What is Local Buddhism?

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Abstract: My research on Buddhism has largely been concerned with the localisation of Buddhist institutions, that is, their situatedness within the immediate society, economy, and culture of where they existed. To pursue that research, I drew on the evidence of local texts (such as gazetteers) as well as pilgrimage texts. I now wonder whether my use of sources was too promiscuous in overriding the differences between local worshippers who organised their lives around one particular religious institution, and pilgrims who toured a site only once. Did the difference in their experience of place entail a different understanding of Buddhism, and if so, was it simply the difference between popular and elite religion, or was it something else? To explore this problem, which I will call tourist Buddhism, I examine the treatment of three sites in the standard Qing Buddhist pilgrimage handbook, *Canxue zhijin* 參學知津 [Knowing the Fords on the Way to Knowledge], comparing these accounts with locally-based documentation in order to explore the subtle and unstable relationship between local Buddhism and translocal religion.

Keywords: local Buddhism, translocal religion, pilgrimage, Dong Qichang, Wutaishan, Wudangshan, Wushan

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To ask what is local Buddhism is inseparable from asking what Buddhism is: the sum of its local manifestations, or a concept that hovers as a translocal category without regard to how it is locally expressed or practised? We tend to think of religion in a dematerialised way, elevating it as an abstraction that transcends the real world. Some might see this habit of abstraction as the effect of the modernist concept of religion, though it is one we share with the long tradition of Buddhist commentators who looked back through the centuries, as far back as Buddha himself, in the belief that it was sensible to address the ideas and forms of worship of Buddha as a coherent and unified entity.

Approaching Buddhism as a local practice rather than a translocal religion may not strike some readers as a pressing problem, but it caught my attention as I returned to earlier work I have done on Ming Buddhism. The problem of localism, to put this in stark terms, is the problem of materialism, which is to say, granting priority to the materiality of Buddhist practice over the ideation of doctrinal concepts. Three decades ago in her Massey Lectures, the German-Canadian metallurgist (and historian of Chinese metallurgy) Ursula Franklin argued for shifting our thinking about technology, seeing it not so much as a structure of knowledge but as what she termed 'formalized practice' through which people do things and, by doing them, define themselves as a social group. From this perspective, technology becomes, in a phrase she made famous, 'how we do things around here'.[1] What motivated this definition was the impulse to deconstruct a concept as vast as technology in favour of a more instantiated understanding based on how people use technology in particular social contexts, which is how most people experience technology. I would venture that most Buddhists understand Buddhism in relation to the context in which they practise it—'how we do things around here'—whereas scholars of Buddhism are prone to elevating their subject to a transcendent position above everyday existence, more so than treating it as a technology by which people engage materially in order to survive that existence.

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[1] Rephrased from Franklin, *The Real World of Technology*, 25.

The problem of localism is also the problem of perspective, which is how this issue has come back to my attention. My earlier research on Ming Buddhism focused on localising Buddhist institutions in relation to the society, economy, and culture of the localities where they existed. To that end, I drew on primary sources that ranged from local texts (such as gazetteers) to texts written by visitors and pilgrims (in the form of travel essays and pilgrims' accounts).[2] I now wonder whether that method made an error in failing to distinguish between the perceptions of locals and the perspectives of visitors who are outsiders. For local Buddhists, a temple was part of the local social topography and woven into the fabric of everyday life. For visitors, it was instead a monument, the legibility and significance of which depended on its identification as a Buddhist site, and indeed as one of an endless number of Buddhist sites that cohered through the translocal concept of Buddha's teachings. The difference in perspective has to do with the materiality of the observer's presence at the site. The local knows the tangled social web within which the site functions, which is largely invisible to the outsider who has come on pilgrimage. The local knows the temple as a site of deeply layered social experience; the pilgrim approaches the same site without this history and so relies on a different consciousness that constructs the site's identity from an understanding that transcends the local, without which the local site would have no meaning. Missing this difference would be inattentive to the ways in which the outsider's perspective dominates the history we write of Buddhist institutions, thereby tethering that history to universalist ideas about Buddhism rather than discovering it through the particularised practices found at the site.

