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Female Holder of the Lineage: Linji Chan Master Zhiyuan Xinggang (1597-1654)

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The late Ming and early Qing witnessed a brief but vital revival of the Linji Chan Buddhist lineage. [1] It came at a time when the notion of lineage and sectarian distinctions seemed to have little to recommend it: not one of the four Great Buddhist Masters of Ming--Yunqi Zhuhong (1535-1615), Daguan Zhenke (1543-1603), Hanshan Deqing (1546-1623) and Ouyi Zhixu (1599-1655)--felt it necessary or perhaps even advisable to associate themselves with a formal Chan lineage and all are listed in the "lineage unknown" section of the official biographies of Chan monks.

Nevertheless, there were a few Buddhist masters who were very much interested in restoring the fading glory of the line that traced itself back to the iconoclastic and brilliant Tang master, Linji Yixuan (d. 866). Of these, the most well-known was Miyun Yuanwu (1565-1641, hereafter referred to as Yuanwu). Yuanwu was of peasant stock, and spent much of his early years engaged not in study but rather in hard physical labor. He managed to educate himself, however, and when he was thirty years old, he left his wife and family and went to Mt. Longchi (Zhejiang) where he became a disciple of Linji Chan Master Huanyou Zhengzhuan (1549-1614). He rose quickly in the ranks and soon became a highly influential teacher, who travelled widely and took on a great number of disciples both monastic and lay from all parts of the country, particularly from the Jiangnan area. The Chinese religious historian Guo Peng argues that Yuanwu was a manipulative and ambitious man with little spiritual or religious substance. Guo cites various anecdotes which, in his opinion, reflect someone who was fond of "putting on a performance," arbitrarily hitting, shouting, and rattling off *koans* to his students as if he were the Tang master Linji Yixuan himself. [2] An indication of his political astuteness can be seen in the fact that he declined an imperial invitation from the faltering Ming court, and instead directed all of his energies to writing, **[End Page 51]** preaching, traveling, restoring temples and monasteries, and training students who would continue the Linji line. Yuanwu presided over the tonsure of over three hundred persons, and his twelve official dharma heirs did much to shape early Qing dynasty Chan Buddhism, many of them developing close connections with the early

Qing court.

What is most significant for our purposes is that an unusual number of female disciples studied with and received dharma transmission from Yuanwu and his dharma heirs. Some of these women became eminent teachers in their own right and left behind collections of *yulu* or discourse records compiled by their disciples, which contain sermons, poems, letters and other writings as well as biographical accounts of their lives. Although some mention is made in Tang and Song texts of the *yulu* of Buddhist women teachers, these earlier texts appear to be no longer extant. [3] There are many more references to such collections of religious women's writing during the Ming and Qing periods, although, again, only a very small percentage of these titles are available to us today. In a 1658 preface to one of these *yulu*, Gao Yiyong (*jinshi* 1613) from Jiaxing (Zhejiang) attempts to explain to his readers why there were so few records of the lives of religious women among the voluminous accounts of Buddhist monks and laymen through the ages.

> Those who abandoned worldly glory and went in search of tranquility, seeking to transcend this dusty world and refusing to be entrapped by it, were for the most part all virile, and heroic knights with wills of iron. Thus they were able to embark on this path and penetrate to the origin and become the famous religious figures of the ages. When it comes to the denizens of perfumed inner chambers and embroidered fans, they are as a rule gentle and submissive, weak and passive. If one looks in the various books of the *Records of the Lamp* for accounts of women who have taken refuge, one will find very few. [4]

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Gao Yiyong asks himself why there are so few accounts of Buddhist nuns in the *Records of the Lamp*--an umbrella term for the large compendia of biographies of Zen Masters, the most famous of which is Daoyuan's *Record of the Transmission of the Lamp* (*Jingde zhuandeng lu*) compiled in 1004, which contains over 1700 such biographies. Gao does not seem to consider that the absence of biographies of women religious might have been because their lives were simply not deemed worthy of recording. Rather, he assumes that the relative rarity of such accounts was due to the absence of women who were able to overcome the limitations of their sex and display the heroic virility and iron-willed determination that religious discipline (especially in the Chan tradition) clearly demanded.

Gao Yiyong does, however, notice the absence of women's voices in the religious texts he has been reading. He appears to have been one of a small but significant number of educated men who during the late imperial period began to ask themselves why so few women were represented in the voluminous biographical and literary collections that filled their shelves. Many of these men had mothers, wives or sisters who had benefited from changing attitudes towards female literacy during this period and had begun not only to write poetry, but to annotate, compile, anthologize and, with the help of their male relatives, publish women's writings. Thus we have the astonishing existence of titles of over three thousand anthologies of women's poetry from the Ming-Qing period, unheard of in any other part of the world at this time. As Gao notes proudly, many, if not most, of these

women--among them religious women--came from Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces, the cultural heartland of late imperial China:

> Ever since the fall of the [Ming dynasty] there have been in our area famous women from high-ranking families who are able to triumph and liberate themselves. Some are able to renounce honor and glory and [become] guides in the Way; some because they describe a different kind of [religious goal] become well-known among monastics. [5]

In the course of his researches, Gao found that one of these extraordinary religious women was in fact a distant relative. Gao also discovered that she was a Linji Chan abbess affiliated with Master Yuanwu, and that after her death in 1654 her disciples had collected, compiled, and published a selection of her poems, letters, and sermons along with a certain number of official prefaces, inscriptions, and biographical accounts. The name of this eminent abbess was Zhiyuan Xinggang (1597-1654, hereafter referred to as Xinggang) **[End Page 53]** and, fortunately, her *yulu*, published in 1655, has been preserved in a Ming dynasty edition of the Buddhist Tripitika. [6] The various texts included in this *yulu* form the foundation of this essay, which is an attempt to reconstruct, as much as is possible given the limitations of the materials, the spiritual biography of Xinggang and some of her women disciples. Although the texts contained in these discourse records necessarily follow proscribed conventions of biographical and religious writing, read carefully and closely, with attention to what may lie between the lines and at the margins, they can provide us with valuable insight into the religious experiences of Buddhist nuns during the late imperial period as well as the more general religious climate in which they lived, practiced and taught. The life of Zhiyuan provides one example of the way in which religious life in late imperial China--and in particular, a life constructed within the social and doctrinal framework of Linji Chan Buddhism--provided a space in which women might cultivate their spiritual and intellectual interests and exercise their gifts of organization and leadership. [7] It also affords us a rare glimpse of, in the words of Jane O'Connor, "woman as agent as well as object, woman as participant and leader as well as the one overlooked and rendered anonymous, woman as liberated by certain features of the [religious] message as well as woman restricted by patriarchy." [8]

Part One: Master Xinggang as Disciple

Although in this essay I will refer to her by her dharma name of Xinggang, for the first three decades of her life, she was Ms. Hu (given name unknown). She was born in Jiaxing, the only child of a scholar by the name of Hu Rihua and his wife, Mme. Tao. Both her parents appear to have had religious inclinations: in fact, her father stopped having sexual relations with his wife after the birth of his one daughter in order to carry out his Daoist practices in seclusion. Xinggang received an education, and early on showed a gift for **[End Page 54]** poetry: her name is listed in the Jiaxing gazetteer in the section of "talented women." [9] Even as a young girl Xinggang appears to have been fond of reciting the name of the Buddha, and would worship at the family altar day and night. We are further told that upon reaching adolescence she expressed a desire to remain unmarried in order, like her father, to devote

herself single-mindedly to her religious practices.

