

Chinese Buddhist Nuns and Laywomen in a Changing World

Harmonizing Tradition and Modernity throughout 20th and 21st Century

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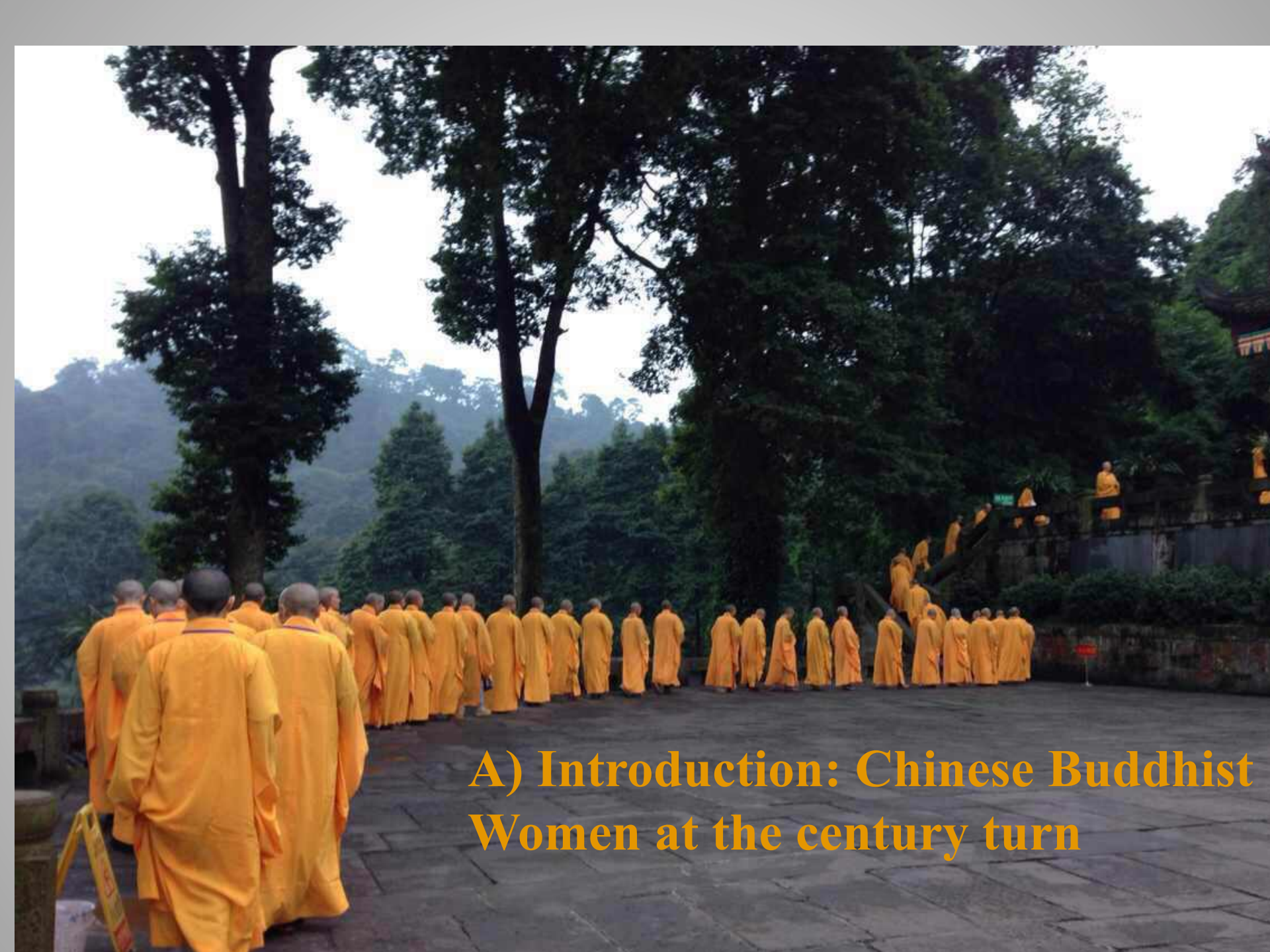
Longlian 隆蓮 (1909-2006)



