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The Influence of Wartime Turmoil on Buddhist Monasteries and Monks in the Jiangnan Region during the Yuan-Ming Transition

Xunqian Liu 

Department of History, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Shanghai 200240, China; lxunqian@sjtu.edu.cn

Abstract: This study explores the transformation of Buddhist culture in the Jiangnan region (present-day southern Jiangsu and northern Zhejiang), driven by wartime disruptions during the transition from the Yuan Dynasty to the Ming. The Yuan Dynasty witnessed the flourishing of Buddhism, and in Jiangnan, the thriving Zen tradition carried on the legacy of the Southern Song Dynasty. Buddhism found many adherents among the affluent gentry class in Jiangnan, fostering a culture of generous charity that sustained and expanded Buddhism in the region. However, the conflicts toward the end of the Yuan Dynasty inflicted considerable damage on the temples, causing monks to flee. Temples, recognizable landmarks during conflicts, were susceptible to military occupation. Visiting Goryeo monks Muhak Jacho and Naong Hyegeun, and Japanese monks Mumon Gensen and Ginan, were forced to abandon their travels and return to their respective homelands, disrupting the once-thriving Buddhist exchange between Jiangnan and broader East Asia. The chaotic environment also fostered alliances between influential monks and regional powers, providing refuge for monks and an opportunity for both sides to forge beneficial connections. Anti-Yuan factions strategically protected revered monks, leveraging their influence to attract literati and intellectuals, who shared common ethical and spiritual values. This dynamic showcased the mutual benefits derived from such collaboration. Through an exploration of the interplay between politics, social forces, and Buddhism, this paper examines the impact of wartime turmoil on the development of Buddhism in the Jiangnan region.



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Keywords: Buddhist culture; Jiangnan region; Yuan-Ming transition; Buddhism and warfare

1. Introduction

Jiangnan, encompassing the present-day southern Jiangsu and northern Zhejiang Provinces, has long been recognized as one of China's most prosperous regions, renowned for its vibrant Buddhist culture and enduring temples. Influenced by the region's unique geography, cultural landscape, social customs, and aesthetic sensibilities, Jiangnan's Buddhist culture possessed distinct characteristics that differentiated it from both its Indian Buddhist origins and northern Chinese Buddhism (S. Liu 2010; Brook 1994).

Attitudes towards Buddhism have varied across different dynasties throughout Chinese history. Notably, Buddhism flourished during the Yuan (Mongol) Dynasty (1271–1368), a period marked by a widespread reverence for Buddhism, when Tibetan Buddhism was even designated as the state religion. This dynasty displayed remarkable tolerance towards various Buddhist traditions, leading to the flourishing of Esoteric Buddhism and Zen Buddhism (Chen 2021, p. 323). However, as the Yuan Dynasty approached its end, peasant uprisings erupted in the Jiangnan region, and the chaos of war resulted in the destruction of many temples. A significant number of monks were forced to abandon their monastic residences and seek refuge elsewhere. This exodus also included monks from Japan and Korea, disrupting the once-thriving exchange of Buddhist scholarship between Jiangnan and East Asia. Consequently, Buddhism in Jiangnan experienced a period of decline.

Previous scholarly studies have traditionally focused on either Yuan Dynasty Buddhist history or Ming Dynasty Buddhist history as separate entities (Hasebe 1993; J. Shi 2009; Chen 2021). There is an evident need for a comprehensive analysis that fully captures this historical transformation. This paper explores the substantial impact of the wars that occurred during the Yuan-Ming transition on Buddhism in the Jiangnan region, drawing from local chronicles and literary archives maintained by prominent monks and Confucian scholars. Among the literary collections of Yuan and Ming literati, there are scattered accounts concerning specific temples and monks that have yet to be thoroughly investigated by researchers. While warfare can cause severe damage to Buddhist temples and disrupt Buddhist scholarship and practice, Buddhism has a unique ability to bridge the gap between the mundane and the transcendental, the natural and the supernatural, and can serve an essential function in healing the wounds of war and facilitating social moral education. This paper, by analyzing historical evidence of the turmoil in Jiangnan during the Yuan-Ming transition, offers a case study of the intricate relationship between warfare and Buddhism.

2. The Flourishing Buddhist Landscape of Yuan Dynasty Jiangnan

2.1. Temples, Society, and Patronage: Socio-Economic Growth and Scholarly Influence in Jiangnan

Monasteries served dual functions, as sanctuaries for monks to pursue spiritual practices and conduct Buddhist rituals, and as destinations for laypeople to express their reverence through offerings and incense. The geographical distribution of temples maps Buddhism's growth and influence within distinct regions. As Figure 1 illustrates, during the Yuan Dynasty, the Jiangnan region had a much higher concentration of Buddhist temples than the rest of the country. Jiangsu's Yuan Dynasty chronicles document a tenfold increase in the number of local Buddhist temples during the reign of Emperor Shundi in the Yuan Dynasty (spanning the final three decades of the 90-year era), compared to the initial years of the Yuan Dynasty (Miao 1993, p. 137).

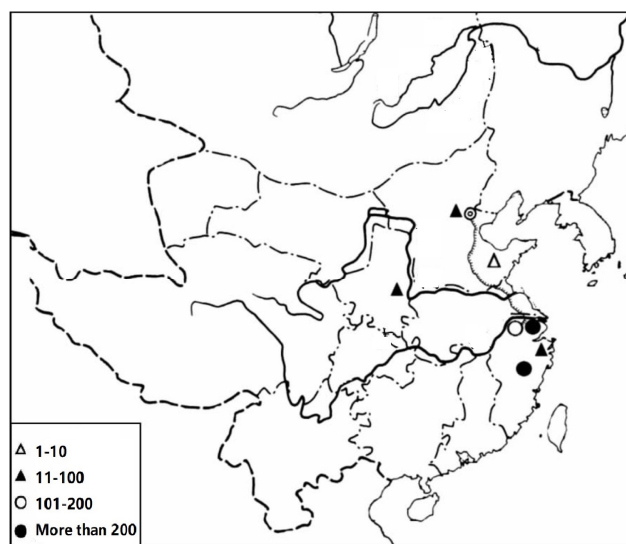


Figure 1. Distribution of Buddhist temples recorded in Yuan Dynasty local chronicles (Yin 2017).

