Leading the Good Life: Peng Shaosheng's Biographical Narratives and Instructions for Buddhist Laywomen in High Qing China (1683-1796)

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This dissertation is focused on the *Shan nüren zhuan* (Biographies of Good Women), the only collection of biographies devoted exclusively to Buddhist laywomen that crossed sectarian lines, composed by Peng Shaosheng (1740-1796), a Confucian literatus turned Buddhist layman and a leading lay voice in early modern Chinese Buddhism. The dissertation examines the life stories of these exemplary Buddhist laywomen in the High Qing (1683-1796), a period marked by social and political change that included the revival of Confucian classicism, increased visibility of women's work, and government policies that reinforced an intrusive morality into the lives of women. Buddhism, long established as both working in tandem and sometimes in conflict with traditional Chinese values, was part of that change. Among the conspicuous features of this period in Chinese Buddhist history are the developments of independent leadership roles for the laity as distinct from the clergy and a prevailing notion of syncretism, which was reflected in the efforts of many Buddhists of the time to combine Buddhism and Confucianism. In addition, Buddhism in early modern China saw an increased focus on the proper behavior of the laity, family values and social concerns, and the religious consequences of such behavior in the form of promises of a happy afterlife, that is, rebirth in the Pure Land of Amitābha Buddha. Moreover, especially for lay society, enlightenment and rebirth in the Pure Land became fundamentally the same goal. This project examines how the biographical narratives of Buddhist laywomen were incorporated into Buddhist-Confucian debates to defend against Confucian accusations against

Buddhism for its perceived lack of concern for social issues and morality while, at the same time, trumpeting Buddhism over Confucianism for its attention to the afterlife or rebirth in the Pure Land. The dissertation also investigates how the biographies proselytize the early modern notion of the dual cultivation of Chan meditative and Pure Land devotional practices within the Buddhist community as well as motivate male Buddhists to accelerate their own spiritual progress through the employment of gendered rhetoric.

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PREFACE

Now that I have concluded my work on this dissertation, I want to take the opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to the people who have helped me and accompanied me throughout my academic struggles and triumphs.

I owe my deepest gratitude to Professor Linda Penkower. As an international graduate student, I am lucky to have had Professor Penkower as my advisor. Her patient, insightful and sympathetic mentorship has made my smooth transition into American academic life possible. During these years, the time and energy she has invested in guiding me at different stages of my study exceeded what a graduate student might expect from an advisor. She has been the ultimate critical reader, always pushing me to think hard and to improve; at the same time, she has also been my cheerleader, boosting my confidence when it seemed like I would never finish.

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Chilson who introduced me to scholarship on Japanese *Myōkōnin den* and challenged me to address issues in my dissertation that I hope will appeal to a wider audience than students of Chinese Buddhism. I also want to thank Professor Adam Shear for encouraging me to look beyond the discipline of Buddhist studies when I began this project and for his sense of humor, which made every annual meeting less "intimidating." I am in debt to Dr. Katherine Carlitz for her help in the final stages of my dissertation project.

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At Pitt, I am fortunate to have made many wonderful friends who have greatly enriched my academic life. I wish to give special thanks to Lin Lu for his unfailing friendship and support; to my cohort Patrick Hughes, who read my dissertation and offered helpful suggestions two weeks after his own defense; to Gunji Naoko, who read a draft of my dissertation despite her tight schedule as a junior faculty member; to my dissertation group members, Joel Brady, Nancy Klancher (and Patrick) who acted as my sounding board during the entire dissertation process and shared the frustrations (and occasional triumphs) of a full-time dissertator; to my Asian studies colleagues in the Department of Religious Studies, Margarita Delgado, Lu Lianghao and Pemaratana Soorakkulame for their light-hearted conversations and sense of humors that pulled me away from the worries and anxieties of writing and research; to Lan Fei, for our shared joys and struggles; and to my friends, Marjorie and Richard Kemper, Lin Hsiang-kai, Liu Xinmin,

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I would like to express my gratitude to the institutions and organizations that supported me in my graduate studies and dissertation research. The Department of Religious Studies, History Department and/or Asian Studies Center of the University Center for International Studies at Pitt have provided me with adjunct teaching, teaching fellowships and tuition remission throughout much of my time at Pitt, while the P.E.O. Foundation offered me financial aid during my early years in the program. I am especially grateful for the support of two Andrew Mellon Doctoral Fellowships from the University of Pittsburgh and a Doctoral Fellowship from the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange, which enabled me to complete my research in China and the write-up phase of the dissertation.

Most of all, I am indebted to my family in China. My grandmother, Pan Jingwei, a Buddhist laywoman, was my first teacher of Buddhism, even though I dismissed her devotional practices as "old lady's superstitions" when I was young. Only when I began to write my dissertation did I realize that her religious practice left marks on my way of looking at religion. I also want to thank my grandmother for the love and care she gave me and for her efforts to maintain a loving and harmonious extended family, regardless of the ups and downs she experienced in her lifetime. I am grateful to my parents, sister, aunts, uncles, cousins, nephews and nieces in China, whose love and well wishes have been so precious during my stay in the United States. In particular, I owe a lot to my sister, Wu Dan, who has shouldered the responsibilities of taking care of our aging parents and has never begrudged me emotional and practical support. If there is a next life, I would love to be her younger sister again. Finally, thanks to Zhiyong for his companionship during all these years.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Whether in a shabby Buddhist temple in a remote small town in China or in the gorgeous Hsi-lai (*pinyin*: Xilai) temple in southern California, you can see a large number of Buddhist laywomen praying and invoking Buddha's name in the Buddha Hall, answering questions of the curious visitors, making and collecting donations, or cooking and cleaning the temple. Braving aftershocks in Sichuan, China in 2008, some Buddhist laywomen helped the disaster victims, while others took care of infants born in the Luohan Si, a famous Chan temple near the epicenter of the Sichuan earthquake. One day after the 2011 earthquake and tsunami devastated northeastern Japan, a group of Buddhist laywomen from the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi (*pinyin*: Ciji) Foundation could be found soliciting donations for victims in front of a Chinese grocery store in Pittsburgh. These scenes are not unusual. The old saying among members of African American churches that "women are the backbone of the church" can also be applied to Buddhist laywomen.[1] For centuries, Buddhist laywomen have been generous donors, donation collectors, caretakers and also proselytizers of Buddhism. In contrast to their important role in Buddhism, the attention they have received within the tradition or from buddhologists is far less than they deserve.

Chinese Buddhists have produced many biographical collections. Since most of these biographical collections are compiled by monks, not surprisingly, the largest portion of these

[1] Ann Braude, *Women and American Religion* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 11.

collections pertains to monks while, at the other end of the spectrum, Buddhist laywomen comprise only the smallest fraction of the figures recorded in biographical literature, with their life stories typically scattered throughout these biographical collections and subsumed under those of eminent monks. However, the small percentage of biographies of Buddhist laywomen found in these collections does not necessarily reflect the actual number of women believers, nor does it mean that women did not attain to high levels of spiritual achievement.

This dissertation takes as its starting point the *Shan nüren zhuan* (Biographies of Good Women), the only collection of biographies exclusively devoted to Buddhist laywomen that crosses sectarian lines.[2] Compiled in the eighteenth century by the Buddhist layman Peng Shaosheng (1740-1796), the collection includes the life stories of 148 Buddhist laywomen. With the source(s) of each life story noted by the compiler at the end of each entry, we know that these life accounts were drawn from a wide range of narratives stretching from the Eastern Jin (318-420) to the Qianlong era of the Qing dynasty (1736-1796). These narratives were previously found scattered throughout such Buddhist biographical compendia as the *Jingde chuan deng lu* (Record of the Transmission of the Lamp [Compiled during the] Jingde [Era], compiled in 1004), *Le bang wen lei* (Compendium of the Land of Bliss, compiled in 1200) and *Fozu tongji* (Comprehensive History of the Buddhas and Patriarchs, compiled 1258-1269); such historical records as the *Ming shi* (History of the Ming Dynasty, compiled 1645?-1739); and stories from fictional literature such as the *Yi jian zhi* (Record of Listeners, 1162-1172) and *Kuai yuan* (The Garden of Craftiness, compiled in 1613). Unique to the *Shan nüren zhuan* moreover is also the

[2] The only known biographical collection of Chinese Buddhist laywomen to predate the *Shan nüren zhuan* is the *You po yi zhi* (Biographies of Upāsikā), *XZJ* 148, compiled by Guo Ningzhi (d.u.) around 1644-1647, but this collection includes only Chan laywomen.

inclusion of nine contemporaneous life stories recorded by Peng of women who hailed from the vicinity of his native town of Changzhou (contemporary Suzhou).

Although, as we shall see, Peng claimed to have written the *Shan nüren zhuan* for his daughters in 1782, there is ample evidence that the collection was known during his lifetime and has remained in active circulation until today. The earliest known work to cite the *Shan nüren zhuan* as the source of some of its biographical entries is the *Jingtu sheng xian lu* (Record of Sages and Worthies in the Pure Land) compiled by Peng Xisu (1761-1793), Peng Shaosheng's nephew in 1784, when Peng was still alive.[3] In the biography of Peng Shaosheng collected in the *Jingtu sheng xian lu xu bian* (Continued Record of Sages and Worthies in the Pure Land) compiled by Hu Ting (d.u.), Hu praises Peng's *Shan nüren zhuan*, which "takes various opportunities to save people, and is widely circulated in this world."[4] The *Shan nüren zhuan* itself has been reprinted several times, for example, towards the end of the Qing dynasty in 1872, again during the Republican period in 1925, and in Taiwan in 1975 and 1983. We further know from a letter sent to Yang Wenhui (1837-1911), the famous modern Chinese Buddhist reformer and publisher, from his Japanese counterpart Nanjō Bunyū (1849-1927), that the *Shan nüren zhuan* was included among a set of books Yang gifted to Bunyū in 1891 and that the latter had not seen the text prior to that time.[5] The *Shan nüren zhuan* was later included in the *Dai Nihon zoku zōkyō* (Great Japanese Continuation of the Buddhist Canon), compiled 1905-1912.[6]

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[3] Peng Xisu, *Jingtu Sheng xian lu*, *XZJ* 135: 382b18-384a2. Peng Xisu notes the *Shan nüren zhuan* as the source of three stories in his collection.

[4] Hu Ting, *Jingtu sheng xian lu xu bian*, *XZJ* 135: 416b6-7.

[5] Chen Jidong, "Qing mo riben chuan lai fo jiao dian ji kao," in *Yang Renshan quan ji fulu* (Hefei: Huangshan shu she, 2000), 639. Yang Wenhui and Nanjō Bunyū collaborated on many projects, the most important of which culminated in Yang importing some 300 sūtra texts from Japan that had been lost in China, which he published in his Jingling ke jing chu (Jinling Sūtra Publishing House) in Nanjing.

[6] Maeda Eun and Nakano Tatsue, ed. *Dainippon zoku zōkyō* (Kyoto: Zōkyō shoin, 1905-1912), Chinese reprint edition, *Xu zang jing* (Taibei: Xin wen feng chuban gongsi, 1983), 150: 211-252. In this dissertation, I use an earlier version of the *Shan nüren zhuan* published in Jiangsu in 1872. According to the postscript to this version, eight

Interestingly, the *Shan nüren zhuan* became a source of inspiration for Yan Zehuan (d.u.), a Daoist woman who compiled a guidebook for female Daoist adepts in the late nineteenth century.[7] The life stories of Buddhist laywomen continue to guide today's Chinese Buddhists in their religious cultivation.[8]

In recent decades, biographies of eminent monks have been well studied by buddhologists. As Buddhism originated in India, its belief system and practices were sometimes in tandem and sometimes in conflict with Chinese values and social norms. There is no doubt that studies of eminent monks can help us to understand how this foreign religion was transmitted in China, how it interacted with Chinese culture and its dominant ideology, and how Buddhists constructed their identity. These studies however are typically concerned with doctrinal developments and thus, for the most part, rarely extend past the Song (907-1279) or Ming (1368-1644) before picking up again for the modern period. In other words, until recently, scholars of Chinese Buddhism have largely sidelined the early modern period or have used it as a stepping stone to studying modern Buddhism precisely because it has been deemed to lack the intellectual heft of earlier periods of development or the vibrancy of the later period. Moreover, with few exceptions, because the syncretism between Buddhism and Confucianism that characterizes the Ming is often assumed to continue in the Qing, little work has yet to be done on

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people made donations to support this printing project. The names listed on the last page indicate that at least two of these eight were surely women. They are Zhang Lishi and Ji Zoushi. A married woman in Chinese society at that time was often addressed as Mrs. X, followed by her maiden name (followed by *shi*, standing here for "Mrs."); in other words, her husband's surname came first, followed by her family surname, followed by the suffix *shi*. Another two donors named Shi Miaoxing and Cao Miaoming were probably women as well because the two had the character "*miao*" (wonderous) in their given names. "*Miao*" is the character that a group of active lay Buddhist women "who carried out their Buddhist activities parallel to, but not subordinated under, the organized Saṃgha," usually used in their names as a mark of their religious identity. See Chün-fang Yü, *Kuan-yin: the Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 337.

[7] Yan Zehuan, "Nan nü dan gong yi tong bian," in *Nü dan he bian*, ed. He Longxiang (Chengdu: Er xian an, 1906), 17a-b.

[8] Sun Yun, "Du *Shan nüren zhuan* de gan wu," in www.qts.com.cn/bezz/berr20/201101/320.html, website of Qita Si, Ningbo, accessed Febuary 11, 2013.

the relationship between the traditions in the early modern period.[9] Yet, the voices of Chinese lay Buddhists, many of which, like that of Peng Shaosheng, came out of and continued to circulate in the same social and intellectual circles as those of some of the most influential literati of the eighteenth century, increasingly found themselves on the defensive against an insular turn in Confucianism, and have a lot to offer to our understanding of the history of Chinese Buddhism. For a fuller picture of the transformation of Buddhism in China and the construction of a Chinese Buddhist identity, we thus need to have a look at lay Buddhists and their practices. For one thing, lay Buddhists as householders faced different challenges from those that monastic Buddhists confronted. Most particularly, the fulfillment of their secular duties designated by their social and familial roles were often viewed—both by themselves and from the outside—as at odds with their Buddhist practices. Lay Buddhists thus strove to find ways to reconcile their spiritual pursuits and their roles in society by incorporating their religious practices into their daily lives. Changes in their self-perception and self-presentation reveal how successfully (or not) they negotiated between secular norms of behavior and personal spiritual pursuit. Alongside scriptural texts, doctrinal debates and monastic rituals, the actions and norms of behavior described in the biographies of Buddhist laywomen provide a ready window into the interaction between Buddhism and its social and cultural milieu.

By focusing on the *Shan nüren zhuan,* and the practices and norms of behavior ascribed to exemplary Buddhist laywomen in particular, this project aims to add to the fledging subfield of lay Buddhism by taking Buddhist studies outside the rarified realm of scriptural texts and into the social realm of religion "on the ground." In so doing, it should serve to rebalance the

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[9] For an excellent example of an exception see Judith A. Berling, "The Collapse of the Unitary Vision of Chinese Religion in the Early Ch'ing," in *Meeting of Minds: Intellectual and Religious Interaction in East Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Honor of Wing-tsit Chan and William Theodore de Bary*, ed. Irene Bloom and Joshua A. Fogel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 125-147.

heretofore emphasis on single, clerical traditions. Second, it should contribute to broader theoretical deliberations on the role and function of religious biographies and hagiographies in defending, (re)defining and (re)shaping religious traditions in the face of internal and external competition and conflict. Third, by examining how Buddhist thought and practice relates to intellectual movements, construction of moral norms and reinforcement of social authority, it should better integrate the field of Buddhist studies into the broader fields of Chinese history and culture. Fourth, the dissertation should add to our understanding of the role of gendered rhetoric in promoting, reinforcing or altering religious ideas and values. In particular, this project hopes to add to the existing body of scholarship on women in late imperial China by introducing the subfield of Buddhist laywomen.

1.1 RESEARCH METHODS

It is not unusual for historians to draw upon dates, events and performances recorded in biographies to reconstruct the lives of their subjects and the social and political contexts in which they lived, but sometimes certain religious biographies and hagiographies can baffle researchers. An example of one such biography is found in the *Shan nüren zhuan* about Ye Xiaoluan (1614-1632), a famous girl poet of the late Ming dynasty (1368–1644).

As Ye Xiaoluan's story is one of the longest in this collection, I summarize her story here. In 1632, Ye Xiaoluan died at the age of seventeen several days before her wedding. Ye Shaoyuan (1589-1648), Xiaoluan's father, commissioned a planchette (a form of spirit writing)

to inquire about what became of his daughter in her afterlife.[10] The spirit of a Tiantai Buddhist monk appeared before him and told Ye Shaoyuan that Xiaoluan was living in the palace of the Daoist immortals. At the repeated request of her father, the spirit of the monk called the spirit of Xiaoluan to the presence of her father. Taking the opportunity that this meeting presented, the monk preached a Buddhist sermon about suffering to the father and daughter pair. Convinced by the master, Ye Xiaoluan requested to accept the Buddhist precepts. As part of the ritual, she confessed her past sins. (Her confessions were not exactly transgressions she had actually done in her lifetime, but rather behaviors described in her poems.) A few days later, when the spirit of the girl poet came to meet her father again, she told him that she no longer composed poems because the world was only the illusion of a deluded mind and poetry writing was an expression of attachment to that illusion. Just as she was about to depart, she urged her father to cut off his attachments as quickly as possible so that he could attain rebirth in the Pure Land and thereby permanently exterminate his suffering (*Shan nüren zhuan* 2: 18a-20b).

This is a brief summary of the biography of Ye Xiaoluan collected in the *Shan nüren zhuan*. The details of Ye Xiaoluan's story will be discussed in chapter three. "History-oriented"[11] research can hardly take this account as reliable documentation for reconstructing the life of this girl poet. Even Peng Shaosheng, the compiler of the *Shan nüren zhuan*, admits as such in the preface of his collection where he notes, "Ye Xiaoluan's story seems very strange and mysterious." He nonetheless goes on to caution his readers, "The truth revealed by [Ye

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[10] Planchette writing has a long history in China and came in a variety of forms but, generally speaking, during the Ming dynasty it refers to directing a stylus or stick to write Chinese characters in sand. The ritual involved a number of specialists, including two people to hold the stylus (only one of whom was possessed by the spirit or deity), an assistant to level the sand, a reader to interpret the spirit writing and a copyist. Popular during the Ming, planchette writing was prohibited by the Qing Legal Code. See David K. Jordan and Daniel Overmyer, *The Flying Phoenix: Aspects of Chinese Sectarianism in Taiwan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1986.

[11] Frank Reynolds and Donald Capps, "Introduction," in *The Biographical Process: Studies in the History and Psychology of Religion*, ed. Frank Reynolds and Donald Capps. (Hague: Mouton, 1976), 28.

Xiaoluan's story] leaves no room for doubt. Her conversion to Buddhism by giving up her immortal state reveals her supreme wisdom. If we dismiss her sincere confession at her posthumous ordination as embellished verses, then we lose the essence of this story" (*Shan nüren zhuan* 1: iiib).[12]

Peng's view of historiography implied in this statement was in fact shared by both earlier biographers and those contemporaneous to him; that is, for these authors and compilers, biographies were considered a type of history even when the contents diverged from reality because authors had "a larger historical purpose in their mind when they wrote biographies" and employed the biographical subject to "illustrate larger historical and moral patterns."[13] The subjects of biographies thus "provide the models and standards of conduct that embody the deeper meaning of history" and are "intended to illustrate timeless truths."[14]

In this vein, Peng's previous statement about Ye Xiaoluan's story gives rise to a set of questions that I hope to answer in this dissertation. For example, what is the truth Peng was attempting to convey to his audience through stories like that of Ye Xiaoluan? What were the moral patterns he wished to emphasize? Who indeed was his intended audience? To answer questions such as these, we need to suspend our search for historicity in these stories, and instead examine them from a different perspective.

One complementary approach to the "history-oriented" method is the "myth-oriented" approach.[15] John Kieschnick's study of the biographies of Chinese eminent monks from the sixth

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[12] Several Chinese texts cited in this dissertation begin the numbering of their introductions or prefaces with the Chinese character "one," and then use the same character "one" to begin the numbering of the text proper. I therefore use Roman numerals to refer to page numbers found in those prefaces and introductions and Arabic numbers to refer to the main body of the text to avoid confusion.
[13] Bret Hinsch, "The Genre of Women's Biographies in Imperial China," *Nan nü* 11 (2009): 107.
[14] Hinsch, "The Genre of Women's Biographies in Imerial China," 107.
[15] Frank Reynolds and Donald Capps, "Introduction," 28; Michael Bathgate, "Exemplary Lives: Form and Function in Pure Land Sacred Biography," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 34.2 (2007): 273.

to tenth centuries is an example of such an approach. In his study, Kieschnick tends to "set aside the historicity of the accounts and accept them as representation of the images of the monk, or what monks were supposed to be."[16] In another word, Kieschnick does not use these biographies of eminent monks as historical documents to reconstruct their lives, but attempts to make sense of actions and norms of behavior in the religious, cultural and historical context in which these idealized images were constructed by the community to which they belonged. Scholars agree that religious biographies set examples or standards of behavior for the community to follow; but the function of religious biographies is more than that. In his study of the biographies of Christian saints, Thomas Heffernan argues that the dramatized actions of Christian saints recounted in biographies and hagiographies can "synthesize multilayered ethos in a more articulated way" than verbal arguments.[17] Following the above scholars, my approach to the *Shan nüren zhuan* is not to attempt to reconstruct the lives of exemplary Buddhist laywomen found in the collection. Instead, I frame my reading of these narratives based on such questions as: What actions make a Buddhist laywoman exemplary and why? What are the multilayered ideologies the compiler aimed to synthesize in this collection? What do these women's actions argue for? With whom is the compiler arguing?

Before answering these questions, a brief introduction to the collection, its compiler and the cultural, intellectual and religious environment in which the collection was compiled, will help give us a better understanding of these stories and the arguments they raise.

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[16] John Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk: Buddhist Ideals in Medieval Chinese Hagiography*, Kuroda Institute Studies in Easst Asian Buddhism 10 (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 1.
[17] Thomas J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographies in the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 6.

1.2 PENG SHAOSHENG'S EARLY YEARS AND CONVERSION TO BUDDHISM

Peng Shaosheng (courtesy names: Yunchu, Chimu; literary names: Erlin Jushi, Zhigui Zi) was born to an elite family in Changzhou county (present-day Suzhou city), Suzhou prefecture in 1740. He took the dharma name Jiqing after he was converted to Buddhism. Generations of male members of his clan were well educated in the Confucian Classics, and many of them passed various levels of the civil service examinations and served the country as government officials. Peng Shaosheng's great grandfather Peng Dingqiu (1645-1719) and his father Peng Qifeng (1701-1784) both passed the metropolitan civil service exam and ranked first in the palace exam; two of his brothers were successful candidates in civil service exams as well. Among his nephews and grandnephews, successful candidates and government officials number more than a few. Peng Shaosheng himself passed the metropolitan exam and was awarded the Jin shi degree in the capital in 1762 at the age of twenty-one.[18] However, unlike his father and brothers, who served the empire as officials, Peng Shaosheng took a different path. When Peng was waiting for his assignment to the court after passing the metropolitan exam, he began a spiritual search, which eventually led him down the Buddhist path.

At first, he devoted himself to the Confucian Classics, composing commentaries on them. Among Confucian scholars, he especially admired the Han Confucian statesman Jia Yi (200-168 BCE), who had served as a sagacious and moral counselor to Han Wendi (Emperor Wen of the Former Han, 179-157 BCE) and helped the emperor bring prosperity to the country.[19] For a period, Peng modeled his behavior completely on the prescriptions of the *Li ji* (Book of Rites) in

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[18] Peng Shaosheng, *Jushi zhuan* (Biographies of Buddhist Laymen), *XZJ* 149: 1009b5, and Yin Hanjin and Cao Duanxiang, ed., *Qing dai jin shi ci dian* (Beijing: Zhongguo wen shi chuban she, 2005), 306.

[19] Jia Yi, an official in the Former Han dynasty who wrote extensively on statecraft, was particularly instrumental in developing agriculture and implementing policies favorable to farmers.

the hope of realizing the so-called golden age of antiquity. During this period, Peng Shaosheng studied well the thought of the Ming neo-Confucian thinker Wang Yangming (1472–1529), even though Wang's thought was not popular at the time and was often criticized by Peng's contemporaries for its syncretism of Buddhism and Confucianism. Although Peng himself was anti-Buddhist in his youth,[20] in the end he was converted to Buddhism when he came to realize that his study of the Confucian Classics and later of Daoist cultivation failed to meet his spiritual needs.[21]

According to Peng Shaosheng's own account, his conversion to Buddhism was brought about by a conversation with his friend Xue Qifeng (courtesy name: Jiasan, 1734-1775).[22] Peng recorded this critical conversation in detail:

> One day when Qifeng talked about Buddhism with me, I asked him, "Since you and I are living in this world, why do we worship the Buddha [who is outside of this world]?"
>
> Qifeng replied, "Sir, it is you who put yourself outside of the world of the Buddha. For the Buddha, there is no difference between inside and outside. Furthermore, what is your standard for measuring 'inside' and 'outside'?"
>
> I then asked him about the idea of transmigration.
>
> Qifeng answered, "The alternation of the sun and the moon produces day and night; the cyclical operation of heat and cold brings about spring and fall. It is so obvious [from the vicissitudes of] heaven and earth that transmigration never ends. Do the suspicions of the non-believer ever end?"

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[20] Peng Shaosheng, *Yi xing ju ji* 7: 15. According to Peng's epitaph for his wife, collected in his *Yi xing ju ji*, she was a pious Buddhist since her youth and strictly observed the lay Buddhist precepts. Peng notes in that epitaph that he had originally "thought this was nonsense."

[21] Peng Shaosheng, *Yi xing ju ji* 1: ii.

[22] Xue Qifeng was a friend of the Peng family. Xue was orphaned at a young age and brought up by his maternal uncle, Master Mingfu, an eminent monk in Suzhou. After Xue passed the provincial exam and earn the Juren degree, he planned on becoming a monk to proselytize Buddhism. Master Mingfu suggested that he preach Buddhism as a Confucian scholar. The master reasoned, "In the latter days of the law, many people do not know the origin of mind, so there is a debate [over the the nature of mind] between Confucians and Buddhists. You are a Confucian, yet you have the form of a great being. A real Confucian should know his true nature, namely, his *bodhi* or enlighten mind. If not, you are neither a Buddhist nor a Confucian." *Suzhou fu zhi* 120 (1824): 20-21. This passage indicates that Xue's maternal uncle as well as Xue had an inclusive attitude towards both Buddhism and Confucianism. They did not think that there were differences between the Confucian concept of *xing* (nature) and the Buddhist idea of enlightened mind.

> With these words, I sighed and regretted that I got to know Buddhism so late. Since then, I have become more and more devoted to Buddhism.[23]

In fact, we are not sure whether or not this single conversation was the only reason for Peng's conversion, but the proselytizing and apologetic tone in this passage is very clear. The question Peng Shaosheng raises at the beginning is typical of the type of question Confucians employed to challenge Buddhism. Confucians criticized Buddhists whom (they claimed) were obsessed by other worldly concerns and ignored their responsibilities in this world. Bringing in the Buddhist concept of non-duality, Xue argues that to think that the Buddha (or enlightenment) is outside of this world was a misconception caused by dualistic thinking. Xue's statement implies that enlightenment and salvation are never separate from this world, from which may be extrapolated that Buddhist cultivation lies in fulfillment of one's secular duties and moral conduct. The fulfillment of secular responsibilities and moral conduct becomes, in effect, an integral part of spiritual cultivation. Another point where the Buddhist Xue 'trumped' the then-Confucian Peng was his reference to the Buddhist ideas of transmigration and the afterlife, which are never addressed by the Confucian Classics. Confucius himself never talked about life after death. His often quoted "You do not understand even life. How can you understand death?"[24] clearly states Confucius' stance on life and death. But for Peng Shaosheng, because death is inevitable, we have to deal with the link between life and death. Xue Qifeng's remarks about Buddhism provided a new lens to look at the world and to make sense of such matters as life and death, which had obsessed him for a long time. What Peng implies here in this conversional testimony is the superiority of Buddhism because it gave him a satisfactory answer to the question of life

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[23] Peng Shaosheng, *Er lin ju ji* (1881) 22: 1a-1b.

[24] *Lun yu* 11: 12, in *Si shu wu jing* (Beijing: Beijing gu ji chu ban she, 1993) 1: 83, as translated by D.C. Lau, *The Analects* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1992), 99.

and death, a question to which the Confucian Classics and Daoist practices had failed to provide an adequate answer. From his conversion to Buddhism on, to defend Buddhism against its Confucians antagonists, who chastised Buddhism for its perceived lack of concern for social issues, and to prioritize Buddhism over Confucianism became Peng's life-long mission.

1.3 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONFUCIANISM AND BUDDHISM IN THE SONG AND MING

By the eighteenth century, Buddhism had been in China for more than one thousand years, and had made inroads into the intellectual and religious life of the Chinese people. The interaction between Buddhists and Confucians helped each to shape the other. One obvious example of this interaction comes in the form of neo-Confucian thinkers, whose thought helped form the dominant ideology in the Song (960-1279) and Ming dynasties and who incorporated Buddhist concepts into their ideas. For example, the leading Song neo-Confucian thinker, Zhu Xi (1130-1200), admitted that he had an interest in Chan Buddhism at a young age.[25] Zhu Xi's theory of *li* and human nature draws on the Buddhist concept of Buddha nature, and his way of moral cultivation is close to that of the Buddhist way. At root, *li* means pattern or principle. In Chinese thought, it refers to "the underlying patterns or processes that run through the world."[26] *Li* exists before things came into being and is present in everything. It determines "proper standards for all things in the world," but "a given thing only manifests certain aspects of *li*" to make one thing

[25] Wing-tsit Chan, *Chu Hsi: Life and Thought* (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1987), 47.
[26] Philip Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 2000), 46.

different from the other.[27] Zhu Xi compares *li* in everything to the moon in the water. "It is everywhere but it is one."[28] This comparison is borrowed from the *Huayan jing* (Flower Garland Sūtra), which states, "Metaphorically, the pure and full moon is reflected in all rivers. Although the configurations are infinite, the original moon has not been cut into two."[29]

According to Zhu Xi, difference in manifestations of *li* is determined by *qi* (vital force), with which one is endowed. "The purer one's *qi*, the more *li* shines forth and the more one understands."[30] Zhu Xi also believed that *xin* (human mind) is the master of the human body and the convergence of *li* and *qi*."[31] The degree of purity of *qi* decides how much one's mind can be aware of *li*. As the sages are endowed with the purest *qi*, so their minds are least clouded and in complete accordance with *li*.[32] Zhu Xi and many of his fellow neo-Confucian thinkers moreover advocated that a mind in complete agreement with *li* is a moral mind. In this sense, *li* identifies with moral patterns. Common people, whose minds are often obstructed by selfish desire, do not realize that their minds possess *li*. Nevertheless, what is unique to human beings, according to Zhu Xi and his fellow neo-Confucians, is that human beings have the potential to refine their *qi* and to realize that they possess the perfect knowledge of *li*. Therefore, cultivation is necessary to enable people to "recover this inherent knowledge."[33]

Zhu Xi also defines human beings as having a dual nature. One is *ben xing* (original nature), "which is *li* in itself"; the other is *qi zhi zhi xing* (material nature), "which is *li* embedded

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[27] Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, 46.
[28] Chan, *Chu Hsi*, 53.
[29] *Huayan jing*, *T* 10, no. 279: 122c20-21, as quoted in Chan, *Chu Hsi*, 53.
[30] Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, 47.
[31] Chin-shing Huang, *Philosophy, Philology, and Politics in Eighteenth–century China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 9.
[32] Chin-shing Huang, *Philosophy, Philology, and Politics*, 9.
[33] Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, 49.

in vital force."[34] Human beings, according to Zhu Xi, should strive for the recovery of their original nature. To recover one's original nature, Zhu Xi proposed two primary methods of moral cultivation: *zun de xing* (honoring the virtuous nature) and *dao wen xue* (pursuing inquiry and study). The former refers to calming one's mind and removing oneself from the obscuring effects of agitated emotions and desires through quiet sitting and so on. In this way, *li* is more easily brought forth.[35] *Dao wen xue*, on the other hand, requires intellectual effort. Since everything possesses *li*, human beings can attain the union of *li* and one's mind through studying everything related to oneself, which Zhu Xi calls *ge wu* (investigating things).[36] Through such efforts, he contends, one's emotional predispositions would be altered and selfish desires removed, enabling clouded minds to function properly, allowing unification with *li*.[37] Another aspect of *dao wen xue* is the study of the Confucian Classics left by the sages, since the sages' minds are identical to *li*. The methods Zhu Xi proposed to bring forth *li* inherent within one's mind are processes of moral self-cultivation because of the agreement between *li* and morality.[38] He wrote commentaries on the Confucian Classics and designed a systematic program for studying these Classics, which became the major curriculum for civil service examinations for the dynasties succeeding his own and greatly shaped the intellectual landscape from the Ming on.

Although Zhu Xi gave up Chan Buddhism in his adulthood and devoted himself to Confucianism, his thought was not free from Buddhist influence. For example, Zhu Xi's theory of the universal presence of *li* is identical to the Buddhist concept of shared Buddha nature. In the Buddhist view, everything in the world is impermanent, subject to causal conditions.

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[34] Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, 48.
[35] Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, 48.
[36] Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, 49.
[37] Chin-shing Huang, *Philosophy, Philology, and Politics*, 8.
[38] Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, 49.

Therefore, there is no permanent "essence" or self in anything. The ultimate truth is one–emptiness (*śūnyatā*). Everything is empty of self, and so is the Buddha. In this sense, emptiness is also called Buddha nature. Everyone possesses the Buddha nature, which is often covered up by defilements such as ignorance, desire and hatred. Only by removing these defilements can one recover one's Buddha nature, which is there from the very beginning.[39] Zhu Xi's theory of recovering one's original nature by removing one's selfish desires certainly shares parallels with the Buddhist way of bringing forth one's Buddha nature.

In fact, in Zhu Xi's time, Buddhism, especially Chan Buddhism, was so popular among the Confucian literati that interpretations of the Confucian Classics employing Buddhist terminologies or Buddhist perspectives were not uncommon among them—even becoming an intellectual trend of the time. Although Zhu Xi disavowed Buddhism in his adulthood, he gave a lengthy talk titled "Shi shi" (On Buddhism) to differentiate Confucianism from Buddhism. At the end of this talk, he laments, "The teachings of the Buddha are too strong to resist. It will not be easy for me to stick to my [Confucian] stance in this life and the next life without being converted to Buddhism. It is possible that I will be converted to Buddhism in my third life."[40] Zhu Xi's comment is telling in several ways. Given that Zhu Xi held a Confucian perspective at the time he composed this treatise, it is ironic that the afterlife was never an original concern of Confucians. Transmigration is obviously a Buddhist concept. This example however vividly demonstrates how Buddhism had permeated Chinese culture, and how neo-Confucian thinkers such as Zhu Xi had internalized the Buddhist concept of transmigration. Zhu Xi's comment also suggests that syncretism in the Song was widely accepted by Confucian literati. This forms a

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[39] Sally King, *Buddha Nature* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1991), 2.
[40] Zhu Xi, "Shi shi," in *Zhuzi yu lei* 126, ed. Li Jingde (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1986), 8: 3041.

sharp contrast to the intellectual trend in the Qing when syncretism was no longer popular with the rise of the Kaozheng School (Evidential School), to which I turn later in this chapter.

On the other hand, the Song was also a time when Buddhism became "Confucianized." Eminent monks of this period, such as Zanning (919-1001), Zhiyuan (976-1022) and Qisong (1007-1072), all wrote commentaries on the Confucian Classics, which received positive attention from Confucian literati.[41] Their discussion of Buddhist doctrines also included social concerns, remarks on statecraft and moral construction as part of the agenda. To include Confucian discourse in Buddhist doctrinal accounts helped to make Buddhism more acceptable to the Confucian literati.[42] Liturgical changes in Buddhism are also associated with Confucianism. For example, prayers for the welfare of the state and the emperor before a Buddhist sermon were introduced in this period.[43] These shifts indicate an active interaction between Buddhists and Confucians, with Confucian views on the relationship between subject and emperor permeating Buddhist ideology.[44]

In the Ming dynasty, the thought of the leading neo-Confucian thinker Wang Yangming (1472-1529) provides another example of the syncretism of Buddhism and Confucianism. Wang Yangming differentiated himself from Zhu Xi by establishing the idea of *xin xue* (learning of the mind) and asserting that *liang zhi* (innate knowledge of the good) is possessed by everyone and is "as perfect as that of the sages." Consequently, he contends that everyone has the potential of becoming a sage.[45] In his view, innate knowledge of the good is morally perfect, and it does not only refer to the cognitive aspect of knowing what is right and what is wrong, but also refers to

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[41] Yu Yingshi, *Song Ming li xue yu Zheng zhi wen hua* (Taibei: Yun chen wen hua shi ye gu fen you xian gong si, 2004), 134.
[42] Yu Yingshi, *Song Ming li xue yu zheng zhi wen hua*, 146.
[43] Yu Yingshi, *Song Ming li xue yu zheng zhi wen hua*, 146.
[44] Yu Yingshi, *Song Ming li xue yu zheng zhi wen hua*, 146.
[45] Takehiko Okada, "Wang Chi and the Rise of Existentialism," in *Self and Society in Ming Thought*, ed. William Theodore de Bary (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 121.

the affective aspect of acting spontaneously towards the morally proper end.[46] Thus Wang Yangming wrote in his *Chuan xi lu* (Instructions for Practical Living), "The Way [Dao] is innate knowledge. From the beginning it is perfect. It regards what is right as right and what is wrong as wrong. If we only rely on it with regard to what is right and what is wrong, everything will be correct. This innate knowledge is, after all, our wise master."[47] Nevertheless, he found that many people did not know what they should or should not do or, even if they did know, they were not motivated to do it or refrain from doing it. Wang Yangming attributes this failure to act in a morally proper way to the separation of people and the innate knowledge of the good.[48] Common persons are usually unaware of their innate knowledge and their potential, and their minds are often clouded by their selfish desire; therefore, the most important task for a person is to remove selfish thought that obscures one's innate knowledge of the good and let one's actions be guided by his innate knowledge of the good.[49]

Different from Zhu Xi, who promoted the recovery of one's original nature by quiet sitting, investigating things and studying the Confucian Classics, Wang Yangming instead proposed a more "context-sensitive method of moral cultivation in which one was to concentrate on the events of one's own life and the movements of one's own mind."[50] Wang sees the Confucian Classics as no longer important; in fact, Wang alleges that too much study of the Classics can be dangerous because one runs the risk of focusing on the accumulation of knowledge of the Classics and taking learning the Classics as the final objective, while missing

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[46] Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, 63.
[47] Wang Yangming, *Instructions for Practical Living and Other Neo-Confucian Writings*, trans. Wing-tsit Chan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 218.
[48] Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, 63-64.
[49] Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, 64.
[50] Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, 102.

life's real goal—the achievement of moral progress and discovery of one's innate moral mind.[51] Rather than quiet sitting as an effective way to moral cultivation, Wang promotes active practice. By completely focusing on doing what one's social position requires one to do with great sincerity, one can guard against the mind being deluded by selfish desires and achieve moral progress. He insists that it is possible for people to awaken to complete and perfect moral knowledge amidst their daily activities.[52] Wang Yangming's emphasis on awakening to one's innate moral mind amidst one's ordinary practices is very similar to Chan Buddhist rhetoric on sudden enlightenment.[53] His emphasis on practice is also close to Chan's rhetoric that downplays scriptural study. The union of one's perfect moral knowledge and activity is identical to the Chan Buddhist concept of the union of one's experience of enlightenment and one's daily work.

Wang's disciples Wang Gen (1483-1541) and Wang Ji (1498-1583) developed the notion of learning of the mind and made it even more syncretic. They emphasized that people follow the innate knowledge of the good and act spontaneously according to the mandate of the innate knowledge of the good.[54] Their approach to achieving this goal was also not limited to the study of the Classics; instead, they introduced "Buddhist" methods (from the Confucian perspective). Their followers, especially those of Wang Gen, used some unconventional teaching methods, such as shouts and blows in their lectures. These approaches, which downplay the role of studying the Classics and highlight the sudden recovery of the clouded innate knowledge of the good, resemble the antinomian rhetoric and practices of Chan Buddhism.[55]

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[51] Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, 68.
[52] Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, 60.
[53] Jiang Wu, *Enlightenment in Dispute: The Reinvention of Chan Buddhism in Seventeenth-Century China* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 49.
[54] Jiang Wu, *Enlightenment in Dispute*, 49.
[55] Jiang Wu, *Enlightenment in Dispute*, 50-53.

Although Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming had different approaches to moral self cultivation, both Zhu Xi's concept of recovering one's original nature and Wang Yangming's idea of discovering the innate knowledge of the good share similarities to the Buddhist teaching of realizing the Buddha nature. These so-called similarities between neo-Confucianism and Buddhism would later become the major issue of debate between Peng Shaosheng and Dai Zhen (1723-1777), the leading Confucian philological scholar of the eighteenth century, to which I turn later.

As a study by Jiang Wu shows, the Confucian literati who were interested in Wang Yangming's learning of the mind turned their attention to Chan Buddhism in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties.[56] Wu points out that this does not necessarily mean these literati had faith in the concept of karmic retribution or reincarnation. In fact, they were most actively involved in reading Buddhist texts, especially Chan *gong'an* (J: *kōan*) or key phrases on which to meditate. Their interest lay in the philosophical wisdom conveyed by these Buddhist texts, on which they could meditate or debate. In other words, they were interested in Buddhist texts that could provide them with intellectual exercises and offer some enjoyment in their leisure time.[57] To borrow two phrases from Jiang Wu, Buddhism was more like "poetry, drama, antiques, tea, wine or other 'toy'" with which these literati could entertain themselves—a kind of "text-oriented spirituality," which had nothing to do with religious practices.[58] Timothy Brook also shows that the involvement of the gentry (most of whom were Confucian literati) in Buddhism during this time served as social and cultural capital, which could reinforce their social status.[59] Kai-wing

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[56] Jiang Wu, *Enlightenment in Dispute,* 48-50.
[57] Jiang Wu, *Enlightenment in Dispute*, 54.
[58] Jiang Wu, *Enlightenment in Dispute*, 57.
[59] Timothy Brook, *Prayer for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 43 and 213-217.

Chow's study on the relationship between printing and changes to the intellectual landscape in the Ming dynasty also suggests that many publishers appropriated Buddhist ideas in their civil service guides to make their comments on the Confucian Classics more original and unique in an effort to make them more marketable.[60]

Studies also show that around some eminent monks were networks of Confucian literati who discussed Buddhist doctrines and participated in all kinds of devotional activities.[61] While Buddhist infiltration in Confucianism is obvious in the Ming, the opposite is also true; Buddhist institutions continued to be "Confucianized." Charles Jones points out the popularity of four eminent monks among Confucian literati in the late Ming—Zibo Zhenke (1543-1603), Hanshan Deqing (1546-1623), Ouyi Zhixu (1599-1655) and Yunqi Zhuhong (1535-1615)—was in large part because these four monks were all trained in the Confucian Classics in their youth and shared the same experience of taking civil examinations with the Confucian literati.[62] Their shared experiences and shared language ("literarily and figuratively")[63] made these eminent monks good conversation partners with the Confucian literati.[64] In this sense, it is not surprising to see these monks talk about Buddhism with the literati in Confucian terms—a language familiar to them and their Confucian literati audience.

In short, in the Ming dynasty, many Confucian literati were involved with Buddhism in one way or another. Even though Confucian scholars in the Ming, such as Gao Panlong (1562-

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[60] Kai-wing Chow, *Publishing, Culture, and Power in Early Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 179-182.
[61] See Jennifer L. Eichman, "Spiritual Seekers in a Fluid Landscape: A Chinese Buddhist Network in the Wanli Period (1573-1620)" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2005), 3-6.
[62] Charles B. Jones, "Contextualizing Gentry Buddhism in the Late Ming Dynasty" (paper presented at the XVth Congress of International Association of Buddhist Studies, Atlanta, Georgia, June, 2008).
[63] In 1425, the Yongle Emperor of the Ming decreed Mandarin, the northern dialect, the official langague of the civil service examinations. See Jones, "Contextualizing Gentry Buddhism in the Late Ming Dynasty," and Benjamin Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Service Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 2000), 619.
[64] Jones, "Contextualizing Gentry Buddhism in the Late Ming Dynasty."

1612)[65] and Gu Yanwu (1613-1682),[66] commented negatively on the syncretic trend represented by Wang Yangming and his followers, most literati did not find blurring boundaries between Confucianism and Buddhism problematic and were content with being 'Buddhist Confucians.' Conversely, many Buddhist clerics in this period were well versed in the Confucian Classics and their interpretation of Buddhist doctrines was also influenced by these texts. Their possession of skills similar to those required of the Confucian elite, such as poetry writing and painting, further enabled well-educated Buddhist monks to socialize with their Confucian counterparts. All these factors helped contribute to the syncretic trend in the late Ming. It is also safe to say that Buddhism was more tolerated among the literati in the Ming than in the High Qing (1683-1796),[67] a point to which I now turn.

1.4 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BUDDHISM AND CONFUCIANISM AT THE TIME OF PENG SHAOSHENG

Like his Song and Ming predecessors, Peng Shaosheng saw complete harmony between Buddhism and Confucianism. His self-perception, characterized by the union of Buddhist and

[65] Gao Panlong was the leader of the Donglin reform movement, a proponent of Zhu Xi and an outspoken critic of Wang Yangming. He was also the leading opponent against the notorious eunuch Wei Zhongxian. For his political activities see Zhang Tingyu, ed. *Ming shi* 243 (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1975), 7: 6300. For his autobiography and thought see Rodney Leon Taylor, *The Religious Dimensions of Confucianism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 55.

[66] Gu Yanwu was another critic of Wang Yangming's thought and blamed Wang Yangming for causing the decline and fall of the Ming dynasty. See Joseph Richmond Levenson, *Confucian China and its Modern Fate*: *A Trilogy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 5.

[67] There are different views on the time frame of the so-called High Qing period. This dissertation sets the time frame between 1683 and 1796. It begins with the Manchu extermination of the last Ming loyalists in 1683 and ends with the resignation of the Qianlong Emperor in 1796. This period marks the trajectory of the Qing from its peak to its decline in the 1790s. The year of Peng Shaosheng's death in 1796 coincides with the end of the Qianlong reign and the so-called "Kang Qian sheng shi" (Prosperous Age from the Kangxi to Qianlong Eras). Susan Mann extneds the High Qing to 1839, the year prior to the outbreak of the Opium War. See her *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

Confucian identities within himself, furnishes a good example of his belief in the compatibility of the two traditions:

> Once I dreamed that I was a teacher lecturing on the teachings of the sage kings and Confucius. Hundreds of people sat around me and listened to my lecture. I was so happy with this. Then I dreamed that I was a monk meditating on a mountain by a brook. I turned my rosary while the birds were chirping. My six senses felt the quietness, and my five *skandha* [form, feeling, conception, mental formation and consciousness] were clear and quiet. I also felt happy with this. I have composed more than twenty poems to interpret the essence of the scriptures at my leisure. When I read them again, I feel as if I am a teacher giving a sermon on the dharma; I also feel like a monk meditating in the vast valley. The two are truly compatible. I delight at this thought. People in this world who understand me say that I am talking about my dreams; they can also say that I am talking about my bliss.[68]

The union of a Confucian teacher and Buddhist practitioner in the same person suggests that since Buddhism and Confucianism can be reconciled in one person, the two traditions are not contradictory to one another because each tradition conveys the same truth in a different way. This inclusive attitude towards Buddhism was also shared by Peng's like-minded friends, including the previously mentioned Xue Qifeng, Luo Yougao (courtesy name: Yougao, 1734-1779) and Wang Jin (courtesy name: Dashen, 1725-1792). These three friends had all been educated in the Confucian Classics from an early age, passed provincial civil service exams, and were finally converted to Buddhism. They all had an inclusive attitude towards Buddhism and Confucianism. Wang Jin, according to Peng Shaosheng, preferred talking about Buddhism in Confucian terms.[69] As noted above, Xue Qifeng's maternal uncle, the monk Mingfu, suggested that Xue proselytize Buddhism as a Confucian scholar because doing so would be an effective strategy since a large portion of Xue's audience would come from the Confucian literati class.[70] Because Buddhists like Peng Shaosheng and his friends were all educated in the Confucian

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[68] Peng Shaosheng, *Er lin ju ji* 5: 9b.
[69] Peng Shaosheng, *Yi xing ju ji* 5: 9b.
[70] *Suzhou fu zhi* 120 (1824): 20-21.

Classics, it is not surprising that they might read Buddhist scriptures through a Confucian lens or, conversely, search for the ideal society and the significance of individual existence in Buddhist sources when the Classics did not provide them with satisfying answers. Being a 'Confucian Buddhist' for most of these Buddhists in the eighteenth century was not a problem. This inclusive attitude was partly driven by a strategy to proselytize and defend Buddhism in a society in which Confucianism was the dominant ideology, and partly determined by the cultural and educational backgrounds of these lay Buddhists.

In fact, many of Peng's family members also adopted an inclusive attitude towards Buddhism. His great-grandfather Peng Dingqiu established the Wen xing ge (Wen Xing Pavilion) near his home as a site for carrying out *fangsheng* (releasing animal),[71] a ceremonial practice designed to demonstrate Buddhist compassion and which had been promoted by the Ming eminent monk Zhuhong for lay Buddhists. Peng Shaosheng's father Peng Qifeng (1701-1784) became interested in the *Jin'gang jing* (Diamond Sūtra)[72] after he retired from official service.[73] Peng's wife had been a pious Buddhist even before her marriage.[74]

However, in the eighteenth century, not all Confucian scholars shared the same view of the relationship between Buddhism and Confucianism. The eighteenth century was a transitional period of Chinese intellectual history. To borrow a phrase from Benjamin Elman's book title,

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[71] Peng Shaosheng, *Er lin ju ji* 9: 9a. This practice is often attributed to a passage in the apocryphal *Fanwang jing* (Brahma's Net Sūtra, *T* 21, no. 1484), but its origin is not clear. The practice became increasingly popular between the Tang (618-907) and Ming dynasties and, by the late Ming, societies for releasing life were established, which built ponds in which to release fish that had been brought from fishermen. Other animals, bought from market places, were also released. For a brief history of the origins of the practice in China see Henry Shiu and Leah Stokes, "Buddhist Animal Release Practices: Historic, Environmental, Public Health and Economic Concerns," *Contemporary Buddhism* 9.2: 182-184. For this practice in the Ming and Qing see Joanna F. Handlin Smith, "Liberating Animals in Ming-Qing China: Buddhist inspiration and elite imagination," *Journal of Asian Studies* 58.1 (1999): 51-84.

[72] *Jin'gang jing*, *T* 8, no. 235.

[73] Peng Shaosheng, *Yi xing ju ji* 1: 4b.

[74] Peng Shaosheng, *Yi xing ju ji* 7:15a.

"from philosophy to philology" is an accurate description of the intellectual trends in late imperial China.[75] The syncretism popular with the Ming Confucian literati was challenged by the rise of the Kaozheng (Evidential) School. The Evidential School, starting in the late seventeenth century (late Ming and early Qing) and popular and widespread in the eighteenth century, was centered in the Jiangnan area, which was the epicenter of intellectual activity at the time and where Peng Shaosheng lived most of his life. As its name indicates, this school emphasized textual study. Philological study was one of the major approaches of this school, which was aimed at the rediscovery of the authentic meaning of texts composed by the sages of antiquity. It promoted a return to the commentaries on the Confucian Classics of the Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE), that is, before Confucianism became "contaminated" by Buddhism. Dai Zhen (courtesy names: Dongyuan, Shenxiu, 1723-1777), an older contemporary of Peng's and one of the leading figures of this school, remarks on the necessity for and purpose of philological study in the following passage:

> It is regrettable that later generations have lost the subtlety of the Six Classics [of Confucianism] because they have not taken the right path. Some people say, "Han Confucian scholars had their way to study the Classics and Song Confucian scholars had their approaches to studying the Classics. The former mainly focused on philological and paleographical studies, while the latter on *li yi* (principle/pattern and meaning)." This statement does not make sense to me. If *li yi* can be achieved through thinking based on nothing, then everyone would gain the moral principle through groundless fabrication. In that case, how can you say it is the study of the Classics? Since groundless thinking is not *li yi* of the sages and worthies of ancient times, one has to seek *li yi* in the ancient Classics. When one seeks [*li yi*] in the Classics of antiquity, the Classics are not easily understood due to the loss of some of the texts and gaps between the present and the past. So we have to use philological methods to understand the Classics. Only [after] the language of the Classics is clear to us, will *li yi* in the texts written by the sages and worthies become clear, and the mind in accord with *li yi* will also be illuminated. The *li yi* of antiquity does not lay in other places, but [is located] in the codes and regulations [established by the sages]. . . . People go astray by separating philological studies from the search for *li yi*. What is the purpose of philological studies if people do not search for

[75] See Benjamin Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 3.

> *li yi*? Conversely, [if people do not search for principle and meaning] in the codes and the regulations established by the sages, then they will fall into heterodoxy without knowing it.[76]

Here, Dai Zhen explicitly expresses the idea that philological study is necessary for the correct understanding of truth as conveyed in the codes and regulations composed by the sages of antiquity. Some texts of antiquity were lost and the significance of characters and terms changed due to the passage of time, thus philology was necessary to reconstruct the incomplete texts and trace the original meaning of the characters and terms found in these texts. Only in this way could the truth conveyed by these texts be understood and recovered. Dai Zhen criticized those Confucians who took metaphysical speculation as the way to acquire moral truth without seriously studying the exact meaning of each character in the texts of antiquity. He dismissed interpretations of the Classics without philological study as mere fabrication based on the interpreter's whim, far from the truth transmitted by the sages of antiquity. For Dai Chen, Zhu Xi, Wang Yangming and other neo-Confucian thinkers of the Song and Ming belonged to this category. On the other hand, he also disapproved of his fellow Evidential School scholars, who mistook philology as the final goal of study and ignored the search for moral truth.

The extent to which Peng Shaosheng participated in the major intellectual debates of his day can be seen in his challenge to Dai Zhen's purist view. The two carried out a heated debate through written correspondence in 1777. According to a letter written by Dai Zhen, Peng initiated the debate after he received copies of Dai's *Yuan shan* (On the Good) and *Mengzi zi yi shu zheng* (Evidential Study of the Meaning of Words in *The Mencius*).[77] After reading Dai's treatises, Peng wrote to Dai arguing against several issues with which he disagreed. Dai Zhen replied with a lengthy criticism of Peng and his efforts to reconcile Buddhism and Confucianism.

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[76] Dai Zhen, *Dai Zhen ji* (Shanghai: Shanghai gu ji chu ban she, 1980), 214.
[77] Dai, "Da Peng jinshi Yunchu shu," in *Dai Zhen ji*, 166.

Before turning to the debate proper, we should note that Dai Zhen's students attached great importance to this debate. According to Duan Yucai (1735-1815), Dai Zhen's major student, Dai 's response letter "further clarified the major points of the *Mengzi zi yi shu zheng*,"[78] which had been completed around 1773, and which I will thus also use in my discussion of the debate between Peng and Dai. It reaffirmed the argument that the thought of Confucius and Mencius should not be mixed with Buddhism and that Buddhism should not promote itself under the guise of Confucianism.[79] For this reason, the correspondence between Dai and Peng was added to the reprinted version of Dai's *Mengzi zi yi shu zheng* shortly after his death and later was also recorded in full in Dai Zhen's biography composed by Hong Bang (1745-1780).[80] As the result of the wide circulation of the *Mengzi zi yi shu zheng* in the eighteenth century, it is safe to say that the controversy between Dai and Peng became widely known and attracted a lot of attention from the literati. Taking into consideration the dominant position of the Evidential School in the Jiangnan area (and beyond) in the eighteenth century, we can assume that Peng and his like-minded friends were a marginalized minority in this literati circle and that Peng faced great pressure. However, it is this pressure that motivated him to defend his faith in Buddhism and bolstered his confidence in the compatibility of the two traditions.

Despite Dai Zhen's severe attacks against Buddhism and the syncretism Peng espoused, the passage about philological study by Dai Zhen cited above suggests that the two opponents in fact shared the same goal—to find the moral truth and the proper way of moral self cultivation. Where the two differed were on the causes of moral corruption and their approaches to moral self-cultivation. The major purpose of Dai Zhen's *Yuan shan* and *Menzi zi yi shu zheng* was to

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[78] Duan Yucai, "Dai Zhen nian pu," in the appendix to the *Dai Zhen ji* by Dai Zhen, 480.
[79] Duan Yucai, "Nian pu," 480.
[80] Duan, "Nian pu," 480.

criticize the neo-Confucian notion of *li* as influenced by Buddhism and to reconstruct the notion of *shan* (the good) proposed by pre-Buddhist Confucian thinkers, especially Mencius.[81] The debate between Peng and Dai thus focused on the definition of "*li*" and the way to obtain the good based on their different interpretations of *li*.

To return to the points of contention between Peng and Dai, the first issue they argued over was whether *li* exists prior to things. Peng agreed with the neo-Confucian thinkers who insisted that *li* exists in everything, regulating, guiding and controlling everything. He also believed that it represents moral truth. Moreover, he accepted that *li* cannot be separated from things in this world, but insisted that it is *li* that transcends all concrete things, sets up standards for all things and defines what they should be, and not vice versa. In this sense, things cannot exist without *li*.[82] The mind of the sages of antiquity is identical to *li*, but a common person can recover the mind identical to *li* through moral self-cultivation, which removes selfish desire that clouds one's mind.

