

TRANSFORMATION OF THE SACRED: THE COMMERCIALIZATION, POLITICIZATION AND GLOBALIZATION OF BUDDHIST HERITAGE TOURISM IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA

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ABSTRACT

The study of heritage has transcended the documentation of places and the formulation of processes and practices for conservation and management, to inquire why people want to preserve the past, how people reinterpret the past and how heritage contributes to the formation of global, national, local and political identities, as Zhou Heping, China's Vice-Minister of Culture, stated that the Chinese cultural heritage, like Deng Xiaoping's socialism, must have unique Chinese characteristics. This paper argues that heritage has to be re-defined as a highly complex commercial and socio-political concept. Meanwhile, the research on heritage tourism today focuses mainly on the supply side of tourism, focusing largely on interpretation, conservation, and other elements of resource management, as well as the support services that exist for visitors at historical locations (Leask et al, 2006). This paper, with an interdisciplinary emphasis, explores the Buddhist heritage tourism in China in the context of commercialization, politicization and globalization. It examines the historical, theoretical and political issues associated with the interpretation of China's Buddhist heritage tourism: representative Buddhist sites, Shaolin Temple in particular, and their extrapolated commercial-spiritual significance, and engaging policies with their postmodern inclinations.

To the Chinese state and its ideologues, the spiritual or intangible nature of the religious heritage, which reflects the belief systems and social morality, has been used to enforce the Chinese pursuit of unity and harmony, to embody the nation, to boost the economy and to reconstruct national collective identities. Such efforts are obligatory, echoing and modifying the political urges and religious policies of the Maoist era, as verified by the "State Outline Program of Cultural Development in the 11th Five-Year Plan Period", issued by the Office of the Central Committee of the CPC and the Office of the State Council on 13 September, 2006. Moreover, amid politicization and increasing globalization, there has been a remarkable growth in religious (esp. Buddhist) heritage as a consumer product and a formidable part of the tourist industry in the past twenty years in China. Consequently, Chinese Buddhist heritage and its tourism have assumed a form of cultural fast food, a commodity, as well as a political tool for social stability and spiritual control. Describing practical applications, models and case studies of Shaolin Temple, this paper provides an insight into Buddhist heritage tourism in China to analyze the intricate tensions between commercialization, politicization, religiosity and globalization.

INTRODUCTION

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sites, Shaolin Temple in particular, and their extrapolated commercial-spiritual significance, and engaging policies with their postmodern inclinations.

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New Trends of China's Policies on Religion and Tourism

The Chinese government believes that, though atheistic in nature, the CPC now allows freedom of religious beliefs for the citizens under the Policy of Religious Freedom. China has a population of about 1.3 billion and is home to a 100 million (official number) believers, largely Buddhists, Taoists, Christians, Catholics and Islamites. "To properly understand and manage the religious affairs was vital to the work of the Party, the peace and stability of Chinese society and the process to build a moderately prosperous society of all respects," Chinese President Hu Jintao said. "The Party's secret in handling well China's religious issues lies in its principles and policies," said Ye Xiaowen, Director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs. "Their insertion in the Party Constitution shows the Party is sincere, and capable, of its implementation of policies on the freedom of religious beliefs" (China Tibet Tourism Bureau, 2008). With the new elaboration on religious work, according to Ye, the Party is determined to promote the active role of the religious circle in maintaining social harmony and boosting economic development.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Chinese attitudes to religion have been restrictive and even repressive (during the Cultural Revolution). But with the Reform and Open Policy carried out in the late 1970s onwards, China's religious policy has been more liberalized, granting freedom to religious practices with government registration, in a Marxist belief that all religions would eventually die out with the social and economic development. CPC's Central Committee issued a major document outlining religious policy during this Reform and Open period: citizens would enjoy freedom of religious belief, but within the five recognized religions and under the supervision of the government; religion as a personal affair could not interfere with or influence civil matters such as education; Chinese religious groups could not be subject to foreign organizations¹. In this vein, the government established the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) to manage and regulate religious affairs, objectively providing a channel for religious personnel to communicate with the government.