The proposition that there is something worth identifying as local Buddhism raises three questions. The first is how to designate the local. Is it the village neighbourhood, say the distance that can be walked in fifteen or twenty minutes? Is it one of the administrative areas that the Ming state distinguished as *tu* 圖 or *li* 里 or *du* 都,

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[2] This concern runs through the introduction to Brook, *Praying for Power*, especially 15–34, and is demonstrated throughout the three case studies later in the book.

which elsewhere I have translated as 'ward' and 'township'?[3] Is it the principal subcounty unit, the *xiang* 鄉, which I have translated as 'canton', or is it higher, at the county level? As county populations rose into the tens of thousands, though, the county was unlikely to be what most ordinary people experienced as local. The second question is who counts as local, which also entails the question of how localism changes at different levels of the social hierarchy. Ordinary farmers probably did not think of their locality as extending much beyond the next village or nearest market town, whereas wealthy landlords may have imagined their locality as extending across the entire county. The third question is how institutions were localised across the social spectrum, from prominent institutions, such as a vast monastic complex on a scenic mountain that enjoyed patronage from leading county or even provincial magnates, down to neighbourhood shrines supported by those who lived down the lane. There are no fixed answers to these questions. Indeed, it is likely that there are many 'locals' depending on the site and its social situation. Still, I would propose that the local is always present, whatever form it takes.

The Pilgrim's Perspective

In my search for local Buddhism in this essay, I briefly examine a few historical records pertaining to three geographically dispersed Buddhist sites. In each case I will start from the perspective of the outsider, the pilgrim who travelled to these sites. Except when it is to a familiar local shrine, pilgrimage is necessarily an outsider's undertaking. The pilgrim seeks locations to visit in a way that is more often site-promiscuous than site-specific, engaging materially with Buddhism in a serial fashion by moving among a potentially infinite number of possible sites, all of which are subsumed under the bland rubric of Buddhism. The contrast between pilgrim and local devotee is strong, for the latter engages in religious practice in the tightly defined context of a local community. This is not to say that the local

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3 Brook, 'The Spatial Structure of Ming Local Administration'.

devotee would have been unable to grasp the broader abstraction of Buddhism in the context of sites elsewhere, but it is to suggest that their practice of Buddhism was predominantly 'how we do things around here'. Monks, officials, and literati may have had ties to a local home institution, but their opportunity to encounter Buddhism everywhere would have induced them to approach a site as a place to visit once rather than as a place to worship daily, and therefore to subordinate each locality to their experience of translocal Buddhism.

My source for the pilgrim's/outsider's perspective is the standard nineteenth-century pilgrim's guidebook, *Canxue zhijin* 參學知津 [Knowing the Fords on the Way to Knowledge], a treasure trove of on-the-ground information about religious sites across China. The book opens with prefaces by its compiler, Xiancheng Ruhai 顯承如海, and its publisher, Yirun Yuanhong 儀潤源洪, dated 1826 and 1827.[4] Both were senior Hangzhou abbots in that decade, and their authority must have done much to secure the reputation of the text.[5] The book's intended audience was itinerant monks, and its content was explicitly presented so that monks would engage in pilgrimage as a form of religious training to lead them to an deeper understanding of Buddhist doctrine and practice. Even though Ruhai did not write the book for the laity, the book spread beyond its intended readership and was widely used by lay pilgrims.

To orient the pilgrim, Ruhai in his preface stresses that travel is not easy, but that managing the burdens of travel could be a training opportunity to burn off bad karma. So that pilgrims understood what was expected of them, and what they should expect of themselves, Ruhai opens his guidebook with a text of several pages entitled 'Ten Essentials of Pilgrimage' 'Chaosan shiyao' 朝山十要.[6] One of the themes of this text is the distinction between lay and monastic

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[4] On *Canxue zhijin*, see Bingenheimer, 'Knowing the Paths of Pilgrimage'. No copy of the original 1827 edition is known to exist, only the 1876 reprint.

[5] For Yirun Yuanhong's relationship to the Zhuhong tradition in Hangzhou, see Stevenson, 'Text, Image, and Transformation', 34.