In his reply to Peng, Dai Zhen reaffirms his view of *li* as found in his *Mengzi zi yi shu zheng*, defining the term in a different way. His claim is that *li* is not *a priori*. "*Li* is the subtle patterns by which things are differentiated from one another."[83] He also points out that "*li* is the [overall comprehension and consideration] of human feelings that do not err. No one can know *li* without investigating human feelings."[84] Dai Zhen emphasizes that the discovery of *li* lies in "empirical observation and theoretical analysis" of concrete "life-forms and activities," such as

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[81] Chung-ying Cheng, *Tai Chen's Inquiry into Goodness* (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1971), 18.
[82] Peng Shaosheng, "Yu Dai Dongyuan shu," in the appendix to the *Dai Zhen ji*, 494.
[83] Dai, *Mengzi zi yi shu zheng*, in *Dai Zhen ji*, 265.
[84] Dai, *Mengzi zi yi shu zheng*, in *Dai Zhen ji*, 265. This translation is based on the interpretation of Dai Zhen's *li* in Chung-ying Cheng, *Tai Chen's Inquiry into Goodness* (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1971), 20, and Justin Twald, "Acquiring 'Feelings that Do Not Err': Moral Deliberation and the Sympathetic Point of View in the Ethics of Dai Zhen," (Ph.D. dissertatation, University of Chicago, 2006), 76-77.

human "needs and feelings," since *li* is not *a priori* to things.[85] In this sense, Dai Zhen contradicts Peng by asserting that it is impossible to obtain *li* by only focusing on one's mind. He further contends in his *Mengzi zi yi shu zheng* that the neo-Confucian notion that *li* was endowed by heaven and completed in one's mind was influenced by the Buddhist concept of *shenshi* (storehouse consciousness).[86] According to the Yogācāra school of Buddhism, *shenshi* or (Skt:) *ālayavijñāna* can exist without a physical form and is the root of all consciousness, determining one's rebirth based on one's karma and giving form to beings, thereby accounting for one's sense of self and the continuity of experience.

In his letter to Dai Zhen, Peng Shaosheng reminds Dai that *shenshi* was not a Buddhist invention but rather early Confucian Classics such as the *Yi jing* (Book of Changes) mention it.[87] Dai Zhen retorts in his reply that the term *shenshi* that is found in the *Yi jing* has a totally different meaning from that employed by Buddhism. He goes on to claim that Buddhism appropriated the term from the *Yi jing* but with an entirely different connotation. When later generations reapplied this term to interpret the Confucian Classics, the significance was totally distorted by a Buddhist overlay. He further points out that confusing the two as the same thing brought about moral degeneration and disaster to the people and the nation. He reasoned that just as the neo-Confucians equated *li* and Buddhist consciousness, they adopted a Buddhist approach to *wuyu* (no-desire) to recover the original nature that was clouded by selfish desire. Dai Zhen thought that neo-Confucian thinkers polarized desire and *li* by promoting the idea that "if one's action does not stem from *li*, it must be stem from desire; if not from desire, it must stem from

[85] Cheng, *Tai Chen's Inquiry into Goodness*, 20.
[86] Dai, *Menzi zi yi shu zheng*, 322.
[87] Peng Shaosheng, "Yu Dai Dongyuan shu," 493.

li."[88] The consequence of this dualistic view was that "requests [for food] from the starving, longing [for love] of men and women, even yearning [for life] by the dying are merely human desires [that should be removed]."[89] If people in power applied this view to practical reality, according to Dai Zhen, they would dismiss people's basic needs as desire and turn a blind eye to their dire situations, or they would only pay lip service to these needs by preaching removing human desire to return to the true original nature but would not do anything to improve their situations.[90] To make matters worse, "When [people in power] do not study things carefully, they believe what they have in their mind to be *li*. [To take personal opinions as *li*] can do harm to one person or even jeopardize the whole country."[91] In other words, people in power could suppress the opinions of others in order to justify vicious behavior and intemperate acts in the name of *li.*[92]

In his *Mengzi zi yi shu zheng* and his letter to Peng Shaosheng, Dai Zhen emphasizes that it was impossible for one to understand *li* to achieve moral development by following the Buddhist way of no-desire. He argued, "Even were a Buddhist to get rid of his desires, that would not mean he is unselfish, because he aims to achieve his selfish goal [of salvation] by removing desire."[93] Sages, in Dai Zhen's opinion, "[by examining] human relationships and the daily needs of the people, understand the feelings of all and meet the needs of all."[94] Thus, for Dai, as an approach to moral self-cultivation, the Buddhist idea of removing desire did not function well. In fact, for him, their approach caused moral degeneration and jeopardized the

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[88] Dai, *Mengzi zi yi shu zheng*, 323.
[89] Dai, *Mengzi zi yi shu zheng*, 323.
[90] Cheng, *Tai Chen's Inquiry into Goodness*, 18-19.
[91] Dai, *Mengzi zi yi shu zheng*, 323.
[92] Cheng, *Tai Chen's Inquiry into Goodness*, 18.
[93] Dai, *Mengzi zi yi shu zheng*, 323.
[94] Dai, *Mengzi zi yi shu zheng*, 275.

whole country. For this reason, he concludes that Buddhist influences must be removed from the commentaries on the Confucian Classics.

In his letter to Dai Zhen, Peng refutes Peng refutes Dai's insistence that the Buddhist idea of *wuyu* (no-desire) means removing desire as experienced through the senses of hearing, seeing and so forth, which leads to indifference to the needs and feelings of others. Rather, Peng insists that it refers to freeing oneself from selfish desire to be in accord with the myriad things.[95] Peng then quotes the great Song Confucian Cheng Yi (1033–1107) to further explain the meaning of no-desire. "When heaven and earth have their minds extend to all sentient beings, then they do not have their own minds. When the sage takes on the passions of all myriad things as his own, he has no passions [of his own]. The training of a *junzi* [superior man] is nothing more than cleaning up his ego to be perfectly impartial, and to conform to the myriad things."[96] Peng's view on no-desire emphasizes breaking the dichotomy of self/other to avoid benefitting oneself at the cost of the other. No-desire does not mean to be indifferent to people's needs and suffering, but to achieve union of oneself and others by completely dropping the ego to take other people's needs and suffering as one's own. No-desire means being totally unselfish. He claims that a state of no-desire is necessary for moral cultivation. "If one is without desire, one is sincere. If one is sincere, one is enlightened. If one's mind is not clouded, one is enlightened. If one is enlightened, one is sincere."[97] A morally perfect person is to remove his or her selfish desire to serve others with great sincerity. In Peng's view, sincerity is identical to enlightenment and an enlightened mind is identical to an unselfish and morally perfect mind.

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[95] Peng Shaosheng, "Yu Dai Dongyuan shu," 493.
[96] Peng Shaosheng, "Yu Dai Dongyuan shu," 493.
[97] Peng Shaosheng, "Yu Dai Dongyuan shu," 493.

Another of the major issues that caused the heated debate between Peng and Dai was the cause of moral degeneration. It is not difficult to figure out Dai Zhen's position on this issue from what I have already discussed. For him, moral degeneration was caused by Buddhist influence on the interpretation of the Confucian Classics by neo-Confucian thinkers such as Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming. Their appropriation of Buddhist concepts to interpret the Confucian Classics, especially their emphasis on seeking *li* in oneself by getting rid of desire to recover the unclouded original nature or the innate knowledge of the good, which is similar to Buddhist approaches of self-cultivation. This self-sufficient introvert approach easily led to self importance; consequently, one could confuse one's personal opinion and the *li*.[98] People in power who falsely claimed their personal opinion as *li* would justify their ignorance of common people's basic needs and their suppression of other people's legitimate request.[99] The abuse of *li* was responsible for prevailing hypocrisy among the ruling elite and "did great harm to people and the state."[100]

In contrast to Dai, Peng thought that moral degeneration was not caused by the views of neo-Confucian thinkers, but rather by the failure to put their thought into practice. Unlike thinkers in the early Qing, such as Gu Yanwu (1613-1682), Zhang Lie (1622-1685) and Yan Ruoqu (1636-1704), who blamed Wang Yangming and his theory of innate knowledge of the good for the collapse of the Ming dynasty,[101] Peng Shaosheng and his great-grandfather Peng Dingqiu held Wang Yangming in high esteem. Peng quoted his great-grandfather in his writings when talking about the moral degeneration that caused the collapse of the Ming. "[Some people] say that the Ming dynasty was not ruined by factional conflicts and bandits, but by [neo-

[98] Dai, "Da Peng Jinshi Yunchu shu," in *Dai Zhen ji*, 173.
[99] Dai, "Da Peng Jinshi Yunchu shu," 275.
[100] Dai, *Mengzi zi yi shu zheng*, 328.
[101] Chin-shing Huang, *Philosophy, Philology and Politics*, 90-91, 113-114.

Confucian] scholars. This statement falsely charges Wang Yangming. If officials of the Ming dynasty had reminded each other and encouraged each other with the goal of *zhi liang zhi* (extension of the innate knowledge of the good), then there would have been no sycophancy, no corruption, no persecution of the upright and no increase of bandits. A person of insight should lament the failure of implementing Wang Yangming's thought."[102] This is not only an apologia for Wang Yangming's thought, but also for Buddhism as Wang Yangming's *liang zhi* was so closely related to the Buddhist concept of Buddha nature, an observation that had been noted by scholars of that time.

Another issue upon which Peng and Dai disagreed was the proper way of moral self-cultivation. Dai Zhen thought that one's moral cultivation was like the growth of one's physical body. In the same way that one needs food to grow, one needs knowledge to nourish one's morality. With knowledge, one's morality increases, which will finally lead one to become a sage.[103] Dai argued that moral cultivation was not a return to one's original self without being clouded by external things and self-desire, as some neo-Confucian thinkers claimed.[104] One has the tendency to be good, but one's moral progress should be based on the study of the Confucian Classics of antiquity, in which the sages had conveyed moral truth. At the same time, the investigation of human relations and human needs could help one know *li* and achieve moral progress.[105]

Peng argued that the quantitative accumulation of knowledge could not qualitatively change a person.[106] He claimed that the most reliable way to moral cultivation is to recover the

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[102] Peng Shaosheng, *Er lin ju ji* 8b-9a.
[103] Dai, *Mengzi zi yi shu zheng*, 281.
[104] Dai, *Mengzi zi yi shu zheng*, 281.
[105] Dai, *Mengzi zi yi shu zheng*, 265.
[106] Peng Shaosheng, "Yu Dai Dongyuan shu," 493.

original nature that has been deluded by one's selfish desires. According to Peng, to return to one's original nature is not unique to Buddhism, but can be traced back to Mencius. In his letter to Dai Zhen to support his argument, Peng quotes from the *Mencius*, "Morality is the nature of the sage kings such as Yao and Shun and kings Tang and Wu, who tried to return to the moral nature [exemplified by Yao and Shun]."[107] He believed that the enlightened mind is the morally perfect mind. Confucianism and Buddhism share the same goal, and express the same truth, that is, a person attains enlightenment and becomes morally perfect at the same time, because only when one attains enlightenment does he or she overcome the delusion of selfish desire. He asserts, however, that Buddhist practices are more effective in attaining enlightenment than is the Confucian way. This is the theme that runs through the following chapters.

Dai Zhen's letter was written one month before his sudden death in 1777.[108] It is obvious that Peng Shaosheng did not have the chance to keep the debate going, but this is not the only debate in which Peng Shaosheng was involved. Outside of the circle of the dominant Evidential School, there were also anti-Buddhist voices among literati such as Yuan Mei (courtesy name: Zicai; literary names: Jianzhai, Cangshan Jushi, Suiyuan Zhuren, Suiyuan Laoren, 1716-1798), a famous poet, artist, and literary critic of his time. Yuan also became involved in a debate on Buddhism with Peng Shaosheng. Yuan was famous not only for his literary talents, but also—sometimes controversially so—for his promotion of women's literary writing and his hedonistic lifestyle. In his lifetime, he composed hundreds of poems and prose works, which were well received among the literati. His *Zi bu yu* (What Confucius Did Not Talk About), a collection of short stories about ghosts and strange things, was frowned upon by Confucian moralists and was

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[107] *Mengzi* (Mencius) 13: 30, in *Si shu wu jing* (Beijing: Beijing gu ji chu ban she, 1995), 1: 232.
[108] Duan, "Nian pu," 486

a source of controversy.[109] One of his unconventional activities was to accept female disciples to teach them poetry writing. His discussion about women's literary talent in his *Sui yuan shi hua* (Comments on Poems by the Master of the Sui Garden) also caused heated debate over women's talent among the literati, which I discuss in chapter three.[110]

Yuan Mei was a close friend of Peng Shaosheng's family. According to Yuan's account, Yuan and Peng's father Qifeng knew each other for a long time and the two exchanged poems after Qifeng retired from office.[111] Xue Qifeng and Wang Jin were also close to Yuan Mei. Xue even wrote a preface to Yuan's *Xiao cang shan fang shi ji* (Collection of Poems in Xiao Cang Shan House), in which he refers to himself as a student of Yuan Mei.[112] Yuan Mei and Wang Jin exchanged correspondence as well.[113] In fact, Yuan's poems also indicated that he socialized with several monks.[114] However, this does not mean that Yuan Mei shared the same belief in Buddhism as his Buddhist friends. His essay "Fo zhe jiu liu zhi yi jia lun" (Buddhism Belongs to the Nine Lowest Social Categories)[115] found in his *Xiao cang shan fang wen ji*, criticizes and ridicules Buddhism, and some of his stories collected in his *Zi bu yu* also tease Buddhists, which I take up in chapter four.[116] Peng Shaosheng and Yuan Mei held a written debate on Buddhism as well. Their entire correspondence on this issue is recorded in Yuan Mei's *Xiao cang shan fang*

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[109] See Lydia Sing-chen Chiang, *Collecting the Self: Body and Identity in Strange Tale Collections of Late Imperial China* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), 137.
[110] See Mann, *Precious Records*, 76-83.
[111] Yuan Mei, *Xiao cang shan fang* (*xu*) *wen ji*, *YQJ* 2.25: 432. In Yuan Mei's poem to celebrate Peng Qifeng's eightieth birthday, he also mentions that Peng Qifeng had paid him a visit in his Sui Garden.
[112] Xue Qifeng, Preface to *Xiao cang shan fang shi ji*, by Yuan Mei, *YQJ* 1. 1: i.
[113] Yuan Mei, *Wen ji* (*xu*), *YQJ* 2.35: 646-647.
[114] Yuan Mei, *Shi ji*, *YQJ* 2.28: 615, 617.
[115] The term "*san jiao jiu liu*" literarily means the three teachings and the nine classes. "*San jiao*" refers to the three teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism, while "*jiu liu*" originally referred to the nine schools of thought in the Spring and Autumn period (770 BCE-221 BCE). Later, "*jiu liu*" came to refer to social classes, usually a derogatory reference to matchmakers, *yamen* runners, thieves, imposters, prostitutes and so on. For changes to the meaning and significance of term "*san jiao jiu liu*" see Chen Yanbin and Guo Jianxin, *San jiao jiu liu* (Beijing: Zhongguo wen shi chu ban she, 1991).
[116] Yuan, *Xiao cang shan fang wen ji*, *YQJ* 2.20: 345-346.

wen ji as well."[117] The *Xiao cang shan fang wen ji* was published in 1775 for the first time. Due to Yuan Mei's literary fame, this anthology enjoyed great popularity among the literati and was re-edited and reprinted at least twice in Yuan Mei's lifetime.[118] We can assume that this collection was widely circulated and the debates on Buddhism between the two were well known during this period.

The point of contention between Peng and Yuan Mei revolved around the nature of life and death. In his letter to Yuan Mei, Peng Shaosheng urges him to think seriously about the nature of life and death. Peng Shaosheng cites Wen Tianxiang (1236-1283), the famous loyalist of the Song dynasty (960-1127) as an example. "When Wenxin Gong [Wen Tianxiang] was captured by the Mongols, he came across a Buddhist named Chuhuang Daoren. After this Buddhist transmitted the Buddhist dharma to him, he understood the nature of life and death and overcame his [fear of] death and [attachment to] life."[119]

Yuan Mei however did not share Peng's view about the nature of life and death. In response to Peng's advice to meditate on the nature of life and death, Yuan Mei argues, "There are things about which we should be concerned, and things about which we should not be concerned. What we should concern ourselves with is moral cultivation and the pursuit of knowledge; what we should not be concerned about are life and death, which are decided by destiny and determined by heaven. . . . If you are concerned about what you should not be concerned about, then it is a transgression [against heaven]. Your concern is but deluded thought."[120] He continues,

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[117] Peng Shaosheng's two letters are collected in the *Xiao cang shan fang wen ji*, by Yuan Mei, *YQJ* 2.19: 338 and 341.
[118] Wang Zhiying, "Qian yan," in *YQJ* 1: xi-xii.
[119] Peng Shaosheng's first letter to Yuan Mei, *YQJ* 2.19: 338.
[120] Yuan Mei, "Da Peng Chimu jinshi shu," in *Xiao cang shan fang wen ji*, *YQJ* 2.19: 337.

> Heaven and earth cannot change the course of life and death, how much more so human beings? You are pure and free from selfish desire by nature and have the potential to become a sage. Unfortunately, when you think about life and self, you want to preserve yourself. That is why Buddhism attracts you. When you worship Buddhist doctrines, you ignore [Confucian teachings]. Don't you know Mencius's view on life and death? "One's lifespan, long or short, is endowed by heaven. [All I can do is] cultivate myself to wait for death [with a mind at peace]."[121] Tao Qian [the famous hermit poet,] [122] said, "[I am] floating in this world with no attachment to [life] and no fear for [death]." If you are not able to follow Mencius, why not follow Tao Qian's example? Confucianism has clearly defined a way to [handle] life and death; why did you give up [Confucianism] and convert to [Buddhism]?[123]

Yuan Mei's attitude towards death is typical of that of Confucian scholars, namely, there is no need to worry about death as it is beyond one's control. To be concerned about life and death is an indication that one desires to preserve oneself.

In his reply to Yuan Mei, Peng Shaosheng clarifies what about the concept of life and death he thinks Yuan Mei misunderstands.

> Life and death are the accumulation of thought at every moment. One's thoughts are the major cause of [the cycle of] life and death. What is your thought of life and death at this moment? It is a desire for sensual pleasure and all kinds of discriminative thought arising and falling away. The so-called termination of life and death does not mean that there is no life or death, but refers to seeing through the nature of life and death. When one's knowledge of the nature of life and death has been accumulated to a certain degree, one suddenly awakens to the nature of the arising and decaying of things. One is free from passions and karmic conditions and attains enlightenment.[124]

Since everything in this world is impermanent and shares the same nature of emptiness, there is no need to cling to one's life as one's life. According to Buddhism, it is the dualistic view of life and death that gives rise to a desire for life and fear of death. People suffer because they do not realize emptiness is the true nature of everything, but mistake the impermanent as permanent, and try every means to hold on to what they believe to be permanent. Due to people's

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[121] *Mengzi* 13a: 1, in *Si shu wu jing*, 1: 227.
[122] Tao Qian is better known as Tao Yuanming (365-427).
[123] Yuan, "Da Peng Chimu jinshi shu," *YQJ* 2.19: 338.
[124] Peng Shaosheng's letter attached to "Da Peng Chimu jinshi shu," *YQJ* 2.19: 341.

misunderstanding of the nature of life and death, they desire to keep what they like and avoid what they dislike, but their desires cause them to create karma leading to their transmigration. Peng thus restates the importance of removing one's desire when he replies to Yuan Mei. "If one can really implement what Mencius and Tao Qian advocated, one has fulfilled half of the task of [seeing through the nature of life and death]. Even if this happens, without taking removal of desire as the foundation [for one's view of death], how can one really be free from discrimination between life and death?"[125] What is articulated in this passage is that the removal of one's desires enables one to awaken to the original true nature, which is clouded by desire. In short, as Peng did when he cited the example of the Song loyalist Wen Tianxiang above, only when one's mind is awakened to the true nature of life and death can one cut off attachment to the ego and to one's present life, and thus become completely devoted to serving the country and others.

Yuan Mei responds to Peng Shaosheng's argument that realizing the true nature of life and death is one's top priority because awakening to this truth can free one from ego-centered desire to become more altruistic. Yuan Mei apparently does not regard realizing the nature of life and death as the most important thing in life.

> The teachings of the sage kings of the Zhou dynasty [1122–256 BCE] and Confucius [make it clear] that one should serve one's ruler in the country, and serve one's father and seniors at home. . . . One cannot talk about wonderful theories without considering basic social relationships and daily life. Neo-Confucian scholars of the Song Dynasty learned Buddhism first, then Confucianism. They taught people quiet sitting and meditation, and labeled one's happiness, anger and sorrow as the phenomena of unactualized original nature. Their thought was influenced by Buddhism in an unintelligible way, and cannot be taken as a reliable *li*.[126]

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[125] Peng Shaosheng's letter attached to "Da Peng Chimu jinshi shu," *YQJ* 2.19: 341.
[126] Yuan Mei, "Zai da Peng Chimu jinshi shu," in *Xiao cang shan fang wen ji*, *YQJ* 2.19: 339.

What Yuan Mei is asserting in this passage is that to learn skills required of a man and to fulfill one's responsibility designated by one's social position should be the top priority instead of leading a socially less engaged life of quiet sitting and metaphysical speculation. Yuan Mei also disputes Peng Shaosheng's notion of desire. "When human desire is not excessive, it is the *li* of heaven. What the sages taught us is to act and stop properly according to our position. [The Buddhist] is much greedier than average people who desire food and sex [because he] desires to obtain the bliss of the Western Paradise, the position of Buddha, the good reputation of virtues and merits, and liberation from the suffering of the three lower realms of rebirth [animal, hungry ghost and hell realms]."[127] Yuan's notion of desire stands in sharp contrast to Peng's view. Instead of denying human desire, Yuan Mei thinks that human desire is morally acceptable if it is not excessive, and regards the asceticism promoted by Buddhists as greedy under the guise of unselfishness.

In summary, the major controversies between the Peng Shaosheng and Yuan Mei lay in their respective views on the nature of existence, human desire and the utmost important mission of one's life. Peng Shaosheng emphasizes the importance of awakening to the true nature of life and death, believing the enlightened mind free from ego-centered desire enables one to better fulfill one's social responsibilities prescribed by the Confucian ethical codes. In contrast to his view, Yuan Mei insists that, since the Confucian Classics of antiquity had clearly stated how to handle life and death and defined the responsibilities a person should assume, there was no need to seek the true nature of life and death in Buddhism. Human desire within the limits of Confucian propriety did not need to be removed. In fact, Yuan claims that Buddhists were more selfish than they appeared to be in the sense that all the austerities they practiced were aimed at

[127] Yuan, "Zai da Peng Chimu jin shi shu," *YQJ* 2.19: 340.

their own salvation and afterlife happiness, and "ignored the father/son and ruler/subject relationship."[128]

Neither Peng nor Yuan "won" their debate in the sense that neither convinced the other of his point of view. Yuan Mei was clearly aware of Peng's proselytizing goal, but refused to accept Buddhism as his personal faith.[129] Even though Yuan Mei would write to Wang Jin, Peng's like-mind friend, "Let's not [continue to] debate this minor issue [of Buddhism] so as to maintain our friendship,"[130]the debates between Yuan Mei and Peng Shaosheng over Buddhism did not end with the letters they exchanged. In the following chapters, I discuss how the disputes between the two continued in various ways.

1.5 LAY BUDDHISTS AMONG THE LITERATI IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

As I have mentioned above, it was common for the literati to be involved in Buddhism in one way or another in the late Ming. Jiang Wu's study of literati Buddhism suggests that a conspicuous feature of literati Buddhists was their lack of faith and devotional practice.[131] These literati showed more interest in discussing the *yu lu* (recorded sayings) of eminent Chan masters than in Buddhist precepts and meditation.[132] For them, this kind of discussion or debate was like a pastime or intellectual game. There was no problem for them to discuss Buddhist scriptures while leading a comfortable family life that was different from the ascetic lifestyle required of the Buddhist clergy. Peng however was different from these literati. Buddhism was not merely

[128] Yuan, "Zai da Peng Chimu jin shi shu," *YQJ* 2.19: 340.
[129] Yuan, "Zai da Peng Chimu jin shi shu," *YQJ* 2.19: 338.
[130] Yuan Mei, "Da Wang Dashen shu," in *Wen ji* (*xu*), *YQJ* 2.35: 646.
[131] Jiang Wu, *Enlightenment in Dispute*, 58.
[132] Jiang Wu, *Enlightenment in Dispute*, 58.

his pastime in his leisure, but his faith. He was not only actively involved in the doctrinal debates of this day, but also led an ascetic life. Duan Yucai commented that Peng was as devotional as a monk, except that he did not shave his head as monks did.[133] Duan was not wrong about this. Peng Shaosheng adopted all the precepts for lay Buddhists, including a vegetarian diet and celibate lifestyle.[134] He was also an ardent proponent of the Pure Land faith, which involved him in another debate within the Buddhist community.[135]

Another feature of the literati Chan practitioners in the late Ming and early Qing was their contempt for Pure Land belief. According to the Pure Land scriptures, if a person places his or her faith in Amitābha Buddha (Ch: Amituofo) and invokes his name, thereby gaining rebirth into his Western Pure Land, this person will listen to the sermons of the Buddha and attain enlightenment, be free from the cycle of transmigration and enter nirvāṇa in the shortest amount of time. Thus, the primary Pure Land practice is to invoke the name of Amitābha in one's lifetime. But many Chan practitioners regarded the belief in the physical existence of a Pure Land outside of this world as a dualistic view and the longing for rebirth in the Pure Land as attachment to illusion created by one's mind. Some Chan practitioners dismissed the invocation of Amitābha Buddha's name as an easy path reserved for those who lacked the intellectual capacity to attain enlightenment.[136] It is not surprising that this dispute between the proponents and opponents of the dual cultivation of Chan and Pure Land lasted into the eighteenth century, and Pure Land proponents found it necessary to defend their faith in the Pure Land.[137]

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[133] Duan, "Nian pu," 480.
[134] Peng Shaosheng, *Jushi zhuan*, *XZJ* 149: 1009b15-16.
[135] Hu Ting, *Jingtu sheng xian lu xu bian*, *XZJ* 135: 416b4-6.
[136] Charles B. Jones, "Apologetic Strategies in Late Imperial Chinese Pure Land Buddhism," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 29 (2001): 71.
[137] Charles B. Jones, "Mentally Constructing What Already Exists: The Pure Land Thought of Chan Master Jixing Chewu (1741–1810)." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 23.1 (2000): 43-44.

The revival or "reinvention" of some Chan practices in the late seventeenth century, such as the ritualized Chan practice of shouting and administering blows as a way of dharma transmission, "overshadowed" some devotional practices associated with the Pure Land.[138] However, the Chan craze was problematic in the eyes of some Buddhists. Unlike many of the literati Buddhists in the late Ming and early Qing, Peng Shaosheng was a very devoted promoter of Pure Land practice. He defended his Pure Land belief in a letter to an anonymous monk, who had degraded the Pure Land practices.

> It is fine to say there is no Pure Land outside of one's mind, but it is not correct to say there is no Pure Land outside of the *sahā* world. It is worse to say one cannot attain rebirth in the Pure Land by contemplating and invoking [Amitābha] Buddha's name. The *sahā* world is created by the delusions of sentient beings, while the Pure Land is created by the pure mind of the Buddha. The difference between the two is so obvious. How can you say they are not different and deny the existence of the Pure Land?[139]

What Peng Shaosheng implies here is that the fundamental nature of the Pure Land and the *sahā* world are empty and created by the mind; but on a phenomenal level, the two worlds are different because one is the creation of the Buddha's pure mind, and the other is the creation of the deluded mind of sentient beings. He devoted himself to invoking the name of Amitābha Buddha because he thought this was the most effective way to attain liberation from the cycle of birth and death. He wrote to his friend, "To chant Amitābha Buddha's name is the first way [number one] to leave the sea of suffering."[140]

As an ardent promoter of Pure Land practice, Peng Shaosheng wrote commentaries and letters to his friends and acquaintances proselytizing for and providing "prove" of the efficacy of this practice. To promote his faith in Amitābha Buddha, he was also motivated to collect the life stories of those who were believed to be reborn in the Pure Land after their death to prove the

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[138] Jiang Wu, *Enlightenment in Dispute*, 12-13.
[139] Peng Shaosheng, *Yi xing ju ji* 4: 32a.
[140] Peng Shaosheng, *Yi xing ju ji* 4: 15b.

existence of the Pure Land, and the efficacy of invoking the name of Amitābha Buddha. This topic is covered in chapter five.

1.6 THE MOTIVATION FOR COMPILING THE *SHAN NÜREN ZHUAN* AND ITS INTENDED AUDIENCE

What I have discussed above outlines the intellectual, social and religious environment in which Peng Shaosheng lived. Unlike some previous frictions between Confucians and Buddhists, most notably the four that culminated with the political persecutions of Buddhism in 446-453, 574-579, 845-847, and 955-960, the anti-Buddhist sentiment of Peng's time was mainly confined and expressed in doctrinal debates in literati circles and among the political elite. The controversy over Pure Land practices was also reflected in the doctrinal debates within the Buddhist community. In this sense, one of the most practical and proper ways for Peng to defend his Buddhist beliefs was in writing. After Peng Shaosheng's conversion to Buddhism, his writings, his autobiography and the biographies written about him all indicate that he devoted his whole life to defending and promoting Buddhism among non-believers, especially detractors among the Confucian intellectuals, and advocating the dual cultivation of Pure Land and Chan among believers.[141] Two of his essays in particular were highly valued by his contemporaries in the Confucian/Buddhist and Chan/Pure Land debates. One essay entitled *Yi sheng jue yi lun* (Treatise on the One Vehicle Clearing Away Doubts) was written in 1781 to "settle the dispute

[141] See Peng's autobiography "Zhi gui zi zhuan" collected in *Jushi zhuan*, *XZJ* 149: 1009b1-1010a4, and his biography collected in Hu, *Jingtu sheng xian lu xu bian*, *XZJ* 135: 415a6-416b17.

between Buddhists and Confucians."[142] The other essay called *Huayan nianfo sanmei lun* (Treatise on the Chanting of the Name of the Buddha Samādhi in the *Huayan* [*Sūtra*]) written in 1784 is aimed at "settling the dispute between Chan and the Pure Land practices."[143]

In addition to these two essays and other writings that defended and proselytized Buddhism over Confucianism and/or promoted the dual cultivation of Chan and Pure Land, Peng compiled the *Jushi zhuan* (Biographies of Buddhist Laymen)[144] and the *Shan nüren zhuan*. By bringing together the activities and life stories of these exemplary Buddhist laymen and laywomen, Peng attempts to demonstrate that Buddhist practices do not contradict Confucian ethics. Rather, they show that Buddhism can help believers fulfill their social and familial responsibilities even better. The life stories of these exemplary people also argue for the existence of the Pure Land and the necessity of devotional practices that ensure one's rebirth there. In the field of Buddhist studies, several scholars, such as Makita Tairyō, Miura Shuichi, and Richard Shek, have introduced Peng's thought based on his treatises and writings in doctrinal debates.[145] Their studies call attention to Peng's contribution to reorienting Chinese Buddhism in a more socially engaged direction. Colin Jeffcott's study of Peng's autobiography and biographies about him examines the relationship between one's social and religious identity and the way one's life story is recounted.[146] His study is instrumental to our understanding of the unique intellectual milieu of the eighteenth century and Peng's position in Chinese Buddhism.

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[142] See Peng Shaosheng, *Yi sheng jue yi lun*, *XZJ* 104: 148-167, and Hu, *Jingtu sheng xian lu xu bian*, *XZJ* 135: 416b4.
[143] See Peng Shaosheng, *Huayan nianfo sanmei lun*, *XZJ* 104: 168-177.
[144] Peng Shaosheng, compiled, *Jushi zhuan, XZJ* 149: 791-1011.
[145] See Makita Tairyō, "Koji bukkyō ni okeru Ho Saisei no chii," in *Chūgoku kinsei bukkyō shi kenkyū,* by Makita Tairyō (Bukkyō bunka kenkyūjō hōkoku 3. Kyoto: Heirakuji shoten, 1957), 232-251; Miura Shuichi, "Ho Saisei no shisō," in *Tōhō gakuhō* 60 (1988): 439-479, and Richard Shek, "Testimony to the Resilience of the Mind: The Life and Thought of Peng Shaosheng (1740-1796)," in *Cosmology, Ontology and Human Efficacy: Essays in Chinese Thought*, ed. Richard Smith and D.W.Y. Kwok (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1993), 81-112.
[146] See Colin Jeffcott, "Peng Shaosheng or Peng Jiqing? Biographies of a Confucian Buddhist," in *Religion and Biography in China and Tibet*, ed. Benjamin Penny (Richmond: Curzon, 2002), 148-177.

However, little attention has been given to the biographical collections Peng compiled in his lifetime. Yuet Keung Lo's study of the *Shan nüren zhuan* focuses on parallels and deviations in the structure of the biographies of Buddhist and Confucian exemplary women to analyze syncretism in Peng's thought.[147] Chen Xiaofang's thesis on the *Shan nüren zhuan* gives a survey of practices of Buddhist laywomen and their impact on the contemporary Buddhist practices.[148]

This dissertation takes the *Shan nüren zhuan* as its starting pointing, hoping to add nuance to our understanding of the relationship between the religious and the secular, between the male and female and between the spiritual and the social in early modern China. For, as Peng no doubt also reasoned, when it comes to proselytization, a collection of charming life stories can have a larger impact on lay followers (and non-believers) than a series of highly technical doctrinal treatises and elite debates.

In his study of early Christian women, Peter Brown remarks,

> Continent women play a central role in these narratives [of Apocryphal Acts]. Yet the Apocryphal Acts should not be read as evidence for the actual role of women in Christianity. Rather, they reflect the manner in which Christian males of that period partook in the deeply ingrained tendency of all men in the ancient world, to use women "to think with." There is no doubt that women played an important role in the imaginative economy of the Church. Their presence condensed the deep preoccupation of male Christians with their own relations with the "world," with the ever-present reality of a tainted and seductive pagan society pressed up against the doors of their houses and abutted the closed spaces of their new meeting place. Throughout this period, Christian men used women to "think with" in order to verbalize their own nagging concern with the stance that the Church should take to the world.[149]

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[147] Yuet Keung Lo, "Indeterminacy in Meaning: Religious Syncretism and Dynastic Historiography in the Shan nüren zhuan" (paper presented at the XVIth Congress of the International Association of Buddhist Studies, Taiwan, June 20-26, 2011).

[148] Chen Xiaofang, "Peng Jiqing *Shan nüren zhuan* zhi yan jiu," (M.A. thesis, National Yunlin University of Science and Technology, 2011).

[149] Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 153.

When we consider the tradition of men composing biographies of women in Chinese history and the competition and disputes within and outside of the Buddhist tradition in the High Qing period, Peter Brown's statement is as true of women in the *Shan nüren zhuan* as it is for their counterparts in the Apocryphal Acts. This dissertation therefore does not aim to reconstruct the life of Buddhist laywomen based on the stories collected in this biographical collection. Instead, one of its goals is to take a specific look at how Peng "thought with" these women to address his (read: men's) concerns about the relation between the Buddhist community and secular society from the vantage point of the structure and content of the *Shan nüren zhuan* and its intended audience.

Turning first to the choices of biographical accounts included in the *Shan nüren zhuan*, it is immediately obvious that this collection does not follow along the sectarian lines common to monastic histories dating from the Song and later. Rather, Peng's criterion for including women in the *Shan nüren zhuan* is strictly based on their moral flawlessness without consideration of their sectarian affiliations. He wants to hold these women up as examples for all lay Buddhists. Indeed, in the preface to *Jingtu sheng xian lu* (Collection of Saints Reborn in the Pure Land) compiled by his nephew, Peng compares the criterion his nephew used for choosing the biographical accounts included in that collection and his criterion in the *Shan nüren zhuan*. In the *Jingtu sheng xian lu*, his nephew includes the rebirth stories of evil persons in order to "show the great power of the compassion of Amitābha," while in the *Shan nüren zhuan*, Peng "excludes those with moral flaws in order to set good examples for lay Buddhists."[150] In fact, Peng excludes very few biographies in his collection that appear in the collections from which he drew. Yet in each case, the omitted life story reveals a flawed woman who attains salvation

[150] Peng Shaosheng, preface to the *Jingtu sheng xian lu,* by Peng Xisu, *XZJ* 135: 189b14-17.

through devotional practice despite those flaws, or a woman who gains rebirth in the Pure Land through liturgical intervention by monks without self-effort. I take these stories up in chapter five. For now, suffice it to say that it is clear that stories of that kind did not fit Peng's criterion for adoption into the *Shan nüren zhuan.*

In Chinese history, it is not unusual for men to write biographies for women. Many of these biographies are written or compiled not only for a female audience, but for a male audience as well. In his preface to the *Shan nüren zhuan,* Peng Shaosheng makes a comparison of his collection with the *Lie nü zhuan* (Biographies of Exemplary Women), a category in dynastic official histories composed or compiled by Confucian scholars. The title for the genre is related to the first collection of exemplary women, which shares its name with the *Lie nü zhuan* compiled by Liu Xiang (77 BCE-6 CE), a Confucian scholar-official of the mid-Han dynasty. Liu's *Lie nü zhuan* became the model for all later biographical collections of women composed by Confucian scholars. Liu Xiang compiled the *Lie nü zhuan* for presentation to Chengdi (Emperor Cheng, 51-7 BCE) when the emperor showered his favor on the two "questionable" sisters Zhao Feiyan (d. 1 BCE) and Zhao Hede (d. 7 BCE), thereby jeopardizing the welfare of the country.[151] Liu's compilation thus was not primarily or exclusively aimed at the moral education of women but rather was intended as a road map for male rulers in seeking companions among women of virtue and guarding against evil women, and urging men to behave according to the Confucian moral code. For, if women, as the so-called "inferior gender," could adhere to these codes, then there should be no reason for men to fail to do so. In the case of Liu Xiang, he uses examples of exemplary women to address the issue of the moral cultivation of men and of the ideal ruler.

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[151] Wang Hui, preface to the *Gu lie nü zhuan*, by Liu Xiang, *SBCK* 181: i.

In this vein, when we read Peng Shaosheng's statement in his preface that he compiled the *Shan nüren zhuan* to educate his two daughters who practiced Buddhism under his instruction (*Shan nüren zhuan* 1: 1a) and dismiss this collection as a tool of moral education for his daughters alone, we ignore the multi-layered meanings of the biographies. Rather, we see the same strategy at work here as we do in the Liu Xiang collection. The *Shan nüren zhuan* begins with a poem composed by Peng, which reads as follows: "These exceptional among women/ can gain pure reward/ why are men/ like the walking dead? Now I narrate these biographies/ to transmit them in the world/ to persuade all sentient beings/ to terminate transmigration. . . . Let's be born in the Land of Bliss together!" (*Shan nüren zhuan* 1: ib). It is evident that this opening poem addresses not only women but also men, especially those Buddhist detractors who criticize Buddhism without realizing they are trapped in the world of delusion like the "walking dead," and those who degrade Pure Land practice.

1.7 STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation crosses chronological lines and classifies the biographies of the Buddhist laywomen found in the *Shan nüren zhuan* into four major themes (with some overlap): Buddhist laywomen who represent Confucian ethical virtues, talented women as dharma teachers, women who had a miraculous experience and women who gained rebirth in the Pure Land. Each of the following four chapters covers one of these four categories.

Chapter two focuses on Buddhist laywomen who embodied such Confucius virtues as chastity and filial piety. Through parallels between exemplary women in both traditions, Peng Shaosheng, the compiler of our collection, sets out to affirm that Buddhism shares the same

values with Confucianism and that Buddhists are never lacking in moral concerns in their practices. Peng's goal here is to demonstrate that Buddhist practices do not jeopardize the Confucian moral order, but rather reaffirmed that order and thus allow its followers to fulfill their familial and social responsibilities even better than their non-believing counterparts.

Chapter three discusses the parallels between women as dharma teachers in Chan *gong'an* stories and women as moral instructress in the *Lie nü zhuan* against the backdrop of the debate on women's talents among the literati in the eighteenth century. Like his Confucian counterparts, Peng praises these talented women when their talents contribute to the moral and spiritual progress of men and the transmission of truth as understood by the religious traditions with which they were affiliated. Even though there is some unconventional behavior found among these talented women, their behavior ultimately is morally justified by their final goals.

Chapter four discusses women with miraculous experiences, a type of story that lacks a parallel in the *Lie nü zhuan*. Through these women's narratives, Peng argues that miracles are rewards for the moral behavior and devotional practices of these women. These miracles are all this-world affirming and so "prove" that Buddhist practices for women do not endanger the secular and religious authorities, but rather reinforce the established secular and religious order. By highlighting these stories, Peng Shaosheng seeks to ease the suspicions that the secular authority had towards Buddhism.

Chapter five deals with the rebirth stories of Buddhist laywomen. Rebirth in the Pure Land is a strictly Buddhist topic, as Confucianism does not talk about life after death. Controversies over the physical existence of the Pure Land and the ways to gain rebirth there lasted for a long time among Buddhists. These rebirth narratives argue for the existence of the Pure Land and the three conditions of rebirth: faith, devotional practice and moral behavior.

They also offer, for Peng, a reason why Buddhism "trumps" Confucianism, namely, Buddhism provides the "proof" through this type of narrative that our deeds in this life pay off in the next, and thereby encourages good behavior.

These chapters aim to reveal how the biographies of these Buddhist laywomen defend Buddhism against its detractors by arguing that Buddhism shares values with Confucianism and helps people better fulfill their secular responsibilities and thus prove the superiority of Buddhism over Confucianism. This collection was also intended to reconcile the dispute between Chan and Pure Land practitioners. By appealing to gendered rhetoric, the compiler uses the life stories as a stimulus for men to accelerate and intensify their religious practice.

2.0 BUDDHIST PRACTICES AND THE WOMANLY WAY

In his preface to the *Shan nüren zhuan*, Peng Shaosheng compares his collection with biographical collections of exemplary women composed or compiled by Confucian scholars in the dynastic histories and local gazetteers, and states, "The biographers of exemplary women from the Han dynasty on have taken women of obedience and chastity as their first choice and those with marvelous and outstanding achievements as their second [choice]" (*Shan nüren zhuan* 1:1a). Peng's observation is correct. When we look through biographies of exemplary women in the dynastic histories and local gazetteers, the majority of women subjects embody womanly virtues grounded in the Confucian moral code. As is well known, these virtues include filial piety, sage intelligence, motherly benevolence, chastity and loyalty. Peng continues, "[The previous biographers did not include] those women who resolve to end the cycle of birth and death and aspire to reach nirvāṇa, who solely concentrate on their spiritual cultivation free of material concern. They [too] can set examples for people under heaven. Without firm determination and pure karma, these women cannot achieve [spiritual progress]" (*Shan nüren zhuan* 1:1a). Peng's opening statement implies that it is his intention that the *Shan nüren zhuan* fill in the blanks left by previous (Confucian) biographers by collecting the life stories of women with high spiritual achievement. Although he draws a distinction between his collection and those compiled by Confucian scholars, Buddhist laywomen who exhibit the above-mentioned types of womanly virtues praised by Confucian biographers are often found in the *Shan nüren*

zhuan, where in fact a total of sixty-two stories or over forty percent of the one hundred forty-eight narratives are related to filial daughters(-in-law), good wives and chaste widows. Among the sixty-two stories, some women fall under more than one of these designations, depending on the stage of their lives that is discussed.

By focusing on the images of filial daughters(-in-law), good wives and chaste widows in the collection and delineating the parallels and distinctions of the biographies compiled by Peng with those compiled by Confucians, this chapter investigates how Peng employs the life stories he chooses to defend Buddhism against its detractors by proving that Confucian moral virtues are also appreciated by Buddhists. Peng however goes further than that. For him, these narratives also serve to prioritize Buddhism by affirming that the moral behaviors of these Buddhist laywomen are rewarded not only in this life, but also with a good rebirth upon death.

2.1 THE QING MORALITY CAMPAIGN AND WOMANLY VIRTUES

In the late Ming, the malfunctioning of the bureaucratic system, prevailing corruption, factional conflicts among government officials and social upheavals led intellectuals to become disenchanted by the thought of neo-Confucian thinkers such as Wang Yangming; some even blamed Wang and his followers for the fall of the late Ming.[1] When the Manchus, an ethnic minority in the northeast of China, conquered China in 1644 and established the Qing dynasty, the ruling elite faced various challenges. First of all, the Manchus sought to legitimize their rule over the Chinese majority in ways other than military power; the collapse of the Ming, for

[1] Chin-shing Huang, *Philosophy, Philology and Politics*, 114.

instance, also left a void in the social and moral order that needed to be reconstructed. Like its predecessors in previous dynasties, the Manchu government continued to ground its dominant ideology in Confucianism and launched campaigns to promote Confucian morality in China to show its "earnest commitment to Confucian ideals of governance."[2] Qing emperors presented themselves as ideal Confucian benevolent sage-kings, fathers and filial sons to prove that they ruled by virtue sanctioned by the heavenly mandate, and set themselves up as moral examples for their subjects to follow as well. To reconstruct and reinforce the hierarchical order on which Qing rule was based, the government imposed ever more intrusive moral codes on the lives of its people, and women in particular. The promotion of women's virtues was central to that campaign, as the government believed in the importance of women's moral education for sustaining the moral cultivation of the nation as a whole.[3]

In traditional Chinese society, social roles, including gender roles, were defined in relational terms and were cosmically ordained.[4] One's social roles were designated by one's position in the five cardinal relationships (ruler/subject, father/son, husband/wife, older brother/younger brother and friend/friend) and the extended relationships, such as daughter-in-law/parents-in-law and so on. The fulfillment of one's social roles was seen as not only maintaining the order of human society, but also as the way to ensure the proper operation of the holistic and organic cosmos.[5] The belief was that only when each person played his or her role well, could society and the universe move in a healthy and stable way.[6] Chinese cosmology

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[2] Mann, *Precious Records*, 23.
[3] Mann, *Precious Record*s, 23.
[4] William T. Rowe, "Women and the Family in the mid-Ch'ing Social Thought: the Case of Ch'en Hung-mou," in *Family Process and Political Process in Modern Chinese History* (Jin shi jia zu yu zheng zhi bi jiao li shi lun wen ji), ed. Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica (Taibei: Zhong yang yan jiu yuan jin dai shi yan jiu suo, 1992), 493-494.
[5] Rowe, "Women and the Family in the mid-Ch'ing," 493-494.
[6] Rowe, "Women and the Family in the mid-Ch'ing," 493-494.

defines the two opposite but complementary forces that account for the phenomenal universe as *yin* and *yang*. A balanced interaction between these two forces ensures the normal operation of the cosmos. When the concept of *yang* and *yin* is applied to gender and associated with male and female respectively, it leads to the concept of *bie* (difference), which defines the different position of men and women in the social spectrum and accordingly their different social roles.[7]

The connotation of *bie* is twofold. First, it refers to the horizontal segregation between men and women, that is, the physical separation of the spheres of *nei* (inner) and *wai* (outside) and the distinction of men and women's responsibilities and work.[8] Meanwhile, *bie* also emphasizes the "observance of principles of gender (and other role-based) subordination."[9] The inner sphere is the space where a woman lives and plays a role according to her designated position in the family at different stages of her life. Before she is married, she should serve her parents with filial piety, being obedient to them and to elder siblings. After she is married, she should be obedient to her husband and to her in-laws, and raise her children in a way that the Confucian Classics define as proper. Should she become widowed, a woman should take care of her surviving parents-in-law and her husband's offspring to ensure that the family lineage is carried on. Failing to observe the principle of *bie* was considered to be a transgression and subversion of the established authority and heavenly-sanctioned order. It would bring about disorder and disharmony in the family and great chaos to society and the nation.

Chen Hongmou (1696-1771), a Confucian scholar official noted for the longest total number of years of public service in the Qing and senior colleague of Peng Shaosheng's father, illustrated the relationship between women's virtues and the stability and prosperity of the

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[7] Rowe, "Women and Family in the mid-Ch'ing," 495.
[8] Rowe, "Women and Family in the mid-Ch'ing," 496.
[9] Rowe, "Women and Family in the mid-Ch'ing," 496.

nation, saying, "When a girl gets married, she is the wife of a man. When she has a son, she becomes a mother. If the girl is virtuous before she gets married, she will naturally be a virtuous wife and become a virtuous mother. A virtuous mother will naturally bring up virtuous sons, grandsons and descendants. [Moral education of] future generations and the Kingly Way (*zi sun wang hua*) begin in the inner quarters."[10] Chen Hongmou's statement represents a shared assumption of his time that, if a woman knows exactly what her identity as a daughter(-in-law), wife and mother means, and she acts according to what those positions designate her to do, she will be a filial daughter(-in-law), loyal wife and benevolent mother, giving moral advice to her husband and children. Her embodiment of the virtues of filial piety, loyalty and chastity and her obedience to familial and social authority will guide her husband and children on the morally right track. In this way, women were seen to contribute to the stability and prosperity of the country. Susan Mann aptly points out, "In High Qing discourse, the principle of *bie*—separate sphere—is invoked to stress that wives and mothers inside the home embody the moral autonomy and authority on which husbands and sons must rely to succeed outside."[11]

The High Qing discourse on the separation of gender spheres and gender roles reflects the Chinese cosmology of correlative thinking, which means proper behaviors prescribed by one's position in the hierarchical order at the microcosmic level of family will have resonant implications at the macrocosmic level of the state, namely, the former will influence the stability and prosperity of the later.[12] Consequently, the Qing government enacted strict control over people's lives, including gender relations. For example, as compared to its predecessors, it issued

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[10] Chen Hongmou, *Jiao nü yi gui*, *XSK* 951.1: 1.
[11] Mann, *Precious Records*, 15.
[12] Rowe, "Women and family in the mid-Ch'ing," 494.

more severe punishment laws for rape and bans on pornography.[13] It promoted the cult of chaste widows in more aggressive ways than did previous dynasties, which included not only rewarding chaste widows, but also meting out severe punishment to those who forced widows to remarry or sexually assaulted chaste widows.[14]

Despite the measures and policies adopted by the government, a gap between official ideology and social practice always exists. Real practices, in the High Qing, undermined the efforts of government officials and moralists to establish a well-ordered moral society. For example, a study by Angela Leung suggests that even though the government advocated the cult of chaste widows, young women were in great demand in the more urbanized and commercialized areas, such as the Lower Yangzi River region, due to a disproportionate ratio of men to women. As a consequence, it was not uncommon that economic reasons drove lower-class widows to remarry, either of their own free will or forced by their in-laws.[15]

Between the late Ming dynasty and High Qing, the boundaries that differentiated gender spheres and social classes also began to blur. One major cause was rapid commercialization. Women began taking jobs outside of their families or supported themselves with skills that used to be considered those of men. For example, well-educated women could support themselves or their families as teachers of wives and daughters of wealthy families, or as artists or writers.[16] In the eighteenth century, the Yongzheng Emperor (r. 1723-1736) moreover enacted policies to liberate the *jian min* (social outcast) by terminating the hereditary category of entertainer and prostitute. As a result, women of the *jian min* rank began to leave their hereditary professions for

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[13] William T. Rowe, *Saving the World: Chen Hongmou and Elite Conciusness in Eighteenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 313.
[14] Angela Ki Che Leung, "To Chasten the Society: the Development of Widow Homes in the Ch'ing, 1773-1911," *Late Imperial China* 14.2 (1993): 6-8.
[15] See Leung, "Chasten the Society," 6-9.
[16] Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 116-136.

marriage, while other young women outside of the *jian min* registry entered those professions to meet the demand of the urban consumer classes.[17] Also pressing against the established familial and social limits were certain religious activities and confraternities that brought greater outside freedom for women, such as pilgrimages to holy sites and regular visitation to temples or shrines in which women increasingly participated, and the establishment of certain religious communities formed by fellow-believers around a charismatic religious leader.[18] All these factors contributed to a blurring of social and familial boundaries, which obviously posed a challenge to the dominant Confucian ideology of separation of the sexes, gender roles and subordination to one's superior related to gender and social position.

The anxieties of the ruling elite and intellectuals during the High Qing aroused by the challenges to the social order provoked heated debates on gender-related issues. Essays, correspondences and household instructions were composed, printed and circulated to discuss such concerns as how women should act in the inner sphere, whether *zhennü* (chaste maidens who remained celibate after the death of her betrothed) embodied the virtue of chastity, how women should pursue a religious career, how women's talents could contribute to constructing and reinforcing societal moral order (see chapter three) and so forth. Chen Hongmou, Yuan Mei, Dai Zhen, the Kaozheng school scholar Wang Zhong (1745-1794), Peng Dinqiu and Peng Shaosheng were all involved in these debates on women's chastity.

One of the most popular books on women's moral education and codes of behavior of the time was Chen Hongmou's *Jiao nü yi gui* (Sourcebook on Women Education), which was

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[17] Susan Mann, "Classical Revival and the Gender Question: China's First *Querelle Des Femmes*," in *Family Process and Political Process in Modern Chinese History* (Jin shi jia zu yu zheng zhi bi jiao li shi lun wen ji), ed. Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica (Taibei: Zhong yang yan jiu yuan jin dai shi yan jiu suo, 1992), 405.
[18] See Yiqun Zhou, "The Hearth and the Temple: Mapping Female Religiosity in Late Imperial China, 1550-1910," *Late Imperial China* 24.2 (2003): 113-114, and Rowe, S*aving the World*, 320.

reprinted at least twenty times between its first publication in 1742 and the early Republic period (1910s).[19] This *Sourcebook* includes instructions for women from the Han dynasty on, life stories of exemplary women and comments by Chen Hongmou. It gives a very detailed list of "dos" and "don'ts" for women. For example, women should be diligent, obedient, filial to parents and parents-in-law, respect their husbands, be friendly to sisters-in-law, educate their children, cook, weave, manage the household and so forth. Among the "don'ts" are "don't go out on pilgrimage," "don't donate money to build temples or pagodas," "don't get close to nuns," "don't gossip," "don't talk [too much] or laugh aloud," "don't appropriate in-laws' property" and "don't talk about business outside of the inner sphere."[20] Some common Buddhist practices such as making a donation and a pilgrimage trip are listed in the "don'ts." The wide circulation of Chen Hongmou's *Sourcebook* is a ready indicator that his prescriptions for women's behavior were the accepted norms of mainstream society. It also suggests that mainstream moralists frowned upon certain Buddhist practices as potential threats against the established social order. Chen was a senior colleague of Peng Shaosheng's father Qifeng, and they shared views on statecraft. Peng Qifeng wrote a tomb inscription for Chen Hongmou. In this inscription, Qifeng mentions the *Jiao nü yi gui* as an example of how Chen Hongmou applied what he had learned from the Confucian Classics in practice for the benefit of the people. Qifeng conceived of this *Sourcebook* as a guide to handling domestic affairs, which contributed to maintaining the social and moral order.[21] It is most likely that this *Sourcebook* was also well known to Peng Shaosheng. The following examines how women in Peng's collection fit into these mainstream secular

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[19] Rowe, "Women and the Family in the mid-Ch'ing Social Thought," 504. Chen was considered a progressive for this time, being among the first to call for the same education for women and non-Chinese ethnics as that received by Han Chinese men. For a detailed study of Chen Hongmou see also Rowe's S*aving the World*, 313-322.
[20] Chen Hongmou, *Jiao nü yi gui*, *XSK* 951.2: 30-33.
[21] Peng Qifeng, *Zhiting wen gao*, *SKWS* 9.23: 536.

norms, to what extent they deviate from these social norms, how these deviations related to their religious practices, how these behaviors are morally justified, and how these religious markers differentiate these Buddhist laywomen from the Confucian model.

2.2 FILIAL DAUGHTERS(-IN-LAW)

Filial piety was the number one virtue valued and promoted by the ruling elite in China for centuries. Accordingly in the campaigns launched by the government to promote morality in the High Qing, filial piety was highly emphasized. The importance attached to filial piety is based on the idea, found in *The Analects* of Confucius, that, "It is rare for a man whose character is such that he is good as a son and obedient as a young man to have the inclination to transgress against his superior."[22] Filial piety to one's parents and obedience to one's seniors are considered the starting point for becoming a loyal subject of the ruler. Filial piety is seen as the root of a good subject and a stable society. It is not surprising that the two Chinese characters *zhong* and *xiao* (loyalty and filial piety) are often found together. Life stories of filial sons and daughters(-in-law) were recorded in official local gazetteers and dynastic histories, and it was the duty of local officials to report filial sons and daughters(-in-law) to the emperor for reward. The Qing emperors, such as the Yongzheng Emperor and Qianlong Emperor (r. 1735-1796), identified themselves as filial sons to set examples for their subjects to follow.[23]

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[22] *Lun yu* 1: 2, in *Si shu wu jing*, 1:39, as translated by D.C. Lau, *The Analects* (Hong Kong: the Chinese University Press, 1992), 3.

[23] See Evelyn S. Rawski, *The Last Emperors: A Social History of Qing Imperial Institution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 208, 212-217, and Harold Miles Tanner, *China, a History: From Neolithic Culture through the Great Qing* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2009), 377.

For centuries, one criticism that Confucians deployed against Buddhism was that Buddhists were not filial to their parents because they renounced their homes and severed ties to their parents to eliminate their attachment to this world and thereby achieve their own salvation. This view is echoed by High Qing Buddhist critics, such as Yuan Mei, who accused Buddhism of ignoring the cardinal relationships and the responsibilities they assume.[24] Chen Hongmou, in his popular *Sourcebook*, also criticized the Buddhist practices of women:

> Women without [proper moral education] are usually eccentric in personality. They are not devoted to their parents or their husbands, but chant Buddhist sūtras and worship the Buddha. They do not support their relatives with whom they share blood ties, but generously donate to Buddhist monks or Daoist priests. They do not enjoy the peace of this life, but pin their hopes on the uncertain prosperity of the next life. They are the most stupid of women. Is it possible that envious and arrogant women enjoy prosperity, while virtuous women fall into the vicious cycle of reincarnation?[25]

Peng Shaosheng was an active participant in promoting the moral values of his time as well, but his approach differs from Chen Hongmou's. He does not blame Buddhist practices among the causes of the destabilization of the social order. Instead, he argues that Buddhist practices served the goal of re-instating proper moral conduct as well as, or better than, Confucian practices did. In his *Yi sheng jue yi lun* written in 1781, Peng argues that, according to the Buddhist teachings, since sentient beings share the same nature—that of emptiness, if one realizes the true nature of all sentient beings, removes discrimination between self and other, and drops the ego to embrace all, then loyalty, filial piety, benevolence and righteousness will naturally emerge.[26] In Peng's view, the enlightened mind is the selfless mind that enables one to completely devote oneself to serving one's parents and one's country; therefore, in his view, Buddhism in fact reinforces the same family and social values advocated by Confucian ideology.

