

Property Management of Chinese Chan Buddhist Monasteries: Strengthening Sustainable Trajectory of Religious Establishments

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Abstract

This paper undertakes a comprehensive examination of property management paradigms within the precincts of Chinese Buddhist monasteries, further elucidating individual monks' asset management practices. Drawing from historiographical and documentary resources, this research contextualizes the multifaceted evolution of monastic property ownership, acquisition, and stewardship throughout successive epochs. This analysis illuminates that such paradigms have been sculpted by an intricate confluence of factors, encompassing: dynastic decrees, socio-economic fluxes, ecclesiastical ordinances, and symbiotic interactions with the laity. We discern distinct stratagems of property management, oscillating between the collective stewardship emblematic of cohesive monastic communities and the individual asset holdings of mendicants. In the contemporary milieu, with the accelerative thrust of urbanization and China's mutable regulatory milieu, monastic conglomerates grapple with intricate juxtapositions of canonical religious tenets, exigent economic imperatives, and state apparatuses. This manifests in innovative modus operandi such as lay-partnerships, entrepreneurial ventures, and more. This scholarly endeavor augments the extant literature on ecclesiastical asset management, proffering pivotal insights into the syncretic interplay between religious confraternities and their ambient socio-economic matrices. Furthermore, discerning these intricate practices and their foundational philosophies could catalyze efficacious policy formulations, aligning with cultural conservation objectives and ensuring the sustainable trajectory of religious establishments while contributing to broader global goals such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in promoting sustainable communities, cultural preservation, and responsible resource management.

Keywords: *Property management paradigms, Chinese Buddhist monasteries, monastic stewardship, Urbanization, Sustainable Development Goals*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the early years of Buddhism, after its introduction to China in the Han Dynasty, translation and preaching were the primary forms of Buddhism preaching. Until the Tang Dynasty, the economic model was one of "righteousness based on the estate economy", and the source of this support was mainly the noble scholarly class. This is also compatible with the predominantly upper-class nature of Buddhism in the early stages of

its introduction. In this context, the mystique of Buddhism, combined with its noble foreign origins, dictated the historical inevitability that the rulers would revere Buddhism, and this reverence gave rise directly to the monastic economy. At the same time, the economic sustenance model of the monasteries implicitly coincided with the development and evolution of Buddhism in China.

According to a summary of the economic model of Chinese Buddhist monasteries by the sinologist Jacques Gernet, "mercantilism" (Gernet, 2004) has

been a keyword throughout the history of Chinese Buddhism. The root of this idea may be that at the time when Buddhism was introduced to China, India already had a relatively well-established social and commercial tradition. Therefore, the influence that the introduction of Buddhism had on Chinese culture was not limited to the religious and cultural level alone but even to the introduction of a relatively complete economic system. This had a profound effect on the development of the economic model of the later Mahayana Buddhist monasteries. According to Garnet (2004), Chinese Buddhism is characterised by an 'early capitalist business model' based on a value proposition, a revenue flow in the form of sustenance, and a customer relationship between monks and followers, which suggests that the economic model of Buddhism has been somewhat commercialized since ancient times.

Beside Garnet (2004), there are several other researchers concerned with the economic aspects and property management of Buddhist monasteries in China. Yongshan He (2011) explores the economic roles of Buddhist monasteries in China, focusing on land ownership, taxation, and the interactions between monasteries and the state. In addition, Gregory Schopen (2019) analyzes how Buddhist monastic communities in early and medieval India acquired and managed productive assets, providing insights into the economic strategies that may have influenced Chinese monastic practices. Karel Davids (n.d.) offers a comparative analysis of the economic roles of monasteries and the impact of their dissolution, with a focus on T'ang China, shedding light on state-monastery economic relations. Yifeng Liu (2024) examines the reconstruction and revitalization of Buddhist temples in modern China, considering the economic and social transformations that have influenced monastic property. These studies provide a comprehensive understanding of the economic models, property management practices, and state interactions of Buddhist monasteries in China across different historical periods.

Within the annals of Chinese Buddhist historiography, the nuanced intricacies of property management paradigms within monastic enclaves remain notably underrepresented. Despite the significant accumulation of material assets by monasteries and mendicants across epochs, there exists a conspicuous absence of

scholarly endeavors that methodically dissect and contextualize the multifarious mechanisms, practices, and tribulations pertinent to ecclesiastical property stewardship. Concomitantly, in the contemporary milieu marked by precipitated urban expansion and an oscillating regulatory matrix in China, a salient interrogation emerges regarding the modus operandi of these venerable religious confraternities in recalibrating their asset management stratagems.

