

Ethical Leadership and the Sinicization of Chinese Buddhism: Re-Reading the *Chanlin Baoxun* as a Model of Monastic Governance Today

Guangxi ZUO ¹, Chompoo Gotiram ²

¹²Department of Global Buddhism, Institute of Science Innovation and Culture, Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep, Bangkok, Thailand

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.

¹Corresponding Author: chompoo@gmail.rmutk.ac.th

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INTRODUCTION

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.

Scholarly attention to the Sinicization of Buddhism has primarily centered on doctrinal adaptation, state control, and interreligious negotiation (Laliberté, 2019;

Goossaert & Palmer, 2011). However, less emphasis has been given to the internal mechanisms by which Buddhist communities construct and transmit ethical leadership models responsive to both spiritual ideals and political exigencies. While historical studies of Chan Buddhism have explored institutional regulations such as Baizhang Qinggui (百丈清規) (Yifa, 2002; Huang, 2019), 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 tendency to treat Buddhist normative texts as static legal codes rather than dynamic instruments of ethical reform. Chanlin Baoxun embodies what Zhang (2020) terms “normative revivalism,” a reformist effort to reconstruct sangha ethics from within rather than through imperial imposition. Therefore, this study examines how Chanlin Baoxun constructs a model of monastic leadership mediating between Buddhist universalism and the Chinese moral-political order.

In addressing the identified problem, this study sets out to achieve three interrelated objectives. First, it analyzes the ethical and leadership principles embedded in the Chanlin Baoxun as a normative response to the moral decline of the Buddhist sangha during the Song Dynasty. Second, it examines how the text embodies the historical process of Sinicization by incorporating Confucian moral codes into Buddhist concepts of discipline and governance. Third, it evaluates the contemporary relevance of Chanlin Baoxun’s leadership ethics within the framework of the People’s Republic of China’s Sinicization of Religion policy (2015–present), particularly through comparative analysis of current practices in Nanputuo and Baoguang Monasteries. Collectively, these objectives aim to illuminate Chanlin Baoxun not only as a historical artifact but also as a living ethical framework, revealing the enduring continuity between classical Buddhist monastic ethics and the moral governance principles shaping modern Chinese religious policy.

This study holds theoretical, historical, and practical significance for Buddhist Studies, Religious Ethics, and the Chinese Sociology of Religion. Theoretically, by situating Chanlin Baoxun within broader discourses of ethical leadership and institutional legitimacy, it enriches our understanding of daofeng (monastic ethos) as an interaction between spiritual discipline and social governance (Mou et al., 2023), showing that monastic ethics emerge not only from Vinaya rules but from moral narratives mediating between Dharma and empire (Faure, 1991; Sharf, 2005). Historically, the study reinterprets Chanlin Baoxun as a model of internal ethical reform comparable to Baizhang Qinggui (Lai, 2015; Lin, 2018), integrating Confucian virtues such as li, zhong, and xiao to illustrate a mature phase of Buddhist Sinicization. Practically, it offers an ethical framework relevant to contemporary debates on the Sinicization of Religion, providing Buddhist monasteries like Nanputuo and Baoguang with a self-reflective model for moral governance and institutional renewal.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs an interpretive qualitative design integrating philological, textual, and historical analysis with limited comparative case studies to explore how

Chanlin Baoxun (禪林寶訓) constructs a model of ethical monastic leadership within the broader Sinicization of Chinese Buddhism and its recontextualization in the practices of Nanputuo and Baoguang Monasteries. Following Denzin and Lincoln (2018), qualitative inquiry here addresses meanings, values, and discourses rather than measurable behaviors, treating the text as both a cultural artifact and a moral discourse requiring sensitivity to how language encodes leadership ethics and institutional adaptation (Nguyahambi & Rugeiyamu, 2025). Methodologically, the study adopts a hermeneutic-interpretive approach inspired by Ricoeur (1976) and Gadamer (1989), viewing texts as dialogical mediations between historical authorship and present understanding. Through philological-textual and comparative institutional analyses, this research constructs a multilayered interpretive framework linking textual ethics, Song Dynasty reforms, and contemporary Sinicization-era governance.

