Strangers in Paradise: Foreigners on Mount Putuo in the Late Qing*

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Abstract: Geographically, Mount Putuo is a small island in the Zhoushan archipelago near Ningbo, some four kilometres east of the main island Zhoushan. Culturally, it is one of the most popular Buddhist pilgrimage sites in China, considered to be the abode of the Bodhisattva Guanyin. Its many visitors have left numerous traces, their poems and travelogues contain impressions of the island from the twelfth to the twenty-first century. Many of them are collected in a series of so-called temple or mountain gazetteers (*sizhi* 寺志/ *shanzhi* 山志). Whereas for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there is a lack of Chinese travelogues in the gazetteers, in the nineteenth century at least quite a few foreigners visited and wrote about Mount Putuo. The island is mentioned in numerous accounts by European and American travellers such as C. Gützlaff, W. Medhurst, R. Fortune, N. Rondot, É. Huc, A. Little, T. Watters, B. Laufer, and C. Kupfer. Those visitors often left descriptions that reveal a wealth of detail about life on the island at a time for which few Chinese records exist. These provide, for instance, credible estimates for the number of monastics on the island over several decades. Below we will discuss

* I am grateful to Jinhua Chen, Timothy Barrett, and Anne Baycroft, for insights and hints. In all quotations I have regularised 'Ningbo', 'Putuo' and some other names to their *pinyin* spelling. Translations, where not otherwise indicated, are my own.

the reasons behind this constellation of sources and explore some aspects in the travelogues by foreign visitors to Mount Putuo in order to complement the record of the Putuo gazetteers.

Keywords: Mount Putuo, Zhoushan, Buddhist pilgrimage, Western visitors to China, travelogues, Chinese Buddhism

Introduction

For Chinese Buddhists the island of Mount Putuo 普陀山 near Ningbo 寧波 is the abode of Guanyin 觀音 (Skt. Avalokiteśvara), the Bodhisattva of Compassion. At least since the tenth century, believers went to the island site to pray and perhaps glimpse the Bodhisattva herself, who was thought to dwell in one of the steep grottoes along the picturesque shoreline. Over the centuries the site's fortunes varied. Patronised by the imperial court during the Song (960–1279) and Yuan (1271–1368), the island attracted increasing numbers of pilgrims. This changed during the early and mid-Ming when Mount Putuo was closed to pilgrimage travel for almost hundred fifty years as part of various ocean embargoes (*haijin* 海禁). It was only in the mid-sixteenth century that the site was reopened in the wake of a general revival of Buddhism in the late Ming, especially in the Jiangnan region. In the late Ming and early Qing both imperial court and local gentry supported the temples on the island and there is evidence for a lively pilgrimage scene that encouraged the expansion of monastic and other settlements into the north of the island. The Kangxi 康熙 (r. 1661–1722) and Yongzheng 雍正 (r. 1722–1735) emperors bestowed gifts on Mount Putuo and the monastic leadership was well connected at court. During the reign of the Qianlong 乾隆 emperor (r. 1735–1796), who favoured Tibetan, not Chinese Buddhism, imperial patronage decreased, but Mount Putuo remained a popular pilgrimage site.[1] In

[1] For a more extensive overview of the history of Mount Putuo see Bingenheimer, *Island*, 16–28.

the nineteenth century, pilgrimage to the site again declined when the Opium Wars (1839–1842 and 1856–1860) and the Taiping 太平 civil war (1850–1864) made pilgrimage travel difficult.[2] Mount Putuo was, at least in part, economically reliant on a steady flow of visitors for the upkeep of its infrastructure. The temples also owned land on neighbouring islands, especially Zhoushan 舟山 and Zhujiajian 朱家尖, that was rented out to tenants.[3] As such, they might have been directly affected by the British invasion and occupation of Dinghai (1840–1846), the main harbour of Zhoushan. Fifteen years later, the ripple effects from the Taiping civil war, in which by some estimates more people perished than in World War I, would have impacted leisure travel in the East China Sea. Although neither Zhoushan nor Mount Putuo saw active fighting in the Taiping campaigns, due to the combined pressures of foreign presence on the coast and the civil war in the interior, the Qing lost control over the archipelago. As a consequence, piracy impacted both merchant and pilgrimage travel around Zhoushan.[4] The reports by foreign travellers mention hundreds of monks and dozens of temples, but also often remark on the dilapidated state of the buildings—without, however, associating the difficult times with the destabilising influence of their own presence there.

For most of its history, visitors to Mount Putuo set out from Ningbo, entering Hangzhou Bay at Zhenhai and then following the south coast of Zhoushan Island, often with a stopover at Dinghai. This route remained largely unchanged even after the introduction of steamships in the nineteenth century. For 1907–1908 Boerschmann reports:

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[2] For the term 'civil war' instead of 'rebellion' see Meyer-Fong, *What Remains*, 11. The Taiping were a Christian inspired religious movement. Famously, the leader Hong Xiuquan 洪秀全 (1814–1864) considered himself the younger brother of Jesus. Depending on how much weight one accords to the ideological dimension of the conflict and the impact of ideas in general, the Taiping civil war can be understood as an unintended consequence of Christian missionary activities in nineteenth century China.

[3] 'Pootoo Ancient and Modern', 122.

[4] See ibid., 120; and *Cycle of Cathay*, 122–23, discussed below.

[Mount Putuo] can be reached relatively easily. From Shanghai to Ningbo there are daily crossings, taking about twelve hours, on elegant and conveniently furnished steamships of French, English and also Chinese shipping lines. From the same pier in Ningpo, at which the large steamers arrive, smaller Chinese steamboats leave almost daily for the six to eight hour journey along the Ningbo River [...] via Dinghai the main city on Zhoushan [...] with ca. 30,000 inhabitants, to its terminal at Shenjiamen. In summer, during pilgrim season, they even stop at Mount Putuo where they anchor near the coast, and one is taken to the island via small rowboats. Otherwise one takes a two to three hour trip on a sailing boat from Shenjiamen to Putuo.

In summer the large steamships that ply the Shanghai Ningbo route sometimes make special trips to Mount Putuo that allow their passengers to stay at Mount Putuo for a whole day with enough time to visit the monasteries and take a bath in the clear ocean at the marvellous beach on the east side of the island. The passengers are mostly European and thus the island is not unknown, it has been visited quite often, and described at times quite extensively.