This scholarly lacuna engenders the pressing query: Through which historical trajectories have property management practices in Chinese Buddhist monasteries and among individual mendicants evolved, and how are these paradigms negotiating the labyrinthine challenges of the extant socio-economic and regulatory topographies? Therefore, to address these questions, this study examines the evolution of property management of Chan Buddhist monasteries in China.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The research used a qualitative research design, including document analysis as the primary method for data collection. Historical texts, archival records, monastic rules, and regulatory documents were systematically reviewed to gather information on the evolution of property management practices. The data collected were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common themes and patterns in the property management practices of Buddhist monks in China. This process involved coding the data to categorize key concepts, such as collective stewardship, individual asset management, and interactions with state apparatuses.

Cross-referencing was conducted to ensure the validity of findings, and interpretations were contextualized within socio-economic, political, and religious frameworks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. This process involves thematic analysis that was continued with a contextual analysis, where the identified themes were situated within broader socio-economic, political, and religious frameworks. This step allowed the researchers to explore how external factors, such as state regulations, economic conditions, and religious doctrines, shaped and influenced property management practices in Chan

Buddhist monasteries. By examining these intersections, the study provided a nuanced understanding of the evolving dynamics between monasteries and external entities.

Subsequently, an interpretation and synthesis phase was undertaken, wherein the researchers connected the themes to historical and institutional contexts, highlighting the adaptive strategies employed by monasteries to ensure sustainable property management. This synthesis offered a cohesive narrative that traced the trajectory of these practices over time, emphasizing their role in maintaining the long-term viability of religious establishments. Finally, in the presentation of findings, the results were structured to effectively convey key themes and their implications. The findings were contextualized with historical insights, shedding light on the sustainable practices of property management and their contributions to the resilience and continuity of Chan Buddhist monasteries.

3. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The study of property management in ancient Chinese Chan Buddhist monasteries reveals a complex system of administration, economics, and social interaction that belies the austere spiritual reputation of the tradition. Chan Buddhism, which emphasizes direct experience and meditation over doctrinal study, nonetheless developed an intricate network of monasteries that required effective property management to sustain their communities and activities (Wright, 1959). Research into the landholding and economic strategies of these monasteries uncovers the pragmatic approaches these institutions employed to navigate the material demands of monastic life (Brook, 1993).

The primary sources of property for Chan monasteries were donations from lay followers and imperial patrons. They were often recorded in inscriptions and temple records, providing a wealth of data for modern scholars (Schluter, 2010). These donations included not only land but also monetary contributions and material goods, all of which had to be managed to support the monastic population and the monasteries' various functions (Verellen, 2004).

Furthermore, the economic activities of Chan

monasteries had broader social and economic impacts on their surrounding communities. Monasteries often provided public goods, such as bridges, roads, and inns, contributing to local infrastructure and economy (Grant, 2008). The interaction between monasteries and local communities also extended to labor; monasteries would employ laypeople for various tasks, thereby influencing local labor markets and economic activities (Poceski, 2007). The reciprocal relationship between monasteries and the lay community was a defining feature of Chan Buddhism, which, despite its ascetic ideals, was deeply enmeshed in the social and economic fabric of Chinese society (Sharf, 2002).

In analyzing the property management of Chan monasteries, it is crucial to consider the broader political and economic contexts. The support of the state, which could be both a boon and a liability, was a significant factor in the fortunes of monastic properties. Imperial patronage could lead to substantial donations and grants of property, but political changes could also result in the confiscation or redistribution of monastic lands. Economic policies, taxation, and land reforms implemented by the state also had direct implications for the management of monastic properties (Brook, 1998).

The state of research into the property management of ancient Chinese Chan Buddhist monasteries is thus a tapestry woven from multiple disciplinary strands, including religious studies, history, economics, archaeology, and gender studies. It is an area that continues to develop as new discoveries and methodologies enable scholars to delve deeper into the material complexities of Chan monastic life. These inquiries not only enrich our understanding of Chan Buddhism but also illuminate the broader socio-economic landscapes of ancient China.

