



BUDDHISM

Rituals and Monastic Life

Zheng Lixin



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China Tour Guide

Buddhism: *Rituals and Monastic Life*

Zheng Lixin

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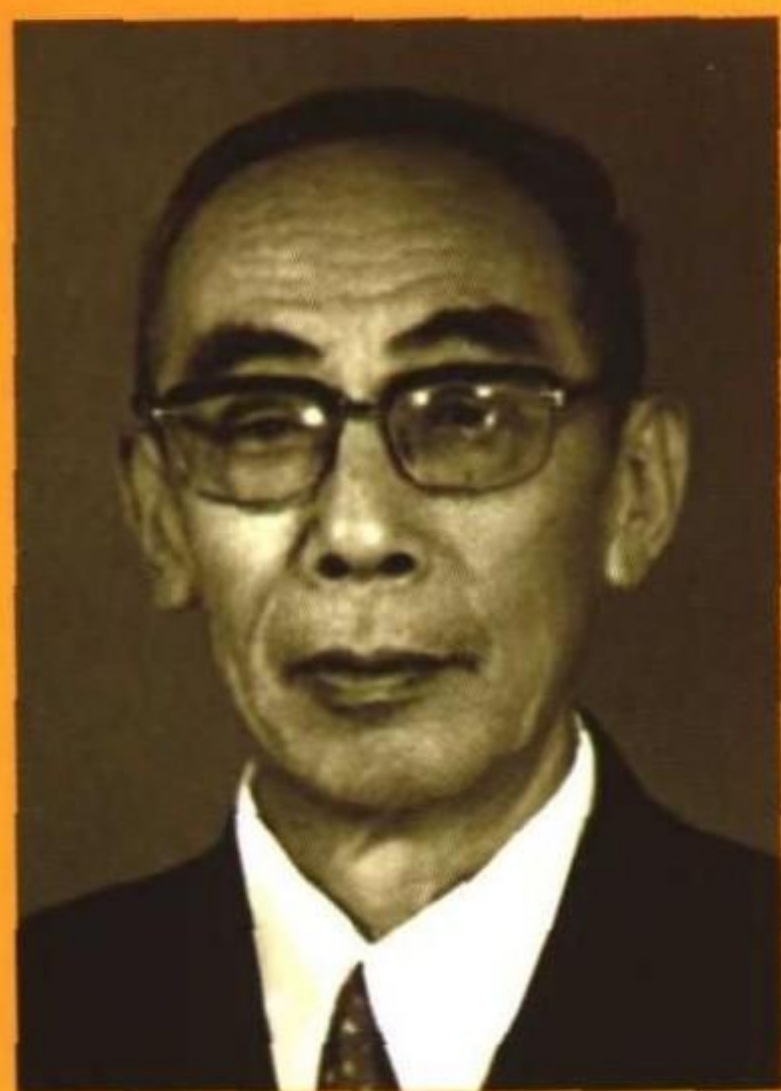
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Zheng Lixin, born in 1916, is a native of Jianli County, Hubei Province. He studied Buddhism in Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka) for many years before

returning to China in 1951. He became a staff member of the Chinese Buddhist Association, and was engaged in foreign relations in his capacity as deputy director of the International Department and acting director of the Department of Religious-affairs of the Chinese Buddhist Association. He wrote and translated a series of books, including *Buddhism in Beijing*, *The Basic Creeds of Southern Theravada Buddhism*, *India: Religion and Folklore*, *Buddhist Sights in India Visited*, and *The Wisdom of the Buddhist World*. For a period of time he catalogued and compiled materials for the publication of 19 books in the *Collection of Books as a Cultural Heritage*. He has also contributed large numbers of articles on the history of Buddhism to magazines and newspapers.

This book gives a brief introduction to the Chinese Buddhist beliefs, history, sects, art, architecture, pagodas, monasteries, and sutras translated into Chinese from the original Sanskrit and other Indian languages. It also describes the four sacred Buddhist mountains and five major grottoes travelers may wish to see, the organization of the Buddhist monasteries and life in the cloisters, Buddhist festivals and major Buddhist activities, as well as relations between Chinese and foreign Buddhist societies and organizations. Written in a lively and conversational style, with accurate historical references and fascinating legends and stories, this book is not only suitable for tourists at home and abroad, but also worth reading by anyone interested in the past and present of Buddhism in China.

