

EXTRAORDINARY WOMEN DAOISTS IN CHINA: PAST AND PRESENT

by

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(Under the Direction of Carolyn Jones Medine)

ABSTRACT

By comparing Chinese women Daoists in the Tang dynasty, the Song dynasty and the present society, insights of the women's roles in Daoism are presented. Questions such as how women Daoists were portrayed, how women Daoists interacted with men, and how women Daoists extended the influence of Daoism in Chinese societies were explored. The women Daoists diligently pursued spiritual transcendence through fasting, hidden virtue, good works, ingesting elixirs and most importantly with determination and persistence. They manifested both yin and yang characters in their lives. Their different religious paths are all working towards one truth, to be union with the Dao.

INDEX WORDS: Women Daoists, Tang dynasty, Shangqing Daoism, Song dynasty, Quanzhen Daoism, Hidden virtue, Yin, Yang, Compassion, Transcendence

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the thesis, I will present and analyze the lives of five women Daoists in their specific cultural and social environments. Huang Lingwei and Bian Dongxuan were followers of Shangqing Daoism from the Tang dynasty in medieval China. Priestess Wole and Audun Hongdao were Quanzhen nuns from the Song dynasty. In addition, I interviewed Li Siheng, a 21st century Quanzhen nun who is born after the founding of the People's Republic of China. I will argue that these women demonstrate a balance of yin and yang characteristics—not just the yin that Livia Kohn in *Women in Daoism* (Kohn 2003, 246) argues is their predominate character. This balance of yin and yang makes these women acceptable both to Daoist thinkers and Confucian leaders—particularly Confucian imperial figures. This transcendence of or balance of Daoism and Confucianism signals how each of these women, in her particular way, transcend the cultural roles of and for women in medieval China, offering a model of liberation but within acceptable religious practices.

As in many cultures, very few women achieved “public recognition” in traditional China (Kirkland 1991, 47). Even women with extraordinary talent were limited only to life in the household (Kirkland 1991, 47). In medieval China, women were to be entirely dependent on other people and were not allowed “complete authority” surrounding their actions (Bumbacher 2000, 506). According to the Confucian classic, *Liji* (*The Records of Rites* 禮記), there are three kinds of obedience that a virtuous woman should follow: “when she is young,

she is bound to her father and mother; when she grows up, she is bound to her husband; when she is old, she is bound to her sons” (Bumbacher 2000, 506). Marriage was arranged by her parents or older brother. “The foremost duty of a wife was to give birth to children,” ideally a male heir (Bumbacher 2000, 507-508). Women were educated that “the right conduct of a woman requires that, unless there is great reason, she should not go out of her husband’s house” (Bumbacher 2000, 507). In medieval China, one area outside the household in which women could become involved was the religious life. Most cultures provide women a certain degree of freedom in religious activities, but few offer women the positions of leadership. Many religions prohibit women from becoming priestesses or clergy. The Daoist tradition in medieval China reveals a rather different picture of women practitioners (Kirkland 1991, 47).

The Celestial Master tradition set up the earliest Daoist institution in the 2nd century CE. In this tradition women seemed to enjoy a great deal of equality with men. There were corresponding titles for both women and men practitioners. For example, they call the beginners daonan 道男 or daonü 道女 (“men of the Dao” or “women of the Dao”). The advanced practitioners were named daofu 道父 or daomu 道母 (“Daoist father” or “Daoist mother”). The position of libationer, “the primary clerical office in the Celestial Master tradition,” was held by both women and men (Kirkland 1991, 47). For example, Wei Huacun 魏華存 (251-334 CE) respectfully called “Lady Wei” had been one of the libationers during her life in the Celestial Master tradition (Kirkland 1991, 48). The equality between men and women in the earliest Daoist tradition laid a good foundation for women to be considered as equal members of the religious community for the later Daoist traditions. People always look

back at the first Chinese Daoist institution to be inspired to uphold the heritage of equality between the genders.

Flourishing in the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE), a later Daoist tradition called Shangqing 上清 (Supreme Clarity) Daoism was established through revelations to chosen individuals from celestial beings. Sacred scriptures were revealed from the celestial being to the individual (Kirkland 2004, 86). Lady Wei was the celestial being who transmitted the scriptures to the founder of Shangqing Daoism and was venerated as the matriarch of the tradition. In Shangqing Daoism, there was also sexual equality on an institutional level. The Tang women Daoists held the same clerical titles as their male counterparts. Despite the examples cited here, there are few historical sources giving much attention to the lives of religious women. The two Tang women Daoists Huang Lingwei and Bian Dongxuan discussed in this thesis were among the few who did achieve recognition (Kirkland 1991, 47).

In the following Song dynasty (960-1279 CE), under the influence of Neo-Confucianism, there was “more attention to the segregation of the sexes.” There was “increased emphasis on patrilineality” (Ebrey 1993, 265). The practice of footbinding spread. Literacy increased among women, but generally they were encouraged to use it to educate their sons (Ebrey 1993, 265). However, a few women were recognized for their talent in poetry such as the renowned woman poet Li Qingzhao 李清照. She was considered a more superb poet than her husband who was a well-known poet. In the Song dynasty, a new form of Daoism, Quanzhen Daoism 全真 (Complete Perfection), attracted many women and offered a way for them to pursue their religious goals in a monastic setting or in lay society.

In modern China, after the founding of the People's Republic of China (1949-present), movements abandoned "backward and feudal" Confucian values and traditions oppressive to women. Women are called "half of the sky." Men and women hold equal rights and responsibilities by law. Women are encouraged to participate in every academic, social, economical and political activity. They are recognized for their contributions to all aspects of the society. Women have more freedom to choose to practice Daoism.

CHAPTER 2

TWO TANG DYNASTY WOMEN DAOISTS

In this chapter, the lives of two women Daoists from the Tang dynasty are analyzed and compared and the studies of several leading scholars, including Russell Kirkland, Livia Kohn and Suzanne Cahill, are evaluated.

Huang Lingwei

1. Life of Huang Lingwei 黄靈微 (640-721 CE)

There were two renowned scholars and court officials in the Tang dynasty who wrote about Huang Lingwei's life. Yan Zhenqing (709-784 CE) a younger contemporary of Huang wrote an earlier version of her biography (Kirkland 1991, 48). Based on Yan's account, Du Guangting 杜光庭 (850-933 CE) wrote a slightly different version of biography of Huang and collected it into his book titled *Records of the Assembled Transcendents of the Fortified Walled City* (*Yongcheng jixian lu*) 壙城集仙錄 (Kirkland 1991, 65). Huang Lingwei was called by her contemporaries "the Flower Maid." Huang and two other women Daoists in Du's book who were also called "maid", a word suggesting celibacy and were all "wandering ascetics," living "far from the comforts of family or convent" (Cahill 2006, 119). There is no record of Huang Lingwei's birthplace, and we know neither any information about her family nor social class. According to the biography by Yan Zhenqing, she was interested in the Dao

from her youth. At age twelve, she was ordained a female Daoist. At age eighty, she was still as energetic as a young lady (Kirkland 1991, 49).

The highlight of Huang's life was in her fifties, when she rediscovered and restored the shrine of "an earlier Daoist luminary," Wei Hua-cun who was called as "Lady Wei" (Kirkland 1991, 47-48). Lady Wei was "buried with great dignity" at her time, but in over three hundred years, her tomb site was neglected and became difficult to locate in the wilderness (Kirkland 1991, 48). With the help of a Daoist who had the ability to communicate with spirits and deities, Huang located and repaired the shrine complex. She also built a hut to live in and meditated by the side of the shrine (Kirkland 1991, 51-53). She later had a few disciples. At age eighty, she predicted her own death and asked her disciples not to nail her coffin shut but just to cover her body with a piece of red silk. Then she died overnight without suffering from any illness. Her disciples later found out that her coffin was empty and a hole was in the ceiling big enough for a person to pass through (Kirkland 1991, 55). The disappearance of her body proved that she obtained transcendence through liberation by means of the corpse (Kirkland 1991, 68). The transcendents who achieve "liberation by means of the corpse" leave the world by leaving "their physical bodies or a substitute behind when they ascend into the other world" (Kohn 1990, 2). Each anniversary of her death, numinous light and sound would appear around her former dwelling (Kirkland 1991, 56). When Yan Zhenqing was appointed as the Prefect of this region, he heard Huang's story and was inspired to set up a stele to commemorate her life (Kirkland 1991, 57). This served as a source for later scholar Du Guangting (Kirkland 1991, 69).

2. Russell Kirkland's studies on Huang Lingwei's life

In medieval China there were few female Daoists who achieved public recognition within the religious community or beyond. Huang Lingwei “gained significant attention for her rediscovery and restoration of the shrine of an earlier Daoist luminary Wei Huacun” (Lady Wei) (Kirkland 1991, 47).

Russell Kirkland studied two slightly different biographies of Huang Lingwei written by her contemporary, scholar and government official Yan Zhenqing, who was also among the four greatest calligraphers in Chinese history. The themes of the two biographies are similar: they emphasize the “saintly character” of Huang and the “divine nature” of her mission to restore sacred sites (Kirkland 1991, 48).

Kirkland points out that, although Yan was a contemporary of Huang Lingwei, information about her private life, such as her family background and her life before she restored the shrines of Lady Wei are missing (Kirkland 1991, 49). The absence of such information is not because the central character of the biography is a woman. The biographies of Tang male Daoists illustrated in Campany's book titled *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth: A Translation and Study of Ge Hong's Traditions of Divine Transcendents* were similarly brief, lacking any details about their private life (Campany 2002, 333-334). Generally speaking, in traditional Chinese literature, biography is not as elaborate and detailed as some other forms of writing. In the Tang dynasty, poetry is the model because it is very concise but yet profound. All of these characteristics of literature in the Tang dynasty may explain to the brevity of the biography. Another reason for the scarcity of information on the life of Huang was probably due to the Confucian emphasis on a person's societal

responsibilities. One is not interesting as an independent individual but one part of the whole society. The missing information of Huang could be because of the lack of data on her previous life experience. It could also be possible that Yan intentionally left her parts of life out of the biography in order to highlight her later achievements.

In Yan's time, the typical virtues of women were filial piety to her parents and in-laws and loyalty to her husband. Such virtues were never attributed to Huang (Kirkland 1991, 50). There is no evidence that she ever married. She is by no means a conventional woman figure (Kirkland 1991, 50).

Huang Lingwei's story shows a very different picture of social orientation than our long-held image of medieval women who relied on male authorities. From careful study of Huang's biographies written by Yan, we learn that she could travel freely without any social restrictions. It is clear that Huang made the decision of seeking the shrine of Lady Wei with no objections from others (Kirkland 1991, 64). She dwelled in caves or constructed huts by herself. This demonstrates that she is a "self-reliant" person (Kirkland 1991, 63). This kind of character earned respect from a male scholar, Yan, who wrote her a biographical account and a eulogy on the site where she dwelled (Kirkland 1991, 64; 57).

