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WOMEN AND GENDER IN THE DISCOURSE RECORDS OF SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY SICHUANese CHAN MASTERS POSHAN HAIMING AND TIEBI HUIJI

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This article explores the textual presence of nuns and laywomen in the official discourse records of two of the most well-known and influential seventeenth-century Chan Buddhist masters active in mid-seventeenth-century Sichuan: Tiebi Huiji (1603–68) and Poshan Haiming (1597–1666). Close readings of the poems, sermons, and occasional letters composed to or about their female monastic disciples and lay followers shed light on the range of attitudes — from condescension and ambivalence to apparently genuine concern and admiration — held by these masters regarding women’s spiritual practice and aspirations. These readings also demonstrate the extent to which these masters shaped their words, within the limits of literary and religious convention, to suit the particular life circumstances and religious aspirations of each of the women to whom their texts are addressed. In other words, they appear to have taken these women’s aspirations seriously and, in one case at least, even go so far as to formally name a female dharma heir. These texts also suggest that there were a small but significant number of women Chan practitioners active in Sichuan during this period, women for whom there is very little information in other sources.

KEYWORDS: Tiebi Huiji, Poshan Haiming, women, gender, Sichuan

Thanks to path-breaking studies by Miriam Levering, Evelyn Ding-hwa Hsieh, and others, we are now familiar with a number of religiously accomplished women from the Tang and Song dynasties such as Liu Tiemo 劉鐵磨, Moshan Liaoran 末山了然, Miaodao 妙道, and Miaocong 妙總 (1095–1170). In the case of Miaodao and Miaocong’s teacher, the great Song dynasty master Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲 (1089–1163), we also have a clear idea of at least one male master’s views of women’s religious potential. However, we know much less about women Chan practitioners from later periods.¹ This does not mean, however, that they are

¹ See, for example, Miriam Levering, “Miao-tao and Her Teacher Dahui,” in *Buddhism in the Song*, edited by Peter N. Gregory and Daniel A. Getz, Jr., (Kuroda Institute Studies in East Asian Buddhism. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1999), 188–219; Miriam Levering, “Women Ch’an Masters: The Teacher Miao-tsung as Saint,” in *Women Saints in World Religions*, edited by Arvind Sharma (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 180–204; and Ding-hwa E. Hsieh, “Images of Women in Ch’an Buddhist Literature of the Sung Period,” in Gregory and Getz, 148–87.

completely invisible. In fact, a closer look at the discourse records (*yulu* 語錄) of Chan masters from the Ming and Qing periods can sometimes shed unexpected light on the presence of such women, some of whom clearly played roles beyond those of mere donor or devotee.

The focus of this paper is on women in the *yulu* of two well-known seventeenth-century Linji 臨濟 Chan masters from Sichuan: Poshan Haiming 破山海明 (1597–1666), also known as Poshan Tongming 破山通明, and Tiebi Huiji 鐵壁慧機 (1603–68).² Sichuan boasted a long history of famous Chan masters, including Mazu Daoyi 馬祖道一 (709–88), founder of the influential Hongzhou school of Chan Buddhism and Dahui Zonggao's dharma master, Yuanwu Keqin 圓悟克勤 (1063–1135), who compiled the *Biyan lu* 碧岩錄 (Blue Cliff Record). However, by the late Ming, many of Sichuan's Buddhist establishments had fallen into disrepair and there were few Buddhist masters of any note. The revival of Buddhism in the seventeenth century was largely due to the activities of Chan monks such as Tiebi Huiji and Poshan Haiming. They were among the most respected and influential religious figures in Sichuan during the tumultuous period of the Ming-Qing transition, and their respective lines continued to dominate the religious landscape of southwest China until recent times.

While they belonged to different Linji lineages — Poshan was a dharma successor of Miyun Yuanwu 密雲圓悟 (1565–1641) and Tiebi a dharma heir of the Sichuanese master Chuiwan Guangzhen 吹萬廣真 (1582–1639) — they had close connections with each other and both counted many women among their followers. Poshan's collection, for example, includes texts addressed to more than a dozen different nuns and as many laywomen, and Tiebi, as we shall see, even had an official female dharma heir. While these texts do not offer us very much detailed information about the women themselves, when considered *in toto*, they do provide invaluable insight into the nature of these two important seventeenth-century Chan masters' general attitudes towards questions of gender and, more importantly, the nature of their interactions with women practitioners, as well as the kinds of religious guidance and support they offered them.

Tiebi Huiji, whose secular surname was Luo 羅, was born in 1603 to a scholarly family from Yingshan 營山 in northeast Sichuan province. His father died when he was only eight, after which he appears to have spent most of his time with his mother engaged in Buddhist devotional activities. Desiring to pursue his religious interests further, in 1622 he went into closed retreat (*biguan* 閉關) in the mountains near Dazhu 大竹, located about 100 miles northeast of Chongqing. A few years later, he took ordination as a monk under Linji Chan master Chuiwan Guangzhen, who claimed to be the fourteenth-generation heir of the great Song dynasty Linji Chan master Dahui Zonggao. Upon Chuiwan's death in 1639, Tiebi took over the

² Hundreds of Ming-Qing discourse records found nowhere else are preserved in the *Jiaying Tripitaka* (*Jiangxingzang*) compiled and printed between 1579 and 1677. A reprint edition in forty volumes was published in 1987 by the Xinwenfeng Publishing Company in Taipei and is now available online through both the Chinese Buddhist Text Association (CBETA) and Chinese Buddhist Tripitaka Electronic Collection, Taipei Edition. In this paper, I will be using Poshan Haiming's twenty-fascicle collection, *Poshan chanshi yulu* (Discourse records of Chan Master Poshan) (J26, no. B177, hereafter *PSYL*) and Tiebi Huiji's *Qingzhong Tiebi Ji Chanshi yulu* (Discourse records of Qingzhong Temple Chan Master Tiebi) (J29, no. B241, hereafter *TBYL*).

leadership of Juyunsi 聚雲寺 in Chongqing. By the time Tiebi died in 1668, he had named over one hundred dharma successors who continued to make their mark on the Buddhist landscape of southwest China.