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Preface

Chinese Buddhism has a history of more than 2,000 years since it was first introduced into China. It features the coexistence of three language-family types of Buddhism, namely, Chinese, Tibetan, and Pali Buddhism that are found within a territory of 9,600,000 sq km. But the three language-family types of Buddhism spread into China in succession, and they are characterized by different forms and contents. Due to the coexistence of the three language-family types of Buddhism, China abounds in Buddhist literature and other materials, an accumulation perhaps unparalleled in the world.

The book *Buddhism: Rituals and Monastic Life* in the *China Tour Guide* series, written by Zheng Lixin, puts emphasis on each aspect of Chinese Buddhism. For example, this book gives a brief introduction to the history, sects, relationship between Chinese and foreign Buddhists, temples, four famous mountains, monks' societies and organizations, classics of Sanzang (*Tripitaka*), grotto arts, Buddhist festivals, major Buddhist activities, and Buddhist societies and organizations. This book is not only suitable for tourists at home and abroad, but also worth reading by anyone who wants to know about Chinese Buddhism. The book is written in an easy and fluent style with accurate historical records and some interesting legends and stories. As this book was soon

to be published, Mr. Zheng wanted me to write some words, and I could not decline. To show my willingness and to accumulate virtue, I just wrote the above paragraph as the book's preface.

Dao Shuren

Vice-President of the
Chinese Buddhist Association

Foreword

With a chronicled history of some 5,000 years, China is one of the oldest civilizations in the world. The splendid Chinese culture has made important contributions to the progress and development of humanity, and holds forth the fascination of fabulous natural scenes and richly diversified characters and manners. Many of the scenic spots and sites of cultural and historical interest are associated with Buddhism.

Buddhism in this country falls into three language systems: Chinese, Tibetan, and Pali. The emphasis in this book is on Chinese Buddhism, with a brief introduction to Tibetan and Pali Buddhism in Chapter 1.

Buddhism spread to China from India during the Han Dynasty around the first century BC. However, it took some 600 years for Buddhism to become part of the Chinese cultural environment. While its basic creeds remain largely intact, major changes have taken place in both the spiritual and material life of the cloisters. Such changes were conducive to the dissemination and development of Buddhism, for dogmatism and conservatism would have gotten this religion nowhere in an alien land. After Buddhism met its demise in India, China became its second cradle and the origin for various sects in many other countries and regions.

Tourism is now booming in this country because of ongoing

reform and the opening up to the outside world. Visitors are arriving in droves, and many of them are curious about the religious life of the Chinese. This book is designed to satisfy that curiosity by telling a little about every aspect of Chinese Buddhism.

The emergence of the three language systems of Buddhism in China tallied with the three stages of development of Buddhism in India. While the Han-inhabited regions became repositories of Buddhism in the intermediary stage of its development during the first century BC, it was not until the seventh to eighth centuries that the early and late stages of Buddhism found their way into Yunnan and Tibet. The ups and downs of Buddhism in these three stages of development are dealt with in Chapter 1.

After Buddhism came to China, different sects began to emerge. The Tiantai sect was the first, and it was followed by seven others. Chapter 2 renders a brief account of the origin of each of these sects and their tenets.

Buddhism advocates the delivery of the multitude of people from misery through benevolence, and admonishes people to perform good deeds during their lifetimes. Buddhists in China have always maintained friendly cultural exchanges with their counterparts in other Asian countries. From Chapter 3 readers may learn some of the Buddha's teachings and gain some idea about Buddhist exchanges between China and the rest of Asia.

Chapters 4 and 5 take a look at the architecture, layout, and interior furnishings of Buddhist temples in this country, and provide the reader with a brief tour of the four holy mountains and some of the major ancestral establishments of the eight sects of Chinese Buddhism. As the saying goes, "Of all the renowned mountains under heaven, most are home to monks." These four mountains are not only peppered with monasteries

and temples, but also each is endowed with a divine landscape. No visit to this country is complete without seeing these mountains. This is particularly the case for tourists who believe in Buddhism.

Chapter 6 answers a series of questions about the monks' organizational structure, commandments and prohibitions, their financial sources, and life in the cloisters.