The model for creating Buddhist agriculture provides a concrete way for Buddhism to adapt to a socialist society with Chinese characteristics. In the 21st century, one of the crucial measures practiced by the Buddhist community under the banner of "Humanistic Buddhism". It is to vigorously develop Buddhist agricultural construction and consolidate the foundation of "agriculture and Chan", which is the way to realise the moral economic development of Buddhist monasteries. It is also the concrete manifestation of the adaptation of Buddhism to a socialist society with

Chinese characteristics" (Jiang Chenxi et al., 2008).

Research into the management of property in modern Chinese Chan Buddhist monasteries reveals a blend of traditional monastic principles with contemporary economic realities. Modern Chinese Chan Buddhist monasteries, while continuing the religious and cultural legacy of their predecessors, face novel challenges and opportunities in property management due to China's rapid economic development and changing socio-political landscape (Fisher, 2008). The economic reforms of the late 20th century, which introduced market principles into the socialist framework, have had a considerable impact on the ways in which monasteries manage their assets and sustain their operations.

A central issue in contemporary property management within these monasteries is the balance between maintaining religious integrity and engaging in commercial activities. Some monasteries have ventured into various forms of entrepreneurship, such as running meditation centers, guesthouses, and tea plantations, thereby securing financial independence and resources for religious activities (Chau, 2008). This commercialization of monastery property has been a subject of scholarly debate, raising questions about the influence of market forces on religious practices and the potential risks of commodification of spirituality (Laliberté, 2009).

The revival of Buddhism in China has also led to an increase in donations to monasteries, which has bolstered their economic position and allowed for the expansion of property holdings (Fisher, 2008). However, the management of these donations and assets requires a modern administrative apparatus that can navigate both religious obligations and the complexities of China's legal and economic systems (Goossaert & Palmer, 2011). Monasteries often employ lay professionals in administrative roles to handle financial matters, investment, and property development, representing a significant shift from traditional monastic property management practices (Pittman, 2001).

Moreover, the research has identified the government's role in the management of monastic properties as crucial. The Chinese state, with its policies on religious affairs and property rights, remains a decisive force in the operation and sustainability of religious

institutions, including Chan monasteries (Goossaert & Palmer, 2011). Regulatory frameworks and the degree of religious freedom afforded to monasteries can significantly influence their property management strategies (Ashiwa & Wank, 2009).

In addition to economic considerations, environmental concerns have become increasingly relevant to the management of monastic properties. Chan monasteries, traditionally stewards of natural environments, are now incorporating ecological considerations into their property management decisions. This shift reflects a broader trend within Buddhism towards engaging with contemporary environmental issues. Monasteries have adopted sustainable practices in agriculture and construction, aligning their management strategies with environmental conservation principles, which also appeal to the growing eco-consciousness among lay followers (Bruun & Kalland, 2014).

The current state of research into property management in modern Chinese Chan Buddhist monasteries indicates a field that is evolving rapidly, influenced by both internal religious dynamics and external socio-economic factors. Scholars continue to explore how these institutions navigate the intersection of tradition and modernity, with a focus on how monasteries reconcile their spiritual missions with practical economic considerations. Future research trajectories are likely to delve deeper into the impact of globalization, the digital economy, and changing demographic patterns on the sustainability of monastic properties.

Property Management in Religious Institutions

The monastic economy was a particular economic form that emerged in line with social development, and its formation and development was balanced by two social constraints: the level of economic development of society and the development of Buddhist power. Around the 3rd to 9th centuries AD, the monastic economic system was a way of doing business based on the large land ownership system of the monastery. It is a system that has developed in the economy of Buddhist monasteries after a certain stage of development, with the monastic estate economy as the main feature.

The emergence of the monastic estate economy must have two elements. First, secular private ownership of land and land centralization is widespread, so that the secular estate economy and Buddhist monasteries were related to the system. Second, the emergence of the monastic estate economy, not only requires the general social conditions for the emergence and development of the secular estate economy of large estates, but also the prerequisite for the flourishing and expansion of the power of Buddhist monasteries. The development of the monastic economy, like the secular economy, is reflected in two main aspects: the expansion of the occupation of land, and the increase in the occupation of the working population (Xiūwēi & Huīmíng, 1988).

From the Northern and Southern Dynasties, Buddhism became increasingly popular, the rulers often bestowed more and more fields and land on the religion, which gradually became one of the main sources of the monastic economy. It is recorded in *The Supplement to the Biographies of Eminent Monks* that Emperor Wu of Qi had built a fine house on Mount Qi and bestowed land and property on it. It is also recorded in the *Book of Liang* that Emperor Wu bought more than 80 hectares of good land from Wang Qian at the market price and gave it to the Great Aijing Temple (Sīlián, 1999).