Poshan Haiming, whose secular name was Jian Dongyu 蹇棟宇, came from a distinguished Sichuan family — he was a descendant of Jian Yi 蹇義 (1363–1435) who had held high-ranking official positions in the early Ming court. By the time Poshan was born, however, the family had fallen on hard times and settled in Dazhu. Despite his precocious intelligence, Poshan was married off when he was only thirteen and shortly afterwards fathered a son. Only two years later Poshan's mother and father both passed away, the shock of which appears to have motivated him to shortly afterward leave home to become a monk.³ In 1617, Poshan left Sichuan and traveled to Huangmei 黃梅 county in Hubei province, where many centuries earlier the so-called Fourth and Fifth Chan patriarchs Daoxin 道信 (580–651) and Hongren 弘忍 (601–74) trained their students and where, according to tradition, the southerner Huineng 惠能 (638–713) received transmission as the Sixth Patriarch. There he spent three years of intensive and largely solitary religious retreat in a small hermitage on the slopes of Potoushan 破頭山 (from whence he took the name of Poshan) after which he traveled around the Jiangnan area studying with a succession of some of the most eminent teachers of the day, including Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (1546–1623) and Zhanran Yuancheng 湛然圓澄 (1561–1626), before finally receiving Dharma transmission from Linji master Miyun Yuanwu in 1627.

Poshan remained in the southeast for a few years as abbot of the Dongta 東塔 Temple in Jiaying 嘉興 (Zhejiang province) where he was highly regarded not only for his teaching but also for his artistic and poetic talents. Then, in 1632, he decided to return to his home province of Sichuan, where he spent the rest of his life actively engaged in teaching, writing, and the publication of Buddhist texts. By the time of his death in 1666, he had named as many as ninety dharma successors, many of whom would continue the Buddhist revival in different areas of Sichuan as well as in other parts of south China.

The contributions of Tiebi and Poshan to the Buddhist revival in southwest China were all the more remarkable given the fact that they were active during the Ming-Qing transition, a period of tremendous political and social instability. Sichuan in particular suffered greatly from the widespread destruction and violence by the notoriously ruthless rebel leader Zhang Xianzhong 張獻忠 (1606–46). Much of this violence was directed against the gentry, as well as other groups considered dangerous, including Buddhist monks.⁴

Poshan and Tiebi both harbored strong Ming loyalist sympathies. Their monasteries often served as important centers of relief for families seeking refuge. Many of their lay followers were men actively engaged in the military resistance against Zhang, as well as their wives and widows. During the mid-1640s, however, the

³ A contemporary lay biographer, scholar-official Liu Daokai 劉道開, would draw a parallel to the young Siddhartha Gotama's leaving behind his wife and son, Yasodhara and Rahula. See Liu Daokai, *Poshan heshang taming* 破山和尚塔銘 (Stupa inscriptions for Monk Poshan), *PSYL*, 100, 226–27.

⁴ See James Parsons, *Peasant Rebellions of the Late Ming Dynasty* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1970), 178.

situation was so dire that Poshan and Tiebi themselves were forced to seek protection. Their protectress was the famous “woman warrior” from Sichuan, Qin Liangyu 秦良玉 (1574–1648), the highly educated woman of Miao ethnicity, who after the death of her husband, the general Ma Qiancheng 馬千乘 (1570–1613), assumed leadership of his troops and for the rest of her long life fought tirelessly against both rebel and Manchu on behalf of the Ming.⁵ Qin appears to have been a strong Buddhist devotee, and was responsible for the restoration of the Sanjiaosi 三教寺, where both Poshan and Tiebi found refuge in the mid-1640s. Both Tiebi and Poshan appear to have served Qin in the capacity of what one might call spiritual advisors, and Poshan presided over her funeral services at the Sanjiao Temple when she died in 1648 at the age of seventy-five. Poshan’s discourse records include a letter addressed to Qin, and Tiebi’s records include a lengthy dharma discourse addressed to her, as well as one to her son Ma Xianglin 馬翔麟, who judging from his religious name Dengyou 燈佑, was also Tiebi’s formal lay disciple.

While Qin was an exceptional individual, and neither Poshan nor Tiebi regarded her as a typical woman, it is still interesting to see the kinds of religious counsel that they offered her. Not surprisingly perhaps, both monks are quick to remind her of the law of impermanence, as well as the ultimately illusory nature of all phenomena. In his letter to Qin, written when she was seriously ill and no doubt completely disheartened over the defeat of her troops, Poshan tries to console her by telling her that illness is not necessarily a bad thing:

Haven’t you heard that illness is an excellent teacher? The sages and saints of ancient times would, if three days passed without any illness, pray and beseech that they might fall ill. This is simply because they wanted others to understand that this body and mind have their limits, and not to make a thousand year plan. The experiences of a lifetime are but a dream, not to mention everything else.

胡不聞病為良導。上古聖賢，三日無病，祈禱求病。無非要人覺此有限身心，不作千年計耳。身世尚幻，況其他。⁶

In his long sermon dedicated to Qin, on the other hand, Tiebi focuses not so much on the illusory nature of the world as he does on the centrality of the mind in determining how one experiences that world. Thus, he opens his sermon with a famous quote from the twentieth chapter of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*: “If you want to comprehend all the buddhas of the three times, you must contemplate the nature of the dharma realm: everything is a creation of the mind.”⁷ He then continues as follows:

Awakened minds will manifest as great immortals, perfected sages, buddhas and patriarchs; deluded minds will manifest as hells, hungry ghosts,

⁵ For a detailed biography of Qin, see Arthur Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch’ing Period*, 2 vols. (rpt. Taipei: Nantian shuju, 2002), vol. 1, 168–69.

⁶ “Yu Shizhu ci Suzhen Qin xongjie 與石砮司素真秦總戎,” *PSYL*, 50, c13–15.

⁷ *Dafangguang Fo Huayanjing* 大方廣佛華嚴經 T10, no. 279, 102a–b.

Oxheads and Horsefaces. All are but creations of the mind [...] If you wish to gain insight to the Great Way, the Great Way is right in front of you: it is not characterized by male or female, birth or destruction, long-lasting or temporary, bitterness or joy.

心悟則為大賢、為至聖、為佛祖菩薩。心迷 則現地獄、現餓鬼、現牛頭。
 一切惟心造。
 若欲體會大道，大道只在目前。無男女相，無生滅相，無久暫相，
 無苦樂相。⁸

One wonders whether Qin, who had probably seen horrors on the battlefield more terrible than the descriptions of the Buddhist Hells guarded over by Oxhead and Horseface demons, would have found any consolation in knowing that they had all been but creations of the mind. It is worth noting, however, that the examples of the various types of illusory dyads created by the unenlightened mind provided by Tiebi include not only creation and destruction, but also male and female. This was probably intentional, since the same claim that gender is of ultimate irrelevance appears in many of his other texts addressed to women followers.