[6] *Canxue zhijin*, *shou*, 6b–10a; paraphrased in Johnston, *Buddhist China*, 158–67, based on a later pilgrim's guide published in Fuzhou.

pilgrims. 'There are two classes of pilgrims, laymen and monks', he writes in the sixth essential. 'Lay pilgrims who present offerings and have enough to cover their expenses can find lodgings for themselves without difficulty. Buddhist and Daoist monks traveling in search of teachings are scantily furnished and must rely on the monasteries to claim their privilege of free room and board' (朝山有僧俗之別. 俗人進香, 盤費充足, 易尋安寓. 僧道參訪, 盤費淡薄, 秖可挂單).[7] A monk on pilgrimage may regard himself as an insider, but in the elaborate scheme of giving and receiving support, he is certainly not local, and indeed is further outside the materiality of the pilgrimage act than the lay pilgrim because his presence does not generate a benefit for the hosting institution. As Ruhai states in the eighth essential, 'Bear in mind that temples and monasteries were built for the purpose of honouring Buddha and the spirits, not established for the purpose of providing for the wants of oneself. The provisions in these places are intended to be used primarily for making sacrifices to Buddha and the spirits and secondarily for supporting the resident monks, not for the benefit of oneself' (須知寺廟為供佛神而建, 非為我來而備彼之飲食. 上奉佛仙, 次及住眾, 亦非為我而備).

In pursuit of local Buddhism, I propose to examine briefly Ruhai's presentation of three pilgrimage sites, each quite different from the others, in the order he presents them: Mount Wutai 五臺山 in northern Shanxi province; Xiangyan Monastery 香嚴寺 in western Henan province; and Wushan 五山 or the Five Hills east of Nantong on the north shore of the Yangzi Estuary. Each is a particular site in a particular location. Each also is the subject of a gazetteer documenting its history, which means that we can use both translocal and local resources to inquire into to what extent any of these sites is 'local', and if so, in what way. To anticipate my conclusion, no site of any prominence is ever purely local, however much it depends on local support. Indeed, the local will often be constructed in such a way as to interact with the translocal in order to attract material benefits from outsiders.

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[7] *Canxue zhijin*, *shou*, 8b, 9b. I use the translation, slightly altered, that Reginald Johnston provides in his *Buddhist China*, 162, 165.

Local Buddhism at Mount Wutai?

Through the period of the Great States of Yuan (1279–1368), Ming (1368–1644), and Qing (1636–1911), Mount Wutai was important as a site of Buddhist practice and pilgrimage. The first Buddhist mountain monastery in China, Wutai was established to honour the Buddhist deity Mañjuśrī (Ch. Wenshu 文殊), who was believed to reside there.[8] A holy site for Inner Asian Buddhists devoted to Mañjuśrī, Wutai also attracted Chinese monks and lay persons over many centuries. *Canxue zhijin* gives it pride of place by making Wutai the destination of the first route in the book, as well as the point of departure for routes four and five. The second half of route one provides a detailed itinerary of the sights and destinations on Mount Wutai organised as excursions from Wenshu Monastery 文殊寺, which was centrally positioned among the Five Terraces (*wutai* 五臺) that give the site its name. Ruhai's account emphasises the area's vastness, the great number of holy places, and the difficulty of travel. He warns the pilgrim wandering through these hills to avoid getting lost and to be prepared for cold and hunger. As for what we might call local Buddhism, he makes no comment.

