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Temple and Text:
Re-imagining Women's Social Spaces in Late Imperial China

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in East Asian Studies

by

Xu Ma

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Martin W. Huang, Chair
Professor Hu Ying
Professor Michael Fuller
Assistant Professor Elizabeth Tinsley

2020

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DEDICATION

To Pu and Max

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Temple and Text:

Re-imagining Women's Social Spaces in Late Imperial China

by

Xu Ma

Doctor of Philosophy in East Asian Studies

University of California, Irvine, 2020

Professor Martin. W. Huang, Chair

My dissertation aims to offer a new window into women's spatial, social, and spiritual positioning in late imperial China by reconsidering women's interactions with various physical and imagined temples/religious spaces. It explores the kinetic role of temples —a unique yet understudied "space"—in producing and reproducing gender relationship, identity, body, and space itself. Temples not only drew the cloistered Chinese women of diverse social and educational status out of their homes, but also disorientated yet vitalized them between the bipolar sensations of anchorage and variability, between bodily confinement and spiritual ecstasy. Through women's controversial yet common existence in temples or various religious spaces, we could glance at how Buddhism (and other heterodox religions), by lavishing

persistent attention on and offering tremendous opportunities to women, negotiates its status and domain within an increasingly hostile society dominated by Neo-Confucianism.

From the second half of the Ming dynasty through High Qing (roughly spanning late 15th to 18th centuries), a dual development rises to prominence in China's ideological landscape. On the one hand, lay Buddhism flourished across wide swaths of Chinese society, and especially among women; one the other, the Neo-Confucian doctrines ascended to the state orthodoxy and fueled a reinforcement of Confucian family rituals and women's seclusion. Under these circumstances, women were increasingly relegated to the private sphere, and yet there was nevertheless an ever-growing group of female devotees who embarked on far-flung pilgrimages and devoted themselves to outdoor spiritual activities. As Buddhism and Confucianism vied more dramatically for women's allegiance at the time, the temple came to represent both a problematic site of heresy and transgression, and an alternative space that provided unique accommodation for women's body and soul.

Examining a wide range of literary and historical materials, my dissertation aims to show that women's engagement with religious spaces is much more complicated and even contradictive to what the normative narrative (as prescribed by Confucian moralists and evinced in orthodox discourse) has represented. The temple should not be simply categorized into the tabooed sphere of *wai* (outside, public) for women, and it was not always the antithesis to the *nei* sphere (inside, private). As I will show, the temple was capable of contesting, compensating, and conflating with the binary *nei and wai* spheres as a malleable site. I interpret the temple as a "space" that can take any number of forms. It signifies but is not always bound to any monastic site with specific scale, size, or shape; it could be simultaneously physical and imagined, locating both within and beyond the *nei-wai* system. Temples can make a combination or take an in-

between position along the *nei-wai* dichotomy; temples also provide a third option, substitution, and compensation for the original binary oppositions. Briefly, instead of asking how temples fit into the Confucian *nei-wai* divide, my research reorients the question by classifying the religious space as a fluid "third social space" that simultaneously supplemented and subverted the *nei-wai* divide.

Furthermore, my consideration of temples as a "third social space" does not confine itself to the level of the spatial and gendered *nei-wai* duality. I also interpret it as a third possibility in terms of its constitution of and conflation with the *symbolic* worlds of the boudoir and books—the two available social spaces to women at the time. In this way, my research expands on the scholarly trend of locating and interpreting women's alternative social spheres in late imperial China. Taking a further step from the scholarly endeavor to expand women's social spaces in late imperial China, I will argue that the temple is not merely a parallel third option that makes a new locus for us to re-contour women's bodily placement and social position beyond boudoirs and off pages. Rather, religious spaces, material, textual, or symbolic, could also actively fuse or be identified with the first two realms, ie. books and boudoirs. Self-fashioned shrines or religious spaces within the domestic can always be evoked; physical temples could also be de/re-spatialized and transmuted into written words and illustrations, metaphorically rendering the reader a textual temple of sorts. In other words, boudoirs could be redesigned and appropriated into religious sites; architectural temples could also turn into a system of ideas and practices that traveled through texts. As such, temples not only furnished women with a geographical location to visit, sojourn, and occupy, but also conjured up a symbolic textual and spiritual "pure land" accommodating women's soul and sentiment.

As religious spaces were transformed into printed words and images, a figurative parallel between text and temple could be thus established. Allowing its audience to evoke an "implied pilgrimage" every time they consumed the texts, all the sutra canvas and book pages became what I would call "textualized temples." I, therefore, call for a creative hermeneutics of texts/books as an active agent and mediating spaces between ideological norms and people's concrete interpretation and internalization in daily life. It is my contention that proliferating texts actually functioned as symbolic temples, carried and spread the Confucian and Buddhist doctrines to the individual reader. This "decomposed" discursive narrative denotes, in and of itself, a unique "space" which Michel Foucault would call "heterotopia." Eventually, these temples on pages enacted multifold and secular appearances of the sacrosanct Confucian tradition and concurrent heterodox systems, in which women's "socio-religious ablution" is recorded and renewed in innovative and robust manners.

As a more intimate connection between women and Buddhism was forged, Lay Buddhism took full advantage of this new perception of the gendered body to secure its foothold in a Neo-Confucian society that was increasingly hostile to heterodox systems. It strategically circumvented the public sphere and its steadfast male apologists by forging a more intimate connection with women. Through lavishing persistent attention on women and the substantial secularization of its religious practices, Buddhism introduced new ontological dimensions of the female spirituality and enabled the hitherto private, cloistered female body accrued public meaning and visibility in the literary, religious, and social spheres. Meanwhile it also provided men with a new possibility, new mode and new vocabulary to lionize and immortalize their otherwise ordinary mothers, wives, and daughters. As a result, Buddhism not only won over women's allegiance, but also eventually co-opted or inveigled the male Confucian sectarians into

facilitating its full integration into Chinese cultural landscape. In this sense, my research also offers new insights into the question concerning Buddhism's survival and revivification in China after the catastrophic anti-Buddhism persecution of the 9th century.

Introduction

Nothing shall have taken place but place.

---Stéphane Mallarmé

This dissertation examines women's spatial, social, and spiritual intersections with material and imagined temples as represented in both texts and daily practice in late imperial China. I explore the role of religious spaces in representing and reshaping gender as two key developments arose in China. First, lay Buddhism flourished across wide swaths of Chinese society, and especially among women,[1] from the second half of the Ming dynasty through the high Qing (roughly spanning the 16th to 19th centuries). At the same time, the Neo-Confucian doctrines ascended to the state orthodoxy and fueled a reinforcement of lineage ideal and family rituals.[2] Under these circumstances, officials increasingly emphasized women's relegation to the

[1] For the thriving of lay Buddhism in the Ming, see Beata Grant, "Patterns of Female Religious Experience in Qing Dynasty Popular Literature," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 23 (1995): 29-58; Susan Naquin, *Peking: Temples and City Life: 1400-1900*, Berkeley: University of California Press. 2000; Chün-Fang Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China: Chu-hung and the Late Ming Synthesis*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1981, etc.

[2] For the orthodoxization of Neo-Confucianism and the centralization of family rite and lineage ideal in China after the Song-Yuan period, see Chow Kai-wing, *The Rise of Confucian Ritualism in Late Imperial China: Ethics, Classics, and Lineage Discourse*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994; Patricia Ebrey, *Confucianism and Family Rituals in Imperial China: A social History of Writing of Rites*, Princeton: Princeton University Press,1991; William Rowe,

private sphere, and yet it was not uncommon for women to frequent temples, embark on far-flung pilgrimages, and devote themselves to spiritual activities.[3] As Buddhism and Confucianism vied for women's allegiance, the temple became a problematic site of heresy and transgression and an alternative social space that provided unique accommodation of women's body and soul.

This study explores the temple as a gendered and multivalent space. The temple, as I understand it, can be within *or* without the domestic space; it can be imagined as well as concrete. That is, the temple signifies but was not always bound to any monastic site with specific scale, size, or shape; it could be simultaneously physical and symbolic in terms of its interactions with women in various contexts. It is my contention that the temple/monastic space was by no means passive and inert background for women's common yet controversial existence in it; rather, it served as active and dynamic actor in producing and reproducing identity, body, relationship, and space itself. Engaged with but beyond the private family quarters and the public political sphere, temples constituted a "thirdspace" (I will explain this later).[4] where women's personal identities were to be socialized and fomented in the Ming-Qing era. Drawing on contemporary spatial theorists' innovative interpretations of space and place, this research

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"Ancestral Rites and Political Authority in Late Imperial China: Chen Hongmou in Jiangxi." *Modern China*, 24, No.4 (1998): 378-407; Michael Szonyi, *Practicing Kinship: Lineage and Descent in Late Imperial China*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2002, etc.

[3] For details of women's excursion to temples, see chapter 1.

[4] Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996.

expands on modern historians' project of locating and interpreting women's expanded social spheres in late imperial China.

Book and Boudoir: Established Social Spaces of Women

From the first forays into writing the history of Chinese women in the May Fourth-New Culture period (1915-1927) through the last decade of the twentieth century, histories of Chinese women were dominated by the notion that their protagonists were voiceless victims of an unapologetically patriarchal society. Throughout much of the twentieth century, it was widely accepted that the only permissible social spaces for women living in the benighted Ming and Qing periods were their own boudoirs. It was not until the 1980s that this stark characterization of Chinese women lost its stranglehold on academic discourse. Since then, historians have turned to the female poets of the Ming-Qing period and used those women's texts to write against the hitherto hegemonic May Fourth legacy. Academics have recuperated traditional women's subjectivity and agency by uncovering how women poets successfully negotiated, contested, and reshaped gender norms and prevailing ideologies with their writings. Through re-readings of Ming-Qing women's poetry (and other literary productions), scholars revealed the supposedly marginalized, cloistered women to be efficacious and articulate historical actors whose work manifested and reinforced their sociocultural power and challenged prescribed gender roles.[5]

Modern historians' recovery of Ming-Qing women's literary voices hinges on work published during the Ming-Qing printing boom. The 15th century in China and Europe alike

[5] Much has been done with this innovative methodology by scholars such as Grace Fong, Ellen Widmer, Dorothy Ko, Susan Mann, Maureen Robertson, Kang-I Sun Chang, Wai-yee Li, Hu Ying, Xiaorong Li and Joan Judge, to name just a few.

witnessed the decline of handwritten books and the explosion of print.[6] Print's victory over the erstwhile-hegemonic manuscript restructured the social, cultural, intellectual, and educational landscapes of late imperial China.[7] Just as contemporaneous imprints in Europe facilitated the

[6] It is widely accepted there were two major printing booms in Chinese history, one was the Southern Song, and other in the Ming. Due to the political upheaval, dynasty transition, demographic shifts, economic decline, and intellectual transformation, the early Ming period (from the late 14th century through the early 16th century) witnessed a marked recession in the printing industry. It was not until the economy picked up in the Jiajing era (1522-67) of Ming that the second publishing boom had the material preconditions necessary to take off. In this sense, I think it would be more accurate to redefine the so-called "two booms" of printing as one that has been interrupted and retarded for about a couple of centuries. See Lucille Chia, "*Mashaben*: Commercial Publishing in Jianyang from the Song to the Ming," in Paul Smith and Richard Von Glahn, eds., *The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition in Chinese History*, Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Centre, 2003, pp. 302-5. See also Cynthia J. Brokaw, "On the History of the Book in China," in *Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China*, eds. Cynthia J. Brokaw and Kai-wing Chow, Berkeley, Los Angeles, & London: University of California Press, 2005, p. 24.

[7] However, it has been a debatable issue as when the real "conquer" of printed book happened in China. Scholars have debated the technical question of when and where to draw the quantitative line between imprint and manuscript culture. Many Song-Yuan historians suggest that as early as the Song period the printing had dominated the field of book production in China, while scholars on the Ming-Qing period like Joseph McDermott and Susan Cherniack suggest that "the date of

Protestant democratization of the divine,[8] Chinese printed books fueled the popularization of academic knowledge and the destabilization of social and gender stratifications. The printing boom dramatically improved women's literacy rates and cultivated new intellectual practices, bestowing newfound cultural authority and autonomy on literate Chinese women. Women could craft and publicize an outward-facing identity through reading and writing. Today, historians typically construe the literary sphere as an alternative social space in which women transcended the physical boundaries of their boudoirs through reading and writing.

Partaking the new surge of scholarly interest among modern historians in recuperating premodern Chinese women's agency, reconstituting their subjectivity, and rediscovering their new social spaces, this research is both an addition to and deviation from this full-fledged

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the eventual 'victory' of the imprint over the manuscript…should be pushed ahead from the Song to as late as the mid-Ming." See Joseph McDermott, "Book Collecting in Jiangxi During the Song Dynasty," in *Knowledge and Text Production in an Age of Print: China, 900-1400*, ed. Lucille Chia, Hilde de Weerdt. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011, p. 76. See also, Susan Cherniack, "Book Culture and Textual Transmission in Sung China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 54, No.1(1994): 5-125, p. 33. For the Song-Yuan camp's contention, see Lucille Chia, "Mashaben", pp. 327-8. See also Joseph McDermott, "The Ascendance of the Imprint in China," in *Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China*, pp. 55-6.

[8] For a global perspective of the book history across Europe and Asia, see Joseph MacDermott and Peter Burke, "Introduction," in *The Book Words of East Asia and Europe*, 1450-1850*: Connections and Comparisons*, ed. Joseph MacDermott, Peter Burke. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2015, p. 4.

scholarly trend. Echoing these scholars' endeavors, my dissertation as well discusses an alternative social space for women who were supposed to remain cloistered in their boudoirs. If those historians on Chinese women creatively demonstrated well-educated women's capacity to stretch, negotiated, and contested the boundary between *nei* 內 (domestic) and *wai* 外 (public) space through perusing and producing books/texts, my research examines how women's activities in the religious sphere is imagined and represented, and its cultural ramification and implication.

Meanwhile, my project differentiates itself from the aforementioned histories of premodern Chinese women in three key ways. First, historians of Chinese women have largely left illiterate and semi-literate women out of their research scope, even though these women constituted the majority of the female population. My research, however, engages with women of all socioeconomic backgrounds, as a temple could invite any women for a visit both in spatial (an open site) and spiritual (Buddhist indiscriminate compassion) terms. Briefly, this dissertation looks at a wider range of women without a class, status, or educational concentration.

Second, my research is not a recuperation of writing women's agency and autonomy, but a recovery of the "dynamism" of the temple—monastic space through the lens of gender. In other words, temple as an alternative "social space" which allures and accommodates women's body and soul will be re-read with modern spatial theorists' reformist methodology. They have called on "mov[ing] away from the Kantian perspective on space—as an absolute category—towards *space as process* and *in process*."[9] (I will come back to this point later.)

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[9] Mike Crang, and Nigel Thrift, eds. *Thinking Space*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000, p. 3. See also Edward Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History.* Berkeley: University

Third, rather than paralleling of temple (monastic space) with women's poetry (textual space; the main available genre of writings by women studied by most scholars so far), my examination of temple as an alternative space for women will take on a nuanced approach. I argue that the two spaces for women's public participation—temple and text—fused in religious compendia and literary writings by both male and female authors. The physical temples could be transformed into text and de-spatialized (as seen in the pagoda-shaped sutra 塔形经), while many eulogizing texts and fictions served to consecrate their female subjects, metaphorically rendering the reader a textual temple of sorts. Therefore, whereas the women historians' agenda was to rediscover women's literary and textual production as a symbolic space for women to explore and occupy, I aim to examine 1) how women's interactions with temples were perceived at the time, and 2) how the temple became a system of ideas and practices that traveled through texts and intersected with various spaces. Briefly, the temples my research considers are both physical religious sites and symbolic textual spaces, and thus the dissertation discusses both the "temple of bricks" and the "temple in books."

Historicizing the *Nei-Wai* System

Place/space offer a helpful grammar with which we can better read the social meanings of the lives of those people who dwell, describe, desire for, and even disassociate from a location.

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of California Press, 1997. Doreen Massey, "Power-geometry and a progressive sense of place." In *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*, ed. John Bird, Barry Curtis, Tim Putnam, and Lisa Tickner, London and New York: Routledge, 1993. Kim Knott, *The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis*. London: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2005. And Jonathan Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987, etc.

In his seminal monograph *The Poetics of Space,* Gaston Bachelard argues that spatial distinctions are the foundation of Western thought, as evinced by the binary oppositions of here and there, up and down, inside and outside, high and low, etc.[10] Spatial coordinates are also key to traditional Chinese definitions of people's identity, status, and relationships. William Rowe explains that in traditional Chinese culture "social roles were routinely conceptualized in terms of spatial metaphors."[11] Interestingly, although men and women alike were labeled with reference to their location," men's spatial tag was public—men were addressed by their official post, hometown, studio, etc.[12]—whereas women's spatial tag was domestic—it referred to the "bedroom (房)" to which they were assigned.[13] This gendered difference clearly reaffirms the spatial order of *nei*

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[10] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*. 1958. Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon, 1994.

[11] William Rowe, "Women and the Family in Mid-Qing Social Thought: The Case of Chen Hongmou," *Late Imperial China*, Vol.13 1992, pp. 1-41, 5. See also "Women and the Family in Mid-Ch'ing Social Thought: The Case of Chen' Hung-mou." In *Family Process and Political Process in Modern Chinese History*. Taipei: Academia Sinica, Institute of Modern History, 2 vols. Part 1, 1992, pp. 489-539, 497.

[12] For example, the famous Tang poet Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824) is also known as Han Changli 韓昌黎; Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819) is also known as Liu Hedong 柳河東; the famous Ming scholar and playwright Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖 (1550-1616) has a different appellation as Tang Linchuan 湯臨川.

[13] For example, an official wife is always mentioned by the sobriquet of "primary house 大房" or the "central house 正房." Whenever a man marries a concubine, he would assign her a house to reside, and the concubine will be then addressed as "certain house" according to her ranking

(inner, woman) and *wai* (outer, man), the fundamental binary on which Chinese gender was built.

The preeminence of the spatial terms *nei* and *wai* in the formulation and maintenance of Chinese gender is widely recognized. Li-hsiang Lisa Rosenlee writes, "The term *nei-wai*, when correlated with gender, is often equated with these two mutually opposing and conflicting spheres—family and state—which in turn signify a distinct separation between private and public, or woman and man."[14] The earliest elaboration of the spatial dyad as it applies to gender appears in pre-Han texts. *The Book of Change* (易經) avers, "The proper position of women is the domestic; the proper position of men is the outside. Both men and women observe their proper positions, this is the primary principle of the world. (女正位乎內，男正位乎外。男女正，天地之大義也.)"[15] Similarly, *The Book of Rites* (禮記 內則) writes, "The men occupied the exterior; the women the interior. […] The men did not enter the interior; the women did not come out into the exterior. (男子居外，女子居內… 男不入，女不出.)"[16] Although scholars maintain that the *nei-wai* dichotomy was not always intimately associated with gender

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among all the co-wives. For examples in literary texts, see Naifei Ding, *Obscene Things: Sexual Politic in* Jin Ping Mei, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002, pp. 170-71.

[14] Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee, *Confucianism and Women: A Philosophical Interpretation*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006, p. 69.

[15] *T*he 37th divinatory symbols, "Family 家人," in *Zhou yi* 周易 (I-Ching, the Book of Change), Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2010, p. 157.

[16] *The Book of Rite* 禮記, *neize* (The pattern of the family) 內則，trans. James Legge. https://ctext.org/liji/nei-ze, 10/15/2018.

distinctions, it is clear that the pair of terms is "prominent in the later ritual and instruction books defining proper gender relations and spheres" and only grew more popular as gender roles became more aggressively distinct.[17] The *nei-wai* binary became more intimately tied to gender distinctions after the Song dynasty, when Neo-Confucianism ascended to orthodoxy and spatial separation became a key strategy for maintaining gender differentiation and familial order.

Many women historians have worked to revise the common understanding that the *nei-wai* demarcation yielded two incompatible and hierarchical spheres. By emphasizing the gap between prescription and practice, Dorothy Ko, for instance, paints a picture of *nei-wai* as more a continuum than a polar binary in writing women's daily experience and practice. Ko argues that the Chinese dialectic is distinct from, and far more elastic than, its Western counterpart of private and public spheres.[18] Educated women could "stretch" the boundary of their inner space through reading and writing. Francesca Bray, too, concedes that "in the case of late imperial China, the boundaries between 'inner' and 'outer' worlds were also relational and fluid."[19]

If the above scholars destabilized the boundary between *nei* and *wai* in terms of writing women's daily "practice," other scholars have even achieved a similar agenda within the

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[17] Rosenlee, *Confucianism and Women*, p. 71. See also, Lisa Raphals, *Sharing the Light: Representations of Women and Virtue in Early China*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998, pp. 234.

[18] Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in 17th Century China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.

[19] Francesca Bray, *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, p. 54.

discursive "prescription" through close readings of the Confucian canon. Lisa Ralphal argues that *nei* and *wai* are relational and codependent, just as *yin* and *yang* are.[20] Rosenlee points out, "The conventional emphasis on the nature of the separation of man and woman in a literal and physical sense in understanding Chinese gender construction overlooks the symbolic functions of the dynamic and correlative metaphor of *nei-wai* in the process of genderization. […] The boundary between the *nei* and the *wai* is constantly moving and being renegotiated."[21] In one word, through a scrutiny of ancient orthodox/canonical texts, they demonstrate that the *nei-wai* pair was more relational, intermeshed than completely separated and incompatible.

Each of these scholars asserts that the boundary between *nei and wai* was more fluid than we may be inclined to think, but they leave the binary structure itself intact. My dissertation aims to question the validity of this dualism as it applies to late imperial Chinese women's interaction with multivalent monastic spaces. I hereby draw on work by spatial theorists and philosophers who challenge binarisms through fresh approaches to space.

Rethinking "Space": Theoretical Framework

"Place," "location," and "space," these three terms that had once described static and bounded geographical areas, became the theoretical focus of a host of humanistic geographers, sociologists, anthropologists, and philosophers from the 1970s on.[22] Foucault and other philosophers contributed to the increasing academic focus on "space" by problematizing the

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[20] Lisa Raphals, *Sharing the Light*, especially Chapter 8 & 9.

[21] Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee, *Confucianism and Women*, pp. 69-70.

[22] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977; E.C. Relph, *Place and Placelessness*. London: Pion, 1976.

discipline of history and its "obsession" with time.[23] Foucault asks rhetorically, "Why is it that time has tended to be treated as 'richness, fecundity, life, dialectic,' while in contrast, space has been typically seen as 'the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile?'"[24] He goes on to proclaim somewhere else that, "[T]he present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space."[25]

Indeed, the 1990s witnessed an unprecedented revitalization of studies of space, buoyed by the English translation of Henri Lefebvre's monumental book *La production de l'espace* (*The Production of Social Space*). Lefebvre challenges the traditional notion of space as a passive container and proposes to replace it with a theory that emphasizes the continual production and reproduction of space.[26] Lefebvre employs the term "social space" to connote both the cultural and material aspects of space. For Lefebvre, space is both a product and a producer of social relations, and it must be understood as belonging at once to the material base and to the ideological superstructure. Ensuing was what became known as "the spatial turn,"[27] within which space was no longer to be treated as stagnant, homogenous, inert, and tangential; modern scholars began to consider space as dynamic, relational, and agentive.[28]

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[23] Michael Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, No.1(1986): 22-27.

[24] Quoted from Soja, *Thirdspace*, p. 15.

[25] Foucault, "Of Other Spaces."

[26] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1991.

[27] Thomas Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008, p. 9

[28] Spatial theorists posed and proposed answers to new questions: "What if spaces were not the

It is under this scholarly trend, Edward Soja argues that "spatiality" is so crucial to our understanding of the human experience that it ought to be elevated to the status of sociality and historicality.[29] Soja goes on to describe a process of "thirding-as-othering": space's capacity to "respond to all binarisms, to any attempt to confine thought and political action to only two alternatives, by interjecting an-Other set of choices."[30] In other words, whatever binary might be in play in a given space, that binary is upset by the third term of the space itself. Soja coins the term "Thirdspace" to describe "a space of extraordinary openness, a place of critical exchange where the geographical imagination can be expanded to encompassing a multiplicity of perspectives that have heretofore been considered by the epistemological referees to be incompatible, uncombinable."[31] Soja cautions that the "Thirdspace,"[32] which he describes as a

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recipient but rather the creation of the human project? What if places were an active product of intellection rather than its passive receptacle?" Smith, *To Take Place*, p. 26.

[29] Edward Soja writes, "[O]ne of the most important intellectual and political developments of the late 20th century, a growing community of scholars and citizens has, for perhaps the first time, begun to think about the *spatiality* of human life in much the same way that we have persistently approached life's […] *historicality* and *sociality*. For much too long, spatiality has been relatively peripheral. […] [F]ew would deny that understanding the world is, in the most general sense, a simultaneously historical and social project." *Thirdspace*, p. 2.

[30] Here he took the dichotomy of modernism and post-modernism as an example. Ibid. p. 5.

[31] Ibid.

[32] This "thirdspace" jives with other key theorists' interpretations of space, including those of Lefebvre, Foucault, Oldenburg's "great good third space," in *The Great Good Place*, and Homi

"third possibility or 'moment' that partakes of the original pairing," is neither "a simple combination or an 'in-between' position along some all-inclusive continuum" nor a substitution of the third for the original binary choice.[33] The critical "thirding," Soja asserts, presents a "creative process of restructuring that draws selectively and strategically from the two opposing categories to open new alternatives."[34]

The spatial turn in critical theory predominantly spoke to socio-cultural studies of globalization and post-modernism; "space" is typically used in socio-political contexts and urban

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Bhabha's "third space." Soja himself also reads Foucault's "heterotopologies" and Lefebvre's triadic framework of "perceived, conceived, and lived space" (which revises the conventional dichotomy of "real and imagined" space) as epitomizing the move from a single binary enclosure to a "coinciding and parallel" third plane. "When faced with a choice of confined to the either/or," Soja explains, "Lefebvre creatively resisted by choosing instead 'an-Other' alternative, marked by the openness of the both/and also […] with the 'also' reverberating back to disrupt the categorical closures implicit in the either/or logic." p. 7. Soja continues, "Like Lefebvre, Foucault begins his exploration with a 'thirding,' a sympathetic critique of the bicameralized spatial imagination that leads us to Other spaces. […] Foucault called these spaces 'Heterotopias.'" *Thirdspace*, p. 15. See also Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How They Get You Through the Day*. New York: Paragon House, 1989; Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London and New York : Routledge, 1994.

[33] Soja, *Thirdspace*, p. 60.

[34] Ibid., p. 5

studies, and the intervention in space was intended as an intervention in how geography produced politics. Spatial theory is, however, germane to my research here as it inspires a new approach to the temple as a productive and meaningful space that was simplified and stereotyped as a passive container, a mere backdrop. Chinese temples in the Ming-Qing period, as I will show, were dynamic, amorphous spaces that sometimes confirm and sometimes complicate spatial theories on their own terms.

This dissertation, considering theorists' new approaches to space in a Chinese context, aims to excavate the dynamism of the monastic space and to use that new understanding of monastic space to upset the binary of *nei*-*wai*, thus providing another mode of thinking about women's spatial, social, and spiritual positioning in late imperial China. It demonstrates the precarity of the dichotomy between the domestic as pure and sanctioned—the proper site for women to explore spirituality—and the monastic as problematic and even forbidden. When women entered the monastic spaces, the spatial order of *nei* and *wai* itself often becomes susceptible to contestation, disruption, or reconstruction, as the usual spatial boundaries are destabilized, dissolved, or distorted. Monastic spaces, hereby in my understanding, working as a "thirdspace" for women, provide an alternative, "an-Other" way, to combine, compensate, disorder, and transcend the spatial binary of *nei* and *wai*.

I will argue that temple exists at the same time in-between and beyond the two supposed antagonistic realms of *nei* and *wai*, bestowing women a unique experience of the mutual codification, compensation, and constitution of Confucianism and Buddhism (and other religions) in spatial terms and in innovative manners. The temple constituted a "thirdspace" on two levels: first, it built on and transcended the world of the boudoir and books, the two social spaces available to women; and, second, it opened up a "thirding" space that built on and

transcended the *nei-wai* binary. Because temples were both indoors and outdoors, textual and physical, material and metaphorical, they could not sort neatly into the *nei-wai* categories. The temple was not an inert, homogenous, and stagnant *tabula rasa*, but a kinetic, dynamic, amorphous, fertile "process" that reshaped and reproduced gender, culture, and religion in late imperial China.

The Religious and Cultural Milieu of Late Imperial China

Now let us situate the theoretical framework of this project into it historic-cultural context. The religious historian Kim Knott writes, "A project which foregrounds space or uses a spatial analysis need not neglect time, and need not to be a-historical or anti-historicist."[35] Taking a cue from Knott, this project limits its scope to a specific historical period—late imperial China, c. 1500-1900—although its methodological focus is not on time per se. As previously mentioned, the late imperial period of Chinese history was marked by opposing cultural trends: the official embrace of Neo-Confucianism on one hand and a lay Buddhist movement on the other.

During the Ming dynasty, Buddhism "flourished with respect to numbers of adherents and social acceptance during the Ming" and became a "pervasive force" and integral elements in people's daily lives and spiritual world.[36] The first Ming emperor Zhu Yuanzhang recognized religion's power but was ambivalent toward that power; he alternately patronized and suppressed Buddhism (and Taoism). Zhu emphasized certain gods and ghosts while ejecting others from the

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[35] Kim Knott, *The Location of Religion*, p. 5

[36] Twitchett, Denis, and John Fairbank. *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 8: The Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644, Part 2*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 894-8.

pantheon, [37] which at least highlighted, if not contributed to the strong presence of Buddhism (and other religious practice) in China's cultural landscape.

The Ming dynasty also witnessed a shift within Buddhism towards eliminating or ignoring sectarian distinctions. As Buddhism became less specific and dogma-driven, its message became more accessible and more easily integrated into everyday life.[38] Meanwhile, according to Eberhard Wolfram, the two most active periods for the construction of temples and monasteries in China were the tenth century and 1550–1700.[39] A 15th-century Ming official also recorded the apparent ubiquity of Buddhism: "Buddhism […] runs rampant everywhere, in both capitals, in every circuit, in every prefecture and country, and in every rural village, misleading both gentry and commoners and deluding both men and women."[40] As the official notes, women were

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[37] Timothy Brook, *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China.* Cambridge: Harvard University Asian Center, 1994; Qitao Guo, *Exorcism and Money: The Symbolic World of the Five-Fury Spirits in Late Imperial China*. Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 2003, pp. 40-47. See also Zhao Shiyu 趙世瑜, *Kuanghuan yu richan—Mingqing yilai de miaohui yu minjian shehui* 狂歡與日常：明清以來的廟會與民間社會 (Carnivalesque and quotidian: temple fairs and the civil society since the Ming-Qing period), Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2002. pp. 14-19.

[38] See Yü Chün-fang, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China*, especially Zhuhong's endeavor to dissolve the boundary between the *chan* and *tiantai* sects, pp. 29-137.

[39] Wolfram Eberhard, "Temple-Building Activities in medieval and modern China: An Experimental Study." *Monumenta Serica*, 23(1964): 264-318.

[40] Brook, *Praying for Power*, pp. 91-2.

among those "gentry and commoners" who were "deluded" by—or, to put it less pejoratively, committed to—Buddhism. Women's excursions to temples thereby perturbed state officials and Neo-Confucian moralists.

On the other side of the picture, Neo-Confucianism was finally installed as state orthodoxy, fueling an unprecedented focus on reinforcing lineage ideals and family rituals. The state's move to uphold more stringent standards of Confucianism is widely understood as an attempt to combat the increasing influence of Buddhism. As Kenneth Chen puts it, "With the coming of the Song dynasty, [...t]he rational philosophers who emerged [] sought to revive the ancient Confucian philosophy as a counterforce against what they considered to be the antisocial, individualistic, and other-worldly philosophy of the Buddhists."[41] Despite their hostility toward Buddhism and other popular religious practices, the Neo-Confucian apologists of late imperial China nevertheless proved to be integral to the unstoppable trend of syncretism. One might argue that, by framing Buddhist ideas in Confucian terms, these defenders of Neo-Confucianism further incorporated Buddhism into Chinese culture throughout the late Ming and Qing. In fact, as early as1930s, Hu Shi already pointed out the subtle influence exerted by Buddhism on those "rational" Neo-Confucianists of the Song and later dynasties. Hu Shi opines that Neo-Confucians active during or after the Song period "secularize[d] Buddhist ideas and, by so doing, spread them beyond the Buddhist monasteries to the whole Chinese population."[42] Although his point may be overstated, Hu Shi draws our attention to the infusion of Buddhist doctrines into the

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[41] Kenneth Ch'en, *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973, p. 4.

[42] Ibid.

overall ideological framework of Chinese society. Wang Yangming's radical School of Heart (*xinxue*), which flourished in the Late Ming, is arguably indebted to *Chan* thought and further fueled the syncretism of Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism.[43] Indeed, Confucian scholars' attack on Buddhism ironically depended upon their incorporation of some of their antagonists' doctrines.

Meanwhile, changes to policies concerning civil examinations, which routinized, simplified, and democratized the recruitment of officials, meant there was an unprecedented imbalance between the number of qualified applicants and the number of available posts.[44] At the same time, the burgeoning print industry and booming economy in the late Song and Ming had greatly expanded the highly literate population. The rising class of educated gentry urgently needed an alternative mode to shore up their cultural authority, as it grew increasingly difficult for their children to procure degrees and official appointments. As Francesca Bray writes, most gentry

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[43] Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 criticizes Wang Yangming 王陽明 of being "overtly Confucian but secretly Buddhist." See Kang-I Sun Chang, and Stephen Owen, eds., *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature: From 1375*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 158

[44] The Ming emperors simplified the civil examination to expand the official recruitment, and both training and recruitment of scholars were thus routinized and standardized. Meanwhile, new meritocratic policy also allowed young scholars from non-hereditary families to compete in the examination arena, a situation different from pre-Song period when students from aristocratic families' monopoly the job market of officialdom. See Wm. Theodore De Bary, ed. *Self and Society in Ming Thought*. New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1970, pp. 1-28, 100, &145-245.

families turned to "localist strategies of advancement and of social action, emphasizing their role as local leaders in ways advocated by Neo-Confucian philosophers like Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033-1108) and Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), who called for the revival of pure Confucian rites and lineage institutions as a way of combating Buddhism, providing cohesion in rural society, and giving educated families appropriate dignity."[45] When educated scholars' ambition and motivation in the public service were enervated, they retreated to their families and local communities and turned to an inward cultivation of mind.

Under these circumstances, Timothy Brook writes, local temples and shrines were "attractive to the gentry as an object of patronage by virtue of being a revered non-state forum in which the gentry could publicize their philanthropy, and hence their elite status, in local society."[46] As education grew increasingly difficult to translate into public authority via official posts, the well-educated gentry considered monastic spaces as alternative venues for garnering status and cultural capital.[47] Of course, even the monastic space was limited by gender in orthodox discourse, as women were expected to keep themselves cloistered.

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[45] Francesca Bray, *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, p. 100.

[46] Timothy Brook, "At the Margin of Public Authority: The Ming State and Buddhism," in *Culture and State in Chinese History*, Stanford: Stanford University, 1997, p. 179. See also Brook, *The Chinese State in Ming Society*, London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005, pp. 139-57.

[47] See Brook, *Praying for Power*, especially Chapter 6, pp. 185-223.

Neo-Confucian mores concerning women's whereabouts made palpable the strong separation between the public and private spheres. As Yiqun Zhou argues about orthodox perception of women's religiosity in late imperial China,

> [T]he Confucian champions […] took it upon themselves to re-sacralize women's domestic role and reassert the ancestral altar as the holy place par excellence. The neglect and desecration of ancestral rites emerged as an object of grave concern in this discourse, […] and praise was showered upon women who rejected Buddhism and more cautiously accorded to those whose Buddhist practice did not interfere with their filial duties and ancestral piety.[48]

By limiting women's range of movement and reasserting the importance of ancestor altars, Neo-Confucianists reaffirmed the Confucian lineage ideals that assured their otherwise precarious cultural and public authority. Family altars symbolized the ascendancy of an ideology that framed these men as respectable local leaders and formidable patriarchs.[49]

Temple and Gender

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[48] Yiqun Zhou, "The Hearth and the Temple: Mapping Female Religiosity in Late Imperial China, 1550-1900." *Late Imperial China,* 24, No.2(2003): 109-155, 111.

[49] Charlotte Furth points out that the rise of the lineage organization also enhanced the importance of the purely domestic cult because it made every patriarch the potential ancestor of his own individual line of descent. See "The Patriarch's Legacy: Household Instruction and the Transmission of Orthodox Values." In Liu Kwang-ching ed., *Orthodoxy in Late Imperial China*, ed. Liu Kwang-ching, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990, p. 189.

The reader might pause here and wonder whether temples have the same affordances for men as they do for women. Do temples function as alternative social spaces only for women? How do we make sense of the temple's gender dimension? After all, men also visited temples, and men predictably enjoyed greater autonomy and mobility in the process. As Martin Huang writes, the capacity to roam in the public sphere was an indispensable badge of masculinity in traditional Chinese culture.[50] In Confucian society, men's Confucian duties to their families seldom stood in the way of their forming multiple social identities and exploring diverse public spaces, including temples.[51] Timothy Brook reads the gentry's passionate patronage of Buddhist monasteries in the late Ming as a strategy for garnering cultural capital. Elites' interest in the temples, which they demonstrated through financial contributions, frequent visits, and ritual worship, helped to affirm their cultural (and economic) authority.[52]

Brook's approach depends on the dyadic opposition of private and public. Brook suggests that the male gentry's constitution of an alternative "public/political" (公 *gong*) realm compensates for the loss of official posts and examination degrees. Women's attachment to

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[50] Martin Huang, "Male Friendship in Ming China: An Introduction." *Nan Nü*, 9, No.1(2007): 2-33, 6, See also Huang, *Negotiating Masculinities in Late Imperial China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006, p. 238, note 10.

[51] Yiqun Zhou, "The Hearth and the Temple." p. 111. See also Patricia Ebrey, "The Early Stages in the Development of Descent Group Organization," in Ebrey and James L. Watson eds., *Kinship Organization in Late Imperial China, 1000–1940*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986, pp.16–61.

[52] See Timothy Brook, *Praying for Power*.

temples, however, must find an alternate explanation. Women had neither the need, the resources, nor the mobility to achieve the "self-fashioning" offered to their male counterparts by touring temples.[53] Yiqun Zhou writes, "Such ability of self-fashioning through manipulating and creating the meanings of public religious spaces clearly fell within the privileged domain of men [… i]t was quite another story for women."[54] Whereas men's exploration of public monastic spaces was a mode of establishing and enhancing their public image, women's excursions to temples constituted at best a controversial exteriorization of their private needs and feelings. Women's presence in the "public" sphere, even in monastic spaces, was never unconditionally sanctioned.[55]

Buddhism managed to attract women by speaking to their private needs and desires. Women were drawn to temples in order to pray for any number of things—male heirs, cure to disease, family members' good fortune in business and academics, deliverance of the souls of deceased relatives, a better afterlife or salvation after death, and so on. The egalitarian spirit that

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[53] Man Xu and Mark Halperin indeed show how the Song women achieve a certain public reputation in patronizing or organizing Monastic building and development, this is still confined to their personal merits and can by no means lead to a public accomplishment. See Man Xu, *Crossing the Gate: Everyday Lives of Women in Song Fujian (960-1279)*, Albany: State University of New York press, 2016, and Mark Halperin, "Domesticity and the Dharma: Portraits of Buddhist Laywomen in Sung China." *T'oung Pao*, 92, No. 1/3(2006) : 50–100.

[54] Yiqun Zhou, "The Hearth and the Temple," p. 112.

[55] Both the state and male scholars opposed women from visiting temples. For details, see Chapter One. Women's entering the religious order would be even more problematic.

ran through Buddhism reached out to women directly. Women could have a place beside the Buddha as adherents to Buddhism, whereas in Neo-Confucian contexts they were inevitably secondary and subservient to patriarchs. Brook argues, "Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism were tied to different social visions: the one had the potential to be socially plastic, even indiscriminate, for everyone was equally eligible for the Buddha's compassion. The other insisted on the necessity of role and hierarchy for the successful maintenance of social order."[56] In this sense, the "democratic" heterodox religion must be more appealing to women, a social group that was in many ways marginalized and deprived in a patriarchal and gender-biased society.

In addition to the general appeal of Buddhism to women in China, the Guanyin Bodhisattva specifically appealed to Chinese women because of her attribute of Compassion; she was an advocate for all, regardless of religious affiliation. Because of Guanyin's nonpartisan inclusivity and universal good will, she served all important practical purposes.[57] Scholars believe, the

[56] Timothy Brook, "Funerary Ritual and the Building of Lineages in Late Imperial China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (Dec., 1989): 465-499, 493.

[57] Susan Mann also avers that Guanyin is the one Goddess that enjoys most popularity among Chinese women. See *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997, p. 179.

evolution of Guanyin's image and its change of sex in China's long history is arguably marked by its secularization and its approachability to women.[58]

If, as Brook has shown, men's relationship to monastic space was primarily motivated by individuals' public/political self-representation, women's relationship to temple was still oriented around private matters. James Watson's study of the cult of T'ien Hou in Southeast coast of China aptly demonstrates this crucial gendered difference:

> Women, as indicated earlier, have a very different vision of T'ien Hou from that held by any category of men—so different, in fact, that one begins to wonder if we are dealing with the same deity. Women play no role whatsoever in the formal organization of the temple cults, not even to the extent of forming a women's auxiliary to complement the activities of their husbands and fathers. For women the worship of T'ien Hou is usually defined in *personal* or family terms. Wives appear at the annual festivals with individual sets of offering, which they present to the goddess on behalf of their households. Men never make these presentations, as they are said to be "too busy" attending to the *collective* ritual associated with the cult. (my emphasis)[59]

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[58] Xing Li 邢莉, *Guanyin xinyang* 觀音信仰, Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 1994, p.47. Chün-Fang Yü, *Kuan-Yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokitesvara,* New York: Columbia University Press, 2001, especially chapter 8, pp. 293-352.

[59] James Waston, "Standardizing the Gods: The Promotion of T'ien Hou ("Empress of Heaven") Along the South China Coast," in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, edited by David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan, and Evelyn S. Rawski, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, p. 320.

Interestingly, men tended to avoid making personal petitions, while women take charge of prayers for private or familial issues. Although Watson is discussing a particular religious cult, the division of labor he observes echoes Brook's study. In discussing the male gentry's temple activities, Brook drew upon the Chinese terms of "*gong-si* 公－私"—a political-specific pair as the equivalent to the English words "public and private." These are political rather than spatial terms; they primarily describe a relationship to the community rather than a relationship to spatial positioning. Thus, the dyad of *nei-wai,* inside-outside, applies more directly to women's temple experience because of its *spatial* connotations.[60] Although men and women alike negotiate public and private spheres, the Chinese terms *describing* those spheres differ for men and women. The dyad used to describe men's spheres connotes the political and collective, whereas the dyad describing women's spheres centers on spatial locations.

From Temple to Text

A temple can take any number of forms. A niche in a boudoir function as an improvised temple,[61] as can the pages of a text.[62] The burgeoning printing industry at the time not only nurtured women's passion in publishing their writings which were the focus of the studies by women historians (as mentioned previously), but also spawned an upsurge of producing and

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[60] Rosenlee talked about *nei-wai* system's political connotation of the civilized domestic Han proper and foreign Barbarians in early texts, or the inner body and outer body in terms of Daoist self-cultivation. However, when it is used for "apolitical" gender issues, the spatial dimension of *nei-wai* is more applicable to women. See *Confucianism and Women*, pp. 72-9.

[61] See chapter 2.

[62] See chapter 3 &4.

consuming books, among which religious texts were quite prominent. The proliferation of texts was closely tied to the thriving world of popular religion in late imperial China. Religious encyclopedias, ritual manuals, and hagiographies burst onto the scene and were taken up by a diverse readership. The late Ming and early Qing also witnessed a trend of translating Confucian doctrine into the vernacular or semi-vernacular for the benefit of women, children, and other poorly-educated groups.[63] These encyclopedic and entertaining books helped ordinary people to perform sundry religious devotions and ritual duties, and therein became alternative monastic spaces. Moreover, the secularization of doctrine not only demythologized the hitherto rarefied knowledge but also imbued the vectors of that doctrine—books—with a cultic aura. Books came to hold an authority that was comparable to that of the elites who had hitherto enjoyed exclusive authority over moral tenets, religious rituals, and social mores. The ubiquitous Ming book entitled *Wanshi bu qiu ren* 萬事不求人 (*Seek No Further for a Myriad of Affairs*) aptly implied that one no longer needed to seek answers from experts.[64] Texts were not only omnipresent but also omnipotent.

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[63] See an episode in the 90th chapter of the Qing novel *Qi Lu Deng* 歧路燈 (The Light at the Crossroad) in which a character, Su Linchen 蘇霖臣, a strictly virtuous character, completes a vernacular translation of the Confucian canon for women and children. Li Lüyuan 李綠園. *Qilu deng* 歧路燈, ed. Luan Xing 欒星. Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1998, pp. 664-5.

[64] See He Yuming, *Home and the World: Editing the 'Glorious Ming' in Woodblock-Printed Books of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013, pp. 95-96.

Not only in this sense that books can function in many ways the same as or even more effective than real temples, temples/monastic spaces were extensively textualized. As printed religious compendia, proselytizing sutras, and collection of hagiographies became a key mediator between gods and commoners, between recondite religious epitome and mundane desires, the materiality and spatiality of temples are greatly destabilized and even dissolved. When the burgeoning printing industrial enables proliferating books to transform temples into written words and illustrations, women were able to symbolically finish their excursion to temples through consuming the religious texts.

A figurative parallel between text and temple could be thus established. Allowing its audience to evoke an "implied pilgrimage"[65] every time the audience consumed the texts, all the sutra canvas and book pages became what I would call "textualized temples." I, therefore, call for a creative hermeneutics of texts/books as an active agent and mediating space between ideological norms and people's concrete interpretation and internalization in daily life. It is my contention that proliferating texts actually functioned as symbolic temples, carried and spread the sacred Confucian and Buddhist doctrines to the individual reader. the thoughts/ideas transmitted by books would no longer be a predefined and well-contained epistemological domain, but turning into a pluralized, fragmentized, and fluid entity. This "decomposed" discursive narrative denotes, in and of itself, a unique "space" which Michel Foucault would call "heterotopia."[66]

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[65] Wagner, Rudolf. "Reading the Chairman Mao Memorial Hall: The Tribulations of the Implied Pilgrim." In *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China*, ed. Susan Naquin, Chün-fang Yü. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, pp. 399-417.

[66] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces."

Moreover, women's intersection with texts by no means confine to their own composition or consumption of the written words; they themselves were to be apotheosized in biographical or literary texts penned by male scholars. When those women were deified by and in male scholars' narrative, they became female divinities being worshipped in textual "temples" by generations of readers. Eventually, these temples on pages enacted multifold and secular appearances of the sacrosanct Confucian tradition and concurrent heterodox systems, in which the female image and gender norms kept being rewritten and contested.

Methodological Approach and Sources

A wide array of textual genres is to be consulted in this study, including the "unserious" and unofficial prose narratives which so far have largely escaped the scholarly attention of a few modern historians who have worked on the phenomenon of women's visit of temples. As I have discussed previously, official and didactic records of women's involvement in a monastic space is anything but detailed and noncritical due to the orthodox condemnation of women's passion for outdoor religious activities. The "mainstream" silence or playing-down of this issue in the "serious" genres yields very limited material that can serve as the basis for a continuous and rich narrative of temple as a unique gendered space. On the other hand, women's temple trips supply a good fodder for many "lesser" literary genres (compared to official documents and historical records) such as popular fictions, short stories (*huaben*), jotting notes, anecdotes, hagiographies, local gazetteers, proselytizing scriptures etc. These literary narratives thus make a good source pool and a rich context of women's interaction and intersections with temples.

Admittedly, one might discredit literary narratives' eligibility as a source of socio-cultural studies, due to the chasm between reality and fictionality.[67] It is always a disputable and bewildering question as to what extend we can rely on imaginary narratives (fictions) to arrive at a historical and sociological conclusion. First, no written words (regardless its genre) would be immune to this defect as a source for us to access the past. Many Western scholars have perceptively argued for a porous boundary between history and fiction.[68] If historical narratives are no less suspicious as the fictional in faithfully reflecting the reality, we might also be able to argue that the fictional can be as descriptive and suggestive as the historical in revealing the past and people in the past.

This is only more so in the context of Chinese cultural tradition: history and fiction has never been conceived as binary oppositions as in the Western tradition. Stephen Owen configures a spectrum of "degree of credibility" of Chinese literary narratives, on which various

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[67] For an analysis of the difficulty to apply literary narratives to sociological and historical research, see Peter Laslett, "The Wrong Way through the Telescope: A Note on Literary Evidence in Sociology and in Historical Sociology," *British Journal of Sociology* 27, No.3(1976): 319-42.

[68] Roland Barthes argues that fictional discourse has an arbitrary relationship to historical reality, but, even more, that historical narratives are also arbitrary in this sense. The difference between historical narratives and most fictional narratives is that the former tends to disguise their arbitrary nature by the use of certain linguistic devices judged most apt to create an illusion of objectivity or a reality effect. See Suzanne Gearhart, *The Open Boundary of History and Fiction: A Critical Approach to the French Enlightenment*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 204.

literary genres only fall in different position between absolute truth and outright falsity.[69] If none of the genres can claim itself as a mirror of the reality, they meanwhile never get beyond a margin of veracity.[70]

In this sense, maybe prose narratives are both blemished and blessed by its distance to (or distortion of) reality. Even if its figures and plots are subject to insufficient credibility, it can still be of value to us in revealing the mental structure of people at that time and their likely perception and reaction in a specific circumstance. Andrew Plaks has argued that sometimes novels display "a thoroughgoing realism that is almost cinematographic" in terms of its relation to real life and trend in socio-intellectual history, while he also admitted this "realism" can also

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[69] Stephen Owen, "Postface: Believe it or Not," in *Idle Talk: Gossip and Anecdote in Traditional China*, ed. Jack W. Chen, David Schaberg, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014, pp. 217-223.

[70] This is even so for those most unbelievable strange tales to modern readers about fox spirits, ghost, and supernatural phenomenon. It is a time-honored tradition for Chinese authors to collect strange stories but meanwhile claim the credibility in their works. For example, the historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145-86 BCE) includes many supernatural elements in his monumental historical records. Similarly, Hong Mai 洪邁 (1123-1202), the author of *Yijian zhi* 夷堅志 (Records of the Listener)—a Song collections of stories and anecdotes—unweariedly provided his informants' name, profession, and relationship with the author. Clarifying the sources of the stories is a gesture for the Chinese authors to show that they are faithfully recording what they are told by reliable informants rather than circulating the destructive words of groundless gossip or fabrications.

"stray beyond the bounds of realistic depiction."[71] Therefore, my use of literary narratives accords to what Glen Dudbridge has elaborated about the merit of literary sources, "We shall never be in a position to repose simple trust in the author's statements. But neither can we dismiss them as random fantasy bearing no relation to real human experience."[72] To be more specific, I am not attempting to employ literary narratives as faithful reflection of historical reality; instead, I am trying to excavate and exploit their values in showcasing the reality of temple as perceived and imagined by late imperial men and/or women.

Indeed, literary narratives (especially those of realism) experiment on all the possibilities and impossibilities in real life, and thus push the reflective barrier to the extreme. It tests the limits, juxtaposes all scenarios, and then attempts all the solutions. Bearing less generic restrictions (compared with the orthodox or poetic narrative), prose (or fictional) narratives are more autonomous in testing how far things can go while situating into a reality-based context. All in all, literary narratives display more than reality; they diversify reality. Therefore, in this study, the scattered textual fragments of women's interaction with temples will be culled from a wide range of literary genres as well as from historical records, archaeological evidence, and elegiac writings. The hitherto discriminately categorized sources will work together to produce a nuanced picture regarding women and temples in late imperial China. But I am not using those "historically unreliable" literature indiscriminately, and not trying to re-delineate women's actual

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[71] See Andrew Plaks, "After the Fall: *Hsing-Shih Yin-Yüan Chuan* and the Seventeenth-Century Chinese Novel." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies,* 45, No. 2 (1985): 543-80, 564-6.

[72] Glen Dudbridge, "A Pilgrimage in Seventeenth-Century Fiction: T'ai-shan and the "*Hsing-shih yin-yüan chuan*," *T'oung Pao*, 77 (1991): 226-252, 230.

life experience through those male-generated texts. I am acutely aware that some contrasts have to be nuanced, contextualized, and qualified. I consider them as multivalent discursive layers that reveal the dynamics of cultural significance and mental structure, not as merely ahistorical fabrications.

Aiming to reveal the common structures in various literary and historical records, I have wandered across textual and generic borders—to the possible dismay of some scholars who are more "history-oriented." They may question my bringing together different genres of texts and materials into a single study. Historians may question my juxtaposition of historical records, archaeological evidence, and fictional narratives. Feminists may question the study of women's religiosity from the written words mainly penned by men. Yet, women's interactions with various temples/religious spaces is a ubiquitous and recognizable *topoi* across all kinds of genres of the time, be it textual or material. The versatility and omnipresence of temple in women's life and in a wide range of textual representation, I believe, can justify my studying them together in a systematic way, and a cross-generic manner. Therefore, I would clarify that this research is not an endeavor to recover women's "actual" interaction or experience in temples/religious spaces, but an attempt to tease out a collective imagination of it in various forms of representation, physical or textual. That is, it shows how heterodox systems' intervention into women's life is likely to be perceived and presented at the time. I will show that in a wider scope of literary narratives, women's interaction with religious spaces is much more complicated and even contradictive to what the normative discourse has prescribed. To put it differently, I am deploying and combining the localized representations in individual literary genres for a universal pattern; it is the consisting micro fragments from various texts/records that composed a macro picture of the newly-emerged gender implications of the varied religious spaces.

Another problematic is the predominantly male nature of the literary discourse I am going to discuss. Women have a prominent function in those sources but they remain almost always merely the objects of representation. Unfortunately, we have very few documents written by Buddhist laywomen themselves, just like many female Christian mystics who are more likely to adopt a predominantly male language and imagery than claiming a distinctive subjectivity.

My reluctance to limit myself to women's self-representation of their religiosity is not only because of the scarcity of materials. In fact it greatly correlates with my methodological approach and research objectives. As I have clarified, this research is not another effort to recuperate premodern Chinese women's agency and autonomy through re-reading women's own textual productions and artistic voices. Instead, it is an endeavor to demonstrate how women's partaking of heterodox systems was imagined and represented in literary and non-literary narratives and further help us nuance our understanding of the gender, cultural and religious landscape in Ming-Qing China. I argue that a discussion of varied depiction and imagination on women's religiosity renders the dynamic between gender and religion as indiscrete phenomena as confined within the boundary of only one orthodox discursive scope.

I group together the similarities among various types of genres under one rubric of temple as a malleable, spatial process. By homing in on various episodes and sources, I can illustrate the rich nuances and complicated meanings that the collision between gender and religion had for people in Ming-Qing China. To put it bluntly, I venture to provide a somehow coherent narrative voice from partial perspectives, disparate descriptions, biased views, fragmentary materials, historically trivial genres, and sources are traditionally considered as flawed or skewed. This narrative voice, however, simultaneously dovetails and deviates from the orthodox prescription

and women's autobiographical articulation, actively composing the whole picture of the intersected religion and gender.

Structure and Itinerary

The conceptualization of the temple will grow increasingly abstract and decreasingly material (site-specific) as the chapters progress. I will address, first, the temple as a physical site (Chapter 1), then as the privately curated "pure room 淨室" or home altar (Chapter 2), then as conflated with the corporeal (Chapter 3), and finally as the metaphorical temple conjured by the written words of biographies or eulogistic texts which served to consecrate their female subjects. (Chapter 4).

Women's excursions to outdoor temples are the focus of the first chapter. Temples neither only exist in discursive representation as a diabolic, crisis-ridden antithesis to the pure and peaceful boudoir, nor serve as inert and homogenous container or *tabula rasa* for women's spiritual pursuits. Rather, in many literary narratives, outdoor temples are imagined as the compensation, extension, substitution, and mediation for both the inner quarters and the public sphere. It at the same time extends and exceeds the *nei* and *wai,* private and public distinction, bestowing women a unique experience of the mutual codification and constitution of Confucianism and Buddhism in spatial terms and in innovative manners.

In chapter two, I explore the temple within the domestic as concrete or spiritual "pure land." A domestic homemade prayer room, altar, or a hanging image of Buddha, temple here represents an amorphous and capacious religious realm set up by women in the household. These religious spaces always constituted a chronotope; women would use them to physically enter or conflate with a personalized subspace so as to pray for personal desires, redemption, or enlightenment. I argue that the domestic "temples" did not merely collude with Confucian doctrines in fettering

women, but often provided alternative asylum for women's bodies and souls, and gave women leeway to reimagine/transcend gendered spatial divisions, to advance personal agendas (virtuous or otherwise), and to construct alternative conjugal relationships and hierarchies.

Chapter three aims to offer a nuanced window into the interaction between the corporeal and the spatial from the lens of gender. Focusing on the female body (both living and dead) as represented in literary narratives and burial practices in the Ming-Qing era, this paper argues that women's corporeal asceticism and relicized corpses both function to instantiate, invoke, and invigorate sacred spaces in which the Buddha's sanctity is to be manifested, experienced, and enacted. In other words, rather than making another effort to pin down the female body into the either-or category of carrier/barrier for one's journey to the *Buddhakṣetra* (Pure Land), this paper will show that in many Chinese cases, a woman's body integrated into and homogenized with the *Buddhakṣetra*. The identification of women's bodies with spaces, in a broader sense, reveals how the human body, instead of being an inert receptacle of religious "habitus," to the contrary partakes and presides over the making of spiritual spaces.