Es ist verhältnismäßig leicht zu erreichen. Von Shanghai nach Ningpo gelangt man täglich in 12 stündiger Fahrt mit bequem und elegant ausgestatteten Dampfern englischer und französischer, auch chinesischer Linien. Von demselben Kai in Ningpo, an dem diese großen Dampfer anlegen, fahren sehr kleine chinesische Dampfer fast täglich in 6-8 stündiger Fahrt den Ningpo-Fluß abwärts [...], über *Ting hai t'ing*, den Hauptort auf *Chu san*, [...] etwa von 30 000 Einwohnern, nach dem Endpunkt *Cheng kia men*, ja im Sommer zur Pilgerzeit sogar bis nach *P'u t'o shan* selbst und ankern dort unweit der Küste. Mit kleinen Ruderbooten wird man ans Land gebracht. Sonst fährt man von *Cheng kia men* mit einem Segelboot in zwei- bis dreistündiger Fahrt nach *P'u t'o*.

Im Sommer machen jene großen Dampfer, die zwischen Shanghai und Ningpo verkehren, zuweilen Sonderfahrten nach *P'u t'o* und richten es so ein, daß die Passagiere einen ganzen Tag auf der Insel verweilen können und genügend Zeit haben, die Klöster zu besichtigen und an dem herrlichen Strande der Ostseite in der klaren See ein Bad zu nehmen. Es handelt sich dabei meist um Europäer. So ist

> denn die Insel den Europäern nicht unbekannt, bereits viel besucht, auch einige Male mit einer gewissen Ausführlichkeit beschrieben.[5]

These 'at times quite extensive' descriptions form an important group of sources for our knowledge about the pilgrimage site during the nineteenth century.

Lack of Chinese Sources vs. Abundance of Western Accounts

Difficult times often leave their trace in the sources by an absence. The Putuo gazetteer of 1832 was not too well researched, but nevertheless offers some information about Mount Putuo under Qianlong and Jiaqing 嘉慶 (r. 1796–1820). The next Putuo gazetteer was compiled in 1924, but lacks information about the mid-nineteenth century. In part as a consequence of this, the most recent Putuo gazetteer that was published in 1999, although carefully researched, was not able to reconstruct even the exact succession of abbots of the main temples for the years between 1830 and 1875.[6] Another notable absence is the lack of miracle stories for this period.[7] Still another lacunae are travelogues. For the time before the twentieth century the 1999 Putuo gazetteer includes travelogues by the following authors:

Xu Jing 徐兢 (visited Putuo **1123**-06-28)
Shi Hao 史浩 (between **1148**-03-29/04-26)
Liu Geng 劉賡 (**1298**, 1299, and 1300)

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[5] *P'u T'o Shan*, 4–5. The Shanghai to Ningbo steamer route was running since the 1870s, without gaining speed. Some thirty years before Boerschmann, Hughes made the very same trip described by him, twelve hours from Shanghai to Ningbo, a one-hour layover, and about six hours to Putuo (*Among the Sons*, 254–55).

[6] Wang, *Putuoluojiashan*, 509. On the relationship between the different Putuo gazetteers see Bingenheimer, *Island*.

[7] Wang, *Putuoluojiashan*, 37.

Wu Lai 吳萊 (**1324**-06-30/07-29)
<First Lacunae>
Hou Jigao 侯繼高 (**1588**-03-30)
Tu Long 屠隆 (1585–**1589**)
Yin Yingyuan 尹應元 (**1603**-06-23)
Lu Bao 陸寶 (**1617**-03-20/27)
Zhu Guozhen 朱國禎 (early June **1617**)
Zhang Dai 張岱 (late March, early April **1638**)
Shi Shibiao 施世驃 (autumn–winter **1701**)
Lao Zhibian 勞之辨 (**1713**-03-11/16)
<Second Lacunae>
Gao Henian 高鶴年 (**1898**)

The first lacunae is easily explained. The absence of travelogues in the 250 years between the travel reports of Wu Lai and Hou Jigao is simply a result of the forced closure of the site during the early and mid-Ming. The reasons for the second lacunae, the gap between Lao Zhibian and Gao Henian, are more difficult to ascertain.

One possibility is that there were indeed no new travelogues about Mount Putuo during much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but this is unlikely in view of the 'renaissance' of the travelogue genre during that time.[8] More likely is that the editors of the 1832 gazetteer were not interested in this genre and did not update the record of travelogues. Thus nothing much was added in 1832, beyond what was already found in the earlier gazetteer (compiled in 1740).[9] This would explain the absence of Chinese travelogues for the period until 1832, but not for the nineteenth century. The 1924 gazetteer, which was compiled with great care, would have included nineteenth-century travelogues, had there been any. At is stands we have to assume that the lack of Chinese travelogues for the nineteenth century (in spite of an increasing output of travelogues overall), is probably due to fewer literati visits to Mount Putuo.

However, the dearth of Chinese travelogues for nineteenth cen-

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[8] Eggert, 'Der Reisebericht', 177.

[9] Bingenheimer, *Island*, 84.

tury Mount Putuo coincides (but not coincidentally) with a large number of reports by European and American travellers, missionaries, scholars, and adventurers, who described their sojourns to the sacred site. Among the most prominent were:[10]

Karl F. A. Gützlaff (visited Putuo **1833**-02-04), missionary
Walter Medhurst (**1835**-10-19), missionary
Robert Fortune (**1844**-07), naturalist
Natalis Rondot (**1845**-10-7/8), economist
Évariste R. Huc (between **1840**–1853), Catholic priest & traveller
John Nevius (summers of **1854**, **1855**+**1856**), missionary
Helen Nevius (summers of **1855**+**1856**), missionary
William A. P. Martin (visited **1855**[11]), missionary
Michael S. Culbertson (between **1848**–**1856**[12]), missionary
John Edkins (between **1848**–**1857**), missionary
Ferdinand von Richthofen (**1868**-11-25/26), geologist
John Thomson (**1870** or **1871**), photographer
Jules Arène (**1872**-07 for 10 days), traveller
Archibald Little (**1875**-09-27/28), missionary
Julia Hughes (summer **1879**), wife of military officer
Drew, Edward Bangs (between **1878**–**1880**), Chinese maritime customs service
Hampten C. DuBose (between **1875**–**1886**[13]), missionary

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[10] See the bibliography for their published works. There are a number of other, shorter accounts of voyages that were published in the newspapers of the French, German and English communities in China. Gützlaff's is the first published account of a visit, that I found, but earlier reports might still turn up in archives and letters.

[11] Martin visited at other times as well. He arrived in Ningbo in 1850 ('List of Protestant Missionaries', 518) and lived there for six years (*A Cycle of Cathay*, 63). The year 1855 is mentioned in *A Cycle of Cathay*, 121.

[12] Culbertson arrived in China 1844 and resided in Ningbo until 1851, when he moved to Shanghai ('List of Protestant Missionaries', 516–17).

[13] *The Dragon, Image, and Demon*, 275, mentions the steamer line that started service in ca. 1875, his visit must have taken place after that date.

