

BENJAMIN BROSE

Credulous Kings and Immoral Monks: Critiques of Buddhists during the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms

King Qian [Chu] of the Southern Han [Wuyue] once governed the Danqiu [region]. [The monk De] shao was able to foresee the future and said to him, "One day you will become king and should make the Buddha Law prosper." These words proved true.

Zanning

Since antiquity, not only have occultists been favored for the novel, but ultimately valorous men turning to insurrection have anointed themselves through prodigies and omens. Such upstarts would scarcely have succeeded in deluding the gullible masses, if not for exploiting such superstitions.

Ouyang Xiu

The tail end of the Tang dynasty (618–907) and the following period of political division – known as the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms (907–960) – were difficult times for many Buddhist monastics in China.¹ In 842, Tang Emperor Wuzong 武宗 (r. 840–846) launched a persecution of Buddhism that resulted in the laicization of more than

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¹ The traditional dating of this era, 907–960, obscures the fact that the Tang had lost *de facto* control of the empire by 880, while the Song (960–1279) did not consolidate its control until 979. The term Five Dynasties refers to the five, short-lived regimes that successively controlled the north of China, and Ten Kingdoms indicates the ten smaller states that rose and fell primarily in the south (Northern Han being an exception).

Five Dynasties 五代

Later Liang 後梁 907–923
Later Tang 後唐 923–937
Later Jin 後晉 937–947
Later Han 後漢 947–951
Later Zhou 後周 951–960

Ten Kingdoms 十國

Wu 吳 921–937
Wuyue 吳越 923–978
Former Shu 前蜀 908–926
Min 閩 925–946
Southern Han 南漢 917–971
Nanping 南平 948–963
Chu 楚 932–951
Later Shu 後蜀 925–965
Southern Tang 南唐 937–975
Northern Han 北漢 951–979

260,000 monks and nuns and the destruction of more than 40,000 temples and shrines. Some years later, in 859, the rebel Qiu Fu 裘甫 (d. 860) led 30,000 men in the plunder of southeastern China, wreaking havoc on the populace and laying waste to Buddhist monasteries in his path. Qiu Fu was followed in 874 by the infamous Huang Chao 黃巢 (d. 884), whose much larger force of 600,000 men marauded across China for six years before capturing the Tang capital in 881 and forcing the Tang emperor into exile. Both rebellions were eventually put down, but they exhausted an already ailing Tang court, which in 907 was overthrown by the warlord Zhu Wen 朱溫 (852–912). The fall of the Tang was accompanied by the destruction of the old aristocracy – the great clans who had held the reins of power for centuries. Many of these families were once stalwart supporters of Buddhist monks and monasteries, but now most were either impoverished or dead.² The establishment of Zhu Wen’s Liang dynasty ushered in a new era of violence and instability in China. Over the course of the next seventy years, China was divided into multiple quasi-autonomous states, rising and falling in quick succession. The last of the northern dynasties, the Later Zhou (951–960), presided over yet another Buddhist proscription in 955. Some semblance of stability was restored only after the Song dynasty reunified the empire in 979.

In light of the wars and persecutions that marred the late ninth and tenth centuries, scholars once assumed that Emperor Wuzong’s anti-Buddhist campaigns (also known as the Huichang persecutions) marked the beginning of the end of Buddhism in China. Kenneth Ch’en, in his influential survey of Chinese Buddhist history, summed up the scholarly consensus of his day when he wrote that “Even before [Wuzong’s] persecution, Buddhism already showed signs of decay and slackening of faith and intellectual vigor in some areas, but the suppression of 845 supplied the crippling blow. That year is therefore the pivotal date, marking the end of the apogee and the beginning of the decline of the religion.”³ The eminent French sinologist, Jacques Gernet, concurred, describing Buddhism after the Tang as “a church that had outlived itself and that seems to have lost its soul... .”⁴

² On the massacre of the Tang aristocracy, see Kwok-Yiu Wong, “The White Horse Massacre and Changing Literati Culture in the Late-Tang and Five Dynasties China,” *AM* 3d ser. 23.2 (2010), pp. 33–75.

³ Kenneth Ch’en, *Buddhism in China: a Historical Survey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 232. More recently, see John Keay, *China: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), p. 285.

⁴ Jacques Gernet, *A History of Chinese Civilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 295. This narrative continues to inform popular accounts of Buddhist history

In this article, I challenge the “Tang climax” paradigm, but I am hardly the first to do so. Over the last twenty-five years, a host of studies has demonstrated the great vitality of Buddhism during the Song.⁵ The Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms, on the other hand, is still often dismissed as a period cultural stagnation or, at best, subterranean ferment.⁶ In what follows, I examine a small but representative sample of Song texts that describe the degenerate state of Buddhist monastics during the Tang-Song interregnum. I argue, in short, that the critiques of Buddhist monks found in these works can be read, not as descriptions of Buddhism in decline, but, on the contrary, as reactions against the burgeoning economic and political power of monastic institutions during the tenth and early eleventh centuries. The argument is a simple one, but the sources on which it is based are complicated for a number of reasons. Before turning to the content of these works, more needs to be said about the contexts in which they were produced.

in both China and the United States. At the Museum of Chinese Buddhist Culture (Zhongguo Fo jiao wenhua bowuguan 中国佛教文化博物馆) built in Yangzhou in 2008, an exhibit on the “Evolution of Buddhism in China” identifies the Sui-Tang period as “the prime,” the Song-Yuan era as “past the prime,” and the Ming and Qing dynasties as having fallen into “decay and desacralization.” Here in the U.S., John Fairbank’s *China: A New History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 86, also informs readers that “the splendor of the Tang and of Chinese Buddhism declined together.”

⁵ See, for example, Abe Chōichi 阿部肇一, *Chūgoku Zenshū shi no kenkyū* 中国禅宗史の研究 (Tokyo: Komazawa daigaku rekishigaku kenkyūshitsu, 1960); Ishii Shūdō 石井修, *Sōdai zenshū no kenkyū* 宋代禅史の研究 (Tokyo: Daitō shuppansha, 1987); T. Griffith Foulk, “Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice in Sung Ch’an Buddhism,” in Patricia Ebrey and Peter N. Gregory, eds., *Religion and Society in T’ang and Sung China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), pp. 147–208; Peter N. Gregory, ed., *Buddhism in the Sung* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999); and Morten Schlütter, *How Zen Became Zen: The Dispute over Enlightenment and the Formation of Chan Buddhism in Song-dynasty China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008).

⁶ Important exceptions to this trend include studies of the *Zutang ji* by Yanagida Seizan 柳田聖山 [Yokoi Seizan 横井聖山] (“*Sodōshū no shiryō kachi*” 祖堂集の資料価値, *Zengaku kenkyū* 禅学研究 44 [1953], pp. 31–80) and Kinugawa Kenji 衣川賢次 (“*Sodōshū no kōri*” 祖堂集の校理, *Tōyō bunka* 東洋文化 83 [2003], pp. 127–51); research on the life and work of Yongming Yanshou by Albert Welter (*The Meaning of Myriad Good Deeds: A Study of Yongming Yen shou and the Wan-shan t’ung-kue chi* [New York: Peter Lang 1993], and *Yongming Yanshou’s Conception of Chan in the Zongjing Lu: A Special Transmission within the Scriptures* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2011]), and Yi-hsun Huang (*Integrating Chinese Buddhism: A Study of Yongming Yanshou’s Guanxin Xuanshu* [Taipei: Dharma Drum Publishing Corporation, 2005]); Makita Tairyō’s 牧田諱亮 chronology and study of religion during the Five Dynasties (*Godai shūkyōshi kenkyū* 五代宗教史研究 [Kyoto: Heiraku-ji shoten 平樂寺書店, 1971]); and Suzuki Tetsuo’s 鈴木哲雄 voluminous work on the history of Chan during the late Tang and Five Dynasties (see especially *Tō Godai no Zenshū: Konan Kōsei hen* 唐五代の禅宗, 湖南江西篇 [Tokyo: Daitō Shuppansha, 1984], and *Tō Godai Zenshū shi* 唐五代禅宗史 [Tokyo: Sankibō busshorin 山喜房佛書林, 1985]).