It is at this point that Xinggang came up against the conflict between social and familial expectations and the call to personal liberation experienced by religious women everywhere in the traditional world, but perhaps especially in China where the family and the continuance of the family line has always been considered to be a sacred duty. Thus, when she requested permission to enter the religious life, her parents refused to even consider her request and proceeded to find a suitable husband for her. In this way, at the age of eighteen, she found herself engaged to a young licentiate named Chang Gongcheng. However, not long after the betrothal, Chang succumbed to illness and died, leaving Xinggang a widow even before she had become a bride.

As was the custom, Xinggang went to live with Chang's family anyway, and did her best to fulfill the duties expected of a filial daughter-in-law. In the case of most women, the story would probably have ended there. Xinggang, however, found it impossible to forget her early religious aspirations and as her awareness of the passage of time grew increasingly acute, she fell into a deep depression. Feeling that her life was being wasted, she began to spend hours on her knees in front of the family altar weeping and pleading with the Buddha to allow her to attain the fruit of enlightenment before she died.

Xinggang's parents--and her in-laws as well--were exceedingly fond of Xinggang, and became anxious about what they clearly perceived as being excessive behavior. In particular they were worried about Xinggang's health, and forbade her to engage in prolonged vegetarian fasting. Xinggang, who was twenty-six *sui* at this point and determined not be dissuaded any longer, responded by giving up eating and drinking altogether. Only then did her family relent, and allow her to formally take refuge with an elderly Buddhist teacher at a nearby temple by the name of Master Tianci Cixing (dates unknown).

Thus began a lengthy period of more formal religious training, a period marked by considerable delays, obstacles, and difficulties. We do not know much about Xinggang's initial spiritual training under Master Cixing, although we do know that she remained at home during this time taking care of her in-laws and watching over her own parents as well. Five years later, **[End Page 55]** when Xinggang was thirty-one, her father passed away and two years after that she decided that she had progressed enough in her religious practice to pay a visit to Cixing's own teacher, the Master Yuanwu, who in the spring of 1624 had become the head of the Guanghui Chan si (also known as Jinsu si), a flourishing monastic community of over three hundred monks in nearby Mt. Jinsu (Jiaxing county, Haiyan prefecture). [10]

During her first interview with Master Yuanwu, Xinggang posed a question that would constitute the central *koan* of her spiritual training: "Where is the place where I can settle myself and establish my life?"--a traditional question which appears with particular frequency in the recorded dialogues of Linji Master Gaofeng Yuanmiao (1238-1295). Gaofeng Yuanmiao's writings appear to have been quite popular during the late Ming in part due to the efforts of Master Yunqi Zhuhong, who in 1599 wrote an introductory preface to his *yulu* in which he remarks that he has carried his copy with him for over thirty years, and

has often lamented the fact that it had not been included in previous editions of the Buddhist canon. [11] Later in her own writings, Xinggang often quotes directly from Gaofeng Yuanmiao's *yulu*, and it is quite possible that she had become familiar with his writings even before her meeting with Yuanwu. In any case, Yuanwu's initial reply was the same one his own master had used with him many years earlier: "I believe you've come a long way, so I'll spare you the thirty blows." [12] This phrase occurs in many of the cases of the great Tang masters. Deshan Xuanjian (780-865), a contemporary of Linji Yixuan, was as famous for striking students with his stick as Linji was for startling them with his shouts. According to a case related in the *Linji lu*, Deshan would often tell his students, "If you can speak, it's thirty blows, and if you can't speak, it's thirty blows." [13] Yuanwu and his teacher's modification of this idea may simply be a slightly different way of saying the same thing: that is, "you are tired from your long journey, and so I will spare putting you in the double-bind that you are already in anyway."

Less clear is the significance of another exchange between Master Yuanwu and Xinggang at this time: Yuanwu presented Xinggang with a case concerning Thirteenth Daughter Zheng (*Zheng shisan niangzi*) a twelve-year old girl from Nantai in the southern province of Fuzhou. In Wuming's Liandeng huiyuan (1183) she is listed as a dharma successor of Changqing Da'an (793-883), although there is no trace of her in later lineage records and *gongan* **[End Page 56]** collections. [14] In the two brief stories related by Wuming, Thirteenth Daughter Zheng is described as a young woman with a tongue like a sharp sword whose words flow like torrents of water. In both of these stories, she enters her interview with the master with complete fearlessness and confidence in her understanding of Chan, and in both, although she is summarily dismissed by the master, she remains undiminished. The stories would appear to illustrate the unripe understanding of an intellectually precocious girl with considerable spiritual potential--the fact that she is listed as Master Da'an's dharma heir is an indication that she did ultimately attain realization. In any case, Xinggang's biographers believed that the fact that Master Yuanwu brought up this story during their first interview indicated that he recognized Xinggang's spiritual potential from the start. Finally, he may have used it because in the story thirteenth Daughter Zheng, a lay woman, is portrayed having a much deeper insight than the nun who accompanies her on her first visit to Changqing Da'an. In fact, Thirteenth Daughter Zheng even goes so far as to tell the nun that she is unworthy of the robes she wears and, taking them from her, puts them on herself. However, the fact that she is several times dismissed unceremoniously may indicate that Master Yuanwu was using the story as a warning to an intelligent and articulate Xinggang that she must not be overly headstrong or impatient. Hong Beimou, author of popular book on famous nuns of China published recently in Shanghai, suggests that Xinggang had wanted to become a nun, but that Yuanwu sent her home when he discovered that not only that she had not completed the three year mourning period for her deceased father, but that her mother was also still alive. [15] If this was the reason (and the original sources are silent on this point) it would indicate a not surprising double standard on the part of Yuanwu, who himself had abandoned parents, wife, and children at the age of thirty to become a monk. In any case, Xinggang bowed politely and returned home, where, alone, she continued to meditate on the question she had posed to Master Yuanwu.

A year passed, and still she had made no headway. Again, she became profoundly depressed and discouraged. Then, when Xinggang was thirty-four *sui*, her mother passed away. Now that both of her parents were gone, and convinced that she would make no further progress if she remained at home, she resolved to formally enter the religious life. Although her in-laws tried hard to dissuade her, she gave away all of her property, clothes, and jewelry and moved into a small chapel near the site of her parents' graves. The following year, she went to Jinsu where she formally requested the tonsure **[End Page 57]** from Master Yuanwu. This time, during her interview with Master Yuanwu, she asked: "When the mind becomes like the shining sun, then what"? "Have you already experienced enlightenment then"? Miyun asked in response. "No, in truth I have not," replied Xinggang, "which is why I have come to beg you to show compassion and point out the way." Again, Master Yuanwu's reply was minimal: he struck her and left the room.