The Constitution of China stipulates that religious freedom is a right enjoyed by all Chinese citizens; the government prohibits interference in the normal religious life of the Chinese people; the government maintains that religious activities should be conducted in temples, mosques and churches. Meanwhile, to guarantee the legal protection of religion, the Constitution includes the criminal code of the state, stipulating that government employees who unlawfully deprive citizens of their freedom to conduct normal religious activities shall either be taken into custody or punished with a prison sentence of less than two years in serious cases. Thus, according to Kim Kwong Chan (2005, p. 89), the government defines religion as "a private matter which can be pursued in confined areas...a particular government ministry, the RAB, deals with government-sanctioned religious groups and activities..." Ultimately, the party's objective is "to keep these groups within the political parameters established by the government as well as to lead these groups to support the sociopolitical objectives of the government." After the formal adoption of the 'Three Represents' as the CPC's orthodox doctrine at the Sixteenth CPC Congress in 2002, Chan (Ibid) notes the religious rhetoric of the CPC:

First, since longevity is of the nature of religion, it will exist for a long time, and the CPC should therefore actively guide religion to adapt to socialist society. Second, since the critical issue for religion in China is its mass nature (more than 100 million believers), the CPC should vigorously implement its policy on religious belief. Third, since religion is complex and unique, the CPC should emphasize the legislative nature of religious policy and stress the independent nature of religion in

China. As for non-sanctioned religions, although it is not explicitly stated as part of religious policy, it is understood by government officials that they will be suppressed by legal and administrative means either as 'evil cults' or as 'activity that endangers public security', as mentioned earlier.

At the same time, China's continuing economic reform since 1978 have substantially altered its economic structure, resulting in spectacular economic growth and a boom in tourism development. Tourism has become one of the industries with strongest development momentum in the global economy, and it constitutes the pillar industry of China's economic development. Tourism in China has undergone a rapid and prosperous development since the adoption of open-door policy and economic reform in 1978. By 1998, international tourism earned US\$14.1 billion of foreign exchange, a 53-fold increase from US\$262.9 million in 1978 (CNTA, 1998, 1999). By 1999 China had 7,035 hotels, 7,236 travel agencies, and tourism directly employed 1.9 million people (CNTA, 2000). In 2006, the revenue of China's inbound tourism achieved USD33.95 billion, with a year-on-year growth of 15.9%. The revenue from domestic tourism came to RMB 623 billion, seeing an increase of 17.9% year-on-year ('In-depth Report', 2007).

On the other hand, tourism, like any other sector in China, is tightly bound with Chinese politics, as the first principle of China's National Tourism policy states, "It is imperative to take Deng Xiaoping's theories and his economic thinking on tourism as guidance." Under this guidance, religious heritage tourism plays an important role in the developing system of Chinese tourism industry, enacting politics of nationalism with global connection and symbolizing the Chinese national spirit. Aijmer and Ho (2000), Hsiao (1960) and Dean (2003, p. 352) have noted that since the 1980s, there has been a growing trend of building and reconstructing of the Buddhist and Taoist temples with a view to solve anxieties and problems for people; temple revival is often for filling of a moral vacuum in modern day China and elsewhere in the global village; and religious sites not only manage to survive under state power, but also are sometimes able to prosper under the political mechanism, which indicates the power dynamics between local authorities and the state.

China has a set of tourism policies adopted ever since its open-door to the outside world, and these policies are managed and implemented with remarkable Chinese characteristics. According to Qiu Hanqin Zhang, et al (2002, pp. 38-42), these policies and regulations have covered almost all aspects of the tourism industry, including investment, start-up and operation of the tourism business, competition, consumer protection and qualification of tourism employees, etc. To Zhang (Ibid), tourism policy implementation in China can be concluded as a "top-down" and "trial and error-correcting" model:

These two concepts are closely related. The term "top-down" means that tourism policy decisions, to a large extent, are shaped in the top level of tourism administration. Then the tourism administration implements these policies and monitors the responses from enterprises. If there is no strong resistance, the implementation continues; if resistance occurs, government will revise the policy decisions and re-implement it. This reflects the concept of "trial and error-correcting". But, the adjustment and revision sometimes take a long time.

In contemporary P.R. China, the issue of tourism is complicated because of the political nature of the tourism industry. The governmental tourism bureaus macro-control the market and shape the management of tourism enterprises and their construction of tourist sites; meanwhile, there could be possible collaboration between the state and tourism enterprisesⁱⁱ, influencing in particular the representations of religious cultures.