In medieval China women tended to be thought of as subjects to their male counterparts defined by "Confucian" values. In the biographies, Yan left out any authoritative figures with whom Huang could be associated. The only help she sought was from Master Hu who had the ability to impress spirits and demons. Master Hu was hardly a Daoist authority himself (Kirkland 1991, 52). In the biographies, Yan took pains to demonstrate that the discovery and restoration of the shrines by Huang were "divinely sanctioned" (Kirkland 1991,

52). Master Hu expressed that it was Huang's destiny to find the shrine of Lady Wei. Later Huang was continuously instructed by the divine spirit to discover more sacred sites attributed to Lady Wei. During her meditation by the side of the shrines, there were unusual fragrance and numinous sound. So Yan seems to emphasize that Huang's mission is a "self-defined" one, but with divine sanction. (Kirkland 1991, 52)

The interaction between Master Hu and Huang Lingwei can provide us some information on the relationship between women and men in the Tang dynasty. The Confucian classics *Liji* 禮記 (*the Records of Rites*) states that "nannü youbie 男女有別": "There is distinction between men and women." It was normally considered that women and men should be treated differently. "Nangeng nüzhi 男耕女織": "men plough the fields and women weave" was an agricultural community's ideal of peace and order. Men and women have distinct responsibilities. "Nannü shoushou buqin. 男女授受不親" means "In giving and receiving, men and women should not touch each other" according to Confucian rules of etiquette. Under these Confucian teachings, women and men seem to be strictly defined and restrained. They cannot interact freely without realizing and upholding their gender differences. In the biography of Huang, however, we see a free interaction between Master Hu and Huang Lingwei, outside of Confucian convention. We read that Master Hu "conversed with her for several days," and he "climbed the mountain with the Maid and gazed out upon the western side" (Kirkland 1991, 51). Apparently the interaction between the two was considered nothing but a "professional" interaction. It did not raise any questions from anyone in the Tang dynasty.

Furthermore, these events were inscribed on the tablets erected for other people and future generation to respect. It is an intriguing fact that Yan, a successful scholar and significant political figure in the Tang society, paid tribute to Huang, a woman Daoist cleric. Yan seems very comfortable with Huang's character, with her unconventional behavior, and with the degree of independence (Kirkland 1991, 50; 64). According to Kirkland, Huang lived by the shrine of Lady Wei for thirty years taking care of the sacred sites. She never reported her good works to local officials (Kirkland 1991, 72). Huang's selfless act in pursuing the Dao transcended the difference of genders and what she achieved at the end transcended the distinction of human and divine.

3. Suzanne Cahill's studies on Huang Lingwei's life

Suzanne Cahill's study of Huang Lingwei's life is based on the book titled *Records of the Assembled Transcendents of the Fortified Walled City* by Du Guangting. The book was written during the turmoil of the last decades of the Tang dynasty. It was the first and the only text that was dedicated exclusively to the lives of female Daoist goddesses, holy women in or before the Tang dynasty (Cahill 2001, 19). Du Guangting, the author of the book and an imperial court official, was also an eminent member of Shangqing Daoism in his generation. The "Fortified Walled City" is the name of the capital city where Queen Mother of the West resides. Since the Queen Mother of the West is the leader of all of the female transcendents, Du named his collection of biographies after her home (Cahill 2006, 27).

According to Cahill's research, Huang Lingwei was from southeastern China where Shangqing Daoism flourished (Cahill 2006, 119). Kirkland notes that one of the differences between the earlier version of the biography by Yan Zhenqing and Du Guangting's biography

is that Du tells us that before Huang decided to seek out the Lady Wei's shrine, she visited holy places all over the country seemingly protected by divinities. Huang was also revered as a deity by the ordinary people (Kirkland 1991, 66). We do not know the source of Du's information on Huang's life before her fifties, since such information was not found in Yan's biography. This information implied that before Huang started to look for the Lady Wei's lost shrines, she seemed to already lead a life as a hermit. Huang's life showed that "women as well as men could live as hermits" in the Tang dynasty (Cahill 2006, 119).

There were several major themes that Du wanted to demonstrate in his book. The mutual supportive and beneficial relationship between the Daoist institution and the Tang imperial government was one of them (Cahill 2006, 119). The biography mentioned that the emperors of Tang paid homage to the recovered Lady Wei's shrines and the site where Huang ascended to the Heaven. The imperial court sent the famous Daoist master and magician Ye Fashan 叶法善 (631-720 CE) to perform rituals to revive the sacred shrine. Ye "established a convent and ordained seven nuns" there (Cahill 2006, 120). For decades, the site remained active due to this imperial patronage (Cahill 2006, 120).

Cahill also suggests that by adding the information about the author, the court official Yan Zhenqing at the end of the biography of Huang Lingwei, Du allied Daoism with Confucianism. Doing so, Du promoted Daoism and intended to weaken the influence of its rival, Buddhism, a foreign religion in the Tang dynasty (Cahill 2006, 119; 122). The fact that Yan Zhenqing, an elite member of the society who was a Confucian scholar, paid homage to Huang, an extraordinary woman Daoist, showed that eminent members of Confucianism and Daoism shared common values.

Another major theme in Du Guangting's book was on the hidden virtue that Huang Lingwei revealed by restoring the shrine of the matriarch of her religion. The hidden virtue leads to the reward of her transcendence (Cahill 1990, 25; Cahill 2003, 255).

Cahill illustrated several marks of sainthood of Huang Lingwei defined by the Daoist tradition. First, a saint can avoid and reverse the aging process. Due to Huang's successful Daoist cultivation and her hidden virtues, even when she was eighty years old her skin was as fresh and tender as that of a baby's (Cahill 2006, 119). Second, a saint has remarkable energy and self-reliance. Cahill points out during the process of restoring Lady Wei's shrine, Huang Lingwei only asked for help from master Hu about the possible location of the altar. But she uncovered and repaired the shrine complex single-handedly, by her own effort (Cahill 2006, 120). Third, a saint has a harmonious relationship with animals. For example, Huang Lingwei built a hut and devoted herself to meditation (Cahill 2006, 121). She was at ease in the wild, seemingly always protected by the deities. She pulled out an arrow from a wounded elephant and the elephant brought a lotus to Huang in gratitude (Cahill 2006, 121). Finally, a saint can transcend death. Huang Lingwei predicted her own death and transcendence. Knowledge of one's time of death demonstrates extreme control of one's body. "Her corpse remained uncorrupted" and released a pleasing fragrance indicating another sign of sainthood (Cahill 2006, 121). Lightning struck when she ascended to Heaven. The phenomenon signifies one's sainthood in that the Heaven was responding to her transformation. Furthermore, two sacrificial gourds beside her coffin sprouted and bore peach-like fruits. The peach symbolizes immortality. The sacrificial gourds shooting sprouts symbolizes the power of reversing death. Every anniversary of her transcendence, the site

where she lived still remained numinous, for example, “nature put on a light and sound show” (Cahill 2006, 122).

4. Livia Kohn’s studies on Huang Lingwei’s life

In her book *Women in Daoism*, Livia Kohn compared Huang Lingwei to those imperial concubines who entered convents because of the death of their husbands. The widows vowed to keep loyalty to their husbands and joined the convent. In some cases, life in the convent would shield the concubines from political battles for power within imperial families (Kohn 2003, 123; 124). The widowed women under traditional “Confucian” values were expected to keep their chastity and to remain widows for the rest of their lives. Memorial archways were built to praise their chastity, for all women in the community to emulate. The widows entered the convent with a great deal of determination.

It seems a bit strange to compare this kind of dedication to Huang’s. The concubines’ joining the convents was somewhat passive compared to Huang’s natural disposition to the Dao from a young age. Huang was neither under social pressure nor did she gain political advantage. Huang had “superior piety and exceptional courage, who possessed great humility and confidence ...indomitable energy and very self-reliant ...dedicated to her own self-realization” (Kohn 2003, 124).

Kohn indicates that women Daoists’ “most fundamental characteristic” is their “cosmic nature of yin” (Kohn 2003 , 246). According to popular definition, yin is originally defined as the shadow side of the mountain and is later extended to characterize the feminine: soft, gentle, still, flexible and passive. Yang is originally defined as the bright side of the mountain and later is extended to be used for the characteristics of the male: masculine, hard,

stubborn, active, un-negotiable and aggressive. I do not agree with Kohn's view that "the most fundamental characteristic of Daoist women is their cosmic nature of yin" (Kohn 2003 , 246). I would say both yin and yang characters can be found in Huang Lingwei, based on her life story.

A few things can be considered as yin characteristics of Huang Lingwei in her life story. Yin in Huang's life was characterized as feminine, gentle, nourishing, something hidden. First, she was described as very attractive and graceful when she was young. This means she had typical yin character of feminine beauty. Second, her compassion to animals shows her yin character of gentleness. She pulled an arrow out of an injured elephant. Third, Huang Lingwei went to restore Lady Wei's shrine and never wished to publicize it despite of the hard life she endured, living in the danger of the wildness. Her hidden virtue was to contribute to the Daoist religion with no demand of any kind of recognition and reward. This is also a yin virtue Laozi recommends that people possess. "One completes one's work but does not dwell on it" 功成而不居 (*Daode jing*, Chapter 2; Mair, 1990, 60). The hidden virtue shows a yin nature.

Huang Lingwei however is also tough, independent, strong, and in constant movement. Huang Lingwei's yang characters are manifested through her independent traveling and single-handedly restoring Lady Wei's shrines and tomb site. She built huts and lived alone in the wilderness. The way she made decisions independently without relying on a male's guidance in her life is a yang characteristic in her time and age. Her strong will to accomplish her work in restoring the shrines of Lady Wei is another yang trait, as well as her

diligent practices of meditation. All these were deemed typical masculine traits in that day and age.

Her transcendent body at the end is considered as purely yang. The body and mind of the transcendentals in Daoist terms are considered as purely yang. Daoists believe that ordinary people who die without Daoist practices will become ghosts. Ghosts (gui 鬼) are purely yin in nature whereas transcendentals are purely yang in nature. A living human being who has not transcended is a mixture of both yin and yang, but one could refine one's yin in one's body to become purely yang.

5. Concluding Analysis of Huang Lingwei's Life

According to all the studies on Huang Lingwei, we can see that Huang did have freedom to travel across the country, and to make decision about her own life to seek out a sacred site of her religion. We do not know how much this kind of freedom was available to other women in the Tang dynasty. We have seen the openness, tolerance, and even esteem towards Huang's behavior from her contemporaries. The stereotypical view that traditional Chinese society with its Confucian values is oppressive towards all women should be re-evaluated. While Confucian values may have silenced most women, a few were able to turn societal norms to their own advantage and to become exemplars for both Daoists and Confucians. Her life story also has a religious, political and ethical use.

The Tang scholar Yan Zhenqing did not emphasize the imperial patronage to Huang Lingwei as Du Guangting did. It is because the author Yan does not have the same agenda as Du. Du himself was a Daoist master who wanted to establish a supportive and beneficial

relationship between the Daoist institution and the imperial government (Cahill 2006, 119).

He wanted to attract more imperial patronage to his own religion rather than Buddhism.

Kirkland points out that the imperial government paid little attention to Huang Lingwei since her life was not recorded by the imperial historians in the Tang dynasty. He noted that this was due to the lack of Huang's contribution to enhancing the stability and imperial prestige of the Tang government (Kirkland 1991, 71). If Huang Lingwei had no significance to the Tang imperial government, why did Yan take pains to write her biography? It seems that Yan was not politically oriented—that is, he did not intend to use Huang's life story to praise the emperor, though such biographies of transcendents were used to show Heaven's favor to the current reign (Kirkland 1991, 71; Cahill 2001, 19). In the same way, Yan probably did not address his work only to the women in the society. The biography written by Yan did not distinguish or emphasize Huang's gender because there were no womanly "Confucian" virtues attributed to her such as filial piety or loyalty to one's husband (Kirkland 1991, 50). On the contrary, he seemed very much awed by her character and deeds, which were something beyond her gender, even beyond human, as is shown from the "mythic overtone" of her biography (Kirkland 1991, 64). We do not have sufficient resources to show what the women's social status was alike in the society in Tang China, but in ethical and moral terms, Huang's life story presents an extraordinary example that could be followed by both men and women who wanted to pursue a religious goal outside of the family.