Buddhism has permeated the Jiangnan region since the Song Dynasty (960–1279), influencing much of daily and social life, including dietary habits, entertainment, funeral customs, and even societal psychology (Halperin 2006). This extensive influence helped establish a strong foundation of believers. Buddhism's flourishing relied on more than faith; it also required a certain level of economic support (Fraser 2003). The Jiangnan region boasted a thriving economy and vibrant cultural landscape and attracted a continuous influx of monks due to its well-connected transportation networks. In Jiangnan, Bud-

dharma was interwoven with the prosperous gentry class, driven by their financial means and existential contemplations regarding life's impermanence (Halperin 2014, pp. 1433–92). Members of the gentry embraced Buddhism to seek spiritual enlightenment, liberation, and rebirth in the Pure Land of the West; they also sought blessings for their descendants, safeguards against misfortune, and the accumulation of merit¹ and longevity (Fraser 2003, p. 15). This faith prompted personal contributions to temples and spurred generosity among families and communities, cultivating a culture of benevolence that ensured temples' material sustenance and fostered the expansion of Buddhism in the region.

During the Yuan Dynasty, Buddhism was highly revered, and the development of temples grew rapidly. Economically, temples benefited from enduring tax exemptions, and monastic establishments possessed land holdings while also receiving grants from both the imperial court and affluent patrons (Chen 2021, pp. 275–97). The Mongol Yuan administration adopted a relatively lenient policy in the region and endeavored to win the support of Jiangnan landowners by reducing their tax burden (S. Gao 1997). This policy, on top of a Yuan Dynasty taxation system that was not well-established, led to swift growth in the wealth of many prominent families in Jiangnan, who, in turn, increased their contributions to the temples (Cao 2004, pp. 456–57).

An illustrative example of a flourishing Buddhist temple's construction is Mount Putuo 普陀山, located within the Zhoushan Archipelago 舟山. It is renowned for its veneration of Avalokiteshvara and experienced a remarkable rise to prominence during the Yuan Dynasty, attracting visitors not only from other areas of China but also from Korea, Japan, and inner Asia. To this day, it stands as one of the foremost temples in the Jiangnan region. Mount Putuo's Duobao ("many-treasure") Pagoda, constructed in 1334, exemplifies the grandeur and architectural excellence that flourished in Jiangnan during the Yuan Dynasty (Bingenheimer 2016a). Notably, the Pagoda's donor, Prince Xuanrang (1286–1368) 宣讓, was a grandson of Kublai Khan. His patronage of Mount Putuo is characteristic of the imperial support that the temple received during the Yuan Dynasty (Bingenheimer 2016b).

Hangzhou, at that time, was renowned as the "Buddhist Capital of Southeast China 東南佛都" (Y. Xu 2008, p. 183), with numerous temples shaping the local landscape. These temples boasted magnificent and exquisite architecture, attracting gatherings of devoted monks. Grand ceremonies and rituals presented scenes of opulence and solemnity (Y. Xu 2008, p. 184).

In the social realm, the Yuan Dynasty witnessed a notably liberal atmosphere regarding Buddhist beliefs. The imperial court imposed minimal restrictions on individuals seeking ordination. According to regulations during the Yuan Dynasty, common people who embraced Buddhism and sought ordination were permitted to become monks or nuns, as long as they possessed the ability to understand scriptures, recite sutras, write, or engage in Zen meditation (Anonymous 2002, p. 336).

The region of Jiangnan, with Hangzhou at its core, has historically fostered a strong intellectual community, marked by an uninterrupted tradition of scholarly vitality (Bol 2003). However, the Mongols, as a nomadic people from the grasslands, did not hold Confucianism in high regard, and scholars found it difficult to secure official positions during the Yuan Dynasty (Mote 1960; Elman 2000, pp. 34–35). Over time, the persistence of this situation led to a fundamental shift in scholars' values and priorities, making them more indifferent to Confucianism and politics. Numerous scholars turned to Zen meditation, dedicating a considerable part of their lives to Buddhist practice. Consequently, the transition from the Yuan Dynasty to the Ming witnessed a significant departure of scholars from their conventional roles. Disillusioned with the pursuit of government careers, many scholars sought solace and spiritual refinement within monasteries. They formed meaningful bonds with monks, engaging in discussions encompassing poetry and Buddhist teachings. Prominent figures like Song Lian (1310–1381), a pivotal advisor to Zhu Yuanzhang, exemplified this trend (Song 1999, pp. 440–55).

In 1348, Zhu Yuanzhang's later advisor Liu Ji 劉基 (1311–1375) offered a vivid portrayal of his involvement in temple life while residing in Hangzhou. He described par-

ticipating in a range of activities within the temple precincts, from ascending to high elevations to enjoy scenic views, to composing poetry, to engaging in deep dialogue with monks regarding Buddhist doctrines (J. Liu 1999, p. 104). Zhang Yu 張昱 (1302–1384), considering himself a recluse, found a spiritual kinship with the eminent monks residing within the temple walls (Y. Zhang 1986, p. 534). To deepen this connection, he decided to take up residence there, immersing himself in a scholarly monastic life. Yang Weizhen 楊維禎 (1296–1370), known for his poetic prowess, frequently drew inspiration from the ambience of temples and the profound teachings of Zen Buddhism. His work is often regarded as a prime example of Buddhist philosophy’s influence on literary thought during the Yuan Dynasty (Yang 1929, p. 108). Renowned poets like Gu Ying and Gao Qi 高啟 (1336–1374) were also drawn to these temples, recognizing their cultural and spiritual significance (Q. Gao 1985, p. 876). These temples not only preserved their fundamental religious functions but also evolved into vibrant centers of secular cultural exchange during this period, attracting the privileged circles of Jiangnan society. (Heller 2014, pp. 309–55).