Bernhard Laufer (**1901**), scholar
Carl F. Kupfer (before **1904**), missionary

The people on this list, which could be extended well into the twentieth century, visited Putuo mainly because of its scenic landscape and its bathing beaches. As several sources (Nevius, Arène, Edkins) attest, already in the mid-nineteenth century the island had become a popular bathing resort for the foreign community in Shanghai and Zhejiang. Its fame lasted into the early decades of the twentieth century when the third edition of Crow's *Travelers' Handbook to China* says of Mount Putuo: 'Among foreigners living in Shanghai it is known as the nearest bathing beach, to Chinese Buddhists it is the most sacred place in East China.'[14]

Mount Putuo owed its prominence among foreigners in large part to its central location along China's coast. It was accessible for the foreign communities along the coast, especially from the treaty ports of Shanghai and Ningbo. Travel into the interior of China was relatively difficult for both missionaries and traders during the nineteenth century, because of legal restrictions, rebellions, and civil war. Ocean travel along the coast, on the other hand, was comparatively easy. Among expatriates in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century China, Mount Putuo was among the best-known Buddhist sites. Not coincidentally therefore, Mount Putuo was discussed in detail in two early twentieth century publications that introduced the site to a foreign readership.[15]

Foreigners on Mount Putuo

It was not love on first sight, however. The first two visitors, Gützlaff and Medhurst, who left a description of Mount Putuo were Protestant missionaries. While acknowledging the picturesque landscape,

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[14] Crow, *The Travelers' Handbook*, 128–29.

[15] *P'u T'o Shan* is a dedicated study of the island and its architecture, while Johnston, *Buddhist China*, 259–312, has devoted a long chapter to Mount Putuo.

they felt entitled to express their disgust about the religious character of the island.[16] Gützlaff does not mince his words:

> A temple built on a projecting rock, beneath which the foaming sea dashed, gave us some idea of the genius of its inhabitants, in thus selecting the most attractive spot to celebrate the orgies of idolatry. ... Though we were in a dark hall, standing before the largest image of Budha [*sic*], there was nothing impressive; even our English sailors were disgusted with the scene. ... No females are allowed to live on the island, nor are there any laymen suffered to reside here, unless they be in the service of the priests. To maintain this numerous train of idlers, lands on the opposite island have been allotted for their use, which they farm out; but as this is still inadequate, they go upon begging expeditions not only into surrounding provinces, but even as far as Siam.[17]

The 'opposite island' here is probably Zhoushan, where some of the temples owned land. That monks from Putuo visited the overseas Chinese in Thailand on fundraising missions as early as the early nineteenth century is a fascinating piece of information, that still needs to be corroborated by local sources.[18]

Walter Medhurst too was disgusted with the Buddhist presence on the island:

> All the aids that could be collected from nature and art, were there concentrated, to render the scene lovely and enchanting. But to the eye of the Christian philanthropist, it presented on melancholy pic-

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[16] In the same vein, though somewhat less rabid, Culbertson (*Darkness*) who when observing a Buddhist ritual was reminded of 'the mummeries practised in the Roman Catholic Church' (ibid., 101). For an apologetic comment about this generation of missionaries by a later colleague see Johnston, *Buddhist China*, 261f.

[17] *Journal of Three Voyages*, 438, 442–43.

[18] For the early twentieth century there is ample evidence for Chinese monks travelling between the Chinese communities in South-East Asia. See Chia, *Monks in Motion*.

> ture of moral and spiritual death. Viewed by the light of revelation, and in the prospect of eternity, the whole island of Putuo, with its picturesque scenery, its hundreds temples, and its six thousand priests, exhibited to the mind nothing but a useless waste of property, a gross misemployment of time, and a pernicious fostering of error, tending to corrupt the surrounding population, and to draw off their minds from the worship of the true God, the adoration of the phantom Buddha... On all sides, we were gratified by perceiving marks of decay, in the temples and adjacent buildings; and earnestly hope, that future travellers will find these worse than useless structures level with the ground; and the lazy drones who inhabit them, scattered abroad, or employed in promoting the welfare and intelligence of their fellow countrymen.[19]

Thus the first descriptions of Mount Putuo by Europeans are filled with the gentle spirit of Christian mission in the Far East. The reason why Gützlaff and Medhurst visited at all was in order to 'distribute good books for their [the monks'] instruction and benefit'.[20] Ambling across the island's 'lovely and enchanting' landscape the missionaries were the vanguard of colonial expansion that materialised a few years later when, in July 1840, the British invaded and occupied Zhoushan. Gützlaff, by then in British employ, served for a while as the civil magistrate on Zhoushan during the occupation of the island, only a few years after his first visit there as a missionary.[21] The activities of both Gützlaff and Medhurst had far-reaching consequences. Hong Xiuquan, the leader of the Taiping army, first became acquainted with the whole text of the bible in 1847 when he visited Issachar Roberts in Guangzhou. Roberts had come to China inspired by reports written by Gützlaff and probably used Gützlaff's draft translation of the bible, which had just been completed in 1847.[22]

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[19] *China: Its State and Prospects*, 483, 486.

[20] Ibid., 487.

[21] Lutz, *Opening China*, 103. For a detailed first hand account of the (second) capture of Dinghai in 1841 see Bernhard and Hall, *The Nemesis*, 238–51.

[22] Boardman, 'Christian Influence', 119.

In spite of their colonialist attitude, our twisted sources yield useful information. That women, for instance, were forbidden to spend the night on Mount Putuo has often been repeated in Western sources about Putuo, but is hardly ever mentioned in gazetteers of the period. It was independently observed by Robert Fortune in 1844,[23] Archibald Little in 1875,[24] and Hampten DuBose in ca. 1880,[25] thus the policy must have been in place for decades at least. The *Imperial Gazetteer* of 1855, an encyclopaedia of the world's geography as owned and desired by the British Empire, has an entry on Mount Putuo that draws on the accounts of Gützlaff and Medhurst. It says:

> It [Mount Putuo] is almost literally covered with monasteries, pavilions, temples, and other buildings appropriated to religious uses; besides grottoes, and other monuments of superstition, in which at least 2000 idle priests chant the praises of their idols, and live in ignorance, idolatry, vice, and dirt. No females are allowed to reside on Putuo, nor any besides priests, unless in their employ.[26]

Not all early travellers to Mount Putuo were Christian missionaries, however, and the reports by Fortune, a Scottish botanist, and the economist Rondot, who was part of a French expedition, were less harsh in their judgment of religion on the island. Both provide a wealth of detail about the site including its religious practices. Rondot, for example, included what is perhaps the first extensive retelling of the Miaoshan legend in a modern European language[27] as

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[23] *Three Years' Wanderings*, 184.