Huang Lingwei had the unusual characters of independence and determination, which allowed her to fulfill her choice of life. She decided to seek the shrines of the Lady Wei. She wandered in the mountains and woods. She built hut and lived in the wild. She

single-handedly restored and maintained the shrine. All of these were her decisions and were executed successfully. The author Yan probably was personally impressed by her character and thus was inspired to write the biography and inscribe the stele.

Let us turn back to the question of the oppression of women in medieval China. Raphals suggests that in both China and the west, there are scholars who believe that the traditional medieval China oppressed women, educating them to be subservient and reliant to men (Raphals 1998, 1). One cannot deny the reality of patriarchy, but one also cannot deny that Huang transcended it. What is the atmosphere for Huang's character to develop? Perhaps the environment of a Daoist convent, since Huang Lingwei was ordained from an early age of twelve, allowed her to escape the patriarchal requirements of marriage and motherhood, so that the character with which she was naturally endowed could develop—away from an oppressive society that would not allow such a character to grow.

Huang Lingwei's independence and determination to fulfill her mission are something that cannot be labeled as fully feminine or yin in her day and age. In her character, there is a compassionate part, a yin nature—demonstrated when she pulled the arrow out of the elephant. She restored Lady Wei's shrine in a sense manifesting a yin nature of nourishing and creating. All of these were part of Huang Lingwei that cannot be separated from the unity of her character, from what made who she was. And that unity is the fundamental nature of her character, which demonstrated both yin and yang, not just "cosmic nature of yin" (Kohn 2003, 246).

Bian Dongxuan

1. Life of Bian Dongxuan (邊洞玄) (628-711 CE)

In Bian Dongxuan's biography, Du Guangting described young Bian Dongxuan as "lofty and pure ...humane and compassionate" (Cahill 2006, 155). According to Du Guangting, Bian Dongxuan collected grains and rice to feed the hungry birds and sparrows in frosty and freezing winters. When Bian Dongxuan was fifteen-year-old, she planned to enter the Dao and "refined her body by cutting off grains and nourishing her vital energy" (Cahill 2006, 155). But her father and mother, who loved her being a benevolent and compassionate person as well as a filial daughter, would not allow it. While it was the age for her to get married, she vowed not to marry but to take care of her parents instead. After her parents died, she mourned their deaths and joined a Daoist temple. After joining the convent, she was very good at weaving, and she worked from dawn to night without taking rest. She fasted for thirty years, but whenever she had some extra income, she would use it to purchase and store the five grains. People wondered why she purchased and stored the food since she had fasted for so many years. She smiled and did not explain. Every day she spread food to feed the wild birds and the rats. She also distributed food to people in famine. During the time Bian Dongxuan lived in the temple, there were no rats harming things. This was interpreted by the people who were close to Bian Dongxuan as an example of her hidden virtue reaching response to all creatures (Cahill 2006, 155-156).

Also according to Du Guangting, Bian Dongxuan was devoted to elixir drugs and was eager to experiment with them even when the drugs made her deadly ill. She "continued to fast, ingest elixirs and distribute food to the needy" (Cahill 2006, 153). After many years, a

Daoist immortal showed up at the temple and brought Bian Dongxuan the elixir drug of immortality. Due to her forty years of fasting and hidden virtue, she was given the high-grade drug and was instructed to prepare for transcendence in seven days. When the day came, she departed on purple clouds, and fragrance filled the courtyard of the temple. Bian Dongxuan ascended to Heaven in the broad daylight, and it was witnessed by many people. Inspired by her, the emperor's sister, Princess Jade Verity, entered a convent in 711 (Cahill 2006, 156-160).

2. Suzanne Cahill's studies on Bian Dongxuan's life

Cahill considers the life story of the Bian Dongxuan to be among the most powerful ones in the entire book of Du Guangting's *Records of the Assembled Transcendents of the Fortified Walled City*. The story illustrates the major themes of Du's book. Bian Dongxuan inspired the imperial patronage and made it possible for the author to connect between Daoism and the Tang royal family (Cahill 2006, 149).

Cahill believes that the life story of Bian can dialogue with modern issues such as female disorders, like anorexia. In China, accounts were reported occasionally of some highly advanced Daoist masters or even Buddhist monks who fasted for a long period of time and still kept healthy and energetic. Over the centuries, fasting (bigu 辟谷 “to restrain from grains”) was considered as a normal exercise for Daoist practitioners. Fasting in Daoist terms—and perhaps by Bian Dongxuan herself—was to purify one's body in order to still one's mind. Fasting was not considered a psychological disorder sometimes related to an incorrect image of one's body. Cahill also pointed out that both women and men in medieval China fasted and kept celibate. Apparently food or sensual desires were obstacles for Daoist

practitioners from both genders. Men often had to “give up wealth, public positions, and family ties” (Cahill 2006, 150). In the same way, women gave up household life and family connections when they joined a convent.

According to Cahill’s analysis, the author Du Guangting gave hidden lessons through the story of Bian Dongxuan in that Shangqing Daoism emphasized self-cultivation through hidden good works, fasting, and ingesting elixir drugs. Due to these practices, Cahill believes that Bian Dongxuan was the ideal Shangqing adept and was, therefore, highly regarded by Du Guangting. Bian achieved “the highest form of transcendence available to human beings: ascending to heaven in broad daylight” (Cahill 2006, 149).

Du Guangting also took pains in depicting Bian Dongxuan’s hidden virtues such as her compassion to animals and hungry people. In this way, compassion was not a virtue exclusively held by Buddhists (Cahill 2006, 150).

Another detail in Bian Dongxuan’s life story illustrated that a claim of Mahayana Buddhism was equally held dear by Daoism: when an old man, a very accomplished Daoist master, refused to transcend until he helped another person to transcend with him. This old man was comparable to a Bodhisattva in the Mahayana Buddhism. One could not only seek one’s own salvation; he or she out of compassion would help others to achieve liberation as well. This is something in the story that illustrates Du Guangting’s ongoing argument with Buddhism: that compassion was not exclusively a Buddhist claim (Cahill 2006, 150).

Du Guangting writes that Bian Dongxuan fed the starving animals during the cold winters. Cahill pointed out that the harmonious relationship between her and the animals signified the quality of a saint (Cahill 2006, 121). We will remember that, in Huang

Lingwei's life, she pulled an arrow out of the body of a wounded elephant. The elephant came back and brought her lotus root in gratitude. Bian Dongxuan used her income, earned from weaving, to buy food to feed rats and birds. The rats, to repay her compassion, did not bother the nuns' food stores. Another detail showing her hidden virtue was when the other nuns suspected her secretly eating during the nights. Bian Dongxuan did not respond but kept feeding the animals or the people in need of food.

The compassion and the harmonious relationship between human and animals demonstrate that the people who follow the Dao should be like the Dao. *Daode jing* Chapter Two says that "Dao creates the ten thousand things but does not discriminate" (wanwu zuoyan er buci) 萬物作焉而不辭 (*Daode jing* Chapter 2). The term "ten thousand things" is mentioned seventeen times in various verses of *Daode jing*, indicating the Daoist holistic view of nature. The "ten thousand things" refers to the overwhelmingly large amount of things and includes all lives in the cosmos. The human being is only one among the many life forms. The "ten thousand things," including human beings, are considered equally important under the Heaven. *Daode jing* Chapter Two also argues that one should do work without expecting reward or talking about that work. "Hidden virtues" means doing good deeds without advertising it, without claiming credits and without arguing with other people even when misunderstood. *Daode jing* Chapter Two says that the sage of the Dao "completes his work but does not dwell on it" (*Daode jing* Chapter 2; Mair 1990, 60). Bian did exactly like this.

Cahill demonstrates that another theme of Du's book was to ally with Confucianism. Many current scholars think that Confucianism and Daoism were rivals in the history of

imperial China (Cahill 2001, 20). Du Guangting, an eminent member of Shangqing Daoism did not consider Confucianism as the rival of his religion (Cahill 2006, 196). Furthermore, he was a court official, who was brought up in a society in which Confucian teachings had a deep impact, for example, one needed to study all major Confucian classics to pass the civil service examinations to get his office position. Confucian virtues such as diligence, filial piety and loyalty were held dear to him. For example, to be loyal to one's authority will also apply within a religious institution. Sometimes, one could say, it would be difficult for Du Guangting himself to separate the Daoist part or Confucian part of his own mind.

Du tied the character of Bian to "Confucian" family values such as filial piety, taking care of one's aged parents, and mourning them after they died. Bian's womanly "Confucian" virtue also was shown in her skills in weaving (Cahill 2006, 151). According to the Chinese cultural and economical tradition, "nangeng nüzhi" men plough the fields and women weave. Yishi 衣食 (clothes and food) is considered as most important to people's life. Men plough the field to produce food. Women weave to make clothes. Skill in weaving was an ideal women's virtue. In a festival still celebrated at every seventh day of the seventh month on Chinese Lunar calendar, girls ask for blessings to be skilled at weaving and needle works. To be skilled at weaving and needle works is still considered as a very ideal women's virtue even in modern China.

After the death of her parents, Bian fulfilled her daughterly duty. When she became a nun, she "turned out to be a skilled and industrious weaver," fulfilling her duty in the convent (Cahill 2006, 151). Being a filial daughter, skills in weaving, diligent and responsible in her duty are all "Confucian" virtues in Bian's character. As Cahill points out, the weaving activity

in the convent could provide us a clue of the financial income of the female religious institutions during the Tang dynasty. Weaving was not only a domestic industry for women staying at households. It was also a way for the nuns to support the religious life in the Tang dynasty (Cahill 2006, 151).

According to Du Guangting, another practice that Bian Dongxuan faithfully engaged in was taking elixir drugs. She was fearless when she ingested any drugs that she encountered (Cahill 2006, 153). Even when she would get really sick after ingesting the drugs, she never regretted her action or complained. She continued to try out any drugs that she obtained with great faith and reverence. When she received any drugs, she always burned incenses, made offerings and prayed in front of the highest gods to show her respect and gratitude (Cahill 2006, 156). This could be seen as the influence of the Confucian idea of following li 禮 (ritual) in her life. All her hard work and hidden virtues lead to her final transformation. An old man who visited Bian's convent one day brought the elixir for her transformation.

One scene worth noting in Bian's biography was when the old man entered Bian's room without permission. Bian was not annoyed at all by his rudeness and did not judge his appearance. Other nuns judged the old man from his shabby clothes and unhealthy appearance. They could not believe what he said and offered. When Bian Dongxuan met him and was offered the elixir, she ingested it with total faith. It turned out, at the end, that she achieved the elixir of transcendence. Her extraordinary insight and wisdom echoed the beginning of the biography which portrayed her as "clever and perceptive" (Cahill 2006, 155).

When the old man and Bian Dongxuan discussed the price of the elixir, Bian had no material wealth to purchase the drug, but more importantly, her forty years of doing good deeds, feeding animals and the needy, were counted as valuable as the drug. This shows that Bian's material wealth was not as important as her hidden virtues.