Chapter four looks at how women were depicted and deified in male scholars' writing. In Chinese culture, the honor of being immortalized in a written text was traditionally reserved for a selective, extraordinary few. The Ming-Qing era, however, saw a general "secularization" process in which the eulogetic writings were increasingly dedicated to women living "trivial" lives. As is be shown in this chapter, many filial sons and grieving husbands tended to write women's biographies as hagiographies, "plebeianizing" the erstwhile sacrosanct genre through a consecration of the obscure female subject. They happily extolled their female kin's religious piety and identified them with Bodhisattvas/deities; the hitherto lackluster biographies and epitaphs were thereupon saturated with supernatural occurrences and miraculous events. As a

result, the hagiographically coded eulogies transformed into a divine site in which an ordinary woman was commemorated, immortalized, and apotheosized, and her insignificant life story was *relicized* and preserved into a textualized reliquary. This *sacralizing* of common women in the *secularized* elegiac writings, in a broader sense, shows how heterodox systems (especially Buddhism) provided the male chroniclers with an alternative mode and vocabulary to lionize their ordinary mothers, wives, and daughters, and further co-opted and inveigled male Confucian sectarians into facilitating unorthodox belief's full integration into the Chinese cultural landscape within an increasingly hostile Neo-Confucian society.

Chapter One: Encountering Public Temples

In Chapter 73 of the 17th-centrury novel *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻緣傳 (*A Tale of Fates in Marriage that Bring Society to Its Senses, hereafter XSYY*)[1], a local prefect makes an official announcement:

> The Jinan Prefect strictly prohibits women from going to temples to offer incense; our cultural mores must be rectified, and the stirrings of social unrest must be stifled. It is hereby [announced that] a distinction should be made between men and women, and the demarcation between inner and outer spheres must be guarded. All Buddhist temples and divine shrines are sites where monks and priests practice [their religion] and burn [incense]. Those bald men wearing black robes and yellow caps are widely known as wonton demons and lustful devils. Once they catch sight of women, they act like flies flocking to blood, or ants thronging toward a stench. Chaste women and virtuous wives constantly fear that they are not concealed deeply enough [inside their houses] and that they are not secluded far enough away [from temples]. Recently, however, certain shameless women have crossed the thresholds of their inner chambers in droves, taken monks as their teachers, sworn oaths to Buddhist disciplines, and

[1] The novel title is Daria Berg's translation. Some scholars also translated the title as *Marriage Retributions that Awaken the World,* see Yiqun Zhou, "The Hearth and the Temple," or "Marriage as Retribution, Awaking the World," in Yenna Wu, *Ameliorative Satire and the Seventeenth-century Chinese Novel,* Xingshi Yinyuan Zhuan--*Marriage as Retribution, Awakening the World*, Lewiston:The Edwin Mellen Press, 1999.

visited temples freely. […] It is thus reiterated that all such behaviors shall be strictly forbidden.

濟南府為嚴禁婦女入廟燒香，以正風俗，以杜釁端事：照得男女有別，內外宜防。所有佛刹神祠，乃僧道修焚之所；緇禿黃冠，舉世比之淫魔色鬼。見有婦人，不啻如蠅集血，若蟻聚膻。所以貞姬良婦，匿跡唯恐不深，韜影尚虞不遠。近有無恥婦人，不守閨門，呼朋引伴，投師受戒，出入空門…合行再申嚴禁…[2]

The rationale the prefect offers for this prohibition is twofold: first, temple-going is a spatial transgression, as women must be confined to the *nei* (the domestic) sphere in accordance with the principles of gender segregation prescribed by Confucian tradition; and, second, the monks and religious priests who practice and reside in temples are lecherous and nefarious, and thus pose a threat to women's sexual and moral integrity. As this speech makes clear, Confucian moralists considered women's ideological outlook to be tied to and indicated by their location. Women's temple-going, as a violation of spatial norms, is understood as coterminous with bodily/sexual impurity. The prefect's quick dismissal of Buddhist priests as lascivious posers and his insistence that women who travel to temples inevitably fall prey to wicked monks are typical of the general attitude among his contemporary Confucian moralists. Orthodox Confucian discourse stereotyped temples as mere fronts for sex rackets—places where licentious monks and nuns seduced gullible women and wayward wives. Women who visited monastic spaces, thereby violating gendered spatial norms, were stigmatized as unchaste and morally suspect.

[2] My own translation. See Xi Zhou sheng 西周生, *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*, chapter 74, Beijing: renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2015, pp.985-6.

The contemporary women themselves, however, were of a different mind. In the same chapter of the novel, the shrewish woman protagonist, Xue Sujie 薛素姐, responds with a vulgar yet incisive retort that undercuts the official proclamation's solemn sanctimony. Upon hearing the prefect's prohibition, she grumbles, "That is bullshit! […] While we're on the subject, doesn't his wife visit temples? 沒的家放屁！… 說起來， 他家老婆就不上廟？"[3] Even after the ban on temple-going takes effect, the defiant Sujie embarks on a far-flung journey to visit sacred mountains and a cluster of temples.[4] Sujie's dismissiveness and defiance lay bare not only the fact that temple-going was a common and seemingly unstoppable phenomenon among women at the time, but also that officials who attempted to castigate women for the practice lost credibility in the eyes of many. Perhaps Sujie's response suggests a broader trend; the upside of women's exclusion from the *wai* sphere was that they were shielded from putting too much stock in political opinions and moralistic fashions. The juxtaposition of the two tableaus—the prefect's proclamation and temple-goer's response on the subject of women's worship—vividly illustrates the chasm between women's actual ritual practice and men's representations thereof, and it should remind us of how scholarship has largely overlooked a sufficient exploration of this chasm.

Scholarship on Women's Visits to Temples

The association of women's temple tours with sexual victimhood and moral degradation that prevailed throughout the Ming-Qing period has captured a great deal scholarly attention. Much contemporary scholarship on women's interactions with Buddhist and Daoist temples in

[3] *XSYY*, p. 983.

[4] Ibid., p. 1250.

late imperial China has focused on how the state and Confucian moralists managed to reinforce gender distinctions by deterring women from entering religious spaces. Vincent Goossaert, William Rowe, and He Suhua, among others, have meticulously examined how state policy and the writings of the literati discouraged women from taking trips to temples, and how, despite these moralists' best efforts, women persisted in their pilgrimages.[5] In a similar vein, Charlotte Furth documents how didactic writings at the time ascribed a putative decay of family values to the decline of Confucian ritual life brought on by women's newfound affinity to Buddhism (and other local non-Confucian religions).[6]

Susan Mann presents a more nuanced picture, pointing out the ambivalence of the state's approach to women's religious practice. Mann argues that many of the temples women visited

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[5] See William Rowe, "Women and the Family in Mid-Ch'ing Social Thought: The Case of Ch'en Hung-mou;" Vincent Goossaert, "Irrepressible Female Piety: Late Imperial Bans on Women Visiting Temples," *Nan Nü* 10 (2008) 212-241. He Suhua, "Officials and Women in Early Qing: Taking as the Focal Point of the Prohibition on Women's Religious Practices 清初士大夫與婦女-以禁止婦女宗教活動為中心," *Qingshi yanjiu* (*The Qing History Journal*) 清史研究 3 (2003): 62-72.

[6] Charlotte Furth, examining the didactic family instructions at the time, states that it was not unexpected that the identification of domestic depravity with women's religious deviance was undergirded by the association of women's outdoor trip to temples with sexual license. In Furth's observation, women were considered by the male moralists as the main culprit in stirring up a religious heterodoxy within the Confucian family. See Charlotte Furth, "The Patriarch's Legacy," p. 202.

were in fact patronized by the Qing royal family; this official patronage may have attracted women devotees to the temples in the first place. Though she complicates the Qing state's official restrictions on women's temple visits, Mann admits that "official critics may have been correct about the vulnerability of female pilgrims. The worst threat they faced was from kidnappers and highwaymen."[7] Mann's argument takes seriously the stereotypical representation and perception of temples as heterodox, dangerous places for laywomen.

Yiqun Zhou understands Confucian moralists' concern about Buddhist laywomen's spatial positioning as a more general concern about women's spirituality. She argues that Confucian scholars' criticism of and anxiety about women's traversal of the *nei-wai* boundary "should be understood in terms of [the men's] efforts to defend and strengthen the values of ancestral rites and filial piety at a time when the influence of lay Buddhism reached a new height."[8] Zhou contends that Confucian moral standards demanded that women find spiritual meaning in the presence of their ancestors' tablets, not in Buddhist temples. In addition to the threat of sexual promiscuity posed by temple culture, Confucian moralists were concerned about maintaining the Confucian primacy of domestic space. Thus, Zhou argues, it was fear of Buddhist encroachment on Confucian hegemony together with fear for women's corporeal integrity that mainly motivated Confucian moralists' pronouncements on the subject of women's temple practices.[9]

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[7] Mann Susan, *Precious Records*, pp. 194-6.

[8] Yiqun Zhou, "The Hearth and the Temple," p. 110.

[9] Yiqun Zhou also convincingly outlined the three degrees of acceptance of women's religious practice: a celebration of female detractors of Buddhism; tolerance or acquiescence to those who limited their religious activities in the domestic sphere; a stern rejection of women's participation

Although Zhou deviates from the aforementioned scholars in emphasizing male scholars' ulterior motives in keeping women away from temples, her argument is still undergirded by the obstinate dichotomy that pits exterior monastic space against domestic Confucian space; Zhou reiterates the binary opposition of *nei* and *wai* in understanding women's religiosity. Confucian discourse at the time was quite clear about the distinction between the two: while the domestic, Confucian scholars contended, is the pure and sanctioned site for women to pursue moral exemplarity and spiritual devotion, the monastic is a taboo place of moral degradation that virtuous women should shun. That is, temples were reduced to passive, inert containers of danger, sin, and sex racketeering. Confucian discourse understood a woman's moral and spiritual propriety as dependent on and reflected by her physical location. A woman's respect for the *nei-wai* boundary indicated her moral mettle and worth as a woman. The binary opposition between temple and boudoir[10] unmistakably corresponds to the *nei-wai* dichotomy of Chinese tradition.

Despite the clear proscription of the practice, many women carried on visiting temples, and many, like Xue Sujie, disdained any man who suggested they do otherwise. In fact, plenty of women toured temples without being raped, seduced, or otherwise led into sin, and not every

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in any ritual, festival, or other religious events outdoors. Ibid.

[10] Here boudoir is used more as a metonymy of the interior space of a household. Admittedly, many women from a lowly status are not lucky enough to have their own boudoirs as their elite counterparts. But as Francesca Bray states, "Doctrines of segregation were elaborated by Neo-Confucian philosophers during the Song and formulated in spatial terms that gradually became the orthodoxy at all levels of society. In late Imperial China all houses, rich or poor, marked off a separate space for women." See Francesca Bray, *Technology and Gender*, p. 129.

temple and monastery posed physical threats to women. The court's painstaking reinforcement of its prohibition on women's temple visits and scholars' intensified focus on the subject in late imperial China speaks to just how popular and visible the phenomenon of women's participation in outdoor religious activity really was. Literary or historical sources paint a far more nuanced picture of women's interactions with monastic spaces than do the pronouncements of Confucian scholars. The temple was less a receptacle for people and events than a dynamic actor that bridged, upset, and mobilized the binary opposition between *nei* and *wai*.

This chapter considers the temple as an alternative space, a third term that confounds and reorients the *nei*-*wai* dyad, for women in late imperial China. I complicate the temple's role in delineating gender norms and shaping the cultural landscape of late imperial China. I argue that the temple serves as a productive, transformative, and gender-specific "thirdspace" that builds on and transcends the *nei*-*wai* framework. Temples reshape women's social positioning and spiritual identity. The outdoor temple is not merely an antipode to the boudoir (while in the next chapter I will show that the domestic religious space is not completely compatible with the boudoir); it is a heterotopic extension of, projection of, substitute for, and supplement to both private quarters *and* the public realm. As an alternative gendered space, the temple allows women to explore the tension between their prescribed passivity and privacy, on the one hand, and their activism and exposure in practice, on the other. Monastic spaces also illuminate the complex and constantly evolving relationship between Confucianism and its rival heterodox religious systems. By examining women's controversial yet widespread presence in temple spaces, we gain insight into how Buddhism (alongside other religions) negotiated its status and domain as a supplement to rather than a threat to or subordinate of orthodox Confucianism.

Women and Temple

Starting from the 16th century, Chinese women found themselves subject to especially tenacious expressions of Neo-Confucian doctrine, and yet many women also privately held Buddhist religious beliefs. Although women were increasingly fervently relegated to the private sphere, there was nevertheless an ever-growing group of women who made temple pilgrimages and practiced Buddhism. Contemporary scholars agree that the inextinguishable enthusiasm for temple-going among women is rooted in women's particular affinity for Buddhist tenets and rituals at the time.[11] Because of their universal values and promise of salvation from personal suffering, Buddhism and other popular religions were particularly attractive to women who suffered through patrilocal marriage, childbirth, and widowhood. Unlike the gentry, which was attracted to monasteries because local religion offered opportunities for publicity and power, women were enticed by temples because of their religious solutions to issues surrounding procreation, disease, family prosperity, and personal salvation.

Even during the Ming-Qing period, scholars recognized the attractiveness of local religion to women; for example, the famous Ming scholar Xie Zhaozhe 謝肇淛 (1567-1624) wrote, "Male scholars' interest in fame is similar to women's predilection for gods and ghosts. Both are

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[11] Yiqun Zhou, "The Hearth and the Temple." See also, Li Zhende 李貞德, "Zuijin Zhongguo zongjiaoshi yanjiu zhong de *nüxin*g wenti 最近中國宗教史研究中的女性問題 (The Women Problems in Recent Religious Studies of China", in *Jindai zhongguo funüshi yanjiu* 近代中國婦女史研究 (Studies in Modern Chinese Women), (1994): 251-270, 252; David Johnson, "Communication, Class, and Consciousness in Late Imperial China," in David Johnson, Andrew Nathan, and Evelyn Rawski. eds., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, pp: 34–72.

irresistible impulses determined by their respective natures. 士人之好名, 與婦人女子之好鬼神, 皆其天性使然, 不能自剋。”[12] Xie goes on to complain that women are prone to squander money on cultic activities instead of using it to bond with relatives and friends (婦女之錢財，不用之結親友，而用之媚鬼神者多矣).[13] Another Ming scholar, Li Le 李樂 (1532-1618), wrote, “It is a trend under heaven that many regions are worshipping the Buddha. Among those [who worship the Buddha], women are particularly numerous 天下大勢,崇佛之地多, 而婦人女子尤多.”[14] Nuns became a familiar sight around town, and temple-visiting became common practice among women in nearly every household.

Although male Ming-Qing biographers tended to keep silent on subject of women’s outdoor religious activities,[15] women from all walks of life were frequenting temples. The mother of the

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[12] Xie Zhaozhe 謝肇淛, *Wuzazu* 五雜俎 (*Five Assorted Offerings*), 人部四 (fourth Volume of Human), Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959, p.207.

[13] Ibid., 物部三 (third volume of Things), p. 435.

[14] Li Le 李樂, *Jianwen zaji* 見聞雜記 (*Jotting Notes on Knowledge*), vol. 5, entry 58, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986, p. 467.

[15] For example, *Shan nüren zhuan* 善女人傳 (*The Biographies of Buddhist Laywomen*, hereafter *SNRZ*) by Peng Shaosheng 彭紹昇 (1740-1796), a collection of biographies of model lay women which, as Yiqun Zhou claimed, sets an emphasis on how laywomen “engaged in devotional practices in strict domestic confinement.” “The Hearth and the Temple,” p. 123. However, the book of *SNRZ* doesn’t completely eradicate details regarding women’s excursion to temples. See the entry of “Née Shi 施氏” in which a wife Shi accompanied her mother in-law

Ming Emperor Shenzong and the mother and aunt of the Ming Emperor Shizong were widely known as generous temple patrons and devout disciples of the Buddha.[16] In the 18th chapter of the 18th-century Chinese novel *Honglou meng (Dream of the Red Chamber*, hereafter *HLM*), the Jia family waits at their front gate for the imperial concubine Consort Yuan (Yuan chun 元春) to return from visiting her natal home when they are informed by a eunuch that "the royal consort Yuan had to worship the Buddha in the Baoling temple before she set off."[17] Zhang Dai 張岱 (1597-1689), an elite scholar of the early Qing, mentioned that he followed his mother to various temples to offer incense.[18] Wu Weiye 吳偉業 (1609-1672), a prestigious poet of the late Ming,

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to visit a temple; see also the entry of "Née Wang 王氏" in which Wang was recorded as visiting the Tianzhu temple in Hangzhou. Peng Shaosheng, *Shan nüren zhuan* 善女人傳, in *Xu zhang jing* 續藏經 (Sequel to Tripitaka), vo150. Taibei: Xin wenfeng chuban gongsi, 1994, pp. 0238-9 (施氏), and pp. 0248-9 (王氏).

[16] Chen Yunü 陳玉女, "The Enthrallment with Buddhism of Empress Dowager Cisheng in the Wanli Period: Concurrently Discussing the Confrontation between Buddhism and Daoism 明萬曆時期慈聖皇太后的崇佛——兼論佛、道兩勢力的對峙," *The History Journal of Chenggong University* 國立成功大學歷史學報, 23(1997): 195-245.

[17] Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹, and Gao E 高鶚, *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢 (Dream of the Red Chamber), Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2000, Chapter 18, p. 183.

[18] Zhang Dai 張岱, "Caoshan 曹山 (the Cao Mountain)" in *Tao an mengyi* 陶庵夢憶, (Reminiscences in Dreams of Tao An), vol. 6, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008, pp. 122-123;

records that his mother, Lady Zhu, "attentively practiced Buddhism, and once established a Buddhist shrine in the mountain of Dengwei, in which she piously expressed her devotion to Tibetan Buddhism 精心事佛, 嘗於鄧尉山中創構傑閣, 虔奉一大藏教. "[19]

Women of obscure parentage with low social status were less constrained than their noblewomen contemporaries in visiting temples. It is noteworthy, however, that although monasteries were public sites open to all, women of the gentry and nobility were able to visit temples privately, outside of peak hours, and to choose to visit temples specifically patronized by their families.[20] By choosing private times to visit temples and by limiting themselves to temples

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"Gaoli Si 高麗寺 (the Gaoli Monastry)" in *Xihu mengxun* 西湖夢尋 (Search the West Lake in Dreams), vol. 4. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007, p.197.

[19] Wu Weiye 吳偉業, "Qinmu taifuren qishi xu 秦母太夫人七十序 (An Eulogy Dedicated to Qin's Mother for her 70th Birthday)," in *Wu Meicun quanji* 吳梅村全集 (The Complete Collected Writings of Wu Meicun), vol. 38, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1999, p. 815.

[20] As claimed in the story of "The Young Sister of Su Puzzled the Groom Three Times 蘇小妹三難新郎:" "it is always the case that women of the gentry families go to temples to burn incense either in the early morning or in the late night. Why? In the morning, people haven't arrived, and in the night, the crowd have already dispersed. 從來大人家女眷入廟進香, 不是早, 定是夜, 為甚麼? 早則人未來, 夜則人已散." In Feng Menglong 馮夢龍, *Xingshi hengyan* 醒世恒言 (Stories to Awaken the World), chapter 11, Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 1998, p. 152. Also, in *XSYY*, the model woman Madame Chao 晁夫人 also planned to visit a temple in adjacent to her house when visitors are relatively less, see Chapter 2, p. 24. Similarly,

they knew to be respectable, elite women made the public sphere more private, striking a compromise with the *nei* ideal.

Women sometimes made excursions to temples to attend boisterous temple fairs and public festivals. Historians and local gazetteers spilled plenty of ink on women's highly visible participation in such temple fairs and open-air activities--although this coverage was often negative in tone.[21] Novels, too, often featured women's roles in temple fairs, festivals, and ceremonies. In *HLM*, the maiden poets, who are favorably depicted as talented and refined, visit temples together with their matriarch, Jia. Similarly, *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 and the short story collections *Sanyan erpai* 三言二拍 (Three Words and Two Slaps) are littered with depictions

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in *HLM*, when the Jia women went to temples together, they usually go to the ones owned or supported by Jias.

[21] See Cheng-han Wu, *The Temple Fairs in Late Imperial China*, PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 1988. See also Zhao Shiyu 趙世瑜, *Kuanghuan yu richan* 狂歡與日常, 2002; Chen Hsi-yuan 陳熙遠. "Sleepless in China: Carnivalesque Celebration of the Lantern Festival and Official Regulation of Everyday Life during the Ming-Qing Period 中國夜未眠──明清時期的元宵、夜禁與狂歡." *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊 (Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philosophy Academia Sinica) 75, No.2 (2004): 283-329, especially his discussion of the carnivalesque activities of women during the temple fairs such as "stealing greens (偷青)" and "warding off the hundred diseases (走百病).

of temple festivals attended by women.[22] Evidence of women's appearance in temples abounds in poetry, too.[23]

Some women engaged in outdoor religious events for economic reasons. Susan Mann observes that, during the "southern tours of the Kangxi and Qianlong emperors," many women were employed in producing "religious artifacts in the neighborhood of the shrines and along pilgrimage routes."[24] Women of all social statuses and ages would appear in temples in various situations, and historical and literary records of the phenomenon are not always pejorative. Chen Hongmou 陳宏謀 (1696-1771), an iconic official who staunchly opposed illicit local cults,

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[22] For example, in *HLM*, chapter 29, when some Jia women are planning a temple-tour, even the most deferential and exemplary wife Li Wan is among the female temple goers, pp. 305-317. See also Lanling Xiaoxiaosheng 蘭陵笑笑生, *Quanben Jin ping mei cihua* 全本金瓶梅詞話, Hong Kong: Taiping shuju, 2013, passim.

[23] See Zhang Yingchang 張應昌, ed., multiple poems in the session of "Shaoxiang 燒香 (Burning Incenses)," vol. 24, in *Qingshi duo* 清詩鐸 (Compilation of Qing Poems), Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960. All the poems compiled describe women's activities of burning incenses in various religious spaces; some even convey erotic implications. See also, "Song of Incense-Burning 燒香曲" written by a Qing scholar Li Wen 李雯 (1609-1647). The poem is compiled in Fang Junshi 方濬師 (1830-?), *Jiaoxuan suilu* 蕉軒隨錄 (A Random Jotting Notes of the Banana Studio), Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995, pp. 269-70.

[24] Susan Mann, *Precious Records*, p. 194.

nevertheless admits that, given the pervasiveness and fervor of women's religious piety, he could not expect all women to stay indoors under all circumstances.[25]

While some women found excuses to frequent temples, others deployed temples-going as a convenient pretext for stepping outside the household. In *Honglou meng*, the jealous wife Wang Xifeng manages to visit her husband's newly wed concubine You Erjie by reporting to her matriarch that she is headed to a temple to offer incense.[26] Similarly, in a Ming collection of short stories, *Xingshi yan* 型世言 (Words to Structure the World), a husband tricks his wife into traveling to an extra-provincial region by promising her they were visiting a temple.[27] Susan Mann comments, "A visit to a temple or shrine to burn incense was the most respectable reason [for women] to leave home."[28] It is no surprise that respectable women would use temple-going as an excuse to escape their boudoirs.

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[25] William Rowe, *Saving the World: Chen Hongmou and Elite Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001, p. 320.

[26] *HLM*, Chapter 68, p. 764.

[27] Lu Renlong 陸人龍. *Xingshi yan* 型世言. In *Guben xiaoshuo jicheng* 古本小説集成 (Collection of Ancient Editions of Fiction), Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990, Chapter 3, pp. 105-157, especially 150.

[28] Susan Mann, *Precious records*, p. 57. Mann also enumerates other occasions that "drew women out on a regular basis," such as visiting natal families and maternal relatives. All these occasions though witness women's physical mobility still confining their bodies within the domestic sphere. So temple visiting is the only respectable reason for women to cross the domestic boundary, and the private-public demarcation.

Besides being motivated by their "irrepressible piety," in Goossaert's words, women were encouraged in their temple worship by the lack of effective deterrents. Although state regulation and Confucian norms militated against visiting temples, penalties were rarely inflicted on female temple-goers. He Suhua cites a legal case under the Qianlong Reign (1736-1796) in which two Manchu women of noble pedigree were accused as frequenting an illicit temple (淫祠) and donating a fortune to the temple's crooked nun. The donation turned out to be comprised of embezzled official funds. The scandal immediately provoked a public outcry and attracted the attention of the Emperor himself. The nun and her sons were executed, and the husbands of the two women, who were state officials, were severely punished and banished. The two laywomen, however, emerged from the trial more or less unscathed—they were merely sentenced to house arrest under the supervision of clan seniors.[29] As this case demonstrates, women's spatial transgressions were not punished harshly in court, however aggressively government officials and scholars tried to threaten women practitioners in the abstract. Given the absence of effective deterrents to temple worship, women had few reasons not to defy Confucian prescriptions and enter outdoor monastic space.

"Temple" is represented by a number of Chinese characters, including *miao* 廟, *si* 寺, *an* 庵, *guan* 觀, and *ci* 祠.[30] Temples are buildings in which "the images of gods were housed, the resident clerics engaged in personal cultivation and conducted public religious services, and

[29] He Suhua, "Officials and Women in Early Qing: Taking as the Focal Point of the Prohibition on Women's Religious Practices 清初士大夫與婦女-以禁止婦女宗教活動為中心," pp. 62-3.

[30] Sometimes we also encounter names like *yuan* 院, or *foshe* 佛舍.

where lay believers came to worship and attend services and fairs."[31] These temples lured women outside of the Confucian domain of the home and drew them into the ambit of Buddhist religious figures. Women experienced far more in temples than the clichéd seduction by monks and other trickster figures. Temples drew women outside of the Confucian domain of their homes, carving out in Soja's term, a "thirdspace," or to use Foucault's word, a "heterotopia" for women beyond the *nei-wai* spatial order. Temples extended, supplemented, troubled, and reconstituted notions of the public and private. When women were in temples, new social positions were to be negotiated and a host of tensions navigated: presence and absence, mobility and stasis, truth and falsehood, morality and sensuality, piety and performance, abstraction and embodiment.

The Temple as Heterotopia

This chapter considers the physical temple as a thirdspace loaded with spatial, gendered, and cultural meanings. Francesca Bray proposes to reread Chinese people's homes as social spaces, arguing that "we can enrich our understanding of the meanings of space if we abandon our preconceptions and look in detail at how people actually behave."[32] In this chapter, I apply Bray's approach to temples, which enable and nurture unique practices and relationships. Bourdieu's insight about space writ large holds in the case of temples, too: the temple comprises "a key mechanism in the inculcation of habitus, a site where symbolic relations are encoded in the everyday and naturalized as physical patterns of behavior."[33]

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[31] Yiqun Zhou, "The Hearth and The Temple," p. 114.

[32] Bray, *Technology and Gender*, p. 53.

[33] Ibid., p. 57.

The monastic spaces that appear in the stories I examine here constitute a rhetorical topography. Temples work through cultured understandings of space as metaphor, especially the dialectic of *nei* and *wai*, inside and outside. As I will show, the temple, as an alternative space, allows women to explore the tension between their prescribed passivity and privacy, on the one hand, and their activism and exposure in practice, on the other. The monastic space not only disrupts the *nei-wai* categories as they apply to physical spaces, but also destabilizes women's understanding of the dichotomy writ large. By examining women's controversial yet widespread presence in temple spaces, we gain insight into how Buddhism negotiates its role as a supplement and/or threat to orthodox Confucianism.

On the Way to the Temple

In addition to fulfilling religious functions, famous temples and sacred mountains have always served as tourist attractions in Chinese culture. Male literati have left copious records of their trips to scenic monastic places.[34] Ming women, too, longed for sight-seeing and other outdoor entertainments, and temple-going was among the most respectable and practical ways women could enjoyed scenic outings.[35] A Ming scholar and playwright Wang Heng 王衡

[34] For example, Tang Poet Zhanggu 張祜 (785—849?), and Xu Xiake's 徐霞客 (1587-1641) travelogues.

[35] Dorothy Ko also discussed other occasions that women made forays outside the households, such as boating and picnic, drinking and poetry parties with female relatives and friends, long journeys accompanying a husband to official duties. See *Teachers in the Inner Chambers*, 1994. However, these are opportunities unusually open to a few elite and privileged women. And even though they ventured to the outdoor space, they still maintained a *nei* boundary and aura with

(1562-1609) records, “Women are prone to visit sacred mountains and famous monasteries and to burn incense in front of the Buddha there 婦女多之名山勝剎拈香佛前.”[36] In *Xingshi yan*, a wife decides to tour a temple to relax after a quarrel with her husband.[37] In *XSYY*, two old nuns explicitly tell the woman protagonist, Xue Sujie, that they are making a pilgrimage to a sacred mountain largely to enjoy the scenery along the way.

The Qing scholar Wang Shizhen 王士禎 (1634-1711) records a story that is especially powerful in demonstrating the lengths to which women went to take trips to sacred spaces. The story goes as follows. A man named Wang in the Shandong province goes on a pilgrimage to Wudang Mountain. Upon his return, Wang describes the trip’s magnificent scenery to his wife. His wife is so fascinated by her husband’s description that she asks to go with her husband on his next trip. Wang does his best to dissuade her from coming with him, citing the long distance and

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great care by moving in group and isolating themselves from the public and strangers on the journey or sites. Temple-going is different; temples are open to all the women, regardless of their status, age, or background, women could go by themselves or with other women, and they could often mix with both male and female strangers.

[36] Wang Heng 王衡, “Gaofeng yipin furen xianmu zhushi xingshi 誥封一品夫人先母朱氏行實 (An Account of the Deeds of My Late Mother Lady Zhu, The First-Rank Mistress Awarded by the Royal Court,” *Goushan xiansheng ji* 緱山先生集 (The Collected Writings of the Master of Goushan), vol. 14, *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu* 四庫全書寸目叢書 (Collectanea of works mentioned in the *cunnu* catalog), Jinan: Qilu shushe 齊魯書社, 1997, Section of *Ji* 集, Book 179, p. 82.

[37] Lu Renlong, *Xingshi yan*, Chapter 12, pp. 525-58, especially 533-4.

financial hardship. His wife responds by "hanging herself out of indignation 恚而自經." Depressed by this turn of events, the husband places her body in a coffin and sets off again for Wudang Mountain. When he arrives in the Henan province, he is shocked to find his wife sitting under a tree. Calming Wang's fears, the woman explains that she is not a ghost. She says that, because the travel schedule was delayed as a huge expenditure is to be expected, she had to leave for the mountain ahead of time, and she had been waiting under the tree for Wang for a couple of days. Wang has no choice but to take his wife with him to the sacred mountain. After the couple returns home, the husband opens the coffin he had laid in his house and finds it empty.[38]

Regardless of whether the woman was miraculously resurrected or was just trying to prove a point, the story illustrates women's deep hunger for outdoor trips to far-flung sacred sites. It is noteworthy that, according to the story's narrator, the woman is more fascinated by the journey to the religious destination than the destination itself. She is entranced by her husband's description of the scenery along the road, not by the sublimity of Wudang Mountain. Perhaps the outdoors and the forbidden trip to the sacred mountain function as a metonym in the wife's eyes for the *wai* sphere that is forever out of her reach. The outside world the woman craves is unknown to her when she decides to take the journey; it exists to her only in fantasy.

Drawing on Hegel, Judith Butler incisively emphasizes the link between desire and absence, writing, "Desire does not attend to what is given in perception, but rather what is hidden in perception; it is, in a sense, an investigation into the significant dimension of absence. It

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[38] Wang Shizhen 王士禎. "Jining furen 濟寧婦人(A woman of the Jining Prefecture)," in *Chibei outan* 池北偶談 (Casual Conversations North of the Pool), vol. 26, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982, p. 620.

thematizes absence and thereby makes it present to itself."[39] French theoretician Jacques Lacan similarly claims that desire "is not a relation to the real object independent of the subject but a relation to phantasy."[40] Desire derives from the absence of something, and this absence is made apparent only through fantasy.[41] Absence both activates desire and thwarts it from ever being fulfilled.

In the story about Wang and his wife, the wife is attracted to the mystery of the monastic space. She craves it because of it is out of her reach. Her suicide, or fake suicide, is in a sense quite effective, as Wang relocates her body from her boudoir into the common area of the home. The coffin becomes a liminal space in which the wife's body can escape the inner chamber. It is only after her body is placed in the coffin that she manages to embark on her journey to the divine mountain. Death ironically endows the wife with more mobility that she ever knew in life—upon her death, feigned or real, she steps out of her house and sets off on her own. Death does not impede her mobility; life in the house does. A paradox thus emerges: monastic space is so attractive that a woman is willing to sacrifice her life to experience it, and yet monastic space is so forbidden that she can only access it in death. The outside world appears to women only in

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[39] Quoted from Martin Huang, *Desire and Fictional Narrative in Late Imperial China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001, p. 2, note 3.

[40] Quoted from Martin Huang, *Desire and Fictional Narrative*, 2001, p. 2.

[41] Martin Huang's reading of the representation of desire in the Ming novel *Jin Ping Mei* also emphasizes the paradox of desire: "[I]f the ultimate desire is defined as the wish to acquire what one does not yet have—which is absent or what is beyond one's reach—[…the] existence [of desire] is predicated on its being *not fulfilled*." (my emphasis). Martin Huang, *Desire*, p. 107.

death and/or as an absence. The living wife and the *wai* sphere cannot co-exist: either the wife may travel to the mountain as a "dead" woman, or she may live within the confines of the *nei*.

Wang's story demonstrates how cloistered women's desire for the absent world of *wai* is cathected through a distant temple. Huang argues that mobility in late Imperial China was a crucial marker of masculinity; the right and capacity to explore the *wai* sphere was a gender-based privilege.[42] In the story, the wife's desperate obsession with her husband's pilgrimage can also be interpreted as a larger desire for mobility, the masculine freedom to traverse the *wai/nei* boundary. The story's framing of the sacred Wudang Mountain resonates with Foucault's "fifth principle" of heterotopias: heterotopias "have the appearance of pure and simple openings, although they usually conceal curious exclusions. Anyone can enter one of these heterotopian locations, but, in reality, they are nothing more than an illusion: one thinks one has entered and, by the sole fact of entering, one is excluded."[43] In the story, the wife both does and does not succeed in entering the space of the divine mountain due to her "death." The sacred mountain, as a heterotopian space, can never allow the wife to truly enter—she "thinks [she] has entered and, by the sole fact of entering, [she] is excluded."

Temples were among the few incarnations of the absent *wai* domain that a cloistered woman could envisage and therefore fantasize about. Shen Fu 沈復, a Qing writer, records in his autobiographical memoir that when his wife fantasized about touring the world with him, the

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[42] Martin Huang writes, "Travel is associated with masculinity since travel was largely a male privilege in traditional China," *Negotiating Masculinities in Late Imperial China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006, p. 238.

[43] Foucault, "Of Other Places", p.6.

five sacred mountains and the Lingyan 靈岩 temple were the only destinations she could immediately enumerate.[44] Shen's anecdote reminds us of how limited women's capacity to mentally construct the *wai* sphere really was. It may have been impossible for some secluded women to *imagine,* let alone desire, typical public and masculine spaces like official seats and examinations halls. Although temples drew women out of the *nei* sphere, they did not challenge the allocation of most all other public spaces to men. Temples enabled women's imagination of the *wai*—the absent and unreachable world outside their sealed boudoir—but it also shored up the limits of that imagination.

The Temple as Carnival

While the Shandong woman lays down her life in order to embark on a temple visit, a Suzhou woman depicted in the *Mountain Song* 山歌 complied by Feng Menglong (1574-1646) takes a more offensive approach.[45] In the farcical song "Incense-Burning Lady 燒香娘娘," a woman living in an urban area plans to fulfill a vow by offering incense to the god in a rural temple. Her husband, like Wang in the previous story, tries to hold her back because of the considerable expense that the trip will incur. Unlike her Shandong sister, however, the Suzhou woman threatens to beat her husband up if he dares to persist in attempting to dissuade her: "I'm

[44] Shen Fu 沈復. *Six Records of a Floating Life* 浮生六記, trans. Leonard Pratt and Chiang Su-Hui, London: Penguin Books, 1983, p. 40.

[45] Yasushi Oki, "Women in Feng Menglong's 'Mountain Song'," in *Writing Women in Late Imperial China*, ed. Ellen Widmer, Kang-i Sun Chang. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997, pp. 131-43.

now determined to go offer incense. It is beyond any doubt. If you dare to say one more word, I'll turn you black and blue! 我今立意要燒香，無狀，再開言，教你滿身青胖." The domestic dispute escalates until the women next door step in and attempt to reason with the shrewish wife. The neighbors invoke Confucian spatial proscriptions in hopes of supporting the henpecked husband; they remind the wife, "The jade does not leave his golden palace, and a woman would never step out of her boudoir 玉帝也弗離個金殿，閨女也弗出個繡房." While the husband tries to sway his wife with appeals to financial responsibility, the women themselves seem to be acutely aware of the spatial taboo.

The wife responds glibly, "I have been married him for many years, but I have barely seen him supporting our family. It is only thanks to my efforts [that the family makes ends meet]. If I give up on going to offer incense, I cannot consider myself a female husband [or a real man-wife]! 與他多年夫婦，幾見他撐持門戶，盡虧奴，若不去還香願，非為女丈夫." The oxymoronic phrase "female husband" is rather striking, as the woman is claiming herself as the de facto patriarch of the household. Because she shoulders more of the family's financial burden, the wife considers herself to fill a husband's role. Her jibe suggests that a marriage's hierarchy should be defined by each spouse's practical role in sustaining the family, not by the spouses' biological sexes. Thus, the wife's trip to the temple expresses her authority and autonomy in the family. Coming from and going to the temple as she pleases marks her dominion over the household. In the case of the *Mountain Song*, the temple is less a religious space than a social one, a thirdspace in which the Confucian principle of *nei-wai* separation is contested, suspended, and even reversed. However, inversion is not subversion; one could argue that the defiant wife only reinforces the gender division by insisting on adopting an opposite gender role.

If agency in visiting temples signifies a woman's power and autonomy within the domestic sphere, which can be coded masculine, a woman's performance while *at* the temple can be coded as feminine, as the temple stage sometimes encouraged ostentatious displays of feminine beauty and refinement. Almost two thirds of the *Mountain Song* narrative is spent describing how the woman dolls herself up in preparation for the temple visit. She borrows all kinds of jewelry, hairpins, and clothes from neighbors to make herself as conspicuous as possible. This vanity and exhibitionism resonates with the general obsession with opulence and sumptuousness that permeated the late Ming.[46] As the Ming scholar Gu Qiyuan 顧起元（1565-1628）complained, "The fashion among the folk is increasingly lavish, particularly among women. While women's household income might only amount to a *dan* of grains, they cannot wait to purchase silk and brocade; before they have accumulated any real wealth, they have already rushed to buy pearls and jade 俗尚日奢，婦女尤甚。家才擔石，已貿羅綺，積未錙銖，先營珠翠."[47] The Chinese scholar Lin Liyue has pointed out that the Ming state's repeated banning of ostentatious behaviors indicates the Ming people's irrepressible craving for luxury.[48]

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[46] A most famous example is the novel *Jin Ping Mei*; See also, Timothy Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998, especially pp. 190-203.

[47] Gu Qiyuan 顧起元, *Kezuo zhuiyu* 客座贅語 (Rambling talks of a guest), vol. 2, rpt. of 1618 edition; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987, p. 67.

[48] Lin Liyueh 林麗月, "Mingdai jinsheling chutan 明代禁奢令初探 (A Preliminary Research on the Ming Proscription of Extravagance)," *National Taiwan Normal University Journal of History* 台灣師範大學歷史學報, 22(1994): 57-75, especially 70-71.

An excursion to a rural temple, as in the *Mountain Song*, might present the only opportunity for a workaday woman like the song's protagonist to display her feminine charms and to express her suppressed love of finer things. Women's frustrated desire for opulence explains why a woman like the protagonist might exhaust her sources heaping herself with baubles and fancy clothes. As she travels to the temple, the protagonist's over-the-top dress, coy gestures, and effusive deference make a spectacle of her; local ne'er-do-wells throng behind her, and follow her all the way to the temple. In an erotically charged moment, she is even mistaken as a goddess who has descended from heaven (有個道是出鄉個觀音菩薩 …到處生香，令人妄想). The protagonist uses the occasion of a temple visit to perform her amorous charm and to flaunt her wealth as she competes for the public gaze. The monastic space thus becomes carnivalesque, a space in which spectacle is embraced and orthodox expectations and moral restrictions are temporarily relaxed.

Temple spaces seem to relax the grip of Confucian norms, if only temporarily. As a local gazetteer records, "On the twelfth day of the fourth month, the birthday of Madam Bai, the city god's wife […] women from humble families sit in rows in the east and west boxes to watch the performance and do not feel ashamed of being made the objects of crude comments by licentious young men."[49] As Cheng-Han Wu observes, not only the young women themselves, "but [occasionally] their husbands or relatives did not feel insulted by noticing their female dependents surrounded by those young rascals."[50] Temples, especially during their yearly festivals, offered a site where gender, spatial, and hierarchical order could temporarily blur. In

[49] Wu Cheng-han, "The *Temple Fairs in Late Imperial China,*" 1988, p. 102.

[50] Ibid.

the famous novel *Jin Ping Mei*, Song Huilian 宋惠蓮, one of the lovers of the male protagonist, dresses to the nines in an effort to seize the public spotlight at a temple parade. The author of the novel suggestively changed the name from of the parade from "walking away a hundred diseases (Zou baibing) 走百病" to "walking with a hundred coquettish poses (Zou baimei) 走百媚," highlighting the eroticism of the procession of women.[51] Although it does not take place during a festival, the vignette narrated in the *Mountain Song* exemplifies women's eagerness to use the occasion of temple visits to flaunt their feminine glamour.

The *Mountain Song* story ends when the woman returns home and is instantly cut back down to size—all her borrowed finery is repossessed, and she is left naked and embarrassed in her own home. As the song's speaker gloats, "A moment ago, when she was visiting the temple, she looked like a newly-carved, solemn Guanyin statue. Now, all of a sudden, she returned home and was as abject and unkempt as the 'stingy prostitute' 星臭婆娘."[52] The juxtaposition between the divine Guanyin goddess and the odious prostitute highlights the comedy and bathos of the protagonist's temple visit. Rather than prostrating herself before the temple's goddess, the protagonist is keen to impersonate the female divinity and embody her eroticism. The irony is thus that the more dazzling the wife appears outdoors, the more abject she appears in her own

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[51] Zhao Shiyu 趙世瑜. *Kuanghuan yu richang,* 2002, pp. 273-74; see also *Jin Ping Mei,* Chapter 24, Hong Kong: Taiping shuju, 2013, p. 620.

[52] Feng Menglong 馮夢龍, "燒香娘娘 (Incense-Burning Lady)," *Shange* 山歌 (Mountain Song), in *Feng Menglong quanji* 馮夢龍全集 (The Complete Collected Writings of Feng Menglong), book 10, Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2007, pp. 94-96.

home; and this sad state of affairs all stems from her insistence on her superiority to and authority over her husband.

Religious ritual and piety per se are not the focus of the *Mountain Song* story; the temple itself is paid little heed. It is the journey *to* the temple that attracts narrative focus; the journey offers a fluid and evocative space for the woman to defy Confucian principles of gender hierarchy and segregation. The monastic space in the story denotes a dynamic process of complicating *nei-wai* binary. The protagonist is determined to engage with temple practice, but she is far less interested in the geographical destination than she is in the boisterous journey. The ostensibly static monastic site becomes a metonym for a more expansive process that accommodates the protagonist's sweeping geographical and political itineraries.

But these temple trips, as the *Mountain Song* shows, were not without social cost. The experience is enchanting, but it threatens shame and embarrassment; although the carnivalesque is momentarily freeing, it cannot permanently unfetter the woman from her boudoir and all of its concomitant social expectations. The temple holds out the promise of freedom, but after visiting the temple the woman pilgrim must return to her regular life, unsure of whether the release of the temple experience was a mirage all along. The fluid monastic space serves as a heterotopia that, in Foucault's words, "perform[s] the task of creating a space of illusion that reveals how all of real space is more illusory, all the locations within which life is fragmented."[53] The Suzhou woman is something of a Cinderella figure. She tastes the ecstasy of a privileged life full of possibility before being cruelly thrust back into the cold reality of her workaday world. The temple, like Cinderella's crystal shoes, is a heterotopic dream in which she can indulge in guilt-

[53] Foucault, "Of Other Places," p. 6.

free narcissism for a time, but she ends the story (unlike Cinderella) disillusioned and humiliated. Ultimately, the moral of the story seems to be that women who show themselves in public are doomed to humiliation. Although the protagonist seems to enjoy her unusual domestic authority and to be emboldened by her financial power, she seems to lose her edge when she parades that power in public. The theatrical reversal of fortune that finds the protagonist pathetically naked and alone in her home at the end of the song suggests that, in the end, public respect remained just outside of women's grasp.

The Gendering of the Temple

Now that we have considered women's journeys to temples, we can turn our attention to what happens on the temple premises. As we have seen, it was not uncommon for women to visit temples in order to pray for fortune or personal salvation. Man Xu states that, amongst laywomen in the Song, "[t]he most commonly claimed reason for temple visits was to pray for blessings."[54] Like their Song equivalents, Ming-Qing laywomen frequented temples mainly in order to attend to private or domestic matters, such as concerns about fertility, family members' health, and good fortune in marriage. Many stories about women's pilgrimages to sacred sites feature miraculous upheavals; at monastic sites, irreconcilable conflicts are resolved, the *wai-nei* boundary is disturbed, and gender restrictions are slackened.

The most commonly cited reason for women to visit temples at the time was to plead for a male heir (求子).[55] Specific rites sprung up in various temples to cater to this demand, among

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[54] Man Xu, *Crossing the Gate*, p. 194.

[55] For example, in the famous series of Ming short stories *Sanyan erpai* 三言二拍 (Three Words and Two Slaps), praying for offspring serves as the most common reason for female

which the yearly Shannxi temple fair for sons is the most noteworthy. Since the Yuan dynasty,[56] every spring, between the tenth and fifteenth day of the third lunar month, tens of thousands of pilgrims, especially laywomen, assembled in the Zhou Gong Temple 周公廟 in Baoji city 寶雞 of the Shaanxi province. Almost all of these women were afflicted with infertility and pinned their hopes of conceiving a male heir on the divine hall of the Goddess Jiang Yuan 姜嫄殿, where they would perform a specific rite in order to petition the gods for sons. But begging for sons with temple offerings and prayers is not what makes this temple rite unusual. After the routine worshipping of the goddess Jiang Yuan, many women participants would spend the night with a randomly selected male stranger in a cave dwelling at the back of the temple—a scandalous and sensational practice in a conservative patriarchal society, to be sure.

Locals called this rite "chasing the incense tip 攆香頭" because women seeking a one-night-only sex partner would light incense in the dark so interested men would know to enter the

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characters to visit temples in all of the entries. See Yu Shujuan's 于淑娟 statistics in "Fojiao kongjian yu Ming Qing Jingnan funü shenghuo 佛教空間與明清江南婦女生活 (The Buddhist Space: Jiangnan Women's Life in the Ming-Qing Period)," Master Thesis, Fudan University, 2014, pp.16-19.

[56] According to the local gazetteer, the Jiang Yuan hall was built no later than the Yuan Dynasty, so it is possible that the temple fair could also be traced to at least to the Ming dynasty. However because of its vulgarity, it is impossible to find any written records of this convention. See Gao Zhanxiang 高占祥, *Lun miaohui wenhua* 論廟會文化 (On the Culture of Temple Fairs) Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1992, p. 226.

women's dwellings.[57] The consenting parties would not exchange personal information (including name, address, or any other distinguishing details). They would part unceremoniously the following day with the expectation of never seeing one another again. This strategy for ensuring fertility, far from being condemned as adultery, was tacitly sanctioned by family seniors and the local society. It was not uncommon for mothers-in-law (or other female seniors) to chaperone younger wives in the clan at the festival and even to pick the young woman's sexual partner. According to local historians, the custom was quite popular for a time in northwest China.[58]

On its surface, this temple rite is a wild defacement of the core Confucian value of women's sexual fidelity, a value that was celebrated as *the* foremost feminine virtue in late imperial China. It might also seem shocking that a wife's sexual purity would be thus violated in the Zhougong Temple, a site that commemorates the legendary hero believed to be the founder of the Rite of Zhou.[59] In a temple that honors Confucian rites and moral teachings, the *qiuzi* rite, a nearly unimaginable sexual aberration, was tacitly tolerated. Perhaps the public looked past the scandal

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[57] Ibid. p. 225.

[58] The information regarding this temple fair and the unusual *qiuzi* rite there was collected and published by local scholars based on anthropological sources. See Gao Zhanxiang, *Lun miaohui wenhua* 論廟會文化, pp. 223-232. See also Zhao Shiyu, pp. 282-3.

[59] Zhougong is a Chinese culture hero credited with writing the *I Ching* 易經 (Book of Change), establishing the *Rites of Zhou* 周禮, and creating the *yayue* 雅樂 of Chinese classical music. It is under his tutelage, Confucius compiled all his cannons and established his doctrines as Confucianism.

of extramarital sex because the anxiety surrounding male heirs was even stronger than that surrounding women's sexual purity. Admittedly, it was not uncommon for one Confucian principle be sacrificed to another as circumstances demanded.[60] The case of the *qiuzi* rite is rare, however, in the dramatic extremity of the moral violation.

The women who came to the temple seeking a cure of infertility faced a dilemma: they had to choose between two Confucian demands of women—chastity and providing an heir—which were ordinarily understood as perfectly compatible but which sometimes proved mutually exclusive, especially in the case of a husband's infertility and/or absence. The Jiang Yuan shrine was especially promising to women hoping to conceive when their husband was impotent or absent. According to the *Record of the Grand Historian* 史記, Jiang Yuan, a queen during Chinese high antiquity, conceived Houji 后稷, a king during Chinese high antiquity and the god of grain, after she stepped on mysterious giant footprints.[61] This legend of immaculate conception, in tandem with the extraterritorial quality of a monastery, helps to construct a unique

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[60] There are always competing claims of people's virtue in Confucian discourse, such as filiality to parents vs. loyalty to the state. See Sor-hoon Tan, "Between Family and State: Relational Tensions in Confucian Ethics." In *Mencius: Contexts and Interpretations*, ed. Alan Chan, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002, pp. 169-188.

[61] For Jiang Yuan's story, see Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記 (The Records of The Grand Historian), vol.13 Qing Qianlong wuyingdian keben 清乾隆武英殿刻本, Zhongguo jiben guji ku (Digital collection) 中國基本古籍庫 (Database of Chinese Classic Ancient Books via Erudition). Houji is believed to be the son of the heavenly god and he is considered to be the founder of the agrarian culture in ancient China.

chronotope, or, in Edward Soja's formulation, a thirdspace that legitimates non-normative sexual encounters. According to Soja, any interpretation of a space must take into account its social function, history, and spatiality. This "trialectic" render a place's meaning integrated.[62]

During the temple fair season, Jiang Yuan's hall offered a unique opportunity to conceive extra-maritally while deflecting any shame or defilement associated with illicit sex. The stringent protection of both partner's anonymity effectively erased the male stranger from the story of the pregnancy altogether; the anonymity dims, if not denies, the male's contribution to the procreative process. The allusion to Jiang Yuan's sexless pregnancy effectively exonerates women of sexual wrongdoing by implying that the temple worshippers, too, effectively conceived alone. The patriarchal line could be protected and prolonged without any conjugal sex at all. Thus, the temple carved out a special ethical space as one moral precept was suspended (or circumvented) to make way for another. Moral boundaries blurred, and procreation was symbolically divorced from sexuality.

By situating non-normative sex in a monastic space and reading it as analogous to a supernatural story of immaculate conception, Confucian families protected their bloodline and rewrote infidelity as filial piety. Both the temple hall and the cave dwelling were feminine spaces as these loci celebrated young wives' sexuality and fecundity (which in other contexts were seen as pesky and dangerous); In an ironic twist, a young wife's sexual availability and ability to conceive with any man became a Confucian family's last resort in securing its longevity. In other words, young wives' "inadequately assimilated and potentially destabilizing female foreign

[62] Edward Soja, *Thirdspace*, pp. 53-82.

bodies," in Kenneth Pomeranz's words, were mobilized as the only outlet for patrilineal continuity in a liminal religious space.[63]

The ritual also claimed indirect validation from the Jiang Yuan's legend. Both a young wife's mother-in-law and Jiang Yuan loomed over the wife's extramarital intercourse, supporting and validating the young wife as she becomes morally vulnerable. This moment of (quasi-) institutional affirmation of non-normative sexuality marks an unusual collaboration between Confucian doctrine and heterodox religious compensation. The Zhou Gong's temple stood in for the woman's private boudoir in accommodating and facilitating procreation; the public temple fair served as a stopgap for the private matter of patrilineal continuity. Echoing Foucault's assertion that, "this heterotopia is not one of illusion but of compensation,"[64] the temple constituted a heterotopia in its substitution or compensation of a boudoir that had proved insufficient in its barrenness.

In this case, monastic space appears to be female-dominated, and ensures reproduction even in the absence of men. Women's religious beliefs, travels (from domestic to monastic space), and corporeal rites (having sex with strangers) do not amount to a competition between Confucianism and heterodox alternatives. Instead, women's practices illustrate the mutual constitution of the boudoir and temple, two supposedly antagonistic spaces of *nei* and *wai*.

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[63] Kenneth Pomeranz, "Power, Gender, and Pluralism in the Cult of the Goddess of Taishan." In *Culture and State in Chinese History: Conventions, Accommodations, and Critiques,* ed. Theodore Huters, Roy Bin Wong, and Pauline Yu. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997, pp.182-206, 185.

[64] Foucault, "Of Other Places," p.6.

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A story published in a Buddhist proselytizing pamphlet tells a similar story about how a woman's religious piety helped her to fulfill her procreative obligations without any assistance from her husband. The story goes as follows. After the Ming military martyr Yang Huang 楊璜 and his only son died in battle, his wife Lu and concubine Zhang were determined to become vegetarian devotees of the Guanyin Bodhisattva and to pray daily to a portrait of Guanyin. Lady Lu was convinced that, by doing so, the child the concubine Zhang was carrying—a child she had conceived with Yang Huang before his death—would be male. Despite Lu's efforts, Zhang gave birth to a girl. Lu was so dismayed by the lack of an heir that she decided to divide up Yang's property and disseminate it to his kinsmen on the first anniversary of Yang's death. When the first anniversary came, however, the baby girl miraculously turned into a boy. Not only did Lu and Zhang secure a male heir, but they had also managed to hang onto Yang's wealth, as a male heir was entitled to the inheritance in its entirety. The local magistrate refused to believe the news, so he ordered state officials to inspect the baby and to interrogate the Yang relatives. The relatives unanimously affirmed the story, saying, "It is absolutely true! Why would we lie at the expense of our portion of Yang's property?"[65]

The power of religious devotion allows the heroines of the story to acquire a male heir without any input from a man. Although the child had been conceived when Yang was alive, it is the women's pious devotion to the Bodhisattva that changes the baby's sex. Yang and his martyrdom have no ostensible role in yielding a male heir; the women and their ascetic piety alone secure the family's honor and security. Unlike in the case of temple-goers "chasing the

[65] Xing Li, *Guanyin xianyang*, p. 264.

incense tip," the boundary that is transgressed is not sexual, but rather biological—a female infant is physically changed into a male. The biological chaos, although it upsets the gender binary, nevertheless leads to the reestablishment of familial order, as Yang's line can be carried on by a biological son. The women's Buddhist religious piety earns the Confucian man, Yang, a tangible reward for his moral exemplarity. Buddhism provides a solution to an otherwise insoluble Confucian conundrum, upholding Confucian moral and familial order by upsetting the sex binary.

In both cases, monastic space appears to be female-dominated, and in both cases Buddhism ensures reproduction even in the absence of men. Monastic space functions as a compensatory alternative for a boudoir that remains barren. Women's religious beliefs, travels (from domestic to monastic space), and corporeal rites (having sex with strangers or abstaining from meat, for example) do not amount to a competition between Confucianism and heterodox alternatives. Instead, women's practices illustrate the mutual constitution of the boudoir and temple, two supposedly antagonistic spaces of *nei* and *wai*.

The Transcendent Temple

Temples not only solved problems pertaining to infertility and family lineage, but also showed women the way out moral predicaments. The following two stories, drawn from the collection of strange stories *Zibuyu* 子不語 (*What the Master Does Not Discuss*) by the Qing scholar Yuan Mei 袁枚, address women's uncertainty in navigating precepts of filiality and fidelity. In "A Filial Daughter 孝女," [66] a young girl swears not to marry so she can care for her

[66] Yuan Mei (1716-1797), *Zibuyu* (*What the Master Does Not Discuss*), Shanghai: Shanghai guji

ailing father and keep the struggling family business afloat. One day, she learns that an old woman from the neighborhood is gathering women to offer incense to a goddess on a sacred mountain. Although the old woman tells the girl this pilgrimage will cure her father's illness, the girl declines the invitation. Still, she asks how far away the mountain is, and she is informed of the exact distance. The young girl burns incense every night, walking and counting her steps in the courtyard after her father falls asleep. Praying and kowtowing with all her might, she explains to the goddess that she cannot make the pilgrimage because she is a young woman 默祝身為女子不能朝山之故.