This insistence that gender is irrelevant when it comes to the enlightened mind represents what Miriam Levering calls the Chan “rhetoric of equality,” and can be traced back primarily to Dahui Zonggao.⁹ Dahui can be regarded as the first Chan master to really take women practitioners seriously, even going so far as to officially designate several of them as his Dharma heirs. Miaodao, Miaocong, and Lady Qinguo 秦國夫人 are the most well known of these women, and Dahui often refers to them in sermons and letters, usually in the context of the meditation method known as *kan huatou* 看話頭 (sometimes translated as “investigating the critical phrase”) that he is credited with systematizing.¹⁰ When speaking of these women disciples, and of the spiritual potential of women in general, Dahui would often say such things as: “This Way does not depend on being male or female, noble or base. Once you break through, you will be shoulder to shoulder with the Buddha.”¹¹ A number of seventeenth-century Linji monks followed Dahui’s example and, when speaking about or to women, often made use of this type of “rhetoric of equality.”¹² Tiebi Huiji’s indebtedness to Dahui is particularly explicit, not surprising given that

⁸ “Shi Xuanwei Qin Furen 示宣慰秦夫人,” *TBYL*, 591, a3–9.

⁹ See Miriam Levering, “Lin-chi Chan and Gender: The Rhetoric of Equality and the Rhetoric of Heroism,” in *Buddhism, Sexuality and Gender*, edited by Jose Ignacio Cabezón (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 137–56.

¹⁰ This method basically entailed using a single word or phrase (usually from a traditional anecdote or story of the old Chan masters) as a tool for deep meditative inquiry rather than conceptual interpretation or analysis.

¹¹ Quoted in Miriam Levering, “Miao-tao and Her Teacher Dahui,” 203. (Translation slightly modified.)

¹² There are titles of at least thirty *yulu* associated with late Ming and early Qing female Chan masters, most of whom were from the Jiangnan area, although unfortunately only those reprinted in the *Jiaying Tripitaka* remain extant today. For a detailed study of seven of these women, whose discourse records were fortunately preserved in the *Jiaying Tripitaka*, see Beata Grant, *Eminent Nuns: Women Chan Masters of Seventeenth-Century China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2012).

he claimed to be the great Song master fourteenth-generation dharma successor. A good example is a lengthy dharma instruction addressed to a certain Lady Luo 羅夫人 which begins:

The Great Way is not divided into north and south; much less is Buddha-nature divided into male and female. Each and everyone's nostrils brushes the Heavens, each and everyone's heels touches the earth.

大道不分南北，佛性豈別男女？人人鼻孔遼天，箇箇足跟點地。¹³

Master Tiebi then goes on to recount in detail the stories of two Song dynasty woman Chan masters, Zhitong 智通 (d. 1124) and Dahui's dharma successor Miaozong.¹⁴ Zhitong was the talented wife of a prime minister's son who, tiring of married life, returned home to ask her parents for permission to take ordination. When her father refused, she continued to practice at home until their death, after which she left in search of a master. Praised by many of the most eminent teachers of the day, she achieved awakening under Linji master Sixin Wuxin 死心悟新 (1043–1104). Ultimately she took ordination and became renowned for her skilled teaching as well as her philosophical writing and her poetry — the most famous of which Tiebi quotes in full. Tiebi also recounts the story of Miaozong, who as it happens was Zhitong's sister-in-law, again citing some of her verses as well as some of the more well-known accounts of her dharma exchanges with her teacher Dahui. Master Tiebi concludes his sermon as follows:

The pious woman Lady Luo bears the dharma name of Dengzhi. She was born into an official family and [also] married into an official family. In the midst of the hustle and bustle [of the world], She knew enough to turn her back and embrace on the Great Compassion. She wants to take refuge in the Three Jewels, has devoutly aspired to the Great Vehicle. But, the way of the Buddha is not distant; it can be found in none other than the supervision of one's maids and servants, in eating and dressing, in [how one] looks, listens, feels and knows, [in how] one recites the sutras and refrains from killing [for food]. If amidst all of this, one does not obscure the inner numinous light and [is able to] attain the functioning of the true reality, [then one can] become a modern day Kongshi, Miaozong, Dragon Girl, or Yueshang. Strive on!

羅氏善女法名燈智，生于宦門，于歸宦室。鬧熱場中，亟知回首，具大悲。願皈依三寶，志慕大乘。然佛法非遠，只在驅奴使婢處、喫飯穿衣處、見聞覺知處、持經戒殺處者，裏不昧靈光，得真實受用，又是今之空室、妙總、龍女、月上也。勉之。

In yet another text that addressed the wife of a prominent official, Tiebi refers to stories of Sichuan native Lady Qinguo. In a lengthy sermon designed both to honor Lady Qinguo and illustrate the efficacy of his methods of *huatou* investigation, Master

¹³ “Shi Luoshifuren 示羅氏夫人,” *TBYL*, 590, b4–c28.

¹⁴ For more on Chan women during the Song, see Hsieh 1999.

Dahui relates how having learned of these methods from one of his male disciples, she achieved awakening after an intense grappling with the phrase “The dog has no Buddha Nature”. As proof of her realization, Lady Qinguo sent Dahui a letter and several poems, including the following gatha:

Day after day I read the words of the sutras:
It is like meeting with friends from the past.
Do not say that they are difficult to understand:
Each time I pick one up, I find something new.

逐日看經文
如逢舊識人
莫言頻有礙
一舉一回新

In his sermon, Tiebi quotes Lady Qinguo’s verse in full, and then comments: “This is why it is said that the Dharma is one of equality, and is not [characterized] by high and low.”¹⁵ To emphasize his point, he goes on to proclaim “each and every person’s nose is vertical while their brows are horizontal; each and every person’s head touches the sky and their feet rest on the ground.”¹⁶

Notably, Tiebi also followed Dahui’s example by naming a woman Dharma successor of his own: Chan master Dengjian Miaode 燈鑑妙德. Unfortunately, we do not know much about her, although her ordination in 1657 was considered significant enough to note in Tiebi’s chronological biography (*nianpu* 年譜),¹⁷ and at least one recent scholar has called her “one of the most influential nuns in the lineage of Juyun.”¹⁸ Before becoming a nun, Dengjian was Lady Jiang 蔣. She and her husband had both taken the Buddhist precepts with Master Tiebi in 1653, at which time he was given the religious name of Dengyou 燈佑 and she Dengjian. During the third month of 1657, which is when next we hear of Lady Jiang, she is deep in the Tongbai 桐柏 Mountains in closed retreat under the strict supervision of Master Tiebi, who had himself engaged in these sorts of ascetic practices.

