The Shifting Narratives and Circling Bodhisattvas of Baoguo Si: A Study of Lay Buddhist Ritual at an Historic Temple on Mt. Emei, Sichuan China.

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Abstract

China has an ancient tradition of sacred mountain pilgrimage. One of these sacred mountains is Emei Shan, located in Sichuan province. For the past 1500 years Emei Shan has been associated with the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra, and many monasteries have been built on and along its pilgrimage route. My research focuses on lay Buddhist ritual at Baoguo Si, an ancient and prestigious temple located at the foot of the Mt Emei Shan.

During the Ming Dynasty Baoguo Si was established under the name of the Huizong Tang. Originally it served a different function; a temple established for dialogue and communal practice of Buddhists, Daoists and Confucians. During the Qing dynasty it was shifted to a new location, then was converted into a Buddhist temple, and Emperor Kangxi gave the temple its current name Baoguo Si. The temple was used by the Nationalist Army and then by Sichuan University during the Sino-Japanese wars. Like most Buddhist monasteries in China, Baoguo Si was "closed" during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) its monks were forced to return to lay life and many traditions fell into disuse. After 1979, Baoguo Si was permitted to reopen and there has been a revival of lay interest in this important monastery since that time.

Today Baoguo Si receives some two million visitors annually, as it is an important gateway along Emei Shan's ancient pilgrimage route. While today there are such a large number of visitors to Baoguo Si, it is not possible to isolate them into two distinct groups of tourists and pilgrims. This is because most visitors engage in standard rituals that are performed at almost any Buddhist monastery (offering incense, lighting candles and prostrating to the buddhas and bodhisattvas). However there is a group of lay Buddhists known as laopusa (old bodhisattvas) who visit the monastery to engage in a circumambulatory procession and recitation that takes place in the Samantabhadra Hall.

This study first examines how narratives have played a role in making Baoguo Si so popular and creating an image for this temple as both an historic heritage site and a sacred temple. To do this I examine contemporary publications that promote Baoguo Si and Emei Shan. Then I present an ethnographic study of how laopusa use the temple today.
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments ......................................................................................... i
Abstract ......................................................................................................... ii

Introduction ................................................................................................. 1
  The Setting ................................................................................................. 2
  Pure Land .................................................................................................. 4

Chapter One: In the background: Emei Shan .............................................. 9
  The research methodology ...................................................................... 9
  Narratives about Taoist history and arrival of Buddhism to Emei Shan .... 11
  Narratives of Amitabha’s Pure Land at Emei Shan .................................. 18
  Critiques of the religious experience of Emei Shan today ...................... 21
  “Religion”, “heritage”, and “tourism”: reflections on terminology ............ 24

Chapter Two: Baoguo Si .............................................................................. 31
  Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) .................................................................... 32
  Qing Dynasty (1644–1912) .................................................................... 35
  Republican Period (1912–1949) ............................................................ 38
  Baoguo Si under Mao ............................................................................ 40
  Baoguo Si in the post-Mao era (1977 - the present day) ......................... 44
  Discussion .............................................................................................. 47

Chapter Three: Lay Ritual at Baoguo Si ..................................................... 50
  Baoguo Si as it stands today .................................................................... 50
  Negotiated spaces at Baoguo Si ............................................................ 54
  Lay Ritual at Baoguo .............................................................................. 58
  Zoumiao: Returning to Baoguo Si on chuxi .......................................... 62

Chapter Four: Nianfo at Baoguo Si ............................................................. 65
  The laopusa ............................................................................................. 66
  Circling the Bodhisattva: A characteristic day for laopusa at Baoguo Si .... 68
  Waiting at the Samantabhadra Hall ......................................................... 69
  The Main Ceremony ............................................................................... 70
  Lunch Break and Afternoon Session ...................................................... 72
  A brief introduction into Amitabha’s Pure Land and Nianfo ..................... 74
  Analysis of Nianfo: theories and ritual and liturgy ................................ 77

Conclusion ................................................................................................. 83
  The elephant in the room: future areas for study ................................... 84
  Closing considerations ............................................................................ 86

Bibliography ............................................................................................... 88
Introduction

In Emei City, Sichuan, on chuxi,除夕 (New Year’s Eve) February 6, 2008, the end of the year of the Red Fire Pig and the beginning of the Brown Earth Rat year, people spent their day cleaning their homes, greeting visiting relatives, and enjoying family dinners. In the evening, they visited Baoguo Si 报国寺, an important local monastery at the foot of Emei Shan. During most of the year Baoguo Si charges an entrance fee to visitors. However on chuxi this fee is waived to allow local people to visit the temple to generate good merit for an auspicious start to the new lunar year.

Inside the temple grounds, family groups offered incense, lit candles, and made offerings. Most also gave monetary donations. They also bowed, prayed, and made silent requests to (the images of the) buddhas and bodhisattvas. After passing through the first three halls of Baoguo Si, they reached the Samantabhadra Hall. Here they recited the name of Amitabha, namo Amitofo, and joined a ritual procession that zigzagged between the rows of meditation cushions while circumambulating a large statue of Samantabhadra seated on a six-tusked white elephant.

Daniel Overmyer wrote that Chinese festivals “...are intended to be lively and renao [热闹] ‘hot and noisy’, a kind of ‘collective effervescence’”.¹ This was indeed the case on chuxi 2008 at Baoguo Si. The temple and its grounds were filled with people, outside the entrance gate, in each of the large courtyards and halls, and especially during the procession in the Samantabhadra Hall. In 2008, I had been living in China for six years and had already visited Emei Shan twice, yet chuxi 2008 was the first time I witnessed anything that could be described as “hot and noisy” or “collective effervescence” involving religious ritual. During my earlier visits to Emei Shan in 2002 and 2007, the mountain and its temples seemed more like a tourist destination, a combination of a museum and a

Disneyland-style entertainment park.² Buddhist ritual seemed to be largely absent.

In 2011 I returned to Baoguo Si to examine the relationship between the commercial functions of this pilgrimage site and Buddhist rituals performed by local residents. My original research questions were: Was Baoguo Si a tourist site or a religious monastery? How was Baoguo Si affected by commercialization and tourism? Were there differences between tourists and religious visitors in terms of their activity at the temple? How did locals utilize the temple? During my fieldwork, additional questions emerged: What is the history of Baoguo Si? When did this temple become an important site for pilgrims to Emei Shan? Were Buddhist rituals practiced at the temple? Underlying all these inquiries are the central questions about Buddhist monasteries, their lay congregations and Buddhism in contemporary China.

The Setting

Baoguo Si is one of the most important temples on Emei Shan today. It consists of four main halls built along the central axis of the monastery. James Hargett translates its name, Baoguo Si, as “Loyal to the State Monastery” in his monograph Stairway to Heaven: A Journey to the Summit of Mount Emei.³ In the 1936 bilingual (English and Chinese) publication Mount Omei Illustrated Guide Dryden Linsley Phelps found it difficult to find a suitable English equivalent, but writes that Baoguo Si indicates “... a monastery where the monks, by their prayers and ritual, bring blessing to the country.” He notes several English translations of his time including “Monastery of the Country’s Reward”, “Serving the country” and “Protect the nation” monastery.⁴ I utilize the Chinese name for this thesis, and briefly return to the meaning of the monastery’s name in Chapter Two.

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² A term used to describe how Emei Shan has been developed see: Christoph Baumer, China’s Holy Mountain: An Illustrated Journey into the Heart of Buddhism (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 133 Baumer’s criticism of Emei Shan is described later in this chapter.
Emei Shan (Mt. Emei) is the tallest of China’s Four Famous Buddhist Mountains, *sida fojiao mingshan* 四大佛教名山, with the highest point being Wanfo Peak 万佛顶: 3099m (10,167ft). The other peaks are the famed Golden Summit (Jinding 金顶), the second highest with an elevation of 3,077m (10,095ft), and Qianfo Peak 千佛顶, at 3046m (9,990ft). The Golden Summit has become established as one of the most important destinations for pilgrims and tourists. The other three mountains in this series of *sida fojiao mingshan* include the northern Wutai Shan (五台山) in Shanxi province, the eastern Putuo Shan (普陀山) in Zhejiang, and the southern Jiuhua Shan (九华山) in Anhui. Emei Shan is the westernmost and is situated approximately 150 kilometres (92 miles) south-southwest of Chengdu, the provincial capital of Sichuan.

Each of the *sida fojiao mingshan* is famous as the abode of a different bodhisattva (*pusa* 菩萨): Wutai Shan for Manjusri (*Wenshu pusa* 文殊菩萨) the bodhisattva of wisdom; Putuo Shan for Avalokitesvara (*Guanyin pusa* 观音菩萨) representing compassion and mercy; Jiuhua Shan for Ksitigarbha (*Dizang pusa* 地藏菩萨), who in China represents filial piety and the lord of death; Emei Shan for Samantabhadra (*Puxian pusa* 普贤菩萨), the bodhisattva who in China represents happiness and the ideal Buddhist practitioner. Holmes Welch writes that Buddhists believe that these bodhisattvas appear “to devout pilgrims” at their respective sites. This is one of the reasons why these mountains have become so popular.

It is claimed that Samantabhadra, said to be originally a disciple of the Buddha, rode a six-tusked elephant from India, and after arriving on Emei Shan attained nirvana. Narratives of Samantabhadra’s enlightenment and of emanations have

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spread to the point where Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhists have incorporated it into their cosmologies. As a result pilgrims have been visiting the sacred mountain hoping to find visions of this bodhisattva for centuries. In later sections I will argue that narratives regarding Emei Shan, Samantabhadra, and various monasteries have been a major factor in establishing this mountain as one of the Four Famous Buddhist Mountains. However I will also explain that by visiting this famous Samantabhadra mountain many are in fact hoping to be saved by Amitabha Buddha.

Most of the monasteries along the Emei Shan pilgrimage route are inside the Emei Shan National Park, which requires an entry fee 150rmb, and most monasteries and temples charge an additional fee. Because Baoguo Si is not inside the national park, only an 8rmb fee was required to enter. However entry to the temple is free for people with a “layperson’s conversion certificate” (guiyizheng皈依证) . The hours the monastery is open to the public are 6:30am to 8pm during the summer months and 7am to 7pm in the winter.

**Pure Land**

Despite Emei Shan’s special connection to Samantabhadra, the ritual I observed on the eve of the chuxi in 2008 involved the recitation of Amitabha’s name. During my fieldwork in 2011 I focused my observations on a group of lay Buddhists known as laopusa (老菩萨) who visit Baoguo Si daily to perform two sessions of Amitabha recitation nianfo (念佛), “the reciting the name of the Buddha.” Laopusa, which translates as old bodhisattva, is an honorific title for the lay congregation that visits Baoguo Si.

**Jushi** (居士) is a more general term (than laopusa) referring to “[a] householder who practices Buddhism at home without becoming a monk.” Holmes Welch translates jushi as “devotee” and explains that there are specific terms for lay

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male and female Buddhists. Welch points out that the term jushi can refer to a wide variety of groupings; in my thesis I will use the term laopusa to refer to the specific group I study. One of my research findings is that the laopusa are mostly retired lay people, mostly women, who participate regularly in nianfo procession at Baoguo Si. Other studies seem to indicate that lay women often outnumber men in religious groups. Some scholars have proposed reasons behind this occurrence. Cheung argues, in her book Woman’s Ritual in China, women participate in ritual to become “members of a new community of lay worshippers.” According to Susan Sered, in traditional societies, when local social and family support networks break down, elderly women join religious movements to rebuild meaning in their lives as well as to establish new relationships. Such explanations are helpful in understanding some of the changes that have taken place in the Emei region (and throughout China) during the 20th century.

These women have used Baoguo Si to create a sacred space for themselves, one which is separate from modern China, where traditional beliefs and values are upheld. In a study of female participants in a Pure Land (jingtuzong 净土宗) group in Taiwan an informant said,

“Today's society is full of problems. When we look around, we see young people who behaving badly [sic]. So my heart is full of joy whenever I see young people taking classes at Snow Hut. I am very happy to cook for the youth camp, etc. I feel that I am doing something good for the society.”

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While this informant was happy to be part of positive social development, her comments also show that other retired lay people join groups that promote more conservative and traditional values to escape from modern society.  

Everyday, laopusa visit Baoguo Si to perform two sessions of nianfo. Their practice is not unusual: nianfo is a common and widespread practice in Chinese Buddhism in the past as well as today. In The Buddhist Revival in China Holmes Welch described a nianfo procession (in the 1920s) in much the same way as I observed the practice at Baoguo Si in 2011.

Their members got together to chant the name of Buddha Amitabha... They would chant his name while circumambulating, then chant it seated then sit in silent concentration on the idea of Amitabha. This was one cycle of work lasting up to an hour and a half. At the end of each cycle they would assign the merit generated thereby to the benefit of themselves and others, so that all might be reborn in the Western Paradise.

Similar nianfo processions are widespread as part of the daily morning and evening practice of monastics, and also among jushi and pilgrims who visit monasteries, temples and pilgrimage sites.

Nianfo is “... the single most representative feature of Pure Land practice,” which has a different goal than attaining nirvana. Japanese scholar Musashi Tachikawa explains that Buddhist theories operate under the paradigm of repeated cycles of “birth, development, and death,” in which the world is constructed “through the senses.” The ultimate goal of Buddhists is to attain nirvana through the development of the understanding of emptiness. However,

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16 Sered, 'Women, Religion, and Modernization'.
17 In Chapter Four I will describe a very similar cycle of ritual performed by the community of laopusa at Baoguo Si today.
22 Tachikawa argues that this paradigm is a result of a lack of scientific knowledge in the past, but that it "still remains appropriate in certain respects" see: ibid., 102.
Pure Land practitioners “... abandon hope of attaining the wisdom of emptiness itself.” Instead of aiming directly at nirvana, nianfo practitioners - through the recitation of the Amitabha mantra - aspire to be reborn in Amitabha's Pure Land. Here I use the phrase “Pure Land” to refer to “Amitabha's realm and the cultic tradition in China associated with it.” Tak-Ling Terry Woo describes Pure Land Buddhism as “a devotional sect of Chinese folk Buddhism.” It has a “spiritual discipline [which] consists of good works, prayer, offerings to Guanyin, and the chanting of the mantra namo-omitofo ('homage to Amitabha Buddha'). Despite this description it is important to clarify that Pure Land Buddhism is “not an independent school [zong] of Chinese Buddhism.” Instead it is an “integrated element functioning within all Chinese Buddhist Schools.”

Missionaries noted the popularity of Amitabha and Pure Land Buddhist worship at Emei Shan over 100 years ago. For example Reverend Virgil Hart found Shakyamuni and Amitabha to be the two most “revered deities” on Emei Shan. He also wrote, “[Amitabha’s] name is now on the lips of every devotee, whether performing at his or other shrines. I have seen worshippers go the round of all the gods in a temple and repeat without intermission 'Omito-foo' [sic]. His name is used everywhere and under all circumstances.” During my fieldwork in 2011 I observed similar scenes at Baoguo Si, where devotees visited each statue of the temple and recited Amitabha’s name in similar fashion. However they never mentioned the name of Samantabhadra, despite the ubiquitous images of Samantabhadra at Baoguo Si and other monasteries and temples on the

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23 Ibid., 122.
26 Ibid., 215.
27 Stevenson, 'Pure Land Buddhist Worship and Meditation in China', 23.
30 Ibid., 203.
During my fieldwork I was unable to find any ritual directly dedicated to this bodhisattva. When I asked the monks at Dafo Chanyuan (大佛禅院) if there were any rituals for Samantabhadra that were conducted by visiting pilgrims or local jushi; the answer was no. Why is there such a lack of ritual on Samantabhadra at Emei Shan? Why is there so much focus on devotion to Amitabha at a site dedicated to Samantabhadra? The reasons for this are complex, and I can't fully address these questions in this thesis. However I will return to this issue in the conclusion where I suggest some possible strategies for comprehending the roles these two Buddhist figures play at Emei Shan.

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31 Huang notes that each temple on Emei Shan has an image of Samantabhadra. See: Huang, A New Edition of the Omei Illustrated Guide Book, 150.
Chapter One: In the background: Emei Shan.

The purpose of this chapter is to contextualise my study by explaining my approach and outlining how I gathered information in the field during 2011 and 2012. I also explore some of the history of Emei Shan through narratives. At the end of the chapter I examine several issues relating to terminology, which often confounds rather than clarifies the nature of Buddhism in China.

There are two main threads that run through my research. The first thread is narrative, and the way that narrative have been used to establish Emei Shan and (with a focus on Baoguo Si) as important, historic and sacred places. The second thread focuses on lay ritual, and how lay ritual maintains Baoguo Si’s status and identity as the gateway to Emei Shan. The first of these is explored in the first two chapters: narratives about Emei Shan, and in Chapter Two at narratives about Baoguo Si. The narratives regarding Emei Shan are more widespread and pervasive than those regarding Baoguo Si. I examine how ritual interacts with these narratives in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, which focus on lay ritual performed at Baoguo Si. Before presenting and discussing these narratives I will describe my field research.

The research methodology

The majority of my research was conducted during fieldwork at Baoguo Si with daily observation sessions at the temple during August and September of 2011. I made a preliminary climb of Emei Shan a month previously (July 6-9) during which time I surveyed tourist and ritual activity at Baoguo Si and the other major temples and monasteries on the mountain. Birnbaum writes that a “... good deal of lay practice may be carried out privately before a family altar at home, and in this sense it is more difficult to observe and discuss- except on a case-by-case basis – than the more public activities carried out in monastic halls.” 32 Baoguo Si was an ideal site to observe lay ritual, as it is a public space. 33

33 I obtained informed consent from each of the interviewees, and I also had ethical approval from the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee prior to my field trip.
Apart from my time in the Emei region I visited various temples, bookstores and a publishing house in Chengdu. I also went to Chongqing where I observed a morning session of nianfo at Huayan Temple on 14 July 2011. A year later I returned to China to visit temples in Suzhou, Hangzhou, Tiantai, Ningbo and Putuo Shan during June and early July of 2012. The visit in 2012 was useful for collecting information through a series of “question and answer” sessions with abbots and guest masters of the various monasteries I visited. Although the topics discussed did not touch on Emei Shan or Baoguo Si directly, they helped me to contextualize issues such as tourism, commercialization, the state of monasticism in China today, the relationship between temples and the lay congregations, and the role of governmental agencies such as the Buddhist Association of China.

Most of my research was conducted over two months during 2011. I spent most of this time at Baoguo Si observing and participating in the rituals conducted by the lay congregation of laopusa. At the beginning of the two months I spent several days visiting Dafo Chanyuan, a newly reconstructed monastery in Emei town, where I began searching for printed materials in their library. Here I discovered - the out of print - *Baoguo Si*, a short book that presents an abbreviated history of the monastery. In the following chapter I trace a history of Baoguo Si based on this and other Chinese publications. Most of these publications are designed for tourists; there are very few academic publications on Emei or Baoguo Si in Chinese or English.