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[24] Yuan, "Zai da Peng Chimu jinshi shu," *YQJ* 2.19: 340.
[25] Chen Hongmou, *Jiao nü yi gui*, *XSK* 951.3: 28.
[26] Peng Shaosheng, *Yi sheng jue yi lun*, *XZJ* 104: 150a3-7.

Accordingly, the life stories collected in the *Shan nüren zhuan* present a different picture from Chen Hongmou's view on Buddhist women. In these cases, Buddhist practices did not conflict with a woman's fulfillment of her role as daughter(-in-law) to her family or as a good subject of the realm. Let's begin with a rather long story of a filial daughter and loyal subject in the *Shan nüren zhuan*.

> Liu Shu [1620-1657] was the daughter of the famous loyalist Liu Duo [1573-1626] of Luling [in the Ming dynasty]. On the night she was born, the room filled with a wonderful fragrant smell, lasting the whole night. She was graceful when she was young, and did not cry or laugh casually [like other young children do]. At the age of four or five, she could read such Confucian Classics as the *Xiao jing* [Classic of Filial Piety] and *Lun yu* [Analects]. When Liu Shu was seven, her father was the magistrate of Yangzhou and was falsely charged by the eunuchs. When her father was arrested and taken to Beijing, the capital, Liu Shu begged her mother to let her go with her father. As soon as they arrived at Beijing, Liu Shu wrote an appeal for her father in her own blood. She planned to submit the appeal to the emperor but was stopped by her mother. Upon receiving the news that her father had been executed, Liu Shu attempted to kill herself. Fortunately, her nanny promptly stopped her. After she went back to her hometown and buried her father, she read all the books he had left behind. She favored Buddhist sūtras most and her interest also extended to books on military strategy by Sun Wu and Wu Qi as well as books on martial arts. A few years later, she married Wang Cixie of the same county. After she gave birth to a son, Cixie died. In 1644, when [the rebels led by] Zhang Xianzhong [1606-1647] captured Hunan, [neighboring] Jiangxi [where Liu Shu lived] was in danger. In the same year, the capital was taken over by another army of rebels led by Li Zicheng [1606-1645]**.** With funds obtained from selling all her property, Liu Shu organized an army of several hundred of soldiers made up of fighters she enlisted and the guards of her family to fight against the rebels and seize back the capital city. Before she led her army across the river to the north, she considered gaining more allies. But most of the local army officers hesitated to join her. A General Zhang from Yunnan happened to arrive at Jiangxi at that moment. Liu Shu went to see him to discuss their cooperation to fight against the rebels and seize back the capital. She also generously rewarded General Zhang's soldiers to mobilize them to fight against the rebels. But the general was not so determined to fight. Angered by the general's cowardice, Liu Shu pulled out her sword to stab the general. General Zhang's soldiers were alerted and put on their battle armor. With the mediation of her aides, [a fight between the two sides did not erupt]. Eventually Liu Shu had to give up her plan. She dispersed her own soldiers and withdrew to her hometown, where she built a small hut called "Lotus Ferry." She donated a large piece of land to a Buddhist temple and commissioned monks to hold memorial services for the deceased. She adopted a vegetarian diet and chanted Buddhist sūtras in her small hut for the rest of her life. (*Shan nüren zhuan* 2: 22b-23b)

In Liu Shu's biographical account, except for one sentence mentioning her interest in Buddhist sūtras and her practice of Buddhism at the end of her life, the narrative focuses on her activities as a filial daughter and loyal subject. Her activities, such as writing a petition on behalf of her father and the attempt to kill herself for her father's sake, are the typical reactions of a filial daughter who has found herself in such circumstances. These actions can be found in the life stories of filial sons or daughters recorded in official histories composed by Confucians. Her attempt to fight against the rebels for the emperor despite her father having been wrongly killed sets her up as an example of a loyal subject even under extreme circumstances. Yet, her willingness to fight on the battlefield and her attempt at suicide are obvious violations against the Buddhist precept of non-killing. What then qualifies Liu Shu as an exemplary Buddhist woman even though so little is revealed about her Buddhist practices or her spiritual achievement? What message does this woman warrior's story convey to Peng's intended audience?

This story was adopted from Zou Yi's (b. 1615) biography for Liu Shu, collected in his *Qi zhen ye sheng* (Unofficial History of the Tianqi and Chongzhen Eras), published in 1666. The *Qi zhen ye sheng* was indeed a non-Buddhist collection of biographical narratives about upright officials, famous literati, women martyrs and chaste widows in the social turmoil from the Tianqi (1621-1628) to Chongzhen (1628-1644) eras of the Ming. Most of Peng's account is the same as the original text written by Zou Yi, except that Peng omits details about the conflict between Liu Shu and General Zhang. Because of the omitted description of her martial arts skills and courage as a woman warrior in the *Shan nüren zhuan* makes the account in Zou Yi's version more vivid and attractive to readers, but it does not make too much difference in presenting Liu Shu as a loyal subject. However, the change of one sentence in Zou Yi's account by Peng deserves our attention. Zou Yi writes, "[Liu Shu] read all the books her father left behind day and night. Her

interest extended to Chan Buddhism and military strategy books by Sun [Wu] and Wu [Qi] 旁及禪學, 孫吳兵法 (*pang ji Chan xue, Sun Wu bing fa*)."[27] It is safe to say Zou Yi's original text implies that Liu Shu's primary interest was in the Confucian Classics; Chan Buddhist texts, works on martial arts and military strategy were secondary interests, for the Chinese character "*pang*" above means "collaterally" or "secondarily." Zou Yi's description coincides with what we know about the lifestyle of the Ming Confucian literati, many of whom took reading Chan Buddhist texts as a hobby. Zou Yi's original text presents Liu Shu more as a loyal woman warrior well versed in the Confucian Classics and the texts of other traditions. While Zou does mention at the end of his narrative that Liu Shu built a small hut to spend the rest of her life on Buddhist scriptures, his text does not single out Buddhism as the key factor that led to Liu Shu's heroic deeds. In fact, many Ming loyalists chose to become Buddhist monks or nuns or to live like the Buddhist clergy at the transitional period between the Ming and Qing to avoid serving the Qing government. So, in this too, Liu Shu was not unusual among her contemporaries. Zou Yi's original text thus does not indicate that Liu Shu had a special interest in Buddhism at that time.

In contrast to Zou Yi's version of the life narrative of Liu Shu, Peng Shaosheng's text reads**:** "She favored Buddhist scriptures most. Her interests extended to books on military strategy books by Sun [Wu] and Wu [Qi] 好讀天竺書，旁及孫吳兵法 (*hao du Tian zhu shu, pang ji Sun Wu bing fa*)." The change of wording by Peng creates a difference in connotation. In Peng's version, Buddhist scriptures are no longer secondary among Liu Shu's interests. In Peng's version, if Buddhist scriptures do not supersede the Confucian Classics on Liu Shu's reading list, they are at least as important as the Classics.

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[27] Zou Yi, *Qi zhen ye sheng* (Reprint, Beijing: Guo li gu gong bowu yuan tu shu guan, 1935), 15: 15b.

In the preface to the *Shan nüren zhuan*, Peng Shaosheng asserts that in order to keep the authenticity and essence of the original texts on which his compilation relied, he made only minor changes in vocabulary or sentence structure when he found the words or sentences in the original texts to be vulgar, ambiguous or difficult to understand (*Shan nüren zhuan* 1: iiib). In the case of Liu Shu's story, the sentence in the original text was neither vulgar nor ambiguous. Peng intentionally articulated Liu Shu's interest in Buddhism and the importance of Buddhist scriptures in her life even during her early period. In doing so, a link between Buddhism and her later loyal and heroic behavior is established. That is to say, Liu Shu's strong sense of commitment to the state was the result of both a Confucian education and an interest in Buddhism in her youth. It is also obvious that Peng changed Zou Yi's more specific term "*Chan xue*" (Chan literature) to a more general term "*Tian zhu shu*" (Buddhist texts). As I have mentioned above, Zou Yi's reference reflects the Chan craze among the literati in late Ming. Peng's replacing Chan with a more general term for Buddhism might well have been out of his prioritization of Pure Land practice over Chan, which I turn to in chapter five.

Peng's incorporation of the story from a non-Buddhist source into his collection of biographies of Buddhist exemplary women conveys a clear message that Buddhists also embody the virtues of loyalty and filial piety. In response to the Confucian criticism that Buddhist conceived loyalty and filial piety as fetters, elsewhere he writes:

> Some people think because Buddha teaches that all things are empty, Buddhists conceive loyalty and filial piety as fetters [to attaining nirvāṇa]. [People who think so] do not know that loyalty and filial piety are innate in our mind, not acquired through one's hard work. If one really understands that everything is empty and [the innate loyal and filial mind] is not covered by desires, loyalty and filial piety [will manifest] spontaneously. [On the contrary,] if one does not know that everything is empty, he only dies for fame, is mobilized by anger and bound by emotions. Under these circumstances, his actions do

> not correspond to the pure [enlightened] mind. If one is guided by the Buddhist dharma and not limited by form, one will not violate the cardinal Confucian relationships.[28]

In line with this statement, Peng's inclusion of Liu Shu's story and sentence manipulation in the *Shan nüren zhuan* explicitly suggest that loyalty and filial piety are not only "Confucian" but also "Buddhist" values. Directly following the manipulated sentence, Liu Shu's determination to fight against the rebels and to give up her personal property for this purpose justify Peng's view that only when one really understands the true nature of things, can one be liberated from the dichotomy of self and other to fully actualize loyalty and filial piety. For Peng, Liu Shu's story proves that Buddhists never lack social concern or ignore societal and familial responsibilities as good subjects and sons and daughters. Indeed, Buddhism helps them to fulfill these social and familial roles all the more.

As alluded to above, one thing at issue in Liu Shu's story from a Buddhist perspective is her active involvement in violence, despite that her plan to recapture the capital by force as well as her suicide attempt were aborted. Unlike Peng's rejection of Empress Dugu's narrative in his collection for the act of murdering a favorite concubine of the emperor (see chapter five for her rebirth account),[29] he has no problem including Liu Shu as an exemplary Buddhist laywoman. The major difference between the two women lies in their intention for killing. The empress killed out of jealousy, while Liu Shu is motivated to kill on the battlefield out of patriotism and to commit suicide out of filial piety (and actually never does either). Liu Shu's violation of the

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[28] Peng Shaosheng, *Yi Sheng jue yi lun*, *XZJ* 104: 151b12-15.

[29] Empress Dugu was the wife of Emperor Wen, the founder of the Sui dynasty. By all accounts, they were a loving couple, so much so that they vowed while young that he would not take a concubine while she was alive. However, in their later years, the emperor had an affair with the granddaughter of Yuchi Jiong, a former rebellious official; the empress had her killed. A powerful woman during her husband's reign, she was involved in the decision to divert the succession from her oldest son to her second son (the future Emperor Yangdi). She is often blamed by traditional historians for the downfall of the Sui dynasty. See Wei Zheng et al., *Sui Shu* 36 (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1973), 2: 1108-1109.

Buddhist precept is thus justified by her "noble" intention to save the country and vindicate her father. From Peng's perspective, her actions are moral. His implicit endorsement of killing in Liu Shu's case, in fact reinforces Peng's argument that Buddhists never fail in their duties to the family and the nation.[30]

Another point worth noting is Liu Shu's crossing of the boundary separating the inner and outside spheres. This trespass is justified by her filial piety to her father and her loyalty to her ruler. It is her Buddhist practice however that takes her back to the inner quarter where Confucian behavior codes require women to stay. This also strengthens Peng's argument that Buddhism does not destabilize the social order that the ruling elite aims to construct but in fact supports it.

The following story about Miss Xie, an unselfish filial daughter-in-law and older contemporary of Peng Shaosheng, also shows that Buddhist practices do not contradict Confucian moral codes. Both Buddhist and Confucian moralists honor the virtuous behavior of this Buddhist laywoman.

> Xie Zhennü [Chaste Maiden Xie][31] was the daughter of Xie Youhui, a native son of Changzhou. She was betrothed to Gu Changyuan, who hailed from the same county. When Miss Xie was eighteen years old, Changyuan died. In tears, Miss Xie beseeched her parents to allow her to go to live with Gu's family. Her parents agreed. Upon arriving at the Gu family home, she first paid respect to Changyuan's stepmother and worshiped Changyuan's ancestors at the clan shrine, then performed the funerary rites for Changyuan as his wife. After Changyuan's funeral, Miss Xie adopted a vegetarian diet and prayed to the Buddha every day. She worked hard and lived a plain life in order to make ends meet. When Changyuan's stepmother offered her a plot of about twenty-four *mu*, she declined, saying, "Since two dead people in our family have yet to be buried, and my brother-in-law is still young, please save the field for the family."[32] Changyuan's

[30] For a discussion of modern Chinese Buddhism and violence see Xue Yu, *Buddhism, War and Nationalism: Chinese Monks in the Struggle against Japanese Aggressions, 1931-1945* (Brunner: Routledge, 2005).
[31] *Zhennü* refers to girls and young women who lived a celibate life after the death of their fiancé in the Ming and Qing. It is also translated as "faithful maiden." Cf. Weijing Lu, *True to Her Word: The Faithful Maiden Cult in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 1.
[32] In traditional Chinese society, it was a common practice to keep the dead body unburied after the performance of the funerary rites. There were various reasons for this practice. The dead might not be buried until the death of the

> stepmother agreed. With the revenue generated from the field and her own dowry Miss Xie buried Changyuan and Changyuan's father. She adopted the son of the younger brother of Changyuan. In the eleventh year of the Qianlong era [1746], she received an award from the emperor for her chastity. On her seventieth birthday, when her adopted son prepared a banquet for her, she declined. Later, when she fell ill, she said to her son, "You should prepare for my funeral now. I will die in three days." When the day came, she took a bath, faced west, chanted the name of Amitābha Buddha and died with her palms joined in prayer. It was the twentieth year of the Qianlong era [1755]. (*Shan nüren zhuan* 2: 32a-32b)

Miss Xie's story was also collected in a catalog of virtuous women in the *Qianlong Changzhou xian zhi* (Changzhou Gazetteer Complied in the Qianlong Era), which was compiled by Confucian scholars.

> Xie Youhui's daughter was betrothed to Gu Changyuan. When Changyuan died, [Miss Xie] went to [Changyuan's home] to see Changyuan's widowed mother and mourned Changyuan as his wife. As her mother-in-law pitied her living alone, she offered her twenty-four *mu* of land. Miss Xie said to [her mother-in-law], "Changyuan's brother is still young and Changyuan's heir has not been adopted yet. [I] can live on my work." She firmly declined the offer, but Changyuan's mother insisted on giving the land to her. Then the land was put aside. Mr. Ni, the Education Director of the county wrote "Account of the Virtuous Woman Xie Declining the Field."[33]

Miss Xie's story in the *Gazetteer* is briefer than Peng's version, but both highlight her rejection of land offered by her mother–in-law. That this action is noted in both accounts suggests that Miss Xie's unselfishness and devotion to her betrothed family are character traits honored by Buddhists and Confucians alike. This in turn affirms that Buddhism and Confucianism share the same moral code for women. Peng's account gives a more detailed description of how Miss Xie entered her fiancé's family by performing the proper rituals (paying respect to Changyuan's stepmother and ancestors) and how her social identity was transformed from the daughter of Xie Youhui to the daughter-in-law of the Gu's and the widow of Changyuan. It was the performance of these Confucian rituals that completed and legitimized the transformation of her social

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surviving spouse; or the family may not have been able to afford the land to bury the dead; or the family would wait for an auspicious day to bury the dead. This practice can be seen in some rural areas of contemporary China.

[33] Li Guangzuo, et al. *Qianlong Changzhou xian zhi*, *ZDFZ* 13.28: 27a

identity. According to Confucian ritual manuals, only when a woman paid her respects to the ancestors of her husband after the wedding was she officially incorporated into her husband's family. Peng's description of this ritual process signals to the audience that Miss Xie, a Buddhist laywoman, nonetheless understood and observed Confucian behavioral norms.

What differentiates Peng's account of Miss Xie as an exemplary Buddhist laywoman from the *Gazetteer* version of her as a Confucian virtuous woman is her death.[34] The death account is completely missing from the *Gazetteer* version while it is the climax in Peng's account. As many Buddhist biographies report, a death preceded by a prophecy of the time of death and/or a death that occurs while in prayer (or meditation) indicates a person of high spiritual achievement who would certainly gain rebirth in the Pure Land of Amitābha. (Stories that directly recount rebirth in the Pure Land will be taken up in chapter five.) In our story here, Miss Xie is rewarded for her virtue both in this life and the afterlife**,** namely, an award from the emperor in this life and rebirth in the Pure Land upon her death. The parallel between the two versions regarding Miss Xie's behavior (and reward for that behavior) in life supports Peng's argument of the compatibility of Buddhism and Confucianism; Miss Xie represents the virtues appreciated by both Confucianism and Buddhism. Her afterlife reward in Peng's account however is a marker of her Buddhist identity and serves the purpose of prioritizing Buddhism over Confucianism by affirming that Buddhism takes care of (and, in this case, rewards) one's afterlife while Confucianism does not.

In both narratives that we have discussed so far, the expression of filial piety (as well as loyalty to the ruler embodied by Liu Shu) is close to the expression of filial piety as defined by

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[34] Scholars such as Y.K. Lo and Beata Grant have noted the similarities and differences between lay Buddhist women and women in traditional accounts of Confucian *lie nü* or virtuous women. See Beata Grant, "Who is this I? Who is that Other? The Poetry of An Eighteenth Century Buddhist Laywomen," *Late Imperial China* 15.1 (1994): 50.

traditional Confucian ethics, which, at base, means to give up one's own benefits or even one's life for the sake of one's parents. But the Buddhist view on filial piety goes beyond a concern for merely performing memorial rites for parents. In fact, the most filial act that a Buddhist can do is to help one's parents terminate suffering in the cycle of birth and rebirth. Peng Shaosheng, in his apologia for Buddhism, took the Buddha and his parents as examples to prove that, with the help of the Buddha, his parents gained enlightenment and terminated their suffering in the cycle of transmigration.[35] The following story in the *Shan nüren zhuan* also illustrates this Buddhist view of filial piety.

> Weishi Nü (Daughter of the Wei Family) was a native of Liang prefecture. Her father and brother were Pure Land practitioners. Miss Wei was also a firm believer in the Pure Land, aspiring to be reborn there. At one point, she passed away [and gained rebirth in the Pure Land]; but seven days later, she came back to life and seated herself in a high position to chant the *Wu liang shou jing* (Greater Pure Land Sūtra).[36] Miss Wei told her father and brother, "As soon as I passed away, I went to the seven treasured pond of the Pure Land and saw two large lotuses designated for Father and Brother,[37] but Mother did not have one. I was so saddened to see this that I came back to report this." Thereupon, she passed away again. From then on, her mother worshiped the Buddha as well. (*Shan nüren zhuan* 1: 2b)

This story provides further evidence of Peng's argument that Buddhists not only take care of their parents in this life, but their filial piety also includes a concern for the afterlife of their parents. In other words, Buddhists see it as their duty to help their parents gain a good rebirth and eventually attain nirvāṇa by proselytizing Buddhism (in Miss Wei's case, Pure Land practice) to them.

In the view of Confucians, filial piety also means keeping the family lineage going on by producing male heirs and bringing honor to one's ancestors through service to the ruler and the nation. Buddhists were often chastised for their ascetic lifestyle and withdrawal from society to

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[35] Peng Shaosheng, *Yi sheng jue yi lun*, *XZJ* 104: 150a15-17.
[36] *Wu liang shou jing*, *T* 12, no. 360.
[37] A sign of rebirth in the Pure Land.

concentrate on individual salvation, which was seen as ignoring their responsibility to serve the country. The life story of Yang Tiaohua gives a typical response to this Confucian critique.

Miss Yang's fiancé took tonsure upon his mother's death after realizing the impermanence of life. At the news, Yang wrote a letter to her fiancé-turned-monk, stating, "Because our bodies and hair are given by our parents, we should not hurt our bodies; neither should we desert our ancestral shrines. You had better change your mind and resolve to work for the prosperity of the dynasty so that your ancestors and the gods may be comforted. . . . Even though you need not take me into consideration, you should think about an heir to your family line." The young man replied, "It is better to establish a greater ideal to work for the welfare of thousands of kingdoms than to serve one king for the welfare of one country; it is better to spread the great Dharma to save sentient beings of the three realms than to only serve one's own parents. . . ." Inspired by this letter, Yang was converted to Buddhism (*Shan nüren zhuan* 1:1a-b).

Yang Tiaohua is initially most concerned with the Confucian values of filial piety, loyalty to one's country and continuation of the family line. The young monk's answer expands his responsibilities to his own family and country to include all sentient beings in the world. This does not imply that the monk shunned his familial responsibilities; instead he resolved to shoulder the responsibilities of a much larger world. This monk's reply is the centuries-old response by Buddhists to the criticism of its lack of filial piety. Simply put, filial piety is insignificant when compared to the good one does in saving all sentient beings. In this way, the honor one brings to one's ancestors in saving the world is greater than the honor one would bring serving only one's family. Comparing the Buddha's efforts to enlighten all sentient beings and save them from suffering in the cycle of birth and rebirth with the achievements of the sage-

kings Yao, Shun and Yu, Peng concludes that the achievements of the latter were like "a floating cloud, impermanent and insignificant."[38] Thus, Buddhists argue, Buddhism does not ignore the basic relationship between father and son, ruler and subject. Rather than contradicting Confucian ethics, Buddhism upholds these values and actualizes them in a better and more universal way.

2.3 BUDDHIST PRACTICES AND THE WIFELY WAY

In the traditional Chinese view, "The Dao [Way] of husband and wife is closely connected to *yin* and *yang*, connecting one to the gods and ancestors. It illustrates the great meaning of heaven and earth, and lays the foundation for human relationships."[39] There is no doubt that Confucians pinned great importance on the husband and wife relationship. Not surprisingly, large numbers of Confucians composed various family manuals or instructions to prescribe the Dao (Way) of husband and wife. Women were the intended audience of most of these instructions. Chen Hongmou's *Sourcebook* collects instructions written in different dynasties. To summarize the fundamental instructions that cross all dynasties, a wife should be obedient to her husband, but when her husband does something morally wrong, the wife should admonish him and prevent him from going astray; the wife should produce a male heir for her husband's lineage as befitting her wifely duty, but when she cannot, she should not be jealous when her husband takes a concubine in order to produce a male heir, and she should treat the concubine's children as her own.[40] Taking the requirements listed in Chen Hongmou's *Sourcebook* as criteria, we turn to a

[38] Peng Shaosheng, *Yi sheng jue yi lun*, *XZJ* 104: 150a14-17.
[39] Ban Zhao, *Nü jie*, quoted in Chen Hongmou, *Jiao nü yi gui*, *XSK* 951.2: 65a.
[40] Song Ruohua, *Nü lun yu*, quoted in Chen Hongmou, *Jiao nü yi gui*, *XSK* 951.1: 2-14 and 2: 1-3.

discussion on whether or not women in the *Shan nüren zhuan* fit these criteria, and whether their Buddhist practices reinforce or undermine the accepted norms of behavior for wives.

The first example is Mrs. Wang, the wife of Wang Ji (1498-1583). Wang Ji was one of the most prominent followers of Wang Yangming, and an active advocate of the syncretism of Buddhism and Confucianism. According to Peng's account, Mrs. Wang had been well educated in the Confucian Classics before her marriage. After she married Wang Ji, she often gave him sagacious career suggestions. When her husband was offered a piece of land appropriated from a Buddhist temple by a friend, she persuaded him to decline it because it was unethical to accept an offer such as this. Mrs. Wang also bought a concubine for her husband since she could not produce a male heir. She treated the sons of the concubine as her own. Mrs. Wang chanted the *Jin'gang jing* (Diamond Sūtra) every day and worshiped Guanyin bodhisattva with great piety. As evidence of her piety and virtue, she often dreamed of miraculous signs. At some point, Mrs. Wang asked her husband if there was any difference between the "innate knowledge of the good" promoted by Wang Yangming and her husband and enlightenment promoted by the Buddha. Her husband replied, "The innate knowledge of the good is the enlightenment of one's mind. The Buddha is enlightened. That is to say, the innate knowledge of the good is the Buddha. There is no difference. . . ." She was awakened by these words. She died peacefully at the age of seventy (*Shan nüren zhuan* 2: 5b-6a).

Mrs. Wang is thus held up as an exemplary role model in both the Confucian and Buddhist senses. Measured by the wifely ways prescribed in Chen Hongmou's *Sourcebook*, Mrs. Wang meets every requirement: she gave proper suggestions to her husband so that her husband could avoid moral misconduct. She was not jealous but rather purchased a concubine for her husband, and she treated the concubine's sons as her own. Her virtues parallel those found in

exemplary women highly praised by Confucian moralists. Yet her devotion to Buddhism and her peaceful death imply that her actions were not only motivated by Confucian moral codes, but were also motivated and rewarded by her devotion to Buddhism. The question she poses to her husband and her awakening to the similarity between the innate knowledge of the good and enlightenment suggest her effort to reconcile Buddhism and Confucian values. Peng Shaosheng exactly mirrors her husband's claim that there is no difference between Buddhism and Confucianism in his writings, namely, that Buddhism and Confucianism do not contradict each other but are in every way compatible. Moreover, left unsaid but certainly implied is that the innate knowledge of the good (also known as enlightenment, to which Mrs. Wang was awakened) does not derive from Ming Neo-Confucianism but rather traces its roots back to the Buddha himself. In China, where a long textual lineage is the basis of authority, this is another way of declaring that Buddhism is superior to Confucianism as it can be traced back not just to Confucius but even further back to the Buddha.

Another story about a Mrs. Zhang is even more telling about how Buddhism can help a woman to give sagacious suggestions to her husband.

> Zhang Furen (Mrs. Zhang), a native of Shaowu, was the daughter of Minister Huang Lu and the wife of Academician of the Dragon Diagram Hall, Zhang Gen. She was precocious [as a child] and was able to read and fully understand hundreds of pages of the Classics in a single day. She had a special interest in Buddhist and Daoist texts. When she married Mr. Zhang, she served her parents-in-law with great sincerity and managed the house servants with benevolence. She never showed her emotions in an excessive way. In middle age, she favored Buddhism and expressed her detachment to worldly [gain and fame]. She prepared a clean and quiet room for herself. Every day, Mrs. Zhang sat in the room to enjoy the pleasures of Chan Buddhism. Mr. Zhang was a very upright and frank person. When he encountered something [not fair], he would criticize it without fear. [Because of this,] he was not popular among his colleagues. Mr. Zhang was forced to resign from his position and was deprived of power and privilege for ten years, but Mrs. Zhang was at ease with [her husband's position] and never talked about worldly fame and material gain. Later, when Mr. Zhang was promoted to the position of Fiscal

> Commissioner, Mrs. Zhang cautioned him, "In Buddhism, among the six *pāramitā*s,[41] wisdom is the root of the other five. If you want to benefit the world, you cannot achieve this goal without knowing skillful means [Skt: *upāya*, C: *fangbian*]." Mr. Zhang accepted her suggestion to behave in a more skillful way. But later he was removed from his position, again due to his frankness. Mrs. Zhang told him, "[Among the six perfections], you still need improvement in patience." After Mr. Zhang's resignation, Mrs. Zhang's will to leave this world became stronger and stronger. Once she dreamed of a golden man ten feet tall [i.e., Amitābha Buddha]. She was happy [with this auspicious sign] and gave detailed instructions to her children. The next morning, she bid farewell to her siblings and in-laws, saying, "I will die in my dream without bothering people with illness. . . ." The next day, she saw to it that the servants prepared medicine and food for her husband as usual. After a short while, she lay down and passed away, facing the West and her fingers forming a *mudra* [Buddhist hand gesture], which was too firm to be loosened. (*Shan nüren zhuan* 1: 17b-18a)

Mrs. Zhang fits the Confucian criteria of a good wife: she always gives good career advice to her husband, supports and comforts her husband when he experienced vicissitudes in his career, and takes care of her husband even at the moment before her death. What differentiates Mrs. Zhang from other Confucian exemplary women or from the wife of Wang Ji in the previous story is that the advice she gives to her husband is based entirely on Buddhist doctrines, not on the Confucian Classics. Another noteworthy point in this story is how Mrs. Zhang relates Buddhism to the ups and downs in her husband's political career. Her Buddhist belief enables her to face her husband's disgrace with dignity and behave like a supporting wife, who never talks about fame and material gain with her husband. She does not complain or show resentment, which is often found in stories of wives of disgraced officials. Her husband's second resignation in fact reinforces her Buddhist beliefs and motivates her to practice even more diligently. The prediction of her death as well as the westward positioning of her body and her hand gesture at the moment of death are signs of her high spiritual achievement and rebirth in the Western Pure Land of Amitābha Buddha. In this story, the praiseworthy speech and behavior in the daily life of Mrs.

[41] The six *pāramitā*s (C: *liu bo luo mi*) refer to the six perfections of *bu shi* (giving or charity), *chi jie* (observing the precepts), *ren ru* (patience), *jing jin* (diligent progress), *chan ding* (meditation) and *bo ruo* (wisdom).

Zhang originates from her understanding of Buddhist doctrines and her Buddhist practices, and explicitly proves that women can play their gender role well under the guidance of Buddhism.

In the Qing dynasty, detractors challenged Buddhism in two seemingly contradictory ways. On the one hand, they faulted Buddhist practices for providing opportunities for men and women to mix together, leading to sexual leniency, an issue to which I return later in this chapter. On the other hand, they disapproved of the celibate lifestyle advocated by Buddhists**.** The sentiments in the letter written by Yang Tiaohua to her fiancé quoted above were shared by most of the Confucian detractors against Buddhism, namely, celibate clergy and even certain lay practitioners, by renouncing family life and thereby discontinuing the family line, left aged parents and ancestral shrines unattended and the family without male heirs. In fact, Peng Shaosheng himself lived a celibate life after he converted to Buddhism. From his writings, we know that his choice was met with displeasure from his family since he had only two daughters without a son to carry on his lineage.[42] Therefore, as a result of his commitment to his Buddhist beliefs, Peng found himself involved in all kinds of disputes on all fronts. In addition to the previously mentioned criticism he received from the Confucian literati with whom he socialized, he had difficulties reconciling his religious practices with his family role from within his family as well. Although his wife—a pious Buddhist—supported his decision to live a celibate life, his clan did not like the idea. In traditional Chinese society, to have a male heir to carry on the lineage was the major responsibility of all married men and women. Letters to a nephew and to a friend indicate that he was under great pressure to do so. In defense of his celibate lifestyle, Peng

[42] Peng Shaosheng, *Er lin ju ji* 3: 10a.

insisted that a Buddhist treats the children of others and all sentient beings as his own and therefore it was unnecessary to have his own son.[43]

The responsibility to produce a male heir to continue one's husband's lineage was even greater for women. Sexual liaisons for women outside of marriage were considered a grave sin and severely condemned by the Confucian moral code, however a married woman's abstinence from sex with her husband was also highly discouraged by Confucian ethics, as it was considered an unfilial act when a woman was unable or unwilling to produce a male heir for her husband's family. The story of Tao Shan (1756-1780) in the *Shan nüren zhuan* illustrates what a woman should do if she finds herself in a situation in which her Buddhist practices were in conflict with her wifely duty. What is particularly noteworthy about this narrative is that it is not culled from an earlier biographical source but rather is taken from Peng's own family history. Tao Shan was the wife of Peng Xiluo (1758-1806), the nephew of Peng Shaosheng.

> Tao Shan's courtesy name was Qingyu. . . . Her mother Feng Shi [Madam Feng] was a pious Buddhist. . . . She [Tao Shan] was intelligent and well educated, and composed a lot of poems in her teens. She and her younger sister Tao Ren studied together, and they often exchanged their poems with each other. . . . After her younger sister died, Tao Shan's will to renounce the world became stronger. She gave up writing poems and devoted herself to the *Da bao en jing* (Great Sūtra of Repaying Benevolence).[44] Admiring the Tathāgatha's ascetic practice, she made a vow to terminate transmigration. She copied the *Da bao en jing*, *Jin'gang jing* and *A mi tuo jing* (Amitābha Sūtra or Shorter Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtra)[45] with her graceful calligraphy. . . . At the age of twenty-three, she married Xiluo of the Peng family. Every day, she preached Buddha's teachings on suffering and emptiness to her husband's family members. She chanted Amitābha Buddha's name throughout each day. Her wish to abstain from sex caused discord in the Peng clan. Acquiescing to the demands of her husband's family, she began to 'cultivate the wifely way' and became pregnant. During her pregnancy, she did not stop her Pure Land practices. She also read the *Fahua jing* (Lotus Sūtra),[46] *Shou leng yan jing* (Śūraṅgama Sūtra)[47] and *Huayan jing*. Her interpretation of these sūtras suggested she

[43] Peng Shaosheng, *Yi xing ju ji* 2: 26a.
[44] *T* 3, no. 156.
[45] *T* 12, no. 366.
[46] *T* 9, no. 262.
[47] *T* 9, no. 278.

> had a good understanding of Buddhist doctrine. Her poems in response to my poems on recluse meditation revealed her understanding of the non-obstruction of principle and phenomena. . . . She preached Buddhism as a great master. In the winter, upon the birth of her son, she fell ill. Predicting her death, she sent for her mother and invoked the name of Amitābha Buddha. When her mother arrived, she told her, "The great monk is coming and I am going to the West!" (*Shan nüren zhuan* 2:35a-36b)

This narrative is bittersweet. In modern feminist terms, Tao Shan's death can be seen as the result of not following her own convictions and not taking control of her own body. Of course, this is not what Peng (or any traditional Chinese) takes from this story. Rather, for Peng, it upholds fulfilling one's wifely duty to produce an heir and implies that Buddhist asceticism is appropriate only after a woman has fulfilled that duty. A good Buddhist laywoman does not escape from this most sacred of secular responsibilities. Tao Shan is rewarded for her devotion to Buddhism in the form of predicting her own death and gaining rebirth in the Pure Land, the details about which I return to in chapter five.

In a letter to Peng Shaosheng's friend, Wang Jin, Yuan Mei ridiculed the ascetic lifestyle of Buddhists:

> I asked Peng Chimu [Shaosheng] if Buddhism prohibits sex, to which he replied, "Yes." [I asked] if Buddhism prohibits killing, to which he answered, "Yes." [I asked] if everyone can become Buddha; he again answered, "Yes." I said, "If that is the case, then in forty or fifty years there would be no human beings. Who would build Buddhist temples? Who would worship the Buddha? Who would chant Buddhist sūtras? Wouldn't it mean that, if Buddhism became more popular, the Buddhist dharma would disappear [on its own]? [If that is the case,] there was no need for Zhou Wuzong (Emperor Wu of the Zhou, 543–578) to have destroyed Buddhist temples, or any need for Han Yu (768–824) to have burned Buddhist texts. If Buddhism is left to its own devices or has its own way, then Buddhism will come to its end on its own." Chimu did not answer my questions.[48]

Yuan Mei is asking the same question and employing the same logic as critics of Buddhism have done through the centuries (and which baffle undergraduates each term). Namely, the more

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[48] Yuan Mei, "Da Wang Dashen shu," *YQJ* 2: 647.

Buddhism becomes popular, the more followers it has; the more followers it has, the more people will adopt a celibate lifestyle. Consequently, the procreation of future generations will come to an end, which would ultimately lead to the decline of Buddhism (if not the entire world). Although Yuan Mei claims that Peng was left defenseless and defeated in the face of his questions, Tao Shan's story, about Peng's own relative, included in his *Shan nüren zhuan* can serve as a retort to Yuan Mei. Lay Buddhists can practice Buddhism as well as produce heirs to carry on their familial line *and* the lineage of the dharma. Through Tao Shan's story, Peng suggests that one's devotion to Buddhism does not contradict the Confucian ethical code and thus it is not necessary to separate the two. Rather, Tao Shan's rebirth in the Pure Land proves that fulfilling one's secular responsibilities while remaining committed to Buddhism only hastens one's reward in the afterlife.

2.4 BUDDHIST PRACTICES AND WOMEN'S CHASTITY

Aside from filial piety and obedience, chastity, among all other womanly virtues, was most valued by the Qing ideology. The government set guidelines and rules that not only rewarded filial sons and daughters, but also rewarded chaste widows, especially those who endured hardship to take care of surviving in-laws and children and those who resisted sexual assaults to keep their chastity at the cost of their lives. The Qing government believed that a woman's chastity was the one of the major pillars of the family hierarchical order. The canonization of chaste widows in the Qing was part of the government's project to restore the social and political hierarchy challenged by the societal upheavals of the late Ming and reinforce the legitimacy of Manchu rule. "The restoration of gender order based on female chastity and gender separation

was indeed inseparable from the revitalization of family and community authority."[49] As the Chinese saying goes, "A virtuous woman never marries two husbands, and a loyal subject never serves two rulers." Thus the loyalty of a woman to her husband is equivalent to the loyalty of a subject to his ruler. A woman's chastity ensures the purity of her husband's lineage, and subordinates the woman to patriarchal authority. Only in an ordered and stable family could a moral society be established. Even though there was a huge gap between reality and what the dominant ideology advocated, ruling elites such as Chen Hongmou believed that the transformation of a society into a well-ordered moral one starts with the behavior of women. In support of this view, the opening passage of the *Nü lun yu* (Women's Analects), written by Song Ruohua (d. 820) and commented on by her younger sister Song Ruozhao (d. 825), was included in Chen Hongmou's *Sourcebook*. It states, "If a woman wants to establish herself, the top priority is to be pure and chaste. To be pure is to be physically unblemished; to be chaste is to be honored."[50] The discourse on women's chastity thus emphasized a woman's pure reputation and honor as largely determined by her body remaining undefiled by sexual misconduct and her loyalty to her husband once she married. A loyal and chaste wife was believed to have a positive influence on her husband and her sons; in turn, the men of the family could become loyal and obedient subjects of the country.

I have mentioned above that segregation of the sexes is related to the difference in gender roles sanctioned by the Chinese cosmology of *yin* and *yang*; on the other hand, sex segregation is also a way to shield women from being preyed upon by male outsiders or being seduced by outsiders, which might lead to their sexual promiscuity. In the Qing period, government officials

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[49] Janet M. Theiss, *Disgraceful Matters: the Politics of Chastity in Eighteenth-Century China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 21.
[50] Chen Hongmou, *Jiao nü yi gui*, *XSK* 951.1: 9.

tried many means to keep women in their inner quarters. For example, they prohibited women from visiting temples and shrines. In his "Zou hui yin ci shu" (Petition for the Destroying of Evil Temples), Tang Bin (1627-1687)[51] wrote:

> I thought that the Wu area[52] valued integrity and literary talent. . . but extravagance and wantonness are in vogue in this area. Evil persons make profit from these activities, and the stupid indulge themselves in these activities. For example, women in this area like visiting temples [wearing] makeup and [dressed in] colorful clothing. Some of these women gather to burn incense on their bare arms, calling this practice "*dian rou shen deng*" [lighting flesh body light]. These kinds of practices harm one's body and induce people to wantonness, but they regard them as piety. . . . I have taken many strict measures to prohibit these kinds of practices to ensure that there are no women wandering in the temples.[53]

Chen Hongmou also disapproved of women visiting temples and thought it was detrimental to the family and Confucian propriety. "Some women do not avoid strange men at all. They go to temples to burn incense or get on board a boat to wander for fun. Their husbands know what they are doing, but they just let them go."[54] Even though the temples referred to in Chen's *Sourcebook* and Tang's memorial may not necessarily be Buddhist temples**,** Buddhist temples are obviously among the targets of their prohibitions since visiting pilgrimage sites and temples is a common Buddhist practice. In the eyes of Confucian officials like Tang Bin and Chen Hongmou, pilgrimage trips and temple worship are violations of the Confucian behavior codes and should be prohibited. Even though the government enumerated several reasons for prohibiting women from visiting temples, among the major concerns was the public mixing of men and women and the resulting possibility of sexual promiscuity. In addition, women's visits to temples and contact with celibate Buddhist monks easily aroused secular suspicions of

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[51] Tang Bin was the governor of Jiangnin, minister of the Department of Rites and teacher of Peng Dingqiu, Peng Shaosheng's great-grandfather. See *Qing shi gao* 480 (Reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1998), 4: 3359.
[52] The Wu area refers to the lower Lower River region, including Suzhou prefecture.
[53] Tang Bin, "Zou hui yin ci shu," in *Qianlong Changzhou xian zhi, ZDFZ* 13.31: 3b.
[54] Chen Hongmou, *Jiao nü yi gui*, *XSK* 951.3: 17.

possible promiscuity between monks and laywomen. Sexual scandals between Buddhist laywomen and Buddhist monks are often found in fictions produced in the Ming and Qing.

One example of such a fictive work is by Xia Jingqu (1705-1787), a contemporary of Peng Shaosheng. Xia's novel *Ye sou pu yan* (Humble Words of Rustic Men) was completed and circulated between 1767-1772.[55] Xia explicitly defines his novel as "anti-syncretism of the three teachings."[56] His hero Wen Suchen, a Confucian scholar-warrior, is a sworn opponent of Buddhism and Daoism, who takes to exterminating the "evil" influences of Buddhism and Daoism to honor Confucianism.[57] The first part of this novel depicts how Wen fights against this so-called evil, that is, sexually covetous monks and 'saved' women who have fallen into the hands of these monks. Xia Jingqu presents Buddhism as an evil and morally degenerate religion through his description of the sexual misconduct of monks and laywomen devotees. Xia Jingqu was a native of Jiangyin in the Jiangnan area, not far from Changzhou, Peng's hometown. In his novel, locations such as Wujiang and Suzhou are also mentioned. Xia's novel had a large audience among the elite in these areas, leading to speculate that the novel may have reflected the actual situation in Buddhist temples at that time or how the secular elite imagined that situation to be. At any rate, although Xiao does not explicitly state the dynasty or time frame in which the novel is set, it shows a general distain, shared by the author, for Buddhism as morally bankrupt by the people in these areas during that time.

In fact, Xia Jingqu's novel was not the only one to feature negative descriptions of Buddhism in the late Ming and High Qing periods. Cao Xueqin's *Hong lou meng* (Dream of the Red Chamber), now considered one of the four great classical novels of Chinese literature and

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[55] My thanks to Li Haihong of Harvard University, who introduced this novel to me. For the dates of the novel see Wang Qiongling, *Xiao Jingqu yu ye sou pu yan kao lun* (Taibei, Xuesheng shu ju, 2005), 405.
[56] Xia Jingqu, *Ye sou pu yan* (Changchun: Jilin wen shi chu ban she, 1994), 5
[57] Xia Jingqu, *Ye sou pu yan*, 5

written in this period (the earliest extant version is dated 1754), also ridicules the immoral behavior of Buddhist nuns, who either have affairs with their male patrons or intervene in the marriage of a patron's daughter, which leads to the death of the young girl and her fiancé.[58]

In novels like the two mentioned above, monks and nuns are usually described in a negative way as imposters, going from one wealthy and powerful family to another for secular profit, while Buddhist laywomen who get involved with these monks or nuns are either sexually promiscuous or naïve enough to be deceived by monastics who promise to bring good fortune and a good afterlife to them and their families. Things usually go against these laywomen's wishes—their trust in the Buddhist clergy and their donations to Buddhist temples do not bring good reward but rather disaster. One cannot take works of fiction as historical records. Nevertheless, these fictional works reveal a stereotypical image of Buddhist clerics and lay believers in this period. Namely, Buddhist clerics are corrupt, busy with secular gains, do not pay attention to Buddhist cultivation, and many are sexually lenient. As for lay believers, especially Buddhist laywomen, they are stereotypically depicted as either naively ready to be fooled by evil monks or nuns or shameless transgressors of the rule of sex segregation prescribed by Confucian ethic codes and readily mingle with these corrupt monks. Thus, in his *Sourcebook*, Chen Hongmou cautions women, "Do not go to the temple to pray for begetting a son." "Do not get close to Buddhist nuns."[59] This popular negative view of Buddhism and discouragement or prohibition from going to Buddhist temples reflect the anxieties of the ruling elite and Confucian moralists about the potential challenges that Buddhism posed to the established familial and social order and the authorities that sanctioned the Confucian ideology. When faced with the discrepancy between reality and the intended goal of their campaigns to uphold Confucian moral

[58] Cao Xueqin, *Honglou meng* (Shanghai: Shanghai gu ji, 1988), 221-225.
[59] Chen Hongmou, *Jiao nü yi gui*, *XSK* 951.2: 26a, 32a.

values, their anxieties were actualized in accusations that Buddhism and other religions were degenerative forces that acted against public morality.

Being a strong proponent of the governmental campaigns to recover Confucian moral ideals, before and after his conversion to Buddhism, Peng Shaosheng wrote often about self-moral cultivation and moral exemplary figures, such as loyal officials and chaste women in history and his time. Unlike Dai Zhen or Chen Hongmou, Peng held a different view on the cause of moral degeneration. As I mentioned in the introduction, Peng insists that Buddhism and Confucianism are completely in harmony and that the two express the same truth in different terms. In the *Shan nüren zhuan*, his accounts of the actions and words of many exemplary Buddhist laywomen demonstrate his belief that Buddhism and Confucianism share the same family values and that Buddhists and Confucians observe the same moral code. One example is Mao Yulong.

> Mao Yulong was a native of Macheng, the daughter of Mao Fengshao, the Assistant Censor of Yunnan. She was married to Liu Shoumeng. . . . After her husband died, she served her mother-in-law and lived in a small house. For the more than sixty years of the rest of her life, she never once stepped beyond the gate of the house. She liked reading and was good at composing poems. When she was old, she was devoted to Buddhism and strictly observed the Buddhist precepts. When Li Zhuowu[60] went to lecture in Longhu, he requested a meeting with Mao Yulong. Mao firmly refused his request. Then Li asked for an exchange of correspondence to discuss Buddhism, but she declined this as well. People of her county honored her as Wen Zhen Furen (Madam of Literary Talent and Chastity). (*Shan nüren zhuan* 2: 11a-11b)

Mao Yulong's secluded life and refusal to have any contact with men earned her the title of Madam of Literary Talent and Chastity. The text tells us that her life was completely based on the Confucian behavior code for women, and widows in particular, and on the Buddhist precepts.

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[60] Li Zhuowu was the style name of Li Zhi (1527-1602), the famous iconoclast writer of the late Ming. Many Confucius moralists of the late Ming and Qing accused him of moral degeneration.

If we have a look at a biography of a chaste widow in a Confucian biographical collection, we will find no difference in behavior:

> Dong Shi [Madam Dong] was the wife of Cheng Shangjian and the daughter of the Dong Bing, the secretary of the Hanlin Academy. She married Shangjian at the age of twenty-two. . . . Shangjian fell ill and died in the seventh year of their marriage. Madam Dong sold her entire dowry to bury Shangjian. She stayed up late to work every day to support her widowed mother-in-law until her death. Madam Dong lived in a small house for thirty years, never leaving it. Her other relatives rarely saw her. . . . She was well educated in the Confucian Classics and in history and composed textbooks to teach her son. At the age of eighty, she had a worthy son and grandsons. Madam Dong was rewarded by the government in the eleventh year of Qianlong era [1747].[61]

This life story comes from the *Qianlong Changzhou xian zhi* (Qianlong Changzhou Gazetteer) under the category of chaste widow. Both Mao Yulong and Madam Dong lived secluded lives, never went out of their living quarters, and never had any contact with men outside of their respective families. They led lives prescribed by Confucian norms. Both of these women were educated in the Confucian Classics. The only difference is that Mao believed in Buddhism while Madam Dong did not. Mao's life story furnishes strong evidence for Peng Shaosheng's argument that women's Buddhist practices do not lead to the transgression of the boundary between the two sexes established by the dominant Confucian ideology.

Narratives of widows like Mao Yulong are not few in number in the *Shan nüren zhuan*. There are a total of thirty-two life stories about chaste widows (or maidens).[62] The following are two more short accounts about the relationship between Buddhist practices and women's chastity.

> Huang Shude, whose courtesy name was Rouqing, was knowledgeable in literature and history from a young age and was very good at phonetics as well. She married Mr. Tu.

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[61] *Changzhou xian zhi, ZDFZ* 13.28: 28b.

[62] Among the thirty-two stories, there are only eight chaste widow stories out of eighty-four stories about women from the Jin to the Song, and twenty-four chaste widow (or maiden) stories out of sixty-four life accounts of women in the Ming and Qing periods. The number triples in the Ming and Qing with the rise of the chaste widow cult in this period.

> When her husband died, she adopted a vegetarian diet and worshiped the Buddha with one mind. She lived in the same small house [never leaving it]. At the age of thirty-four, she fell ill. Joining her palms in prayer and chanting the Buddha's name, she passed away peacefully. (*Shan nüren zhuan* 2: 11b)
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>
> Madam Wang whose given name was Gui, was a native of Dezhou. She was married to Han Chengye, who died soon after their marriage. Gui stopped drinking and eating in order to die with her husband but was stopped by her mother-in-law. From then on, she only took vegetarian food, never taking anything tasty. She lived alone in a small room for ten years. She dressed up and left a note on her desk to show her resolve to die on the night before Chengye was buried. Asking her family not to interrupt her, she went calmly to the courtyard. As she sat in lotus position and faced the West, fire sprang forth from her mouth and nose. She burned to ashes. The fragrant smell [her ashes gave out] lasted for more than ten days. (*Shan nüren zhuan* 2: 8a-b)

These two widows from the *Shan nüren zhuan* collection are not much different from the exemplary Confucian widow cited above in local gazetteers in terms of lifestyle, except for their Buddhist practices. The secluded and ascetic lifestyle is supported by both the Confucian and Buddhist codes of behavior. Confucian norms require that widows should not leave their inner quarters, and should not wear makeup but should live a plain life. On the other hand, pious Buddhists always lead plain lives without colorful clothes or makeup, adopt vegetarian diets, and stay in secluded place to engage in spiritual cultivation, renouncing all sensual pleasures, including sex. Unlike the women criticized by Chen Hongmou and Tang Bin, the two widows here lead lives isolated from contact with men. These stories of chaste widows in the *Shan nüren zhuan* convey a clear message that women's Buddhist practices do not jeopardize their chastity; in fact, they provide an alternative but similar lifestyle for widowed women and offer them spiritual support in their widowhood to preserve their chastity. What differentiates Peng's two widows from Confucian exemplary widows is the reward they received for their moral and devotional behavior. The government rewarded Confucian chaste widows, but the two women who practiced Buddhism in their widowhood died a very auspicious "Buddhist" death.

According to Buddhist texts, death while seated in the lotus position and deceased bodies that give off wonderful fragrances are signs of high achievement in spiritual and moral cultivation and of a good rebirth. For Peng, these auspicious signs clearly demonstrate that Buddhism trumped Confucianism by addressing the issue of the afterlife and offering a heavenly reward far greater than one conferred by the government.

In the *Shan nüren zhuan* moreover there are several stories about *zhennü* (chaste maidens). A chaste maiden is a girl who refuses a second betrothal and remains celibate throughout her life after the death of her fiancé. Miss Xie, whose biography appears above, belongs to this category. Peng's inclusion of these chaste maidens in his collection is closely related to the surge of the cult of chaste maidens in the Qing dynasty. The cult of chaste maidens was as highly promoted by the government as the cult of chaste widows, but also provoked heated debate among intellectuals, subsumed under the larger framework of debate over women's moral education and statecraft. Susan Mann correctly points out that debates on women's issues were closely tied to larger literati debates, which shaped status and power in the scholarly world, or even political alliances.[63] This is true of the debates over the issue of chaste maidens. There were two opposing camps with regard to the issue of chaste maidens, whose debates fell in line with the divide between the thought of Evidential School scholars and the followers of the Song and Ming neo-Confucian thinkers. Women's chastity was highly promoted by Song neo-Confucian thinkers, such as Zhu Xi, Cheng Hao (1032-1085) and Cheng Yi (1033-1101). The obsession with women's chastity was reinforced in the Ming and reached its peak in the Qing. Even though no one opposed the cult of chaste widows, the cult of chaste maidens was

[63] Susan Mann, "Classical Revival and the Gender Question," 402.

often a bone of contention. Evidential School scholars were on one side of the debates and the followers of Song and Ming neo-Confucian thinkers on the other.

Evidential School scholars disapproved of the cult of chaste maidens because they thought that chaste maidens, who remained celibate or even committed suicide to follow their betrothed in death, exhibited extreme behavior that violated the principles laid out in the *Zhong yong* (Doctrine of the Mean) and *Li ji* (Book of Rites).[64] The Evidential scholar Wang Zhong (1745-1794), a contemporary of Peng Shaosheng, held this view. He argued that faithful maidens violated the rituals regulating marriage and husband-wife relations.[65] According to Wang's interpretation of the Classics, only a wife could mourn her husband. Because a chaste maiden had not performed the rituals that completed her marriage due to the untimely death of her fiancé, she was not the wife and therefore could not mourn her fiancé.[66] Other detractors also pointed out that this kind of practice was inhumane since girls made the decision to remain celibate at such a young age and were not mentally and physically prepared for the hardship that a widow would have to endure. Such circumstances, these detractors argued, could lead to undesirable results, including sexual misconduct.[67]

Peng Shaosheng and Peng Shaosheng, his great-grandfather Peng Dingqiu, and his friend Luo Yougao were all supporters of the Song and Ming neo-Confucian thinkers.[68] Without exception, both were proponents of the cult of chaste maidens. Peng Dingqiu composed "Zhennü bian" (An Apology for Chaste Maidens). In this treatise, he refutes the argument that chaste maidens violate the rituals that regulate marriage between a man and woman. Peng Dingqiu

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[64] For the details of Wang Zhong's argument see Lu, *True to Her Word*, 225.
[65] Lu, *True to Her Word*, 225.
[66] Lu, *True to Her Word*, 226.
[67] Lu, *True to Her Word*, 226.
[68] Peng Shaosheng, *Er lin ju ji* 23:8b-9a.

argues that it is reasonable and harmless for a girl to marry someone else if her fiancé died, but the girl or young woman who vows to be loyal to her fiancé and refuses to marry someone else is exceptional. Such a girl or young woman distinguishes herself from the morality practiced by ordinary people.[69] He goes on to argue that it is unfair to accuse these chaste maidens of violating the principles of propriety, while approving of those who remarried soon after the death of their husbands, simply because they had already completed all the marriage rituals prescribed in the Classics.[70] Peng Dingqiu further criticizes those who stuck to the face value or letter of the Classics, because "the *Zhou li* [Rites of the Zhou] also states that, in mid-spring, men and women can meet to find their mates [without the sanction of their parents]. Isn't it ridiculous to follow everything in the ancient Classics?"[71] What this statement insinuates is that rigid adherence to the literal meaning of the Classics of antiquity by some Evidential School scholars discouraged or degraded the exceptionally virtuous behavior of chaste maidens, while endorsing immoral behavior.

Peng Shaosheng also agreed with his great-grandfather's attitude towards chaste maidens. He composed an essay called the "Si zhennü zhuan" (Biographies of Four Chaste Maidens) between 1777 and 1779, after his conversion to Buddhism. Luo Yougao also joined the pro-chaste maiden camp and wrote a commentary on this essay.[72] The four chaste maidens are Peng's contemporaries. They are Song Jingwei (b. 1715), Jiang Gui (d.u.), and two others only known by their family names, Wang Zhenü (Chaste Maiden Wang, d.u.) and Shi Zhennü (1742-1778). In this essay, Peng compares the loyalty shown by chaste maidens to their betrothed with

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[69] Peng Dingqiu, *Nanyun wen gao*, *PSJJ* 12: 31-32.
[70] Peng Dingqiu, *Nanyun wen gao*, *PSJJ* 12: 32.
[71] Peng Dingqiu, *Nanyun wen gao*, *PSJJ* 12: 32.
[72] Luo Yougao, "Si zhennü zhuan hou lun," in *Luo Taishan wen chao* (Reprint, Shanghai: Guo xue fu lun she, 1910), 1: 2b.

the loyal ministers in Chinese history, and concludes that if a man wants to establish himself in history, he should be a loyal subject; if a woman wishes to establish herself in history, she should be chaste and loyal to her husband or her betrothed. He claims that these chaste maidens represent the virtues of loyalty, chastity and righteousness, which were indispensable for the established social order. A quote of a remark written by one of the chaste maidens and recorded in Peng's essay reads, "Some women in this world envy the female Buddha, female immortals or nuns, but they do not really understand the true meaning of [the identity of or non-differentiation between] emptiness and the phenomenal world, and the Pure Land and the *sahā* world. Only by removing one's desires can one enter the Dao. It is not necessary for everyone to talk about Chan. The sages never ignored the cardinal relationships. If one can understand the true meaning of the cardinal relationships, one can be a sage."[73] Peng's verbatim recording of this remark in his essay indicates that he shares the view of this chaste maiden. The message in this statement is clear, namely, Buddhist practices never go beyond the cardinal relationships defined by Confucian ethics. To remove selfish desires as Buddhism advocates is the way to fully fulfill the responsibilities dictated by the cardinal relationships and to truly understand the Buddhist doctrine of emptiness is to gain rebirth in the Pure Land. Peng's essay extols the behavior of four chaste maidens and his position on chaste maidens is closely related to his apologia for Buddhism.

In fact, the life story of Miss Shi, one of the four chaste maidens, is also collected in the *Shan nüren zhuan*,[74] and supports his argument for the positive role of Buddhism in moral cultivation. The following is Miss Shi's story:

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[73] Peng Shaosheng, *Er lin ju ji* 24: 4b.
[74] Luo Yougao, "Shi zhen nu zhuan hou lun," 1: 2b-3a.

