

# Buddhism since the Cultural Revolution

By HOLMES WELCH

On 3 August 1966 a brief dispatch was included in the English service of the New China News Agency. That day, it said, the Chinese Buddhist Association had given a banquet in honour of a group of visiting Japanese Buddhists, members of the Shingon sect, led by Juncho Onozuka. The day before they had joined in performing a religious ceremony at the principal Peking monastery; and the day after, 4 August, they were received by Kuo Mo-jo.<sup>1</sup>

So far as I can discover, these were the last items of news on Buddhism to be printed in the Mainland press for three years.<sup>2</sup> Not only was there no further mention of foreign Buddhist delegations (including this one, which was headed for Sian when it dropped out of sight), but nothing more was heard of the Chinese Buddhist Association or its members<sup>3</sup> or of the activities of monks or lay devotees. Buddhism, along with other religions, appears to have abruptly vanished from the Chinese scene.

This did not happen without warning. For one thing Chinese Buddhist leaders had suffered a series of setbacks in their effort to show that they could serve foreign policy. For years they had been trying to win control of the main international Buddhist organization, the World Fellowship of Buddhists. They had been rebuffed at its sixth

<sup>1</sup> *Survey of the Mainland China Press* (hereafter abbreviated *SCMP*), No. 3756, pp. 31–32.

<sup>2</sup> The literature of the Cultural Revolution is extraordinarily silent about what would seem to have been a natural target, especially during the campaign against the “Four Olds.” In “A Hundred Examples of Smashing the Old and Establishing the New,” posted at a Peking middle school on 1 September 1966, all sorts of things to be smashed are listed—even finger-guessing and *t'ai-chi ch'üan*—but nothing is said about temples, monks, festivals and so on (*Extracts from China Mainland Magazines*, hereafter abbreviated *ECMM*, No. 566, pp. 16–20). Perhaps the closest thing to a specific allusion to Buddhism was printed in Canton, where the “Four Olds” were said to include “altars for worshipping the gods,” rites for dead ancestors, and feudal festivals (*SCMP*, No. 3778, p. 7) and where a shop that sold religious goods was closed down (*SCMP*, No. 3774, p. 13).

<sup>3</sup> A check of biographical files in Hong Kong (U.S. Consulate General, Union Research Institute, etc.), made in May 1969, revealed that the last dates on which important Buddhists had been mentioned were as follows: A-wang Chia-ts'o (3 August 1966); Chou Shu-chia (3 August 1966); Chü-tsan (16 June 1966); Chao P'u-ch'u (20 April 1966, but last mentioned as a Buddhist 1 March 1966); Shih Ming-k'o (4 April 1966, as a Buddhist 11 August 1964); Ch'ih-sung (8 May 1965); Shirob Jaltso (30 November 1965, as a Buddhist 26 March 1964); Li I-p'ing (6 August 1965); Kuo P'eng (23 August 1965); Lü Ch'eng (13 December 1964); Wei-fang (15 September 1964); Ming-chen (11 August 1964); Ying-tz'u (14 July 1962); Chia-mu-yang (27 April 1962, as a Buddhist 27 February 1962). February 1962 was the date of the third and most recent conference of the Chinese Buddhist Association, when most of the 231 directors then elected were mentioned for the last time.

conference, hosted by friendly Cambodia in 1961, had protested in vain when its headquarters moved to unfriendly Thailand in 1963, and only advertised their failure by boycotting its seventh conference at the end of 1964.<sup>4</sup> By then their hopes had shifted to the Buddhists of South Vietnam, whose activism seemed to offer important new possibilities. In October 1963 and June 1964, with considerable fanfare, the Chinese Buddhist Association held conferences attended by delegations from nearly a dozen countries, some of which had never sent Buddhist delegates to China before. Apparently the Chinese hoped to launch a new world Buddhist organization that would rival the WFB. But in this too they failed. All they could get the delegates to agree on were rather mild manifestos condemning the U.S. in Vietnam.<sup>5</sup> Already the Buddhist movement in Vietnam had begun to splinter. By the end of 1964 it had lost its revolutionary momentum, and the Chinese Buddhist Association published its last Vietnam protest on 11 February 1965. That spring Buddhist exchanges with foreign countries—except Japan—ceased.

