

Flipping the Script: Buddhist Youth in Communist Shanghai, 1949-1956¹

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This paper explores the impact of Communist governance on the Chinese religious landscape during the early years of the People's Republic of China (PRC) through a case study of the Young Buddhist Association in Shanghai. Recent scholarship on the early PRC has taken advantage of newly available sources to recover this period, and particularly the years from 1949 to 1956, from a master narrative of revolution that led directly from the founding of the new regime in 1949 to the chaotic violence of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).² Some scholars have emphasized the continuities in the early PRC with the nation-state building projects of the preceding Nationalist regime. Others have found in the 1950s important legacies that provided a foundation for reform and opening in the 1980s.³ In this new scholarship, the early PRC has therefore become a mid-century pivot point that is crucial to our understanding of the broader history of twentieth-century China.

To what extent was this period also pivotal in the history of the Chinese religious landscape as it was transformed over the course of the twentieth century? With a few notable exceptions, the burgeoning body of scholarship on religion in twentieth-century China has overwhelmingly tended to bracket the early PRC by focusing on either the pre-1949 Republican era on the one side, or the post-1978 Reform era on the other.⁴ This paper (and the others on this panel division) contributes to our understanding of the transition that took place at mid-century when many Chinese religious groups first encountered the newly ascendant Communist party-state that has remained in power up to the present.

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² Julia Strauss, ed., *The History of the PRC (1949-1976)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz, eds., *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People's Republic of China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

³ See, for example, Christopher Russell Leighton, "Capitalists, Cadres, and Culture in 1950s China" (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2010).

⁴ For an overview of religion in twentieth-century China with an up-to-date synthesis of scholarship, see: Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China* (Chicago: University Press, 2011). For examples of notable exceptions to the bracketing of the early PRC in recent scholarship on Chinese religion see: Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, "Politics of Faith: Christian Activism and the Maoist State in Chaozhou, Guangdong Province," *The China Review* 9:2 (Fall 2009), 17-39; Paul P. Mariani, *Church Militant: Bishop Kung and Catholic Resistance in Communist China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); David Ownby, "Imperial Fantasies: The Chinese Communist and Peasant Rebellions," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43 (2001), 65-91.

Shanghai is a suitable vantage point from which to explore the early encounter between religion and the Communist state because by mid-century China's largest city and former treaty port had become a national center of religious activism for most of China's major religious traditions. Protestants, Catholics, Han and Tibetan Buddhists, Daoists, redemptive societies, and even Hui Muslims tapped into the city's vast commercial wealth, central position in communication and transportation networks, extensive foreign contacts, and predominance in the modern publishing industry. The importance and complexity of religious activity in Shanghai was recognized by the Communist party-state, which assigned there more than double the number of cadres dedicated to religion work in any other city in the country.⁵ Shanghai was the focal point for the new regime's governance of religion in the 1950s.

The case of the Young Buddhist Association is worthy of our attention because it appears to have been the largest and most active non-Christian group in Shanghai that held legal status as a religious organization. Founded only in 1946, the Young Buddhist Association advanced rapidly to the forefront of the Shanghai Buddhist community and built momentum for a Buddhist youth movement that did not peak until well into the 1950s. In the final months of 1955, the Young Buddhist Association also became the first Buddhist voluntary group in the city, and probably in the country, to be singled out as the target of a nation-wide mass campaign against counterrevolutionaries in the Buddhist community. The denunciation of the Young Buddhist Association began the state's coercive dismantling of urban Buddhist activism that was largely completed by the end of the 1950s.⁶ However, after decades of imprisonment and forced labor, former leaders of the Young Buddhist Association were finally rehabilitated. Under state sponsorship in the 1980s they therefore renewed the brand of Buddhist activism that they had previously engineered with success under Communist rule in the pivotal age of the early 1950s.

I. RE-GENERATION

The Young Buddhist Association of Shanghai emerged in 1946 from within a community of Buddhist householders⁷ that was already looking back to the 1930s as a golden age. In that earlier decade, a cross-section of the city's social elites had

⁵ SMA B24-2-20.

⁶ For existing scholarship on Buddhism in the 1950s see: Xue Yu, "Buddhists in China During the Korean War (1951-1953)," in Michael K. Jerryson and Mark Juergensmeyer, ed., *Buddhist Warfare* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); and his "Buddhist Contributions to the Socialist Transformation of Buddhism in China: Activities of Ven. Juzan during 1949-1953," *Journal of Global Buddhism* 10 (2009): 217-253; Holmes Welch, *Buddhism under Mao* (Harvard University Press, 1972).

⁷ The term "householder" (*jushi* 居士) refers to non-monastic Buddhist adherents who made a formal commitment to their religion (normatively by taking the Three Refuges) yet retained their status as regular members of society with families and careers. The term served as a self-identification that distinguished such adherents from clerics (*chujiazhong* 出家眾) on the one hand, and the credulous masses (*xinzong* 信眾) on the other.

pioneered a new brand of Buddhist activism in China. Beyond the confining walls of cleric-dominated temples, they had erected an array of new organizations for the laity to collectively practice, study and propagate their faith within the modern environment of the cosmopolitan metropolis. Taking full advantage of their city's unrivaled centrality to the country's communications networks and modern publishing industry, the Shanghai householders had played the leading role in building a vibrant national Buddhist print culture consumed by a mass readership spread throughout the provinces and abroad. At a time when modern secularism was permeating politics and public opinion, the householder community won both legitimacy under the Nationalist state and respect in the eyes of their fellow citizens by launching a wide range of social welfare enterprises, from medical clinics to interest-free credit unions.⁸

However, for all its achievements, Buddhist activism, whether in Shanghai or elsewhere in China, had never succeeded in mounting a movement among the nation's youth. As Taixu, the self-proclaimed monastic leader of the modern Buddhist reform movement, remarked at the opening ceremony of the Young Buddhist Association, all earlier attempts at starting a Buddhist youth organization had proved to be ephemeral.⁹ Similarly, the scholar Holmes Welch observed in his foundational study of twentieth-century Chinese Buddhism that the great weakness of the lay movement was the "indifference of the youth."¹⁰ This weakness became a matter of concern when the elders of the householder community, who had already been advanced in age during the 1930s, began to pass away one after another during China's War of Resistance against Japan (1937-1945). A string of well-attended memorial services held during the long, dark years of Japanese invasion and occupation gave rise to the perception of a fading golden age. Contributing to this sentiment was the fact that the services could not be held at the community's flagship organization, the World Buddhist Householder Grove, which had been leveled by Japanese bombs at the start of the war.

Despite its losses, the householder community continued its activism under the privations of wartime occupation, and it was at this time that a youth movement began to take shape among a small circle of its younger participants. Prominent in this circle were two young men who had both grown up in the port city of Ningbo, in Zhejiang province. The older of the two was Fang Zifan 方子藩 (1908-1968) [Figure 1]. In Ningbo, Fang had been raised in a Buddhist household and as a boy frequently visited the city's Guanzong Temple to hear dharma lectures by Dixian, the most well-known Tiantai Buddhist master of the early twentieth century. Around 1931 he

⁸ J. Brooks Jessup, "The Householder Elite: Buddhist Activism in Shanghai, 1920-1956" (PhD Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2010). On Buddhist publishing in Shanghai, see: the conference papers included in this panel by Gregory Scott and Paul Katz; Jan Kiely, "Spreading the Dharma with the Mechanized Press: New Buddhist Print Cultures in the Modern Chinese Print Revolution, 1865-1949," in Christopher Reed and Cynthia Brokaw, eds., *From Woodblocks to the Internet: Chinese Publishing and Print Culture in Transition, 1800-2008* (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 2010); Francesca Tarroco, *The Cultural Practices of Modern Chinese Buddhism* (Routledge, 2008).

⁹ "Shanghai fojiao qingnianhui kai chenglihui" 上海佛教青年會開成立會, *Juequn zhoubao* 1.8 (1946) [MFQ 101:122].

¹⁰ Holmes Welch, *The Buddhist Revival in China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 86.

had gone abroad to study chemical engineering in Tokyo and later in Germany. By the start of the war, Fang had returned to China and moved to Shanghai, where he became the general manager of both the Dafeng Industrial Material Company and the Dafeng Chemical Medicine Factory. A lifelong devout Buddhist, once in Shanghai Fang became friends with a number of co-religionists, and developed a particularly close relationship with fellow Ningbo native, Zheng Songying.¹¹

Unlike Fang, Zheng Songying 鄭頌英 (1917-2000) [Figure 2] had not been raised Buddhist. By his own account, his conversion had come during his years in middle school when he began to feel perplexed by questions about the true nature of the universe and the ultimate meaning of human life. Unable to find satisfying answers at school in his textbooks on history, geography, science and other subjects, Zheng felt lost and without direction in life. A book lover, at the age of 15 he answered a newspaper advertisement for free books, and soon received copies in the mail of *Showing the Right Path to Human Life* by Nie Yuntai, and *Compiled Records of Historical Miraculous Responses* by Xu Zhijing, two of most widely circulated Buddhist tracts by respected elders in the Shanghai householder community.¹² Perusing them over summer vacation, Zheng was surprised to find that these were books pertaining to religion, a topic which he had been taught in school to criticize. However, reading through the words of these learned householders he felt suddenly awakened as if from a dream: “so this is what human life is!” By the time of the war, Zheng had been studying and practicing Buddhism as a householder for five years and was working at the Xiangji Paper Shop in Shanghai when he became acquainted with Fang Zifan.¹³

Another member of Fang and Zheng’s circle was Chen Hailiang 陳海量 (1909-1982). Chen had grown up in another region of Zhejiang, Tiantai county, and similar to Fang he had been raised Buddhist by a devout father. Also like Fang, Chen had come under the influence of one of the eminent clerics of the age, the venerable Vinaya master and cultural luminary, Hongyi. After meeting him in 1931, Chen formed a close bond with Hongyi and became his lay disciple. When Chen queried the master one day about the karmic preconditions of their relationship, Hongyi had replied that their current connection was the continuation of a master-discipline relationship that extended over many previous lives. However, when Chen requested that Hongyi ordain him as a monk, the master dissuaded him because the disciple’s ties to world had not yet been exhausted. Chen had begun a career as a shop accountant, but in 1938 during the war he accepted an invitation to help found and run a new Buddhist publishing company in Shanghai, Great Wheel of the Dharma Books (*Dafalun shuju*). Leveraging his editorial position, Chen soon became

¹¹ XFC 1: 128.

¹² *Rensheng zhijin* 人生指津, *Lishi ganying tongji* 歷史感應統紀.

¹³ XFC 2:1595; Zheng Songying 鄭頌英, “Huangran rumeng fang jue” 恍然如夢方覺, in Chen Hailiang 陳海量 ed., *Ziwo jieshao* 自我介紹 [Self Introductions] (Shanghai: Daxiong shuju, 1949), 93-94.

a popular author in Buddhist print culture and a respected interpreter of Buddhist doctrine for the lifestyle of the modern lay practitioner.¹⁴

Fang, Zheng, Chen and their circle of Buddhist friends in Shanghai represented a new generation of householders. As their biographies indicate, these young men had been deeply influenced by their elders during the golden age, yet they also differed from them in important ways. Whereas the elder generation had been classically educated during the late Qing dynasty, this new generation had gone through the modern school system with not only its Westernized curriculum, but also its physical education classes, student groups, sports teams, bands, choirs, plays, and so forth. Moreover, whereas the elders had seen the rise of the modern publishing industry and the mass media, the new generation grew up with and breathed it. In other words the elder generation had been a transitional one, and the transition had distanced them culturally from those who grew up after the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911. There were social differences as well. Part of what had made the elder householders of the golden age so prestigious and allowed them to build such a successful urban religious community was that they were among the most elite members of Shanghai society—often industrial capitalists who had made vast fortunes in the economic miracle of the early 1920s and sat atop powerful social networks that ran the city. On the other hand, these three younger men from Zhejiang—the engineer-manager, the paper merchant, and the accountant-turned-publisher—straddled the lower ranks of the capitalist class and the upper ranks of the “petty urbanites” employed by them. As Wen-hsin Yeh has written, Shanghai’s petty urbanites were a new, diverse class produced by modern education and commerce; they were often bored by their desk jobs and plagued by the anxiety of falling off their middle rung on the social ladder, particularly during times of economic depression such as the war.¹⁵ It would be to this class of petty urbanites, and the vocational youth among them, that the Buddhist youth movement in Shanghai would address itself.

II. REJUVENATION

In 1941, the first year of full Japanese occupation in Shanghai, Fang, Zheng, Chen and close to a dozen of their friends founded the Deer Park Buddhist Study Society (*Luyuan foxuehui* 鹿苑佛學會). In addition to conventional activities centering around the collective study and practice of the Buddhist teachings, this small organization formed a singing group and played sports, made radio broadcasts and opened a magazine reading room, arranged professional introductions for members to find jobs and, specifically for youth in the city who had been forced to cut short their education, they opened a free vocational night

¹⁴ XFC 1:1091-1092; Zheng Songying, “Chen Hailiang jushi ersan shi” 陳海量居士二三事, in *Jingyishi wencun* 淨意室文存2 [Collected Writings from the House of Pure Thoughts, 2] (Beijing: Zhongguo xianzhen nianjian she, 2001), 116-118.

¹⁵ Wen-hsin Yeh, *Shanghai Splendor: Economic Sentiments and the Making of Modern China, 1843-1949* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 101-103.

school.¹⁶ After the Japanese occupation was finally lifted, they secured the support of prominent elder householders and eminent monks to expand their small study society into the Young Buddhist Association (*Shanghaishi fojiao qingnianhui* 上海市佛教青年會) in 1946 with Fang Zifan as president, Zhen Songying managing finances and Chen Hailiang in charge of propagation.¹⁷ As an organizational vehicle, the youth association more aptly fit their mission to “follow the path of the Buddha-dharma and take the spirit of youth (*qingnian jingshen* 青年精神) as a foundation to benefit oneself and others.”¹⁸

Taking the “spirit of youth as a foundation” was a two-way street. As one householder put it, “Buddhism needs the youth, and the youth also needs Buddhism.”¹⁹ One of the primary duties of the new organization was therefore to “awaken” and “purify the lives of the youth,” who, like Zheng Songying, could only satisfy their thirst for understanding and direction within the Buddhist teachings.²⁰ Moreover, by applying Buddhism to the transformation of society, Shanghai’s struggling vocational youth were told, “everyone will be able to enjoy peaceful and prosperous lives.”²¹ On the other hand, Buddhism also needed the enthusiasm and dynamism embodied in the youth. There was a sense among the YBA leadership that the fading of the golden age not only manifested itself in the loss of its leaders, but also in the outmoding of its brand of activism. They therefore aimed to rejuvenate the methods and public image of the householder community as well as its membership.