I conducted formal interviews at the end of the two-month period to fill the gap left between the printed materials I found and the observations I had made. These interviews helped me put together an oral history of the recent

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34 Which was the 14th day of the 6th lunar month, and according to the Chinese lunar calendar it was chufu 初伏, the first day of the summer heat season.
35 席永 (Yongshou), 报国寺 (Baoguo Si) (峨眉山佛教协会 emeishan fojiao xiehui, 2002).
36 These other publications include: 徐杉 (xushan), 布金满地：神秘的峨眉山佛门传奇与揭秘 (1) (bujin mandi: shenmi de emeishan fomen cheanqi yu jiemi), vol. 1 (成都 Chengdu: 四川大学 Sichuan Daxue, 2003); 田家乐 (Tianjiale), 峨眉山 (Mt. Emei) (北京 Beijing: 中国建筑工业出版社 zhongguo jianzhu gongye chuban she), 1998); 何志愚 (He Zhiyu), 佛教圣地峨眉山 (fojiao Shengdi Emeishan) (Buddhist Holy Land Emei Shan) (香港 Hong Kong: 天马图书有限公司 tianma tushu youxian gongsi), 2001); 汤明嘉 (Tangmingjia), ed., 圣地峨眉: 文化与自然 (shengdi Emei: Wenhua Yu Ziran) (Holyland Emei: Culture and Nature) (成都 Chengdu: 四川人民出版社 Sichuan People’s Publishing House), 2007).
development of the ritual. These interviews were not recorded on audio equipment; instead they were chronicled in note form. During the formal interviews a research assistant, who was both a linguist and a native speaker of the local Emei dialect, was employed to aid communication. After returning to New Zealand, I made several phone calls to my informants to answer questions that arose during writing.

I found that clusters of narratives have been used, and are still used, to promote the importance and authenticity of Baoguo Si and Emei Shan. The narratives emphasize the timelessness of these sacred sites and the historical links to important figures and China’s other religious traditions. My research also suggests that lay ritual conducted by local Buddhist congregations rather than the rituals performed by the ordained Sangha are maintaining Baoguo Si as a living Buddhist site.

**Narratives about Taoist history and arrival of Buddhism to Emei Shan**

In this section, and throughout this thesis, I discuss several narratives relating to the history of Baoguo Si and Emei Shan. The narratives are a bricolage consisting of myth and supposed historic facts that imply rather than directly state that Baoguo Si and Emei Shan are “authentic” religious and historic sites. My analysis of these narratives is not focused on the claims made by the narratives, but on the explanations they provide for how and why these sites are important and sacred.

In this section I outline two narrative clusters that bolster Emei Shan’s historical origins as a sacred site. One of these clusters implies that the mountain has always been a sacred site by claiming it was originally a Taoist site that was gradually taken over by Buddhism. The other is a “founding myth” regarding the arrival of Buddhism to Emei Shan. It also is used to explain why the site is linked to Samantabhadra and how the “Buddha Light” (*foguang* 佛光) is related

37 Although I can communicate in the Sichuan dialect, the local Emei dialect can be challenging. See: Wenjie Qin, ‘The Buddhist Revival in Post-Mao China: Women Reconstruct Buddhism on Mt. Emei’ (Ph.D. Thesis, Harvard University, 2000), 25 who also noted problems understanding the local dialect despite being a native speaker from Chengdu.

38 See: Hargett, *Stairway to Heaven*, 141.
to this deity. Outlining these narratives helps provide some of the context of Buddhism in Post-Mao China and more specifically during the first twelve years of the 21st century. These narratives, along with the site’s natural beauty, its links to certain scripture, Imperial patronage, and supernatural phenomena all reinforce the notion of Emei Shan’s importance as a sacred mountain and as an important heritage site. These claims are further bolstered by titles bestowed upon the mountain by local, regional, national and international organizations.

No one narrative explains why Emei Shan is an important sacred site; there are many narratives and folk tales that work together to construct an overall picture of the mountain. Furthermore there are several reasons for “how” and “why” Emei Shan became such an important pilgrimage spot. Hargett outlines several of these narratives in his chapter “How and Why Did Mount Emei Become a ‘Famous Buddhist Mountain’.” 39 He describes how the mountain’s various attributes have been important for this process, as I will describe below. He also explains that scriptural references in texts like the Avatamsaka Sutra (Huayan Jing), that identify Emei Shan as Samantabhadra’s abode gradually appeared. 40 Imperial patronage was also important element to Emei Shan’s fame and success. 41

Since the fall Imperial China, Emei Shan has continued to receive seals of “authenticity” from secular sources. These secular sources have included various local, national and international accolades and titles. For example in 1997 Emei Shan was awarded UNESCO World Heritage status. 42 The importance of this status can be seen in the UNESCO logo that decorate websites, printed materials (such as books and pamphlets), audio and video materials (DVDs, CDs, and VCDs), and on signs along Emei Shan’s pilgrimage route.

Emei Shan’s own natural beauty and “supernatural” phenomena are important in the claim that it is a sacred site and so is embedded in narratives regarding the

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39 Ibid., 137–164.
40 For a Hargett’s description see: Ibid., 147–151.
41 Ibid., 137.
mountain. He Zhiyu writes that it is so beautiful that it cannot be captured by literature or art. In his book on the mountain Hargett writes, “Without a doubt, Emei shan’s remote location and unique environment have played the greatest roles in determining what has happened there over the centuries.”

However it is not just the natural beauty of the mountain that has enabled it to become a sacred site. Emei Shan has also become famous because of its “supernatural” phenomena. These include the four wonders; the Buddha Light foguang, the sea of clouds yunhai 云海, the sunrise richu 日出, and the magic lanterns shengdeng 圣灯. O’Jack argues that the foguang is one of the most important reasons why Emei Shan became so widely accepted as a sacred mountain.

The foguang has several English translations including the “Buddha's Light,” “Buddha's Glory,” and “Buddha's Aureole.” This is a kind of halo that appears when looking down from the peak at Jinding; in the center of it the viewer’s shadow can be seen. Hargett writes that it occurs only under certain conditions: (1) a certain time of the afternoon, (2) there needs to be “... a thick, flat cloud bank or heavy fog... directly below the observers position on the cliff edge,” and (3) a preceding rain or snow shower. Although this is not a unique phenomenon to the site, it has taken on mythical and magical proportions. The sighting of the foguang has a special significance for Buddhists: it indicates a special blessing, spiritual insight, or the good karma of the observer. Furthermore it is believed that Samantabhadra uses the foguang “... to manifest himself to those that are predestined to see him” in his “reward body” or

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43 This is a reoccurring theme, here presented at a pillar at Hongchunping near Wanian Si, as “峨眉画不成” the beauty of Emei cannot be captured in art. See: 何志愚 (He Zhiyu), 佛教圣地峨眉山 (fojiao Shengdi Emeishan) (Buddhist Holy Land Emei Shan), 3.
44 Hargett, Stairway to Heaven, 194 I return to Hargett and this book often throughout this thesis, as it is the only academic monograph published in English on this site.
46 See: Ibid., 17 n. 59 for an explantion of the term foguang.
47 Hargett, Stairway to Heaven, 18–19.
The fuguang is embedded in the “founding myth”; the story that describes how Buddhism arrived at Emei Shan.

The “founding myth” that is widely propagated, even on the UNESCO website, is that the first Buddhist temple was built on Emei Shan during the 1st century CE. In a Chinese article, Kunhan 坤韩 points out that although this claim is widely disputed by scholars and even the monastic community, it permeates through literature aimed at tourists and extends the pilgrimage site’s history as a Buddhist site by several hundred years. Kunhan argues that there is no historical evidence indicating that there were Buddhist structures at Emei date in the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220 AD).

The “founding myth” claims are based around a cluster of folktales regarding an herbal medicine-gatherer whose vision of Samantabhadra caused him to establish the first Buddhist monastery on the mountain. There are several versions of this story; one of the most common versions was posted on an online blog:

Emeishan has a Buddhist heritage that can be traced back to the Eastern Han Dynasty under the reign of Emperor Ming (58-75). One day a hermit called Pugong was collecting medicinal herbs in Emeishan when he suddenly saw a man with a halo around his head flying over on the back of a white elephant. Awe-stricken, Pugong followed the man to the summit where he found nothing but fleeting purplish clouds. Then he went to the Western Region (Xinjiang region, from where Buddhism spread from India to China) to consult an abbot who told him that the man he saw was the holy person of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra. Back to Emeishan, Pugong converted his residence into a temple for worshipping Bodhisattva Samantabhadra. This became the first temple ever built in Emeishan.  

48 Ibid., 98.
49 UNESCO, ‘Mount Emei Scenic Area, Including Leshan Giant Buddha Scenic Area - UNESCO World Heritage Centre’.
51 Ibid.
An alternative example published online:

It was said that when Pu Gong, a hermit of the Eastern Han Dynasty spotted the spectacular rays on the mountaintop, he consulted an Indian monk who had just arrived in China, who said, “This is the auspicious symbol of Samantabhadra. This light was originally used to protect Tathagata, but now it has made its presence felt in this place for the benefit of the multitude.” 53

In another version of the story, Pugong (or Old Man Pu in this version) 54 is friends with the abbot of “Precious Palm Monastery,” whom he often visits when taking a break from herb gathering. One day, Old Man Pu hears celestial music. When he gets closer to the source of this music he sees “... a crowd of men and horses riding colourful clouds and heading in the direction of the Golden Summit.” 55 According to this version of the story, the Abbot tells Pugong that he has developed so much merit by providing medicinal herbs to alleviate “... the pain and distress of so many... the bodhisattva has been moved into revealing his true features to you.” 56 Even the Abbot claims (in this version of the folktale) not to have gained sufficient merit to see the bodhisattva in his true form, instead he just saw “the aura above his head,” apparently referring to the Buddha Light.

The most common version reports that Pugong saw a deer one day when collecting herbs. He followed the deer to the Golden Summit. When Pugong arrived there the deer led him to the Buddha Light in the centre of which an image of Samantabhadra appeared. Hargett translates a more detailed and “oldest extant version of the tale.” 57

In Hargett’s commentary he notes that this “founding myth probably dates back from the early Song” as it is not referenced in literature until after Tang dynasty.

55 Ibid., 72.
56 Ibid., 74.
57 To read this version refer to Hargett, Stairway to Heaven, 141–142.
I will not summarize all of his analysis on Pugong, however I will briefly discuss several of Hargett’s points that relate to my argument.

Hargett claims that even if we cannot locate the origins of the Pugong legend, “we can, with some confidence, discern the underlying purpose of the story: the creation of a three-way connection between Emei shan, Samantabhadra, and the Foguang... This three-way association is the foundation of Emei shan’s identity as a ‘Buddhist mountain.’” As this legend is set during the Eastern Han period, it can be used to trace the Buddhist legacy of the mountain further back than Wutai Shan. Hargett writes “… Wutai in the north had already been settled by monks by the late fifth century and, during the Tang, had received generous imperial support... by the mid-Tang period Wutai was already a major Buddhist center in China and each year eminent monks and pilgrims from China and abroad visited there.” The Pugong legend helped Emei Shan compete with the legacy already being established at Wutai. As a result of this and other factors, Emei Shan eventually became widely accepted as one of China’s Four Famous Buddhist Mountains.

On the UNESCO’s web page that introduces Emei Shan as a world heritage site, it is clear that the story of Pugong is used in the claim that the first Buddhist temple was established on the mountain during the 1st century. In the introduction it is stated that, “The first Buddhist temple in China was built here in Sichuan Province in the 1st century A.D. in the beautiful surroundings of the summit Mount Emei.” In a subsection describing the history of the site it is written, “… Buddhism was introduced into China in the 1st century AD via the Silk Road from India to Mount Emei. Pugong, a medicinal Plant farmer, built the Puguang Hall on the Golden Summit at this time.”

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58 Ibid., 142.
59 For Hargett’s analysis and discussion on this ‘Founding Myth’ see: Ibid., 141–147.
60 Ibid., 142.
61 See Chapter 7 for this and other arguments on ‘How and Why did Mount Emei Become a “Famous Buddhist Mountain”?’ Ibid., 137–164.
62 Hargett cites the earliest reference of this grouping to be dated in 1687. For more of his discussion on the formation of this series of mountains see: Ibid., 157–160.
63 UNESCO, ‘Mount Emei Scenic Area, Including Leshan Giant Buddha Scenic Area - UNESCO World Heritage Centre’.
Another narrative is Emei Shan’s prehistory as a sacred mountain as a Taoist site. I am not disputing this claim; instead I want to demonstrate how such an assertion is used to boost the status of the pilgrimage site in two ways. It emphasises the mountain’s ancient claim to being a sacred site while enhancing its importance as an “indigenous” Chinese site.

O’Jack points out that “Daoist traditions on the mountain predate even the advent of Buddhism to China, and Mount Emei remained an important Daoist site of cult through the end of the Ming dynasty... It also remains part of Daoist religious geography in China as the seventh of the thirty-six Lesser Grotto-heavens.” 64 These points are echoed on tourist brochures, online, Chinese tourist books, and in Hargett’s book. According to Mingfei Shi, poems by the Tang poet Li Bai (李白,701-769) indicate that Taoism flourished on the mountain. Shi argues that “despite the unavailability or total loss of the oral tradition, and the scarcity of the literary records in Taoist scriptures and poetic or prosaic sources, one still can sporadically run across some interesting jigsaw puzzle pieces that signify the mountain as a crucial site of mystic revelations for Taoism from approximately the third to the ninth century.” 65

Hargett writes that, “Source materials related to Mount Emei’s Daoist tradition falls into three categories... First are reports and tales of immortals associated with the mountain... The second type... appears in the form of references or biographies in official historic works... where myth is sometimes repeated and seemingly taken as history. The third and final variety is a collection of selected texts in the official Daoist Canon.” 66 Hargett’s sources claim that the earliest Daoist structure on Emei Shan was founded during the Jin Dynasty (265–420). 67 Popular narratives however identify the mountain as an ancient sacred site, thousands of years old. For example over a century ago Johnston wrote, “... the earliest legendary associations of the mountain are in the Chinese minds

66 Hargett, Stairway to Heaven, 71.
67 Ibid., 76.
naturally connected with those mythical progenitors of the Chinese people-Fu His and Nu Wo. This carries is back to the twenty-ninth century B.C.” ⁶⁸

In Chapter Two I will describe how during the post-Mar era it has become important to claim that sites on Emei Shan have ancient links to China’s other religious traditions.

**Narratives of Amitabha’s Pure Land at Emei Shan**

As I mentioned in the introduction, today Pure Land practices, especially nianfo, are common on Emei Shan. However it is clear that Amitabha has a well-established presence at the mountain as well. This suggests that the role of Amitabha at Emei Shan might be more important than generally reported. Just as the “founding myth” attempts to link together the fogaung, Buddhism’s arrival to the mountain, and the establishment of the first temple, there are also narratives suggesting the first monastery was established at Emei Shan during the Eastern Jin Dynasty 东晋 (317—420 C.E.) was closely connected to the Pure Land Buddhism. I have also encountered secondary literature indicating that it is possible that elements of Pure Land Buddhism could have been present at the mountain since around 400 C.E. ⁶⁹ Christian missionaries noted there was a presence of an Amitabha cult at Baoguo Si dating back at least as far as the 1880s. This information illustrates that there are historical links between Emei Shan and practices relating to Amitabha’s Pure Land. In other words, the nianfo ritual as practiced by the laopusa is not necessarily a new trend.

Missionaries uncovered evidence of Amitabha worship at Emei Shan in the late nineteenth century. During the summer of 1887 several Chinese pilgrims encountered Virgil Hart during a pilgrimage on Emei Shan.⁷⁰ In Evanston Ives Hart’s account of his father’s mission in China, he writes, “They turned quickly from their worship of the idols and fell to his feet, knocking their heads on the floor and crying repeatedly, ‘Omito-foo! Omito-foo!’ Amita Buddha! Amita

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⁶⁸ Reginald Fleming Johnston, *From Peking to Mandalay: A Journey from North China to Burma Through Tibetan Ssuch’uan and Yunnan… with Map and Illustrations* (Book on Demand, 1908), 55.
⁷⁰ He was a missionary and writer, who wrote Hart, *Western China.*
This event, which occurred outside a temple on Jinding, illustrates that Buddhist pilgrims were familiar with the Buddha Amitabha.  

In the early 1930s Prip-Møller also encountered the Amitabha Cult and noted that certain temples on Emei Shan, and Western China in general, afforded greater importance towards Amitabha than in other regions. An example of this was the inclusion of Amitabha instead of Maitreya at the entrance of one monastery. The standard form of Amitabha is described to have “... a long, down-stretched right hand, with the palm facing outward. This special feature, which is emphasized far beyond human proportions, indicates his vow to save all mankind.” Prip-Møller points out that Amitabha is depicted in a standing position, but sometimes sitting.

Despite Prip-Møller's findings, Samantabhadra is the dominant figure at Emei Shan and at Baoguo Si. For example, at the temple Amitabha does not have his own hall; there is a standing Amitabha facing out the rear entrance of the Main Hall. On the other hand, Samantabhadra is the central figure of the Samantabhadra Hall, which operates as the recitation hall (hence: nianfo tang). What I have discovered is that at Baoguo Si - and on Emei Shan more generally – while Amitabha may not hold the dominant iconographical position he is the main cult figure worshipped by visitors and laopusa.

Prip-Møller and Holmes Welch both describe the nianfo procession in detail, which I will discuss below. This, along with the other information presented above, would indicate there is a long history of Amitabha nianfo at monasteries at Emei Shan. However I do not claim the practices of the cult are exactly the same as they were in the past. One reason for this is, as Pi-yen Chen claims,

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72 Virgil Hart also notes this encounter in his book. See: *Western China*, 252.
73 See: J. Prip-Møller, *Chinese Buddhist Monasteries; Their Plan and Its Function as a Setting for Buddhist Monastic Life*, 2d ed. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1967), 49 in which he finds that at times the Amitabha statue placed in a position generally reserved for Maitreya.
74 See: Ibid. in which he finds that at times the Amitabha statue in a position generally reserved for Maitreya.
liturgical rituals in the Chinese context were often transmitted orally. Today the tunes are becoming standardized between locations; this is due to the mass distribution of audio (and audio/video) recordings in various formats. At Baoguo Si an audio recording of nianfo plays continually in the Samantabhadra hall at times when the nianfo procession is not being conducted. At locations where there are no monks to lead the procession, such as at Daci Si in Chengdu, an audio/video recording is used to guide the lay participants through the ritual.

Research findings by O’Jack and Hargett indicate that Emei Shan’s relationship to Amitabha Pure Land practices might be almost as long as its connection to Buddhism. As I explained above, it is likely that the first Buddhist institutions on Emei Shan were built during the Eastern Jin Dynasty. O’Jack writes that this is “... when Shi Huichi, the younger brother of Master Shi Huiyuan, the founder of the Pure Land school of Buddhism in China, first came to reside on the mountain.” Hargett notes that Master Shi Huiyuan “... and one-hundred and twenty-three followers founded the famous White Lotus Society (Bailian she) on Mount Lu. Their principal goal was rebirth in the Pure Land Paradise of Amitabha Buddha. To achieve this goal they practiced nianfo – repeatedly invoking the name ‘A-mi-tuo-fo’... This practice, they believed, would not only help them gain true understanding of the scriptures; it would also assist their rebirth in the blissful Pure Land.”

Weiran writes that in 400 Shi Huichi established the first Buddhist monastery on Emei Shan, and “became known as the founder of Mount Emei.” Weiran’s statement here indicates that there is a claim that Emei Shan has a close connection with the brother of the Pure Land’s first patriarch. The claim Weiran briefly discusses is that Shi Huichi established the original temple known today as Wannian Si, once known as the Samantabhadra Monastery. However Hargett doubts that Shi Huichi was involved in any major construction projects

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77 Hargett, Stairway to Heaven, 80.
79 Ibid. Also see page 177 58, 59, and 60.
such as the building of the Samantabhadra Monastery, but admits he could have been involved in the construction of “small, modest buildings”.  