The Shaolin Abbot Becomes the CEO: Commercialization of Chinese Buddhist Heritage Tourism

Chinese Buddhism, or *Hanchuanfojiao*, can be dated to the various schools of Buddhism that have prospered in China ever since ancient times. It absorbed and assimilated the ideas of Confucianism, Taoism and other Chinese native philosophies so that this foreign religion was able to take roots in China, forming a natural part of Chinese civilization. Buddhism is instrumental in shaping the mindset of the Chinese people, affecting their life, world look and politics. Historically, Buddhism has prospered under imperial patronage and continues to flourish today with governmental sanction. It has left to the Chinese people a great legacy of Buddhist heritage sites. Today, there are still 2,100 Buddhist caves and niches, 100,000 Buddhist images, more than 3,600 inscribed tablets and 43 Buddhist pagodas in existence. The White Horse Temple, Qianxi Temple, Binyang Cave, Ten Thousand Buddhists' Cave, Lotus Cave, Fengxian Temple, the Four Sacred Buddhist Mountains of China etc. are all remarkable manifestations of the booming Chinese Buddhism.

The Shaolin Monastery or Shaolin Temple is a Chan Buddhist temple located at Song Shan in China's Henan Province. It has a history of 1500 years and is the birth place of Chinese Chan Buddhism,

introduced by Bodhidharma who came to China from India. In addition, famous for its association with Chinese martial arts and particularly with the Hong Kong movieⁱⁱⁱ that popularizes and commercializes Shaolin Kung Fu, a physical manifestation of the Chan spirit, the Mahayana Buddhist monastery itself is also best known to the Western world for its heritage tourism. The fact is that at the beginning the Chinese government was unwilling to grant a favorable policy towards the Shaolin Temple. Yet in the 1980s when Shaolin kungfu gained popularity and tremendous commercial profits both inside China and around the world, the government came to modify its attitude to it with a profit-oriented strategy to promote and preserve Shaolin heritage. And this naturally leads to a dilemma, which is best expressed by *Independent Lens* ('Shaolin Ulysses') as follows:

Monks and Temple officials argued that the awe-inspiring physicality of kungfu could be used to draw people to Shaolin, leading them ultimately to the core Buddhist principles. They understood the showmanship of the monks as a necessary preservation of Shaolin teachings through promotion. Cynical observers, however, detected a crass commercialization both in Shaolin village and in the glitzy international tours that summarily depicted Shaolin history while showcasing acrobatic stunts.

Shi Yongxin, the abbot of Shaolin Temple, is known as the "CEO Monk," or "CEO in a cassock," because of his tendency to run the temple as a business. Under his management, Shaolin has gone into film production, e-commerce and kung fu shows, and he is among the first to send his monks to take MBA courses and get degrees. Shaolin Temple now has its own welfare foundation, magazine, movie and TV production team and martial arts promotion agency. Apart from the establishment of numerous schools nearby the monastery starting to teach Shaolin kungfu^{iv}, the famous brand "Shaolin" now comes to appear on a startling diversity of products ranging from snacks to sportswear. To deal with such commercial affairs, the Temple has set up a corporation to regulate the use of its name. In March, 2006, the Shaolin temple and a satellite TV station in Southern China jointly organized a global Chinese kung fu star competition, imitating an extremely popular reality TV amateur singing contest called Super Girl, which, in turn, is an imitation of American Idol. Braving the public criticism, Shi commented:

"Nowadays, there are too many agencies making films and TV soaps about the Shaolin temple. They do them mostly for commercial purposes. Their rendition of the history, culture and the spirit of Shaolin temple are not always accurate or complete. We hope our participation this time will guarantee the truth on what is reflected through historical or feature films, although we do need investment from outside."

When asked about the heritage tourism business carried out by the temple, Shi commented that "if we only rely on donations from Buddhists, we could hardly survive. It is only under the precondition that we manage tourist development well that we can save some funds for the maintenance of the temple and carry out cultural research and cultural relic protection as well as popularizing Buddhist principles. Tourism is our basic sustenance."