- A. Introduction: Chinese Buddhist Women at the century turn
- B. Longlian's life and deeds > major events in modern China and modern Chinese Buddhism
- C. Longlian's Legacy > Buddhist nuns and women in contemporary China

- Ester Bianchi, *The Iron Statue Monastery. Tiexiangsi, a Buddhist Nunnery of Tibetan Tradition in Contemporary China*, Firenze, Leo S. Olschki, 2001, 232 p. (ISBN 88 222 4985 2).
- Ester Bianchi, “Subtle erudition and compassionate devotion: Longlian (1909-2006), the most outstanding *bhiksuni* in modern China”, in V. Goossaert, Ji Zhe, D. Ownby (a cura di), *The Making of Saints in Modern and Contemporary China: Profiles in Religious Leadership*, Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Ester Bianchi, “*Rufa chuanjie* 如法傳戒: Restoring ‘proper’ procedures for nuns’ ordination in 20th century China” (speech delivered at the Maison de l’Archéologie et de l’Ethnologie, Laboratoire d’Ethnologie et de Sociologie Comparative, Nanterre, “L’asymétrie sexuelle dans les différentes traditions bouddhiques à travers le prisme de l’ordination et de l’éducation des nonnes”, Paris, January 16, 2015).

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- Valussi Elena, “Gender as a useful category of analysis in Chinese Religions – with two case studies from the Republican period” (paper presented at the conference “Framing the Study of Religion in Modern China and Taiwan: Concepts, Methods and New Research Paths”, Centre for the Study of Religion and Culture in Asia at the University of Groningen, December 9-12, 2015).
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- Daniela Campo e Catherine Despeux, *Yinkong 印空 (1921-), maître du Chan: Vieille nonne et représentante d'un bouddhisme moderne / Chan master Yinkong 印空 (1921-) : An old woman and a modern Buddhist leader* (paper and documentary film presented at the Maison de l'Archéologie et de l'Ethnologie, Laboratoire d'Ethnologie et de Sociologie Comparative, Nanterre, “L'asymétrie sexuelle dans les différentes traditions bouddhiques à travers le prisme de l'ordination et de l'éducation des nonnes”, Paris, January 16, 2015).
- Chiu Tzu-Lung 2016, *Contemporary Buddhist Nunneries in Taiwan and Mainland China. A Study of Vinaya Practices* (PhD, Universiteit Gent).



A) Introduction: Chinese Buddhist Women at the century turn

Buddhist and Daoist Nuns (Ming, Guimet)



Notions on women/nuns in Chinese Buddhism

From the *Vinaya* texts and related literature:

- 1) the idea that the very existence of Buddhist nuns weakens the Buddhadharma;**
- 2) the necessity, in order to prevent this, of nuns' submission to male clergy;**
- 3) the idea of weakness and impurity of women;**
- 4) positive figures as Mahaprajapati, aunt and stepmother of the Buddha and founder of the Buddhist nuns' order.**

From the Mahayana tradition:

- 1) the idea of the impossibility for women of becoming Buddha;**
- 3) the need for the transformation of gender;**
- 4) the inconsistency of the sexual transformation concept.**

“Three aunties and six grannies” (sangu liupo 三姑六婆)

1-3) Buddhist nuns, Daoist nuns and female fortune-tellers (尼姑、道姑、卦姑);

4-8) procuresses, matchmakers, sorceresses, madams of brothels, female herbalists and midwives (牙婆、媒婆、师婆、虔婆、药婆、稳婆).

Yang Wenhui 楊文會
(Renshan 仁山)
(1837-1911)



Taixu 太虛
(1890-1947)



**B) Longlian 隆蓮 (1909-2006)'s
life and deeds**





Wang Enyang 王恩洋 (1897-1964)



Fazun 法尊 (1902-1980)



Nenghai 能海 (1886-1967)



汉地大般若宗开祖能海上师八十岁时德相
(摄于山西五台山)



Sherap Gyatso (1884-1968)