A more promising source for localism is the monastic gazetteer of Mount Wutai, *Qingliang shanzhi* 清涼山志 [Mount Clear and Cool Gazetteer], compiled in 1596 and widely available in the much-reprinted 1755 edition. The first three chapters of the gazetteer lay out the conceptual organisation and religious geography of the site. The text then turns in the fourth chapter to the political and social structure of support on which the monasteries of Mount Wutai depended by celebrating imperial patrons, highlighting the site's relation to, and indeed its dependence on, the state, and claiming for the site national and dynastic importance. Not until the fifth chapter, which records the patronage of powerful officials, do two stories emerge that touch for the first time on local interests. One is the dominant theme of Ming tales of Wutai,

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[8] For the early history of Wutai's transformation into a Buddhist centre, see Lin, *Building a Sacred Mountain*, 1–5.

which is its deforestation at the hands of local loggers and timber dealers. The other is the attempt by local landowners to claim the tax exemptions that were given to monasteries by virtue of their enjoyment of imperial patronage. Both tales make it into the gazetteer because powerful officials intervened to protect the interests of the monasteries against local economic interests.[9] The next three chapters then turn to famous monks who lived on Mount Wutai, all of them outsiders.

It is only in the ninth chapter of *Qingliang shanzhi*, on marvellous events and divine responses, that local matters come to the fore. The chapter includes seven reports of miraculous events in the Ming period involving laity, all of whom are identified by their native places. One comes from Suzhou and the rest from North Zhili 北直隸, a distribution that suggests that Mount Wutai by late in the sixteenth century was enmeshed in a Buddhist network based not in Shanxi province but in the larger North China macroregion anchored at Beijing. The information about monks that follows widens the geographical range to include one or two people native to Shanxi, yet the overall impression is that Wutai was not so much a Shanxi site as a site linked to the North China Plain. The only purely local story that I have noticed tells of a man from North Terrace 北臺 who stole copper coins, was struck by lightning, and admitted to the theft when he regained consciousness.[10] This displacement of patronage away from the locality to some degree confirms Jinping Wang's recent analysis of local society in Shanxi province by showing that the protection and patronage of religious sites by powerful interests, notably the princely households based in Shanxi, began to decline around the middle of the sixteenth century with the strengthening of the civil administration and its links to an emerging local gentry. As she concludes her study, 'By the beginning of the seventeenth century, the clergy and their establishments had been

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[9] *Qingliang shanzhi*, 5.25b, 28b. On the deforestation of Mount Wutai, based in part on *Qingliang shanzhi*, see Lowdermilk and Wickes, *History of Soil Use*, 5–11.

[10] *Qingliang shanzhi*, 9.13a.

severely marginalised in local society.'[11] The institutions at Mount Wutai had to find regional networks to replace the local networks that had turned against them.

Alterations to the woodblocks of the 1755 reprint of *Qingliang shanzhi* may confirm but also complicate this conclusion. The blank pages at the end of some chapters have been filled in with the printed names of those who donated to the costs of publication. These lists vary from copy to copy, but in almost every case the names are primarily those of married women. Consider by way of example the two-page spread listing the name of sixty-nine donors at the end of chapter two in the Harvard-Yenching copy. With the exception of the final three names in the last column, all are married. Only one man is identified by surname, Cheng shi 程氏, and he seems to be there as the husband of the woman whose married and maiden surnames, Cheng Wang shi 程王氏, follow his.[12] Until we can identify who these female patrons are, we have to pause before declaring Mount Wutai exclusively dynastic or regional in character. At the very least, these donor lists suggest that the imperial storyline of Mount Wutai as a dynastic site for the veneration of Mañjuśrī is not sufficient to contain our analysis of the dispersed votive community that supported Wutai, whether as a regional or as a re-localised institution.

Local Buddhism at Xiangyan Monastery?

From Mount Wutai, route five in *Canxue zhijin* runs down the Fen 汾 River valley to Tongguan 潼關 where the Yellow River turns eastward from its southbound course. Route nine picks up where route

[11] Wang, *In the Wake of the Mongols*, 267.