In the meantime there had been an ominous development on the domestic scene. From 1963 to 1965—perhaps in reaction to a recrudescence of domestic religious activity in 1960–62<sup>6</sup>—a debate was carried on in the pages of several Mainland journals about the past and future role of religion in Chinese life.<sup>7</sup> It reached its denouement in October 1965, with an article in *New Construction*. Previously the official line had been that religion would disappear automatically once socialism had removed its causes. Now, with a flurry of mixed metaphor, a new thesis was enunciated: “religion . . . will not disappear of its own accord . . . [it] will rely on the force of custom to prolong its feeble existence and even plot to make a comeback. When a dying cobra bites a man, it can still wound or kill him. Therefore no matter how little of religion’s vestigial poison remains, it is necessary to carry

<sup>4</sup> See Holmes Welch, “Buddhism in the Cold War,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Vol. 35, No. 9 (8 March 1962), pp. 555–563 and “Buddhism after the Seventh,” *ibid.*, Vol. 47, No. 10 (12 March 1965), pp. 433–435.

<sup>5</sup> The conference in October 1963 was attended by delegates from 11 countries, including the first ever to come from Pakistan and Indonesia. Some of the same delegates returned for the conference in June 1964, at which eight countries were represented. Only the Burmese kept aloof throughout.

<sup>6</sup> Refugees reported such a recrudescence in the cities; and in the countryside it was revealed in documents captured by Nationalist guerrillas raiding Lien-chiang hsien, Fukien. On the latter see C. S. Chen and Charles Price Ridley, *Rural People’s Communes in Lien-chiang* (Stanford, 1969), pp. 49, 97–98, 110, 172, 183 and 185. Press translations provide occasional confirmation, as in *SCMP* No. 2649, p. 19; No. 2683, p. 29; No. 2742, pp. 19–20; No. 2805, p. 18; No. 3048, pp. 9, 12–13; No. 3141, pp. 4–7; No. 3180, p. 16; No. 3783, p. 14; No. 4018, pp. 5–6.

<sup>7</sup> A good summary of this debate by Winifred Güler may be found in *Ching Feng: Quarterly Notes on Christianity and Chinese Religion and Culture* (Hong Kong, 1967), Vol. 10, No. 3, pp. 34–57. Cf. *China Notes* (New York, October 1965), Vol. 3, No. 4, pp. 1–7.

on a rigorous struggle against it on all fronts and to pull up and destroy all of its poisonous roots.”<sup>8</sup> This suggested a basic change in policy that was already, in fact, under way.

At the beginning of 1965 the official organ of the Chinese Buddhist Association, *Modern Buddhism* (*Hsien-tai fo-hsüeh*), had ceased publication. Since 1960 it had been increasingly directed to foreign readers: it printed articles in English and avoided mention of concrete details about the condition of Buddhism in China. It functioned as a kind of *Buddhist China Reconstructs*—surely a useful function in making friends abroad. Yet its last issue came out in December 1964. Subscribers got their money back the following April.

October 1965 saw the publication of a new *People's Handbook* which, unlike the previous editions, listed the Chinese Buddhist Association without the names of any of its officers.<sup>9</sup> This did not mean that their offices had been abolished, because some were mentioned in news items right up to August 1966.<sup>10</sup> But it did suggest that there had been some change in the status of the Association.

On 30 November 1965 its President, Shirob Jaltso (Hsi-jao Chia-ts'o), was dismissed as Vice-Governor of Tsinghai. We do not know whether he was also dismissed as President of the Association, but he was the second Tibetan Buddhist leader to fall from grace in a year. (The Panchen Lama had been attacked and demoted in 1964.)

In retrospect one can see that all these events formed a pattern. The failure to win a role in the World Fellowship of Buddhists or to set up a rival organization, the disintegration of the Buddhist movement in Vietnam, China's deteriorating relations with Asian Buddhist countries, the uselessness of Buddhism in pacifying Tibet—these negative factors were confronted by the developing needs of the Socialist Education Campaign and by the increasing impatience of the regime, perhaps of Mao himself, to see the next generation do as predicted and smash the idols of their own accord. It would not have been rash to predict that the Buddhist structure erected by the regime since 1953 was about to be dismantled.

