



# Daughters of Emptiness

*Poems of Chinese Buddhist Nuns*

**BEATA GRANT**

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The incense in the Han halls has dispersed,  
the blue birds are gone,  
In the autumn chill of the Hou Mountains  
the jade pipes grow faint.  
In the ashes I can make out the remnants  
of sadness and sorrow,  
As alone I face the human world,  
wrapped in the robes of a nun.

— **Jingwei, in seventeenth-century China**

Women played major roles in the history of Buddhist China, but given the scarcity of the remaining records, their voices have all but faded. In *Daughters of Emptiness*, Beata Grant renders a great service by recovering and translating the enchanting verse — by turns assertive, observant, devout — of forty-eight nuns from sixteen centuries of imperial China. This selection of poems, along with the brief biographical accounts that accompany them, affords readers a glimpse into the extraordinary diversity and sometimes startling richness of these women’s lives.

“Beata Grant’s deft and elegant translations, together with her informative introduction and the brief biographies she provides for each of her judiciously selected poets, disclose fascinating but hitherto concealed or ignored dimensions of Chinese women’s spirituality and literary creativity.”

— **Professor Robert M. Gimello, Harvard University**

“A landmark collection of exquisite poems scrupulously gathered and translated by Beata Grant. Grant provides an impressively compact and readable overview of the changing fortunes of Buddhist nuns in China, from the fourth century to the present.”

— ***Buddhadharma***

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## PREFACE

BUDDHIST POETRY CONSTITUTES an important, although often undervalued, tributary of the Chinese poetic tradition: anthologies and other sorts of collections often included the works of monk-poets such as Hanshan and Jiaoran of the Tang dynasty (ca. 618–ca. 907) as well as the Buddhist-inspired verse of many of the great poets of the tradition, such as the Tang dynasty poets Wang Wei and Po Juyi and the Song dynasty poet Su Shi (ca. 1037–ca. 1101). Less known, however, is the fact that there were also a significant number of poet-nuns as well as ordinary laywomen who wrote Buddhist-inspired verse. They were by no means numerous: if the idea of men becoming monks and abandoning their familial responsibilities was never fully accepted in Confucian China, the notion of women becoming nuns and failing to fulfill their procreative duties or, as the case might be, leaving the protective shelter of fathers, husbands, or sons, was looked upon with even less favor. Still, whether due to warfare and displacement, difficult personal or financial circumstances, or simply determined religious aspiration, many women did become “daughters of emptiness.” And, as this selection of translations demonstrates, many of them did write poetry; and some of them wrote very good poetry indeed.

Poems by Buddhist nuns are to be found scattered in various different sources; a very, very few in collections of their own, somewhat more in anthologies of women’s poetry, and many others embedded in biographical and other sorts of anecdotal and historical accounts. None are available in the annotated editions that have often been compiled for their more famous male counterparts. Lacking these editorial and scholarly supports, I have had to rely even more than usual on the generous advice and expertise of many colleagues and friends. First of all, I wish to express my appreciation to Professor Wilt L. Idema, who has been a wonderful mentor in the art of translation, and has consistently

provided me with sometimes much-needed encouragement and support. I also owe a debt of gratitude to the late Professor John McCrae for encouraging me to rethink some of my translations and for clarifying my introduction, as well as to my colleague at Washington University, Professor Robert E. Hegel, who kindly read the introduction to this book and offered his usual succinct and insightful editorial advice. The editorial advice and moral support of these colleagues has been generous indeed; any errors of fact, translation, or interpretation remain, of course, mine alone. Last, but by no means least, I want to express my gratitude and admiration for the expertise and dedication of the editorial and production staff at Wisdom Publications: they have been a pleasure to work with from beginning to end.

I would like to dedicate this book to my parents, Robert and Carolyn Grant, who early on provided me with an abiding appreciation for the beauty and power of the written word, as well as with constant reminders of what Chinese Buddhist poets have always known: that which is of greatest importance often lies far beyond words.

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## INTRODUCTION

MANY WESTERN READERS are familiar with poetry written by Chinese Buddhist monks, perhaps the most famous of which is that collected under the name of the elusive Buddhist recluse Hanshan, or Cold Mountain.<sup>1</sup> They may also be familiar with poetry written by Japanese Buddhist nuns such as Otagaki Rengetsu (ca. 1791–ca. 1875).<sup>2</sup> Until now, however, there have been no translations of poetry written by Chinese Buddhist nuns. That such poetry exists may come as a surprise to some, given the widely held belief that, unlike the case of Japan, there were very few women writers in China before the modern period. However, the fact that there are now two anthologies of translations into English of Chinese women's writing of the imperial period, both of which are many hundreds of pages long, should put that misapprehension firmly to rest.<sup>3</sup>

Poetry writing assumes, of course, a fairly high degree of literacy. This is particularly true in the case of traditional Chinese poetry, which requires a mastery not only of the classical language but also, because of the frequent use of intertextual references and allusion, of the larger literary tradition, including poetry, history, and philosophy. This is one of the reasons why women poets are considerably less represented in the Chinese poetic tradition. In China, literacy and literature were traditionally looked upon largely as a means to an end, the end being not so much self-expression and aesthetic fulfillment as an official post in the imperial bureaucracy. Because women were excluded from this career goal, it was not considered vital — indeed many felt it to be morally dangerous — that they be provided more than a rudimentary education, if any at all.

Nevertheless, a significant number of women, mostly from elite families, of course, did manage to obtain the classical education that was necessary if they were to write. Such educated women writers can be

found throughout the entire imperial period; one of the earliest was Ban Zhao (ca. 45–116). For many women writers from the earlier periods we have only a handful of poems, or even just a single poem. From the seventeenth century and onward, however, we have significantly more poems by Chinese women writers: we know the titles of at least three thousand collections of poetry composed by women, one third of which are still preserved. This was due to momentous economic and social changes in Chinese society (which meant that more elite women were afforded education in the literary arts as well as the domestic ones) and to a veritable explosion in book-printing technology and publishing. Not surprisingly, we find the same pattern in the case of Buddhist nun-poets. Although the records contain the names of Buddhist nuns from the earlier periods of Chinese history known to have been highly educated and even famous for their literary talents, only rarely were any of their writings preserved. Of the many women of later periods whose writings have been collected and anthologized, there was also a small but significant number of Buddhist nuns. Indeed, many of these nuns had established reputations as *cainü*, or “talented women,” even before they entered the religious life.

The reason the writings of these Buddhist nuns has received so little attention is due, in part, to the fact that Buddhist nuns in general have occupied a marginal place in the eyes of both male scholar-officials and Buddhist monastics; over the long span of Chinese history the men were the ones responsible for compiling official histories, genealogical records, and poetic anthologies. Thus, although the percentage of Buddhist nun-poets was quite small compared to that of their male counterparts, it was probably always greater than the extant texts and records would indicate. In any case, the reader needs to bear in mind that the nuns and the poems presented in this translation are shadows and echoes of a world that, given the paucity of sources, we will never be able to recover fully.

### *Writing Nuns in China: A Brief History*

Buddhism found its way to China in the first century of the Common Era, and although the orthodox lineages of nuns did not begin until several centuries later, according to at least one source, a Chinese woman by the name of A Pan became a Buddhist nun as early as 67 C.E.<sup>4</sup> The first ordained Chinese Buddhist nun, however, is traditionally considered to be



Jingjian (ca. 292–ca. 361), a woman from an educated, elite family who was inspired by reading some of the Buddhist sutras that had been translated into Chinese. She sought out a monk from Kashmir who explained to her that since the Buddhist monastic code or Vinaya with the rules and regulations had not yet come to China, he would not be able to give her a full ordination. She would, however, be able to take the preliminary vows of a novice, that is, the ten precepts (to refrain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, intoxicants, indulging in singing, dancing, or the playing of music, self-adornment, sleeping on a high bed, eating after midday, and handling money). Jingjian took the tonsure, along with twenty other women of similar resolve, and the women took up residence in the Bamboo Grove Convent, located in the capital of Loyang. Subsequently, she “supported and cared for her community of disciples [and] observed the monastic rules with purity and distinction.”<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the power of her preaching was likened to the power of the wind under which the grass cannot help but bend.<sup>6</sup>

We know about Jingjian and other eminent nuns from this formative period of Chinese Buddhism thanks to Baochang, a monk at the court of the Liang dynasty, who in the year 516 compiled a collection of sixty-five accounts of nuns from the two preceding centuries entitled *Lives of the Nuns* (*Biqiuni zhuan*). Although these accounts are indisputably hagiographic in nature, the factual detail they contain is enough to provide a vivid picture of the first Chinese Buddhist nuns. What quickly becomes evident is that these first nuns exerted unprecedented authority, political and social as well as moral, not only within their own monastic communities, but in society at large. The nun Miaoyin, for example, was in the year 385 appointed the abbess of a convent in Loyang that had been built for her by the grand tutor. Subsequently, many people, both monastic and lay, aristocratic and common, rich and poor, came to her bearing gifts and hoping that she would use her influence on their behalf. As Baochang tells us, every day would find over a hundred horse-drawn chariots at the doors of her convent.<sup>7</sup>

Fifty-three of the sixty-five nuns represented in Baochang’s collection are described as being able to read and write — at a time when girls and women were rarely afforded an education. Lingshou (fourth century), for example, is said to have “widely perused all kinds of books, and, having read a book through only once, she was always able to chant it by heart.”<sup>8</sup>

A near contemporary text, *A Record of Buddhist Monasteries in Loyang*, compiled in the year 547 by Yang Xuanzhi, also provides a glimpse into these often quite wealthy convents. In the Jingluo Convent, for example, “Halls and corridors encircled each other, while inner rooms followed one after another. Soft branches brushed the windows; blooming flowers covered [every inch] of the courtyard... as this was a nunnery, no male visitors were [ordinarily] admitted, but those who were permitted to come in for a look considered themselves as having paid a visit to paradise.”<sup>9</sup>

Of the Hutong Convent in Loyang, we are told that “with its many suites of spacious rooms, fitted with symmetrical windows and doors, red pillars and white walls, it was the height of elegance and beauty. The nuns here were among the most renowned and accomplished in the imperial city, skillful at preaching and discussing Buddhist principles. They often came to the palace to lecture on Dharma....”<sup>10</sup> These nuns were known for a wide diversity of talents, including chanting, preaching, asceticism, monastic discipline, and meditation. Several were also admired for their literary gifts. Daoyi (fourth century), for example, is described as being “intelligent, quick-witted, widely learned, and [possessing an] excellent memory.”<sup>11</sup> Miaoyin, the influential abbess mentioned above, was “well versed in subjects both inner and outer [secular and sacred] and was skilled at composing literary essays” and often “would engage in discussions and write compositions” in the company of court scholar-officials and even the emperor himself.<sup>12</sup> This early period can, in many ways, be considered the heyday of Buddhist nuns in China, a time when they were accorded a respect and exerted an influence unheard of again until contemporary times. Unfortunately, however, no writings by these early Chinese nuns — apart from the one poem by Huixu (431–99) included in this book — have been preserved.

After the Liang dynasty (502–57), either the number of Buddhist nuns engaged in literary and intellectual activities diminished considerably, or else, in the absence of another Baochang, no record was kept of their activities. One of several possible reasons for this was the stricter enforcement of the Vinaya for women in the late sixth century and afterward. According to some scholars, this female monastic code, burdened as it was with the so-called Eight Special Rules,<sup>13</sup> which ensured the subservience of nuns to monks, reinforced the indigenous Confucian

emphasis on the social submission of women to men and in so doing greatly restricted the social mobility of Buddhist nuns.

Sometime between 335 and 342 a monk named Sengjian acquired a copy of a Mahasanghika Vinaya for nuns (no longer extant), which was translated into Chinese in Loyang in 357. It was only after the translation of this text that Chinese Buddhists began to have a clearer notion of the rules of the female sangha, and in particular the stages of ordination, beginning with that of novice and culminating in full ordination and the taking of the full range of precepts. That same year Jingjian and four other women received a more formal ordination by a foreign monk named Tanmojie. Baochang points out that although some objected to the fact that these women were not being ordained in the presence of the requisite number of senior nuns and monks, this did not deter Jingjian and her Dharma sisters from devoting themselves to the religious life with complete dedication.

In the year 429 a missionary monk and eight nuns from Sri Lanka arrived in China and asked how it was that the Chinese nuns had been able to be ordained. According to Baochang's account, a nun named Huikuo (ca. 364–433) explained to him that, in the absence of an established Chinese female sangha, they had accepted the monastic rules in the same way that Mahaprajapati Gotami, the Buddha's aunt, traditionally considered to be the first Buddhist nun, had accepted ordination directly from the Buddha.<sup>14</sup> Unwilling to cast doubt on the authenticity of her predecessors, Huikuo nevertheless became concerned about the validity of the ordination of both herself and her disciples. In 434 eleven more nuns came from Sri Lanka, and three hundred Chinese nuns were re-ordained according to the orthodox procedures.

If authenticity was a concern for Huikuo, lay donors may have been equally concerned with the purity and moral discipline that a stricter monastic code could presumably provide. It is probably safe to say that this concern for the enforcement of vVinaya rules reflects the traditional suspicion, in Buddhist India as well as China, about the morality of women living in independent communities without the supervision of fathers, husbands, and sons. In fact, during the Tang dynasty (618–907), we find that much of this obsession with the supposed moral laxity of both monks and nuns, but in particularly the latter, was to be found among (largely

Confucian) opponents of Buddhism. Their concerns were not entirely without foundation.

For one thing, convents had increasingly become havens not only for women with strong religious vocations, but also, and perhaps even primarily, for women in need of refuge, whether from poverty, the vulnerability of the childless widow, or other sorts of familial and social discord. The number of nuns increased greatly during this period. According to one account, during the reign of the emperor Xuanzong (r. 713–41), there were at least 50,567 registered nuns in comparison to 75,524 monks, making up 40 percent of the entire monastic population.<sup>15</sup> The significantly larger number of inhabitants in these nunneries resulted in a lower level of education and, consequently, an overall lower standing in the eyes not only of the male Buddhist clergy but also of lay donors. This may explain the relative absence of references to spiritually and intellectually accomplished Buddhist nuns in the official records of the time, although given these large numbers of nuns, surely there must have been at least a few. As Valentina Georgieva notes, “monks deemed the deeds of nuns neither significant nor useful in propagating the religion and attracting more donations.”<sup>16</sup>

Another reason for the invisibility of writing nuns at this time is that many educated Buddhist nuns served primarily as preachers and educators in the many special religious establishments that were set up within the inner quarters of the palace precincts during this period. These convents were designed primarily to serve the needs of the many thousands of women who made up the imperial harem, as well as women of the royal family or of high officials associated with the court. Given the secluded and largely hidden world of the palace in general and its women’s quarters in particular, coupled with the traditional Confucian inhibition against women teaching and speaking in public, few of these women ever had the opportunity to reach a larger audience, either through their preaching or their writings.

Despite the absence of extant writings, there were literate and literary nuns during the Tang dynasty. Feng Yuan, whose Dharma name is unknown, was the daughter of a high official from Loyang. After the death of her husband, also a high official, she was inducted into the Inner Palace where, unwilling to join the ranks of palace women, she became a Buddhist nun. She left behind a collection of poetry, which unfortunately

has not survived.<sup>17</sup> Another daughter of a high official surnamed Xue who decided to become a nun after being inducted into the Inner Palace was known for her “talent and learning.”<sup>18</sup> Another eminent nun was Fadeng (640–729), who apparently divorced her husband in order to enter the religious life. She was subsequently appointed abbess of the Xingsheng Convent in Chang’an by Emperor Xuanzong, who also received religious instruction from her. She later retired from her duties and devoted herself to the recitation, copying, and explication of the sutras, for which she gained recognition among both monastics and lay followers.<sup>19</sup>

There are also references to women embedded in the many stories of the Tang dynasty Chan Buddhist masters. (Note that although the Chinese romanization “Chan” is familiar to most readers in its Japanese romanized form of “Zen,” “Chan” will be used throughout this book.) They include Liu Tiemo, or Grindstone Liu, a disciple of the famous Chan master Guishan Lingyou (771–853), whose nickname gives some indication of her powerful charisma, and Moshan Liaoran, who became famous for the “Dharma battle” in which she bested the arrogant monk Guanqi Zhixian, who, in admiration of her insight, became a gardener at her convent for three years. In this dialogue Moshan tries to get Guanqi Zhixian to understand that there is no essential, unchanging essence that one can call “man” or “woman.” Moshan Liaoran is the only Tang dynasty nun who has a record of her own in the *Jingde chuandeng lu* (*The Transmission of the Lamp of the Jingde [Period]*).<sup>20</sup>

There was a fair number of literate women during the Tang both from the upper echelons of society and from the courtesan quarters. However, most of the few well-known women poets from this period, including Xue Tao (758–831), Li Jilan (d. 784), and Yu Xuanji (b. 848?), were Daoist, rather than Buddhist, nuns. When it comes to poetry written by Buddhist nuns, the only example included in the massive *Quan Tang shi* (*Complete Poetry of the Tang Dynasty*) is by Haiyin, who lived during the last part of the Tang dynasty and was associated with the Ciguang Convent in what is today Sichuan province.

There continued to be a large number of Buddhist nuns during the Song dynasty (960–1279) as well. According to one source, in 1019 there were at least 15,643 fully ordained nuns, and only two years later there were 61,239 fully ordained nuns, making up about 13 percent of the entire monastic population at that time. These figures do not include postulants

and novices, or nuns who may have been privately ordained and thus not officially registered. It would seem, moreover, that in the Song dynasty convents offered women a far more respectable social role than they did during the Tang. Part of the reason for this, according to one scholar, is that having a daughter enter the convent became an acceptable way of resolving the financial dilemma posed by the growing trend of providing handsome dowries in order to cement relations between the families of the newly emergent scholar-official class.<sup>21</sup> As Ding-hwa E. Hsieh notes, “the fact that these scholar-officials did not hesitate to include pious daughters in their funerary eulogies for the deceased may indicate that during the [Song] the upper class in general... viewed the monastic life as an acceptable vocation for its women to pursue.”<sup>22</sup> Another reason was clearly related to the Song court’s establishment of a new policy whereby nuns were allowed not only to ordain their own female disciples, but also to run their convents without having to rely on the authority of the male monastic sangha. According to the Eight Special Rules, nuns were required not only to defer to monks, but also to be ordained in the presence of at least ten senior monks as well as at least ten senior nuns — the so-called dual ordination. This tradition had been maintained ever since the fifth century, when the arrival of a group of Singhalese nuns in China made possible the full ordination of women. However, in 972 Emperor Taizu (r. 960–72) issued an edict to the effect that from that time onward qualified women who desired to enter the Buddhist monastic order should receive ordination in convents and from nuns only.

There were both male and female clergy who opposed this edict, and, in fact, it seems not to have always been strictly enforced, although it was incorporated into Song dynasty legal code. As Hsieh notes, one of the positive results of this new policy, contrary as it was to the Buddhist vinaya, was that it “not only allowed women to gain some control... over their own religious lives, but also enabled them to establish their leadership in the Buddhist community.”<sup>23</sup>

As was true in earlier periods, it is very likely that the majority of these nuns were from poor, uneducated families. Nevertheless, there was also a significant number of women from aristocratic or elite backgrounds, who were thus likely to have been at least partially literate. There were also nuns who were quite active as both teachers and abbesses and whose reputation was such as to attract sufficient donations from lay



believers to enlarge their nunneries and construct stupas and reliquaries. Daojian, for example, was ordained in 983 and the following year was honored with a purple robe by Emperor Taizong (r. 976–97). In fact, several of Taizong's own female relatives, including several of his daughters, also became Buddhist nuns. One of them, Qingyu (d. 1024), later presented by the court with the honorific title of Eminent Master Baoci Zhengjue, was known not only for her religious attainments, but apparently also for her poetic talents.

Apart from the many convents officially recognized by the court, there were also many smaller, private nunneries or cloisters during the Song. Many of these smaller establishments were established by elite families for pious daughters who either did not want to or could not marry, or widowed relatives without children to care for them. Others were founded by wealthy Buddhist lay women, since during the Song dynasty, married elite women were allowed to “maintain separate ownership of their personal assets, including their dowries and other land or goods purchased after marriage.”<sup>24</sup> Not surprisingly, many of these female patrons were members of the imperial family. In addition, since women who were divorced or widowed were also allowed to dispose of their dowries as they wished, those with the inclination for the religious life could also build cloisters for themselves. Other nuns increased their financial resources by renting their land, or by spinning silk: the nuns of the Lotus Convent in Fuzhou (in present-day Jiangxi province), for example, were known for producing a delicate variety of silk known as “lotus silk.” And finally, nuns were themselves also patrons, using their money to sponsor the printing of Buddhist texts, the building or renovation of Buddhist temples and statues, or feasts for both monastics and lay believers.

Given their upperclass background, many of these nuns were highly educated. As scholars have noted, many elite women of the Song were at least partially literate, a fact that is not reflected in the paucity of written works by Song women included in anthologies and collections of the time.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, it would seem that Song women also had somewhat more mobility than their Tang dynasty counterparts. In the case of at least a few Buddhist nuns, this meant that they were able to study under some of the great Buddhist masters of the time. In fact, it would seem that during the Song, at least a few male clergy were more willing to



acknowledge publicly the ability of women not only to engage in spiritual practice and to be considered exemplars of morality and piety, but also to serve as Dharma teachers, ascending the Dharma hall platform to deliver sermons, accept disciples, and formally pass on the Dharma lineage. It was during the Song dynasty that, for the first time, we find the names of Buddhist nuns, although admittedly very few, formally listed as official Dharma heirs in the venerable lineages of Chan masters.<sup>26</sup>

The male Chan master credited with doing the most to legitimize women's participation in the "public" sphere of Chan religious life was the Linji Chan master Dahui Zonggao (1089–1163), generally acknowledged as one of the greatest Buddhist figures of his day. Among Dahui's formal Dharma heirs were two extraordinary women, Chan master Miaodao (fl. early twelfth century) and Chan master Miaozong (1095–1170).<sup>27</sup> Both women were known not only for their spiritual attainments and skillful teaching, but also for their literary talents. Miaozong in particular appears to have had an impressive command not only of Buddhist literature, but also of the Confucian classics and Daoist texts. There is also mention of a *yulu* or "recorded sayings" for Miaozong, which may well have been printed and circulated during her lifetime. Such discourse records included accounts of a master's exchanges with his or her disciples, sermons, hymns, letters, and also poetry, both religious and secular. Although Miaozong's collection is unfortunately no longer extant in its entirety, we do have over forty poetic commentaries or *songgu* on well-known Chan Buddhist stories and "public cases" or *koan*.

Complete collections of recorded sayings apparently existed for other eminent Song dynasty nuns as well, although none remain extant today. One example is the twelfth-century Buddhist nun Huiguang from Chengdu, whose uncle was the Confucian scholar-official Fan Zuyu (1041–98) and author of *The Mirror of the Tang (Tang jian)*. Huiguang herself was known for her erudition and eloquence, and in 1121 was appointed abbess of the Miaohui Convent in the capital Kaifeng by the emperor Huizong, who greatly admired her learning. The famous Song dynasty poet Lu You (1125–1210), who wrote a piece in her honor, mentions having visited the nun's burial site on West Mountain (in Jiangxi province) in 1165 and then, in 1172, coming across a collection of her writings in Chengdu — writings that he found to be truly extraordinary. He goes so far as to compare their

overall tone and spirit to the poetry of the Song dynasty writer Fan Zhen (1007–88).

In 1279, the beleaguered Southern Song dynasty fell to the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1260–1368). Although China's new overlords adopted Buddhism as their official religion, it is not until the subsequent Ming dynasty (1368–1644) that we find any significant references to Buddhist nuns. The first Ming emperor had himself begun as a Buddhist monk and although astute enough to realize the importance of exercising a firm control over its institutions, he was in general favorably disposed toward its activities: an edition of the Buddhist canon was reprinted on his command and distributed to many of the larger monasteries. Buddhism continued to flourish under subsequent emperors as well, and the numbers of temples, monasteries, and clergy grew rapidly.