After a couple of weeks, she finally completes the voyage to the mountain temple when her soul leaves her body and becomes the lucky petitioner to burn the "first incense" on the first day of the month. This is quite an honor; a powerful eunuch who comes to the mountain temple for the efficacious "first incense" has already failed twice, although he has bribed the temple host and ordered him not to open the gate until he, the eunuch, arrives. The girl (or her soul) circumvents the eunuch's machinations. Although the eunuch arrives at the crack of dawn, he is dismayed to find at the temple a shadowy young woman who vanishes suddenly after finishing offering the first, most efficacious incense. The eunuch is livid. Suspecting his competitor is a ghost, he tries to convince the pilgrims that the temple is not worth visiting by describing the ghost to the crowd. However, the old woman neighbor realizes that the supposed specter is actually the young girl who could not join on the pilgrimage but who nevertheless walked and prayed at home in order to save her father. Now the eunuch is touched by the girl's filial devotion, and he praises her: "This is a remarkably pious daughter, and even the god has been

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chubanshe, 2012, pp. 82-3.

moved [to respond to her devotion] 此孝女，神感也." He takes the girl as his adopted daughter, and the story wraps up happily with the note that the father soon recovered from his illness and the daughter married a rich merchant.

This is a "squaring-the-circle" story. The young girl heals her sick father through a pilgrim's devotion without having to leave her house for a pilgrimage. It is noteworthy that when the neighborhood women gather to take the trip, the young girl nevertheless prays and tells the deity that she cannot go because she is a woman. The girl's simulation of pilgrimage in her private backyard becomes real as her spirit travels to the distant public temple. Her spirit and her virtue become public as her ghost makes known her filiality and righteousness in upholding the *nei-wai* boundary. Although circumstances prevent the girl from fulfilling the obligation of marriage and reproduction, she paradoxically manages to enter the public by refusing to abandon her private post. It is her sequestration in private that publicizes her virtue and wins her the recognition of the powerful eunuch. Her virtual domestic pilgrimage turns out to be more effective than the real one made by her neighbors. The deity transports her soul to the temple, thus sanctifying a transgression of spatial boundaries, while the eunuch facilitates her leaving her natal home ritually through marriage without making her suffer guilt about abandoning the father.

Pomeranz similarly points out the temple's role in reconciling the otherwise competing claims of filial devotion on the one hand and marriage and religious practice on the other.[67] What I find striking here is that the dilemma requires a supernatural out-of-body experience and a miraculous confusion of private and public (*nei* and *wai*) space. The outdoor temple in this

[67] Pomeranz, "Power, Gender, and Pluralism," p. 200.

story collapses into the girl's private courtyard when the eunuch's announcement makes her private rite public. Her moral integrity miraculously bridges the private and public. The girl's adherence to the *nei-wai* boundary disturbs the very spatial order she protects, making public a household's private rites. The *nei-wai* binary dissolves in the eyes of the gods. The monastic site in this story thus constitutes a dynamic thirdspace that is both public and private, a bridge between and beyond the *nei* and *wai*.

The old neighbor who invites the young girl on the pilgrimage deserves our critical attention as well. Obviously, she belongs to a problematic social group that is described in the story as a group of "three aunties and six grannies (*sangu liupo*) 三姑六婆."[68] This band of women presumably consisted of professional women who were, in the words of Yi Ruolan, "imperfectly controlled but annoyingly indispensable" in late imperial China.[69] In many Ming-Qing literary texts, one encounters records of how the *sangu liupo* intruded on the domestic sphere and exerted profound influence on women and domestic life.[70] Women's problematic passion for religious

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[68] This special term is referring to those women who are marginalized from the family system and society, and living on touting their professional services to the house-bound women. Among them are: Buddhist nuns, Daoist nuns, female fortune-tellers, procuresses, go-betweens, shamanesses, adopted mothers of the brothels, medicine sellers and midwives.

[69] See Yi Ruolan 衣若蘭, *Sangu Liupo: mingdai funü yu shehui de tansuo* 三姑六婆: 明代婦女與社會的探索, Taibei: Daoxiang chubanshe, 2002. See also Katherine Carlitz, *The Rhetorical of* Chin p'ing mei, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986, p.60.

[70] See Yi Ruolan, *Sangu liupo*. Novels such as *Jin ping mei, HLM, XSYY, etc.,* all have such plots involved vulgar or malicious *sangu liupo*.

activity was often ascribed to these unruly and seemingly ubiquitous women. The contemporary Confucian literati considered the proliferation of *sangu liupo,* who wielded significant influence among gentry women, a threat to Confucian familial and ritual order.[71] It should come as no surprise, then, that it is stipulated in Ming-Qing law that the following people (including women) "are to be severely punished: All masters and shamans who call down heterodox gods, write charms, [chant] incantations [to transform] water [into magical potions], perform planchette, and pray to sages […] pretending to do good works but [actually] rabblerousing and misleading the people."[72]

Sangu liupo not only had the alarming freedom to cross the threshold of women's boudoirs, but also lured good women to step out of their homes. Pilgrimage was a common cause of women's travel, and the practice seemed to open the door to broader and more worrisome shifts in gendered power dynamics. As Pomeranz puts it, "Complaints about pilgrimages were often linked to a more general elite hostility toward the leadership role that midwives, matchmakers,

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[71] Yiqun Zhou has contended that literati's critique of female religiosity in late imperial China are less trying to eradicate women's religious practices than stressing on the centrality of Confucian ritual and moral order when female religiosity becomes a competing discourse to Confucian ideology. As long as women's belief in and exercises of religious principles don't violate but contribute to their observation of Confucian virtues, it is acceptable or even commendable for the women to carry out religious practices within the domestic ambit. I will complicate this picture in the next chapter. See Yinqun Zhou, "The Hearth and the Temple."

[72] See Kang Xiaofei. *The Cult of the Fox: Power, Gender, and Popular Religion in Late Imperial and Modern China*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006, pp. 112-3.

healers, and other such women played in the cult. These women were usually independent, regularly breached the boundaries of family and female privacy, and thus were often seen as social irritants."[73] In the story of "the filial daughter," however, the old woman's breach of *nei* boundaries makes possible the plot twist that saves the girl from a lonely, ascetic fate. The old woman informs the girl of the efficacy of the goddess and the distance to the mountain temple, and it is also she who apprises the eunuch of the girl's exemplarity. Had she not been on the pilgrimage herself, information could not have traveled between the girl's home and the monastic space. The old woman is the mechanism by which the private courtyard and the public temple are conflated—she makes it possible for the cloistered girl to meet the *wai* world.

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In the previous story, the filial girl's righteousness moved a god and suspended the natural laws of space; in another story, "Mount Jiu Hua 九華山," recorded in the same collection, a wife faces a dilemma in which she must choose between her reputation as a chaste wife and her filial devotion to her father-in-law. As the story goes, a female villager, Jiang, dutifully serves her widowed father-in-law, Gu, when her husband is away on business. Gu is ill and needs to keep his feet warm at all times in order to treat his ailment. Jiang is so filial that she holds her father-in-law's feet as he sleeps at night, thus sharing his bed 為翁抱足眠. She believes in serving her family at all costs and gives no thought to the suspicions she might arouse. After her husband returns home, he refuses to share his bed with his wife because he has misgivings about her relationship with his father in his absence. Jiang feels wronged, and she tries to explain that

[73] Kenneth Pomeranz, "Power, Gender, and Pluralism," p. 185.

her unusual behavior was perfectly innocent. The husband remains unconvinced, and thus Jiang decides to join a female neighbor in making a pilgrimage to the sacred Mountain Jiu Hua.

After the pilgrims burn incense on the sacred mountain, Jiang ignores the warnings of an old monk and decides to scale a dangerous cliff that is said to have special divine powers so as to demonstrate her innocence. Halfway to the top of the precipice, she falls, and her fellow pilgrims feel extremely sorry for her. However, when her neighbor and travel companion rushes home to inform Jiang's farther-in-law of the tragedy, she finds Jiang sitting on a prayer mat inscribed with characters "Jiu Hua." Gu explains to the neighbor that Jiang fell into their courtyard out of thin air the day before. As incredible as this explanation appears, the cushion inscribed with "Jiu Hua" supports the validity of the story; it not only proves Jiang's trip to the Jiu Hua mount, but also that the mountain god manifested himself in her miraculous reappearance. She survived the fall down the cliff only to fall directly back into her own household. Everyone marvels at the miracle, and the husband's doubts are allayed. From then on, pilgrims to Mount Jiu Hua drop by and pay homage to Jiang before they set off on their journey. The old neighbor comments at the end of the story that Jiang "is the very living Buddha; why do we bother to make pilgrimage to Mount Jiu Hua? 此即活佛, 何須更朝九華?"[74]

Jiang does not count on supernatural powers to cure her elder charge; rather, she hopes to use her religion to regain her husband's trust and to lay to rest the very powerful incest taboo. In this story, the supernatural mediates a domestic crisis, providing an unusual solution to conflicting moral precepts of filiality and fidelity. As Jiang explains as she attempts to justify sharing her bed with her father-in-law, "only the heavenly Buddha knows my [pure] heart 此心

[74] Yuan Mei, *Zibuyu*, "Jiuhua shan 九華山 (Mount Jiu Hua)," p. 343.

惟天佛知之耳."[75] Indeed, her trip to monastic space frees her from her husband's suspicion and redeems her tarnished name. When she returns unscathed to her home after falling from the cliff, the boundary between the private household and the public religious site collapses in the eyes of the mountain god. Jiang forcefully demonstrates her purity of virtue by simultaneously demonstrating her endorsement by supernatural powers. Indeed, she seems to have more than just supernatural approval—she becomes something of a local demi-god or supernatural proxy, if not a goddess per se.

This domestic solution is reached through a disturbance of spatial order and a suspension of natural law. While the filial daughter of the earlier story never physically entered the temple, we might say that Jiang, the wife of this story, never really returned home; a supernatural being returned in her place. The seamless transition between a ritualistic suicide in a public monastic space and a miraculous return to private space superimposes the private onto the public. Jiang makes public a private conjugal conflict with her theatrical attempt to scale the cliff, and that initial inversion of *nei* and *wai* anticipates the second, which constitutes the denouement. The now apotheosized Jiang turns the hitherto private household into a semi-public temple where she herself receives the worshipping pilgrims as a bodhisattva.

Both stories figure monastic space as a thirdspace that, or to use Foucault's description of heterotopia, "is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible."[76] The temples featured in the two stories eliminate or even eradicate the boundary between private and public, at least as that boundary applies to the female

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[75] Ibid.

[76] Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," p. 25.

protagonists. Rather than precipitating social collapse, the disruption of spatial order reaffirms the female protagonists' jeopardized moral and social statuses.

The Judicial Temple

Temples not only supplement or extend *nei* space, but also offer an alternative judicial system for women. In many literary narratives, women turn to temples to tackle stubborn domestic conflicts. As Yenna Wu writes, "the Confucian ideal was 'harmony within hierarchy,' […] when the patriarchal system did not function well, domestic problems surfaced."[77] Women's sequestration at home could lead to familial discord and vicious power struggles. Women were known to clash frequently with husbands, co-wives, in-laws, and other (female) relatives. When virilocal marriage dropped young women into a strange new family, they often felt themselves to be outsiders, late-comers, and subordinates, while the women whose family these newcomers entered often felt threatened and intruded upon. As a result, as Bray observes, "Wives were commonly represented, in Confucian moral works as well as in popular proverbs, as gossiping troublemakers eager to stir up strife."[78] Shrewish wives and henpecked husbands are common tropes in literary texts at the time.[79]

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[77] Yenna Wu, *The Chinese Virago: A Literary Theme*. Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1995, pp. 20-24.

[78] Bray, *Technology and Gender*, p. 129.

[79] See Yenna Wu, *Chinese Virago,* and Keith McMahon, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists: Sexuality and Male-Female Relations in Eighteenth-century Chinese Fiction*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995.

Jealousy and women's gossip (*koushe* 口舌) were both prime targets for Confucian apologists. The revered Ban Chao 班超, in her guidebook on women's virtue, warns, "There are three thousand offenses subject to the five punishments, but of these the most serious is jealousy. It is the first among the seven grounds for divorce 五刑之屬三千，而罪莫大於妒忌，故七出之狀標其首焉."[80] For his part, the Southern Song moralist Yuan Cai 袁采 (fl.1140-95) attributes family tensions to women's occupation of domestic space: "Many cases of family discord begin because a woman, by what she says, incites animosity between her husband and other family members of his generation."[81] Although he condemns this behavior, Yuan Cai acknowledges that women's vitriolic jealousy and gossiping are caused by intrinsic problems with virilocal marriage. Keith McMahon in his examination of the polygamous relations in late imperial Chinese novels also asserts that polygamy exacerbated women's jealousy.[82]

Although discord amongst wives was understood to be unpleasant, it also seemed to be inevitable, and the state offered no clear mechanism for dealing with it. Public judgment and juridical regulations did not extend to a family's inner quarters. As Bray observes, "[M]en and women controlled different domains, into which the other should not intrude."[83] Gender segregation deprived women of mobility and freedom to act in the public sphere, but it also

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[80] See Ebrey, Patricia, trans. "The Book of Filial Piety for Women," in *Under Confucian Eyes: Writings on Gender in Chinese History*, ed. Susan Mann, Yu-yin Cheng. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, p. 59.

[81] Bray, *Technology and Gender,* p. 128.

[82] Keith McMahon, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists*, 1995.

[83] Bray, *Technology and Gender,* p. 128.

shielded them from state regulations and penalties. The Chinese scholar Mao Liping discusses the preferential treatment (lowly) women received from local officials when they became embroiled in lawsuits. According to Mao, Qing state laws were not strictly enforced for women.[84] Yen-na Wu adds that women's legal status, subordinate to men's, "could exempt them from assuming the full responsibility for violating the law."[85] If Confucian discourse offers any conspicuous benefit to women, it might be women's easy exoneration from (harsh) legal punishments. The legal double standard is evident in a legal case involving an illicit Xiangshan 香山 cult. Under the Qianlong Reign (1736-1796), two Manchu women of noble pedigree were accused as frequenting an illicit temple (淫祠) and donating a fortune to the temple's crooked nun. The donation turned out to be comprised of embezzled official funds (managed by their husbands). The scandal immediately provoked a public outcry and attracted the attention of the Emperor himself. The nun and her sons were executed, and the husbands of the two women, who were state officials, were severely punished and banished. The two laywomen, however, emerged from the trial more or less unscathed—they were merely sentenced to be grounded at home under the supervision of clan seniors.[86]

If women's prescribed absence in the public could protect them from the harsh public legal penalty, their occupancy of the private sphere could similarly resist the penetration of the public

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[84] Mao Liping, "The wives are stupid and ignorant: Magistrates and lowly women in the trial of civil cases during the Jia Jing and Dao Guang reigns '婦愚無知': 嘉道時期民事案件審理中的縣官與下層婦女." *The Qing History Journal* 清史研究, 3 (2012): 100-110.

[85] Yenna Wu, *The Chinese Virago*, p. 25

[86] He Suhua, "Officials and Women in Early Qing."

regulation into the *nei*. The domestic space, as the unique domain of women, was an unlegislated zone where official pronouncements and state laws were more than often reduced to empty threats as evinced in the old Chinese saying, "Even a good judge will find himself worthless in hearing a case of domestic disputes 清官難斷家務事." This inevitably left women's interpersonal disputes and discord unresolved, as there was no clear authority to render final judgment. Temples and deities thus presented an alternative judicial process through which difficult private matters could be settled. An anecdote recorded by a Ming scholar Yu Shenxing 于慎行 (1545-1608) showcases this mechanism:

> There is a woman in a commoner's household who extends no ritual courtesy to her mother-in-law. One day, she and her mother-in-law are about to pray in a temple. The mother-in-law requests a headscarf to cover her head, but the woman dismisses the request. The son then grabs a hood himself and hands it to his mother. However, the wife immediately rips the scarf back off. The elder woman has no choice but to go with her daughter-in-law to the temple [with her head uncovered]. Just before they finish worshipping the deity, the wife suddenly disappears and cannot be found. The next day, the mother-in-law inquires after her daughter-in-law and searches everywhere, but she finds no leads on the wife's whereabouts. When the elder woman leaves the temple, and arrives at a hill just outside of the town, she finally finds her daughter-in-law. To her astonishment, the woman has been turned into a donkey; only her face and breasts remain unchanged.
>
> 有民家子婦，事其姑無禮。一日，姑與之入廟祠禱，求一冒絮包頭，婦不肯予。其子自探一巾與母，婦取而裂之。姑不得已，與同入廟，叩神未已，忽失婦所

在，覓之不見。明日，遍走求，竟無蹤跡。已而，至城外一小山上，其婦在焉，竟化為一驢，惟留一面兩乳.[87]

Even those conflicts that baffle "the good judge" find resolution in the temple. The wife is punished for her disrespect by a supernatural power that whimsically transforms her body into a shape that matches her animalistic behavior. This mysterious intervention into a domestic struggle between two women exemplifies how religious space supplements the judicial apparatus, which did not quite apply to women in the domestic sphere. In the story, the shameful wife receives punishment in the *wai* sphere—in a temple and on a hill—for acts she committed in the *nei* sphere. The temple not only led the woman outside of her home but also reshaped her body into that of a beast.

In the story, supernatural justice is manifested by and inflicted on the female body. The punishment is made more intimate and compelling because the woman's face and breasts remain unchanged even in her changed state. If the breasts signal the semi-donkey's low status (as a female), the face keeps the woman's human sensations intact. The commingling of human and bestial qualities highlightthe woman's inhumanity without allowing her to escape altogether into the realm of the animal. Her human features sustain the humiliation of her animalized body, while her beastly body deprives the woman of her personhood. We can read the sorry woman-donkey's liminality as akin to the liminality of the temple; the temple challenges the boundary

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[87] Yu Shenxing 于慎行, "Nifu bian lü 逆婦變驢 (The Unfilial Wife Transforming into a Donkey)," in a bound edition of Wangqi 王錡, *Yupuan zaiji* 寓圃雜記 (Desultory Notes of the Yu Garden) & Yu Shenxing, *Gushan bizhu* 穀山筆麈 (Desultory Notes of Master Gushan), Beijing: Zhonghuashuju, 1984, vol. 15, p. 177.

between supernatural and mundane, between human and animal. This instability, however, inevitably reaffirms the Confucian moral order.[88] When the *wai* sphere proves incapable of intervening in *nei* affairs and conflicts, the monastic space, as an alternative "thirdspace," substitutes or compensates for *wai* legal institutions.

Far from instilling heterodox doctrines, the temple in these stories serves as a supernatural court in which impieties are brought to trial and subjected to supernatural penalties in accordance with Confucian tenets. Carefully considering the local temples and legends of the Shangdang region of the Shanxi province, Chinese scholar Zhu Wenguang argues that one of the fundamental functions of the scattered local temples is to promote Confucian moral principles.[89] The supernatural religious apparatus presupposes the existence of an impersonal and universal law of karma. This karmic system typically collaborates with and even draws from the Confucian moral code as it metes out ultimate punishments and rewards.[90] What's more, it has

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[88] For more stories on the theme of unfilial wife's metamorphoses, see Li Daohe 李道和, "A research on the stories about unfilial wives' transformation into animals 逆媳變物故事研究," *Wenxue xin yao* 文學新鑰 (A New kernel to Literatue), 23 (2016): 113-202.

[89] For temples' moralizing dimension, see Zhu Wenguang 朱文廣, *Miaoyu yishi quanti: shangdang minjian Xinyang yanjiu* 廟宇·儀式·群體:上黨民間信仰研究(Temple, Ritual, Community: Studies on the Local Religions in Shangdang), Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2015, pp. 31-6.

[90] A local folk story of Shangdang 上黨 tells how a local temple became a judicial site where a shrewish woman was beheaded by the dragon deity from a numinous local temple, see Zhu Wenguang, p. 32.

none of the limitations of a Confucian system; it is free from *nei-wai* spatial divisions and gender distinctions, and applies equitably to all, wherever one might reside.

The temple also offers alternative arbitration for discontent wives. An example of this temple function can be found in *Honglou meng,* in a scene in which Matriarch Jia tells a joke about nine sisters-in-law: in a certain family, there were ten sons who married ten wives. The tenth of these wives was so incisive, quick of mind, and sharp of tongue that her father—and mother-in-law loved her best of all, and they groused from morning to night about how the other nine were not filial. These nine were vexed, and they decided to go to the temple of Yama to air their grievances. They intended to ask the King of Hell how it was that, when he bade them receive life and become human beings, he only conferred a sharp tongue on the young shrew, while he allotted them unpleasant and bland mouths. In the end, it was revealed that the youngest wife accidentally drank the Monkey King's urine when she was about to be born.[91]
Though in the context of the novel this story was likely told in order to tease Wang Xifeng, a sharp-tongue young character in the book, it does convey the idea that temples were important outlets for frustrated woman to vent their complaints. The monastic space, with its supernatural laws and indifference to the natural and social order, heals painfu intra-familial wounds by reframing them in karmic terms. When endless friction, quarreling, and competition ate away at a family's resources, temples allowed women the opportunity to communicate privately with the deities and make sense of their woes without airing their dirty laundry in the *wai* sphere. Temples calmed the tempestuous waters of the *nei* by stepping in for the regulatory power of the *wai*.

[91] *HLM*, chapter 54, pp. 597-8.

In the process of serving as private courts and supernatural enforcers, temples could procure publicity and legitimacy for the cults they represented. The famous Qing scholar Yu Yue records an anecdote concerning the illicit temple of Tan Xiangu:

> Illicit cults abound in the mountainous regions and waterfronts of Jiang Su and Zhe Jiang […] It is said that only in the temple of Tan Xiangu is no wrongdoer allowed to step inside. Violators are immediately punished by divine powers. Once, there were three wives who went to the temple to worship. On their way back, they passed by a toilet, and immediately a wind kicked up and splashed filthy feces everywhere. The wife walking in the middle found her clothes and robes soaked, while the other two wives, although they were standing near to her, were not the least bit stained. All considered this extremely strange until it was discovered that the woman in the middle had been shrewish and domineering all along. On the subject of Tan Xiangu—it appears she never fails to be wise and righteous; perhaps we should not dismiss her cult and temple as illicit.
>
> 江浙間山椒水濱多淫祀，… 惟聞譚仙姑之廟，凡素行不修者，皆不得入，入必為神所譴。有三婦人入廟瞻禮，歸經路廁，旋風忽起，糞穢激射。中間一婦人衣裙皆汙，而前後兩婦相去咫尺，略不濡。群以為異，後知此婦素悍也。然則如譚仙姑者，尚不失聰明正直之義，或未可以淫祀例之與？[92]

Improper and immoral women could not enter the temple lest immediate punishment befall them. The temple's constant distribution of reward and punishment not only deterred morally dubious

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[92] Yu Yue 俞樾, *Youtai xianguan biji* 右台仙館筆記 (Anecdotes of Youtai Fairy Lodge), vol.15, Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2004, p. 308.

women from tainting its reputation, but also won the cult recognition from a scholar-official whose natural tendency would be to stand with the state in condemning heterodoxy. Yu Yue's hesitance to dismiss the temple as illicit suggests the power struggle between the state and the gentry scholars.[93] This anecdote about divine punishment ends in a more classically political negotiation of power: the scholar is wresting authority from the state in questioning the state's judgment of the legitimacy of a local temple. Yu Yue's suggestion that Confucian moralists might legitimize the historically illicit shrine *yin ci* 淫祠 aptly demonstrates what Kenneth Pomeranz has called the "breathing space" between Neo-Confucian designations of orthodoxy 正 and heterodoxy (*xie* 邪).[94] The temple acts as a thirdspace that allows religious cults and deities of low or no status in orthodox cosmology to work as tolerable "auxiliaries to the existing order."[95] As a thirdspace, the temple Yu Yue writes about not only serves as a moral court but also as an arena in which sociocultural power is negotiated and renegotiated—the privileged and the marginalized, the state and the scholars all use the temple apparatus to work out their position in the social hierarchy.[96]

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[93] For gentry scholars' both rebellious and compliant relationship with the state, See Qitao Guo, *Ritual Opera and Mercantile Lineage*, 2005; and Liangyan Ge, *The Scholar and the State: Fiction as Political Discourse in Late Imperial China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015.

[94] Pomeranz, "Power, Gender, and Pluralism," p. 184.

[95] Ibid., p. 204.

[96] For the state canonization of local illicit deities and temples, see Valerie Hansen, *Changing Gods in Medieval China, 1127-1276,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016. For the power

The Transitional Temple

The final function of temples I will explore in this chapter is their ability to heal the body. Temples offered therapy not only for domestic discord and social upheaval, but also for women's physical forms. It was not uncommon in late imperial China for parents to send their enfeebled daughters to the convent in hopes of improving their failing health. It was believed that the Buddha would protect fragile or luckless girls if they devoted themselves to religion and grew up in the spiritual atmosphere of the monastery. The character Miaoyu 妙玉 in *Honglou meng* became nuns for this reason at a young age (without getting tonsured).[97] In the famous Ming opera excerpt "Sifan—Longing for the worldly pleasure 思凡," the beautiful nun Sekong 色空 complains of being "abandoned" at the nunnery by her parents, a couple of lay Buddhists.[98] The legendary Ming female poet Feng Xiaoqing nearly met a similar fate when she was ten years old, but her mother declined an old nun's request to initiate Xiaoqing into her order.[99] Although temples offered physical and spiritual salvation to fragile young girls, they also interrupted their march toward procreative adulthood. Seclusion in the nunnery might cure a girl's disease, but it

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struggling between the state and scholars, see Ge Liangyan, *The State and the Scholar*.

[97] In fact, there is also a monk who tried to take Daiyu, the female protagonist who has been sickly all along, into the Buddhist "empty gate." See *HLM,* p. 27.

[98] *Nei hai ji* 孽海記 (Romance of the Evil Sea), Harvard Library, Chinese Rare Books Collections.

[99] Zhang Dai, "Xiaoqing *foshe* 小青佛舍 (The Buddhist Hut of Xiaoqing)," in *Xihu mengxun* 西湖夢尋, pp. 183.

would also thwart her ability to fulfill the obligations of marriage and reproduction. In any case, young girls in temples were never immune to prying suspicions and spiteful speculations about their sexual virtue.

A story written by Ling Mengchu 凌蒙初 (1580-1644), "Wenren Engaged in Illicit Trysts in the Green Duckweed Nunnery / Nun Jingguan Appeared in Splendor at Sand Street 聞人生野戰翠浮庵 靜觀尼晝錦黃沙巷,"[100] presents a young girl whose mother leaves her in a convent so as to improve the girl's poor health. The story is unusual in that the erstwhile nun finds herself happily married to an ideal husband by the end of the tale. The story offers two parallel bildungsroman plots. First, it features a budding sixteen-year-old scholar as he passes through sexual and spatial impurity before finally affirming his manhood and establishing his patriarchal authority through marriage and examination degrees. Second, it tells the story of a young girl discarded into and then ejected from a convent before being re-assimilated into the Confucian family order through marriage. The protagonists' migration from one setting to another corresponds to their evolution as Confucian adults; the young man evolves from a hedonistic, undisciplined student into a masculine official-patriarch, while the young woman develops from a marginalized, gender-unstable nun into an honorable Confucian wife. The two narrative arcs meet in the same liminal space: the temple.

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[100] See Ling Mengchu, *Chuke paian jingqi* 初刻拍案驚奇 (Slapping the table in Amazement), Chapter 34, Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 1994, pp.400-416. English translation is from *In the Inner Quarters: Erotic Stories from Ling Mengchu's Two Slaps*, trans by Lenny Hu in collaboration with R.W.L. Guisson, Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2003, pp. 157-90.

The protagonists of the story are a young man named Wenren 聞人 and a pretty girl of the same age from the Yang family. Wenren is introduced to the reader as a young student whose manhood and identity are ambiguous: "As a sixteen-year-old, he […] lived with his forty-year-old mother and had yet to marry due to his strained family circumstances."[101] Neither a promising patriarchal line nor a marriage proposal ensure his identity as a respectable and mature man. For her part, the girl grows up in a nunnery, as her mother took an abbess' advice to send the young ailing girl to the nunnery for tonsure when she was twelve. Like the young student, the Yang girl has no father. The story is set in a world dominated by elder women until Wenren takes on the role of patriarch and scholar by marrying the girl and passing his civil examinations.

The story begins with Wenren touring the nunnery with his friend. Of course, the Yang daughter—who has now acquired the religious name of Jingguan—is leading her life as a nun there. It so happens that on the very day Wenren visits the nunnery Jingguan is out for a stroll and gets an eyeful of the handsome student. Needless to say, she falls in love with Wenren at first sight. Upon his departure, Jingguan is dejected, saying, "If I could just make his acquaintance and marry him, I am sure we would live a happy life. What a mistake I have made in taking the holy orders!"[102] The temple becomes a prison in Jingguan's eyes, as it prevents her from pursuing love and a worldly life.

After several months, Jingguan, who disguises herself as a monk for the purposes of public travel, happens to ride in the same boat as Wenren, who is sojourning to his aunt's household to

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[101] His age should be 16 years old while the translation was 17. I changed it back to 16 here. Lenny Hu, *In the Inner Quarters,* p. 167.

[102] Lenny Hu, *In the Inner Quarters*, p. 169.

prepare for his civil examinations. Once Jingguan recognizes Wenren, she reveals her true identity, and they spend the night together on the boat, pledging to marry in secret. The next day, Wenren is anxious to elope with his fiancée, but Jingguan persuades him to lodge in her convent for a while so as to give the matter thorough thought; she is also concerned that the abbess might report her disappearance to the local court. Wenren follows Jingguan to her nunnery. There, the abbess and two other young nuns seduce Wenren, and they all indulge in intemperate amorous delights. Interestingly, it is the young man, not the pretty young girl, who is seduced and deflowered in the temple.

The convent here serves two dissimilar purposes: it serves both as a stereotypical bastion of illicit sex (to Wenren and the licentious nuns) and as a transitional site in which a young girl can re-imagine and reconfigure her life (to Jingguan). While the other nuns conform to the licentious cliché put forth in all kinds of literary texts, Jingguan chooses not to have sex with Wenren in the temple. She remains pure, aloof, as she pines for secular life with Wenren. Ironically, the committed nuns show themselves to be degenerates, while Jingguan, who longs for a secular life, abstains from worldly pleasures.

One day, the abbess and her two disciples need to leave the convent for three days. Jingguan and Wenren decide to seize the opportunity to elope together. Because his examinations are imminent, Wenren entrusts Jingguan to his aunt (whom he previously planned to lodge with while he studied) while he is away for the exams. A middle-aged widow of an official, Wenren's aunt is a devout lay Buddhist who has built an indoor nunnery in her home. Jingguan finds the aunt's home a perfect place to wait for Wenren to return from the capital city and to let her hair grow back.

Here we see the two lovers' parallel rites of passage. The monastic settings in the story accommodate and facilitate the two teenagers' key decisions at the threshold of adulthood. Arnold van Gennep defines *rites de passage* as the rites that accompany an individual's transition between two life stages.[103] He divides the rite of passage into pre-liminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (transition rites), and post-liminal rites (rites of incorporation). Jingguan and Wenren's transgressive behaviors and adventures belong to the category of liminal rites, and the temple enables the protagonists' transformation. Both Jingguan's and Wenren's respective genders are symbolically reversed in the temple. Jingguan dresses up as a monk and coaxes a young man to enter the monastery, where he is seduced by licentious nuns—a perfect inversion of the clichéd plot in which monks seduce a hapless woman. While Jingguan literally cross-dresses, Wenren is symbolically feminized as he is analogized to the naïve young girls who frequent stereotypical morality tales. Moreover, it is a group of lustful nuns rather than a group of monks whose illicit tastes corrupt the young Wenren. The blurring of gender identities anticipates and activates the liminal stage of both protagonists' rites of passage. Wenren's process features spatial migration; he detaches from his Confucian family, voyages towards his aunt's house, re-routes, and ends up in a rural temple, where he encounters the archetypical "alien woman," who in Wenren's case is played by lecherous nuns.[104] Meanwhile, Jingguan

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[103] Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage.* Trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960, pp. 2-3.

[104] Here I borrowed Allan Barr's phrasing of "Alien Women" as marginalized, dangerous, voluptuous women who were out of the normative social order. For a discussion of the alien women in *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋誌異 (Stange Stories from a Chinese Stuido of Liao), see Allan

decides to escape from the extra-familial nunnery to a sort of domestic convent within a Confucian family.

The Confucian family is the center of the established social order, and thus Wenren's physical distance from his home and decision not to station himself at his aunt's residence as planned constitute a deviation from the orthodox social center.[105] Jingguan, for her part, abandons the marginal, heterodox monastery in favor of returning to the Confucian family order. The temple is responsible for caging the girl and entrapping the boy, and yet it also allows the two young people's complex trajectories to converge.

Temporary disorder in the liminal rite is necessary in order to reestablish order in the postliminal rites, or rites of incorporation. Jingguan's growing hair and general changes in appearance function as metonyms for her recovering Confucian identity and newfound position in secular society. The tonsure rite, in which a prospective devotee's hair is shorn, holds great significance for Buddhists. The bald head distinguishes the sangha from secular creatures; the hairstyle externalizes the devotee's spiritual and mental separation from worldly life. In Aunt

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Barr, "Disarming Intruders: Alien Women in *Liaozhai zhiyi*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 49, No.2 (1989): 501-17.

[105] The aspirants' examination-related travel, which always featured a young scholars' encountering with a femme fatale or remarkable woman, appears in many *chuanqi* stories, such as "Li Wa zhuan 李娃傳," "Renshi zhuan 任氏傳," and so forth. It is arguable that they provide the primal model for the later romantic tales. For English translation of the two stories and more cases of a similar motif, see Y. W. Ma and Joseph S. M., Lau, ed. *Traditional Chinese Stories: Themes and Variations.* Boston: Cheng & Tsui Company, 1986, pp. 163-171; 339-345.

Huang's private nunnery, Jingguan's hair grows longer and longer, symbolizing and denoting her decreased identification with Buddhism and increased identification with Confucianism. Jingguan's gradual feminization and assimilation into the mundane world dovetails with Wenren's growing authority. Before the elopement, Jingguan enjoys complete autonomy, even on an outdoor trip; after she sleeps with Wenren, however, she begins to follow Wenren's lead. Moreover, as Jingguan's hair grows longer, Wenren's degree (as conferred by state exams) becomes more and more authoritative. Both protagonists grow increasingly qualified to claim a position in the Confucian order. The gendered difference in this evolution is noteworthy: a women's social evolution is signified by her corporeal transformation, while a man's is marked by his degree and cultural achievements. The two temples—the convent and the aunt's semi-public monastic space—are liminal sites in which a nun integrates herself into a new family and Wenren grows into his manhood as a husband and official.

The (fictional) story runs parallel to the (actual) anecdote of Chen Miaochang 陳妙常, a renowned nun in the Southern Song.[106] Chen Miaochang was forced into the nunnery when she was young due to political turmoil (or, as another history would tell it, because of her poor health). In the temple, she comes across a talented young scholar, Pan Fazheng 潘法正, whose aunt is the temple abbess. Over the course of his visit, Pan has a sexual liaison with Miaochang and later marries her after procuring a high degree. The story of Wenren and Jingguan alludes to

[106] See Zhang Zongsu 張宗橚, *Cilin jishi* 詞林紀事 (The Chronicle of Lyric Forest), Chengdu: Chengdu guji shudian, 1982, vol 19, pp. 518-9. It included the anecdote of Chen Miaochang. Chen Miaochang and Pan Fazheng's romance was later adapted into famous dramas such as Gao Lian 高濂's *The Story of a Jade Hairpin* 玉簪記.

the legend of Chen Miaochang; Aunt Huang tells Wenren, perhaps jokingly, "You have found yourself a Chen Miaochang 你寻着了个陈妙常."[107] Chen Miaochang's illicit affair and self-determined marriage, like Jingguan and Wenren's, goes against the grain of Confucian norms; as one Confucian source explains, "A man does not act on his own to procure a wife; a woman does not act on her own to marry a husband. [Marriages] must be arranged by parents and facilitated by go-betweens 男不自專娶，女不自專嫁, 必由父母，須用媒妁."[108] Obviously, Jingguan and Wenren acted independently in choosing their mates. However, Wenren and Jingguan are different from Chen Miaochang and Pan insofar as they deployed a fluid monastic continuity (from outdoor convent, to domestic temple, to Confucian family) to legitimize their disregard for parental authority in marriage-arrangement. The monastic spaces in the story become more domestic as the plot proceeds; Jingguan moves from serving as a nun in a public rural convent to inhabiting Aunt Huang's private shrine. Capitalizing on the momentum of this transition, Jingguan the nun effectively slides her way into Wenren's family as a new wife, fully entering the private sphere.

The monastic spaces in the story both support the cliché of the nunnery as a diabolic house of sin and also complicate that cliché. These spaces seem to exist on a continuum that gradually

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[107] Lenny Hu, *In the Inner Quarters*, p. 177.

[108] "Rather than awaiting the bidding of parents and the brokering of a matchmaker, drilling a hole to look at each other and jumping over the wall to associate with each other will cause one to be despised by family and countrymen 不待父母之命， 媒妁之言，鑽穴隙相窺， 逾牆相從，則父母國人皆賤之." S-C Kevin Tsai, "Ritual and Gender in the 'Tale of Li Wa.'" *Chinese Literature Essays, Articles, Reviews,* 26 (2004): 99-127, 108.

reintroduces the woman protagonist into a private Confucian household and launches the man protagonist's career as a state official. Not until Wenren is assigned a high official post and the wedding ceremony is completed does Jingguan return to her natal home. Her mother sighs, "If I had known that you would have a day like this, I would never have sent you to the nunnery 早知你有這一日，為甚把你送在庵裡去？" The daughter replies, "If you hadn't, how could I have become what I am today? 若不送在庵中，也不能勾有這一日"[109] Jingguan's remark self-reflexively affirms the temple's unique function in the story. Far from thwarting young girls' natural movement toward marriage and reproduction, the temple works as a transitional space in which personal inhibition unravels. The destabilizing space breaks down social anxieties, breeds amorous sentiments, and unleashes carnal desires, and the temple's isolation furnishes young girls with a way station in which they can reestablish their dignity and moral rectitude before migrating back to worldly Confucian life. Temples in this way both harbor illicit relationships and make them honest. Positioned between the spheres of *nei* and *wai*, the varied monastic spaces in this story reincorporate the young woman back into the *nei* and propel the young man up the social ladder and into the *wai*.

The story features one further point of interest for us. In a bawdy interlude, the story explains how a Serene Lady Yang 楊安人 happens to come across a pretty male acolyte in a temple she is visiting. The Serene Lady manages to smuggle this male monk into her household by dressing him as a nun. Once again, the heterotopic temple is a site for gender reversal as the Serene Lady transgresses both spatial and sexual boundaries. The disguised monk enters the supposed realm of purity, the inner quarters, and transforms them into a carnal nest; the male

[109] Lenny Hu, *In the Inner Quarters*, p. 187.

monk becomes a sexual pet, and the Serene Lady a lustful predator. The story confirms the power of the Serene Lady, who freely transports the monk and changes his appearance, gender, and identity at will. Meanwhile, in Aunt Huang's domestic convent, Jingguan undergoes the reverse transformation: her hair is growing longer, connoting her return home to procreative femininity. Aunt Huang's domestic temple parallels the Serene Lady's: both accommodate an illicit self-arranged marriage and facilitate a nun's abjuration of her religious oaths. The temples' liminality allows them to serve as sites for romance at one moment, carnal transgression at another, and finally, as sites for mediation—as transitional thresholds—between the divine and mundane, between private and public, between legitimacy and transgression.

Conclusion

The preconception that associates women's temple trip with sexual and heterodox deviation or reduces temples to a stagnant *tabula rasa* would thwart us from any attempt to fully explore the productive and dynamic image/role of temple in women's life. I argue that temples were not the diabolical, crisis-ridden antithesis to women's pure and peaceful boudoirs; nor did they serve as inert and homogenous containers or backdrops for people and events. The public outdoor temple drew women of diverse social and educational statuses out of their homes. It both disoriented and invigorated women with its possibility. Women visiting temples negotiated new social positions and navigated a host of tensions—between presence and absence, mobility and stasis, truth and falsehood, morality and sensuality, piety and sanctimony, abstraction and embodiment. As alternative social spaces for women, the temple constituted a dynamic, amorphous, and transformative thirdspace that exceeded and re-configured the *nei-wai* boundary through its active interactions with its female visitors.

The heterotopic space of the temple brought creatures of the private sphere into a public arena. Gendered spatial binaries were thereby forcefully complicated, disrupted, or collapsed—temples can be the compensation, extension, substitution, and mediation for both the inner quarters and the public sphere. Therefore, the monastic space was both public and private, and meanwhile neither public and private. It exists at the same time in-between and beyond the two supposed antagonistic realms of *nei* and *wai*, bestowing women a unique experience of the mutual codification, constitution, and reconciliation of Confucianism and Buddhism in spatial terms and in innovative manners.

Within the walls of the temple, Confucianism's monopoly on moral discourse was simultaneously challenged and confirmed. On the one hand, Buddhism and other entangled religious doctrines are unleashed to contest, suspend, circumvent, and even nullify Confucian gender restrictions; while on the other, the subversion, inversion, or suspension of the *nei-wai* spatial order in monastic spaces always led to an ultimate reaffirming or restoration of the Confucian gender and moral order. Therefore, by examining women's controversial but common participation in temple life, we can glimpse how Buddhism and other non-Confucian systems negotiated their status and domain among women who never can be considered as simply dismissed or strictly complied with orthodox Confucianism. The temple's subtle negotiations through women's religiosity allowed heterodox ideologies to survive an era dominated by increasingly hostile Neo-Confucianism.

Women not only visited outdoor temples but also created sacred spaces of their own in which they articulated their devotion to diverse divinities. While only women from well-to-do families could establish a private shrine in the *nei* sphere, many of their less privileged sisters did carve out diverse self-fashioned monastic spaces by constructing altars, hanging up portraits of

the Buddha, and writing about and embroidering religious subjects in their private quarters. A general representation of women's self-fashioned domestic sacred spaces will be the focus of Chapter Two.

Chapter Two　Establishing Domestic Temples

The early Qing scholar Lu Qi 陸圻 (1614-?) wrote a series of instructions concerning how to behave as a worthy new wife for his soon-to-be-married daughter (and potentially for other similarly situated women). Among other detailed notes, Lu offers advice on what the bride should do if her mother-in-law happens to be a lay Buddhist:

> As for those whose mother-in-law is devoted to the Buddha: if the mother-in-law is only practicing vegetarianism and reciting sutras at home, the bride is encouraged to join in and follow her mother-in-law's example. […] She should do this not only for the sake of obedience to her mother-in-law, but also because these practices are conducive to the young wife's own felicity. If the mother-in-law associates with nuns, however, the bride should keep respectfully aloof from them. She should not make prodigal donations nor interact frequently with the nuns. If the mother-in-law takes to offering incense at temples, the bride should use the pretext of illness to avoid joining her, and the bride would be more virtuous still if she occasionally remonstrated her elder [for going to temples].
>
> 凡為姑有佞佛者，如在家長齋誦經等，新婦俱宜遵信。… 非惟順姑，且亦惜福。倘姑喜尼眾往來者，新婦當敬而遠之，不可妄有施與，及多接譚。倘姑喜入寺燒香者，新婦託病不得隨行，或能幾諫，更為賢哲.[1]

[1] Lu Qi, "*Xinfu pu* 新婦譜 (Instructions for New Brides)," in *Biji xiaoshuo daguan* 筆記小說大觀 (Collection of *Biji* Fiction), vol. 5, section 6, pp. 3385-3406. Yiqun Zhou correctly points

The most striking point Lu Qi makes in this passage is that, if a mother-in-law is a lay Buddhist, her daughter-in-law should stay home when asked to accompany her elder to temple, violating the general precept of unconditional obedience to parents-in-law. A new wife's morality, in Lu's opinion, hinges on her adherence to the boundaries of the boudoir more than it does on her pious submission to her mother-in-law. Lu is concerned with the *nei-wai* (inside-outside) boundary. When filial obedience to in-laws comes into conflict with the gendered precepts of spatial seclusion, Lu insists, the latter must prevail. On the other hand, however, religious heterodoxy per se is not Lu's concern; Lu explicitly endorses the practice of Buddhism at home for elder and younger woman alike.

Lu Qi's conditional approval of women's Buddhist religious devotions is "rather typical" of the Confucian moralists in Late Imperial China.[2] The scarce written records of women's outdoor religious activities reflect the scholars' reluctance to allow women to practice Buddhism outside the home, while pious Buddhist laywomen who practiced religion at home nevertheless abound in the biographies, epitaphs, and other eulogistic writings of the late imperial period.[3] Ming-

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out that Lu Qi explicitly offers three different strategies for the young wife in accordance with the spatial positions of the mother-in-law's religious practice. See Yiqun Zhou, "The Hearth and the Temple," p. 109.

[2] Yiqun Zhou, "The Hearth and the Temple," p. 109.

[3] Man Xu, *Crossing the Gate*, 2016, p. 167. See also Jian Ruiyao 簡瑞瑤, *Mingdai funü fojiao xinyang yu shehui guifan* 明代婦女佛教信仰與社會規範 (Women's Buddhist Piety and Social Norms in the Ming Dynasty), Taibei: Daoxiang chubanshe, 2007, pp. 134-52. I will be discussing the model laywomen in elegiac writings in chapter 4.

Qing scholars seldom hesitated to endorse women who were devout lay Buddhists, so long as they confined their religiosity to the privacy of their homes. Indeed, ever since the Song through the Ming-Qing period, Confucian scholars noticed and acknowledged Buddhism's capacity in helping women achieve equanimity and pacifying domestic tensions, and thus its conspicuous contribution to the integrity of the Confucian order within the *nei* sphere.[4]

For example, a Ming scholar Gu Qiyuan 顧起元 (1565-1628) extols a Lady Fang (of Suitibility) 方宜人 that,

> Although she practiced religious devotion following the Buddhist injunctions, she has neither stepped into the monasteries, nor intimately associated with nuns and sorceress. [Her] heart and the doctrines work in coordination, which even tightened her preserving of bodily purity/moral integrity. That is why Lady Fang's conducts made her a role model [for other women].

[4] For the Song male scholars' perception of women's religiosity, see Bettine Birge, "Chu Hsi and Women's Education," in *Neo-Confucian Education: The Formative Stage*, edited by Theodore de Bary and John Chaffee, John Chaffee. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989, pp. 325–67. See also Patricia Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, pp.170-71. Man Xu, *Crossing the Gate*, pp. 166-67.

雖以持戒作佛事，而足未嘗履招提，跡未嘗親尼覕。心契其道，乃益密於周身之防，此宜人所以動而為女師也."[5]

It is noteworthy that Gu adopted a rhetorical concession with the pattern "Although….雖…而" while discussing Lady Fang's religiosity. Gu sounds more like defending rather than celebrating his female subject's Buddhist devotion. However, deflecting the negative tone through an apologetic twist, Gu emphasized on Fang's persistence of spatial seclusion in her religious practice. He explained that Lady Fang never set on an excursion to temples nor connected with religious priests, and her religious pursuit within the household could only be a wholesome booster to the Confucian moral and gender order. In this way, Gu highlights how Buddhist injunctions served as a back-up insurance to women's fixation in the *nei* sphere and further to the woman's moral integrity and exemplarity.

Among the many male scholars who recognized Buddhism and Confucianism as compatible within the household, some even went so far as to equate the efficacy of Confucian and Buddhist doctrines in cultivating women's morality. The Ming scholar Wang Heng 王衡 (1564-1607) eloquently defended a pious Buddhist laywoman against accusations that her interest in Buddhism and financial contributions to Buddhist temples were excessive and self-interested. In his writing dedicated to The Great Lady Li 李太安人 of the Wang family on the occasion of her birthday, Wang Heng reads Li's Buddhist efforts as a sagacious measure intended to help the

[5] Gu Qiyuan 顧起元, "Fang yiren zhuan 方宜人傳 (Biography of Lady Fang of Suitability)," in *Lanzhen caotang ji* 嬾真草堂集 (The Collected Writings from the Thatched Hut of Leisure and Purity), vol. 27, microfilm of the Ming edition.

Wangs express gratitude for their copious blessings and thereby to perpetuate the clan's good fortune. As he praises Li's Buddhist devotion, Wang points out the homologies between Buddhist and Confucian systems, arguing that they both reinforce feminine virtue and ensure familial harmony and order: "These are Buddhist precepts, but Confucian principles as well 夫此佛戒也，亦儒矩也."[6]

If Wang Heng argues that Lady Li's adherence to Buddhist precepts also makes her a fit model of Confucianism, the renowned early Qing scholar Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582-1664) argues the reverse with respect to another exemplar. Qian documents how a laywoman achieved Buddhahood by following Confucianism. In his epitaph for Lady Huang, The Child Nurturess 黃孺人, Qian describes how the Buddhist laywoman weaved her religion into every aspect of her life by following Confucian moral principles.[7] As a result, Lady Huang was believed to achieve

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[6] Wang Heng, "Shou wangmu litai'anren qishi xu 壽王母李太安人七十序 (An Eulogy to Wang's Mother The Great Lady Li for Her 70th Birthday)," *Collected Writings of Master Goushan* 緱山先生集, volume 8, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu* 四庫全書寸目叢書 (Collections of Books from the Complete Library in Four Sections of Treasuries), Jinan: Qilu shushe 齊魯書社, 1997, *Bieji* 別集, book 178, pp.718-9.

[7] Lady Huang abstained from meat for six years in mourning for her deceased mother, who died when Lady Huang was only six; she performed *gegu* 割股 (sliced off a piece of her thigh to use as medicine) and swore to be a vegetarian for the rest of her life in hopes of curing her sick husband; she knelt and prayed to the Buddha every night that her son would befriend decent people; she used her knowledge of Buddhist philosophy to console her politically frustrated

Buddhahood upon passing away in a solemn and Buddha-like manner. Qian thus comments, "As her exemplary ways demonstrate, the [Confucian] tenets of womanhood are the same as the Buddhist tenets; the [Confucian] teachings concerning women are also Buddhist teachings. […] None of the [Buddhist and Confucian] doctrines contradict the ultimate truth 繇張母之道，女律即佛律也，女教即佛教也, …一切教相皆與實相不相違背."[8] Qian sees no important differences between the two ideologies as they apply to women's morality and self-discipline in the *nei* sphere. Both Wang Heng and Qian Qianyi agree that the two frameworks overlap so neatly in their regulations concerning the household that they are identical in their shaping of women's morality and gender performance.

However, a direct counterexample can be found in the literary narrative—a story authored by Ling Mengchu 凌蒙初 (1580-1644), "Wenren Engaged in Illicit Sexual Behavior at the Green Duckweed Nunnery / Nun Jingguan Appeared in Splendor at Sand Street 闻人生野战翠浮庵 静观尼昼锦黄沙巷" which I have carefully analyzed in the previous chapter.[9] An

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father and bereaved mother-in-law (whose son had died); and she disciplined the other household wives and younger generations using Buddhist austerity and wisdom. In Qian Qianyi 錢謙益, "Zhangmu Huang ruren muzhiming 張母黃孺人墓誌銘 (The Epitaph for Zhang's Mother Lady Huang, The Child Nurturess)," in *Muzhai chuxue ji* 牧齋初學集 (Collected Writings of Elementary Learning by Mr. Muzhai), vol. 59. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1983, pp.1441-4.

[8] Ibid.

[9] English translation is from "The Envelope of a nun," in Lenny Hu trans., *In the Inner*

interlude in the text describes a certain Lady 安人 who comes across a handsome acolyte in a temple where she is offering incense. In order to maintain her reputation while satisfying her sexual appetite, she disguises the young monk as a nun and smuggles him and an old abbess into her private, in-home convent. As the Serene Lady explains to the licentious old nun, "With your assistance, I will be able to revel in pleasure, and even Heaven won't know the truth. […] I may even request that you share my bedchamber [along with the lad] lest people become suspicious."[10] The three live happily ever after as a *ménage a trois* until the young man is so drained of vitality by the "two middle-aged bawds" that he perishes. As scandalous as her behavior may be, the Serene Lady faces no dire consequences for her moral lapse, nor is the scandal ever brought to light; she merely passes away out of grief for her young lover.

The Serene Lady's episode demonstrates the extremity of moral violation enabled by domestic religious apparati—the laywoman brazenly transforms a domestic convent intended for religious purification into a den of debauchery. The religious values of celibacy, suppression of desire, and spiritual seclusion are overrun by an extended orgy. Ironically, the domestic religious space that is supposed to be congruous with the secluded *nei* sphere conveniently enables the Serene Lady's obscene agenda and meanwhile protects her from public suspicion and judgment. Not only does religion embolden the wanton woman to surreptitiously transform her secluded inner quarters into a secret garden of sensuality, but it also allows her to claim masculine agency and authority in feminizing a monk and upending the gender hierarchy. The holy inner quarters become a carnal nest, the male monk becomes a sexual pet, and the Serene Lady becomes a

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Quarters, pp. 157-90.

[10] Ibid., p. 182.

lustful predator as she controls a man, freely changing his appearance and gender, and eventually killing him with her insatiable lust. In this way, the domestic monastic space and the seclusion it is supposed to provide, are manipulated by the woman to defy the moral prescription, reverse gender roles, and nullify the Confucian *nei-wai* boundary.

Admittedly, the serene lady's misconduct is a rare case. This chapter, however, in a similar light, aims to complicate the picture of domestic sacred spaces' role in women's lives as revealed in a wider scope of literary imaginations in late imperial China. In other words, this chapter aims to present a nuanced picture regarding lay women's experience in domestic religious spaces as revealed in various literary narratives in late imperial China. I will show that indoor religious spaces established by women are much more complicated and even contradictive to what the normative discourse has prescribed. Whereas the domestic sacred spaces colluded with Confucianism in secluding and subduing women, their apparent conduciveness to the familial order and closeness to women in turn has great potential to empower women in terms of negotiating and disrupting the gender and conjugal order as evinced in an overall examination of various literary representation and imagination.

Of course, not every woman could afford building a domestic convent or shrine like the serene lady, but many of them did have various Buddhist spaces within their households, be it a pure room, an informal or movable altar, or a portrait of Buddha's image hanging on the wall.[11] Temple here represents both a domestic homemade prayer room or altar, and an amorphous and

[11] Francesca Bray found a Qing illustration of a merchant's house in which there is a religious altar set up on the second floor where the female family members resided. See *Technology and Gender*, p. 134.

capacious religious realm set up by women in the domestic. These spaces constituted a chronotope; women would use them to enter a personalized subspace within the household so as to pray for personal desires, redemption, or enlightenment.

The thriving of lay Buddhism in late Ming fueled the domestication of religious practices. Especially the success of the "Pure Land" sect in late imperial China and its gradual conflation with other major sects, including Zen Buddhism, encouraged more and more women to create various domestic religious spaces. Before we dive into case studies, a brief introduction to the historical context is in order.

Pure Land and Lay Buddhism

According to Chün-Fang Yü, "post-Tang" Buddhism in China was marked by "an increasing emphasis on self-enlightenment through a practical methodology and a growing openness toward Confucianism and Taoism."[12] This less intellectual approach to enlightenment and its embrace of self-cultivation signaled the thriving of the lay Buddhist movement from the late Ming through the Qing period.[13] The eminent monk Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲袾宏 (1535-1615) was "the most influential figure" to promote and facilitate the formation of lay Buddhism at the time; he was "greatly distressed by what he considered to be the failure of Buddhism in his own time."[14] Reacting to the "decline" of Buddhism, Zhuhong promoted the practice of Chan Buddhism and Pure Land Buddhism and advocated for *nian-fo* 念佛 ("calling the Buddha's name") as an alternative to *chan* meditation as a way to pursue enlightenment. Through more

[12] Chün-Fang Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China*, p. 65.

[13] Ibid., p. 66.

[14] Ibid., p. 82.

accessible methods such as calling the Buddha's name, meditating on the Buddha's image, and reciting sutras,[15] Zhuhong insisted, ordinary people could be reborn into Western Paradise and achieve Buddhahood. All these requirements were not incompatible with Confucian tenets and relatively easy to meet.[16] Zhuhong's promotion of a less intellectual Buddhism, together with his eschewing of sectarian distinctions, made the hitherto esoteric religion more accessible and attractive to individuals with relatively lower levels of education and literacy. Therefore, ordinary people were more likely to become lay practitioners of Buddhism, as they were able to meet religious obligations while remaining at home and performing their typical social functions.

The diverse avenues of practicing lay Buddhism at home in turn facilitated the popularization of the "pure-land" sect, which attracted an unprecedented number of women. In a discussion of the feminized Guanyin and her impact on women's everyday lives in Ming-Qing China, Chün-Fang Yü distills two aspects of women's "domesticated religiosity." First, the home became a "physical arena" for women, especially adherents to Pure Land Buddhism, to conduct their religious activities. These activities included chanting the Buddha's name, chanting Buddhist sutras, worshiping *Guanyin*, practicing meditation, and maintaining a vegetarian diet.

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[15] Ibid., p. 45.

[16] Meanwhile, the Buddhist canonical text *Saṃyukta Āgama* (雜阿含經) clearly states that, in order to become a lay Buddhist, one need not perform complex rituals or observe the ten commandments 十戒 devised for monks and nuns. One need only observe five commandments, embrace Buddhist teachings wholeheartedly, and help others with compassion. Pan Guiming 潘桂明, *Zhongguo jushi fojiao shi* 中國居士佛教史 (The History of Chinese Lay Buddhists), Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2000, pp. 7-8.