At the end of the story, due to Bian Dongxuan's influence, the Tang emperor was intrigued by Daoism. He publicized the story of Bian by honoring her convent and erected a stele to record Bian's transcendence. The emperor also allowed his younger sister Princess Jade Verity to join the convent. This shows Du Guangting's attempt to associate Daoism with the imperial government (Cahill 2006, 150). Before Bian Dongxuan's ascent to Heaven, she paid a visit to the emperor. Another detail that showed Du's attempt to connect the emperor with Daoism lay in the conversation between the nuns of Bian's convent and the old man. The old man revealed that the current emperor was one of the immortals in the Heaven who came down to earth in turns to rule the earth (Cahill 2006, 153). This not only associates Daoism with the imperial house but also elevates the status of the Tang emperors to be Daoist immortals.

3. Livia Kohn's Studies on Bian Dongxuan's life

In Kohn's book, *Women in Daoism*, she listed Bian Dongxuan as the most recognized example of a woman Daoist who practiced outer alchemy. Outer alchemy was a Daoist practice of ingesting drugs made of "artificial substances" to facilitate transcendence (Kirkland 2004, 85). Because some ingredients of the drugs were poisonous, a new model of "spiritual refinement through meditation" called inner alchemy was developed (Kirkland 2004, 109). Kohn used Bian as an example to show that both men and women practiced outer

alchemy in the history of Daoism (Kohn 2003, 200). She cited both the biographies of Bian Dongxuan in *A Broad Record from the Era of Grand Peace* (太平廣記 *Taiping guangji*) and Du Guangting's *Records of the Assembled Transcendents of the Fortified Walled City* to talk about Bian's life.

In the Bian Dongxuan's biography collected in *A Broad Record from the Era of Grand Peace* of the Song dynasty, there was no information on Bian's hidden virtue or on her feeding hungry birds or animals. There was no information on her diligent weaving in the convent. The short entry only mentioned her love of ingesting elixir for forty years. It also included the old man who brought her the elixir to final transformation. Some of Kohn's description of Bian's life was not found in either biography, such as Bian's being expelled from her family and taken in by an official to work as a weaver. In another short biography translated by Cahill in *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian* 歷世真仙體道通鑒 there is another very different account of Bian. Bian was described as a Daoist master who enjoyed drinking wines and traveled extensively to purchase elixir drugs (Cahill 2000, 216-219). The common theme of all three accounts of her life was her passion for ingesting elixirs.

In the conclusion of Livia Kohn's book *Women in Daoism* she indicates that "the most fundamental characteristic of Daoist women is their cosmic nature of yin" (Kohn 2003, 246). I do not agree with this view. Once again I will demonstrate both yin and yang characters within Bian Dongxuan's life story.

Yin is usually characterized as feminine, gentle, nourishing, and something hidden. A few things can be considered as yin characteristics of Bian Dongxuan in her life story. First, when she was young, Bian Dongxuan was described by Du Guangting as "lofty and pure,

humane and compassionate”—which means she had typical feminine character of purity and gentleness. Her compassion and gentleness were further illustrated when she saved even the smallest unimportant creatures in danger and forgot her own hunger or thirst. She fed the birds in the freezing winter. After she joined the convent, she continued to purchase food to feed the animals and people in need. Her compassion to all the creatures was like a mother who nourishes life but does not brag about it, and she did not argue even when people misunderstood her. These virtues thus are called hidden (yin) virtue (“yinde 陰德”), specifically using the character yin (陰) here. She also had the typical womanly virtue of filial piety to her parents. Even when she wished to join a convent from very young age, she still stayed at home to take care of her parents first. After her parents died, she buried them and mourned them for a long time as the Confucians taught a filial person should do. She eventually entered the convent and showed other womanly virtues such as skillful in weaving and diligently serving her new family members, the fellow practitioners in the convent.

Yang characteristics are something hard, tough, masculine, strong and in constant movement. Bian Dongxuan’s yang characters manifested most through her unchanging and unyielding pursuit of the Dao. Her strong determination to join the Daoist convent manifested when she refused to get married. A girl who chose not to get married was not to follow a womanly virtue in her day and age. She fasted until she almost starved. She diligently wove without taking rest. She continuously fed the animals and birds for thirty years. She constantly tried any elixirs she could get without thinking about the consequences. These characteristics are typical yang characteristics, revealing a great deal of determination and persistence in contrast to the yin characters of flexibility and obedience. Her intense fasting

and ingesting drugs were a very important part of the practice that lead to her final transformation. Her transcendent body, at the end, in Daoist terms is considered as purely yang.

4. Concluding Analysis of Bian Dongxuan's Life

What gave Bian Dongxuan the reward of the highest form of transcendence: “ascent to heaven in broad light?” The old man who gave Bian Dongxuan the elixir to transcendence uncovered the secret. He said that:

“To be able to love the Way and in addition to refine your practice so as to keep the essential spirits from retreating, to be diligent for a long time in these matters, to avoid being enticed by sounds and colors, moved by fame and profit or led around by right and wrong, but to keep your heart as it was in the beginning, unchanging as metal or stone: that is difficult!” (Cahill 2006, 157)

The old man said that there were not many who pursued the Dao with determination and who can cultivate the Dao years after years without being distracted by sensual desires, material wealth, and fame. Bian Dongxuan achieved transcendence at the end because of her unchanging heart, as “metal and stone.” Her body was also transformed to something never corrupted like the “metal and stone.”

Cahill's studies on Bian Dongxuan's life are very extensive. They are based on her study of the text *Records of the Assembled Transcendents of the Fortified Walled City*. Kohn's study on Bian Dongxuan was very limited. But one could draw certain conclusion based on her claim that women Daoists' “most fundamental characteristic” is their “cosmic nature of yin.” We can see that her view is problematic when applied to Bian Dongxuan's life.

The *Book of Changes*, both a Daoist classic and Confucian classic, says “天行健，君子以自強不息” that the gentleman should behave like Heaven (Tian 天), always making

unceasing effort to improve oneself (*Book of Changes*, 1). Heaven in Daoism is always considered as yang, and it has the characteristic of yang: unceasing movement towards perfection. In this sense, Bian Dongxuan epitomizes the yang character. The other part of the teaching is “地勢坤，君子以厚德載物” where the gentleman should also behave as the earth, dealing with things with the great virtue of compassion and tolerance (*Book of Changes*, 1). The earth is considered as yin. The *Book of Changes* teaches that the gentleman should be perfect at both characters. Bian Dongxuan is a good example of one who has both characteristics of yin (compassion) and yang (unceasing efforts to perfection).

Comparison and Contrast of Huang Lingwei and Bian Dongxuan

1. Commonality between Huang Lingwei and Bian Dongxuan

Both Huang Lingwei and Bian Dongxuan were followers of Shangqing Daoism. They were compassionate towards animals. They both possessed “hidden virtues” in their own way. Huang restored Lady Wei’s shrines without claiming credit for herself. Bian stored and fed the birds and animals without publicizing it. Both of them restrained from grains and looked young and vital when they were at old age. Neither of them got married or had children. They both transcended to heaven at the end of their religious practices.

2. Difference between Huang Lingwei and Bian Dongxuan

These women, though similar, achieved their transcendence in different ways. Huang Lingwei was a hermit living in the wilderness of the forest. Bian Dongxuan lived in a convent. There was no account of Huang taking care of her parents or any other “Confucian” women virtues. Bian was praised for the female virtue of filial piety to her parents and skills in weaving. Huang practiced meditation beside Lady Wei’s shrine. But she did not ingest any

elixir drugs as Bian did. That could be the reason why Bian achieved a higher form of transcendence than Huang.

Both women, operating within religious limits—as hermit and nun—and practicing, each in her way, Daoist and Confucian values, stands as a model figure for Daoism.

CHAPTER 3

QUANZHEN DAOISM AND QUANZHEN NUNS

The two Song women Daoists Wole and Audun Hongdao who will be presented in Chapter Four and the modern woman Daoist Li Siheng who will be presented in Chapter Five are all adepts of Quanzhen (Complete Perfection) Daoism. In this chapter, historical information of Quanzhen women's monastery and practices of Quanzhen nuns is provided to promote a better understanding of these women's lives.

History of Quanzhen Women's Monastery

In twelfth century north China, Quanzhen Daoism was founded by an aristocratic scholar named Wang Chongyang 王重陽 (also called Wang Zhe). He had seven disciples often called “the Seven Perfected Ones.” Among the Seven Perfected Ones, there was a woman Daoist master Sun Buer 孫不二 (1119-1182 CE). Sun Buer set up the first women's center in Shandong Province where many Daoist convents flourished later (Kohn 2003, 152). All the Quanzhen nuns Kohn described who set up the early institutions came from “an aristocratic or official background” and were widowed during the Mongol invasion of China in the early thirteenth century (Kohn 2003, 155). They were often joined by their daughters in the religious life. Due to their education and devotion to the Dao, they soon erected their own institutions and became leaders of their own convents. They were “granted titles and honors” by the contributions they made—such as restoring the devastated monasteries during the war,

setting up new institutions and “guiding younger nuns” on the path of realizing the Dao (Kohn 2003, 155).

Parallel to the extraordinary women Daoists in mid-east China in Shandong Province were the two non-Han Chinese women Daoists, Priestess Wole and Audun Hongdao from the northern part of China. They were not ethnically identical to the southern women Daoists. Nonetheless, they achieved the same level of honor as the Han Chinese women Daoists. For example, Priestess Wole was appointed the regional leader of Quanzhen Priestesses in Shanxi Province in 1240s CE (Chao 2003, 4). A similar honor was given to a Han Chinese woman Daoist who was appointed to oversee the religious affairs in the area of Shandong Province. She had done exemplary work and contributed to the restoration and maintenance of the glory of the largest Daoist convent in Shandong Province in 1290 CE (Kohn 2003, 152). Evidently, there was no discrimination against the ethnic origins of a woman Daoist when they were only recognized by their contributions to the religious community.

After the Song dynasty, Daoism received more control and regulation from later imperial governments. In the following Qing dynasty (1644-1911 CE), according to Kohn,

All religious affairs were controlled by the Ministry of Rites, which now included a Bureau of Daoist Registration as well as various local offices that issued and monitored ordination certificates. Ordinations were allowed only in specially designated monasteries and were held only once every three, five, or ten years. The number of monks and nuns permissible in the country was restricted according to the government’s needs and the ordination of men was limited to between the ages of fourteen and twenty so that they would not join to evade the draft and taxes, while women were not permitted to become nuns when still of child-bearing age (Kohn 2003, 156).

These administrative measures standardized the practices among Daoist institutions and their followers (Kohn 2003, 157).

Quanzhen Lineages

There were a number of “formal lines and lineages” in Quanzhen Daoism (Kohn 2003, 157). I interviewed a nun in the Quanzhen Daoist lineage, Li Siheng. The temple where Li Siheng lives was originally a male Daoist temple. It belonged to the Longmen lineage which traces back to one of the patriarchs of Quanzhen Daoism, Qiu Chuji. Qiu Chuji was another famous disciple of Wang Chongyang. He traveled to inner Mongol to explain Daoism to the famous Chengis Khan.