Lady Jiang was probably engaged in intensive practice of *huatou* meditation, where the primary goal was to utilize the assigned word or phrase to foster the “great doubt” which, once broken through, would give way to an unmediated insight into ultimate reality, that is, an experience of awakening. Indeed, we are told that Lady Jiang “entered deeply into her innermost self” and attained just such an insight, which was then officially certified as genuine by Master Tiebi, who marked the occasion by penning a *gatha*.¹⁹

It was only after this that Lady Jiang, along with a group of *bhikhunis*, took the full monastic precepts at which time she was given the religious name of Dengjian Miaode.

¹⁵ “Gao Tian er fu furen qing shangtang 高田二府夫人請上堂,” *TBYL*, 572, b22–30.

¹⁶ For a detailed discussion of this sermon, see Miriam Levering, “Lin-chi Ch’an and Gender,” 147–51.

¹⁷ *TBYL*, 673, b23–26.

¹⁸ Daojian 道鑑, *Chongqing Zhongzhou Fojiao yanjiu* (A study of Buddhism in Chongqing Zhongzhou) (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2012), 108.

¹⁹ Daojian, *Chongqing Zhongzhou fojiao yanjiu*, 108.

Xudeng Zhengtong 續燈正統, compiled by one of Master Tiebi's dharma successors (and thus Dengjian's dharma sibling), contains a brief entry on Dengjian which consists primarily of the following *gatha* of praise that she composed as a commentary to the line "Fundamentally there is nothing at all 本來無以物" from the verses in the *Platform Sutra* traditionally ascribed to Huineng, the Sixth Patriarch of Chan.²⁰

Originally there is no "thing" upon which dust can gather;
The rice hulled, the task completed, nothing left but winnowing.
At night after the third watch, the robe and bowl are transmitted;
The flower with its five petals at this moment has blossomed.

本來無物惹塵埃
米熟功成獨倩篩
衣鉢夜傳三鼓後
一花五葉至今開²¹

Tiebi's collection also includes a description of a dharma encounter involving a nun who asks the master: "Since the lioness eats meat, why does it not eat its cub?" Tiebi's reply: "Why does a person who has left the household bother about such trivial matters?"²² The name of this nun — Xingshi Miaode 惺世妙德 — appears again in the following *gatha* entitled "Instructions to Chan Follower Xingshi Miaode" (Zhu Xingshi Miaode chanren 囑惺世妙德禪人), which suggests that she may also have been one of his female disciples.

In Guishan's assembly there was one called Iron Grindstone
And then there was Moshan whose summit was not exposed.
Finally today we arrive straight to the lineage of Juyun,
With a wondrous awakening glowing fresh and radiant.

為山會裏名鐵磨
輪到末山不露頂
而今驀直聚雲宗
的的歷歷妙明惺²³

In this *gatha*, Tiebi places the nun firmly in a tradition of female Chan masters, which can be said to have begun with Liu Tiemo and Moshan Liaoran, and which he now claims is being continued by the lineage of his teacher Chuiwan Guangsheng. By extension, of course, Tiebi also places himself in the tradition of

²⁰ This well-known verse reads: The mind is the Bodhi tree,
The body is the mirror stand.
The mirror is originally clean and pure;
Where can it be stained by dust?

See Philip P. Yampolsky, trans., *The Platform Sutra: The Text of the Tun-Huang Manuscript* (rpt. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 132.

²¹ *Xudeng zhengtong*, CBETA X84, no. 1583 511, b19–21.

²² *TBYL*, 598, a5–6.

²³ *TBYL*, 614, b12–14.

their spiritual mentors, the Tang masters Guishan Lingyou 澠山靈祐 (771–853) respectively. As we have seen, Tiebi and Poshan traveled and taught in many of the same religious circles, so it is perhaps not surprising that Poshan's discourse records also include a poem addressed to this same nun. This poem, according to its title, was composed on the occasion of her return to her convent south of Chongqing, presumably after having paid a visit to his monastery. It is composed not as a *gatha* but rather as a pentasyllabic regulated verse:

Have a look at the swallows up in the rafters;
How they come and go as the need arises.
Having found some leftover nests from before,
Chattering without cease, they apply new mud.
Once they've fashioned a safe, peaceful place,
They think again about soaring into the clouds!
Who is the one who now flies up so very high?
Enduring hardship but her moral integrity intact.

試看梁上燕
來去自應時
得步舊巢跡
頻呼新阜泥
作成安樂處
復憶翬霄兒
高飛誰為誰
忍苦全其節²⁴

Due no doubt in part to the renewed interest in Dahui Zonggao among monks like Miyun Yuanwu who were intent on reviving what they regarded as the true spirit of the Linji lineage, the seventeenth century saw an unusual number of certified woman Chan masters. For example, at least six of Poshan's own dharma brothers each named a women dharma successor, and among Miyun's second-generation dharma successors there were even more. Most of these women were from the Jiangnan area, which during the seventeenth-century was an important center of women's literary culture as well as of Buddhism. However, as the references to Dengjian and Xingshi as well as other accomplished nun-practitioners in the discourse records of Tiebi and Poshan show, such women were also quite active in the southwest.

Poshan may have had at least one female dharma successor: Yinlan Zuru 印瀾足如.²⁵ We know little about her apart from the fact that after receiving dharma transmission from Poshan, she settled in the Long 龍 Mountains in northern Sichuan. There is no doubt, however, that he had women monastics as disciples, and his

²⁴ "Ni yan song Xingshi ni gui Zhongnan 擬燕送醒世尼歸忠南," *PSYL*, 82, b22–24.

²⁵ *Wudeng quanshu* (The complete genealogy of the Five Lamps), X82, no. 1571, 335, a15–20. A monastic by this name also appears in the index to the *Jinjiang Chandeng* (Chan Lamps of Jinjiang) as having received dharma transmission from Poshan (X85, no. 1590, 112, c.14). Both of these sources give the name as Zuru Lan 足如瀾.

discourse records include references to over a dozen different nuns. Most of these are *gatha*, written for the purposes of instruction or simply encouragement. Poshan's discourse records — like those of most of his counterparts — contains numerous verses of this sort, many written on request for his many lay and monastic followers. This does not mean, however, that they should all be dismissed as purely occasional or even perfunctory compositions. In fact, despite their brevity, in many cases they do appear to address a specific individual at a particular stage in their religious development. Thus, Poshan's verses addressed to nuns range from ones addressed to women just embarking on serious religious practice to those who appear to have already attained a higher level of realization. In the following verse addressed to a nun by the name of Qingxu 晴虛, for example, Poshan emphasizes that physically leaving home is easy compared to the hard work of religious practice and cultivation:

To leave the householder's life is easy, to study the Way is hard;
The hardest of the hard being the bonds that tie one to one's family.
But once you understand the source of both the difficult and the easy,
Like a wild goose, although hungry you freely roam heaven and earth.

