



**Between The Mundane and Super-Mundane:  
Master Yongjue Yuanxian and the Revival of  
Chinese Buddhism in 17th Century Fujian Area**

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BETWEEN THE MUNDANE AND SUPER-MUNDANE: MASTER YONGJUE  
YUANXIAN AND THE REVIVAL OF CHINESE BUDDHISM IN 17TH CENTURY  
FUJIAN AREA

by

Shyling Glaze

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## List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used for sources in the footnotes and dissertation:

J            *Jiaxing da zang jing*

T            *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*

X            *Shinsan dai Nihon Zokuzōkyō*

*Guanglu*    *Yongjue Yuanxian chanshi guanglu*

*Xingye quji* *Fuzhou Gushan Baiyun feng Yongquan chanshi Yongjue xiangong daheshang singye quji*

## Abstract

Yongjue Yuanxian (1578-1657) was a Confucian scholar, an eminent 17th-century Buddhist Master, and a prolific writer who re-established the reputation of the Caodong Buddhism. This study investigates Yuanxian's life and his works: the *Shou ta ming* (*Inscription of the Longevity Stupa*), the *Yiyan* (*Nonsense Uttered in Dreams*), the *Jie ni nü* (*To Refrain from Drowning Female Infants*), and the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* (*Record of Propagating Buddhism in Jianzhou*).

This research unfolds Yuanxian's Confucian and Buddhist backgrounds as well as his impact through his writings on both the mundane and super-mundane worlds. The *Shou ta ming* gives us clues regarding Yuanxian's natural inclination and life. The study of *Yiyan* investigates Yuanxian's philosophy, his position towards the harmonizing the Three Teachings, and his approach towards the challenges of 17th-century Chan Buddhism. The *Jie ni nü* provides us with Yuanxian's engagement in Fujian society, the social phenomena among the commoners, and their unconventional Buddhist concepts. His *Jianzhou hongshi lu* reveals eminent local Chan and Confucian masters, how the Chan teachings enhanced the Confucian scholars' demeanor, and the influence of the Chan masters of the Jianzhou area that extended well beyond that local region.

Yuanxian devoted his literary talents as a reviver and fearless defender to uphold the supremacy of Buddhism. He vigorously pointed out the deficiencies of Confucianism and Daoism and expressed distinctive insight towards the popular trend of the Three Teachings syncretism. His life manifested the ideal of actualizing the functions of the super-mundane world while engaging simultaneously in society.



## Chapter One Introduction

This dissertation is about the 17th-century Buddhist master, Yongjue Yuanxian 永覺元賢 (1578-1657). Yuanxian was a well-revered Buddhist master and a prolific writer who actively reestablished Caodong Chan Buddhism in 17th-century China. The 17th-century was a unique and important period in Chinese political, financial, intellectual, and especially religious history. It involved a period of the Ming-Qing transition during which many people, including religious clergy, migrated out of China and spread their influence outside of China. Wang Yangming's 王陽明 (1472-1529) teachings of the School of Mind and his later generations caused many ripples in both intellectual and religious societies. On the other hand, Christian missionaries were also able to truly make footholds in China. Meanwhile, many literati sought refuge in Buddhist monasteries to escape serving the Qing court. International trade also improved the Chinese economy and the people's lives during this period.

The 17th-century of the Fujian area, Buddhism suffered declining when compared with the Tang and Song dynasties. The intrusions of Japanese pirates since the Ming Jiajing reign (1522-1566) and the conflicts of the Ming-Qing transition all had an impact on the so-called "Buddhist kingdom" of Fujian.<sup>1</sup> Many Buddhist monasteries had been destroyed especially along the coastal area and the monastic economy also suffered severely. However, after the suppression of pirates and the defeat of the Southern Ming, there were rebuilding activities. Nevertheless, the Fujian area was important to our study because Yuanxian was born and raised in the Fujian area. The later years of Yuanxian's life also correlated with the period when the

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<sup>1</sup> See more information from Jiang Wu's *Leaving for the Rising Sun: Chinese Zen Master Yinyuan & the Authenticity Crisis in Early Modern East Asia* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 55-59.

Buddhism in Fujian endured the difficult time, Yuanxian therefore, is critical to the studies of the 17th-century Buddhism in China.

Yuanxian's personal life demonstrates the intricate intertwined relationship between Buddhism and Confucianism and also reflects the trends in the religious and intellectual communities of his time. In the big picture, the occurrences of the Ming dynastic history had considerable influence on Yuanxian or, in other words, Yuanxian's life echoes the happenings of the Ming society. Yuanxian's works, the *Yiyan* 寤言 (*Nonsense Uttered in Dreams*), the *Shou ta ming* 壽塔銘 (*Inscription of the Longevity Stupa*), the *Jie ni nü* 戒溺女 (*To Refrain from Drowning Female Infants*) and the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* 建州弘釋錄 (*Record of Propagating Buddhism in Jianzhou*),<sup>2</sup> all illustrate to us the challenging status of Buddhism in Ming society, Yuanxian's interaction with lay society and how he defended the supremacy of Chan Buddhism. By virtue of Yuanxian's numerous works, we can obtain valuable information and discern a more accurate picture of late Ming Chan Buddhism and Fujian society. His ample writings had great influence on not only his own generation but also on later generations of Buddhist cultivators as well.

As an eminent Buddhist master, Yuanxian had great impacts on both the super-mundane religious landscape and mundane world. For this dissertation, the attributes of Yuanxian's super-mundane phenomena are his compositions and teachings that are related to his religious philosophy, thoughts and concepts. In the religious world, Yuanxian applied his literary talents and well-learned Buddhist and Confucian knowledge to unremittingly uphold and promote Buddhism. In the *Yiyan*, Yuanxian vigorously points out the weaknesses of other traditions and expounds on why Buddhism should be sustained. Yuanxian also had penetrating insight

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<sup>2</sup> I will further introduce Yuanxian's works in later sections of this chapter.

regarding the popular trend to synthesize the Three Teachings<sup>3</sup> during his era which made him stand out amongst some of the contemporary Buddhist masters. He also did not want the inspiring examples of the eminent Buddhist masters from his home town of Jianzhou to have all been in vain and therefore, compiled a Buddhist record, the *Jianzhou hongshi lu*. The *Jianzhou hongshi lu* not only furnishes people with good exemplars, but also reveals how Chan cultivation served to assist Confucians. Through his numerous writings, I see Yuanxian as an unyielding reviver and defender of Buddhism. He had aspirations of restoring Buddhism back to its authentic teachings and glory days. He firmly upheld the standards of dharma transmission to revive the caliber of the Buddhist clergy. Yuanxian's composition and actions produced a significant impact on the super-mundane religious world.

Additionally, Yuanxian's efforts related to the mundane world were the differences that he achieved as being a Buddhist master and abbot. Yuanxian closely associated himself with lay Buddhists and condemned by means of his writings the merciless practice of female infanticide, providing much-needed teachings to the people and society. Later in his life, as abbot of leading Buddhist monastery, Yuanxian selflessly provided humanitarian aid to the sufferings of war time refugees. He transformed the Mahayana Buddhist teaching of compassion into reality for the miserable people and had an influential impact on mundane society. Yuanxian demonstrated the ideal of engaging in both the super-mundane and mundane worlds simultaneously for the well-being of the people.

There are a few compositions from Yuanxian's disciples that describe him, such as *Fuzhou Gushan Baiyun feng Yongquan chansi Yongjue xiangong daheshang xingye quji* 福州鼓山白雲峯湧泉禪寺永覺賢公大和尚行業曲記 (*A Record of the Honorable Great Monk*

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<sup>3</sup> The Three Teachings are Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism. During the Ming period, the idea of syncretizing these three different teachings was a popular trend.

*Yongjue Xian's Religious Practice and Sayings at the Yongquan Chan Monastery on the White Cloud Summit of Gushan in Fuzhou*)<sup>4</sup> and *Gushan Yongjue laoren zhuan* 鼓山永覺老人傳 (*The Biography of Yongjue Old Man in Gushan*) however, one eulogy stands out for its precise accuracy. This eulogy was composed by one of the scholarly disciples of Yuanxian and was compiled into the beginning of Fascicle One of the *Yongjue Yuanxian chanshi guanglu* 永覺元賢禪師廣錄 (*Extensive Record of Yongjue Yuanxian Chan Master*),<sup>5</sup> by Weilin Daopei 為霖道霈 (1615-1702), the only dharma heir of Yuanxian. The significance of this eulogy is that not only was it composed by a *jinshi* degree high court official of the late Ming period, Zheng Xuan 鄭暄, but is also one of the most accurate and concise portrayals of the Caodong Buddhist master, Yongjue Yuanxian:

This old monk is the descendant of the Chan master Shouchang. He is as dull as an ugly rock and as firm as hard iron. He greatly spreads the essence of the Caodong Dharma teachings and is able to carry on the wonderful virtues of his predecessors. He follows in the footsteps from distant times of having a route to connect to heaven and directly goes back to the authentic teachings. One fly whisk sweeps away a hundred eras of delusions. A seven-foot rattan staff points out a thousand mountains<sup>6</sup> and bright moon.<sup>7</sup> He transforms the *Chan*, *Jiao* and *Vinaya* into one family and gathers Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism into the same destination as a drop of snow falling [on a red-hot stove] (i.e., emptiness).<sup>8</sup> In five hundred years of history, we have only this one person [who

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<sup>4</sup> Hereafter will be briefed as *Xingye quji*.

<sup>5</sup> Hereafter will be briefed as *Guanglu*.

<sup>6</sup> Chan Buddhism always has a close relationship with mountains. Many Chan monasteries are located on famous mountains. During the Southern Song period, there was a network of state-sponsored Chan Buddhist temples called Five Mountain System, and the term "mountain" means temple or monastery.

<sup>7</sup> The moon in Chan Buddhism has a substantial meaning. Chan artists usually use the moon to convey the profound teachings of Chan, such as the picture of "a finger pointing to the moon" to mean that the language used to describe the ultimate Buddha nature is like a finger pointing to the moon. Artists also draw a big full circle as a symbol of Zen, meaning perfection and enlightenment. The inside of this big full circle is empty, which also represent the Chan teaching of emptiness.

<sup>8</sup> The Chinese phrase that Zheng Xuan used is *dian xue* 點雪 which derive from *hong lu shang yi dian xue* 紅爐上一點雪. According to the *Zengo jiten* 禪語辭典 the meaning of *hong lu shang yi dian xue* implies something very insignificant that leave no traces just like a drop of snow falls on a red-hot stove which would melt in no time and leave no traces at all. See fascicle 14 of the *Transmission of the Lamp*. It is an impermanent phenomenon to imply nonexistence and emptiness. Hidehiko Koga, *Zengo jiten* (Kyōto: Shibunkaku Shuppan, 1991), 135.

can do this]. Don't recklessly give your conclusion whether he is a sage or an ordinary person.<sup>9</sup>

Zheng Xuan uses iron and rock to precisely imply Yuanxian's characteristics. Yuanxian demonstrated his uncompromising stand to often uphold Chan Buddhism and to select his dharma heir. After a total of 41 years of being an ordained monk, Yuanxian bestowed his dharma seal to only one prominent disciple, demonstrating his intention to defend the caliber and authenticity of Caodong Chan Buddhism. This eulogy also explicitly points out that Yuanxian's teachings and cultivation followed those of his predecessors, illustrating his orthodox Caodong Chan discipline. The fly whisk in the Chan religious world is a sign of a master's teaching authority and his ability to transmit the dharma.<sup>10</sup> In this eulogy, the fly whisk symbolizes Yuanxian's dharma teachings and wisdom which had swept away the cultivators' ignorance and afflictions. The staff is also a Chan master's implement which had practical and iconic functions to assist a Chan master in daily life or to strike disciples to enlightenment. The staff represents the spiritual authenticity and institutional authority of a Chan master.<sup>11</sup> Zheng Xuan uses a rattan staff to indicate that the authentic teachings of Yuanxian identified various methods and revealed the sources of wisdom to expose to people the way of enlightenment. The two dharma implements, the fly whisk and rattan staff, symbolize Yuanxian's position of authority in Chan Buddhism, as well as his enlightenment.

Emptiness or *śūnyatā* in Sanskrit is a crucial teaching in Chan Buddhism. Buddhists believe that everything is in constant motion and change; all existences are illusions and do not have permanent entities. In this eulogy, Zheng Xuan uses the phrase, "a drop of snow falls on a

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<sup>9</sup> X72.0384b17. Yuanxian's works and other Chinese materials are my own translations, unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>10</sup> Helen J. Baroni, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Zen Buddhism* (New York, NY: the Rosen Publishing Group, 2002), 139.

<sup>11</sup> Pamela Winfield and Steven Heine, *Zen and Material Culture* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1-5.

red-hot stove," to indicate how easily phenomena can vanish in no time to imply the transitional nature of all things. This phrase is a perfect allusion to mean *śūnyatā*. Yuanxian guided the teachings of Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism all toward the teaching of emptiness, one of the essential teachings of Mahayana Buddhism.

As mentioned in this eulogy, Yuanxian was the descendant and dharma heir of the Shouchang Chan master, Wuming Huijing 無明慧經 (1548-1618) and the dharma brother of Wuyi Yuanlai 無異元來 (1575-1630). Furthermore, his cultivation and thinking were also greatly inspired by Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲祿宏 (1535-1615) through Wengu Guangyin 聞谷廣印 (1566-1636).<sup>12</sup> During the late Ming period, most of the Chan schools had disappeared. Only the Linji and Caodong Schools had survived with the Caodong Chan School being divided into two important sub-lineages; the Shaoshi 少室 and Shouchang 壽昌. In the Shouchang sub-lineage, only Wuyi Yuanlai, Yongjue Yuanxian and Dongyuan Yuanjing 東苑元鏡 (1577-1630) became prominent Chan masters who actively propagated the dharma of Caodong Chan. Scholars have praised Yuanxian as the last successful Caodong Chan master,<sup>13</sup> crediting him as the vital Chan master who led the Caodong Shouchang sub-lineage teachings to Fujian, from where his later generations were able to spread his teachings throughout Southeast Asia and Taiwan.<sup>14</sup> Yuanxian was also recognized for rebuilding Gushan Yongquan monastery and, due to his teaching of

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<sup>12</sup> Jialing Fan, *Mingmo caodong dianjun--Yongjue yuanxian chanshi yanjiu* 明末曹洞殿軍: 永覺元賢禪師研究 (Taipei: Hua mu lan wen hua, 2009), 1-5.

<sup>13</sup> See Kaiten Nukariya's *Zengaku shisōshi* 禪學思想史 (Tōkyō: Genkōsha, 1923), 737, where Nukariya considers Yongjue Yuanxian the last successful and eminent Chan master among Chan masters of the Ming period. See also the title of Jialing Fan's *Mingmo caodong dianjun--Yongjue yuanxian chanshi yanjiu* 明末曹洞殿軍: 永覺元賢禪師研究 (Taipei: Hua mu lan wen hua, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Hsuan-Li Wang, "Gushan: the Formation of a Chan Lineage During the Seventeenth Century and Its Spread to Taiwan" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2014), 26.

Gushan Chan, was also a great influence in many present day Asian countries.<sup>15</sup> Many scholars also recognize Yuanxian as an erudite and prolific writer.

It is inspiring to scrutinize Yuanxian's various works and thoroughly investigate his background, philosophical thinking and his aspirations as a Buddhist master during the upheaval of 17th-century China. It is important at the same time to acknowledge his impacts on not only the super-mundane religious arena but also on mundane world. There have not been many studies previously regarding Yongjue Yuanxian, especially in the Western languages. I believe the eminent Buddhist master, Yuanxian, deserves our attention and thorough investigation.

Before beginning our investigation of Yuanxian, a historical background of the 17th-century of Chan Buddhism in China and Fujian will help shed some light on the importance of this study.

### **Buddhism of 17th-Century China**

Chan Buddhism is one of the major traditions of Mahayana Buddhism in East Asia. The history of Chinese Chan Buddhism began with the arrival of the legendary Bodhidharma from India around the 5th century and is generally recognized as the first Chan Patriarch in the Chinese Chan lineage. The "golden age" of Chan Buddhism occurred afterwards during the Tang dynasty (618-907). Huineng 惠能 (638-713), a Chan monk in the Tang dynasty, is considered to be the 6th Patriarch of the Chinese Chan tradition despite his illiteracy.<sup>16</sup> From Huineng, the Chan lineage extended and later developed into the Five Houses of Chan during the Song period

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<sup>15</sup> Huachuan Ji, *Ming Qing Gushan Caodong zong wenxian yanjiu* ( *the Literature Study on Gushan Caodong Sect in Ming and Qing Dynasties*) (Beijing: shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> Huineng's teachings and stories were recorded in *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*. There were several controversies regarding the true authorship of the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*. Hu Shi argues in his articles, the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* is the creation of Shenhui or the Southern School. Most recent scholar, Morten Schlütter remarks that we will probably never be able to know for certain the origin and development of the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*. Please see *Liuzu tanjing yanjiu lunji* 六祖壇經研究論集 edited by Zhang, Mantao, published by Dasheng wenhua chubanshe. Schlütter's article, "Transmission and Enlightenment in Chan Buddhism Seen Through the *Platform Sutra*" in the *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal*, no. 20, p. 319-410 (2007).

(960-1279). The Song period of Chan is also regarded by John McRae in terms of a "climax paradigm."<sup>17</sup> It was a remarkable period for Chan literature, during which the "Transmission of the Lamp Records" 傳燈錄, "Recorded Sayings" 語錄, and "Gong'an (J. Kōan)" 公案 genres prevailed within the Chan intellectual communities. After the Song dynasty, the succeeding Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) upheld Tibetan Buddhism and made esoteric Buddhism an official religion of China. The fifth Emperor of the Yuan dynasty, Yingzong (1320-1323), was a devotee to both Lama Buddhism and Confucianism. He once even considered using religion as a means to rule his empire. He ordered temples to be built in every prefecture to honor a Tibetan lama.<sup>18</sup> During the Kubilai Khan era (1215-1294), a famous debate between Buddhist monks and Daoist priests happened in the year of 1258. The Buddhism was able to gain dominance; however, the Yuan court continued to patronage all three different teachings.<sup>19</sup> During this era, the Chinese had to rationalize and explain the reasons for the existence of three religious contestants<sup>20</sup> in society to the Mongol emperors, giving rise to the expressional phrase "*san jiao he yi*" 三教合一 meaning the unity of the Three Teachings.<sup>21</sup>

The founder of the Ming dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328-1398), was at one point a novice in a Buddhist monastery and later joined the Red Turban Army which was related to the rebel force of the White Lotus Society. After Zhu Yuanzhang ascended the throne, he issued decrees to ban the White Lotus Society and to intentionally regulate the Buddhist community.

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<sup>17</sup> John R. McRae, *Seeing Through Zen* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2003), 119.

<sup>18</sup> Ch'i-ch'ing Hsiao, "Mid-Yuan Politics" in *The Cambridge history of China v. 6*, edited by Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 532.

<sup>19</sup> Natasha Heller, *Illusory Abiding: the Cultural Construction of the Chan Monk Zhongfeng Mingben*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 11.

<sup>20</sup> They are Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism. In Chinese religious history, the Three Teachings were often competing with each other.

<sup>21</sup> Timothy Brook, *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China* (Cambridge, Mass: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University and Harvard-Yenching Institute : Distributed by Harvard University Press, 1993), 68.



Zhu Yuanzhang dealt with Buddhism favorably but later, governed it with rigorous rules. As described by Timothy Brook, the Ming founder before 1380 sponsored the reconstruction of run-down monasteries, bestowed tax-exempt land to Buddhist temples, employed monks as advisers and asked the clergy to conduct plenary masses for the souls of war casualties.<sup>22</sup> Buddhism was a great asset to the Ming founder prior to 1380, but Zhu Yuanzhang realized afterwards that Buddhism could become a threat to court authority. He ordered the Ministry of Rites to supervise the affairs of Buddhist clergies and monasteries and reorganized Buddhists into three categories; *Chan* 禪, *Jiang* 講 and *Jiao* 教. The court required "*Chan*" monks to "see their true nature without establishing words;" the "*Jiang*" monks to "illuminate the meaning of all scriptures;" and the "*Jiao*" monks through the performance of Buddhist rituals to "eliminate all karma created by human beings."<sup>23</sup> This new way of regulating the different schools of Buddhism was a change from the previous Buddhist categories of *Chan*, *Jiang* and *Lü* 律 which had been carried out since the Song period. In 1391, Zhu Yuanzhang imposed the Hundred-Day Edict, an amalgamation order on Buddhist monasteries. The order demanded the smaller monasteries to close their residences and transfer their property to a limited number of larger institutions called *conglin* 叢林 or abbeys. These abbeys would receive a name plaque from the emperor as an official legal document. The order of amalgamation was another means of controlling and supervising the Buddhist communities under state rule. In addition, Zhu Yuanzhang issued the edict of seclusion to isolate Buddhist monks from gentry, officials, or commoners. Buddhism by then was not considered to be an asset to assist the government in the guidance and education of

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<sup>22</sup> Timothy Brook, "At the Margin of Public Authority: The Ming State and Buddhism" in *Culture & State in Chinese History: Conventions, Accommodations, and Critiques* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 164.

<sup>23</sup> Jiang Wu, *Enlightenment in Dispute: The Reinvention of Chan Buddhism in Seventeenth-Century China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 22-23. Also see T49.0932a07.

the people but rather was becoming an opponent to imperial authority. Ironically, most of the legislation made by the Ming founder fell by the wayside and was left defunct by his heirs.<sup>24</sup>

After Zhu Yuanzhong, the Yongle emperor (r. 1402-1424) issued a decree in 1418, imposing a cap on the number of novices per prefecture (40), sub-prefecture (30) and county (20). This regulation also required novices to be trained for five years before applying for ordination.<sup>25</sup> This quota system was quickly ignored. Another restriction issued after the Ming founder was the limitation of how many landholdings a monastery could have, but, this restriction was disorderly and also short lived. In an essay, the Emperor Yongle expressed approvingly to commend Buddhism's ability to encourage the people to do good deeds. But, on another occasion, he refused to grant amnesty to honor the display of a Buddhist relic. The Emperor Chenghua (r. 1464-1487) favored Buddhism, but Emperors Tianshun (r. 1435-1449) and Hongzhi (r. 1487-1505) did not support Buddhism.<sup>26</sup> During the following centuries, tensions and disputes occurred between the state and Buddhist communities.<sup>27</sup> The Buddhist communities declined and were not able to be revived until the late Ming period when the Emperor Wanli 萬曆 (1573-1620) and his mother, the Empress dowager Cisheng 慈聖, enthusiastically patronized Buddhist masters and communities.

The rise of powerful patrons in the gentry class in the late Ming period also contributed financially and intellectually to the revitalization of Buddhist institutions. The late Ming period was a time of extensive changes in social and economic life due to the commercialization of the Ming economy. The impact of silver imports from Europeans and large scale circulation of

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<sup>24</sup> Brook, "At the Margin of Public Authority: The Ming State and Buddhism" in *Culture & State in Chinese History: Conventions, Accommodations, and Critiques*, 165-169.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>27</sup> For example, the incident of 1566, the pagoda of the Baoen Monastery caught fire and its abbot and 18 other monks were thrown in prison. In 1573, the state issued a ban on mass Buddhist ordinations.

commodities contributed tremendous wealth to the upper stratum of wealthy gentry, landlords and merchants. Wealthy families were able to advance more and improve access to education for their heirs in order to pursue careers as scholar-officials from which a powerful gentry class emerged. These gentry demonstrated political leadership in local regions by virtue of their official posts or through their patronage of Buddhist monasteries. Buddhist communities became an arena for gentry to exhibit their talents, accommodate religious needs, establish leadership, fulfill public service obligations and to serve also as a place of escape from worldly affairs.<sup>28</sup> Timothy Brook remarks that "The gentry dominated the economic and social processes of the locality, doing so to a considerable degree independently of magisterial supervision. And they had a public presence and voice."<sup>29</sup> These phenomena also facilitated the formation of a large lay Buddhist community during the late Ming period.

One of the signs of Chan Buddhism's revitalization began with the increased activities in the production of Chan literature. The rise of Chan literature was due to literati followers who were fond of exegetic studies of traditional Huayan, Yogācāra and Tiantai Buddhist texts.<sup>30</sup> Since the Song period, there had been many scholastic studies of the *Shou Lengyan jing* 首楞嚴經 (*Sūramgama Sūtra*). The exegetical study of this sutra generated considerable enthusiasm among literati followers and scholarly monks in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Beijing became the center of Buddhist doctrinal studies and then spread out from there to other areas during the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>31</sup> Thus, Buddhist scholasticism had enormous influence on the revitalization of Chan Buddhism during the late Ming period.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Brook, *Praying for Power*, 1-34.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>30</sup> Wu, *Enlightenment in Dispute*, 25.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-27.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-82.

The middle of the 17th-century in China was a period of transformation and a time of turmoil due to the crisis of the Ming-Qing transition. It was also a period of robust development for Chan Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism. Before the arrival of the turbulent era of the 17th century, the famous Neo-Confucian scholar, Wang Yangming, promoted the study of "mind" which helped unify Chan Buddhism with Neo-Confucianism. Through his disciples, Wang's teaching of "innate knowledge" (*liang zhi* 良知) accelerated the trend of bridging the gap between Buddhism and Confucianism. This trend not only developed into the idea of merging Buddhism with Neo-Confucianism into one syncretic philosophical system but also promoted the syncretism of all the Three Teachings. The Ming-Qing transitional period advanced the tendency of interrelating Buddhism and Confucianism even further. During the fall of the Ming dynasty, many Confucian Ming loyalists chose to hide inside of or join in Chan Buddhist monasteries rather than sacrifice their lives or serve the Qing dynasty.<sup>33</sup> This phenomenon in Chinese Chan history was referred to as "Escaping Chan" (*tao chan* 逃禪). The influx of Confucian Ming loyalist refugees generated resurgence for 17th century Chan Buddhism. The influence of Wang's "School of Mind" also provoked an intellectual current of "Mad Chan" (*kuang chan* 狂禪) which also troubled some of the orthodox members of the 17th-century Chinese intellectual and Chan Buddhist communities.

The prevalence of Chan Buddhism in the late Ming period was also marked by controversies within the Chan communities, such as the debate between Miyun Yuanwu 密雲圓悟 (1566-1642) and his dharma heir Hanyue Fazang 漢月法藏 (1573-1635), as well as the lawsuit over the dispute of dharma transmission lineage in the *Wudeng yantong* 五燈嚴統.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Wu, *Enlightenment in Dispute*, 47-82.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

Lineage became a crucial concern for some Chan cultivators. Yūkei Hasebe comments that the early and middle periods of the Ming dynasty were periods in which the concept of differentiating Buddhist lineages in China was not as strong as the sectarian differentiation of Japan.<sup>35</sup> However, during the late Ming period this situation changed. The last two decades of the Ming dynasty, authentic dharma transmission was stressed more and more.<sup>36</sup> By the end of the Ming dynasty, legislations over Buddhism diminished and court control over Buddhism became relatively weak. The Chan schools actively defined their own lineages and frequently compiled their own "Transmission of the Lamp" records. The Linji and Caodong Chan schools were particularly active. Fortunately, the dynastic change from Ming to Qing did not disrupt the development of Chan Buddhism; the Chan communities continuously thrived until 1733. At this point, the Qing emperor, Yongzheng, published his *Jianmo bianyi lu* 揀魔辨異錄 to interfere in the controversy between Miyun and Hanyue and ruled in favor of Miyun. Afterwards, Chan Buddhism began to lose its previous strength but yet continued to receive patronage from the Manchu court.<sup>37</sup>

Scholars have two very different perceptions regarding Chan Buddhism of the late Ming period in China. Some believe that it was a period of decline for Chinese Buddhism; in general, after the apogee of the Tang period, Buddhism was in a state of decline due to the absence of newly translated sutras or formulated doctrines and the quality of the *Sangha* also suffered a downturn.<sup>38</sup> However, some scholars<sup>39</sup> believe the late Ming period was a period of renewal

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<sup>35</sup> Yūkei Hasebe, *Min Shin Bukkyō kyōdanshi kenkyū* 明清佛教教團史研究 (Kyōto: Dōhōsha Shuppan, 1993), 251-252.

<sup>36</sup> Wu, *Enlightenment in Dispute*, 106.

<sup>37</sup> Wu, *Enlightenment in Dispute*, 7 and 106.

<sup>38</sup> Chun-fang Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China: Chu-hung and the Late Ming Synthesis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 4.

<sup>39</sup> See Jiang Wu's *Enlightenment in Dispute* and Chun-fang Yü's "Ming Buddhism" in *The Cambridge history of China*. Vol. 8.

because of the rise of Buddhist scholasticism and the emergence of four eminent monks, Yunqi Zhuhong, Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (1546-1623), Zibo Zhenke 紫柏真可 (1543-1603) and Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 (1599-1655). These four monks energized the Buddhist communities with the dual cultivation of Chan and Pure Land teachings, the ideal of harmonizing the Three Teachings, and the formation of an active community of lay Buddhists.

It was also during the Ming period that the Western sciences and Christianity made noticeable inroads into Chinese society. The gospel of Persian Nestorian Christians 景教 had reached China around 635. However, the Nestorians did not gain noteworthy influence in China at the time but instead gradually declined after 845 due to the persecution of Buddhism along with other "foreign religions" which included the Nestorian Christians.<sup>40</sup> However, Nestorian Christianity made a comeback later during the Yuan period since the mother of the founder of the Yuan dynasty, Sorkaktani-beki, was a Christian.<sup>41</sup> During the Yuan period, Marco Polo and Italian merchants, as well as Roman Catholic Christians, came to China through the Silk Road. Thereafter, there was direct competition between the Catholics and Nestorian Christians.<sup>42</sup> However, both Christian denominations did not have any remarkable influence at that time over the majority of Han Chinese or their institutions. Christianity did not become a permanent feature in the Chinese religious landscape or achieve any considerable influence. It was not until the 16th century, a well known Italian missionary, Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), arrived that Christianity achieved any substantial influence. The successes of Ricci and many other Jesuits in China were due mainly to the quality of their education, especially because they placed emphasis on science and technology and displayed consideration and tolerance for the cultural differences

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<sup>40</sup> Daniel H. Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012) 7-11.

<sup>41</sup> Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China*, 12.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

between their Christian teachings and Chinese traditions.<sup>43</sup> In 1644, when the dynasty changed, the Jesuit missionary Adam Schall von Bell immediately presented the Qing emperor with the skills the Jesuits had in astronomy and other areas of science and technology. However, from 1665 to 1671 many missionaries were exiled to Guangzhou or Macau due to the prevalent xenophobic sentiment of the time. Despite this, it was recorded in 1700 that China still had many Jesuits working in various functions for the Qing court.<sup>44</sup>

17th-century China was a period full of upheaval and excitement and during this era Chan Buddhism was filled as well with intrigues and pivotal events. The impact of 17th-century Chinese Chan Buddhism yielded great consequences in general to the Chan Buddhism of the East and Southeast Asia regions during the later centuries. From China, Chan Buddhist teachings enriched the religious life of Korea, Japan and many other Southeast Asian countries. The Caodong and Linji Chan schools all had significant influence on Taiwan's Chan Buddhism through many of their eminent Chan masters. This was particularly crucial for the successive dharma transmission and propagation in the 19th century. As a Buddhist master of 17th century China, Yuanxian had a critical position in the history of Chan Buddhism since his later dharma generations were able to propagate Chan Buddhism throughout many of the Southeast Asian countries and Taiwan.

### **Buddhism and the Fujian Area**

Yuanxian originated from Jianyang, the northern part of the Fujian area. The Buddhist monasteries that he had affiliation with as an abbot were also mostly in Fujian. Buddhism in Fujian became significant after the year of 909 when Wang Shenzhi 王審知 was made the king

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<sup>43</sup> See Nicolas Standaert, *Handbook of Christianity in China*, ed. Vol. 1:635-1800 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 310-311.

<sup>44</sup> Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China*, 22-23.

of Min.<sup>45</sup> Wang Shenzhi invited monk Shen Yan 神晏 to become the abbot of the Gushan Yongquan monastery in 908. Under Wang's support, Buddhism in the Fujian area flourished. The *Song shi* 宋史 (*The History of Song*) describes, "The custom of Fujian valued the worship and belief in spirits and thought highly of the teachings of the Buddha; these practices were similar to the Jiangnan and Zhejiang areas. However, the people of Fujian liked to study, loved to read books out loud and were fond of composing literary works; therefore, many passed the imperial civil examination."<sup>46</sup> This statement indicates that people in Fujian were serious devotees of Buddhism and their religious and cultural cultivations matched the highly sophisticated cities of the Jiangnan area despite the spreading of Buddhism to Fujian was later than other areas.

Rongguo Wang believes that the entry of Buddhism into the Fujian area occurred sometime between the end of the Eastern Han (25-220) and the Eastern Wu (222-280) periods.<sup>47</sup> The initial Buddhist temple building in Fujian area was around the year of 280 during the Western Jin dynasty. At the time of Emperor Wu of Liang in the Southern dynasties (420-589), the number of Buddhist monasteries in the Fujian area grew despite the rebellion of Hou Jing. When the Sui unified China, most of Buddhist temples were intact, due to Fujian is mostly mountainous and the duration of war in the area was short.<sup>48</sup> By the time of Tang (618-907), the development of Buddhism was unprecedented, a total of 547 Buddhist monasteries were built. Even the great anti-Buddhist persecution of Huichang period (841-846) did not cause too much of damages to monasteries in the Fujian area due to the fact that the local officials did not carry

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<sup>45</sup> Wang, *Hongzhi bamin tongzhi*, fascicle 1. The alternative name of Fujian is Min 閩.

<sup>46</sup> *Song shi* 宋史 fascicle 89.

<sup>47</sup> Rongguo Wang 王榮國, *Fujian fojiao shi* 福建佛教史 (Xiamen: Xiamen daxue chuban she, 1997), 4.

<sup>48</sup> Zhiping Chen 陳支平, *Fujian zongjiao shi* 福建宗教史 (Fuzhou: Fujian jiao yu chuban she, 1996), 135.



out the order enthusiastically.<sup>49</sup> During the political upheaval period of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms, the rulers over the Fujian area, especially the Kingdom of Min (919-945), all valued Buddhism and made Fujian the most active area for Buddhism. The number of Buddhist monasteries built had reached a pinnacle during the Song period (960-1279), a total of 1180.<sup>50</sup> In the Yuan period (1271-1368), the court supported Buddhism but, the number of Buddhist monasteries built was a lot less than the Song period, it was about 381.<sup>51</sup> By the time of Ming and Qing dynasties, the number of monasteries built was even less than the Yuan period. During the early Qing period, Fujian was the base for the Ming loyalists to resist the Qing's ruling and therefore, battles occurred frequently. The numbers of Buddhist monasteries were built indicate the fluctuation of the Buddhist development in Fujian. From this viewpoint, it shows a declining condition for the Ming Buddhism in Fujian.

Mianshan He believes that the development of Buddhism in Fujian area historically suffered less damage than the overall condition of Buddhism in China, despite Buddhism in the Fujian area being affected by some serious incidents: the conflict of wars at the end of Yuan dynasty, the intrusions and disturbances of Japanese pirates during the Jiajing reign of the Ming and the revenue of the Buddhist monasteries being taken to pay for the cost of military expenses. Buddhism in Fujian area was still able to continue to expand.<sup>52</sup> Mianshan He points out positive point of view regarding the development of Buddhism in Fujian.

Mianshan He also believes that the reasons why the Buddhism in the Fujian area could continually survive in history were due to: 1) Politically, the ruler's support and advocacy; Wang Shenzhi granted Buddhism with various preferential treatments such as, treating eminent

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<sup>49</sup> Chen, *Fujian zongjiao shi*, 140-141.

<sup>50</sup> Wang, *Fujian fojiao shi*, 211-212.

<sup>51</sup> Wang, *Fujian fojiao shi*, 294.

<sup>52</sup> Mianshan He 何綿山, *Fujian zongjiao wenhua* 福建宗教文化 (Tianjin shi: Tianjin shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 2004), 10, 67.

Buddhist monks with courtesy and patronized Buddhist institutions with large amounts of financial support to build or rebuild Buddhist monasteries. Rulers of past dynasties also on various occasions had bestowed Buddhist monasteries in Fujian with honorary plaques, canons and other gifts. 2) Financially, the support from rulers helped to accelerate the tendency of upholding Buddhism in society. The common people in Fujian had a tradition of contributing money to help the monasteries. The "alms giving" tradition was not only from the lay believers but also from the local officials and retired officials who had returned home. 3) The Buddhist monasteries in the Fujian area owned large amounts of lands. The Buddhist monastic economy was a large and important part of the Fujian economy. Land ownership also provided long-term financial resources for the monasteries. 4) Religiously, many eminent Buddhist masters migrated to Fujian and helped the propagation of Buddhism in Fujian. These eminent masters came to Fujian to avoid the chaos of war or to propagate the dharma teachings. 5) In the geography aspect, Fujian was located far from the political center and so when the national persecutions toward Buddhism occurred, such as the Huichang persecution by Emperor Wu of the Tang period. By the time it reached the Fujian area the tension already faded out. Monks would hide deep in mountains to temporarily escape the disorder and when the dangerous conditions passed, they would return back to monasteries again.<sup>53</sup> Mianshan He gives rational reasons to support his positive assessments to Fujian Buddhism.

In the Chinese Buddhist history, Fujian was an influential location for the development of Buddhism. The first and oldest existing Chan Buddhist historical work, the *Zu tang ji* 祖堂集 (the *Anthology of the Patriarchal Hall*) was compiled by two monks from the Quanzhou of Fujian. During the Tang period, the famous Japanese Buddhist monk Kūkai arrived in Fujian and

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 35-36.

stayed there for a short period of time when he came to China to study Buddhism. A well known Chan master Baizhang Huaihai (720-814) who established the *Pure Rules of Baizhang* was from the Fuzhou of Fujian. His disciple, Huangbo Xiyun (?-850) also originated from Fujian, and was the teacher of the Linji Chan school's founder, Linji Yixuan (?-866). One of the establishers of the Caodong school, Caoshan Benji (840-901) also was from the Fujian area.<sup>54</sup> The originator of the Japanese Ōbaku Chan school, Yinyuan Longqi (1592-1673) was from Fuqing, Fujian.<sup>55</sup> Jianyang, Fujian was where Yuanxian originated from; surrounded by such magnificent Buddhist history of Fujian, Yuanxian indeed had affinity and aspiration with Buddhism.

### **Previous Scholarship**

Many of the previous works regarding Yuanxian only mention him briefly, while others focus on a singular aspect related to Yuanxian's Gushan Chan Buddhism and lineage. An example of one of the recent works is Hsuan-Li Wang's dissertation, the *Gushan: the Formation of a Chan Lineage During the Seventeenth Century and Its Spread to Taiwan*.<sup>56</sup> This work investigates Yuanxian's Gushan Chan lineage, but focuses more on the formation and transformation of the Gushan Chan lineage during the 17th-century and how it extended to Taiwan and later developed into humanistic Buddhism. Wang's dissertation also contains much information regarding the ancestry of Yuanxian's Pure Land lineage and practices. However, Yuanxian is not the main theme of Wang's dissertation.

Many of studies on Yuanxian were also conducted and presented in languages other than English. Haiyan Ma published a book titled *Weilin Daopei chanxue yanjiu* 為霖道霈禪學研究 (*A Study on the Chan Teachings of Weilin Daopei*) in Chinese. His book focuses on Yuanxian's

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<sup>54</sup> Chen, *Fujian zongjiao shi*, 154-206. See also Wu, *Leaving for the Rising Sun*.

<sup>55</sup> Wu, *Leaving for the Rising Sun*.

<sup>56</sup> Wang, *Gushan: the Formation of Chan Lineage During the Seventeenth Century and Its Spread to Taiwan*.

dharma heir, Daopei, his Chan teachings and concepts. Even though the book does mention Yuanxian, Yuanxian is again not the main focus. Huachuan Ji wrote the *Mingqing Gushan caodongzong wenxian yanjiu* 明清鼓山曹洞宗文献研究 (*Literature Study on Gushan Caodong Sect in Ming and Qing Dynasties*) which describes Gushan monastery history and its lineage. He praises Yuanxian for his contributions in the rebuilding of the Gushan monastery and his revival of the teachings of the Caodong Chan which developed later into "Gushan Chan." However, Ji's book focuses on the carving, printing and storing of various sutras and Buddhist scriptures in the Gushan monastery. Jialing Fan's book, titled *Mingmo Caodong dianjun: Yongjue Yuanxian chanshi yanjiu* 明末曹洞殿軍：永覺元賢禪師研究 (*Last Caodong Chan Master in Late Ming: A Study on Yongjue Yuanxian*) is also in Chinese. Fan systematically investigates and comprehends Yuanxian in various aspects. Her book presents a biography of Yuanxian, a list of his numerous writings, his understanding of the differences between Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism, his scholarship, Caodong Chan teachings and characteristics.

However, even though Fan provides detailed information about Yuanxian, there are still some aspects that she does not cover; Yuanxian's viewpoints toward the syncretism of the Three Teachings in comparison with those of the other Buddhist masters, his attitude regarding female infanticide, or a comprehensive investigation into one of Yuanxian's works, such as, the *Jianzhou hongshi lu*. Aside from the recent works mentioned above, there are some earlier writings that have remarked about Yuanxian but either just briefly touched on Yuanxian's Chan teachings or Yuanxian was not their main theme. Furthermore, I have translated some of Yuanxian's writings that have not been previously rendered into English, which I hope will be of benefit to other researchers into 17th-century Chinese Buddhism.

Through the study of Yuanxian, I expect to contribute some important pieces to the picture of 17th-century Chan Buddhism in China. What was the impact of the intertwined relationship between Confucianism and Buddhism on Ming society? How can we properly define the importance of the Confucian scholar and Buddhist master, Yuanxian, to 17th-century Chan Buddhism? I believe that Yuanxian represented a strongly principled reviver and defender of Buddhism during a declining period of Chan Buddhism. I argue that he not only devoted his intellectual talents to Chan Buddhist literature but also through his mission as a Buddhist master, demonstrated the ultimate Mahayana Buddhist teaching of compassion for the miserable people and the Confucian objective of observing one's responsibility to benefit and serve society. He was able to combine the super-mundane religious cultivation with its practical functions to benefit society. His unyielding attitude towards Buddhist dharma teachings and his mindset of upholding Buddhist practices made him an unyielding Buddhism reviver and defender. Yuanxian undoubtedly left a great impact on the Chan Buddhist community of the Fujian area as well as on other domestic and international religious communities.

### **Sources**

Since Yuanxian composed many valuable works, it is logical for us to investigate and understand Yuanxian through his many compositions. Many of Yuanxian's works are assembled in the *Manji Shinsan Dainihon Zokuzōkyō* 卅新纂大日本續藏經 (*Manji Newly Compiled Great Japanese Supplementary Canon*). Logically, this canon is my major primary source. This Buddhist canon includes the *Guanglu* in Volume 72, and the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* in Volume 86. Fascicle 29 of Volume 72 has *Yiyan*, Fascicle 30 of Volume 72 contains the *Xu Yiyan* 續寢言 (*Continued Nonsense Uttered in Dreams*), Fascicle 16 of the same volume is the *Jie ni nü*, and Fascicle 18 has the *Shou ta ming* (*you xu*). I employed the critical textual analysis to examine

these primary works. The *Guanglu* is a specific work that includes Yuanxian's personal writings as well as his disciples' portrayal of him. It was compiled by Weilin Daopei, Yuanxian's exclusive dharma heir and contains essential authentic material about Yuanxian.

Besides using critical textual analysis, I will also utilize comparative methods for my research. I explore several transmission records or *denglu*, such as the *Jingde chuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄 (*Records of Transmission of the Lamp*), as well as the hagiographical collections, the *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 (*Biographies of the Eminent Song Monks*), the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 (*Supplementary Biographies of the Eminent Monks*), and the *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (*Biographies of Eminent Monks*) in my research. I will also rely on primary historical sources, including dynastic histories such as *Song shi* 宋史 (*History of the Song*) and *Ming shi* 明史 (*History of the Ming*). In addition, I will also utilize other historical local records for complementary information regarding the Jianzhou locale, such as the *Jiajing Jianyang xian zhi* 嘉靖建陽縣志 (*Records of Jianyang County in the Jiajing Period*), the *Jianyang Xian Zhi* 建陽縣志 (*Records of Jianyang County*) and the *Fujian Tongzhi* 福建通志 (*General Records of Fujian*). These local historical records were crucial to my studies because Yuanxian was a native of Jianzhou, Fujian which was also a famous location for both Chan Buddhism and Confucianism in Chinese history.

In addition, to better understand the changes of Yuanxian's time and the transformations of Buddhist history, I will investigate the works of various domestic and international historians and Buddhist scholars related to the particular periods of the Song, Ming and early Qing dynasties in the areas of religion, society, economics and politics.

## **Chapters Outline**

The focus of my dissertation is Yongjue Yuanxian and contains a total of seven chapters. This first chapter provides the reasons for investigating Yuanxian, the general background of 17th-century Buddhism in China as well as in Fujian area, previous scholarship, expected outcomes, and the outline of the dissertation. Chapters Two through Six will target the four areas which provide crucial clues about Yuanxian as well as his philosophy and inclination in 17th-century Chan Buddhism. The last chapter, Chapter Seven, will conclude with my analysis and assessments regarding Yuanxian and his impact on Chan Buddhism and society of the Fujian area.

The four main areas of investigation regarding Yuanxian can also be divided into two main subareas to effectively demonstrate Yuanxian's impacts on Ming Chan Buddhism and society; the super-mundane and mundane impacts. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the super-mundane impact refers to Yuanxian's compositions and thoughts related to his religious philosophy and concepts. Yuanxian's impacts on society are the efforts that Yuanxian took through his position as a Buddhist master and abbot to effectively influence society.

First, in Chapter Two, I examine Yuanxian's life from his *Shou ta ming* and other sources in terms of the following: as a descendant of the famous Confucian scholar, Cai Yuanding 蔡元定 (1135-1198); how Yuanxian became fascinated with Chan Buddhism; his change from pursuing Confucian studies to focusing on Chan Buddhism and eventually to his renunciation of the world and enlightenment. Investigations into Yuanxian's life provide us with a valuable understanding of the interwoven relationship between Confucianism and Chan Buddhism during his era. After Yuanxian became an esteemed Buddhist master, he made various contributions to the Buddhist communities as well as to the Ming-Qing Fujian societies. I believe Yuanxian can represent many of the literati of his era and his life provides us with a vivid picture of the Chan

Buddhism and literati communities in the society of 17th-century China. His life also presents to us how the two different functions of the super-mundane and mundane can be worked together for the benefit of the people.

The second area that I would like to examine is Yuanxian's philosophical perspectives. This area shows Yuanxian's super-mundane impact on the religious world. This discussion will be covered in two chapters, the Chapters Three and Four. Many scholars believe that the *Yiyan* and *Xu yiyan* reflect the characteristics of Yuanxian's profound thinking. The *Yiyan* was his early work, composed in 1628. The *Xu yiyan* was written later in 1647 when Yuanxian was in his seventies. These two works represent both the earliest and latest periods of Yuanxian's works. For this dissertation however, I would like to focus on the *Yiyan*. The title, *Yiyan*, was derived from the Mahayana Buddhist sutra, *Shou Lengyan jing*. Fascicle Nine of the *Shou Lengyan jing* describes an occurrence of someone talking nonsense unconsciously during sleep. The people who were not sleeping however heard the nonsense and were able to understand the meaning completely and become enlightened. Yuanxian used the word *Yiyan* to humbly imply the nonsense of his own work and hoped that at the same time readers would come to some realization after reading his foolish talking in dreams.<sup>57</sup> Yuanxian also expressed that his motivations for writing the *Yiyan* were to achieve a thorough and mutual understanding of Buddhism and Confucianism 會通儒釋.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, Yuanxian's efforts were through the lens of a Buddhist master and the *Yiyan* reveals him therefore to be a strong reviver and defender of Buddhism.