In contrast, during the Northern and Southern Dynasties, only the Northern Wei and the Northern Zhou Emperor Taiwu adopted a policy of exterminating Buddhism, while all other rulers chose to protect or support its development. The consistency and continuity of the dynasty's policy towards Buddhism undoubtedly guaranteed the economic stability of the monasteries. The collective ownership of monastic land safeguarded and avoided problems of encroachment and property inheritance from secular land.

The later emergence of private ownership of monastic property did not completely destroy the collective ownership of monasteries. The monastic economy in the Middle Ages was one that was privileged from servitude, with a large land and dependent population, active commercial activities and operations, considerable movable gold and silver assets, and a central position in financial circulation. It was a relatively striking phenomenon in traditional China.

The fervor of religious belief and the political

dividends of the monasteries led to the growth of a predominantly monastic economy, whose shading of the population and plundering of resources led to a sharp decline in the state tax base. And coupled with the taxation model of the early Middle Ages, which was based on capitation, led to a heavy burden on the registered cadastral population and difficulties in the collection of national taxes. In addition, it was clear that the privilege of tax exemption for monasteries was a threat to the functioning of the nation (Xu, 2001).

From another point of view, the Equal Field System was in place from the Northern Wei to the early Tang dynasties, attracting people from the powerful estates of the clans to return to the land under state control. It was not until the time of Emperor Gaozong and Wu Zetian that the state land ownership system tended to shrink in the process of land annexation, with overburdened subsistence farmers fleeing the land and a serious loss of laborer and households, that the system was undermined. Most of the peasants who escaped from the Equal Field System entered new businesses - commerce and industry - or became tenant farmers under the tenancy system of the estate economy. The late Tang Dynasty gradually ceased to restrict landowners' possession of land and labour, and the freedom of peasants to use leased land gradually increased, which transformed the traditional manor economy, and the old manor economy of large estates with strong dependency gradually disintegrated, with the emergence of a new manor economy dominated by Peasant Economy.

At the same time, the monastic economy in the Middle Ages is consistent with the secular society and economy, roughly divided into two stages: first, the monastic estate economy, which was part of the large estate system from the Northern and Southern Dynasties until the middle of the Tang Dynasty. Second, the period from the mid-Tang to the end of the Tang Dynasty Buddhist Chan monastic economy, the monastic economy of large estates was mostly unsustainable, and the emergence of an operating manor economy. The former one, with the collapse of the equal field system and the development of the commodity economy in the Tang dynasty, personal dependence loosened, the original dependency of the labour force left the estate, the estate economy cannot be maintained, and replaced by the tenancy system.

The economy of the monasteries went through the process of exemption from taxation to the payment of miscellaneous taxes and then the implementation of the two taxation laws, after which the privilege of exemption from regular taxation was lost and the dependent population of the monasteries was reduced. It is then suggested that "the reduction in the number of slaves in the typical sense of the Tang law and the increase in the number of hired slaves was a fundamental change in the Tang system" (Jinbao, 2004) The latter was the result of the Huichang persecution of Buddhism in the mid-Tang dynasty, which led to a decline in the economy of Buddhism during the Tang dynasty and led to a change in the way monasteries were financed. This led to the Chan Buddhist monastery's model of "one day without work, one day without food", where work and meditation were combined with farming, which can be described as a self-sufficient and self-supporting Buddhist monastic economy.

Real Dharma, as Thepa argued in his work, means doing the right thing and treating others with respect (Thepa, 2024). From this lens, it aligns with the view that harmonious interdependent relationships are essential among all people. In addition, it mitigates a perceived moral imperative to support marginalized communities (Margulies, 2024).

Economic management model of monasteries under the system of Chan

In the middle of the Tang Dynasty, Buddhism experienced the 'persecution of Buddhism by Emperor Wu', which dealt a great blow to its development and economic resources, and thus began to change the mode of economic income. The Tang Dynasty was the period when Chan Buddhism was most prevalent and when the economy of monasteries tended to move towards the path of monastic 'self-support'. The Chan Buddhist monks wrote a book called the "The Baizhang Chan Monastic Regulations", which concentrated on the idea of agricultural production and the internal organisation of the Buddhist monastic community.

