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# The Gendered Image of Sun Bu'er in Yuan Hagiographies

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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS  
East Asian Studies Program

The Gendered Image of Sun Bu'er in Yuan Hagiographies  
by  
Tali Dina Hershkovitz

A Thesis presented to the  
Graduate School  
of Washington University in  
partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree  
of Master of Arts

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Tali Hershkovitz

*Washington University in St. Louis  
May 2018*

Dedicated to my Grandmother, Rivka.

ABSTRACT OF MA THESIS

Thesis on The Gendered Image of Sun Bu'er in Yuan Hagiographies

for Arts & Sciences Graduate Students

by

Tali Dina Hershkovitz

Master in East Asian Studies

Washington University in St. Louis, 2018

Professor Beata Grant, Chair

Professor Robert Hegel Co-Chair

This research examines the gendered image of the Song dynasty (960-1279) Daoist matriarch Sun Bu'er (1119-1182) based on four hagiographies dedicated to her in four different anthologies from the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368). Building on Sun's representation in these hagiographies, previous scholarship argued that Sun Bu'er's Daoist identity is more significant than her gender identity. However, a close study of these hagiographic narratives reveals that as the only female disciple among the Seven Perfected Sun Bu'er was chronicled differently than the six male disciples, with emphasis on her gender. This is evident in the Daoist designation given to her by the Quanzhen founder Wang Chongyang (1113-1170). It is also evident within the hagiographic narratives, where we can detect many themes highlighting Sun Bu'er's gender, rather than her Daoist identity. This examination of the hagiographic treatment of Sun Bu'er can further our understanding of how gender played a role in the construction of sainthood, as well as provide a more nuanced understanding of the often idealized relationship between women and the Daoist tradition.



## Introduction

The marginalization of women in world religions and their exclusion from prominent positions of religious leadership is well documented in ethnographic and historical studies.<sup>1</sup> However, in the mostly patriarchal landscape of world religions Daoism (*Daojiao* 道教) is occasionally regarded as a tradition that “has always placed great emphasis on the contributions made by women.”<sup>2</sup> Although this latter statement is indubitably an overemphasis as well as an oversimplification of the relationship between Daoism and women, it is equally impossible to repudiate the fact that Daoism, especially vis-à-vis Confucianism, has persistently incorporated women and elevated them to positions of power.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, even though Daoism at its foundation emphasized the power of Yin 陰, and largely honored the feminine, it also developed in a social environment where the patriarchal, patrilocal and patrilineal Confucian model was highly influential for vast portions of Chinese history and inscribed its ideals in the social fabric.<sup>4</sup> This meant that as it developed, the Daoist tradition often had to negotiate with such Confucian-inspired ideals; one of the principal subjects at the center of these negotiations were women. For this reason, and despite the ideal cosmological premise favoring the Yin over the Yang in the *Classic of the Way and its Virtue (Daodejing 道德經)*,<sup>5</sup> the relationship between Daoism and women can only aptly be characterized as complex.

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Starr Sered, *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister: Religions Dominated by Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Robin Wang, “Internal Alchemy: Self, Society, and the Quest for Immortality,” in *To Become a Female Daoist Master: Kundao in Training*, eds. Livia Kohn and Robin Wang (Cambridge, MA: Three Pines Press, 2009), 163

<sup>3</sup> See Suzanne Cahill, *Transcendence and Divine Passion: The Queen Mother of the West in Medieval China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993) and Suzanne Cahill, *Divine Traces of the Daoist Sisterhood* (Magdalena, NM: Three Pines Press, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Catherine Despeux and Livia Kohn, *Women in Daoism* (Cambridge MA: Three Pine Press, 2003), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

To address this complex relationship between gender and religion in Daoism, I will examine in this thesis one female Daoist figure, the Song 宋 dynasty (960-1279) female immortal Sun Bu'er 孫不二 (1119-1183) who was the only woman among the Seven Perfected (Qizhen 七真) and who I believe distinctly epitomizes the complex position of women within Daoism.<sup>6</sup> The Seven Perfected were the original disciples of Wang Chongyang 王重陽 (1113-1170) who founded the School of Complete Perfection (Quanzhen 全真).<sup>7</sup> The tradition of the Quanzhen was established during the Song dynasty and is the dominant school of monastic Daoism in China yet today.<sup>8</sup> Sun Bu'er joined this school when she was fifty-one years old, following her husband Ma Danyang 馬丹陽 (1123-1184) who also acted as Wang Chongyang's successor.<sup>9</sup> In addition, she was the founder of the Purity and Quiescence Branch (Qingjing pai 清靜派) about which regrettably we know very little.<sup>10</sup> However, Sun became prominent posthumously as one of the major figures associated with the Daoist tradition of female Inner Alchemy (*nüdan* 女丹) during the Qing 清 dynasty (1644-1912), along with the Queen Mother of the West and the relatively popular female immortal He Xiangu 何仙姑 (fl. 8<sup>th</sup> century CE).<sup>11</sup> *Nüdan* poetry attributed to Sun Bu'er is featured in the *Essentials to the Daozang* (*Daozang jiyao* 道藏輯要) under the title *Secret Writings of the Way of the Elixir Transmitted by the Primordial*

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<sup>6</sup> Quanzhen actually originated in Northern China while it was under the rule of the Jin 金 dynasty (1115-1234). However, this time period is frequently associated with the Song dynasty. In addition, Sun Bu'er is frequently referred to as a Song dynasty immortal.

