



ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND THE SINICIZATION OF CHINESE BUDDHISM: RE-READING THE *CHANLIN BAOXUN* AS A MODEL OF MONASTIC GOVERNANCE TODAY

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Abstract

This study reinterprets Chanlin Baoxun (禪林寶訓) as a foundational text that shapes ethical leadership and institutional governance in Chinese Buddhism from the Song dynasty to the present. Combining philological analysis of classical sources with comparative case studies of Nanputuo and Baoguang Monasteries, it argues that the Baoxun established an enduring paradigm of virtue-based governance that integrates Buddhist self-cultivation with Confucian moral rationality. The research identifies three interrelated principles—self-discipline (de 德), administrative competence (neng 能), and social responsibility (gong 公)—that constitute the moral architecture of legitimate monastic authority. The text's internalization of Confucian ethics, particularly li (ritual propriety) and zhong-xiao (loyalty and filiality), illustrates how Sinicization functioned historically as an ethical translation rather than ideological assimilation. Contemporary monasteries continue to embody this legacy through distinct modalities: Nanputuo emphasizes compassion-driven civic engagement, while Baoguang institutionalizes virtue through transparent moral bureaucracy. The findings challenge reductionist readings of Sinicization as state compliance, demonstrating instead a long-standing process of moral localization through which Buddhist institutions negotiate cultural legitimacy and ethical autonomy. The study contributes to broader theories of religious leadership and governance by proposing a "virtue-bureaucracy" model that reconciles charisma, ethics, and institutional order—suggesting that durable authority, whether spiritual or secular, remains a moral achievement grounded in disciplined virtue.

Keywords: *Chinese Buddhism; Chanlin Baoxun; Monastic Leadership; Ethical Governance; Sinicization; Virtue-Bureaucracy Model; and Case Studies*

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The transformation of Buddhist leadership and ethical governance in China has long been intertwined with the process of *sinicization* (宗教中国化)—the cultural and political adaptation of foreign religious traditions to the norms of Chinese civilization. Since the Tang and Song dynasties, Buddhism's survival and institutional resilience have depended on its ability to reconcile universal *Dharma* principles with the hierarchical and Confucian moral order of Chinese society (Chen, 2018; Faure, 1991; Sharf, 2005). Within this historical framework, *monastic leadership* (住持制度) evolved from being a primarily

spiritual function into a complex system of administrative and ethical authority that reflected both Buddhist and Confucian paradigms of moral governance.

Among the textual products of this transformation, the *Chanlin Baoxun* (hereafter CBX)—compiled during the Southern Song period (12th century)—stands out as a cornerstone in the codification of ethical leadership within the *Chan* (Zen) Buddhist community. The text is both prescriptive and reflective: it reasserts monastic discipline, moral responsibility, and *daofeng* (道風, monastic ethos) as foundations for religious legitimacy (Chao, 2012; Zhang, 2020). Emerging amid widespread concerns over moral decay, corruption, and the commodification of Buddhist institutions, *Chanlin Baoxun* provided a comprehensive moral framework for abbots (*fangzhang* 方丈) and monastic administrators (*weina* 維那) to embody virtue through both personal conduct and institutional management (Lin & Zeng, 2023; Mou et al., 2023).

In the twenty-first century, the relevance of such historical Buddhist ethical frameworks has resurfaced under the Chinese government's policy of the *Sinicization of Religion* (宗教中国化), formally announced at the 2015 National Conference on Religious Work. This policy calls for all religions, including Buddhism, to align with "socialist values with Chinese characteristics" (Xie & Liao, 2021; Laliberté, 2019). Within this political climate, the Buddhist sangha has faced growing demands to institutionalize "clerical integrity" (*lüde*, 律德) and to reaffirm "political loyalty" (*zhengzhi suzhi*, 政治素质) through state-approved training and certification (Feng, 2020). However, beyond bureaucratic compliance, the challenge remains how to reconstruct a genuinely ethical model of leadership grounded in the internal resources of Buddhist tradition rather than state ideology.

This study situates *Chanlin Baoxun* as a crucial textual bridge between classical Buddhist ethics and contemporary state-led Sinicization. It examines how the text articulates a vision of ethical leadership rooted in Buddhist morality yet expressed through Confucianized values of loyalty, filiality, and social harmony (Susiyawati, Rachmadiarti, Prastiwi, Sukarmin & Sulistyawati, 2025). As a normative text, *Chanlin Baoxun* not only responded to the Song dynasty's moral crisis but also anticipated the modern state's preoccupation with ideological conformity and moral governance. Through a historical-hermeneutic and comparative framework, this research explores how the ethical governance model embedded in *Chanlin Baoxun* continues to shape Chinese Buddhist discourses on leadership and institutional integrity in the Sinicization era.

Problem Statement

Scholarly attention to the Sinicization of Buddhism has primarily centered on doctrinal adaptation, state control, and interreligious negotiation (Laliberté, 2019; Goossaert & Palmer, 2011). Nevertheless, far less emphasis has been placed on the *internal mechanisms* by which Buddhist communities construct and transmit ethical leadership models responsive to both spiritual ideals and political exigencies. Historical studies of Chan Buddhism (Yifa, 2002; Huang, 2019) have explored institutional regulations such as *Baizhang Qinggui* (百丈清規), but the subsequent normative texts—particularly *Chanlin Baoxun*—have received limited systematic analysis despite their significance in reshaping the moral consciousness of Chinese monastic institutions.

This neglect reflects a broader methodological gap: the failure to treat Buddhist normative texts as dynamic instruments of ethical reform rather than

static legal codes. *Chanlin Baoxun* embodies what Zhang (2020) terms "normative revivalism," a reformist effort to reconstruct sangha ethics from within the tradition rather than through imperial or bureaucratic imposition. By overlooking such texts, existing research risks reducing Sinicization to a top-down political process, ignoring the internal agency of Buddhist monastics in negotiating ethical legitimacy.

Therefore, this study addresses the following problem: How does the *Chanlin Baoxun* construct a model of monastic leadership and ethical governance that mediates between Buddhist universalism and the Chinese moral-political order, and in what ways can this model inform contemporary debates on religious Sinicization and clerical integrity?

Research Objectives

In response to this problem, the study pursues three interconnected objectives:

- 1) To analyze the ethical and leadership principles embedded in *Chanlin Baoxun* as a normative response to the moral decline of the Buddhist sangha during the Song Dynasty.

- 2) To examine how the text reflects the historical process of Sinicization by integrating Confucian moral codes into Buddhist notions of discipline and governance.

- 3) To evaluate the contemporary relevance of *Chanlin Baoxun*'s leadership ethics in the context of the People's Republic of China's Sinicization of Religion policy (2015–present), through comparative analysis with the practices of Nanputuo and Baoguang Monasteries.

These objectives collectively illuminate *Chanlin Baoxun* as both a historical artifact and a living ethical framework, revealing continuities between classical Buddhist monastic ethics and modern state-directed moral governance.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to Buddhist Studies, Religious Ethics, and Chinese Sociology of Religion on three distinct levels—theoretical, historical, and practical.

(1) Theoretical Significance

By positioning *Chanlin Baoxun* within the broader discourse on ethical leadership and institutional legitimacy, the research deepens our understanding of *daofeng* (monastic ethos) as a dynamic interplay between spiritual discipline and social governance (Mou et al., 2023). It demonstrates how monastic ethics are constructed not merely through Vinaya rules but through culturally embedded moral narratives that mediate between Dharma and empire (Faure, 1991; Sharf, 2005). This challenges the dominant narrative of Sinicization as a one-way process of state control, revealing it instead as a dialogical negotiation between religious self-regulation and political conformity.