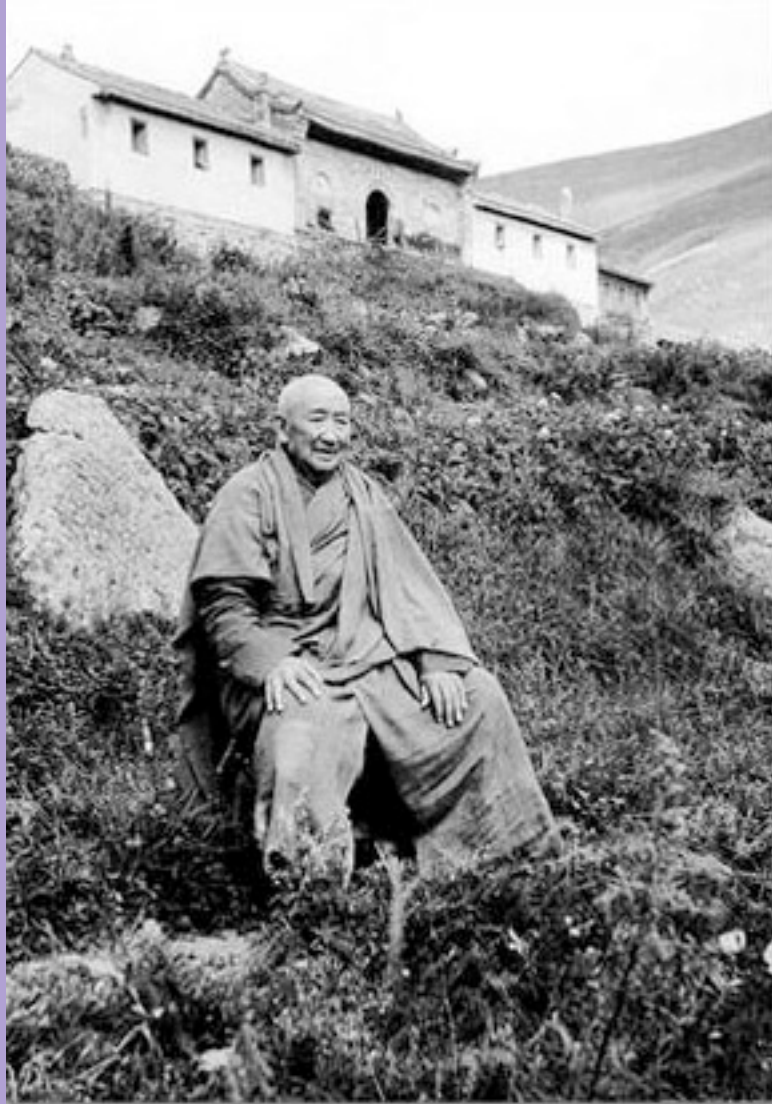
Changja *qutughtu* (1891-1957)



Changyuan 昌圓 (1879-1944)



