

The quasi-genderless heresy: The Dhūtaists and Master Jizhao*

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Introduction

In late Jin and early Yuan times, and particularly during the transition from one dynasty to the other, northern China was in ferment. Political unrest and the intermingling of culturally diverse ethnic groups brought about creative social, intellectual and religious developments that were to lead to the great ecumenical synthesis of the mature Yuan times, when the relatively tolerant attitude of some Mongol rulers—mostly for concrete and utilitarian reasons—would result in the (controlled) flourishing of a variety of religious expressions.¹ Searching for cultural vitality, scholarship often tends to concentrate on the philosophical and religious approaches of the Southern Song, thus overlooking the multifaceted kaleidoscope of social and intellectual events taking place in northern China between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The Dhūta sect,² established in the first decades of the twelfth century, was indeed among the peculiar manifestations of this age. As a ‘heretical’ form of Chan Buddhism, apparently widespread in the Beijing³ region among the lower and upper classes alike, it can be included among the various expressions of sectarianism and/or social activism stemming from Buddhism and Daoism which flourished during this period of uncertainty, when sensations of uneasiness and dislocation were accompanied by a growing desire to participate actively and obtain salvation. The Dhūtaists—who, like many other movements, alternately ‘enjoyed’ state patronage and persecution—were, at least in the beginning, (self-)perceived as an offshoot of Chan, that is of a mainstream teaching, mainly addressed to the elites, but also proposing a relatively ‘innovative’ social and professional role for women. From the tenth century in particular, Chan’s rhetoric of ‘equality’ and ‘heroism’,⁴ that is its allegedly genderless (but in fact quite gendered or, rather, it far from redefined gender roles) view of enlightenment had been providing some women with socially acceptable role models that seemed to transcend and counteract the ‘natural’ roles assigned to females. This kind of attitude, as well as the significant discourse which resulted from it, seemed to endure (and in some respects even to be stronger) within the Dhūta tradition, where the presence of at least one important woman master—Jizhao—is recorded.⁵ Although it provides insufficient evidence to make general assumptions about female roles in the

* I wish to express my gratitude to Professor T.H. Barrett and to two anonymous reviewers for their valuable suggestions.

¹ cf. Hok-lam Chan and Wm. Theodore De Bary (eds), *Yüan Thought: Chinese Thought and Religion under the Mongols* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 18.

² I shall at times use this term, which is reminiscent of Christian orthodox/heterodox classifications and thus not too apt to define a Buddhist movement, exactly to render the peculiar position of the Dhūtaists; for a full explanation of the name Dhūta see below.

³ i.e. Zhongdu under the Jin, Yanjing and later Dadu under the Yuan: throughout this paper, I shall use the present-day name for practical purposes.

⁴ cf. Miriam L. Levering, ‘Lin-chi (Rinzai) Ch’an and gender: the rhetoric of equality and the rhetoric of heroism’, in José I. Cabezon (ed.), *Buddhism, Sexuality and Gender* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 137–56.

⁵ cf. Xiong Mengxiang [Beijing tushuguan shanbenzu ed.], *Xijin zhi jiyi* (Beijing: Guji chubanshe, 1983), pp. 85–6 [hereafter referred to as *Xijin zhi*].

movement, the stele erected in Beijing's Xingjiao cloister in memory of Jizhao provides some interesting details about a woman's achievements, representation and perception, and also in comparison to the description of Puguang, a Dhūta male master who lived some decades after her.

After sketching an overview of the historical setting and socio-religious conditions, as well as of conceptions of femininity in the late Jin/early Yuan society, the present paper shall attempt an analysis of the figure of Master Jizhao, so as to try and better appraise, going beyond traditional perceptions and submission/patriarchy paradigms, both the shifting boundaries of gender and the status of *some* women (the category being not unproblematic and quite broad, it shall be used here *faute de mieux*) in northern Chinese society between the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries.

The setting

1. The socio-political side

Northern China in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was a multifaceted environment, with a complex, mutually influential, interplay of forces and cultures. Far from merely absorbing Chinese civilization, the so-called 'barbarian' conquerors also introduced their customs and *Weltanschauung*, thus affecting the indigenous outlook in a fertile process of adaptation that entailed political, social and ideological exchange.⁶ In this cosmopolitan atmosphere, where people belonging to different cultures and ethnic groups had to live side-by-side, notions previously considered 'natural' could be subject to a sometimes profound revision. The very concept of orthodoxy became more relative than ever: both rulers and subjects seemingly redefined it periodically, according to their needs and/or to the ever-evolving environment. Heresy being 'the other', and all the more dangerous because of the threat it posed 'from within the culture',⁷ it is interesting to observe a situation where the (forcefully) established authority—endowed with the power to enforce the boundaries and content of orthodoxy/heresy—was itself an *other*, an 'alien' in need of legitimizing devices, while most 'heretics' stemmed from well-established indigenous streams of thought.

Foreign-dominated northern China witnessed a strong ideological vitality, with several trends and teachings competing for the Jin or Yuan rulers' recognition and support. The 'religious market' which had opened up under the Song, entailing wider and more active access to religious participation, was also present under the foreign dynasties, and it was—I believe—open to common people and rulers alike. Indeed, as Sun posits with reference to the 'turbulent' religious/intellectual environment in the Yuan, 'individual identification with Confucian or non-Confucian schools of thought grew rather ambiguous'.⁸ In fact, it was not unusual for thinkers in this period to use creatively elements deriving from the 'Three Teachings', or to attribute a specific function to each teaching, as expounded, for instance, by the

⁶ The Jurchen Jin, who had supplanted the Liao in 1115 and subsequently taken over the northern part of the Song empire in 1127, were eventually annihilated by the Mongols, who first (between 1211 and 1215) conquered Beijing and the regions surrounding it, then took over the whole Jin empire in 1234 and finally crushed the Southern Song in 1279.

⁷ John B. Henderson, *The Construction of Orthodoxy and Heresy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 1.

⁸ K'o-k'uan Sun, 'Yü Chi and Southern Taoism during the Yüan period', in John Langlois, Jr. (ed.), *China under Mongol Rule* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 216.

influential Yelü Chucai.⁹ The latter happened to be one of the Dhūtaists' harshest critics, which goes to show that, unsurprisingly, the orthodoxy or heterodoxy of any thought or movement was defined by the position in which it stood in relation to those in power, principally with respect to the potential help or hindrance it could give to rulers, and secondly *vis-à-vis* the established mainstream religious-philosophical currents that were competing for official (and popular) allegiance.

After the mid-twelfth century, the Jin rulers' interest in Confucian-related political institutions and ideology as a means of legitimacy and control engendered a growing patronage of literati education and culture, in order to be *wen* without being *han*, and to obtain good officials.¹⁰ Interestingly, in 1188 the Dhūta was proscribed by emperor Shizong, who in the same year had received in audience Qiu Chuji, leader of the Quanzhen, itself proscribed in 1190 under Zhangzong.¹¹ This may imply both a temporary 'rectification' of the boundaries of heterodoxy and an evaluation carried out by the rulers about the potential danger, strength and usefulness of a movement *vis-à-vis* the needs of the state. Similarly, the Yuan increasingly adopted 'the Chinese tradition as their model for institutional reforms',¹² and augmented their use of Confucian ideology as a means of control, although state examinations for the civil service were not reintroduced until 1315.¹³ In the fourteenth century growing patronage of Confucian values was one possible cause of a hardening of attitudes towards non-mainstream ideologies, as is borne out by the loss of special prerogatives experienced by the Dhūtaists after the 1310s.

2. The religious side¹⁴

The Jin had—less permissively—adopted the Liao's favourable attitude towards Buddhism.¹⁵ In the intellectually thriving atmosphere of the period, several schools were active, one of which—quite popular in the Beijing region—was, interestingly, the Vinaya, or Disciplinary school, 'dominating [...] during the early years of the dynasty'.¹⁶ Chan, however, only spread after the collapse of the Northern Song. By that time, its transformation from 'an obscure and rather heterodox movement' to a 'ruling orthodoxy'¹⁷ had already been accomplished, a goal which the Dhūtaists were not able to achieve, possibly also because of the overwhelming presence of 'orthodox' Chan. The skilful systematization of Chan doctrine and practice, together with its self-consciousness, literature, and capacity to appeal to the upper classes, undoubtedly helped it gain standing and influence. In keeping with the spirit of

⁹ cf. Igor de Rachewiltz, 'Yeh-lü Ch'u-ts'ai (1189–1243): Buddhist idealist and Confucian statesman', in Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett (eds), *Confucian Personalities* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), p. 210 and *passim*.

¹⁰ cf. Yu Jie and Yu Guangdu, *Jin zongdu* (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1989), pp. 260–67; and Peter K. Bol, 'Seeking common ground: Han literati under Jurchen rule', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 7/2, 1987, pp. 461–538.

¹¹ cf. Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett, *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 317.

¹² Chan Hok-lam, 'Liu Ping-chung (1216–74), a Buddhist-Taoist statesman at the court of Khubilai Khan', *T'oung Pao*, 53, 1967, p. 99.

¹³ cf. Liu Ts'un-yan and Judith Berling, 'The "three teachings" in the Mongol-Yüan period', in Chan and De Bary, *Yüan Thought*, pp. 484–7.

¹⁴ Considering the subject of this paper, the religious overview is centred mainly on Buddhism.