<sup>7</sup> This is a Daoist name (*daohao* 道號). His real name was Wang Zhe 王嘉. For the purpose of this paper I will use the Quanzhen members' Daoist names, as these are the names used in their hagiographic titles. In addition, though Sun Bu'er's secular name was Fuchun 富春, she is always referred to by her Daoist name Bu'er.

<sup>8</sup> See Stephen Eskildsen, *The Teaching and Practices of the Early Quanzhen Taoist Masters* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>9</sup> His real name was Congyi 從義 and his style name Yifu 宜甫. In Sun's hagiographies, however, he is sometimes referred to as Ma Yi 馬宜.

<sup>10</sup> See Catherine Despeux and Livia Kohn, *Women in Daoism*, 142.

<sup>11</sup> See Elena Valussi, "Beheading the Red Dragon: A History of Female Inner Alchemy in China" (PhD diss., University of London, 2002), 70.

*Goddess Sun Bu'er (Sun Bu'er yuanjun zhuan shu danyao mishu 孫不二元君傳述丹道秘書)*.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, in the late Qing and early Republican periods (1912-1949), the Quanzhen patriarchs became the subject of five vernacular novels, which further contributed to the popularization of the Seven Perfected including Sun Bu'er.<sup>13</sup> In other words, Sun Bu'er is clearly an important figure within the context of early late and late imperial Daoism.

Although overall Sun is a relatively prominent Daoist figure, the extent of her importance varies in different periods. In the early Quanzhen context she is somewhat marginalized and although she is chronicled as one of the Seven Perfected, she is not presented in her hagiographies as being equal to her male counterparts. This different treatment she receives is apparent in the 13<sup>th</sup> century Quanzhen hagiographic anthology, *Record of the Orthodox of the Lineage of the Golden Lotus (Jinlian zhengzong ji 金蓮正宗記*; hereafter abbr. *Jinlian ji*), which records the lives of early Quanzhen disciples.<sup>14</sup> In this anthology she is placed last and is being referred to with the title of “Vagabond” (*sanren* 散人), clearly separating her from the male counterparts who are titled Perfected Person (*zhenren* 真人).<sup>15</sup> This treatment is reversed in the later periods, and the revived Sun quite suddenly becomes a prominent figure. First, she is elevated to the status of a Daoist matriarch who transmits sacred texts to Daoist practitioners. Second, in the Quanzhen vernacular novels she is described as being more assertive and

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<sup>12</sup> The *Daozang jiyao* mostly contains texts on Inner Alchemy, supposedly received through spirit writing. The poems attributed to Sun Bu'er in the *Daozang jiyao* are not unanimously accepted as legitimately written by her. See Louis Komjathy, “Sun Buer: Early Quanzhen Matriarch and the Beginnings of Female Alchemy,” *Nannü* 16 2 (2014): 198-199.

<sup>13</sup> See Vincent Durand-Dastès, “A Late Qing Blossoming of the Seven Lotus: Hagiographic Novels about the Qizhen 七真,” in *Quanzhen Daoists in Chinese Society and Culture, 1500-2010*, eds. Liu Xun and Vincent Goossaert (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 2013), 78-112.

<sup>14</sup> DZ 173, 5.9a-11b. From here on I will frequently refer to “DZ”, which stands for Daozang 道藏 (the Daoist Canon), the number 5 in this case represents the *juan* 卷 or scroll number and the numbers following, in this particular case 9-11, are the page numbers within the scroll. Each page is divided into “a” and “b.” The *Jinlian ji* was compiled by Qin Zhian 秦志安 (1188-1244) and dated 1241.

<sup>15</sup> See Elena Valussi, “Beheading the Red Dragon,” 120.

dominant in her relationship with Ma Danyang and is also portrayed as having a more central role in the formation of the Quanzhen movement. In other words, the image of Sun Bu'er clearly shifted from being a female appendix to the six male Perfected to a powerful matriarch of female Inner Alchemy.

Strangely, similar patterns of treatment emerge in the scholarly world; although scholars of Chinese religion, both in China and outside of it, studied the Quanzhen movement in detail, there are very few, if any, comprehensive studies of Sun Bu'er.<sup>16</sup> One reason for this, as Stephen Eskildsen argues, might be the paucity of historical records about her.<sup>17</sup> Another reason could be the relative marginalization of Daoism within the study of Chinese religions as a whole. Consequently, even though Sun Bu'er is an important Daoist female figure in medieval pre-modern China, and thus far has indeed been recognized as one by scholars of Chinese religion and Daoist studies, in most current research on the Quanzhen School Sun is often lumped together with the other six members of the Seven Perfected and is very rarely compared to them. Such treatment can be found in Stephen Eskildsen's *The Teachings and Practices of Early Quanzhen Taoist Masters*, where he admittedly does not examine each disciple individually, but in comparison to the other six disciples gives Sun Bu'er scant attention.<sup>18</sup> This assimilation is inconsistent with anthologies of early Quanzhen hagiographies, where she was chronicled in a way that accentuated her differences and her gender in particular.

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<sup>16</sup> See Stephen Eskildsen, *The Teaching and Practices of the Early Quanzhen Taoist Masters* and Louis Komjathy, *The Way of Complete Perfection* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2013). In China, Li Hongquan 李洪权 published a few articles about the Quanzhen among them is *On the Political Participation and Choice of the Complete Perfection Tradition between the Jin and Yuan Dynasties* Jinyuan zhiji quanzhenjiao de zhengzhi canyu he zhengzhi jueze 金元之际全真教的政治参与和政治抉择, *Zhexue yu renwen kexue* 哲学与人文科学 5 (2013) : 62-67.

