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Forging sanctity: the way Laiguo became a saint

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ABSTRACT

This article uses the analytical framework of hermeneutic hagiography to analyze the autobiography of the eminent Chan monk, Laiguo 來果 (1881–1953), in Modern China, showing how a monk with charismatic characteristics constructed his sacred image step by step from his childhood, to his enlightenment in Chan and his mastery of deacons. Laiguo was a Buddhist leader who could turn the tide in a time of crisis. In him, the typical charismatic personality shows the individual's rebellion against the legitimacy of the external world. The experiences Laiguo suffered are just as typical an aspect as charisma is in the processes of 'dilemma' and 'passion.' Those who experience suffering are trying to find a new beginning in the desperate situation of life and determine the fundamental principles of human social relations through their struggles and efforts when facing desperate situations.

KEYWORDS

Chan master; charisma;
hermeneutic hagiography;
Laiguo; sanctity

Introduction

The sanctity of Buddhism has many aspects, among which are Buddhist leaders acting as an important representative of it. For a long time, the question of 'how to become a saint' has been a fascinating topic. This article will use hermeneutic hagiography as an analytical method and biographies as the main material to analyze Laiguo's 來果 (1881–1953) path to sainthood. Laiguo has been called one of the three great masters of modern Chan Buddhism,¹ and he also carried the title of 'living Buddha'² because of his personal characteristics, practice, enlightenment and style of conduct.

The word charisma first appeared in *Corinthians II of the New Testament* and originally referred to gifts that were given from God. The nineteenth century German jurist, Sohm, used it to refer to the ultra-secular nature of the Christian church. The German sociologist, Max Weber (1864–1920), greatly extended the word. In his book, *Herrschaftssoziologie* (Dominant Sociology), he expanded its definition to mean certain personality traits people have which are considered to be extraordinary, an endowment that is supernatural and superhuman, or at least of a special power or quality. This is something that ordinary people do not have. Charismatic people have divine or at least exemplary qualities.

According to Max Weber's perspective, charismatic leaders who are born in a crisis or dilemma (the crisis can be psychological, physical, economic, ethical, religious or political) have a fighting spirit, heroically dedicate their abilities, and

can use their body, spirit and a special ‘supernatural’ genius.³ In the process of the modernization of Chinese Buddhism, a number of influential Buddhist leaders emerged. Because of their excellent talent, as well as their hard practice, intellect, respectable morality and noble orthodox tradition, some of them also joined with state agencies and local powers or outside political forces to gain the recognition of secular society, increasing their order’s legitimacy and gaining recognition. Such people were defined as *shengseng* 聖僧 (holy monks) of the era, including Jing’an 敬安 (1852–1912), Yinguang 印光 (1861–1940), Xuyun 虛雲 (1840–1959), Hongyi 弘一 (1880–1942), Tanxu 倓虛 (1875–1963), Taixu 太虛 (1890–1947), and so on. These *shengseng* came from a special period when both the state and Buddhism were about to collapse. They not only had the ability to elicit a response with the Way but were also a source of legitimacy in educating people about and spreading the benefits of Buddhism.

Buddhist leaders have long been a focus of study because of their great influence on the development of Buddhism. Over the past twenty years, research from the viewpoints of history, sociology and anthropology that investigated Buddhist leaders and other elites included Gabriele Goldfuss’s study of Yang Wenhui⁴, Don A. Pittman’s study of Taixu,⁵ Raoul Birnbaum’s study of Hongyi,⁶ James Carter’s study of Tanxu,⁷ Zhang Xuesong’s study of Yinguang,⁸ Daniela Campo’s study of Xuyun,⁹ and Wang Jia’s study of Jinghui.¹⁰ However, most Buddhist character research focused on using the sanctity of the Buddhist leader as a way to study Buddhism as a whole – acting as an introduction through which the characteristics and changes in modern and contemporary Chinese Buddhism can be observed – rather than focusing on the charismatic personality of the Buddhist leaders themselves (such as the process of establishing personal charm, authority and leadership). Research on Chinese religions, with ‘charisma’ as the center topic, was first carried out by Stephan Feuchtwang, a British anthropologist who conducted the first specific discussion on charisma in his book *Grassroots Charisma*, which was co-authored with Wang Mingming.¹¹ ‘Charisma’ became an important topic in the international symposium on the ‘integration of religion and society in Chinese society’ held in Hong Kong in 2007. The following year, Vincent Goossaert, David Ownby, Zhe Ji and David A. Palmer released a series called *Mapping Charisma in Chinese Religion in Nova Religio*, published by the University of California Press.¹² The volume starts with Feuchtwang and Wang Mingming’s definition of charisma, and uses methods from history, sociology and psychology. Goossaert and Ownby discuss how the divine authority was able to be successful in modern times in the context of Chinese culture. Their focus is not on political factors or the relationship between religion and state but the religious figures of authority themselves.¹³ In 2016, Ownby et al. published the edited volume, *Making Saints in Modern China*,¹⁴ which collected papers from the United States, Canada, France, Italy and Taiwan from many scholars. Through studies on charismatic religious leaders from the early twentieth century to the early twenty-first century, the proceedings discuss how leaders, through their autobiographies and charismatic communications, use traditional topics to attract followers and compete in the religious market. It can be seen that increasing attention has been paid to the study of the authority of religious leaders under charismatic theory, which is also a topic in this article.

Laiguo, the hero of this article, was a Buddhist leader who could turn the tide in a time of crisis. In him, the typical characteristics of charisma can also be seen clearly. One

characteristic of a charismatic personality is the individual's rebellion against the legitimacy of the external world, and this trait is evident in Laiguó. Laiguó constantly challenged traditional authority in the early stages of his personal cultivation. From an early age, he dared to defy the authority of his family, and he practiced his beliefs so assiduously that he would not even return to his former master or his fellow practitioners when they asked him back. What is more, from a Buddhist perspective, Laiguó did not look like a monk when he first became a monk – he tonsured himself in the southern area of the Sansheng tang (Hall of the Three Sages), he went to Baohua Shan 寶華山 to ask for commandments without knowing a single rule about Buddhist community, and he answered the questions poorly. He lacked the fee for the commandments, as well as the required clothes and recommendation letter, and he was badly beaten by the monks. Shortly after his initiation into monkhood, he lived at Chan hall in Jinshan si 金山寺. Because of his unfamiliarity with the rules, he was beaten with a stick as many as four hundred times a day. He was so involved in the practice of *huatou* 話頭 that he walked flat out, which annoyed the *zhikeshi* 知客師 (a monk responsible for the reception) so greatly that they wanted to drive him away. From these experiences, we know that Laiguó did not receive the acceptance of his fellow monks in the early stages of monkhood and was disliked or even hated by most people. He was more like a novice who 'parachuted' into the Jiangnan area, which was a very strange environment to him, and he 'groped, climbed and rolled' alone. The experiences Laiguó suffered are just as typical an aspect as charisma in the processes of 'dilemma' and 'passion.' Those who experience suffering are just trying to find a new beginning in the desperate situation of life and determine the fundamental principles of human social relations by their struggles and efforts when facing desperate situations. In other words, the unconditional ability of pure charisma is to completely suspend the chronological order of life so as to rebuild one's life on an abyss without foundation.¹⁵