Second, women reframed longstanding domestic obligations, such as practicing filial piety and chastity, as modes of pursuing enlightenment (as we see exemplified in Qian Qianyi's eulogy for Lady Huang).[17] Chün-Fang Yü's observation resonates with Dorothy Ko's analysis of what she calls "domestic religion," a system of religious practices "embedded in everyday life in the inner chambers and [were] integral to the women's worldviews and self-identities."[18] Women's inner quarters were no longer coded as exclusively Confucian terrain in which women cultivated their virtues and worshiped at the central ancestral altar; now the boudoir was also a convenient portal to the "pure land" that accommodated women's bodies and souls, life and death.[19]

As the Confucian domestic terrain was now pervaded by heterodox elements, women—residents of the *nei* sphere—became the primary constituents of the flourishing "domesticated religion." Lay Buddhism's flexibility, approachability, and compatibility with Confucian norms allowed women to create "pure lands" within the household, in turn enhancing the Buddhism's "seculerization." As Mark Halperin writes, "If according to prevailing conceptions of domesticity women were not to leave the home to live in a temple, then they would recreate the temple and its aura of purity and remoteness in their home."[20] Moreover, the socio-ideological

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[17] Chün-Fang Yü, *Kuan-yin*, pp. 336-338.

[18] Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of Inner Chambers*, p.198.

[19] It may have been because women had relatively little ritual role to play in a Confucian household that Buddhism became especially attractive, as it fulfilled a spiritual longing (if we deem Confucianism as a religion).

[20] Mark Halperin, "Domesticity and the Dharma: Portraits of Buddhist Laywomen in Sung China." *T'oung Pao* 92, No. 1/3 (2006): 50–100, 86.

focus on women's purity, chastity, and filial piety in late imperial China was bolstered by Buddhist practices and in particular by the worship of Guanyin bodhisattva. Women forewent luxuries and entertainments, chanted scriptures, lit incense, and abstained from meat, alcohol, and sex (especially when they were widowed); they essentially practiced the mild asceticism commonly found in nunneries, albeit less strictly and more idiosyncratically.

Therefore, orthodox Confucian discourse tended to tolerate women's domestic religiosity because it endorsed Buddhist doctrines of restraining desire and remaining aloof from the mundane world. Male authors emphasized how effective Buddhism and Confucianism were in collaborating to enhance women's self-discipline and moral integrity. The two ideologies worked together to allay women's sexual and material desires and to sever their attachments to the outside world. By devoting themselves to Buddhism, laywomen were essentially practicing the domesticity enjoined by Confucianism. The model woman of the era was thus typically a "household recluse" who lived a "monastic or semi-monastic life without leaving the household," in Halperin's words.[21] However, on the other side of this ideal picture, these recluses could also threaten to turn unruly and to subvert both the Confucian family and the gender order in a wider scope of literary imagination or narratives.

Boudoir? or Temple?

The Qing scholar Yu Yue 俞樾 (1821-1907) in his *Anecdotes of Youtai Fairy Lodge* 右台仙館筆記 records a unique Cantonese custom among young woman called *muqing* 慕清 (literarily means to esteem the pure).[22] It indicates the practice of unwed women to ritualistically

[21] Ibid., p. 84.

[22] It is also named *muqing* 墓清 (to observe purity by the grave). See Qiao Hongyu 喬紅玉,

marry with a dead man and thereby live in widowhood for her entire life. This custom is different from the practice of chaste maidens 贞女 whose fiancées happened to die between their betrothal and wedding dates.[23] For women who practiced *muqing*, they were not betrothed to the prospective husband before he died. That is to say, the woman specially chooses to enter a marriage without an living husband so that she was not subject to any marital obligation. In Yu Yue's account, a girl named Xu insists on practicing *muqing* as she was coming to the ripe age of marriage. Facing immediate opposition from her parents, she eloquently elaborates a threefold reason for her usual decision. 1) Given her sister's unhappy marriage, she doesn't want to risk doubling her parents' worry; 2) it is always her wish to join the Buddhist order to be a nun, but it will be a grave violation of Confucian principles; 3) Practicing *muqing* would allow her to have both ways as observing the Confucian principle and meanwhile adhering to her religious aspiration as being a lifelong virgin and devotee. She then achieves what she wishes and moved to her in-law's home living as a devout laywoman. Beside the basic daily formalities, all her job is to burn incense and sit in meditation every day. Interestingly, Xu herself, the devout Buddhist

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"Hungui hechu?: Mingqing zhushanjiao diqu nvzi 'zishu' yu 'buluojia' yanjiu 魂歸何處——明清珠三角地區女子'自梳' 與 '不落家' 研究 (Where are the Souls Going? — The Rethinking of 'Self-hairdressing Women' and 'Not Living in Husbands' Family' in Ming and Qing Dynasties in Lingnan)," *Tianjin shifan daxue xuebao* 天津師範大學學報 (社會科學版) (Journal of Tianjin Normal University—Social Science Section) 1 (2015): 25-30, 27.

[23] Weijing Lu did a thorough research on chaste maidens and male scholars' perception of this practice. See *True to Her Word*: *The Faithful Maiden Cult in Late Imperial China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008.

devotee admits her religious aspiration to stay in a lifelong celibacy would absolutely go against the Confucian grains. But this admission sounds more like a bargaining chip to elicit her parents' permission. She is in fact forcing her parents to choose for her the lesser between the two "devils"—being a nun or the *muqing* practice. She thus successfully eludes the unavoidable marriage by making a nominal marriage. Marrying to a dead man, she constructed a de facto monastic space in her in-law's home—she isolated herself from the opposite sex and the outside world, devoting only to Buddhist cultivations.

Xu's self-fashioned and autonomic monastic space even further influences the other female resident of the same household. Her sister in-law Chen makes a more striking case. Xu's unmarried sister in-law Chen admires her *muqing* life, so much so that she importunes her mother (i.e. Xu's mother in-law) to pull back a settled betrothal and rearrange a *muqing* marriage for her. Successfully becoming a *muqing* practitioner, the sister in-law, however, doesn't move to her in-law's; she stays at her natal home and keeps Xu's company till an old age.[24] Strikingly, the sister in-law "leaving home" by forever staying at home. The domestic space in Chen's family is transformed into a temple-like residence where the two women live a monastic celibate life; the boudoir meanwhile also denotes a gendered community for a same-sex companionship. Ironically, it turns out that Xu, virtually or not, "marries" her sister in-law with the absence of the two nominal husbands.

Moreover, both women constitute a considerable subjectivity in advancing of their agendas. When the envious sister in-law asks Xu how she could achieve practicing *muqing*, Xu replies, "this is only depending on my unflinching determination. 止憑此一念之堅耳." Moreover, as

[24] Yu Yue, *Youtai xianguan biji* 右台仙館筆記, pp. 4-5.

the sister in-law complains that she has been betrothed and thus is unlikely to practice *muqing*, Xu reaffirms their potential agency in deciding their own marriage, "As long as we haven't consummated the marriage and moved into their house, it is still up to us 未入其門，事猶在我也." Xu's words and the two women's efforts all demonstrate to what extend a woman's religious piety would stake her marriage arrangement and allow her a certain degree of autonomy in deciding her social and spiritual outlook. Moreover, this self-fashioned authority in navigating through the tension between Confucian marriage and Buddhist celibacy nevertheless lead them to the moral exemplarity. The two women both receive acclaim from their clan and community. Even Yu Yue, the author who deems the *muqing* practice as intolerable by Confucian principles (為禮法之所不許) at the beginning, wraps up this entry with a concessive comment, rendering the two women's conducts as the "propriety achieved in impropriety 非礼之礼." Ironically, the women autonomously ruled out the presence of a male spouse in the domestic sphere by virtue of, and for the sake of, religious commitment, which nonetheless wins them a social justification from both the public community and Confucian moralists.

The Qing scholar Li Yu 李漁 (1611-1680) records a similar yet more dramatic story in which three co-wives enjoy a same-sex companionship and shut the husband out of their self-fashioned domestic "temple." Different from the two *muqing* practitioners, the three women in Li Yu's story carve out a "pure land" to subvert their husband rather to cultivate themselves spiritually. The story "An Ugly Fellow Fears Beauty but Ends Up with a Dazzler anyway 醜郎君怕嬌偏得艷" and its *chuan-qi* dramatic adaption *Naihetian* 奈何天 ("What Can You Do?") both by Li Yu narrate how the three wives of a rich man Que Lihou 闕里候 escape their nuptial obligations by taking Buddhist vows and retiring to lives of seclusion in Que's study.

Transforming the man's study into a Buddhist prayer room, the three women live as nuns together and refuse conjugal relations with Que because of his dreadful ugliness and noxious body odor.[25]

In the ending part, the drama takes a shortcut of sorts by making Que palatable, transforming him into a handsome nobleman who draws the wives out of their pure room of their own volition. The family's happy reunion is typical of the genre of the *chuanqi* drama. The story has no such generic constraints, and thus envisions a different and more realistic outcome. To persuade the first two women to surrender their religious ideals, the third wife Wu establishes new procedures, approved by Que, to reduce the unpleasantness of the sexual encounters the

[25] Although the plot is similar in the short story and its theatrical adaption, there are some significant differences. The play depicts how Que's loyal servant wins him a reputation as philanthropist and adds a subplot concerning a state crisis that looms in the background of the comedy. Moreover, at the end of the *chuan-qi* drama, a divine power transforms Que into a handsome man, and the emperor ennobles him; the story includes no such supernatural elements and transformations. Perhaps most crucially, the fate of Miss Zou and Miss He (Que's first two wives) differ in the play and the story. In the play, the women declare their wish to return to their boudoirs; they cast aside their Buddhist robes almost as soon as they learn of the changes to Que's appearance and social status. In the story, by contrast, the third wife tricks Zou and He into emerging from the locked prayer room because she wants to avoid shouldering the odious burden of sharing Que's bed herself. See Li Yu 李漁, *Wushegnxi* 無聲戲 (Silent Operas), Beijing: Dazhong wenyi chubanshe, 2002, pp. 7-30; and *Liweng shizhong qu* 笠翁十種曲 (The Ten Operas by Liweng), the Kangxi edition (Qing dynasty).

wives must endure. Each of the wives' bedrooms is newly furnished with two beds on opposite sides of the room; these two bed are separated by a table in the middle of the room bearing an incense burner. Que is to visit each wife's bedroom no more than once every three nights. On those nights, he is to share the women's beds only so long as coitus requires, and is to spend the remainder of the night in the auxiliary bed. He buys plenty of incense and allows the wives to burn as much as they like to mask his odor. Soon, each of the wives gives birth to a healthy child. Since none of the wives crave Que's affection, the household is free of jealousy and discord. Their distaste for sex with Que also means that Que is not tempted to waste his vitality, and he lives to the ripe old age of eighty in good health.

Eric Henry maintains that the story is "concerned with attacking the philosophy of disobedience encouraged by romantic plays and with discouraging young women from entertaining unrealistic dreams."[26] Henry is right to read the story as didactic, and to point out that Li Yu, to some modern-day readers' disappointment, was far from a "prophet of liberalism." The three brides' bold rebellion must not be read as an endorsement on Li's part of women's independence and free will. However, I would like to underscore the point that the story's domestic monastic space emboldens and enables the three brides to (at least appear to) rebel against a husband's authority. Religion lends private feminine spaces a solemnity that men, too, recognized; Que cannot take violent measures against his wives' revolt because it transpires in a nominally religious context. Here it is noteworthy that the pure room is remolded from the man's

[26] Eric Henry, *Chinese Amusement*: *The Lively Plays of Li Yu*, Hamden: Archon Book, 1980, pp. 142-43.

"study" 書房 which denotes a nebulous status as neither quite "inside" nor quite "outside", but definitely conventionally a man's space.

It was convenient for the women to manipulate religion in this masculine space in order to negotiate their marital relationships and gendered power relations. Once the women enter the religious domain of the study-turned pure room, Que dares not even cross the room's threshold, much less consider forcing the women out through physical means. In a farcical scene, the first wife hides herself in the pure room, and the ugly husband Que, bereft of all recourse, is left "alternately groveling and blustering, kneeling outside the study in which his wife has locked herself."[27] There is nothing much the emasculated Que can do; by locking themselves in the Buddhist space, the women unburden themselves of marital and Confucian obligations. The domestic monastic space endows women with the temporary power to escape the inner sphere of the household and to suspend their sexual and ritual conjugality. This prayer room serves as an exclusive space for the three women, who are physically located in the *nei* sphere and yet symbolically freed of it in their rejection of wifely roles and expectations. The women are both at and away from home. In the words of the first wife, Zou, the women endeavor "to be one who leaves home while staying at home 做個在家出家." The paradox captures how the domestic monastic space not only insulates the women from the *wai*, but also fortifies them from the *nei*.

Freeing women from the *nei-wai* binary, the self-fashioned domestic "temple" carved out a women-only space in which the laywomen could not only reject their sexual obligations and their husband's authority, but could also redesign their boudoirs' layout and their husband's conjugal practices. The spatial rearrangement of the inner quarters and the conscious redesign of the

[27] Patrick Hanan, *The Invention of Li Yu*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988, p. 157.

family's sex practices signify a redefinition of family order itself. As if to reaffirm the autonomy and subjectivity bestowed on women by monastic space, at the story's conclusion the narrator urges all ugly and clumsy husbands to hold their wives in high esteem, as if they were bodhisattvas 就要當做菩薩一般燒香供養.[28] Li Yu imagines the household in its entirety as a "temple" in which the conjugal hierarchy is reconceived, and husband and wife are likened to a male worshipper and a goddess respectively. In the domestic sphere, at least, the wife is consecrated and held above her husband in ritual status.

Although the solemn aura of religious space checks the husband's authority, the power of the Buddhist pure room in this story does not appear to reflect any superiority in the three women's religious standing. The three women are seldom depicted performing religious rites, and the reader is not given any reason to believe their Buddhism is any more than perfunctory. At one point, in fact, the women even call the pure room an "ominous place 不祥之地."[29] In the dramatic adaptation *Naihetian*, the chapters concerning the first and second wives' escape into the prayer room are respectively titled "Taochan" 逃禪 ("escaping through Buddhist practice") and "Jiaotuo" 狡脫 ("a cunning escape"). Both chapter titles call attention to the women's departure from the domestic and conjugal rather than to their arrival *at* a superior religiosity. What's more, the story's religious subspace invites some interestingly gendered designations. The wives refer to it as *biqin zhidi* 避秦之地 (a place to shun Qin domination) and *taoyuan* 桃源 (the Spring of the Peach Blossom)—both allusions to Tao Yuanming's 陶淵明 famous

[28] Li Yu, *Wushengxi* 無聲戲, p. 30.

[29] This episode happens when the third wife enters the pure room, the other two women ask why she doesn't enjoy her wedding night in her boudoir but end up in the ominous place.

bucolic utopia of political seclusion. Que, for his part, calls the pure room a "cold palace 冷宫" when he hurls abuse at his first wife, who has just locked herself inside. Whereas the women consider the religious space a utopic shelter guarding them against a boorish husband, the man sees it as a prison in disguise. While the women enjoy the isolation afforded by the pure room, the man understands it only as a pitiable exile from the warmth of the home.

Although the women take pains to block sexual encounters with their husband, the gendered monastic space suggests other forms of sexuality. Many details hint at homoeroticism between the co-wives. For example, the narrator describes the first wife, Zou, as talented and highly cultured, and the second, He, as beautiful and delicate, which frames them as an ideal couple adhering to the "scholar-beauty pattern." The two become "husband and wife but without a penis, while Que Lihou is put aside, looking on in despair and jealousy 做了没卵夫妻，闕里候倒睜著眼睛在旁邊吃醋." The dramatic adaption of the story makes similar insinuations; when the second wife, He, implores the first wife, Zou, to keep her in the meditation room, Zou responds with a homoerotic lyric: "You and I, […] sharing the same meditation bed, are bound to have the same dream, like a fish that is finally soaked in water. […] Tonight […] let us stop frowning and press our tender skin close, competing in [carnal] beauty and fascination 我和你…有禪床共棲，少不得夢相同，也當魚沾水…今夜呵…且舒皺眉把香肌熨貼較瘦論肥." In promoting same-sex companionship and facilitating sexual involvement,[30] the monastic space serves as an alternative domestic/conjugal locus for the women.

[30] Martin Huang renders this same-sex erotic intimacy as "spiritual lesbianism." See Martin Huang, *Desire and Fictional Narrative in Late Imperial China*, p. 194.

The pure room emancipates women from marriage and compulsory heterosexuality, allowing them the space and privacy to develop homosocial and potentially homoerotic rapport. Free from their suffocating boudoirs, women enter the pure room ready for a different kind of boudoir, one that revolves around their pleasure and power. Ironically, the women free themselves of their spatial and sexual fetters by assuming religious attributes; these spiritual identities activate an alternative same-sex intimacy that resembles but resists formal conjugal partnership. The prayer room (temporarily) supersedes the original inner chamber and transforms into a new kind of matrimonial space. Interestingly, while the domestic "temple" evokes an alternative boudoir for homoeroticism, the original boudoir is finally redesigned into a temple-like space where incenses are constantly burnt and the wives claim a "consecrated" authority and superiority over their husband.

The most direct example of a boudoir-turning-temple can be found in Feng Menglong's *Illustrious Words to Instruct the World* 喻世明言. Feng compiles a story of how the Wu Emperor of the Liang dynasty 梁武帝 achieves Buddhahood through several reincarnations. Among the multiple episodes of his reincarnations, he once is born as a gentleman named Huang Furen who has a natural fondness of Buddhism. When he reaches adulthood, his parents marries him with a Miss Tong who is similarly keen on Buddhist cultivation. Although they held the wedding ceremony, they nonetheless didn't really consummate the marriage but only slept separately and respected each other like guests. One day, Huang told Miss Tong that he decided to leave home and travel the world as an ascetic, while Tong offered to keep his company because "a wife is supposed to follow his husband and should never defile her chastity 婦人嫁了從夫。'身子決不敢壞了." Considering Tong's rejection of getting remarried and resolute insistence on Buddhist devotion, Huang suggested they swear brother- and sisterhood so as to

practice Buddhist cultivation together at home. They then practiced Buddhist cultivation everyday until they pass away together like enlightened monks.[31] In this way, the couple together transformed the boudoir into a temple where they advanced together to the next reincarnation toward the Buddhist enlightenment.

The same physical place acquires different meanings when the relation between its dwellers change—it transforms from a mundane boudoir to a sex-free monastery. Swearing brother/sisterhood, they secretly transform their relationship from the conjugal one to the sibling-oriented one. They subtly maintain the familial bond while eliminating all the sexual potential between them. It seems that they don't mind being tied to the familial framework but the sexual contact, be it in suggestive or substantial conditions. In other words, they change the context in which their relationship is defined—from nuptial to fraternal. It is interesting that when the husband decides to roam afar and denounce this marital bound, the wife nevertheless suggests to follow him citing the Confucian expectation on a virtuous wife. In other words, Tong applies the Confucian vocabulary to adhere to the Buddhist tenets. Ironically, she denies sexual commitment to her husband in a manner of emphasizing her sexual purity to him. The rejection of conjugal sex is a symbolic gesture of isolation from this-world life. In this way, the domestic sphere accommodating their marital intimacy became an in-between site striding both the Confucian family and Buddhist pure land. This unique space alienates both the husband and wife from the Confucian familial arena but meanwhile literally fixes their physical bodies within the private

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[31] Feng Menglong, *Yushi mingyan* 喻世明言 (Illustrious Words to Instruct the World), Chapter 37 "Emperor Wu of Liang Achieved Ultimate Enlightenment through Cultivations in Multiple Lives 梁武帝累修歸極樂," Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 1998, pp. 380-394.

boudoir. They escape the marriage by staying together in the same boudoir as the marriage expects them to do.

Embroidered Temple

If an indoor room could be appropriated to establish a symbolic "pure land," so could womne's handicrafts. For example, dexterous laywomen in the Ming-Qing period produced an ever-growing number of embroidered Buddha. In Francesca Bray's words, embroidering religious icons was understood to be a "moral activity linked to a gendered identity."[32] Many historians have explored Ming and Qing women's passion for embroidering images of the Buddha. The meticulousness and repetitiveness of the craft demanded a certain focus and serenity that made it akin to other religious rituals of purification such as meditation, fasting, and sutra recitation.[33] Embroidery was also an effective way for women to combine Confucian womanly virtues and activities with Buddhist religious cultivation and the pursuit of enlightenment. The image of the diligent and pious woman was reflected in Guanyin—by embroidering Guanyin, women reproduced an image of what they sought to become in the act of

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[32] According to Francesca Bray, embroidery was both a "woman's work" and "womanly work." "Woman's work" is a wider concept that refers to any work done by women. See Francesca Bray, *Technology and Gender*, p. 256.

[33] Grace Fong and Susan Mann both identified the female practice of embroidering Buddha (or particularly the Guanyin bodhisattva) with women's religious piety. Susan Mann, *Precious Records,* pp. 182-183. Grace Fong, "Female Hands: Embroidery as a Knowledge Field in Women's Everyday Life in Late Imperial and Early Republican China." *Late Imperial China* 25, No.1 (2004): 1-58, especially 19-20.

embroidery. In Li Yuhang's words, these works of embroidery "raised the former image [of Guanyin] to the level of a moral ideal: that of chaste womanhood."[34] Similarly, Susan Mann argues that "embroidering Guanyin was an act of spiritual devotion, to be sure. But it was also a creative work of art, a sign of sexual purity and fidelity, and a discipline of self-cultivation."[35] It is thus widely accepted that the embroidery of Guanyin enacted ideals of Confucian womanhood and helped to situate women in the clear social roles of chaste wife/widow, filial daughter-in-law, and/or righteous mother.

Moreover, women reaped considerable economic benefits and earned karmic credit through religious embroidery. Man Xu observes that from the Song dynasty onward many women accumulated personal credits by producing and donating their religious handicrafts.36 In his autobiography Six Records of a Floating Life, the Qing author Shen Fu mentions how his seriously ill wife struggled to embroider the Buddha's image both to garner divine blessings and to win handsome material profits 芸念可以消灾降福, 且利其绣价之丰, 竟绣焉.[37] The marriage of women's labor with Buddhist devotion helped to bridge the gap between a secular, Confucian model of women's diligence and the more spiritual, Buddhist model of women's meditative practices.

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[34] Li Yuhang, "Embroidering Guanyin: Constructions of the Divine through Hair," *EASTM* 36 (2012): 131-166.

[35] Susan Mann, *Precious Records*, p. 183.

[36] Man Xu, *Crossing the Gate*, p. 197.

[37] See Shen Fu, *The Six Records of a Floating Life* 浮生六記, p. 77.

However, just like the concrete domestic sacred space, the embroidered "temple" could also be subversively manipulated by unruly women. The following anecdote works against the popular (and flattering) understanding of women's Buddhist handicraft by showing the self-interest of women's ostensibly virtuous labors. Although as contemporary scholars have acknowledged, embroidering Buddha's image opened up a new field of knowledge and expertise that was exclusive to women, allowing them to constitute individual subjectivities through skilled and creative work, this subjectivity could easily backfire on the Confucian values per se. We will see the recalcitrance enabled by and expressed through embroidery, and observe how the practice of religious embroidery gave women an opportunity to claim subversive authority, reverse conjugal hierarchies, and renegotiate *nei-wai* boundaries.

In his collection of jotting notes *Jia yi shengyan* 甲乙剩言, the Ming scholar Hu Yinglin 胡应麟 (1551-1602) recounts the anecdote of how a jealous wife manipulates her exceptional skill with embroidery to justify overweening emotions and wrest authority from her husband. The entry goes as follows:

> Wang Changqing, a resident of Xin'an, is a talented poet, and his wife excels in embroidery. I once caught sight of her embroidery of the Buddha's image, which was finely done and dazzlingly beautiful. The Buddha's hair, facial features, and overall appearance, as well as the fabric of his clothes, were all so exquisite that they resembled the paintings of the famous Tang painter Daoxuan. I have seen many Song works of embroidery, and [this wife's] embroidery surpasses them all. She undoubtedly deserved the honorable title of "Lord of Stitching." Wang Xingfu, Wang Mingsheng, and other gentlemen have written many poems celebrating her embroidery. She, however, was harsh and jealous by nature. When Changqing went to

visit Minister Zhou in Shuofang, his wife was worried that he might be having an affair. Therefore, she had Changqing receive the Buddhist commandment of licentious behaviors in front of the embroidered Buddha before he left.

王長卿, 新安人, 能詩。其內人精于紩繡。 嘗觀其繡佛,纖密絢爛;而髮絲眉目,光相衣紋,儼若道玄運管。余所見宋繡最多,此繡當不多讓,即謂之針王可也。王行甫、汪明生諸君,多以篇詠重之。第性嚴妒,長卿往朔方謁周中丞,慮有外私,使向繡佛前,受邪淫戒而去。[38]

Although this entry is accounted under the husband's name, Wang Changqing, it spills most of its ink on Wang's wife and on her remarkable skill. Wang's wife is by no means an admirable figure by Confucian standards. Although she is famous for her dexterity with stitching and embroiders a magnificent image of the Buddha, her embroidery is not understood as a manifestation of her religious devotion or her womanly virtue. She is offered instead as an example of how jealous wives negotiate or reverse the conjugal hierarchy by presiding over homemade religious spaces, in this case built around an embroidered image of the Buddha. The wife's manual skill and spiritual focus serve only to create a religious object used to castigate and control her husband. Channeling the awesome power of the Buddha, the wife uses her embroidery to construct a malleable and mobile religious space—a temporary "temple"— that will accompany or haunt her husband throughout his journey. This embroidery serves as a deputy of the wife and substitutes for her authority and supervision in her absence. The Buddha

[38] Hu Yinglin 胡應麟, "Wang Changqing 王長卿" in *Jiayi shengyan* 甲乙剩言 (The Left Words After Jia & Yi Examinations), from *Secret Collection of Baoyantang* 寶顏堂秘笈, p. 6b-7a.

and the wife fuse together, such that by receiving the Buddhist commandment in front of the piece of embroidery the husband receives both the Buddha's proscriptions and the wife's shrewish domination. The wife becomes continuous with the Buddha in her discipline of the man's sexuality.

Through the womanly skill of religious embroidery, Wang's wife makes her power felt even when her husband roams afar from the household where she resides. The religious iconography coupled with the gendered handiwork weaves a net for the husband; and even as he sojourns in the *wai* sphere he never escapes his wife's restrictions in the *nei*. The mobile yet domestic "temple" guarantees her husband's fidelity. As such, the wife may have embroidered the Buddha, but the Buddha carries the wife's will and authority into the *wai* world. Interestingly, if in Li Yu's story, the prayer room of the three wives isolates women from both the *nei* sphere and their husband without having them physically escape the domestic, in Hu Yinglin's account of Changqing's wife, the embroidered temple curtail the man (not the woman) from the *wai* sphere in term of forfeiting his polygamous privilege while he is traveling in the public. Women's self-fashioned indoor sacred space, be it a room or an embroidery, suspends and subverts both the spatial boundary and gender hierarchy.

In addition, fine embroidery could even further immortalize its creator and transfigure women's subversive tendencies into cause for celebration. Although Wang's wife seems to be motivated primarily by jealousy (among the most unfavorable womanly traits in Confucian notions), her handiwork wins her a place in a late Qing collection of outstanding female figures, where her story is placed alongside more ennobled models of womanhood.[39] In the later Qing

[39] See also Jia Ming 古吳靚芬女史賈茗, "Wang Changqing qi 王長卿妻 (The Wife of Wang

collection, the same entry that appears above is re-titled as "The Wife of Changqing." The woman is no longer remembered as the incidental dependent of a notable man; her prowess with embroidery wins her recognition as the subject of her own entry. By producing images of the divine, women could succeed in enshrining themselves, even in the absence of spiritual virtue and wifely exemplarity.

A Domestic Temple of *Qing* 情

The domestic temples not only reconfigure women's identify, labor, power, and homosociality as evinced in aforementioned examples, it can further intersect with women's affective outlook. Let us read the famous quasi-historical story of Xiaoqing which centers on the female protagonist's *qing*.

Xiaoqing's life story enjoyed tremendous popularity in the late Ming and Qing, as evidenced by the "Xiaoqing craze" of the seventeenth century, during which period various accounts, dramas, and mourning poems concerning Xiaoqing appeared. After her purported death in 1612, Xiaoqing posthumously rose to prominence just as many women poets and tastemakers were making their remarkable debut on the stage of Chinese literature. Although the historical facts concerning her life and work are in constant dispute, Xiaoqing's extraordinary talent and tragic lot exemplified women poets' travails and aspirations while also speaking to politically frustrated male scholars. Xiaoqing was inextricably linked to the flourishing movement of *qing* (emotion, love, passion, or sentiment), which promoted emotion and

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Changqing)," *Nü Liaozhai zhi yi* 女聊齋志異 (Liaozhai's Records of the Strange for Women), Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2004, p. 39.

authenticity as the foremost virtue in human nature and literary production alike.[40] Biographies, plays, and poems about Xiaoqing proliferated, and she was fashioned into her era's cultural archetype. Although sources differ, Xiaoqing lore shares a basic storyline (with the exception of dramas about Xiaoqing, which typically have a happy ending).[41] Scholars have carefully unpacked the cultural and gendered implication of Xiaoqing lore and its gender-specific reception by contemporary audiences in late imperial China.[42] What concerns us here is the elusive yet significant role of religious space in Xiaoqing's life story.

Xiaoqing's biography will be familiar to many. Xiaoqing was married off as a concubine to a gentleman named Feng. Feng's principle wife was so jealous and domineering that she exiled Xiaoqing to a family-owned rural villa on Gushan Mountain. Deprived of all connection to the outside world (including her husband), Xiaoqing took solace in monologues, reading, and writing, as well as the occasional company of a Lady Yang. Depressed and languishing,

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[40] For a study of the Xiaoqing lore, its influence on the cult of *qing*, and its gendered reception by men and women in late imperial China, see Dorothy Ko, *The Teachers of The Inner Chambers*, pp. 92-112; Ellen Widmer, "Xiaoqing's Literary Legacy and the Place of the Woman Writer in Late Imperial China," *Late Imperial China*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1992, pp. 111-55.

[41] For a translation of Feng Menglong's transcription of the Xiaoqing story in *Qing Shi* 情史 (The History of *Qing*), see Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, eds., *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China*, 2004, Cambridge : Harvard University Asia Center, pp. 504-12.

[42] See Ellen Widmer, "Xiaoqing's Literary Legacy;" Dorothy Ko, *The Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, pp. 92-112; Daria Berg, *Women and the Literary World in Early Modern China, 1580-1700,* London and New York: Routledge, 2013, pp. 128-59.

Xiaoqing took seriously ill and eventually died at the tender age of 17. Most accounts of Xiaoqing's life and death refer to her rural dwelling as "an alternative estate on an isolated mountain 孤山別業." The early Qing scholar Zhang Dai 張岱, however, records the estate as a "Buddhist hut 佛舍." He also specifies that the servant who kept Xiaoqing's company was an old nun 乃匿之孤山佛舍，令一尼與俱.[43] Regardless of the rural villa's explicit function, its religious utility is apparent in all versions of Xiaoqing's story. Many of the accounts allude to the Tang anecdote *Zhangtailiu* 章台柳 (The Willow of Zhangtai), in which a concubine hides in a nunnery in order to keep her chastity while waiting for her lover to return from battle.[44] Moreover, Xiaoqing's seclusion, celibacy, and mastery of the Buddhist canon all frame her as analogous to a/n (unofficial) nun.

Before Feng's principle wife banished Xiaoqing to the remote Buddhist cottage, she and Xiaoqing went to a public temple together. It was there that the domineering wife had a significant religious discussion with Xiaoqing: "'The Buddha of the Western Paradise, I have

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[43] See Zhang Dai, "Xiaoqing Foshe 小青佛舍 (Xiaoqing's Buddhist Hut), " in *Xihu mengxun* 西湖夢尋, vol. 3, 2007, p. 183. The proxy-biography of Xiaoqing can be found in a wide range of literary texts through 17th century to 19the century. For a brief introduction to the different adaptions and versions in different genres such as proses, and drama, see Ellen Widmer, "Xiaoqing's Literary Legacy."

[44] The Willows of Zhangtai" is a title of lyric tones which derives from the famous lyric written by a Tang poet Han Hong 韓翃 (dates unknown, obtained the *jinshi*-degree in the year of 754) in remembrance of his lover, a courtesan named Liu (Willow). Liu was abducted during the An Lushan's rebellion in 755.

been told, is Amitabha, so why do all the people in the world honor and revere the Mahāsattva [Guanyin]?' Xiaoqing answered: 'Because of her compassion.' The main wife […] said with a smile: 'I will [also] show you my compassion!' 西方佛無量, 乃世獨禮大士, 何耶?"小青曰 :"以慈悲故耳。"大婦笑曰: "我亦慈悲若。"[45] The wife then immediately drove Xiaoqing to her rural exile. The wife's appropriation of the word "compassion" to describe her treatment of Xiaoqing subtly identifies her with the Guanyin bodhisattva on two levels. First, the wife asserts her authority in freely altering Xiaoqing's lot, just as an omnipotent goddess might; and, second, the wife demonstrates her generosity by secluding Xiaoqing with the compassionate Guanyin forever in the nunnery-like estate.[46] In this way, the principle wife's expulsion of Xiaoqing is tantamount to forcing Xiaoqing into a monastic order, as all of Xiaoqing's earthly connections and concerns are minimized, if not eliminated, while her attachment to the Guanyin bodhisattva is strengthened.

The exile strategically maximized the physical distance between Xiaoqing and her husband Feng while keeping Xiaoqing within the domestic ambit. Because the hut belonged to the family, Xiaoqing never really left the *nei* sphere, and Xiaoqing was thus still at the mercy of the jealous wife who managed the household and disciplined its female residents. Hence the wife's injunction: "If my husband arrives without my express permission, don't let him in! If so much

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[45] Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, eds., *The Red Brush*, pp. 505-6.

[46] The Chinese socialist Pan Guangdan also points out that the version of *foshe* should be more reasonable as it better resonates with the later "compassion" topic discussed between the wife and Xiaoqing. See *Pan Guangdan wenji* 潘光旦文集 (The Complete Collected Writings of Pan Guangdan), Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1993, p. 10.

as a letter arrives from him without my express permission, don't you dare accept it! 非吾命而郎至，不得入；非吾命而郎手劄至，亦不得入!”[47] As such, the primary wife turns the semi-domestic, semi-monastic space into a prison.

The public temple and the private Buddhist hut form a monastic continuum thereof. This monastic continuum allows for Xiaoqing to be isolated from the *nei* sphere in terms of both her conjugal connections and her physical location. Xiaoqing's relocation spatializes and dramatizes the otherwise latent female rivalry between her and Feng's principle wife. Xiaoqing's deportation affords us a glimpse into how shrewish women mobilized religious space to secure their own interests, discipline their husbands' sexuality (somehow resonating with Changqing's wife, although one garnering sympathy, the other less so), and reshape the domestic landscape. The private "temple" in the mountains offers an outlet for the principle wife's overweening power and intense emotionality. If in Li Yu's story the domestic monastic space activates and accommodates women's alliances with one another, the monastic spaces in Xiaoqing's story allow a domineering woman to control her co-wives.

As for Xiaoqing, the victim of this female rivalry, the Buddhist environment proves not simply to be a receptacle of the fragile concubine and her suffering. Unlike Que's wives in Li Yu's story, Xiaoqing does not turn to an alternative homosexual partnership; nor does she, like the two women practicing *muqing* in Yu Yue's anecdote, enjoy the Buddhist cultivation of asceticism and piety. Although she is known for her great facility with internalizing Buddhist teachings and although she displays precocious sophistication in religious philosophy,[48]

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[47] Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, eds., *The Red Brush*, p. 506.

[48] When she was as young as ten years old, she is able to recite the Heart Sutra immediately

Xiaoqing shows no interest in deepening her devotional practice or spiritual cultivation, to say nothing of taking the Buddhist tonsure and becoming a nun. In the histories of her life, Xiaoqing is said only to have composed poems, talked privately to her own image reflected in water and mirrors, and worshiped her own portrait in the rural convent while she was in exile.

Although the Buddhist context is supposed to dampen passions, Xiaoqing nevertheless indulged in sentimentality. Art, as Marram Epstein points out, "is the most legitimate aspect of *qing* […] a talented artist is able to transform the raw and frequently transgressive passions of *qing* into culturally acceptable forms of artistic production."[49] It seems that Xiaoqing, in the secluded tranquility of a Buddhist environment, unleashed her obsession with *qing* and its attendant activities, so much so in fact that she is believed to have died in part from an excess of emotion caused by reading the drama *Mudan ting* (*Peony Pavilion*, the canonical manifesto of the cult of *qing*) and by writing sentimental poems.[50] Surprisingly or not, although Xiaoqing used her time alone to indulge her infatuation with *qing*, her reading and writing was suffused with Buddhist vocabulary and content. Her interest in *qing* while living in the "Buddhist hut" even has a corresponding reflection in her literary production. For example, she writes in her farewell letter to Lady Yang,

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after an old nun passes it on her through oral instruction. In her literary productions, she displays a sophisticated savvy in Buddhist wisdom and philosophy. See Pan Guangdan, p. 28.

[49] Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses: Orthodoxy, Authenticity, and Engendered Meanings in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction*, Harvard University Asia Center, 2001, p. 159.

[50] Ellen Widmer, "Xiaoqing's Literary Legacy," p.112.

> What if I shave my head to receive the tonsure at the empty gate, washing away my makeup and ridding myself of melancholy? I will be overwhelmed by the flood of romantic words and thoughts that so easily stir my feelings. I am afraid that although I was born with a natural root in the Buddhist lotus flower, it would be by no means easy to break the strand of silk-like threads in the Rhizome lotus. So it is hard for me to take this step [of receiving Buddhist tonsure].
>
> 若祝髮空門，洗妝浣慮，而艷思綺語，觸緒紛來，正恐蓮性雖胎，荷絲難殺；又未易言此也.[51]

Here, Xiaoqing uses the decidedly Buddhist trope of the lotus to articulate her obsession with earthly love. The image of the lotus encompasses this paradoxical set of attachments: while the flowering lotus emblemizes the sacred Buddha and his salvific protection, the wispy strand of silk in the Rhizome lotus presents a graphic image of stubborn love and emotionality. Admitting she has a "flower-like" Buddhist nature, Xiaoqing nevertheless finds herself attached to the Rhizome lotus's lingering strands of passion. By the same token, Xiaoqing writes in a poem,

> I bow my head and pray to the Mahasattva upon her cloud of compassion:
> May I not be reborn in the Western Paradise, may I not be reborn in Heaven,
> But may I become a drop of water dripping from your willow branch,
> That sprinkled on the earth becomes a double-blossomed lotus flower.
>
> 稽首慈雲大士前，莫生西土莫生天. 願將一滴楊枝水，灑作人間並蒂蓮[52]

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[51] Pan Guangdan, p. 28.

[52] Translation is quoted from Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, eds.,*The Red Brush*, p. 509.

If it is a self-metaphor to identify herself as a drop of water in Guanyin's vase, she clearly states that she would rather to be sprinkled to the mundane world and grow into a twin lotus flowers (a stock metaphor for happy couples). Interestingly, Xiaoqing's literary depiction of her stubborn aspiration for true love and pure feeling always stemmed from religious origin or context. Religion, somethings supposed to inhibit emotion nonetheless provided a language to exude it.

Finally, Xiaoqing's sentimental digression from a Buddhist context found an ultimate articulation in a highly religious manner. She established a new religion of *qing* within the Buddhist hut. When Xiaoqing's illness worsened, she had a painter paint her a portrait. Then "she placed the painting on an altar table in front of her bed, lit some incense, and preparing a libation of pear wine, said: 'Xiaoqing, is this to be your karma?'" She worshipped her own portrait and overcome by emotion, she passed away.[53] Worshipping a portrait of herself with a surge of emotion, Xiaoqing enshrined *qing* and consecrated herself into an incarnation of *qing*. Both her life and her emotion became the sacrificial offering to the divinity of *qing* (which is in her own image). She plays simultaneously the divine goddesses and the devout pilgrim. Her obsession with or piety to *qing* is sealed and perpetuated in both her worshipping rite and her poetic writings. The other-worldly retreatment and salvation, eventually, collapsed into this-worldly female talent, depression, and emotion. Within the isolated, lonely monastic space, Xiaoqing evokes a self-contained religious subspace for *qing* through her self-fashioned, self-represented, and self-centered altar. Her self-deification would witness a regeneration and perpetuation in later textual and material imaginations by generations of writers and audience.

[53] Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, eds., *The Red Brush*, p. 508.

Both historical notes and fictional stories to different degrees, sketched how women appropriate and manipulate self-fashioned domestic monastic spaces (either concrete or symbolic) to re-delineate the conjugal and gender landscape within a marriage. The following story offers yet another possibility for the use of domestic temple by a married woman. Here, like Changqing's wife who indulges and justifies her subversive emotion of jealousy through carving out an embroidered temple, a woman deprived of love and denied access to her husband projects and channels her frustrated yet insidious desires onto a divine being in a private monastic space.

In *Xingshi hengyan* 醒世恒言 (Eternal Words that Enlighten the World), Feng Menglong records a story entitled "The Boot that Reveals the Culprit 勘皮靴單證二郎神."[54] The heroine, Lady Han, is introduced to the reader as a teenaged royal consort who is forced to live a gloomy, widow-like life because her husband never shows her emotional and sexual favor. Her marital status obviates the possibility of her seeking alternative romantic encounters, especially given that she is married to an emperor. She is separated from the Jade-Pure Pavilion-- the residence of another consort who is exclusively showered with the emperor's favor and love. This spatial banishment parallels her sexual and emotional marginalization from her husband. Her story thus begins with a description of how she is tormented by her sexual deprivation and loneliness; she falls ill of sorrows. The emperor then orders her to leave the palace and travel to the household of her former patron Marshal Yang in hopes that a change of scenery will expedite her recovery--

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[54] Feng Menglong, *Xingshi hengyan*, "The Boot that Reveals the Culprit 勘皮靴單證二郎神." For an English Translation, see Y. W. Ma, & Joseph S. M. Lau, eds., *Traditional Chinese Stories: Themes and Variations,* Cheng &Tsui Company, Inc., 1986, pp. 505-23.

a further spatial marginalization. Alas, if the palace had served as a virtual prison for the girl, Marshal Yang's house is no better. Marshal Yang orders to split the compound into two halves and assigns the western part to Han. The door to Lady Han's residence is kept locked at all times except in the event of a medical inquiry or one of Marshall Yang's routine visits (with his wife).[55] Sadly, even in her new residence, Han is still geographically secluded; she is carefully separated from both the public and Yang's family.

Han's pathetic marginalization and isolation from the domestic center is soon complicated and subverted by the establishment of a private sacred space. One day she suddenly suffers a serious relapse from her illness, and medical intervention proves useless. Marshal Yang's wife then suggests a last resort that they pray to the local deities who are "known for their speedy answers to prayers."[56] Too sick to get up, Han sets up a makeshift altar on her bed that allows her to lie back on a pillow while praying. It turns out that this is Lady Han's first time petitioning the gods directly; she complains to Yang's wife, "I've been miserable every day since I entered the palace. When would I have had the heart to make petitions?"[57] In this sense, Han's

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[55] "[Marshall Yang] then divided his quarters into two parts and cleaned upthe West Garden for Lady han to live in. he also put a lock on the door, only allowing the physician and his own servants to pass through. The Marshall and his wife went over to visit her once a day. During the rest of the time, the door remained locked. 收拾西園與韓夫人居住，門上用鎖封著，只許太醫及內家人役往來。太尉夫妻二人，日往候安一次。閒時就封閉了門." Y. W. Ma, & Joseph S. M. Lau, eds., *Traditional Chinese Stories*, p. 507.

[56] Y. W. Ma, & Joseph S. M. Lau, eds., *Traditional Chinese Stories*, p. 508.

[57] Ibid.

relocation to Yang's house marks not only her spatial move to private inner quarters, then, but also her entrance into religious space, and the altar she erects from her bed is a perfect example of how the boudoir is fused with private worship.

Han recovers soon after petitioning the deities from her sickbed. Thereafter, she decides to keep the vows she made while ill by going to temples with Lady Yang. They therefore travel to the temple of the god Er-Lang. Although the temple's religious ceremonies are only mentioned in passing, the narrator lavishes attention on Han's inner desires and psychic activity. Han surreptitiously peeks through the curtain of an altar when Lady Yang leaves her unattended, and Han falls suddenly and unexpectedly in love with the magnificent statue of the god Er-Lang she uncovers. There and then, Han makes a second (impossible) request of the gods: she asks to marry a husband who exactly resembles the god's image (rather than gaining her Emperor-husband's favor). Although she is visiting a public outdoor temple, this moment at the altar takes on a private quality, especially as Han's inner desires gush forth. Han takes care to make sure she is alone before gazing upon the statue, and her plea to the god is clearly meant for his ears alone. The privacy of this monastic space manifests in the description of Han's prayer: "a wishful thought slipped from her mouth 漏出一句話." This "slip" suggests that Han recognizes that her wish is impossible and wicked—under no circumstances could a royal consort admit that she longed for a more affectionate spouse.

Han extends this chronotopic moment to the *nei* sphere as she searches for ways to channel her emotional and sexual depression. When she arrives back home, Han sets up an altar for Er-Lang in her residence's private garden, where she repeats her prayer for a husband resembling the god. The gods respond promptly to her petition, and Er-Lang appears just as Han finishes her worship. The two proceed to enter into a sexual relationship, which they continue for some

months. Er-Lang's companionship makes it palatable for the lonely woman to remain in the domestic sphere and refrain from truly transgressing spatial and marital boundaries. Thus, the domestic monastic space fuses with the boudoir; the god that Han worships doubles as a supernatural sexual partner, if not a spouse. As the temple and boudoir are conflated, the god transforms from a spiritual guide, protector, and savior into a superior substitute for an absent husband, and Han steps on the center of the alternative boudoir she established herself. In her service to a celestial being, Han believes she has implicit permission to disregard mundane rules and restrictions, especially when the god explicitly indicates their destined connection during Han's previous divine life in the celestial world. Here, a gender contrast is thus established: while all the men (the Emperor and Marshal Yang) endeavor to seclude and subdue the woman in the *nei* sphere, the woman herself seeks an alternative marital space within her sealed boudoir. The male-established spatial boundary ends up collapsing in women's self-fashioned monastic space. The *nei* sphere, and the moral and gender constraints it symbolizes are nullified when the woman conjures an alternative conjugality with a deity in her self-fashioned private "temple."

Up until this point, the narrator sympathetically describes how a languishing palace lady projects her desires for forbidden conjugal love onto a divine figure in a private, homemade monastic space. Thereafter, the story takes a narrative turn and becomes a male-centered detective story with a strong didactic bent. Ban Wang comments, "As if suddenly realizing the grave nature of this dangerous liaison, the narrative hastily begins to pursue a contrary line of interest and to narrate another sequence of events concerned with tracking down the culprit who has violated the Emperor's concubine and reaffirming the imperial order."[58] Indeed, in the

[58] Ban Wang, *Narrative Perspective and Irony in Selected Chinese and American Fiction*,

second half of the story, a wide-ranging group of officials and priests are enlisted to track down and subjugate the criminal. The "god" turns out to be the temple host, Sun Shentong 孫神通, who is capable of sorcery and thus disguises himself as Er-Lang after he overhears Han's private prayer. The story concludes in the sorcerer being arrested and sentenced to death.

Strikingly, Lady Han disappears entirely in the second half of the story. It is mentioned only in passing at the story's end that she is expelled from the palace and married off to a "merchant from a distant town who owned a shop in the capital."[59] Although she is seduced and defiled by a rascal, Lady Han manages to get what she wanted at the story's outset. The narrator admits, "Her lifelong wish was fulfilled and her passionate longing was finally satisfied."[60] Because her new husband is an out-of-town merchant who owns a store in the capital, Han serves as his alternative wife for when he travels, standing in parallel to the primary wife, who lives in the merchant's home district. In this way, Lady Han is "able to live harmoniously" with her second husband and his first wife into old age. Oddly enough, Han's scandalous adultery not only succeeds in getting her remarried, but also frees her from the brutal rivalry of co-wives, which is what had made the palace an unsustainable home for her at the very beginning of the story. If anything, Han seems to be rewarded for her sexual liaison with the religious imposter.

Ban Wang reads this incredible ending as a result of structural and moral ambiguities embedded in the story.[61] However, I contend that the story's two halves constitute a feminine

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Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002, p. 33.

[59] Y. W. Ma, & Joseph S. M. Lau, eds., *Traditional Chinese Stories*, p. 523.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Wang Ban, *Narrative Perspective*, p. 33.

and masculine version on the narrative. The narrative and ethic rupture, I argue, is triggered by the gender bifurcation in one's perception and experience of temple. In other words, it seems that the women's and men's relationships with monastic spaces are totally different, as evinced by the abrupt change in the story's narrative concerns and style. The story's second half falls into clichés about how women's excursions to temples incur sexual misbehavior and moral chaos; in the first half, however, the male-intended privacy of a woman's residence nonetheless makes it easy to be appropriated by the woman to seek alternative marital anchorage. Marshall Yang senses Han's wrongdoings after a couple of months, and he could only peek and eavesdrop the woman in a clandestine manner.[62] Ironically, the Confucian seclusion of a woman to a certain degree defers, if not precludes, the outside regulation and intervention. Moreover, the same location of Lady Han's inner chamber functions alternately as public and private "temple" based on its gender orientation. It is now a private site for Han to entertain her supernatural sexual partner without men's involvement, now a public site for an open spectacle of farcical sorcery made by male priests.

Surprisingly, women's private temple-cum-boudoir remains intact from outset to the end. Let us imagine for a moment how the would-be Er-Lang would have appeared to Lady Han. How would it have seemed to her that he could appear out of nowhere in the tightly sealed inner quarters of Marshal Yang's mansion, and disappear just as quickly? He is even capable of

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[62] "Use a ladder against the outside wall, and wait until all is quiet before climbing over to Lady Han's room. See what is going on inside…只把摘花梯子，倚在牆外，待人靜時，直扒去韓夫人臥房，看他動靜." Y. W. Ma, & Joseph S. M. Lau, eds., *Traditional Chinese Stories*, p. 512.

outwitting the priests; the last time Lady Han sees him, he leaves one boot in her boudoir while escaping from a cunning trap the priest has set. From Han's perspective, the god Er-Lang is never defeated by mortal men, at least not in her presence. Although the imposter Sun Shentong is arrested, he must have seemed more a subject of hearsay than the god-like man of flesh and blood who had shared her bed and answered all her prayers. How could Lady Han know for sure that the Sun apprehended was really the same being she had loved and worshipped?[63] Similarly, to a woman who wholeheartedly loved Er-Lang, the men's declaration that Er-Lang and Sun Shentong were one and the same could hardly have seemed satisfactory. Moreover, Feng Menglong offers no explanation of how Sun Shentong would have come and gone so freely in a high military official's household (even *after* Marshal Yang has laid a trap for him), nor of how Sun could have been made aware of what was happening in the inner quarters in his absence (we learn that Sun even knew the emperor had sent Lady Han a jade waistband). Of course, there are plenty of potential explanations for these phenomena, but the fact that Feng leaves those mysteries unsolved, together with Han's happy remarriage at the story's end, leaves enough doubt on whether a real god *wasn't* involved in Han's fate—at least in Han's eyes. Er-Lang's power is subtly reaffirmed by the neatness of Han's ending—all her wishes come true.

[63] As Tina Lu suggests in her discussion of the unstable definition of personhood in late imperial China, it was unclear whether a ghost was continuous with the person the ghost was before s/he died. The inconsistence of the god's identity is also at issue in this story. See *Persons, Roles, and Minds: Identity in* Peony Pavilion *and* Peach Blossom Fan, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.

The identity of the god/ghost in the two halves of the story fails to maintain an undoubted coherence due to a gendered bifurcation. To Lady Han, the power and credibility of the god remains unimpeachable. His statue is magnificent, his power undeniable, his martial prowess formidable. Lady Han's half of the story presents a validated process of erecting the "temple" in which the god is verified and enshrined in a monastic space built just for him. The men, on the other side of the picture, feel differently, of course. To the officials and other detectives involved in sniffing out the intruder, their version proves to be an anti-temple story. These men work together to see to it that the purported god is gradually reduced to a sorcerer, then a criminal punished with death, and finally a ghost.[64] That is, in men's eyes, the fake deity is desecrated and demonized, and temple torn down.

In this light, we can read the structural and moral inconsistencies Ban Wang identifies in the story quite differently. Rather than showing the "clash within the mind of the storyteller [which] is rarely translated into dialectic coherence of achieved art," as C. T. Hsia would have it, or the "disparity between style and content," as John Bishop says of Chinese classical stories,[65] the rupture of narrative continuity arguably indicates the disparity between the two genders' perception and experience of the monastic space. The women and men of the story—and of its world—understand monastic space and religious cultivation quite differently, and it is thus unsurprising that we should see that difference reflected as moral ambiguity in the story. Women

[64] According to a Qing scholar Chen Qiyuan 陳其元, those temple hosts or managers were addressed as "temple ghosts" in late imperial China. See Wu Cheng-han, "The *Temple Fairs in Late Imperial China*," p.93.

[65] Ban Wang, *Narrative Perspective,* p. 34.

found solace, redemption, and edification in worship because it superseded the concerns of this world, while men tended to conduct public activities in the temple that reflected their interest in *investing* in things of this world. (The magistrate in the story donates his boots to the temple; the detective Ran Gui prays in the Er-Lang temple for his mission be successful.) Men's privileged social status allows them to spar even with heavenly authorities; or at least, the heavenly power should be aligning with the public/state authority (so they would rather believe the one that defiles the Emperor's consort is demonic than divine). The men of the story are therefore more inclined to believe in their own power, and in the power of the state, than in supernatural power. Religion, for these men, is at best an ancillary tool. Thus, the men of the story, although never doubt the legitimacy of Er-Lang, are hardly convinced that he would descend to earth to help a hapless woman in a subversive manner. Women's perspective, by contrast, are different. An inferior social group, their hands are tied, their autonomy discounted, and their resources limited; it is only logical that they would be more prone to invest in supernatural powers that could override earthly hierarchies and rules, thus making sense of their personal suffering and bringing justice to an unjust world. In one word, in this story, while the woman breaks out of the marital and spatial boundary by elevating the purported god to the place that overrides the Confucian principles, men tend to subjugate the subversive mysterious power under their control and thus restore the order that they define and defend.

Domestic Temple as a Thirdspace

The most famous, formal, and noteworthy domestic temple which inextricably engages in all the issues of emotion, gender, and familial/conjugal dynamics, might be the Green Bower Hermitage (Longcui An 櫳翠庵) in the eighteenth-century novel *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢 (*Dream of the Red Chamber*, also known as *Shitou ji*, *The Story of the Stone*). This pinnacle of

Chinese fiction depicts numerous temples which in Yiqun Zhou's words, "play an important role in providing *Honglou meng* with its much admired mimetic richness and conveying its complex philosophical message."[66] Among the various temples depicted by the novel, the Green Bower Hermitage merits a special scrutiny in this research as it is the only temple spatially located inside the household of the Jia family on whom the novel is unfolded. This unique spatiality not only distinguishes it from all the public or anonymous monastic compounds showing up in the novel, but also singles it out among the several "family temples" patronized by Jias.[67]

Located inside the Jia household, this convent serves as a constitutive unit of the Grand-View garden which is specially built for the Palace consort Jia Yuanchun 賈元春 who comes back to visit her natal home. Rather than a monetary providing accommodation to professional clerics, the Green Bower Hermitage is occupied by a half-nun-half-gentry-girl Miaoyu (Adamantina) who is antithesis to those fraudulent, parasitic clerics living in all the other temples and convents in the novel. Miaoyu's social and gender identity prove to be rather ambiguous. A gentry girl who has received very good education, Miaoyu is peculiarly eccentric, sensitive, refined, and aloof, but also extraordinarily tasteful in various literati undertakings. Indeed, for

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[66] Yiqun Zhou, "Temples and Clerics in *Honglou meng,*" *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 71, No.2 (2011): 263-309, 264. This paper is a detailed analysis of all the temples/shrines showing up in *HLM*, see especially pp. 266-72.

[67] Yiqun Zhou categorized into Jia's "private temples" all the monasteries that are subject to Jia's finical or territorial control, including the Green Bower Hermitage. However, I would like to argue that the special location of the Green Bower Hermitage merits a separate evaluation and definition.

most of her appearance in person in the novels, she is depicted as skillfully practicing the refined literati activities, such as tea culture, composing poems, playing the go chess and the Zither. She was even praised highly as "poet immortal" by Daiyu 黛玉, the most talented and proud maid poet in the novel.[68]

What's more, when she is first mentioned in Chapter 17, Lin Zhixiao's wife 林之孝家的 reports to Lady Wang about Miaoyu, explaining that she is a semi-nun of very good pedigree and education, and it is thus not easy to persuade her to move into the Jia family. Lady Wang then suggests to send a formal written invitation of courtesy to invite Miaoyu again. And Lin Zhixiao's wife indeed has a professional letter-writer in the family's employment to craft this formal invitation shortly afterward. Interestingly, Miaoyu as a gentry-girl-cum-lay-sister is formally invited into the Jia family in a manner neither of nuns nor of young ladies, but in a ceremonial manner usually persevered for male literati. More strikingly, Miaoyu's own behavior also betrays a literati-specific quality. In chapter 63, she sends Jia Baoyu, the protagonist, a formally written birthday greeting which at first sight, is unmistakably crafted in a literati convention, especially judging from its format, diction, and delivery method. Baoyu is thereby very puzzled about how to reply to this unexpected greeting; fortunately, he runs into a distant cousin Xing Xiuyan 邢岫煙 who happens to be Miaoyu's neighbor for ten years prior to both of their arrival at the Jia family. Xiuyan therefore recalls about Miaoyu's past, again, as a half-

[68] Besides practicing refined tea cultures, playing zithers, and composing poems, Miaoyu also shows up to do the divination so as to figure out the whereabouts of Baoyu's lost jade. But that episode happens in the last 40 chapters which are supposed as apocrypha to the first 80 chapters. See *HLM*, Chapter 95, p. 1070-71.

literatus-half-nun who is living in a convent and Xiyan's family happen to rent a room from it. As Xing exposits, when she is young, it is Miaoyu that teaches her to read and write in the temple or convent. Miaoyu is not only her "hard times friend," but also in a sense her "semi-teacher."[69] That is to say, Miaoyu serves as both Xiuyan's friend in the boudoir but also a tutor or mentor in a private school, which is a profession usually taken up by male literati.[70] Miaoyu's friendship and mentorship with Xiuyan is also rather rare between two women at the time.[71] To them, temples are tantamount to alternative boudoirs in which they keep each other's company and establish a women-centered community for both literacy and friendship cultivation.

