to be emulated and venerated by later generations. One could also suggest that in this respect Longlian willfully crafted her image based on ancient hagiographical norms, in a similar way as, according to Daniela Campo, did Xuyun 虛雲.¹⁰³

Longlian's own most revered models were Mahāprajāpatī (Ch. Daaidao 大愛道), reputed to be the founder of the Buddhist monastic order for nuns, and the Sinhalese nun Tiesaluo 鐵薩羅 (a possible rendering of Tesarā), head of the nuns who transmitted the *bhikṣuṇī* order to China in the fifth century.¹⁰⁴ Mahāprajāpatī is mentioned in the name of Aidaotang nunnery; as for Tesarā, the three characters composing her Chinese name are written on a couplet at the entrance of Tiexiangsi. The choice of these two figures by Longlian makes sense, considering her dedication to the issue of nuns' ordination.

Nevertheless, the models with whom Longlian can be more easily identified are the Chinese nuns of the *Biqiuni zhuan* 比丘尼傳 (Lives of the *bhikṣuṇīs*), a work she was very fond of and on which she wrote an essay.¹⁰⁵ Like Longlian,

(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 77–94; on the *gurudharmas* in the *vinaya* of the Dharmaguptaka (T 1428: 923a26-b21) see the translation by Heirman, *The Discipline in Four Parts*, 606–607. On the roles and status of Buddhist nuns in the Chinese society, see Ester Bianchi, “Monache buddhiste cinesi: figure esemplari di *biqiuni* e realtà di una comunità monastica nel XX secolo,” in *Cina: miti e realtà*, Alfredo Cadonna and Franco Gatti, eds. (Venezia: Cafoscarina, 2001), 469–480; Bernard Faure, *Sexualités Bouddhiques. Entre désirs et réalités* (Aix-en-Provence: Le Mail, 1994), 126–130; Beata Grant, “Patterns of Female Religious Experience in Qing Dynasty Popular Literature,” *Journal of Chinese Religions* 23 (1995), 31–57; Kajiyama Yuichi, “Women in Buddhism,” *The Eastern Buddhist* 15, no. 2 (1982), 55–56; and Tsai, Wen-Ting (Cai Wenting 蔡文婷), “Daughters of the Buddha (Putidao shang de nū'er duo 菩提道上女兒多),” *Sinorama* 12 (1998), 82–101.

102. Mahāprajāpatī was the foster-mother of Śākyamuni Buddha who sought and eventually obtained the Buddha's permission to be ordained for herself and for her retinue of five hundred women.

103. See Chapter Three; for an in-depth analysis of Xuyun hagiography, 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).

104. On Tiesaluo, see Zheng Weiyi, “Tracing Tesarā.” Also see above, note 42.

105. See Longlian, “Biqiuni zhuan 比丘尼傳,” In *Zhongguo fojiao* 中國佛教, vol. 4. (Shanghai: Dongfang chuban zhongxin, 1996, first ed. 1989), 173–176. The *Biqiuni zhuan* (*Taishō* 2063) is a collection of hagiographies of sixty-five Buddhist nuns who lived between 335 and 516; it is traditionally attributed to Baochang 寶唱, who is said to have compiled it in 517 during the Liang dynasty. In his preface, the author defines four categories of excellence for these nuns: some stood out for their ascetic lives, others for their meditation or for their determination, and others were able to spread the Dharma far and wide. The text is translated in Li, *Biographies of Buddhist Nuns*, and Kathryn Ann Tsai, *Lives of the Nuns: The Pi-ch'iu-ni Chuan. Biographies of Famous Chinese Nuns from 317–516 C.E.* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass

many of these *bhikṣuṇīs* from the Six Dynasties, who had a positive and active role in certain elitist social and cultural environments, were highly learned, and well-versed in Buddhist doctrines and scriptures, as well as in secular subjects such as Chinese literature, Confucian classics, literary composition, and *ars oratoria*.¹⁰⁶ Some were able to study and practice meditation under famous masters of the time, and others proved to be influential in political matters.¹⁰⁷ Finally, many devoted themselves to the task of teaching Buddhism and spreading the Dharma, and had a large following of disciples and devotees.¹⁰⁸ Much as in the case of Longlian, miracles and extraordinary events are mentioned in their hagiographies, but instead of being the main focus (as, for instance, was the case in contemporary Buddhist edifying miracle tales) they are only a secondary theme, serving to highlight the nuns' spiritual cultivation.¹⁰⁹ Longlian's resemblance to many of the *bhikṣuṇīs* of the *Biqiuni zhuan* is quite striking, hence Zhao Puchu's statement that: "Longlian is the first among contemporary nuns; thus, in future editions of the *Lives of eminent monks* and of the *Lives of the bhikṣuṇīs* she must be there."¹¹⁰