2.2. Hierarchy and Influence: The “Five Mountains” System and Longxiang Temple in the Yuan Dynasty

The Zen tradition not only maintained wide adherence among the common people but was also practiced by Emperor Renzong (1311 to 1320), Emperor Yingzong (1320 to 1323), and prominent figures within the imperial Yuan court.

The Yuan Dynasty inherited the “Five Mountains” system² which involved the secular bureaucratic management of five prominent Zen monasteries, from the Song Dynasty. During the early reign of Emperor Wenzong of the Yuan Dynasty (1328 to 1332), the emperor converted his former residence in Jinling (now Nanjing) into a temple known as Longxiang Temple 龍翔寺, elevating its status above the Five Mountains (see Table 1). This served as a demonstration of Emperor Wenzong’s commitment to the hierarchical system, indicating the Yuan Dynasty’s endorsement of the Five Mountains System. By placing Longxiang Temple in a superior position among the Five Mountains temples, Emperor Wenzong not only showcased his authority but also reaffirmed the privileged status of the Five Mountains.

Table 1. The Five Mountains system in the Yuan Dynasty.

Ranking	Temple Name	Location
Ahead of the five temples	大龍翔集慶禪寺 Longxiang Temple	Jiqing (modern-day Nanjing) 南京
1st	徑山興盛萬壽禪寺 Jingshan Temple	Hangzhou 杭州
2nd	北山景德靈隱禪寺 Lingyin Temple	Hangzhou 杭州
3rd	太白山天童景德禪寺 Tiantong Temple	Qingyuan (modern-day Ningbo) 寧波
4th	南山淨慈報恩光孝禪寺 Jingci Temple	Hangzhou 杭州
5th	阿育王山廣利禪寺 Ayuwang Temple	Qingyuan (modern-day Ningbo) 寧波

In the Yuan Dynasty’s local chronicle in Nanjing (X. Zhang 1344), one of the earliest known temple maps from the Nanjing region depicts the layout and architecture of the Longxiang Temple, capturing the temple’s grand scale. The temple’s opulent decorations are also detailed in the chronicle. Throughout the late Yuan Dynasty and into the early Ming Dynasty, this temple served as the center of Buddhism in the Jiangnan region, its leadership guided by esteemed Zen monks. In 1335, Emperor Yuan Wenzong extended a special invitation to the prominent monk (Xiaoyin) Daxin 笑隱大訢 (1244–1383) from Hangzhou, appointing him abbot of Longxiang Temple and granting him the rank of a third-ranking official (Huang 2013, p. 1030). In this way, the Yuan Dynasty incorporated certain influential monks into the bureaucratic structure. These practices contributed to an elevation in the social status and prestige of monks, which sometimes even surpassed that of the scholar-official class (Zürcher 2007, pp. 4–9).

Buddhism in the Jiangnan region during the Yuan Dynasty witnessed a flourishing economy and generous patronage from affluent families, which facilitated extensive temple construction. The influx of Confucian scholars engaging in temple-based Zen meditation further contributed to this trend. Moreover, the integration of monks into the bureaucratic system elevated their social status, and eminent monks emerged as a prominent social force in Jiangnan during this period.

3. Temples as Sites of Conflict: Vulnerability and Military Occupation

3.1. Wartime Devastation of Temples

The Red Turban Rebellion began in 1351 and swept across the landscape, challenging the Yuan Dynasty's authority. Three key leaders emerged in the area around Jiangnan. Zhang Shicheng 張士誠 (1321–1367), a former Grand Canal boatman, headed a significant force in the thriving Yangtze Delta region, centered in Suzhou. Concurrently, Fang Guozhen 方國珍 (1319–1374), a former salt trader, established his own autonomous coastal domain in Zhejiang, with Ningbo as its nucleus. They had another powerful neighbor, the founder of the Ming Dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328–1398), whose main power base was in Anhui. Zhang and Fang would sometimes submit to the Yuan Dynasty and other times rebel against it. These three forces' interactions with the Yuan Dynasty developed into a continuous power struggle of back-and-forth conflict in the Jiangnan region.

To elucidate the experiences of Jiangnan's temples during the turbulent twilight of the Yuan Dynasty, the situations of the aforementioned "Five Mountains" hold significant representational value. These six prominent temples, documented extensively in historical records, enable a more comprehensive examination. Moreover, their prominence allows for a nuanced understanding of how they not only mirrored the pivotal forces influencing Buddhism in the region during this era but also played a formative role in shaping trends in Buddhist practice within the area.

In Figure 2, the red circles represent the core cities of the three rival powers in 1365: Ningbo (referred to as Qingyuan at that time), which served as the capital city of Fang Guizhen's regime; Suzhou (known as Pingjiang at the time), the central city under Zhang Shicheng's authority; Nanjing (referred to as Jiqing at the time), which was the capital city of Zhu Yuanzhang's regime. The place names on the map are presented in their contemporary terms to enhance readability.

The Jingshan Temple 徑山寺 in Hangzhou had been acclaimed as the pinnacle of Zen Buddhism since the Song and Yuan dynasties. However, by the end of the Yuan Dynasty, Jingshan Temple had been nearly decimated by the ravages of war. In 1357, Hangzhou plunged into a state of turmoil, enduring months of military upheaval as a consequence of Zhang Shicheng's occupation of Suzhou and his subsequent plan to besiege Hangzhou, leading to a protracted conflict with reinforcements sent by the Yuan Dynasty. During this tumultuous period, Jingshan Temple was burned and plundered. The magnificent Mahavira Hall, originally constructed during the early years of the Southern Song Dynasty, and even the temple plaques personally inscribed by Song Dynasty Emperor Xiaozong 宋孝宗 (1127–1194) during his visit to Jingshan, were all destroyed. After the turmoil of the war, the abbot of Jingshan Temple, Zhuyuan Zhengyuan 竺遠正源 (1290–1361), took charge of cleaning up the aftermath. In addition to overseeing the restoration efforts, he also undertook the arduous task of collecting and respectfully cremating the fallen soldiers' remains that had been exposed within the temple's grounds (Li 1980, p. 561).