> Shi Zhennü [Chaste Maiden Shi] was a native of Wujiang. Her father died when she was ten. She lived with her mother and older brother. As she believed in Buddhism from a young age, she did not want to have a family. . . . A young man called Wang Zhi betrothed her. Wang died two years after the betrothal. Miss Shi was twenty years old at the time. Hearing of the death of Wang, she damaged her face, put on [mourning] clothes, adopted a vegetarian diet and devoted herself to Buddhism. Remaining celibate, she lived with her brother and supported herself by weaving and sewing. When the mother of Wang Zhi died six years later, she went to the Wang family to mourn the deceased as a daughter-in-law. After the funeral, she returned to her brother's home. Eight years later, she moved in with the Wang family as the widow of their son. Cleaning up three unused rooms in the Wang residence, she lived there on her own. The door to her room was always closed. People could only hear her chanting Buddhist sūtras, but could not see her. When she became ill, her brother came to visit her. She said to him, "Brother, take care of yourself for I will leave you soon." Her family comforted her. She said, "I will not live through today." Soon after uttering these words, she passed away. This happened in the forty-first year of the Qianlong era [1777]. (*Shan nüren zhuan* 2: 34b)

Miss Shi's story indicates that the ascetic lifestyle advocated by Buddhism actually prepared these young women for the austere life that Confucian ethics required of widows. Although lay Buddhists are not prohibited from having sex with their spouses, since Buddhist precepts and doctrines place a high value on physical virginity,[75] many lay Buddhists chose to live celibate lives. According to Peng Shaosheng's account, Miss Shi had such a desire since she was young. Her betrothal was apparently not of her own will, but due to obedience to her family and the social norms. Being a chaste maiden provided her with a good reason to remain celibate without defying her family's will and the Confucian moral norms. In Miss Shi's case, Buddhism might be a factor that motivated her to become a chaste maiden. Her behavior, such as damaging her face to make her sexually unattractive, is an expression of her resolve to preserve her chastity (or virginity) and putting on mourning garb for her fiancé as well as living a cloistered life are Confucian norms for widows, while abstaining from sex, eating a vegetarian diet and sūtra chanting are obviously Buddhist practices. In this sense, Miss Shi's devotion to Buddhism and

[75] See Yuet Keung Lo, "Conversion to Chastity: A Buddhist Catalyst in Early Imperial China," *Nan nü* 10 (2008): 22-56. Lo suggests that the Buddhist concept of the "pure body" has influenced the Chinese notion of women's chastity.

the observance of the Confucian moral codes worked in tandem. Through her story, Peng Shaosheng asserts that women's Buddhist practices do not contradict female chastity at all. In fact, Buddhism helps widows or chaste maidens overcome their sexual desires and provides them with an emotional and spiritual alternative.[76] It is a groundless accusation by intellectuals and political elites that the Buddhist practices of women blur the boundary between male and female, which results in detrimental effects on social stability and social morality. The opposite can be seen as true from this story. Namely, Buddhism helps women to preserve their chastity and contributes to the moral values that sustain social stability.

A second chaste maiden, Wenshi Nü (Daughter of the Wen Family), began an ascetic Buddhist life at a young age, which was not very different from the life she later led as a chaste maiden.

> Wenshi Nü was a native of Ganlu li [Ganlu ward] in Wuxi and the third daughter of Wen Jian. She adopted a vegetarian diet at the age of five and began Buddhist sūtra chanting at the age of seven. She chanted sūtras day and night without stop. When she grew older, she supported her parents with her embroidering. She liked to make donations to Buddhist temples and was ready to help those in need. When her mother became ill, she prayed to the Buddha and bodhisattvas and cut off a piece of her own flesh to administer to her mother as medicine. Her mother was soon cured. Later, Miss Wen was betrothed to a son of the Hua family in her neighborhood, but her fiancé died before the wedding. She begged her parents to permit her to mourn her fiancé, but her parents refused. When she vowed to kill herself if her wish was not fulfilled, her parents eventually gave in. She went to the Hua family at the age of sixteen. From then on, she no longer used a mirror or wore makeup, no longer went to the front porch, no longer showed her teeth while speaking. [She lived a life] like this for a long time. At some point, her brother became seriously ill. She thought to herself, "My father loves his young son so much. If my brother dies, my father will not be able to survive. I should have died [with my fiancé]. But my death has been postponed for ten years! [Now it is time to die.]" Then Miss Wen fasted for three days and prayed to the Buddha, beseeching him to take her life in exchange for the life of her brother. Her brother was miraculously cured. Miss Wen refused to take food. Three days later, she took a bath and sat with a sūtra and rosary in her arms. She bade farewell to her mother-in-law and died. She was twenty-six years old. (*Shan nüren zhuan* 2: 24a-24b)

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[76] See Mann, *Precious Records*, 200, and Lu, *True to Her Word*, 198.

This story clearly collapses the boundary between Buddhist and Confucian ethics, particularly the values of filial piety and chastity. Miss Wen's cutting off her own flesh for a cure for her mother is, no doubt, an action of extreme altruistic filial behavior applauded by Confucians, which nonetheless can also be seen in Buddhist literature beginning with the *Jātaka* tales, which tell the stories of the previous lives of the Buddha. One such tale, for example, relates how the future Buddha offered his own life to a mother tigress in order that she might feed her cubs.[77] (Controversy over mutilating one's body is discussed in chapter four.) Miss Wen is totally different from the women in Xia Jingqu's novel and Tang Bin's memorial, who shamelessly transgress the boundary between the inner and outer spheres. Her behavior in widowhood fits perfectly with the behavior codes for women prescribed by Confucians of the time, as clearly laid out in Chen Hongmou's *Sourcebook*. For example, a woman should be gentle and quiet and not show her teeth when she talks and smiles; she should not laugh loudly when she is happy; she should not peek at the outside or go into the outer courtyard.[78]

Peng's inclusion of this story in the *Shan nüren zhuan* in part surely serves to refute detractors among the Confucian literati and officials who insisted that Buddhism did not discourage young women from trespassing between the inner and outer quarters; on the contrary, Buddhist and Confucian ethics in fact advocate the same norms of behavior, and there was no reason for Confucian moralists to accuse Buddhism of being immoral. Despite this, as a proponent of this cult, Peng Shaosheng realized the hardships chaste maidens and chaste widows had to endure. He set up a charity organization to help these chaste women financially.[79] The biographies he included in the *Shan nüren zhuan* also provide chaste maidens and chaste widows

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[77] Edward Conze, trans., *Buddhist Scriptures* (Baltimore: Penguin books, 1959), 24-26.
[78] Chen Hongmou, *Jiao nü yi gui, XSK* 951.2: 31-32.
[79] Angela Leung, "To Chasten Society," 11.

with advice on how to spend their widowhood to avoid sexual misconduct and how to take care of their spiritual welfare, that is, to practice Buddhism at home. In the *Shan nüren zhuan*, widows or chaste maidens like Miss Shi and Miss Wen practice Buddhism at home. Their practices include adherence to a vegetarian diet, sūtra chanting, sūtra copying, invocation of the Buddha's name and so on. In Peng's collection, there is no example of young widows or chaste maidens leaving their homes to visit Buddhist temples. It is clear that Buddhists did not encourage trespassing between the inner and outer spheres, equally denounced by literati and officials. As a result of their devotional practices and moral virtues, the chaste women in the *Shan nüren zhuan* all were reborn in the Pure Land, as were Miss Wen and Miss Xie.

As we have seen, in response to the suspicions of and charges against Buddhism put forth by Confucian literati, political elites and commoners, Peng Shaosheng wrote treatises to prove that the attainment of the Buddhist spiritual goal (namely, enlightenment or rebirth in the Pure Land) lay in the fulfillment of one's secular responsibilities as a family member and subject of the realm. This argument is also clearly articulated in his *Shan nüren zhuan*. His debates and treatises prove this argument doctrinally, while the *Shan nüren zhuan* supports this argument with concrete examples. Through the accounts of filial daughters(-in-law), good wives and chaste widows in the collection, Peng argues that typical Chinese ethical values, such as filial piety, obedience, sagacious intelligence and chastity, are appreciated not only by Confucian moralists but by Buddhists as well.

However, deviations in the life stories of these Buddhist filial daughters(in-law), good wives and chaste widows as compared to those of Confucian exemplary women do exist and mainly involve miraculous experiences and mode of death, taken up respectively in the last two chapters. Suffice it to say here that, for Peng Shaosheng, Buddhism in fact trumps the this-world

orientation of Confucianism in its emphasis on the efficacy of miracles and attention to the afterlife. Here, Peng's insistence on the moral rectitude of women as a necessary condition for a good death or rebirth in the Pure Land is especially evident. Most telling is that these miracles, which directly address the important spiritual concerns of reward and punishment, life and death, are always linked in karmic terms to devotional practice and proper behavior. Unlike Buddhist miracle tales sometimes found in other collections, the miracles evidenced in Peng's collection are never undeserved or lacking in moral message. Indeed, such stories were deliberately omitted from Peng's collection. A good case in point is the biography of Dugu Huanghou (Empress Dugu) (544-602) of the Sui dynasty (589–618) found in the *Fozu tongji* [80] but rejected by Peng. According to Peng, Empress Dugu's murder of a favorite concubine of the emperor out of jealousy violated the Buddhist precept of non-killing. Even though the empress was said to have gained rebirth in the Pure Land in the *Fozu tongji*, her unethical behavior disqualified her from Peng's collection of exemplary Buddhist laywomen. (See also chapter five.)

In Peng's view, then, the special or miraculous aspect of Buddhism is in effect proof-positive that there is no reason for people to criticize Buddhism on moral grounds. These stories therefore not only help to defend Buddhism, but also stress that the positive workings of karmic retribution begin within the family, which for Peng is the paramount locus for the saving of all sentient beings.

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[80] *T* 49, no. 2035: 286a16-20.

3.0 DHARMA TEACHERS, MORAL INSTRUCTRESSES AND TALENTED WOMEN

In the High Qing period, along with the campaigns launched by the ruling elite and literati to uphold Confucian moral values, there appeared numerous accounts about women who embodied the virtues of obedience, filial piety and chastity written by men. At the same time, there also appeared many more self-expressive literary writings by women that attracted the attention of the literati. The increased visibility of women's writings gave rise to debates among literati over women's talent, behavior codes designated by gender roles and the promotion of moral truth. These debates were polarized by two images: the stern Confucian moral instructress, whose modes of behavior and speech were intended to sustain the established social order, and the graceful and passionate female poet, whose writings expressed emotional and personal voices somewhat subversive to the social hierarchy.[1] Women in this period, as evidenced by their writings, also expressed diverse and individualized views on the relationship between their talents (especially literary talent), gender role and moral virtues.[2] However, among the nine women contemporaries of Peng, whose life accounts are collected in his *Shan nüren zhuan*, except for Tao Shan (whose writings are discussed in chapter five), none left any writings or are

[1] Mann, *Precious Records,* 76.
[2] See Mann, *Precious Records,* 94-120, and Beata Grant, "Little Vimalakīrti: Buddhism and Poetry in the Writings of Lady Scholar Chiang Chu (1764-1804)," in *Chinese Women in the Imperial Past: New Perspectives*, ed. Harriet Zurndorfer (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999), 286-307.

even known to have written in their respective lifetimes. This chapter therefore does not focus on the self-expressive and diverse writings of women in the High Qing. Rather, it examines Peng Shaosheng's views of talented women by looking at the stories collected in the *Shan nüren zhuan* against the backdrop of the debates among literati over women's talent, moral truth and social authority. We explore what functions these stories served in promoting Buddhism and how the parallels in the Buddhist and Confucian presentations of talented women provided the common ground Peng sought to prove that Buddhism was completely in harmony with Confucianism.

This chapter focuses on two types of talented women presented in *Shan nüren zhuan.* The first are women in the Chan tradition, who displayed their enlightened minds through unconventional behavior and encounter dialogues with monks. Many of these women even served as dharma teachers to Chan monks. This category of woman parallels the Confucian moral instructress so highly praised by Confucians of the eighteenth century such as the historian Zhang Xuecheng (1738-1801) and the Evidential School scholar Wang Zhong.[3] The second category is talented women writers who were appreciated by Yuan Mei.[4] In the *Shan nüren zhuan*, Ye Xiaoluan of the Ming dynasty is representative of this category, and her life story and poems were adopted by Peng for the promotion of Buddhist truth. Through a comparative study of these exemplary talented women in the Buddhist tradition and their Confucian counterparts, this chapter aims to address questions such as: What kind of women's talents were accepted or considered to be ideal from the Buddhist perspective? What was Peng's view on the spiritual achievements of these exemplary women when compared to what men could or should achieve? What were the effects of these stories? And finally, how did Peng tailor these life stories to

[3] See Mann, *Precious Records*, 81-92.
[4] See Mann, *Precious Records*, 92-93.

address his concern about the relationship between women's talents and the established social and religious order?

3.1 CHAN LITERATURE, DHARMA TRANSMISSION AND LITERATI

In the *Shan nüren zhuan*, there are total of twenty stories about Chan women. The life account of Cui Shi (Madam Cui) is the only one that is adopted from non-Buddhist sources, such as the *Tang shu* (History of the Tang Dynasty), *Wang youcheng ji* (Collection of Literary Works of Deputy Prime Minister Wang [Wei]) and *Shanxi zhi* (Shanxi Gazetteer).[5] The other nineteen stories about Chan women are all adopted from Chan literature.[6] Eleven stories out of the nineteen come from the *Jingde chuan deng lu* (Record of the Transmission of the Lamp [Compiled during the] Jingde [Era]) compiled in 1004,[7] four from the *Wu deng hui yuan* (Assembled Essentials of the Five [Records of the Transmission of the] Lamp) compiled in 1252,[8] two from the *Zong men wu ku*,[9] one from the *Dahui Pujue chan shi yu lu* (Recorded

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[5] See *Shan nüren zhuan* 1: 4a-4b. Madam Cui was the mother of Wang Wei (courtesy name: Mojie, 692-761), the famous poet, artist and politician (and devout Buddhist) of the Tang dynasty. Peng's biography about Cui Shi recounts that Wang Wei turned his mother's villa into a Buddhist temple in her honor, whereas the non-Buddhist sources only note that Wang's mother studied Chan under the instruction of the prominent Chan Master Puji (651-739).

[6] There are four recognized genres of Chan literature: genealogical histories called *deng lu* (transmission records), *yu lu* (recorded sayings), *gong'an* (J: *kōan*, public cases), and *qing gui* (monastic codes). *Deng lu* are mainly concerned with lineages of dharma transmission and the biographies of Chan masters who were recognized as dharma heirs of each lineage. *Yu lu* are records of the sayings of a Chan master and include sermons and lectures of the Chan master recorded by his disciples, as well as writings left by the master or accounts of "conducts and interactions" between the Chan master and other Chan practitioners. Anecdotes or encounter dialogues and sometimes non-verbal behavior considered significant for expressing Buddhist truth, are included in *yulu*. See Albert Welter, *The Linji Lu and the Creation of Chan Orthodoxy: the Development of Chan's Records of Sayings Liaterature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 46. For encounter dialogue see 98n12 below.

[7] *T* 51, no. 2076.

[8] *XZJ* 138.

[9] *T* 47, no. 1998b. The full title of this work is *Dahui Pujue chan shi zong men wu ku* (Chan Master Dahui Pujue's Arsenal for the Chan School). Peng uses its abbreviated title *Zong men wu ku* in his *Shan nüren zhuan*.

Sayings of Chan Master Dahui Pujue)[10] and one from the *Shuokui chan shi yu lu* (Recorded Sayings of Chan Master Shuokui).[11] As for the subjects of the nineteen stories, sixteen are old women and three are young girls. Most of the old women are lowborn and seemingly uneducated, but their spiritual achievements are said to be as high as eminent Chan masters; some are even considered superior to monks in their spiritual achievement. Their enlightenment is displayed through encounter dialogues with Chan masters and their seemingly unconventional behavior when interacting with these masters.[12] At various points, these women even serve as dharma teachers directing Chan monks along the right path of practice towards enlightenment or evaluating their spiritual progress in order to push them forward in their spiritual cultivation.

The stories of these enlightened women are found scattered throughout Chan literature. Few of these women are listed as dharma heirs in any Chan lineage found in any Chan genealogical history. Most of these old women are ambiguously referred to simply as "Old Woman so and so." Only a few have a biographical narrative devoted to them in any of the Chan genealogical histories. In fact, not surprisingly, the narratives of their interactions with Chan monks through encounter dialogue and antinomian behavior are most often included in the life stories of the monk in question. Through interactions with these old and humble women, we are told that these monks reportedly gained rapid progress at a crucial moment in their spiritual cultivation or came to experience sudden enlightenment. In some cases, the exchange of

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[10] *T* 47, no. 1998A.

[11] The full name of Chan master Shuokui is Shuokui Yuanzhi (1628-1697). The Qing government censored his *Yu lu*. It is is not included in the Taishō Tripiṭaka (*T*) or the Supplement to the Tripiṭaka (*XZJ*) and probably no longer exists. See Wu Zhefu, appendix to the *Qingdai jin hui shu mu yan jiu* (Taibei: Jia xin shui ni gong si wen hua ji jin hui, 1969), 428.

[12] Encounter dialogue (C: *ji yuan wenda*, J: *kien modō*) is a unique Chan literary genre and has no clear definition. According to John R. McRae, an encounter dialogue has several features. It consists of a dialogue that occurs in *deng lu* or *yu lu* literature. It is presented as a transcription of an oral dialogue that often lacks "straightforward exchanges of ideas; it is characterized by logical disjuncture." It often consists of antinomian gestures or behaviors. See John R. McRae, *Seeing through Zen: Encounter, Transformation, and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 77-78.

seemingly nonsensical conversation between an eminent Chan master and an old woman or little girl are recorded as an indicator of the monk's enlightenment. This, in turn, confirmed the high spiritual achievement of the girl or woman involved, as she was able to understand and converse with an enlightened master.

In Chinese Chan literature, a recurring theme is that truth allows for no mediation or representation as it is immanent and unchanging; however, denial of mediation and representation does not mean that truth is not transmittable.[13] Buddhist texts describe all kinds of skillful means to express absolute truth in order to help people attain enlightenment. The skillful means recorded in Chan literature include encounter dialogues, antinomian behaviors, such as beating and shouting, and so forth. Even though the Chan rhetoric of "a special transmission outside the scriptures" indicates a suspicion of texts as an effective vehicle for conveying truth, Chan practitioners did not hesitated to compose records of encounter dialogues and anecdotes of antinomian behavior of their enlightened predecessors as tools to assist future generations in realizing enlightenment. Recent studies on the origin of *gong'an* indicate that many stories in *gong'an* collections were culled from anecdotes or encounter dialogues in the genealogical histories and recorded sayings. These *gong'an* stories were later incorporated into monastic curriculums and used by Chan masters as teaching materials for Chan practitioners to ponder and through which to realize their Buddha nature and attain awakening.[14] The stories about the old women who would later be included in the *Shan nüren zhuan* were included in such *gong'an* collections as teaching materials as well.

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[13] Robert Sharf, "How to Think with Chan *Gong'an*," in *Thinking with Cases: Specialist Knowledge in Chinese Cultural History*, ed. Charlotte Furth, Judith T. Zeitlin and Ping-Chen Hsiung (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 215.

[14] For a fuller treatment of *gong'an* see Sharf, "How to Think with Chan *Gong'an*," 230, and T. Griffith Foulk, "The Form and Function of Koan Literature: a Historical Overview," in *Kōan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism*, ed. Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 15-45.

In theory, the pedagogical use of *gong'an*, encounter dialogues or antinomian behavior in dharma transmission are skillful means like "the raft used to cross the river" or "the finger pointing at the moon," to use favorite Chan expressions. That is to say, one should not mistake the raft or finger as truth itself.[15] Following this logic, one cannot simply imitate the speech or antinomian behavior of the characters found in Chan literature, but rather should use their stories to meditate on the truth manifested through them. In reality, however, various readers or audiences read these stories in different ways. Literati beginning in the Song dynasty (960-1279) came to read or use these texts for entertainment. Albert Welter's study of the *Jingde chuan deng lu* suggests,

> Chan dialogues and the antics of Chan masters make for highly entertaining reading. This is especially true for those who feel constricted by contemporary conventions and seek an escape from the tedium and banality of everyday life. As represented in the literature pioneered in *deng lu*, the Chan tradition represents not merely an escape from the banality but proposes a way to transform it into a mechanism for spiritual transcendence. For those interested in more than the entertainment that Chan anecdotes afford, *deng lu* stories provide an enticing and seemingly simple approach to religious realization, one that appears deceptively accessible to the spiritually inclined but otherwise secularly disposed.[16]

In fact, when it comes to Chan dialogues, there is only a fine line between their being carriers or conveyors of truth and anecdotes for entertainment. This literary genre became a popular pastime of the literati, who both discussed the dialogues recorded in the *Jingde chuan deng lu* and used or inserted Chan-style dialogues in conversation. However, Chan-style dialogues became problematic in the eyes of certain Buddhist monks when they found that people were paying too much attention to the rhetorical wit of these debates, while ignoring the truth expressed in these

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[15] Sharf, "How to Think with Chan *Gong'an*," 215.
[16] Albert Welter, *Monks, Rulers, and Literati: The Political Ascendancy of Chan Buddhism* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 207.

dialogues. For example, Hanshan Deqing (1546-1623), an eminent monk of the Ming dynasty, criticized this practice among the literati:

> When well-intentioned men nowadays become lay Buddhists, they pride themselves on their worldly knowledge and secular wit. Slighting the precious precepts and the ten virtues, they leave themselves open for Māra. They think that to delight in the way of Ch'an [*pinyin*: Chan] is most superior. So they look up a few ready-made kung-an [*pinyin*: *gong'an*] of the patriarchs, memorize them, and taking advantage of their quick wit and clever eloquence, believe that they have gained awakening. They are fully satisfied, and they have no idea where they have gone wrong.[17]

What Deqing took issue with was the misuse of Chan *gong'an* by the literati, even those professing to be lay Buddhists, who mistook quick wit and clever eloquence as enlightenment, but ignored the Buddhist precepts and serious spiritual cultivation. Imitation of antinomian speech or behavior without an understanding of the truth that lay behind it led such men spiritually astray, far from enlightenment. For example, by the seventeenth century, the antinomian practices recorded in Chan literature were ritualized and performed live in front of an assembly by Chan masters and disciples.[18]

Peng Shaosheng shared Deqing's concern over the misuse of Chan *gong'an* stories when he included those about Chan women in the *Shan nüren zhuan,* such as the *gong'an* stories of the older sister-in-law of Chan master Pingtian Puan, the old woman selling cakes and Old Woman Yu, all of which I take up in the next section. Thus, he cautioned his audience in the preface to his biographical collection:

> The [patterns of] speech of these women practitioners from various Chan schools [recorded in this collection] are spontaneous expressions of their intrinsic enlightened minds. They cannot be understood by a mind full of discriminative thoughts. If you have questions about these stories, you should diligently meditate on them. Only in this way will you be able to find the key to understanding the message [that these stories convey].

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[17] Hanshan Deqing, *Hanshan lao ren mou you ji* 53 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Buddhist Book Distribution, 1965), 2885, as quoted in Chün-fang Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China: Chu-hung and the Late Ming Synthesis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 35.
[18] Jiang Wu, *Enlightenment in Dispute*, 12.

> Don't give up when you have questions. Don't distort or defame the truth [in these dialogues]. Otherwise, your good roots for enlightenment will be forever severed. This is not a minor matter. Be careful! Be careful! (*Shan nüren zhuan* 1: via)

This message in the preface to the *Shan nüren zhuan* is addressed to two audiences. First it reminds Buddhist readers that these Chan dialogues are spontaneous expressions of an enlightened mind, far beyond the reach of a mind filled with delusion and discrimination. It urges this Buddhist audience to meditate on these stories as a way to transcend dualistic views and come to a realization of the truth that is conveyed by these stories, thus finally bringing forth one's Buddha nature. Second, because these stories are beyond the reach of a deluded mind, Peng is also cautioning readers, including opponents of Buddhism, not to use the unconventional behavior and sometimes seemingly nonsensical speech of these Chan women as a pretext to degrade the truth underlying these stories. Therefore, this opening statement to his collection warns its audience that one should not take these stories at face value by simply imitating—or criticizing—antinomian behavior and speech while ignoring the truth expressed through these mediums.

3.2 MOTHERLY FIGURES AS DHARMA TEACHERS AND MORAL INSTRUCTRESSES

In these *gong'an* stories, it is common that old and uneducated women teach young and erudite (and sometimes self-important) monks a lesson. In their encounters with these monks, these women usually show their superiority in understanding the Buddhist dharma. I begin with the widely circulated story of the older sister-in-law of Master Pingtian Puan as an example. Peng adopted this story from the *Jingde chuan deng lu*:

> Chan master Pingtian Puan had an older sister-in-law called Pingtian Sao [Older Sister-in-law of Pingtian]. Master Linji [Linji Yixuan, d. 866] encountered Pingtian Sao, who was driving a buffalo to the field, on his way to visit Master [Pu]an.
>
> Master Linji asked her for the way to Pingtian's Chan temple.
>
> Pingtian Sao beat the buffalo with a club, saying, "This stupid animal has walked this way so many times, but still does not know the way!"
>
> Master Linji asked her again. The woman said, "This animal is five years old, but still not usable!"
>
> Linji was surprised at her words, and thought to himself, "This woman is extraordinary!" He suddenly felt the sticking point blocking his spiritual progress disappeared.
>
> When he saw Chan master Puan, the latter asked him, "Have you seen my older sister-in-law [on the road]?"
>
> Linji answered, "Yes, I have received [her instruction]." (*Shan nüren zhuan* 1: 8a)

In this story, the older sister-in-law of Pingtian seized the chance to instruct Linji when he asked for the way. By complaining about the buffalo, she was implying that people tried so many ways to seek enlightenment without realizing the way to enlightenment was nowhere but in one's own mind. Master Linji comprehended the truth underlying her complaint; thus the older sister-in-law of Pingtian helped Master Linji Yixuan make progress in his spiritual cultivation. He later became known as the eminent Chan monk and founder of the Linji School of Chan.[19]

Another story about Maibing Po (Old Woman Selling Cakes) speaks even more directly to how an old woman lectured a monk and directed him on the right path of Buddhist practice. This story involves Deshan Xuanjian (780-865), a contemporary of Linji above. From quite early on in Chan literature, these two Chan masters were often said to have had similar teaching and

[19] For the *Linji yu lu* (J: *Rinzai roku*) see *The Record of Linji*, trans. with commentary by Ruth Fuller Sasaki, ed. by Thomas Yūhō Kirschner (Nanzan Library of Asian Religion and Culture, 2009).

training methods, so much so that it became typical to refer to "the stick of Deshan and the shout of Linji."[20]

> Chan master Deshan was a famous lecturer on the *Diamond Sūtra* and wrote a commentary on it. When he heard that [the method of sudden enlightenment of the Southern School of] Chan was very popular in the south, he felt very indignant and decided to go south to convert those Chan practitioners. . . . On the way he saw an old woman selling cakes and stopped to buy some refreshments (*dianxin*).
>
> The old woman asked him, "What are you carrying?"
>
> The monk replied, "It is my *Qing long shu chao* [Blue Dragon Commentary].
>
> "What is it on?" [inquired the old woman].
>
> "It is [a commentary] on the *Diamond Sūtra*" [replied Deshan].
>
> The old woman said, "I have a question. If you can answer it, I will give you the cakes for free; if not, go somewhere else! The *Diamond Sūtra* states, 'The mind (*xin*) of the past cannot be grasped; the mind of the present cannot be grasped; and the mind of the future cannot be grasped.' You wish for some refreshments. Which mind do you wish to refresh (*dian na ge xin*)?"
>
> Hearing these words, the monk could not answer. He then went to study under the Chan master Longtan [Chongxin, d. 838] and attained enlightenment. (*Shan nüren zhuan* 1: 8a-8b)

This story gives a vivid description of how an old, humble and seemingly uneducated woman making a living by selling cakes on the roadside defeated an erudite, eloquent and somewhat self-important monk. Through the use of a pun on the words *xin* (mind), *dian/xin* (take/mind) and *dianxin* (refreshments), the old woman lectures the well-known monk, dispelling his arrogance and directing him on the right path to practice Buddhism, which eventually leads to his enlightenment. In this story, regardless of her social status and her educational background, this old woman obviously bests the well-educated and erudite monk in an understanding of the *Diamond Sūtra* and the Buddhist concepts of impermanence and non-attachment.

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[20] Ruth Fuller Sasaki, trans., *The Record of Linji*, 73.

Just like the Buddha, who used various skillful means to convert people and help them realize enlightenment, the old cake proprietress in this story and Older Sister-in-law of Pingtian in the preceding narrative each uses the skillful means at her disposal to identify the sticking point blocking the spiritual advancement of her respective soon-to-be recognized eminent monk and instructs him back on the tight track of cultivation.

In her study of depictions of women in Chan literature, Ding-hwa Hsieh suggests that the images of women found in Buddhist literature, such as the old women in the *Lao nüren jing* (Sūtra of Old Women),[21] and in Chinese mythology, such as the Xi Wangmu (Queen Mother of the West), may have served as the basis for the depictions of old women in Chan literature.[22] She also argues that the unexpected defeat of monks in their encounters with nameless old women was probably intended to spur on monks in their Chan training.[23] Expanding upon her excellent study, I suggest another approach to the study of Chan women by examining the parallels between these women and the exemplary women in Confucian biographical literature. In recent studies of Chan literature, there has been increasing attention to the parallels between Confucian or Daoist literature and Chan literature. For example, in his study of Chan encounter dialogues, John McRae suggests that Chan dialogues reverberate with the rhetorical wit and humanistic perspective (or rather, the rejection of all fixed perspectives) personified so exquisitely in the *Zhuangzi*, and the frequent use of the dialogue mode of exposition found in *The Analects* and *Zhuangzi* onward.[24] Albert Welter also notes the possible influence of Confucian literati on the

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[21] *T.* 14, no. 559.
[22] Ding-hwa E. Hsieh, "Images of Women in Ch'an Buddhist Literature of the Sung Period," in *Buddhism in the Sung*, ed. Peter N. and Daniel A. Getz, Jr., Kuroda Institute Studies in East Asian Buddhism 13. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 166-167.
[23] Hsieh, "Images of Women in Ch'an Buddhist Literature," 177.
[24] McRae, *Seeing through Zen,* 84.

composition of encounter dialogues and *gong'an* in the *Jingde chuan deng lu*.[25] Eleven out of the nineteen stories in the *Shan nüren zhuan* under discussion in this chapter are from the *Jingde chuan deng lu*. It is not surprising that these stories share similarities with stories in the biographical accounts of Confucian exemplary women.

Women with superior intellectual capability and extraordinary rhetorical skills, acting as instructors or counselors to rulers or male relatives, can be found in Liu Xiang's *Lie nü zhuan* under the categories of *bian tong* (Eloquent Debaters) and *ren zhi* (Benevolent and Wise). In many cases, these women would make use of their intellectual capabilities and rhetorical skills, usually in some unconventional way, to give sagacious advice to their morally astray male relatives or to rulers, thereby redirecting them to the right track. The unconventional behavior of these women was usually morally justified by the goals they achieved. For example, in Liu Xiang's collection, Zhongli Chun presents herself in front of the king for marriage, which must well have been considered a violation of the socially accepted norms of behavior (see below). However, her story has been widely circulated and praised by Confucian moralists for the motivation behind her actions, namely, her intention to bring the king back on to a morally right track from which he had strayed. I return to the details of this story later. Women like Zhongli Chun were extolled as the transmitters of moral truth or the embodiment of certain moral virtues.

It is noteworthy that these two categories of exemplary women in the *Lie nü zhuan* composed by Liu Xiang in the Han dynasty were absent in the official records of exemplary women collected in local gazetteers and dynastic histories composed or compiled in the Song, Ming and Qing dynasties, most probably as a result of the increasing obsession with women's

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[25] Welter, *Monks, Rulers, and Literati,* 171-172.

chastity and the cult of chaste widows.[26] These types of women however did not disappear. Rather, they find parallels in the enlightened but seemingly unconventional women in Chan *gong'an* stories composed from the Song dynasty onwards. As an instructional text for women since the Han dynasty, the *Lie nü zhuan* has been reprinted and widely circulated among both men and women. In the High Qing period, the *Lie nü zhuan* was imperative reading for educated women. Both women and men readers of Chan *gong'an* stories would no doubt also be familiar with these exemplary women in the *Lie nü zhuan*.[27] There is not enough evidence to prove that the lowborn old women and little girls with exceptional rhetoric skills and superior spiritual achievement in the Chan *gong'an* stories were modeled on the exemplary women of the *Lie nü zhuan,* but the similarities do suggest it was a possible source for the depiction of these Chan women. It is however safe to say that women in the *Lie nü zhuan* paved the way for the acceptance of the antinomian behavior and speech of women in Chan *gong'an* stories.

In the *Lie nü zhuan,* Confucian exemplary women who used whatever convenient means at hand to teach lessons in like fashion to the two Buddhist laywomen—Older Sister-in-law of Pingtian and the cake proprietress—discussed above in the *Shan nüren zhuan* are not unusual. Take the story of the mother of Mencius as another example:

> When Mencius was a young boy, he returned home from school one day. At that time, his mother was weaving and asked him, "How did your studies go?"
>
> Mencius answered, "About the same as usual."
>
> Mencius' mother cut what she was weaving with a knife. [At the sight,] Mencius was frightened and asked his mother why [she had done that].

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[26] Lisa Raphals, *Sharing the Light: Representations of Women and Virtue in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 4.

[27] There have been various editions of Liu Xiang's *Lie nü zhuan*, including illustrated editions aiming at making its stories more accessible for women of little education, but also for commercial reasons. See Katherine Carlitz, "The Social Use of Female Virtue in Late Ming Editions of *Lienü zhuan*," *Late Imperial China* 12.2 (1991): 117-152.

> His mother replied, "Your giving up on your studies is the same as my cutting what I am weaving. A gentleman studies in order to establish his name, and he inquires to broaden his knowledge. In this way, he can have peace at home and avoid harm when he acts. It is the same as those who live on weaving. If a woman gives up weaving, how can she clothe her husband and feed her children? A woman who gives up her job that she relies on for survival is the same as a man who gives up cultivating his morality. Sure a man will become either a thief or a slave.[28]

Confucian moralists often praised Mencius' mother as a combination of a caring mother and stern moral instructress. The Confucian ideal of motherly love lay in the close attention mothers paid to the moral upbringing of their children. A good mother never hesitated to correct her son when he went morally astray. Many Confucian literati in the Qing dynasty would agree that a mother should be the upholder of Confucian moral values and an active transmitter of moral truth in the inner sphere.[29] The two old women in the *Shan nüren zhuan* and the mother of Mencius share some common features. First, they exercise spiritual or moral authority and transmit truth to their sons or young men of their sons' age. The means they employ to lecture these young men are associated with their daily work, such as herding buffalo, selling cakes and weaving. Their spiritual and moral authority does not depend on their erudition, and the moral and religious lessons they teach can be incorporated into their daily lives. Second, the two old Buddhist laywomen and Mencius' mother behave like strict moral and spiritual instructresses who teach their young men in proper and effective ways. Their motherly love or compassion is manifested through their concern for the moral or spiritual cultivation of these young men. This kind of motherly figure stands a contrast to the image of the doting mother who fails to discipline her sons and which eventually leads to the moral degeneration of their children. Confucian

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[28] Liu Xiang, *Gu Lie nü zhuan*, *SBCK* 181.1: 15b-16a.
[29] See Mann, *Precious Records*, 15, 117-120, and Patricia Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 183-187.

moralists often criticized doting mothers, while mothers who turned their motherly love into strict moral education of their children were highly praised.

In the Chinese Buddhist tradition, the relationship between master and disciple is modeled on the secular father-son relationship. Among other things, the disciple carries on his master's dharma lineage.[30] Chan Buddhism is no exception. It is noteworthy, however, that Chan masters, perhaps more than those in any other tradition, are also associated with old women. In Chan literature, Chan masters, who were well known for using various expedient means to help disciples make breakthroughs in their spiritual cultivation, were referred to as masters of great compassion with "the heart of old women." Ding-hwa Hsieh suggests that the image of old women in *gong'an* stories reflects Chan monks' self-perception.[31] According to Hsieh, by comparing themselves to compassionate old women, Chan masters defended their renunciation of the secular world as a way to direct people to enlightenment, rather than an irresponsible escape from their social duties.[32] Chan masters in this sense were like mothers in the Confucian tradition, who served as their son's moral instructress.

I agree with Hsieh's insight on the juxtaposition of the self-perception of Chan masters and these old women, but I would like to suggest that the relationship between these mother-like old women and young monks represents an extension of the mother-son relationship that goes beyond family boundaries and blood ties. In other words, this relationship embodies Buddhist compassion that embraces all sentient beings. The story of Yu Daopo (Old Woman Yu) provides a good example of this view. Yu Daopo was a lowborn old woman, who made a living by selling

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[30] See Morten Schlütter, *How Zen Became Zen: the Dispute over Enlightenment and the Formation of Chan Buddhism in Song-Dynasty China*, Kuroda Institute Studies in East Asian Buddhism 22 (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 55-62.
[31] Hsieh, "Images of Women in Ch'an Buddhist Literature," 172.
[32] Hsieh, "Images of Women in Ch'an Buddhist Literature," 172.

fried rice cakes, and attained awakening upon hearing a beggar sing. The following story tells of a series of conversations she had with several monks who went on to become pillars in the Chan community:

> When Chan master Yuanwu Keqin [1063-1135],[33] went to the home of Old Woman [Yu], she did not go out to greet him, but shouted at him harshly, "You are a little kid. How dare you teach dharma in public?"
>
> Yuanwu replied, "Old woman, I know you now. Don't show off!"
>
> The old woman burst into laughter, and went out to greet him. [From then on,] whenever monks came to her home, she called them "son." If the monks wanted to argue with her, she closed her door [without talking to them].
>
> Chan master Fodeng [Shouxun, 1079-1134] went to her home to test if she had really attained enlightenment. As soon as the old woman saw Fodeng, she called out, "Son! Son!" [refusing to bow to him].
>
> The master retorted, "Where is my father?"
>
> The old woman turned to a pillar on the road and bowed to it.
>
> Fodeng quickly kicked over the pillar and said, "I thought you had something unique to show."
>
> The old woman said, "Son! Son! Come here! Let me cuddle you."
>
> Fodeng left without answering her.
>
> Master An from Deshan went to see her. When the old woman asked him where he was from, the master answered "Deshan."
>
> The old woman exclaimed, "Master Tai of Deshan is my son!"
>
> Master An retorted, "Whose son are you?"
>
> The old woman replied, "Master, your question really makes me want to pee on you." (*Shan nüren zhuan* 1: 15a-16a)

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[33] Yuanwu Keqin (1063-1135), a famous Chan master of the Linji School, is best known for his *Biyan lu* (Blue Cliff Records), which enjoyed and continues to enjoy great popularity among Chan practitioners. *The Blue Cliff Records* have been translated by Thomas Cleary and T. C. Cleary (Boston: Shambala Publications, Inc., 1977).

Compare these stories to the chapter on "Dashizhi pusa nianfo yuan tong zhang (Bodhisattva Mahāsthāmaprāpta on Attaining Enlightenment through Reflecting on Buddha)" in the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* (C: *Shou leng yan jing*), which states, "The Buddha of the ten directions reflects with compassion on sentient beings just like a mother reflecting on her son. If a son leaves his mother, what is the point of a mother's reflection? If a son reflects on his mother while the mother reflects on her son, then the mother and son will not be far away from each other their entire lives. If all sentient beings reflect on the Buddha and invoke the name of the Buddha, they can see the Buddha immediately."[34] In the *Lotus Sūtra*, the Buddha states, "All sentient beings are my children. . . . I will not save only one, but will give them all the Great Vehicle to save them and bring them to nirvāṇa."[35] Against the backdrop of the familial language evoked in these Buddhist texts, it is reasonable that Old Woman Yu calls the monks "son." First, in doing so (and refusing to bow down in respect to one of them while claiming to be the mother of a superior to another) the old woman is reminding them that they are deluded beings who have not yet realized their Buddha nature. Much like the son who leaves his mother, she tries to awaken their Buddha nature. Being enlightened herself, Old Woman Yu was as compassionate as the Buddha and bodhisattvas who vow to save every sentient being in this world. In this respect, her compassion towards all monks whom she encounters is just like the love and care a nurturing mother gives to her children. It is not surprising that she calls the monks "son." When the last monk asks the old woman, "Whose son are you?"—challenging her with a play on her gender, Old Woman Yu rebukes him for his apparent attachment to this dichotomous and discriminatory preconception in a "vulgar" way—"I want to pee on you."

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[34] *Shou leng yan jing*, *T* 19, no. 945: 128a27-128b1.
[35] *T* 9, no. 262: 13c7-8. My thanks to Miriam Levering, who reminded me of this quote.

Similar to the exemplary Confucian mothers who use every means to educate their sons to be morally upright, this old woman helps these monks attain enlightenment using unconventional means. In all three encounters with monks in this story involving Old Woman Yu, she counters youthful arrogance and a sense of superiority on their parts, simply by virtue of the young men's status as monastics. Different from the exemplary Confucian mothers, who apply their motherly wisdom to the moral cultivation of their children or their junior male family members, this old woman crosses the boundary of family to help all people, and monks in particular. The old woman's behavior agrees with Buddhist apologia that Buddhists were not only responsible towards family and society but also the salvation of all sentient beings.

Peng Shaosheng provides a further illustration:

> There are three kinds of children. The lowest rank of people takes their [biological] children as their children; the middle rank takes the wise and worthy as their children; the highest rank is the Buddha who takes all sentient beings as his children. The lowest rank takes [biological] children as their children based on a shared body [genetics]; the middle rank takes the wise and worthy as their children based on a shared mind; the highest rank takes all sentient beings as their children because their mind is the mind of all sentient beings. . . . That is why Yao took Shun as his son; Sun took Yu as his son and Confucius took Yan Hui as his son. . . . The Buddha said to Subhuti, ". . . I make all sentient beings attain enlightenment and enter nirvāṇa. Bodhisattvas who reincarnate in the six realms for *kalpa*s love all sentient beings just as the benevolent father and mother love their children."[36]

Peng Shaosheng articulates in this passage that, because the Buddhist concept of non-duality enables one to transcend the dichotomy of self and other to gain union with all sentient beings, Buddhist compassion goes beyond family boundaries and extends to all sentient beings. In this sense, Peng is arguing, Buddhist morality is superior to secular (Confucian) morality. The old women in the Chan *gong'an* we have been discussing, who use skillful and (usually) unconventional means to correct the misconceptions of monks and induce them to make great

[36] Peng Shaosheng, *Yi xing ju ji* 2: 26a.

strides in their spiritual progress, not only illustrate Chan teachings and affirm the claim of sudden enlightenment[37] but also furnish a strong argument for Buddhism in general, namely, that Buddhist compassion extends to all sentient beings and is not limited to one's biological relatives (or to those deemed wise and worthy). In this sense, the Buddhist fulfills the responsibility required of the Confucian ideal person to cultivate moral virtue, establish order in the family and assist the ruler in managing the country and pacifying the world. In fact, the Buddhist does an even better job than does his or her Confucian counterpart by taking saving all sentient beings as his or her mission.

3.3 REINFORCEMENT OR SUBVERSION OF THE ESTABLISHED SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS ORDER

In addition to stories of old women who act as mothers and teachers to monks in the *Shan nüren zhuan*, Peng includes stories about young girls who understand the Buddhist dharma as well as an eminent Chan monk. Take the little girl named Lu Huaxian as an example. This story is one of the longest narratives in the collection and is adopted from the *Shuokui chan shi yu lu* (Recorded Sayings of Chan Master Shuokui).

> Lu Huaxian was a young girl from Yancheng in the Jiangnan area. Her uncle Ziquan used to seek instruction from Chan master Shuokui [1628-1697] of Shangfang Temple. When Ziquan returned from the temple, he would tell his mother Lingyue Daoren what he had learned from the Chan master. Lingyue Daoren decided to pay a visit to master Shuokui. At that time, the little girl [Lu Huaxian] was only nine years old and she requested to go with her grandmother, but permission was denied. She cried and cried and refused to take any food until her grandmother gave in.

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[37] Hsieh, "Images of Women in Ch'an Buddhist Literature," 177.

> Two years prior to this incident, when seeing her reflection in a mirror, the girl had asked herself: "Because there is a stinking skin bag [my body], there is an image in the mirror. Who would be talking now if there were no such thing as a stinking skin bag?"
>
> When [Lu Huaxian went with] her grandmother to see the Chan master, [her grandmother] relayed her granddaughter's question to him.
>
> After hearing the question, the monk patted the little girl on the head with a smile, and asked her, "Who are you?"
>
> The girl replied, "Who are you?"
>
> The master said, "I am the monk of Shangfang Temple. Who are you, the person talking to me here?"
>
> When the girl raised one finger, her grandmother asked, "If fire burned your finger, what would you raise?"
>
> The girl replied, "If you burn this finger, it is still good enough to raise."
>
> The monk asked her again, "What on earth would you raise?"
>
> The girl beat the monk on the chest three times.
>
> At this moment, master Tianning arrived at Shangfang Temple. Master Shuokui told him what happened. Master Tianning asked the girl, "What did you mean by raising one finger?"
>
> The girl joined her palms and walked two steps away from him.
>
> The monk asked her again, "What did you mean by raising your finger?"
>
> The girl answered, "I have met the monk." The monk was so surprised at the girl's reply. (*Shan nüren zhuan* 2: 24b-27a)

This exchange between the young girl and the two monks is about the nature of the self and is an allusion to *yi zhi chan* or one finger Chan and refers to the way the ninth-century Chan monk Juzhi responded to questions asked of him. Whatever people asked him he would raise one finger. Many people were awakened after they saw the master raise one finger in response to their questions. A young novice heard about this and began to imitate Juzhi and answer all questions by lifting one finger. One day, when Juzhi asked the novice, "Have you attained Buddhahood?"

The monk said, "Yes." Juzhi asked him, "What is Buddha?" As soon as the novice raised his finger, the master cut it off. The novice cried out in pain and ran away. Juzhi stopped him, asking, "What is Buddha?" The novice habitually raised his finger as before, but the finger was gone. He suddenly attained enlightenment.[38]

By raising one finger, Juzhi implied that the nature of all sentient beings in the phenomenal world is one—emptiness. To realize universal oneness is to be liberated from a dichotomous view of things in the world and see the true nature of one's existence. According to Chan teachings, any conceptualization, including language, will lead to discrimination and dichotomous thought, which cannot exhaust universal truth. Therefore when a Chan master such as Juzhi uses the gesture of a raised finger, it becomes an expedient means pointing at the truth. While the finger may convey truth, the finger is not truth itself. As the Chan saying goes, "Don't mistake your finger for the moon." In this sense, with or without lifting one's finger, the true nature is what it is and remains the same. Coming to that realization is how the young novice under Juzhi's tutelage attained enlightenment when he lost the finger he had used to imitate the master. The encounter dialogue between the young girl and the monks is also about the nature of self and is an allusion to Juzhi's one finger Chan. By raising her finger, the young girl's response in fact answers the monk's question about self-nature, namely, that all things share the same nature, which is identical to the Buddha nature. The girl's final reply to the monks' repeated question shows that she understood the nature of the self. Her declaration, "I have met the monk," can literarily mean the monk who is talking to her, but, in line with one finger Chan, it also refers to her own self-nature that is identical to the nature of the Buddha.

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[38] *Wu men guan* (Gateless Barrier), *T* 48, no. 2005: 293b11-14.

The image of an enlightened girl is not rare in Buddhist scriptures. The most famous example is the dragon girl in the *Lotus Sūtra*, who challenges the Buddha's disciple Śāriputra and attains enlightenment upon presenting a gem to the Buddha.[39] In the story about Lu Huaxian above, our young girl also challenges religious authority as represented by the Chan master Shuokui. At first, the Chan master does not take her seriously as a spiritual counterpart, but only treats her as a smart kid or precocious child, patting her on the head. But when he begins to communicate with her through gestures and dialogue, the young girl displays no inferiority to the monk in her understanding of Buddhist doctrine and impresses him with her wisdom. In her encounter dialogues with the Chan masters, the questions and answers put forward by the girl seem to deviate from Buddhist norms of behavior. The respect a lay Buddhist (in this case, a junior) owes to a senior Buddhist monk is not applied here, any more than it did in reverse in our story of Old Woman Yu who failed to appropriately respect a young monastic. Irrespective of these seeming deviations (a sign of the truly enlightened in Chan), Lu Huaxian and Old Woman Yu display their understanding of the Buddhist dharma through their unconventional speech and behavior.

In fact, the number of stories about junior and inferior persons who equal or best seniors and superiors in spiritual achievement in Chan *gong'an* stories are not rare. Those in inferior or subordinate positions in the secular and religious hierarchy, such our young girl and lowborn and uneducated old woman, often display superior understanding of the Buddhist doctrines and lecture monks accordingly. In stories such as these, the religious order is reversed. Monks are no longer the authority; the supposedly inferior person becomes the superior in terms of her spiritual cultivation. In the case of Lu Huaxian, the young girl challenges the authority of the monks and

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[39] *T* 9, no. 262: 35c12-19.

demonstrates her equal understanding of Buddhist doctrines. Her seemingly transgressive behavior in itself is the representation of Buddhist non-duality, non-discrimination and the shared Buddha nature of all sentient beings. At the same time, her behavior is justified by the Buddhist truth she expresses through unconventional behavior. Thus, it serves the purpose of expressing the ultimate truth of Buddhism. Such transgressions are acceptable and not subversive.

Lu Huaxian also challenges secular authority represented by her father and uncles. When one of her uncles named Ziquan died, her younger uncle Ziyu was very sad and wept at the death of his older brother. The girl laughed when she saw her uncle crying:

> Ziyu criticized her, "Why do you laugh?"
>
> The girl responded with a question, "Why do you cry?"
>
> Ziyu did not answer, but could not help crying.
>
> The girl said, "Men do not shed tears easily."
>
> Ziyu answered, "Because [there is not much that is] sad enough to make them cry."
>
> The girl beat her chest with both hands, and sighed, "Oh Heaven! Heaven!"
>
> Her father was a Confucian and had little faith in Buddhism. Once, when he was talking about the *Zhongyong* [Doctrine of the Mean] with his students, this daughter asked him, "Where is the Dao [the Way]? What is our true nature?"
>
> The father replied, "The Dao is in the five cardinal relationships. One is born with the five cardinal relationships. Since the five relationships are not imposed on us by outside forces, they are our true nature. If one fails to live up to the five relationships, it harms our true nature. This is heterodoxy."
>
> The girl asked, "If what you say is true, why it is said that people should not be separated from the Dao for a moment? If there is a Dao that people can separate from for a while, it is not the true Dao. Is it really true that the subject cannot be without the ruler for a moment, or the son cannot be without his father for a moment? If one can, then [the five cardinal relationships] are not the true Dao."
>
> The father could not answer.

> The girl said, "If you want to seek the Dao, you should seek it in what you cannot be separated from. What on earth is it?" (*Shan nüren zhuan* 2: 24b-27a)

Lu Huaxian's conversations with her uncle and father were also transgressions of the social order defined by Confucianism. She disapproves of her uncle's attachment and ignorance of the true nature of existence when the latter cries at the death of his younger brother. She challenges her father on his understanding of the Dao. These acts are obviously reversals of the traditional social order, but her actions, or so Peng Shaosheng suggests by including her story in the *Shan nüren zhuan*, are justified by her goal of saving both her uncle and father in the Buddhist sense. For Peng, each is a teachable (and therefore filial) moment. The young girl takes the opportunity of her uncle's death to teach his younger brother about the non-duality of birth and death. She corrects her father's misconception of the Confucian understanding of the Dao and preaches the Buddhist truth (Dao) to him, which is neither internal nor external but is all-pervasive. Her conversation with her father expresses a two-fold truth: the five cardinal relationships are not the real Dao, and the Dao should be sought through Buddhism. In this sense, Buddhism can be seen as superior to Confucianism since the five cardinal relationships the latter defines does not embody the real Dao from which we cannot be separated.

Wise young girls who challenged established authority by demonstrating a better understanding of Confucian truth with exceptional rhetorical skills are also not uncommon in the *Lie nü zhuan*. The story about a girl called Ti Ying is a good example of this type of girl. Ti Ying's father was accused of a crime and was about to be sentenced to death. To save her father, Ti Ying wrote an appeal to the king on behalf of her father. In her appeal, she argued:

> When my father served in [the state of] Qi, all the people said that he was honest and fair. Now he has been tried by the law and sentenced to death. I feel regret that the dead cannot come back to life, and those who are sentenced to death cannot find a way to reform themselves even though they desire to do so. Thus, I beg to become a palace

> servant to receive punishment in place of my father so that he may have a chance to reform himself.[40]

Convinced by her words, the king set her father free. It is obvious that Ti Ying challenged the secular authority by challenging the king's decision with her eloquence and intelligence. Just as the young girl's behavior and speech in the *Shan nüren zhuan* were acceptable due to the truth they revealed, Ti Ying's seemingly subversive act of confronting the social authority too was justified by her remonstrating with the king to be benevolent towards her father and her demonstration of filial piety in offering to serve out a punishment in order to spare his father's life and give him an opportunity to reform.

Ti Ying's story is not the only one about wise and eloquent girls who challenged or transgressed the established boundaries of social status and gender roles to achieve a morally justified goal. A number of women under the categories of Eloquent Speakers and The Benevolent and Wise in the *Lie nü zhuan* compiled by Liu Xiang acted in ways deviant to the Confucian behavior codes for women. As Lisa Raphals points out, these women "act with considerable independence and use skills that, if anything, are 'moralized' by their goals that drive them."[41] In other words, the unconventional behavior and speech of these women were justified by the ends they aimed to achieve, such as preserving the welfare of the country or bringing about the realization of a certain virtue valued highly by Confucian moralists.

One famous example is Zhongli Chun, an ugly and lowborn woman who presented herself in front of the king of Qi and proposed marriage to him in the belief that her extraordinary talent would help the king to rule the country well. The following is a detailed description of her conversation with the king:

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[40] Lix Xiang, *Lie nü zhuan*, 6: 30b-31a.
[41] Raphals, *Sharing the Light*, 27.

> [When Zhongli Chun was presented at the court,] she did not say anything else, but opened her eyes wide, gnashed her teeth, slapped her knees, and declared, "Dangerous! Dangerous!" She repeated this four times.
>
> The king said, "Please explain [what you mean] in detail."
>
> Zhongli Chun said, "There is the malicious Qin to the west of your kingdom, and the powerful Chu to the south. Outside of this state, you have problems with these two states; within those states, there are evil officials. The common people cannot rely on you. You are forty years old but have not named your successor. You neglect your sons and pay too much attention to your consorts. You favor those who you like but ignore those whom you can count on. When you pass away, the country will be unsettled. This is the first danger. The second danger is that your Jian Terrace is covered with five layers of gold, decorated with jade, gems and pearls. People are full of resentment towards this. The third danger is that the sages have withdrawn to the mountains and forests, while the flatterers serve you. Those who are evil and pretentious have established themselves in the government. Those who want to admonish you cannot get access to you. . . . The fourth danger is that you indulge yourself in drink day and night and enjoy the company of female musicians and actresses, laughing the whole day without observing the rites of a duke or maintaining the country with good statecraft. Thus I said, 'Dangerous! Dangerous!'"
>
> The king sighed, "I feel very sad that I have heard these words only from you." Then the king dismantled his Jian Terrace, dismissed the performers and removed the flatterers from high positions. With the money saved through these measures, he recruited more soldiers to reinforce the borders. He appointed righteous and outspoken people from the lower classes to important positions in his government. The king established his heir, honored the mother of the crown prince and granted the title of queen to Zhongli Chun. Qi later became a powerful country due to the talent of the ugly woman Zhongli Chun."[42]

Zhongli Chun's behavior during her audience with the king is as antinomian as that of the Chan women we have encountered. That she presented herself in front of the king to propose marriage in the first place ostensibly violated the Confucian propriety of marriage, which dictates that a woman should not initiate a marriage for herself without the permission of her parents and the proper rites. Her noble intention to help the king to put the country in order and the final results she achieved however made her deviant behavior not only acceptable but also praiseworthy to Confucian moralists.

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[42] Liu Xiang, *Gu Lie nü zhuan*, *SBCK* 181.6: 20a-20b.

The parallels between the Chan old women stories and those of Confucian exemplary women lie in their antinomian behavior and speech and the goals they achieve through them. In most cases, these women either lecture monks or male relatives on the Buddhist dharma to help them advance in spiritual cultivation or, in the Confucian case, admonish male rulers or male relatives with Confucian moral truth to help them along that version of the morally correct track. Therefore, the seemingly unconventional or subversive behavior of these women was not seen to jeopardize the established religious and secular authority, but rather to reinforce and promote the doctrines and values of each tradition.

The nineteen stories about Chan women in the *Shan nüren zhuan* comprise a small percentage of the one hundred forty-eight exemplary Buddhist laywomen in Peng's collection. Nevertheless, Peng was well aware of the possible misuse of these stories by Buddhist practitioners, who may not have understood the special circumstances that allowed for these breaches in decorum, and the potential for attacks from opponents as a result of that misuse. As noted above, his worries are explicitly expressed in his preface, in which he warns his audience that the antinomian behavior and speech of these Chan women in particular are manifestations of the enlightened mind, not for imitation or slander by deluded people. Rather, Peng reminds his readers, one should seek the truth behind such unconventional behavior and speech.

It is also noteworthy that these old Chan women and young girls in the *Shan nüren zhuan* and women like Zhongli Chun in the *Lie nü zhuan* were sexually unattractive, sexually no longer active or sexually immature. In traditional Chinese society, the segregation of the sexes is meant to reduce the direct communication between (sexually mature and appealing) women and men to prevent the sexual misconduct that endangered familial and social stability. Segregation of the sexes was most strictly applied to women of marriageable and reproductive age among the elite

class. Patricia Ebrey aptly points out that the elite class differentiated itself from lower class by keeping their women invisible to the public.[43] In the nineteen Chan stories in the *Shan nüren zhuan*, there were no adult women from the elite class who behaved in like antinomian fashion to that of the old women. This gives rise to the questions: When women were talented and beautiful, how were their talents accepted? In what way could their beauty not pose a threat to the secular and religious order? And how could their talents and beauty be transformed or reinterpreted to help promote secular and religious values?