BENJAMIN BROSE

THE FIVE DYNASTIES AND
TEN KINGDOMS IN SONG SOURCES

There are, broadly speaking, two groups of materials available for the study of Buddhist institutions during the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms, and they view the history of this period from rather different perspectives. On the one hand, Buddhist historiography, inscriptions, and archaeological evidence depict Buddhist monastic communities flourishing under the generous support of regional courts, particularly in southern kingdoms, where hundreds of temples were constructed, tens of thousands of monks were ordained, hundreds of thousands of Buddhist sutras and images were printed, and nearly a thousand fascicles of new Buddhist texts were composed. In contrast, non-Buddhist sources, particularly historical accounts of the Five Dynasties written by Song scholar-officials, often take a dim view of tenth century clerics. Buddhist monks appear only infrequently in these works – which chronicle the seemingly incessant violence and betrayals at the northern courts and the administrative and military incompetence of southern regimes – but when they do, most are portrayed as unproductive, ignorant, and deceitful men who hastened the demise of kingdoms and dynasties. I discuss the former sources at length in a forthcoming monograph on clergy-court relations during the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms.⁷ Here, I would like to limit my focus to the latter, largely critical accounts of tenth century monastics and their lay benefactors.

Denunciations of Buddhist monks as illiterate, indolent, greedy, and undisciplined are, of course, nothing new. The same sorts of accusations, often employing the same sets of metaphors, were voiced as early as the Six Dynasties and have continued up through the twentieth century. It might be argued that the condemnations of tenth century monastics by Song literati represent just another expression of the age-old antagonism between Buddhist clerics and their Confucian critics. As is well-known, some Song scholars, like Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072), the author of the most widely read history of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms, viewed Buddhist monks as parasites who leeches the life out of the empire. Others, like Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086), the preeminent historian of his generation, and Lu You 陸游 (1125–1209), the Song poet and literatus, held that Buddhism was a tradition noble in principle but often corrupt in practice. Given such predispositions, it is hardly surprising that these men's historical ac-

⁷ Brose, *Buddhist Empires: Patronage, Lineage, and the Rise of Chan in Tenth Century China* (currently under review).

counts of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms contain descriptions of degenerate monks.

Long before the eleventh century, condemnations of Buddhist clerics by scholar-officials had evolved into something of a literary trope. And yet, formulaic as they may have been, critiques of Buddhist individuals and their institutions were not issued arbitrarily but in response to what their authors saw as urgent political and social problems. Generally speaking, calls for the suppression of monastics tended to grow more vocal and more vitriolic when the fortunes of the samgha were on the rise and the economic and military stability of the state was threatened. There was a chorus of anti-Buddhist critique, for example, in the decades following the fall of the famously pro-Buddhist Liang dynasty (502–557).⁸ During the Tang, Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) took aim at what he saw as the moral, social, and economic disruptions brought about by the excessive imperial patronage of Buddhist monks and institutions. Emperor Wuzong's persecutions were likewise justified by the fact that the number of monastics was increasing and their "public temples and private chapels [had] reached boundless numbers, all with soaring towers and elegant ornamentation sufficient to outshine the imperial palace itself."⁹ Han Yu, Wuzong, and others were worried that the state's authority and resources were being undercut by the samgha. Screeds against the corrupting influence of Buddhist monks thus typically sought to undermine the power and influence then commanded by clerics. There is usually no need to denounce something of little consequence.

Not surprisingly, the charges levied against tenth century monks and their patrons also expressed alarm over the inordinate political and economic influence of the samgha, but there was an important difference. Unlike Han Yu and Wuzong, most of the authors of these works lived generations after the events they were recording. They had no interest in salvaging the political fortunes of defunct northern dynasties or southern kingdoms; they were writing for their peers in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

⁸ See Mark Strange's excellent account of how Emperor Wu and his relationship to the Buddhist church are depicted in later historical sources: "Representations of Liang Emperor Wu as a Buddhist Ruler in Sixth- and Seventh-century Texts," *AM* 3d ser. 24.2 (2011), pp. 53–112.

⁹ *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (Bonaben 百衲本 *Ershisi shi* 二十四史 edn.) 18A:14b–15a, trans. Burton Watson, in William Theodore de Bary, ed., *Sources of Chinese Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) 1, p. 586. Wuzong was also under the sway of his Daoist advisors and their mind-adding elixirs; see T. H. Barrett, "The Madness of Emperor Wuzong," *CEA* 14 (2004), pp. 173–86.

As is well known, Chinese historiographical writing was self-consciously didactic; the past was something to be framed and interpreted as a commentary on the present and a guideline for the future. Song historians' evaluations of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms were thus colored by the intellectual and political debates of the late eleventh and twelfth centuries. Ouyang Xiu, for example, was one of the first to define orthodox dynastic succession not by means of linear continuity or the cyclical successions of Five Phases theory, as had been common practice, but in terms of morality (*daode* 道德).¹⁰ Only demonstrably ethical regimes like the Tang and the Song were deemed orthodox. Dynasties characterized by disunity and disloyalty, periods like the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms, lacked legitimacy. By this logic, the Song dynasty was the direct successor of the Tang, and it fell to Song historians to demonstrate that the Five Dynasties were but an aberration in the long tradition of virtuous governance. Evidence of the economic hardship and the social disorder brought on by regional rulers' overzealous support of Buddhist monks thus served as a foil for the prosperity and moral rigor of the Song.

It also served as an object lesson for the Song administration. After the economic disruptions of the Xixia incursions and a succession of natural disasters, many court literati were concerned about the economic solvency of the Song and philosophical integrity of the Confucian tradition. Song authors who wrote about Buddhist matters of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms – another period of discord and foreign invasion – seem in many cases to have reproduced accounts of greedy and duplicitous monks in order to caution the Song court against excessive or irresponsible support of Buddhist institutions.

Historical accounts of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms, like all historical narratives, reflect the ideological agendas and the contemporary concerns of their authors, but they also provide valuable perspectives on the social history of the tenth century. Bearing the biases of Song authors in mind, we can now turn to their histories to see what they reveal about the state of the Buddhist clergy during the Tang-Song interregnum.

¹⁰ See Liu Pujiang 刘浦江, "Zhengtong lun xia de Wudai shi guan" 正统论下的五代史观, *Tang yanjiu* 唐研究 11 (2005), pp. 73–94.

DEVOTION AND DELUSION

While there is a predictable disparity between the way Buddhist and non-Buddhist sources describe and interpret the details of samgha-state relations in the northern dynasties and southern kingdoms, there is broad agreement on the nature of the relationships themselves. In sources dating from both the Five Dynasties and the Song, the rulers of southeastern kingdoms in particular – Min (corresponding roughly to modern Fujian province), Wuyue (Zhejiang), and the Southern Tang (Jiangsu, Jiangxi, and Anhui) – are all credited with lavishing support on Buddhist monks and monasteries. Some regional rulers had gone so far as to receive the bodhisattva precepts and engage in various forms of Buddhist practice – chanting sutras, copying texts, attending dharma talks, performing prostrations, and so forth.¹¹ (In one extreme case, a Buddhist monk was even briefly enthroned as emperor of Min.¹²) In return for the support they received, clerics served their patrons in conventional ways, such as generating merit, warding off disasters, ministering to ancestors, and providing counsel. The open-handed patronage of regional rulers facilitated the expansion of monastic populations and the accumulation of monastic estates. Donors and their monastic beneficiaries subscribed to the belief that giving land, cash, and other resources to the clergy was in the best interest of the donor. These offerings were seen as an investment that would yield dividends in the form of merit, timely rains, and political stability. If monks, either by nature or by disposition, lacked the apotropaic powers attributed to them, the offerings would benefit merely the monks themselves – an unacceptable outcome. Furthermore, to many observers, the holdings of monastic estates seemed excessive. What real need did Dawei tongdu si 大滬同度寺, a temple in the capital of Chu, have for over one thou-

¹¹ See, for example, the memorial stele for Min's first king Wang Shen zhi 王審知 (862–925), *Zhongyi wang miao beiwen* 忠懿王廟碑文, in *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 (1815; rpt. Taipei: Dahua shuju, 1987), j. 893; Wuyue King Qian Chu's "Wuyue guowang Qian Chu Huang fei ta ji" 吳越國王錢俶黃妃塔記, in Wu Zhijing 吳之鯨, *Wulin fanzhi* 武林梵志 (SKQS edn.), 3:5; the description of the Southern Tang king Li Yu in Ma Ling 馬令, *Nantang shu* 南唐書 (SBCK), 26:2; Lu You 陸游, *Nantang shu* 南唐書 (SBCK), 15:2; and Ouyang Xiu's account of the Later Tang Emperor Zhuangzong and Empress Liu, *XWDS*, pp. 133–34.