(2) Historical Significance

The paper reinterprets *Chanlin Baoxun* as a paradigmatic example of internal ethical reform in Chinese Buddhism, comparable in importance to *Baizhang Qinggui* (Lai, 2015; Lin, 2018). Through its integration of Confucian moral codes such as *li* (ritual propriety), *zhong* (loyalty), and *xiao* (filial piety), the text demonstrates a mature stage of Buddhist Sinicization in which ethical authority was both localized and moralized. Understanding this evolution provides insight into how Buddhism sustained institutional legitimacy amid

dynastic, intellectual, and ideological transformations.

(3) Contemporary and Policy Significance

Amid current debates on the Sinicization of Religion, *Chanlin Baoxun* offers an alternative vision of moral governance rooted in the Buddhist ethical tradition rather than bureaucratic ideology. Its emphasis on self-cultivation, transparency, and compassionate authority provides a historically grounded counter-model to modern state-led attempts at moral regulation. For contemporary Chinese Buddhist monasteries such as Nanputuo and Baoguang, revisiting *Chanlin Baoxun* can serve as both an ethical mirror and a source of institutional renewal.

Thus, this study bridges the gap between historical scholarship and present-day governance, demonstrating how classical Buddhist texts continue to shape discourses of religious morality, legitimacy, and leadership in Sinicized Chinese Buddhism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Institutional Transformation of Chinese Buddhist Monasticism

The institutional transformation of Chinese Buddhism represents one of the most profound cases of religious indigenization in world history. The process of adapting the Indian *sangha* model to the Chinese socio-political environment involved not merely organizational modifications but also epistemological reconstruction—redefining the relationship between *Dharma*, authority, and governance (Chen, 2018; Faure, 1991; Sharf, 2005). In its Indian origins, the *sangha* was largely egalitarian, autonomous, and centered on the principle of consensual community governance through the *Vinaya*. However, when Buddhism entered China, it encountered a hierarchical and bureaucratic social system grounded in Confucian ideals of order (*li* 禮), loyalty (*zhong* 忠), and filial piety (*xiao* 孝). As a result, Buddhist monasteries gradually became institutional actors embedded within the imperial moral-political order (Lai, 2015; Goossaert & Palmer, 2011).

Scholars such as Yifa (2002) and Welch (1967) have shown that by the Tang dynasty (618–907), Buddhist monasteries had evolved into semi-autonomous administrative entities with complex bureaucratic structures, property ownership, and official recognition by the state. The *Baizhang Qinggui* (百丈清規), compiled by Master Baizhang Huaihai (720–814), codified a distinctive form of monastic regulation that emphasized labor, discipline, and hierarchical order as means to harmonize Buddhist community life with Chinese social ethics (Huang, 2019). This regulatory code institutionalized what Chen (2018) terms "ethical bureaucracy," blending spiritual authority with administrative responsibility. In this transformation, the abbot (*fangzhang* 方丈) became not only a spiritual exemplar but also a moral administrator responsible for aligning the monastery's internal discipline with the expectations of civil society and imperial oversight (Ji, 2020).

The *Baizhang Qinggui* thus represented the first major synthesis between Buddhist monastic ideals and Chinese bureaucratic rationality. Scholars such as Lai (2015) and Lin (2018) have emphasized that this synthesis marked the beginning of an indigenous Chinese conception of monastic leadership as both moral and managerial. This institutional model would later influence the compilation of *Chanyuan Qinggui* (禪苑清規) during the Song dynasty and culminate in the *Chanlin Baoxun* (禪林寶訓), which deepened the moral

dimension of leadership by integrating Confucian family ethics and Daoist moral metaphors. Whereas *Baizhang Qinggui* emphasized the procedural aspects of governance, *Chanlin Baoxun* moved beyond regulation to moral pedagogy—transforming the monastic community into a moral microcosm of the Confucian polity (Zhang, 2020).

This literature underscores that Sinicization was not an externally imposed process but a dialogical adaptation within Buddhism itself. The *sangha* transformed from a transnational ascetic community into a moral institution embedded within Chinese social hierarchies. In this transformation, normative texts such as *Chanlin Baoxun* served as instruments for defining the moral consciousness of leadership. As Mou et al. (2023) argue, the Chinese notion of *daofeng* (道風, monastic ethos) emerged precisely through this indigenization process—where spiritual discipline was reinterpreted as moral exemplarity, and ethical leadership became the foundation of institutional legitimacy.

Ethical Decline and Institutional Responses in the Song Dynasty

By the Song dynasty (960–1279), the flourishing of Buddhism under state patronage had paradoxically led to ethical erosion within the monastic community. The expanding wealth of monasteries, coupled with the bureaucratization of abbot appointments, created opportunities for corruption, ritual commodification, and the abuse of clerical privileges (Huang, 2019; Lin, 2018). Confucian literati such as Zhu Xi frequently criticized Buddhist monks for moral laxity and commercialism, depicting monasteries as morally degenerate and socially parasitic (De Bary, 1981). Within the Buddhist community itself, reform-minded monks began to express concern that the *sangha* had strayed from its ascetic ideals and was increasingly dominated by political and economic interests (Chao, 2012).

This crisis generated a wave of internal reformist literature that scholars term "normative revivalism" (Zhang, 2020). These texts sought to revive the moral authority of the *sangha* through ethical codification, rather than through ritual law alone. Among them, *Chanlin Baoxun* emerged as a paradigmatic response to the degeneration of *daofeng*. Compiled during the Southern Song, it addressed the moral responsibilities of monastic leaders and explicitly warned against corruption, greed, and negligence in governance. The text emphasized virtues such as humility, frugality, compassion, and integrity as essential to legitimate leadership (Lin & Zeng, 2023).

Unlike the *Baizhang Qinggui*, which outlined organizational rules, *Chanlin Baoxun* operates as a moral exhortation. It enjoins abbots to lead through personal example—embodying the principle of *shenjiao shengyu yanjiao* (身教勝於言教, "moral modeling surpasses verbal instruction"). This pedagogical orientation aligns closely with Confucian leadership ethics, wherein authority arises from virtue rather than coercion (Chen, 2018). The text's structure—organized into thematic aphorisms and didactic maxims—suggests that it was designed for monastic education and leadership training rather than legal enforcement. In this sense, it functioned as a "moral mirror" (*jing*, 鏡) for the *sangha*, intended to restore ethical order through reflection and self-cultivation.

The emergence of such texts coincided with the Song government's increasing involvement in regulating religious institutions. As Goossaert and Palmer (2011) demonstrate, imperial policies during this period sought to

domesticate Buddhism by integrating it into the state bureaucracy. However, *Chanlin Baoxun* represents a bottom-up response to this pressure: rather than external control, it advocates internal ethical reform as the basis for social harmony. Zhao (2021) argues that the text's underlying logic of "ethical governance" (*de zhi*, 德治) parallels the Confucian doctrine of ruling through virtue, thereby aligning Buddhist leadership ideals with imperial moral discourse without surrendering spiritual autonomy.

This dual orientation—compliance and critique—made *Chanlin Baoxun* both politically adaptive and ethically resilient. It affirmed loyalty and harmony, yet it also subtly resisted the commodification and politicization of religion by reaffirming the primacy of moral integrity. As a result, *Chanlin Baoxun* embodies what Lin (2018) calls "the moral counter-discourse of Sinicization," in which Buddhist leaders appropriated the language of Confucian virtue to safeguard the spiritual core of monastic life.

