From Comrades to Bodhisattvas

Moral Dimensions of Lay Buddhist Practice in Contemporary China

GARETH FISHER

© 2014 University of Hawaiʻi Press
All rights reserved
First published in the United States of America by University of Hawaiʻi Press

Published for distribution in Australia, New Zealand, Southeast and East Asia by:
Hong Kong University Press
The University of Hong Kong
Pokfulam Road
Hong Kong
www.hkupress.org

ISBN 978-988-8208-45-6 (*Hardback*)

All rights reserved. No portion of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed and bound by Paramount Printing Co., Ltd. in Hong Kong, China

Contents

Series Editor's Preface vii
Acknowledgments ix

Introduction 1

1 Chaos 23

2 Balance 57

3 Buddhic Bonds 82

4 Cause and Consequence 102

5 Creating Bonds 136

6 Heart/Action 169

Conclusion: Islands of Religiosity 201

Notes 215
Glossary 237
Bibliography 241
Index 255

Introduction

I first met Liu Yuzhen during a visit to the apartment of two Buddhist laypersons living in the southern suburbs of Beijing.[1] These laypersons had allowed a monk, Jingxu, and his cousin, a nun, Miaozhen, to live with them and to see patients using traditional Chinese medical practices (mostly massage therapy). When it was her turn, Liu complained of back pain; Jingxu prepared some red flower oil, which Miaozhen applied to her upper back and shoulders. In spite of the fact that they were members of the clergy and she was a layperson, Jingxu and Miaozhen spoke gently and with great respect to Liu, addressing her as an "old bodhisattva," a polite form of address that monastics sometimes use to refer to senior laypersons.

Miaozhen, who was in charge of these healing sessions, always inquired after both the psychological and bodily well-being of her patients and listened to their personal stories and problems as she administered her treatment. Liu Yuzhen responded to Miaozhen's general questions with a detailed account of her family problems. She began by launching into an aggrieved description of her relationship with her late husband. She complained about how he had cheated on her with a younger woman who became his mistress. Later on, after he had died, she had been forced to care alone for his elderly parents. She went on to explain that her daughter was now neglecting her: she was behind on her payments toward Liu's living expenses. The failure of these family members to, as Liu saw it, reciprocate her kindness as a mother and wife had left her feeling deeply wronged.

Calmly and without hesitation, Miaozhen explained to Liu Yuzhen that, through the spiritual insights she had gained as a nun practitioner, she could see that, in a previous lifetime, Liu had been a wealthy man who had raped a young woman. That woman had become pregnant and had a daughter. The man had not taken care of either of them and both had died. The woman he raped became her husband in this lifetime and her unfilial daughter was the daughter from the previous lifetime. Miaozhen urged Liu to try to gain merit (*gongde*) by chanting each day the *Great Compassion Dhāranī* (*Dabei zhou*), a collection of verses praising buddhas and bodhisattvas that forms part of the morning Buddhist liturgy. Once Liu did that, Miaozhen said, her fortune would begin to change, but it was also important that she change her attitude of feeling sorry for herself. Liu was responsible for her misdeeds, Miaozhen asserted; she was merely paying for past

sins. She would not be able to resolve her bad karma by focusing on her past but only by moving forward.[2]

Liu said she would listen to Miaozhen's advice, but I ran into her again one week later in the outer courtyard of the Temple of Universal Rescue (Guangji Si) on the eighth day of the eleventh lunar month of 2003 (December 1 in the Western calendar) on the occasion of a minor Dharma Assembly (*fahui*). It was in this temple courtyard, during a previous Dharma Assembly, that Liu Yuzhen had first met Jingxu and Miaozhen. On that occasion also, Miaozhen had offered insights into the past lives of temple-goers who had consulted with her and dispensed moral advice for improving their karma. She had also advertised her services as a medical practitioner and encouraged the temple-goers to consult with her and Jingxu in the apartment where they were staying. On this occasion, however, Liu Yuzhen was consulting not with Miaozhen but with another lay practitioner, Zhou Ning. Zhou Ning had started coming to the temple courtyard following family problems of her own: after she and her husband had both been laid off following a round of economic restructuring in the late 1990s, he had grown depressed and despondent and occasionally lashed out at her with verbal and physical abuse. To make matters worse, her teenaged son was now serving a short prison sentence. Following his frustration with his family's inability to pursue a lifestyle of conspicuous consumption, he had stolen a pair of designer basketball shoes from a local store. Zhou Ning now considered herself the follower of Teacher Zhang, a retired car salesman who preached charismatic sermons in the courtyard to large crowds of listeners. While he spoke on a variety of topics, Teacher Zhang, like many other preachers in the courtyard, consistently bemoaned what he saw as the moral decline of Chinese society in the post-Mao period. In response to this decline, he urged his fellow lay listeners not only to see bodhisattvas as objects of worship but also to follow the path of the bodhisattva themselves and resolve to reform the depraved world around them. In establishing an example of an ideal bodhisattva for them to emulate, Zhang suggested China's late leader Mao Zedong, under whose rule, Zhang asserted, people everywhere were neighbors, no doors were locked at night, and China was a moral exemplar to the world.

On this day, my attention was attracted to Liu Yuzhen's conversation with Zhou Ning when the former began shouting out loudly about the same set of grievances that she had quite calmly explained to Miaozhen the week before. On this occasion, Liu added to her narrative that her daughter was also out of work. Zhou Ning, being laid off herself, told Liu that she should try to understand that her daughter might have difficulties in keeping up with her payments to her

because of the daughter's own difficult financial problems. At this advice, Liu began to shriek even more loudly at Zhou, claiming that her daughter had disengaged from her life after Liu had earlier tried to commit suicide following her husband's infidelity. Unfazed at both this new information and the manner in which it was delivered, Zhou repeated Miaozhen's advice: that Liu should stop feeling sorry for herself. She did not agree, however, with Miaozhen that Liu should recite the *Great Compassion Dhāranī* to gain good karma. Reflecting Teacher Zhang's Maoist-influenced view that reciting dhāranīs and sūtras was a superstitious (*mixin*) activity, she advised Liu only to critically examine how her present misfortunes were rooted in her own karmic misdeeds and to engage in good acts toward others so that she could gain good karma for her future. Liu left the conversation with Zhou Ning much as she had the treatment session with Miaozhen, agreeing with her interlocutor. I never saw Liu again, so I do not know whether the mostly similar advice that Miaozhen and Zhou Ning imparted to her succeeded in helping to improve her obviously fragile emotional state, not to mention her precarious financial position. It was only obvious to me that she desperately wanted it to.

This book is about Liu Yuzhen, Zhou Ning, and lay practitioners like them who gather in the outer courtyard of the Temple of Universal Rescue. It is about their attempts to use Buddhist teachings and practices to resolve their experiences of moral breakdown that have resulted from radical ruptures to their identities and social roles as China undertakes a long transition from a centrally planned to a market-based society. Borrowing from the work of Jarrett Zigon, I define moral breakdown as an unsettled psychological state that occurs when changing circumstances challenge the cultural norms within which one exists as a social person forcing one to engage in what Zigon (2007, 138), borrowing from Foucault (1997), refers to as an "ethical demand" to work out the contradictions that these changing circumstances provoke. A moral breakdown is so named because cultural change provokes a social person to reflect on basic questions of how a society should work and what pathways he ought to follow to function as a person within that society; to put it another way, he is forced to redetermine what is right and wrong. Resolving a moral breakdown is an ethical project because it requires one to reflectively determine how a correctly functioning social person should behave.

Zigon (2009, 263) emphasizes that anyone living in a complex, multidiscursive world with multiple and sometimes conflicting cultural norms will experience moral breakdowns on a frequent basis. Whether through organized religion or with some other ethical toolkit, the contemporary person will also

resolve these moral breakdowns so that he can know how to function as a *person*, that is, as an individual human being who subjectively experiences a livable relationship to and interaction with his social environment (Zigon 2010, 10).[3] Since, following Zigon's usage, the moral is a domain in which one reflects on cultural norms and attempts to harmonize himself with society (either by changing his own thought and behavior or that of others), here learning to be a person is the same thing as learning to be a good person: one can only function as a social being if one develops a notion of how to be good even if that notion remains a standard that one cannot always attain. In using the concept of moral breakdown in this book, I am generally sympathetic to Zigon's view that everyday moral breakdowns are resolved. However, I suggest that there are certain times when the intensity of cultural change disrupts values that are so central to a person's creation of self that he finds it extremely difficult and disorienting to adjust. A strong example of a person who experienced this sort of disruption was Liu Yuzhen, whose psychological discomfort did not stem merely from her anxiety about her financial well-being, but also from her belief that although she had followed what she thought were correct norms of moral conduct as a wife and a mother, her contributions had been neither recognized nor reciprocated in kind. This left Liu experiencing a painful anxiety about her place and purpose as a moral actor in the world that she did not know how to resolve. While Liu tried to relieve her moral breakdown by consulting two local experts in Buddhist morality—Miaozhen and Zhou Ning—by the time I last saw her, she had yet to fully succeed.

Thus while I agree with Zigon that moral breakdown creates an ethical demand to return to a steady moral state, fulfilling that demand can be a long and arduous process that requires help from others. Moreover, while Zigon (2011, 15) emphasizes how one resolves moral breakdown to adjust to changing social circumstances, at least insofar as one can function sanely within that changed society, I suggest that, for certain persons, the resolution of moral breakdown can occur only through the wholesale rejection of the social persons and institutions that brought about the breakdown in the first place. This rejection is viable if the person is able to inhabit wholly new forms of personhood in a community that self-consciously positions itself in opposition to the society that brought about the breakdown in the first place. By "personhood" here, I mean ways of being in society that are recognized as valid by others. Simply put, if one is surrounded by those who accept that one's sense of self and purpose are morally valid, then one can resolve moral breakdown and return to a moral steady state even if one has

not reintegrated into and cannot function harmoniously within the society whose changes initially triggered the breakdown.

For many of the regular practitioners at the Temple of Universal Rescue, the outer courtyard constitutes a social environment where persons experiencing highly disruptive forms of moral breakdown stemming from undesirable changes to their social roles in post-Mao Chinese society use Buddhist teachings as part of an ethical toolkit to resolve those breakdowns and return to a steady moral state. For some, this is a temporary process that is resolved when they find a teacher or message that enables them to redefine themselves in new moral terms or, in rare cases, when their social positions outside of the temple change, after which they sometimes leave the courtyard or even abandon Buddhist teachings and practices altogether. For many others, however, resolving moral breakdown becomes an indefinite struggle that is ended only (and then partially) when they position themselves in opposition to the moral values (real or imagined) of the largely non-Buddhist-practicing urban Chinese society that surrounds them. Zhou Ning is an excellent example of this sort of practitioner: she came to the temple seeking to resolve the moral breakdown created by her loss of ability to act as a productive worker in society, a lack of respect shown to her as a wife by her husband, and perhaps a failure to fulfill her son's desire to improve his image in a society where conspicuous consumption has taken on increasing value. Rather than finding a way to resolve her moral breakdown by adjusting to the values of her immediate social world, Zhou Ning found at the temple a community of practitioners who convinced her that the problems causing her moral breakdown came not from aspects of her own self that needed changing but from a moral decline in society as a whole. Under the tutelage of Teacher Zhang, Zhou accepted a new social identity, that of moral reformer, whose purpose it was to arrest this moral decline. While this change in identity did not improve Zhou's status as a laid-off worker and most likely did not alter the way that her unbelieving husband and son treated her, it did change her subjective experience of these difficulties, thus enabling her, to some degree, to resolve her experience of moral breakdown. To the extent that this new identity of moral reformer was created and reinforced by her fellow Buddhists, it was also a new form of personhood. Yet this new personhood and, with it, Zhou Ning's resolution of her moral breakdown depended precariously on her maintaining these social relationships with fellow Buddhists and minimizing interactions outside of the temple that had created the breakdown in the first place and could continue to lead to its irresolvability.

THE OUTER COURTYARD

While the ethical projects of Beijing lay Buddhist practitioners to resolve moral breakdown can take place in a variety of settings, the outer courtyard of the Temple of Universal Rescue forms a social space where these projects both occur and can be observed in a particularly intensive fashion. The courtyard is an outdoor space enclosed by buildings or building facades on all four of its sides. It is the southernmost of three courtyards in the temple and the closest to its only public entrance. Both the temple authorities and the practitioners who participate in temple activities refer to the courtyard as the outer courtyard to indicate its separation from the temple's inner courtyard, the middle of the three, where nearly all of the temple's ritual activities take place. For this reason, while the outer courtyard lies within the administrative area of the temple, the monks in the temple view it as a space that is peripheral to the temple's main religious activities. Its main official use is as a parking lot for the temple's cars. The buildings around the perimeter of the courtyard house the temple's bookstore, the office of its security guards, and its public restrooms.

On most days of the week, the courtyard remains quite empty. Four times each month, however, on the days of the temple's Dharma Assemblies, it comes to life with a variety of informal and often impromptu activities among mostly self-defined Buddhist lay practitioners.[4] The most notable of these activities is referred to by the courtyard participants as "preaching on the Dharma" (*jiang fa*). Those who preach are occasionally monks and nuns like Jingxu and Miaozhen, although never those who reside within the temple itself. Most often, though, they are lay practitioners like Zhou Ning's teacher, Teacher Zhang. These lay preachers, who have no institutional credentials and whose activities are unsanctioned by the authorities of the temple, speak to interested audiences of listeners, who are mostly laypersons like themselves, on a wide variety of religious topics. These topics include lessons in ritual etiquette, guides to the correct pronunciation of Buddhist sūtras and dhāranīs, and descriptions of how to obtain cures for health ailments through combinations of sūtra singing and a correct diet and lifestyle. The preachers' activities also include sermons, like those delivered by Teacher Zhang, on what many of them claim is a lack of or decline in moral values in the present-day world as compared to the recent past. Of all of the preachers' activities, it is these moralistic sermons, which can be either prearranged or completely spontaneous, that attract the largest crowds and generate the greatest interest. Preaching mostly to a sympathetic audience, the preachers exemplify

this global moral deficiency with what they see as a rise in greedy and selfish behavior in Chinese public life. They argue that contemporary China is populated mostly with those who pursue only their individual self-interest or, at best, act in the interests of a narrow and parochial set of relationships consisting of family, neighbors, and friends. This narrow orientation, they argue, has led to a basic failing in compassion for other beings—both fellow humans and nonhuman animals—to whom many persons are either indifferent or exploitative. The preachers interpret this moral decline as evidence of the world's movement into the latter days of the Dharma (*mofa shiqi*), a time furthest removed from the teachings of Śākyamuni Buddha.[5]

Narratives of cosmic decline have been used by religious groups throughout Chinese history (Overmyer 1976, 150–161; Naquin 1976, 12–18; Shek 2004) and the concept of the latter days of the Dharma was specifically used by medieval Buddhist groups facing religious persecution (Stone 1985a, 31; Marra 1988, 29, 50–51) and living through periods of social instability (Hubbard 2000, 56). In contrast to Indic Buddhist views that emphasized the decline of the Dharma as inevitable and therefore irresolvable, certain East Asian Buddhist teachings have emphasized the agency of Buddhist practitioners in bringing about the decline of the Dharma and, according to some interpretive commentaries, reversing the negative moral conditions that have brought it about or, at the very least, possessing the ability to creatively articulate ways that those living in a degenerate world can find salvation (Chappell 1980, 122–125; Nattier 1991, 119; Hubbard 2000, 37).

In a similar fashion, preachers in the present-day Temple of Universal Rescue who make use of the concept of the latter days of the Dharma also do not accept moral deterioration as part of a pre-fated cosmic cycle, but rather take it as a call to action. They tell their listeners that, at a time when it is difficult for anyone to hear or understand the teachings of the Buddha, it is all the more urgent for all Buddhists to work hard to spread his teachings. At hand is the need—but also the opportunity—to rescue the world from its slothful suffering. While individual preachers differ in their interpretations of both how this moral reform should take place and what it should entail, most urge their listeners to interpret their misfortunes through the Buddhist doctrine of cause and consequence (*yinguo*), disengage themselves from the venal obsessions of the society around them, and understand that their special pre-fated bond with the Buddha (*foyuan*) carries with it important moral responsibilities. Unlike the temple monks who are generally reluctant to use Buddhist teachings to comment on present-day social and political issues, the preachers frequently draw from recent current events to

illustrate their arguments: one preacher discussed a range of copycat killings of kindergarten students throughout China in 2010 as an example of the extent of moral depravity in the world today. Another preacher told his listeners how the recent diagnosis of a corrupt official's wife with cancer was an example of the workings of *yinguo* of which all should take heed. In many of their sermons, preachers combine Buddhist teachings with other grand narratives and moral tropes that have held currency in China's recent history. This syncretic project sometimes leads the preachers to make strange bedfellows: like Teacher Zhang, many preachers evoke the socialist egalitarian values of China's late chairman Mao Zedong as an example of correct moral outlook and the Maoist era as a time of a morally upright society in spite of the fact that Buddhist practices were disrupted and curtailed during Mao's rule and even the very temple in which the preachers now deliver their sermons was closed to worshippers.

The sermons of the preachers are often very dynamic affairs punctuated with frequent questions or outbursts from listeners, like Liu Yuzhen, sometimes delivered in a loud and cathartic manner, as to how they might resolve both everyday ethical problems and serious spiritual crises. These outbursts are usually met with advice from the preachers and sometimes also from other listeners in their circle. Preachers sometimes challenge both the moral authority of the temple monks and each other, competing for followers in a Buddhist version of London's Hyde Park corner. In addition to or in place of listening to the preachers, practitioners in the courtyard also gather in separate small groups without a central preacher or leader, which I refer to as discussion groups. Participants in the discussion groups also frequently discuss the moral content of Buddhist teachings and how those teachings relate to their lives. Practitioners also share Buddhist-themed books, handouts, posters, and other multimedia materials, some with moral themes. Some of these books are written by monastics or lay teachers with a pannational or transnational following like the Ven. Jingkong, an Australian-based monk who also emphasizes the importance of following Buddhist teachings in a time of moral decline. Some practitioners who gather in the outer courtyard also write and distribute their own interpretations of Buddhist teachings. Some of the authors of these materials preach on them while others simply hand them out.[6]

For many of the participants in the preacher circles and discussion groups, a discourse of moral decline resonates with their disruptive experiences of life in contemporary urban China.[7] A great many of these practitioners are over the age of forty-five and find it difficult to connect with the dizzying changes that China has experienced during their lifetimes. Other practitioners, particularly those in

their late thirties and forties, come to the courtyard concerned that they do not know how to teach their children how to become moral persons since, in their view, those children are growing up in a society that lacks a coherent system of values. Many regular participants in the preacher circles and discussion groups are also those whom China's project of modernization through individual economic growth has disenfranchised. Some are young adults who have had little or no opportunity to enter Beijing's workforce since they originally left secondary school. Many more are in their forties and fifties, having worked mostly in unskilled manufacturing positions earlier in their adult lives, who now find themselves unemployed. While they kept their jobs and privileges during the early years of China's post-Mao policy of economic liberalization, state policies introduced in the late 1990s accelerated the government's withdrawal of support from failing state-owned enterprises (Croll 2006, 109–110). This led to the laying off (*xiagang*) or forced early retirement (*tiqian tuixiu*) of a significant percentage of this workforce.[8] Many of those laid off have faced severe reductions or the complete elimination of access to health care, schooling, and retirement benefits (Hung and Chiu 2003, 229; Croll 2006, 112–113). They have little means to acquire the job training necessary to secure positions in service or professional sectors of the economy to which cities like Beijing have now transitioned (Hung and Chiu 2003, 220). Many of the remaining manufacturing jobs these workers previously occupied have been taken over by migrants to the city from rural areas who provide a cheaper and more expendable source of labor (Lü 2001, 196–197).

However, while they occasionally express concerns about their economic circumstances, many of the unemployed practitioners receive a steady, if meager, living stipend from their former work units or from the municipal authorities. Most are not engaged in actively seeking job training or further employment. As they describe it, what is far more disruptive to their lives is the radical alterations of status and value in the society around them, alterations that are reflected in their unemployment. The middle-aged unemployed practitioners often represent those who were once glorified as central cogs in the operation of a socialist machine. However, with the penetration of a culture of consumption, few Chinese now define social worth through socialist-era labels of class background or productivity (in which the position of the proletariat worker was highly favorable) but instead through an ability to acquire consumer goods and emulate a Westernized lifestyle (Davis 2000; Hung and Chiu 2003, 223; Zheng 2003; Croll 2006). Sidelined out of meaningful roles in Beijing's new social order, the laid-off workers and other practitioners at the Temple of Universal Rescue with low incomes have little means to acquire the consumer goods through which status is

now measured. It is this uncertainty concerning their moral roles that has led many of these practitioners to acute experiences of moral breakdown. With the help of preachers and fellow practitioners in the outer courtyard, they look for the means to learn once again how to be moral persons now that the moral project in which they thought they were participating, that of creating a socialist future, has been abandoned by the state and society around them. It is for this reason that the messages of moral decline delivered by the preachers and discussed in much of the literature that the practitioners share is so appealing to them: it creates a religiously inspired conceptual framework by which practitioners who have been disadvantaged by post-Mao economic reforms can understand that their present problems stem from a deficiency not within themselves but within the society around them. Within this understanding, practitioners such as Zhou Ning can resolve their experiences of moral breakdown by taking on the roles of moral reformers who actively try to rehabilitate Chinese society and restore an ideal moral order from the past. Because of the presence of the preachers, the availability of Buddhist literature, and the fellowship of like-minded practitioners, the outer courtyard is a space where practitioners experiencing moral breakdown can gain access to the ethical tools to resolve their moral breakdowns and the social validation necessary to believe in their new moral roles.