出家容易學道難
難中最苦是家緣
若知難易從何處
野鶴無糧天地寬²⁶

In this verse, Poshan emphasizes that the most difficult thing about becoming a monastic is dealing with one's family bonds and attachments. He may be implying that such attachments represent more of a difficulty for women than it does for men, but he does not discourage her from pursuing this path. Indeed, he holds out the reward of a difficult but untethered freedom — like a wild goose that, although hungry, is free to roam the cosmos, unlike the domestic animal who while it may be well-fed, is caged and confined, and ultimately destined for the cooking pot.

We see a similar warning about the difficulties of divesting oneself of family ties and responsibilities in a text addressed to nun Foran 佛然. Unlike most such texts, in this case Poshan actually tells us a little bit about his interaction with her. Although the larger context is unclear, it would appear that Foran was from Dazhu and, having already been tonsured for the required time, had traveled to where Poshan was residing in order to receive full ordination. Poshan's remarks suggest that at first he may have been unwilling to accept her request for ordination, perhaps because he did not feel that she was quite ready, or that she had completely detached herself from her family situation:

The [nun] Foran is from my home region. She had the good fortune to leave the secular life and become a nun. Her heart set on the Way, she came to my place in order to receive full ordination. Upon her departure, she wanted a

²⁶ This poem is not in the *Jiaxing Tripitaka* version of Poshan's discourse records. It is cited in Xiong Shaohua 熊少華, *Poshan chanshi pingzhuan* (An analytical biography of Chan Master Poshan) (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2003), 219.

few Dharma words from me. It is not that this old monk was lacking in compassion; it was just that I was afraid that she was not yet strong enough in her [practice of] the Way, not to mention being burdened down with the responsibilities of husband and children. If she is really determined that this old monk [write] some lines to commend her aspiration, how could I refuse her? How about these two lines from an actualized *koan*:

Three times he got drunk at Yueyang without being recognized:
Until one morning someone stood out from a thousand others.

此佛然者，乃吾鄉人也。幸出俗為尼，有志於道。來老僧處受具足戒。臨行，欲老僧法語。非老僧吝慈，誠恐道力未堅，況有夫君兒子為累。若必欲老僧一言嘉志，老僧何敢辭之。只有兩句現成公案，何也？三醉岳陽人不識，一朝迴出萬人頭。²⁷

What Poshan offers Foran here is not just a *koan* (*gong'an*) but a *xiancheng gong'an* 現成公安, which can be defined as a koan that has already been completed or actualized ordinary life. For example, it is said that sometimes when the great Tang master Muzhou Daoming 睦州道明 (780?–877?) saw a monk approaching he would call out “The case is completed. I will spare you the thirty blows from staff!”²⁸ In this case, Poshan has come up with *koan* that appears to be not only of his own making, but also one that alludes to a popular story of the Daoist immortal Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓 who left Yueyang after realizing people who he had tried to inspire were not interested in the Way. Lü purportedly wrote the line “Three times he got drunk at Yueyang without being recognized.”

In another somewhat less enigmatic verse composed for Foran, Poshan makes even more explicit reference to the need for heroic courage: perhaps suggesting that the courage needed to become a nun is not unlike that needed to be a good loyalist. In this case, he ends with a more recognizably Chan *koan* for her to meditate upon as part of her practice.

Heroism and courage are never to be separated from;
Loyalty and filiality should be maintained to the end.
This old monk presents you with this parting phrase:
“Who is the one that is on top of the staff?”

肝胆從來不可別
為忠為孝盡于期
老僧為贈臨行句
拄杖頭邊個是誰²⁹

²⁷ “Shi ni Foran 示尼佛然,” *PSYL*, 47, a6–11.

²⁸ See Thomas Cleary and J. C. Cleary, trans., *The Blue Cliff Record* (Boston and London: Shambhala, 1992), 67 (the commentary to Case 10.)

²⁹ “Shi ni Foran,” *PSYL*, 63, a24–26.

In other texts, Poshan addresses nuns who are clearly more well established in their practice. In these, he offers advice, encouragement, and, in some cases, praise. In verse composed for a nun by the name of Tianran 天然, for example, he notes her feelings of contentment and lack of regret (*buwang* 不枉) at having made the decision to leave the life of the householder:

With a round hat and square robes: a “great gentleman,”
 Decorous whether moving or still she embodies Suchness.
 Time and time again, she gently pats down her monastic robes:³⁰
 Happy within the Empty Gate continuing the Patriarch’s line.³¹

圓頂方袍大丈夫
 威儀動靜體如如
 時時摸著衣線下
 不枉空門續祖圖

It is worth noting as well that, in referring to her as “*da zhangfu* 大丈夫,” “manly man,” or “great gentleman,” Poshan appears to be commenting on the extent to which Tianran’s monastic robes de-emphasize her femininity, as indeed they were intended to do. This degendering allows him to more easily place her literally “in the patriarchal picture” (*zutu* 祖圖) as a full-fledged member of the patriarchal lineage of Chan. Poshan makes use of the term *da zhangfu* again in the following verse addressed to the nun Xinyuan 心源:

Earnestly cultivating virtue and strictly keeping the precepts,
 Is equivalent to protecting the bright pearl [of Buddha-nature].
 If you fully understand both movement and quiescence,
 Then you can truly be regarded as a great gentleman.

精進持禁戒
 猶如護明珠
 若然知動靜
 真是大丈夫³²

These verses are examples of the second type of rhetoric often used by male Chan masters, which Levering calls the “rhetoric of heroism.” Commenting on, Dahui Zonggao’s use of such rhetoric in conjunction with the “rhetoric of equality” mentioned earlier, suggests two different possibilities. The first is that, in using the term *da zhangfu*, Dahui is sincerely celebrating “the freedom of humans from limiting category distinctions.”³³ The other possibility, of course, is that his use of this term implies an “unconscious condescension.”³⁴ As she rightly notes, the use of this

³⁰ The term Poshan uses is *yixianxia* 衣線下 which is equivalent to *jiasha* 袈裟 (Skt. *kāśāya*).

³¹ “Shi ni Tianran 示尼天然,” *PSYL*, 63, a6–8.

³² “Shi ni Xinyuan 示尼心源,” *PSYL*, 73, c9–10.