[24] *Gleanings*, 178.

[25] *The Dragon, Image, and Demon*, 277.

[26] *The Imperial Gazetteer*, s.v. 'Puto'. 'Excursion à l'île de Pou-tou', 182, too writes that beside the nearly 2000 monks only two hundred lay people were allowed to live on the island. This seems in great contrast certainly to the Republican period and today, but also to previous periods. The gazetteers do not mention or at least not extensively discuss that the island was reserved for monks.

[27] 'Excursion à l'île de Pou-tou', 164–71.

well as descriptions of monastic garb and ritual.[28]

Fortune was informed,

> that the resident priests were fond of collecting plants, particularly Orchidaceæ, and that their collections were much increased by the itinerant habits of the begging priests, who visit the most distant provinces of the empire, as well as by the donations of the lay devotees, who come to Putuo at stated seasons of the year, to worship and leave their offerings in the temples.[29]

The Catholic priest Évariste Huc, a member of the Vincentian order, too was much milder in his assessment of Buddhism on Mount Putuo. Huc had, different to most of the Ningbo missionaries, travelled far and wide in China, Tibet, and Mongolia. He too considered Chinese Buddhism in decline, especially when he compared it to the Buddhism he had encountered in Tibet and Mongolia. Nevertheless, as his account of Mount Putuo shows, he sought contact with monks and appreciated their politeness.[30]

After the Opium War resulted in the establishment of the first treaty ports, a small but growing number of missionaries came to live in Ningbo.[31] Among them were John L. and Helen S. C. Nevius, American Presbyterian missionaries that stayed in China for almost forty years (1854–1893). Their first years in China were spent in Ningbo, from where they visited Mount Putuo. John Nevius spent his first summer there in company of a friend in 1854. An excerpt from his diary:

> Island of Putuo, Zhoushan Archipelago, sixty miles from Ningbo, August 16, 1854: Last week Mr. Cobbold, of the Church Missionary

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[28] 'Excursion à l'île de Pou-tou', 161–62.

[29] *Three Years' Wanderings*, 181.

[30] *L'Empire Chinois*, vol. 2, 232–36. On É. Huc see also Simon Leys' essay 'Les tribulations d'un Gascon en Chine' (Leys, *Essais*, 596–629).

[31] Until 1851, fifteen Protestant missionaries of different denominations had settled there, many with their families. 'List of Protestant Missionaries', 530.

Society, having determined to take a trip to Putuo on account of his health, kindly invited me to accompany him. As I have been closely confined to my work and needed a little change, I accepted his invitation, and soon found myself very much in the spirit of going. ...We started with the tide at 7 p.m., and arrived at the mouth of the river [at] about ten and anchored for the night. As the tide was just changing, Mr. Cobbold and I enjoyed a fine swim before going to bed. Yesterday at ten in the forenoon we reached the island of Zhoushan. ...This morning, after all sorts of detentions from wind and tide and incompetent boatmen, we arrived at Putuo and anchored some distance from shore. There was, fortunately, a small boat close by, which took us off. We started at once for a walk up the hill behind the nearest temple, and on to the northern side of the island, enjoying many beautiful views from the summits of the hill. We visited the immense boulder which rests on a very slight foundation, scarcely bigger than a thimble.[32] Several of the priests from an adjoining monastery following us, Mr. Cobbold had an opportunity of speaking to them of the folly of idolatry. They assented to all he said, but no doubt it seemed foolishness to them. The sun broke through the mist and we hastened back. I took shelter in a monastery, and Mr. Cobbold went to our boat. He soon returned, bringing some food for our lunch, and also books and writing-materials. Having no bed or lounge, I was glad to lie down upon two tables furnished me by a priest, to get a little rest. After occupying them an hour or so, I left them to write, and I presume Mr. Cobbold has now appropriated them.

Thursday: After breakfast this morning we followed the beach to the right until we passed the first monastery, and from there on to another near a very deep cave. ...From there we went to 'Tunbridge Wells,' where there is another natural cave, and rocks piled up in a very fantastic manner. We found in the adjoining monastery a man from Shanghai who has taken temporary vows upon himself. He was very talkative, and somewhat intelligent. There was also a good-natured old priest, who had nothing to say, but assented to everything

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[32] Probably the Pantuo Stone 盘陀石, a famous site on the island. But perhaps also the boulder seen in the background of the sketch drawn by Helen Nevius.

> that was said to him. And there was another, a stupefied, besotted fellow, who sat in a little nook conning an old book, looking up and grinning at us occasionally. I procured a string of beads—a rosary—from the talkative Shanghai man, and the good-humored priest presented me with another. ...When we reached the top of Veh-ting-san [Fodingshan 佛頂山] we found ourselves in the clouds, which were driving over the top, and the air was very cold. As we were thinly clad, and warm with climbing, we quickly started back. We got to our boat at seven o'clock, and the boatman at once shoved off and we started for Zhoushan, which place we reached about midnight ... I have been out of sorts ever since leaving home; still I have enjoyed the trip and hope to visit Putuo again.[33]

His wish was fulfilled when in the following two summers he visited Putuo again, this time with Helen, his newly betrothed wife. To Helen we owe the first account of Mount Putuo by a woman:

> Putuo is devoted exclusively to the Buddhists; having four large temples with monasteries attached, and not far from a hundred smaller ones. The number of priests is variously estimated from seven or eight hundred, to several thousands. I believe it is more than eight hundred years since this island was first devoted to religious purposes; and some of the buildings were constructed at that time. Others again are of much more recent date, but all, even the newest, have a dilapidated, faded appearance, which indicates a great falling off in resources, as well as in the devotion of the people generally to the Buddhist religion.... Adjoining this is a lotus pond, which, though not what it once was, is still very pretty. It is crossed by an arched stone bridge. There are numerous other buildings, — some used as temples for the idols, and some as sleeping places for the lazy, stupid priests, who doze away their lives in this pretty retreat. Had they a spark of energy or ambition, they would make some effort to rescue these buildings from the decay and ruin in which we now

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[33] *Life of John Livingstone Nevius*, 133–34. Omissions and abridgements in the original.