Now formally tonsured but still very frustrated, Xinggang sought out the advice of an elderly monk by the name of Master Ergong Ci'an (dates unknown) in Yanguan who suggested that she investigate the well-known case "If the ten thousand dharmas return to the one, then where does the one return to?"--also a favorite of Gaofeng Yuanmiao. She did as she was told, but again with little success. After a year, Master Ergong Ci'an suggested that perhaps there was no karmic affinity between them, and advised her to return to Jinsu and study with Master Tongsheng Shiche Tongsheng (1593-1638, hereafter referred to as Tongsheng), a senior disciple of Miyun Yuanwu. In Master Tongsheng (who would eventually take over the leadership of the monastery on Mt. Jinsu , which is why he is also known as Jinsu Tongsheng), Xinggang finally found a teacher who would be able to help her. She was already thirty-six *sui*, and almost exactly ten years had passed since she had formally begun her religious training.

Master Tongsheng was an exceedingly tough mentor and Xinggang's struggle was far from over. At their first interview, he assigned her the famous *koan*, "What was your original face before your father and mother were born"? Xinggang struggled with this koan for a full year before returning for a second interview with her teacher. When she was unable to answer the question to his satisfaction, he scolded her and sent her off again, warning her that she should not even bother to come back for a third interview unless she had something to show for it. Distraught, Xinggang gave herself seven days to reach enlightenment. Berating herself for her stupidity, and plagued by nightmares she wept bitterly in front of the Buddha statue. One day as she was seated in meditation, her darkened room suddenly filled with blazing light which was just as suddenly obscured by a dark, cloud-like mist. After this experience, she redoubled her efforts until she began to spit blood and found it impossible to eat or drink. She was in despair but afraid to ask for guidance directly from Master Tongsheng. However, one day she did go to the monastery at Jinsu and sat in attendance at a dharma talk given by the Master. Her old teacher, Cixing, was also in attendance, and in the course of the talk, Master Tongsheng asked him what case he was working on. Cixing replied that he was simply asking himself "Who"? (This may have been a form of the *huatou* (capping phrase) practice recommended by Yunqi **[End Page 58]** Zhuhong and others, who recommended a form of meditation which combined elements from both Pure Land and Chan and entailed asking oneself "Who is reciting the name of

Amitabha Buddha"? When she heard this, Xinggang had her first flash of insight and boldly spoke up saying: "Asking 'Who?' and answering 'Who,' getting dressed and eating, one does as one pleases." Tongsheng then asked her directly: "Where does the master of your house settle his body and establish his destiny"? This time--for the first time--Xinggang bypassed a verbal response and simply stamped her foot. Tongsheng then asked, "When you have died and returned to ashes, what kind of life will you make for yourself?" This time Xinggang answered with a clenched fist and then turned the same question back on her teacher. Master Tongsheng for the first time acknowledged that Xinggang had made important progress. However, he also reminded her that she had yet to achieve the great awakening and sent her back to her meditation room. After several sleepless days of intense and utterly determined practice, she suddenly had another, deeper, flash of illumination. This time, she composed a gatha to express her insight.

> Before my parents had been born,
> Emptiness congealed, clarity complete,
> From the start there is nothing lacking:
> Clouds scatter dew over the blue heavens. [16]

Not long afterwards, this time not as she was seated in meditation, but rather as she was having her head shaved, Xinggang suddenly experienced what is often called the great enlightenment. She immediately went to seek out Master Tongsheng for confirmation, asking "Please tell me, after this where do I go"? Again, Tongsheng posed the question she herself had posed to Miyun Yuanwu many years earlier: "Where will you settle your self and establish your fate"? This time, Xinggang's answer came without hesitation: "On the top of Mt. Jinsu, ten thousand pines." "That is not your realm" replied Master Tongsheng. Undaunted, Xinggang said "If the storehouse of jades and jewels is opened, the night-shining pearl will be revealed."

Although Master Tongsheng could not gainsay Xinggang her achievement, over the next several years he continued to test her, prodding her on to greater depths of insight or, perhaps, convincing both himself and his male disciples of Xinggang's spiritual attainments. Finally, he formally presented her with staff and robe as symbol of the transmission. The gatha Xinggang wrote at this time reveals a deep awareness of being a member of a long and venerable lineage: that all her predecessors have been male does not seem to bother her at all. **[End Page 59]**

> Fingers fold around the 'wish-fulfiller,' the lineage continues;
> As both past and present disappear in a dazzling emptiness.
> When one understands the nature of the true 'wish-fulfiller';
> Then the unchanging Absolute will rest in the palm of one's hand. [17]

In 1638, Master Tongsheng began to show signs of illness and summoned Xinggang for a final interview, after which he pronounced her a dharma heir. Xinggang was forty-two *sui*.

At this point, it might useful to remind ourselves that the narrative I have reconstructed so far has been based largely on a text written in accordance with Linji Chan Buddhist

hagiographic conventions and that similar records of exchanges with teachers and the disciple's struggle with *koan* practice can be found in the biographical accounts of Chan Buddhist monks as well. What then, if anything, does it tell us about Xinggang's experience as a female rather then a male disciple? There are several things. The first is that it illustrates the particular difficulty a religious woman had in extricating herself from the familial context. Xinggang's interest in the religious life was not a reaction to personal loss or economic difficulties as it was for many women who entered the convent. Rather, she seems to have felt drawn to it from a very early age. And yet, at every step of the way, she was forced to put aside her own desires and accommodate those of her family: first through marriage, then through service to her in-laws and, because she was an only child, to her own parents as well. Her rebellion came only after many years of depression and despair, and then only in a form of passive resistance: refusing to eat or drink. It is also worth noting that Xinggang appears to have been a young woman trapped not only by social and familial demands, but also by familial concern and affection. She was clearly a well-loved and well-provided for daughter, who was also looked upon with fondness by her in-laws. I would suggest that this combination of social and psychological pressure and the use of passive resistance to confront it, although not absent in the stories of male aspirants to the religious life, is played out in greater relief in those of women aspirants such as Xinggang.

Part of the function of the Linji Chan hagiographic tradition is to present models of fearless and even virile determination. Not surprisingly, given the basic underlying assumptions concerning women's inherent lack of such determination, Xinggang's biographers may have felt impelled to emphasize their teacher's tremendous will-power and utter determination. Indeed, the impression one gets is that Xinggang pursued her spiritual path with minimal psychological or emotional support from family, teachers, or fellow students. This **[End Page 60]** impression may be misleading--there is certainly an overwhelming emphasis on determination and pure grit in all Chan biographical accounts. However, as we shall see, it contrasts strongly with what appears to have been a far more supportive environment in the convent Xinggang later headed.