In focusing on the outer courtyard of one particular temple as an arena in which certain contemporary Chinese citizens try to fashion themselves into new moral persons, this book takes a point of departure from many studies of contemporary Buddhism both in China and elsewhere. Generally speaking, studies of contemporary Buddhists have either focused on a field of Buddhist practice in a particular region, such as a city or country, or provided an intensive examination of individual Buddhist-themed movements. Examples of field-based studies include Rocha's (2005) study of Zen practices in contemporary Brazil, LeVine and Gellner's (2005) survey of the spread of Theravada Buddhism in Nepal, Covell's (2006) survey of temple Buddhism in contemporary Japan, and, in the Chinese context, Alison Jones's (2010) study of lay Buddhist practices in Nanjing. The advantage of a field-based approach is that it illuminates the differences, often significant, that characterize different practitioners who label themselves as Buddhist. However, this approach also makes it difficult to do justice to one particular arena of Buddhist practice.[9] For this reason, I focus my present study on the moral dimensions of contemporary Chinese lay Buddhist practice; I have given less consideration to other, perhaps more prominent, aspects of lay Buddhism in China today such as devotional practices. I have done so because I believe that

concentrating on the moral dimensions of lay Buddhist practice in China today illuminates important ways in which persons experiencing rapid cultural change in a globalizing world are attracted to Buddhist teachings and practices.

However, by no means am I suggesting that the Buddhists I discuss in this study represent a phenomenon that is confined to a single temple courtyard in Beijing. Rather, as I discuss in the book's later chapters, the practitioners who gather in the outer courtyard of the Temple of Universal Rescue are connected in discursive networks with practitioners in other parts of Beijing and China. In this respect, my study is similar to analyses of Buddhist organizations and movements like the Benevolence Compassion (Tzu Chi) movement (Huang 2009), the Foguang Buddhist Order (Chandler 2004), or the Santi Asoke movement in Thailand (Essen 2005). However, for both political and economic reasons, the lay Buddhists in this study lack the institutional structures, organizational capacities, and modern patterns of bureaucracy of these other Buddhist movements, yet they still represent a social force that is likely to increase in influence.

The use of Buddhist teachings to craft identities in opposition to social norms is not unique in Chinese history. In the next section, I contextualize the courtyard groups historically and show how they reflect trends in the modern development of Chinese Buddhism, though in a very different way from well-known Buddhist modernists of the early twentieth century.

HISTORICAL CONTEXTS OF LAY BUDDHIST IDENTITY

Nonmonastic forms of Buddhist practice among Han Chinese took two divergent paths in Chinese history: one, on which anthropologists have most often focused (Jordan 1972, 27–31; Baity 1975; Cohen 1985; Watson 1985; Sangren 1987; Weller 1987; Kang 2009), featured the worship of Buddhist deities such as Śākyamuni (the historical Buddha, Shijiamouni) and the bodhisattva Guanyin within a popular religious pantheon. These worshippers would have recruited Buddhist clergy as one of many types of ritual specialists in local religious life, often responsible for presiding over funerals. Buddhist moral teachings on karmic retribution and the importance of earning merit had become widespread by the Tang dynasty (618–907) (Teiser 1988, 12). Scriptures such as the *Ghost Festival Sūtra* (*Yu lan pen jing*), whose protagonist Mulian travels to hell to rescue his mother, popularized Buddhism by situating Buddhist teachings within traditional Chinese values of filial piety (Teiser 1988, 208–224; Cole 1998). Though the worship of Buddhist deities, the observance of special days like the Hungry

Ghost Festival, and the following of Buddhist-inspired moral systems may have been very important to worshippers within popular religious traditions, those worshippers would usually not have considered themselves exclusive adherents to a Buddhist-centered religiosity; indeed, to them, making a categorical distinction of this sort would not have made much sense.

Another pathway of lay Buddhist practice was less widespread, more sectarian, and more often involved an intensified and more exclusive commitment to the Buddhist path. As early as the fifth century, groups of Buddhist-centered lay practitioners gathered under the direction of monastics to write and copy sūtras for mass circulation (Liu 1995, 34–35), a direct antecedent to the copying and distribution activities of lay practitioners at the Temple of Universal Rescue today. During the Tang and Song (960–1279) dynasties, large groups of laypersons gathered to recite the name of Amitābha (Amituofo) to gain admission to his Paradise of Western Bliss (Xifang Jile Shijie; Overmyer 1976, 85; ter Haar 1992, 17; Amstutz 1998, 27–29; Getz 1999, 501–506). During these periods, Buddhist-centered lay adherents sometimes took five or more specific lay precepts, which included injunctions against killing, lying, stealing, drinking intoxicants, or engaging in extramarital affairs (Liu 1995, 43; Getz 1999, 498; ter Haar 2001, 142). While participants in these groups would not have labeled themselves as Buddhists in the modern sense of the term, some distinguished themselves from other persons of the time through an intensified observance of what ter Haar refers to as "Buddhist-inspired" religious practices such as full-time vegetarianism or the substitution or addition of Buddhist-themed characters into their names (Naquin 1985, 260; ter Haar 1992, 39; 2001, 133–136). Also during this period, voluntary lay Buddhist groups emerged, most prominently under the label of White Lotus Society (Bailian She), whose members would participate in devotional activities to Amitābha, reprint and distribute sūtras, and sometimes live together in cloisters. They also engaged in charitable activities such as building roads, giving alms to the poor, and caring for the sick (ter Haar 1992, 16–113; Gernet 1995, 216; Hubbard 2000, 166–173).[10] Like the Buddhist lay groups who gather at the Temple of Universal Rescue, the White Lotus and other lay Buddhist groups throughout the imperial period often appealed to those who sought social fellowship and religious meaning outside of the family and the state, including women and others with marginalized positions within mainstream Chinese society (Amstutz 1998, 39; Zhou 2003).

By the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), a revival of Confucianism and its influence on the shaping of the moral system of the literati class resulted in the social and political marginalization of many lay Buddhist groups, particularly those

with less affluent participants (Welch 1968, 73; ter Haar 1992, 200; Amstutz 1998, 39). The authorities increasingly regarded these groups with suspicion, fearing that they held values and practices that could be disruptive to a Confucian-defined patriarchal social order (ter Haar 1992, 112–113). For much of the Ming and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, they were subject to occasional official harassment and censure and became less active in social welfare activities, although their religious activities remained robust (ter Haar 1992, 207; Amstutz 1998, 41). By the late nineteenth century, however, modernist critiques of the Confucian order and a reduction in the policing of religious groups by weakened authorities led to the renewed public presence of Buddhist-inspired religiosity by members of all social classes (Tiedemann 1996, 344; Welch 1968, 73–74). An increase in the ranks of these groups was also facilitated by an expansion of literacy in urban areas and the mass printing of Buddhist scriptures. This modern community of worshippers identified themselves as "believers in Buddhism" (*fojiao tu*; Welch 1967, 357–358; Tarocco 2008). Like their historical counterparts, they also advocated a vegetarian lifestyle, participated in organized sūtra recitation, "life rescue" (*fangsheng*) activities (where animals sold for food in the market were purchased and set free), and organized societies for lay Buddhist practice. Many of them formally converted to Buddhism by "taking the refuges" (*guiyi sanbao*) and also made vows to uphold the five lay precepts (Welch 1967, 357–393). They took on pivotal roles in the creation of Buddhist societies independent of the daily activities of monastics in temples, including the circulation of Buddhist literature and media and the establishment of Buddhist schools and lay associations (Welch 1968; Tarocco 2008).

An important influence on Buddhist practices in the modern period has been the role of the state and intellectual reformers in privileging a discrete category of Buddhism as one of several modern religions that, contrary to the traditional Chinese worldview, are incommensurable with others (Goossaert 2008b; Ashiwa 2009). Reformers and the authorities have often labeled forms of religiosity that fall outside of these religious categories, which include much of China's folk religious tradition, as superstition. Beginning from the late nineteenth century and more aggressively following the establishment of the Republic of China (1912–1949) and the subsequent People's Republic (1949–), religiosities that found themselves labeled as superstitious were subject to periodic campaigns of eradication (Duara 1991; Goossaert 2006). In the early period of the People's Republic, when Mao was chairman of the Communist Party (1949–1976), these campaigns of eradication intensified and began to encompass not only folk religious practices but also well-established religious institutions. In the present post-Mao era, the

state, through policies known as "reform and opening up" (*gaige kaifang*), has relinquished control over certain areas of economic and social life, including the practice of religion. As a result, Buddhist practices have revived in the post-Mao period and self-identified lay Buddhists have reemerged in both rural and urban settings, also under the names of *fojiao tu, jushi,*[11] or "disciples of the Buddha" (*fo dizi*; Wu 2009). Like lay Buddhists in earlier times, many (but not all) of these lay Buddhists have formally taken the refuges and obtained conversion certificates (*guiyi zheng*) that formalize their status as laypersons in the eyes of the Buddhist Association and, by extension, the state.[12] Some have also taken the five lay precepts and others have taken the more advanced twenty-five bodhisattva precepts.[13] All abstain from eating meat on the days of the Dharma Assemblies; many are full-time vegetarians.[14]

In spite of its tolerance of religion relative to the Maoist period, the post-Mao state shares with the Republican and early Maoist regimes a privileging of institutionalized religious forms and a suspicion of popular and spontaneous forms of religiosity; this privileging is most apparent in urban areas, particularly in Beijing where those who practice religion in public are legally able to do so only in sites that are affiliated with one of five discrete religions.[15] This means that religious practitioners in Beijing today are more likely to be drawn to exclusive adherence to a particular religious tradition than would have been the case in the past when a wide variety of folk religious temples dotted the city's landscape (Naquin 2000). It also means that, while they share many patterns of belief and practice that mark them as unique in ways similar to their historical counterparts—such as the taking of specific vows and the maintenance of an exclusively vegetarian diet—lay Buddhists in Beijing today are more formally marked in that they self-consciously take on a specific social identity, that of a follower of Buddhism or disciple of the Buddha, that others in society do not. Thus what, in imperial times, would have been a difference in the *degree* to which one committed to religious practices based on widely shared ideas of karmic retribution is, in the modern—and particularly in the communist—period a difference in *type*, where one chooses to be a committed religious practitioner in a city where most people lack formal religious affiliation and are heavily influenced by secular and atheistic ideas. For many of the practitioners who gather in the outer courtyard of the Temple of Universal Rescue who already feel themselves estranged from mainstream society by economic and cultural changes, choosing to formally become a *jushi, fo dizi,* or *fojiao tu* is a mark of personal pride and, at least among themselves, a means of establishing moral superiority.

THE OTHER BUDDHIST MODERNITY

As part of Buddhism's self-conscious adaptation to the state's requirements for a modern religion in the early Republican period, reformers such as the Ven. Taixu (1890–1947) arose from within the Buddhist tradition to advocate major changes to Buddhist institutions and the orientations of both lay and monastic practitioners. Some of Taixu's views are reflected in the discourses and practices of twenty-first-century practitioners in the outer courtyard of the Temple of Universal Rescue. For instance, in Taixu's concept of "Buddhism for human life" (*renjian fojiao*), he advocated that practitioners focus on the cultivation of Buddhist ideals like universal compassion and egalitarianism to morally remake both the Chinese nation and the world as opposed to directing their practices toward the dead and their passage to a subsequent rebirth (Pittman 2001, 157–158). Like the participants in the courtyard groups, he also viewed the world as being in the period of the latter days of the Dharma and believed that its moral quality could be revived if those living through this period would embrace the bodhisattva ideal and act in the world with compassion toward others (Müller 2007, 48–49).

Recent studies of Buddhism in contemporary China have discussed how figures like Taixu have a strong influence on Buddhism in present-day China, most notably in terms of monastic organization and education (Birnbaum 2003, 438–442; Wank 2009, 128). Taixu was also well known to monastic leaders at the Temple of Universal Rescue and, according to them, influenced them to downplay their traditional role in officiating funerals in favor of providing moral guidance to lay practitioners for problems in their present-day lives and, more recently, to engage in charitable activities. Nevertheless, I suggest that modern Buddhist reformers like Taixu have little influence on lay-based practices at the Temple of Universal Rescue and among Chinese lay Buddhists more generally. None of the laypersons I studied had heard of Taixu and I never once have seen any of the writings he authored among the materials available to laypersons at the Temple of Universal Rescue or any other temple in China. More generally, I suggest that the lay practitioners' interests in moral reform and the role of Buddhism in the making of a Chinese nation stem not from a direct influence from Republican-era to post-Maoist-era Buddhists, but from related experiences of Chinese modernity. Modern ideas of nation building have influenced both the Buddhist reformers of the Republican period and present-day lay Buddhists because both experienced the state's projects to influence them to transcend their particularistic loyalties and advance the interests of a Chinese nation. In Taixu's era, this process was just beginning, and he shared with other non-Buddhist

intellectual reformers of his time an interest in the utopian remaking of Chinese society. The participants in the preacher circles and discussion groups, by contrast, have already experienced the full force of the Maoist state's efforts to implement a utopian egalitarian society. As part of these efforts, the Maoist-era state aimed to create in its ordinary citizens wholly new subjectivities through which the self was conceived through its ability to assiduously engage in the building of the nation and, by extension, a socialist world. To accomplish this, it organized an ongoing series of mass political campaigns whose aim was to mobilize ordinary citizens to connect their everyday lives and struggles within an epochal battle in which the masses (who were always spoken for through the state) strove to overthrow the facilitators of their oppression (represented variously by landlords, bosses, and corrupt cadres) and work to further the building of a socialist future. Two of the major ways that the state carried out these campaigns was through mass rallies, where leaders used the emotional energy of a large crowd to stir up support for its projects, and the formation of small study groups whose participants were charged with analyzing how their own lives fit into the state's utopian agendas (Whyte 1974). Small-group participants were taught that their everyday actions, however seemingly small and unimportant, played a part in the struggle to create that utopia. An unskilled worker in a state-owned factory would learn that his laziness and tardiness were hurting the revolution; at the same time, however, his diligence and industriousness in even the most seemingly menial and unimportant job helped to serve the people.

The state's projects to transform the subjectivities of the Chinese people amounted to a series of politically orchestrated examples of what Zigon would refer to as moral breakdowns: they were designed to disorient and dislocate the people from their social roles and identities within traditional Chinese society and re-orient them to new forms of moral personhood (X. Liu 2009, 168–169). For many Chinese living in the post-Mao period, the transition from Maoist to post-Mao China has involved equal, if not more intense, moral breakdowns. In this occasion, the moral breakdowns are not engineered by the state but are a by-product of its policies: the substitution of any active or credible attempt to re-create revolutionary citizens with a loosely articulated ethic of advancing the nation by looking for ways to increase individual wealth and consumption has created a bewildering loss of direction for many Chinese, especially those who were emotionally committed to the revolution. For the practitioners at the Temple of Universal Rescue, the search to resolve these moral breakdowns has led to Buddhism. For some, Buddhism is appealing because it enables them to continue the revolutionary project that was abandoned by the post-Mao state: that of cre-

ating selves with moral missions to look beyond their own needs or the needs of their immediate circle of family and friends and engage in the building of a morally upright nation and world. For many monastic leaders in contemporary China, who experienced persecution during the Maoist era, the Maoist past is something best forgotten and so it is not surprising that many have returned to Republican-era figures like Taixu as models for a twenty-first-century Buddhist modernity (see also Fisher 2008, 164). However, most of the lay practitioners who gather in the outer courtyard of the Temple of Universal Rescue are new converts to Buddhism and did not experience the persecution of their religious practices by the state. For them, Buddhist teachings on the importance of egalitarianism, the interdependent relationship between self and others, and the importance of one's mission to rescue other beings from suffering often seem like repackaged versions of Maoist-era moral ideals. This perceived connection between Buddhist and Maoist moral teachings makes more sense when one takes into account that, as many scholars have argued, Maoism focused increasingly on the utopian belief, itself inspired by neo-Confucian and Buddhist thought in Chinese history, that the material conditions of society could be transformed by a change in the spiritual and ideological orientations of the people (Nivison 1956; Meisner 1982, 198; Goossaert and Palmer 2011, 168–169).

Even for those practitioners who are critical of Maoist teachings, the idea that resolving moral breakdown involves making a larger connection between the self and the world around it often resonates. Moreover, influenced by the experience of resolving state-manufactured moral breakdowns in the very public arenas of mass campaigns and small groups, many of the participants in the preacher circles and discussion groups have created a similar public social environment to engage in their own projects of ethical self-making. In the environment of the outer courtyard, they can be whipped up into an emotional frenzy by a charismatic preacher, or through small-group discussions educate themselves and others on how to orient their everyday lives to participation in a greater moral cause.

Just as the moral projects of the courtyard participants follow a different trajectory of modernity from Republican-era Buddhist thinkers, so, too, do they function in a very different type of social environment. Large Taiwanese Buddhist associations like the Foguang Buddhist Order and Tzu Chi are highly rationalized, bureaucratic organizations where monastics and laypersons take on regimented and compartmentalized roles within an organized hierarchy (Jones 1999, 191–193; Huang 2009). The same is true of the mainland Chinese sangha, where monks and nuns are trained in regional and national Buddhist academies

and are affiliated with regional and national Buddhist associations rather than studying in discrete lineages surrounding particular masters as they would have in premodern times. Many of these new institutional models, such as the Buddhist academies, were originally conceived by Republican-era reformers like Taixu (Birnbaum 2003, 436). Although it exists within the headquarters temple of the national Buddhist Association, the outer courtyard is a vastly different sort of social and religious space from that represented by these modern Buddhist organizations: no central authority has control over the organization of the space or the content of the discourses that are formed there. In this respect, it also differs from communist-era mass rallies and small groups, which in spite of their emphasis on spontaneous outbursts and active participation, were highly coordinated by the state. In the preacher circles and discussion groups, the participants themselves act with their feet to decide which preachers are most worth listening to and which of a vast corpus of Buddhist teachings they will incorporate into their personal self-making projects. In many ways, in contrast to the rationalized modern Buddhist institutions of Taiwan and the modern clerical institutions of mainland China, the courtyard exists as a postmodern space whose participants take apart religious and political master narratives and then put them back together in ways that suit themselves.

FIELDWORK AND METHODOLOGY

I conducted the ethnographic research on which this project is based over twenty-seven months stretched out over ten years. This included a short period of preliminary research in 2001, an extended period of fieldwork from September 2002 to July 2004, and return visits in the summers of 2007, 2010, 2011, and 2012. I attended nearly every Dharma Assembly during these research periods. I observed and took notes on the content of the lay preachers' narratives and the interactions between their listeners and among the discussion group practitioners. I also interacted extensively with the groups and made the acquaintance of many of their participants. At times, particularly toward the end of a long afternoon when the circles had thinned and my language skills had warmed up to the occasion, I engaged with my interlocutors in dynamic discussions of religion, society, and politics that caused me to forget my status as an outsider. I also participated in other activities in the temple including a "lecture on the scriptures" class (*jiangjing ke*) that the temple monks held for two hours on Saturday and Sunday mornings. In exchange for their tolerance of my presence at the temple, I taught a free English class to the monks two nights per week in 2002 and 2003 during

which I was able to learn more about their everyday practices and participate in the life of the temple after it was closed to outside visitors.

My research began but did not end at the temple: the bulk of my time was spent traveling to the homes of practitioners whose acquaintance I had made during the Dharma Assemblies. Almost none of my interlocutors worked; most spent their days at home, engaged in the reading or recitation of Buddhist scriptures, and only occasionally visiting other friends (most of whom were Buddhist) and tending to family members (most of whom were not). I learned early on in my fieldwork that I should visit only one practitioner each day. The practitioners' domestic and religious duties rarely took up all of their time, and their idleness sometimes brought with it the unease that their lives were becoming meaningless. For this reason, most of them looked forward to filling their time with my visit and were usually disappointed if I left before dark. In the final year of my fieldwork, I took trips to Buddhist temples at cities in other parts of the country and conducted several weeks of participant observation at the Chongwenmen Christian church in Beijing to gain a further comparative perspective from which to understand the lives of Beijing lay Buddhists.