The description of Laiguó in this article is mainly based on his autobiographies, *Zixing lu* 自行錄 [Self-introduction Record] and *Yixing lu* 異行錄 [Record of the Supernatural], which were completed in 1951. *Zixing lu* recorded his life stories. *Yixing lu* recorded all of the supernatural events from Laiguó's childhood to the period when he was the abbot of Gaomin Monastery. These two works are important for understanding Laiguó's life and religious practices. In terms of writing methods, this article draws lessons from the analytical framework of hermeneutic hagiography. The word 'hagiography' is a combination of 'hagio,' meaning 'saints,' and 'graphy,' meaning 'records.' The word originally described records of the lives of Christian saints and their veneration to highlight the divine power of God as shown through such individuals. Reading hagiography is a way to become familiar with saints and enter their spiritual space. Currently, anyone who is regarded by religious believers as having divine power or holy qualities can generally be referred to as a 'saint.' There are many ways to approach the study of hagiography, one of which is to regard hagiography as historical data, but this way of research has been criticized by historians. The descriptions of saints vary in different times and regions due to distinctive understandings held by believers from various civilizations. As such, if the Bible is interpreted only as a eulogized text, it will cast doubt upon its credibility to nonbelievers. To show the responsibility of religious studies in rendering mystical experiences and divine revelations understandable and sympathetic, and to tolerantly overcome academic and religious differences, Western academic

circles started to use hagiographic hermeneutics in postmodern times. This kind of research method is used to make a critical interpretation of a sacred biography and to give the text a diversified understanding through interpretative research in order to discover new content and meanings in the images of common saints. At present, this kind of research method is widely accepted in academic circles. As opposed to seeing hagiography as historical fact, hermeneutics studies hagiography as a kind of literary expression. This means reinterpreting the text and its historical and cultural context from the interaction between the narrative points of view and the historical situation as well as analyzing how the saint themselves uses various narrative techniques and what kind of narrative frameworks he or she uses in the autobiography to present his or her holy image. This involves a 'structural' problem that is a common concern, which is combined with narrative discourse, text and the historical analysis model. Li Fengmou and other scholars pointed out that there are structural commonalities in hagiographical texts. According to Li Fengmou, a hagiographical review of different texts of the scriptures of various religions shows that although their doctrinal systems differ, saints' paths to sainthood all include the process of transcendentalization. Saints' spiritual abilities that are due to their successful practices are also a core factor of 'holy' traditions. They can always persevere in their journeys of sanctification, adhere to the highest ideals of practice and, eventually, become a model of a holy personality. The process of transformation to sanctification despite hardships is a common theme across all kinds of religions. Laiguó himself is such a case. His autobiography is full of many stories of myth and mystery, and the book *Yixing lu* was specially developed to record all kinds of anecdotes about his practice of Buddhism. In addition, saints are typically seen to practice filial piety, penance and self-sacrifice; implement magic and cause miracles; and exhibit the divine performance of courage.¹⁶ Moreover, saints have very virtuous morals, are able to do what other people cannot, can endure what other people cannot, and show confidence, perseverance and other universal characteristics. These characteristics are reflected by Laiguó in this article. Next, this article will provide a detailed description of the growth and practices of Laiguó.

A hermeneutic hagiographical interpretation of Laiguó

Laiguó's perseverance and filial piety in childhood

Laiguó was born in Longwangdun 龍王墩, Huanggang County, Hubei Province in the seventh year of Emperor Guangxu's reign (1881). Laiguó's name was Liu Yongli 劉永理, his style name was Futing 福庭, and his infant name was Xiao Heshang 小和尚 (Little Monk). In typical hagiography, the birth of a saint is generally accompanied by an auspicious sign, which indicates the saint's extraordinary life. Laiguó was no exception to this. *Zixing lu* records the situation before and after his birth: 'When his mother was pregnant, she did not like to eat any meat. Once, in the night, his father saw a golden carp entering the room; his mother saw an old monk with yellow robes coming into the room 母妊時, 不能食葷, 臨產之夜, 父見金鯉進房, 母見黃袍白須老和尚入內.'¹⁷ By providing such a description, Laiguó intended to create a divine image by implying that he was a superior monk in his previous life and that his many achievements in this life were predestined. His father's name was Jiazhen 嘉禎, and his mother's family name was Fang

方氏。Laiguo's family was a reasonably prosperous one that made a living by farming and clerking. As was typical for the traditional education of children, Laiguo was taught by his father starting from when he was five-years-old, and he showed talent in recitation. Laiguo also went to private school to receive his education. Between the ages of sixteen to eighteen, Laiguo participated in the liberal arts and martial arts examinations and was very successful in the martial arts exam.

Laiguo was enthusiastic about Buddhism since his childhood. When he was three-years-old, he was fond of kneading clay Buddha statues and setting them up in offerings in an earthen cave. When he was seven-years-old, he was able to recall the *Heart Sutra* spontaneously and debate with others on the principles of the sutra. When Laiguo was 12-years-old, he began feeling that life was impermanent and full of illusion, so he aspired to become a monk. Laiguo went to Guiyuan Monastery 歸元寺 in Hanyang 漢陽 of Wuhan 武漢 to become a monk, but was stopped by his family and persuaded to go back home. At the age of 15, he took refuge in Monk Dazhi 大智 (dates unknown) and asked for a dharma in order to settle down for the rest of his life. At the beginning, Dazhi taught him the dharma of chanting Buddha's name. Laiguo practiced it so diligently that he even called the Buddha's name aloud while dreaming. After that, Dazhi taught him the *huatou* of *nianfo shishui* 念佛是誰 (Who is it that is reciting the name of the Buddha)? Since then, Laiguo began his Chan practice. Not only was he a brave and progressive practitioner, he was also very good at guiding his family and relatives in learning Buddhism together. When Laiguo was 13-years-old, his family decided upon a marriage for him. Laiguo always treated his fiancée with respect and courtesy, but never really wanted to get married to her. The two even decided to remain seated all night on their wedding day. Under the influence of Laiguo, the fiancée's willingness to follow Buddhist practices was strengthened day by day. As expected, when Laiguo married at the age of 19, the couple kept their agreement to sit down every night. They stayed in the Buddhist hall to practice dharma every day. Their parents saw that Laiguo sought only to follow Buddhist practices; they were gradually affected and began to follow Laiguo and practice Buddhism together. From this point on, we can see that Laiguo was as firm as a rock in his determination to practice Buddhism, and he also showed a great ability to influence those around him.

In addition, it can be found from *Zixing lu* and *Yixing lu* that Laiguo had a solitary and exclusive personality by nature and that he would defend his stance tenaciously. For example, he was a very strict vegetarian. When he was two-years-old, he liked to eat fried rice with salt, and he insisted on using separate dishes and chopsticks to avoid contamination with meat. Laiguo's stubbornness mostly appeared in the 'battles' he had with his father. His father was the most strongly opposed of all his family to Laiguo's worship of Buddha, and he always played the role of 'adversity' in Laiguo's practices. In relation to the practice of vegetarianism, his father impetuously thwarted Laiguo and threatened him with death if he did not eat meat. However, Laiguo would not relent and stated that he would rather die than eat meat. In regard to spiritual practices, Laiguo's father saw him chanting 'Buddha' and tried to stop him, calling him a disgrace to the family, but Laiguo continued loudly chanting Buddha, showing tenacious resistance.