Despite having no evidence that Huichi actually visited the mountain “… it seems reasonable to assume that at some point in his missionary work he would have paid a visit to Mount Emei.” 

Hargett points out that Huichi spent thirteen years in Sichuan (399-412), so during this time it is possible that practices of the White Lotus Society, such as nianfo had spread to Chengdu and then onto Emei Shan.

What these sources indicate is that Amitabha and Pure Land practices are not new to the mountain. Reverence to this Buddha can be traced at least as far back as the late Qing Dynasty, and perhaps as far back as the Eastern Jin. These narratives suggest that Emei Shan’s connection with Amitabha is as historic as its connection with Samantabhadra. It is not surprising to find Pure Land ritual to be an important aspect of Buddhism on the mountain.

**Critiques of the religious experience of Emei Shan today**

Despite the predominance of Buddhist ritual, narratives and major restoration projects in contemporary China, there has been a barrage of criticism towards Chinese Buddhist sites, both by China’s domestic media and also by international scholars. In this section I examine several media attacks on the “authenticity” of Buddhist sites and then focus on critical studies on Emei Shan. Before exploring these attacks I will consider Walsh’s explanations for the reasons Chinese Buddhist temples have had to find new ways to make money in the past century.

From at least the fifth through to the early twentieth century, land formed the primary economic foundation of the sangha… This began to change during the Republican period (1911-48), and especially after 1949 with China’s communist revolution. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), all temple lands were confiscated… Since the 1980s and Deng Xiaoping’s reforms there has been a remarkable revival, reinvention, and re-creation of Chinese religiosity and Chinese Buddhism… for the vast majority of Chinese Buddhist temples and monasteries new innovative sources of income had to be found. The most common solution was to become a

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81 Ibid.
tourist center, a fact that today is often criticized by more conservative Buddhists as negatively affecting monks and nuns and distracting them from their practice.  

However it is not just the conservative clergy who find transforming Buddhist sites into tourism centers distasteful. In recent years the Chinese media picked up on a number of controversial issues as well. Contentious topics included: the opening of a Starbucks at the historic Lingyin Si in Hangzhou, the listing of pilgrimage sites (such as Putuo Shan) on the stock market, and the discovery of “fake monks” in several Chinese monasteries. What these news stories indicate is that there is a degree of discontent regarding the wide-scale commercialization of Buddhist institutions for the tourist industry. Stories have placed monasteries under the microscope of the media to uncover some of the controversial ways money is made. They reveal a conceptual dichotomy between the narratives promoting tourism to Buddhist sites and the effects of large-scale tourism.

Western media outlets have reported similar stories. For example in July 2012 The Guardian published an article entitled Chinese shrine seeks stock-market path to financial nirvana. Tania Branigan summarises several articles published in the People’s Daily including reporting “Putuo Mountain Tourism Development Co Ltd is gearing up to go public on the domestic capital market.” One issue discussed is a growing relationship between religious sites and being listed on the stock market. In 1997 the Emei Shan Tourism Co Ltd (EMST) was listed on the Shenzhen Stock Exchange. According to an article in the People’s Daily, EMST was not directly related with the monastic institutions on the mountain but

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82 Michael John Walsh, Sacred Economies: Buddhist Monasticism & Territoriality in Medieval China (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 4.
83 As a scholar/monk Venerable Jing Yin explores several of these issues see: Venerable Jing Yin, ‘Buddhism and Economic Reform in Mainland China’, in Chinese Religions in Contemporary Societies, ed. James Miller (Santa Barbara, Calif: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 85–99.
rather was "primarily engaged in the sales of admission tickets and the operation of tramways and hotels in Emei Mountain." 87

Several Western scholars have also published cynical responses to religion at Baoguo Si and more generally at Emei Shan in the Post-Mao era. They claim that religion at Emei Shan has suffered as a result of both mushrooming tourism and governmental intervention. These criticisms generally stem from personal experiences during fieldwork, and through contact with Chinese sources during short visits to the site. These criticisms typically reflect western notions of how Chinese religion should appear.

In the preface of Sacred Economies, 88 Michael Walsh writes about some of his experiences at Emei Shan. During his visit to Baoguo Si, “...where monks’ chanting voices trailed upwards towards the pine trees along with their incense smoke,” he peered into a window and noticed a monk counting “...a pile of money almost two and a half feet high.” 89 He records this as the moment when he lost “... any naïve sentiment [he had] about Buddhist materiality.” He asks, “What type of space was conducive to producing an income as well as a salvific outcome?” 90 This is a question that I return to throughout this thesis. For Walsh, these were merely initial impressions that eventually led him to extensive fieldwork at Tiantong Si.

Christoph Baumer in his book on Wutai Shan also criticises Emei Shan over as being developed “...in the direction of Disneyland, where the priorities of mass tourism overwhelm the needs of the monasteries.” 91 Baumer’s notion of a Disneyland is also mirrored by Birnbaum’s idea that religion and ritual act as a “mild exotic backdrop” to tourists. 92 Davis also writes about the exoticization of a local culture to facilitate tourism for both domestic and foreign visitors. 93

87 Ibid.
88 Walsh, Sacred Economies, xi–xii
89 Walsh, Sacred Economies, xi.
90 Ibid., xii.
91 Baumer, China’s Holy Mountain, 133.
92 Birnbaum, ‘Buddhist China at the Century’s Turn’, 444.
Other critics noted disillusionment during their brief visits to Emei Shan. For example, during Gretel Ehrlich’s quest “…to pick up the threads of a once flourishing Buddhist culture,” she became dissatisfied with religious encounters during her ascent, and was totally disillusioned by the time she reached the peak.  

94 Pál Nyíri wrote that the modernization of this ancient site would be “offensive” to western visitors seeking “authenticity” in their cultural experience.95 For Nyíri, “The tickets, video clips, and 'love locks' at Mount Emei are offensive for the western tourist... since they appear incompatible with the historical and sacred that constitute the very raison d’être of the tourist site.” 96

The main criticism I have with these two writers (Ehrlich and Nyíri) is that they spent too little time on Emei Shan to discover or to judge the authenticity of religious ritual. Both of these scholars only spent a few days on the mountain. Their idea of an “authentic” experience may have also been swayed by their own presumptions of what kind of experience there should have been. We know that Emei Shan as a pilgrimage site has also served as an economic hub for the region for centuries, for example in 1888 Virgil Hart discovered that most monasteries on the mountain also served as hotels. 97

In addition to economic realities of pilgrimage sites the various narratives that we have seen create a dichotomy between what visitors expect and experience at Emei Shan. Before recounting the narratives used to promote Baoguo Si in Chapter Two, I will first provide more background on the changes surrounding the category and terminology of the term “religion” in China. This is important not only for better understanding the terminology itself, but also to clarify preconceptions relating to my study.

“Religion”, “heritage”, and “tourism”: reflections on terminology

The Mandarin Chinese word for religion zongjiao (宗教) incorporates two characters: zong (宗), “lineage” and jiao (教), “teachings”. Zongjiao has different

95 Pál Nyíri, Scenic Spots: Chinese Tourism, the State, and Cultural Authority (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 67.
96 Ibid., 67.
97 Hart, Western China, 231.
roots, connotations and meanings than it does in other languages and so does not represent a “precise equivalent” to western notions of religion. It is for this reason that Clarke argues that Chinese words for religion, culture and philosophy are “misleading”. 98 Furthermore it is widely accepted that Chinese terms, such as “zongjiao (religion) and mixin (superstition)... were adopted from Japanese neologisms”. These became new and widespread in the Chinese public discourse around the turn of the twentieth century. Vincent Goossaert writes that these terms “... were used to express Western notions that had not existed in Chinese discourse until then.” 99 Therefore the term for religion in China has been easily reshaped according to government policy, and even though there is not enough space here to explore this in depth, this short section will help contextualise these issues for my study.

The introduction of new terminology led to a new religious paradigm. Goossaert explains that “...for centuries, religious specialists, groups, and practices had to conform to certain standards of orthodoxy, they now had to conform to a category of ‘good’ religion... imposed from the West. 100 The definition of “religion” changed throughout the twentieth century, it was viewed by intellectuals as being the antithesis of modernity, and demonised during the Cultural Revolution. Despite reforms in the 1980s, there still are negative connotations regarding the word “religion”.

Birnbaum points out that the introduction of new western concepts into the Chinese vocabulary, and the fall of the Imperial system, was a “... response to a general perception of stagnation and decline of China, made more evident and pressing by a succession of foreign interventions-military and commercial-on Chinese soil revealed the deep weaknesses of the late Qing rule.” 101 He clarifies: “the modernization process in China in that era was not simply an uncritical ‘Westernization,’ even as many leading figures turned outward for answers to

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100 Ibid., 184.
the problems of their age.” 102 In fact, policy was enacted which intended to reshape Buddhist institutions to suit needs and goals of the central government. However Zhe Ji points out that the outcome of these processes sometimes had unintended “paradoxical effects.” 103

One of the paradoxical effects of restructuring Chinese Buddhism into institutional forms of the Communist secular state was that a top down approach did not always work. Heavy restrictions during the Mao years did not destroy religion, but instead created a “spiritual vacuum.” The restructuring of traditional religious sites as secular tourist destinations in the early Post-Mao era did not satisfy this spiritual vacuum. Instead people looked elsewhere for something to believe and practice. For example during the 1980s and 1990s there was an explosion of new religious movements many of which encompassed healing practices known as qigong. 104 David Palmer reported estimates of numbers as high as 100 million qigong practitioners. 105

However by 1999 the government discovered they could not control qigong groups and banned them, at the same time they loosened their grip on traditional religious organizations and changed their discourse on them. Goossaert and Palmer argue that to repress the Falun Gong and other qigong groups, a two-tiered discourse was utilized. The term xiejiao or evil cult was used along with various narratives that vilified banned groups. At the same time the term religion became more positive in public discourse. They point out that during 2000 the China Anti-Cult Association was established which set up a series of conferences and publications that promoted this new discourse. They write, “In this literature, the xiejiao was defined as almost as an antireligion, in

102 Ibid.
sharp contrast to religion, which was depicted in unambiguously positive terms.”

While religious terminology can be easily manipulated in China, the term “religion” faces another major problem in the Chinese context. And that is the relationship between society and the several co-existing religions. Tarocco points out that Buddhism and Buddhist institutions have retained influence on “... all strata of society and was present in all spheres of culture” since the Tang Dynasty. 107 That is to say Buddhism has served as a central force behind China’s development despite changing official policies on Buddhism over these centuries. Birnbaum echoes this sentiment when saying, ”The Chinese Buddhist world has never been separate from Chinese society. It is a constituent element....” 108 This includes Buddhism’s entanglements with popular religion, Daoism, and Confucianism. For example Overmyer points out that in China Confucian “ethical principles” have “... considerable influence on the beliefs and values of the practitioners of other religious traditions.” 109

Lu and Lang argue that it is important to appreciate the non-exclusivity of the “Chinese religious landscape.” Sanjiao is a phrase often translated as the three teachings or the three religions: Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism. A model to describe how they function is that of a pyramid, with each of the three sides corresponding to the separate elements of sanjiao and the base representing popular religion. 110

However the notion of sanjiao implies that they represent three distinctive identities; and so does not reflect the complexity of the system it is supposed to explicate. 111 In other words, Buddhist, Daoism, Confucianism, and popular religion are not really separate, but are infused elements of a wider paradigm.

111 Clarke, *The Tao of the West*, 22.
Or as Goossaert wrote they should not “… be confused (so there was no syncretism) but were seen as of equal importance: they coexisted and collaborated, and shared some common values.” For example in the preface of Hua Chen’s In Search of the Dharma, a quote by Mencius is used to clarify the Buddhist concept of “causality.” In a later section a Confucian poem is used to describe his respect for his dharma teacher. In fact throughout the book examples from Daoist and Confucian classics are used to illustrate various Buddhist concepts. This complexity of sanjiao is also exemplified by difficulties faced in the classification of temples as one of these religions during the 1980 and 1990s that housed a mixture of “… Daoist gods and Buddhas or Bodhisattvas in their pantheons.” Another example of this is the description of Chinese mountains as being either Buddhist or Daoist, as this over simplifies the intricate environment represented at each site.

Therefore Goossaert uses the term “Chinese religion” to describe this “hybrid system,”… in which cosmology, ritual, scriptures, practices of worship and spiritual cultivation, and temples and communities are pervasive but interconnected and organized in a very different way” to that of a “…Western post-Reformation sense as a system of doctrine organized as a church separated from society.” Walsh decides that phrases such as “Chinese religions” or “Chinese religiosity” are acceptable in that they cater for pluralistic, overlapping, and multifaceted orthodoxies and heterodoxies. Walsh states his partiality for the phrase “Chinese religiosity,” as it refers to “an active, participatory, social transaction, which is to say, an active exchange between social agents as determined by social institutions.”

117 Walsh, Sacred Economies, 12.
Despite having "no native term for ‘religion’ in Chinese,"\textsuperscript{118} there has been a level of continuity in the attitude towards religious organizations by the imperial state and then later by China’s “…modern regimes (Nationalist, Communist)…” that is, attempting to control and limit such diversity and autonomy—but based on very different foundations. The imperial state regulated on a theological basis (the emperor, as Son of Heaven, was a religious authority and could decide what was orthodox or heterodox); the modern regimes regulate on a legalistic basis (they define legal, objective standards for accepted religion and repress groups or people who ignore them).\textsuperscript{119} This is important for this thesis, as efforts by central leadership to regulate and control the institutions in the Emei region have been constant regardless of the belief structures of the governing body. I will return to this theme when discussing the history of Baoguo Si in the next chapter.

If we accept these points then it is no wonder that various attacks on Chinese religion have not been successful. This is because the new category of religion did not encompass the pervasive nature of the belief structures and practices to which it was attempting to describe. Today this misunderstanding continues with “good religion” being tolerated for various economic and political reasons.

In the next chapter I outline how the new secular governance of the Nationalist and Communist regimes led to changes that directly affected Baoguo Si and other monasteries on Emei Shan. As I discuss the high degree of commercialization of monastic institutions in the Post-Mao era and the influence of new ideas and technology on them, it is important to point out that it has also been argued that these (new ideas and technology) have been utilized for religious purposes and by religious institutions. Tarocco argues that various Buddhist protagonists integrated (the potentially threatening) new ideas and technology for their own purposes.\textsuperscript{120} During the Republican period, \textit{lay} Buddhists became the “active

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{119} Goossaert, 'The Social Organization of Religious Communities in the Twentieth Century', 179; Also see: Ji, 'Secularization as Religious Restructuring: Statist Institutionalization of Chinese Buddhism and Its Paradoxes', 244–245.
entrepreneurs” \textsuperscript{121} who conscripted new technologies, such as modern printing, for uses within Buddhism, and in setting up modern Buddhist societies. In other words, she argues, lay Buddhists were instrumental in the modernization of Buddhism. Although my thesis does not specifically focus on this point, it is an interesting theme to ponder while discussing the role of lay Buddhists at Baoguo Si.

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 632.
Chapter Two: Baoguo Si

Baoguo Si was established during the Ming Dynasty under the name the Huizong Tang 会总堂. It originally was a multi/inter-religious space for Buddhists, Taoists and Confucians; the commonly reported date for the foundation of this institution is 1614. Compared to the other temples and monasteries on Emei Shan, Baoguo Si’s history is short. In comparison, the nearby Fuhu Si 伏虎寺 was established in 1131, Wannian Si 万年寺, “Emei’s oldest surviving Buddhist temple,” has a history that can be traced back to 420, and as discussed earlier, there is the unsubstantiated claim that a Buddhist temple was built on the mountain during the first century CE. Despite Baoguo Si’s comparatively short history, there is a rich narrative tradition consisting of folk tales, mystical occurrences and historical events associated with this monastery. The main narratives, like those relating to Emei Shan in general, link Baoguo Si to China’s other religious traditions, to Imperial patronage, and to its importance in terms of its cultural heritage. However at times over the centuries of its existence this sacred space has been moved, reshaped and used for a variety of purposes, such as a training barracks for the Nationalist Army, and later as a safe site for Sichuan University during the war of resistance with Japan. The historical records show that since the late 1930s Baoguo Si, perhaps because of its situation at the foot of the mountain, has become established as the gateway between the outside world and the sacred mountain. In this chapter I will examine how this monastery has been constantly reshaped and influenced by local and regional politics and other historical events.

The historical data that I present in this section on Baoguo Si comes from a handful of Chinese publications, most of which were produced by the Emei Shan Buddhist Association (EMSBA). These sources must be read with the understanding that they were published to promote the monastery and therefore present a positive historical account of how the monastery has developed over the centuries. One of these publications is Baoguo Si 报国寺 by

122寿永 (Yongshou), 报国寺 (Baoguo Si), 1.
124 It was expanded into a monastery in 887 see: Hargett, Stairway to Heaven, 108.
Yongshou. Most of the other information I found on Baoguo Si was in short sections of books on Emei Shan. Very little has been written about Baoguo Si in English and most of it was published for tourists. While Hargett’s Stairway to Heaven is an invaluable source of information on Emei Shan’s history, only one paragraph deals directly with the history of Baoguo Si. Unfortunately even the Chinese sources only provide superficial detail.

However, several narratives have helped Baoguo Si to become the most important monastery on Emei Shan. They convey Baoguo Si’s meaning and guide the expectations of its two million annual visitors. These narratives are also well known by locals, many of whom witnessed the events of the Mao era, the end of the civil war in 1949, and even some old enough to remember the events that occurred during World War II. It is important to note that I do not claim that all of these narratives reflect actual events. Nevertheless they do help explain how Baoguo Si’s reputation as a Buddhist monastery and as a heritage site is portrayed today.

**Ming Dynasty (1368–1644)**

The original name of Baoguo Si was Huizong Tang, meaning the “Assembled Ancestors Hall.” According to the Chinese language sources this religious institution was established during the Wanli period of the Ming Dynasty (1563-1620) at a location near Fuhu Si, facing Tiger Brook (huxi 虎溪), a small river.

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125 寿永 (Yongshou), 报国寺 (Baoguo Si) This publication was out of print, but I managed to access a copy at the library of Daofochanyuan 大佛禅院 in Emei Town.

126 See: Hargett, Stairway to Heaven, 137–192, but also 1–88. I would like to thank Dr. Hargett for providing me with information about sources and contacts at the Mount Emei Museum.

127 Ibid., 179.

128 In fact two other synonymous names were used for the Huizong Tang, these were 会宗坊 Huizong Fang (Abbots Memorial hall) or 问宗堂 Wenzong Tang (Hall of Enquiry). Translations of names by Phelps who also translated Huizong Tang as ‘Meeting Place’. However only Baoguo Si and Huizong Tang are the only names mentioned in all the other publications. See: Shou-fu Huang, A New Edition of the Omei Illustrated Guide Book, trans. Dryden Linsley Phelps (Chengdu, China: Harvard-Yenching Institute, 1936), 55.