Xinggang's remarkable ability to sustain herself can be seen in the decision she took shortly after formally receiving dharma transmission from Master Tongsheng: she went into solitary retreat or *biguan* in the same small hermitage near her parents' graves where she had begun her formal religious life years earlier. The practice of *biguan* was quite popular during the Ming-Qing period, despite the fact that some teachers deplored the practice as a corruption of Chan tradition, citing examples of people who either lived in quiet but self-indulgent luxury or, at the other extreme, went mad from loneliness. The practice itself may well have been associated with the Linji Chan monk Gaofeng Yuanmiao, who as we saw earlier, had become very popular with late Ming teachers such as Yunqi Zhuhong as well as Yuanwu and his immediate disciples. In 1266, Yuanmiao spent nine years meditating in virtual solitude on Mt. Longxu in Ling'an. During this period, he wore "a single robe both winter and summer" and enjoyed neither the comforts of "fan or stove." [18] Later, in 1279, he retreated once more--partly to avoid the chaos which accompanied the collapse of the Southern Song dynasty--this time to the Tianmu mountains of Hangzhou. He built a small hut for himself where he lived in seclusion until his death in 1295. His practice of solitary confinement was called "enclosure as if dead" (*siguan*).

Xinggang herself went into retreat for nine years--the length of Gaofeng Yuanmiao's first retreat--and apparently was able to avoid both extremes. She engaged in fairly ascetic practices such as reducing her intake of food, but her experience, as she describes it, appears to have been a positive one:

> I lived in deep seclusion with few comforts but determined to persevere. My body [seated upright] with grave dignity, [I made no distinctions between] inner and outer. I pushed against emptiness, cutting off entanglements. Once the [distinction between] inner and outer [was gone] then all entanglements were dissolved. When there is neither shape nor form, one sees oneself face to face, and can gather up a *mahakalpa* in a single point and spread a speck of dust over the ten directions. [Then one experiences] no restrictions, no restraints,[and is] free to go where one pleases. [19]

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The language here is fairly conventional, and it would not be difficult to find similar descriptions of inner liberation in the writings of many male monks. One might also be tempted to say that in returning to her hermitage and locking the doors behind her, Xinggang was returning to where women were traditionally considered by many to belong: hidden away in the inner chambers. The difference was that despite, or rather because of, her physical seclusion, her inner life was such that she could describe herself as being subject to "no restrictions, no restraints, free to go where one pleases." Xinggang's story might well have ended here. For as Patricia Ebrey notes, "What is striking in women's biographies, however, is not the ways women used religious activities to escape the house, but the ways they drew on Buddhism to withdraw deeper inside." [20] Master Xinggang, however, was not allowed to withdraw into her inner peace and freedom.

Part Two: Master Zhiyuan Xinggang as Teacher

In 1647, a certain Mme. Dong along with a group of lay devotees from nearby Meixi invited Xinggang to become abbess of a family chapel belonging to the Dong family which had recently been refurbished and given a new name: the Fushi Chanyuan (Jetavana Chan Temple) Although initially reluctant, she finally agreed. From the beginning, people began to refer to her as another Moshan Liaoran (d. 895), perhaps the most famous nun of the Tang dynasty and, more significantly, an influential and highly respected abbess who counted a number of eminent male Buddhists as her disciples. Although at first there were also those who doubted Xinggang's ability to run a monastic establishment, she soon proved to be a charismatic teacher with high standards of morality and strict discipline. She began to attract great numbers of both lay and monastic followers, rich and poor, educated and illiterate, none of whom she turned away. Xinggang was unstinting in her generosity, providing food and medical care for all those who so requested. Eventually, it became necessary to add buildings to house all of those who came seeking shelter. When one of her disciples expressed her concern over the dwindling resources in the monastery treasury, Xinggang responded by citing the examples of great Tang masters such as Danxia who all

his life wore a single robe and Yangqi who lived in a dilapidated hut that let in the wind and snow. The author of Xinggang's official biography notes that Xinggang was adamant about being as self-reliant as possible, and not depending on the charity of donors. **[End Page 62]**

Xinggang appears to have had a particular reputation for integrity and discipline in what was considered by many to be a time of decline and decay. In fact, she clearly saw her mission as one of reform and revival of what she considered to be the original values of the Chan lineage. On one side of her seat, she had carved the following admonition by Master Gaofeng Yuanmiao: "If by opening your mouth and moving your tongue, you do not benefit others, then do not speak; if by lifting your feet and going somewhere you do not benefit others, then do not go; if by applying your mind and directing your thoughts you do not benefit others, then refrain from doing it." [21] Significantly, on the other side she had carved the three goals Confucius is said to have laid out for himself: comfort the aged, be worthy of your friends' trust, and cherish the young. In this regard, Xinggang also saw herself in the tradition of some more immediate predecessors, in particular Yunqi Chuhong who was known above all for his high standards of monastic discipline, standards which according to his contemporary, Master Hanshan Deqing, exceeded those of the Buddha himself. [22] In the fall of 1653, she travelled to Mt. Yunqi to study the Water and Land ritual for the souls of the dead (*shuilu*), and seeing that the monastery had maintained the discipline of Chuhong's day remarked that "those who perceive it [the Dharma] are many, those who practice it are few." [23]

Xinggang's many charitable activities were grounded in a strong emphasis on spiritual cultivation, in particular meditation and *koan* practice. She appears to have been a charismatic and eloquent teacher, and people came from all over to listen to her sermons and dharma talks. In one of these sermons she urges her listeners to remember that liberation is a matter of life and death and that:

> There is no greater suffering than to be caught up in the bustle of worldly affairs, there is no greater joy than cultivating the way with a one-pointed mind. The Way is no other than the greatest joy in this world. Abandoning the Way in order to seek out pleasure is like throwing away food and seeking hunger! [24]

There is no question that Xinggang was very conscious of her place in a long lineage of great Chan masters. That she saw herself in the same "ordinary **[End Page 63]** way" tradition of Danxia, Zhaozhou, and Linji Yixuan is evident from two lines of an inscription she wrote for a portrait of herself: "Zhiyuan [Xinggang] does not understand Chan / When hungry she eats, when tired she sleeps." [25] The language is conventional. What is significant is the fact that they are penned with unhesitant and unapologetic authority by a woman who sees no problem in echoing the great male masters of the past. This can be seen also in the sequence of short texts in which Xinggang traces the line of dharma transmission though thirty-five generations beginning with Nanyue Huairang, continuing through the masters such as Baizhang Huairong, Mazu Daoyi, Linji Yixuan of the Tang, Yuanwu Keqin of the Song, Gaofeng Yuanmiao, and concluding with her own teachers, Yuanwu and

Tongsheng. (A similar sequence can be found in the collected writers of some of Xinggang's disciples, beginning with Baizhang Huairong and concluding with Xinggang herself.) She briefly notes what are presumably her favorite anecdotes about these various teachers followed by a verse of her own composition, such as the following appended to that of her teacher Tongsheng:

> Raising a flower with a smile : before a single word is uttered:
> Lightning flashes and stars fall : before a single text is written.
> Face to face with a white staff of the most marvelous means
> One lamp lights the next as the past is continued into the present. [26]

Appropriately enough, her own disciples when arranging her collection of writings, placed their biography of her immediately after that of Tongsheng, reflecting a shared sense of the importance of lineage.