My relationship to my Buddhist research interlocutors was a complex affair: while I was concerned with understanding how they used Buddhist-inspired narratives to foster ethical self-transformation, they were mostly interested in proselytizing Buddhism. I will not pretend that these goals were always complementary. Few of my interlocutors respected my interest in conducting an anthropological analysis of Buddhist practices. Instead, they advised me to publish in English a translation of the doctrine they were dictating to me. In the relationships I developed with my interlocutors, I rarely lost sight of the fact that I was doubly other: other as a foreigner of non-Chinese descent and other as a non-Buddhist. This double otherness presented both challenges and opportunities. My otherness as a foreigner was less remarkable for my presence in Beijing, where foreigners have become a familiar sight, than in Buddhist religious sites where foreigners are still extremely rare. On the one hand, the curiosity that centered on my unusual personhood made it easier for me to form connections with my interlocutors, especially early in my fieldwork. On the other hand, it limited my access to certain people and places; it also made me noticeable to Chinese authorities concerned about the access of foreigners to the dirty laundry of their modernization policies. A more problematic otherness, however, was my status as a non-Buddhist. It was this otherness, far more than the otherness of my ethnicity or national origin, that caused the most distrust and suspicion among my interlocutors. It is also for this reason that so much time I spent with my interlocutors was

taken up with their determination to proselytize their faith to me. Some practitioners suggested that I had no hope of understanding anything about their religious experiences if I did not first become a Buddhist and believe as they did.[16] That the frustrations and contention created by my persistent failure to convert created far greater obstacles than my category as a foreigner provided me with a significant insight: the lay Buddhists I studied sought to define self and other more in terms of a translocal opposition between Buddhists and non-Buddhists than through relations of place and kinship, a contrast I explore more closely in chapter 3.

CHAPTER ORGANIZATION AND GOALS

The project of this book, which I develop throughout the subsequent chapters, is to outline both the moral visions developed by lay practitioners at the Temple of Universal Rescue and their struggles to live out these visions in ethical projects to make themselves into new persons. I have centered each chapter on a central trope or "key symbol" (Ortner 1973) in the practitioners' own description of their experiences and identities as Buddhists.

In the first two chapters, I situate the practitioners who participate in the preacher circles and discussion groups in relation to other temple-goers. As the chapters demonstrate, the temple-goers overall have diverse positions within contemporary Beijing society. Because of this, they also have very different reasons for coming to the temple. Sometimes these different temple-goers, while congregating in the same temple space, are simply ships that pass in the night with no particular relationship to one another. Others feel threatened by the presence of different groups and competing moral orders and are highly critical of the differences in one another's practice.

In chapter 1, "Chaos," I present a spatial analysis of the temple as a whole and the types of persons that gather within it. As the title suggests, far from taking refuge in the temple as a tranquil sanctuary where unsettling realities in their lives outside the Buddhist community can be set aside or forgotten, many temple-goers view the temple, and the outer courtyard in particular, as a chaotic venue full of competing ideologies and practices, a kind of Buddhist public sphere. Even for the participants in the preacher circles and discussion groups themselves, the flexibility of the courtyard is not always a blessing, as they are not always sure which of the many contradictory teachings that are presented there can help them to resolve their moral breakdowns. Furthermore, because both the preachers and their followers see themselves as articulating universal moral orders, they

are often dismayed to find that the views of others do not coincide with their own. As such, they often portray the eclectic nature of the courtyard as symptomatic of moral disorder rather than the possibility of moral reform even as, paradoxically, they aim to use the space to work through the negative effects of that moral disorder in their own lives. In the second chapter, "Balance," I focus specifically on people who come to the Temple of Universal Rescue to resolve what they express as problems of imbalance (*bu pingheng*). Relating the notion of imbalance to moral breakdown, I compare the approaches of participants who endeavor to construct identities as moral reformers, who make up most of the practitioners who gather in the outer courtyard, with other practitioners who resolve their experiences of moral breakdown in different ways. I trace these different approaches to resolving breakdown and achieving balance to the varying subject positions of these temple-goers within Beijing society.

Having situated the moral reform groups in the outer courtyard in relation to the other temple-goers, I turn in the next three chapters to concentrate on an analysis of the new forms of morality and personhood that these reformers aim to develop through their self-making projects. Chapter 3 explores how practitioners use the concept of *foyuan,* a predestined or pre-fated bond with the Buddha and his teachings, to transform their identities from failed participants in a global capitalist system to chosen moral architects within an emergent religious order. Chapter 4 discusses how they use the Buddhist moral framework of cause and consequence (*yinguo*) to create forms of morally appropriate exchange that differ from the practice of gaining status through the cultivation of relationships (*guanxi*), which many of the practitioners believe has led Chinese in the post-Mao period into a downward spiral of corruption and greed. Chapter 5 explores how the practitioners aim to build these new forms of exchange through the sharing of free Buddhist media, an action that initiates a positive karmic link (*jieyuan*) between the recipient of the media and the Buddha's teachings and, by extension, the donor of the materials and the recipient. This chapter moves beyond the outer courtyard of the Temple of Universal Rescue to explore how its practitioners form rhizomatous links with fellow Buddhists in other parts of China. In this way, their efforts to resolve moral breakdown are linked to new forms of personhood validated by a pannational religious community.

In chapter 6, "Heart/Action," I examine in detail the teachings of the most organized and charismatic of the preacher circles that gathered in the courtyard from the late 1990s to the late 2000s. Through an analysis of its lead preacher's sermons and essays, I consider how the group cleverly juxtaposed Maoist and Buddhist themes in the making of persons for a post-Maoist order that they had

morally reimagined. I also explore how the members of the group attempted to carry out their message of "heart/action" in the form of social activism outside of the temple and the limitations they encountered in doing so. The concluding chapter continues this theme to explore both the potential and limitations of the lay practitioners at the Temple of Universal Rescue and their like-minded counterparts elsewhere in China not only to create an isolated moral world but also to influence the direction of a changing country or, to put it another way, to what extent they could be successful in their aims of moral reform.

Conclusion
Islands of Religiosity

In August 2011, I sat with Liu Mei in a small traditional dessert café near the Chongwenmen metro station in the heart of Beijing. The café was deserted except for ourselves, in contrast to crowded scenes at nearby branches of McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and Dairy Queen, which we had passed by in search of a quiet place to talk. I showed Liu the draft of the section I had written about her in chapter 2 on my laptop computer. An English major in college, Liu understood the gist of what I had written and agreed that I had correctly represented her moral uncertainties and dilemmas. But she stressed to me that I had described only herself from the previous year; she was very different now. From Liu's comments, I had the strong impression that she felt as though she was reading about another person in the narrative on my computer screen, a person who was very familiar but with whom she no longer completely identified.

Liu Mei's feeling of alienation from her previous year's self did not completely surprise me: even though only a year had passed since I had last seen her, I almost did not recognize Liu during our first of two meetings in 2011. She had grown her hair longer, wore makeup, and came to our meeting from work dressed in professional clothing, which contrasted sharply with her more casual college student attire from the previous year. Liu Mei's change in appearance was accompanied by a decidedly more confident attitude about herself and her position at work. I still found her a very thoughtful person, but she was no longer torn between what she saw as the obligations of her job in a publicity department, which she had reasoned might cause her to lie, and her moral obligation to society to tell the truth. She told me that now that she had actually started her job, she was confident that she was using her skill in writing to satisfy her superior's demands in a way that did not require her to lie. She was still uncertain about the moral quality of the people around her and still felt that being a good person in twenty-first-century Beijing presented challenges, but she was determined that she could meet these challenges by relying on herself (*kao ziji*), that is, by using her own knowledge, abilities, and, most crucially, her own moral compass. This was in contrast to the previous year, when she had hoped to rely on Buddhism in two respects. First, she had hoped to find that Buddhist teachings could be a resource

to her in resolving the moral breakdown created by a conflict between what she felt she ought to give to society and what she feared that society wanted from her. Second, she had hoped that spending time at the Temple of Universal Rescue and in the company of Master Mingyi could help her to develop into the sort of moral person she wanted to be. But once she had actually worked a year in her position, Liu Mei felt that she already possessed within herself the agency to act as the moral person she wanted to be in both her workplace and society at large.[1] Because of this, in the year between our two meetings, she had not been back to the Temple of Universal Rescue and had not thought much about Buddhist teachings.[2]

Liu Mei's journey contrasts significantly with those of many of the regular temple-goers at the Temple of Universal Rescue, particularly the participants in the preacher circles and discussion groups. Whereas most of its practitioners came to the outer courtyard having experienced a decline in their status within society at large, often due to a layoff or forced retirement, Liu Mei experienced the raising of her status from the time she first went to the temple in 2008 to the time of our meetings in 2011, after she had started her job. Unlike many of the courtyard practitioners, Liu Mei's earlier belief that she lacked the agency to understand and act as a moral person in Beijing society had stemmed from her young age and inexperience, and not because of a low class status. When I first met Liu, she was going through a prolonged period of ethical reflection that stemmed from the moral breakdown caused by her uncertainty as to how she could (and should) concretely act as a good person in what she, like many of the courtyard practitioners, saw as a morally troubled society. But after gaining experience, and transitioning from the status of student to professional worker, she began to see how she could resolve this moral breakdown on her own. This did not mean that she no longer continued to experience moral breakdowns altogether. Indeed, in our 2011 and later 2012 meetings, she often arrived with stories of ethical dilemmas in her workplace experiences, whether it was reconciling the demands of her superiors with what she felt to be appropriate assignments or dealing correctly with workplace gossip and rivalry. But in these later meetings, in contrast to our earlier conversations in 2010, Liu always expressed confidence in her ability to resolve these dilemmas without outside help.

Liu Mei's passage into and out of the Temple of Universal Rescue points to the temple's potential relevance within a liminal time in the lives of those who attend it when they can seek resources to resolve prolonged and difficult moral breakdowns and reintegrate into the larger, changing society around them. Yu Jiali also frequented the temple within a liminal time in her life (chapter 3): after

finding work as a ticket collector on a local bus route, Yu gained more confidence in her position within Beijing society and a stronger sense of how to act as a good person. Like Liu Mei, she then went to the temple much less often, and not merely because she was busy. However, as I have argued throughout the book, it was only an exceptional few temple-goers such as Liu Mei, Yu Jiali, and perhaps Song Li (chapter 6), who succeeded in reintegrating themselves as moral persons into society at large. In the case of Liu and Yu, it was mostly changes to their social status outside of the temple that enabled them to do so.[3] Their experiences of structural change within Beijing society lead many of the practitioners at the temple, particularly those within the preacher circles and discussion groups, to prolonged and psychologically undesirable moral breakdowns that are not easy or even possible to resolve. Many of these practitioners aim to resolve these prolonged breakdowns by combining Buddhist teachings with recycled elements from China's past modernization projects to take on new forms of personhood as moral reformers, which involve them in new forms of exchange within an imagined community of like-minded practitioners. As the habits of the literature distributors in chapter 5 reveal, while aspiring to reform Chinese and even global society as a whole, these practitioners usually carry out specific acts of moral reform by sharing their moral visions with other self-defined Buddhists or, at the furthest extent of their influence, with all those who enter Buddhist temples. As the case of lay activists within Teacher Zhang's Lotus Group shows most clearly, attempts at moral reform outside of the temple can risk forcing practitioners to confront the limits of their social agency and jeopardize their fragile identities as moral reformers. For these courtyard practitioners, the temple does not provide a temporary place to resolve their moral breakdowns and reintegrate into society, as it did for practitioners like Liu Mei, but rather a permanent social space where they can resolve moral breakdowns only if they remain in intensive social contact with other Buddhists like themselves.[4]

What is the future for these practitioners? Can they continue to resolve their moral breakdowns by taking on new forms of self and personhood within an imagined community of lay Buddhists? Will their social isolation prevent them from succeeding, even partially, in their efforts to morally reform their nation and world by influencing the social development of twenty-first-century China? In this conclusion, I address these questions through a consideration of the present and future prospects for Buddhism in China and specifically the sort of morally engaged Buddhism with which many of the practitioners in this study concern themselves. I use the framework of "islands of religiosity" to describe the state of Buddhism in China today, arguing that the sorts of moralizing discourses

discussed in this book are mostly confined to discrete religious environments such as temples. This confinement, which is largely the result of state policies on religion, keeps Buddhist-based morality from integrating into an urban Chinese public sphere. At the same time, however, it facilitates the creation of an environment where creative moral discourse making can continue to grow and even to slowly influence a greater number of Chinese people.

ISLANDS OF RELIGIOSITY

Prior to the sweeping social reforms that began in the late nineteenth century (Goossaert 2006) and took full force during the Republic of China and the present People's Republic, many of the different groups that one sees at the Temple of Universal Rescue today might have gathered in different places: devotees would have had a range of temples to attend, not all of them ostensibly Buddhist. Many of the preacher circles and discussion groups might have formed as different lay groups that met independently: some of these groups might have been considered orthodox Buddhist groups, like the Song- and Yuan-period White Lotus Society, while others—with a stronger emphasis on the problems of moral decline and the divide between a largely misguided populace and an elect with a special *foyuan*—might have fallen more into the category of what scholars have considered sectarian groups (see for instance Overmyer 1999, 4). However, in the eyes of the present-day post-Mao state, all of these different groups with their different approaches to religiosity and modernity fall under the single rubric of Buddhism provided that they all gather in officially approved Buddhist temples. While both the imperial state and the Maoist state concerned itself greatly with whether certain religious groups exhibited heterodox (*xie*) thought and behavior, the post-Mao state is largely unconcerned with micromanaging religious groups based on their thought and practice. In keeping with its modern character, its mode of categorizing religion is not theological or cosmological; rather it is spatial.

Certainly, as many empirical studies indicate (see for instance Dean 1993; Bruun 2003; Q. Liu 2009; Chu 2010, 171–216; Dean and Zheng 2010; Fisher 2011a; Sun 2011, 503–506; Smyer Yü 2012), religiosity in China today is rarely neatly contained within the spaces in which the state attempts to regulate it. Nevertheless, I suggest that, at least in urban China, and especially in a city like Beijing where the power of the central state is strong, religion remains mostly confined within isolated spaces that function as religious islands in a larger sea of secularism. As a result, Buddhism, along with many other forms of religion, re-

mains largely invisible within contemporary urban Chinese life. It becomes visible mostly when the state has a vested interest in making it so. In contemporary urban China, religion is allowed to become temporarily visible under three circumstances: (1) when it assists with economic development by attracting the funds of tourists or pilgrims, such as at the Temple of Divine Light in Beijing, where visitors to the Buddha tooth relic must pay a fee to enter a park surrounding the temple (Fisher 2011a, 520; see also Weller and Sun 2010, 37–40; Ji 2011a, 40–45); (2) when it fills a gap in the state's provision of social services by assisting in charitable activities, like the Temple of Universal Rescue's sponsorship of the Hongci Elementary School (see also Laliberté 2009, 2012); and (3) when it assists with state diplomatic agendas through events like the World Buddhist Forum, in which China promotes its international image by inviting Buddhist leaders from other countries and exposing them to propaganda justifying its political maneuvers on both the domestic and international stage (Ji 2011a, 43–44).

When religion seeps out of the spaces within which the post-Mao state confines it in ways that the state does not approve, then it is potentially subject to censure. The most striking example of this censure is the fate of the Falun Gong spiritual movement, a qigong-based movement that combined body cultivation practices with commentary on the moral ills of present-day Chinese society and the decline of human morality throughout the earth. Following the reaction of group members to critical articles in the state-run media that culminated in the group's demonstration outside Zhongnanhai, Falun Gong was officially banned and then brutally suppressed (Palmer 2007, 219–277; Ownby 2008). Privately established Jingkong temples devoted to the moral cultivation of their members through Pure Land teachings have also experienced run-ins with authorities because of their unregistered status (Sun 2010, 102–104). Many unregistered Christian groups have encountered resistance from the state when their activities have become too extensive and visible, as seen most clearly in the Beijing authorities' restrictions on the worship services of the Shouwang church in Beijing in 2010 and 2011 (Vala n.d.).

In curtailing the activities of these groups, the present state has occasionally used labels similar to those of imperial-era authorities. For instance, it labeled Falun Gong as a heterodox teaching (*xiejiao;* Palmer 2007, 279). However, this was only after Falun Gong had challenged the state's right to administer the group and control the spread of its discourses within the public sphere (Palmer 2007, 266–277). As the example of the PSB officers who showed no interest in breaking up preacher circles at the Temple of Universal Rescue most clearly

illustrates (chapter 1), the state has little appetite for banning discourses and publications within legal religious sites, regardless of their content. Nor are they concerned with the circulation of those publications and discourses between officially approved religious sites, as in the case of the distribution of religious media discussed in chapter 5. This is the case even when the content of the distributed media has not been officially approved by the authorities of the temples in which it is circulated, let alone by umbrella organizations like the Buddhist Association of China. Groups such as the temple monks or lay volunteers may be concerned about controlling who circulates what religious materials and discourses within their own site (or at least about the appearance of control over that circulation), but outside authorities show little interest provided that the circulation only occurs within that site or between that site and other authorized religious spaces.

However, not all Buddhist religious activities occur within the official, legal spaces to which the state confines them. Research into the spread of Tibetan Buddhism among urban Han Chinese shows how many lay-centered Buddhist groups gather outside of official temple spaces in locations such as private homes, businesses, and vegetarian restaurants (Jones 2010; Smyer Yü 2012). While the lay Buddhists I studied had little computer know-how and little money to purchase access to the Internet, Smyer Yü and Jones show how some Buddhists, particularly those in the middle class, maintain an active and largely unrestricted presence online. Jones (2010, 195–197) also discusses how informal groups of Buddhists in Nanjing meet online and then gather in real life to conduct visits to Buddhist sites and engage in life rescue activities. Smyer Yü (2012, 99–100) discusses how Tibetan Buddhist-based gatherings in Shanghai (with varying levels of authenticity) attract Han Chinese pilgrims by advertising on Buddhist websites. In Beijing, in 2011 and 2012, I also encountered groups of Tibetan Buddhist converts largely unconnected to brick-and-mortar temples who used e-mail and text messaging to advertise life rescue events. By the end of the 2000s, the content of most of the morality texts that I collected at temples had been posted online (even though all of my interlocutors acquired it from print copies distributed at the temples).

Informal gatherings of like-minded practitioners both online and face-to-face are not the only examples of Buddhists meeting outside of approved religious sites. Both lay preachers and monastics have taken to traveling around China to speak to large gatherings of students in vegetarian restaurants, hotels, rented temple spaces, and even in private residences given over for the sole use of

these teachers. As discussed in chapter 6, Teacher Zhang eventually left the Temple of Universal Rescue to take on this role of an itinerant preacher. The lay teacher at the Jilin Buddha Hall (mentioned in chapters 2 and 5) frequently travels to other cities delivering lectures that stress both how to secure rebirth in the Paradise of Western Bliss and how to act as a good person in the family and in society. When I first met her in Beijing, she spoke on the second floor of a teahouse whose owners allowed her the space rent free and did not charge her listeners anything to enter. In 2010, the lay practitioner Wang Xuan, who was originally a student of Teacher Zhang's, had become the follower of a Taiwanese-based monk who frequently lectured on the mainland. After hearing his initial lectures, she and several dozen other local laypersons formed small groups of four to five persons who would meet regularly to discuss the master's teachings in their homes. In 2012, Wang told me that a wealthy student of the master's had established a site for religious practice (*daochang*) on the outskirts of Beijing that took up two entire floors in a residential apartment building. In addition to housing the master when he visited Beijing, the worship hall was used to hold classes to teach interested practitioners how to meditate, how to cook vegetarian food, and other skills. Huang (2012) has also studied Taiwanese entrepreneurs in Shanghai who, as members of the Tzu Chi movement, conduct religious activities in their businesses.

None of these nontemple venues are registered as approved religious sites and, except for the small gatherings that take place in practitioners' private homes, all of them are technically illegal. While the Buddhists who practice in these sites are able to continue their activities without much interference from the state, they cannot draw attention to themselves, which would include seeking to generate outside interest in their activities, or else risk suffering the fate of the Falun Gong or the Shouwang church. The Taiwan master's group was particularly secretive and would not allow me to visit their site at all, although I attended one of their smaller study groups. The smaller, informal groups begin as groups of friends and then expand by word of mouth. Larger groups advertise mostly among other known Buddhist groups. Registered Buddhist temples are frequently the setting for this sort of advertising, most particularly the outer courtyard of the Temple of Universal Rescue as an open and unregulated space: students of the Jilin preacher handed out copies of her DVDs to interested listeners in the courtyard and encouraged them to visit the Buddha Hall; the Taiwanese master generated his local following by originally speaking at another Beijing-area temple; followers of a Tibetan master who was visiting Beijing in July 2012 stood at the front entrance

to the Temple of Universal Rescue handing out fliers on his visit and even attached them to the windshield wipers of the temple's cars that were parked in the courtyard.

