The Inner Quarters and Beyond

Women Writers from Ming through Qing

Edited by

Grace S. Fong and Ellen Widmer

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CHAPTER SEVEN

CHAN FRIENDS: POETIC EXCHANGES BETWEEN GENTRY WOMEN AND BUDDHIST NUNS IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY CHINA

Beata Grant

There is a long tradition in China of intellectual and literary, not to mention religious, friendships between Buddhist monks and male literati. Indeed, as has been persuasively demonstrated in recent studies by religious historians such as Albert Welter, Mark Halperin and Jiang Wu, lay literati have played a major role in the shaping of Chinese Buddhism.[1] This was particularly true of Chan Buddhism, which, despite its often touted ideals of spontaneity and "non-dependence on words" (*buli wenzi* 不立文字), was largely a textual creation of the Song dynasty onwards. As Jiang Wu puts it, "In general, Chan monks and the literati lived in a shared textual culture that regarded Buddhist texts, especially Chan texts, as part of a textually constructed antiquity."[2] It stands to reason, then, that in the late imperial period, an educated gentry woman (*guixiu* 閨秀), aspiring to a more active participation in the larger textual community beyond the boudoir, might find a place for Buddhist texts—and Buddhist monastics—in her literary life.

Personal Buddhist devotional piety had, of course, always been a part of gentry women's lives, and this certainly continued in the late imperial period. This form of religious engagement was tolerated, if not always completely approved of, by Confucian fathers and husbands, as long as it remained within the domestic sphere. What was frowned upon was any activity that entailed transgressing these boundaries,

[1] See Mark Halperin, *Out of the Cloister: Literati Perspectives on Buddhism in Sung China, 960–1279* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006); Albert Welter, *Monks, Rulers, and Literati: The Political Ascendancy of Chan Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); and Jiang Wu, *Enlightenment in Dispute: The Reinvention of Chan Buddhism in Seventeenth-Century China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[2] Wu, *Enlightenment in Dispute*, 251.

whether this involved leaving the inner quarters to go on pilgrimage or visit temples, or allowing Buddhist nuns from outside to enter the home. There was an especially strong social disapproval (often reinforced, although usually unsuccessfully, by government bans) of women traveling outside the home to visit temples and monasteries.[3] This social disapproval also extended to Buddhist nuns visiting the homes of laywomen, well illustrated by the ubiquitous figure in fiction and drama of the (usually) elderly nun who, along with matchmakers, fortunetellers and other women of dubious character (the so-called *sangu liupo* 三姑六婆), was accused of introducing illicit and contaminating ideas and behaviors into the sanctity of the inner quarters. Nor is this negative description confined to fiction. The noted seventeenth-century poet and scholar-official Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 (1629–1709), for example, in a piece composed in honor of an aunt's 80th birthday, lauds the elderly woman for having spent her widowhood securely cloistered in the inner chambers "without once having left to look out from the gate." Not only that, Zhu adds with undisguised admiration, she has also made sure that no unsavory types ever set foot in her quarters:

> There are an especially large number of vulgar and clever-tongued Buddhist *bhiksunīs* in the Wu-Yue area. They are constantly going in and out of the women's quarters, and they are particularly skilled at establishing relationships with widows. My aunt was one of the few who firmly resisted them, saying: "Once one becomes involved with this type, then the words of the inner household will be taken out across the threshold." For this reason, not a trace of a nun could be found in [her] halls.[4]

Zhu's aunt, lauded by her nephew for her exemplary adherence to the proper Confucian norms of female behavior, not only kept nuns out of her house, but appears to have eschewed anything at all to do with Buddhist belief or practice. More common, perhaps, was the containment of one's Buddhist interests or inclinations within proper Confucian (i.e. domestic) boundaries. In a biography written by the

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[3] For an excellent discussion of this question, see Vincent Goossaert, "Irrepressible Female Piety: Late Imperial Bans on Women Visiting Temples," *Nan Nü: Men, Women and Gender in China* 10.2 (2008): 212–241.

[4] Zhu Yizun, "Shumu He taijun bashi shou xu" 叔母賀太君八十壽序 (Preface for the eightieth birthday of my aunt, the Great Lady He), *Pushuting ji* 曝書亭集 (Collection of Pushu Pavilion), *Guoxue jiben congshu* 國學基本叢書, ed. Wang Yunwu 王雲五, vol. 22 (Taibei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1968), 689.

late-Ming literatus Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526–90) for the mother of a Confucian literatus acquaintance of his, for example, we are told that not only did she chant the *Heart Sūtra* on a regular basis, but she was also an avid reader of Buddhist texts who "grasped the essential meaning" (*tong dayi* 通大意) of these texts, and had "a clear understanding of the principles of Buddhism" (*ming foli* 明佛理). However, like Zhu's aunt, she was decidedly "not fond of those witches, crones and *bhiksunīs* going in and out of the inner chambers." Her fastidiousness is further reflected in the fact that although she would occasionally copy out Buddhist *gāthās*, as soon as she had done so, she would immediately order her servants to burn them, saying that "it was not proper to leave any traces of her handiwork for other people to see."[5]

It is important to remember, however, that it was not only proper gentry women who did not welcome nuns into their quarters; proper nuns were not supposed to encourage gentry women to visit them in their monastic quarters either. The regulations for nuns of the Xiaoyi 孝義 Convent in Hangzhou, which during the late Ming was often regarded as a model of female monastic discipline, placed particular emphasis on strictly regulating the amount and the nature of contact that the nuns had with the outside world, including with laywomen.[6] "…Only when a female guest has a proper reason for entering, should the gate be opened to her" reads one of these regulations.[7] It was also forbidden for nuns "to travel far to places such as Tiantai 天台 and Putuo 普陀 and to join gatherings of women on boat excursions on

[5] Wang Shizhen, "Wu yiren zhuan" 吳宜人傳 (Biography of Lady of Suitability Wu), in *Yanzhou shanren xugao* 弇州山人續稿 (Further Drafts of Yanzhou shanren), *Mingren wenji zongkan* 明人文集叢刊, ed. Shen Yunlong 沈雲龍, vol. 22 (Taibei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1970), 79.23/p. 3895.

[6] The Xiaoyi Convent was associated with the nun Zhujin 袾錦 (courtesy name Taisu 太素) née Tang 湯. She had originally been married to a fellow Hangzhou-native surnamed Shen 沈, who, however, left her to become a monk and one of the great Buddhist masters of the late Ming, Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲袾宏 (1535–1615). Lady Tang, who was only nineteen *sui* 歲 at the time, refused to remarry and finally, at the age of 47, took the tonsure herself. In time, she became the abbess of the Xiaoyi Convent and attracted many women disciples. She was particularly known for her monastic discipline as well as her single-minded practice of the combination of Chan and Pure Land practices advocated by Yunqi Zhuhong. She died at the age of 67 in 1614, a year before her ex-husband's death. For more on Yunqi Zhuhong, see Yu Chün-fang, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China: Chu-hung and the Late Ming Synthesis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

[7] *Xiaoyian lu* 孝義菴錄 (Records of Xiaoyi Convent), *Congshu jicheng xinbian* 叢書集成續編, ed. Wang Deyi 王德毅 and Li Shuzhen 李淑貞, vol. 49 (Taibei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1989), 819.

the lake."[8] Even fellow monastics from outside were viewed with suspicion: "If there is a nun who comes from a distant place with whom you are not familiar, she must not be allowed to enter or stay in the convent."[9]

It would appear then, that "proper women"—whether nuns or gentry women—were ideally meant to live in parallel worlds of enclosure, with no direct contact between them. If this were actually the case, it would mean that friendships between such women would be relatively rare. However, the gap between the prescriptive and the actual being what it always is, such relationships were in fact not at all uncommon. One place where the evidence for this can be found is in the poetry left by both types of women, and it is this poetry that will serve as the primary basis for the discussion that follows. Most of my examples will be drawn from the late Ming and early Qing, since this is, of course, the period in which educated women began to read and to write and publish as never before. Anthologies of women's poetry also included Buddhist nun-poets among their selections. Of particular interest are the poems by nuns included in one of the first and most important anthologies of women's writings, the *Mingyuan shiwei* 名媛詩緯 (Complementay canon of poetry by notable women) compiled in 1667 by the woman writer Wang Duanshu 王端淑 (1621–ca. 1680).

The late Ming and early Qing also saw a virtual explosion of commercial printing and publishing, including Buddhist publishing. Literally hundreds of Buddhist texts were printed and circulated, including genealogical histories and discourse records (*yulu* 語錄) of both the great Tang- and Song-dynasty Chan masters and more contemporary teachers as well. In fact, a significant number of Buddhist nuns and laywomen were very much involved in sponsoring the collection, carving, and printing of some of these texts, many of which found their way into the private libraries of literati families of the period. Not only that, they also found their way into the inner quarters of these families where, as Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582–1664) remarks with clear disapproval, "discourse records and *gāthās* can be found in their dressing cases, all jumbled up together with rouge and powders."[10] Qian Qianyi was supportive of literary women—as is well known, he shocked many

[8] *Xiaoyian lu*, 819.
[9] *Xiaoyian lu*, 819.
[10] Qian Qianyi, "Zuotuo biqiuni Chaoyin taming" 坐脫比丘尼朝音塔銘 (Stupa inscription for the nun Chaoyin who attained liberation seated [in meditation]), in

of his fellow literati by wedding the poet-courtesan Liu Rushi 柳如是 (1618–64). Qian also considered himself a lay Buddhist, although as a follower of Yunqi Zhuhong, his sympathies clearly lay with the strict segregation of the secular and the religious reflected in the regulations for the nuns of Xiaoyi Convent.