³³ Levering, “Lin-Chi (Rinzai) Ch’an and Gender,” 146.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 146.

metaphor “convey [s] the message that some women did merit the appellation, but that only extraordinary women could expect to do so, and then only at a discount.”³⁵ Although Poshan does not use this term very often, it is clear that, like many of his male counterparts, he also harbored an ambivalence, whether conscious or not, as to most women’s capacity for advancing to the highest levels of religious accomplishment.³⁶

Apart from this fact, however, it is also worth noting that vital importance of upholding the precepts is a motif that emerges again and again in Poshan’s instructions to both his male and female disciples. Thus, in praising Xinyuan for her firm adherence to the precepts, Poshan was emphasizing what was a central component of his teaching in general. As he writes to the nun Changle 常樂:

By taking the precepts and ascending to the rank of Buddha, you become one of Buddha’s children; when you give rise to the great causes and conditions, you will realize the principle of the Unborn. This is the teaching of the Buddha, the teaching that is also the principle of settling the mind. As the days stretch into months it will deepen: but you must always regard as precious the monastic precepts.

受戒登佛位，即同諸佛子，是大因緣生，便證無生理。以此是佛學，學亦安心旨，日久月又深，珍重威儀耳。³⁷

Indeed, for Poshan, it is the strict adherence to the precepts that would seem to be the main difference between the lay and monastic way of life. As he writes to the nun Xingkong 性空:

Leaving the household life and becoming a nun requires that the form be upright and the shadow straight: it means that one be meticulous about the thousand things one cannot do, the ten thousand things one cannot do. [Then] from within the tranquil ground [of being] one must search for a glimpse of who is the one [searching]. Whether walking or standing, sitting or lying down, who is ultimately in charge? [If you do this then] suddenly you will experience a breakthrough and for the first time be convinced that the nun has always been a woman.

出家為尼，務要形端影直。既是千不能萬不能正好。靜地裏討箇分曉看是阿誰。行住坐臥中，畢竟是誰主張。忽地看破，始信師姑原是女人做。³⁸

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ For a detailed study of the use of this terms in the writings of seventeenth-century monastics, see Beata Grant, “*Da Zhangfu*: The Rhetoric of Female Heroism in Seventeenth-Century Buddhist Writings,” *Nan Nü: Men, Women and Gender in China*, 10, no. 2 (2008), 177–211.

³⁷ “Shi ni Changle 示尼常樂,” *PSYL*, 82, b19–21.

³⁸ “Shi ni Xingkong 示尼性空,” *PSYL*, 47, a12–15.

As we can see from this passage, for all Poshan's emphasis on keeping the precepts, in the end the practice is the same: seeking the "actor" behind the daily activities of walking, standing, sitting, or lying down. The allusion in the last sentence is to the story of the Tang dynasty monk Zhitong, who was a student of the great master Guizong Zhichang 歸宗智常 (dates unknown). One night, as Zhitong was sitting in meditation, he suddenly shouted: "I have experienced the great enlightenment!" The next day Guizong Zhichang asked Zhitong what it was that he had realized, to which Zhitong replied saying: "It turns out that this nun is a female!"³⁹ While at first glance this may seem to be a statement of the obvious, it was clearly not just that, given that it was an observation made by someone who had had a glimpse of "things as they truly are." In other words, the ordinary seen through the enlightened eye is in fact somehow extraordinary. But what about Xingkong who is herself a nun? Presumably, if she were to utter the same sentence upon her own awakening, the meaning would be somewhat different. I would suggest the possibility that what she would realize is the ultimate "thus-ness" of her "conventional self," which in this case is indeed a woman. By applying conventional Chan gendered phrase usually used in the context of a monk's religious experience to describe a woman's experience of enlightenment, Poshan engages in a kind of double-gendering which in itself points to the ultimate emptiness of the labels of male and female, or indeed monks and nuns.

While Poshan placed considerable importance on both determination and the adherence to the precepts, it is important to note that he saw these as a foundational part of one's training, but still a means to an end rather than an end unto itself. Interestingly, one of Poshan's most explicit expressions of the dangers of becoming overly attached to the "form" of precepts at the risk of violating the spirit of wisdom and compassion appears in a poem addressed to a nun named Jianzheng 見微 after having been ordained by Poshan:

The one who keeps the precepts will not ascend to heaven; the one who breaks the precepts will not fall into hell. If you are able to understand the significance of this, [then] there will be no precepts that are not kept, and no life that is not liberated. This is the true [meaning] of adhering to the precepts. Strive on!

持戒之人不上天堂，犯戒之人不落地獄。若向此處理會得無戒不持，無生不度，即此是真持戒者。勉之。⁴⁰

More than half of Poshan's verses addressed to nuns can be read as words of encouragement, and sometimes praise, for their inner work towards awakening. An example is the following poem in which Poshan plays on the nun's religious name of 自慙:

If you say you are self-awakened, what are you awakened to?
And who is the one that knows that you are one who knows?

³⁹ This story, often used as a *koan*, can be found in *Wudeng huiyuan* (Compendium of five genealogies). See X80, no. 1565, 98, b14-20.

⁴⁰ "Shi ni Jianwei jiezi 示尼見微戒子," *PSYL*, 47, a24-26.

If walking, sitting or sleeping, you are completely at ease;
In this very body, a single thought reveals the truth.

若道自惺惺何物
阿誰知是箇中人
經行坐臥渾無事
只在當人一念真⁴¹

In a poem addressed to the nun Xizong 西宗 who has embarked on a closed solitary retreat, Poshan urges her to make the best possible use of this opportunity to “open the mind’s eye.”

One half faith and the other half doubt;
Three lifetimes and sixty kalpas is still slow!
If this time you do not open up the mind’s eye,
You’ll never measure up to nun Zongchi.

一半信兮一半疑
三生六十劫還遲
此回若不開心眼
難效當年尼總持⁴²

In this poem, Poshan urges Xizong to maintain a balance of trust in the efficacy of her practice, on the one hand, and the all-essential “great doubt” required to achieve a breakthrough when engaged in the practice of *huatou*. According to the *Four-Part Vinaya* (Sifen lü 四分律) practitioners on what for the Mahayana constitutes the lower path or *śrāvaka* vehicle (*shengwen sheng* 聲聞乘), require longer or shorter periods of practice in order to attain awakening. Those with sharp faculties (*ligen* 利根) can accomplish this goal in three lifetimes, while those of dull capacity (*dungen* 頓根) will need sixty kalpas. Poshan, in good Chan Buddhist fashion, considers even the former to be too slow: rather, Xizong should be able to achieve her goal before the end of her period of retreat! If she does not succeed, he half-playfully reminds her, she will have failed to measure up to the achievement of the nun Zongchi, said by tradition to have been the only woman among the four disciples of Bodhidharma.