3.4 LITERARY TALENT AND ENLIGHTENMENT

Ye Xiaoluan's (1614-1632) story provides us with an example of how Peng Shaosheng solved the possible contradiction between beautiful women's talents and the established social and religious orders. He reorients her potentially subversive talent to a sacred goal. I mentioned in the introduction that this narrative is unusual in that it does not record the life of this girl poet as biographies (by definition) typically do, but focuses instead on her afterlife conversion to Buddhism. To expand upon her story here, Ye Xiaoluan, a famous girl poet in the late Ming dynasty, was born to a literati family in Wujiang in the Jiangnan area. Her mother Shen Yixiu (1590-1635), father Ye Shaoyuan (1589-1648), and sister Ye Wanwan (1610-1632) were all famous among the literati for their literary talent. Xiaoluan died several days before her wedding.[44] After her death, anthologies of her poems and essays written in her memory by her family were published and widely circulated. These writings by her family members are

[43] Ebrey, *Inner Quarters*, 25.
[44] For details of Ye Xiaoluan's family, life and literary work see Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 166-169, 187-218.

excellent sources of information about Ye Xiaoluan's life. Peng Shaosheng however chooses not to adopt these sources and compile a biographical account of her in this life in the *Shan nüren zhuan*. Instead, he gives a detailed account of her afterlife confession and ordination.

Peng bases his account on the *Wu meng tang ji* (Collection from the Meridian Dream Hall) by Ye Shaoyuan, in which he describes the afterlife of his daughter revealed by planchette.[45] The following is that story about Ye Xiaoluan adopted by Peng:

> Xiaoluan was betrothed to a Mr. Zhang at the age of seventeen. She fell ill several days before her wedding. At the last moment [of death], she recited the name of the Buddha. When people coffined her body seven days after her death, they found that it was still soft and pliable. In the fifth year of Chongzhen era [1633], a planchette master named Le An, who was famous in the Wu area, claimed [to be able to request the spirit of] a disciple of the Tiantai master Zhiyi [538-597] to descend into this world. . . . The Tiantai master preached the method of calming and contemplation through planchette. Ye Shaoyuan invited the planchette master to his home to ask about his daughter's whereabouts. The master said, "[In a previous life,] she was called Hanhuang and was a library assistant in the Moon Palace [*Yue fu*]."
>
> The father asked, "Where is she now?"
>
> The master answered, "In the Goushan Immortal Realm [*Goushan xian fu*]. . . ."
>
> The father asked, "Could you let her come here?"
>
> At first, the master refused. With the repeated requests [of the father], he agreed. When Xiaoluan arrived, her father asked about her present state.
>
> Xiaoluan answered, "Bodhisattvas have transformed bodies, while sentient beings exist in transmigration. I am still in the state of transmigration, but I am happy without experiencing any suffering."
>
> Hearing her words, the master interrupted her and said, "Ignorance gives rise to karmic action; karmic action gives rise to consciousness; consciousness gives rise to name and form; name and form give rise to the six sense organs, the six sense organs give rise to

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[45] Planchette use was prohibited by the Qing government for its potentially subversive function. See *Da qing hui dian shi li* 766 (Reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1991), 9: 433-494, and Daniel Overmyer, *The Flying Phoenix* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 44-45. Eminent monks such as Zhuhong also criticized it. See Chün-Fang Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China,* 186. Despite this ban and criticism, it remained popular among the literati in the Jiangnan area. Peng Shaosheng and his great-grandfather commissioned or participated in planchette. Peng even wrote an essay to defend this practice. See chapter five for details.

contact; contact gives rise to sensations; sensations give rise to craving; craving gives rise to attachment; attachment gives rise to becoming; becoming gives rise to birth; birth gives rise to old age, death and all kinds of suffering. Please listen to me carefully, and I will give you a detailed explanation."[46]

The master paused for a while and said, "The first priority is to cut off one's craving."

After the master's sermon, Xiaoluan composed a poem. . . . and presented it to the master, saying, "I wish to accept the Buddhist precepts from you rather than go back to the Realm of the Immortals."

Before her ordination, the master asked her to confess her sins.

The master asked, "Have you committed [an act of] killing?"

Xiaoluan answered, "Yes."

The master asked, "How?"

[Xiaoluan] answered, "[I] ordered [my maid] Xiaoyu to kill a pest among the flowers/ [I] injured a butterfly with my silk handkerchief."

The master asked, "Have you committed [an act of] stealing?"

"Yes," she replied. "[I appreciated] a tree with tender green leaves, but didn't know who the owner was/ I enjoyed the pure music of a flute, but I do not know who the flutist was."

[Zhiyi] asked, Have you ever committed [an act of] sexual misconduct?"

"Yes," [Xiaolun] answered. "At night, peeking at my image, [I was proud of my] my curved eyebrows/ in the spring, embroidering a pair of birds on a dress, [I envied] their attachment to each other."

[The master] asked, "Have you committed [an act of] false speech?"

"Yes," she confessed. I claimed I had been a joyful deva in a previous life/ I falsely declared I was Sarasvatī in this life."[47]

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[46] The list recited here is the Buddhist concept of dependent origination, namely, the twelve linked chain of causation (C: *shi er yin yuan or shi er yuan qi*, Skt: *pratītyasamutpāda*): ignorance (*wu ming*, *avidyā*), karmic action (*xing*, *saṃskāra*), consciousness (*shi*, *vijñāna*), name and form (*xing se*, *nāma-rūpa*), six sense organs (*liu ru*, *ṣaḍāyatana*), contact (*chu*; *sparśa*), sensation (*shou*, *vedanā*), craving (*ai*, *tṛṣṇā*), attachment (*qu*, *upādāna*), becoming (*you*, *bhava*), birth (*sheng*, *jāti*), old age and death (*lao si*, *jarā-maraṇa*).

[47] For a study on Sarasvatī's transformation from the Indian riverine goddess of knowledge and music to the Buddhist defender of the dharma see Catherine Ludvik, *Sarasvatī: Riverine Goddess of Knowledge: from the*

[The master] asked, "Have you committed [an act of] embellished speech?"

"Yes," she replied. "Women poets' words are as graceful as aromatic tea/ Girl poets' verses are as pure and delicate as carved ice."

[The master] asked, "Have you ever committed the sin of divisive speech?"

"Yes," she confessed. "Gazing at the moon, [I] intended to compose more happy or sad verses/ Holding a flower in hand, [I] evaluated long or short verses." . . .

. . . Thereupon the master said, "Well, [because all these 'confessions' are lines taken from your poems], what you have [actually] committed is [the sin of] embellished speech that may arouse other's erotic desires." He then gave her the dharma name Zhiduan.

Xiaoluan asked, "What does [the character] '*zhi*' [in Zhiduan] stand for?"

The master replied, "'*Zhi*' is perfect knowledge, knowledge of the cause of all phenomena, knowledge of the empty nature of all things, and knowledge of all aspects of things and their relationship to the past, present and future."

Xiaoluan asked, "What about [the character] '*duan*'?"

The master explained, "['*Duan*' means] the cutting off of delusion from imperfect perceptions, the cutting off of delusion from the various duties of saving sentient beings, the cutting off of delusion from primal ignorance. One should cultivate the three kinds of *zhi* (knowledge), and cut off the three kinds of *huo* (delusion). The bodhisattvas have achieved these two kinds of virtues: virtue of the three kinds of knowledge and virtue of the three kinds of excision."

Xiaoluan said, "Bodhisattvas gain because they don't gain intentionally. In this sense, people should cut off [delusion] by not cutting off [delusion] intentionally." The master was surprised by her words, and said, "I cannot treat you as an immortal." . . .

. . . Xiaoluan's mother died in the fall of the same year. In the fourth month of the next year, Shaoyuan again asked the master to tell him about the afterlife of his wife. The master brought [the spirits of] his wife, Xiaoluan and [his deceased older daughter] Wanwan to Ye Shaoyuan. At that moment, the master also created a lecture hall called the Wu ye tang in which to save women with good roots. In it, the mother [Shaoyuan's wife] and her daughters practiced Pure Land Buddhism under the instruction of the master. . . .

Manuscript-carrying Vīṇā-player to the Weapon-wielding Defender of the Dharma, Brill's Indological Series 27 (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

> . . . When Shaoyuan asked Xiaoluan if she continued to compose poems in her afterlife, she replied, "Everything in the human world is transitory. All the illusions created by one's mind extinguish like a flint fire and water bubble." She finally urged her father, "Father, you should act without the slightest hesitation to remove all attachments. Since the emotional seed and sentimental bud are the major cause of suffering in the eight hells, you will immediately arrive in the pure and clear realm as soon as you cut off all attachments." (*Shan nüren zhuan* 2: 18a-20b)

Peng Shaosheng's version of Ye Xiaoluan's story in the *Shan nüren zhuan* is mainly adopted from Ye Shaoyuan's *Wu meng tang ji*. The confessions of Xiaoluan at her ordination are recorded verbatim from Ye Shaoyuan's account, but a portion of his story was excluded from Peng's version. The following is the omitted section taken from Ye Shaoyuan's account.

> I [Ye Shaoyuan] asked, "Where is Xiaoluan?"
>
> [The spirit of] the master answered, "In the Goushan Immortal Palace. . . . "
>
> "What is her name?"
>
> [The master replied,] "Hanhuang. . . ."
>
> . . . I asked, "What predestined tie did she have with her fiancé Mr. Zhang?"
>
> [Answer,] "They met once in their previous lives. In his previous life, this Mr. Zhang was born to the Zhengs, a prominent family of central Zhejiang province. In his previous life as a Zheng, he was a disciple of a Buddhist patriarch. . . . When he was Mr. Zheng, he was very talented and boasted of having compiled the *Yujing nüshi* (Record of Female Immortals in Yujing Mountain). The immortal Hanhuang happened to hear his words and appeared in the garden outside of his study. The young man was stunned by her beauty and unaware that she was an immortal. Mr. Zhang thus established a karmic tie with Xiaoluan due to his unfulfilled wish in his previous life to see her again. [This karmic tie] brought him to her in this life."
>
> I asked, "Since they have a karmic tie, why didn't they get married [in this life]?"
>
> The master replied, "Hanhuang regretted deeply appearing before the young scholar, smiling at his crazy words. For this reason, she definitely did not want to stay in the human world to have that shameful relationship with him to pollute her. However, her superior knew of the visit and blamed her, so she was forced to come [again] to this world. Repenting for her behavior as much as she did, she came to this world but was not willing to marry [Mr. Zhang]."[48]

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[48] Ye Shaoyuan, *Wu meng tang ji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1998), 520.

The interpretation of the untimely death of Ye Xiaoluan before her wedding day from the vantage point of karmic ties reveals a touch of romance and adds an erotic tone to her father's memoir. It fits into the notion of companionate love between a man and woman popular in Ming novels, thereby leaving space for fantasy in what has been called the cult of *qing* (emotions).[49] But from a Buddhist perspective, romantic attachment between a man and woman is an impediment to liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Moreover, such an attachment as well as a girl immortal appearing in front of a young man were, for Peng, violations of the behavior code for women as discussed in the previous chapter. Since women in the *Shan nüren zhuan* are examples for others to follow, it was reasonable for Peng to omit these passages based on these two factors. He included Ye Xiaoluan's story for a different reason than such literati as Yuan Mei might have done. These literati often recounted her story in admiration of her literary talent and the romantic fantasy of her relationship and her fiancé, to which I later turn.

In the preface to the *Shan nüren zhuan*, Peng provides a guide on how to read Ye Xiaoluan's story.

> Ye Xiaoluan's story appears to be close to a strange tale, but the truth it reveals is eternal. There is nothing to doubt. Furthermore, the fact that she chose to become a Buddhist by giving up her [Daoist] immortal state indicates exceptional wisdom. Xiaoluan's repentance at her ordination was sincere. If we dismiss her confessions as the mere erotic and exotic words of a beauty, we lose the essence [of her story]. She saved not only herself, but also others. Her statement that cutting off one's craving is the essence of one's salvation was really a heroic insight. Those who aspire to transcend *saṃsāra* [the cycle of birth and death] should pay close attention to this." (*Shan nüren zhuan* 1: iiib)

Both Peng's intention in including this story and his concern over its possible misinterpretation are explicitly expressed in this passage in his preface. In fact, he remarks that Xiaoluan's conversion to Buddhism after death appeared strange and incredible in the eyes of many

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[49] Ko, *Teachers of Inner Chambers*, 91-93.

Confucian literati, but that the Buddhist truth conveyed by the story qualified it for inclusion in his collection. Peng Shaosheng held the view that the authenticity of biographies lay in the ultimate truth they illustrated, not in the details of the life of its hero. Indeed, Peng Shaosheng was not the only person to hold this view. Most Confucian biographers shared the same view.[50] On the other hand, since the beauty of Ye Xiaoluan, her poems, and her relationship with her fiancé aroused romantic and erotic fantasy among those who read about her, Peng felt compelled to warn his audience not to take her story as emotional and romantic fiction but rather to regard it seriously and pay attention to the truth revealed in her story.

Turning to the story itself, there are several motifs that serve Peng Shaosheng's goal in compiling the *Shan nüren zhuan*. First, Ye Xiaoluan forfeits her life in the Daoist immortal realm for a Buddhist life, aspiring for rebirth in the Pure Land upon hearing the master's sermon. These acts imply that Buddhism was superior to Daoism because to be a Daoist immortal does not mean one can gain final liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Her life story highlights that only Buddhism can bring people to the final liberation from suffering.

Second, the story reveals Peng's attitude towards women's talent in literary writing and the promotion of Buddhist truth. Peng's verbatim quote of questions and answers between the master and Xiaoluan is worthy of our attention. In fact, the sins to which Xiaoluan confesses were not really committed by her, but rather were verses from her poems. According to the judgment of the master, her misconduct only amounted to embellished speech. Peng's citing Xiaoluan's poetry verses is not due to his admiration of her literary talent, but rather for the "sincerity" of her repentance, her keen discernment of the cause of her suffering and the way to end it. Her confessions also remind Peng's audience that indulgence in sensual pleasures, even in

[50] Hinsch, "The Genre of Women's Biographies," 107.

the literary elegance of emotional expression, can obstruct one's awakening and lead to transmigration in *saṃsāra*.

It is well known that literary talent in poetry writing was highly appreciated among Chinese intellectuals. Composing elegant poems was a necessary hobby and a mark of one's literatus status. However, literary creation as an expression of one's emotion, especially erotic passion, was not encouraged among either Buddhist men or women. The story of the famed Song dynasty artist and calligrapher Huang Tingjian (1045-1105) in the *Jushi zhuan* (Biographies of Buddhist Laymen), also compiled by Peng Shaosheng, is a good example for illustrating why literary works of romantic emotion between men and women were not accepted by the Buddhist community.

> Huang Luzhi,[51] whose given name was Tingjian, was a native of Fenning in Jiangxi province. As he used to enjoy visiting the Shangu Temple in Qianshan in Wan [Anhui], he called himself Shangu Daoren. In the Zhiping era [1064-1068], he passed the metropolitan civil service exam. Huang liked composing amorous and erotic poems. Once, the Chan master Faxiu [1027-1090][52] shouted a question at him, "Aren't you afraid that you will fall into hell because you compose so many erotic poems that arouse people's desires?" Huang was suddenly awakened by this question. He thanked the master and repented for his misdeeds. From then on, he was diligent in his Buddhist cultivation.[53]

Huang Tingjian was not a rare case among the literati. Wang Nianfeng (1755-1817),[54] who was in correspondence with Peng, held the view that poems were the emotional expressions of talented men and beautiful women, in other words, that writing poems had nothing to do with moral and Buddhist cultivation.[55] Peng refuted this idea, "If [poems were about the emotions of

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[51] Luzhi is Huang Tingjian's courtesy name.
[52] Faxiu is also known as Fayun Faxiu and FayunYuantong, an eminent Chan master. He had close relationships with such famous Song artists as Huang Tingjian and Li Gonglin. See An-yi Pan, *Painting Faith: Li Gonglin and Northern Song Buddhist Culture,* Sinica Leidensia 77 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 112-113.
[53] Peng Shaosheng, *Jushi zhuan*, *XZJ* 149: 890a17-b2.
[54] Wang Qisun (courtesy name: Nianfeng) was a native of Changzhou. He was a Juren degree holder and famous for his literary talent.
[55] Peng, *Yi xing ju ji* 4: 23a.

talented men and beautiful women,] Confucius would not have praised the "Chi xiao" [The Owl] and "Zhengmin" [The Mass][56] in the *Shi jing* (Book of Poetry) as [literary works] expressing the Dao."[57] It is apparent that Peng did not oppose literary writing as a vehicle of the Dao or of universal truth, but he did not accept poems as only expressions of the sentiments of talented men and beautiful women. He cites Ye Xiaoluan again as an example to illustrate this view:

> The poems written by beautiful women and talented men to express their emotions are just like silkworms that bind themselves to the silk they produce. These silkworms finally kill themselves by their own silk. . . . It is just as the sūtra states, "Too much attachment and too little reflection [on the true nature of existence], in the end, lead to transmigration. . . ."[58] Ye Xiaoluan said, "Emotional seeds and sentimental buds are the major cause of suffering in the hells. You will immediately arrive at the pure and clear world as soon as you cut off attachments." If even a weak girl like Ye Xiaoluan has such insight, isn't it shameful that men do not realize this?[59]

Peng Shaosheng's repeated remarks concerning Ye Xiaoluan address the issue of literary writing and women's talent. Through Ye Xiaoluan's repentance over her indulgence in composing elegant and sentimental poems, Peng Shaosheng cautions literati who indulge in the pleasure of composing sentimental and erotic poems that writing such poems are a violation of the Buddhist precepts because they arouse or increase attachment and thereby obstruct the way to enlightenment. But what makes Ye Xiaoluan's story particularly instrumental for Peng's proselytizing purposes are her keen discernment of the cause of suffering, her resolution to remove attachment, and her final remonstrance to her father urging him to cut off his attachments caused by ignorance so that he could attain real and final liberation. Women's talent, in Peng Shaosheng's view, should contribute to the realization of a women's enlightenment and help

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[56] "Chi xiao" expresses the sadness, despair and anger of oppressed commoners. "Chi xiao," in *Shijing yi zhu*, annotated by Zhou Zhenfu (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 2002), 218. "Zhengmin" praises the virtuous ruler and describes an ideal country under the leadership of talented and moral officials. "Zhengmin," in *Shijing yi zhu*, 475.
[57] Peng, *Yi xing ju ji* 4: 23a.
[58] *Shou leng yan jing*, *T* 19, no. 945: 143b24.
[59] Peng, *Yi xing ju ji* 4: 23a-23b.

others (especially men) to attain their own enlightenment. In Peng's words, which parrot the bodhisattva vow, one should put one's talents to work to "save oneself and save others" (*Shan nüren zhuan* 1: iiib).

In his comments about Ye Xiaoluan, we can see gendered discourse at play again. Peng Shaosheng again directs his message to his male audience. If even the slender girl poet, supposedly inferior to a male, could realize enlightenment and urge her father to cut off attachments to aspire for his own liberation from *saṃsāra*, there is no reason for male literati to cling to the causes of suffering. Her confession serves as an admonition to those who still indulged in emotional and embellished writing and mistook this kind of writing for lifelong enjoyment. Such behavior, Peng believed, stemmed from ignorance and was a cause of suffering. The account of the afterlife conversion of Ye Xiaoluan accompanied by this gendered rhetoric serves as a stimulus for men to realize the cause of their suffering and attain final liberation.

In this sense, Peng's choice of Xiaoluan's story was not made out of admiration of her poetic talent or her beauty as many of his contemporaries such as Yuan Mei would have it. Yuan also compiled a shorter account of the life of Ye Xiaoluan, but the connotation of Yuan's story is totally different.

> Gu Jiansha, a native of Yongdong, once dreamed of a woman dressed in palace style studying in Banmei Tang [Plum Flower Mate Hall]. [In his dream,] the woman said to him, "I am the lady-in-waiting in Moon Palace, and I have a karmic tie with you. Now I am assigned to send books to the South Sea [Guangdong]; you should come with me." Gu awoke from his dream, but he could not figure out what it meant. Later, when he was assigned to a position in Guangdong, he happened to receive a portrait of Xiaoluan at a book market. It turned out to be the woman in his dream. He asked Qian Fangbo to write a poem about this portrait. . . .[60]

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[60] Qian Fangbo (Qian Qi; courtesy name: Yusha, 1709-1790) was a Jinshi degree holder and a friend of Yuan Mei. Yuan Mei wrote an epitaph for him. See Li Huan, *Guo chao qi xian lei zheng chu bian* 178 (Reprint, Taibei: Wenhai chu ban she, 1966), 11: 6574.

> . . . Xiaoluan was a native of Guangdong. She became a Buddhist novice at age of fifteen when she received the precepts from Master Yuelang. According to Buddhist law, one must confess her sins before accepting the Buddhist precepts.
>
> The Master asked her, "Have you ever committed [an act of] sexual misconduct?" To which Xiaoluan replied, "I like singing 'Qiu huang qu' (A Male Phoenix Courts a Female Phoenix), and peeking at the picture 'Chu yu tu' [Imperial Concubine Yang Leaves the Bath]."
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> The master then asked, "Have you committed [an act of] divisive speech?" [Xiaoluan] confessed, "Disliking dirt polluting [my room], I scolded the swallows; regretting the withering flowers, I cursed the east wind."
>
> "Have you committed [at act of] killing?" [Xiaoluan] replied, "I once ordered my maid to kill a flower pest; I happened to hurt a butterfly with my silk handkerchief."[61]

Several points in Yuan Mei's narrative are worth our attention. First, he includes incorrect biographical information. Xiaoluan was not a native of Guangdong, but of Wujiang in Jiangsu province. Secondly, Xiaoluan was not ordained as a nun when she was alive. Also, Yuan's version of Xiaoluan's confessions has strong erotic connotations. The song Xiaoluan liked singing is associated with a well known love story between Zhuo Wenjun, a talented and beautiful woman, and Sima Xiangru, a famous male poet of the Han dynasty. Sima Xiangru played the song "A Male Phoenix Courts a Female Phoenix" to express his love to Zhuo Wenjun. The song moved Wenjun, and the two eloped without the approval of the young woman's parents, a violation of Confucian social norms of any time.[62] The subject of the painting Xiaoluan is said to appreciate is of the notorious Yang Yuhuan (719-756), the favorite imperial consort of the Tang emperor Xuanzong (685-762). Several poets recount the love between Yang and Emperor Xuanzong, but Confucian historians often blame her for being the

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[61] Yuan Mei, *Sui yuan shi hua, YQJ* 3: 177-178.
[62] Sima Qian, *Shi ji* 117 (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1973), 9: 3000-3001.

major cause of the chaos that occurred in the mid-eighth-century Tang.[63] Third, the young man's dream is a later addition to the story of Ye Xiaolun and is not found in the memoir of her father. In fact, it bears similarities to the famous drama *Mu dan ting* (The Peony Pavilion) by Tang Xianzu (1550-1616), which was first performed in 1598. This drama, which is set in the final days of the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279), was popular in the Ming and Qing and gave rise to the cult of *qing* (emotions or passion between man and woman) in the Ming dynasty.[64] In it, Du Liniang, the sixteen-year-old daughter of an important official, Du Bao, dreams of a young man and falls in love with him. Being lovesick for this young man, she falls ill, leaving a self-portrait behind before she dies. The young man in the dream turns out to be a real person named Liu Mengmei, who happens to see the portrait and falls in love with the girl in it. The deep love between the two young people in different worlds finally brings them together with the resurrection of Du Liniang.[65]

None of the characters referred to in Xiaoluan's repentance recounted in Yuan Mei's rendition of her story were morally perfect, but controversial in their time. The literary works associated with these figures were not recommended for women, and these characters were not examples for women to follow in the eyes of the Confucian moralists in the High Qing.[66]

Yuan Mei includes Ye Xiaoluan's story in his *Sui yuan shi hua* (Poetry Talks from Sui Garden), in which he collected many poems by girl and boy prodigies and accounts of their life

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[63] The most popular poem about the love story of Yang Yuhuan and Tang Xuanzong is "Chang hen ge" (Song of Everlasting Sorrow), written by the famous Tang poet Bai Juyi (courtesy name: Letian; literary name: Xiangshan Jushi, 772-846). See Bai Juyi, "Chang hen ge," in Bai Juyi quan ji (Zhuhai: Zhuhai chu ban she, 1996), 2: 183. In the dynastic histories, Yang is blamed for the chaos in the Tang. See Ouyang Xiu et al., *Xin tang shu* 76 (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1975), 11: 2495.

[64] For the reception of the *Mu dan ting* among women in late Ming and early Qing and the cult of *qing* see Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 78-106.

[65] For the details of the drama *Mu dan ting* see Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 72-78.

[66] See Cao Xueqin, *Honglou meng* (Shanghai: Shanghai gu ji, 1988), 670-671. This novel, published around 1754, has a detailed and vivid description of how elite families prohibited their children from reading romantic and erotic novels and dramas.

stories. Yuan Mei highly praises the originality and talent of these prodigies and revels at the legends associated with them. It is not surprising therefore that he includes Ye Xiaoluan's story and her confessions in this collection due to the romantic tone of her story and the elegance of her poems. Anne Gerristen rightly points out that Xiaoluan's image allowed men to play with the tantalizing combination of "her sexual awakening" as described in the accounts by her father and Yuan Mei and "her untainted moral purity."[67] What Yuan Mei articulates in Ye Xiaoluan's story was the emotional tie between the girl poet and a young male scholar, and her beautifully written stanzas.

Yuan Mei was famous or notorious for his acceptance of women students and for anthologizing the poems of his female disciples in the *Suiyuan nü di zi shi ji* (Collected Poems of Female Disciples from the Sui Garden). The qualities in a woman poet that Yuan Mei most appreciated were spontaneity, simple diction and pure emotion.[68] Therefore, Ye Xiaoluan's poems and her premature death combined with her sexual naiveté fit the ideal model of a woman poet from Yuan Mei's perspective.[69] Women's literary talent, in Yuan's view, had nothing to do with uplifting Confucian moral virtues. In this respect, Yuan Mei's ideally talented women poet could be subversive to the established patriarchal society, because the subtle expressions of her longing for romantic love jeopardized the Confucian norms for marriage and gender roles. It is not by accident that the model Qing official Chen Hongmou (1696-1771) cautioned, "Women who like reading and are good at writing poems undermine their moral virtue [through their learning and writing]."[70]

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[67] Anne Gerristen, "The Many Guises of Xiaoluan: the Legacy of a Girl Poet in Late Imperial China," *Journal of Women History* 17.2 (2005): 49.
[68] Susan Mann, *Precious Records,* 93.
[69] Gerristen, "The Many Guises of Xiaoluan," 41.
[70] Chen Hongmou, *Jiao nü yi gui*, *XSK* 951. 1:1b.

In summary, unlike Peng, Yuan Mei appreciated everything that Xiaoluan confessed to as sin in her afterlife conversion collected in Peng's version of her story. In her study, Anne Gerristen suggests that the various versions of Ye Xiaoluan's life story reflect the continual process of recreating her image to fit with constantly changing needs and desires of men. Xiaoluan is constructed as a talented girl poet rich in passion, sexually mature but physically and morally pure, a beauty and an immortal.[71] Peng Shaosheng's version adds a new characteristic or trait to that list. She was a girl with keen discernment of the cause of suffering, determined to remove attachments, devoted to spiritual cultivation and compassionate about saving others—in other words, the perfect role model for female and male Buddhists alike. The message that Ye Xiaoluan's story in Peng's collection conveys to the audience is twofold. First, one should not indulge in composing poems that give rise to cravings in oneself or others, but instead should be devoted to spiritual cultivation and the promotion of Buddhist truth. Second, a model Buddhist should not only save herself from suffering, but should save others as well. In the case of Buddhist laywomen, they should not only take care of their own enlightenment, but also should take care of the spiritual welfare of their male family members, as Xiaoluan did.

To conclude this chapter, Peng Shaosheng's views on talented women did, in fact, expose a debate on women's talent and its relation to women virtues. In early biographical narratives of women, such as Liu Xiang's *Lie nü zhuan*, talent in poetry writing or debate alone would not make a woman a moral example. In fact, for Liu Xiang, a woman's talent should be displayed only for the purpose of advancing male interests and upholding a code of conduct approved by men; only women such as these were singled out to setting an example.[72] In her study of women in the High Qing period, Susan Mann summarizes two major arguments on women's literary

[71] Gerristen, "The Many Guises of Xiaoluan," 41-59.
[72] Yiqing Zhou, "Virtue and Talent: Women and *Fushi* in Early China," *Nan nü* 5.1 (2003): 38.

writing and women's talent. One camp held that women should receive an education and their talent should be oriented to moral instruction of their children or their spouses. This group was represented by the historian Zhang Xuecheng (1738-1801) and Evidential scholars such as Wang Zhong. The other camp appreciated talented women writers who expressed purity and spontaneity in their writings. Yuan Mei was one of the leading figures of this group.[73]

Peng Shaosheng's writings, and the *Shan nüren zhuan* in particular, indicate that he shared views on women's talent with his Confucian counterparts in the first camp. The stories of the enlightened old women and young girls and the beautiful and talented female poets reveal Peng Shaosheng's stance on the relation between women's talent and virtues. He agrees with the view of his Confucian counterparts that talented women should be moral instructresses or spiritual guides to their male relatives—and men more broadly. In short, only when women's talents serve a sacred purpose, such as the spread of the Buddhist dharma, do their talents *not* pose a threat to the established religious and secular order and are acceptable, even valued—even when said behavior or speech is antinomian or transgresses established social boundaries. Ding-hwa Hsieh is correct in asserting that the outspoken, assertive and independent women in Chan literature form a sharp contrast to the chaste, filial and obedient women in the Confucian biographies. I would however also like to argue that in the case of Peng Shaosheng and the *Shan nüren zhuan*, these independent, outspoken and assertive women eventually serve the goal of expressing the truth approved by men. Peng, in this respect, was not progressive. His rendition of Ye Xiaoluan's story provides an excellent example of an effort to turn a girl—who was the object of male romantic and erotic imagination, potentially subversive or obstructive—into a role model for reinforcing and promoting social and religious values. She was transformed, in other

[73] Mann, *Precious Records*, 77-94.

words, into an exemplary Buddhist concerned with "saving oneself and saving others." Therefore, for Peng, women's talent was accepted only when that talent was incorporated into the embodiment of truth and used as a means to advance the spiritual welfare of others, especially men. Unconventional or transgressive behavior was justified by noble goals and final consequences, and interpreted as a sign of the embodiment of truth. The parallels between talented women as moral instructress in the Confucian tradition and dharma teachers or promoters in the Buddhist tradition are indicative of the common ground shared by Buddhism and Confucianism concerning women and women's talent, namely, women's talent should be oriented towards displaying or transmitting truth (in the Confucian and/or Buddhist sense), upholding moral codes and bringing spiritual benefits to men.

4.0 MIRACLES, SINCERITY AND MORALITY

The *Shan nüren zhuan* includes forty-eight stories about women who were involved in supernatural or supernormal events. Even though there is "no well-tested" Buddhist term equivalent to the word "miracle,"[1] I categorize these stories as miracle stories for several reasons. In the Christian tradition, the word "miracle" refers to supernatural phenomena brought about by the power of God, a proof of God's greatness, power and holiness. Scholars have noted that phenomena parallel to miracles in Christianity also exist in other religious traditions. For example, in Buddhist literature, supernatural or superhuman phenomena demonstrate the power and compassion of the Buddha, his teachings and institutions.[2] Kenneth Woodward, who compares miracles among five religious traditions, defines a miracle as "an unusual or extraordinary event that is in principle perceivable by others, that finds no reasonable explanation in ordinary human abilities or in other known forces that operate in the world of time and space, and that is the result of God, or gods or human beings transformed by efforts of their own through asceticism and meditation."[3] Chinese Buddhist historians introduced various schemas for the supernatural phenomena and people involved in them. For example, Huijiao (497-551), in his *Gaoseng zhuan* (Biographies of Eminent Monks, compiled ca. 520),

[1] John Kieschnick, "Miracles," in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, ed. Robert Buswell (New York: Thomason & Gail, 2004), 541.
[2] David Fiordalis, "Miracles and Superhuman Powers in South Asia Buddhist Literature," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 2008), 3.
[3] Kenneth Woodward, *The Book of Miracles: The Meaning of the Miracle Stories in Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 28.

memorializes the contributions of monks in ten categories, grouping miracle-working monks with spiritual powers under the category "*shenyi*" (Divine Marvels), which comprise thirty of the 499 biographies in his collection. Daoxuan (596-667), the compiler of the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* (Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks, completed 667), generally follows Huijiao but calls his category of miracle-inducing monks who evoked spontaneous responses from nature "*gantong*" (Spiritual Resonance), and collected 135 biographies under this category out of a total of 705 biographies in his collection.[4] The categories of monks in the *Song gaoseng zhuan* (Biographies of Eminent Monks compiled during the Song dynasty), compiled by Zanning (919-1001) in 988, is identical to those designated by Daoxuan; under *gantong* are included 112 of the 656 names in that collection. Looking at these figures seems to suggest a gradual rise in interest in supernormal powers in the Chinese Buddhist community in the nearly five hundred years separating these texts.[5] The subtle difference between the two categories of *shenyi* and *gantong* moreover is that the former refers to "wonder-working honed through practice and spiritual-like power,"[6] that is, to people who brought about extraordinary events with their spiritual power, while the latter refers to those whose spiritual cultivation and moral behaviors can induce divine intervention or a spontaneous response from nature, which is a manifestation that occurs spontaneously in response to the spiritual purity, devotion and moral behavior of the practitioner.[7] This response appears in the form of benefits to the practitioners or his/her family members. In short, persons of "divine marvel" are wonder or miracle workers and those under the category of "spiritual resonance" are witnesses to or beneficiaries of these extraordinary

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[4] Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk: Buddhist Ideals in Medieval Chinese Hagiography*, Kuroda Institute Studies in East Asian Buddhism 10 (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 98.
[5] Welter, *Monks, Rulers and Literati*, 42-43.
[6] Robin B. Wagner, "Buddhism, Biography and Power: A Study of Daoxuan's Continued Lives of Eminent Monks," (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1995), 5.
[7] Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk*, 98.

events. However, the extraordinary or supernatural events associated with the two categories of monks identify with what Woodward defines as miracles since the extraordinary events are either the result of divine intervention or the spiritual power and devotion of an individual.

Moreover, Daoxuan's *gantong* is closely related to the Chinese concept of *ganying*, which also contributes to the interpretation of occurrences of miracles in Buddhist literature.[8] *Gan ying* means "sympathetic resonance" or "act on and response," that is, it refers to cosmic or divine forces responding to human behaviors in a reasonable way.[9] People's sincerity and moral behavior bring about a positive and life-affirming response from the cosmos or the divine, such as timely rain, cure from illness or deliverance from disaster. Conversely, sacrilege and immoral behavior result in cosmic or divine punishment. The concept of sympathetic resonance was not the proposition of a given religious tradition, but became part of the general Chinese cultural heritage starting in the Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE).[10] Robert Sharf also makes note of the idea that from the Han dynasty on, sympathetic resonance was invoked to explain moral retribution, ritual efficacy and so on and influenced the Chinese understanding of Buddhist cosmology and practice.[11]

The following passage penned by Peng Shaosheng furnishes evidence to support Sharf's argument:

> The Six Confucian Classics are books on sympathetic resonance (*ganying zhi shu*) because the *Book of Changes*, *Book of Poetry*, *Book of History*, *Book of Rites*, *Book of Music* and *Spring and Autumn Annals* all state that the cosmos responds to human behavior. Good fortune or disaster and success or failure are determined by one's mind; the difference in outcome is determined by one's reverential or negligent behavior. The

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[8] Kieschnick, "Miracles," 543.
[9] For a fuller discussion of *ganying* in the Chinese tradition see Cynthia Brokaw, *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit: Social Change and Moral Order in Late Imperial China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1991), 28-42.
[10] Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk*, 98.
[11] Robert H. Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism: A Reading of the* Treasure Store Treatise, Kuroda Institute Studies in East Asian Buddhism 14 (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 94.

> effects of one's behavior can immediately be seen as [bringing either] good luck or bad luck, life or death. [That is why Confucius said,] "The gentleman [*junzi*] seeks moral truth, while the inferior person [*xiaoren*] seeks wealth and fame."[12] The major message of the Confucian teachings can be summarized into two aspects: One should do only good; one should do no evil. This message is manifested in our daily lives through the five cardinal human relationships. In this respect, Buddhism and Daoism are not exceptions. Some people only know that the Buddha said that [since] emptiness is the true nature of all things, the Buddhist dharma is also empty. They do not know [what Buddha really means] is that when bodhisattvas aspire to purify the land [to save all sentient beings], they do all good [deeds] without missing one.[13]

In this passage, Peng characterizes the Confucian teachings as sympathetic response, a feature he claims is shared by Buddhism. Since sympathetic response is recognized as "the nature of miracles and the mechanism of the numinous,"[14] one's good fortune and life-affirming miracles are rationalized in terms of sympathetic response through their connection with one's moral cultivation and sincerity. The articulation of the definitive role of one's mind in bringing about sympathetic response justifies Peng's equating the moral mind and the enlightened mind of bodhisattvas.[15] At the same time, the Buddhist laywomen's stories we shall discuss in this chapter support Peng's claim that the attainment of Buddhist enlightenment and Confucian moral perfection are never separate from our daily lives and the five basic human relationships.

Although Peng's statement above confirms the non-sectarian feature of sympathetic resonance, the miracle stories in his *Shan nüren zhuan* are presented in such a way as to highlight their Buddhist features. By viewing "miracle" as "a religious phenomenon and as a means of religious expression and communication"[16] and against the backdrop of Peng's understanding of sympathetic resonance, I analyze the meaning these miracle stories held for the compiler, what

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[12] *Lun yu* 14: 23, in *Si shu wu jing*, 1: 100
[13] Peng, *Er lin ju ji* 5: 14b-15a.
[14] Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk*, 101.
[15] Buddhist historian Daoxuan also links karma and one's mind that defines one's good and bad fortune. See Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk*, 101.
[16] Anne-Marie Korte, "Introduction," in *Women and Miracle Stories*, ed. Anne-Marie Korte (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2004), 5-6.

message he aimed to convey to his intended audience, how he affirmed his Buddhist identity and how he justified and promoted Buddhist beliefs and practices through accounts of miracles.

Recent scholarship on early Christian miracle stories indicates that believers translated social concerns and problems into miracle stories and/or used these tales as a means to promote or defend their faith when faced with competition and slanderous attacks.[17] This is also true of Buddhism in the eighteenth century. In the previous chapters, I have discussed that Buddhism in eighteenth-century China experienced contention and conflict in various arenas. For example, although we see Buddhist efforts to syncretize Buddhism and Confucianism and imperial patronage of Buddhism at that time, there was never a lack of criticism against and suspicion of Buddhism among intellectuals and officials. The campaigns launched by the government advocated such virtues as filial piety and chastity; however a consensus on how to fulfill these moral virtues had yet to be reached. In addition, urbanization, the growth of a market economy and changes in the social registration system also brought about blurred boundaries between social status and a faltering belief in the established views on values that supported the status quo. Bernard Faure and John Kieschnick's studies of miracles in the biographical collections of eminent monks suggest that the roles these stories played intra- and inter-traditionally and the ways they were presented were also "chronically sensitive."[18] In the same vein, the miraculous events collected in the *Shan nüren zhuan* address concerns and problems specific to Peng's time.

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[17] Magda Misset-Van de Weg, "Magic, Miracles and Miracle Workers in the *Acts of Thecla*," in *Women and Miracle Stories: A Multidisciplinary Exploration*, ed. Anne-Marrie Korte (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2004), 30.
[18] See Bernard Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: a Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 131, and John Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk*, 67-70.

Chün-fang Yü points out that the Chinese literary genre of accounts of anomalies called "*zhi guai*" (strange writings)[19] is the product of a "fascination with the strange and anomalous."[20] This genre of literature existed at least as early as the Six Dynasties (220-589), although the term "*zhi guai*" was not widely used as a designation for this literary genre until late Ming.[21] Buddhist miracle tales can be regarded as a subgenre of "strange writings" and frequently share data with the larger genre. In many cases, Buddhist miracles can be considered to be the "native application" of sympathetic resonance to the theory of Buddhist soteriology.[22] The earliest Buddhist collections of miracles deploying this genre appeared in the late fourth century.[23] Buddhist miracle tales assume an audience not only of believers, but also of non-believers.[24] In Peng's time, it was not rare for his contemporaries to compose and collect strange writings.[25] For example, Yuan Mei, the friend of the Peng family and long-time debate opponent of Peng's Buddhist positions, compiled such a collection called *Zi bu yu* (What Confucius Would Not Talk About), also named *Xin qi xie* (New Collection of Strange Stories), completed around 1765-1766, sixteen years before Peng completed the *Shan nüren zhuan*.[26] Through a comparative study of miracle stories in Peng's collection and the strange tales in Yuan Mei's collection, this chapter will also discuss how the concept of sympathetic response merges with the Buddhist theory of

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[19] "Strange writing" is Robert Campany's term to refer to *zhi guai*; he also calls them "anomaly accounts." See Robert Campany, *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), ix, 29.
[20] Chün-fang Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 155.
[21] Campany, *Strange Writing*, 29.
[22] Chün-fang Yü, *Kuan-yin,* 155.
[23] Robert Campany, *Signs from the Unseen Realm: Buddhist Miracle Tale from Early Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012), 2.
[24] Campany, *Signs from the Unseen Realm*, 2.
[25] Sing-chen Lydia Chiang, *Collecting the Self: Body and Identity in Strange Tale Collections of Late Imperial China* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 3-4.
[26] In his letter to Qiu Shudu in 1765-1766, Yuan Mei mentions that he had just finished composing the *Xin qi xie* and would send a copy to Qiu. The earliest extant edition of the *Xin qi xie* was printed in 1788. Hand-copied versions most likely were circulating prior to 1788. See *Xiao cang shan fang chi du* (The Letters of Xiao cang shan fang), in *YQJ* 5: 33 and 1: 13. It is probable that Peng read a hand-copied version before 1788.

soteriology in the miraculous experience of Buddhist laywomen. In doing so, we explore how the virtues and practices evoking sympathetic response address the issue of indeterminacy in moral standards and views of values in the eighteenth century, and see how these stories validate and reinforce a value system and the practices that support it, thereby offsetting hostilities in the face of competition and conflicts between the religious beliefs and moral standards of that time.

4.1 MIRACLES AS SYMPATHETIC RESONANCE TO VIRTUE AND DEVOTIONAL PRACTICE

With the exception of the life story about Pengshan Shenggu, who possesses spiritual powers that produced miracles, the miracles narrated in the *Shan nüren zhuan* are close to the category of spiritual resonance or sympathetic resonance as described above. That is to say, almost none of the Buddhist laywomen whose stories are collected in the *Shan nüren zhuan* possess the spiritual power to produce miracles; rather the miracles associated with them typically occur through the intervention of a Buddhist deity or sometimes through the miraculous power of a Buddhist sūtra. Miracles take place as a response to their pious devotional practice and moral virtue. The most conspicuous nature of these miracle stories in fact is that these Buddhist laywomen are not wonder-workers and they do not have any control over the miracles associated with them. Indeed, they are passive recipients of or witnesses to these miracles. This characteristic differentiates these Buddhist laywomen from the monks as wonder-workers in the *Gao seng zhuan*, who possessed supernatural power to tame demons, local deities and spirits into accepting the Buddhist precepts, cure illness with spells or bring rain with special rituals, and

bring them closer to the stories collected in the *gantong* sections of the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* and *Song gaoseng zhuan* as well as those found in *zhi guai* accounts.

Our first example is Liangshi Nü (Daughter of the Liang Family).

> The daughter of the Liang family was a native of Fenyang. She became blind at a very young age. At one point, a monk taught her to [continually] chant the name of Amitābha Buddha. [She did as the monk instructed her, and] suddenly regained her eyesight three years later. She invoked Amitābha Buddha's name without stop each and every day. One day, [she saw] banners in the sky; Amitābha Buddha and [his two assistant] bodhisattva[27] came to meet her. She suddenly passed away. (*Shan nüren zhuan* 1:26a)

In this story, the girl does not possess any supernatural power. The miraculous recovery of her eyesight and her rebirth in the Pure Land are in response to her devotional practice and her faith in the wonderful power of Amitābha Buddha. Miss Liang is obviously the beneficiary of the miraculous power of the Buddha Amitābha.

In the *Shan nüren zhuan*, miracles are not only life affirming as we have just seen in the case of Miss Liang, who regains her eyesight and whose devotional practices are responded to and rewarded by Amitābha Buddha. Other stories indicate that Confucian virtues and Buddhist devotional practices can work together to trigger a response from a Buddhist deity. The story of Changshi Nü (Daughter of the Chang Family) is an example of this.

> Miss Chang, was the daughter of a farmer in the countryside of Changzhou. Her mother died not long after her birth. When she was twelve years old, her father became seriously ill. On his deathbed, he said to her, "It is my great regret that I cannot wait until you grow up." The girl was saddened by her father's lament and vowed not to marry in order to take care of her father's tomb. Upon the death of her father, she bought a piece of land to bury her father and built a hut next to his grave. Every day, she worshiped Guanyin bodhisattva by offering incense and flowers to her image. She also chanted the name of [Amitābha] Buddha in order to transfer merit to her deceased parents to ensure their rebirth in the Pure Land. Miss Chang supported herself through weaving. But her brother was a good-for-nothing. He sold the grave land property three times, and Miss Chang had

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[27] Amitābha Buddha is typically depicted along with two assistant bodhisattva: Avalokiteśvara (C: Guanyin), representing the power of compassion on the right, and Mahāsthāmaprāpta (C: Dashizhi or Shizhi), representing the power of wisdom on the left.

> to redeem it three times. In the year of the great famine, a burglar breaking into her hut stabbed her. The pain was so severe that she fell to the ground. Suddenly, she was bathed in auspicious light, and the wound was immediately healed. As she examined the light, it came from the image of Guanyin bodhisattva in her hut. She guarded the grave of her father and refused to leave. She predicted people's fortunes and these prophecies all proved to come true. Some people said that she had attained enlightenment. When Minister Sun Shenxing [1565-1636] visited her, he found her dressed in hemp garments, looking as young as when she first began to observe memorial rituals for her father. But she was already eighty years old. She accepted two disciples and ordained them as nuns. After she passed away, the two nuns took care of her hut. People all called it Zhenxiao Nunnery [Nunnery of Chastity and Filial Piety]. This occurred in the mid-Wanli era [1573-1620]. (*Shan nüren zhuan* 2: 14a-14b)[28]

In Miss Chang's story, the narrator articulates two points. First is the filial piety she demonstrates through dutifully taking care of her father's tomb and through her devotional practice of merit transfer to her deceased parents; second is the miraculous healing of her wounds by the image of Guanyin bodhisattva. Signs of high spiritual achievement, represented by Miss Chang's success in making prophecies and perpetuation of a youthful appearance, are mentioned in only two sentences. Rather, what make Miss Chang exemplary are her moral virtues and devotional practices. Her ability to make prophecies and delay her old age is the result of those filial virtues and practices. In fact, the structure of the story makes the causal relation between her behavior, miracles and spiritual achievement clear. In short, all the miraculous or supernatural phenomena or abilities are in sympathetic response to her moral virtue and devotional practice.

It is also noteworthy that, in the Confucian tradition, it is the responsibility of sons to observe the memorial rituals for deceased parents and to tend to the gravesites of their ancestors. But in this story, Miss Chang—a daughter and a Buddhist—assumed these responsibilities for

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[28] This story originally was adopted from a collection entitled *Xi'an sheng yan* (Remaining Words of Xi'an), which no longer exists. As Xi'an was the courtesy name of the great-grandfather of Peng's granduncle, we can assume that this book or collection circulated in his clan. As the title suggests, this document may have collected anecdotes and accounts of anomalies from previous dynasties.

her deceased father and the family, while her younger brother—the first son of the family and presumably a non-Buddhist—failed to do so. The story gives a detailed description of how a Buddhist fulfilled the familial responsibilities designated by the Confucian moral code and how moral virtues, such as filial piety appreciated and promoted by Confucian moralists, were rewarded with a miracle performed by a Buddhist deity. Miss Chang's story affirms the compatibilities between the two traditions through their shared view of family values and the close relationship between what constitutes moral virtues and Buddhist practices. The story further reveals that Buddhist deities are not indifferent to the virtuous and pious. Their intervention occurs when the virtuous and pious are in need of their help. This refutes Yuan Mei's criticism that Buddhist deities were only empty names, and were not efficacious at all.[29]

The following story tells how divine intervention helped a filial granddaughter to fulfill her wish by bringing her virtue into realization.

> Chenshi Nü [Daughter of the Chen Family], whose name was Miaozhen, was a native of Lishui in Chuzhou prefecture. Her father was a local shrine priest, who died when she was young. When her mother remarried, she continued to live with her grandmother, Lin Shi [Madam Lin]. When Madam Lin fell ill, Miaozhen cut the flesh from her thigh, and minced the flesh so that her grandmother could eat it. Madam Lin soon returned to health. When Miaozhen told her how she had been cured, Madam Lin could not keep from crying and blamed herself for [consuming her granddaughter's flesh]. She soon fell ill again. At first, Miaozhen sold her clothes to make offerings at the Buddhist temple to pray for her grandmother's recovery. But it did not work. Then she burned her arms with incense and prayed to shorten her own life in exchange for that of her grandmother's. In the fourth month of the fourth year of Zhizheng era [1345], she dreamed that a man in a dark blue gown and blue hat spoke to her, saying, "Don't worry. If you can cut a piece of your liver to feed to your grandma, she will be cured." [Miaozhen] then asked the man how she could do this. The man pointed at his right ribcage and gave her a half tablet of a red pill to swallow, which she did. She awoke to find it was a dream. Miaozhen took a bath to purify herself and prayed to all the gods of heaven and earth for their help. At that time, it began to rain. But strangely enough, no rain fell on Miaozhen and she did not get wet at all. She found a red mark about three inches long on her right ribcage and cut along the red mark with a knife. As her blood gushed out, she could not locate her liver. She then decided to get the help of the deities by tossing divination strips. As she bent

[29] Yuan Mei, "Da Peng Chimu jinshi shu," in *Xiao cang shan fang wen ji*, *YQJ* 2.19: 337.

> over to pick up the divination strip she had cast, her liver popped out. She cut off a slice. Again, she prayed that should her grandmother be cured, she would take the bodhisattva precepts and maintain lifelong celibacy. Miaozhen then blended her liver with some tender bamboo shoots to serve her grandmother. Madam Lin soon recovered. Miaozhen was so seriously hurt [by her self-inflicted incision] that her wound was near impossible to heal. She again dreamed that the deity said to her, "There is no need to worry. Just burn some paper into ashes and apply the ashes to your wound." Miaozhen did as the deity advised. Her wound was soon healed. Miaozhen was fourteen years old at that time. Three years later, her grandmother died a natural death. [Miaozhen] built a stūpa to bury her grandmother. As she had vowed previously, she accepted the precepts for Buddhist laywomen and remained celibate her whole life. In the eighth year of the Zhizheng era [1349], the prefecture official Gao Minglai reported her deeds to the court. The Ministry of Rites sent a delegate to investigate this matter, which proved true. Miss Chen was rewarded by the emperor and supplied with a bushel of grain every month. (*Shan nüren zhuan* 1: 33a-34a)

This story is very similar to several sympathetic response stories of filial children recorded by Confucian literati. One story is about a filial son called Wei Jun. Once Wei Jun and his aged father traveled to another place, and had to stay in an inn at night. At dawn, they heard a tiger roaring outside of the inn. Wei Jun went out of the inn, knelt down and said to the tiger, "If you are hungry, take me for food, but please don't frighten my father." At these words, the tiger looked around and left.[30] While this story is similar in intent to the one about Miss Chen, Wei Jun sacrifices nothing of himself to the hungry tiger. Closer still, is the story about a filial son called Ni Riheng, whose mother was seriously ill. He cut a piece of flesh from his body and made a broth with it. After completing this task, he fell to the ground in great pain. At this moment, he heard a divine voice from the sky telling him that his lifespan would be increased by twenty-four years due to his filial piety.[31]

These two stories share some similarities with Miss Chen's story in that extreme altruism towards one's parent or grandparent, such as the willingness to offer one's body (in Wei Jun's

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[30] Li Fang et al. comp. *Tai ping yu lan* 411(Reprint, Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiao yu chu ban she, 2000), 4: 428-429.
[31] "Xue xing dian," in "Li xue hui bian," *Gu jin tu shu ji cheng* 120.624: 12.2-11.1, as recounted in Jimmy Yu, *Sanctity and Self-inflicted Violence in Chinese Religions, 1500-1700* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 86.

case) or to cut one's flesh to cure one's mother (in the case of Ni Riheng), induces sympathetic response in the form of divine intervention or unusual phenomenal occurrences in nature. More similar to the divine intervention in the Confucian account of the filial son Ni Riheng, Miss Chen's acts of filial piety are eventually responded to by a deity, who gives her detailed instructions on how to cut off a piece of her own liver to cure her grandmother and, later, how to heal her own wound. Her wish is fulfilled with the recovery of her grandmother under these divine instructions. In fact, it is not unusual that in filial accounts of children divine aid is conferred to actualize filial piety as well as to sanction such behavior.[32] The practice of cutting one's flesh to cure one's sick parent or grandparent or "filial slicing," as Yu so poetically puts it, moreover is not limited to any specific religious tradition.[33] What differentiates Miss Chen from the other two stories cited here are her prayers to Buddhist deities and vows to keep Buddhist precepts and live a celibate life, which imprint a Buddhist mark on the story.

One of the most popular stories related to filial slicing is the story of Princess Miaoshan, who later became known as the bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokiteśvara or Guanyin in Chinese. In one rendition of her story,[34] we are told that Miaoshan was the youngest daughter of a king called Zhuang. The king and his queen had three daughters, but did not have a crown prince. The king had no respect for Buddhism, but Princess Miaoshan was a devote Buddhist. She lived an ascetic lifestyle and often spoke about impermanence and karma to people around her in the palace. Many people were convinced by her, and began to practice Buddhism as well. The king tried to make her marry as her two sisters had done so that she might produce a

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[32] Keith Knapp, *Selfless Offspring: Filial Children And Social Order in Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 94-104.
[33] Jimmy Yu, *Sanctity and Self-Inflicted Violence*, 62.
[34] Stories abound in China about the life of Miaoshan and her eventual transformation into various depictions of Guanyin bodhisattva. The most thorough study remains Chün-fang Yü's *Kuan-yin*.

grandson to inherit the throne, but Miaoshan declined. The king tried every means to make the young princess change her mind. He locked her in the back garden of the palace without any food, but it did not scare her and she sat in deep meditation instead. The king then allowed her to go to a nunnery, but secretly ordered the nuns to assign Miaoshan all kinds of difficult tasks to force her to abandon her plan to become a nun. Surprisingly, with the help of a dragon spirit, Miaoshan completed all the tasks. When the king heard about this, he was angry and thought his daughter was practicing heterodoxy and employing magic to delude people. He ordered his soldiers to behead the princess. At the moment of execution, the mountain deity used his divine powers to produce violent wind, lightning and thunder, and spirited her away. The king was enraged and ordered his soldiers to kill the nuns. After the mountain deity saved Miaoshan, she went to a place called Xiangshan (Fragrant Mountain) to continue her religious cultivation. The king, however, developed a serious case of jaundice due to the sinful karma he incurred by killing the nuns and for disrespecting Buddhism. The king was desperate for a cure. At that time, a mysterious old man came to the king and told him that if he could get the arms and eyes of the hermit of Xiangshan, who never got angry, he would be cured. The king sent an envoy to the hermit to ask for her arms and eyes. The hermit turned out to be Princess Miaoshan. She told the envoy she would give up her arms and eyes if the king should mend his ways and devote himself to Buddhism. She gauged out her eyes and had the envoy cut off both her arms. When her arms and eyes were made into medicine and the king took it, he was cured. To show his gratitude to the hermit, he and his queen decided to pay homage to the hermit. When they met the hermit, they discovered that she was none other than their youngest daughter. Princess Miaoshan suddenly turned into Guanyin of the Thousand Arms and Eyes. The king and queen were struck by the transformation of their daughter and recognized her as a bodhisattva. The royal couple

repented for their wrongdoings and vowed to worship the bodhisattva. From then on, the king and queen were converted to Buddhism.[35]

This story, widely circulated beginning in the Song dynasty, was later incorporated into *baojuan* (precious scrolls) texts, a genre of prosimetric narrative literature typically with religious content that arose around the fourteenth century and was intended for performance. Written in simple classical Chinese with vernacular elements, *baojuan* texts were often read by women or functioned as scripture in folk religions.[36] Despite Princess Miaoshan's defiance of her father's will and her rejection of marriage, two actions subversive to the social norms, her willingness to offer her body to save her father reincorporated her into the established social order.[37] As a reward for her extreme filial piety, she attained enlightenment and became the bodhisattva Guanyin. This story is usually considered to be a good example of the reconciliation between Buddhist practice and Confucian filial piety.

Like Princess Miaoshan, Miss Chen made a vow to uphold the Buddhist precepts and remain celibate throughout her life. Her vow was motivated by her sincere wish to cure her grandmother. In this sense, her refusal to marry is no longer defiance against Confucian norms of behavior, but a manifestation of the virtue of filial piety. Second, the final fulfillment of her wish to cure her grandmother is the result of divine intervention, which affirms the divine sanction of her observance of the Buddhist precepts. This, in turn, legitimizes Buddhist practices, including lifelong celibacy, on moral grounds. The sympathetic response from a divine power "proves" the workings of karmic retribution, a position that Peng promoted in a debate with Yuan Mei, which I turn to later in this chapter. If Miss Chang's story shows that Buddhism never fails to respond

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[35] For a detailed account of Princess Miaoshan see Chün-fang Yü, *Kuan-yin*, chapter 8 and 495-504.
[36] See Chün-fang Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 449-477, and Wilt L. Idema, trans., *Personal Salvation and Filial Piety: Two Precious Scroll Narratives of Guanyin and Her Acolytes* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 43.
[37] Chün-fang Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 341.

to the virtuous and helps them out of difficulties, Miss Chen's story further indicates that Buddhist deities not only deliver the virtuous from danger, but also help them to realize their potential virtue and bring it to reality.