Although there were many disagreements between Laiguo and his father due to the former's belief in Buddhism, Laiguo himself still maintained the image of filial piety. When Laiguo was 18-years-old, an event took place in which he cut liver to cure his

father, epitomizing his sincere and filial qualities. This became a symbolic event in shaping Laiguó's sacred image in the future. The following describes the process of liver cutting in *Yixing lu*:

At the age of eighteen, my father was suffering from a food disease for several months and did not eat or drink. He was thin and weak and could hardly breathe. We had seen many doctors but were helpless. Therefore, we prepared clothing and a coffin for him in case he died. I have read stories about the virtue of people showing piety to their parents and saving them from disease. How could I not be ashamed that I couldn't behave like them? Therefore, I vowed to give my life in order to redeem my father, and if he could not live, I wished to die in his place. After that, I took a sharp knife, a bowl and grindstone, all of which I had prepared, and cut my chest with a knife. However, after my chest was cut open, the cut was three *cun* wide and four *cun* long; the breath was rushing forward, and I was afraid that the breath would not come out of my throat. So, I took off my trouser belt and tied the cut up tightly so as to let my breath still come out through my throat. After several days, I prayed to the Buddha to let my wound heal earlier and not let other people know in order to avoid my father worrying for me. Soon after that, I saw an old man in front of me in a dream, untying my skirt, wiping something several times and leaving without a word. The next morning, I opened my chest and saw that the cut wound had disappeared, so I knew for certain that if one prays with sincerity, the result will surely be effective. 余十八歲時，父染隔食病月餘，飲食未沾，身體羸瘦，氣絕如縷，百醫難治，束手無策，衣衾棺槨已為備辦，待死而已。每閱前賢多方行孝，挽救親痾，我何人乎，其不愧歟？由是立誓，願捨身命，贖父病痊，如不能生，誓死替父。即夜避去家人，孤身危坐，取快刀，飯碗，磨刀石，各件俱備，以刀割裂胸口，不料割開後：刀口三寸寬四寸長，大氣直沖，又恐氣息不從喉出，乃急解褲帶一根，當刀口束住，熱氣止出，氣從喉上，方始放心，否則危急萬分。迨至數日後，複求神佑，刀傷早愈，免使人知，令父不悅。即夜夢中見一老者在前，解我衣襟，用手抹擦數轉，無言而去。次早掀胸私看，刀口合縫，還復如故，誠心感召，神必有靈，可謂無妄矣。¹⁸

In *Zixing lu*, Laiguó gives a more detailed description of his liver cutting process:

I waited until midnight, and then I took off my cloth. I used a knife and cut from the middle of my chest violently. I cut and stabbed more than ten times but could still not open my chest. So, I sharpened the knife and cut one more time. This time, it was a success. There was no blood on the knife, so my body was not covered with blood. I extended my right hand inside my body and took a piece of liver, cutting two-thirds of it away. My body inside was like boiling water. After cutting, the cut wound could not close, and the air coming out was hot. So, I tied my trouser belt tightly and stood up to bow in front of the Buddha. Then, I cooked my liver with tofu and brought it to my father's bed to feed him. 至深夜自解上衣，在正胸膛下，用刀力剖，數十轉未開，刀鈍複磨，再剖方開，刀無血跡，身未沾紅，內有幹血一團滾出，見之極圓，即用右手伸入，取肝一塊，割下三分之二，內如沸水之動盪。割後刀口無法收閉，熱氣外沖，即將褲帶攔口捆緊，起身禮佛，取豆腐合煮熟透，親送父床餵食。¹⁹

This description of Laiguó's liver cutting is truly breathtaking. This fantastic description not only shows Laiguó's perseverance and devotion to Buddha, but also caters to the traditional Chinese concept of filial piety. 'Serving parents with one's own flesh 割肉事親' has a long cultural origin in China. The earliest record of such is Jie Zitui's allusion to 'cutting off the thighs and treating the king' in his work during the Jin Kingdom in the Spring and Autumn periods. In the *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 [Complete Collection of Tang Prose], there is also a story about Chen Gaoren, a man from Jinling during the Sui Dynasty who cut off his thighs to make soup for his relatives. In the story of *Ershisi xiao* 二十四孝 [Twenty-Four Filial Exemplars], another story of 'cutting thighs to serve one's mother' took place in the Tang Dynasty. The wife of Wang Wuzi 王武子 secretly cut

a piece of meat from her leg to cook soup for her mother-in-law. Although the practice of ‘cutting off one’s thighs to cure one’s parents 割股療親’ has always been labeled as the sincerest and filial act in Confucian culture, this traditional filial act did not originate in Chinese culture. The practice has its origin deep within Buddhism, which can be seen in the motif of ‘sacrificing one’s body to make offerings’ in the stories of ancient Indian Buddhism. For example, in the *Lotus Sutra*, Bhaiṣajya-rāja broke his arm and lit it in offering to the Buddha. His deed was praised as ‘the most noble’ and an ‘offering of the highest class.’ In addition, as recorded in the *Pusa bensheng man lun* 菩薩本生鬘論 [Skt. *Jātakamālā*; Versified Incarnation Stories of the Bodhisattva], in one of his previous lives, Śākyamuni Buddha saved a rabbit by cutting his flesh to feed an eagle, which showed the compassion of the Bodhisattva in saving all living beings. After the Wei and Jin Dynasties, Buddhism became widespread in China, and the idea of ‘sacrificing one’s own body to make an offering’ entered people’s experience. However, this kind of behavior is quite contrary to the Confucian argument that one’s body, hair and skin are given by parents, one should be careful not to damage them, doing this is the beginning of the filial piety 身體發膚受之父母，不敢毀傷，孝之始也。 Despite this, the practice eventually conquered Confucian ethics, and the story of the ‘body offering’ became a new kind of custom and practice of Confucian filial piety. From that point on, ‘sacrificing for the Buddha’ was replaced by ‘sacrificing for one’s own parents,’ which constituted a new understanding of filial piety in Chinese culture, namely, that self-imposed torture is the external performance of one’s sincere inner beliefs and that such a practice can achieve the effect of interaction between heaven and mankind, and thus win heavenly blessings.

It was under the concept of filial piety that Laiguó cut his liver for his father. The late Qing Dynasty existed at the intersection of ancient and modern Chinese and foreign cultures. Although the worship of science gradually became more popular and the wisdom of the people gradually developed, the idea of filial piety was still deeply engrained in people’s minds because the power to write history still lay with the traditional scholar-officials. Not long before Laiguó cut his liver for his father, the 17-year-old Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868–1940), who later became a famous educator in the Republic of China, did the same action in 1885. At the time, Cai’s mother was suffering from a serious stomach disease. Hearing that cutting flesh from his body could prolong her life, Cai cut a piece of flesh from his left arm and fried it for his mother. However, his mother eventually died, and Cai was so heartbroken that he took his pillow and quilt and slept next to his dead mother in her coffin. When we browse through the historical materials of the late Qing Dynasty, we find, in addition to these two people, many reports about such kinds of events. One mainstream media publisher, *Shen bao* 申報 [Shanghai News; founded in 1872], alone reported six events of such ‘cutting of one’s body for one’s relatives,’ and each piece was written from a position of praise.²⁰ The ‘foolish’ idea of filial piety still had great influence in the late Qing Dynasty. Even in the period of the Republic of China, there was still the trend of ‘the Twenty-Four Filial Exemplars,’²¹ whose supporters even included government officials, such as Chen Baohua 陳寶驊 (1907–1975), the head of the KMT party in Shanghai, who developed a fundamental concept in ethical construction:

The word *filial piety*, of course, is the most natural ethic from one’s natural conscience. How can one not be filial to one’s parents who give birth to one and give one a body? The

stories of the *Twenty-Four Filial Exemplars* in China are all capable of evoking praises and tears; they show the purest and noblest and highest moral form of Chinese people. Now that the system of absolute monarchy and the patriarchal clan system have been reformed, social organizations are moving towards the goal of democratic constitutionalism. However, 'loyalty and filial piety' should still be the highest standard of ethics. "孝"字當然是最自然的從天性良知發出的倫理觀念，一個人對於生我者的父母，知道自己的身体性命都是父母所賜，哪有不油然而起孝順侍奉的心願？中國二十四孝的故事，都是可歌可泣的，表現了最純良最崇高的道德形態。現在君主專制和宗法社會的制度已經改革了，社會組織向著民主憲政的目標前進，然而“忠孝”二字，還應該是倫理道德的最高標準。²²

It can be seen that the moral promotion of filial piety in the Republic of China still occupied a position in mainstream society. It was obvious that if Laiguó combined his Buddhist beliefs and filial piety through the act of 'liver cutting,' it would be easier to win the recognition and admiration of the majority of Chinese people, and it would enforce their image of him as a preeminent monk in the context of traditional culture.