It was recorded in The Baizhang Chan Monastic Regulations: "If there is any person who has pretended to be a monk and mixed with other monks, or who has

caused any other disturbance, he shall be reported by the karmadana, and shall be expelled from the monastery." Or if they have violated the law, striking him with a staff, setting the crowd to burn the robe and bowl, and sending them out from the side door to show the disgrace. The system has four benefits: firstly, it does not defile the pure Sangha, so as to give rise to respectful faith; secondly, it does not destroy the monastic form, so as to follow the Buddhist system; thirdly, it does not disturb the government, so as to reduce litigation; fourthly, it does not leak to the public, so as to protect the Triple Gem."

That is to say, the introduction of Chan strengthened the self-regulation and self-restraint of Buddhism in the Tang dynasty, and at the same time required monks not to pretend as monks, so as to show the authentic features of the Buddhist monastic order. In addition, the Chan also made important innovations in the monastery and the monks, especially in the area of economic management. For example, in the management of the monastery's economic organisation, Chan set out a clear and detailed division of labour, with the monks in charge of their own duties (Liú Xiǎopíng, 2009). What Baizhang Huaihai proposed was a Buddhist monastic economy based on the traditional economy of the period from the Northern and Southern Dynasties to the early Tang Dynasty, and this model is arguably the key to the reform of traditional monasteries.

The traditional monastic economy was dependent on the feudal economy, and the monasteries relied on the alms of the faithful and various economic activities to gather a large amount of wealth from the society. It builds large and extravagant buildings and consumes social resources, while at the same time requisitioning a large number of people to provide labour for them, affecting the normal functioning of social production. The expansion of the traditional monastic economy, which competed several times with the government for the expansion of its own interests, affected the development of the social economy and the revenue of the court. It causes damage to the state economy and poses a threat to the interests of the ruling class. The rulers took steps to suppress the expansion of the monastic economy by censoring the monasteries and eliminating the monks and nuns, especially during the Huichang persecution of Buddhism. It dealt a severe

blow to the monasteries and led to the collapse of the traditional monastic economic system.

The Chan school of Buddhism, with its closed production system, was less involved in the struggle for the interests of secular society because it advocated jungle cultivation. It survived by relying on a self-sufficient, combined farming and Chan economy, to the extent that, after the reign of Emperor Wu, the Chan sect relied on the Chan economy to recover and develop in a short period of time (Mèng Juān, 2019). The economic rise of the Buddhist monastery could not be separated from the support of Chan Buddhism and its means of preaching. The comparative importance attached to agricultural production and the advocacy of farming was in keeping with the social stability of the Tang dynasty, which saw the recuperation and development of agricultural life and gained an opportunity for its own survival.

From the end of the 8th century onwards, the various generations of Dharma heirs under Master Dao Yi spread throughout the mountainous regions. It established Chan monasteries, combining farming with meditation, and teaching Chan Buddhism. At the same time, the Chan monastic economy developed into a sub-species of the monastic economy. In this way, Buddhism joined forces with the peasant economy, using agriculture and the mountains and forests as a means of self-support for Buddhist monasteries, and advocating that "one day without work, one day without food".

With the formulas of the Chan sect formulated by Huai Hai, the latter school of Chan Buddhism introduced a self-sufficient monastic economy in a written and compulsory form. It is a system that allowed all Chinese Buddhist monks to engage in labour and changed the parasitic system of the monastery from the traditional precept that monks were not to be productive. However, it also reduces the social burden and unnecessary trouble caused by reliance on secular support, and circumvents the pitfalls of a monastery's parasitic nature of waiting to be fed by farmers and clothed by silkworms. It led to a setback in the development of Buddhism.

The economic model of "monastic self-support" in modern Chinese Buddhism

The economy of a monastery is a matter of survival and social stability. Generally speaking, there are two ways of financial support for monasteries: one is by the government and rulers, and the other is through the alms given by the faithful to the monasteries. The first source of economic support has been eliminated in modern times, and most monasteries now rely on the second source of almsgiving and support from the faithful.

In the Qing dynasty, monasteries were quite wealthy in terms of temple property, but there was a lack of study of Buddhist teachings. The Complete Works of the Old Man Dongchu writes: In the middle of the Shunzhi period of the Qing dynasty (1644), the Chan master Shi Qiyun rebuilt Xuedou Temple, discussing the relationship between temple property and Buddhist teachings and suggesting that "a monastery with little property is a beauty", which is a pertinent and meaningful argument. At the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, too much monastic property was fought over by the public, and the monastic property was merely the sustenance for the monks. However, at this time the sustenance was scarce and it was difficult for the monks to sustain themselves. In addition, too much monastic property even made the monastic property a source of servitude, increasing the disturbance and making things more difficult. Therefore, he advocated that, firstly, a monastery should have less property as its beauty; secondly, the management should be strengthened and there should be proper management of the property; thirdly, more work should be done for the benefit of society and all sentient beings. Then the monks would not be burdened by the property and the monastery would not be dragged down by the property as well. The the monastery would become a pure land for pure Dharma practice(Lǐ Pèihuá, 2010).