Not only did a fair number of literary women read and even pen commentaries on these "discourse records and *gāthās*," they also sought out others, including nuns, with whom to discuss them. Like many of their male literati counterparts, these women did not regard friendship with Buddhist nuns or engagement with Buddhist texts to be anathema to their standing as proper women. On the contrary, like their male literati counterparts, they appear to have found these connections to be a source of intellectual and aesthetic, if not spiritual, inspiration that enriched and supplemented but did not necessarily replace their primarily Confucian allegiances. For women, as for many of their male literati counterparts, Buddhist monasteries and monastics as well as Buddhist teachings, represented, although not without controversy, yet another option for those caught up in the trauma and turmoil that accompanied the fall of the Ming dynasty.[11] It is this complex intertwining of the political, the aesthetic and the religious, which has been explored in some detail in the case of male literati but rarely in the case of educated women that I wish to explore more fully in this chapter.[12] Because it is a large topic, my focus will be on women's poetry of this period written to, by, and about female Buddhist monastics. In particular, I am interested in the poetic relationships between women of the inner chambers, the so-called *guixiu*, and women who left home and entered the religious life.

The term "Chan friends" (*chanyou* 禪友), found in many male literati writings from the Tang dynasty onwards, appears in an editorial note to a letter written by the seventeenth-century woman poet Shen Hui 申蕙 (courtesy name Lanfang 蘭芳) to her friend Gui Shufen 歸淑芬 (courtesy name Suying 素英). The male compilers of

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Muzhai youxue ji 牧齋有學集 (Muzhai's collection of having learning) (Taibei: Taiwan Shangwu yinshuguan, 1979), 508.

[11] Wai-yee Li, "Introduction," in *Trauma and Transcendence in Early Qing Literature*, ed. Wilt L. Idema, Wai-yee Li, and Ellen Widmer (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2006), 2.

[12] For recent discussions of this complicated interface in the case of male literati, see Li, "Introduction," especially pp. 10–12 and, in this same volume, Lawrence C. H. Yim, "Loyalism, Exile, Poetry: Revisiting the Monk Hanke," 149–198.

the collection of letters in which this text is found write that Shen Hui had four types of friends: poetry friends (*shiyou* 詩友), painting friends (*danqing you* 丹青友), calligraphy friends (*shufa you* 書法友) and, finally, Chan-discussing friends (*tan Chanyou* 談禪友)."[13] In this last category is placed the woman Chan master Yikui Chaochen 一揆超琛 (1625–1679), who, before entering the religious life and becoming a Chan master, had been a young gentry-woman poet much like both Shen Hui and Gui Shufen.[14] Although I have so far been unable to locate any extant poems written by Shen Hui to Yikui Chaochen (or vice-versa), we do have a song-lyric composed by Gui Shufen, in which she describes a visit to Yikui Chaochen's Cantong 參同 Convent, which was located in Jiaxing 嘉興, Zhejiang province. Gui's song lyric reads as follows:

Blanketed by Dharma clouds,	法雲普覆
Encircled by twin streams,	雙谿水繞
The new edifice gleams.	新築燦燦
The pavilion towers are lofty,	高閣孤聳
A solitary lamp shines in the distance, Sanskrit chants reach all the way to the flowery banks.	一燈遠映梵音到花畔
The fragrance of the cassia circles around,	桂香又遍
We summon the recluse to be our companion here	招隱作伴
In this deep valley, this secluded place.	深塢幽境
I used to come here in my imagination to amuse myself,	時臥遊玩
My dream-spirit wandering about—I have not heard from you in so long.	夢魂繚繞鴻飛少芳翰
The invalid is the most listless;	病客最疎懶
At dusk I call Lianlian [the maid] to dust off the ancient ink stone,	暮喚蓮蓮滌古硯
Then I peruse my books, reciting until my eyes grow dim	還是檢書咿唔常目眩
When winter ends and spring comes	待臘盡春來
I again come to the Chan convent.	重赴禪院

[13] Shen Hui, "Gui Suying Gao furen wen zuoshu fa" 答歸素英高夫人問作書法 (In reply to the questions of Gui Suoying, Madame Gao, about calligraphy methods), in *Chidu xinyu* 尺牘新語 (Modern letters), ed. Wang Qi 汪淇 (1668), 3a–4b.

[14] For a detailed biography and discussion of Yikui Chaochen, see Beata Grant, *Eminent Nuns: Women Chan Masters of Seventeenth-Century China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), especially chapters 3 and 4.

This time as I climb up to the hall,	此時登殿
And slowly stroll through this women's monastery	緩步女叢林
My pent-up emotions enjoy a measure of release.	積懷頗展
In the green shade, I listen to the warbling of the yellow orioles.[15]	綠陰堪聽黃鶯囀

The allusion to summoning the recluse in the first stanza of this song-lyric has, of course, a long resonating history that goes back to the Han dynasty poem "Summoning the Recluse" 招隱士 which was later included in the *Chuci* 楚辭 (Elegies of Chu). In this lyric, it is the abbess of the Cantong Convent, Yikui Chaochen, who is being summoned from her reclusive hideaway, and in particular, in the words of Yikui Chaochen herself, from "the cassia railings of its secluded chambers, the winding halls of its tiny rooms; and beyond the kiosks by the ponds the waterside pavilions, flowering plants and slender bamboo."[16] In the winter of 1656, Yikui Cantong had taken up residence in the Cantong Convent, which her brother had built especially for her. It would not be long, however, before her reputation as a Chan master began to spread. And so it is with a certain nostalgia that in this same text, she goes on to recall how in the early days "there were only six or seven women living in the convent; and I was able to fully enjoy the pleasure of [living in] the woods. The white clouds sealed the gates and it was quiet and tranquil with no one around."[17]

Yikui Chaochen was proud, however, of being able to add new buildings to her convent, including the pavilion that Gui Shufen has gone to see and to admire. It would appear from the last line of the first stanza that Yikui Chaochen and Gui Shufen engaged in epistolary or poetic exchanges, although Gui complains that it has been a long time since she has received a letter from the abbess. Because she is ill, however, she cannot go in person to call on the nun, and so resorts

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[15] Gui Shufen, "Rao Foge: Delighting Over the Newly-Built Dabei Tower at the Cantong Convent" 遶佛閣:喜叅同菴新建大悲樓, in *Guixiu cichao* 閨秀詞鈔 (Song lyrics by boudoir talents), ed. Xu Naichang 徐乃昌, 4.5a–b.

[16] Yikui Chaochen, "Zixu xinglüe shun tu" 自敘行略順徒 (A brief autobiographical account written to instruct my disciples), *Yikui chanshi yulu* 參同一揆禪師語錄 (Discourse records of Chan master Cantong Yikui), *Mingban Jiaxing Dazangjing* 明版嘉興大藏經 (Ming edition of the Jiaxing Buddhist Canon), vol. 39 (Taibei: Xinwenfeng, 1987), 18a.

[17] Yikui Chaochen, "Zixu xinglüe shun tu," 8a.

to dreams and *woyou* 臥遊 (recumbent or armchair travel). Male literati traditionally engaged in *woyou* when they were too ill or too old to physically take the journey; for women, however, *woyou* was often regarded as the only "proper" mode of travel, since it did not entail leaving the inner quarters.[18] Gui Shufen in her poem, however, both recalls a visit she made there in the past and anticipates another excursion to the convent with her friends once spring has come and she has recovered from illness. In fact, it is only there on the physical grounds of the Cantong Convent, that her "pent-up emotions [can] enjoy a measure of release." In other words, Gui Shufen's pleasure in visiting this "female monastery" and conversing with its highly-educated abbess was equivalent to the pleasure male literati had long derived from visiting with refined monks in elegant monastic surroundings.

However, it was not always, or perhaps even primarily, aesthetic pleasure that *guixiu* found in the company of their Buddhist monastic women friends. During the political and social turmoil of the Ming-Qing transition when so many women suffered dislocation and often, the premature loss of husbands and other family members, Buddhist nuns and convents offered to many a friendship and solace they could not always find elsewhere. Moreover, since during this period a number of gentry women entered the convent after become prematurely widowed, it was not unusual for there to be familial connections between laywomen and the Buddhist nuns they visited or with whom they corresponded. An example is the friendship between the nun Guxu 谷虛, also known by the religious name of Jingyin 靜因, and the celebrated woman poet Shang Jinglan 商景蘭 (1604–ca. 1680). We do not know very much about Guxu, apart from the fact that she was a native of Nanjing, and had married into the Shang family. Her husband suffered a premature death (very likely in the turmoil surrounding the fall of the Ming, perhaps even as a loyalist martyr), after which she became not only a nun, but apparently also an "eminent master" (*dashi* 大師), with a reputation for both her spiritual achievements and her poetic

[18] The term *woyou* 臥遊 is believed to have been first used by the painter Zong Bing 宗炳 (375–443), who after a lifetime of traveling to a wide range of famous scenic mountains and rivers, when old and ailing, resorted to imaginary travel with the aid of paintings and a purified mind. See Susan Bush, "Tsung Ping's Essay on Painting Landscape and the 'Landscape Buddhism' of Mount Lu," in *Theories of the Arts in China*, ed. Susan Bush and Christian Murck (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 132–164, especially p. 137.

talents. Wang Duanshu includes a poem by this nun in her anthology of women's writings, and in her brief biographical notice praises her as someone who "because of her mastery of Chan teaching, [composed] poetry of sublime elegance and simplicity."[19]

Shang Jinglan composed at least two song lyrics to Guxu, both of which are infused with a somewhat somber melancholy that bespeaks more than a passing acquaintance. Like Wang Duanshu, Shang Jinglan was an immensely accomplished woman who wrote, painted, and organized poetry gatherings and excursions for her women friends and relatives. She had also suffered a great tragedy, however, when in 1645, her loyalist husband, the noted scholar-official and writer Qi Biaojia 祁彪佳 (1602–1645), committed suicide after Nanjing and Hangzhou fell into the hands of the Manchu troops.[20] The first of Shang Jinglan's two song lyrics, written to the tune of "Yi Qin'e" 憶秦娥 is titled "Parting from Eminent Master Guxu in the Snow" 雪中別谷虛大師:

Vain longing,	空留戀
The slender hang of willows tussle in the wind	楊柳裊裊隨風戰
Tussle in the wind	隨風戰
Space: the roads are distant;	彌天道遠
Time: like an arrow it flies.	流光如箭
Night moon in the inner quarters, frozen light in the hall,	从壼夜月凝光殿
A perverse wind shreds the goose-feather snowflakes,	逆風翦碎鵝毛片
The goose-feather snowflakes,	鵝毛片
Swirling ceaselessly about:	飛翔莫定
When will we meet again?[21]	何時相見

Shang Jinglan's second song lyric, written to the tune "Su zhongqing" 訴衷情 is titled "On a Snowy Night, Thinking about the Woman Monastic Guxu" 雪夜懷女僧谷虛:

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[19] Wang Duanshu, ed., *Mingyuan shiwei* (1667), 26.11a, in Fong, ed., *Ming-Qing Women's Writings*, http://digital.library.mcgill.ca/mingqing/.