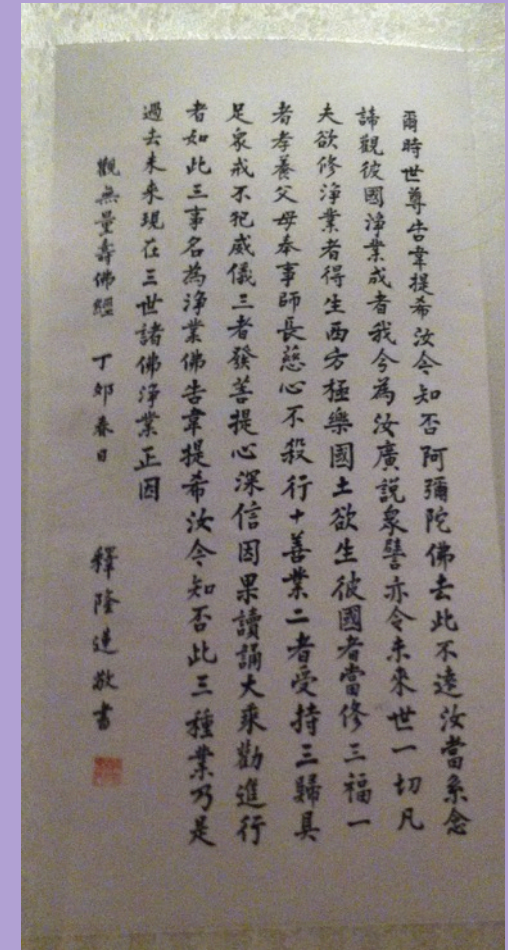
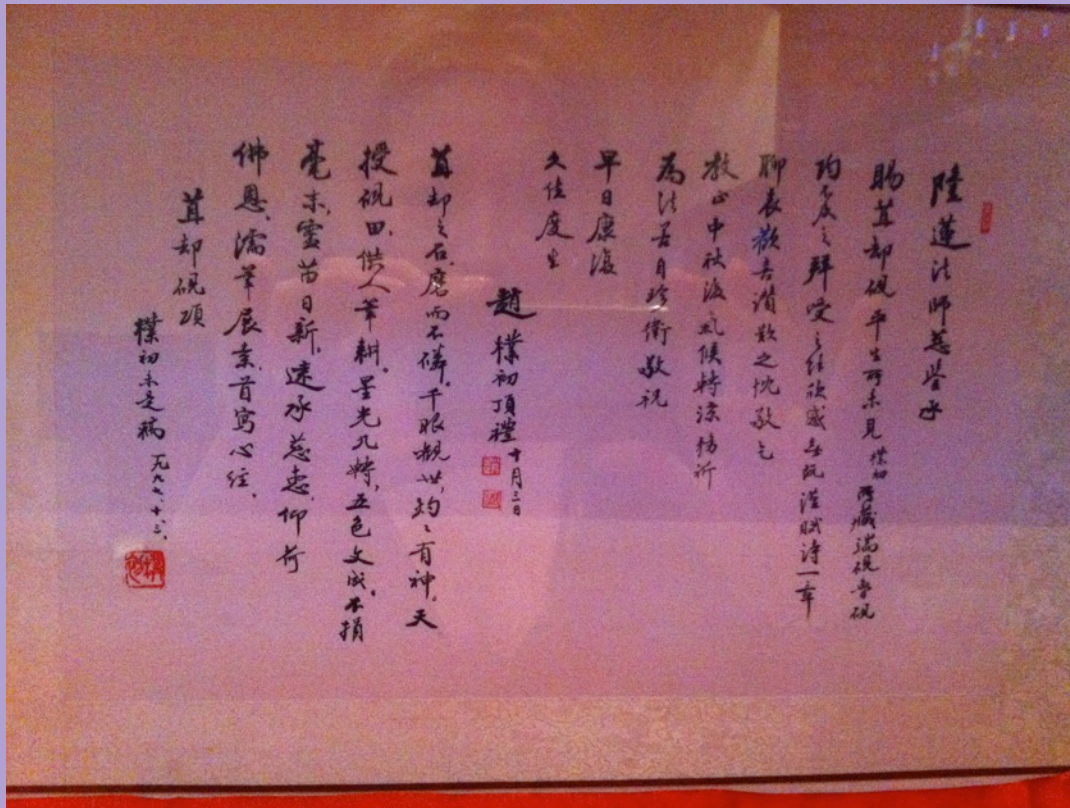
Nenghai on Wutaishan (1960s)



Longlian's writings



Longlian's calligraphy



Erbuseng jie 二部僧戒 (“ordination conferred by the two *saṃgha*-orders”)

“After a woman has been trained as a probationer (*śikṣamāṇā* 式叉摩那) for two years, the ordination ceremony must be carried out in both (nuns’ and monks’) orders”.

(*Gurudharma* / *bajingfa* 八敬法, exposed in the *Dharmaguptavinaya* 四分律: T. 1428: 923a26–b21)

- Transmitted to China from Śrī Laṅka in 433-434

- Shuyu 書玉, “Dual ordination procedures”
(*Erbuseng shoujie yishi* 二部僧受戒儀式)

«Buddhism is a science of wisdom. It is very difficult to understand, so it is really important to have masters. I had many masters myself. Half of the Buddhist doctrine I have learned comes from my masters, and half from my independent study and practice. Without teachers I would not have what I have attained today» (Longlian, 1995)

Longlian and Dingjing 定靜 (1903-1997)