According to Ji Hua Chuan, the "Temple Property for Education" movement of the late Qing Dynasty dealt a heavy blow to the economy of Buddhist temples, and the turmoil and warfare during the Republic of China caused the economy of temples everywhere to collapse. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the economy of monasteries, which is the basis for the survival and development of Buddhism, has undergone great changes. For example, with the

land reform in 1951, the monasteries were redistributed according to the land law. The monastic economy changed from the traditional land-based rent and estate economic model to a modern economy, with the exception of some monasteries in mountainous areas, most of which were basically self-supporting (Huázhuàn & Fāngyào, 2014).

After the reform and opening-up, the entrance fees of monasteries were also an important part of the economic income of monasteries. With the implementation of the policy of religious belief, monasteries continued to charge entrance fees as an economic income in order to better support themselves after the restoration of their religious sites. In some of the best economically developed zones in China, such as the Yangtze River Delta and the Pearl River Delta, the large monasteries are large enough to have raised themselves. Since the reform and opening-up of the country, with the speedy development of the social economy, Buddhism has also moved forward. Yet, along the way there have been various drawbacks to be reflected upon. Although monasteries have been charging entrance fees for a long time as a means of "self-support", this has had a certain impact on Buddhism itself and on Buddhist followers, and has led to various negative news about Buddhism in society.

In 2012, the State Administration for Religious Affairs, together with 10 departments, issued the Opinions on Handling Issues Related to the Management of Buddhist Temples and Taoist Palaces. This process was intended to allow for orderly religious management, legal compliance and the promotion of Buddhist economic development. According to Sheng Kai, the significance of this is threefold: *First*, in response to the current phenomenon of monasteries being "kidnapped" economically, the ten departments have jointly put forward the opinion that "religious activity sites should not be listed as corporate assets". It can be said to be a clear voice of opposition to "being listed". *Secondly*, the legitimate rights and interests of the religious community and the believers could be protected. In addition, it should be made clear that no unit or individual should interfere in the internal affairs of religions. A strict distinction should be made between places for religious activities and places for tourism from the level of government administration. Moreover, the government should oppose any form of "capital intervention" and the "contracting out" of the

monastery economy. *Third*, it is clear that tourism and economics are not the main social functions of religion. Although Buddhism has made positive efforts and important contributions to promote social and economic development since the reform and opening up, the main function of Buddhism should be to Propagate the Dharma to Benefit Sentient Beings, to promote social morality and to participate in charity and relief. Therefore, the opinions clearly point out the misconceptions of some places, enterprises and individuals, and make policy provisions. It is undoubtedly oriented towards the return of Buddhism to its social function, so whether it is a "monastic economy" or a "Buddhist economy", as long as the monastery itself can have a certain "self-supporting" function and the monks are given the capacity to live in peace and conduct their own affairs, it is sufficient.

As Zhou Qi of the Institute of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences stated: "The 'monastic economy' or 'Buddhist economy' is a long-term, concomitant problem, a phenomenon that goes hand in hand with the development of Buddhism. As a result, such problems cannot be solved by a single decree or precept, but always have to be dealt with continuously and concretely, depending on the time and place. Buddhism is a religion that is spiritual, precept-based, less desirous, more practice-oriented, karmic, and believes in karma. Although Buddhist orientation is relatively solid, it is not the same as rigidity in its expression. Therefore, in this new era, to preserve and enhance the internal energy of Buddhism, and to extend and enrich its outreach and universality, should be an important element in the promotion of Buddhism and the maintenance of the originality of Buddhism today.

The modern monastic economy has many functions, broadly speaking several. Firstly, to safeguard the running of the monastery. Secondly, to counteract the excessive greed of society by embodying the concept of Buddhism. Thirdly, to lead the way in a Buddhist way to good ideas of the times through modern concepts. This is precisely one of the very important aspects of the function of a monastery nowadays."