<sup>17</sup> See Stephen Eskildsen, *The Teaching and Practices of the Early Quanzhen Taoist Masters*, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Eskildsen is also candid about this in his book. See Stephen Eskildsen, *The Teaching, and Practices of the Early Quanzhen Taoist Masters*, 204.

An opposite yet equally problematic treatment of female Daoist figures is when scholars gather them together to create a collective representation of women in the Daoist tradition, yet then these figures are not studied in the context of the environment that impacted and shaped their lives. In this case, when figures such as Sun Bu'er are studied in the context of other Daoist women, scholars often use them to argue for the inclusivity of women within the Daoist tradition. We see this in the work of such scholars as Catherine Despeux and Livia Kohn who in their book *Women in Daoism* introduced Sun Bu'er alongside other prominent Daoist women, as an important Daoist matriarch, relating her story and creating a somewhat idealistic picture of this figure. Interestingly, this treatment is reminiscent of the revival of Sun Bu'er in the Qing, when she became a *nüdan* authority outside the context of the Quanzhen.

Sometimes this idealistic approach to Sun Bu'er is replicated even when she is isolated from both the Quanzhen and women, as can be seen in Louis Komjathy's article concerning the hagiographic Sun Bu'er, which serves as the fountainhead of this thesis. In his article Komjathy offers a construction of a historical Sun based on her Yuan hagiographies, trying, in his words, to "distinguish historical fact from legend" in order to provide "an accurate picture of the historical Sun."<sup>19</sup> One of the claims Komjathy makes in his work, perhaps as a means to enhance Sun Bu'er's status as well as to emphasize the positive treatment of women in Daoism, is that Sun Bu'er's Daoist identity is more significant than her gender identity. He defines her as a "female Daoist" rather than a "Daoist woman." This, he states, is because "She was a Daoist first, and a woman second. That is, her gender identity was less important than her religious identity."<sup>20</sup>

Interestingly, the hagiographic accounts of Sun Bu'er feature many details that challenge Komjathy's claim. One such detail is her Daoist designation "Vagabond of Purity and

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<sup>19</sup> Louis Komjathy "Sun Buer,"171

<sup>20</sup> Louis Komjathy, "Sun Bu'er,"171

Quiescence” (*qingjing sanren* 清靜散人).<sup>21</sup> This designation is a marker of her gender, as it relates to the Daoist text *Qingjing jing*, which specifies a cosmological gender hierarchy. Moreover, some of the hagiographic narratives, as we will see later, highlight Sun’s virtue and chastity, the latter of which is rarely emphasized in life-stories of men during that time. In addition, we can also see that Sun was ordained into the movement later than the men for reasons related to her role as a wife and a mother. In other words, the male hagiographies do not feature similar concerns to Sun’s life stories.

Beyond the hagiographic narratives, even in later periods Sun Bu’er’s gender identity plays an important role. As previously mentioned, during the Qing the practice of Inner Alchemy became a gendered process called *nüdan*, or female Inner Alchemy and Sun Bu’er’s image and voice were employed in transmitting texts concerning this practice.<sup>22</sup> Due to the gender-specific nature of *nüdan* and the target audience of these texts, it is reasonable to infer that it was Sun’s female identity and not just her capacity as a Daoist Immortal that qualified her to be one of the authoritative figures linked to this practice.

In conclusion, previous scholarly works exhibit an inconsistent treatment of Sun Bu’er. She is either assimilated with the male disciples without any consideration of her gender, or is isolated from the male disciples and is assimilated with other Daoist women, to emphasize the prominence of women in this tradition. This dichotomy often results in one of the following: neglect of gender-related issues or the manufacturing of an idealized vision of Sun Bu’er as an of

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<sup>21</sup> See Miura Kunio “Qingjing 清靜 Clarity and Quiescence”, in *The Encyclopedia of Taoism* ed. Fabrizio Pregadio (London: Routledge, 2008), 800. Similarly to other English translations of Daoist terms, *sanren* has been formally translated into “Serene one” (see Catherine Despeux and Livia Kohn, *Women in Daoism*) and “Recluse” (see Louis Komjathy, *The Way of Complete Perfection*). I chose “Vagabond” as Sun was encouraged to act like a beggar by Wang Chongyang. In addition, once she was ordained she spent a considerable amount of time traveling and wandering from place to place.

<sup>22</sup> Elena Valussi, “Beheading the Red Dragon: A History of Female Inner Alchemy in China.” PhD diss., University of London, 2002, 119-124.

Daoism's privileged treatment of women. In my opinion, neither approach can provide us with a comprehensive understanding of this figure and therefore necessitates revision.

Seeking to correct this dichotomy, I suggest that Sun should be studied in the context of the Quanzhen, in comparison and contrast to the six male disciples. Therefore, this thesis, drawing on Komjathy's claim, will argue that based on the Yuan hagiographies, Sun Bu'er's gender identity is, at least, as significant as her religious identity.<sup>23</sup> In order to support my argument, I will examine her in the context of the other Quanzhen disciples. However, due to the limited scope of this thesis, the comparison will mostly refer to her husband, Ma Danyang. Still, even this incomplete comparison can already expose in an effective way the extent to which her hagiographic accounts emphasize her gender. In addition, I am not trying to recover a historical Sun Bu'er, but rather speak of her construction in her hagiographic writings and particularly her gendered image, as I believe that as long as we rely on such accounts, the best we can aim for, when discussing Sun Bu'er, is her representation.