"Filial slicing" has been well documented in Chinese medicine books, official histories and local gazetteers. For example, as early as 739, Chen Cangqi (681-757) explicitly states in his *Ben cao shi yi* (Supplement to Materia Medica), a practical guide for clinical diagnosis and drug application, that human flesh could be used to cure diseases that caused atrophy and emaciation.[38] The pioneering Chinese pharmacologist, Li Shizhen (1518-1593), lists thirty-seven hierarchically ordered medicinal benefits of consuming different parts of the human body in his *Ben cao gang mu* (Compendium of Materia Medica), one of the most important and popular medical compendiums in Chinese medicine.[39]

This practice of cutting one's flesh or one's liver as an act of extreme filial piety towards one's parents is also frequently found listed in historical records, and had become "a culturally established expression of filial piety" by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[40] However, there was never a lack of controversy over this practice. For example, Han Yu (768-824), the famous literatus and Buddhist critic of the Tang dynasty, criticized this practice upon hearing of a filial son who cut off his flesh to cure his mother. "When one's mother is ill, it is filial enough of him to prepare medicine for her. I have never heard of cutting one's flesh as medicine. If it really works, why did the sages of antiquity not adopt this practice? If one dies from this, it leads to the extinction of the family lineage. Isn't it a great sin?"[41] Although Li Shizhen listed the

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[38] Jimmy Yu, *Sanctity and Self-Inflicted Violence,* 66.
[39] Jimmy Yu, *Sanctity and Self-Inflicted Violence,* 66.
[40] Jimmy Yu, *Sanctity and Self-Inflicted Violence,* 62.
[41] Han Yu, "Hu ren dui," in *Quan tang wen*, compiled by Dong Gao et al. (Taiyuan: Shanxi jiao yu chu ban she, 2002), 4: 79.

medicinal uses of the human body in his medical compendium, he also opposed the practice, stating, "Our bodies, hair, and skin are inherited from our parents and must not be harmed. How could any parent, even if seriously ill, possibly desire their [sic] [children's] offerings to harm their bodies and limbs, and consume their own flesh and bones? Such [practices] stem from the views of the foolish."[42]

Miss Chen's story in the *Shan nüren zhuan* is adopted from the *Hu fa lu* (Record of Protecting the Dharma), composed by the neo-Confucian Song Lian (1310-1381), who served as the literary and political adviser to the founder of the Ming dynasty and was also a lay Buddhist. It was later re-edited by the Buddhist leader Zhuhong (1535–1615). In Peng's rendition of Miss Chen's story, he omits a remark found in the Song account about Miss Chen's practice being an apologia for filial slicing.

> Considering [that Miss Chen's practice is] closely related to propriety, the prefect, Mr. Huang [Huang Mou] asked a Confucian education official called Zheng Ruyuan to record her deeds and carve them on a stone monument [that read]: "A child originates from his or her parents, and [parent and child] are in fact one. If possible, one should live and die together with one's parents. Why would parents and child be considered separate entities? When one's parent is ill, the child prays to heaven and earth, ghosts and deities, for the parent's recovery. The filial child desperately searches for the way to cure his or her parent. [The child] does not care about his or her own life and death but only about finding a cure. How would he or she have a moment to think about the discontinuity of the [family] lineage? [Han Yu] wrote the *Hu ren dui* [Response to the People of Shanxi] in which he criticizes the filial child. It does not make any sense to me. There is no difference between loyalty and filial piety. People do not blame the loyal subject who sacrifices his own life; why do they blame a filial child? I think that Han Yu did not write the *Hu ren dui*. This essay must have been written by someone who appropriated his name." I heard what about Mr. Huang wrote and composed the story of Miss Chen to support his argument.[43]

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[42] Li Shizhen, *Ben cao gang mu tong shi* (General Explanation of the Compendium of Materia Medica), ed. Chen Guiting (Beijing: Xue yuan chu ban she, 1992), 52: 224a-b, as quoted in Jimmy Yu, *Sanctity and Self-Inflicted Violence,* 66.

[43] *Hu fa lu,* in *Jiaxing da zang jing* (Jiaxing Tripiṭaka), *J* 21, no. B110: 646c22-647a26.

It is obvious that Song Lian recorded Miss Chen's story for the purpose of defending filial slicing, but his comment on this practice, embedded in Miss Chen's story in his *Hu fa lu*, is not included in her story in Peng's collection. I return shortly to a possible reason why Peng excluded this passage in his narrative of Miss Chen, but here suffice it to say that controversy over this practice extended even to the imperial court. For example, the Yongzheng Emperor (r. 1722-1735) frowned on such a practice when he commented on a case in 1729 reported by Chang Lai, the governor of Fujian province, about a filial son called Li Shengshan of Luoyuan county, who had cut out his liver to save his mother and had seriously injured himself. The emperor replied to the governor's request to reward this filial son, remarking in his edict, "To cut one's liver is a foolish practice of some commoners to demonstrate their filial piety by taking their own lives lightly. According to the precedent set by the Kangxi Emperor (r. 1662-1723), this practice should not be rewarded."[44] He went on to state that, "According to the *Xiao jing* [Book of Filial Piety], one's body, hair and skin are gifts from one's parents; one must not damage them. It is the starting point of filial piety."[45] The emperor continued:

> The love of parents for their children is so deep and profound. If a child happens to get sick, the parents will worry about him or her. Parents always forgive and love good-for-nothing children, how much more so a filial one? It is absolutely impossible that parents will not worry about their filial children or not become distressed if a filial child cuts his or her flesh or body to cure a parent's disease! Parents will worry and become upset even though the child's body is not harmed, how much more so if [the child's] body is seriously harmed. A filial child should try his or her best to serve his/her parents, but there are so many ways to be filial. To harm one's body to serve one's parent is not encouraged.[46]

Nevertheless, the emperor concludes:

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[44] In the ninth year of Kangxi reign (1671), the emperor decreed, "To prevent people from following suit, those who hurt themselves by practicing filial slicing. . . should not be rewarded." *Da qing hui dian shi li* 403.5: 501-506.
[45] See *Xiao jing*, annotated by Zheng Xuan, *XSK* 151.1: 1b.
[46] *Da qing hui dian shi li* 403.5: 505-506.

> The way of filial piety is extremely important, but the bottom line is not to destroy one's own body. The previous emperor set up the rules about this issue and it is important [that everybody comply with them]. However, local administrators have never educated the commoners in the way of the sages and the benevolence of the country. Thus, many ignorant men and women have destroyed their own bodies in order to cure their parents. . . . Since these deeds have been done, if these men and women are not rewarded, their resolve will not be acknowledged and their souls will not be comforted. Therefore, during these decades, although the rule is not to encourage this kind of practice, some cases are allowed to come before the court and some are even rewarded.[47]

The Yongzheng Emperor's edict indicates an ambivalent governmental attitude towards this practice. On the one hand, the government did not outright prohibit this practice since it was motivated by one's devotion towards one's parents or grandparents. The Qing government in its morality campaigns vigorously advocated filial piety, and Qing emperors often set themselves up as examples of filial sons. The Yongzheng Emperor understood that the practice was so entrenched in the culture of the time that re-education would be needed before it could be abandoned completely. In the meantime, those who risked their lives for the sake of their parents' welfare, should be acknowledged in some way. It is therefore no surprise to find that filial slicings were recorded as praiseworthy practices and that the government rewarded some of those cases. For example, in the fifty-sixth year of Qianlong era (1792), a filial daughter of the Song family practiced "filial slicing" to cure her mother; unfortunately, the mother was not cured and passed away. The daughter killed herself to follow her mother. The government rewarded her posthumously.[48] On the other hand, the emperor discouraged this practice because one could harm oneself without even curing one's sick parent. According to the emperor, filial slicing is an ignorant or improper way to demonstrate filial piety. Nonetheless, it did not directly threaten the established social hierarchy or the authority of the imperial government as a filial child who sacrificed him or herself for the benefit of a senior relative also symbolized an extreme (and no

[47] *Da Qing hui dian shi li* 403.5: 506.
[48] *Da Qing hui dian shi li* 403.5: 513.

doubt rare) case of honoring the hierarchy defined by the Confucian five basic relationships. Such devotion in fact reinforced, not subverted, the established hierarchical order, and so could be tolerated until such time as the common people were re-educated.

This brings us back to the question of why Peng Shaosheng did not include Song Lian's argument for promoting filial slicing in his version of the story of Miss Chen in the *Shan nüren zhuan*, although the former was his source for that story. There are several stories in the *Shan nüren zhuan* about Buddhist laywomen who practices filial slicing, such as the above-mentioned Miss Chen and Miss Wen, whom we met in chapter two. These women's stories suggest how the dilemma between inflicting harm on oneself and the mandate to care for and cure one's parents can be resolved. Similar to the filial son cited in the emperor's edict, Miss Chen demonstrates her extreme filial piety by slicing off part of her liver to save her grandmother. Unlike the unlucky filial son, however, Miss Chen cured her grandmother without hurting herself. The problem that bothered the emperor and other Confucian scholars seems to be resolved here, in a fashion that also insinuates that Buddhists not only are as filial as Confucians but perhaps even more so. It may well be that Peng sided with those who considered the act of filial slicing too extreme or dangerous in ordinary cases but allowed it only in cases where the child is so filial that he or she is rewarded with a miracle in the form of divine intervention, a reward that is more prestigious than one from the emperor himself. Miss Chen's sincere prayers to the Buddhist deities, her vow to keep the Buddhist precepts and her filial piety worked together to bring about a miracle. This story and others like it in the *Shan nüren zhuan* reaffirm that sympathetic response can be provoked only by virtues and sincerity, and that Buddhist deities never fail those who are

virtuous and devoted. This proselytizing intention is conveyed through this story, demonstrating what Chün-fang Yü aptly contends—a filial miracle can be adopted to serve Buddhist ends.[49]

According to Chün-fang Yü, women comprised a large majority of those who practiced filial slicing. Different from Buddhist monks who performed self-immolation as a way to show their devotion to Buddhism, these women cut their bodies only to aid their senior relatives. This family-oriented filial slicing is an indication of the domestication of women's religiosity.[50] This practice for the benefit of one's ill grandparent, parent or in-law does not pose a threat to the established social hierarchy, which is in contrast to other women's practices, such as burning incense on their arms, which was considered to be "vulgar" by many Confucian scholar officials, as we saw in chapter two. Instead, it confirmed the established social hierarchy, but in an extreme way. As the emperor's edict suggests, it was an improper or extreme action of filial piety, but not a crime. The government did not forbid the practice, but only discouraged it.

In fact, the practice of cutting one's flesh to cure one's senior relatives is not the only indication of the domestication of women's religiosity. Less controversial, for example, are the stories of two devoted Buddhist laywomen. Unlike the unmarried filial daughters in the stories above, these stories are about a wife and a mother.

> Cheng Shi [Madam Cheng] was the mother of Xu Xizai. She believed in Buddhism. The first thing she did when she got up at daybreak was to burn incense and chant Buddhist sūtras. She did this without interruption. Madam Cheng worshiped Guanyin bodhisattva with great piety. In the fourth year of Shaoxi era [1194], when Xizai was crossing the river in a boat with his two sons, a strong storm stirred up huge waves that almost capsized their boat. Xizai invoked Guanyin bodhisattva's name with some fellow passengers for a while. Thereupon the boat steered close to a huge mulberry tree and [the passengers] were able to stabilize it by anchoring it to the tree. The next morning, they found the boat on shore but the mulberry tree had mysteriously disappeared. When [Xizai and her sons] arrived home that afternoon, Madam Cheng greeted Xizai and said, "Last night I dreamed that a woman carried you back home [in the storm]. It turned out to be

[49] Chün-fang Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 346.
[50] Chün-fang Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 338.

> true. Xizai told his mother about their experience. They all marveled at the miracle. After that, Madam Cheng became even more pious. (*Shan nüren zhuan* 1: 24b-24a)

Another story tells of Madam Yang, the wife of Song Kan.

> When Song Kan decided to travel with his friends on business, his wife tried to persuade him not to go, but he did not listen to her. When the boat he was on capsized, Song Kan was overwhelmed by water. He finally floated to shore by grasping onto a bunch of straw. Song carried the straw with him. After settling in an inn, he loosened the bunch of straw to dry the pieces in the sun. To his surprise, he saw a bamboo tube in the bunch. When he opened the tube, he found a copy of the *Diamond Sūtra*. The old proprietress of the inn told him that this copy of the *Diamond Sūtra* was the one his wife had been using to chant. When Song returned home, he checked with his wife, who told him that she had commissioned a copy the *Diamond Sūtra* from which she had been chanting every day while he was away. The sūtra however had mysteriously disappeared ten days earlier. Song's wife further said that there had been a character mistake in the text, and she had asked a monk to make note of it in the margin. If the sūtra was indeed the one she had lost, the character should be there. When they opened the sūtra, the [identifying] character was there. They sent a servant to the inn near the riverbank, but both the inn and the old woman who ran it had disappeared. (*Shan nüren zhuan* 1: 5b-6a)

These two stories were adopted from the *Yi jian zhi* (Record of Listeners) and *Bao ying ji* (Record of Retributions) respectively. Both these two texts belong to the "strange writing" genre. Like the stories of the filial daughter or granddaughter, the religious activities of these two Buddhist laywomen were family based as well, but without any ambiguity that can be leveled against young women who remain celibate, even when in service to their parents. I mentioned in chapter two that the political elite and Confucian intellectuals looked poorly upon Buddhist laywomen in two regards. First, Buddhist laywomen were foolish because they prayed for a better next life, but ignored their duties designated by their gender in this life, meaning their religious activities were detrimental to their present lives and to the welfare of their families. Second, the practices of Buddhist laywomen, such as visiting pilgrimage sites, praying in Buddhist temples and mingling with men, transgressed the family boundaries of the inner and outer spheres thus destabilizing the familial and social order. Unlike the practices of women who went beyond the prescribed boundary criticized in Tang Bin's memorial or in Xia Jingqu's novel

discussed in chapter two, the religious practices of these women are "domesticated" in several respects.[51] First of all, their practices, such as sūtra chanting and worshiping Guanyin bodhisattva, were home-based; second, the two women fulfilled their gender roles in the domestic sphere prescribed by the dominant Confucian ideology, that is, they married and never ignored their duties as wives and mothers. These two women are different from the two young girls cited above, who fulfilled their duties as (grand)daughters, but failed to fulfill their roles as wife and mother that Confucian social norms expected to all women. The miracles their devotional practices elicited were this worldly and family oriented. When they practiced Buddhism, the safety and welfare of their son or husband were at the center of their concerns. The devotional practices of these two women did not benefit themselves, but their male relatives. Contrary to the criticism of Confucian officials and scholars, the Buddhist practices of these women in fact brought actual benefits to their male relatives and maintained the stability of the male-centered family structure. In short, like the miracles that occurred with the filial daughter and granddaughter but without the possible rebuke for going to extremes or remaining celibate, the miracles brought about by the devotional practices of these married women are also world affirming and entirely support the established familial order defined by Confucian ethics.

The domestication of Buddhist practices as evidenced in these women ostensibly addresses the suspicions of and slanderous attacks by Confucian officials and scholars. But the message these stories convey is more than that. The first story about Madam Cheng and her son Xizai, although nowhere mentioned, is a testimony to the efficacy of Guanyin bodhisattva.

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[51] Chün-fang Yü (*Kuan-yin*, 338) has aptly identified several features of the "domesticated religiosity" of women. For example, their religious practices are completely within the domestic sphere and independent of those of male monastics, but their spiritual achievements are as high as those of monks. They also "achieved religious sanctification by performing one's domestic obligations to the fullest degree," exemplified by filial slicing and the chaste widow cult. In addition to the features Yü lists, I would like to emphasize the fulfillment of women's gender roles sanctified by the social norms.

According to Buddhist texts, such as the "Pu men pin" (Universal Gateway Chapter) of the *Lotus Sūtra* devoted to Guanyin bodhisattva, the bodhisattva can deliver people from water disasters.[52] The second story about Madam Yang and her husband Song Kan demonstrates the supernatural powers evoked by copying and reciting Buddhist sūtras, a point that is also emphasized in the *Lotus Sūtra*.[53] In Kieschnick's study on the *Biographies of Eminent Monks,* he further suggests that from early on Buddhist scriptures in China were read for philosophical insight as well as chanted as spells to fend off disasters.[54] The two stories under discussion clearly suggest that the miracles in these women's lives are based on their devotional behavior. Together with the stories of filial (grand)daughters, all these stories serve as testimonials to the efficacy of Buddhist deities and Buddhist texts. Each is ostensibly "a persuasive brief for the truth and efficacy of Buddhist teachings and the authority of bodhisattvas and Buddhas."[55]

Nevertheless, the intended audience of these stories, for Peng Shaosheng, is not only comprised of Buddhists, if we take the debate between Peng Shaosheng and Yuan Mei into consideration. In his letter to Peng Shaosheng written before 1775, Yuan Mei states, "The so-called Buddha is as rootless and unreal as the wind. If you want to have a look at him, you cannot see him; if you want to listen to him, you cannot hear him; if you pray to him, he cannot answer your prayers. In fact, Tathāgata Śākyamuni is as unreal as a ghost in the fields. This is only a heterodox name and is not efficacious at all. Therefore, wise people do not believe in Buddhism."[56] Peng did not argue with Yuan Mei in his reply, but he addressed this issue in his postscript to Yuan Mei's *Xin qi xie*. Although it is not certain when Peng wrote the postscript to

[52] The full title of this chapter is called *Guan shi yin pusa pu men pin* (Chapter of Universal Gateway of Guanyin Bodhisattva), *Fahua jing*, *T* 9, no. 262: 56c10.
[53] *T* 9, no. 262: 46a4-46b3.
[54] Kieschnick, The *Eminent Monk*, 92.
[55] Campany, *Strange Writing*, 322-323.
[56] Yuan Mei, *Xiao chang shan fang wen ji*, *YQJ* 2.19: 338. The first thirty scrolls of the *Xiao chang shan fang* were compiled around 1775. This letter appears in scroll nineteen.

the Yuan manuscript, it is probable that it occurred prior to the time he completed the *Shan nüren zhuan* since the Yuan text predates the Peng collection by seventeen years.

> In his letter to me, Mr. Yuan states, "The so-called Buddha cannot be seen or heard by people; neither can he answer people's prayers. Therefore, Buddhas are the same as ghosts in the wild. They only have names, but are not efficacious at all . . ." What he writes is really misleading, yet he states it with such confidence that I thought it was impossible to change his position in the short-term and so laughed off his critique. Recently I read his *Xin qi xie*, in which he relates the story of the maternal grandmother of his grandmother, Madam Tang 湯 [sic]/Yang 楊.[57] [According to him,] the old women worshiped the Buddha and chanted Buddhist sūtras every day. She practiced Buddhism for thirty years without stepping out of her living quarters. Three days before she died, she asked for a basin to wash her feet, claiming she would depart the earthly world to straddle a lotus [in the Pure Land]. She died seated in lotus position, and the room was filled with wonderful fragrant smell for three days. The karmic cause and karmic effect are as obvious as the fact that water is cool and fire is hot. How can we say Buddhas are in name only, and are not efficacious at all? [Mr. Yuan] also narrated the story of Jiang Xinyu, who declined Yan Wang's [King Yama's] offer of an official position [in hell] by chanting the *Da bei zhou* [Dhāraṇī of Great Compassion]. Mr. Zheng drove away a fox spirit by chanting the *Xin jing* (Heart Sūtra)[58] and praying to Guanyin bodhisattva; Mr. Zhu dispersed ghosts by chanting the *Lotus Sūtra*. These practices elicited responses, didn't they? In fact, even though Madam Tang and these others only orally chanted sūtras, without really understanding the significance of these Buddhist texts, the responses to their practices are so obvious. How much [more response would] those who practice and understand the Buddhist scriptures well [elicit]? How can one say there is no difference between understanding and not understanding? If one heavily indulges in delicious food and beautiful women and slanders heaven and the sages, one will become an *icchantika* or incorrigible [who has no belief in Buddhism or any chance of being saved]. Isn't this regretful? In his treatise, Mr. Yuan recorded the principle of sympathetic response. Is it possible for a person who worships the Buddha and observes the Buddhist precepts to fall into hell or into the realm of hungry ghosts? Mr. Yuan knows that it is impossible. In fact, the opposite is also true. I personally feel that Mr. Yuan will be in danger [in his future lives]."[59]

In Peng's postscript, karma, translated as *yinguo* (karmic cause and karmic effect), is used interchangeably with sympathetic response to define the working mechanism of the miracles recorded in Yuan Mei's manuscript. The stories in Yuan Mei's *Xin qi xie* were cited by

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[57] In Peng's postscript, the surname of the old women is Tang, but Yuan Mei's account reads Yang. This is must be a copying error in Peng's collection as the two characters shared the same radical 易.
[58] *Xin jing*, *T* 8, no. 250.
[59] Peng Shaosheng, *Yi xing ju ji* 5: 6b-7b.

Peng Shaosheng as evidence of the efficacy of devotional practice and the power of Buddhist teachings and deities. Nevertheless, Yuan's stories imply several differences from Peng's conceptualization of sympathetic response. Take Yuan Mei's account of his grandmother's maternal grandmother cited in Peng's postscript as an example:

> Madam Chai, my grandmother, used to tell me the story about her maternal grandmother Madam Yang 楊, who had no sons and had to live with her daughter Madam Hong in her old age. By the time she died at the age of ninety-seven, she had lived in a secluded building for thirty years and never stepped out of it. Every day, she worshiped the Buddha and chanted sūtras. Madam Yang was so compassionate that she could not eat when she heard the servants being beaten or scolded. She used to share her food with her servants when they came to her room at mealtime. When she was ninety, the Buddha statue she worshiped daily began to stand up in response to her bow. Madam Yang was so surprised. At that time, my grandmother was still young. Madam Yang would have her as company. She told my grandmother, "The Buddha will not answer my bow when you are here." Three days before she passed away, she asked the maid to bring her a basin to wash her feet. The maid gave her the wood basin that she usually used. She said, "No, I cannot use this basin since I will [soon] step on a lotus. You should give me the bronze basin I use for washing my face." In an instant, she passed away in a seated lotus position. The room was filled with a wonderful fragrant smell for three days.[60]

Peng cites the second half of Madam Yang's story to prove the efficacy of karmic retribution. This part of the story parallels the miracles and rebirth stories recorded in Peng's collection, which I take up in the next chapter, but no parallel to the first part of the story, that is, a Buddha bowing to an ordinary person, can be found in his collection. In the *Shan nüren zhuan*, Buddhas or bodhisattvas are always the objects of worship and at the top of the Buddhist pantheon. Paying homage to Buddhas or bodhisattvas in these stories is an indication of piety and considered to be proper or imperative behavior for a Buddhist. From Peng's perspective, Yuan Mei's account can at least be an indication of ignorance of the ecclesiastic order in the Buddhist tradition, if not an outright offense.

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[60] Yuan Mei, *Zi bu yu*, *YQJ* 4.21: 401.

The following story by Yuan Mei can also be considered as a reversal of the ecclesiastic order:

> Yu Chenglong was the governor general of Liang Jiang. Before he passed the civil service exam, he dreamed that he was in a palace, which had the inscription "Dizang wang fu [Residence of Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva]" over its gate. An old monk was seated in the palace with his eyes closed, meditating in lotus position. Yu thought to himself that since Kṣitigarbha bodhisattva was in charge of the birth and death of human beings,[61] why not ask for the bodhisattva to extend his old servant's life. The servant was very pious and diligent, but had been ill in bed for a long time. He requested time and time again, but the monk did not answer. Yu was so angry that he went up to the old monk and slapped him. The old monk finally opened his eyes, smiled and pointed at Yu with one finger. Yu woke up and told people his dream. All said, "The one finger of Kṣitigarbha represents one decade." [As people had predicted,] the old servant recovered and lived for another twelve years.[62]

Unlike the stories collected in Peng's *Shan nüren zhuan*, in which miracles occur as responses from Buddhist deities or scriptures to the moral and devoted behavior of Buddhist laywomen, in Yuan Mei's account, Yu presses the bodhisattva to act by slapping the bodhisattva when he thought his request had gone unanswered. In Chinese folk religious tradition, we can find stories in which local officials or common people punish statues of local gods when their prayers are not answered,[63] but in Peng's collection, no story reports such a practice being applied to Buddhist deities. In fact, many accounts of miracles in Indian and Chinese Buddhist literature are related to the victory of Buddhist deities/adepts over deities of local cults, whom they convert to Buddhism as an indication of the Buddhist "conquest" of local cults and the transformation of Buddhism from a new or foreign religion into an integral part of mainstream culture.[64] Against this backdrop, Yuan Mei's story can be considered as a disruption of the sacrosanct order of

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[61] For a study of Kṣitigarbha or Dizang, as he is known in Chinese, see Zhiru, *The Making of a Savior Bodhisattva: Dizang in Medieval China*, Kuroda Institute Studies in East Asian Buddhism 21 (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007).
[62] Yuan Mei, *Zi bu yu*, *YQJ* 4.18: 304.
[63] See C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, 92.
[64] See Campany, *Strange Writing*, 323, 330-331, and Fiordalis, "Miracles and Superhuman Powers in South Asian Buddhist Literature," 107-108.

Buddhism by degrading bodhisattvas to the level of the spirits and demons of local cults and breaking the human-divine "moral-ritual reciprocity."[65] In this sense, Yuan Mei's account undermines established moral standards by rejecting the notion that the divine rewards moral and devotional behavior and needs no prodding from an outside, disrespectful source.

4.2 MIRACLES AS WARNINGS AGAINST TRANSGRESSION

In the *Shan nüren zhuan*, not all miracles occur as a response to the moral and devotional behavior of the Buddhist laywomen depicted in the collection. The following story may tell us something different from what I have discussed above.

> Chen Shi [Madam Chen] was very benevolent and compassionate and was called Female Sage by her neighbors. She chanted the names of the fifty-three Buddhas with great devotion every day. One day, she gave a Buddhist scripture to her servant to make another copy. The servant placed the scripture on a dirty desk and consumed a lot of alcohol while copying the scripture. Half a day later, a deity in black entered the room, seized the scripture and left. As the deity passed Madam Chen's house, he suddenly rose into the sky. From the sunny sky, loud thunder erupted and lightening [flashed] like bolts of white silk. Even people in towns tens of miles away saw this. (*Shan nüren zhuan* 2: 15b)

The deity in black seizing the scripture and the thunder and lightning in this story are sympathetic responses to the "negatively marked deeds"[66] of mistreating a Buddhist scripture and drinking alcohol while copying it. Different from the life-affirming miracles brought forth by the moral behavior and utmost sincerity of the Buddhist laywomen cited previously, this story features contra-natural phenomena as warnings against activities violating the Buddhist codes of behavior. Copying a text is among the Buddhist activities that bring great merit. Conversely, here

[65] Campany, *Strange Writing*, 367.
[66] Campany, *Strange Writing*, 325.

mistreatment of the scripture shows a total lack of respect towards a sacred text, while alcohol is prohibited by the Buddhist precepts. This story is similar to the previous stories in function. Both kinds of narratives provide evidence of the responsiveness of Buddhist deities, reaffirm the authority of the Buddhist teachings, establish proper codes of behavior and validate Buddhist (and Confucian) moral virtues. Where the two kinds of stories differ however is in method. Whereas this story cautions against misconduct through miraculous signs as warnings, the previous stories encourage people to do good through miraculous rewards.

In contrast to the stories in the Peng collection that serve as proof of the responsiveness of the divine to morally proper and improper behavior, one of Yuan Mei's stories suggests another way to interpret anomalies of this kind:

> Fang Ji [Concubine Fang] had a statue of Guanyin bodhisattva made of sandalwood. The statue was four inches tall. As an easygoing person, I didn't forbid my family to worship the bodhisattva, although I do not believe in Buddhism. Zhang Ma [Old Woman Zhang], one of our servants, worshiped the statue with great sincerity. The first thing she used to do every morning was to burn incense and bow to the bodhisattva. One morning, as I was in a rush [to attend] to some urgent business, I hurried her to prepare warm water for me to wash my face, but she kept bowing to the bodhisattva. I was so angry that I seized the statue, threw it to the ground and stepped on it. Old Women Zhang cried out, saying, "Last night I dreamed that Guanyin bodhisattva came to me to bid farewell. She said, 'There will be a disaster tomorrow, and I will leave for somewhere else.' Today you destroyed the bodhisattva. Wasn't this predestined?" The statue was sent to the Zhunti An [Zhunti Nunnery]. I thought [to myself], "Since the essence of the Buddhist dharma is empty, how can such a bizarre thing happen? The statue must be possessed by a ghost." From then on, I prohibited my family members from worshiping Buddhist deities.[67]

Unlike in Peng's story in which warning miracles are the response to sacrilege, no miraculous warning or punishment is imposed on Yuan Mei because of his "offensive" action in his account. Rather, Yuan justifies his offensive action by dismissing the anomaly as ghost possession, dismissing all belief in the power of a Buddhist deity. His complete disregard for liturgical

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[67] Yuan Mei, *Zu bu yu*, *YQJ* 4.19: 361-262.

propriety can be considered a rejection of the notion of sympathetic response or karmic retribution, both highlighted and promoted by Peng. Yuan Mei's story challenges the belief in the workings of karmic retribution and the responsiveness of Buddhist deities, and undermines the value system and codes of behavior supported by divine reward and punishment. It is not surprising that Peng thought Yuan was in danger of being punished because of his sacrilegious behavior and language.

The *Shan nüren zhuan* also contains stories describing negative and positive miraculous events occurring to the same person with the former as punishment for misconduct or sins and the latter as reward for good deeds and repentance of past misdeeds. The hidden dynamic behind these events is of course the workings of karmic retribution. In addition to the stories about pious Buddhist laywomen who brought worldly benefits to their male relatives through their devotional practices, the following two stories show how women assisted immediate family members—in particular male relatives—in escaping punishment in the afterlife. In one case, we see a woman introduce her errant relative to a Buddhist practice; in the other, a woman instructs her father on how to repent in order to remove the bad karma incurred by his violation of a Buddhist precept.

> Wang Digong Qi [Wife of Wang Digong] was a pious Buddhist, but Mr. Wang liked hunting. When Wang came back home after hunting one day, his wife was chanting the *Diamond Sūtra*. She asked him to chant with her. He chanted with her for a while, but gave up halfway. Five years later, Wang suffered a stroke. Lying in bed, he dreamed that two messengers of King Yama from hell were chasing him. [When he was caught and brought before King Yama for judgment,] King Yama angrily scolded him, "You have obtained a high official rank and enjoy good fortune, but you favor killing over doing good. Stripping you of your high official rank and shortening your lifespan would not be enough to offset your sins." He thereby ordered the ghost clerk to put Wang in a hot pot. The ghost clerk, upon further examination of Wang's record, informed King Yama about the time that Wang had chanted the *Diamond Sūtra* with his wife, for which he should be sent back to the [land of the] living since the merit he had gained by chanting the sūtra canceled out his sin [of killing animals]. Scooping some hot water from the pot, King Yama poured it on Wang's back as a warning and sent him back to life. [Awakening from his dream,] Wang found a deep-rooted ulcer in his back. The pain was unbearable. His wife prayed to the Buddha on his behalf, promising that he would not kill any

> sentient beings in future. She also vowed on his behalf that he would copy the *Diamond Sūtra* and observe the Buddhist precepts for the rest of his life. That night, Wang dreamed a monk massaged his back three times. The next morning, he awoke free from pain. (*Shan nüren zhuan* 1: 31a-31b)

Our second story also deals with punishment for killing and reward for correcting that behavior by performing good deeds and abstaining from killing.

> Lishi Nü [Daughter of the Li Family] was a native of Jiangling. Her father was named Yuanzong. When she was thirteen years old, she dreamed an Indian monk said to her, "You are [a person of] good roots, why not chant the *Diamond Sūtra*. If people of the world chant one section of the sūtra each day, their lifespans will be extended by one year. When they die, they will be reborn in heaven. If one gains wisdom through the *Diamond Sūtra*, one will attain nirvāṇa. Even if you don't have a thorough understanding of the sūtra, you will not be detained in the netherworld after you die." Miss Li accepted the monk's advice and chanted thirty sections of the sūtra every day. At the age of twenty-four, she refused to marry. One day, she was infected with typhoid and died three days later. [Appearing before King Yama in the netherworld,] King Yama said, "Since this girl gained merit from chanting the *Diamond Sūtra*, she should be sent back to the human realm." Before she left, King Yama said to her, "Your father has created a lot of bad karma and twenty years will be deducted from his lifespan because he likes cooking living fish. There are seven thousand fish complaining about the injustice they have suffered because of your father. They ask for his life to pay off their suffering. Tell your father that the reason he often dreams of falling into nets and has headaches when he writes are [the results of] the suffering [he has caused] the fish." The girl came back to life and told her father what King Yama said. Yuanzong was shocked, and went to Tianning Temple with his daughter to hold a vegetarian feast for a hundred monks. He also vowed to abstain from meat and alcohol and copied the *Diamond Sūtra* forty-nine times. After he finished copying the sūtra, he dreamed thousands of boys in blue shirts were bidding him farewell. "We have suffered for a long time. Thank you for transferring the merit you gained from sūtra copying to us. [Because of your efforts,] we have been able to escape from suffering and have been reborn in a better [i.e., human] realm. Since you have removed your bad karma, you should continue to make merit in order to extend your lifespan." From then on, Yuanzong chanted the sūtra with utmost piety. At the age of one hundred-twenty, after taking a bath, he died in a seated posture without suffering from any disease. (*Shan nüren zhuan* 1: 30b-31a)

These two stories, respectively, were selected from the *Jin'gang chi yan ji* (Records of Efficacy of Chanting the Diamond Sūtra)[68] and *Jin'gang zheng guo* (Evidence of Karmic Effects of

[68] Zhou Kefu, *Jin'gang jing chi yan ji*, *XZJ* 149.258a: 16-258b12.

Chanting the Diamond Sūtra).[69] As their titles indicate, these two collections promote the efficacy of the *Diamond Sūtra*. There is little doubt that the two stories were selected for inclusion in the *Shan nüren zhuan* to provide evidence of the power of that scripture. Like the stories I have cited previously, the Buddhist practices of the two women in these stories—here mainly focused on chanting the *Diamond Sūtra*—bring benefit to male family members. They act as mediators between the netherworld and this world to supplicate for a male family member or to carry a message of karmic retribution to him, resulting in his correcting his behavior and thereby removing the punishment entailed by his previous misconduct.

Different from previous stories, in which miracles occur as a response to moral virtues and piety as advocated by Confucian and Buddhist ethics, punishment and reward in these two stories are delivered based on violation and observance of the Buddhist precept of non-killing and vegetarianism. Confucian ethics of course do not condemn hunting or the consumption of animal products. Prohibition against killing animals and consuming animal products are Buddhist precepts, which sometimes find themselves in contention with mainstream (Confucian) social norms. In traditional Chinese society, everyone was obliged to participate in memorial rituals for one's ancestors and government officials were also supposed to officiate at rituals for gods officially recognized by the government, such as city gods or the gods of rivers, mountains and clouds.[70] At these rituals, foods with meat were usually prepared as offerings to ancestors and deities. Meat as an offering is also recorded in the *Li ji* (Book of Rites) and the *Analects*.[71] In

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[69] Fakong, *Jin'gang zheng guo* (scanned copy, Hu guo wan shou si, 1593), 12a-12b, downloaded from ishare.iask.sina.com.cn/f/19595660.html, accessed March 22, 2013.
[70] See C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, 14 and 145-146.
[71] Confucius talked about sacrificial meat several times. For example, when Zigong, one of Confucius' disciples, wanted to do away with the sacrificial lamb at the ritual of announcement of each new moon, Confucius said, "You love the sheep, but I love the rite." See *Lun yu* 3: 17, in *Si shu wu jing* 1: 49. This comment by Confucius suggests that the offering of meat is part of properly conducted ritual. Another quote from the *Analects* about proper treatment of sacrificial meat after the rite is, "After assisting at the lords' sacrifice ritual, he did not keep his portion

his correspondence with lay followers, the Ming eminent monk Zhuhong discusses possible ways for lay Buddhists, especially officials, to accommodate these social customs while at the same time reducing the killing of animals, which indicates just how difficult it was to keep a vegetarian diet for many lay Buddhists, especially for those degree holders who served in the government. Zhuhong gave his lay followers a tip to avoid or reduce the killing of animals for the purpose of sacrifice: "When statutes for state or family rituals or [official] banquets require the sacrifice of [animal] life, one should buy [meat] in the market and prepare dishes from that.[72]

In Peng's time, vegetarianism never ceased to be a topic of debate between Buddhists and non-Buddhists (mainly Confucian literati). Peng and Wang Jin, his friend and fellow Buddhist practitioner, were advocates of a vegetarian diet. Peng received the precept of non-killing at the age of twenty-five, but he continued to eat meat bought from the market at that time. Four years later, he refrained from eating all meat products.[73] According to Peng, he decided to do so because "Confucians thinkers always say the myriad things are one. Oneness means there are no two entities. If so, to kill animals to nourish oneself is just like cutting one's limbs off to satisfy one's appetite. The pain is the same. Those who do not feel the pain separate one into two, and lose their hearts and minds."[74] Elaborating further on his reason for adopting a vegetarian diet, Peng continues:

> I want my mind to be at peace with what I do. When my mind is at peace, I know that life itself should be loved and all things in the world should be cherished. Because life should be loved, it is unbearable for me to kill an animal; because all things in the world should be cherished, how can I feel at ease knowing that I have destroyed something. Doesn't it

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of the sacrificial meat overnight. In other cases, he did not keep the sacrificial meat for more than three days." *Lun yu* 10: 9, in *Si shu wu jing* 1: 80. The *Li ji* mentions sacrificial animals, including lamb, pork and ox. *Li ji* 5: 10, in *Si shu wu jing* 2: 795. There is also a detailed prescription in the *Li ji* about how the sacrificial animal was slaughtered and offered to the royal ancestors. *Li ji* 8: 17, in *Si shu wu jing* 2: 921.

[72] Zhuhong, *Zi zhi lu*, in *Lianchi da shi qu ji* (Taibei: Dongchu chu ban she, 1992), 2255, as quoted in Eichman, "Spiritual Seekers in a Fluid Landscape," 106.

[73] Peng Shaosheng, *Er lin ju ji* 6: 1a-2b.

[74] Peng Shaosheng, *Er lin ju ji* 6: 1b-2a.

> agree with the teaching of embodying benevolence [advocated by Confucius] when I give up taking lives to achieve peace of mind? Unfortunately, those who claim themselves Confucian do not examine this issue.[75]

Here Peng Shaosheng employs Confucian concepts to justify and advance the precept of non-killing and Buddhist vegetarianism, but Yuan Mei again challenges his position. Yuan Mei loved food and composed a culinary book called *Sui yuan shi dan* (Cuisine of the Sui Garden), which included many recipes with meat as an ingredient. In a letter to Wang Jin, Yuan Mei cites Confucius to refute the former's argument about abstaining from killing animals. Yuan Mei writes,

> You [Wang Jin] said, "The compassionate mind that abstains from killing is identical to the mind of the Confucian sages who were benevolent to human beings and loved animals." Do you know that the nature of heaven and earth is to value human beings? When Fan Chi asked Confucius about benevolence, the master answered, "Love people"; he did not say "love animals."[76] . . . The government prohibits butchering only on occasions such as drought or flooding. This means that butchering agrees with the will of heaven and is a normal activity of people's daily lives. The prohibition [in unusual situations] is the same as reducing one's meals and ceasing entertainment at a time of disaster. It is a variation of rites [in such situation]. Confucius fished with fishing rod instead of net and he did not hunt the roosting animals,[77] but did he give up fishing and hunting in normal conditions? Did he release animals [in these situations as Buddhists do]? . . . You only know that the red fluid in the body of animals is blood. Don't you know that the white fluid in plants is their blood as well? . . . Don't you know that the vegetables and rice silently beg for their lives [when you cook]? Since you claim yourself to be compassionate and benevolent, it must be unbearable for you to eat rice and vegetables. Only when you do not eat them, will you have peace in mind. But I know you are unable to give up eating [rice and vegetables].[78]

Yuan Mei employs the Confucian Classics to privilege human beings over animals and justify meat consumption as a lifestyle sanctioned by heaven. At the same time, he ridicules Buddhists for the fact that their compassion and benevolence does not extend to plants, vegetables and rice. I have mentioned above that Peng and Wang made their case for Buddhist vegetarianism by

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[75] Peng Shaosheng, *Er lin ju ji* 6: 2a.
[76] *Lun yu* 12: 22, in *Si shu wu jing* 1: 91.
[77] *Lun yu* 7: 27, in *Si shu wu jing* 1: 68.
[78] Yuan Mei, "Da Wang Dasheng shu,"*Xiao chang shan fang wen ji*, *YQJ* 2: 646-647.

drawing on the parallels between Confucian benevolence and Buddhist compassion through their reinterpretation of the Confucian Classics. The two opposing sides both resort to the Confucian Classics to defend their respective practices, but Peng attributes the difference between his position and that of Yuan Mei to the fact that many Confucians did not realize that the oneness of the myriad things found in the Confucian Classics meant that benevolence should be extended to animals.[79] In this sense, the Buddhist precepts of non-killing and adherence to a vegetarian diet better implements the Confucian moral ideal by extending benevolence to all animals. To harmonize Buddhist practices and Confucian ethics and prove the former better fulfilled the latter's ideal is the strategy used by Peng and other Buddhists to validate Buddhist practices in response to Confucian challenges.

Peng Shaosheng in fact resorts to two approaches to persuade people to uphold non-killing and maintain a vegetarian diet. First, he contends that Confucian benevolence is identical to Buddhist compassion. Second, he draws on the law of karmic retribution and rebirth to persuade people to abstain from killing animals and consuming meat products. In his "Wei wang you Lu Jiuling chan hui wen" (Repentance Written on Behalf of My Deceased Friend, Lu Jiuling), we are told that Lu was devoted to Buddhist practices and made a vow to adopt a vegetarian diet in middle age, but broke his vow one year later and died soon after he resumed

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[79] The concept of *wan wu yi ti* (oneness of all myriad things) can be traced back to the *Mencius*, which states, "The myriad things are all in me." *Mengzi* 13: 4. The Ming Confucian thinker Wang Yangming, said, "The great person sees the myriad things are one. . . . He who discriminates one from another is an inferior person. The superior man does not consciously [think the way he does]. It is decided by the benevolent nature of his mind. His mind and the myriad things in this world are one. . . . He is worried about and is sympathetic towards the child when he sees him fall into a well because he identifies with that child based to his benevolence. . . . [The superior person] cannot stand the sad wailing of birds or animals because his benevolence makes him and the birds or animals as one." Wang Yangming, *Da xue wen* (Inquiry on the Great Learning), in *Wang Yangming qu ji* (Shanghai: Shanghai gu ji chuban she, 2006), 968-969. For a detailed discussion on the development of the theory of the oneness of the myriad things in Confucianism in the Ming see Huang Shuling, "Ming ru zhi wan wu yi ti lun ji qi dao de shi jian: yi Luo Jinxi gong fu lun wei ke xin" (Ming Confucian Theory of the "Oneness of the Mriad Things" and its Moral Implications: A Case of Lu Jinxi's Theory of "Effort"), *Taida wen shi zhe xue bao* 73 (2010): 1-35.

meat consumption. Peng attributes Lu's sudden death to the bad karma he created due to the violation of his vow against killing.[80] Peng's accounts of his friend's death and the miracles cited above explicitly serve to caution against killing animals for consumption or for fun.

4.3 MIRACLE WORKER: CONFORMER OR TRANSGRESSOR?

The women in the stories discussed previously are not miracle workers, but witnesses or benefactors of miracles, which occur in response to their piety and moral virtue. I turn now to the story of the only wonder worker in this collection, Pengshan Shenggu (Holy Maiden of Pengshan), to explore whether she was a transgressor of or a conformist to the established religious and secular order.

> Pengshan Shenggu was a native of Pengshan County in Xuzhou prefecture. Her real name is unknown. She was graceful and virtuous. At a very young age, she began to worship the Buddha. Shenggu intended to leave her family to become a Buddhist nun, but was stopped by her parents. Later, her parents married her off to a man in a neighboring village [against her will]. Every night, when the couple went to sleep, the husband felt as though a wall had been erected between him and Shenggu preventing him from intimacy with her. They lived like this for about one month. The husband told his mother about this strange sensation. The mother-in-law decided to investigate the matter for herself. At night, when she slept with Shenggu, the same thing happened. The mother-in-law was surprised and asked Shenggu about the wall. She replied with a smile, "There is no wall. It is only created by your mind." Two months later, her husband's clan went to the county court and accused Shenggu of sorcery. She was brought before the magistrate at the county court and questioned. Although the magistrate could not find anything wrong with her, he ordered her arrest and locked her in a small mountain cave out of fear of her sorcery. The entrance was completely blocked with rocks except for one very small hole. Several days later, people went to the cave and found that she looked the same as before. Her mother and brother brought her some nuts and dates, but she declined, telling them that she was full and not hungry at all. When her brother came to see her three months later, he found her as healthy as before. To his surprise, there were heavenly flowers scattered on the ground of the cave. Nobody knew where these flowers came from. When

[80] Peng Shaosheng, *Yi xing ju ji* 1: 3b.

> asked when she would be freed from the cave, she replied, "When an official with [the character] Huan in his given name comes, I will get out of here." Her prophecy spread all over the county. Three years later, an official of Shanyin named Xu Huan passed by this place and heard of Shenggu's story. He decided to pay her a visit. Shenggu told him, "Your son is in danger, but he can escape that danger through religious practice." Two days later, a messenger from Xu's hometown relayed a message to Xu that proved Shenggu's prophecy. As Xu's wife was a pious Buddhist, she wanted to have the cave opened so that Shenggu could be set free. Shenggu declined, "My sins have not been redeemed." Xu asked her, "When will you be set free?" She answered, "When a person with [the surname] Ning comes here, I can be freed." Four years later, an official called Ning Ruili happened to pass through this place on his way to Zhejiang province. When he heard the story of Pengshan Shenggu, he paid her a visit to see if he could do something for her. Shenggu then asked him to send a letter to Xu Huan. Ning did what Shenggu requested. When Ning told Xu about his encounter with Pengshan Shenggu, Xu, remembering his meeting with her, sent people to Xuzhou right away to set Shenggu free from the cave. She had been locked in the cave for eighteen years. . . . The next spring, Wu Yongxian, the governor of Jiangxi, invited Shenggu to his home and worshiped her [as though she were a bodhisattva] for three months. She ate vegetables and fruits like common people, but she did not relieve herself. When people asked her about the future, her prophecies were always correct. When Wu escorted her back to Xu's family, many clergy and laypeople followed her. One year later, she felt a little sick. Knowing she was dying, Shenggu asked for a wooden barrel [large enough for her] to sit in. She then took a bath and sat in the barrel and asked those around her to chant the *Heart Sūtra*. She died peacefully in a seated position. (*Shan nüren zhuan* 2: 9b-11a)

This story was adapted from the *Kuai yuan*, compiled by Qian Xiyan (1573-1638). The *Kuai yuan* is made up of short stories and anecdotes that Qian collected from his friends. Many belong to the "strange writing" genre. The most conspicuous change Peng made to this story is the name of the protagonist. In the *Kuai yuan*, the female character is called Qian Shan Pusa (Bodhisattva of Thousand Kinds of Goodness).[81] But in the *Shan nüren zhuan*, as we have seen, Peng changes her name to Pengshan Shenggu. Pengshan was the native town of the protagonist and Shenggu simply means "Holy Maiden" or a maiden of high spiritual achievement, but the term "*pusa*" refers to a bodhisattva, a title sometimes appropriated by charismatic leaders of

[81] Qian Xiyan, *Kuai yuan*, *XSK* 1267.5: 612-613.

religious sects. It is safe to assume that Peng did not change her name arbitrarily. Let's examine this story in light of the political and historical context of the Qing dynasty to see why he did.

Pengshan Shenggu deviates from mainstream social norms in her rejection of normal family life, her spiritual powers to summon an invisible wall to protect her virginity, and her ability to make predictions that later proved to be true. At the same time, she was charismatic and attracted many followers. These qualities can be perceived as potential threats to the established authorities. Qing law had strict controls over religious practitioners and religious group activities outside of religious institutions sanctioned by the government:

> Sorcerers who pretend to call upon heretic gods, write charms, cast spells on water [to cure illness] or perform spirit-writing, those who call themselves shamans or falsely claim themselves to be Maitreya Buddha, societies called the White Lotus Sect, Honoring Illumination Teachings and White Cloud Society all preach heresy and evil teachings. Some of them secretly store [images of heterodox gods] and burn incense [to them]. They gather in the evening and disperse in the morning. They act as if they do good, but intend to delude the masses. The leaders should be sentenced to jail to await strangulation, and their followers should be sentenced to one hundred blows of the stick and be exiled three thousand *li* away from their homes.[82]
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> Yin-yang sorcerers should not be invited to the homes of civil officials and military officers of any rank to predict the fortune of the empire. Violators should be sentenced to one hundred blows of the stick. To employ the *Book of Changes* to predict personal fortune is not prohibited.[83]

These severe penal codes explicitly express the Qing government's vigilance against charismatic religious leaders who claimed themselves to be reincarnations of Buddhist or Daoist deities, possessing spiritual powers to work miracles and make prophecies about the dynasty, and able to rally large group of followers around them. The major concern of the government lay in the seditious potential of any large group of followers under the leadership of a politically ambitious religious figure. Such eschatological expectations and religious fanaticism held the

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[82] *Da Qing hui dian shi li* 766.9: 432b-433a.
[83] *Da Qing hui dian shi li* 768.9: 451b.

potential to mobilize followers to challenge the political power of the government in the hope of establishing a new and better world. In Chinese history, religious rebellions are not rare. For example, the Qing rulers were well aware that the Red Turban Rebellion brought about the fall of the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1206-1368) and the rise of the Ming dynasty began with a militant millennial movement led by Han Lin'er (d. 1366), who claimed to be a Manichean-Buddhist savior. This movement later came under the control of Zhu Yuanzhang (1328-1398), who established the Ming.[84] The religious rebellion closest to Peng's time was the White Lotus Sect Rebellion in Shandong in 1774 (eight years before the completion of the *Shan nüren zhuan*) under the leadership of Wang Lun (d. 1774), who claimed to be the reincarnation of Maitreya Buddha.[85]

The above examples of religious rebellions suggest that religious leaders who claimed to be Buddhas or bodhisattvas and demonstrated supernatural powers, as did Pengshan Shenggu, could "satisfy powerless people's fantasy of power,"[86] empowering and mobilizing them to challenge the secular authority. But the opposite is true as well. These religious figures easily fell victim to political persecution because of their "exotic beliefs," lifestyles deviant from the social norms and people's fear of their potentially unruly power.[87] In the nationwide sorcery scare of 1768 that originated in the Jiangnan area where Peng lived, Buddhist monks, Daoist adepts,

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[84] Charles O. Hucker, *The Ming Dynasty: Its Origins and Evolving Institutions*, Center for Chinese Studies (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1978), "Introduction."
[85] Susan Naquin, *Shantung Rebellion: The Wang Lun Uprising of 1774* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 65.
[86] Philip Kuhn, in his *Soul Stealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768* (Harvard University Press, 1990), and John Kieschnick, in his chapter on thaumaturgy in *The Eminent Monk,* both point out from different perspectives that supernatural power satisfies people's (especially powerless people's) fantasies of power in hierarchical societies, such as imperial China.
[87] Kuhn, *Soul Stealers*, 232.

beggars and other deviants from the social norm became the most susceptible targets of persecutions accompanied by panic.[88]

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising to find that a Buddhist miracle worker like Pengshan Shenggu was both threatening to the established authority and vulnerable to persecution by that authority. The change of her name from bodhisattva to holy maiden downplays her "divine" capacities and expresses her human nature, thereby making her story less offensive to the authorities. What differentiates Pengshan Shenggu from other charismatic millennial rebellious leaders moreover is her willing submission to secular authority. In her story, when social norms are in contention with her religious practice, she chooses to comply with her parents' will to marry and accepts the punishment imposed on her by the county magistrate as a way to redeem herself for her evasion of her wifely duty. Despite her obvious spiritual power, she did not leave the cave until she received permission from an official. Request for permission in her case is a symbolic action, showing her obedience to secular authority. Pengshan Shenggu's compliant behavior integrates her into the established social order and disentangles her from the marginal "other" of the social structure, whose unruly power and deviant lifestyle posed a threat to conventional society.

To view Pengshan Shenggu along the continuum of the conformity/transgression paradigm,[89] she is obviously a conformist as she does not subvert the existing religious and social order but sustains the established order through her complete obedience and life-affirming prophecies. Her story could be used to assuage the suspicions and anxieties of non-believers and the ruling elite about the potential dangers of people with supernatural power by articulating that Buddhists did not intend to endanger society and those within it. Rather, they were obedient

[88] Kuhn, *Soul Stealers*, 232.
[89] Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy*, 131.

subjects of the country. The account of Pengshan Shenggu's life also suggests a way for lay Buddhists to behave when they find their religious precepts and practices in conflict with social norms, namely, they should make concessions to fit their religious practices into the norms of secular society rather than put up direct confrontation.

In fact, one conspicuous feature of all the women in the miracle stories collected in the *Shan nüren zhuan* is that they are not transgressors of the religious or social order despite that they are witnesses to miracles, benefactors of miracles or miracle workers. The miracles recorded in this collection highlight moral virtues and proper behavior as well as Buddhist practices in agreement with the dominant values that sustain the established secular and religious order. However, not all writers who record accounts of these supernatural phenomena share the same goal with Peng. Yuan Mei, for example, expresses his opinion on collecting anomaly accounts in the preface to his *Xin qi xie*:

> Other than my interest in literature and history, I like collecting and recording stories that entertain my mind and shock my ears. I am not deluded by these stories. It is just like a person who tastes all eight delicacies; he would get bored if he did not eat some ant egg sauce and pickled vegetables. It is also like a music fan, who [only] listens to the classical music of Xian and Shao; his knowledge of music would be limited if he did not also listen to vulgar popular music. [By collecting and recording these stories,] wild imagination can drive away boredom; shock can awaken [me] from sluggishness. Isn't it like battling at chess? It is as entertaining as Pi Chen's outings."[90]

Yuan's preface implies that writings in line with Confucian orthodoxy alone are far from adequate to provide him with the diversified and exciting lifestyle he seeks. He defends anomaly accounts as supplementary or alternative discourses to mainstream literature that can liberate a person's mind from the "boredom" and "sluggishness" fostered by the conventional order. His

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[90] Yuan Mei, *Zi bu yu*, *YQJ* 4: 1. Pi Chen (d. 541 BCE) served as a consultant to Zichan, the premier of Zheng. Only when he was he in the wild could he give good advice. Zican would go on outings with Pi Chen when Zican needed his guidance. See Zuo Qiuming, *Chun qiu zuo zhuan zheng yi* 40, annotated by Du Yu and Kong Yingda et al. (Taibei: Taiwan gu ji, 2001), 1301.

interest in anomaly accounts also indicates his lack of acceptance of the existing value system and intellectual trends of his time, which is well reflected in the following stories.

> There was a Confucian scholar in Hangzhou called Yang Zhaonan, who was also interested in Chan Buddhism. One year after his death, he appeared to his wife in a dream, saying, "Everybody should have a place to go after death. Since I was a Confucian scholar, I was sent to Wenchang's Palace.[91] Wenchang tested me on the Confucian Classics, but I could not answer. So the god in charge of souls sent me to the Buddha's place. The Buddha tested me on the Buddhist sūtras, which I could not answer either. The Buddha also did not accept me. Thus I wander between and betwixt the Confucian netherworld and the Buddhist netherworld, and have no place to settle down. Since there is no other way out, I will be reborn into the Zhang family on a certain day. Considering that I was so devoted to Buddhism in my life, you should remember to tell the Zhangs not to feed me meat or milk. In this way, I will not fall [into purgatory] again." Zhang was an old friend of Zhaonan. When the time came, a baby boy was delivered, seated in lotus position. He cried incessantly day and night until the Zhangs gave him some meat three years later. [After the young boy ate the meat,] he soon developed epilepsy.[92]

This story explicitly teases Confucian scholars who promoted the syncretism of Buddhism and Confucianism. According to the story, Confucian scholars, such as Yang Zhaonan, who attempted to practice the two teachings came to know neither the Confucian Classics nor the Buddhist sūtras well enough to be accepted by either tradition. They were caught between the two and struggled with how to define their ultimate identity. Buddhist vegetarianism was again ridiculed in this story. This narrative thus indicates Yuan Mei's rejection of the syncretic approach popular among Song and Ming neo-Confucian thinkers as well as his contemporaries, such as Peng Shaosheng. However, Yuan Mei was not a member of the prominent Evidential School of his time either, which sought to eliminate all Buddhist influence from neo-Confucian

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[91] In Chinese mythology, Wenchang is the patron deity of literary arts, and worshiped by scholars. For the study of the development of the cult of Wenchang in late imperial China see Terry Kleeman, *A God's Own Tale: The Book of Transformations of Wenchang, the Divine Lord of Zitong* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 68-83.