In summary, from the Northern and Southern Dynasties to the early Tang Dynasty, the monastic economy was a traditional one, with both official and faithful sources, until the Sui and Tang Dynasties,

when the monastic economy was at its peak and caused much social discontent. By the middle of the Tang Dynasty, the social and economic situation had become more stable due to Great Anti-Buddhist Persecution by the Emperor Wu'. The monastic economy gradually changed to a more stable one, with the Chan Buddhist Master Huai Hai proposing a Chan monastic economy of "one day without work, one day without food", and also writing the Chan, in which the dictates of the monastic economy are described in detail. The economy of monasteries has always been a major concern of society, and since the reform and opening up, there has been a gradual increase in the number of ways in which monasteries can support themselves. However, there is also a certain amount of control, no doubt to allow Buddhism to maintain its own purity. Buddhist self-support is a way of financing the monastic economy and the support of the monks as a form of Dharma resources.

Economic and Social Impact of Property Management in Religious Institutions

As the material foundation of Buddhism, the economic activities of temples are pivotal for the propagation and development of the religion. It is also intricately connected to the social and legal systems. Examining temple economies across different historical periods reveals the profound significance of legal influences on temple economic management.

The study of temple economies during the Ming Dynasty illustrates the significant role imperial power played in protecting temple economies. Emperor Ming Taizu's decree exempting temples from taxes secured the economic benefits of major temples, particularly in Nanjing, transforming them into significant landowners exempt from taxes and labour obligations (He, 2019). This policy, reflecting the government's supportive stance towards Buddhism, demonstrates the direct impact of legal frameworks on temple economic management.

In modern society, Taiwan's flourishing study of temple economies, especially adopting new organizational forms like corporate and foundation models, contrasts with ancient temple economic structures. These contemporary studies not only unravel the trajectory of Buddhist transformation in

modern society but also provide lessons for the development of Buddhism in mainland China. Social laws are crucial in managing and regulating temple economies in this context.

The rise of the Chan monastery economy during the Tang Dynasty represents a self-innovative shift from traditional temple economic models. Emphasizing frugality and self-sufficiency, particularly in agricultural production, the success of this economic model showcases how temples adapted and transformed under legal and social pressures (Meng, 2019). Furthermore, since the Tang Dynasty, legal regulations on temple economies, such as the management and use of temple properties, have profoundly affected the stability and development of temple economies.

An analysis of Buddhist economics and its systems during the Northern Dynasties also indicates the significant impact of social laws on temple economic management. The financial activities of Buddhism during this period were closely related to the social systems and legal norms of the time, reflecting the interplay between Buddhism and state power (Liú Xiǎopíng, 2009).

In conclusion, whether in ancient or modern times, social laws have significantly influenced the economic management of temples. Through the analysis of historical documents, the interactive relationship between temple economies and social laws is evident, as is the shaping and influencing role of legal frameworks on the development of temple economies. These studies offer new perspectives for understanding Buddhist economics and valuable historical experiences and legal references for modern temple economic management.

With the rapid development of the social economy and the continuous improvement of legal systems, the economic activities of religious organizations, including Buddhist temples, have increasingly garnered widespread attention. The effective management of temple economies is directly linked to the sustainable development of Buddhism and the stability and harmony of the social economy. Therefore, research on temple economic management has significant practical importance and profound social value.

The current state of temple economic management shows a diversified development trend. On the one hand, the formation and development of temple economies have deep historical and cultural roots, evolving from the begging system in India to the economic development of temples during the Northern and Southern Dynasties and the Tang, Song, Ming, and Qing Dynasties in China, gradually establishing their financial foundations. On the other hand, contemporary temple economies have achieved notable development in tourism, water and land repentance ceremonies, and donation practices. These provide a solid material foundation for the propagation of Buddhism and social service activities. However, the commercialization and corporatization trends in temple economies have also raised widespread social concerns and discussions (He, 2007; Zheng, 2014).

The impact of the legal environment on temple economic management cannot be overlooked. Under the socialist market economy system, the operation of temple economies inevitably falls under the constraints and influences of laws and regulations. As non-profit organizations, the legality, compliance, and alignment of temple economic activities with social functions must be reasonably interpreted and regulated within the legal framework (Zhou, 2009). Additionally, the healthy and orderly development of temple economies is closely related to the fit and trim development of socialist culture and economy. It requires temple economic management to follow religious doctrines and traditions and adapt to modern social legal requirements (Yu, 2014).