The contents of the *Yiyan* place great emphasis on elucidating and commenting on Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism as well as their differences. Jialing Fan has briefly

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<sup>57</sup> Fan, *Mingmo caodong dianjun*, 34.

<sup>58</sup> Yongjue Yuanxian, *Guanglu*, fascicle 30.



examined this aspect in her book. I, however, would like to explore and discern Yuanxian's philosophical perspectives toward the Three Teachings and compare his thoughts on the Three Teachings with other Buddhist masters. Yuanxian expressed his points of view towards Confucianism and Daoism and vigorously defended Buddhism to be superior to the other two teachings. He had different perspectives regarding the trends of synthesizing Buddhism with Confucianism and Daoism and these made him stand out among the other masters and produced an impact on the super-mundane religious world. What was Yuanxian's motivation? Why did he think the popular trend of the syncretism of the Three Teachings was not an applicable approach?

Chapter Five contains the third area that I would like to investigate, the social phenomena during Yuanxian's time which also connects with his impact on the mundane world. Female infanticide had occurred since antiquity; the historical documents, such as the *Shi Ji*, *Han Shu* and *Han Feizi* all depict incidents of infanticide. I use the critical textual analysis method to analyze what Yuanxian says in his essay and what can be perceived from this essay regarding this social phenomenon in his era in the Fujian area. Why did he feel a need to address this kind of inhumane behavior? Why did Yuanxian conclude that the main reason for female infanticide was due to the customs of society? I will also address why the horrible practice of infanticide continued in 17th-century China despite official regulations and religious teachings. Why were female infants selected more frequently for infanticide? What was the rationalization those parents believed that allowed them to feel less guilty? In this chapter, I argue that aside from the male dominated Confucian tradition, the sinified and unconventional Buddhist concepts of a soul that would continue for "this life," "next life" and "future life" played an unanticipated and intertwined role in the discriminatory practice of female infanticide in Chinese society.

Meanwhile, Yuanxian's writing of persuading people to not commit female infanticide shows his concern for people and therefore made an impact on society.

The fourth area of my research, described in Chapter Six, will reveal a study of Yuanxian's work, the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* which shows the significance of the Chan Buddhist connection to the unique geographic area of Jianzhou, Fujian. This study also exposes Yuanxian's close contacts with both the religious world and the society of his time. Jianzhou was an influential area in the history of Confucianism and Chan Buddhism. Yuanxian was born there, many generations of his ancestors lived there, and he had a broad firsthand knowledge of the local history and the extraordinary figures of this area. Inspired and encouraged by his dharma brother, Wuyi Yuanlai, Yuanxian compiled the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* in order to propagate Buddhist teachings and provide good models for later generations to follow. Jianzhou is a famous location in the history of Chan Buddhism due to the famous Chan master, Mazu 馬祖 (709-788), who propagated the dharma teachings in Jianzhou's Fojiling temple. Jianzhou was also the origin of Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), who was the leading figure of the School of Principle and a well known Neo-Confucian scholar who had compiled the Four Books as the foundation of Confucian teachings. In the Jianzhou area also had many outstanding Confucians who were studied and cultivated Chan Buddhism. Jianzhou's unique association with Mazu and Zhu Xi reveals to us that Jianzhou was a place of profound history and teachings of Chan Buddhism as well as a famous Neo-Confucian community. The significance of the Jianzhou area, however, was largely unknown to the locals and others of Yuanxian's time. Additionally, local historical records did not provide sufficient information regarding the historical importance of Jianzhou to Buddhism. There were many other Chan masters from the Jianzhou area who had spread the dharma teachings to other regions and Southeast Asia. This spread further manifests

the influence of Chan Buddhism from the Jianzhou area and may help us to understand the importance of Yuanxian and 17th-century Chan Buddhism. Yuanxian's work, the *Jianzhou hongshi lu*, provides us with valuable insights in identifying these contributions of Yuanxian and the Jianzhou area as well as manifests to us how the Chan cultivations enhanced the Confucian scholars' demeanor.

Yuanxian's life reflected the religious and intellectual history of China. Due to his prodigious writings, we are able to find various traces and indications regarding the religious climate and Fujian society of his period of time. Through some of the first-hand studies of Yuanxian's compositions in this dissertation, I intend to reveal some unexplored knowledge regarding Yongjie Yuanxian. In the meantime, I also expect to obtain a clear picture and accurate understanding regarding the 17th-century Chan Buddhist phenomena as well as its influences. I believe that through this study, we will realize Yuanxian's impacts, not only on the super-mundane religious world, but also on society and, by virtue of his various compositions, was a strong defender and reviver of Buddhism as well.

## Chapter Two Yongjue Yuanxian's Life According to His Autobiography

Starting at the age of 40, Yongjue Yuanxian dedicated the rest of his life to Chan Buddhism. His renunciation of the world at this mature age and his commitment of himself to the Buddhist *Sangha* after having a solid background in Confucian scholarship are unexpected. In this chapter, I will scrutinize Yuanxian's scholarly works and the only autobiography that he wrote as an inscription for his longevity stupa. Only a few scholars (Hsuan-Li Wang, 2014; Huachuan Ji, 2014; Jialing Fan, 2009) have recently studied Yuanxian's life and teachings, while many others have only touched upon the surface of his life. Most of these works have failed to investigate what elicited Yuanxian to alter his cultivation from Confucianism to Chan Buddhism. Particularly, there is a lack of close analysis of Yuanxian's reasons for conversion as well as a comprehensive investigation into his autobiography in the Western languages. From these viewpoints, observing his background and life should provide us with substantial facts not only regarding Yuanxian's personal life and individuality but also the phenomena of the profound interrelationships between the intellectual and religious communities of 17th-century China.

### Primary Sources Regarding Yuanxian's Life

Yuanxian (1578-1657) scatters many expressions of his wisdom and thoughts regarding life, Buddhism, and other teachings over his numerous writings. In all of the abundance of his many works, he rarely mentions his family and his life before becoming a Chan master. Yuanxian wrote only one short autobiography, in the *Shou ta ming* (*you xu*), in an inscriptional style. Apart from this brief autobiography, his other biographies were composed by his disciples and were collected together into the Buddhist text, titled, *The Yongjue Yuanxian Chanshi guanglu*. This *Guanglu* includes the *Shou ta ming* in Fascicle 18, Lin Zhifan's 林之蕃 *Xingye*

quji and Pan Jintai's 潘晉臺, the *Biography of the Gushan Old Man* in Fascicle 30. Another important source of Yuanxian's biography comes to us from his only dharma heir, Chan master Weilin Daopei's *Ta zhi* 塔誌 (*The Record of Stupa*), which is collected in the second fascicle of the *Weilin Daopei Chanshi bingfu yulu* 為霖道需禪師秉拂語錄 (*Recording Sayings of the Chan Master Weilin Daopei's Formal Chan Sermon*). Besides referring to these sources, the *Song shi* and *Ming shi* will be used also as supplementary sources for some valuable information regarding Yuanxian's ancestors. There are a few other materials and Buddhist records which also briefly make mention of Yuanxian's life, such as the *Gushan zhi* 鼓山志, which was compiled by Huang Ren 黃任.<sup>59</sup>

There are two approaches to investigate the reasons why Yuanxian converted himself from a Confucian scholar to a Buddhist master. One approach is to look into the primary and secondary sources which explicitly express Yuanxian's attitude and thought processes. Yuanxian explicitly states some straightforward remarks regarding his personality and inclination toward life in his autobiography and some of his own writings. In addition, the ways he responded to his disciples as well as Yuanxian's disciples' compositions about his life, all yield valuable traces about Yuanxian's philosophy and personality. Another approach is through the historical happenings of Yuanxian's time to perceive the sensible pressures and trends of his era which formed the implicit reasons for Yuanxian's alternation. The 17th-century of China was an exclusive era; Confucianism and Buddhism collided with each other, the corruption of court during the late Ming dynasty, and the Manchu conquest of the ethnic Han all provided stimulations for the literati. Yuanxian lived in such a challenging time; his life would have been

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<sup>59</sup> To find out more about the sources regarding Yuanxian's life please see Fan's *Mingmo Caodong Dianjun: Yongjue Yuanxian Chanshi Yanjiu*.

affected by it. As a result, the study of the 17th-century Chinese history will be a part of my investigation into the understanding of Yuanxian. To start, it is essential to learn about Yuanxian's life from his only autobiography, the *Shou ta ming*.

### **The Preface of Yuanxian's *Inscription of the Longevity Stupa***

The *Shou ta ming's* preface reveals essential facts for the reason to build a longevity stupa for Yuanxian. It not only provides us with the why, who, and where the longevity stupa was to be built but also conveys to us some of the dispositions of Yuanxian. The event of building a longevity stupa prompted Yuanxian to write an autobiography that briefly described his own life and included a short inscription for the longevity stupa. The preface says:

In the spring of the year of Jiashen 甲申 (1644), the Prefect of Wucheng 烏程, Chen Baian 陳白菴, considered that I was getting old and sick and therefore [he] wanted to build a longevity stupa in the reclaimed field on the west side of Yongquan temple 湧泉寺 for me. Later, due to the disasters of the era occurring and obstructing the construction, it could not be finished until winter in the year of Xinmao 辛卯 (1651). [By that time,] I was even more aged and deteriorated than before, and [I] therefore thought [that my longevity stupa is] a piece of stone in the wilderness, and my dharma heirs certainly want to seek praises from the high-ranking officials [for me]. [They would like to] make use of [those officials'] literary talents to compose tremendous writings. Nevertheless, this would [only] increase my sins. When I investigated the various masters of ancient times, some had composed their own autobiographies, some had [written inscriptional articles] to have inscribed on their own stupas and the later generations all widely read about them and did not think they were erroneous. I, therefore, followed them and did the same thing.<sup>60</sup>

A longevity stupa is a stupa for the purpose of praying for the longevity of the stupa's designee. It is built while the designee is still alive and therefore, people use red tint to fill the characters on the inscription of the stupa to distinguish it from a tombstone. This custom initially began with the Chan schools, but later, other Buddhist schools also practiced it.<sup>61</sup> In 1642, Yuanxian

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<sup>60</sup> X72.0492a21. Yongjue Yuanxian, *Guanglu*, fascicle 18.

<sup>61</sup> Xingyun dashi 星雲大師, Ciyi 慈怡 and Cizhuang 慈莊. *Foguang da cidian* 佛光大辭典 (Gaoxiong shi: Foguang chu ban she, 1989), 5774.

returned to the Yongquan monastery for the third time and, at the time, his health was in an unfavorable condition. Due to the concern of the lay devotees, they decided to build a longevity stupa to pray for Yuanxian's health in 1644. The preface reveals that Yuanxian was very conscientious about following the practices of his Buddhist predecessors; he did not want to be disrespectful or break tradition. He also did not intend to earn fame for himself even after his death. Yuanxian consistently shows this same mindset throughout his life and in his longevity stupa inscription.

Due to the conflict of the Ming-Qing transition, which resulted in the end of the Ming dynasty in 1644, the building of Yuanxian's longevity stupa had been interrupted; it took a total of eight years to complete it. We will study more of Yuanxian's *Shou ta ming* throughout the following sections.

### **The Explicit Reasons and Yuanxian's Confucian Root**

Yuanxian was born on the nineteenth day in the seventh month of the sixth year of Wanli (1578) at the Jianyang prefecture (present-day district of Jianyang), which is in the northern part of Fujian province. He passed away in 1657 during the reign of Qing Shunzhi; he was 80 years old, making his dharma age be 41.

We do not have detailed information about his immediate family, but he was named Maode 懋德 with a courtesy name of Anxiu 闇修 in the Cai 蔡 family. His father was Yunjin 雲津; his mother was from the Zhang 張 clan, and his birth mother was from the Fan 范 clan. The biography written by his disciple, Lin Zhifan, says that Yuanxian was the 14th descendant of the great Song Confucian, Cai Yuanding (1135-1198).<sup>62</sup> Yuanxian's autobiography only briefly states that he comes from the Cai clan in Jianyang. The *Shou ta ming*, states, "My name is

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<sup>62</sup> Zhifan Lin 林之蕃, *Guanglu*, fascicle 30, *Xingye quji* X72.0576a05, in the *Manji Shinsan Zokuzōkyō* 卍新纂續藏經. Vol. 72.

Yuanxian, courtesy name Yongjue, the son of the Cai clan in Jianyang county of Jian province."<sup>63</sup> Yuanxian deliberately did not point out that his ancestor was a famous Confucian scholar in his preface. There are two possible speculations; it may have been because of his humbleness or that he assumed most of the people should already know about his family since the Cai clan was a well-known family in Jianyang.

Yuanxian's ancestor, Cai Yuanding was famous for his scholarship and having associations with Zhu Xi (1130-1200), the famous Song Neo-Confucian scholar. Cai Yuanding was not only a student and good friend of Zhu Xi, but was also an erudite scholar in his own right. Cai Yuanding was known for his expertise in geomantic practice, Chinese medicine, ancient Chinese music, theories of army combat strategy, and astronomy. The *Song shi* describes the extraordinary relationship between Zhu Xi and Cai Yuanding as follows:

[When Yuanding] heard about Zhu Xi's reputation; he went and asked [Zhu Xi] to be his master. Zhu Xi inquired about Yuanding's learning and was thrilled about his scholarship. In great surprise, Zhu Xi stated: "He should be my old friend and should not be listed as one of my students." Thereupon, [they] sat face to face to exchange views about the profound meanings of the various classics, often until midnight. Zhu Xi would require that whoever came from the four different directions to learn from him must follow Yuanding; let Yuanding ask them questions and examine them first.<sup>64</sup>

The *Song shi* also depicts how intelligent Cai Yuanding was in the following excerpt:

He read all kinds of books, investigated all the phenomena in the world, sought insight into the sources of reasoning, had excellent knowledge about ceremony and music, as well as knew the norms of law and regulations. He could well comprehend rare terms and their profound meanings in ancient books. When Zhu Xi annotated the *Four Books* and wrote his studies on the *Book of Changes* 易經, the *Book of Odes* 詩經 and the *Tongjian gangmu* 通鑑綱目, he would always consult and evaluate back and forth with Yuanding. The draft of one of the Zhu Xi's books, the *Qimong* 啟蒙, was written by Yuanding.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Yongjue Yuanxian, *Shou ta ming* (you xu) in the *Guanglu*, fascicle 18.

<sup>64</sup> The *Song shi* 宋史 fascicle 434 卷 434 *liezhuan* No.193 列傳第 193.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.



The Song court officials, You Mao 尤袤 and Yang Wanli 楊萬里, both presented a petition to the throne recommending Cai Yuanding to serve the court; Yuanding, however, declined the court's offer.<sup>66</sup> Historically, aside from Cai Yuanding, other ancestors of Yuanxian had also been honored as great Confucian scholars; they were referred to as the "Nine Confucian Scholars of the Cai Clan 蔡氏九儒." These Nine Confucian Scholars encompassed four generations beginning with Cai Yuanding's father, Cai Fa 蔡發, and continued with Yuanding, who was then followed by a third generation, Cai Yuan 蔡淵, Cai Hang 蔡沆, and Cai Chen 蔡沉, and then a fourth generation of Cai Ge 蔡格, Cai Mo 蔡模, Cai Hang 蔡杭 and Cai Quan 蔡權.<sup>67</sup> Both Cai Yuanding and one of his sons, Cai Chen, were enshrined in the Confucius temple during the Qing dynasty. These facts indicate that Yuanxian inherited and was brought up in a very traditional, orthodox Confucian family. We can assume that Yuanxian studied Confucian teachings and classics from a very early age and even pursued a career of studying for the civil service examination as most of the literati would do at that time. When Yuanxian was young, he had a very high esteem toward his Confucian moral cultivation and scholarship. He once said, "I modeled Yan Hui 顏回 and Min Ziqian 閔子騫 for moral cultivation, and followed Zi You 子由 and Zi Xia 子夏 for scholarly pursuit. I do not want to settle myself below the rest of them."<sup>68</sup>

This statement seems to indicate that Yuanxian focused his life objectives on moral cultivation and scholarly pursuit and not on the political pursuit or civil service examination even though he had studied for and taken the exams. It was a normal practice for the male descendant from a

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Qingfu Li 李清馥, *Min zhong li xue yuan yuan kao 92 juan* 閩中理學淵源考 92 卷 (Taipei: Taiwan shang wu yin shu guan, 1971), Fascicle 25.

<sup>68</sup> X72.0590c16. Weilin Daopei, *Weilin Daopei Chanshi bingfu yulu* 為霖道需禪師秉拂語錄 fascicle 2. See also the "Xianjin 先進" in the *Analects*, 11-3. There is a list of excellent disciples of Confucius who were good at moral conduct, articulate, administration or scholarship. Yuanxian chose to follow those who were good at moral conduct and scholarship.

traditional orthodox Confucian family to participate in the civil service examinations. In addition, Yuanxian's expression in his *Shou ta ming* provides us more information regarding his natural inclination, which further coincides with his life objectives. The *Shou ta ming* states:

[My] natural disposition is simple and [I am] not interested in seeking fame or wealth and do not enjoy the atmosphere of the mundane world. In addition, [my] ability is really obtuse and [I am] not good at following the currents of my time. Therefore, even though [I was] studying to be a Confucian scholar and was a district student, [I] often concealed a will to renounce the world.<sup>69</sup>

Yuanxian clearly describes his preference for a simple and tranquil life. He even has thoughts of renouncing the world when he was studying to be a Confucian scholar. Yuanxian also acknowledges that he is not good at following the currents of his time, indicating that he was a person who disliked forming ties with others just to obtain a good reputation. Later, after Yuanxian was a monk and living in seclusion, he wrote a funeral oration for his lay supporter reinforced this similar inclination. He describes himself as an unattended monk who normally was not known by people and did not have intimate friends to praise or commend for him. In addition, he would insist on following the ancient ways and could not mendaciously mingle with people. People therefore were not pleased with him and some would reproach him privately and then ridicule him.<sup>70</sup>

Yuanxian's descriptions about himself show that he was not the kind of monk who would ingratiate with high officials or wealthy gentry in order to gain benefits from them for his reputation or material support. He was a genuine monk who adhered to the authentic teachings, and followed his predecessors to cultivate his virtue. Yuanxian's natural inclination was straightforward and did not like to seek for fame and wealth. I believe these kinds of

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<sup>69</sup> Yongjue Yuanxian, *Shou ta ming (you xu)* in the *Guanglu*, fascicle 18.

<sup>70</sup> X72.0477a09. "Ji teng xiu shi ju shi 祭滕秀實居士."

personalities were the explicit reasons for him to convert into Chan Buddhism later in his life. In addition, Yuanxian also had affinity with Buddhism when he was young.

Yuanxian's first contact with Buddhism was when he was 18 years old; he read the first Buddhist text of his life, the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, unintentionally. He was compelled by its perfect and sublime teachings. He found the Buddhist theory and teachings very interesting, and he even had a very good comprehension of its meanings.<sup>71</sup> At age 20, Yuanxian was already a district student.<sup>72</sup> Later, at 25 years old, Yuanxian stayed in a Buddhist monastery to study for the civil service examination. It was there that Yuanxian heard the chanting of the *Lotus Sutra* and he suddenly had a sensational feeling that his body was pure and bright. He was so delighted and realized that besides the teachings of Confucianism, another great teaching existed separately.<sup>73</sup> Thereafter, he became fascinated about the Buddhist sutras and decided to study them seriously. Yuanxian then studied three important Mahayana Buddhist Sutras; the *Lengyan* 楞嚴, the *Lotus* 法華 and the *Yuanjue* 圓覺. His teacher was a local Buddhist layperson, Zhao Yuzhai 趙豫齋. Zhao Yuzhai was a Confucian scholar originally but later, decided to become a vegetarian and focus on Buddhist studies. He followed monk Yunyang to study Buddhism and believed that the learning of Buddhism would help him to comprehend Confucianism. When he discussed the Buddhist teachings with others, he would provide various examples and explanations in order to let people truly understand the teachings of Buddhism even when he was sick, he persisted in helping others. In order to let more people learn about Buddhism, Zhao Yuzhai also printed many different Buddhist sutras and urged people to follow

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<sup>71</sup>Yongjue Yuanxian. "Shi Lingsheng Shang ren" 示靈生上人 in the *Guanglu*, fascicle 10.

<sup>72</sup> *Tazhi* 塔誌 from The *Weilin Daopei Chanshi binfo yulu* the second fascicle 為霖道霈禪師秉拂語錄 第2卷 in the *Manji Shinsan Zokuzōkyō* 卍新纂續藏經. Vol. 72, X72.0590c16.

<sup>73</sup> X72.0576a05. See Lin Zhifan's *Xingye quji*.

the teachings of the sutras.<sup>74</sup> The next year, when Yuanxian was 26, coincidentally the Caodong Chan master of the Shouchang 壽昌 sub-lineage, Wuming Huijing, was at the Dongyan Temple 董巖寺 propagating the Buddhist dharma. Yuanxian seized upon this opportunity and went to visit Huijing, of whom he tirelessly asked many questions.<sup>75</sup> However, Yuanxian did not shave his head and renounce the world at the time. He waited until he was 40 years old when his parents<sup>76</sup> had passed away, whereupon he abandoned his family and paid his respects to monk, Huijing, and received the tonsure ceremony.

In the Buddhist community, most monks take their tonsure at an early age; many becoming monks before they have even reached adulthood. The first time Yuanxian appeared to be serious about studying the Buddhist sutras was in the year 1602, when he was 25 years old. However, Yuanxian chose to wait until both of his parents were deceased and then, in 1617, at the mature age of 40, he renounced the world to become a genuine monk. As mentioned above, Yuanxian was brought up in a traditional orthodox Confucian family. The observance of filial piety towards one's parents was a solemn practice. Filial piety is considered to be the most fundamental of Confucian values; it is considered to be the root of all other virtues. Yuanxian followed the Confucian teaching to look after his parents while they were still alive. In a letter to one of his scholar/lay followers, Yuanxian remarks on the importance of filial obedience to parents. He states, "One of the most important bodhisattva precepts is to be filially obedient to your parents, and it is the root of becoming a buddha. If one can sincerely attend upon one's parents, it is the same as reverence to all the buddhas."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Yongjue Yuanxian, *Jianzhou hongshi lu* 建州弘釋錄 fascicle 2. X86.0571c07.

<sup>75</sup> X72.0576a05.

<sup>76</sup> Here, "parents" means Yuanxian's father and his father's first wife. Yuanxian's birth mother was not the first wife of his father. Yuanxian's actual birth mother passed away after he became a Chan monk.

<sup>77</sup> X72.0447c12. The *Guanglu*, fascicle 11.

On another occasion, Yuanxian wrote a preface for the *Shimen zhenxiao lu* 釋門真孝錄 (*Records of True Filial Piety in Buddhism*) to praise the compiler for his intention to show the Buddha's original meaning regarding the ultimate truth of filial piety. He also expounds on his perception toward the concept of filial piety in Buddhism. Yuanxian remarks that the practice of filial obedience is the most fundamental moral cultivation to people, heaven, earth, and even supernatural beings. Yuanxian also points out that the understanding and practice of filial piety in the mundane world is narrow and limited when compared with the true meaning of filial piety practiced in Buddhism.<sup>78</sup> Buddhists believe that, because of the monks' practice of celibacy and asceticism, they possess great virtue and ability. They are also able to build up their virtue by intensive dharma study and practice of meditation. This was the reason the Buddha instructed his followers in the famous *Yu-lan-pen Sutra* (*ullambana Sutra* in Sanskrit) to use the *Sangha* as a medium to send gifts to their ancestors. Stephen Teiser believes that, "...they have renounced the family; monks are able to enrich the family. Having dedicated themselves to an ascetic way of life that claims to deny the principle of procreation, monks simultaneously contribute a regenerative force to that very world they appear to transcend."<sup>79</sup> Monks and nuns generate merits through their cultivations, especially after the intensive cultivations during the summer retreat. Therefore, their merits can be a revival source to the world. By joining the monastic order, monks are in a position to convert his parents or others to achieve emancipation and escape the endless cycle of birth and rebirth. This concept of filial piety is broader than the Confucians' since they are only concerned with this world. Furthermore, monks look upon all sentient beings as equal; one of their vows is to deliver all of them to the other shore of enlightenment. Thus, the capacity of the Buddhist piety is extended to not only one's parents and

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<sup>78</sup> X72.0457a13. *Shimen zhenxiao lu xu* 釋門真孝錄序 in the *Guanglu*, fascicle 13.

<sup>79</sup> Stephen F. Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 204-205.

ancestors but also to the parents and ancestors of others; it is a universal salvation. "The Confucians think of filial piety entirely in terms of human relations on this earthly level...The Buddhists, on the other hand, consider piety in terms of something spiritual which extends into the future."<sup>80</sup> Yuanxian ultimately demonstrated that he did not neglect his deep-rooted Confucian origins, but rather, the Buddhist teachings surpassed the Confucian ideals. After becoming a fully fledged Buddhist master, he understood the immense capacity of the Buddhist concept of filial piety.

After fulfilling his filial duty at age 40, Yuanxian's explicit reason to renounce the world was due to his natural inclination to prefer a simple and serene life. He had aspirations to cultivate his virtue and literary skills and not chase after fame and wealth. Yuanxian had a straightforward personality. Aside from these explicit reasons, Yuanxian also had affinity with Buddhism. In addition, the historical happenings during the Wanli period may have also played an important inducement towards Yuanxian's ultimate decision.

### **The Implicit Reasons and the Political and Intellectual Contexts**

The Ming dynasty was one of the most fascinating dynasties in Chinese history; it was positioned between two non-Han ethnic dynasties, the Yuan and Qing. The Ming founder, Zhu Yuanzhang was a Buddhist novice and later joined the Red Turbans rebellion before becoming eventually emperor. Zhu Yuanzhang defeated the Yuan military and other rebellion forces and restored the Mandate of Heaven back into the hands of the ethnic Han Chinese in 1368. Zhu Yuanzhang was a thorough but very suspicious emperor; he understood the hardships of the peasants' lives and established many regulations to benefit them. In order to prevent government officials from manipulating their powers to take advantage of the peasant's land ownership and

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<sup>80</sup> Kenneth Chen, "Filial Piety in Chinese Buddhism" from *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*. Vol. 28 (1968), 81-97.

cause the tax liability to increase on the peasants, Zhu Yuanzhang established two taxation systems; the *Huang ce* 黃冊 (Yellow Records) and the *Yulin tuce* 魚鱗圖冊 (Fish Scale Records). He utilized these two systems to keep records of how many members were in each family and how much land each family owned. He also drafted the *Daming liu* 大明律 (*Code of the Great Ming*) which provided stability and order to society. However, Zhu also wanted to consolidate his power at the same time and thus, he purged many of his officials and generals who had helped him establish the Ming dynasty and anyone who had criticized him or made him feel insecure. Zhu centralized the government power of the emperor by revoking the position of prime minister. He also set regulations to protect the longevity of the Ming dynasty and laid down firm rules regarding eunuchs. His rules stated that eunuchs should be limited in number, should not be educated to read or write, and should be put to death if they interfered with governmental operations.<sup>81</sup> The Ming founder also set up a much consolidated centralized governmental system; he had a surveillance agency to watch all personnel and operations of governmental affairs. Because of his mistrustful personality, he had the Embroidered-Uniform Guard 錦衣衛 serve as his personal bodyguard and secret police. Later, these guards conspired with the eunuchs and performed secret police and judicial activities.<sup>82</sup> Emperor Yongle set up the Eastern Depot 東廠 run by eunuchs to spy on people beginning in 1420. Later, eunuchs would investigate and arrest suspects and then turn them over to the Embroidered-Uniform Guard for interrogation.

Some of the succeeding emperors of the Ming dynasty were eminent, while some others were insignificant. A few of the early emperors laid good foundations for the stability of the

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<sup>81</sup> Charles O. Hucker, "Governmental Organization of the Ming Dynasty" in the *Harvard Journal at Asiatic Studies* Vol. 21 (Dec., 1958), p. 10-11.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 50 and 60.

Ming dynasty, but they also unintentionally made some serious mistakes. For instance, Emperor Yongle 永樂 (r.1403-1424) relied greatly on the eunuchs to help him secure his power. He granted exceptional authority to eunuchs for secret police work and had the eunuch Zheng He 鄭和 (1371-1433) launched seven voyages of exploration into the South Pacific and the Indian Ocean. Zheng He's voyages, besides displaying the Ming court's supremacy, naval technology, and establishing relationships with foreign countries, also carried the secret purpose of finding the whereabouts of Emperor Jianwen.<sup>83</sup> Emperor Yongle's reliance on Zheng He initiated the incredible power and opportunity for eunuchs to become educated and later to be able to interfere with governmental affairs. During the later periods of the Ming court, many scandals and much damage were caused by the eunuchs. The expansion in numbers and prosperity of the eunuchs during the Ming period all began with Emperor Yongle.

Yuanxian was born at the end of the Ming period in the year 1578, around the time of Emperor Wanli (r. 1572-1620). The 48 years of Wanli's reign were the longest reign among all of the Ming emperors. While some later scholars have criticized Emperor Wanli as being an inadequate emperor, others claimed him as a competent ruler. Emperor Wanli's performance during his early period was deeply connected with his teacher and statesman, Zhang Juzheng 張居正 (1525-1582). When Emperor Wanli assumed the crown, he was only six years old and so, he needed to heavily rely on his noble statesman. Wanli diligently performed his duty and behaved as a good ruler under the aid of Zhang, who had the mutual consent and cooperation from the Empress Dowager Cisheng and eunuch Feng Bao 馮保. At the time, Wanli attended all the morning meetings to discuss court affairs with his scholar officials. This period was called

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<sup>83</sup> Emperor Yongle took over the emperor seat through the usurpation of his nephew, Emperor Jianwen, and rumor said that Emperor Jianwen had disguised himself and escaped from burning palace.



the "Restoration of Wanli 萬曆中興." Even ten years after Zhang's death, Wanli still managed to win the wars against the Japanese invasions of Korea in 1592 and from 1596 to 1598. Kenneth Swope calls these wars the First Great East Asian War; they are referred to as the Imjin War in Korea. Swope's book<sup>84</sup> points out the strong military leadership of Emperor Wanli, which differs greatly from how most of the historical records have described Wanli. A good number of historians consider Emperor Wanli to have been lazy and inattentive to his responsibilities during his later reign. Yuanxian's initial period of studying for his civil service examination coincided with the period of "Restoration of Wanli."

Yuanxian was about 22 to 42 years of age during the last 20 years of Wanli's reign. Emperor Wanli had ceased to attend the morning meetings or to appoint new officials for vacant posts, and he also had disputes with his officials over the naming of his successor.<sup>85</sup> He abandoned evaluating the annual merit of court officials, used eunuchs to collect the numerous mineral taxes from the peasants, and indulged himself in luxuries. During Wanli's reign, three serious incidents occurred: the Stick Case, the Red Pill Case, and the Moving Out of the Palace Case.<sup>86</sup> These incidents demonstrate the factional disputes, convoluted struggles, and purges among court officials with eunuchs as well as between court officials and emperor.

Factional struggles and purges were severe during the late Ming period. John Dardess believes that "the leaders of the Donglin also labored to place their adherents and sympathizers in key offices of the central government and, through them, to achieve nothing less than the

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<sup>84</sup> Kenneth Swope, *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail: Ming China and the First Great East Asian War, 1592-1598* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009).

<sup>85</sup> In the Ming history, this was called "Guo ben zhi zheng 國本之爭", some historians believe that in order to fight against officials for crowning the elder son, Emperor Wanli abandoned court meetings as a way to oppose court officials, due to Wanli preferred the third son from the Zheng imperial concubine.

<sup>86</sup> John W. Dardess, *Blood and History in China: the Donglin Faction and its Repression, 1620-1627* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 9-30.

remaking of a troubled Ming China starved, they believed, of morally right-guided leadership."<sup>87</sup> In the words of Heinrich Busch, "The Tung-lin [Donglin] speakers were, e.g., not to adulterate truth to suit one's likes and dislikes, to form convictions on the basis of truth and adhere to them uncompromisingly without regard to the consequences."<sup>88</sup> The Donglin considered themselves as the "righteous circles" and facilitated the chaotic and destructive factionalism that made the destiny of the Ming dynasty doomed even though they were moral and righteous people.

During the Ming period, one of the disrespectful punishments for court officials was to be flogged or whipped during court meetings to humiliate them. Also, since the Ming government did not provide good stipends to its officials, many of them had to rely on bribery to support their living. These behaviors became a trend of corruption in the Ming court. To make matters worse, the emperor could forfeit the court officials' pay for a period of time as a punishment, which made the livelihood of lower ranking government officials very difficult. During the Wanli period, the emperor used eunuchs to collect the mineral taxes and caused much loathing and anguish from the wealthy families down to the poor peasants. The so-called "Restoration of Wanli" disappeared only to be replaced with corruption and factional controversies among court officials, eunuchs, and the imperial family.

Yuanxian became a monk in the year 1618. At this time, the Ming court was already in critical trouble financially and politically. Emperor Wanli died in 1620, and the succeeding emperor, Guangzong 光宗, was only on the throne for 29 days when he succumbed to severe diarrhea. Guangzong died after taking a laxative and then later, asked for a red pill to counter the effects of the laxative. The next emperor, Xizong 熹宗, did not make the Ming court any better.

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<sup>87</sup> Dardess, *Blood and History in China*, 1.

<sup>88</sup> Heinrich Busch, "The Tung-lin Academy And Its Political And Philosophical Significance." *Monumenta Serica* 14 (1949-1955): 48.

During his reign from 1620 to 1627, the notorious scandal of the eunuch Wei Zhongxian and wet nurse, Madam Ke, seizing power and taking over the Ming court. During Xizong's reign, the eunuchs fiercely purged and struggled with the Donglin members. The Ming court was in a tremendous crisis; the political environment of the late Ming period disappointed and frustrated the literati, including Yuanxian.

In such a chaotic political environment, many well-educated literati were alarmed and had to carefully consider whether to fully engross in pursuing the career of a court official. Furthermore, under such chaotic political circumstances, some of the literati, even though they had passed the *jinshi* degree and worked in the court, would have rather resigned their position in the court in protest of the disorderly condition of the Ming bureaucracy. In the *Ming shi* records, one of *Jinshi* literati, Wang Yuanhan 王元翰 (1565-1633), resigned without formal approval in 1609.<sup>89</sup> The political climate of the late Ming period was not suitable for many intellectual scholars with straightforward personalities. Yuanxian once described himself as, "This old man was born with an extreme nature and is not willing to follow the current to drift in the mundane world."<sup>90</sup> This statement expresses the true personality of Yuanxian regarding his natural character. An upright personality such as Yuanxian's, who also did not like to chase after fame and wealth, would disdain the political climate of his times. The political conditions of 17th-century China could have been one of the implicit reasons that influenced Yuanxian to change his course. Timothy Brook states, "It is in the Chongzhen era, 1629 to 1644, that the gentry turned to monastic life in great numbers and from higher status levels. At the time, commentators attributed the gentry's retreat to monastic life to the deterioration of the political climate at court,

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<sup>89</sup> *Ming shi* 明史 fascicle 236, 列傳 lie zhuan 124.

<sup>90</sup>X72.0589a15. 老漢生來性太偏. 不肯隨流入世塵.

beginning with the ascendancy of the eunuch faction in the 1620s."<sup>91</sup> The 1620s was also the same period when Yuanxian renounced the world to become a monk. Apart from political factors, the popularity of Chan practices among the literati also seems to have affected Yuanxian's decision.

During the Ming period, the literati and gentry both immersed themselves in not only studying Confucianism for the civil service examination but also explored Buddhist teachings, especially the Chan Buddhist philosophy. Visiting a Buddhist *Sangha* was also part of social life and culture. As Brook illustrates about one of the late Ming gentry, Zhang Dai 張岱 (1597-1679) and his relationship to Buddhism, "a constant visitor to Buddhist places, steeped in the cultural lore of Buddhism, able to quote from the sutras with ease, preferring Buddhist rites to Confucian after his death."<sup>92</sup> Zhang Dai was familiar with and accustomed to Buddhist sites and culture. However, he was not devoted, nor did he commit himself, to religious cultivation as a faithful Buddhist should. Zhang Dai was a contemporary of Yuanxian and his life can be used to represent the literati and gentry of their time, who considered Buddhism and Chan philosophical study to be part of the intellectual culture. The descriptions of Zhang's attitude and behavior give us a window into the culture of 17th-century China and how literati society viewed Buddhism.

The economic prosperity from the middle of 16th-century to the 17th-century brought various influences to Ming society. It provided a strong financial foundation that allowed more people to invest and participate in the civil service examination. However, it was also due to the accumulated wealth in the flourishing economy that many literati were able to obtain copies of Buddhist sutras and spend more time studying them. The Buddhist sutras attracted the literati more than the Confucian canon of the Four Books and Five Classics. Literati also felt that the

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<sup>91</sup> Brook, *Praying for Power*, 121.

<sup>92</sup> Brook, *Praying for Power*, 52.

traditional career ladder of entering service to be a public official was too competitive, and they lost one of the more important motivations — becoming wealthy — to allure them to focus on Confucian studies only. Wang Yangming and his later generations of the Taizhou school all encouraged people to investigate their mind and innate knowledge of goodness. These teachings were similar to the Chan Buddhist's concept of knowing one's Buddha nature to achieve enlightenment. The intellectual culture and trends of the time shifted from focusing on cultivating Confucian social roles to investigating one's true mind.<sup>93</sup> One of the Four Great Buddhist Masters of the Ming dynasty, Yunqi Zhuhong, was the first *shengyuan* or county student to disregard his Confucian studies and become a famous Buddhist master. In the Wanli period, another county student, Yuan Wenwei 袁文瑋, partook in a tonsure ceremony to become a monk after his repeated failures in the civil examinations. A *juren* 舉人 from Ningbo in the Tianqi era took his monk's vows shortly after obtaining his degree in 1624, and in the year 1629, became an abbot of the famous Tiantong Monastery.<sup>94</sup> The intellectual culture during Yuanxian's time made the conversion from Confucian scholar to Chan master a possibility in spite of an anti-Buddhist sentiment from Confucian scholars at the time.

The introduction of new crops, such as sweet potatoes and maize from the New World, helped spur population growth during the Ming period. More people had the ability to pursue and invest in the careers of civil service for their young heirs. Passing the highest civil service examinations was extremely difficult in the late Ming period. William Atwell states "...from 1400 to 1600 the population of China approximately doubled...the number of *shengyuan* increased from about 30,000 to perhaps as many as 600,000."<sup>95</sup> Many candidates suffered the

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>95</sup> William Atwell. "From Education to Politics: the *Fu She*," in Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed., *The Unfolding of Neo-Confucianism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 338.

same fate of failing to obtain a *jinshi* degree. Chan master Zhuhong broke his ties with the mundane world not only due to experiencing the loss of many of his family members but also because he repeatedly failed the higher examinations.<sup>96</sup> The more candidates participated in the race, the more difficult it was to become a winner since the number of available posts stayed constant. The intensified competition for a career in the bureaucracy also inspired some competitors to seek ways to improve their opportunities by forming factional alliances with some of the office holders who were already in an advantageous position.<sup>97</sup> This was one of the reasons why factionalism was ferocious during the late Ming period. Officials actively formed factions to obtain benefits and power within the court. Timothy Brook states, "The unreported factors inducing fin de siècle gentry to enter monasteries often had to do with narrowed career expectations tied to the disarray at court in the 1620s and the intense factionalism among bureaucrats that followed in the 1630s."<sup>98</sup>

The unfavorable political environment of the late Ming period, the change of intellectual pursuit, and the economic prosperity all altered the objectives of many literati during the 17th-century. The study of Confucianism intertwined with Chan Buddhism and the studies of Chan philosophies became part of the curriculum and culture of the literati. However, career expectations were narrow among literati; there were only two directions they could choose for their careers. They could either serve the state government or withdraw from public life, but there were no other existing options in between.<sup>99</sup> Yuanxian chose to focus on Chan Buddhist cultivation, which followed his natural inclination. His lack of desire to pursue fame and fortune probably contributed to his failure in the civil service examinations. The unfavorable political

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<sup>96</sup> Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China*, 12.

<sup>97</sup> Brook, *Praying for Power*, 18.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 121-122.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

climate, the prosperity of economy and the intellectual phenomena may all have been the implicit reasons that influenced him.

### **Yuanxian's Life after Becoming a Monk**

Yuanxian's master, Huijing, was an eminent Caodong Chan master who believed in not only focusing on Chan practice but also in engaging in agricultural cultivation for the independence of the monastery. He himself led his disciples to work hard in the fields. All his life, he did not have to ask for alms or seek connections with wealthy gentry or high court officials for patronage. Huijing did not easily bestow his approval of enlightenment to his disciples during his forty years of dharma teachings. He established the Shouchang branch of Caodong teaching, cultivated plain and down-to-earth practices without highlighting miraculous encounters, and his teachings flourished in the Jiangxi, Guangdong, and Fujian areas. The first time Yuanxian met with Huijing was in 1603 when Yuanxian was only 26 years old, but Yuanxian did not shave his head at that time. Yuanxian made a remark more than twenty years later after his first encounter with Huijing "...thereupon I disregard what I had studied before and let everything go to follow my former master to learn Chan and meditation."<sup>100</sup> Yuanxian studied Chan under Huijing as a lay cultivator for more than 14 years. Huijing passed away one year after Yuanxian received his tonsure ceremony from him. Yuanxian continued his Chan cultivation at Boshan 博山 with his dharma brother, Wuyi Yuanlai (1575-1630), for three years and received full ordination from Wuyi, who strongly advocated practicing Chan and *Vinaya* as well as Chan and Pure Land Buddhism together. He also placed emphasis on thoroughly practicing meditation and truly cultivating one's virtue. Wuyi obtained great prestige among the Buddhist communities. He also urged Yuanxian to compile the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* and hoped

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<sup>100</sup> Yongjue Yuanxian, *Guanglu*, fascicle 13, *Fahua siji xu* 法華私記序. X72.0454a18.

that through this Buddhist record, the teachings of Chan Buddhism could be propagated. He knew that Yuanxian was from Jianzhou and would know many of the local Buddhist masters and Confucian scholars and his knowledge would make the collection of valuable data easier for compiling this record.

In 1622, Yuanxian left Boshan and returned to the Min area to stay in seclusion at the Shuangji summit 雙髻峰 in Sha county 沙縣 of the Fujian area. The next year, he went back to Jianyang for his birth mother's funeral. During his trip, Yuanxian heard monks reciting the *Lotus Sutra* inside the boat. When they chanted the verses of "yishi qingkai, jugong tanzhi, shier yinsheng, pianzhi shifang zhufu shijie 一時警欬. 俱共彈指. 是二音聲. 徧至十方諸佛世界--- A swift sound of coughing and snapping one's fingers, the two sounds can be heard in the ten directions of buddhas without hindrance ...," Yuanxian experienced great enlightenment.<sup>101</sup> This happened in the ninth month of the year of 1623, when Yuanxian was 46 years old. Yuanxian composed a poem to express his realization and joy. He utilized the portrayal of a golden chicken, which repeatedly pecked at a jade-like beryl until it was broken to manifest his perpetual cultivation and practicing to reach his enlightenment. After awakening, numerous worries and illusory thoughts ceased and only he could comprehend this state of mind. Yuanxian felt steady and clear without doubts or obstructions on the journey ahead of him. His poem states:

Golden chicken [constantly] pecked and [eventually] cracked the green jade-colored beryl. Thousands and tens of thousands of illusory thoughts ceased; only I could realize this state of mind. Steadily lying on a sailboat, the sky is so clear and bright, and the mountain(s) ahead of me no longer will be under the rain again.<sup>102</sup>

Thereafter, he stayed at the Jinxian an 金仙庵 in Ouning 甌寧 province to focus on studying the Buddhist canon for three years. In 1627, he moved to Mount He 荷山. The next year, when a lay

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<sup>101</sup> X72.0454a18.

<sup>102</sup> X72.0576a05. In Yuanxian's poem, he uses turtle dove 鳩 to imply the rain, due to the Chinese tradition regards that when turtle dove cries it can cause rain. Many poets used to utilize turtle dove in their poems to imply rain.



person came to ask Yuanxian to obtain the Chinese Buddhist canon in a string-bound style, Yuanxian agreed without hesitation because he understood the precious value and importance of having the Buddhist canon. Yuanxian went through great adversity, taking more than two months to travel to Weili 檇李 (today's Jiaxing 嘉興 in Zhejiang province 浙江省) to bring back a set of the Buddhist canon from Lengyan Temple. In the same year, Yuanxian composed the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* and *Yiyan*. In 1631, he went to Jianyang to compile the posthumous works for the Confucian scholars of the Cai clan. In 1632, Yuanxian met with Chan Master Wengu at the Baoshan an 寶善庵. Before he met with Wengu, Yuanxian lived in seclusion and spent most of his time composing Buddhist literary works without planning to leave his hermitage or become an abbot. In his *Shou ta ming*, he states:

Before long, [I] was mistakenly<sup>103</sup> bestowed the mind seal. [I followed Master Huijing] until the monk passed away, and [then I] went to study with Boshan for three years. Later, I returned to the Min area and lived seclusively on the mountain for twelve years. [My] head covered with dust and [my] face full of dirt, I intended to decay with the grass and trees. One day, because I was visiting Chan Master Wengu, he strived to encourage [me] to come out of seclusion and, therefore, recommended for me to become the abbot of the Gushan monastery at Fuzhou. Master Wengu thus bestowed on me the full ordination. At that year, I was 57 years old.<sup>104</sup>

Chan Master Wengu played an important role in the turning point of Yuanxian's Chan Buddhist pursuits. Wengu approved and applauded Yuanxian's literary talents and intelligence. Wengu remarked that if he had not come to the Jianyang area and made Yuanxian come out of seclusion to become an abbot, people would not be able to know of Yuanxian's talents. Yuanxian may have disappeared without being known.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Yuanxian was very humble in here, he considered that he did not qualify to be bestowed the mind seal.

<sup>104</sup> Yongjue Yuanxian, *Shou ta ming (you xu)* in the *Guanglu*, fascicle 18.

<sup>105</sup> Jintai Pan's 潘晉臺 the *Gushan Yongjue laoren zhuan* 鼓山永覺老人傳 in fascicle 30 of the *Guanglu*.

Wengu himself was a well respected and humble Chan master; he received teachings from several eminent masters, including one of the late Ming Four Buddhist Masters, Yunqi Zhuhong. Wengu's *Vinaya* teaching was derived from and followed Zhuhong's teachings. Zhuhong placed emphasis on the teachings of *Vinaya* and promoted both the recitation of the Buddha's name as well as the releasing of captured animals. Even though Wengu was an enlightened master, he never considered himself to be enlightened. When Wengu was an abbot of a temple, he would leave the monastery right after the general affairs of the temple became orderly and regulated,<sup>106</sup> so others could have an opportunity to be an abbot as well. Apart from Huijing, Wengu was also an important master who shaped Yuanxian's *Vinaya* cultivation. Yuanxian once asserted that his Chan was based on the Shouchang sub-lineage and his *Vinaya* was in accordance with the teachings of Yunqi.<sup>107</sup> After Yuanxian met with Wengu, he came out of his seclusion and became the abbot of Gushan Monastery in the year 1634. Subsequently, Yuanxian became an abbot of four different monasteries. His *Shou ta ming* states:

Afterwards, I became the abbot of the Kaiyuan monastery at Quanzhou, the Zhenji monastery of Hangzhou, the Baoshan temple at Jianzhou and later, [I] returned to Gushan again. Thereafter, [I] rebuilt Buddhist monasteries and composed various writings as well as a *yulu*; altogether 20 categories, for a total of more than one hundred fascicles.<sup>108</sup>

Yuanxian's lay disciple, Lin Zhipan states in the biography that he wrote about his master, "After Yuanxian renounced the world, he had been an abbot of four different Buddhist monasteries. Wherever Yuanxian went, he did not try to form ties with high officials or rich gentry but they all strived to offer their support and so numerous tasks were able to be advanced."<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> See "Zhenji Wengu Dashi taming (*bingxu*) 真寂聞谷大師塔銘 (并序)" in the *Guanglu*, fascicle 18.