Tongyuan 通愿 (1913-1991)





Sichuan Nuns Institute for Buddhist Studies 四川尼眾佛學院 (Tiexiangsi, 1996)



The Ordination Issue



“Dual ordination” in Tiexiangsi and Wenshuyuan (Chengdu 1982)



Dual ordination in Tiexiangsi (Chengdu, 1987)



1981: first *bhikṣu* ordination in Beijing Guangjisi
廣濟寺 (47 ordinees);

1982: first *bhikṣuṇī* ordination in Chengdu
Tiexiangsi 鐵像寺 in 1982 (nine ordinees >
śikṣamāṇās)

1980s-2010s:

- **Process of uniformation (unique models disregarding local varieties)**
- **Process of monopolization (only the BAC can organize ordinations)**
 - **Process of standardization**

✓ “triple platform ordination”

(*santan dajie* 三壇大戒);

✓ “dual ordination” or “ordination conferred by the two *saṃgha*-orders”

(*erbuseng jie* 二部僧戒)

“Triple platform ordination”

- I. Novice ordination (10 precepts of noviciate);**
- II. Full ordination (*prātimokṣa* prohibitions: 250 for monks and 348 for nuns);**
- III. Bodhisattva ordination.**

The three rites are held altogether within a short period of time

“Dual ordination” (Emeishan, 08/2014)



Fual ordinatio at Donglu Guanyinsi 東廬觀音寺 (Lishui, Jiangsu, November 2013)



Longlian's relics



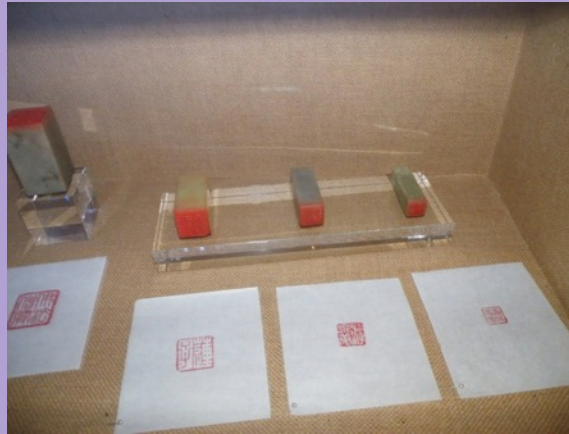
Longlian's stupas



**Longlian relics (隆蓮法師舍利)
are the most tangible proof of
her spiritual achievements:**

- 1) as the final outcomes of a lifetime of
study and meditation (disciples view)**
- 2) as the concrete demonstration of her
holy nature (many commoners view)**

Longlian's memorial Hall



Worship of Longlian



C) Longlian's Legacy: Buddhist Women in Contemporary China



Shanghai East China Normal University (2007)

- 31,4% (300 millions) engages in religious practices;
- 66,1% (200 millions) is Buddhist and/or Daoist.

Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (2010)

- 15% is non-religious > 85% engages in religious practices.
 - 18% is exclusively Buddhist;

Number of Buddhist monasteries:

- **2007: 16.000 monasteries and 32 Buddhist Studies Academies;**
- **2008: 20.000 Buddhist monasteries.**