However, in spite of their high level of activity and easy mobility, because they can only promote themselves within existing Buddhist communities, I suggest that these non-temple-based Buddhist practices are also examples of islands of religiosity. They remain isolated from urban Chinese society at large in the same way that approved temple spaces do. Like the moralizing discourses that are spread within approved religious sites, those that are spread at nonapproved sites are officially tolerated only so long as they do not become noticeable to society at large. Even Internet-based Buddhists remain isolated: while their content is not password protected and is therefore available to anyone online, in practice only those with prior contacts within the Buddhist community would be able to easily find them; rarely do their organizations attempt to solicit interest in their content outside of Buddhist circles. In many ways, they are even less accessible to the general public than brick-and-mortar temples, which are highly visible spaces. In sum, non-temple-based Buddhisms, including those that concern themselves with moral questions, add to the number of spaces, both virtual and real, where people can engage with Buddhist teachings and create a Buddhist community, but they do not function to further integrate Buddhism into mainstream urban Chinese society any more than registered temples do, let alone as spaces where Buddhist teachings can be used to morally reform that society. In this way, they remain within the state's administrative structure of a spatial regulation of religion even though the spaces they occupy are not those specifically designated for them by the state. It is for this reason, I suggest, that the state seems largely unconcerned about the gathering of these unauthorized Buddhist groups or the content of the discourses that they foster within their sites.

This control of Buddhist movements represents the main distinction between groups like those that convene in the outer courtyard of the Temple of Universal Rescue, who constitute a social force that espouses a particular set of moral visions for society, and Buddhist movements operating in other countries and regions, many of which have similar moral visions, but are engaged more actively in making those visions part of national or even international public discourse. Examples of these groups include the Sarvodaya movement in Sri Lanka, dedicated to village-level social improvement, which, like many of the courtyard practitioners, sees structural inequalities as the root of social problems (Bond 2004, 2); the Santi Asoke movement in Thailand, which engages in regular demonstration and outreach seminars to educate the public on the evils of consumption and the

dangers of environmental imbalance (Essen 2005); the "tree consecration" movement, also in Thailand, where monks have wrapped robes around trees to draw attention to the dangers of deforestation (Darlington 2012); and the organized resistance of Buddhist monks in Burma to the political and economic repression of the Burmese people, known by some as the Saffron Revolution (McCarthy 2008). In nearly all of these cases, there is also political resistance to the efforts of these movements to change public discourse,[5] yet their voices continue to be heard because, in each case, present or previous state regimes, as a result of their own planning or the force of tradition, have created a space for Buddhist moral discourses in the public sphere that prevents the present state or other powerful forces in their countries from eliminating these voices completely.[6] By contrast, in the mainland Chinese case, particularly in urban areas, decades-long efforts not merely to co-opt but also to comprehensively discredit religious ideas and institutions means that there is little on which Buddhists in China committed to moral reform can build to directly influence public debate.[7]

It could be argued that the courtyard groups are unable to engage in public acts to assert their moral views because of their own internal disagreements and general suspicion of the intentions of others, which makes them different from more active Chinese religious groups like Protestant Christians (chapter 4). While this is no doubt a significant factor in the difficulties of the courtyard groups and their like-minded counterparts throughout the country in carrying out their stated goals of moral reform, the realization that the state will not, in any case, permit their moral activism discourages practitioners from overcoming these differences and organizing themselves to influence public discourse. Moreover, it is their witness throughout their lifetimes of the failure of ordinary people like themselves to create social movements that foster moral and social change—from the Cultural Revolution to the Falun Gong—that often contributes to their suspicion and mistrust of organized groups in the first place.

Because of restrictions on the circulation of religious ideas in mainland China, non-Buddhists in China are less likely than their counterparts in other Asian countries to hear about problems of environmental degradation, the dangers of meat eating, or the religious dimensions of egalitarian socialism. This restriction means that one set of critical perspectives on the direction of China and the world is not being heard by those who do not interact within Chinese Buddhist religious sites, whether in brick-and-mortar or virtual settings. Moreover, the types of Buddhism that are most publicly visible and accessible—its colorful rituals, impressive temple architecture, and opportunities for transactional engagements with the sacred—are the least connected to the potential function

of its teachings as a moral critique of the direction that contemporary Chinese society is taking. However, I argue that it would be incorrect to suggest that the confining of Buddhism to particular spaces weakens the social impact of Buddhist moral teachings overall. On the contrary, though this is undoubtedly not the state's intent, it is the very isolation of Buddhist temple sites that enables them to function both as spaces of creative moral discourse and meaning making and as social spaces where marginalized people can resolve their moral breakdowns by taking on new identities and new forms of personhood in ways that would not be possible within the larger society that they seek to reform.

This is for two reasons. First, the confinement of Buddhism within islands of religiosity, especially those that form at highly visible temples like the Temple of Universal Rescue, focuses the circulation of Buddhist moral discourses within a small number of sites. Because free religious literature and media are not readily available elsewhere, practitioners who seek such materials must go to temple sites to acquire them. Moreover, because the number of registered temples in a city like Beijing is very small, the actual number of sites where these materials are available is also very small, much smaller than it would be in a city in Taiwan, for instance, where free religious materials are frequently available at a wide variety of sites but are more thinly spread over a larger area. In urban mainland China, both practitioners who wish to distribute these materials and practitioners who wish to collect them know that they must go to one of these few religious sites to distribute or to find them, usually on the days of the Dharma Assemblies. At the Temple of Universal Rescue, it is the shared reading and discussion of these materials, including those that the preachers distribute themselves, that often drives the conversations of the discussion groups and the sermons of the preachers. If there were fewer such materials because they were spread out over a greater number of both temple and nontemple sites, there might be fewer practitioners at each of these sites, and the discussions in the sites might be both less dynamic and less sufficiently diverse to attract practitioners with differing religious needs and perspectives. Even in temples where there are no preacher circles and discussion groups, the availability of a large amount of religious literature and media in a single location more easily connects practitioners with religious materials appropriate to their interests and like-minded practitioners with one another.

Second, the isolation of the practitioners' religious activities within specific religious sites enables those who gather in those sites to create discourses that are more independent of what are often the very different values of those in the world outside of these islands of religiosity. Because an important part of the religious identities of the courtyard practitioners at the Temple of Universal Rescue cen-

ters on their role as moral reformers, if given the political opportunity, they might seek to spread their moral visions as widely as possible to a non-Buddhist audience. This might include, as it does for Taiwan-based religious movements, leaving religious materials in nonreligious sites, or perhaps also preaching to audiences in public parks or at other nonreligious sites. Doing so might gain further converts but it would also subject those engaged in such proselytization to ridicule from a largely non-Buddhist public or force them to confront their economic difficulties in gathering resources to reach out to large numbers of people, especially when compared to well-financed overseas Buddhists like Jingkong, whose materials they frequently consume. These difficulties in turn might endanger the practitioners' projects to resolve their moral breakdowns by effectively taking on positive social roles as moral reformers. As practitioners within an isolated religious community, however, they are less forced to surround themselves with those who might expose limitations to their projects of religious person making. They can remain within a space where they can take refuge with those who are more likely to share a moral view similar to their own (even if it is not as often as they would like), whether for a short time, like Liu Mei, or for an indefinite period, like many of the participants in the preacher circles and discussion groups. They can also take comfort that, within the framework of their isolation, they are doing what they can to reform China and the world by taking actions such as spreading Buddhist-themed media within and between temple sites or, like the Lotus group, engaging mostly indirectly with those outside of the temple through actions like writing letters to newspaper editors.

In sum, cut off within these isolated communities, lay Buddhists who seek to speak and act about their own concepts of morality and moral reform lack sufficient means to spread their ideas within urban Chinese society at large, yet by consuming Buddhist-based media and gathering with like-minded practitioners in isolated religious sites, they are able to maintain a degree of critical distance from the influences of other dominant regimes of value in urban Chinese society that have arisen through China's increased integration into a global capitalist system. In this way, Buddhists such as those who gather in the outer courtyard of the Temple of Universal Rescue and also others who gather in their own informal groups outside of temple settings constitute a type of what Dean (1997), in his discussion of the ritual systems of the Xinghua region of Fujian in southeastern China, refers to as "disruptive communities," that is, communities that flexibly establish local conceptions of space, time, and relationality that interact with but are not subsumed by the advance of global capital or the nation-making projects of the Chinese state. Unlike some of the communities Dean studies,

however, who belong to temple networks that can provide them with concrete economic support as well as particular outlets for self-making, practitioners at the Temple of Universal Rescue can at best sustain fragile forms of personhood within an accepting religious community. They are often one serious health problem away from being exposed within the raw reality of their precarious positions at the margins of a global capitalist system. Yet until this happens, cultivating positive identities within an isolated, marginal religious community enables them to reject, at least for themselves, the social roles that mainstream urban Chinese society would fashion for them.

Moreover, although they remain isolated, the number and size of these disruptive Buddhist communities is growing. While the increasing commercialization of Buddhist temple spaces, such as the outer courtyard of the Temple of Universal Rescue, has eroded the availability of some sites for the spread and discussion of Buddhist morality, an increase in the return of temples to the sangha (Fisher 2008; Weller and Sun 2010; Sun 2011) combined with the expansion of Buddhist groups into nonapproved spaces, both virtual and real, is creating new arenas, some of which are being used for the popular development of Buddhist-themed moral discourses. Buddhists have also appropriated spaces intended for commercial use to spread their own moral discourses (Fisher 2011a). While Buddhists are unable to openly proselytize to a general public, they are nonetheless able to attract new followers through word of mouth among friends, relatives, and neighbors or by introducing those who come to temples as devotees or tourists to free religious literature or the moral content of charismatic sermons. While, as this study shows, lay Buddhist groups can provide particular resources for the marginalized, the research of Smyer Yü and Jones indicates that people from a variety of social classes are becoming interested in organized Buddhism, albeit in different ways and for different reasons. Some of these more affluent practitioners are able to use their economic power to provide venues and programs for less affluent fellow practitioners. Buddhists are also seeking to attract those beyond the traditional range of middle-aged and elderly practitioners to foster Buddhist moral discourses among the young: Master Mingyi's effort to engage the moral aspirations of a generation of young adults born after 1980 represents one example. Another example is summer camps organized by active monastics at Buddhist temples throughout China, which have sprouted up in large numbers since the late 2000s.[8] Targeted at children of middle and high school age, the operators of these camps aim to instill moral values such as filial piety, respect for others, and the importance of hard work and diligence.[9] While the organizers of the camps, like other Buddhist groups, cannot advertise them di-

rectly to the general public, they are able to reach out to the existing families of lay Buddhists or to other temple-goers by placing advertisements in the temples they administer. In these and other ways, while it may be difficult for preachers like Teacher Zhang to use Buddhist teachings to revive a Maoist modernization project that once aimed at mobilizing an entire nation to a set of moral goals, Buddhists in China today make up an increasing segment of a population that continues to grow more culturally diverse.

Notes

Introduction

1. The name Liu Yuzhen, along with all other names of my research interlocutors mentioned in this book, is fictitious. I have changed the names of my interlocutors in order to protect their identities.

2. Passing on spiritual advice to practitioners by providing insights into their past lives is a common Chinese religious practice and has been observed in contemporary times in spirit-writing groups in Taiwan (Jordan and Overmyer 1986, 127–128) and among Yiguandao groups in Singapore (Song 2011, 105), sometimes to influence the person hearing the story to pursue religious practice within a given sect. The practice is often called "stories of cause and consequence over three lifetimes" (*sanshi yinguo lun*). In this practice, religious experts provide clients with the description of their two previous lifetimes that the experts have divined through their superior spiritual insights. These descriptions explain the causes and conditions that have created their clients' present life circumstances. In Jordan's research, as in Miaozhen's account, the clients' gender in the previous lifetime is usually the opposite of their present gender. In his analysis of this phenomenon, Jordan observes that the telling of these narratives is intended not only to emphasize how the listeners are responsible for their present fates through their deeds from past lives but also to influence them to make more serious engagements with spiritual or moral practices that the specialists ascertain will enable them to take agency over their fate (Jordan and Overmyer 1986, 202–212). It is likely that Miaozhen hoped that her telling of Liu Yuzhen's past life would have a similar effect on her practice, though whether it did or not I do not know. While Jordan and Song found the telling of stories from past lives a common practice among the groups they researched, Miaozhen's definitive claim of insight into the past lives of her patients was rare among the Buddhists I studied in Beijing.

3. Zigon's (2010, 2011) two ethnographies center on the experiences of Russians who, like their Chinese counterparts, have experienced the effects of a rapid transition from a centrally planned state economy in a largely isolated society to a nation that is integrated within a global capitalist system with all of its accompanying cultural influences.

4. In this study, I refer to Buddhist laypersons as "lay practitioners," a translation of the Chinese term *zaijia xiuxing ren*. Generally speaking, I use the term "practitioner" to refer to all of those who have made a specific and exclusive commitment to Buddhism as a holistic moral and cosmological framework. Lay practitioners are those who have made this commitment but continue to live as householders (i.e., not as monastics). I also translate the term *jushi,* more commonly rendered as "householder," as "lay practitioner" since my interlocutors used this term to describe the same category of persons as *zaijia xiuxing ren* (see also ter Haar 1992, 60; Jones 2010). Recent Western language work on Chinese and Vietnamese Buddhism often uses the term "devotee" to describe all nonmonastic participants

in Buddhist activities (see Welch 1968; Birnbaum 2003; Ashiwa 2009; Soucy 2012). I use "devotee" to describe those who come to the temple only to make offerings or to enter into devotional relationships with buddhas and bodhisattvas who usually do not take on a religious identity as Buddhists. It is important to distinguish between devotees and lay practitioners, who have different roles and identities within urban Chinese religious life today.

5. The interpretation of the latter days of the Dharma that contemporary Chinese Buddhists most widely accept is close to the version developed by the Tiantai patriarch Nanyue Huisi (515–577) in the sixth century (Chappell 1980, 144). It was further developed and spread by the early Pure Land patriarchs Daochuo (562–645) and Shandao (613–681), among others (Chappell 1980, 123). It is part of a general theory of the decline of the Dharma that developed first in India and then spread to East Asia (Chappell 1980; Nattier 1991). The decline of the Dharma is based on the idea that as beings are further and further removed in time from hearing the Buddha's teachings directly, it is increasingly difficult for them to comprehend those teachings. This lack of comprehension affects not only their understanding of Buddhist concepts but also their ability to behave morally. Under Huisi's eschatological framework, there have been three periods of time since Śākyamuni first preached the Dharma: these are the period of true Dharma (*zheng fa*) that was accessible to practitioners closest to the time of Śākyamuni and lasted for the first five hundred years after his death and passage to parinirvāna; the period of the "semblance Dharma" or "imitation Dharma" (*xiang fa*), which lasted for the next thousand years; and, finally, the period of the "latter days of the Dharma," which is to last for another ten thousand years (Chappell 1980, 144). Many East Asian Buddhist thinkers have espoused the idea that, during this last period, special teachings are needed to guide beings to salvation (Marra 1988, 29–30; Hubbard 2000, 48). This idea is prominent in Pure Land (*jingtu*) teachings (Chappell 1980, 148; Marra 1988, 29–30; Nattier 1991, 138; Amstutz 1998, 27) and also features in the *Lotus Sūtra* (*Fahua jing;* Chappell 1980, 122; Stone 1985b, 45; Nattier 1991, 91–92). Both the *Lotus Sūtra* and Pure Land teachings are influential among lay practitioners who gather in the outer courtyard of the Temple of Universal Rescue.

6. Gatherings of preacher circles and discussion groups are not exclusive to the Temple of Universal Rescue but they are less common at other Buddhist temples in China. The Temple of Divine Light (Lingguang Si), on the outskirts of Beijing, occasionally features preachers (see Fisher 2011a, 521–522), most of whom are also regular preachers at the Temple of Universal Rescue. Outside of Beijing, I observed preacher circles and discussion groups at major temples in the northeastern Chinese cities of Harbin, Shenyang, and Changchun and discussion groups at temples in Tianjin, Shanghai, and Nanchang. In none of these locations are the weekly participants as numerous and well-organized as they are at the Temple of Universal Rescue. I found neither preacher circles nor discussion groups at temples in Nanjing and Guangzhou. The free distribution of Buddhist literature and multimedia materials is common at a large number of Buddhist temples in China (see Fisher 2011b).

7. In connecting the social and economic deprivation of many participants in the courtyard groups with their discussions on moral decline, I am not proposing that there is gener-

ally a direct correlation between socioeconomic status and perceptions of the moral well-being of contemporary Chinese society. Indeed, studies have shown that Chinese from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds have expressed concern about a moral decline or "spiritual crisis" (*jingshen weiji*), though not usually with reference to Buddhist notions of the latter days of the Dharma and not always with the opinion that the Maoist era was a morally superior time (Wang 2002; Yan 2009; Smyer Yü 2012). A good example of a strikingly different use of moral decline comes from Cao's (2011) study of Christian entrepreneurs in Wenzhou. While many of the Buddhist practitioners I studied had moved from having stable jobs with adequate health care to having no work, lower than average incomes, and precarious access to social services, the entrepreneurs in Cao's study had often gone from earning average incomes to gaining tremendous wealth in relatively short periods of time (Cao 2011, 24–30). Yet they, too, described the world around them as passing through a period of moral decline and aimed to take on for themselves roles as moral reformers by spreading values such as honesty, marital fidelity, and hard work (63–68). They used their identities as Christians carrying out God's plans to explain how they came to gain tremendous wealth in a new market economy while others had not (24–28). To employ Zigon's terminology to describe their situation, we could say that it was their wealth rather than their poverty that created a moral breakdown in these entrepreneurs, which they resolved by finding new social roles for themselves through Christian teachings.

8. The Chinese government's own statistical bureau reported that, between 1997 and 2001, 31 percent of all employees in state-run enterprises had been laid off (cited in Solinger 2006, 50). According to some estimates, the resulting layoffs left as many as 100 million workers unemployed (Croll 2006, 111) with, by many estimates, less than half finding any substantial form of new employment (Croll 2006, 113–114; Solinger 2006, 51). *Xiagang* literally means "off-post." The state defines *xiagang* workers as possessing the "three withouts" (*sanwu*): being (1) without a job assignment within one company, (2) without another assignment from the same company, and (3) without a job with any other company (Hung and Chiu 2003, 207). Other official categories of laid-off workers include those "put on a long vacation" (*fang changjia*) and "internal retirement" (*neitui;* Solinger 2009, 42). *Xiagang* workers are still formally connected to a work unit. The government labels those with no work unit and no work whatsoever as "without work" (*shiye;* Hurst 2009, 12). While accounts differ on the extent to which the employment situation has improved since these statistics were published, there is general agreement that very high urban employment persisted at least until the mid-2000s, coinciding with the heyday of the preacher circles and discussion groups at the Temple of Universal Rescue.

9. Studies that have focused on a particular dimension of Buddhist practice over a range of different temple sites include Samuels's (2010) study of the role of emotional ties between the laity and the sangha in Sri Lanka and Soucy's (2012) study of the gendered aspects of lay Buddhist practice in Vietnam.

10. The label White Lotus (*bailian*) was used to designate a variety of religious-type groups in different periods of China's imperial history. Ter Haar (1992, 111) argues persuasively that, up to the Song dynasty, White Lotus associations were respected lay

Buddhist groups with members from many different social classes who actively contributed to their wider communities. In the Ming and Qing periods, however, Confucian-inspired authorities started to look on Buddhist lay groups with suspicion and frequently used the term White Lotus to label a wide range of sectarian religious groups about which they were wary (ter Haar 1992, 166–172, 196–246).

11. Writing about Buddhist practice in the early part of the twentieth century, Welch (1967, 358) defines the term *jushi* to "include not only devout laymen who have taken the Refuges or Five Vows, but also those who are merely scholars and friends of Buddhism. Indeed, it can be loosely applied as a title of courtesy to anyone who has any interest in Buddhism whatever." The Buddhists I studied used the term to describe only committed laypersons who had formally taken the refuges. However, these committed laypersons form part of all social classes and are not merely those with high social status or influence.