¹² Sima Guang 司馬光, *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (SBCK), 284:28; *XWDS*, p. 583; Liang Kejia 梁克家, ed., *Chunxi Sanshan zhi* 淳熙三山志 (Fuzhou: Fuzhoushi difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, 2000), p. 5; Qian Yan 錢儼, *Wuyue beishi* 吳越備史 (SBCK), 3:14–15. Zhuo Yanming 卓巖明 was installed as emperor of Min in the spring of 945. The *Wuguo gushi* 五國故事 (author unknown, SKQS), 2:11, states that a red snake slithered in and out of Zhou Yanming's nose while he slept, an occurrence that understandably set him apart from ordinary men. Aside from these miraculous accounts and a later tradition that Zhuo Yanming was originally from Shengguang si 神光寺, little else is known about this monk. He was assassinated after just two months on the throne.

sand tenant families?¹³ Why did Xuefeng si 雪峰寺, a monastery in the Min kingdom, receive annual tax revenue and regular donations from the court, when their fields produced more than one and half million pounds of rice annually?¹⁴

The wealth of Buddhist monks was particularly troublesome because it contrasted so sharply with the poverty of the average peasant. In northern Fujian, for example, the monastic estate on Mount Xuefeng was only one of nearly 500 new temples built during the tenures of the ruling Wang and, later, Qian families – from 892 to 978.¹⁵ The earliest gazetteer for the region (compiled in the late twelfth century) cites an “old record” that claimed that monastic fields made up one half of all the agricultural land holdings in northern Fujian.¹⁶ Other sources note that on average one monk held a total of 160 *mu* (10.5 hectares/26 acres) of land, more than ten times the amount of the average person.¹⁷ Monks were accused of monopolizing the best, most fertile fields, leaving non-ordained locals and immigrants to work middling and lesser lands.¹⁸ The Song dynasty official and Fujian local Cai Xiang 蔡襄 (1012–1067) complained that the “illegal autocratic kings [of Min] took the land of the people and gave it to the Buddhists.”¹⁹

This situation was not unique to Min. In neighboring Wuyue as well, later writers charged that Buddhist monks had grown wealthy and indolent as a result of the lavish patronage they received from Wuyue’s kings. “The Qian family built extensive halls and temples, ornamenting them with statues. It is said that the monks received [the temples] and then gave them to the ten directions, so how could they be considered [private] property? [...] Each year, Zhejiang monks emerge and travel near and far, always asking the people for things. Although the business from their fields has made them quite rich and their expenses are

¹³ Yue Tao 陶岳, *Wudai shibu* 五代史補 (SKQS), 3:15.

¹⁴ Xu Bo 徐焯, *Xuefeng zhi* 雪峰志, in *Zhongguo Fosi zhi congkan* 中國佛事誌叢刊 (Yangzhou: Jiangsu guang ling gu ji ke yin she, 1996), vol. 103, pp. 186–87. See also the description of the estate in *Chunxi sanshan zhi*, pp. 546–47.

¹⁵ These “temples” almost certainly included small shrines and hermitages.

¹⁶ *Chunxi sanshan zhi*, p. 127. The populace had 82,000 *qing* of land for 579,000 residents (not including the old and young), while monks controlled over 2,000 *qing* for a population of just 14,000.

¹⁷ Chikusa Masaaki 笠沙雅章, *Chūgoku Bukkyō shakaishi kenkyū* 中国仏教社会史研究 (Kyoto: Dōhōsha, 1982), p. 151. For a comparison of the amount of land owned by monks and non-monks, see Huang Minzhi 黃敏枝, *Songdai Fojiao shehui jingji shi lun ji* 宋代佛教社會經濟史論集 (Taipei: Taiwan xue sheng shu ju, 1989), pp. 122–23.

¹⁸ Tuo Tuo 脫脫, *Song shi* 宋史 (SKQS), 173:48.

¹⁹ Angela Schottenhammer, “Local Politico-Economic Particulars of the Quanzhou Region during the Tenth Century,” *Journal of Sung-Yuan Studies* 29 (1999), pp. 18, 30.

few, they ask for things from those who constantly labor and have little to spare.”²⁰ Although scholars once assumed that Buddhist institutions never recovered from the economic devastation of Wuzong’s persecutions, accounts like these make it clear that many Buddhist monasteries were in fact thriving during the tenth and early eleventh centuries.

MONASTIC POPULATIONS

The growing number and size of Buddhist monastic complexes in southeastern China was indicative of the expanding population of monks and nuns. Song scholars noted with alarm that, despite the political and economic instability of the period, regional rulers permitted the ordinations of tens of thousands of able-bodied men, thereby removing them from tax registers, military service, and corvée labor pools.²¹ In the kingdom of Min, for example, the Wang family is said to have supported multiple mass ordinations.²² Some reports claim that 2,000 new monks were ordained every year during the reign of Min’s third king, Wang Yanjun 王延鈞 (r. 927–936).²³ Later legends held that Wang Yanjun’s brother, Wang Yanxi 王延羲 (r. 939–944), the fifth king of Min, fed an impossibly large number of monks – three million – and commissioned no fewer than 300 copies of the Buddhist canon.²⁴ Such numbers are clearly hyperbolic, intended to demonstrate the folly of Min’s rulers and to account for the existence of so many monastics in the Fujian region during the Song. (By 1021, there were over 71,000 officially registered monks in Fujian, roughly ten percent of the population.²⁵)

²⁰ *Nantang shu* (Ma), 26:7–8.

²¹ Some modern historians once assumed a decline in monastic populations during the tenth century. Chou Hsiang-kuang, writing in the 1950s, noted that the beginning of the Five Dynasties coincided with “a great falling-off in the number of Buddhist monks. Through lack of scholarly monks, Buddhism declined for half a century”; *A History of Chinese Buddhism* (Alahabad: Indo-Chinese Literature Publications, 1955), p. 161.

²² According to *Chunxi Sanshan zhi* (pp. 513–14), Wang Shenzhi ordered the ordination of 2,000 monks in 898 on the occasion of establishing a new ordination platform at Qianyuan si 乾元寺 in Fuzhou. Another platform was established at Kaiyuan si four years later and another 3,000 monks were ordained for the purpose of ensuring Tang Emperor Zhaozong a safe return to Chang’an. Again, in 928, Wang Shenzhi’s son and successor, Wang Yanjun, had no less than 20,000 monastics ordained at the new official ordination platform at Taiping si 太平寺.

²³ Hugh Clark, *Portrait of a Community: Society, Culture, and the Structures of Kinship in the Mulan River Valley (Fujian) from the Late Tang through the Song* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2007), p. 183. Wang Yanjun reigned for ten years, so logic here may be that 10 x 2000 = 20,000.

²⁴ *Wuguo gushi*, 17:45.

²⁵ Clark, *Portrait of a Community*, p. 183. Population statistics extrapolated from Robert M. Hartwell, “Demographic, Political, and Social Transformations of China, 750–1550,” *HJAS* 42.2 (Dec., 1982), pp. 365–442.

The kingdoms of Wuyue and the Southern Tang – two neighboring states that, like Min, generously subsidized their monastic populations – were also charged with administrative and economic incompetence. According to Lu You, the last king of the Southern Tang, Li Yu 李煜 (r. 961–975), “built more than ten Buddhist temples within the palace compound and gave gold to recruit commoners and Daoists to become monks. Within the capital there were thousands of monks who were well-versed in extracting resources from the county magistrate.”²⁶ This peculiar strategy ran counter to the usual policy of requiring the populace to pay fees in order to enjoy the economic benefits accorded the clergy. According to the thirteenth-century author Jia Sidao 賈似道 (1213–1275), after the fall of the Southern Tang, in an attempt to reduce the number of monastics in the Jiangnan region, sixty to seventy percent of those ordained during the reign of the Li family were laicized. Fearing that the defrocked clergy might turn to banditry, they were branded and forced to serve in the Song army.²⁷

SOCIAL INSTABILITY

For several Song officials, the problem with rulers’ patronage of Buddhism was not their piety per se, but the fact that their faith had so many negative repercussions for their states and their subjects. Rulers were responsible for law and order within their realms and there was a long standing concern that indiscriminate support of undisciplined clergy could lead to social instability. Commenting on the demise of the Southern Tang, the Song scholar Ma Ling 馬令 (fl. 1105) wrote:

Alas! I understand the way of the Buddhists. When the ten thousand things are contained within a single mind, emptiness will certainly be illuminated. When a single mind gives rise to the ten thousand things, illumination will certainly be empty. How could this be considered a shallow view? Yet the ignorant do not understand this and ruin themselves with grains, gold, and silk. They speak of cause and effect and consider it the Dharma. They decorate clay images and consider it the Buddha. They pray for good fortune but are extremely demonic. They look for liberation, yet

²⁶ *Nantang shu* (Lu), 15:2. Long Gun 龍袞, *Jiangnan yeshi* 江南野史 (SKQS, 3:7), also writes that “The monks within Jiankang’s [Nanjing’s] temples amounted to more than ten thousand. [The king] personally supplied them with grain, state funds, cash, and silks.”