[12] *Qingliang shanzhi*, 2.15a–b. This list of names is not printed in the copy I acquired in Tokyo in 1980, clearly a different printing. It shares only the lists at the ends of the ninth and tenth *juan* with the Harvard-Yenching edition, though it includes an additional set of mostly clerical male donors at the end of *juan* 10 that is not in the Harvard-Yenching copy.

five leaves off, connecting Tongguan southward to Mount Wudang 武當山 in northern Huguang 湖廣 province. The main route runs via the Huguang subprefecture of Junzhou 均州, but Ruhai includes an alternate route detouring through Xichuan 淅川 County at the western edge of Henan province before dipping back into Huguang and connecting to Mount Wudang. Wudang was a site sacred to the Daoist veneration of Zhenwu 真武, the Perfect Warrior, until Emperor Yongle 永樂 (r. 1402–1424) singled out the deity and the mountain for extraordinary patronage in the 1410s, incorporating this warrior god into the official ritual pantheon of the dynasty.[13]

Although Wudang is not our concern here, Yongle's veneration of the Perfect Warrior affected the religious ecology of the region, including Xichuan county, for the route through Xichuan was the route that imperial emissaries from Beijing took to reach Wudang. One effect of that traffic was to bring Xichuan's leading Buddhist institution, Xiangyan Monastery 香巖寺, to notice beyond the county. Ruhai notices Xiangyan Monastery to the extent that he offers advice regarding the difficulty in getting to the site. He advises the pilgrim that after entering Xichuan county at Jingzi Gate 荊子關, he should cross Liguan Bridge 李官橋 and take care to ask the way on the 'back mountain roads' 山岡僻路 he will travel. In five *li* the pilgrim reaches Lower Xiangyan Monastery, then after another thirty *li*, Upper Xiangyan Monastery. Beyond Xiangyan it is fifteen *li* to the courier horse station and another fifteen to the bottom of the mountain, at which point the pilgrim crosses the bridge on the right and follows that road into Huguang province. A further two hundred *li* gets him to the summit of Mount Wudang.[14]

Both Upper and Lower Xiangyan had roles in shaping the history of Buddhism in Xichuan. From the 1660 monastic gazetteer we learn that Xiangyan was regarded as an 'ancient monastery' 古寺 with a millennium-long history. Although it was destroyed in the inter-dynastic war, abbot Chaogu 超古 rebuilt it in 1658–1659, following which

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13 On Yongle's patronage of Mount Wudang, see Campbell, *What the Emperor Built*, 89–125.

14 *Canxue zhijin*, 1.16a.

he compiled the gazetteer, the monastery's first, to commemorate its restoration.[15] Though roughly produced and amounting to only two chapters, it is an intentionally crafted text designed to link Xiangyan to the world of imperial patronage that dominated Mount Wudang. We see this at the start of the first chapter, which Chaogu opens with a short section of imperial texts reaching back to 761. The highlight of this section is an edict that Emperor Chenghua 成化 (r. 1464–1487) issued two months before his death in 1487, affirming his commitment to Buddhism and singling out Xiangyan Monastery for protection. The emperor notes that Xiangyan, long dilapidated, was revived in the Yongle period thanks to the patronage of an aristocrat appointed to develop Mount Wudang, who diverted excess building materials not needed for that project to monk Taixu 太虛, who used them to rebuild Xiangyan. When an imperial eunuch on assignment to Mount Wudang reported to Chenghua that the monastery had been stripped of its assets over the subsequent half-century, the emperor ordered that 'officials, soldiers, and commoners' of the region should cease their predations so that the monastic community at Xiangyan might devote its efforts to its religious duties.[16]

Having tied Upper Xiangyan Monastery to the imperial complex on Mount Wudang, Chaogu turns in the second chapter to Lower Xiangyan Monastery, also known as Iron Buddha Chapel 鐵佛庵. Unlike Upper Xiangyan perched in the hills, Lower Xiangyan lay on the route that official court emissaries took when travelling from Beijing to Mount Wudang, and in fact was the last Buddhist institution where emissaries could receive shelter and support along that route before reaching their destination. The reports of both the gazetteer and the route book indicate that Xiangyan Monastery, Upper as well as Lower, could flourish only by exploiting their proximity to Mount Wudang. As Xichuan county magistrate Zheng Tingcai 鄭廷才 writes in his preface to the gazetteer, a monastery

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[15] *Xiangyan lüeji*, *xu*, 3a–b. Chaogu's preface is dated 1660. The only surviving copy of which I am aware, in the Harvard-Yenching Library, can be dated roughly to 1746; Brook, *Geographical Sources*, 108.