### CLOSING THE TEMPLES

During the great rally of 18 August 1966, when the Red Guards first appeared, Lin Piao called on them to eradicate the old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits of the exploiting classes. A campaign against the “Four Olds” spread through Peking and many other cities within the next two weeks. Most sources agree that by the end

<sup>8</sup> *Hsin chien-she*, Vol. 10, No. 33 (20 October 1965). Compare *SCMP*, No. 3599, p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> *Jen-min shou-i'se*, 1965, p. 143.

<sup>10</sup> See note 2.

of September every Buddhist monastery—and every temple, church and mosque—in China's metropolitan areas had closed.<sup>11</sup> Of course monasteries here and there had been closing for centuries as they fell into disuse; and for 50 years more and more of them had been subject to government seizure and confiscation. However, this was the first time since A.D. 845 that nearly all the monasteries in China ceased to function. Some were simply closed; some also had their walls covered with revolutionary slogans<sup>12</sup>; some were stripped of images and religious paraphernalia<sup>13</sup>; some were converted into factories, offices, apartments or barracks for Red Guards.<sup>14</sup>

Since most of the information about this comes in bits and pieces from scattered sources, I have relegated it to footnotes. However, there is one coherent eye-witness account that has not been published, so far as I know, in the West. In August 1967 Tokuda Myohon, one of the leading monks of the Vinaya sect in Japan, went to China as a member of an educational delegation. Originally he had planned to be in Sian for the 1300th anniversary of a Vinaya patriarch, but on the night he

<sup>11</sup> The only sources available are Mainland visitors and refugees. For one of the former, see Colin Mackerras and Neale Hunter, *China Observed* (New York, 1967), pp. 82–83. The observations of some Japanese and English visitors in the autumn of 1966 and the spring and summer of 1967 are summarized in *China Notes*, Vol. 5, No. 3, p. 2 (July 1967), Vol. 5, No. 4 (October 1967), p. 4, and Vol. 6, No. 1 (January 1968), p. 4. The closure of temples in the Cultural Revolution may have begun before 18 August 1966. A Japanese Buddhist delegation that went to China in June was not permitted to visit monasteries aside from the one where they joined in commemorative rites for I-hsüan, founder of the Lin-chi sect. A foreign student who visited Hangchow at the end of July found that all three T'ien-chu monasteries were closed and locked. At the Shang T'ien-chu, which appeared to have been closed quite recently, "no entry" signs were posted at the outer gate, and, looking through the windows of the main shrine-halls, one could see that the images and religious paraphernalia had been removed.

<sup>12</sup> A photograph widely reproduced showed an image at the Ling-yin Ssu (apparently an image of Maitreya, the next buddha to come) covered with slogans reading "Long live the dictatorship of the proletariat," "Smash the old world, create a new world," and so on: see *N.Y. Times*, 29 August 1966. I have in my possession a photograph of this same monastery (the largest in Hangchow) taken several months later in January 1967. It shows the lofty main building completely deserted, every door and window shut tight, and a tattered "Long live the people" posted over "*Ta-hsiung pao-tien*," the traditional name for the great shrine-hall in Chinese monasteries. Another interesting photograph appeared in *Bodhedrum* (Taichung), No. 169, p. 6 (8 December 1966). Presumably taken in August or September, it showed slogans posted over the doors of the Kuei-yüan Ssu, the principal Buddhist monastery in Hankow. The slogans read: "Smash the old, establish the new; smash greatly, establish greatly." The doors were sealed with strips of paper, so that they could not be secretly opened.

<sup>13</sup> Known cases include the Neng-jen Ssu in Kiukiang, where foreign visitors observed that all the images had been removed; and the Liu-jung Ssu, Canton, on which information is provided in the Mainland press (Canton *Hung-wei pao*, 1 September 1966, translated in *SCMP* No. 3781, p. 15). Cf. *World Buddhism* (Ceylon), Vol. 15, No. 10, p. 291 (May 1967).