<sup>107</sup> *Tazhi* 塔誌 from The *Weilin Daopei Chanshi binfo yulu* the second fascicle 為霖道霈禪師秉拂語錄 第2卷 in the *Manji Shinsan Zokuzōkyō* 卍新纂續藏經. Vol. 72.

<sup>108</sup> Yongjue Yuanxian, "*Shou ta ming (you xu)*" in the *Guanglu*, fascicle 18.

<sup>109</sup> X72.0576a05.

Even though Yuanxian was an abbot of four different monasteries, the one in which he spent the most time was the famous Gushan monastery, a total of twenty-three years from three different time periods. The last time he returned to Gushan was in the year 1642; thereafter, Yuanxian began to actively rebuild many construction projects of the Gushan monastery. It was also during this time period that he experienced the heart breaking occurrences of the passing of Emperor Chongzhen, the fall of the Ming dynasty, and the brutalities of war. Yuanxian expressed his sorrowful feelings through his writings. He wholeheartedly wrote a memorial of worship and repentance on the death of Emperor Chongzhen.

In his memorial for Emperor Chongzhen, Yuanxian first expresses his sincere respect and mourning for the emperor. He remarks that "...from the ancient times to present, the great teaching of truth cannot be obliterated. I am thinking of repaying your benevolence but do not know where to start. In the meanwhile, with all my heart, I am carrying a heartfelt prayer for you." He continues on to say that he does not dare to forget to be mindful of cultivation and reverence. Yuanxian mentions that the Buddhist scriptures teach Buddhists that there are four kinds of essential graces: the favor of parents, the support of sentient beings, the grace of a king, and the blessings of the Three Treasures. In Yuanxian's concept, one of the important teachings of truth in Buddhism was to repay the kindness of an emperor. Yuanxian praises and credits Emperor Chongzhen with various virtues such as "having perfected valiant bearing, manifesting great considerations for his people, having the ultimate virtue as the King Wen of Zhou 周文王, applying frugality to restrain himself, and having as great a stratagem as Xia 夏 and Yu 禹." Yuanxian remarks, however, that such a good emperor encountered a declining national fate and successively occurring calamities. Yuanxian humbly considers himself to be a worthless head-shaved monk who had nothing to offer and could only sincerely and diligently perform a litany

and private practice Tantra to transcend the emperor's spirit to the golden palace where the celestial beings lived. He also prayed that the universe could return to being tranquil and pure as well as silently blessing the dynasty to be well protected and strong.<sup>110</sup> During this unstable period, many wars and banditry occurred. Yuanxian also composed a poem to lament the ruthlessness of war that happened at the city of Fuzhou during the transitional period:

Alas! What I am sorry about the most is the sufferings of the Fuzhou city. The sufferings of the Fuzhou city are the most sorrowful phenomena. The endlessness of severe calamities gathered at this time. Soldiers laid siege to Fuzhou for ten months and the people in the city were still not able to lift the siege. After all, ten thousand households altogether with their strength could not sustain the overall situation. Three calamities<sup>111</sup> all occurred at the same time and Heaven does not detest them. Unknown numbers of dead bodies filled the city; it is said that a virtuous person in ancient time had told a prophecy; the blood from the slaughter of the people of Fuzhou city<sup>112</sup> will generate ponds. People looked everywhere for grasses on the surface of ponds in order to satisfy their hunger; they also cut the flesh of destitute people who had died in the ditch to allay their hunger. Since people were eating each other like animals, the saying states "in the city there is a tiger"; this phrase does not deceive people. Have you ever seen rich people begging in the street? Suddenly, one day, you let your wife and child be separated from you, only because you want to survive; it was so hard to protect even yourself. Who cares to sneer at you even when you failed to keep up the family tradition of moral standards? When Wuzhu<sup>113</sup> established his kingdom here, he called it the lucky place, up to now, why are the calamities of Fuzhou so astonishing? If people in the city all die out, people will still fear that empty city could be the base of disasters. Alas! The sufferings of the Fuzhou city are the most sorrowful phenomena.<sup>114</sup>

The horrible scenes of Fuzhou were also described and recorded by Haiwai Sanren, one of the contemporaries, in an informal essay, the *Rongcheng ji wen* 榕城紀聞. It depicts Fuzhou city as a place where all you could see were a few scrawny, starving, and exhausted people. Some of the

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<sup>110</sup> X72.0487b16.

<sup>111</sup> In Buddhism there are two kinds of three calamities; the minor and major. The minor one appears during a decadent world period are war, pestilence and famine. The major three calamities for world destruction are fire, floods and storms. See <http://www.buddhism-dict.net/ddb/06/25/2017>.

<sup>112</sup> San shan 三山 is another name for Fuzhou city due to at the west side of city there is Min 閩 mountain, east side is Jiuxian 九仙 mountain, and at the north side is Yuewang 越王 mountain.

<sup>113</sup> Wuzhou 無諸 is the name of the king of Minyue 閩越 during the Han dynasty. He established his kingdom at the present day of Fujian province.

<sup>114</sup> X72.0522a07.

houses looked magnificent and elegant on the exterior, but inside, you would see piles of skeletons of the corpses on the ground. The discarded dead bodies would be cut into pieces in just a moment; some people would even steal away small children and in a flash, the young kids would be put into the cauldron to cook. There were some parents who even ate their own children. The author estimated that out of ten people, eight or nine died during this horrifying time.<sup>115</sup>

The battles between the Qing and the Southern Ming troops raged continuously for many years around the Fujian area. In the spring of 1655, due to the conflict of wars, many starving refugees wandered from Xinghua 興化, Changle 常樂, and Fuqing 福清 into the southern suburbs of Fuzhou to look for food and shelter. That year, Yuanxian, already in his late seventies, could not bear to see so many of the miserable, hungry people dying. He organized his disciples of the Yongquang monastery to prepare rice porridge to feed the refugees and coffins to bury more than two thousand dead. Yuanxian continued to do this for fifty days.<sup>116</sup> The *Rongcheng ji wen* also mentions the same relief event that Yuanxian brought to these refugees. It states, "The monk(s) of Gushan brought forth kindness of mind; begging for alms, they would come to the dock and wait for starving refugees every day. Monks provided rice porridge to relieve the hungry people and give medicine to the sick for more than a month."<sup>117</sup> Two years after the event, Yuanxian passed away.

An incident happened a few years before Yuanxian conducted the charity event of feeding the hungry refugees and the burying of thousands of the dead. Some of his poems describe what had happened when Yuanxian was 74 years old; he had fallen, which caused him

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<sup>115</sup> Haiwai Sanren 海外散人, *Rongcheng ji wen* 榕城紀聞 in the *Qing shi zi liao* 清史資料 Vol. 1, compiled by Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan lishi yanjiusuo Qingshi yuanjiu shi (Beijing: Zhonghua shuru chuban, 1980), 7.

<sup>116</sup> X72.0576a05.

<sup>117</sup> Haiwai Sanren, *Rongcheng ji wen*, 9.

to stay in bed for five months. According to his poems, Yuanxian fell during the hottest season of the year and when he was able to walk a few steps with the help of support from others, it was already winter.<sup>118</sup> The demanding charity work required physical strength that no doubt took a serious toll on Yuanxian's health. Yuanxian died on the seventh day of the tenth month in 1657 at the age of 80. According to the biographies written by his disciples, at the beginning of the ninth month, Yuanxian already showed symptoms of illness and did not eat for more than twenty days but still continued his daily routine. He designated Daopei as his dharma heir and composed a poem to express his laments about life during this period of time. The poem states:

This old man was born with extreme character did not willingly follow the currents to drift into the mundane world. His obstinate disposition still has not yet been transformed and resolutely devotes his unyielding character to save Confucianism and Chan Buddhism. The Confucian teachings place emphasis on scholarly honor which already has lost its truthfulness. Chan devotees venerate wittiness and debate which causes their conducts to not be thorough. Now, I am dying and even more, without usefulness, I merely entrust the thought [of saving Confucianism and Chan Buddhism] to the Dharma protecting deities.<sup>119</sup>

A few days later, the head seat of the *Sangha* asked Yuanxian for the last sentence to his disciples. Yuanxian states, "Inside and outside of the three realms, without a place to look for."<sup>120</sup> Another three days passed, and Yuanxian told the head seat monk that he was no longer sick and then sat up with the help of his attendant. Yuanxian passed away while he was sitting in meditation.

The rest of the *Shou ta ming* states Yuanxian's brief description and thoughts about his own life up to the year of his writing this inscription for his Longevity Stupa:

Alas, my long journey of life is completely like the dream of yesterday, a journey of failure and deficiency. It is hard to avoid people's perception [of me]. [People may think] his entering the way to become a monk was the dullest. His becoming an abbot was at the

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<sup>118</sup> X72.0519c19, X72.0520a22.

<sup>119</sup> X72.0576a05.

<sup>120</sup> X72.0576a05.

latest. His complying with the affairs of human life was the clumsiest. [He] also was not able to broadly bring in outstanding monks in order to expand his denomination when compared with other various schools. [He is] like the crippled turtle who wishes to be a flying dragon. How can [he] be worthy of talking about? [I am] already seventy-five years old this year, soon I will be going to transcend into a dead person. Therefore, I prepared this tomb in advance to wait for the time to come as well as to prepare an inscription for it. The inscription states: whose skeleton is this, who erects this stupa? The son of the Shouchang, the abbot of the Gushan monastery;<sup>121</sup> [he] did not understand the ways of the world, stubbornly thoughtless. [His] aspiration was lofty, his words exaggerated, his eyes deserted the Buddha. [Once he] took possession of rising up<sup>122</sup> to the abbot seat, scolded the present and blamed the past, ordering about ghosts and driving the wind, rebuilt this monastery, and cast aside this human body to hide in the desolate stupa. Do not say there is no mouth, there is a voice like a tiger, is it alive or dead? Please interpret these words broadly and declare them to the coming prosperity who can continue my courage.<sup>123</sup>

Yuanxian briefly describes his life in a humble but also sarcastic way. Yuanxian was a humble and virtuous Buddhist master; he would not boast about himself in his own Longevity Stupa inscription. He considers himself as the dumbest and clumsiest, one who is not able to broadly yield an extensive amount of disciples to expand the teachings of Caodong Chan Buddhism. He sarcastically portrays himself as a crippled turtle, who conceitedly wants to be a flying dragon. His inscription also records his self-disparagement as being stubborn and thoughtless or so supercilious that he does not even realize the existence of the Buddha. He also scolded the present and blamed people of the past. However, there is also a sense of his concern for the future. He wants the teachings of Chan Buddhism to be able to continue and he hopes that through this inscription later generations can understand his aspirations and follow his ways. Yuanxian was a Buddhist master with great aspirations who considered the revival and perpetuation of Chan Buddhism as his own responsibility.

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<sup>121</sup> Gushan monastery is the Yongguang si at the Gu Mountain 鼓山. See Yuanxian's *Gushan zhi* 鼓山志 Fascicle One, in the *Siku quanshu zunmu chongshu* 四庫全書存目叢書, Shi bu 史部二三五, Qilu shushe chubanshe 齊魯書社出版, 1996. Shi 史 235-743.

<sup>122</sup> The "據" can be translated as "according to, depend on or take possession of," due to the context of sentences I chose "take possession of". "興" can be translated as "flourish, prosper, thrive or to raise up," I chose "to raise up" due to the context of sentences.

<sup>123</sup> Yongjue Yuanxian, " *Shou ta ming (you xu)* " in the *Guanglu*, fascicle 18. X72.0492a21.

Yuanxian's only dharma heir, Weilin Daopei, makes comment on the contributions of his master in the preface of the *Zui hou yu* 最後語 (The Final Words). He remarks, "...since the Chan teachings of Bodhidharma has been transmitted up to now, the abuses are extreme. This old man (Yuanxian) stood up and devoted all his efforts to save the condition. Using dignity and honesty to accomplish and elevate the Chan teachings, emphasizing the essential principle and objective to restrain it, utilizing words and actions to examine and verify it."<sup>124</sup> Daopei continues on to express that Yuanxian firmly secured the iron gate of Chan cultivation. He investigated and differentiated true cultivators from the false ones. Only those who were genuine cultivators would be able to stay with Yuanxian. Therefore, Daopei states that "...nowadays the Shaolin Chan lineage is able to continue and be without decline; it is all because of this old man."<sup>125</sup>

A lay disciple, Lin Zhipan also states that Yuanxian was always very cautious about the great dharma transmission. Yuanxian opened the lecture hall for nearly 30 years; he never lightly made the promise of dharma transmission to his disciples. He only had Weilin Daopei as his dharma heir when he was 80 years old. People from different directions all admired his strictness in choosing a dharma heir. Yuanxian conducted himself with high moral principles and undefiled behaviors.<sup>126</sup> Lin states that as long as Yuanxian was defending the dharma teachings and saving the declining world, even though a sharp sword was held in front of him, he would not withdraw a bit.<sup>127</sup>

### **Miraculous Events**

There were many miraculous events recalled in his biographies, such as driving away a tiger, entering hell to rescue a believer, praying for rain and so on. One of Yuanxian's lay

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<sup>124</sup> X72.0589c01.

<sup>125</sup> X72.0589c01.

<sup>126</sup> X72.0576a05.

<sup>127</sup> X72.0576a05.



disciples recounts the event of praying for rain in Yuanxian's biography. In 1643, when Yuanxian was staying in Baoshan an, there happened to be a drought, three months without rain, the trees and grass were all dried out and the people were all very frightened. There were officials who went all over to the temples and shrines to pray for help from the deities, but without results. An official reached out to Yuanxian for help. Yuanxian ascended the hall, expounded the Buddhist dharma teachings and prayed for rain. Right after Yuanxian finished his dharma teaching and descended from the head seat, a great rain poured down and reached up to three feet. That year, the area had a plenteous harvest.<sup>128</sup> However, among the many of miraculous events, one incident in particular says a lot about Yuanxian's reputation for supernatural powers. In 1647, bandits came to Gushan and put Yuanxian in a basket to carry him down the mountain. When they were only half way down, the bandits trembled and suddenly fell. The masts of their ship, which was anchored in the river, were hit by lightning as well. They were so afraid and decided to carry Yuanxian back to the Gushan temple. Thereafter, bandits would not dare to rob the Gushan monastery again.<sup>129</sup> I believe that bandits might have fallen by accident but Yuanxian's reputation for miraculous abilities made the bandits frightened and they carried him back to Gushan without any harm. Yuanxian did not consider himself to have supernatural powers and he always admonished his disciples not to spread tales of those mysterious events to others.

His lay disciple, Lin Zhipan, honored Yuanxian as an ancient Buddha come again, who possessed great compassion, virtue and perfect wisdom. Lin remarks, therefore, that wherever Yuanxian went, miraculous happenings often occurred.<sup>130</sup>

### **Yuanxian's Works**

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<sup>128</sup> X72.0395b13 and X72.0576a05.

<sup>129</sup> X72.0576a05.

<sup>130</sup> X72.0576a05.

One of the most significant contributions of Yuanxian was his abundant Buddhist literary works. In the *Shou ta ming*, Yuanxian says that he composed a "total of twenty different categories of *yulu* and numerous writings in a total of more than one hundred fascicles." However, Pan's biography of Yuanxian states that his master had composed a total of twenty categories of *yulu* and various writings in a total of more than 80 fascicles.<sup>131</sup> Huachuan Ji believes that Pan's number is not accurate. As for the number of categories; according to the *Catalogue of Printing Blocks at the Gushan Yongquan Chan Monastery* 鼓山湧泉禪寺經版目錄, the monastery has a total of 23 categories of Yuanxian related writings. Huachuan Ji points out that the number that Yuanxian indicated in the *Shou ta ming* was before he had composed the *Wanlu* 晚錄, the *Zuihou yu* 最後語, the *Xinjing zhizhang* 心經指掌 and later, his disciple also compiled the *Guanglu* 廣錄. Ji believes that the total number of categories should be 26. Regarding the total number of fascicles; Ji counts a total of 120 fascicles that includes the current existing works of Yuanxian from related records.<sup>132</sup> The exact number of Yuanxian's Chan literature works is now difficult to give an accurate count because some of his works have vanished and some have possibly been counted repeatedly.

Yuanxian spent most of his life perpetually composing and compiling various Buddhist literary works until close to the end of his last breath. His work, *Zuihou yu* or The Final Words, collects Yuanxian's works from 1652 to 1657, indicating that Yuanxian was still writing even into the last year of his life. His early period of works can go back as early as 1624 or even earlier. We do not know the exact year the *Fahua siji* 法華私記 or the *Private Notes of the Lotus Sutra* was composed but, according to the content of its preface we can estimate it was written in

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<sup>131</sup> Pan Jintai's the *Gushan Yongjue laoren zhuan* in fascicle 30 of the *Guanglu*.

<sup>132</sup> Huachuan Ji 紀華傳, *Ming qing gushan caodong zong wenxian yanjiu* 明清鼓山曹洞宗文獻研究 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2014), 31-32.

the early period of Yuanxian's cultivating life. If it was not written during the time when Yuanxian was still a lay cultivator, then at least by that time he had already written down some of his thoughts regarding the *Lotus Sutra*. Previously, we mentioned the time Yuanxian stayed at a Buddhist monastery to study for his civil service examination and heard the chanting of the *Lotus Sutra* upon which he had a very sensational feeling of his body being so pure and bright. It was due to this experience that Yuanxian became curious about the Buddhist sutras. Twenty years later, Yuanxian also became enlightened upon hearing the chanting of one of the verses in the *Lotus Sutra*. Yuanxian had a great affinity with the *Lotus Sutra*. No copy of the *Fahua siji* has survived but through its preface and other sources we know this work existed. Through many primary and secondary sources, as well as previous scholars' research findings, I have been able to generate a table showing how frequently and diligently Yuanxian dedicated himself to composing numerous Buddhist works throughout his life.

**Table of Yuanxian's Buddhist Works**

No.	Name	Year	Where to find	Fascicle(s)	Reference
1	Lenyan yijie 楞嚴翼解	1624	<i>Manji Zokuzōkyō</i> / Gushan Monastery	2	
2	Jianzhou hongshi lu 建州弘釋 錄	1628	<i>Manji Zokuzōkyō</i>	2	Printed in 1632
3	Yiyan 寢言	1628	<i>Manji Zokuzōkyō</i>	1	Printed in 1632
4	Zhuzu daoying zan 諸祖道影 贊	around 1633	<i>Guanglu</i>	Unknown	
5	Jingci yaoyu 淨慈要語	1634	Komazawa/ Kyōto Universities	2	Printed in 1637

No.	Name	Year	Where to find	Fascicle(s)	Reference
6	Chanyu neiji 禪餘內集 Chanyu waiji 禪餘外集	1634, 1635, 1637	Komazawa University	8	Printed in 1643, assembled through the years of Yuanxian's works and compiled by Taichong
7	Lenyan lueshu 楞嚴略疏	1636	<i>Manji Zokuzōkyō</i> / Gushan Monastery	10	Printed in 1638
8	Sifen jieben yueyi 四分戒本 約義	1641	<i>Manji Zokuzōkyō</i>	6	
9	Kaiyuan sizhi 開元寺志	1642	<i>Fosi shi zhihui kan</i>	4	
10	Dongshang guche 洞上古轍	1644	<i>Guanglu</i>	2	
11	Yongjue pushuo 永覺普說	Chongzhen period	Gushan Monastery	1	Recorded by Daoshun and Taichong
12	Jinang lueshu 金剛略疏	1645	<i>Manji Zokuzōkyō</i>	1	
13	Gushan zhi 鼓山志	1645	<i>Siku quanshu</i>	12	Printed after 1654
14	Lüxue faren 律學發軔	1646	<i>Manji Zokuzōkyō</i>	3	
15	Xu Yiyan 續寤言	1647	<i>Guanglu</i>	1	Printed in 1652
16	Jideng lu 繼燈錄	1648	<i>Manji Zokuzōkyō</i>	7	Printed in 1651
17	Bu deng lu 補燈錄	1649	Gushan Monastery	1	
18	Gushan wanlü 鼓山晚錄	1643 - 1652	<i>Kinsei kanseki sōkan Shisō hen</i>	6	Printed 1652

No.	Name	Year	Where to find	Fascicle(s)	Reference
19	Zuihou yu 最後語	1652 - 1657	<i>Kinsei kanseki sōkan Shisō hen</i>	2	Compiled by Chuanshan Printed in 1658
20	Bōre xinjing zhizhang 般若心經 指掌	1654	<i>Manji Zokuzōkyō</i>	1	
21	Lingguang beichan shiji heke 靈光北禪 事蹟合刻	1656	<i>Zhongguo fosi zhi con kan</i>	1	
22	Gushan Yongjue Chanshi guanglu 鼓山永覺 禪師廣錄	1659	<i>Manji Zokuzōkyō</i>	30	Compiled by Weilin Daopei 3 years after the death of Yuanxian
23	Chanlin shuyu 禪林疏語	Unknown	<i>Manji Zokuzōkyō /Gushan</i>	1	
24	Chanlin baoxun shiyi 禪林寶訓 事義	Unknown	Gushan Monastery	2	Yuanxian revised the work
25	Chanlin shuyu kaozheng 禪林疏語 考證	Unknown	<i>Manji Zokuzōkyō</i>	4	Compiled by Yuanxian's lay disciples/Chaoran
26	Fahua siji 法華私記	Unknown	Lost	Unknown	Early period of work

## Conclusion

Yuanxian's life began with a traditional Confucian background upbringing; however, he made a crucial decision to alter his pursuit to Chan Buddhism. By means of his *Shou ta ming* and various other sources, Yuanxian explicitly expresses his attitude and character. He preferred a

simple and tranquil life and even had thoughts of renouncing the world in his early life. He was also a humble person, did not want to obtain fame for himself through any occasions or by forming ties with high officials. Through the historical happenings of Yuanxian's time we perceive a sense of the implicit pressures and popular trends which indeed influenced him. When the political environment was distasteful and his learning of Chan teachings shown him a practical way to live life, Yuanxian followed his nature.

Yuanxian observed the most fundamental Confucian values, filial piety to his parents. That was one of the reasons that he did not renounce the world until after his parents had passed away. However, he also understood the most important bodhisattva precept was to be filially obedient to parents. We also know from some of his works that later in Yuanxian's life, he further realized the broader capacity in Buddhist teachings of filial piety than in the Confucian teachings.

As a Buddhist master, even though Yuanxian lived in the super mundane world of religion, he, however, manifested the Mahayana Buddhist teachings of compassion and the Confucian sentiment of observing one's responsibility to benefit and serve society. His altruistic humanitarian acts of helping the war time refugees not only demonstrated his Mahayana teaching of compassion but also revealed his deep Confucian concept of serving society. I believe that Yuanxian's life manifested considerable impacts not only on the super mundane world of religion but also on society. His dharma heir remarked that the reason the Shaoling Chan tradition was able to last was all because of the efforts of Yuanxian. The Shouchang sub-lineage Chan teaching spread out from Fujian to Taiwan and to many other foreign countries in the modern-day. Today, Yuanxian's influences still exist through his descendants. His humanitarian endeavors influenced the formation of humanistic Buddhism in Taiwan.

While a Buddhist master, Yuanxian did not disregard his training from being a Confucian scholar. He incessantly utilized his literary talents to compose numerous works of Buddhist literature to propagate Buddhism and benefit the literati. The table of Yuanxian's Buddhist works demonstrates that for almost every year, Yuanxian continually used his pen to compose Buddhist literature. Due to his efforts, he not only assisted Chan cultivator of his time but also provided great resources for later generations to shed some light on the vast Buddhist teachings. We are going to investigate one of his important works, the *Nonsense Uttered in Dreams* or the *Yiyan* in the following chapter as well as some of Yuanxian's other literary works in the following chapters.

### Chapter Three *The Nonsense Uttered in Dreams*

Yuanxian composed the *Nonsense Uttered in Dreams* or *Yiyan* in 1628 while living in seclusion on Mount He 荷山 before assuming the abbacy at the Gushan monastery. Prior to the writing of *Yiyan*, he spent three years reading and studying the Buddhist canon, risking his life to obtain a string-bound style of the Chinese Buddhist canon from Lengyan Temple 楞嚴寺 in Weili 樛李, and also composed the *Jianzhou hongshi lu*. The *Yiyan* was printed in autumn, the month of the Chrysanthemum (September) in the year of Renshen (1632) during the Chongzhen 崇禎 era at the Study Hut on Mount He.

The *Yiyan* is one of Yuanxian's major works and expresses his thoughts and confrontation regarding Confucianism and Daoism, their differences with Buddhism and his viewpoints toward syncretism of Three Teachings. Scholars consider the *Yiyan* to be an important work for later generations to comprehend Yuanxian's distinctive philosophies and to understand the intellectual and religious phenomena of the late Ming period. Yuanxian was originally a Confucian scholar who later became a Caodong Buddhist master. He had a substantial understanding and unique perspective toward Buddhism and Confucianism which are all reflected in his *Yiyan*. To begin with the *Yiyan*, Yuanxian wrote a very intriguing preface to correlate with the title of his work, *Nonsense Uttered in Dreams*:

This insubstantial world is a place of dreams. The [classification system] of the three vehicles and four teachings<sup>133</sup> are a Dharma of dream. The various buddhas and sentient beings are all dreamers. The dreamers occupy the place of dreams and perceive the Dharma of the dream. [In such an environment,] how can one be sure they are not dreaming of a dream...The wild monk of Mount He did not wake up from a vast dream, and his crazy mind still did not cease, therefore, he composed the *Yiyan*.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> During the 5-8th century Huiyuan, Zhiyi, Fazang, and Zongmi were according to theme or time period to classify the diversity of the Buddha's teachings into a single system. The three vehicles are for different capacities of sentient beings. The four teachings mean the set of four of the classification of the doctrinal system.

<sup>134</sup> Yongjue Yuanxian, *Guanglu*, fascicle 29, the *Yiyan*. X72.0560b22-0570b03.



Yuanxian gave his work a modest title to imply that his writings in this work were all just nonsense uttered in his dreams, then, in his preface, he humbly describes himself as a wild monk still in a vast dream and has crazy thoughts. This implied that Yuanxian was being humble; he did not want to make a big disturbance to obtain the attention of others by his statements in the *Yiyan*. Thus, in order to soften the intensity of his opinions in his writings, he gave the title, *Yiyan*, to suggest that he is still in a dream and talking nonsense.

At the time, Yuanxian was concerned about the Chan teachings being mixed with the teachings of Taizhou School<sup>135</sup> which created a radical practice of "Mad Chan." Yuanxian did not want to see the unorthodox teachings of Mad Chan to be confused with authentic Chan teachings. The way Yuanxian combated the unorthodox teachings was to utilize his literary skill to distinguish their differences and to show the supremacy of the orthodox Chan Buddhism. Twenty years later, Yuanxian explained his purpose of composing the *Yiyan* in a subsequent work, the *Continued Nonsense Uttered in Dreams* or *Xu Yiyan*. He states his purpose in a modest manner, "...to respond to the Confucians' questions and debates in order to achieve a thorough and mutual understanding of Confucianism and Buddhism."<sup>136</sup> However, when we investigate the statements in the *Yiyan*, we realize that Yuanxian not only points out the differences of Confucianism and Daoism with Buddhism and the insufficiencies of Confucianism and Daoism but also ranks Buddhism to be above Confucianism and Daoism. He acts as a vigorous defender of Buddhism.

In this chapter, I focus on Yuanxian's perspectives toward Confucianism and Daoism and then investigate Yuanxian's thoughts regarding the integration of Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism. This would be an effective step toward scrutinizing Yuanxian's thoughts and allows

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<sup>135</sup> One of the sub-lineages of Wang Yangming's School of Mind.

<sup>136</sup> Yongjue Yuanxian, *Guanglu*, fascicle 30, the *Xu Yiyan*. X72.0570c04 to 0575c16.

greater insight regarding Chan Buddhism and the religious climate during the late Ming period. I argue that Yuanxian's *Yiyan* manifests his disapproval of the trend to harmonize the Three Teachings. As a Buddhist reviver and defender, he stood against the currents of his era through his writings and upheld the teachings of Buddhism to be above the teachings of Confucianism and Daoism of his time. Yuanxian's distinct position toward the syncretism of the Three Teachings and his intent of upholding Buddhism made an impact on the super-mundane religious world. As his dharma heir comments, Yuanxian's efforts were one of the reasons that the Shaolin Chan lineage was able to persist.<sup>137</sup>

Throughout this chapter, I will utilize various ancient sources and records, including Yongjue Yuanxian's *Guanglu*, the *Ming shi*, the *Analects*, *Mencius*, the *Daode jing*, *Zhuangzi*, and so forth. The main method used in this chapter is a critical textual analysis and translation especially centered on the *Yiyan*. Other scholars have already mentioned a few examples of Yuanxian's incisiveness in their works, such as Jialing Fan articulating Yuanxian's criticism about Mencius's belief that human nature is good, Wang Yangming's theory of no good and no evil, Zhu Xi's Great Ultimate and the vital force or *qi*, as well as Zhu Xi's concept of learning through investigation into the nature of things. I focus on some of the fundamental concepts from the contents of the *Yiyan* to illustrate the ultimate differences among Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism. My topics of discussion will include the concepts of mind, the human essence, the Great Ultimate, emptiness, existence and nonexistence, and the harmonization of the Three Teachings. The *Yiyan* not only furnishes us with essential clues about Yuanxian's intrinsic thoughts and notions but also provides us with traces and indications regarding the trends of religious and intellectual societies of Yuanxian's era.

### **Observations Regarding Confucianism in the *Yiyan***

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<sup>137</sup> X72.0589c01.

Confucianism has been the officially recognized imperial ideology and state cult since the period of Emperor Wu of Han (156 BC-87 BC) in Chinese history,<sup>138</sup> and it occupied an important political position during the Ming period. Zhu Yuanzhang, the founder of the Ming dynasty, favored using Confucianism to govern his court. According to the records of the *History of the Ming*, when Zhu Yuanzhang entered the Prefecture of Huai 淮州, the first thing he did was to pay his respects to Confucius at the Temple of Confucius. He also instituted the Confucian Classics as the core of the official curriculum in the civil service examinations, and used the commentaries of Cheng Zhu's school as the Confucian orthodoxy for interpreting the Confucian Classics. During Emperor Yongle's period (r. 1402-1424), the court compiled and published the *Complete Great Four Books* or 四書大全 and the *Great Book of Complete Five Classics* 五經大全, and the *Great Book of Neo-Confucianism* 性理大全.<sup>139</sup> During the Ming period, Neo-Confucianism was the mainstream of the intellectual and religious communities while the Neo-Confucianism from the Song period was the focus of Confucian studies.

In one of the important paragraphs of the *Yiyán*, Yuanxian expresses his viewpoints regarding Confucian and Neo-Confucian teachings. He includes several subjects within the paragraph. Beginning with his discussion of human essence, Yuanxian discourses on the meanings of heaven and the ordinance of heaven and then unfolds furthermore into a discussion of the *taiji* 太極 or the Great Ultimate<sup>140</sup> which includes the two vital forces, *yin* and *yang*, and the five elements or five agents. Yuanxian considered these two vital forces and five elements to

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<sup>138</sup> Wei-ming Tu, "The Confucian Tradition in Chinese History" in *Heritage of China: Contemporary Perspectives on Chinese Civilization* ed., by Paul S. Ropp and Timothy Hugh Barrett (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 122-123.

<sup>139</sup> Tingyu Zhang 張廷玉, *Ming shi* 明史 fascicle 50 and 70 (Taipei, Taiwan: Taiwan Shangwu yin shu guan, 1981), 529c, 719b.

<sup>140</sup> Some scholars translate *taiji* as supreme polarity or ultimate polarity, I follow Wing-Tsit Chan's translation and use the Great Ultimate.

be equal to exquisite mind. After some twists and turns, Yuanxian eventually points out that human essence is the mind and is the thusness of buddha nature. He indicates that the buddha nature is bestowed from heaven (nature) and that all sentient beings possess it equally. This essence or buddha nature is perfect, complete and self sufficient; it cannot be divided or be destroyed and this concept of human essence is distinct from the new generation of Neo-Confucianism. The beginning of the paragraph states:

Confucians say that the essence of humans and matter is endowed from heaven. The Buddhist learners all oppose this. The people did not know that the heaven the Confucians articulated about does not really point to heaven. It is called heaven, meaning before the deluded consciousness has intervened. It is called heaven, meaning the time before human manipulations have not yet been added. It is called heaven, meaning the place where the intended planning has not yet been carried out.<sup>141</sup>

The first sentence of this paragraph is derived from the *Doctrine of the Mean* 中庸, "What Heaven confers is called nature. Accordance with this nature is called the Way. Cultivating the Way is called education."<sup>142</sup> As Yuanxian was initially a Confucian scholar, he often obtained his references from Confucian sources. To Yuanxian, heaven is pure, genuine, and authentic nature which is without man-made alterations or pollution. Here, he gives a hint that heaven implies the essence of human nature; it is pure and without defilements. In the later portion of this section, Yuanxian continues to provide quotes from the *Wen shi jing* 文始經,<sup>143</sup> the "Wanzhang I 萬章上" of the *Mencius* 孟子, the *Tanggao* 湯誥 of the *Book of Document* 尚書 and the *Book of Songs* 詩經 to further explain what he means about heaven or human nature. At the same time, he weaves in the idea of the ordinance of heaven. Interestingly, Yuanxian

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<sup>141</sup> Yongjue Yuanxian, *Guanglu*, fascicle 29, the *Yiyan*. X72.0561c11.

<sup>142</sup> See the *Doctrine of the Mean*, "天命之謂性, 率性之謂道, 修道之謂教." the translation is from A. Charles Muller at the website of <http://www.acmuller.net/con-dao/docofmean.html>. 05/25/2017

<sup>143</sup> It is also named *Wen shi zhen jing* 文始真經, or *Guan yin zi* 關尹子. Some believe that an official, Yin Xi 尹喜 in the Zhou dynasty wrote this book. The *Wen shi zhen jing* can be found in the "Treaties on Literature 藝文志" in the *Book of Han* 漢書.

expressed his acceptance of the early Confucian's original concept regarding the human nature, but criticized the insufficiency of the concept of heaven in later Confucianism, meaning the Neo-Confucianism. He continues on to state:

Therefore, the *Wen shi jing* says, "It cannot be made, cannot be reached, cannot be measured, cannot be divided and, therefore, reluctantly named it heaven, named it destiny." Mencius also says, "...that which is done without men's doing is the will of heaven. That which happened without men causing it is destiny." There are people who are good at speaking about the heavenly mandate. To speak truly, the expression of the early Confucians about the original human essence coming from heaven is no different with the Buddhist's [concept]. However, the Confucian's [explanation] only guides people to a point but does not complete it, holding it back and without uttering it all out. They make their views only according to the convenience of the situation, such as, when the *Book of Document* says, "The great God has bestowed on the people a moral sense of sincerity and kindness"<sup>144</sup> and the *Book of Songs* states, "Heaven gives birth to all men, and each thing possesses its principle."<sup>145</sup>

Yuanxian acknowledged that the explanations from the Confucian Classics indicated that the teachings of original Confucianism in the aspect of heaven or nature was close to the Buddhist concept of human essence. However, he also indicates that their explanations are not complete. He then intertwines the notion of *yin* and *yang* vital forces with the five elements into the analysis within the same paragraph. Meanwhile, Yuanxian also plants a seed for his condemnation of Neo-Confucianism later in the paragraph. He continues on to state:

It is what has been said before the deluded consciousness has not intervened, the time that human manipulations have not added, the place where the intended planning has not been carried out. It is also like those words that others have said, reaching up to the heaven and knowing the mandate of heaven, as well as the will of heaven and the intent of heaven. They all did not deviate from this meaning. The subsequent Confucians did not understand its meaning and say that in the dark, high and far space there is authority. They call it the mandate of heaven, which is the center that is in charge of the two vital forces, *yin* and

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<sup>144</sup> Please see James Legge's *The Sacred Book of China: The Texts of Confucianism* (Oxford: the Clarendon Press, 1879), 89-90 for the translation of "維皇上帝。降衷下民."

<sup>145</sup> X72.0561c11.

*yang*, and the five elements.<sup>146</sup> All humans and substances obtain them to form their shapes and essences.<sup>147</sup>

The *yin* and *yang* and the five elements were important topics of investigation for the Song period Neo-Confucians. Yuanxian would not disregard this essential subject to express his viewpoints regarding the Great Ultimate. He applies Confucian sources to discuss the essence of humans and things to lay out his points and to form his subject of argument for later. At the end of this paragraph, Yuanxian expressly states that the essence of mind is the backbone of the universe; the mind is the key for what occurs in life but not the two vital forces and five elements. He criticizes the later generations of Confucians for misunderstanding that the true meaning of the essence of humans and matter is endowed from heaven. Yuanxian intends to place Buddhist teachings in a more superior position than Confucianism and criticizes the irrationality of the Confucian's concept of human essence. The remainder of his paragraph states:

In fact, our marvelous mind is the essence of the two vital forces, *yin* and *yang*, and the five elements. Therefore, [in Buddhism,] it says "Three realms<sup>148</sup> are only a manifestation of mind." Now people discard the mind and look outside of the mind, saying that in the dark, high and far space there is authority; this means looking for reasons outside of one's mind. When one is looking for causes outside one's mind, the Buddha considered it as a non-Buddhist teaching due to the cause or reason being outside of one's mind. People also say that in the heaven, it is the ordinance which is united and without being apart. In the human being, it is the essence, which is apart and without uniting. Therefore, the essence acts as having apartness and unity. When the vital forces collect together then there is life and the essence begins to activate. When the vital forces scatter then there is death and the essence immediately terminates. Therefore, the essence has life and death. Having both apartness and unity as well as life and death, it cannot be called essence; not even to call it the mandate of heaven, or the Way. This surely is not the originally intended meaning from the Confucians.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Please refer to *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* trans. and comp. by Wing-Tsit Chan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), for the translation of *qi* 氣. The five elements are water, fire, wood, metal, and earth.

<sup>147</sup> X72.0561c11.

<sup>148</sup> In Buddhism, the three realms are the desire realm, the form realm, and the formless realm.

<sup>149</sup> X72.0561c11.

Yuanxian steers the direction of this paragraph to focus on the Buddhist concept regarding the mind. He disagrees with the way the Neo-Confucians placed emphasis on looking for causes or reasons outside the mind. He believed that for something to qualify as human essence, the essence cannot be divided or have life and death. The essence should be perfect, bright, self sustained, and the mind should be the source of all phenomena. Yuanxian voices the difference between the Buddhist's and Confucians' teachings regarding the human essence or mind. He did not accept the Neo-Confucian's concept of the Great Ultimate controlling human essence, because if the Great Ultimate has *yin* and *yang* then it would mean the Great Ultimate has life and death, which is not absolute.

The mind, to Chan cultivators, is the fundamental element. The Sixth Patriarch, Huineng, expounded, "...the ten thousand dharmas are all within our minds..."<sup>150</sup> The famous slogan of Chan states, "A special transmission outside the scriptures; not established upon words and letters; directly pointing to the human mind; seeing one's nature and becoming a Buddha." This slogan reveals that the crucial element of becoming a Buddha lies within one's own mind. Yuanxian agreed with the traditional Confucian concept of the original human essence coming from heaven but disagreed with the Neo-Confucian concept of the Great Ultimate controlling the universe or the essence of humans. In another section of the *Yiyan*, Yuanxian states:

The Buddha spoke mind-only; this is different with the objective of "my Way is penetrated by a single thread" by Confucius ...Using the whole mind to do a thing, the whole thing becomes the mind. It is like using gold to cast a statue; the statue is not outside of the gold. It is also like the reflection of a mirror, the reflection is within the mirror.<sup>151</sup>

Yuanxian articulates that everything around us is the viewpoint of our mind. He uses the gold statue and mirror as examples to illustrate the inseparability of mind and all phenomena in the

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<sup>150</sup> Philip B. Yampolsky, *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch: the Text of the Tun-Huang Manuscript* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 151.

<sup>151</sup> X72.0567c05.

universe. All phenomena are the appearances and movements of our mind. The most important insight of the teachings of Buddha is "the claim that who we are and what we think exists is a function of our mind and its cognitive or intellectual powers."<sup>152</sup> Yuanxian also remarks that Confucius' teaching of "my Way is penetrated by a single thread" is just expedient words which are not about "mind" at all. The one single thread mentioned by Confucius refers to the loyalty and forgiveness which are centered on a person's morality. In this section, Yuanxian asserts that one of the crucial distinctions between the teachings of Buddhist and Confucian is the mind.

In another paragraph in the *Yiyan*, Yuanxian describes the contrast between Mencius' and Buddhism's concept of human essence. Yuanxian wrote:

Question: Mencius said that the human essence is different from dogs and sheep but are there two different kinds of essences? Answer: The essence is the same. Question: Then do things obtain the partial and human beings obtain the complete essence? Answer: Essence is without partiality or completeness. Question: Then human beings and other things are the same? Answer: The immutable essence is without differences, the function according to circumstances is without similarities. The scripture says: This is the Dharma-kaya,<sup>153</sup> deluded transmigration through life and death in the five destinies.<sup>154</sup>

Yuanxian expounds that the essence of human and animals has no difference in the Buddhist teachings. This essence is the thusness of buddha nature 真如佛性, therefore, all sentient beings equally possess it, even though there are various classifications among sentient beings. The various classifications imply the five or six destinies.<sup>155</sup> Yuanxian further remarks the rationality of the cause, why some become animals even though the essence of humans and animals is the same. The difference depends on one's karma or cause-effect which determines whether sentient

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<sup>152</sup> Stephen J. Laumakis, *An Introduction to Buddhist Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 95.

<sup>153</sup> Dharma-kaya is one of the so-called three bodies of the Buddha; the dharma-kaya, the sambhoga-kaya and the nirmana-kaya. The Dharma-kaya is the true self of the Buddha, present within all beings.

<sup>154</sup> X72.0561b08.

<sup>155</sup> The five destinies are added the *asura* to become six destinies. According to Ding Fubao's 丁福保 *Foxue da cidian* 佛學大辭典 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chu ban she, 2015). This source indicates that it depends on the sutra, some say five some say six destinies.



beings are reborn as a hell-being, hungry ghost, animal, human being or god. The buddha nature has often been compared to the water in the ocean; the wind and other circumstances cause the waves to rise but the water in the ocean does not change its essence. The main idea of this paragraph is to show that in Confucianism, the essence of humans and animals is not the same and this idea contradicts the Buddhist's theory.

The "Gaozi I 告子上" of *Mencius* says "The feeling of commiseration belongs to all men, so does that of shame and dislike, and that of reverence and respect, and that of approving and disapproving..." These are the essence of human nature. Mencius believed and advocated that human nature is good. The aim of Mencius in pointing out that the human nature is different from that of animals was to emphasize the virtues of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom which are all possessed by humans. Mencius attempts to instill the dignity of being a human and the value and greatness of being a human being.<sup>156</sup> Yuanxian, in his position as a Buddhist master, utilizes a Buddhist lens to seize upon the defect of Mencius and remarks on the crucial distinction between Buddhism and Confucianism regarding the human essence.

Yuanxian discusses the human nature in another section of the *Yiyen*. At the beginning of his discussion, he utilizes statements from the Confucian Classics to comply with the Buddhist concept of human essence. Then, at the end of his statement, Yuxian reveals his true feelings regarding the Confucian's explanation of human essence. Yuanxian believes that the Confucian teachings of human essence are only an expedient means of explanation for good and he did not think that human essence can really use "good" to classify it. The paragraph states:

Question: Mencius expressed that human nature is inherently good. Most of the Chan cultivators did not agree with him, only the Reverent Zong of the Donglin temple<sup>157</sup> agrees. Is it correct that this fundamental human nature of goodness does not pair with evil?

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<sup>156</sup> Fan, *Mingmo caodong dianjun*, 401.

<sup>157</sup> He was Zhaojue Zong Chanshi 照覺總禪師 at the Lushan Donglin temple in Jiangxi province. His master was Shoushan Shengnian 首山省念.

Answer: The essence is tranquil without conforming to names and words. All the annotations are completely in conflict with original nature. Not only is it not suitable for Mencius to call it "goodness" or even for Yao and Shun to call it "middle." The *Great Learning* calls it "bright." The *Means* calls it "sincerity." To go so far as the various buddhas call it "thusness" or "perfect enlightenment." How can they all speak of the essence? As for the convenience of teaching, sages do not discard using words to explain its meanings. It is called middle due to being without slant. It is called brightness due to being without ignorance. It is called sincerity due to being without delusion. It is called thusness due to being without delusion and changes. It is called perfect enlightenment due to various virtues being united and the ignorance of crowds being illuminated. Due to the fundamental nature being without evil, then why not name it goodness? Besides, what is called good is also called the middle, the brightness, the sincerity, so name them as goodness. But if we can understand that to name human nature as good is for the expedient measurement of means, then Mencius is Confucius's student. If one insists goodness is the true meaning of the doctrine then Mencius also belongs in the same category as Gao Zi.<sup>158</sup>

At the middle of this paragraph sounds like Yuanxian is taking sides with the Confucian's concept of human essence being originally good. In fact, Yuanxian is articulating that the Confucian's analysis is only good for the convenience of explanation or teachings. Mencius's contemporary, Gao Zi, argued that the origin of human nature was neither good nor evil; it is the influences of the environment which cause human nature to become good or evil.<sup>159</sup> Therefore, if Mencius named human nature as good, then it is the same concept as Gao Zi's. Ultimately, Yuanxian considered that human nature is the buddha nature and cannot be categorized as "good" because the other side of good is evil and in the Buddhist concept, human essence has to be absolute, complete and as perfect as the thusness. To name the human essence as good is only for the expedience of teaching but cannot be the real truth. In this paragraph, Yuanxian also implies that the Buddhist teaching is above that of Confucianism for its profoundness and thorough teaching of human essence.

As mentioned before, Yuanxian disagreed that the Great Ultimate can be divided into the two vital forces, *yin* and *yang*, and five elements. During the Song period, Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤

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<sup>158</sup> X72.0561b12.

<sup>159</sup> Gao Zi had an argument with Mencius regarding the human nature, please refer to "Gao Zi I" in the *Mencius*.

