

Article

The Trajectory of Revival: Wenshu Monastery 1978–2006

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Abstract: This study traces the trajectory of the Wenshu Monastery's revival during the reform era of China. In this special but duplicable case, we generalize three key strategies employed by the Wenshu Monastery to enhance its reputation and status—the binomial system, centralized organizational structure, and officialization—in an attempt to rethink the patterns of development of local religious institutions in modern China.

Keywords: Wenshu Monastery; revival; binomial system; centralized organizational structure; officialization



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1. Introduction

Chengdu 成都, owing to the city's relative stability, freedom from imperial constraints, and support from the local lay community, is widely credited for the flourishing of Buddhism since the Northern and Southern Dynasties (386–589) (Wong 1998). Some representative local temples, such as the Daci Temple (Daci Si 大慈寺), Zhaojue Temple (Zhaojue Si 昭覺寺), and Baoguang Temple (Baoguang Si 寶光寺), once enjoyed a high status in Chinese Buddhist history. However, in the three decades commencing in 1949, these temples suffered from destruction due to anti-religion campaigns (Marsh 2011). Although restrictive religious policies were eased in the 1980s, none of these institutions have since been able to restore their past splendor. Nevertheless, another temple emerged from obscurity that had lasted for hundreds of years—the Wenshu Monastery (Wenshu Yuan 文殊院)¹—and is now the representative of Buddhism in Chengdu, or perhaps even in Southwest China. To elucidate how such an unknown monastery suddenly rose to prominence in the reform era (1978–) and finally became the center of Buddhism in Southwest China, in the present study, three key strategies employed by the Wenshu Monastery to enhance its reputation and status during 1978–2006 are examined²—the binomial system, centralized organizational structure, and officialization—in an attempt to rethink the patterns of development of local religious institutions in modern China. This study highly relies on local gazetteers and monastic publications. Furthermore, interviews with two senior volunteers of the Wenshu Monastery and Niangniang Temple (Niangniang Miao 娘娘廟) were conducted to help acquire a clearer picture of the divergent paths that these two local religious institutions are taking.

2. Binomial System

The “binomial system” concept stems from Chinese tradition of giving two or more names to one person (Gao 2008) and is a practical method for dealing with dilemmas. The Wenshu Monastery is a successful example of utilizing the binomial system to mitigate conflicts between religion and science, traditional and modern norms, and temple ownership and public ownership.

¹ According to some legends, the history of the Wenshu Monastery could trace back to the Sui Dynasty (581–618), but the real founder of today's Wenshu Monastery is a Qing monk named Cidu Haiyue 慈篤海月 (1659–1720), a dharma grandson of the well-known Chan master Poshan Haiming 破山海明 (1597–1666).

² In this article, the discussion begins in 1978, when the monastery resumed its religious activities after the Cultural Revolution, and ends in 2006 when the construction of the Wenshu Plaza (Wenshu Fang 文殊坊) was completed.

2.1. Director and Abbot

Traditionally, the abbot of a temple was elected by the monks residing in the temple and had absolute power over the personnel management, including the appointment of stewards (Zhi Shi 執事) and other positions. This tradition continued until the mid-1950s, when the supreme leader and stewards were replaced by “Administrative Office of the Temple” (Siyuan Guanli Weiyuan Hui 寺院管理委員會) which was controlled by a director and consisted solely of government or military officers, thus completely excluding the monks (Yang 2017). In this case, the director and abbot were two mutually exclusive positions.