Evidently, this project is not sufficient if we want to fully grasp the extent of Sun Bu'er's role in the Daoist tradition and in Chinese culture. In order to achieve that, we need to look beyond the hagiographies and study her various representations in both religious text and literary ones, from the Yuan through the Qing. This prospective larger-scale project will examine the sum total of Sun Bu'er's construction, would study the shifting role of gender in her representations and use her as a case study reflecting, at least in part, the relationship between women and the Daoist tradition. As I view this thesis as the first stage of this greater project, in here I will focus on Sun's gender construction within the Yuan 元 (1271-1368) hagiographies.

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<sup>23</sup> .” See Louis Komjathy, “Sun Buer”, 171-172.

## How I structured my thesis

This thesis is comprised of three chapters. The first chapter's purpose is to familiarize the reader with the Quanzhen movement in general and with Sun Bu'er in particular. Therefore, in this chapter I will provide some background concerning the founding the Quanzhen School and its early disciples, as well as essential details forming the story of Sun Bu'er. In addition, as this thesis will continually refer to hagiographies, I will briefly describe the genre of hagiographies and deliberate on the value of studying hagiographies.

The second chapter will discuss the Daoist designation given to Sun Bu'er in the hagiographies. I will argue that her designation, Vagabond of Purity and Tranquility (Qingjing sanren 清靜散人), which also serves as the title of her hagiographies in the *Jinlian ji* and the *Jinlian xiangzhuan*, is inherently gendered, basing my argument on the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 and the Tang dynasty (618-907) Daoist text, titled *Classic of Purity and Tranquility* (*Qingjing jing* 清靜經).

Finally, the third chapter will elaborate on certain themes within the hagiographic narratives in the *Jinlian ji* and the *Lishi tongjian houji* hagiographies, which further highlight her gendered image. Drawing on Bret Hinsch's argument regarding hagiographies of Buddhist nuns and the negotiation between the construction of the ideal Chinese Buddhist woman and Confucian ideals, I aim to exhibit how similar considerations can be detected in the hagiographic treatment of Sun Bu'er.



## Chapter 1: Background:

### 1.1 The Quanzhen School

The name “Quanzhen” is comprised of two parts, “*quan* 全” meaning “whole, total, complete, perfect” and “*zhen* 真” meaning “true, real.” As a compound word this name often translates into “Complete Reality” or “Complete Realization.”<sup>1</sup> It was established by Wang Chongyang (also known as Wang Zhe 王嘉) in 1170, During the Jin 金 reign (1115-1234), and it became the first Daoist monastic order. Wang Chongyang was an Inner Alchemy (*neidan* 內丹) practitioner who lived in the Zhongnan mountains 終南山 in Shaanxi 陝西. He was said to have been guided by the two popular immortals Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓 (born around 786) and Zhongli Quan 鍾離權 (born during the Han dynasty 206 BCE-220 CE). In 1167, after his own conversion at the age of 48, Chongyang traveled to Shandong 山東 and converted seven disciples: Ma Yu 馬玉(1123-1184) Sun Bu'er 孫不二(1119-1183), Tan Chuduan 譚處端 (1123-1185), Liu Chuxuan 劉處玄(1147-1203), Qiu Chuji 丘處機(1148-1127), Wang Chuyi 王處一(1142-1217), and Hao Datong 郝大通(1140-1213). These seven disciples were later called the “Seven Patriarch” or “Seven Perfected of the Northern School.”<sup>2</sup>

It is worth noting that Sun Buer’s historical place within the early Quanzhen movement was a subject for debate with the Quanzhen. Pierre Marsone, who has traced the history of the designation Qizhen (七真 Seven Perfected), shows that this designation originated from two lists; one that included only Wang Chongyang and his six Shandong male disciples, while the second

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<sup>1</sup> Quanzhen is also translated to “Complete Perfection” as reflected in the title of Louis Komjathy’s book concerning this movement “Way of Complete Perfection.”

<sup>2</sup> See Julian F.Pas and Man Kam Leung eds., *Historical Dictionary of Daoism*, (Lanham MD: Scarecrow Press, 1998), 96.

list did not include Wang Chongyang who became one of the Five Patriarchs (*wuzu* 五祖) and was comprised of his seven Shandong disciples, including Sun Buer.<sup>3</sup> It is clear that there was no unanimous agreement on the disciples belonging to the Seven Perfected and this seemed to have sparked controversies within the Quanzhen movement during its first decades. The version of the Seven Perfected incorporating Sun Bu'er was published in the *Jinlian Ji*; yet even after she was officially incorporated into this Quanzhen hagiographic collection, lists of the Seven Perfected sans Sun Buer were still produced and circulated. It was only approximately one hundred years after Sun Buer's death that lists not including her name became less and less common.<sup>4</sup>

The *Quanzhen* combined the Three Teachings (*sanjiao* 三教) namely Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism. Wang Chongyang emphasized the study of three scriptures: The Confucian *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing* 孝經), The *Daodejing* 道德經 and the Buddhist *Heart Sutra* (*Xingjing* 心經).<sup>5</sup> This incorporation of doctrines other than Daoism, particularly Confucianism, is easily visible in Sun Bu'er's hagiographies, as she is portrayed according to Confucian values, with emphasis on her chastity and loyalty to her husband, as we will see below.

Wang Chongyang cautioned against the four hindrances: alcohol, sex, wealth, and anger.<sup>6</sup> His main objective in training his disciples was to instill humility and discipline in them. For this reason he emphasized celibacy and the importance of an ascetic lifestyle, which meant the rejection of comfort and wealth. He also stipulated begging for food as an essential part of the

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<sup>3</sup> See Pierre Marsone, "Accounts of the Foundation of the Quanzhen Movement: A Hagiographic Treatment of History," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 29 (2001): 95-110.