(1017-1073) composed a short treatise, the "An Explanation of the Diagram of the Great Ultimate 太極圖說," which induced a tremendous influence on Neo-Confucianism. The Great Ultimate became an important theory and so the Neo-Confucian's direction of teaching was determined by it.<sup>160</sup>

Zhou Dunyi states "...The Great Ultimate through movement generates *yang*. When its activity reaches its limit, it becomes tranquil. Through tranquility the Great Ultimate generates *yin*...So movement and tranquility alternate and become the root of each other, giving rise to the distinction of *yin* and *yang*...By the transformation of *yang* and its union with *yin*, the Five Agents of Water, Fire, Wood, Metal, and Earth arise ...The interaction of these two material forces engenders and transforms the myriad things..."<sup>161</sup> Another of Zhou Dunyi's treatises, "Penetrating the Book of Changes 通書" also states that "... The myriad things are created and transformed out of the two material forces and the Five Agents..."<sup>162</sup> Zhou Dunyi considers that the Great Ultimate generates and nourishes all things in the universe. Yuanxian argues that the Great Ultimate as an ultimate principle should not and could not be divided. The *Yiyan* states:

Question: The Song Confucians say that the Great Ultimate is divided into *yin* and *yang*. Is this right? Answer: Inside the Great Ultimate, the *yin* and *yang* are divided. It is not the Great Ultimate to be divided into *yin* and *yang*. Ordinarily speaking, if one can be divided, it would have a form or substance but the Great Ultimate is without form or substance. Ordinarily speaking, if one can be divided, it would obtain changes, but the Great Ultimate is without changes. Ordinarily speaking, if one can be divided, it must have segmentation and completeness but the Great Ultimate is without segmentation or completeness. [The Song Confucians] say that the Great Ultimate is divided into *yin* and *yang*, isn't it wrong?<sup>163</sup>

Yuanxian believes that as the source of creation and transformation, the Great Ultimate should not be divided into *yin* and *yang* or two forces of activity and stillness. Its division indicates that this source has form and has the characteristics of arising and ceasing. These phenomena cannot

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<sup>160</sup> Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 460.

<sup>161</sup> The translation is from Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 463.

<sup>162</sup> The translation is from Chan, *Ibid.*, 474.

<sup>163</sup> X72.0562b08.

constitute their source to be the highest Great Ultimate. Yuanxian's ideal of the ultimate principle of the universe would be no limitation, no form, and does not fall into existence and non-existence. It is perfect by itself and is self sufficient. Yuanxian gives a very logical argument regarding the essence of the Great Ultimate which places the Neo-Confucian concept of the Great Ultimate in an inferior position to Buddhist teachings.

A crucial point which makes an ultimate distinction between Buddhism and Confucianism is whether there is life after death. Buddhists believe in the six destinies of transmigration and the three life-times. This belief is derived from the core teaching of cause and effect in Buddhism. This concept emphasizes that people's lives depend on their karma and merit as they transmigrate through the six kinds of rebirth. In contrast, the teachings of Confucianism do not place emphasis on the life after death or affirm the existence of spirits or ghosts. Two famous statements from the *Analects* related to death or spirits are "If you don't understand what life is, how will you understand death?"<sup>164</sup> and "...paying respect to the spirits, but keeping away from them, you can call wisdom."<sup>165</sup> Yuanxian expresses his concept in a few paragraphs to indicate the substantial difference between Buddhism and Confucianism. One of the paragraphs in the *Yiyan* states:

Question: the Confucians say that there is annihilation after death; does this claim truly have a base? Answer: No, it does not have a base. The discussion of Confucians relies on the *Six Classics* as the foundation, and the *Six Classics* state that after people die they become ghosts. Moreover, the *Six Classics* include a theory of heaven. Therefore, the *Six Classics* have the system of the ancestor hall and holding memorial ceremonies during the spring and autumn. They even say that one should respect the dead as if they were still alive, so that, [their living descendants] can exhaust their responsibilities as being benevolent and pious sons. They cannot properly say that the dead are completely ignorant and end in extinguishment. The *Zuozhuan* states, "the spirit is transformed into a fox," or "one becomes a fierce ghost after death," and so on, are particularly notable examples. It

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<sup>164</sup> "Xian jin 先進" 11:12 the *Analects* 論語, translated by A. Charles Muller, from <http://www.acmuller.net/con-dao/analects.html> accessed March 3, 2017.

<sup>165</sup> "Yong ye 雍也" 6:22 the *Analects*, translated by A. Charles Muller, from <http://www.acmuller.net/con-dao/analects.html> accessed March 3, 2017.

wasn't until later, beginning in the Han dynasty, that Confucians began to have the theory of annihilation after death. [This theory] violated the *Classics* and betrayed the sages. This was [due to] one's showing off oneself with subjective talking. However, mundane people did not all realize it and rushed to quote it as the foundation of Confucian teachings. They were tied by their learning from childhood and could not break off from it. It is sorrowful.<sup>166</sup>

Yuanxian argues that the Confucians' claim has no basis at all that after death people are annihilated. He utilizes the teachings of the *Six Classics* and *Zozhuan* to prove his argument.

Yuanxian points out that the *Six Classics* state that after people die, they become ghosts and even goes as far as to include the notion of Heaven. He expounds that the concept of eradication after death started during the Han dynasty. In addition, he points out that this concept was not the original teaching of the sages but, nevertheless, the later generations did not notice this and followed the unorthodox teaching which contradicted the orthodox teachings.

Since ancient times, Chinese already had a concept of Heaven. Wing-Tsit Chan pointed out that the entire history of Chinese philosophy is about humanism; the kind of humanism that acknowledges the unity of man and Heaven.<sup>167</sup> The early period of the Zhou dynasty was an idealized period of peace that Confucius had wanted to always preserve and reclaim. The Duke of Zhou was the exemplar for Confucius, so much so that Confucius yearned to dream about the Duke of Zhou. The founders of the Zhou developed the doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven after overthrowing the Shang. The *Book of Rites* says, "The people of Yin (Shang) honor spiritual beings, serve them, and put them ahead of ceremonies...The people of Chou (Zhou) honor ceremonies and highly value the conferring of favors. They serve the spiritual beings and respect them, but keep them at a distance..."<sup>168</sup> The belief of spiritual beings existed during the Shang and Zhou periods and the attitude toward Heaven changed during the Zhou period but the

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<sup>166</sup> X72.0562c09.

<sup>167</sup> Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 3.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4 and note 1.

concept of Heaven has always been deeply connected to the Chinese. Indeed, Yuanxian had some grounds for disputing the later Confucian's concept of annihilation after death and pointed out that the *Zuozhuan* states, "the spirit is transformed into a fox," and "one becomes a fierce ghost after death."

Yuanxian also discussed the belief of transmigration in the *Yiyan*. He identified the contrast between the Buddhist and Confucian teachings regarding transmigration. Buddhism believes in the three life times, but Confucianism only mentions the present life, even though the *Book of Changes* acknowledges the existence of spirits after death. Buddhism has six destinies and Confucianism only discusses the way of humanity. Yuanxian also utilizes this section to justify his argument that people are not annihilated after death. The *Yiyan* states:

Question: The *Book of Changes* states that the vitalities of *yin* and *yang* form things, the wandering away of the soul produces changes. Does this statement have the meaning of transmigration? Answer: It cannot be used as underlying support [for transmigration]. Transmigration theory highlights the three periods of time; past, present, and future. Confucians only highlight the present time. Transmigration theory explains the six destinies and the Confucians only understand the way of humanity, therefore, the Confucians do not discuss transmigration. [I] have investigated all over the *Five Classics* and the various schools of thought; they all did not have the ideology [of transmigration]. The *Book of Changes* has only one remark similar to the meaning of transmigration, "the wandering away of soul produces the changes." Since we cannot find other evidence, then we cannot forcefully explain [that the statement supports the idea of transmigration]. Not even to mention that the sentence after this one says that "Therefore, the sage knows the circumstance of the spirits." This is nothing but to remark that the human turns into spirit after death. The remarks that humans turn into spirits after death and the sage knows the circumstance of spirit [both indicate that there is a spirit after death]. Therefore, to say that there is annihilation after death, is this really the meaning of the sages?<sup>169</sup>

Yuanxian provides his knowledge of the *Book of Changes* to prove to people how Buddhist teachings differ from Confucianism and how the Confucian teachings themselves contradict each other. He points out that since the *Book of Changes* already mentions that "the wandering away of soul produces the changes" implies that after humans die, they become spirits, so how can

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<sup>169</sup> X72.0562c02.

Confucians still say that after death there is no spirit and all is abolished. He doubts that the later generations of Confucians were following the orthodox teachings of the sages. In this section, Yuanxian also demonstrates the different capacities between the two teachings. He states that Buddhism embraces the three life-times but Confucianism is only concerned about this life. This indicates that the Buddhism has a larger capacity compared with Confucianism when regarding human life and spirit. Buddhist theories address the extensity of the three life times, provide explanations to questions regarding life after death, cause and effect and rebirth which Confucianism does not even cover. Buddhism is able to logically satisfy people's curiosity about life and life after death, so therefore, Buddhism's teaching is more superior than Confucianism.

The *Yiyan* manifests that Yuanxian considers Buddhism to be a higher teaching than Confucianism. In the *Yiyan*, he repeatedly utilizes Buddhist concepts to explain or compare with Confucian theories. Yuanxian also acknowledges the teachings of Confucius or the traditional Confucian but opposes the teachings of Mencius and the Neo-Confucians. Yuanxian considered himself to be a Buddhist master and fought hard to defend Buddhism against Neo-Confucianism.

### **Remarks Regarding Daoism in the *Yiyan***

Some of the Ming period emperors are fascinated by the Daoist magical arts of preserving health and achieving immortality; longevity was their goal. Inside the palace, they extravagantly assembled Daoist ceremonies for offering sacrifices and prayers to the gods for longevity. The scale of immoderate spending for the ceremonies even affected the common people's livelihood and created turmoil for the court and society. During the Emperor Jiajing's 嘉靖 reign (1521-1567), an officer of the court, Hai Rui 海瑞 (1514-1587), submitted a memorial to the emperor and strongly admonishing his wrong doings in elaborate spending for ceremonies

which brought disasters to the country.<sup>170</sup> Even though some of the Ming emperors favored the Daoism and were fascinated about the practice of longevity, the Confucians still held the main political positions and, in reality, the Daoists rarely enjoyed the same degree of influence in the Ming court as the Confucians. Chun-fang Yü mentions that during the late Ming period, Neo-Confucian possessed significant positions in the Ming court, therefore, Buddhism and Daoism usually had to justify themselves to reconcile with the Neo-Confucian "orthodoxy."<sup>171</sup> In fact, Emperor Jiajing was the last emperor of the Ming dynasty to be captivated by the Daoists' practice of alchemy.<sup>172</sup>

Yuanxian's opinions toward Daoism in the *Yiyán* mainly refers to the concepts of the Daoist philosophy in Lao Zi's *Daode jing* 道德經 and Zhuang Zi's works but did not extend into the teachings of religious Daoism. Yuanxian suggests in the *Yinyán* that one of the fundamental discrepancies between the teachings of Buddhism and Daoism is the interpretation of "emptiness." He acknowledges that although both teachings discuss emptiness, they both possess very contradictory views. Yuanxian expounds in the *Yinyán* that the perspective of the Daoists regarding emptiness is an attachment to a one-sided view of emptiness. This view is totally astray from the Buddhist notion of emptiness. He explicates that, in Buddhism:

The Buddha discussed the foundation of emptiness which said that all compounded phenomena are begun with nescience and this nescience is really without essence, without attachment. Due to its being without essence and attachment, this nescience will, therefore, be accorded with conditions to achieve various dharma.<sup>173</sup>

However, Yuanxian's explanation of emptiness has a vulnerability. The theory of emptiness in the Buddhist teachings is referred to as the theory of dependent origination; all phenomena are inter-dependent, none of them having an independent, determinable, or permanent existence.

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<sup>170</sup> Zhang, *Ming shi*, fascicle 226, 2463bcd.

<sup>171</sup> Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China*, 2.

<sup>172</sup> Noritada Kubo, *Dōkyō shi* 道教史 (Tōkyō: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1977), 348.

<sup>173</sup> X72.0561b23.



Therefore, it is called "emptiness," and due to its insubstantiality; the mutual relationships of countless causes and conditions are aroused to form diverse dharmas. But, according to Yuanxian's description, it is the "nescience" which attained the various dharmas. In the teaching of Buddhism, thusness is the source that generates numerous dharmas in accordance with various conditions. The root of forming abundant dharmas is the thusness, which is also called the buddha nature. To the contrary, nescience is the karmic cause for sentient beings to transmigrate through the cycle of birth and death. Yuanxian utilizes "nescience" instead of "thusness" to say that due to its being without essence, it can be accorded with conditions to achieve various dharmas. From another section in the *Yiyan*, we may be able to find the reason why Yuanxian uses "nescience" as a parallel with emptiness rather than using "thusness." He states:

Question: The Sutra says that the realm of sentient beings derives from nescience. If the nescience does not arise then it is completely as the thusness, then will there be no realm of sentient beings? Answer: The Sutra would be in line with the principle and then consider what would follow. It says that the direct and circumstantial retributions are derived from karma and karma is derived from the nescience. The nescience relies on the thusness to exist, but this nescience is really without the initiation. The Sutra states, the ignorance is without beginning. Some ask, if the ignorance is without beginning then is it because we originally have ignorance? Answer: The thusness and the ignorance both did not have beginnings but the essence of the thusness is without changes and the essence of the ignorance is completely empty. Therefore, the ignorance originally did not exist and the ignorance relies on the thusness to have existence. We cannot say the thusness relies on the ignorance to have existence; it is just like the stick and the light. Even though we did not know which one comes first, but the light has to rely on the stick to exist. Therefore, we say that the ignorance did not exist originally.<sup>174</sup>

At first, Yuanxian uses the word "*wuming* 無明 or nescience" and then switches to "*wang* 妄 or ignorance" in the paragraph, but both words have a similar connotation. A crucial phrase in this section is *zhen ru* 真如 or thusness. The *Foxue da cidian* 佛學大辭典 (*Great Buddhist Dictionary*) gives an explanation of *zhen ru*, as *zhen* means "true, real" and *ru* means "as usual." The essence of various dharmas is away from unfounded, fabricated but, it is genuine and so it is

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<sup>174</sup> X72.0565a20.

called *zhen*. "As usual" means constantly existing and without changes and so it is called *ru. zhen*. *ru* is also a synonym of the essence of buddha, the clean and pure self-nature, the dharma body, the womb of Tathagata, the true original nature, the reality realm, thusness, and so on.<sup>175</sup>

Therefore, thusness is authentic and without alteration, which would not be able to be compared with "emptiness" in the theme that Yuanxian is analyzing due to "emptiness" being without substantiality; it changes all the time. This might be the reason that Yuanxian uses "nescience" and not "thusness" for his argument. Meanwhile, this paragraph mentions that "...the essence of ignorance is completely empty...", which makes "nescience or ignorance" suitable for Yuanxian to compare with emptiness. However, this paragraph also states that "...the ignorance relies on thusness to exist..." which we can conceive of as without thusness, there is no way to manifest the ignorance since there is nothing to compare. Equivalently, if without the torch for people to light, the light would not be able to exist. To Yuanxian, the focus of these paragraphs was to expose the contrasting teachings between Buddhism and Daoism regarding "emptiness" even though he may have had to twist the language for the sake of his argument. Meanwhile, this also shows the consequence of using Daoist terms in Buddhist teachings. Sometimes it would create misunderstanding.

The concepts of emptiness are truly quite different between the Buddhism and Daoism despite Yuanxian's reasoning. In the *Daode jing*, Chapter Eleven provides a glimpse into the Daoist concept of emptiness. It uses the hub of a wheel, a clay vessel, and a house to demonstrate the usefulness of empty space. The *Daode jing* states, "The thirty spokes unite in the one nave; but it is on the empty space (for the axle), that the use of the carriage depends..."<sup>176</sup> From this

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<sup>175</sup> Ding, the *Foxue da cidian*, 1747-1748.

<sup>176</sup> Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi, *The Texts of Taoism*, trans. James Legge and an introd. D. T. Suzuki (New York: The Julian Press Inc., 1959), 102-103.

illustration, the meaning of emptiness in Chapter Eleven suggests a synonym of void or nothingness.

Chapter Three of the *Daode jing* states, "...Therefore in the government of the sage, he keeps their hearts vacuous, fills their bellies, weakens their ambitions..."<sup>177</sup> Wing-Tsit Chan translated *xu* 虛, which can mean emptiness, in this chapter as vacuousness, and he further explains the meaning of *xu* in his notes to distinguish it from the Buddhist concept of emptiness. Wing-Tsit Chan defines that in Daoism, *xu* means "absolute peacefulness and purity of mind, freedom from worry and selfish desires...there is no obstruction."<sup>178</sup>

Compared with the meaning of emptiness in the Buddhism, the Daoist concept of emptiness is very straight forward and can be used to describe a state of mind. This might be what Yuanxian also wanted to demonstrate, the complexity and profoundness of Buddhist teachings in comparison to the straightforward Daoist concept of nothingness. Nonetheless, Yuanxian seizes upon the fundamental difference between Buddhism and Daoism, which is in their concepts of emptiness.

Yuanxian also investigates the Daoist concepts of existence, 有, and non-existence, 無. He indicates in the *Yiyan* that by the Daoist teachings placing emphasis on nonexistence only causes them to confine their views to existence and non-existence and not be able to transcend or elevate beyond these boundaries. Yuanxian argues that "...therefore, the Daoists promote the idleness of their body, the demotion of their intelligence, the disapproval of sages, and the abandonment of benevolence and righteousness..." He believes that all of these practices are not really cultivating non-thinking or non-action but instead; only lead Daoists to remove themselves

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<sup>177</sup> Lao Zi, *The Way of Lao Tzu: Tao-te ching*, trans. with introductory essays, comments, and notes, by Wing-Tsit Chan (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1963), 103.

<sup>178</sup> Chan, *The Way of Lao Tzu*, 104.

from people. Yuanxian believes that by following these Daoist teachings, practitioners can become celestial beings but the teachings would not lead them into sage-hood.<sup>179</sup>

One of the sections of the "Zhi Beiyou 知北遊" in the Daoist Book of *Zhuangzi* gives a story regarding existence and nonexistence. The story concludes that even though one can conceive of the idea of existence and nonexistence, conceiving the perception of non-existing non-existence (無無) is too far inconceivable. Furthermore, an understanding of nonexistence is still needed to be based on existence to manifest nonexistence.<sup>180</sup> Thus, Yuanxian considered that the ideas of existence and nonexistence of Zhuang Zi only constrain people within a limited boundary and would not transcend the cycle of life and death.

In another section of the *Yiyan*, Yuanxian expounds his opinion specifically aiming at the philosophies of Zhuang Zi in the *Geng sangzi* 庚桑子, a work, that the Song Neo-Confucians believed, was full of teachings similar to Chan Buddhist theory. Some considered that the teachings of Zhuang Zi had exhausted the profoundness and reached the utmost mysteries of the teachings of Chan.<sup>181</sup> Yuanxian rebuts this allegation and points out that the teachings of Zhuang Zi all but tranquilize with nothingness and teach people to be in accordance with nature and be non-resistant. Yuanxian expounds that the Way, or Dao 道, is above existence and nonexistence. The Daoists discuss nothingness or emptiness, but it is not the Way; it is just a description of the Dao. Furthermore, the Daoists like to learn "nothingness" in order to be in accord with the Way; Yuanxian condemns it and argues that because of this desire, the Daoist's interpretation of emptiness becomes a stereotype. The Daoists also liked to consider being accordance with nature or being non-resistant; Yuanxian disapproves of this and replies that their intention only becomes

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<sup>179</sup> X72.0564a05.

<sup>180</sup> Zhuang Zi, the "Zhi Beiyou" in the *Zhuangzi*.

<sup>181</sup> X72.0564b20.

their own shackles in return. Yuanxian then explicates the teachings of Buddhism which are without concern about existence or non-existence of the mind but rather to completely apprehend the truth or the essence of mind. Yuanxian asserts that the essential matter is for us to realize that all phenomena are produced by the mind and nothing but mind. He discloses that after all, we do not need to be concerned whether we are following the nothingness or the Way or have lived according to the natural ways or not. If we penetrate our mind and become enlightened, everything will then follow the Way.<sup>182</sup>

Yuanxian once again placed the Buddhist teachings in a superior position to Daoism. As a Caodong Buddhist master, to uphold Buddhism would be a logical thing to do. We realize that Yuanxian demolishes both Confucian and Daoist teachings in the *Yiyan*. Why did he take the time to write down his opinions and criticisms toward Confucianism and Daoism and to sarcastically, give this work the title, *Yiyan*, meaning utterances in one's dream? We are only able to speculate about the true inspiration of this work now. As we mentioned previously, the title, *Yiyan*, implies someone talking nonsense unconsciously during sleep but, people who were not sleeping and hearing the nonsense are able to understand the meaning completely and even become enlightened. Yuanxian might think that his expressions in the *Yiyan* to some people may sound like nonsense but to others, it may bring forth their deep contemplation.

During the Ming period, the concept of harmonizing the Three Teachings was extremely influential. The founder of the Ming dynasty wrote "On the Three Teachings, or 三教論," to promote the syncretism of the Three Teachings. He even wrote a poem to express his intention; "Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism are of one essence. The whole world shall see that the

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<sup>182</sup> X72.0564b20.

sun is bright."<sup>183</sup> What were the reasons to cause the concept of syncretism of the Three Teachings to become so popular during the Ming period? In addition, Yuanxian makes a statement in the *Yiyan* regarding the sages of Buddhism and Confucianism which may give the impression that he supported the trend of consolidating Buddhism with Confucianism. However, was this the true intention of Yuanxian and why is it important to know his perspective? What was the religious environment during the Ming period for Buddhism?

### **Yuanxian's Perspective towards the Syncretism of the Three Teachings**

Originally, with the importation of Buddhism into China, the Three Teachings were considered to be three different religious teachings. They each had their own founders or patriarchs and so, the people assumed that Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism were distinct religions and this was nothing out of ordinary. However, through the years, some scholars, monks and even emperors, all articulated their theories supporting the syncretism of the Three Teachings in their writings, such as Mouzi's *Lihuo lun* 理惑論, Zongmi's *Yuan ren lun* 原人論 and Song Zhenzong's *Chong shi lun* 崇釋論. Scholars and religious cultivators and even the court during the Ming period gradually began to advocate for harmonizing of the Three Teachings; they utilized this practice to reduce friction amongst themselves. The teachings of Wang Yangming's School of Mind also acted as a significant catalyst to cause this trend of consolidating the Three Teachings to thrive.

After the middle of the Ming period, some scholars, such as Chen Xianzhang 陳獻章 (1428-1500), began to turn their interests to the learning of mind. The teaching of placing emphasis on the interior cultivation of mind became important with the rise of Wang

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<sup>183</sup> John D. Langlois, Jr. and Sun Ko-kuan, "Three Teachings Syncretism and the Thought of Ming Tai-tsu" in the *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (June 1983), 97-139.

Yangming.<sup>184</sup> When the development of learning the mind progressed forward to Wang Yangming, he attained great achievement by making the Neo-Confucians take interest in investigating the mind. During the later years of Wang Yangming's life, he put forward the Four Sentences Teaching;<sup>185</sup> however his two disciples, Qian Dehong 錢德洪 and Wang Ji 王畿, disputed the true meaning of his teaching. Qian Dehong complied with Wang Yangming's teachings. He acknowledged that the essence of mind was pure and absolute, without good or evil but, due to our habitual mind, our thoughts moved between good and evil. This condition requires us to cultivate sincerity and investigate things to attain knowledge, as well as to rectify our mind in order to remove evil. In contrast, Wang Ji had skepticism toward Yangming's Four Sentences. Wang Ji's notion was that if the essence of mind is without good or evil then thought, perception, and things should all be without good and evil. Eventually, Wang Yangming concluded that both of them were correct. Wang Ji's notion can be utilized on a disciple of superior faculties and Qian Dehong's approach can be applied to those without superior faculties. Wang Yangming instructed them to keep both approaches in practice. However, Wang Ji's theory greatly influenced later generations of the School of Mind and twisted Yangming's original intention. The concept of being without good and evil developed into an iconoclastic trend and even combined with Chan teachings that later developed into "Mad Chan." As a result, the syncretism of the Three Teachings became a vigorous tendency during the time of Yuanxian. Wang Yangming's study of the mind replaced Zhu Xi's doctrine of the investigation of things and, thereafter, Neo-Confucian scholars searched openly for and studied the Buddhist Chan philosophy and teachings. This phenomenon promoted the syncretism of Buddhism and

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<sup>184</sup> Zongxi Hugang 黃宗羲, *Ming ru xue an* 明儒學案 (Taipei shi: Ming we shu ju, 1991), 78.

<sup>185</sup> Wang Yangming's Four Sentences Teaching is "Without good and evil are the essence of the mind, having good and evil are the movement of the thought, knowing good and evil are the conscience, doing good and eliminating evil are investing the nature of things. 無善無惡是心之體, 有善有惡是意之動, 知善知惡是良知, 為善去惡是格物." See *Wang Yangming quan ji* I (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chu ban she, 1992), 117-118.

Confucianism and, consequently, also stimulated the resurgence of Chan Buddhism in the late Ming period.<sup>186</sup>

One of the statements that Yuanxian makes in the *Yiyan* regarding the similarity of the sages of Buddhism and Confucianism is:

People all know that the Shakyamuni Buddha was a sage who transcended the mundane world but do not know that he was also exactly the sage who engaged in society. Without engaging in society, one cannot transcend the mundane world. People all know that Confucius was the sage who engaged in society but do not know that he was also exactly the sage who transcended the mundane world. Without transcending the mundane world, one cannot engage in society.<sup>187</sup>

This statement expresses equality between the Shakyamuni Buddha and Confucius. This is a rare statement in the *Yiyan* which speaks in a non-criticizing manner. Commonly, scholars use this statement to convince people that Yuanxian agreed with the practice of harmonizing the Three Teachings. What was the true objective of Yuanxian's statement toward the syncretism of the Three Teachings? What is the relationship between transcending the mundane world and engaging in society? Yuanxian explains the correlation between them in one of his works, the "Shi Liu kong xue mao cai 示劉孔學茂才."

The "Shi Liu kong xue mao cai" is one of the Dharma words that Yuanxian bestowed on one of his followers and was compiled into Fascicle Nine of the *Guanglu*. It appears that in it Yuanxian was giving an answer to one of his lay followers regarding the difference between Buddhism and Confucianism. This lay follower happened to be a scholar and had passed the imperial examination at the county level. In this work, Yuanxian remarks that if we only discuss the superficial differences between Buddhism and Confucianism, then Confucianism is good for administering human affairs and Buddhism is suitable for going beyond the mundane world.

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<sup>186</sup> Araki Kengo, *Unsei Shukō no kenkyū* 雲棲株宏の研究 (Tōkyō: Daizō Shuppan, 1985), 12-24

<sup>187</sup> X72.0561b01.



Yuanxian then points out that if the Duke of Zhou or Confucius had not possessed solid virtue as if they were living in a super-mundane world, then when they were administering human affairs, they would have mixed their administration with material gain and been concerned about their fame and how then would they be able to oversee the affairs of government? And, vice versa for the case of Shakyamuni Buddha as well; if Shakyamuni had not had the functional ability to manage world affairs then so-called being withdrawn from mundane world must fall into an evil scheme and be confined by selfishness.<sup>188</sup> How then could you say that you were renouncing the world? Yuanxian, therefore, expresses that to renounce the world or to engage in society, there are no differences; they are the two sides of the same coin. In the end, Yuanxian expresses his opinions in a positive way by saying that the Duke of Zhou and Confucius had obtained the Shakyamuni Buddha's subtle application to administer affairs and serve the people and that Shakyamuni Buddha had obtained the secret teachings of the Duke of Zhou and Confucius to achieve nirvana. Yuanxian concludes that the important point is that you can realize the true essence of human nature, meaning to become enlightened, and so it does not matter whether one chooses to become a Buddhist or Confucian.<sup>189</sup> Even though Yuanxian remarks that neither being a Buddhist or Confucian makes no difference, if we read between the lines, Yuanxian still points out the contrast between the two teachings and also stresses that the only way the two teachings can be the same is when one has an enlightened mind. In fact, I believe that Yuanxian's remarks about the equality between the Shakyamuni Buddha, Duke of Zhou and Confucius were only to express his vision of an ideal situation where one can transcend the mundane world and also engage in society simultaneously. The priority of the Mahayana Bodhisattva concept of

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<sup>188</sup> The reason that Yuanxian described whoever renounced the world as being selfish is due to the criticism from the Confucians in the history. Due to monks and nuns could not carry out the responsibilities of continuing family lineage and care for their parents.

<sup>189</sup> X72.0435c13.

cultivation considers that cultivators should be compassionate to all sentient beings and help them even though the monks and nuns are supposed to live in a super-mundane world. And on the other hand, Confucians believe that one should serve society and make oneself be beneficial in order to create a harmonizing world. Therefore, to Yuanxian, having had influences from both traditions, he recognized that without engaging in society, one cannot transcend the mundane world and vice versa because they are meant to be accomplished and actualized at the same time. Later in his life, Yuanxian personally demonstrated that the ideal of transcending the mundane world and engaging in society both functioned simultaneously to benefit people. This statement is not about consolidating Buddhism with Confucianism but is more of an expression of his ideal vision and belief.

Jialing Fan has some intriguing points of view in her book regarding the transcendence of the mundane world or engaging in society. She points out that when the Mahayana Buddhists renounce the world to become monks or nuns, they make a Bodhisattva vow called the Four Encompassing Vows.<sup>190</sup> Among these four great vows, the Mahayana monks and nuns place the vow to save the masses of sentient beings to be the highest priority of the four vows. Therefore, she believes this indicates that the characteristic of Mahayana Buddhism is to actually be engaged in society. Furthermore, the engagements of Mahayana Buddhism sometimes are even more active than the involvement of the ordinary people in the mundane world. One essential point Jialing Fan makes is that the purpose for Buddhism to be engaged in society is not to obtain fame or material gains or to physically aid people but rather for the purpose of assisting sentient beings to achieve nirvana. She also gives the reason for Confucius having been engaged in society as being due to the fact that his inner cultivation having achieved a sage-hood state and

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<sup>190</sup> The Four Encompassing Vows are; masses of sentient beings are boundless and we vow to save them all, afflictions are inexhaustible and we vow to cut them off, Dharma gates are immeasurable and we vow to learn them all, the Buddha-way is unsurpassable and we vow to accomplish it.

so, felt a strong moral obligation to engage in the society to establish his ideals into reality for the benefit of the people.<sup>191</sup>

We can exam other sections in the *Yiyan* which may express the true intention of Yuanxian regarding the syncretism of the Three Teachings:

Since teachings are divided into three, whoever forcefully makes them be the same is foolish. The principle truly is only one; whoever forcefully makes them distinct is deluded. Therefore, if we simply discuss their differences, then it is not only that the three teachings are different but even inside Buddhism is also different, and yet there are the differences of Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism. Even within the same Mahayana Buddhism, there are differences of expedient and true teachings. Therefore since there are innumerable motives, the teachings are not only one type. If we simply speak about their similarities, then not only are the three teachings the same, even all the heretics and the activities of daily necessities and so on are alike. They all follow the true dharma.<sup>192</sup>

Yuanxian points out that the principle or the truth is absolutely just one but due to there being many different motives, it therefore has evolved into different teachings in the world. He simply argues that even inside the world of Buddhism, there are different sects; are we going to say one or the other does not belong to Buddhism? He thinks that whoever wants to make the Three Teachings be the same or different are all deceived. Obviously, Yuanxian does not like the idea of making the Three Teachings the same or even different. What was the reason for him to hold this notion? He gives some explanations in the rest of this section. He states:

So that the sages follow the trend of the times, investigate human relationship and teach benevolence and righteousness to the people, establish moral standards and law, teach propriety and music to transform the people, use punishment to control the people to make them be orderly...However, since sentient beings are bounded by the doctrines of Confucianism, attached to name and appearance, so, their distinction of name and appearance turn around and become the shackle to confine them. How can this be the intention of the sages of Confucianism? Therefore, the teachings of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi appeared and expounded the way of natural nothingness, to make the listeners become calm, peaceful, and transcendent and not to be bothered by material things.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Fan, *Mingmo Caodong dianjun*, 312.

<sup>192</sup> X72.0567c13.

<sup>193</sup> X72.0567c13.

Yuanxian manifests that the different teachings are the outcomes of trends at a particular time and reflections of the needs of the people at the times. Thus, Yuanxian did not feel that people should try to make the Three Teachings the same. The reason is that if we consider all teachings to be the same then, even heretical teachings are the same as those of the Three Teachings.

At the end of this section, Yuanxian then brings up Buddhism. He upholds Buddhism and says that Buddhism is the real dharma; it surpasses the human realm, goes beyond heaven and that Buddhism is the true teaching that seriously investigates the principle of matters and exhausts the human essence. He concludes that "...the principle is one and the teachings have to be divided. The teachings are divided but the principle is only one. Those who insist to distinguish them or to make them the same are all making non-useful statements."<sup>194</sup> These statements reveal the true intention of Yuanxian, that he was not keen on the concept of harmonizing or distinguishing the Three Teachings. He thought the difference between teachings was the way it was so there was no need to try to integrate them. The crucial point was the principle and the truth is only one, despite what the form of teaching might be.

However, the trend of reconciling the Three Teachings was strong enough to cause Yuanxian to step back and write another paragraph to point out the necessary element for the syncretism of the Three Teachings to occur. In another section of the *Yiyan*, Yuanxian further explains that the way to make the Three Teachings become harmonized was to be without the existence of self. He states:

The sages of the Three Teachings established teachings in different ways. And the way to make their teachings become the same is to have the "absence of self." Confucius testified to it, therefore he stated the elimination of the four things.<sup>195</sup> The elimination of the four things is about obtaining the absence of self. After Confucius, there was only Yan Hui who could deny himself. He was able to overcome his desires and this is close to the absence of

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> The "Zi Han 子罕" section of the *Analects*, Confucius eliminated four things from himself; imposing his will, arbitrariness, stubbornness, and egotism 毋意, 毋必, 毋固, 毋我.

self. Therefore, [Zeng Zi] says "possessing, yet seeming to lack, being full yet seeming empty, able to accept harm without retaliation."<sup>196</sup> When the teaching of Confucianism reached the time of Mencius, he put the self as the main focus and, due to his focus on self, the teaching of the non-self tradition was, therefore, cut off. Even so, Mencius expounded that human nature is good and also praised benevolence and righteousness. How could he qualify to be the disciple of Confucius? Even though benevolence and righteousness are good things, people need to achieve non-self to reach these virtues.<sup>197</sup>

Yuanxian indicates the crucial element which can make the syncretism of the Three Teachings possible is to cultivate non-self or the absence of self. He praises Yan Hui for denying himself but condemned Mencius for not following Confucius' teachings of overcoming one's own desires. Why did Yuanxian denounce the teaching of Mencius, who was considered to be second only to Confucius? Yuanxian was concerned that those who still have the deluded selfish human mind would compel others or use circumstances to earn the name of being benevolent or righteous. In other words, the desire of obtaining the name of being benevolent or righteous without cultivating the absence of self may cause some people to become hypocritical or stray from the Middle Path. In order for people to truly accomplish good virtues they must achieve the absence of self first.

What is "absence of self" or "non-self" in the Buddhist teachings? According to the doctrine of non-self, there is no existence of an inherent self or soul. The empirical self is merely an aggregation of elements and when those elements disintegrate, the self ceases to exist.<sup>198</sup> The non-self doctrine can also be described as selflessness; it is called *wuwo* 無我 in Chinese, *anattā* in Pali and *anātman* in Sanskrit. The Buddha taught that the idea of self produces harmful thoughts of "me" and "mine," selfish desires, cravings, attachments, hatred, pride, egoism and is the source of all the troubles in the world. Understanding of the teaching of non-self provides

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<sup>196</sup> This statement comes from the "Tai Bo 泰伯" section of the *Analects*, 曾子曰。以能問於不能、以多問於寡、有若無、實若處、犯而不校、昔者吾友、嘗從事於斯矣。

<sup>197</sup> X72.0569c04.

<sup>198</sup> Christmas Humphreys, *Exploring Buddhism* (Wheaton, Ill: Theosophical Pub. House, 1974), 42-43.

people with a mind to see things objectively without attachment or prejudices. This is the condition that Yuanxian believed would make the harmonization of the Three Teachings a possibility. It takes a lot of effort and self control to achieve this state of non-self in practical life and, therefore, is not an effortless process for the majority of cultivators, may be even more difficult for ordinary commoners. Furthermore, as we know, Yuanxian also vigorously criticized Confucianism and Daoism in the *Yiyán*. He intentionally upheld Buddhism to be above the other two traditions. In addition, Yuanxian had to oppose to the trend of harmonizing the Three Teachings, because he disliked the radical teaching of "Mad Chan," and Yuanxian wanted to revitalize the authentic Buddhist teachings of ancient times. Therefore, I believe that Yuanxian not only did not endorse the syncretism of the Three Teachings but also did not think that it could happen easily.

## **Conclusion**

The *Yiyán* demonstrates the thoughts and inclination of Yuanxian regarding the Three Teachings as well as his criticisms of Confucianism and Daoism. Yuanxian lived during a period when Confucianism, particularly Neo-Confucianism was the leading philosophy and teaching. Buddhism was insignificant until the late Ming period when the four Great Buddhist Masters appeared to revive the degenerate condition of the late Ming Buddhism. As a Caodong Buddhist master, Yuanxian utilized his talent of composition and Confucian scholarly background to firmly defend Buddhism. In addition, he also felt the necessity of severely distinguishing Buddhism with Confucianism due to the misunderstanding people had of the teachings of Chan and tangling it up with Wang Ji's teaching of the School of Mind which had created a trend of "Mad Chan."

Yuanxian condemned Mencius but upheld Yan Hui for being selfless. Yuanxian disapproved of the Neo-Confucian theory of human essence; he believed that human essence is the buddha nature, the thusness, and should be absolute and self sufficient. He also greatly regarded that the mind is the source of all the occurrences in life; he emphasizes the saying in Buddhism, "Three realms are only a manifestation of mind." Yuanxian also demonstrated the profoundness of the Buddhist theory of "emptiness" which was not the same as the void or nothingness of Daoism.

In Yuanxian's perception, the capacity of Buddhism was greater than Confucianism and Daoism. Buddhism embraced the three life times but Confucianism only embraced the present life and Daoism did not concern itself with this or future lives, only caring about complying with nature or being able to reach longevity or immortality. People usually believed that the goal of practicing Buddhism was to transcend the mundane world and become enlightened. However, Yuanxian discusses in the *Yiyan*, that in fact transcending the world and engaging in society are two sides of the same coin; both are meant to be accomplished and actualized at the same time. We can see that Yuanxian achieved this standard through his energetic humanistic reliefs performed while he was an abbot of the Gushan monastery. Yuanxian showed that a Buddhist master is capable of performing his or her duty to society and monks and nuns were not parasites on society. We can say that Yuanxian's life made impacts on both the super-mundane and the mundane worlds. He accomplished the ideal of transcending the mundane world and engaging in society both functioned simultaneously to benefit people.

Yuanxian had a logical perception toward the syncretism of the Three Teachings in which he concluded that only if people could abandon the "self" and become selfless, would the harmonization of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism be possible. This inclination of not

supporting the syncretism of the Three Teachings was very different from most of the Ming period Buddhist masters.

The *Yiyan* reveals Yuanxian's philosophies, perception, and inclination regarding the trend of syncretism of the Three Teachings. The *Yiyan* demonstrates Yuanxian as a vigorous Buddhist Master who stood firmly by the Buddhist teachings without agitation. He advocated Chan Buddhism and acted as a reviver and defender of Buddhism during a tumultuous period of 17th-century of China. In the next chapter, I would like to further compare Yuanxian's position regarding the syncretism of the Three Teachings with other Buddhist masters.



## Chapter Four Ming Buddhist Masters and the Syncretism of the Three Teachings

The syncretism of the Three Teachings was a significant phenomenon during the Ming period. It was like a strong current flowing through the intellectual and religious societies. During the transitional period of the 17th-century, its influences to the Chan Buddhist communities appeared to be even more compelling than before. Besides the emergence of the Four Great Buddhist Masters, the revival of Buddhism in the late Ming period had a profound connection with syncretism. Chun-fang Yü states that "'Combining three teachings in one' became a motto of the day."<sup>199</sup> In the *Yiyan*, Yuanxian expressed his stance when confronted with such a tremendous movement of harmonizing the Three Teachings. The Four Great Buddhist Masters also had encountered this ideology and on occasions, voiced their points of view. Investigating their standpoints can provide us with substantial information regarding the late Ming Buddhist community and the individual characters of these Buddhist Masters.

The Four Great Buddhist Masters all embraced the trend of syncretism of the Three Teachings in one way or another. Their approaches were all upheld Buddhism to be superior to Confucianism and Daoism. However, when comparing these Buddhist Masters with Yuanxian, Yuanxian manifested his unyielding stance on the Buddhist teachings. The underlying conclusion of his perspective toward the syncretism of the Three Teachings was dissimilar. Yuanxian's intention was to protect and prevent Buddhist teachings from further degeneration and to revive Chan Buddhism back to its former glory. As one of the three Shouchang sub-lineage Caodong Chan descendants who actively propagated the Caodong teachings during the 17th-century China, Yuanxian had aspirations to revive Chan Buddhism. He knew he had a great responsibility to protect and defend the true Chan teachings from unorthodox influences. Due to

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<sup>199</sup> Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China*, 2.

his sense of responsibility, Yuanxian did not hesitate to be an honest person and voice a different perspective from the other Buddhist masters. Through his *Yiyan*, Yuanxian manifests his integrity and leaves a great example and impact on the super-mundane world of religion.

### **History of the Syncretism of the Three Teachings**

The syncretism of the Three Teachings has had a long history in China. Buddhism was transmitted to China from India through the Western Regions of the Silk Road around the time of the first century. During the initial period, the main task for the foreign monks from the Western Regions was to translate the various Buddhist scriptures from the Indian languages into Chinese. Due to many of the Buddhist terms and concepts having originated in India and being new to the Chinese language, the translators elected to utilize Confucian and Daoist terms for the purposes of interpreting their profound meanings. Erik Zürcher points out that in order to introduce Buddhism to the Chinese public during the early period of propagating Buddhism, the famous eminent monk, Huiyuan 慧遠 (337-417), was authorized by his master to utilize Daoist doctrine from the *Zhuangzi* to interpret certain Buddhist terms.<sup>200</sup> This approach was the first vestige of the later development for the syncretism of the Three Teachings. Nevertheless, Zürcher comments that the primary concern and focus during early Buddhism's introduction in China was simply on the translation of Buddhist scriptures into the Chinese language.

In the beginning, differences between culture and structures of society yielded some conflicts and struggles among the three different teachings. Around the time of the Eastern Han (25-220 AD) period, a Confucian scholar, Mouzi 牟子, composed the *Lihuo lun* 理惑論 or the *Removal of Doubts* to educate people about Buddhism. The *Lihuo Lun* has a total of thirty-seven chapters and utilizes the question and answer genre to explain away some of the skepticisms

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<sup>200</sup> E. Zürcher. *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 12.

regarding Buddhism. It answers questions such as, why monks are required to shave their heads when taking the Buddhist tonsure though Confucian teachings say that a pious son should not cut his hair or damage his body. Mouzi answers that Taibo 泰伯 cut his hair short and tattooed his body, in order to follow the customs of the Wu and Yue, and yet, Confucius praised him. Therefore, as long as it is for the greater virtue then why be concerned about small things.<sup>201</sup> Mouzi also pointed out that a monk must give up all his possessions, his wife, and children and be without the entertainment of the physical faculties by sound and form. He uses Xuyou 許由 as an example and says that Emperor Yao and Confucius both praised Xuyou for not wanting to accept the successive throne after Yao. Xuyou pursued benevolence and therefore obtained it. Mouzi remarks that he did not hear that anyone had ridiculed Xuyou for being without descendants or possessions. A monk has the greater virtue of being without yearning.<sup>202</sup> Mouzi focused on using Chinese traditional philosophy and concepts to convince people to accept the different traditions of Buddhism. He compared the Buddha to the ancient Three Sovereigns and the Five Emperors 三皇五帝 or the immortals of Daoism 仙人. Mouzi intended to rationalize the status of the Buddha to be in between the other two teachings. The *Lihuo lun* set the foundation for the concept of harmonizing the Three Teachings.<sup>203</sup> However, at the time, the intention was to try to help Chinese to understand the foreign teachings from India, not necessarily to amalgamate Buddhism with pre-existing traditional Chinese philosophy and literature.

The Han dynasty upheld Confucianism as the official state doctrine and excluded all other schools of thought. Confucianism of the time enjoyed exclusive privilege. However, in the

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<sup>201</sup> Shi, Sengyou 釋僧祐. *Gumyōshū, Kōgumyōshū* 弘明集, 広弘明集 trans. Daoxuan 道宣 and Tadao Yoshikawa 吉川忠夫 (Tōkyō: Chūō Kōronsha, 1988), 24-25.

<sup>202</sup> T52.0002c16-0003a07. Seng You 僧祐, "Mouzi Lihuo" in the *Hong ming ji* 弘明集 fascicle 1, the *Taishōzō* 大正藏 Vol. 52.

<sup>203</sup> Fan, *Zibo dashi shengping jiqi sixiang yanjiu*, 63.

second half of the second century, the Han court collapsed and as Confucianism lost ground, various schools of thought utilized the chance to revive themselves. One of them was the Dark Learning or *xuanxue* 玄學, which was derived primarily from the merger of the philosophy in the *Book of Changes* with ideas elicited from the Daoist thoughts of the teachings of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi. Dark Learning became the dominant way of thinking among the cultured gentry and was the intellectual leisure pastime of the aristocratic class during the tumultuous period of the 3rd to 6th centuries in Chinese history.<sup>204</sup> The cultured gentry and aristocratic class enjoyed discussing the metaphysical topics of emptiness and non-being which were affiliated with Buddhist and Daoist thoughts.<sup>205</sup> During the Weijin 魏晉 period (220-589), Buddhism and Confucianism both were transformed by the Dark Learning concepts. As a result, some of the eminent Buddhist monks themselves also became skilled with Confucian and Daoist teachings. Huiyuan was well-versed on the Confucian *Six Classics* and Daoism's *Daode jing* and *Zhuangzi*.<sup>206</sup> Monk Sengzhao 僧肇 (384-414) studied all the Confucian Classic works and history, and also perfected his knowledge of classical texts from the ancient sages as well as carefully studied the *Daode jing* and *Zhuangzi*.

In general, the tendency of the Three Teachings during the Sui and Tang dynasties was to place Confucianism at the center as the main teaching with Buddhism and Daoism parallel to each other. Despite the esteemed status of Confucianism during the Sui period, Buddhism had some notable events; Zhi Yi 智顛 (538-597) established the Tiantai Buddhist doctrinal classification system. Emperor Yang of the Sui even received bodhisattva precepts from Zhi

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<sup>204</sup> From the Three Kingdoms period to the Northern and Southern dynasties. Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, 46.

<sup>205</sup> Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, 45-46.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 204-207.

Yi.<sup>207</sup> During the Tang period, the relative status of each of the Three Teachings followed the change of the successive emperors and had some modifications. The founder of the Tang dynasty, the Li family 李, for example, favored Daoism because he had the same last name as Lao Zi whose personal name was Li Er 李耳. The Tang ruler placed the Buddhist monks and monasteries under the control of the government. His successor, Taizong 太宗, also upheld Daoism in the beginning but later Taizong turned to support Buddhism due to the influence of Xuan Zhuang 玄奘. Buddhism reached a peak during the Tang dynasty but, at the same time, it also suffered persecution during the reign of Emperor Wuzong 武宗. It was also during this period that the court official, Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824) wrote his famous "Memorial on Bone-relics of the Buddha 諫迎佛骨表" to protest Buddhism and its influence on the court and society.<sup>208</sup> Meanwhile, the doctrinal classification system which analyzed and explained the various teachings of the Buddha continued to develop, assisting the harmonization approach in Buddhism.