In 1978, soon after the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), the abbot Kuan Lin 寬霖 (1905–1999) received an official notice of reinstatement (Tan 2000). However, at that time, the Wenshu Monastery was still controlled by the government’s administrative office led by the director Wang Zhichao 王志超 who was an officer of the Chengdu Religious Bureau (Chengdu Zongjiao Ju 成都宗教局). In the years that followed, more and more monks gradually returned to the Wenshu Monastery with the expectation of resuming their former life, but they were disappointed to find that the reality was far from what they had imagined, as the abbot’s living room (Zhang Shi 丈室) was still used as an office by the administrative staff, and other monks’ rooms (Seng Liao 僧寮) served as the staff dormitory (Chengdu Qingyangqu Zhengxie Wenshi Yu Xuexi Weiyuan Hui 2003). Consequently, monks were now forced to live in the meditation hall (Chan Tang 禪堂) and, despite being the previous owners of the monastery, they were tasked with daily cleaning duties and repair work. Their dire situation was exacerbated further in 1979 when the Buddhist Association of Chengdu (Chengdu Fojiao Xiehui 成都市佛教協會) held its first meeting since the Cultural Revolution in which Kuan Lin was compelled to hand over the keys to the Depository of Buddhist Sutras (Cangjing Lou 藏經樓) where many precious antiques were stored (Tan 2000). Fortunately, only a year later, the State Council published Document No. 188 which announced that all the buildings belonging to religious groups shall be returned to them (Chengdu Fojiao Xiehui 2007). Encouraged by this favorable turn of events, Kuan Lin spent the next 18 months appealing to the Chengdu Religious Bureau to abolish the Administrative Office of the Temple’s ownership of the Wenshu Monastery and return the property to the monks. In 1982, the government staff finally withdrew from the monastery, allowing the Buddhist Association of Chengdu to take over. Concurrently, another administrative organization denoted as the Relics Preservation Team (Wenwu Baohu Gongzuo Dui 文物保護工作隊) was established, with Kuan Lin and another monk from the Wenshu Monastery as the team consultants (Tan 2000). As monks still had no managerial power, they eventually realized that the local government would never relinquish its domination of the monastery. Hence, they decided to recapture management authority by having Kuan Lin co-hold the positions of the abbot of the temple and the leader of the administrative organization, with other former stewards serving on the management committee.

Three years of extensive efforts finally yielded results, as in 1985 the local government officially returned the ownership of the Wenshu Monastery to the monks (Chengdu Difangzhi Bianwei Hui 1998), mandating withdrawal of the Relics Preservation Team. The Administrative Office of the Temple, which was later renamed “Administrative Committee” (Siyuan Guanli Weiyuan Hui 寺院管理委員會), was still in existence but functioned differently, as Kuan Lin—who had been the abbot of the Wenshu Monastery since 1953—became the new director. On his assumption of duty, Kuan Lin implemented a drastic organizational reform, as he combined the traditional steward system with the administrative committee system and assigned the previous stewards as the managers of some newly established departments. This binomial system of “Yitao Banzi, Liangkuai Paizi” (one administrative committee takes charge of two managerial systems 一套班子, 兩塊牌子) allowed the monks to regain administrative power over the temple, while also avoiding infringing upon the government’s absolute control by nominally retaining the administra-

tive office system. As a result, the monks could undertake various positions concurrently without conflicts, while maintaining normal operation of the monastery.

As can be seen from the above, the so-called binomial system is very effective in Chinese society where everything in the world is perceived as dualistic or even pluralistic. Indeed, the old system of the Wenshu Monastery led by the abbot is from the past, i.e., the old self, and the new system of the Wenshu Monastery managed by the director signifies the present, or the new self. The old self is rooted in tradition and history, while the new self reflects modern trends and a desire to grow and transform. It can also be said that the old self represents the monks' dreams and aspirations, while the new self is a reflection of the requirements of the contemporary society. While these positions are divergent, as demonstrated by the Wenshu Monastery, the old and the new self can coexist and find common ground to overcome conflicts and satisfy sometimes competing needs.

2.2. Wenshu Plaza and Wenshu Monastery

In ancient times, most governments recognized the legitimacy of temples' ownership of their lands, and in some dynasties such as Liang 梁 (502–557), they even held an acquiescent attitude towards the expansion of temple lands. Therefore, temples were known as "Temple Landlords" as the monasteries were financed by controlling lands and collecting rent from neighboring farmers (Xie 2009). However, this system did not eliminate conflicts between temples and governments—every time temples expanded their lands and infringed upon governments' power, large-scale persecutions would occur, such as the persecution (840–846) led by the Emperor Wuzong 武宗 (814–846) of the Tang Dynasty (Chen 1964).