While most of Poshan’s texts addressed to nuns are short four-line *gathas*, a handful of poems composed in eight-line regulated verse suggest a relationship less of master and disciple and more of fellow practitioner. An example is the following poem addressed to a nun by the name of Yihe 一喝.

How could this be the behavior of a novice:
A nun aspiring to the Way shouldn’t raise a son!
In the past this staff was disobedient and defiant,

⁴¹ “Shi ni Zixing 示尼自惺” *PSYL*, 63, a15.

⁴² “Shi ni Xizong guanzhu 示尼西宗關主,” *PSYL*, 62, c25–27.

Now she is pregnant with a belly-full of doubt!
 She lives in seclusion in Caiyuantuo,
 And yet she towers above the great Mount E [mei].⁴³
 If one day the white elephant is passed on to you,
 Do not ride away on it and upset all the donors!

如何可是沙彌行
 向道師姑莫養兒
 拄杖昔年曾觸忤
 及今懷滿肚皮疑
 幽居常在菜園沱
 卻勝中天一大峨
 白象有時輸與你
 莫將騎去惑檀那⁴⁴

Of particular note are the specific allusions Sichuan places, especially the “Great E” or Mount Emei 峨眉山, traditionally regarded by Buddhists to as the bodhimandala of Samantabhadra, whose mount is a white elephant. While I am not completely certain as to the meaning of the first two couplets, they appear to refer to the initial phase of religious instruction, perhaps characterized by a generous use of the master’s staff to both instruct and inspire. The belly-full of doubt probably refers to the inner state of great doubt that the practitioner of *huatou* Chan must nourish as a prelude to a spiritual breakthrough. What is interesting is the double-gendering: a celibate nun pregnant not with a child, but with the developing embryo of her Buddha-nature. Yihe, while not formally engaged in solitary retreat, appears to have lived and practiced in seclusion. The light-hearted tone of this poem may, of course, reflect a certain condescension on Poshan’s part. However, Poshan, who was known for his versifying, wrote many other such poems to fellow monks as well. So perhaps we can read it simply as an occasional verse offered to a fellow monastic that neither dismisses nor diminishes her spiritual dedication and aspirations.

Like Tiebi, Poshan also had many female lay followers, most of whom were either gentry wives or, in many cases, widows of Ming loyalists who had died fighting Zhang Xianzhong. Unfortunately it is impossible to identify many of these women since they are usually referred to only by their religious names (all of which begin with *yin* 印 or “seal” just as the religious names of Master Tiebi’s disciples for the most part being with *deng* 燈 or “lamp”). Nevertheless, the case of his female follower Yinzhen 印貞 was probably not unusual. Yinzhen was the religious name of Lady Liu 劉, the wife of the Sichuanese loyalist martyr, Tan Wen 譚文 (?–1659). Tan and his two brothers had joined forces with other Sichuan loyalists and engaged in fierce military resistance to Zhang. However, in 1659, Tan was killed by his two brothers because he refused to surrender to the Manchu forces who had been fighting Zhang Xianzhong as well.

⁴³ Poshan’s disciples were very active in reviving Buddhism on Mt. Emei.

⁴⁴ “Shi ni Yihe 示尼一喝,” *PSYL*, 62, c28–30.

All three brothers had been devout Buddhists and had maintained close relationships with several Buddhists masters in the Chongqing area. In fact, after Tan Zhi's capitulation, his entire family took refuge in Tiebi's monastery. Lady Liu, Tan's wife, was also a lay disciple, and we find a number of references to her in Poshan's discourse records. On one occasion, we are told, Lady Liu came to the Shangguitang to sponsor a meal for the monks, at which time she also requested a Dharma talk. The fact that she is described as coming together with her young son would suggest that she was already a widow, and that it was probably after her husband's death that she became more religiously active both in terms of her personal practice and her support of Poshan's monastery. In the following dharma instructions addressed to her, Poshan's primary emphasis is on the unchanging and ultimately non-dualistic "Buddha nature," here described as a drop of luminous light, that is untouched by life and death. He also suggests the emptiness of high rank and prestigious titles:

People in this world wish only for high rank and do not want to be lowly. Why don't they understand that glory is also subject to [the cycle of] life and death. High rank and low [are both] like dreams, like illusions, like shadows. But there within the indistinct and dark there is the drop of numinous light that is not obscured, and that has nothing to do at all with this samsaric world of life and death. This is what you need to clearly understand.

天地間人只欲貴而不欲賤，殊不知貴亦如是蓋生死。貴賤如夢、如幻、如影也。直是就中隱隱濃濃一點靈光不昧，與生死際頭一點用不著者，要分曉得明白。⁴⁵

We know even less about the other laywomen mentioned in Poshan's records. Most, however, are referred to as "Lady" (*furen* 夫人), which would indicate that they were wives or widows of loyalists. Like his teacher Miyun and other Linji Chan monks of the time, one of the primary practices he advocated was that of *huatou* meditation which, for laypersons, entailed going about all the one's ordinary and everyday activities, but always asking "who" it is that is actually drinking, eating, sleeping, walking, and so on. Poshan recommended this practice to both men and women, but occasionally his instructions are quite gender-specific. Thus, in a letter of instruction to a certain laywoman follower with the religious name of Yinle 印樂, Poshan writes:

As for the way of the female, she must carry out her duties to the utmost: she must carry out the ritual of serving to her husband, the ritual of teaching her sons and daughters, the ritual of respectfully attending to her guests. In each and every one of these [activities] there is nothing that is not [the Way].

既是坤道，當要盡禮。事夫君之禮、教兒女之禮、敬賓客之禮，法法頭頭無不是道。⁴⁶

⁴⁵ "Shi Yinzen Liu furen 示印真劉夫人," *PSYL*, 46, c22–26.

⁴⁶ "Shi Yinle shanren 示印樂善人," *PSYL*, 42, c17–19.