[20] Qi Biaojia himself engaged in a number of Buddhist practices, including *sūtra*-chanting and *fangsheng* (releasing life). See Joanna Handlin Smith, "Benevolent Societies: The Reshaping of Charity During the Late Ming and Early Qing," *Journal of Asian Studies* 46.2 (1987): 309–337.

[21] Shang Jinglan, *Jinnang shiyu* 錦囊詩餘, in *Xiaotanluan shi huike guixiu ci* 小檀欒室彙刻閨秀詞 (Joint publication of song lyrics by one hundred boudoir talents from the Xiaotanluan Chamber), ed. Xu Naichang (Nanling, 1896), 7a, in Fong, ed., *Ming Qing Women's Writings*.

I stand awhile for no reason by the latticed window;	無端小立瑣窗前
The shadows of the swirling catkins join the sky,	飛絮影連天
Piled up on the meditation mat, three feet of snow,	蒲團雪深三尺
How much Chan has she been able to penetrate?	參透幾多禪
Blossoms about to burst open,	花欲綻
The crows are still cold:	烏猶寒
Who feels for them?	孰相憐
Songs flutter in the white snow,	歌翻白雪
Reeds turn into bamboo flowers,	蓬弄竹花
Frost tinges the hair at one's temples.[22]	兩鬢霜添

In the first of these two song lyrics, the setting is the poet's own home which feels cold and solitary, in part because of the snow and cold, in part because of the sadness of parting with a friend. And of course, underlying it all there is an existential angst that infuses all of space and time. In the second song-lyric, we see the poet standing at the window looking out at the swirling snow and imagining her monastic friend in her more austere surroundings, her meditation mat covered with snow. Whether it is empathy or pity that she feels is difficult to say: most likely it was a mixture of the two.

This poetic posture of anticipating, or imagining, a visit with a *chanyou* appears as well in the poem written by Master Guxu that Wang Duanshu chose to include in her anthology. The anticipated visitor in this case is the celebrated woman poet Huang Yuanjie 黃媛介 (courtesy name Huang Jieling 皆令, ca. 1620–ca. 1669). Huang Yuanjie, a committed Ming loyalist, had been separated from her family during the dislocation of the times, and was forced to support herself through the sale of her poems and paintings, and the generosity of her many friends. She lived with a number of these friends, including the women poets Liu Rushi, Wu Shan 吳山 (fl. mid seventeenth century), and Shang Jinglan herself. It may well have been during the time Huang Yuanjie had traveled by boat to stay with Shang Jinglan in the mid-1650s that Master Guxu wrote the following pentasyllabic poem, entitled "Paying a Visit to Huang Jieling, but Not Finding Her In" 訪黃皆令不遇:

From afar I hear this distinguished guest has come;	遙聞佳客至
Her boat's double oars cutting through the river wind.	雙槳度江風
Friends in the Way are bound together from the start;	道侶原相結

[22] Shang Jinglan, *Jinnang shiyu*, 8a–8b.

Hearts set on Chan—to whom can one speak of this?	禪心孰與通
Clouds shift: shadows are cast on chilled sleeves;	雲翻寒袖影
Blossoms fall: the little pond is tinged with red.	花落小池紅
When I do not see your solitary skiff returning,	不見孤舟返
I entrust my melancholy to the colors of dusk?[23]	愁予暮色中

Here Guxu is utilizing a very old poetic theme, of which Jia Dao's 賈島 (779–843) "Seeking the Recluse and Not Finding Him In" 尋隱者不遇 is undoubtedly the most well known. As Paula Varsano notes, one of the characteristics of this theme is that the disappointment at not finding the person one seeks at home is in the end transformed into the "strange, peaceful exhilaration of a poet's momentary brush with enlightenment."[24] It is interesting to note that Jia Dao began life as a Buddhist monk but later left the monastic life in order to become an active participant in Han Yu's poetic circles. Guxu, on the other hand, as a young woman and wife, probably participated actively in the networks of women poets that included Shang Jinglang and Huang Yuanjie before she became a widow and entered the religious life. Another reversal can be seen in Gu Xu's poem itself: whereas traditionally it is a male literatus or layman who seeks out a recluse or holy person, in this case it is the Buddhist nun, already herself a Chan master, who seeks out the company of the laywoman Huang Yuanjie. The roles are reversed, but in both cases, the initial impulse is to find a *chanyou*, or in Guxu's case, a *daolü* 道侶 (friend in the Way), with whom to discuss more transcendent matters. Guxu may have once been a fellow *guixiu*, or even a relative by marriage, but as a Buddhist nun what she now seeks is a spiritual friend. What is noteworthy, however, is that she seeks this friendship not within her own immediate monastic circle, but rather across the boundary, however porous, between inner and outer, religious and lay, past and present—a boundary represented poetically in her poem by the river itself, which while it marks a division, also affords the possibility of crossing and, by extension, of communication. It is also worth noting that for Guxu, an acknowledged Chan master and thus someone who presumably has already had a formally confirmed enlightenment experience, the disappointment at not finding Huang Yuanjie at home

[23] Wang Duanshu, ed., *Mingyuan shiwei*, 26.11a.

[24] Paula Varsano, "Looking for the Recluse and Not Finding Him In: The Rhetoric of Silence in Early Chinese Poetry," *Asia Major* 12.2 (1999): 39–70, see p. 39.

is transmuted into a melancholy which in turn is "entrusted" to the colors of dusk and allowed to return to its source.

Guxu and Shang Jinglan were related by marriage. Wang Duanshu's relationship to the nun Yizhen 一貞 was an even closer one: Yizhen was her elder sister, known before she entered the religious life as Wang Jingshu 王靜淑, and also acclaimed for her poetry. She had married Chen Shurang 陳樹勷, a son of the official, scholar and playwright, Chen Ruyuan 陳汝元 (fl. ca. 1600). Chen Shurang lost his life in the turmoil of the fall of the Ming and his widow was forced to flee, together with her mother-in-law and a three-year old son, to the mountains for safety. Later, Wang Duanshu would compose a piece entitled "Song of Suffering, Written in the Voice of Elder Sister Zhen" 敘難行代真姊, in which she vicariously relives her elder sister's ordeals.[25] It is here that we learn that, vulnerable and far from home, Wang Jingshu shaved her head primarily in order to avoid losing her chastity at the hands of the Manchu invaders. In other words, like many other women during these traumatic times, her decision to become a Buddhist nun was taken under extreme duress.[26] Nevertheless, it would seem that Wang Jingshu—whose poetic personality, at least, had always been more introverted and contemplative than that of her energetic and forceful younger sister—found the religious life to be congenial.

The name most often used by others to refer to Wang Jingshu after she became a nun is Yizhen daoren 一真道人 (Person of the Way Yizhen): Wang Duanshu refers to her as Elder Sister Zhen (Zhen jie 真姊). As it turns out, however, her full religious name was Chan master Yizhen Yu'en 一真玉恩禪師 and she was, in fact, an officially recognized dharma successor of Linji Chan master Benchong Xingsheng 本充行盛 (d. 1671),[27] himself a Dharma heir of one of the most famous

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[25] Wang Duanshu, *Yinhongji*, 4.9b–10a.

[26] Among them were a number of educated women from Wang Duanshu's poetic circle, including, for example, Zhao Dongwei 趙東瑋, who although she lived alone for a while after the death of her husband, suffered so greatly from the "ridicule of her clansmen" (*zuren zhi ji* 族人之譏) that she decided to become a nun. (See Wang Duanshu, ed., *Mingyuan shiwei*, 13.27a). One wonders if women such as Wang Jingshu and Zhao Dongwei had enjoyed more supportive family situations that they would have remained as chaste widows, living in respected if lonely lives near or in the family home. See Wai-yee Li's chapter in this volume for a discussion of this poem by Wang Duanshu.

[27] *Wudeng quanshu* 五燈全書 (The complete books of the five lamps), in *Xuzangjing* 續藏經 (Supplement to the Buddhist Canon) (Hong Kong: Yingyin Xuzangjing weiyuanhui, 1967), 141:397a–b.