The YBA organization was designed to give institutional expression to the “spirit of youth.” Zheng Songying wrote,

The activities and work of the Young Buddhist Association should be centered on health and entertainment (*kangle* 康樂), cooperative enterprises, and serving society. If we limit our affairs to preaching and [religious] practices then we will completely fall into the old rut of ordinary ‘Buddhist study societies’ and ‘householder groves’, and be unworthy of the name and spirit of the Young Buddhist Association.²²

¹⁶ *Jueyuoqing banyuekan* 50/51 (Nov. 1, 1941); *Jueyuoqing banyuekan* 121/122 (Sept. 1, 1944); Yuan Renze 阮仁澤 and Gao Zhenong 高振農, eds., *Shanghai zongjiaoshi* 上海宗教史 [The History of Religion in Shanghai] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1992), 289.

¹⁷ The English translation, “Young Buddhist Association,” was the one favored by the organization itself.

¹⁸ “Shanghaishi Fojiao qingnianhui zhangcheng” 上海市佛教青年會章程, *Juexun* 1.1 (January 1, 1947) [MFQ 103: 8-9].

¹⁹ You Zhibiao 尤智表, “Qingnian yu Fojiao” 青年與佛教, *Juexun* 3.8 (August 1, 1949) [MFQz 78: 486].

²⁰ “Shanghaishi Fojiao qingnianhui zhangcheng” 上海市佛教青年會章程, *Juexun* 1.1 (January 1, 1947) [MFQ 103: 8-9]; “Shanghai Fojiao qingnianhui yuanqi” 上海佛教青年會緣起, *Juequn zhoubao* 1.5 (August 12, 1946) [MFQ 101: 80].

²¹ Zhong Huicheng 鍾慧成, “Fakanci: Qingnian de lichang” 發刊詞: 青年的立場, *Juexun* 1.1 (January 1, 1947) [MFQ 103:1-2].

²² Zheng Songying 鄭頌英, “Foqing de guoqu xianzi ji qianzhan” 佛青的過去現在及前瞻, *Juexun* 5.2/3 (March 1, 1951) [MFQz 79:53-54].

The distinctive dynamism of the spirit of youth was symbolized most saliently in the YBA's health and entertainment department (*kangle bu*), which organized activities under the categories of arts, music, travel, sports, entertainment, and family.²³ Each activity was given a distinctive Buddhist spin; for example, the family group visited model Buddhist families to observe their lifestyle, the travel group organized trips to famous Buddhist sacred sites [Figure 4], the singing group sang Buddhist songs, and the entertainment group played Buddhist movies.

However, the youthful emphasis on health and entertainment was not intended to come at the exclusion of more conventional forms of householder activism, which were adequately represented in the YBA's other departments: propagation, social welfare, and religious practice. These departments held daily worship in the mornings and evenings, observed the major ceremonies of the Buddhist ritual calendar, organized lecture series and study groups, ran a library, established a printing press (*Daxiong shuju*), published a widely circulating journal, gave daily radio broadcasts, preached in prisons, ran a free medical clinic, and participated in charities and disaster relief.²⁴ However, even these established elements of Buddhist activism were imbued with the "spirit of youth" at the YBA. For example, the group's popular lecture series included not only dharma talks by eminent monks on topics like "The Essential Doctrines of the Pure Land School," but also discourses by householders on such topics as "The Road of Health and Entertainment." Social welfare went beyond handing out winter clothes to running a night school that taught accounting. Another example was the YBA's popular monthly journal, *The Awakened Dispatch* (Juexun 覺訊), which included an insert called "Teen" (*qingshaonian* 青少年) that solicited contributions and discussions (often directly from middle school students) on health, love, and marriage, as well as jokes, riddles, movie reviews, and so forth. Such innovations aimed to infuse Buddhist activism with a new aesthetic that supplemented the solemn and scholarly with the fun and entertaining. Without displacing the pious pursuit of serious practice, study and devotion, leaders of the YBA sought to repackage this religious core of householder culture with a new aesthetic that would resonate with the lifestyle and interests of the urban vocational youth and other petty urbanites of their generation.

Part and parcel to the youthful spirit at the YBA was an exuberant optimism about the future of the organization and of Chinese Buddhism, an attitude that drove a confident, almost aggressive, approach to religious propagation and membership expansion. Chen Hailiang wrote in the inaugural issue of *The Awakened Dispatch*, "those who do not propagate are not disciples of the Buddha, but rather followers of [the demon] Māra."²⁵ Under Chen's leadership, the propagation department ran regular programs to train a cadre of effective propagators. This aspect of the YBA

²³ "Shanghaishi Fojiao qingnianhui zhangcheng" 上海市佛教青年會章程, *Juexun* 1.1 (January 1, 1947) [MFQ 103: 8-9].

²⁴ "Shanghaishi Fojiao qingnianhui zhangcheng" 上海市佛教青年會章程, *Juexun* 1.1 (January 1, 1947) [MFQ 103: 8-9].

²⁵ Chen Hailiang 陳海量, "Hongfa shi women de zeren," 弘法是我們的責任, *Juexun* 1.1 (January 1, 1947) [MFQ 103:4-5]

spirit was most clearly expressed in the membership drives that took over the affairs of the association every year for a month or more. Earlier householder associations had run similar drives in the past, but never on such a sustained basis with such broad participation from the existing membership. To carry out its membership drives, the YBA usually organized about two dozen teams led by the top officers to compete in bringing in the most members. As the drives became more elaborate over the years, the main teams were divided up into as many as 160 small branch teams, each with their own target quotas. The teams were supported by all-day broadcasts over the radio, and their progress was reported in *The Awakened Dispatch* (*Juexun* 覺訊). The first of these drives was held immediately after the official founding of the YBA at the end of 1946, and by the end of the third drive in early 1949 they were targeting 5,000 new members (an optimistic 60% increase over existing membership at the time).²⁶ The member drives became such a central feature of the YBA that they carried over into a year-round enthusiasm for expansive propagation.

At the beginning of 1949, prior to the third membership drive and on the eve of the Communist liberation of Shanghai, the YBA had over 3,000 members. In a short three years, amidst civil war and the financial ruin of the city under Nationalist misrule, the youth organization had thus already equaled the peak size of the largest householder organization in the golden age. After the Communists took over the city in May of that year, the YBA not only survived the regime change but actually gained momentum. In 1950, they added 1,816 new members, and the results reported for the 1951 drive were the largest yet: 3,650 new members in just over one month.²⁷ Furthermore, participation figures show that the membership was highly active in the affairs of the organization. Over the year 1950, even before the massive membership drive of 1951, YBA lecture attendance was totaled at over 10 thousand and religious practice attendance at just under 12 thousand; the medical clinic treated over 5 thousand patients with Chinese medicine and over 14 thousand with Western medicine; over 33 thousand free Buddhist texts were distributed, and the circulation of *The Awakened Dispatch* had climbed to about 4 thousand copies per monthly issue.²⁸ The energy produced by membership expansion and participation also affected the organization and its scope of activities. The new “Teen Department” and “Women’s Department” both quickly became highly active wings of the YBA, each with their own sets of subsidiary groups and activities geared toward their particular constituencies. The new organizational charter of 1951

²⁶ “Disanjie zhengqiu huiyuan dahui teji” 第三屆徵求會員大會特輯, *Juexun* 3.2 (February 1, 1949) [MFQ 103:184].

²⁷ “1950 niandu benhui gexiang shiye gaikuang tongjibiao” 一九五〇年度本會各項事業概況統計表, *Juexun* 5.2/3 (March 1, 1951) [MFQz 79:59]; “Benhui diwujie zhengqiu huiyuan zongjiexiao” 本會第五屆徵求會員總揭曉, *Juexun* 5.6 (June 1, 1951) [MFQz 79:118].

²⁸ Although the figures represent a counting of how many people participated in these activities, these were not distinct individuals – the same person could have attended multiple lectures and been counted each time.

listed 8 departments overseeing 39 individual groups, each organizing multiple activities for the membership.²⁹

By the early 1950s, the Young Buddhist Association of Shanghai had therefore become perhaps the most active and influential grassroots Buddhist organization in the People's Republic of China. In 1951, You Youwei, the president of another householder organization in Shanghai, declared to his fellow Buddhists throughout the nation:

Among the householder groups in the country, the Young Buddhist Association of Shanghai is the most suited to the times: its organization is legal and robust; its work is responsive and thorough. It not only propels Buddhists in the important work of carrying out social welfare enterprises, but especially since Liberation it has brought forth great power in both protecting the faith and propagating the Dharma... It is well known that amidst the current development of Buddhism throughout the nation, Shanghai is thriving the most; and that within the Buddhist trends in Shanghai, the Young Buddhist Association is the most advanced. So the propagation and salvation work of this association has great significance for the future of Buddhism. We should combine our power to expand its organization and strengthen its duties!³⁰

Indeed, the YBA ran one of the largest Buddhist publishing houses in the country; edited one the few Buddhist periodicals with a national circulation to continue after 1949; projected its influence over the airwaves with daily radio broadcasts; and increasingly expanded its membership beyond the city limits to the provinces beyond. YBA leaders declared with characteristic optimism their pretensions to become a vehicle for uniting the national Buddhist community. The Buddhist youth movement that had been missing even from the golden age of the 1930s was now confidently underway in the 1950s. However, what makes this development most surprising is that it occurred under the rule of an avowedly atheist Communist regime that by most accounts had consolidated its mastery of China's premier metropolis with rapid efficiency after 1949.

III. RELIGION WORK

When the Communists came to power in 1949, they did so not as “messianic visionaries” but as “somber realists.”³¹ The ideological aim of transitioning the country to socialism was delayed in favor of the more pragmatic goals of achieving political stability and economic development. Erstwhile ideological enemies of the

²⁹ “Shanghaishi fojiaohui zhangcheng” 上海市佛教青年會章程, *Juexun* 5.2/3 (March 1, 1951) [MFQz 79:50-53].

³⁰ You Youwei 游有維, “Quanguo fojiao jushimen gankuai tuanjie qilai” 全國佛教居士們趕快團結起來, *Honghua yuekan* 117 (February 15, 1951) [MFQb 70:458].

³¹ Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic, 3rd Edition* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), 55-56.

party such as the Chinese capitalists—provided they declared their political loyalty to the new party-state—were therefore to be included in a domestic “united front” with workers and peasants. According to the principles of Mao’s “New Democracy,” the members of the united front were to enjoy democratic freedoms, while the iron fist of dictatorship would be reserved for only the true enemies of the people, such as counterrevolutionaries and foreign imperialists. Among the democratic freedoms extended to “the people” in the Common Program (1949), and later the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China (1954), was the “freedom of religious belief” (*zongjiao xinyang de ziyou* 宗教信仰的自由). As with capitalism, the policies of the new regime in the early 1950s were designed to control religion, not to eliminate it. However, the vagueness of this national policy on religion largely left it up to the cadres assigned with “religion work” (*zongjiao gongzuo* 宗教工作) on the ground to determine precisely which religious adherents were to be denied their freedoms as enemies of the people, and what exactly counted as legitimate “religious belief.” In order to understand how the Young Buddhist Association experienced the governance of the Communist party-state, it is therefore necessary to first examine the specific government organs with which it interacted.³²

On the local level in Shanghai during the early 1950s, there were two offices in the party-state apparatus that shared the primary responsibility for governing religion in the city. One was the Religious Affairs Office (*zongjiao shiwuchu* 宗教事務處), which went through a dizzying series of transitions: in 1951 it was housed within the Culture and Education Committee of the East China Military Governance Committee; in 1952 a specific Shanghai office was split off and attached to the Culture and Education Committee of the Shanghai People’s Municipal Government; then in 1955 the office was elevated as a direct subsidiary of the Shanghai People’s Municipal Committee.³³ Such institutional turnover reflected the fact that even by 1955 the party-state had not yet settled on an effective organizational apparatus or strategy for governing religion in Shanghai. This situation was compounded by the considerable administrative overlap that existed between the Religious Affairs Office and the second state organ with a primary responsibility for religion work, the Civil Affairs Bureau of the Shanghai People’s Municipal Government (*Shanghaishi renmin zhengfu minzhengju* 上海市人民政府民政局).

In early 1953, the Civil Affairs Bureau sent a frustrated report to its superiors at the Municipal Government describing how administrative overlap with the Religious Affairs Office undermined religion work in Shanghai. The report began by explaining that in January of 1951, when the Three-Self Movement was launched among Protestants and Catholics, the Bureau handed over all relevant files and responsibilities to the newly-established Religious Affairs Office of the East China

³² On the post-49 Communist approach to governing religion, see: Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China* (U Chicago Press, 2011), 152-165; Chen Jinlong 陳金龍, *Zhongguo gongchandang yu zhongguo de zongjiao wenti* 中國共產黨與中國的宗教問題 [The Chinese Communist Party and China’s Religion Problem] (Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2006), 125-181.

³³ Shanghai zongjiao zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, *Shanghai zongjiaozhi* 上海宗教志 [Shanghai Religion Gazetteer] (Shanghai: Shanghai shehuikexueyuan chubanshe, 2001), 603.

Military Governance Committee. However, it was decided that the Bureau itself would continue to handle work related to Buddhism and other non-Christian religions until Shanghai had its own religious affairs office. This was because the affairs of the non-Christian religions like Buddhism were considered local to the city in character, whereas Christian affairs were national or regional in character. However, when the Shanghai office was established in 1952, though the Bureau transferred over some of its Buddhist work, along with two cadres, it continued to handle a portion of the work itself. “From that point on, it has been the situation in this city that the affairs of Buddhism and so forth have been managed by two organs. Due to this, the transferring back and forth of communications and the mutual dependence on each other have caused much unnecessary damage.”³⁴

The report goes on to give specific examples of the damage done. A temple property dispute was brought to the Religious Affairs Office, which forwarded the case for the Civil Affairs Bureau to handle, but an entire month was lost just in the transferring of files. Another temple property case was brought separately to both the Office and the Bureau, resulting in contradictory replies from the two organs. Such handling of cases had resulted in complaints from the Buddhist community that for one affair they always had to deal with two offices, and it was unclear which was their guiding government organ. In addition, the administrative overlap caused another sort of problem that the report described as “everyone is handling it, so no one handles it” (*douguan doubuguan* 都管都不管) and “what should be done, doesn’t get done” (*yingzuo er buzuo* 應做而不做). For example, churches and mosques in the city had already been exempted from taxes but no one had done the same for Buddhist temples, which led to Buddhist outcries of unfairness that the Bureau claimed had frequently put it in awkward situations. However, perhaps the most important example given in the report is the following:

Because the work is not clear[ly assigned], there has been insufficient guidance (*lingdao* 領導) over the thinking (*sixiang* 思想) of Buddhists and others. Currently we are held up at simply latching onto a few progressive monks, while we have not been able to lead the vast majority of monks, nuns and Daoists through thought education. Moreover, we have not established leadership over the Buddhist journals published in this city, like *Honghua Monthly* and *The Awakened Dispatch*, both of which are circulated nationally. As for researching the number of temples, the number of monks, nuns, and Daoists, and other such basic conditions in the city, we still haven’t even done a survey. These are all things that should be done but haven’t been done in religion work.³⁵

The Bureau explained that, for its part, it did not currently have the organizational capacity to carry out such important tasks. Without even a section of the Bureau dedicated to religion, they had to assign religion work to a *single* cadre in the Social

³⁴ SMA B1-2-862.