Sinicization of Monastic Ethics: From Ritual Law to Moral Order

The sinicization of Buddhist ethics unfolded as a shift from the legalistic *Vinaya* tradition to a moral order grounded in Chinese sociocultural values. In India, the *Vinaya* (律) functioned as a disciplinary code governing personal conduct and communal harmony. In China, however, monastic ethics came to emphasize internal moral cultivation and social responsibility rather than formal rule compliance (Yifa, 2002; Chen, 2018). This transformation occurred through the integration of Confucian moral categories—especially *li* (ritual propriety), *zhong* (loyalty), and *xiao* (filial piety)—into Buddhist ethical frameworks (Mak, 2020).

The *Chanlin Baoxun* represents the culmination of this ethical synthesis. It redefines the abbot's role not merely as an enforcer of rules but as a moral father figure—responsible for guiding monks as a patriarch governs his household (Zhao, 2021). Leadership is thus familial: the monastery becomes a moral community where hierarchical relations mirror Confucian social structures. While this adaptation reinforced social stability, it also reoriented Buddhist ethics from the pursuit of *nirvāṇa* toward the maintenance of social harmony (*he*, 和). In effect, Buddhist monasticism was transformed into a moral institution of the Chinese state, embodying the ideal of "harmony between Dharma and the Way of the Emperor" (*fa he daotong*, 法合道統) (Faure, 1991; Lin & Zeng, 2023).

However, this synthesis was not without tension. As Chen (2018) and Mak (2020) emphasize, the universalist orientation of Buddhist compassion conflicted with the hierarchical, duty-based structure of Confucian ethics. *Chanlin Baoxun* negotiates this tension through what Zhao (2021) calls "moral discursivization"—the recasting of Buddhist virtues in Chinese moral vocabulary. For instance, *karuṇā* (compassion) becomes the abbot's benevolent care for the community, while *śīla* (discipline) is expressed as social responsibility. The result is a hybrid ethical discourse where Buddhist universality and Confucian particularism coalesce into a distinctive model of moral governance.

This hybridization also prefigures the ideological dynamics of modern Sinicization. Under the People's Republic of China, religious institutions are expected to align with the state's moral-political vision, promoting "harmony," "patriotism," and "cultural confidence" (Laliberté, 2019; Xie & Liao, 2021). The

historical precedent of *Chanlin Baoxun* demonstrates that Sinicization need not equate to ideological subservience; it can also represent a creative ethical negotiation that preserves spiritual integrity while engaging state discourse. By internalizing moral governance, *Chanlin Baoxun* offered a framework for the sangha to adapt to political constraints without abandoning Buddhist principles.

Furthermore, the sinicization of Buddhist ethics expanded the conception of leadership from spiritual self-cultivation to institutional stewardship. Scholars such as Ji (2020) and Mou et al. (2023) note that *daofeng* became the key measure of a monastery's legitimacy. A leader's personal virtue was inseparable from the institution's moral climate. In this sense, *Chanlin Baoxun* functions as both a pedagogical manual and a philosophical treatise on governance. It constructs a model of leadership that embodies the Confucian principle of *zhengshen qi jia zhi guo ping tianxia* (正身齐家治国平天下, "rectify oneself, regulate the family, govern the state, and bring peace to the world") within a Buddhist monastic context.

Thus, the sinicization of monastic ethics does not dilute Buddhist teachings but rather amplifies them in context. It enabled Buddhism to sustain relevance in an ideologically Confucian environment while preserving its internal mechanisms of ethical regulation. *Chanlin Baoxun* stands as both a product and an agent of this process—transforming external adaptation into internal moral reform.

Synthesis of Literature and Identified Research Gap

The literature converges on three main insights. First, the transformation of Chinese Buddhist monasticism involved a gradual shift from transnational asceticism to localized moral governance (Yifa, 2002; Lai, 2015). Second, periods of ethical decline—especially in the Song dynasty—stimulated the production of normative texts such as *Chanlin Baoxun* that reasserted monastic discipline through moral pedagogy rather than legal enforcement (Huang, 2019; Zhang, 2020). Third, the sinicization of Buddhist ethics represents an enduring process of cultural negotiation, in which Buddhist institutions internalized Confucian moral ideals to sustain legitimacy within a hierarchical political order (Mak, 2020; Zhao, 2021).

Despite these insights, existing scholarship leaves several gaps unaddressed. Most notably, few studies have examined *Chanlin Baoxun* as an independent text of leadership theory rather than merely as a supplement to *Baizhang Qinggui*. Moreover, the continuity between historical ethical codification and contemporary Sinicization policy remains underexplored. As Lin and Zeng (2023) observe, modern Chinese Buddhist institutions continue to invoke classical notions of *daofeng* and *de zhi* (moral governance) in their responses to state regulation. Nevertheless, the intellectual genealogy linking these discourses to texts such as *Chanlin Baoxun* has not been systematically traced.

This study addresses that lacuna by offering a hermeneutic and comparative analysis of *Chanlin Baoxun*—interpreting it as a living ethical framework whose conceptual logic continues to inform the moral discourse of Buddhist leadership in the Sinicization era. By doing so, it contributes to the growing interdisciplinary dialogue between religious studies, ethics, and political sociology on how religious institutions negotiate moral autonomy under conditions of ideological conformity.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts an interpretive qualitative design that integrates philological, textual, and historical analysis with limited comparative case studies. The central aim is to understand how *Chanlin Baoxun* (禪林寶訓) constructs a model of ethical monastic leadership within the broader trajectory of the Sinicization of Chinese Buddhism, and how its moral principles are recontextualized in the contemporary institutional practices of two major monasteries—Nanputuo and Baoguang.

The interpretive-qualitative design was selected because the research questions address meanings, values, and discourses, rather than quantifiable behavior. As Denzin and Lincoln (2018) emphasize, qualitative inquiry seeks to capture "the socially constructed nature of reality and the situational constraints that shape meanings." In this study, the *text* itself functions as both a cultural artifact and a moral discourse, requiring interpretive sensitivity to how language encodes leadership ethics, political adaptation, and institutional self-understanding (Nguyahambi & Rugeiyamu, 2025).

At its core, the study employs a hermeneutic-interpretive approach, drawing on the methodological insights of Ricoeur (1976) and Gadamer (1989), who argue that texts are dialogical mediations between historical authorship and contemporary understanding. The *Chanlin Baoxun* is thus read not as a static monastic regulation, but as a living ethical document whose meanings evolve in relation to its historical context (the Song Dynasty) and contemporary resonances (Sinicization of Religion since 2015).

Two complementary methodological components support this interpretive orientation:

- 1) Philological and textual-critical analysis of *Chanlin Baoxun* and its related normative texts (e.g., *Baizhang Qinggui* and *Chanyuan Qinggui*), focusing on vocabulary, structure, and conceptual patterns of leadership ethics; and

- 2) Comparative institutional analysis of Nanputuo and Baoguang Monasteries, using publicly available data (e.g., official websites, publications, policy statements) to assess how Baoxun's principles are reflected or reinterpreted under the Sinicization policy.

Together, these approaches form a multi-layered interpretive framework: textual meaning (ethical ideals) → historical context (Song Dynasty reform) → modern manifestation (Sinicization-era governance). This triangulation ensures historical validity, contextual depth, and theoretical relevance.