A remarkable monk, Zongmi 宗密 (780-841), appeared during the Tang period and presented a syncretic system that not only consolidated the Three Teachings but also the various schools within Buddhism as well. Zongmi was considered an important Chan master in the development of Chinese Buddhist scholasticism. His syncretism of the Three Teachings, the reconciliation of Chan and other Buddhist Schools and his integration of the sudden and gradual enlightenment Chan practices all became paradigmatic methods for later thinkers.<sup>209</sup> His doctrinal classification system 判教 involved not only the internal amalgamation of Buddhist

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<sup>207</sup> Shi, Sengyou, *Gumyōshū, Kōgumyōshū*, 263-264.

<sup>208</sup> Kenneth Chen, *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), 213-226.

<sup>209</sup> Peter N. Gregory, *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 10-24.

teachings but also the harmonization of the theories and teachings of Buddhism with Confucianism and Daoism. He used the entire Buddhist teaching as a whole to integrate it with the other two teachings. Through his doctrinal classification, Zongmi manifested the weakness of Confucianism and Daoism and classified them as inferior to the Buddhist teachings.<sup>210</sup>

His *Yuan ren lun* 原人論 or *Inquiry into the Origin of Man*, states, "Confucius, Laotzu (Laozi), and Shakyamuni were consummate sages, who, in accordance with the times and in response to beings, made different paths in setting up their teachings. The inner and outer [teachings] complement one another, together benefiting the people..."<sup>211</sup> In addition, the *Yuan ren lun* also states that the Confucian's Five Constant Virtues are similar to the Five Precepts of Buddhism.<sup>212</sup> Zongmi also wrote commentaries for the *Yu lan pen jing* 盂蘭盆經 or the *Ullambana Sutra* to express that this Buddhist sutra describes a sincerely pious son who rescued his parents, and therefore, Buddhism was the same as Confucianism because they both teach and highlight filial piety.<sup>213</sup> He even claimed that the scope of filial piety in Buddhism was higher and greater than that of Confucianism because the filial piety of monks could affect and benefit the whole of humanity and not just be limited to an individual's parents. Zongmi believed that under the true mind 真心, all teachings could be harmonized and were derived from the true mind; therefore they all have their own rationality and righteousness. He believed this true mind was equal to the enlightened mind possessed by a buddha.

During the Song period, Neo-Confucianism took up a central position within the government and intellectual arenas. The trend of the Three Teachings also followed this and placed Neo-Confucianism in the main central position. The Emperor Zhenzong 真宗 of the

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<sup>210</sup> Gregory, *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism*, 10-24.

<sup>211</sup> T45.0708a07. The translation is from Gregory's *Tsung-Mi and the Sinification of Buddhism*, 257.

<sup>212</sup> T45.0708c15.

<sup>213</sup> T39.0505a06.

Northern Song composed the *Chong shi lun* 崇釋論 or the *Discourse of Venerating the Buddha* to express that Buddhist teachings have the ability to facilitate the cultivation of Confucianism.

The *Fozu tong ji* 佛祖統紀 records this event briefly; it says:

Buddhism has the function of helping the Five Constant Virtues. If the ruler follows it and applies it to love his people and the commoners follow it and use it to transform themselves to become virtuous people, [Buddhism] could sincerely govern people and [let the people] achieve high virtue and longevity. It also says that the Buddhist sutras and the books of the Duke of Zhou, Confucius, Xun Zi and Mencius all expound the same Way but in different tracks. They all advise people to do good deeds and prohibit people from doing evil deeds. No killing is benevolence; no stealing is honesty, without a doubt is trust, without falsity is righteousness and without intoxication is good manners.<sup>214</sup>

The statements of the *Chong shi lun* obviously reveal the Emperor's intention to harmonize Buddhism with Confucianism; however, it was a syncretism that considered Confucianism as the central teaching and accepted the Buddhist teachings to be comparable with it. The five precepts of Buddhism were akin to the Five Constant Virtues of Confucianism. This was the Song period milieu regarding the status of Buddhism within the stage of syncretism of the Three Teachings. When the Song Buddhist monk, Qisong 契嵩(1007-1072), composed the *Fu jiao pian* 輔教篇, he catered Buddhist teachings to fit into Confucian teachings, actively analyzing Buddhist concepts and teachings to lead Confucians to accept them. Qisong correlated the Buddhist five precepts and ten good conducts with the Confucian teachings of the Five Constant Virtues and remarked that they had the same functions as the Confucian teachings of filial piety, fraternal love, righteousness, loyalty and so forth.<sup>215</sup>

The Mongol rulers during the Yuan period treated religions with a lenient attitude.

Shunjō Nagami remarked that, in order to have a peaceful society, the Mongolian rulers wanted to prevent the Han people from social upheaval and so embraced the various religions without

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<sup>214</sup> The *Fozu tong ji* 佛祖統紀 fascicle 44. in the *Taishōzō* Vol. 49 大正藏 49. T49.0402a08.

<sup>215</sup> T52.0648c25. "Yuan jiao 原教" in the *Fu jiao pian* 輔教篇 of the *Tanjin wenji* 鐔津文集卷一 fascicle one in the *Taishōzō* Vol. 52 大正藏第 52 册.

levying burdensome regulations.<sup>216</sup> The concept of consolidating the Three Teachings continued during the Yuan period.

During the early stages of the Ming dynasty, Buddhism had declined as well as the Chan schools except for the Linji and Caodong Chan schools and the Pure Land school which were still active. One of the early Ming period Chan Masters, Konggu 空谷, described the fall of Chan as, "...Since the end of the Sung dynasty, the method of Chan instruction has been substandard, and the quality of students has also been very inferior."<sup>217</sup> Chun-fang Yü states, "Post-Tang Buddhism is regarded as having been in a state of decline because no new sutras were being translated, no new doctrines were being formulated, and the *Sangha* as a whole was of a qualitatively low caliber."<sup>218</sup>

The Four Great Buddhist Masters emerged during the late Ming period and they sensed the need to revitalize Buddhism. "They all felt that the most effective way to achieve this goal was to transcend sectarian rivalries, to stress religious cultivation over doctrinal specialization, to arrive at an understanding of Confucianism, while seeking no confrontation with it."<sup>219</sup> According to Chun-fang Yü, the major difference when comparing the Ming's syncretism with its predecessors was that "Syncretism in Ming Buddhism is evidenced in both the internal combination of Buddhist schools and the external rapprochement with Confucianism and Taoism."<sup>220</sup> Shi Guoxiang 釋果祥 also remarked that the Buddhist teachings had extremely declined. Buddhism also experienced suppression from Neo-Confucianism during the late Ming

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<sup>216</sup> Shunjō Nagami 野上俊静, *Bukkyōshi gaisetsu. Chūgoku hen* 仏教史概説. 中国篇 (Kyōto-shi: Heirakuji Shoten, 1968), 156-157.

<sup>217</sup> Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China*, 33.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.



period.<sup>221</sup> As scholar Yü mentions in her book, during the late Ming period, Neo-Confucianism possessed significant positions in the Ming court and Buddhism and Daoism usually had to justify themselves to reconcile with the Neo-Confucian "orthodoxy."<sup>222</sup> The Buddhist community, therefore, promoted the theory of syncretism of the Three Teachings in order to reduce oppression from the Neo-Confucians and to draw in more scholars during such a difficult period of time.<sup>223</sup> These conditions reveal that the syncretism of the Three Teachings in the late Ming period was provoked due to the fact that Buddhists needed to counter the pressure from the Neo-Confucians. Meanwhile, the teachings of Wang Yangming's School of Mind also acted as a significant catalyst for causing the trend of consolidating the Three Teachings to thrive. The Four Great Buddhist Masters of the late Ming period also used the syncretism of the Three Teachings as a means to revive Buddhism. However, the method the late Ming Buddhist Masters used to harmonize with Neo-Confucianism was not to place Buddhism in an inferior position but rather, to uphold Buddhism in order to pull the other religions in. Xia Li in one of her articles says that one of the distinguishing characteristics of the syncretism of the Three Teachings during the Ming period was that it did not treat all three religions fairly but instead manifested an attitude of advocating Buddhism while opposing Confucianism and Daoism. This characteristic of Ming period syncretism is different from that of the Song period but similar to the Tang period.<sup>224</sup> As mentioned previously, during the Tang period Zongmi's doctrinal classification manifests the weakness of Confucianism and Daoism and classifies them as inferior to the Buddhist teachings. On the contrary, the Song period, Qisong catered Buddhist teachings to fit into Confucian

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<sup>221</sup> Shi, Guoxiang 釋果祥. *The Zibo dashi yanjiu--yi shengping wei zhongxing* 紫柏大師研究--以生平為中心 (Taipei: Dongchu chubanshe, 1990), 71.

<sup>222</sup> Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China*, 2.

<sup>223</sup> Shi, Guoxiang, *Zibo dashi yanjiu*, 71.

<sup>224</sup> Xia Li 李霞, "Lun Mingdai fojiao de sanjiao heyi shuo 論明代佛教的三教合一說" in the *Anhui daxue xuebao zhaxue shehui kexue ban* fascicle 24, issue 5, September year 2000. p. 57.

teachings which showed the superior status of Confucianism. Therefore, the Ming period syncretism had a similar attitude with the Tang period, they all made Buddhism to be surpassed Confucianism.

The practice of the syncretism of the Three Teachings was a perennial religious and philosophical fact in Chinese Buddhist history. Yuanxian belonged to the late Ming era and had a unique perspective toward the syncretism of the Three Teachings. He expresses in the *Yiyan* that those who want to make the Three Teachings be the same or different were all deceived. His attitude was at odds with those of the late Ming Four Great Buddhist Masters. Why did Yuanxian and the Four Great Buddhist Masters have different perspectives even though they were contemporaries of the late Ming period? Further investigation sheds light on not only the syncretic characteristics of these Buddhist Masters but also in the milieu of late Ming Buddhism.

### **The Four Great Buddhist Masters of the Late Ming Period**

As was mentioned above, some scholars consider Buddhism during the late Ming period to have been in a declining situation. One of the main reasons Buddhism was invigorated again was due to the emergence of the Four Great Buddhist Masters. They appeared during a time when the Buddhist communities desperately needed them the most. They all had one thing in common; they accepted the trend of syncretism of the Three Teachings. They expressed their attitudes and thoughts regarding the Three Teachings in their writings. We will utilize in this chapter the primary works of the Four Great Buddhist Masters as our source of material; the *Yunqi fa hui* 雲棲法彙, *Zhuchuang suibi* 竹窗隨筆 (*Jottings under a Bamboo Window*) *Zibo zunzhe quan ji* 紫柏尊者全集, *Hanshan dashi mengyou ji* 憨山大師夢遊集, *Lingfeng zonglu* 靈峰宗論, and *Sishu Ouyi jie* 四書藕益解. Using the critical textual analysis method, we will

reveal that the Four Great Buddhist Masters all embraced the strong trend of syncretism of the Three Teachings during the late Ming period and also intentionally upheld Buddhism.

### **Yunqi Zhuhong**

Yunqi Zhuhong (1535-1615) was known as "Master Yunqi" due to being known to regularly reside in the Yunqi Monastery. He passed the imperial examination at the county level at age 17 but was not able to advance further in the civil service examination system. He experienced several tragic happenings in his family within a short period of time. His first wife died due to child-birth, his father passed away when Zhuhong was 27 and his mother died when he was 31 years old. Thereafter, Zhuhong decided to renounce the world to become a monk and penetrate the important matters of life and death which he had experienced in succession for such a short period of time in his family life. According to Chun-fang Yü, Zhuhong was not only a Pure Land patriarch but also strictly observed the *Vinaya*, studied sutras, cultivated Chan meditation and performed the correct Tantric rituals. During the course of his being a monk, he advocated the practice of not killing by releasing captured animals and promoted lay Buddhism.<sup>225</sup> His book, the *Zizhi lu* 自知錄 (*Record of Self-knowledge*), is considered to be an example of the ideology of the three teachings in one because of his incorporation of the ideas and practices together from Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism as a popular morality book to encourage people to do good and stop being evil.<sup>226</sup> However, in his book, Zhuhong demonstrates his attitude by assigning twice as many merit points to an act that benefits Buddhism as he does when the same act benefits Daoism or Confucianism. This difference in points reveals that Zhuhong considered Buddhism to have a higher value than the other two

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<sup>225</sup> Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China*, 5.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

teachings.<sup>227</sup> This mindset is also presented in one of his other writings, in the *Zheng e ji* 正訛集 (*Refutation of Mistaken Views*), which states Zhuhong's view on the relationship of Buddhism Confucianism and Daoism:

"People always say, 'The three teachings are one.' But it would be a mistake if one took this to mean that there is no distinction among them. The three teachings indeed belong to one family. However, among members of a family, is there no difference between the senior and the junior ... Buddhism makes clear what happened before the dissolution of the cosmos and is therefore most senior, whereas Confucianism and Taoism expound what is near in time. The Buddha is the most heavenly of the heavens, and he is the most saintly of the saints and is therefore the most exalted, whereas Confucians and Taoists occupy the position of ordinary men. Buddhism enables all beings to realize their original selfhood and is therefore closest [to our life] ... Even though the three religions agree in principle, yet they differ most clearly in their profundity and shallowness. However ... they nevertheless lead to the same principles. Only in this sense can we say that the three teachings are one. It certainly does not mean that there is therefore no difference among them."<sup>228</sup>

Zhuhong agreed that the Three Teachings are as one family and they are derived from the same principle, but he regarded Buddhism as more profound and superior than Confucianism and Daoism. He had a similar point of view as Yuanxian to not only uphold the superiority of Buddhism but also to distinguish the differences among Three Teachings. Yet, Zhuhong's approach was not to resist the idea of consolidating the Three Teachings or to sharply disapprove of the other teachings but to just point out that they have differences. Scholar Yü discloses that during the late Ming period, due to the higher esteemed position of Neo-Confucianism, "Buddhists and Taoists usually had to justify their causes by attempting some kind of reconciliation with the Neo-Confucian 'orthodoxy.'"<sup>229</sup>

On another occasion, Zhuhong expounded that Confucians and Buddhists were, in fact, interdependent. Buddhist teachings could be the hidden help to the inadequacies of legal regulations and vice versa. Zhuhong gave examples: when a commoner who had committed evil

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 297. Yü's translation. The *Yunqi Fa Hui* 雲棲法彙卷 15. J33.0077a23.

<sup>229</sup> Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China*, 2.

acts, but then, due to fear of receiving punishment in hell after his death, rectifies himself to become a good person even though he could escape punishment from the legal regulations of this life or monks and nuns might not want to follow the monastic rules but due to being afraid of the penal law, they, therefore, restrained themselves.<sup>230</sup> In his work, the *Zhuchuang suibi*, Zhuhong also voices his opinion regarding the coordination between Buddhism and Confucianism. He remarks that people should not emphatically try to consolidate or distinguish Confucianism and Buddhism because they both have their own approaches and philosophic teachings for guiding people. He argues that if we say that Confucianism is equal to Buddhism, then why do we need Shakyamuni to be born and Bodhidharma to come from the west since all the teachings are already in the *Six Classics* and the *Mencius*? If we say that Buddhism is Confucianism; then why don't we just use the *Śūraṅgama-sūtra* and the *Lotus Sūtra* to govern the world? Why do we still have to draw aid from the ancient sages, Confucius and Mencius? Zhuhong cautions people that, despite some ingenious and adroit scholars said that to consolidate or differentiate the Three Teachings, all are beneficial and without deficiency.<sup>231</sup>

Zhuhong repeatedly voiced his points of view regarding the uniqueness of each teaching and the complementary benefit of each; he believed that people should let the Three Teachings be the way they are. This concept of Zhuhong was the same as Yuanxian's perspective. Yuanxian expresses in the *Yiyan* that the different teachings are the outcomes of a trend and a reflection of the needs of the people at a particular time.<sup>232</sup> There was a connection between Yuanxian and Zhuhong even though they separated by more than four decades in age. Zhuhong's dharma heir, Wengu Guangyin (1566-1636) was also the respectful mentor of Yuanxian. Wengu not only

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<sup>230</sup> Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲株宏. "Ru fo jiao fei 儒佛交非" in the *Zhuchuang suibi* 竹窗隨筆 (Taipei: Taiwan yinjing chu, 1958), 91. J33.0045a29.

<sup>231</sup> Yunqi Zhuhong. "Rufo peihe 儒佛配合" in the *Zhuchuang suibi*, 124. J33.0052b12.

<sup>232</sup> X75.0567c13.

bestowed on Yuanxian the full Buddhist precepts but also recommended Yuanxian to become the abbot of the Gushan monastery.<sup>233</sup> He also passed on to Yuanxian the monastic codes of the Yunqi and the Buddhist *Vinaya* teachings of Zhuhong. Yuanxian once stated about his teachings, "The Chan teachings originated from the Shouchang, the *Vinaya* teachings rooted in Zhenji."<sup>234</sup> After Wengu Guangyin passed away, Yuanxian subsequently continued Wengu's abbacy at Zhenji Temple for five years. We can sense the closeness between Wengu Guangyin and Yuanxian. Yuanxian, consequently, obtained influences indirectly from Zhuhong through Wengu and molded Yuanxian in his teachings of *Vinaya* and his particular philosophies toward the syncretism of the Three Teachings.

### **Zibo Zhenke**

Among the Four Great Buddhist Masters of the late Ming period, Zibo Zhenke 紫柏真可 (1543-1603) was one with a fiery and forthright personality. At 17, he became a monk and at 20 he received the full precepts; afterward, he trained and learned from different masters by pilgrimages around to different monasteries and also confined himself to live in seclusion in order to focus on studying the Buddhist canon. Zhenke took the burden of reviving Buddhism as his own responsibility. He organized an extraordinary project of carving and printing the Buddhist canon in the string-binding style with private funding. The traditional binding style of the Buddhist canon was an Indian style which was expensive to produce due to its higher cost to carve and print. The traditional style of the Buddhist canon was also too heavy to carry or move around and was not easy to store or flip through. Zhenke made a brave innovation of producing a string-binding style of the Buddhist canon in order to provide commoners with a better opportunity to study and read the Buddhist canon. This string-binding style of the Buddhist

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<sup>233</sup> X72.0492a21. X72.0488b17.

<sup>234</sup> X72.0590c16. Zhenji represents Wengu Guangyin due to he resided at the Zhenji Temple and also means the *Vinaya* teaching of Yunqi Zhuhong.

canon was later printed at the Lengyan temple in Jiaxing and so, was called the Jiaxing canon. Coincidentally later, Yuanxian confronted great danger in the year 1628 to obtain a copy of this string-bound style of Buddhist canon from the Lengyan temple. Yuanxian wrote a narrative to record the difficulty he went through to attain this canon, "...it took several decades and painstaking efforts, tears and blood of Master Zibo to finally complete the carving and printing of this Buddhist canon. And then, due to the generous donation of a lay Buddhist as well as the encountering of grave danger to my life to finally be able to bring this canon to here. How can it be easy to have this Buddhist canon..."<sup>235</sup> Yuanxian had an affinity with Zhenke through the Jiaxing canon.

Zhenke also undertook a humanitarian action against the government's mining taxation by virtue of his sense of justice and humanity for the suffering of commoners. When Chan Master Deqing was arrested and accused of "building a private temple," Zhenke went to the capital and tried to rescue Deqing from jail. Due to Zhenke's gallant demeanor and bold actions, he was falsely incriminated for having connections with the Emperor's rivals who were against Emperor Wanli's decision to crown his favorite concubine's son as the crown prince. Zhenke suffered a great deal in prison and passed away while sitting in a posture of meditation during his captivity.<sup>236</sup>

Zhenke was a Buddhist Master but also studied Confucianism and learned the Daoist teachings in his early life. He did not exclude the non-Buddhist teachings or scriptures. One of his recorded Dharma words says "No killing is as same as Confucius' benevolence, no stealing is as same as Confucius' righteousness, no debauchery is as same as Confucius' propriety, no lying is as same as Confucius' trustworthiness, no consuming alcohol is as same as Confucius'

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<sup>235</sup> X72.0467b03. fascicle 15.

<sup>236</sup> Fan, *Zibo dashi shengping jiqi sixiang yanjiu*, 91-124.

wisdom...Therefore, in mundane and super-mundane phenomena, sages establish different teachings, but at the beginning, their teachings are without a difference; the three refuges are the same as the three cardinal guides; the five constant virtues are equal to the five precepts..."<sup>237</sup>

This statement shows that Zhenke highly agreed with the similarities between Buddhism and Confucianism and therefore, supported the trend of harmonizing the Three Teachings without offering an opposing opinion. This attitude was very different from Zhuhong and Yuanxian, who had articulated distinctions among the Three Teachings. Zhenke also remarked that the Three Teachings derived from the same one mind; they did not have any fundamental diversity at all and just carried different names and teaching methods. Even though the name is different, the one mind is no different.<sup>238</sup> Zhenke considered that under the one mind, the integration of the Three Teachings could be obtained. Zhenke also incorporated the Confucian "Five Constants" with a buddha's title, "Ru Lai 如來" to write a poetic verse called "Wu Chang ji 五常偈."<sup>239</sup>

Again, we can sense that Zhenke did not try to criticize Confucianism but truthfully trying to combine Confucianism with Buddhism. Another statement shows that Zhenke upheld Buddhism to be superior to Confucianism and Daoism. He argued that the teachings of Confucianism only described and concerned itself with the phenomenal world but, the Buddhist teachings embraced both the phenomenal world and above. Therefore, the Buddhist teachings are above the other two teachings.<sup>240</sup> He remarked that the Neo-Confucians claimed the Buddhist teachings were encouraging the withdrawal from the mundane world and so, was one of the defects of Buddhism. Zhenke argued that Confucians and Daoists did not know about the profundity of the Buddhist

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<sup>237</sup> *Zibo zunzhe quan ji* 紫柏尊者全集 fascicle 7 "Fa yu 法語." X73.0200a11.

<sup>238</sup> See *Zibo zunzhe quan ji* 紫柏尊者全集 fascicle 3 "Fa yu 法語." "...儒也，釋也，老也，皆名焉...三家一道也，而有不同者名也，非心也."

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, fascicle 20. See 紫柏尊者全集 X73.0315b18.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, fascicle 9.



philosophies and therefore, Buddhism surpassed them.<sup>241</sup> Zhenke was the same as the majority of other Buddhist Masters during the late Ming period and supported the syncretism of the Three Teachings without opposition but, as a Buddhist master, advocated the superiority of Buddhism.

### **Hanshan Deqing**

Hanshan Deqing (1546-1623) was born in a Cai 蔡 family in the Jinling Quanjiao 金陵全椒 Province (present day's Anhui). Deqing received a traditional education when he was young in the local public school and studied Confucian and Lao Zi teachings. He states in the *Hanshan dashi mengyou ji* 憨山大師夢遊集 that, "...when I was young I followed the teachings of Confucius but was not able to know him. I followed the teachings of Lao Zi but was also not able to know him..."<sup>242</sup> When he was 12 years old, he followed a monk Yongning Xilin 永寧西林 in the Bao en 報恩寺 Temple to prepare for the imperial examinations. Deqing learned about the Confucian Classics, the Four Books and Five Classics as well as the composition of poems. When he was 19 years old, he came upon a copy of the *Zhongfeng guanglu* 中峰廣錄 (*Extensive Records of Zhongfeng*). He felt so delighted when he was reading it and decided to become a monk to practice Chan.<sup>243</sup> He received full ordination under Master Wu Ji 無極 in the same year. The next year, Deqing went to the Tianjie 天界 Temple to learn Chan meditation from Chan Master Yungu Fahui 雲谷法會. Deqing also studied the Daoist philosophy and wrote a commentary to the first seven inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi*.<sup>244</sup> He composed not only the Buddhist related works but also some Confucian relevant works especially associated with the

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<sup>241</sup> *Zibo zun zhe quan ji* fascicle 10 "Fa yu."

<sup>242</sup> Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清. "Guan lao zhuang ying xiang lun--Lun xin fa 觀老莊影響論" in the *Hanshan dashi mengyou ji* 憨山大師夢遊集 fascicle 45. X73.0766c01.

<sup>243</sup> The *Hanshan da shi meng you ji*, fascicle 53. X73.0832a24.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, fascicle 54. X73.0845b18.

*Zhongyong* 中庸 (*Doctrine of the Mean*), the *Daxue* 大學 (*Great Learning*) and the *Chun Qiu* *Zuo Zhuan* 春秋左傳.

Deqing and Zhenke were intimate friends since meeting each other in 1586. In 1595, Deqing was arrested and put in jail for "building a private temple" and was later sent into exile.<sup>245</sup> After Zhenke heard that Deqing had been arrested, he became busy trying to rescue Deqing and ran back and forth between the capital and the Guangdong 廣東 Leizhou 雷州 area where Deqing had been sent into exile. Their remarkable friendship was well spoken of in the Chan history of China. Deqing passed away in the year of 1623 at the Nan hua 南華寺 Temple in Caoxi 曹溪.<sup>246</sup>

Hanshan Deqing was one of the Four Great Buddhist Masters who also consented to the syncretism of the Three Teachings without opposing opinions. He remarked many opinions in his works and was similar to Zhenke, who paralleled the five constant virtues of Confucianism with the five precepts of Buddhism. Deqing states:

The Buddha constituted the five precepts; it is the five constant virtues of Confucian teachings. No killing is benevolence; no stealing is righteousness; no debauchery is propriety; no consumption of alcohol is wisdom and no false speech is fidelity. Even though the words uttered from the mouth of the Buddha are different [from Confucius], the meaning is similar. Every time the contemporaries vowed to sustain the Buddhist precepts, they simply avoided and omitted by themselves [to also follow] the five constant virtues. This is a case of only knowing one-side and without observing the whole picture.<sup>247</sup>

Deqing points out that the Buddhist and Confucian teachings are comparable, however, people did not look at both teachings as one or perceive them as one complete teaching. The problem was how people perceived the Three Teachings and not the Three Teachings themselves. He also utilized Buddhist terms to interpret one of the statements in the *Great Learning*, 知止而後有定

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<sup>245</sup> Fan, *Zibo dashi shengping jiqi sixiang yanjiu*, 96.

<sup>246</sup> Wang, Honglie 王紅蕾. *Hanshan Deqing yu wanming shilin* 憨山德清與晚明士林 (Beijing: Zhong guo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2010), 46-47.

<sup>247</sup> The *Hanshan dashi mengyou ji*, fascicle 5. X73.0491b24.

which means when you know where to stop, you have stability. He states that the word "*ding* 定" means the essence of our true nature, since it is thusness, so it cannot be trained or learned to obtain it. However, a lot of learners did not realize this and all tried to obtain the "*ding*" through cultivation and so were not able to achieve the stability. He states that if learners can apprehend the essence of our true nature they would obtain the thusness.<sup>248</sup> We can see that Deqing tried to harmonize the two teachings by guiding Buddhist concepts into Confucian teachings. Deqing remarks in another statement:

When I was a young child, I followed the teachings of Confucius but I was not able to comprehend Confucius. I followed the teachings of Lao Zi but I was not able to understand him. After I became mature, I followed the teachings of the Buddha but I was not able to perceive him. I retreated into the deep mountains and vast water areas to practice observing mind quietly. I then realized that the three realms are only mind, all phenomena are nothing but consciousness.<sup>249</sup>

Deqing indicates how essential the mind is. The sixth patriarch had mentioned that all things are the manifestation of the essence of Mind and Yuanxian also acknowledges the same phrase, in his *Yiyan* "the three realms are the manifestation of mind." Deqing's statement also manifests that the mind is the essential element for integrating the Three Teachings. On another occasion, Deqing also says that even though the Buddha, Confucius and Lao Zi focused on different goals, the first step of all the teachings was about refuting the attachment to the notion of an enduring, inherent self.<sup>250</sup> Regarding this point, both Yuanxian and Deqing had very similar opinions. Yuanxian expounded to abandon self as the only way to achieve the harmonization of the Three Teachings. However, the difference between Yuanxian and Deqing was in their attitude towards the syncretism of the Three Teachings. Deqing did not criticize and greatly approve the

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid., fascicle 32.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., fascicle 45. X73.0766c01.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., fascicle 45. X73.0771b22.

syncretism of the Three Teachings. On another occasion, Deqing apparently expresses his approval of harmonizing the Three Teachings; he says:

I have used three things to encourage myself; without knowing the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, I cannot experience the world; without knowing the teachings of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi, I cannot forget the world; without practicing meditation, I cannot transcend the mundane world. After knowing all these then we can talk about learning.<sup>251</sup>

In this statement, Deqing positions Three Teachings in an equal status without comparison or promotion of any particular teaching. Deqing strongly supported the consolidation of the Three Teachings.

Deqing was similar with other Buddhist masters who also upheld the status of Buddhism to exceed Confucianism and Daoism. We can sense this attitude from one of his statements that are included in his *Hanshan dashi mengyou ji*. He expounds his learning experiences of the Three Teachings and concludes that he entrusted Buddhism as his ultimate choice. He states:

Due to being reborn as a human being<sup>252</sup> and does not go beyond the vehicle of humans,<sup>253</sup> I, therefore, followed Confucian learning since I was a young child. [Later,] because of knowing that human desires were the root of sufferings I, therefore, determined to deviate from the realm of desire, and so, I followed the teachings of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi when I was young. Due to observing that the three realms are only mind and all phenomena are nothing but consciousness, I knew the effect of the ten realms and I, therefore, committed myself to the Buddha.<sup>254</sup>

Deqing explains why he chose Buddhism as his refuge. He intended to manifest Buddhism as the greatest teaching among all the Three Teachings by this statement. The rhetorical expression in this section illustrates that Deqing was utilizing a Buddhist lens to see through the other two teachings. Deqing expresses the superior status of Buddhism and had a resonant attitude with

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid., fascicle 45. X73.0767b07.

<sup>252</sup> One of the six destinies in Buddhism.

<sup>253</sup> One of the five vehicles; the teaching of human beings, which rebirth among man conveyed by observing the five precepts. See *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*. 09/10/2017, <http://www.buddhism-dict.net>.

<sup>254</sup> *Hanshan dashi mengyou ji*, fascicle 45. X73.0769a07.

Zhenke; they both did not have objections or criticisms toward the syncretism of the Three Teachings.

### **Ouyi Zhixu**

Ouyi Zhixu (1599-1655) is the last of the Four Great Buddhist Masters of the late Ming period. Scholars usually consider the Great Buddhist Masters of the late Ming is being only three, i.e. the Three Great Buddhist Masters, and do not include Zhixu as one of them. However, I include Zhixu as a fourth Great Buddhist Master due to his Confucian background and because he was also a prolific writer similar to Yuanxian, as well as having connections with Yuanxian and Wuyi during his life time.

Zhixu wrote an autobiography three years before his death. He named his own biography the "Babu daoren zhuan 八不道人傳" (Autobiography of the Follower of Eight Negations). He explains that "...in ancient times, there were Confucianism, Chan, *Vinaya* and Doctrinal teachings. I feel uneasy to follow them. Nowadays, there are also Confucianism, Chan, *Vinaya*, and Doctrinal teachings, but I would also disdain angrily to follow them..."<sup>255</sup> Zhixu did not consider himself to belong to Buddhism or Confucianism. He called himself Daoren 道人 which in general, means a Daoist priest. However, according to the *Foxue daci dian*, Daoren means a person who has obtained the Dao or who has cultivated the Dao.<sup>256</sup>

His autobiography states that he was a vegetarian at age seven; at age twelve, he studied Confucianism but was influenced by the bias of Confucian teachings and pledged to abolish the teachings of the Buddha and Lao Zi. He started to drink and wrote many essays to repeal Buddhism and Daoism as heresy. At seventeen, after reading the preface of Zhuhong's the

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<sup>255</sup> Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭. "Babu daoren zhuan" in *Lingfeng Zonglun* 靈峰宗論 fascicle 1, the *Jiaying zang* 嘉興藏. J36.0253a13.

<sup>256</sup> Ding, *Foxue da cidian* 佛學大辭典, 2363.

*Record of Self-knowledge and Jottings under a Bamboo Window*, Zhixu burned all of his critical essays. He deeply regretted his acts of writing reproachful essays to abolish Buddhism and Daoism and thereafter, seriously believed in the law of karma. At the age of twenty, he wrote a commentary on the *Analects* and had insightful comprehension regarding Confucius and Yan Hui's teachings of the mind. He stated in the preface of the *Sishu Ouyi jie* 四書藕益解 that "...it is necessary to rely on the *Four Books* to help manifest the supreme truth [of Buddhism.]"<sup>257</sup> During the winter of 1619, his father passed away and Zhixu was inspired to renounce the world when he heard the recitation of the *Dizhang pusa benyuan jing* 地藏菩薩本願經 (*Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva Pūrvapraṇidhāna Sūtra*). At the age of 24, after dreaming of Hanshan three times, he took tonsure with one of Hanshan's disciples, Master Xueling 雪嶺. At the age of 27, he read through the Buddhist canon. The next year, his mother died and after the funeral, he then confined himself onto a mountain and stayed in seclusion until he was thirty. During this period of time, he suffered a great illness and sought for rebirth in the Pure Land. At 32, he decided to draw lots and chose to write commentaries on the Tiantai school. As a prolific composer, Zhixu continued to write various commentaries and essays.<sup>258</sup> He passed away in the year 1655 at the age of 57.

Zhixu's perspective toward the syncretism of the Three Teachings can be observed from his writings. Zhixu believed that by composing commentaries for the *Four Books*, he could carry forward the Buddhist teachings to a larger Confucian community. He annotates the *Four Books* to integrate Confucius' and the Buddha's teachings and intended to convert Confucians into Buddhists. On another occasion, Zhixu intended to convey Buddhism and Confucianism; he wrote "...only after learning about Buddhism can one then comprehend Confucianism. Also, only

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<sup>257</sup> Ouyi Zhixu. The "Sishu Ouyi jie xu 四書藕益解序" in the *Sishu Ouyi jie* 四書藕益解. J36.0354c09.

<sup>258</sup> Ouyi Zhixu. The *Lingfeng Zonglun*, J36.0253a13.

by being a true Confucian is one then able to learn Buddhism."<sup>259</sup> He also states that "...the scholarship and meritorious activities of a Confucian are actually the lifeline and marrow of a Buddhist and therefore, those who engage in the mundane society as a true Confucian, when renouncing the world, is then also a true Buddha."<sup>260</sup> Zhixu believed that a truthful Confucian can be also a genuine enlightened Buddhist. These statements sound similar to Yuanxian's expressions on the equality between the Shakyamuni Buddha and Confucius.<sup>261</sup>

Zhixu gave a profound perspective regarding the concept of life and death in the *Analects* through his unique interpretation of the "Li Ren 里仁" section. "If I can hear the Way in the morning, in the evening I can die content." Zhixu believed that Confucius meant that life is not limited to the present life only; after death, life did not vanish. He wrote a commentary in the *Lunyu dianjing* 論語點睛 which is the first part of the *Sishu Ouyi jie* regarding his thoughts toward this "Li Ren" section. He states:

Those who did not know or hear about the Way, how could they be ready to die? If one knows that death is inevitable, why not urgently seek to know the Way? If we realize "to know or hear [the Way] in the morning" [one] can "die in the evening" then we know that the Way is throughout all the space and time; it does not annihilate after we have passed away.<sup>262</sup>

In this statement, Zhixu implies the Dao or the Way is the truth; it does not cease to exist and after people die, its true nature is not annihilated. Zhixu also remarks another annotation in the "Xian Jin 先進" chapter of the *Analects*. He interprets the statement, "If you don't understand what life is, how will you understand death?" to mean that life and death are identical in the sense that our true nature is without life and death; it is self sufficient and absolute. Zhixu believed that Confucius had obtained the deep insight of "ten realms without deviation from one

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid., J36.0385a26.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., J36.0292a02.

<sup>261</sup> X72.0561b01.

<sup>262</sup> Ouyi Zhixu. *Mingqing sida gaoseng wenji*. (Beijing: Beijing tushu guan chuben she, 2004) 699. *Lunyu dianjing*.

mind; life and death are without two different causes."<sup>263</sup> The intention of Zhixu was to channel Confucius' thoughts with Buddhist's concepts. Through his commentaries, Zhixu indicates that by realizing and focusing on the mind, all teachings are able to be harmonized. He states, "...one's own mind is the source of the Three Teachings, the formation of the Three Teachings are all derived from the mind."<sup>264</sup> Zhixu also treated the Three Teachings as different methods of education and dharma teachings for helping people to achieve Buddhahood. Despite being Confucianism or Daoism, it will be a good device as long as it can assist people to learn about Buddhism. He states:

"I then knew that Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, Chan, *Vinaya*, and Buddhist doctrines were all yellow leaves and empty fists. In accordance with what the child desires, parents placate them with different things. If the inducement is appropriate, the child laughs with glee, but if the inducement is inappropriate, he cries out aloud. Laughing and crying happens only to the child. They neither add to nor subtract from the parents. However, the parents feel happy when they see the child laugh, but sad when they see the child cry. This is connected with their nature. They cannot help it even if they wanted to."<sup>265</sup>

Zhixu viewed the various teachings as skillful devices; he did not particularly uphold a certain teaching in this case. Nevertheless, this did not suggest that Zhixu would not consider Buddhism to be above the other teachings. In one of his works, Zhixu expounds that:

In the classification system of Buddhism; Confucianism belongs to the human vehicle of the five vehicle teachings. To relate what we understand, the five constant virtues are equal to the five precepts. The rest of the various regulations are half equal to the ten kinds of wholesome behavior...The teachings of Lao Zi belongs to the vehicle of the celestials, it does not exhaust the ultimate of Heaven...After examining, then we can say that, overall, [they are] inferior to the Tripitaka teachings, which exceed the life and death. Moreover, it understands and separates the perfect and evil [teachings]... these sages are the manifestation and transformation of bodhisattvas and sent by the Buddha.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Ouyi Zhixu, *Mingqing sida gaoseng wenji*, 726.

<sup>264</sup> Ouyi Zhixu. The *Lingfeng Zonglun*, J36.0386b13.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., J36.0354c09. Fascicle 6, Yü, Chun-fang's translation from "Some Ming Buddhist Responses to Neo-Confucianism" in the *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 15 (1988) 371-413.

<sup>266</sup> Ouyi Zhixu. *Lingfeng Zonglun* fascicle 3. J36.0311a03.



This paragraph demonstrates that in Zhixu's concept, Buddhism is superior to Confucianism and Daoism. Under the classification system of Buddhism, Zhixu categorizes Confucianism and Daoism into the system, but they are not as profound and perfect as the Tripitaka teachings. We can also sense his upholding of Buddhism in his efforts of composing his Confucian related commentaries; the *Sishu Ouyi jie* and the *Zhouyi Chan jie* 周易禪解. Zhixu states, "Bhikshu Che-in [Cheyin] followed me during the difficult years of my travels and sufferings. He did not know the *Vinaya* and he also could not get anywhere in Chan meditation. I often encouraged him by talking to him, but it did not help too much. So, I prayed to the Buddha with utmost sincerity and cast lots several times for guidance. They all indicated that I should rely on the *Four Books* and let them help me make the meaning of the First Principle clear."<sup>267</sup> Zhixu intended to not only convey Buddhism with Confucianism but also use Buddhist concepts to rationalize Confucianism. He also discloses his reason for composing commentaries for the *Zhouyi Chan jie* was to "...use Chan to penetrate Confucianism and to induce Confucians to know about Chan."<sup>268</sup>

The considerable effort that Zhixu contributed to the syncretism of the Three Teachings was to devote himself to writings on connotations for the *Four Books* and the *Book of Change*. In these works, he clearly indicates his intentions. In his writings, he also remarks to uphold the superiority of Buddhism.

Although Zhixu was twenty years junior to Yuanxian, he had connections with both Wuyi and Yuanxian. In 1629, Zhixu visited and stayed with Wuyi for many days and had long discussions with Wuyi regarding the disturbance of Mad Chan practices among some cultivators.<sup>269</sup> At the time, Yuanxian was still living in seclusion at Mount He and Zhixu did not

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<sup>267</sup> Ouyi Zhixu. *Lingfeng Zonglun* fascicle 6. J36.0354c09. Translated by Chun-fang Yü, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 402.

<sup>268</sup> Ouyi Zhixu. The *Lingfeng Zonglun* fascicle 6. J36.0356c18.

<sup>269</sup> J36.0357a19.

have had a chance to meet with Yuanxian. It was probably after several years, when Yuanxian was an abbot, that Zhixu wrote a letter to Yuanxian. In his letter, Zhixu expresses his respect for Yuanxian's strict and conscientious selection of a dharma heir and therefore, believes the buddha-land of southern Quanzhou would be able to illuminate the whole nation under heaven, due to Yuanxian residing at there. Zhixu also humbly asks that due to himself being tied down by delusive worldly affairs and not able to attend on the side of Yuanxian, that he ventured to invite Yuanxian to come visit him as early as possible.<sup>270</sup> The time Zhixu wrote to Yuanxian is possibly when Yuanxian was an abbot of the Kaiyuan temple in Quanzhou in the year of 1635 since Zhixu mentions the area of southern Quanzhou.

Zhixu utilized his literary skills as same as Yuanxian to compose numerous works in the hope of enlightening people about Buddhism. Zhixu did not criticize the other teachings due to his earlier life experiences; he had learned a better way to handle it. However, Zhixu was similar to all the other Buddhist masters; he also believed that Buddhism was above the other two teachings.

### **Analyzing Yuanxian's Mindset toward the Syncretism of the Three Teachings**

From last chapter, we examined Yuanxian's points of view toward Confucianism, Daoism and the idea of harmonizing the Three Teachings in his *Yiyan*. Yuanxian did not hesitate to point out the weaknesses of Confucianism and Daoism. Furthermore, he rationally indicates the supremacy of Buddhism. When discussing the notion of combining the Three Teachings, Yuanxian continually expounds his true feelings, which were; people should leave them alone and the only way to achieve harmonization was without self. Yuanxian had great aspirations to revive the late Ming Chan Buddhism. He was concerned about the perpetuity of the true Chan teachings and so, Yuanxian's intention was to defend the true Chan Buddhist teachings against

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<sup>270</sup> J36.0338c23.

the unauthentic and degenerated teachings of his times, such as the Mad Chan and the imitation of imagined Chan events from ancient times.<sup>271</sup> Yuanxian stood by his strict principles and fearlessly fought for his objective of revising the glorious Chan history from the past. From this stand point, we can understand that Yuanxian was more concerned about not letting the orthodox Chan teachings fall than about advocating the syncretism of the Three Teachings.

I believe that Yuanxian had his justifications for taking an oppositional position. Once, he expressed his concern regarding the later generations of the Yangming school. Yuanxian condemns the "Two Xi" 二溪<sup>272</sup> of using Confucian terms to interpret Chan teachings. But, what really made Yuanxian concerned was a student of Jinxi (Luo Rufang), Li Zhi 李贄. Li Zhi believed that the teachings of the "Two Xi" were the same as the Chan teachings and suggested that every Chan monk should have the book of the "Two Xi." Yuanxian lamented that in the old days, people used the words of Chan to assist the learning of Neo-Confucianism, but that now, people have turned this around to regard Confucian words as authentic teachings of the Chan school. Yuanxian was concerned that the great teachings of Chan Buddhism would be confused with other teachings and be misled by Yangming's later generations.<sup>273</sup> Therefore, Yuanxian had to stand firm, to debate and defend the teachings of Chan Buddhism and against the popular trend of harmonizing the Three Teachings. I believe this was also one of Yuanxian's strategies to confront the challenge of the 17th-century religious and social climates. It was also due to Yuanxian's uncompromising position towards the unorthodox teachings that he elevated the caliber of Chan cultivators and the Shaolin Chan lineage was able to continue without decline.<sup>274</sup>

Yuanxian's outspokenness and magnificent morality were described in one of the prefaces

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<sup>271</sup> Wu, *Enlightenment in Dispute*, 3-17.

<sup>272</sup> The "Two Xi" is pointed to Wang Longxi 王龍溪 and Luo Jinxi 羅近溪, both were famous Wang Yangming's disciple and later generations.

<sup>273</sup> X72.0565c11.

<sup>274</sup> X72.0589c01.

written by his lay disciple. It states, "My master, he would express his true points of view which others, from ancient times until the present, did not dare to express...the light of his wisdom was perfect, without flaws and could be praised as the outstanding one in the abbeys. He was qualified to carry the dharma-seal of the Shouchang sub-lineage. His sincere mind and practices all equaled to his predecessors and were a good exemplar for his successors. He especially was suitable to be extolled as the pillar of the declining era."<sup>275</sup> We can see those qualities in Yuanxian's work, the *Yiyan*.

On the other hand, the Four Great Buddhist Masters' intentions were to revive Buddhism by not having any confrontations with Confucianism. They also wanted to draw in scholars from the other teachings and therefore, they needed to not be critical while also pointing out the superiority of Buddhism.

## **Conclusion**

The Four Great Buddhist Masters were essential masters of the Buddhist communities, history and even to the intellectual society during the late Ming period in China. My studies demonstrate that all of the Four Great Buddhist Masters were all compliant with the strong trend of the syncretism of the Three Teachings during their lifetimes. They also upheld Buddhism to be superior to Confucianism and Daoism. When we compare them with Yuanxian, their similarities is that they all advocated the supremacy of Buddhism. However, the obvious difference between them is that Yuanxian did not strongly support or approve of the trend to harmonize the Three Teachings. Yuanxian's viewpoints were close to those of Zhuhong, who also expressed his opinion to reject the treatment of the Three Teachings as being either the same or different. However, Chun-fang Yü points out that Zhuhong was a supporter of the Three Teachings because he compiled a book, the *Zizhi lu*, which incorporates the ideals and practices

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<sup>275</sup> X72.0385b24.

from Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism all together to inspire people to do good deeds. Zhenke and Deqing both had very similar concepts regarding the similarity between Buddhism and Confucianism. They believed that the five constant virtues of Confucianism parallels with the five precepts of Buddhism. Both of them endorsed the syncretism of the Three Teachings without oppositional arguments. Zhixu also did not criticize Confucianism or Daoism but rather, utilized his Confucian scholarship to write commentaries to integrate Buddhist concepts into Confucian teachings.

On the contrary, Yuanxian's work, the *Yiyan*, illustrates oppositional opinions towards Confucianism and Daoism and even to the ideology of the syncretism of the Three Teachings. Yuanxian points out the greater capacity of Buddhism which embraces the three life times and the profoundness of Buddhism's concept of emptiness when compared with the Daoist teachings. He even remarks on the contradictory points of the Confucian teachings regarding life after death. Yuanxian believed that in order to consolidate the Three Teachings, cultivators must reach the stage of no-self. In a way, Yuanxian tries to say that this is not an easy task for the majority.

Through the writings of the Four Great Buddhist Masters, we realize the syncretism of the Three Teachings was a considerable trend during the late Ming period. The harmonization of the Three Teachings has had a long history in the arena of Chinese religions. During the Wanli era of the Ming dynasty, Buddhism was able to revive due to the support of the Empress Dowager Cisheng, Emperor Wanli, and the emergence of the Four Great Buddhist Masters. And the Four Great Buddhist Masters all supported the syncretism of the Three Teachings. Buddhism took this juncture to advocate the perfection of its teachings and philosophies.

Yuanxian's age was in between the oldest, Zhuhong, and the youngest, Zhixu, of the Four Great Buddhist Masters. Although he did not have personal contact with most of them, through

his *Yiyan*, we know that he had very similar view points with Zhuhong. Nevertheless, they all upheld Buddhism to be superior to Confucianism and Daoism. Yuanxian not only had a close relationship with one of Zhuhong's dharma heirs, Wengu Guangyin, but also received teachings from him. Yuanxian was also associated with Zhenke through the Jiaxing canon; he understood the prestige and hardship of producing and having a Buddhist canon. To find that Zhixu had written a letter to Yuanxian praising him and wishing to soon meet with him can be assessed as a sign of good reputation of Yuanxian.

