Preface

The sixteenth day of the first month of 1565 was an ordinary day for most people in China, but a sad one for the monks of the Great Baoen monastery 大報恩寺 in Nanjing. Its abbot, Xilin Yongning 西林永寧 (1483–1565), died that day at the age of eighty-two. Having served as the abbot of this monastery for thirty-four years and concurrently as a top monastic official in the Nanjing Central Buddhist Registry (*senglu si* 僧錄司) for twenty-five years, Yongning was highly esteemed not only by the Baoensi community but also by the entire Buddhist world in the Jiangnan region. The Baoensi monks also felt disturbed by Yongning's prediction that their monastery would decline. To their surprise, his solution to the bad situation was to entrust them to a young monk eventually known as Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (1546–1623). It took the Baoensi monks little time to realize that their leader's prophecy was not empty talk. The first major challenge facing the monastery was ironically generated by Yongning himself—or, to be more precise, by his funeral, which was estimated to cost three hundred taels of silver. Yongning left behind only about thirty taels, so the difference had to be met by a loan at a very high interest rate. When the funeral was over, the Baoensi monks began to worry about the debt. A meeting was convened, but no good idea was put forth. Finally, Deqing suggested selling Yongning's belongings and part of the monastery's land holdings. This was accepted, and the debt was taken care of. One year later, much more severe challenges emerged as a fire, caused by lightning, destroyed the main body of the monastery. Allowing such a degree of damage to an imperially sponsored monastery constituted a heavy offense. As many as fifteen superintendent monks were hence thrown into prison and were rumored to face the death sentence. Baoensi monks started to flee in panic, but Deqing did not. He instead occupied

himself with taking care of his imprisoned colleagues and attempting to overcome the crisis. Shortly after Emperor Jiajing (r. 1522–1566) died, the indicted monks were set free with relatively minor punishments. Subsequently, spurred by the dilapidated state of the monastery, Deqing and a fellow monk named Xuelang Hong'en 雪浪洪恩 (1545–1607) vowed to rebuild it at any cost. At the turn of the Wanli era (1573–1620), despite Hong'en's opposition, Deqing set off to North China in search of the Dharma and support for the monastery. In time, he spent most of his life outside the Jiangnan region where the Great Baoen monastery was located, and even became the mentor to the reigning emperor's mother. In 1589, as a way of expressing respect to him, a copy of the Buddhist canon, a rare imperial gift, was bestowed from the inner court to the Great Baoen monastery and further enhanced its reputation and appeal.

In contrast, Hong'en chose to stay on and remained very active in the Jiangnan region. Finally, with support from local society, he managed to reconstruct the Baoen stupa, a landmark of the monastery. The efforts of these two friends represented two ways of restoring the Great Baoen monastery—drawing resources from the inner court and from local society, respectively—but neither of them was successful in completely fulfilling their vow. Eventually, the monastery was fully rebuilt in 1699, early in the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), with government money.

The preceding narrative, derived mainly from Deqing's autobiography, includes many puzzling points. Built by the Yongle emperor (r. 1403–1424) in memory of his mother, the Great Baoen monastery was one of the biggest monasteries owning a great amount of imperially bestowed land. Why did it become so financially strapped in the last years of the Jiajing era that it could not even afford its abbot's funeral? Was it a common practice to sell monastic property? How did this affect the *saṃgha* in the long run? Was it fair for those arrested monks to face the threat of the death sentence? If not, how did they come to face such heavy charges? Turning to Deqing's departure from the Jiangnan region, why did it happen at the turn of the Wanli era? Why did he head for North China rather than stay in Jiangnan to seek local or regional support? Deqing and Hong'en would both become influential masters, but how and to what extent did their different choices affect their growth as religious leaders? As for the restoration of the monastery, which was the most decisive of all the forces involved in the process: eminent monks, the *saṃgha*, the inner court, the local society, or the government? More intriguingly, to what extent was this not a story about a single monastery but the experience of the contemporary *saṃgha* as a whole? These questions concern the entire history of Chinese Buddhism in late imperial China, but many of them have not been adequately answered by previous scholars. Providing answers to these problems was the initial motivating force that engaged me in this study.