Philosophical and Methodological Orientation

The study's methodological foundation is rooted in constructivist epistemology, which views knowledge as context-dependent and socially mediated (Schwandt, 2007). In Buddhist studies, constructivism aligns with what Gregory (1999) calls the "genealogical approach"—treating Buddhist texts not as dogmatic authorities but as products of negotiation among doctrine, culture, and power. Accordingly, *Chanlin Baoxun* is analyzed as a discourse of moral authority, simultaneously descriptive and prescriptive, reflecting the Chan community's attempt to reclaim legitimacy amid ethical and political crises.

To operationalize this epistemology, the research employs textual hermeneutics—the interpretive art of uncovering moral and cultural meanings through the close reading of language, genre, and rhetorical structure. This

involves three interrelated interpretive movements:

- 1) Philological reading: examining linguistic choices (e.g., use of Confucian terminology such as *li*, *zhong*, *xiao*) that reveal sinicized ethical frameworks.

- 2) Contextual reading: situating the text within the socio-political and institutional developments of the Song dynasty.

- 3) Reflexive reading: engaging the modern Sinicization discourse to understand how these historical ethics continue to shape contemporary Buddhist governance.

Following Ricoeur's (1976) hermeneutic arc—moving from explanation (*what the text says*) to understanding (*what it means*)—the analysis traces how *Chanlin Baoxun* constructs a moral vision of leadership characterized by self-cultivation, institutional transparency, and social harmony. These interpretive stages enable a dialogue between ancient ethical systems and modern policy frameworks, avoiding the extremes of historical positivism or ideological critique.

Data Sources and Sampling Strategy

Primary Textual Sources

The core primary source is the *Chanlin Baoxun* (禪林寶訓), a Song-dynasty normative text attributed to the Chan monastic community. The research utilizes critical editions published by Huang Yongwu (2019) and the modern annotated versions cited in the *Chinese Buddhist Canon (CBETA)*. The textual analysis focuses on identifying its ethical categories, rhetorical patterns, and references to Confucian moral codes.

Complementary primary texts include:

- 1) Baizhang Qinggui (百丈清規), compiled by Master Baizhang Huaihai (720–814), provides a baseline for early Chan monastic governance (Yifa, 2002);

- 2) Chanyuan Qinggui (禪苑清規), a Song-era administrative code that institutionalized Chan regulations nationwide (Lai, 2015); and

- 3) Shimen Guangji (釋門廣記) is a monastic compendium that includes moral anecdotes and disciplinary reflections (Zhang, 2020).

These texts enable comparative historical triangulation, clarifying how *Chanlin Baoxun* extends earlier regulatory traditions toward a more explicitly moral and pedagogical orientation.

Secondary and Contextual Sources

To contextualize the ethical and institutional dynamics, secondary materials are drawn from:

- 1) Classical Confucian texts such as the *Liji* (Book of Rites) and *Xunzi*, which articulate moral governance and hierarchical ethics;

- 2) Tang–Song government edicts concerning Buddhist regulation (as cited in Chen, 2018; Faure, 1991);

- 3) Modern Sinicization policy documents and speeches from the *Buddhist Association of China* (中国佛教协会), particularly those issued between 2015 and 2022.

These sources provide a diachronic frame linking historical ethical discourse with contemporary religious governance.

Case Study Samples

The two monasteries selected—Nanputuo Monastery (Xiamen, Fujian) and Baoguang Monastery (Chengdu, Sichuan)—are purposefully chosen for their historical continuity, public documentation, and active engagement with the Sinicization policy.

Table 1: Exemplary Buddhist monasteries studied

Monastery	Historical Relevance	Data Sources	Research Function
Nanputuo Monastery 南普陀寺	A prominent Chan temple with Tang–Song lineage; active social outreach and educational programs.	Official website, abbot's statements, published annual reports (2016–2023), and field studies by Xiamen University.	Illustrates <i>ethical governance through public service and educational outreach</i> .
Baoguang Monastery 四川宝光寺	Historic Sichuan monastery noted for cooperation with government Sinicization initiatives.	Buddhist Association of Sichuan, media interviews with abbots, temple bulletins (2015–2023).	Demonstrates <i>institutional adaptation and clerical integrity under state supervision</i> .

These case studies are not intended as ethnographic fieldwork but as documentary exemplifications—illustrating how Baoxun's ethical principles of leadership, transparency, and communal welfare continue to shape the moral ethos of contemporary Chinese monasteries.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection proceeded through three interconnected phases:

1) Textual Data Compilation

Critical editions of *Chanlin Baoxun* and related texts were reviewed in their original Chinese and modern annotated versions. Passages explicitly addressing leadership (*fangzhang, zhuchi, weina*), moral conduct, and institutional governance were extracted for thematic coding.

2) Documentary Analysis of Case Studies

Digital and print materials produced by Nanputuo and Baoguang Monasteries—such as annual activity reports, abbot's addresses, and educational program outlines—were systematically collected. These documents were retrieved from official websites, state-affiliated Buddhist associations, and scholarly repositories (2015–2023).

3) Comparative Contextualization

To ensure analytical triangulation, each textual theme identified in *Chanlin Baoxun* (e.g., moral modeling, meritocratic appointment, communal harmony) was compared with its manifestation in modern institutional discourse, particularly in official Buddhist rhetoric on "Sinicized ethics" (*zhonghua fojiao daodehua*, 中华佛教道德化).

This combination of philological analysis and documentary observation enabled the researcher to link classical Buddhist ethical frameworks with current policy-driven institutional realities.

Research Instruments

Two interpretive instruments were designed to structure data collection and analysis:

1) Textual Analysis Worksheet — used to record and code Baoxun's moral categories and leadership ideals. Each entry included: (a) textual citation (Chinese + English translation), (b) ethical concept (e.g., humility, transparency, moral modeling), (c) interpretive notes, and (d) corresponding Confucian/Buddhist sources.

2) Institutional Document Observation Worksheet — applied to modern monastery data, containing: (a) type of document (speech, report, policy), (b) ethical or governance theme, (c) resonance with Baoxun principles, and (d) interpretive remarks.

This systematization followed the qualitative content analysis model outlined by Schreier (2012), emphasizing interpretive categorization rather than numerical frequency.

Both instruments were pilot-tested on a limited corpus (five chapters of *Chanlin Baoxun* and two official Nanputuo statements) to ensure conceptual consistency and inter-textual reliability.

Validity and Reliability

Ensuring validity in interpretive research requires transparency in analytic reasoning rather than replication. Following Lincoln and Guba (1985), this study applies the four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

1) Credibility: achieved through triangulation of multiple sources—historical texts, commentaries, and contemporary documents—to confirm thematic coherence.

2) Transferability: ensured by a thick description of historical and institutional contexts, allowing readers to assess the applicability of findings to comparable Buddhist communities.

3) Dependability: maintained through consistent use of analytic instruments and documentation of interpretive decisions.

4) Confirmability: supported by reflexive journaling, where interpretive assumptions were continuously reviewed in light of historical evidence.

Although textual interpretation cannot claim statistical reliability, conceptual consistency was maintained through iterative reading and peer consultation with Buddhist ethics scholars (cf. Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis followed six interrelated stages, combining philological precision with hermeneutic synthesis:

1) Textual Deconstruction: Line-by-line reading of *Chanlin Baoxun*, identifying ethical keywords and metaphors (e.g., 清, 廉, 慎, 敬 — purity, honesty, caution, reverence).