²⁷ Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀, *Shuo fu* 說郛 (SKQS), 20:28; Chen Baozhen 陳葆真, “Nantang sanzhu yu Fojiao xinyang” 南唐三主與佛教信仰, *Foxue yu wenxue: Fojiao wenxue yu yishuxue yantaohui lunwenyi (wenxue bufen)* 佛學與文學, 佛教文學與藝術學研討會論文集 (文學部份), in *Foxue huiyi lunwen huibian* 佛學會議論文彙編 (1998), vol. 2, pp. 262–63.

are exceptionally ignorant. For that reason, Emperors Liang Wu and Qi Xiang offended their contemporaries as well as later generations. A biography of the Buddha says that “the Liang dynasty fell while practicing abstinence and upholding the precepts. That was not the fault of Sakyamuni.”²⁸ Then why did the Buddha-dharma regularly result in the suffering of later generations? It was because sovereigns became disoriented and were unable to return to the standard. Bad laws and lax discipline always follow from this.²⁹

Like many other Song literati, Ma Ling claimed to respect Buddhism in theory, but held that in practice the tradition had been hijacked by ignorant and avaricious men passing themselves off as virtuous monks. Even so, the fall of the Liang dynasty, and by analogy the fall of the Southern Tang, could not be blamed on the misbehavior of monks alone. An undisciplined samgha was symptomatic of failed leadership; monarchs’ participation in Buddhist ceremonies distracted them from their administrative duties. When rulers neglected their responsibilities, their subjects were left without a moral compass. Disorientation bred disorder, which led to the collapse of dynasties.

Among the southern kingdoms, the Southern Tang was the largest and most powerful and posed the most significant challenge to northern dynasties. Song historians, particularly during the Southern Song (1127–1279), when northern China was occupied by the Jurchen Jin dynasty and the Song court was forced to relocate to Hangzhou, were ambivalent about the significance of the Southern Tang. On the one hand, it represented a powerful, culturally sophisticated southern state which, for a time, defied an alien regime in the north. Many thus came to regard the Southern Tang as a cultural and political conduit, linking the Tang and Song dynasties.³⁰ At the same time, the Southern Tang had been invaded and overthrown by the Song in 975, and that defeat was justified in terms of morality and order displacing depravity and chaos. Song histories of the Southern Tang thus tend to celebrate the cultural achievements of Southern Tang literati and artists while disparaging the indulgences and administrative inadequacies of the Southern Tang’s kings, particularly the last monarch, the famed aesthete Li Yu.

²⁸ Zhipan’s 志磐 *Fozu tongji* 佛祖統紀 (T 49, no. 2035, p. 361B15) attributes this line to Wen Zhongzi 文中子, a.k.a. Wang Tong 王通 (580–617).

²⁹ *Nantang shu* (Ma), 26:1.

³⁰ For a discussion of how the Southern Tang was represented in later literature, see Chengjuan Sun, “Rewriting the Southern Tang (937–975): Nostalgia and Aesthetic Imagination” (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2008).

Not surprisingly, a blind faith in the teachings of the Buddha was high on the list of Li Yu's many shortcomings. The king was accused of serving the Buddha rather than his own subjects. He and his wife reportedly dressed in monastic robes, chanted sutras, made mudras, and bowed until sores formed on their foreheads.³¹ His system of rewards and punishments also appeared arbitrary. The sentences of serious criminals were decided by a so-called "lamp of fate" left burning before a Buddha image in the palace. Death sentences would go forward if the lamp went out in the course of a night; pardons were granted if the lamp still burned at dawn.³² Thus, left without clear ethical standards, the common people began to disregard their own filial responsibilities and civic obligations.³³

The force of these critiques is directed against rulers, but they also called into question the very basis of state support for the samgha. Buddhist clerics, of course, were supposed to be ethical exemplars. The vinaya and monastic codes were intended to regulate the minutia of monastic behavior and represent the pinnacle of morally and spiritually conducive behavior. In China as elsewhere, monastics were patronized (or at least tolerated) with the understanding that their meritorious work brought benefit to their patrons and the local populace, and collections of eminent monks' biographies highlight the samgha's purity of conduct and service to society. To accuse monks of violating major precepts was a serious charge, not only because it cast doubt on the integrity of the samgha as a whole, but because it undermined the very rationale for patronage.

The charges lodged against tenth century clerics rehearsed a familiar litany: monks were supposed to be vegetarian but in fact openly ate meat;³⁴ they were forbidden to drink alcohol yet were often

³¹ *Nantang shu* (Ma), 26:1; *Nantang shu* (Lu), 18:2.

³² *Nantang shu* (Ma), 26:2-3; *Nantang shu* (Lu), 15:3.

³³ Describing Bian Hao 邊鐫 (d.u.), a Southern Tang military commander who led successful invasions of the kingdoms of Min, in 946, and Chu, in 951, Sima Guang wrote that when Bian first occupied the Min territory of Jianzhou 建州, "he did not harm any of his captives, so the people of Jian called him 'Buddha Bian.' When he conquered Tanzhou 潭州, he did not disrupt the markets, so the people of Tan called him 'Bodhisattva Bian.' But when he became Military Commissioner, he did not maintain law and order but only set up daily vegetarian feasts and enthusiastically undertook Buddhist activities. The people of Tan were disappointed and called him 'Monk Bian.'" *Zizhi tongjian*, 291:8. To be a buddha or a bodhisattva, it seems, was to exercise compassion. To be a monk, on the other hand, was to serve only the interests of the samgha.

³⁴ The Southern Tang king Li Jing 李璟, for example, was enamored of a monk with the ironic name Shining Modesty (Qianguang 謙光). Qianguang was reportedly unusually charismatic and his transgressions were overlooked by the king: "[Qianguang] did not restrain himself, eating and drinking like a commoner, and the ruler did nothing to prohibit this. Among

drunk;³⁵ they had taken a vow of celibacy yet were having sex. Some of these charges were directed at Chan monks, who had a reputation for engaging in principled antinomianism. Refusing to distinguish between ignorance and enlightenment or the sacred and the profane, some Chan clerics sought to embody the fundamental Buddhist position of non-duality. From this perspective, unorthodox behavior was in fact entirely normative. But there were many, both within and without the samgha, who were less tolerant of monks who violated the precepts, regardless of the reasons. The same behavior could thus be read very differently depending on the ideological position of the observer.³⁶ Critics of the samgha took reports of precept violation as evidence of monastic debasement and reproduced them as implicit condemnations of the regional rulers who were blind to the abuses of the very monks they supported.

Reports of monastic misbehavior in southern kingdoms were also part of a larger tradition of representing the south as ethically unmoored. Richard Davis has noted that several Song authors displayed a “heightened anxiety about the south, particularly the southeast, as the

the various types of meat, he was particularly fond of soft-shelled turtle. The ruler often spoke with him in a casual way about the Buddha’s [teaching of] retribution. He once asked, ‘Does my master have any aspirations? I would like to hear about them.’ Qianguang replied, ‘I have no other wish but to have goose legs and calipash, that’s all I need.’ The king laughed heartily”; *Wudai shibu*, 5:16.

³⁵ Ma Ling’s *Nantang shu* contains the following account of the monk Xuanji 玄寂: “Xuanji had the family name of Gao. He said that he was from the clan of [the Tang general] Gao Pian 高駢 (ca. 822–887). He received the precepts during the Shengyuan era (937–943) at Shengyuan si 昇元寺. He was by nature straightforward and insightful and had read through the Buddhist canon. During the Baoda era (943–957), he was summoned to discourse on the *Lotus Sutra* and awarded the post of Monastic Recorder on the Left as well as provisions. He was given the title Great Master Preacher of Sutras, Explicator of the Luminous Teachings 講經論明教大師 and a purple robe. During the Buddhist prohibition, many monks and nuns became slack and did not keep the regulations. Xuanji was repeatedly charged with breaking the law but an official who admired his talent pardoned him. The last ruler summoned him [to the palace] and questioned him about the *Avatamsaka sūtra*. Xuanji spoke on the *Brahmacaryā* 梵行 chapter and was awarded much gold and silk. Because of this he was able to do as he pleased and would get into trouble on days when he was drunk. Wasted, he would be followed by dozens of young boys. Xuanji would walk and sing along the road saying, ‘Drunk baldy, drunk baldy! What honor, what humiliation! Just look! Fine clothes become a burial mound. Haven’t you seen the Yang and Yellow rivers become hills and valleys?’ He and the children would echo each other as though there were no one else around. [He said that] sitting was for inferior monks. He went to live at Changgan si 長干寺 and would frequently carouse with disreputable youths. He drank himself to death at Shizi ridge 石子崗”; *Nantang shu* (Ma), 26:5–6.