Linji Chan masters of the seventeenth-century, Feiyin Tongrong 費隱通容 (1593–1662). Benchong Xingsheng served for a time as abbot of the Huiyun 慧雲 Monastery in Hangzhou, and it was here that Wang Jingshu no doubt met and studied with him. Wang Duanshu herself never mentions this bit of information, which is tucked away in a brief entry found in the *Wudeng quanshu* 五燈全書 (Complete records of the five lamps), a massive Buddhist genealogical history first published in 1699.[28] She does, however, note that her elder sister had "thoroughly mastered the esoteric scriptures of the Mahāyāna."[29] She also quotes, in the editorial comments appended to the selection of Wang Jingshu's poems included in the *Mingyuan shiwei,* the words of another author who goes so far as to compare Wang Jingshu's poems to those of such great poets of the past known for writing Buddhist-flavored poetry, including the Tang poets Wang Wei 王維 (701–761) and Bai Juyi 白居易 (722–846) and the Song poet Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1105):

> In the past, there have been those who used Chan to compose poetry, such as Weimo [Wang Wei], Xiangshan [Bai Juyi] and Dongpo [Su Shi]. Cai [Wenji 蔡文姬 (b. 177)], Ban [Zhao 班昭 (45–116)], Zuo [Fen 左芬 (ca. 255–300?)] and Bao [Linghui 鮑令暉 (fl. 464)] achieved fame in the world solely on the basis of their poetry; it has been difficult enough for women to write poetry; how much more difficult for them to achieve renown for both their Chan and their poetry.[30]

Whether Wang Duanshu herself completely agreed with this lofty evaluation of her sister's poetry is difficult to say. She does note that Wang Jingshu "had the [karmic] roots of intelligence and sublime realization, and she took refuge in the Dharma King [the Buddha]. She was fond of living among the famous mountains and rivers and cared little about such things as acquiring a glorious reputation."[31] She also tells us that her sister "in her leisure time would write little poems. She did not seek to make them artful; she transcended both things and

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[28] The only hint Wang Duanshu provides that her sister was not just an ordinary Buddhist nun but a verified Chan master is hidden away in her brief editorial notes on a nun by the name of Shangxin Jinghui 上信靜慧 who, Wang Duanshu notes, was a disciple of a certain Chan master Yizhen En of Qingliang (Qingliang Yizhen En chanshi 清涼一真恩禪師). See Wang Duanshu, ed., *Mingyuan shiwei*, 26.11b.

[29] Wang Duanshu, ed., *Mingyuan shiwei*, 15.5a.

[30] Wang Duanshu, ed., *Mingyuan shiwei*, 15.5b. This quote is attributed to a text entitled *Tongqiu ji* 同秋集, which however, I have as yet been able to identify.

[31] Wang Duanshu, ed., *Mingyuan shiwei*, 15.5b.

feelings and simply followed her elevated mood."[32] While this is not the place for an extended discussion of Wang Jingshu's poetry, the following quatrain, entitled "Mountain Dwelling: Falling Leaves" 山居落葉, may serve to illustrate the spirit of many of these "little poems."

Forest trees already half bare, proof of autumn come;	林疎半已出秋徵
Leaves swirl in confusion all around the bamboo gate.	歷亂飄零遶竹扉
As the misty vapors send the cold into one's very bones;	嵐氣避人寒薄骨
Leisurely I gather fallen leaves to fashion a Chan robe.[33]	聊將落葉制禪衣

Even after having become a nun, Wang Jingshu continued to keep in close contact not only with her sister, but also with other relatives and friends, especially those with whom she had so often participated in poetic gatherings and excursions. Wang Duanshu's poetry collection includes a number of poems about her sister, composed both before and after she entered the religious life. Those composed afterwards reflect the close emotional bond she felt with her sister. They also reflect an awareness of the differences between them, both in terms of her sister's new religious status and her avowed orientation towards Buddhist transcendence. We see this combination of intimacy and distance with particular clarity in the following poem, entitled "Thinking of Elder Sister Zhen" 憶真姊, in which Wang Duanshu refers to her sister as "Master" (*shi* 師).

She departs on her little boat, a witness to the dharma;	證法扁舟去
To a secluded village and the chill of an ancient temple.	幽村古寺寒
The wind gusts and the shadows of the banners quiver;	風吹旛影亂
The moon sets, leaving little bits behind in the alms bowl.	月落鉢中殘
Exquisite beauty—the blossoming of the Udambara tree;[34]	美色優曇放
Delightful feelings—dining on the hills and rivers.[35]	娛情山水飡

[32] Wang Duanshu, ed., *Mingyuan shiwei*, 15.5b.
[33] Wang Duanshu, ed., *Mingyuan shiwei*, 15.6a.
[34] In Buddhist mythology, the Udambara tree flowers once every three thousand years and is used figuratively to indicate rarity and also insubstantiality.
[35] I am not entirely sure of the translation of these two lines. I am reading (tentatively) *sanshui can* 山水飡 as a variation on the expression *canyun woyue* 粲雲臥

The Master has long ago transcended the Triple Realm,	師超三界外
While I, alas, remain caught up in my poetic worlds.[36]	嗟逐混詩壇

In this poem we can sense the kind of ambivalence towards the religious life that, I would suggest, is more typical of many educated women than it is of their male counterparts. For one thing, the propriety of leaving home to enter the religious life is not an issue for Wang Duanshu: this is true not only in the case of her own sister, but also for the other nuns whose poems she includes in her anthology, all of whom clearly met her high standards of moral conduct and proper behavior. The ambivalence lies rather in the tension between pity—the "chill" of a largely solitary life in a secluded convent—and admiration, even envy, of a woman who has transcended, or, more realistically, made it her goal to transcend, the Triple Realm (*sanjie* 三界, the realms of desire, form and formlessness) that, in the Buddhist conception, constitute the world of *samsara*, that is, the world of suffering. There was, needless to say, no dearth of often acute suffering during this difficult period, for both women and men. Even more importantly, many living through this traumatic period of upheaval, strongly felt that poetic expression should stem from and express their anger and their anguish. It is with mixed feelings, then, that Wang Duanshu laments her own continued entanglement in the world of poetry and, by extension, with the suffering world. We find some of these same concerns implied in a poem entitled "A Visit from Elder Sister Zhen on a Spring Day" 春日真姊過訪:

The flowers fall, zither and books turn cold:	花落琴書冷
The incense wafts, a passing bird calls out.	香吹過鳥鳴
The east wind lessens the loneliness,	東風鮮寂寞
The spring bamboo laughs at my isolation.	春竹笑淒清
In my heart, I cherish my memories of the Master,	心抱懷師念
I am grateful for your thoughts for me.	深蒙顧我情
The Way penetrated, the Dharma should appear,	道通應有法
How can I topple the city of sorrow?[37]	何以破愁城

The metaphor "toppling the city of sorrow" (*po choucheng* 破愁城), together with some of its variants, such as "toppling the fort of sorrow"

月, "to feed on the clouds and sleep under the moon," a metaphor for the hardships of travel.

[36] Wang Duanshu, *Yinhong ji* 吟紅集 (ca. 1655), 7b–8a.

[37] Wang Duanshu, *Yinhong ji*, 9b.

(*po choulei* 破愁壘) in numerous poems, has a long literary history. Normally, the weapons employed against this seemingly unbearable anguish, sometimes successfully but usually not, are wine and poetry.[38] Thus, in posing the question of how one should pit oneself against the city of sorrow, Wang Duanshu intimates that her sister has found a way to transcend the anguish of trauma not by shaping it into poetic expression, but by means of her Buddhist faith, which sees sorrow as the result not of history but of attachment. Given Wang Duanshu's own personality and character, not to mention her fierce loyalism and her tremendous literary talents, this was not a path she herself would or even could have chosen. But this does not mean that she did not respect, perhaps even envy, her sister for having done so.

Wang Duanshu was not the only one who continued to exchange poems with Wang Jingshu after she became a Buddhist nun. Hu Zixia 胡紫霞 (courtesy name Fucui zhuren 浮翠主人), a woman poet from Shaoxing who was a friend of both of the Wang sisters and had often participated in poetic excursions together with them. Hu Zixia was the second wife of Wu Guofu 吳國輔 (fl. 1638), known best perhaps as the co-compiler of the 3-fascicle *Jingu yu ditu* 今古輿地圖 (Geographical maps of past and present, 1643), which contains a preface by the famous loyalist poet and martyr, Chen Zilong 陳子龍 (1608–1647). Wu belonged to the famous Wu clan of Zhoushan 州山, located in Shaoxing bordering Mirror Lake, which during the Ming-Qing transition period was one of the primary centers of anti-Manchu resistance.[39] Loyalists and poets would gather here not only to commiserate and conspire, but also to drink wine and exchange poetry. It is because of living in such beautiful natural surroundings, comments Wang Duanshu, that Hu Zixia's poetry was "exceptionally pure and exceptionally accomplished" (*bieqing biezhi* 別清別致). She did not, however, leave very many poems—only three are included in the *Mingyuan shiwei*. One of these poems was composed in exchange with Wang Duanshu. Another commemorates a poetic excursion on the Lantern Festival,

[38] See for example, Qian Qianyi's poem in the series "The Latter Autumn Meditations" 後秋興, trans. by Kang-i Sun Chang in, "Qian Qianyi and His Place in History," in Idema, Li, Widmer, eds., *Trauma and Transcendence*, 211. See also Laurence Yim, "The Poetics of Historical Memory in the Ming-Qing Transition: A Study of Qian Qianyi's (1582–1664) Later Poetry" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1998), 254–256.

[39] According to Wang Duanshu, Wu Xiangzhen 吳祥禎, daughter of Hu's ill-fated son Wu Lizhen 吳理禎 (1642–1659), studied poetry with her when she was a young girl.

when Hu invited Wang Duansu and Wang Jingshu, as well as Tao Gusheng 陶固生 (courtesy name Lüdan 履坦), and Huang Yuanjie, the famous poet and loyalist from Jiaxing who, as we have seen, in the mid-1650s spent some time in Shaoxing with Shang Jinglan, to come to her studio to celebrate.[40] The third poem, translated below was composed for Wang Jingshu on her fortieth birthday, by which time she had been a Buddhist nun for a full decade.