¹⁵ cf. Zhongguo fojiao xiehui, *Zhongguo fojiao* (Beijing: Zhishi chubanshe, 1979), p. 95.

¹⁶ Yao Tao-chung, 'Buddhism and Taoism under the Chin', in Hoyt C. Tillmann and Stephen H. West (eds), *China under Jurchen Rule: Essays in Chin Intellectual and Cultural History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. 150.

¹⁷ Bernard Faure, *The Will to Orthodoxy: A Critical Genealogy of Northern Chan Buddhism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 4.

the times, Chan's charismatic masters, such as the famous Xingxiu—incidentally, Yelü Chucai's teacher—tended to promote a rather syncretic stance, invoking harmonization both within Chan and in general among the 'Three Teachings'.¹⁸ Considering Yelü's stigmatization of the Dhūtaists, such syncretism was probably not meant to include *all* religious expressions or, rather, it contained quite a precise view of what it was convenient/dangerous to embrace.

Chinese Buddhism continued to flourish under the Yuan, although it had to face both governmental control and the 'religious, social and political'¹⁹ rivalry of Daoism and Tibetan Lamaism. The Mongols did not have any entrenched prejudice towards any school, possibly because of their 'traditional pantheistic beliefs',²⁰ which might explain their relatively tolerant attitude toward the Dhūtaists, at least during the thirteenth century. Quite pragmatically, the Yuan rulers' attitude of 'tolérance indifférente'²¹ was meant to win them—from any teaching they would support—protection in both supernatural and secular terms.²² Under the Yuan, Chan maintained its influence, but its position was not unchallenged: competition was also fierce within Buddhism, and rulers tended to try and curb Chan power by encouraging other traditions.²³

In such circumstances, it is not difficult to understand why the presence of any potential competitor was perceived as a threat by mainstream teachings. Similarly, access to religious practices needed to be regulated, that is, handled or somehow controlled by 'professionals', and preferably not left to 'private initiative'. On the other hand, the *Zeitgeist*—encompassing perceived uncertainty, socio-cultural changes and enhanced initiative—encouraged the questioning of assumed values and meant that access to the sacred was no longer a prerogative of established professionals. Common people and elites alike increasingly felt the need for *participation*, in terms of both temple patronage and devotional/philanthropic associationism.

The turmoil preceding and following the Jin conquest of northern China had provoked the flourishing of several 'radical religious movements',²⁴ stemming from Buddhism or Daoism, but setting themselves (or being set) apart from the mainstream tradition. In the early decades of the twelfth century, at least three 'heterodox' Buddhist currents appeared in different parts of China, that is the White Cloud (1108), White Lotus (1133), and Dhūta (in the *Tianhui* era, i.e. between 1123 and 1137²⁵).²⁶ Such a proliferation might—although one wishes to avoid reductionism—have been due to a common reaction of people

¹⁸ cf. Yao, 'Buddhism and Taoism under the Chin', p. 151.

¹⁹ Chan, 'Liu Ping-chung', p. 128.

²⁰ Sechin Jagchid, 'The Mongol Khans and Chinese Buddhism and Taoism', *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 2/1, 1979, p. 7.

²¹ Paul Demiéville, 'La situation religieuse en Chine au temps de Marco Polo', in *Oriente Poliano* (Roma: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1957), p. 195.

²² cf. Guo Peng, *Song Yuan fojiao* (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 1981), p. 177.

²³ cf. Richard von Glahn, 'Towns and temples', in Paul Jakov Smith and Richard von Glahn (eds), *The Song–Yuan–Ming Transition in Chinese History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 194. The competition within Buddhism is shown, for instance, by the court debate held in 1288 among representatives of the Chan, Tiantai and Vinaya schools; cf. Guo, *Song Yuan fojiao*, p. 202.

²⁴ T. H. Barrett, 'Daoism: a historical narrative', in L. Kohn (ed.), *Daoism Handbook* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p. xxiv.

²⁵ cf. *Xijin zhi*, p. 74.

²⁶ The emergence of new schools was not, however, limited to the first decades of the century, as the Daoist Quanzhen was founded around 1170. Other new Daoist movements included the Great Way (*Dadao*) and Grand Unity (*Taiyi*), both founded around 1140: see Yao, 'Buddhism and Taoism under the Chin', pp. 151–3.

in times of anxiety and dislocation, that is a growing attraction towards 'groups promising salvation, a reverend leader and mutual support'.²⁷ Although obviously different, all such movements also expressed a quest for renewal,²⁸ with more immediate access to religion and salvation, as well as an attempt to restore the vitality of their mother traditions,²⁹ well within orthodoxy, quite in accord with officially recognized Buddhist teachings,³⁰ and usually enjoying social respect.³¹ In other words, no movements considered themselves heterodox or subversive, but they came to be regarded as such most probably because of the competition they posed to established schools. This did not happen to all of them in the same way, neither was proscription their common and definitive outcome. Success of the teachings, leaders' charisma and position in society, willingness to comply with state 'necessities' and relationship with mainstream currents were among the factors deciding a school's survival or decay. On the other hand, all such movements seem to have been trying to win imperial favour, which was indeed granted to all of them, in different ways, during the thirteenth century, that is when they became 'institutionalized'.³²

3. Portraits of femininity

Among the participants, both lay and clerical, in the new religious movements, a significant role was played by women. It is quite difficult to make general assumptions about 'women' as an all-inclusive category, which does not actually exist. The notion of (oppressed) 'womanhood' has been created and used, in the past, as a kind of umbrella to cover the experiences of all women, with little attention being paid to their social class, occupation, education and role. Victimization paradigms, indeed, fail to grasp the complexity of historical reality, and deny the existence of agency, compromise and negotiation, besides ignoring the fact that gender boundaries were not immutable but shifting, that is they were defined according to roles, rather than depending strictly on chromosomes. Rather than 'womanhood', it is therefore more useful to concentrate on 'femininity',³³ evaluating the relative, changing—i.e. cultural—construction and composition of female attributes, notably of what, taxonomically, makes a woman. These caveats in place, I shall attempt to sketch some very general remarks about prescriptions of femininity in Jin and Yuan northern China, while trying to highlight the opportunities available in an evolving and unstable social environment, although such chances diminished with time.

Scholarship represents women belonging to 'barbarian' societies as endowed with a relatively high level of 'freedom'. They seem to have been able

²⁷ Daniel L. Overmyer, 'The White Cloud sect in Sung and Yuan China', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 42/2, 1982, p. 620.

²⁸ cf. Vincent Goossaert, 'Entre quatre murs: un ermite taoïste du XIIe siècle et la question de la modernité', *T'oung Pao*, 85, 1999, p. 391.

²⁹ cf. Daniel L. Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist Religion: Dissenting Sects in Late Traditional China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 63.

³⁰ cf. Hubert Seiwert, *Popular Religious Movements and Heterodox Sects in Chinese History* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), p. 167.

³¹ cf. Barend J. ter Haar, *The White Lotus Teachings in Chinese Religious History* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), ch. 2 and 3, referring to the White Lotus.

³² Barrett, 'Daoism: a historical narrative', p. xxiv.

³³ cf. Sherry J. Mou (ed.), *Presence and Presentation: Women in the Chinese Literati Tradition* (London: Macmillan, 1999), p. xx, quoting Nancy Armstrong, 'Chinese women in a comparative perspective: a response', in Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang (eds), *Writing Women in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 420–21.

to 'display publicly their [...] independence of action',³⁴ sometimes wielding power not only in relation to the household—a sphere of Han Chinese women's power as well—but also in the 'religious lives of their people' (for Liao elite women),³⁵ within marriage choices (among the Jurchen lower classes),³⁶ as well as in the political sphere, at least indirectly and obviously for elite women, as shown, for instance, by the influence of Mongol imperial widows in the thirteenth century, or by the relationship between Khubilai Khan and his mother and wife.³⁷ If some elements derived from the encounter of different cultural modes could encourage a more active female role, others, such as marriage customs, did however have a different, and in the long run damaging, influence. Among the Jurchen and Mongols, women were not granted a dowry, as the payment of brideprice was common, which meant that women ended up being economically dependent on the husband's clan.³⁸ Moreover, widow remarriage outside the family, a common custom among the Chinese, was strongly opposed, as it went against the economic interests of the clan.

On the other hand, the practical standing of elite women had been improving in China since the tenth century, by virtue of their increased access to and control of property, which gave them 'unprecedented economic independence'.³⁹ Although Confucian ideals tended to limit the scope of women's movements according to the inner/outer division, whereby space reflected a functional and behavioural differentiation, female submission was closer to ideal than to reality. The increasing importance given to women's influence on children and to their role as household managers—with an emphasis on frugality and self-sacrifice which reminds one of the Dhūtaists' main tenets—contributed to providing them with some opportunities for leeway, enhanced by the fact that role could sometimes supersede biological gender in determining female appreciation and range of action.⁴⁰

Unfavourable material and conceptual changes did eventually occur, as is shown by the change in the relationship between women and property, with a strong contraction in the rights of women to inherit.⁴¹ Indeed, under the (late) Yuan a shift in gender conceptions and relations was caused by the interaction between Mongol marriage customs and government interests, and Neo-Confucian attempts at rectifying the hiatus between patrilineal discourse and the praxis of female control of property. As a result, the bond between women and their property was broken, and their autonomy curtailed in favour of their marital families, while widow chastity started to become essential.⁴²

³⁴ Frederick W. Mote, *Imperial China 900–1800* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 413.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 76.