<sup>14</sup> The Wo-fo Ssu near Peking was reported occupied by Red Guards in the Tokyo *Shimbum*, 29 September 1967. The Liu-jung Ssu may have been converted into a cardboard-box factory: see *China Notes*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (April 1967), p. 4. Refugees reported the conversion into factories of the San-yüan Kung (Canton's principal Taoist temple) and the Hung Miao in Shanghai, a centre of the popular religion.

reached Peking, he was told that his itinerary had been changed to Tsinan and Shanghai. Nonetheless, whenever he got the chance, he slipped away from his guides to look for Buddhist monasteries. In Shanghai he visited the Fa-tsang Ssu at 5.00 a.m. on 19 August 1967. He found that this important temple, which had been a centre of considerable religious activity as recently as 1962, when visited by foreigners, had been converted into an apartment house. Its lecture hall, where eminent monks used to expound the sutras to large audiences, had been partitioned into living quarters and the images removed. Next he went to the Yü-fu Ssu, until 1965 the headquarters of the Shanghai Buddhist Association. He was not allowed to enter. He asked to worship its famous Jade Buddha and was told it was no longer there. People said that only one monk, the abbot, remained in residence (out of the 50 who lived there before the Cultural Revolution and the 300 before 1949), but Tokuda could not meet him "because he had been summoned to a government office." Later, when he asked a taxi driver to take him to the Ching-an Ssu (the famous Bubbling Well Monastery), the driver said: "It is not there any longer."

In Peking he went alone to the Kuang-chi Ssu, until 1966 the national headquarters of the Chinese Buddhist Association. He found it closed to visitors, its monks apparently expelled, posters and cartoons covering its walls. A lamasery near the Palace Museum had been converted into a museum (on the evils) of rent collection. He saw wall posters accusing Liu Shao-ch'i and his followers of "treating religion sympathetically" as part of their revisionist programme. They had even planned a memorial hall for Chien-chen, the T'ang dynasty monk who visited Japan (a plan that had now been abandoned). Kuo Mo-jo told the delegation that "religion is the dog of capitalism and an opiate. . . . Those who believe in a god carry on aggressive wars." Tokuda left China very much disheartened about the future of Chinese Buddhism.<sup>15</sup>

One of the things he could not find out was what had happened to the monks and nuns who used to live in the temples that had now been shut down. Other visitors who asked this question were told that they had been sent back to their native places in order to take part in production. Refugee accounts add that they had been ordered to "abandon superstition," shed their robes, let their hair grow, eat meat and marry. The 50-year old abbot of a well-known monastery in Fukien, who finally yielded to pressure in 1968, married a woman devotee and resigned his post to move to Shanghai. On the other hand, a Shanghai nun who changed into lay dress and went to work

<sup>15</sup> Tokuda Myohon, "Seeing Chinese Buddhism under the Cultural Revolution" (in Japanese), *Asahi Shimbun* (Osaka), 27 October 1967.

in a factory in 1967, still had not married or started to eat meat as at early 1968.<sup>16</sup> Laicization was no more of a new phenomenon than the closing of temples. Most of the Buddhist clergy had already returned to lay life when their landed income and religious fees were cut off in 1950–52.

Although there have been rather lurid reports of the physical destruction of Buddhist art and architecture, I am inclined to think that it was rare. The contents of a large Taoist temple in Soochow were burned,<sup>17</sup> but I have heard of nothing comparable happening at a Buddhist monastery. Buddhist images not in a monastery but at the Central School of Fine Arts were smashed by students on 24 August 1966.<sup>18</sup> Outdoor rock carvings were defaced in Hangchow. In Shanghai the stone lions of the Ching-an Ssu were reported to have been smashed but before many objects *inside* the monastery were damaged, the PLA arrived to expel the Red Guards and lock it up. One reason for the locking up of the monasteries and the posting of “no entry” signs may have been precisely to avert damage. At the end of 1966 there were reports of a deliberate effort to preserve stone lions, religious images and the like, by moving them to warehouses; and trucks loaded with them were seen in the streets of Peking.<sup>19</sup>