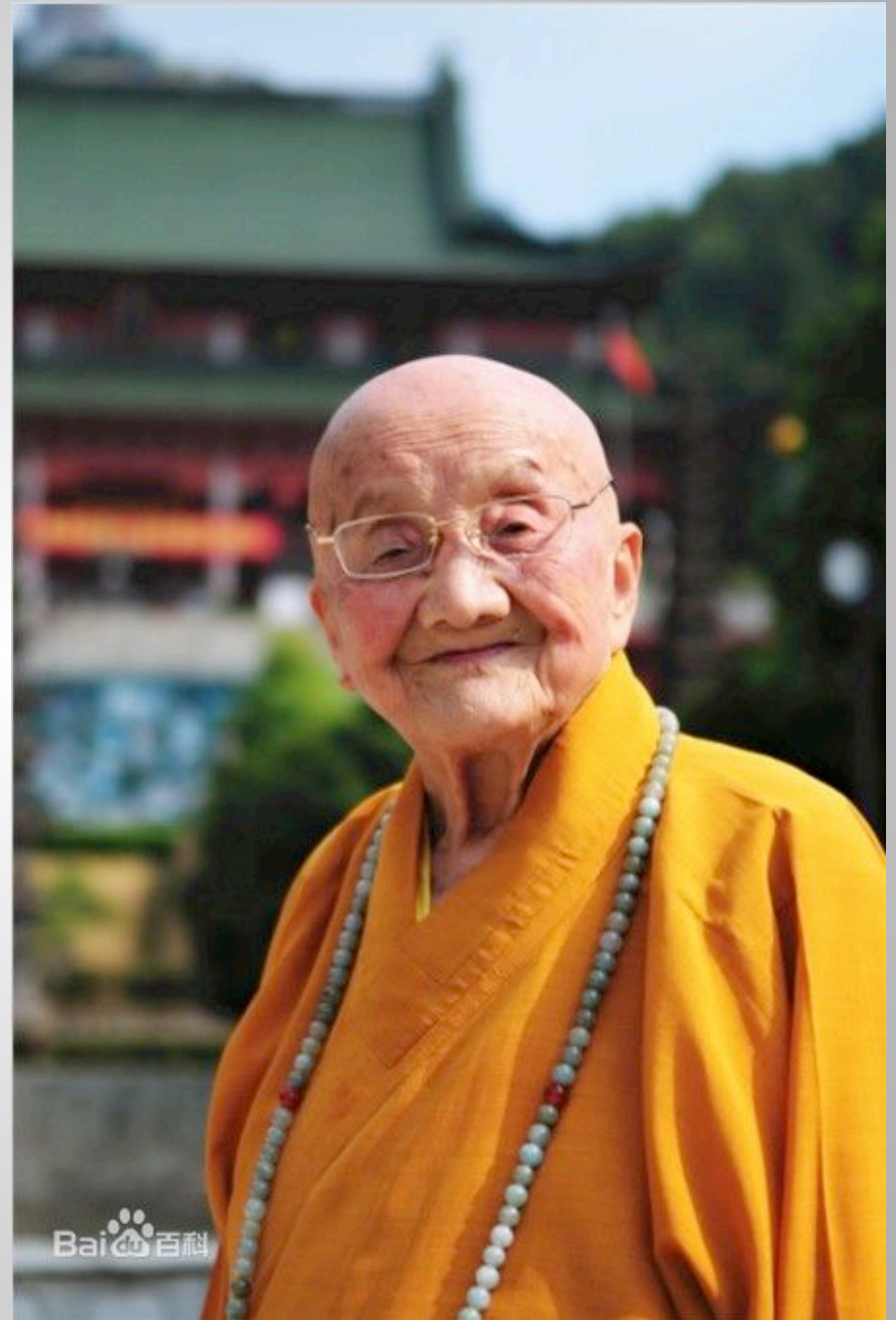
Size of the Han Buddhist clergy in Mainland China (Ji Zhe 2012 and 2013):

- ✓ 1930s: 738,000 monks and nuns;**
 - ✓ 1949: about 500,000;**
 - ✓ 1949-1966: rapid and dramatic decline down to a few thousand Buddhist monastics;**
 - ✓ 1997: the size of Han Chinese Buddhist clergy was around 70,000;**
 - ✓ 2009: about 80,000**
- > Nowadays most probably around 100.000 Han Buddhist monastics. Ca. 30% are nuns.**

Cixue 慈學 (1920-)



Yinkong 印空 (1921-)



Everyday life



Rituals and ceremonies



Funerary rites



Pilgrim nuns (Wutaishan, 2007)



Chanting and meditation



Official engagement



Abbe and monks (Wutaishan, 2007)



Young scholar nun



Rural nunnery (Chongzhou, 2010)



Eremit-nun (Putuoshan, 2007)



Concluding Remarks



Longlian's heirs (Changwu 昌悟, Renyi 仁義, Longhui 隆慧 (Aidaotang 愛道堂))



Guoping 果平 and “Second master” (2008)



Guoping 果平 (Baitasi 白塔寺)



Thank you



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