³⁶ For example, the stupa inscription for Yuanji (the same monk as Xuanji, discussed above), written by the Southern Tang literatus Han Xizai 韓熙載 (902–970) depicts an exemplary Chan monk; “Yuanji chanshi bei” 元寂禪師碑, *Quan Tang wen*, j. 877.

center of material decadence and moral ambivalence.”³⁷ This anxiety is particularly evident in descriptions of Southern Tang monks. According to Ma Ling, the many sexual transgressions of that kingdom’s clerics were acknowledged but only weakly repudiated by the court. “When monks engaged in illicit sexual activity, officials [invoked] a document [circulated by the king] which said, ‘Discussed in terms of the law, the illicit sexual activity of monks and nuns stems from the [same] desire as the basic intention to marry.’ [The offenders] were ordered to bow one hundred times before the Buddha and were released [laicized?]. Therefore, the public display of sexual abuses was not prohibited.”³⁸

The problem with non-celibate monks was not just that they were violating their own monastic codes. Much more worrisome was the possibility that monastic impropriety would set a dangerous precedent for others. These concerns were brought to a head with the teachings and practices of a group of monks and laypeople in northern China in the first half of the tenth century. The problems first surfaced in the autumn of 920, when a “diabolical renegade” named Wu Yi 毋乙 proclaimed himself Son of Heaven. This direct challenge to the authority of Emperor Mo 末帝 of the Later Liang dynasty (r. 913–923) was ill-advised; Wu Yi and his followers were liquidated just three months later. But the Liang court remained wary of the people of Chenzhou 陳州, Wu Yi’s center of operations, located about 100 km south of Kaifeng. According to both the old and the new histories of the Five Dynasties, the people of Chenzhou were engaging in some form of Buddhist practice which involved the improper mixing of men and women.³⁹ It seems that the situation had not much improved by the Later Tang. An edict issued in 927 stated, “Within cities and villages there are many who esteem evil teachings and make spurious claims regarding the teachings of the

³⁷ Richard L. Davis, “Images of the South in Ouyang Xiu’s *Historical Records of the Five Dynasties*,” Dongwu daxue 東吳大學, ed., *Shixue yu wenxian* 史學與文獻 (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1998), p. 151.

³⁸ *Nantang shu* (Ma), 26:2. One of the most infamous libertines of the Southern Tang was the Assistant Minister Han Xizai (see n. 36), who brushed a number of inscriptions for local Buddhist monks and monasteries. In Song dynasty accounts, Han is portrayed as a profligate and a panderer. In addition to his wife, a princess from the kingdom of Min, Han “had several tens of concubines and prostitutes within his inner chambers, many of whom went to other homes to provide services for guests” (*XWDS*, p. 502). Apparently, monks also availed themselves of Han Xizai’s harem. According to one author, “There were several doctors and monks skilled in alchemy who, whenever they went [to Han Xizai’s place], would all ascend the hall and enter the chamber with the maidservants” (*Wudai shibu*, 5:15). Han Xizai’s hedonism was depicted in a famous painting by the Southern Tang artist, Gu Hongzhong 顧闳中 (fl. 943–960), who, legend has it, was sent to one of Han’s parties as a spy by King Li Yu. A copy of Gu’s painting shows a single monk mingling with Han, his guests, and his courtesans. The scene, flanked by unmade beds, has clear sexual overtones.

³⁹ *XWDS*, pp. 27, 123; *Jiu Wudai shi*, 10:4.

Sage [i.e. the Buddha]. Some do not differentiate between monks and nuns, [and permit] men and women to live together. Factions gather at night and disperse at dawn. They claim to disseminate [the teachings] in dharma assemblies but secretly indulge in illicit activities. If not eliminated, they will certainly become a pernicious problem.” The edict went on to stipulate that offenders be apprehended, flogged, and/or executed.⁴⁰

The eminent Buddhist scholar-monk Zanning 贊寧 (919–1002), writing his own history of the samgha, felt compelled to respond to these allegations. He quoted from the official accounts already in circulation but asserted that the real perpetrators of these crimes were actually not Buddhists but Manicheans.

In the sixth year of Zhenming of the [Later] Liang [920] a group of Manicheans in Chenzhou set up Wu Yi as the Son of Heaven. Soldiers were dispatched on a punitive expedition and Wu Yi was captured alive. Together with his followers he was brought to the capital and beheaded in the city. In the past, the people of Chenzhou delighted in the practice of the left-handed way. Basing themselves on the teachings of Buddhism they set up their own sect, calling it the Most Supreme Vehicle (*shangshang sheng* 上上乘). They did not eat meat. They converted the common people with their disorderly and debauched ways, assembling in the evenings and dispersing at dawn. Since the Prefect [Zhu Youneng 朱友能], Prince of Hui, committed many unlawful acts, the demon-bandits grew stronger. The campaigns [against them] were tireless but unsuccessful in quelling [the uprising] until the Zhenming 貞明 era [915–920] when they were all executed. During the Later Tang and Shi [Later] Jin dynasties, the movement again resurfaced. One person was chosen as leader and was obeyed in all matters. Someone made a drawing of a demon king sitting and the Buddha was washing his feet. [They claimed that] the Buddha’s [teaching] stopped at the Great Vehicle, but they [taught] the most supreme vehicle. [In fact] theirs was only a shadow of the Buddha’s teaching, what is called the semblance of the Way. There were some *bhiksus* who, driven by starvation and cold, joined this group but the wise and noble kept them at a distance. This teaching leads people to hell. Be careful!⁴¹

⁴⁰ Wang Pu 王溥 (922–982), *Wudai huiyao* 五代會要 (SKQS), 12:6.

⁴¹ Zanning, *Da Song seng shi lue* 大宋僧史略 (T 54, no. 2126), p. 253c8–20.

Whether engaging in some form of Buddhist tantra or, as Ma Xisha has recently proposed, some fusion of Maitreyan and Manichaen cults, the people of Chenzhou, according to northern officials, had fallen under the sway of heterodox teachings.⁴² Such teachings led not only to a breakdown of morality but to the stirrings of rebellion. The fear that governmental support for the samgha, or, at the very least, a failure to effectively regulate the activities of aberrant monks and lay people, could ultimately threaten political stability lay at the heart of many critiques of Buddhist monks during this and other periods. While accounts detailing the resultant economic and social calamities make this point implicitly, other sources point directly to the various ways monks could compromise the security of the state.

MONASTIC ASYLUM

Many of the protocols of Buddhist monasteries were designed, in theory if not always in practice, to eradicate the social distinctions of name, rank, and class. During the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms, when personal and political alliances were in constant flux and political assassinations common, the sort of anonymity accorded clerics was attractive to some who sought to conceal themselves and their histories. Song literati reproduced several accounts of political refugees, often the sons of recently defeated or deceased leaders, who entered Buddhist temples to escape execution at the hands of rivals.⁴³ The northern courts in particular were keenly aware that Buddhist temples harbored these and other men wanted by the state: potential political adversaries, as well as escaped convicts, military deserters, runaway slaves, thieves, murderers, and adulterers. Attempts were made to police monastic populations more effectively – including the supervision of ordinations and the updating of monastic registers – but surveillance of the samgha could not have been easy. Northern courts, unable to effectively monitor the clergy themselves, attempted to enlist the aid of other monastics, threatening that the residents of any temple that harbored wanted men would be severely punished, while anyone who reported illicit occupants would be rewarded with the possessions of the offender.⁴⁴

⁴² Ma Xisha, “The Syncretism of Maitreyan Belief and Manichaeism in Chinese History,” in Ma Xisha and Meng Huiying, eds., *Popular Religion and Shamanism* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 19–53.

⁴³ See, for example, the case of Feng Yanlu 馮延魯 described in *Nantang shu* (Ma), 21:11, and *XWDS*, p. 496; and Wang Zhaohui 王昭誨 (912–?) in *XWDS*, pp. 323–28.

⁴⁴ *Wudai huiyao*, 12:9. See also Makita, *Godai shūkyōshi kenkyū*, pp. 176–80.