Since 1949, such issue became more complicated. In Chengdu, the last two decades of the 20th century were riddled with conflicts pertaining to lands owned by temples. The problems began in 1979, when the Zhaojue Temple turned to the Buddhist Association of Chengdu for help because the Zoo of Chengdu was forcibly occupying their lands (Li 2017). This dispute remains unresolved, and even today, the dagoba of Yuanwu Keqing 圓悟克勤 (1063–1135), an eminent monk of the Song Dynasty, is still located in the zoo. One year later, the nuns of the Aidao Monastery (Aidao Tang 愛道堂), a renowned Buddhist convent, submitted an application to the government requesting to have their temple reopened to the public, which was rejected on the grounds of their lack of ownership of the lands because, at that time, part of the Aidao Monastery was occupied by nearby residents who were unwilling to move (Chengdu Difangzhi Bianwei Hui 1998). Although the temple was eventually reopened after endless appeals, the nuns never regained the ownership of the lands. Then, in 1985, a famous temple of Gelug, the Jinci Temple (Jinci Si 近慈寺), was closed down for real estate development and the resident monks were forced to move to the faraway Shijing Temple (Shijing Si 石經寺) (Chengdu Difangzhi Bianwei Hui 1998).

Owing to these and similar disputes, the monks of the Wenshu Monastery sensed that they would soon be similarly affected because, from 1980s to 2000s, Chengdu—like other major cities in China—had witnessed a surge of real estate development. Thus, as a monastery that is located at the center of Chengdu, the Wenshu Monastery is seen as a piece of "treasured land" with untapped financial potential. Furthermore, the monastery is both a place of worship and a cultural heritage—according to the official ideology and the local elites' narrative, the former was dross (Zaopo 糟粕) that was to be discarded, while the latter was an essence (Jinghua 精華) which should be extracted (Quqi Zaopo, Quqi Jinghua 去其糟粕, 取其精華). As a result, some officials proposed transforming the monastery into a museum, which would also mean making full use of its precious lands. Although this suggestion was presented as a protective measure, from the standpoint of the monks, it was even crueler than complete destruction.

Given the context presented above, attempts must be made to provide a solution that would protect the lands of the Wenshu Monastery without damaging its religious nature while also satisfying the needs of all stakeholders—once again, the strategy of the binomial system was employed—a proposal came up which aimed at establishing a

Chuanxi Museum (Chuanxi Bowu Guan 川西博物館) to display religious relics and folk culture. This was a departure from most of its contemporary protective measures that would inevitably result in a loss of vitality of the traditional buildings, as the goal was to construct a living museum with no changes to the main buildings of the Wenshu Monastery while partly reconstructing the surrounding dwellings to be used as restaurants and shops (Yuan 2016). The proposed project was well received both by the local government and the monastery and was completed in 2006. In the same year, the entire area, including the Wenshu Monastery and its surroundings, was renamed as Wenshu Plaza (Zhou 2008).

By transforming the Wenshu Monastery into Wenshu Plaza, the intellectual elites acquired their desired museum to protect cultural relics, while the government gained endless commercial opportunities, and the Wenshu Monastery obtained legitimate status in academic and political contexts. In fact, the monastery became more important, since such a famous scenic spot attracted visitors to the Wenshu Plaza, which gradually became an appendage of the Wenshu Monastery (See Figure 1). In sum, the proposed solution increased the value of both institutions, thus ensuring their long-term sustainability.



Figure 1. Wenshu Plaza and Wenshu Monastery. (Liao and Chen 2012).

3. Centralized Pattern: Kuan Lin 宽霖 and Zong Xing 宗性

C. K. Yang (1961) described Chinese religious life as “decentralized” due to the absence of a powerful centralized priesthood that would dominate and guide religious life or direct the operations of the secular social institutions, which resulted in the emergence of a few large or well-organized lay groups. Therefore, the lay Buddhists and Daoists participated in religious activities and community life, such as charity, education, and enforcement of moral discipline individually without any centralized guidance or oversight. After the Cultural Revolution, two remarkable abbots of the Wenshu Monastery attempted to overcome these limitations and began to organize and coordinate religious life and lay activities, giving rise to a “centralized structure.”

3.1. Kuan Lin: Rehabilitation and Consolidation of the Buddhist Associations

Kuan Lin was born in Xindu 新都 and became a monk when he was still a child. By traveling all over China during his youth, he laid foundations for his profound knowledge and excellent social skills. In 1953, he was appointed the abbot of the Wenshu Monastery and immediately put his outstanding leadership and communication skills into practice (Tan 2000). For example, he made great effort to acquire and enshrine the parietal-bone relic of Xuan Zang 玄奘 (602–664) in his temple, while quickly gaining the government’s trust by carrying out “Orchid Diplomacy” (Lanhua Waijiao 兰花外交) to

build solid contact with Zhu De 朱德 (1886–1976), who was at that time the vice president of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) (Tan 2000). Nevertheless, his greatest contribution was the rehabilitation of the Buddhist Association of Chengdu, which further strengthened his leadership position in the Buddhist circle.