> find them.... Our rooms were not in the Sien-z [=Qiansi 前寺], but at the Heo-z [=Housi 後寺], about a mile further on. ... On three sides of our large room were windows, looking towards the sea, the Sien-z, and the Heo-z, of the latter of which our building formed part. .... One reason for our coming to the Heo-z, rather than either of the other temples nearer the landing, was its proximity to a sandy beach which was a capital bathing-place.[34] Some years before this, an English chaplain had lost his life while bathing on this beach; having ventured, I suppose, to an unsafe distance. Thus on our guard against possible danger, we had many refreshing baths. As several other families from Ningbo were also at Putuo, we planned some delightful picnics and rambles in company to various points of interest. During the summer, years ago, it was very customary for foreigners from Ningbo and Shanghai to visit this island; but of late such visits seem nearly discontinued. Since the opening of Japan, and of other parts of China, by the recent treaties, foreigners, in choosing summer resorts, have generally given the preference to places situated in more northern latitudes, or more accessible.[35]

Sien-z or 'Front Temple', was the informal name of the Puji Temple 普濟寺, the older of the two main temples of Mount Putuo. The Hou-z ('Back Temple') is the Fayu Temple 法雨寺. In Helen Nevius's memoirs she includes (facing page 46) a sketch she must have drawn at one of her visits in 1855–1856, which appears to be the earliest image of Mount Putuo created by a foreigner (**Figure 1**).

A photo of the lake before the Puji Temple was taken from the spot some fifteen years later by John Thomson, one of the first photographers who travelled to China, and who must have visited Mount Putuo in 1870 or 1871 (**Figure 2**).[36] In the text accom-

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[34] This is the beach today called Qianbusha 千步沙.

[35] *Our Life*, 45–48.

[36] *Illustrations of China*, vol. 3, plate VII-15. Thomson's is the best known, but perhaps not the oldest existing photo of Mount Putuo. A (probably) earlier series of photos of Mount Putuo and Zhoushan were in the collection of Robert Wilson Shufeldt (1822–1895), who was in the archipelago in 1866 or 1867.

TEMPLE OF KWAN-YIN, POOTOO.
(The Sien-sz.)

FIG. 1 The Puji Temple as sketched by Helen Nevius (*Our Life in China*, facing page 46). Public Domain.

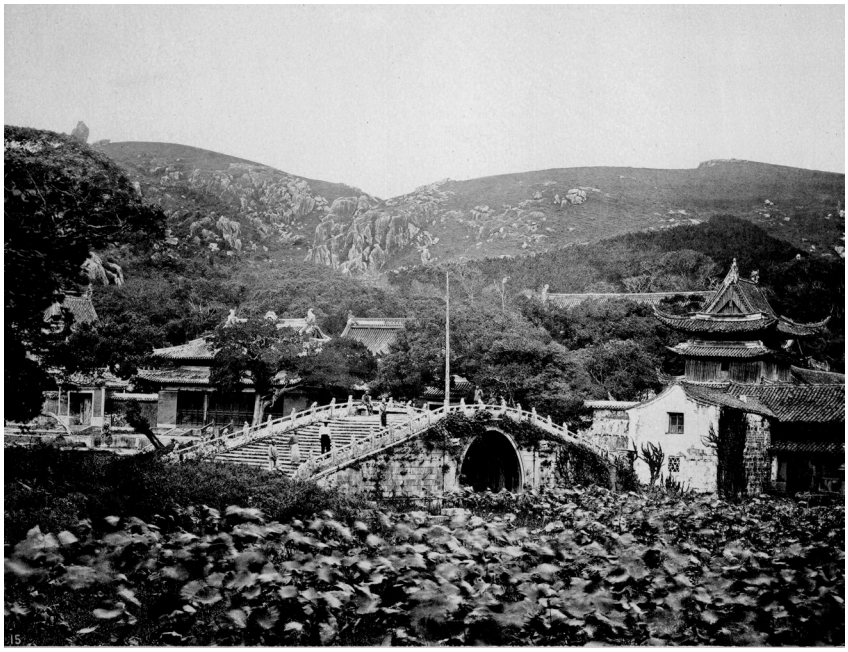

FIG. 2 John Thomson (*Illustrations of China and its People*, vol. 3, Plate VII-15.) Scanned image from the original plates by the Wellcome Trust (CC License).

These are now kept at the United States National Anthropological Archives (Inventory Nos: 04513300-04537900). Thomson seems only have taken the photo above of Mount Putuo. It should be noted that next to the well-known series of ca. 200 photos published in *Illustrations*, which were later republished and included in other publications, there are still more unpublished images. The Wellcome Library owns a collection of Thomson's original glass plate negatives and has digitised 662 of these and made them available as a digital collection. Another photo of the temple taken from the same spot a few years later is found in the Edward Bang Drew collection in the Harvard-Yenching Library (Identifier: Hv37-29). Still later, sometime before 1904, Carl F. Kupfer took excellent photos at Mount Putuo (first published in 'Pootoo: China's Sacred Island', then *Sacred Places in China*).

panying the image Thomson speaks of a community of ca. 2000 monastics, 'its ranks ... recruited from time to time by the purchase of young slaves, who are trained by the monks to devote their lives to the spirit-crushing service of the Buddhist faith'. Thomson's language is harsh, as he describes the monks on Mount Putuo as '...lusty, lazy monks, the pious paupers who spend their years in drowsily chanting to Buddha, and who, if dirt and sloth will foster the growth of piety, must indeed be accounted holy men.'[37] He also remarks on the economy of the site: 'The revenues for the support of these various religious establishments are derived from three sources: the rent of church lands, the contributions of pilgrims and the labours of the mendicant priests.'[38]

A close friend of the Nevius' was William Martin who, like them, stayed in China for more than forty years. His memoirs confirm that the Ningbo missionaries were able to visit Mount Putuo regularly during the hot summers even during the Taiping war.

> Beyond Zhoushan, to the east, and parted from it by a narrow channel, lies the sacred isle of Puto. Like Iona in early times, and Mount Athos at the present day, it is exclusively an abode of monks, no native woman being allowed to live there on any pretext. This rule, however, is not enforced in the case of foreigners; and, taking our wives and children with us, we sometimes sought refuge there from the heat of Ningbo. ... In the daytime we climbed the hills or bathed in the surf, and in the evening inhaled the ocean breeze while we viewed the phosphorescent waves breaking on the shore in long billows of flame.[39]

However, the visits to 'the most lovely spot in Far Cathay',[40] during the 1850s, were not altogether carefree. Apart from the dangers of the surf, the Chinese defeat in the Opium Wars, as well as the Taiping civil

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37 *Illustrations*, vol. 3, facing Plate VII-15.

38 Ibid.

39 *A Cycle of Cathay,* 119–20.

40 *The Dragon, Image, and Demon*, 274.

war had weakened government control of the Zhoushan archipelago and this led to an increase in piracy in the region. Between the 1840s and the 1870s the waters around Zhoushan were not entirely safe for travel, as Martin and one of his colleagues, W. A. Russell, found out when they tried to join their families on Mount Putuo.