The climate of late Ming Buddhism demonstrates the vitality and seriousness of the Chan and Buddhist masters. Yuanxian lived in such an era that he not only uplifted Buddhism but also attempted to make a difference to the society of his times. Through his *Yiyan*, Yuanxian honestly expresses his points of view. The *Yiyan* demonstrates Yuanxian's belief and stance toward Buddhism which is superior to Confucianism and Daoism. As a Caodong Buddhist master, Yuanxian also firmly defended Buddhism through his literary talents of composing; his *Yiyan* distinctly conveys his adherence to Buddhism. It was Yuanxian's refusal to compromise that made a great impact on the super-mundane religious world.

In the next chapter, we are going to look at one of Yuanxian's works, *To Refrain from Drowning Female Infants or Jie ni nü* 戒溺女. From this work, we can begin to understand Yuanxian and the Ming society from a sociological angle and also be able to perceive how Yuanxian's ideal of transcending the mundane world and engaging in society was meant to be accomplished and actualized at the same time.

## Chapter Five Sinified Buddhism and Female Infanticide

Female infanticide has been a phenomenon of social injustice since the early periods of Chinese history. However, the practice of infanticide happens everywhere around the world. The author of *Drowning Girls in China*, states: "Abandonment, infanticide, and abortion have been practiced in every society since antiquity..."<sup>276</sup> Williamson states "Infanticide has been practiced on every continent and by people on every level of cultural complexity, from hunters and gatherers to high civilizations..."<sup>277</sup> Infanticide refers to the killing of newborn infants; abandonment is an alternative to infanticide, i.e. leaving the defenseless child to fend against the forces of nature. Infanticide is considered to occur by some any time from the point of conception to two or three years of age.<sup>278</sup>

In this Chapter, I focus on the practice of female infanticide in China during the 17th-century. I will particularly discuss one of the works of Yongjue Yuanxian, *To Refrain from Drowning Female Infants*. I use the critical textual analysis method to study what Yuanxian has expressed in his essay and what we can perceive from his article regarding this social phenomenon. Throughout Chinese history, there were many cases and articles that have remarked about infanticide, especially female infanticide. I refer to historical documents, such as the *Shi Ji*, *Han Shu*, and *Han Feizi* to reveal the ruthless acts of infanticide in the history of China since ancient times. I unfold the reasons and excuses parents used to rationalize infanticide and what the court and religious community did to try to prohibit this merciless act. What were the reasons for the horrible practice of infanticide to have continued in 17th-century China

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<sup>276</sup>D. E. Mungello, *Drowning Girls in China: Female Infanticide since 1650* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008), 2.

<sup>277</sup> Laila Williamson, "Infanticide: An Anthropological Analysis" in *Infanticide and the Value of Life* edited by Marvin Kohl (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1978), 61.

<sup>278</sup> Mungello, *Drowning Girls in China*, 2.

despite official regulations and religious teachings against it? The crucial point is why were females selected more frequently for infanticide? What was the justification the parents used to relieve their guilt? I argue that aside from the influence of Confucian patrilineal tradition, the unconventional Buddhist concepts of "this life" and "next life" of a soul played an unanticipated and intertwined role in the discriminatory practice of female infanticide in Chinese society.

Yuanxian felt obligated to compose *To Refrain from Drowning Female Infants* to admonish the inhumane behavior that was a trend of society at the time. *To Refrain from Drowning Female Infant* shows Yuanxian's concern and guidance towards mundane society. It also demonstrates that Yuanxian intended to carry out his goal of simultaneously transcending the mundane world and engaging in society to benefit people.

### **Historical Context**

There are several early Chinese historical documentations associated with infanticide such as the story of Lord Mengchang 孟嘗君 recorded in Fascicle 75 of Sima Qian's 司馬遷 *Shi Ji* 史記 (*the Records of the Grand Historian*). When the famous Lord Mengchang was born, his father did not intend to keep him alive because his birthday was on the fifth day of the fifth month of the lunar calendar; this was considered to be a bad omen. According to the superstitious convention of the Qi 齊 State (1046 BC - 221 BC) during the Zhou dynasty of ancient China, if a child born on this day grew up and his height was as high as the lintel of a door, he would be a bad luck to his parents and cause them to die. Lord Mengchang's mother, however, did not have the heart to kill her son and instead brought him up in secret. The day when Lord Mengchang revealed his identity to his father; he inquired of his father, "Is a human's destiny controlled by the Mandate of Heaven or by the lintel of a door? If it is controlled by the lintel of a door, then all you have to do is to increase the height of the lintel." Thereafter, his



father recognized Lord Mengchang's cleverness and began to think highly of him.<sup>279</sup> This story reveals to us that as early as the Warring States period, Chinese already had the practice of abandoning or killing unwanted infants and the reasoning could sometimes be simply because of a superstitious belief.

Number 42 of Fascicle 72 of the *Han Shu* 漢書 (the Book of the Han), the "Wangong liangong bao zhuan 王貢兩龔鮑傳" records that during the reign of Emperor Wu of Han 漢武帝 (r. 141 BC - 87 BC), the court wanted to increase revenue to be able to launch several expeditions and the peasants were required to pay high taxes on their children. The high tax began when a child reached three years old and was called *kouqian* 口錢 or "tax for the mouth" which meant "child tax." Many poor peasants were unable to afford to pay the tax and so chose to drown or abandon their infants.<sup>280</sup> This record reveals that due to poverty, poor peasants chose to kill their infants in order to survive the adversity of their times. If the peasants had a choice between male and female infants, they would choose to keep the male rather than the female infant.

The "Liu Fan 六反" (the Six Contrarities) from Fascicle 18 Article Number 46 of the *Han Fei zi* 韓非子 states:

The way the parents reacted to [the sex of] their children; if they gave birth to a baby boy, they would congratulate each other, if they had a baby girl, they would kill her.<sup>281</sup>

This statement discloses that the Chinese had a gender preference as early as the Warring States period.

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<sup>279</sup> Sima Qian, *Shi ji. lie zhuan* 史記.列傳. (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju chu ban, 1973), 2351.

<sup>280</sup> Ban Gu 班固, Huaqing Liu 劉華清, Jiannan Li 李建南, and Xiangfei Liu 劉翔飛. *Han shu quan yi* 漢書全譯 (4) (Guiyang shi: Guizhou ren ming chu ban she, 1995), 3270.

<sup>281</sup> Huanbiao Wang 王煥鑣, *Han fei zi xuan* 韓非子選 (Shanghai: Zhong hua shu ju chu ban, 1965), 105.

During the Southern and Northern Dynasties period (420-589), a well-known Chinese scholar and court official, Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (531-591), wrote a famous book of 26 chapters titled the *Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓 (*Admonitions for the Yan Clan*). One of the chapters, the "Essay of Administrating Family" 治家篇, describes the scene of female infanticide of his distant relatives:

I have a distant relative who has a number of concubines. When one of the concubines is going to give birth to a child, she will be kept under close watch by a servant who will peep into her room through a window at the time of delivery. If the newborn is a daughter, the servant will enter and snatch it away while the mother staggers behind screaming and wailing in a heartbreaking manner.<sup>282</sup>

This statement vividly describes what happened when a wealthy family's concubine gave birth to a female child and how the helpless female child was treated. It indicates that female infanticide was practiced even among prosperous families. The remark also clearly states if the infant was a daughter, she would be killed by the servant, under the orders of the master of the household. The defenseless female infant was discriminated against due to her sex.

Zhu Song 朱松 (1097-1143), the father of the famous Song period Neo-Confucian scholar, Zhu Xi, wrote "Article of Abstaining from Infanticide" 戒殺子文 when he was the Vice-magistrate of the Zhenghe 政和 county of Jianzhou 建州. The motivation for his writing was that he realized the people of Jianzhou did not prefer to have many children. They frequently killed their unwanted children, and Zhu Song felt that he could not tolerate seeing this horrible act of infanticide.<sup>283</sup> From this source, we know that people in the Jianzhou 建州 area frequently practiced infanticide during the Song period. Nonetheless, the practice of infanticide continued

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<sup>282</sup> Zhitui Yan 顏之推, Zao Ximing, and Wenzhao Lu. *Yanshi jia xun zhu* 顏氏家訓注 (Taipei: Yi wen yin shu guan, 1950s), 69.

<sup>283</sup> Shu-hui Meng 孟淑慧, *Zhu Xi ji qi men ren de jiao hua li nian yu shi jian* 朱熹及其門人的教化理念與實踐 (*Instruction in Virtue and its Practice* by Chu Hsi and his Disciples) (Taipei: National Taiwan University, 2003), 100.

on into the Ming dynasty as evidenced by Yuanxian's article, *To Refrain from Drowning Female Infants*, in which he tried to convince people not to drown and kill female infants.

**Yuanxian's article, *To Refrain from Drowning Female Infants* 戒溺女**

Yuanxian, a native Jianzhou Buddhist master, is considered to have been the person responsible for the revival of Caodong Chan Buddhism. In Fascicle 16 of the *Guanglu*, Yuanxian wrote the article *To Refrain from Drowning Female Infants* condemning the act of female infanticide during the late Ming period. This article is also included in Fascicle 2 of the *Jingci yaoyu* 淨慈要語. When Yuanxian wrote the *Jingci yaoyu*, he was the abbot of Yongquan si 湧泉寺 in Gushan 鼓山 of the Fujian area during the year 1634.<sup>284</sup> In his work, *To Refrain from Drowning Female Infants*, Yuanxian began with remarks on karma, crime and the sin of people's transgressions and he systematically pointed out the seriousness of killing infants. He lamented that people did not think the act of drowning female infants was abnormal. The beginning of the article states:

[I] have heard that among misdeeds in the ocean of karma, the karma of killing alone is the most serious crime. Among the karma of killing, the killing of human beings alone is the most severe sin. Among the killing of human beings, the act of father and child killing each other alone is the most serious sin. Among the killing of children, the killing of an innocent child alone is the most severe crime. Now, mundane society drowns female infants; this is exactly like killing an innocent child. This transgression is the most serious; no other sin can compare with it. However, mundane society is at peace with it and does not feel uncomfortable about it; they see it as a common phenomenon. Isn't it strange?<sup>285</sup>

We can acknowledge from Yuanxian's writing that society during his time must have practiced the drowning female infants so often that it caught his attention and even made him feel obligated to write an essay to discuss the cruelty of this act. As Yuanxian states in the beginning of his work, the practice of female infanticide must have been so acceptable that people did not

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<sup>284</sup> Fan, *Mingmo Caodong dianjun*, 29-35.

<sup>285</sup> X72.0475b04. *Guanglu*, fascicle 16.

feel strange about its practice and saw it as common phenomena. Jianhua Chang provides sufficient records in his article, "Mingdai niying wenti chutan 明代溺嬰問題初探 (The Initial Exploration of the Problem of Drowning Infants in the Ming Period), to show that during the Ming period, not just Fujian but three other provinces in particular; Zhejiang, Jiangxi, and Hunan, also had the custom of drowning female infants.<sup>286</sup> In the *Min Shu* 閩書, under the "Records of Custom" 風俗志, it describes that "the Jianning area... required a substantial amount of money to marry out girls and the demand was without satisfaction. For this reason, if the family was poor they would rather abandon their girls and as a result, local custom favored drowning girls."<sup>287</sup> Jianhua Chang also provides many other local historical records to highlight the prevalence of female infanticide in the Fujian area. For example, several local regional gazetteers such as the Wanli 萬曆 period's *Jiayang xianzhi* 建陽縣志 and *Fuan xianzhi* 福安縣志, and the Chongzhen 崇禎 period's *Shouning daizhi* 壽寧待志, all indicate the cruel practice of female infanticide in the Fujian area.<sup>288</sup> As an abbot of the local monastery, Yuanxian was compelled to put a stop to the currents of this custom. In his article, Yuanxian points out several human benevolent acts; his intention may have been to remind people about the meaning of being a human, which should not be engaged in killing especially the killing of innocent female infants. He states:

In ancient times, Mencius said that when contemporary people suddenly see a young child is going to fall into a well, they all tremble, are watchful and have compassion. This is not because they know the parents of the young child, or want to earn praise from fellow villagers and friends or fear to damage their reputations [and so] take actions like these. Frankly, not having a compassionate heart is not being a human being. Now, people give birth to a girl and then drown her, they show that their love for her is inferior to the love [people show] towards the

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<sup>286</sup> Jianhua Chang 常建華. "Ming dai ni ying wen ti chu tan 明代溺嬰問題初探" in the *Zhong guo she hui li shi ping lun* 中國社會歷史評論 Fascicle 4, 121-124.

<sup>287</sup> Qiaoyuan He 何喬遠, *Min Shu* 閩書 Vol. 1 (Fujian: Fujian ren ming chu ban she, 1994), fascicle 38, p. 944.

<sup>288</sup> Chang, *Zhong guo she hui li shi ping lun*, 123.

neighbor's child. Not only this but, law enforcement officers still think repeatedly about when to carry out the sentences of death-row criminals who are to be executed and should it be in the autumn or winter in order to postpone their short transient lives. Now, people who give birth to a girl and then drown her show that their love to the girl is inferior to the concerns [of law enforcement officers] towards death-row criminals. Not only this but, there are benevolent people whose feeling of compassion fills everywhere, even unto insects; they cannot bear to hurt them. Now, people who give birth to a girl and then drown her show that their love for the girl is inferior to the love towards tiny insects. Not only this, nothing is more fierce and hard to control than beasts but we can hear the grieving monkey crying heartbroken because of the loss of its child. The tiger would turn its head and look after baby tigers. Their love towards their children could not make them select between male or female. Now, people who give birth to a girl and then drown her show that their love to the girl is inferior to the benevolence of a beast.<sup>289</sup>

Yuanxian utilizes the well known Mencius teaching on human nature, which should possess compassion and righteousness, to remind people of how human beings should behave. Yuanxian uses the benevolent examples of law enforcement officers, humans caring about insects, and the affection of fierce animals for their babies to show how their compassionate actions are superior to those who drown their female infants. In other words, those brutal people who kill their female infants consider their girls not as precious as a neighbor's child, criminals on death row, insects or the babies of monkeys and tigers. This was a very sorrowful status for innocent infant girls.

Yuanxian continued on in his work to describe the heartrending conditions of female infants:

The parents of human beings act like this. Let's not discuss what we can see of the obvious legal retribution of killing; there is also an invisible retribution from heaven of being without offspring. But, [let us] observe when the baby girl has just been separated from her mother's womb and is soon thrown into death. There is not even enough time to wail, [her] agony can't even pour out to the people. [Her body] passes through mountain streams and passers-by dare not to confront [the scene]. But, for the parents of the girl, are they really able to do this? Alas, the reason a human being is different from animals is that human beings have the heart to sympathize with others. Now, parents who dare to kill like this, we cannot even compare them with animals. How can they consider themselves as human beings and stand between the heaven and earth? I have tried hard to profoundly seek for the reasons, but I can't comprehend it myself.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> X72.0475b04. *Guanglu*, fascicle 16.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*

Yuanxian describes the horrible scene and suffering female infants went through and again emphasizes that the difference between humans and animals is that humans have the heart to sympathize with others. Those parents who kill their female infants have lost this human essential and Yuanxian wonders how they could live up to being human beings in the world. Yuanxian himself was not able to comprehend the act of female infanticide. Nonetheless, he states some rational reasons as well as counter reasons in his article:

[People] would say that females are going to marry into other families; they have nothing to do with replacing an elders' position to carry out the duties of venerating ancestors. And therefore they drown girls? But people say that after raising boys, they might then roam about the four directions [and not venerate their ancestors.] What could you do about this? [People] would say that due to wanting to save expenses on dowries, they, therefore drown girls? But people have also said that after having boys, they might then gamble or often visit brothels and lose the whole family fortune. What could you do about this? [People] would say that they anticipated the girls would not become capable and virtuous and they, therefore, drown girls? But people have said that they raised boys who ruined and dishonored the family reputation. What could you do about this? [People] would say that due to a family being poor and difficult to sustain, they, therefore, drown girls? But people have said that they must provide clothes and food for boys to wear and eat. What could you do about this? [People] would say that due to being without a son and already having numerous girls, they, therefore, drown girls? But people have said that [if you do so] you would receive the hidden retribution of being without male offspring throughout their lifetime. What could you do about this? To guess at their reasoning, it is no more than because they have become used to killing [infant girls] as normal behavior. Their benevolent heart has dried up and been destroyed, living in the same prevalent custom of drowning girls, deceiving the law of the nation and not living up to the law just for the convenience of personal plans and without concern for punishments from the divinity and spiritual world. To know these reasons and to consider being a female, her feeling of injustice and hatred must go straight through the sun and cause frost in the summer.<sup>291</sup>

Yuanxian listed five reasons that people commonly used as their excuses for female infanticide behavior and also provides counter reasons to admonish those excuses. When we analyze the reasons the parents used, they are either connected to concepts of the Confucian tradition or due to poverty and not being able to afford a large dowry to marry out their daughters. However,

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<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

Yuanxian believed that these rationalities could not be sustained by themselves because he could counteract every single one and explained why having male descendants was not necessarily beneficial. Yuanxian concluded that the act of female infanticide was due to the selfishness of people; they took the advantage of lax laws and were reckless about the possible punishment from the divine and spiritual world. The parents had not only lost their compassion but also regarded the act of drowning girls as a custom; they had become used to female infanticide and therefore accelerated it into a prevalent behavior. Yuanxian was not the only one to conclude that the main reason for female infanticide was due to the custom of society; Yunü Chen, also expresses comments in her book. She comments that if the society did not have the trend and notion of infanticide or did not have repeating social cases of infanticide for people to imitate, people would not have fearlessly drowned girls.<sup>292</sup> At the end of *To Refrain from Drowning Female Infants*, Yuanxian states:

As the parents, their wicked and ominous spirit must also have blocked and concealed the universe. Wouldn't they have created the greatest transgression and left endless calamity? When people glimpse the [drowning] scene, they were sick at heart. I employ this article to speak out in the hopes that the parents would do their best to change and persuade each other to turnaround from this social trend. If you see others abandon girls, make deliberation for them to find them a place to stay to keep them alive. This may be an opportunity to turn calamity into auspiciousness.<sup>293</sup>

Yuanxian states his main purpose of writing this article was to speak out for those defenseless girls and persuade people to change their abnormal practice of drowning female infants. He even asks people to rescue other people's female infants when they happen to encounter one that has been abandoned. From this essay, we sense that the act of drowning female infants was so uncontrollable in the 17th-century society of the Fujian area that it even became a custom.

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<sup>292</sup> Yunü Chen 陳玉女, *Mingdai de fojiao yu shehui* 明代的佛教與社會 (Beijing Shi: Beijing da xue chu ban she, 2011), 305.

<sup>293</sup> X72.0475b04. *Guanglu*, fascicle 16.

Yuanxian wanted to change this social phenomenon and hoped to turn the calamity of female infanticide into an auspicious situation of saving lives. As a monk, Yuanxian could easily distance himself from mundane society and not be involved in social incidents. However, this was not Yuanxian's attitude. He cared about people and understood that without being engaged in society, one cannot transcend the mundane world and vice versa because they were meant to be accomplished and actualized at the same time.

### **Confucian Teachings and Female Infanticide**

According to Yuanxian's article, there were five excuses used for female infanticide. First, females would not be able to carry out the sacrifice to the ancestors. Second, people wanted to save on dowry expenses or could not afford them. Third, people believed that females would not bring honor to the family because only males could participate in civil service examinations and have the chance to become court officials. Fourth, people were poor. Fifth, some already had many girls and were desperate to have a boy to continue the family lineage. After analyzing these five excuses, we find that three of these, the first, third and fifth, are deeply connected with the traditional Confucian concepts of a patrilineal society. Chinese society needed male offspring to carry out the veneration ritual for the ancestors and only males could bring honor to the family and so Chinese families needed male descendants to fulfill these demands.

Beginning with the Han period, Chinese held up Confucian teachings as the norm for government and society. The essence of Confucianism was to achieve harmony in the family and then expand outward to the whole of society. In order to accomplish this goal, Confucius emphasized the five basic human relationships; ruler to ruled, father to son, husband to wife, elder brother to younger brother and friend to friend. Between each pair of relationships, there were regulations and duties to be followed such as the wife being obedient to the husband and



the husband being righteous towards the wife. Confucius highlighted the Five Constants<sup>294</sup> and Four Virtues<sup>295</sup> along with the five basic human relationships to guide people, society, and government. Confucius underlined the proper conduct of the five relationships within society among many of his teachings, using rituals to regulate and demonstrate the proper social relationships necessary to have an orderly society and country. Filial piety is one of the most important Confucian ethics; Chinese consider filial piety to be the root of all virtues. The teachings of Confucius were valuable and helpful to society to some extent but, later generations of Confucian thinkers may have taken his teachings to an extreme. Thus, the Confucian traditional ethics for family virtues are; the continuity of the family name, filial piety, and ancestor worship.<sup>296</sup> Only the male heir is privileged with continuing the family name and the worshiping of ancestors. Normally, the parents rely on the male heirs to provide for their care in their old age but not female heirs because daughters will marry into other families. Shūzō Shiga explains why traditionally only male descendants can be allowed to carry out ritual sacrifices and connect ancestors with present and future generations. He remarks that in Du You's 杜佑 classic, *Tongdian* 通典 (the *Comprehensive encyclopedia*), it states "Although [the grandfather, the father, and the son are] three generations, they are united in one body (*yi ti* 一體)." Therefore, father and son are considered as one single unit. Shūzō Shiga also quotes from Professor Hsu, "whatever the one is the other is, and whatever the one has the other has," to emphasize the strong bond between father and son. Furthermore, Shūzō Shiga states that "father and son were also referred to as one breath (*yi qi* 一氣) or the same breath (*tong qi* 同氣)," and "...although they are two separate bodies, the life that pulsates in them both is identical. Every man's life is

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<sup>294</sup> The Five Constants are humaneness, righteous, proper rite, knowledge and integrity.

<sup>295</sup> The Four Virtues are loyalty, filial piety, continence and righteousness.

<sup>296</sup> Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee, *Confucianism and Women: A Philosophical Interpretation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 122.

nothing other than an extension of the breath he received from his father."<sup>297</sup> The *yi ti* and *yi qi* concepts are deeply rooted in the minds of Chinese. As a consequence, Chinese tradition acknowledges that only male heirs are able to continue a family's lineage, connecting the past and future generations by maintaining the ancestral sacrifices.

The importance of a male heir is also reinforced in the seven regulations of the Chinese tradition to expel a wife, called "*qichu* 七出." This law indicates that if a wife fails to produce a male child, the husband can legitimately expel her.<sup>298</sup> Historically, Chinese society was a male dominated community; females were not well respected and sexual discrimination was often openly demonstrated. Furthermore, females were not allowed to participate in the civil service examinations or artistic and mercantile professions. Therefore, only males could have the opportunity to bring honor or wealth to a family, placing females in an even more inferior position. Hence, in most Chinese families, not only the father but also the mother both desperately wanted to produce male heirs even if they had to kill their own female infants.

In Yuanxian's work, he also gives counter reasons for each of the excuses for female infanticide. He expresses feasible and justifiable reasons to articulate the potential disadvantages of having male heirs in a family. Yuanxian fought against conventional Confucian traditions in the hopes of altering the custom of female infanticide. Unfortunately, the Confucian patrilineal tradition continued on to exist into the modern era of Chinese society. Various selfish excuses were developed to justify the custom of female infanticide and combating this custom would take the time and effort of many to change the current of this social practice. Nevertheless, Yuanxian utilized his writings to attempt to make an influence on the mundane world.

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<sup>297</sup> Shūzō Shiga, "Family property and the Law of inheritance in traditional China" in the *Chinese Family Law and Social Change in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1978), 120-23.

<sup>298</sup> This regulation original from the *Dadai liji* 大戴禮記, in the *benming* section 本命篇 see also, Rosenlee, *Confucianism and Women*, 123.

## Dowry and Poverty

Besides the traditional Confucian concepts generating dreadful positions for females, there were more excuses that people utilized to legitimize their female infanticide behavior. The most common one was being poor and not being able to afford to provide a dowry to marry out their girls. According to Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) in his book *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci: 1583-1610*, he discourses that sometimes even the well-to-do families would also drown their infant girls. Some Chinese believed that it was better to kill their children now than later if they had to sell them to an unknown cruel slave master.<sup>299</sup> There also was a case from the *Yan shi jia xun* which we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that describes the scene of female infanticide when a wealthy family's concubine gave birth to a female child. Thus, female infanticide was linked with poverty but also happened sometimes within wealthy families. Some believe that female infanticide was reinforced by the local custom of demanding dowries. Poor families could not afford dowries, but rich families might also consider the cost of dowry as being too high. According to Rachana Sachdev, "...Chinese sources from the Ming period show that women were indeed expected to bring a dowry, and increasingly so, a more sizeable dowry, if they wanted to marry well and have a position of some authority within their married households."<sup>300</sup> The custom of marrying out daughters with sizeable dowries was especially prevalent in the Fujian area. A local proverb states in the *Min Shu*; "A family owning a thousand gold pieces would have nothing left after three marriage ceremonies; a family owning a hundred gold pieces would be destroyed after ten

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<sup>299</sup> Matteo Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci: 1583-1610* translated by Louis S.J. Gallagher, (New York: Random House, 1953), 86-87. See also Gaoji He 何高濟, Wang Zunzhong 王遵仲, Li Shen 李申 translated *Limadou zhongguo zhaji* 利瑪竇中國札記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1953), 92.

<sup>300</sup> Rachana Sachdev, "Contextualizing Female Infanticide: Ming China in Early Modern European Travelogues" in *Asia Network Exchange*, September 2010, Vol. 18 Issue 1, 24-39.

banquets for guests."<sup>301</sup> During the middle period of the Ming dynasty, due to the flourishing economy, people became prosperous and the climate of society increasingly favored luxurious spending. This phenomenon created tremendous pressure on the rich families due to their competition of showing off their wealth when marrying out their daughters. Many families became bankrupt after married out their daughters and so even rich families did not like to raise girls.<sup>302</sup>

A poor family naturally could not afford dowries but the well-to-do families also did not want to have daughters. In the *Yan shi jia xun*, it states, "Burglars do not even evolve a plan to steal if the household has five daughters." Jiang Taigong said, "To raise too many girls is a waste."<sup>303</sup> Dowries and poverty were intertwined together; the demands of a dowry to marry out daughters caused even rich families to become poor and therefore, did not favor having daughters. In Yuanxian's work, he points out that simply having a male descendant would not rule out the possibility that a family may still lose all their fortune if the male descendant wasted it all by gambling or visiting brothels. Yuanxian indicates that poverty and dowry cannot be the reasons for parents to commit female infanticide, because male descendant is also able to lose family fortune. Yuanxian tried to help people out of their ignorance.

### **Buddhist Teachings and Infanticide**

Yuanxian was a Buddhist master as well as the abbot of the well established Gushan Yongquan monastery at the time he wrote his essay. However, he did not use a lot of Buddhist terms in his article. He only used three Buddhist related terms which are all associated with the concepts of karma 業 as well as retribution 報. Right at the beginning of his article, Yuanxian

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<sup>301</sup> He, *Min Shu*, 946. "千金之家, 三遭婚娶而空; 百金之家, 十遭宴賓而亡."

<sup>302</sup> Liyue Lin 林麗月, "Feng su yu zui qian: ming dai de ni nü ji xu ji qi wen hua yi han 風俗與罪愆: 明代的溺女記敘及其文化意涵" in the *Wu sheng zhi sheng II Jin dai zhong guo de fu nü yu she hui (1600-1950) 無聲之聲近代中國的婦女與社會* ed. by You Jianming (Taipei: zhong yan yan jiu yuan jin dai shi yan jiu suo, 2003), 1-6.

<sup>303</sup> Yan, *Yanshi jia xun zhu*, 68.

draws the reader's attention to the ocean of karma and the karma of killing. Karma is an important Buddhist concept which is often correlated with the theory of interdependent arising. In the teachings of Buddhism, karma is the cause for sentient beings to continue to be reborn and wander in *samsara*. In his article, *To Refrain from Drowning Female Infants*, Yuanxian attributes that the action of female infanticide would lead to the retribution of being without male offspring. Because people might not realize or acknowledge this consequence right away in this life, he says it is concealed or invisible. Subsequently, he repeats the same notion again. We may wonder why Yuanxian did not use this work to expound more on Buddhist teachings.

Stephen Laumakis points out that "...the Buddha's ideas and teachings about *kamma*, *samsara*, and rebirth are directly related to other important ideas that are logically connected to them, namely, the interdependent arising of phenomena, the impermanence of all things..."<sup>304</sup> One of the Buddhist scriptures, *Anguttara Nikaya* states, "It is volition that I call *kamma*; having willed or formed the intention, one performs acts by body, speech, and mind."<sup>305</sup> Every volitional action produces its effects or results; "beings are owners of their actions, heirs of their actions; they originate from their actions, are bound to their actions..."<sup>306</sup> Karma should have nothing to do with the idea of justice or reward and punishment. The Buddhist tradition considers that karma is the fruit of actions or intentions. It is subtly connected with the theory of interdependent arising due to "...the events or happenings in the world and the mind are causally conditioned by and dependent on other processes, events, or happenings."<sup>307</sup> However, we find that some of these Buddhist teachings were sinified and the teachings of karma, retribution, and rebirth are all influenced by Chinese cultural values after Buddhism was transmitted to China from India.

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<sup>304</sup> Stephen J. Laumakis, *An Introduction to Buddhist Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 102. *Kamma* is Pali means karma.

<sup>305</sup> Laumakis, *An Introduction to Buddhist Philosophy*, 99.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

Chi-chiang Huang in his article, "The Sinification of Buddhist Causation Theory" remarks that after Buddhism entered into China, the causation theory had gone through several periods of change and had been altered from the original Buddhist principle of karmic retribution theory. One important person was Lushan Huiyuan 廬山慧遠 (334-416); he composed the "*Sanbao lun* 三報論" to respond to the commoners' doubts about whether or not good or evil deeds really would prompt retributions accordingly.<sup>308</sup> The Buddhist causation theory acknowledged retribution in three periods, it is called *sanbao* 三報, which means *xianbao* 現報 (retribution in the present life for deeds done in this life), *shengbao* 生報 (retribution in the next life for deeds done now) and *houbao* 後報 (retribution in subsequent future lives for deeds done now). The sinified causation theory was a blend of the *sanbao* concept of retribution, the Buddhist teaching of causation, and the Chinese traditional retribution concept of *tianbao* 天報 (retribution comes from heaven) as well as Confucian family values. Therefore, Chinese believed the karmic retributions not only could be perceived in three different lifetimes, but also the retributions came from heaven and those rewards or punishments could be extended to family members and posterity.<sup>309</sup> As we know, besides offering someone congratulations, there is also a popular and frequently used phrase among Chinese people. When congratulating others for their achievements or honors received, Chinese would say "The virtues of your ancestors have shielded and benefited you 祖德庇蔭." Another famous Chinese saying states "Kind or evil actions are clearly demarcated and would receive retributions accordingly from heaven; the retributions can be visited on distant posterity or happen soon in your life 善惡分明天有報, 遠在兒孫近在身." These sayings indicate that in Chinese society, ancestors and posterity are

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<sup>308</sup> Chi-chiang Huang, "The Sinification of Buddhist Causation Theory" in *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal*, No. 16, (Taipei: Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies, 2003), 243.

<sup>309</sup> Huang, *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal*, 233-261.

connected and demonstrated a Confucian influence on the Buddhist teachings of causation. This concept is different from the original teachings of the Buddha; the performer of the deeds was the one who received the consequences.

However, the concept of believing that one can have an unchanging soul or Self is also a sinified Buddhist teaching influenced by Hinduism. The Buddha taught his disciples that there is no permanent soul or Self. In fact, the teaching of no-self (*Anatman*) is one of the "Three Marks" of existence in Buddhist concepts.<sup>310</sup> There is nothing permanent or unchanging that can pass or transmigrate from one life to the next. Therefore, orthodox Buddhist teachings do not believe in reincarnation<sup>311</sup> but rather, accept the concept of rebirth, which believes that after the physical body does not function anymore, energies or forces do not perish with it but continue to take other shapes or forms in another's lifetime. It is like a candle that burns through the night; it is not the same candle nor is it another. Rebirth is closely interconnected with karma; it depends on one's karma, sentient beings would be transmigrated through six kinds of rebirth. According to the teachings of Buddha, everything lacks inherent existence due to all things arising in dependence on impermanent causes and conditions. Thus, the Chinese commoner's belief in the reincarnation of a permanent soul through different lifetimes was a sinified Buddhist belief.

This concept of reincarnation of the same soul through different lifetimes was further twisted within Chinese society and grew into a sinified unconventional Buddhist belief which was used to provide an excuse for carrying out female infanticide. The Italian Jesuit, Matteo Ricci, described his observation about infanticide in China and believed the reason Chinese drown female infants without feeling much guilt was that the Chinese believed in the reincarnation of soul. Ricci stated that "This barbarism is probably rendered less atrocious by

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<sup>310</sup> The "Three Marks" of existence are *dukkha*, *anatman* and impermanence.

<sup>311</sup> Reincarnation normally is meant the transmigration of a permanent, unchanging soul from a body to another after death.

their belief in metempsychosis, or the transmigration of souls ... they cover up their frightful cruelty with a pretext of piety, thinking that they are doing the child a benefit by murdering it."<sup>312</sup> Parents believed that by killing their poor child in this life, not only would the child have a chance to be reincarnated into a well-to-do family in the next life but would also prevent the child from suffering in this life due to being poor and possibly being sold as a slave. Ricci stated, "...this slaughter of the innocents is carried out not in secret but in the open and with general public knowledge."<sup>313</sup> From Ricci's description and comments, he revealed two crucial points. First, Chinese commoners believed in the reincarnation of the same soul from this life to the next. Second, the act of female infanticide was carried out openly as though it was nothing to be hidden. The notion of killing an infant so that it could reincarnate to a next life as a way of doing the child a favor was a contorted Chinese belief from unconventional Buddhist concept. The author of the *Mingdai de fo jiao yu she hui* 明代的佛教與社會 (*Ming Period's Buddhism and Society*), believes that Ricci misunderstood transmigration and retribution. She states that transmigration and retribution were doctrines the Buddhists relied on to teach the common people in order to restrain them from the custom of drowning infants in society. They taught these doctrines as important paradigms for parents to know the awful retribution for the act of infanticide.<sup>314</sup> However, she agreed that it was possible Ricci had tried to make sense of the unmerciful female infanticide of Chinese and had thus formed an incorrect understanding. The author also agrees that there were people who utilized the conventional Chinese concept of this life and next life as a rationalization for their inhuman infanticide behavior.<sup>315</sup> Another author, Jianhua Chang, believes that people who committed female infanticide used the excuse that their

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<sup>312</sup> Ricci, trans. by Louis J. Gallagher, S. J. *Limadou zhongguo zhaji*, 86.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>314</sup> Chen, *Ming dai de fo jiao yu she hui*, 306.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*



girls could be reincarnated into a wealthy family after death to extricate their wrongdoing. He also mentions that the concept of reincarnation was very popular during the Ming period.<sup>316</sup>

Historically, the Chinese society and Buddhist community compiled many karma related tales to illustrate the retribution of wrong doings. One of the earliest karmic retribution books is a Tang period work, the *Ming bao ji* 冥報記 which was composed by Tang Lin 唐臨 (600-659). In his preface, Tang Lin expounds the Buddhist teaching of causation theory and refers to Huiyuan's Buddhist concept of *sanbao*. Even though Tang Lin was a court official and not a monk, in the *Ming bao ji*, he collected many stories that were associated with the Buddhist concept of cause and effect.<sup>317</sup> Another example of karma retribution stories is articulated in Zhu Song's article "Jie sha zi wen." Zhu Song, who was Zhu Xi's father and a Song period court official, employed the story of a married woman, Wang, who had died and then returned to life again. After coming back, Wang described the awful scenes she saw about the punishment for infanticide in hell. She had mistakenly been taken to the hell as another lady who had killed five infants.<sup>318</sup> The Buddhist community was hoping that by providing these karma retribution stories, people would restrain from drowning infants due to being afraid of karma retribution in their lifetimes; this, next or future.

Matteo Ricci or some Chinese commoners, who had committed female infanticide, might look at a different facet of reincarnation and retribution than the orthodox Buddhist teachings. The parents who performed female infanticide might only consider the benefit of ending this life and think about their girls being able to begin a better next life. A scholar's mother described her own experience of drowning her own daughter in the book, *Chen que ji* 陳確集. In the story, the

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<sup>316</sup> Chang, *Zhong guo she hui li shi ping lun*, 126.

<sup>317</sup> Tang Lin 唐臨, *Ming bao ji* 冥報記, Preface of the fascicle one.

<sup>318</sup> Zhu Song 朱松, *Wei zhai ji: Fu yu lan ji* 韋齋集附玉瀾集, Si bu cong kan xu pian ji bu, fascicle 10.

mother admitted that besides being poor she was also full of resentment, helplessness and bitterness in her mind towards life.<sup>319</sup> In a male dominant society, females do not have status or authority in their own family or society. Besides diligently following the Confucian teachings of the Three Obedience and Four Virtues,<sup>320</sup> the most important responsibility of a wife was to have a male offspring. The mother might consider that her daughter would have the same miserable life in the future as she had and, so by killing her, the daughter could have a better chance in the next life. The horrible punishment of karmic retribution for killing might not in her concern at the time and, because of her love for her child, she might rather accept the karmic retribution for killing her daughter in order to let her have a chance of possibly having a better next life. This twisted and corrupted concept of reincarnation and retribution also explains why they would openly drown their infant daughters and were not afraid of the criticisms from others, punishment from law regulations or retribution from the spiritual world. On the contrary, the Chinese Buddhist community thought that through the teachings of the morality books; karma, retribution and transmigration concepts would provide enough evidence to restrain people from committing female infanticide. Nevertheless, it is difficult to know whether people knowingly manipulated unorthodox Buddhist concepts of reincarnation and ignored the possible karmic retribution to support their selfish acts or whether they truly believed that they were doing a good thing for their daughters. The fact that the act of female infanticide was carried out openly also indicates that this inhuman act was ubiquitous; people became so used to it and female infanticide was so common that it became a custom and was not secret at all.<sup>321</sup> The indication of female infanticide as a custom coincides with Yuanxian's point of view. It is a heartbreaking and

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<sup>319</sup> Liyue Lin, *Wu sheng zhi sheng II Jin dai zhong guo de fu nü yu she hui*, 13.

<sup>320</sup> A woman needs to obey her father as a daughter, her husband as a wife and her son in widowhood. Four female virtues are morality, proper speech, modest manner and diligent work.

<sup>321</sup> We mentioned earlier in this chapter that the author, Jianhua Chang provides us several local records indicate the prevalence of infanticide in the Fujian area.

unanticipated consequence that the concept of transmigration might have promoted the practice of female infanticide. Was this why Yuanxian did not mention too many of other Buddhist teachings in his article; because he might have been afraid that commoners would misuse more Buddhist teachings? I believe the sinified unconventional Buddhist belief of a permanent soul to reincarnate through "this life" and "next life" played an unanticipated and intertwined role in the discriminatory practice of female infanticide in Chinese society during 17th-century.

### **Government Legal Regulations**

Due to the commonplace of female infanticide during the Ming period, the court and local officials formulated legal codes to prohibit and punish female infanticide. One example was in the year 1485 during the Emperor Xianzong's 憲宗 period. According to the *Huangming tiaofa shileicuan* 皇明條法事類纂, an official proclamation announced that people should not overextend with dowries when marrying out their daughters. People were to rear their female children and the law would not permit parents to drown them. If people did not comply with this code, they could be sent into exile. Their neighbors should report them to the authorities and, if not, the neighbors could be punished also.<sup>322</sup> This legal code was focused on eliminating female infanticide, but a few years later, in the year 1490, during the Emperor Xiaozong's 孝宗 period, another regulation was issued to include both male and female infants, as well as to not only declare punishments for parents and neighbors but also to midwives. These regulations indicate the concerns of the court and local officials by declaring infanticide to be illegal.

The county magistrate of Shouning 壽寧 of Fujian Province, Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574-1646) declared that whoever drowned or abandoned female infants would be punished with thirty floggings and wear the cangue on display in public for a month. Whoever reports the

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<sup>322</sup> *Huangming tiaofa shileicuan* fascicle 13. The legal codes in this general regulations were issued after the *Da Ming Lü*. See Liyue Lin, *Wu sheng zhi sheng II Jin dai zhou guo de fu nü yu she hui*, 7.

incident to the authorities would be rewarded with five *qian* 錢 or coins. If the parents were not able to rear a child, they were allowed to give the child to others and those who raised abandoned children were rewarded three *qian* or three coins.<sup>323</sup> The government saw the problem of female infanticide, especially in the local region, and officials used their authority to try to force people to comply with not killing female infants. Another example occurred in Tangxi 湯溪 county of Zhejiang province. To encourage raising girls, the county magistrate not only declared a regulation for how much a dowry could be to eliminate the custom of substantial dowries, but also announced that if a family raised three girls, one man in their family would be allowed to be exempt from the corvee.<sup>324</sup> This regulation tackled one of the important excuses of female infanticide, which was not being able to afford an expensive dowry to marry out their daughters. At the same time, it also provided a good reason for a family to raise girls; three girls would bring an exemption of one man from the corvee for the family.

Besides issuing legal codes and regulations for people to observe, some local officials also composed some simple easy-to-read and understand articles to convince people not to kill or abandon their female infants. At the local regional level, officials also wrote ballads to persuade people not to kill or drown female infants, such as "The Song of Refrain from Killing Girls" or "The Song of Persuading People to Raise Girls." Mungello mentions that beginning in 1655 to 1656, local elites took leadership to establish the *yuying tang* 育嬰堂 or hospices for abandoned children even though the Ming court (1368-1644) did not establish any orphanages but rather, placed more efforts in assisting the elderly.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>324</sup> Wan li "Tangxi xianzhi 湯溪縣志" fascicle one. See also Liyue Lin, *Wu sheng zhi sheng II Jin dai zhong guo de fu nü yu she hui*, 9.

<sup>325</sup> Mungello, *Drowning Girls in China*, 46-47.

The legal codes demonstrate the efforts of officials, but I believe those punishments were too light for the act of killing a human life. Since ancient times, murderers have received the death sentence and, even in modern society, this punishment still exists. The *Da Ming Lü* 大明律 (The Great Ming Court Regulations) states that when one murders another person, the punishment is death; when one kills one's grandparents, parents, elders, husband, or husband's grandparents or parents, the punishment is death.<sup>326</sup> However, the legal code in the *Da Ming Lü* for killing a child was to only receive seventy floggings and imprisonment for one and a half years.<sup>327</sup> When the *Da Ming Lü* is instituted by the Ming dynasty founder, Zhu Yuanzhang, he summed up the experiences and lessons learned from practicing law regulations from different dynasties and drew up the *Da Ming Lü*. The light sentence for killing a child reflected the inferior status of an infant and the powerful Chinese parental authority over children. In a Confucian Chinese society, being male and senior was more superior to being female and junior. Furthermore, a father was considered to have total authority and control over his children. The laxity of law punishments did not help much in eradicating female infanticide.

## **Conclusion**

Female infanticide did not happen only in China; historical documents reveal many cases of infanticide or abandonment on every continent. Some of the early Chinese records show infanticide occurred as early as the Warring States period (475-221 BC). Various excuses have been furnished since antiquity; superstitious belief, poverty, heavy demands of a dowry, Confucian traditions and so forth. Female status traditionally has been insignificant in Chinese society due to the patrilineal and hierarchical Chinese family tradition which considers that only males can continue the lineage of the family. Therefore, when the parents could not raise all their

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<sup>326</sup> *Da Ming Lü* 大明律 compiled by Huai Xiaofeng 懷效鋒 (Shenyang: Liao Shen shu she, 1989), 149-150.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

children, they would discriminatorily choose to raise male children rather than females. Female infanticide was a prevalent phenomenon not only as Yuanxian indicated in his *Refrain From Drowning Female Infants* but also was frequently remarked about in historical and local records. Yuanxian comments in his essay regarding the five excuses people commonly used for executing female infanticide. Three out of those five reasons are associated with traditional Confucian thinking of the patrilineal family structure; the female not being able to carry out the sacrifices to the ancestors or bringing honor to the family and therefore, parents were desperate to have a boy.

Aside from Confucian traditions, I believe that the sinified unconventional Buddhist concept of the same soul that can go through "this life" and "next life" also played an intertwined role in the practice of infanticide in Chinese society. Buddhism was sinified after its introduction to China. The orthodox Buddhist teachings on the theory of causation, rebirth as well as retribution were interwoven with Chinese culture and traditional teachings. The Confucian concept of the Way of Heaven and the Buddhist theory of karma together formed the sinified Buddhist causation theory. As the result, the sinified concept of karma became entangled with the reward or punishment from heaven or the divinity. In addition, Chinese belief also expanded the effect of karmic retribution on future generations and family members. In contrast, orthodox Buddhism considers karma as a reaction to an action; it is a natural law and has no involvement of judgment from heaven. The generator of an action is the only one to receive retribution for his/her actions. The Buddha taught his disciples that there is no permanent soul or Self and therefore, there is no reincarnation but rather rebirth in orthodox Buddhism. By contrast, many Chinese believed in the notion of this life, next life and past life with a continual soul. These sinicized unconventional Buddhist concepts I believe motivated and have been manipulated by some Chinese to rationalize the practice of infanticide. As Ricci mentioned, the Chinese believed

that by killing their daughters, they might be reincarnated into a better next life and avoid the state of suffering in this life.

The religious efforts did not eliminate female infanticide and government regulations also did not prevent people from drowning infants. The legal sentences only punished people with a threat of exile or floggings, revealing relatively mild legal codes for the killing of a child. The prevalence of female infanticide demonstrates that lax law regulation and therefore, did not help to end this inhuman act.

The acts of female infanticide in China have had many reasons since antiquity. Nevertheless, I believe that the main reasons for Chinese female infanticide continuing and being unable to be eliminated were the combination of Confucian male dominated traditions and the unconventional Buddhist belief of the same soul that goes through "this life," "next life" and "future life." Both of these played an unanticipated and intertwined role in the discriminatory practice of female infanticide in 17th-century Chinese society.

By the means of Yuanxian's work, we are able to get a glimpse of 17th century Ming period Fujian society. His article exposes the horrible practice of female infanticide of commoners in the late Ming Fujian society. Yuanxian was an abbot at the Yongquan Monastery at the time when he wrote this work; he was a Buddhist master with Confucian training. The best thing he knew he could do was to use his literary skills to fight against this evil trend of his times. Yuanxian's writing about female infanticide also suggests that Yuanxian was concerned about what had happened in society and tried to rectify the inhuman custom. Yuanxian's action tells us that he believed a monk could still contribute efforts to benefit society despite living in a super-mundane world of religion.

In the next Chapter, we are going to investigate another Yuanxian's works, the *Record of Propagating Buddhism in Jianzhou*. This work provides us with clues to further understand the significance of Yuanxian's hometown and its influence on areas beyond Jianzhou. Through this additional work, Yuanxian also adds his impact on super-mundane and mundane worlds to make Buddhism well known through him and his later generations.