129 寿永 (Yongshou), 报国寺 (Baoguo Si); 何志愚 (He Zhiyu), 佛教圣地峨眉山 (fojiao Shengdi Emei Shan) (Buddhist Holy Land Emei Shan); 田家乐 (Tianjiale), 峨眉山 (Mt. Emei); 骆坤琪 (Loukuqi), 话说峨眉山 (huashuo Emeishan) (香港 Hong Kong: 天马出版有限公司 (tianma chuban youxian gongai), 2005); 峨眉山佛教协会 Emeishan xiehuiFojiao, ‘报国寺 (Baoguo Si)’, 峨眉山佛教网 emeishan fojiao wang, accessed 8 June 2011, http://www.emsfj.com/dcls/ShowArticle.asp?ArticleID=734; 徐杉 (xushan), 布金满地：神秘的
According to Yongshou, a Taoist monk called Mingguang 明光 originally set up the monastery as a Confucian-Taoist-Buddhist temple in 1614.30 Three tablets (paiwei 牌位), one for each of these religious traditions, were placed in the temple. One was dedicated to Samantabhadra, one to Guangchengzi 广成子 (a Taoist Immortal), and one to Chukuangjieyu 楚狂接舆 (a contemporary of Confucius). As such it was originally intended that the temple to be a communal place of worship and discussion for followers of these three traditions.

Tianjiale, a well-known calligrapher and author of several publications on Emei Shan, provides more details about how the monk Mingguang established Huizong Tang.131 According to this account Mingguang decided there was a need for a new temple at the base of Emei Shan to serve the needs of the three religions. So he looked for sponsors to help him finance the project and provide land for the temple. When a famous Sichuan governor named Xu Liangyan 徐良彦 travelled to Fuhu Si, Mingguang lay on the path to block people who were passing to and from the monastery to gather donations and support for his project. Xu Liangyan asked the monk why there was such a need for a new place of worship. Mingguang explained that a new temple was needed to accommodate followers of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, because many people, including himself, followed all three traditions. The governor then inquired why the temple needed to be built on Emei Shan. Mingguang replied that because Puxian, Guangchengzi and Chukuangjieyu had all visited the mountain in the past, a temple should be set up to focus on what the three traditions had in common. Xu Liangyan must have seemed reluctant, because the monk threatened to go on a hunger strike for seven days to show his resolve. Tianjiale claimed that because the governor was a Buddhist, who respected other religions, he offered his support to Mingguang’s project. According to the Mt Emei Buddhist Gazetteer Emei Shan Fojiao Ji, Mingguang collected money for the establishment from several Sichuan government officers, not only Xu Liangyan, but also Sunhaogu,

30 寿永 (Yongshou), 报国寺 (Baoguo Si), 1; The year is sometimes placed at 1615, see: 骆坤琪 (Loukuqi), 话说峨眉山 (huashou Emeishan), 10.
131 田家乐 (Tianjiale), 峨眉山 (Mt. Emei), 145–146.
and Zhuwanbang. Tianjiale claims that after the Huizong Tang was built, Mingguang became a prolific writer, leading to his own fame, which in turn meant that the new temple also became well known.

Huizong Tang seems to disappear from historical records after 1614, and does not reappear until the beginning of the Qing Dynasty (see below). The reasons for this are unclear and could possibly be that the Huizong Tang was not as well known as the narrative above suggests, or perhaps political instability at the end of the Ming era meant that the temple was abandoned for several years (see below).

It is also interesting to note that several of the published histories of Baoguo Si begin with the casting of the Shengji Bell, (Shengji wanzhong 圣积晚钟) in 1534. One example of this is in Luo Kunqi’s Words on Emei Shan 话说峨眉山, the chapter on Baoguo Si begins with a paragraph on the bell. The bell was originally donated to Shengji Si 圣积寺. Yongshou also notes the importance of the bell as one of the ten attractions of Emei Shan. He explains that it was moved to Baoguo Si in 1979 and moved again to its present location in 1982 on Phoenix Hill, where it “stands in an attractive pavilion directly across” from the monastery. Because of the bell’s current proximity with Baoguo Si, some websites claim that Baoguo Si was first established in 1534, some 80 years prior to founding of the Huizong Temple. Utilizing the history of the Shengji Bell to lengthen the span of Baoguo’s history are most likely attempts to make the monastery seem older than it really is, and to enhance its status as a heritage site. We will briefly return to the Shengji Bell narrative when discussing events that occurred at the end of the Qing Dynasty and later during the Great Leap Forward.

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132 峨眉山佛教志 (峨眉山佛教志编委会, 2003), 92.
133 Translated as ‘the Sagely Accumulation Evening Bell’ by Hargett, Stairway to Heaven, 102.
134 Here it is claimed the date the bell was caste in 1564 see: 骆坤琪 (Loukuqi), 话说峨眉山 (huashou Emeishan), 6–7.
135 寿永 (Yongshou), 报国寺 (Baoguo Si), 4.
136 Hargett, Stairway to Heaven, 102.
**Qing Dynasty (1644-1912)**

The story of Baoguo Si resurfaces at the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, which brought many changes to the Huizong Tang. Hargett writes that for 20 years "...large scale peasant rebellions spread chaos throughout China." 137 He also points out that Emei Town was "...directly involved in the fighting," which led to the destruction of religious sites on Emei Shan. 138 The situation became stabilized under Shunzhi’s reign (1643-1661), which resulted in a period of nine years of reconstruction. During this time the Huizong Tang was moved to a new location and expanded into a Buddhist monastery.

Most of these changes stemmed from the efforts of a Buddhist monk called Wenda 闻达. Hargett writes that Wenda “...upon seeing the hall was in a severe state of disrepair, converted it into a monastery” in 1655. 139 However other Chinese sources suggest that, in the process of doing so, Wenda discovered the original site to be too small, so another larger site was selected at Fohuang Hill. 140 Wenda moved the monastery to its present location for this reason in 1652. 141 Regardless of when it was actually moved it seems clear that, once it had, it became a Buddhist monastery with initially two halls.

Another uncertain date is the year the Kangxi Emperor named the temple “Baoguo Si”. 142 Tianjiale calculates it to be 1702, 143 whereas Yongshou writes that this happened in 1703. 144 According to a folk story told by a tour-guide, the monastery itself requested the renaming, but more on the folk story shortly. However the real “history” of the monastery does not explain why the temple

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137 Ibid., 178.
138 Hargett finds sources that indicate that Central Peak Monastery was destroyed as a result of the fighting. See: Ibid., 179.
139 Ibid.
140 田家乐 (Tianjiale), 峨眉山 (Mt. Emei), 145.
141 寿永 (Yongshou), 报国寺 (Baoguo Si), 1.
142 The Kangxi Emperor (1654-1722) ruled China from 1661 to 1722, was the longest reigning Chinese emperor, who expanded the Chinese Empire borders greatly. It is claimed in material designed for tourists that the Kangxi Emperor visited Emei Shan and even Baoguo Si, yet there is no evidence of this excursion. It is clear that the Kangxi emperor did go on Buddhist pilgrimage to Wutai Shan, and there are claims that the Kangxi Emperor offered imperial patronage by various sites across China. By claiming the Kangxi Emperor named Baoguo Si confirms the authenticity of the monastery as an important heritage site with links to this emperor.
143 田家乐 (Tianjiale), 峨眉山 (Mt. Emei), 145.
144 寿永 (Yongshou), 报国寺 (Baoguo Si), 1.
required a new name. It is possible that Wenda, or the other monks involved with the expansion decided that there was such a need. I think it is likely that in their view, the temple’s name needed to reflect its new identity as a Buddhist monastery. However, the old name Huizong Tang implied that it was a place for different religious traditions to meet.

According to Hezhiyu 何志愚 the name Baoguo comes from the Humane King Protects the Country Sutra Huguo Renwang Jing 护国仁王经. Hezhiyu claims that the sutra stresses that gratitude or baoen 报恩 is the base of Buddhist monastic practice; without baoen one cannot complete Buddhist training. Furthermore there are four baoen 报四恩 that need to be mastered: the baoen of heaven and earth, the baoen of the nation’s water and earth, the baoen for being looked after by the sun and moon, and the baoen of gratitude to one’s parents. However there are other explanations regarding the origin of name.

During my field trip in July 2011 a tour guide told our group a folk story: that the original name of Baoguo Si was Chen monastery, and that it was a temple that only accepted monks with the last name Chen:

Once there was a young teenager who came to Baoguo to become a monk, his surname was Chen (as in Chen Long). The abbot let him live in the temple and he became the master’s disciple. At first he worked in the kitchen for three years, and then the master took him to live and study in the sutra hall. He was smart but he didn’t like to read a lot, so he would just kind of flip through the books, and not really read them. One day the abbot asked ‘how’s your study going?’ and Chen replied ‘Well I don’t really want to start reading another one [sutra] until I’ve read one very thoroughly.’ The abbot was very happy with this, and he felt validated in his decision to only accept people with the family name Chen into the monastery. And from that point on he started building the monastery even bigger. Later he wrote a letter, which got sent out to many different places, and eventually it ended up with the Emperor Kangxi... it ended up in his hand. The contents of the letter made the following request ‘we need a new name for the temple, and we want the emperor to pick a name.’ However the emperor wasn’t happy that the monastery was only accepting people with the family name Chen. So he wrote a letter to the abbot and instructed him to accept people with any family name, ‘because

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145 何志愚 (He Zhiyu), 佛教圣地峨眉山 (fojiao Shengdi Emei Shan) (Buddhist Holy Land Emei Shan), 20.
146 Ibid.
147 For example see: 田家乐 (Tianjiale), 峨眉山 (Mt. Emei), 145.
the Dharma is everybody’s’. On the front of the letter he wrote Baoguo Si, because he was reading YueFei, and it just happened to be that way. He said, ‘Whatever happens here the monks have to protect the state’. Once the abbot received the letter, of course he changed the name to Baoguo Si, and he started admitting monks who weren’t just named Chen.

This story illustrates several themes seen when examining the “official” versions as published by EMSBA. Firstly the folk story suggests that the monastery was initially set up under a “faulty pretext” - only men with a certain last name could become monks there. Secondly, by changing the name of the monastery the structure of the monastery was improved. Thirdly, there is a link between the Kangxi Emperor, the institution, and the name “Baoguo Si.” During the Jiaqing period of the Qing Dynasty (1796-1820) the monastery underwent another reconstruction. However little information has survived on this event.

In 1849, at the end of the Daoguang period of the Qing dynasty (1821-1850), the monastery was damaged in a fire. Sources do not elaborate on the extent of the damage, however it seems to have been extensive. Rebuilding of the front part (qiantian) of the monastery commenced at the beginning of the Xianfeng period (1850-1861) followed by the two wings on the sides. Then from 1857 a monk called Beyi began expending the central axis of the monastery. Later in 1864, during the Emperor Tongzhi’s reign (1861-1875), a monk called Tongji expanded the monastery further by building the mountain gate in 1864, and in 1866 Wangpo (a famous general and calligrapher) made the sign to hang on it.

Further expansions were made to the monastery during the Guangxu period (1875-1908) with the addition of a Seven Buddha Hall. This meant the monastery now had three large halls; the fourth, the Samantabhadra Hall, was not built until the Republican period.

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148 YueFei 岳飞 (1103-1142) was a military general who posthumously became a symbol of loyalty across China. A biography of YueFei’s life called Shouyue QuanZhuan 说岳全传 may have been written during Kangxi’s reign. So it is conceivable that the Kangxi emperor read this, and named Baoguo Si after the level of loyalty exemplified by YueFei.

149 Story told to the group by tour guide and translated by made by group’s translator Joseph Williams at Baoguo Si on July 9 2011.

150 All the dates of this paragraph come from: 寿永 (Yongshou), 报国寺 (Baoguo Si), 1–2.
It was during this period that Western travellers began to write about their visits to Emei Shan. One example is Edward Colborne Baber, whose group bypassed Baoguo Si to stop at Fuhu Si for breakfast on the first morning of the ascent of the mountain. Another was Archibald John Little who visited the Shengji Temple on July 22nd in 1892 during his climb. He described the Shengji Si as “a ruinous temple in which is a huge bell said to weigh 2500 catties, and a bronze pagoda about 15 feet high, covered with thousands of miniature buddhas cast and then engraved on its surface.” Even though Baoguo Si did not appear in his writings, the description of Shengji Si and its bell indicate that the temple itself was in disrepair long before it was completely abandoned, but was (at that time) an important stop along the pilgrimage route, perhaps because it still held these two precious Ming Dynasty objects. As neither of these men stopped at Baoguo Si during this period, it suggests that it was not seen as a major pilgrimage spot at the time. It seems rather that Baoguo Si began to take on importance during the Second World War; at this time the Republican leadership utilized Emei Shan as a military base for a time.

**Republican Period (1912-1949)**

The Republican period was a tumultuous time for Baoguo Si and Buddhist institutions across China in general. Several forces shaped monasticism during this period; there were political and ideological attacks on traditional belief systems and institutions, for examples the Japanese invasion in September 1931 and the Second Sino-Japanese War (July 7, 1937 – September 9, 1945) resulted in several changes to Baoguo Si. These events are presented in narratives of Baoguo Si in several interesting ways. For example, it is well-publicized that in the summer of 1935 Jiang Jieshi 蒋介石 (1887-1975) requisitioned Baoguo Si

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152 Archibald John Little, *Mount Omi and beyond: A Record of Travel on the Tibetan Border... with a Map and Illustrations* (London: W. Heinemann, 1901), 59.
153 Also known or Chiang Kai-shek, leader of or the Nationalist Party of China known as Kuomintang (KMT) or Guomintang 国民党 from 1926 to 1927 and also between 1938 and 1975.
as the headquarters for military training when co-opting several monasteries on Emei Shan for officer training.  

Prior to the Second World War there was a period of growth of religious institutions at Emei Shan and throughout China. According to Welch this revival of monastic Buddhism peaked in 1930 when there were some five hundred thousand monks living in monasteries around China. This revival meant that at Baoguo Si the Samantabhadra Hall was built, as was the Sutra Hall in 1928. However in the 1930s the war with Japan was underway, which resulted in several unexpected outcomes.

The Republican military leader Jiang Jieshi arrived at Emei Shan in the summer for 1935 to recruit soldiers from the south-western Chinese provinces, and to form a military unit (tuan 团). As Baoguo Si served as the headquarters for these operations it was closed to the public for religious purposes, and entry to the area highly restricted. Hargett reports that during Jiang Jieshi’s stay on Emei Shan he “... mobilized a work force of three thousand workers” to build the two kilometre “stretch of road” to Baoguo Si. The road built has enhanced Baoguo Si’s importance for pilgrims and tourists since that time. In 1939 a famous general Feng Yuxiang 冯玉祥 gave the monastery the additional title of Mingshanqidian 名山起点, meaning that the monastery was formally recognized as the starting point of the mountain. The official name of the monastery was changed to Mingshanqidian Baoguo Si.

It seems Baoguo Si has been repaid for its supportive role in the 1930s and 1940s. As a result of the new road and Feng Yuxiang’s proclamation Baoguo Si became the essential stop on Emei Shan. During my observations at Baoguo Si during the Chinese summer of 2011, I noticed that Baoguo Si was one of a few monasteries where tourists were able to bus or take a taxi right up to the main

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154 寿永 (Yongshou), 报国寺 (Baoguo Si), 2.
155 Welch, The Practice of Chinese Buddhism, 1900-1950, 4–5 Please note this peak is for the modern era only, as there were some two million monks during the Wei Dynasty.
156 In fact the Sutra Hall sits one floor above the Samantabhadra Hall.峨眉山佛教志, 92.
157 Ibid., 92.
158 Hargett, Stairway to Heaven, 183.
159 寿永 (Yongshou), 报国寺 (Baoguo Si), 2; however the date is 1940 according to 田家乐 (Tianjiale), 峨眉山 (Mt. Emei), 145.
gates. Unlike Baoguo Si most of the temples and monasteries on the mountain require at least some degree of physical effort. This improved access, combined with its location at the bottom of the mountain, has established Baoguo Si as the starting point of the pilgrimage route. As a result Hargett suggests that when climbing Emei Shan, “... we should all gather at the Loyal-to-the-State Monastery (Baoguo si) in the foothills, and then begin our ascent on foot.” 160 The easy access to the monastery also provides laopusa with a convenient location to enact ritual on a regular basis.

Between 1939-1943 there were fears that the Japanese would bomb Leshan and Chengdu. As a result, Baoguo Si and Fuhu Si were requisitioned for use by Sichuan University. 161 Because of its location on the new road, Baoguo Si was selected as the site for the university’s main offices, and the monastery’s guest rooms and monks’ quarters were used as teacher dormitories. 162

Another development during, and in particular, prior to, the Republican period, was the development of China’s Religious Associations. Between 1912 and 1929 over eighteen Buddhist Associations were established to “... gain political recognition and contend for the redistributed religious power.” 163 In 1929 the Chinese Buddhist Association Zhongguo Fojiao Hui (CBA) was founded and later recognized by the Nationalist government. The CBA remained the recognized national association for China’s Buddhist institutions until 1949. In the next section we will see that the Buddhist Association of China Zhongguo Fojiao Zhehui (BAC) replaced the CBA in the PRC in 1953 by the CCP.

**Baoguo Si under Mao**

The Mao era (1949-1976) can be divided into several phases of political engagement with religious institutions, including Baoguo Si. Barnett points out that the victory by the Communists over the Nationalist army was in no way the end of the Communist revolution; the mission “... of consolidating power and

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161 峨眉山佛教志, 92.
162 Ibid.
reorganizing Chinese society lay before them.” 164 This reorganization meant major changes for both Baoguo Si and Emei Shan. Initially there was a period of re-development and re-utilization of religious organizations to suit the new government’s ideology. At Emei Shan this process included the establishment of the female monastic order, and also the rebuilding and repair of the many of the historic monasteries, including Baoguo Si. The initial period saw the attempted utilization of monastic space and the promotion of socialist ideals within them. This began with the “liberation” of Emei Shan on December 17 1949, the confiscation of all monastic land in 1951, the development of the BAC on May 30 1953, and the local branches including the EMSBA in 1956. 165 Yuxue wrote that the confiscation of monastic land “shook the very foundation of the existence of the sangha, because traditionally the livelihood of monks and nuns was largely dependent upon the rents of temple lands.” 166

During 1954 and 1955 the Emei Study Committee “… saw to it that the Vinaya was followed” at all local monasteries. 167 One result of this intervention is that in 1956 nuns were assigned their own religious spaces on Emei Shan, apparently for the first time. 168 According to Qin, before this time there were no institutions for nuns on the mountain. To provide the nuns with living quarters “… monks moved out of their home monasteries into other monasteries and nuns moved in.” 169 Welch notes the establishment of a “special office” or a monastery repair commission during the early 1950s, which took charge of expansions and repairs of pilgrimage sites, the budget coming from the provincial government. 170 This commission is likely to be the EMS Cultural Relics Repair Association, mentioned

167 Welch argues that this was for two reasons: ‘First, it would bring the Chinese monks closer to their brethren in Theravada countries, which the regime wanted to build friendly relations. Second, the idea of strict discipline may have had an inherent appeal to the Leninist mentality.’ See: Welch, *Buddhism under Mao*, 130.
169 Ibid., 11.
170 Welch, *Buddhism under Mao*, 151–152.
in the Mt Emei Buddhist Gazetteer, which reports that funds were allocated for the repair of statues, monasteries and cultural relics in 1952. 171 There is little written directly about Baoguo Si regarding this period, except that from 1952 the government began distributing money for repairs, and that later EMSBA was set up in the monastery. 172 Hargett claims these policies indicated the government had “a clear intention to subjugate and control the church” and points out that these could even be seen (retrospectively) as initial steps designed for the “eventual elimination of Buddhism in China.” 173

It seems clear that Buddhism and Buddhist institutions were in heavy decline during the first decade of communist rule. Hargett points out that there were only 104 monks and nuns remaining at Emei Shan by 1959.174 Goossaert and Palmer write,

In the 1950s, the number of monks fell from around 500,000 to over 100,000 – a development hailed as proof of the success of religious freedom, as people previously forced to don the monastic robes, or had become monks to escape poverty, were now ‘free’ to return to secular life. 175

These developments were interrupted by the “Great Leap Forward” (1958-1961), which resulted in progressively greater attacks on religious institutions. During this era, the resources of monasteries were requisitioned for national development; today locals, the local sangha, and tour guides still recall the loss of Buddhist material culture during this period. Hargett also notes the events of the Great Leap Forward on Emei Shan:

The infamous ‘backyard furnaces’ of this campaign, designed to produce steel, required fuel. In response to government directives, timber cut to fire these ‘backyard furnaces’ destroyed almost ten hundred mou of forest land around Crouching Tiger Monastery, Clear Tones Gallery, Dragon Gate, and the Big Emei Monastery. At the same time, a bronze pagoda cast in the Yuan dynasty, a Ming statue of Guanyin, and the iron and tin tiles on

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171 峨眉山佛教志, 92.
172 寿永 (Yongshou), 报国寺 (Baoguo Si), 2.
173 Hargett, Stairway to Heaven, 185.
174 Ibid., 187.
175 Goossaert and Palmer, The Religious Question in Modern China, 160.
the Golden Summit were dismantled and shipped to Chongqing for smelting.\textsuperscript{176}

Hargett then refers to a damage survey carried out in 1962 of the Emei historic sites notes that “twenty temples had been destroyed and three thousand trees removed.”\textsuperscript{177} Locals claim that in 1959, Shengji Temple was demolished and the Shengji Bell was removed so it could be melted down for its metal. Apparently pious Buddhists helped save the Shengji bell, and the strength of the bronze bell itself hindered the attempt to destroy it.\textsuperscript{178} The end of Shengji Temple marks the beginning of the journey of the bell to Baoguo Si and its famous pagoda, the \textit{Huayan tongta} 华严铜塔, to Fuhu Si.