According to the local gazetteer, before 1949, ten Buddhist associations of varied sizes had already been established in Chengdu, as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. List of the Buddhist associations in Chengdu before 1949, including locations and persons in charge.

Name	Location	Person in Charge
The Buddhist Association of Shuangliu 双流	Weituo Monastery 韦驮堂	Han Shou 含寿
The Buddhist Association of Huayang 华阳	Daci Temple 大慈寺	Fang Yu 方玉
The Buddhist Association of Chengdu 成都县	Yaoguang Temple 尧光寺	Fo Ru, Ding Hui, Sun Zhicheng 佛如, 定慧, 孙质成
The Buddhist Association of Pengian 彭县		De Chong, Zhao Cheng, Guang Chao 德崇, 昭乘, 广超
The Buddhist Association of Pixian 郫县		Chang Yuan, Long Guang 昌圆, 隆光
The Buddhist Association of Guaxian 灌县		
The Buddhist Association of Xinjin 新津		Ji Shan, Jin Xuan, Fa Hu, Jue Hong, Hong Ji 寂善, 静轩, 法忽, 觉洪, 洪基
The Buddhist Association of Wenjiang 温江		Jin Shan, Cong Kuan, Kuan Ren, Xuan Zhang 静山, 从宽, 宽仁, 宣章
The Buddhist Association of Chongqing 崇庆	Changhuang Temple 城隍庙	
The Buddhist Association of Dayi 大邑	Wenchang Palace 文昌宫	Dao Ben, Shen Lang, Zu Jie 道本, 深朗, 祖戒

(Sichuan Difangzhi Bianwei Hui 1998).

As can be seen from Table 1, although Buddhist associations were established in almost every county, they were managed autonomously, without a centralized system, and were self-governed. In addition to major festivals and ceremonies, different monks led different groups of lay Buddhists when participating in various activities.

In an effort to integrate these activities, in 1979, Kuan Lin proposed establishing a unified organization to standardize the management of Buddhist associations in different counties, which was soon approved by the local government. Not surprisingly, the head office of this unified organization was at the Wenshu Monastery (Wenshu Monastery 2009).

On 5 January 1982, the first representative assembly of the Buddhist Association of Chengdu was held in the Wenshu Monastery which granted the administration authority of the Buddhist Association of Chengdu over all local Buddhist associations and elected the presidents as well as the committee members of the local associations. In this assembly, the Wenshu Monastery was officially selected as the head office of the association, proposing that two of its monks—Yong Guang 永光 (1902–1988) and Kuan Lin—should assume the positions of the president and the vice president, respectively. Although both monks accepted their positions, considering Yong Guang’s advanced age, he would be assisted by Kuan Lin in routine affairs (Chengdu Difangzhi Bianwei Hui 1998). During his presidency, Kuan Lin once again demonstrated his excellent leadership and great influence upon the Buddhist circles. He not only continued consolidating the status of the Wenshu Monastery as the leading temple and the Buddhist center of Chengdu but also held a large number of events centered at the Wenshu Monastery with active participation from branch

associations, such as the “Peace Prayer Ceremony” (Heping Qidao Fahui 和平祈禱法會) which echoed the United Nations’ (UN) “Year of Peace” and caused a sensation in China (Wenshu Monastery 2009).

As expected, in 1987, Kuan Lin was elected as the honorary president of the Buddhist Association of Sichuan (Chengdu Difangzhi Bianwei Hui 1998). Shortly before this appointment, he had attained his goal of moving the Buddhist Association of Sichuan into the Wenshu Monastery, which thus became the Buddhist center of Sichuan, and its abbot assumed the position of the Buddhist leader of Sichuan.