The Buddhist practices of Laiguó in his youth

When he was 22-years-old, Laiguó served as an official alongside his uncle. Although he was at court, he did not stop his Buddhist practices. After only one year as an official, he had witnessed such a great amount of extreme punishment that he could not bear it anymore. Therefore, he resigned from his official post. One day after he returned home, he recited the *Pumen pin* 普門品 [the Universal Door Chapter] from the *Fahua jing* 法華經 [Lotus Sutra]. He felt purity in his body and mind, and all thoughts were suddenly gone. He realized that he must give up his worldly life to become a monk. Finally, at the age of twenty-four (1905, the 31st year of the reign of Emperor Guangxu), Laiguó left home and embarked on a pilgrimage to Mount Putuo with a strong desire to seek out Buddhist teachings.

The process of Laiguó heading to Putuo to prepare for monkhood, hiking to the Baohua si 寶華寺, apprenticing in the Baota si 寶塔寺 and becoming ordained at the Jinshan si 金山寺 is worth considering. Later, Laiguó recalled this journey and said:

When I recall making up my mind to go to Putuo to become a monk, I know that although my experience cannot compare with Sudhan's fifty-three pilgrimages, it still shows my absolute devotion to the Way. In the process, my bad habits and the dust in my heart were totally scraped out. I benefited from it a lot. 再思由發心朝海，披緇至此，雖不若善財之百城煙水，然亦磨身捨命，唯道是尊，彷彿近之，此中研塵刮垢，去習消愆，實有不可思議之受用。²³

It should be noted that although this period of exploration lasted only one year or so, it paved the way for his monastic life and even for his later dharma preaching. This one-year experience included profound enlightenment; thus, it needs to be analyzed in detail. The process was a test of life and death for Laiguó. In the process, Laiguó's innate quality of persistence was torturous and then sublimated. As the old Chinese saying goes: 'Through these things his mind was shaken, his character hardened, and his powers increased 動心忍性，增益其所不能.' Facing a desperate situation, Laiguó's internal potential revealed itself fully, and his mental state also advanced. In the following, his experience is divided into four stages.

In the first stage, he almost took his own life because he felt so desperate and hopeless about the world. Laiguo had just arrived at Mount Putuo and was preparing to become a monk. He saw there were monks with cigarettes in their mouths who were wearing silk cloth and holding umbrella in hands, and their feet were in white socks. Seeing this, Laiguo's heart immediately froze. He felt that it was hopeless to practice Buddhism in this world and that the goal to end birth and death could not be fulfilled, so the idea of suicide came to his mind. He went to the Fanyin dong 梵音洞 (Brahman Cave) three times to commit suicide but was fortunately discouraged by other people from carrying his plan out. Later, he met five ascetic dhutanga monks, and he saw that there still existed real Buddhist practitioners. Therefore, his monastic aims were reignited. He then went to the south piedmont of Sansheng tang 三聖堂 (Hall of the Three Sages) to shave himself and began his journey of wondering and preaching. Laiguo was always fond of strict ascetic practices and most liked to see monks with bare heads and bare feet; seeing them as such gave him a more pleasant feeling than seeing his own parents. Therefore, after becoming a monk, Laiguo decided to practice dhutanga.

In the second stage, Laiguo challenged himself in physiological terms, testing the limits of hunger. Faced with the situation of foregoing food, Laiguo's only thought was: 'I would rather not eat for three days than lose my determination to follow the Way.' Although his feet were trembling from hunger, he decided that he would rather die than live for food. He simply fasted and went up the mountain to meditate for seven days. After three days without food, he climbed further into the mountains, finally reaching the top of the mountain on his fourth day without food. For the next 10 days, Laiguo sat in a lotus position, and, as he claimed, he experienced induction by meditation. In his sleep, he saw an old lady in green cloth give him food and point him towards a place where there was water. When he woke up, he felt clear and cool, and he found the water that the old woman in the dream had pointed out. The dreams came to his rescue, Laiguo once again escaped from the edge of death.

In the third stage, Laiguo was nearly beaten to death because of his writing habits. Laiguo decided to go to Baohua Shan to be initiated into monkhood. Baohua Shan is a famous Way-Place 道場 for precept transmission ceremonies. However, at that time, there was societal unrest and bandits were rampant. Therefore, the temple was especially desperate for external resources. When monks went there for ordination, they had to provide ordination fees, cloth and recommendation letters. There was also a fixed-answer test for approving the request, through which the *zhikeshi* could get to know the situation of the newcomer. Laiguo, however, knew nothing about the procedure. When he arrived at Baohua Shan, he did not have the ordination fee, cloth or recommendation letter. He also talked to the *zhikeshi* in a strange manner, which made the *zhikeshi* very suspicious. Moreover, Laiguo's literary habits unknowingly led him into a dangerous situation – perhaps at the thought of being ordained right away, Laiguo could not resist the joy in his heart, thus, he wrote two poems in quick succession on a whim and posted them on the wall. This strange behavior increased the suspicion of the monks that his words and deeds were not in accord with the new order and that he was wicked and on guard. As a result, they made him do the most dangerous work. Later, when Laiguo fell ill, no one took care of him, and he was allowed to sleep only in the mill. Feeling hopeless, Laiguo took the foolish suggestion of a peer – just run away. He never expected this to be a Buddhist taboo. Laiguo's escape caused public anger, he was mid-escape when he was stopped,

beaten up, dragged back to the temple, and further beaten until he fell unconscious. Despite being beaten and frazzled, Laiguo's will to practice was still as firm as before. He did not complain about being beaten; on the contrary, he believed that torture was a good way for Buddhism to show its strict discipline in removing karmic obstacles. Laiguo regarded those people who treated him badly as his great knowing advisors 大善知識 and said:

If I had not fortuitously met these great knowing advisors and had not been unforgettably prompted by them, how could I have become the abbot of Gaomin? For their kindness, I could hardly return it ten thousand times even if I were to have my body smashed to pieces. 我若不是幸遇各大善知識, 刻骨究實提拔, 我何能為高旻一代住持, 粉骨碎身, 難報萬一。²⁴

The beating made him deeply feel that the rigor of the Vinaya School and the depth of self-cultivation are the foundation of Buddhahood and the seed of becoming a bodhisattva. It can be said that to Laiguo, this encounter did not rob him of his will to practice Buddhism; on the contrary, it made him very respectful of the Vinaya, laying the foundation for his later rectification of the Gaomin Monastery through the promotion of strict discipline.

In the fourth stage, Laiguo, was almost desperate because he was refused when begging. After leaving Baohua Shan, Laiguo went to the Zhenjiang Jinshan si to receive his ordination. However, because he still did not have the ordination fee and did not know the rules, he was once again dismissed by the monks there. At that point, he had not eaten for a couple of days, and he begged on the street. However, he did not receive a single meal. Feeling very desperate, he even knelt to a Taoist priest, asking him to accept him as a disciple; it is clear that this particular experience of adversity almost shook Laiguo's decision to become a monk. The Taoist priest did not accept him and Laiguo was driven away as a scoundrel. Later, Laiguo went through a series of misfortunes, such as living with dogs in a doghouse, kneeling for help but being rejected, and planning and failing to become a worker. Finally, Laiguo found himself in the hopeless situation of having no food, being unable to become a monk or a Taoist, having no work and being at his wits' end. At this point, Laiguo had tried all kinds of survival methods, but he could find no way forward. Born into a family that never worried about food or clothing, Laiguo underwent such great abjection that he decided to move straight forward to the river, if no one came to his rescue and there was no chance of becoming a monk in this lifetime, he would rather jump into the river and reincarnate to fulfill his wish. Approaching the Yangtze River that was 80 *li* 里 away, Laiguo slowly traveled to this potential burial place, one tear falling with every step. He felt that the time of death was immanent, and no other thoughts filled his head. After he travelled forty *li*, he saw a small temple and thought that he could eat there. His expectations were once again not met because there happened to be no one there. Finally, on the second day, Laiguo met his savior: the master of the Mituo si 彌陀寺 gave him food to eat. After Laiguo recovered his physical strength, the master let him go to the Baota si to be a *xingtang* 行堂 (a monk who serves food). Laiguo was rescued from desperation once more.