³⁶ cf. Herbert Franke, 'Women under the dynasties of conquest', in *China under Mongol Rule* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1994), VI.

³⁷ cf. Morris Rossabi, 'Khubilai Khan and the women in his family', in Wolfgang Bauer (ed.), *Studia Sino-Mongolica: Festschrift für Herbert Franke* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1979), pp. 153–80.

³⁸ cf. Jennifer Holmgren, 'Observations on marriage and inheritance practices in early Mongol and Yüan society, with particular reference to the levirate', in *Marriage, Kinship and Power in Northern China* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1995), III, p. 131.

³⁹ Bettine Birge, *Women, Property and Confucian Reaction in Sung and Yüan China (960–1368)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 2.

⁴⁰ cf. Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 44. On the importance attached to women's roles, see also Birge, *Women, Property and Confucian Reaction*, p. 29.

⁴¹ cf. Kathryn Bernhardt, *Women and Property in China, 960–1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 40.

⁴² cf. Birge, *Women, Property and Confucian Reaction*, especially ch. 4 and conclusion.

In twelfth- and thirteenth-century northern China, however, exogenous and endogenous stimuli could provide alternatives, allowing female action and participation.⁴³

4. Viable religious avenues

Religious activism, lay or professional, was among the most significant alternatives to marriage and kinship roles. Historically, Buddhism was quite popular among women as it gave them the discursive and practical possibility of a 'professional career'. Although such a path, like all alternatives to a dominant model, could be subject to 'social disapproval',⁴⁴ and nuns' careers were—potentially—not as prestigious as monks', the relative openness of the religion encouraged female participation, at least in the mature Mahāyāna doctrine most widespread in China, which acknowledged the 'spiritual potential of women'⁴⁵ by positing that no transformation into male bodies was necessary to reach enlightenment, as all sex differences were illusory and to be transcended. Being 'one of the most flexible'⁴⁶ misogynist discourses, Buddhism, in spite of its quite contradictory attitude towards the feminine,⁴⁷ provided women with liberating symbols⁴⁸ and several images of role models: nuns, female teachers, lay benefactresses and 'female' bodhisattvas. All this did not imply a revision of gender constructs, neither in the mundane world nor within the religious environment: women were 'supposedly given the opportunity to match the human norm, but that human norm [was] collapsed into the male ideal'.⁴⁹ In other words, the outstanding results and relative power achieved—for instance—by female Chan masters or by Master Jizhao did *not* involve a new appreciation of female characteristics, or a new definition of masculinity/femininity. It was more a question of transcending gender than of modifying its contents.

Buddhism's inherent contradictions are well exemplified by the situation of nuns. Although generally subordinate *vis-à-vis* monasteries,⁵⁰ nunneries could, indeed, give females the chance to obtain a formal education and display their talent. The relative acceptability and respectability of this alternative varied over time but, at least until the twelfth–thirteenth centuries, it did not decay. Moreover, the first hagiographical/propagandistic description of nuns' lives had set an interesting precedent destined to condition female (self-)perception

⁴³ Social ferment could also contribute to provide some women with some opportunities. Such was the case of Yang Miaozhen (1193–1250), who inherited the command of her brother's rebellious army, ruled on an equal standing with her husband, and after his death led her troops to join the Mongols and became governor of Shandong. Significantly, it appears that her achievements depended on her merit, regardless of gender; cf. Pei-yi Wu, 'Yang Miaozhen: a woman warrior in thirteenth-century China', *Nan Nü*, 4/2, 2002, pp. 137–69, and Françoise Aubin, 'The rebirth of Chinese rule in times of trouble: North China in the early thirteenth century', in Stuart R. Schram (ed.), *Foundations and Limits of State Power in China* (London: SOAS, 1987), pp. 113–46.

⁴⁴ Mote, *Imperial China*, p. 162; see also the comic representation of nuns (and monks) as lascivious in Yuan drama: cf. Vivian Hsü, 'Monks and nuns as comic figures in Yüan drama', *Dodder*, 2, 1970, p. 12.

⁴⁵ Diana Y. Paul, *Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in the Mahāyāna Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 309.

⁴⁶ Bernard Faure, *The Power of Denial: Buddhism, Purity, and Gender* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 9.

⁴⁷ cf. Alan Sponberg, 'Attitudes toward women and the feminine in early Buddhism', in Cabezon, *Buddhism, Sexuality and Gender*, pp. 3–29.

⁴⁸ cf. Cabezon, *Buddhism, sexuality and gender*, p. xii.

⁴⁹ Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis and Reconstruction of Buddhism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), p. 178.

⁵⁰ cf. Nancy S. Barnes, 'Buddhism', in Arvind Sharma (ed.), *Women in World Religions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), p. 108.

and representation.⁵¹ By defining the ideal nun in terms of asceticism, erudition, mastery in doctrine, meditation and preaching (which all happened to be Jizhao's virtues), a powerful identification model/discourse was established whereby female achievements were valid *per se*, irrespective of their connection to kinship or to other legitimizing male agencies. On the other hand, as we shall see also in Jizhao's case, the power of recording was still firmly in men's hands, which demonstrates where real authority lay. Records, however, show a significant increase in female (important) presence after the tenth century, in the lay and professional religious environment. Favourable historical conditions, such as social changes, increased desire for participation, interaction with alien cultures, rulers' interest in religion, quite sympathetic social attitudes towards Buddhism—whereby even literati culture did not condemn it *a priori*, but praised the asceticism it could foster in women practitioners—and the influence of Chan, all created the right environment for the emergence of outstanding female figures.

Chan is significant to this analysis because of its practical and discursive/representational models, which offered women rhetorical and effective recognition and contributed to creating a favourable substratum for public acceptance of female religious prominence. Although basically a 'masculine discourse',⁵² in spite of its rhetorical/self-laudatory/self-distinctive claims to equality and irrelevance of delusive sex differences both *per se* and *vis-à-vis* enlightenment,⁵³ Chan did concretely encourage female participation, allowing at least some female practitioners to hold the same positions as males, namely to deliver lectures, compose tracts and poetry, and—above all—to act as teachers, helping women and men disciples attain enlightenment. Chan's literary corpus (elaborated by males⁵⁴) projected increasingly positive feminine images, with many women portrayed as enlightened masters and lineage heirs, where in some cases a woman's link to the lineage was a female teacher.⁵⁵ In the *Jingde Chuandeng Lu* (1004)⁵⁶ Moshan Liaoran was the first woman depicted as a teacher whose insight was superior to that of a monk, whereas in Southern Song-produced *Zongmen Liandeng Huiyao* (1183), Miaodao and Miaozong were the first nuns to be included in flame histories as formal Chan teachers (learning from men but formally teaching only women) and lineage members having dharma heirs. Interestingly, such important female masters were described in masculine terms, endowed with the male virtues of courage, independence, perseverance, strength and determination, and they were called *da zhangfu* (great hero, manly man), which shows how role can supersede biological attributes.⁵⁷

⁵¹ i.e. Baochang's sixth-century *Biqiuni Zhuan* (*Biographies of Nuns*), describing the lives of 65 outstanding (upper-class) nuns in fourth- to sixth-century Jiangkang area; cf. Kathryn A. Tsai (tr.), *Lives of the Nuns: Biographies of Chinese Buddhist Nuns from the Fourth to the Sixth Centuries: A Translation of the Pi-ch'i'u-ni Chuan*, compiled by Shih Pao-ch'ang (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994).

⁵² Bernard Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: A Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 242.

⁵³ Miriam L. Levering, 'The dragon girl and the abbess of Mo-Shan: gender and status in the Ch'an Buddhist tradition', *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 5/1, 1982, p. 20.

⁵⁴ cf. Miriam Levering, 'Stories of enlightened women in Ch'an and the Chinese Buddhist female Bodhisattva/Goddess tradition', in Karen L. King (ed.), *Women and Goddess Traditions in Antiquity and Today* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), pp. 137–40.

⁵⁵ cf. Ding-hwa E. Hsieh, 'Images of women in Ch'an Buddhist literature', in Peter N. Gregory and Daniel A. Getz (eds), *Buddhism in the Sung* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), p. 140.

⁵⁶ Which was evidently part of the tradition when Chan spread under the Jin.

⁵⁷ On this 'rhetoric of heroism', contrasting with its parallel 'rhetoric of equality' see Levering, 'Lin-chi (Rinzai) Ch'an and gender', p. 141.

Chan discourse used heavily gendered categories to classify its experiences (while the Dhūta discourse was slightly different), thus avoiding a serious challenge to normative descriptions of femininity/masculinity. On the other hand, it seems that Chan women regarded the term *da zhangfu* as genderless, apt to define anybody who successfully devoted themselves to Chan practice.⁵⁸ In sum, although Chan discourse neither elevated women *per se* nor praised female qualities, its outcomes were quite positive, especially insofar as it built on existing cultural premises—such as Confucian virtues—and socially approved/tolerated behaviours to devise a set of relatively innovative and limitedly disrupting feminine representations. Being subversive or challenging the *status quo* was the last thing Chan mainstream propaganda wished to do: its strong reaction against a ‘cousin’ that also had women in leadership positions is therefore hardly surprising.