## Chapter Six *The Record of Propagating Buddhism in Jianzhou*

The *Jianzhou hongshi lu* (*Record of Propagating Buddhist Teachings in Jianzhou*) was compiled in 1628 and printed in 1631.<sup>328</sup> It has a total of two fascicles, includes encounter dialogs and biographies of eminent Chan and Confucian masters who propagated or cultivated Buddhism and had connections with the Jianzhou area during the Tang to Ming periods. The *Jianzhou hongshi lu* begins with three prefaces of Wuyi Yuanlai 無異元來 (1576-1630), He Qiaoyuan 何喬遠 (1558-1632), and Yuanxian himself and then continues with a table of contents. The table of contents lists 77 eminent Chan and Confucian masters classified into four categories. Following the table of contents are the sections for each category and at the end of each section is a commentary. Yuanxian completes the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* with three epilogues. Yuanxian organized his four categories within the two fascicles with only one of the categories, *Daben* 達本 (Reaching the Fundamental), in the first fascicle. The second fascicle contains the remaining categories; *Xianhua* 顯化 (Miraculous Events and Behaviors), *Chongde* 崇德 (Venerating Virtue), and *Fujiao* 輔教 (Assisting Teaching) and ends with the epilogues. In compiling the *Jianzhou hongshi lu*, Yuanxian referenced more than twenty different sources and all were not strictly Buddhist texts.<sup>329</sup>

### The Significant of Jianzhou

Yuanxian provided a brief summary at the beginning of his preface regarding the history of Buddhism in the Jianzhou area. He stated:

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<sup>328</sup> One of Yuanxian's poems which were collected in the *Guanglu* Fascicle 24 indicates "辛未秋日, 寓清修寺, 刻弘釋錄," the 辛未秋日 in the period of Emperor Chongzhen is the year of 1631. Also see Jialing Fan's *Ming mo cao dong dan jun*, 46.

<sup>329</sup> Yongjue, *Jianshou hongshi lu*, 913-915. The table of contents lists many sources where the materials for the eminent masters were derived from, some are non-Buddhist materials, such as the *records of local Prefecture or city* (府志 or 邑志) or text from a Confucian scholar, the *Pingshan ji* 屏山集.

The so-called 'Record of Propagating Buddhist Teaching' is a record that is also able to propagate Shakyamuni's Way of teachings. This Way begins with seeing the golden man in a dream and white horses from the west. Every generation had authors who greatly propagated his teachings and so, one thousand lamps compete to illuminate [him], his glory is reflected in the present and ancient times. What a vastness of teachings; we are not able to record them all. Generally, before the Six Dynasties, the Buddha's teachings were not heard in my area of Jianzhou. The building of the Buddhist temple began [only] after the establishment of the Tang dynasty. Mazu taught and transformed the people at the Fojiling temple of Jianyang starting with his entering into [Min] Pass. Only then did Chan teachings become a major fundamental importance [in Jianzhou.]<sup>330</sup>

Yuanxian expounds that the Buddhist teachings were not heard in Jianzhou until after the Six Dynasties period (220 -589) and the Buddhist temples were not built until the Tang period (618-907). His statement indicates that the introduction of Buddhism to the Jianzhou area was quite a bit later than the first century of the Common Era when Buddhism had first arrived in China. Chan teachings became an important practice in the Jianyang 建陽<sup>331</sup> area during the Tang dynasty when Mazu propagated Chan in the Fojiling temple 佛跡嶺 (now Shengji si 聖跡寺). Mazu was a very renowned Chan master and therefore, had many followers and disciples in the Jianyang area, prompting Jianzhou into becoming a well established place of Chan Buddhist cultivation despite its late initiation into Buddhist learning.

Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) was a famous Confucian scholar and was born and educated in Jianzhou. Zhu Xi later became an influential leader of Neo-Confucianism and therefore, made

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<sup>330</sup> Yongjue Yuanxian, *Jianzhou hongshi lu* 建州弘釋錄 in the *Chan Zong Quan Shu* 禪宗全書: *Shizhuan bu* 史傳部 (16), edited by Jifu Lan (Taipei: Wenshu chuban she, 1988), 912.

<sup>331</sup> Since the Southern dynasty, no matter how the name changed for the Jianyang 建陽 and Jianzhou 建州 areas, Jianyang county has belonged to the Jianzhou. Jianyang was originally called Jianping county 建平縣 and was established as a county in the year 205, changing its name in year 280. Originally, Jianyang belonged to the Jianan commandery 建安郡. In the year 619, the Jianan commandery was called Jianzhou (Jian Province). In the year 988, Jianzhou changed its name to Jianning jun 建寧軍 (Jianning Military) and in the year 1152, Jianning jun was upgraded to Jianning fu 建寧府 (Jianning Prefecture). During the Yuan period, Jianning fu changed its name to Jianning lu 建寧路 (Jianning Circuit). In the year 1368 of the Ming dynasty, Jianning lu changed its name back to Jianning fu and included Jianyang county. See Li, Jiaqin, and Mingkao Chen. *Jianyang Xian Zhi*. (Beijing Shi: Qun zhong chu ban she, 1994), 46-47. During the Ming period, Jianzhou had a total of 8 counties, located in the northern Fujian Prefecture.

Jianzhou a stronghold of Neo-Confucianism. Yuanxian's dharma brother, teacher, and also a prominent Chan master, Wuyi Yuanlai, expressed the following in the preface of the *Jianzhou hongshi lu*:

When I was a young Buddhist novice, I traveled around the Min area and learned that Jianzhou was the community where Neo-Confucianism emerged from. Later, after reading various records of the transmission of the lamp, I realized that Jianzhou was a profound society where Chan Buddhism was deeply entrenched.<sup>332</sup>

Wuyi's preface says a lot about the significant of Jianzhou in the Chan Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism communities. Jianzhou was where the Song Neo-Confucianism originated from because of Zhu Xi. Jianzhou also was an important location for Chan Buddhist teachings, due to Chan master Mazu had resided and propagated teachings there.

Besides being an affluent intellectual and religious area, Jianzhou was also famous for its printing industry. Lucille Chia, in her book, *Printing for Profit*, reveals that there were several reasons for Jianyang of Jianzhou to develop into one of the largest printing centers during the Song and Yuan periods. She concludes that this development was due to three factors. First, Jianyang had all the natural materials required for woodblock printing. Mount Wuyi 武夷山 had abundant forests to yield woods and bamboo for producing paper and woodblocks for printing. Secondly, from a geographic aspect, Jianyang was located on a convenient water transportation route. Jianyang is in the northern part of Fujian Province, a coastal province with several deep-water international sea ports, and where it borders the Zhejiang and Jiangxi Provinces. Since ancient times, Jianzhou has been the gateway of the lower Yangzi region to trade with other parts of the nation or travel to foreign countries. Thirdly, Jianyang was a highly developed intellectual stronghold during the Song period; Zhu Xi and his disciples were famous for their teachings of Neo-Confucianism and many family schools (*jiashu* 家塾 or *shuyuan* 書院) were established

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<sup>332</sup> Yongjue Yuanxian, *Jianzhou hongshi lu*, 911.

there. Often these family schools were tied to publishers who would print the materials needed for their school's teachings. In addition, the growing examination culture during the Song period also helped to facilitate the printing industry in Jianyang. During the early Southern Song period, approximately four thousand candidates took the triennial prefectural examination in Jianyang and by 1186 the number had increased to some ten thousand.<sup>333</sup> Those phenomena all indicate that Jianzhou was a significant location for intellectual, cultural and religious developments.

To date, there are not many thorough studies on the *Jianzhou hongshi lu*. Jiang Wu has written a paper remarks the *Jianzhou hongshi lu*.<sup>334</sup> I therefore, believe that the study of the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* will reveal not only the prestige of Jianzhou's religious and intellectual significance but also unfold neglected segments of Chan Buddhism in the Fujian area during the 17th-century. I argue that a thorough investigation of the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* would reveal to us that Yuanxian considered the teaching of Chan Buddhism benefited Confucians and in fact, even supported and enriched their Confucian cultivation. This study would also show the great influence of Jianshou in the history of Chan Buddhism through many Chan masters from the Jianzhou area. Yuanxian's *Jianzhou hongshi lu* not only provides a legacy of Chan Buddhism to the later generations but also makes Jianzhou to be known to people. It demonstrates Yuanxian's intention of connecting the society of Jianzhou with Chan Buddhist teachings and to purposely upheld Buddhism to be greater than Confucianism.

### **Purposes of Compiling the *Jianzhou Hongshi Lu***

Wuyi's preface also indicates that when he asked the monks of the Jianzhou area who were the previous eminent or virtuous masters of their locale, they could not answer. This lack of

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<sup>333</sup> Lucille Chia, *Printing for Profit: The Commercial Publishers of Jianyang, Fujian (11th-17th Centuries)* (Cambridge and London: the Harvard University Asia Center for the Harvard-Yenching Institute, 2002), 66-141.

<sup>334</sup> Jiang Wu, "Chan Buddhism in Southern-Song Jianning Prefecture: With Special Reference to Zhu Xi's Critique of Chan Buddhism" term paper for the seminar on Social and Cultural History of Chinese Religion. Harvard University, Spring, 2000.

response gave Wuyi an inspiration to compile a local Jianzhou Buddhist record to propagate Buddhism further.<sup>335</sup> Their lack of response also illustrates that not many people at that time had made note of the significance of Jianzhou area to the intellectual and religious history of China. Even now, only a few people realize the importance of the Jianzhou area. Besides wanting to reveal the historical significance of Jianzhou, Wuyi also believed that a careful compiled Buddhist record could be crucial to the Chan Buddhist history.

Wuyi's preface in the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* criticizes the famous Song scholar, Zanning 贊寧 (919-1001), whom Wuyi believed had categorized some of the monks incorrectly in the *Song gaoseng zhuan*. Wuyi stated:

During the Song dynasty, Zanning compiled the biographies of monks. He had an abundance of knowledge but was careless with his talent. He listed Huangbo under the category of Miracle Worker, Yantou as a Practitioner of Asceticism, and placed Yongming under Promoters of Works of Merit. In the case of Yunmen, who was the preeminent figure among monks, [Zanning] abandoned him and did not even list him.<sup>336</sup>

Wuyi's statement elicits a need for us to look further at the *Song gaoseng zhuan* to understand Zanning's process and purpose of compiling his hagiographic work.

The *Song gaoseng zhuan* and the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* are both biographic genres. The compilers had to decide on at least three criteria; how to choose eminent monks from among numerous candidates, how to categorize them into particular sections and what sources should they choose to obtain information regarding their candidates. Jingjia Huang believes that the choice of certain eminent monks for biographies usually depended on the author's personal preference, his intention and the reason for compiling the text as well as influences from the

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<sup>335</sup> Yongjue Yuanxian, *Jianzhou hongshi lu*, 911.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, 911.

social and political climate of his times.<sup>337</sup> JingjiaHuang remarks that when the *Gaoseng zhuan* was compiled by Huijiao 慧皎 (497-554) in 520; Huijiao intentionally selected monks that had high qualities of virtue but were not famous. Huijiao wanted to change the climate of his times whereby many Buddhist monks sought fame but neglected their own moral cultivation. Later, Daoxuan 道宣 (596-667) compiled the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* to purposefully strengthen the influence of Buddhism at a time when the Tang court supported Daoism and suppressed Buddhism. Zanning's case however was different. He was appointed by the Song court to compile the *Song gaoseng zhuan*. The Song government expected Zanning's work to educate the people, assist the government and inspire people in society.<sup>338</sup> The Song court wanted Zanning to produce biographies of eminent monks to provide good examples for the people to follow. In general, the *Song gaoseng zhuan* and *Xu gaoseng zhuan* both followed the approach of Huijiao's *Gaoseng zhuan*, which organized selected eminent monks into ten categories without consideration of their sectarian differences.<sup>339</sup>

The *Jianzhou hongshi lu* was compiled in 1628 at the end of the Ming Dynasty and was an early period of Yuanxian's work. Yuanxian indicated in his preface that:

Since the establishment of the Ming Dynasty, more than two hundred years have passed. However, the flame of the lineage lamps has extinguished and the ocean of teaching has also silted up. In between, there are two or three lamps still blazing but they are like a few scattered stars at dawn. Who would take the responsibility of propagating the Way?<sup>340</sup>

Yuanxian expresses a sense of responsibility for the revival and propagating of Buddhism. In

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<sup>337</sup> Jingjia Huang, *Zanning Song Gaoseng zhuan xushi yanjiu* 贊寧宋高僧傳敘事研究 (Taipei: Taiwan Xuesheng shuju, 2008), 104-107.

<sup>338</sup> Huang, *Zanning Song Gaoseng zhuan xushi yanjiu*, 105-108.

<sup>339</sup> Albert Welter, *Monks, Rulers, and Literati: The Political Ascendancy of Chan Buddhism* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 42.

<sup>340</sup> Yongjue Yuanxian, *Jianzhou hongshi lu*, 912.

the same preface, Yuanxian considered himself to be without talent but his love of the ancients, culture, country, and a sense of responsibility compelled him to compile the *Jianzhou hongshi lu*.

His preface explicitly points out that:

[I] chose the various masters, whom either originated from or had initiated dharma and manifested miraculous events in the Jianzhou area and then recorded them all for future circulation so later generations of learners could see how the ancients had passed through so much hardship, how [they] had been so strict and cautious, and how [they] had been so profound, thoughtful, and sufficient. If [people] could completely change their direction and move towards following the examples of ancients, then we may be able to see the same vigorousness of the Tang and Song dynasties again in the present.<sup>341</sup>

Yuanxian's statements reveal that his purpose in compiling the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* was to benefit younger generations and to provide good examples for them to follow. His statements also tell us that he believed that the ancients' spirit of determination and perseverance regarding religious cultivation were outstanding role models for the younger generations. Meanwhile, Yuanxian also provides us with a clue that the teaching of Chan Buddhism in his time was in a stagnant situation and not as fruitful as those during the Tang and Song periods. Hence, he compiled the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* in the hopes of carrying the glory of the Tang and Song Chan Buddhism forward for the later generations.

Another important reason for Yuanxian to compile a *difangzhi*-like 地方志 record such as the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* was that he might have found the local historical records such as the *difangzhi* of Jianyang contains an insufficient amount of information related to Chan Buddhism. For example, Mazu was an influential Chan master and some believed that he had propagated Buddhist teachings in Jianyang during the Tang period. However, the *Jianyang xianzhi* 建陽縣志 (The Records of Jianyang County) from the Jiajing 嘉靖 period (1521-1537), Mazu is mentioned only at the very end in Fascicle 16 under the title "Biographies" 列傳 and a subtitle,

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<sup>341</sup> Ibid., 912.

"Skills of Medicine and Preserving Health" 方伎. This same Fascicle 16 includes biographies of four Daoists, four Buddhists and one Chinese medical doctor; among these other biographies, Mazu's biography only takes up seven lines, not even a page. Fascicle 7 of the *Jianyang xianzhi*, the Buddhist and Daoist temples 寺觀 section, only briefly lists the temples with the location, year and when the temple was built; occasionally, it may provide the temple's previous name. The record of Shengji si where Mazu taught Buddhist dharma only states "At Chongtai li 崇泰里, built in the fifth year of the Baoda 保大 era of the Southern Tang."<sup>342</sup> The contents of the *Jianyang xianzhi* reveal an overwhelming amount of Confucian influence. It designates an entire fascicle<sup>343</sup> to elaborate on two famous elite Confucian families of Jianyang; the two well known Neo-Confucian scholars, Zhu Xi and Cai Yuanding. This elaboration of Neo-Confucian scholars exposes to us that, in the minds of the compilers of this local historical record, Confucian related elements are more highly valued. We also learn the significance of Yuanxian's ancestor, Cai Yuanding, to Jianyang. These phenomena also indicate the compilation of the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* was needed and would serve to promote Buddhism in the Jianzhou area. The *Jianzhou hongshi lu* therefore not only becomes a crucial supplementary historical record for its locale but also testifies and serves to remind us of the domination of Confucianism within governmental institutions.

In a way, Yuanxian's compilation of the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* might demonstrate an intention to use the Neo-Confucian stronghold area of Jianzhou to spread Chan Buddhist teachings and to balance out the influences of these two teachings. Yuanxian's preface also shows his concerns toward the Ming period Chan Buddhism and the younger generations of Chan cultivators who would need good exemplars. He had a sense of responsibility to reveal and

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<sup>342</sup> Jike Feng 馮繼科, *Jiaqing Jianyang xian zhi* 嘉靖建陽縣志 (Shanghai: Shanghai gu ji shu dian, 1964).

<sup>343</sup> The entire Fascicle 8 of the *Jianyang xianzhi*.



revive the significant of Chan Buddhism in Jianzhou. His compiling of the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* possesses his efforts of associating a society with a religious institution, which made an impact on propagating authentic Chan Buddhism to his and later eras.

### A Unique Literary Structure

The *Jianzhou hongshi lu* is unique among the many other works of Buddhist hagiographic genre because it concentrates on only one particular geographic area, Jianzhou. However, there are two *denglu* works that focus on one area also.<sup>344</sup> The literary style of the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* appears also to be a unique structure in Chan literature. Its format is closer to the hagiographic style of the *Gaoseng zhuan*, which divides its Buddhist masters into ten categories based on the criteria of their achievements. Additionally, one of the uniqueness of the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* is its compiling the Confucian scholars into one single category after many Chan Buddhists.

Some scholars believe that the literary style of the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* is presumed to be a Chan *denglu* 燈錄 since they believe that Yuanxian was a Chan master. A Chan *denglu* documents the historical transmission records of Chan schools and their masters and disciples' dharma transmission and encounter dialogs. It usually begins with the biographies of the seven buddhas of the past, and then continues with that of Bodhidharma as well as the later Chan Patriarchs and Chan masters of China. The *denglu* literary genre places emphasis on the legitimacy of a complete and continuous transmission lineage for Chan schools. The term "*chuan deng*" 傳燈 first appeared in the *Leng qie shi zi ji* 楞伽師資記 compiled by Jingjue 淨覺. The first Buddhist text to use "*chuan denglu*" 傳燈錄 in the title was the *Jingde chuan denglu* 景德傳

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<sup>344</sup> There are two *denglu* works that also focus on local area; the *Jinjiang chandeng* 錦江禪燈 which compiled by Tongzui 通醉 in 1693 and *Qiannan hui denglu* 黔南會燈錄 which compiled by Shanyi 善一 in 1702.

燈錄 (*The Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*).<sup>345</sup> This *denglu* was compiled in 1004 and emphasized encounter dialogues among various Chan masters and their disciples and included poems as well as some short discourses. Compilation of the *denglu* had a purpose; Albert Welter states, "Daoyuan compiled the *Jingde chuan denglu* in order to promote the fortunes of the Fayan sect among the so-called "Five Houses" of Chan Buddhism current at the time..." and "...for the express purpose of verifying the correct lineage of the Chan school."<sup>346</sup>

We find that Buddhist scholars have classified the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* as one of the many *denglu* works of literature produced throughout Chan history. The *Zhong guo denglu quan shu* 中國燈錄全書 (*The Complete Collection of Chinese Transmission Records*) was compiled by Chan master Jinghui 淨慧 (1933-2013)<sup>347</sup> in 1993 and has a total of 20 volumes consisting of only Chan *denglu* texts. Chan master Jinghui assembled as many *denglu* literary works as possible from the Tang to the Qing periods. He included the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* in Volume 15 of the *Zhong guo denglu quan shu* as one of the Chan *denglu* texts.<sup>348</sup> Yūkei Hasebe's book, the *Min Shin Bukkyō kyōdanshi kenkyū* 明清佛教教團史研究 (*A Study of the History of Buddhist Religious Groups During the Ming and Qing Periods*) also includes the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* as one of the seventeen Ming period transmission records.<sup>349</sup>

However, is the literary style of the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* actually a *denglu*? When we look at the structure of the *Jianzhou hongshi lu*; it only has two elements that are similar to a *denglu*; the encounter dialogues and the majority of the masters are Chan masters. Aside from

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<sup>345</sup> Jinghui, *Zhong guo denglu quan shu* 中國燈錄全書 (Beijing: Zhong guo zang xue chu ban she, 1993), 1-7.

<sup>346</sup> Albert Welter, the *Meaning of Myriad Good Deeds: A study of Yung-ming Yen-shou and the Wan-shan T'ung-kuei chi* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1993), 54.

<sup>347</sup> Chan master Jinghui was one of the disciples of Chan master Xuyun 虛雲.

<sup>348</sup> Jinghui, *Zhong guo denglu quan shu*, 3.

<sup>349</sup> Yūkei Hasebe, the *Min Shin Bukkyō kyōdanshi kenkyū* 明清佛教教團史研究 (Kyōto shi: Dōhōsha Shuppan, 1993), 382.

these, we cannot find the most important component of a *denglu*, which is a complete recording of a legitimate and continuous transmission lineage. Therefore, it is difficult for us to classify the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* as a true *denglu* literary style as some scholars claim.

Instead, the format of the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* is a lot more similar to the hagiographic genre of the *Gaoseng zhuan*.<sup>350</sup> It uses four categories to classify the different monks and scholars, resembling the use of the ten categories in the *Gaoseng zhuan*. The style of the *Gaoseng zhuan* was derived from official historiographic format models used by Chinese dynastic historians, such as the compilers of the *Shi ji*. Biographies of Buddhist masters in Chinese history were not well documented due to an anti-Buddhist inclination of imperial officials. This lack of biographic documentation led Chinese Buddhist monks and scholars to compile their own biographies of eminent monks in the *Gaoseng zhuan*. They followed the official historiographic models, categorizing honorable monks into ten categories on a non-sectarian basis.<sup>351</sup> The *Jianzhou hongshi lu* follows suit and does not differentiate by denominational differences of Chan schools, incorporating the biographies of many Buddhist and Confucian masters. The *Gaoseng zhuan* style of biographic format may have been more suitable for Yuanxian's purposes in compiling eminent biographies of the local Chan Buddhist and Confucian figures. It allowed the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* to categorize Confucian scholars and Chan Buddhist masters into separate sections and made the organizational work pragmatic.

The *Jianzhou hongshi lu* is a record of only one locale, Jianzhou. This localized focus is different from most of other Chan Buddhist *denglu* and Buddhist hagiographic genres. To be precise, the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* is a combination of the hagiographic genre with partial local history (*difangzhi* 地方志 or gazette). Usually, a gazetteer involves not only the local history but

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<sup>350</sup> *Gaoseng zhuan* is not included in Jinghui's *Zhong guo denglu quan shu* because it is not considered as a *denglu* genre by Jinghui.

<sup>351</sup> Welter, *Monks, Rulers, and Literati*, 41-42.

also maps of the locale and its developments and changes throughout history. It would describe all aspects of the site and history for a certain location, from nature to society, economics to politics, morality to misconduct; all are included. However, the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* only includes Buddhists and Confucians information in Jianzhou. Nevertheless, the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* is a Buddhist hagiographic genre with a partial local religious and intellectual history.

### **Method and Contents**

In this chapter, I utilize the comparative approach to analyze the *Jianzhou hongshi lu*. I correlate the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* with four different works; the *Song gaoseng zhuan*, the *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, the *Gaoseng zhuan*, and the *Jingde chuandeng lu*. My intent is to find what can be perceived from the compilers' methods of assigning monks to a certain category and the construction and contents of these works. I aim to unfold the thinking of the compilers relative to the background history of their times. I also utilize the detailed textual analysis method to investigate the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* and turn to primary historical sources to further enhance and support what I have found in the *Jianzhou hongshi lu*. I will also consult various scholarly works of Buddhist history and local historical records to confirm my analysis of the *Jianzhou hongshi lu*.<sup>352</sup>

First, I investigate Yuanxian's purpose and underlying intention of compiling the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* from his preface and other sources. Second, I reveal what the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* presents to us that is related to dynastic and Chan Buddhism histories. Third, I focus on analyzing the content of the first and fourth categories in the *Jianzhou hongshi lu*, due to these two categories can manifest and provide explanations to support my argument. In this chapter, I will also discuss the interesting historical case of Mazu and his relationship with Jianzhou.

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<sup>352</sup> Such as scholars Albert Welter, Jiang Wu, Timothy Brook and Chun-fang Yü's works as well as the *Jiayang xianzhi*.

Before the conclusion, I unfold the influence of Jianzhou Chan Buddhism, which was not confined to only the Jianzhou area but actually radiated outwards further into national and international regions.

### **What Does the *Jianzhou Hongshi Lu* Reveal to Us about the Buddhist History**

The eminent masters from the Song period occupy 41 of the total 77 masters in all categories of the *Jianzhou hongshi lu*, a ratio of about 53 percent. The next highest percentage is that of the Ming period masters, about 18 percent. The Tang and Yuan periods both have about 10 percent each and the Five Dynasties period about 8 percent. For this study, I will concentrate on the two largest percentages, those of the Song and Ming periods. These percentages indicate that during the Song period, there were more prominent exemplars having connections with Jianzhou than in the other periods.

The Song dynasty (960-1279) was a lengthy dynasty in Chinese history and so could produce more Buddhist and Confucian masters than the other periods. More importantly, Song government policies placed emphasis on "civil" *wen* 文 over "military" *wu* 武, which served to facilitate further the development of Chan Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism. History also informs us that the founder of the Song dynasty, Song Taizu 太祖 (r. 960-976), was a commander of the palace army before being elevated to the emperor by his troops. To solidify his control over all the military forces, Taizu replaced the military governors with civil officials and emphasized civil rule over military domination. The second emperor, Song Taizong, revived the translation projects of Buddhist scriptures to uphold an image of literary learning and civil society, as well as to demonstrate that the Song court was a highly cultural state.<sup>353</sup> The early period of the Song emperors consistently encouraged literary learning, publication, and

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<sup>353</sup> Welter, *Monks, Rulers, and Literati*, 15.

translation of Buddhist texts. In general, Buddhism resurged during the Song period and Chan Buddhism gained prestige. The well known *denglu* texts, the *Jingde chuandeng lu*, *Tiansheng guangdeng lu* 天聖廣燈錄, *Wudeng huiyuan* 五燈會元 and *Jiatai pudeng lu* 嘉泰普燈錄, were all compiled during the Song period. Many biographies of the Song period masters in the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* were derived from the *Wudeng huiyuan*. In conjunction, Jianyang became one of the largest printing centers during the Song dynasty. Woodblock printing technology was first employed to replicate Buddhist texts and images.<sup>354</sup> Developments in printing technology inevitably promoted further religious and intellectual studies as well as made publication for eminent Chan and Confucian figures easier. The advances in printing increased the volume of books and its affordability and obviously contributed to more records and literary works being available for later generations of scholars.

After the Song dynasty, the Ming period followed suit and composed many *denglu*.<sup>355</sup> The known period of publishing dates for the Ming period *denglu* works was from the years of 1401 to 1653 and at least nine of them were published after the *Jianzhou hongshi lu*.<sup>356</sup> According to Lucille Chia, printing industry in Jianyang suffered a setback<sup>357</sup> in the early period of the Ming dynasty but then flourished again during the late Ming period.<sup>358</sup> Many of Yuanxian's sources for the Ming period Chan masters were from *yulu*, preserved stone carvings, and local records rather than from *denglu* texts themselves. His use of these sources suggests that Yuanxian was unable to obtain as many *denglu* sources for the Ming period as he could for the

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<sup>354</sup> Chia, *Printing for Profit*, 8.

<sup>355</sup> A total of 17 of *denglu* and transmission records of Chan Buddhism were compiled during the Ming period. This is according to information from Yūkei Hasebe's book the *Min Shin Bukkyō Kyōdanshi Kenkyū*, 382-383. According to Shi Shengyan's *Ming mo fo jiao yan jiu* (Tai bei: Dong chu chu ban she, 1993), the number of transmission records for the end of the Ming period (from 1595 to 1653) is 15, see 31-32. In fact, at least four of them belonged to the Qing period (after 1644).

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*, 382-383 and 31-32.

<sup>357</sup> This issue may have been due to Ming Taizu ceasing to hold civil examinations for over a decade. See Patricia Buckley Ebrey's the *Cambridge Illustrated History of China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 192.

<sup>358</sup> Chia, *Printing for Profit*, 149-150.

Song; many of the Ming period's *denglu* were published later than 1628, which was after the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* was published.<sup>359</sup>

As mentioned above, the total percentage of Chan and Confucian masters who were compiled into the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* for the Ming period is only 18 percent, much less when compared to the 53 percent of the Song period masters. This could be an indication that the Jianzhou area did not produce as many eminent masters during the Ming period. Chinese history indicates that the Chan Buddhism of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) did not fully recover from its decline during the Yuan dynasty until Yuanxian's time during the reign of Emperor Wanli 萬曆. After the fall of the Song, the Yuan dynasty greatly patronized Tibetan Buddhism, Daoism, and Shamanism. Afterwards, in addition to this change in patronization, the morality of the Chan Buddhist monks also experienced degeneration during the early Ming period.

The Ming dynasty founder had personal experience with the Buddhist communities which influenced his religious politics toward Buddhism as mentioned in previous chapters. The early Ming rulers also continued the Yuan policy of patronizing Tibetan Buddhism. During Jiajing's 嘉靖 reign (1522-1566), Daoism received the emperor's favor. It wasn't until Emperor Wanli (r. 1572-1620) that he and the Empress Dowager Cisheng reenergized the recovery of the Buddhism communities. Cisheng summoned the famous monk, Hanshan Deqing, to the palace, supported Zibo Zhenke, built the memorial pagoda for Bianrong Zhenyuan 徧融真圓 (1506-1584), and used imperial donations to rebuild monasteries. Emperor Wanli bestowed imperial Buddhist canons to famous monasteries throughout his empire.<sup>360</sup> Their revival of Buddhism also fostered the renaissance of Chan Buddhism during this period. As Jiang Wu points out in his book, *The Enlightenment in Dispute*, the revival of Chan Buddhism was also greatly connected

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<sup>359</sup> Shi Shengyan, *Ming mo fo jiao yan jiu*, 32-32.

<sup>360</sup> Wu, *Enlightenment in Dispute*, 24-25.

with the Confucian literati and the textual revival of Chan literature. The Neo-Confucian scholar, Wang Yangming, prompted his followers to study the mind and encouraged them to explore Chan teachings. The Buddhist literati based their beliefs on the "Golden Age" of the Tang and Song's Chan disciple-master interactions, applying them as models to reinvent romantic images and to reenact Chan enlightenment events.<sup>361</sup> During Yuanxian's time, many Chan followers imitated the iconoclastic practices of imagined Chan events. The difference between Yuanxian's Chan practice and that of other Chan practitioners or literati of the Ming period was that he did not promote the iconoclastic shouting and beating styles of imagined Chan practices but rather placed high regard on the ancient Chan masters' strength of cultivation without submission to hardship and high moral standards. Yuanxian remarks in one of his works about the strange practices of his time: Chan monks learning how to compose verses praising the merits of the Buddha, studying and drilling on *koans*, learning how to perform encounter dialogues between master and disciple, learning to "ascend the hall" 上堂 or performing a "small gathering" 小參, and performing beating and shouting exercises.<sup>362</sup> In contrast, Yuanxian advocated "Gushan Chan" 鼓山禪 which did not use any method outside of the formal traditional practices but rather focused on one's own mind to realize one's true nature without trying to imitate the strange trends of the time.

The eminent Chan master of the late Ming period, Yunqi Zhuhong, criticized the moral and spiritual stagnation of the Chan monks of his time. Zhuhong's criticism of the Chan monks was remarked about in Chun-fang Yü's book, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China*. Zhuhong first condemned monks for abusing Chan practice. The sayings of Chan masters were memorized and imitated from *koans* in the *Biyān lù* 碧巖錄 (*Record of the Blue Cliff*) and *Wumen guan* 無門關

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<sup>361</sup> Wu, *Enlightenment in Dispute*, 3-17.

<sup>362</sup> *Manji Shinsan Zokuzōkyō* 卍新纂續藏經. Vol. 72, *Guanglu*, fascicle 10, "示善侍者" X72.0441b02.



(*The Gateless Gate*). Some of the monks even liked to compose quick-witted phrases to show off their spiritual attainment but may not have had the true experience of enlightenment.<sup>363</sup> Secondly, monks lacked discipline within the monastic community. Zhuhong witnessed the corruption of traditional Chan training of *jie* 戒 (discipline), *ding* 定 (concentration) and *hui* 慧 (wisdom) as well as the neglect of monastic discipline. Scholar Yü believes that the decline in monastic discipline was due to the selling of ordination certificates to anyone who could afford to buy them and thus caused a decline in moral and intellectual standards. Another cause of decline was the replacement of *lü* or *Vinaya* with *jiao*. Many of the monks were more concerned about performing liturgies to obtain income rather than following the precepts. This trend also motivated the secularization of monastic orders during the late Ming period.<sup>364</sup> Thirdly, monks became worldly. Zhuhong found that many of the monks of his day favored practicing literati pursuits of calligraphy, poetry, and literature. These pursuits of non-Buddhist interests caused many monks to become greedy for donations, fame and material comforts.<sup>365</sup>

In such a degenerated "Age of Dharma Decline," Yuanxian sensed the need to compile the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* in order to rectify the declining Chan Buddhist practices and to provide examples of legitimate behavior for future generations. In other words, the compiling of the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* further confirms to us that in Yuanxian's mind the late Ming period of Chan Buddhism in Jianzhou was in a stage of deterioration due to incorrect trends of cultivation. The percentages of the Song and Ming period masters in the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* reflect the history of vicissitude of Chan Buddhism during the Song and Ming dynasties in Jianzhou of the Fujian area.

The history of Chan Buddhism indicates that before the late Ming period, Chan Buddhism did not place emphasis on sectarian differences. Before the late Ming period, many

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<sup>363</sup> Yü, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China*, 172-175.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*, 177-179.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*, 179-182.

Chan monks sought teachings from various Chan masters without any concerns regarding sectarian affiliations. Yuanxian own personal experience, for example, was that he learned the Linji 臨濟 teachings first before choosing to focus on the teachings of Caodong 曹洞 and becoming a great Caodong Buddhist master. As Jiang Wu's book reveals, "The disputes about dharma transmission in the seventeenth century displayed different characteristics from those in earlier periods."<sup>366</sup> Yuanxian did not distinguish between the various Chan masters by their different schools in the *Jianzhou hongshi lu*, implying Yuanxian's Chan cultivation style was to harmonize between the Caodong, Linji and other schools.

The non-denominational treatment of the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* also discloses Yuanxian's inclination to reconcile the sectarianism of the various Chan schools. However, his inclusion of Confucian scholars in the Buddhist record did not indicate that Yuanxian wanted to unify Buddhism with Confucianism at the time. In fact, Yuanxian wanted to demonstrate the supremacy of Buddhism.

### **Chan Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism**

The *Jianzhou hongshi lu* not only includes Confucian scholars but also designates an entire category for them as well.<sup>367</sup> During the Song period, Buddhism and Confucianism were inclined to work together. Some of the court officials were not only Confucian scholars but also Buddhist admirers. Some *denglu* works, such as the *Jingde chuandeng lu* and *Tiansheng guangdeng lu*, were either compiled by a Confucian scholar or included Confucian scholars. The *Jianzhou hongshi lu* however takes this inclusion one step further; it sets aside an entire section just for Confucian scholars. Yuanxian uses the section of Category Four, Assisting Teaching, to compile 14 famous Confucian scholars who had affiliations with both Buddhism and Jianzhou.

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<sup>366</sup> Wu, *Enlightenment in Dispute*, 205.

<sup>367</sup> The *Tian sheng guang denglu* and other *denglu* also include Confucian scholars in their collections, but they did not designate an entire category or a section just for Confucian masters alone.

Why did Yuanxian want to include these Confucian scholars in his Chan Buddhist record? As a Confucian scholar early in life and then a Buddhist master later, Yuanxian certainly well comprehended both teachings. Yuanxian arranged the fourth category to express his underlying belief that the teaching of Chan Buddhism in fact benefited and supported Confucian scholars as well as enhanced Confucian teachings.

When we take a look at the structure of the *Jianzhou hongshi lu*, the first category is the *Daben* or Reaching the Fundamental, which relates to the Chan masters who had realized their Buddha nature. The last category is the *Fujiao* or Assisting Teaching, which contains the eminent Confucian scholars from the Song to Ming periods who had connections with Jianzhou. This arrangement demonstrates the Confucian scholars were not as influential as the enlightened Chan masters to Yuanxian. Albert Welter points out in his book, the *Monks, Rulers, and Literati*, that the decline or growth for a total number of masters in certain categories of the *Gaoseng zhuan*, *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* or the *Song Gaoseng zhuan* reflects the changes of trends and degree of importance of these categories in their times. Therefore, we see "Translator" is being arranged first in those Buddhist hagiographic works. He also states: "These numbers reflect the significance ceded to translation and exegetical scholarship during the early reception of Buddhism, when the Chinese were eager to acquire basic knowledge of the new religion through scriptural sources and their interpretation."<sup>368</sup> Huijiao in his preface for Fascicle 14 of the *Gaoseng zhuan* also states,

The dharma teachings circulated to China, all due to the merits of propagation and translation. [Those translators] either crossed over the dangerous desert or floated in the big waves; they all disregarded and sacrificed their lives, entrusting their lives to propagate the dharma teachings. China became an enlightened land; one of the

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<sup>368</sup> Welter, *Monks, Rulers, and Literati*, 41-43.

reasons is because of [these translators'] sacrifices. This virtue is venerable and therefore the Translator is listed as the first of [all other] categories.<sup>369</sup>

This paragraph suggests that the compilers of hagiographies, such as Huijiao, would list the most important category first and then other categories would follow in order of importance. Jingjia Huang in her book also describes that when the Buddhist dharma was transmitted to China, the translation of the Buddhist sutras was the most important job and therefore these three works of the *Gaoseng zhuan*<sup>370</sup> all arranged their categories accordingly, placing the Translator as the first followed by the Exegetes.<sup>371</sup> The ordering of the categories, therefore, expresses important logic and reasoning. Hence, the order of categories in the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* also conveys a very important message; the records of the enlightened Chan Buddhist masters are far more compelling than those of the Confucian scholars.

In addition, the total number of Chan masters under the Reaching the Fundamental category is 32, but the total number of the Confucian scholars under the Assisting Teaching is only 14 scholars. This difference in number also implies Yuanxian's belief in the overwhelming importance of Chan practice in comparison to the Confucian studies of the time. As mentioned above, due to the encouragement of the Song court in emphasizing civil over a military government and the court's constant encouragement of literary learning, publication, and translation of Buddhist texts, many of the court officials were not only Confucian scholars but also Chan Buddhist admirers. For example, the compiler of the *Jingde chuandeng lu*, Yang Yi (974-1020), was a Confucian scholar and court official but also a Buddhist devotee. The compiler of the *Tiansheng guangdeng lu*, Li Zunxu 李遵勗 (988-1038), was also a Confucian scholar as well as Yang Yi's student; when Yang Yi died, he wore mourning clothes for Yang Yi

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<sup>369</sup> Huijiao, Daoxuan and Zanning. The *Gaoseng zhuan he ji* 高僧傳合集 (Shanghai: Shanghai gu ji chu ban she, 1991), 97.

<sup>370</sup> The "three works" refers to the *Gaoseng zhuan*, *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* and *Song Gaoseng zhuan*.

<sup>371</sup> Huang, *Zanning Song Gaoseng zhuan xushi yanjiu*, 75-77.

to show his respect. Li Zunxu also understood Buddhist teachings very well; before he passed away, he composed Buddhist dharma poetries (*jisong* 偈頌) with the monk Chuyuan 楚圓.<sup>372</sup>

As Jiang Wu mentions that during the Ming period, the revival of Chan Buddhism was greatly connected with the Neo-Confucian literati and the textual revival of Chan literature. Many Confucian literati also practiced Chan Buddhism for three different reasons. First, Wang Yangming's teaching of "the School of Mind" encouraged Neo-Confucians to study Buddhist scriptures. Second, during the 17th-century, the literati were attracted to Chan Buddhism through their readings of Chan anecdotes, myths, and legends, giving them a sense of easiness and serenity. They were fascinated by the enigmatic and paradoxical languages and stories of *yulu* or *koan* of the Chan masters.<sup>373</sup> Third, many Buddhist institutions became sanctuaries for the Ming loyalists and faithful literati to escape the obligations of serving the Manchu rulers during the Ming-Qing transitional period.<sup>374</sup>

The analysis of comparing the relative numbers of masters in the Reaching the Fundamental category to those of the Assisting Teaching indicates that Chan Buddhism was, in fact, more popular and important than Confucian teachings during the Song and late Ming periods. As Albert Welter pointed out earlier, the greater number of masters in a category indicates not only the change of trends but also the importance of the category at the time. Yuanxian's inclusion of more Chan masters than Confucian scholars in the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* demonstrates an underlying statement that Chan Buddhism was more popular than Confucianism. Yuanxian also manifests his intention of placing Buddhism to be above Confucianism.

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<sup>372</sup> See *Song shi* 宋史, fascicle 464, *lie zhuan* 列傳 223 "...師楊億為文, 億卒, 為制服...通釋氏學, 將死, 與浮圖楚圓為偈頌。"

<sup>373</sup> Wu, *Enlightenment in Dispute*.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid*.

However, if Chan Buddhism was more popular than Neo-Confucianism, then why in his preface did Yuanxian still condemn the Ming period's Chan cultivation? As we recall in Yuanxian's preface, he emphasized the ancients' spirit of determination and perseverance regarding religious cultivations and he considered the Chan cultivators from the Tang and Song periods to be outstanding role models for later generations. This means he did not consider the Ming period of Chan cultivators to be as good as those of their predecessors. Therefore, Yuanxian did not include any of Ming period's Chan masters in the first category. For Yuanxian, the Chan cultivators of the Ming period were not practicing the authentic Chan teachings; he criticized the cultivators who had tried to reinvent romantic images and intentionally reenact Chan enlightenment events. These were the kinds of practices Yuanxian tried to condemn and the incorrect trends of Chan practice gave him great concern for the future of Chan Buddhism. I believe therefore that he strived to rebuild the glory of ancient Chan Buddhist history within his own time by doing what he knew he could do the best, use his literary skills to compile the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* for those of his day and future generations.

Meanwhile, according to the history of Buddhism in the Fujian area, when comparing the number of Buddhist monasteries built during the Tang and Song dynasties with the Ming period, there was a great difference in number.<sup>375</sup> Therefore, in the aspect of Fujian area, the development of Buddhism during the Ming period was not as great as previous dynasties. However, Yuanxian acknowledged and lamented the decline of Buddhism, therefore, he intended to uphold and revise Buddhism to be superior to Confucianism.

The contents of the Assisting Teaching category also express Yuanxian's underlying position toward the relationship between Chan Buddhism and Confucianism. Yuanxian chose to

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<sup>375</sup> During the Ming period, the number of Buddhist monasteries built was about 38. See Wang, *Fujian fojiao shi*, 299. During the Tang Dynasty, the number was 547 and the Song Dynasty was 1165.

include the Confucian scholars in Category Four illustrate how the study of Chan Buddhism not only helped to ease these Confucian scholars lives but also strengthened their loyalty to the court and enhanced their integrity and honesty. Clearly, Yuanxian believed that Chan Buddhism was effective enough to enhance the teachings of Confucianism. These points also illustrate Yuanxian's attitude of placing Buddhism above Confucianism.

The first example Yuanxian listed under the Assisting Teaching category was the Song period Confucian scholar and court official, Yang Yi. He was the Song dynasty academician of Hanlin 翰林學士 and was bestowed a *jinshi* 進士 degree due to his ability to intelligently compose essays when he was only seven years old. Yang Yi was a native of Pusheng 浦城 in Jianzhou and became famous for his sophisticated literary abilities; he composed literary pieces to high levels of refinement and embellishment in the Xikun 西昆 style of poetry in his collection, the *Xikun chouchang ji* 西昆酬唱集. The Song emperors, Zhenzong 真宗 and Renzong 仁宗 both thought very highly of Yang Yi and employed him for high official positions. Yang Yi not only came from a traditional Confucian background but was also from a Buddhist family; his grandfather's brother, Yang Huizhi 楊徽之 was a devoted Buddhist. According to one of the works of Yang Yi, the *Wuyi xinji* 武夷新集, it states that Yang Huizhi:

He liked to discuss the theory of the school of logicians, understood many classical literary quotations... [he] venerated the Buddhist scriptures, extremely believed in the law of cause and effect. Everyday [he] would get up just before dawn, wash his face and rinse his mouth then recite the *Diamond Sutra*. He continued doing so for thirty years and did not temporarily neglect this practice; the number of times that he had recited [the *Diamond Sutra*] would pass more than hundred thousand times.<sup>376</sup>

Yang Huizhi was very close to Yang Yi according to the *Song shi*:

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<sup>376</sup> Yang Yi, *Wuyi xinji: gu hanlin shidu xueshi Yanggong xingzhuang* 武夷新集: 故翰林侍讀學士楊公行狀, fascicle 11.

Not too long after his (Yang Yi's) father passed away, and [Yang Yi] completed the period of mourning. At that time, his grandfather's brother, Huizhi, had to go to Xuzhou to become the county magistrate, and therefore, Yang Yi being dependent on him, went with him. [Yang Yi] would devote his efforts to studying for days and nights without stopping. Huizhi talked to him privately and praised Yang Yi and saying, "You will be the person who is going to make our family prosper."<sup>377</sup>

The information above suggests that at an early age<sup>378</sup> Yang Yi lived with his granduncle and because Yang Huizhi was a devoted Buddhist cultivator, Yang Yi would, therefore, receive much Buddhist influence from him. Yang Yi's wife also came from a Buddhist family; she was the daughter of Zhang Bo 張洎 (934-997), a devoted Buddhist. According to the *Song shi*, Zhang Bo was an erudite scholar and well learned with ancient books and classical scriptures. He had not only broadly read Buddhist and Daoist books and sutras but also understood abstract concepts of Chan and emptiness. As a court official, Zhang's job was to embellish the translated Buddhist sutras.<sup>379</sup> Therefore, not only did Yang Yi's side of the family, but also his wife's family, have substantial influences from Buddhism. Yang Yi also highly appreciated Chan Buddhism because of what happened to him in his later life. One incident was when he had suffered the loss of his son. In Yang Yi's work, the *Shang zi shu* 殤子述 (*Narration of a Death of a Young Child*), he described his hardship of enduring the death of his young son and in the same article, also stated his realization of the Buddhist teachings on the transience of human life; emptiness and non-attachment, showing his subtle understanding and cultivation of Chan Buddhist teachings.<sup>380</sup> Chan Buddhist teachings definitely provided comfort to alleviate Yang Yi's suffering.

Even though Yang Yi received much support and praise from the emperors, he was

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<sup>377</sup> See the *Song Shi* fascicle 305 *lie zhuan* number 64.

<sup>378</sup> According to Yang Tiejū 楊鐵菊. "Yō Oku no Bukkyō shinkō" 楊億の仏教信仰. *Indogaku bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 印度学仏教学研究 42-I (1983): 279-281, Yang Yi was 14 years old at that time.

<sup>379</sup> *Song Shi* fascicle 267 *lie zhuan* number 26.

<sup>380</sup> Yang Yi, the *Wuyi xinji: Shang zi shu*. Fascicle 11. It states, "...了知大雄氏之旨, 識六塵之妄相, 見諸行之無常...煩惱歸於空何執何著一切虛幻..."



purged by his colleagues, such as Chen Pengnian 陳彭年 and Wang Qinrou 王欽若, because of his outspoken and straightforward personality. During Yang Yi's old age, he was relegated to Ruzhou 汝州.<sup>381</sup> There, ironically, he had the chance to study with Chan master, Guanghui Yuanlian 廣慧元璉 (951-1036).<sup>382</sup> Yang Yi also made many friends who were famous Chan masters, such as Fenyang Shanzhao 汾陽善昭 (947-1024) and Shishuang Chuyuan 石霜楚圓 (987-1040). Yang Yi was recognized by Song Emperor Zhenzong and chosen to collate the famous Buddhist Chan *denglu*, the *Jingde chuangdeng lu*.