That political refugees could hide themselves in monasteries was a cause for concern, but it was also a fact that could also be exploited for strategic advantage. The case of Liu Jiyong 劉繼顥 (d. 973) illustrates some of the many ways monastic status might serve political ends. Liu Jiyong was the son of Liu Shouguang 劉守光 (d. 914), the former Prince of Yan 燕, a small, short-lived kingdom centered on present Beijing. When the kingdom was overthrown and his father executed, Liu Jiyong was spared because his mother had been a mere concubine. He took the tonsure and settled in the Wutai Mountains 五台山, effectively renouncing his claim to his father's position and putting an end to his family line. For this and other reasons, he remained in the good graces of the region's rulers. According to Ouyang Xiu, Liu Jiyong "excelled at trade and finance," and "could lecture so deftly on the *Huayan Sutra* that accumulated donations from the four corners often served to subsidize the state." Liu served the northern court in other capacities as well. During the reign of the Northern Han ruler Liu Chengjun 劉承鈞 (r. 954–968), Liu Jiyong used his position on Mount Wutai, on the Liao border, to obtain several hundred horses each year for the Northern Han's cavalry. He also conscripted commoners to mine and smelt silver for the court. For his services, Liu Jiyong was successively named Master of State Ceremonies (*Hongluqing* 鴻臚卿), Grand Preceptor (*Taishi* 太師), and Palace Secretary (*Zhongshuling* 中書令).⁴⁵

If the Liao court had been aware of Liu Jiyong's activity, he might have been executed as a spy, but he was a hero to the Northern Han. He was able to do what he did precisely because, as a monk, he was more mobile and less conspicuous than he would have been as a courtier. By law, the movements of clerics during the Tang and Song dynasties were, like those of civilians, highly regulated.⁴⁶ But the existence of so many small sovereign states and the fluidity of their borders during the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms would have made enforcement of interstate travel regulations difficult. Even if Tang legal codes could

⁴⁵ *XWDS*, p. 599–600.

⁴⁶ According to the Tang code, customs barriers were set up at major water and land crossings, and officials at these stations were responsible for examining and verifying the passports and other documentation for persons seeking passage. Anyone caught attempting to circumvent these barriers was to be sentenced to one year of penal servitude; *Gu Tang li shuyi* 故唐律疏議, vol. 1, pp. 46–53 (pages refer to Wallace Johnson, trans., *The Tang Code* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979]). Clerics were not exempt from these regulations. Far from roaming free, monks and nuns were required to apply to the local prefect for permission to travel on pilgrimage. The travel permits they received were supposed to stipulate the precise itinerary (duration, route, lodging, etc.) and needed to be kept with the traveler at all times. Travel in sensitive border areas was strictly prohibited (See Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China: An Annotated Translation and Study of the Chanyuan qinggui* [Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002], pp. 78–80; and *Song gaoseng zhuan*, 747A25–26).

have been enforced during the Five Dynasties, monks still made ideal emissaries and spies because the appropriate documentation could be provided by their governments, and monks on pilgrimage generated less suspicion than civilians and could travel more swiftly than merchants.⁴⁷

The thrust of Song critiques of Buddhist espionage during the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms was aimed not just at duplicitous monks (or civilians and soldiers disguised as monks); such men were, after all, only pawns in larger political games. It was regional kings, whose Buddhist faith left them defenseless against enemy attacks that bore the brunt of the blame. For instance, when the king of Chu, Ma Xiguang 馬希廣 (d. 950, r. 947–950), was attacked by his brother, Ma Xi'e 馬希萼 (r. 950–951), he “did not know where to turn. He suddenly became a vegetarian follower of the Buddha, draping black robes over his shoulders. He convened an assembly of monks to chant the Buddha’s name for protection. The sound of their chanting did not cease even as the city walls came down. His ignorance was just like that. He was found by Xi’e and strangled.”⁴⁸ Not only did a naive faith in the powers of buddhas result in the death of Chu’s king, failure to properly monitor the clergy contributed to the defeat of the kingdom the following year. Just after Ma Xi’e murdered his brother and assumed the throne, the Southern Tang, capitalizing on the discord, launched an invasion of Chu. A Southern Tang military commander dressed his troops as monks and sent them to Chu’s capital at Changsha. The sleeper agents played cymbals and begged for alms in the city while waiting for reinforcements.⁴⁹ The invasion was a success; Chu fell to the Southern Tang in 951.

⁴⁷ The practice using of monks as spies dates back at least to the Six Dynasties, another period of division and instability, and continued into the Song; see Fujiyoshi Masumi 藤善真澄, “Rikuchō Bukkyō kyōdan no ichisokumen: kantefu kazō monshi, kōkyō saie” 六朝佛教教團の一側面: 聞諜, 家僧門師, 講經齋會, in Kawakatsu Yoshio 川勝義雄 and Tonami Mamoru 砥波護, eds., *Chūgoku kizokusei shakai no kenkyū* 中國貴族制社會の研究 (Kyoto: Kyoto daigaku jinbun kagaku kenkyūjo, 1987), pp. 475–506. See also Klaus Flesel, “The State-run Espionage System of the Northern Song dynasty and the *Zouma* Official or Fast Messenger,” in Lutz Bieg et al., *Ad Seres et Tungusos: Festschrift für Martin Gimm*, Opera sinologica 11 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000), pp. 115–16. To note one additional example from the tenth century, the monk Haoyuan 浩源 (d. 921) served the prefect of Quanzhou, Wang Yanbin, who was secretly plotting to cede from the Kingdom of Min. Wang Yanbin sent Haoyuan by sea to travel to the Liang court and seek recognition of Wang Yanbin as Military Commissioner of Quanzhou, a position which would make him the equal of his uncle, Wang Shenzhi, in Fuzhou. Unfortunately for Haoyuan, Wang Shenzhi discovered the plot and intercepted the monk before he could carry out his mission. Haoyuan was put to death and Wang Yanbin was placed under house arrest; *Zizhi tongjian*, 271:15.

⁴⁸ Zhang Bangji 張邦基, *Mozhuang manlu* 墨莊漫錄 (SBCK), 7:7–8.

⁴⁹ Song historians claimed that during the invasion the same Southern Tang commander,

The very same subterfuge employed by the Southern Tang, however, was later used against them. According to both versions of the *Book of the Southern Tang*, the Song's invasion of the Southern Tang was hastened by the work of two agent-provocateurs disguised as monks. The first monk was known as Xiao Zhanglao 小長老 (Little Elder) and, after arriving in the capital of Jinling (present Nanjing) he immediately impressed King Li Yu with his learned expositions of classic Buddhist sutras. He became Li Yu's personal advisor but the advice he gave often exasperated other members of the court. The recent loss of lucrative northern territories had left the Southern Tang economically hobbled, yet the monk urged the king to construct a massive temple complex on Mount Niutou 牛頭山. This, said Xiao Zhanglao, would demonstrate of the depth of the king's piety. By the time the temple was built in the southern suburbs, the natural resources of the region had been all but depleted. The monk then cajoled the king into sponsoring daily vegetarian feasts for the thousands of monks who had taken up residence. Before long, the granaries were emptied and the kingdom was left in an extremely vulnerable position.⁵⁰

Around this same time, a second monk arrived in the Southern Tang and set to work quarrying stones for the construction of a pagoda on the banks of the Yangzi at the city of Chizhou 池州. Not long after his work was completed, the Song army launched its invasion. Their progress was halted at the Yangzi, which was too deep and too swift to cross. But the monk anchored a floating bridge to his stone pagoda, allowing the troops to cross the river with ease. Marching north, they took refuge in the newly built temple complex and replenished themselves on the stores of provisions they found there. With the capital surrounded, Li Yu took refuge inside the imperial compound and turned again to Xiao Zhanglao for help. The monk assured the king that the power of the Buddha was all that was needed to protect the city. Like Ma Xiguang, Li Yu fervently prostrated before the Buddha, vowed to cast even more images of buddhas and bodhisattvas, to provide further vegetarian feasts for masses of monks, and to build additional temples. It was not until the arrows and stones began raining down on the besieged city that the king realized he had been played for a fool and had Zhanglao executed.⁵¹

Bian Hao, who sent his soldiers disguised as monks, also ordered his regiments to carry Buddhist icons and perform Buddhist rites during their offensives. As a result, his distracted soldiers allowed the enemy to escape; Zhou Yuchong 周羽翀, *Sanchu xinlu* 三楚新錄 (SKQS), 1:5-6.

⁵⁰ *Nantang shu* (Ma), 26:3-4; *Nantang shu* (Lu), 15:3-4.

⁵¹ *Nantang shu* (Ma), 26: 3-4; *Nantang shu* (Lu), 15: 3-4.