[16] *Xiangyan lüeji*, 1.1b–2a.

such as Xiangyan 'is not one that can easily be supported on the resources of one county or one canton'. The only way Xiangyan could survive in a backwoods county such as Xichuan was by hitching itself to imperial power. Its situation was thus not unlike Mount Wutai's, where local interests were ready to divest the institution of its resources rather than support it, and where the key to survival was imperial patronage. For the Buddhists of Xichuan county, this 'ancient monastery' was their only claim to significance. Local support may well have made Xiangyan a site of local Buddhism, but without notice from the political summit, locals lacked the means to sustain its fabric and identity. The local succeeded to the extent that it could mesh with the translocal.

Local Buddhism at Wushan?

Southeast of Tongzhou 通州 on the Yangzi estuary lies a circle of five hills known as Wushan. The most prominent in size and reputation is Langshan 狼山 (Wolf Hill). Langshan is the destination of two land routes in *Canxue zhijin*, both of which start in Yangzhou. Route thirty-four runs north to Huaian 淮安 and then returns south, while route thirty-five runs down to Suzhou, then turns north to cross the Yangzi. That two routes should end in the same place was Ruhai's device to link routes into extended networks, though it does lend a certain emphasis to this destination. In addition, route thirty-four somewhat unusually includes an appendix describing the routes and sights around Langshan.

If Langshan is important to Ruhai, it is because it was the dharma-place of Mahāsthāmaprāpta (Ch. Shizhi 勢至), who with Amitabha (Ch. Amituo 阿彌陀) and Avalokiteśvara (Ch. Guanyin 觀音) constituted the trinity of Pure Land bodhisattvas. Despite this importance, the only Buddhist institutions at Wushan that Ruhai identifies are the pagoda and great hall on Langshan. He recommends pilgrims get their passports stamped at the great hall, yet he cannot name the monastery of which that was the main building, which the mountain gazetteer identifies as Guangjiao Monastery 廣教寺. Even the term 'great hall' is problematic. Originally, the building

was known as Dasheng dian 大勝殿 (Mahāsthāma Hall). Restored in the Wanli era (1572–1620), it was called Dasheng dian 大聖殿 (Great Sage Hall), although all Ruhai could provide was *dadian* 大殿 (great hall).

A different image of the Buddhist element on Wushan emerges from the mountain gazetteer, *Wushan quanzhi* 五山全志, published in 1751. Not a monastic gazetteer, this book is thematically focused on the military charisma of the site as a bastion of supernatural resistance against pirates. Even though Buddhist matters are not central to the gazetteer's purpose, some information about the area's Buddhist history and institutions is preserved. For example, the chronology of significant events at Wushan credits the withdrawal of Japanese pirates intent on burning down Guangjiao Monastery in 1614 to Buddha's intervention.[17] In the opening set of illustrations, however, the monastery is not named, though it may appear as the complex of buildings at the south-eastern foot of Langshan.

The Buddhist history of Wushan receives more notice in two chapters of writings by famous authors. This cohort hails from places as far west as Nanjing and as far south as Ningbo, suggesting that it had a regional reputation within the Lower Yangzi microregion not unlike Mount Wutai's reputation across the North China Plain. The most instructive of the documents is the text written by the artist and Buddhist layman Dong Qichang 董其昌 in 1630 to celebrate the building of a monastery, not on Langshan but on Junshan 軍山 (Army Hill). Dong's essay does more than anything in the gazetteer to Buddhisise Wushan.[18] Dong starts his account with two monks who aided the local commander by giving warning of approaching pirates, for which they received patronage and experienced minor miracles and auspicious dreams confirming Buddha's protection of the site. Dong notes that their success in this context gradually won them support from the gentry of the surrounded cantons. Gaining the support of the military establishment at Wushan thus appears to have encouraged local elites to involve themselves in supporting

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17 *Wushan quanzhi*, 8.3a.

18 Ibid., 12.7b–11a.

what came to be called Putuo Cloister 普陀别院, or in local usage, Little Putuo 小普陀, an epithet that linked the site with the Buddhist island of Putuo off Ningbo. Dong mentions this fact only to object, 'Get rid of the "Little"' (去其小也). He regarded the monastery on Junshan as the equal of the better-known Putuo rather than a diminished version of it.