Miaoyu is never depicted explicitly with feminine traits as applied to the other main female characters such as the highly sentimental moment of Daiyu's burying the falling blossoms and Baochai's prowess in the women-specific skill of embroidering. It seems that Miaoyu's identity as a Buddhist practitioner obviously alienates her from those wifely routines or feminine traits.

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[69] *HLM*, Chapter 63, pp. 708.

[70] Especially when we recall Lin Daiyu's private tutor is Jia Yucun 賈雨村, one of the main male characters in this novel. Dorothy Ko indeed introduced female private tutors in 17th century Jiangnan, however they are also deemed as taking on a certain degree of masculinity. See *The Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, especially, pp. 125-9.

[71] Friendship in later imperial China is a bond reserved mainly to men because women's intimacy is always built on and confined to the kinship relationship and the domestic sphere. Although scholars have discussed the friendship between gentry woman and eminent nuns at the time, Miaoyu is first of all not indisputably a nun, and more interestingly, what Miaoyu imparts into Xiuyan is less Buddhist than Confucian teachings.

However, Miaoyu seldom directly engages in any Buddhist practices as a professional nun in the novel either. We only know she practices meditation on the eve of her adduction by the bandits which is her last appearance in the novel. Even an unusual only-one-time religious practice of her in chapter 95 is in fact a Daoist divination assisted by a Daoist sorceress.[72] Briefly, almost in all the occasions when Miaoyu is mentioned or appears in person, she is involved in activities intimately associated with gender-neutral, if not male-exclusive, connoisseurship, professions, and etiquette. One might point out that the most feminine moment for Miaoyu might be her conspicuous blushing upon her encounter with Baoyu in Xichun's boudoir. However, Baoyu, the other party of this meeting also experience red in the face for a couple of times and is even mocked by Xichun for his coyness. If this blush in face can unmistakably indicate one's femininity, Baoyu's shyness alike at least proves Miaoyu is no more girlish than Baoyu, the male protagonist.[73] Briefly, rather than an apathetic nun or a demure young maiden, Miaoyu is described more like a literatus with extraordinary refinedness and pride.[74]

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[72] *HLM*, Chapter 95, pp. 1070-71.

[73] Moreover, the tendency of easy blushing although is registered as girlish in the novel, is not a preservation for female characters. Baoyu's friend and study-companion Qin Zhong 秦鐘 was depicted in words like "how shrinking and gentle Qin Zhong was, blushing almost before you spoke to him and timid and bashful as a girl 靦腆溫柔, 未語面先紅, 怯怯羞羞,有女兒之風." Honglou meng, Chapter 7, p. 80.

[74] Both Yiqun Zhou and Zhu Meishu 朱眉叔 deem Miaoyu as "less a Buddhist nun than as an eccentric literatus figure." See Zhou, "Temples and Clerics," p. 282.

Miaoyu's literati-specific hallmarks are occasionally contradicted by her either explicit or implicit self-identification with a young lady. For example, Miaoyu's selection of a pink letter paper as the carrier of her seemingly formal birthday message to Bayou tints it with a feminine and romantic hue. Moreover, many scholars agree on her secret harboring of an amorous desire for Baoyu.[75] The most explicit case appears in Chapter 76. After Miaoyu adds a few couplets to Daiyu and Xiangyun's poem, she tells the two girls, with the posture of a female instructress, they all should manage to "avoid losing the style proper to us young women of the inner quarters (*zanmen de guige mianmu* 咱們的閨閣面目)."[76] Interestingly, Miaoyu in the novel encompasses and alternately demonstrates both male literati attributes and a self-recognized femininity.

In addition to her gender ambiguity, Miaoyu's religious and social status is of a similar vagueness. Admittedly, she is always considered as a nun by other characters in the novel. However, it is also indisputable that she doesn't receive the tonsure when entering the religious order, not to mention her unusual possession of a lavish fortune and multiple maidservants seems to be unimaginable to a fully ordained nun. Some scholars argue that Miaoyu should be more properly categorized as a *jinzhunü* 近住女, literary means a laywoman who takes up residence in or close to the monastery.[77] This appellation of *jinzhu nü* highlights Miaoyu's in-between

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[75] Yiqun Zhou, "Temples and Clerics," pp. 283-89.

[76] Ibid., p. 283.

[77] Li Guangcui 李光翠 and Du Hongchun 杜宏春, "Jinzhunü yu kanwairen: Miaoyu de shenfen ji qita tanwei 近住女與檻外人: 妙玉的身份及其他探微 (Laywomen who living

position, spatially and spiritually, between a lay devotee who performs religious devotions at home and those novices who receives all the Buddhist precepts (including shaving their hair, donning monastic robes, and formally enters the monastery order). In other words, she lives closer to the monastery than the at-home practitioners while not close enough to be a real nun. This spatial betweenness aptly corresponds to Miaoyu's either-literatus-or-maiden quality. Miaoyu seems to enjoy her ambiguous status and quality very much. She inscribes her birthday note to Baoyu with a *nom-de-plume* "*kanwai ren* 檻外人" (the dweller beyond the threshold) instead of her religious or courtesy name. When she addresses herself as a *kanwai ren*, the threshold here can be both a threshold of the household that secludes women and also a threshold that circumscribes the ambit of a quotidian mundane life. To be sure, she perceives herself as not only beyond the threshold of the Confucian family but also beyond that of the religious realm. She stands free from the "threshold" in both levels—she is neither subject to the prescription of gender roles nor to the toils of the earthly world. Hence is Xiuyan's bantering yet incisive comment on her as "'a monk no monk, an ordinary no ordinary, a maid no maid, and a lad no lad! 僧不僧,俗不俗,女不女, 男不男."[78]

It is arguable that in *HLM*, only Miaoyu could enjoy such an in-between status in terms of both gender and social identity. Moreover, she is extremely eccentric or wayward (不合時宜), which is surprisingly not considered as worrisome as well (comparing to how people would be perturbed by Baoyu's eccentricity). For example, once she taunts Daiyu (the beloved heroine

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closely to the monastery and Who beyond the Threshold: Probing Miaoyu's Identities and other Problems," *Mingzuo xinshang* 名作欣賞 2 (2010): 47–49.

[78] *HLM*, Chapter 63, p. 708. My own translation.

who has a reputation of refinedness, sensitivity, and pride) to be "such a vulgar person" only because Daiyu fails to figure out that the tea she has just been served was made with melted snow that had been collected five years ago from the branches of winter-flowering plum-trees.[79] Easily offended and sharp-tongued as Daiyu, she surprisingly takes this satire for granted and doesn't express any discontent. Miaoyu is excessively contemptuous of the vulgar people that after an old villager visits her Hermitage and takes a sip of tea from one of her valuable teacups, she is not hesitant to throw the cup away so as to avoid its polluting potential. When Baoyu offers to send some maidservants to wipe the floor for Miaoyu after the villager has gone, Miaoyu agrees only on the condition that the maidservants not entering her Hermitage but leaving the water outside at the foot of the wall. Surprisingly, fastidious and difficult as Miaoyu, no one in the novel really feel anything wrong with her. Baoyu's justification of Miaoyu's hard personality is thus noteworthy, "Adamantina is never among ordinary people like those. She's beyond the mundane crowd 他原不在這些人中算,他原是世人意外之人."[80] Thanks to her intimacy with the Buddhist order, she nevertheless enjoys more tolerance from the Confucian family and society. That is, Buddhist bipolar capacity as both being assimilated into the domestic sphere of a Confucian family and meanwhile denying all the secular values carves out a unique niche for Miaoyu and her ambiguous identity, eccentricity, and hard personality. Miaoyu's in-between status is achieved by the facilitation of the monastic space she is residing. As what Xiuyan said, "[Miaoyu] had evidently found [Green Bower Hermitage] a place where her

[79] *HLM*, Chapter 41, p. 443.

[80] *HLM*, Chapter 63, p. 709.

eccentricities would be tolerated."[81] In other words, the seclusion and ascetic cultivation in the domestic as provided by the indoor convent not only fit her into the Confucian expectation of a morally/sexually pure maid, but also meanwhile offsets all her wayward and peculiar traits that are otherwise intolerable by a Confucian context.

Now it is safe to move forward and argue that the Green Bower Hermitage, like its dweller, also acquires a bipolar quality. It serves as both a boudoir and a convent, it is both rooted in and stay aloof from the Jia family. First of all, although all the refined girls are living in the Grand view garden, Miaoyu's hermitage is geographically isolated from the others' residences. Miaoyu has to pass a middle gate 腰門 to visit Jia Xichun and others. Economically, although the hermitage is constructed by the Jia family and located in the household of Jia, we are informed that the Miaoyu in fact is financially independent from Jia's patronage.[82] The Hermitage has both pure room, hall of Buddha, but also has delicate and fancy ornaments and utensils which by no means make it typical among the normal and simple monasteries.[83] Moreover, the jarring existence of the red plums flourishing in the Hermitage has been widely accepted as a

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[81] Ibid.

[82] As Yiqun Zhou points out, "In Chapter 113, when Miaoyu's disappearance gives rise to the question of what will happen to the clerical community that was formerly under her leadership, the narrator comes forward with the following statement, 'as a religious establishment [Green Bower Hermitage] had always been self-supporting, and had never been dependent on Jia family charity.'" See Yiqun Zhou, "Temples and Clerics," p. 280.

[83] *HLM*, especially Chapter 41, pp. 441-44.

concretization of Miaoyu's insuppressible desire and sentiments for Baoyu,[84] which lays bare the entanglement with this-world of both the supposed other-worldly resident and her residence. Hence a Qing commentator insightful avers that "Miaoyu self-defines as to be dwelling beyond the threshold, but in fact she is dwelling behind it 自謂檻外，實在檻內."[85] Indeed, although Baoyu categorizes Miaoyu as one beyond the secular groups, she in fact gains a central position in the heavenly main register of the twelve most outstanding girls of Jinling 金陵十二钗正册.

Furthermore, beside Miaoyu's pernality and residence, even the novel's sketch-style per se about Miaoyu also repeats this in-between style. Miaoyu seldom gets a front-view of portrait (expect the chapter 112) in the whole novel, while all the other Jinling girls all have their own moments of a close-up description. In fact, Miaoyu shows up in person only for two times in the first 80 chapters (drinking tea and completing the poem), and even in the last 40, she doesn't receive much direct depiction compared to the other protagonists as categorized together as "Twelve Beauties of the Jinling." What's more, some key episodes regarding her, such as Baoyu's visit of her for a branch of red plum is also purposely omitted. As a result, a reader barely knows nothing about Miaoyu's countenance, appearance, or life experience. Her first emergence in chapter 18 is only a vague profile offered by the wife of Lin Zhixiao; her previous experience although is mentioned by Xiuyan and Lin Zhixiao's wife, they in fact don't really provide any specific, valid information about her background and authentic identity. Her result is

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[84] Yiqun Zhou, "Temples and Clerics," p. 284.

[85] Feng Qiyong 馮其庸, *Chongjiao bajia pingpi Honglou meng* 重校八家評批紅樓夢 (A Revised Edition of Eight Commentaries on *Honglou meng*), 3 vols., Nanchang: Jiangxi jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000, Commentary by Zhang 張評, p. 1560.

similarly elusive as after she is abducted by a gang of bandits, her whereabouts only exits in some hazy rumors. Briefly, both her mythological origin and denouement are of no detailed account, which makes Miaoyu among the most perplexing characters to modern Redologists.

In this sense, it can be concluded that, Miaoyu is both present and absent in the book, as she comes from and disappears in nowhere, and is usually mentioned by other's reference instead of a direct depiction. That is why the red inkstone—the most important Qing commentator of *Honglou meng*—exclaims that "Miaoyu is one that beyond the mundane world. Therefore, the author always makes indirect reference of her. This is indeed very much ingenious and pertinent. 妙玉世外人也,故筆筆帶寫,妙極妥極!"[86] As if the author is affirming Miaoyu's self-identification as "one that beyond the threshold," he always places Miaoyu beyond the "threshold" of the narrative.

In fact, a threshold not only denotes a margin, an end of a domain, but also signals a starting point and origin of the "other" realm. Threshold 檻 itself then signifies a proximity, a bond, and reference to a "third" yet in-between domain that is connecting the two binary spheres. In the context of a Confucian family, the threshold is the bridge between *nei* and *wai*, and thus belongs to both and neither of them. Miaoyu's Hermitage functions like such a threshold. It provides her with a self-sustained space in which she could keep the domesticity and meanwhile stride on the otherwise tenuous boundary between *monastic* and *ordinary*, between *masculine* and *feminine*, between *presence* and *absence*. Miaoyu belongs to neither spheres and meanwhile belongs to both. The domestic monastic space as evoked by the Green Bower Hermitage to a certain degree

[86] Cao Xueqin, *Zhiyanzhai quan ping* Shitou ji 脂硯齋全評石頭記 (*The Story of Stone*, commentated by Zhiyanzhai), Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 2006, p. 223.

illustrates both laywomen's new positionings but also epitomizes Buddhism's equivocal yet critical existence in a hostile Confucian context in late imperial China.

Conclusion

As lay Buddhism rose to prominence, the Pure Land sect popularized more material and manageable ways of practicing Buddhism, especially in the domestic sphere. Many laywomen established personal monastic spaces in the *nei* sphere. These private, woman-centric, homegrown religious spaces became increasingly fragmentary, adaptable, transportable, and clandestine. The supposed cooperation and even identification between Confucianism and Buddhism, especially as the systems pertained to women's religiosity and wifely duties, proved to be precarious. The Confucian codes, envisioning the home temple instead as a simple receptacle of women's submissive piety, insisted that women's spaces for worship remain in the *nei*, while a much wider range of behaviors those spaces would open up for women is observed by and recorded in a wider range of literary texts. In another words, the fusion of the two ideologies in the domestic sphere, did not consistently produce spiritual or moral coherence between Buddhist and Confucian expectations and values; the two religious systems could conflict as they pertained to women spirituality and morality even in the domestic sphere. Domestic Buddhist spaces could work alongside Confucianism to fasten women to the *nei* sphere, but the apparent traditionalism of home worship could also serve as an excuse to carve out alternative spaces in which Confucian norms were manipulated or nullified. As a result, women insulated in religious spaces in turn acquired a broader horizon and more complicated positioning in both gender and cultural landscape.

Because Buddhism could both bolster Confucian norms in the domestic sphere and devalue personal ties to the earthly world, it gave laywomen leeway to reimagine gendered spatial

divisions, to advance personal agendas (virtuous or otherwise), and to construct alternative conjugal relationships and hierarchies. In other words, monastic spaces situated in the *nei* often challenged and de-stabilized the *nei-wai* dichotomy and threatened the Confucian gender and family order, as these spaces allowed women to fashion their own religious activities within a sealed and shielded space. Because of their lack of regulation and their apparent conformity with Confucian guidelines, women's private monastic spaces could be more subversive and resilient than outdoor temples which could be more easily legislated or destroyed by the state or Confucian scholars. In this way, Buddhism's ostensible cooperation with Confucianism and tangible empowering of women allowed the popular religion to gain tremendous ground with female adherents. Buddhism thrived—even in a society dominated by Neo-Confucianism that was increasing hostile to it—(at least partly) by lavishing persistent attention on and offering tremendous opportunities to women, who were likely to be despised and deprived in Confucian families.

Buddhism's interaction with the gender landscape not only confines itself to disturbing the spatial and social order prescribed by the Confucian *nei-wai* principle, it further engages with women's corporeality within a woman's resident context, be it her boudoir or burial site. In next chapter, I will discuss how the female body was imagined as intersecting with temples—religious spaces—in both texts and tombs.

Chapter Three Imagining a Corporeal "Temple"

The Female Body as a Sacred Site

The eminent Qing scholar and lay Buddhist Peng Shaosheng 彭紹昇 (1740-1796) includes a biography of a laywoman, née Fei 費氏, in his compendium *Shannüren zhuan* (*Biographies of Buddhist Laywomen* 善女人傳, hereafter *SNRZ*).[1] The entry narrates how Fei is widowed at an early age and remains celibate, practicing vegetarianism and cultivating her spirituality, for the next 40 years. Fei sets up, in her own house, an altar with a sandalwood statue of *Guanyin* and portraits of the Buddha of Three Periods 三世佛. Every day, without fail, she worships the statue and portraits and recites the *Diamond Sutra*. When her region is ravaged by the plague, Fei moves to her daughter and son-in-law's house, taking along only the *Guanyin* statue and leaving behind the paintings of the Buddha (probably for the ease of travel). Fei maintains her daily worship in her new residence. Every day, she prays that her incense will reach the Buddha's place 日課回向,祝願此香,直達佛所. Three years later, an unaccountable fragrance appears suddenly in the air of her room and lingers for a few days; then, shining images of the Buddha of Three Periods miraculously appears on the wall of her prayer room. News of this marvelous

[1] The collection includes the biographies of 148 Buddhist laywomen, and all of its sources are drawn from a wide range of texts spanning from the Eastn Jin (318-420) to the Qianlong era of the Qing dynasty (1736-1796). For a detailed analysis of *SNRZ*, see Hongyu Wu, "Leading the Good Life: Peng Shaosheng's Biographical Narratives and Instructions for Buddhist Laywomen in High Qing China (1683-1796)," PhD Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 2013.

event spreads, and more and more people come to catch a glimpse of and pay homage to the miraculous portraits of the Buddha.[2]

This story suggests that the private monastic space Fei establishes in her home is not affixed to any particular location. The domestic "pure room" turns out, quite miraculously, to follow its architect wherever she goes. When Fei's prayer ("may the incense directly reach the Buddha's location 祝願此香.直達佛所") is answered, as evidenced by the appearance of Buddha's images and the mysterious fragrance in the air, the incense Fei burns does indeed find its way into the domain of the Buddha. Fei's boudoir is incorporated into the Buddha's sacred space; distinctions between the ethereal and earthly dissolve. Fei's corporality proves a more valuable medium than any particular sacred location. As Fei's story illustrates, it is not a sacred space that precedes and awaits the residence of a sacred person, but rather the holy person's physical position that gives rise to the sacred space. Fei's private sacred space appears to be attached to the migrating female body rather than to any particular geography; wheresoever Fei worships, her sacred space is destined to surface. Fei's experience suggests that personal religious spaces are actually dynamic processes rather than stagnant locations, processes that accommodate the worshipper's body and respond to her pious desires. The female body gives rise to a sacred space where this body resides. Women's piety and spiritual cultivation overleaps geographical limitations and renders sacred space mobile and malleable. In this way, the pious laywoman's corporeal asceticism is given spatial expression in a setting that marvelously transforms into a portable "Pure Land."

[2] "Née Fei," in *SNRZ*, p. 0243-4.

Fei's biography points us towards a broader culture's configuration of Buddhist spaces as personal and flexible. Women at the time also shared this imagination that considering sacred spaces as fluid, portable sites that depended more on the body of the devotee than on any geographical anchor. For example, in the early Qing compendium *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成 (a collection of texts and illustrations, old and new, hereafter *GJTS*), the widow née Wang 王氏 loses her husband at the age of 21. From then on, she abstains from meat and recites sutras indefatigably . Wang's biography is characterized by repeated acts of self-injury. When her husband falls seriously ill, Wang slices her thigh to make medicine for him (i.e., she practices *gegu*); when, on his deathbed, Wang's husband entrusts her with the care of the family, she bites her finger to swear her fidelity; and she cuts off her finger to deter the avaricious kinsman who attempts to seduce her and plunder her inheritance. In her later years, when she is invited to visit the local temples and pay homage to a *stupa*, she refuses, saying, "The Buddha is right here and there is no need to seek him elsewhere 佛在是，無用他求."[3]

Undoubtedly, the editor quotes Wang's refusal to visit the local temple in order to demonstrate her staunch adherence to the ideal of women's seclusion. Yet her words suggest an alternate interpretation. Wang does not explicitly claim that it is inappropriate for her to leave her boudoir; she merely dismisses the necessity of a temple visit, claiming her transcendental

[3] "Qichao qi wangshi 齊潮妻王氏 (Qichao's Wife Née Wang), " In *Qinding gujin tushu jicheng* 欽定古今圖書集成 (Imperially Approved Collection of Texts and Illustrations, Old and New), Mingluhuibian 明倫彙編, guiyuan dian 閨媛典, vol.206, guijie bu 閨節部, Liezhuan 列傳 88, Ming 83, book 410, p. 57.

correspondence with the Buddha obviates the journey: "the Buddha is right here." The sacred space to Wang's mind, seems not to be demarcated by its geographical position but could be accessed through an ascetic and moral body.

Caroline Bynum asserts that late-medieval European women's asceticism constituted "a way of manipulating and controlling the self and one's environment by ideologically fusing with and emulating a Christ, whose suffering saved the world."[4] The same principle applies to pious Chinese women of the Ming-Qing era, who, like their Christian counterparts, came to embody their religious model, the Buddha/Bodhisattva, through suffering and self-restraint. Wang's asceticism and even self-harm allow her to achieve a quasi-Buddhahood as she feels no need to travel in order to gain access to the divine. Moreover, Wang's Buddhahood is conflated with an ideal Confucian womanhood through her physical suffering, seclusion, and filiality. Wang's body generates a sacred site that enacts both Buddhist sanctity and Confucian virtue.[5] As such, Wang herself, embodies a corporeal shrine. The sacred temple is not a fixed religious place that awaits Wang's visit; instead, her exemplarity imbues her surroundings with a holiness so pure that the Buddha takes up residence in her residence. Wang's story again shows how, in women's

[4] Quoted from Jimmy Yu, *Sanctity and Self-Inflicted Violence in Chinese Religions, 1500-1700*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 10. See also Caroline Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, University of California Press, 1987, pp. 208-18.

[5] For sure, here Confucian virtues are much more dominant while Buddhist scaredness is largely a religious affirmation of the secular virtues of the Confucianism.

own mind, the female body could partake in and produce a corporeal "Pure Land" through self-discipline and moral rectitude.

Both Fei's and Wang's biographies exemplify how the religious space is imbricated with the corporeal, and thus lead to the thesis of this Chapter. I will discuss how women's bodies, living and dead, actively partake in the production of sacred spaces in Ming-Qing literary texts and burial practices. Before we consider further case studies, a brief introduction to academic research and cultural background concerning the human body's relationship to religious discipline is in order.

Religions and the Human Body

Many religions enjoin adherents to express their piety through their bodies, whether through corporeal alteration, decoration, care, or mortification.[6] Current scholarship concerning religious demands on the body emphasize how religious traditions shape attitudes about the nature and meaning of embodiedness. Briefly, a perennial question in religious theory and praxis is whether the body is a barrier to or a means to arrive at the sacred realm.

Scholars on premodern European Christianity have undertaken to problematize the assumption that Christianity has always subscribed to a Cartesian dualism of body and mind. It is often assumed that early Christians considered the body a burden, a weight that prevents the soul from entering the Kingdom of Heaven. Many scholars have nuanced that picture of Christian body-negativity by highlighting how religious practitioners' asceticism and mortification

[6] Omnipresent is the corporeal practices such as mandated celibacy, restrictive diets/fasting, circumcision, genital mutilation, self-flagellation, or the specification of clothing and decorations, etc.

constituted an "integral aspect of piety and religious expression." The obsession with asceticism paradoxically meant that early Christians were deeply invested in bodily practices; they did not simply renounce the earthly world and the earthly body.[7] Similarly, Jimmy Yu, in his work on premodern Chinese asceticism, points out that in premodern China, Buddhists who practiced self-inflicted violence did not see their bodies as a negative entity that must be rejected; instead, the bodily self-inflictions in premodern China "were instrumental and in themselves epistemologically productive; they fashioned the body 'with a much higher aim' in order to produce a particular kind of social subject and participant I society—one that was sanctified and revered."[8] Scholars of both western and Chinese religious traditions complicate the view that the human body was seen in pre-modern religious practice as merely a "barrier" or "burden" impeding one's journey towards spiritual fulfillment; they argue, instead, that the ascetic's body was an indispensable means of religious striving.

Although they successfully upset traditional formulations of Cartesian dualism, these academic exploration of the body's religious instrumentality reinforce the notion that the human body serves as a receptacle for religious habitus.[9] In these histories, religious subjects' internal devotional life is maintained and inscribed through routinized external behaviors. These behavioral habits are designed to discipline the body in accordance with religious principles. In

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[7] See Teresa M. Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh: Fasting and Sexuality in Early Christianity*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press,1998, pp. 2-3, 29-33. See also Jimmy Yu, *Sanctity and Self-Inflicted Violence,* pp. 9-10.

[8] Jimmy Yu, *Sanctity and Self-Inflicted Violence,* pp. 15-16.

The Logic of Practice, Pierre Bourdieu describes this practice as "bodily *hexis*," the realization and embodiment of abstract principles.[10] Yet bodily hexis implies a hierarchization of religion and body: the religious traditions and doctrines define and discipline the adherent's body, not the other way around. Can the human body be agentive in (re)shaping religious ideology? Can religion and body constitute one another? Can the relationship between the two be truly reciprocal?

Rather than claiming the human body as either a barrier to spirituality or a mechanism for access to it, I will show in this chapter that, in many cases, the pious female body actively instantiates pure lands or presides over the making of sacred spaces in late imperial China.

The Female Body and the Pure Land

It is no exaggeration to say that female bodies and ascetic practices occupied a prominent, if not central, position in the discourse of lay Buddhism in late imperial China. As I discussed in Chapter 2, laywomen's austerity practices and religious devotions in the domestic sphere led to a widespread sense that Confucian and Buddhist ideals and practices were happily compatible, especially insofar as they informed the self-disciplining of women's bodies. The Buddhist promotion of vegetarianism, abstinence, frugality, and self-cultivation conformed to Confucian expectations of women's—and especially widows'—exercise of virtue. The Buddhist-inflected phrase describing perfect self-discipline—"to don plain white robes, to abstain from meat, to

[10] Habitus is a state of the body and of being, a repository of ingrained dispositions that thus seem natural. Bourdieu calls this the bodily hexis, where "the body is the site of incorporated history," Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice,* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992, p. 74.

maintain strict Buddhist diet 缟衣茹素，持斋不辍, and to seclude oneself in one's inner quarters for life 隐居深闺"—appears as a stock phrase in hagiographies of Confucian female exemplars.[11] Building on Confucian norms of women's roles, moral convictions, and gendered practices, Buddhist asceticism mobilized the female body as a repository of Buddhist values and as an arena for the display of ideal Confucian womanhood.

Although Confucian moralists typically approved of laywomen's asceticism in late imperial China, Buddhist traditions are ambivalent about the role of the female body in women disciples' journey toward enlightenment. Sectarian doctrines and sutras (which were widely distributed in premodern China) differ in their approaches. Some advocates for gender-specific understandings of Buddhist practice, suggest that female adherents must obtain a male body before achieving enlightenment (*Mahāyāna* scriptures).[12] Others claim gender is irrelevant to enlightenment and

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[11] Women's self-infliction on their body as a manifestation of their exemplarity can be either physical or sexual. Upstanding women were expected to show moral rectitude by denying or destroying their bodies/sexuality. As Sherry Mou puts it, "women's sexuality—or often the denial of it…always seems to be at the center" of orthodox Confucian discourse. Sherry J. Mou, *Gentlemen's Prescriptions for Women's Lives: A Thousand Years of Biographies of Chinese Women*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004, p. 184.

[12] The *Mahāyāna* scriptures assert that "[a woman] could be a *bodhisattva* and tread the *bodhisattva*-path toward enlightenment—but somewhere along the way, in the course of her own rebirths, she would have to cease to be female and go on being born only as male." See Nancy Schuster, "Striking a Balance: Women and Images of Women in Early Chinese Buddhism," in

the sex of a body is meaningless. The gender- and sex-blind approach is in evidence in the *Vimalakīrti Sutra,* in which a bodhisattva transcends the sexed body and adopts male and female bodies at will.[13] Moreover, many *Mahāyāna* scriptures, exoteric and esoteric alike, describe the female body (and/or sexual activities) as a means of expediency (*fang-bian*, upāya)" or "a powerful tool" in the spiritual transformation of men.[14] The *guanyin* bodhisattva was said to have been incarnated as a prostitute-like figure in order to enlighten lecherous men through arousal and sexual satisfaction.[15] The dead female body is also deployed as an instrument for men to contemplate the impurity and filthiness of the human body, and this contemplation was understood to lead to men's ultimate awakening. This practice is known as *bujingguan* 不淨觀

Yvonne Y. Haddad and Ellison B. Findly, ed., *Women, Religion, and Social Change*. New York: SUNY Press, 1985, p. 90.

[13] The bodhisattva in the *Vimalakīrti Sutra*, however, "uses her supernormal powers to change freely back and forth from female to male, in order to demonstrate to… her monk antagonist, that maleness and femaleness are not ultimately real at all but are empty like a show of a magic." See Nancy Schuster, "Striking a Balance," p. 90, and note 11 on page 106.

[14] Chün-fang Yü, *Kuan-Yin*, p. 424.

[15] Yülan Guanyin 魚籃觀音 (Guanyin with a fish-basket) and one of her incarnation known as the "woman of Yen-chou." She was a seductress who would "have sex with any man who asked for it. But whoever had sex with her was said to be free from sexual desire forever." After she died, her bones turned out to be chained in the same manner of the Guanyin with fish casket. see Chün-fang Yü, *Kuan-Yin*, p. 421-24.

(Contemplation on the impure).[16] Although the female body, living or dead, can serve to further men's spiritual progress, it is nevertheless overlaid in these contexts with erotic desire or disgust (or both).

In this chapter, I move beyond the Buddhist instrumentalization of the female body, complicating the categorization of the female body as either a barrier or tool to enlightenment. I will explore an alternative or third role of the female body as a generator of pure lands using a variety of sources, including literary texts and archeological evidence. In other words, I show how, in many written narratives as in material proofs, the female body is imagined as integral or contributive to the sacred space/Pure Land.

Spatializing the Female Body: Buddhist and Chinese Provenance

Actually this identification of female bodies with sacred spaces didn't pop out in late imperial China, it can be traced back to earlier historical periods in both Buddhist and Chinese traditions. Before we dive into examples in late imperial China, let us look at the buddhist and Chinese Provenance first. For example, in canonical Buddhist texts such as The *Lalitavistara*

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[16] The practice of *bujingguan*不淨觀 is widely visible across Asia. For a discussion of this contemplation on female corpses, see Liz Wilson, *Charming Cadavers: Horrific Figurations of the Feminine in Indian Buddhist Hagiographic Literature*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996; Rajyashree Pandey, "Desire and Disgust: Meditations on the Impure Body in Medieval Japanese Narratives," *Monumenta Nipponica*, 60, No.2 (2005): 195-234. For the primary source on the mindfulness of the body, see Satipatthāna Sutta ((Majjhima Nīkāya 10), translated by Gil Fronsdal. https://www.insightmeditationcenter.org/articles/SatipatthanaSutta.pdf, traced on 5/22/2019.

Sutra, which includes, in John Strong's words, "one of the most embellished of the Buddha's biographies,"[17] records how the pregnant Queen Māyā, the Buddha's mother, was offered multiple magnificent palaces in which she could reside. Rather than choosing between them, Queen Māyā marvelously "appeared in all of the residences" at once.[18] The sutra attributes this miracle to "the power of the Bodhisattva resting in the absorption known as *the great array*."[19] Queen Māyā's womb hosts the Buddha, and thus her own body's relationship to space corresponds with the Buddha's; her body is a fluid and transcendent site that breaks free of the limitations of the space-time continuum. She dwells everywhere, just as the Buddha does.

The sutra suggests that the transcendent female body, not the sacred space of the palace, incubates and instantiates the fetal Buddha's holiness and ubiquity. This anecdote featuring Queen Māyā is in an interesting intertextual dialogue with the stories of the laywomen Fei and Wang discussed earlier in the chapter. In the scriptural story of Queen Māyā the female body breaks free of fixed geography, resembling the ubiquitous Buddha who is unmoored from any spatial fixity in Fei and Wang's biographies. Yet all of these cases present a continuity between the female body and the sacred spaces in which she resides, and all emphasize the dissolution of spatial boundaries in articulating women's holiness. The holy female body can exist in multiple

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[17] John Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 63.

[18] *The Play In Full:* Lalitavistara*.* Trans. Dharmachakra Translation Committee, 2013, p. 50. Translated by the Dharmachakra Translation Committee, http://read.84000.co/translation/UT22084-046-001.html

[19] Ibid.

locations at once, while sacred spaces become portable, migrating together with holy female bodies.

The interior of the female body—epitomized by the womb—is construed in simultaneously spatial and sacred terms in both Buddhist and Chinese traditions. The *Lalitavistara Sutra* offers a description of Queen Māyā's womb implanted with "a bejeweled palace-like structure called a *ratnavyuba*."[20] As the sutra goes, "The jeweled structure […] was finely shaped, exquisite, and beautiful to behold. It was square and had four pillars. At its top was a beautifully adorned upper floor scaled to fit a six-month-old fetus. Inside that upper chamber was a throne with a sitting area that was likewise scaled to fit a six-month-old fetus."[21] The Queen's womb is further identified with a temple: "Yet before [the Buddha] entered his mother's womb, a temple of precious materials was manifested on the right side of his mother's womb […] [The Buddha] sat crossed-legged inside the peaked structure."[22] The womb is ekphrastically defined as sacred architecture that enshrines the Buddha in embryo.

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[20] John Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, p. 63.

[21] For an English translation of the whole *Lalitavistara Sutra, see The Play in Full*, p. 52.

[22] Ibid., p. 53. The "temple" is also described in architectural terms. "Likewise nothing whatsoever in all the divine realms can compare to the size and shape of the throne inside the structure that had delighted the Bodhisattva… The temple was made from uraga sandalwood, which is so precious that a single mote of its dust is equal in value to a thousand universes... Inside that temple hovered an identical second structure, …[and] an identical third structure, ... Within that third temple made of incense was a throne with cushions." *The Play in Full*, p. 52.

The womb is a necessary way station for the Buddha as he embarks on his rite of passage and descends from the heavenly to the human realm.[23] The Buddha's emergence from the womb qualifies him as human and marks his entrance into the human world. Yet because the otherwise "loathsome" human body part (the womb) has been elevated to the status of a temple, the baby Buddha is protected from being sullied "by any contact with the impurities that are normally characteristics of the womb and the birth canal."[24] The female body, traditionally framed in Buddhist discourse as "impure," serves as a liminal stage, a divine portal, and a pure pivot for the Buddha, spatially bridging the ethereal and the earthly.

The mythological sacralization and "temple-ization" of a woman's womb indeed finds a more secular yet similar expression in Chinese cultural tradition. Chinese medical discourse describes the womb in spatial terms as *zigong* (literarily "the son's palace").[25] The character of *gong* (which can be interpreted either as a palace or as a temple) here unmistakably indicates the

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[23] Ibid., p. 52.

[24] John Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, p. 63.

[25] Common in traditional Chinese medicine such as *Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目 (The Compendium of Materia Medica), the traditional term of *zigong* is still in use nowadays. See Li Shizhen 李時珍. *Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目, Zhongguo jiben guji ku (Digital collection) 中國基本古籍庫 (Database of Chinese Classic Ancient Books via Erudition). Beijing: Beijing Airusheng shuzihua jishu yanjiu zhongxin, 2009. For a more detailed discussion on the gendered Chinese body, see Charlotte Furth, *A Flourishing Yin: Gender in China's Medical History: 960–1665*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

imagined architectural quality of the uterus and analogizes the female body to a physical shelter for the fetus.

Meanwhile, the architecturally coded womb is also the fetus's point of entry into society; the womb denotes the place where "habitus" begins to take shape and take place. For example, the account of a laywoman named You 游氏 in the Song dynasty suggests how important it was for the fetus to form good habits in utero. According to the account, You stays in her meditation room reading from the Buddhist and Confucian canons every day of her pregnancy. She refrains altogether from yelling or glaring. The biographer comments, "This is how the ancient people practiced prenatal education. It is therefore predictable that all of You's sons became men of virtue and talent 此古人胎教法也。故其子生，皆賢才."[26] The description of You's pregnant body as a pure and sacred space resonates with other writing from later in the Ming dynasty. The eminent Ming monk Yunqi Zhuhong 袾宏 records how a Buddhist laywoman named Zhang had a son named Yuan who was also a pious Buddhist. As Zhuhong writes, "[Zhang] carried Yuan—the lay Buddhist—for ten months, during which time she never neglected to perform the religious service. That was why Yuan, even in his early childhood, was already on intimate terms with Buddhist Triratna. This is an example of what we call prenatal education. 孕居士腹中十月，無一日怠緩禮敬。故居士在孩提，即知歸向三寶，蓋所謂胎教也."[27] A laywoman's

[26] "Née You, Huang Chong's wife in the Song dynasty 宋朝黃崇妻游氏" in *GJTS,* Mingluhuibian 明倫彙編, Guiyuan dian 閨媛典 (The Section of Respectable Women), vol. 24, 閨淑部 (The part of decent women), book 396, p. 62.

[27] Yunqi zhuhong 雲棲袾宏, "Yuanmu 袁母 (Yuan's Mother)," *Zhuchuang erbi* 竹窗二筆

religious devotion facilitates her creation of a tranquil, decent, and compassionate environment in which to nurture her unborn children both biologically and spiritually—a salubrious environment that is conflated with the space of her womb.

In fact, the practice of prenatal education fits into Confucian discourse legislating proper femininity. *The Book of Filial Piety for Women* includes a section on "Prenatal Education," which prescribes the proper conduct of pregnant women to ensure outstanding offspring. "One has an intrinsic nature from birth, but much virtue is learned," *The Book of Filial Piety* explains. "If children are exposed to good, then they will be good; if exposed to evil, they will be evil. Even when they are in the womb, they therefore must be educated!" Hence in You and Zhang's cases, as the cultivation of an ideal Buddhist commences in the woman's body, the womb becomes a sacred place in which the embryo undertakes moral and religious cultivation. A laywoman's religious devotion facilitates her creation of a tranquil, decent, and compassionate environment in which her unborn children were nurtured both biologically and spiritually. This salubrious environment is thereupon conflated with the space of her womb, denoting a salubrious corporeal temple where "habitus" begins to take shape and take place.

The identification of the corporeal with the spatial surely doesn't confine to the particular body part of a woman's womb. In both Japanese and Chinese Buddhist tales, one can find a more straightforward expression of the homogenization between women's body and sacred spaces. For example, the earliest Japanese collection of Buddhist legends entitled *Nihon koku genpo zen'aku*

(The Second Collection of the Bamboo Window), in *Lianchi dashi quanji* 蓮池大師全集 (Collected Writings of Master Lianchi), vol. 6. Facsimile of Yunqi fahui edition 雲棲法彙影印本.

ryoi ki (Extraordinary stories of the retribution of good and evil in Japan),[28] records an interesting tale of this kind. As the story goes, a man swears to build a pagoda but failed to fulfill his vow. When he was in his 70s, his wife (who was in her 60s) gave birth to a baby girl who had a clenched left hand and didn't open it until seven. At the very beginning, the girl was considered as a deformed freak, but at the moment she unfolded her palm, her parents realized that she has been holding two grains of Buddha's relics. All the country was amazed at this miracle and a seven-story stupa was thus built for the relics. The girl, however, died immediately upon the erection of the stupa.[29]

With the divine Śarīra in her hand, the girl was actually born as a corporeal reliquary, or a "human pagoda" in William LaFleur's words.[30] Her palm (or her body) "housed, or enshrined" the divine residue of Shakyamuni. Brian Ruppert considers this Japanese anecdote as a later adaption to a Chinese Buddhist anecdote which tells the story of how a poor and demeaned female servant was reborn as the daughter of King Aśoka. As a karmic reward to the servant's donation of a copper coin to the monastic, she was reborn as the king's daughter with her clenched right hand holding a gold coin. Whenever the coin was removed, there will be a new

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[28] The *Nihon ryoiki* is compiled by a Japanese monk named Kyokai (787-822). See Brian D. Ruppert, *Jewel in the Ashes*: *Buddha Relics and Power in early Medieval Japan*, Harvard University Asian Center, 2000, p. 198.

[29] For a complete translation of this tale, see William LaFleur, *The Karma of Words*: *Buddhism and the Literary Arts in Medieval Japan*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986, pp. 39-41

[30] Ibid., pp. 39-41.

one appeared in its place.[31] Ruppert convincingly equates the princess' copper-turned gold coin with the relics in the Japanese girl's hand, as they both are "synecdochic" for the Buddha's infinite plenty and presence. A corporeal reliquary/stupa, both girls' hands instantiates the physical access enjoyed by pious devotees to the plentitude and eternity of the Buddha's body. Therefore, it is perhaps not a coincidence that in both stories, the corporeal container of the holy residue is a *female* body (part). Demonstrating the Buddha's infinite presence and plenty, the two girls' body (especially hands) is spatialized into a corporeal surrogate of an architectural stupa/temple to house the Buddha's body (residue). The girls' palm in this way parallels the female body part of "womb" that conceived the embryo of enlightened beings, representing a sacred space in which the Buddha's sanctity is to be stored, displayed, and experienced.

This parallelism between the corporeal and the spatial in earlier historical periods was still confined to a notion that woman's body is always a vessel, a *container* that houses the sacred *content*. I will show that this parallelism took on new forms and became more prominent in late imperial China. The female body was no longer merely a metaphorical *container* of the sacred *content*; rather, it could be both and further imagined to be able to engage and activate the holiness of its environs.

The Female Body as a Sacred Site

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[31] See Shi Daoshi 釋道世, *Fayuan zhulin jiaozhu* 法苑珠林校注 (Forest of Pearls in the Garden of the Dharma), Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003, vol. 81, Section of Six Rebirths 六度篇, item 85 (2), pp. 2363-65. See also Brian D. Ruppert, *Jewel in the Ashes*, pp. 198-99.

Our first case study focuses on a filial girl and pious devotee named Chen Miaozhen 陳妙珍. Miaozhen was extolled both as a Confucian exemplar and as a saintly bhikṣunī in recognition of her extraordinary filial and religious piety. Song Lian 宋濂 (1310-1381), an Early Ming scholar, wrote for her the stele inscription "Biography of the Filial Daughter Chen from Lishui Inscribed on a Stone Stele 麗水陳孝女傳碑."[32] A concise biography of Miaozhen and a reference of Song Lian's tribute to her were both recorded in the early Qing compendium *GJTS*.[33] Song Lian's epigraph also inspired a fictionalized account of Miaozhen's life in the late Ming. A story about Miaozhen attributed to the brothers Lu Renlong 陸人龍 (fl. first half of 17th century) and Lu Yunlong 陸雲龍, entitled "A Single Heart Moves the Gods from Afar; One Slice of Liver Instantly Revives Grandmother 寸心遠格神明, 片肝頓蘇祖母," was included in the short story collection *Xingshi yan* 型世言 (*Exemplary Words for the World,* 1632).[34] All

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[32] Song Lian 宋濂, "Lishui chen xiaonü zhuanbei 麗水陳孝女傳碑 (A Biographical Epitaph for the Filial Girl From Lishui)," in *Song xueshi wenji* 宋學士文集 (Collected Writings of Scholar Song), vol.43, *Zhiyuan ji* 芝園集 (Collected Writings from the Garden of Orchid), part 3, Zhongguo jiben guji ku (Digital collection) 中國基本古籍庫.

[33] There is, however, a discrepancy in the girl's name: while in Song Lian's record the girl is named Chen Miaozhen 陳妙珍, in the *GJTS*, her name is Chen Miaozhen 陳妙真. The two characters 珍 and 真 are homophones though. See *GJTS*, Guiyuan dian 閨媛典 (The Section of Repectable Women), vol. 32, 閨孝部 (The part of filial women), book 397, p. 40.

[34] See Lu Renlong, *Xingshi yan*, Chapter 4, pp. 161-94. The English Title of the story is Maria Sibau's translation. *Reading for the Moral: Exemplarity and the Confucian Moral Imagination in*

biographical accounts of Miaozhen include her canonization as a Confucian exemplar;[35] while the Lu brothers' substantially expanded account adds a denouement in which Miaozhen is consecrated as a Buddhist saint whose body generates śarīras after cremation.

In this section, I will draw from the Lu brothers' version of the woman's life story and from Song Lian's stele inscription (which is transcribed by Peng Shaosheng).[36] The first half of the Lu version basically conforms to Song Lian's. Orphaned at an early age, the heroine, Chen Miaozhen, is raised by her loving grandmother. When her grandmother falls gravely ill, Miaozhen twice cuts off a piece of her own flesh, practicing *gegu,* to present to her grandmother as medicine. She takes flesh first from her arm and then from her liver. Although Miaozhen succeeds both times in reviving her grandmother, the old woman eventually passes away several years later. Miaozhen then takes a vow of celibacy and receives Buddhist tonsure to become a nun.

The versions diverge in their accounts of Miaozhen's life after her practice of *gegu*. While Song Lian's version concludes with Miaozhen building a pagoda in which to bury her grandmother and then receiving governmental recognition for her exemplarity, the Lu story introduces new plots. The Lu story relates that, after her grandmother's death, Miaozhen fails to find a permanent religious residence; although she travels to two convents, she finds "lurid

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Seventeenth-Century Chinese Short Stories, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018, p. 3 & 70.

[35] As the version in *GJTS* is so succinct that it doesn't mention Miaozhen's religious orientation at all.

[36] Beside some minor changes, Peng omitted the commentary part at the end of the original text.

traffics going on at both places, and retreats to her own hermitage which she builds by the grandmother's grave."[37] After over a decade of living in isolation, Miaozhen dies seated in full-lotus posture. She is then cremated and her sacred relics enshrined; worshippers build a pagoda on the site of her hermitage, which is thereafter known as "Xiaonü Zhong (the tomb of a filial girl) 孝女塚" or "Sheni ta (the pagoda of a sacred nun) 神尼塔."[38]

In Song Lian's biography, Miaozhen's body features prominently. After her grandmother falls seriously ill, Miaozhen visits temples and performs rites intended to exorcise the illness, all to no avail. Miaozhen's grandmother does not recover until Miaozhen burns her own arm as incense and pledges to sacrifice her own body and indeed her very life in exchange for her grandmother's health.[39] The young woman's body reveals further supernatural powers when she remains untouched by water in the pouring rain. As Song Lian describes, "it is as if there is a

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[37] Maria Sibau, *Reading for the Moral,* p. 70.

[38] Lu Renlong, *Xingshi yan*, p. 193.

[39] Here, burning one's calvarias or arms (燃頂 or 燃臂) was a popular practice for Buddhist devotees to express their piety in a Buddhist ritual. Sometimes, devout Buddhist disciples or followers would burn their whole body to fulfill this ritual. This practice derives from the notion that to take one's own body or body part as a *bushi* 佈施 or gift to the Buddha; it is also an allusion to the legend of Buddha's self-sacrifice to feed the starving tigress with his own flesh. James Benn deems this legend significantly contributed to the construction of a logic of self-immolation in China. See James Benn, *Burning for the Buddha: Self-Immolation in Chinese Buddhism*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007, pp. 25-28.

canopy covering her."[40] Although offerings at the physical temple fail to save her grandmother, Miaozhen's body becomes a sacred site in which the Buddha's power and blessing is activated and manifested. Miaozhen is recognized as extraordinary not only because of her moral exemplarity but also because of her personal correspondence to the Buddha, a divine sponsorship that manifests itself in her body. Body itself thus becomes a site in which the divine is to be evoked and experienced, as what William R. LaFleur writes, "If the human being's body is its own ready-made canvas, it is also its most readily attainable altar or temple. The yogi and Zen practitioner insist that the whole of religious practice can be carried out within the domain of the epidermis."[41] Miaozhen's body, in keeping with LaFleur's reading, comprises a divine arena in which she carries out her devotions and receives divine response.

The most striking moment of divine intervention occurs when Miaozhen practices *gegu* for the second time. Here, the Lu brothers' story fills out the brief sketch of the incident offered in Song Lian's version. Miaozhen's first use of *gegu* is prompted by Confucian doctrine, whereas she is guided by her Buddhist religious devotion when she practices *gegu* for the second time. In the first instance of *gegu*, Miaozhen is inspired by "a story her grandmother told her about how someone had saved her parent by cutting flesh from her thigh. […] [Miaozhen] then picked up a kitchen knife, lightly pinched the flesh on her left arm to draw it up, bit firmly into it, and cut with all her strength. Fresh blood gushed forth from the wound and so she quickly bandaged her

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[40] Peng Shaosheng omitted this sentence in his transcription.

[41] William R LaFleur, "Body," in Mark C. Taylor ed. *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, pp. 36-54, 37.

arm with a piece of cloth."[42] Maria Sibau reads this episode as demonstrating a lack of "physical pain," but I would argue the opposite, that it clearly suggests tremendous pain and sacrifice on the part of Miaozhen. The gushing blood and the series of verbs—pinching, biting, slicing, bandaging—viscerally remind the reader of the physicality of *gegu*. Miaozhen's first *gegu* is an act of Confucian emulation; the earthly inspiration of Confucian predecessors is accompanied by a grim and bloody reality of bodily suffering. This typically private act of auto-violence is caught sight of by a neighbor, Auntie Zou, who exclaims, "How can she not fear the pain?" Auntie Zou stands in for the reader in her amazement at Miaozhen's courage.

Miaozhen's second experiment with *gegu*, however, is apparently free of physical agony, and narrative attention turns instead to divine revelation and intervention. As Maria Sibau observes, "The second time Miaozhen attempts to save her grandmother, […] the tone of narration veers decidedly toward the miraculous and the hagiographical."[43] Before her second *gegu,* Miaozhen encounters an immortal in a dream who suggests that Miaozhen slice off a piece of her liver so as to save her dying grandmother. The next morning, Miaozhen sets up an altar in her courtyard so as to worship the deity while performing *gegu* for a second time. In stark contrast to her first experience of *gegu*, after Miaozhen applies a knife to the left side of her belly, the narrator assures the reader, "[Miaozhen] suffered *no pain and no blood* appeared […]." The narrator then continues to write, "Miaozhen again addressed heaven after a double bow, saying, 'I cannot find my liver… I pray that the gods to direct me. I promise to live as a nun for the rest of life to repay this favor from Heaven!' At the very moment that she made her bows,

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[42] Maria Sibau, *Reading for the Moral,* p. 76.

[43] Ibid., p. 78.

moving up and down, her liver popped out, and Miaozhen hastily cut off a piece of it."[44] In the second *gegu* scene, Miaozhen mysteriously acquires divine assistance and thus suffers no pain; she makes her filial sacrifice without the gore and indignity even of bloodletting.

While the first instance of *gegu,* in which Miaozhen takes flesh from her arm, is both more horrifying and more realistic, the second instance, in which she takes flesh from her liver, is presented as a solemn and relatively benign ritual supervised and supported by divine powers. The presence of the altar and Miaozhen's ongoing prayer seems to facilitate the smooth process. Miaozhen's physicality is downplayed, while the divinity and rituality of the practice comes front and center. As Miaozhen's virtuous act is rhetorically separated from biological pain and aligned with divine will, the girl is elevated to the status of a demigod, separated from the secular both in her physical capacities and in her moral superiority. Her mysteriously desensitized body is conflated with the provisional religious space (the altar) and appears as a holy site in and of itself. Miaozhen's body, aligned with divine will and apparently impervious to pain, is transformed into a sacred site that facilitates and manifests divine power.

Meanwhile, the narrative absence of physical agony and gushing blood subtly reframes Miaozhen's physical form as a stage on which she performs morality and divinity. I do not mean to suggest that the girl's filial devotion to her grandmother is insincere or sanctimonious; rather, what I call the "performance" of morality describes Miaozhen's physical capacity to display and enact her private moral integrity and spiritual access as a public spectacle. As part of a

[44] Ibid.

hagiography, Miaozhen's *gegu* is inherently spectatorial, because hagiographies are in nature performative in the sense of demonstrating a miracle to the public.[45] As Jimmy Yu states, those who engaged in self-inflicted violence could be understood as performers, not in the sense of actors on stage but in the sense of the term that captures the interpersonal and public nature of their practices. Even when some of these acts were carried out alone, they were often scripted, thereby signaling certain sets of cultural expectations, and highly intelligible to both the person doing the act and those who argued about them.[46]

In the act of self-mutilation, Miaozhen's body serves both as a holy site and as a theatrical stage. The embedded audience, an audience implied both in the "script[ing]" and "cultural expectation" of *gegu* and also in the recognition of Miaozhen's virtue and miraculousness, warrants Miaozhen's canonization as a Confucian and Buddhist paragon. The understanding of Miaozhen's body as a spectacle is corroborated by some of the story's details. The two acts of *gegu,* although ostensibly performed in private, are in fact both exposed to the public. In the first instance, the act is witnessed by the neighbor Zou and the news is then relayed to others; in the second instance, the narrator describes how Miaozhen "time and again urged those who saw it and those who learned about it not to tell others […] This anecdote, however, has already been spread far and wide with great fanfare 又再三叮囑，那當時看見的，聽得的，叫他不要說…只是這節事，已沸沸傳將開去了)."[47]

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[45] Hence that the temple (as well as the medieval church) was the ground for theater is no accident.

[46] See Jimmy Yu, *Sanctity and Self-inflicted Violence,* p. 8.

[47] *Xingshi yan*, p. 182.

Others attempt to appropriate Miaozhen's body as a public sacred site when she visits a convent. An avaricious abbess uses Miaozhen's residency to solicit the laity's devotion and donations. The abbess glibly tells the laywomen, "There is a filial girl in my convent […] who has cut a piece of her liver to save her grandmother. What she did is exactly the same as what the *Guanyin* bodhisattva did when she cut off her hands to save her father, the King of Miaozhuang. There is no difference between [Miaozhen] and a living Buddha 我院裡有一個孝女，…曾割肝救祖母，就是當日觀音菩薩剜服斷手救妙莊王一般，真是如今活佛." Predictably, the convent subsequently enjoys a huge influx in donations and incense offerings. Rather than visiting the convent per se, the new wave of pilgrims are interested in Miaozhen and the space where she, a true incarnation of Buddha, resides. Miaozhen's consecrated body creates a sacred space even *within* the temple. Miaozhen herself—her private body—becomes a public "temple" that attracts the worship and homage of devotees.

The conflation of the corporeal and the monastic is further concretized in Miaozhen's relics, which are collected and enshrined in a stupa built on the site of her hermitage. After death, Miaozhen's body transforms into a literal temple. This stupa in the only architectural space in the story that is legitimately holy. Although Miaozhen visits a number of monastic places, they are revealed to be cesspools of fornication and greed. The only true religious Pure Land is to be found in her own permanent residence, where both she and her grandmother are eventually buried, and which later becomes a stupa. The story suggests that authentic sacred space derives from and is predicated on holy practitioners' physical forms. Miaozhen's living body and her remains partake of and even produce the true Pure Land. Although Miaozhen lodges in various convents, she refuses to involve herself in them; although those places present themselves as holy, they are revealed to be mere unsavory imitations of truly sacred Buddhist space.

Interestingly, when the community recognizes the moral exemplarity of Miaozhen's practice of *gegu,* Miaozhen becomes highly marriageable; "the gentry men, degree holders, and landlords in the neighborhood all ask to take her as their wife or daughter in-law 城中鄉宦、舉監、生員、財主都要求他作妻作媳." However, Miaozhen elects to enter the Buddhist order and rules out the prospect of marriage. The second *gegu,* during the course of which Miaozhen vows to become a nun, illustrates the competition between Confucianism and Buddhism for women's bodies. Buddhism allows for a painless *gegu* rite but claims Miaozhen's body and sexuality. Although *gegu* marks Miaozhen as a Confucian paragon of filial duty, its association in this instance with Buddhism uproots her from the Confucian family. Miaozhen thus subversively evades her prescribed gender roles as a wife and mother even as a canonized Confucian exemplar. The appearance of a Buddhist religious element allows Miaozhen to push her filial devotion to its limit—a limit that actually excuses her from the Confucian injunction to procreate. Miaozhen's body comprises an arena in which Confucianism and Buddhism duke it out. The triumph of Buddhism is apparent in the girl's asceticism and abstinence and also her forfeiture of her fertility. This tacit triumph over Confucianism manages to elude public censure; in fact, the townspeople applaud Miaozhen's achievement of Buddhahood despite the fact that she has failed to meet basic Confucian obligations: the pagoda housing Miaozhen's relics are known both as the "pagoda of a divine nun" and as the "pagoda of a filial girl."