According to Oyanagi, cited in Kohn’s book, each Quanzhen lineage has exerted significant influence in the area around “one specific temple or mountain” (Kohn 2003, 157). A specific lineage poem (cipai 词牌) describes the essence of their doctrine and practice. Disciples from the same generation share a common character in their name from the poem. This can be used to tell which generation a disciple is from (Kohn 2003, 157). There is no particular poetry claimed by the temple where Li Siheng lives. But their Daoist names all have a special character shared by the same generation of the disciples. For example, Siheng’s generation all shares the character si 嗣 meaning “to inherit, to carry on the tradition” while her master’s generation all share the character gao 高 meaning “advanced, great, deep and profound.” In Chinese families, there is a similar tradition of sharing one character or one part of the name among all children of the same generation. The Daoists adopted this tradition and made their religious lineage a new kinship among their followers.

Within the main lineages of Quanzhen Daoism, the nuns led a spiritual life following the great founders (Kohn 2003, 158). Kohn comments that historically the nuns’ lives “were simple, stark, and often hard, but they served one main purpose: overcoming the limitations

of this world, finding perfection, joining the mystery, and ascending to immortality” (Kohn 2003, 158). Similar images of the life in the monastery were described by Siheng herself. She thinks the life in her temple is very simple and well disciplined. The nuns grow their own vegetables in the backyard. They do still strive for the goal of achieving immortality, according to my conversation with Siheng.

Basic practice

Before the Quanzhen nuns joined the religious community, “they had to pass through a period of family service before dedicating themselves to the Dao. For this preparatory period, a general sense of humility and dedication were encouraged” (Kohn 2003, 159). Kohn listed in her book several written rules for the women when living in a household before they join the monastery (Kohn 2003, 159). One text called *Ten Rules for Women’s Alchemy* from the Qing dynasty listed ten rules that a woman should follow. The beginning of their Daoist cultivation started from in household life since the girls in Qing dynasty still did not have the opportunity to work outside a household. The girls were expected to be filial to their parents if they were single and to be filial to their in-laws if they were married. The girls were expected to be yielding, receptive, compassionate, loyal and generous toward others. The girls should also be very diligent in housework, have good manners, be respectful to teachers, elders, and should be modest and humble to all people young or old. They should be “cooperative and empathetic” to neighbors and other villagers (Kohn 2003, 159). Based on my interview with Siheng, I can see these virtues in her. Before Siheng entered a temple and became a nun, she took care of her sick mother and her younger sisters and cooked for the

whole family. She was a very filial daughter and dedicated to her siblings. She expressed her disappointment in the people in her village who do not treat their parents and siblings well because of their lack of material wealth. She went out to work in big cities when she grew older, to support her family and herself. She was respectful to her master in the temple and made sure other people who came to the temple were the same.

In the seventeenth century, during the Qing dynasty, the abbot in Baiyun Guan (the White Cloud Abbey), the headquarter of Quanzhen Daoism, established three ranks of Daoist ordination with three levels of precepts (Kohn 2003, 160). The texts set up ethical rules and regulations for the monks and nuns who live in monasteries essentially in the same way (Kohn 2003, 161).

Chuzhen jie 初真戒 (*The Precepts of Initial Perfection*), precepts for the first rank of Daoists, men or women, are not to engaged in killing, lying, stealing, ingesting intoxicating substances, and engaging in sexual misconduct. These were basic rules possibly adopted from early Buddhist precepts. There were ten further rules that more specifically asked the Daoist monks or nuns to be loyal and filial, benevolent to others. There were an additional nine rules particularly for women: to have “loyalty, filial piety and chastity,” “to be gentle, compassionate and honest” and not to join “public ceremonies, banquets and other festivities that might pollute the senses” (Kohn 2003, 162). These virtues were very similar to the “Confucian” virtues expected from a girl in traditional Chinese society. These virtues are still considered to be some of the most feminine and pleasant characteristics that a girl should have, especially for a girl like Siheng who is from a rural area of China.

After people had cultivated these virtues inside a household, if they decided to leave home to join the religious life, they had the solid moral foundation to lead a religious life. The practitioners would then develop higher level of virtues including respect for teachers and being serious about the Dao. These rules began to emphasize the determination to pursue the Dao as expressed in the *Nüdan shize* 女丹十則 *Ten Rules in Women Alchemy* (Kohn 2003, 163).

As you enter the Dao and take up cultivation practice, make a vow [to pursue it] for as long as you live in this body or even for several lifetimes. Never lose that firmness of mind and painstaking determination (Kohn 2003, 163-164).

Monastic life

Now, there are men and women practicing in the same temple like where Siheng lives. Some temples are dedicated entirely to women (Kohn 2003, 169). In the Bill Porter's book *Road to Heaven*, a nun named Chuanfu, became a Daoist nun at age seventeen switched to Buddhism at age twenty (Porter 1993, 113). Siheng started out as a Buddhist nun and later switched to Daoism. A woman Daoist in 4th century CE named Ji Huiyan did the same (Bumbacher 2000, 496). It seems that it is very common for people to switch between the two religions after they have practiced one for a period of time. And it seems that there is no discrimination in the Daoist or Buddhist community just because one once practiced the other religion.

In our interview, Siheng talked about how she was initiated as a nun. She went through formal ordination witnessed by her fellow members of the temple. She confessed her sins in front of the image of her patriarchs. She was given the texts of precepts and vowed to be the follower of the Dao. These procedures seem to be standard in the initiation of nuns in

Quanzhen Daoism in different regions of China (Kohn 2003, 164). The organization of the monastery strives to follow the traditional rules closely.

After the initiation, Siheng joined the other members in the morning and evening services. They read the scriptures and meditate during the services. *Qingjing jing* (*The Classic of Clarity and Stillness*), Siheng reads everyday is a very common scripture for Quanzhen Daoists. As Kohn pointed out, some lineages of nuns might have their own scriptures to study (Kohn 2003, 166). In Siheng's temple, besides reading *Qingjing jing*, they read the scriptures on how to cultivate and refine the elixir of immortality following the works of the patriarchs of their lineage, such as *Wuzhen pian* (悟真篇 *Chapters on Awakening to the Truth*), *Cuixu pian* (*Chapters on the Green Emptiness* 翠虚篇), etc. The texts are particularly studied within Siheng's lineage and are not translated into English. The master transfers the teaching in the texts to the disciples under proper rituals.

It is very important to repent one's sins in their monastic life either for the beginning level of the nuns or the intermediate level. The daily curriculums of confession of one's sins are required for both levels of nuns (Kohn 2003, 167).

In all of the aspects of monastic life, I learned from Siheng, men and women are equally treated as the seekers of the Dao. Rules outlined for women encourage many virtues, emphasizing compassion and filial piety before they enter the monastic life. These rules comply with the Confucian virtues for women. These rules suit the need for lay people to practice Daoism at home whether they decide to pursue a monastic life in the future. The rules work towards the harmony that Daoism is striving for within the society. To have these virtues is to contribute harmony within families, harmony within community and thus

harmony in the cosmic world. After they leave the household life and join the religious life, the women's relationship with society becomes their personal cultivation, and the application of what they have achieved in their personal cultivation influences and leads more people to the Dao.

Meditative Practices

Men and women engage in different meditative practices in Quanzhen Daoism. Men practice “subduing the white tiger 伏白虎 (retaining semen)” while women practice “slay the red dragon 斬赤龍 (ceasing menstruation).” This was explained by an elderly nun from Taiwan (Kohn 2003, 167-168). It is virtually the same thing I heard from Siheng, but they probably have different texts on how to practice these techniques based on their different lineages. For instance, according to Kohn, the lineage following Sun Buer, whose key practice is the “inner-chemical transformation towards purity,” begins with the “slay the red dragon” (Kohn 2003, 168).

Hermitage

In Bill Porter's book *Road to Heaven* published in 1990s, he encountered a few women hermits living in the mountains of China in the 20th century. One of the hermits Porter interviewed stayed in a shrine by herself on a mountain. Although the life is very hard, she enjoyed being in solitude (Porter 1993, 45). She is very much like Huang Lingwei who lived alone by the side of Lady Wei's shrine.

Conclusion

From past to present, the Quanzhen nuns carry on the traditions and lead a religious life in a monastery or as a hermit in a mountain. As Kohn writes, “The tradition of nuns continues even today” (Kohn 2003, 171). However, I disagree with what she said that the tradition is “under slightly different auspices, in smaller settings, and certainly with much less political support” (Kohn 2003, 171). I do not see how there is less political support in current China. There was never a constantly strong support for Daoism from any government in Chinese history. The authority has always tended to have the religious community under a certain degree of control, throughout imperial history. Daoism and Buddhism have been political tools for the rulers in imperial China for centuries. If the stability of current regime was not threatened and harmed by the religious community, either Buddhists or Daoists, the government would not interfere much with their activities. The current Chinese government is the same way.

CHAPTER 4

TWO SONG DYNASTY WOMEN DAOISTS

In this chapter, two Song dynasty (960-1279CE) women Daoists' lives are presented and compared. Their characters are analyzed based on the concepts of yin and yang characteristics defined in their day and age.

Priestess Wole

1. Life of Priestess Wole 斡勒 (1181-1251 CE)

According to the account of Priestess Wole's life collected in *Daojia jinshi lue* 道家金石略 (*Records of Daoist Epigraphy*), she showed an interest in Daoism at age seven. At fifteen, she passed a Daoist examination of scriptures and was ordained to be a priestess (Chao 2003, 2). In her forties, she was instructed by Qiu Chuji (1148-1227 CE), one of the founding masters of Quanzhen Daoism, to establish congregations in northern China. Wole traveled to Inner Mongol where she met the family of the Duke of Pu, who became her most important patrons for forty years. She became the Abbess of the Daoist temple the Duke built for her, and the Duke of Pu put his son under her spiritual custody. In her fifties, after the Duke of Pu won a campaign in Xi'an 西安 located in mid-west of China, he invited the priestess to the temple in Xi'an and put his grandson under her spiritual custody (Chao 2003, 1-3).

In her sixties, Priestess Wole achieved higher prestige when she met the current Patriarch of Quanzhen Daoism, Yin Zhiping, when he led the ceremonial reburial rituals of Wang Chongyang, the founding master of Quanzhen Daoism. Yin appointed her as a regional leader of Quanzhen Priestesses in Shanxi 陕西 Province. She also received the honorific title of six-character, designed for Daoist masters, from the state. She accepted many disciples in her life. She passed away when she was seventy (Chao 2003, 3-5).

2. Analysis of Priestess Wole's Character

Priestess Wole's yin character did not manifest in her life story. There are no records of her being a mother or a wife, and it seems she never took care of a household. Based on the story, most of her characteristics described are yang, mostly her having a career in Daoism. She was a religious leader and a teacher respected by her disciples and patrons. In her day and age, traveling long distances was unusual for a female. As a female priestess she assisted in the very important burial ceremony of the Quanzhen Patriarch Wang Chongyang. Based on her outstanding religious work, she was appointed as a regional leader in Daoism. She received an honorific title from the state. She significantly extended the influence of Quanzhen Daoism in the northern part of China. To perform rituals, be a religious leader and receive honors from the state indicate a successful career. A professional career for a woman in imperial China is something very unusual; it is the yang character in Wole's life.