Another significant element in the north Chinese panorama is the Daoist Quanzhen movement.⁵⁹ Praising purity, tranquillity,⁶⁰ asceticism,⁶¹ poverty and withdrawal,⁶² it attracted followers from all social classes, and—at least in its initial stage—openly catered to women by offering them a standing similar to men’s. Among the women who were part of it, Sun Bu’er (1119–1182) had great significance, as one of Wang Zhe’s first Seven Disciples. Following her husband’s conversion, she became a leader in her own right and a model to other women practitioners, able to ‘teach and ordain other women followers’.⁶³ Like Dhūta, Quanzhen originated as a non-mainstream teaching with a significant female leadership—which was, however, soon ‘purged’ from the records⁶⁴—, but it succeeded in achieving long-lasting ‘respectability’,⁶⁵ whereas Dhūta did not, possibly also because Quanzhen did not have to defy mainstream Chan (and its female discourse).

The actors

1. The source

The following overview of the Dhūta tradition and masters Jizhao and Puguang is based—especially in what concerns Jizhao—on the descriptions provided by the *Xijin zhi*, a Yuan gazetteer of Beijing which illustrates in great detail two monasteries (Shengyin si and Xingjiao yuan) belonging to the movement.

The *Xijin zhi*, which is named after the Xijin fu, i.e. the name used from 1012 to 1153 to define the capital prefecture, was written towards the end of

⁵⁸ cf. Hsieh, ‘Images of women’, pp. 162–3.

⁵⁹ There were also women acting as mediums in the northern Chinese fox cult, and gaining local power because of this. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for this remark.

⁶⁰ cf. Tao-chung Yao, ‘Quanzhen-complete perfection’, in Kohn, *Daoism Handbook*, pp. 582–3.

⁶¹ cf. Vincent Goossaert, ‘Starved of resources: clerical hunger and enclosures in nineteenth-century China’, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 62/1, 2002, p. 77; Pierre Marsone, ‘Accounts of the foundation of the Quanzhen movement’, *Journal of Chinese Religions*, 29, 2001, p. 95; Vincent Goossaert, ‘The invention of an order: collective identity in thirteenth-century Quanzhen Taoism’, *Journal of Chinese Religions*, 29, 2001, pp. 125–7.

⁶² cf. Isabelle Robinet, *Taoism: Growth of a Religion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 223–4.

⁶³ Catherine Despeux, ‘Women in Daoism’, in Kohn, *Daoism Handbook*, p. 392.

⁶⁴ Though she was a senior member of the group of the ‘Seven Perfected’, i.e. the early disciples of Wang Zhe, Sun Bu’er was soon excluded from the enumeration—her place being taken by Wang Zhe himself—only to reappear much later as ‘author’ or transmitter of texts related to female alchemy. See David Hawkes, ‘Quanzhen plays and Quanzhen masters’, *BEFEO*, 69, 1981, pp. 167–8; Judith M. Boltz, *A Survey of Taoist Literature: Tenth to Seventeenth Centuries* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1987), pp. 65 and 155–6; Barrett, ‘Daoism: a historical narrative’, pp. xxv–xxvi.

⁶⁵ cf. Barrett, ‘Daoism: a historical narrative’, p. xxv.

the Yuan dynasty, probably around 1350, by Xiong Mengxiang, a Jiangxi officer-literatus.⁶⁶ Versatile in his interests and artistic achievements, Xiong held, among others, the posts of superintendent of Confucian schools (*ruxue tiju*)⁶⁷ and of deputy director of the Directorate for Confucian Literature (*chongwen jian cheng*),⁶⁸ both in the Datu (Beijing) circuit.⁶⁹ Such positions undoubtedly allowing him access to interesting material about the capital, he compiled the *Xijin zhi* (also known as *Xijin zhi dian*), the first gazetteer recording the history, life, culture and customs of Beijing and its district in Jin and Yuan times.

Very popular in early Ming times, the *Xijin zhi* eventually disappeared in the late sixteenth century, and has been recently (1983) reassembled in part by collating pieces from other works, some of which had themselves been drawing on it.⁷⁰ As Goossaert has argued, the *Xijin zhi* is a very precious source on Beijing's religious life under the Yuan.⁷¹ Indeed, it allows us to cast a glance on the little known and quite neglected Dhūta and, above all, on two of its eminent masters.

2. The Dhūtaists

'The calamity of Buddhism',⁷² and 'the greatest evil in the empire'⁷³: such was Yelü Chucai's judgement on the Dhūta sect, as expressed in the preface to his *Bianxie lun*, written between 1225 and 1226 and entirely devoted to the confutation of this horrible 'heresy'. Indeed, Yelü harshly attacked the Dhūtaists in many of his writings,⁷⁴ showing real contempt—almost hate—for them and invariably calling them *kangnie*, that is 'miserable pests'⁷⁵ or 'good-for-nothing dirt'.⁷⁶ It appears that he felt the need to unveil the evil nature of this increasingly popular movement, which was in his view very dangerous for religion and society alike. Notably, in the preface to his *Xi you lu*, written in 1228, i.e. in a period when Buddhism was somehow subdued by Daoist Quanzhen supremacy and thus much needed to defend itself and its privileges, he labelled Dhūta doctrines (and those of other movements, including Quanzhen) as

⁶⁶ For details on the name of the gazetteer and the time of composition, cf. *Xijin zhi*, editors' introduction, pp. 2–4. On Xiong Mengxiang, some information is given on p. 3. More information about him and the source can be found in Wang Canji, *Yandu Guji Kao* (Beijing: Jinghua chubanshe, 1995), pp. 61–6; Cai Meibiao (ed.), *Zhongguo lishi da cidian: Liao Xia Jin Yuan shi* (Shanghai: Cishu chubanshe, 1986), p. 281; Vincent Goossaert, 'Les fêtes au temple du Pic de l'Est de Pékin sous les Mongols: une source ancienne inédite', *Sanjiao Wenxian: Matériaux pour l'Étude de la Religion chinoise*, 1, 1997, p. 87.

⁶⁷ cf. David M. Farquhar, *The Government of China under Mongolian Rule: A Reference Guide* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1990), p. 370.

⁶⁸ cf. *ibid.* pp. 136–7 (for the *chongwen jian*) and 23 (for the post of *cheng* in directorates).

⁶⁹ The Yuan antecedent of the region as an administrative unit.

⁷⁰ *Yongle dadian*, *Shuntianfu zhi*, *Rixia juwen kao*, *Xiantai tongji*; cf. Wang Canji, *Yandu Guji Kao*, p. 64, and *Xijin zhi jiyi*, editors' introduction, especially pp. 7–16.

⁷¹ cf. Goossaert, 'Les fêtes au temple du Pic de l'Est', p. 87.

⁷² Yelü Chucai, *Zhanran jushi wenji*, j. 8, 'Bianxie lun xu'.

⁷³ *ibid.* translation by Igor de Rachewiltz, in 'The *Hsi-yu lu* by Yeh-lü Ch'u-t'ai', *Monumenta Serica*, 21, 1962, p. 39 note 4.

⁷⁴ cf. *Zhanran jushi wenji*, j. 8, 'Xiyou lu xu', 'Bianxie lun xu', 'Ji Zhao yuanshuai shu', and j. 13, 'Kangnie jiaomin shi wuyi lun xu'.

⁷⁵ In the translation proposed by de Rachewiltz in 'The *Hsi-yu lu*', p. 17 and p. 39, n. 5, where an explanation of the words' meaning is given; the term is rendered as 'husk-pests' by Arthur Waley in his translation of *The Travels of an Alchemist: The Journey of the Taoist Ch'ang-ch'un from China to the Hindukush at the Summons of Chingiz Khan, Recorded by his Disciple Li Chih-ch'ang* (London: Routledge & Co, 1931), p. 26.

⁷⁶ In the translation ('nichtsutziger Abschaum') proposed by Herbert Franke in 'Eine buddhistische Quelle über Kaiser Qubilai: das Hung-chiao chi', *Chinesischer und tibetischer Buddhismus im China der Yuanzeit: Drei Studien* (Munich: Kommission für zentralasiatische Studien, 1996), p. 145.

'heresies' (*xie*), whose repudiation was nothing but a correct discrimination, similar to Mencius's rejection of Yang and Mo.⁷⁷ He also composed the preface to another work against the *kangnie*, the *Kangnie jiaomin shi wuyi lun*, apparently written by a Buddhist monk.⁷⁸ In addition, he harshly criticized the marshal (*yuanshuai*) Zhao, who had let this heresy lead him astray, and had even composed a *Toutuo fu* to celebrate the Dhūta sect.⁷⁹

Such a deeply Confucian⁸⁰ rejection of heterodoxy, whereby the Dhūtaists were harshly accused of corrupting both society and properly religious people/practices, is quite interesting if one thinks that it came from a seemingly tolerant and syncretic personality. A possible explanation for this might be the potential serious menace represented by the various heterodoxies Yelü Chucai felt it necessary to attack. Quanzhen enjoyed great power during the first decades of the thirteenth century, and the Dhūta movement must also have been popular. According to Yelü's work, its followers were most of all artisans and merchants.⁸¹ This does not appear to be quite right, as both Jizhao's and Puguang's descriptions mention prominent upper-class officers as patrons or admirers of the Dhūtaists.⁸² Moreover, it seems that Dhūta also had a substantial following in the Yuan court.⁸³ All these happening to be exactly the target of Chan, such support could on the one hand account for the movement's potential power, and on the other hand for the threat it posed. Conversely, Yelü Chucai was—in his attacks on the *kangnie*—following his master, the Caodong Chan teacher Xingxiu, who had previously composed a *fu* (the *Kangchan fu*), against the Dhūtaists.⁸⁴

Kangnie was not the only derogatory term used to indicate Dhūta. The *Jin shi*, reporting the order given in 1188 by Shizong to prohibit it and punish its followers, calls it *kang chan*, that is 'miserable/useless Chan'.⁸⁵ On the contrary, the *Yuan shi*—reporting Wuzong's 1309 order to establish a special Dhūta registry (*toutuo chan lusi*)⁸⁶ in Huguang,⁸⁷ and the subsequent 1311 decision to abolish it—uses the name *Toutuo chan* and *Toutuo*, that is Dhūta Chan or Dhūta, thus possibly reflecting a higher evaluation of the movement.⁸⁸ It seems therefore that the Yuan government considered Dhūta as 'an independent religious unit',⁸⁹ a 'separate religion'⁹⁰ with its own bureaucracy, as also

⁷⁷ cf. 'Xiyou lu xu', in *Zhanran jushi wenji*, j. 8, and de Rachewiltz, 'The *Hsi-yu lu*', pp. 1–128.