However, the policy of protection did not extend to articles of little artistic value and it cannot be doubted that during the campaign against the “Four Olds,” many popular images were destroyed. Shanghai, for example, had a famous temple of the city gods, in one hall of which were sixty wooden statues representing the cyclical years of the old Chinese calendar. It had been customary to burn incense to the year in which one was born. Before the temple was closed, according to a Shanghai resident, Red Guards forced devout old women to break up the statues with hammers and sticks. A somewhat more bizarre story appeared in a Taiwan newspaper. During the Cultural Revolution in northern Kiangsu (where Buddhism had particularly deep roots) big-character posters were pasted over images in local temples: a city god would be labelled “tyrannical landlord”; Kuan-yin (the goddess of

<sup>16</sup> Concrete information about the campaign for monks and nuns to marry is scarce. Chiang Ch'ing is quoted as saying: “There are large numbers of monks and nuns in Chekiang streets. Let the nuns get married.” See the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Vol. 61, No. 29 (18 July 1968), p. 148.

<sup>17</sup> *Life* (7 October 1966), pp. 40–41, printed photographs of the images, altars and other furnishings of the San-ch'ing Kung, blazing away before a crowd of spectators.

<sup>18</sup> *NCNA*, 25 August 1966, quoted by *Hsiang-kang fo-chiao (Buddhism in Hong Kong)*, No. 77 (1 October 1966), p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> *N.Y. Times*, 25 December 1966. Cf. Mackerras and Hunter, *China Observed*, p. 83. A Canadian journalist who saw the statues at the Ling-yin Ssu (see note 12) being plastered with slogans was told that the monastery was a national monument; and that therefore the Red Guards were only making the symbolic gesture of breaking one bench and throwing a small buddha to the ground (Associated Press, dispatch printed in the *Boston Globe*, 28 August 1966).



mercy) "ruined woman"; Tathagatha (the Buddha) "robber"; and so on. Then the Red Guards would bind the images with ropes and put them up on a platform, where they would be struggled against like any other counter-revolutionaries. People were encouraged to curse them and vent their indignation and anger. After this, the images had paper dunce-caps put on their heads, placards hung around their necks, and were pulled through the streets to the beating of gongs and drums—sometimes for several days on end. Finally a meeting would be held to announce the verdicts: this or that bodhisattva would be sentenced to be "shot to death." In the words of the ex-Red Guard who told this story, "how queer it was!"<sup>20</sup> And yet it was really not so queer in a country where district magistrates used to have statues of city gods publicly whipped for failing to bring rain during a drought. Furthermore it is easy to forget the atmosphere of those wild days in August and September 1966, when women were dragged from their houses for having a permanent wave and graves were dug up because foreigners were buried in them. Chinese graves were also desecrated: the relation of a famous Overseas Chinese, buried in Fukien, stopped the Red Guards at the very side of his tomb, with shovels in hand. "You cannot dig him up until you telegraph Chairman Mao," she said. They did so and, somewhat to their disappointment, found that he did not approve of the exhumation. The same woman saw Buddhist monks being forced by Red Guards to parade through the streets wearing the dress of Christian ministers (and vice versa). There were, of course, reports of much harsher treatment.<sup>21</sup>

The effect of all this on the Buddhist laity is obvious. Quite aside from the fact that they were frightened half to death, they could not offer incense in temples that had been closed and sealed, nor have rites performed by monks who had gone back to their native places. Actually, except for elderly women, fewer and fewer Chinese had dared to

<sup>20</sup> *Chung-yang jih-pao*, 14 April 1967. A similar report (of unstated origin) was published in *World Buddhism*, Vol. 15, No. 6 (January 1967), p. 175, which described how an overseas Chinese woman had had to pay "bail" to some Red Guards who had "jailed" her two buddha images "as a hindrance to the Cultural Revolution."