Drawing on anthropologists' depiction of the body as "the original tool with which humans shape their world and the substance out of which the world is shaped,"[48] I suggest that

[48] Setha M. Low, "Embodied Space(s): Anthropological Theories of Body, Space, and Culture," *Space & Culture* 6, no.1 (2003): 9-18, 12. See also, T. Csordas, *Embodiment and experience:*

Miaozhen's hagiography features her body as the medium, material, and locus for publicizing her moral and spiritual excellence. The spectacle of Miaozhen's filiality and Buddhahood takes shape in her body; the female body becomes a sacred site. It is noteworthy, however, that those biographies of Miaozhen which present themselves as historical accounts do not include Miaozhen's apotheosis as a Buddhist saint, whereas the lengthier biography goes much further in elevating the heterodox system to the moral status of Confucianism (if not *above* Confucianism). The Lu brothers' rewrite of Miaozhen's story embraces heterodoxy although the story collection itself means to promote Confucian moral principles.[49] Yenna Wu argues that the story's religious and supernatural elements are intended to justify the otherwise contentious practice of self-harm. Without the context of divine intervention, self-injury would have been understood as problematic, given that many Confucian moralists opposed harming a body that was deemed a precious inheritance bequeathed by one's parents.[50] Wu is right, I argue, to sense that the

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The Existential Ground of Culture and Self, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994. M. Mauss, *Les techniques du corps. Sociologies et Anthropologie,* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950.

[49] The book title itself literarily means "to model the world with (moral) words." The Chinese scholar Chen Qinghao who rediscovered this collection in Korea deems that the book is basically compiled for moral edification. Chen Qinghao 陳慶浩, *Xingshi yan* 型世言, Taibei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan zhongguo wenzhe yanjiusuo, 1992, p. 5.

[50] See Yenna Wu, "Interactions between Emotion, Religion, and the Confucian Ethical Code: Analyzing and Comparing Representations of *Gegu Liaoqin* in the Fourth Story of *Xingshi Yan* and 'Lishui Chen Xiaonü Zhuan Bei' 禮教、情感、和宗教之互動:分析比較《型世言》第四

introduction of Buddhist elements mitigated the controversy surrounding self-mutilation. Here, I would stress that these religiously supernatural elements also forcefully demonstrate how the female body appears as a sacred site in which divine power is manifested and experienced.

The Continuity Between the Female Body and Sacred Space

Miaozhen's body comprises a sacred site that both produces and activates the presence of the divine. In the following story, the body establishes an intimate correspondence with its environs. Here, the female body and its setting form a continuum that contributes to both the body's and the setting's sanctification.

SNZ includes a biography of "Pengshan Shenggu 彭山聖姑" (The Holy Maiden of Pengshan) that is adapted from an entry entitled "Qianshan pusa 千善菩薩" (The Bodhisattva of a Thousand Goodnesses) in Qian Xiyan's 錢希言 (1573-1638) *Kuai yuan* 獪園 (*The Garden of Craftiness*).[51] Although a century separates the two accounts, Peng did not significantly revise Qian Xiyan's original text; only its title is notably different.[52] Because the two versions are more or less equivalent, I will take the *Kuai yuan* text as the primary source for my analysis.

回和〈麗水陳孝女傳碑〉對割股療親的呈現." *Literature and Philosophy* 文與哲 12 (2008): 413-454.

[51] Qian Xiyan 錢希言, *Kuai yuan* 獪園 (*The Garden of Craftiness*), In *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu* 四庫全書存目叢書, book 247 of Section *Zi* 子部, Jinan:Qilu shushe, 1995, pp. 511-767, vol. 5, 588-9.

[52] It is noteworthy that the distance of more than one century set the two versions of a same biography apart with two different titles. While Qian records the religion-minded girl as

The story follows a village girl who lives in perfect seclusion and is very religiously minded. Although she implores her parents to allow her to join a Buddhist order instead of marrying, her parents marry her off to a local villager. Every night, when the couple goes to sleep, a miracle prevents the girl from losing her virginity: the husband feels as though a wall has

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"Qianshan pusa (the bodhisattva of a thousand goodness), Peng changed her title to "Pengshan shenggu (the divine maid of Pengshan). Obviously, while Qian explicitly entitled the girl as a divine figure with Buddhahood, Peng, a pious lay Buddhist himself, nevertheless took pains to eliminate the Buddhist elements in the title. Instead, the title he chose for the girl is loaded with local cultic implication. In Peng's adaption, Qianshan is no longer a universally recognizable bodhisattva but a regionally emerged deity. Hongyu Wu explained this change as a result of the Qing government's "vigilance against… politically ambitious religious figure" who had seditious potential to organize a large group of followers and advance rebellious or illegal agendas. Wu thus infers that Peng changed the female subject's title to "downplay" her divinity but highlight her "humanness" so as to show her complicity to the orthodox order. However, I don't think the switch from a Buddhist tile to a local cultic one would make a significant difference in terms of a miracle worker's seditious potential. Given the harsh policy on the illicit cults in late imperial China, the state and the officials not only aim at ruling out the illicit Buddhist deities, but target at all officially unrecognized cults. It is my contention that Peng changed her title because he, as a pious and passionate lay Buddhist, has a much stricter standard to recognize a bodhisattva than Qian Xiyan. In fact, the girl has never received a formal and complete Buddhist precepts (she was even not a nun strictly speaking), which might be an important reason that Peng dismissed her title as a bodhisattva but chose a localized designation for her.

been erected between him and his wife. When the girl's mother-in-law learns about her son's strange experience, she goes to sleep with the new wife herself, and the same thing happens. The mother-in-law is so surprised that she interrogates her daughter-in-law about the wall. The young wife replies, "How is it possible? Perhaps it is produced by the blockages and misgivings in your heart."

When more kinsmen are apprised of the situation, they conclude that the girl is a demon, and they report the matter to the local magistrate. Accusing the girl of sorcery, the official has the girl imprisoned in a cave in the remote mountains. The entrance to the cave is sealed with rocks, leaving just a small hole; the girl is left to starve. After a few days, locals find that the girl has survived without suffering, and that her body has become mysteriously radiant. The girl's mother and brother try to deliver nuts and dates to her, but she rejects them, saying, "I no longer crave earthly food." When the girl's brother comes to check in on her three months later, he finds that the cave is covered with beams of light, heavenly flowers, and delightful fragrance; statues of the Buddha, incense, and candles have sprung up all around the cave. The girl sits among these temple trappings in unearthly peace and serenity. The brother concludes that his sister must be watched over by some heavenly being. He asks her when she will emerge from the cave. The girl predicts that someone named Huan will open the cave in three years' time, and that she will emerge from the cave when she encounters someone named Ning. News of the miracle spreads, and pilgrims come from near and far to worship her as a Qianshan bodhisattva and to ask her to tell their fortune.

Three years later, an official named Xu Huan opens the cave and offers the girl his patronage, but she insists on remaining in the cave. The girl finally leaves the cave when an

official named Ning Ruili pays her a visit; thus her predictions come true.[53] Although she has at this point abstained from food for 18 years, she resumes eating fruits and vegetables upon reentering the secular world. Even so, she never relieves herself. People continue to ask her to tell their fortunes, and her prophecies always prove accurate. She travels to the official seat of Xu Huan, where an official named Wu invites her to stay for three months in Hangzhou. When she returns to Xu's residence, more than a thousand clergy and laypeople follow her across the river. One year later, she begins to feel ill. Knowing herself to be dying, Qianshan asks for a barrel to sit in so as to fulfill a Buddhist death ritual.[54] She predicts that the barrel hoop will break after three years, and that that will be the day her remains return to her hometown. Asking those around her to chant the *Heart Sūtra*, Qianshan dies seated peacefully in the barrel.

Qianshan's biography revolves around her body and the mysterious spaces that both house and are engendered *by* her body. The first instance of Qianshan's body's miraculous power to create sanctified spaces is to be found in the invisible wall that protects the girl from carnal knowledge of her husband. This insulation further symbolically separates her from her in-laws' household—she never truly becomes a member of their family. The girl lives in the *nei*, the

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[53] For a translation of the entry of "Pengshan Shengu" in *SNRZ*, see Hongyu Wu, "Leading the Good Life," pp. 172-3.

[54] Here the death ritual should be the rite of *zuogang*, or sitting in an urn, which is believed to be popular among Buddhist monks since the Ming dynasty. They adopted this way to preserve their body as a "flesh-relic." Here, although Qianshan sits in a barrel instead of an urn, it can be unmistakably considered as a rite of *zuogang* to produce a "flesh-relic" after she died. I will come back to this ritual later in this chapter.

domestic, but is nevertheless protected from it. Like the prayer room established by Que's co-wives that I explore in chapter 2, this mysterious wall creates a celibate religious space for Qianshan *within* the domestic sphere. The wall symbolizes a religious obstruction separating the girl from her secular family: the religious space resists conjugal incursions on Qianshan's virginal body. The miraculous wall bespeaks the extent to which religious space can disturb and even defy the household's spatial and social orders. It also signifies how religious spaces preserve the female body's integrity, an integrity expressed through virginity.

If from Qianshan's perspective the wall protects her physical and spiritual purity from mundane defilement, to her husband and mother-in-law, the wall prevents their engagement with the sacred. Hence Qianshan's suggestion that the wall might result from "blockages and misgivings in [their] heart"—the husband and his family cannot access Qianshan's body in a similar way that they are spiritually hampered and cannot attain enlightenment. The story of the wall, in this way, graphically analogizes the female body and the sacred realm of enlightenment.

When the girl is held captive in a cave, she is not only uprooted from the domestic sphere of her family but also isolated from the mundane in general. By entering the cave, Qianshan accomplishes a symbolic *Pabbajja* (leaving home). The cave becomes the girl's new saintly residence. In the cave, Qianshan transforms into a divine being who ceases to desire food, who never defecates, and who manifests her glory with fragrance, incense, and statues of the Buddha. Qianshan's corporeal consecration is part and parcel of the consecration of the cave; both her body and her cave become temple-like sacred spaces. The hitherto dark and unremarkable cave transforms into a magical locale where the human body is sanctified, miracles are manifested, and darkness dispelled. The cave transforms into a shrine, a sacred place, a Pure Land.

Qianshan's transcendent body and the sacred space in which it lodges seem to help constitute one another as pure and worthy of reverence.

Qianshan's story is reminiscent of the Buddhist legend of princess Miaoshan 妙善. Of the myriad tales that have been spun about the *Gunyin* bodhisattva in premodern China, the legend of Princess Miaoshan 妙善 (Wonderful Goodness) might be the best known. The most popular and influential account of Miaoshan's life in the Ming-Qing period was *Xiangshan baojuan* 香山寶卷 (*The Precious Scroll of Incense Mountain*).[55] The scroll tells of how the pious Miaoshan devotes herself to the practice of Buddhism and, against the will of her father, the king, refuses to marry. Even after Miaoshan is imprisoned and threatened with death, Miaoshan remains steadfast in her refusal, and her father finally executes her. After descending into hell and transforming it into a kingdom of light, Miaoshan is resurrected and led to Mt. Xiangshan to obtain the Way. Some time later, upon hearing that her father has fallen gravely ill and can only be cured by a medicine made from human hands and eyes, Miaoshan anonymously sacrifices her own body to make his medicine. Miaoshan saves her father's life; she reemerges as the thousand-armed, thousand-eyed goddess Guanyin and her father endows her with the title of "Thousand-armed and thousand-eyed."[56]

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[55] Sun Xiaosu, *Performing the Bodhisattva Guanyin: Drama, Ritual and Narrative*, PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2017, p. 3.

[56] For a detailed introduction and translation of *Xiangshan Baojuan* 香山寶卷, see Wilt L. Idema, *Personal Salvation and Filial Piety: Two Precious Scroll Narratives of Guanyin and Her Acolytes*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008, pp.1-160.

Both Qianshan's and Miaoshan's life stories involve a girl's renunciation of marriage, her isolation in the mountains, her corporeal sanctification, and, finally, her apotheosis as a bodhisattva. The main difference between these stories is that Qianshan does not die a tragic death, nor is she resurrected, as Princess Miaoshan is. Qianshan does, however, experience metaphorical death in marriage, which is consistently likened to a kind of ritualistic death by Chinese women themselves.[57] Emily Martin points out that many marriage laments hummed by Chinese brides depict marriage as death because marriage separates mother from daughter.[58] Martin's point that young girls associated marriage with death is illuminating here.[59] Marriage highlights and ritualizes the taking of a girl's virginity and the permanent end to her residence in

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[57] Emily Martin [Ahern], "Gender and Ideological Differences in Representations of Life and Death," in *Death Ritual in Late Imperial China,* edited by James L. Watson and Evelyn S. Rawski, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, pp. 164–179, 170-171.

[58] Ibid. For examples of the marriage laments, see also Fred Blake, "Death and Abuse in Marriage Laments: The Curse of Chinese Brides," *Asian Folklore Studies* 37, No.1 (1978): 13-33.

[59] Admittedly, it might be hasty to embrace Emily Martin's argument as she seems fail to distinguish the brides' true feelings and a female convention (or moral performance) to chant laments they learned from other women on their wedding days. For example, as Anne McLaren opines, the bridal lament could "convey a personal grievance," but it doesn't necessarily rid the lament of the attribute of "public performance" which aims to cater to the public expectation and "achieved desired social or ritual effect." See Anne McLaren, *Performing Grief: Bridal Laments in Rural China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008, p.4.

her natal home.[60] Whether or not a bride desires her marriage, the wedding day is indeed a symbolic death; her life as a virgin in her natal home ends and she is reborn as a wife and daughter-in-law to her in-laws' household.

The association of marriage with death enables a richer comparison between the hagiographies of Qianshan and Miaoshan. Miaoshan is forced to die a literal death because she refuses to die symbolically through marriage; she is executed by her father and descends into hell. Similarly, although Qianshan marries, the wall stops Qianshan's social death and rebirth, while her exile to a cave functions like hell in Miaoshan's story. In the dark and tomb-like cave, Qianshan is essentially buried alive; she is deified and symbolically reborn as a bodhisattva when she miraculously emerges from that tomb. Miaoshan becomes enlightened on her trip through underworld, and she manages to dispel the darkness even of hell, transforming hell into heaven; similarly, Qianshan brings light and joy into the hellish depths of her cave. Both Miaoshan and Qianshan "die" virgins; and both of them are consecrated upon their "resurrection." Both legends feature the death of the body not as the end of a girl's journey, but as a way station on the path to sacralization, just as marriage, a symbolic death, is understood for ordinary women as a necessary process of socialization/social rebirth.

The most important distinction to be drawn between the two legends is to be found in their relationship to self-harm. Miaoshan's apotheosis is achieved through filial self-sacrifice, whereas

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[60] Of course, there are also considerable cases of matrilocal marriage in which girls are not to move out of their natal homes. See Weijing Lu, "Uxorilocal Marriage Among Qing Literati." *Late Imperial China* 19, No. 2 (1998): 64-110. Here I am talking about the mainstream situation of marriage which both Qianshan and Miaoshan encountered.

Qianshan's is achieved through an integration of her physical body into spiritual space. If Miaoshan escapes marriage through execution, Qianshan manages to dodge the loss of her virginity because of the intervention of external forces, namely the mysterious wall and the cave-temple. Divine space is invoked to protect Qianshan's body. Her surroundings are converted into numinous places that sustain her corporeal purity. The narrative's sacred spaces dissolve not only the Confucian *nei-wai* divide but also the distinctions between the sacred and the secular, life and death. Religious spaces allow Qianshan to avoid physical death and metaphorically perform a substitutive symbolic death and rebirth. When Qianshan transforms the tomb-like cave into a temple, the alleged "demon" is revealed as a deity. The cooperation between the anomalous female body and its surrounding dynamic spaces manifests Qianshan's sanctity and allows for her deification.

While Qianshan's interment in the cave constitutes a symbolic death, her literal death while sitting in a barrel, a death that Qianshan engineers for herself, introduces yet another expression of the body-space continuum: the relic and the reliquary/stupa. In that case, the female corpse and a sacred space are unified and homogenized.

Relics and the Female Body

Relics, or śarīra, have always been highly visible elements of the Buddhist tradition. The social meanings of the Buddhist focus on relics have been the subject of a great deal of incisive scholarship. Scholars of religion have argued that relics are deemed worthy objects of worship because a "ritual and functional equivalence" drawn between the Buddha and his relics. John Strong writes, "The relics are alive, own property, perform miracles, inspire devotees, and filled with various Buddha qualities, in exactly the same way that the Buddha is… [T]hey are a

substitute for him in his absence."[61] Relics are considered capable of manifesting the absent (dead) Buddha's "charisma, apotropaic power, and grace."[62] Relics denote the Buddha's enduring presence in his absence (especially after his death).

Relics' engagement of the dialectic of presence-absence has to do with its association with death and the ensuing corporeal residues. In a narrow sense, "relics" par excellence are the crystalline fragments (śarīra) left behind after the cremation of the body, but the concept of the relic has broader applications. According to the Indian relic classification schemes, relics can be categorized into three groups: 1) *body relics*, such as hair, nail clippings, ashes, and bones; 2) *contact relics*, which include all objects the Buddha owned or used, such as bowls, robes, and Bodhi trees; and (3) *dharma relics*, which include sutras and verses of dharma.[63]

The relics are worthy of attention because they bring together two contradictory Buddhist approaches to the human body: the cult of relics, on the one hand, and the understanding of the body as profane and vile, on the other.[64] As a general rule, Buddhist doctrine considers the

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[61] Gregory Schopen would argue for a more radical ontological equation of the Buddha and his relics, while John Strong nuanced this equation by stating that the relics are substitutes of the Buddha, but *is not* the Buddha himself. John Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, p. 4.

[62] Robert Sharf, "On the Allure of Buddhist Relics." *Representations* No.66 (1999): 75–99, 78.

[63] John Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, p. 8. But Bernard Faure seems to categorize the third group into the second one and deems that all the incorporeal relics are "contact relics." See *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: A Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991, p. 133.

[64] As John Strong states, "the question of the connection in Buddhism between the cult of relics,

human body (especially the dead body) to be disgusting and impure. This body-phobic aspect of Buddhism is aptly illustrated by the oft-quoted list of the thirty-two loathsome constituent parts of the body.[65] This phobic discourse also gives rise to the practice of "cemetery meditation," or "meditation on the vileness of the body 不淨觀," advocated by sectarian Buddhism as a tool for helping devotees and sangha to realize the impurity and impermanence of the physical form and the illusionary nature of the self.[66] On the other hand, however, relics associated with the dead body of saintly beings are deemed "a potent vestige of the death of an enlightened being, a memento of his or her abiding liberation…signify[ing] the unfathomable freedom of nirvana."[67] Although they are related to or drawn from the (dead) body, relics are seen as worthy of veneration, not occasions for disgust. Although relics are inextricably associated with death, they escape the foul and polluting aspects of death by "emphasizing themes of purity, regeneration, and permanence."[68]

Despite the general picture, the Buddhist ambivalence about the (dead) body in fact has a gendered dimension. Rajyashree Pandey writes, "In Buddhist narrative there was often a significant shift or slide from a discourse on the impurity of the body in general to a more clearly

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on the one hand, and the cemetery meditation and other contemplations of the impurity and impermanence of the body, on the other, is interesting and rather complex." *Relics of the Buddha*, p. 17.

[65] For a list of the 32 loathsome body parts, see John Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, p. 17.

[66] See Wilson, *Charming Cadavers*, pp. 41-76.

[67] Robert H. Sharf, "On the Allure of Buddhist Relics," p. 166.

[68] John Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, p.16.

gendered discourse on specifically the impurity of the female body."[69] Relics associated with women are far less common than relics associated with men;[70] relatedly, female corpses were most often used as object studies in meditations on the vileness and impurity of the human body.[71] While male saints' corpses produced sacred relics, female corpses were often observed (usually by men) in order to highlight the foulness of the human form. An overwhelming majority of the sacred relics in China, whether they come down to us by way of canonical records or in material reality, belong to eminent monks and male devotees,[72] and it is thus

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[69] Rajyashree Pandey, "Desire and Disgust: Meditations on the Impure Body in Medieval Japanese Narratives." *Monumenta Nipponica* 60, No.2 (2005): 195-234, 196.

[70] Faure's detailed discussion of relics provides no explicit example of relics from female Buddhists. See *Rhetoric of Immediacy*.

[71] For the Indian Buddhist texts on the meditation of female corpse, see Liz Wilson, *Charming Cadavers*. Wilson avers that she has yet to encounter "any post-Asokan narratives about women who contemplate dead or disfigured male bodies…," p. 105. Katherine Rennie Blackstone also points out that in both *Theragatha* and *Therigatha* (the two Pali Buddhist cannons), none horrific representations of the human body "refer explicitly to male bodies." *Women in the Footsteps of the Buddha: Struggle for Liberation in the Therīgāthā*, London and New York: Routledge, 2013, p. 64. For the Japanese case, see Rajyashree Pandey, "Desire and Disgust," pp. 195-234.

[72] Faure presents a detailed discussion of the few physical relics of eminent monks survived to nowadays, but there is no premodern physical relics of Buddhist nun survived in China. The only extant flesh-body relic of a nun is made from a contemporary female Buddhist master Renyi fashi 仁義法師 (1911-1995). This is also known as the only flesh-body of a nun in the world.

understandable that Faure would describe relics in general as "the remnants of an eminent *monk*."[73] Discussions of the relationship between relics and the female body have been understandably absent from modern scholarship.[74]

Yet, as we have seen, we do have records of the importance of female saints' relics in the Ming-Qing period. Both Miaozhen's (the Lu brothers' version) and Qianshan's biographies refer to the relics made from the saints' bodies. Miaozhen's story concludes with her tomb being transformed into a pagoda that houses her śarīra after cremation.[75] Qianshan's biography, too, makes reference to the relic that will be made of Qianshan's body; Qianshan requests that she be mummified in a barrel rather than being cremated.

Qianshan's story also introduces the possibility that the body in its entirety could constitute a relic. In Chinese Buddhist tradition, śarīra are typically produced either through cremation or through the process of "emanation," to use Faure's term. "Emanation" refers to the phenomenon of the Buddha's relics appearing in and around fervent devotees (recall the story in which a girl

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[73] Faure, *The Rhetoric of the Immediacy*, p. 133.

[74] Here I owe thanks to Professor Elizabeth Tinsley who confirms that the issue of women's body and relics has not been discussed sufficiently so far by scholars in Buddhist studies.

[75] In the biography penned by Peng Shaosheng, Miaozhen built the pagoda as her grandmother's tomb and meanwhile as her own monastic residency. It could also be assumed that she finally was also buried there. In Lu Renlong's version, Miaozhen's body (relics) fused with the monastic space (pagoda) in terms of making her *de facto* tomb a sacred site for people to commemorate the model and worship the divine.

is born with relics clutched in her left fist).[76] However, the entire "flesh-body 肉身," the mummified body of a Buddhist saint, can be considered a variant form of śarīra. As the eminent Chinese Monk Zan-Ning 贊寧 (909-1001) writes in *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 (*Biographies of Eminent Monks in the Song*), "[The Buddha's] whole body is a śarīra."[77] Qianshan's hagiography is worthy of discussion not only because it provides evidence of the female body as a source of relics, but also because it references a special type of relic—the "flesh-body relic 肉身舍利."

Qianshan performs a death rite of self-mummification alternately called *zuogang* 坐缸 (sitting in an urn) or *gangzang* 缸葬 (burial in the urn); she asks to be placed in a barrel and

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[76] Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy*, pp. 138-9. For anecdotal records of the relics appeared among or within people's body parts while they were alive, see Zhen Hua 震華, "Fota kaolüe 佛塔考略 (A Brief Examination of Buddhist Pagodas)," in *Zhongguo fojiao sita shizhi* 中國佛教寺塔史志 (A Historical Annals of Buddhist Monasteries and Pagodas in China)," ed. Zhang Mantao 張曼濤, Taibei: Dacheng wenhua chubanshe, 1978, pp. 281-310.

[77] Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy*, p. 149. Admittedly, the Śarīra and the flesh-body seem to be mutually exclusive on the first glance, as they respectively subject to the practice of cremation (a destruction of the corpse) and mummification (a preservation of the corpse). Faure, however, considers them as "variants" of the relics, because both cremation and mummification samely aim to recreate rather than destroy the corpse. Following Faure's expansion of the concept of "relics," I would also interpret both Miaozhen's Śarīra and Qianshan's "flesh-body" as different kinds of relics derives from female dead bodies.

predicts that the hoops on the barrel will break after three years.[78] Self-mummification was a popular practice among Chinese Buddhist patriarchs during and after the Tang dynasty. Faure observes, "Beginning with the Sixth Patriarch Hui-neng (638-713), many [Buddhist] masters turned themselves or were turned into mummies or flesh bodies after their deaths."[79] The rite of *gangzang* reached its heyday in the Ming-Qing period. Faure points out that *gangzang* became the "standard procedure" for eminent monk's self-mummification after medieval times.[80] In the *gangzang*/*zuogang* rite, the Buddhist priest's body would be placed cross-legged in two facing

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[78] The earliest record of the *ganzang* rite could be found in Shi Minghe 釋明河, *Bu xu gaoseng zhuan* 補續高僧傳 (A Supplement to the Sequel to Biographies of Eminent Monks), vol.16., in *Xu zhang jing* 續藏經, vo1.134, Taibei: Xin wenfeng chuban gongsi, 1994, pp. 274-5. A monk named Jishan 季善 was recorded to be subject to this kind of death rite. For more examples of survived "flesh-body" relics produced through the *zuogang* rite, see Huang Shifu 黃世福, "A Religious Interpretation of the Buddhist Cult of Flesh-Body Relic: A Case Study of the Jiuhua Mountain 佛教肉身舍利崇拜的宗教闡釋——以九華山爲例." *Social Sciences in Yunnan* 雲南社會科學 5 (2009): 142-6.

[79] Faure, "Relics and Flesh Bodies: The Creation of Ch'an Pilgrimages Sites," in *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China*, pp. 150-189, 167. He provides many cases of this mummification of eminent monks and wonder workers. For more examples, see also Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy,* pp. 133-178.

[80] Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy*, p. 152, note 7. There he gives a very detailed description of the *zuogang* procedure.

urns and sealed in with quicklime, wood charcoal, tambac, limestone, and sandalwood. In a few years (three, in Qianshan's case), the urn would be opened and the flesh-body relic retrieved. The desiccated flesh-body would then be gilded or dressed in lacquered clothes; if the body turned out to have decomposed, it would be cremated for śarīras. As a Buddhist devotee in the Ming dynasty, Qianshan's choice to mummify herself through the *zuogang* rite is not unexpected, and her request conforms to the practice's typical procedure.

One could argue that self-mummification could be considered a "secondary burial," a term used by Robert Hertz to describe "any extended processing of the corpse—namely, the separation of the corrupting effects of the rotting flesh from the permanent, dry, and pure bones."[81] However, I would argue that the *zuogang* rite practiced by Qianshan is more interested in a process of preserving the body than burying it, a process I would call "anti-burial." Qianshan requests not to have her corpse interred but rather to have it *made into a relic.* Note that the Buddha/Bodhisattvas need not make individual, piecemeal relics of their bodies, because their corpses are *themselves* relics; only a secular body needs to be *relicized*. By relicizing her entire corpse, Qianshan obtains a proximity to Buddhahood. The making of her body into a relic

[81] Gordon F. M. Rakita and Jane E. Buikstra, "Corrupting Flesh: Reexamining Hertz's Perspective on Mummification and Cremation," in *Interacting with the Dead: Perspectives on Mortuary Archaeology for the New Millennium*, eds., Gordon F. M. Rakita, Jane E. Buikstra, Lane A. Beck, and Sloan R.Williams, University Press of Florida, 2005, p. 97. For an English translation of Robert Hertz' classic discussion on the "secondary burial," see *Death and the Right Hand*, London and New York: Routledge, 1960.

consecrates her physical form and differentiates her death from the ordinary death of mortals, an ordinary death which is supposed to be concealed and quarantined away from the living.

The urn or barrel, moreover, differs from the stupa/reliquary in that it *creates* rather than stores the relics. Ultimately, the urn/barrel is to be discarded—it is merely a temporary vessel. The mummy, however, is destined to be uncovered and brought before the public gaze for worship and meditation. The mummification revivifies the dried flesh and bones, investing them with social dynamism. The point of the mummification is not to marginalize death and separate it from life, but to reincorporate the dead into the community of the living. Hence Qianshan's request that her remains be returned to her hometown after the barrel breaks; her flesh-body relic in this sense, claims space for Qianshan in the living world forever.

The self-mummification of a Buddhist saint is not used merely as a manifestation of the individual's Buddhahood, but more importantly is used to make an icon, spectacle, and sacred site for the public. The iconization of the flesh-body relic makes the mummy itself a destination for pilgrimages and an occasion for moral emulation. Although Qianshan's biography does not explicitly say what will become of her flesh-body after her barrel is opened and her remains returned to her hometown, it is expected that Qianshan's flesh-body would be displayed and brought forward as a public spectacular and sacred site. The iconographic relic of Qianshan in this sense, becomes a shrine in and of itself, regardless where it will be housed and worshipped. As the mummy/relic is transportable, the icon's sanctity remains independent of its geographical context; thus, the mummy is a self-contained, portable stupa/temple. If in Fei's story the living holy body constitutes a portable temple in which a woman's spiritual self is protected and transported, in Qianshan's case the *dead* holy body is its own stupa/temple that creates holy space wherever it goes.

The female relic disturbs not only the norms surrounding burial rites but also the meaning of death itself. The mummified flesh-body embodies not death, but the triumph over death. Death is a process of decay, absence, forgetting, and loss; the rite of self-mummification turns each of these qualities on their head. Relics do indeed convey "a sense of ending,"[82] but the relic symbolizes not the end of life but the end of death. That is, the relic marks the end-point not of one's life and earthly power but of one's entrapment to the cycle of death and rebirth—in Buddhist term, *saṃsāra*. What better physical reminder of entering nirvana than a permanently present body that ceases to change, either through growth or decay?

The mummy's escape from the physical cycles of *saṃsāra* parallels the spiritual state of *samādhi*. Jonathan Parry explains that *samādhi* refers both to the ascetic practitioner's tomb and to his or her mental disengagement from the earthly realm. He writes,

by entering Samadhi (the term refers to his tomb as well as to his condition within it) […] the ascetic unequivocally escapes the normal consequences of death: the severance of the connection between body and soul, the corruption of the body and the transmigration of the soul. […H]is body is immune to putrescence and decay although it remains entombed for thousands of years.[83]

The mummy is thus a perfect instantiation of *samādhi,* as it indicates the ascetic's detachment from death-rebirth as a *cycle* and frames death instead as the entrance into a permanent,

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[82] Robert Sharf, "On the Allure of Buddhist Relics," p. 87.

[83] Jonathan Parry, "Sacrificial Death and the Necrophagous Ascetic," in *Death and the Regeneration of Life*, eds. Maurice Bloch, Jonathan Parry. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 96.

unchanging sacred space. If the practice of *samādhi* is considered a "living grave"[84] because the practitioners enter a state of corporeal detachment while still alive, the mummified body-relic denotes an "anti-tomb" in which the decay and absence of death are banished and the dried flesh and bones are not to be entombed.

In summary, then, the flesh-body relic serves both as its own stupa-shrine and as an anti-tomb. This connection between shrine, tomb, and the body seems to find an echo in the Buddhist practice of pairing stupas with relics. Faure observes, "in the esoteric tradition, the fivefold stupa is later symbolically identified with the body of Buddha Vairocana."[85] Indeed, both the esoteric Buddhist discourse and its Chinese analogue emphasize the union of the two,[86] but my interpretation of Qianshan's flesh-body relic deviates from this conventional interpretation of the relationship of the relic to stupa. That is, whereas in the traditional notion, relic and stupa

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[84] "The body of the practitioner immersed in Samadhi, on the other hand, becomes metaphorically a 'living grave.'" Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy,* p. 146, note 44.

[85] Faure, *The Retoric of Immediacy*, p. 146, note 44.

[86] The Buddha's body was often conflated with the stupa that housed it, both in esoteric Buddhist tradition and in the discourse of Chinese Buddhist sects. For example, the Tang Buddhist master Shenxiu 神秀 (606-706) claims that "the body is equated with the stupa" in "The Contemplation of the Mind." *Guanxin Lun* (觀心論) (Treatise on the Contemplation of the Mind). See John Mcrae, *The Northern School and the Formation of Early Ch'an Buddhism*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1986, p. 200. A Japanese Buddhist master Buddui also made a similar assertion as equating the body with stupa. See Faure, *Rhetoric of Immediacy*, p. 146.

function together as an integrated sign manifesting the Buddha's sanctity, it is my contention that Qianshan's mummy takes precedence over the physical stupa; it *creates* holy space rather than being created by unifying with it. The mummified relic of Qianshan, the portability of which is emphasized by her request that her remains be sent back to her hometown, does not need a geographically fixed stupa in order to be considered holy; it is *itself a* portable shrine/stupa of its own. In this way, the mummified body erects a corporeal (anti-)stupa for itself by disturbing the spatial and ideological order that a physical stupa traditionally stands for. The relicized body gains its sacredness by being *itself* the holy space rather than by proximity to and combination with a physical holy space.

Both Miaozhen and Qianshan's cases demonstrate that, in contemporary Chinese social perceptions as in the literary imagination, women's bodies could be consecrated as saintly relics. Whereas Miaozhen is consecrated as a *bhikṣunī,* Qianshan never underwent a tonsure rite to join the Buddhist order of nuns. Even so, Qianshan proved her saintliness through her unremitting devotion and miracle work. These women's relics reflect their sanctity and enshrine them as Buddhist divinities. When it came to burial practices for ordinary laywomen, however, many of the same tropes were invoked. The Ming-Qing era witnessed ordinary people's appropriation of the Buddhist cult of relics, especially for burials of female family members. These women were by no means saintly miracle-workers like Miaozhen and Qianshan, yet their cadavers were nevertheless symbolically relicized in secular manners. Through these practices of relicizing the female body, women's engagement with religion was understood to extend into the afterlife.

Secularizing the Relics and Relicizing the Secular

Tomb/coffin both hides and highlights death. It is highly relevant to body, albeit dead body. Sacred spaces are often created and imagined within the burial space of deceased women, as the

Buddhist rituals crept into popular burial managements across the society in late imperial China. Timothy Brook observes, "[I]n late-imperial China, Buddhism was the religious tradition associated with death. Buddhist monks […] held posthumous services for the soul of the departed. The link between death and Buddhism was so strong that the popular euphemism for funerals was *foshi* 佛事, or 'Buddhist services.'"[87] Although Brook points out that from the sixteenth century onward many Confucian moralists of the gentry class endeavored to challenge Buddhism's monopoly on funerals, Buddhism remained central to funeral rites in the popular culture. Even those who advocated for pure Neo-Confucian funeral practices were compelled to "follow the popular preference for Buddhist rites."[88] In this context, it is unsurprising that Buddhist objects and rituals were always central to women's burial practices, especially given Chinese women's proclivity for religious practice at the time.[89]

A striking example can be found in the grave of a Ming woman; the tomb not only replicates the woman's boudoir but also evokes a pagoda-like space in which the laywoman's body would be immortalized. In 1975, this Ming tomb was unearthed by a salvage excavation organized by the Jiaxing 嘉興 museum in Zhejiang province. This tomb is believed to have been

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[87] Timothy Brook, "Funerary Ritual and the Building of Lineages in Late Imperial China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 49, No.2 (1989): 465-499, 465.

[88] Ibid., p. 489.

[89] For details of other Ming tombs and their funeral objects, see *Mingqing zaidao: Jiaxing bowuguan guancang wenwu-mingmu guqi* 明器載道: 嘉興博物館館藏文物-明墓古器 (The *Dao* as Carried by Burial Objects: Collection of Jiaxing Museum—Cultural Relics in Ming Tombs), produced by Jiaxing Museum 嘉興博物館, Beijing: zhonghuashuju, 2016.

the joint grave for the eminent Ming scholar and connoisseur Xiang Yuanbian 項元汴 (1525-1590) and for his wife and concubines. Only the leftmost portion of the tomb survived the ravages of time—and the avarice of grave robbers. Nevertheless, the archeologists found three coffins in this leftmost cabinet. From right to left, they were inscribed with the words "the primary house/wife 大房," "the second house/concubine 二房," and "the third house/concubine 三房." It is thus believed that the remains belong to the wife and two concubines of Xiang Yuanbian, whose burial cabinet had unfortunately already been destroyed at the time of the excavation.

Many burial objects were discovered in the coffin of Xiang's official wife—Lady Qian, The Child Nurturess 錢孺人, while almost no funeral objects were found in the other two coffins. It is noteworthy that among the funeral objects found in Qian's coffin, there are many daily-used stuff or *mingqi* (burial objects 明器 or 冥器), such as wooden miniature furniture (including bench, chair, bed, and washstand, etc. See figure 4), a bronze mirror, porcelain vases, and statues of the god of longevity (figures 5), and Buddhist Sutras (figure 3). All of these objects effectively restore a scene of the woman's daily life in the inner quarter and thus enable us to envision a vivid vignette of her domestic daily life. Their existence in the coffin subtly establishes a consistency and continuum between this life and afterlife of the woman when the death-involved coffin becomes a site to restore an alive moment of the female subject. The boudoir and the burial space were thereby mediated and then merged together.

This duplication of a segment of the domestic life indicates a way to come to terms with death in the burial practice. This reproduction of the living space within the burial site is a common practice in premodern Chinese burial customs. Besides the daily utensils and objects would be buried with the dead together, many mural painting on the tomb walls also present an

intention to copy or capture a quotidian moment in the household. As Man Xu correctly states, in a traditional Chinese tomb, "[a]n inner chamber with a bed and bed curtains was a popular motif … Other subjects including house structures and granaries, or such human figures as attendants and maidservants, allude to the occupants' domestic life or entertainment."[90] Lady Qian's coffin is no exception; it restores her boudoir and the religious corner within this boudoir.

Indeed, lady Qian was very likely a Buddhist devotee given the fact that her husband Xiang Yuanbian is a pious lay Buddhist and the heavy religious import of her burial objects.[91] The religious stuff, especially the volumes of written sutras (see figures 3) not only testifies to Lady Qian's proclivity for Buddhism and her identity as a laywoman, but also carves out a religious niche within this mortuary "boudoir," which strikes a peculiar chord with my discussion of the religious spaces established by women within the domestic in chapter two. A religious niche is correspondingly set up in both the boudoir and the boudoir-like coffin.

Qian, as the primary wife, however, is the only one among the three occupants that was placed in a boudoir-like coffin. Just like the three labels inscribed on the three coffins (*defang, erfang, sangfang*) that explicitly discriminate the three female subjects' identities and rankings

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[90] Man Xu, "Gender and Burial in Imperial China," *Nannü*, p. 3. Jeehee Hong also provides a case of a tomb with theatrical figurines in a 13th-century tomb, see "Virtual Theater of the Dead: Actor Figurines and Their Stage in Houma Tomb No. 1, Shanxi Province," *Artibus Asiae* 71, No.1 (2011): 75-114.

[91] See Chen Maiqing 陳麥青, "Guanyu Xiang Yuanbian zhi jiashi ji qita 關於項元汴之家世及其它 (On the Pedigree of Xiang Yuanbian and Other Problems)," in *Xueshu jilin* 學術集林 (Academic Forrest), Shanghai: Shanghai yuandong chubanshe, 14 (1998): 246-70, 249.

while they are alive, the disparate number of burial objects and different arrangements in their coffins also hierarchizes the individual space they occupy in the burial site and their afterlife. As the official wife and legitimate ancestor, Qian is privileged to be buried in a more honorable and high-profile way. Interestingly, the singling out of Qian's coffin is not confined to the distinction of her title label and material offerings. She receives a more preferential treatment of her coffin: There is a magnificent pagoda-shape diamond sutra (figure 1&2) covering on the top of Lady Qian's coffin.[92]

This coffin shroud easily reminds one of the *mingjing* 銘旌 (the inscribed funeral streamer) which is a common implement in traditional Chinese burial customs. This practice found a canonical provenance in the *Rite of Zhou* 周禮.[93] The adoption of *mingjing* in burial logistics was especially popular in the Ming-Qing era, and it can be applied to both men and women.[94] Usually, the name and title of the deceased are to be inscribed on the *mingjing*, and

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[92] Lu yaohua 陸耀華, "Zhejiang jiaxing Ming xiangshimu 浙江嘉興明項氏墓 (The Ming Tomb of the Xiang Family in Jiaxing of Zhe Jiang Province)," *Wenwu* 文物 (Antiques), 8 (1982): 37-43.

[93] In the *Rites of Zhou*, Chapter of "Chunguan zongbo disan 春官宗伯第三," it is written that "For a grand funeral, the *Mingjing* is to be provided 大喪，共銘旌." See Yang Tianyu 楊天宇, *Zhou li yi zhu* 周禮譯注, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2004, p. 157.

[94] For example, *HLM* mentions in chapter 13 that a *mingjing* was prepared for Qin keqing 秦可卿 when the Jia family carried out the funeral parade for her; see *HLM*, p. pp. 133-5. Also, in chapter 26 of *Rulin wiashi*, when the favorable character Bao Wenqing, a righteous actor, dies,

after it is publicly displayed during the funeral procession, the *mingjing* will be placed on the coffin for good. Here, Lady Qian's case is quite extraordinary because the *mingjing*-style cover of her coffin is but a pagoda-shape *Diamond Sutra*. Undoubtedly, this untypical arrangement must bring forth nuances to the burial space of the dead woman.

This pagoda-shape sutra is so special and culturally meaningful that it is worth of a brief introduction here. Pagoda-shape sutras could be traced back to early 10th century and it is also spread to Japan and Korea in different variations.[95] The uniqueness of this kind of sutra lies in its ingenious use of precisely choreographed characters from sacred scriptures rather than architectural lines to compose the central icon of a pagoda.[96] That is, characters became lines

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his *mingjing* was honorably inscribed by an official. See Wu Jingzi 吳敬梓, *Rulin waishi* 儒林外史 (The Unofficial History of Scholars), Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2002, p. 277. Beside these literary examples, a Qing tomb found in Guizhou province also provides archeological evidence. It is reported that there is a *mingjing* covering on the female subject's coffin. See Li Fei 李飛, "Rituals Spreading to the Countryside: Qing Dynasty Rituals Discovered in Tomb M1 at Lushan 禮達鄉間：貴州凱裡爐山一號墓所見之清代禮儀," in *Journal of National Museum of China* 中國國家博物館舘刊 2 (2016): 57-69.

[95] See Halle O'Neal, *Word Embodied*: *The Jeweled Pagoda Mandalas in Japanese Buddhist Art*, Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2018, pp. 122-30. She introduces the 10th-century pagoda-shape *Heart Sutras* from Dunhuang which are now persevered in both British and French.

[96] For a discussion on Chinese pagoda-shape sutras, see Yang Baoyi 陽寶頤, "Shaped as Pagoda: Combining the Sutra, Buddhist Paintings and Pagoda Construction 熔寫經、佛繪及造

and dots forming a painted pagoda/temple, and the painted temple was in fact a meticulously designed text. Although the sutra highlights a visual image of the monastic space at the price of certain textual legibility with its always tiny and tilted characters and discontinuous reading thread, the rigorousness of transcription of the sutra never abates. The monastic space and the textual space are hereby fused together while the routine reading order is disrupted and transformed into a spatially shifted experience. Moreover, the pagoda-shape sutra offers a direct? visual experience of the "textualized temples," by which I refer to the proliferating religious compendia and encyclopedias for common people to fulfill symbolic pilgrimages by shuffling back and forth between book pages and sutra canvas.[97]

The pagoda-shape sutra not only conflated the spatial with the textual, but further fused the two supposedly distinct medias—characters and pictures. While the magnificent picture was built up by words, the sacred and semantic message of words was realized by a holistic view of a picture. This "combinatory composition" thereby creates an artistic and spiritual synthesis that transforms its audience/devotees into both reader and viewer of religious spectacles at once. In this light, the pagoda-shape sutra makes the most graphical case for my argument that a reader/viewer's pursuing of this kind of texts is tantamount to a real excursion to the physical temple, as it presents a written sutra which meanwhile morphs into a verisimilar temple standing

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塔於一爐－塔形經探討," in *The National Palace Museum Monthly of Chinese Art* 故宮文物月刊 373 (2014): 74-85. For a thorough research on the pagoda-shape sutras across Asia, see Halle O'Neal, *Word Embodied*.

[97] See my own article titled "Temple and Text: The Domestication of Religious Rituals in Two Ming Books," unpublished paper.

on paper/canvas. Temple in this sense, are textualized into written words and images, and the semantic and pictorial signs are erected as architectures, albeit two-dimensional. The pagoda and the sutra in this way become one and same.

This conflation of text and temple somehow found a resonance in the Buddhist tradition. Buddhist dharma and the stupa-relic unity are both considered as embodiments of Buddha's teaching and power, and are thus mutually identifiable. Hence is the well-known story in the *Flower Ornament Scripture*: the Bodhisattva used his bone as a pen, his blood as ink, and his skin as a parchment to write down a teaching. And according to the eminent Tang monk Xuanzang 玄奘, there were on-site stupas erected to commemorate this sacrificial event in India.[98] This biographical account of the Buddha's previous lives (Jātaka) convincingly demonstrates boundaries among the textual, corporeal, and architectural collapsed in the Buddha's divine presence and power. That is, the Buddha/Bodhisattva enshrines his body into the written words through a manner of physical sacrifice. The textual space and the dharma itself became a stupa/reliquary for his corporeal remains, and this textual-corporeal relic is then finally to be stored by architectural stupas. It is following this logic that the sutra, stupa, and soma are homogenized under the overarching concept of the relic-stupa unity.

This unification of the three further sparks a common religious practice to package them together. John Strong points out that "stupas and images and other objects that served as reminders of the Buddha were often consecrated or enlivened by the insertion within them of a

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[98] John Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, p. 54. See also, Yuhang Li, "Gendered Materialization: An Investigation of Women's Artistic and Literary Reproduction of Guanyin in Late Imperial China," PhD dissertation, Chicago University, 2011, pp. 122-3.

body relic (e.g., a piece of bone), or of a textual dharma relic (e.g., a written verse from the Buddha's teaching), or of both."[99] This practical integration of the three also witnessed a secular appropriation by the royal funeral devising in the Qing. Buddhist Sutras and images were found engraved on the side walls and the top cap of the emperors' and empresses' coffins. Moreover, some of the corpses of these royal family members were also covered with a stupa-shape *Dhāraṇī Sutra* shroud 陀罗尼经被.[100] The carved scriptural words and images on the coffin top and sides, the dead body, and its religious shroud together allude to and evoke a Buddhist unity of stupa, relic and sutra. If the coffin could be figured as a symbolic stupa that is inscribed with scriptures, the dead royals are relicized and thus immortalized when their corpses are placed into the coffin-stupa.

Lady Qian's grave site could be neatly integrated into this framework, albeit in an even more secular form. Although it is impossible for her to get a fancy scripture-craved coffin as the royal people, her coffin is covered by a pagoda-shape *Diamond Sutra* on which more than five thousand characters were presented as a pagoda shape in an ingenious and meticulous way.[101] This is a very burdensome yet karmically rewarding work, and no doubt all the merits are supposed to be transferred to Lady Qian whom this time-consuming and labor-demanding sutra

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[99] John Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, p. 9.

[100] See Francoise Wang-Toutain 王徽, "An Interpretation and reading of Tibetan Scripture Found on the Inner and Outer Coffins of the Qianlong Emperor at Yuling 乾隆裕陵棺撐藏文經咒釋讀," *Palace Museum Journal* 故宫博物院院刊 1 (2006): 48-65.

[101] For a detailed description of similar Pagoda-shape Diamond Sutra found in Japan, see Halle O'Neal, *Word Embodied,* pp.21-52.

is dedicated to.[102] With this sutra, her coffin could be a secularized adaption or reduction of the royal funeral mode, while the purpose of consecration and relicization of the dead will by no means be altered.

The pagoda-shape sutra is originally inscribed on a stele which was commissioned by Qian's son Xiang Mu 項穆 (1550-1600). Undoubtedly, it embodies the son's heartfelt filial piety and sincere devotion to his mother. It perhaps not unreasonable to assume that it was Xiang Mu that covered the rubbing of the stele onto Qian's coffin with his own hands. It is very likely that Xiang Mu chose the *Diamond Sutra* so as to borrow the connotative meaning and quality of permanence as symbolized by the "diamond." Xiang Mu inscribes on the right bottom of the canvass, "The diamond will never deteriorate, and thus stay fresh new over ten thousand years. 金剛不壞，萬載如新." Indeed, as the diamond is believed to be capable of resisting deterioration and dissolution,[103] the *Diamond Sutra* is specially fit for the burial rite in terms of conveying the wish to prevent the body from decaying and the dead from estranging. This quality of anti-decomposing easily reminds one of the flesh-body relic which, as a perpetuated dead body (part), ceases to decompose and change. In this sense, Xiang Mu actually makes a gesture to *relicize* his mother's body, and then immortalizes the secular women by covering her coffin-boudoir with a textual-pictorial pagoda. If we took the inner sphere of the coffin as a

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[102] In Qian Xiyan's *Kuaiyuan*, there are two entries "Fahua Pagoda 法華塔," and "The kumara (virgin boys) transcribing the Pagoda(-shape Sutras) 寫塔童子" that describe in detail how such pagoda-shape sutras look like and its complex making process, vol. 6 p. 593 & 597.

[103] In the Buddhist tradition, there is always such a notion that the diamond is free from decay and thus the enlightened is to obtain a diamond-like body 金剛不壞之身.

stimulation of her boudoir with the existence of all the quotidian utensils and furniture (though in a miniature size), the pagoda-shape sutra extends and meanwhile accommodates the contractible "boudoirs" into a religious space.

Qian's secular body, different from Miaozhen's and Qianshan's, is not to undergo a mummification or cremation. As such, the son's gesture to relicize his mother's corpse features instead a remake of the tomb rather than the body. That is, whereas Buddhist saints make relics from special treatments of their dead bodies, a mundane woman's corpse, after all, could metaphorically acquire a sanctity from being placed in a holy space--the reliquary/stupa. Robert Sharf highlights the role of a reliquary in sacralizing the otherwise unrecognizable relics, "A relic, however, requires a 'frame' in space and time that explicitly signals its status as sacred object. Removed from their glided and jewel-studded reliquaries most relics resemble so much dirt."[104] The pagoda-shape sutra in fact bestows Qian's body with such a holy "frame." Her son seems to appropriate the Buddhist way to immortalize his mother with the religious soteriological power. Meanwhile, with Qian's body, the sutra itself reaches beyond the canvass and is symbolically erected as an architectural construction. As Xiang Mu writes on the sutra, "Before the sutra is delivered, the pagoda has already been erected. Now that to engrave the [image of the] pagoda is also to transcribe the sutra. Both the dharma and its phenomenal appearance are ready, and they are mutually constitutive.未說是經,已設是塔.今刻此塔,即鐫此經.法相俱足,相待而成." Xiang Mu states that the process to inscribe the texts is coterminous with constructing the pagoda. The pagoda and the sutra are interchangeable and interdependent; they construct a unity that secures an immortality and indestructibility. The temple and the text

[104] Sharf, "On the Allure of Buddhist Relics," p. 170.

conflated and coincides in the woman's burial site and also in her son's religious and filial devotion. In this way, Qian's body, tomb, and the pagoda-sutra mutually enhance one another's symbolic value under the allusion to the unification of sutra, stupa, and soma.

Briefly, the moment Xiang Mu preserved his mother's boudoir-like coffin under the sutra-stupa, he symbolically relocated his mother's body and domestic life into a Buddhist sacred space. In this way, this practice not only denotes a symbolical relicization of the woman's corpse but also is a "mummification" of her living space—her boudoir. Both the woman's body and the daily setting that body dwells are captured and freeze-framed as an eternal presence.

Interestingly, this immortalization of the woman and her living space sparks a dialectic of secularization of the relics and a sacralization of the secular body. That is, Xiang Mu's symbolic relicization of Qian's body is quite different from that of the Buddha or religious priests. Usually, the sutra-stupa unity creates a sacred space where a holy body is to be placed, commemorated, and worshipped. However, in Qian's case, the body that is inserted into the sacred space of the sutra-stupa is in fact a mundane woman's. Meanwhile, there is no doubt that the son does not mean to iconize his mother body and make it a public spectacle or worshipping site as those Buddhist patriarchs as well as Qianshan and Miaozhen would do. His appropriation of the Buddhist way to sacralize a secular body, I argue, gains its rationale from the relics' capacity of "reconsil[ing] a contradiction between a 'cognitive' understanding that the Buddha is dead, and a 'psychological' or 'affective' sense that he is living."[105] That is, Xiang Mu is more likely to borrow the Buddhist making of relics to remedy the inevitable absence caused by death and thus further enable an emotional and psychological compensation. In other words, the

[105] John Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, p. 5.

relicization of his mother is deployed to pacify a sensitive pain triggered by the loss of her and meanwhile to manifest and perpetuate the bonding between the mother and son. As Faure puts it, "[Relics] bring death into the world of the living, but they also assure the continuity of life into death, the regeneration of life through death, …to bridge the gap between both realms."[106] In one word, it is not only a way to deal with death but also to tame it. In this light, this secularized relicization of a mother's body warrants "an undramatization of death (as a traumatic event) through a "dramatization" of death (as a ritualistic immortalization of the dead).[107] Paradoxically, albeit Buddhism is marked by its denunciation of all sentiments or attachments, this adoption of Buddhist relicization is nevertheless to confirm and consolidate the private attachment between the mother and son.

Indeed, what was perpetuated/relicized is the mother's body, boudoir, and also the mother-son bonding as embedded in and embodied by the son's sincere filial piety. In this light, the secularization of relics and its application to women's body belies a domestication or privatization of the Buddhist relics as it sustains a Confucian-style bonding between the alive family members and the deceased, and also perpetuates presence of the dead through a domestic enshrinement at a private burial site. In other words, this practice has a twofold ramification: 1) it enshrines/consecrates the ordinary body by symbolically inserting it into a sacred space of a sutra-stupa unity; 2) it secularizes and domesticates the making of holy relics within a private burial site occupied by an "ordinary" body.

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[106] Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy,* p. 135.

[107] Ibid.*,* p. 184.

In summary, the tomb of Lady Qian is not only reimagined as a miniature boudoir to perpetuate the woman's living moment but also rearranged as a temple/pagoda, a sacred space to accommodate and deify the woman's dead body. Boudoir, tomb, and temple intersected and interacted through the relicization of the female body. In this way, a secularized and self-fashioned sacred space emerges, in which a Buddhist Pure Land and a Confucian ancestral shrine conjoin and conflate together.

As a matter of fact, it was not uncommon for the Ming-Qing laywomen to be buried with religious texts covering on or placing besides their body. Some other coeval graves provide evidence for the popularity of this burial practice. In the tomb (dated as late Ming or early Qing) excavated in Lujiashan of the Hubei province, the unearthed female corpse was found to be covered at her chest by a scarf inscribed with the characters from the *Dhāraṇī Sutra* (see figure 6).[108] Meanwhile, a Qing tomb found in Guizhou province presents similar arrangement of covering the chest of a female corpse with a stupa-patterned *Dhāraṇī Sutra*.[109] These scarfs might be an expedient adaption of *Dhāraṇī Sutra* shroud 陀羅尼經被 which is designed in a stupa-like layout and only allowed to be applied to burial rites for royal members and high-

[108] Although this *Dhāraṇī Sutra* quilt was not rendered in a pagoda-shape, it did function as a textualized stupa in which the female subject is to be relicized and then immortalized and enlightened.

[109] This scarf was not well persevered due to a long-term immersion in water, so scholars could only figure out a few characters and patterns on a small part of it. See Li Fei 李飛, "Rituals Spreading to the Countryside," pp. 57-69.

ranking officials since the Yongzheng reign of the Qing dynasty (see figure 17).[110] Although the scarfs are not rendered into a stupa-shape layout, in my opinion, the simplified format seems to be a way to circumvent the state prohibition of ordinary people from using this kind of burial object, and it does not mean to undermine or impair its function as a textualized stupa in which the female subject is to be relicized, immortalized, and enlightened. The simplified *Dhāraṇī Sutra* scarf, similar to Qian's coffin shroud, proves a secularization of the Buddhist stupa-sutra-śarīra symbol, but also testifies to a crafty privatization or domestication of this appropriation among the masses of the people despite the official ban.

Besides the archaeological evidence, the late Ming scholar Ye Shaoyuan 葉紹袁 (1589-1648) also records how his wife put her embroidered portrait of *Guanyin* and two volumes of hand-copied sutras over their beloved daughter's head when the young girl was encoffined. Buried along with the girl's corpse are tambac, her daily used mirror, jade pendant, and stone seals.[111] If the existence of all the personal belongings easily invokes a scene of Xiaoluan's domestic life as a talented, refined gentry woman, the Buddhist scriptures, Guanyin's image are there not only for their salvific and apotropaic powers, but also to affirm her identity as a pious Buddhist devotee in the boudoir. Ye Shaoyuan hence explicitly expressed the dual purpose for him to put these things in Xiaoluan's coffin: It is for both an immortalization and deification of

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[110] See Francoise Wang-Toutain 王徽, "An Interpretation and reading of Tibetan Scripture," pp. 48-65.

[111] Ye Shaoyuan 葉紹袁, "Ji wangnü xiaoluan wen 祭亡女小鸞文 (Mourning For My Deceased Daughter Xiaoluan)," *Wumeng tangji* 午夢堂集 (Collected Writings from the Hall of Mid-Day Dreams), Beijing: Zhonghuashuju, 1998, p. 373.

his daughter into the western Pure Land and also for her to resume the familiar domestic life in the spiritual realm.[112] In a subtle way that resonates with Lady Qian's coffin, the burial logistic for Xiaoluan simultaneously perpetuates her existence and immortalizes her into the Buddhist Pure Land by bridging the sacred and secular spaces with a coherent setting in both her boudoir and her coffin. Moreover, the consistent existence of Xiaoluan's body, alive and dead, makes possible of this spatial continuity and conflation of boudoir, temple, and tomb. In a sense, Xiaoluan's body was "relicized" into an emotional and memorial stupa erected by the bereft Ye couple when they made all these suggestive devising to the girl's burial space.