During the sixteenth century, however, with the ascent of the Jiajing emperor (r. 1522–66) to the throne, Buddhism went into eclipse. Although the emperor appears to have been completely obsessed with his desire to obtain Daoist immortality for himself, a number of dedicated Confucian officials took advantage of their emperor's undisguised anti-Buddhist feelings to impose what were often quite draconian measures on the many Buddhist establishments that dotted the Chinese physical and social landscape. Many of these men found their orthodox Confucian sensibilities particularly offended by the ubiquitous presence of convents. Perhaps the most vivid illustration of this is an official named Huo Tao, who in 1536 assumed the post of secretary of the Nanjing Board of Rites. After taking a count of the nunneries (nearly seventy) and nuns (nearly five hundred) in the Nanjing area, he launched a determined campaign to return all of them to their proper Confucian places. His reasoning — no doubt shared by many of his counterparts — was as follows:

Men and women are different; this is the norm of the ancients. As for nuns, within they lack a husband and family; above, they lack a father and mother; below, they lack descendents. Is this not pathetic? They call [what they are doing] religious cultivation, but in actuality, they are transgressing the norms. And, moreover, they also contaminate the wives and daughters of others. Is this not disgusting?<sup>28</sup>

Huo Tao issued orders for all nuns under the age of fifty to marry and all those over this age to return to live with their families or, if they had no families, to take up residence in charity houses. In the meantime, a concerted effort was made to destroy all of the nunneries, large and small. By 1537, after only one year in office, he was able to announce that “Now all of the nuns fifty and below have been returned to their natal families; their pernicious influence has been mitigated, and there are no longer any cloisters or temples into which people’s wives and daughters can secretly repair.”

The death of the Jiajing emperor put a halt to this persecution, and Buddhism flourished again during the subsequent Wanli period (1572–1619) and continuing on until the end of the Ming dynasty and the beginning of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). This period of Buddhist revival coincided with a period of significant social and cultural upheaval, often referred to simply as the Ming-Qing transition. It also coincided with a number of momentous changes in Chinese society, including an unprecedented expansion of commerce and trade, which led to growing urbanization and private wealth. This was accompanied by an explosion in writing and publishing of all sorts. In their eagerness to cater to the needs of a burgeoning readership, especially in the urban areas of southeast China, publishers, editors, and anthologists for the first time began to pay attention to the writing, in particular the poetry, of women.<sup>29</sup> Yet another of the consequences of the socioeconomic changes of this period was that, although still denied access to schools and academies, many women from elite families — again, especially those in the highly urbanized regions of southeast China — were afforded the education required not only to read widely, but also to write themselves and even to circulate and publish their writings. In a bibliography compiled by the modern Chinese scholar Hu Wenkai, we find the names of four hundred women writers for the Ming dynasty and more than three thousand names (as well as more than two thousand titles of extant collections) for the Qing dynasty.<sup>30</sup> Among these names are a number of Buddhist nuns, and among the titles are several collections of sermons, letters, and poems composed by female Chan Buddhist masters. Although many of these writings are lost, fortunately a significant number are still extant today. Of particular interest are the seven collections of discourse records found in a privately published seventeenth-century edition of the

Buddhist canon printed in a temple in the city of Jiaxing, in what is today Zhejiang province. These women represent a brief but vigorous revival of Chan Buddhism that took place at the end of the Ming and the first decades of the Qing dynasty. Most of these women were first- or second-generation Dharma heirs of the most important figure in this revival, the influential Linji Chan master named Miyun Yuanwu (1566–1642) and his twelve Dharma heirs. In terms of time, they span the entire seventeenth century and three generations of Linji Chan masters. Their lives reflect many of the trends and concerns of this volatile period of Chinese religious, social, and literary history, which we normally see only through the eyes of male scholars, writers, and officials. The appearance of female Chan masters can in large part be attributed to the fact that this revival coincided both with the explosion of publishing and women's writing in general during this period, and with the political turmoil and social upheaval of this transitional period between dynasties. These events helped to loosen many of the traditional restrictions on women's lives. As such, it might be compared to the Six Dynasties, also a time when the grip of the Confucian orthodoxy was loosened by political upheavals. And just as the reunification of the empire in the Tang dynasty resulted in a significant diminishing of the public presence of religious women, so the reassertion of traditional Confucian gender restrictions from the last half of the seventeenth century onward put a virtual end to this brief flourishing of female Chan masters.

In general, the Buddhism of most of the Qing dynasty was largely in the hands of lay believers. The most outstanding figures of this period were neither monks nor nuns, but rather, with few exceptions, devout lay men and women. The latter are most vividly represented by a collection entitled *The Biographies of Pious Women (Shannüren zhuan)* compiled by one of the most well known Buddhist laymen of the time, Peng Shaosheng (1740–96). Unlike the collection of biographies compiled by the monk Baochang over a thousand years earlier, Peng's collection of biographies offers as spiritual role models not nuns of independent mind (although he does mention Tang dynasty Buddhist women such as Moshan Liaoran), but rather pious laywomen. Some of these laywomen were indeed commended for their literary talents — the wife of Peng's nephew, Tao Shan (1756–80), left a collection of Buddhist poems that he praised most highly.<sup>31</sup> The primary justification for their inclusion in this collection of

exemplary women was, however, the fact that they managed to somehow embody both the ideals of proper Confucian womanly behavior — including serving their husbands and in-laws and bearing children — and the ideals of Pure Land piety, which allowed them at the moment of death, at least, to detach themselves from these domestic concerns and single-mindedly focus on obtaining birth in the Pure Land.

Toward the end of the imperial period, when the Qing dynasty was on its last legs and society was again plunged into turmoil, the religious life again appears as a last resort, if not always a choice, for intelligent women caught up in the chaos and uncertainty of the times. I have included a few selections from Buddhist nuns who were born in the last days of the Qing dynasty, including the famous scholar-nun, Longlian (1909–2006). Recently the female monastic sangha has experienced a dramatic revival, especially in Taiwan, but also in the People's Republic of China.<sup>32</sup> Many if not most of these contemporary nuns are highly educated and no doubt many of them find time from their busy schedules as administrators, educators, preachers, and teachers to write poetry. Translations of their poems will, however, have to wait for another book and another time.

### *A Note on the Translations*

There are a number of Chinese anthologies of monk-poets, but there are no such anthologies of poetry written by nuns. As we have seen, there is only one poem attributed to a nun included in the voluminous *Complete Poetry of the Tang Dynasty*. Nuns are somewhat better represented in anthologies of women's poetry compiled during the Qing dynasty by women anthologists, such as Wang Duanshu's *Mingyuan shiwei* (*The Longitudinal Canon of Poetry by Noteworthy Women*) compiled in 1667, Wanyan Yun Zhu's *Guochao guixiu zhengshi ji* (*Correct Beginnings: Poems by the Women of Our Dynasty*) published in 1831, and its sequel *Guochao guixiu zhengshi xu ji* (*Continuation of Correct Beginnings: Poems by the Women of Our Dynasty*) published in 1836. Most of the poems in the present translation, however, are to be found embedded in the brief accounts of these nuns' lives found scattered in various official and unofficial records, such as Baochang's *Lives of the Nuns*, and in later Buddhist genealogical histories, such as the *Jingde chuandeng lu* and the *Wudeng quanshu* (*The Complete Records of the Five Lamps*), compiled by the monk Chaoyong in 1699. They

are also to be found in the few complete collections of female Chan masters' writings preserved in the privately sponsored Jiaxing edition of the Buddhist canon first printed in 1676. Many of the sources for both the biographical material and the writings of nuns from the seventh century and onward can be found in the *Xu biqiuni zhuan* (*Continuation of the Lives of the Nuns*) compiled by Zhenhua (b. 1921) in the early part of the twentieth century. I have checked Zhenhua's original sources wherever possible, but, for the sake of expediency, have refrained from providing all of the citations from these other sources in the notes.

That these poems should be embedded in other sorts of texts should come as no surprise, however. Many of these nuns, and in particular those from the seventeenth century and onward, were known for their literary talents before entering the religious life. Some women actually gave up the writing of poetry after becoming nuns, regarding it as an inherently secular activity incompatible with their religious aspirations. For those who continued to write, poetry became above all a vehicle for either the expression of their own religious understanding or the conveyance of Dharma lessons to their disciples.

It is worth noting in this regard that the majority of these nun-poets were practitioners of Chan Buddhism, although clearly Pure Land devotions also found a place in their activities. Chan Buddhism, as is well known, distinguished itself from other forms of Buddhism in its emphasis on a mind-to-mind transmission that transcended language. The great irony is that, despite its claim of independence from words and letters, from the Song dynasty onward Chan produced a staggering number of written texts. One of the justifications for this, of course, is that language, and in particular poetic and paradoxical language, could be used as a tool with which students might be jolted out of their rational ruts as well as a means by which masters and students alike could demonstrate the depth and authenticity of their realization. Many of these texts, for example, sought to record examples and exemplars of dialogues between masters and disciples, known as public cases, or *gong'an*, more familiar to Western readers as *koan*, the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese term. These koan were designed not so much to be studied as to be meditated upon and experienced, ideally under the guidance of an enlightened master. In other words, these koan, and the poetic verses by later commentators designed to explicate or rather embody them, were not primarily vehicles



for the expression of personal emotions or biographical dilemmas. Rather, they sought to touch on the ultimate nonduality (including, at least theoretically, the transcendence of the duality of male and female) that was considered to be the essence of the enlightened state.

This does not mean, however, that these poems can tell us nothing about their authors as women. What biographical information we have on the Chan Buddhist nuns in particular demonstrates that these women overcame tremendous odds in order to find themselves a place in a tradition that was largely defined in masculine, even martial, terms. This is reflected in the fact that many of these women were praised not for being great women, but rather for being “great heroes” (*da zhangfu*).<sup>33</sup> Unlike Pure Land practice, which could be carried out in the home if necessary, Chan practice required rigorous training and extended periods of meditation under the tutelage of a master. It also required a thorough internalization of the experience of previous masters as embodied in Chan texts and, as such, presupposed a high degree of literacy. Indeed, we find that many of these women first became interested in Chan after having read one or another compilation of records by eminent Chan masters. In other words, the ability to write a religious poem meant both that these women had thoroughly mastered the written tradition and that they felt they had the spiritual authority to express their personal realization of the truths embodied in that tradition in their own writing.

Many of the poems composed by Buddhist nuns are virtually indistinguishable from those composed by Buddhist monks. Rarely do they refer to gender, except to remind their readers of its irrelevance. It is important to note, however, that monks rarely if ever feel a need to stress the irrelevance of gender distinctions (except when they are addressing their few female disciples). In other words, a nun stressing the irrelevance of gender means something quite different from a monk doing so. Both may be seen as a form of rhetoric, but the practical implications are very different: men could take it for granted, women most certainly could not. In a poem titled “Writing of My Feelings Within the Convent” by the Qing dynasty nun Wanxian, we find the following lines: “The red cord that stretches a thousand *li* is at this very second cut in two:/ In this sublime setting, it is pointless to speak of the thrice-following.” The red cord in these lines refers to the traditional belief that couples karmically destined to be together are bound together with a cord of red silk; the “thrice-



following” refers to the traditional Confucian assumption that as a daughter, a woman should submit to her father, as a wife, to her husband, and as a mother, to her son. This kind of direct and personal reference to being a woman is, however, very rare: most of the nun-poets mention gender only as an example of the sort of duality that they aspire to transcend. For example, the seventeenth-century nun known as One-Eyed Jingang, having lost the sight in one eye due to her repeated reading of the *Diamond Sutra*, which in Chinese is known as the *Jingang jing*, writes:

Male or female: what need to distinguish false and true?  
When Guanyin manifests, what sort of person can it be?  
Even if you peeled away the skin, it would be to no avail:  
I ask you: is it the body of a man or the body of a woman?<sup>34</sup>

That direct and personal reference to being a woman is rare does not mean, however, that there is no indication at all of gender in these poems. For one thing, often these nuns refer to previous Buddhist nuns or lay women as spiritual exemplars, an indication that there was a sense of there being a female lineage to which they belonged as well. The seventeenth-century abbess Jizong, for example, reminds a lay disciple that “the pearl-offering Dragon Girl was bound to become a buddha./ The sapling-planting wife of Pang was fond of studying Chan.” The first reference here is to the daughter of the dragon king who, when she hears the bodhisattva Manjushri preach the *Lotus Sutra*, attains immediate and supreme enlightenment. Later, another of the Buddha’s eminent disciples, Shariputra, questions how it could be that a person could attain enlightenment so quickly when it took the Buddha many lifetimes, and more importantly, how this person could be a woman, since women were supposedly subject to the five hindrances, the last of which specifically stated that they could not become a buddha. The dragon king’s daughter replies not in words but in an action: she quickly turns herself into a man, thus demonstrating that her spiritual insight has endowed her with the ability to determine her own gender, since she has transcended both. The second allusion is to the wife of the eighth-century layman and poet Pang Yün, who, along with their daughter, Lingzhao, was considered to be as dedicated to the spiritual life as Pang himself.<sup>35</sup>

Another thing that readers should note is that these nuns often addressed poems to their female disciples, both lay and monastic, as well as to their “Dharma masters” and “Dharma sisters.” (It is telling that relationships within the female sangha were often described using male kinship terms, such as “Dharma younger brother” (*fadi*) and “Dharma older brother” (*faxiong*.) Such poems point to the shared aspirations and, in many cases, strong bonds of religious community among women within a largely male-dominated tradition. In short, although I believe that many of these poems can certainly be enjoyed on their own, in order to be fully appreciated, they should be read with an understanding of the larger context in which they were written.

Finally, a note on the technicalities of the translations themselves. These poems, like all traditional Chinese poetry, are written in rhyme and, in most cases, contain either five or eight syllables (or words, since in classical Chinese, the literary language, most words consist of only one syllable) per line. Moreover, they rely considerably on intertextual allusions and references both to Buddhist texts and Chinese historical and literary texts, to lend their sometimes rather bland (or bewilderingly opaque) surfaces a texture and resonance that is often lost in translation.

Many translators of Chinese poetry are tempted to vary line length and even, in some cases, to spice up the language in order to make the poems more palatable to a non-Chinese reader. Many such translations do indeed capture the spirit of the originals, often, if truth be told, more fully than translations that are more faithful to the letter. In this book, however, I have tried to preserve the original form (rhyme is nearly impossible to translate) and adhere as closely as possible to the text without sacrificing readability. I have tried to refrain from depicting the lives of these nuns as being more feminine or feminist than they were. I have also tried to refrain from making their poems sound more entrancing (or enlightened) than they appear in the original. I have done so not primarily out of allegiance to rigid academic or scholarly standards, but rather because I feel that presenting these nuns as realistically as possible (given, of course, the limited number and the largely hagiographic nature of many of the primary sources) in the end does them a greater justice. The nun-poets presented in this small book represent only a small percentage of the thousands of nuns who lived in imperial times, many of whom could not read or write. Moreover, the

poems in this collection represent only a small percentage of the poetry written by this small minority of nun-poets. I hope, however, that this selection of poems, along with the brief biographical accounts that accompany them, will afford readers a glimpse into the extraordinary diversity and sometimes startling richness of these women's lives.

## ABBREVIATIONS

- JT* *Mingban Jiaxing zheng xu da zang jing*. 40 vols. Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1987. Reprint of Ming dynasty edition.
- ZZ* *Dai Nihon zokuzōkyō*. Ed. Nakano Tatsue. 150 vols. Kyoto: Zōkyō shoin, 1905–12. Reprint: Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1968–70.
- T* *Taishō shinshō daizōkyō*. Ed. Takakuso Junjirō and Watanabe Kaigyoku. 100 vols. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–32.

## *Six Dynasties*

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(220–581)

# 慧緒

HUIXU (431–99), whose family name was Zhou, was born in Jiangsu province in southeastern China. She was drawn to Buddhist practice from an early age: we are told that she began to adhere to a vegetarian diet at the age of seven and took the tonsure at the age of eighteen. She soon gained a reputation for her firm adherence to the monastic rules and for her straightforward and direct manner. During the first part of her religious career, she spent some time with an eminent contemplative from northwestern China. “Disregarding the age difference between them [they] followed the Buddhadharma,” and engaged in at least one intensive three-month summer retreat together.

These were turbulent times, and Huixu was often forced to leave one place for another. In time, however, Huixu attracted the attention of a member of the royal family, the prince of Yuzhang, who happened to be stationed in the area. Appreciating her religious attainments, he invited her to live in his home, where his wife and the other royal family members sought instruction from her and became her devoted followers. During this time Huixu met a meditation master by the name of Xuanchang who taught her advanced meditation methods, in which she became extremely proficient. When the prince and his family returned to the Qi capital of Jiankang in the southeast, Huixu went with them and took up residence in the convent the prince had built for her on one of the royal estates located in the suburbs of the capital.

In time, the emperor himself had a convent built for her and her community of nuns. After this, despite repeated invitations, she did not visit the royal residences for many years. Finally, she agreed to attend a special religious feast held in her honor, at which time she wrote the poem translated below. Upon her departure, she told her devotees that she would never again leave her convent. About a month later, she fell ill and passed away.

世人或不知  
呼我作老周  
忽請作七日  
禪齋不得休

Worldly people who do not understand me  
Call me by my worldly name of Old Zhou.  
You invite me to a seven-day religious feast,  
But the feast of meditation knows no end.<sup>36</sup>



# *Sui and Tang Dynasties*

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(581–907)

# 法願

FAYUAN (601–63) was a sixth-generation descendent of Emperor Wudi of Liang (502–50), a ruler famous for his patronage of Buddhism: legend has it that he was the emperor visited by Bodhidharma, the first Patriarch of Chan Buddhism in China. Fayuan was also the third daughter of a member of the Tang dynasty royal family, and as such was raised in an atmosphere of privilege and luxury. We are told that she was an exceptionally intelligent and loving child who showed a real talent for study as well as painting and calligraphy. From an early age she was drawn to Buddhism as well, and as she grew into a young woman, she apparently refused to wear fancy brocades, jewelry, or cosmetics. Even as a child, she refused to eat meat. When it came time for her to be married, she went to her parents and pleaded with them to allow her to enter the religious life. They did not put up any resistance, and Fayuan entered the Jidu Convent in the Tang capital of Chang'an. Fayuan appears to have led a secluded life devoted to meditation and the study of Buddhist texts, rarely returning to the court circles in which she had been raised. Eventually, she attracted many disciples and began to acquire a reputation for her skillful teaching and exemplary discipline. In the autumn of 663, Fayuan fell seriously ill. Knowing that her death was imminent, she instructed her disciple to dispose of her body in the wilds to serve as food for hungry birds and not to encase it in precious metals or rare woods. Her family overruled her last request, however, and had her buried in the imperial tombs.

我無身是

萍水譬取

累有身是  
This body without a self  
Can be compared to floating duckweed.  
This body with its troubles  
Is exactly like a leaf in the wind.  
This cycle of life and death  
Is just like that of night and day.<sup>37</sup>

葉風夫同

環循死生

夜晝均實

# 海印

HAIYIN. We know very little about Haiyin, apart from the fact that she appears to have lived during the last part of the Tang dynasty and was associated with the Ciguang Convent in what is today Sichuan province. Hers is one of the only poems attributed to a Buddhist nun (there are quite a few by Buddhist monks) among the over fifty thousand poems written by some two thousand poets included in the voluminous compendium of Tang poetry, *The Complete Poetry of the Tang Dynasty*.

水色連天色

風聲益浪聲

旅人歸思苦

魚叟夢魂驚

The color of the water merges with that of the sky,  
The sound of the wind adds to that of the waves.  
The traveler's thoughts of home are painful,  
The old fisherman's dream-self is startled.

舉棹雲先到

Lifting his oars, the clouds get there before him,  
When his boat moves, the moon follows along.  
Although I've done reciting the lines of my poem,  
I can still see the hills extending in both directions.<sup>38</sup>

移舟月遂行

旋吟詩句罷

猶見遠山衡

## 梅花尼 梅花尼

PLUM BLOSSOM NUN. Nothing is known about this nun: she may well be a fabrication. However, the poem she is said to have written is very famous and often included in anthologies.

盡日尋春不見春  
芒鞋踏遍嶺頭雲  
歸來笑撚梅花嗅  
春在枝頭已十分

The entire day I searched for spring but spring I could not find,  
In my straw sandals I tramped among the mountain peak clouds.  
Home again, smiling, I finger a sprig of fragrant plum blossom;  
Spring was right here on these branches in all of its glory!<sup>39</sup>

# *Song Dynasty*

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(960–1279)

# 妙總

MIAOZONG (1095–1170) was the granddaughter of a prime minister, Su Song (1020–46), and the widow of a high-ranking scholar-official. Coming as she did from an upperclass literati family, Miaozong was highly educated and appears to have had an impressive command not only of Buddhist literature, but also of Confucian and Daoist texts. Her interest in Buddhism showed itself early: at fifteen she is said to have suddenly said, “Where did this body come from in this life? And after one passes away, where will it go?” She became the disciple, and subsequently a Dharma heir, of the great Linji Chan master Dahui Zonggao. Miaozong was also quite well known for her poetry and other writings. Many of her poems were in the form of responses to traditional Chan stories or koans, a literary tradition made famous by the Chan master Xuedou Chongxian (998–1052), who compiled a hundred koans to which he appended a commentary (designed to further challenge rather than elucidate) in verse. Later the students of another Chan monk, Yuanwu Keqin (1063–1135) — Dahui Zonggao’s Dharma master — took Xuedou Chongxian’s koans and verses, added their own teacher’s commentaries, and thus produced the famous book known today as the *Blue Cliff Record*. Forty-three of the poetic commentaries by Miaozong remain extant today.

一葉扁舟泛渺茫  
呈橈舞棹別宮商  
雲山海月都拋卻  
贏得壯周蝶夢長

A leaf of a boat drifts across the endless expanse of water,



Lifting and dancing the oars to a different melody now.  
Clouds on the mountain, moon over the sea: all tossed away;  
This done, Zhuang Zhou's butterfly dream will last forever.<sup>40</sup>

驀然觸著鼻頭

伎倆冰消瓦解

達摩何必西來

Suddenly I have made contact with the tip of the nose,  
And my cleverness melts like ice and shatters like tiles.  
What need for Bodhidharma to have come from the West?  
What a waste for the Second Patriarch to have paid his respects!<sup>41</sup>

To ask any further about what is this and what is that  
Would signal defeat by a regiment of straw bandits!<sup>42</sup>

更問如何若何

一隊草賊打敗

# 正覺

ZHENGJUE (twelfth century) came from an elite scholarly family from Haiyan (in present-day Zhejiang province). She married a young scholar by the name of Ye, but when she was left a widow shortly afterward, she chose the life of a Buddhist nun rather than remarry. She spent the rest of her life in the Fayun Convent. She was quite well known for her poetry, although unfortunately very little of it survives. The following are two of her quatrains.

春朝湖上風兼雨  
世事如花落又開  
退省閉門真樂處  
閒雲終日去回來

Spring morning on the lake: the wind merges with the rain,  
Worldly matters are like flowers that fall only to bloom again.  
I retire to contemplate behind closed doors, a place of true joy,  
While the floating clouds come and go the whole day long.<sup>43</sup>

幽鳥枝頭不住聲  
天開雨霽一窗晴  
西來妙意非文字  
金屑休教落眼睛

The hidden birds on the treetops sing without pause,  
The sky clears, the rain stops, the window brightens.  
From the West came the wondrous meaning without words,<sup>44</sup>  
It may be gold dust, but don't let it get in your eyes!<sup>45</sup>

# 本明

BENMING. We know very little about the nun Benming, also known as Mingshi, apart from the fact that she was a Dharma heir of Chan master Yuanwu Keqin (1063–1135). In 1141, shortly before her death on a visit to her family, she wrote a series of verses, which she dedicated to Chan master Caotang Shanqing (1057–1142). He was so impressed with them that, after she died, he published them together with a laudatory colophon of his own. The great Song dynasty Chan master Dahui Zonggao also found her poetry exemplary and quoted her verses in sermons to his own disciples.

不識煩惱是菩提  
若隨煩惱是愚癡  
起滅之時須要會  
鷓過新羅人不知

Don't you know that afflictions are nothing more than wisdom,  
But to cling to your afflictions is nothing more than foolishness?  
As they rise and then melt away again, you must remember this:  
The sparrow hawk flies through Silla without anyone noticing!<sup>46</sup>

不識煩惱是菩提  
淨華生游泥  
人來問我若何爲  
喫粥喫飯了洗鉢盂  
莫管他  
莫管他

終日癡憨弄海沙

Don't you know that afflictions are nothing more than wisdom

And that the purest of blossoms emerges from the mire?<sup>47</sup>

If someone were to come and ask me what I do:

After eating my gruel and rice, I wash my bowl.<sup>48</sup>

Don't worry about a thing!

Don't worry about a thing!

You may play all day like a silly child in the sand by the sea,<sup>49</sup>

But you must always realize the truth of your original face!<sup>50</sup>

When you suffer the blows delivered by the patriarchs' staff,

If you can't say anything, you will perish by the staff,

If you can say something, you will perish by the staff.