At present, the relationship between the Wenshu Monastery and other temples resembles that between an ancient Chinese guild and its members (See Figure 2). As the undisputed leader, whenever disagreements among temples or conflicts between monks occur (and especially when a local Buddhist association faces a dilemma), they turn to the Wenshu Monastery for arbitration, which usually yields a satisfying solution. Moreover, as every action of the Wenshu Monastery draws attention from or is emulated by other temples in Chengdu or even Sichuan, its authority is self-evident. Most importantly, due to the presence of such a well-respected leading temple and unified associations, Buddhism in Chengdu and Sichuan has achieved considerable development.

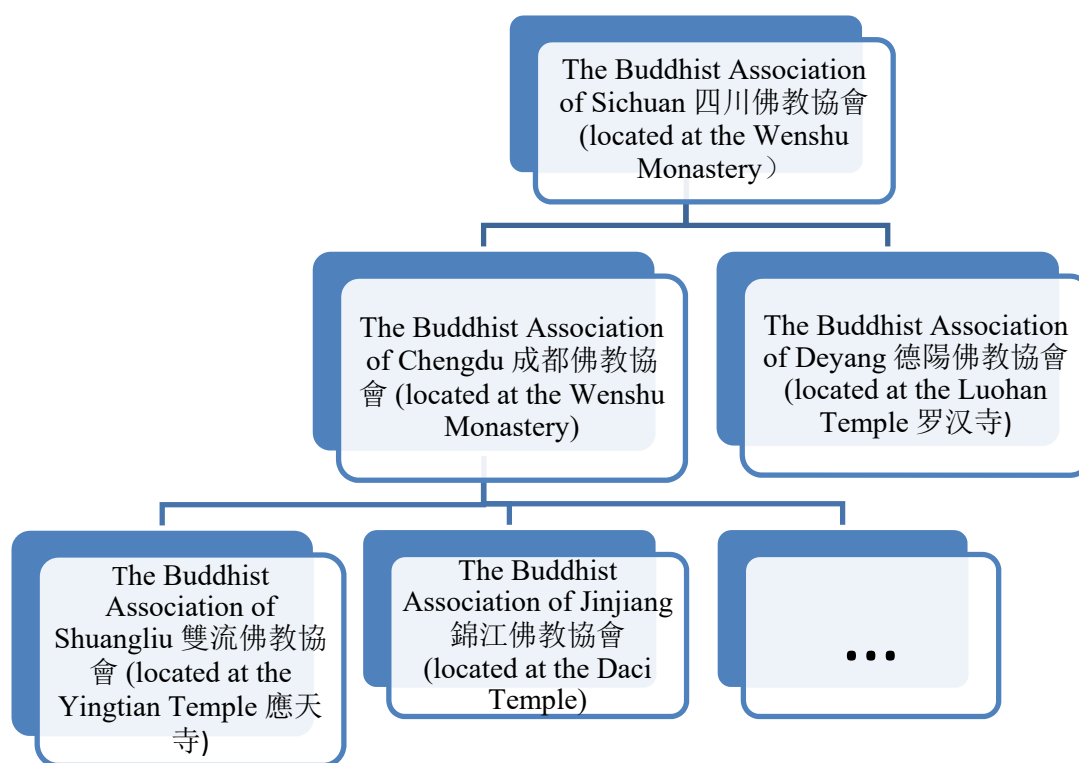


Figure 2. The structure of the Buddhist associations in Sichuan after 1987 (Wenshu Monastery 2009, p. 37).

3.2. Zong Xing: Rehabilitation of Lay Buddhist Groups

“Laymen Buddhism” (Jushi Fojiao 居士佛教) is a notable characteristic of Chinese Buddhism that emphasizes the importance of lay Buddhists. However, due to the tradition of polytheism and the dominance of the magical factor in Chinese religious life, development of an organized laity for a certain temple or uniting the laymen as a functioning religious group is difficult (Yang 1961). Nonetheless, during the Republican Period (1912–1949), several Buddhist groups organized by lay Buddhists operated successfully in Chengdu. As these Buddhist groups were independent and lacked cooperation, their functioning or even existence was constantly threatened by difficulties such as lack of funding or personnel. Therefore, carefully balancing the relationship between the temple

and laymen and organizing the lay Buddhist groups are challenges that every abbot of the Wenshu Monastery has to face.