12. I agree with Soucy (2012, 4) that defining oneself as a serious Buddhist practitioner in either China or Vietnam should not depend on having taken the lay precepts and that Welch somewhat overemphasizes the importance of this formal affiliation. I have met many committed Buddhist practitioners in China who have not taken the precepts either because they did not consider it important or because they took issue with the idea that they should have to take vows before a monastic to make spiritual progress along a Buddhist path. Some were also wary of formalizing their status as Buddhists in the eyes of the state. Nevertheless, the lay Buddhists I studied who considered themselves *jushi* considered it very important to distinguish between a minority who truly "believed in Buddhism" (*xin fo*), by which they usually meant only those practitioners like themselves who had made an exclusive commitment to Buddhist teachings, and the overwhelming majority of the population who either rejected Buddhist teachings altogether or who (in their view) mistakenly combined them with other "superstitious" beliefs and practices.

13. According to the Temple of Universal Rescue's internal figures from the late 2000s, 80 percent of those who take the refuges also take the five lay precepts. Approximately 10 percent go on to further take the twenty-five bodhisattva precepts. Most of those Buddhists I studied who took the bodhisattva precepts did so several years after taking the initial five precepts, a period of time they said they needed to better evolve in their practice.

14. It is important to note that what I have characterized as two pathways of Buddhist religiosity in China historically are not hard and fast types, but are better thought of as broad modalities of religious belief and practice. Certain persons might shift between one and the other throughout their lifetimes. Among those who have taken on more exclusive identities as Buddhist adherents, types of religious practice can also vary widely.

15. The five religions include Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, and Protestant and Catholic forms of Christianity.

16. The salience of this category of belief among Chinese Buddhists today is likely a modern invention influenced by Protestant Christian missionizing in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For more on this topic, see Wu (2009).

Chapter 1: Chaos

1. The Chinese calendar is based on lunar cycles. The full moon usually occurs on the night of the fifteenth day of the month. The holding of the major Dharma Assemblies on the first and fifteenth days of the lunar month follows a pattern of lay practice dating far back in Chinese history (see Naquin 1985, 261; 2000, 92; Overmyer 1976, 88).

2. The Buddha's birthday is held on the eighth day of the fourth lunar month, usually during May in the Western calendar. The conversion day of the bodhisattva Guanyin is held on the nineteenth day of the ninth lunar month, usually in October, and the Hungry Ghost Festival is held on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, usually in August.

3. Many temples in China charge entrance fees (see Fisher 2011a).

4. These rituals are usually held more frequently at most Buddhist temples in China and are often performed on demand at the request of ritual sponsors. Many are held in conjunction with the evening devotions. At the Bailin Chan Monastery (Bailin Chan Si) in southern Hebei Province where I conducted fieldwork in the summer of 2011, a ritual to placate deceased spirits is held during the majority of evening devotions. However, at the Temple of Universal Rescue, a ritual to placate deceased spirits is held during evening devotions only on very rare occasions and usually when the sponsor of the ritual has a prior relationship with one or more of the monks. This reflects the influence of Taixu's thinking on the monks who administer the temple, who feel that it is more appropriate to emphasize the scientific and philosophical dimensions of Buddhist thought rather than rituals.

5. A hungry ghost is a being that, owing to the bad karma it has earned, is reborn in a hell realm with a thin, narrow neck and an enlarged stomach. During the Feeding of the Flaming Mouths ritual, the Hungry Ghosts are called into the temple to hear the Dharma so that they can gain good karma and the time of their punishment can be reduced (see Teiser 1988).

6. An exception to this is the Feeding of the Flaming Mouths ritual, which is held in the Guanyin Hall immediately to the north of the Daxiong Hall.

7. As many of the monks and lay practitioners explained to me, female lay practitioners are supposed to stand on the left side of the altar, with male lay practitioners on the right. However, in practice, since women greatly outnumber men, a significant number of them also stand on the right. In general, the most committed and earliest arriving of the lay practitioners, who take up the first few rows behind the main altar, segregate themselves by sex. The later-arriving practitioners who populate the back rows must fit in wherever there is space and, as a result, they are not usually sex-segregated.

8. Soucy (2012, 45–48) makes a similar observation in his ethnography of the Quán Sứ Pagoda in Vietnam, which, like the Temple of Universal Rescue for China, is also the headquarters temple of the national Buddhist association (11).

9. For a related discussion of the differences between sūtra chanters and devotees and the relationship between advancing age and intensified Buddhist practice in contemporary urban Vietnam, see Soucy (2012, 118–122). Near the conclusion of the ritual, the sūtra chanters recite a vow to transfer the merit they have gained from their chanting to other

sentient beings. Most generally believe, however, that this does not really mean they have not gained merit themselves through their participation in the chanting: some believe that the merit they have given to others will still also accrue to them, which is plausible to them since they do not tend to see the gaining of merit as a zero-sum game. Others believe that their willingness to selflessly transfer their merit to others is in itself an action that provides them with merit that is technically different, but no less important, than the merit they have given away. None of my interlocutors believed that participation in the sūtra chanting provided no gains in merit for its participants.

10. In my observation, the Temple of Universal Rescue receives far fewer tourists than many other area temples such as the nearby White Dagoba Temple (Baita Si) and the Temple of Divine Light. However, it is likely that the number of tourist visitors at the Temple of Universal Rescue was much higher during the Olympic Games. For the most part, however, tourists have very little impact on religious practice at the temple.

11. The bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha is dedicated to relieving the suffering of beings that have been reborn in hell and helping them to achieve a more favorable rebirth.

12. Since there was a high degree of turnover in the groups with, I would estimate, about half of the participants being semiregular or irregular participants, the total number of participants in the courtyard groups on an annual basis probably numbered well into the thousands.

13. Overmyer (1976, 85–88) shows how certain active monks as far back as the fifth century began preaching to a lay audience that focused on chanting the name of Amitābha Buddha in order to gain salvation in his Paradise of Western Bliss. By the Tang, monks delivered popular lectures (*sujiang*) to lay audiences during special taboo periods, when killing was prohibited, sometimes for a fee or to encourage donations (Weinstein 1987, 116). Itinerant lay preachers and the sectarian groups they sometimes led were common during periods like the late Ming and late Qing, which share with the contemporary period significant changes in economic conditions and social roles (ter Haar 1992, 197–198; Gaustad 2000, 19). Like their contemporary counterparts, these lay preachers stressed everyday morality and the need for moral reform and sometimes made use of miracle stories to establish their legitimacy (ter Haar 1992, 142–144). Well-known lay preacher–leaders such as Luo Qing (1443–1527) and Lin Zhao'en (1517–1598) established religious traditions by traveling around to preach and gain followers and, like lay preachers at the Temple of Universal Rescue today, distributing their own religious literature (Dean 1998, 64–136; Overmyer 1999, 91–94). Naquin (2000, 219) writes about lay preachers who lectured on political topics at Beijing temples in the late Ming dynasty, and Brook (1993, 117–118) recounts how Neo-Confucian scholars used the spaces of temples to lecture to their students in the same period. In his travels around Asia in the 1920s, the Christian missionary Pratt (1928, 346) describes meeting a Buddhist lay practitioner who lectured at the Temple of Universal Rescue to a group of interested followers.

14. Welch (1967, 10–16) discusses how, during the early twentieth century, wandering monks and nuns would commonly find accommodation within temples in the places they had visited. In my journeys to temples in rural areas, I found that this remains a common practice. This is not the case in urban areas, however, and monks who visit the temple's

guest office without prior connection nearly always find themselves turned away for lack of available beds. For this reason, it is common for these wandering monks to seek accommodation in the homes of lay practitioners.

15. On a few occasions, wandering monks solicited donations in the courtyard for what they claimed were temple-building projects (Fisher 2008, 149), although these monks did not share their accounting practices like the lay preacher did, relying on the prestige that came from their clerical status to persuade potential donors that their intentions were sincere. On only one occasion did I see a monk accept payment for himself personally: on August 14, 2011, a wandering monk claimed to have mastered a form of qigong that enabled him to cure physical ailments. He emitted qi (*faqi*) by moving his right hand over the back and neck of two practitioners who were experiencing discomfort in those areas. He also dispensed advice to two people (one male and one female) who complained of (separate) marital problems. A practitioner who claimed that he had been cured by the monk the previous week offered him a ¥100 note, which the monk accepted. I have never once seen a lay preacher accept a donation. However, it is lay preachers and not monks who are nearly always the subject of accusations.

16. Goossaert (2008a, 17–18) points to a tradition in modern China of lay religious leaders whose subject positions closely parallel what I have shown here. These lay leaders achieve moral status by patronizing religious institutions or engaging in certain ritual activities (such as playing music at festivals and funerals) for which they do not receive cash remuneration. In this way they differ from religious specialists such as Buddhist or Daoist clergy, who expect to be paid for their religious services. Goossaert argues that the sacrifice of time and money among these lay leaders enables them to establish an argument for their moral superiority to the clergy.

17. In their ethnographic research in Taiwan, Jordan and Overmyer (1986, 275–276) note how the leaders of spirit-writing groups are frequently attracted to their roles because they can use their knowledge of scripture and ritual to gain prestige among the group's members in a way that they could not in society at large. Soucy (2012, 178–181) writes about a lay practitioner in Vietnam who gained a high social status as a recognized expert on Buddhist matters in a small pagoda that helped to replace the status he had lost in outside society following his retirement. Both of these observations resonate with Overmyer's (1976, 172) findings that, in late imperial China, leaders of lay Buddhist groups were often literate but not members of the social elite, thus likely having aspirations to social prestige through intellectual achievement that could not be met through the attainment of political office but that found fulfillment within a smaller religious group. In analyzing the roots of the phenomenon of lay preachers at sites like the Temple of Universal Rescue, we should also consider that, as literacy rates have expanded in the modern period, the proportion of people that can read religious texts compared with those who take on professional religious roles has increased.

18. Qigong, a form of exercise based on the regulation of one's vital breath (qi), was promoted by many as a health cure (see also N. Chen 2003; Palmer 2007).

19. On the first occasion, which was related to me afterward by a discussion group practitioner, a *hufa* volunteer called the police complaining about the preaching of Teacher Zhang. On the second occasion, to which I was a direct witness, the temple security guard

who had called the PSB was brand-new and unfamiliar with the phenomenon of the preaching. He became concerned about the political content of a preacher's sermon. Following this, on the days that I attended the temple, the security guard merely observed the preachers. Whether he attempted to call the police again, I do not know, but they never returned at any of the subsequent Dharma Assemblies I attended.

20. The concept of harmonious society (*hexie shehui*) here refers to a conceptual goal of governance in the People's Republic first discussed by China's then president, Hu Jintao, at the National People's Congress in 2005. The Hu regime intended the concept to reflect its goal of stable and sustainable national growth that does not disproportionately privilege certain elements of society over others. Like many other political catchwords articulated by the country's leadership (such as former president Jiang Zemin's Three Represents [*san ge daibiao*]), it is frequently invoked by government bureaucracies when making important announcements or rulings, regardless of whether those announcements or rulings have a clear connection to the original concept. Critics of harmonious society discourse have suggested that the concept of harmony is often used to idealize a single hegemonic voice that drowns out pluralism and dissent. This would seem very close to the context in which it is evoked in this sign.

21. The white sign contains two small changes from the red signs, which I have italicized in the following passage: "In order to build a harmonious society, uphold the true character of Buddha law, *protect our cultural relics,* [and] safeguard the peaceful and dignified atmosphere of the Temple of Universal Rescue, and in accordance with the Buddhist Association of China's policy on the 'means of managing Han Chinese Buddhist temples,' the gathering of large numbers to listen to a lecture [delivered in] a loud voice and causing commotion is prohibited in this temple. [Furthermore], unless they have received [prior] permission from the [temple's] guest office, no one may *make video recordings,* [or] distribute any books, audio and video media, or any other materials. To those who would disobey [this notice]: the security officers of this temple have the power to confiscate these materials and any illegal earnings obtained [through their distribution]. If there are those who are violating 'Beijing's Public Security Administration Laws,' [the guards] will turn them over to the Public Security Bureau."

22. Most of these cars are gifts to the temple or to individual temple monks.

23. The municipal government allocated approximately 1 million yuan toward the repaving of both the inner and outer courtyards. Though the intended use of the funds was to upgrade the temple's infrastructure for an influx of visitors during the Olympic Games, the project was not completed until 2010.

24. Practitioners could purchase a tablet and write the name of a deceased loved one on it, who would then receive a call to listen to the Dharma during the ceremony. Practitioners could also provide a donation to sponsor an anonymous ghost as an act of compassion.

Chapter 2: Balance

1. In theory, too, a monastic who officiates a large lay conversion ceremony becomes the master of the lay disciples who take the refuges in that ceremony. In practice, however,

these new lay practitioners rarely know the officiating monastic and so they do not form a personal relationship with him.

2. Chinese characters are made up of component parts known as radicals (*bu*) which can be arranged either vertically or horizontally. Radicals can convey both sound and meaning.

3. The term "Paradise of Western Bliss" is synonymous with "Pure Land," which is most commonly used by scholars to refer to both the realm and the religious group that aspires to rebirth in that realm. Here I generally refer to the realm as the Paradise of Western Bliss and the group as Pure Land because this is the way that my interlocutors normally spoke.

4. A *koṭi* is a number roughly equal to ten million. So the total number of buddhas in this example would be one trillion.

5. In addition to the *Amitābha Sūtra,* the main Pure Land sūtras are the *Sūtra of Infinite Life* (*Wu liang shou jing*) and the *Sūtra on the Visualization of the Buddha of Infinite Life* (*Guan wu liang shou fo jing*).

6. Very few practitioners were familiar with Chan techniques, but for those who had been exposed to them (sometimes through Master Mingyi's lectures in the free class for laypersons), practices such as emptying one's mind of thoughts proved very difficult to master, and many confessed that they did not see the point in doing so. While Pure Land practices like reciting the homage to Amitābha also involved intense, single-minded concentration to be done correctly, most practitioners found that concentrating on something tangible, like a slogan, was easier than emptying their minds altogether.

7. Not all Buddhists have focused on the Paradise of Western Bliss as an outward realm. More than once I was in the audience as Mingyi delivered a lecture to laypersons where he suggested that the Pure Land could be understood as a state of mind. However, I cannot think of any self-acknowledged practitioners of Pure Land that I met who thought of it as anything other than an actual realm (however unlike their present world) in which they sought to achieve rebirth. This difference marks another area in which lay Buddhists show a lack of influence from early twentieth-century Buddhist reformers. Taixu and his student Yinshun (1906–2005) were critical of the idea of focusing on rebirth in the Pure Land as a faraway place, an approach that was championed by a more conservative contemporary of Taixu's, the Ven. Yinguang (1861–1940). Taixu and Yinshun emphasized the importance of focusing on attaining a Pure Land in this world through social activism (Jones 2003). At the Temple of Universal Rescue, many of Yinguang's texts are still widely distributed, unlike Taixu's or Yinshun's, which I have never seen handed out.

8. The appeal of Chan to intellectual elites has a long history in China, from Neo-Confucian literati in the Song dynasty who sometimes learned with Chan teachers (Fu 1973, 375) to contemporary institutions like the Bailin Chan Monastery's Living Zen Summer Camp (Shenghuo Chan Xialingying), which actively recruits its participants from among young adults who are studying at or have recently graduated from China's top universities. In her study of Zen Buddhists in Brazil, Rocha (2006, 152) emphasizes Chan/Zen

identity as a "marker of social distinction" that distinguishes its practitioners as affluent and cosmopolitan. However, despite their similarities in social class to practitioners in Brazil, I have yet to find evidence of Chan practitioners in China using their identities as Chan practitioners to make this sort of distinction.

9. Forms of community service in which these volunteers engage include movements to clean up the environment, prevention of cruelty to animals, concern for the welfare of peasants (Jankowiak 2004, 168–169), tutoring for poor students, assisting the elderly and disabled, and mobilizing support for disaster relief (Rolandsen 2008, 106).

10. Fleischer (2011b, 317) found that, rather than seeking to use volunteer activities to promote their career advancement, participants in her study often did not tell prospective employers about their volunteer activities for fear that the employers would consider the volunteer work a waste of time.

11. Historically, there are cases of monastics who advocated a combination of both Pure Land and Chan practices (Ch'en 1964, 348, 445; Amstutz 1998, 32). In my research in post-Mao China, however, I have rarely come across either lay or monastic practitioners who engage in both practices. While modern Buddha recitation halls (*nianfo tang*) such as those found in Jilin were originally modeled after Chan meditation halls (Stevenson 1995b, 367), I have not found any dedicated Chan practices at the recitation halls I have visited. As indicated above, there are often significant differences in both demographics and life orientations between Chan and Pure Land practitioners. In present-day China, Chan also is less widespread and less well known than Pure Land. Even at a Chan center in the Hebei provincial capital Shijiazhuang, where I conducted research in 2011 and 2012, separate Chan and Pure Land activities were scheduled. Moreover, I was told by a layperson that lay practitioners rarely participated in both activities.

12. Some of my interlocutors used *huixiang* to transfer their own store of merit to loved ones who usually were not practicing Buddhists or to all sentient beings as an act of compassion. *Kaishi* refers to a lecture or sermon given by a member of the clergy for an audience of either fellow clergy or lay practitioners.

13. *The Flower Garland Sūtra* (*Huayan jing*), which focuses on describing the interpenetrating nature of reality, is the foundational sūtra of the Flower Garland school, one of the eight major Buddhist schools in China.

14. The *Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch* (*Liuzu tan jing*) tells the story of the transmission of the Dharma from the fifth patriarch Hongren (601–674) to the sixth patriarch Huineng (638–713) in the Southern Chan school. It is an influential text in the school's doctrine of sudden enlightenment, which holds that realization of ultimate truth can occur in a sudden flash of insight.

Chapter 3: Buddhic Bonds

1. This was, in fact, the beginning of the same day that ended in her criticism of my plans to return to the Temple of Universal Rescue, described in chapter 1.

2. In everyday speech, *yuanfen* amounts to just meaning *yuan*. Two-character compounds are a common feature of modern Chinese. Since the *baihua* movement of the early twentieth century to make written Chinese more closely equivalent to its spoken form, many two-character compounds now replace what were just single-character forms in classical Chinese. In spoken Chinese, the second character helps the listener to identify the first character from its many homonyms.

3. Farrer (2002, 198) discusses how his interlocutors talked about a romantic relationship that ended as having "*yuan* but no *fen*." Moskowitz (2001, 42) uses the term *you yuan wu fen* to refer to the relationship between a mother and her aborted fetus. Moskowitz (2001, 120, 182n1) also discusses having more or less *yuan*. I did not hear my interlocutors use any of these terms. In general, for them, *yuanfen* is something one either does or does not have; there is no intermediate quality. While, as noted below, Buddhists would express weaker or stronger indications of *yuanfen,* they did not suggest that the *yuanfen* itself was either weak or strong. One woman expressed her divorce with her husband as the ending of their *yuanfen* (*yuanfen wan le*). Practitioners often talked about their *yuanfen* as having not yet begun (*yuanfen hai mei dao*) or having (finally) started (*yuanfen dao le*), mostly in reference to their bond with Buddhism (the former often used as an explanation for why they did not become practitioners following visits to temples earlier in their lives). In general, the use of the term *yuanfen* among the Buddhists I studied emphasized a cyclical process in which relationships would begin and keep returning throughout many lifetimes until they had been karmically resolved. In the special case of a *foyuan,* however, the relationship, once begun, can only grow stronger.

4. Another survey, conducted by K. S. Yang and David Ho (1988, 276–278) on college students in Hong Kong, found a similar result.

5. By contrast, in Yang and Ho's (1988, 276–278) study, 90 percent of all college student respondents (both Buddhist and non-Buddhist) believed that all relationships were rooted in *yuan,* and a much smaller number rejected the notion altogether. It is possible that this difference reflects the stronger continuing influence of Buddhist and other Chinese traditional religious forms on residents of Hong Kong, who did not experience the efforts of the mainland communist state to discredit religiously derived understandings of fate.

6. The Chinese term *fo* does not have a direct English equivalent. It is best understood as a descriptive term that connotes a Buddhic quality or nature. One can talk of the historical Buddha (*fozu*), a particular buddha such as Amitābha (Amituofo), the Buddha nature (*foxing*), or a Buddhist temple (*fosi*).

7. Jiang Xiuqin once boasted to me that she had convinced nearly two hundred people, mostly in her small neighborhood, to become Buddhist laypersons.

8. The concept of *yuanfen* or *yuan* is also used to describe the bond between master and disciple in other modern Chinese religious settings: in a context that may have been known to some contemporary Chinese Buddhist practitioners, qigong grand masters in the 1980s would discuss their pre-fated bonds with mythical mountain masters whom they claimed had taught them (Palmer 2007, 91). Huang (2009, 140, 265–266) discusses how followers of the Taiwan-based Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation's leader, the Ven. Zhengyan, would

spontaneously cry when they saw her, a phenomenon that Zhengyan described as the result of a shared *yuan* from a previous lifetime or lifetimes.