⁷⁸ cf. 'Kangnie jiaomin shi wuyi lun xu', in *Zhanran jushi wenji*, j. 13, and de Rachewiltz, 'The *Hsi-yu lu*', p. 39 note 4.

⁷⁹ cf. 'Ji Zhao yuanshuai shu', in *Zhanran jushi wenji*, j. 8.

⁸⁰ cf. de Rachewiltz, 'Yeh-lü Ch'u-ts'ai', p. 212.

⁸¹ cf. *Zhanran jushi wenji*, j. 13, 'Kangnie jiaomin shi wuyi lun xu'; referring to the same source, Waley (*The Travels*, p. 26) affirms that the school apparently had 'a very wide hold over the lower classes'.

⁸² As recorded in the *Xijin zhi*, pp. 73–6 (Puguang) and 85–6 (Jizhao).

⁸³ cf. Zhou Liangxiao and Gu Juying, *Yuan dai shi* (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1993), pp. 741–2.

⁸⁴ cf. *Zhanran jushi wenji*, j. 8, 'Bianxie lun xu'.

⁸⁵ cf. *Jin shi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju chubanshe, 1975), j. 8, p. 201.

⁸⁶ cf. *Yuan shi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju chubanshe, 1976), j. 23, p. 510; since 1265, there existed some local-level Buddhist offices, among which the Prefectural Buddhist Registries (*seng lusi*), cf. Farquhar, *The Government of China*, p. 156.

⁸⁷ Huguang province occupied modern Guangxi, the western part of Guangdong, and Hainan island: cf. Farquhar, *The Government of China*, p. 382; the movement's diffusion must therefore have been definitely wide by the beginning of the fourteenth century.

⁸⁸ cf. *Yuan shi*, j. 24, p. 542.

⁸⁹ Arthur Waley, *The Travels*, p. 26; also Paul Pelliot, '[Bibliographie] Arthur Waley. An index of Chinese artists represented in the sub-department of Oriental prints and drawings in the British Museum', *T'oung Pao*, 21, 1931, p. 417.

⁹⁰ Herbert Franke, 'Sha-lo-pa (1259–1314), a Tangut Buddhist monk in Yüan China', in *China under Mongol Rule*, XI, p. 218.

testified by the existence of a general (*zhulu*) superintendence in charge of the Dhūta religion.⁹¹

Dhūta (*toutuo* in Chinese, but also *ku xing*, i.e. asceticism) was originally a Sanskrit term, literally meaning ‘shaking off’ and referring to twelve long-standing Buddhist ascetic practices concerned with the restrained use of clothes, food and lodging in order to develop willpower and by means of discipline remove the passions and trials of life, so as to attain nirvana. Significantly, such practices had always been controversial, considered as an extreme, ‘radical impulse’⁹² to renunciation and solitude, but at the same time they were—in a way—attractive, also to mainstream figures,⁹³ as they suggested reform and spiritual purity.⁹⁴ Interestingly, another ‘deviant’ Buddhist school, the San Jie, had adopted them, associating to this a strict monastic training and a high level of lay participation and official patronage, which all reflected more the milieu of the times than heterodoxy.⁹⁵ A similar conclusion can, in my view, be drawn for the Dhūta movement, whose emphasis on ascetic practices gained it such a name.⁹⁶

The movement was founded during the Jin *Tianhui* era, between 1123 and 1137 (and it lasted surely till the first decades of the fourteenth century) by the monk Liu Zhiyi,⁹⁷ that is ‘paper-clothed’.⁹⁸ Interestingly, a paper-clothed master seems to have been portrayed by Ma Yunqing, a contemporary painter connected with the literati milieu.⁹⁹ The painting, in turn, inspired two poems by Wanyan Shou (1172–1232) and Yuan Haowen (1190–1257), both describing a ‘paper-clothed *daoze*’ living in tranquillity and reclusion.¹⁰⁰ If Ma Yunqing’s portrait did indeed refer to Liu Zhiyi, that would testify to the movement’s relative popularity in its times.

Dhūtaists preached moderation, discipline and asceticism, not unlike other movements which originated in the same period, e.g. the White Cloud, which highlighted the need for discipline (e.g. in food¹⁰¹) and envisaged salvation not by faith but through practice and spiritual development.¹⁰² In troubled times such as those of the Song collapse, and also afterwards, the need for simplicity, reform and discipline was apparently widespread: monastic discipline was especially valued, as shown also by the mainstream Chan master Zhongfeng Mingben’s insistence on rules.¹⁰³ The *Xijin zhi* frequently mentions willpower,

⁹¹ cf. ‘Zhulu Toutuo jiaomen dutidian Cheng gong ta ming’, in *Chengxuelou Wenji*, j. 21.

⁹² Jamie Hubbard, *Absolute Delusion, Perfect Buddhahood: The Rise and Fall of a Chinese Heresy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001), p. 25.

⁹³ Also within earlier Chan; cf. Jiang Yibin, ‘Fayan wenyi de chanjiao sixiang’, *Zhonghua Foxue Xuebao*, 13, pp. 431–56.

⁹⁴ Hubbard, *Absolute Delusion*, p. 25.

⁹⁵ cf. *ibid.*, pp. 29–30.

⁹⁶ Interestingly, an uprising took place at the end of the thirteenth century, with the rebels calling themselves *Toutuo jun*, i.e. Dhūta army; cf. *Yuan shi*, j. 20 p. 257, and j. 153 p. 3193; see also Cai Meibiao, *Zhongguo Lishi da Cidian* p. 125, and Paul Pelliot, ‘Notes additionnelles sur la secte du Lotus Blanc et la secte du Nuage Blanc’, *BEFEO*, 4/1–2, 1904, pp. 438–9.

⁹⁷ cf. *Xijin zhi*, p. 74; in the gazetteer, the first patriarch is always mentioned as Zhiyi: in his ‘Ji Zhao yuanshuai shu’, Yelü Chucai indicates Liu Zhiyi to be the founder of the sect (cf. *Zhanran Jushi Wenji*, j. 8). I have unfortunately been unable to find any reference to a Zhiyi (with dates and facts corresponding) in the indexes and sources consulted.

⁹⁸ The appellation ‘paper-clothed’ seems to have been used also by ‘orthodox’ Chan masters of previous periods, cf. Lian Lichang, Wang Jianchuan, ‘Jin Yuan shiqi zhi ‘Kang chan’ chu tan’, *Yuanguang foxue xuebao*, 3, 1999, p. 142.

⁹⁹ cf. Susan Bush, ‘Five paintings of animal subjects or narrative themes used and their relevance to Chin culture’, in Tillmann and West, *China under Jurchen Rule*, p. 203.

¹⁰⁰ cf. Xue Rizhao and Guo Mingzhi (eds), *Quan Jin shi* (Nankai daxue chubanshe, 1995), vol. 3, j. 84, p. 121 and vol. 4, j. 120, p. 112.

¹⁰¹ cf. Guo, *Song Yuan Fojiao*, p. 203.

¹⁰² cf. Overmyer, ‘The White Cloud sect’, p. 618.

¹⁰³ cf. Chün-fang Yü, ‘Chung-feng Ming-pen and Ch’an Buddhism in the Yüan’, in Chan and De Bary, *Yüan Thought*, pp. 419–77.

discipline, tranquillity and concentration as the main characteristics of the Dhūtaists: the school ‘has compassion and frugality as its purposes’, the followers ‘use worn-out rags’ and ‘their dwellings are gloomy’;¹⁰⁴ ‘Vinaya rules are observed in their quarters, [...] disciples keep silence, and transmission does not rely on the written word’.¹⁰⁵

This last point is quite significant: the *Xijin zhi* states that ‘since Zhiyi responded to the world, [this school] has been here for two-hundred years. They transmit to each other the lamp of wisdom, without interruption throughout the generations’.¹⁰⁶ I think it is possible to see here a potential problem for Chan, which might also account for the Chan (lay and clergy) establishment’s strong attacks on the Dhūtaists. Chan, very popular by the late twelfth–early thirteenth century and catering mainly to the upper scholar-official classes, had since the tenth century produced a literature corpus meant to portray itself as the product of an unbroken lineage of transmission of the Buddha-mind, outside of the scriptures. This constructed status of ‘pure’, essential Buddhism could thus legitimize Chan and, most significantly, justify its privileges. The appearance of a ‘competitor’ advancing a similar message could therefore hardly be welcome, especially insofar as the newcomer—where at least *some* women had important positions—appeared to be gaining support among the high and powerful classes.