Xinggang followed the example of Yunqi Zhuhong as well in her emphasis that lay status was no impediment to spiritual practice. She had a great many lay disciples, both male and female, from the educated gentry class. In fact, most of the poems, letters and other commemorative writings in her *yulu* are addressed to just such lay disciples. However, not all of them came immediately. Xinggang's biographers make mention of the many "men of letters, scholars of the brush and knowers of the world" [27] as well as Buddhist monks, who came not to sing her praises but to engage Master Xinggang in philosophical debate. Ultimately, they were forced to "sheathe their swords and put away their knives" [28] and suddenly found themselves stuttering and feeling foolish. Again, if one reads between the lines, I would suggest that what we see here is a continual testing of Xinggang's spiritual, moral, and **[End Page 64]** intellectual qualifications. As we saw earlier, Tongsheng himself subjected Xinggang to a prolonged period of testing before finally naming her a dharma successor. It would seem, however, that despite her master's imprimatur, there were many who still doubted and needed to be convinced.

If some required eloquence and learning to be converted, others were more impressed by miracles. The story of the conversion of the family of Wu Tao (*zi* Zhixian, *jinshi* 1618) who had at one time held the post of Secretary in the Ministry of Rites, among others. Wu's wife, Mme. Qian, had heard of Master Xinggang and persuaded her husband to let them invite her to their home for a private religious gathering. Several days before her arrival, she dreamed that she saw Master Xinggang arriving, preceded by fluttering banners and covered with a magnificent canopy. Mme. Qian had never seen Xinggang before, and was astonished that when she actually arrived, she looked just as she had in the dream. Mme. Qian had always been a pious woman, but after she met Xinggang, she became even more serious about her spiritual practice, taking the dharma name of Chaohui. The story is told that when she was about to pass away, she bade her family to recite the name of the Buddha, while she herself sat in the lotus position and calmly passed away. However, after a short while, she revived and proceeded to tell her startled family that she had had been taken to the underworld. At first she was very frightened, but when she told her demon hosts that she was a disciple of Master Xinggang, their attitude changed immediately and

her own fear completely vanished! Three days later, she died. That evening, her son Yuanqi (who would pass the *jinshi* exam in 1661) dreamt he saw his mother dressed in plain white robes and bowing in the direction of Xinggang's convent. The next day he asked Xinggang to perform a special service for his mother, and that night he again saw his mother in a dream looking radiant and content. [29] Wu Tao, although somewhat less pious than his wife, was also a loyal supporter of Master Xinggang, whose collected works include several letters and poems addressed to him. Nor was the connection to remain a purely spiritual one: not long after meeting Master Xinggang, Wu Tao's daughter married Hu Shengzhou, Master Xinggang's nephew.

Not once does Master Xinggang make any reference to gender as being an obstacle to enlightenment. The primary obstacles are rather worldly affairs and distractions, obstacles which nevertheless can be overcome by single-minded attention on one's *huatouû* even, as she writes to a female disciple, in the midst of "leisure or business, activity or silence, calling the maids, holding the baby boy, playing with the baby girl and socializing." [30] And although **[End Page 65]** she admires the essays and poetry of her lay disciple Zheng Yuduo--she even writes her own poem using the rhymes of one of Zheng's verses--she also warns him of the danger of losing oneself in the "sea of words and the river of poetry" (*wenhai shijiang*) and of the necessity of attending to his meditation practice. [31]

Apart from her numerous lay disciples, Master Xinggang had seven dharma heirs, several of were women who became acknowledged masters in their own right, including Yigong Chaoke (1620-1667, hereafter referred to as Yigong) and Yikui Chaochen (hereafter referred to as Yikui), the distant relative of Gao Yiyong mentioned earlier. Yigong had entered the monastic life as a child and had studied for many years with eminent teachers such as Tuiweng Hongzhu (1605-1672) and Shiyu Mingfeng (1598-1648). It was not until 1656, when she was already thirty-six *sui* (and Master Xinggang at the point of death) that she met Master Xinggang and asked to be accepted as her disciple. When Yigong first moved into the Fushi *chanyuan*, Yikui was serving as Master Xinggang's personal attendant and was very helpful in getting Yigong adjusted to life in the convent. It would appear that despite her many years of religious practice, Yigong had never engaged in the intense and often difficult *koan* training advocated by Master Xinggang. According to Yigong's biographer, Yikui was very supportive to Yikui during her training and the two would often stay up until dawn discussing various aspects of *koan* practice. [32] This mutual support--reflected in numerous poems, letters and other commemorative writings--contrasts strongly with what appears to have been Master Xinggang's lack of such support during her own extended period of spiritual training.

Yikui Chaochen (hereafter referred to simply as Yikui) was born on the first of July, 1625. She was the great-granddaughter of Sun Jianxiao, who at one point held the position of Minister of Justice, and the daughter of scholar and painter Sun Maoshi and his wife, Mme. Gao. Yikui had two brothers and two sisters. She appears to have been a favorite of her eldest brother, Sun Xiaolian, although it was her second eldest brother, Sun Zhongduan (hereafter referred to by his style name of Zilin) who would play a particularly central role in her life. She is described as a precociously intelligent girl, who not only mastered the

feminine arts of sewing and embroidery, but also excelled in the arts of painting and poetry-writing. [33] She was married off to a young scholar by the name of Sheng Jun and, in her biographer's words, was devoted to the wifely way (*fudao*) and loved and respected by her in-laws. She also seems **[End Page 66]** to have enjoyed a companionate marriage with her husband, with whom she shared many intellectual and artistic interests.

Not long after her marriage, however, Sheng Jun fell desperately ill. When he realized that he would not recover, he contemplated taking the vows of a Buddhist monk and devoting his last months to spiritual cultivation. With this in mind, he requested a Buddhist teacher by the name of Master Linquan to come to the house and give him religious instruction. Chaochen apparently sat in on these discussions, which were her first introduction to deeper levels of Buddhist teachings.