Zong Xing, Kuan Lin's successor, who was born in 1973, entered the Buddhist Academy of China (Zhongguo Foxue Yuan 中國佛學院) at the age of 21 and obtained a Master's degree six years later. Known for being erudite, Zong Xing has a comprehensive understanding of the role of lay Buddhists (Li and Qing 2016). Even before he took over the Wenshu Monastery, he tried to recruit a large group of laymen to help handle some daily routines and organize activities such as freeing captive animals (Fangsheng 放生). This allowed him to develop strong relationships with these laymen, who appreciated his interest in their daily life and his active involvement in welfare projects for the lay staff (Dai Qian, personal communication, 10 November 2013). In 2002, Zong Xing reinstated the previously closed Sichuan Buddhist Charity Foundation (Sichuan Fojiao Cishan Gongde Hui 四川佛教慈善功德會). To ensure its success, he replaced the original monk-dominated organizational structure by a layman-dominated one and implemented a variety of donations, poverty alleviation, and disaster relief efforts, all of which greatly mobilized the lay Buddhists' enthusiasm.

Immediately after Zong Xing officially took the position of the abbot in 2003, the Young Buddhist Society (Qingnian Fojiao Hui 青年佛教會) was established, allowing its members to actively participate in the management of the Wenshu Monastery as well as benefit from workshops on Buddhist history and teachings provided by visiting experts and scholars. Besides developing the lay Buddhist group for the Wenshu Monastery, Zong Xing also promoted communication among lay Buddhist groups from different temples, which quickly led to the establishment of the most influential lay Buddhist group in Chengdu. In 2004, taking advantage of the opportunity provided by the first Meditation Camp (Chanxiu Ying 禪修營), Zong Xing merged the Young Buddhist Society with the Wenshu Monastery Volunteer Union (Wenshuyuan Yigong Xiehui 文殊院義工協會) to form the Sichuan Young Buddhist Society (Sichuan Qingnian Fojiao Hui 四川青年佛教會) and spared no effort in expanding it (Wenshu Monastery 2009). Then, through the Buddhist Association of Chengdu, he appealed for resource sharing among Buddhist organizations and participation in the Sichuan Young Buddhist Society, allowing this newly established body to gradually emerge as the center of all lay Buddhist groups in Sichuan. Having achieved full centralization of the lay Buddhist groups in Sichuan, instead of forcing the lay Buddhists to accept his ideas and teachings, Zong Xing encouraged young Buddhists to make contributions to the Wenshu Monastery based on their own interests and specialties, which is in line with his vision of "Undertaking, Contributing, Enjoying, and Tolerating" (Chengdan, Fengxian, Huanxi, Baorong 承擔, 奉獻, 歡喜, 包容) (Wenshu Monastery 2009).

The lay Buddhist group is a bridge connecting the temple with the secular world, as it acts as a representative of Buddhism outside the temple, and thus strives to resolve any conflicts between these realms. Moreover, a well-organized and highly-trained lay Buddhist group is always authoritative, allowing it to guide the religious activities of lay Buddhists while serving the interests of the temple. From this point of view, the Sichuan Young Buddhist Society could be regarded as a highly effective lay Buddhist group, as it is not only the center of all lay Buddhist activities in Sichuan, but also serves the Wenshu Monastery, thus helping reinforce its influence among lay Buddhists. This is once again in keeping with the binomial system, as the two functions constantly supplement and strengthen each other.

4. Officialization: Wenshu Monastery and Niangniang Temple

Feuchtwang (1974) classified the temples in Taipei during the 20th century into territorial and universalistic temples. The former celebrated festivals in the poorer and older parts of Taipei, while the latter were located in the newer and wealthier parts of the city and their ceremonies were closely identified with the central government. Although this classification is a generalization of the temples in Taipei, it could also apply to two temples in Chengdu—Wenshu Monastery and Niangniang Temple—even though both are located

at the most prosperous street of Chengdu. Yet, despite being separated by a single wall, the two temples are poles apart.