<sup>21</sup> A report apparently brought by a refugee to Hong Kong tells of three elderly monks living in a village between Hong Kong and Canton. When Red Guards from Peking arrived there, they whipped the monks, demolished their small temple, and replaced all ancestor tablets with portraits of Mao Tse-tung. I think that such accounts of Red Guard excesses, while individually unverifiable, are consistent with the revolutionary atmosphere for which there is ample confirmation in Red Guard newspapers. Actually the harshest treatment of a Buddhist monk was reported in an official broadcast. On 29 August 1966 a monastery in Harbin was wrecked and a rally of 100,000 people was held to denounce its abbot, Ching-kuan, who was then arrested by the Public Security forces: see FBIS, 30 August 1966, DDD 3. Ching-kuan had been in good standing until then, having served on the council of the Chinese Buddhist Association since 1957: see *Hsien-tai fo-hsüeh (Modern Buddhism)*, No. 5 (1957), p. 21.

patronize these temples since 1962. It had not been uncommon to bring incense home and burn it in front of an image in the kitchen, perhaps of the kitchen god, or perhaps of Kuan-yin, Maitreya, Kuan-ti or Chi-kung, who had once stood on an altar in the front part of the house, but had been moved into the kitchen during the 1950s so as to arouse less comment. But in August 1966 there began a campaign to search people's houses for feudal, bourgeois or superstitious objects: images were therefore hidden or destroyed. At the same time incense became even harder to buy than it had been in the past. One informant recalled how his mother used to sit in the kitchen and look silently at a wall or out a window, for minutes or for hours. If anyone saw her they would think she was just day-dreaming; but he knew that she was focusing her mind on the Buddha and on the refuge that he offered.

If the temples and the various religious associations and journals had been closed down and if no religious delegations were coming to China, then what was there to justify the continuing existence of the Religious Affairs Bureau in Peking? The answer seems to be that, like some other government organs, it ceased to function. Neither its director, Hsiao Hsien-fa, nor his deputy, Kao Shan, has been mentioned in the Mainland press since August 1966.<sup>22</sup> Early in 1967 and again in 1968 groups of Australian students touring China tried to get in touch with the Religious Affairs Bureau while they were in Peking. They did not succeed; and were given the impression by some of their hosts that it no longer existed.<sup>23</sup> It is interesting that a German visitor who was there at about the same time found that there were two divisions of Islamic affairs, one in the Ministry of Culture and one in the Ministry of Internal Affairs. This may have represented a transfer of responsibility and personnel from an organ that had become defunct; and it would fit in with the fact that the first religious institutions to be re-opened in China were mosques.<sup>24</sup> It seems not unlikely that the old Religious Affairs Bureau, which had close connexions with the United Front Work Department, suffered along with the latter during the Cultural Revolution.

What we are most ignorant about is the fate of Buddhism in the

<sup>22</sup> NCNA, 3 August 1966. This statement is based on a check of the biographical files mentioned in note 3.

<sup>23</sup> See *China Notes*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (July 1968), p. 4, and Vol. 7, No. 2 (Spring 1969), pp. 13–15. Among those attacked and/or dismissed and/or arrested during the Cultural Revolution was Liu Ying "former deputy director of the Religious Affairs Section of the United Front Work Department": see Canton *Yeh-chan pao*, No. 12–13 (March 1958), as translated in *SCMP*, No. 4158, p. 11. In 1957 Liu had been introduced to a Japanese Buddhist delegation in Peking as a "division chief (*ch'u-chang*)" of the Religious Affairs Bureau under the State Council. He is the only casualty whose name I have seen mentioned.

<sup>24</sup> See Wolfgang Appel, "Chinesische Impressionen im Jahre 20 nach Mao," *Neue Württembergische Zeitung* (Göppingen), 10 April 1969.



countryside. Rural and mountain monasteries have been the real strongholds of orthodox Buddhism for a thousand years—in places like Wu-t'ai, P'u-t'o, Chiu-hua, O-mei, T'ien-t'ai, Pao-hua and Chung-nan Shan. Japanese visitors could not go there or even find anyone who had gone there, and concluded that the monasteries there were closed as they were in the city. Overseas Chinese have had the same experience, and refugees are no better informed. As one said who came out in 1968, "There is no news of what has happened at the famous mountains; I only know there is no religion left in Shanghai."<sup>25</sup> Diplomats stationed in Peking as late as June 1969 report that, so far as they could see, all religious institutions—except the mosque—were still shut down.