The primary source of this study is the Chanlin Baoxun (禪林寶訓), a Song-dynasty normative text attributed to the Chan monastic community, analyzed through critical editions by Huang Yongwu (2019) and annotated versions in the Chinese Buddhist Canon (CBETA) to identify its ethical categories, rhetorical patterns, and Confucian references. Complementary texts include Baizhang Qinggui (百丈清規), compiled by Master Baizhang Huaihai (720–814) as the foundation of Chan governance (Yifa, 2002); Chanyuan Qinggui (禪苑清規), a Song-era administrative code institutionalizing Chan regulations (Lai, 2015); and Shimen Guangji (釋門廣記), a compendium of moral anecdotes and disciplinary reflections (Zhang, 2020). Secondary sources comprise classical Confucian works like the *Liji* and *Xunzi*; Tang–Song Buddhist regulatory edicts (Chen, 2018; Faure, 1991); and modern Sinicization policy documents (2015–2022) from the Buddhist Association of China. Two case-study monasteries—Nanputuo (Xiamen) and Baoguang (Chengdu)—are selected for their historical continuity and engagement with 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 in this study followed three interrelated phases combining philological and documentary approaches. First, critical editions of Chanlin Baoxun and related normative texts were examined in both their original Chinese and modern annotated forms, extracting passages on leadership (fangzhang, zhuchi, weina), moral conduct, and institutional governance for thematic coding. Second, documentary analysis was conducted using digital and printed materials from Nanputuo and Baoguang Monasteries—such as annual reports, abbots’ addresses, and educational program outlines—sourced from official websites, Buddhist associations, and scholarly databases (2015–2023). Third, comparative contextualization was applied to triangulate findings by comparing the ethical themes identified in Chanlin Baoxun (e.g., moral modeling, meritocratic appointment, communal harmony) with their expression in contemporary discourses of “Sinicized ethics” (zhonghua fojiao daodehua, 中华佛教道德化). This integrated approach bridges classical Buddhist ethical frameworks with the policy-oriented realities of modern Chinese monastic institutions.

This study employed two interpretive instruments to structure the process of data collection and analysis. The first, a Textual Analysis Worksheet, was used to record and code Chanlin Baoxun’s moral categories and leadership ideals, including textual citations in Chinese and English, ethical concepts such as humility, transparency, and moral modeling, interpretive notes, and related Confucian or Buddhist references. The second, an Institutional Document Observation Worksheet, was applied to modern monastic materials to categorize document types (e.g., speeches, reports, policies), ethical or governance themes, resonances with Baoxun’s principles, and interpretive reflections. Following Schreier’s (2012) qualitative content analysis model, both instruments emphasized interpretive categorization over numerical frequency to capture meaning and contextual nuance. Prior to full implementation, the instruments were pilot-tested on a limited corpus—five chapters of Chanlin Baoxun and two official Nanputuo statements—to ensure conceptual coherence, coding consistency, and intertextual reliability.

Ensuring validity in this interpretive study emphasizes analytic transparency over replication, following Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was achieved through triangulation of historical texts, commentaries, and institutional documents; transferability ensured via thick contextual descriptions; dependability maintained through consistent analytic instruments; and confirmability supported by reflexive journaling. Although textual studies lack statistical reliability, conceptual consistency was preserved through iterative readings and peer consultation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data analysis proceeded through six stages: textual deconstruction of Chanlin Baoxun’s ethical lexicon (e.g., 清, 廉, 慎, 敬); thematic categorization into leadership ethics such as self-cultivation and moral modeling; intertextual comparison with Baizhang Qinggui and Chanyuan Qinggui; contextual embedding within Song-dynasty Sinicization (Huang, 2019; Chen, 2018); comparative application to Nanputuo and Baoguang Monasteries; and interpretive synthesis aligning with Gadamer’s (1989) hermeneutic circle, integrating textual meaning and institutional practice into a coherent narrative of Buddhist ethical governance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

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).