When Henan government officials awarded Shi with a spectacular sports sedan valued at approximately US\$125,000 for his contributions to the local tourism industry, it raised increasing doubts that Shi is a monk dedicated to fortune rather than religion, the *Beijing News* reported on August 30. "I resorted to using commercialization to promote Shaolin culture," Shi says. "I believe that people who concentrate on hard work can understand me." Under the trend of commercialization and globalization, the abbot has cooperated with dozens of mainland universities, including Tsinghua University and Peking University; he has also maintained his cultural exchange with the international community by purchasing 12 square kilometers of land in Australia to build a Shaolin martial arts heritage center according to traditional Chinese construction methods.^v

As Chi-Chu Tschang (2007) points out, China's preference of a market economy has also encouraged many Buddhist temples to try their utmost to boost revenue. "The commercialization of Buddhism has already become quite common, and this is causing a great deal of concern for a lot of people because it goes against the function of Buddhism as a religion," Tschang quotes Xuan Fang, a professor at Renmin University's Institute for Studies of Buddhism and Religious Theory in Beijing. Tschang goes on to argue that throughout history China's Buddhists have always been related to material wealth and commerce. Since the Tang Dynasty, temples have served as hostels or run vegetarian restaurants to supplement their traditional sources of revenue such as donations and sales of incense.

Nowadays some Buddhist temples have come up with more creative ways to get more money from lay Buddhists, such as asking them to sponsor miniature gold Buddhas, halls, or roof tiles. One temple is selling one stick of incense for \$790, according to Chinese media reports.

With Shaolin Temple heritage as a case in point, the main arguments center round the following lines according to an online survey carried provided by *Beijing Review*^{vi}. According to Jiaping Fang (www.qq.com), Shaolin Temple is moving in line with the modern marketing rule, so people should not focus on the temple's commercial operation but should realize the significance of the Shaolin Temple's innovative practice. Fang thinks, with Shaolin Temple selling its products online, we should show more support and understanding to its business efforts; after all, we have many reasons to believe that in the near future, Shaolin Temple's commodities will become a brand of high reputation and a bridge for the spread and promotion of Chinese religious heritage. To Liang Yu (hlj.rednet.cn), the primary concern does not lie in whether Shaolin heritage should be promoted in a commercial model or not, but in whether this heritage can be developed and accepted by more people after it is run as a business. In the opinion of Zhoucha Zhao (www.sina.com.cn), Chinese traditions need to develop with time and splendor of a culture should aim to find its expression in new forms suitable for modernization. It is more than a historical heritage. Thus, to transform the Shaolin Temple into a leisure and entertainment venue and to run it as a business are not a big problem.

Amid the sea of commercialization, the Chinese government has also sensed the need to enshrine the institution of Shaolin. The government has applied to the UN to place "Shaolin Kungfu" on the "World Intangible Heritage" list, and it is also trying to add the physical Temple and surrounding structures on the "World Heritage List." To preserve the pristine aroma of the Shaolin Temple area, the government has relocated the kungfu schools and Shaolin paraphernalia shops to a nearby town. In general, under governmental management, the Shaolin Temple has tried its best to ensure its holistic survival through a philosophy that values both spectacle and preservation.^{vii}

Besides the historical Shaolin Temple, China has a long list of Buddhist Heritage tour destinations: the Four Famous Buddhist mountains^{viii}, the countless Buddhist monasteries, Buddhist heritage caves, Buddhist pagodas, Buddhist cultural festivals (both domestic and international), Buddha's Birthday celebrations, Leshan Giant Buddha, the largest stone sculpture of Buddha in the world, etc. What's more, China has also developed new and modernized Buddhist attractions in Buddhist communities with the aim to preserve the intangible Buddhist heritage. Nanshan Buddhism Cultural Tourism Zone is a typical instance of this trend. The China Travel Depot website introduces the Zone as follows. It is one of the most typical Buddhist cultural tourist attractions in China, located to the west of Sanya City in Hainan Province. The following three components make up this zone. The first one, Nanshan Buddhism Culture Park, boasts of a window on China's traditional Buddhist heritage culture. Next comes the Felicity and Longevity Culture Park with its marketed atmosphere of peace, harmony and long life. And the Nanshan Cultural Park highlights China's diverse Buddhist and folk customs. The most eye-catching feature of the zone is the three sided statue of Guan Yin Buddha and the numerous Buddhist Temples against the background of spectacular landscape and sea views. Featuring Chinese traditional Buddhist heritage, the Zone encompasses many religiously significant structures, such as Nanshan Temple, Nanhai Avalokiteshvara Statue, ancient Buddhism relics, Buddhism Cultural Exchange Center, Food Court for Vegetarians, and Boutiques for Buddhism adherents. The zone has been designated a Priority Project of China Tourism Development and earmarked for further development. The Zone's online advertisement (chinatraveldepot.com) highlights its commercial pursuit:

As a National AAAA Class Scenery Park, the tourism zone provides you with an ideal paradise where you can worship the Buddha, eat the vegetarian food and view the enchanting scenes. There are main scene parks in the area such as the Nanshan Buddhist culture garden, which displays traditional Buddhist culture and contains deep philosophy and moral meaning. Highlight of the tourism zone is a 108-meter high Kwan-yin Bodhisattva Statue on the sea.

The Monk Negotiates with the Ideologue and the Politician: Ideology and Politics of Chinese Buddhist Heritage Buddhism

According to Ryckmans (2008), two important ideological factors have contributed to a Chinese environment particularly conducive to lasting pursuits of historical and religious heritages: 1) that China's dominant ideology - Confucianism - extolled the values of the past; and 2) that China from a very early age developed an extraordinary sense of history - it actually possesses the longest

uninterrupted historiographical tradition. Ryckmans (Ibid) mentions the fact that Confucius considered Antiquity as the repository of all human values; therefore, as he notes, the Sage's mission was not to create anything anew, but merely to transmit the heritage of the Ancients. And Buddhism is one of the most representative in this line. Besides, Buddhism's growing influence has promoted a steady growth in the value of Buddhism's cultural and religious capital. Zhe Ji (2004) has noted that from the 1990s onwards, China's local authorities have sought to co-operate with Buddhism, expecting profit by its heritage capital through attracting investors and promoting tourism. But Ji also senses that the state did not cease to control the Buddhists although, motivated by economic interests, it did contribute to promoting and reconstructing Buddhism: the monasteries thus found new legitimacy and new space for development.

The relationship between Buddhism and the Chinese politics has been undergoing a complex and ever-changing relationship; it cannot be simplistically ascribed to the loosening or liberalization of political ideology. Although control and restrictions do exist, negotiations, compromises, and support are being carried out by the government for economic as well as social reasons like the building of a "harmonious society." Countless buildings, reconstructions and renovations of Buddhist monasteries have taken place all over China. Meanwhile, ideologically speaking, Buddhism, like other religions of China, used to be considered superstitions, accused of exploiting the masses and being parasites, so it has to be remolded and transformed into politically acceptable ideology. Therefore, as Ji (Ibid) has shown, slogans like "combining Chan with agriculture"^{ix} are instigated into Buddhist activities. Under this guideline, Ji goes on to narrate that monks are encouraged to do agricultural labor so as to contribute to building the state and show their patriotism; and with the development of economy and especially China's entry into the WTO, the government begins to see considerable opportunities in Buddhist economy, particularly in the case of Buddhist heritage tourism. The Chinese government contends that tourism has invigorated Buddhism, citing money spent on restoring more than 1,700 religious sites. Thus, it is not difficult to reach an agreement in terms of an aligned monetary interest on the part of the monks, the local government and the Communist state.

Ji (Ibid) summarizes that an essential ideological slogan has evolved that stresses a religious economy based on Buddhist cultural capital: Cultivate the good earth and make merit. This slogan carries the meaning of lay believers donating or contributing to the Buddhist temples and services so as to accumulate virtues. Practices of this principle are often found in activities like lay people going to the temples to ask the monks to carry out simple religious rituals as a way of interpreting Buddhist oracles or gaining merit for themselves and their close relatives. For instance, Kau Cim is one such traditional Buddhist fortune telling practice. It is originated in ancient China and is best known as "Oracle of Guan Yin" in Buddhist traditions. It can give those inquirers answers from the sacred oracle lot, or informally called Fortune Sticks by westerners. As a result, monks with acknowledged high virtues and profound understanding of the Buddhist truth can always attract more donations from lay believers, or in other words, more cultural capital. To Ji, the Buddhist monks, fully aware of the nature of their religious capital, take great care to display their historical heritage; and these days they consider it essential to piece together their own histories, to celebrate the anniversaries of their foundation or those of their great Masters of past years.