Looking back, it can be said that Laiguo's experience of seeking after the Way 求道 could be described as a thousand twists and turns, which not only reflects the consistent style of his advocacy of asceticism, but also shows how he went from actively facing difficulties to being forced into a helpless and tragic situation. In addition, during this

ordeal, Laiguo's experience with the current situation of Buddhism profoundly influenced his future practices and promotion of dharma. In the later stages, we can see that the reasons and methods for Laiguo's revitalization of the Gaomin Monastery and his understanding of Buddhism were influenced by this experience. It can be said that this was a period of experiences that influenced the nature of his future trajectory and development, which is worth repeating. The significance of this experience can be summarized in the following three aspects.

First, this experience thoroughly tested Laiguo's determination to practice dharma and made him realize that only perseverance and pure devotion to dharma could bring about a great reversal in the spiritual realm. Laiguo proved that the abandon of body and mind required by the practice of Chan is not just empty words but an extremely painful process. Buddhism often teaches people to *fangxia* 放下 (to give up) as a method of practice. It should be said that for Laiguo, *fangxia* maintains its positive connotation. He had always practiced desperately and held this upwards aspiration as a rule in all kinds of things. However, only when he practiced *fangxia* from a spontaneous and active attitude to passively giving up his honor, and giving up the idea of becoming a monk, and finally, he even had to kneel down to beg to be a Taoist, but still nobody gave him shelter, that he thoroughly experienced a hopeless moment of having nothing at all to give up. With such a significant psychological experience, he was able to achieve the necessary degree of practice and finally achieve enlightenment.

Second, the process of seeking after the Way also made Laiguo come to an unforgettable understanding about his writing habits. In Laiguo's opinion, if the two poems were not written on the spur of the moment at Baohua Shan, he would not have been misunderstood and experienced this series of lessons. Knowledge alone is not bad, but knowledge is not a true requirement for Buddhist practices. It might allow practitioners an easy way to indulge in their personal talents and thus lose their true recognition of themselves, inadvertently encouraging their superiority over others. For Laiguo, the result of this was the horrible beating. Therefore, he made the following decision: 'From now on, I make an important vow: I will not compose poetry on pain of death.' For practitioners of Buddhism, the purest determination is key to achieving enlightenment. The 'bloody event' triggered by the two poems brought about a painful introspection for Laiguo. In his later life, Laiguo actually did refrain from writing any literary poems, adhering to his one way forward. He practiced *huatou* thoroughly and opposed any form of miscellaneous practice. Such actions were inseparable from his painful experience.

Third, from his initial encounter with monks who were inferior to the dharma he found on Mount Putuo and his frequent punishment for not understanding discipline, Laiguo realized the importance of discipline. It may be said that it was during this period that Laiguo paid great attention to how discipline was developed. Additionally, Laiguo's suffering in Baohua and Jinshan were all related to his unfamiliarity with common rules. The frustrating experience also triggered his later creation of the *Gaomin si siliao guiyue* 高旻寺四寮規約 [the Four Sites Protocol of Gaomin si], which was about how to politely receive practitioners who have high inner qualities but who act quite strange.

After experiencing all kinds of trials and tribulations, Laiguo no longer cared about his body and mind; he could sacrifice his life without hesitation for the sake of Buddhist

karma. Later, when Laiguo became a widely known Chan master, these past experiences all became part of his valuable guidance for the monastery. He once said:

When I think of what I have done before, it has cultivated my body and mind, eliminated my bad habits. I have always cherished my body as a treasure and cleaned it frequently. But from then on, I completely put my body and mind down and disregarded them both. 自思前之所行, 磨煉身心, 掃除惡習, 一向愛身如寶, 衛生若勤, 徹底放下, 渾不顧及。²⁵

After those experiences, the physical and mental preparation of Laiguo was becoming more and more skillful, and a spiritual breakthrough was just around the corner.

The completion of the image of a holy man: achieving enlightenment

In the 32nd year of the reign of Emperor Guangxu (1906), Laiguo was 25-years-old. After he spent a period of time in Baota si serving food to the monks, he finally began worshipping his master and received the dharma name Miaoshu 妙樹. After obtaining a recommendation letter, he again traveled to Jinshan si to receive ordination, and this time, he finally succeeded. After that, Laiguo spent a period of approximately half a year travelling. He worshipped Mount Wutai and returned home, and then he guided his whole family in taking refuge in Buddhism. Laiguo's family members were all affected by him. After delivering his family to Buddhism, Laiguo went to the Chan hall of Jinshan again. This time, Laiguo vowed to stay in the Chan hall until he achieved enlightenment.

His decision was a turning point; it can be said that a variety of hardships swept Laiguo's bad habits away, and his family visit also completed his last duty to his family. Now that Laiguo had given up all of his worries, there was nothing else that could shake his heart except practicing with *huatou*.

When Laiguo stayed in the Chan hall in Jinshan for the first time, he was beaten more than four hundred times with the incense board because he was not familiar with the rules. This punishment also made him pay extra attention to learning the rules. He learned all of the large and small rules and the inside and outside rules by heart. In addition, he finally reached a point where no one could see his eyes, hear his voice, or see him turn around. He truly put his heart and soul into meditation. However, he also suffered many misunderstandings because of his selfless attitude of seeking after the Way. The severity and selflessness of Laiguo's practice with *huatou* was not understood by the other monks, and sometimes they even treated him as an evildoer. Of course, there are reasons that Laiguo did not understand the rules of the temple. He was quite curt. However, he would rather be beaten and scolded than give way in his Chan practice. He wrote:

When I used to live in Jinshan, I did not pay attention to any social activities or social favors. I just focused on *huatou* of 'Who is it that is reciting the name of the Buddha?' and completing the experience clearly without interruption; I didn't care whether I jostled other people, even the hierodeacon, I did not care. I often walked quickly with *huatou* in my heart and I didn't see the *zhikeshi* coming through and I knocked him back rather far; he immediately roared at me. At that time, I thought, 'If I hit other people like this, it is not social intercourse, I had better give up my practice to do some social engagement.' But immediately I thought, 'No way!' Why did I become a monk? Since I am a monk trying to solve the problem of life and death, today this problem has not been solved, how can I put

down my mission for social intercourse? Nonsense! If so, should I not become a monk? Let him roar, and I will be glad when he does that. If he won't hit me, I'll ask him to hit me a few times to see how my practice goes; If I get a few slaps on my face, I will be more attentive than usual. This is very good; If the slaps come and I forget the *huatou*, how can I be a studious person? So, I made promise to myself, no matter how people yell at me, scold me, beat me, the *huatou* cannot be lost, this is my personality. 我以前住金山的時候, 用起功來, 甚麼人情, 甚麼應酬, 我是一概不顧; 我只顧“念佛是誰”, 歷歷明明毫不間斷; 任是得罪何人, 雖系職事, 我是不管的, 每每跑路只顧工夫, 見了知客, 我也不知道合掌讓路, 當路一撞, 把知客撞退多遠, 他即時一頓一大吼; 那時我想: 不對! 如此衝撞, 於人情上有關係, 把工夫放下來, 應酬, 應酬罷! 再複一想: 咄! 不可以的! 我為甚麼出家? 我既為生死出家, 今天生死還沒有了, 竟把工夫放下來應酬人情嗎? 胡說! 若要這樣, 不如不出家罷! 還是我的工夫要緊, 任他吼, 就是打, 我亦歡喜。好! 他不打我, 我還要請他打我幾下, 試試我的工夫如何; 假使幾個耳巴子打下來, 我的工夫還是照應如常咧! 這是好得得的; 若是一個耳巴子打下來, “念佛是誰”跟耳巴子跑了, 我這個人還算一個用功的人嗎? 所以立定主宰, 任何人再吼我, 罵我, 打我, 終歸“念佛是誰”不能丟, 這就是我的為人處。²⁶