Sheng Jun passed away in the fall of 1648, leaving Chaochen a widow at the age of twenty-four. Partly in a spirit of mourning, and partly in response to a new-found interest in religious cultivation, after her husband's death Yikui retreated to her room, where she remained in seclusion, eating a minimal vegetarian diet and engaging in single-minded Buddha-recitation (*nianfo*). In fact, on the wall of her room, she wrote in large characters, "The myriad dharmas all return to the One / With focussed mind recite the name of the Buddha." It is clear that at first Yikui practiced primarily Pure Land devotions, which is what was traditionally considered to be the most appropriate for women in her situation. Her biographers also tell us that she "disfigured her face and changed her manner of dress" (*huirong bianfu*). Although Hong Beimao writes that Chaochen actually used hot oil to disfigure face, it should be noted that this is a conventional phrase which suggests that she was not only intelligent and well-off, but beautiful as well--and utterly determined to deny her femininity in order to devote herself to spiritual cultivation. [34] It should be also be noted that in the West we find similar forms of protest among female aspirants to the religious life. In her *Book of Foundations* (first published in 1610) Theresa of Avila recounts with approval the story of Catalina Godinez who at the age of fourteen not only (in the words of Alison Weber) "vigorously resisted her parents' plans to arrange a marriage for her," but also "put on humble clothing, unbefitting her rank, and exposed her face to the sun to make herself unattractive to suitors." [35] **[End Page 67]**

After a year had passed, seeing that her spiritual determination had not abated, and seeing that she seemed to have what it took, her brother Zilin suggested that she engage in Chan practice instead. Zilin had been involved in various religious practices from a very early age, and over time had become a strong advocate of the Three-in-One movement which emerged in the late Ming around the figure of Lin Zhao'en, 1517-1598. He had had particular success with the practice of investigating a *huatou*, or capping phrase, and suggested to his sister that she do the same.

For the next year or so, Yikui remained in her room struggling day and night with her *huatou*. It was a difficult period, and she grew more and more frustrated and depressed, especially when she compared herself with Zilin who seemed to be so easy and carefree. She redoubled her efforts and soon found herself at the brink of a physical and nervous

breakdown. What appears to have saved her was an informal "support group" made up of her mother and several other devotees who would meet for group devotions and discussions. The discussions appear to have been presided over by Buddhist monks or laymen who happened to be passing through the area. Sun Zilin, himself considered to be one of the more eminent laymen in Zhejiang, often presided over these meetings as well. On one of these occasions, while everyone was still sitting on their meditation mats, Zilin asked each one in the group to express their deepest spiritual ambition. It was at this point that Yikui expressed her desire to follow in the footsteps of Master Xinggang Zhiyuan.

Almost four years earlier, in 1647, Xinggang had been appointed abbess of the Fishi Chanyuan. Yikui clearly had heard about Master Xinggang--both her parents and Zilin had been to visit her many times: there are several letters address to Sun Zilin in Master Xinggang's discourse records, and Mme. Gao had even become a formal lay disciple of hers, taking the name of Zhaozhen. For some reason, however, Yikui had chosen to remain confined in her room and pursue her practice alone, and with little guidance apart from that offered by Zilin. However, by this time, not only was she clearly desperate, but Zilin himself felt that he had done all he could. Thus it was that in 1651, when Yikui was twenty-six *sui*, she and her mother boarded a boat and went to meet Master Xinggang, who immediately recognized her spiritual potential and accepted her as a disciple. However, she advised Yikui to continue to rely on her brother's guidance and to continue with her investigation of the *huatou* "Who?" Yikui returned home, but later that winter came back to the Fushi Chanyuan and, together with her mother, carried out her practice under the immediate supervision of Master Xinggang. This time, she finally was able to "solve" her *huatou*. Two years had passed since Yikui had first become Master Xinggang's disciple: now, at the age of twenty-eight **[End Page 68]** *sui*, she decided to formally take the tonsure. She returned all of the goods and property she had inherited from the Sheng family, as well as the dowry her parents had provided her at the time of her marriage. In this way, she entered the convent "bare and empty-handed" to the astonishment of her relatives, who expressed first consternation and then admiration.

In 1654, Master Xinggang fell ill. Sensing that she would not recover, she formally named her seven dharma heirs, including Yigong, Yikui, and Yichuan. She also appointed Yigong--who although not Xinggang's first disciple, was the one who had been a nun for the longest time--as her immediate successor as abbess of the Fushi Chanyuan. Since receiving her dharma transmission several years earlier, Yigong had been living in solitary retreat at Banruo an, at the time under the leadership of yet another fellow disciple, Yichuan Zhaoke. Master Xinggang also summoned Yichuan back to Fushi Chanyuan and both women were entrusted with the immediate responsibility for supervising their master's funeral and stupa construction, as well as the more long-term responsibilities of running the monastery. In the autumn of that same year Xinggang died. Her body was placed, uncremated, in a stupa located on a piece of land near the Fushi Chanyuan which was donated by the layman Wang Xiangshen. The official stupa inscription was written by Wu Tao. Less official but perhaps more indicative of Master Xinggang's relationship with her disciples are the following verses written by Yigong:

Mourning the Nun who was my Master

I.

The moon sinks west as autumn comes to a close;
The fly-whisk untouched lies at the head of her seat.
Outside the window, the branches of a single tree weep;
A wind rises, and rain drips mournfully in the meditation hall.

II.

For the past twenty years, she has been our teacher,
Truly unique and alone, her staff flashing up and down.
When did the smoke from her quarters dwindle away,
Leaving her children and grandchildren as they were before. [36]

The last line reflects the fact that Xinggang had in many ways become a second mother to her female disciples--reproducing the patriarchal lineage traditionally recreated among male masters and their students. The nature **[End Page 69]** of this relationship is perhaps most dramatically evidenced by the fact that Yikui cut a piece of her own flesh in the hopes that, made into a broth, it would restore her Master's health. (This practice, known as *gegu*, was fairly common during the Ming-Qing period, when it was primarily associated with female filial piety.) [37] However, Yikui almost died herself, and Master Xinggang's health only continued to deteriorate. [38] Yigong and Yichuan followed their teacher's instructions and struggled with difficulty to maintain the convent. However, Yichuan passed away only a two years after her own teacher's death, leaving Yigong with complete responsibility for the Fushi Chanyuan. The talk Yigong delivered at the funeral ceremony illustrates the depth of feeling that existed between the two women.

Alas! There was no one like you, my dharma sister, the monk from Banruo. Your heart was like that of a naked child, your actions were like those of the ancients . . . you were clever while appearing awkward, wise while appearing stupid, eloquent while appearing inarticulate, iron-strong while appearing soft. You treated others as you would treat yourself, and fully exhausted the possibilities of both man and heaven. You and I shared the same way of life, but you have abandoned me and entered the realm of the deathless. [39]

Not wanting to interfere with Yigong's leadership, Yikui felt she should leave the Fushi Chanyuan. Thus, towards the end of 1656, that traumatic year, she moved into a lovely hermitage located on the river bank which had been built for her by Zilin and which was named Cantong an or "Chapel of Investigating Into Commonality," reflecting Zilin's syncretic sympathies. Cantong an quickly developed into a fairly large establishment and Yikui, now Master Yikui, attracted a great number of disciples. In addition, because Yikui's formal training under Master Xinggang had been interrupted by the abbess's death, during these years she sought spiritual guidance from other Buddhist masters. She took the full ordination from Muchen Daowen (1596-1674, also known as Hongjue Guoshi, or Natural

Teacher Hongjue, an honorary title bestowed upon him by the emperor in 1659), a fellow disciple of Master Shiche Tongsheng. She also maintained religious and literary friendships with numerous other monks, nuns, and laymen and women. Yikui was very happy at Cantong an. As she herself writes in a brief autobiographical piece: "[At **[End Page 70]** the beginning] there were only six or seven people, and I was truly able to derive the joy of being beneath the forest trees, and the leisurely tranquility of living under the roof of white clouds. Six years passed as if they were but a single day." [40]