2) Thematic Categorization: Grouping the identified concepts into thematic clusters corresponding to leadership ethics: self-cultivation, moral modeling, meritocracy, communal harmony, and resistance to greed/power abuse.

3) Intertextual Correlation: Comparing Baoxun's themes with other normative texts (*Baizhang Qinggui*, *Chanyuan Qinggui*), highlighting continuities and innovations.

4) Contextual Embedding: Interpreting each theme within the socio-political framework of Song-dynasty sinicization (960–1279), using historical commentaries and secondary analyses (Huang, 2019; Chen, 2018).

5) Comparative Application: Assessing the resonance of these themes in the rhetoric and practice of Nanputuo and Baoguang Monasteries under the Sinicization policy.

6) Interpretive Synthesis: Integrating textual and case data into a coherent narrative of ethical governance, emphasizing the transformation of *Chanlin Baoxun* from a historical code into a contemporary moral paradigm.

This layered analysis aligns with the hermeneutic circle described by Gadamer (1989), in which understanding moves continuously between parts (specific textual details) and the whole (the ethical worldview of Chinese Buddhism).

Research Ethics

Although the study does not involve human participants, it adheres to academic research ethics concerning data integrity, intellectual honesty, and cultural sensitivity. Primary texts were cited according to established Sinological standards (Pinyin transcription, Chinese characters where appropriate). Contemporary monastery documents were sourced only from publicly accessible domains, in accordance with confidentiality and institutional autonomy.

The analysis intentionally avoids political bias, treating the Sinicization policy as a contextual factor rather than a normative framework. The goal is not to critique state ideology but to illuminate how Buddhist ethics negotiate moral integrity within a controlled environment. Following King and Queen (2022), the study upholds "interpretive neutrality," ensuring that conclusions are grounded in textual and institutional evidence rather than ideological assumptions.

Limitations

Three limitations should be noted:

1) Scope Constraint: The research centers on *Chanlin Baoxun* and two case monasteries; it does not attempt a complete comparative survey across all Chan institutions or regional variations.

2) Data Access: Contemporary institutional data are restricted to publicly available documents, limiting the depth of ethnographic analysis.

3) Interpretive Subjectivity: As with all hermeneutic research, interpretation is influenced by the researcher's theoretical lens; this was mitigated through triangulation and scholarly peer review.

Despite these constraints, the methodological framework ensures internal validity through comprehensive documentation, intertextual comparison, and contextual rigor.

In summary, this research employs a qualitative, interpretive, and hermeneutic methodology combining textual analysis, historical contextualization, and comparative case study. The design reflects the multi-layered nature of Buddhist ethical discourse—linking classical textual traditions to modern institutional practices.

By analyzing *Chanlin Baoxun* as both a historical text and a living ethical

system, and by situating its moral vision within the evolving political landscape of Sinicization, the methodology bridges the gap between philology and sociology, history and ethics, doctrine and governance. The subsequent chapters will apply this framework to analyze (1) the ethical leadership ideals codified in *Chanlin Baoxun*, and (2) their contemporary reinterpretations in Nanputuo and Baoguang Monasteries.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Ethical Leadership Principles in the *Chanlin Baoxun* *Reaffirming Monastic Integrity through Self-Cultivation*

Compiled in the Southern Song, the *Chanlin Baoxun* articulates a leadership ideal in which virtue (*de*, 德) is the primary source of authority. Administrative power or genealogical prestige is repeatedly subordinated to a prior work of self-cultivation (*xiushen*, 修身). The text emphasizes that the abbot (*fangzhang*, 方丈) must "govern the grove by first governing the mind," a formula that aligns monastic leadership with a moral interiority conceived as both Buddhist and Confucian (Chen, 2018; Zhao, 2021). In this framing, *authority is a moral achievement*—recognized and sustained by the community because it is rooted in visible ethical discipline.

The *Baoxun* advances a core cluster of leadership virtues: humility, frugality, vigilance toward fame and profit, benevolent authority, and sincerity. Each works as an antidote to Song-era problems—patronage politics, donation economies, and status competition—that scholars have identified as drivers of ethical strain in Chan institutions (Huang, 2019; Lai, 2015). Rather than legal sanctions, the text's primary technique is exhortation: pithy aphorisms are designed to be memorized, recited, and imitated, embedding a pedagogy of conscience in everyday governance. The intended outcome is the cultivation of an institutional ethos (*daofeng*, 道風) in which the abbot's visible conduct becomes the formative curriculum of the sangha (Mou, Zhou, & Sun, 2023).

Moralizing Administrative Authority

The *Baoxun* reframes administration itself as a moral vocation. Passages directed at office-holders—abbots, priors (*weina*, 維那), treasurers—warn against favoritism, opacity in finances, and self-interested decision-making, urging impartiality (*gong*, 公), incorruptibility (*lian*, 廉), and diligence (*qin*, 勤). Rather than opposing "spiritual charisma" to "bureaucratic routine," the text integrates them: administrative acts are valid insofar as they arise from, and reinforce, virtuous character (Lin & Zeng, 2023). In Weberian terms, the *Baoxun* channels the routinization of charisma through ethics rather than through mere procedure (Weber, 1947).

A recurring emphasis on transparency—accounting for donations, treating offerings as "entrusted faith," and public reporting of expenditures—anticipates modern concerns about clerical integrity (Chen, 2018; Ji, 2020). The point is not financial technique but moral accountability: institutional trust is a spiritual good, safeguarded by leaders' willingness to subject themselves to scrutiny.

Ethical Pedagogy and Community Harmony

The *Baoxun* projects a relational model of governance: the abbot's embodied example (*shen jiao*, 身教) shapes a moral atmosphere (*fengqi*,

風氣) in which harmony (*he*, 和) and compassion (*cibei*, 慈悲) are sustained across ranks. Novices, administrators, and senior monks are instructed to avoid factionalism, gossip, and coercion—behaviors that fracture communal conscience. Where the *Vinaya* often governs through rules, *Baoxun* works through moral imagination: analogies and metaphors ("a clear pool reflects the moon") train perception so that monks recognize the nexus between inner clarity and collective flourishing (Yifa, 2002; Mou et al., 2023). The telos is a pedagogy of conscience that stabilizes discipline by converting it into a shared ethical aspiration.

Confucian Integration and the Sinicized Ethical Discourse ***Confucianization of Buddhist Morality***

The chapters show that the *Baoxun* is structured as a Confucian-style manual—short propositions, moral contrasts, and exemplary sayings—designed for ethical formation. Substantively, its vocabulary draws in Confucian norms: *li* (禮, ritual propriety) regulates decorum, *yi* (義, righteousness) displaces personal affection (*qing*, 情) in decision-making, and *xiao/zhong* (孝/忠, filiality/loyalty) are reinterpreted as reverence for teachers and responsibility toward the community (Mak, 2020; Lai, 2015). This is not capitulation but translation (Chen, 2018): Buddhist virtues are expressed in the idiom of a Confucian moral order so that the sangha can be legible, and thus legitimate, within Chinese society.

Textually, this integration shifts emphasis from legal compliance (*Vinaya*) to moral self-regulation. The abbot is not merely an enforcer of rules but a moral father who cultivates character through ritualized practice and persuasive example. As Faure (1991) puts it, enlightenment is "domesticated" as civic morality: spiritual attainment underwrites social virtue, not withdraws from it.