> Going on deck, as we approached a narrow channel we saw many lights dancing over the surface of the water, and heard an occasional discharge of small arms. In a solitary place this looked suspicious; and the next moment we perceived through the twilight the outline of seven large Canton junks lying at anchor. We pursued our course, hoping to pass them unobserved, but when we were just abreast of the fleet, a boat was lowered from the side of one of the junks and gave chase. The wind had fallen, and we were soon overtaken. Springing on board, the pirates began beating our sailors to compel them to slacken sail. Turning to us, they said, *Pu pa pu pa* ('You have nothing to fear'). Our boat was lashed to the side of a large junk, and the free-booters made free with our fresh provisions—the only booty they found in our possession. The pirates were evidently disappointed. 'Who are you,' they asked, 'that you have no goods? As you have no opium, you are not merchants; and as you have no firearms, you are not soldiers; who and what are you?' 'We are missionaries,' we quietly replied. 'Missionaries!' exclaimed a handsome young man, whom we recognized as the leader of the prize crew. 'You preach about Jesus—you are good men; we will not hurt you.' He then told us that he had been in a mission chapel at Whampo, near Canton, and there heard missionaries preach the gospel. Becoming communicative, he added that he and his party, thrown out of business by the outbreak of rebellion [i.e. the Taiping], had been forced to take to the sea. 'It was a bad business,' he knew, 'but there was no help for it.' In searching our persons for money, of which they found very little, they had stripped off my coat and taken away Russell's shoes and watch. My own watch, or rather my wife's, I had taken off and left at home, not wishing to risk the loss of an object which she held precious. Observing me in my shirt-sleeves, the young leader pointed to Russell and asked if we were not 'all the same'? 'Oh yes,' said I; 'but one of your fokees ("pals") has carried my coat away.' The young man left us and

> in a moment came back with the coat. The shoes, too, were restored, but not the watch; which, however, was brought to the owner for an explanation of the mode of winding and setting.[41]

After the defeat of the Taiping in 1864, Mount Putuo recovered slowly, but steadily. Foreign guests were generally accommodated in the monasteries. Bathing remained one of the major attractions for foreigners that visited Mount Putuo. In 1872, Jules Arène, the brother of the writer Paul Arène, visited the island. He recorded his ten-day trip in a short essay titled 'Excursion de Deux Baigneurs Européens a l'Ile Sacrée de Poutou' [An Excursion of Two European Bathers to the Sacred Island of Putuo]. Arène writes in an impressionist, orientalist style very much en vogue in the French literary scene at the time:

> The columns of the temple are, as in all monasteries, of wood coated with a red mastic. They almost disappear under the banners of white or blue silk, painted with gold letters, ex-votos of pious people, and pilgrims. In a corner, next to an enormous drum intended to imitate the wind, the thunder, and the rain during the services, dust and cobwebs cover the [soul-]tablets of the monks who, after a holy and solitary existence, today rest in perfect annihilation.
>
> *Ieo tchiou pii ing!* (Your requests will be granted) [=*Youqiu bi ying* 有求必應]. It is, how shall I say?, the sign of the merchant of destiny who keeps his small industry next to the front door: let's see what the goddess is going to predict for us. We give some small cash, you always have to give some small cash in China! From a bamboo pot we are made to draw, as with a short straw, a board whose number corresponds to that of a printed sheet announcing in ambiguous terms the good or the bad which must befall us.
>
> Les colonnes du temple sont, comme dans toutes les bonzeries, en bois enduit d'un mastic rouge; elles disparaissent presque sous les bannières de soie blanche ou bleue, peintes de lettres d'or, ex-votos de pieux pèlerins; dans un coin, à côté d'un tambour énorme destiné

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[41] *A Cycle of Cathay*, 122–23.

> à imiter le vent, le tonnerre et la pluie pendant les offices, la poussière et les toiles d'araignée couvrent tes tablettes des bonzes qui, après une sainte et solitaire existence,reposent aujourd'hui dans le parfait anéantissement.
>
> *Ieo tchiou piiing!* (Vos demandes seront exaucées). C'est là, comment dirai-je? l'enseigne du marchand de destin qui tient sa petite industrie à côté de la porte d'entrée; voyons ce que la déesse va nous prédire; nous donnons des sapéques, il faut toujours donner des sapéques en Chine! D'un pot en bambou on nous fait tirer, comme à la courte paille, une planchette dont le numéro correspond à celui d'un feuillet imprimé annonçant en termes ambigus le bien ou le mal qui doit nous survenir. [42]

Arène, his companion and their Chinese cook, stayed in the Fayu temple. His account also contains one of the clearest references in foreign sources that the island's economy had suffered from the Taiping civil war ('la dernière rébellion'):

> Let's take a quick look at the three courtyards which rise up to the forest; there are shrines of the second order such as the *Shin-an-Tang* (shrine of new rest), *An-tsouo-tang* (shrine of seated rest), *Pao-eun-tang* (shrine of gratitude), *Shien-jen-tching* (well of spirits); at the top, the refectory and the living quarters of the monks, all ruined by the last rebellion and already invaded by shrubs and grasses. [...]
>
> The chief monk of the *Fa-yu-se*, a very amiable man, would have liked to be able to give us somewhat more comfortable lodgings; but here too the rebellion had demolished everything, as evidenced by the numerous posters on the walls, appealing to charity from visitors.[43]

> Jetons un coup d'oeil sur les trois cours qui s'étagent jusqu'à la forêt; il y a là des sanctuaires de second ordre: *Shin-an-Tang* (sanctuaire du nouveau repos), *An-tsouo-tang* (sanctuaire du repos assis), *Pao-eun-tang* (sanctuaire de la reconnaissance), *Shien-jen-tching* (le puits

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[42] 'Excursion de Deux Baigneurs', 469–70.

[43] Ibid., 470.

> des esprits); en haut, le réfectoire et le logement des bonzes, tout cela ruiné par la dernière rébellion et déjà envahi par les arbustes et les herbes.[...]
>
> Le chef-bonze de *Fa-yu-se*, homme fort aimable, voudrait pouvoir nous donner un logement à peu près confortable; mais ici encore la rébellion a tout démoli ainsi que le témoignent, affichés sur les murs, de nombreux appels à la charité des visiteurs.

Chinese women pilgrims were in principle forbidden to spend the night on the island, but foreign women were being exempted from that prohibition. An account by Julia Hughes, the wife of an officer in the British Imperial Maritime Customs Service, who visited in summer 1879, describes the very effective catering service arranged in a Buddhist monastery, complete with meat and champagne.[44] To Hughes we also owe an account of how a lady bathed on the beaches of Mount Putuo:

> After visiting one or two other temples, we strolled down to a lovely beach, in a secluded corner of which our kind captain had erected a tent for my own special comfort, I being the only lady of the party, and having attired myself in a bathing costume, I indulged in a most refreshing sea-bath. When I was again dressed it was getting late, and having joined the others, who had been bathing in another part of the beach, we all proceeded towards the landing-place.[45]

While most foreign visitors seemed have come to Mount Putuo to enjoy its scenic beauty, a few travellers were looking for different assets. One of these was Ferdinand von Richthofen whose description of the island is mainly geological, with the exception of a comment on the Huiji Temple:

> [At the Huiji Temple:] Here lived twenty-three monks in poverty and simplicity. They were just holding a procession with sombre

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[44] *Among the Sons*, 258–59.