It might be argued that the state's favouring policies and liberalizing attitudes towards rebuilding Buddhist heritage sites and popularizing Buddhist doctrines and practices are means by which to exploit Buddhist heritage tourism for the maximum of economic benefits. In this respect, Ji (Ibid) has provided relevant examples as follows. On nearly all the Buddhist Mountain Sanctuaries, such as Mount Emei in Sichuan and Mount Heng in Hunan, Buddhism is at the heart of strategies for developing tourism. In Shaanxi, every year since 2001, the authorities in the city of Baoji have been organising a tourism festival at the Famen Temple. In 2003, the Zhejiang government did not hesitate to invent a festival called the Festival of the Bodhisattva of the South Sea on Mount Putuo, in order to stimulate the development of the tourist economy. As Ji summarizes the whole practice, the state uses its political power as capital to decide which practices and discourse were suitable for financial rewards. And in the case of Buddhism, its capital is founded on the symbolic power of its heritage sites, enabling it to mobilise believers or amateurs of Buddhist culture. The state's political capital cannot be directly exchanged for the economic capital of the Buddhist believers because it must first be converted into religious cultural capital. So the state, and in particular local government, is obliged to seek an alternative method of transaction with the monasteries. While the state can seize some Buddhist resources using its political power, it is nevertheless indispensable for it to co-operate with the monks, because the exploitation of the Buddhist cultural capital demands that Buddhist authority should grant it symbolic recognition.

Despite all this, it has to be noted that when economic interests wrought from Buddhist heritage tourism or other Buddhist practices are in conflict with political ideologies or basic state policies, the former has to give way to the latter. In the introduction to the book *God and Caesar in China: Policy Implications of Church-State Tensions* (2004), Kindopp explains that the Chinese "policy framework established after 1978 provides limited space for religious believers to practice their faith but also calls for comprehensive control measures to prevent religion from emerging as an independent social force," which is the tension at the heart of authoritarian government. "Religious faith commands an allegiance that transcends political authority, whereas the Communist Party's enduring imperative is to eliminate social and ideological competition." Yet, unlike Christianity, which has Western, imperialistic undertones, Buddhism, as a religion that sees all worldly pursuits as empty and illusory, must be counted as the least "harmful" to the dominant communist ideologies and thus is given relatively higher degrees of freedom. Moreover, the domestic Buddhist heritage tourism is also capable of counterbalancing the negative effects of the modern worshipping of money and materialistic possessions that lead to corruption of both the common masses and the government officials. So as an antidote to this moral decadence and as a filler in the moral vacuum, when it is no longer possible to return to the ideology of the Communist state of the Maoist era, Buddhism, especially its commercialized and popularized tours, is employed by the government to heighten people's moral consciousness and recall a collective national spirit.

In contemporary China, a fundamental nationalistic ideology becomes the binding force in China, guiding the operation of issues ranging from economy, politics and religion to even the Olympic Games. Bruce Kapferer focuses on how nationalist ideology, as a type of social theory used to make sense of the world, objectifies and sacralizes the nation; in particular, the notions of boundedness, continuity, and homogeneity are essential to the analysis of the reasoning about Chinese culture (Quoted Tuohy, 1991). Tuohy (1991) points out that several nationalistic terms keep appearing in Chinese Party and government discourses that resonate with Handler's notion of nationalism: patriotism (爱国主义), Love of Motherland (热爱祖国), and nationality self-esteem (民族自尊心); Love of Motherland is a rudimentary part of the moral ideology "needed on the part of every member of a nationality" and carries with it love of the country's rivers and mountains, citizens, culture, progress and prosperity, and so on (196). Therefore, Buddhist heritage tourism industry, as one integral manifestation of Chinese history and classical culture, has become instrumental in maintaining and promoting the nationalistic spirit of unity, continuity and harmony. The commercial exploitation of the Buddhist heritage can both boost the economy and, what's more important, "enhance nationality self-esteem, strengthen citizens' patriotism, assimilate the experiences of our predecessors, and build on their wisdom and good qualities" (Lin 1989, p. 65). The party's aim to integrate religion into the ideological doctrine of a socialist harmonious society is here most clearly illustrated.