In the end, what will you do

If you are forbidden to travel by night but must arrive by dawn?<sup>51</sup>

畢竟如何

不許夜行投明須到

# 真如

ZHENRU was the daughter of a Wang family from northwest China (Shenxi and Gansu area). As a young girl she was inducted into the inner palace because of her considerable talents and abilities, and there she became an attendant to an imperial concubine by the name of Qiao. Concubine Qiao was herself a Buddhist devotee, and so did not put up any resistance when Zhenru expressed a desire to leave the palace and enter the religious life. Zhenru subsequently traveled as far as Fujian province in the south, where Chan master Dahui Zonggao was then living in exile. Dahui thought very highly of her and cited her poetry in his writings.

平地偶然著顛  
起來都無可說  
若人更問如何  
笑指清風明月

I suddenly find myself upside-down on level ground;  
When I pick myself up, I find there's nothing to say!  
If someone should ask me what this is all about,  
Smiling, I'd point to the pure breeze and bright moon.<sup>52</sup>

今日如師姑  
昔日王師父  
身居羅綺叢  
只著麕麻布  
開口便高談  
嫌佛不肯做  
跳出是非坑  
裁斷生死路  
入虎穴魔宮  
心中無怕怖  
杜選八陽經  
自又三千部  
愛吟落韻詩  
偏不勒字數  
行腳走天下  
參禪無所悟  
近日到雲門  
一時都敗落  
錯認碓嘴頭  
喚作冬瓜瓠  
如此作師姑  
勸君少吃醋  
更有一處乖  
且道那一處

嘉州大象喫炙麩

Today she is Buddhist Nun Ru,

陝府鐵牛撐破肚  
Yesterday she was Teacher Wang.

可概見矣

Although born to wear silken gauze,  
She now wears only the roughest hemp.  
Mouths that open and spew out lofty talk  
Have no interest at all in becoming buddhas.  
Leap out of the cauldron of right and wrong,  
Cut off completely the road of life and death,  
Then enter tiger's lair and demon's palace  
With a heart that feels not the slightest fear.  
The made-up nonsense of the *Eight Yang Sutra*  
Easily adds up to three thousand chapters!<sup>53</sup>  
I am fond of chanting poems that have no rhymes,  
And I can't be bothered with counting syllables!<sup>54</sup>  
This wandering nun had traveled the world,  
Investigated Chan, but was not yet enlightened.  
Until recently I found my way to Cloud Gate,<sup>55</sup>  
Where I immediately encountered total defeat.  
I'd mistaken the shape of a mortar pestle,  
Thinking it was a winter melon gourd!  
Having gone through all this just to be a nun,  
I urge you not to feel jealous of me!  
Is there anything else that I've got wrong?  
If so, then do tell me what it may be!  
When the elephant of Jiazhou eats steaming bran,  
The iron ox of Shanfu suffers a distended belly:<sup>56</sup>  
This is easy to see!<sup>57</sup>



# 祖勲

ZUQIN was a disciple of Chan master Huo'an Shiti (1108–79). Apparently, her intelligence, perspicacity, and literary talent were such that local male literati-officials sought her company, no doubt interested more in intellectual diversion than in spiritual illumination. She was unwilling to fraternize with them and clearly did not think much of their worldly occupations. The following poem uses the analogy of the official life to refer to that of the deluded and unenlightened mind.

終日爲官不識官  
終年多被吏人瞞  
喝散吏人官自顯  
揭翻北斗面南看

All day long you play the official oblivious of what it means,  
All year long you are duped and deceived by your petty clerks.  
If you chased away your clerks with a shout, the official would appear,  
But instead you tip over the northern dipper and face toward the south!<sup>58</sup>

# 德英

DEYING came from a well-known elite family: she was a descendent of the eminent scholar Yang I (974–1020) who, among other things, was known for re-editing one of the first Chan genealogical histories (the *Jingde chuandeng lu*). Deying very early on gained a reputation for her precocious intelligence. She studied under a number of eminent Chan masters and eventually was named a Dharma heir of the Yunmen master Fazhen Shouyi (dates unknown). She subsequently preached at a number of different convents in the Jiangnan area, including the Zhuming Convent in Suzhou and the Jinghui Convent in Changzhou. After her death, her writings and sermons were compiled into a collection of discourse records, which is no longer extant.

自贊

自贊贊不出

自畫畫不成

*A Self-Description*

有箇本來相

I try to characterize myself, but can't seem to do it;  
I try to sketch a self-portrait, but with no success!

There is such a thing as the original form,<sup>59</sup>

But how can it be made to look like a person!

Alive and lively,

It was never born.

As always the nostrils hang over the upper lip.<sup>60</sup>

活潑潑

本無生

鼻孔依然搭上唇

# 智通

ZHITONG (d. 1124) came from a famous scholar-official family and even as a young girl gained a reputation for her intelligence and love of study. When she reached marriageable age, she was engaged to the son of another eminent gentry family but, unhappy with the realities of married life, she returned to her parents' home and requested permission to become a nun. When her father refused to give her his permission, she retreated to her room in order to practice visualization and meditation. After her parents died, she accompanied her elder brother when he went to take up various official posts around the country. She lived for a time in Jinling (what is today Nanjing), where she sponsored the building of a bathhouse at the Baoning Monastery and wrote the text to be inscribed over its entrance.

During this time, she also had interviews with a number of eminent Chan Buddhist masters in the Jiangnan area, including Master Sixin (1044–1115), who was a Dharma heir of Master Huanglong (1002–69). She eventually realized her aspiration to take the tonsure and become a nun. She took up residence at the Xizhu Convent in Suzhou (in Jiangsu province), where she attracted a devoted following of both laypersons and nuns. She is known to have composed a work, no longer extant, entitled *Record of Mind Illumination (Mingxin lu)*, which was published along with a preface and several verses penned by eminent male Chan Buddhist masters of the time.

一物也無  
洗個什麼  
纖塵若有  
起自何來  
道取一句子玄  
乃得大家入浴  
古靈祇解揩背

開土何曾明心  
Since there is nothing that exists, what are you bathing?  
If there is even a speck of dust, from where does it arise?  
If you produce a single profound phrase,  
欲證離垢地時  
Then everyone should come in and bathe.  
The most the ancient holy ones can do is scrub your back;  
When has a bodhisattva ever illuminated anyone's mind?  
須是通身汗出  
If you want to realize the stage beyond impurity,<sup>61</sup>  
You should sweat from every last pore of your body.  
It is said that water is able to wash away impurities,  
盡道水能洗垢  
But how do you know that the water is also not dirty?  
Even if you erase the distinction between water and dirt,  
焉知水亦是塵  
When you come in, here, you must still be sure to bathe!<sup>62</sup>

直饒水垢頓除  
到此亦須洗卻

浩浩塵中體一如  
縱橫交互印毘盧  
全波是水波非水  
全水成波水自殊

Within the vast expanse of dust essentially a single suchness,  
Whether vertical or horizontal, everything bears the seal of Vairochana.<sup>63</sup>  
Although the entire wave is made of water, the wave is not the water;  
Although all of the water may turn into waves, the water is still itself.<sup>64</sup>

物我元無異

森羅鏡像同

明明超主伴

了了徹真空

Subject and object from the start are no different,  
The myriad things nothing but images in the mirror.  
Bright and refulgent, transcending both guest and host,  
Complete and realized, all is permeated by the absolute.

A single form encompasses the multitude of dharmas,  
All of which are interconnected within the net of Indra.<sup>65</sup>  
Layer after layer there is no point at which it all ends,  
Whether in motion or still, all is fully interpenetrating.<sup>66</sup>

交參帝網中

重重無盡處

動靜悉圓通

# 法海



FAHAI was from a high-ranking elite family from Hunan province: she was the aunt of a high-ranking scholar-official named Lu Jia, who was a member of the Institute of Academicians who served in the palace Hall for Treasuring Culture. Even as a young girl she was known for her intelligence, and from an early age took a special interest in the practice of Chan meditation. She became a nun and spent many years traveling from one place to another studying with various teachers, and in the end received Dharma transmission from an eminent Chan master. She then retired to a life of quiet contemplation. She attracted the attention of many eminent Confucian scholars of the day (many of whom no doubt knew of her through her nephew) who repeatedly tried to get her to leave her mountain retreat and give Chan teachings to the public. However, Fahai refused to abandon her life of quiet contemplation and remained in seclusion until her death.

法海  
山月冷  
夜半  
无人知

On this frosty day, clouds and mist congeal,  
On the mountain moon, the icy chill glows.  
At night I receive a letter from my home,  
At dawn I leave without anyone knowing.<sup>67</sup>



# *Yuan Dynasty*

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(1260–1368)

# 妙湛

MIAOZHAN. Little is known about this nun, apart from the fact that the Changming Convent where she lived was painted by one of the most famous woman painters of premodern China, Guan Daosheng (1260–1308). Miaozhan, who was known for her calligraphy, is said to have inscribed the following poem, or one like it, on Guan’s painting.

雙樹陰陰落翠岩  
一燈千古破幽關  
也知諸法皆如幻  
甘老煙霞水石間

In the shade of two trees and the hanging green of the cliffs,  
One lamp for a thousand years broke open the dark barriers.<sup>68</sup>  
I too now realize that phenomena are nothing but a magic show  
And happily grow old among the mist, the rivers, and the stones.<sup>69</sup>

## *Early and Mid-Ming Dynasty*

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(1368–1600)

# 悟蓮

WULIAN was born in 1395 in Shandong province. She is said to have been very precocious as a young girl: she learned to read at five, and by seven was already able to recite Buddhist sutras and had memorized the *Lotus Sutra*, among others. At the age of thirteen, she was inducted into the Inner Palace, where she was often called upon to write and recite poetry for the emperor and other members of the royal family, and she took every opportunity to urge him to rule with compassion. She also tried to get him to abstain from the slaughter of animals for the royal table. At the age of twenty-two she fell ill, and requested permission to become a nun. She then devoted herself to the study of Vajrayana Buddhism, and within two years had mastered the most esoteric of texts. She died at the age of twenty-four in 1419, leaving behind a collection of poetry as well as a hymn on the *Lotus Sutra* in seven sections.

# 雨晴

海棠初種竹新移

*After the Rain*

流水潺潺入水池  
The flowing stream bubbles and gurgles as it enters the pond.  
The spring rain suddenly clears, both breeze and sun are fine,  
As the call of a singing bird wafts past the branches in flower.<sup>70</sup>

春雨乍晴風日好

一聲啼鳥過花枝

# 覺清

JUEQING was born to an elite, educated family from the Nanjing area. After entering the religious life, she took up residence in a small, impoverished convent in the countryside, where she grew her own vegetables. Her quiet, secluded life was thrown into turmoil, however, when in 1537 secretary of the Board of Rites, Huo Tao, made it his mission to destroy all of the convents in the Nanjing area, large and small, and return all the Buddhist nuns to lay life. Jueqing took her small community and fled to safety. She is said to have left the following poem written on a wall before she left.<sup>71</sup>

# 題壁

急忙簡點破袈裟  
收拾行囊沒一些  
袖拂白雲歸洞口  
肩挑明月遶天涯  
可憐松頂新巢鶴  
卻負籬根舅種花  
卻負叮嚀與犬貓  
休教流落俗人家

*Written on a Wall*

In haste and hurry we gather up our tattered robes,  
And pack up our traveling bags: not much to take.  
Sleeves brushing white clouds, we retreat to the cave's mouth,  
Carrying the moon on our shoulders, we circle the sky's edge.  
I feel such sad pity for the young cranes nesting on the pine tops,  
And for abandoning the flowers I planted at the foot of the fence.  
Again and again I admonish the cats and the dogs  
Not to hang around the homes of the laypeople!<sup>72</sup>



# 獨目金鋼



ONE-EYED JINGANG. This nun got her name from the fact that she lost the sight in one eye as a result of reading the *Diamond Sutra* (*Jingang jing*) with great single-mindedness. She was known for her simple and straightforward personality and lifestyle, and for giving away everything that she received. Every time she preached on the *Diamond Sutra*, crowds of monks, nuns, and laypeople, including many officials and literati, would gather to listen to her and engage her in dialogue. Many were converted to Buddhism after having heard her preach. She died when she was over seventy years old, having predicted the day of her death.

男女何須辯假真  
觀音出現果何人  
皮囊脫盡渾無用  
試問男身是女身

Male or female: why should one need to distinguish false and true?  
What is the shape in which Guanyin would finally take form?<sup>73</sup>  
Peeling away the bodhisattva's skin would be of no use whatsoever  
Were someone to ask if it were the body of a woman or that of a man.<sup>74</sup>

# 寂性 寂性

JIXING entered a nunnery as a young girl, perhaps because her family was too poor to raise her. When she grew older, she visited a number of Buddhist masters and appears to have had an enlightenment experience as the result of her practice. She then took to wandering around begging for food. She made no effort to shelter herself from wind and rain, and bathed in the cold river. At first people took her for a madwoman and would not feed her. She gained a reputation for being able to forecast the future, however, and soon people found that blessings seemed to visit the household that invited her in as a guest. She also acquired a reputation for her wisdom and insight, expressed in simple and straightforward language.

奉勸學道人  
學道要認真  
如若心不切  
苦海永沉淪

大地浩無邊  
眾生多難數  
幾個聰明人  
跳出輪回苦

I urge those of you who aspire to enlightenment —  
In aspiring to enlightenment you must be diligent!  
If your mind is not completely sincere,  
You will wallow forever in the bitter sea!

The great earth is vast and without limit,  
And sentient beings are too many to count.  
Yet how many people are there with the sense  
To leap out of the bitterness of samsara?<sup>75</sup>

# 無為

WUWEI, who hailed from Xiaoshan in Zhejiang province, apparently decided very early on in life that she would remain unmarried. She also decided to adhere to a vegetarian diet and dedicate herself to Buddha-recitation. At the age of twenty, she was tonsured, after which she built herself a small hermitage and devoted herself to Pure Land practice. Despite her ill health, when she was thirty she began to travel around the country visiting various pilgrimage sites and Buddhist masters. Sometime during the early 1500s she attracted the attention of the court in Beijing, and was summoned to the capital to give teachings as well as to receive an honorary title from the emperor. She then returned to her hermitage, where she lived out the rest of her life. After her death, a stupa was built on Mount Guan in Jiangxi to house her relics.

中華書局  
北京  
中國圖書出版社  
北京

After sixty-four years of working and toiling,  
I've managed to achieve a *samadhi* of wisdom.  
At dawn, I'll let it all go and head home to the West,<sup>76</sup>  
And the bright moon will blanket the earth just as before.<sup>77</sup>

# *Late Ming and Early Qing Dynasty*

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(1600–1750)

# 道元

DAOYUAN. We know very little about Daoyuan, apart from the fact that she was born to a certain Wu family in the area that today comprises Anhui and Henan Provinces. She was inducted into the Inner Palace during the last years of the Ming, and fled south with the court when the capital of Beijing fell in 1644. Not long afterward, she entered the Mingyin Convent in Hangzhou. She was known for her poetry, examples of which were collected in a number of anthologies, including the *Mingyuan shiwei* compiled by the woman anthologist Wang Duanshu. Her poem reflects this transition from life in an imperial palace to that in a Brahma palace, or Buddhist monastery.

# 禪坐書懷

碧雲靜鎖梵王宮  
猶似明霞拱禁中  
玉樹舊枝歸靜業  
內家新調擅宗風  
三千里外腸堪斷  
十二年前淚暗紅  
欲悟無生何處是  
禪燈移照鏡臺空



*Seated Meditation: Writing My Feelings*

Green-tinted clouds quietly lock in the Brahma Palace,  
Just as radiant rose clouds guarded the Forbidden Palace.  
Old branches from the jade tree have taken refuge in a life of purity,  
But new melodies from the inner palace still dominate the lineage airs.<sup>78</sup>  
What happened three thousand *li* away was enough to break one's heart,  
What happened twelve years ago has made my tears flow dark and red.<sup>79</sup>  
I long to become enlightened as to where the birthless is to be found;  
When the wisdom lamp is brought to shine, the mirror proves to be  
empty.<sup>80</sup>

# 神一

SHENYI, whose secular name was Xia Shuji, was the daughter of Xia Yunyi, director of the Bureau of Evaluations during the Ming and brother of Xia Wanchun (1631–47), a brilliant poet who died at the hands of the invading Qing troops. Her husband, who was the nephew of Hou Dongceng (1591–1645), a high-ranking Ming official and also fervent loyalist, also died fighting the Qing. After her home was reduced to rubble in the ensuing chaos of the times, Shenyi retreated to a small hermitage, where she was later joined by other members of her family, including two of her sisters-in-law. Even as a young girl, Shenyi was known for her talents in poetry writing and calligraphy. She left behind a collection of her religious discourses (unfortunately no longer extant) and is said to have attracted a considerable number of disciples.

# 憶王庵舊游寄再生

人生聚散本浮漚  
回首蒼茫感昔游  
曉露未收花力重  
午陰欲定鳥聲幽  
聞香小坐忘塵世  
步月清言掃舊愁  
梅影橫斜應似畫  
殘英滿地有誰收

*Recalling a Past Excursion to Wang Convent: Sent to Zaisheng*

Human life consists of meetings and partings, in the end but froth and foam,

Gazing back at the vast expanse, I am moved by thoughts of our past excursion.

The morning dew had not yet dried, the blossoms were plentiful and firm,  
The noon shade was about to settle, the songs of the birds were hidden away.

Inhaling the fragrance around the little bench, we were oblivious to the dusty world,

Walking in the moonlight, our pure talk swept away all the old sorrows.  
The slanting shadow of the plum blossom looked just like a painting;  
Who will gather up the tattered blossoms strewn upon the ground?<sup>81</sup>

# 夢游天台

石梁飛度接花茵

殿閣經行覲勝因

香氣入衣初不觸

*A Dream Journey to Mount Tiantai*  
Across the Stone Bridge I soared until I came to the Lotus Throne,<sup>82</sup>  
Wandering through halls and towers, I saw firsthand the supreme causes.  
When a fragrant vapor suffused my clothes, for the first time I felt  
cleansed,

鐘聲到耳迴無塵  
When the sound of a bell reached my ears, in a split second, I was dust-free.

木童石女賓中主  
The wooden lad and the stone maiden, the host with the guest,<sup>83</sup>  
Green bamboo and yellow blossoms, I now see what they mean.

憶舊臨風三歎息  
Recalling the past, I lean into the wind and let out three long sighs;  
On the azure water, the bright moon's reflection glows like a jewel.<sup>84</sup>

翠竹黃花覺後身

憶舊臨風三歎息

碧潭明月影磷磷

# 再生

ZAISHENG was the daughter of Yao Ximen (1597–1636), who served as a Minister of Culture in the late Ming. Like Shenyi, she married into the Hou family of Ming loyalists; her husband, Hou Yan, died a martyr at the hands of the Qing troops. After his death, she became a nun and joined Shenyi, whom she apparently took as her spiritual teacher, in her hermitage.

## 仲春十五夜大人山中言旋既別寫懷

白雲天末和秋低  
無限離懷怨贖雞  
煙柳河橋殘月小  
疏鐘古寺曉風淒  
白年幻影花枝老  
二十浮生草路迷  
一輩江頭如何折

*On the Night of the Fifteenth of the Second Month of Spring, in the Daren Mountains, Writing of My Feelings after Saying Goodbye after a Conversation*

The white clouds at heaven's end hover low like this sadness,  
I blame this endless sorrow of parting on the rooster at dawn.  
Misty willows along the river bridge, a small new moon,  
Sporadic bells from an ancient temple, a cool dawn breeze.  
The illusory mirage of a lifetime, flowering branches grown old,

A floating existence of twenty years lost on the weed-covered road.  
The lone reed at the river's mouth is about to be snapped in two,  
When you set off to the West, we'll go there hand in hand.<sup>85</sup>

# 靜維

JINGWEI was Shenyi's cousin and also from an elite scholarly family of Huading. She had been engaged to marry the third son of the loyalist Hou Dongceng, but before the wedding could take place, the young man was executed by the Qing. Jingwei then joined Shenyi and Zaisheng in their Buddhist hermitage.



# 贈聖幢師

自是閨中秀

超然遠物華

心能同水月

*Presented to Master Shengchuan*  
From these inner chambers you shine forth,  
Having left all worldly glory far behind you.<sup>86</sup>

骨自帶煙霞  
Your mind is able to be like moon in water,  
Your bones naturally glow with misty colors.

翠長真如竹  
Emerald it grows, the bamboo of suchness,  
Golden it blooms, the flower of wisdom.

翠長真如竹  
I will send a message to Iron/Grinder Liu:  
I must understand the tea of Zhaozhou.<sup>87</sup>

黃開般若花

寄言劉鐵磨

應識超州茶

# 碧海

碧海風濤靜不飛

凌霄高閣敞雲扉

The Jade-Green Sea 擁書千卷無人到

When the wind settles, the waves on the jade-green sea do not soar,  
The lofty heaven-skimming pavilion opens up wide its cloud doors.

I have around me thousands of books, but not a single guest arrives,  
Although when I trim the wick at the third watch, a heron returns.

The incense in the Han halls has dispersed, the bluebirds are gone,<sup>88</sup>

In the autumn chill of the Hou Mountains the jade pipes grow faint.<sup>89</sup>

In the ashes I can make out the remnants of sadness and sorrow

As alone I face the human world, wrapped in the robes of a nun.<sup>90</sup>

緱山秋冷玉笙微

劫灰辨得餘悲愴

獨向人間寄衲衣

超一 

CHAOYI was from Guangling, in Jiangsu province. She married, but was left a widow at a relatively young age, after which she became a nun. Three years after entering the religious life, she passed away. She left a small collection of poems and religious verse, unfortunately no longer extant. However, the noted poet Wang Shizhen (1634–1711) wrote of her very highly.

# 看花

土來澆 灌水來栽

*Flower Gazing*

顛倒工夫任我來

Using soil to irrigate them, using water to plant them in –  
This topsy-turvy way of working allows me to do as I please.

In the garden full of spring breezes, the flowers chatter to themselves;  
They do not feel the need to show off their colors to anyone else!<sup>91</sup>

滿院春風花自語

不將顏色向人開

# 鏡明



JINGMING appears to have been a very sickly child, which is perhaps why at the age of seven her parents entrusted her to the care of the nuns in the Xiaoyi Convent of Hangzhou, which is where Madam Tang, the second wife of the great Ming dynasty Buddhist master Yunqi Zhuhong (1535–1615), had pursued her devotions after he left her to become a monk. Jingming grew up in this convent, and at the age of nineteen was ordained. It would appear that she eventually became an abbess at the convent, and by dint of sheer determination, added a number of buildings to the nunnery over time, including a lecture hall, a meditation hall, and a stupa garden. The girl who had been so sickly as a child that no one thought she would survive finally died at the ripe old age of eighty-two.

口占示徒

庭中卓刹竿  
懸旛更懸鐙  
鐙明大千界  
旛引最上乘

門外河之水  
照面復照心  
真面何虞皺  
道心須要深

*Oral Instructions to My Disciples*

In the center of the hall is a stately pole  
From which hang banners and lanterns.  
Lanterns that illumine the great chiliocosm,<sup>92</sup>  
Banners that draw down the highest vehicle.<sup>93</sup>

Outside the gates are the river's waters,  
Which reflect both the face and the mind.  
The face of truth doesn't worry about wrinkles  
As long as the mind of the Way is profound.<sup>94</sup>

# 行剛

XINGGANG (1597–1654) was born in Jiaxing, in what is today Jiangsu province in southeast China, the only child of a scholar by the name of Hu Rihua and his wife, Madam Tao.<sup>95</sup> She was very intelligent and gifted with a talent for writing poetry: her name is listed in the Jiaxing gazetteer in the section of “talented women.” Like many of our other nuns, she showed an inclination for the religious life at an early age, and upon reaching adolescence, expressed a desire to remain unmarried. Her parents insisted that she marry, however, and she was engaged to a young scholar who succumbed to an illness and died shortly after the betrothal. As was the custom, Xinggang went to live with her fiancé’s parents, and did her best to fulfill the duties of a filial daughter-in-law. She had not given up on her religious aspirations, however, and when she was thirty-four years old and both of her parents had died, she became a nun and a Dharma disciple first of the Linji Chan master Miyun Yuanwu and then later of Miyun Yuanwu’s senior Dharma heir, Shiche Tongsheng (1593–1638). After nearly a decade of solitary meditation, Xinggang was asked to become the abbess of the Crouching Lion Convent in nearby Meixi. She appears to have been a charismatic and eloquent teacher, and people came from all over to listen to her sermons and Dharma talks. When she died, she left behind numerous lay disciples, both male and female, and seven female Dharma heirs. She also left behind a collection of recorded sayings, which remains extant today.