[45] Ibid., 262–63.

> chanting and incense-burning. Refectory and cells showed how little they desired.[...] The monks were said to own an old library and have a reputation for clerical erudition.
>
> Hier lebten 23 Mönche in Armuth und Einfachheit. Sie hielten eben in ihrem Tempel Procession mit düsterem Gesang und Räucherung. Refectorium und Zellen zeugen von ihren geringen Lebensansprüchen. [...] Die Mönche sollen eine alte Bibliothek besitzen und stehen im Ruf kirchlicher Gelehrsamkeit.[46]

It is only in his posthumously published diaries that we find a more detailed account of his visit to the island. It contains an interesting remark about how the fortune telling, common to Chinese temple culture, on Mount Putuo was geared towards fishermen:

> From the place where we anchored we came first to a small temple, where the Europeans tend to stay. [...] In the main temple we found some priests, one of their best sources of income is fortune telling. In a box there are some hundred lots. One draws a lot and a priest who sits in a stall, exchanges, for a small fee, the number for a printed slip of paper. We made the experiment and received some commonplace divinations which were mainly concerned with fishing. This is because the place is visited especially by fishermen who pray here and seem to consider the place as some sort of oracle. I was prophesied a lucky catch in a river. Another source of income is the sale of images of the temple deity, a map of the temples and their surroundings, a kind of rosary etc.
>
> Vom Ankerplatz kamen wir erst zu einem kleinen Tempel, wo die Europäer zu wohnen pflegen. [...] In dem Haupttempel fanden wir einige Priester. Eine ihrer besten Einnahmequellen besteht in Wahrsagerei. In einer Büchse sind gegen hundert Lose. Man zieht eine Nummer. Ein Priester sitzt in einer Bude und gibt für die Nummer einen gedruckten Zettel, für den man eine Kleinigkeit

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[46] *China: Ergebnisse eigener*, vol. 3, 656.

> zahlt. Wir machten das Experiment und erhielten einige plumpe Wahrsagereien, in denen der Fischfang besonders berücksichtigt war. Der Ort wird nämlich vorzüglich von Fischern besucht, die hier ihre Andacht verrichten und in dem Ort eine Art Orakel von Delphi zu finden scheinen. Mir wurde ein glücklicher Fischzug in einem Fluß prophezeit. Andere Erwerbsquellen sind der Verkauf des Bildes der Tempelgottheit, eines Planes des Tempels mit seinen Umgebungen, einer Art von Rosenkränzen usw. [47]

The maps mentioned by von Richthofen here (and earlier by Rondot)[48] would have been the kind of simple woodblock prints for the use of pilgrims of which some specimens have survived in libraries and museums.[49] Von Richthofen's survey of China's geography and geology was done not merely for scientific purposes. His survey served the same German imperial ambitions in China that in 1898 lead to the concession of Qingdao. His diary notes:

> As free port in the hands of a power such as Prussia Zhoushan would assume a commanding position. The harbour can be fortified easily and a war fleet would control the traffic with northern China and Japan. It would turn into an important centre of commerce. Ningbo would wither away and Shanghai be greatly diminished, because property would be much safer here.[...] For the Chinese the islands are but of little value, and a purchase could perhaps be arranged for a price that is not too high .[50]
>
> Als Freihafen in den Händen einer Macht wie Preußen würde Tschusan eine gebietende Stellung einnehmen. Der Hafen kann mit Leichtigkeit befestigt werden, und eine Kriegsflotte würde den

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[47] *Tagebücher*, 47. For another account of fortune telling at Mount Putuo see *Among the Sons*, 262.

[48] 'Excursion à l'île de Pou-tou', 161.

[49] See e.g. the maps in the American Museum of Natural History (ASIA/0578, No. 70/11655).

[50] *Tagebücher*, 44.

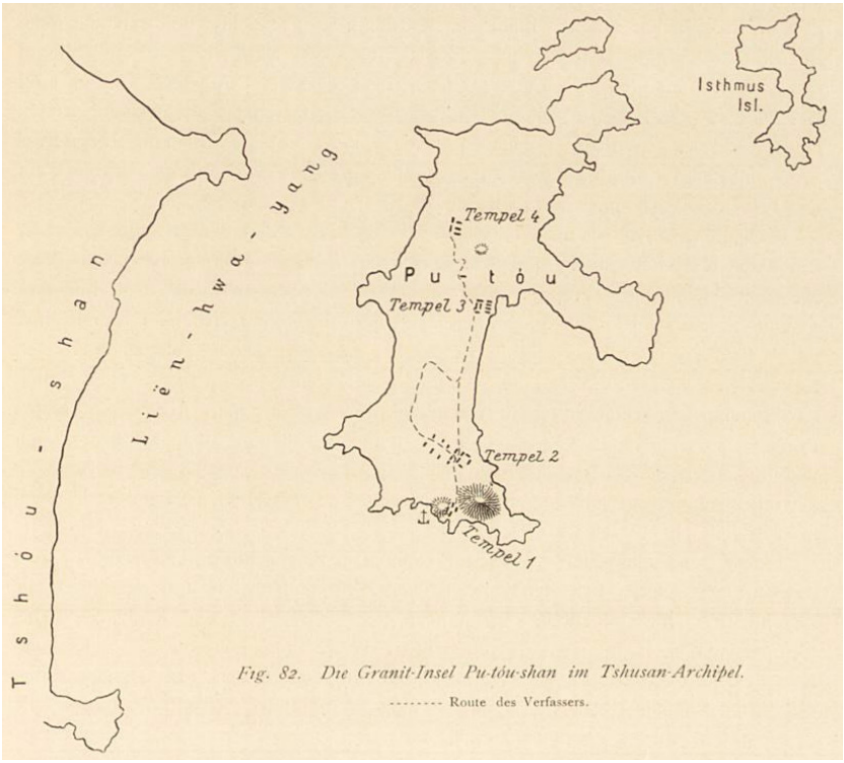

FIG. 3 Map of Mount Putuo by von Richthofen.

> Verkehr mit dem nördlichen China und Japan beherrschen. Als Handelsort würde es zu hoher Wichtigkeit gelangen. Ningpo würde eingehen und Schanghai viel einbüßen, da das Eigentum hier viel sicherer sein würde. [...] Für die Chinesen sind die Inseln von geringem Wert, und ein Kauf könnte vielleicht für einen nicht zu hohen Preis abgeschlossen werden.