3. Master Jizhao and the Dhūta discourse of femininity

The *Xijin zhi* informs us that after the death of patriarch Zhiyi, the dharma was inherited by his disciples, and through an unbroken line of transmission it arrived with Puguang. Among the ten masters in the lineage,¹⁰⁷ the seventh, i.e. Linyi Jueye, was possibly a woman, namely Jizhao.¹⁰⁸

The final part of her biographical stele—where several characters are unfortunately missing—tells us that ‘in the winter of the year *xinmao* (1231), his excellency the regional administrator (*xing tai*)¹⁰⁹ Liu¹¹⁰ [heard¹¹¹] the Master’s name, vowed to submit to [her] authority’, and eventually became a follower of the seventh patriarch, whose name is partially extant and reads

¹⁰⁴ All quotations from *Xijin zhi*, p. 74.

¹⁰⁵ *Xijin zhi*, p. 75.

¹⁰⁶ *Xijin zhi*, p. 85.

¹⁰⁷ That is Hejian Tiehua, Xingji Yixi, Shuang Guichun, Yanshan Yong’an, Bilai Zhiman, Zhenjiao Mengjue, Linyi Jueye, Puhua Shoujie, Qing’an Lianxing and Bai Ximiao, cf. *Xijin zhi*, p. 74; none of the indexes consulted mention any of them in their full name as reported by the gazetteer.

¹⁰⁸ All information concerning her comes from the *Xijin zhi*, as none of the indexes consulted have any reference to a female master Jizhao. There is, however, a mention of a ‘Master Jizhao’ (*Jizhao shi*) in the ‘Zhulu Toutuo jiaomen dutidian Cheng gong ta ming’ (in *Chengxuelou Wenji*, j. 21), which presents the life and career of Yang Zhicheng, appointed in 1297 general superintendent of the Dhūta religion. He, apparently, was a disciple of the ‘seventh master’, to whom he also made sacrifices, and he chose for himself the name of Ji’an (the same Ji as Jizhao).

¹⁰⁹ In Mongol times—i.e. when the inscription was written—this was also a short form for the Regional or Branch Censorate (cf. Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), p. 246), but since such a body was only created after Liu Min’s death (cf. Farquhar, *The Government of China*, pp. 241–3, and Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles*, p. 64), I use here the translation ‘regional administrator’ (cf. Elizabeth Endicott-West, *Mongolian Rule in China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 199).

¹¹⁰ i.e. Liu Min (1201–1259), very prominent officer of the early Mongol decades, fluent in Mongolian, holder of several posts. See *Yuan shi*, j. 153, pp. 3609–10, as well as Igor de Rachewiltz, Hok-lam Chan, Hsiao Ch’i-ch’ing and Peter W. Geir (eds), *In the Service of the Khan: Eminent Personalities of the Early Mongol-Yüan Period* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1993), pp. 104, 125–6, 147, 158, 389; Cai Meibiao, *Zhongguo Lishi da Cidian*, p. 178; Zhang Huizhi, Shen Qiwei and Liu Dezhong (eds), *Zhongguo Lidai Renming da Cidian* (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1999), p. 641; Wang Deyi (ed.), *Yuanren Zhuanji Ziliao Suoyin* (Taipei: Xinwen feng, 1980–1982), p. 1787, for references to historical works mentioning him.

¹¹¹ Zhou and Gu, *Yuan dai shi*, suggest inserting the character *wen* (heard) here.

‘[missing]...Yi great patriarch’, thus giving a significant boost to the expansion of the movement.¹¹² Leaving aside the quite ironic fact that Liu Min appears to have been a friend of one of the Dhūtaists’ arch-enemies, Yelü Chucai,¹¹³ it is worth noting that such ‘Yi’ corresponds to a part of the name of the seventh patriarch as mentioned in the transmission lineage quoted above. If, as has been suggested,¹¹⁴ we suppose the missing character is Lin, we obtain the name Linyi,¹¹⁵ that is a part of the name of Linyi Jueye, seventh master in the lineage starting from Zhiyi and coming to Puguang. Jizhao would thus appear to be none other than Linji Yueye. Such a fact, if actually proved by other sources, would equate the formal position of women in the Dhūta movement to that in Southern Song Chan, where since 1183 nuns were included in flame histories as lineage members having dharma heirs. Be that as it may, even without supposing too much, the figure and role of Jizhao as they appear from her epitaph preserved in the *Xijin zhi* are noteworthy and do tell us something significant concerning Dhūta and, above all, the female position within it.

Jizhao’s stele was placed in the Xingjiao yuan, a cloister also known as the Dhūta nunnery (*Toutuo miaozhenyuan*), and located in the Southern (Yuan¹¹⁶) city, in the right part of Tieniu ward.¹¹⁷ It was written out (*shu*) by Xue’an, that is Puguang, possibly her heir in the lineage.¹¹⁸ The fact that he, the Dhūta leader between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and a very prominent figure, took the time to write does, in my view, corroborate the possibility that Jizhao had a particular relevance within the school. The epitaph was composed (*zhuan*) by the *zhongshun dafu* (grandee of the nineteenth class, an honorary civil official title¹¹⁹) Li Jian, ‘Hanlin lecturer-in-waiting and drafter of imperial edicts, co-redactor of the national history’.¹²⁰ The relatively high status of the compiler also testifies to Jizhao’s importance and public recognition, confirmed by the fact that somebody was spending time and money to memorialize her.¹²¹

Puguang’s stele, located in the Shengyin monastery,¹²² was composed by a much more prominent figure, Yan Fu, ‘Hanlin academician for the

¹¹² *Xijin zhi*, p. 86.

¹¹³ cf. de Rachewiltz, Chan, Hsiao and Geir, *In the Service of the Khan*, p. 158.

¹¹⁴ cf. Zhou and Gu, *Yuan Dai shi*, p. 741.

¹¹⁵ The Yi mentioned in the *Xijin zhi* on p. 86 is written slightly differently from the one mentioned in the lineage list on p. 74; they both, however, refer to the seventh patriarch.

¹¹⁶ The Yuan capital (Dadu) was built north-east of the Jin capital (Zhongdu), so that Zhongdu’s Tieniu fang (ward), which was in the eastern part of the city, came to be in the southern part of Dadu; cf. Yu and Yu, *Jin zhongdu*, maps, and Cao Zixi (ed.), *Beijing tongshi*, (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 1994), maps in vols. 4 and 5.

¹¹⁷ Jin and Yuan Beijing was divided into several four-sided wards (*fang*), where streets (*jie*) were to be found; cf. Yu and Yu, *Jin zhongdu*, pp. 29–30, and Nancy S. Steinhardt, ‘The plan of Khubilai Khan’s imperial city’, *Artibus Asiae*, 44, 1983, p. 138.

¹¹⁸ Li Puguang, self-styled Xue’an, was from Datong; acknowledged leader of the Dhūta sect in the last half of the twelfth–early years of the thirteenth century; he was also a poet, painter and famous calligrapher, whose great skills are praised in Tao Zonggyi, *Shushi Huiyao*, written in the 1360s (Shanghai: Shudian chubanshe, 1984), j. 7, p. 347; he was also conversant with Confucianism, in contact with the most famous literati of his time, and with Khubilai Khan: cf. *Xijin zhi*, pp. 74–5. On Li Puguang cf., among others, Zhongguo fojiao renming da cidian bianji weiyuanhui, *Zhongguo Fojiao Renming da Cidian* (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1999), p. 896; Zhang, Shen and Liu, *Zhongguo Lidai Renming da Cidian*, p. 2423; Wang, *Yuanren Zhuanji Ziliao Suoyin*, pp. 546–7 for a list of sources mentioning him; Herbert Franke, ‘Sha-lo-pa’, p. 218 note 75.

¹¹⁹ These and the following official/honorary titles have been translated according to Farquhar, *The Government of China*, except for Hanlin-related titles, for which the rendition of de Rachewiltz, Chan, Hsiao and Geir, *In the Service of the Khan*, has been followed.

¹²⁰ *Xijin zhi*, p. 85.

¹²¹ cf. Ding-hwa Hsieh, ‘Buddhist nuns in Sung China (960–1279)’, *Journal of Sung-Yüan Studies*, 30, 2000, p. 83.