Niangniang Temple, also known as Guangsheng Palace (Guangsheng Gong 廣生宮), is a family temple built by Liu Chen 劉謙 (?–263), the Prince Beidi (Beidi Wang 北地王), in the Three Kingdoms Period (220–280). Later, it was used to commemorate Liu Chen and his wife Lady Cui (Cuishi Niangniang 崔氏娘娘) (?–263). According to a folk tale, Lady Cui is a goddess who endows people with sons, due to which the Guangsheng Palace is also called Niangniang Temple. On March 3rd of the lunar year—which is recognized as Lady Cui's birthday that was formerly one of the grandest local festivals in Chengdu—even today the locals pray for sons and children's health (Qingyangqu Difangzhi Bianwei Hui 2010). Throughout ancient times, the Niangniang Temple attracted pilgrims in large numbers, which allowed it to expand considerably, especially during the Kangxi Period (1654–1722) when it covered an area of 1730 m² and had over 70 halls. Aside from its reputed magical efficacy, it is also notable for its main god and goddess, Liu Chen and Lady Cui, who gave their lives for their country as the ultimate expression of patriotism and loyalty. Therefore, the Niangniang Temple had always been favored and supported by the local as well as central government. It gradually became an institution for official memorial ceremonies, thereby emerging as a universalistic temple, in contrast to the Wenshu Monastery, which was just an ordinary local temple.

However, after 1978, the situation reversed. With the return of the monks, religious rites were immediately resumed in the Wenshu Monastery, which rendered it a “Model Temple” under the new religious policy (Pengxi Zhengxie Wenshi Ziliao Yanjiu Weiyuan Hui 1986). At that time, Niangniang Temple was still a residential zone with only one Daoist nun Sun Zhixing 孫至興 (1920–2006) guarding the remaining halls of the temple (Qingyangqu Difangzhi Bianwei Hui 2010). In 1980, seizing the opportunity offered by reception for Japanese visitors, the Wenshu Monastery applied for recruiting monks and organizing the first “Three Platforms of Precepts Assembly” (Santan Dajie Fahui 三壇大戒法會) since the Cultural Revolution. The event was accidentally recorded by a CCTV (China Central Television) program “About Changjiang” (Huashuo Changjiang 话说长江), which enabled the Wenshu Monastery to come into the national spotlight (Wenshu Monastery 2009). In the same year, the local government forced over 30 residents to move out of the Niangniang Temple and returned ownership of their homes to Sun Zhixing. However, due to extensive damage, the restoration work on these buildings is still ongoing (Qingyangqu Difangzhi Bianwei Hui 2010).

Two years later, the Buddhist Association of Chengdu moved into the Wenshu Monastery and Kuan Lin was elected as a member of the Political Consultative Conference of Sichuan, thus becoming the first monk in Sichuan to enter the political circles during the reform era (Tan 2000). At this point, the Niangniang Temple was taken over by the Daoist Association of Chengdu, but instead of repairing the temple, the premises were leased to the local residents again as a means of generating funds (Chengdu Difangzhi Bianwei Hui 1998).

In 1985, to mark the UN's “Year of Peace,” the Wenshu Monastery took the lead in holding the “Peace Prayer Ceremony” and invited guests from all over the world, including the deputy director of China's State Administration for Religious Affairs, which helped the monastery win worldwide acclaim. In the same year, although the Niangniang Temple resumed religious rites, with the exception of a small number of laymen, Sun Zhixing was the only monk that remained on the premises, living in poverty due to the lack of income (Chengdu Difangzhi Bianwei Hui 1998).

In 1990, responding to the government's appeal, the Wenshu Monastery established a Buddhist clinic offering free diagnostic and treatment services, and was among the first to provide money for disaster relief when Southern China suffered serious flooding, for which it received a national award (Wenshu Monastery 2009). During this period, in order to increase its income and fund repairs to the main hall, the Niangniang Temple

opened a vegetarian restaurant and teahouse, but it could not recapture its former splendor (Chengdu Difangzhi Bianwei Hui 1998).

In 2003, the Wenshu Monastery's attempt to further expand its area was opposed by the Daoists of the Niangniang Temple because this would encroach onto their lands. Since the dispute between the two temples could not be resolved, they finally appealed to the Religious Bureau of Sichuan, which supported the Wenshu Monastery's expansion plan (Qiu Xiaolin, personal communication, 15 December 2013). As a result, the Niangniang Temple gradually faded from public attention.

Today, the Wenshu Monastery is recognized as a universalistic temple, as its ceremonials and activities are closely aligned with the central government ideology (Table 2), while the Niangniang Temple is practicing ancient rites (Table 3) that have fallen behind the times in a lonely corner of a market.