[92] Yuan Mei, "Ru fo liang bu shou" (A Confucian Scholar Whom Neither Confucians nor Buddhists Accept), in *Zi bu yu, YQJ* 4.18: 340.

thought and return Confucian to its "pure" (read: pre-Buddhist) state. Consequently we also find stories in which he ridicules them as well:

> Pan Shu, a native of Huzhou, died before he married his betrothed. On his deathbed, he asked Mr. Li, his prospective father-in-law, not to marry off his daughter to someone else. Mr. Li agreed. After [Pan Shu's] death, however, Mr. Li forgot his promise and agreed to marry his daughter off to another man. On the eve of the wedding, the ghost of Pan Shu possessed the bride. When a teacher called Mr. Zhang heard about this, he decided to argue with the ghost on behalf of the bride's family. Walking into the bride's room, he called upon [the prescripts] about rites in the Classics to convince the ghost [to take his leave and not interfere with the wedding]. [Mr. Zhang] reasoned, "If a woman is married into a man's home without conducting the ritual of paying respect to the man's ancestors at his clan shrine, she should be buried with her natal family when she dies. How much more so an unmarried girl? What is the point of her remaining celibate for your sake?" The ghost could not answer Zhang's question. Suddenly, he opened his mouth and sent out a gust of cold and stinking air. [Upon his departure,] the girl was cured but Mr. Zhang's mouth became crooked. Mr. Li respected the teacher and invited him to his home. All the villagers called Zhang Mr. Crooked Mouth (Wai Zui Xiansheng).[93]

In this story, Yuan Mei scorns the values promoted both by Evidential School scholars, neo-Confucian moralists and the government. Different from the rhetoric of the dominant ideology, which equated the loyalty of chaste widows to their deceased husbands and chaste maidens their deceased betrotheds to the loyalty of subjects to rulers, the disruptive and jealous ghost (aka the now deceased fiancé) in this story reveals that the obligation that he imposed on Mr. Li's daughter on his deathbed had nothing to with morality, but only with the young man's selfishness. The argument Mr. Zhang presents in his debate with the ghost is typical of the response we found in chapter two by proponents of the Evidential School to the cult of chaste maidens. Mr. Zhang's crooked mouth made him a laughing stock regardless of his erudition in the Classics and his eloquence in debate, and is evidence of the lack of respect, indeed contempt, that Yuan Mei held towards the pedantry of Evidential School scholars.

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[93] Yuan Mei, "Wai zui xian sheng," in *Zi bu yu*, *YQJ* 4.16: 303.

In Yuan Mei's stories, the motif that moral behavior, proper ritual protocol and piety will be rewarded and evil deeds and transgressions will be punished is not prevalent. The commonly held correlation between cosmic principles and human affairs is not always at work in Yuan's writings.[94] In Robert Campany's work on cosmographies in medieval China, he outlines several purposes or reasons for the creation or development of cosmographies. One of these is "to undermine a dominant worldview without necessarily offering a clearly articulated alternative system."[95] This is true of Yuan Mei's stories. Instead of composing a morally didactical manuscript through these stories, Yuan Mei's *Xin qi xie* reveals his doubts about and resistance to the established norms valued by Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism.[96] In fact, Yang Zhaonan's anxiety over his identity is also true of Yuan Mei and other intellectuals of his time, who sought to reconstruct their own identities and worldviews that could function as alternatives to the current value system in the face of the emergence of competing views on values, discrepancies between ideology and reality, and the malfunctioning of the dominant social norms and value system.

In opposition to Yuan's dissatisfaction, disbelief and rejection of the established and dominant value system expressed in his accounts on cosmographies, Peng's accounts of the supernatural phenomena witnessed, experienced and worked out by Buddhist laywomen confirmed the current value system and social norms and reinforced the social order on which they were based. Peng's assertion that sympathetic response in the Chinese tradition is identical to the working of Buddhist karmic retribution is well manifested in his accounts of miraculous experiences of Buddhist laywomen in the *Shan nüren zhuan*. The miraculous rewards conferred

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[94] Sing-chen Lydia Chiang, *Collecting the Self*, 248.
[95] Campany, *Strange Writing*, 5.
[96] Sing-chen Lydia Chiang, *Collecting the Self*, 194-196.

on these women are responses to their moral virtues, piety and proper behavior. The warning signs and punishments of their male relatives are meted out based on their transgressions, and are only removed contingent on self-correction and repentance for their sins. Miraculous rewards sanctified moral virtues such as filial piety, chastity and obedience, which are highlighted in the stories Peng chose to include in his collection and are the same virtues that were also highly valued by the dominant ideology and promoted by the secular authorities.

In comparison to morality books and the ledgers of merit and demerit popular in the late Ming and early Qing, which are mainly based on the belief system of sympathetic response and are more syncretic in nature,[97] the miracles collected in the *Shan nüren zhuan* focus on and communicate Buddhist features, such as the intervention of Buddhist deities, supernatural power of Buddhist texts, piety in worshiping Amitābha Buddha and Guanyin bodhisattva and observance of the Buddhist precepts. These features dominate despite that the stories in the *Shan nüren zhuan* espouse the same virtues and emphasize the same modes of proper behavior as do the morality books. On the Buddhist side, Zhuhong's *Zi zhi lu* (Record of Self-knowledge) is an example of a Ming Buddhist version of a ledger of merit and demerit. Employing a "bean counting" or quantitative method, it outlines behaviors that can increase or decrease one's merit.[98] In this sense, ledgers of merits and demerits use a "carrot and stick" method of weights and measures to encourage moral behavior and discourage unethical behavior based on the Buddhist precepts and Buddhist doctrines. Even though the *Shan nüren zhuan* includes stories about miracles occurring as warnings against misbehavior (as discussed in section two of this chapter), the miracles in Peng's collection are much more focused on reward than punishment and serve as examples of proper behavior, devotional practice, and moral virtues, and are

[97] Brokaw, *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit*, 234.
[98] Chün-fang Yü, *Renewal of Buddhism in China*, 118-137.

intended for Buddhists and non-Buddhists, including outright detractors, alike. Thus, the difference between Peng Shaosheng's miracle stories and ledgers of merits and demerits is one of methodology and orientation.

In the face of fleeting and competing views on values, the miracle stories in the *Shan nüren zhuan* validate the view on values shared by Buddhists and Confucian moralists. Instead of undermining or subverting the existing social order, like Yuan Mei's accounts (which were later banned by the Qing government in 1838, 1844 and 1868),[99] Peng's stories sustain the established hierarchical social structure. The highlighted Buddhist features in these stories at the same time reorient the Confucian moral system to enable moral virtues to be fully actualized.

[99] Sing-chen Lydia Chiang, *Collecting the Self*, 157.

5.0 THE NON-REGRESSING PATH TO REBIRTH IN THE PURE LAND

Women's soteriological issues are elaborated in a number of scriptural texts. For example, in the *Longer Pure Land Sūtra* (Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtra), popular in late imperial China, several of the forty-eight primal vows made by the future Amitābha Buddha while still the bodhisattva Dharmākara are related to women. For example, in his second vow, the future Amitābha Buddha notes that his Pure Land should be free from women and other defiled things;[1] in his thirty-second vow, he declares, "If there is a woman in the ten directions who feels happy, generates faith in me, and despises her female body, she will no longer be reborn as a woman after she dies; otherwise, I will not attain buddhahood."[2] According to these two vows, for a woman to gain rebirth in the Pure Land of Amitābha Buddha, she would first need to transform her body into a male body. The *Lotus Sūtra,* another popular scripture in Chinese Buddhism, relates the story of the dragon girl who attained buddhahood (after instantaneously transforming her body into a male form), and also identifies five obstacles that women face in their religious careers by virtue of their female form.[3] On the one hand, these sūtras convey a message of universal salvation that encompasses women; on the other hand, the androcentric discourse in these scriptures places women in a spiritually inferior position. This chapter focuses on issues of

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[1] *T* 12, no. 364: 328c13-15.
[2] *Fo shuo Da Amituofo jing*, *T* 12, no. 364: 329c12-15.
[3] *Fahua jing*, *T* 9, no. 262: 35c6-26. The five obstacles (*wu zhang*) are five states of being that women are considered unable to achieve: Brahma-kings, Indras, Māra-kings, Cakravartin-kings, and Buddhas.

women's rebirth in the Pure Land in the *Shan nüren zhuan* and other writings by Peng Shaosheng as well as Buddhist women contemporaneous to him to examine the various ways employed by Buddhists to handle the rebirth of women in the Pure Land and to challenge the androcentric rhetoric in Buddhist doctrines. In particular, I look at differences in motivation and perspective between these two groups.

Although there had been a syncretic trend within the Buddhist tradition since the late Ming, namely, the advocacy of *chan jing shuang xiu* (dual cultivation of Chan and Pure Land) by eminent monks such as Zhuhong and his followers,[4] disputes over Pure Land practice within and outside of the Buddhist community continued. With specific reference to the eighteenth century, Confucian detractors in Peng's time dismissed Pure Land belief as an explicit expression of the fear of death and a clinging to long life, and criticized Pure Land practices, such as the oral invocation of the name of Amitābha Buddha to attain rebirth in his Pure Land, as foolish since nobody knows what happens after death.[5] Within the Buddhist community disputes over Pure Land belief and practice between Pure Land proponents and Chan practitioners lasted from the late Ming to the eighteenth century, despite that the dual cultivation of Chan and Pure Land scheme had, by then, been proposed by Pure Land proponents as a way to settle the dispute between the two systems.[6] Backed by the famous saying from the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, "If the bodhisattva wishes to acquire a pure land, he must purify his mind. When the mind is pure, the

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[4] Chün-fang Yü, *Renewal of Buddhism in China*, 4-6.
[5] Peng Shaosheng, *Yi xing ju ji* 7: 12a.
[6] On the disputes between Pure Land practitioners and Chan followers in the Ming, especially the apologia for Pure Land written by the Ming lay Buddhist Yuan Hongdao, see Charles B. Jones, "Apologetic Strategies in Late Imperial Chinese Pure Land Buddhism," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 29 (2001): 78-87; also Jones, "Yuan Hongdao and the *Xifang helun*: Pure Land Theology in the Late Ming Dynasty," in *Path of No Path: Contemporary Studies in Pure Land Buddhism Honoring Roger Corless*, ed. Richard K. Payne (Berkeley: Institute of Buddhist Studies and Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2009), 89-126.

Buddha-land will be pure,"[7] Chan practitioners and those who believed in *wei xin jing tu* (mind-only Pure Land) insisted that the Pure Land was only the construction of one's mind, and condemned the physical existence of a pure land outside the *sāha* world that one could aspire to as a violation of the Buddhist concept of non-duality.[8] Another popular view among well-educated elite from the late Ming to Qing was that Pure Land practice was an expedient means for those with low intellectual capacity who were less able or unable to carry out other forms of Buddhist practices, but was an unnecessary practice for those of high intellectual capacity who were able to understand Buddhist doctrine, practice meditation or formulate smart arguments in Chan conversation.[9]

Adherents longing for rebirth in the Pure Land through faith and devotional practices thus found it necessary to defend their beliefs and practices against critics from time to time. To name a few among the monastic community and lay apologists from the Ming to the Qing, Yunqi Zhuhong (1535–1615), Yuan Hongdao (1568-1610) and Jixing Chewu (1741-1810) all wrote commentaries and treaties defending and promoting Pure Land belief and practice.[10] Peng Shaosheng was also an active apologist of the Pure Land tradition, evidenced by his large corpus of doctrinal elaborations on Pure Land practice, such as his *Huayan nianfo sanmei lun* and *Wu liang shou jing qi xing lun* (Faith in the Pure Land Generated by the Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtra).[11] Alongside these polemical writings of famous Buddhists, another literary genre specifically

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[7] *Weimo jing, T* 14, no. 475: 538c6, as translated by Burton Watson, *The Vimalakirti Sutra* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 29.
[8] In a debate between Peng Shaosheng and an anonymous monk about the Pure Land, the latter held this view. See Peng Shaosheng, *Yi xing ju ji*, 7: 12.
[9] Jones, "Apologetic Strategies," 78-80.
[10] On the apologics for Pure Land practice written by these men see Jones, "Apologeic Stragegies," 69-72, "Yuan Hongdao and the Xifang helun" 89-127, and "Mentally Constructing What Already Exists: the Pure Land Thought of Chan Master Jixing Chewu (1741-1810)," *Journal of International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 23.1 (2000): 43-70.
[11] *Wu liang shou jing qi xin* lun, *XZJ* 32.

devoted to recounting stories of rebirth in the Pure Land deserves scholarly attention. Known as *wangsheng zhuan* (J: *ōjōden*), these are biographical narratives of rebirth in the Pure Land.

In the *Shan nüren zhuan*, a total of ninety-one stories tell of a woman's rebirth in the Pure Land that can be categorized under the genre of *wangsheng zhuan*. *Wangsheng zhuan* follow a highly formulaic style, which typically includes the name of the protagonist, his/her native place, family background or professions, and the protagonist's devotional practices and moral activities. The narrative then ends with a description of auspicious signs suggesting rebirth in the Pure Land, such as dying in seated lotus position, wonderful fragrances at the moment of death, a body that does not decay, the appearance of Amitābha Buddha and his retinue bodhisattvas at the moment of the subject's death and so forth. The delineation of the major causes leading to rebirth in the Pure Land, such as the moral behavior and devotional practices of the protagonist, all build to the climax and happy ending of the narrative—the last moment of the death and rebirth in the Pure Land. Despite the highly standardized form of *wangsheng zhuan*, and the frequent lack of personality development of the protagonist, these rebirth narratives are informative in many ways. Depictions of the behavior of people who embody the religious ideal and its associated valued virtues—and the practices that are said to account for their auspicious rebirths, in particular—put a face on, so to speak, positions taken in doctrinal debates and reveal changing religious paradigms and motivating factors of the authors or compilers of these stories.[12] Take the story of Yao Po (Old Women Yao) as an example:

> Old Woman Yao was a native of Shangdang. She befriended Fan Po (Old Woman Fan). When Old Woman Fan persuaded her to chant Amitābha Buddha's name every day, Old Woman Yao accepted her suggestion. She cut off all family ties and devoted herself to reciting the name of Amitābha Buddha. As she was dying, Amitābha Buddha appeared in the sky with his retinue of two bodhisattvas, [Mahāsthāmaprāpta] on his left and [Avalokiteśvara] on his right. Old Woman Yao said to Amitābha Buddha, "I haven't seen

[12] Mark Blum, "*Ōjōden* in India, China and Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 34.2 (2007): 331.

> Old Woman Fan, how can I go with you? Please give me a moment to say good-bye to her." When Old Woman Fan arrived, the Buddha and his retinue were still there. Old Woman Yao stood there and passed away. (*Shan nüren zhuan* 1: 11a)

This story follows the pattern of *wangsheng zhuan* literature, outlining the practices of Old Woman Yao and her rebirth in the Pure Land evidenced by the presence of Amitābha Buddha. Reading the story in the light of Peng Shaosheng's apologia, we can see how rebirth accounts work together with polemic writings to make a strong argument against detractors. In a letter to an anonymous monk who denied the physical existence of the Pure Land, Peng asserts,

> The Tathāgatha Buddha loves all sentient beings and uses all kinds of skillful means to save them, which is why there is rebirth in the Pure Land through invoking [the name of] and reflecting on Amitābha Buddha. Rebirth in the Pure Land can be achieved only through faith, vow and practice. . . . The sūtra says, "If one reflects on Amitābha Buddha, the Buddha will appear in front of him, and he will surely see the Buddha. . . ."[13] As soon as one generates faith in Amitābha Buddha, he is embraced in the sea of Amitābha Buddha's original vow. If he follows the practices originating from his faith, he will surely receive sympathetic resonance [*ganying*] from Amitābha Buddha. His effort will never fail.[14]

Old Woman Yao furnishes the evidence for Peng's pronouncement above, but the narrative has its own "confirmatory devices" lacking in polemic writings.[15] One can imagine how amazed Old Woman Fan must have been when she saw Amitābha Buddha and his retinue bodhisattvas standing there to welcome her friend to the Pure Land. So too, we can imagine Qing readers experiencing a sense of admiration for these two old women. A down-to-earth image of Amitābha Buddha is presented through a detailed depiction of the conversation between Old Woman Yao and the Buddha, who kindly agrees to wait so that the old woman can bid farewell to her friend and fellow Pure Land practitioner, reaffirming the responsiveness and accessibility

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[13] *Shou leng yan jing*, *T* 19, no. 945: 128b1-2.
[14] Peng Shaosheng, *Yi xing ju ji* 4: 32a-32b.
[15] Robert Campany, *Signs from the Unseen Realm*, 15.

of Amitābha Buddha. These personal details can impress readers, believers and non-believers, in a most dramatic way.

This story was adopted from the *Longshu Jingtu wen* (Writings from Longshu on the Pure Land), compiled by Wang Rixiu (d. 1173).[16] Except for the rebirth stories of nine women who were contemporaries of Peng Shaosheng, the rebirth accounts in the *Shan nüren zhuan* are all adopted from previous rebirth accounts. Most of the stories were from biographical collections such as the *Le bang wen lei*, *Fozu tongji*, *Wangsheng ji* (Collection of Rebirth Accounts) compiled by Zhuhong in 1585,[17] and *Jingtu quan shu* (Completed Writings about the Pure Land, 1664-1672) by Yu Xingmin (d.u.).[18] Nevertheless, variations can be detected in Peng's collection. For example, even though Peng relies heavily on the *Fozu tongji* as his major source for rebirth accounts, he does not include all rebirth stories about women from that collection in the *Shan nüren zhuan*, although the excluded stories are found in biographical collections compiled by other compilers in the Qing, a point to which I shall return. Not surprisingly, in the nine rebirth stories of contemporaneous women, Peng moreover gives a more detailed description of their practices, oral pronouncements and writings than is typically found in the life stories that he adopts from earlier sources. These detailed rebirth accounts not only present a more vivid and rich picture of these women, but also expose their voices. Based on these rebirth stories and Peng's other writings on the Pure Land and writings of some women subjects, we shall see how Peng related the saving power of Amitābha Buddha to people's devotional practice, ethics, gender role and salvation, and how the factors presented in the rebirth accounts that contributed to one's rebirth in the Pure Land reflected or reinforced the arguments

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[16] Wang Rixiu, *Longsu jing tu wen*, *T* 47, no. 1970: 268a19-23.
[17] Zhuhong, *Wangsheng ji*, *XZJ* 135.
[18] Yu Xingmin, *Jingtu quan shu*, *XZJ* 109. Yu's collection is largely based on Wang Rixiu's *Longsu jing tu wen*, to which he added some rebirth accounts after Wang's *Jingtu wen* was published.

made by the compiler in debates on Pure Land belief. By revealing a more complicated picture of Pure Land belief and practice "on the ground" in the High Qing, this chapter aims to map the continuities and divergences of Pure Land beliefs and practices independent from the monolithic view presented in Pure Land scriptures.

5.1 PRACTICES LEADING TO THE PURE LAND

First, let us turn to the necessary practices leading to a successful rebirth in the Pure Land depicted in the *Shan nüren zhuan*.

> Jiang Shi [Madam Jiang] was the second wife of Yan Rengong. Rengong, one of the lay disciples of Master Zhuhong, followed the Pure Land teachings with great piety. Madam Jiang also became devoted to the Pure Land teachings when she married Yan. Every morning, she got up early and knelt before the Buddha's image, invoking Amitābha Buddha's name thousands of times. Then she would chant various sūtras and dhāraṇī spells. She was so pious that she burned incense, lit candles, and made offerings in person, never having her servants do these things for her. On the sixth day of the third month of the seventh year of the Kangxi era [1669], feeling tired after her morning worship, she lay down for a rest. Suddenly, she shouted, "Guanyin bodhisattva is coming!" Getting some warm water, she took a bath and died. Her face was red and her hands and feet were as soft as a living person's. (*Shan nüren zhuan* 2: 29a)

Madam Jiang typifies women who gained rebirth in the Pure Land portrayed in the *Shan nüren zhuan*, thus it is safe to say that her actions represent the norms of behavior that the compiler accepted as indispensable factors leading to a successful rebirth in the Pure Land. In addition to her pious invocation of Amitābha Buddha's name, the story highlights that Madam Jiang did everything related to her worship in person, which not only indicates her great piety, but also underscores the importance of self-effort. As Peng Shaosheng's passage from his letter to an anonymous monk cited above indicates, Amitābha Buddha's original vow to save all sentient beings to his Pure Land is realized by the sympathetic resonance established between each

individual and Amitābha Buddha. To elicit sympathetic resonance, one should diligently chant Amitābha Buddha's name and also do good; the latter requirement will be discussed in the next section. In other words, one cannot gain rebirth in the Pure Land without his or her own self-effort.

That self-effort is key to one's rebirth is well supported by the story of Wen Ziyu, which Peng cites to urge his friend Wang Jin, who was terminally ill, to concentrate on chanting the name of or reflecting on Amitābha Buddha to ensure rebirth in the Pure Land. Wen Ziyu was a follower of Master Zhuhong, and a devoted Pure Land practitioner.

> Ziyu told people when he was seriously ill, "I will go directly to the Pure Land." But he could not control his mind. Being afraid that he would not go to the Pure Land [with a confused mind], he instructed his family members to invite monks to chant Amitābha's name [for him]. But his mind remained as distracted as before. Suddenly realizing that others cannot remove the karmic roots of transmigration, he struggled to get up to kneel in front of the image of Amitābha Buddha. Then he burned incense on his arm, purified himself and repented his past sins sincerely without stop. His mind soon became clear and peaceful. The Pure Land appeared in front of him.[19]

In this story, the indispensability of self-effort for rebirth in the Pure Land is reaffirmed by the Buddhist concept of karma: one's rebirth is determined by the deeds one does in past or present lives. More specifically, the noteworthy point here is that in this story the role of liturgical intervention conducted by clergy is diminished or sidelined. Ziyu's attainment of rebirth in the Pure Land through his own self-effort explicitly renders the ritual activities of monks less essential for rebirth. Although, in his day, Peng was sometimes thought of as a Buddhist cleric who did not shave his head,[20] as a lay Buddhist, he nonetheless commissioned rituals for the welfare of the afterlife of his father, and also provided feasts for monks. In the *Shan nüren zhuan*, in addition to pious invocations of Amitābha Buddha's name, depictions of women

[19] Letter to Wang Dashen (Jin) in *Yi xing ju ji* 4: 11b-12a.
[20] Dai Zhen's student Duan Yucai commented on Peng, "He was devoted to Buddhism, and adopted a vegetarian diet for a long time. [He lived like a monk] except that he did not shave his head." Duan, "Nian pu," 480.

feasting monks and inviting monks to their homes for deathbed rituals can be found as well. There is therefore no doubt that Peng encouraged these merit-making actions. These acts, however, for him, were not decisive factors in guaranteeing one's rebirth in the Pure Land. In this sense, and perhaps not surprisingly, Peng's view on the essential practices for rebirth in the Pure Land conveyed in the *Shan nüren zhuan* somewhat deviates from those expressed in collections compiled by monks, both before and after his time.

Take the story of Weng Po (Old Woman Weng) as an example. Peng included all the rebirth stories from the *Fozu tongji* in his *Shan nüren zhuan*, except for the story of this old woman and another concerning Empress Dugu, whom we met in chapter two and to whom we return in the next section of this chapter. The *Fozu tongji* was compiled by the monk-historian Zhipan and completed in 1269. This same story is also collected in the *Xifang hui zheng* (Collection of Stories about the Boat to the West) by the monk Ruizhang in 1819, which postdates Peng's collection by thirty-seven years. The story of Old Woman Weng reads as follows:

> Old Woman Weng was a native of Yueshan, Fenyang. After she realized the impermanence of life, she commissioned two monks to perform rituals, invoke the name of Amitābha Buddha and chant sūtras for her throughout the night on the first and fifteenth day of every month. She prepared a vegetarian repast for these monks at the conclusion of their performance [each time]. Upon her deathbed, she saw the light of the Buddha and died a very peaceful death.[21]

Unlike in the case of the story of Empress Dugu, Peng Shaosheng does not tell us why he omits the story of Old Woman Weng from the *Shan nüren zhuan*. Two possibilities however can be safely assumed. Either Peng simply missed this story by accident when he compiled his collection or he did it intentionally. Whichever is the case, it is for sure that no story in Peng's

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[21] *Fozu tongji*, *T* 49, no. 2035: 287c2-5.

collection parallels this one. What is absent from Old Woman Weng's story, but present in every other story collected in the *Shan nüren zhuan,* is devotional practice and/or an example of good moral behavior performed by the woman herself. In the story of Old Woman Weng, her successful rebirth is attributed to clerical or liturgical intervention, while self-effort seems less important or even unnecessary. The efficacy of clerical rituals clearly prioritizes the role of monks as ritual specialists with high spiritual power. It is not surprising to find this story in collections compiled by monks. The clerical collections suggest a possible way to gain rebirth in the Pure Land other than through one's own practice, while Peng's collection affirms one's own practice as the solely efficacious way.

The rebirth story of Old Woman Yu in the *Shan nüren zhuan* is another example that highlights the idea that one's own devotional practice is essential for rebirth in the Pure Land:

> Yu Ao (Old Woman Yu) was from the Zongshi (Zong family) of Xuzhou. She was the mother of the monk Zhaoyue. When the Venerable Zhaoyue was the abbot of Gaomin Temple, he set up a separate room in the temple and invited her to live there. During her first days in the temple, she missed her home very much. When she saw her monk[-son], she always talked about family affairs with him. Ven. Zhaoyue preached impermanence, emptiness, and non-attachment to her and exhorted her to invoke the Buddha's name to attain rebirth in the Pure Land, but to no avail. The monk then avoided seeing her. When his mother sent for him, he declined to see her. The old woman had no other option but to invoke the name of Amitābha Buddha. At first, she was unable to devote herself to this practice with one mind. Three years later, she came to have a better understanding of the practice and generated deep faith in Amitābha Buddha. She accepted lay precepts and worshiped the Buddha with great devotion day and night. When the monk asked her if she missed home, the old woman replied, "It is good to chant Buddha's name and so I do not miss home anymore." One day, while sitting in the courtyard, facing a pagoda and chanting the name of Amitābha Buddha, she suddenly saw a world filled with golden light in front of her. The walls and trees around her all disappeared. She was so amazed that she could not help jumping up. All she saw suddenly disappeared. From then on, she completely rejected all sensual distractions and chanted the Buddha's name with one mind for a long time. Once she dreamed entering a family, where a woman was delivering a baby. She [asked herself], "I desire to be born in the West Paradise. Why have I come here?" She was so scared that she awoke from her dream. That morning, she got up and told her monk[-son], "My worldly life is coming to an end. Please gather the monks to chant Buddha's name for me to send me off to the West." The monk did as she

> requested. Soon afterwards, she died in a seated position, facing west. This occurred in the twenty-seventh year of the Qianlong era [1763]. (*Shan nüren zhuan* 2: 31b-2: 32a)

The mother and her monk-son easily remind us of the story of Mulian (Skt: Maudgalyāyana) and his mother. Mulian, a disciple of Śākyamuni Buddha, saved his mother from suffering in hell by the combined spiritual power of monastics and the merit acquired from feasting them. This story has been popular in China for many centuries and is considered a good example of reconciling the Buddhist monastic lifestyle and the fulfillment of filial piety.[22] Like the famous Mulian story, our story confirms the notion that the most filial thing a devoted son can do for his mother is to assist her out of suffering, out of the trap of *saṃsāra*, through Buddhist practices. Unlike Mulian's mother, however, who had already been reborn in hell and was passively reliant on her monk-son's liturgical mediation for salvation, this old woman gained salvation through her own assiduous devotional practices while still in this world. Her son played the role of s*han zhi shi* (Skt: *kalyāṇa-mittatā*, good dharma friend or teacher) by introducing her to the Pure Land tradition and encouraging her to practice diligently. Unlike in the Mulian literature, which makes the point that Mulian cannot save his mother without the aid of clergy, *shan zhi shi* is not a role exclusively reserved for the clergy. The story of Old Woman Yao cited previously is but one example of the laity assuming that role as well. Old Woman Yu's rebirth account moreover makes it clear that salvation through devotional Pure Land practice is accessible to anyone. The message of universal salvation conveyed by stories like these undermines the dependence of the laity on liturgical mediation. Despite this, or perhaps more accurately because of this, they served to sway the hearts and minds of ordinary laypeople.

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[22] For detailed studies on the sources, varations and interpretation of the Mulian story see Stephen F. Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), and Alan Cole, *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

The Pure Land tradition, as a result of its decreased dependence on monastic liturgy and increased importance attached to devotional practices, such as chanting Buddha's name with one mind, is more personalized and less demanding in terms of space, time and method required to carry out its practices. These features of the Pure Land tradition gave rise to practices that were in harmony with the gender division of labor and space in late imperial China as the following two rebirth accounts suggest.

> Chen Yu [Old Woman Chen] was a native of Changshu who lived in the south of the city and made a living by weaving. She worshiped the Buddhist dharma with great piety. Every day, while she weaved, she chanted Amitābha Buddha's name along with the rhythm of the spinning wheel without pause. She practiced this way for thirty years without missing a single day. One day, she said to her son, "Do you see the jeweled canopies and banners?" She clapped her palms and laughed. After taking a bath, she died quietly in a seated lotus position. This happened in the tenth year of the Shunzhi era [1654]. At that time, the minister Weng Shuyuan [1633-1701] was still a young man of obscurity. When he heard of this event, he went to see the old woman in person. The women sat in her room, which was filled with fragrance. In his later years, [Weng Shuyuan] collected this story in the postscript to his *Jingtu yue shuo* [Stories of the Pure Land] as a testimony to [Old Woman Chen].[23] (*Shan nüren zhuan* 2: 24b)

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> Zhang Shi [Ms. Zhang] was the wife of Qian Yongming. She piously worshiped the Buddha. Every day, she would produce a bolt of cloth. While she was weaving, she chanted the *Diamond Sūtra*. One day while weaving and chanting, she [came to the line in the *Sūtra*], "One has planted the seeds of good deeds and charity not only [before] one Buddha, two, three, four or five Buddhas, but [before] numerous Buddhas. . . ."[24] She suddenly stopped her shuttle to join her two palms in prayer. Her family was surprised to find that she had passed away in lotus position. (*Shan nüren zhuan* 2: 14b)

These two rebirth accounts provide good examples of the unity of fulfilling one's worldly duties and working for a good rebirth after death. This unity bears great importance in the social and religious context of the High Qing in two ways. First, productive labor for women, spinning and

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[23] Weng Shuyuan's *Jingtu yue shuo* is not collected in the Taishō Tripiṭaka (*T*) or the Supplement to the Tripiṭaka (*XZJ*). It may not survive, but the postscript in which Old Woman Chen's story is included is collected in the *Nianfo jing ce* (Exhortation to Chanting Buddha's Name) by Peng Shaosheng, *XZJ* 109: 747b18-748a4.
[24] *Jin'gang jing*, *T* 8, no. 235: 749b1-749b2.

weaving in particularly, was highly advocated by the Qing government and Confucian moralists. Diligence and frugality were commended as virtues for women of all classes.[25] Spinning and weaving were particularly encouraged first of all for the sake of family and state revenue, because in the eighteenth century government taxes were based on the productivity of each farming family unit.[26] At the same time, the production of handicrafts by women was becoming more marginalized as the number of male artisans in this profession grew in the highly civilized and wealthy Jiangnan area.[27] As a result of the commercialization and development of the textile industry, the line between traditional gender roles had become blurred. In this sense, women's work, which had traditionally been half of the idealized Confucian lifestyle of "men ploughing and women weaving" and its related moral connotations, now had to be defended by those among the Qing Confucian elite who wished to "preserve and promote [it] in the face of economic change."[28]

The moral importance of spinning and weaving lies in that it is closely related to women's chastity for two reasons. First, women's weaving kept them at home, within the boundaries of the designated gender sphere. Second, it also provided them with the means to support themselves, their children and in-laws, especially if they were widowed, thus limiting the necessity for remarriage. In these ways, weaving contributed to maintaining women's chastity, the patrilineal order and the moral ethos promoted by the government. The rebirth accounts of Miss Xie (*Shan nüren zhuan* 2: 32a-32b) and Miss Shi (*Shan nüren zhuan* 2: 34b-35a), two eighteenth-century women contemporaries of Peng Shaosheng whom we met in chapter two, also show that these women were both exalted for their chastity and diligently engaged in

[25] Mann, *Precious Records*, 14 and 149-152.
[26] Mann, *Precious Records*, 144.
[27] Mann, *Precious Records*, 144.
[28] Mann, *Precious Records*, 144.

weaving to support themselves and their in-laws. Other women, such as Miss Hu of Hangzhou (*Shan nüren zhuan* 2: 29b-30a), although not widowed, made donations to Buddhist temples and helped others in need with the income obtained through their work. The combination of devotional chanting and secular productive work again provides a strong argument that Pure Land practice does not pose a threat to Confucian family values, but rather reinforces those values by integrating well into the gender division of labor and space and rewarding women of virtue with a good and happy afterlife.

Within the Chinese Buddhist tradition, especially after the rise of Chan Buddhism in the Tang and Song dynasties, renouncing all secular duties was not a necessary component for Buddhist cultivation. Instead, spiritual cultivation came to be seen as something that could be integrated into attending to one's daily chores or daily work, which in turn became part of one's spiritual cultivation leading to enlightenment. The enlightened person did not withdraw from this world but lived in it in order to save others in a form appropriate to the situation. Pang Yun (740–808), better known as Pang Jushi or Layman Pang, the celebrated lay Chan practitioner, became famous in Buddhist literature for the verse: "Supernatural power and marvelous activity—drawing water and carrying firewood!"[29] The prominent Chan master Baizhang Huaihai's (720–814) motto, "One day without work; one day without food," would become regulation in Chan/Zen monasteries.[30] The more worldly engaged orientation of Buddhist cultivation featured by these prominent Chan practitioners broke down the dichotomy between religious cultivation and secular work; as a result, it justified various new ways of Buddhist practice. In this respect, the behavior of the women in Peng's account is in line with this trend.

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[29] *Pang Jushi yu lu* (Recorded Sayings of Layman Pang), *XZJ* 120: 55a10-11.
[30] Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China: An Annotated Translation and Study of the Chanyuan qinggui* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 29-33.

At the same time, women's daily work extended beyond the secular sphere and took on sacred significance, just as we have seen in the stories of the two women cited above, where weaving coupled with devotional practice made the difference in their afterlives.[31] The sanctification of women's daily work no doubt provided an option for religious practice that fit gender roles and seemingly provided additional motivation for women to perform their daily work with increased vigor and with greater satisfaction.

In the *Shan nüren zhuan*, the practices leading to rebirth in the Pure Land articulate the importance of self-effort and its close relationship to women's family duty. The rebirth accounts affirm that the family-based and self-reliant orientation of Pure Land practice is completely in line with Confucian ideology, which advocated separation of the gender spheres and the promotion of women's work, as well as with the Chan Buddhist ethic of enlightenment, which also lies in fulfillment of one's daily work. Women's rebirth in the Pure Land stories in this collection thus convey the message that Pure Land practice excelled over other practices in bringing a more accessible salvation to laypeople by creating less tension between one's religious career and secular duties.

5.2 PURE LAND AS A MORALLY PERFECT PLACE

Devotional practices, invoking the name of Amitābha Buddha in particular, are highlighted in every rebirth account in the *Shan nüren zhuan*. Without exception, no moral flaw of these women protagonists can be detected in their respective rebirth stories. Morally suspect or

[31] A contemporary example of sanctifying women's housework is the Tzu Chi (*pinyin*: Ciji) Buddhist Compassion Relief Foundation, which attracts many housewives in Taiwan. This Foundation promotes the integration of Buddhist practice into charitable activities, such as feeding and clothing disaster victims.

problematic women are intentionally excluded from the collection. For example, the rebirth account of Empress Dugu (544-602) collected in the *Fozu tongji*[32] is rejected by Peng because the empress is alleged to have killed an imperial consort:

> The *Fozu tongji* records that Empress Dugu had piously and diligently cultivated pure karma (i.e., Pure Land practice). When she died, wonderful fragrance filled the room, and she headed westward on a cloud [guided by light] as bright [as the sun]. But the *Sui shu* [History of the Sui Dynasty] reports that the empress was jealous by nature. When the emperor favored an imperial consort, she murdered her. Compassion and non-killing are the first priorities of Pure Land practice. As she had not eradicated the bad karma that resulted from killing, how could she attain rebirth in the Pure Land? Furthermore, [the *Fozu tongji*] does not note its sources, and errors could have occurred in the process of circulation. For these reasons, I exclude this story [from my collection]. (*Shan nüren zhuan* 1: iiia)

Peng is obviously not convinced or is unwilling to accept that Empress Dugu attained rebirth in the Pure Land because she had been a violator of the Buddhist precepts and the Confucian code of behavior. His disbelief is based on his view that bad karma created by doing evil, such as murder, would necessarily obstruct one's rebirth in the Pure Land (unless the bad karma had been eliminated). The scheme he developed to solve the potential inconsistency between moral behavior and rebirth in the Pure Land is discussed later in this section. Despite Peng's exclusion of Empress Dugu's story in his collection, it is not rare to find rebirth accounts of morally flawed or evil persons in other collections.

Empress Dugu's rebirth account can be found in other rebirth collections of Peng's time, including the *Jingtu sheng xian lu* compiled in 1784 (two years after the completion of the *Shan nüren zhuan*) by Peng's nephew, Peng Xisu. Peng Shaosheng annotated, proofread and even contributed several entries to this collection.[33] Empress Dugu's story in Peng Xisu's collection is as follows:

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[32] *Fozu tongji*, *T* 49, no. 2035: 286a16-20.
[33] *Jing tu sheng xian lu*, *XZJ* 135: 190a2-3.

> Empress Dugu was a native of Luoyang, Henan province. She was the daughter of the Great Commander Dugu Xin [502-557]. She was married to Emperor Wen before he came to power and was given the title of Empress when Wendi was enthroned. Empress Dugu was wise and helpful to the emperor in managing the empire, but she was jealous of the imperial consorts favored by the emperor. The emperor promoted Buddhism throughout the empire and ordered the local governments to establish pagodas to enshrine Buddha relics. Thereupon, many auspicious signs appeared. The empress also had faith in Mahāyāna Buddhism, and she frequently orally invoked the name of Amitābha Buddha. Each time before she began her invocations, she changed into clean clothes, and rinsed her mouth with fragrance. She passed away at the age of fifty in the Yong'an Gong [Palace of Everlasting Peace] on the eighth month of the second year of Renshou [602]. When she died, wonderful fragrance filled the palace, and heavenly music could be heard. The emperor asked an Indian monk what these auspicious signs stood for, and the monk told him they were the signs of Amitābha Buddha, who resides in the Pure Land. The rebirth of the empress [in his Pure Land] was the cause of these auspicious signs.[34]

Peng Xisu singled out the empress' jealousy, a vice that both Confucian and Buddhist moralists admonished women to overcome, but he did not explicitly talk about the murder committed by the empress as had his uncle, Peng Shaosheng. Instead, nephew Peng stressed the empress' devotional practices and the auspicious signs suggesting rebirth in the Pure Land, thereby directing the reader's attention to the karmic cause and effect relation between one's behavior and salvation. Xisu's account conveys a message that a morally flawed person is also eligible for rebirth in the Pure Land, if s/he is diligent and devotional enough in carrying out the related practices.

Since Peng Shaosheng was highly involved in the compilation of his nephew's collection, it is impossible to conceive that he did not know about its inclusion of Empress Dugu's story and thus the apparent contradiction to his own damning statement about the empress in his *Shan nüren zhuan*. In his preface to Xisu's *Jingtu sheng xian lu*, Peng Shaosheng explains the inclusion of the life accounts of morally flawed or evil persons in this collection:

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[34] *Jingtu sheng xian lu*, *XZJ* 135: 368b3-12.

> I examined the practices of all the saints when I compiled the *Jushi zhuan* [Biographies of Buddhist Laymen] and *Shan nüren zhuan*. If there were some flaws in their behavior, I excluded their stories from those collections. But this collection is based on their post-mortem lives, and does not consider their past misconduct. . . . Since [these morally imperfect persons] were reborn in the lowest level of the Pure Land and joined the saints, [their rebirth stories are included in this collection]. . . . Their rebirths reveal the incredible power of Amitābha's original vow, which is as powerful as the sea that accepts hundreds of rivers flowing into it, and as bright as the sun that casts its light everywhere without leaving a single small spot [in darkness]. Anyone who has faith in Amitābha Buddha will not be deserted by him. All sentient beings who generate faith in Amitābha Buddha will surely be accepted by him.[35]

According to Peng, the intended audience and the compiler's motivation come together to decide the selection of rebirth stories. Peng rejects rebirth stories of morally imperfect or evil persons like Empress Dugu in his biographical collection of exemplary Buddhist laywomen because his intention was to target both Buddhist and non-Buddhist audiences. Peng therefore presents a morally perfect image of Buddhists to non-Buddhists in order to legitimize Buddhist practice. At the same time, he sought to guard Buddhists against bad examples as well. But, by including the rebirth account of persons like Empress Dugu in the *Jing tu sheng xian lu*, a collection mainly aimed to promote Pure Land practice among Buddhists by demonstrating the universal saving grace of Amitābha, Peng Xisu reaffirms the efficacy of devotional practice alone and Amitābha Buddha's original vow.

Peng Shaosheng's two statements concerning Empress Dugu in fact indicate a dilemma that Pure Land promoters faced. The rebirth of evil persons in the Pure Land, in fact, is an issue that can work both for and against Pure Land proponents. On the one hand, in the *Larger Pure Land Sūtra*, Amitābha Buddha declares in his thirtieth vow, "When people who did evil in a previous life hear my name, repent for their evil [ways], reform themselves, chant sūtras, observe the Buddhist precepts and vow to be reborn in my Pure Land, if they do not attain rebirth in my

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[35] *Jingtu shengxian lu*, *XZJ* 135: 189b14-190a1.

Pure Land, I will not become a Buddha."[36] This message of universal salvation prioritizes Pure Land belief and practice over other forms of Buddhist thought and practice. On the other hand, belief in the saving power of Amitābha Buddha might discourage people from doing good or, even worse, legitimize evil behavior—a point that critics both within and outside of the Buddhist community were quick to point out. The moral failures of Pure Land practitioners surely garnered criticism and hostility that were directed both to the individual and to the Pure Land teachings she or he followed—and could eventually jeopardize the whole Buddhist community. Peng Shaosheng was quite aware of this potential pitfall and developed a scheme that neither denied that the saving power of Amitābha Buddha had the potential to undermine the Pure Land claim as a superior practice nor endorsed "licensed evil." He writes:

> No one who contemplates Amitābha Buddha with one mind will not be reborn in the Pure Land due to the power of Amitābha Buddha's original vow. But, if one's bad karma is so severe, it is difficult for that person to come across a good dharma teacher who will help her or him to generate faith in Amitābha Buddha and vow to be reborn in his Pure Land. The sun shines everywhere, but the innately blind cannot see it; the Ganges River is deep and wide, but it [is too far away] to quench one's thirst. This is frightening, isn't it?"[37]

What is at work explicitly and implicitly in the above statement is the concept of karmic retribution and sympathetic resonance (*ganying*, see chapter four). Peng assures his audience of the saving power of Amitābha Buddha, yet also points to the possibility of a failed rebirth. This failure, in the view of Peng, is not the inefficacy of Amitābha Buddha, but the karmic retribution of one's moral failings. Knowing Amitābha Buddha and his Pure Land, generating faith in him and contemplating and chanting his name are essential factors to bring about sympathetic resonance from Amitābha Buddha to attain a successful rebirth.[38] However, if one never has a chance to know Amitābha Buddha in this life due to the bad karma accrued by unethical

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[36] *Fo shuo Da Amituofo jing*, *T* 12, no. 364: 329c5-8.
[37] Peng Shaosheng, *Wu liang shou jing qi xin* lun, *XZJ* 32: 540a14-16.
[38] Peng Shaosheng, *Yi xing ju ji* 4: 32a-32b.

behavior, there is no way for one to conduct these devotional practices. Consequently, sympathetic resonance with the Buddha and a successful rebirth are out of the question (in this lifetime). In this sense, the key to turning on the whole system of sympathetic resonance is contingent upon one's karma. By holding the individual accountable for his or her failed rebirth in the Pure Land, Peng Shaosheng essentializes individual moral cultivation without undermining the power of Amitābha Buddha or degrading the Pure Land teachings.

Doing evil at the cost of one's rebirth in the Pure Land probably is sufficient to keep "licensed evil" at bay, but an incentive is still needed to encourage people to do good. The story of the exemplary Buddhist laywoman Wang Shi, a contemporary of Peng's, serves this purpose.

> Wang Shi (Madam Wang) was the mother of Fei Yuanliang of Wujiang county. She was widowed in middle age. Madam Wang worshiped the Buddha and was always ready to help those in need. Yuanliang reached middle age without a son. Madam Wang went to the Linyin Temple in Hangzhou and prayed to Guanyin bodhisattva [for a grandson]. [Yuanliang's wife] soon gave birth to a son. In her later years, [Madam Wang] entrusted the household to her son and daughter-in-law, and went to live in a separate room [to worship the Buddha]. She set aside a field of four hundred *mu*. With the revenue from the field, she made donations to temples and gave financial aid to the needy. She often felt sad that she did not have more to support others. Whenever someone came to her for help, she would give something. Sometimes, people just came to her room and took away what they needed. She did not care what they took away. At other times, when she went out for a walk with her staff, her neighbors would approach her for help. She would take off her hairpins or earrings to help them. At the age of ninety-two, she became ill on New Year's eve. She said to her family, "Tomorrow is New Year's day. I should not let my children and grandchildren cry on that day. The next day will be fine." On the night of New Year's day, she took a bath and put on clean clothes. She asked her son to open the window, saying, "I have seen the banners coming. It is time for me to go." Then she placed a rosary around her neck, chanted the name of Amitābha Buddha, and died. This happened in the twelfth year of the Qianlong era [1748]. (*Shan nüren zhuan* 2: 30b)

This story was composed or recorded based on what Peng heard and saw (*Shan nüren zhuan,* 2:30b). Diverging from many rebirth accounts that center on the devotional practices of the protagonist, this story shifts its focus to the altruistic behavior of an old woman and the secular and religious rewards she reaps for her compassion and generosity. Morality looms large in the

process of Madam Wang's attaining rebirth in the Pure Land, while other practices, although implied, are not articulated. By directing the reader's attention to her altruistic deeds, this story is structured to encourage emulation of the old woman's moral behavior.

The decisive role of moral behavior in a successful rebirth highlighted in Madam Wang's story is also asserted in the rebirth account of Peng's wife, Fei Shi (Madam Fei), whose rebirth story is not included in the *Shan nüren zhuan* because she passed away after the collection was completed. It was discovered through planchette that Madam Fei had been reborn in the Land of the Lax and Arrogant (Xie Man Guo), just over the border from Amitābha Buddha's Pure Land, along with Tao Shan (see chapter two and section three of this chapter) and Jintang, a friend of Peng's.[39] Xie Man Guo is a place from which one can transition to the Pure Land, and is saved for people whose understanding of doctrine or precepts observance is not yet fully developed.[40] People reborn there need not go through transmigration in the six realms, but will attain rebirth in the Pure Land more quickly, if they practice diligently (see Tao Shan's story in section three).[41] In Peng's view, this region is better than the six realms of transmigration and he counts it as the Pure Land, even though there is still gap between this land and the lowest of the nine grades of the Pure Land.[42] Peng comments on the postmortem life of his wife, "Madam Fei was more vigorous in observing the Buddhist precepts [than Tao Shan and Jintang], although her

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[39] Peng Shaosheng, *Yi xing ju ji* 8: 17a.
[40] Peng Shaosheng, *Yi xing ju ji* 8: 17a, and Huaigan, *Shi jingtu qun yi lun*, *T* 47, no. 1960: 50c17-20.
[41] Peng is not the first person to talk about moral behavior (including observance of the precepts) and rebirth in Xie Man Guo. The three Yuan brothers, prominent lay Buddhists who dominated the literary world in the late Ming—Yuan Zongdao (1560-1600), Yuan Hongdao (1568–1610) and Yuan Zhongdao (1570–1624)—also spoke about this place. Yuan Zhongdao reported that his deceased brother Hongdao told him in a dream that he (the brother) had been reborn in Xie Man Guo due to the laxity with which he had followed the precepts during his lifetime, even though he had a good grasp of Buddhist doctrine. The Yuan brothers singled out precept practice over other criteria for rebirth in the Pure Land. See Eichman, "Spiritual Seekers in a Fluid Landscape," 63-64. Peng also mentions the Yuan brothers' account in his writings to emphasize the importance of observing the Buddhist precepts. See *Yi xing ju ji*, 8: 17a.
[42] Peng Shaosheng, *Yi xing ju ji* 8: 17a.

mental ability to understand Buddhist doctrine was inferior to the other two. According to the principle of karmic cause and effect, it is reasonable that she [has been reborn] there."[43] Moral virtue in Peng's scheme of Pure Land practice is elevated to such a top position that it can supplement other criteria deemed necessary for a positive rebirth but found somewhat lacking in a person, even though moral virtue does not completely replace these other components.

In the two cases cited above, secular reward and successful rebirth in the Pure Land were two motivators for doing good, but both Confucians and Chan adherents found fault with the idea of doing good for the sake of a greater reward. As examples of Confucian critics, Chen Hongmou dismissed concern for the afterlife as foolish,[44] while Yuan Mei ridiculed the Buddhist ascetic lifestyle and observance of the precepts as selfish desire for a long life.[45] Peng Shaosheng finds another way to justify doing good.

> The basic teaching in the Pure Land sūtras instructs people to do good, to remove evil and pursue salvation with a devoted mind. The ways to teach people to escape from *saṃsāra* are different, but all teach people to do good and avoid doing evil. The Pure Land is the place of *zhishan* [ultimate good]. Aspiration for rebirth in the Pure Land functions to achieve the ultimate good. If one is not reborn in the Pure Land, one's good cannot be completed and evil cannot be cleansed because all sentient beings are trapped in transmigration, their *ālāya* [storehouse consciousness] defiled by their past karma to produce the *sahā* world. It is just like a dirty food vessel filled with manure and maggots. Even when delicious food is placed in it after lightly cleansing it with water, the stench still lingers. If one is reborn in the Pure Land, then one can see the Buddha, listen to his sermons and attain the forbearance of the unborn [*wu sheng ren*] without being trapped in transmigration. Upon exterminating the roots of evil and eventually attaining the roots of good, one can reenter the *sahā* world to preach the true dharma and save all sentient beings by helping them to gain rebirth in the Pure Land. [Doing so], one embodies goodness and illuminates virtue between heaven and earth.[46]

To the best of my knowledge, Peng is the first to equate the Confucian concept of the ultimate good and the evil-free Pure Land. Ultimate good is a concept presented in the *Da xue* (Great

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[43] Peng Shaosheng , *Yi xing ju ji* 8: 17a-b.
[44] Chen Hongmou, *Jiao nü yi gui*, *XSK* 951.3:28.
[45] Yuan, "Zai da Peng Chimu jinshi shu," *YQJ* 2.19: 340.
[46] Peng Shaosheng, *Wu liang shou jing qi xin lun*, *XZJ* 32: 551a7-14.

Learning),[47] a Confucian Classic selected by Zhu Xi as one of the Four Books of Confucianism in the Song, and which was also discussed by Dai Zhen in his two major works on ethics, the *Yuan shan* and *Mengzi zi yi shu zheng* discussed in chapter one. Dai Zhen designated *ren* (benevolence), *li* (propriety) and *yi* (righteousness) as the major and indispensible aspects of the ultimate good.[48] Peng, by arguing for rebirth in the Pure Land as an effective way to achieve the Confucian sense of the ultimate good, gives Pure Land practice a moral justification. By integrating the Mahāyāna concept of universal salvation and the bodhisattva path into Confucian moral cultivation, Peng moreover affirms that Pure Land followers do good not for the sake of their own benefit but for the salvation of all sentient beings.

The revival of Chan practice, especially the re-invention of Chan rituals, in the early Qing somewhat endorsed antinomian behavior among Chan practitioners.[49] Consequently, this may have led to leniency in precept observance and "licensed evil," which the violators defended on the basis of the idea of *wu shan* (no-good),[50] a non-dualistic view of good and evil based on the Buddhist concept of emptiness. Peng challenges the interpretation of no-good held by these Chan practitioners immediately following his discussion on the ultimate good in the treatise cited above:

> Chan practitioners like the term "no-good," while Confucians say "ultimate good." If [you] ask [me] what the difference is between the two, my answer would be that, since good is the opposite of evil, good ceases to exist when there is no evil. Therefore, when the pure mind of non-duality extends to the entire *dharma-dhātu* and virtues permeate everywhere like the sands of the Ganges River, everything is transformed—perfect and complete. The good of no-good is the ultimate good. Those who talk about emptiness but

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[47] The first sentence of the *Da Xue*, reads: "The way of the Great Learning lies in illuminating virtues, loving people and achieving the ultimate good." *Da xue,* in *Si shu ji zhu* by Zhu Xi (Changsha: Yue lu shu she, 1985), 20.
[48] Dai Zhen, *Dai Zhen ji*, 160.
[49] Jiang Wu, *Enlightenment in Dispute*, 45.
[50] Wang Yangming also talked about *wu shan* in his *Chuan xi lu*. "The essence of one's mind is no-good and no-evil [i.e.. no distinction between good and evil]. With the arising of intention comes the distinction between good and evil. The innate knowledge tells us what is good and what is evil. Investigating things is to do good and to remove evil." Wang Yangming, *Wang Yangming quan ji* (Shanghai: Shanghai gu ji, 1992), 1: 117.

> behave in a dualistic way [by doing evil] create evil karma, but falsely claim it is no-good. They are the walking dead and the dregs of hell. The Buddha cannot save those who do not know what they are doing."[51]

Peng admits to discrimination between good and evil on the phenomenal or relative level, but on the noumenal or absolute level, emptiness is the nature of all things and thus the dichotomy of good and evil no longer exists. To avoid the pitfall of blurring the boundary between good and evil and endorsing the later, Peng draws on the interdependence of the two opposite extremes in the good-evil dichotomy to emphasize that so-called no-good is grounded on the complete eradication of evil. The realization of non-duality and emptiness by the enlightened person thus can be translated into moral perfection. In other words, the truly enlightened individual spontaneously avoids doing evil, while a person who claims to be non-dualistic but indulges in doing evil is still trapped in duality and far from enlightenment.

It is thus safe to say that Peng Shaosheng sees faith in Amitābha Buddha, enlightenment and moral perfection as completely identical. To furnish further evidence, Peng Shaosheng also claimed that, "[Chanting] Amituofo [Amitābha Buddha] is the extension of one's innate knowledge."[52] The extension of one's innate knowledge of the good was advocated by the leading Ming neo-Confucian thinker Wang Yangming (1472–1529), discussed in chapter one. Although Wang's thought was not popular among Qing Evidential School scholars, no one would deny that moral self-cultivation was the spiritual career to which one should be devoted. By giving emptiness moral substance and asserting that Pure Land practices are instrumental for achieving the ultimate good, Peng Shaosheng argues that Confucian and Buddhist ethics are completely identical. Therefore, it is not surprising to find in the *Shan nüren zhuan* that all those who gained rebirth in the Pure Land were filial daughters, good wives and chaste widows (see

[51] Peng Shaosheng, *Wu liang shou jing qi xin lun*, *XZJ* 32: 551a14-551b1.
[52] Peng Shaosheng, *Yi xing ju ji* 4: 1a.

chapter two). As Whalen Lai rightly points out, the Pure Land seemed to be full of neo-Confucian moralists.[53]

In his study of the ethics and practices of Chinese Pure Land Buddhism, Charles Jones makes an astute comparison of the relationship between rebirth in the Pure Land and moral practice. "Pure Land in China is an escalator that will take one to the top without fail, but one can still speed up the process by walking."[54] In other words, rebirth in the Pure Land is assured due to Amitābha Buddha's original vow, but one is motivated to behave morally by a dynamic to shorten the process for the sake of saving others.[55]

Peng's case, however, presents something different than Jones' observation. For Peng, one's rebirth in the Pure Land is pending. Ethical behavior is indispensable for one to be reborn in the Pure Land rather than a dynamic to shorten the process of attaining rebirth there. To illustrate Peng's view of the relationship between one's rebirth and moral behaviors, I would like to propose the analogy of trying to make a cell phone call. Eliciting the sympathetic response between Amitābha Buddha and an individual necessary for a successful rebirth is like making a call on a cell phone. To make a successful call, one needs a charged battery, a strong signal, and the phone number of the person one wishes to call. Knowing Amitābha Buddha and generating faith in him is like knowing the telephone number of the person one wants to call. Accrued bad karma can deprive an individual of the chance to know Amitābha Buddha's phone number. Therefore, a person should avoid doing evil to eradicate any obstacles to knowing Amitābha Buddha. Moral behavior and devotional practice are like charging the phone's battery to produce

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[53] Whalen Lai, "Legends of Births and the Pure Land Tradition in China," in *The Pure Land Tradition: History and Development*, ed. James Foard, Michael Solomon and Richard K. Payne. Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series 3 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 213.
[54] Charles Jones, "Foundations of Ethics and Practice in Chinese Pure Land Buddhism," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 10 (2003): 15.
[55] Jones, "Foundations of Ethics and Practice," 15.

a strong signal. Only when one has the right phone number, enough battery power and a strong signal can one make a successful cell phone call, regardless if one is making the call on a sophisticated smart phone or an out-of-date dumb phone. As the rebirth accounts of Madam Wang and Madam Fei illustrate, rebirth is assured when sympathetic response between the Buddha and the practitioner is established, regardless of the individual's intellectual capacity. In short, Peng views ethical behavior as an essential factor that contributes (along with Amitābha Buddha's original power) to a successful rebirth in the Pure Land.

5.3 WOMEN'S SOTERIOLOGICAL ISSUES AND PURE LAND BELIEF

This section examines how the salvific message and androcentric discourse found in the scriptures were perceived, interpreted and adapted by lay followers—male and female. I again focus on Tao Shan, part of whose life story has been discussed in chapter two. By comparing her life account in the *Shan nüren zhuan* and Peng's afterlife account of her in his *Yi xing ju ji* (Works from Yixing Residence) with the poems written by Tao Shan herself during her lifetime, this section looks at how the two (Peng and Tao) sometimes share and sometimes diverge on views of women's salvation in the Pure Land and related Buddhist teachings. It goes beyond the scriptural or commentarial texts on Pure Land belief to situate itself in the social realm of religion "on the ground." Instead of following such dichotomous models as resistant/subordinate or oppressive/liberating to analyze how Buddhist men and women tackled androcentric discourse in Buddhist doctrines and secular (Confucian) social norms, I propose a more nuanced approach to examining how lay Buddhists related their faith in Amitābha Buddha and his Pure Land to

their gender roles, social responsibilities and salvation. In this respect, my research has benefited from the work of such Japanese Buddhist scholars as Lori Meeks and James Dobbins.