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

Dimension	Nanputuo	Baoguang
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

The study reveals three key findings that together redefine the *Chanlin Baoxun* as a living framework of ethical governance in Chinese Buddhism. First, leadership is portrayed as a moral vocation in which authority derives from virtue rather than administration, making self-cultivation the foundation of legitimate power (Chen, 2018; Lin & Zeng, 2023). Second, the text embodies a Confucian ethical translation, integrating *li*, *yi*, *zhong*, and *xiao* into monastic relations without displacing Buddhist principles such as compassion and non-attachment, thereby aligning spiritual ideals with social ethics (Mak, 2020; Zhao, 2021). Third, practices at Nanputuo and Baoguang Monasteries demonstrate genealogical continuity in Sinicization, where present-day policy alignment reflects the reactivation of long-standing ethical vocabularies and institutional traditions (Laliberté, 2019; Xie & Liao, 2021; Feng, 2020). Collectively, these findings show *Baoxun* as a dynamic repertoire for constructing moral legitimacy between Dharma and empire.

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.

Chanlin Baoxun (CBX) secures Buddhist ethical authority through cultural legibility, institutional resilience, and normative autonomy. By articulating Buddhist virtues in Confucian terms of *li*, *yi*, *zhong*, and *xiao*, it enabled rulers, literati, and lay patrons to recognize monastic leadership as a contributor to social harmony, reframing the monastery as a school of civic virtue rather than a retreat for ascetic withdrawal (Faure, 1991; Mak, 2020). This ethical translation also produced institutional resilience, transforming charisma into codified virtue so that communities could withstand

expansion, political scrutiny, and patronage while maintaining moral integrity (Lin & Zeng, 2023; Ji, 2020). Yet CBX's adoption of Confucian form did not signify capitulation; rather, it preserved Buddhist normative autonomy—compassion limited hierarchy, non-attachment restrained accumulation, and transparency safeguarded simplicity. Thus, CBX exemplifies how minority traditions employ dominant moral languages to protect core values, aligning with broader theories of religious accommodation and 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 demonstrates how a single ethical grammar—Baoxun's moral framework—produces distinct yet recognizably related leadership modalities. Nanputuo emphasizes relational-charismatic exemplarity through public programs in education, environmental care, and philanthropy, transforming CBX's virtues into civic performances that generate visible compassion, harmony, and public legitimacy. In contrast, Baoguang institutionalizes procedural moralization through committees, transparency reports, and meritocratic systems, translating CBX's ethics into organizational structures that discipline leaders and build institutional credibility. Theoretically, these orientations correspond to two mechanisms of organizational ethics: ethical climate via modeling, where virtue diffuses from exemplars, and ethical infrastructure via controls, where virtue is embedded in governance processes. CBX regards both as complementary, urging leaders to “be the mirror” while accepting communal oversight. The variation between Nanputuo and Baoguang thus reflects contextual adaptation—rooted in history, patronage, and regulation—without compromising the shared principle that virtue precedes office.

Contemporary analyses often portray Sinicization as mere compliance with state ideology (Laliberté, 2019; Xie & Liao, 2021), yet the CBX genealogy introduces a more nuanced notion—moral localization—where religious communities actively translate their own ideals into culturally authoritative forms to ensure that internal goods such as salvation, discipline, and compassion can endure within dominant systems. Moral localization differs from ideological subservience in three ways: it prioritizes internal ends, grounding programs and procedures in Buddhist imperatives like purity, compassion, and transparency; it institutionalizes bidirectional accountability, with leaders answerable to monks and laity through transparency and exemplarism, as reflected in CBX's call for communal supervision of abbots; and it upholds doctrinal limits where compassion and non-attachment constrain the pursuit of wealth and authority. Both Nanputuo and Baoguang embody these features, suggesting that their resonance with public policy ideals—harmony, integrity, and civilization—reflects genealogical continuity rather than coercive conformity.