# 孟夏關中間詠

諸老門庭家業盛  
自知疏拙隱爲安  
玄機棒喝都休歇  
萬法虛融莫問禪

白結鶉衣倒掛肩  
饑來吃飯倦時眠  
蒲團穩坐渾忘世

*The First Month of Summer Retreat: Written in Leisure (Four Verses)*

一任窗前日月遷

In the gates and halls of the elders, the work of the lineage flourishes,  
Knowing my own lazy ignorance, I've hidden away in order to be still.  
Esoteric methods, blows and shouts<sup>96</sup> — I am giving them all a rest,  
The myriad dharmas merge in emptiness — stop asking about Chan!

高臥雲巒寄幻驅

A worn, patched robe hangs lopsided from my shoulders,

When hunger comes, I will eat, when tired, I will sleep.

Sitting still on my cushion, I will completely forget the world

And just let the days and the months drift by my window.<sup>97</sup>

白雲翠竹兩依依  
眼前幻境隨遷變

Resting high in the cloudy peaks, a lodging for this illusory body,

White clouds and green bamboo are leaning against the other.

深掩柴扉樂有餘

Before my eyes this magical scene undergoes its transformations,  
Fastening shut my brushwood gate, my happiness spills over.

茅舍風高孰敢親  
棒風喝月走煙雲  
儼然寶鉢虛空托  
淡飯黃齏自現成

A thatched hut buffeted by high winds — who would dare come near?  
Blows of wind and shouts of moon keep away the mist and clouds.  
Solemnly, I lift up my alms bowl toward the empty heavens;  
My unseasoned rice and minced yellow pickle will soon be ready!<sup>98</sup>

# 蒲團

蒲團一片絕遮攔

*The Meditation Cushion*

覆地翻天在處安  
聖號凡名都坐斷

大千收在一毫端

# 拄杖

超然迴別骨稜稜

*The staff*

獨立孤標亙古今

Transcending all major distinctions, cold and detached as bone,

Its independent and solitary style extends from past to present.

It applies equally to sage and fool, its commands are authentic,

Raised to the sky or resting on the ground, it deserves respect!<sup>99</sup>

凡聖齊施全正令

撐天拄地獨爲尊

# 拂子

拂拂真風絕覆藏

*The Fly Whisk*<sup>100</sup>

橫拈豎用好風光  
Swoosh, swoosh, the true tradition uncovers all that is hidden,  
Waved to and fro with vigor, it improves the atmosphere!

當年馬祖曾懸壁  
Once in years gone by, Mazu took it and hung it on the wall.  
Today what harm is there in lifting it up and waving it again?<sup>101</sup>

今日何妨再舉揚

# 鉢盂

滲漏全無何俊哉

*The Alms Bowl*

How very elegant it is, with not even a single leak or hole!

When thirsty I drink; when hungry I eat, leaving not a crumb.

I understand that once washed, nothing more need be done.

Yet how many lost souls insist on attaching a handle to it! <sup>102</sup>

要知洗後渾無事

多少迷人安衲來

新正警眾

浮生幻化苦奔波  
終日茫茫被業磨  
若能掃斷無明窟  
獨露逍遙自在多

人生幻世愛相延  
若休時大覺仙地  
獄天堂俊自取話  
頭透綿密莫貪緣

心常坦坦本來清  
細察多知混世情  
值下翻身登彼岸  
無明頓破笑笑吟

*New Admonitions to the Assembly (Four Verses)*

This floating life an everchanging dream, yet we bitterly toil away,  
The entire day full of busyness, as our karma grinds us down.  
If only you can make a clean sweep of the cave of ignorance,  
You will be left with a life full of leisurely freedom and ease!

Human life and this mirage of a world are kept going by desire,  
Once desire stops, all is the realm of the Great Enlightened One.  
The lords of the heavens and hells will find themselves speechless,  
Having poked through the web, there will be no conditions of desire.

The mind always composed and calm — that is the original purity.  
Careful study and accumulation of facts — turbid worldly emotions.  
If you immediately change your life and step onto the further shore,<sup>103</sup>  
Your ignorance will shatter on its own with a laugh and a song!

了得凡心聖自圓  
急參父母未生前  
覷破本來一著子  
山花流水共同歡

Understand the ordinary mind, and realize one is naturally complete,  
Ask urgently who you were before your father and mother were born.  
When you have seen through the method that underlies them all,  
The mountain blossoms and flowing streams will rejoice with you.<sup>104</sup>



# 掩關

挈挈波波多少年  
杜門息影隱林泉  
乾坤蹄破腳收轉  
獨坐寒窗皎月圓

終日如愚頓息機  
箇中無是也無非  
堂堂坐斷聖凡路  
亙古彌今一本如

*Behind Closed Doors*

After teaching and preaching, running about for so many years,  
Now I've shut my door and retired to the hidden forest spring.  
Having kicked open heaven and earth, I can now rest my feet;  
Alone I sit before the winter window, the shimmering moon full.

Spending the day in a foolish way: no need for any method,  
Here within there is neither existence nor nonexistence.  
Straight and tall, I sit, cutting off the path of sage and fool;  
Since time immemorial to the present day it has been so. <sup>105</sup>

# 一揆

YIKUI (1625–79) was one of the seven Dharma heirs of Master Xinggang. The great-granddaughter of a Minister of Justice and the daughter of a scholar-painter, Yikui had two sisters and two brothers, one of whom, Zilin, would play a particularly central role in her life. Yikui was by all accounts 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. She married a young scholar and apparently fulfilled all of the requirements of a good wife and daughter-in-law happily and successfully. In the fall of 1648, however, her husband, with whom she had a companionate marriage, passed away, leaving Yikui a widow at the age of twenty-three.

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*). Later, she became interested in Chan meditation and sought out the guidance of Master Xinggang, under whom she eventually took ordination. Yikui lived for a few years at the Crouching Lion Convent, but after Master Xinggang's death, moved into a lovely hermitage located on the river bank, which had been built for her by her brother Zilin and which was named Cantong Cloister, or "Cloister of Investigating Commonality." The cloister quickly developed into a fairly large establishment, and Master Yikui attracted a great number of disciples.

This seemingly idyllic life came to an abrupt end in 1667 when, seven years after taking over the leadership of the Crouching Lion Convent, Master Xinggang's designated successor and Yikui's Dharma sister, Yigong, fell ill from exhaustion and overwork. Not long after, the forty-six-year-old Yigong passed away, but not before formally designating Yikui as her successor. After six tiring but productive years as abbess of the Crouching Lion, Yikui moved back to her beloved hermitage, where

she died in 1679 at the age of fifty-four. Her own collection of religious discourses and other writings was compiled several years before her death.

哭本師祇老和尚

折心磨琢幾春秋  
午夢驚殘淚未收  
嘆息離師何太早  
家松蕩盡不知愁

幾見青黃不事師  
自規啼偏落花枝  
傷心愁聽三回喚  
靜掩柴扉風雨時

*Mourning My Teacher, the Venerable Nun Qiyuan [Xinggang]*

After submitting myself to her rigorous training for several years,  
A midday dream shattered awake, tears not yet wiped away.  
Alas, why did I have to be separated from my teacher so soon?  
The family pine tree has grown still and knows no sorrow.

Since when have spring and fall passed without me serving her?  
I find myself imitating the birds crying over the fallen branches.  
Brokenhearted, I listen as again and again they return my calls,  
Then silently I shut the brushwood gate against the wind and rain. <sup>106</sup>

# 輓義公法兄

夢覺含悲聽曉鐘

*An Elegy for Elder Dharma Sister Yigong*

空彈血淚染舟楓  
Half dreaming, half awake, sorrowfully I listen to the morning bell,  
In vain I wipe away tears of blood that stain the boat and the maples.  
I think back on how together we sang the songs of the birthless,  
Why is it, then, that the wind now seems to blow a different tune?<sup>107</sup>

追思共唱無生曲  
何意風吹別調中

# 傷風不得睡

通身發燒咳難儘

*Unable to Sleep Because of a Cold*

起坐披衣氣漸清

My whole body burns with fever, I cannot keep from coughing,  
Rising, I sit, my robes pulled about me; my breath slowly clears.

As I emerge from a state of samadhi the hourglass has run out;  
All I hear is the sound of neighbors' dogs barking in the town.<sup>108</sup>

出定了然更漏絕

只問隣犬吠滾村



# 禁足

九旬收足且偷閑  
欲了殘經對月看  
有耳不聞塵俗事  
熏風透戶憶高賢

自愧彩疏遯古溪  
抱痾終日掩雙扉  
藤蘿密密無人到

*Summer Retreat*<sup>109</sup>

林鳥時談向上機

Ninety days of staying put and yet one can find moments of leisure,  
Trying to make out a tattered sutra, I read under the light of the moon.  
Although I have ears, I hear nothing of the dusty affairs of the world;  
A fragrant breeze slips through the door as I think of the lofty sages.

冷看浪走法門衰

Ashamed of my meager talents, I flee the world to ancient streams,  
Nursing my illness, all day long I keep the double-shuttered gate closed.  
The vines and creepers grow thick and dense, and no one comes;  
Sometimes the forest birds and I discuss methods of self-cultivation.

條忽夏尚秋又杪

I watch unmoved as waves recede and Dharma gates fall into disrepair,  
I now find on the ground within which I will hide myself away.

剛剛學得一痴呆

Suddenly the summer begins to draw to a close, and fall comes again;  
It is only recently that I have mastered the art of being a complete fool.<sup>110</sup>

## 和禪坐偈

打破重關隨處安  
無心于物更瀟然  
閒來危坐松陰下  
漸看蟾蜍東上懸

嘉饒說法墜天花  
擬議尋思被物遮  
觸境遇緣無不足  
敲空取髓作生涯

浩浩談玄疊似雲  
相逢難得箇知音  
紅爐突出超凡志  
宿有夙機轉法輪

Once the layered gates are shattered, any place is a place of tranquility,  
Once the mind becomes unattached to things, all things become pure.

勞生油油姿貪嗔  
In moments of leisure, I sit upright in the shade of the pine tree,  
Watching as the toad in the moon slowly rises to hover in the east.

頓發心花大地春

When one freely speaks of the Dharma, the heavenly flowers fall,  
When one debates and debates, one is only confused by things.

胸懷廓徹若水輪  
With the right opportunity and good fortune nothing is impossible,

Knocking on emptiness, extracting the marrow,<sup>111</sup> becomes a way of life.

How wonderfully sublime to discuss mysteries layered like clouds,  
It is truly rare to meet someone who can be called a kindred soul.  
The red stove blazes forth with an extraordinary determination,  
As if it possessed the karmic power to turn the Dharma wheel.

This toiling life disordered and confused by lust, greed, and anger,  
But when the mind-flower suddenly opens, the world becomes spring.  
Melting snow to boil water for tea, I while away the entire day,  
Feeling inside as vast and expansive as the icy-cold moon above.

輕舟帶月水生花  
菡萏花開暗度香  
聞見覺知無別法  
頭陀懶散髮垂長

A tiny boat in the moonlight stirs up foam-flowers on the water,  
Blossoming water lilies send across their fragrances in the dark.  
Hearing, seeing, knowledge, and consciousness are all one dharma,  
Now this nun can afford to be lazy and let her hair grow long.<sup>112</sup>

# 題鏡

相逢覷而觸人性

*Inscribed on a Mirror*

箇裏無私物物親

We meet and scrutinize each other, I confront my own nature;  
If within there is no self, then each and every thing is intimate.

I am fond of this mirror, which like autumn water is completely clear,  
Always the same, whether reflecting the face of a foreigner or a

Chinese.<sup>137</sup> 我愛秋波清澈底

胡來漢現不留情

# 贈洞雲禪友

古院堂堂一整新

*To My Chan Companion, Dongyun*

洞雲深鎖有知音  
The ancient hall stands tall and proud, completely renewed,  
Locked inside the caves and clouds is a kindred soul. <sup>114</sup>

焚香默坐君有姿  
Burning incense, sitting silently, you are completely at ease,  
The words of a tongueless person are the most novel of all. <sup>115</sup>

無舌人傳語最新

這漢一生骨硬如釘  
一處轉腳最難移根  
二十四上知有此事  
十年克苦忘形  
四十九上憫絕娑婆世界  
覷得世態如冰  
實求早離如願

業緣又使七春  
目今鐵釘如灰  
四大風火分散  
葉落知秋  
正是歸根時候

Altogether, this “fellow” has been as tough as nails,  
Once I dug my heels in, I could not be moved.  
At twenty-four I first found out about this matter  
And for ten years struggled to forget outward appearances.  
At forty-nine, I cut myself loose from this suffering world  
And could see through mundane affairs as if through water.  
I’d got to the truth of things and could leave when I wished,  
But I stuck to my labors for seven more seasons of spring.  
Now in front of your eyes, the iron nails will turn to dust,  
And the four great elements will disperse like wind and fire.  
When leaves fall, one knows autumn has come,  
Now is the time for me to return to the source.  
Ha, ha, ha!

Footloose and fancy-free — that’s me!<sup>116</sup>

啊呵呵  
逍遙惟我

# 靜諾

JINGNUO was the daughter of a county magistrate from Hangzhou. She entered the monastic life as a young girl and became the senior Dharma heir of the woman Chan master Weiji Xingzhi (d. 1672). Like her teacher, Jingnuo earned a reputation for compassionate but strict discipline and impeccable behavior and attracted hundreds of followers, many of them women of the gentry class. It is possible that some of these women knew that behind Jingnuo's stern facade was a lover of poetry and nature. One anecdote relates how she built a grass hut on the banks of the river. Every time she saw the blossoming plum on the myriad trees or the wildly blowing snow, she would say: "This is where true enlightenment is to be found." Jingnuo also occasionally professed shame at the pleasure she derived from words. Late in life she is said to have noted to a disciple, somewhat ruefully, that "The religious life does not rely on words and letters. I am already old, and I've managed to cleanse myself of all kinds of attachments; still I laugh at myself and this one remaining thought."



# 憶維極師

冰雪家風古  
蕭然仗室中  
當年親教誨  
數語發愚蒙  
生死恩難報  
箕裘愧未工  
妙峰還掬土  
道範邈何窮

*Remembering Master Weiji*

Like ice and snow, the lineage air is an ancient one,  
It was stern and strict there in the quarters of the abbess.  
In years gone by she personally taught and guided me,  
With a few words she dispelled my blind ignorance.  
Her compassion in life and death matters hard to repay,  
And I am ashamed that I've not yet lived up to her teachings.  
I will always return to her extraordinary example for sustenance;  
As a model of the Way, she will always be inexhaustible.<sup>117</sup>

幽居靜坐

幽居惟自適  
一編聊自遺  
白晝一何長  
安不自黽勉  
古人碎往矣  
微旨亦須闡  
空檐滴長漏  
爐香生寶篆  
每當興會嘉  
雙手不釋卷  
嗟哉世俗子  
不解親墳典

*Living in Seclusion, Sitting in Silence*

Living in seclusion, one can simply do as one pleases,  
With a single text, one can forget oneself for a while.

The daylight hours — how much time is there really?  
Why then do I not exert myself?  
Although the ancients are long gone,  
Their wisdom must still be grasped.  
From the empty eaves, water keeps on dripping,  
From the censer, ashes fall marking the time.<sup>118</sup>  
This mood always brings me great pleasure,  
As with both hands, I clasp my book tightly.  
What a pity it is that ordinary people of the world  
Know not this intimacy with the words of the wise!<sup>119</sup>

# 歲暮作

時序自推遷  
忽然驚歲暮  
舉目見寒雅  
悲鳴如欲訴  
太陽慘不舒  
似雲四野布  
朔風時北來  
哀號滿庭戶  
翹首望陽春  
春陽不我顧  
居諸如隙駒

*Written at Year's End*

剝啄有定數

The sequence of seasons naturally pushes forward,

suddenly I am startled by the ending of the year.

Lifting my eyes I catch sight of the winter crows,

calling mournfully as if wanting to complain.

The light of the sun is chill rather than gentle,

spreading over the four corners like a cloud.

A cold wind blows fitfully in from the north,

its sad whistling filling courtyards and houses.

結伴儘堪度

Head raised, I gaze up toward the spring,  
But the spring pays no attention to me at all.  
Time is a galloping colt glimpsed through a crack,  
Death's knock on the door has its predestined time.  
How could I not know, one who has left the world,  
And become familiar with the floating clouds?  
In my garden grow several trees of flowering plum  
Whose sworn pact of friendship helps me get by.<sup>120</sup>

## 春宵即事

野藤花氣暗隨風

*Spring Night, An Impromptu Poem*

狼籍春光一半空

斜依石欄頻望處

滿庭明月有無中

# 夏日晚晴

窗白雨將去  
猶存一帳寒  
神清無俗夢  
心定不生瀾  
紅濕知蓮苦  
聲遲識漏殘  
畫梁新燕小  
窺棟何處聲

*Clear Sky Late on a Summer's Day*

The window lightens as the rain gradually stops,  
Although the curtains still retain a bit of the chill.  
A transcendent heart means no mundane dreams,  
A stabilized mind does not give rise to any waves.  
Its reds soaked through, I know the lotus suffers,  
The sounds slow down, the rain must be stopping.  
Under the painted crossbeams the little swallow chicks  
Peek through the eaves, fill the house with chatter. [122](#)

# 河渚初夏

石枕藤床萬慮忘  
跣趺不遂世間忙  
風生蒲扇人情冷  
竹映紗窗月影涼  
隨地可消清夜永  
無心嘗戴野荷香  
門迎流水塵聲遠  
欄外松濤入耳長



*On a Riverbank in Early Summer*

A stone pillow and a vine cot: the ten thousand worries forgotten,  
Sitting cross-legged, I do not chase after the busyness of the world.  
A breeze rises from the rush fan: human emotions grow cold,  
The bamboo etched against the gauze window: moon shadows grow chill.  
No matter where one is, one can mitigate the endlessness of the pure  
night,  
In the state of no-mind one can fully enjoy the fragrance of the wild lotus.  
At my door I greet the running brook, the sounds of the world are  
faraway,  
And beyond the railing, the sighing of the pine trees lingers in my  
ears.<sup>123</sup>

# 閱楞嚴經

青蓮自是出游泥

*On Reading the Lankavatara Sutra*

在處明心便不迷

The blue lotus spontaneously emerges from the drift of the mire;  
If you bring to everything an illumined mind, you won't get lost.  
I send word to those who study to always keep firmly in mind,  
That which is originally pure is none other than wisdom itself.<sup>124</sup>

寄語學人須著意

本來無染既菩提

# 舟泊姑蘇

扁舟今夜泊  
遙對閶閭城  
霞落浦雲晚  
雅眠山月明  
片帆歸路遠  
千里客心驚  
鼓柁不成寐  
蕭蕭何處聲

*Mooring My Boat at Suzhou*

My little boat drops anchor tonight,  
From afar I gaze at the closed city gates.  
As the rosy mist descends, the riverbank clouds darken,  
As the crows return to roost, the mountain moon shines.  
But this little boat still has a long way to go,  
And the thousand-*li* traveler's heart is unsettled.  
The noise of drums and oars make it difficult to sleep,  
And that rustling sound, from whence does it come?<sup>125</sup>

# 行徹

XINGCHE was born in 1606 in Hengzhou in Hunan province. Her father was a scholar-official who himself had a strong interest in Buddhism and often took advantage of his official travels to different parts of China, in particular to the southeast, to visit well-known Buddhist teachers and meditation masters. Xingche relates that on the night she was conceived, her father had a dream that a Buddhist monk came to his door asking for food and shelter, and that he very gladly acquiesced. She also notes that, even as a child, she felt an aversion to meat and was strongly attracted to the Buddhist teachings — details found in many hagiographic stories of holy men and women in the Buddhist tradition. As was true of a growing number of women of the gentry class during this period, Xingche was educated at home. By the time she married (she would have preferred not to), she had read widely in both the Confucian classics and the Buddhist scriptures and had mastered the art of writing poetry as well. Xingche bore her husband several children in quick succession, but not long after the birth of the last child, her husband died while on an official journey in the south. After his death, she retreated to a small cloister on the family property, where she devoted herself to meditation and other religious devotions. Feeling the necessity of a spiritual mentor, she began to study Chan Buddhism, first with a local monk, and then with a Linji Chan master by the name of Shanci Tongji (1608–46), who was a Dharma heir of Chan master Miyun Yuanwu. After several years, at the age of thirty-three, Xingche was ordained, and moved into a small hermitage on Mount Heng (also known as Nanyue, or Southern Peak) to be closer to her teacher. Shanci, however, died prematurely only a few years later from eating poisonous greens after the area was overrun by invading Qing troops and all of the agricultural crops were destroyed. Xingche left Mount Heng and traveled to southeast China to visit a number of eminent but aging Chan teachers in the Linji lineage of Master Miyun Yuanwu. It was from one of

these, Master Wanru Tongwei (d. 1657), in what is today Suzhou, that she received Dharma transmission and to whose lineage she officially belongs. Xingche spent a number of years in the Jiangnan area, where her teaching drew a great number of disciples, both lay and monastic, male and female. She was particularly famous for her strict adherence to monastic discipline in a time many considered to be marked by general religious and moral decline. She was also known for her literary gifts. In 1654, at the age of forty-seven, she was invited to become the abbess of a convent in Suzhou. Two years later, a sizeable collection of her religious discourses and other writings — including the poems translated here — was compiled, printed, and circulated widely. Little is known about Xingche's later life, but it would appear from her poems that she returned to her beloved Mount Heng to pass her final years.

南嶽山居雜

澗底風來嘯  
情空物物幽  
不聞車馬鬧  
遠卻世塵憂  
葉落如秋老  
林疏露瀑流  
忘機鷗與鷺  
柏狎若相投

門倩閑雲護  
清幽丈室臨  
林猿探果熟  
巢鳥入林深  
撤卻浮名網  
超然樂道心  
空空四句外  
得意芥投針

日出通身暖  
風來大地涼  
人心多障礙  
聖道獨揮揚  
白玉生成白  
黃金不煉黃  
古今無改變

Living in Seclusion in the Nanyue Mountains (Ten of Twenty-Five Poems)<sup>126</sup>

On the mountain stream the wind gusts fiercely;

When the heart is empty, each and every thing is still.  
There is no noise here of clattering carts and horses,  
It is far from both neighbors and dusty worldly cares.  
The leaves fall, as if autumn had grown old,  
The trees are bared, revealing the waterfall.  
I've abandoned all ambitions: now seagull and egret  
Are as close to me as the most intimate of friends.

The gate borrows stray clouds to guard it,  
And a pure solitude borders my quarters.  
Forest gibbons go in search of ripe fruit,  
Roosting birds fly deep into the forest.  
I've thrown off the net of floating fame  
And aimed higher with a mind that delights in the Way.  
The emptiness of emptiness, beyond the four phrases,<sup>127</sup>  
A fulfillment as rare as finding a needle in a haystack.<sup>128</sup>

When the sun comes out, it warms the body through,  
And when the wind rises, it cools off the great earth.  
The human heart must face so very many obstacles  
That only the way of the sages can scatter and dispel.  
Like white jade, from the beginning it is completely white,  
Like yellow gold, it needs no refining to become yellow.  
Whether ancient or modern, it undergoes no change,  
And in each and every place reveals the eternally real.



亂石千峰裏  
危廬依碧岑  
黃鶯鳴翠柳  
白鷺雜芳林  
曲徑穿雲細  
荆扉落葉深  
幾番遷位處  
山色盡沉吟

高隱平生志  
今來住此山  
幻塵都覷破  
浮世漫相觀  
石乳隨時汲  
藤花任意攀  
乾坤空浩大  
誰識此中間

林壑晴雲鎖  
亭亭幾樹梅  
汲泉吟詠去  
採藥帶香回  
葉上寒山偈  
雲中般若臺  
杖屨隨所至  
石几布蒼苔

A jumble of boulders amid thousands of mountaintops,  
A thatched hut leaning precariously against jade peaks.

Yellow orioles sing in the kingfisher-green willows,  
White egrets wheel through the sweet-smelling woods.  
The winding path threads narrowly through the clouds,  
The bramblewood gate lies deep among the fallen leaves.  
I wander from one vantage point to another and another,  
Until all the mountain scenes have been captured in verse.

To dwell in noble solitude has been the goal of a lifetime,  
So from now on I will live my life here on this mountain.  
I have seen through the illusions of this dusty world  
And am no longer embroiled in this floating existence.  
There are stalactites that one can suck whenever one likes  
And wisteria flowers that can be pulled down as one pleases.  
Heaven and earth make up a space so great and so vast,  
Who really appreciates the leisure to be found therein!

The forest ravine locked in by fair-weather clouds,  
Where a scattering of plum trees stand tall and proud.  
Humming a tune, I set out to draw water from the spring,  
Wrapped in fragrances, I return from gathering herbs.  
On the leaves, the *gathas* of Hanshan,  
In the clouds, the terraces of wisdom.  
I follow my bramblewood staff wherever it goes,  
To a stone bench covered with gray-green moss.