On Master Yizhen's Fortieth Birthday	壽一真師四十
For forty years now, she's been an upright woman scholar,	四十年來女士規
The famous works of her red brush like poems from the *Feng*.	名章彤管著風詩
Rosy-cheeked and dark haired, she was an immortal companion,	朱顏紺髮同仙侶
White-robed and yellow-capped, she is now a spiritual guide.	白袷黃冠作導師
The blue lotuses make a special offering of lapis lazuli;	優鉢特將青石供
The peach blossoms serve as harbinger of spring's arrival.	桃花正是小春期
Fasting and embroidering Buddha images, she enjoys a long life.	長齋繡佛知眉壽
Even without any "pure essence," her hunger has been assuaged.[41]	無藉青精已療饑

Hu opens her poem with a reference to what she perhaps still thought of as Wang Jingshu's primary vocation, that of poet and scholar. And as poet and scholar, she clearly met the high moral and literary standards that her own sister lays out in the preface to the *Mingyuan shiwei*, where she notes that even the poems of women who happened to be "Buddhist nuns, Daoist priestesses, and foreigners" were worthy of inclusion if they "nonetheless harmonize with the *Feng* and *Ya*," two major sections of the *Shijing* 詩經 (Classic of poetry).[42] She then succinctly notes the transformation of a young woman with glossy dark hair who once joined her women friends and relatives on poetry

[40] Elsewhere in the *Mingyuan shiwei*, one can find the poems written by Huang Yuanjie about this particular excursion (9.21b) as well as by Wang Duanshu herself (42.7a).

[41] Wang Duanshu, ed., *Mingyuan shiwei*, 12.5a.

[42] See Haun Saussy's translation of this preface in *Women Writers of Traditional China*, ed. Kang-i Sun Chang and Haun Saussy (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 692.

excursions—often compared to gatherings of the female immortals around the Jasper Pond of the Queen Mother of the West—into a Buddhist teacher dressed in white robes with a yellow cap to protect her shaven head. She then describes her as spending her time keeping vegetarian fasts and embroidering Buddhist images: a stock phrase for the religious pursuits of many women, whether monastic or not. It is these pursuits, rather than Daoist alchemical practices requiring the cultivation of "pure essence" that, while they may not have brought her immortality, certainly appear to have provided her old friend with a means by which to "assuage her hunger," that is to say, transcend, or at least make peace with, her personal sorrow.

This same admiring acknowledgement of sorrow transcended appears as well in a poem dedicated to Yizhen composed by Zheng Huiying 鄭慧瑩 (courtesy name Mingzhan 明湛), a woman poet from a well-known loyalist family from Yuyao 餘姚—her brother Zheng Zunyi 鄭遵謙 (?—1646, courtesy name Lügong 履公) who was known more for his swordsmanship than for his literary talents, became involved in anti-Qing insurrections during the late Ming, and ultimately committed suicide. Wang Duanshu, in her editorial comments to the selection of Zheng Huiying's poems included in the *Mingyuan shiwei*, notes that Zheng was known not only for her poetic talent, beauty and propriety, but, like her brother, a fondness for swordsmanship. Zheng's poem "A Gatha Presented to Master Yizhen" 偈呈一真師, in the form of a Buddhist quatrain (*ji* 偈 or *gatha*), was not just sent to Yizhen, but respectfully "presented" (*cheng* 呈) to her as befits a lay person to a Chan master:

In those years, we truly were fools who knew nothing;	真是當年識認癡
Surrounded by sorrow and heartbreak, we lost our way.	悲忻到境便成迷
Then, in the pitch of the night, you woke with a smile;	中宵一笑眠初覺
What happiness? What sorrow? What right and wrong?[43]	何樂何愁何是非

This short poem in many ways embodies, in highly compressed form, the fusion of the poetic, political, and religious that, as noted earlier, was particularly characteristic of the times. The sorrow and heartbreak,

[43] In Wang Duanshu, ed., *Mingyuan shiwei*, 17.2a–2b.

and indeed, the "pitch of the night" here most certainly refer as much to the dark days of the fall of the Ming as they do to the darkness of ignorance from which, according to Buddhist teachings, one can be liberated only through an enlightened vision of non-duality. The questions Hu poses at the end were those raised by thousands during this period of trauma, although few, perhaps, ever found themselves to so definitively wake from the nightmare "with a smile." And even here, while Hu acknowledges her friend's seeming accomplishment, it is clear that she herself has not sought, much less achieved, this enlightenment and, perhaps, is not completely convinced of its feasibility.

There were other *guixiu*, however, whose exchanges with Buddhist nuns in fact led to a decision to not only take the tonsure, but to embark on a rigorous path of study and practice that would ultimately lead to being named an official Dharma-heir of an eminent male Chan master. An example of this is Jin Shuxiu 金淑修, who was the wife of Xu Zhaosen 徐肇森 of Xiushui 秀水, scion of a long line of high officials and latterly, Ming loyalists and martyrs.[44] In her official biographical accounts, she is recognized primarily for being the mother of Xu Jiayan 徐嘉炎, who would become one of the group of Jiangnan literati who in 1679 sat successfully for the special "Outstanding Scholars of Vast Learning" (*boxue hongci* 博學宏詞) examination and subsequently went to Beijing as one of the members of the commission established to compile the Ming dynasty official history.[45]

Jin Shuxiu was also praised for her talents, especially in calligraphy, painting, and poetry. She was skilled in painting landscapes, in which she is said to have executed in the style of the Yuan dynasty, in "a skillful and lofty manner" (*judu xuanchang* 局度軒敞), and with a "gentlemanly (or virile) air" (*zhangfu qi* 丈夫氣).[46] She also enjoyed delving into Chan Buddhist texts and would spend time at the nearby

[44] Her father-in-law was Ming loyalist martyr Xu Shichun 徐世淳 (1585–1641, *jinshi* 1618) who perished, along with one of his sons, his two concubines, and eighteen other family members, defending the city of Suizhou 隨州 in Hubei province against the attack of rebel Zhang Xianzhong 张献忠 (1605–1647). For a detailed study of her life and writings, see Grant, *Eminent Nuns*, Chapter 7.

[45] *Jiaxing fuzhi* 嘉興府志 (Gazetteer of Jiaxing) (1682), 2.7b–2.8a. The head of this commission, the scholar Xu Yuanwen 徐元文 (1634–1691), apparently wrote a brief biography of her entitled *Jin Taifuren zhuanlue* 金太夫人傳略. This text is mentioned in a biographical notice for Jin found in *Zhongguo meishujia renming cidian* 中國美術家人名辭典 (Biographical dictionary of Chinese artists), ed. Yu Jianhua 俞劍華 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1981), 557a.

[46] *Zhongguo meishujia renming cidian*, 557.

Miaozhan Convent 妙湛禪院 studying with an eminent nun named Zukui Jifu 祖揆繼符.[47] It was while visiting Zukui Jifu that Jin Shuxiu first read the recently-printed collections of Zukui Jifu's master, the Linji Chan monk (and fervent loyalist) Jiqi Hongchu's 繼起弘儲 (1605–1672) discourse records. Impressed, she persuaded the nun to take her to visit him: we are told that Jiqi Hongchu immediately perceived in her the qualities of a "great gentleman" (*dazhangfu* 大丈夫) which in the Chan Buddhist context indicated her possession of the intellect and, even more importantly, the fierce and heroic determination needed to follow the Chan path.[48] It was probably not too long after this that Xu Zhaosen died, leaving the middle-aged Jin Shuxiu a widow.[49] The gazetteer accounts tell us that after the death of Zhaosen, she abandoned both her painting and calligraphy (and presumably her poetry-writing as well) and devoted herself to the care of her son.[50] She also spent her time engaged in extended religious fasts and other religious devotions, including the embroidery of Buddhist images, a popular devotional practice among gentry women. What the gazetteer does not mention is that some years later, Jin Shuxiu returned to Lingyan Monastery and requested first the tonsure and then, full ordi-

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[47] Although we have almost no biographical information on this nun, we do know that she was somewhat younger than Jin Shuxiu, and may very likely have entered the religious life as a young girl. Despite the paucity of biographical information, Zukui Jifu was well-known for her mastery of the Chan textual tradition, as well as for her own literary talents. For a detailed discussion of her writings, see Grant, *Eminent Nuns*, Chapter 8.

[48] This information is provided by the literatus and Buddhist layman Zhang Youyu 張有譽 (1598–1669), who wrote a preface to the *Songgu hexiangji* 頌古合響集 (Collection of joint verses in praise of ancient [cases]), a collection of religious verse composed collaboratively by Jin Shuxiu and Zukui Jifu. See "Songgu hexiang ji xu" (Preface to *Songgu hexiangji*), in *Mingban Jiaxing dazangjing*, 35:712c.

[49] *Jiaxing fuzhi*, 64.16b. It is unclear when exactly Xu Zhaosen died, although it was probably sometime during the tumultuous years of the 1650s. Nearly half a century later, in 1699, Xu Jiayan published a collection of his own poetry, to which he appended a selection of twenty poems composed by his father that he had "saved from burning," in this case by storing them away in the prodigious memory for which Jiayan had been famous even as a child. Xu Jiayan, *Baojingzhai shiji* 抱經齋詩集 (Poetry collection of Baojing Studio) (Jinan: Qi Lu Shushe chubanshe, 1997), 309–554.

[50] Susan Mann, *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 182–183. As Grace Fong observes: "It is through the analogy of repeated practice, discipline, and concentration that embroidery takes on religious meanings. Its practice is in some ways akin to religious recitation, the accumulation of merit through endlessly repeating the name of the Buddha, and chanting or copying a sutra." See Grace S. Fong, "Female Hands: Embroidery as a Knowledge Field in Women's Everyday Life in Late Imperial and Early Republican China," *Late Imperial China* 25.1 (2004): 19–20.

nation. She would also become, like Zukui Jifu, one of Jiqi Hongchu's official Dharma-heirs, after which she was known as Chan Master Baochi Jizong 寶持繼總.

Jin Shuxiu had first gone to the Miaozhan Convent in search of a monastic *chanyou*. After she became first a nun and then an abbess and Chan master, she herself became the one to whom laywomen would turn for advice and friendship. Perhaps the most poignant indications of this are two poems sent to distant women friends from her previous life as a gentry wife. The first of these, a poem addressed to a certain Madam Zhang 張, would indicate that these discussions were carried on through correspondence as well as personal visits.