9. Much larger percentages of respondents (23.1 percent) said that they had worshipped buddhas and bodhisattvas within the past year and a substantial majority (77.2 percent) believed that right actions would lead one to benefits (*shan you shan bao*), a basic moral assumption behind the Buddhist doctrine of *yinguo*. Yao (2007, 178) see these numbers as indicating that Chinese religiosity is much more widespread than statistics on religious affiliation would indicate (see also Yang 2010, 1, quoted in Madsen 2011, 19–20). While this may be so, these findings could also be taken to show that while many urban Chinese are willing to engage with the supernatural or even accept certain forms of traditional morality, they are less willing or interested in embracing particular religions wholesale as vehicles of social identity or personal moral transformation. However, self-consciously taking on the religious identities of Buddhists was central to the self-making projects of lay practitioners at the Temple of Universal Rescue.

10. Rowe (2003, 112–113) discusses how, in recent years, the concept of *yuan* (J. *en*) has also been expanded in Japan to legitimate relationships formed outside the traditional bonds of family (Ch. *xueyuan;* J. *ketsuen*) and place (Ch. *diyuan;* J. *chien*) to refer to relationships among friends or among those, particularly women, who share bonds related to their gender. In Rowe's research, this expanded form of *yuan* is being used in reference to changing relationships among the dead, who are increasingly buried together with others to whom they are unrelated by either place or kinship.

11. Historically, Buddhist laypersons have adopted full-time vegetarian diets only after taking the bodhisattva precepts. Those who have taken just the five precepts generally have observed a vegetarian diet only on selected days of the month, which includes the dates of the Dharma Assemblies, and at all times while present inside a Buddhist temple (ter Haar 2001, 132–133). This intermediate vegetarian stage was still explained to me by some monastics and laypersons as the sole obligation that a practitioner who had taken the five lay precepts had toward maintaining a vegetarian diet and is also observed by Soucy (2012, 131) in his research on contemporary Vietnamese Buddhists. However, among the Buddhists I studied, many who had only taken the five lay precepts (and a few who had not taken any) also observed a full-time vegetarian diet. These practitioners were heavily influenced by the reading of Buddhist texts and the sermons of preachers in the courtyard that spoke of the retribution awaiting anyone who ate meat.

12. Princess Miaoshan was the daughter of a king who defied her father to become a nun, was put to death, and later returned to sacrifice herself to save him from a fatal disease (see Yü 2001, 293–350).

Chapter 4: Cause and Consequence

1. Very few of my interlocutors felt comfortable with my direct recording of our interviews. Mostly I just took handwritten notes. Gao Jie was exceptional in this respect, as was Teacher Li, whose sermons I quote below.

2. The term *guanxi* can be used in a broad sense to describe any type of relationship or connection. Although, in this chapter, I contrast a *guanxi*-based system of morality with an *yinguo*-based system, one can also speak of relationships created or understood through the doctrine of *yinguo* (*yinguo guanxi*). The *guanxi* I discuss, which contrasts with *yinguo,* is a narrower term that refers specifically to its role in the creation and maintenance of ego-centered networks.

3. Another practitioner who made this claim was Jiang Xiuqin, discussed in chapters 1 and 3.

4. While the factors that alienated my interlocutors from a *guanxi*-based to an *yinguo*-based morality are closely connected to the functioning of *guanxi* in post-Mao Chinese society, they also mirror, to some extent, long-standing conflicts throughout China's history between Buddhists and members of a Chinese ideological orthodoxy that was highly influenced by Confucian and sometimes Daoist ideals. Apologists for this ideological orthodoxy were often highly suspicious of the withdrawal of Buddhist-inspired persons from basic networks of reciprocity and their replacement of family-based duty with a pathway to individual salvation based on a love for all beings (Fu 1973, 394; Hinsch 2002, 50). The most fundamental example of this withdrawal was the institution of monasticism, which involves monks and nuns literally "leaving the family" (*chujia*) and renouncing their filial ties in an effort to forsake all attachments (Fu 1973, 380, 393; Overmyer 1982, 641; Hinsch 2002, 53). Sometimes, lay-based groups were also the targets of criticism: Confucian-based thinkers and government officials were greatly concerned about practitioners who observed a full-time vegetarian diet as this influenced their ability to engage in the exchange of meat-based meals, which was one of the key practices of mutual reciprocity (ter Haar 2001, 130, 137), and about women who neglected their duty to their husband's relatives and ancestors to engage in Buddhist worship practices for the salvation of all beings (Hinsch 2002, 53; Zhou 2003). With a few exceptions (Zürcher 1959, 283; Ch'en 1973, 18; Lai 1987, 19; Shek 2004, 78–79), however, monastics tried to adapt to rather than to argue against Chinese indigenous norms of reciprocity, particularly when it came to the important principle of filial piety: they emphasized, for instance, how men and women who became monastics were actually fulfilling their filial roles rather than abandoning them by generating merit that could be passed along to their families (Hinsch 2002, 65). Texts like the *Ghost Festival Sūtra,* which may have originated in China, showed how a monk could use the power of the sangha to deliver his mother from hell (Teiser 1988, 208–224; Shek 2004, 80; Stevenson 2004). Lay Buddhist groups, including those that were classified by the state as heterodox (*xie*), may have presented a greater challenge to Confucian-based orthodox social norms, especially after mainstream monastic institutions had already partially adapted to those norms. They often comprised those who had voluntarily decided to question norms of social interaction such as a meat-based diet, the importance of worshipping one's ancestors, and perhaps the strict segregation of the sexes (ter Haar 1992, 46, 112–113; Shek 2004, 81). In many ways, the groups that gather in the outer courtyard of the Temple of Universal Rescue are engaging in a similar critique. Like their historical counterparts, they are also less inclined to adapt to a social and moral orthodoxy than the members of monastic institutions, who often remain very conscious of their filial obligations and are deeply embroiled in *guanxi*-based relationships.

5. I am grateful to Yuqin Huang for highlighting this gendered contrast.

6. On the business cards I distributed during the 2002–2004 portion of my research, I listed my scholarly affiliation as Peking University, which corresponded to my academic status in China rather than the University of Virginia, my home institution in the United States. I hoped my Chinese credentials might make it easier for my interlocutors to understand what I was doing at the temple and to feel more comfortable about my status as a researcher.

7. For many, Buddhist practice was simply not closely connected to their family life: the results of a questionnaire I passed out in the courtyard on November 8, 2003 (a Saturday, when it was more likely that even those family members with jobs would not have been working) showed that only 4.7 percent of respondents (three out of sixty-four) who were participants in the preacher circles and discussion groups had come to the temple that day with other family members. Moreover, only 27.6 percent (sixteen out of fifty-eight) had been introduced to Buddhism in the first place by those in either their immediate or extended families.

8. In this sentence, Teacher Li refers to the head of the local branch of the Beijing Public Security Bureau in Fuxingmen, the area where the Temple of Universal Rescue was located. I do not know whether the corruption of the police chief had been reported in the newspapers or was hearsay and speculation that was believed among the listeners to Teacher Li's circle.

9. I prefer to use Parry's term "religious gift" here instead of "free gift" or "pure gift" since it more accurately describes the donor's expectation that his gift will be reciprocated by unseen, religious forces (such as a god or, in the Buddhist case, the operation of *yinguo*) rather than that he truly expects no reciprocity in any form, which is the connotation of a free gift.

10. A similar framework is considered by Palmer (2011, 576–577) in his discussion of the functioning of certain types of Chinese religious systems. Palmer notes how, through acts of giving to gods, communities circulate resources among their members.

11. In strictly doctrinal terms, the merit that the practitioner gains comes not from the actual act of giving, but from the positive spiritual advancement gained from the intention to give (Spiro 1970, 106; Cook 2008, 15).

12. In this way, to use Lévi-Strauss's (1969) formulation, religious gift exchange functions as a form of generalized exchange wherein the exchange of gifts does not flow directly from the donor to the recipient but circulates among other parties (or, in this case, among past, present, and future versions of the same beings) before returning to the donor (Strenski 1983, 471–474). *Guanxi*-based exchange, by contrast, is, in most cases, a form of restricted exchange in which two parties exchange only with one another.

13. This does not mean to say that karmic consequence always results in or from an exchange between the same two parties. Consequences from both positive and negative actions can also be manifested in other ways, but reward or retribution always balances the equation for both parties involved.

14. Of course, another way of looking at the same system of religious gift exchange is that one can also circulate negative actions that will then return to one in the form of retribution.

15. A monastic or lay practitioner who converts with an individual teacher is sometimes given a new name. This new name reminds the practitioner of her identity as a disciple of the Buddha. Just as siblings in China may share the first character in their given names, Buddhist practitioners (both monastic and lay) often share the first character of their Dharma names with others who share the same teacher. For monastics, this also has the effect of emphasizing that they have left their old families to take on new lives within a Buddhist family. Since laypersons frequently take the refuges in mass conversion ceremonies, they do not always receive these names. However, even when they do (such as when a master individually converts them), they very rarely use the names to address one another. Practitioners sometimes refer to groups of practitioners with whom they regularly practice as "fellow practitioners" (*tongxiu*) but only in the third person and never as a form of direct address.

Chapter 5: Creating Bonds

1. My findings differ from those of Chandler in his study of contemporary Taiwanese Buddhists in the Foguang Buddhist Order. Chandler (2004, 29) suggests that *jieyuan* refers primarily to giving from a monastic to a layperson. By contrast, with the mainland Chinese Buddhists I studied, it was more common for laypersons to practice *jieyuan* than monastics. One possible reason for this difference is that monastics, particularly those who are closely connected to the Buddhist Association, are concerned not to distribute media that the Association has not directly approved. Laypersons, who lack these institutional restrictions, are much freer to produce and distribute different varieties of Buddhist-themed media to other laypersons or to non-Buddhists.

2. As Chandler (2004, 30) notes, here the degree of merit earned does not correlate to the present worthiness of the recipient, as it does in charity to monastics, but to the future fruits of the bond that the gift forms between the recipient and the Buddha's teaching.

3. Two types of video disc recordings are available in China: VCDs (video compact discs) and DVDs. DVDs are gradually replacing VCDs but, at the time of writing, the latter still make up around one-third of the distributed video recordings in Chinese Buddhist temples.

4. In this way, *jieyuan*-based exchange also has a different implication than the result of the religious gift exchange that Palmer (2011, 577) describes in the Chinese religious context. While Palmer discusses gift exchange through gods as facilitating and strengthening community ties within the area of a god's cult (see also Keyes 1983, 857), in the context of *jieyuan* among lay Buddhists today, the nature of the exchange of religious materials for merit enables the donor to earn merit and act as a moral person without forming concrete social relationships and by helping to form an imagined community in the abstract rather than participating in a concrete community of persons who know and interact with one another (see also Clart 2009, 141–142). Here I also take a point of departure

from Chandler (2004, 28–30), who, in his discussion of the spread of the Foguang Buddhist Order, suggests that *jieyuan*-based exchange establishes a "close relationship" between two people and specifically compares it to *guanxi*-based relationships. The *jieyuan*-based exchange relationships that my interlocutors entered into established close spiritual relationships but did not require and did not lead to the establishment of close social relationships. In this way, they were very different from *guanxi*-based relationships, a difference that, for many practitioners, was appealing.

5. This concern on the part of my interlocutors with ensuring that the right texts reach the correct audience contrasts with Clart's (2009, 130–132) findings in his research on the spread of morality books by spirit-writing cults in contemporary Taiwan. Clart suggests that, although disciples in the spirit-writing cult, like the Buddhists in Beijing, spend much time reproducing and distributing morality books, they show little concern about how successful their distribution efforts are in attracting newcomers to the message of the cult. One possible reason for this difference is that the cult is a more cohesive social institution than the mass of lay practitioners in mainland China who work to reproduce and distribute Buddhist texts in cell-like groups; therefore, the leadership of the cult can do more thinking for its members. Clart mentions how, in one case, a medium who was troubled by his rate of success in influencing others with the message of the texts consulted with his god, who reassured him that his efforts were successful. Moreover, at the spirit hall where Clart conducted his research, the gods established fixed amounts of merit for each act within the chain of reproduction and distribution of morality texts. By contrast, Buddhist practitioners in China who engage in the writing, printing, and distribution of morality-themed media operate without any institutional control, and few would claim any direct communication with divine authority. They have only their own knowledge and that of their fellow practitioners to determine whether the materials they might reproduce and distribute will help their readers to form positive karmic bonds and, therefore, prove meritorious for themselves.

6. It is common for practitioners to keep a few copies for themselves, one for their own reading or recitation, and a few others to give visitors or friends who show an interest in their contents.

7. As mentioned in chapter 1, Jiang Xiuqin did not approve of the preachers. She did, however, give some copies of the materials she reproduced to an elderly male practitioner who handed them out at the temple after slowly explaining their contents to his would-be readers. Because much of what he did was identical to the other preachers, I labeled him a preacher. For Jiang, however, he was different from the preachers she criticized because, in her view, they often expounded on heterodox teachings while he did not.

8. This pattern of adding materials to existing texts and then reproducing them again carries on a tradition from far back in Chinese history when original copies of Buddhist scriptures or morality books were added to by later generations of readers who reproduced them (Bell 1996, 180; Yü 1995).

9. The *Chanlin bao xun* is attributed to the monks Dahui and Dagui from the twelfth century. It is a compilation of the teachings of well-known Chan masters on the moral dimensions of monastic life.

10. The Five Blessings are described in the Confucian text *The Classic of History* (*Shu jing*). They include (1) having a long life, (2) having wealth, (3) avoiding illness or disaster, (4) cultivating virtue, and (5) fulfilling one's allotted fate.

11. The author of the book is listed as a Fo'en Jushi, which could be either the name of a single individual or a collective name for a group of laypersons who wrote the book together. The book is one of the most widely distributed at temples I have visited in China throughout the last ten years. It seems to originate with an organization calling itself the Pure Land Buddhism Foundation (Jingtuzong Jijinhui), which is based in Taipei, Taiwan. An electronic copy of the book is available on their website (Fo'en Jushi, *Walking Closer to Buddhism* [*Zoujin Fojiao*], http://www.pureland-buddhism.org/淨土宗叢書/走近佛教/目錄.aspx, accessed October 5, 2013). The mainland version of the book (which is written in the simplified character system) is listed as having been printed at the Hongyuan Temple in Anhui Province, which is also affiliated with the foundation. I have translated *jin* as "closer" rather than "close" because the content of the book suggests to me that, like many of the materials distributed at temples, it is directed at an audience that has already accepted many of the bases of Buddhist teachings but that wants to advance and understand more.

12. Not all laypersons who read Jingkong's teachings see monastics as corrupt. Many monastics also consider themselves followers of Jingkong (though less so at the Temple of Universal Rescue, whose monks view his teachings with suspicion). Many laypersons I met at temples other than the Temple of Universal Rescue considered themselves close followers of both Jingkong and the monastics of the temples they frequented. Some of these practitioners told me that, although the problem of monastic corruption was significant, the particular monastics that they knew were upright followers of the Buddha's teachings. Jingkong's teachings do not condemn all monastics as corrupt, and even the lay preachers at the Temple of Universal Rescue who were most critical of monastics, like Teacher Zhang, insisted that there are still some monastics who are righteous followers of the Dharma.

13. The original *Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Gao seng zhuan*), which chronicled the lives of important Buddhist monks and nuns beginning from the introduction of Buddhism to China, was written by Huijiao in 519. Later versions include *The Further Biographies of Eminent Monks,* composed by the monk Daoxuan in the late seventh century, and later updates in the Song and Ming dynasties. "Lamp records" of the transmission of the Dharma from the Buddha and through a lineage of Indian and then Chinese patriarchs claimed by Chan Buddhism were written in the eleventh through thirteenth centuries (Shinohara 1998, 305–306).

14. Late imperial narratives of pious laywomen also report sightings of the miraculous such as manifestations of Amitābha or Guanyin at a practitioner's deathbed, the appearance of lotus blossoms, the hearing of heavenly music, and fragrant scents from unknown sources (Grant 1994, 50; Stevenson 1995a, 594; Halperin 2006, 89).

15. Yang (1994, 287–311) uses Deleuze and Guattari's concept of a rhizome to describe networks of informal relationships that formed in early 1980s China around the cultivation

of *guanxi*. Yang's analysis of these *guanxi*-based networks as rhizomatic is centered on her argument that *guanxi*-based relationships represented a mode of sociality that was an alternative to a distributive mode of knowledge and resources created by a strong centrally controlled state. Yang (1994, 309) argues that this alternative mode of sociality enabled nonstate actors to break the state's monopoly on what stands for the public. As argued in chapter 4, in China today, a *guanxi*-based system of social relationships has been comprehensively fused with the making of economic and political power; *guanxi* now describes both the dominant system of resource distribution and the dominant morality of social relationships. In my view, this makes it difficult to conceive of a twenty-first-century *guanxi*-based system as rhizomatic or as fostering the creation of a sociality that is counter-hegemonic; I suggest that it is rhizomatic networks created through *jieyuan* that enable Buddhists to form one type of counterpublic in present-day China.

16. Although the practitioners I studied could afford to travel throughout mainland China at relatively little cost, for nearly all of them, journeying overseas (or even to Hong Kong or Macau) would have been economically unfeasible. Even if they could have found ways to spread their homemade materials overseas, those materials contain cultural references (such as to the upright nature of Mao's rule) that would not resonate with overseas practitioners.

Chapter 6: Heart/Action

1. There are several meanings of *xinxing* within Buddhist scriptures: it can refer to the attitudes of the heart, the ambition and direction of the heart, the heart's consciousness of division and discrimination, and the purification of one's heart to perform good deeds. Teacher Zhang's use of the term *xinxing* is closest to that found in the *Platform Sūtra:* "What is needed is action from the heart, not words from the mouth" (*ci xu xin xing, bu zai kou nian*). This passage epitomizes Teacher Zhang's consistent message of taking action from one's heart rather than simply talking about taking that action.

2. In spite of Teacher Zhang's frequent claims that he had no need to read beyond the *Lotus Sūtra,* by the time I met him, he was very conversant with a large number of sūtras. Though he most frequently quoted from the *Lotus,* the essays Teacher Zhang wrote and distributed over the course of my fieldwork referred to no less than twenty-six sūtras. When I questioned him on this point, he replied that the sūtras other than the *Lotus* that he quoted from, while lesser in importance, were still complementary. In this respect, he explained, they were different from Pure Land sūtras like the *Amitābha Sūtra* and the *Sūtra of Infinite Life* that were very popular among many lay practitioners, but which Teacher Zhang condemned as heterodox.

3. It is interesting to consider whether Teacher Zhang's commitment to spreading Buddhist teachings rather than continuing his money-making ventures was not itself a form of religious gift, donated in the hope of ameliorating past misdeeds. While Teacher Zhang would no doubt have dismissed this conclusion, he would sometimes make vague references to the fact that he had taken a circuitous path to the truth rather than a direct road

as he now encouraged others to do. Teacher Zhang was also vague about the exact nature of his money-making activities and how they had brought him his wealth. While his narrative explained why he had turned to Buddhist teachings, it did not explain why he had completely retired from his business ventures.

4. Teacher Zhang asserted that, after developing the photograph, he had called the exhibition repeatedly to see whether anyone might have been selling a Mao image that had cast a reflection onto the sculpture and claimed that they had fervently denied this.

5. Teacher Zhang's main accusation of Jingkong concerned the master's role in pandering to what Zhang called the selfish qualities of practitioners who merely wanted to save themselves through rebirth in a pleasant paradise rather than taking on the morally worthy task of sacrificing their own comforts to help save other sentient beings. In my analysis of Jingkong's writings and the courtyard practitioners' discussions of those writings, however, I found Teacher Zhang's accusations to be unsupported. In fact, Jingkong's writings are highly critical of those who simply focus on rebirth in the Pure Land at the exclusion of action in their present world. As discussed in chapter 5, Jingkong places a lot of emphasis on learning how to behave as a moral person and on the possibility of moral action to change not only one's own karma but also that of other beings, a theme that was also a common feature in Teacher Zhang's writings. Moreover, like Zhang, and in spite of being a monk himself, Jingkong is also critical of present-day monastic institutions. Indeed, in my view, it was precisely because Jingkong so frequently wrote about morality that Teacher Zhang felt compelled to criticize him. He and Zhang both spoke to practitioners with similar concerns about moral decline. In denouncing Jingkong as spreading harmful and immoral teachings, Zhang aimed to discredit his main opposition on the subject of moral reform.

6. In this way, Zhang, unbeknownst to himself, followed in the example of famous exegetes of the sūtra such as the Japanese monk Nichiren (1222–1282), who, like Teacher Zhang, championed the *Lotus Sūtra* as the sole true teaching for the latter days of the Dharma and attempted to convince the authorities of his time that calamity faced the Japanese nation because it had turned its back on this important scripture. Like Zhang, Nichiren was particularly critical of Pure Land Buddhists who, then as now, were very influential (Yampolsky 1990, 1–10).