The practical-minded von Richthofen also produced one of the first scaled maps of Mount Putuo, which compares well with a modern map (**Figure 3**).[51]

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[51] *China: Ergebnisse eigener*, vol. 3, 655. For Chinese maps and representations of Mount Putuo see Bingenheimer, *Island*, chapter 2.

Conclusion

The travelogues of foreigners, whether written with missionary, imperialist, or touristic intent, contain a wealth of detail about Mount Putuo which is not found in gazetteers. They are of course written by outsiders who were by-and-large unfamiliar with the religious culture of the site. But indigenous sources like the gazetteers too suffer from their own—literati—bias and disregard details that Western visitors found remarkable. They do not seem to mention, for instance, the prohibition against women residing on the island which is mentioned by almost all foreign witnesses. The prohibition seems to have been in force for several decades at least during the nineteenth century, and was probably limited to pilgrims, not the resident population. Still, it is hard to imagine, that all women pilgrims were confined to one day visits and returned to adjacent Zhoushan by nightfall. This might have been one of the prohibitions that were widely announced, but not too rigorously enforced.[52] Another facet not obvious from the gazetteers is the important role that fishing communities played as devotees at the religious sites on Mount Putuo. Their worship is mentioned in the reports by Gützlaff,[53] Rondot,[54] and von Richthofen.[55]

Also not included in the later gazetteers are the Tibetan inscriptions on the island mentioned by Laufer[56] and Kupfer.[57] These inscriptions, almost certainly the mantra *oṃ maṇi padme huṃ*, vanished in the twentieth century. That Mount Putuo was also visited by at least a few Tibetan and Mongol Buddhists during the Qing is not in itself surprising, considering the importance of pilgrimage in Tibetan Buddhism, the presence of Tibetan Buddhism in Beijing

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[52] For more prohibitions concerning women and temples in China see Goossaert, 'Irrepressible Female Piety'.

[53] Gützlaff, *Journal of Three Voyages*, 443.

[54] 'Excursion à l'île de Pou-tou', 158.

[55] *Tagebücher*, 47.

[56] 'Die Kanjur Ausgabe', 568.

[57] *Sacred Places in China*, 62.

and at Mount Wutai, and the fact that Tibetans were able to move freely in the Qing Empire. Nevertheless, neither Mount Putuo's gazetteers nor today's site itself show traces of Tibetan Buddhism in text, image, or architecture.

Perhaps the most important information provided by foreign accounts pertains to the number of monks in residence. While the figure of 6000 given by Medhurst is probably exaggerated,[58] most early travellers before 1850 report ca. 2000 monks.[59] In 1857, Culbertson reports a decline in the number of monks.[60] Arène too, as mentioned above, connects the decline of Mount Putuo to the 'rebellion'.[61] Estimates from after the Taiping wars (1850–1864), speak again of about 1000 monks.[62]

Although these numbers are estimates, the discrepancy between the size of the monastic population before and after the Taiping, combined with Culbertson's and Arène's observations, indicates a decline in the monastic population in the early 1850s. The main reason for this was probably the Taiping civil war (1850–1864), which directly and indirectly affected the movement of supplies and people all through central China and especially the middle and lower Yangzi region. Qing naval forces, already expelled from Zhoushan during the British occupation, were engaged in the war effort against the Taiping. This would have further strengthened the pirates—Martin's 'free-booters'—that had filled the power vacuum in the

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[58] *China: Its State and Prospects*, 483.

[59] *Journal of Three Voyages,* 443; *Three Years' Wanderings*, 185; 'Excursion à l'île de Pou-tou', 182.

[60] 'The number of priests, once perhaps reaching three thousand, now hardly reaches three hundred.' (*Darkness*, 97).

[61] Arène, 'Excursion de Deux Baigneurs', 470.

[62] Thomson stayed only shortly around 1870–1871, but in his description also mentions 2000 monks, he might have been quoting from older sources. A Chinese traveller visiting in 1913 corroborates the lower figure of 'somewhat more than 1000' (Gao, *Wuzinian*, 139). 'Pootoo Ancient and Modern', 122; *The Dragon, Image, and Demon*, 277; *P'u T'o Shan*, 12; Johnston, *Buddhist China*, 316.

archipelago after the British left Zhoushan for Hong Kong (1841). Together with the ripple effect of the war in much of China, pilgrimage traffic was interrupted and the monasteries were not able to sustain the same large number of monastics. Consequently, there is an informational gap in the gazetteers of Mount Putuo for the decades roughly between 1840 and 1880. Neither are there miracle tales for this period, nor travelogues, nor do we know the succession of abbots of the major temples. All this indicates that the Taiping civil war and, to a lesser degree, the short-lived British occupation of Dinghai, impeded pilgrimage travel to Mount Putuo in the mid-nineteenth century.

The site eventually recovered after the defeat of the Taiping in 1864. Whereas in the 1840s Abbé Huc found 'the vast monasteries of Putuo, where once large numbers of monks congregated, now almost entirely abandoned to legions of rats and huge spiders', visitors in the late 1870s saw a rejuvenated pilgrimage site. In a lecture delivered before the Ningpo Book Club on January 29, 1879, John Butler, another Ningbo missionary, gave an account of 'Modern Putuo':

> Modern Putuo begins with the era of rebuilding, on a large and permanent scale, and this era has commenced within the last ten years. While the fear of pirates hovered around the island, the priests were chary to bring forward their buried wealth and Buddhism appeared as dead. Now that merchant steamers are daily passing back and forth in sight of its shores, and gunboats, native and foreign make frequent visits to its waters, the fears of the priests have been quieted, and there is a simultaneous movement all over the island, to repair the old temples and to build new ones.[63]

Later Butler again remarks on the role of steamships in the development of shipping routes to Putuo:

> I have been so struck with this appearance of revival and activity that I have enquired of some of the oldest priests on the island, the cause,

[63] 'Pootoo Ancient and Modern', 120.

> and all give the same reasons, viz., a sense of security that their buildings will not be burned nor their contents rifled, and this security and immunity from danger, is the result of foreign commerce and civilization, in driving pirates from the seas, and introducing the era of steam into Chinese waters.[64]

Thus it seems to Butler that Buddhism on Mount Putuo, which appeared to its Western visitors to have fallen on hard times all by itself, was now rescued by the arrival of 'foreign commerce and civilization'. A truly amazing conclusion, and, in its lack of reflection and shame, in line with the colonialist attitudes commonly found among European and American missionaries of the nineteenth century.

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[64] 'Pootoo Ancient and Modern', 120.

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