Another temple, West Mountain Temple 西山寺, also located in Hangzhou, met a similar fate during this conflict, being reduced to ashes. The statue of Guanyin vanished, but Zhang Shicheng, after investing significant resources and effort, succeeded in discovering it hidden nearby (Tao 1958, p. 141).

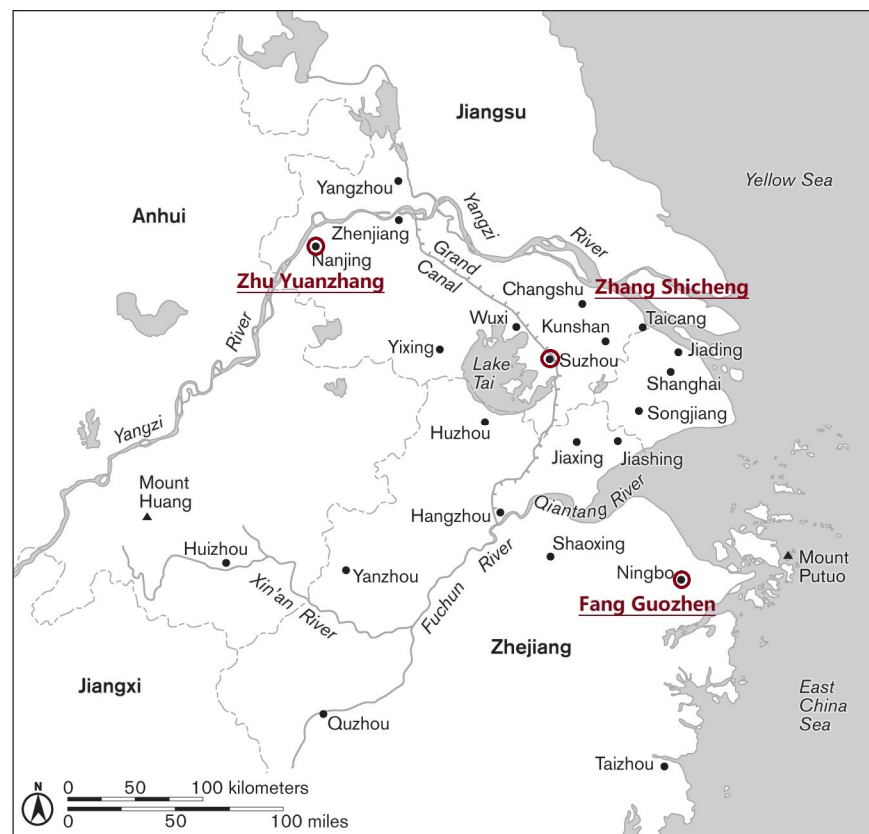


Figure 2. Key cities of Yuan Dynasty warlord factions in Jiangnan in 1365.

When Zhu Yuanzhang's forces captured Suzhou, many temples in the area suffered damage. The poet Xie Yingfang 謝應芳 (1295–1392) visited Lingyan Temple 靈岩寺 in Suzhou again after the war. He was deeply moved by the sight of the temple in ruins, with monks dispersed. He expressed his sentiments through poetry: "In the palace, no more towers stand tall, Buddhist temples, now just grass for all". 娃宮無複有樓臺，佛刹而今亦草萊 (Xie 1986, p. 103).

3.2. Temples as Garrisons and Landmarks

Lingyin Temple 靈隱寺, second among the revered "Five Mountains", was not protected by its stature. In the tumultuous year of 1359, Zhang Shicheng launched an attack on Hangzhou from Suzhou, prompting Zhu Yuanzhang to send troops to suppress the rebellion. The army was stationed at Lingyin Temple, resulting in the destruction of its main hall (Y. Xu 2008, p. 363).

Buddhist temples were often advantageous locations for both military garrisoning and the storage of provisions. Temples were typically larger than private residences and were often situated in more spacious areas. The practice of utilizing temples as military camps was widespread, persisting even into the early Ming Dynasty. An illustrative case is Tianning Temple 天寧寺 in Ningbo. The stationing of troops there transformed the temple, with military prostitutes exemplifying the descent into debauchery. This state endured until the third year of the Ming Dynasty (i.e., 1370), when Master Laifu 來復見心 (1319–1391) assumed the position of abbot and compelled the withdrawal of troops from the temple, effectively restoring its sanctity (Song 1999, p. 900). At the outset of the period of conflict, Ningbo was the focal point of Fang Guozhen's political influence. Commencing in 1358, he directed his subordinates to "establish a fortress and occupy Tianning Temple" 築寨天甯寺以居 (S. Zhang 2014, p. 44) while laying siege to Ningbo. As a result, Tianning Temple functioned as a military encampment for 12 years.

During times of intense conflict, monks would disperse to seek refuge, leaving temples unoccupied and vulnerable to potential takeover by local armed factions. The defilement or destruction of temples often became a symbolic tool to assert dominance and supremacy over the conquered population. Consequently, numerous monasteries ended up under the control of soldiers or transformed into strongholds for bandit activities. Due to their spacious halls and prominent landmarks, temples often served as gathering points for peasant revolts or as operational bases for their armies. Recognizing the potential threat, the Yuan authorities sometimes destroyed temples that held strategic importance but were difficult to control and monitor to prevent their exploitation by rebel forces. This measure aimed to prevent these sites from becoming havens for “thieves” and reduce the costs of maintaining control over the region. In the year 1355, a peasant uprising erupted in Shipu Village, Kunshan 昆山石浦村, Suzhou. “A band of rebels killed the local tyrant Hu and his family, set their house on fire, looted their belongings, and sought refuge in the Wu Xiang Temple 無相寺 located within the village” (Gu 2008, p. 62). During that period, Zhang Shichen’s forces were stationed on the north bank of the Yangtze River (he captured Suzhou in the following year, in 1356). The villagers contemplated joining Zhang Shicheng, greatly alarming the Yuan Dynasty officials in the region, who pretended to be conciliatory while secretly reporting to higher authorities and dispatching troops to suppress the uprising. Within days, Yuan forces decisively quelled the rebellion at Wu Xiang Temple, crushing the local populace’s revolt in a show of overwhelming force. As the temple was seen as a gathering place for rioters, it was immediately razed (Gu 2008, p. 62).