From Fa (Dharma) to Dao (Political Order): Harmonizing Two Normativities

The *Baoxun* visualizes harmony between Dharma (*fa*, 法) and civilizational order (*dao*, 道)—often summarized as *fa he daotong* (法合道統). Leadership is presented as a practice that stabilizes both the monastery and the polity: virtuous abbots minimize social friction and enhance public trust (Goossaert & Palmer, 2011). The community is familial: the abbot "as father," senior monks "as elder brothers," novices "as younger brothers," each with graded duties. In adopting Confucian social metaphors, the text embeds Chan communities within a recognizable Chinese hierarchy, while preserving the Buddhist ground of non-attachment and compassion—as—normative limits on authority (Lin, 2018; Zhao, 2021).

This harmonizing posture allowed Buddhism, historically vulnerable to charges of heterodoxy, to negotiate legitimacy by presenting its governance as congruent with imperial moral expectations—without surrendering spiritual ends (Chen, 2018).

Genealogies of Contemporary Sinicization

Contemporary "Sinicization of Religion" (2015–) is often treated as a novel policy environment (Laliberté, 2019; Xie & Liao, 2021). The chapters, however, make clear that Sinicization is a *longue durée* process. The *Baoxun* supplies a usable past: its lexicon of purity (*qing*, 清), incorruptibility (*lian*, 廉),

and impartiality (*gong*, 公) maps cleanly onto present campaigns for "clerical integrity" and "moral civilization." Statements and training guidelines issued by Buddhist associations frequently revive these Song-era terms, presenting them as heritage-based ethics rather than external impositions (Buddhist Association of China, 2020; Feng, 2020). The genealogical point is crucial: ethical governance today is not merely a policy compliance exercise but a reactivation of internal Buddhist resources already Sinicized in the Song.

Comparative Insights: Nanputuo and Baoguang under Sinicization
Nanputuo Monastery (Xiamen): Social Engagement as Ethical Governance

Nanputuo's public communications and leadership program thematize purity, harmony, and compassion (清、和、慈悲) as administrative virtues—precisely the cluster valorized in *Baoxun*. Routine publication of activity reports, environmental initiatives, and educational outreach (e.g., Buddhist ethics courses, volunteerism) is framed as *daofeng jianshe* (道風建設, building the monastic ethos). This renders the monastery transparent to its lay public and local authorities, translating spiritual discipline into civic trust (Lin & Zeng, 2023).

Organizationally, Nanputuo deploys a relational leadership: the abbot appears as a moral exemplar—present in instruction, ritual, and service—whose visible restraint functions pedagogically for both monks and laity. The monastery's Sinicization posture is adaptive: aligning publicly with policy language of harmony and contribution, while internally grounding programs in Buddhist compassion and self-governance (Ji, 2020). The *Baoxun* here is performative: a lived script whereby frugality, humility, and benevolence become the recognizable face of institutional authority.

Baoguang Monastery (Chengdu): Moral Bureaucracy and Institutional Discipline

Baoguang prioritizes institutional discipline and administrative accountability. Leadership speeches and training syllabi frequently cite *Baoxun* alongside *Baizhang Qinggui*, with monks memorizing maxims on vigilance and incorruptibility. Notably, Baoguang has established a Monastic Conduct Committee (*lüde weiyuanhui*, 律德委员会) and regular transparency reports—a structural operationalization of *Baoxun*'s insistence that virtue must be publicly verifiable.

Where Nanputuo stresses social engagement, Baoguang emphasizes internal probity: merit-based appointments, formalized reviews, and codified responsibilities. The effect is a moral bureaucracy (Lin & Zeng, 2023): the routinization of ethical leadership via procedures that embody and reinforce virtue. Situated within the Sinicization environment, this model resonates with state discourse on "moral civilization," yet Baoguang's justificatory grammar remains Buddhist—self-restraint and purity as the spiritual core of institutional order (Feng, 2020).

Comparative Discussion

Table 2: Case Monasteries Instantiate the *Baoxun* Paradigm, but with Distinct Ethical Accents

Dimension	Nanputuo	Baoguang
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Primary Orientation	Social engagement; compassion-forward	Institutional discipline; probity-forward
Leadership Modality	Relational-charismatic (embodied example in public service)	Procedural-bureaucratic (formalized accountability)
Key <i>Baoxun</i> Virtues	<i>Ren</i> (仁, benevolence), <i>he</i> (和, harmony), frugality	<i>Lian</i> (廉, incorruptibility), <i>jie</i> (戒, restraint), impartiality
Sinicization Strategy	Civic adaptation framed as heritage ethics	Administrative alignment framed as ethical self- governance
Legitimacy Outcome	Public trust and moral influence	Institutional credibility and internal stability

Read together, the cases show the polyvalence of the *Baoxun*: a shared ethical grammar supports divergent applications responsive to local histories, leadership profiles, and regulatory expectations. Both realize what Weber (1947) would recognize as ethically routinized charisma—authority stabilized not by impersonal rule alone, but by codified virtue.

The comparison also clarifies the historicity of Sinicization. Rather than an extrinsic ideological pressure, Sinicization in these temples appears as *resumption*: a renewed deployment of Song-era moral technologies—exemplary leadership, transparency, communal supervision—to make Buddhism publicly legible and institutionally robust. The continuity claim is not rhetorical; it is instantiated in vocabulary, training protocols, and governance structures.

Synthesis of Findings

Three findings stand out:

1) Leadership as Moral Vocation: *Chanlin Baoxun* frames leadership as self-cultivation made public. Authority is ethical before it is administrative; procedures derive legitimacy from visible virtue (Chen, 2018; Lin & Zeng, 2023).

2) Confucian Ethical Translation: The text's idiom is Confucianized—*li/yi/zhong/xiao* organizes monastic relations without displacing Buddhist ends (compassion, non-attachment). This translation secures cultural legibility and stabilizes the community by aligning spiritual aspiration with social ethics (Mak, 2020; Zhao, 2021).

3) Genealogical Continuity in Sinicization: Contemporary practices in Nanputuo and Baoguang show that Sinicization is best understood as a genealogy of ethical governance—a long tradition of embedding Buddhist leadership in Chinese moral vocabularies and institutional forms. What appears today as policy alignment is often the reactivation of internal, historically sinicized resources (Laliberté, 2019; Xie & Liao, 2021; Feng, 2020).

Collectively, these findings argue that *Baoxun* is not a static code but a living repertoire for constructing ethical legitimacy. It supplies the concepts, affect, and procedures through which Chinese Buddhism has historically negotiated its place between Dharma and empire—a negotiation still visible, and viable, in the present.

DISCUSSION

Situating *Chanlin Baoxun* within Theories of Religious Leadership and Ethical Governance

The findings demonstrate that the *Chanlin Baoxun* (CBX) constructs leadership as a moral vocation—a public manifestation of self-cultivation that

legitimizes administrative authority and stabilizes communal life. This map of leadership coheres with, yet also extends, several theoretical families in the study of religion and organizations.

First, CBX exemplifies an ethical form of what Weber called the "routinization of charisma": the abbot's spiritual authority is stabilized not primarily by impersonal rules but by codified virtue (Weber, 1947). In modern organizational theory, routinization is usually read procedurally (e.g., standard operating procedures); CBX reorients routinization toward characterological routines—repeated, public acts of humility, frugality, impartiality, and compassion that make authority legible and trustworthy. In this sense, CBX operationalizes a *virtue bureaucracy*: procedures do exist, but their legitimacy and effectiveness depend upon the ethical credibility of their stewards (Chen, 2018; Lin & Zeng, 2023).