All the above cases afford us a glance at how the female body (in the form of a corpse) combines and mediates the three spaces that she has been occupying: her boudoir (the inhabitant of her living body), her tomb (the residence of her dead body), and her temple (the "reliquary" of her relicized body). It is thus safe to argue that the burial rites for laywomen always involves a relicization of their body and a religious-specific re-imagination of their burial space. In one word, restoring boudoirs and resembling temples, women's tombs underwent a re-imagination and renovation to immortalize the ordinary laywomen through a secularization/domestication of the Buddhist tradition of relics veneration.

Conclusion

Through a consideration of figurations of the female body (both living and dead) in literary narratives and burial practices in the Ming-Qing era, this chapter demonstrates how the body instantiates and invigorates sacred space. The female body is neither merely the vessel containing nor merely the barrier obstructing Buddhists' journey to the *Buddhakṣetra* (Pure

[112] Ibid.

Land). It plays a third role as both a combination of and alternative beyond the two. Sometimes, it *is* the Pure Land: in many cases, the female body is integrated into and becomes continuous with the *Buddhakṣetra*. The female body comes into focus as a "thirdspace" that overrides the *nei-wai* boundary and geographical restrictions, a thirdspace that dialectically bridges dualisms including boudoir and burial site, mundane and sacred, and this life and the next. The Ming-Qing identification of women's bodies with spiritual spaces reveals that, in religious discourse of the era, the human body partakes in and presides over the production of the spiritual; the body is not an inert receptacle of religious habitus. In addition, the identification of women's bodies with spaces, in a broader sense, reveals how the human body, instead of being an inert receptacle of religious "habitus," to the contrary partakes and presides over the making of spiritual spaces.

Furthermore, the case studies I offer in this chapter (Miaozhen, Qianshan, and Lady Qian) demonstrate that in Ming-Qing China the female body was understood not only as an actor in the creation of sacred spaces, but also as fully capable of enlightenment and Buddhahood.[113] This

[113] Admittedly, Miaozhen's Śarīra only appears in the more fictional version of her life story and thus is not adequate to be taken as the real. It is however noteworthy that Song Lian does confirm that Miaozhen's an apt case to demonstrate that one can achieve enlightenment and Buddhahood even in the form of a female human body. However, Song Lian, makes a comment at the end of his epigraphy for Miaozhen that, "The filial girl observed the Buddhist commandments, being a Buddhist laywoman for her entire life. Her case exactly demonstrates achieving enlightenment via a female body. That is why I append her epitaph here. 孝女持菩薩戒終身為優婆夷此現女人身得度者也故附載於此." His commentary on the one hand testifies the fact that a woman's body could be sacralized as a man, but on the other hand, it meanwhile

finding contributes to the Buddhist query of "whether or not women can become Buddhas (fully enlightened beings)… as her physical body, after all, was visually different from the male body of the historical Buddha."[114] The *Mahāyāna* scriptures assert that the female body is incapable of transcendence: "[a woman] could be a *bodhisattva* and tread the *bodhisattva*-path toward enlightenment—but somewhere along the way, in the course of her own rebirths, she would have to cease to be female and go on being born only as male."[115] Yet, as I document, Buddhist practitioners like Miaozhen and Qianshan *did* achieve Buddhahood with female bodies and all, and their female bodies were preserved and worshiped in the form of narrative and literal "relics." Although Qianshan and Miaozhen both forgo certain dimensions of their femininity when they renounce or elude marriage, they need never obtain a male body en route to Buddhahood.

These female characters' attainment of nirvana, or liberation from the unremitting cycle of rebirth and death (*saṃsāra*), dovetails with the contemporary tendency to valorize women's "superior spiritual prowess." As Dorothy Ko observes, 17th century-China was marked by "a widespread recognition of female spirituality" with several woman religious teachers rising to prominence as exemplified by Tan Yangzi 曇阳子 (1558-1580) and the Tiantai master Lezi 泐

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reaffirms how scarce for a female body to be sacralized and it is worth of a well-written epigraph.

[114] Nancy Schuster, "Striking a Balance," p. 90.

[115] Ibid., p. 90, and 105, note 10.

子.[116] Both Tanyangzi and lezi attracted a great many male *and* female followers from the gentry class. Lezi even eloquently articulated women's powers through a séances: "Women, … were endowed with a special spiritual sensitivity; they should seek to become immortals in their womanly bodies after death."[117] Lezi's recognition of women's spiritual potency helps make sense of the widespread sacralization/spatialization of women's bodies (alive or dead) in late imperial China. Both literary narratives and popular burial practices lend their support to the association between women's bodies and spirituality. As a more intimate connection between women and religion was forged, the hitherto private, cloistered female body accrued public meaning and visibility in the literary, religious, and social spheres. Whereas Buddhism bestowed more freedom upon female bodies and introduced new understandings of the deep ontological dimensions of the female form, the female body, in turn, helped to integrate Buddhism into the Confucian Chinese cultural landscape through the domestication and secularization of Buddhist practices.

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[116] See Ann Waltner, "Telling the Story of Tanyangzi," in *Yugai minzhang: zhongguo lishi wenhua zhong de "si" yu "qing"—siqing pian* 欲掩彌彰：中國歷史文化中的「私」與「情」— 私情篇 (Concealing to reveal: On "the Private" and "Sentimental" in Chinese History and Culture—section of private emotions), Taiwan: Guojia tushuguan, 2003, pp. 213-241. See also "Life and Letters: Reflections on Tanyangzi," in *Beyond Exemplar Tales: Women's Biography in Chinese History*, eds. Joan Judge, Hu Ying, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011, pp. 212-229.

[117] Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, p. 200.

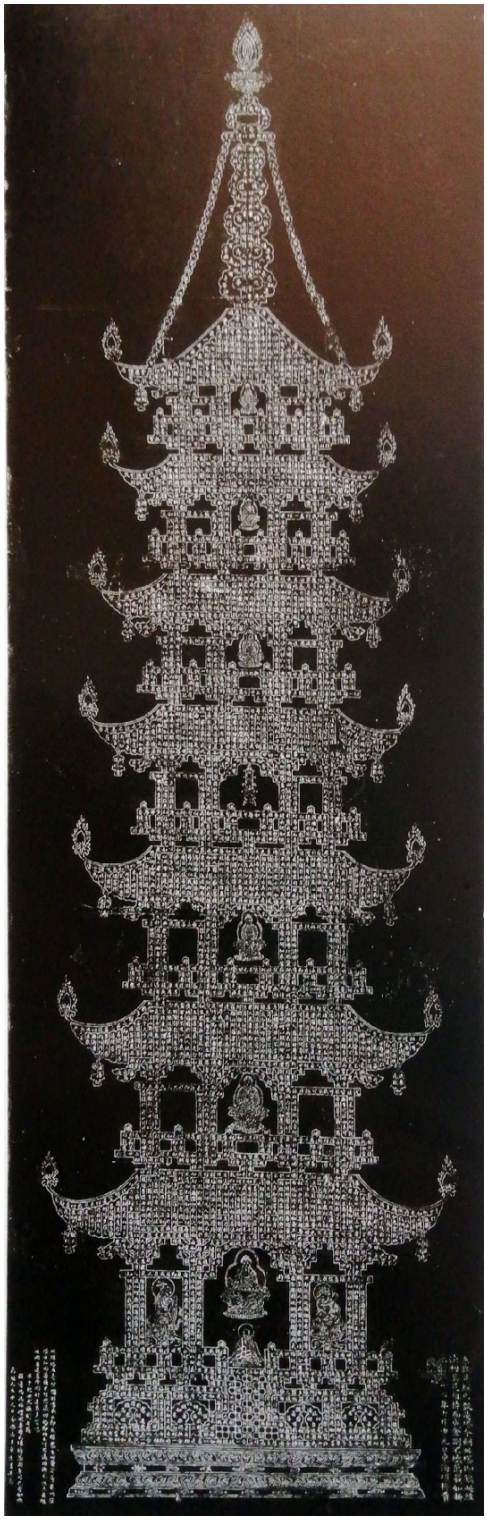
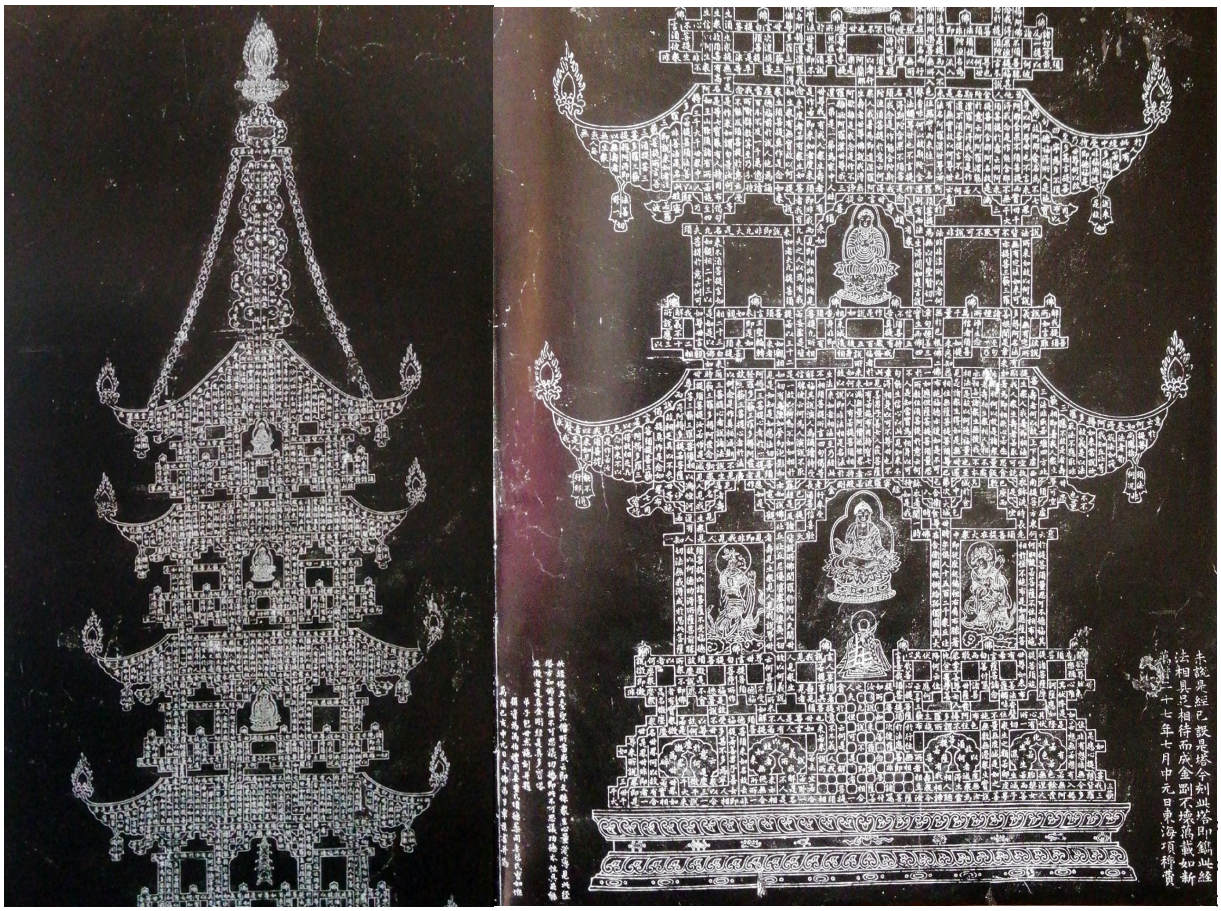


Figure 1 The Pagoda-Shaped Diamond Sutra Rubbing found in the Three Xiangs' Tomb at Hongheliang 洪合良三項氏墓, (Jiaxing, Zhejiang), arribute to the Jiaxing Museum.



Figures 2 Part of the “The Pagoda-Shaped Diamond Sutra Rubbing,” arribute to the Jiaxing Museum.

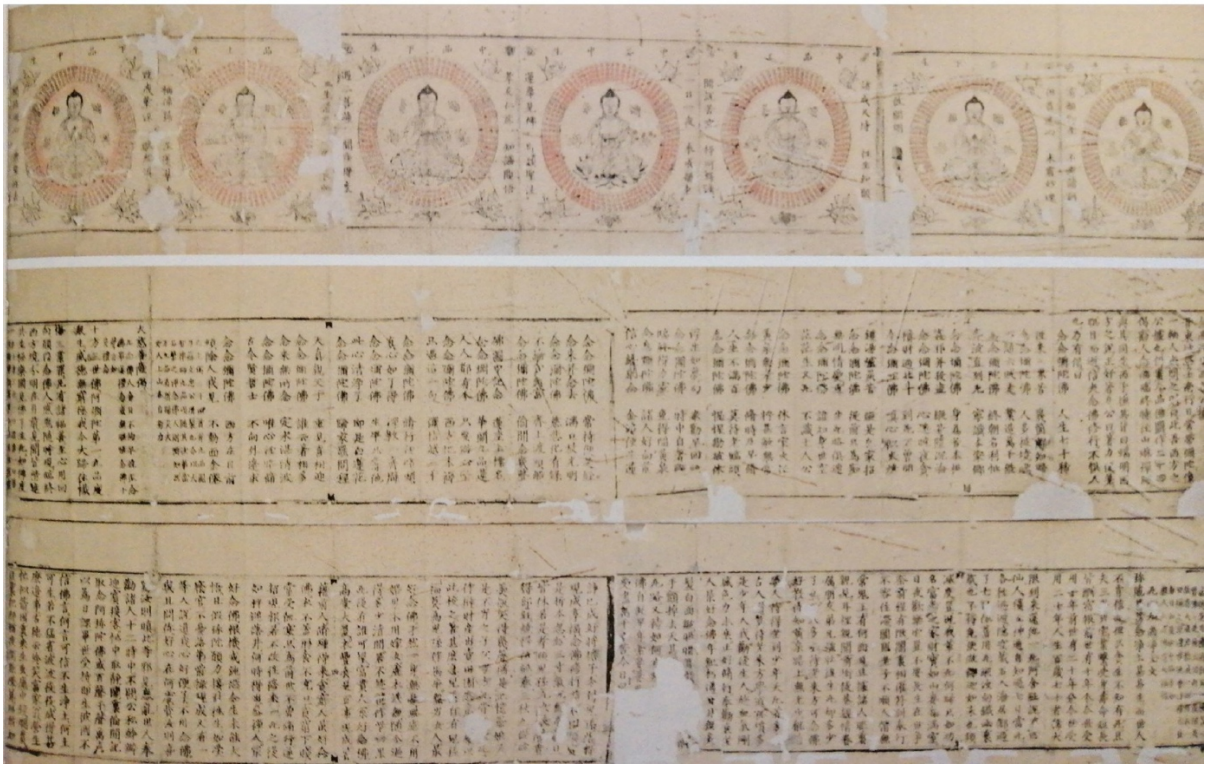




Figure 3 Buddhist Sutras found in Lady Qian's coffin, the Three Xiangs' Tomb at Hongheliang, attribute to Jiaxing Museum.



Figures 4 Miniature Furnitures found in the Three Xiangs' Tomb at Hongheliang, attribute to the Jia Xiang Museum



Figures 5 Daily Utensils found in the Three Xiangs' Tomb at Hongheliang, attribute to the Jia Xiang Museum



Figure 6 The Dhāraṇī Sutra Scarf found in Lujiashan Tomb 魯家山墓, Hu Bei, from internet

Chapter Four Inscribing a Memorial Temple

In the last chapter, we saw how a filial son erected a textual temple—a pagoda-shaped diamond sutra—in order to give his mother's worldly body a divine incarnation. Invoking the Buddhist tradition of venerating relics, the son relicized and thereby immortalized his late mother. As the son's example showed, both a beloved family member's body and his or her memory demand ritual and preservation. When it comes to the memory of a deceased kin, much has to be committed to written words. China has a long history of elegiac writing, but the honor of being immortalized in text was traditionally reserved for a select few. However, as Martin Huang has documented, Chinese mourning texts or *daowang* writings were "secularized" in late imperial China, in part through the trend of widowers writing elegiac texts for their late wives.[1] The honor of being recorded in elegiac writings became increasingly available to women and to others belonging to subordinate social groups.[2]

However, as Katherine Calitz points out, elegy and biography were highly formal genres that were subject to rigid conventions. Female subjects were typically stereotyped as virtuous mothers, wives, and/or daughters-in-law admired for feminine virtues including chastity, frugality, abstinence, diligence, and competence. Many scholars have endeavored to read highly

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[1] Martin Huang, *Intimate Memory: Gender and Mourning in Late Imperial China*, New York: SUNY Press, 2018.

[2] Such as merchants and other lesser social groups. For examples, see Katherine Carlitz, "Advertisements for Ourselves: The Reproduction of Elite Status in 16th-century Chinese Epitaphs," paper presented at the Conference on "Lifewriting," Sheffield, England, March, 2008.

troped biographies of women with fresh eyes, teasing out how the particular intentions of male authors might have exceeded or even run counter to the generic conventions by which they abided.[3] Nevertheless, one would be hard pressed to deny that these hagiographic biographies of women conform to a greater or lesser degree to Confucian principles of virtuous womanhood.[4]

This chapter examines a unique process of sacralization through which ordinary women were elevated to the status of divine beings in secular Ming-Qing mourning texts, much as some other women were through relicizing burial spaces and practices. My reading complicates the extant narrative of how memorial writing represented female subjects in the Ming-Qing era. These female subjects were not only remembered as beloved family members but also commemorated as divine beings. The hagiographical biographies by Miaozhen and Qianshan that I explored in the last chapter both support my argument. Although one might imagine that the two miracle-workers' biographies are religiously oriented and do not reflect a general cultural trend, the sanctification of women in religious terms was a relatively common practice

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[3] Martin Huang, *Intimate Memory*, 2018. See also Martin Huang, "Introduction: Remembering Female Relatives: Mourning and Gender in Late Imperial China," *Nan Nü* 15, No.1 (2013): 4-29; "Negotiating Wifely Virtues: Guilt, Memory and Grieving Husbands in Seventeenth-Century China," *Nan Nü* 15, No.1 (2013): 109-36. See also, Katherine Carlitz, "Mourning, Personality, Display: Ming Literati Commemorate Their Mothers, Sisters, and Daughters," *Nan Nü* 15, No.1 (2013): 30-68; Allan Barr, "Marriage and Mourning in Early-Qing Tributes to Wives," *Nan Nü* 15, No.1 (2013): 137-78; and Lynn A. Struve, "Song Maocheng's Matrixes of Mourning and Regret," *Nan Nü* 15, No.1 (2013): 69-108.

[4] Carlitz, "Mourning, Personality, Display," p. 6.

among ordinary people at that time. When composing elegiac writing for ordinary kinswomen, many male writers styled their biographies and epitaphs as quasi-hagiographies, incorporating supernatural phenomena, occult events, and even religious glossaries into their texts.

This chapter focuses on narratives of ordinary women who were at most lay devotees of Buddhist religions and who had never entered a religious order. I will discuss epitaphs, biographies, and pertinent literary narratives concerning ordinary women whom male chroniclers sacralized through the addition of supernatural details to otherwise unremarkable biographies. Famous female saints and priests such as Tan Yangzi and Le Zi are therefore beyond the scope of my discussion;[5] because of their close identification with religion in life, it is not at all unexpected that supernatural elements would abound in their explicitly hagiographical biographies composed after their deaths.

Secularizing Confucian Biography and Religious Hagiography

[5] Besides Tan Yangzi and Lezi, there were other female religious priests/saints as remembered by her family. For example, see Li Yesi 李鄴嗣, "Fan dashi waizhuan 梵大師外傳 (The Unofficial Biography of Master Fan," and "Nüxiong Wenyu zhuan 女兄文玉傳 (The Biography of My Female Brother Wenyu)," in *Gaotang shiwen chao* 杲堂詩文鈔 (Poem Drafts from Gaotang), vol. 4., Zhongguo jiben guji ku (Digital collection) 中國基本古籍庫 (Database of Chinese Classic Ancient Books via Erudition), Beijing: Beijing Airusheng shuzihua jishu yanjiu zhongxin, 2009. For a discussion of Tan Yangzi, see Ann Waltner, "Telling the Story of Tanyangzi," and "Life and Letters: Reflections on Tanyangzi." For a discussion of Lezi (who is also known as Madam Chen), see Dorothy Ko, *The Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, p. 200.

Ideally (in the view of Confucian moralists), most Chinese women should remain cloistered in domestic spaces and be discouraged from flaunting their talents. They were therefore apparently ineligible for immortalization in memorial writing. In traditional Confucian society, eulogistic genres such as the epitaph and the biography were to be reserved for towering figures of extraordinary moral standing who made their mark on the public sphere. Women who were confined to their boudoirs were living ordinary, "unworthy" lives and were forbidden from pursuing public projects that would merit written documentation. However, as Martin Huang observes, 16th- and 17th-century China witnessed a wide "secularization trend associated with memorial writings in general…more and more seemingly unworthy men and women, sometimes from lower social strata, were becoming epitaphic or biographical subjects."[6] The hitherto "sacred" honor of being immortalized in memorial writing was "plebeianized" and became "increasingly available to a significantly larger segment of the society, [of which] women were an important part."[7] The availability of memorial writings to obscure women helped to reshape gender norms. According to Huang's research, many husbands shifted the focus of elegiac writing from conventionally "important events" to the "small and trivial things" of everyday life, "trivial things" that were the sole permitted terrain of cloistered wives and mothers. Huang insightfully points out that this shift in the genre greatly complicated and even altered women's public image: "her image became less 'saint-like' and less dictated by the Confucian

[6] Martin Huang, *Intimate Memory*, p. 17.

[7] Ibid., p. 18.

biographical rhetoric of the exemplary, with more attention being shifted to the mundane details in her life."[8]

Building on Huang's insights, I examine another important evolution in the genre of secularized elegies dedicated to women: some filial sons (and grieving widowers) wrote women's biographies as hagiographies. These authors happily extolled female kin's religious piety and identified them with Bodhisattvas and divinities; biographies and epitaphs for ordinary women were suffused with supernatural and sometimes miraculous events. Moreover, these texts were self-consciously public documents. Almost all of these elegiac writings were included in the author's published oeuvres and distributed to the public as well as to posterity. Katherine Calitz writes, "[T]he epitaph was intended as an enduring public document, it is a part of the construction of the male author clan's images, so the anecdotes included are drawn from what the families wanted known."[9] As such, we might ask why male survivors would want deceased women in the family to be remembered as devout lay Buddhists or even as divine beings. How should we make sense of the emerging practice of apotheosizing female kin in memorial writing?

As I will show, hagiographic eulogies served as divine sites in which common women were commemorated, immortalized, and apotheosized. These texts relicized otherwise insignificant life stories and preserved them in a textual reliquary of sorts. A filial son's relicization and immortalization of his mother was achieved not only through attending to her tomb and remains but also through attending to the immortalization of her life story in eulogy. This practice of relicization is distinct from that which Huang's examines: the authors I examine are not

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[8] Ibid., p. 19.

[9] Carlitz, "Advertisements for Ourselves," Conference paper, p. 3.

secularizing an erstwhile sacred genre in order to accommodate ordinary subjects (as in Huang's study), but rather compensating for the banality of women's lives by weaving supernatural events into their eulogies. Male authors thus created an alternative way to justify elevating female subjects' via commemorative biography. Even if a woman failed to meet the traditional Confucian criteria for worthiness of written eulogy (i.e., achievements in the public sphere or extremely unusual moral deeds), she might nevertheless deserve to be remembered for her extraordinary spirituality, which often went hand in hand with moral exemplarity. Thus devoted sons and husbands reconfigured the metrics of a female subject's worthiness by highlighting women's spirituality in hagiography.

Women's Spirituality: Superstition or Religion?

Consider two seemingly contradictory vignettes recorded by Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716-1798) in *Zibuyu* 子不語 ("What the Master Does Not Discuss"), a collection of supernatural stories. The first concerns Yuan's conflict with his concubine over her worship of the Buddha:

> *Guanyin Bids Farewell*
>
> One of my concubines, Mrs. Fang, worshipped a four-*cun*-tall statue of the Guanyin Buddha made of sandalwood. I am open-minded and uninhibited, but I do not worship the statue myself. Nevertheless, I did not forbid others to do so. An old servant by the name of Zhang worshipped the statue particularly devoutly. The first thing she did every morning was to go to the room where the statue sat. She would not clean the house until after she burned incense and kowtowed to it. One morning, I was in a hurry and asked for water to wash my face, but Zhang was still kowtowing before the statue. Outraged, I threw the statue of Guanyin to the ground and stomped on it. My concubine cried and said to me, "Last night, I dreamed that Guanyin came to me and

bade me farewell. She said, 'A mishap will befall me tomorrow and then I will leave for elsewhere.' Today, you stomped on the statue—isn't that fate?" With that, she sent the statue to Zhunti Nunnery. I reflected that if Buddhism teaches that everything is empty, how could Guanyin be so crafty [as to come to life and meddle with family affairs]? I concluded that it must be possessed by a ghost. From then on, I forbade my family to worship the Buddha.[10]

觀音作別

方姬奉一檀香觀音像，長四寸。余性通脫，不加禮，亦不禁也。有張媽 者，奉之尤虔，每早必往佛前，焚香稽首畢，方供掃除之役。余一日早 晨，呼盥面湯甚急，而張方拜佛不已，余怒，取觀音像擲地，足蹋之。 姬泣曰:"昨夜夢觀音來別我，云:'明日有小劫，我將他適矣。' 今 果被君作蹋，豈非數也!"乃送入准提庵。余想:佛法全空，焉得作如 此狡獪，必有鬼物憑焉。嗣後，乃不許家人奉佛。(*Zibuyu*, chapter 19)

In this anecdote, Yuan contrasts Buddhist beliefs with worship of Buddhist statuary, explicitly conveying his approval of the former and suspicion of the latter. He understands observance of doctrine to be more pure than the visceral experience of worship. Yuan Mei's attitude conforms to Hindu and Buddhist traditions in its gendered hierarchization of religious expression. As Susan Sered and Reiko Ohnuma argue, many scholars dismissed women-dominated religious traditions in South Asia as "magic" or "superstition" rather than

[10] This is generally Polo Santangelo's translation with my own modifications. Polo Santangelo, trans. Zibuyu*, "What the Master Would Not Discuss," According to Yuan Mei (1716-1798)*: *A Collection of Supernatural Stories*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013, p. 929.

understanding them as aspects of "religion." According to Sered and Ohnuma, this dismissal by men reflected their suspicion of how certain practices attracted women devotees and placed an "emphasis upon specific, interpersonal relationships." Sered and Ohnuma understand the purported distinction between superstition and religion as essentially gendered. James Frazer's seminal work *The Golden Bough* provides the conceptual model for Sered and Ohnuma's insights about gender: "Whereas religion addresses ultimate concerns (such as death) in abstract and transcendent terms, magic is associated only with the private, personal, and particular."[11] Women's religiosity was, according to Sered and Ohnuma, conveniently relegated to the inferior realm of the specific, personal, and practical in South Asia, while men's religiosity was automatically presumed to correspond to the superior, abstract, and transcendental.

Yuan's attitudes toward the statue of Guanyin also reflect a shared attitude to religion among many Confucian literati at the time. Late Imperial Chinese approaches to religion. Scholars of Chinese religion use the term "anticlericalism" to describe a general disdain for professional clerics in the Ming-Qing period.[12] But while there was widespread suspicion of

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[11] Reiko Ohnuma, "Mother-Love and Mother-Grief: South Asian Buddhist Variations on a Theme," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 23 No.1 (2007): 95-116, 96. Susan Starr Sered, "Mother Love, Child Death and Religious Innovation: A Feminist Perspective," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 12, No1 (1996): 5-23. The same ideas are also treated in Sered's *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister: Religions Dominated by Women*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 89-101.

[12] Vincent Goossaert, "1898: The Beginning of the End for Chinese Religion?" *The Journal of Asian Studies* 65, No.2 (2006): 307-35, 308.

priests who lived off of the profits from liturgical services and from soliciting donations, Confucian scholars still held the doctrinal systems of Buddhism and Daoism in high esteem.[13] Yuan Mei's story captures the intersection of Chinese anticlericalism with gender-based suspicions of women's "superstitious" religiosity in South Asian religious traditions. Poorly educated and deemed intellectually inferior, Chinese women were considered more susceptible to clerical brainwashing and were thought to be hopelessly ignorant of what truly valuable philosophical enlightenment constituted. Unsurprisingly, women who were more inclined to the practical and personal aspects of religion tended to find considerably more appeal in karmic calculations, divine manifestations, and even charlatan priests than in abstract doctrines and philosophies. While male literati were more typically inclined to appreciate Buddhist and Daoist philosophy, they lamented women's impressionability and wrote off women's religious practices as little more than superstitious mania. Confucian moralists sternly opposed women's visits to temples and socialization with monks and nuns,[14] even as those same moralists befriended erudite monks and engaged in philosophical debate and contemplation. Anticlericalism manifested a general disdain for women's religiosity.

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[13] A perfect example of how anticlericalism coexisted with an appreciation for religious philosophy can be found in the monumental Chinese novel *HLM*. While corrupt monks and nuns were always objects of derision in the novel, it undoubtedly constitutes a "philosophically sophisticated" religious framework. Yiqun Zhou, "Temple and Clergies in *Honglou meng*, " p. 265.

[14] See chapter 1 of this dissertation.

In *Jushi zhuan* 居士傳 *Biographies of Buddhist Laymen*, a book documenting the lives of Buddhist laymen, most of the biographies focus on the men's philosophical insights, pursuits of enlightenment, and occult interpretations of Buddhist dharmas; by contrast, in *SNRZ* by the same author, most of the women are remembered for the supernatural occurrences that their religious piety apparently evoked. The philosophy underlying heterodox religious systems provided a refreshing resource for men's intellectual cultivation while the more cultic and earthly aspects of those same systems were relegated to women and pooh-poohed as superstition. Male scholars might not have totally dismissed the efficacy of the Buddha and his teachings, but, as Yuan's story suggests, they often used the occasion of women's religiosity to assert their authority as Confucian patriarchs. Women's religiosity became synonymous with vulgar "superstition" and offered an excuse for further surveillance, regulation, and subjugation by men.[15]

Like many of his peers, Yuan was more inclined to value doctrine and philosophy than to believe in physical manifestations of religious power or to embrace heterodox system's

[15] Yuan Mei's story also strikes a chord with Feng Meng Long's "boot" story I have analyzed in Chapter 2. Both demonstrate the disparity between the two genders' perception and experience of the Buddhist religion. The women and men of the story—and of its world—understand religious cultivation quite differently. Women found concrete, personal, and straightforward solace, redemption, and fantasy in worship because it either superseded or suspended the concerns of this world, while men tended to focus on the public and philosophical aspects that reflected their interest in *investing* in things on a superior plane. Men's privileged social status allows them to spar even with heavenly authorities; or at least, the heavenly power should be aligning with the public/state authority as embodied by eminent Confucian scholars.

subversive potential to grant women religious agency and even superiority. Although Yuan Mei never doubts the power and legitimacy of the Bodhisattva, he is hardly convinced that he/she would descend to earth to communicate with an ignorant concubine and a servant woman. Yuan Mei therefore stridently bans Buddhist prayer in his household.

Interestingly, the same collection takes a markedly different tone in its account of Yuan Mei's pious great-great-grandmother's brushes with the supernatural:

> *The Bodhisattva Replies to a Prayer*
>
> My grandmother, Madam Chai, often told me that her grandmother on her mother's side, whose name was Lady Yang, was old and did not have a son. Lady Yang had to live with her daughter, Madam Hong, for the rest of her life. She died at 97. In her old age, Lady Yang lived upstairs worshipping the Buddha and reading aloud from the scriptures daily. She did not go downstairs for over thirty years. She was very kind. Whenever she heard someone chastising servants and maids downstairs, she would be too agitated to take her meals. If a maidservant came upstairs, Lady Yang would share her food with her. Once, when Lady Yang had passed the age of 90, she was praying to the Buddha when his statue actually stood up to salute her in response to her prayers. Lady Yang was terrified. At the time, my grandmother was still fairly young. So [after this first occasion] Lady Yang would pull my grandmother along with her, saying, "If you are here, then the Buddha won't respond to my worshipping." Three days before her death, she asked for a basin in which to wash her feet. The maidservant fetched her the wooden basin. Lady Yang told the girl, "Not that one. This time I will walk across lotus flowers. You must bring me the bronze basin that I use to wash my face." After a while, the scent of sandalwood wafted through the air as she sat cross-legged and

passed away. Even though she was dead, the fragrance lingered for over three days and nights before finally fading away.[16]

菩薩答拜

余祖母柴太夫人常為余言，其外祖母楊氏老而無子，依其女洪夫人以終，年九十七而卒。居一樓奉佛誦經，三十年足不履地。性慈善，聞樓 下笞奴婢聲，便傍徨不能食。或奴婢有上樓者，必分己所食與食。九十以後拜佛，佛像起立答拜，太夫人大怖，時余祖母年尚幼，必拉之作伴，曰:“汝在此，佛不答我也。”卒前三日，索盆濯足。婢以向所用 木盆進，曰:“不可，我此去踏蓮花，須將浴面之銅盆來。”俄而，旃檀之氣自空繚繞，端坐跏趺而逝。逝後，香三晝夜始散。

(*Zibuyu*, Chapter 21)

Lady Yang's motherliness is conspicuous: she is compassionate and giving. Her impulse to feed others (like the maidservant) suggests that she mothers all the younger members of the household; her motherliness exceeds the exclusive and jealous tie binding a mother to her son. Her maternity recalls Buddhahood in its indiscriminate love and generosity. In this sense, Lady Yang is not figured as merely a domestic ancestor of a particular male author, but as a saint, and her saintliness is corroborated by the miraculous awakening of the Buddha's statue. The moment the statue comes to life and salutes Lady Yang, she achieves a divine footing of sorts herself. Moreover, the biography concludes with Lady Yang's consecration as a Bodhisattva. At the ripe old age of 97, the Lady's prediction that she will step on lotus peddles after death and the fragrance that lingers around her corpse suggest that, upon her death, Lady Yang enters a holy

[16] This is generally Polo Santangelo's translation with my own modifications. Polo Santangelo, pp. 1031-2.

realm as a Buddhist divinity. Under ordinary circumstances, the son-less Lady Yang might not even have been remembered as an ancestor; but Yuan Mei's account enshrines her not only as a virtuous and lovable senior but even as a saint.

However, it is notable that Lady Yang's apotheosis must finally be confirmed and inscribed by her male offspring. Yang's divinity is passed down orally by her granddaughter, but it is Yuan Mei—her great-great-grandson—who plays the role of Yang's heir by immortalizing her miraculous encounter with the Buddha and her virtuous track record in text. Yuan consummates the process of her immortalization and Buddhification. The heirless mother-figure acquires divine status and immortality only when a male offspring fulfills a son's duty of committing her marvelous life story to paper.

When we read this second anecdote against the previous one, "*Guanyin* Bids Farewell," we note that Yuan Mei's attitudes toward the two purported epiphanies appear to be diametrically opposed. Although the two entries present a similar occurrence—the sudden vivification of a statue of the Buddha—Yuan Mei does not betray even a hint of suspicion or judgment of the supernatural phenomena that surround his late great-great-grandmother. Whereas the concubine's dream subjects her to suspicion and ruthless regulation, the statue that comes to life in response to Lady Yang's devotion appears a credible reflection of Yang's exemplarity. Yuan Mei's account of Lady Yang's life demonstrates how an otherwise ordinary woman can be apotheosized through memorial writing.

The Lady Yang episode reflects a broader trend in the Late Ming through High Qing: more and more eulogistic writing was dedicated to women whose lives were, on the whole, mundane. For example, Yuan Mei's contemporary, eminent Qing scholar Wang Chang 王昶 (1725-1806), was commissioned by his friend Zhang Shangyan to write an epitaph for Zhang's late mother,

Lady Wu.[17] As was customary, the epitaph was drafted based on the *xingzhuang* (sketch of a mother's life and deeds) provided by Zhang, the bereft son. At the end of the piece, Wang mentions that Zhang's draft recorded many supernatural events that supposedly occurred in the youth of Lady Wu, who was a devout Buddhist laywoman 多神仙靈應之事. However, Wang also remarks that these miracles are so commonplace in private quarters that he sees no need to relate them in detail 以閨壺之常故不著.[18] Although Wang makes the editorial decision to cut the platitudes, he nevertheless feels compelled to indicate that Zhang is willing and even eager to incorporate evidence of supernatural connections into the biographical sketch of his mother.

Not all of Wang's contemporaries took the same tack. Qing scholar and *jinshi*-degree holder Cai Shiyuan 蔡世远 (1682-1733) explicitly includes a supernatural vignette in his account of his mother's virtuous exploits. Cai writes that his mother once encountered a fierce rainstorm on her way home. At the very moment she was about to be overtaken by a flood, she entered a trance, and a goddess descended and told the woman that she was not going to die. When the mother tried to respond and to bow to the Goddess, she regained consciousness; shortly

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[17] Wang Chang 王昶, "Zhangmu wutairuren muzhiming 張母吳太孺人墓誌銘 (The Epitaph for Zhang's Mother Lady Wu, The Great Child Nurturess)," in *Chunrong tang ji* 春融堂集 (Collected Writings from the Hall of Cheerful Spring), vol. 59, in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 (Continuation of the Complete Texts of the Four Treasuries), Section of Ji 集部, book 1438, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995, p. 245.

[18] Wang Chang further claims that the emphasis would be focused on her extraordinary filial devotion to her parents in-law.

thereafter, she was rescued 坐寐之間忽有神女聲立言曰: 汝其未可死也. 先慈禮拜神下答須臾遂醒. Cai writes that the memorial writing is intended not only to provide a historical record of his mother's exemplarity, but also to establish a moral exemplar for women of later generations to emulate.[19] Cai was clearly well aware that this *xingzhuang* was to be published and distributed to the general public.

Cai's unblinking inclusion of this supernatural anecdote in his mother's biography epitomizes the broader treatment of maternal figures in the biographical writing of Ming-Qing China. In both fictional narratives and elegiac writings, it was not uncommon for a beloved maternal figure's life to be peppered with supernatural happenings that reflected the figure's piety and exemplarity; sometimes, the women were even posthumously elevated to divine status. Before discussing more cases, we must first interrogate why male authors would choose to apotheosize their deceased mothers against the religio-cultural backdrop of anticlericalism and widespread disdain for women's religiosity.

The Impulse to Sacralize Mothers

Filial piety is the central pillar of Confucianism, and there is no doubt that children are obligated to honor and serve fathers and mothers alike. However, Alan Cole points out a "fault

[19] Cai Shiyuan 蔡世遠, "Xianbi wu taijun xingzhuang 先妣吳太君行狀 (The Sketch of My Late Mother Great Lady Wu's Deeds)," in *Erxi tang wenji* 二希堂文集 (Collected Writings from the Hall of Erxi), *Wenyuange siku quanshu* 文淵閣四庫全書本, Taibei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan,1986, pp.1185-6.

line" in the Confucian understanding of filial piety.[20] Cole argues that the Confucian ideal of filial piety, which in theory applied equally to sons, daughters, fathers, and mothers, in fact centered almost exclusively on the father-son relationship, especially in the Confucian canons. Cole writes that the canons most typically describe filial piety as a mandate to accept paternal dictates both before and after a patriarch's death; filiality is grounded in unquestioning obedience and emulation rather than in affection or a sense of indebtedness. Thus, although filial piety would technically require children's respect for their mothers, Confucian ideology used what was nominally filial to reject, displace, and trivialize women's positions of authority in the family. Cole writes:

> Patriarchy moves forward from father to son by negating images of difference deriving from the mother…In this sequence, father-as-patriarch is imagined to be in charge of dispensing a singular, invisible, and transcendent Something that he lodges in his son-to-be through rituals and narratives that construct and commemorate that sameness, and which is then evidenced in clan, caste, and surname legitimacy. In effecting this 'mystical' injection of patriarchal sameness in the son, the mother, who is obviously located outside the patriline, must be completely negated as a place of origin for the boy in order for the father to reconstitute his pristine patriarchal identity in the son…

[20] This term is from Linda L. Penkower, "Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism (review)," *China Review International* 6, No.2 (1999): 416-21, 417.

> Hence patriarchy claims to have the power to install male identity first by "executing" or obliterating the maternal element (i.e., purifying the son of his nonpaternal past).[21]

Although he argues that Confucian filiality revolves around a father-son nexus, Cole also points out that Confucian mourning practices reflected children's affection for and indebtedness to their mothers. Cole suggests that the observance of the three-year mourning period for parents (a prime symbol of family values) is in fact intended to repay the debt owed by children to their mothers, and not their fathers, for sacrifices the mother made during pregnancy and child-rearing—that is, for the life-giving gifts of feeding, care-taking, and educating.[22] Indeed, because fathers and sons were encouraged to stay physically and emotionally detached from one another, a fault line emerged in the Confucian patrilineal system: a son would be tied legally, culturally, and religiously to his father, but would feel a stronger emotional affinity for his mother. Often, sons would lack formal avenues for expressing this more minorly filial love to mothers.

Although the mother-son tie tended to be minimized if not eradicated by patriarchal ideology, especially because the natural intimacy between mother and son had the potential to disrupt a son's loyalties to the patriline,[23] there were instances in which the maternal bond was

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[21] Alan Cole, *Text as Father: Paternal Seductions in Early Mahayana Buddhist Literature*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005, pp. 43-44.

[22] Alan Cole, *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.

[23] As aptly evinced by the term "Uterine family." According to Margery Wolf, in the Chinese kinship system a woman's uterine family includes the woman's mother and her mother's

mobilized for patriarchal ends. Given the culturally enforced estrangement between father and son, Cole observes, mother-son intimacy was relatively better equipped to offset and resist potential threats posed to the patriline by the son's wife. The daughter-in-law presented her own set of dangers; as an outsider and intruder, the daughter-in-law's conjugal claims on the son's affections were still more dangerous than the mother's. The mother-son alliance supported the vertical Confucian hierarchy, whereas the husband-wife union was more horizontal and therefore more suspect. Whatever its misgivings, the Confucian system had to tolerate and sometimes to encourage the mother-son alliance because of the critical role it played in counteracting the horizontal power struggle between the son and his wife—a struggle that was likely to exert pressure on the son's vertical obligations to his parents and ancestors.[24]

Cole contends that early Chinese Buddhists were sensitive to these power dynamics. They recognized that they could harness Confucian ambivalence about the role of mothers and could profit economically by emphasizing the Confucian sense of indebtedness to elders. From the early sixth century well into the medieval periods, Chinese Buddhist leaders developed a style of filial piety that focused on the mother-son relationship especially in the mourning rites for late mothers. In the early and medieval periods, this emphasis on maternal connection was intended to motivate filial sons to donate money and offerings to monasteries in their deceased mothers' names. By marketing offerings to monasteries as the conduit through which a son's debt to his mother could be repaid, Chinese Buddhists created a triangular symbiosis between donors (sons),

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children, which is the source of the woman's power. See *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan*, Stanford: Stanford University press, 1972, p. 226.

[24] Alan Cole, *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism,* pp. 34-40.

the dead (mothers), and the religious establishment (monasteries). Cole argues that mothers found that the Buddhist system validated their contributions to the household and offered them a mechanism for maintaining a claim to their sons' affections into adulthood. Sons gained a practical avenue for expressing the natural (and sometimes suppressed) affection they had for their mothers. Monasteries, of course, found a reliable source of material support.[25]

Building on Cole's reading, I argue that the Buddhist sense of a son's filial debt to his mother remained prominent but evolved into new forms in late imperial China, when institutional Buddhism underwent unprecedented decline.[26] Riffing off of the secularizing trend in *daowang* writings, filial sons borrowed Buddhist vocabulary and tropes to draft memorial essays for their deceased mothers. These authors repaid a mother's kindness and saved her from hell not by donating to monasteries but rather by elevating her memory in text.

Male scholars' sentimental bonds with their mothers and the Buddhist contention that children owed their mothers a tremendous debt paved the way for filial sons's use of the written word to express grief and admiration for their mothers.[27] As Martin Huang argues, a son's "filial love for his mother, different from a husband's *siqing* (selfish feelings) for his wife, hardly needed any apology given the Confucian notion of filiality."[28] It was perfectly appropriate for a respectable Confucian man to gush about his grief over a deceased mother. Moreover, the

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[25] Alan Cole, *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism,* especially pp. 210-35.

[26] Chün-Fang Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China*.

[27] Hsiung Ping-chen, "Constructed Emotions: The Bond Between Mothers and Sons in Late Imperial China," *Late Imperial China* 15, No.1 (1994): 87-117.

[28] Martin Huang, *Intimate Memory*, p. 2.

tradition of posthumous repayment of debts to mothers was well established: since the 6th century, Buddhists had enjoined sons to make monetary gifts in order to repay their debts to their mothers. These gifts were said to redeem the mothers' sexual sins (i.e., their choice to reproduce).

In fact, beyond the Chinese context, the Buddhist practice of redeeming mothers grew out of two perennial concerns in Buddhist traditions: problematic love of the mother and anxiety over the debt to the mother.[29] Reiko Ohnuma writes,

> Mother-love is a potent, reoccurring symbol in South Asian Buddhist literature. Buddhist literature often idealizes mother-love as the purest, most compassionate, and most self-sacrificing type of love possible—far more intense, for example, than father-love. Mother-love thus serves, in many contexts, as the most appropriate metaphor for the love and compassion that a Buddha or bodhisattva radiates outward toward all beings; in countless Buddhist texts, we learn that Buddhas and Bodhisattvas love all beings 'just as a mother loves her only son.' On the other hand, however, when mother-love is considered not as a symbol, but as an actual entity, it is often condemned in Buddhist texts as being a potent manifestation of desire, attachment, and clinging—all negative emotions in Buddhism that keep one bound within the realm of *samsara*.[30]

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[29] Reiko Ohnuma, "Mother-Love and Mother-Grief," and "Debt to the Mother: A Neglected Aspect of the Founding of the Buddhist Nuns' Order," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74, No.4 (2006): 861–901.

[30] Reiko Ohnuma, "Mother-Love, Mother-Grief," pp. 97-98.

Mother-love forms the foundation of devotees' understanding of the Buddha's indiscriminate compassion while also paradoxically symbolizing its antithesis: self-serving "desire, attachment, and clinging." Thus mother-love simultaneously sanctifies and degrades women, who play the role both of saint and sinner to their sons. As Reiko Ohnuma reminds us, "the Buddha [had a] complex tie to his mother—a tie both nurturing and devouring, sometimes furthering and sometimes hindering his dharma."[31] Not only did the selfishness of the mother-love confirm women's sinfulness and bad karma, but the mother is also by definition guilty of sexuality and procreativity, both of which were stigmatized as polluting and contemptible.

The Buddhist ambivalence about motherhood took root in Confucian society from the 6th century to the late imperial period. On one hand, sons were increasingly admonished to repay the kindness and self-sacrifice of their mothers; on the other hand, mothers were ever more vividly depicted as sinners who needed assistance breaking the cycle of rebirth. The very act of childbirth was presented as at once desirable and loathsome. While the production of a male heir guaranteed the administration of ancestral rites, childbirth was associated with sexuality and bodily impurity (especially blood) and was thought to tarnish all mothers. This blemish on a woman's spiritual standing could be ameliorated by a son's religious and filial piety. In this way, a woman's reproductivity was both a curse and a remedy.[32] That mothers were willing to suffer in hell in exchange for giving birth to their sons, Cole speculates, only served to heighten the guilt a son felt about his mother's sacrifices.[33] In short, maternity was both extolled and

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[31] Reiko Ohnuma, "Debt to the Mother," p. 30.

[32] Cole, *Mothers and Sons,* pp. 77-78, 100-101, 230-231.

[33] Cole, *Mothers and Sons,* pp. 207-213.

devalued, and mothers could be made whole only through a son's repayment of his debt to his mother. Hence the phenomenally popular story and drama about Mulian 目連 saving his mother out of hell.[34]

The Buddhist establishment enhanced (if not invented) sons' anxiety about the debt to their mothers; I argue that this anxiety found a new outlet in late imperial elegies dedicated to deceased mothers. These elegies focused entirely on the beatific aspects of mothers and obliterated all reference to her obscurity (not to mention potential sins); male authors elevated their mothers to the status of sacred beings in their biographies and epitaphs, which, I argue, allowed them to mitigate their religiously and culturally informed sense of guilt. By making use of the new trend of eulogizing secular women, Buddhism offered filial sons a fresh way to commemorate their loved ones, repay their debts, and portray their mothers not only as Confucian sages but also as religious saints.

Sacralized Mothers in Fictional and Hagiographic Writing

The Confucian ideal of womanhood in many ways resembles that of a Buddhist ascetic in its austerity and selflessness. In late imperial epitaphs and biographies, a woman's moral exemplarity was usually proven through practices of corporal self-discipline, such as slicing flesh to use as medicine (*gegu*), abstinence from sex and other pleasures, vegetarianism, and extreme frugality. John Kischnick observes that a hallmark of the Buddhist hagiographies of medieval China is asceticism: Buddhist monks abstained from sex, meat, and alcohol, wore plain

[34] For an analysis of legends and operas about Mulian, see Qitao Guo, *Ritual Opera & Mercantile Lineage: The Confucian Transformation of Popular Culture in Late Imperial Huizhou*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.

robes, and so on. The laudable behaviors of Buddhist monks and exemplary laywomen overlapped considerably.[35]

Even so, asceticism alone was insufficient cause to celebrate a woman as extraordinary, much less to warrant memorial writing in her honor, especially if said woman lived to a ripe old age without encountering life-threatening adversity. As Huang writes, the influx in elegiac essays celebrating women who lived what were in fact trivial lives made it ever more urgent that male biographers provide "extra justification in terms of the worthiness of [the female] subjects."[36] While Huang examines how male authors altered traditional vocabularies and generic patterns so as to accommodate the ordinariness of their female subjects, I point out another strategy men used to tackle the worthiness problem. As I will show, many male biographers borrowed miraculous elements and religious framing from Buddhist traditions in crafting their odes to female kin, and especially to their mothers. Kischnick points out that hagiographies of eminent monks typically interrupt a straightforward biography with thaumaturgy and other supernatural occurrences. For example, "The mixture in this biography of precise historical intonation—such as Tanjie's [an eminent monk] ancestry and place of origin—with the miraculous light that appeared at his death, is typical of the accounts that appear in the *Biographies[of the eminent Monks]*."[37] Like eminent monks and nuns, ordinary women were also said in biographical accounts to have predicted when they would die, to emanate mysterious fragrances after death, to

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[35] John Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk: Buddhist Ideals in Medieval Chinese Hagiography*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997.

[36] Martin Huang, *Intimate Memory*, p. 18.

[37] John Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk*, p. 5.

produce jade-like charges from their bodies, and generally to be liberated from the defiled state of embodiment. The hagiographical style that infused secular biography with supernatural or religious anecdotes was eventually used to immortalize mundane women, especially mothers commemorated by their sons.

The sacralization of deceased mothers by devoted sons was a common feature in biography and fiction alike. Quite a few lengthy works of fiction from the Ming-Qing period star maternal figures who precipitate miracles over the course of their lives and who are granted divine status upon their deaths. For example, in the early Qing novel *XSYY*, Lady Chao 晁夫人 is depicted as a morally superior woman who is a devout Buddhist and a compassionate mother. She not only shows tremendous kindness to all, both within and without the household, but also takes the initiative to open a private grain warehouse during a famine to donate foodstuffs to the local government for public distribution.[38] Like Yuan Mei's great-great-grandmother Lady Yang, Lady Chao's indiscriminate compassion for others, emblematized by her desire to feed the hungry, imbues her with a Buddhist saintliness—hence the explicit attribution of Buddhahood to Lady Chao in the title of the chapter "The Female Bodhisattva Sells Grain at a Low Price to Relieve the Famine 女菩薩賤粜賑飢." Chao's extraordinary kindness and charity posthumously earn her a divine title; a temple is established in her honor and locals regularly worship her as "The Holy Mother of Yishan 嶧山聖姆" after her death.[39] Lady Chao's

[38] *XSYY*, Chapter 32, pp. 423-36.

[39] *XSYY*, Chapter 92 & 93, pp. 1216-42, 1237.

posthumous divinity also caught the attention of modern scholars; Daria Berg considers her "a Daoist immortal, a bodhisattva in her compassion and a Confucian reformer of society."[40]

The narrator also refers to Lady Chao as a "*shan nüren,*" which literally translates to "benevolent woman" and which was used to designate a Buddhist laywoman in late imperial China.[41] It is notable that Lady Chao's holiness seems to be bound up with her son's filiality. When Lady Chao was approaching 104 years of age, she and her son both dreamed that a heavenly god descended and conferred a divine title on Lady Chao, appointing her a female divinity. Shortly thereafter, the mother passed away, and her son fell seriously ill from grief. As the son lay dying, a Daoist priest arrived to deliver a miraculous medicine that cured him. The priest told the son that he was sent by his mother, now the Goddess of Yishan. After the son recovered from his illness, word of the Goddess's intervention and efficacy spread, and her cult grew much more popular.[42] The title of the chapter in which these events are related—"The

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[40] Daria Berg, *Carnival in China: A Reading of the* Xingshi Yinyuan Zhuan, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2002, p. 344. See also Yiqun Zhou, "The Hearth and The Temple," p. 135.

[41] *XSYY*, Chapter 90, p. 1189. Yiqun zhou, "The Hearth and The Temple," p. 133. Yiqun Zhou argues that, by conferring the title of "*shan nüren*" and "female bodhisattva" on Madame Chao, the novelist is "stating that Confucianism can sufficiently subsume Buddhism, and that a woman who is truly spiritual does not heed any other teachings." However, she fails to explain why Lady Chao's being taken as a female divinity after she dies and why the author spent much inks on local people's repeated pilgrimages to her temple and the repeated epiphanies happened on their journeys.

[42] *XSYY,* Chapter 90, especially pp.1200-1201.

Benevolent Laywoman Achieved Immortality After Death, the Filial Son Obtained Medicine When Sick 善女人死後登仙, 純孝子病中得藥"—connects the sanctification of the mother with the filiality of her son. This extraordinary mother, who differs from "the great multitude of 'ignorant' women, who donated and performed good deeds only to assuage their fear of the afterlife,"[43] is celebrated and consecrated for her maternal compassion and generosity. Meanwhile, the son's filial devotion facilitates the spread of the mother's cult.

Lady Chao's identification as a *shan nüren* and as a Bodhisattva, her posthumous deification, and her filial son's furthering of her beatific reputation all recall tropes from the biographies compiled by Peng Shaosheng in *SNRZ.* Several entries in that collection narrate how filial sons recorded and published their mothers' miraculous experiences and posthumous consecrations. For example, a Ming official and *jinshi*-degree holder named Liu Daolong 劉道隆[44] records how his mother—a devout Buddhist—encountered the *guanyin* bodhisattva she had worshipped for 25 years in a dream and then was able to predict the precise date of her death.[45] Another Ming official, Tan Zhenmo 譚貞默 (1590-1665), writes about the miracle following the death of his mother, a pious laywoman who practiced Buddhism diligently. For seven days after her death, the mother's complexion stayed the same as when she was alive, and a heavenly fragrance lingered around her corpse that dispelled flies and worms.[46]

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[43] Yiqun Zhou, "The Hearth and The Temple," p. 133.

[44] Li Daolong's dates are unknown but it is recorded that he obtained the *jinshi*-degree in the year of 1586.

[45] *SNRZ*, "Née Li 李氏," p. 0244.

[46] *SNRZ*, "Née Liu 劉氏," p. 0244.

In these cases, the mothers' deification was at least partly contingent on their sons' accounts—recall, for example, Yuan Mei's essential role as the de facto male heir in capturing his great-great-grandmother's life story. The son's record endorses the mother's sacred status and makes her ordinary life accessible to posterity and even to a broad audience. The miracles and occult events the son inserts into the biography make the case for the mother's worthiness of memorialization in text. The wisdom of this strategy has been borne out over time: modern readers only have access to those narratives of women's lives that were preserved in religious anthologies, as the complete texts of the biographies have been lost to the vagaries of time. The sons' emphasis on the mothers' religiosity and their incorporation of miracles into the mothers' biographies allowed common women to achieve immortality through worship and text.

Interestingly, men were seldom consecrated, as mothers were, in fictional and elegiac representations. In *Honglou meng,* a famous 18th-century novel that details the rise and fall of the aristocratic Jia clan, the Jia family's two male ancestors, Duke Ninguo and Duke Rongguo, are said to dwell in the Jia household rather than taking up residence in the heavens after their deaths. The female divinity Disenchantment 警幻仙子 mentions that she encounters the two ancestors' spirits (*ling* 靈) when she visits the Jia family.[47] Although the two male ancestors have the opportunity to ask Disenchantment to discipline and enlighten their decedents on their behalf, they remain on the premises to do it themselves. By contrast, all of the book's lovable female characters, including the matriarch Jia, migrate to a sacred space called "*Zhenru fudi*, the

[47] In chapter 5, when the goddess of Disenchantment goes to visit the Jia house, the two ancestors request her to discipline and enlighten the male protagonist Jia Baoyu whom they consider the only worthy descendent of the Jia clan. See *HLM*, p. 55.