This seemingly idyllic life came to abrupt end in 1667 when, seven years after taking over the leadership of Fushi Chanyuan, Yigong herself fell ill from exhaustion and overwork and died in 1667 at the relatively young age of forty-seven *sui*. Before passing away, she formally designated Yikui as her successor. During that time, she had Xinggang's stupa moved from its rather isolated location to a more accessible and more beautiful spot near the Cantong an. She also undertook to write the official biography of Master Xinggang as well as to complete a *gongan* casebook which her teacher had left unfinished. In addition, she supervised the construction of several new buildings and dharma halls, built with money donated by donors who had come to respect her highly disciplined and ordered leadership. Yikui served as the abbess of Fushi Chanyuan for six years: she died in 1679, at the age of fifty-five *sui*. Although she left four dharma heirs of her own, after her death the remarkable spurt of female religious and intellectual energy inspired by Chan Master Zhiyuan Xinggang began to flag, and within a few decades had disappeared. By the Yongzheng reign period (1723-1735), the attempt to revive the Linji lineage and spirit had come to an end. This was due in part to the religious presumptions of the Yongzheng emperor who, calling himself Layman Yuanming jushi or Completely Enlightened Layman, single-handedly took it upon himself to interpret and reform the Chan school.

Master Hongjue, who less then two decades earlier had been bestowed with the highest of imperial honors, was castigated as a heretic and miscreant. [41] Even more extreme was Yongzheng's condemnation of some of the very masters whom Xinggang and her disciples held in such high regard. Conspicuously absent from the *Yuxuan yulu* (Imperially selected discourse records) which the Yongzheng emperor personally compiled were the works of Danxia Tianran, Deshan Xuanjian, and Gaofeng Yuanmiao, all of whom the emperor accused of defaming both the Buddha and Buddhism. [42]

Another factor (although further research is needed to fully substantiate this) which may have contributed to the fact that there were increasingly fewer religious women of authority was the amalgamation of Chan and Pure Land beliefs and practices that had begun as early as the late Song and by the late Ming, and by the mid-Qing became the largely uncontested characteristic **[End Page 71]** of Chinese Buddhism as a whole. Thus, although there would continue to be women nuns and even masters, the growing domestication of Buddhism with its emphasis on lay piety conducted in the home, coupled with the traditional belief of female inferiority associated with Pure Land Buddhism, cast long shadows on women's contemplative and monastic (as opposed to purely devotional) practice.

Concluding Remarks

In the pre-modern West, the voice of the woman religious, the nun, was often one of the few female voices that was allowed to speak of her life with some authority, largely because, in the words of Sidonie Smith, she had "left behind that which was identified as female and . . . entered a 'mainly spiritual contract by sacrificing the female body and desire for the word of man'." [43] Not surprisingly, much the same is true in premodern China. The poet and scholar Qian Qianyi (1582-1664), who composed the stupa memorial for Master Yuanwu, in an inscription written for the portrait of a Pure Land nun by the name of Chaoyin, quotes an unknown Perfection of Wisdom text as follows:

> Whether male or female, anyone who has fully mastered the four aspects of the dharma [44] is worthy of the title of *zhangfu*. By the same token, whether male or female, anyone who lacks the realizations of his or her Buddha-nature, I say should be called a woman. If there should happen to be a woman who is able to realize with certainty her own Buddha-nature, than she is worthy of being considered a man. [45]

Qian Qianyi was an ardent if ambivalent supporter of Buddhism--as we have seen, he was a close friend of Muchen Daowen . (After Yuanwu died, Daowen took over the leadership of the Tiantong monastery, and asked Qian Qianyi to compose the official funerary inscription for Master Yuanwu.) He was also an ardent if ambivalent supporter of the new class of educated women of the late Ming--his wife was none other than the famous courtesan-turned-poet, Liu Rushi (1618-64). However, the idea that extraordinary women are worthy of the title of *zhangfu* is ubiquitous in Ming-Qing literati writing, for the simple **[End Page 72]** reason that "the masculine was apparently the only paradigm available" [46] to describe virtues not considered to be traditionally feminine. Thus, it is not surprising that in male-authored prefaces, inscriptions, and biographical-cum-hagiographical accounts from other sources, women teachers are more often then not regarded as honorary men, women who have, in the words of Simone Sidonie, transcended all "shape and form," and in particular "the drag of the body, the contaminations of female sexuality." [47] As Miriam Levering has shown in her studies of women in Song dynasty Buddhism, this use of what she terms "the rhetoric of heroism" was common in Linji Chan, with the emphasis on determination, stamina, and ultimate achievement often associated with *koan* practice. [48] However, it is important to remember that this same rhetoric is also used by the nuns to describe both each other and their disciples as well--both monastic and lay. Master Xinggang repeatedly urges her male disciples to strive to become "great gentlemen who live in the world of dust and yet have left the world of dust," [49] even as she encourages her female followers to become "women gentlemen [living in freedom] in the burning house and the dusty prison." [50] Yikui Chaochen, in her official biography of her teacher, uses the adjective *kuiyan* (imposing and stalwart) to describe Master Xinggang's appearance, and characterizes her attitude and behavior as being that of a "*zhangfu*." And in a 1671 commemorative piece, the official and poet Wang Ting (*jinshi* 1649) refers to Master Xinggang as one who has "taken on the form of a woman, in order to established the principles of the lineage." This is a somewhat ambiguous statement, intimating that

Xinggang was not "really" a woman, but rather a Guanyin-type figure who took on the form of a woman out of compassion. In the same piece, he notes with admiration that Master Xinggang's disciple Yikui 's hermitage "preserved the air of the lineage; her person lacked the appearance of a woman."

However, it is important to realize that this assumption of honorary male status certainly did not mean that women religious such as Master Xinggang abandoned the qualities expected of traditional Chinese women. For example, although she would have preferred to enter the religious life and avoid **[End Page 73]** marriage altogether, she did not resist her parent's insistence that she marry. Moreover, after her husband's early death, she continued to care for both her in-laws and her own parents. Even after she became the abbess of a thriving monastic community, she continued to visit her ill students, bringing them medicinal broths which, according to her biographers, she fed them with her own hands. Yikui tells how although extremely frugal when it came to her own needs--in fact, she herself only wore a thin, coarse robe no matter the weather--when, one cold winter, she visited Jinsu and monks suffering greatly from the cold, she immediately returned to the convent and, together with her nuns spent the next several months sewing warming leggings for them all. Finally, although I would not go so far as to say that mutual support and friendship is inherently female, the close emotional ties between Xinggang's disciples, as reflected in poems, letters and other writings is significant. [51] Ultimately, what is most significant is that expressions of what might be called traditional feminine roles co-existed with activities traditionally considered masculine, such as engaging in severe ascetic practice and rigorous intellectual study, building up and guiding large religious establishments, preaching in public settings, taking on disciples, and naming dharma heirs. Although Xinggang and her disciples by no means completely transcended traditional expectations of female behavior, membership in the Linji Chan Buddhist lineage--with its traditional emphasis on the unmediated realization of a Buddha-nature beyond all duality, including that of gender--allowed them a freedom and a flexibility that they would never have found through loyalty to the Confucian patriarchal line.