This empty show in the blink of an eye reverts to clouds and mist	浮華轉盼屬雲煙
Straw mat and hemp robes: I have learned to let go of my burdens.	草座麻衣悟息肩
When ill, I do not worry, but rather seek the marvelous medicine:	識病豈煩尋妙藥
Once one has realized Emptiness, then one can move all the gods!	解空時復感諸天
The pearl-offering Dragon Girl was suited to become a Buddha;	獻珠龍女當成佛
Pang's comb-sticking woman was fond of studying Chan.	插疏龐婆好學禪
A melody of the Unborn is something we can speak of together,	一曲無生堪共語
Taking advantage of the winds, I dispatch the goose with a letter.[51]	臨風寄與鴈頭箋

This poem is interesting for its allusions to two female figures in Chan lore: the first is the well-known story of the eight-year old daughter of the Dragon King, mentioned earlier, and the second is to the wife of the Tang dynasty lay-poet Pang Yun 龐蘊 (740–808), who although she is always acknowledged as having been a woman of insight, usually takes second place to her much more famous daughter, Lingzhao 靈照. The story referred to here can be found in the *Pang jushi yulu* 龐居士語錄 (Discourse records of Layman Pang): one day Madame Pang went into the monastery on Mt. Lumen 鹿門 intending to make an offering at a ritual feast. However, she was stopped at the door by the

[51] Baochi Jizong, *Baochi Zong chanshi yulu* 寶持總禪師語錄 (Discourse records of Chan master Baochi Zong), *Mingban Jiaxing dazangjing*, vol. 35 p. 712c.

proctor who asked her what merit she hoped to gain by making this offering.[52] She then took her comb, and stuck it into her coiled bun of hair, saying: "The merit has already been transferred."[53] Here, the reference to Madame Pang probably refers to the capacity for laywomen in general to engage fruitfully in the study of Chan.

The second poem is addressed to another friend, a certain Lady Hou 侯 in Luoyang. I have not been able to identify her, but she was clearly someone whom Jin Shuxiu had known before she became a nun, and with whom she had shared the traumas and sorrows of unsettled times.

Recalling the changes of the past, sighing over our parting:	憶昔滄桑歎別離
Ten years without any news to bridge our separate worlds.	十年消息重相違
Golden cups on a sandalwood altar: you have kept well,	金尊檀板君無恙
A stone hut and meditation mat: just the right thing for me.	石室蒲團我正宜
The spring warmth has yet to melt the snow on my temples:	春暖未融凝鬢雪
Only after the dream breaks am I able to make sense of them:	夢醒方辨處囊錐
Often in them I've felt you there providing encouragement,	幾番領得殷勤意
But looking back towards the Central Plains, who else is there?[54]	回首中原更有誰

This is one of the few poems included in Jin Shuxiu's collection that speaks directly of the trauma of the Ming-Qing transition, and in so doing slips into the elegiac mode found in many literati writings of the poetic act of "looking back towards the Central Plain." Nevertheless,

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[52] See Ruth Fuller Sasaki, Yoshitaka Iriya and Dana R. Fraser, trans., *A Man of Zen: The Recorded Sayings of Layman P'ang* (New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1971 and 1976). A footnote to the translation of this passage explains that "It was customary for a temple priest to write on a slip of paper the donor's name, the gift and its purpose, and the date. This would then be displayed in public so that the donor's merit would become known to others, i.e., transferred" (73).

[53] This line could also be read, as "I am done with performing works of merit for others." Perhaps it would not be too far-fetched to interpret this as an indication that Lady Pang was tired of other-serving virtue (the making of offerings) and ready for something different, such as focusing on her own personal enlightenment.

[54] Baochi Jizong, "Sent to Madame Hou of Luoyang," 寄洛陽侯夫人, *Baochi Zong Chanshi yulu*, 713c.

especially when seen in the context of her other writings as a nun, it would appear that the gentry woman once known as Jin Shuxiu and lauded for her Confucian virtues had found in the "stone hut and meditation mat" an alternative space in which she felt quite at home.

In the last part of this chapter, we will turn to a group of poems from the generation after that of Shang Jinglan, Wang Duanshu and Jin Shuxiu, that is after the immediate trauma of the transition period was over. In these poems we see a move away from the pain and sorrow of loss and more of an emphasis on an aesthetic, if not a purely religious, transcendence of the everyday. The central figure in this group of poems is the woman Chan master Yuanduan Yufu 元端御符, a contemporary of Yikui Chaochen from Jiading 嘉定 in Jiangsu province. Unlike Yikui Chaochen, who became a nun only after the premature death of her husband, Yuanduan Yufu entered the religious life at the age of twelve *sui*. Eventually she received dharma transmission from Linji Chan master Shanxiao Benxi 山曉本晳 (1620–1686), who belonged to the same sublineage and was of the same generation as Yikui Chaochen's teacher, the eminent nun Qiyuan Xinggang 祇園行剛 (1597–1654). In fact, Yuanduan Yufu would eventually serve as the abbess of the Fushi 伏獅 Convent, which had been established by Qiyuan Xinggang and where Yikui Chaochen had also served for a time as abbess after her teacher's demise. The poems that we will discuss here, however, probably date from when Yuanduan Yufu was serving as the abbess of the famous Mingyin 明因 Convent in Hangzhou and before she assumed leadership of the Fushi Convent.

In the brief biography of Yuanduan Yufu found in the *Xu biqiuni zhuan* 續比丘尼傳 (Further biographies of nuns), compiled by the monk Zhenhua 震華 (1908–1947), we find the following comment: "In the time she had free from meditation, she would intone poetry, and [produced] many beautiful pieces."[55] It is worth noting that this statement echoes a phrase often found in biographical accounts of literary gentry women, who are said to have turned to poetry in the time they had after having duly carried out their household duties (or their needlework): in other words, the gap between elite gentry women and eminent nuns may not have been that great after all. The verse by Yuanduan Yufu that is most often anthologized (and which Zhenhua

[55] In *Xu Biqiuni zhuan*, ed. Zhen Hua, in *Biqiuni quanji* 比丘尼全集 (Complete collection of [biographies of] nuns) (Taibei: Fojiao shuju, 1988), 5.89.

cites as well) is entitled "An Impromptu Verse from My Writing Studio" 書齋偶吟, and if we did not know she had already entered the religious life as a young girl, it would be easy to assume that it had been composed in the inner quarters rather than in the convent.

Leaning on the low table, at leisure by the window:	榻寄閑窗下
Hand in hand we reminisce about excursions past	相携話昔游
Brewing tea, it becomes an elegant gathering,	烹茶成雅集
Unrolling scrolls, sufficient to create a pure seclusion.	開卷足清幽
After the night rain, the flowers gleam with brightness,	宿雨花生潤
In the light breeze, the birds chatter away to themselves.	微風鳥自謳
If we can just keep the remnant glow of the sun,	留將残照影
And quietly brush this plain white silk seclusion.[56]	静拂素絲幽

In this poem, we are not told who the person is with whom the poet is sharing tea, paintings, and reminiscences: it may have been a fellow nun, but it is just as likely to have been a laywoman friend come to visit. In any case, Yuanduan Yufu is mentioned in the poetry of at least one quite well-known gentry woman-poet, Xu Zhaohua 徐昭華 (courtesy name Yibi 伊璧). Zhaohua was the daughter of the woman poet and calligrapher Shang Jinghui, and the niece of the even-more-celebrated woman poet Shang Jinglan who, as we saw earlier, herself had a number of women "Chan friends." Xu Zhaohua learned the arts of poetry, painting and calligraphy from her mother and aunt, and later became a poetic disciple of her father's good friend, the prolific poet, scholar, Ming loyalist, and sometime Buddhist, Mao Qiling 毛奇齡 (1623–1716), who, in his *Shihua* 詩話 (Talks on poetry) and elsewhere, often sings her praises.

It is in his *Shihua* that Mao Qiling provides the context for the three poems that Xu Zhaohua wrote to and about Yuanduan Yufu. Mao relates how once, when he was staying at the Dashan 大善 Monastery in Shaoxing, the woman Chan master Yuanduan Yufu happened to come to the monastery to pay her respects at the great *stūpa* for which the monastery was famous.[57] Hearing that the famous poet Mao Qiling was also staying at the monastery, Yuanduan Yufu expressed a wish to meet him. Mao refused to do so, however, saying that "it was

[56] In Zhen Hua, ed., *Xu Biqiuni zhuan*, 5.89; also in *Wanqingyi shihui* 晚晴簃詩匯 (Collected poems of the late Qing dynasty), ed. Xu Shichang 徐世昌 (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1996), 3360.

[57] This *stūpa*, built in 504, underwent a major restoration in 1669, around the time Yuanduan Oufu visited it.

not proper to engage in social interchange with female monastics"[58] and sent his woman poetic disciple Xu Zhaohua in his stead. Just as Yuanduan Yufu was about to leave the monastery and return to her convent in Hangzhou, however, the elderly poet relented and agreed to compose a regulated verse for the nun, which he then inscribed on her fan. The next day, when Xu Zhaohua and some women companions were seeing the nun off on her return journey to Hangzhou, they saw what Mao had written on her fan, and the women immediately begged Xu Zhaohua to write a poem using the same rhymes. Xu complied, composing not one but two poems.

Poem I

In her past life she was originally Lingzhao:	前身本靈照
Each time she speaks, it is with an "Amitābha."	開口即彌陀
She begs for food to give to the mountain birds;	乞食施山鳥
And she packs her incense inside a conch shell.	裝香在海螺
She came down here from beyond the clouds:	降程雲外近
Thoughts of parting multiply as evening falls.	別思晚來多
Just look at the moon over the thousand rivers:	試看千江月
Slowly, slowly arising from the verdant waves.	徐徐出綠波

Poem II

She makes ready to return to her Benevolence Hall:	幾欲還慈室
Where with supreme detachment she practices good.[59]	無緣款跋陀
With a tiny bit of white hair where the brows divide,	毫分眉際彩
Palms together, the whorls on her fingertips meet.[60]	掌合指頭螺
Bestowed the whisk for having caught the lion's tail,	贈拂留狮尾
She interprets the scriptures written on *pattra* leaves.[61]	繙經度貝多
In the Dragon Palace there is a goddess,	龍宮有神女
Where does she not traverse the waves?[62]	何處不凌波

[58] Mao Qiling, *Shihua*, in *Xihe wenji* 西河文集 (The collected writings of Xihe), *Guoxue jiben congshu* 國學基本叢書, ed. Wang Yunwu 王雲五, vol. 317 (Taibei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan), 2232. I am not quite sure whether he is expressing his own reticence, or indirectly criticizing her for wishing to meet with him in the first place.