Priestess Audun Hongdao

1. Life of Priestess Audun Hongdao 奥敦弘道 (1199-1275 CE)

Priestess Audun Hongdao's life story was collected in the same book as Wole's, *Daojia jinshi lue (Records of Daoist Epigraphy)*. According to the biography, she lived in a Daoist temple with her mother in early childhood. Her parents were ordained Daoists and were well connected with the second-generation patriarchs of Quanzhen Daoism. During her twenties, she led a very ascetic life, after she learned the methods of self-cultivation from Master Qiu Chuji. She "lived within a small space entirely surrounded by walls and did not go outside of the wall" for more than ten years (Chao 2003, 6). This Daoist practice is called "huandu 环堵." Her extraordinary ascetic life earned her reputation. In her thirties and sixties, she traveled to various temples all over China. Wherever she stayed, she diligently built temple halls and set up statues of the Daoist masters or Daoist immortals for people to worship (Chao 2003, 5-8).

During her seventies, she stopped traveling. All these years, she had gathered a hundred followers and made good connections with both local people and the imperial consorts. Even after she passed away, for a long time she was still remembered by her disciple who set up a stele in memory of her (Chao 2003, 8-9).

2. Analysis of Priestess Audun Hongdao's Character

Audun Hongdao's yin character was not evident in her life experience other than being a female Daoist. Yang characteristics in Audun's life were manifested in her active, diligent practice of Daoist meditation and building temples. Her intense practice showed the dedication to pursue the Dao in a most intense (yang) manner. The practice of "huandu"

earned her recognition and respect as a religious leader. Her life contributed to extend the influence of Quanzhen Daoism. Being a religious leader and receiving an honorary title from the emperor indicated a very successful career in religion. This was not a feminine character, as defined in her time. It is, therefore, a yang characteristic in her life.

Commonality between the Two Song Dynasty Women Daoists

The two women Daoists were both non-Han Chinese and were born in families of high-ranking officials. Moreover, their parents were elite members of Daoist clergy. They were deeply influenced and interested in Daoism from very young age. They were both from the same region (Liaoning Province) in northern China. Both of them met Master Qiu Chuji, one of the patriarchs of Quanzhen Daoism, and received his teaching and instruction. They both traveled to different places to be the heads of several temples. They were both sought after and patronized by elite members of the society. Both of them took some disciples and were respected as great religious mentors. Both of them had a successful religious career which was not defined as a woman's vocation in their age. They share the same yang characteristics in their lives.

Chao shin-yi suggested that learning Daoism is an important channel for the non-Han Chinese women to learn about indigenous Han culture. Wole and Audun played significant roles in bringing Daoism to non-Han Chinese women (Chao 2003, 10). Both women not only contributed greatly to the development of Daoism, but also served as cultural bridges between Han and non-Han Chinese women.

Difference between the Two Song Dynasty Women Daoists

Despite of the commonality between the two women Daoists, there are a few differences in their religious activities. First, Wole had an especially close tie with one family for forty years. Audun did not build such close relationship with a single family. Audun did attract patronage from imperial consorts and elite members of the society. Second, there is no mention of religious practice by Wole. Audun practiced asceticism intensely for years. Other than the practice of “huandu,” she did not lie down to sleep because of ascetic practices. Third, Wole did not travel as extensively as Audun. Audun traveled to at least five regions of China to be abbess of various temples. Lastly, Wole did not build any temples based on the account of her life. Audun diligently built temple halls and set up statues of Daoist immortals.

CHAPTER 5

COMPARING AND CONTRASTING BETWEEN THE TANG AND SONG

WOMEN DAOISTS

In this chapter, the comparing and contrasting of the women Daoists' lives from the Tang dynasty and the Song dynasty are based on their different cultural, social and religious backgrounds in Chinese history.

Commonality between the Tang Dynasty and Song Dynasty Women Daoists

All of the women described had a natural disposition towards the Dao at early age. They were all ordained at young ages, though these were normal ages for ordination during the Tang dynasty (Kirkland 1991, 49) and the Song dynasty (Chao 2003, 2). This could imply that all of these women were eager to engage in the religious life. None of these women was associated with any male partners in her life, and they all led a celibate life. The Tang women Daoists, Huang Lingwei and Bian Dongxuan, were from families with low social status. The Song women Daoists were from families of high-ranking officials. In both the Tang dynasty and the Song dynasty, women were expected to marry and bear children at certain age. To choose to become a Daoist nun was an unusual life decision for all of these women, regardless of social class.

To encourage imperial and literati patronage for the Daoist institutions was also a common theme, both in the Tang dynasty and the Song dynasty because Daoism was under

competition from Buddhism. At the end of Bian Dongxuan's story, Princess Jade Verity was inspired by Bian to join a Daoist convent. This event enhanced the influence of Daoism in the society. Both Audun Hongdao and Wole had patronage from the imperial courts and elite members of the society. The family of the Duke of Pu paid loyal patronage to Wole's temple and Quanzhen Daoism for decades, due to their admiration for Priestess Wole. Several generations of the family were under her spiritual custody. Influenced by Audun Hongdao, the empress and consorts from the imperial court made "extravagant outfits and other offerings to the image of Sagely Mother" that was built and enshrined by Audun Hongdao (Chao 2003, 8).

All of these women Daoists, except Bian Dongxuan, traveled extensively to fulfill their religious missions. This made possible a different style of living than that of the non-Daoist women in the Tang dynasty and the Song dynasty. In both dynasties, women were expected to conform to the Confucian norms: to be virtuous and hard-working, and to be a filial person: "Their greatest duty as loyal subjects and filial daughters-in-law was to bear and raise sons for the patriline into which they married. Their own interests were subordinated to or identified with the interests of their family" (Cahill 2006, 9). Women were expected to stay inside the household. To travel far away or live in the wild forests was something ordinary women who lived in the home could not imagine.

All of the women practiced Daoist asceticism except Wole. Huang Lingwei practiced meditation by the side of Lady Wei's shrine. Audun practiced "huandu" behind the walls for ten years. Bian Dongxuan ingested elixirs and cut off grains for a long time. All of the rigorous practices earned them recognition from others. Bian's practice was recognized by

the immortal who gave her the elixir to immortality. Her ascetic practice earned her immortality in addition to her hidden virtues. Audun's practice earned recognition from a high official in the imperial court who invited her to be the abbess of a Daoist temple where she continued her religious career.

All of these women were considered as spiritual leaders and religious teachers. After Huang Lingwei restored the shrine of Lady Wei, she accepted a few disciples. It was not mentioned in Du Guangting's account whether Bian Dongxuan had any disciples during her life times. But her biography in *Taiping guangji* did mention she had disciples. Both the Song women Daoists described here were the head of various temples. Wole was even appointed as the regional leader of priestesses of Shanxi Province. She helped to perform important ceremonies, such as the reburial ritual of Wang Chongyang with Yin Zhiping. Audun Hongdao attracted nearly 100 followers.

Difference between the Tang Dynasty and Song Dynasty Women Daoists

Bian Dongxuan's parents in the Tang dynasty did not allow her to join the convent. When she reached marriageable age, she was expected to get married. This kind of resistance did not appear in the Song dynasty women's stories. Both the Song dynasty women's parents were not only from high-ranking families but also were accomplished Daoist masters. For example, Audun Hongdao's parents were ordained Daoists, and her father was well "acquainted with three of the six second-generation patriarchs" of Quanzhen Daoism (Chao 2003, 6). Audun's mother was an honorable Daoist master who received the honorific title of six-character. Both of the Tang women Daoists seemed to be from the ordinary families with

no high social prestige. The perception of the lack of different options for women might be the reason that the family of Bian Dongxuan expected her to get married. Marriage, in her class, would promise a more secure life after the parents passed away. Since the Song women Daoists were from the powerful and wealthy families, to enter the convent was not considered a less secure choice than that of the household. As their life stories showed, they secured patronage from social elites and lead a rather financially stable life because of their connections with these elites. For the same reason, Princess Jade Verity joining the convent seems to be a highly celebrated and happy event at the end of Bian's story. Unlike the women from the high social status, Huang Lingwei led a life as a hermit. Bian Dongxuan did weaving to support her religious life.

The different attitudes between the families towards the women's choices may also be due to the different Daoist schools to which they belonged. The women of the Tang dynasty were followers of Shangqing Daoism. The women in the Song dynasty belonged to Quanzhen Daoism. The founding master of Quanzhen Daoism, Wang Chongyang, himself was a well-educated elite member in the Song society. From the biographies of the Wole and Audun, Daoism seems to be welcomed by the non-Han elite members in the Song dynasty. Wole and Audun's parents were ordained as Daoist masters. The Duke of Pu, who is a non-Han Chinese elite was willing to accept a Daoist Priestess Wole and give spiritual custody of his family to her. He patronized Daoism through Priestess Wole for forty years. Audun attracted many imperial consorts who were evidently enthusiastic about patronizing the Daoist temples and immortals.

Hidden virtues such as compassion towards animals or human were essential characters for the Daoists women in the Tang dynasty. This theme was not evident in the stories of the Song dynasty women. Huang Lingwei pulled the arrows out of an injured elephant. Bian Dongxuan fed the birds and sparrows despite the freezing snow and frost. She stored and purchased grains to distribute to the needy. There were no rats harming things during the time Bian stayed in the convent. The ability to communicate with animals was considered a sign of transcendence. There were no such episodes in the women Daoists' life stories from the Song dynasty.

On the other hand, doing good works, such as extending the influence of the Daoism and building temples, was evident in the Song dynasty women's stories. To extend the influence of Daoism is to lead more people to enter the Dao. This is another form of compassion: to lead people to perfection, to be liberated from death and decay. Priestess Wole secured the patronage of the family of the Duke of Pu and contributed to the development of Quanzhen Daoism in various regions of China. As for Audun Hongdao, her name "Hongdao" signified her works in contributing to the popularity of Quanzhen Daoism in numerous areas of China. She traveled extensively in her life and built 200 ying 楹 (pillars) of buildings (Chao 2003, 8). She connected with local people and accepted disciples. These activities are considered as good works even in current Daoist institutions. There were similar statements I got in my interview with a 21th century Quanzhen Master. Master Zhang said that the Daoists should not only focus on self-cultivation, they should also build temples and enlarge the influence of the Daoism in current society.

Another difference from the Tang dynasty women Daoists and the Song dynasty women Daoists lies in the ends of their religious lives. Both of the Tang women Daoists transcended either through liberation by means of the corpse or transcended in the broad daylight witnessed by many people. The author of the biographies of the two Tang Daoist women, Du Guangting was a Shangqing master. His book of holy women has served propaganda purposes. According to Cahill, “He argues for the superiority of Daoism over Buddhism, for the unification of the Daoist church, and for the exaltation of his school over others” (Cahill 2006, 13). His depiction of the unusual behavior and numinous phenomena around the Daoist holy women in the Tang dynasty would attract people to read and spread the message. Books written of Daoists in the Tang dynasty and later dynasties always depicted the Daoist masters as weird and unusual. For example, Sun Buer, in the novel *Seven Daoist Masters*, one of the female disciples of Wang Chongyang, burned off her face just to go to Luoyang to practice the Dao. (Wong 1990, 57)

The Song dynasty women Daoists were not claimed to have ascended to heaven when they died. Even though both of them contributed significantly to Quanzhen Daoism, they were not reported as ascending to heaven at the end of their religious lives.

To achieve transcendence is the goal of both Shangqing and Quanzhen schools of Daoism, past or present. The 21st century Quanzhen Daoist Master Zhang who has an advanced degree in Computer Science still talks about transcendence as his religious goal. For some reason, transcendence through the means of corpse or in broad daylight must be unbelievable and unimaginable for the author of the Song women Daoists’ stories.