Implications for Leadership Formation and Policy Dialogue

For Buddhist leadership formation, the Chanlin Baoxun (CBX) outlines a holistic

curriculum composed of three concentric rings that sustain ethical integrity and organizational stability. The first, self-cultivation, emphasizes inner practices such as restraint, silence, simplicity, and confession to discipline the mind and temper egoic tendencies. The second, exemplarist pedagogy, focuses on the visible embodiment of virtue through modest living, humble speech, and acts of service, reinforced by mentoring systems that transmit moral habits across generations. The third, ethical infrastructure, institutionalizes virtue through transparent financial management, merit-based appointments, and communal oversight mechanisms that prevent abuse of authority. Each ring supports and stabilizes the others: inner virtue without structure risks charismatic excess, structure without moral exemplarity becomes rigid, and exemplarism without self-cultivation devolves into performance. CBX's lasting contribution lies in its integrated vision of leadership as the harmony of personal morality, visible virtue, and ethical governance.

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).

Table 3. Toward a Contemporary CBX: Propositions for Practice

Code	Proposition	Core Idea	Practical Implementation
P1	Priority of Character	Leadership roles depend on proven moral integrity.	Require documented habits of restraint and transparency, verified through peer review before appointment.
P2	Public Frugality	Simplicity enhances moral credibility.	Ensure leaders model modest consumption to preserve communal trust and symbolic capital.
P3	Bidirectional Oversight	Accountability must flow upward and downward.	Create standing <i>conduct committees</i> including lay members to review leaders' behavior and financial integrity.
P4	Ritualized Teaching by Example	Humility must be institutionalized, not personal.	Schedule rituals where leaders deliberately take lower positions or smaller portions to embody humility.
P5	Narrative Accountability	Ethical leadership is demonstrated through reflection, not numbers.	Publish annual <i>ethos reports</i> detailing how leadership decisions reflect CBX virtues.

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 reaffirms the *Chanlin Baoxun* (CBX) as a foundational text in shaping ethical monastic leadership within Chinese Buddhism. Through philological and comparative analysis at Nanputuo and Baoguang Monasteries, it demonstrates that the *Baoxun* functions as a living ethical framework uniting virtue (*de* 德), competence (*neng* 能), and social responsibility (*gong* 公) as the moral triad of legitimate leadership. The text rejects nepotism and bureaucratic formalism, defining leadership as moral authority grounded in self-cultivation. By internalizing Confucian virtues such as *li* (propriety), *zhong* (loyalty), and *xiao* (filial respect), the *Baoxun* transforms Vinaya obedience into a Chinese moral order that emphasizes relational harmony, humility, and transparency.

Within the framework of the contemporary “Sinicization of Religion” policy, the *Baoxun* offers an alternative model of ethical Sinicization from within the Buddhist tradition itself. The case studies reveal that Nanputuo embodies CBX’s ethical legacy through compassion-centered civic engagement, while Baoguang institutionalizes it through disciplined moral bureaucracy. Both monasteries translate the *Baoxun*’s principles into modern institutional realities, affirming that ethical self-governance remains Buddhism’s most durable bridge between Dharma and the state. Theoretically, this research contributes by framing (1) virtue as institutional architecture; (2) Sinicization as moral translation rather than political subordination; and (3) ethical governance as moral localization, wherein Buddhist ethics guide adaptation without ideological compromise.

Practically, CBX offers a framework for sustainable religious governance rooted in *zizhi* (self-governance) and *shen jiao* (teaching by example). Its tripartite curriculum—self-cultivation, moral exemplarity, and institutional transparency—ensures that ethical integrity is internalized, demonstrated, and systematized. In public ethics, the *Baoxun* provides a cross-traditional vocabulary for cultivating social trust and moral leadership. Ultimately, 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. As its enduring maxim declares, “The abbot must cultivate inner virtue and bring peace to others” (住持者, 當內修戒行, 外安眾心), reaffirming that the legitimacy of leadership—religious or secular—rests not in authority, but in virtue exercised wisely, humbly, and for the common good.

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