Publishers, 1996); also see Tom De Rauw, "Baochang: Sixth-Century Biographer of Buddhist Monks . . . and Nuns?" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 125, no. 2 (2005), 203–218; Lily Xiao Hong Lee, "The Emergence of Buddhist Nuns in China and its Social Ramification," in *The Virtue of Yin: Essays on Chinese Women*, Lily Xiao Hong Lee, ed. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994), 47–64; and Nancy Schuster, "Striking a Balance: Women and Images of Women in Early Chinese Buddhism," in *Women, Religion and Social Change*, Yazbeck Haddad and Ellison Banks Findly, eds. (New York: State of New York University Press, 1985), 87–112.

106. According to Kathryn Ann Tsai, more than eighty percent of the *bhikṣuṇīs* of the *Biqiuni zhuan* were scholar-nuns. Some of them also wrote Buddhist works, none of which, however, have been handed down to us. See Tsai, *Lives of the Nuns*, 12.

107. On the relationship—which was often criticized by contemporaries—between the medieval Buddhist nuns and monastics, and noble circles, imperial courts, and political authorities, see for example Schuster, "Striking a Balance," 109.

108. Fabian 法辯 (n.d.), for example, studied under famous foreign masters such as Dharmamitra and Kālayāśas; Miaoyin 妙音 (n.d.) was very influential at the court of Emperor Xiaowu 孝武 (362–396) of the Eastern Jin; Daoxin 道馨 (n.d.) was reputed to have a profound knowledge of Buddhist scriptures and to be an excellent teacher; the same is true of Jinghui 淨暉 (n.d.), who was abbess for twenty years and whose disciples amounted to more than four hundred people. See respectively *Taishō* 2063: 940b–c, 936c–937a, 936a–b, and 943b.

109. On miracles and extraordinary phenomena in the *Biqiuni zhuan*, see Valentina Georgieva, "Representation of Buddhist Nuns in Chinese Edifying Miracle Tales during the Six Dynasties and the Tang," *Journal of Chinese Religion* 24 (1996), 58–62, and Lee, "The Emergence of Buddhist Nuns in China and its Social Ramification," 55–56. On medieval Chinese Buddhist miracle tales, see Georgieva, "Representation of Buddhist Nuns in Chinese Edifying Miracle Tales," 47–76.

110. Qiu Shanshan, *Dangdai diyi biqiuni*, 1.

Conclusion

Longlian is presented at times as the compassionate Buddhist master caring for her students and disciples, at other times as an erudite scholar producing many books and articles. She stands out as a model to be emulated both in a religious and in a secular sphere, as well as a “holy Bodhisattva”¹¹¹ deserving profound veneration, and even as a tutelary presence granting supernatural protection and spiritual assistance. She is regarded as a modern example of female empowerment and independence and as a typically traditional nun strictly adhering to monastic rules and regulations. Longlian is a teacher who was “destined to have chalk on her fingers throughout her life,”¹¹² but also a patriotic and clever woman inclined to politics and able to take up many important governmental offices.

In an attempt to tie together these different strands and adopt instead a unifying perspective, I shall suggest that all these images of Longlian share a fundamental common basis: she was exceptional, and she proved to be so from her early childhood. Her exceptionality, which was acknowledged already during her life, is sustained by her own recollections and by some actual events that occurred in her early years, and is confirmed both by the hagiographical accounts written down by her disciples and followers and by the more “secular” biography or by the recent *nianpu* (Chinese-style biography). This forms the solid foundation of Longlian’s cult and, at the same time, allows us to look at her multifaceted image in a traditional light: she stands out as a precocious child destined to be a saint or an accomplished monastic, an ambition that is deeply rooted in Chinese Buddhism.¹¹³

Longlian showed her innate and unusual intelligence very early in life: at age three, although she could not yet read or write, she could recognize some of the characters on the couplet hung at the entrance of her grandparents’ mansion; at the age of four, she is said to have begun reciting Tang and Song poems as if it was the most natural thing in the world. But what really matters in light of her process of “sanctification” is her early calling: at a young age, she manifested signs suggesting her destiny as an accomplished Buddhist. In

111. “In the heart of believers she is a ‘holy Bodhisattva’ (*shensheng de pusa* 神聖的菩薩)” (Chen Meiwu, “Boai tianxia pudaο renjian,” 12).

112. Liu Qian, “Dharmacarya Long Lian,” 29; a similar quotation is: “fate reserved me a career filled with chalk” (Ruyi “Mingxin de zhuisi, wujin de huainian,” 43).