[59] My translation of this line is tentative: *wuyuan* 無緣 is often used to refer to the highest form of compassion (*cibei* 慈悲) such as can be exercised only by those who have attained Buddhahood. I am interpreting *batuo* 跋陀 as a transliteration of the Sanskrit *bhadra*, one of the meanings of which is "good."

[60] Here again, Xu Zhaohua seems to continue her praise of Yuanduan Yufu, one of the traditional signs of a Buddha being the white hairs between the eyebrows.

[61] The earliest Buddhist scriptures were written on the leaves of the *pattra* tree.

[62] Both this account and the subsequent poems can be found in Mao Qiling, *Shihua*, 2232–2233.

These two poems paint rather different images of Yuanduan Yufu. The first portrays her as a reclusive hermit living far up in the cloud-swathed hills with wild birds as her companions. The second refers to her status as a Chan master, wielding her whisk of authority and elucidating difficult Buddhist texts. The emphasis is very much on her supposedly enlightened status, indicated in the very first line by referring to her as a reincarnation of Lingzhao, the daughter of the famous Chan Buddhist layman poet, Pang Yün and his wife Madame Pang (referred to in the poem quoted earlier by Jin Shuxiu), Lingzhao was traditionally considered to have attained a deep understanding of Chan—even, some say, deeper than either of her parents. Further on in the poem, there are even more such references—the special marks on Yuanduan's body indicative of Buddhahood and, in the concluding two lines, the comparison to the "goddess" of the Dragon Palace. This, of course, refers to the famous story of the eight-year old daughter of the Dragon King discussed above, who had to exercise her considerable spiritual powers and transform herself into a man to attain enlightenment. Not only that, but a woman is subject to the five obstacles (*wuzhang* 五障), a reference to the five higher forms of spiritual being to which a woman is barred due to her gender: that of a Brahma King, a Śakra King, a Māra King, a Cakravartin King, and finally, a Buddha. Once the Dragon King's daughter assumes her male form however, "with the thirty-two features and the eighty characteristics, he expounded the wonderful Law for all living beings everywhere in the ten directions."[63]

Yet another slightly different portrait is provided by Xu Zhaohua's third poem, entitled "Seeing off a Nun," 送尼.

Under winding cliffs of fairyland with their scattering of rose-hued clouds;	芙蓉曲岸散红霞
We send off the traveler by the river's edge where scattered willows droop.	送客江邊疎柳斜
As the magnolia oars move, they create a rain of flying blossoms;	蘭槳行時飛花雨
Where we lay out brocade cushions golden sands are spread.	锦茵鋪處布金沙
Riding on a skiff, you want to cross the waters of Wuchang,	乘杯欲渡吴閶水

[63] Watson, *The Essential Lotus* (NewYork: Columbia University Press, 2001), 86.

The dust wiped away, the flowers of Mirror Lake have already opened.[64]	拂塵曾開鑑曲花
Once you depart from these watery fields, though we gaze at each other,	一自水田相顧去
When will I again take hold of your dark monastic robes?[65]	何年重把綠袈裟

Here Xu Zhaohua creates a more approachable figure of an eminent Buddhist nun who nonetheless enjoys the same aesthetic pleasures as does Xu, and whose company she will miss: a picture that is closer to the one that Yuanduan Yufu gives us in her own poem. Xu does, however, once again refer to the nun's spiritual attainments: Mirror Lake, which was located just south of Shaoxing and which Yuanduan Yufu apparently had to cross on her way home, can also be read as the dust-free mirror of the mind, upon which the flowers of enlightenment have already opened. But, what do these poems tell us about Xu Zhaohua's engagement with Buddhism? The first thing to note is that her poems demonstrate a more than superficial knowledge of Buddhist terms: in fact the large number of such terms in the second of the two poems translated above makes it rather difficult to understand unless the reader is familiar with this vocabulary. Moreover, despite the rather exaggerated praise, it is clear that she genuinely admires the intellectual and spiritual attainments of this particular woman Chan master.

We see this same evidence of a deep familiarity with Chan Buddhist texts in yet another poem dedicated to Yuanduan Yufu, this one by a woman poet by the name of Huang Kexun 黃克巽 who was a native of She county 歙縣 in Anhui province. Her father was Huang Zongxia 黃宗夏, perhaps best known for being a student of the polymath Liu Xianting 劉獻廷 (1648–1695), and the person responsible for editing the latter's five-fascicle collections of miscellaneous notes entitled *Guangyang zaji* 廣陽雜記 (Miscellaneous records of Guangyang). We do not know very much about Huang Kexun, Huang Zongxia's "beloved daughter" (*ainü* 愛女). She was said have been a precocious

[64] I am reading "Jianqu" 鑑曲 as a reference to a bend (*qu*) in Mirror Lake, located just south of Shaoxing.

[65] The poet is asking when she will see the nun again. In *Xu Dujiang shi* 徐都講詩 (Poetry of Xu the Top Student), 1.18b–19a, in *Guochao guige shichao* 國朝閨閣詩鈔 (Draft poems by gentlewomen of this dynasty), 100 *juan*, 10 vols., ed. Cai Dianqi 蔡殿齊 (Langhuan bie guan, 1844), in Fong, ed., *Ming Qing Women's Writings*.

child who loved to write poetry, so much so, claims the literatus Yang Yimu 楊以牧, a friend of her father's who wrote a preface to Huang Kexun's collected works *Xiuyu oucao* 繡餘偶草 (Spontaneous drafts leftover from embroidery), that "if there was a single character that was not right she would go the entire day without eating in the effort to get it right."[66] We are also told that she was married to a man named Zheng Ningzhou 鄭寧周, but died in childbirth at the age of only twenty. Her collection of poetry appears to be no longer extant. However, seven of Huang's poems, as well as Yang Yimu's preface, can be found in the *Xiefang ji* 擷芳集 (Gathering fragrance collection), a massive anthology of women's poetry compiled by the male literatus Wang Qishu 汪啟淑 (1728–1799) and published in 1785. It is impossible to say to what extent these seven poems reflect her larger, lost oeuvre, but as such they certainly confirm Yang Yimu's comment that Huang Kezun's poems do not suffer from the "narrowness of rouge and powder."[67] One of these poems, for example, is a poem of social criticism entitled "The Ballad of Abandoning a Child" 棄兒行, the concluding lines of which are: "In those days, having a child was like having yellow gold? / But nowadays, children are tossed away like dung" 當年得兒如黃金 / 今朝棄兒如糞土.[68] Another series of eight poems, and the one most relevant to the present discussion, is entitled "In Celebration of the Buddhist Nun Yufu's Fortieth Birthday" 祝比丘尼御符四十初度.[69] It is unclear whether or not Huang Kexun actually ever met Yuanduan Yufu, although among her handful of seven poems there is one entitled "Ascending Tiger Hill" 登虎丘.[70] Tiger Hill is a famous landmark located in Suzhou, Yuanduan Yufu's home territory, and it may well be that Huang Kefu accompanied her father on a visit to this area. In any case, not only did Huang Kefu know of Yuanduan Yufu, the poem she composed in honor of the nun's birthday also shows that this young woman, not yet twenty, had a solid knowledge of Buddhist textual sources, and in particular Chan Buddhist sources. In fact, most of the eight poems are not readily appreciated without

[66] Yang Yimu, *Xiaoyu oucao xu*, in *Xiefang ji* 擷芳集 (Collection of gathered fragrance), ed. Wang Qishu 汪啟淑 (1773), 25.16a.
[67] Yang Yimu, *Xiaoyu oucao xu*, 25.16a.
[68] *Xiefang ji*, 25.16b.
[69] *Xiefang ji,* 25.18a–18b.
[70] *Xiefang ji*, 25.17b.

this knowledge, as can be seen from the three verses that I have translated and annotated below

Poem 3

The meeting at the Dragon-flower mountain will be magnificent:	一會龍華尚嚴然
The spring wind in a snap of the finger—a thousand years past.	春風彈指已千年
Moshan would have been more than willing to take in Lingzhao,	末山可肯容靈照
And personally testify to the Chan of the Pang family daughter.[71]	親證龐家兒女禪

The Dragon Flower Assembly refers specifically to the meeting of "the faithful" under the Dragon-flower tree when Maitreya, now waiting in the Tushita Heaven, comes down to earth as the next world Buddha. The last two lines of this poem make reference to two of Chan Buddhism's most well-known Tang Dynasty female icons, the nun Moshan Liaoran 末山了然 and Lingzhao, who was referred to in Xu Shaohua's poem above. I would suggest that by juxtaposing the two, Huang Kexun is referring to Yuanduan Yufu's transformation from a *guixiu* or woman of the inner chambers to an eminent nun like Moshan Liaoran. Huang may also be thinking of herself, a laywoman, in relation to Yuanduan Yufu, the nun.

Poem 4

Illusion is no different from reality: practice calm and insight	既假既真研止觀
Not the mind, not the Buddha: bring to fruition the Yellow Plum.	非心非佛熟黃梅
When you've done counting black beans, there's no more to say,	數完黑豆無消息
For you've succeeded in personally bringing your half-ladle full![72]	得得親承半勺來

[71] *Xiefang ji*, 25.18a. The characters 兒女 in the last line normally refer to "sons and daughters," However, there is no mention of sons in the stories about Layman Pang and his family: it is only his daughter Lingzhao who is said to have attained enlightenment.