³⁵ SMA B1-2-862.

Affairs Section (*Shehui ke* 社會科). With such insufficient resources, the Bureau had its hands full just reacting to day to day religious affairs, let alone actively getting control and doing the work that it knew needed to be done. Buddhist work, the department felt, was of great importance because American imperialists had spreading their nefarious rumors and plots in the Buddhist community. The report concluded that the irrational overlap in responsibilities between the Bureau and the Office had to be resolved: a single government organ conducting unified research, planning, and handling was absolutely necessary.

Even if there may have been a degree of exaggeration in this report by an office eager to lessen its own work load, it still reveals a highly fractious and chaotic administrative situation among religion work in a regime that was clearly far from monolithic. In 1953, the party leadership had still failed to clearly define a bureaucratic apparatus for religion work on the local level. Protestants and Catholics were perhaps getting adequate attention from the Religious Affairs Office, but Buddhism was falling through the cracks. In fact, many of the examples given in the Bureau's report show Buddhists exasperated with the incompetence of government organs and putting officials on their heels with justified complaints. Furthermore, the response that the Religious Affairs Office gave in reply to the Bureau's insinuation that it wasn't doing its job did not give hope that the situation would be rectified anytime soon. "The Religious Affairs Office, in accordance with work principles and the directives of the Central Culture and Education Committee Religious Affairs Office, specially focuses on the imperialism-related Catholic and Protestant work. As for Buddhism [we] only work on control of a policy nature (*zhengcexing de zhangwo* 政策性的掌握)." ³⁶ This curt rebuff points to the power that the Religious Affairs Bureau had through a direct connection to Party Central. Pulling rank, the Office flatly told the lowly local municipal Bureau that the status quo would be maintained.

Amidst this bureaucratic rivalry and confusion, administrative responsibility for the Young Buddhist Association appears to have fallen primarily to the Bureau and its Social Affairs Section. The main task of the Section during the early 1950s was to carry out a full registration of all social organizations (*shetuan* 社團) in the city. The stated purpose of the registration project, as of 1951, was "to understand and gain control of the overall situation among each category of social organization in Shanghai." ³⁷ The Section analyzed each organization according to its "political character" and either denied legal registration status or granted it, with or without the requirement for organizational reform. Although at the time the Section counted almost forty thousand social organizations in the city, nearly thirty-six thousand of these were categorized as workers organizations, a figure that reveals the Section's primary concerns. By contrast, only 89 organizations appeared in the "religion" category, and only 5 of these were labeled Buddhist (most of the others were Protestant or Catholic). Although elsewhere the Section put the figure for Buddhist groups at 17, such numbers reflect a lack of complete and precise information. Nevertheless, prominent among these 5 Buddhist organizations on the Section's

³⁶ SMA B1-2-862.

³⁷ SMA B168-1-802.

radar was the Young Buddhist Association, which was recognized as being one of the two largest Buddhist groups in Shanghai, but also analyzed as having “complicated conditions” and “lacking core cadres” of a politically progressive character. Despite this assessment, the Section decided that the YBA was to be granted legal registration status, with the requirement that the group be reformed at some unspecified point in the future. In effect, at least partially due to the fact that the Section could not make Buddhist groups a priority, the primary government organ responsible for religion work among Buddhists in Shanghai (i.e. the Civil Affairs Bureau) gave the YBA both legal status and a de facto free hand in managing its own affairs.³⁸

However, formal organs of the party-state were not the only agents through which the regime approached the religious community. Far more than either the Religious Affairs Office or the Civil Affairs Bureau, it was the Shanghai Democratic Youth League (*Shanghaishi minzhu qingnian lianhehui* 上海市民主青年聯合會) that had the most interaction with the Young Buddhist Association. An implementation of the principles of New Democracy, the Youth League was one of an array of mass organizations, like the Shanghai Democratic Women’s League and the Shanghai Federation of Industry and Commerce, that the regime established particularly in the cities to enhance the party’s influence and support among the diverse sectors of society and incorporate them into the new polity. Although as mass organizations these groups encouraged broad participation, they remained a top-down initiative that was firmly controlled and directed by the party. This was the Communist regime’s version of the “state corporatist” approach to governing society that it had inherited from its Nationalist predecessors.³⁹

The complexity of local conditions in Shanghai colored the way the Youth League tackled its mission of uniting the city’s youth under the political leadership of the party. In the League’s own analysis, whereas the party had built a foundation of influence for itself among workers and students prior to 1949, very few contacts had been established with other sectors of the youth. By contrast, the Nationalists and the foreign imperialists who had previously ruled the city had a strong influence among the youth at all levels that did not simply disappear with the Communist takeover. It was this problem that shaped the strategies and priorities of the Youth League in the early years of the PRC. And such prioritization led them straight to religion. “In the past Shanghai was the center of the imperialist use of culture and religion to invade China. Therefore work among religious youth, whether at the present or in the future, is extremely important.”⁴⁰ The League elevated religious youth to the first of four main targets for its work, a strategic decision that was reflected in the fact that while religious youth remained far less numerous in the League’s overall membership than workers or students, they had the highest

³⁸ SMA B168-1-802.

³⁹ Nara Dillon, “New Democracy and the Demise of Private Charity in Shanghai,” in Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz, eds., *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People’s Republic of China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 83-88.

⁴⁰ SMA C23-1-3.

percentage of representatives on the mass organization's executive committee.⁴¹ As with the Religious Affairs Office and the Bureau of Civil Affairs, a strategic focus on the lingering influence of imperialism among Shanghai's religious youth led the League to make Protestant and Catholic youth their top priority. However, Buddhism was not nearly as de-prioritized and under-governed at the League as it was in the formal organs of the party-state. The League assigned Buddhist youth a "secondary" importance and reported that "much of [our] work has had to stand in for the Religious Affairs Office and the Civil Affairs Bureau."⁴²

The Young Buddhist Association joined the League immediately after the Communist takeover and by 1951 accounted for 1,660 of its members, making it the third most represented religious youth group after the Chinese YMCA and YWCA. As such, the League actively engaged the YBA with its full repertoire of methods for integrating youth into the new polity. Chief among their methods was encouraging and organizing participation in the series of nationwide patriotic campaigns (*aiguo yundong* 愛國運動) launched by the party. Campaign participation was meant to unify the youth under the banner of patriotic support for the party's political goals and policies. The League also regularly held representative meetings (*daobiaohui* 代表會) and discussion meetings (*zuotanhui* 座談會) that were intended to bring forward politically progressive leaders from the youth groups, educate them on political policies, and correct errors in their thought. The overall strategy behind these methods was to cultivate a "progressive core" (*jinbu hexin* 進步核心) of religious cadres within each youth group, which would then motivate the religious masses in the rank and file of the group to actively respond to the party-state's calls for participation in patriotic campaigns. Beginning in 1951, the Young Buddhist Association was one of the groups singled out by the league for new specialized training sessions (*jiangxihui* 講習會). "For Muslim and Buddhist youth we are still at [the point of] using the training classes to cultivate a solid number of core cadres, so that in the future [we can] use them for the work of controlling Muslim and Buddhist youth."⁴³ While the League closely engaged the Young Buddhist Association, it did not yet seek to assert as direct control as over Protestant and Catholic youth groups.

Religion work in the early 1950s Shanghai therefore appears to have been significantly shaped by the larger goals that the regime prioritized for consolidating its rule in city. First, the pragmatic goal of reviving Shanghai capitalism as an engine for national economic recovery contributed to the comparatively greater degree to which the city's residents, religious and otherwise, enjoyed the freedoms promised by New Democracy. However, even more important was the top priority the regime placed on severing the city's foreign connections that had made it a beachhead of Western imperialism since the beginning of the treaty port system in the mid-nineteenth century. On the one hand, this meant that religion (viewed as a primary tool of cultural imperialism) became a matter of great, even national, concern to the city's new masters. An indication of the importance placed on religion in Shanghai

⁴¹ SMA C23-1-24.

⁴² SMA C23-1-3.

⁴³SMA C23-1-3.

was that, as of 1953, the number of cadres the central government assigned there for religion work was more than double that in any other city in the country and higher even than in any single province.⁴⁴ However, the focus on imperialism also directed the attention of these cadres primarily to Catholicism and Protestantism, in which the city's ties to the West were deeply rooted. As we have seen, this resulted in considerable bureaucratic overlap and confusion in religion work when it came to Buddhism, which tended to fall through the cracks. Although the Youth League picked up some of the slack despite its own focus on Christian groups, this democratic mass organization's engagement with the Young Buddhist Association fell short of direct intervention into its affairs. The comparatively tolerant, even negligent, approach to governing non-Christian religious groups in Shanghai would change dramatically in late 1955, when the central party leadership finally determined to overhaul its organizational apparatus for religion work and take groups like the YBA in hand. However, up to that point, the YBA enjoyed a six-year period in which to adjust itself to the new regime and carve out a space for the Buddhist youth movement in the new political order.

IV. FLIPPING THE SCRIPT

The pattern of response with which the Young Buddhist Association would react to the new regime and its agents was evident even before the Communist takeover of Shanghai on May 25, 1949. The January 1 issue of *The Awakened Dispatch* led with an article that joined the voice of student protestors in denouncing the social injustices of the Nationalist government. The article declared that if Nationalist government officials continued to ignore the lives of the people for their own self interest, "then there is no cure that can save [them], and without pity [we] will watch them crumble and be finished."⁴⁵ Soon news of the Communist victories in north China and advances toward the south reached the Shanghai public and touched off a panicked scramble to flee the city and even the country. However the February 1 issue of *The Awakened Dispatch* led with an article on its cover page penned by the chief editor of the journal himself, Ding Hongtu, that was simply entitled "Change!" Ding addressed what he perceived to be a growing anxiety in the Buddhist community that an unprecedented "change" was about to descend on them like a dark shadow and that when it arrived it would proscribe Buddhism. But Ding reminded his readers that constant change and impermanence were, after all, the very basis of the Buddhist teachings; under any type of political system, birth, old age, sickness and death would continue to exist and there would therefore still be a need for Buddhism. Furthermore, he asserted confidently, in this age of historical progress no regime could be so anti-democratic as to deny the freedom of conscience. "So we do not need to fear. We need to believe in the truth of the Buddha's teachings: true gold does not fear fire!"⁴⁶ Then, just days after the People's

⁴⁴ SMA B24-2-20.

⁴⁵ Qici契慈, "Dezheng? Canju! Dabeixin" 德政? 慘劇! 大悲心, *Juexun* 3.1 (January 1, 1949) [MFQ 103:167].

⁴⁶ Ding Hongtu 丁鴻圖, "Bian!" 變!, *Juexun* 3.2 (February 1, 1949) [MFQ 103:183].

Liberation Army took the city, Ding followed up with another cover article that pointed to the “frugality, discipline, compassion and bravery” with which the newly-arrived soldiers were comporting themselves, particularly in their interactions with Buddhists, as proof that he had been correct. Although censorship had prevented him from doing so before, he now reprinted for his Buddhist readership the writings in which Mao promised freedom of religion under New Democracy. His fellow Buddhists should therefore unite with Helmsman Mao and the Communist party on the revolutionary front against imperialism and feudalism. “The success of New Democracy will ensure a bright future for the Buddhist youth!”⁴⁷

Ding Hongtu’s articles exhibited a pattern that was subsequently to be repeated and developed in the YBA’s response to the new regime and its efforts to incorporate them into the new political order. YBA leaders like Ding saw that many Buddhists would be hesitant to embrace the politics of an ideologically atheist party, but that embracing it was precisely what would secure a place for them in the new order. Having already envisioned themselves as reinvigorating the Buddhist community with the spirit of youth, the YBA leaders believed that they were well positioned to now apply that spirit in taking on the role of a progressive Buddhist vanguard, which would stay ahead of the curve in adopting the new political script and transmitting it to their more hesitant and fearful co-religionists. Flipping the script in the Buddhist community would entail mastery of both the political language of the new regime and the roles that it assigned to religious groups as a sector of society and of “the people”. As Ding himself pointed out, his courageous early call for “change” under the conditions of censorship and martial law had already begun to establish the YBA’s credentials in this regard.

An important way in which the YBA leadership sought to expand its progressive credentials was through pro-active participation in the Shanghai Democratic Youth League. They appear to have joined the League around the time of its founding on the May 30 anniversary immediately after the takeover in 1949. By September of the next year, 1660 YBA members were now also members of the League.⁴⁸ When the League held its first city-wide representative meeting in 1953, the delegation of non-monastic Buddhist youth was headed by YBA teen department founder, Cai Huiming, and also included the YBA’s current teen department head, Li Xingxiao, YBA president, Fang Zifan, and the head of the YBA women’s department, Lu Xiuqing (Fang’s wife).⁴⁹ In addition, Fang Zifan was elected as the non-monastic Buddhist representative on the League’s executive council, which was made up of one to three representatives from each sector of the youth. Showing their pro-active attitude at the meeting, the householder delegation requested that one among them be selected as a representative for the national youth alliance meeting, and also that the YBA be allowed to join the League as a corporate member.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ding Hongtu 丁鴻圖, “‘Bian’ hou fojiao qingnian yongyoude renshi yu shiming” ‘變’ 後佛教青年應有的認識與使命, *Juexun* 3.6 (June 1, 1949) [MFQ 103:449-450].

⁴⁸ SMA C23-1-1.

⁴⁹ SMA C23-1-14. Zheng Songying joined the delegation at the next League representative meeting in 1955.

⁵⁰ SMA C23-1-14.