7. The Eighth Route Army was under the leadership of the communists during the war of resistance against Japan in the 1930s. It was one of many divisions of the communist army that won fame for its strict adherence to a code of conduct that emphasized the development of personal morality as well as allegiance to communist ideals in cultivating the support of the masses. In referring to the Eighth Route Army, whose story would have been well known to many of his listeners, Teacher Zhang evoked a model of public mindedness and moral uprightness from the Maoist era to contrast it with the selfishness and moral chaos of the present period. Zhang's mention of Mao's teaching of being above vulgar interests likely refers to Mao's essay in memory of the Canadian doctor Norman Berthune (1890–1939), who assisted the Eighth Route Army during World War II. In the essay, Mao praises Bethune as an example of how a moral person should behave, that is, not serving his

own "vulgar" interests but putting the needs of others in his heart. (I am grateful to Xiao He for drawing my attention to this connection.)

8. Zhou Enlai (1898–1976) was the first premier of the People's Republic of China, serving during the time of Mao's rule as chairman of the Communist Party.

9. Here *fahua* literally means "Dharma Flower" or "Dharma Flower [of the Lotus]." *Fahua* is an abbreviated translation of the longer title of the sūtra in Chinese, which reads in full *The Sūtra of the Sublime Dharma of the Lotus Flower* (*Miaofa lianhua jing*). However, *fahua* also is, in Chinese, the accepted abbreviation for the sūtra in the same way that *Lotus* is the accepted English abbreviation. For this reason, I have glossed *fahua* as "Lotus." It is important to note that this "Lotus" is not the same term in Chinese as that used to refer to lay Buddhist groups in imperial times, such as the White Lotus Society or Lotus Society, which is *lianhua* (or just *lian*).

10. A former PLA soldier who died when he was hit by a truck, Lei was once a paragon of self-sacrifice held up by Chairman Mao as a model for all. Disenchantment with the promises of the Maoist state, especially after the Cultural Revolution, and an emphasis on pursuing self-interest within a market capitalist system have made the model of Lei Feng a twisted joke—even an insult—to most contemporary Chinese. For this reason, Zhang's unsullied praise of Lei seemed anachronistic to some of his casual listeners but was a source of pride to many of those who more regularly attended his sermons.

11. In this way, they shared something in common with Buddhist women lay practitioners in the late Ming and Qing periods who took refuge from male-centered, home-based Confucian rituals by worshipping nonancestral deities with like-minded women in Buddhist temples (Zhou 2003); women in nineteenth-century Guangdong who took refuge in sworn sisterhoods and vegetarian halls to avoid marriage (Topley 1975; Stockard 1989); and contemporary Chinese women in both Taiwan and mainland China who have rejected a family-centered morality to work toward their own spiritual advancement in Yiguandao temples (Lee 2008) or as Buddhist nuns (Qin 2000, 299–300; Crane 2004, 273).

12. Though nearly all of the female core members in the Lotus Group were married, not a single one practiced together with her husband.

13. When I challenged Jin on her interpretation of the Cultural Revolution, citing the often brutal behavior of the Red Guards, she asserted that torture and deaths had never been Mao's intention and that certain Red Guard factions had gotten out of control.

14. As I have noted elsewhere (Fisher 2012, 359), Teacher Zhang's discouragement of divorce and reinforcement of correct gender roles may seem more in line with Confucian thought than that of Mao, under whose leadership the Chinese Communist Party once advocated the dismantling of a "feudal" patriarchal marriage system and instituted recognition for the rights of women as property owners. However, as Stacey (1983, 177) observes, Mao himself was strongly in favor of encouraging couples to reconcile instead of divorce.

Conclusion

1. In part, Liu Mei's approach of relying on herself was similar to that of Chan-based practitioners (chapter 2), some of whom she had known in her time at the temple. Those practitioners also believed in the importance of resolving external dilemmas through contemplation of the self. The difference was that, even in being trained to contemplate the self, the Chan-based practitioners still relied on Buddhist tradition and a Buddhist-based institutional structure, whereas Liu Mei, in our 2011 and 2012 meetings, relied upon neither.

2. I asked Liu whether she had been prevented from returning to the temple because of the time her work responsibilities took up, but she stated very clearly that this was not the reason.

3. Of the three, only Song Li continued to attend the temple for the same amount of time after securing her new employment. I suggest this is because, in her case, her new job had come as the direct result of the moral transformation she had experienced after becoming Teacher Zhang's student, while Liu Mei and Yu Jiali did not pursue their specific jobs as a result of a realization they had gained at the temple.

4. In this way, Liu Mei, Yu Jiali, and Song Li closely resemble the types of persons on which Zigon (2010, 2011) focuses in his two ethnographies, persons who experience moral breakdowns but then resolve them to function within society at large. In Zigon's (2011) second ethnography of a drug treatment center, he observes how resolving moral breakdowns sometimes requires a person to remove herself from society for a time but argues that that removal is always focused on learning to reintegrate into it. In developing this argument, Zigon (2011, 10) stresses the inevitability of participation in a "neoliberal" economic and social order, to which Russian persons are forced to adjust in order to survive because their society will no longer accept any other type of subject. By contrast, as I stress in this study, persons within societies like China and Russia who are experiencing greater social and economic integration into a global capitalist order can also resolve their moral breakdowns by building new forms of personhood in an alternative community of their own making that does not necessarily embrace the changing ideals of the society around them.

5. Examples of this political resistance include the Sri Lankan JVP government's interrogation and jailing of Sarvodaya activists (Bond 2004, 83); the harassment and in one case the assassination of environmentalist monks in Thailand whose efforts crossed paths with powerful figures with interests in mining Thailand's natural resources (Darlington 2012, 197–208); and the arrest, torture, and killings of monks who participated in the Burmese protests (McCarthy 2008, 308–310).

6. Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Burma are predominantly Theravadan Buddhist countries, with vast majorities defining themselves as Buddhist laypersons and many with close relatives who are monks. For this reason, Buddhist figures like Thai monks participating in tree consecration, while often criticized, still hold positions of respect within their societies

that enable them to make their moral messages heard (Darlington 2012, 157). In Burma, members of the ruling military junta often patronize the sangha and must show respect to Buddhism to legitimate their position as rulers (Jordt 2007, 122).

7. Buddhism arguably never penetrated into Chinese political life to the extent that it did in the Theravadan Buddhist regions of South and Southeast Asia. With the exception of the short reign of the Empress Wu Zetian (625–705) in the Tang dynasty, no Chinese ruler based the right to rule on a position within a Buddhist cosmological system, whereas many rulers of kingdoms in South and Southeast Asia based their authority to rule on their patronage of the sangha. Nevertheless, Buddhism did penetrate deeply into Chinese society and Buddhist monasteries were large landowners. While Buddhism was periodically persecuted in China's history, it was never more so than during the communist period, when the state confiscated large numbers of Buddhist monastic lands and embarked on a systematic project of reeducating the entire populace that discredited many forms of religious ideas (Welch 1972). One need look no further than Taiwan, where Buddhist organizations and moral discourses have influenced the public sphere since the lifting of martial law in the 1980s to see that Buddhism can exert a significant influence on contemporary Chinese society, given favorable political conditions (Jones 1999, 178–218; Chandler 2004; Laliberté 2004; Huang 2009).

8. These summer camps are inspired by the Bailin Chan Monastery's Living Chan Summer Camp, which celebrated its twentieth anniversary in 2013. The popular camp, which is attended by young adults between the ages of eighteen and thirty, is focused on teaching meditation and temple life (see Ji 2011b).

9. Since the government prohibits the preaching of religion to persons under eighteen, these camps are careful not to teach specific Buddhist doctrine or practices in their camps or to mention them in their advertisements. Nevertheless, they can and do teach Buddhist-based moral values.

Index

academies (for Buddhist learning), 17–18, 28
age, 33–36, 63, 69, 78–79, 182, 193, 198, 212
agency, 24–25, 43, 88–89, 99, 140, 164, 167–168, 171, 179, 181, 202–203, 215n.4
Ai Fang (pseudonym), 186–190, 193, 195
Amitābha Buddha (Amituofo), 31–32, 39, 65, 67, 102, 105, 116, 122, 155, 163, 220n. 13, 225n. 6, 231n. 14; birthday of, 67; homage to, 12, 57, 66–68, 77–78, 128, 136, 162–163, 176, 187, 223n. 6. *See also* Paradise of Western Bliss (Xifang Jile Shijie); Pure Land Buddhism
Amitābha Sūtra (*Amituofo Jing*), 67, 102–103, 223n. 5, 232n. 2
animals (non-human), 7, 114, 135. *See also* vegetarianism
anticipation, 63–69, 72–73, 77–78, 80
antiwar activism, 178, 189–190
art of *guanxi* (*guanxixue*), 109–112, 114–116, 119, 122, 128–129

Bailin Chan Monastery (Bailin Chan Si), 219n. 4, 223n. 8, 236n. 8
balance. See *pingheng*
bao (reward or retribution), 106, 108. *See also* karmic retribution; karmic reward
Bathing of the Baby Buddha ritual (*yufo*), 28, 80
"believers in Buddhism" (*fojiao tu*), 13–14
"benefiting oneself while benefiting others" (*zi li li ta*), 193
Berthune, Norman, 233n. 7
"big self" (*dawo*), 173, 181, 194
Biographies of Eminent Monks (*Gao seng zhuan*), 231n. 13
bodhisattva, 40, 104, 114, 163; as moral path, 2, 15, 75, 177, 180; as term of address for laypersons, 1. *See also* Guanyin (bodhisattva); Kṣitigarbha (Dizang); Maitreya (Mile Pusa); Samantabhadra (Puxian Pusa)
Buddha, the (Śākyamuni), 11, 31, 36, 40, 55, 87, 95, 173, 191, 216n. 5, 225n. 6; birthday of, 25, 28, 38, 219n. 4; tooth relic of, 99, 172, 205
Buddha Hall (*fotang*): in Jilin Province, 68, 144, 207
"buddha light" (*foguang*), 40, 98, 172, 175–176, 191, 197
Buddhism (as a religious category), 13–14, 31–32, 37, 204, 218n. 15
"Buddhism for human life" (*renjian fojiao*), 15. *See also* Taixu, Ven.
Buddhist Association of China (BAC), 14, 26–28, 36, 42, 48–49, 55, 154, 206, 229n. 1
burning incense. *See* devotional activities
Bush, President George W., 100, 116–117, 190

capitalism, 179, 200. *See also* global capitalism
Chan (Zen), 37, 67, 70, 76, 78, 80, 223n. 6, 223–224n. 8, 224nn. 11, 14, 230n. 9, 231n. 13, 235n. 1
Chanting of the Sūtras (*songjing*), 25, 28, **29,** 30–31, 33–35, 37, 39, 65, 130, 162
charitable activities, 28, 74; building of schools, 71–72, 76, 129; caring for the sick, 12; poverty relief, 12; road construction, 12. *See also* monastics, donations to; temple building
Chen Fei (pseudonym), 57–58, 60, 63, 69–70, 74, 80, 118–119
Ching Hai, Supreme Master (Qinghai Wu Shangshi), 145, 160, 164
Chongwenmen Christian church, 19, 132

Christianity: Catholic, 132; Protestant, 107, 131–134, 217n. 7, 218n. 16. *See also* Chongwenmen Christian church; Shouwang church
class, 12–13, 29, 33, 35, 62–63, 69–70, 78–79, 182–183, 193, 198, 202, 212, 216–17n. 7. *See also* inequality (*bu pingdeng*)
clergy. *See* monastics
Clinton, President Bill, 100
Collected Writings of Chairman Mao, The 58–59, 76, 100
Communist Party of China (CPC), 13, 58, 77, 180, 225n. 5, 233n. 7, 234n. 14
community (of Buddhist practitioners), 5, 20, 99, 128, 132, 164, 166; imagined nature of community, 134–135, 137, 140, 142, 154, 166–168, 203, 229n. 4; isolated nature of community, 92, 140, 204, 206, 208–212; pannational nature of community, 21, 135, 140, 168
Confucianism, 12–13, 104, 107, 141, 218n. 10, 227n. 4, 231n. 10; 234nn. 11, 14. *See also* Neo-Confucianism
consumption, 2, 5, 9–10, 16, 166, 179, 196, 199, 208
contradiction, 63–64, 69–72, 76–81
conversion (to Buddhism). *See* taking the refuges (*guiyi sanbao*)
conversion certificates (*guiyi zheng*), 14, 153
conversion narratives, 40, 87, 94–99, 151
corruption, 21, 75, 81, 110–112, 119–121, 183, 185
crime, 55–56, 120–121, 185
Cultural Revolution, 26–27, 54, 142, 147, 181, 185, 209, 234nn. 10, 13
cycle of karmic transmigration, 35, 86, 130, 187

Daoism, 132, 141, 221n. 17, 227n. 4
Deng Xiaoping, 185, 192
devotees, 30–34, **31,** 37, **52–53**, 56, 61, 83, 176, 193, 204, 212; definition of, 215–216n. 4
devotional activities, 10, 28, 30–33, 55, 61, 104, 185. *See also* devotees
dhāranīs, 6, 143, 151, 154–155, 176. See also *Great Compassion Dhāranī* (*Dabei zhou*)
Dharma Assembly (*fahui*), 6, 18–19, 25, 28, 30, 34, 36–37, 45, 47–48, 51, 54, 57–58, 71, 80, 88, 92, 98, 103, 136, 145, 165, 173–174, 186–188, 191–192, 194–195, 210; history of, 219n. 1; major, 25, 55, 67, 175; minor, 2, 25, 174
Diamond Sūtra (*Jingang Jing*), 82
"differential mode of association" (*chaxugeju*), 107–108
"disciples of the Buddha" (*fo dizi*), 14
discriminating heart (*fenbie xin*), 115–116, 125, 178–179, 181, 188, 192
discussion groups, 8, 17–18, 20, 23–24, 27, 30, 33–35, 37, **38,** 38–39, 43, 45–49, 51, **52–53,** 54, 61–62, 70, 77, 88, 90, 96–98, 118, 130, 142, 158, 170, 182, 202, 210, 217n. 8, 228n. 7; away from the Temple of Universal Rescue, 146, 216n. 6
"disruptive communities," 211–212
distribution (of Buddhist-themed media), 21, 28, 43, 47–48, 67, 91, 94, 96, 99, 123, 126–127, 134, 137, 140, 142–154, 158, 164–166, 203, 206–207, 210–211, 216n. 6, 220n. 13, 230nn. 5–8; away from approved religious sites, 143, 146; between authorized temple sites, 145–146, 164, 167, 206; in pre-modern times, 12; online, 206; organized by commercial presses, 142–143; organized by rank-and-file practitioners, 23, 138–140, 146, 148–153; organized by temple-based publishing, 146–148, 153; organized from overseas, 147–148, 154, 167; prohibition against, 46–47, 144, 222n. 21. *See also* node distributors (of Buddhist-themed media)
Dong Juan (pseudonym), 32–33

egalitarianism, 8, 15–17, 61–62, 113, 130, 171, 177–181, 183–184, 188–189. *See also* "heart of equality" (*pingdeng xin*)

ego-centered: moral system, 78, 112–113, 132; networks, 71, 107, 227n. 2. See also *guanxi* (relationships)
Eighth Route Army, 180, 233n. 7
Encouragement of the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra (*Puxian pusa quan fa pin*), 180, 196–197
enlightenment, 65–67, 70, 87, 177–178, 187, 224n. 14
enqing, 108, 118, 122–123
environmentalism, 32, 117, 145, 160, 164, 178–179, 181, 186, 188–189, 191–192, 197, 209
ethical demand, 3–4
ethical projects, 3, 6, 20, 35, 40, 72, 78, 106
ethical tools, 3–5, 10, 184
ethical work, 24, 68, 194
exchange, 111, 176, 178, 227n. 4; gift-based (non-religious), 62–63, 108–110, 115, 122, 139, 150; *guanxi*-based, 108, 111, 113, 119–122, 131–132, 134, 139, 228n. 12, 229n. 4; *jieyuan*-based, 91, 131, 133–134, 137, 139, 229n. 4; religious gift-based, 122–123, **124,** 125, 134, 139, 150, 228nn. 9, 12, 229n. 4, 232n. 3; *yinguo*-based, 21, 113, 120–121
expressive ties (*suili*), 109, 112, 114

face (*mianzi*), 85, 102–103, 108, 112
false self (*jiawo*), 117–118
Falun Gong, 92, 152, 205–207, 209
family, 1–3, 12, 20, 24, 56, 71, 74, 78, 87, 92–93, 104, 107–108, 110–114, 127, 171, 183, 187, 194, 207, 226n. 10, 227n. 4, 228n. 7, 229n. 15
fannao (distress), 58, 61, 63–64, 68, 70, 72, 76, 80
Feeding of the Flaming Mouths ritual (*fang yankou*), 28, 219nn. 5–6
fieldwork methodology, 18–20
filial piety (*xiao*), 1–4, 11, 58, 60, 102, 108, 127, 141, 148
Flower Garland Sūtra, 75, 224n. 13
Foguang Buddhist Order, 11, 17, 229n. 1, 230n. 4
foreigner (category of), 19–20, 24, 40, 42–43, 83, 89, 151
foyuan (Buddhic bond), 7, 21, 85, 87, 89, 93–101, 115–116, 128, 186–187, 204, 225n. 3; with Buddhist teachings, 87–90, 98, 138; with fellow Buddhist practitioners, 83, 90–91, 93–94, 134, 138, 150
future lifetime. *See* rebirth

Gandhi, Mahatma, 157
ganqing, 106, 108–109, 112
Gao Jie (pseudonym), 102–104, 112, 114, 116, 122, 127, 178, 226n. 1
Ge Chaoyang (pseudonym), 117–118
gender, 12, 30, 34, 111–112, 129–130, 171, 182, 187, 194–195, 219n. 7
Ghost Festival Sūtra (*Yu lan pen jing*), 11
ghosts, 11–12, 28, 114
gifts. *See* exchange
global capitalism, 21, 93, 189, 211–212, 215n. 3, 235n. 4
Good and Evil Always Have Consequences (*Shan e zong you bao*), 157–158
Great Compassion Dhāranī (*Dabei zhou*), 1, 3
Great Leap Forward, 179
guanxi (relationships), 21, 108, 110, 114, 116–118, 128, 231–232n. 15; as system of morality, 104, 106–114, 118, 122, 130, 132, 135, 227nn. 2, 4. *See also* art of *guanxi* (*guanxixue*); exchange, *guanxi*-based; "net of relationships" (*guanxiwang*)
Guanyin (bodhisattva), 11, 25, 31–32, 40, 55, 98–99, 104, 137, 158, 173, 184, 191, 193, 219n. 2, 231n. 14; as Princess Miaoshan, 99, 226n. 12

hagiography, 143, 148–149, 162–163
harmonious society, 46, 222nn. 20–21
health care, 9, 77, 166, 185, 212
health cures, 1–2, 32, 41, 65, 82, 174, 176
heart/action (*xinxing*), 21–22, 75, 179–180, 182, 186, 188–190, 195

"heart of equality" (*pingdeng xin*), 178–179, 181, 183
heterodoxy, 24, 41, 43, 46–47, 152, 204–205, 230n. 7
Hongyi, Ven., 142
Hong Ying (pseudonym), 199
Hou Jing (pseudonym), 83–84, 89, 91, 127, 150
Hu Jintao, 222n. 20
humaneness (*ren*), 107–108
Hungry Ghost Festival, 25, 51, 219n. 2

identity, 5, 14, 16, 20–21, 26, 31, 43–44, 59, 63, 85, 87, 101, 113, 128, 132, 178, 189, 210, 216n. 4, 226n. 9
imbalance (*bu pingheng*), 21, 60–61, 63–64, 72–73, 76–78, 80, 119–122, 125, 166, 185. See also *pingheng* (balance)
impermanence, 160
individualism, 30–31, 33, 70–71, 112
inequality (*bu pingdeng*), 60, 63–64, 77, 79, 111–112, 117–118, 139, 166, 179
infidelity, 1, 3, 73–74, 119, 184
inner courtyard (of the Temple of Universal Rescue), 6, 27, 30–34, 36, 38–39, 45–47, 57, 145, 222n. 23
instrumental ties (*songli*), 109–110
interconnectedness, 17, 72, 78, 86, 106, 114, 116–117, 172–173
Iraq, invasion of, 116–117, 190
Islam, 132
islands of religiosity, 203–204, 208, 210