4. Exile and Experiences of Monks in Times of Turmoil

4.1. Resolute Amid Chaos: Monastic Fearlessness and the Zen Buddhism Legacy in Jiangnan

Amid the chaos of war, marauding soldiers ransacked temples, looting sacred objects, and forcing monks to flee and hide among the general population. On their journeys, monks often became victims of highway robbers, adding to their woes. The prevailing disorder made it challenging for monks to find sanctuary within the temple precincts. The troops of warring factions were not the only threat. During the Yuan Dynasty, temples held significant wealth, rendering them attractive targets for bandit raids aimed at extorting money and valuables from monks. The case of Huaiwei (1317–1375) 懷渭, the dharma heir of the aforementioned Master Daxin who had served as the abbot of Jingci Temple 淨慈寺 in Hangzhou (D. Shi 2006, p. 150) is illustrative. Seeking sanctuary from the chaos, he embarked on a journey to Mount Lushan 廬山. Yet once there, he encountered bandits who sought to extort money from him. Demonstrating great boldness and resolve, he reprimanded them and even exposed his neck, confronting their blades. Startled by his determination, the bandits retreated (M. Shi 1994, p. 131). This episode underscores the commanding presence of monks and their cultivation of fearlessness in the face of death.

Another noteworthy figure is Yunruo (Jiheng) 允若季蘅 (1280–1359), who was known for a similar spirit. He spent his later years in seclusion at the modest Yunmen Temple in Shaoxing. In 1359, at the age of eighty, he ignored pleas from fellow monks to seek refuge outside the temple and faced thieves without fear, calmly kneeling on the ground, ready to be killed (Song 1999, p. 454). This serene acceptance of mortality has long been considered a hallmark of spiritual attainment. For instance, Kieschnick (1977) delved into records of monks passing away peacefully and illuminated the profound interplay between the meditative state and the circumstances of transition in Mahayana Buddhism. Song Lian, a prominent statesman during the early Ming Dynasty, lauded the monks’ serenity, remarking, “In this world, almost anything can be counterfeited, except for one’s demeanor at the precipice of life and death” 世間萬事皆可偽, 唯生死之際不可偽 (Song 1999, p. 455). He believed that only those who truly comprehended and practiced Zen Buddhism could transcend the cycle of life and death, facing mortality with equanimity. Ming Dynasty scholars regarded this episode as a notable event in the history of Buddhism, but it was not unique to this period. The ability to transcend the fear of death was seen as a manifestation of high Buddhist accomplishment; this mastery became particularly evident amid the chaos

of dynastic transition. Stories of monks, influenced by the Zen tradition, exhibiting fearless poise during the turmoil at the end of the Yuan Dynasty, led Ming scholars to identify the transition from the Yuan Dynasty to the Ming as the second zenith of Zen Buddhism³ in Jiangnan (Qian 1996, pp. 873–75).

4.2. Monastic Repatriation and the Disruption of East Asian Buddhist Exchanges

The dispersion of Jiangnan monks caused cascading disruption, as the turbulence at the close of the Yuan Dynasty also signaled the end of the extensive Buddhist exchanges between Japan, Goryeo (Korea), and Yuan. During the Yuan Dynasty, Japanese maritime vessels had typically landed in Qingyuan 慶元 (modern-day Ningbo) when coming to China. The Japanese monks who arrived during this period were primarily practitioners of Zen Buddhism. Following their arrival, Japanese monks made pilgrimages to renowned Buddhist temples, sought audiences with esteemed monks, and dedicated themselves to Zen meditation. Based on existing records, their activities were predominantly confined to the Jiangnan region, with only a few venturing to temples in the northern areas. During that time, Zhongfeng Mingben 中峰明本 (1263–1323) of Mount Tianmu 天目山 in Hangzhou enjoyed significant renown within the Jiangnan Buddhist community (Heller 2014, pp. 87–129). Numerous Japanese monks specifically journeyed to pay their respects to him (Yu 1982, pp. 419–78).

According to the statistics in Kinomiya's "History of Sino-Japanese Cultural Exchange", 222 Japanese monks were recorded as entering the Yuan Dynasty (Kinomiya 1985, p. 465). In comparison, 109 Japanese monks visited during the Southern Song period and 114 during the Ming Dynasty. Just based on numbers, the influx of Japanese monks reached its historical peak during the Yuan Dynasty, despite its spanning less than a century. This phenomenon is especially remarkable considering the adversarial relationship between Japan and Yuan at the time.