CHAPTER 6

A MODERN WOMAN DAOIST LI SIHENG

I interviewed Li Siheng李嗣衡, a 21st century woman Daoist. She is one of the three Daoists living in the Tongbai Temple (桐柏宮). I also interviewed Master Zhang who is the Head of the Tongbai Temple where Siheng lives. As a disciple of Master Zhang, one of Siheng's responsibilities is to assist Master Zhang in arranging for the visitors who come to the temple asking for consultation about their lives. She is also the one who always stays in the temple to answer phone calls, and she manages some of the routine affairs of the temple.

Introduction of the History of Tongbai Temple

Tongbai Temple is located in Tiantai County of Zhejiang 浙江Province in southeast China. It was built at the Tiantai Mountain 天台山where many famous founding masters (zhenren真人) of Daoism cultivated Dao. It was first built by Sima Chengzhen 司馬承禎in 711 CE and was supported by Rui Emperor of the Tang Dynasty (唐睿宗). Sima Chengzhen was a highly regarded Daoist in the Tang dynasty. He lived in Tongbai Temple for thirty years and edited the Tongbai Daoist Canon which is rarely known by many people (<http://www.tttbg.org/>).

In the 11th century CE, the founding master Zhang Boduan張伯端 (984-1082 CE) came to Tongbai Temple and founded the Southern Linage of Quanzhen Daoism there. Because he was attracted by the mountain and the temple's splendid ties with many Daoist

masters of the past, he chose Tongbai Temple to cultivate Dao. The legendary Daoist master, the Yellow Emperor cast a tripod used for refining the elixir of immortality at Tiantai Mountain. Wang Qiao王喬ascended to heaven on the back of a crane in the front of Jade River of Tongbai Temple. Ge Xuan葛玄, the uncle of Ge Hong葛洪, refined elixir in Tiantai Mountain. Zhang Boduan established Tongbai Temple as the founding temple of the Southern Linage of Quanzhen Daoism. The founding temple of the northern lineage founded by Wang Chongyang is the White Cloud Abbey located in Beijing in northern China (<http://www.tttbg.org/>).

In the period of full bloom of Tongbai Temple in the Song Dynasty, the size of the temple covered 3000mu (畝) and had thousands of Daoists. The temple has been through different dynasties and was burned down several times due to warfare and other manmade disasters. It was rebuilt a few times, but it gradually reduced its size to 60mu (畝) in 1950s. In 1958, a reservoir was built to help generate electricity for the people around Tiantai Mountain. Because of the building of the reservoir, most of Tongbai Temple was inundated with water, and many antiques in the temple were lost. After that only a few rooms remained and most of the Daoists left (<http://www.tttbg.org/>).

Despite all of the difficulties caused by the wars and natural or manmade disasters, still, a few Daoists stayed. They strove to preserve the tradition and taught people to cultivate Dao. From the 1950s to the 1980s, Master Xie Xichun, the head of the temple, sustained Tongbai Temple and had quite a few accomplished disciples including Master Zhang. Master Xie passed away in his 90s. In 1992, Ge Huaying who was a disciple of the southern lineage living in the U.S. visited Tongbai Temple and generously donated money to restore the

temple. Today the temple continues to grow by the hard work of Master Zhang, the current Head of the temple. Master Zhang plans to restore some of the original temple halls and start a Daoist academy for anyone from China who wants to learn about the Dao. Now, there are three Daoists at the temple and hundreds of Daoists throughout the country visit every year (<http://www.tttbg.org/>).

An Interview with Li Siheng

1. “What is the routine of everyday life in the temple?”

We get up at 5:00am in the morning. Everyday we have morning ritual. We will read the scriptures such as *Qingjing jing* (*The Scripture of Clarity and Stillness* 清静經), *Xiaozai jing* (*The Scripture on Dispelling Disasters* 消災經), *Huming jing* (*The Scripture of Protecting one's Life-Destiny* 護命經), *Yuhuang jing* (*The Scripture of Jade Emperor* 玉皇經). We also read *Baogao* (*The Treasured Declarations* 寶誥). It is the kind of articles praising how our founding masters cultivate Dao. It is also used to pray for blessing and eliminating the unfortunate. We read the confession article, make confession for ourselves. We will pray in front of our founding masters about our sins in the past, such as the non-loyal, the non-pious, the non-benevolent, and the non-righteous. During lunch hours, we read the *Sanguan jing* (*The Scripture of Three Officials* 三官經). It is also used to pray for blessings, avoid the unfortunate, and eliminate the devil.

At night, we have the night ritual. We will read *Beidou jing* (*The Scripture of Northern Dipper* 北鬥經), which is used to bless and elongate one's life. We will read the *Jiuku jing* (*The Scripture of Salvation of the Suffering* 救苦經), *Shengtian dedao jing* (*The*

Scripture of Ascending to the Heaven and Realizing the Dao 昇天得道經), and the *Jieyuan bazui jing* (*The Scripture of Resolving Evil and Eliminating Sins* 解冤拔罪經) to help the deceased to be redeemed from the torture of hell. During the daytime, we clean the courtyard of the temple and offer service to the visitors who come to the temple to pray or ask for consultation to their problems in life.

2. “What are the common physical exercise and practice in the temple?”

We practice the cultivation of inner alchemy (dan 丹) from the method in *Wuzhen pian* (*Chapters on Awakening to Perfection* 悟真篇). We practice taiji quan (taiji fist 太極拳). We also practice the Daoist *Yijin jing* (*The Scripture of Changing the Joints* 易筋經). It is a Daoist practice based on the principle of maintaining flexibility of one’s body. It is a great method to cure disease and maintain health. For a woman Daoist, the first step of self-cultivation is called to “slay the red dragon” (斬赤龍) which means to stop the menstrual cycle to keep the energy from flowing out of our body.

3. “How does one get initiated to be a Daoist?”

In order to become a Daoist nun, we cannot get married and should keep celibacy. We should abstain from meat and alcohol and we should live in the temple.

In order to learn the Dao, we need to find a master and perform a formal ritual to become his student. We will write an article to report to the heaven court. On the report we write our name and read it in front of the shrines of all the founding masters, and at the end we burn the paper.

4. “How did you become a Daoist and stay in the temple?”

I am twenty-eight years old. I was originally from a village in Zhejiang Province. I am a daughter among six girls in my family in a fishing village. My father is a fisherman. I went to school for a few years; then, I quit and stayed at home to take care of my ill mother and my four younger sisters. My eldest sister is with my grandparents. I usually cooked and looked after the younger sisters, and when I grew a bit older I went out of the village to work in the city. I was very confused and did not know what my future would be like. I was deeply influenced by my grandparents and my parents, who are very faithful believers of Buddhism. They light the incense, retreat, and go to temples routinely. I was always intrigued when I went to worship Guanyin (觀音) in the temple accompanying my parents. I wanted to become a nun. I sadly watched the cruelty between siblings in my neighborhood. Just because some of the siblings have no money, his/her sister or brother will not offer any help to them. They discriminate within the family by who is rich and who is poor. The children are not taking care of their aged parents. The marriage is not reliable either. My parents did not understand why I wanted to become a nun and why I couldn't just have a job and start a family. But I was very persistent. Eventually, my father agreed, he said: “the kid has grown up, she wants to find her own future, let her be.”

In 1996, when I was eighteen years old, I went to Yandang Mountain and became a Buddhist nun where there is a Buddhist temple. I was happy, but I was not satisfied with the teaching they offered. I wanted to find a place where I could cultivate and find peace within myself. I traveled and visited some other temples. By chance I heard the Tongbai Temple where people practice Daoism. They are the people who really care about your growth as a

practitioner of Daoism, not just for tourism and putting on a show. This is where I met Master Zhang who is now the Head of the temple. I attended some gathering he held. I observed how he treated people. I found that he is a compassionate and tolerant person. Some time when people asked strange questions or being disrespectful, he just smiled back. He seemed to me a good master, and I wanted to become his student to learn the Dao. He always said that being a Daoist, we are at the lowest level of society, even lower than the beggar. We don't care about money or fame. We don't compete with other people. We don't think too much about ourselves. We don't mind what others think of us, and we contribute to the society selflessly, with no expectation of reward from others and we don't discriminate and judge others. We tolerant everything and everyone; we just strive to be union with the Dao. After becoming a nun, I realize that compared to the people who are "at home," who have to struggle to make money, worrying about their career, fame and fortune, haggling over every ounce with the benefit and the profit, my life as a Daoist is very peaceful and satisfying to me.

5. "Speaking of Master Zhang: What does he practice every day?"

He practices qigong (氣功) every day if he has some free time. He is very busily engaged in rebuilding the temple halls and meeting with the people who come to consult with him about their personal affairs. He practices the teachings of qigong from five founding masters who are Zhang Boduan (張伯端), the founding master of the southern lineage, Chen Nan (陳楠), Shi Xinglin (石杏林), Xue Daoguang (薛道光) and Bai Yuchan (白玉蟾). Each master wrote a book. They are *Wuzhen pian* (*Chapters on Awakening to the Truth* 悟真篇), *Cuixu pian* (*Chapters on the Green Emptiness* 翠虛篇), *Huanyuan pian* (*Chapters on Returning to the Source* 還源篇), *Fuming pian* (*The Scripture of Returning to Life-Destiny*

復命篇) and *Ziqing zhixuan ji* (*Collection of Pointers of the Profound of the Purple Clarity 紫清指玄集*). The practices are closely guarded secrets, only taught to the students by the master himself who learned from his own master.

Master Zhang's master is Master Xie Xichun who had won the first prize on a competition of qigong (氣功"exercise of the qi") in Zhejiang Province in 1980. Master Zhang visited him and wanted to learn the Dao. Because Master Zhang had quit eating meat and decided not to get married at that time, Master Xie accepted him as one of his disciples. After two years study of qigong with the master, Master Zhang went abroad to the US to pursue his degree on Computer Science. After his graduation, he had a very highly paid job as a computer scientist in Florida, US. He continues to practice qigong every day. Master Xie had three accomplished students, and after he ascended to heaven, Master Zhang's senior female fellow student, Master Ye, became the Head of the temple. After Master Ye ascended to Heaven, Master Zhang has been the Head of the temple ever since 1999.

6. "What else do the Daoists do in the temple?" "What is your responsibility?"

We grow vegetables for our own need, and we learn to use computers and surf on Internet. We sing songs together. I am in charge of admitting the visitors to Master Zhang. I have a reputation of being stern and outspoken when I see people being disrespectful towards the master and not being considerate when they keep asking the master questions even it is very late into the night. I think the master should rest from his busy schedule of the daytime. I will tell the visitors that they should leave the temple, show respect to the master, and let him take a rest. Master Zhang always tells me to be nice to the visitors even under those circumstances.

Analysis of Li Siheng's Character

From Siheng's description of her life, yin is exhibited in Siheng's caring character as a filial daughter and elder sister before she became a Daoist nun. She performed her domestic duty like other girls in China. As a daughter and the elder one in the family, she has to fulfill her responsibility to take care of her parents and siblings. Her disappointment in the behavior of those who are not kind to their family members shows her kind-heartedness and gentleness which are characters of yin.

Siheng's yang characters are her persistence in pursuing the Dao. Her decision to become a Daoist nun in modern China is hard for people to comprehend. Compared to the comfortable and carefree lifestyle common people enjoy, Daoist life is very simple and disciplined. While most people do not know what Daoism is in today China, Siheng is persistent in pursuing the possibility of becoming a practitioner of the religion in face of social bias and questioning. Her parents also tried to stop her from becoming a Daoist nun. Another yang personality is her being in charge of admitting the visitors to the master in the temple. She has a reputation of being stern and direct when she sees people being disrespectful towards the master.