<sup>4</sup> See Komjathy, "Sun Buer," 186.

<sup>5</sup> See Julian F. Pas and Man Kam Leung eds., *Historical Dictionary of Daoism*, 97.

<sup>6</sup> See Louis Komjathy, *The Way of Complete Perfection*, 34-35.

disciples' training.<sup>7</sup> The ultimate goal of the rigorous training he enforced on his disciples was self-cultivation in order to achieve immortality.

Today the Quanzhen is the main official branch of Daoism in continental China, particularly one of its subdivisions, the Dragon-gate Branch (Longmen pai 龍門派), to which the famous temple White Cloud Abbey (Baiyun guan 白雲觀) in Beijing belongs and where young Daoist priests still receive training to this day.<sup>8</sup> As Vincent Goossaert points out, Quanzhen tenets do not greatly differ from other branches of Daoism, yet this branch is distinguished from other branches as it emphasizes both celibacy and communal modes of life.<sup>9</sup>

## 1.2 The Story of Sun Bu'er

The *Daoist Canon of the Zhengtong Reign* (*Zhengtong Daozang* 正統道藏) from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) contains four hagiographic accounts dedicated to Sun Bu'er. These accounts, dating from the Yuan period, will be the focal point of this essay; based on these accounts I will discuss her gendered image. The hagiographies in chronological order are: (1) *Record of the Orthodox Lineage of the Golden Lotus* (*Jinlian zhengzong ji* 金蓮正宗記 abbr. *Jinlian ji*; DZ 173, 5 9a-11b) by Qin Zhian 秦志安 (1188-1244) and dated to 1241. (2) *Comprehensive Mirror of Successive Generations of Perfected Immortals and Those Who Embodiment the Dao, Later Anthology* (*Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian houji* 歷史真仙體道通鑑後集;

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<sup>7</sup> For a newly initiated monk begging was a humiliating activity. Wang Chongyang himself dressed up in funny clothes and engaged in begging. He made his disciples do the same to maximize humiliation and in order for them to vanquish their pride. For more on the importance of begging in the Quanzhen practices see Stephen Eskildsen, *The Teaching and Practices of the Early Quanzhen Taoist Masters*, 39-56.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 98

<sup>9</sup> Vincent Goossaert, "Quanzhen", in *Encyclopedia of Daoism*, ed. Fabrizio Pregadio New York: Routledge, 2008, 814.

For more notable scholarly works on Quanzhen see Stephen Eskildsen. *The Teachings and Practices of the Early Quanzhen Taoist Masters*, Louis Komjathy. *Cultivating Perfection: Mysticism and Self-Transformations in Early Quanzhen Daoism*. (Leiden, Netherland: Brill, 2007), Louis Komjathy, *The Way of Complete Perfection—A*

abbr. *Lishi tongjian houji*; DZ 298, 6 15b-19a) by Zhao Daoyi 趙道一 (fl.1294-1307), dated circa 1294. (3) *Illustrated Biographies of the Orthodox Immortal Stream of the Golden Lotus* (*Jinlian zhengzong xianyuan xiangzhuan* 金蓮正宗仙源像傳; abbr. *Jinlian xiangzhuan*; DZ 174, 39b-41a) by Liu Zhixuan 劉志玄 (fl.1326) and Xie Xichan 謝西蟾 (fl.1326) and dated circa 1326. (4) *Master Shangyang's Great Essentials of the Golden Elixir: Record of Arrayed Immortals* (*Shangyangzi jindan dayao liexian zhi* 上陽子金丹大要列仙志; abbr. *Jindan Liexian zhi*; DZ 1069, 6b-7a) by Chen Zhixu 陳致虛 (fl.1270-1350) and dated circa 1331.<sup>10</sup> These four narratives vary in length and in detail: the two most informative and comprehensive ones are the *Jinlian ji* and the *Lishi tongjian houji* hagiographies. Subsequently, these two will be the ones I will frequently refer to these two, particularly in the second part of this thesis.

Based on the hagiographic accounts in the *Jinlian ji* and the *Lishi tongjian houji* we can construct the following tentative chronicle of her life: She was born as Sun Fuchun 孫富春 in 1119 in Ninghai 寧海 in Shandong 山東. Her father was Sun Zhongyi 孫忠翊. Similar to other Daoist immortals, her birth, as well as her Daoist calling, was predicted in a prophetic dream her mother had prior to her birth. In the dream, her mother saw seven cranes, the riding bird of Daoist immortals, frolicking around her courtyard.<sup>11</sup> Six of the cranes flew off, leaving the seventh to magically enter the breast of Sun's mother. When her mother woke up she realized she was pregnant with a child. As a child Sun Bu'er was intelligent, obedient and studious. When she reached the age of fifteen her father married her to Master Ma and she gave birth to three

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*Quanzhen Daoist Anthology* and Liu Xun and Vincent Goossaert eds., *Quanzhen in Chinese Society and Culture 1500-2010*, (Berkeley, CA: Institute of East Asian Studies, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> Louis Komjathy, "Sun Buer," 173-174

<sup>11</sup> Cranes are a symbol of longevity and of the immortals in Daoism and Chinese culture. For Daoists the crane is also the mythical mount of Lao Zi and of other immortals. See Julian F.Pas and Man Kam Leung, eds., *Historical Dictionary of Taoism*, (Lanham MD: Scarecrow Press, 1998), 52.

children, whom she taught how to be righteous. The Ma household was quite wealthy and Ma and Sun often helped the poor.