Not only did he ignore the dissatisfaction of the other monks, but he also ignored their greetings and those of his master. He refused to have anything to do with his kin and friends:

This is what I have done. So, I tell you to make you believe. When I lived in Jinshan, there were four people sharing a seat. Coincidentally, the four people's names started with the word Miao 妙. Among them there was one, my fellow junior apprentice, called Miaofeng. Verna always said to us, 'For other people, it is *sanmiaosanputi* 三藐三菩提 (Skt. *samma-sambodhi*), but for you, it is *simiao siputi* 四妙四菩提. What fun!' I always sat alone on the ground, they felt embarrassed and often said, 'Master Miao, take a seat!' I didn't care about their calls to me. I still sat down on the ground as usual. My fellow junior apprentice always wanted to talk with me, I also ignored him; he said, 'You come from Hubei, don't you?' I said, 'Who is it that is reciting the name of the Buddha?' He said, 'Your dharma name is Miaoshu, your Fahao is Jingru, isn't it?' I said, 'Who is it that is reciting the name of the Buddha?' He said, 'You are probably my senior fellow apprentice!' I said, 'Who is it that is reciting the name of the Buddha?' He had no idea what my words meant. Several times during the winter, I answered him just like this. He asked me for a word but could get nothing. At the beginning of the first lunar month, he returned to the temple. The master asked him, 'Have you seen your brother in Jinshan?' 'Yes,' he said, 'But when I talk to him, he doesn't answer me, or I don't know if he does.' The master said, 'Go, quick, bring him back!' He came to Jinshan, took me by the hand, and said, 'I am sure you are my senior brother, but you didn't answer me. You are really my brother!' I said, 'Who is it that is reciting the name of the Buddha?' He said, 'No matter who is reciting, you should go back with me!' I said, 'Who is it that is reciting the name of the Buddha?' He said, 'The master specially told me to take you back to the temple, you have to go back with me!' I said, 'Who is it that is reciting the name of the Buddha?' He had no idea, then he said, 'You are too unreasonable! Going back to see the master will not take you far away, it is just in Jurong, why not go back?' I said, 'Who is it that is reciting the name of the Buddha?' He put me down and said, 'That's it!' He then went back. 我自己行過來的, 說到你們聽, 大概要相信: 我在金山住的時候, 四個人共一個位子, 剛巧的, 四人名字都是妙字, 妙某, 妙某, 內中有我師弟叫妙豐。維那常常講: “人家三藐三菩提, 你們四藐四菩提。倒好玩!” 我是一個人獨在地下, 他們覺得難為情, 常說: “妙師傅, 妳坐位置罷!” 我也不理他叫我不叫我, 我照常坐在地下。我那師弟老要與我講話, 我也不理他, 他說: “你是湖北人不是?” 我說: “念佛是誰?” 他說: “你叫妙樹, 法號淨如嗎?” 我說: “念佛到底是誰?” 他說: “你大概是我師兄!” 我說: “念佛究竟是誰?” 他弄得沒有辦法; 一個冬好幾次這樣問, 我皆如是答他; 他要我講一句話, 了不可得。到了正月期頭, 他回小廟, 師父問到他說: “你師兄在金山住, 你知道不知道?” 他說: “我是知道, 我與他講話, 他總不答我, 我也不知道究竟是不是的。” 師父講: “快去把他帶回來!” 他就來金山, 一把拉住我說: “我說你是我的師兄, 你總不答

我：原來真是我的師兄！”我說：“念佛是誰？”他說：“不管是誰不是誰，你跟我回去！”我說：“念佛是誰？”他說：“師父特為教我來帶你回廟的，你不能不回去！”我說：“念佛是誰？”他弄得沒有辦法，便拉住我說：“你這個人太無道理！回去看看師父，也沒多遠，就在句容，為甚麼不回去？”我說：“念佛是誰？”他把我放下說：“罷了！罷了！”他回去了。²⁷

One could draw the conclusion that the image of Laiguó in Jinshan was of quite the maverick, but this story also reflects Laiguó's unique characteristics. The dialogue on religious kin relations did not completely work on him; he was a person who only paid attention to seeking after the Way and not to other human feelings. This style of action illustrates the revolutionary character of a person with charisma who despises and ignores all rules and traditions.

It was under such hardship that on 26 September 1908 of the lunar calendar in the 34th year of the Guangxu reign, Laiguó, who was 28-years-old, was suddenly enlightened after a knock on the wooden fish indicated that tonight's sixth meditation was over. It was like he had discharged a burden with a thousand Jin and he was beaten without noise, so he cried out loud. After that, he went to the senior monk to ask for instruction. The monk questioned Laiguó through *huatou*, and Laiguó answered fluently. Soon after that, the message of Laiguó's enlightenment spread among the monks, and he was praised by the masses.

'Enlightenment' in Buddhism represents an individual's thorough insight into the truth of the universe and the individual's liberation from the entanglement of his or her relationships with others. When a Chan master is enlightened, there must be a state of peaceful natural accommodation among the people, things and things associated with him. The success of Chan masters lies in their ability to use their wisdom to adjust to various conflicts and contradictions between themselves as individuals and the world, and to restore themselves to a state of 'free will.' Chan masters' contributions to the world must be the result of externalizing their internalized spiritual worlds. The enlightenment of Laiguó marks the complete revelation of his charismatic endowment. For a religious leader with the qualities of charisma, there are many factors that contribute to the title of being 'a holy man,' but the most important part is religious achievement. Such achievements often include asceticism, enlightenment and supernatural powers. It is clear that Laiguó, with his ardent desire for incorporating dharma in his practice, overcame many trials and was reborn from all hopeless situations he faced, acquiring these abilities one by one. His success in practice also foreshadowed his subsequent success in winning the favor of the Gaomin Monastery and being entrusted with important tasks.

Laiguó's outstanding ability as deacon

After enlightenment, there was no slackening of practice for Laiguó. To the contrary, he changed his past style of rashness and became more thoughtful in his words and deeds. He changed from being a dedicated meditator to being a diligent deacon: 'Whenever there is an official duty, I will do it without any hesitation. I am quick and meticulous and will always be the best of all people. 凡有公務行單各事，置身不顧，操作敏捷，辦事精詳，為眾人冠。²⁸

As a deacon, Laiguo had the following characteristics. First, he did everything by himself, and he pursued extreme comprehensiveness in every detail. He noted the following about when he was in charge of food distribution:

In the past, when it came to the ordination period, there were three people in charge of food distribution, but at the end, there were spoiled rice and vegetables left in each jar. When it came to my turn to do the food distribution, I did it alone. I didn't leave any spoiled food in the dining hall. When one session of ordination finished, there was not a single grain of rice left. Whatever it was, porridge or vegetables, nothing was thrown away. I tried my best to give all the monks the best to eat. 往年戒期，飯頭三個，大寮餽飯缸一口，餽菜餽粥各一口。至我當飯頭，只我一人，餽物各缸，不存大寮，一戒期滿，未剩粒米，粥飯菜蔬，亦未拋散，想法辦好，與大眾吃。²⁹

In work, Laiguo was always the first to take the fall. When it came to labor, Laiguo alone was responsible for all the work, and he did not want to bother other people: 'I washed all the clothes of the monks living in the Chan hall. Washing oil basin, bamboo pad, I did not allow other people to do that. I did it all by myself. 禪堂大眾衣服被條，盡歸我洗，成就人用功。油盆，洗竹墊，不準人倒，概我一人。'³⁰ As for cultivating good karma, he did not turn away from shouldering responsibility.