When the League decided in 1951 to deepen its cultivation of progressive leading cadres in the religion sector by offering a special cadre training program (*jiangxihui* 講習會) [Figure 5], the YBA immediately responded with a cover article in *The Awakened Dispatch*. The article called for enthusiastic participation among the Buddhist youth by pointing out that Catholic and Protestant youths regularly outnumbered the Buddhists in this sort of cadre training. Although the Buddhist youth were in need of more cadres who had a strong grasp of both politics and Buddhism, many were reluctant, the article criticized. “We should therefore not be like in the past, waiting for the guidance and help of the party-state. We should take the initiative to broadly raise the awakening and demands of Buddhists to vie for the guidance of the party-state... [We should] show ourselves to be a strong progressive unit within the ranks of patriots!”⁵¹ Numerous YBA members responded to the call and applied for the training program, such as one twenty-year old female participant in the YBA’s music group who wrote on her application to the League that she wanted to learn about the history of the party, New Democracy, and democratic policies.⁵² Concurrent with the training program, the secretariat of the YBA Teen Department held its own political discussion meetings (*zhengzhi zuotanhui*) that were attended by the trainees together with the rest of the YBA leadership. At these meetings the trainees reported on what they were learning, and discussions ensued about how to resolve any problems they were encountering, how to integrate this patriotic education with Buddhist doctrines, and how to apply it in their concrete work at the YBA.⁵³ Through such training and participation in the Youth League, the YBA leaders were therefore learning the political script and adapting it for Buddhist use. They were willingly cooperating with the League’s plan to transform them into a “progressive core” of Buddhist cadres who could exert a political influence among the masses within the wider Buddhist community.

The primary way in which the League deployed progressive youth cadres to exert political influence was by encouraging them to organize participation in the rapid succession of national mass campaigns (*qunzhong yundong* 群眾運動) that the regime called for in the early 1950s. Often highly successful exercises in broad mobilization, the mass campaigns were critical to the rapid consolidation of Communist rule.⁵⁴ As early as July 1949 the YBA joined the first campaign that the League promoted among religious youth, namely the campaign to “comfort the soldiers” (*laojun* 勞軍) of the People’s Liberation Army while they stayed in Shanghai and then support them as they moved on to liberate the south. The YBA participated in the meeting that the League called among not only religious youth

⁵¹ Zhong Huicheng 鐘慧成, “Yingjie 1951 nian guoqing: fojiaotu zai jianshe xinzhongguo renwu zhong yingyoude gongxian” 迎接1951年國慶:佛教徒在建設新中國任務中應有的貢獻, *Juexun* 5.10 (October 1, 1951) [MFQz 79:175].

⁵² SMA C23-1-4.

⁵³ “Shaonianbu juban zhengzhi zuotanhui” 少年部舉辦政治座談會, *Juexun* 5.12 (December 1, 1951) [MFQz 79:221].

⁵⁴ Julia Strauss, “Morality, Coercion and State Building by Campaign in the Early PRC: Regime Consolidation and After, 1949-1956,” *The History of the PRC, 1949-1976*, Julia Strauss, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 42-46.

but also students, young workers and other sectors of the youth, at which it was decided to raise money for the army, write a joint letter of comfort, and entertain the soldiers with youth activities like sports and performances.⁵⁵ The cover article, again written by editor Ding Hongtu, in the next issue of *The Awakened Dispatch* was entitled, “Rise Up Buddhist Youth! Respond to the Call to Comfort Soldiers!” Equating PLA General Chen Yi and his troops to bodhisattvas liberating the people from their suffering, the article suggested that they were due praise and offerings as to a Buddhist deity.⁵⁶ “Comfort the soldiers” was only the first of what must have seemed like an endless stream of campaigns. In March 1951, Fang Zifan wrote that during just the past year the YBA had “responded to the calls of the government” for reducing the public debt, starting a Buddhist signatures-for-peace movement, collecting relief donations for natural disaster victims, donating medicine for troops fighting in the Korean war, raising relief funds for Korean victims of the war, and many more.⁵⁷ As each new campaign was called for, it changed the political script that the Buddhist householders had to master and transmit. Even the Youth League itself reported that it was racing just to keep up and often unable to organize its plans in time for each new initiative.⁵⁸ However, there were two campaigns in particular that had the greatest impact on the YBA and were at the core of its response to the politics of the new regime: the campaign to Resist America and Aid Korea and the campaign against Reactionary Sects.

In August 1950 the People’s Republic of China went to war against America on the Korean peninsula and shortly thereafter launched the campaign to Resist America and Aid Korea (RAAK; *kangmeiyuanchao* 抗美援朝). A recent article by Xue Yu has depicted the Buddhist participation in the RAAK campaign as starting from Beijing and radiating outward into the provinces.⁵⁹ However, this was not the case in Shanghai, where organized Buddhist participation began not by imitating Buddhists in the capital, but rather by joining the larger religious community in city-wide RAAK meetings and demonstrations that began in late November 1950 and culminated in an unprecedented massive demonstration of over 50,000 religious participants on March 21, 1951.⁶⁰ Well-represented in these city-wide events, some of which appear to have been organized by the Youth League, the YBA simultaneously mobilized the Buddhist youth to participate in the RAAK campaign. An early example of one of the many cover articles dedicated to the campaign in *The Awakened Dispatch* was entitled, “The Responsibility of Buddhists to Resist American and Aid Korea.” The article drew on scriptural excerpts associated with the concept of “compassionate killing” to encourage Buddhists to get over their

⁵⁵ “Qingnianjie chengli laojunhui” 青年界成立勞軍會, *Juexun* 3.8 (August 1, 1949) [MFQz 78:482].

⁵⁶ Ding Hongtu 丁鴻圖, “Fojiao qinnian qilai! Xiangying laojun” 佛教青年起來！響應勞軍, *Juexun* 3.8 (August 1, 1949) [MFQz 78:469].

⁵⁷ Fang Zifan 方子藩, “Juan shouyu” 卷首語, *Juexun* 5.2/3 (March 1, 1951) [MFQz 79:47].

⁵⁸ SMA C23-1-3.

⁵⁹ Xue Yu, “Buddhists in China During the Korean War (1951-1953),” in Michael K. Jerryson and Mark Juergensmeyer, ed., *Buddhist Warfare* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 140.

⁶⁰ “Zongjiaojie fabiao shengming” 宗教界發表聲明, *Juexun* 4.12 (December 1, 1950) [MFQz 79:26]; “Shanghai zongjiaojie kongqian da tuan jie wuwan duo ren juxing shiwei youxing” 上海宗教界空前大團結五萬多人舉行示威遊行, *Juexun* 5.4 (April 1, 1951) [MFQz 79:88].

hesitations and enlist in China's volunteer army.⁶¹ On January 7, the Teen Department invited YBA president Fang Zifan to deliver a radio address during their regular program at the Xinsheng Broadcasting Station on the topic, "Buddhists Should Participate in the Resist America Aid Korea Campaign."⁶² On International Women's Day, Lu Xiuqing led the YBA Women's Department in a city-wide RAAK demonstration, and as their group demonstrated in the streets the onlookers shouted, "Respect our Buddhist sisters!"⁶³

Buddhist participation in the RAAK campaign entered a new phase soon after June 1, 1951, when the government issued a national call for patriotic contributions to the war effort. In mid-July at a meeting of representatives from every sector in Shanghai society to discuss the RAAK campaign, the twelve Buddhist delegates decided to establish a RAAK Buddhist Branch Association to organize campaign participation among all their co-religionists. On August 2 the Buddhist Branch Association held a meeting to transmit their ideas for organized participation to representatives from the wider Shanghai Buddhist community. On the following day representatives from all of the city's householder associations met to schedule the individual transmission meetings (*chuanda hui* 傳達會) that would take place at each of their organizations.⁶⁴ In other words, a chain of transmission was being established with a corporatist hierarchy that extended from the city-wide RAAK association at the top (guided by organs of the party-state), through Buddhist representative associations, down to the individual grassroots Buddhist organizations. This corporatist structure resembled the similar structures that the Nationalist regime had used to govern religious and other social groups prior to 1949. In fact, Buddhist householders in Shanghai during their golden age of the Nanjing decade had been instrumental in pioneering the state corporatist model as it was applied to religion under Nationalist governance.⁶⁵

At this point in 1951, the corporatist hierarchy for political participation under Communist rule was still in the process of being formed, and the YBA moved quickly to establish a leading position for itself within the new structure. YBA officers, at least Fang Zifan and Zheng Songying, were almost certainly among the twelve Buddhist delegates at the city-wide RAAK meeting in mid-July. The very next day after that meeting ended on July 14, at a time when most Buddhist groups in the city were likely still unaware even of the decision to form a Buddhist Branch

⁶¹ Jixiang 吉祥, "Fojiaotu ying fuqi kangmei yuanchao de zeren" 佛教徒應負起抗美援朝的責任, *Juexun* 4.12 (December 1, 1950) [MFQz 79:17]. The concept of compassionate killing was fresh in the minds of Chinese Buddhists because it had been widely used to justify resistance against Japanese invasion in the 1930s and 1940s. See Xue Yu, *Buddhism, War and Nationalism*.

⁶² "Qingshaonian tongzhi aiguo bu houren: relie yonghu kangmei yuanchao yundong" 青少年同志愛國不後人熱烈擁護抗美援朝運動, *Juexun* 5.3/3 (March 1, 1951) [MFQz 79:73].

⁶³ "Fandui meidi wuzhuang riben" 反對美帝武裝日本, *Juexun* 5.4 (April 1, 1951) [MFQz 79:91].

⁶⁴ Pin Shen 頻申, "Fojiao tuanti kangmei yuanchao chuandahui xunli" 佛教團體抗美援朝傳達大會巡禮, *Juexun* 5.9 (September 1, 1951) [MFQ 79:159-160].

⁶⁵ Rebecca Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes: Religion and the Politics of Chinese Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009), 47-53; J. Brooks Jessup, "The Householder Elite: Buddhist Activism in Shanghai, 1920-1956" (PhD Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2010), 29-33.

Association, the YBA immediately held its first of two discussion meetings about the proceedings. At the YBA's following three weekly lecture events in late July, Zheng Songying used the opportunity to give the YBA membership early transmission reports, far ahead of the Buddhist transmission meetings held at the city-wide level in early August and subsequently at the other individual householder associations. The YBA transmission meetings had been held nearly three weeks ahead of any other householder group in the city. In fact, Zheng Songying himself went to a number of the other householder organizations to deliver the transmission reports to their members.⁶⁶ An important order of business at these transmission meetings was for each organization to establish their own "patriotic pledge" (*aiguo gongyue* 愛國公約), just as other social groups in the city were doing at the same time. The pledges listed the duties that the group swore to carry out as their participation in the RAAK campaign. The patriotic pledge for the Shanghai Buddhist community as a whole began with such duties as supporting Chairman Mao, the government and the party; upholding the Common Program and all government policies; opposing American manipulation and the rearmament of Japan; and so forth.⁶⁷ On July 31, the YBA held a special meeting of its executive committee to establish their organization's patriotic pledge, again ahead of any other householder association in the city. They appear to have intended their pledge to serve as a model for others, and the second item was a vow to "broadly and deeply expand the patriotic contribution campaign among all [our] members and readers; and *promote the proper contribution work of all Buddhist householder associations.*"⁶⁸

In response to the government's call in June for patriotic contributions to the war, the Beijing Buddhist community, from the pages of the journal *Modern Buddhist Studies*, had issued its own call for the national Buddhist community to raise donations for a "Chinese Buddhist Airplane" (*Zhongguo fojiaohao feiji* 中國佛教號飛機).⁶⁹ This was the "contribution work" that the YBA pledged to promote among Buddhist householders. In fact, before the other Buddhist organizations in Shanghai had even drafted their own patriotic pledges, Zheng Songying had written a cover article for *The Awakened Dispatch*, issuing the YBA's call for contributions.

Buddhist comrades across the nation! To protect peace, love our country and love our religion, we must more tightly unite ourselves under the flag of nationalism. To give expression to the patriotism and power of the Buddhist masses, and strive for the glorious future and position of Buddhism, we must thoroughly respond to the June 1 call from the Resist America Aid Korea

⁶⁶ Pin Shen 頻申, "Fojiao tuanti kangmei yuanchao chuandahui xunli" 佛教團體抗美援朝傳達大會巡禮, *Juexun* 5.9 (September 1, 1951) [MFQ 79:159-160].

⁶⁷ "Shanghaishi fojiaotu aiguo gongyue" 上海市佛教徒愛國公約, *Juexun* 5.9 (September 1, 1951) [MFQz 79:166].

⁶⁸ "Shanghaishi fojiao qingnian hui aiguo gongyue" 上海市佛教青年會愛國公約, *Juexun* 5.9 (September 1, 1951) [MFQz 79:168].

⁶⁹ On this campaign, see Xue Yu, "Buddhists in China During the Korean War (1951-1953)," in Michael K. Jerryson and Mark Juergensmeyer, ed., *Buddhist Warfare* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 146-148.

General Association by properly carrying out with enthusiasm the work of contributing an airplane!⁷⁰

Zheng's article did not simply play on patriotic sentiments to urge contributions. It explicitly emphasized that this was an opportunity for Buddhists to secure a position for their religion in the new order by demonstrating that they had a powerful influence among the masses that could be useful to the goals of the party-state. In this effort, the YBA was willing to take the lead. The chain of transmission this time came through Beijing, but the YBA was equally assertive in positioning itself within the hierarchy. First it took on the responsibility of housing the central station for receiving and forwarding contributions from all Buddhist groups in the city.⁷¹ Then it made itself a model by raising on its own within six months a total of over 130 million *yuan*, which was hailed as a "national record" that far outmatched the contribution of any other Buddhist group in the country.⁷² In showcasing the stories of individual contributors, the YBA deliberately pointed to the patriotic response it was able to elicit from its members in places as far away as "Gansu, Sichuan, and every other province and city."⁷³ The YBA's pretensions to become a vehicle for uniting the *national* Buddhist community therefore found expression as well in its efforts to establish progressive credentials for a role of corporatist leadership under party rule amidst the RAAK campaign.

The second campaign with a particularly strong impact on the YBA was directed against "reactionary sects" (*fandong huidaomen* 反動會道門) a term the party used to indicate redemptive societies. Although redemptive societies have received little attention in English language scholarship, David Palmer has argued that "they constituted, by far, the largest group of organized religious congregations in Republican China," and possibly had as many as 18 million followers spread throughout 81% of China's prefectures by the early 1950s.⁷⁴ Because many redemptive societies were militarized and had collaborated with the Japanese or sided with the Nationalists, they were seen as a major domestic threat to the Communist state. The campaign against them had already begun as the CCP occupied north China in early 1949.⁷⁵ Many of those targeted had fled south to Shanghai where they went underground among the city's complex urban populace. Although targeted primarily in the countryside during the late 1950 campaign against counterrevolutionaries, the redemptive societies became the focus of a renewed campaign that covered the cities as well beginning in 1952 and picking up

⁷⁰ Zheng Songying 鄭頌英, "Quanguo fojiaotu tuanjie zai aiguo zhuyi de qizhixia" 全國佛教徒團結在愛國主義的旗幟下, *Juexun* 5.8 (August 1, 1951) [MFQz 79:143-144].