¹²² *Xijin zhi*, p. 73; the exact location of the monastery cannot now be detected: cf. Yu and Yu, *Jin zhongdu*, pp. 55, 60.

transmission of directives, *zhengfeng dafu* (grantee of the eighth class), drafter of imperial edicts and redactor of the national history,¹²³ who had written inscriptions for such personages as Sangha and Bayan.¹²⁴ On the other hand, Puguang lived in a very favourable moment for the Dhūtaists, as shown by the treatment he received from the Yuan emperors. In 1281 he was conferred the titles of *Yuantong xuanwu*¹²⁵ and *da chan shi*, great Chan master—which Jizhao never had—and patriarch of the Dhūta school. Moreover, he was later appointed *zhongfeng dafu* (grantee of the tenth class) and Grand Academician of the Zhaowen Institute¹²⁶ and—on the practical side—he received eight mu¹²⁷ of land to establish a temple (the Shengyin si), which was then built between 1287 and 1303 thanks to the lavish patronage of several believers, among whom there were wealthy officers like Yao Zhongshi.¹²⁸ All this, again, is proof of the effective diffusion and importance of the movement towards the end of the thirteenth century, a fact probably due both to the charismatic personality and achievements of its more ‘visible’ master, and to the specific historical environment.¹²⁹

The non-mainstream Dhūta sect may have been considered heretical by some of its contemporaries, and in the long run it apparently failed acceptably to compromise with the religious establishment,¹³⁰ but at least for a certain period it was considered and described by relevant external figures in accordance with the pattern used for orthodox religious expressions. This is well shown by Jizhao’s memorial inscription, which in many respects follows both the Yuan ‘genre of Buddhist necrologs’¹³¹ and the typical Chan biographical accounts as found in the flame histories corpus.¹³² Strong historical awareness, genealogical/familial metaphors of ‘inheritance’ and transmission, emphasis on the religious and secular *cursus honorum*,¹³³ stress on the early age of *chu jia*, on the Master’s accomplishments and on significant life episodes are all present in the text, which thus shows the influence of the dominant/orthodox contextual discourse.

Jizhao’s biography is especially interesting as an example of women-related discourse and praxis, particularly in relation to the position and representation of women in Chan.¹³⁴ We shall see how her inscription contains many elements reminiscent of Song Chan female masters’ sacred biographies, such as the importance given to the setting of the will on the dharma and to the lack of interest in worldly pleasures, while at the same time presenting some

¹²³ *Xijin zhi*, p. 76.

¹²⁴ Yan Fu, 1236–1312, prominent scholar and officer, Confucian Dongping graduate, Hanlin academician (then president of the Academy) and poet; cf. *Yuan shi*, j. 160, pp. 3772–4; see also de Rachewiltz, Chan, Hsiao and Geir, *In the Service of the Khan*, pp. 558 and 584.

¹²⁵ A religious title borne by many Buddhist masters; cf. de Rachewiltz, ‘The *Hsi-yu lu*’, p. 84 note 233.

¹²⁶ cf. Farquhar, *The Government of China*, p. 159 note 15.

¹²⁷ i.e. 5548.8 square metres (1 mu = 693.6 sq.m.; cf. Farquhar, *The Government of China*, p. 443).

¹²⁸ 1239–1311, officer (salt, tax office commissioner) and subsequently rich Buddhist patron; cf. Zhang, Shen and Liu, *Zhongguo Lidai Renming da Cidian*, p. 1805. The information about Puguang is drawn from the *Xijin zhi*, pp. 74–5.

¹²⁹ Roughly in the same period, Dao’an obtained official recognition for the White Cloud (1279), which came to have its own registry in Hangzhou’s Puning si, and organized a reprinting of the Buddhist Canon (completed in 1289), supported by private donations, cf. Overmyer, ‘The White Cloud sect’, pp. 634–5. The *Xijin zhi*, p. 75, reports that Puguang sent his disciples to fetch the blocks of that Canon for his Shengyin si in Beijing.

¹³⁰ cf. Barrett, ‘Daoism: a historical narrative’, p. xxv.

¹³¹ Franke, ‘Sha-lo-pa’, p. 207.

¹³² cf. Dale S. Wright, ‘Historical understanding: the Ch’an Buddhist transmission narratives and modern historiography’, *History and Theory*, 31/1, 1992, pp. 37–46.

¹³³ Compare Jan Fontein, ‘The epitaphs of two Chan patriarchs’, *Artibus Asiae*, 53, 1993, p. 102.

¹³⁴ All the following references to her life are from *Xijin zhi*, pp. 85–6.

remarkable differences.¹³⁵ One source, it is evident, is hardly sufficient to infer everything about one person (let alone to penetrate the whole discourse of a movement), especially since the text was not composed by Jizhao herself; it would have been extremely interesting to see how the female master represented herself, that is in feminine, masculine or genderless terms. None the less, the inscription does allow some noteworthy insights into the Dhūta movement as a possible provider of alternative female roles.

Originally from Fengrun, in the sub-prefecture of Ji (Jizhou),¹³⁶ she then moved to the sub-prefecture of Ping (Pingzhou).¹³⁷ Daughter of Yang Yi¹³⁸ and Madame Li, Jizhao—i.e. the name she chose for herself, as her taboo name was Taozhen—was born in 1194 (fifth year of the Mingchang era; the date of her death is unknown). From childhood, the ‘Master’ (*shi* or *chan shi*, but not *da chan shi*)—as she is always called, and we shall see the implications of this—apparently manifested her brilliance, in the sense that her character was precociously accomplished, and she did not show any interest in children’s amusements. When she was only five *sui*, Jizhao became a novice: significantly, the text does not say anything concerning her family’s reaction to her choice. Leaving aside the possibility that the composer did not deem it worthwhile to mention details concerning the Master’s family, one could assume that Jizhao’s father somehow encouraged, or anyway did not oppose, her desire to enter a nunnery. This was not very common behaviour, since—as Levering argues about Song epoch nuns¹³⁹—a minority of women became nuns at an early age, while most had to marry first, thus fulfilling their ‘natural’ duties. At the age of twelve *sui*, Jizhao received full ordination and, by this time, her knowledge seems to have been quite extensive and deep (another typical feature), as she could understand sutras ‘at a stroke’, and—most significantly—she was widely praised as ‘vessel (*qi*) of the Buddha’. Such appellation was a common feature of Chan discourse, where *qi* was understood as the vessel or receptacle of the dharma and also as a sort of instrument, insofar as the patriarchs were receiving, preserving and transmitting the sacred, ‘like ceremonial vessels’.¹⁴⁰

The fact that Jizhao was thus defined is therefore indicative of her standing, i.e. of the esteem others had for her and her achievements, regardless of her gender. On the other hand, her being a woman is mentioned only once, as if irrelevant. There is no hint, here, of the fact that she had great capacities *although* she was a female, like one finds—for instance—in Chan nun and teacher Miaozong’s biography.¹⁴¹ This, it seems to me, gives the ‘Dhūta alternative’ a less gendered and more effectively genderless tone *vis-à-vis* the ‘Chan alternative’, in the sense that the masculine parameter whereby female accomplishments tended to be judged within orthodox Chan discourse tends to be diluted in favour of a slightly more ‘neuter’ standard, be it plainly rhetoric or real.

¹³⁵ cf. Miriam Levering, ‘Women Ch’an masters: the teacher Miao-tung as saint’, in Arvind Sharma (ed.), *Women Saints in World Religions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), p. 188.

¹³⁶ Both in modern Hebei: they were then part of Zhongdu lu (Jin) and Dadu lu (Yuan), that is of the capital region, and were located east of Beijing: Jizhou corresponds to present-day Tianjin’s Ji county, while Fengrun xian—which was under the Ji sub-prefecture—corresponds to present-day Fengrun, in Hebei; cf. Cao, *Beijing Tongshi*, vol. 4 p. 117; and Tan Qixiang (ed.), *Zhongguo Lishi Ditu ji* (Shanghai: Ditu chubanshe, 1980), vol. 6, maps 45–46 and vol. 7, maps 7–8.

¹³⁷ Further eastward from Beijing, corresponding to present-day Lulong, in Hebei; cf. Yao, ‘Buddhism and Taoism’, p. 166, and Tan, *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji*, vol. 6 maps 45–6.

¹³⁸ Concerning whom I have not, unfortunately, found any mention: there are two persons with the same name, but they were born in the thirteenth century.

¹³⁹ cf. Miriam Levering, ‘Dogen’s *Raihaitokuzui* and women teaching in Sung Ch’an’, *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 21/1, 1998, p. 107.

¹⁴⁰ Wright, ‘Historical understanding’, p. 401.

¹⁴¹ cf. Levering, ‘Women Ch’an masters’, p. 196.

The significance of representation being generally fundamental to stimulate either compliance to the proposed model or change/adaptation towards it, it is indeed in a sense irrelevant—theoretically speaking—to detect whether such neutrality/equality was wished for, depicted or real. If practice derived also from stories and accounts¹⁴² that were thus meant to be both descriptive and normative, the narrative of Jizhao's deeds must have been, I believe, a powerful model and a potential influence for other women. Her actions themselves were, of course, also influential, as she could stand as an example to emulate: indeed, it seems that there were, after her, other significant female practitioners.¹⁴³ Moreover, the inscription states that she had several women disciples who came to study with her after 1219, and with whom she apparently had quite a close bond. In general, a relationship seems to have been constituted whereby her pupils did not wish to separate from her, although she had been repeatedly invited to Beijing by important officers who admired her enlightenment. Likewise, all disciples were very attracted to and interested in her exceptional expounding and preaching of the dharma.

Her intellectual and spiritual gifts are in fact described as outstanding, which undoubtedly attracted people's admiration, thus winning for her a prominence not limited to the clerical milieu. From the inscription, it appears indeed that Jizhao gained public recognition of her role as a teacher—far more than a mere nun. Earlier in her life, that is at nineteen, after she had lived for a while in Yi sub-prefecture's (Yizhou, in Liaoning)¹⁴⁴ Mingzhen yuan, her spiritual achievements and enlightenment had in fact been highly praised and renowned well beyond her cloister. Besides highlighting Jizhao's spiritual accomplishments, the text also emphasizes and praises her character. The advance of the Mongol army in 1212, with the ensuing turmoil, are used to strengthen further the image of the Master, portrayed as she flees to the woods and endures great difficulties—being hungry and displaced for years, until 1219 when the region is finally pacified—, without, however, losing courage or determination.