Second, Laiguo secretly endured humiliation. While working, Laiguo adhered to the principle of 'better to die in a ditch than fight with others in the Chan hall 寧死溝壑，不在禪堂與人交口爭鬥.' Because of his working ability, he was envied by other deacons, but when he was insulted, he neither answered them back nor scolded them; instead, he treated them with the same deference as always. Below are two examples:

- (1) One day, when I was on my way to the end of the western side of the mediation hall, someone came to my place for questioning. My neighbor was jealous and beat me with a wake board many times. When the *weinuo* 維那 (the monastery controller) came and asked me: 'Is there anyone who beats you?' I said, 'it was a neighboring master who learned to use incense sticks.' The other monk could not keep his silence and told the *weinuo*, 'Someone beats him.' I added, 'No.' *Weinuo*, therefore, did not pursue the matter deeply. Otherwise, this neighboring master would have been beaten to within half an inch of his life. This is how I secretly cultivated my morality. In that way, I used the mental method to learn the internal and external rules to my benefit. 我一日往西單尾，有人來我處問話，鄰單嫉妒，用醒板打我數十下。維那得知，進堂問我：'阿誰打你？'我即白曰：'是鄰單一位師父學打香板，在我肩上試之。'悅眾抱氣不平，即云：'實是某人打他。'我即曰：'不是。'維那因此未深追究，否則這位鄰單師父，必將命送一半，此我學德之密處。故我自用心法，稍得益後，專門學習內外規則，日無倦態。³¹
- (2) One day, a deacon shouted at me in public, and I bowed my head with him. At night, I set a seat up in the western apartment and invited him to come. I put on three sticks of incense and bowed my head to him three times. I asked that if he wanted to point out my faults in the future, that he would not mention my name. Days later, another deacon rebuked me. I rushed to my apartment and made some balls of cotton, filling my ear with them. I had taken a vow before: 'I would rather die in a ditch than fight with others in the Chan hall. 一日，有一位執事，當眾吼我，我與他磕響頭；至晚，請他到西寮明間設位，請他上坐，特裝三支香，向他磕三個頭，請他向後再表我的堂，求他不要提我名字。一日，我後一位執事又講

我,我急到寮房,弄一團棉花,把耳朵塞好。前人吼我者,即裝香碰響頭,後人講我者,弄棉花塞耳朵。我有誓在先:寧死溝壑,不在禪堂與人交口爭鬥,若稍違逆,以誓證盟。³²

Third, Laiguo familiarized himself with the rules. While he did work, he paid much attention to the observance of the rules. After he became a deacon, Laiguo came with other monks doing morning prayers, outside labor, running and sitting through meditation together and never left them for a single step. He became the most familiar with all the big and small rules.

Laiguo laid emphasis on rules and discipline since he first became a monk. When he was at Mount Putuo, he saw monks wearing rich clothes; when he was at the Baota Temple, his refuge master secretly smoked cigarettes, and he himself was beaten repeatedly in the Chan hall because he was not familiar with the regulations. All kinds of experiences deeply rooted in him the importance of regulations in the process of practice. Laiguo thought that regulations not only were a manifestation of the dignity of monks but could also guide people in practice on the road to achieving a clear mind and understanding of the truth. He said:

I put my heart into the rules for two reasons: first, the rules in the monasteries are great methods and forms through which people achieve enlightenment. At present, they are the basic part of practice; in the future, they will be a step for promoting practice. Second, if one is careful with rules and clear in every detail, one will make no mistakes. This can be a benefit for oneself as a principle of self-reliance and a benefit for others as a punishment and warning. Once one becomes a deacon, one can use it freely without too much hesitation. 我在規矩上用心,其義有二:當知叢林規矩,為行人悟心大法,見性宏模,現為行法基礎,未來為進道階漸,一也;人能留心規矩,巨細清明,毫無訛謬,自則為立身大本,他則為拔楔抽釘,一旦受執為人,拈來便用。³³

Laiguo himself practiced the rules and totally understood the simple principle of Chan: 'Do not obsess over a single item 不著一物.' His bedroom was decorated quite simply:

On my bed there is nothing else but my neatly folded quilt with a pillow in the middle. On the table is an incense board and the Four Sites Protocol. Other things such as teapot cups, oil lamps, oil pots, Buddhist statues and scriptures, paper, ink, inkstone, incense, candlesticks etc., I don't keep them in my room. 我寮床上被條,龍含珠放當中,毫無其他零細。桌上一塊香板,現在規約一本,其余茶壺杯子,油燈油壺,佛像經書,紙筆墨硯,香爐燭臺,大小各物,一概不存。³⁴

It can be seen that after his enlightenment, Laiguo not only achieved unimpeded access to the spiritual world but also achieved a charismatic and dignified image, successfully expressing the character of a Chan master from the inside out.

Conclusion

This article applies the method of hermeneutic hagiography in interpreting Laiguo's autobiography. This approach to interpretation will not misconstrue his holiness; on the contrary, it can truly reflect on how Laiguo, after all kinds of abnormal experiences, turned from an ordinary person into a holy man. It also reveals how his divine image can be preserved and, thus, how his sanctity can become more accessible to the public through recognition. Through an interpretation of the text, a relatively human and humanized holy monk is revealed, showing why and how he became holy to the world.

The autobiography of Laiguó shows a common feature of many biographies of traditional sages in terms of its structure. That is, the sages break through all kinds of difficulties and finally reach a state of enlightenment through a strong, consistent perseverance in seeking after the Way. If we were to sum up the life characteristics of Laiguó in one word, it would be ‘pureness.’ Whatever he was determined to do, Laiguó always carried out his efforts to the end, regardless of whether the goal was filial piety at home, ascetic practices after becoming a monk, or the work involved in being a deacon. Laiguó never allowed himself to have a hint of carelessness; he devoted himself completely. Even in simple things, Laiguó showed his excellence in his practice. Sanctity must be forged through hardship; the purity of Laiguó’s character was sublimate and expanded. These characteristics were vividly reflected in both Laiguó’s personal practice experience and also in the revitalization of Gaomin Monastery. Talking about his own character, Laiguó once said:

I am a man who is different from other people. After I saw in Mount Putuo some monks with white pants, white socks and umbrellas, I went to the Fanyin Cave to commit suicide. Once I saw things in this world that were not to my liking, I didn’t want to live in this world anymore. I am just that kind of person. When I was in the Chan hall, I still saw so many bad things. So, I reflected upon myself: ‘Why did I become a monk? Do I come here just for looking at others? Or to earn a living?’ I said to myself, ‘No, I came here for enlightenment.’ So, I continued talking to myself: ‘Since I came here for the sake of enlightenment, I will just do what I want to do. Why I look at others?’ After reflecting upon myself, I blamed myself and came to know that when I blame other people, it is none of their business but is instead all my fault. It is me myself who sets obstacles in my way. 我這個人與人不同, 在俗家看人家種種不好, 我才出家; 後至普陀山看了一些出家人, 白褂褲, 白襪子, 洋傘, 我又看到不好, 我就至梵音洞舍身; 在世界上看到不好, 我就不住世界, 我是這麼一個人. 到了禪堂裏, 還看得這麼許多不好, 就自己回頭想: 我是為甚麼出家? 難道為看人家來出家的? 還是混不了飯吃出家的? 自己問自己, 自己說: ‘都不是的, 是為道出家的.’ 我又與自己考究: ‘既是為道出家, 辦道就是的! 為甚麼看人家呢?’ 這一問, 才自己痛責自己, 這個不是, 那個不是, 皆是自己不是! 自己打自己的岔.³⁵

His maverick personality and almost harsh spirit of introspection sustained his sense of distance from any group he belonged to no matter what environment he was in. He never belonged to any group and was always ‘out of touch with reality’ and above the general rules. Laiguó’s innate talent for practice and influence and his stinging nature and selflessness in his work all proved that he was a man with the gift of charisma, and these qualities were further honed and revealed in his years of practice.