This study explores the impact of social laws on temple economic management, analyzing the current status, problems, and solutions of temple financial management in the modern legal environment. Through the collation of historical documents and analysis of practical cases, this study will reveal the operational mechanisms of temple economic management within the legal environment. It assesses the positive and negative impacts of laws on temple financial management, and proposes recommendations for optimizing temple economic management. It is expected to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for the economic management of Buddhist temples.

In the context of the legal environment, temple

economic management faces many challenges. How to regulate temple economic activities transparently, reasonably, and legally while ensuring religious freedom and respecting religious traditions is a pressing issue in temple financial management. Simultaneously, as society's understanding and attitudes towards religious activities change, temple economic management must continuously adapt to new social development requirements to achieve harmonious coexistence between Buddhism and the community (He, 2007; Zheng, 2014).

In summary, this study will explore the legal environment of temple economic management, its current status, challenges faced, and corresponding strategies. Through analyzing relevant legal policies and practical cases of temple financial management, this study aims to provide scientific and reasonable suggestions for Buddhist temple economic management, promoting harmonious development between Buddhism and society.

As places of Buddhist activities, temples' economic management is not merely an aspect of religious activities but a complex phenomenon closely tied to the social-legal environment. During the Northern Dynasties, the expansion of temple economies under state rulers' management lacked institutionalized means, leading to relatively weak state management of the expanding temple economy (Wēn Jīnyù, 2019). In the Tang Dynasty, the expansion of temple economies led to a specific predatory effect on state resources, prompting the state to take a series of suppressive measures (Meng, 2019).

Temple economies began to face more complex social and legal regulations as society developed. In modern society, the independence of temple economies has led to trends of commercialization and even corporatization, contributing to internal issues such as embezzlement, corruption, and relaxation of monastic discipline. Therefore, improving the organizational structure and management system of temples, establishing a joint meeting system based on ancient practices, limiting the power of individual leaders, and enhancing the quality of management personnel became urgent issues in temple economic management.

The influence of social laws on temple economic management is multi-faceted: on the one hand,

regulations define the non-profit nature of temples and limit the scope of their economic activities. On the other hand, laws also provide legal legitimacy for temples' economic activities, allowing them to allocate resources and operate economically within the legal framework. Moreover, the perfection of laws also helps supervise temple economies, preventing excessive commercialization and protecting Buddhism's religious nature and social image (He, 2007).

4. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, the social and legal environment fundamentally influences temple economic management, providing institutional safeguards and reasonable constraints and playing a pivotal role in the healthy development of temple economies. In discussing the fundamental influence of the social and legal environment on temple economic management, formulating laws and regulations is a core issue. As a combination of religious and financial activities, temple economic management has inevitably been influenced and regulated by laws and regulations throughout history. Formulating laws and regulations involves understanding the nature of temple economies, respecting religious freedom, and maintaining social order.

First, formulating laws and regulations requires an accurate understanding of the nature of temple economies. Although temple economies have non-profit characteristics, their scale and impact are significant. Therefore, laws and regulations must consider the uniqueness of temple economies, neither equating them entirely with commercial enterprises nor excluding their participation in the economic field. For example, during the Northern Dynasties, temple economies developed under state rulers' management, but the lack of institutionalized constraints led to the relatively free expansion of temple economies. This historical experience suggests that laws and regulations should balance state oversight of temple economies with the development needs of the temples themselves.

Second, laws and regulations should respect the principle of religious freedom. Religious freedom is a fundamental human right in modern society, and rules and regulations should not infringe on religious groups' freedom of belief and autonomy (Meng, 2019). For

instance, temples accumulating funds through market economic activities contribute to their development and reflect the altruistic spirit of benefitting all beings (Meng, 2019). Therefore, laws and regulations should allow temples to autonomously manage their economic affairs without violating social norms and morals.

Third, when formulating laws and regulations, they should consider their impact on social order. The development of temple economies should not lead to an unreasonable allocation of social resources or disrupt fair market competition (Meng, 2019). For example, the excessive commercialization of temple economies may lead to negative social impacts, such as corruption and other unethical practices. Hence, laws and regulations should aim to maintain social and economic order and prevent adverse effects of temple economic activities on society. Research is "creative and systematic work undertaken to increase the stock of knowledge". It involves the collection, organization, and analysis of information to increase understanding of a topic or issue. A research project may be an expansion on past work in the field. The primary purposes of basic research (as opposed to applied research) are documentation, discovery, interpretation, and the research and development (R&D) of methods and systems for the advancement of human knowledge. Approaches to research depend on epistemologies, which vary considerably both within and between

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