113. On this topic, see the recent study by Miriam Levering, “The Precocious Child in Chinese Buddhism,” in *Little Buddhas: Children and Childhoods in Buddhist Texts and Traditions*, Vanessa R. Sasson, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, AAR Religion, Culture, and History, 2013), 124–156.

her words: “I could formally join the Buddhist *saṃgha* only at 32, but the idea to become a Buddhist nun came to me very early, when I was six or seven.”¹¹⁴ More precisely, when she was five she began to abstain from meat and one day she recited the *Avalokiteśvara sūtra of King Gao* (*Gaowang Guanyin jing* 高王觀音經) by herself without omitting a word, thus arousing great amazement among her relatives. Throughout her childhood she devoted herself to the recollection of the Buddha’s name (*nianfo* 念佛) and the recitation of the *Amitābha sūtra* (*Amituo jing* 阿彌陀經) together with her grandmother. The most significant sign of her precocious vocation occurred when, at age eleven, she met Dayong and knew that she would don the monastic robes herself one day. At thirteen she adopted a fully vegetarian diet, which is usually regarded as a first step toward monastic life. She made this decision after she found a book offering an introduction to Pure Land Buddhism (*Jing zhong jing you jing* 經中徑又徑) in her grandfather’s library: she read it through, unable to stop. The same year, her father brought from Putuoshan 普陀山 a manuscript by master Yinguang, which led to the definitive awakening of her faith in Buddhism.¹¹⁵

At the same time, Longlian refused the idea of any supernatural element in her life experience. She wanted to be regarded as a human being, not as a deity. For example, she denied the appearance of extraordinary phenomena at her birth: “I was brought into the world in a very ordinary way,” she used to say.¹¹⁶ Thus, when she was told that in the lay devotees saw her as a compassionate Bodhisattva, she burst out laughing and replied: “Me a Bodhisattva? . . . I may be the Bodhisattva of gluttony.”¹¹⁷ Her request that others not speak about miracles and extraordinary events she might have experienced supported this stance. Consequently, as we have seen, miracles are—so far—seldom referred to in written sources, while they have become a frequent topic in oral accounts only since she passed away. Why was Longlian so reluctant to speak about the extraordinary signs in her life? The emic point of view is offered by the explanation given by her lineage nuns: Longlian knew that to accomplished Buddhists those phenomena were spontaneous outcomes of a lifetime of practice and meditation, but she would not let common people know about them, because she feared that they might not understand their origins and

114. Qiu Shanshan, *Dangdai diyi biqiuni*, 16.

115. On Yinguang’s inspiring and influential role in Buddhist *milieus* of the Republican period, see Chapter One.

116. Qiu Shanshan, *Dangdai diyi biqiuni*, 22.

117. In Sichuanese, the term *yinshi pusa* 飲食菩薩 means a gluttonous person. See Qiu Shanshan, *Dangdai diyi biqiuni*, 261.

significance. At present, these different approaches have emerged in regard to her *sheli*, which are considered evidence of her spiritual realization (*chengjiu* 成就) by Buddhist monastics and laypeople, while most common believers see them as proof of her being the manifestation of a Bodhisattva (*pusa jiangsheng* 菩薩降生).¹¹⁸

The same sort of tension between mundane and supernatural or divine is to be found also in other religious leaders' careers, such as the already mentioned Li Yujie.¹¹⁹ On the one hand, Longlian might have sensed that "deification" could result in the loss of her "political capital," which she had built up over decades, through her own official positions and her relations to the government (i.e., the recognition of a higher status for Chinese nuns through the establishment of elevated educational standards and ordination procedures). On the other hand, however, a religious leader cannot totally renounce her otherworldly aura and maintain charisma; she can, however, assume a stand-offish attitude toward such ideas, asking her entourage not spread such rumors, but not opposing them too vigorously. This, at least, seems to have been Longlian's approach.

Will the varied views of and different approaches to Longlian eventually merge and unify, as has been the case with other modern Chinese religious leaders?¹²⁰ In this light, the process of her sanctification would appear at present to have reached the midway point. Even so, we cannot but take note of the fact that at the moment her relics and her memorial hall have become a favorite pilgrimage spot in Sichuan. Her exceptional character is recognized by an increasing number of Buddhist believers and laypeople, by her closest nun disciples and monastics in general, as well as by common people who see in her an eminent woman, regardless of her religious affiliation.¹²¹ To all of them Longlian is a modern saint, even if they may not all share the same understanding of the concept of "sainthood."

118. Longhui (personal communication, September 2012).

119. On Li Yujie, leader of a redemptive society, see Chapter Seven. Also see the Introduction.

120. One of the most notable cases is that of Xuyun; see Chapter Three.

121. On the different perspectives on Longlian, also see Chen Meiwu, "Boai tianxia pudaorenjian."