Finally, the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) resulted in Baoguo Si and all other religious institutions being closed until the late 1970s. Stories have survived about locals who outwitted the Red Guard in order to protect various artefacts at Baoguo Si. Several people informed me that the statues in the Maitreya Hall and the Seven Buddhas Hall were saved when locals pasted pro-Mao slogans on them. However, the statues in the Main Hall and the Samantabhadra Hall were destroyed, as there was not enough time to find a way to protect them. Another artefact, a tablet featuring calligraphy by Jiangjia Shi, was saved by being covering with a pro-Mao slogan. These stories of outsmarting the Red Guard and communist soldiers parallel the narratives about the strategies used by Republican Army on Emei Shan to outsmart the Japanese.

There is little information about Baoguo Si during the Cultural Revolution. It is clear that all the temples on Emei Shan, including Baoguo Si, were closed for religious activities. During 1967 and 1968 Buddhist monks caught lingering on the mountain were brought to the conveniently located Baoguo Si for struggle sessions in which they were tried for anti-revolutionary crimes. Those found guilty were sentenced to manual labour, a punishment previously designed to rehabilitate criminals.\textsuperscript{179}

\textsuperscript{176} Hargett, \textit{Stairway to Heaven}, 187.
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid. in which he cites the Emei Shan Gazetteer 1997 edition.
\textsuperscript{179} Hargett, \textit{Stairway to Heaven}, 188.
Baoguo Si in the post-Mao era (1977 - the present day)

After the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1977, changes in the government and the economy meant that religious institutions on Emei Shan slowly began to revive. Monasteries were allowed to accept monks again, rebuild, and to open doors to visitors, under the close supervision of the government.

The role of the BAC was also revised at the end of the Mao era; the change has been a shift in focus from “social mobilization to clerical management.” Changes included the “... centralization of clerical power from monasteries to the BAC.” Ji argues that this centralization of clerical power has resulted in establishing a hierarchy similar to a church. In the past each monastery operated on their own within a system tied to lineage. However now the system has a hierarchy, at top of which is a centralized bureau that guides national policy for Buddhist organizations, which are then implemented locally. Ji points out, “... the BAC is still far from being independent from the state, but it enjoys more and more autonomy, along with the increasing social and religious liberty in China, and it has begun to work for the interests of the Buddhist clergy and the general promotion of Buddhism.”

Much of the reconstruction on Emei Shan and at Baoguo Si during the Post-Mao era has been aimed at improving infrastructure in order to develop the local tourist industry. This policy has been noted and critiqued by many. The following paragraphs by Qin Wenjie summarises several of these critiques:

The state ideology began in the early 1980s to define religion as an integral part of traditional Chinese culture and to differentiate religion for “feudal superstitions” which were still to be suppressed. However, being a Socialist regime, the Chinese government would certainly not go as far as championing religious freedom and initiating religious activities. The religious policy of China remains essentially a policy of tolerance with restriction...

181 Ibid., 253.
By safely containing religion within the ideological definition of traditional culture and within the physical space of traditional institutions, the state intends to make religion a museum piece...\textsuperscript{183}

On the one hand, the restoration of traditional religious institutions has opened up a new market niche within the national economy, as pilgrimages to traditional religious sites provide great stimuli to the newly born tourist industry. On the other hand, religion serves as a diplomatic tool for China in international politics.\textsuperscript{184}

During the early to mid-1980s, monastery committees embraced heritage tourism with its associated commercialization as a way to reopen monasteries and temples and support their running costs. For example, during an interview with a monk from Baoguo Si, I inquired as to why there were so many businesses, such as a teahouse and souvenir stores, within the monastic compound. I also enquired whether the EMSBA, the monastery, or the tourism bureau ran these businesses. The monk explained that they were owned and operated by the monastery in an effort to subsidise on-going costs. Apparently the maintenance of the wooden buildings takes the most money; other costs include feeding the monks and providing their monthly stipend.\textsuperscript{185}

The promotion of heritage tourism has resulted in the rapid growth in the numbers of visitors to Emei Shan. Hargett writes that in 1979, “the first year of the mountain’s official ‘opening,’” there were an estimated 282,000 “domestic and international visitors,” in 1984 there were some 1,000,000 visitors, in 1988 there were over 1,570,000, but that the number fell to 1,250,000 in 1989. According to Hargett’s findings between 1989 and 1993 the “average” annual number of visitors was an estimated 1,400,000 and by 2002 the number had risen to 1,746,200.\textsuperscript{186} The commonly stated figure in 2011 was 2,000,000; the

\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., 55.
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 55–56.
\textsuperscript{185} The Director of the Heritage committee also informed that Baoguo Si’s buildings require constant restoration because they are made of wood. I observed on going restoration projects during my visit in 2011, I noticed major renovations being made to the guesthouse and the repainting of the Samantabhadra statue, however the general layout of the temple has not expanded or changed in recent years
\textsuperscript{186} Hargett, \textit{Stairway to Heaven}, 190–191, 247 n. 94, n. 96 The author quotes all of the figures from; \textit{Emei Shan Zhi} 峨眉山志 (Emei Shan Gazetteer) (Chengdu, China: Sichuan kexue jishu chubanshe, 1997) except the figure from 2002 which was provided by Mr. Xiong Feng, ‘chief historian at the Mount Emei Museum‘.
majority of these visitors pass through Baoguo Si on their way to the Golden Peak.

Heritage sites were categorized according to differing scales of legitimization. For example, the State Council *gouwuyuan* 国务院 proclaimed Baoguo Si a National Key Monastery *guojia jizhing dianshiyuan* in 1983, and in 1986 the Leshan government listed the monastery as a protected heritage site. 187

The development on Emei Shan is striking: new hotels, restaurants, a narrow-gauge train to carry visitors between two of the mountain’s peaks, a cable way to the Golden Summit, and the Mount Emei Museum were constructed between 1993-1997. The most elaborate developments on Emei Shan took place during the first decade of the 21st century when major renovations were made to the Golden Summit. Three temples were constructed on the peak of the mountain, as well as a giant 48m (157ft) statue of the Ten Directions Samantabhadra Bodhisattva. 188 This giant image has become the ubiquitous icon of the mountain, represented graphically on tourist souvenirs, advertisements promoting Emei Shan, and on tourist maps of the site. When Hargrett learned of plans for the development of this summit, he was informed that the strategy behind these renovations was to “... make the Emei the ‘Number One Mountain’ (Zhonggou diyi shan) by the end of 2005.” 189 He explains that the phrase “Number One Mountain” means “... the top tourist center in all China, and the development has improved the infrastructure for tourism rather than improving it for Buddhist practice.” 190

During 2006 an official and elaborate opening of the summit was held, attended by hundreds of sangha members and important business and political figures. In contrast, there seems to have been little development to the temple buildings at Baoguo Si during the 1980s. The only major change was the reconstruction of the

187 寿永 (Yongshou), 报国寺 (Baoguo Si), 4.
188 The statue is of the ten-headed Bodhisattva Samantabhadra, seated on a four-headed six tusked elephant. The ten vows of Samantabhadra are written on plaques placed on the circular base of this giant image. The outside of the statue is decorated with lanterns and visiting devotees circumambulate its circumference. The base also serves as a temple: inside the floor is tiled, niches contain statues of bodhisattvas circling a Buddha standing in the centre. Devotees enter to pray and to make offerings.
189 Hargrett, Stairway to Heaven, 194.
190 Ibid.
Mountain Gate in 1986.\(^{191}\) After 1993, when Emei Shan was preparing for UNESCO Heritage status, souvenir stores and drum towers were built at Baoguo Si.\(^{192}\)

**Discussion:**

In this chapter, I have presented narratives regarding the history of Baoguo Si, many of which are currently used to bolster its status as an important Buddhist monastery on Emei Shan. These include the institution’s links to China’s wider cultural heritage, such as its previous incarnation as the Huizong Tang, and also its close connection with Imperial patronage. However Baoguo Si’s growth in status, as one of the most important monasteries on Emei Shan, only became established after it “served the nation” in the war of resistance against Japan.

Baoguo Si’s role in serving the nation during World War II is not presented as the pivotal moment in establishing its pre-eminent status on the mountain today, but rather as one in a series of historical events dating back to the foundation of the Huizong Tang in 1614. This series of “historical events” suggests that centuries of development of Baoguo Si, including its location change in the 1650s, its new name by the Kangxi Emperor in 1702, its gradual growth from a single temple to a monastery with four main halls, and its adaptation to suit the modern day heritage site, constitutes a logical progression. Is there an underlying theme to all these seemingly unrelated events?

Despite receiving the name “Baoguo Si” in 1702, why has its old name – Huizong Tang – persisted in the narratives until the present? As I have discussed, obtaining a new name would have been part of an effort to rid the monastery of links to non-Buddhist elements of the Huizong Tang. I believe the old name persists because both names remain relevant in the image of the monastery today. For example its old name links it to all three of China’s main traditions. Yet its current name is closely connected to its role during World War II, living up to its name by serving the nation. Both names imply the monastery’s role as a

\(^{191}\) 峨眉山佛教志, 92.

\(^{192}\) 寿水 (Yongshou), 报国寺 (Baoguo Si), 2.
sanctuary: a place where China’s ancient traditions, cultural relics, and even military have been protected and preserved.

In Chapter One I explained how Emei Shan’s Daoist past is an important narrative establishing the mountain’s role as a sacred site prior to the arrival of Buddhism. The same is true for Baoguo Si: its role as a meeting place for Buddhists, Daoists and Confucians extends the monastery’s historical narrative to imply a timeless sacred space. But it also emphasizes the monastery’s connection with the sanjiao paradigm. It indicates Baoguo Si as a sanctuary for China’s ancient heritage and even the nation’s traditional values. Today tour-guides point out Taoist inscriptions outside the Seven Buddhas Hall.

Baoguo Si’s role in the preservation of Ming and Qing era artefacts also reinforce its image as a sanctuary. There are narratives connecting the monastery to the preservation of the Shengji Bell, the Maitreya statue and the Seven Buddhas Statues. While these narratives do not always suggest that monks from Baoguo Si were directly involved in protecting these artefacts from destruction, the monastery curates and safeguards them now.

Baoguo Si’s role in the war is also presented in the narratives to indicate that it was helpful in China’s struggle against the Japanese invasion. While Jiang Jieshi is still seen as an enemy, this interaction exhibits Baoguo Si in a positive light. Baoguo Si is seen to be living up to its name by literally “serving the nation.” Again Baoguo Si can be seen as a sanctuary, this time by providing shelter and safety to China’s military leaders and then later Sichuan university academics and students.

The notion of Baoguo Si as a sanctuary is useful in terms of promoting the monastery for heritage tourism. Yet, how does the image of Baoguo Si live up to these narratives? The wooden buildings are maintained to resemble Ming and Qing era structures. While there are monks in traditional robes, it is rare to see them praying or engaged in ritual. Baoguo Si’s image as a sanctuary sets up the monastery as a timeless space; a place which today safeguards artefacts and promotes traditional Chinese values. Walls surround the monastery seemingly
protecting it from the outside world. Peering in the gate one sees crowds of people burning incense.
Chapter Three: Lay Ritual at Baoguo Si

In the first two chapters I presented several narratives promoting Baoguo Si and Emei Shan as religious sites of historic value. Now I investigate how the temple maintains its positive image invoked by these narratives. My fieldwork has shown that today, monks have little (if any) time to practice traditional religious rituals while the monastery is open to the public. According to my informants, the monks of Baoguo Si have to spend most of their daylight hours dealing with the public in a variety of roles. They are only able to practice Buddhism (study sutras, meditate, during the morning and evening prayers sessions) when the monastery is closed to the public. However Buddhist lay people perform religious rituals in the monastery during the day, thereby enabling Baoguo Si to retain its image as a living Buddhist site to visitors.

As described in the introduction, Baoguo Si is an important monastery on Emei Shan due to its location at the bottom of the mountain: it is the most accessible monastery for local lay practitioners to attend, and is the first (or last) stop for tourists on the mountain. In other words, Baoguo Si is where the needs of the tourist industry and local Buddhists converge. In this chapter, I will describe the ritual practices performed by lay people that create the “mild exotic backdrop” 193 that visitors expect to experience when entering an historic Buddhist monastery in China today. Before examining lay ritual practices at Baoguo Si I first provide a physical description of the monastery as it is was during 2011, and then describe the main areas reserved for lay ritual.

Baoguo Si as it stands today

According to EMSBA’s webpage, Baoguo Si stands at 533 metres above sea level. 194 It is 60 mu, 40m² (430.60 ft²), 195 and consists of four main halls. Like most

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193 Birnbaum, ‘Buddhist China at the Century’s Turn’, 444.
194 The reported altitude of Baoguo Si differ according to publication, for example two EMSBA sources provide different data: the EMSBA webpage claims that the monastery stands at 533 meters see: 峨眉山佛教协会,_Logos (Baoguo Monastery)a, 峨眉山佛教网, accessed June 8, 2011, http://www.emsfj.com/dcls/ShowArticle.asp?ArticleID=734; The reported altitude of Baoguo Si differ according to publication, for example two EMSBA sources provide different data: the EMSBA webpage寿永 (Yongshou), Baoguo Si (Baoguo Monastery) (峨眉山佛教协会 (The Mt Emei Buddha Association), 2002), 1.
Chinese Buddhist monasteries at Emei Shan, each hall is built further up the incline of the mountain. Therefore there are stairs between each of the halls, which are “... quite close to each other horizontally... Because of the compact yet complex design of the temple, the heavy smoke from incense burning in front of the main hall is visible from all parts inside the temple.”

The Mountain Gate, or shanmen 山门, is located at the lowest point, and the Samantabhadra Hall is located at the highest point within the monastic complex. Most monasteries and temples on Emei Shan have the Mountain Gate at the lowest point. From there pilgrims ascend the mountain as they move from hall to hall, exiting from a rear gate before continuing along the path up the mountain. However at Baoguo Si, after visitors exit the last temple, the Samantabhadra Hall, they turn left and descend the left axis of the compound, which I will describe below.

Outside the front of the main entrance is a large open space where tourists and tour groups purchase tickets to the monastery. A public road enables easy access, making Baoguo Si one of the most accessible sites on the mountain. There is a parking area for busses and private cars situated outside the monastery's walls to the right of the entranceway. There are two guardian lions standing in this area. Behind them people purchase the entrance tickets from monks who sit inside little alcoves to the left of the main gate. Except for a couple of stalls, and an area where locals sell fruit and other local produce, there are no commercial structures (hotels, shops, restaurants) near the entranceway. The initial impression of Baoguo Si is that it has been preserved as an ancient and sacred structure.

Usually the first structure encountered when entering a Chinese monastery is the Hall of Guardian King (tianwang dian 天王殿). However, Baoguo Si does not have a gatehouse or a Hall of Guardian Kings. Instead there are two shrines to the extreme left and right sides of the main entrance. To the left is longshen 神龙 and to the right is jialan 伽殿. These two figures are largely ignored, although laopusa often make small donations of money to them.

The first courtyard is just beyond the mountain gate. This is probably the busiest area inside Baoguo Si as it is where tourists and tour groups congregate when entering and leaving the monastery. It is the largest of the four courtyards inside the monastic compound and is surrounded by the Mountain Gate and an outer fence to the rear. There is a teahouse, a snack store, a bookshop, and several souvenir stores the sides of the courtyard. The main temple building comes next, and consists of the Maitreya Hall in the center, with offices to the right and a small room for offering gold leaf to statues to the left. There is a small bookshelf to the left of the entrance of the Mile Hall that contains free religious books for visitors to take away. The courtyard is usually very busy with people taking photos, lighting incense and candles, and entering or exiting the temples and stores.

The Maitreya Hall (Mile dian 米拉殿) is the first hall visitors enter along the central axis of Baoguo Si. As its name suggests it houses a large statue of Maitreya (Mile Pusa 米拉菩萨). It is also often very busy with tourists and pilgrims bowing, praying and making offerings to the statue. When they bow, a monk rings a large gong. People can also donate money here for the upkeep of the temple. The walls are unadorned and house no other statues. There is a door to the left leading to the office where people can book a room in the monastery's guesthouse, or consult a monk about sponsoring a ceremony. Behind the Maitreya statue is a standing Skanda (weituo pusa 韦驮普萨), who faces out into the second courtyard.

In the centre of the second courtyard stand large burners for incense, candles and also a cauldron for offering paper money to ancestors. Flanking the right side of the courtyard is the dining hall, in front of which hang a long woodenfish and a large chime, which are beaten to announce mealtimes. Engraved on the sides of the two stone banisters aside the steps leading up to the next hall are several Daoist carvings.
Next is the Main Hall (daxiong baodian 大雄宝殿). This is the location where ordained monks at Baoguo Si conduct their rituals, such as the morning and evening prayers. There are various ritual instruments in the room including a bell, a drum, a gong, a giant singing bowl and a woodenfish. I observed these all being used by monks during rituals. The main statue is a large seated Shakyamuni. In front of this large statue is an altar laden with various offerings and small statues. The two sides of the hall are lined with the eighteen Arahats (luohan 罗汉). In the left and right rear corners sit life-size statues of Manjushsri and Ksitigarbha respectively. Between these two statues, and standing directly behind the Shakyamuni is a standing Amitabha statue facing out towards the next courtyard.

The next courtyard also has a large altar with deity protectors for each of the twelve Chinese zodiac birth signs. A tour guide explained this was a new addition and had been there for less than a year. Along the right wall of the courtyard are the names of benefactors who have donated more than 1,000 RMB of money to the monastery organized by year. This courtyard also houses the usual candleholders, incense burners and paper money burners.