The Temple Goes to the World: A Global Glimpse of Chinese Buddhist Heritage Tourism

Yao (2008) points out that China's traditional culture is being globalized at an increasing speed and with an overpowering vigor, even though there is an ongoing debate about whether the commercialization of the Shaolin Temple, or any other sort of Buddhist heritage tourism, is a means to survival in modern time or selling the sacred soul of the ancient site. The great international influence of Shaolin Kung Fu proves that it is an important symbol of Chinese culture, and it is argued that China's characteristic Buddhist heritage should play an important role in spreading Chinese culture around the world. *Beijing Review* (2006) has recorded Shi Yongxin when he comments that against the globalisation backdrop, Shaolin Temple has the responsibility to respond to the economic and cultural dominance of the Western world. Otherwise, Shaolin would not be able to maintain its social influence, which would fall short of the expectations of Shaolin's ancestry. Since Shaolin was born and has grown through international cultural exchange, it is aimed at becoming the global centre of the Chinese Chan Buddhist sect and a venue of international communication, said Shi. The *Review* (Ibid) features Liao Baoping, a columnist at *Guangming Daily*, as uttering the following: Buddhism is essentially a type of culture; culture evolves with multiple factors of modernity, so has Buddhism. Monks are not gods; they are humans with flesh and blood. The global TV competition for selecting new kung fu stars is essentially about the commercialization of a culture in a globalized world.

The case study of the Buddhist heritage such as Shaolin Temple reveals the measures that a developing country like China has taken to get involved in the vehement globalizing trend. In the Chinese Buddhist heritage tourism, we can see the religious-commercial-political dynamics at full play to secure China as a country of heritage and spirit as well as an indispensable international player. The globalization of Buddhist legacies like the Shaolin Temple is an effective means by which to make full

use of China's religious legacies for economic and political purposes in response to the Westernization, or rather Western cultural imperialism. The processes of secularization and commercialization in the form of tourism contribute to the globalization of the Chinese Buddhist heritage, all the while aided by a modernizing China entering the global economy. With the increasing and deepening effect of globalization, it is only natural for Buddhists to take up socially engaged Buddhism and to adapt themselves to the new phenomenon by globalizing their heritage sites and organizations. In this way, Chinese Buddhist heritage tourism enacts a post-modern scenario by dynamically synthesizing the secular and sacred, the traditional and the modern, the political and the commercial, as well as the local and the global.

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ⁱⁱ This point is adequately illustrated in Li, Jing 2004, 'Tourism enterprises, the state, and the construction of multiple Dai cultures in contemporary Xishuang Banna, China', *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, volume 9, no 4, pp. 315 – 330.

ⁱⁱⁱ In 1982 came the Jet Li movie "Shaolin Temple," inspiring a wave of tourism the Chinese government supported; it even helped rebuild the temple as a Buddhist heritage tour destination.

^{iv} There are about 70 kungfu schools, of which the largest has 15,000 students. The local economy has been greatly boosted by tourism and the martial arts schools.

^v This part is partly based on Guo Qiang, "Shaolin Temple Goes Commercial" <chinadaily.com.cn>.

^{vi} The following survey results are based on Yao Bin, "Should the Shaolin Temple Be Commercialized?" *Beijing Review*, NO. 31, JUL. 31, 2008.

^{vii} For an in-depth analysis of this topic, please refer to *Beijing Review*, vol. 49, no. 21, May 25, 2006, pp. 44-45, on which my comment is based.

^{viii} Pu Tuo Shan, Buddhist mountain of the east, Zhejiang province, 284 meters, sacred to Kuan-Yin, the Bodhisattva of Compassion; Wu Tai Shan, Buddhist mountain of the north, Shanxi province, 3061 meters. Sacred to Manjushri, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom; Emei Shan, Buddhist mountain of the west, Sichuan province, 3099 meters, sacred to Samantabhadra, the Bodhisattva of Benevolent Action; and Jiu Hua Shan, Buddhist mountain of the south, Anhui province, 1341 meters, sacred to Kshitigarbha, the Bodhisattva of Salvation.

^{ix} On the occasion of the reunion organised for the thirtieth anniversary of the Buddhist Association of China in 1983, Zhao Puchu, the Association's President, re-interpreted the slogan in these terms: "To adapt Buddhism to Chinese society, the Venerable Masters of Buddhism in our ancient history have, after several centuries of research and experimentation, established the rule 'combine Chan with agricultural work'. Quoted from Zhe Ji, "Buddhism and the State: The New Relationship."