Jataka Tales (*Shijiamouni fo zhuan*), 99
Jiang Xiuqin (pseudonym), 23–24, 43, 54, 83–84, 89, 91, 127, 150–153, 225n. 7, 227n. 3, 230n. 7
Jiang Zemin, 157, 222 n. 21
jieyuan (creating bonds), 21, 91, 94, 128, 135, 138–140, 150–151, 154, 167, 229n. 1, 230n. 5, 231–232n. 15. *See also* exchange, *jieyuan*-based
Jingkong, Ven., 8, 77, 136, 142, 147, 154, 161, 164, 167, 176, 211, 231n. 12, 233n. 5. See also *Understanding Buddhism* (*Renshi fojiao*)
Jingxu, Ven. (pseudonym), 1–2, 6, 39, 108, 129
Jin Xianglun (pseudonym), 184–189, 193, 195, 198, 234n. 13

kaishi, 75–76
karma, See *yinguo*
karmic retribution, 1–2, 11, 14, 55, 70, 104, 114–115, 119–121, 124–125, 127, 164, 219n. 5, 228n. 13
karmic reward, 2–3, 35, 65, 70, 91, 115, 119, 124–125, 128, 163, 228n. 13
Kṣitigarbha (Dizang), 36, 114, 116, 220n. 11
Kṣitigarbha Sūtra, 102–103

latter days of the Dharma (*mofa shiqi*), 7, 15, 40, 66, 130, 161, 176, 216n. 5, 217n. 7, 233n. 6
lay ordination. *See* taking the refuges
lay practitioners, 1, 10–11, 15–17, 19–20, 28, 33, 61, 67, 87, 90, 107, 142, 147, 155, 162–163, 216n. 5, 221n. 14, 224n. 11, 229n. 1; authors of Buddhist-themed materials, 84, 151,153, 231 n.11; definition of, 215n. 4, 218nn. 11–12; distinction from other temple-goers, 30–32; history of, 11–14; isolation from society, 164, 166, 211–212, 227n. 4; mutual suspicion of, 134; views on monastics, 176, 231n. 12. *See also* distribution (of Buddhist-themed media); preachers; vegetarianism
Lay Practitioners' Center (*jushi lin*), 67, 130
lay-offs. *See* unemployment
"leaving the family" (*chujia*): as symbolic action, 178; for monastic ordination, 183, 227n. 4
"lecture on the scriptures" class (*jiangjing ke*), 18, 28, 61, 63, 86, 102, 140, 185, 191
Lei Feng, 182, 198, 234n. 10
Li, Teacher (pseudonym), 98, 116–118, 120–122, 125, 185, 226n. 1, 228n. 8

Li Danni (pseudonym), 83–84, 89, 91, 127, 150–151
life rescue (*fangsheng*), 13, 27, 127, 206
liminality: of space, 79, 156–157; of time, 202–203
Lin Biao, 100
literacy, 221n. 17
"little self" (*xiaowo*), 173, 181, 194
Liu Mei (pseudonym), 80–81, 201–203, 211, 235nn. 1–4
Liu Yuzhen (pseudonym), 1–4, 54, 55, 60–61, 104, 108, 112, 118–123, **124,** 125–126, 128, 215nn. 1–2
Lotus Group, 73, 127, 168–171, 184–200, 203, 211, 234n. 12; activism of, 22, 186, 188–190, 193–195; core members in, 183–195; peripheral members in, 182–183; preaching of, 184, 186–192. *See also* Ai Fang (pseudonym); Jin Xianglun (pseudonym); Song Li (pseudonym); Wang Xuan (pseudonym); Zhou Ning (pseudonym)
Lotus Sūtra (*Fahua Jing*), 87, 98, 140, 169, 172–173, 177–178, 180, 184, 186–188, 191, 195–196, 200, 219n. 5, 233n. 6, 234n. 9
Luo Baoquan (pseudonym), 65, 164–168, 173, 196

Ma Shuzhen (pseudonym), 82–83, 90, 93
Maitreya (Mile Pusa), 45–46, 144
Mao Zedong, 8, 13, 27, 40, 59, 77, 148, 173, 175, 182, 185, 192, 198, 233n. 4, 234n. 13; as moral exemplar, 2, 157, 169, 232n. 16; teachings on self-sacrifice, 178–179, 190, 233–234n. 7, 234n. 10; views on marriage 234n. 14. *See also* Maoism
Maoism, 3, 35, 58–59, 78, 174, 181–183, 186–187, 189–190, 192, 196, 198–200; connection with Buddhist thought, 8, 17, 21–22, 59, 73–74, 126, 168, 170–171, 176, 185, 193, 213
Maoist era (1949–1976), 16–17, 61–62, 72, 74, 79, 126, 171; as time of upright rule, 54, 74, 112–113, 171, 180–181, 184; disenchantment with, 234n. 10
Mao Zedong Thought. *See* Maoism
marriage, 74–75, 80, 187, 194, 234nn. 11–12, 14. *See also* infidelity
mass rallies, 16–18
meditation. *See* Chan (Zen)
merit (*gongde*), 1, 11, 33, 35, 42, 56, 72, 77, 91, 94, 122, **123,** 129, 137–139, 141, 150–151, 227n.4, 228n. 11, 229n. 2, 230n. 5; moral aspects of, 128, 139–140, 148, 164, 166; transfer of (*huixiang*), 76–78, 127, 162, 220–221n.9, 224n. 12
Miaozhen, Ven. (pseudonym), 1–4, 6, 39, 41, 105, 108, 119, 121, 123, 126, 129, 215n. 2
migrants (rural-to-urban), 9, 26, 33, 45, 47, 62, 95, 103–104, 110, 119
Mingyi, Ven. (pseudonym), 57–58, 69–70, 72, 74–77, 80–81, 118, 202, 212, 223nn. 6–7
miracle stories, 40, 87, 98–99, 103–104, 125–126, 157–158, 162–163, 175–176, 197, 220n. 13, 231n. 14, 233n. 4. *See also* conversion narratives
Miserable World, The (*Beican shijie*), 157, 159–160
misogyny, 111–112, 129–130, 171, 187, 195
monastics, 17, 34–35, 87, 125, 157–158, 227n. 4, 229n. 1, 231nn. 12, 13, 234n. 11; as regulators of religious policy, 206; as ritual specialists, 15, 28–30, 130, 221n. 17; as teachers to laypersons, 15, 28, 55, 61–63, 90–91, 94, 96, 220n. 13, 222–223n. 1; at the Temple of Universal Rescue, 15, 27–30, 32, 39, 46, 54, 56, 62–63, 162, 219n. 4, 222 n. 22; conversion to, 183; criticism of, 40–41, 46, 55, 75–76, 129, 161–162, 175–176, 184, 192, 231n. 12; donations to, 42, 62–63, 95, 122–123, 221n. 16; laicization of, 181; wandering, 39, 41, 129, 220–221n. 14, 221n. 15
monks. *See* monastics

moral breakdown, 3, 10, 16–17, 21, 24, 61, 84–85, 88–89, 113, 118, 122; definition of, 3–4; irresolution of, 4–5, 167, 193; resolution of, 3–6, 20–21, 33, 43–44, 56, 59, 68, 70, 97–98, 105–107, 119, 124, 126, 140, 155, 161, 164, 166, 168, 194–195, 202–203, 210–11, 217n. 7, 235n. 4. *See also* moral reform
moral decline, 2, 5–8, 10, 21, 41, 61–62, 66, 74–75, 77, 80–81, 101, 112, 141, 155, 158–164, 171, 179, 183–184, 186, 197, 199, 204–205, 216–217n. 7
moral reform, 5, 7, 15, 21–22, 33, 35, 43, 59, 75, 77, 87–89, 100–101, 137, 140, 154, 162–164, 167–168, 170–171, 189, 203, 208–213, 220n.13, 233n. 5; as means to resolve moral breakdown, 10, 140, 164, 168, 217n. 7
morality books (*shanshu*), 140–143, 148–149, 155, 157–164, 230nn. 5, 8

Neo-Confucianism, 17, 220n. 14, 223n. 8
neoliberalism, 235n. 4
"net of relationships" (*guanxiwang*), 114, 116, 127
Nichiren, 233n. 6
node distributors (of Buddhist-themed media), 152–153, 165
nonbelief (in Buddhism), 5, 19–20, 92–93, 102, 114, 127, 137, 160, 163, 172, 191, 218n. 12

Olympic Games, 26, 36–37, 220n. 7, 222n. 24
one-child policy, 60
outer courtyard (of the Temple of Universal Rescue), 2–3, 5–11, 15, 21, 27, 34, 37–58, **52–53,** 67, 77, 84, 99, 105, 112, 118–120, 122, 125, 130, 137, 139, 144, 169–171, 191, 195, 207–208, 210–211, 216n. 5, 222n. 23, 228n. 7; as chaotic space, 20–21, 23–25, 43–44, 56, 59, 72, 134; as contested space, 44–54; as liminal space, 45, 79; as non-existent space, 48, 56; as postmodern space, 17–18; as site for conversion, 88, 94, 96; as site for media distribution, 10, 21, 94, 117, 134, 136, 143, 145, 155, 162, 167; as space for ethical self-making, 5–6, 17, 24, 40, 42–43, 59, 61–62, 72, 87, 194

Paradise of Western Bliss (Xifang Jile Shijie), 12, 31, 57, 65–69, 73, 96, 126, 156, 163, 174, 220n. 13, 223nn. 3, 7
past lifetime. *See* rebirth
person, category of, 3–4, 154
personhood, 4–5, 16, 19, 21, 68, 73, 84, 140, 164, 166–168, 194, 203, 212, 235n. 4
pingdeng. *See* egalitarianism
pingheng (balance), 21, 58–61, 64–65, 70, 72, 76, 79–81, 126
Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch (*Liuzu tan jing*), 75, 162, 232n. 1, 224n. 14
preacher circles, 8, 18, 20, 23–24, 27, 30, 33–35, 37–39, 45–46, 48, **49**, 51, **52–53,** 54, 61, 70, 88, 96, 130, 142, 146, 170, 175, 182, 202, 205, 210, 216n. 6, 217n. 8, 222n. 21, 228n. 7
preachers, 6–8, 10, 17–18, 37–43, 47–48, 50, 63, 73, 77–79, 90, 94, 98–99, 117, 125–126, 130; as nodes in Buddhist-media distribution, 8, 141, 143, 152, 165–166; at temples other than the Temple of Universal Rescue, 84, 146, 165, 196, 206–207; category of, 42–43, 230n. 7; criticism of, 41, 44–45, 221n. 16; debates among, 8, 39–40, 126; historical contexts for, 140–141, 220n. 13, 221n. 16; motivations of, 41–42, 166; origins of, 38–39, 221n. 17; strategies for finding listeners, 39–41, 91. *See also* Li, Teacher (pseudonym); Luo Baoquan (pseudonym); Wang Yuzhen (pseudonym); Wu Jing (pseudonym); Zhang, Teacher (pseudonym)
precepts: lay, 12–14, 93, 104, 218nn. 11–13, 226n. 11; bodhisattva, 14, 93, 104, 218n. 3, 226n. 11; for monastics, 199. *See also* vow-taking

Precious Volumes (*baojuan*), 141, 148, 162
proselytization (of Buddhism), 19, 83–84, 87, 89–90
psychology, 60, 70
Public Security Bureau (PSB; Gong'an Ju), 45, 47, 58, 73, 205, 221–222n. 19; 222n. 21, 228n. 8
public sphere, 20, 205, 209, 231–232n. 15
Pure Land Buddhism, 65–70, 77–78, 80, 176, 187, 219n. 5, 223nn. 6–7; 224n. 11, 231n. 11, 232n. 2, 233nn. 5, 6. See also *Amitābha Sūtra* (*Amituofo Jing*); Paradise of Western Bliss (Xifang Jile Shijie); *Sūtra of Infinite Life* (*Wu liang shou jing*)

qigong, 45, 163–164, 221n. 18, 225n. 8. *See also* Falun Gong

Reaching the Gateway to the Five Blessings (*Wu fu lin men*), 159
rebirth, 1, 15, 35, 65–70, 86–91, 98, **124,** 125–126, 129–130, 139, 158, 165, 187, 215n. 2
reciprocity, 71, 104–105; failure of, 108–109, 119–124; invisibility of, **123–124;** "sociology of," 122; "soteriology" of, 122, 125; success of, 121, 124. *See also* exchange
Red Guards, 27, 181, 234n. 13. *See also* Cultural Revolution
"reform and opening up" (*gaige kaifang*), 14, 44, 54–55, 109, 165, 172, 174, 181–182, 185, 192
reincarnation: *See* rebirth
religious activity sites (*zongjiao huodong changsuo*), 147, 210: restriction of religious discourses to, 14, 92, 157, 167–168, 203–206. *See also* islands of religiosity
renqing. See *ganqing*
Republic of China (1912–1949), 13–15, 17, 142–143, 204. *See also* Hongyi, Ven.; Sun Yat-sen; Taixu, Ven.; Yinguang, Ven.
restricted courtyard (of the Temple of Universal Rescue), 27, 36–37, 62
rhizomatic networks, 21, 154, 167

Saffron Revolution, 209
Śākyamuni. *See* Buddha, the (Śākyamuni)
Samantabhadra (Puxian Pusa), 98, 172–173
sangha, 17, 72, 75–76, 93, 122–123, 130, 135, 147, 161, 165, 212, 217n. 9, 227n. 4, 236nn. 6–7
Santi Asoke movement, 208
Sarvodaya movement, 208
scientific claims (of Buddhist truths), 157–158, 167
self, 4–5, 16, 20, 70, 78, 84, 88–89, 107–108, 132, 203; self-making, 17–19, 21, 59, 72, 92–98, 101, 164, 171, 195, 212, 226n. 9. *See also* "big self" (*dawo*); "false self" (*jiawo*); "little self" (*xiaowo*); true self
Shan Hong (pseudonym), 58–59, 76–77, 100, 127
Shouwang church, 205, 207
small study groups (*xiaozu*), 16–18, 207
socio-economic status. *See* class
Song Baozhu (pseudonym), 58–59
Song Li (pseudonym), 190–193, 195, 198, 203, 235nn. 3, 4
Source of Law Temple (Fayuan Si), 28
spatial control of religion, 204, 208
spirit possession, 104, 121
state: Maoist, 13–18, 26–27, 77, 204, 225n. 5, 234n. 10, 236n. 7; post-Mao, 9–10, 13–14, 16, 41, 44, 48, 54, 76–77, 87, 92, 100, 109, 167, 185, 204–211, 217n. 8, 232n. 15
summer camps, 212–213. *See also* Bailin Chan Monastery (Bailin Chan Si)
Sun Xiaohong (pseudonym), 69–70, 74
Sun Yat-sen, 157
superstition (*mixin*), 3, 13, 48, 126, 158, 160–161, 176, 181, 191, 217n. 8, 218n. 12
sūtra chanting, 30–31, 33–34, 61, 67–68, 219–220n. 9. *See also* sūtra recitation

Sūtra of Infinite Life (*Wu liang shou jing*), 156, 223n. 5, 232n. 2
sūtra recitation, 3, 13, 19, 39, 41, 51, 66–68, 102–104, 127–128, 140, 176, 230n. 6
sūtra singing, 6, 39, 51
synthesis, 63–64, 69–73, 76–81

Taiwan, Buddhism in, 207, 231n. 11, 236n. 7
Taixu, Ven., 15–18, 219n. 4, 223n. 7
taking the refuges (*guiyi sanbao*), 13–14, 30, 33, 36–37, 62, 82, 93, 96, 145, 163, 218nn. 11, 13, 222n. 1, 229n. 15. *See also* precepts
Tanzhe Temple (Tanzhe Si), 23, 82
temple building, 41–42, 123, 127, 129, 138, 163, 221n. 15
Temple of Divine Light (Lingguang Si), 73, 99, 165, 172–173, 205, 216n. 6, 220n. 10
Temple of Universal Rescue (Guangji Si), 16, 20, 25–27, 30, 34, 36, 45, 59, 67, 73, 80, 90, 96, 123–124, 130, 168, 172–173, 184, 191, 202, 204, 222n. 21, 231n. 12; distribution of Buddhist-themed media at, 140–141, 145, 157, 165, 210, 223n. 7; history of, 8, 26–27, 44, 220 n.13. *See also* inner courtyard (of the Temple of Universal Rescue); outer courtyard (of the Temple of Universal Rescue); restricted courtyard (of the Temple of Universal Rescue)
Tibetan Buddhism, 39, 206–207
Tong Wanjun (pseudonym), 104, 110–111, 114–115, 119, 121, 127, 156
tourism, 36, 92, 146, 205, 212, 220n. 10
true self, 117–118, 170
Tzu Chi (Benevolence Compassion) Movement, 11, 17, 207, 229n. 8

Understanding Buddhism (*Renshi fojiao*), 154, 161–162
unemployment, 2, 5, 9–10, 42, 54–55, 60, 65, 92–93, 96, 103, 110–112, 119, 199–200, 217n. 8
universal salvation, 178, 180, 188

vegetarianism, 13–14, 83, 99, 127, 130, 176, 191–192, 234n. 11; as environmental stewardship, 145, 159–160, 164; as healthy behavior, 157–158; as moral behavior, 55, 57, 102, 141, 155, 157, 159–160, 162, 178, 226n. 11; as social identity, 12, 14, 93, 227n. 4; at restaurants, 143, 206
video recordings (Buddhist-themed), 46–47, 104, 127, 139, 143–144, 155–156, 197
virtual Buddhist spaces, 142–143, 161, 174, 206, 208–209
visualization techniques, 68
volunteers (*hufa*), 28, 30, 34–36, 40–42, 44, 46, 55–56, 61, 63, 72, 145, 191, 193, 206, 221n. 19
volunteers (*yigong*), 35–37, 44, 50–51, 61, 63, 71–72, 76, 79–81
vow–taking, 82–83, 93–94

Walking Closer to Buddhism (*Zoujin fojiao*), 160, 231n. 11
Wang Xuan (pseudonym), 73–75, 80, 119, 181, 184, 207
Wang Yuzhen (pseudonym), 65
White Dagoba Temple (Baita Si), 146
White Lotus Society (Bailian She), 12, 204, 217–218n. 10, 234n. 9
worker, category of, 9, 184
World Buddhist Forum, 205
Wu Jianguo (pseudonym), 64–65, 68–69, 92, 119
Wu Jing (pseudonym), 84, 100, 153
Wutai Shan, 83–84, 91, 127, 150–151, 191

xin (heart), 58–60, 64, 68–69, 75, 170–172
xinxing (heart/action), 169–171, 182, 188–195, 232n. 1

Yiguandao, 215n. 2, 234n. 11
Yinguang, Ven., 142, 223n. 7
yinguo (cause and consequence), 8, 21, 61, 73, 101, 105–106, 114, 116–117, 119–123,

125–129, 135, 165, 226n. 9, 228n. 9; as system of morality, 7, 105–107, 112–116, 120, 122, 127–128, 130, 141, 167, 183–184, 227n. 4
Yinshun, Ven., 223n. 7
yuanfen (pre-fated bond), 85–89, 91, 94, 225nn. 2–3, 8. See also *foyuan* (Buddhic bond)
Yu Jiali (pseudonym), 96–99, 202–203, 235nn. 3, 4
Yu Zhirong, 163–164

Zhang, Teacher (pseudonym), 2–3, 6, 8, 46, 55–56, 73–77, 80, 168–200, 203, 207, 213, 234n. 10; as moral exemplar, 199; biography of, 232–233n. 3; essays of, 75–76, 129, 169–170, 173–174, 177–180, 183, 186–187, 191, 198, 233n. 7; miracle claims, 233n. 4; preaching of, 38, 73, 99, 117–118, 169, 174–177, 182–183, 185, 194, 196, 221n. 19, 232n. 2; relationship to students, 5, 90, 129, 174–175, 191–192, 194, 207, 235n. 3; sexual misconduct of, 194
Zhao Dan (pseudonym), 95–98
Zhao Xinyun (pseudonym), 57–58, 69
Zhengyan, Ven., 225n. 8
Zhiyi, Ven., 87, 105
Zhongnanhai, 25, 205
Zhou Enlai, 27, 157, 173, 180, 182, 198, 234n. 8
Zhou Ning (pseudonym), 2–6, 10, 44, 54–56, 61, 74, 90, 92, 108, 115, 118–119, 121–123, 125–127, 184–185, 188–189, 195
Zigon, Jarrett, 3–4, 16, 59, 106, 215n. 3, 217n. 7, 235n. 4

About the Author

Gareth Fisher is assistant professor of religion and anthropology at Syracuse University. He received his BA in religious studies from Grinnell College, his MA in religion from Columbia University, and his PhD in sociocultural anthropology from the University of Virginia. His research interests focus on the cultural politics of Buddhist revival in contemporary China and the broader relationship between morality and cultural change in societies undergoing rapid transformations. He is the recipient of two Fulbright fellowships, a Charlotte W. Newcombe award, and a research fellowship from the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity. His research articles have appeared in the *Journal of Asian Studies, Modern China*, *Social Compass*, *Fieldwork in Religion,* and *Nova Religio*.