⁷¹ Pin Shen 頻申, "Fojiao tuanti kangmei yuanchao chuandahui xunli" 佛教團體抗美援朝傳達大會巡禮, *Juexun* 5.9 (September 1, 1951) [MFQ 79:159-160].

⁷² "Fojiaojie aiguo juanxian yundong jianxun" 佛教界愛國捐獻運動簡訊, *Xiandai foxue* 18 (February 15, 1952): 24.

⁷³ "Benhui huiyuan yu Juexun deyou relie xiangying aiguo juanxian" 本會會員與覺訊讀友熱烈響應愛國捐獻, *Juexun* 5.9 (September 1, 1951) [MFQ 79:168].

⁷⁴ Goossaert & Palmer, 107.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 148-149.

momentum in 1953. On May 30, 1953, the Shanghai Military Affairs Committee of the PLA issued a ban on “reactionary sects,” the members of which were required to register themselves with the Municipal Public Safety Bureau. By the end of 1953 the campaign had reportedly yielded the destruction of 768 altar halls, legal action against four thousand leaders, registration of over ten thousand members, and renunciation of membership by over 320 thousand people.⁷⁶

The campaign against reactionary sects had a special significance for Buddhists, who frequently complained that they were being mistaken by the authorities for sect members. The mistake was not terribly difficult for an untrained cadre to make because the syncretic redemptive societies did commonly appropriate Buddhist practices and terminology. Within the Buddhist community, lay groups were particularly vulnerable to cases of mistaken identity because redemptive societies themselves rarely had monastic institutions. In fact, there was historically a degree of overlap in the membership, and even the leadership, between Buddhist householder associations in Shanghai and the redemptive societies.⁷⁷ The YBA initially responded to the campaign by trying to publicly distinguishing itself from these reactionary dopplegangers, and lending its voice to the authorities’ denunciation of them.⁷⁸ However, these efforts were soon reinforced by an internal self-cleansing campaign (*zisu yundong* 自肅運動) [Figure 6] that the YBA Propagation Department declared was designed to:

Clearly distinguish and dismiss from Buddhism those heterodox teachings (*waidao xieshuo*) and reactionary sects (*fandong daomen huimen*) that rely on, attach themselves to, and mix themselves among [us]; ferret out those spies, bandits, and counterrevolutionary elements that have infiltrated Buddhism; clean out those poisonous bacteria which are living off of the body of Buddhism!⁷⁹

The Buddhist community, like other social groups, now had its own internal “enemies of the people” against which it had to struggle and maintain vigilance [Figure 8]. The YBA urged any of its members who had connections to reactionary sects to cut those connections, register with the authorities, and notify the YBA leadership. For these “innocents” who had clearly been duped by the devious sectarians, the YBA would conduct regular educational sessions on official religion policy and orthodox Buddhist doctrine so that they might learn to distinguish the

⁷⁶ Zhongguo huidaomen shiliao jicheng bianzuan weiyuan hui, *Zhongguo huidaomen shiliao jicheng* 中國會道門史料集成 [Collection of historical materials on China’s Reactionary Sects] 1:325-326.

⁷⁷ See Paul R. Katz, “The Religious Life of a Renowned Shanghai Businessman and Philanthropist: Wang Yiting,” *The City and Chinese Modernity*, edited by Wu et al, (Taipei: Academia Sinica, Institute of Modern History, 2010) 275-296.

⁷⁸ For example: Foqing hongfabu 佛青弘法部, “Fojiao yu mixin fandong daohuimen de duibi” 佛教與迷信反動道會門的對比, *Juexun* 5.6 (June 1, 1951) [MFQz 79:114-115].

⁷⁹ Foqing hongfabu 佛青弘法部, “Fojiaojie de zisu yundong” 佛教界的自肅運動, *Juexun* 5.6 (June 1, 1951) [MFQz 79:116].

true from the false and become good citizens and Buddhists.⁸⁰ The association joined its internal campaign to the larger mass campaign through such activities as arranging for five hundred of its members to view a propaganda film about the most notorious sect, Yiguandao, playing at the Shanghai Movie Theatre.⁸¹

From the eve of Liberation through the mass campaigns of the early 1950s, the Young Buddhist Association's pattern of response to the political demands of the new regime remained essentially unchanged. The YBA had been left a relatively free hand to craft its response by the party-state apparatus for governing religion, which did not directly intervene in its affairs. Fang Zifan, Zheng Songying, Chen Hailiang and the other leaders of the YBA led the organization in responding with alacrity to the political calls of the regime as opportunities to establish the progressive credentials that would bring them a legitimate position in the new order. Leaping into the Youth League brought them opportunities for political training and public representation that were not available to other Buddhist groups in Shanghai. This affirmed their original mission for the youth to play a vanguard role in the Buddhist community. Political campaigns were an opportunity to demonstrate their willingness to stay ahead of the curve and put their mass power in service of state goals, with the hope that this would secure them a role of prominence and leadership. This corporatist aspiration was expressed most fully in the campaign to Resist America and Aid Korea when the YBA endeavored to quickly master the shifting political script and transfer it to their co-religionists not only within Shanghai but throughout the country. Finally, during the campaign against reactionary sects, the YBA protected its credentials as a progressive and legal religious group by matching the general campaign with an internal campaign to purify its organization in line with the political environment.

Coverage in the state-controlled media signaled that the YBA's strategy had achieved a measure of success. At the end of 1951, the *New People's Evening News* ran a feature article with the title, "The Progressive Young Buddhist Association." The article held the YBA up as a model religious organization, "an example worth following." The structure, operation and specific activities of the organization all received praise. The article recognized that "Whenever there is a patriotic movement, the Young Buddhist Association does not fall behind." However, more than this, "the greatest achievement of the BYA has been to help its co-religionists establish a new work style..." With its patriotic enthusiasm and corporatist leadership affirmed, the YBA was granted the most important indication of its political status: "they stand together with the Chinese people in the work of constructing the motherland."⁸²

V. PRESERVING THE MISSION

⁸⁰ "Yonghu renmin zhengfu quid fandong huidaomen jiangao benhui quanti huiyuan huiyou" 擁護人民政府取締反動會道門兼高本會全體會員會友, *Juexun* 7.6 (June 10, 1953) [MFQz 79:325].

⁸¹ *Juexun* 7.6 (June 10, 1953) [MFQz 79:333].

⁸² Ye Wei 業偉, "Jinbu de fojiao qingnianhui" 進步的佛教青年會, *Xinmin wanbao* (November 5, 1951).

The thrust of the political script that the YBA had adopted in its response to the new regime was to elevate politics over religion. In the RAAK campaign, defense of the nation had to come before specifically religious concerns such as upholding the Buddhist doctrine of non-killing; in the campaign against reactionary sects, internal political enemies had to be struggled against even if they were co-religionists. As Fang Zifan explained to YBA members in a cover article for *The Awakened Dispatch*, “Buddhists are the same as people in every other sector of society [in that they] only have one standpoint—and that is the standpoint of the people (*renmin lichang*). [They] should not have some other so-called ‘Buddhist standpoint.’”⁸³ This was what was meant by the officially-endorsed slogan “love the nation [first], love religion [second]” (*aiguo aijiao*). To love one’s religion first and take a Buddhist standpoint would be divisive of the nation because it implied taking non-Buddhists as enemies even if they were among “the people,” and taking counterrevolutionary Buddhists as friends even if they were “enemies of the people”. In other words, the script demanded that political identity was to override religious identity. In adapting this script the YBA attempted to downplay any conflict between the two by making them commensurate. Defending the nation was actually saving sentient beings, while struggling against reactionary sect members hidden among them was just purifying the Buddhist community. According to Xue Yu, such politicization had a secularizing effect in the case of Buddhist monastic institutions that paved the way toward a full-scale eradication of Buddhism during the Cultural Revolution.⁸⁴ What about householder associations like the YBA? Was the pro-active adoption of an official script that elevated politics above all else corrosive of the religious identity of the YBA? Performing the political script certainly demanded large amounts of time, energy and resources, but to what extent did this come at the expense of the YBA’s distinctive religious character and mission?

The opening celebration of the YBA’s newly constructed compound in September 1951 provides a window into the effects of politicization on the organization and how it now defined its identity within the new order. Having outgrown its previous location in a lane off Linsen Middle road, YBA leaders had convinced the Renji Benevolent Society to turn over to them a five-building compound that had previously been used as an orphanage. YBA leaders were particularly pleased with not only the size but also the location of the new plot on Wusheng Road directly adjacent to People’s Park—the public recreational heart of Shanghai’s urban landscape—where they would enjoy high visibility to the masses. However, because the existing buildings at this location were dilapidated, the YBA executive committee had to set about designing and constructing an entirely new complex.⁸⁵ Born at the very time that the YBA was adopting the political script, the

⁸³ Fang Zifan 方子藩, “Zhanwen renmin lichang, huaqing diwo jiexian” 站穩人民立場，畫清敵我界限, *Juexun* 7.7 (7/10/1953) [MFQ 79:341].

⁸⁴ Xue Yu, “Buddhist Contributions to the Socialist Transformation of Buddhism in Chin: Activities of Ven. Juzan during 1949-1953,” *Journal of Global Buddhism* 10 (2009): 217-253.

⁸⁵ “Benhui xinhuisuo de xiuzhu jihua baogao” 本會新會所的修築計劃報告, *Juexun* 5.5 (May 1, 1951) [MFQz 79:97].

self-designed compound and the choreographed public ceremony announcing its completion were concrete expressions of how the group defined and presented its identity in the early 1950s.

Beginning on September 23, the YBA held a three-day celebration to introduce its new compound to both its members and the public. An opening ceremony was held on the morning of first day before an audience of about 400 members, together with representatives from other Buddhist institutions and religious groups throughout the city, as well as supervising cadres from the Religious Affairs Office, the Democratic Youth League and other government organs. After a “simple and solemn” ceremony, the YBA band played the national anthem, Fang Zifan reported on the history and future of the organization, and the most eminent monks of the city gave a series of speeches that “symbolized the great unity of the Buddhist community.” Slogans such as “Long live the united Buddhist community!” “Long live the PRC!” and “Long live Mao Zedong!” were shouted in unison.⁸⁶

After the morning ceremony, the compound was opened to the public for the remainder of the three-day celebration, during which the YBA reportedly received as many as 3,000 guests. Aside from visitors walking in off the street in this busy section of the city, the YBA extended invitations to its new neighbors, and received a special delegation from the Shanghai Catholic community that presented a banner embroidered with the words, “Undivided by sect and faith, we unite and march forward together under the flag of patriotism!” Entering the reception hall that could hold as many as 300 people, visitors would gaze upon a large image of Chairman Mao situated near a lecture platform, a piano, bookcases, and so forth. For this event the hall had been filled with photographs and statistical charts detailing the various departments of the YBA and their activities. The most attention was garnered by one particular chart that contrasted the orthodox faith of Buddhism with the superstition of heterodox sects. As visitors moved around this exhibition in the reception hall, they would also come across a counter manned by householders collecting patriotic donations for the war effort in Korea.

As they left the reception hall to tour the other rooms of the five-building compound, visitors could inspect the YBA’s main office, meeting room, medical clinic, the Daxiong press, the women’s sewing workshop, the Teen Department headquarters, a guesthouse, the storage room, and so forth. Directly above the reception hall they found the great Buddha hall, which doubled as a lecture hall and could hold an audience of 400. Those visitors familiar with Buddhist temples would notice that on the altar in the Buddha hall rested only a single statue, of Sakyamuni Buddha seated on a lotus—a distinctive feature intended to represent the trans-sectarian unity of the Buddhist community. In the library, which boasted a collection of 3,000 texts and three different editions of the Buddhist canon, an exhibition of paintings, steles, statues and other precious objects had been set up for visitors to learn about the many contributions that Buddhism had made to history, culture and art. Even as they took in these sights that had been carefully prepared for them, the

⁸⁶ “Foqing xinhuisuo kaimu zhisheng” 佛青新會所開幕誌盛, *Juexun* 5.10 (October 1, 1951) [MFQz 79:181].

visitors would hear voices coming over the six speakers that had been installed throughout the compound. Zheng Songying and another householder manned the microphone continually over the three-day period, exhorting everyone to make their patriotic war contributions.⁸⁷

There is no question that the celebration had intentionally been designed to present a Buddhist adaptation of the political script and thereby highlight the progressive credentials of the YBA. Political theatre abounded, from the portrait of Mao, to the shouting of slogans, to the exhibited differentiation of Buddhism from sectarians, to the constant calls for patriotic contributions coming over the speaker system. The RAAK campaign and the campaign against reactionary sects were both integrated visibly in the arrangements. Details like the Sakyamuni statue in the Buddha hall pointed to the YBA as a corporatist leader in the unification of the wider Buddhist community. The event therefore demonstrates the degree to which politics had penetrated the affairs and identity of the YBA. However, does it also provide evidence that the religious identity of the organization was lessened as a result? To answer this question it is necessary to distinguish between the event and the compound itself. Aside from the Mao portrait, there was actually little that was permanently inscribed in the physical space of the compound to suggest that politics had displaced the religious mission and functions of the organization. The rooms in the five buildings were designed to do little else than carry out those functions. Loudspeakers commanding the attention of the entire compound could just as easily be used to broadcast Buddhist lectures as wartime propaganda. As a physical space, the large new compound at the city's center was nothing less nor more than the fulfillment of a dream that could have already been dreamt by Fang, Zheng and the other YBA leaders before the Communist liberation in 1949.

The strongest evidence that the YBA's religious identity was not displaced by adopting the political script can be found in the program of activities that it continued to run even after the opening of the new compound. Core religious activities such as frequent scriptural lectures, daily worship, and seven-day ceremonies continued as before. Although the range of social welfare activities appears to have gradually narrowed, the medical clinic remained popular and the YBA was graduating students from its evening literacy classes. The propagation training program kept up the vision for expansive growth. And the YBA's most distinctive activities in the category of health and entertainment—such as band, choir, sports competitions, chess, etc.—remained strong.