古樹蟠奇石  
清谿遶碧苔  
飯餘山鳥靜  
雲破盈龍回  
壁老形如圖  
人間冷似灰  
三生如半日  
何處得愁來

巖老山房瘦  
閒僧許暫棲  
雲深天墜地  
影淡日沉西  
勞我烏藤杖  
看人白壁題  
悠悠清興永  
說偈對潺谿

窗碧映清輝  
開門納翠微  
離霞孤鶴迴  
繞石亂雲飛  
矮榻苔爲席  
疏簾葉作衣

Ancient trees coil around odd-shaped stones,  
Clear streams circle around jade-green moss.  
Bellies full, the mountain birds settle down,  
The clouds break open and the dragons return.  
The cliffs are old and shaped as in a painting,  
Humans at leisure, passions as cold as ashes.  
Three lifetimes pass like just a half of a day,  
From what place will melancholy ever emerge?

The cliffs are old, the mountain hut decrepit,  
A good place for this idle nun to roost a while.  
The clouds darken as the sky descends into the earth,  
The shadows grow faint, as the sun sets in the west.  
Trudging along with my staff of black cane,  
I notice someone's inscription on a white wall.

Long and lingering, this pure elation is endless,  
As I recite my *gathas* to the gurgling brook.

The azure sky in the window gleams pure and clear,  
I open the door to let in the blue-green of the hills.  
From out of the rosy mists, the lone crane returns,  
Circling boulders, soaring through scattered clouds.  
A low bed of moss can be used as a meditation mat,  
The scattered leaves on the eaves can serve as a robe.  
The setting sun has disappeared far into the west,  
The weary birds instinctively know their way home.

桂輪偏照野  
風氣浦幽林  
愛見激清景

The late autumn moon lights up the forest,  
And mountain mists fill the secluded woods.  
I love to look at this crystal clear landscape.  
It helps me sustain an empty and clear mind.  
On the flat moss, I can sit in stable meditation,  
As the wind whips its way deep into the woods.  
An old nun comes to see how I am getting along.  
We light some incense, play a bit on the zither.

恒持虛白心  
苔平跌坐穩  
風勁入林深  
老衲來相問  
焚香一鼓琴

猛秋送行

塞鴈多南度  
翩翩遠送君  
此時看別路  
何處共斜曛  
調拂關山月  
思浮海國雲  
尺書如不吝  
千里寄殷勤

紅樹霜橋別  
青蘿水寺期  
去來唯仗錫  
得失但稱詩  
細雨迷松徑  
孤煙結柳絲  
好隨梧葉信  
莫負落花時

國亂猶飛錫  
天邊何處留  
朝雲排小閣  
夕雨上孤洲  
白業皈常住  
青燈說浪遊

*The First Month of Autumn: Seeing Someone Off on a Journey*

孤帆歎乃襄  
西蕃定中劉

These flock across toward the south,

Wings flapping, they see you off into the distance.  
As I gaze now at the road that will lie between us,  
Where will we again together share a setting sun?  
Sent away in exile to below the mountain-pass moon,  
I think of the clouds over that faraway land by the sea.  
If I am not forced to be sparing with my letters to you,  
A thousand *li* I will send them, bidding you to take care.

By the red-leaved trees, the frosty bridge, we parted,  
By the blue wisteria, the waterside temple, we were to meet.  
Going and coming now with nothing but a walking staff,  
Winning and losing apply only to the judging of poems.  
A fine rain: I lose my way along paths of pine,  
A lone mist: I braid together threads of willow.  
It is better to put your trust in the leaves of *wutong* trees,  
Who will never abandon you when the flowers fall.

The country in chaos, but still you wander about;  
Where at heaven's edge will you finally stay still?  
Early morning clouds file before the little pavilion,  
Late afternoon rains climb up to the solitary isle.  
White karma has led you to take refuge in the deathless,  
Blue lamps have persuaded you to drift like a wave.  
A lone solitary sail, the sound of creaking oars,  
From dawn to dusk floating within samadhi.<sup>130</sup>

# 偶然作

短髮蓬鬆披雪裘

長季寂寞臥林丘

松華漫煮青精飯

*Improvvisu Verse*  
My short hair in disarray looks like a coat of snowy fur,  
The entire season I've spent alone resting in the wooded hills.

霜葉寒燒黃蘗秋

Pine seeds thrown in boiling water make a fine green meal,  
Frosty leaves burn away the cold, yellow oak in autumn. <sup>131</sup>

The misfortune of my worldly affairs, a butterfly's dream,  
The death of my husband now entrusted to the spring flow.

澆倒世情如蝶夢  
The cricket on the stone stairs does not yet understand my thoughts  
And so continues to address the eaves with its melancholy plaint. <sup>132</sup>

此離時事付春流

砌蛩未識閒情思

早向簷肯訴冷愁



# 寫懷

道路崎嶇過傻休  
閒觀世事水東流

*Writing My Feelings*

目窮天際空今古

The road through rugged terrain, at times easy, at times obstructed,  
In leisure I observe the affairs of the world like a river flowing east.

I gaze toward the end of the sky, empty of past and present,  
I walk among the clouds, freely coming and going.

I often sit together with a master of stream and boulder

And occasionally travel with a wayfarer of the pine flower.

At times I manage to come up with a phrase, and whistle as I ride the void,  
Better even than exchanging poems with the fisherman and

woodcutter.<sup>133</sup>

泉石主人常並坐  
松花道者每同遊

有時得句憑虛嘯

勝與漁樵共唱酬

竹拄杖頌

儻侗一椽  
無枝無葉  
硬骨稜層  
七凹八凸  
其心雖空  
針撈不通  
凌霜傲雪  
不變其容  
生荆棘林  
長頑石壁  
無陰陽地  
卓卓安立  
用時活潑  
能縱能奪  
全生即殺  
全殺即活  
指西劃東  
勢若飛龍  
挑回明月  
撥轉虛空  
往往來來  
全憑渠力  
把住時  
聖凡乞命  
放行時  
瓦礫生色  
通身作用  
自天然  
倒弄橫拈

詠竹則 *On the Bamboo Walking Staff*

Roughly broken off with a snap,  
Stripped of branches and leaves.  
Hard as bone, bumpy and uneven,  
Holes and knots here and there.  
Although its “heart” is empty,  
Pricks and blows can’t pass through.  
It withstands both frost and snow  
Without changing its appearance.  
When thorns spring up in the woods,  
It is as obstinate as a stone wall.  
Without being either yin or yang,  
Majestically, it establishes itself.  
When it is used, it is vital and alive,  
Able to both hold on and let go.  
When life is complete, then it kills,  
When killing is complete, it revives.<sup>134</sup>  
Pointing east or pointing west,  
Its power is like a flying dragon,  
It can pluck back the bright moon  
And make the empty skies revolve.  
Going and coming, coming and going,  
It relies completely on its own power.  
When it is laid to rest, both sages and fools plead for their life,  
When it is made use of, even potshards and tiles are beautiful.  
From first to last, its function stems from its inherent nature,  
Flipping over, lifting up — who knows what it will do next?<sup>135</sup>

# 濟符

JIFU was born in Huzhou in Jiangsu province to the Li family, and was an extremely precocious young girl. She received Dharma transmission from Chan master Jichu Hongchu (1605–72), who was a Dharma successor of Hanyue Fazang (1573–1635), who was himself a Dharma heir of Miyun Yuanwu but later broke with his teacher over a number of doctrinal issues. In the latter part of his life, Jichu Hongchu served as the abbot of the Lingyan Monastery in Hangzhou, and was known for his close connections with lay literati of the Jiangnan area. Jifu herself served as the abbess of the Miao-zhan and the Lingrui Convents, both located in the Hangzhou-Suzhou area. However, we have few details of her life apart from what can be gleaned from her poems, sermons, and other writings. In fact, she left two collections of writings. The first of these is a five-chapter collection of sermons, poems, and other writings compiled during the time she was abbess of Miao-zhan Convent, which appears to have been printed and circulated during her lifetime. The second collection, also in five chapters, appears to have been printed after her death.

## 十二時歌

夜半子

夢裏紛紛不知止  
踏破東山西嶺青  
翻身原在被窩裏

雞鳴丑

日用頭頭自諧偶  
那邊水洗面皮光  
這裏啜茶濕卻口

平旦寅

*Song of the Twelve Hours of the Day*<sup>136</sup>

*Middle of the night* 佛祖到來難著力

In my dreams, I go here and there and don't know how to stop myself.

*Leading into pieces the green of the eastern hills and the western peaks,*  
唯人自肯乃方親  
Then turning over to find one's been nestled in the bedcovers all along.

The cock crows — the second hour

*All the routines of everyday life, each one naturally in accord.*

Over there, by the banks of the river, they scrub their faces until they

*shine,* 珊瑚樹林色杲杲

*Over here, rising the mouth with tea then swallowing it down.*

不須別處覓瞿曇

*Down breaks the third hour*  
丈六金身一整草

I am alone here among ten thousand forms and I can bare my body.  
If the Buddha and ancestors came, they'd find it hard to overpower me,  
Only if a person is herself willing can anyone become intimate with her.

The sun rises — the fourth hour  
In the coral tree<sup>137</sup> groves, the colors are bright and radiant.  
There is no need to look elsewhere for the Buddha, Gautama,  
His sixteen-foot-tall golden body is in a single blade of grass.

食時辰  
別甑炊香玉粒新  
喫粥了洗鉢盂去  
便道宗師指示人

禺中已  
莫向太虛分彼此  
風中鈴鐸善宣揚  
歷歷分明無一字

日南午  
愛閒不打禾山鼓  
無事上山走一遭  
倦來又上蒲團坐

日昃未  
十二部經可知禮  
稽首南無上大人  
Mealtime — the fifth hour  
試問如為秋乙巳  
In the new pot, fragrant, mouth-watering grains of fresh rice.  
When I've finished eating my porridge, I go wash my bowl  
Then tell the Dharma master to correct and instruct the others.

Midmorning — the sixth hour  
Do not split up the great emptiness into “this” and “that.”  
Bells and clappers in the wind are very good at preaching,  
Explaining everything in detail without using a single word!

The sun shifts south — the seventh hour  
Those who are fond of leisure do not pound on Hoshan's drum.<sup>138</sup>  
When there's free time, I climb the mountain and stroll about,  
And when I'm weary, seat myself on meditation mat once more.

The sun begins to sink — the eighth hour  
From the twelve-sectioned canon we can know how to behave.  
With bowed head, I place my trust in the Peerless Great One  
And venture to ask how to apply it to this autumn of 1665.<sup>139</sup>

晡時申

會得依狀猶隔津  
自怪修行不得力  
順成歡喜逆成瞋

日入西

一彎月掛窗遷柳  
吹火柴生滿灶煙  
頭上青灰三五斗

黃昏戌

老鼠便來頭白蜜

Late afternoon — the ninth hour

床頭打起五更

I chide myself that my cultivation practice is not stronger.

連累山僧不得息

When all goes well, I am happy; when it doesn't, I get angry!

The sun sets — the tenth hour

A curve of moon hangs over the willow by the window.

I blow on the kindling, and the furnace fills with smoke.

Four or five flecks of dark ash fly up over my head.

人定亥  
芥子吸乾香水海

Golden dusk — the eleventh hour  
Time for the mice to venture out to steal the pale honey.

衣內麝尾忽放光  
At the foot of my bed they make a racket late into the night,

Which disturbs this mountain monk so she cannot sleep.

露柱燈籠齊唱采

Everyone settled — the twelfth hour

The mustard seed drinks dry the Fragrant-Water Sea.<sup>140</sup>

Beneath my robes, the *mani* jewel suddenly radiates light,<sup>141</sup>

Singing in unison with the lanterns on the outside pillars.<sup>142</sup>



# 荷花

風掠晴荷水閣涼

*Lotus Flower*

淤泥不染夜生香

The wind brushes the fine lotuses, the water pavilion is cool,  
Unstained by drifting mud, at night they give off a fragrance.

If one's entire self is as stable as a carriage with giant wheels

There will be no need to travel West to meet the Dharma King.<sup>143</sup>

全身如坐車輪大

不必西行覲法王

# 濟總

JIZONG. Chan master Jizong was born into a famous scholar-official family from Zhejiang province and married into an even more famous family with a long tradition of official service. She was known even as a young girl for her intelligence and love of books as well as for her calligraphy and painting. She appears to have had an early interest in Buddhism and would often go to the Miaozhan Convent, where she would study and practice under Master Jifu. She was widowed, most likely in middle age, after which she went to visit Master Jichu Hongchu at the Lingyan Monastery in Suzhou. She became his disciple, and after completing the mourning period for her husband and settling her family affairs, she took the ordination and went to live in the Miaozhan Convent. Jizong and Jifu seemed to have had a strong spiritual and intellectual connection, and together they compiled a five-chapter collection of poetic commentaries on ancient Chan stories. After her death, one of her disciples also collected her writings, which were printed in 1677.

# 贈張夫人

浮華轉盼屬雲煙

草座麻衣悟息肩

To Lady Zhang 識病豈煩尋妙藥

This empty show in a blink of an eye reverts to clouds and mist,  
A seat of straw and robes of hemp, knowing how to rest the shoulders.  
When one knows one is ill, why bother to search for miraculous cures?  
When one understands emptiness, one can move all the gods.

The pearl-offering Dragon Girl was bound to become a buddha,<sup>144</sup>  
And the sapling-planting wife of Pang was fond of studying Chan.<sup>145</sup>

獻珠龍女當成佛  
The melody of the breathless is something we can discuss together,  
And the wind I send this letter to you tied to the leg of the goose.<sup>146</sup>

搜疏龐婆好學禪

一曲無生堪共語

臨風寄與雁頭箋

# 印月

YINYUE. Yinyue was from an elite Shaoxing (Zhejiang province) family. It is said that from an early age she showed little interest in worldly activities and would often sit in meditation. She was married to a certain Mr. Xie at the age of sixteen, but when she was thirty, she became a disciple and later a Dharma heir of Linji Chan master Linye Tongqi (1595–1652), another of Miyun Yuanwu’s twelve Dharma heirs. It may be that she was widowed; or it may be that she could no longer deny the religious vocation she had felt since she was a child. Yinyue appears to have been of a strongly eremitic bent and in the beginning lived in a small hermitage and called herself “the Crouching Dragon Abbess.” Although her disciples compiled her discourse records after her death, unfortunately none of her writings remain extant today apart from a few poems and scattered accounts of Dharma exchange. Wang Duanshu (1621–ca. 1706), the famous woman poet and compiler of an anthology of women’s writings, remarks that Yinyue’s religious poetry provides evidence for those who need it that “the ability to realize the Great Way has nothing to do with whether one is a man or a woman.”<sup>147</sup>

# 世尊賭明星

*The World-Honored One Gazes at the Shining Stars*  
Present, past, heaven and earth— no more rebirth,  
So what need for special analysis and explication?  
And yet now night after night shining stars appear;  
Is it not perhaps a convocation of the compassionate?<sup>148</sup>

今古乾坤無變易  
何許特地費分疏  
而今夜夜明星現  
試問諸仁會也無

# 山中偶

伏龍不會禪  
問者只粗拳  
高臥重岩下  
都忘歲與年  
堪嗟逐世客  
勞勞天地間  
愧予百不會  
贏得一身閒

*In the Mountains*

This crouching dragon knows nothing of Chan,  
The one who asks gets nothing but a fist in reply.  
Resting up high beneath the many-layered cliffs,  
I completely forget the passing of the years.  
Pitiable are all those who chase after the world,  
Struggling and toiling between heaven and earth.  
Embarrassed that although I don't know much,  
I've succeeded in living out my life in leisure!<sup>149</sup>

# 明修



MINGXIU, a native of Jiangsu province, is said to have showed a decided leaning toward the religious life at a very young age, refusing to eat meat even as a child, and when she became a little older, expressing her determination to remain unmarried in order to care for her aging parents. After their deaths, she took the tonsure and became a nun. She is known to have traveled on pilgrimage to many of the famous Buddhist sites in China, including Mount Emei, Mount Putuo, and Mount Wutai. She left a collection of poetry and a collection of discourse records, neither of which, unfortunately, have been preserved.



# 合江

合江山色好  
耐可雨連綿  
欲覓峨眉路  
須憑般若船  
雲峰呈曉景  
仙樹帶秋煙  
咫尺趨瞻處  
將登第一天

*The River He*

The mountain landscape along the He River is fine,<sup>150</sup>  
But one must put up with a rain that goes on forever.  
If you want to find the way to Emei Mountain,  
You must rely on the boat of intuitive wisdom.  
Cloud-covered peaks give way to early dawn,  
Numinous trees are covered with autumn mist.  
And very close by is a spot where one can look up,  
As if about to ascend into the first of the heavens!<sup>151</sup>

# 泊舟

漁火村燈兩暗然

*Moorng the Boat*

暮雲空隙見長天  
The fisherman's fire, the village lights have both grown dark.  
Through a break in the evening clouds, a glimpse of the long sky.  
The waves lie flat, the gleam on the river's surface stirs slightly,  
The auspicious mist gently shimmering in the air is not smoke.<sup>152</sup>

波平江面光微動

瑞霞輕搖不是煙

# 示眾

妄談般若妄談宗

誤引群聾學我聾

*Instructions to the Congregation*

Recklessly speaking of wisdom, carelessly talking of religion,  
Mistakenly entice the deaf to learn from my own deafness.  
From the beginning form and substance have been complete,  
Affairs follow the pattern of the world manifesting in emptiness.

It is because you are attached that opportunities are blocked;  
Beings, once free of emotions, can fully penetrate the Way.

Right in the midst of this is where the truth can be realized,  
As the sun heads toward the west and the river flows east.<sup>153</sup>

人因有執機皆塞

物爲無情道盡通

可是箇中真得處

太陽西去水流東

# 明本



MINGBEN was from the area around present-day Shanghai. Her mother was childless for many years and spent a great deal of time at the temple praying for children. Finally she gave birth to two daughters. Just before she gave birth to Mingben, she had a vision of a divine being who said to her, “This child will be worthy of transmitting the [Buddhist] lineage.” Mingben turned out to be an extraordinarily intelligent child who loved to read. When she reached the age of marriage, her mother, no doubt because of her vision, placed her in a convent. Eventually, Mingben became a Dharma heir of the famous Linji master Feiyin Tongrong (1592–1660). After this, she traveled extensively and visited all four of the sacred mountains of Chinese Buddhism: Putuo, Jiuhua, Wutai, and Emei. She finally ended up in Beijing’s Lingguan Convent, where she gained a reputation for her spiritual attainments and for her ability to write moving religious poetry. She was also known for her painting, not only of Buddhist images but also of landscapes and flowers. Many of her poems were written as inscriptions on her paintings.

# 自題荊州寓庵求畫西湖

融融麗日洞天幽

一種清華近寶樓

香篆去從朝彩接

白雲來自曉風收

*An Inscription for a Painting of West Lake Commissioned by a Convent in Jingzhou*

泉流竹葉將成筏

Mild and gentle, a fine sun pierces through the heaven's obscurity,

And there is a kind of pure flower growing near the jeweled tower.

Patterned incense smoke leaves to meet the colors of the morning,

And pale clouds arrive gathered in by the breezes of the dawn.

The bamboo leaves floating on the stream will turn into rafts,

The wuting branches among rosy clouds will become dragons.

The auspicious air filling the peaks, the blossoms filling the foothills,

Are enough to transform this small cell into a realm of the gods!<sup>154</sup>

瑞氣滿峰花滿麓

值教斗室作神州



# 題智林莊嚴閣圖

移將江浙置荊州

咫尺西湖任所遊

神入妙時天地闊

*An Inscription for a Painting of The Statey Pavilion of Zhilin*  
Jiangsu and Zhejiang have been transplanted here to Jingzhou,<sup>155</sup>

So that in this intimate West Lake one can wander as one pleases.

When the spirit enters into the mystery, heaven and earth are vast,

Where thoughts merge and penetrate, rivers and hills are lovely.

Every time the clouds and mist retreat, the forest path opens up,

And the rosy dawn colors repeatedly rise to embrace the halls.

Along the stretch of fragrant hillside, the springtime is truly fine,

Above the three ponds, the round moon is as lovely as that of fall.<sup>156</sup>

霞彩頻興擁殿樓

一帶芳堤春正好

三潭印月又堪秋

# 超衍



CHAOYAN was born in Hangzhou, in present-day Zhejiang province, to the Qiu family. She appears to have been raised in a monastery setting, leaving home when she was only three years old — we do not know if this was because of her spiritual precocity, or perhaps because her parents were poor and could not afford to raise her. She was tonsured when she was only eleven years old and subsequently became the disciple of Chan master Benchong Sheng (d. 1671), who was a Dharma heir of Feiyin Tongrong and the abbot of the Huiyun Monastery in Hangzhou. She appears to have been quite famous for her literary gifts: there is mention of a collection of her recorded sayings, which I have been unable to locate. The seventeenth-century woman anthologist Wang Duanshu writes that “When I read all the poems in her recorded sayings, [I find them to be like] fish leaping in the vast sea, [like] birds soaring in the heavens above. They are neither separated from words nor obstructed by words.”

# 自贊

吳山頂上月輪孤

*A Self-Description*

冷淡清貧一物無  
來問頭陀何所事

到九華見溪水偶成  
坐久自歡娛

九華別是一諸天  
殿宇人傳自晉年  
怪低夜來渾未寐  
松風不端水涓涓

*Arriving at the Jiuhua Mountains, I Saw the Creek and Was Moved to Write This*

The Jiuhua Mountains are a different kind of heaven,<sup>158</sup>  
Their halls and towers dating back, it is said, to the Jin.<sup>159</sup>  
I wonder why when night comes I am unable to sleep:  
The pine wind gusts endlessly, the water trickles on.<sup>160</sup>



# 大殿

寒色蒼蒼老柏風

*The Great Hall*

石苔清滑露光融

Winter colors hoary and pale, the winds in the old poplars,  
The stone moss is pure and slippery, the bright dew shimmers.

At midnight in the surrounding hills the bells and chimes grow still,  
And the crystal palaces and halls of the moon are like lustrous jade. <sup>161</sup>

半夜四山鐘磬盡

水晶宮殿月鈴瓏

# 峰頂

月明如水山頭寺

*Mountain Peak*  
仰面觀天石上行

The moon as bright as water above this mountaintop temple,  
Looking up I gaze at the heavens and wander among the rocks.  
It is midnight and in the deep halls people's voices have stilled;  
The shudder of a pine tree branch brings the cry of a heron. 162

一枝松動鶴來聲

# 蒲團偈

蒲團靜坐閉禪觀

*Meditation Mt. Gath*

四歲歸來改舊嚴

On this mat I've silently sat in solitary meditation retreat.

Four years come and gone, my old countenance has changed.

In a snap of the fingers I've seen through the mind's games

The blue mountain stand as before among the white clouds.<sup>163</sup>

彈指欄將心事了

青山依舊白雲間

# 夏雨

萬樹搖風驟雨聲

*Summer Rains*

蕭蕭一榻傍初更

Thousands of trees are swaying in the wind and driving rain,  
Whistling fiercely by my couch as the first watch draws near.

Tossing in my bed, a cool dream scatters just like the clouds.  
As the moon rises in the western sky in a thin shaft of light. 164

翻身涼夢和雲斷

月上西空透隙明

# 元端

YUANDUAN was from a scholarly family of Jiading in Jiangsu province. She became a nun at the tender age of twelve and later received Dharma transmission from Chan master Shanshao Benzhi, a second-generation Dharma heir of Miyun Yuanwu. She subsequently served as abbess of the Mingyin Convent in Hangzhou and of the Crouching Lion Convent in Jiaying. She was particularly known for her poetry.

# 書齋偶詠

榻寄閑窗下  
相攜話昔遊  
烹茶成雅集  
開卷足清幽  
宿雨花生潤  
微風鳥自謳  
留將參照影  
靜拂素絲幽

*My Study: An Impromptu Verse*

Leisurely we rest on the couch by the window,  
And hand in hand reminisce over past excursions.  
We brew some tea and all is elegant and refined,  
Perusing books is enough for this pure seclusion.  
In the night rain, the flowers begin to glisten,  
In the gentle breeze, the birds start to chatter.  
As if to detain the shadows of the fading light,  
I silently strum the white silk strings in the dark. <sup>165</sup>

# 妙惠

MIAOHUI was born in Changzhou, in Jiangsu province. She later married a scholar by the name of Li Shiyan from Shanxi. Her husband died not long after their marriage, and Miaohui's parents urged her to remarry. She was determined to remain faithful to her husband's memory, however, and refused to do so. After the death of both her parents, she became a nun at the Bore (Prajna) Convent in her hometown of Changzhou. She attracted a great number of disciples and was particularly known for her poetic talent. She died when she was over eighty years old and left behind a collection of writings, unfortunately no longer extant.