Next is the Seven Buddha’s Hall (qifodian 七佛殿). In this hall participants offer candles for various purposes. This is also the location where a piece of calligraphy written by Jing Jia Shi hangs. Each tour guide carefully points out this to tourists. The Hall of the Seven Buddhas in Baoguo Si is devoted to the past seven buddhas (Guoqu Qi Fo 過去七佛): “… the six buddhas before Shakyamuni… as well as the Shakya Buddha.” I was informed that these seven statues date back to the Qing dynasty and locals covered them with pro Mao slogans to save them from the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution. Behind the Seven Buddhas and facing out towards the Samantabhadra Hall is a diorama of Guanyin.

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197 Also translated as ‘great shrine hall’ see: Welch, The Practice of Chinese Buddhism, 1900-1950, 24 also referred to as dadian 大殿.
A steep set of stairs leads to the final courtyard. This area is usually the least busy of the courtyards except before and after the lay ritual sessions. There are also burners for candles and incense here, but no cauldron for burning paper money - perhaps because the space itself is smaller than the other courtyards.

The hall that attracts the most lay public ritual is the Samantabhadra Hall (puxiandian 普贤殿). This is the location where I participated in the nianfo procession on chuxi in 2008. In the centre of the room is a large statue of Samantabhadra sitting on a six-tusked white elephant. To the immediate left and right of Samantabhadra are two standing Guanyin statues. The floor is set up with approximately 250 cushions. The two side and rear walls are lined with the shelves, containing the Huayan Jin, and statues of Shakyamuni and Samantabhadra.

This hall also has a second floor, which is described as the sutra hall. The remaining structure, which stands directly behind (and above) the Samantabhadra Hall, is a workshop where labourers repair the monastery's damaged and worn wooden structures. At the top of the monastery are several buildings including the offices of the EMSBA.

After visitors walk up the central axis of the monastery, through the courtyards and halls they walk back down along the left axis. On the way down they can visit a store selling calligraphy, a garden adjacent to the Mila hall and a souvenir store at the bottom. Other public areas at the bottom of the monastery include the teahouse, bookstore, and restrooms. To the right of the second courtyard is the monastery's dining room and cafeteria. The rest of the right axis is not part of the main pilgrimage circuit of the monastery and contains offices not open to the public.

**Negotiated spaces at Baoguo Si**

While Buddhists consider the entire monastery complex of Baoguo Si to be sacred space, some of the spaces are clearly more sacred than others. This is in part because space is used in Chinese Buddhist monasteries for both sacred and secular activities. People typically go to the monastery to exercise, play cards,
have a meal, go to a teahouse, and meet with friends as well as pray and perform sacred rituals. Another reason for the ambiguity of sacred space at Baoguo Si is because many tourists don’t know, or choose not to follow, Buddhist etiquette at the monastery. The presence of non-religious structures that cater for the tourists – guesthouses, restaurants and souvenir shops within the monastic compound – further confuses the boundaries between sacred and secular space at Baoguo Si.

The Main Hall is reserved for monastic rituals; visitors are permitted to pass through and make offerings as they do in any of the other halls. However there are certain areas that are dedicated specifically to lay Buddhist rituals. There are also spaces that are both secular and sacred where monks and lay people can interact or rest, such as a pavilion near the monastery’s garden, and benches in several of the courtyards.

Access to space in Baoguo Si relies on complex dynamics between the public, monastic institutions, and government. The term “negotiated space” describes the dynamics that enable the monks, laypeople, and tourists to share space at Baoguo Si. It also refers to the way that individuals and groups are able to project their own meanings and uses onto a particular space. This is done by negotiating directly or indirectly both with the institutions (monasteries and government) and with other visitors at the site. This phrase is also quite useful for explaining the synchronous uses of a single space by different interest groups. It also helps clarify the on-going negotiation over appropriate and acceptable behaviour by visitors to the monastery. To illustrate the rationale behind my use of the term “negotiated space” I describe some of the observations I made during my field trip to Sichuan in 2011.

During my first morning at Wenshu Monastery in Chengdu, I was staying in the monastery hotel. At about seven, I got up to explore the monastic grounds. Although the monastery’s main entrance gate was closed at this hour, the side gates were left open for lay people to enter. This meant that no one was paying

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entrance fees at this time of day and the side gates were “guarded” to monitor who was entering and exiting rather than to check for tickets. I saw several groups of lay people engaging in a wide variety of activities, ranging from pious religious practice to physical exercises.

There were several organized groups made up of between five to twenty people. Some groups were practicing tai chi and others wu-shu sword exercises. There were also individuals exercising alone: jogging, walking, and practicing tai chi or stretching. Bicyclists were taking a shortcut to work through the monastery grounds. Some sat and chatted in various seated areas such as the traditional wooden pavilions. Around the main religious structures (such as the pagoda and temples), people were praying, bowing and making offerings. Several of them were also doing circumambulation around the grounds. At this time of day none of the monastery’s shops were open and the monastery was not accepting ticketed visitors, so the site was in no way a commercial space. Yet most of these early morning visitors were using the grounds for purely secular purposes, and so could not be described as Buddhist pilgrims.

I found that people used space at Baoguo Si and the other monasteries on Emei Shan in a similar way. Boundaries and rules were under constant re-negotiation depending on various circumstances. For example smoking, drinking and gambling, are not permitted at Buddhist monasteries, and there are many signs to remind people of this fact. Yet outside the teahouse at Fuhu Si, I observed a group of people playing cards, smoking cigarettes and chatting with a nun (who was not engaged in the game or smoking). I also saw visitors at Baoguo Si smoking in various areas of the monastery’s grounds, for example in the teahouse, and noticed that construction workers were allowed to smoke while working in the monastery. Certain areas of the monastery are more sacred, for example the four main halls. It was uncommon to see people actually smoking inside these structures. On the rare occasion that this did happen, a monk or another visitor would instruct the smoker not to do so.

Signs indicating the prohibition of photography are posted in each of the temples of Baoguo. However most tourists take photographs. In particular, the
Woodenfish tour group felt entitled to take photographs. During the two weeks of the Woodenfish program, there was only one occasion when a monk stopped members of the group from taking photographs.

This flexibility is not just limited to Baoguo Si and seems to be a feature of contemporary monastic institutions in China. One reason is the need for monasteries to be self-sufficient, and generate income. For example most monastic compounds in China today contain a teahouse, a public restaurant, souvenir shops and some kind of a hotel. While these businesses serve religious purposes by selling religious books and paraphernalia and vegetarian food, they are also obviously commercial enterprises. This ambiguity, in combination with the shortage of ordained sangha to supervise activities in the monastery, creates a certain “laissez-faire” atmosphere that encourages visitors to decide for themselves the appropriate behaviour for the site.

Fisher discovered that in Beijing several temples do not even provide space for jushi to engage in spiritual practice. This is because they have not been approved as “religious activity sites” (zongjiao huodong changsuo, 宗教活动场所). There are a number of temples in Beijing that have never been approved for religious activity since they were closed during the Cultural Revolution. Temples such as White Dagoba Temple (Baita si, 白塔寺) function as secular museums. However jushi transform these legally secular spaces in ambiguous religious space by using them to perform ritual.

At Baoguo Si there are several areas that have been allocated specifically for lay ritual. Each of the four courtyards has burners for offering incense and candles. Additionally three of the courtyards, the first, second and third, have burners for paper money, which are offered to the ancestors. The third courtyard also has an altar for making offerings to zodiac protectors. Lay liturgical groups sometimes use the third courtyard for ritual music and dance. For example during the Chinese Hungry Ghost festival, I observed a troupe of laywomen dancing and singing songs to Guanyin and other bodhisattvas there.

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200 Fisher, 'In the Footsteps of the Tourists', 513.
Each of the temples provides space for visitors to bow to the various buddhas, bodhisattvas and arahats. In the two chanting halls there are cushions that can be used for sitting, meditation and chanting. In the Main hall these are for the public, as the monks do not use them during their ritual practices. Instead they bring in benches and chairs, while onlookers are permitted to either stand, or sit on the cushions, and watch.

The temple designated for lay ritual is the Samantabhadra hall, which operates as the recitation hall (nianfo tang). The Samantabhadra Hall is the site where I decided to focus my study, and it is the location where lay practitioners perform the nianfo I describe in the following chapter. Every day there are two sessions when local laopusa visit the hall to do two hours of Pure Land meditation practices. At first there is a brief period of chanting led by monks. Then one of the monks leads the circumambulatory procession for approximately an hour and a half chanting the Amitabha mantra “A-Mi-To-Fo” (阿弥陀佛). In the next chapter I will explain and discuss these sessions more in depth.

There are several features that make Baoguo Si the busy temple that it is. Firstly it is a small monastery, located on a steep incline is steep and the halls are quite close together. Secondly it is the most accessible monastery on the mountain, partly because of the road, also because of its location, and thirdly it is outside the Emei Shan National Park ticketed zone, so the cost of entry is affordable. These factors together mean that the temple is very crowded with tourists and laopusa.

**Lay Ritual at Baoguo**

As I mentioned above at Baoguo Si, and other Buddhist sites on Emei Shan, visitors engage in many kinds of ritual activities. Lay ritual contributes to the ongoing sponsorship and sacralisation of Baoguo Si. Visitors are also instrumental in financing the monastery through donations and also by making purchases from businesses run by the monastery. This money not only helps feed and house the monks but also helps maintain the temples and other buildings, which enables them to resemble Ming and Qing Dynasty structures. Visitors to the monastery also contribute to the site's mystical aesthetic by engaging in ritual
practices such as burning incense and lighting candles. Therefore I argue it is the visitor who is instrumental in maintaining the physical image of Baoguo Si as a sacred place.

The most common rituals performed by visitors include burning incense, lighting candles, making donations, and bowing to the various buddha and bodhisattva statues housed within the monastery's temples. Other common rituals include adding gold leaf to statues and offering paper money to ancestors. Another practice is offering canola or rapeseed oil, which is used in the burning of lamps in the temples. In this thesis I call these “common offerings”, as a large contingent of visitors to the monastery engage in at least some of these practices, many of whom may not necessarily be considered (or consider themselves) to be Buddhists. 201 These common offerings not only help the monastery financially and but also help maintain the reverent image of the site itself.

Each of these offerings serves different ritual and spiritual purposes and results in a variety of perceived spiritual outcomes. For example many offerings are made in relation to the five senses; candles for sight, prayers for sound, fruit (and other foods) for taste, incense for smell, and so on. By making offerings in relation to the five senses Buddhists offer all known phenomena for the benefit of all sentient beings. In doing so the practitioner follows the bodhisattva path of developing compassion. However these offerings also serve to build merit. 202 A sangha informant explained that when practitioners kowtow to a sacred object they receive merit - for ritual action towards a sacred object - and also practice humility. This is an example of the two-fold benefits includes earning merit and developing Buddhist attributes.

However, according to the same informant, non-Buddhists see such rituals as an exchange; the participant bows and makes a wish, which he or she hopes will be fulfilled. He called this exchange doing “business with the Buddha.” He explained

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201 During interviews it became clear that many of the tourists did not consider themselves to be believers, or shinturen “信徒人”, but engaged in these rituals anyway.
that Buddhists do ritual to build merit for future lives, and to develop themselves spiritually, whereas non-Buddhists do the same rituals to bring about benefits to non religious aspects of their lives, such as for education, better health for family members, or to improve their finances. Therefore, according to the monk, Buddhists perform ritual in order to escape samsara, whereas non-Buddhists do so to improve it. I want to point out I do not believe that there is such a clear delineation between the two groups, but these points illuminate the ways that ritual can serve different groups. I will return later to this monk’s description of Buddhist and non-Buddhists to show that the monastery is happy to accommodate [perceived] non-Buddhists as a recruitment tool.

One outcome not mentioned by my interviewees is that lay ritual activity adds to the religious aesthetic (or spiritual backdrop) of the monastery. When offerings are made in relation to each of the five senses, the corresponding (sight, sound, smell, touch and taste) experiences are set up for the next visitor. For example, it is because the public burns incense that the monastery has perfumed-smoke wafting in the courtyards. The candles also add to this ambience, both inside and outside the temples. People bowing and praying in the temples indicate that respect and reverence is still being bestowed at the site. In this way, the narratives about Baoguo Si and Emei Shan are retold and reinforced through the ritual activity of visitors at the monastery.

The complex use of space at Baoguo Si also serves an important economic purpose. Financial donations by visitors help subsidise the high price of maintaining its wooden structures. Interview data indicated that the monastery relied not only on donations from visitors, but also from profits made by the several businesses: the tea house, a guest house, a book shop and several other stores. None of this is particularly new, as Buddhist institutions have relied on the support of the wider lay-community for over two thousand years; what is new is the diminished role of the ordained sangha at the monastery and the elevated position of the laity.

It is often difficult to establish the differences between the “Buddhists” (religious pilgrims and local laopusa) and those that do “business with the Buddha”
(tourists) at Chinese temples. One reason for this is monasteries like Baoguo Si are not only "religious/sacred places, but also cultural destinations." 203 This is because "... religious tourist sites in China are an important part of Chinese historical and cultural heritage." 204 One reason for this is non-religious Chinese visit religious sites in an effort to connect with their cultural past. 205 Furthermore most Chinese visitors to Baoguo Si, perform the standard ritual devotions during their visit.

‘Laypeople’ within the Buddhist community are not so easily recognized. A Buddhist temple filled with worshippers who offer incense and bow before deity images is not necessarily filled with Buddhists. Such visitors may well respond to the atmosphere and the many images just as they would in any Chinese temple, with prayers and offerings made to powerful spirits in order to seek good fortune for themselves and others. 206

Other writers have also grappled with this issue. For example in a study of the Shikoku pilgrimage in Japan, Ian Reader decides not to differentiate between tourists and pilgrims. He argues that the difference between the two groups depends upon their “inner motivations,” which are difficult for outsiders to ascertain. 207 Furthermore, because visiting a sacred site is inherently meritorious and anyway is dependent on one’s karma, the inner motivation of the visitor is less important. 208 Rather than grapple with this thorny issue, I have chosen to focus on a ritual conducted (mostly) by laopusa: nianfo circumambulation. My reason for focussing on laopusa is because they have undergone two Buddhist commitments: they have taken refuge in the three jewels, and have vowed to follow the five Buddhist lay precepts. According to Holmes Welch the people who have made these two commitments are more

204 Ibid.
205 Ibid.
206 Birnbaum, ‘Buddhist China at the Century’s Turn’, 429.
likely “to have a clear idea of Buddhism as a distinct religion and to have decided that they belonged to this religion rather than any other.” 209 I will discuss the way that the laopusa at Baoguo Si distinguish themselves from other visitors later in Chapter Four. But first I will consider the reasons why non-jushi as well as jushi conduct nianfo ritual at Baoguo Si during the Chinese New Year.

Zoumiao: Returning to Baoguo Si on chuxi

According to my fieldwork, during chuxi and the new and full moon, many local people come to Baoguo Si to participate in ritual activities such as nianfo. It is unlikely in today’s China that the majority of the large crowds of locals who visit Baoguo Si are devout Buddhists. However, a visit to the local temple at certain times is obviously an important part of the annual cycle of festivals. To understand this we need to briefly look at the Chinese Lunar calendar, as it is significant for dictating important days to conduct ritual at the monastery.

China people follow the lunar calendar to keep track of traditional festivals and holidays. It is claimed that the lunar calendar can be traced as far back as the Shang Dynasty (16th-11th B.C), 210 and gradually became used to keep track of traditional Chinese festivals. Despite the introduction of the Gregorian calendar, the lunar calendar remains important for many Chinese traditional festivals and holidays. As a result, houses in Emei Town display calendars marking the dates for both systems. These calendars are also on display at Baoguo Si for the resident monks to consult. Generally, the first and the fifteenth are the most important days for ritual of the lunar month, with the first being the new moon, and the fifteenth, the full moon. In terms of my study, these two days hold particular significance, as they were days when the largest contingent of lay participants took part in rituals at Baoguo Si. Most of China's important traditional holidays fall on one of these two dates. For example Chinese New Year (农历新年) is the first day of the first lunar month, and Mid-Autumn Day (中秋节) is falls on the fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month. The Chinese New

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Year, also called the Spring Festival (春节), is regarded as the most important festival on the Chinese lunar calendar. 211

In an article entitled *Toward a Theory of Public Ritual* Etzioni argues that holidays and festivals function in several ways. Of particular interest are the "recommitment holidays" when people reaffirm their connection with traditional and religious beliefs. 212 According to Etzioni’s theory, most of the general population ignore certain traditional, religious, and cultural protocol in daily life. Yet on certain special days of the year large portions of a population reconnect with and reaffirm their commitment to traditional belief structures and communities (Etzioni gives Easter and Passover as examples). 213 Likewise, Sangren argues that Chinese ritual is a good indicator for both, what people believe (which he frames within terms of both “orthodoxy” and “heterodoxy”) and in what people value. 214 If ritual in China is a good indicator of what people believe and value, then this may strengthen the argument that local people engage in nianfo at Baoguo Si during chuxi in order to recommit to traditional beliefs and values.

While Etzioni and Sangren’s theories may explain ritual at Baoguo Si during chuxi, they are not universally applicable to other holidays. During the Hungry Ghost Festival there was only a slight increase in jushi at Baoguo Si. It should be noted here that the Hungry Ghost Festival is celebrated differently in the Emei region than most of China. In Emei it falls on the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth of the seventh lunar month, whereas elsewhere it is usually observed on the fifteenth of the same month. This pattern is found throughout China: how and when festivals and rituals are enacted varies depending on region. Each festival and holiday has its own unique characteristics and results in varying degrees of interaction between the public and monasteries. So perhaps these theories are

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211 Ibid., 164.
Another major category consists of ‘holidays of tension management’ when societal rules are loosened and boundaries are lifted. He lists Mardi Gras and April fools day as examples.
213 Ibid., 47.
too simplistic to explicate the relationship between Baoguo Si and its lay congregation.

In a case study in Zhejiang province, Katz found confirmation of some aspects of Etzioni's theory but more complicated outcomes. While the resurgence of local festivals in the town of Pucheng has “...served to strengthen traditional alliances,” they also created conflict amongst the townspeople, and also with local authorities. In other words, beliefs and values needed to be negotiated within the groups themselves and sometimes posed a challenge to local authorities. Kenneth Dean notes similar problems when fieldwork conducted in six hundred villages in Fujian China. Dean also finds different settings, such as rural and urban, can radically alter the impact and dynamics of ritual and festivals. In my research I found that the extremely large number of participants in nianfo ritual during chuxi creates a high level of ambiguity and complexity. However, Etzioni and Sangren's theories about public ritual can be usefully applied the rituals performed by laopusa at Baoguo Si on a more regular basis.

The notion that the monastery is a “religious institution” is enhanced when a specific hall has been set-aside for local lay believers to conduct ritual. At Baoguo Si this is the Samantabhadra Hall. This special space inside the monastery is where laopusa can do religious practice on a regular basis. This religious practice includes meditation, religious lectures and nianfo circumambulation. As we will see in the next chapter, the ritual is practiced on a daily basis; a ritual space for lay practitioners is necessary.