The continued vitality of the YBA's distinctive religious identity was demonstrated saliently in a propagation trip organized by the Teen Department in the spring of 1953. Department manager Li Xingxiao led a "propagation troop" (*hongfa duiwu* 弘法隊伍) of 34 Buddhist youth—some were students, some working, others were young housewives—out of Shanghai by train to stay overnight in the nearby city of Suzhou. In the account of the trip published in *The Awakened Dispatch*, the group appears to have relished attracting attention and challenging preconceived notions about Buddhism. At the train station other travelers gawked

⁸⁷ "Foqing xinhuisuo kaimu zhisheng" 佛青新會所開幕誌盛, *Juexun* 5.10 (October 1, 1951) [MFQz 79:181].

at them and seemed to be thinking, “Buddhism has this many youths? Where did they come from?” When they started chanting in unison their morning scriptures on the train their fellow passengers observed them with looks on their faces “as if they had discovered the New World.” Upon arrival in Suzhou they were greeted by local householders and driven by car to a local temple, where they were treated as honored guests and continued to impress. After the troop burst out in song, an old woman came up to them beaming and exclaimed, “I’ve lived for over 60 years and this is the first time I’ve ever seen so many young people worshipping the Buddha and singing in a temple!” The troop lost no time in setting up among the crowd at the temple an exhibition of newspaper clippings and images they had brought with them to teach about the true nature of Buddhism and its difference from the superstition of reactionary sects [Figure 7]. A monk standing nearby remarked, “The times have progressed and Xiyuan [temple] has changed with them.” After their singing performance, three local school girls became so interested they bought YBA songbooks and begged to be taught a tune or two. Soon the troop was off to climb Mount Lingyan to sightsee and stay the night at the famous temple there. The next day they forwent visiting Tiger Hill to instead distribute hundreds of Buddhist tracts back in the city. Even after Suzhou’s Buddhist leaders gathered to see them off, the troop continued to do its propagation work on the train ride home by enticing some middle school students to sing Buddhist songs with them.⁸⁸

Even if this published account may have been embellished for propaganda purposes, it nevertheless expresses the self-image and character of the YBA at this time. First of all, the trip is meant to be fun and adventurous—a form of wholesome entertainment for young people. The troop’s youthful enthusiasm is expressed in their eagerness to break out in song and spread Buddhism to everyone they meet. Travelling puts the Buddhist youth in public visibility, which appears to have its own effect on popular attitudes toward Buddhism and create natural situations for making conversions. At the same time, the trip helps the YBA to build its network among Buddhists beyond Shanghai, where its progressive style can help others to change with the times as well. The YBA’s original character of youthful spirit and zeal for expansive propagation are both clearly still central to its self-image at the time of this propagation mission in 1953. In addition, although the political script is not nearly as prevalent here as at the opening ceremony, it still makes an appearance in the traveling exhibition that the youth put together, and was highlighted by the sketch that accompanied this account [Figure 7]. Political consciousness has been assimilated into the YBA identity as one of the features that distinguish these youth as a Buddhist vanguard.

Aside from merely failing to displace the YBA’s religious identity, integration of the political script could also sometimes ironically reinforce it. This can be seen in the effect that the campaign against reactionary sects had on the YBA. As evidenced by the fact that it was prosecuted primarily by security agents rather than religious affairs officers, the campaign targeted redemptive societies primarily for their politics. However, the rhetoric of the campaign borrowed language from

⁸⁸ “Gusuxing” 姑蘇行, *Juexun* 7.5 (May 10, 1953) [MFQz 79:317].

earlier Nationalist campaigns against superstitious beliefs and practices.⁸⁹ The YBA's efforts to distinguish itself from the banned groups—such as in the exhibitions at both the opening ceremony and on the propagation trip—focused on the rhetoric of superstition rather than counterrevolution. This was a repetition of householder reactions to the Nationalist campaigns of the Nanjing decade, yet perhaps with greater impact. Take, for example, an article composed by the YBA Propagation Department titled, “The Contrast Between Buddhism and Superstitious Reactionary Sects,” which employed the same technique seen at the exhibition during the opening celebration. This article presents 18 points of contrast between true Buddhist groups like the YBA and superstitious sects like Yiguandao. Listed were such items as the different deities worshipped by Buddhists and sects; the Pali and Sanskrit origins of Buddhist texts as opposed to the sectarian tracts composed through spirit writing; the open teaching of Buddhism as opposed to the secret activities of sects; the Buddhist belief that Maitreya Buddha will not arrive for eons as opposed to the sectarian belief that his arrival was imminent; Buddhism was a “world” religion with a clear history whereas superstitious sects merely borrowed bits and pieces from different religions and had murky origins.⁹⁰ All of the points listed dealt with religious content rather than political differences. In responding to the campaign against reactionary sects, the YBA was emphasizing its religious identity rather than eliding it.

The emphasis on religious difference spurred a renewed focus on the prerequisites for becoming a Buddhist. An unmistakable spike in the number of articles on the Three Refuges and the Five Precepts began to show up in *The Awakened Dispatch* and other Buddhist periodicals during the campaign against reactionary sects, particularly beginning in 1953. Whereas the most pious householders in Shanghai almost always took the Refuges and the Precepts, in practice this had never been a requirement for claiming Buddhist identity or joining a Buddhist organization. Lay religious adherents often constructed their religious identity heterogeneously by joining communities belonging to different religious traditions simultaneously. However, there was now a growing sense that, “A Buddhist absolutely must take the Three Refuges.”⁹¹ Behind this hardened approach to Buddhist identity was the perceived problem of reactionary sect members “infiltrating” Buddhist organizations to escape the law and work their devious plots against the Chinese people. Fang Zifan brought the problem down to a practical level: “When monks and householders administer the Three Refuges or the Five Precepts, if they do not conduct a careful background check beforehand, then it will make it easy for reactionary sects or counterrevolutionaries to bore a hole [into the Buddhist community] and disguise their identity.”⁹² In other words, the specter of

⁸⁹ Rebecca Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes: Religion and the Politics of Chinese Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009), 27-34, 78-86.

⁹⁰ Foqing hongfabu 佛青弘法部, “Fojiao yu mixin fandong daohuimen de duibi” 佛教與迷信反動道會門的對比, *Juexun* 5.6 (June 1, 1951) [MFQz 79:114-115]

⁹¹ Xu Hengzhi 徐恆志, “Sanguiyi de yiyi” 三歸依的意義, *Juexun* 8.4 (April 10, 1954) [MFQz 79:321].

⁹² Fang Zifan 方子藩, “Zhanwen renmin lichang, huaqing diwo jixian” 站穩人民立場，畫清敵我界限, *Juexun* 7.7 (7/10/1953) [MFQz 79:341].

internal enemies raised by the political campaign resulted in a heightened emphasis on the formal rites and commitments required for entrance and belonging in the Buddhist community. In the process, the religious identity of householders at the YBA became sharpened and reinforced, rather than weakened and displaced by politics.

Therefore well into the 1950s, even as the Young Buddhist Association worked pro-actively to master and integrate the evolving political script of the Communist party-state, its religious character and mission remained intact. As seen in the 1951 celebration for the opening of the new compound, performing the script required time, energy and resources, and certainly had an impact on the identity of the organization. However, as the 1953 propagation trip to Suzhou demonstrated, the pursuit of progressive credentials did not displace the YBA's original spirit and mission. On the contrary, the group deployed its mastery of the political script to reinforce its claim to act as a vanguard for the rejuvenation of the Buddhist community. Meanwhile, participation in the campaign against reactionary sects only sharpened the religious identity and commitment among the group's membership as they sought to differentiate themselves from those who were targeted. The simultaneous achievement of progressive political credentials and maintenance of religious mission established the fundamental conditions that allowed the YBA to continue to build momentum for the Buddhist youth movement under Communist rule into the 1950s.

VI. DOWNFALL

If the Young Buddhist Association appeared publicly progressive in the context of the wider Buddhist community, there is evidence to suggest that agents within the regime were increasingly taking a different view. References to the YBA in internal documents from the Youth League reveal an evaluation of the organization as less than progressive. A work report from 1950 had briefly and vaguely mentioned that the YBA's "conservative superstition derives from its study of Buddhist doctrine."⁹³ A more detailed League report on the Buddhist youth from the last day of 1952 asserted that the YBA had taken "an attitude of suspicion and avoidance" toward the party, the state, and the League; it had used every method at its disposal to seal its members off from the outside world while superficially playing along with mass movements and continuing to believe that the Buddhist standpoint encompasses the standpoint of the people. The report went on to acknowledge that cadres had not yet been established within the YBA and although the organization was in need of reform the League's own capabilities had been too limited to do much more than build contacts.⁹⁴

Signs that the YBA had begun to run into more specific troubles with the authorities are found in the League's report on an extended political study session it ran for YBA leaders in late 1953. This particular study session had been inspired by a decision made at the founding meeting of the Chinese Buddhist Association (CBA;

⁹³ SMA C23-1-1.

⁹⁴ SMA C23-2-19.

Zhongguo fojiaoxiehui 中國佛教協會) in May of that year. The founding of the CBA marked a new development in the governance of religion because this group of Buddhist representatives was officially empowered as an intermediary between the authorities and the Buddhist community.⁹⁵ Zhao Puchu, a Shanghai householder who had moved to Beijing and was now vice-president and secretary-general of the new CBA, proclaimed that although Buddhists had received some political education through the mass movements over the past three years, “we should admit that from the viewpoint of the needs of the motherland, our efforts at [political] study are clearly insufficient...”⁹⁶ Zhao chose Shanghai as the site for an intensive five-week pilot study program for the city’s Buddhist leaders that began on September 8, 1953 and emphasized two subjects: patriotism and official religion policy.⁹⁷

As it had in the past, the YBA responded proactively by organizing its own intensive seven-week study program, to parallel Zhao Puchu’s city-wide program, from November 15, 1953 to January 3, 1954. Fang Zifan chaired the program and Zhao himself, who had in the past helped the YBA with fundraising and long been a supporter, was invited to give a report on official religion policy at the outset.⁹⁸ However, it was the Youth League that led the study program for the YBA. Over sixty YBA executive committee members and officers participated, a group that the League reports it maintained control over through twelve core leaders. The League found that the two points that needed to be stressed to the group in the regular study sessions were: elevating love of the nation over religion, and clarifying the official scope of what counted as legal religious activity (*zongjiao huodong fanwei* 宗教活動範圍). Discussion of the second point in particular revealed it as an area in which the YBA had begun to run afoul of the authorities.⁹⁹

It appears that beginning earlier in the year, at about the same time as the founding of the CBA, the regime had begun to narrow the scope of permissible activity for religious groups. In particular, it was mandated that religious propagation should be carried out only within the walls of religious institutions, not in public places, and the activities of religious organizations could not extend beyond their localities.¹⁰⁰ Now, in the political study sessions with the League, YBA leaders confessed that these regulations had rekindled their fears that the regime’s religion policy was aimed at eradicating religion by slow strangulation, but study had now brought understanding and put such fears to rest. The report makes note of Zheng Songying’s further admission that that the YBA should not have, in the past, recruited members from outside the city. Lu Xiuqing added that YBA members

⁹⁵ Holmes Welch, *Buddhism Under Mao* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 19-20.

⁹⁶ Zhao Puchu 趙樸初, “Fojiaotu bixu zhongshi xuexi nuli xuexi!”, *Xiandai foxue* 36 (August 15, 1953).

⁹⁷ Huang Dahua 黃大華, “Shanghaishi fojiaojie renshi de xuexi qingkuang” 上海市佛教界人士的學習情況, *Xiandai foxue* 39 (November 15, 1953).

⁹⁸ “Jinxing zongjiao zhengce xuexi” 進行宗教政策學習, *Juexun* 8.1 (January 10, 1954) [MFQ 103:258].

⁹⁹ SMA C23-1-21.

¹⁰⁰ Chen Jinlong 陳金龍, *Zhongguo gongchandang yu zhongguo de zongjiao wenti* 中國共產黨與中國的宗教問題 [The Chinese Communist Party and China’s Religion Problem] (Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2006), 130; “Buying zuo zongjiao huo fanzongjiao de xuanchuan” 不應作宗教或反宗教的宣傳, *Juexun* 7.6 (June 1, 1953) [MFQz 79:331]

should cut off all communication with these non-locals. And a number of people requested guidance on what the report refers to as the organization's "member problem" (*huiyuan wenti* 會員問題). The report does not clarify this ominous reference. It may have simply indicated the recruitment of non-locals mentioned by Zheng. However, it may also have been related to the fact that after membership had leapt up by 50% in 1951 with new members joining from all over, the YBA had to expel many of them the following year (when the campaign against reactionary sects began to be emphasized in the cities) for having unclear backgrounds and religious commitments.¹⁰¹ Finally, a much later document that may not be entirely reliable mentions briefly that eleven YBA members had been secretly arrested as counterrevolutionaries sometime in 1954.¹⁰² Although the details are not clear from the sources, it seems likely that these issues were linked from the perspective of the authorities: the YBA's expansive, perhaps hasty, membership recruitment had brought in individuals of a politically suspect character.

The League made the policy on the scope of religious activity concrete for the YBA leadership by focusing discussion on errors made by the Teen Department and its head Li Xingxiao. Li had been denounced on at least two accounts. First, he had "forced" a student to disregard his official placement in a university to instead work for the Teen Department. And second, Li had repeatedly sent groups from the Department out on trips to Wuxi, Suzhou and other places beyond Shanghai to propagate religion in public spaces and on public transportation. The League opted not to launch a direct struggle against Li because it might increase sympathy for him among his co-religionists. Even so, a small group continued to defend him against criticism and make problems for the progress of the study sessions. The report notes that Fang Zifan was particularly helpful in resolving such difficulties.¹⁰³

In the end, although over the course of the seven-week program the top YBA leaders were seen to have corrected mistakes in their political views, the League nevertheless concluded that the YBA as a whole was still an extremely "backward" (*luohou* 落後) organization—a political rating at the opposite end of the spectrum from "progressive." The report noted that, "The Young Buddhist Association is the largest householder association in the entire city and has definite historical roots and a foundation among the masses," yet so far "it has been a blind spot in our propaganda education work." The recommendation was that the organization would have to be reformed, membership should not be allowed to exceed its current level, and particular attention had to be paid to ensuring that the scope of religious activities followed policy restrictions and did not extend beyond the city limits.¹⁰⁴ However, even after this report, the YBA continued to operate apparently without direct interference from the authorities and without losing its position within the wider Buddhist community. Fang Zifan was on the executive committee of the CBA

¹⁰¹ Chen Xinxing 陳信行, "Women zai ti huiyou zuo xie shenme?" 我們在替會友做些甚麼?, *Juexun* 7.1 (January 1, 1953) [MFQz 79:231].

¹⁰² "Zhongguo fojiao xiehui lishihui di'erci kuoda huiyi de chuanda tigang" 中國佛教協會理事會第二次擴大會議的傳達提綱, *Xiandai foxue* 63 (November 15, 1955).

¹⁰³ SMA C23-1-21.