Table 2. The calendar of the Wenshu Monastery (lunar year).

Chinese New Year Ceremony 新年祈福法會	1 January
Offering Ceremony for Buddhas and Celestial Guardians 供天護國法會	9 January
Light-Offering Ceremony 供燈祈福法會	15 January
Guanyin's Birthday Ceremony 觀音菩薩聖誕法會	19 February
Spring Ritual for the Deceased 清明法會	24 February
Buddha's Birthday Ceremony 佛誕法會	8 April
Temple Stay 寺院生活體驗	22 April
Meditation Camp 禪修營	June
Guanyin's Enlightenment Ceremony 觀音菩薩成道法會	19 June
The Ullambana Ceremony 盂蘭盆會	7–15 July
Mid-Autumn Festival Ceremony 中秋晚會	15 August
Prayer for Peace and Prosperity Ceremony 國慶祈禱國泰民安法會	Chinese National Day
Temple Stay 寺院生活體驗	27 August
Guanyin's Renunciation Ceremony 觀音菩薩出家法會	19 September
Prayer for Peace and Prosperity Ceremony 祈禱國泰民安法會	1 December
Buddha's Enlightenment Ceremony 佛陀成道日法會	8 December
Refresher courses for lay Buddhists 居士進修班	All year round

(Dai Qian, personal communication, 10 November 2013).

Table 3. The calendar of the Niangniang Temple (lunar year).

Tian La Prayer Ceremony 天臘祈福法會	1 January
Welcoming the God of Wealth Ceremony 迎財神法會	5 January
Emperor Jade's Birthday Ceremony 玉皇華誕慶賀醮事	9 January
Lantern Festival Ceremony 上元法會	15 January
Qiu Chuji's Birthday Ceremony 邱祖聖誕慶賀醮事	19 January
The God of Culture and Literature's Birthday Ceremony 文昌聖誕迎祥法會	3 February
The Grand Supreme Elderly Lord's Birthday Ceremony 道祖華誕慶賀迎祥醮事	13–15 February
Guanyin's Birthday Ceremony 慈航聖誕祈福法會	19 February
Qingming Ceremony 清明賑濟法會	24 February
Lady Cui's Birthday Ceremony 崔氏娘娘會（撒童子）	3 March
Pay-back (Shousheng Tianhuan) Ceremony 受生填還法會	14–18 April
The God of Medicine's Birthday Ceremony 藥王聖誕祈醮事	28 April
The Celestial Master Ceremony 天師會	5 May
The Heavenly Lord of the Numinous Treasure's Birthday Ceremony 靈寶天尊華誕慶賀醮事	14 May
Guanyin's Enlightenment Ceremony 慈航成道祈禱法會	19 June
The Celestial Worthy of the Universal Transformation of Thunder Noise's Birthday and Emperor Guan's Birthday Ceremony 雷祖及關帝聖誕祈禱雷醮	24 June
Daode La Prayer Ceremony 道德臘祈禱法會	7 July
Zhongyuan Festival Ceremony 中元法會	12–15 July
Mid-Autumn Festival Ceremony 中秋法會	15 August
The Nine-Emperor Gods Ceremony 太上玄靈九皇大醮	7–9 September
Minsui La Ceremony 民歲臘寒衣賑濟法會	1 October
Xiayuan Festival Ceremony 下元解厄消災法會	15 October
The Heavenly Lord of Primordial Beginning's Birthday Ceremony 元始天尊華誕慶賀醮事	Winter solstice

(Qiu Xiaolin, personal communication, 15 December 2013).

5. Conclusions

Wenshu Monastery, a temple that was once unremarkable but experienced a marvelous development during the reform era, may be simply a special case without any representativeness. In this sense, its success is unique and cannot be duplicated.

Nevertheless, it would be valuable to explore the strategies used in its development, as the binomial system relies on creative application of traditional wisdom, while its centralized organizational structure and officialization are the means of adapting to changing circumstances. From this point of view, the success of the Wenshu Monastery is not only duplicable but is also relevant in a wide array of contexts.

Regardless of whether the Wenshu Monastery's achievements can be replicated elsewhere, the present study has great significance, as it illustrates that only by closely following the footsteps of history can temples truly find their proper position in society and the unique meaning of their existence, which helps us to rethink the patterns of development of local religious institutions in modern China.

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