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217 Monasteries often provide a space for nianfo. According to my fieldwork, this is usually the rear-most temple of the monastic complex. Isabelle Charleux and Vincent Goossaert, ‘The Physical Buddhist Monastery in China’, in The Buddhist Monastery: A Cross-Cultural Survey, ed. Pierre Pichard and François Lagirarde (Ecole française d’Extrême-Orient, 2005), 330. They also mention the existence of the nianfo tang, or Recitation Hall.
Chapter Four: Nianfo at Baoguo Si

In the previous chapter I examined ritual as Chinese visitors to Baoguo Si perform it and nianfo as part of the chuxi end of year rites. In these instances it is remains problematic to divide them into distinct groups of visitors, tourists and pilgrims. While Baoguo Si receives, at time, thousands of visitors per day, it is on chuxi that local people (including those returning home for the Chinese spring festival) visit Baoguo Si in large numbers. In the previous chapter I argued that this indicates an effort to recommit to traditional values and communities. For the rest of the year most of Baoguo Si’s visitors come from outside the Emei region. In this chapter I focus on a group of certified Buddhists, or laopusa. They are also locals who visit the monastery in regular intervals throughout the year to engage in religious practice.

On most days a small group of laopusa visit Baoguo Si, but on the first and fifteenth of the lunar month they come in large crowds. Generally the laopusa go to the monastery for the entire day. Most arrive prior to the first nianfo sessions, which begins at nine in the morning, and leave after four in the afternoon after the second nianfo session concludes.

For the monks the rituals performed by the laopusa provide opportunities for religious interaction with the lay public. The monks facilitate the nianfo ritual and use the time to teach Dharma to the participants. Despite the willingness of the monks to provide access of non-monastic space to tourists to do “business with the Buddha,” the laopusa gives the monks the opportunity to interact with people they perceive as “believers.” The willingness of the laopusa to partake in this arrangement also indicates their need for religious and spiritual guidance from the monks and the monastery. While these interactions help Baoguo Si’s appearance as a living Buddhist site to visitors, they also provide for the goals of the laopusa. Jushi could perform nianfo elsewhere, yet the narratives about Baoguo Si make it an ideal place to do so. However just as the monks perform nianfo when the monastery is closed, laopusa performance of nianfo is not about upholding Baoguo Si’s image as portrayed in narratives. I will return to this
discussion at the end of this chapter, however first I will present a section on the laopusa.

**The laopusa**

The group engaged in nianfo ritual consisted mostly of female retirees. 218 Becoming a jushi is “…a once-in-a-lifetime major rite of passage” for Chinese Buddhist women. 219 Tak-Ling Terry Woo describes such a decision as “…a gesture of filial commitment,” when discussing the case of a women following her grandmother’s spiritual footsteps. 220 This may indicate that it is not only a rite of passage for Buddhist women in China, but also a maternal lineage. As jushi, women enter into a spiritual phase of life, perhaps relating to Confucian notions of the stages of life. For example Yi-Lan Kang (a blogger) justifies her rationale for becoming a jushi when she turned fifty.

Last year, I marked my 50th birthday. I was thinking about what Confucius said: ‘at the age of 50, I know heaven’s decree.’ I thought it will [sic] be a good time for me to practice. 221

Women who pursue a more monastic style of life when reaching the retirement age are not eligible to become nuns. This is because “… Buddhist monasteries [on Emei Shan] should only take in new members who are between the age of 18 and 30, unmarried, and have finished at least middle school.” 222 While many retiree women would like to become nuns, they have “missed the boat” for two reasons; nunneries do not accept women of their age to become new nuns, and at the time when these women would have been at the appropriate age during the Cultural Revolution monastic institutions were prohibited from ordaining new monks or

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218 Cheung, *Women’s Ritual in China* Cheung uses the phrase ‘post-menopausal women’ to describe a similar demographic in Fujian Provence.

219 Ibid., 1.


222 Qin, ’The Buddhist Revival in Post-Mao China’, 179.
nuns. 223 Becoming a jushi is the only realistic option available to these women who wish to dedicate their lives to Buddhism.

Through interviews I learned that this lay community and the monks of Baoguo Si worked together to create a special society. To become members, potential participants had to ensure that they were Buddhists; in order to do this they took the Shou sangui wujie (受三皈五戒), to take refuge in the three jewels and follow pañcasīla (the five vows). 224 After following these steps, each member received a special robe, a book of rules, and a precepts certificate (jiedie 戒牒). The shou sangui wujie ceremony is held every few years at Baoguo Si; an informant told me that she decided to get hers in another city instead of waiting.

While the jiedie indicates holder to be a jushi (or on this case a laopusa), it also allows them to enter the monastery without having to pay the usual entrance fee. It also can also be used to receive meals at a discounted rate in the monastery's canteen. The robe provides them with special status during the ritual. I was told that the main reason why the society was established was to organize the practitioners into rostered groups. This was because previously it was common for the Samantabhadra Hall to become overcrowded and disorganized. Each group was drawn from a village or neighbourhood and was allocated three days per month to take part in the ritual.

Wenjie Qin noted that local women visited temples on Emei Shan to make offerings on the first and fifteenth of the lunar month. “The purpose of these fortnightly rituals is to ward off disasters, cure disease, pray for peace, wealth and health, and increase one’s chance of going to the Land of Bliss.” 225 For the laopusa at Baoguo Si, as I had observed, this meant much larger groups than usual on the first and fifteenth of the lunar month. For example during one of my observation sessions I counted over 300 participants consisting of 294 women and 19 men, the majority of whom appeared to be over fifty years of age. On mid-autumn day I counted 177 women and 11 men; most were retirees. On regular

223 Ibid., 196.
days of the Chinese Lunar Calendar smaller groups performed the ritual, usually less than 10 and sometimes as few as 3 women.

The laopusa have two sets of robes, the black robes called the haiqing 海清, which indicates the wearer to have taken refuge in the three jewels, and a brown robe called the manyi 缅衣, which indicates that the wearer is following the pañcasīla. Charles Jones explains, “The robes, called ‘ocean purity’ (haiqing)... A loose black gown with billowing sleeves... resembled a baccalaureate graduation gown... These robes served the purposes of preserving modesty, erasing any social distinctions between participants based on dress, and added a greater air of solemnity and seriousness...” to the ceremony. During an interview a Baoguo Si a monk informed me that the robes were modelled on ancient Chinese Buddhist monastic robes. I observed that the haiqing and manyi were only worn during the actual ritual, and were not worn at other times even inside the monastery. For example laopusa would neatly fold their robes at the end of the morning nianfo session, go for lunch, and then when recommencing they would don them again. I also noticed that some participants wore the haiqing, while others wore the manyi, yet during the sessions there seemed to be no hierarchy according to the colour of the robe either during the procession or in seating position. During an interview, a laopusa informed that these two kinds robes were interchangeable, and she was not aware of any hierarchy regarding which robe was worn.

Circling the Bodhisattva: A characteristic day for laopusa at Baoguo Si

For the next portion of the chapter I present a characteristic day's activities by the group of laopusa at Baoguo Si. The focus of the daylong series of activities is the nianfo ritual in the Samantabhadra Hall. My description here is based on my observations on the first day of the seventh lunar month (July 31 2011). However the series of activities and rituals described were mirrored on the fifteenth of both the seventh and eighth lunar months (August 14, September 12

2011). The participants began early in the morning by walking or taking buses to the monastery. There was an air of anticipation as laopusa hurriedly approached the main gate of Baoguo Si with “... a pilgrim’s bag on one shoulder and a bag of offerings on the other.” Many abstain from meat that day, if not vegetarian already. Upon reaching the monastery itself many of the practitioners appropriated the circuit via the central axis, making offerings until they reached the Samantabhadra Hall. The laopusa are generally more meticulous than most other visitors in their approach as they follow the etiquette more closely; they also pay attention to a larger number of bodhisattva statues. However, as most of the laopusa intend to stay the entire day at the monastery, some choose not to make offerings along the central axis until some later point of time of the day. Approximately thirty minutes before the ritual begins large numbers of laopusa have congregated in the Samantabhadra Hall or in the courtyard outside.

Waiting at the Samantabhadra Hall

Upon approaching the final courtyard outside the nianfo tang, several laopusa lit incense and candles and placed them in their respective burners. On busy days the donation box and cushions used for bowing are brought outside the hall and are placed in front of the middle archway of the hall’s entrance. This is done because during the ceremony the hall becomes too crowded for non-participants, and prevents non-participating visitors from entering the hall. Laopusa outside the hall rest, chat, and don their robes, whereas those inside sit on the meditation cushions.

The seating of participants is arranged in a hierarchy: the small number of robed males sitting closest to (and facing) the rear of the hall in the right hand column, while a larger number of robed female laopusa sit behind them. The left column operates as a continuation of hierarchy of the right, with robed female laopusa sit in the front, while laypeople in regular attire sit behind them (first men then women). Later during the circumambulation hierarchy is maintained as the two columns link up to make one long procession.

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227 This quote comes from Qin’s descriptive account of songs about visiting the monastery Qin, ‘The Buddhist Revival in Post-Mao China’, 326.
Before the beginning of the session, two laopusa (usually female) organizers make sure the participants are seated in the appropriate location according to their ritual status. This is done with varying degrees of conformity, and sometimes participants refuse to conform to their orders and question the authority of the organizers. One issue I noticed was when two friends, with only one wearing the haiqing, wanted to sit together. In the end the organiser gave up and allowed them to sit together as she had to move on to other matters.

Within fifteen minutes prior to the start of the hour, most participants were already seated in position according to their ritual status. Then one of the organizers told them to face the rear wall and to begin reciting the Amitabha mantra "Namo Amitofo". Within a few moments, conversations began to subside as the participants became engaged in recitation. This change of activity inside the hall resulted in a flurry of activity outside, causing other participants to put on their robes and quickly enter the hall.

At around nine in the morning two monks entered the hall and quickly checked whether the participants were seated correctly and prepared for the ritual. They did this with the help of the organizers. The two monks sat (one of them sometimes stands by the door). One monk rings a hand chime to capture the attention of the participants and signal the beginning of the ceremony.

**The Main Ceremony**

Each session is divided into various sections. The first is a short one where the participants bow in each of the cardinal directions. Two monks guide the participants. The *weinuo* “verger” 228 rings the *yinqing* or “small hand bell” 229 while the other taps a woodenfish drum *muyu*. 230 These instruments are used to indicate when actions are to be done, and to keep the participants in unison. After bowing towards each of the four directions three times, the

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229 Ibid., 271; other names for this item as *lingzi* or *lingyi* see: Li-Hua Ho, ‘Dharma Instruments (Faqi) in Chinese Han Buddhist Rituals’, *The Galpin Society Journal* 59 (1 May 2006): 234, doi:10.2307/25163868.

230 For an explanation the woodenfish see: Ho, ‘Dharma Instruments (Faqi) in Chinese Han Buddhist Rituals’, 233.
congregation stands and chants the Amitabha mantra for several minutes before the procession begins.

The weinuo walks to the front of the hall to lead the procession. He carries a wireless microphone and the yinqing. The weinuo recites the mantra into the microphone and begins playing the yinqing, to set the pace of the chanting. Once he begins leading the procession the robed males begin to follow him. As one row empties the next one begins filing out to join the procession. By the third row the robed female participants begin following their male counterparts. On this new moon the entire right column consisted of robed participants. The procession proceeded clockwise along the walls of the hall, and passed around the seated participants of the left column.

As the weinuo and the procession reach the second column of participants they begin walking between the rows of mediation cushions. When the final participants of the first group pass the first row of the second column, the other participants begin joining, row-by-row. By this point in time all the female robed participants had passed, so the males in regular attire begin joining the procession, who were then followed by the remaining women. The second monk helped the organizers slot latecomers into the right section of the procession, then trailed at the back of the procession.

As Charles Jones notes during his Buddha-One retreat, there were times during the procession at Baoguo Si when the participants’ “hands were clasped together in front of [their] chests (hezhang [合掌])” and when the hands were placed “at waist level, right over left, palms facing up (fangzhang [放掌])” 231

According to my observations and interviews the number of cycles were not predetermined, instead they were determined by time of the ritual. On days when there were fewer participants I counted more cycles than on busy days. This is most likely due to the fact that the larger number of participants slowed down the speed of the procession itself. On the eve of the Chinese New Year individual groups of participants usually did either one or three cycles. However

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on this particular day, and on the days that I observed, the majority of participants remained involved in the ritual from start to end.

After around an hour the procession gradually “unwound” row by row with participants returning to their original positions. This was followed by a short period of chanting the Amitabha mantra, bowing in each of the cardinal directions as in the beginning, and then dedication prayers are recited to disburse merit before the participants began leaving the hall.

**Lunch Break and Afternoon Session**

At 11:30 the participants have lunch at the monastery’s canteen in groups. They receive a special discount as if they have a “layperson’s conversion certificate” known as a *guiyizheng*, an official Buddhist identification card that can be obtained from the BAC. The lunch itself was not heavily ritualized, apart from dedication prayers made by individual groups prior to the meal. The food is vegetarian. At the end of the meal the participants rinse their own dishes and chopsticks before returning them to the canteen.

For the remainder of the lunch break the laopusa dispersed into smaller groups around the monastery. Some sat in shaded areas of the monastery on benches in the courtyards or in the pavilion near the monastery’s garden. Some started the pilgrimage circuit along the central axis of the monastery. Others met with their respective teacher monks, who would offer advice or Buddhist teachings.

At one in the afternoon, the participants returned to the Samantabhadra Hall for the afternoon session. On the first and fifteenth a monk gave Buddhist talks. The talk covered simple topics, and the contents seem to be at the discretion of the individual monk teacher. On mid-autumn day, the monk asked the participants to not donate too much money to the monastery, and told them that they needed to make sure they kept enough to look after themselves. On another day, a different monk lectured the participants on how to be more pious while in the hall: he suggested they turn off their cell phones, sit more attentively, and not chat. On the first day of the seventh lunar month the monk talked about various Buddhist principles as he browsed through a book on Buddhism. During an
interview with one of the teacher monks, I was informed that the lectures were not supposed to be too philosophical, but rather provide the participants with simple guidelines for their lives. Lectures are kept simple because the monks believe that the laopusa, due to their age, would have trouble comprehending more complex doctrine.

On each occasion I observed several laopusa struggling to understand the lectures, and witnessed several catnapping. One reason for this may be that several of the listeners have trouble understanding Mandarin Chinese, the language that the monks use for lecturing. Qin mentioned that the local dialect was hard for her to understand when first arriving at Emei Shan. I was informed that the monks used Mandarin, instead of the local vernacular, to keep the lectures more formalized. Other problems, related to the age of the participants, some had poor hearing, and sitting for long periods on the low meditation cushions was a problem for others. I questioned a laopusa why she was not sitting inside during a lecture; she replied that she had trouble sitting on the mediation cushions for such a long time, and preferred to sit outside on the higher bench. She would, however, return for the nianfo session.

On several occasions, the teaching was followed by a short period of meditation and then at two o’clock the same cycle as the morning’s proceedings would begin. On days when it was busy, such as the New Moon, at the end of the second session a small group laopusa remained at the hall to sweep and mop the floors. They also reorganized the cushions into tidy rows. The courtyard outside the hall was also cleaned; waste material that had accumulated during the day was gathered and candle wax and incense sticks left in and around the incense and candle burners were cleared away.

For the rest of the month the daily proceedings resembled the description presented above, except for that there are far fewer participants and there is no teaching session after lunch between one and two. As there are no teachings on these days the lunch breaks were longer. The afternoon nianfo session still began at two, but the laopusa more time to talk with monks, make offerings, and relax.
My field-notes for the morning of the first day of the Ghost festival state, “…the monastery seems as quiet as, or even quieter than, usual. In the procession there are only three lay women, plus the two officiating monks.” There was no increase number in the afternoon session either. However there were more people offering paper money than usual.

In this section I have presented a case study of the nianfo as a contemporary ritual as practiced at Baoguo Si. One of the reasons for doing this was to present an opposing view to the large degree of scepticism towards the authenticity of the site as a religious one. Despite nianfo being a “simple” ritual, with the majority of participants mostly coming from a single demographic, it is an attempt by the monastery and the practitioners to promote Buddhist practice at the site. For the practitioners it not only provides time and space for routine spiritual practice, but it also enables a special relationship with the monastery.

A brief introduction into Amitabha’s Pure Land and Nianfo

What do the laopusa hope to achieve by performing nianfo? While I did not focus on this specific question in my ethnographic enquiry, I will briefly outline the commonly reported goals of performing nianfo here. So the purpose of this section is to elaborate on my explanation of Pure Land Buddhism that commenced in the introduction. Apart from the goal of being reborn in Amitabha’s Pure Land known in Sanskrit as Sukhavati, there are other goals and reported outcomes of performing nianfo, such as developing samadhi and purifying one’s thoughts. In Riding the River Home Hargett notes even during the life of Huiyuan the goals of performing nianfo included gaining “true understanding of the scriptures” and rebirth in Sukhavati. However these are certainly not the only goals for performing nianfo, as I will discuss below.

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232 Also translated as the Western Paradise.
233 Lee, ‘Chanting the Amitabha Sutra in Taiwan’, 140.
The more prominent goal is to be reborn in Sukhavati. Pi-yen Chen translates the description of Sukhavati as written in the *Sukhavatyamrta-vyuha*, 236

The Buddha says in this Sutra that in Sukhavati (utmost joy) there is no suffering, and that world is adorned with all kinds of treasure, beautiful lotuses, and wonderful music. Beings come to Sukhavati by transformation through lotus flowers and are no longer reincarnated...

This is an exceptional world, especially for the salvation of the unenlightened beings in the period of degeneration, who are able to attain the enlightened state in this blessed land even with their impure karma crated in other worlds. The Buddha told his disciples in this Sutra that people hear the name of the Buddha Amitabha, and keep it in mind and recite it for one, two, three, four, five, six, or seven days with thoughts undisturbed. Then when the person comes to die, the Buddha Amitabha, together with an assembly of sagacious beings, will appear in front of the person. He or she will depart this life with tranquillity and be reborn in Sukhavati.

Therefore it is claimed that by aspiring for rebirth in Sukhavati, the practitioner is not abandoning his or her quest for nirvana, but rather choosing an alternative (perhaps easier) route.237 As explained above, by entering Sukhavati one enters a realm with favourable conditions for spiritual practice, especially at times of the degeneration of Buddhist teachings.