The abundance of Buddhist canonical writings and translations are a crystallization of two millennia's diligent work by scholars at home and scholars from abroad. These books, known as the *dharma*, are one of Buddhism's *triratna* (three treasures, the other two being the Buddha and Sangha) as well as a component part of the Chinese cultural heritage. The origin and formation of these books, the translation work associated with them, and the composition of the *Tripitaka* are explored in Chapter 7.

Buddhist grottoes are found all over the land. One of them, the Dunhuang Grottoes, has had a history of 1,600 years since it came under construction during the Western and Eastern Jin dynasties (265-420), and compares favourably with the famous Ajanta Caves of India in terms of engineering size and artistic attainment in sculpture and mural painting. These grottoes give apt expression to the diligence and wisdom of the labouring people of ancient China. Chapter 8 introduces five major grottoes the traveler may wish to see.

The traveler is invariably enchanted by the ritualistic activities of Buddhist festivals. However, of all the festive and ceremonious occasions in a Chinese temple, only the ceremony that marks the birthday of Sakyamuni is relatively elaborate. This and some other rituals are dealt with in Chapter 9 as an orientation for those wishing to take a ringside look at what is happening in a Chinese monastery.

Chapter 10 acquaints the reader with Buddhist organizations

and undertakings in present-day China, with the spotlight on the Chinese Buddhist Association and its achievements.

Numerous Buddhist temples are found in urban and rural areas. Apart from those already mentioned in the previous chapters, a selection of fifty important temples is featured in the Appendix for the use of the prospective visitor.

Chapter 1

A General Situation of Chinese Buddhism

1. Introduction and Development of Han Buddhism

The term “Han Buddhism,” or to be exact “Buddhism in the Chinese Language,” can be attributed to the fact that after Buddhism was brought into China all its scriptures have been translated into Chinese.

Opinions differ as to exactly when Buddhism spread into China, but only two of them prevail.

One has it that Buddhism was brought into this country in 2 BC (1st year of the Yuanshou reign, Western Han Dynasty), when Yicun arrived from Indo-Scythae to dictate Buddhist scriptures to a man named Qin Jingxian.

The other is based on the legend that in 64 AD (7th year of the Yongping reign, Eastern Han Dynasty), Liu Zhuang, or Emperor Mingdi, dreamed one night of a golden man wearing a sparkling necklace who was flying over his palace. At morning court the following day, he asked his ministers what this incident implied. Fu Yi, the grand scribe, replied, “I heard that there is a god in the West whose name is Buddha, and he might be the person Your Majesty dreamed of.” Convinced, the emperor dispatched an 18-member mission headed by Cai Yin to go to the West in search of the Buddhist doctrine. In 67 AD (10th year of

the Yongping reign), the mission arrived in Indo-Scythae where they met two Indian monks, Kasyapamatanga and Gobharana. At Cai Yin's invitation, the two monks brought Buddhist scriptures and sculptures to Luoyang, the Chinese capital, where they began to translate the *Forty-two Chapter Sutra* into Chinese. Their arrival is thus thought to be the beginning of the dissemination of Buddhism in China.

It is difficult to tell which of the two ideas holds water. While scholars espouse the first opinion, the second is widely believed among Buddhists. However, given the narrow gap of seventy years between the two, both theories indicate that Buddhism first made inroads into China during the interregnum between the Western and Eastern Han dynasties.

In the beginning the Chinese regarded the Buddha as a god from some alien land, putting him on a par with the Yellow Emperor, Laozi, or immortals well versed in the art of divination¹, and the popularity of Buddhism was limited to the elite. However, it did not take long for Buddhism to acquire a following among the common people, despite the absence of canonical texts. It was not until the mid-second century that monks began to arrive from the Western Territories to preach the doctrines and translate the scriptures. According to history books, An Shigao, a prince of Parthia (present-day Iran), and Lokaksema from Indo-Scythae, were the two earliest monks to arrive as Buddhist translators. With more and more scriptures being translated into Chinese, Buddhism gradually presented itself to the Chinese not only as source of spiritual solace but also as a profound philosophy that played an important role in the development of civilization.

¹ Both the Yellow Emperor and Laozi are honored as founders of Taoism, and the "immortals" here refer to those Taoist alchemists who successfully achieved immortality and mastered the unpredictable art of divination.