In addition, hagiography not only reflects the practices of a ‘saint,’ but also proves the success of spreading religion through ‘man.’ The way a person becomes a saint is also a way of religious transformation. As David Ownby, Vincent Goossaert and Zhe Ji said, the concept of a ‘saint of the charismatic type’ was not imposed on these leaders by many other people but was constructed by the leaders themselves and their followers.³⁶ On the one hand, Chinese culture itself has a rich tradition and custom of sainthood. By conferring the titles of ‘Great Master,’ ‘Chan Master,’ and ‘King of Dharma’ on Buddhist leaders, the state gave them political and religious authority, thus making them an important supplement to Confucian ideology under imperial rule. On the other hand, Buddhist leaders themselves also tried to show the charm of religious practice through biography so as to gain the recognition and support of the majority of believers

for the sanctity of their faith. It can be found from the autobiography of Laiguo that he was recognized by many Buddhists because he showed his tenacious character, sincere filial piety to his relatives, enthusiasm for religious practice, and other factors typical of holy persons, such as his practice of meditation and his enlightenment, through which he also accumulated a great deal of religious capital for the development of Gaomin Monastery.

Notes

1. In addition to Laiguo, the other two Chan masters in modern times have been Xuyun 虛雲 (1840–1959) in the Yunjushan Zhenru Chan Monastery in Jiangxi Province and Zhenkong 真空 (1872–1952) in the Mile yuan 彌勒院 on Northern Street in Xizhi men 西直門, Peking. The successors of master Zhenkong are very few, and not much has been written about him. In addition, the Mile Yuan was destroyed in the 1950s, leaving a lack of places of worship. Therefore, Master Zhenkong is not as famous as the other two masters. However, his Chan method was ingenious, and he once had the reputation of ‘Xuyun in the South, Zhenkong in the North. 南虛雲’北真空.’ His life story can be found in ‘Haixian laoheshang de shigong—Zhenkong chanshi’ 海賢老和尚的師公——真空禪師 [The master of Ven. Haixian—Chan master Zhenkong], Zhiguang 智光 (dates unknown). *Canchan lutou jianwen lu* 參禪路頭見聞錄 [The sketch book of Chan practice], 113–163.
2. Wang, *Yangzhou lidai mingren*, 235. According to *Hanjiang wenshi ziliao* 邗江文史資料 [Hanjiang Literature and historical materials], there is a Laiguo temple in Jiangsu Yizheng Shierxu 十二圩, and there is a statue of Laiguo there. Many of Laiguo’s disciples have Laiguo’s picture in their houses. Some people have even begged for pieces of Laiguo’s beard and put them on wooden Laiguo statues to make offerings for him. At an early age, Laiguo had his hair cut. Later, he vowed that he would not cut his hair until ‘the five engineering feats of Gaomin,’ including the pagoda, the main temple hall, the Chan hall, the house for the sick and the house for the old, were finished. In his later years, Laiguo had long, all black hair. His disciples regarded him as a reborn Buddha who achieved enlightenment, thus, they respected him even more. Zhang, ‘Gaomin si,’ 125.
3. LCG, 254.
4. Goldfuss, *Vers un bouddhisme du XXe siècle*.
5. Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism*.
6. Birnbaum, ‘Master Hongyi Looks Back,’ 75–124; Birnbaum, ‘Deathbed Image of Master Hongyi,’ 175–207.
7. Carter, *Heart of Buddha*.
8. Zhang, *Fayu lingyan*.
9. Campo, *Construction de la sainteté*.
10. Wang, *Shenghuo chan*.
11. Feuchtwang and Wang, *Grassroots Charisma*.
12. Goossaert and Ownby, ‘Mapping Charisma in Chinese Religion,’ 3–11. The three French scholars’ papers are Goossaert, ‘Mapping Charisma among Chinese Religious Specialists,’ 12–28; Ji, ‘Expectation, Affection Responsibility,’ 48–68; Palmer, ‘Embodying Utopia,’ 69–89.
13. See Wu, *Faguo de Zhongguo zongjiao yanjiu zongshu*; Cao, *Zhongguo zongjiao yanjiu nianjian* (2011–2012).
14. Ownby, Goossaert and Ji, *Making Saints in Modern China*. The chapters related to the Buddhist elite and leaders include the following: Kiely, ‘Charismatic Monk and the Chanting Masses,’ 30–77; Campo, ‘Chan Master Xuyun,’ 99–136; Birnbaum, ‘Two Turns Life,’ 161–208; Bianchi, ‘Subtle Erudition and Compassionate Devotion,’ 272–311; Ji, ‘Comrade Zhao Puchu,’ 312–348; Despeux, ‘The “New Clothes”,’ 349–393; Sun, ‘Jingkong,’ 394–418.

15. *Huatou* is a main method for Chan practice and is commonly used in “Forest Dwelling Community 叢林”. Usually the *huatou* would be a question such as “What is your original face before your parents gave birth to you 父母未生前本來面目?” “All dharmas return to one, where does one return to 萬法歸一，一歸何處?” “Who is it that is reciting the name of the Buddha 念佛是誰?” etc.
16. Li and Liu, ‘Shengzhuan de xushu yu quanshi,’ 223.
17. LCG, 511.
18. LCG, 549.
19. LCG, 513.
20. They are, respectively, ‘Lun gegu liaoqi sheshen xunmu shi’ 論割股療親舍身殉母事 [On cutting off one’s thighs to heal one’s mother], 1873.7.11; ‘Zuo xiaozi xiaowei shi’ 左孝子孝威詩 [Poem of the dutiful son Zuo], 1874.7.15; ‘Gegu fengqin’ 割股奉親 [Serving parents with one’s thigh], 1876.2.22; ‘Jielu laishu’ 節錄來書 [An excerpt of the letter], 1878.5.20; ‘Chenxiao getian’ 誠孝格天 [Sincere filial piety can resonate the Heaven], 1878.6.28; ‘Sanxiao gebi ji’ 三孝割臂記 [The story of three dutiful sons and daughters who cut off their arms to serve their father], 1890.9.18. There are a number of such reports; these are just examples.
21. See Han, ‘Geguliaoqin.’
22. Chen, ‘Lunli jianshe zhi jiben guannian.’
23. LCG, 518.
24. LCG, 516.
25. LCG, 518.
26. LCG, 612.
27. LCG, 663.
28. LCG, 522.
29. LCG, 523.
30. LCG, 525.
31. LCG, 522.
32. LCG, 524.
33. LCG, 522.
34. LCG, 525.
35. LCG, 690.
36. Ownby, Goossaert and Ji, *Making Saints in Modern China*, 22.

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Abbreviation

LCG *Laiguo chanshi guanglu* 來果禪師廣錄 [Wide collection of Chan master Laigu]. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 2006.

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