CHAPTER SEVEN

TEMPLES, MONASTERIES AND PROCESIONS

Buddhist monasteries and Daoist temples

An exhaustive list of Buddhist monasteries, pagodas, and nunneries is included in the Putian zongjiaozhi caogao (1991). According to this source, there were 656 Buddhist monasteries, nunneries and halls in Putian and Xianyou after 1949. After the Cultural Revolution, only 382 buildings were left (89 monasteries and 293 nunneries and halls). Since 1980, 343 of these have been restored. The lists in the Caogao provide the names and locations of 218 Buddhist sites in the Putian plains, along with the names of over sixty monasteries that have disappeared.¹ These are distributed as follows (by township): Chengxiang, including Putian city: 58; Hanjiang 24, Wutang 9, Xiatianwei 16, Jiangkou 20, Huangshi 38, Quqiao 30, Beigao 10, Hushi 10—the numbers for Jiangkou, Beigao and Hushi are approximate, as these townships contain large areas outside the irrigated plain).² Almost one

¹ This draft of the gazetteer was never published. About half of the monasteries that have disappeared did so over the past centuries for a wide variety of reasons. The other half vanished after 1949, and especially during the Cultural Revolution. The final published version of the gazetteer, the Putian xianshi, 1994, included only half of this information. Unfortunately, the section in the draft volume on Daoist temples is not nearly so thorough, reflecting the definitional confusion discussed in Chapter Two above, and the lack of an active organization working for the cause of the reclamation of local temple properties. Only some sixty temples are listed, and while these include a few with early Daoist affiliations, the majority are distinguished more by their local prominence than by any relation to Daoism. In general, local gazetteers of all ages provide very sketchy information on local temples. Very few can be relied upon for anything close to a comprehensive survey. Only the most important temples in terms of official recognition, local power, historical significance or scenic beauty are listed. Some gazetteers go so far as to explain that their editors (such as the editor of the [Kangxi] Ningxia xianzhi gazetteer) have worked to improve the language of the stone inscriptions found at these temples. The recorded inscriptions in the gazetteers almost invariably omit the financial contributions of various patrons.

² As these sources sometimes provide information the survey team was unable to gather, we have added information from this list into the survey below (indicating in each case that their information is drawn from the Putian zongjiaozhi caogao (1991)). We have also drawn from a survey list drawn up by the Three in One religious movement of their temples and the numbers of initiates in each temple. These figures could
third of these Buddhist temples were built in the Republican period. These lists also record the date of restoration or rebuilding of many of these monasteries in the 1980s. These restorations were the culmination of a process of the reclaiming of property rights from the government, after the temples had been converted into warehouses, if not torn down, during the Cultural Revolution. In some cases, funding came from Overseas Chinese Buddhist temples associated with the founding monastery in Putian. During the late Qing and up to the late 1950’s, monks from Putian were sent to Southeast Asia to set up subsidiary monasteries. Several of these monks, or their disciples, were active in the restoration process.

Currently, an impressive number of large Buddhist monasteries can be found in the mountains surrounding the Putian plains, or occasionally in an open area between irrigation canals in the fields in between villages. These include the Guanghuasi 廣化寺, founded in 558, and located near the south gate of Putian, the Guishansi 龜山寺, founded in 822, in Huating township, the Nangshansi 囊山寺, founded in 875, at the center of the rim of mountains on the north side of the Putian plain, the Meifengsi 梅峰寺, founded in 1104 in Putian city, the Gufengsi 鼓峰寺 founded in 1127 several kilometers to the west of Jiangkou, and the Shishisi 石室寺 to the west of Putian city. Inside Putian city there are several newer Buddhist monasteries. One large Buddhist temple located closer to the villages is that near the village of Huangxiang 黃巷, the Guohuan chansi 國懺禪寺, which is dedicated to Miaoying fashi 妙應法師, one of two brothers from the Huang lineage who are said to have attained enlightenment during the Tang dynasty.

Within the villages, a large number of Buddhist halls or pagodas are dedicated to Guanyin 觀音. These are positioned by the sides or on the mid-way point of bridges, recalling the role of Buddhist monastic estates in developing the infrastructure of the Putian plains. In addition, lay Buddhist groups have set up numerous shrines to Guanyin, and Shijia mouni 釋迦牟尼 is worshipped in a smaller number of Buddhist temples. In villages like Longhua 龍華 in the southern irrigated plain, where the entire population was said to have been vegetarian in the past, a dozen Buddhist lay temples complexes remain active to this