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Glossary

Notes

1. For a discussion of Miyun Yuanwu, see Du Jiwen and Wei Daoru, *Zhongguo Chanzong tongshi* (Jiangsu: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 539-43.

2. Guo Peng, *Mingqing fojiao* (Fujian: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 1985), 77.

3. The only major compilation of biographies of religious women, the monk Baochang's *Lives of the Nuns* was written in the sixth century. See Kathryn M. Ts'ai, tr., *Lives of the Buddhist Nuns: Biographies of Chinese Buddhist Nuns from the Fourth to Sixth Centuries*

(Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994). It would be many centuries before nuns would again be the subject of the kind of attention accorded them by Baochang. This did not mean that they did not continue to exist, and even flourish. We know, for example, that there were a significant number of intelligent and dynamic religious women who lived and taught in the Tang and Sung dynasties. For a study of Tang dynasty nuns, see Li Yuzhen, *Tangdai de biqiuni* [Nuns of the Tang dynasty] (Taiwan: Xuesheng shuju, 1989) and for research on Sung dynasty nuns, the work of Miriam Levering and Ding-hwa Evelyn Hsieh.

4. *Fushi Yigong Chanshi yulu* (hereafter *FYCY*) 1:1b in *Jiaxing Da zang jing* (Taibei: Xin wenfeng chuban gongci, 1987 reprint of Ming edition) 39:435, 1-7.

5. *FYCY*, 39:435:1b.

6. It is significant that these discourses are found only in the Ming dynasty Jiaxing edition of the Buddhist Tripitika and not in the more widely known and circulated editions. Since Xinggang and many of her disciples were in fact from Jiaxing, the implication is that their lives and teachings were considered primarily, and also merely, of local interest.

7. During the late Tang and in particular the Song, Linji Chan teachers such as Dahui Zonggao took women religious very seriously, and had a significant number of eminent female disciples. Thus, in many ways, the appearance in the late Ming of several extraordinary female Chan masters may be seen as a continuation, or revival, of a long-standing tradition. See Miriam Levering, "Lin-chi (Rinzai) Ch'an and Gender: The Rhetoric of Equality and the Rhetoric of Heroism in the Ch'an Buddhist Tradition." In Jose Ignacio Cabezon, ed., *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992); 137-56.

8. June O'Connor, "Rereading, reconceiving and reconstructing traditions: feminist research in religion." *Women's Studies* 17.1:103.

9. *Jiaxingfu zhi* 79:67b.

10. *Miyun Chanshi yulu, TZ* 12:23b.

11. "Yuan Gaofeng Dashi yulu xu," *Gaofeng Yuanmiao Chanshi yulu* 1:1a. (*Xu zang jing*, (Tripitika Supplement) (Taipei: Xin wenfeng chubanshe, 1977, hereafter *XZJ*) 122:327.

12. *MYCL* 12:21b.

13. See Burton Watson, *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi*. (Boston: Shambhala Press, 1993), 92.

14. Wuming, *Liandeng huiyuan* 10, in *XZJ*, 136:298.

15. Hong Beimou, *Zhongguo mingni* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1995).

16. *FZCY*, 2:21a.

17. *FZCY*, 2:22a.

18. Quoted in *Zhongguo chanzong tongshi*, 293.

19. *FZCY*, 1:13a.

20. Patricia B. Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 125.

21. The original, entitled "Three Rules for the Instruction of Disciples" can be found in *Gaofeng Yuanmiao Chanshi yulu, XZJ*, 122:347.

22. See Leon Hurvitz, "Chu-hung's One Mind of Pure Land and Ch'an Buddhism" in Wm. DeBary, ed., *Self and Society in Ming Thought*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 451-52.

23. *FXZY*, 2:35a.

24. *FZCY*, 1:13b.

25. *FZCY*, 1:39a.

26. *FZCY*, 2:18b.

27. *FZCY*, 2:33b.

28. *FZCY*, 2:33b.

29. *FZCY*, 1:10a.

30. *FZCY*, 1:31a.

31. *FZCY*, 1:33a.

32. *FZCY*, 434:2b.

33. I will discuss Yikui's life and, in particular, her poetry and other writings, in my book in progress, *Women and Religion in Late Imperial China.*

34. This expression is often used in connection with Sun Bu'er (1119-1183), the wife of Ma Yu (1123-1183), both disciples of Wang Che (1112-1170), founder of the Quanzhen lineage of Daoism. The story goes that Wang was reluctant to allow her to travel to Luoyang, concerned that because of her beauty she would be the target of lustful men. Refusing to be deterred from her search for immortality, Sun disfigured her face with boiling oil. The story of how Sun disfigured her face can also be found in many popular Daoist sources, such as *Jinlian qizhen zhuanyi*, ed. by He Qisheng and based on the work of Huang Yungliang (fl. 1893). Taibei: Shanghai Printing Co., Ltd., 1979.

35. Alison Weber, *Theresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 150.

36. *FYCY*, 1:5a.

37. Yü Chün-fang discusses the relationship between the practice of *gegu* and female filial piety in her paper, "Images of Kuan-yin in Ming-Ch'ing Popular Literature," presented at the 1993 Conference of Women and Literature in Ming-Qing China held at Yale University.

38. *Cantong Yikui chanshi yulu* (hereafter *CYCY*) in *Jiaxing Da zang jing* 39:436, 3a/b.

39. *FZCY*, 1:6a/b.

40. *CYCY*, 18b.

41. *Ming Qing fojiao*, 333.

42. *Zhongguo Chanzong tongshi*, 584.

43. Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 55.

44. The four aspects of the dharma include: the teaching (*jiaofa*); the principles (*lifa*); the practice (*xingfa*); and the rewards (*guofa*).

45. "Chaoyin ni huaxiang can," Qian Qianyi, *Muzhai you xue ji fu, Sibu congkan* 88:520.

46. This is how Alison Weber refers to Theresa of Avila's use of the rhetoric of heroism to discourage individual friendships and promote a more "impartial camaraderie." Thus Theresa admonishes her nuns not to make use of endearments and affectionate words with one another because "they are very effeminate, and I do not want my sisters to seem like that in any way but rather to be like strong men." *Theresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*, p. 84-85.

47. Sidonie Smith, p. 55.

48. See "Lin-chi (Rinzai) Ch'an and Gender: The Rhetoric of Equality and the Rhetoric of Heroism in the Ch'an Buddhist Tradition," pp. 137-56.

49. *FZCY*, 1:33a.

50. *FZCY*, 1:30b.

51. Even after they had separated and gone to their own hermitages and convents, they often visited each other and invited each other on a more formal basis to present dharma talks and conduct various religious functions. In addition, they provided both economic and moral support when any of them needed a place to retreat or to recuperate from illness.

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