In her study of medieval Japanese nuns, Lori Meeks proposes an alternative approach to viewing the relationship between women and Buddhism as an oppressive/liberating dichotomy.[56] Rather, her study focuses on the "multivalent natures" of women's agency. To construct their religious identity, Japanese Buddhist women embraced the dominant ideologies and sometimes "talked past" or "downplayed" the androcentric discourses on Buddhist teachings and secular norms instead of putting up explicitly confrontational resistance against the patriarchal religious and social order.[57] In the androcentric religious and social system, men and women were not always at odds with each other over issues, such as those relating to women's salvation or women's roles in religious institutional construction and development. In fact, evidence points to much collaboration between men and women, although each side was often motivated for different reasons.[58]

In his recent work on Japanese Jōdo shinshū (True Pure Land School), James Dobbins examines Shinshū in practice through the letters of Eshinni (1182-1271), the wife of the founder of Shinshū, Shinran (1173-1263). His study reveals two completely different views on women's rebirth in the Pure Land—one held by the idealized religion "expressed in doctrinal axioms" and the other "practiced religion functioning among believers."[59] Moving beyond the trend in Buddhist studies to favor scriptural texts over religious practice, the work of these two scholars calls our attention to the ambiguities, inconsistencies, and discrepancies existing between

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[56] Lori Meeks, *Hokkeji and the Reemergence of Female Monastic Orders in Premodern Japan*, Kuroda Institute Studies in East Asian Buddhism 23 (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010), 12.
[57] Meeks, *Hokkeji*, 13-14.
[58] Meeks, *Hokkeji*, 14.
[59] James Dobbins, *Letters of the Nun Eshinni: Images of Pure Land Buddhism in Medieval Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 105.

religious doctrine and practice by drawing largely on non-doctrinal texts. They challenge the assumption that religious ideas and concepts viewed and accepted by believers in practice are enacted in the same way as they are expressed in doctrinal texts and suggest a more nuanced understanding of the subtleties and complicities of religion in practice.

My study follows these approaches and focuses on biographical narratives, self-expressive poems, and other texts of "practiced religion"[60] to outline their variations in interpreting or employing the androcentric views expressed in Pure Land scriptural texts. In so doing, it provides a more complex picture of Pure Land belief and practice "on the ground" in eighteenth-century China in contradistinction to the monolithic view presented in Pure Land scriptures. For this purpose, I begin by briefly retelling the life story of Tao Shan composed by Peng Shaosheng. The life story of Tao Shan in the *Shan nüren zhuan* is much longer than other rebirth stories and gives the reader more details about Tao Shan's life and her religious experience and practice. According to Peng, Tao Shan was born to a Confucian scholar's family, but her parents were interested in Buddhism. She began her Buddhist practice with sūtra copying, sūtra chanting and adherence to a vegetarian diet at a young age. She was precocious as a writer, composing poems well received by senior scholars. She married Peng's nephew. We pick up her story with her married life through to her last moment before death.

> At the age of twenty-three, [Tao Shan] was married to Xiluo of the Peng family. Every day, she preached Buddha's teachings on suffering and emptiness to her husband's family members. She continually chanted Amitābha Buddha's name throughout each day. Her wish to abstain from sex caused discord in the Peng clan. Acquiescing to the demands of her husband's family, she began to cultivate the wifely way and became pregnant. During her pregnancy, she did not stop her Pure Land practices. She also read the *Lotus Sūtra* and the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*. Her interpretations of these sūtras suggested that she had a good understanding of Buddhist doctrines. Her poems in response to my poems on reclusive meditation revealed her understanding of the non-obstruction of noumenon and phenomena. . . . She preached Buddhism as a great master. In the winter,

[60] Dobbins, *Letters of the Nun Eshinni*, 105.

> upon the birth of her son, she fell ill. Predicting her death, she sent for her mother and invoked the name of Amitābha Buddha without stop. When her mother arrived, Tao Shan told her, "The great monk is coming and I am going to the West with him!" When a servant asked her about her aged parents [who were both still alive], she replied, "The Western Paradise is good; I will meet them there in the future." With these words, she passed away. This happened in the first month of the forty-fifth year of the Qianlong era [1781]. (*Shan nüren zhuan* 2: 36b)

Tao Shao's story however does not end with her death and alleged rebirth in the Pure Land as recorded in the *Shan nüren zhuan*. Peng Shaosheng wrote a follow-up account of her postmortem life collected in his *Yi xing ju ji*, which is based on communication through spirit writing. As mentioned in chapter three, planchette was a very popular practice among the elite in the Jiangnan area. Peng's great-grandfather Peng Dingqiu (1645-1719) participated in it and even composed a book on moral cultivation based on his communications through planchette with prominent Confucian scholars in history. Despite its popularity among the literati, including lay Buddhists, this practice had been strongly opposed by such eminent clerics as Zhuhong (1535-1615), and banned by the Qing government several times.[61] Peng Shaosheng obviously was not discouraged by the disapproval of the religious and secular authorities. Rather, he defended the practice.

> Since ancient times, those who were reborn in the Pure Land can be recognized through dreams, [through communication with] the other world or by the confirmation of signs [predicted in their lifetimes]. These three ways are related to the existence of one's consciousness. Monks and scholars have recorded testimonials of rebirths in the Pure Land obtained in these ways, because they believed these narratives or communications to be reasonable. Even though they did not see [the rebirths] with their own eyes, the principle behind them was true. . . . In recent years, planchette has become popular in this area. It can foretell fortunes and disasters, ups and downs. It is also related to one's consciousness. In terms of credibility, I do not think it is false.[62]

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[61] See chapter three, 123n45.
[62] Peng Shaosheng, *Yi xing ju ji* 8: 8b-9a.

What Peng implies here is that planchette was as reliable as other ways widely accepted by monastics and literati to verify rebirth in the Pure Land. He believed that practices such as spirit writing were acceptable as they provided evidence for the existence of the Pure Land, encouraged more people to generate faith and helped promote belief.[63] Since his intended audience for the *Yi xing ju ji* is the literati, he argues his case in a way convincing to them by using a method popular among them. It is therefore not surprising that Peng recorded and circulated the afterlife account of Tao Shan to prove the physical existence of the Pure Land and identify the ways to achieve a successful rebirth there.

There are two communications through planchette associated with Tao Shan. In the first instance, Tao Shan comes back to this world and tells a male audience that she had been reborn in the borderland of the Pure Land. She also admonishes them to concentrate their minds on Amitābha Buddha and not to be disturbed by emotions and defiled by desires.[64] At the end of the meeting, she urges these men to "invoke Amitābha Buddha's name as soon as possible."[65]

In the second instance, a deity called the Great Master of the West (Xi Fang Dashi) descends and tells Peng that Tao Shan is no longer available because her body has been transformed into a male body and is destined to live in the lowest level of the highest grade of the Pure Land.[66] Peng is apparently encouraged by the good news and decides to record this story to help those "who hear this to generate admiration for the Pure Land and work diligently to gain rebirth there."[67] Peng celebrates the transformation of her female form into a male body and subsequent rebirth in the Pure Land as the greatest spiritual achievement a woman could

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[63] Peng Shaosheng, *Yi xing ju ji* 5: 24b.
[64] Peng Shaosheng, *Yi xing ju ji* 8: 9a-9b.
[65] Peng Shaosheng, *Yi xing ju ji* 8: 10b.
[66] Peng Shaosheng, *Yi xing ju ji* 8: 10b.
[67] Peng Shaosheng, *Yi xing ju ji* 8: 10b.

achieve through unfailing faith in Amitābha Buddha, devotional practice and moral behavior. Also explicit in this afterlife account is that Peng's view of women's salvation in the Pure Land is consistent with the androcentric view in the Pure Land scriptures that equates women with other defiled things and denies their place in the Pure Land in their female form.

The poems written by Tao Shan herself however reveal a view of a woman's body and her salvation in the Pure Land that is quite different from the discourses found in Peng's writing and consistent with Pure Land scriptures. Ninety of Tao Shan's poems were edited and collected in the *Qionglou yin gao* (Draft of the Lyrics of Qinglou) and posthumously published by the Peng clan. Peng praises these poems as "expressing deep understanding of the dharma and absent of all delusion,"[68] so there is no doubt that these poems met his expectations and agreed with his understanding of Buddhist doctrines. Subtle divergences from Peng's views however can be perceived in Tao Shan's surviving poems. Here are two poems, for example, that express her self-perception as a woman:

> I am ashamed that I did not cultivate my virtues in previous lives,
> There are causes for being a woman with the five obstacles in this life.
> Fortunately, I have a human body,
> Why complain of my female body?[69]

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> Holding sacrificial rituals and giving offerings to the ancestors are not extraordinary,
> I am ashamed [that I do not know] how to express my thoughts of filial piety.
> Fortunately, I have a human body living between heaven and earth,
> Why can only a man repay the love of his parents?[70]

These two poems are from a series of poems under the title "Chants of Shame and Embarrassment" (Can kui yin) collected in Tao Shan's *Qionglou yin gao*. Peng Shaosheng

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[68] Peng Shaosheng, "*Qionglou yin gao* xu," in *Qionglou yin gao*, by Tao Shan, *XZJ* 110: 718a11-12.
[69] Tao Shan, *Qionglou yin gao*, *XZJ* 110: 721a18-721b1.
[70] Tao Shan, *Qionglou yin gao*, *XZJ* 110: 721b2-3.

singles out this series of poems in his biographical narrative of Tao Shan because they are "insightful and convey the truth" (*Shan nüren zhuan* 2: 35b). The first poem above suggests that Tao Shan was aware of the five obstacles a woman was reputed to face according to the scriptures and accepted the notion that a woman's body is the consequence of her bad karma.[71] In the last two lines however she does not complain about the "disadvantage" of being female, but rather expresses confidence in her potential to attain enlightenment and salvation as a human being because only in the human realm does one have the chance to create the good karma necessary for a better rebirth. In this first poem we thus see a touch of optimism regarding her future salvation as a human being.

In the second poem, Tao Shan clearly embraces the notion of filial piety, a Confucian moral virtue appreciated by Buddhists as well. The last two lines of this poem straightforwardly confirm her belief that women are not morally inferior to men by claiming that women can also repay the love of parents and fulfill filial responsibilities as well as men can. The rationale underlying this claim can be found in the Buddhist teaching of emptiness. Since everyone is void of a substantial and permanent self-nature, there is no need to make the distinction between a male and female body. In addition, in the Confucian tradition, women were subordinate to men socially, but never morally. Confucian thinkers believed that women have the same moral potential as men.[72] The androcentric discourses in Buddhist doctrines and social norms indeed have an impact on women's self-perception, as is evident from this case study. But as Tao Shan's two poems suggest, women (or at least this woman) did not completely internalize these negative views or directly refute them. Rather, they dismissed or downplayed these explicitly or implicitly

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[71] See chapter five, 183n3.
[72] Tu Weiming, *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 144.

expressed androcentric views while remaining in line with the dominant ideologies and espousing their major values.

Tao Shan composed another poem dealing with women in which she does not concentrate on Buddhist doctrines that articulate the physical impurity and spiritual inferiority of women.

> Mahāprajāpāti Gotami made an unlimited vow
> To save all women of Jambudvipa.
> I am ashamed of the karmic obstacles in my previous lives
> That I am inferior to Lingzhao who gained enlightenment.[73]

Mahāprajāpāti Gotami was the aunt and foster mother of the Buddha who was determined to be ordained as a nun with five hundred other women. Even though the Buddha declined her request several times, she finally achieved her goal through persistence and the intercession of Ānanda, Buddha's cousin and disciple. Tao Shan's poem does not focus on the negative remarks the Buddha is reputed to have made about women when Prajāpāti requested ordained that are found in certain renditions of the mature narrative.[74] Rather, she emphasizes Prajāpāti's aspiration and determination to save all women. Lingzhao was the daughter of the famous Chan layman Pang Yun, whom we encountered earlier in this chapter and whose story and sayings are collected in Chan literature and widely circulated. She is often cited as an example of enlightenment along with her celebrated father. The two women cited in Tao Shan's poems attained the same spiritual achievement as men, and serve as role models for Tao Shan. In this poem we see again Tao Shan's confidence in the salvation of women in the female body. The three poems cited above

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[73] Tao Shan, *Qionglou yin gao*, *XZJ* 110: 723a4-5.
[74] For a fuller discussion of development of this story see Alan Sponberg, "Attitudes towards Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism," in *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. José Ignacio Cabezón (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 3-36.

together suggest that Tao Shan concentrated more on examples or views of the dominant ideology that related to her life in a more positive way when she talked about her female identity.

In fact, not many of her poems deal with issues of her female body. Most of her poems are about her faith in Amitābha Buddha.

> There is truth in the light of emptiness
> The compassionate breeze [of Amitābha Buddha] turns the four seasons into spring.
> As soon as I get the message [from Amitābha Buddha]
> I will pay homage to the Pure Land.[75]

> Originally, there was neither reality nor delusion
> It was unnecessary to talk about the Way or of Chan.
> One chanting of [the name of] Amitābha Buddha awakens me to the emptiness of self nature
> Who am I? Who is the other?[76]

> I took the vow of the Lotus Society in this world
> The water of eight merits gives rise to the lotus of [the Pure Land].
> The unconfused mind determined to transcend the mundane world
> To go to the Pure Land of Great Bliss.[77]

> Having overcome obstacle after obstacle and finally getting to the truth
> I no longer tread on the confusing road.
> There is no end and no beginning to transmigration in the six realms
> Spring always comes with the flowing water and wandering clouds.[78]

Peng Shaosheng cites these four poems in his life account of Tao Shan in the *Shan nüren zhuan*. He held these poems in high esteem, claiming that Tao Shan "preached the dharma as a great master" through them because these poetic accomplishments manifested "her thorough understanding of the unobstructed interpenetration of noumenon and phenomena" (*li shi jiao rong*) and "her firm determination to attain rebirth in the Pure Land" (*Shan nüren zhuan* 2: 35b).

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[75] Tao Shan, *Qionglou*, *XZJ* 110: 723a8-9.
[76] Tao Shan, *Qionglou*, *XZJ* 110: 723a10-11.
[77] Tao Shan, *Qionglou*, *XZJ* 110: 723b6-7.
[78] Tao Shan, *Qionglou*, *XZJ* 110: 723b8-9.

These poems reveal her faith in the supremacy of Amitābha Buddha's Pure Land over other practices such as Chan. This view no doubt struck a sympathetic chord with Peng Shaosheng's Pure Land belief. Yet, it is also obvious that female body transformation was not the focus of her spiritual concern. As beautifully expressed in the second of the four poems, there is no need to discriminate between "I" and "other" since emptiness is one's self-nature. In the same vein, there is no need to cling to the distinction between man and woman.

Another notable point in Tao Shan's story is what she said on her deathbed. According to Peng Shaosheng's account, when Tao Shan was asked about her aged parents, she answered, "The Western paradise is good. I will meet them there in the future" (*Shan nüren zhuan* 2: 36b). This pronouncement clearly shows that she believed she would be reunited with her parents in the Pure Land as their daughter. It equally implies that her mother would be recognizable as such. The body transformation talked about in the scriptures is ostensibly ignored. We are not sure, however, if these are the exact words Tao Shan uttered as she lay dying since Peng Shaosheng was not at home when Tao Shan passed away and consequently her words were relayed by a third party, at best.[79] If this was truly the deathbed pronouncement of Tao Shan, it means that Tao Shan ignored the concept of female body transformation found in the scriptures and commentaries.

We need to keep in mind that Tao Shan had a keen interest in various Buddhist scriptural texts. She is reported to have copied the *Diamond Sūtra* and Pure Land sūtras and to have read many more sūtras and commentaries. According to Peng's account, her understanding and interpretation of Buddhist texts were keen and insightful (*Shan nüren zhuan* 2: 35b).[80] In this

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[79] Peng Shaosheng, "*Qionglou yin gao* xu," in *Qionglou yin gao*, by Tao Shan, *XZJ* 110: 718a1-2.
[80] Tao Shan's achievements in Buddhist scholarship were also praised by her grandfather-in-law, Peng Qifeng, and her husband Peng Xiluo. See the postscript to the *Qionglou ying gao*, *XZJ* 110: 723b10-724b30.

sense, it is impossible for her not to have known that the scriptures, and especially the Pure Land texts, state that women must experience a physical transformation before rebirth in the Pure Land. It is always possible that Tao Shan did utter the words that Peng attributes to her on her deathbed. Her last words may have been distorted or perhaps even invented by the narrator. Whatever the case, we are sure that when Peng recorded this story in the *Shan nüren zhuan*, he did not view Tao Shan's deathbed declaration as being in contradiction to the Pure Land scriptures. This, despite clearly stating in his separate account of Tao Shan's afterlife that she completed her body transformation and was reborn in the Pure Land.

We can thus safely assume that individual perceptions of the Pure Land, in reality, are not always consistent with the images presented in the scriptures. Inconsistencies can occur in the same person in different situations, and to those who are well versed in these scriptures and Buddhist doctrines. In the case of Pure Land believers, for example, women ignored or downplayed the negative presentation of women in those scriptures intentionally or unintentionally to highlight the circumstances or elements more favorable to them. In some concrete and specific instances, even men like Peng Shaosheng who tended to stick closely to the scriptures ignored these "negative" aspects or connotations.[81]

In the afterlife accounts of his family and friends composed by Peng, another noteworthy point is that a female body is not an obstacle to rebirth in the Pure Land, while a male body does not always guarantee rebirth in the Pure Land. The rebirth of Luo Yougao (1733-1778) provides a good example of this. According to Peng, Luo was very advanced in his Buddhist cultivation and strictly observed the Buddhist precepts. In one of his planchette communications, Peng was told that Luo had been unable to be reborn in the Pure Land, although he was reborn in one of

[81] For parallels in Japanese Pure Land believers see Dobbins, *Letters of the Nun Eshinni*, 105.

the good realms.[82] Peng asked why Tao Shan had been reborn in the Pure Land while Luo had not. The spirit replied, "She [Tao Shan] was inferior to Yougao in diligence and precept practice, but her right mindfulness at her deathbed surpassed his. Guanyin bodhisattva responded to her faith. . . . She thus could transform her body into a male body. . . and finally reached the lowest level of the highest grade in the Pure Land."[83] Peng apparently accepted the reason provided by the spirit and commented:

> Qionglou [Tao Shan] had a very determined faith in the Pure Land. When she was ill, she never stopped contemplating and chanting Amitābha Buddha's name. Before she died, she completely detached herself from all secular affairs. [At the last moment before death], she cried out, "The great monk is coming!" Isn't that the great monk Guanyin bodhisattva? But when Yougao was dying, he looked at his relatives, unwilling to depart from them. . . . He knew that attachment [to the secular world] distracted him from the path to [the Pure Land], but he could not control himself on his deathbed. Thus we know the root of attachment is difficult to remove and pure contemplation of Amitābha Buddha is difficult to achieve. [For this reason,] we must be very careful [on our deathbeds].[84]

This comment is telling in two aspects. First, Peng Shaosheng recognizes that a woman could attain a higher spiritual achievement than a man and that a woman's (or man's) salvation was ensured if she (or he) had unfailing faith in Amitābha Buddha and right mindfulness at the moment of death. Second, through the failed rebirth of Luo Yougao, he articulates the importance of right contemplation and unfailing faith in Amitābha Buddha over doctrinal learning at one's last moment. Peng Shaosheng was well aware that Luo Yougao's failure was not a rare case. Many literati Buddhists had a keen interest in Buddhist doctrines, wrote commentaries on Buddhist texts, and formulated smart arguments in Chan-style dialogues but failed to gain rebirth in the Pure Land due to their inability to concentrate their mind on Amitābha Buddha at the last moment. Zhuhong attributes a distracted mind on one's deathbed to

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[82] Peng Shaosheng, *Yixing ju ji* 8: 10a.
[83] Peng Shaosheng, *Yixing ju ji* 8: 10b.
[84] Peng Shaosheng, *Yixing ju ji* 8: 11b.

a lack of training in invoking or meditating on Amitābha Buddha in one's daily lives. He reasoned, "If one invokes Amitābha with one mind during one's lifetime, how can one not have right contemplation on one's deathbed?"[85] The mental and vocal invocation of the name of Amitābha Buddha at anytime and anywhere in one's lifetime prepares one for the concentrated mind needed to focus on the Buddha in one's last moment. Peng Shaosheng shared Zhuhong's view:

> If one is determined to trust rebirth to Amitābha Buddha, s/he should face the West with joined palms and chant Amitābha Buddha's name hundreds of times or thousands of times every day; [only by doing this] can one generate the ten contemplations on Amitābha Buddha on one's deathbed. In this way, one can gain rebirth in the Pure Land, listen to the sermons of the Buddha and never retrogress in *saṃsāra*.[86]

This statement ostensibly highlights the oral invocation of Amitābha Buddha's name as the key practice for rebirth in the Pure Land; however, many literati considered this practice to be one reserved for uneducated men and women due to their lack of mental facility. By contrasting Tao Shan and Luo Yougao's afterlives, Peng Shaosheng reasserts the cause-effect relationship between right mindfulness and a successful rebirth. Underlying his assertion of the efficacy of right mindfulness made possible by one's oral invocation of Amitābha Buddha however is the androcentric assumption at work. In other words, if women, the inferior sex, can be saved with proper devotional practice and unfaltering faith, there is no reason for men to fail if they have faith and purport themselves in the proper practices.

In summary, the similarities and divergences in views on women's salvation in the writings of Peng Shaosheng and Tao Shan provide us with a more nuanced and complicated picture of Pure Land belief and practice "on the ground" than the single and uniformed view presented in Pure Land scriptures. The writings of these two laypeople also suggest various ways

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[85] Zhuhong, *Xi fang yuan wen*, *XZJ* 108: 405b4-5.
[86] Peng Shaosheng, *Chong ding xi fang gong ju*, *XZJ* 109: 646a8-11.

to handle androcentric views in Buddhist doctrines. Instead of openly or intentionally challenging or submissively internalizing the Buddhist doctrines and social norms that justify discrimination against women, women ignored or downplayed the unfavorable elements and espoused the religious and social values that made the religious traditions relevant to them in a more positive way. Men, moreover, were not always in agreement with androcentric doctrines. As Peng Shaosheng's case shows, men recognized, appreciated and sometimes even admired women's spiritual achievements.

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In conclusion, the rebirth accounts of women collected in the *Shan nüren zhuan* indicate that women's soteriological issues can be instrumental in defending Pure Land Buddhism against its internal and external opponents and in advocating the compassionate power of Amitābha Buddha and the efficacy of Pure Land practices. It is noteworthy however that the superiority of Pure Land practices advocated by men does not lie in its emphasis on the Buddhist concept of non-duality or a more egalitarian message of universal salvation equally accessible to men and women. Instead, its superiority or efficacy lies in the assumption that women are inferior to men. As Peng Shaosheng' poetically puts it:

> The Buddha of Infinite Life [Amitābha Buddha]
> [Emits] immeasurable light
> To respond to all sentient beings in the *sahā* world.
>
> People can find salvation quickly
> Because of his compassionate vows
> He is good at directing people.
>
> Even women, those without good roots and the evil and weak can reach [the Pure Land]. . . ."[87]

[87] Peng Shaosheng, *Er lin chang he shi*, *XZJ* 110: 689a4-5.

For Peng, the soteriological disadvantage of women, in fact, advances the supremacy of Pure Land belief and practice by universally encompassing the inferior and least likely to be saved, including women. Through the *Shan nüren zhuan* and its exclusive focus on exemplary women, his belief in the efficiency of Amitābha Buddha in conjunction with faith and practice moreover challenges men not to be left behind.

Like anyone with a point of view, there is no doubt that men, to serve their own agenda, incorporate the discourse on women's salvation into a larger inter- and intra-traditional debate. On the other hand and on the practice level, androcentric views in scriptural texts are not always perceived or accepted the same way as they are presented in texts. As Peng Shaosheng's rebirth accounts show, women's spiritual achievements are acknowledged and appreciated by men, while androcentric views, such as the transformation of a woman's body, are adhered to in several situations. But in most cases, these views are ignored or intentionally or unintentionally downplayed. This gap between doctrine and reality "on the ground" demands scholarly attention to non-canonical texts for the new possibilities they provide in understanding religion in practice or how religion functions in the daily lives of people, especially the laity.

6.0 EPILOGUE

The exemplary Buddhist laywomen in the *Shan nüren zhuan* give us a window into the ways Buddhism came to be defined or redefined in nondoctrinal texts. These exemplary Buddhist laywomen charted an idealized lifestyle that Buddhists, and laypeople in particular, were supposed to imitate. Their norms of behavior also constituted an identity for Chinese lay Buddhists. In the field of Chinese Buddhist studies, it is commonly accepted that no clear-cut boundary existed between Buddhist and Confucian practices; neither were black and white sectarian lines drawn between Chinese schools of Buddhism. These observations hold true when we take into consideration the prevailing syncretic characteristics of Buddhism and neo-Confucianism and the popular notion of dual cultivation of Chan and Pure Land in eighteenth-century China as well. We have seen how many Buddhists interpreted Buddhist doctrines or proselytized Buddhism in the language of Confucianism. Lay Buddhists also lived lives not that much different from those of their Confucian counterparts, the main distinctions being the adoption of a vegetarian diet, sūtra chanting, abstention from sex once offspring were produced, praying to Buddhas or bodhisattvas and belief in rebirth in the Pure Land. The exemplary Buddhist laywomen in the *Shan nüren zhuan*, who are also filial daughters(-in-law), chaste maidens or widows, wise and morally upright mothers or motherly figures, seem to had lived lives not different from those of women held up as exemplary models for Confucian women.

The so-called syncretism of Chinese religious traditions however did not mean that Chinese Buddhists did not try to differentiate themselves from non-Buddhists and from Confucians in particular. Buddhist attempts to construct or reconstruct a Buddhist identity have been very conspicuous throughout Chinese history, especially when the community faced external challenges. Buddhism in the eighteenth century is a good example of efforts by Buddhists—and, in our case, lay Buddhists—to construct and reinforce a Buddhist identity. With the rise of the Evidential School, which aimed at removing all Buddhist influence from the Confucian Classics, and with Buddhism criticized as the cause of moral degeneration, lay Buddhists like Peng Shaosheng were pressed to provide justifications for their conversion from Confucianism to Buddhism and to defend their Buddhist practices. In addition to following the typical (monastic) Chinese Buddhist approach of relying on authoritative doctrinal texts to argue for Buddhism, Peng Shaosheng incorporated the life stories of exemplary Buddhist laymen and laywomen into the debates between Buddhists and their opponents. For him, the norms of behavior of these exemplary Buddhist laypeople were the hallmarks of Buddhist identity.

As shown in the previous chapters, life accounts of exemplary Buddhist laywomen in the *Shan nüren zhuan* in many ways bore similarities to their Confucian counterparts. Some narratives are adopted from narratives recorded by Confucian scholars; some subjects are found recorded in "Confucian" or secular collections such as dynastic histories or local gazetteers. The virtues that these Buddhist laywomen shared with their Confucian counterparts are extolled by Confucians, namely, filial piety, chastity, wisdom and unselfishness, defined as a readiness to advance the benefits of their male relatives or men in general even at the expense of benefit to themselves. To present these moral virtues promoted by Confucian ideology as part of the identity of Buddhists affirms that Buddhists embraced the core values of the Confucian ideology

of its time. To set up Buddhist laywomen who embodied Confucian moral virtues as examples for Buddhists to follow might be considered a strategy employed by Peng Shaosheng to defend Buddhism. On the other hand, taking into account his Confucian education and the syncretic tradition he inherited from his family, it is safe to assume that he believed in the compatibility of the two traditions. In this sense, Peng's complete embrace of the Confucian value system should not be interpreted solely as a defensive strategy to legitimize Buddhism in a Confucian society. These women's stories argue in a concrete way that Confucian social norms do not constrain one's pursuit of Buddhist spiritual goals and that Buddhist practices are not obstructions to the cultivation of Confucian moral virtues.

Despite Peng's belief in the complete harmony of the two traditions, he was a Confucius literatus turned Buddhist. What motivated his conversion was his belief in the supremacy of Buddhism to achieve the moral ideals advocated by Confucianism. For Peng, what truly distinguished Buddhism from Confucian and thus why the former was superior to the latter moreover was not simply that it was more efficacious in developing the social and family values shared by both traditions. Rather, Buddhism dealt both with the here and now and with the afterlife. More specifically, the Buddhist idea of karma explained and guaranteed—without exception—that moral behavior was rewarded (i.e., with rebirth in the Pure Land) and bad behavior punished. His awareness of the primacy of his Buddhist identity was further reflected in his deliberate alterations and divergences from Confucian narratives, which we have seen in Peng's presentation of certain biographical narratives of Buddhist laywomen. All alterations and divergences without exception highlighted Buddhist features designed to reinforce the Buddhist identities of his women protagonists. These life stories revealed how these Buddhist laywomen

"live with" or "inhabit" Confucian (secular) ethical values.[1] Namely, they pushed the envelope while fundamentally staying within the boundaries of mainstream secular (Confucian) ethical norms.

Peng Shaosheng and his *Shan nüren zhuan* provide us with a window through which to view how Buddhists defined and defended their tradition in the face of inter-traditional disputes and contests as well as how Buddhists handled their relationship with the dominant ideology of their time. By the eighteenth century, Buddhism had long become an integral part of Chinese culture and had played a major role in shaping the Chinese worldview and its ethical values; however, for most of that time, Buddhism had not been the dominant ideology of Chinese society. Buddhists upheld the mainstream (Confucian) views on social and family values and observed the codes of behavior prescribed by the dominant ideology. The embracing of Confucian values by Buddhists, lay or monastics, was partly due to the internalization of Confucian values, as most (elite) Chinese Buddhists received a Confucian education in their youth, and was partly a response to their Confucian opponents in order to fit into the social and political order supported by Confucian ideology. However, this does not mean that Buddhists and especially lay Buddhists, the focus of this dissertation, used their Buddhist beliefs as a defensive strategy to make themselves more acceptable to the dominant ideology. In fact, they tried to find common ground, which is reflected in their efforts to prove the complete compatibility of Buddhism and Confucianism. In the case of Peng Shaosheng, his exemplary Buddhist laywomen embodied the compatibility of the two traditions. Peng Shaosheng and his like-minded friends articulated Buddhist doctrines, values and practices that did not contradict Confucian ideology, but downplayed or dismissed those that conflicted with Confucian values.

[1] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 23.

In this sense, Chinese Buddhism has been reshaped by its opponents to some extent, which in turn has enabled Buddhists to live peacefully with their Confucian opponents most of the time. One could say that Chinese Buddhists reintroduced or repackaged Buddhist beliefs and practices to establish a common ground with Confucianism, while at the same time expanding the dominant ideology by filling in gaps that Confucian ideology failed to address by providing different options.

The patterns presented by Peng's use of exemplary women in his biographical collection have continued to be used in contemporary greater Chinese society. This is exemplified by so-called *renjian fojiao* (Buddhism of the Human Realm), a modern movement with a this-worldly orientation that promotes a life of service to others. *Renjian fojiao* first appeared in the early twentieth century pioneered by such Buddhist monastic reformers as Taixu (1890-1947) and Yinshun (1906-2005). Although the term of *renjian fojiao* was first put forth by monastic reformers, it has been popular among both lay and monastic Buddhists for its emphasis on integrating spiritual practice into all aspects of one's daily life and is now prospering in Taiwan and mainland China, where atheism is promoted as the dominant ideology. Similar to what Peng advocated, *renjian fojiao* redefines or reinforces the notion that Buddhist practice lies in fulfillment of one's secular responsibilities as citizen, employer/employee and family member. Downplaying the alleged or perceived otherworldly orientation of Buddhism, *renjian fojiao* addresses worldly issues to reshape Buddhism. On the one hand, it upholds mainstream values such as diligence, harmony and responsibility to family and society; on the other hand, it attempts to fill the spiritual gaps left empty by modern, commercialized and stress-filled secular society by drawing upon Buddhist traditional doctrines or practices and tailoring them to fit the contemporary context. In this sense, *renjian fojiao* expands and alters mainstream norms of

behavior while remaining in line with socially accepted views on values, rather than directly challenging or confronting established values.

One example is the Tzu Chi (*pinyin*: Ciji) Buddhist Compassion Relief Foundation based in Taiwan under the leadership of the *bhikṣuṇī* or nun, Cheng-yen (*pinyin*: Zhengyan, b. 1937), which has a predominantly laywomen membership.[2] Tzu Chi advocates the practice of Buddhism in one's daily life. It encourages female members to fulfill their traditional gender roles as filial daughters, dutiful wives and wise and caring mothers.[3] Tzu Chi resorts to Buddhist concepts such as compassion, interdependence and universal Buddha nature to address contemporary social problems such as the gap between rich and poor, an increasing divorce rate, and ecological deterioration.[4] The increased popularity of Tzu Chi and like Buddhist organizations in Taiwan and mainland China in recent years suggests that so-called *renjian fojiao* has made itself particularly relevant to Chinese societies undergoing dramatic changes by providing more channels or options to help people cope with problems in their lives without challenging the core values on which current social and political authority rests. The overseas branches of these Buddhist organizations also endeavor to avoid any confrontation with the mainstream culture of their host countries.

Peng's collection of Chinese Buddhist laywomen, meanwhile, reveals the complexity of the relationship between women and Chinese Buddhism and the discrepancies between male visions of laywomen and women's self-perceptions. As we have seen in this thesis, women presented in this collection are different from those described in misogynistic Buddhist scriptures.

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[2] Other Buddhist leaders of *renjian fojiao* in Taiwan are Hsing-yün (*pinyin*: Xingyun, b. 1927), founder of Fo Guang Shan, Wei-chüeh (Weijue, b. 1928); founder of Chung Tai Shan; and the late Sheng-yen (Shengyan, 1930-2009), founder of Dharma Drum Mountain.

[3] See Julia Chien-Yu Huang and Robert T. Weller, "Merit and Mothering: Women and Social Welfare Taiwanese Buddhism." *Association for Asian Studies* 57.2 (1998): 379-396.

[4] Ciji takes charity, medical care, education and environmental protection as its major missions. See www.tzuchi.org.tw, accessed on March 15, 2013.

The women protagonists in the *Shan nüren zhuan* were morally flawless, pious and wise and had the same potential to attain enlightenment and rebirth in the Pure Land as did men. Peng Shaosheng admits and even admires the high spiritual achievements that these women had attained. However, the positive image presented in Peng's biographical collection does not mean that Chinese Buddhism was completely friendly to women or that Buddhist laymen like Peng totally embraced the Buddhist concept of emptiness that transcends the dualistic view that justifies discrimination against women. This conflicting and ambiguous attitude of men towards women is well manifested in the postscript to the *Shan nüren zhuan*:

> In the *Garland Sūtra*, *Lotus Sūtra* and *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, we find many women who possessed wisdom that enabled them to gain enlightenment and transcend the transmigration of the six realms. This is because all sentient beings have the incredibly wonderful root to realize buddhahood. Since the introduction of Buddhism into China, so many women saints have also attained enlightenment. There were not only women recorded in the *Wu deng hui yuan* [Collected Essentials of the Five Lamps] who brought honor to their schools, but also those who devoted themselves to Pure Land practice and finally gained liberation from suffering.[5] These women were like Queen Vaidehī. So I recorded their life stories to tell women who aspire to attain rebirth in the Pure Land not to regret their female form. (*Shan nüren zhuan*, 2:37a)

Queen Vaidehī is often held up as the exemplary wife in Buddhist literature. The queen, a devout Buddhist, was the chief wife of King Bimbisāra (558–491 BCE) of Magadha, whose son Ajataśtru usurped the throne, jailed his father and attempted to starve him to death. Queen Vaidehī, against the orders of her son, managed to feed her husband by deploying such stratagems as concealing the juice of grapes in the flower garlands she wore and coating her body with honey and ghee mixed with corn flour, which the king would lick from her body. The

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[5] The *Wu deng hui yuan* is a Song dynasty compilation by Puji (1179-1253), which removes redundancies from the five previous Transmission of the Lamps Records—*Jingde chuan denglu*, *Tiansheng guang deng lu* (Tiansheng Extensive Record of the Lamp), *Jianzhong jingguo xu deng lu* (Jianzhong Jingguo Continuing Record of the Lamp), *Lian deng hui yao* (Collected Essentials of Joint Lamps) and *Jiatai pu deng lu* (Jiatai General Record of the Lamp)—to form the *Wu deng hui yuan* (Collected Essentials of the Five Lamps). *Wu deng hui yuan*, in *Puji zhuan* (Taibei: Xin wen feng chu ban gong si, minguo, 1995).

queen narrowly escaped her own execution but was imprisoned. While in prison, she calls on the assistance of the Buddha, who visited her along with Ānanda and preached the *Sūtra of Meditation on the Buddha Amitāyus*, one of the core texts of Pure Land Buddhism, to her.[6]

Peng's passage in the postscript to the *Shan nüren zhuan* thus conveys a conflicting view of women. By appealing to the egalitarian rhetoric of universal Buddha nature advocated by Mahāyāna Buddhism, it makes clear that women have the potential to attain enlightenment. Nevertheless, it also explicitly uses as an example the depiction of Queen Vaidehī, whose wifely devotion not only trumps her allegiance to her unfilial son but also highlights the idea that among Peng's primary reasons for compiling the *Shan nüren zhuan* was to encourage women to benefit the men in their lives even at the expense of their own lives. Because of her devotion to the Buddha and her visualizations of Amitāyus, Queen Vaidehī, it is implied, will be rewarded with rebirth in the Pure Land. Peng further affirms the inferiority of women through his acceptance of the idea found in Pure Land texts and elsewhere that the physical female form places women at a soteriological disadvantage. On the one hand, these inconsistencies or conflicting views on women's spiritual achievements and salvation result from the tension between the androcentric religious and social norms and the message of universal salvation found in Mahāyāna Buddhism. On the other hand, these ambiguities leave room for Buddhist men like Peng Shaosheng to make use of gendered rhetoric to advance their own agendas. First of all, women's rebirth in the Pure Land despite their salvific disadvantage due to their female bodies makes a strong case for the advocacy of Pure Land practice and its supremacy over other forms of Buddhist practice. Second, the inferiority of women and their high spiritual achievement are employed as a stimulus to urge men to speed up their own spiritual cultivation.

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[6] *Guan wu liang shou jing*, *T* 12, no. 365: 340c29-346b18. See also Serinity Young, *Courtesans and Tantric Consorts: Sexualities in Buddhist Narrative, Iconography and Ritual* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 99.

Juxtaposed to male Buddhist ideas of womanly perfection, there are scant sources that relate the religious experiences and self-perceptions of Buddhist laywomen. Just as we have seen in the discrepancies between Peng's retelling of the life and afterlife of Tao Shan and her own account of her experiences found in her writings, although women were also exposed to androcentric discourse in the social and religious environment in which they lived, they adopted different approaches to this discourse. Instead of directly confronting or passively internalizing negative views of women, they intentionally or unintentionally turned away from the Buddhist aspects that were less favorable to them and focused on those more positively relevant, such as the compassion of Amitābha Buddha, efficacy of devotional practice and narratives about exemplary women who were well-known for their spiritual achievements. In this sense, Buddhism, for women, is neither a liberating religion nor a monolithic oppressive androcentric institution. Women played an active role in making use of the inconsistencies and ambiguities about women found in Buddhist doctrine and supported by social norms to make sense of their lives, and even to empower themselves. I thus end with a comment by a contemporary Chinese Buddhist laywoman about the *Shan nüren zhuan* to show how the gender norms and salvific message in this biographical collection relate to a Buddhist woman today:

> The *Shan nüren zhuan* printed by Donglin Temple of Lushan is a very inspiring guidebook for Buddhist cultivation. In this collection, some women from elite families were well educated in the Classics; others from poor families were illiterate. Still others [attained] high spiritual achievements due to their inborn good roots, while others were inspired by accident. Without exception, all in the end attained incredible achievements. The most important reason for these achievements is that they all had strong faith in the Pure Land and gained rebirth due to their self-effort and the other-effort of Amitābha Buddha.
>
> Women in ancient times suffered a lot. [Many] were deprived of education and had to shoulder the heavy burden of their families. Because they were full of passion, they were vulnerable to hurt. Their own suffering and sensitivity to the suffering of others brought them closer to the Buddha. . . .

> . . . What I have gained from this book is that whoever has deep faith in the Pure Land and practices diligently can definitely attain rebirth in the Pure Land. This wonderful book gives us definite proof of the incredibly wonderful practice of Pure Land.[7]

Just like her female predecessors, this woman writer is aware of the social and religious disadvantages imposed on women. Similarly, she creates positive significance for herself based on the stories of these exemplary women, namely, confidence in her ability to attain her own salvation through faith and devotion to Amitābha Buddha.

[7] Sun Yun, www.qts.com.cn/bezz/berr20/201101/320.html, accessed on March 20, 2013.

GLOSSARY

Amituofo	阿彌陀佛
A mi tuo jing	阿彌陀經
ai	愛
Bai Juyi (aka, Letian)	白居易 (樂天)
Banmei Tang	伴梅堂
Ban Zhao	班昭
bao juan	寶卷
Bao ying ji	报應記
Ben cao gang mu	本草綱目
Ben cao gang mu tong shi	本草綱目通釋
Ben cao shi yi	本草拾遺
benxing	本性
Biyan lu	碧岩錄
biantong	辯通
bie	別
bo ruo	般若
bu shi	布施
Cangshan Jushi (aka, Yuan Mei)	倉山居士

Cao Miaoming	曹妙明
Cao Xueqin	曹雪芹
Chan	禪
Chan ding	禪定
chan jing shuang xiu	禪淨雙修
Chang hen ge	長恨歌
Chang Lai	常賚
Changshi Nü	常氏女
Changshu	常熟
Changzhou	常州
Changzhou (Peng's hometown)	長洲
Chen Cangqi	陳藏器
Chen Hongmou	陳宏謀
Chen Shi	陳氏
Chenshi Nü (Miaozhen)	陳氏女 (妙珍)
Chen Yu	陳嫗
Chengdi	成帝
Cheng Hao	程灝
Cheng Shangjian	程尚鑒
Cheng Shi	程氏
Cheng-yen (*pinyin*: Zhengyan)	證嚴

Cheng Yi	程頤
chi jie	持戒
Chimu	尺木
Chi xiao	鴟鴞
Chongzhen	崇禎
chu	觸
Chu	楚
Chuhuang Daoren	楚黃道人
Chu yu tu	出浴圖
Chuzhou	處州
Chuan deng lu	傳燈錄
Chuan xi lu	傳習錄
Cui Shi	崔氏
Da bao en jing	大報恩經
Da bei zhou	大悲咒
Dahui Pujue chan shi yulu	大慧普覺禪師語錄
Dahui Pujue chan shi zong men wu ku	大慧普覺禪師宗門武庫
Dashizhi	大勢至
Dashizhi pusa nianfo yuan tong zhang	大勢至菩薩念佛圓通章
Da xue wen	大學問
Dainippon zoku zōkyō	大日本續藏經

Dai Zhen (aka, Dongyuan, Shenxiu)	戴震 (東原，慎修)
dao wen xue	道問學
Daoxuan	道宣
Deshan Xuanjian	德山宣鑒
Dezhou	德州
deng lu	燈錄
Dizang wang fu	地藏王府
dian na ge xin	點哪個心
dian rou shen deng	點肉身燈
dianxin	點心
Dong Bing	董炳
Dong Shi	董氏
Du Bao	杜寶
Dugu huanghou	獨孤皇后
Dugu Xin	獨孤信
Du Liniang	杜麗娘
Duan Yucai	段玉裁
Erlin Jushi (aka, Peng Shaosheng)	二林居士
Fahua jing	法華經
Fayun Faxiu (aka, Yuantong)	法雲法秀 (圓通)
Fan Chi	樊遲

Fan Po	範婆
Fanwang jing	梵網經
fangbian	方便
Fang Ji	方姬
fangsheng	放生
Fei Yuanliang	費元亮
Fenning	汾寧
Fenyang	汾陽
Feng Shi	馮氏
Fodeng Shouxun	佛燈守珣
Fozu tongji	佛祖統紀
Fujian	福建
Ganlu li	甘露里
gantong	感通
ganying	感應
ganying zhi shu	感應之書
Gaomin si	高旻寺
Gao Minglai	高明來
Gao Panlong	高攀龍
Gaoseng zhuan	高僧傳
ge wu	格物

Gong’an	公案
Goushan xian fu	緱山仙府
Gu Changyuan	顧長源
Gu Jiansha	顧鑒沙
Gu Yanwu	顧炎武
Guan shiyin pusa pu men pin	觀世音菩薩普門品
Guanyin	觀音
Guo Ningzhi	郭凝之
Han	漢
Han Chengye	韓承業
Hanhuang	寒簧
Han Lin’er	韓林兒
Hanshan Deqing	憨山德清
Han Wendi	漢文帝
Han Yu	韓愈
Hangzhou	杭州
He Longxiang	賀龍驤
Hong Bang	洪榜
Hong lou meng	紅樓夢
Hsi-lai (*pinyin*: Xilai)	西來
Hsing-yün (*pinyin*: Xingyun)	星雲

Hu fa lu	護法錄
Hunan	湖南
Hu ren dui	鄠人對
Huzhou	湖州
Hua	華
Huayan jing	華嚴經
Huayan nianfo sanmei lun	華嚴念佛三昧論
Huang Lu	黃履
Huang mou	黃某
Huang Shude (aka, Rouqing)	黃淑德 (柔卿)
Huang Tingjian (aka, Luzhi)	黃庭堅 (魯直)
Huijiao	慧皎
huo	惑
Jiqing (aka, Peng Shaosheng)	際清
Jixing Chewu	際醒徹悟
ji yuan wenda	機緣問答
Ji Zoushi	季鄒氏
Jiatai pu denglu	嘉泰普燈錄
Jia Yi	賈宜
jian min	賤民
Jianzhai (aka, Yuan Mei)	簡齋

Jianzhong jingguo xu denglu	建中靖國續燈錄
Jiang Gui	姜桂
Jiangling	江陵
Jiangnan	江南
Jiang Shi	江氏
Jiangxi	江西
Jiang Xinyu	蔣心餘
Jiangyin	江陰
Jiao nü yi gui	教女遺規
Jin	晉
Jin'gang chi yan ji	金剛持驗記
Jin'gang jing	金剛經
Jin'gang zheng guo	金剛證果
Jinshi	進士
Jintang	近堂
Jingde chuan deng lu	景德傳燈錄
jing jin	精進
Jingtu quan shu	淨土全書
Jingtu sheng xian lu	淨土聖賢錄
Jingtu sheng xian lu xu bian	淨土聖賢錄續編
Jingtu yue shuo	淨土約說

Juren	舉人
Jushi zhuan	居士傳
Juzhi	俱胝
junzi	君子
Kang Qian sheng shi	康乾盛世
Kangxi	康熙
Kaozheng	考證
Kongzi (Confucius)	孔子
Kuai yuan	獪園
Lao nüren jing	老女人經
lao si	老死
Le An	泐庵
Le bang wen lei	樂邦文類
Lengyan jing	楞嚴經
li (pattern/principle)	理
li (propriety/rites)	禮
Li Gonglin	李公麟
Li ji	禮記
Li Shengshan	李盛山
Lishi Nü	李氏女
Lishui	麗水

liyi	理義
Li Zhi (Zhuowu)	李贄(卓吾)
Li Zicheng	李自成
Lian deng hui yao	聯燈會要
Liang	梁
Liang jiang	兩江
Liangshi Nü	梁氏女
liang zhi	良知
Lie nü zhuan	列女傳
Linji lu	臨濟錄
Linji Yixuan	臨濟義玄
Lin Shi	林氏
Lingyue Daoren	靈月道人
liu bo luo mi	六波羅密
Liu Duo	劉鐸
Liu Mengmei	柳夢梅
liu ru	六入
Liu Shoumeng	劉守蒙
Liu Shu	劉淑
Liu Xiang	劉向
Longhu	龍湖

Longshu jingtu wen	龍舒淨土文
Longtan Chongxin	龍潭崇信
Lu Huaxian	呂化顯
Lu Jiuling	陸九齡
Luling	庐陵
Lun yu	論語
Luohan si	羅漢寺
Luo Yougao (Taishan)	羅有高 (臺山)
Luoyuan	羅源
Macheng	麻城
Maibing Po	賣餅婆
Manchu	滿人
Mao Fengshao	毛鳳韶
Mao Yulong	毛鈺龍
Mengzi (Mencius)	孟子
Mengzi zi yi shu zheng	孟子字義疏證
miao	妙
Miaoshan	妙善
Ming	明
Mingfu	明福
ming se	名色

Ming shi	明史
Mu dan ting	牡丹亭
Mulian	目連
Nanjō Bunyū	南条文雄
nei	內
Ni Riheng	倪日亨
Nianfo jing ce	念佛警策
Ning Ruili	甯瑞鯉
Nü jie	女誡
Nü lun yu	女論語
Nü sheng	女聖
Ouyi Zhixu	藕益智旭
Pan Shu	潘淑
Pang Jushi	龐居士
Pang Yun	龐蘊
Peng Dingqiu (aka, Nanyun)	彭定求 (南畇)
Peng Qifeng (aka, Zhiting)	彭啟豐 (芝庭)
Pengshan Shenggu	彭山聖姑
Peng Shaosheng	彭紹升
Peng Xiluo	彭希洛
Peng Xisu	彭希涑

Pi Chen	裨諶
Pingtian Puan	平田普岸
Pingtian Sao	平田嫂
Puji (651-739)	普寂
Puji (1179-1253)	普濟
qi	氣
Qi	齊
Qisong	契嵩
qi yu	綺語
Qi zhen ye sheng	啓禎野乘
qi zhi zhi xing	氣質之性
Qian Fangbo (aka, Qian Qi, Yusha)	錢方伯 (錢琦，嶼沙)
Qianlong	乾隆
Qianshan	潛山
Qian shan pusa	千善菩薩
Qian Xiyan	錢希言
Qian Yongming	錢永明
Qin	秦
qing	情
Qing	清
qinggui	清規

Qing long shu chao	青龍疏鈔
Qing shi gao	清史稿
Qiu huang qu	求凰曲
Qiu Shudu	裘叔度
qu	取
renjian fojiao	人間佛教
ren ru	忍辱
Ren shou	仁壽
ren zhi	仁智
Ru fo liang bu shou	儒佛兩不收
Ruizhang	瑞璋
Shan'gu Daoren	山谷道人
Shan'gu si	山谷寺
Shan nüren zhuan	善女人傳
Shanxi zhi	陝西志
Shanyin	山陰
shan zhi shi	善知識
Shangdang	上黨
Shangfang si	上方寺
Shaowu	邵武
Shaoxi	紹熙

shen shi	神識
shenyi	神異
Shen Yixiu	沈宜修
sheng	生
Sheng-yen (*pinyin*: Shengyan)	聖嚴
shi er yin yuan	十二因緣
shi er yuan qi	十二緣起
Shi Miaoxing	石妙性
Shi shi	釋氏
shi	識
Shi Zhennü	施貞女
shou	受
Shou leng yan jing	首楞嚴經
Shun	舜
Shunzhi	順治
Shuokui chan shi yulu	碩揆禪師語錄
Shuokui yuanzhi	碩揆原志
Sichuan	四川
Sima Xiangru	司馬相如
Song	宋
Song gaoseng zhuan	宋高僧傳

Song Jingwei	宋景衛
Song Kan	宋衍
Song Lian	宋濂
Song Ruohua	宋若華
Song Ruozhao	宋若昭
Sui	隋
Sui yuan	隨園
Suiyuan Laoren (aka, Yuan Mei)	隨園老人
Sui yuan nü di zi shi ji	隨園女弟子詩集
Sui yuan shi dan	隨園食單
Sui yuan shi hua	隨園詩話
Suiyuan Zhuren (aka, Yuan Mei)	隨園主人
Sun Shenxing	孫慎行
Sun Wu	孫武
Suzhou	蘇洲
Taixu	太虛
Tang	湯
Tang Bin	湯斌
Tang shu	唐書
Tang Xianzu	湯顯祖
Tang Xuanzong	唐玄宗

Tao Qian (Yuanming)	陶潛 (淵明)
Tao Ren	陶仁
Tao Shan (Qingyu)	陶善 (慶余)
Ti Ying	緹縈
Tianning	天甯
Tianning si	天寧寺
Tianqi	天啓
Tiansheng guang denglu	天聖廣燈錄
Tiantai	天臺
Tian zhu	天竺
Tzu Chi (*pinyin*: Ciji)	慈濟
Vaidehī	韋提希
Wai zui xian sheng	歪嘴先生
wai	外
Wan	皖
Wang Cixie	王次谐
Wang Digong qi	王迪功妻
Wang Gen	王艮
Wang Gui	王桂
Wang Ji	王畿
Wang Jin (Dashen)	汪缙 (大紳)

Wang Lun	王倫
Wang Qisun (aka, Nianfeng)	王芑孫 (念丰)
Wang Rixiu	王日休
wangsheng	往生
Wangsheng ji	往生集
Wangsheng zhuan	往生傳
Wang Shi	王氏
Wang Wei (Mojie)	王維 (摩诘)
Wang Yangming	王陽明
Wang youcheng ji	王右丞集
Wang Zhennü	王貞女
Wang Zhi	王志
Wang Zhong	汪中
Wei-chüeh (*pinyin*: Weijue)	惟覺
Wei Jun	韋俊
Weishi Nü	魏氏女
Wei wang you Lu Jiuling can hui wen	為亡友陸九齡懺悔文
wei xin jing tu	唯心淨土
Wenchang	文昌
Wen Jian	聞見
Wenshi nü	聞氏女

Wen Suchen	文素臣
Wen Tianxiang	文天祥
Wenxin gong	文信公
Wen xing ge	文星閣
Wen zhen furen	文貞夫人
Wen Ziyu	聞子與
Weng Po	翁婆
Weng Shuyuan	翁叔元
Wu (Lower Yangzi River region)	吳
Wu	武
Wu deng hui yuan	五燈會元
Wujiang	吳江
Wu men guan	無門關
Wu meng tang ji	午夢堂集
wu ming	無明
Wu Qi	吳起
wu shan	無善
Wuxi	無錫
Wu ye tang	無葉堂
Wu Yongxian	吳用先
wu yu	無欲

wu zhang	五障
Xi'an sheng yan	息庵剩言
Xifang hui zheng	西舫彙征
Xi Wangmu	西王母
Xia Jingqu	夏敬渠
Xiangshan	香山
Xiao cang shan fang shi ji	小倉山房詩集
Xiao jing	孝經
Xie man guo	懈慢國
Xie Youhui	謝有輝
Xie Zhennü	謝貞女
xin	心
Xin qi xie	新齊諧
xin xue	心學
xing	行
Xu gaoseng zhuan	續高僧傳
Xu Huan	徐桓
Xu Xizai	徐熙載
Xu zang jing	續藏經
Xuzhou	徐州
Xuzhou	敘州

Xue Qifeng (aka, Jiasan)	薛起鳳 (家三)
Yancheng	鹽城
Yan Rengong	嚴訒公
Yan Ruoqu	閻若璩
Yan Wang	閻王
Yan Zehuan	顏澤寰
yang	陽
Yang Tiaohua	楊苕華
Yang Wenhui (aka, Renshan)	楊文會 (仁山)
Yang Yuhuan	楊玉環
Yang Zhaonan	楊兆南
Yangzhou	揚州
Yangzi	揚子
Yao	堯
Yao Po	姚婆
Ye Shaoyuan	葉紹袁
Ye sou pu yan	野叟曝言
Ye Wanwan	葉紈紈
Ye Xiaoluan	葉小鸞
Yi jiang zhi	夷堅志
Yi jing	易經

Yi sheng jue yi lun	一乘訣疑論
Yi xing ju ji	一行居集
Yi zhi chan	一指禪
yin	陰
yinguo	因果
Yinshun	印順
Yong'an gong	永安宮
Yongdong	甬東
Yongzheng	雍正
you	有
youcheng	右丞
You po yi zhi	優婆夷志
Yu	禹
Yu Ao	余媼
Yu Chenglong	于成龍
Yu Daopo	俞道婆
Yujing nüshi	玉京女史
yulu	語錄
Yu Xingmin	俞行敏
Yuan Hongdao	袁宏道
Yuan Mei	袁枚

Yuan shan	原善
Yuanwu Keqin	圓悟克勤
Yuan Zhongdao	袁中道
Yuanzong	元宗
Yuan Zongdao	袁宗道
Yue fu	月府
Yuelang	月朗
Yue Shan	約山
Yunchu (aka, Peng Shaosheng)	允初
Yunnan	雲南
Yunqi Zhuhong	雲棲袾宏
Zanning	贊寧
Zhang	張
Zhang furen	張夫人
Zhang Gen	張根
Zhang Lishi	張李氏
Zhang Lie	張烈
Zhang Ma	張媽
Zhang Shi	張氏
Zhang Xianzhong	張獻忠
Zhang Xuecheng	章學誠

Zhao Feiyan	趙飛燕
Zhao Hede	趙合德
Zhaoyue	昭月
Zhejiang	浙江
Zhennü bian	貞女辯
Zhenxiao an	贞孝庵
Zheng	鄭
zhengmin	烝民
Zheng Ruyuan	鄭汝原
zhi	智
Zhiduan	智斷
Zhiguizi (aka, Peng Shaosheng)	知歸子
zhi liang zhi	致良知
Zhipan	志磐
Zhiping	治平
zhishan	至善
Zhiting wen gao	芝庭文槀
Zhiyi	智顗
Zhiyuan	智圓
Zhong yong	中庸
Zhongli Chun	鐘离春

Zhou	周
Zhou li	周禮
Zhou Wuzong	周武宗
Zhu Xi	朱熹
Zhu Yuanzhang	朱元璋
Zhuangzi	莊子
Zhunti An	準提庵
Zhuo Wenjun	卓文君
Zibo Zhenke	紫柏真可
Zi bu yu	子不語
Zicai (aka, Yuan Mei)	子才
Zi Chan	子產
Ziquan	子權
zi sun wang hua	子孫王化
Ziyu	子愚
Zi zhi lu	自知錄
Zong Shi	宗氏
Zou hui yin ci shu	奏毀淫祠疏
Zou Yi	鄒漪
zun de xing	尊德性

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