Stephenson writes that the Pure Land“... articulated the religious concerns of the non- or semi-literate masses.” 238 He describes it as “an easy path to salvation that was open to anyone with faith, regardless of religious status or persuasion, Pure Land appealed to a great deal of persons who were either alienated from the monastic system or for whom religious pursuits outside the family compound were not an option.” 239

How does performing nianfo result in being reborn in the Sukhavati? Jones explains that rebirth in the Pure Land depends on developing a special connection with Amitabha. This connection can be described as having a “resonance,” “wavelength,” or “vibration” with the bodhisattva. These terms

236 Pi-Yen Chen cites the *Sukhavatyamrta-vyuha* in *Taisho shinshu daizokyo* (Tokyo: Taisho issaiikyo, 1924-30).
237 Pure Land is often described as the ‘easy way’, however Jones points out that “... although easier than Chan, Pure Land practices requires constant effort”. See: Jones, ‘Buddha One: A One Day Buddha-Recitation Retreat’, 274.
238 Stevenson, ‘Pure Land Buddhist Worship and Meditation in China’, 272.
239 Ibid.
attempt to convey the meaning of the Chinese word *ganying* (感應) “... a term difficult to translate... meaning ‘feeling and response.’” 240 Jones further illustrates this by describing the concept of “sympathetic vibration” which is used to explain how performing nianfo results in developing a special connection with Amitabha:

If two strings on an instrument are tuned to the same note, then one string is struck, the other will begin to vibrate along spontaneously. In a like manner, if one ‘tunes’ the mind to vibrate at the frequency of the Pure Land, then Amitabha will respond to this cultivation and a link between practitioner and Buddha will come into being. 241

However apart from seeking rebirth in *Sukhavati* there are a multitude of other reasons for performing nianfo, such as purifying the mind, developing meditation skills, developing wisdom and cultivating samadhi. Pi-yen Chen writes conducting nianfo means “concentrating one’s mind on the Buddha” which helps the practitioner purify their mind and thoughts. 242 Chen writes the visualizations made during nianfo also improve the practitioner's concentration ability. 243 He points out that nianfo and other chanting practices can be seen as “... an expedient for achieving samadhi, is itself a way to perceive and experience Reality-the impermanence of being.” 244 Jones references the claim that Pure Land practices can be used to cultivate “both wisdom and samadhi.” 245 Furthermore, as presented earlier in this chapter, laopusa perform nianfo in an attempt “… to ward off disasters, cure disease, [and] pray for peace, wealth and health.” 246

These arguments may indicate the importance of nianfo and Pure Land amongst Chinese Buddhist practices today and their broader significance within the context of its participants, it does not, however, explain what they mean. The

241 Ibid.
243 Ibid., 40.
244 Ibid., 45.
sociological implications of ritual, and for my own case study remain to be explored.

**Analysis of Nianfo: theories and ritual and liturgy**

The performance of Amitabha Pure Land nianfo on chuxi, bimonthly and on a daily basis by local laopusa indicates its importance at Baoguo Si and to Buddhists living in the vicinity. Pi-yen Chen points out that that nianfo is a central practice of Buddhism in China today, not only among the laopusa, but also as part of the monastic system. He argues this by pointing its prominent position during the daily morning and evening monastic services. 247

Chen also focuses on Chinese Buddhist ritual as liturgy. He has produced several works including a book, 248 and several articles related to this topic. 249 These works relate well to my topic as they include analysis of nianfo. Apart from indicating the importance of nianfo in the contemporary Buddhist context Chen also argues that chanting “... strengthens a sense of unity among Chinese Buddhists.” 250 Therefore it is interesting to note that the jushi on Emei Shan address each other by using the term foyou 佛友 or “Buddhist friend.” 251 By becoming part of a group of Buddhist friends enables a “spiritual family” outside of the regular social sphere. 252 By doing ritual together jushi believe that their karmic bonds are being strengthened which will enable them to meet in a future life, perhaps in the Pure Land. 253 Therefore women who conduct ritual may do so to become “transformed into members of a new community of lay Buddhist

252 Ibid., 326.
253 Ibid., 327–328.
worshippers.” However Bell pointed out that there is more to ritual than creating a sense of community:

Ritualization cannot turn a group of individuals into a community if they have no other relationships or interests in common, nor can it turn the exercise of pure physical compulsion into participatory communality. Ritualization can, however, take arbitrary or necessary common interests and ground them in an understanding of a hegemonic order; it can empower agents in limited and highly negotiated ways.

The point that ritualization not only builds communities but also structures them in terms of a hierarchy is also noted by Pi-Yen Chen and Eric Reinders. The latter writes that rituals themselves indicate the hierarchal status of the participants. He considers “... the notion of hierarchy as essentially an embodied strategy which takes certain sets of categories (e.g., old-young, male-female) and correlates them through the basic metaphor of vertical distinction (high-low or above-below).” The vertical metaphor indicates the “higher” one denotes superiority; the “lower” one determines one’s inferiority in the ritual setting. Reinders points out that this topography is manifest in the physical design of Chinese monasteries and the language associated with them:

Traditionally, monasteries are always in the mountains, even when they are, in fact, in the city or the plains. The entrance to a monastery is frequently called ‘mountain gate’ (shanmen). The language used to speak of the physical site of the temple or monastery expresses the site as if it were a mountain—one ‘goes up’ (shang) as one ‘goes in’ (ru), goes down as one goes out. Hence, the abbot ‘ascends the hall’ (shangtang); the term for ‘abbot’ is ‘high seat’ (shangzuo). A similar linguistic pattern was the case with imperial sites of ritual, such as audience halls. Partly, of course, it was physically true: the central image or throne would be raised upon a platform. The ‘high seat’ of an abbot both represented and embodied the abbot’s social and spiritual authority over others.

In Chapter Three it was explained that visitors enter Baoguo Si from its lowest point - the mountain gate. After entering the monastery they gradually ascend to

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257 Ibid., 246.
the highest point - the Samantabhadra Hall. I am not suggesting that the Samantabhadra Hall is more important that the others. In fact the Main Hall is probably most ritually significant as it is where the monks conduct ritual. And even though Baoguo Si is at the bottom of the mountain is seen as more significant than many of the other monasteries and temples at higher elevations. However I am not discussing the symbolic status suggested by spatial positioning or represented within the linguistic terminology.

I detected clear layers of hierarchy during my observations of nianfo: the ordained monks received the highest status, the robed male laopusa were higher than their female counterparts, followed by lay men and finally lay women. As described in the section above seating position and position in the procession delineated this same hierarchal order. After the ritual, when the laopusa had packed away their haiqing robes and left for lunch, they reverted to their regular status within society.

Jones notes in *Buddha One* that participants were organized into a hierarchy according to their vows, first the clergy, then those that took the lay bodhisattva precepts (*zaijia pusa jie*), then jushi who had taken the five precepts, and finally “… those who had not taken any precepts. Within each group, participants were further sorted by gender and age, and the last two groups were also arranged by height.” 258 At Baoguo Si the organization of participants did not include the final categories of age and height or the distinction between the laopusa who had and had not taken the bodhisattva precepts.

In an article investigating the role of women in a Pure Land Buddhist group in Taiwan Wei-yi Cheng claims there were several “positive” aspects of female engagement in her case study. While the hierarchy of the group, textual sources and symbols were dominated by males or masculine symbols, there were several positive outcomes for women including; “widened women’s social network,”259 women sometimes led the nianfo service,260 women were integrated in religious

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260 Ibid.
performance, it provided them with opportunities “to enjoy a kind of sisterhood/social life that is not otherwise available at home”, and were able to seek “alternative meanings for themselves other than being confined to the roles of wives and mothers”. Cheng’s findings seem to summarize most of what I have written so far: despite the low symbolic status of women in nianfo, they received many opportunities and freedoms outside their regular domestic roles.

Qin writes, “Going to the monastery... grants these women a temporary suspension of their social and gender roles. Pilgrimage allows them to form a temporary community of women.” However we have seen that once a woman becomes a jushi she is involved in a different hierarchy. Qin also notes that once women become nuns they find themselves trapped in a different hierarchal system.

Qin writes that Buddhism at Emei Shan “has a long tradition that frustrates women’s attempts to reach positions of power”. In fact the laopusa themselves were not highly regarded as a group. People outside the group often referred to them pejoratively, with titles such as “old grandmas” laopopo 老婆婆 at Emei Shan, and “recitation mothers” nianfo mama 念佛妈妈 in Ninghua in Fujian. Several people who learned that my fieldwork focussed on laopusa thought it was humorous while others found it an odd topic of study due to their perceived low status. Despite the low status of jushi at Emei Shan, Baoguo Si is content with this cooperative.

The cooperation between the laopusa and the monks at Baoguo Si does not happen everywhere. For example at Daci Si in Chengdu jushi sold the entry tickets at the front gate, acted as caretakers at each of the halls, and there were no monks involved the nianfo ritual. Instead an audio-video recording was used as a guide during the ritual. Some Beijing temples functions as museums, and do

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261 Ibid.
262 Ibid., 183.
263 Ibid.
265 Ibid., 435–436.
266 Ibid., 446.
267 Cheung, Women’s Ritual in China, 122.
not even have a congregation of ordained monks or nuns. In these cases jushi struggle to even have access to these temples to conduct ritual. For example, in some cases the conversion certificate is not accepted instead of the entrance fee.

Sun Yanfei, in a case study the growth of Protestantism in Lanxi County in Southeast China, discovered there to be far less interaction between jushi and monastics than I uncovered at Baoguo Si.

The Cypress Shade Temple and the Bamboo Grove Temple have Buddha recitation groups which gather once every week to recite the name of Amitabha Buddha. The initiators and participants are all laypeople. Monks do not lead the activities. These temples only provide a venue for such activities. And the activities are largely liturgical. No talks are given during the activities to explicate the doctrines, instruct the methods of practices, or advise how to apply Buddhism in everyday life.

While Yanfei Sun’s conclusions suggest there are temples or regions where there is very little monastic support for the lay Buddhist congregation, this is certainly not always the case. For example at Baoguo Si each laopusa has a monk that they support in return for spiritual guidance. Goossaert and Palmer also note “significant variations” between regions and even villages in the level of the revival of temples.

One reason for the relationship between the laopusa and monks of Baoguo Si is that it suits both groups’ interests. While laopusa can perform nianfo even without the support of a local monastic community, this would be difficult at Baoguo Si. As the monastery is such a popular site with visitors, access would be much more difficult without support from the monastic community. In the Chapter Three I explained that several areas of the monastery have been set-aside for visitors to engage in ritual, with the Samantabhadra Hall being mostly reserved for nianfo. During the morning and afternoon nianfo sessions on the first and fifteenth of the lunar month the hall is effectively closed to tourists and other non-participating visitors. During these times, visitors have to bow and make their offerings from outside the hall. Yet they do not seem irritated with

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270 Goossaert and Palmer, The Religious Question in Modern China, 245.
their lack of access to the hall during their short visit to Baoguo Si. Instead being able to observe a functioning and somewhat restricted ritual space helps meet their expectation that the monastery is an on-going religious institution. Smouldering incense and candles set up a mystical atmosphere in the monastic grounds, and robed laopusa performing nianfo further suggests that the site is sacred. The chanting can be heard in the distance from other areas of the monastery, and at time crowds gather at the entrance of the hall to observe the ritual and to take photographs. While there various sections of the monastery are ambiguous, the nianfo sessions indicates that the Samantabhadra Hall is not an ambiguous space. This is especially clear, as pilgrims have to make their offerings from outside the hall.

One advantage of performing nianfo at a prestigious monastery is that it provides the laopusa more legitimacy than if it were conducted in an unknown location. As we know, Emei Shan is one of the most significant mountains in China, and Baoguo Si is one of the most important monasteries on the mountain. Having a space reserved for them and their ritual status at the monastery, means that they are worthy of it. Having an audience further boosts their legitimacy, as does the honour of performing nianfo at this sacred and auspicious significant site.

The monastery also benefits in several ways by having the laopusa perform ritual at one of its halls. For one thing it helps the monastery appear to be a living Buddhist site, as there are two daily ritual sessions being performed at the Samantabhadra Hall. For another it provides the monks with Dharma students. More generally it helps propagate the dharma.
Conclusion

In this thesis I have claimed that there is no one history of Baoguo Si but many intertwined narratives that meet together at the gateway of the mountain. Baoguo Si is a space, nexus, where Sangha, laopusa and visitors meet in order to create an exoticized dichotomy; a Religio-cultural and political-economic hub. For Chinese tourists and laopusa Baoguo Si represents China’s great cultural legacy, a source of spiritual power, and a place of great historic significance. Baoguo Si also represents a sanctuary for artefacts and knowledge of China’s past. For laopusa the temple is a sanctuary away from the modern world where traditional values are still maintained.

In the first two chapters I discussed several of the narratives that are used to promote Baoguo Si as an important and historic temple. However this exoticization is part of a dichotomy that not only prejudices what an experience should be like, but also formulate the likely disappointment of what it will be like. During the second half of this thesis it has become clear that visitor performance of lay ritual has played an important role in maintaining the “exotic backdrop” of Baoguo Si.

In Chapter Two I described a few of the narratives regarding Baoguo Si’s role in serving China through several centuries of its long history. These narratives have promoted the temple’s role as a shelter during war, its part in conserving historic relics during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. Baoguo Si’s past as an interreligious space endorsing the interaction of Buddhists, Daoists and Confucians is another important aspect of these narratives. This is because it implies a harmony between them, and also promotes the combined Chinese traditional values of the three teachings. Therefore these narratives not only promote Baoguo Si as a sanctuary by serving the nation during the war and protecting relics, but also as a place where Chinese traditional values are also upheld.

While narratives of Baoguo Si as a sanctuary are ideal for promoting the temple as a tourist destination in recent decades, it also provides a ritual space for the laopusa and other visitors. It allows for ambiguity and the negotiation of space
and roles. For example the monks are happy to accept “tourists” into their temple for several reasons, including: they make donations and buy products from their shops thus helping with funding, and they make wishes to the sacred statues which may be a step in becoming a convert. However it is important to remember that pilgrimage sites, like Baoguo Si, have facilitated visitors for centuries. In other words having large numbers of visitors to Baoguo Si and other sites on Emei Shan is not a new phenomenon.

In Chapter Three and Chapter Four I explained how local people maintain Baoguo Si as a religious site for themselves as a space to engage in religious practice. This helps preserve their temple and local cultural traditions. As laopusa conduct ritual at Baoguo Si it helps maintain the monastery as a religious site in several ways, including providing the relationship between the monks and their lay followers. If there is enough religious interaction between these two groups, and the laopusa are regularly engaged in ritual, then visitors are more likely to be satisfied that it is a living Buddhist site. The laopusa arrive in the morning and help set the mise-en-scene by making offerings of candles and incense. They can be seen talking with monks, and performing nianfo in the Samantabhadra Hall. However laopusa are not just providing an “exotic backdrop” for other visitors when they enter Baoguo Si they are also escaping the modern world and reconnecting with a more traditional world.

**The elephant in the room: future areas for study**

In this section I propose three areas that very much require further study. The first of these is an ethnographic study of the laopusa to investigate the gender imbalance in their jushi community. The second suggestion is also for an ethnographical study on laopusa, this time focussing on their beliefs regarding Pure Land nianfo practices. The third proposed future study topic is examining the relationship between Amitabha and Samantabhadra. My thesis has revealed

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271 Dr. Elizabeth Guthrie, one of my two thesis supervisors, first used this phrase in this context after I gave a conference paper. During this paper I introduced the notion Emei Shan as a Samantabhadra mountain, but then went on to discuss nianfo practiced by the laopusa at Baoguo Si. The phrase “the elephant in the room” is used in this thesis to indicate a certain disconnect between the Emei Shan being a Samantabhadra site and the lack of rituals dedicated to the Bodhisattva.
that at Emei Shan these two figures are both ubiquitous but in different ways; Samantabhadra in imagery and Amitabha in ritual.

It is clear that there is an information gap between my research on laopusa, Qin’s PhD thesis on the nuns of Fuhu Si, and Cheung’s research on nianfo mama in Jiangsu Province. While all three of us discover that there are certain reasons for women deciding to become jushi, it remains unclear why it is that women outnumber men to such a large extent. One possible approach would be a series of interviews with jushi and their husbands to investigate why there is such a gender gap in the lay Buddhist community.

Another issue alluded to during various points of the thesis relates to the goals of Pure Land practice. While there have been several sociological studies regarding the role of gender and Amitabha’s Pure Land, I believe it is important to investigate what jushi motivation for performing nianfo. One possible method would be to interview members of the jushi community. One could also investigate the source of the knowledge on Pure Land Buddhism, this could include analysing the published materials jushi read on this topic and also by interviewing the monks who lecture.

Another possible topic for further investigation is the relationship between Samantabhadra and Amitabha on Emei Shan. While the most important symbol on the mountain is the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra, the most worshipped is Amitabha Buddha. While visitors visit Emei Shan hoping to receive a vision of Samantabhadra, they continually utter Amitabha’s name. The nianfo ritual performed in the Samantabhadra Hall at Baoguo Si focuses on this same recitation, yet this is done while circumambulating a Samantabhadra statue. This relationship is also anthropomorphized on Jinding, where visitors enter the Giant Ten Direction Samantabhadra statue, inside of which is a temple, where offerings are made to an Amitabha statue. By physically placing Amitabha inside the giant Samantabhadra statue implies a two-tiered relationship. Furthermore it is claimed that the giant Samantabhadra Statue on Jinding is "dedicated to
We have also seen that the importance of Amitabha Pure Land practices can be traced back into history.

What is the relationship between this buddha and bodhisattva at Emei Shan? It is clear that they play different roles in terms of Buddhism on the mountain. Is this due to what they represent within Chinese Buddhism, or the predominance of Amitabha Pure Land in popular Chinese Buddhism today? Unfortunately I did not have the time to investigate or analyse these questions in preparing this thesis. However I believe it would provide a fascinating avenue for further investigation.

**Closing considerations**

Before ending this thesis I will revisit the several of questions I pondered at the very beginning. While many of these have been addressed throughout the thesis, reassessing them here will ensure all my research goals have been addressed.

The first question enquired whether Baoguo Si was either a tourist site or a religious monastery, and the second one pondered how Baoguo Si was affected by commercialization and tourism. These two questions are linked in that they both relate to how the two million visitors to Emei Shan affect Baoguo Si. While there is no definitive answer, my study has revealed the dynamics of large-scale tourism at a religious site. In Chapter Three I pointed out that businesses inside the monastery, such as souvenir stores and a teahouse, created a degree of ambiguity of space upon which visitors could negotiate their own uses and meanings. While this may mean that some visitors could make a sacred space ambiguous, we also learned of the negotiation of space by jushi. For example in Beijing where jushi used temple museum as space to conduct religious practice, or at Baoguo Si where the large number of laopusa has meant that the Samantabhadra Hall is effectively closed to nonparticipants during their nianfo sessions on the first and fifteenth of each lunar month.

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272 十方普贤菩萨圣像内供奉的多弥陀佛：表征同归极乐。See: www.emsfj.com/dcls/ShowArticle.asp?ArticleID=761
The third question pondered if there were differences between tourists and religious visitors in terms of their activity at the temple. The problem encountered with this question is that it is difficult to identify the difference between these two groups. This is partly due to that most visitors who visit Chinese Buddhist monasteries perform the same rituals whether or not they consider themselves to be Buddhists. In Chapter Four I was able to separate the laopusa as a distinct group. The laopusa are more involved in ritual and ritualization, partly by spending more time at the monastery, and also by donning the haiqing during nianfo.

However there are several questions I will not deal with here. Some of them have already been dealt with in the first section of this Conclusion, and some overlap with others that I have just discussed. For example, the question “What is the history of Baoguo Si?” this was summarised earlier in this chapter. For the question “Were Buddhist rituals practiced at the temple?” was discussed in the paragraphs above.

In regards to the question, “When did this temple become an important site for pilgrims to Emei Shan?” I discovered that Baoguo Si’s significance dramatically rose as a direct result of its role during World War II. This happened for several reasons, including the new road being built specifically for the temple’s role as a military headquarters. The new road made it the most accessible temple on the mountain, and as a result the starting point of the pilgrimage circuit.

I also asked “How did locals utilize the temple?” I discovered that Baoguo Si is an important part of chuxi for local Emei residents. If Etzioni is right, then we can assume that Baoguo Si is an essential institution for local residents. At other times of the year laopusa visit the monastery regularly to engage in nianfo. A visit to Baoguo Si provides laopusa not only provides them a shelter away the modern world, it also enables them to build a community of likeminded believers. However in return for access to this space, they help maintain it as a sacred site.
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