# 般若招提曉坐

夜雨洗山巖  
朝來翠獨濕  
跌坐學觀空  
清風滿香積  
正因字本無  
而我好翰墨  
心即等死灰  
未了人間孽  
窗竹皆虛心  
庭松多勁節  
體此長青樹

*Early Morning Meditation at the Bore Convent*

原不在虛實

The night rain washes down the mountain cliffs,  
When dawn comes the brilliant greens are damp.  
Sitting cross-legged, I learn to contemplate emptiness,  
As the pure breeze fills with accumulated fragrance.

Words cannot in the end overcome delusion,  
But still I remain fond of brush and ink.

坐久聞妙香  
My mind has yet to become as dead as ashes,  
It has not yet exhausted all my worldly karma.

慈航如何接

The bamboo by the window is completely hollow of a self,  
The pine in the courtyard is extremely determined and pure.  
I intuitively understand that these evergreen trees  
Are in essence beyond both emptiness and form;  
How could it be then that between bell and fish-drum  
Is where the principles of Buddhism are to be found!  
After a long sitting, I get a whiff of its wondrous fragrance,  
How can one find passage on the Ship of Compassion?<sup>166</sup>

# 石巖

SHIYAN was from the Hangzhou area, in present-day Zhejiang province. A precocious young girl, she not only read voraciously, but was also a particularly gifted musician, calligrapher, painter, and poet. She became a concubine in the house of a powerful family but later left to become a nun at the Bizhi Convent in Hangzhou. Although we are not told why she entered the religious life, her poetry would indicate that she was very much drawn to spiritual practice. She gained a reputation not only for her sermons, but also for poetry, which deftly conveyed religious ideas without slipping into dry didacticism.

# 憶夢

蕉團穩坐好安禪  
炯炯金鐙法座燃  
慧鳥鳴來深樹裏  
亂出飛入瀟窗前  
雲鎔碧海摹晴日  
露洗空天散曉煙  
記得夢中參我佛  
色空空色悟真詮

*A Dream Remembered*

Sitting firmly on the plantain-leaf mat, I can meditate in peace,  
Surrounded by golden lamps flickering by the Dharma seat.  
Wise birds emerge singing from deep within the woodlands,  
A confusion of mountains soars up and into my small window.  
Clouds fuse with the deep blue seas to mold this glorious day,  
The dew washes the empty heavens, scatters the morning mist.  
I recall how in my dream, I had a meeting with my Buddha;  
Form is emptiness, emptiness form: now I know what it means.<sup>167</sup>

# 春夜與閩音師詠月

皓月輕飛處

經堂寂不嘩

碎光穿竹罅

*On a Spring Night, Admiring the Moon with Master Langyin*

The luminous moon drifts by so lightly,  
The sutra ball lies silent without a sound.

Bits of moonlight pierce the cracks between the bamboo,  
Its round refulgence perches in the intersecting pine branches.

The dew dampens the nests filled with noisy swallows,  
The wind combbs the grasses filled with croaking frogs.

I sit with the master after the ceremony is over  
As, face to face, we straighten out our robes.<sup>168</sup>

風流草亂蛙

與師清課後

相對理袈裟

# 題達摩像

折葦江流疾似帆  
九年枯坐向寒巖

*On an Image of Bodhidharma*

靜中悟得言詮妄  
笑把如來大藏緘

Picking a reed, he floated on the river as swiftly as if he had sails,  
Then for nine years sat like a withered tree facing a cold stone wall.  
In the stillness he realized that verbal explanations were nonsense  
And with a smile, sealed shut the Tathagata's Great Storehouse. <sup>169</sup>

# 宛仙

WANXIAN. Unfortunately, all we know about Wanxian is that she was born in Changzhou (present-day Suzhou in Jiangsu province) and that her family name was Shi. She married, but it would appear that her family fell on difficult times, and so she retired to a small hermitage in the hills. She left a collection of poetry.



# 庵中寫懷

禪關晝掩絕塵跡

前有修篁後有松

野鶴去時人少伴

*Writing of My Feelings from Within the Convent*  
Meditation gates shut all day, keeping out all traces of worldly dust,  
In front, groves of fine bamboo, and in back, a forest of pine.

曉雲起處壁添峰  
Now that the wild cranes have gone, there are few companions left,  
But where the dawn clouds rise, a brushstroke of dark mountain peak.

Long ago, I came to understand the shallowness of worldly roots,

Today, is there anyone who understands the pungent flavor of the Way?

當時自識塵緣淺  
The red cord that stretched a thousand li has in a second been cut in two;  
In this sublime setting, it is fruitless to talk of the “three-following.”<sup>170</sup>

今日誰知道味濃

千里赤繩從此斷

超然何用講三從

# 可度

KEDU was from Huai'an in Jiangsu province. Her father, an official, ran into trouble with his superiors and was executed. Kedu was only seven years old at the time, and when she saw her father's corpse, she was said to have expressed her desire to leave the world and become a nun. However, her family responsibilities kept her in the world, and it was not until she was forty years old that she finally decided to visit several eminent Chan masters, including Jie'an Wujin (1612–73), in search of spiritual instruction. Apparently Master Jie'an Wujin was initially unwilling to allow Kedu to take the tonsure. Kedu was so distraught that she began to cough up blood. Jie'an, convinced of her resolute determination, then gave her the tonsure, and she embarked on an arduous practice of koan meditation. Finally Jie'an Wujin gave her Dharma transmission. Kedu spent the rest of her life at the Lianhua Convent in Xiuzhou in neighboring Zhejiang province.

脫體凡流竟莫窮  
堂堂獨露主人公  
朝來換水焚香課  
盡在尋常日用中

Drop off the body: the river of the world will never end,  
Stately and grand: nothing to show but the inner master.  
When morning comes, change the water, light the incense,  
Everything is in the ordinary affairs of the everyday world.<sup>171</sup>

# *Second Half of the Qing Dynasty*

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(1750–1911)

# 寂居



JIZHU was born to a scholarly family from Jiangsu province but was orphaned as a young girl and subsequently raised by an elderly nun. It would seem that her parents, probably her mother, taught her the art of writing poetry when she was young. In any case, not only did she not give it up, but she cultivated enduring friendships with other well-known literary women from Jiangsu province, in particular the members of the Clear Brook Poetry Club founded by Zhang Yunzi (b. 1756) and her husband, Ren Zhaolin (fl. 1776–1823). Of the ten women who made up this group, Jizhu appears to have been closest to Zhang Zifan, who was widowed at a relatively young age. Zifan would often visit Jizhu at the Yishou Convent, where they would discuss poetry and Chan Buddhism.

書懷東紫蘩女史

花細翠袖久蠲除  
靜案繩床意自如  
性懶已忘驕慢習  
家貧猶惜舊藏書  
談空有弟窮禪理  
適興從親學蠹魚  
更喜蕭蔬塵慮少  
草衣木食足安居

*To Lady Scholar Zifan*

Flowery filigree and kingfisher sleeves, I've discarded long ago,  
With sutra table and corded chair, my thoughts wander unhindered.  
Despite my laziness, I've forgotten my old arrogant habits,  
Despite my poverty, I still long for my old library of books.  
For discussing emptiness, I have you who understand Chan principles,  
When in the mood, I study like a bookworm with those close to me.  
I take delight in this solitary life in which worldly concerns are few,  
Grass for clothes, roughage for food: with this one can live content.<sup>172</sup>

# 子雍

ZIYONG. Ziyong's family was originally from Liaodong province in the far north, but had followed the Qing armies to Beijing. Later her father settled in what is today Hubei province, where he and his wife lived a life of farming and study. Ziyong was an only child; her mother was in her late forties when she gave birth to her. A serious child, when she reached marriageable age, she protested vehemently and insisted that she wanted to live a life of vegetarian renunciation, fasting, and embroidering buddhas. Her parents reluctantly agreed. However, Ziyong soon decided that she wanted to further her spiritual knowledge, and she began to seek out many of the eminent Chan masters of the time, and several decades later, received Dharma transmission from a Linji Chan master by the name of Gulu Fan (dates unknown). She later became the abbess of a number of convents in the Beijing area. No doubt many of her devotees were the ladies of the royal family, and in time the Kangxi emperor bestowed upon her the honorary title of Compassionate Vehicle of Universal Salvation. Later, Ziyong took an extended pilgrimage to the south to visit sites associated with past masters of the Linji lineage as well as sacred Buddhist mountains and temples. Along the way, she visited various temples and met with many eminent monks. She so impressed the lay donors of one area in Jiangsu province that they convinced her to become the head of a convent that they had restored. Ziyong appears to have spent many years in the south, and it is unclear when (if ever) she returned to the capital.

# 京都引眾送行讚詩十首

昨逢諸子話離情  
無限愁腸向外傾  
分付庭花休著疾  
恐驚珠露占秋英

買得輕舟欲指南  
滿懷明月素心慙  
巖前幽鳥頻頻唱  
話到南詢五十三

*Ten Verses Presented on the Occasion of a Gathering in the Capital of My Disciples  
to See Me Off*

昨夜靈花夢裏分  
As, heart filled with fathomless sorrow, I head out to the beyond.  
醒來依舊渺無痕  
Fearful that the pearly drops of dew mean that autumn has come.  
一天明月清如洗  
Having purchased a little boat, I am ready to head southward,  
玉水燕山客意欣  
The bright moon fills my breast, my empty heart is a bit giddy!



In front of the cliffs, hidden birds sing out with great urgency,  
Saying, “When you reach the south, consult the fifty-three!”<sup>173</sup>

Last night the numinous flower opened up in my dreams,  
But upon waking everything was vast and unscarred as before.  
A heavenful of luminous moon, as clear as if it had just bathed,  
The jade-like waters and hills of Yan all lift the traveler’s spirits.<sup>174</sup>

莫嫌懶拙兩無心  
雲自無心鳥自吟  
風透花明香有韻  
何須意外更相尋

惟愛燕山玉水情  
情風明月兩相迎  
株禽也解知端的  
飛近征車作遠盟

扁舟遙泛月明中  
薊北南天風景同  
諸子漫言情念切  
秋來依舊看歸鴻

Do not slight the lazy and foolish for having “no mind,”  
Clouds emerge from no mind, just like songs do from birds.  
When wind pierces the flowers’ brightness, their scent sings,  
What need to seek for anything more than beyond all of this?

It is just that I love the hills of Yan and their jade-like waters,  
Where clear breezes and bright moon complement each other.  
The forest birds are smart enough to know what is going on,  
Flying near the traveler’s cart, they make a far-reaching pact.  
直待秋高色自清

A skiff of a boat floats in the vastness under the bright moon,  
Whether in the north or in the south, the moon is one and the same.  
My disciples, do not say that you are overcome by emotion,  
When fall comes, you will once again see the returning goose.<sup>175</sup>

Two sleevefuls of springtime light as I leave the Forbidden City,  
One breastful of anxious thoughts as I head toward the south.  
The hills of Yan are on my mind as the grieving clouds thicken,  
Only at the peak of autumn will their colors naturally become clear.

輕帆高掛五雲中  
千里遵程一望窮  
兩岸蘆花天際外  
日光超出海門東

柳色褰衣話歲寒  
桃紅猶憶別離難  
滿寰玉水虛明月  
留待金臺仔細看

禪心不觸野雲知  
蘆月梅花欲寄誰  
離情有意情難遺  
道合無心道亦宜

The lightweight sail hangs high among the five-colored clouds,  
A thousand miles of road to travel, as far as the eye can see.  
The river lined with reed flowers extends beyond the edge of the sky,  
The sun's glow rises above us at the gateway to the eastern sea.

Willow colors suffuse my robes, intimating the coldness of the year,

Peach russets can still recall the sorrowful feelings of separation.  
The void's bright moon is completely encircled by waters of jade,  
Causing one to linger on at Golden Terrace<sup>176</sup> and take it all in.

The Chan mind is not solitary as the wilderness clouds know,  
Reed moon and plum blossom, to whom can I send them?  
The sorrow of parting is real and difficult to leave behind,  
But if the journey is in tune with no-mind, all will be well.<sup>177</sup>

## 行腳偈

猶憶挑包昔日忘

*Traveling Gatha*

遊山玩水出雲鄉  
I still recall how, with my bag on a pole, I forgot my yesterdays,

Wandered the hills, played in the waters, went to the land of the clouds.

揚眉瞬目皆三昧  
The lift of an eyebrow, the blink of an eye – all of it is samadhi;  
In this great world there is nowhere that is not a wisdom hall.

大地無非般若堂

# 山行

策杖穿林撥落紅

*Traveling in the Mountains*

忽聞清磬度秋風

My bramblewood stick cuts through the woods, stirs up the fallen reds,  
Suddenly I hear the clean sound of chimes carried by the autumn breeze.

I'm just worried that if I come again, I won't know how to find this place,  
So I try to fix in my mind that solitary old pine hanging from the cliff.<sup>178</sup>

再來只恐無尋處

好記懸岩一古松

# 道乾

DAOQIAN (d. 1820) was from Jiahe, in Zhejiang province. At the age of seventeen, she entered a convent in nearby Xiuzhou, where she lived many years in quiet retreat. Later she began to read Chan Buddhist texts and to seek out instruction from various teachers in the area, including Baolin Zhengong from the Guoqing Monastery on Mount Tiantai. Apparently, in her first interview with the man who would become her master, she asked, “What is the face of the great man?” Zhengong’s reply was “Wait until you’ve purified yourself of the five obstacles [standing in the way of a woman becoming a buddha] and then I will tell you.” As it turns out, Zhengong appears to have been testing her, since in the end he gave her both his teaching and, ultimately, Dharma transmission. Later Daoqian acquired a reputation for her spiritual discipline and insight and began to attract many disciples. She also attracted the support of a great many lay donors, which allowed her to build a convent where she lived and practiced for over forty years. Daoqian combined Chan meditation with Pure Land recitation of the Buddha’s name, and it is said that the sound of chanting could be heard day and night coming from her halls.

# 菴居偈

學道殷勤年復年

*Convent Life*

從今不著有無邊

歸家莫使家中坐

好爲人耕劫外田

You've been earnestly studying the Way year after year  
And now no longer cling to either existence or nonexistence.  
But having come home you should not just sit around  
But instead go out and till the fields of merit for others. 179

八十八年

Eighty years and eight,  
No craving, no attachment.

Let's go on back home,

When the water clears, the moon appear. [180](#)

無貪無戀

歸去來兮

水清月現



# 隱慧

YINHUI (dates unknown) was a nun at the Jun Convent in Wuling in Jiangsu province. We know little of her life, apart from the fact that she engaged in Dharma debate with a number of the eminent Chan masters of her time.

四十餘年業識拋  
驀然寶劍逞英豪  
喝教倒推三千佛  
大地全收在一毫

The activity-consciousness of over forty years tossed away,  
As suddenly I raise the jeweled sword as if I were a hero.  
My shouts cause the three thousand buddhas to topple over  
And the great universe to be contained in a single hair!<sup>181</sup>

## 食筍偈

久隱深山保聖胎  
一聲電動出頭來  
層層剝盡蒸來喫  
不負親嘗者一回

*Gatha on Eating Bamboo Shoots*

Hidden away in the deep mountains it guarded its sagely embryo  
Until a crash of thunder impelled it to finally stick out its head.  
Layer after layer must be peeled away, then it is boiled and eaten;  
I am not to going miss the opportunity of having had a taste myself.<sup>182</sup>

# 無為

WUWO started out as an attendant in the palace of Shang Kexi, a man from Liaodong in what is today Liaoning province. In exchange for his service to the Qing court, Shang was given a title and a domain of his own in what is today Guangxi in southwest China. Apparently, Shang had twenty-three sons and seventeen daughters, the youngest of whom, Ziwu, became so upset at the greed and ambition of her father and brothers that she left home and moved to Putuo Island in Ningbo with ten of her female palace attendants, including Wuwo. Ziwu built the Tandu Convent and soon acquired a reputation for her moral discipline and her mastery of the Buddhist scriptures. Wuwo was particularly talented at both poetry and painting and is said not only to have painted a particularly striking portrait of Ziwu (looking more like a lovely princess than an ascetic nun), but to have composed the poem inscribed upon it as well.

六根淨盡絕塵埃  
嚼蠟能尋甘味回  
莫笑錄天陳色相  
誰人不是赤身來

Once the six senses are purified, the dust and dirt disappear,  
Then even in chewing wax one can find the sweetest flavor.  
Do not laugh at the emerald sky for displaying form and substance,  
Which one of us humans did not come pink-skinned into the world?<sup>183</sup>

# 悟情

WUQING was born in Yangzhou, Jiangsu province. Her parents died when she was just a young girl, and having no one to take care of her, she went to live in the capital with her elder sister, who had become the concubine of a former prime minister. Later, her elder sister committed suicide after the death of her husband. Wuqing was only fifteen or sixteen at the time and was deeply traumatized by the experience. She then returned to the south where she found a home with the woman scholar and poet Luo Qilan (late eighteenth century). The two of them shared an interest in Buddhism, and after Luo's death, Wuqing became a nun.

# 感懷

清靜而今遍六根  
焚香幸作佛前人  
已知性海須登岸  
且向恆河試問津  
口藏誰傳彌勒法  
心燈自照女兒身  
癡情一點消難盡  
吟到詩篇忘苦辛

蒼茫回首萬緣空  
漫說平生塞與通  
眼見公候興敗易

*Feelings*

命憐姨妹死生同

Cleansed and purified now are all of the six senses,

But now in tears, I'm fortunate to be one of those before the Buddha.

I already know one must reach the shores of the Ocean of Suchness,

And so facing the night I inquire where it is one can cross.

The oral scripture: who transmits the Way of Maitreya Buddha?

The radiant moon automatically illuminates this woman's body.

The last drop of attachment is difficult to completely eradicate,

But reciting poems can help one forget all of the bitterness.

心緣穩渡片帆風

Looking around at the vast expanse, the myriad conditions are empty,  
So do not speak about a lifetime of obstructions and opportunities.  
With my own eyes I've seen dukes and lords rise and fall in succession,  
And for this ill-fated younger sister, life and death are one and the same.  
All that is left today are these dark-colored monastic's robes,  
The brocades and embroideries of yesterday are nowhere to be seen.  
I sit on the mat till it wears through and the mind-waves are stilled,  
As the grabbing mind settles and crosses over like a sail in the wind. <sup>184</sup>

# 量海

LIANGHAI. We know almost nothing of Lianghai's life apart from the fact that she was for a time the abbess of a large convent (perhaps as many as six thousand nuns) on Mount Lingyan in Suzhou, which by the eighteenth century had become the important center of Chinese Pure Land Buddhism (which it remains today). Judging from her few extant sermons, it would appear that she was particularly concerned with reforming the discipline, spiritual practice, and reputation of Buddhist nuns at a time when Buddhism in general had fallen into considerable disrepute. Lianghai lived during the tumultuous years of the Taiping Rebellion (mid-1800s) and apparently suffered, along with many others, the dislocation and destruction that followed in its wake. Despite the lack of biographical information, there is much to be gleaned from the selection of her writings available to us. An earnest mid-nineteenth-century lay Buddhist named Jiang Yuanliang notes that when he and his Buddhist friends began to compile a collection of religious poetry from Suzhou entitled *The Poetry of the Disciples of the Four Types from Wumen* (*Wumen sizhong dizi shi*), they soon discovered that although they had ample selections from three of the four types — monks, laymen, and laywomen — they were having a hard time finding works by Buddhist nuns. “Could it be that they taught solely through their spiritual presence rather than through words?” He does, however, finally locate a manuscript by the nun Lianghai in the home of a Buddhist layman from Suzhou. This manuscript included not only poems, but also a few essays and sermons. In one of these sermons, she addresses her female disciples as follows:

In the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, the Buddha is compared to a lion among men. Of the fifty-three wise and holy enlightened beings [mentioned in this sutra] there was a single nun who bore the title of “lion.” Thus we can know that the awesome

and peerless attainment of the buddhamind is not weakened because of the presence of nuns.... Now, when women enter the homeless life, they should abandon all the [negative] habits of their se, and plant the seeds of the peerless and wonderful Dharma. They... should enter into the way of the Buddha with great determination. Their hearts should be filled with repentance, their thoughts should be clean and pure, and they should devote themselves fully to awakening the mind of compassion and fully carry out the work of liberation. Only then will they be looked up to as role models throughout the ten directions; only then will monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen gather around them for inspiration.

What is most striking about Lianghai's poems is their spiritual buoyancy. These are not the poems of a woman who has turned against the world out of weariness and disenchantment but rather of a woman who has clearly found an inner freedom, independence, and joy that she may not have found if she had kept to her place in the inner quarters. Her best poems reflect a conviction of the truth of nonduality, whether between the future bliss of the Pure Land and the eternal present of Chan, or between distinctions of male and female.



# 淨土詩

能從忍界現西方  
只要當人信願強  
處處慈尊常接引  
即時演出妙蓮香

淨土昭昭在目前  
不勞舉步問金仙  
樂邦有路誰先到  
咫尺家山落照遍

*Poems of the Pure Land (Seven of Forty-Eight)*

瓦磁荆棘真淨土  
見聞知覺古彌陀  
In this very world can be seen the Western Paradise,  
All that is required is that a person be strong in faith and resolve.  
In every situation the Compassionate One will receive and guide you,  
And in every moment pour forth the marvelous fragrance of the lotus.

但能當處忘分別  
執手何何唱哩囉  
Bright and luminous is the Pure Land right in front of your eyes,  
Don't bother setting out in search of the Golden Buddha.  
On the road to this land of joy, who will be the first to arrive?

So close by: the mountains of home surrounded by setting sun.

Rubble and ruin, brambles and briars: this is the true Pure Land,  
Seeing, hearing, knowing, feeling: these are the ancient Amitabha.  
All you need to do is stay where you are — but forget all distinctions,  
Clapping your hands with a “Ha! Ha!” and singing out a “La! La!”

持戒嚴身幅報真  
金沙地上玉樓春  
但觀自性彌陀佛  
歷劫何嘗染一塵

要結西方淨圖緣  
是非人我盡顛  
腳頭腳底蓮花國  
到岸何許便覓船

佛語禪心兩不差  
挑紅李白一般花  
琉璃地上鋪金粟  
瑪瑙階前布玉沙

Keeping the precepts and discipline, your reward will be truly good;  
On the grounds of the golden sands, the jade towers are in spring.  
All one need do is meditate on one's self-nature, the Amitabha Buddha,  
獨坐幽居萬慮忘  
sitting alone in seclusion, all thoughts have been forgotten.

全身混是法中王  
Right and wrong, oneself and other must be completely overturned.  
休將迷語遮心眼  
From the eye, the head and heel, none is the land of the lotus flower;  
What need, having reached the shore, to go in search of a raft?

正覺花開遍界香

Buddha's words and Chan mind: no difference between them,  
Peach blossoms are pink, pear white, both are blossoms.  
Across the floor of porcelain are scattered grains of gold,  
In front of the agate stairwell are spread granules of jade.

Sitting alone in deep seclusion, the myriad cares forgotten,  
My whole body feels completely absorbed into that of the Dharma King.  
Don't use "delusion" and "enlightenment" to obscure the mind's eye,  
When the flower of true awareness opens, its fragrance will circle the  
world.<sup>185</sup>

# 氣省懷詩

驚蟄聞電萬物蘇  
莫從箇裏認榮枯  
山前澗水源頭活  
徹底澄清不受污

春分紫陌谷鶯啼  
一片閒雲伴我棲  
明月清風留不住  
逍遙自在任東西

*The Twenty-Four Solar Periods: 186 Reflective Verses (Three of Twenty-four)*

Early March and the sound of thunder: myriad creatures stir,  
One can't tell from the outside what will flourish or wilt.  
The stream in front of the mountain is alive at its source,  
Where, completely pure and clean, it is never sullied.

大雪繽紛似絮團  
高山平地一同觀  
A vernal equinox on brushwood paths, the valley birds sing,  
A river of leisurely cloud accompanies me back home.  
A bright moon, a clear breeze, I cannot make them stay,  
Feeling expansive and at ease, I let them go east or west.

頭頭物物無窮意  
多少禪流被眼瞞

The great snow falls deep and full, like fluffy willow floss,  
High mountain and lowland in one and the same.