Mumon Gensen 無文元選 (1323–1390) embarked on his monastic journey at the age of eighteen. Three years later, in 1343, he ventured to the Yuan Dynasty's mainland and pursued his practice under the guidance of Master (Gumei) Zhengyou 古梅正友 (1285–1352) in Wenzhou 溫州, Fujian. Subsequently, he traveled to Mount Tianmu to learn from Zhongfeng Mingben. However, the unfolding conflict in Jiangnan during that time compelled him to return to Japan in 1351 (Takenaka 1960). His disciples documented this phase of his life:

The Yuan Dynasty was plunged into widespread turmoil, with the entire nation facing challenges from all directions, leading to a state of unrest. Temples such as Jingshan, Lingyin, Jingci, and Tiantong were left deserted, their seats vacant, and many monks had their alms bowls taken by marauding enemies. To evade the tumult of war, my master resolved to journey back to our homeland, accompanied by esteemed monks like Ginan Bodhisattva and Canbiyan. Embarking from Ningbo, they sailed towards the city of Mount Cheng in Hakata. (Sho 2013, p. 140) 太元兵亂大起，四海不安。徑山、靈隱、淨慈、天童等皆虛席，無安單地，多為賊曹奪衣盂去。師避兵欲歸本朝，相隨義南菩薩、璨碧岩等諸耆宿。舶發明到博多之城山。

The monk Ginan 義南 mentioned above, driven by a deep respect for Zen Buddhism, had also traveled to the Yuan Dynasty and studied under Zhongfeng Mingben. Impressed by his virtuous character, Emperor Shunzong of the Yuan Dynasty (1264–1292) bestowed upon him the title of "Bodhisattva Ginan" 義南菩薩 (Kinomiya 1985, pp. 422–60). He also returned to Japan as a consequence of conflict in the late Yuan.

Similar narratives can be found among Goryeo monks as well. Muhak Jacho 無學自超 (1327–1405) entered Beijing in 1353. He encountered Naong Hyegeun 懶翁慧勤 (1320–1376), another Goryeo monk, at the Fayuan Temple 法源寺 in Beijing, and the two developed a close rapport. Later, Naong relocated to the Lingyan Temple in Suzhou. Jacho followed him there, formally became Naong's disciple, and embarked on a study of Buddhism. However, the outbreak of the Red Turban Rebellion in the Central Plains and Jiangnan disrupted their plans; Jacho had to relinquish his practice in Jiangnan and re-

turn to Goryeo in 1356. Two years later, Naong was also compelled to return to Goryeo, where Jacho once more joined him to continue his Zen studies and eventually assumed his position as Naong's Dharma heir. With Lee Seong-gye seizing power and establishing the Joseon Dynasty in Korea, Jacho adapted to the circumstances and became the first-generation royal preceptor of the Joseon Dynasty (J. Xu 1478).

The accounts of most Japanese and Goryeo monks who traveled to the Yuan Dynasty have regrettably been lost to history. By examining the narratives of the five monks detailed in the earlier literature, it becomes evident that a substantial cohort of these monks likely opted to return to their homelands during the conflicts in Jiangnan. Consequently, the once-thriving exchange of Buddhist ideologies, practices, and teachings that bridged Japan, Goryeo, and the Yuan Dynasty was abruptly curtailed. The intricate web of Buddhist connections that once flourished among these East Asian nations weakened with wartime conditions.

4.3. Reflections on Buddhist Devastation during War: Ideological Insight on Chaotic Circumstances

The near destruction of numerous temples at the end of the Yuan Dynasty prompted reflection within the Buddhist community. During the Yuan era, due to the state's reverence for Buddhism, its policies toward the religion were lenient, resulting in prosperous temple economies. In pursuit of sustenance and protection, even individuals from the lower strata of society sought refuge within the realm of Buddhism. Craftsmen from the slave class also frequently joined the clergy, aiming to escape arduous labor. This permissive environment led to a mixed quality of monks (Guo 2000, p. 335).

On the other hand, the upper echelons of the monastic community routinely leveraged their economic privileges, pursued indulgence, and in some cases even took wives and concubines. An anecdote from the period is telling: a family had three daughters; one married a landlord and another a minor official, neither of whom was particularly affluent; only the daughter married to a monk enjoyed a privileged life, providing various forms of support to her natal family (Zhu 1973, p. 122). A rarity in other dynasties, the wives and concubines of monks became a unique subgroup of Yuan-era women. Frequently, these wives of monks adopted the outward semblance of nuns (Chen 2021, p. 366).

In the early Ming Dynasty, the eminent monk Chushi Fanqi 楚石梵琦 (1296–1370) believed that the ravages of war were a form of rectification for the aforementioned circumstances—a sort of karmic retribution (Lan 1998, p. 537). Consequently, he emphasized the necessity for a comprehensive purification and reorganization of Buddhism in the early Ming period.

To a certain extent, Zhu Yuanzhang shared a similar perspective.⁴ Zhu Yuanzhang believed that Buddhism's fundamental mission was to educate and guide people towards performing virtuous deeds. However, as mentioned earlier, during the Yuan Dynasty, Buddhism clearly struggled to fulfill this objective, and its prestige was at risk. Therefore, during the early Ming Dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang implemented a series of measures aimed at reforming Buddhist temples and monks (Ryuchi 1939). This included imposing severe penalties on monks who chose to marry (Chen 2021, pp. 423–26).

In summary, the turmoil at the end of the Yuan Dynasty was a significant catastrophe for monks. This period of upheaval compelled them to introspect and reshape the essence of Buddhism in the early Ming Dynasty. Consequently, this era witnessed a return to a more ascetic mainstream practice during the Ming Dynasty.

5. Military Warlords' Protection and Coercion of Eminent Monks

5.1. Guardianship and Cultural Nexus: Temples in Ningbo

Temples in Ningbo, such as the Ayuwang Temple 阿育王寺 and Tiantong Temple 天童寺, enjoyed protection under the patronage of military warlords. Ningbo fell within the sphere of influence of Fang Guozhen, who held considerable power in the region. His mother's strong Buddhist faith led to his remarkable tolerance and respect for monks. Both

temples benefitted from his patronage, emerging unscathed from the ravages of conflict. Fang Guozhen's political alignment was dynamic; he fluctuated between rebellious actions and submitting to the Yuan Dynasty. Accepting an official role from the Yuan Dynasty in 1356, he continued his post in Ningbo. During this period, he established a camaraderie with (Xuechuang) Wuguang 雪窗悟光 (1215–1280), the abbot of Ayuwang Temple. The abbot sought Fang's support in restoring the stupa that safeguarded the relics of the Shakyamuni Buddha, a cherished artifact enshrined within the temple. In 1360, Tiantong Temple also required the revitalization of its revered pavilion. Financing its reconstruction, Fang named it "Chaoyuan Pavilion 朝元", signifying homage to the Yuan Dynasty and symbolizing his submission. In response, the Yuan Dynasty acknowledged Fang's role in securing the region and its inhabitants, thus creating an illusion of peace upheld by both factions (Wen 1976).