¹⁰⁴ SMA C23-1-21.

from the time of its founding in 1953, and became a vice president of the Shanghai Buddhist Association (SBA; *Shanghai fojiao xiehui* 上海佛教協會) when it was established in December 1954. In April 1955, the YBA even celebrated the publication of the 100th issue of *The Awakened Dispatch* which was now circulating 5,000 issues per copy across the country.¹⁰⁵ The League's report does not appear to have significantly damaged the YBA's political status or constrained its activities.

A few months after celebrating the 100th issue, in August 1955, Zheng Songying, Chen Hailiang, and Li Xingxiao accompanied Fang to Beijing for the second meeting of the CBA's executive committee. The themes of the meeting were discussion of Buddhist participation in the nation's transition to socialism and in the campaign to clean out hidden counterrevolutionaries (*sufan yundong* 肅反運動).¹⁰⁶ Before leaving for Beijing, Fang and Zheng had recently lent their voices to a meeting of the SBA to denounce the Hufeng counterrevolutionary clique that was the primary target of the new campaign, and their remarks had been published in the Buddhist press. Zheng had vehemently denounced Chiang Kai-shek's manipulation of Hu Feng as a form of "germ warfare," and Fang had warned the Buddhist community that such enemies could easily be hiding among them as well, cloaking their true identities with Buddhist clothing.¹⁰⁷

It therefore must have come as a shock to the householder delegates from the YBA when, at the meeting in Beijing, they themselves were suddenly denounced from all sides as the leaders of a counterrevolutionary clique (*fangeming jituan* 反革命集團) hidden within the Young Buddhist Association. The two-week-long meeting from August 16 to 31 became one long struggle session against the YBA leaders, as Buddhist representatives from around the country denounced them, one after another. For example, Fang's fellow vice president from the SBA, the monk Chisong, declared,

Not long ago, when we began to study the materials on Hu Feng's counterrevolutionary clique, Shanghai Buddhists—we ourselves—always thought that that there could not possibly be Hu Feng-ists within the Shanghai Buddhist community. It did not seem that Hu Feng-ists would find an excuse to enter Buddhism. But the facts show, having been clearly ascertained this time, that they [i.e. the Hu Feng-ists within the Buddhist community] are none other than the Young Buddhist Association of Shanghai. This organization has great power in Shanghai, with many of the masses

¹⁰⁵ Fang Zifan 方子藩, "Benkan chuangkan yibaiqi jinian zhuan: benkan baiqi ganyan" 本刊創刊一百期紀念專業:本刊百期感言, *Juexun* 9.4 (April 10, 1955) [MFQ 103:468].

¹⁰⁶ The campaign was launched in March 1955 first against cadres of the party state itself who were denounced as reactionaries "cloaked as Marxist-Leninists", but then turned beyond the government to target intellectuals like Hu Feng and other "hidden counterrevolutionaries." See Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic*, 3rd Edition (New York: The Free Press, 1999), 122-124.

¹⁰⁷ "Shanghaishi fojiao xiehui juxing shengtao Hufeng fangeming jituan lishi kuoda zuotanhui" 上海市佛教協會舉行聲討胡風反革命集團理事擴大座談會, *Honghua yuekan* 170 (July 25, 1955) [MFQz 72:265].

within it. Cloaking themselves in Buddhist clothing and borrowing the mantle of spreading the Dharma and saving sentient beings, they have concealed themselves in Shanghai for six or seven years while committing many crimes to harm the motherland, the people and to harm Buddhism. Those of us living in Shanghai frequently met with them, shook their hands and talked happily, all the while unable to see through their political façade... the fact was that the tiger was standing right next to us!¹⁰⁸

The charges lacked specificity, aside from a personal testimony from a young monk, who counted himself among the Buddhist youth and claimed that his revolutionary spirit had been “poisoned” by the “reactionary” journal, *The Awakened Dispatch*, and other pamphlets published by the YBA.¹⁰⁹ But if the charges were vague, the political implications were clear: the Buddhists now had their own Hu Feng or Bishop Kung to struggle against in the campaign against hidden counterrevolutionaries.¹¹⁰ The YBA and its leaders were now enemies of the people. As their train pulled into Zhenru station on its way back to Shanghai on September 5, Zheng, Chen, and Li were arrested by the authorities. Fang, apparently, was free to go.¹¹¹

It had been decided at the national CBA meeting that detailed investigation of the YBA should be carried out on site in Shanghai by the SBA, which convened a meeting at the Jade Buddha Temple for this purpose on September 12.¹¹² At the meeting, 167 representatives of the Shanghai Buddhist community composed an initial list of the heinous crimes committed by Zheng, Chen, and Li over the six years since Liberation. The meeting also exposed a second counterrevolutionary clique led by the monk Qingding at the Jingang daochang, a center for the practice of Tibetan Buddhism among Han Chinese at another of Shanghai’s householder associations. However, after three days it was decided to temporarily halt the meeting in order to conduct further investigations and discussions more broadly among the city’s Buddhist community. Over the next three months, six transmission meetings were held for the various constituencies of the community. As many as 2,200 Buddhists attended these meetings and participated in the small-group denunciations that followed them. Finally, on January 5 the SBA reconvened and presented concluding reports on the YBA and the Jingang daochang, along with many personal testimonies

¹⁰⁸ “Chisong fashi de fayan” 持松法師的發言, *Xiandai foxue* 61 (September 15, 1955).

¹⁰⁹ Nengxian 能先, “Wo shoule shanghai fojiao qingnianhui zhege fangeming jituan de duhai” 我受了上海佛教青年會這個反革命集團的毒害, *Xiandai foxue* 61 (September 15, 1955).

¹¹⁰ Bishop Kung was the ranking Catholic in Shanghai, and was also denounced as a counterrevolutionary at about the same time as the YBA leaders. The struggle of the Shanghai Catholic Community led by Bishop Kung in the 1950s is the subject of Paul P. Mariani, *Church Militant: Bishop Kung and Catholic Resistance in Communist Shanghai* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

¹¹¹ Zheng Songying 鄭頌英, “Chen Hailiang jushi jiqi shizuo” 陳海量居士及其詩作, *Jingyishi wencun 2* 淨意室文存2 [Collected Writings from the House of Pure Thoughts, Volume 2] (Beijing: Zhongguo xianzhen nianjian she, 2001), 109.

¹¹² “Zhongguo fojiao xiehui he shanghai fojiao xiehui lishihui dierci (kuoda) huiyi” 中國佛教協會和上海佛教協會理事會第二次(擴大)會議, *Honghua yuekan* 174 (November 25, 1955) [MFQz 72:324].

that had been gathered during the months of investigation.¹¹³ In April, Zhao Puchu could report at the third meeting of the CBA standing committee in Beijing:

Now that these counterrevolutionaries hidden within Buddhism have been cleared out by the Shanghai Buddhist community with the support of Buddhists across the country, [we have achieved] unprecedented unity and the religious lifestyle of Buddhists is now proceeding normally in greater accord with the law... Through this struggle against counterrevolutionaries, we have all received a profound education, criticized our own unresponsive thinking, made a step forward in defining our standpoint, clarifying the line between ourselves and the enemy, and elevating our awakening.¹¹⁴

In its denunciation, the YBA ironically achieved the role of national leadership that it had often aimed for but never quite attained through its own activism.

The denunciation focused on demonstrating that Zheng, Chen and Li had never been true Buddhists, but rather sinister reactionaries who had all along deviously cloaked themselves in Buddhism to carry out their counterrevolutionary plots against the people and the party.¹¹⁵ Zheng Songying and Li Xingxiao were revealed to be “illegal capitalists” who pretended to be Buddhists in order to cheat people out of their money. Zheng, who was portrayed as the clique’s ring leader, was linked to reactionary sects, wartime traitors, and known counterrevolutionaries. Chen Hailiang was exposed as a “reactionary military official” who had received training under the Nationalists before becoming the clique’s “reactionary thought leader.” These three enemies of the people had used the cover of the YBA to undermine every mass campaign since Liberation, provide a safe house for other counterrevolutionaries, shelter banned reactionary sects by absorbing them into their ranks, and maintain contacts with domestic and foreign counterrevolutionary agents. The Teen Department and *The Awakened Dispatch* were singled out as the main vehicles for the counterrevolutionary activity of the clique. The Teen Department was likened to the Catholic youth organized by Bishop Kung. Under Li Xingxiao’s leadership the Department had become a secret “political party” with strict screening of members, a secret internal publication, constantly shifting meeting times and locations, a secret coded language, and so forth. *The Awakened Dispatch* and other YBA publications were revealed as “counterrevolutionary propaganda weapons” that had spread dissatisfaction with the new society, encouraged law-breaking, blurred the lines between allies and enemies, attacked Marxism-Leninism, and so forth. Although there were shreds of truth behind some of these accusations—for example, the fact that Zheng Songying had confessed to

¹¹³ “Shanghaishi fojiao xiehui lishihui dierci (kuoda) huiyi jiyao” 上海市佛教協會理事會第二次(擴大)會議記要, *Honghua yuekan* 176 (January 25, 1956) [MFQz 72: 387-389].

¹¹⁴ Zhao Puchu 趙樸初, “Guanyu zhongguo fojiao xiehui 1955 nian gongzuo qingkuang he 1956 nian gongzuo anpai de shuoming baogao” 關於中國佛教協會一九五五年工作情況和一九五六年工作安排的說明報告, *Xiandai foxue* 68 (May 15, 1956).

¹¹⁵ “Shanghaishi fojiao qingnianhui nei de fangeming jituan de zuixing” 上海市佛教青年會內的反革命集團的罪行, *Honghua yuekan* 174 (November 25, 1955) [MFQz 72:324-328].

corporate tax evasion in 1951 could support the claim that he was an “illegal capitalist”¹¹⁶—as with other targets of the campaign against hidden counterrevolutionaries, the charges were wildly trumped up.

As late as their very arrival in Beijing as national representatives of the Buddhist community, the YBA leaders were still respected figures at the helm of an organization that had been leading the Buddhist youth movement and pro-actively establishing its progressive credentials in the new order. Almost overnight, they now became villainous enemies of the people and the party-state, denounced vehemently by their co-religionists. Although there had been signs of friction with the authorities in recent years, this had been limited to resolvable membership and propagation issues, and was a far cry from accusations of insidious counterrevolutionary plots to undermine the regime itself. Why had there been such a sudden reversal in the fortunes of the YBA in the fall of 1955?

A partial answer can be found in the seismic shift that was taking place at the time within the party-state’s governance of religion. Apparently, complaints about bureaucratic overlap and inefficiency in religion work, from state organs like Shanghai’s Civil Affairs Bureau, had finally begun to have an effect. In 1955 the party-state began to rationalize and enhance its apparatus for governing religion. In Shanghai, already by May, the Religious Affairs Office had officially taken jurisdiction of Buddhism and Daoism, although the office continued to complain that it lacked the resources to fully execute its work in a city where the religious landscape was so complex.¹¹⁷ Help was on the way. Actions by the central government to address the “jurisdictional problem” and “organizational problem” in religion work culminated in a new set of regulations issued by the State Council on December 1, 1955 to the local governments of every province, autonomous region and special municipality in the country.

In order to facilitate unified leadership (*tongyi lingdao* 統一領導) for carrying out and strengthening religion work... Any work related to Catholicism, Protestantism, and Han Buddhism and Daoism, is unitedly managed by the religious affairs organs (*zongjiao shiwu bumen* 宗教事務部門) at the various levels [of administration].¹¹⁸

The organizational capabilities of these religious affairs organs were to be enhanced by transferring to them top cadres of “political reliability and definite ability” from the various government organs that had previously split the responsibility for handling religion. The special importance of religion work in Shanghai was recognized by elevating its religious affairs “office” (*chu* 處) to the rank of “bureau” (*ju* 局), and establishing additional “sections” for the municipal districts where religious followers were most numerous. The process of rationalizing and unifying religion work in Shanghai, which had already gotten underway earlier in the year, was completed by spring 1956. By April of that year the Religious Affairs Bureau

¹¹⁶ “Xinfuhao taoshui shijian” 信孚號逃稅事件, *Wenhuibao* (January 3, 1951).

¹¹⁷ SMA B3-2-23.

¹¹⁸ SMA B1-2-1705.

(RAB) had reorganized itself according to the new regulations into three divisions, one each for Catholicism, Protestantism, and Buddhism plus Daoism.¹¹⁹ Also in April, the Civil Affairs Bureau finally transferred to the RAB jurisdiction over 146 religious organizations, including all Buddhist groups.¹²⁰ The cracks in the party-state apparatus for governing religion, which for nearly six years had left Buddhist groups like the YBA with the de facto autonomy to determine their own response to the new polity without direct intervention, were finally being closed up. The national campaign against hidden counterrevolutionaries provided this tightening apparatus with the opportunity to enhance its control over and intervention into religious communities by targeting specific groups among them, such as the YBA.

However, the question remains as to why the YBA was singled out as the point of entry for the state to enhance its intervention in the national Buddhist community? Although the available sources do not offer a definitive answer to this question, a number of possible reasons can be suggested. First, the YBA's recent friction with authorities over membership and propagation issues may have made it appear as a vulnerable target against which to build a case for intervention—the YBA had pushed beyond the boundaries within which the regime sought to quarantine religious activity. Second, (as Paul Mariani and Joseph Lee demonstrate in their papers for this panel) the regime had learned it was most likely to encounter resistance in religious communities from their youth groups—directing intervention at the YBA would preempt such resistance from Buddhists. A third possible reason is also related to the youth character of the YBA—if it was truly the strategy of the regime's religion work to simply contain religious influence until it died out of its own accord, then a reasonable early step would be to cut off influence among the younger generation. Fourth, as the Buddhist group recognized as having the greatest influence among the masses in Shanghai, it was a logical target for bringing the community in line. Fifth, as suggested by the denunciation of its leaders as “illegal capitalists,” the decision to target the YBA may have been based on class—such an attack could undermine an important source of moral authority and social prestige for a capitalist urban elite that the regime was also planning to liquidate shortly in the socialization of commerce and industry.¹²¹ A final possible reason for the selection of the YBA as a target is that it was guided by internal Buddhist rivalry—there is evidence to suggest that monastic Buddhist leaders in Beijing were unhappy with the leadership roles that lay Buddhists from Shanghai were playing in the national Buddhist community.¹²² Although available documentation cannot tell us definitively which of these reasons, or what combination of them, was

¹¹⁹ SMA B24-2-30.

¹²⁰ SMA B168-1-817.