In the winter of 1167 (the *dinghai* 丁亥 year of the *Dading* 太定 reign period) Master Wang Chongyang showed up at the couple's estate and set a Quanzhen hut (Quanzhen an 全真庵) on their property. The hagiographies differ in describing Sun Bu'er's reaction to Wang. The *Jinlian ji* hagiography reports Sun locked the master in his hut, while *Lishi tongjian houji* one emphasizes how the couple treated the Master with deep respect. Master Chongyang for his part did everything in his power to convert the couple and convince them they should separate and become his adherents. This included locking himself in the hut without food or drink for a hundred days, performing miracles, preaching against lives of indulgence and lastly, dividing pears (*li* 梨) in ten different occasions to denote divorce and persuade them to separate.<sup>12</sup>

Eventually Ma Danyang was convinced. He subsequently divorced his wife and followed Master Chongyang to the Golden Lotus Hall (*Jinlian tang* 金蓮堂). A year later Sun Bu'er left her children and home behind and joined the other disciples. She also made her way to the Golden Lotus Hall and as soon as Sun Bu'er entered the hall, Master Chongyang ordered Ma Danyang to leave the hall and subsequently performed the ceremony of converting Sun. He conferred on her the name Bu'er 不二, meaning non-dual, and dedicated a poem to her.

Shortly after her conversion, Master Chongyang, along with his four disciples Qiu, Liu, Tan, and Ma traveled to the Zhongnan Mountains. The Master died on the way and his disciples carried his body to be buried in the Zhongnan region. Around the same time, Sun Bu'er began

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<sup>12</sup> “The dividing of the pears” (*fenli* 分梨) represents divorce as in Chinese *fenli* is homophonous to the word for “separation” (*fenli* 分離).

her journey west. Once again, the accounts differ in their descriptions of her journey. The *Jinlian ji* mentions she spoiled her facial appearance, while the *Lishi tongjian houji* tells how she joined with another female immortal named Feng 風 on the way. Both narratives relate how she met Ma Danyang at Master's Chongyang burial grounds one more time, where he dedicated a poem to her.

Sun Bu'er's final destination was Luoyang 洛陽. There she settled in a cave, gathered students and maintained her Quanzhen praxis of ascetic lifestyle and *neidan* meditation. It is said that she converted many people and achieved enlightenment herself.<sup>13</sup> On the twelfth month of 1182 (*renyin* 任寅 year) she spoke her last words to her disciples, bathed and changed her clothes. She then sat in the lotus position and transcended. Fragrant vapors permeated the air and they did not disperse throughout the day. At that time, Ma Danyang was in his hut in Ninghai. He lifted his head and saw her riding the clouds. Sun then told him she is the first one to return to Peng Island.<sup>14</sup>

At the end, the two hagiographies conclude on a different note; the *Jinlian ji* hagiography ends with two poems celebrating her achievement. One is an elegy dedicated to her by Danyang and the other is a shorter poem written by Zhang Shentong in her memory. In contrast, the *Lishi tongjian houji* relates how her grave was moved into the Golden Lotus Hall in the Zhongnan Mountains and the narrative concludes with the official title conferred on her during the Yuan.

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<sup>13</sup> The hagiographies use the Chinese term *chengdao* 成道 meaning “reaching illumination” and has strong Buddhist connotations. Here, Sun's enlightenment is not in the Buddhist sense of attaining Nirvana, but it certainly can be linked to the Buddhist *Bodhi* or “to awaken” or “to understand.” In the Daoist context *chengdao* can be understood as “came to understand the Way.”

<sup>14</sup> Mount Penglai, or “Penglai”, the Island of the Immortals (Penglai xiandao 蓬萊仙島) is one of the legendary dwelling places of the immortals in Chinese mythology.

### 1.3 Why Study Hagiographies?

The term “hagiography” originates from the Greek root *hagios* meaning “holy” or by extension “saint” and it refers to a body of literature describing the lives of saints. It is explicitly Christian in its origin, yet it has been adopted in the study of other religions.<sup>15</sup> Many kinds of writings fit under the rubric of hagiography, for example the lives of saints, accounts of miracles, accounts of the discovery or movement of relics, sermons, visions, as well as other types of writings. Therefore, it is better to view hagiographies as a collection of genres rather than one specific genre.<sup>16</sup>

Hagiographies venerating the lives of saints are unlike modern biographies, which generally aim for accuracy and objectivity. In order to enhance believers’ veneration, such text will recount the saint’s extraordinary qualities, uncommon feats, and miraculous occurrences.<sup>17</sup> At the same time these are not strictly fictional accounts either. In fact, in the heart of this body of literature lie spiritual and pedagogic concerns, thus a hagiography can reveal as much about its author and its intended audience as it reveals about its subjects. Through such a text we can learn about practices, concerns and aspiration of a religious group and as we read it, we should reflect on the compiler’s own motivation.<sup>18</sup>

In the context of Daoism, hagiographies often venerate Immortals (*xianren* 仙人). One can attain the state of *xian*, meaning physical longevity, and even immortality, through various practices, among them the practice of Inner Alchemy. Still, these ideas of transcendence and attaining immortality might appear quite “abstruse” and “mysterious.” Perhaps for this reason, “standard scholarly practice has been to portray *xian* and those who sought to transform

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas Head ed., *Medieval Hagiography: an Anthology* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), xiv.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> See Louis Komjathy, *The Way of Complete Perfection*, 217.

themselves into *xian* as socially distant figures, isolated on mountain tops and residing in the heavens.”<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Sun Bu’er’s hagiographies (as well as all Quanzhen hagiographies) contain some fantastic elements, such as prophecies and miraculous occurrences, which readers (myself included) might treat with skepticism. At the same time, these hagiographies possess a realistic dimension: they feature actual place names, dates, individuals, and events. They also portray ordinary interactions between Sun and her husband, and between Sun and Master Chongyang. In addition, aside from historical and religious values, Quanzhen hagiographies also have literary value, as they often contain poetic language as well as actual poetry composed by each one of the disciples belonging to the Seven Perfected.