During the chaos of dynastic transition, some highly cultured monks formed alliances with local authorities, harnessing the influence of warlords to safeguard the continuity of Buddhism. As previously mentioned, figures like Lai Fu held prestigious positions as abbots at Hangzhou's Jing Shan Monastery. This period witnessed an intense power struggle between Zhu Yuanzhang and Zhang Shicheng, manifesting in recurrent conflicts for territorial dominance, subjecting Hangzhou to frequent assault and protracted battles (Mote 1962, pp. 19–25). Lai Fu sought sanctuary from the upheaval in Ningbo, aligning himself with Fang Guozhen. Lai Fu maintained close ties with eminent literati around Fang, including Liu Renben 劉仁本 (?–1367) and Xiang Bowen 項伯溫 (Sensabaugh 1989, pp. 93–100). In 1359, Lai Fu hosted a gathering with these friends, known as the "Tian Xiang Shi Ya Ji" 天香室雅集, during which they composed poetry and published a collection.

By 1367, prior to Fang Guozhen's surrender to Zhu Yuanzhang, Ningbo fell under Fang's jurisdiction. Lai Fu, a distinguished poet-monk, transformed his temple into a refuge for scholars, nurturing cultural enrichment amid the turbulence. The temple became a hub of engagement and scholarly cultural exchange. Fang Min, Fang Guozhen's son, frequented the temple, engaging in poetic collaborations with Lai Fu, whose poetry reflects his extensive social interactions (L. Shi 1995). This episode epitomizes the trend of anti-Yuan factions offering refuge to esteemed monks to attract literati, nurturing a reciprocally advantageous relationship. Scholars and monks, influenced by both Confucianism and Buddhism, shared ethical and spiritual principles (Heller 2014, pp. 406–21). The shelter extended by anti-Yuan forces to monks was in harmony with Buddhist values and resonated with scholars' ideals. This shared alignment not only fueled scholarly support for these collaborations but also enhanced their collective endeavors, reinforcing their shared perspectives and spurring cooperative initiatives. While the prevailing archetype might portray monks as ascetic and removed from society, the annals of ancient Chinese Buddhism reveal numerous instances of monks actively participating in social and political affairs and cultivating close ties with local authorities.

5.2. Buddhist Patronage and Political Strategy: Longxiang Temple's Resilience

Longxiang Temple was fortunate to be spared from the ravages of war due to the protection extended by Zhu Yuanzhang, who had a special connection with Buddhism. At the age of seventeen, he entered the monastic life as a result of his family's financial hardships, an experience that left a profound imprint on his thinking. As Zhu Yuanzhang's position within the ranks of the uprising rose, ending with him as its leader, he made the pivotal decision in 1355 to cross the Yangtze River and establish Nanjing as his stronghold.

When Zhu Yuanzhang arrived in Nanjing, the distinguished abbot of Longxiang Temple was (Fuzhong) Huaixin 孚中懷信 (1280–1357), a highly influential figure within the temple hierarchy. Huaixin assumed the position of the third abbot in 1349. As mentioned earlier, Longxiang Temple held a prominent status among the revered "Five Mountains", with its abbot effectively occupying the role of the foremost Buddhist leader in the Jiangnan region during the Yuan Dynasty. Zhu Yuanzhang astutely recognized the social influ-

ence and significance of Jiangnan Buddhism; in a gesture of respect towards Huaixin, he frequented the temple to listen to his teachings (Song 1999, pp. 440–45).⁵

Many monks of the Yuan era were well-versed in Confucianism, literature, and poetry and fostered extensive connections and close associations with the scholarly class, thereby becoming a significant societal force. For instance, Zhu Yuanzhang's strategic advisor, Song Lian, maintained close relationships with prominent monks, including Huaixin (Song 1999, p. 440), and recorded numerous anecdotes about these monks in his literary collections.

During the Yuan Dynasty, Buddhist temples owned extensive land holdings. However, with the outbreak of peasant uprisings, many temples' tenant farmers joined the rebellions, leading to the discontinuation of rent payments and a substantial reduction in temple revenue. Longxiang Temple, with its considerable land holdings and royal tax exemption (Chen 2021, p. 415), was not immune from these challenges. In response, Zhu Yuanzhang dispatched officials to assist the temple in reclaiming tax grains that had been overlooked in collection from the general populace. While some tenant farmers aspired to join Zhu Yuanzhang's military, they were denied; instead, Zhu Yuanzhang chose to maintain their connection to the temple's cultivated lands, ensuring both the property rights and the prevailing exploitative system remained intact (Song 1999).

Zhu Yuanzhang's deliberate attention to Longxiang Temple's prominence within Jiangnan Buddhism underscores his conscious efforts to establish a rapport with Huaixin and support Buddhism. As a result, Huaixin's oversight of Longxiang Temple was marked by a sense of equanimity, seemingly untouched by the upheaval that swept through Jiangnan. Huaixin was also among the first prominent monks in Nanjing to pledge allegiance to Zhu Yuanzhang—reflecting the substantial societal influence of Buddhism and its political alignment with Zhu Yuanzhang's rule.

Zhu Yuanzhang's respect for Buddhism extended to his active participation in religious ceremonies. In 1368, deeply moved by the widespread conflicts and suffering among his soldiers, he sought solace in Buddhism's promise to provide salvation for the departed (Song 1999, pp. 858–61). He issued a decree inviting renowned monks from Jiangnan to conduct elaborate memorial ceremonies, personally leading his courtiers in reverent prostration before the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. This religious observance may have had personal spiritual benefits but also projected an image of a benevolent ruler, intertwining his political authority with the spiritual potency of Buddhism. This instance underscores how temples, as symbols, played a vital role in sustaining the authority of political regimes. Rulers sought to align themselves with influential clerics to solidify their control and garner support. The patronage of temples by regional warlords not only protected these sacred spaces from turmoil but also enabled the rulers to showcase their benevolence and piety, thus projecting an image of stability and harmony.