More often than not, however, Poshan's instructions are fairly gender-neutral, as we can see in the following dharma instructions addressed to a lay disciple Lady Zhang 張, where he writes:

This matter requires only that you have complete faith and stability, and that during every one of the twelve hours of the day, whether [drinking] tea or [eating] rice, you inquire who is the master. When you see through this, then you need fear neither life nor death, and once you have directly reached that place of no-doubt, then there will be no restrictions of male or female, just as there will be no separation between sage and commoner.⁴⁷

此事只要信得及，把得住。二六時中，
茶裏飯裏，一切處，看是阿誰主張此處，看得破當下無生死
可怖。直到那不疑之地，亦無男女相拘，亦無聖凡見隔。

And to a laywoman surnamed Wang 王, with the religious name of Yinxiang 印香。

The Great Way is not divided into male and female, for the reason that there are no distinctions to the Way. However, the term “Way” is a forced designation. It is [just a matter of] in the midst of both stillness and movement knowing who it is [that moves or is still]; in the midst of movement and stillness, not being attached to movement and stillness; in the midst of joy and anger, not being attached to joy and anger. This is the true liberation.⁴⁸

大道不分男女，祇緣不別乎道。然而道之一字，乃強名耳。
只在動靜中識者箇是誰，在動靜不著動靜，在喜怒不著喜怒，
此真解脫。

A similar idea appears in an instruction addressed to a certain Lady Mo 牟 where Poshan refers to the non-duality of male and female explicitly rather than as simply one of a series of binary pairs: “[Buddha nature] is something that with which each and every person is originally endowed, it cannot be limited by the forms of male and female.”⁴⁹

For all his insistence on the dangers of labels and the ultimate emptiness of dualities such as that of male and female, Poshan does not completely avoid

⁴⁷ “Shi Hanzhang Zhang furen 示含章張夫人,” *PSYL*, 46, c27–47, a1.

⁴⁸ “Shi Yinxiang Wang shanren 示印香王善人,” *PSYL*, 43, a5–8. As we have seen, the phrase “The Great Way is not divided into male and female” can be found in the writings of many seventeenth-century Chan monks. Interestingly, Poshan takes this a step further by questioning not only the distinction between male and female, but also the dangers of trying to define the Great Way itself. In so doing, he draws, in characteristically ecumenical fashion, on Chapter Five of the *Daodejing* where we find the statement: “I do not know its name, and I give it the designation of the Way (Dao). Making an effort (further) to give it a name, I call it the Great.” (吾不知其名，字之曰道，強為之名曰大).

⁴⁹ “Tan Zongfu Mo furen qing kaishi 覃總府牟夫人請開示,” *PSYL*, 27, c6–16.

slipping into the rhetoric of heroism, in which women are described as honorary males, although such instances are rare. One appears in a dharma talk delivered on the occasion of the cremation ceremony of a woman with the religious name of Fahui 發慧, where Poshan remarks that “[Inhabiting] a woman’s body [but possessed of] a man’s determination, she adhered to the precepts, investigated Chan, and cultivated and practiced the True Cause.”⁵⁰ It is worth noting, however, that Fahui was not an ordinary laywoman, but one who had received formal lay ordination, that is an *upāsikā*. It may well be then, that in emphasizing her “male determination,” Poshan is referring to Fahui’s desire to make an additional level of commitment to religious practice, one that required a more stringent adherence to the moral precepts as well as a more focused investigation of Chan beyond the *huatou* of daily domestic life.

Mention should also be made of the interesting case of Granny Zhu (Zhu pozi 朱婆子) who appears twice in accounts of Poshan’s sermons where, much in the manner of the old Tang dynasty grannies, she engages in a spirited exchange with the Master. In one of these, Granny Zhu asks:

“Your disciple now [inhabits] a female body, but I still don’t know whether [the body] I had before my father and mother were born was male or female.” The Master [Poshan] held up his staff and said: “Do you know what this is?” [The old woman] came forward and said: “It does not come and does not go.” The Master said: “What is the place that it resides [beyond] all this talk of coming and going; all this talk of male and female.” [The old woman] came forward and said: “And now, what about?” The Master said: “It would be better to give you thirty blows.”

“弟子現是女身，未知父母未生前是男是女？”
師卓拄杖云：“還識者箇麼？”進云：“無去無來。”師云：“是甚麼所在？說來說去，說男說女。”進云：“即今如何？”師云：“好與三十棒。”⁵¹

Interestingly, both exchanges between Poshan and Granny Zhu are also recorded in the *Continuation of Records of Pointing at the Moon* (*Xu Zhiyue lu* 續指月錄), a collection of brief biographies of Chan active from the Song up through its publication in 1679,⁵² that as indicated by the title, was designed as a continuation of the *Records of Pointing at the Moon* (*Zhiyue lu* 指月錄) published in 1602, in which the last entry belonged to Song master Dahui Zonggao. The entries for each Chan master in these collections are usually quite brief, and consist of a paragraph or two of biographical data followed by a handful of representative teachings, often in the form of “encounter dialogues.” In the case of more recent masters such as Poshan, such dialogues, although patterned on those of the great masters of the past, can be regarded as “new” koans. In other words, Granny Zhu appears to have played a similar role in relation to Poshan as did the old, often nameless, women in the encounter dialogues of Linji and other Tang masters.

⁵⁰ “Wei Fahui Youpoyi jukan 為發慧優婆夷舉龜,” *PSYL*, 91, c25–92, a2.

⁵¹ “Zhu Pozi wen 朱婆子問,” *PSYL*, 29, a22–25.

⁵² This story can be found in *Xu Zhiyue lu*, *Xuzangjing*, vol. 84, 133c–34a.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The primary purpose of this article has been simply to demonstrate the extent to which nuns and laywomen constitute important threads that run, usually unnoticed, through the textual discourse of these two eminent seventeenth-century monks from Sichuan. The more carefully one reads Tiebi Huiji and Poshan Haiming's discourse records, the more one is struck by the quiet but unmistakable embedded presence of women: as rescuers, as donors, as disciples, as interlocutors, and, yes, as religious metaphors. Poshan and Tiebi's texts at times reiterate traditional notions of female religiosity as best restricted to the domestic sphere, and suggest a certain ambivalence about women who aspire to more than this. But at other times Tiebi and Poshan's claims that male and female represent just another duality to be discarded as illusory are solidly rooted in their religious conviction that all beings possess the inherent capacity for enlightenment. By the same token, neither Tiebi nor Poshan lump all women together, but rather shape their words, within the limits of literary and religious convention, to suit the particular circumstances of each of the women about or to whom they write. In other words, while we may certainly catch an occasional whiff of condescension, whether conscious or not, it is apparent that both monks took their women followers seriously and did not simply dismiss their religious aspirations. It is worth noting as well that, while the selection of texts discussed in this paper were chosen primarily because they are "gendered" in one way or another, many of these two eminent monks' instructions addressed to women make no mention of gender at all, an indication perhaps that they did not consider it to be of central importance when it came to questions of religious practice and realization. And, finally, although in this paper we have been looking at religious women primarily through the lens of their male monastic mentors, these refracted glimpses suggest that, in the seventeenth century, they were as active in southwest China as they were in the Jiangnan area.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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