Due to the wide range of their content and despite the fantastic elements incorporated into them, hagiographies can reliably answer questions germane to the study of religion as a social practice. Some questions might be related to the compilers, such as what considerations did the writers of her hagiographies deliberate on? Do these writers follow conventions typical of other writings about women and if so in what way? Other questions might be related to women and the Daoist tradition, such as what was the process in which women were ordained? Did they face any difficulties due to their gender and if so what was the nature of those difficulties? Moreover, these hagiographies were clearly of some significance as they were included in the Daoist Canon. Due to their official status, the distinctions some of these hagiographies draw between Sun Bu’er and her male counterparts are noteworthy, as they represent how authoritative figures perceived the role of women within the Quanzhen Daoism. In other words, though Sun’s hagiographies originally set out to deliver an idealistic portrayal of her, they still offer us an avenue for the

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas Head ed, *Medieval Hagiography: an Anthology*, xiii.



ways in which Daoist practitioners imagined the sacred. And from them we may learn about the specific considerations of Daoist and Quanzhen anthologists and about the concerns of female Daoist practitioners. We can, to paraphrase Robert Campany's words, bring female transcendence to Earth.<sup>20</sup>

After providing the reader with sufficient background of Sun Bu'er's story and a quick review of the texts on which I will base my argument, we can now continue to examine her gendered image in the hagiographies. The next chapter will focus on Sun Bu'er's Daoist designation, *qingjing sanren* 清靜散人, and demonstrate how this designation is inherently gendered

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<sup>19</sup> Robert F. Campany, *Making Transcendents: Ascetics and Social Memory in Early Medieval China*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), 19. *eBook Academic Collection (EBSCOhost)*, EBSCOhost (accessed April 18, 2018).

<sup>20</sup> Robert F. Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 1.

## Chapter 2 : Sun Bu'er's Daoist Designation

Each one of the Quanzhen members has a Daoist name and a sobriquet. As Stephen Eskildsen explains, the sobriquet (*daohao* 道號) is a title given to a Daoist disciple by his or her master. It was also customary for the master to give new personal names (*ming* 名) to his disciples.<sup>1</sup> It is apparent that this name-conferring practice is an imperative of the ordination process, and the name often embodies Daoist concepts associated with Daoist practices. For example, Danyang, the name of Sun's husband, means "Elixir Yang," which is a name correlated with the practice of Inner Alchemy.<sup>2</sup>

When Sun was ordained into the Quanzhen School, Master Chongyang bestowed her with the name "Nondual" (Bu'er 不二) and the sobriquet "Vagabond of Purity and Quiescence" (*qingjing sanren* 清靜散人). The sobriquet is comprised of the two components *qingjing* and *sanren* whose origins can be traced back to the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*, respectively.<sup>3</sup> The Daoist designation is the first feature in Sun's hagiography in the Quanzhen anthology of the *Jinlian zhengzong ji*. This anthology contains fourteen hagiographies of which thirteen are dedicated to men and one is dedicated to Sun Bu'er. The hagiographies of Wang Chongyang and his seven disciples are preceded by those of Quanzhen ancestors such as Zhongli Quan 鐘離權 who allegedly lived during the Han 漢 dynasty and Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓. This arrangement implies a descending order of importance, with Sun Bu'er's hagiography is being placed last.

Sun is not only placed last, but is also the only one referred to as *sanren*. In contrast to this title, all hagiographies dedicated to the other male figures are titled with the Daoist name of

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<sup>1</sup> See Stephen Eskildsen, *The Teaching and Practices of the Early Quanzhen Taoist Masters*, 204.

<sup>2</sup> See Louis Komjathy, *The Way of Complete Perfection*, 241.

<sup>3</sup> "Qingjing" can be found in the *Daodejing* and "sanren" in the *Zhuangzi*.

the person followed by the surname and the high Daoist designation Perfected Person (*zhenren* 真人).<sup>4</sup> For example, her husband's hagiography is titled *Danyang Ma zhenren* 丹陽馬真人. Her position in the anthology and the difference in her title, even before we reflect on the gender implications her designation evokes, already set the tone and clearly distinguishing her from the other male disciples. I will now focus on her designation, analyzing the two components in her sobriquet individually.