Every thing and every creature contains endless significance,  
How many Chan followers are deceived by their eyes!<sup>187</sup>

# 聚沙庵歌

一粒沙藏世界  
無邊刹土不爲大  
童子戲莊成佛塔  
山僧旋遶忘疲怠  
何爲菴絕纜蓋  
樓臺殿閣無障礙  
廚灶三門日日新  
交飛群燕往來賓  
未識庵中誰是主  
主中之主沒疏親  
沒疏親無用人

莫向個中細討論

*Song of Collecting Sand Hermitage*

八風不動消息盡

In a single grain of sand is stored the entire world,  
It takes little but, boundless, cannot be considered huge.

A child's sandcastle turns into a magnificent pagoda,<sup>188</sup>

When the golden rain nun goes on her alms round, she forgets her  
weariness.

What need for conveyer to get rid of entanglements?

That can be done as well in palatial towers and fancy halls.

The cooking stove and the three gates look newer everyday,<sup>189</sup>

城隍市井如來藏

Filled with sparrows darting to and fro like guests,  
Who are still not quite sure who the owner of this hermitage is.  
The host within the host knows neither distance nor intimacy,  
When distance and intimacy are one, there is then independence.  
No need even to seek out people with whom to discuss and debate,  
When the eight winds have all died down, it will be over.<sup>190</sup>  
The sea of realization fully illumined, the mind-moon clear,  
When the body is like a mirror, its skillfulness becomes divine.  
Hu barbarians appear and then Han Chinese, none leave a trace,  
Whether in city or in village, all is the Tathagatagarbha,



有相身中無相身  
屋雖小恰寬舒  
恒沙諸佛眾生居  
成住壞空幻起滅

The body without form dwelling within this body with form.  
Although the rooms are small, it is spacious and comfortable,  
Housing buddhas and beings numberless as the Ganges sands.  
Forming, existing, destroying, emptying: illusions rise and disappear,  
All of them grounded on the stable earth of the original mind.  
Living below the three rafters,<sup>191</sup> enclosed by the six sense windows,  
I am not dependent on anyone for food to eat or clothes to wear.  
Limitless are the innumerable heroes of the past and the present,  
What a waste to spend a million cash just for good neighbors!<sup>192</sup>

吃飯穿衣無向背

一處消融六處間

夕陽西去月東環  
現成公案休題起

高臥北窗門不關

千萬買鄰空自累

In the one place things merge; though the six they disperse;<sup>193</sup>  
The evening sun heads west, the moon circles east.  
There's no point in raising these ready-made koans,

Lie up near the north window with the door open. [194](#)

無題

看他孤獨人  
真爲無事客  
出入往來間  
逍遙無杖策  
既無兒女情  
亦無妻子迫  
偶然樹下坐  
則見梅花白

行到樹下坐  
坐看雲起處  
白雲天際飛  
紅日空中住  
滄海變喪田  
丘陵夷無地  
起滅水中漚  
眾散小兒戲

石室寒巖客  
不知晝與夜  
坐來歲月忘  
懶把眾生化  
真個自了漢  
賊虎龍蛇怕  
問他廬陵來

如今什麼價 what solitary man,

Untitled Verses (Four of Nine)

Truly a man with no commitments!  
Between coming in and out, going to and fro,  
Easy and free, with not even a walking staff.  
He may lack the love of sons and daughters,  
But neither does he suffer the nagging of a wife.  
On a whim he sits himself beneath the trees  
And gazes at the white of the plum blossoms.

He walks until he reaches the mountain top  
And sits to watch the place from where clouds rise.  
The white clouds sail to the edge of heaven,  
The red sun rests in the center of the void.  
The blue sea turns into fields of mulberry,<sup>195</sup>  
The hills level themselves leaving us a place.  
Rising and falling like the foam on the waters,  
Gathering and scattering like children at play.

The guest of the stone room and cold cliff  
Is unaware of the passing of days and nights.  
Oblivious to the passing of months and years,  
She is too lazy to go out and convert others.  
She is truly a person who has realized herself,  
Feared by robbers, tigers, dragons, and vipers.  
Why don't you ask her about rice in Luling:  
What price are they asking for it today?<sup>196</sup>

但說世界空  
時時行於有  
空亦不自空  
有亦不自有  
空有本來無  
無無何須守  
論塵野干鳴  
談真獅子吼

She'll only say that the world is empty,  
Although it sometimes manifests as form.  
But its emptiness is not inherently empty,  
Nor is its form inherently form.

Emptiness and form are inherently nonexistent.  
Lacking existence, what is there to preserve?  
Debating about dust is a moose's howl,  
Speaking about truth is the lion's roar.<sup>197</sup>

# 大悟

DAWU (1854–1927) was born in Nantong, in Jiangsu province. When the young man to whom she was betrothed died unexpectedly, Dawu refused to marry anyone else and resolved to devote herself to the practice of Pure Land Buddhism. Her family was not at all supportive of her: they did all they could to dissuade her from her decision, and when she finally convinced them that they could not keep her from taking the tonsure, they refused to give her any financial support. In the beginning, her life was very hard, as she struggled to eke out a life of self-subsistence, planting her garden and gathering firewood. She took up residence in a rundown convent called the Dabei or Guanyin Convent. Over time, she inspired the respect of enough lay donors to enable her to restore it to its former condition. Toward the end of her life, she fulfilled a lifelong dream, and went on pilgrimage to various Buddhist sites, such as Mount Jiuhua and Mount Putuo.

世間萬緣都放下  
唯有念佛是真心  
一念超出娑婆苦  
貪瞋癡愛都除盡

The ten thousand conditions of the world have all dropped off,  
All that is left is this true heart-mind invoking Buddha's name.  
With a single invocation I transcend the bitterness of the world,  
Greed, anger, ignorance, and desire are completely uprooted.  
In complete and naked purity I dwell in the tower of radiant light,  
Having realized the *dharma* I am free from the wheel of suffering.  
Once I fulfill my vow to attain the perfect purity of the Land of Bliss,  
I will return to this world of suffering to liberate sentient beings.<sup>198</sup>

得滿極樂清靜願  
再入娑婆度眾生



# 隆蓮

LONGLIAN was born in Sichuan in 1909. While still in her twenties, she became the first woman to pass the government civil service examinations, but when she was only offered a secretarial/editorial job, she decided to enter the religious life instead. At the age of thirty-two, she became a nun at the Aidao Convent in Chengdu, and later at the Tiexiang Convent as well. Given its close proximity to Tibet, esoteric Buddhism was quite popular in the Sichuan area in the early 1930s and 1940s; in fact, Longlian's first teacher was a Tibetan lama. She later became the disciple of the monk Nenghai (1886–1967). As a young nun, before 1949, Longlian often visited the Jinci Monastery, where she studied with Nenghai and attended lectures by various visiting teachers. She also underwent rigorous meditation training. After 1949, Longlian moved to the Tongjiao Convent in Beijing, which remained open until the late 1950s, and then in the early 1960s returned to Sichuan — lying low in a nunnery on Mount Emei during the worst excesses of the Cultural Revolution. Longlian, who died in 2006, was for many decades a leading member of the Chinese Buddhist Association. She was also the abbess of the Aidao Convent in Chengdu, Sichuan, and was responsible for establishing one of the earliest and still most important seminaries for Buddhist nuns. In 1997, a biography of Longlian entitled *Dangdai diyi biquini: Longlian Fashi zhuan* (*Today's Preeminent Nun: The Story of Dharma Master Longlian*) was a bestseller in China. This book contains a selection of Longlian's poems, many of which are composed in the traditional styles and genres and as such represent a continuation of the poetry of the nuns of the imperial period.



# 早課

花遶禪房夜氣清

霜鐘隱隱動長鯨

盡鈴不語風幡靜

*Morning Service*  
Flowers encircle the meditation room, the night air crisp,  
The frosty bells deep and dark rouse the great leviathan.<sup>199</sup>

珠網交羅慧炬明

The golden chimes remain silent, the banner's rest still.  
The jewel net, the interconnected web of luminous wisdom.<sup>200</sup>  
Hymns of praise take us beyond the three worlds of desire,  
Dark robes delight in dragging through the five elements.

梵唱欲超三界外

緇衣喜曳五銖輪

楞嚴轉罷渾無事

月晒琳宮萬瓦晴

# 贈英籍尼師阿旺曲珍拉薩朝聖

孤征萬里歷波濤  
愿切何辭跋涉勞  
雪嶺青回公主柳  
海雲紅印美人焦  
九州同夢華胥國  
聯袂空行淨檢橋

*For the English Nun Ngawang Chopon on Her Pilgrimage to Lhasa*<sup>202</sup>

四海百家通佛語  
人間淨土路非遙

Alone she traverses ten thousand li across the billowing waves,  
Her resolve unbreakable, undaunted by the hardships of travel.  
Snowy peaks turning in the blue: the willow of the princess,  
The sea clouds imprinted with red: the plantain of the beauty.  
The Nine Provinces share a dream: the land of Huaxu,<sup>203</sup>  
Side by side we practice emptiness: the bridge of Jingjian.<sup>204</sup>  
A hundred homes within the four seas understand the Buddha's words,  
The road to the Pure Land here in the human world is not so far away.<sup>205</sup>

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## NOTES

- 1 There have been numerous translations of these poems, and there will no doubt continue to be many more. Just a few published translations include those by Burton Watson (*Cold Mountain: 100 Poems by the T'eng Poet Hanshan*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), Robert Henricks (*The Poetry of Han-Shan*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), Red Pine, *The Collected Songs of Cold Mountain* (Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2000), and just recently, Peter Hobson (*The Poetry of Hanshan*, Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2003). Such collections as *The Clouds Must Know Me by Now* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1998), edited by Red Pine and Mike O'Connor and translated by various authors, introduce the poems of several less well known Chinese monks.
- 2 John Stevens, *Lotus Moon: The Poetry of the Buddhist Nun Rengetsu* (Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1994). Another excellent study of Japanese Buddhist nun-poets is Edward Kamens, *The Buddhist Poetry of the Great Kamo Priestess: Daisaiin Senchi and Hosshin Wakashu* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Japanese Studies, 1991).
- 3 Kang-I Sun Chang and Haun Saussy, eds., *Women Writers of Traditional China: An Anthology of Poetry and Criticism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), and Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, *The Red Brush: Women Writers of Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004).
- 4 Western-language studies on the early female monastic sangha in China include: Kathryn M. Ts'ai, "The Chinese Buddhist Monastic Order for Women: The First Two Centuries," *Historical Reflections* 8:3 (1981), pp. 1–19; Kathryn M. Ts'ai, trans., *Lives of the Nuns: Biographies of Chinese Buddhist Nuns from the Fourth to Sixth Centuries* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994); Hung Lee Lily Hsiao, "The Emergence of Buddhist Nuns in China and Its Social Ramifications," *The Journal of the Oriental Society of Australia* 18/19 (1986–87), pp. 82–100; Erik Zürcher, "Religieuses et Couvents dans l'Ancien Bouddhisme Chinois," in *Buddhism, Christianisme et Société Chinoise* (Paris: Julliard, 1990); and Valentina Georgieva, *Buddhist Nuns in China: From the Six Dynasties to the Tang* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Leiden, 2000).
- 5 Baochang, *Biqiuni zhuan*, 1:9.
- 6 Baochang, *Biqiuni zhuan*, 1:9.

- 7 Ts'ai, *Lives of the Nuns*, p. 33.
- 8 Ts'ai, *Lives of the Nuns*, p. 21.
- 9 Yang Hsüan-chih, *A Record of Buddhist Monasteries in Lo-yang*, trans. Wang, Yi-t'ung (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 51–52.
- 10 Yang, *A Record of Buddhist Monasteries in Lo-yang*, p. 56.
- 11 Baochang, *Biqiuni zhuan*, 1:10.
- 12 Baochang, *Biqiuni zhuan*, 1:9.
- 13 The Eight Special Rules, or *gurudharmas*, were imposed on nuns only and were in addition to the regular precepts. They stipulated that (1) nuns, no matter how senior, must always defer to monks, regardless of how junior; (2) nuns must not speak ill of monks; (3) nuns must not rebuke monks, although monks may scold nuns; (4) nuns must receive full ordination from both the male and the female sangha; (5) if they have violated a vinaya rule, nuns must confess fortnightly in the presence of both the male and the female sangha; (6) nuns must seek Dharma instruction from monks on a regular basis; (7) nuns must not spend the summer retreat season where there are no monks; and (8) after the summer retreat, nuns must make their confession in the presence of the male sangha.
- 14 Baochang, *Biqiuni zhuan*, 2:11–12.
- 15 Georgieva, *Buddhist Nuns in China*.
- 16 Georgieva, *Buddhist Nuns in China*, p. 193.
- 17 Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1985), 2:25.
- 18 Li Yuzhen, *Tangdai de biqiuni* (Taiwan: Xuesheng shuju, 1989), p. 14.
- 19 Li, *Tangdai de biqiuni*, pp. 22–23.
- 20 For a discussion of these women, both historical and legendary, see Miriam Levering, “The Dragon Girl and the Abbess of Mo-shan: Gender and Status in the Ch’an Buddhist Tradition,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 5:1 (1982), pp. 19–35, and E. Ding-hwa Hsieh, “Images of Women in Ch’an Buddhist Literature of the Sung period,” in *Buddhism in the Sung*, edited by Peter N. Gregory and Daniel A. Getz, Jr. (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1999), pp. 148–87.
- 21 E. Ding-hwa Hsieh, “Buddhist Nuns in Sung China (960–1279),” *Journal of Sung-Yuan Studies* 30 (2000), p. 75.

- 22 Hsieh, “Buddhist Nuns in Sung China (960–1279),” p. 77.
- 23 Hsieh, “Buddhist Nuns in Sung China (960–1279),” pp. 81–82.
- 24 Hsieh, “Buddhist Nuns in Sung China (960–1279),” p. 92.
- 25 On women of the Song, see the excellent study by Patricia B. Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). See also Beverly Bossler, “Women’s Literacy in Song Dynasty China,” in *Qingzhu Deng Guangming jiaoshou jiushi huadan lunwenji* (Shijiazhuang, PRC, 1997), pp. 322–52.
- 26 It is in a compendium entitled *Liandeng huiyao* (*Outline of Linked Lamps*) compiled in 1183 that we first find several bona fide biographical entries for female Chan masters. The *Jiandai pudenglu* (*The Jiandai Universal Record of the Lamp*) compiled in 1204 contains fifteen such biographical accounts, out of a total of more than one thousand.
- 27 Miriam Levering has done extensive research on both of these women. See her “Miao-tao and Her Teacher Ta-hui” in *Buddhism in the Sung* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press), pp. 188–219; and “Women Ch’an Masters: The Teacher Miao-tsung as Saint” in *Women Saints in World Religions*, edited by Arvind Sharma (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp. 180–204.
- 28 Cited in He Xiaorong, *Mingdai Nanjing shiyuan yanjiu* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2000).
- 29 There is now a significant number of important studies in English on women’s writing of this period. The best general introduction is Dorothy Ko’s *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China, 1573–1722* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994). For the eighteenth century, see Susan Mann, *Precious Records: Women in China’s Long Eighteenth Century* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).
- 30 See Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao*.
- 31 See Beata Grant, “Who Is This I? Who Is That Other? The Poetry of an Eighteenth-Century Buddhist Laywoman,” *Late Imperial China* 15:11 (1994), pp. 1–40.
- 32 See Miriam Levering, “Women, the State, and Religion Today in the People’s Republic of China,” in *Today’s Woman in World Religions*, pp. 171–224; Qin Wen-jie, “The Buddhist Revival in Post-Mao China: Women Reconstruct Buddhism on Mt. Emei” (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2000); and Barbara Reed, “Women and



Chinese Religion in Contemporary Taiwan,” in *Today’s Woman in World Religions*, pp. 225–43.

- 33 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 *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, edited by José Ignacio Cabezón (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 137–56.
- 34 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 3:54.
- 35 See Ruth Fuller Sasaki and Yoshitaka Iriya, trans., *A Man of Zen: The Recorded Sayings of the Layman P’ang* (Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1992).
- 36 Baochang, *Biqiuni zhuan*, in *Biqiuni zhuan quanji* (Taipei: Fojiao shuju, 1988 reprint), 3:32.
- 37 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 1:6.
- 38 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 1:25.
- 39 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 3:47.
- 40 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 2:32. This poem was composed as a commentary to a story involving the Tang dynasty Chan master Yantou Quanhua (828–887), who for a time took up the occupation of ferryman. One day, an old woman appeared carrying a child in her arms and challenged the master, saying, “Ply your oars and make them dance. And since you haven’t asked, then tell me where this child I have in my arms came from?” The master’s response was typically Chan: he did not say a word — he just hit her. The old woman then said, “I have given birth to seven children: six of them did not understand anything; now this one too appears not to know anything,” and taking the child, she threw it into the lake. This rather cryptic, and somewhat horrifying, story is clearly meant to be read metaphorically and understood intuitively. It may help to keep in mind that in Buddhist thought, the sufferings of life and death, or *samsara*, are often compared to a river, and the Buddhist teachings, a raft with which to cross this river. The ferryman, therefore, would be someone who helps others to cross the river of suffering and attain enlightenment. In Chan literature, old women are often actually quite wise, and serve to test those who call themselves Chan masters. In this story, the children may possibly refer to the illusions, in particular the illusion of a permanent self, that people create from their own thoughts, and which keep them in a state of suffering. Thus Yantou’s response to her question, which is not a verbal one, seems to both answer the old woman’s query and also allow her to get rid of her last illusion and attain enlightenment. Miaozong’s poetic response to this story, not surprisingly, given her interest in Daoism, makes use of the famous story in the *Zhuangzi* in which the master, upon



waking from a dream of a butterfly, wonders if he is a man dreaming he was a butterfly or whether he is a butterfly dreaming that he is a man. However, the central hypothesis — that maybe the self as we mentally conceive it may not be what we think it is — is the same. Note that in Miaozong's poem, Zhuang Zhou never wakes up from his dream, which may perhaps be interpreted as a state of consciousness (enlightenment) that has transcended even the duality of man and butterfly.

- 41 The Second Patriarch refers to Huike, the sixth-century Chinese monk who is said not only to have stood in the snow for days on end, but also to have cut off his arm to show his determination to become Bodhidharma's disciple.
- 42 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 2:33.
- 43 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 2:36.
- 44 In Chinese Buddhist poetry and prose, the "West" either refers to India and Central Asia, from whence Buddhism arrived in China, or to the Western Paradise of the Amitabha Buddha.
- 45 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 2:36. "The wondrous meaning without words" refers to the wordless mind-to-mind transmission exemplified by the famous story of how the Buddha, during one of his assemblies, suddenly fell silent and lifted up a white flower. Only one of his followers, Kashyapa, understood his meaning: the rest were left bewildered. This was said to mark the beginning of the special transmission exemplified by Chan Buddhism, and Kashyapa has been traditionally regarded as the First Patriarch. The gold dust refers to the Buddhist teachings, which are useful but should be taken only as a means rather than as an end unto themselves.
- 46 Silla is the name of an early kingdom in what is today Korea (57 B.C.E.–935 C.E.). The kingdom reached its cultural apogee in the ninth century, also a time when Buddhism flourished there. The image of a sparrow hawk flying through Silla is used in Chan Buddhist texts to refer to the swift and sudden manner in which an opportunity for enlightenment may present itself and, if the disciple is not sufficiently alert, be lost.
- 47 The reference here is, of course, to the lotus flower.
- 48 This refers to a famous exchange found in the discourses of Zhaozhou. A monk comes to the master for an interview and asks a big metaphysical question: "What is my self?" Zhaozhou replies with a more down-to-earth question: "Have you had your breakfast yet?" When the monk replies in the affirmative, Zhaozhou says simply, "Then go wash out your bowl." See James Green, trans., *The Recorded Sayings*

of *Zen Master Joshu* (Boston: Shambhala, 2001), p. 98. Joshu is the Japanese pronunciation of Zhaozhou.

- 49 In the famous chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* entitled “Expedient (or Skillful) Means,” we find the following lines: “even if little boys at play/should collect sand to make a Buddha tower,/then persons such as these/have all attained the Buddha way.” (Burton Watson, trans., *The Essential Lotus* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 17).
- 50 “One true original face” is one of many Zen metaphors for one’s original buddha-nature. To know one’s original face is to experience enlightenment.
- 51 Puji, ed., (1179–253). *Wudeng huiyuan*, In ZZ, 138:385. During the Song dynasty, it was forbidden to travel by night. The paradox of not traveling by night and yet still arriving at dawn is one that is often found in Chan Buddhist texts. The last lines of these poems describe the psychic and spiritual double-bind confronted by a student struggling with seeming paradoxes of this kind.
- 52 Zhenhua, *Xi biqiuni zhuan*, 2:31.
- 53 The *Eight Yang Sutra* refers to a jumble of a text that not only makes no sense, but is three thousand fascicles or chapters in length! Here Zhenru is expressing a typically Chan Buddhist claim that the scholastic study of scriptures and sutras is irrelevant to the quest for enlightenment.
- 54 This disregard (if only rhetorical) for the technicalities of traditional Chinese poetic styles harks back to a poem attributed to Hanshan in which the poet responds to a certain “Graduate Wang” who has ridiculed him for being ignorant of the rules of poetry writing and making repeated use of “common words.” Hanshan’s retort is simply: “I laugh at the way you write poems/Like a blind man singing about the sun!” See Robert H. Henricks, *The Poetry of Han-shan*, p. 384.
- 55 In 1124, Dahui Zonggao had accepted an invitation to live at a newly built monastery called Yunmen (Cloud Gate), which was located in Fuzhou in what is today the southern province of Fujian. This is presumably where Zhenru went to meet him, and where her delusions were completely “defeated” under the guidance of the master.
- 56 There are several variants of this image in Chan literature. In the *Blue Cliff Record*, for example, we find “When oxen in Huai province eat grain, the bellies of horses in Yi province are distended.” (Cleary and Cleary, trans., *The Blue Cliff Record*, p. 528.) It refers, among other things, to the interrelationship of cause and effect over space and time.

- 57 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 2:31–32.
- 58 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 2:36. In the twenty-eighth case of the *Blue Cliff Record*, we find the following: “One by one they all face south and see the northern dipper... The dipper is hanging down. You still don’t know where it comes down. Where is it?” (Cleary and Cleary, trans., *The Blue Cliff Record*, p. 184.) The idea seems to be, to modify the metaphor a bit, that unless you are headed in the right direction, you will not reach your destination. These last two lines could also be read as “If you tipped over the northern dipper, then you would be facing south.” In traditional China, those in authority, such as emperors and abbots, always sat facing the south.
- 59 Here again, the reference is to the original buddha-nature which is, of course, beyond either description or depiction.
- 60 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 2:37. Nostrils figure in various different ways in Chan Buddhist literature. One of the most common is the notion of piercing someone’s nostrils, which means mastering or being in control of them (as of ox when a ring is placed through its nose). If one’s nostrils are in someone else’s hands, one is under the control either of someone else, or of external circumstances. In this case, it would seem that the nostrils are where they should be: above the mouth.
- 61 Literally, the second of the ten bodhisattva stages or *bhumis*, characterized by a transcendence of all passion and impurity.
- 62 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 2:29. The story of the bathing bodhisattvas originally comes from the *Surangama Sutra*. *The Blue Cliff Record*, which was compiled by a contemporary of Chitong’s, Yuanwu Keqin (1063–135), and based on a collection of koan collected by Xuetou Zhongxian (980– 1052), includes a case titled “Sixteen Bodhisattvas Go in to Bathe.” The commentary to this case asks, “Since they didn’t wash off the dirt, and they didn’t wash their bodies, tell me, what did they wash? If you can understand, then, at peace within, you realize the absence of anything existing.” (Cleary and Cleary, trans., *The Blue Cliff Record*, p. 428.)
- 63 Vairochana Buddha represents the *dharmakaya*, or the universal essence of buddhahood.
- 64 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 2:29. Water, of course, refers to the unchanging nature of intrinsic reality or buddha-nature, while the waves refer to the changing and unstable nature of thoughts, phenomena, etc.
- 65 The net of Indra is a famous image used to convey the notion of the interpenetration and interconnection of all things. The image is of a cosmic net, at each knot of which is embedded a multifaceted jewel that reflects each and every other jewel.

66 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 2:29.

67 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 2:28. This poem was supposedly written just before Fahai's death; thus, the letter from home refers to the "summons" to leave the world.

68 The lamp here refers to the light of the Buddha's teaching, the Dharma. The two trees may be an indirect allusion to the *parinirvana* of the Buddha, who, as he lay dying in the shade of two *sala* trees, instructed his disciples to be "lamps unto themselves."

69 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 3:48.

70 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 3:49.

71 The custom of leaving poems inscribed on walls was not uncommon in earlier periods, although often they were poems about the beauties of nature or thoughts inspired by a day's excursion in the wilds left by famous (or in some cases anonymous) male poets on the walls of temples or ruins. During the last years of the Ming dynasty, when women as well as men were often forced to flee the invaders or, in some cases, surrender their lives, poems written on walls by women in desperate straits became more and more common.