While the Song used monks to lay the groundwork for invasion, in the Southern Tang monks were volunteering to take up arms to fight against the invaders.⁵² Lu You's *Book of the Southern Tang* reports that King Li Yu did not permit such patriotism, but other accounts claim that some of Southern Tang's monks did indeed enter the fray.⁵³ One source claims Southern Tang clergy were conscripted into the Southern Tang army while another implies that monks volunteered their services.⁵⁴ Among this latter group were monks from Yuantong Temple 圓通寺 on Mount Lu, which had long enjoyed the patronage of the Southern Tang's royal family. "[Yuantong si] was once granted a thousand *qing* of arable land. The hundreds of disciples [of this temple] cared for the land and became extremely rich. When the [Song] emperor's troops crossed the river, the temple's monks one after the other joined the vanguard in resistance. Before long, the city of Jinling fell and they absconded. If Li Yu had cared for his people as he cared for monks, then the people would also know how to repay their kingdom."⁵⁵

These accounts of the Southern Tang's demise were intended to illustrate the perils of excessive Buddhist devotion. Li Yu's faith in the powers of buddhas rendered him unfit to govern; his lavish support for Buddhist monks and monasteries disrupted the local economy; and his disregard of official obligations resulted in a populace that was both unable and unwilling to defend the kingdom. A powerful samgha, readers might reasonably conclude, was inimical to a strong and stable court.

CALLS FOR REFORM

There is little evidence to suggest that rulers of southeastern kingdoms made any concerted effort to rein in their growing monastic populations, but the situation north of the Huai River (the natural boundary between the northern dynasties and southern kingdoms) was different.⁵⁶

⁵² There is a long, if poorly documented, history of monastic militias in China. During the Liang, the monk Fahe 法和 led a brigade of thousands of monks in defense of Emperor Yuan (r. 552–554) against the rebel Hou Jing 侯景 (d. 552). Li Baiyao 李百藥 (565–648), *Beiqi shu* 北齊書 (SBCK), 32:1–2. As Meir Shahar has shown, Shaolin monks also took up arms to help Li Shimin establish the Tang dynasty; *The Shaolin Monastery: History, Religion, and the Chinese Martial Arts* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), pp. 21–22.

⁵³ *Nantang shu* (Lu), 15:3–4.

⁵⁴ The conscripted monks were later freed by the Song government; see Li Tao 李燾, *Xu zizhi tongbian changbian* 續資治通鑑長編 (SKQS), 16:28.

⁵⁵ Zeng Minxing 曾敏行 (1118–1175), *Duxing zazhi* 獨醒雜誌 (SKQS), 1:8.

⁵⁶ There were some gestures made towards controlling monastic populations in the kingdom of Wuyue – King Qjian Chu officially banned private ordination, private land ownership for clerics, and usury – but there is no evidence that restrictions were ever seriously enforced; Lin Hongyan 林弘衍, *Xuefeng Yicun chanshi yulu* 雪峰義存禪師語錄 (*Wan xu zang jing* 卍續藏

In contrast to the relatively stable and affluent southern kingdoms of Min, the Southern Tang, and Wuyue, by the middle of the tenth century northern China had endured several decades of internecine war, which had severely depleted the stock of men and materials necessary to sustain their military campaigns. Mass laicization of monks could free up rice and silk, precious metals, and able-bodied men, bolstering the economic and military capacities of embattled northern regimes. While some restrictions were imposed on ordinations and temple constructions under the Liang, Later Tang (923–937), and Jin dynasties (937–947), the first call for an extensive winnowing of the samgha came during the Later Han (947–951).

In 949, the Vice Director of the Bureau of Merit Titles, Li Qinming 李欽明 (d. u.), submitted a petition to the Later Han Emperor Yindi 隱帝 (932–951, r. 948–951) noting that there were approximately 100,000 monks and nuns consuming the state's limited supplies of grain and silk.⁵⁷ Every county, he said, had at least twenty Buddhist temples, whose monks sought alms although they had productive fields and paid no taxes. While Buddhist monks lived idle lives in opulent temples, the common people remained impoverished despite their constant toil. Li Qinming thus recommended a substantial reduction in the number of monks and monasteries in Later Han territory.

There is no indication that the Later Han court followed through with Li's plan. Just six years later, however, a new regime had come to power in the north. The second emperor of the Later Zhou (951–960) was more responsive to charges of Buddhist excess. In 955, Emperor Shizong 世宗 (r. 954–959) issued a series of edicts aimed at diminishing the size and the strength of the samgha. Shizong made it clear that his target was not the Buddhist teachings themselves, which he claimed to admire, but those monks who failed to uphold the tradition's high standards: "Buddhism is the true religion, and the miraculous way of sages. In assisting the world and encouraging good, its benefits are extremely abundant. From former eras it continuously maintained a coherent system, but recently [the Buddhist clergy] has corrupted the social

經, vol. 69, no. 1333 [Taipei: Xinwen feng chuban gongsi, 1977; rpt. of *Dainippon zoku zōkyō* 大日本續藏經, Kyoto: Zōkyō Shoin 1905–1912], p. 86A22–B2.

⁵⁷ Li Qinming's petition read: "Each day [monks each consume] one liter (*sheng* 升) of rice; 100,000 people use 1,000 hectoliters (*shi* 石) worth of grain each day." This number, he points out, does not include the many non-tonsured novices, slaves and servants living within temples. Moreover, while most people do not dress in fine silks, "in one year, a monk requires 16.5 meters (5 *pi* 匹) of rough silk and 50 ounces (*liang* 兩) of fine silk. 100,000 monks use up 1,650,000 meters [500,000 *pi*] of rough silk and 5,000,000 ounces of fine silk"; Wang Qinruo 王欽若 et al., *Cefu yuangui* 冊府元龜 (SKQS), 547:29–30.

order with alarming frequency. According to a report received from a recent investigation of the various provinces, monks are continuously violating the law. If they are not punished and prohibited from doing so, it will turn into a serious matter.”⁵⁸

In addition to ordering the destruction of all temples that lacked official name placards, Shizong stipulated that no new temples or hermitages be built outside the city walls and announced that no new requests for temples or ordination platforms within the city would be granted. Private ordinations were forbidden and parental permission was required to leave home. Prospective monks had to be at least fifteen years old and were required to chant one hundred pages of scripture as qualification for ordination. Those who met these requirements were obliged to register with the Ministry of Sacrifices and obtain ordination certificates issued by the state. Monastic records were to be updated and submitted to the court each year (under previous regimes this took place every three years). Clerics whose names were not on the registers would be laicized. Also subject to laicization were monks who engaged in any form of bodily mutilation (sacrificing their bodies, burning arms or fingers, piercing hands or feet, hanging lamps from their skin) or other “perverse” practices (the use of talismans, spirit water, summoning spirits).⁵⁹ By the end of 955, more than 30,000 temples had been abolished (their land and other resources, no doubt, requisitioned), leaving just under 2,700 Buddhist temples in “All Under Heaven” (*tianxia* 天下).⁶⁰ Only 42,444 monks and 18,756 nuns remained in the north.⁶¹ If Li Qinming’s earlier estimates were correct, the size of the samgha had been reduced by roughly forty percent.

Emperor Shizong’s efforts earned the praise of Ouyang Xiu in his *Historical Records of the Five Dynasties*. After recounting the breakdown of family relationships and the desecration of rites, music, and law that characterized the “age of chaos,” Ouyang applauded Shizong’s intelligence and decisiveness, suggesting that his “gallant heroism” paved the way for the Song restoration.⁶² In modern historical accounts, Shizong’s

⁵⁸ *Jiu Wudai shi*, 115:6, trans. Albert Welter, *Monks, Rulers, and Literati: The Political Ascendancy of Chan Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 60.

⁵⁹ *Wudai huiyao*, 12:10. See also Makita, pp. 176–80.

⁶⁰ *Wudai huiyao*, 16:6. *XWDS* gives the number of eliminated temples at a more modest 3,336. These numbers likely refer only to temples within Zhou territory since Shizong’s orders do not seem to have been implemented elsewhere. Responding to Shizong’s order to eradicate unofficial temples, the king of Wuyue, Qian Chu, reported that the city of Hangzhou alone contained no less than 480 Buddhist temples – all officially sanctioned; Wu Renchen 吳任臣 (17th c.), *Shiguo chunqiu* 十國春秋 (SKQS), 81:8.

⁶¹ *Wudai huiyao*, 16:6.