Things Learned about Quanzhen Daoism from the Interview of Li Siheng

The life of Siheng gives evidence that Daoism is a living tradition today in China. From what I have read in other interviews of Daoists living in China, on the website of the Daoist Restoration Society, Tongbai Temple performs similar rituals, such as the daily morning and evening rituals, to other temples (<http://www.taorestore.org>). Confession of

one's sin was a practice of the Celestial Master tradition, the first Daoist institution. This is an element of Daoism practiced from the beginning of the religion to today. Confession of one's sins of non-filial and non-loyal are still practiced in Quanzhen Daoism.

Nowadays, the main financial income of the temple is earned from performing healing services and tourism. Quanzhen Daoism is known to focus on self-cultivation. Healing Rituals were believed to be major practices of Zhengyi Daoism, another surviving form of Daoism in China. This new element of Quanzhen Daoism aiming to suit the need of current society was not anything new in the development of Daoism. As Kirkland noted that for centuries Daoism has always transformed itself to suit the needs of people and society under different social and cultural traditions (Kirkland 2004, 112).

According to the conversation with Master Zhang and the information from the Daoist Restoration Society, many of the Daoists do not obtain an advanced education nowadays. Li Siheng, in this interview, only has an education of second year from elementary school. Master Zhang is a rare exceptional, one who has a master degree in Computer Science. In the history of Daoism, many educated intellectuals played important roles in the development of the teaching of Daoism. The low level of literacy of the Daoists today poses a challenge for modern Daoism to continue to survive and prosper in the constantly changing culture and society.

Women can practice Daoism in today's China as they wish. Siheng, who lives in modern China, has experienced a great deal of equality between men and women. People will not be surprised when they hear that she is cultivating the Dao in a temple with other male Daoists. Besides, the previous abbot was a female Daoist who was appointed by her master

because of her excellence in Daoist meditation. The equality between men and women advocated in modern Chinese society breaks the tradition of “men and women are distinct.” But when Siheng decided to join the convent, her parents objected like Bian Dongxuan’s parents. We can still see that the traditional Confucian ideal is expected from women. The idea that a woman should get married and bear children at certain age still affects how people make or judge life decisions.

One recurrent theme we see from the interview with Siheng is that Confucian values mingle with Daoist practice. Confucian values such as loyalty, filial piety, compassion, righteousness are what Daoists examine themselves during their daily confession.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

All of the women in this thesis had natural interest towards the Dao at an early age. They all made their own life choices of engaging in the religious life in spite of the mainstream image of women being inside a household, raising children and taking care of a family. All of these women Daoists, with the exception of Bian Dongxuan, traveled extensively to fulfill their religious pursuits or missions. Especially in imperial China, this created a different life than that of the traditional non-Daoist women who were defined by the household. To travel far away or live in the wild forests was something ordinary women from imperial China to today could not and cannot imagine.

None of these women was associated with any male partners in their lives, and they all led a celibate life. To marry and bear children was considered as the “normal” life for a woman in the Tang dynasty and the Song dynasty—and even today in China. These women did not take the traditional female (yin) roles in a family but manifested more male (yang) characters by not fulfilling their female duty, as defined in their day and age.

These women Daoists all have a religious career. Except Siheng, they all are said to have accepted disciples. Both Wole and Audun were the heads of various temples. Wole was even appointed as the regional leader of priestesses of Shanxi Province. She helped to perform important ceremonies. These are not typical female (yin) roles in imperial China. By performing good deeds, restoring a shrine of the Daoist luminary, building temples, securing

patronage from the elite members of the society, and extending the influence of Daoism, they contributed to the Daoist tradition as their male counterparts did. These women, in spite of their female gender, lack many essential female (yin) characters defined by their time and society. I will explain my view of yin and yang to bridge this apparent contradiction.

Kohn pointed out that Daoism “links the Dao itself, the force of creation at the foundation of the cosmos, to the female and describes it as the mother of all beings” (Kohn 2003, 1). Dao as the mother of all things appears in *Daode jing* several times. Since *Daode jing* is considered the most sacred text in Daoism throughout the history, it can be concluded that there is a good religious foundation in Daoism where “There is a widespread attitude of veneration and respect for the feminine, honoring the cosmic connection as well as the productive and nurturing nature of women” (Kohn 2003, 1).

However, I do not completely agree with Kohn’s view that, “cosmologically Daoism sees women as expressions of the pure cosmic force of yin.” (Kohn 2003, 1) To say the “cosmic force of yin” held by the women is “superior to yang,” sounds problematic to me (Kohn 2003, 1). According to *Daode jing* chapter 42, “The myriad creatures bear yin on their backs, and embrace yang in their bosoms. They neutralize these vapors and thereby achieve harmony 萬物負陰而抱陽，衝氣以為和” (*Daode jing*, Chapter 42; Mair 1990, 9). The yin and yang here are two complementary elements inherent in all things created by the Dao. Yin and yang interact together to become a harmonious unity. That means in order for anything to be created and survive, both elements are equally important and necessary.

So saying woman is purely yin is not completely correct. Similar views may be developed from a widely read Daoist scripture *Qingjing jing*: “the man is clear and the

woman is turbid, the man is active and the woman is still” 男清女濁，男動女靜（清靜經 *Qingjing jing*, 1). Here it differentiates between men and women. Furthermore, historically, women were expected to play different roles from men in imperial Chinese society. The distinction between men’s and women’s social, economic and political status was very clear. For example, women did and do not usually have a career outside a household. They were and are not allowed to be educated at schools, or to be a teacher. At certain age, they should get married and produce children and continue the husband’s family line. Women were and are not able to take any leadership position in an office because they are supposed to be subjects to their male counterparts. Their major roles in society are to be a filial daughter, a loyal wife, and a nourishing and hardworking mother within the family.

Based on the understanding of yin and yang illustrated in *Daode jing*, I lean more towards the idea that within myriad things, there are both yin and yang. So when people realize that in every human being there is a unity of both yin and yang, a person does not need to obtain yin from a woman if he is a man or obtain the yang from a man if she is a woman. Therefore, in the end to realize the Dao is to harmonize the yin and yang within one’s own body, to transcend the duality of yin and yang and to be union with the undifferentiated Dao. Based on this view, there will be no point in searching for the “essence” of a female to nourish a man’s body in order to harmonize his yang. To exploit women sexually to get what men already have, a practice known as “bedchamber arts,” will not make any sense. Discrimination between men and women based on their “pure yin” and “pure yang” is wrong because they are equally competent and completely originated from the Dao. Due to the unity of yin and yang within oneself, there is no basis for expecting how a

person should behave, simply based on the distinction of their genders. The women Daoists presented here did what they believed necessary and important to realize the Dao, in spite of what the social norms said.

If we look at the interactions between men and women, biologically they perform different tasks. Women can give birth to a child while men cannot. We can define women as the yin factor and man as the yang factor in certain interactions. When taken an individual for consideration, within themselves, there are both yin and yang characters. Women tend to be less aggressive, more gentle and nourishing, but they can be as aggressive if, for example, their children were in danger. As in the five women Daoists studied here, they are very determined and persistent when they fulfill their goals to pursue the Dao. These are yang characters within all of them. Laozi takes water as a good example which resembles the Dao. Nothing is more soft and gentle than water, but water can break the mountains and form valley 柔弱于水，而攻堅強者莫之能勝 (*Daode jing* 道德經 Chapter 78). As to how a person realizes the Dao in oneself, a person should know their yang and hold on to their yin, 知其雄，守其雌 (*Daode jing*, 道德經 Chapter 28). To pursue the Dao with determination is one's yang character resembling the Dao's constant movement and creation of the ten thousand things. But to realize the Dao one has to hold on to one's yin character which is utmost stillness and emptiness: to still one's mind and empty one's desires.

I do not quite agree with Kohn's view of considering women's "natural ability of pregnancy" as an advantage for the women Daoists to achieve immortality, the ultimate goal of Daoist practice (Kohn, 2003, 251). None of the women Daoists described here ever took a

husband. Even a woman who has experienced physical pregnancy does not necessarily have a more advanced knowledge for attaining her “spiritual pregnancy” essential for their transcendence than a man. According to Laozi “the pursuit of knowledge results in daily increase, the pursuit of the Dao results in daily decrease” 為學日益，為道日損 (*Daode jing* Chapter 48). In that sense, a woman’s preconceived knowledge of pregnancy may inhibit her realizing the Dao.

Kohn said that women “fulfill their destiny in the Dao and thereby enhance the harmony of the cosmos” (Kohn 2003, 246). I think through their individual works, they have achieved harmony within themselves, so the cosmos is transformed accordingly. It is not because their “pure cosmic yin” is fulfilled that the cosmos becomes more complete. Any human being, man or woman, if he or she harmonizes the yin and yang within the self, the harmony of the cosmos as a whole will be enhanced.

Although the five women Daoists lived under different social political and economical environment, they share some similar characters and ideas about what it means to be a Daoist. Though Kohn does not talk about medieval Daoist nuns, I do agree with what she concludes that:

Daoist nuns of Complete Perfection were and are strong practitioners with clear goals and a powerful motivation, a great sense of independence and self-worth... dedicated themselves fully to a life of religious cultivation, following their chosen path with strong determination and reaching a status quite equal to that of men in spiritual attainment and monastic authority (Kohn 2003, 172).

All of the Daoist women I described in this thesis, whether they were adepts from Complete Perfection Daoism or Shangqing Daoism, share these characteristics. The practices of early Daoist women like Huang Lingwei and Bian Dongxuan were different from those of

Audun, Wole and Li Siheng. But the dedication they showed to the Dao was not different. There is a strong determination within each of them to do whatever it takes to fulfill her search for the Dao. Their seemingly different paths all work towards the same goal. This coincides well with another Chinese meaning of the word Dao 道 –“path.” This unspeakable, mysterious Dao is also a path. The goal, Dao, the ultimate reality to be in union with, as well as its path, is expressed in the same word. This is the genius of the choice of the word by Laozi, when he humbly said in both *Daode jing* and *The Scripture of Clarity and Stillness*, “I do not know its name, I reluctantly named it the Dao 吾不知其名, 強名曰道”(*Qingjing jing* 1; *Daode jing* Chapter 25) Each woman Daoist in order to achieve the goal, walks on a path that is unique, but she walks with determination and persistence. They are well on their way to the goal, to be in union with the Dao. Du Guangting pointed out in the preface of his book, “The Ways of the transcendents number in the hundreds. We are not limited by a single route” (Cahill 2006, 36).

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老子. 清靜經 (*Laozi Qingjing jing*) *The Classic of Clarity and Stillness*.

禮記. (*Liji*) *The Records of Rites*.

易經. (*Yijing*) *The Book of Changes*.

The homepage of Tongbai Temple: <http://www.tttbg.org/>

The homepage of the Daoist Restoration Society: <http://www.taorestore.org>.

APPENDIX:
LI SIHENG'S BIOGRAPHY

Dao name: Li Siheng

1978: Born in Zhejiang Province

1984-1986: went to elementary school for two years, then stayed at home

1994-1996: worked in a clothing factory

1996: became a Buddhist nun in Yandang Mountain, Zhejiang Province

2000-present: became a Daoist nun in Tongbai Temple, Zhejiang, Province