I would like to first express particular thanks to my thesis adviser, Professor Jinhua Chen, at the University of British Columba (UBC), who has given me sufficient freedom to shape my academic style but never forgotten to remind me of those most important issues. His support continues as generous as ever even after I have graduated. Without his constant support and encouragement, it would have been impossible for me to complete this study of Buddhist revival. I also offer my deep gratitude to the other two committee members at UBC. Professor Timothy Brook has set a formidable academic standard for me with his careful and insightful review of my ideas, just as Philip Kuhn did for him at Harvard University many years ago. He even generously shared his research notes with me. Professor Leo Shin has warmed my life at UBC with his patience and shining smile but has at the same time insisted on training me step-by-step in the strictest way. When I started reworking the dissertation into the book manuscript, I was very fortunate to work at McMaster University as a postdoctoral fellow. It is Professor James Benn, my supervisor there, who has since sailed me through the challenging process. I deeply appreciate him for his patience and wisdom.

I am also deeply indebted to the feedback, support, criticism, and encouragement I have received over the years of struggling through various stages of research and writing. When I started writing my UBC dissertation, Professor Chen Yunü 陳玉女 at National Cheng Kung University in Taiwan sent me her articles and books, including her unpublished dissertation, from which I have drawn much inspiration. In 2010–2011, when I spent one year at Kyoto University revising the dissertation, Professor Funayama Tōru 船山徹 directed me to make good use of relevant materials preserved in Japan. Professor Chün-fang Yü at Columbia University has given me detailed and insightful suggestions, both as an external examiner of the dissertation and as a reviewer of the book manuscript. Of particular importance was her reminder that I should keep a balance between different opinions and methodologies. Moreover, Professors Daniel Stevenson at the University of Kansas, Jimmy Yu at Florida State University, Zhu Honglin 朱鴻林 (Chu Hung-lam) at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Gong Jun 龔雋 at Sun Yat-sen University, Kimura Kiyotaka 木村清孝 and Ochiai Toshinori 落合俊典 at the International College of Postgraduate Buddhist Studies (ICPBS), Marcus Bingenheimer at Temple University, Paul Crowe at Simon Fraser University, Daniel Overmyer, Francesca Harlow, and Josephine Chiu-Duke at UBC have all contributed to my research in different ways. Four anonymous readers for Columbia University Press reviewed my manuscript. Thanks to their advice and assistance, I have corrected some errors and inaccuracies, and I take responsibility for those that remain.

While writing the original dissertation, I received major support from Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai 仏教伝道協会 (Society for the Promotion of Buddhism). It allowed

me to study in Japan for one year, which has proved a significant experience in my academic life. I would also like to acknowledge the help of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, for it was during the term of my postdoctoral research under its sponsorship that I finished the first revision of the manuscript. The Grant for Book-Length Monographs on Chinese Buddhism by Dharma Drum Mountain in Taiwan sponsored the publication of this book, which I appreciate very much.

I thank my friends, particularly Chi Limei 池麗梅, Tim Sedo, Eric Greene, Robban Toleno, Jeff Horowitz, Kang Hao 康昊, and Dai Lianbin 戴聯斌 for their reading of and comments on the dissertation and the manuscript. I also wish to express my gratitude for the support given me by the faculty, staff, and librarians at UBC, Kyoto University, the ICPBS, McMaster University, University of Macau, Sun Yat-sen University, and Jinan University in Guangzhou. The Department of Philosophy at Sun Yat-sen University and my family friend Zhao Dongmei 趙冬玫 provided me, respectively, with an office to work in and a house to live in while I suffered hard times, for which I am deeply grateful. I am indebted also to Lowell Frye and Wendy Lochner, both of whom as editors have guided me through the editing process of Columbia University Press.

Special and deepest thanks are owed to my wife, Zhao Lingyun 趙凌雲, and my parents, who have all supported me without reservation throughout my years of education and research. Without their indulgence, I would not have arrived at this point, let alone complete this study. I dedicate this book to my grandfather Liu Yichang 劉益長 (1908–1996). His wisdom has kept me warm deep in my heart and encouraged me to keep moving even in the hardest times.

An African proverb says that it takes a whole village to educate a child. This casts a light on the pathway of my growth and, in a broader sense, reveals the secret in the development of human civilization. After having benefited so much from others, it is my turn to do something good for society.