⁶² *XWDS*, pp. 115–16.

reduction of the monastic population and transfer of monastic assets into the state's coffers are often treated as emblematic of the embattled state of Buddhism during the tenth century. But the proscription of the Later Zhou was limited in both time and space. It did not extend beyond Zhou territory, and, like the Huichang persecutions more than a century earlier, it did not last long. Elite monks and monasteries were not targeted and imperial patronage of the clergy continued after the establishment of the Song dynasty, five years later.⁶³ While Shizong's suppression was undoubtedly a difficult time for many Buddhist clerics and their lay supporters, there is no evidence to suggest that it was either the cause or the result of monastic decline. In fact, after the Zhou was overthrown, the ranks of the monastic population continued to swell. In 995, Song Emperor Taizong 太宗 (r. 976–997) decreed that each year in the southeastern circuits (Jiangnan, Liangzhe, and Fujian) only one out of 300 men could be ordained as a monk and only one of a hundred women could become a nun.⁶⁴ Despite these measures, by 1021 the number of monks in China had peaked at 460,000, roughly 8.5% of the total population.⁶⁵

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The accounts reviewed here demonstrate that regional monastic movements were, by almost any measure, actually flourishing after the Tang. The number of men (and, presumably, women) entering the order was increasing. Many of the rulers of southern kingdoms subsidized the clergy and funneled cash, land, and other resources into the hundreds of temples they built and restored. As a consequence, large monastic estates were able to amass significant property and generate substantial profits from their fields and industries. Indeed, almost every instance of critique is also a lament about the excessive size, wealth, and influence of the clergy. The problem then was not that Buddhism had degenerated into “a despised creed of the lower classes,” but rather

⁶³ On the policies of early Song emperors towards the Buddhist samgha, see Wang Shengduo 汪圣铎, *Songdai zhengjiao guanxi yanjiu* 宋代政教关系研究 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2010), chap. 1.

⁶⁴ Wang Yong 王祿, *Yanyi zhimou lu* 燕翼詒謀錄 (SKQS), 3:3–4.

⁶⁵ The population of China in 1014 has been estimated at 54.3 million; see Judith Banister, *China's Changing Population* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), p. 4. For a study of Buddhist institutions in southeastern China during the Song, see Liu Xinru, “Buddhist Institutions in the Lower Yangtze Region during the Sung Dynasty.” *Bulletin of Sung-Yuan Studies* 21 (1989), pp. 31–51. It was only after the Song court began regulating the samgha that we begin to see real evidence of decline in monastic populations; see Huang, *Songdai Fojiao shehui jingji shi*, pp. 350–52.

that some Buddhist clerics had become elites who wielded excessive economic and political power.⁶⁶

Song literati were not positing a decline in the quantity of clerics, but a decline in their quality and efficacy. Did the expansion of monastic populations result in a moral or intellectual decline? The relative quality of Buddhist monks during different historical periods is all but impossible to determine, but it is noteworthy that some of the most prominent clerics of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms also expressed concern over the moral failings of their fellow monastics. When Zhou Emperor Shizong was contemplating his suppression of Buddhism, for example, he sought the counsel of Daopi 道丕 (889–955), one of the most respected clerics of northern China at that time. Daopi conceded that “wild and uncontrollable monks” were everywhere and acknowledged the many problems they posed. The danger, he cautioned, was that “when the plowing is done, the orchids might be uprooted along with the weeds. When the water is strained, gold might be lost along with the silt.”⁶⁷ That some silt had begun to sully the gold appears to have been a foregone conclusion, or at least a politic response to a ruler bent on suppressing the samgha.

Likewise, in southeastern China, the heartland of Buddhist culture during the tenth century, ranking monks in the kingdoms of the Southern Tang and Wuyue also despaired that their tradition was being imperiled. In his *Ten Guidelines for the Ancestral House* (*Zongmen shi gui lun* 宗門十規論), Fayan Wenyi 法眼文益 (885–958), the personal teacher to the last two kings of the Southern Tang, chastised monks who “break the Buddhist precepts and abandon the dignified comportment of monks.” Such monks, he fumed, were destroying the reputation of the entire monastic order. They “wear the robes of the Tathāgata to steal the be-

⁶⁶ Zürcher, *Buddhism: Its Origin and Spread in Words, Maps, and Pictures* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1962) p. 62.

⁶⁷ Zanning, *Song gaoseng zhuan*, p. 819B1–4. It is worth noting that a very similar exchange between an emperor and an eminent monk is found in the late eighth century Chan text, *Lidai fabao ji* 歷代法寶記. The relevant passage reads: “At the time of Emperor Huan (Huan Xuan 桓玄, 369–404) of the Jin, [the emperor] wanted to cut back the Buddha-Dharma, and so he summoned Dharma Master Yuan (Huiyuan 慧遠, 334–416) of Mt. Lu. The emperor said, ‘We have observed recently that the monks and nuns are not sincere in their practice of the precepts, and there have been many transgressions. We wish to weed out [the Samgha]. Shall we at once carry out this culling process?’ Gentleman Yuan responded, ‘the jade that is extracted from Mt. Kun is covered with dirt and grit. The Li River is rich with gold, yet it is also full of gravel. Your majesty must respect the Dharma and value its representatives; you must not scorn its representatives or treat the Dharma with contempt.’ The Jin emperor then issued a general amnesty”; trans. Wendi Leigh Adamek, *The Mystique of Transmission: On an Early Chan History and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 306.

nevolence and might of kings.”⁶⁸ This last charge, that men were using their monastic status to exploit the piety of regional rulers, is virtually the same as the claims made by later literati.

Fayan Wenyi’s admonishments were echoed by his grand-disciple, Yongming Yanshou 永明延壽 (904–975), one of the most revered and prolific monks in the neighboring kingdom of Wuyue. In his own *Cautions* (*chuijie* 垂誡), Yanshou warned that “Just because we are in the latter days of the law, monks and nuns rarely uphold the precepts. I am afraid that they deceive good people and cause them to regress in their faith. The extensive practices are then obscured. As it is said in thousands of *sūtras* and tens of thousands of *śāstras*, if one does not quit licentious behavior, all seeds of purity will be eradicated. If one does not quit drinking alcohol, all seeds of wisdom will be eradicated. If one does not quit stealing, all seeds of blessings will be eradicated. If one does not quit eating meat, all seeds of compassion will be eradicated.”⁶⁹

The writings and records of these and other eminent tenth century monks provide some of the most compelling evidence that generous state support of monastics, coupled with lax governmental regulations, resulted in an uptick in illicit activity. They appear to confirm that some ordinations were motivated by the promise of steady income and the prospect of rising to comfortable, if not powerful, positions within monastic institutions. Elite clerics, who were dependent on regional rulers’ largesse, were understandably inclined to align themselves with the interests of the state and disassociate themselves from those monks who merely sought the material benefits of monastic life. While their accounts suggest that a portion of the monastic population was indeed violating the precepts and disrupting social order, it should be expected that an increase in the number of monastics would result in an increase in both devotion and deviancy. Moreover, admonishments of rank and file monks by court clerics were not uncommon and can be found in other eras as well. They served to police the samgha but were also performative in the sense that they established their authors as moral authorities and elevated them and their monastic networks above common clerics and competitors. Monks like Daopi, Fayan Wenyi, and Yongming Yanshou, after all, led large monastic assemblies, subsidized by regional courts, and were renowned for their discipline and erudi-

⁶⁸ Fayan Wenyi 法眼文益 (885–958), *Zongmen shigui lun* 宗門十規論 (*Wan xu zang jing*, 63, no. 1226), p. 38c16–23.

⁶⁹ *Yongming Shou chanshi chuijie* 永明壽禪師垂誡 (*Wan xu zang jing*, 66, no. 1298), p. 753c6–9.

tion. They despaired of the decline of the Dharma at the same time that they exemplified and promulgated the monastic ideal.

While the quality of monks is hard to quantify, something can be said about the creative output of the clergy. It is true that the intellectual achievements of tenth century monks cannot compare with the remarkable and foundational works of Tang clerics, but given the brevity, geographical limitations, and political instabilities of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms, the scale of monastic activity remains impressive. While a full overview of the literary and artistic products of tenth century monks is beyond the scope of this article, a short list would include the revival of the Tiantai tradition through an “international” effort to recover the lost corpus of the Tiantai texts; the collection and cataloguing of new Buddhist treatises and translations; the proliferation of copies of the Buddhist canon; the printing of hundreds of thousands of individual sutras; the compilation of several massive new reference works and compendia; and the emergence of influential new Chan lamp histories and discourse records. These literary projects, together with the casting of Buddhist images, the construction of towering pagodas, and the carving of monumental stone sculptures and Buddhist cave complexes are hardly the hallmarks of decay.

In the end, despite significant differences in interpretation, there is notable agreement between the laudatory and the critical accounts of Buddhism written during the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms and the Song. Both sets of sources demonstrate that, particularly in southeastern kingdoms, the numbers of monks and monasteries, the wealth of monastic institutions, and the political influence of elite clerics were on the rise.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

XWDS Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修, *Xin Wudai shi* 新五代史