Fortune Land of Thusness (Tathātā) 真如福地" after they die.[48] A woman-only paradise, *Zhenru fudi*'s name combines the Buddhist term Tathātā and the Daoist term *fudi*.[49] The narrative genders the family members' destinations in the afterlife and, implicitly, their primary identifications: while deceased Jia women are figured as divinities dwelling in sacred spaces, deceased Jia men are ancestors first, and therefore dwell in the family ancestral shrine. The association of women with spirituality and men with the patriline and the public can help to explain why elegiac writings that deify mothers and wives are so much more common than those deifying fathers.

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[48] When Jia Baoyu visited this heavenly realm while he was losing consciousness, Matriarch Jia does not show up in there directly, but Baoyu saw Matriarch Jia's primary maidservant Yuanyang for a few times which could suggest the old mother's residence there. See *HLM*, Chapter 116, pp. 1277-82. Moreover, when the young girls in the Jia family were asked to copy the Buddhist sutras by the matriarch Jia, Xi Chun teased the maidservant Yuanyang, saying that, "Speaking of this, once matriarch Jia becomes *Guanyin*, you will certainly turn into the dragon daughter 這樣說來, 老太太做了觀音,你就是龍女了." This is another moment that implies the sacralization of matriarch Jia as the *Guanyin* Bodhisattva after she died. See *HLM*, Chapter 88, p. 1002.

[49] Sanskrit 真如 is variously translated as "thusness" or "suchness." It is a central concept in Mahayana Buddhism having a particular significance in *Chan* Buddhism as well. *Fudi* 福地, derived from Daoist canons, indicating the sacred places where immortals take residence of. See Li Yangzheng 李養正, *Daojiao Gaishuo* 道教概說 (An Overview of Daoism), Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989, p. 231.

Pei-Yi Wu has written on the trend of fantastical autobiography among the eccentric male literati of the 17th century. These autobiographies, in Wu's words, "display[ed] a willful embellishment and a sheer inventiveness that seem to disdain credibility." Wu argues that this auto-mythologization responded to the contemporary proliferation of vernacular novels.[50] One might speculate that the trend of deifying deceased mothers might be a related phenomenon, as the son-author novelizes (and makes fantastical) his own family in the process of writing his mother's biography. However, I would argue that the narratives that concern us here differ from Wu's in that their interlocutors are not primarily secular; these narratives of sacralization are deeply engaged with Buddhist discourse on mother-son reciprocity. Moreover, elegiac pieces are usually written for mothers and not fathers, again suggesting that the impetus underling them is not purely novelistic or self-mythologizing.

Sacralizing Mothers in Elegiac Writings

One might ask whether fiction and hagiography (which was used for the purposes of proselytizing the Pure Land dogma) truly reflect a broader cultural trend. In order to prove that these hagiographical depictions of late mothers did indeed partake of a widespread phenomenon, the following section offers examples culled from more formal genres, such as epitaphs and elegiac biographies. The following cases demonstrate that grieving sons were eager to write their mothers' biographies as hagiographies; they happily extolled their mothers' religious piety and readily identified them with Bodhisattvas and other divinities. In these genres, too, we find that

[50] Pei-Yi Wu, *The Confucian's Progress: Autobiographical Writings in Traditional China,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, pp.163-4.

apotheosizing treatment in biographies or elegiac writings applied almost exclusively to female subjects.

The young scholar Gan Biao 甘表 entrusted the late Ming to early Qing scholar Qiu Bangshi 邱邦士 (1613-1679) with writing an epitaph for Gan's mother, née Zhao. Gan offered Qiu a detailed account of his mother's life, and Qiu admits in his memorial writing that the piece Qiu produced was mostly a transcription of Gan Biao' draft. He opens the piece with two bittersweet dreams of Gan Biao's in which he is reunited with his late mother. In real life, Gan arrived home too late to see his mother on her deathbed before she died, so he felt that his mother must have come to him in his dreams to assuage his guilt. A month after his mother's death, (in one of Gan Biao's dreams,) he heard strange sounds emanating from his mother's coffin and opened it to take a look. To his surprise, he found his mother's complexion as rosy as it was when she was alive. He went to move her body and found that she was not breathing. When he put her body back into the coffin, she suddenly spoke, saying that the right side of her foot was uncomfortable. Gan Biao then awoke in tears.

Four days later, Gan Biao felt as if he had just arrived home from a long journey. It was time to move his mother's coffin to the ancestral shrine, and Gan, wailing, crawled to hug his mother. The mother suddenly opened her eyes, smiling, and asked Biao about his trip. The son cried still harder, and his mother leaned over to hug him. Embracing his mother, Biao felt a bump under his mother's robe. He asked whether her clothes fit well, and the mother replied that they were perfect. When Biao ordered some servants to inform his father of his mother's awakening, the mother straightened her outfit and stopped talking and smiling. Later, after the son moved his mother's body to the family shrine, he suddenly heard a loud noise caused by a falling stone. Gan Biao rushed out to find a giant stone miraculously erected on her tomb.

The gravestone read that the epitaph had been bestowed on the mother by heavenly God. It included a brief sketch of the mother's virtues and good works, a list of authors who had dedicated elegiac writings to her, and an accounting of her offspring. There were also some documents concerning the family's finances attached to the stone, but Gan Biao waked from the dream before he finished reading them. The son got up and immediately committed to paper the divinely bestowed inscription he had read in his dream. The first sentence, as he reconstructed it, reads, "The mother of Gan has been kind and affectionate and thus could not be remembered as an ordinary mortal woman. 甘母親愛勤儉,不可以凡言." As if to corroborate this divine evaluation of his mother, Gan then offers a detailed description of his mother's virtuous deeds—all of which provide a typical image of a model Confucian woman.

In between accounts of life events that prove his mother's diligence, frugality, compassion, integrity, and respectability, the son interweaves another dream, this time one that his mother had. When Biao was an infant, his mother dreamed of receiving another baby boy from some mythical immortal. Because Gan Biao was still a newborn, his mother decided to obtain a concubine for her husband who could bear this divinely bestowed child. Thus Gan Biao's half-brother Gan Tun was born to the concubine Li. Zhao, Gan's mother, proved a loving mother who not only tenderly raised both Biao and Tun (Li died when Tun was only six) but also supported both the Gan family and her natal home with her hard work and extraordinary frugality. She educated her sons and daughters-in-law and disciplined them whenever they went astray.

All of this is included in the published account by Qiu Bangshi. After a lengthy paraphrase of Biao's draft, Qiu explains why he agreed to write the piece:

> If the tablet inscription was given by the heavenly god in Biao's dream, why would he bother asking me to draft another? Biao's record of his dream must be justified by a

written testimony, and therefore I did not decline his request and agreed to pen this epitaph for Biao's mother. The eulogistic hymn goes, 'The woman that is eulogized here never behaved improperly; / her discreet observance of principled conduct has exceeded expectations. / Heavenly God therefore responded to the people's request and bestowed upon her supreme accolades, granting Gan Biao (the son) a divine stone for his mother's tomb.

今表夢上帝賜石之文既不可以凡言,則此乞何為至于予耶? 然表所述者固不可以不有所徵. 維屏遂不辭讓而為其封墓之石銘之. 銘曰:斯于祝女無非儀, 維常之行人冀賒, 帝繇民欲降鑒加, 賜石甘表母作碑." [51]

Gan Biao thus portrays his mother as a female Confucian paragon while also framing the narrative as approved and even written by a celestial authority. The mother not only appears twice to Gan in his dreams but is also praised and recognized by the heavens. Although we are told that the original draft of the published piece was penned by Gan Biao, the son claims that he was only transmitting the epitaph that miraculously appeared in his dream. Taken together, divine recognition, a son's mediation, and an eminent scholar's testimony secure the woman's immortalization in spirit and in text.

Here, then, Gan Biao transformed a biographical epitaph into a textual reliquary in which the "bones" of the female subject's life—its key, structural moments—were preserved and consecrated. The mother's biography was essentially hagiography. Robin Rinehart's distinction

[51] Qiu Bangshi 邱邦士, "Gan Jianzhai fu Zhaoshi mu beaming 甘楗齋婦趙氏墓碑銘 (The Epitaph for Gan Jianzhai's Wife Née Zhao)," *Qiu Bangshi wenji* 邱邦士文集 (Collected Writings of Qiu Bangshi), vol.14, Zhongguo jiben guji ku (Digital collection) 中國基本古籍庫.

between biography and hagiography in the Hindu tradition is illuminating here: "[H]agiographers' aims are much different than those of the scholar constructing a critical historical biography. Where some scholars seek the facts that will constitute a factual account of the saint's life, the hagiographer has often blended those facts into an intricate mix of myth and legend."[52] While hagiographies tend to be mythical and thus less historically credible, biographies are intended to be historically objective. The two genres' aims are sometimes in conflict; one prioritizes the spiritual, the other the worldly. However, Zhao's epitaph—a collaboration between divine powers, Zhao's son, and the family friend Qiu Bangshi—hybridizes the genres and works to reconcile the mystical and the factual. This reconciliation meant to be achieved through dreams. Dreams become the conduit through which miracles enter the conservative genre of the biography without impinging on historical credibility.

We can also find instances of fictional narratives in which beloved mothers are consecrated through their appearance in dreams. In the 17th-century novel *Lin Lan Xiang*, the female protagonist is quite favorably depicted as an impeccable Confucian paragon who is elevated to divine status after her death. In the last chapter, the already immortalized mother grants her son's wish to meets him in his dreams. This reunion constitutes the denouement of the novel—the divine mother delivers profound religious messages to her son and thus facilitates his detachment from the secular world and ultimate enlightenment.[53] In life, the mother instructs her children

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[52] Robin Rinehart, *One lifetimes, Many lives: the Experience of Modern Hindu Hagiography*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999, p.3.

[53] Suiyuan xiashi 隨緣下士, *Lin Lan Xiang* 林蘭香, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004, Chapter 64, pp. 254-7.

and demonstrates Confucian virtue; in death, she continues to function as a saintly mentor who guides her offspring toward spiritual salvation.

Judith Zeitlin has pointed out that the dream is a key motif in the writings from the Ming-Qing era:

> [The] preoccupation with dream was part of a contemporary cultural phenomenon—the surge of interest in the dream among literati circles during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which was expressed not only in drama and fiction (both classical and vernacular), but also in scholarly treatises and compendia, informal essays, autobiographical writings, poetry, and even paintings and woodblock illustrations.[54]

Dreams were considered a handy "means of communication either between parallel worlds (e.g., the dead and the living, the divine and the human) or simply with anyone for whom ordinary avenues of communication are blocked."[55] In Gan Biao's case, the Ming-Qing fascination with dreams cropped up in an elegy for a lost mother. The dream world bridged the living and the dead, the divine and the human, the spiritual and the mundane, and the emotional and the textual.

Through dreams, otherwise unbelievable supernatural elements made their way into the Confucian genre of elegy. The idealized female subject of this mode of elegy was differentiated

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[54] Judith Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993, p. 136. For a list of the literary texts involving dreams, see pp. 136-138.

[55] Ibid., pp. 138-139.

from ordinary women by her saintly exemplification of the "highest ideals."[56] This genre made sacred space for deceased mothers, building around their memory a textual temple or ancestral shrine. The textual hybrid of heterodox religious space and Confucian sacred site differs from Xiang Mu's mother's tomb, which, as we may recall, Xiang transformed into a temple of sorts. The written word, unlike Xiang's mother's temple-tomb, is *public* property that is created in order to be visited by generations of reader-pilgrims who hail from the hagiographical subject's family and beyond.

The Immortality of Mother and Son

Often, a son's success or moral exemplarity contribute to the reader's sense of his mother's worthiness, and an extraordinary mother in turn boosts the son's respectability. The reciprocity between mother-subject and son-author is so strong that we might say the pair's exemplarity and immortality are mutually constituted.

In his *Collection of the Studio of Bai and Su* 白苏斋類集, Yuan Zongdao 袁宗道 (1560-1600) includes an epitaph for Lady Jin, the mother of an official and *jinshi*-degree holder named Zhang Kezong 張可宗.[57] The end of the epitaph reports that Lady Jin is reborn in the Buddhist Pure Land as a reward for her unfailing devotion to the Buddha. The religious excerpt was later adapted for and compiled in Buddhist evangelical books such as *The Records of Saints and*

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[56] Robin Rinehart, *One lifetimes, Many lives,* p. 4.

[57] Yuan Zongdao 袁宗道, "Jin taiyiren muming 金太宜人墓銘 (Epitaph for Grand Lady Jin of Suitability)," in *Baisuzhai leiji* 白蘇齋類集 (Collected Writings from the Studio of Bai and Su), vol. 11. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1989, pp. 139-141.

Sages of the Pure Land 净土圣贤录 and *SNRZ,* where it is offered as proof of the efficacy of the Buddha and his belief system (similar to Liu Daolong and Tan Zhenmo's examples in *SNRZ*).

Strikingly, the narrative of the original epitaph does not focus exclusively on its female subject. In fact, the mother's hagiographical biography allots a great deal of space to enumerating her sons' literary achievements, political service, and filial devotion. Yuan spills a great deal of ink over how the son, Kezong, prioritizes proper performing of his mother's mourning rites over the obtainment of his own academic degree and official titles. Yuan then enumerates all the sons' titles and degrees in detail and describes how Kezhong, with his mother's guidance and support, successfully passes the civil examination and gains the *jinshi* degree despite the adverse circumstances. Only at the end of the biography does Yuan briefly relate stories from the mother's personal life—stories which, of course, revolve around her Buddhist piety. The narrative focus makes obvious that this mother's worthiness relies on her sons' and other descendants' accomplishments; her greatest contributions are as their facilitator and guide. Her own life experience and model behavior are mentioned only at the text's end, and then only in order to highlight her religious austerity and then reward. The mother's success in raising excellent sons is presented as at least as important as her unfailing religious devotion in leading to her divine rebirth in the sacred pure land as a holy saint and virtuous sage. Lady Jin's case demonstrates how a mother's apotheosis in text is often inextricable from the political success and social promotion of her son(s).

Many such examples can be found among the works of the generation of writers that followed Yuan Zongdao. The late Ming martyr Huang Duanbo's 黄端伯 (?-1645) mother Li was commemorated in the following words:

Née Li was the mother of Huang Duanbo, the chief official of the department of Rites at Nanjing. Li, a devout Buddhist laywoman, was virtuous and compassionate. As she grew older, she recited Buddhist sutras ever more diligently. One day, she dreamed of sitting cross-legged on a mountaintop with a divine halo encircling her body. Upon waking, she told her son that it was time for her to leave for the West [i.e., to pass away]. She then died sitting upright without suffering from any disease. When Nanjing was penetrated [by the Manchu army], Duanbo would not surrender and thus was killed. His concubine Fan later returned home for his funeral. She then took the Buddhist tonsure and established a convent on the mountaintop of Magu, where she remained until her death.

南京仪制主事建昌黄端伯之母也。贤明仁慈。信乐佛法。晚岁诵金刚经地藏经日虔。一夕梦趺坐山巅。佛光照身。觉谓其子曰。西方之期至矣。无何示微疾。端坐而逝。南京破。 端伯不降。见杀。其妾范氏以丧归。已而剃染。结庵麻姑山巅。老焉.[58]

Née Li's extraordinariness is presented here as twofold: 1) her own religious devotion culminated in miracles surrounding her death and 2) her son was a martyr. It is noteworthy that there is a 13-year gap between the mother Li's dignified, spiritual death (1632) and the son Huang's heroic martyrdom (1645), while the author offers no transition between his account of the two events. The admirable comportment of the son and his concubine are appended directly to the mother's biography without so much as a transitional sentence. The seemingly abrupt juxtaposition suggests that the son's heroic deeds are integral to the mother's biography. What's

[58] "Huang, The Great Lady of Suitability 黃太宜人," *SNRZ*, p. 0244.

more, the juxtaposition suggests that the halo surrounding the mother in her dream anticipates the son's martyrdom and his concubine's exemplarity. Not unexpectedly, when we read the martyred son Huang Duanbo's biography in the *Collection of Biographies of Buddhist Laymen* by the same author Peng shaosheng, Huang's mother's spiritual experience is also appended to her son's entry without any transitional introduction.[59] The mother's hagiography is gilded by the bravery of her son and the piety of his concubine, while the son's heroism takes on a spiritual cast due to his mother's sacralization.

A resonant fictional example appears in the 18th-century novel *Yesou Puyan* (Humble Words of an Old Rustic). The autobiographical urge is salient in "probably the longest known traditional Chinese novel";[60] Huang has cogently analyzed how the novelist, Xia Jingqu 夏敬渠 (1705-1787), identified with the near-omnipotent protagonist and used the most likable female character, Lady Shui (the male protagonist's mother), as a stand-in for his own mother, Tang. The novel offers a detailed account of the protagonist's meteoric success, a success Huang describes as "imaginable for a literatus in traditional China: he rises to the top of the bureaucratic hierarchy—becoming the most powerful minister under the emperor—at the same time heading a huge and harmonious family of numerous wives, concubines, and offerings."[61] Huang argues

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[59] Peng Shaosheng, "Huang Yuangong 黃元公," *Jushi zhuan* 居士傳 (Collection of Biographies of Buddhist Laymen), Chapter 51, in *Xu zhang jing* 續藏經, vol.149, Taibei: Xin wenfeng chuban gongsi, 1994, pp. 0991-2.

[60] Martin Huang, *Literati and Self-Re/Presentation*: *Autobiographical Sensibility in the Eighteenth-Century Chinese Novel*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995, p. 111.

[61] Ibid.

that "what dominates this novel is, at least on the surface, an overwhelming sense of self-confidence in one's role as a literatus," and that the protagonist's self-confidence and even self-aggrandizement reflects the novelist's own.

The unprecedentedly lengthy celebration of the protagonist's ego culminates in a magnificent birthday celebration for the mother with two divine dreams ensuing. Wei Shang deems this extraordinarily extravagant ceremony appropriates and identifies with the Empress Dowager Chongqing's birthday celebration held by her son—the Qianlong Emperor.[62] Meanwhile, in the following oneiric scenes, the protagonist and his mother find themselves "showered with honors and praises by the Confucian sages of previous dynasties and their mothers."[63] Given that the book as a whole reflects Xia Jingqu's intent to "apotheosize his alter ego" by presenting its protagonist as "messiah-like,"[64] it is remarkable that the novel's denouement relies so heavily on the protagonist's mother.[65] It is the grand scene of the birthday ceremony and the alliance between divinely inspired dreams experienced by the mother and her

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[62] Wei Shang 商偉, "Xiaoshuo xiyan: *Yesou puyan* yu wanshou qingdian he diguo xiangxiang 小說戲演:《野叟曝言》與萬壽慶典和帝國想像 (The Theatricality of Novel: *Yesou puyan*, the Grand Birthday Ceremony, and the Imperial Imagination," *Wen Xue Yi Chan* 文學遺產 (The Legacy of Literature), 3(2017): 155-167.

[63] Ibid., p.113.

[64] Ibid., p.116.

[65] Xia Jingqu 夏敬渠, *Yesou puyan* 野叟曝言 (Humble Words of an Old Rustic), Zhengzhou: zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1993, chapter 149 & 154, pp. 1947-1961; pp. 2014-2023.

son respectively—together with the mother's ascension to the Confucian pantheon—that forms the climax of Xia's self-apotheosis.

Huang demonstrates how Xia appropriated biographical details from other texts (such as the biography of Wang Yangming, a Ming Confucian sage) in crafting his own image.[66] I would add that Xia also appropriated the scene of the mother's consecration—which is itself another appropriation of Empress Dowager Chongqing's real-life birthday celebration—to further his project of auto-sanctification. This double-appropriation of the royal mother and fictional mother's glorification subtly and symbolically elevates both the author and his autobiographical protagonist to the status of the Emperor son. The familiar scene of the mother's implicit identification with the Empress Dowager and ultimate deification attests to the son's supreme spiritual, moral, and social status.

Hallowing a long-suffering mother's memory with one's own virtues and successes is arguably the most valuable offering a son could make to his late mother.[67] Because the mother's glory and sanctity are corroborated by her son's achievements, the appropriation of the mother's exemplarity only adds to her glory and demonstrates the author's filial piety. Reversely, when a mother is compared to the royal woman of the highest status and then further the saintly Confucian immortals, the son himself is not far from the horror of sanctification. Recounting both the mother's and son's remarkable feats allow each to reinforce the other's merit. Consecrating the mother is also a way of consecrating oneself.

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[66] Martin Huang, *Literati and Self-Re/Presentation,* pp.129-136.

[67] Hsiung Ping-chen, "Constructed Emotions."

This symbiotic apotheosis of mother and son might seem at first blush to be in tension with *Yesou puyan*'s anti-religious leanings. Indeed, the protagonist's life mission is the eradication of Buddhism and Daoism from Confucian society. However, I would point out that the novel is consistently ambivalent about religion, whatever its protagonist's claims. As Huang points out, "the author inadvertently undermined many conservative values he set out to promote."[68] It is easy to pick out moments from the novel that support heterodox religion. For example, a martyr who died protecting her chastity is not only offered an honorific title by the royal court but is also added to the pantheon and worshipped as a goddess.[69] Moreover, even if we were to say that the mother is elevated to the status of a Confucian sage rather than to that of a religious divinity, we would nevertheless admit that her impeccable behavior and apparent sanctity (as demonstrated both by her birthday ceremony and the dream of the banquet with all the sages' mothers) imbue her with a sort of mystical holiness; the Confucian system itself is already operated as a religion of sorts. Even the steadfast Confucian sectarian Xia (and his fictional double, the novel's protagonist) ultimately resorts to using religious frameworks, and specifically the trope of apotheosis, to denote his and his mother's superiority.

Thus far we have examined cases in which a mother achieves immortality thanks both to her own exemplarity and to her son's success and filial piety. Without the context of their sons' distinguished achievements, these ordinary women could by no means have achieved

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[68] Martin Huang, *Literati and Self-Re/Presentation,* p. 117.

[69] A woman named Huang Tieniang 黃鐵娘 was enshrined as "The Goddess of Fragrance and Martyrdom 香烈娘娘" after she dies tragically for preserving her chastity. See Chapter 53 & 84, pp. 670-672; p. 1504.

immortality and gained public recognition through text. However, there are also cases in which a mother is so remarkable that her reputation alone suffices to win her commemoration and glory.

The distinguished Qing official and scholar Wanyan Linqing 完顏麟慶 (1791-1846) and his esteemed mother Yunzhu 惲珠 (1771-1833) exemplify this latter category. Yunzhu was a preeminent scholar, poet, and painter in the High Qing; she was by no means an ordinary woman whose biography required the added justification of supernatural occurrences or a son's excellence.[70] However, even in Yunzhu's case, the son, Linqing, chose to include anecdotes about the occult occurrences that punctuated his mother's life. Linqing writes, "Shortly before my mother [Yunzhu]'s birth, her grandmother dreamed that an elderly woman gave her an extraordinarily large and brilliant pearl. That is why she named her new granddaughter Zhu (pearl) 祖母唐夢老嫗授以大珠, 有異光, 遂以命名." Linqing also writes, "When [Yunzhu] was young, she once dreamed that she traveled to an isolated island covered by lotus, and there someone told her that in a previous life she was an attendant of the Miaolian (marvelous lotus) bodhisattva on the island of Red Fragrance 少時嘗夢至海中一孤嶼, 上有蓮花,遇人告以前身為紅香島妙蓮大士侍者."[71] Linqing includes evidence of his mother's divine origins as if that evidence offered the most convincing explanation for her remarkable achievements in life.

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[70] Susan Mann, *Precious Records*, pp. 94-108, and passim.

[71] Wanyan Linqing 完顏麟慶, "Xianbi Yun taifuren yanxing lu 先妣惲太夫人言行錄 (A Record of My Late Mother—The Great Lady Yun's Words and Deeds), " in *Ronghu caotang zengyan lu* 蓉湖草堂贈言錄 (Collected Words of Compliments from the Thatched Hut at the Rong Lake), Daoguang bingshen xieke ben 道光丙申寫刻本, from Harvard-Yenching institute.

Moreover, the information offered Yunzhu in a dream about her past life was deemed so important that it was incorporated into epitaphs and biographies penned by other scholars.[72] Linqing's account is not shy about documenting Yunzhu's inclination toward religious and spiritual cultivation throughout her life. She not only practiced Buddhism but also sponsored reprintings of the Buddhist canon.[73] Some of the eulogistic poems authored by Yunzhu's female students (and included in Linqing's collection of all the elegies) explicitly compare Yunzhu to the *Guanyin* Bodhisattva and to Buddhist saints.[74]

Yunzhu's mystical experiences were also reported in her grandson Chongshi's autobiography. As Chongshi recalls, he was ten years old when he ran a persistent high fever for which doctors could find no cure. As he began to feel he was about to expire, Chongshi smelled hawthorn fruit and asked for some to be brought for him. Unfortunately, the fruit was out of season, and anyway the family was almost at the end of its resources. The next morning, a big, red hawthorn fruit miraculously appeared on the table. Yunzhu claimed it was sent by the heavens and insisted that Chongshi eat it, disregarding the doctor's warnings. Chongshi

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[72] See Pan Shi'en 潘世恩, "Biograpgy of Lady Yun 惲太夫人傳," Cai Zhiding 蔡之定, "The Epitaph for Wanyan's Mother the Great Lady Yun 完顏母惲太夫人墓表銘," in *Ronghu caotang zengyan lu* 蓉湖草堂贈言錄.

[73] See *Ronghu caotang zengyan lu* 蓉湖草堂贈言錄.

[74] The heart of the deceased mother Yunzhu is originally the same as Guanyin's 王姑心蹟本觀音"; "for multiple lives, she was aware that she is originally from the Buddhist pure land 夙世知從佛地來", see *Ronghu caotang zengyan lu* 蓉湖草堂贈言錄.

recovered immediately.[75] Besides, Yunzhu more than often also identified herself as a banished immortal.[76] It seem that Yun Zhu and her children all agree that she was sent from the heavens and temporarily exiled to the world of mortals. She was not only a mother but also a mentor, poet, and even divinity.

Like other filial sons I have discussed, Linqing would have been motivated to describe his mother as divine given his adherence to not only Confucianism but also multiple religious systems. However, Linqing is unlike other sons in that he had no apparent need to cushion his mother's accomplishments. The sons in aforementioned examples were eager to repay their debts to mothers who lacked all other access to public recognition. Their mothers' only hopes for posthumous celebration were pinned on their sons. These sons glorified self-sacrificing, supportive mothers by amplifying their own success and accomplishments. These sons associated their career feats with their filial piety—the son's success was never just his own, but rather reflected his mother's rectitude and excellence. Linqing's situation was different. His mother's biography featured ample glamorous and public accomplishments, so Linqing's insistence on publishing evidence of his mother's holiness did not compensate for any lack on her part; rather, it restored the mother's erstwhile status as a divinity. With her son's assistance, Yunzhu regained the immortality of her past life and achieved divine status through her own and

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[75] Wanyan Chongshi 完顏崇實, Ti An Nian Pu 惕盦年譜 (The Chronology of Ti'An), Jindai zhongguo shiliao congkan 近代中國史料叢刊 (Compilation of Historical Materials of Modern China), book 52, Taibei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1970, pp. 9-10.

[76] Xun Liu, "Immortals and Patriarchs: The Daoist World of Manchu Official And His Family in Nineteenth-Century China," *Asia Major* 17, No. 2 (2004): 161-218, 180.

her son's writings. In other words, by (re-)enshrining Yunzhu, the banished heavenly immortal, in the textual temple he dedicated to her, the filial son symbolically repaid his debt to her.

Linqing's commemorative writing about his mother forms a crucial part of his own literary oeuvre. Linqing encouraged his mother's writing and helped her to publish the poetry collection that first brought her fame. He also compiled an elegiac collection for his late mother that included all the memorial essays and poems dedicated to Yunzhu. Indeed, one of Linqing's best known works is an illustrated autobiographical collection of prose that offers us glimpses into the unforgettable moments Linqing spent with his mother.[77] As his deep involvement with Yunzhu's writing suggests, Linqing's own illustriousness as a scholar and official hinged partly if not entirely on his mother's talent and reputation—not the other way around. Close scrutiny of Linqing's works reveals how Yunzhu loomed large in all aspects of her son's life and career. The exemplary mother was indispensable to the son's public image, cultural authority, and textual output. As Susan Mann writes, "Linqing's remarkable aesthetic and administrative talents owed much to his mother's company."[78] Linqing faithfully transcribed the stern instructions

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[77] Wanyan Linqing, *Hongxue yinyuan tuji* 鴻雪因緣圖記 (An Illustrated Record of the Goose-Tracks on the Snow), Daoguang dingwei qiu qiyue chongdiao ben 道光丁未秋七月重雕本. For an analysis of Linqing's autobiographical impulse and self-representation in this book, see Binbin Yang, "Drawings of a Life of 'Unparalleled Glory:' Ideal Manhood and the Rise of Pictorial Autobiographies in China," in *Changing Chinese Masculinities: From Imperial Pillars of State to Global Real Men*, ed. Kam Louie, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016, pp. 113-136.

[78] Susan Mann, *Precious Records*, p. 94.

concerning governing and statecraft that his mother delivered to him each time he was assigned to a new official post, and he included those instructions in his autobiographical collection, *An Illustrated Record of the Goose Tracks in the Snow* 鸿雪因缘图记.[79] It was Yunzhu, the mother, who symbolically mothered and disciplined the subjects under Linqing's jurisdiction; the son merely served as the conduit for her rule. In a sense, Linqing's corpus is largely dedicated to the project of erecting a textual temple for his late mother.

Linqing's choice to invest in building up his mother's reputation and to emphasize the importance of her tutelage might seem to serve his own self-aggrandizing interests. However, Yunzhu's eminence also have put significant pressure on Linqing as her son. The distinguished Qing official Tao Shu 陶澍 (1779-1839), who wrote a preface to the elegiac collection dedicated to Yunzhu, writes, "The son's worthiness was complemented by his mother's virtue, but his mother's worthiness did not necessarily depend on her son's contributions. Given how respected and admired Lady Yunzhu was throughout the country, it was indeed difficult to be her offspring 子之賢以母成,母之賢則不必以子著, 以今海内仰惲太夫人之賢,則所以爲其子孫者難矣."[80] Although Tao lauds Yunzhu's talents and virtues, he acknowledges how challenging it is for a son to have a widely renowned and respected mother; the son's achievements are easily eclipsed. Affirming that Yunzhu was so talented and accomplished that she needed no help from her son in securing her reputation, Tao suggests that Linqing's mother's excellence made it

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[79] For a detailed "Chronology of Yunzhu," see "*A Research on Yunzhu and Her Correct Beginnings: Women's Poetry of Our August Dynasty* 惲珠與《國朝閨秀正始集》研究," Master thesis, Nanjing Formal University, 2006, pp. 55-63.

[80] Tao Shu 陶澍, "Preface to the *Ronghu caotang zengyan lu* 蓉湖草堂贈言錄序."

difficult for him to prove his own worth. Thus, an extraordinary mother could be both a blessing and a curse; the more accomplished the mother, the more burdensome her tutelage. It is unlikely for the son of such an esteemed woman to ever escape her shadow. On a brighter note, however, Tao Shu later states that Linqing did manage to establish himself as a preeminent official-scholar and that he proved himself a perfectly worthy heir. He successfully immortalized his mother in a shrine of text without forfeiting his independent claim to respect. Linqing, like so many others, vindicated himself as a son by sanctifying his deceased mother, no matter the uniqueness of his family situation.

A Comparison: Consecrating Wives

The deification of late mothers in the Ming-Qing period found a parallel in the deification of late wives, although the treatment of wives differed significantly. While filial piety and a sense of indebtedness motivated a man's tribute to his mother, husbands were not obligated to feel indebted to their late wives, as the conjugal relation was understood to be "lateral,"[81] to borrow Huang's terminology. Huang has discussed how specific regrets and a sense of guilt motivated certain widowers to commemorate their late wives. Whereas the debt to one's mother accrued from the natural processes of pregnancy, birth, and child-rearing, a husband's debt to a late wife grew out of his sense of insufficiency. Interestingly, most of the remorseful husbands featured in Huang's work made no move to sanctify their wives; I add to Huang's discussion by considering the writings of husbands who not only mourned their late wives but also deified

[81] Martin Huang, *Intimate Memory*, p. 11.

them in memorial writing. These cases will help to throw into relief how filial sons' writing differed from grieving widowers', and how mothers' and wives' apotheoses took shape against the backdrop of differing social expectations.

Let us begin by taking a second look at Yuan Mei's corpus. Yuan's friend and *xiucai*-degree holder Sun Weiyin commissioned him to write an epitaph for Wang Caiwei, Sun's late wife.[82] As was customary, Yuan's epitaph was drafted based on Sun's sketch of Wang's life. It is therefore not unreasonable to assume that the epitaph reflected the grieving widower's intended message. Instead of relying on clichés to praise Wang's virtue as a filial daughter-in-law or chaste wife, the epitaph opens with a rapturous description of Wang's other-worldly beauty. Yuan draws a euphuistic portrait: "She is as graceful as Yao Shao, as gorgeous as Yunxiu; she displays both the *jiuxiang* of heavenly maidens and the three splendors of Lingyun 有夭紹之麗姿,愠愉之修美,天女九相,靈芸三絕)." Here, "Tiannü jiuxiang 天女九相" alludes to the irresistible feminine allure represented in the Buddhist scripture *Sutra of the Right Mindfulness of Dharma* (Saddharma-smrty-upasthana-sutra 正法念处经); "靈芸" likens Wang to the

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[82] Yuan Mei, "Sunwei yinqi wang ruren muzhiming 孫薇隱妻王孺人墓誌銘 (The Epitaph for Sun Weiyin's Wife Lady Wang, The Child Nurturess)," In *Changlige ji* 長離閣集 (Collected Writings from the Pavilion of Long-Term Parting), ed. Wang Caiwei 王采薇, vol. 1, Qing Jiaqing ershisannian keben 清嘉慶二十三年刻本 (1818), section of "Epitaphs," pp. 1a-2a. http://digital.library.mcgill.ca/mingqing/search/details-poem.php?poemID=27960&language=ch, traced on 5/12/2019.

renowned beauty Xue Lingyun, a beloved consort of Cao Pi, the Emperor of Wen in the Wei dynasty. Yuan depicts Wang as a woman so beautiful and charming that she is essentially divine.

Yuan goes on to extol Wang's poetic talents and to praise the intellectual and literary reciprocity she enjoyed with her husband. The dual focus on Wang's beauty and literary prowess suggests that her epitaph is modeled on a stock *yuxian* 遇仙 story (an encounter with an immortal), in which a mortal man encounters and keeps company with a mesmerizing female immortal who has been banished to the mundane world.[83] In this kind of story, workaday duties and chores are unthinkable; the couple inhabits an other-worldly realm in which they are occupied entirely with romance and conjugal bliss.

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[83] The archetype would be the famous legend of the King Xiang of Chu's 楚襄王 meeting with the divine maid Yao Ji 瑤姬. Later, this union of a mortal man and an immortal woman became a stereotyped plot in many anecdotes and *zhiguai* tales. For example, Dong Yong, the filial son's encountering with the seventh daughter of the emperor Jade in the heaven in Gan Bao's 甘寶 *Sousen ji* 搜神記 (In Search of Immortals), see Karl S. Y. Kao, ed., *Classical Chinese Tales of the Supernatural and the Fantastic: Selections from the Third to the Tenth Century*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985, pp. 64-5; Liu Chen 劉晨 and Ruan Zhao's 阮肇 *yuxian* story in Liu Yiqing's 劉義慶 (403-444) *Youming lu* 幽冥錄 (Records of the Hidden and Visible Worlds). For an English translation of this story, see Robert Ford Company, *A Garden of Marvels: Tales of Wonder From Early Medieval China*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015, pp. 108-9.

As if to underscore the portrayal of its female subject as divine, the epitaph closes with a piece of "spirit writing" provided (or produced?) by Sun.[84] In this closing passage, Wang's spirit reveals to Sun that she was originally a celestial maid charged with the care of books in the heavenly Palace of Doushuai 兜率宮.[85] Yuan Mei then compares Wang to legendary female divinities including Chunhu 純狐 from "Heaven's Questions (*Lyrics of Chu*) 楚辭-天問" and Yihe 羲和 from *Classic of Mountains and Seas* or *Shan Hai Jing* (who, according to the Chinese legends of high antiquity, gave birth to the legendary ten suns in sky).[86] By likening Wang to two beautiful divinities, Yuan affirms her purported identity as a celestial servant overseeing a heavenly palace's literary holdings. Instead of writing a conventional epitaph for Wang, Yuan deploys a series of abstruse allusions and focuses exclusively on her beauty and

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[84] For a study of the "spirit writing" in late imperial China, see Judith Zeitlin, "Spirit Writing and Performance in the Work of You Tong 尤侗 (1618-1704)," *T'oung Pao, Second Series* 84, Fasc. 1/3 (1998):102-135.

[85] Palace of Doushuai 兜率宮 was a Daoist sacred place, which was later appropriated by Buddhists when they translated the Buddhist sacred palaces in Buddhist sutras into Chinese.

[86] For *chunhu*, See Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Chuci jizhu* 楚辭集注 (Lyric of Chu with Commentaries), Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2001. vol. 3, p. 60. For *Yihe*, see Guo Pu 郭璞. *Shan hai jing* 山海經 (Classic of Mountains and Seas or Shan Hai Jing), vol 15, Sibu congkan jingming chenghua ben 四部叢刊景明成化本, Zhongguo jiben guji ku (Digital collection) 中國基本古籍庫 (Database of Chinese Classic Ancient Books via Erudition).

literary talent, collapsing the boundary between a solemn epitaph and a fantastical *yuxian* story. Yuan figures his subject as a celestial being whose death returns her to her true home: the heavens.

Similarly, the Qing scholar Zhou Guangye 周廣業 (1730-1798) wrote an epitaph for Lady Shi, whom he portrays as a celestial being.[87] This short epitaph is comprised primarily of Shi's own writings; it starts with a full transcription of her suicide note. We are told that Shi decided to commit suicide because of illness caused by long-term frictions between Shi and her in-laws.[88] The author mentions Shi's unusual sentimentality and poetic talent. Then come lines of verse Shi composed in which she compares herself to the talented and beautiful female poet Xiaoqing, who died at the age of 17.[89] The epitaph closes with another instance of "spirit writing"; upon being summoned by her grieving widower, Shi's spirit appears and leaves him a few more lines of poetry.

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[87] Zhou Guangye 周廣業, "Shi ruren zhuan 史孺人傳 (Biography of Lady Shi, The Child Nurturess)," in *Penglu wenchao* 蓬蘆文鈔 (Drafts from Penglu), vol. 7, Zhongguo jiben guji ku (Digital collection) 中國基本古籍庫 (Database of Chinese Classic Ancient Books via Erudition).

[88] Echoing Martin Huang's observation that mourning husband were not shy from exposing the domestic conflicts when drafting elegies for their late wives.

[89] For an analysis of Xiaoqing, see chapter 2.

Interestingly, Shi claims in her suicide note that she had been close to her third aunt before she was married. Shi explains that she decided to commit suicide partly because the aunt, now deceased, invited Shi to join her in the world beyond. The author, Zhou, seems ambivalent about this detail; he suggests that the reported divine summons may have been merely an illusion 頗屬幻理, but he nonetheless faithfully includes the passage documenting the encounter in Shi's elegy. Responding to the lines of poetry Shi delivered to her husband posthumously, however, Zhou is emphatic in his praise. He writes that the lines are "clearly not composed by a talented ghost, but by a talented divinity 此殆非鬼才而仙才也." Thus the same author who dismissed Shi's account of her own visitation by a late loved one nevertheless praises her as a poetic immortal and does not hesitate to report that she makes her own visits to earth. Like Yuan's epitaph for Wang, Zhou's epitaph speaks little to Shi's wifely virtues or moral integrity. To the contrary, he reveals the domestic conflicts that undermined her health and (indirectly) drove her to take her own life. Shi identifies with Xiaoqing, who likewise died at a tragically early age, wasting unparalleled poetic talent. The poetry composed by Shi's spirit proves to Zhou that Shi possesses divine status; as a banished immortal, the woman's life on earth was but a temporary and painful trial. In Zhou's understanding, Shi was destined to return to the divine world where she would regain her celestial form. The unusual approach to her biography reflects Shi's unusual status as a displaced divinity with remarkable literary talent.

These two elegies by Yuan and Zhou register a certain male fantasy: the deceased wife is reimagined as the perfect—and, indeed, divine—intellectual and spiritual companion. As the boundary collapses between the genres of *fannan yuaxian* 凡男遇仙 narrative (mortal men's

encountering with female immortals) and elegy, the husband envisions his lost marriage as a kind of fantastic adventure. The husband was at once sexually engaged with an enchanting goddess and intellectually engaged with a divine poet.

The biography the Qing poet and scholar Chen Wenshu 陳文述 (1771-1843), a grieving widower, drafted for his late wife, Lady Gong, differs stylistically from the previous two examples despite the fact that Chen shared the goal of deifying his wife. After providing a detailed account of Gong's virtuous behavior as a filial daughter-in-law and devoted wife, Chen candidly admits that Gong indulged in alcohol constantly. Huang contends that Chen's biography broke new ground in the field of *daowang* writings for women. Chen showed a "surprisingly 'liberal' attitude to his wife" in offering a "a detailed account as to how his wife became an alcoholic and how she remained addicted to heavy drinking for almost thirty years."[90] To be sure, Huang is right to point out that Chen challenged the conventions of *daowang* writing by admitting his wife's flaws.

I would add that Chen further stretched the conventions of *daowang* by integrating several supernatural episodes into his wife's biography. Chen does not compare his late wife to female legends or divinities, nor does he invoke the model Confucian wives of yore. He *does,* however, liken his wife to the ancient (male) immortals of wine, Liu Ling and Ruan Ji. He refers to his wife as the "drunken immortal," claiming that, although Gong did not suffer political setbacks as Liu and Ruan did, she was afflicted with other sorrows: the death of her son and the poor health of her grandson. The whole family took these misfortunes as karmic retribution for the sins of previous lives and devoted themselves to abstinence in hopes of redemption. Gong was among

[90] Martin Huang, *Intimate Memory*, pp. 73-75.

the most devout penitents and lived an austere life (except always being drunk). The despair she endured was no less eviscerating than her two male archetypes'. Chen suggests that psychic pain is felt no less acutely by women than by men, and further insists that tragedy in the domestic sphere is just as significant, if not more significant, than public humiliation or political frustration. Chen drowned herself in wine for good cause, and thus she, like the original referents of the moniker, earned the illustrious (if not scandalous) title of "drunken immortal."[91]

Gong seemed to agree with her husband's assessment. Not only would she "happily acknowledge when her grandchildren called her 'a drunken immortal' (*jiuxian* 酒仙)," but when Buddhist funeral services were held for her after her death, the guests observed a pervasive odor of wine at the proceedings. Chen comments that, although she had passed away, her spirit still relishes drinking 豈生前躭飲沒而麴蘗之興猶未忘**?**. Gong's undying fixation on wine suggests a certain counterintuitive liberation from physical death through drink. Gong's death is redefined as an apotheosis as her foible achieves transcendence. In this sense, the lingering smell of wine further signifies a palpable manifestation of the woman's immortality.

By referring to "the moment she is added to the roster of the pantheon 給籙之夕," Chen renders Gong's death as a transition from the earthly to the heavenly, another gesture of consecration. Chen also writes admiringly about Gong's compassion, good deeds, and religious devotion. Her religiosity was allegedly inspired by Lady Yuan, who successfully cured Gong of disease. Chen also records various supernatural phenomena that followed Gong's death: his neighbor dreamed of Gong coming to extend thanks to Lady Yuan; when Buddhist scriptures were burnt for Gong at her funeral, the flame turned a deep blue 火光作紺碧色; and her 14-

[91] Here my understanding of this passage is slightly different from Martin Huang's.

year-old grandson, Baoyong, managed to carry out all the laborious ritual responsibilities surrounding Gong's burial rites as if he were in good health, despite having been chronically ill and having frequently lost consciousness. People present at the funeral rite all agree that Gong's divine spirit seems to be animating Baoyong and enlivening her funerary rites. Chen's biography for his late wife is not only an unflinching portrayal of her alcoholism but also a hagiography of sorts; Gong is marked by a divinity-linked obsession with wine and continues to manifest her divinity even after death.

The three foregoing examples each demonstrate what Huang has observed: in late imperial China, male biographers reimagined elegiac writings and refused to shy away from capturing their female subjects' talents, physical beauty, and even flaws. I would add that the examples here immortalize their female subjects less as Confucian paragons than as celestial beings. It seems that when the women were identified with otherworldly attributes and past lives rather than with lives of virtue as mundane wives, neither the conventions of *daowang* texts nor the well-established gender expectations on women applied. The secular Confucian prescription of women's image and role are not to be fully imposed on subjects who claimed heavenly origins. In this new category of *daowang* texts, the secularization of the *daowang* genre paradoxically coincided with the sacralization of hitherto mundane women.

Of course, a widower's sacralization of his deceased wife could also be self-aggrandizing. Take the Qing scholar Xu Xudan 徐旭旦 (1659-1720), who wrote a biography for his second official wife, Ren, as an example.[92] Ren was hailed as the "immortal of needlework" and, like

[92] Xu Xudan 徐旭旦, "Jipei anren rentaijun zhuan 繼配安人任太君傳 (Biography of My Second Wife Great Lady Ren)," in *Shijing tang chuji* 世經堂初集 (The First Collection of

other sanctified wives, occult phenomena occurred during her burial rites: the guests heard divine music and marveled at mystical banners and streamers floating in midair 左右侍從之人但聞仙樂嘹喨旛幢縹緲. Also like Yunzhu, Ren's birth story suggested she had divine ties. When Ren's mother, Lady Peng, gave birth to her, Peng dreamed that the Daoist goddess Elühua 萼綠華 arrived with Madam Xi (another goddess)[93] riding a divine *qingluan* bird.[94] Xu identifies his

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Writings from Hall of Shijing), vol. 10, in Siku weishou shu jikan 四庫未收書輯刊 (Collection of Books Beyond the Four Treasuries), Section 7, book 29, Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1997, pp. 269-272.

[93] Madame Xi is also known as the lady of Peach blossom. She was living in the Zhou Dynasty. As the wife of the King of Xi 息君, she later was forced to remarried with the King of Chu. After she died, people worshipped her as the goddess of peach blossom. But in Liu Xiang's *Biographies of Exemplary Women* 列女傳, she died with her husband—the King of Xi together to protect her chastity. See Liu Xiang 劉向, "Xijun furen 息君夫人 (Wife of King of Xi)." in *Quanxiang gujin lienü zhizhuan* 全像古今烈女誌傳 (Illustrated Biographies of Exemplary Women in Ancient and Modern Times) vol. 3, Santaiguan kanxing 三台舘刊行, the Chinese-Japanese Library of the Harvard-Yenching Institute.

[94] *Qingluan* bird was a mystical phoenix-like bird in ancient Chinese legends and was also recorded in *Shan hai jing*. According to the Jin scholar/commentator Guo Pu, *Qingluan* was supposed to be the divine bird in charge of delivering food for the Queen mother the West. It can also serve as the private mount for goddesses. See Guo Pu 郭璞. *Shan hai jing* 山海經 (Classic of Mountains and Seas), Sibu congkan jingming chenghua ben 四部叢刊景明成化本,

late wife with the goddess Elühua, and seems to revel in his connection to such an illustrious female divinity.

Although Xu certainly takes time to celebrate Ren's extraordinariness, the bulk of the biography is devoted to a detailed account of the husband's performance as an official and his dedication to military and civil service. The biography seems more concerned with the husband's career than with Ren's life, although Xu does credit his late wife for her unfailing support of Xu's exploits. As the biography concludes, Xu asserts that his wife was not merely a wife but a valued partner and advisor (良佐). To put the matter bluntly, Xu seems to have seized upon the occasion of Ren's death to vindicate his civil and military service and prove his worth despite not being well to do. By recalling how his wife served as his right hand when he occupied various official posts, Xu unabashedly draws attention to his own competence. Xu's case aptly exemplifies the category Huang terms "autobiographical memoir."[95] Huang writes, "[D]espite its possible redundancy, this term probably best captures its generic hybridity: it is at once both [the male author]'s own autobiography and his memoir of his late wife." That is, the widower's reflections on his own life are "closely intertwined with" his fond memories of his wife.

However, Xu's case diverges from the text Huang interrogates, Shen Fu's *Floating Lives*. Whereas Shen Fu mourns his own failures and nurses his "bruised male ego" through recounting his wife's miserable life, Xu showcases his accomplishments and worth in the process of praising his wife for her sagacious and loyal support. Ren's posthumous apotheosis is also an act

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Zhongguo jiben guji ku (Digital collection) 中國基本古籍庫 (Database of Chinese Classic Ancient Books via Erudition).

[95] Martin Huang, *Intimate Memory*, pp.76-80.

of self-promotion on the part of her husband. The sacralization of the wife-cum-colleague, therefore, is much like certain instances of maternal sacralization in that the biography of the late wife can symbiotically conjoin the vindication, aggrandizement, and immortalization of subject and author. Here, Xu did not merely memorialize his wife as a sensual female divinity, as in the first two examples. Although Ren, too, was allegedly divine, she did not descend to this world merely for a romantic rendezvous with Xu (as in the traditional *yuxian* stories). Nor is Ren remembered for her foibles. Instead, Ren is depicted as a genderless companion, partner, assistant, and advisor.

In each of the four examples I consider in this section, beloved wives are sacralized in their biographies. The wives are each portrayed as (banished) immortals who boast extraordinary attributes or talents, recalling the convention of the *yuxian*. Rather than being remembered as typically virtuous Confucian wives, some of these women are praised for their feminine charm and poetic talent to such a degree that they amount to a male fantasy of an ideal female lover who fulfills her husband's every sexual, emotional, and intellectual desire. Other widowers took a different tack, analogizing their wives to carefree male immortals or genderless companions. In all these cases, wives are remembered less for their diligence and filiality than for their exceptional talents, talents that clearly exceed gendered expectations and norms for women. The women's divine attributes defy gender stereotypes and further demonstrate their extraordinariness and even other-worldliness. Briefly, the cases I present in this section demonstrate two convergences: 1) the hybridization of two literary genres—the biographical elegy and the *yuxian* fantasy; and 2) the conflation of two apparently contradictory feminine roles—the mesmerizing, unruly goddess-lover (who romances outside the bounds of wedlock) and the virtuous, cloistered, docile wife. As the biographical subjects straddle the categories of

mortal and immortal, other categories are transgressed as well; neither the biographical texts nor their female subjects abide by familiar conventions.

Conclusion

Surely, some male authors composed memorial essays for their female kin for the straightforward purpose of channeling grief and mourning the deceased through celebrating their virtues. Biographical writings were also designed to provide models of pious womanhood for later generations to emulate. Female subjects in these elegiac writings are thus understandably stereotyped as paragons of Confucian austerity, and readers will note that these texts are governed by strict conventions and are typically unapologetic in their didactic aims. However, in late imperial China, male authors began to play with the form of elegies for women. As the hitherto sacred genre of elegiac writings was secularized, many filial sons jumped on the innovation bandwagon and chose to write their mothers' stories as hagiographies; they happily extolled their mothers' (or other female kinswomen's) religious piety and identified them with divine beings. Male biographical subjects did not receive the same apotheosizing treatment. The male authors' deification of their mothers implicitly attests to the pressure exerted on the mother-son tie by Buddhist ideas concerning sons' debt to their mothers.

Mothers simultaneously played two conflicting roles: that of intruder and threat to the patriline and that of venerated object of all-important Confucian filial piety. The tensions embedded in Confucian family constellations created an opportunity for heterodox systems, especially Buddhism, to profit from sons' guilt-driven donations. From early medieval times onward, Buddhist leaders in China advanced the notion that mothers and sons relied on a certain reciprocity. As religious institutions declined during the Ming-Qing era, cultural innovators

suggested that this reciprocity could be achieved not only through generous donations to religious institutions but also through elegiac writings that sacralized the mother.

Sons brought a new Buddhist vocabulary and logic to their mothers' eulogistic biographies without drastically breaching the established convention that required all worthy subjects to be paragons of Confucian virtue. Mothers thus appeared in their biographies as simultaneous Confucian sages and Buddhist saints. As more and more religious elements found their way into these memorial writings, the texts became increasingly temple-like. These temples of text made space for sacrosanct Confucian traditions *and* for heterodox systems, and they served as reliquaries of sorts in which deceased women were commemorated, immortalized, and worshipped.

As mothers were deified in elegies, so too were wives. Widowers may not have been religiously and culturally compelled to repay debts to their wives (as they were to their mothers), but they nevertheless wrote late wives' elegies into *yuxian* stories. The wife in the stories above appears at once as a sensually enchanting mistress from the celestial world, a model wife in the Confucian tradition, and a sagacious colleague and advisor without apparent gender. In one woman, the husband finds sensual fantasy, worldly reliability, and moral and intellectual sustenance. The woman's image marries conflicting modes of feminine desirability: the ritually arranged, dutiful spouse and the emotional, enchanting lover.

Interestingly, male scholars who frowned on women's religiosity seldom hesitated to describe their own beloved mothers and wives as bodhisattvas or heavenly beings. The use of a traditionally sacred Confucian genre to immortalize ordinary women and to embrace supernatural elements fundamentally changed the nature of Chinese memorial writing. These generic interventions also unearthed social tensions and revealed new opportunities for male

writers. Moreover, the widespread incorporation of supernatural elements into these elegiac writings for women allowed authors to break free of suffocating conventions and to open up a broader horizon for men's own vindication and self-aggrandizement.

Buddhism's strong appeal to women helped to facilitate the secularization of memory in late imperial China. The heterodox system provided male authors an alternative set of conventions for commemorating beloved female kin in formal *daowang* writings that had hitherto been limited to those who had achieved greatness in the public sphere. The Buddhist register enabled eulogists to add in details of supernatural occurrences that lay outside of the conventional scope of *daowang* writings. These brushes with the divine transformed otherwise trivial and lackluster biographies of ordinary women into hagiographies with clear religious merit. The penetration of spirituality into the Confucian *daowang* writing offered further opportunities for heterodox worship to penetrate further into Confucian society.

Heterodox systems like Buddhism typically made headway in Confucian society through two highly gendered modes of engagement: high-brow philosophy and low-brow cultic ritual and folklore. With memorial writing, Buddhism carved out a middle way that spoke to Confucian culture as well as to heterodox spirituality—a way that engaged both men and women, brought together the orthodox and the heterodox, and bridged the sacred and the secular. In the process, women gained visibility and status in the public sphere, while men were able to repay emotional debts and to construct a more consistent writerly self. Elegies provided an emotive arena in which male authors could express their moral superiority and/or cultural frustrations, all while piously paying homage to a beloved family member. As authors of hagiographies, men implicitly extended their authority from the worldly values of Confucianism to the otherworldly exploration of divinity and spirituality. By identifying exemplary women with deities or

Bodhisattvas, eulogistic texts transformed into divine spaces in which a female idol was immortalized and worshipped. Ironically, male scholars who objected to women visiting monasteries nevertheless enshrined their own beloved women in textual temples of scholars' own devising.

Coda

This dissertation offers a new window into women's multifaceted relationship to temples/religious spaces as represented in historical narratives and literary imaginations. Roughly from late 15th to 18th century, lay Buddhism flourished across wide swaths of Chinese society, and especially among women; meanwhile, the Neo-Confucian doctrines ascended to the state orthodoxy and fueled a reinforcement of Confucian family ritual and women's seclusion. As Buddhism and Confucianism vied more dramatically for women's allegiance at the time, the temple came to represent both a problematic site of heresy and transgression, and an alternative space that provided unique accommodation for women's body and soul. Drawing on contemporary spatial theorists' innovative interpretations of space, I write against the reductionist understanding of temples as passive receptacles of women's religious activities or sex rackets in premodern China, and consider them instead as dynamic "thirdspaces" that partake and preside over the process of Buddhist lay women's identification and immortalization.

This project is both an addition to and deviation from the recent scholarly trend of uncovering and understanding women's expanded social spaces in late imperial China. Rather than another effort to recuperate well-educated women's agency and autonomy by re-reading their literary contributions, my project nuances our understanding of the religious space through the lens of gender. Taking a fresh eye to women's relationships to the economic and printing boom at the time, I find the two available spaces for women's participation in public life—temple and text—fuse in religious compendia and literary narratives. I argue that physical temples could be de-/re-spatialized and transmuted into written words and pictures while many eulogistic texts served to consecrate their female subjects, metaphorically rendering the reader a

textual temple of sorts. That is to say, I am not only interested in how women interacted with architectural temples, but also how the temple became a system of ideas and practices that traveled through texts.

As a more intimate connection between women and Buddhism was forged, Lay Buddhism took full advantage of this new perception of the gendered body to secure its foothold in a Neo-Confucian society that was increasingly hostile to heterodox systems. It strategically circumvented the constraints imposed by the usual inaccessibility of public sphere to women and the steadfast male apologists by forging a interconnection with women. Through lavishing persistent attention on women and the substantial secularization of its religious practices, Buddhism introduced new ontological dimensions of the female spirituality and enabled the hitherto private, cloistered female body accrued public meaning and visibility in the literary, religious, and social spheres. Meanwhile it also provided men with a new possibility, new mode and new vocabulary to lionize and immortalize their otherwise ordinary mothers, wives, and daughters. As a result, Buddhism not only won over women's allegiance, but also eventually co-opted or inveigled the male Confucian sectarians into facilitating its full integration into Chinese cultural landscape. In this sense, my research also offers new insights into the question concerning Buddhism's survival and revivification in China after the catastrophic anti-Buddhism persecution of the 9th century.

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