Dong Qichang's elaborate intervention is curious in two ways. First of all, it makes no reference to any other aspect of the Buddhist history of Wushan. Secondly, and more strikingly, Putuo Cloister in fact has almost no presence in the gazetteer other than in Dong's essay. Its destruction in 1661 counted against its prominence, yet it was later rebuilt and should have been featured more in the 1751 gazetteer. It receives a brief notice in the buildings section of the gazetteer, but is not marked on the woodcut illustration of Junshan. A site called Putuo Cliff 普陀巖 is labelled, but the geography section notes only that this is where you landed by boat to climb to the top of the hill.[19] The cloister has no presence. By the time Ruhai records Wushan, no vestige of this gentry-supported institution remains. He closes the appendix on Wushan by writing, 'Only Langshan receives veneration. The others—Junshan, Jianshan (Sword Hill), Ma'anshan (Horsewhip Hill), and Huangnishan (Mud Hill)—face it in a ring to do it homage' (狼山獨尊, 其餘軍山、劍山、馬鞍山、黃泥山，悉皆面面環拱).[20] The moment of Dong Qichang's literary patronage two centuries earlier had passed, and the local gentry who had stepped forward to support Wushan had vanished from the picture. Ruhai still directed monastic pilgrims to Wushan, but really this was a destination for tourists, not Buddhists. He notes Mahāsthāmaprāpta's birthday on the thirteenth day of the seventh month as though it were still an important date on the local Buddhist calendar, and perhaps at this site it was, yet no other information emerges to confirm the existence or vitality of this glimmer of local Buddhism.

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19 *Wushan quanzhi*, 1.9b, 2,4b, 5.4a.

20 *Canxue zhijin*, 2.10b.

Buddhism and Localism

In this paper, I have examined three sites that attracted the notice of Xiancheng Ruhai in his guide to Buddhist pilgrimage sites in order to understand how, or even whether, any of these sites can be considered instances of local Buddhism. Mount Wutai was nationally known and regionally prominent; Wushan was regionally known but less prominent among Buddhists (and is so today: it was designated a National Forest Park in 2018). Xiangyan Monastery was of only local prominence, though those who travelled to Mount Wudang to offer imperial gifts and sacrifices passed it and knew about it. If you hailed from any of these places, you might well have claimed these monasteries as sites of local Buddhism, yet the evidence of local direction or engagement is sporadic, and when it appears, lies deeply in the shadow of patronage coming from elsewhere and higher up the social and political scale. Each may have hosted some form of local Buddhism, but in terms of support and report, none relies solely on its local situation.

It is not possible that local Buddhism does not exist; but to that assertion must be added, on the strength of what we have just seen, the observation that we have to pause before claiming that an institution of significant reputation cannot be local to the place where it exists. Most temples draw on local support to operate and on local reputation to sustain themselves as efficacious Buddhist sites. Even if the agents for doing so are primarily those licensed as political, cultural, or financial elites, they understood that the material fortunes of the local institutions they supported depended to some extent on interacting with translocal interests. And even though *Canxue zhijin* somewhat prejudices the search for local Buddhism by focusing on institutions that enjoyed regional or dynastic prominence, the book is not a barrier to the task of identifying local Buddhism, given the imbrication of the local with the translocal.

That noted, there is still more that could be done with this pilgrim's guide to investigate local Buddhism. Most of the routes it registers name hundreds of little sites dotted along the paths from one dynastic or regional sites to the next. The prominent sites certainly anchor Ruhai's network, but between every pair can be found

little sites that Ruhai uses to plot the pilgrim's progress along the routes. Reconstructing the histories of these little sites would be an enormous challenge, but a potentially rewarding one that might help us to see where, how, and why Buddhist institutions mattered to the local communities that built them, used them to order their religious lives, and kept them going to the extent that they could, even by hosting travellers on pilgrimage. Local Buddhism is everywhere; we just need to know how to find it.

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