### THE PRESENT SITUATION

In April and May 1969 I visited Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore in the hopes of getting a little more information, particularly about the situation in the countryside. From almost everyone, including the Buddhists in Hong Kong who are usually so well informed, I could learn nothing but what I had already gathered from publications and radio intercepts. But then I came on two extraordinary stories, both at second hand, but both from sources that I consider reliable. I do not want to give details or draw attention to individual temples, but the gist is as follows. In one large city on the south-east coast a famous old monastery continues to operate. There are 14 monks left (compared to 19 before the Cultural Revolution). They wear lay clothes and work on a nearby commune, but they eat vegetarian food. The great shrine-hall is locked and no one can enter to burn incense, but the other buildings are open. The monastery as a community of monks is still in being.

From another source comes an even more remarkable account. In the winter of 1968–69 an elderly Overseas Chinese went back to her native place in east-central China—the heartland of living Buddhism.<sup>26</sup> There she found that some of the most illustrious monasteries—all in the countryside, none near a city—were still in operation, each with dozens of monks in residence. The latter were elderly, but able to perform Buddhist rites. She herself had a seven-day memorial service (*ch'an-hui*) said for her late husband at one monastery and stayed there as a guest throughout the seven days. Everywhere she was able to offer incense. Of course, it was not like the old days: the monks lived

<sup>25</sup> The only news of Red Guards reaching a famous mountain was reported by a West German who saw them defacing inscriptions and dismantling a tomb on Lu Shan (*Life*, 7 October 1966). The significance of this report is diminished by the fact that Lu Shan has not been an important centre of living Buddhism in modern China.

<sup>26</sup> On regional differences in the condition of Buddhism, see Holmes Welch, *The Buddhist Revival in China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 246–252.

a harsh life, growing their own food (as they had had to do more and more since 1950), and some abbots had been replaced by appointees of the Chinese Buddhist Association (apparently before the Cultural Revolution began). But, again, these were living communities of monks. If they survived until the winter of 1968–69 after the massive *hsia-fang* movement of the previous autumn, it seems probable that they can survive a few years longer. The same may apply to other “old customs” that may have survived in the Chinese countryside—about most of which we really know so little.

At the time of writing (July 1969) a swing of the pendulum from left to right, from hard to soft, seems to be under way. Old-fashioned bourgeois leaders like those in the KMT Revolutionary Committee are beginning to reappear. Efforts are commencing to repair foreign relations. Buddhists in Hong Kong and Singapore are under greater pressure than ever before to take a progressive view of the events on the Mainland. These developments make it logical to predict that in coming months the Chinese Buddhist Association will “surface” and resume activity, along with the Religious Affairs Bureau or a successor organ; and that Buddhist delegations will begin coming again from Japan and other countries. If so, some of the temples that have been closed will re-open.

Whether they will re-open as places where the Chinese themselves feel free to worship is more difficult to predict. I am inclined to think that in the largest cities at least one place of worship will be available *pro forma* to the followers of each religion that has had a place of worship there in the past. This would not mean that Buddhism had a bright future in China, but the fact—if it is a fact—that several communities of monks still survive in well-known monasteries leaves open the possibility that ordinations may again be held (the last were in 1957<sup>27</sup>) and that the Sangha may not disappear when the last of today’s elderly monks dies. No one knows how the religious attitudes of the populace have been affected by the Cultural Revolution, the degree to which the needs that used to be satisfied by Buddhism are now satisfied by the cult of Chairman Mao, the degree to which the campaign against traditional religion has been (as Mao himself once warned) counter-productive. No one can predict the religious policy of Mao’s successors. All that can be said, perhaps, is that it is too early to write the closing paragraph to the history of Buddhism in China.

<sup>27</sup> The last ordinations in the Mainland were held in the Spring of 1957 at Ku Shan and P’u-t’o Shan: see *Hsien-tai fo-hsüeh (Modern Buddhism)*, No. 2 (1957), p. 30 and *China News Service*, 16 May 1957.