Second, CBX resonates with virtue ethics and "exemplarist" approaches in moral philosophy and theology, wherein moral knowledge is transmitted by persons whose lives concretize normative ideals (e.g., *shen jiao* 身教, moral pedagogy by example). Leadership is not exhausted by decision rights; it is a pedagogy that forms communal conscience through imitation and aspiration. These dynamic parallels contemporary scholarship on moral exemplars in religious communities, where authority travels through *habitus*—embodied dispositions that are both personally cultivated and institutionally patterned (Mou, Zhou, & Sun, 2023). CBX's stress on visible comportment (silence over gossip, frugality over display, transparency over gain) shows how micro-practices generate a meso-level moral atmosphere (*fengqi*) and, in turn, a macro-level ethos (*daofeng*).

Third, the text foregrounds relational authority, aligning with Confucian political ethics and with relational leadership studies in organizational sociology. CBX reframes the monastery as a *moral family*—an intentional household ordered by role-differentiated care, responsibility, and deference. While contemporary leadership theory sometimes opposes relationality to hierarchy, CBX suggests a hierarchically ordered relationality: paternal metaphors are morally constrained by Buddhist compassion and the expectation of self-restraint. Authority is thus fiduciary rather than proprietary—entrusted for the community's well-being (Ji, 2020; Mak, 2020).

Fourth, CBX advances a theory of ethical governance that shifts the locus of control from legal compliance to internalized conscience. Historically, the Chan community had access to Vinaya codes. However, CBX retools governance around *virtue-first institutionalization*: rules are pedagogically framed, and administrators are explicitly warned that the sangha's spiritual capital is inseparable from public trust. This aligns with the literature on normative institutions, which holds that legitimacy derives from congruence with shared moral frameworks rather than from instrumental performance alone (Goossaert & Palmer, 2011). The emphasis on public transparency in donations and appointments anticipates contemporary accountability regimes. However, its *raison d'être* is doctrinal: misuse of offerings is a betrayal of faith and a corrosion of communal purity.

In sum, CBX contributes to religious leadership theory by showing how virtue, ritualized practice, and institutional design can be braided to sustain authority without collapsing into either charismatic voluntarism or bureaucratic formalism. The model that emerges—charisma disciplined by ethics; procedures animated by exemplarity—offers a distinctive Chinese Buddhist answer to the

perennial question of how religious communities institutionalize holiness without losing it.

Ethical Translation as Sinicization: A Genealogical Argument

The literature review and findings indicate that "Sinicization" in the Buddhist domain is best read genealogically rather than episodically. Instead of a post-2015 rupture, CBX anchors a long continuum in which Buddhist ethics were translated into a Confucian moral idiom so that the sangha could be legible to, and valued by, Chinese society (Lai, 2015; Chen, 2018). This ethical translation achieved three outcomes.

(a) Cultural legibility. By couching Buddhist virtues in terms of *li/yi/zhong/xiao*, CBX enabled rulers, literati, and lay patrons to recognize monastic leadership as a contributor to social harmony. This addressed chronic accusations of asocial asceticism: the monastery was reimagined as a school of civic virtue rather than merely a site of private soteriology (Faure, 1991; Mak, 2020).

(b) Institutional resilience. Ethical translation domesticates charisma without evacuating it. When virtue becomes the explicit grammar of governance, the community can absorb growth, donations, and political attention without losing its center, because the center is codified as character rather than as office. This resilience was visible in the Song and remains visible in contemporary monasteries that weather scrutiny by demonstrating ethical probity (Lin & Zeng, 2023; Ji, 2020).

(c) Normative autonomy under constraint. Translation is not capitulation. CBX borrows Confucian form to articulate Buddhist content: compassion sets substantive limits on hierarchical power; non-attachment constrains accumulation; transparency protects the simplicity of means. Thus, CBX illustrates how a minority religious tradition can inhabit a dominant moral language to protect its own values, a pattern congruent with broader theories of religious accommodation and minority survival (Goossaert & Palmer, 2011).

This genealogy matters for current debates because it reframes present Sinicization initiatives as repertoires that can be activated across multiple key areas. The exact words—purity, integrity, harmony—can be mobilized either to animate internal renewal or to credential external compliance. The historical record in CBX shows the former is possible and durable.

Leadership Modalities under Sinicization: Two Pathways, One Ethos

The comparative analysis of Nanputuo and Baoguang clarifies how one ethical grammar yields divergent leadership modalities that remain recognizably *Baoxun*-like.

Nanputuo prioritizes relational-charismatic exemplarity in public-facing programs—education, environment, philanthropy—turning CBX's virtues into civic performances of compassion and harmony. The effect is enhanced public legitimacy: ethical leadership is seen and imitated by laity, donors, and local officials. This pathway leverages CBX's exemplarist energy.

Baoguang emphasizes procedural moralization—committees, transparency reports, formalized meritocracy—translating CBX's virtues into structures that discipline leaders and reassure stakeholders. The effect is institutional credibility and doctrinal stability. This pathway leverages CBX's energy for bureaucratizing.

Theoretically, these modalities correspond to two classic mechanisms in

organizational ethics:

- 1) Ethical climate via modeling (virtue diffuses from visible exemplars); and
- 2) Ethical infrastructure via controls (virtue is embedded in processes that constrain discretion).

CBX treats them as complementary, not competing. Its aphorisms simultaneously enjoin leaders to "be the mirror" *and* to submit to communal oversight. The monasteries' divergence reflects contextual optimization rather than normative disagreement: different local histories, patron bases, regulatory ecologies, and leadership biographies tilt the balance toward one mechanism or the other. The shared meta-ethic—*virtue first, then office*—remains intact.

Reconsidering "Compliance": Moral Localization versus Ideological Subservience

Contemporary discussions often frame Sinicization as *compliance* with state ideology (Laliberté, 2019; Xie & Liao, 2021). The CBX genealogy complicates this binary by highlighting a third category: moral localization. In moral localization, a religious community proactively translates its own ideals into culturally authoritative forms so that its internal goods—salvation, discipline, compassion—can survive and even flourish in a dominant order.

Three diagnostic features distinguish moral localization from ideological subservience:

- 1) Priority of internal ends

Programs and procedures are justified primarily in Buddhist terms (purity, compassion, transparency as spiritual necessities), even when they also satisfy external metrics.

- 2) Bidirectional accountability

Leaders are accountable *downward* to monks and laity (via transparency and exemplarism) and not only *upward* to regulators. CBX's call for communal supervision of abbots is a strong indicator of such bidirectionality.

- 3) Doctrinal limit-setting

Compassion and non-attachment function as *substantive* constraints: wealth is a means to welfare, not a goal; authority is service, not status. When such internal limits are operative, localization remains a form of faithful adaptation rather than ideological absorption.

Empirically, Nanputuo and Baoguang both exhibit these features, albeit with different emphases. Their alignment with public policy rhetoric ("harmony," "integrity," "civilization") is therefore best interpreted as convergence by genealogy, not merely convergence by coercion.

Implications for Leadership Formation and Policy Dialogue

For Buddhist leadership formation, CBX suggests a curriculum with three concentric rings:

- 1) Self-cultivation (inner ring): practices of restraint, silence, simplicity, confession—habits that stabilize attention and check egoic inflation.
- 2) Exemplarist pedagogy (middle ring): ritualized visibility of virtue (public frugality, modest speech, service roles) and mentoring structures that ensure habit transfer.
- 3) Ethical infrastructure (outer ring): transparent finance, merit-based appointments, communal oversight committees—procedures that *institutionalize* virtue.