In the *Jianzhou hongshi lu*, Yuanxian excerpts a portion of content from the *Wudeng huiyuan* for the biography regarding Yang Yi. At the end, Yuanxian added a paragraph of his own to comment about Yang Yi which remarks much about Yuanxian's perspective, not only regarding Yang Yi but also about the influence of Chan Buddhism to a Confucian scholar.

Yuanxian's comment states,

The viewpoints of Danian<sup>383</sup> (Yang Yi) were exceptional and extensive; [he] was not second to Ciming. Moreover, when [he] reached the end of his life, [he was] self-confident and unrestrained ...when the Emperor Zhenzong wanted to establish Consort De to be Empress, he ordered Yi to draw up an imperial decree and made Dingwei proclaim the imperial instruction. However, Yi did not comply with [the demand]. Dingwei told Yi that [if he] did it with effort, [he] would not have to worry about not being rich and honored. Respectful Yi said, "If it is this kind of richness and honor, it is not what I want." He clung to [integrity and high morals] in this way. How could [one] cultivate Chan and then be without trial? Speculators then said that because of his being frightened, he lost his mind. They used this to criticize Yi's Chan [cultivation] and did not closely examine [the situation]. How could [Yi] at the critical moment of life and death still act comfortably and unrestrained like this, and when it came to the ordinary moment of choosing between gains and losses, instead, his mind was disturbed? This must have been weak contemporary villains who skillfully created this slander.<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>381</sup> See *Song shi* fascicle 305 *lie zhuan* number 64.

<sup>382</sup> See *Wudeng huiyuan* 五燈會元 fascicle 12.

<sup>383</sup> The style name of Yang Yi.

<sup>384</sup> Yongjue Yuanxian, the *Jianzhou hongshi lu*, fascicle 2. 945.

In this paragraph, Yuanxian explains the reasons why he believed Yang Yi was able to be unstrained at the end of his life and embrace integrity and honesty during his life, all because of Yang Yi's subtle Chan cultivation. First, Yuanxian stated that Yi's perception regarding Chan cultivation was as good as the Chan master, Shishuang Chuyuan, if not better. Secondly, in the moments at the end of Yang Yi's life, he acted unrestrained and serene which were signs of being able to detach oneself from the mundane world, implying Yang Yi's insightful Chan realization. Thirdly, Yuanxian believed that Yang Yi placed his integrity higher than obtaining wealth and fame due to his cultivation of Chan, which taught him to detach himself from worldly desires. Fourth, Yuanxian retorted the defamation from villains by saying that if Yang Yi, at the crucial moment of life and death, could be peaceful then how could he be disturbed at the ordinary moment of deciding to obtain gains or losses? Yuanxian undoubtedly believed Chan cultivation had supported and reinforced Yang Yi's decision to execute the Confucian teaching of uprightness.

The second example is Hu Anguo 胡安國 (1074-1138). He was the establisher of the Huxiang School 湖湘學派, which was one of the Neo-Confucianism schools. Hu Anguo became a *jinshi* in the year 1097, had been considered a court official for forty years, and was frequently appointed to posts. Hu Anguo often declined the positions or was purged, and so the actual times he served as a court official was only six years.<sup>385</sup> He was originally from Chongan 崇安, Fujian and, in the winter of 1129, moved his family to Xiangtan 湘潭, Hunan 湖南 to avoid the chaos of wars. After he moved to Xiangtan, he secluded himself at Biquan 碧泉 to compose the *Hushi Chunqiu zhuan* 胡氏春秋傳 and, at the same time, opened a school to teach students. It took Hu Anguo from 1105 to 1136 to finish composing this well-known work. Hu Anguo's school

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<sup>385</sup> See *Song shi* fascicle 435 *lie zhuan* number 194.

nurtured many literati and scholars and evoked the trend of studying Neo-Confucianism in the Hunan area. The Huxiang School placed emphasis on the teaching of *Chunqiu dayi* 春秋大義 or the Cardinal Principles of Chunqiu, which is the fundamental spirit of Confucianism. Its goal was to distinguish right from wrong, righteousness from evil, good from bad and praise from disparage. Besides upholding the spirit of Confucianism, the Huxiang School also believed in governing the world by employing one's knowledge to practical application.<sup>386</sup>

According to the *Wudeng huiyuan*, Hu Anguo composed poems to answer a question regarding the *koan* of "Nanquan zhan mao 南泉斬貓" (Nanquan beheaded a cat) showing his deep understanding of Chan. Hu Anguo was also a lay Buddhist and had the Buddhist name of Caoan jushi 草庵居士 (Lay Buddhist of Grass Hut).<sup>387</sup> Hu's connection to Buddhism can also be seen in his son, Hu Yin's 胡寅 article the "*Xian gong xing zhuang*" 先公行狀. It states,

In his (Hu Anguo) prime of life, [he] had read the Buddhist books, [he] also discussed Chan with others, but thereafter, he discontinued.<sup>388</sup>

Also, Hu Anguo and his son Hu Yin had good relationships with some Buddhist monks. In the *Feiran ji* 斐然集, Hu Yin mentions that at the end of the year 1132, when they traveled from Hang 杭 toward the west, they had an opportunity to stay in the Longze Temple 龍澤寺 of Fengcheng 豐城, Jiangxi 江西 for the winter period. When they are ready to leave in the fourth month of the next year, the Abbot of the Longze Temple, Guangzhao 廣照 asked them to write a memorial record for the newly repaired Zhidu yuan 智度院 at Fengcheng.<sup>389</sup> Another Buddhist monk, Fazan 法讚, had also been a good friend with Hu's family. When Hu Anguo had just

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<sup>386</sup> Lixin Wang 王立新, "Xiangtan xuepai yu fojiao 湘潭學派與佛教" in the *Huafan daxue di 7 ci Ru fo hui tong xue shu yan tao hui lun wen ji* (Taipei, Taiwan, September 2003), 467-472.

<sup>387</sup> Puji 普濟, the *Wudeng huiyuan* 五燈會元 (Taipei: Wenjin chu ban she, 1984), 1210.

<sup>388</sup> Hu Yin 胡寅, the *Chongzheng bian . Feiran ji* 崇正辯. 斐然集 V. 1 and 2 (Beijing : Zhong hua shu ju chu ban, 1993), 556, fascicle 25.

<sup>389</sup> Hu, *Chongzheng bian . Feiran ji*, 406. Fascicle 20, *Fengcheng xin xinxiu Zhidu yuan ji* 豐城新修智度院記.

moved to Piquan, Fazan went to visit him and became good friends with Hu's family for the next twenty years until his death. Fazan also took good care of Hu Anguo's tomb for Hu's brothers after their father passed away. Hu Yin wrote a funeral oration for him when Fazan passed away, the *Ji Longwang zhanglao Fazan* 祭龍王長老法讚 (*Venerating the Abbot of Longwang Temple, Fazan*).<sup>390</sup>

The sources above indicate that the Hu family had good experience with Chan Buddhism and had studied Chan for some period at least once in their lifetimes. Ironically, the Huxiang School's principles were against Buddhism. When the members of the Huxiang School associated with Chan Buddhist monks, they would strive to rectify the concept of Chan Buddhist teachings and guide them toward a way of Confucianism.

The *Jianzhou hongshi lu* states the following at the end of the transcription of Hu Anguo:

Wending<sup>391</sup> was uncompromised toward learning and did his best to bring [it] into [his] actions; his aspiration was to focus on the *Chunqiu*. He was concerned about the country and respected the emperor. The more he was distanced, [he had] yet even more sincerity. And then to Chan study, his deep grasp was so original. How can the study of Chan harm one's loyalty to country and filial piety to their parents? In this world, those who did not understand [the learning of Chan] often said that learning Chan would harm one's loyalty to country and filial piety to one's parents. People who said these things were without pondering.<sup>392</sup>

From these statements, we clearly understand that Yuanxian believed that Chan teachings really helped and enhanced the loyalty of Hu Anguo. First, Hu Anguo had studied Chan, demonstrated a good understanding of it and had good relationships with Chan masters. Second, Hu's studying of Chan did not really affect his loyalty to country and the emperor; in fact, Chan may have enhanced his loyalty eventually because Hu Anguo used his understanding of Chan to uphold Confucianism. Third, even though Hu Anguo studied Chan, he still was loyal to the court and the

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<sup>390</sup> Ibid., 617. Fascicle 27, *Ji Longwang zhanglao Fazan* 祭龍王長老法讚.

<sup>391</sup> Wending is Hu Anguo's posthumous title.

<sup>392</sup> Yongjue Yuanxian the *Jianzhou hongshi lu*, fascicle 2. 945.

emperor. Chan teachings therefore supported and enhanced Hu's loyalty to his country and the emperors.

Another famous Confucian scholar in the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* was Zhu Xi, a very influential figure in the field of Neo-Confucian teachings. He was a supreme synthetic thinker. He redefined the Confucian tradition, restoring the Confucian moral cultivation of the preceding Han and Tang dynasties. One of his contributions was to compile, write and edit commentary for the Four Books.<sup>393</sup> Later, during the Yuan Dynasty, these Four Books became required reading material for taking the imperial examinations. During Zhu Xi's youth, he was not only educated with Confucian teachings but also studied Buddhism and Daoism. One legend depicts that Zhu Xi successfully obtained his *jinshi* degree by using a Chan Buddhism notion to answer his exam questions.<sup>394</sup> Zhu Xi began his classical Confucian learning from his father, Zhu Song 朱松. Later, when Zhu Xi was 14 years old, his father passed away and he was entrusted to study with the "Three Masters of the Wuyi 武夷三先生;" Hu Xian 胡憲, Liu Mianzhi 劉勉之, and Liu Zihui 劉子翬. The "Three Masters of the Wuyi" all followed the Neo-Confucianism philosophies of Cheng Yi 程頤 and Cheng Hao 程顥 but all were also fond of Chan Buddhism; all three had a profound influence on the young Zhu Xi.<sup>395</sup> During this period, Zhu Xi also began to have an interest in Chan Buddhism, maybe in part because of the experience of his father's death. Zhu Xi learned Chan Buddhism for a period of ten years from Chan Master Daoqian 道謙 (? -1155) and Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲 (1089-1163), whom both taught "Kanhua Chan" 看話禪.

In his funeral oration to Daoqian, Zhu Xi expressed that,

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<sup>393</sup> The Four Books are the classical Confucian texts of the *Analects, Mencius, the Great Learning and the Doctrine of the Mean*.

<sup>394</sup> Chan-liang Wu 吳展良, "Praxis and Knowledge: An Analysis of Zhu Xi's Learning in His Early Years" in the *Wen hua yu lishi de zhuisuo--Yu Yingshi jiaoshou bazhi shouqing lunwen ji* 文化與歷史的追索--余英時教授八秩壽慶論文集, ed. by Hoyt Tillman, (Taipei: Lianjing chuban she, 2009), 57-106.

<sup>395</sup> Jingnan Shu 束景南, *Zhuzi Dazhuan* 朱子大傳 (Fuzhuo shi: Fujian jiaoyu chu ban she, 1992), 47-75.

In the past, my studies were centered in *Yijing*, *Lunyu*, and *Mengzi* and to investigate and learn how to become a saint. I did not doubt having the comportment to pursue becoming a saint and intended to become one myself; [however,] my studies of sainthood were exhausted. I then inquired of venerable elders how to achieve the Way. They all told me I should try to search within myself to grasp the truth by understanding Chan and therefore, I began to learn Chan.<sup>396</sup>

Zhu Xi's father had been very enthusiastic to know about Buddhism; one of his works, the "Article of Abstaining from Infanticide," appears to contain the deep Buddhist concept of cause and effect.<sup>397</sup> His grandfather, Zhu Sen 朱森, who became a devoted Buddhist in his old age and Zhu Xi's mother's side of the family were all ardent Buddhists. Yuanxian included a comment regarding Zhu Xi in the *Jianzhou hongshi lu*,

Venerable Wen,<sup>398</sup> [his responses] toward the teachings of Buddhism either supported or scolded [Buddhism], using repression and praise simultaneously. The teachings he praised were utilized to purify the filth of the mundane world. The teachings he scolded were utilized to establish the law of human relations. His words of teaching probably have to be this way due to being the main leader of the Confucian teachings. However, when I observe his works from [the period] when he was living in constraint and reciting sutras, it was not only his mind demonstrating admiration to [Buddhist teachings] but he had also gained a deep understanding from the sutras.<sup>399</sup>

Yuanxian believed that Zhu Xi's Chan Buddhist learning and understanding were not just those of an ordinary amateur cultivator and that his criticisms and opposition toward the Chan Buddhist teachings were, of necessity, because Zhu Xi was the leader of Song Neo-Confucianism. In other words, even though Zhu Xi was the leading figure of Song Neo-Confucianism, he demonstrated a profound Chan insight as well. This demonstration implies an enduring Chan influence on him as a great thinker. Chan philosophy had a considerable impact

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<sup>396</sup> Yongjue, *Jianzhou hongshi lu*, 947.

<sup>397</sup> Shu-hui Meng, *Zhu Xi ji qi men ren de jiao hua li nian yu shi jian* 朱熹及其門人的教化理念與實踐: *Instruction in Virtue and its Practice by Chu Hsi and his Disciples* (Taipei: National Taiwan University, 2003), 103.

<sup>398</sup> Zhu Xi was honored with a posthumous name, Wen Gong (Venerable Wen) in 1208.

<sup>399</sup> Yongjue, *Jianzhou hongshi lu*, 948.

on Zhu Xi and, because of his deep understanding of Chan teachings; he was able to utilize them to support his arguments regarding Confucian teachings.

Yang Yi, Hu Anguo, and Zhu Xi represent the quality of scholarly people in Jianzhou for they were not only exceptional Confucians but also had cultivated Chan Buddhism at some point during their lives. From these examples of Confucian scholars, Yuanxian clearly demonstrates his position that Chan Buddhism teachings in fact benefited and supported Confucians. Chan Buddhism helped Confucians and therefore, was superior to Confucianism.

### **Mazu and the Fojiling Temple at Jianyang in the Jianzhou Area**

The category of Reaching the Fundamental in the *Jianzhou Hongshi lu* begins with the famous Tang dynasty Chan master, Mazu Daoyi. To arrange Mazu as the first eminent monk in the record indicates Mazu's significance, not only in Chan Buddhist history, but also in his essential affiliation with the Jianzhou area. Chan Buddhism in the Jianzhou area not only began with Mazu, but Mazu also had a lasting overall influence on Chan Buddhism in the area. The earliest record of Mazu's stay in Jianyang can be found in the *Jingde chuandeng lu* but was not mentioned in Mazu's biography in the *Song gaoseng zhuan*. The *Jingde chuandeng lu* claims that Mazu began his dharma teachings at Jianyang's Fojiling 佛跡嶺 temple and later moved to Linchuan 臨川.<sup>400</sup> Dongfeng Xing believes that Mazu came to Fojiling and started his dharma propagation in the year of 742. Three locals of Jianyang, Zhixian 志賢, Daotong 道通 and Mingjue 明覺, all obtained teachings from Mazu at that time.<sup>401</sup> We can also find the mention of Mazu's teaching in Jianyang in the *Song gaoseng zhuan* from the biographies of Zhixian, Daotong and Mingjue.<sup>402</sup> However, Zanning's *Song gaoseng zhuan* does not mention Mazu's

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<sup>400</sup> See *Taishōzō* 大正藏 Vol. 51, the *Jingde Chuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄 fascicle 6.

<sup>401</sup> Dongfeng Xing 邢東風, "Mazu he Jianyang 馬祖和建陽" in the *Pumen xuebao*, 2007 Sept. No. 41, p. 59-98.

<sup>402</sup> See Zanning, *Song gaoseng zhuan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju chuban, 2006), 207, 226 and 254.

teaching in Jianyang in his biography of Mazu. Because Mazu was a famous Chan master of the Tang period, finding any historical documents from Tang period regarding Mazu's activities in Jianyang is crucial to proving the legitimacy of the claims in the *Jingde chuandeng lu*. Although scholar Xing could not find any historical Tang period documents that indicate Mazu had been in Jianyang, many other later *denglu*<sup>403</sup> followed the claim in the *Jingde chuandeng lu* to include a brief statement of Mazu acting in Jianyang. These statements raise the question of why the historical materials of the Tang period did not mention Mazu's affiliation with Jianyang. Had Mazu's Jianyang experience been neglected or had Mazu never really been in Jianyang?<sup>404</sup> Yuanxian clearly expresses in the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* that after Mazu had received his dharma transmission from Huairang 懷讓, he traveled to the Min area and stayed at the Fojiling temple in Jianyang.

At that time, various Buddhist disciples in the Min area had all stagnated in the teaching of gradual enlightenment. [When they] abruptly heard about the essential sudden enlightenment teaching, they were all inclined to seek [Mazu's] teaching together.<sup>405</sup>

Yuanxian considered Mazu as the one responsible for beginning the Chan sudden enlightenment teaching in the Jianyang area and the three Jianyang natives receiving the dharma teaching in the Fojiling temple. We can easily find other historical documents from the Ming and Qing period that record Mazu teaching at the Fojiling temple in Jianyang such as, the *Fujian tongzhi* 福建通志 (General Records of Fujian). It records a brief statement saying that, "...Shengji si, built in the year of Xiantong 咸通, Tany dynasty. Legend says that Chan master Mazu had dwelt here and

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<sup>403</sup> Such as *Jianxi Mazu Daoyi Chanshi Yulu*, *Tiansheng Guang denglu*, *Wudeng Huiyuan*, and *Wudeng Yantong*.

<sup>404</sup> Xing, *Pumen xuebao*, 62.

<sup>405</sup> Yongjue, *Jianzhou hongshi lu*, 915.



left his traces."<sup>406</sup> Dongfeng Xing was also able to yield some hard evidence, the precious stone stele and stone inscriptions from the Fojiling temple. A stone stele carved in the year 1690 gives the history of the origin of Shengji si 聖跡寺, the event of its dedication, and a list of the contributors who donated lands for rebuilding the temple. This stone inscription is titled *Chongxing gufojisi beiji* 重興古佛跡寺碑記 (the *Stele Record of Rebuilding the Ancient Foji Temple*). The record expounds that Mazu admired the "Buddha vestige" 佛跡<sup>407</sup> there and so came to Jianyang to cultivate and propagate the dharma teachings. The Fojiling temple was originally built by Weng Gao 翁郜, who was born between the end of the Tang and the beginning of The Five Dynasties periods. He made a vow to build a temple to benefit all beings. According to Dongfeng Xing, there are several different sources indicating when the Shengji si temple was built; some evidence points to between 806 to 874 but some believe it was built in the year 947. Besides a list of contributors for rebuilding the temple during the Qing Dynasty, Dongfeng Xing also mentions a bridge called the "Bridge of Mazu" 馬祖橋, which was built not too far from the Shengji si in the beginning of the Ming dynasty. This reference indicates that the occurrence of Mazu having resided in Jianyang was truly believed as legitimate history in the minds of the local people of Jianyang.<sup>408</sup> On the southeast side of the Shengji si is a pavilion called the Shengji Pavilion. Next to the Shengji Pavilion is a big mountain rock carved with three letters "Fo-ji-ling" 佛跡嶺 (the Mountain Peak of the Buddha Trace). On both the left and right sides of these three letters, other characters appear to have been carved but are now illegible due

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<sup>406</sup> See *Fujian Tongzhi*, vol. 4, fascicle 63, p. 4430, from the *shi* 史, History section, Geography category of the *Siku Quanshu* 四庫全書 the *Complete Library of the Four Treasuries*.

<sup>407</sup> The "Buddha vestige" is a big stone inside the Shengji pavilion which is located at the southeast side of the Shengji si in a mountain valley. This stone has a mark that appears to be like a large human left foot with four small holes representing the four toes of a foot. Since it is difficult to tell whether this footmark is a natural creation or manmade, people consider it to be an inconceivable phenomenon, giving it the name "Buddha vestige." Some believe that it might be the footprint of Mazu. See Xing's "Mazu he Jianzhou," p. 73-74 and 80.

<sup>408</sup> Xing, *Pumen xuebao*, 71-79.

to damage from wind and weather. A few of the lucid characters are the characters of "Tang" 唐 and "Daoyi" 道一.<sup>409</sup> This is thought to be a commemoration on the rock to remember that Mazu had been there. There is another rock inscribed with a poem composed by Chaojie 超戒, the abbot of the Shengji si temple in 1699. The poem reads:

When did the sacred trace descend? Entering the mountain and exiting the mountain.  
Wanting to know the places of coming and going? Trying to listen to the sound of  
water running.<sup>410</sup>

Dongfeng Xing believes the first two verses point to the event of Mazu coming to Jianyang and then leaving and the latter two verses indicate that the vestige of Mazu is where the sound of running water comes from.<sup>411</sup>

These stone stele and inscriptions tell the history of the Shengji si at Jianyang. People believe that the Shengji si had been the place where Mazu spread and taught the Buddha dharma. However, did Mazu really stay and teach there? There are many records from the Song and later periods to support this claim, but they may all do so because of the initial statements in the *Jingde chuandeng lu*. Unfortunately, there is still no historical document from the Tang period to back up any of these claims. The degree to which people perceive Mazu as having stayed and taught in Jianyang connotes the strong belief and popularity of Chan Buddhism in the Jianyang area, especially during the Song and Ming periods. If we apply John McRae's rules of Zen studies,<sup>412</sup> the connection of Mazu and Jianyang reveals to us how significant Mazu's influence was to the people of Jianyang and how reverently Chan Buddhism was perceived at the time. Regardless, since Mazu has been considered an important figure in Chan Buddhism, many

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<sup>409</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>412</sup> McRae, *Seeing Through Zen*, xix.

legends involve him and as a result, Jianyang of Jianzhou has also become a significant location of Chan Buddhist history due to its legendary association with Mazu.

### **The Spreading Chan Influence of Jianzhou**

Jianzhou became an influential location for the spread and development of Chan Buddhism into national and international regions. There were many of Mazu's disciples and later dharma generations from the Jianzhou area that spread out into the nation or even into Eastern and Southeastern Asia. For instance, the Chan master, Zhixian, after receiving the Chan teachings from Mazu at the Fojiling temple, traveled to many places and even performed a miraculous act of relieving drought for the Jinhua mountain 金華山 area in the Zhejiang Province. Later he traveled to Changan 長安, climbed up Mt. Wutai 五台 and finally stayed in the Ganquan temple 甘泉寺, at Taiyuan 太原. Many Chan cultivators and lay people came to receive Chan teachings from Zhixian. He died in a sitting posture without illness.<sup>413</sup> This brief biography of Zhixian indicates that Zhixian propagated the Chan dharma teachings from his native location in the southeast to as far as northeastern China.

Another example is the Chan master Dazhu Huihai 大珠慧海. He was born in Jianzhou but followed the dharma teachings of the monk Zhi 智 at Yuezhou 越州. He had also obtained the Chan teachings from Mazu and attended on him for six years. After reading Huihai's *Dunwu rudao yaomen lun* 頓悟入道要門論 (*The Discourse on the Gateway to Enter the Truth of Sudden Enlightenment*), Mazu praised Huihai as a big bright pearl so complete, clear, brilliant and transparent as to be without any hindrance. Thereafter, many Chan admirers came to seek

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<sup>413</sup> Yongjue, *Jianzhou hongshi lu*, 918 and Zanning, *Song gaoseng zhuan*, 207.

teachings from Huihai.<sup>414</sup> Huihai spread the Chan teachings at Yuezhou which is today's Shaoxing 紹興 in Zhejiang 浙江 on the eastern coast of China.

The Fujian area, to which Jianzhou belongs, is located in the coastal region of southeast China; it has easy seaway access to other countries and to the many foreigners who first land on China's soil. There have been several Chinese monks in Chinese Buddhist history who have traveled from this area to foreign countries and spread the dharma teachings. During the Song period, the monk Zheran 者然, who was from the Chongan county 崇安 of Jianzhou, traveled to India under imperial orders to obtain Buddhist sutras during the Xianping 咸平 era (998-1003).<sup>415</sup>

Later, during the Ming-Qing transitional period, many of the literati who did not want to serve under the Qing emperor migrated to the Fujian area and either became monks or secluded themselves in the monasteries. This condition facilitated the growth of Buddhism in the Fujian area. Yuanxian, a native of Jianyang during this period of frequent conflict and fighting, provided shelter and help to the Ming loyalists, gave relief to war victims, and helped bury the deceased. Yuanxian's selfless acts initiated the large scale practice of social rescue and wartime relief efforts within the Buddhist community.<sup>416</sup> According to Hsuan-Li Wang, these kinds of social rescue and relief from the Buddhist community later developed into humanistic Buddhism in Taiwan by Yuanxian's later generations.<sup>417</sup>

During the 17th-century, many monks emigrated to Japan, Korea, or Southeast Asia from the Fujian area due to the fall of the Ming dynasty, such as Yinyuan 隱元 (1592-1673), the Japanese Obaku Zen school founder, who was from the Min area and subsequently immigrated

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<sup>414</sup> Yongjue, *Jianzhou hongshi lu*, 915-918.

<sup>415</sup> He, *Fujian Zongjiao Wenhua*, 15.

<sup>416</sup> He, *Fujian Zongjiao Wenhua*, 13.

<sup>417</sup> Wang, *Gushan: the Formation of Chan Lineage*, 110-115.

to Japan.<sup>418</sup> Due to the geographic convenience of the Fujian area, many monks were continually traveling to Japan, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and so forth. Many of these monks were later generations of Yuanxian's dharma heirs, for instance, the Chan master, Miaolian 妙蓮 (1824-1907), who originated from Xinghua, Fujian and was the 126th abbot of the Gushan Yongquan temple. Yuanxian had been abbot at this same temple for more than twenty years. Chan master Miaolian was the 45th generation of Caodong Chan lineage. He frequently traveled to Southeast Asian countries to propagate Buddhist teachings and received patronages for renovating the Gushan Yongquan temple. The importation of orthodox Buddhism to Malaysia also began with Chan master Miaolian; he built the first Buddhist temple, Kek Lok si 極樂寺 in Penang, Malaysia in 1893. Later, through his Dharma heir, Chan master Xuyun 虛雲 (1840-1959), Gushan Chan continued to influence the Southeast Asia and Taiwan areas.<sup>419</sup> The Gushan lineage of Chan teachings spread from Fujian to Taiwan in the early 20th century. Through the early efforts of Yuanxian and many other later Jianzhou Chan masters, the influence of Jianzhou was tremendous and has continued since the time Mazu taught Chan in the Fojiling temple, extending even beyond the Jianzhou area to many foreign countries. Through many of Yuanxian's later generations, Caodong Chan teachings become influential. Yuanxian's concept of both the super-mundane religious world and engaging in society being two sides of a coin and are meant to be carried out synchronously continues to flourish outside of the Jianzhou area.

## Conclusion

After careful study of the *Jianzhou hongshi lu*, we realize that it has a unique literary style. The *Jianzhou hongshi lu* is neither a *denglu* nor a typical hagiographic genre and it focuses

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<sup>418</sup> Wu, *Leaving for the Rising Sun*.

<sup>419</sup> Xizhang Chen 陳錫璋, *Fu zhou gu shan yong quan si li dai zhu chi chan shi zhuan lue* 福州鼓山湧泉寺歷代住持禪師傳略 (Tainan shi: Zhi zhe chu ban she, 1996), 424-426 and 441-443.

on a particular geographic area, Jianzhou. Yuanxian's purposes of compiling this Buddhist record, I believe, were not only as he states in his preface, to record the eminent Chan masters for the benefit of later generations, but also because he found the local historical records had insufficient information about Chan Buddhism. Meanwhile, Yuanxian also wanted to show the supremacy of Chan Buddhism. This research reveals to us that the popularity of Buddhist practices was strongly connected with the character of elite society, political upheaval, and preferences of the court. The total percentages of Chan and Confucian masters in the Song and Ming periods who were compiled into the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* reflect the court's religious policies and social trends during these dynasties. Organizing the records of the enlightened Chan Buddhist masters as first and the Confucian scholars at the end indicate Yuanxian's belief of the greater significance of the Chan masters over those of the Confucian scholars. More importantly, I believe the inclusion of the Confucian scholars in this Buddhist record and the contents of the first and fourth categories all explain my argument that Yuanxian's underlying position was that he believed the teaching of Chan Buddhism benefited and supported Confucian teachings and scholars. The examples of Yang Yi, Hu Anguo, and Zhu Xi reinforce this argument.

Through the study of the *Jianzhou hongshi lu*, we realize that Jianzhou is an area deeply connected with Chan Buddhism and Confucianism. According to the local history of Jianyang and several leading Buddhist *denglu*, the well-known Chan master, Mazu, had dwelt there in the Fojiling temple for a period of time during the Tang dynasty. However, there is no direct evidence from the Tang period to support this claim. Despite whether Mazu actually dwelt in the area or not, the Fujian area has become an important area for the spread of Chan Buddhism to other regions and nations. Mazu and Zhu Xi both had associations with Jianzhou in a profound way and their special affiliation with Jianzhou is exclusive; we are not able to find this same

phenomenon in other places. Additionally, Yuanxian and his *Jianzhou hongshi lu* provide us with a realization of how influential Jianzhou was to the history of Chan Buddhism even to this day. By virtue of Yuanxian's efforts, he attained impacts on the religious world and mundane society beyond the Jianzhou area.

This study of the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* is just a preliminary investigation; there are still many other aspects regarding the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* waiting to be discovered such as, comparisons among the four categories, further investigation within the Miraculous Events and Behaviors section or the masters under the Venerating Virtue sections, and further explorations regarding Mazu and Zhu Xi within and outside the Jianzhou area. Yuanxian also compiled a *denglu* genre work, the *Ji denglu* 繼燈錄 (the *Successive Records of Lamp*) later in his life and finished the compiling in 1651.<sup>420</sup> It includes the Caodong lineage; it starts with Qingyuan's 青原 descendants, the 16th generation Tiantong Rujing 天童如淨 and up to the 29th generation, a total of 41 Caodong Chan masters.<sup>421</sup> Besides the Caodong masters, Yuanxian also includes the Linji masters; it begins with Nanyue's descendants, the 18th generation up to the 27th. At the end, Yuanxian enclosed seven of dharma lineage unknown Chan masters. This *denglu* work is in a traditional *denglu* style, which records the generation to generation lineage and the biographies of Chan masters and their encounter dialogs. It will be interesting to compare *Ji denglu* with the *Jianzhou hongshi lu*.

I believe that Jianzhou is a religious and intellectually rich area full of history for both Chan Buddhism and Confucianism. The *Jianzhou hongshi lu* provides us with a crucial part of the whole picture.

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<sup>420</sup> X86.0495b15.

<sup>421</sup> X86.0496b02.

## Chapter Seven Conclusion

The 17th-century in China was an intriguing period; politically, it was a time of instability and chaos; economically, it was a period of vigorousness and new opportunities. Intellectually, the printing industry became well developed and there were more literati than ever before taking the civil service examinations. Religiously, not only was Christianity able to become rooted in China but Buddhism also was able to be revived and the syncretism of the Three Teachings became a substantial trend. Within the Buddhist communities, Buddhism also went through some vicissitudes and through the endeavors of many of the Buddhist masters, Buddhism once again received great attention. Furthermore, there were the intertwining phenomena of the School of Mind and Chan teachings. The literati and gentry also enjoyed immersing themselves in both Confucian studies for the civil service examinations and Chan Buddhist philosophies in their leisure time.

Buddhism in the Fujian area had historically received patronage from rulers and had had minor disturbances when there were persecutions or rebellions in the nation. However, during the late Ming period, the fortune of Fujian changed. Politically, due to its location, Fujian became a region suffered from the Japanese pirates and frequent wars between Ming loyalists and Qing troops. Economically, the revenue of the Buddhist monasteries was also being taken to pay for the cost of military expenses. Intellectually, the School of Mind also had influenced the Fujian area; one of the famous followers of the Taizhou School, Li Zhi, was from the Fujian area. His iconoclastic behavior and teachings were great concerns to Yuanxian and orthodox Buddhist followers. However, Buddhism in the Fujian area survived the Ming-Qing transitional period and continued to develop. Many of eminent Buddhist masters from the Fujian area were able to



propagate Buddhism to foreign countries, such as Japan, Southeast Asia, and Taiwan. The legacy of the Buddhism in the Fujian area was, therefore, spread out of the region to benefit others. I believe that the efforts of Yuanxian and his later generations all made substantial contributions to the growth of Buddhism not only in Fujian area but also around the international regions.

Yongjue Yuanxian lived in a dynamic era which provided him with stimulation as well as frustrations that influenced him to alter his pursuits. Yuanxian came from a deeply rooted traditional Confucian family; many of his ancestors were honored as great Confucian scholars and some also had profound connections with the well known Neo-Confucian scholar, Zhu Xi. Yuanxian studied and was trained as a Confucian scholar in early life; he took the civil service examination and passed the county level examination at age 20. During that time, he had great aspirations to model himself on the ancient eminent Confucians. He once remarked that he modeled Yan Hui and Min Ziqian for moral cultivation and followed Zi You and Zi Xia for scholarly pursuits. This remark indicates Yuanxian's focus was on the cultivation of morality and scholarship and not on the pursuit of obtaining fame or wealth.

Yuanxian's interest in Buddhism started when he was staying in a monastery to study for the civil service examination and heard the monks' chanting of the *Lotus Sutra*; he was evoked to further study the Buddhist sutras. In his autobiography, the *Inscription of Longevity Stupa*, Yuanxian explicitly expounds that he preferred a simple and tranquil life. Implicitly, the unfavorable climate of the Ming political conditions made Yuanxian and many other well-educated literati alarmed to consider climbing up the ladder to become a bureaucratic official in the Ming court. Eventually, Yuanxian decided to change his pursuits from Confucianism to Chan Buddhism and received the tonsure ceremony from Caodong Chan master Huijing at the age of 40. After Huijing's death, Yuanxian followed his dharma brother, Wuyi and received the

precepts from him. At the age of 46, he experienced great enlightenment. Meeting with Chan master Wengu Guangyin at the age of 55 was an important turning point in Yuanxian's life. Wengu acknowledged Yuanxian's talent and strongly encouraged him to come out of seclusion to contribute his abilities to the world. At the age of 57, Yuanxian received full ordination from Chan master Wengu and also assumed his first abbot seat at the Gushan monastery. Thereafter, Yuanxian continued as an abbot of four different Buddhist monasteries until his death at age 80, making his dharma age 41.

When we investigate Yuanxian's life we realize that his life was deeply influenced by the phenomena and trends of his era. One of the essential effects from the Ming period was Yuanxian's decision to alter his profession from Confucianism to Buddhism. As mentioned above there were explicit and implicit reasons, but during the late Ming period, the literati did not have many options for their choice of careers. They were to either pursue a path of Confucian studies to become a governmental official or withdraw from it. If the scholar decided to withdraw from the track of Confucian studies, he did not have to become a monk of course, but for Yuanxian, he had an affinity with Buddhism and also preferred a simple and serene life style. I believe Yuanxian made a wise choice for his life. After becoming a monk, he was able to not only cultivate his virtues and constantly apply his Confucian scholarly training to compose numerous Chan literary works to benefit the religious communities but also offer services and support to the mundane world and lay Buddhists. By being a Buddhist master, Yuanxian was able to propagate Chan Buddhism and to express his philosophical rationalizations and teachings. As a prolific writer, he left various writings for his and later generations which provide needed guidance and influences to the super-mundane world of religion and society. Meanwhile, Yuanxian was able to follow the Mahayana teaching of compassion and contribute humanitarian

help to the people in society. Even though Yuanxian gave up the Confucian path, he still demonstrated the Confucian's dedication of observing one's responsibility to benefit and serve society. He lived an exemplary life of his belief, which was that the functions of both the super-mundane and mundane worlds could and should be achieved simultaneously.

In the *Yiyan*, Yuanxian clearly reveals his inclination to uphold Buddhism from the point of view of a Buddhist master. He utilizes his Confucian knowledge to skillfully disapprove of Mencius's teaching of human nature as good and the Neo-Confucians' belief of the power of heaven and the concept of the Great Ultimate. Yuanxian points out that Confucius' teaching of regarding the elimination of four things is similar to the concept of the absence of "self" and also compliments Yan Hui for his ability to control "self" and achieve a stage of without "self." He criticizes Mencius for placing the "self" as the main focus which suspended the teaching of Confucius' non-self tradition. Even though Mencius taught people to be benevolent and righteous, Yuanxian considered that these virtues still required a high level of non-self to reach true compassion and uprightness in order to be without hypocrisy.

However, on another occasion, Yuanxian utilizes Mencius' teaching of the feelings of compassion when a child is going to fall into a well to discuss the practice of female infanticide. This does not indicate, however, that Yuanxian ultimately agreed with Mencius. I believe that the reason for Yuanxian to mention Mencius' teaching on this occasion was due to Mencius' example of a child falling into a well was well known to most commoners. As an abbot, Yuanxian was concerned about people and society; he employed various methods to help and teach commoners despite his own personal preferences. Yuanxian's work *To Refrain from Drowning Female Infants* shows his care for society and his willingness to help defenseless female infants.

The syncretism of the Three Teachings had a substantial position during the Ming period. The Ming founder advocated this idea and one of Zhu Yuanzhang's intentions was to provide stability for his newly formed dynasty. However, his method of combining of the Three Teachings was to place Confucianism at the center and use the Confucian teachings as the norm.<sup>422</sup> Yuanxian's points of view are expressed in the *Yiyan* regarding Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism as well as the trend of harmonizing these three teachings. By virtue of the *Yiyan*, Yuanxian demonstrates his firm attitude of upholding Buddhism and disapproving of the trend of combining the Three Teachings. I believe, there were reasons for Yuanxian to be against the well-received trend of harmonizing the Three Teachings and to have a different viewpoint than most of the Buddhist masters of his times. First, he intended to manifest the supremacy of Chan Buddhism; Yuanxian criticized Confucianism and Daoism for their subordinate teachings in comparison with Buddhism. To Yuanxian, Buddhism should be above the other two teachings and not as same as them. Second, it was necessary for him to point out the differences among the Three Teachings to protect and prevent the Buddhist teachings from further degeneration due to Wang Ji's teaching of the Taizhou school. This school had become such an iconoclastic popular trend that some literati became confused and deviated from the orthodox Chan teachings. Third, Yuanxian understood that the hope for the syncretism of the Three Teachings was unrealistic. He points out that the only way to accomplish this goal was to be without self, meaning that only if people could reach enlightenment. Fourth, in order to revive Chan Buddhism back to its glory days, it was necessary to advocate the supremacy of Buddhism and elevate the caliber of Chan clergy to attract outstanding cultivators.

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<sup>422</sup> Yan, Yaozhong 严耀中. "Lun san jiao dao san jiao he yi 论三教到三教合一" in the *History Teaching* 史学研究, no. 11, 2002 (serial No. 468), 5-10.

Through the *Yiyan* and his other various writings, Yuanxian demonstrates himself as a vigorous defender and reviver of Buddhism. His distinct points of view regarding the syncretism of the Three Teachings also make him stand out amongst the other Buddhist masters. One of Yuanxian's lay disciples once remarked that Yuanxian would express his true points of view which other people, from ancient times until the present, did not dare to express. This lay disciple continued on to state that Yuanxian was qualified to carry the dharma-seal of the Shouchang sub-lineage and suitable to be extolled as the pillar of a declining era.<sup>423</sup>

Yuanxian also took to heart the rectification of evil customs and the assistance to the suffering commoners. He composed the *To Refrain from Drowning Female Infants* to condemn the merciless custom of female infanticide in the late Ming society of Fujian. He spoke out for the defenseless female infants and compared their strong grievances and crying out loud of injustice with the unexpected and unseasonal frost in the summer to describe the awful sentiment those girls endured. In Yuanxian's work, he points out five rationalizations people used to drown their infant girls. Three of the five reasons were connected with the traditional Confucian concepts of a patrilineal society; females could not carry out the sacrifice to the ancestors, females could not bring honors to the family and they would not be able to continue the family lineage. I believe the teachings of Confucius were valuable and helpful to society to some extent. However, the later generations of Confucian thinkers took the teachings of Confucius to an extreme and made them become burdens and unreasonable to females. Yuanxian hoped that he could turn the unmerciful trend of female infanticide into a merciful behavior of rescuing the infant girls in society. Unfortunately, aside from the influential Confucian patrilineal tradition, the sinified and unconventional Buddhist concepts of "this life" and "next life" of a soul also played an unanticipated and intertwined role in the discriminatory practice of female infanticide

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<sup>423</sup> X72.0385b24.

in Chinese society. The trend was so strong that even the legal regulations and religious retributive teachings could not convince those who wanted to commit infanticide. Yuanxian's writings indicate that he paid close attention to what occurred in society and also put his efforts towards rectifying this heinous social trend in the Fujian area.

On another occasion, Yuanxian also demonstrates his compassionate sentiments of the Mahayana teachings. At an old age, just two years before passing away, he could not bear to see many war time refugees in the Fujian area suffering and dying from hunger and disease and so provided them with food, medicine and shelter. He and his disciples from the Gushan monastery also buried more than two thousand of the deceased refugees. His selfless act not only made a remarkable impact on the society of his time but also made a lasting influence on his later Gushan Chan descendants. His merciful humanitarian act became the foundation for later Gushan Chan lineage in Taiwan to make great contributions to succeed the "Humanistic Buddhism" and provide reliefs to the world in the modern times. Yuanxian's later generations of Gushan were able to evolve Yuanxian's humanitarian act into one of the well organized multinational Buddhist organizations which is called Fa Gushan 法鼓山 or Dharma Drum Mountain. The focus of Dharma Drum Mountain is on teaching Buddhism to the public with a goal of improving the world for the benefit of all sentient beings. It has temples and affiliated centers in 14 different countries.<sup>424</sup> Through his descendants and the formation of the Dharma Drum Mountain, Yuanxian had a great impact on both the mundane and super-mundane worlds.

The *Jianzhou hongshi lu* is a record of the eminent Chan and Confucian masters who propagated or cultivated Buddhism and who also had connections with the Jianzhou area during the Tang to Ming periods. Yuanxian compiled it in order to provide good Buddhist models for

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<sup>424</sup> Schak, David and Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao, "Taiwan's Socially Engaged Buddhist Groups" in *China Perspective*, No. 59 (May-June 2005), 43-55.

later generations to follow and to also reveal the importance of Jianzhou as a stronghold of Chan Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism. This record could also function as a Jianzhou local gazetteer to furnish significant Buddhist figures in the area and supplement the lack of Buddhist information in the government's local records. The *Jianzhou hongshi lu* reveals the importance of Jianzhou of the Fujian area to the religious and intellectual communities of China.

Yuanxian organized the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* to include some eminent Confucian masters in the record. He states his purpose of compiling the *Jianzhou hongshi lu* in the preface which was to provide good exemplars for the later generations to follow. However, I believe there was another purpose and it was to express Yuanxian's underlying belief that the teaching of Chan Buddhism, in fact, benefited and supported Confucian scholars as well as enhanced Confucian teachings. He provides a total of 14 Confucians who had connections with Buddhism and who also lived in the Jianzhou area, including the famous Confucian court officials Yang Yi and Zhu Xi. Yuanxian's *Jianzhou hongshi lu* includes a separate category for Confucian masters, it differentiates this Buddhist record from others. It demonstrates that Yuanxian believed that Chan Buddhism was superior to Confucianism due to his placement of the Confucian masters under the last category of his classification system.

Mazu was a famous Chan Master in Chinese Buddhist history and had profound connections with Jianyang of Jianzhou. Mazu's relationship with Fojiling temple in Jianyang would indicate an undeniable status of Jianyang within the history of Chinese Chan Buddhism. However, Dongfeng Xing could only find historical documentation regarding Mazu's stay in Jianyang after the Tang period but not during it. The connection of Mazu and Jianyang reveals to us how significant Mazu's influence was to the people of Jianyang and how reverently Chan Buddhism was perceived by the people of Jianzhou at the time.

Many of Mazu's disciples from the Jianzhou area later propagated Chan teachings to various areas. Through the efforts of Yuanxian and many other Jianzhou Chan masters, the influence of Jianzhou was tremendous and has continued on since the time Mazu taught Chan in the Fojiling temple, its influence extends beyond the Jianzhou area to as far as many other foreign countries. Due to the teachings of Yuanxian and his later generations of disciples, Chan Buddhism has spread out from Jianzhou to Taiwan, Malaysia and many Southeastern Asian countries. The influence of Yuanxian and Jianzhou are not confined to Jianzhou of the Fujian only.

In the beginning of Chapter One in this dissertation, Zheng Xuan's eulogy precisely portrays Yuanxian. At the end of eulogy, Zheng Xuan makes a remark, "Don't recklessly give your conclusion whether he is a sage or an ordinary person." It is an intriguing statement to end a eulogy with. I believe that Yuanxian perhaps did not want anyone to label him as a sage or buddha. He might have considered himself just doing what his conscience told him to do without concern for worldly praise or assessment. Yuanxian was a person who was not burdened by the desire for fame or wealth. He demonstrated his lack of desire by living seclusively on Mount He for twelve years and covering his head and face with dust, intending even to decay with the grass and trees. Yuanxian did not plan to come out of seclusion but was urged to do so by Chan master Wengu to contribute his talent to the world.

Yuanxian was a person who placed emphasis on the cultivation of one's virtues. We notice it from his remark when he was young, that he would like to follow Yan Hui and Ming Ziqian for his moral cultivation. At the same time, he was also a person with great aspirations to contribute his abilities to the benefit of society. He once expresses statements regarding the equality between the Shakyamuni Buddha and Confucius. Some people take those statements as



a sign of Yuanxian's support for the combination of the Three Teachings. However, I believe that since Yuanxian perceived influences from both Buddhism and Confucian traditions, he understood the crucial relationship between two teachings. He realized that without engaging in society, one cannot transcend the mundane world and vice versa because they are meant to be accomplished and actualized at the same time. I consider this realization is the ideal vision of Yuanxian. During his life, he demonstrated to us that he tried to achieve his vision of actualizing the functions of the super-mundane world while engaging simultaneously in society.

After Yuanxian became a Caodong Buddhist master, he demonstrated by virtue of his writings, his unyielding mindset of upholding Buddhism against Confucianism and Daoism as well as the tendency against syncretism of the Three Teachings. His only dharma heir remarked that it was because of Yuanxian's efforts that the succession of the Shaolin Chan lineage was able to continue. One of Yuanxian's lay disciples also said that Yuanxian was a courageous defender of Buddhism; when defending the dharma teachings and saving the declined world, he would not withdraw a bit even though a sharp sword was held in front of him. Throughout his life, Yuanxian manifested by his own actions his feelings of compassion towards the sufferings of others and a willingness to take up social responsibilities to help people in communities. Yongjue Yuanxian presented himself as a strong-minded defender and reviver of Buddhism and demonstrated the ideal of actualizing the functions of the super-mundane religious world while simultaneously being engaged in society to benefit people.

The study of Yuanxian has brought us many valuable facts not only regarding Yuanxian's background, personality, personal life and possible reasons of his conversion from a Confucian scholar to a Buddhist master but also reveals to us the phenomena of 17th-century Chan Buddhism, society, and intellectual communities. Especially we recognize the challenges that the

Buddhist masters had to face and what they had endeavored to confront predicaments. However, this study is just a preliminary investigation towards the numerous works of Yuanxian. There is an abundance of Yuanxian's writings and legacy waiting for us to study. I believe we can further discover many more valuable facts regarding the influence, development, and transformation of 17th-century Chan Buddhism in China as well as in the local society of Fujian from Yuanxian's remarkable and numerous Buddhist works.

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