6. Conclusions

This paper examines the intricate relationship between warfare and Buddhism during the turbulent Yuan-Ming transition in Jiangnan, drawing from historical records and case studies. The fundamental characteristics of warfare, characterized by its brutality and violence, often led to extensive casualties.

During times of conflict, various socio-cultural resources, including Buddhists and Buddhist temples, could be mobilized for war efforts. Large, grand temples in strategically advantageous locations were often useful to military forces due to their pivotal role as landmarks. Even smaller temples typically occupied larger grounds and possessed distinct landmark attributes, compared to private residences. Some abandoned temples were readily repurposed during times of turmoil. Temples of various sizes became ideal staging grounds during wartime, offering both shelter and provisions, and were repeatedly utilized by military forces during the late Yuan conflicts. In the midst of war, these temples were no longer seen as religious sanctuaries but as military assets.

The Yuan government had multiple reasons for employing Buddhism in the ritual of posthumous salvation. These motivations included seeking blessings for the nation's

well-being, safeguarding the country from disasters, showing remorse or making amends for battlefield casualties, highlighting the achievements of the regime, and mobilizing the populace. Regardless of the specific rationale, government–temple ties during this period underscored Buddhism’s societal influence and its distinctive role in addressing the needs of the time, including consoling those affected by the ravages of war.

Furthermore, the tranquil settings and rich cultural ambiance of Buddhist temples in the Jiangnan region attracted numerous Confucian scholars and intellectuals. Many of them chose these temples for contemplation and developed close relationships with resident abbots. Some of these intellectuals later became advisors and key figures among the ranks of anti-Yuan warlords such as Zhu Yuanzhang and Fang Guizhen. This phenomenon elevated the social status of abbots, leading to a symbiotic alliance between Buddhism and secular political powers. To attract more scholars and cultural figures, these warlord factions displayed immense respect and reverence towards abbots and select temples. They understood that relationships with these abbots and temples could not only solidify their political authority but also garner increased support and allegiance. This mutual collaboration played a pivotal role in safeguarding and advancing Buddhism during this tumultuous era.

In summary, this paper examines the complex interplay between warfare and Buddhism in Jiangnan during the Yuan–Ming transition. It demonstrates how temples, monks, and Buddhist rituals were impacted by the challenges and opportunities brought about by wartime turmoil.

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Notes

- ¹ “Merit” refers to the accumulation of good deeds, virtuous actions, and positive karma that is believed to bring about favorable circumstances, blessings, and spiritual benefits in Buddhism. It is essentially the concept of earning positive spiritual credit through one’s actions and intentions.
- ² The establishment of the “Five Mountains” system by the Southern Song government can be interpreted as an official government ranking of Zen temples. This system’s core was a cluster of five prominent temples that occupied elevated positions among Zen monasteries, entitling them to various privileges. These temples enjoyed the distinction of having their abbots appointed by the government and boasted architectural grandeur surpassing that of ordinary monastic establishments. Essentially, this system introduced a secular bureaucratic approach to the administration of Buddhism. The abbots of these temples held prestigious roles, which presented a formidable temptation for even reclusive monks, given the allure of fame and status. Engaging in active competition for acknowledgment within influential circles, some monks sought to secure positions as abbots through strategic social affiliations (Ishii 1991). The term “Five Mountains” refers to the five major Buddhist temples of Jiangnan, with their abbots serving as recognized leaders of Jiangnan Buddhism under governmental auspices.
- ³ The first zenith had occurred after the migration of the Southern Song Dynasty, marked by the flourishing of Zen Buddhism as the political center settled and prospered in the Jiangnan region.
- ⁴ After unifying the entire country, the Hongwu Emperor implemented stringent control over Buddhist temples. He witnessed a laxity in the monastic discipline during the Yuan Dynasty, which he believed would undermine people’s reverence for Buddhism. Moreover, he observed that some monks had formed alliances with anti-Yuan forces towards the end of the Yuan Dynasty, leading him to suspect that temples could serve as sanctuaries for political opponents, potentially organizing activities against him. Consequently, he instituted a series of rigorous regulations for the management of temples (Chen 2021, pp. 423–442).
- ⁵ Considering that the Yuan Dynasty was a unified realm, it becomes imperative to explore the influence of various Buddhist sects on Jiangnan Buddhism. The Mongols introduced Tibetan Buddhism to the Jiangnan region. Yanglian Zhenjia 楊琿真加, a disciple of Drogön Chögyal Phagpa (1290–1364), played a pivotal role in propagating Tibetan Buddhism in Jiangnan, resulting

in a noteworthy surge in temple construction activities (B. Zhang 1983, p. 751). This proliferation of diverse Buddhist sects significantly augmented the presence of Buddhist temples in Jiangnan, leading to a more densely distributed network of these religious institutions. Nonetheless, scholars contend that Tibetan Buddhism's penetration into Jiangnan was chiefly propelled by political power and lacked robust social foundations, thus impeding its sustained development (Chen 2021, p. 287). In the mid-Yuan period, Zen Buddhism experienced a revival in Jiangnan, an upsurge primarily attributed to the influence of three prominent monks: Gaofeng Yuanmiao 高峰原妙 (1238–1295), Zhongfeng Mingben, and (Xiaoyin) Daxin. Among these figures, Master Daxin played a pivotal role. He maintained close ties with Emperor Wenzong and bore the honorific title of the “Leader of the Five Mountains”, symbolizing the preeminence of Jiangnan Zen Buddhism over other sects (Chen 2021, p. 309). This historical context elucidates Zhu Yuanzhang's endeavors to secure support from Longxiang Temple.

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