72 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 3:53.

73 Guanyin is the Chinese name for the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. In a number of Mahayana scriptures, including the *Lotus Sutra*, the bodhisattva, who is theoretically beyond all gender, is described as being able to assume as many as thirty-three different forms, both male and female, in order to be of benefit to as wide a range of sentient beings as possible. See Chün-fang Yü, *Kuanyin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 45–50.

74 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 3:54.

75 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 3:48.

76 Here, the West refers to the Western Paradise or the Pure Land.

77 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 3:50.

78 The lineage air, or custom, is a reference to the practice style associated with a particular Chan Buddhist lineage. Here Daoyuan seems to be saying that although she has left the inner quarters of the palace for the inner quarters of the convent, the secular melodies in which she no doubt once excelled still make themselves heard in her religious and ritual chanting.

- 79 That is, she has wept so much that her tears have turned to blood.
- 80 In other words, when one gazes in the mirror — a common occupation for palace ladies — by the light of *dhyana* (*chan*) or meditation, one will realize the emptiness of all appearances. Xu Shichang, *Wan Qing yishi hui*, 199:5b. See also Wang Duanshu, *Mingyuan shiwei*, 36:9b–10a.
- 81 Shenyi's biography can be found in Zhenhua, *Xu Biqiuni zhuan*, 5:86. This poem, however, is found, among other places, in Xu Shichang, *Wan Qing yishi hui*, 199:1b–2a.
- 82 The allusion here is to the famous “Rhapsody on Roaming on Tiantai” by Sun Cho (ca. 310–97), which describes a Daoist rather than a Buddhist mystical journey. See Richard Mather, “The Mystical Ascent of the T'ien-t'ai Mountains: Sun Ch'o's *Yu-T'ien-T'ai-Shan Fu*,” *Monumenta Serica* 20 (1961). Mather translates a Chinese editorial comment on “Stone Bridge” as follows: “On the Stone Bridge of the T'ien-t'ai Mountains the path is not a full foot in width but several tens of paces long; every step is extremely slippery, while below it looks down on the Utter Darkness Stream” (p. 239, notes 71–74). In a poem by Han Shan, who lived in the Tiantai Mountains, we also find the lines “In my dreams I go off to wander at Golden Gates/As my soul returns, it crosses Stone Bridge.” See Robert Henricks, *The Poetry of Han-shan*, p. 86. There are nine major peaks in the Tiantai range, the highest of which is called the Lotus Peak; together the nine peaks are said to resemble a lotus flower.
- 83 Wooden lads and stone maidens, metaphors for the paradox of form and emptiness, can be found in many Chan Buddhist writings. The various positions of host and guest (host as host, guest as guest, host within guest, and guest within host) are used in Chan Buddhist writings to illustrate the relationship of subject and object, noumenon and phenomenon. They were first made famous by the Tang dynasty Chan master Linji Xixuan.
- 84 This poem can be found in Xu Shichang's *Wan Qing yishi hui*, 199:1b.
- 85 Here again, the “West” refers to the Western Paradise, the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha. Zaisheng's biography can be found Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 5:87. This poem is found in Wanyan Yun Zhu, *Guixiu zhengshiji fulu*, 10a.
- 86 I have been unable to identify Master Shengchuang, but given the reference to the inner chambers, she was clearly a woman.
- 87 Jingwei's biography can be found in Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 5:86. This poem can be found in Xu Shichang, *Wan Qing yishi hui*, 199:24a. Iron-Grinder Liu was a female disciple of Tang dynasty master Guishan Lingyou (771–853). Her name reflects her reputation for being as fierce a contender in Dharma battle as any of her male counterparts. The famous Chan master Zhaozhou Congshen (778–897) is said to have

asked two new novices whether they had ever been to the monastery before. The first answered that he had, the second that he hadn't. To both of them Zhaozhou simply replied, "Go have some tea." When Zhaozhou's head monk asked him about this, the master simply told him to "Go have some tea." See James Green, trans., *The Recorded Sayings of Zen Master Joshu*, p. 146.

- 88 An allusion to the legend that the Han dynasty emperor Wu (r. 140–87 B.C.E.) was visited in 110 B.C. by the Queen Mother of the West together with her entourage of heavenly maidens. The emperor was alerted to her coming by her messenger, a blue bird, which gave him time to prepare the palace for his mystical encounter with her on the seventh day of the seventh month. See Suzanne Cahill, *Transcendence and Divine Passion: The Queen Mother of the West in Medieval China* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 54–55.
- 89 Legend has it that during the Jin dynasty (256–420), a famous prince retreated to the Hou Mountains (in Henan province) where he mounted a white crane and became a Daoist immortal.
- 90 This poem can be found in Xu Shichang, *Wan Qing yishi hui*, 199:24b.
- 91 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 4:63.
- 92 Qiyuan Xinggang, *Fushi Qiyuan Chanshi yulu*, 36:429. In traditional Buddhist cosmology, in addition to the world most familiar to us, there are countless worlds or universes floating in space. One thousand of such worlds make up one small chiliocosm, one thousand small chiliocosms make up one medium chiliocosm, and one thousand medium chiliocosms make up one great chiliocosm.
- 93 A reference to the Great Vehicle, or the Mahayana.
- 94 Xu Shichang, *Wan Qing yishi hui*, 199:33a.
- 95 For more on Xinggang and her disciples, see Beata Grant, "Female Holder of the Lineage: Linji Chan Master Qiyuan Xinggang, (1597–654)," *Late Imperial China* 17:2 (December 1996), pp. 51–77.
- 96 An allusion to the traditional Linji Chan Buddhist teaching methods made famous by the great Chan masters Linji Yixuan (d. 866) and Deshan Xuanjian (780–865). The former used shouts and the latter blows in order to shock their students out of their mental ruts.
- 97 The "days" and "months" can also be read as the "sun" and the "moon."
- 98 Qiyuan Xinggang, *Fushi Qiyuan Chanshi yulu*, 36:429.

- 99 Qiyuan Xinggang, *Fushi Qiyuan Chanshi yulu*, 39:429.
- 100 Qiyuan Xinggang, *Fushi Qiyuan Chanshi yulu*, 39:429. The first Buddhist monks in India used to carry a small whisk with which they would lightly sweep the paths upon which they walked in order not to step on any living creatures. In Chinese Chan Buddhism, the fly whisk, a short staff of wood with a horse or yak tail attached, was carried only by the master. It was regarded as the symbol of mind-to-mind transmission, and along with alms bowl and monastic robes, was passed down from master to Dharma heir.
- 101 Qiyuan Xinggang, *Fushi Qiyuan Chanshi yulu*, 39:429. Mazu Daoyi (709– 88) was the Dharma heir of Nanyue Huairang, the first of the lineage to which Xinggang belonged. He was a powerful teacher, known for his use of nonverbal teaching methods such as the shout, the unexpected blows from his staff, and wordless gestures with his fly whisk.
- 102 Qiyuan Xinggang, *Fushi Qiyuan Chanshi yulu*, 39:429. Attaching a handle to an alms bowl is an image often used in Chan writings to refer to the tendency of many seekers to believe that enlightenment is something that is found outside of oneself and added on, whereas, say those who know better, “the kingdom of heaven is within you.”
- 103 An allusion to the enlightened state.
- 104 Qiyuan Xinggang, *Fushi Qiyuan Chanshi yulu*, 39:430.
- 105 Qiyuan Xinggang, *Fushi Qiyuan Chanshi yulu*, 39:429. The word “sit” in this translation is *zuoduan* in the Chinese original (Jpn. *zadan*), which literally means “sitting to cut through,” that is, sitting in meditation in order to cut through the ordinary dualistic view of the world, which discriminates between the way of the ordinary person and that of the sage.
- 106 Yikui Chaochen, *Cantong Yikui chanshi yulu, JT*, 39:12.
- 107 Yikui Chaochen, *Cantong Yikui chanshi yulu*, 39:10
- 108 Yikui Chaochen, *Cantong Yikui chanshi yulu*, 39:10.
- 109 The traditional summer rains retreat – which dates back to the time of the Buddha – in China traditionally began on April 16 and continued until July 15. During this time, monks and nuns were not allowed to leave the monastery. The term for this period is *anju* (Jpn. *ango*), which means “dwelling in peace.”
- 110 Yikui Chaochen, *Cantong Yikui chanshi yulu*, 39:12.



- 111 According to legend, Bodhidharma (ca. 470–543?), popularly regarded as the First Patriarch of Chinese Chan Buddhism, after spending nine years at Xiaolin Temple, decided to return home to India. Before doing so, however, he decided to test the realization of his three senior disciples. In response to the first disciple's answer to his question, Bodhidharma said, "You have grasped my skin," and to the second disciple (a nun) he said, "You have grasped my bones." However, to the third disciple, who answered Bodhidharma's question not with words but with silence, he said, "You have grasped my marrow." This third disciple, Huiko (487–593), is considered to have been Bodhidharma's Dharma successor and is known as the Second Patriarch of Chan Buddhism.
- 112 Yikui Chaochen, *Cantong Yikui chanshi yulu*, 39:12. Normally, of course, Buddhist monks and nuns kept their heads shaved. However, for those whose spiritual attainments and complete internalization of the religious discipline have taken them beyond mere appearances, shaving the head might well seem superfluous.
- 113 Yikui Chaochen, *Cantong Yikui chanshi yulu*, 39:12. The mirror, normally an important accessory in the boudoir of a gentry woman, here comes to signify the nonduality of an enlightened mind, which reflects things as they are, whether they be "barbarian" or Chinese, and makes no distinction between them.
- 114 "Dongyun" means "caves and clouds," both of which are associated with hermits and the life of contemplation.
- 115 Yikui Chaochen, *Cantong Yikui chanshi yulu*, 39:12.
- 116 Yikui Chaochen, *Cantong Yikui chanshi yulu*, 39:11.
- 117 Xu Shichang, *Wan Qing yishi hui*, 199:18a/b.
- 118 The use of calibrated incense to keep time appears to have originated in Buddhist monasteries; later the "incense-seal" became a widely-used timekeeping device. See John Kieschnick, *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003, p. 278.
- 119 Xu Shichang, *Wan Qing yishi hui*, 199:21b.
- 120 Xu Shichang, *Wan Qing yishi hui*, 199:21b.
- 121 Xu Shichang, *Wan Qing yishi hui*, 199:21a.
- 122 Xu Shichang, *Wan Qing yishi hui*, 199:21a.
- 123 Xu Shichang, *Wan Qing yishi hui*, 199:21b.



124 Xu Shichang, *Wan Qing yishi hui*, 199:21b

125 Xu Shichang, *Wan Qing yishi hui*, 199:21b

126 Mount Heng, or Nanyue, is a range of mountains composed of seventy-two peaks, five of which are considered to be major, the highest of which rises 1290 meters above sea level. These mountains have long been a favorite place for those seeking spiritual seclusion, poetic and artistic inspiration, or, in some cases, political refuge. Many of China's most famous poets, including Li Bo and Du Fu of the Tang dynasty, traveled to Mount Heng and left poems in praise of its beauties. Xingche, as far as I can tell, is the only woman whose poetry about the mountain is not only mentioned but highly praised in various gazetteers. The poems in this series are clearly influenced by other poets of reclusion, especially the fourth-century poet Tao Yuanming and the eighth-century Buddhist poet Hanshan.

127 The four terms or phrases refer to the famous Buddhist tetralemma: to exist, to not-exist, to neither exist nor not-exist, and to both exist and not-exist.

128 Literally, the odds as slim as that of a mustard seed tossed from a great distance landing on (and adhering to) the point of a needle.

129 Jizong Xingche, *Jizong Che Chanshi yulu*, JT 211, 4:1–4.

130 Jizong Xingche, *Jizong Che Chanshi yulu*, 4:4.

131 The translation of this line is a tentative one. The inner bark of yellow oak, or *huangbo*, is used to make a bitter brew said to relieve hunger and thirst, among other things. There is also a Mount Huangbo located in Fujian province in southern China, which was the home of the great Chan master Huangbo Xiyun (d. 850). Later, Huangbo moved to a mountain in Jiangxi province, which he renamed Mount Huangbo after leaving his old mountain home.

132 Jizong Xingche, *Jizong Che Chanshi yulu* 4:12.

133 Jizong Xingche, *Jizong Che Chanshi yulu*, 4:10.

134 The reference here is to the techniques (including, when necessary, blows and shouts) used by the Chan masters to “kill” ego-driven delusion even as they trigger an awakening to the life of one's buddha-nature.

135 Jizong Xingche, *Jizong Che Chanshi yulu*, 4:37.

136 The Chinese hour is equivalent to two Western hours. (The Chinese word for the Western hour, *xiaoshi*, means “little hour” as opposed to the larger double hour.) Thus the first hour refers to 1–3 A.M., the second, to 3–5 A.M., etc. One of the most

famous poems (and perhaps the model for this type of poem) describing the twelve hours is by the great Tang dynasty Chan master Zhaozhou (Jpn. Joshu, 778–897). Zhaozhou’s poem is somewhat more cantankerous than Zukui Jifu’s. His first verse, which, unlike Zukui Jifu’s, begins with the 3 a.m. to 5 a.m. hour, reads as follows in the translation of James Green (*The Recorded Sayings of Zen Master Joshu* (Boston: Shambhala, 2001), p. 171):

The cock crows. The first hour of the day.  
Aware of sadness, feeling down and out yet getting up.  
There are neither underskirts nor undershirts,  
Just something that looks a little like a robe.  
Underwear with the waist out, work pants in tatters,  
A head covered with thirty-five pounds of black grit.  
In such a way, wishing to practice and help people,  
Who knows that, on the contrary, it is being a nitwit.

137 Another name for the *parijata* tree, known as the king of heavenly trees, said to grow in front of the palace of Indra.

138 An allusion to the forty-fourth case of *The Blue Cliff Record*, which tells the story of Hoshan’s (or He Shan, 890–960) drum. Cleary and Cleary’s translation reads as follows:

Ho Shan imparted some words saying, “Cultivating study is called ‘learning.’ Cutting off study is called ‘nearness.’ Going beyond these two is to be considered real going beyond.” A monk came forward and asked, “What is ‘real going beyond?’” Shan said, “Knowing how to beat the drum.” Again he asked, “What is the real truth?” Shan said, “Knowing how to beat the drum.” Again he asked, “‘Mind is Buddha’ — I’m not asking about this. What is not mind and not Buddha?” Shan said, “Knowing how to beat the drum.” Again he asked, “When a transcendent man comes, how do you receive him?” Shan said, “Knowing how to beat the drum.” (Cleary and Cleary, p. 365).

This poem would seem to indicate the uselessness of asking questions, even very subtle ones. From the perspective of an abess, it describes the simple joy of a quiet couple of hours walking in the hills, not having to reply to persistent students with the phrase “Knowing how to beat the drum.”

139 The translation of these last two lines is a tentative one. We do not have any exact dates for Chan master Zukui Jifu, but we do know that she lived in the middle of the seventeenth century, thus the translation of *qiu yisi* as “the autumn [of the year] [1665–66].”

- 140 According to Buddhist cosmology, Mount Sumeru, the *axis mundi*, is surrounded by eight mountains and eight seas, each of which, aside from the eighth sea (which is filled with salt water), is filled with the fragrance of the eight merits.
- 141 The *mani* jewel, like the mirror, reflects all the colors of the world without itself having any color. And like the mirror, it is symbolic of complete and perfect liberation. It is also symbolic of the buddha-nature within all beings.
- 142 Zukui Jifu, *Lingrui Chanshi Yanhua ji*, JT 339, 5:8–9. The exposed pillars outside the Dharma or Buddha hall. Along with other inanimate parts of the monastery, including walls, tiles, lamps, and lanterns, it belongs to the category of inanimate objects. In Chan terminology, the term is used to refer to the absence, in a positive sense, of emotional attachment.
- 143 Zukui Jifu, *Lingrui Chanshi Yanhua ji*, 5:8.
- 144 In the *Lotus Sutra*, the eight-year-old daughter of the Dragon King is said to have presented a precious pearl to the Buddha; his acceptance of the pearl testified to her enlightened state, after which she changed into a male form and took her place among the great bodhisattvas.
- 145 Both the wife and the daughter of the famous Chan Buddhist lay practitioner and poet Pang Yün or Layman Pang (b. ca. 740), were known for their spiritual attainments. Although Lingzhao (the daughter) is more often referred to in the various writings associated with Layman Pang, his wife was clearly also very accomplished. The family supported themselves by farming, especially after Pang's decision to throw away their money and possessions into the river in order to live a life less encumbered by material goods.
- 146 Baochi Jizong, *Baochi Zong Chanshi yulu*, JT 2:15.
- 147 Wang Duanshu, *Mingyuan shiwei*, 26:1b.
- 148 Wang Duanshu, *Mingyuan shiwei*, 26:1b.
- 149 Wang Duanshu, *Mingyuan shiwei*, 36:2b–3a. See also Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 5:85.
- 150 The He River is in Sichuan province, the location of the Buddhist holy mountain, Mount Emei.
- 151 In traditional Buddhist cosmology, the first of the heavenly realms begin along the upper reaches of Mount Sumeru. This poem is found in Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 4:62. See also Xu Shichang, *Wan Qing yishi hui*, 199:31a.
- 152 Xu Shichang, *Wan Qing yishi hui*, 199:31b.

- 153 Xu Shichang, *Wan Qing yishi hui*, 199:31b.
- 154 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 5:93.
- 155 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 5:93. Jingzhou traditionally referred to the area composed of the entirety of what is today Hunan province, a large part of Hubei province, and a part of Guizhou province.
- 156 The reflection of the moon in the three ponds of Gushan, or Orphan Hill, was one of the “twelve sights of West Lake.”
- 157 Wang Duanshu, *Mingyuan shiwei*, 26:3b.
- 158 The Jiuhua (Nine Flower) Mountains are located in Anhui province. They are so named because they consist of nine major peaks, which to the poetic eye resemble nine petals of a lotus flower. They are considered to be one of the five sacred Buddhist mountains. Chaoyan’s poem would indicate that she had traveled to Jiuhua on pilgrimage. The place referred to in this poem may well be the Jiuzi Monastery, which was known not only for its elegant buildings, but also its many streams and springs, the soothing sounds of which could be heard from the monastery.
- 159 A twelfth-century northern Chinese dynasty.
- 160 Wang Duanshu, *Mingyuan shiwei*, 26:3b.
- 161 Wang Duanshu, *Mingyuan shiwei*, 26:3b–4a. This poem may well have been written at Jiuhua.
- 162 Wang Duanshu, *Mingyuan shiwei*, 26:4a.
- 163 Wang Duanshu, *Mingyuan shiwei*, 26:4a.
- 164 Wang Duanshu, *Mingyuan shiwei*, 26:4a–4b.
- 165 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 5:88. See also Xu Shichang, *Wan Qing yishi hui*, 199:19a.
- 166 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 5:89. See also Xu Shichang, *Wan Qing yishi hui*, 199:20b.
- 167 Xu Shichang, *Wan Qing yishi hui*, 199:20a.
- 168 Xu Shichang, *Wan Qing yishi hui*, 199:19b.
- 169 Xu Shichang, *Wan Qing yishi hui*, 199:20a. The Indian monk Bodhidharma, traditionally known as the first Patriarch of Chan Buddhism, is said to have come up the Yangzi River floating on a reed. After a famous interview with the Emperor Liang

of Wu, he is said to have gone to Shaolin Mountain in Central China, where he spent the next nine years sitting in silent meditation facing a wall. The “Great Storehouse” refers to the Buddhist canon, or *Tripitaka*. Chan Buddhism, as is well known, claimed to represent a teaching beyond words, exemplified by Mahakashyapa’s smile when the Buddha wordlessly raised a flower into the air.

170 Xu Shichang, *Wan Qing yishi hui*, 199:29a. According to Chinese folkloric belief, couples karmically destined to be together are bound together with a cord of red silk. The “thrice following” refers to the traditional assumption that as a daughter, a woman should submit to her father, as a wife, to her husband, and as a mother, to her son.

171 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 4:72.

172 Xu Shichang, *Wan Qing yishi hui*, 199:21a. See also Wanyan Yun Zhu, *Guixiu zhengshiji fulu*, 14a.

173 Sudhana, the main protagonist in the next-to-last and longest chapter of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, known in English as the *Flower Garland Sutra* and in Chinese as the *Huayan jing*, goes on a pilgrimage during which he visits and studies with fifty-three accomplished spiritual teachers.

174 Yan was another name for the area around the capital city, Beijing.

175 Here, Ziyong seems to be promising her disciples that, with the migrating geese, she will return to them in the autumn.

176 Golden Terrace was another name for the capital city of Beijing.

177 Ziyong Chengru, *Ziyong Ru Chanshi yulu*, JT, 39:819.

178 Ziyong Chengru, *Ziyong Ru Chanshi yulu*, 39:821.

179 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 5:101. What is described here is, of course, the Mahayana bodhisattva ideal whereby, having achieved a certain measure of realization for oneself (“returned home”), one should dedicate oneself to the liberation of all other sentient beings.

180 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 5:101.

181 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 4:80.

182 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 4:81. This poem can clearly be read as an analogy for the process of spiritual cultivation, especially in retreat. The layers of “self” are peeled away until one finally obtains a “taste” of the buddha-nature within.

- 183 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 4:66.
- 184 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 5:91. See also Xu Shichang, *Wan Qin yishi hui*, 199:28b–29a.
- 185 Lianghai Ru'de, *Yingxiang ji*, ZZ, 110:341a.
- 186 The Chinese traditionally divided the year not only into twelve lunar months, but also into twenty-four solar periods.
- 187 Lianghai Ru'de, *Yingxiang ji*, 110:341a.
- 188 In the chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* entitled “Expedient (or Skillful) Means,” we find the following lines: “even if little boys at play/should collect sand to make a Buddha tower,/then persons such as these/have all attained the Buddha way” (Burton Watson, trans., *The Essential Lotus*, p. 17).
- 189 The “three gates” symbolize purity of body, speech, and mind, and are also used to refer to a monastery or convent.
- 190 The eight winds refer to the influences that fan the passions: loss and gain; slander and eulogy; ridicule and praise; sorrow and joy.
- 191 Traditionally, monks and nuns were allotted the distance between three rafters — approximately three feet — in the meditation hall.
- 192 An allusion to a story about a man who spent a considerable amount of money to purchase a house. When asked how much he had paid, he replied that he’d spent ten thousand for the house, and a million for the neighbors.
- 193 The six windows are a metaphor for the six senses.
- 194 Lianghai Rude, *Yinxiang ji*, 110:341a/b.
- 195 A common poetic metaphor for the impermanence of all things.
- 196 A monk once asked Master Qingyuan Xingsi (660–774), “What is the primary meaning of the Buddhadharmā?” His reply was “What is the price of rice in Luling?”
- 197 Lianghai Ru'de, *Yinxiang ji*, 110:341a/b.
- 198 Zhenhua, *Xu biqiuni zhuan*, 6:130.
- 199 The great leviathan is Makara, a legendary sea-monster said to dwell in the depths of the sea where, some say, he guards the wish-fulfillment gem.
- 200 A reference to the net of Indra.

201 Qiu, *Dangdai diyi biqiuni*, p. 372.

202 Bhikshuni Ngawang Chodron is a Western nun in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition who received ordination in Hong Kong in 1987. She lives at Shechen Tannyi Dargyeling Monastery in Nepal, where she is engaged in establishing a nunnery for Tibetan women.

203 Huaxu is the name of a land said to have been visited by the Yellow Emperor in his dreams; subsequently it became a term used to refer to the land of sleep and dreams.

204 Jingjian, the reader will remember, is the name of the fourth-century woman traditionally regarded as being the first full-fledged Chinese Buddhist nun.

205 Qiu, *Dangdai diyi biqiuni*, p. 356.

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*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Grant, Beata, 1954–

Daughters of emptiness : poems of Chinese Buddhist nuns / Beata Grant.

p. cm.

ISBN 0-86171-362-1 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Chinese poetry—Women authors — Translations into English. 2. Chinese poetry — Qing dynasty, 1644-1912 — Translations into English. 3. Buddhist nuns — China. I. Title: Poems of Chinese Buddhist nuns.

II.

Title.

PL2658.E3G73 2003

895.1'1480809287 — dc22

2003017357

ISBN 978-0-86171-362-2

ebook ISBN 978-086171-822-1

19 18 17 16

6 5 4 3

Cover design by Christian Dierig.

Interior design by Gopa&Ted2, Inc.

Cover photo by Hedda Morrison, courtesy of the Harvard-Yenching Library.

Calligraphy of nun's names by Gu Xingzhi of Tianjin, China.