Indeed, firmness of will, determination and resoluteness seem to be among Jizhao's main qualities, while Puguang's description is more focused on his asceticism, tranquillity, knowledge and contacts. To a certain extent, this appears to relate to Chan's 'rhetoric of heroism',¹⁴⁵ whereby female masters were described as *da zhangfu*, namely in heavily (male) gendered terms. Such a term was not used for Jizhao, so that the representation is not so much male-oriented and, as previously stated, tends more towards the genderless: still, the qualities she was praised for were evidently masculine. No particular feature indicated that Jizhao was a woman; her qualities were male-like, but she was not described as a 'quasi-male'. In a way, she was neither woman nor man, but simply a Master or, rather, a Chan Master (*chan shi*). Although Puguang's appellation was higher, since he was a Great Chan Master (*da chan shi*), *chan shi* was a momentous title for a female, as it acknowledged her teaching, preaching and dharma-transmitting capacities. In Southern Song Chan, women were formally granted it within biographies after 1252's *Wudeng Huiyuan*,¹⁴⁶ and it would be interesting to know whether Jizhao was actually

¹⁴² cf. the discussion in Wright, 'Historical understanding', pp. 37–46.

¹⁴³ cf. Zhou and Gu, *Yuan dai shi*, p. 741, and Lian and Wang, 'Jin Yuan shiqi zhi "Kang chan" chu tan', p. 147

¹⁴⁴ In Liaoyang fu; corresponding to present-day Liaoning's Yi county, cf. Fudan daxue lishi dili yanjiusuo, *Zhongguo Lishi Diming Cidian* (Nanchang: Jiangxi jiaoyu chubanshe, 1986), p. 58, and Tan, *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji*, vol. 6, maps 48–49 and 50, vol. 7, maps 7–8.

¹⁴⁵ cf. Levering, 'Lin-chi (Rinzai) Ch'an and gender', pp. 137–56.

¹⁴⁶ cf. Levering, 'Dogen's *Raihaitokuzui* and women teaching', pp. 100–01.

called that in her times (since the inscription was, one supposes, evidently composed well after the 1250s).

Jizhao's accomplishments, representation and standing were thus considerable, but all this was in no way related to her femininity: in a way, she had ceased to be considered as a woman. Her portrait is quite unwomanly because she, indeed, was not a female practitioner but a Master, whose qualities were measured according to a masculine paradigm, but whose definition was not really male-like. Hers was not a case of camouflaging gender or of cross-dressing, that is of a woman behaving like a man or distorting/disguising her femininity, but of transcending gender altogether. Jizhao was *yang* insofar as she was performing a *yang* role, but she was not 'named' in a *yang*-like way, so to speak, although the role she played had been originally conceived for and defined according to *yang*. On the other hand, she could play such a role and be successful in it, in spite of traditional *nei/wai* spatial-functional divisions, because of relatively favourable socio-historical conditions, increased access to/desire to participate in religion, and—last but not least—in virtue of a pre-existing Chan discourse that prefigured acceptable public positions for women.

Interestingly, Dhūtaists were not, so far as I know, criticized for their position *vis-à-vis* female participation. Immoral behaviour was indeed ascribed to them, but not in the sexual sense: Yelü Chucai 'only' accused them, *inter alia*, of destroying images, vilifying the teaching, oppressing monks, ruining religion, exploiting benefactors, failing to help people in need, and corrupting filial piety.¹⁴⁷ This lack of reference to women and the potential disruption brought about by their public role may, in my view, have two possible explanations. Either the Dhūtaists did not feature a significant female presence, which—as the figure and deeds of Jizhao demonstrate—does not correspond to the truth, or mainstream Buddhism (Chan) did not wish to stigmatize that aspect, since it was quite close to Chan femininity discourse itself, which in turn was linked to and meant to substantiate Chan's own rhetoric of equality based on fundamental non-duality.

We thus witness the curious occurrence of an established, orthodox—however volatile that notion may be, in China and within Buddhism¹⁴⁸—form of religion including and relatively valorizing women, having to fight against a partially similar 'heretical' competitor that attempted (successfully) to cater to a similar audience and appropriated its forms of discourse, practice and representation, possibly even risking to compromise some of them (the openness towards women, in particular) by associating them with heresy. That would account, one may speculate, for Chan's harsh reaction. On the other hand, given a deeper knowledge of Dhūta, its initial assumptions and early relationship with Chan, it would be interesting to see who actually influenced whom: namely, whether the heterodox paradigm might have produced any changes in mainstream discourse.

Speculation aside, the description of Master Jizhao's life and accomplishments does seem to point to an existing paradigm of femininity within the Dhūta movement: what anyway remains unclear is the origin of such a discourse. We know that the keepers of the records—who, not surprisingly,

¹⁴⁷ cf. *Zhanran Jushi Wenji*, j. 8, 'Ji Zhao yuanshuai shu'.

¹⁴⁸ cf. Antonino Forte, 'The relativity of the concept of orthodoxy in Chinese Buddhism: Chih-sheng's indictment of Shih-li and the proscription of the Dharma Mirror Sutra', in Robert E. Buswell (ed), *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1990), p. 240.

were male—deemed the figure and charismatic personality of a female master to be sufficiently important to receive the honour of a stele, and we thus deduce that she was an integral part of the Dhūta discourse. At the same time, in reading the inscription one does not feel that Master Jizhao was portrayed for utilitarian reasons, that is to demonstrate that even women could attain a high position within the movement. On the contrary, the lack of strongly gendered wording and the general emphasis on her exceptional persona hint at the possibility that she was described simply because she was worth it. This could imply an underlying egalitarian inclination, going well beyond rhetoric while not giving any special relevance to feminine qualities, and just for this reason being indeed ‘neutral’, tending to (relative) equality.

At the same time, the figure and representation of Master Jizhao as a part of the Dhūta’s feminine, or egalitarian, discourse raise issues relating to the origin and construction of that paradigm. In other words, one wonders whether a ‘female-friendly’ avenue existed prior to the appearance of Jizhao—as could be plausible given the generally wide participation open to women in contemporary movements—or whether it was created/modified/fostered/enhanced by Jizhao herself and her powerful exemplary model, or—finally—whether it originated, in theory or in practice, out of the very representation of the female master.

Conclusion

Moving between facts and representations, some insights have tentatively been provided about the Dhūtaists’ discourse and practice for femininity. The analysis of the concrete case of a female master allows for a more complete view of women, and especially for an appreciation of the effective possibilities open to them as an alternative to the usual family/kinship role. Master Jizhao’s figure is in my view especially interesting insofar as it provides evidence in favour of the argument that the so-called (by the establishment) sectarians usually attributed women a relatively high position and, at the same time, it puts such argument in a more precise and less dichotomic perspective. For it shows how a (momentarily) successful non-mainstream ideology did appropriate much of the dominant discourse and practice, so that also the position of women in it gained relevance not within a framework of absolute resistance (or absolute compliance) to the system, that is not in virtue of a generic ‘alternative’ or ‘revolutionary’ vision of the oppressed/dislocated ones, but according to specific and existing paradigms.

In a way, Master Jizhao enacted ‘the protocols of masculinity’¹⁴⁹ in the sense that she left home and led a public existence, becoming *yang* although being born *yin* and gaining extensive recognition for her own achievements and virtues, irrespective of traditional legitimizing agencies. Credit was, however, given to her first of all by males or, rather, we know of her because men considered her sufficiently important to be recorded and, most significantly, we deem her case to be important because she was respected and admired by prominent males.

Her figure does anyway show the meaning of femininity as a concept, rather than womanhood as a category. In other words, one sees how gender boundaries and description may shift, change or even come close to annulment (Jizhao being portrayed as a sort of genderless entity) depending on the role

¹⁴⁹ Angela Zito and Tani Barlow (eds), *Body, Subject and Power in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 10.

played by a single person in specific circumstances without necessarily entailing a redefinition of gender roles or an improvement in the position of women. Thanks to a favourable historical environment, where ideological creativity and increased options emerged from the combination of alien cultures' influence and indigenous premises, and in virtue of enlarged access to religious participation, Jizhao's charismatic personality could attain a significant position within a religious community. Likewise, twelfth- and thirteenth-century Song China saw the appearance of several Chan female masters. Nonetheless, Jizhao's attainments—or those of Song Chan female masters, for that matter—did not result in any significant change of general gender prescriptions, neither do they seem to have led to any improved evaluation of womanly qualities. Rather, if there was a change, it proved in the long run to be not at all in favour of women: gender content and general definitions of masculinity and femininity did evolve, but in a fairly restrictive sense.¹⁵⁰

Social change, that is a possible female secular elevation entailed by religious influences, was thus absent, and the *status quo* was not challenged. Jizhao's achievements, although included in quite an egalitarian framework and described in 'genderless' terms, were not accomplished as a woman, but as a Master who happened to be a woman.

¹⁵⁰ As demonstrated by Birge, *Women, Property and Confucian Reaction*.