Neglect of any ring destabilizes the whole: inner virtue without structure risks charismatic drift; structure without exemplarism becomes brittle; exemplarism without self-cultivation becomes performative. CBX's enduring value lies in integrating all three.

For policy dialogue, the genealogy of CBX offers a vocabulary that is both traditional and intelligible to regulators. When monasteries justify transparency, meritocracy, and public service from inside Buddhist ethics, they expand the discursive space for non-coercive compliance—compliance as shared moral goods rather than mere enforcement. This approach may reduce suspicion, improve trust, and set realistic expectations about what religious institutions *can* contribute without doctrinal compromise (Goossaert & Palmer, 2011; Feng, 2020).

Theoretical Contributions

This study advances scholarship in three ways:

1) A virtue-bureaucracy model of religious governance. CBX shows how virtue and procedure can be co-constitutive rather than antagonistic. This reframes debates that oppose "spirit" to "structure," offering an analytic middle path: structures that render virtue durable.

2) Sinicization as ethical translation. By specifying the mechanisms—lexical borrowing, familial metaphors, ritual propriety—that carry Buddhist content in Confucian form, the study gives operational clarity to a concept often treated abstractly. Sinicization becomes a method of moral localization, not only a state project.

3) A dual-modality leadership typology. The Nanputuo–Baoguang comparison yields a portable typology (exemplarist–relational vs. procedural–bureaucratic) anchored in one common ethos. The typology predicts different legitimacy payoffs (public trust vs. institutional credibility) and suggests how communities can rebalance modalities as contexts change.

Limitations and Delimitations Revisited

Two cautions temper the claims. First, the analysis relies on textual and documentary sources; ethnographic immersion could reveal tensions between stated ideals and lived realities—especially around power asymmetries or financial pressures. Second, the two-case comparison illustrates variation within a tradition rather than mapping the whole national field; other monasteries (urban/rural, Han/minority regions, different lineages) may combine or invert the observed modalities. These limitations point to fruitful directions for mixed-method follow-ups.

Toward a Contemporary CBX: Propositions for Practice

In light of the findings, the following practice-oriented propositions encapsulate CBX's contemporary utility:

1) P1 (Priority of Character): Appointment to abbatial or administrative office should be contingent on demonstrated habits of restraint and transparency, recorded over time and verified by peers.

2) P2 (Public Frugality): Visible simplicity in leadership consumption patterns functions as a signal that protects the community's symbolic capital.

3) P3 (Bidirectional Oversight): Establish standing "conduct committees" with lay participation for periodic review of leaders' comportment and financial stewardship.

4) P4 (Ritualized Teaching by Example): Build calendared observances where leaders take the lowest seat or the least portion, ritualizing humility so it is not left to personality.

5) P5 (Narrative Accountability): Publish annual "ethos reports" narrating how decisions embodied core virtues; numbers alone under-specify moral learning.

These propositions translate CBX's aphorisms into organizational routines legible to contemporary stakeholders without diluting Buddhist ends.

CBX offers a historically tested grammar by which Chinese Buddhism has made holiness governable: charisma disciplined by ethics, hierarchy softened by compassion, and procedure animated by exemplarity. Read genealogically, Sinicization appears less as a post-2015 imposition than as a centuries-long craft of ethical translation. The paired cases of Nanputuo and Baoguang show that this grammar remains generative: one text, two modalities, one ethos. For scholars of religion and policymakers alike, the implication is both hopeful and demanding: that durable legitimacy in religious institutions is a moral achievement, reproducible when virtue is rendered visible, reviewable, and routine.

CONCLUSION

This study reexamines CBX as a seminal text in the formation of ethical monastic leadership within Chinese Buddhism. Through textual–philological analysis and comparative inquiry at Nanputuo and Baoguang Monasteries, it demonstrates that *Baoxun* remains a living ethical framework that unites virtue (德), competence (能), and social responsibility (公) as the moral triad of legitimate leadership.

Core Findings

The *Baoxun* rejects nepotism and bureaucratic formalism, defining leadership as the moral authority of *self-cultivation put into practice*. Its injunctions—such as "毋以私害公" (Do not put personal interest before the public good) and "事有公議，則無私弊" (Public deliberation prevents corruption)—establish a governance ethos rooted in collective accountability. By internalizing Confucian values of *li* (ritual propriety), *zhong* (loyalty), and *xiao* (filial respect), the text transforms Vinaya obedience into a Chinese moral order—a sinicized but authentically Buddhist ethic emphasizing relational harmony, humility, and transparency.

In the contemporary context of the state-led "Sinicization of Religion" policy, the *Baoxun* offers a vital alternative: ethical Sinicization from within. The case studies show that Nanputuo and Baoguang Monasteries sustain this moral lineage in distinct ways—Nanputuo through compassion-centered civic engagement, and Baoguang through disciplined moral bureaucracy. Both translate the *Baoxun*'s principles into present-day institutional realities, affirming that ethical self-governance remains Buddhism's most enduring bridge between Dharma and state.

Theoretical Contributions

1) Virtue as Institutional Architecture – CBX embodies what Weber termed "routinized charisma," yet replaces legalism with *virtue bureaucracy*, where authority is legitimized by moral credibility rather than hierarchy. This

model enriches the global theory of religious leadership by showing how ethical character can be institutionalized without losing spiritual depth.

2) Sinicization as Ethical Translation – Instead of treating Sinicization as political subordination, this study redefines it as a *process of moral translation*: the rearticulation of Buddhist compassion, discipline, and non-attachment in Confucian terms that resonate within Chinese civilization. This genealogical view clarifies how adaptation and authenticity have historically coexisted in Chinese Buddhism.

3) Ethical Governance as Moral Localization – By tracing Baoxun's legacy into modern monasteries, the study highlights moral localization as a sustainable mode of Sinicization, in which Buddhist ethics shape institutional practices without succumbing to ideological co-optation.

Practical Implications

For religious governance, CBX suggests that sustainable harmony arises from *zizhi* (self-governance) and *shen jiao* (teaching by example), not from external control. Its ethical paradigm encourages a partnership model of Sinicization—religion and state cooperating through shared moral language rather than bureaucratic subordination.

For monastic education, the findings support a tripartite curriculum of (1) self-cultivation, (2) moral exemplarity, and (3) institutional transparency. This ensures that ethical integrity is internalized, modeled, and systematized—reflecting the *Baoxun's* holistic view of leadership formation.

For public ethics, the *Baoxun* offers a cross-traditional moral vocabulary for interreligious dialogue. Its synthesis of spiritual discipline and civic virtue shows how Buddhist ethics can contribute to broader discussions on integrity and social trust in modern China.

Future Directions

While limited to two case studies, this research opens the way for comparative inquiry across other monastic regions, especially those that intersect with ethnic diversity or local governance. Future studies may employ ethnography to examine how CBX values are embodied—or contested—in daily practice, further testing the durability of ethical Sinicization in contemporary religious life.

Reflection

CBX stands as both a mirror and a mandate for Chinese Buddhism: a mirror reflecting centuries of moral negotiation between Dharma and society, and a mandate urging leadership rooted in conscience rather than control. Its enduring axiom—"住持者，當內修戒行，外安眾心" ("The abbot must cultivate inner virtue and bring peace to others")—captures the essence of Buddhist governance: authority as moral service.

In an age when religious institutions are often measured by compliance rather than compassion, CBX reaffirms that the legitimacy of leadership—monastic or secular—lies not in power, but in virtue that governs wisely, humbly, and for the common good.

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