[72] *Xiefang ji*, 25.18a.

Calm and insight refer to *samatha*, sometimes equated with samadhi, which is the calming or cessation (止 *zhi*) of all deluded thought-forms. While highly praised by some, it was thought by others to be dangerous and one-sided if not accompanied by insight (*guan* 觀) into the conditioned nature of things, or *vipassyana*. The first line of this poem may well refer again to a famous case featuring the great Tang master Mazu 馬祖 (709–788) in the Song dynasty collection, the *Wumen guan* 無門關 (Gateless gate). In this story, Mazu is asked "What is the Buddha," and replies, simply but cryptically, "not mind, not Buddha" (非心非佛).[73] Wumen's comment about this is: "If you understand this, you have finished studying." Yellow Plum is the name of the mountain home of Hongren 弘忍 (601–674), traditionally referred to as the Fifth Patriarch of Chan Buddhism. Thus, to bring the yellow plum to fruition means to attain the ultimate goal of Chan Buddhism, that is, transcendence of duality. In the last two lines, we have yet another allusion to Moshan Liaoran, who is perhaps most famous for her Dharma encounter with the monk Guanxi Zhixian 灌谿志閑 (d. 895), the skeptical Dharma heir of Linji who went to visit her and ended up sticking around for three years as her gardener. Afterwards, Guanxi is reputed to have told his disciples: "I obtained half a ladle at Papa Linji's place, and half a ladle at Mama Moshan's place. Together they make up the one ladle I drank up, and from that day until now I have never thirsted again."[74] Moshan Liaoran is thus paired equally with Linji: if he is the patriarch of the lineage, then she is the matri-

[73] See *Wumen guan*, in *Xuzangjing*, 119:165. Of course, it is never simple with Chan masters. Earlier in Case 30, we have Mazu replying, to the same question with "This very mind is the Buddha," an equivalent to Huang Kexun's reference to the phrase "illusion is no different from reality." (119:164) What is implied here is that, to see identity (the Buddha is the mind, reality is the same as illusion) is not as advanced as to reach the point of negation of both. It may be that the reference to counting black beans, used sometimes to keep track of sutras recited or invocations made, refers to this relatively "lower" form of religious practice, which, once enlightenment has been achieved, becomes superfluous.

[74] This story can be found in a number of places. For the version contained in the *Wudeng yantong* 五燈嚴統 (Strict transmissions of the five lamps), a Chan Buddhist genealogical history compiled by the seventeenth-century Linji Chan monks, Feiyin Tongrong 費隱通容 (1593–1662) and Baichi Xingyuan 百痴行元, see *Xuzangjing*, 139:235a. For a more detailed discussion of Moshan Liaoran, see Miriam Levering, "The Dragon Girl and the Abbess of Mo-shan: Gender and Status in the Ch'an Buddhist Tradition," in *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 5:1 (1982): 19–35.

arch. Huang Kexun is clearly aware of this female lineage, and thus is able to place Yuanduan Yufu squarely within it.

Poem 8

This scholar of old now lives on the Buddha's grounds;	選佛場中舊學人
On this day, the old Chan cases have come alive again.	今朝公案又重新
All that remains is to burn up the idle words and phrases,	直須燒却閒文字
Only by letting go of the overhang, can one catch a first glimpse of truth.[75]	撒手懸岸始見真

Here, in the mind of Huang Kexuan at least, Yuanduan Yufu has been transformed from a mere "scholar" into a Buddhist master, and if she is urged to consign her poetry to flames, it is not because such writing is not suitable for a woman, but rather because, as an enlightened master, she should have presumably transcended "idle words and phrases" and, perhaps, even gender. In any case, she has gone very far from the inner quarters.

Concluding Remarks

As Martin Huang reminds us in his introduction to a recent collection of essays on the theme of male friendship, there has always been close connection between both the pronunciation and the concepts of *you* 友 (friendship) and *you* 遊 (travel). As he puts it, "To make friends was to move beyond the compound of one's home and to travel afar."[76] It is this connection between travel and friendship that, in part, explains the fact that male friendship "was often considered an important badge of masculinity since it bespoke a man's ability to travel and meet other men outside his family and beyond his hometown…."[77] As Huang acknowledges, gentry women of the late Ming and early Qing periods also had wide-ranging networks of friends and relatives with whom they would exchange poetry and letters, and with whom they would sometimes meet for literary gatherings or temple excursions. A

[75] *Xiefang ji*, 25.18a.
[76] Martin Huang, "Male Friendship in Ming China: An Introduction," *Nan Nü: Men, Women and Gender in China* 9.1 (2007): 6.
[77] Huang, "Male Friendship in Ming China," 5–6.

number of such women also traveled, although they certainly never spent the days and even months away from the family that their male counterparts did. I would suggest, however, that friendships with Buddhist nuns, especially perhaps Chan Buddhist nuns for whom travel was prescribed rather than proscribed, was also predicated, although in far less obvious ways, on this same connection between friendship and travel. In other words, it was precisely the movement beyond the domestic compound, whether physically or psychologically (both of which we see in the song lyric by Gui Shufen translated at the start of this chapter) that made friendships with nuns, however superficial or profound, different from other sorts of relationships. As Huang observes:

> …for friendship to thrive, a man had to free himself from the restrictive structure of the Confucian family, and yet, at the same time, the values of friendship could be appreciated only in terms of models based on this very Confucian institution. In other words, the value of a true friend could only be authenticated or articulated when that friend was accepted (at least symbolically) as a kinsman or a family member.[78]

Again, I would suggest that friendships between literati women and Buddhist nuns also adhered to this same general principle, although again in far less obvious ways. The restrictive structure from which nuns were released—whether by choice or by fate—was precisely that of the Confucian family. This did not mean, however, that educated Buddhist nuns saw themselves as having rejected all Confucian models (although they may have been regarded as having done so by unsympathetic critics). For one thing, the Buddhist monastic life—and especially the Chan monastic life—is firmly based on a (patrilineal) Confucian kinship and lineage model. Thus convent life was for many women an alternative family, with its hierarchy and expectations of mutual responsibility. The relationship between teacher and student was likened to that between father and son, and indeed Buddhist nuns, like their male counterparts, referred to each other as "dharma younger brother" (*fadi* 法弟) and "dharma older brother" (*faxiong* 法兄). By the same token, highly-educated Buddhist nuns like Yikui Chaochen and Yuanduan Yufu were usually as well-read in Confucian texts as in Buddhist ones, in secular poetry as in religious *gāthās*.

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[78] Huang, "Male Friendship in Ming China," 15.

There was, however, a very obvious difference: for all the rules, regulations and restraints of the female monastic life, they were not determined primarily by the needs and demands of actual fathers, husbands—and mothers-in-law. In reality, nuns—especially those who were abbesses with convents to run—did not have much leisure time, either. However, in the eyes of many gentry women, they were seen to have relatively more freedom to read, write and study. The life of a Buddhist nun—whose shaved head signaled her rejection of conventional femininity —could, for some laywomen, represent the sort of creative life that their male counterparts seemed to be able to enjoy so much more easily outside of the home. From their poetry, we can see that for some gentry women poets, visits to temples and discussions or poetic exchanges with nuns, provided the same inner space that they could often find only in illness. In fact the term *qinghuan* 清歡 (pure joy) that Kang-i Sun Chang tells us many women invented to describe the feeling of self-contained solitude afforded by occasional illness could easily be used to describe the experience that many of these Buddhist nuns found, not in the sick room, but in the convent.[79]

Solitude can, however, quickly reveal a darker side: that of loneliness. And while the domestic life had its burdens, in a relatively well-off elite household, it could also offer certain comforts that Buddhist nuns were supposed to have renounced. Thus, while some poems written by laywomen describe (or imagine) a life of monastic leisure and tranquility, others paint a somewhat more somber picture, as in the lyric composed by Shang Jinglan quoted earlier where we find the line: "The shadows of the swirling catkins cross the sky / Piled up on the meditation mat, three feet of snow." Buddhist nuns themselves played with these images of solitude and isolation, sometimes with a whiff of self-pity, but just as often with an acceptance that this was part of the life they had chosen. As Wang Duanshu's elder-sister-turned-nun Wang Jingshu playfully writes in the poem quoted earlier: "As the misty vapors send cold down into one's very bones / Leisurely I gather fallen leaves to fashion a Chan robe." And as exemplary mother-turned-Chan-master Baochi Jizong (Jin Shuxiu) writes to her friend

[79] Kang-i Sun Chang, "Ming-Qing Women Poets and Cultural Androgyny," *Tamkang Review* 30.2 (1999): 12–25. Reprinted in *Critical Studies* (Special Issue on Feminism/Femininity in Chinese Literature) 18 (2002): 21–31, see p. 26. For illness and women poets, see Chapter One by Grace S. Fong, "Writing and Illness: A Feminine Condition in Ming-Qing Women's Poetry."

Lady Hou, also in a poem quoted earlier, "A stone hut and meditation mat: just the right thing for me." This may, of course, have been little more than a poetic pose. Nevertheless, the seeming freedom and transcendence of worldly sorrows on the part of Buddhist nuns was surely appealing to laywomen still very much caught up in the sorrows and frustrations of the inner quarters. By the same token, educated women who, for one reason or another, decided to enter the religious life did not necessarily abandon their literary pursuits, and, in fact, often continued to participate in the literary networks of gentry women to which they had belonged before becoming nuns. In other words, there was a considerable overlap between the worlds of these *guixiu* and these Buddhist nuns: they shared a common elite background, were highly literate and literary, had often undergone similar experiences of trauma and loss, and were sometimes related by blood or by marriage. But there was also a major difference between them: the primary orientation of the former was still the "inner chambers," the latter no longer. It was this combination of closeness and distance that underlay the special kind of personal, poetic, and even spiritual relationship called "Chan friendship."