¹²¹ In her study of voluntary charitable associations in 1950s Shanghai, Nara Dillon argues that the Communist political strategy was to pave the way for disenfranchising capitalists in the socialization of industry in 1956 by first undermining their bases of social legitimacy and prestige. See “New Democracy and the Demise of Private Charity in Shanghai,” in Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz, eds., *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People's Republic of China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 83-88.

¹²² Holmes Welch, *Buddhism under Mao* (Harvard University Press, 1972), 9-10.

responsible for the targeting of the YBA, it is clear that there was ample reason to do so.

It is also clear that the attack on the YBA was the first step in a systematic dismantling of the Shanghai householder community and its Buddhist activism. Taking its cues from the newly enhanced Religious Affairs Bureau, the SBA pointed to the YBA case as evidence that there was a dangerous level of disorganization and disunity in the Buddhist community leaving it wide open for infiltration by counterrevolutionaries. At the conclusion to its early January meeting to denounce the YBA, the SBA therefore passed a resolution to restructure (*zhengli zuzhi* 整理組織) the Buddhist community. The first step was to deal with the YBA itself. *The Awakened Dispatch* and the group's printing press, Daxiong Books, had already been shut down. By the end of the month, all memberships were cancelled and the YBA, together with two other householder groups, were "jointly reformed" (*hezuo gaizu* 合作改組) into a new organization, the Shanghai Buddhist Believer Association (Shanghai fojiao xinzhonghui 上海宗教信眾會). This organization had an entirely new leadership, and, although housed at the same premises, its charter exhibited none of the YBA's original spirit and mission: "Under the guidance of the Shanghai Buddhist Association, this organization unites its members to carry out Buddhist propagation and practice activities, study patriotism, and promote the good traditions of Buddhism."¹²³ The next step was to handle the Buddhist publishing industry. On February 1, 1956, the last remaining Buddhist periodical in Shanghai, *Honghua Monthly*, was taken over to become the mouthpiece of the SBA, and the three remaining publishing houses—the Honghua Society, Buddhist Books, and Great Wheel of the Dharma Books—were united into a single entity, the Shanghai Buddhist Bookstore (*Shanghai fojiao shudian* 上海佛教書店).¹²⁴ On August 3, all other remaining Buddhist householder organizations outside of the Believer Association were jointly reformed into the Shanghai Buddhist Pure Karma Householder Grove (*Shanghai fojiao jingye jushilin* 上海佛教淨業居士林) with a nearly word-for-word identical charter.¹²⁵ Finally, in 1964, two became one, as the Believer Association and the Householder grove were amalgamated.¹²⁶ Some strictly delimited public religious activities were maintained until the last householder association was closed down at the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1967.¹²⁷ However, the autonomous Buddhist activism that had been the hallmark of the Shanghai householder community from its golden age of the 1930s to its rejuvenation in the early 1950s, was brought to an abrupt end in 1956 with the

¹²³ SMA B22-1-47; "Shanghai fojiao qingnianhui, gongdelin foxue hui, zhenjing lianshe lianhe qishi" 上海佛教青年會,功德林佛學會,真淨蓮社聯合啟事, *Honghua yuekan* 177 (February 25, 1956) [MFQz 72:423].

¹²⁴ "Shanghai Honghuashe, foxue shuju, dafalun shuju lianhe qishi" 上海弘化社,佛學書局,大法輪書局聯合啟事, *Xiandai foxue* 68 (April 15, 1956).

¹²⁵ SMA B22-1-47; "Shanghai fojiao jingye jushilin chengli" 上海佛教淨業居士林成立, *Honghua yuekan* 183 (August 25, 1956) [MFQb 73:59].

¹²⁶ Shanghai zongjiao zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, *Shanghai zongjiaozhi* 上海宗教志 [Shanghai Religion Gazetteer] (Shanghai: Shanghai shehuikexueyuan chubanshe, 2001), 132.

¹²⁷ Holmes Welch, *Buddhism under Mao* (Harvard University Press, 1972), 300.

downfall of the YBA. As Zheng Songying wrote decades later, “Buddhist associations ended and only old people were allowed to recite the Buddha’s name.”¹²⁸

EPILOGUE

According to Zheng Songying, in 1955 Chen Hailiang had been afflicted by a recurring dream in which he was thrown in jail, sent to a place of extreme cold, and returned to a family that was changed as if many years had gone by.¹²⁹ Although his arrest came later that year, it was not until August of 1958 that Chen, Zheng and Li were sentenced in court as counterrevolutionaries, and sent to the distant province of Qinghai for labor reform.¹³⁰ Although Chen and Zheng were stationed at the same labor camp, they were separated and never had the opportunity to see each other. Zheng attributed his survival of famine and hard labor at the camp, as well as his early release in 1963, to a protective charm that had been given to him by a monk on the eve of his fateful trip to Beijing. Chen, however, served over two decades at the camp until he was finally permitted to return to Shanghai in 1979. He impressed his fellow prisoners by piously maintaining a Buddhist vegetarian diet even when it meant starving himself, and he was reportedly able to convert one of the guards.¹³¹

In 1982, after the end of the Cultural Revolution and the beginning of a more tolerant era of reform under Deng Xiaoping, Chen and Zheng were finally exonerated in court and the name of the Young Buddhist Association itself was finally cleared in 1993. Both former YBA leaders were rehabilitated within the reviving Buddhist community. Chen, now in his 70s, was elected to the executive committee of the Shanghai Buddhist Association and invited by Zhao Puchu, now once again president of the CBA, to work at the National Buddhist Library in Beijing. However, he soon fell ill, returned to Shanghai, and passed away a few months later in early 1983. Zheng, still in his 60s, was elected to the standing committee of the Shanghai Buddhist Association and charged with overseeing the revival of Buddhist publishing. In 1983, he also led the preparatory committee to revive the most famous householder organization of the golden age, the Buddhist Householder Grove. When the Grove was formally reestablished in 1987, its three vice-presidents were all former leaders of the YBA: Zheng Songying, Lu Xiuqing (founder of the

¹²⁸ Zheng Songying 鄭頌英, “Ye tan ‘Yingchen huiyilu,’” *Jingyishi wencun* 淨意室文存 [Collected Writings from the House of Pure Thoughts] (Beijing: Zhongguo xianzhen nianjian she, 2001), 29-30.

¹²⁹ Zheng Songying 鄭頌英, “Chen Hailiang jushi ersanshi” 陳海量居士二三事, *Jingyishi wencun* 淨意室文存2 [Collected Writings from the House of Pure Thoughts] (Beijing: Zhongguo xianzhen nianjian she, 2001), 118.

¹³⁰ Fang Zifan was not implicated in the counterrevolutionary clique and he continued to serve as a Buddhist representative and to work as a chemical engineer. He was labeled a rightist in 1957, and eventually died in 1968 after contracting a virus during a chemical experiment. *XFC*, 1:128.

¹³¹ *XFC*, 1:1091-1092, 2:1595; Zheng Songying, “Chen Hailiang jushi jiqi shizuo” 陳海量居士及其詩作, *Jingyishi wencun* 淨意室文存2 [Collected Writings from the House of Pure Thoughts] (Beijing: Zhongguo xianzhen nianjian she, 2001), 107-115.

Women's Department), and Cai Huiming (founder of the Teen Department).¹³² Before passing away in 2000, Zheng wrote that the revived Grove,

...has become Shanghai's only current Buddhist householder group, carrying forward much of the propagation and practice work of the earlier Young Buddhist Association. In fact, its work is being managed by none other than former Buddhist Youth people!¹³³

CONCLUSION

The Young Buddhist Association was established with the mission to harness the spirit of youth to rejuvenate Shanghai's Buddhist householder community amidst the perception of a fading golden age. In launching twentieth-century China's first successful Buddhist youth movement, the YBA became perhaps the most active and influential grassroots Buddhist association in the country by the early 1950s. Under the pragmatic orientation and particular prioritizations of the newly ascendant Communist regime, Buddhist groups like the YBA were afforded roughly six years to integrate themselves into the new order without direct state intervention. The YBA responded by taking the initiative to adopt the new political script and build its progressive credentials for corporatist leadership among its co-religionists. The resulting politicization did not undermine the religious character of the YBA, but rather integrated with its mission to advance the Buddhist community and in some ways even sharpened the religious identity of its members. However, as the PRC transitioned from New Democracy to socialism in 1955 and 1956, the YBA suffered a dramatic reversal of political fortune when its leaders were suddenly targeted as counterrevolutionaries by a greatly strengthened state apparatus for governing religion. The downfall of the YBA immediately became the launching point for a coercive dismantling of the householder community and its urban Buddhist activism. Yet, when a more tolerant political environment emerged once again in the 1980s and 1990s, it was the rehabilitated former leaders of the YBA who carried out the revival of householder institutions in Shanghai.

The case of the YBA highlights the pivotal position of the 1950s in the twentieth-century transformation of China's religious landscape. On the one hand, the YBA's response to the Communist takeover followed the householder community's longstanding corporatist approach to regime change that it had pioneered in the golden age of the 1930s. This response was possible because the Communist regime itself initially adopted a form of state corporatism, similar to that

¹³² *XFC*, 1:1091-1092, 2:1595; Zheng Songying, "Chen Hailiang jushi jiqi shizuo" 陳海量居士及其詩作, *Jingyishi wencun* 淨意室文存2 [Collected Writings from the House of Pure Thoughts] (Beijing: Zhongguo xianzhen nianjian she, 2001), 107-115; Zheng Songying 鄭頌英, "Ye tan 'Yingchen huiyilu,'" *Jingyishi wencun* 淨意室文存 [Collected Writings from the House of Pure Thoughts] (Beijing: Zhongguo xianzhen nianjian she, 2001), 29-30; Shanghai zongjiao zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, *Shanghai zongjiaozhi* 上海宗教志 [Shanghai Religion Gazetteer] (Shanghai: Shanghai shehuikexueyuan chubanshe, 2001), 132.

¹³³ Zheng Songying 鄭頌英, "Ye tan 'Yingchen huiyilu,'" *Jingyishi wencun* 淨意室文存 [Collected Writings from the House of Pure Thoughts] (Beijing: Zhongguo xianzhen nianjian she, 2001), 30.

which had been used by the Nationalists, as its primary mode of governing society. The YBA's successful flipping of the political script under the corporatist model paralleled the simultaneous accommodation to the new order of the 1950s by other elements of Chinese society and culture that stood in apparent contradiction with official Communist ideology. Just as the business leaders studied by Sherman Cochran found "belief in the compatibility of capitalism and communism," and the *xiangsheng* performers studied by Perry Link made "political lessons fit in naturally" to their inherently satirical art, the Buddhist householders at the YBA integrated political goals and language of the Communist party-state into their religious institutions.¹³⁴ And similar to the capitalists and comedians, the householders also experienced the dramatic reversal of their political fortune amidst the transition to socialism beginning in 1955 as an unexpected betrayal of their well-intentioned efforts to contribute to the New China.

On the other hand, when the PRC once again returned to a more pragmatic form of governing in the wake of the Cultural Revolution, it was the former leaders of the YBA who emerged to revive the householder community. Their credentials for doing so were based on their earlier experience of accommodating Buddhist activism to Communist rule. Once again, such activism has been permitted on the condition that its promoters "love of the nation (first), and religion (second)" (*aiguo aijiao*). Although householders in Shanghai today have yet to achieve the rebuilding of a youth movement with the dynamism and influence of the Young Buddhist Association, more than ever they look back for inspiration to a previous golden age.

ABBREVIATIONS

- MFQ** *Minguo fojiao qikan wenxian jicheng* 民國佛教期刊文獻集成 [Collection of Republican-era Buddhist Periodical Documents]. Edited by Huang Xianian. 204 vols. Beijing: Quanguo tushuguan wenxian suowei fuzhi zhongxin, 2006. At the end of citations for sources accessed in this collection the location is given in the following format: [MFQ volume:page(s)].
- MFQz** *Minguo fojiao qikan wenxian jicheng bubian* 民國佛教期刊文獻集成補編 [Supplementary Collection of Republican Buddhist Periodical Documents]. Edited by Huang Xianian. 83 vols. Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 2008.
- SMA** Shanghai Municipal Archives 上海市檔案館 (Shanghai, China).
- XFC** Yu Lingbo 於凌波. *Xiandai Fojiao renwu cidian* 現代佛教人物辭典 [Dictionary of Modern Buddhist Figures] 2 vols. Taipei: Foguang wenhua shiye, 2004.

¹³⁴ Sherman Cochran, "Capitalists Choosing Communist China: The Liu Family of Shanghai, 1948-56," *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People's Republic of China*, Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz, eds. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 359-385; Perry Link, "The Crocodile Bird: *Xiangsheng* in the Early 1950s," *Dilemmas of Victory The Early Years of the People's Republic of China*, Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz, eds. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 207-231.

FIGURES

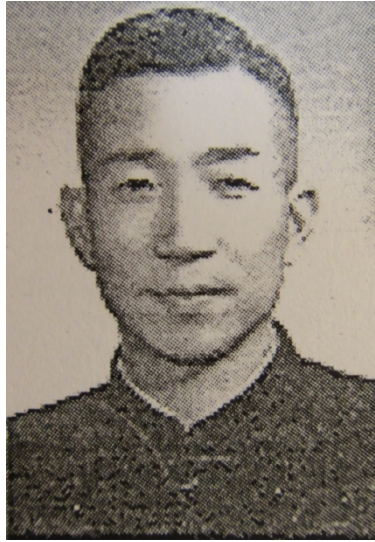


Figure 1: Fang Zifan 方子藩 (1908-1968). SMA C48-1-218.



Figure 2: Zheng Songying 鄭頌英 (1917-2000).



Figure 3: "Association Fourth Plenum Executive Committee Group Photo, February 1, 1951," *Juexun* 5.2/3 (March 1, 1951) [MFQz 79:49].



Figure 4: “A Photograph of the Trip to Wuxi and Suzhou Arranged by the Association Health and Entertainment Department,” *Juexun* 5.2/3 (March 1, 1951) [MFQz 79:61].



Figure 5: "Teen Department Comrades Should Study Common Political Knowledge (Teen Department Work Outline Draft Chapter 2 Section 2)" *Juexun* 5.11 (November 1, 1951) [MFQz 79:205].



Figure 6: “Clean out the feudal superstitious filth that contaminates Buddhism! (Teen Department General Work Outline)” by Bai Xilian, *Juexun* 5.6 (June 1, 1951) [MFQz 79:122].



Figure 7: “Buddhist Image Exhibition Sketch” by Gu Zongxian, *Juexun* 7.5 (May 1, 1953) [MFQz 79:122].



Figure 8: "The People's Religion Does Not Allow Reactionary Sects to Bore Holes" by Gu Zongxian, *Juexun* 7.4 (April 1, 1953) [MFQz 79:282].