## 2.1 Sun, the Vagabond:

The translation of the term *sanren* 散人 into the English word “vagabond” might evoke negative connotations of beggars or vagrants, yet in the Daoist context this is not necessarily the case. This term originated in a story within the “Inner Chapters” of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子.<sup>5</sup> In the context of the *Zhuangzi* tale, *san* 散 can be understood as “useless” or even “wasted” as Carpenter Shi tells his apprentice that the massive oak tree cannot be turned into useful objects

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<sup>4</sup> The term *zhenren* appears in the *Daodejing*. The translation of this term is subject of an ongoing debate among scholars of the *Zhuangzi* in particular and Chinese Studies in general. Among the existing translations are “Real Person,” “Authentic Person,” “True Person” or “Perfected Person.” See Miura Kunio “Zhenren 真人 Real Man or Woman; Authentic Man or Woman; True Man or Woman; Perfected” in *Encyclopedia of Taoism*, 1265. For the purpose of this paper, I have chosen to translate *zhenren* into Perfected Person for two reasons: (a) in the context of Quanzhen practices the *zhenren* state could be achieved through rigorous training, which includes the practice of Inner Alchemy (*neidan* 內丹). Since the foundation of *neidan* practices is the cultivation and refinement of vapor (Qi 氣) in purer forms, I believe the term Perfected Person is fitting, as the word “Perfected” indicates a state achieved through recurring practice. See Julian F. Pas and Man Kam Leung eds., *Historical Dictionary of Taoism*, 162 (b) Sun is part of the Qizhen 七真, which are commonly known as the Seven Perfected. See Julian F. Pas and Man Kam Leung eds. *Historical Dictionary of Taoism*, 96.

<sup>4</sup> See Julian F. Pas and Man Kam Leung eds., *Historical Dictionary of Taoism* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 1998), 162.

<sup>5</sup> In this story master carpenter Shi 石 went to the state of Qi, where he saw an enormous oak tree by the village shrine. The tree was large and beautiful, but Shi passed by it without even giving it a glance. When his apprentice asked him why he ignored such a beautiful tree Shi answered that this is a useless tree (*sanmu* 散木) and no boat or coffin can be made out of its wood. That night, the tree came to him in his dream asking why Shi was judging it so harshly and calling it useless. The tree explains that it is not like other trees because humans abuse other trees; as soon as they bear fruit they are stripped, their branches being torn in the process. That is why fruit trees do not live out their natural lives. The tree explains that it always tried to be useless, which is why it survived and grew so large. See Victor Mair trans. *Wandering on the Way: Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press: 1998, 37-38.

like a boat.<sup>6</sup> It can also be understood as “dispersed,” as the tree evaded the grasp of human hands in order to survive. Carpenter Shi also led an itinerant life, moving from one place to another. Therefore, he can be referred to as *sanren*, or a dispersed person. Over time this term has evolved to describe an idle man, with little use to society; at the same time, it also became a term synonymous with the Daoist hermit (*yinshi* 隱士).<sup>7</sup>

In the context of the Quanzhen School, since practice was both demanding and rigorous, devotees were encouraged to abandon their positions in society and become such “useless” people or *sanren*. Wang Chongyang further emphasizes the importance of an aimless lifestyle to achieving enlightenment in the following poem:

“Ode to Laziness”	詠慵
Ridiculing my own laziness I go by the [ironic] title, “the diligent”	自哂踈慵號可動
In my dreams, I use my writing brush to record my good causes	夢中因筆記良
In returning the greetings of other people, how can I open my mouth?	與人還禮寧開口
Though I experience thirst and feel hunger, I do not move my lips	見飲懷饑不動唇
A paper cloak and hemp robe always clothes my body	紙襖麻衣長蓋體
With messy hair and grimy face I am perpetually in Complete Reality <sup>8</sup>	蓬頭垢面永全真 <sup>9</sup>

This poem demonstrates that Wang Chongyang encouraged a lifestyle of vagrancy, detached from any worldly occupation. In this poem the speaker is described as being so lazy that he cannot bother to eat, talk or even take care of his appearance. However, it is this state of indolence and lack of self-care that facilitates his attainment of “Complete Reality.”

Sun’s husband Ma Yu also emphasizes the importance of maintaining a simple lifestyle in his *Records of Sayings of the Perfected Danyang* (*Danyang zhenren yulu* 丹陽真人語錄): “A

<sup>6</sup> See Victor Mair trans. *Wandering on the Way*, 37-38.

<sup>7</sup> *Gudai Hanyu dacidian* 古代汉语词典 [Dictionary of Classical Chinese], (Beijing: Shangwu yinshu guan guoji youxian gongsi, 商务印书馆国际有限公司, 2012), 1329.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Eskildsen, *The Teaching and Practices of the Early Quanzhen Taoist Masters*, 39. Originally from DZ 1153, *Chongyang Quanzhen ji* 重陽全真集

<sup>9</sup> DZ 1153, 1.9a-b.

person of the Dao must not dislike being poor. Poverty is the foundation of nurturing life.”<sup>10</sup>

Since poverty does not permit indulgence in worldly desires, Ma Yu believes that it aids in achieving spiritual progress and is healthier because it nurtures life.

As can be inferred from Wang Chongyang and Ma Yu’s words, embracing an ascetic regime was one of the principal requirements for becoming a Quanzhen adherent.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the term *sanren* embodies and represents the lifestyle of the movement and does not carry a negative tone. Nonetheless, it is interesting that Sun Bu’er is the only one who receives this designation, while all other disciples are referred to as *zhenren* rather than *sanren*. As we know from the Quanzhen hagiographies, all of the early Quanzhen masters led an existence of pure poverty (*qingpin* 清貧) and relied on begging to survive.<sup>12</sup> Wang Chongyang ordered them to make a habit of begging in the streets, as he disapproved vanity in his disciples.<sup>13</sup> According to Sun Bu’er’s hagiography in the *Lishi tongjian houji*, shortly after she was ordained by Master Chongyang he sent her out to experience life as a vagrant. Therefore, we can conclude that leading a life of a vagabond was an essential part of their training, which gradually became a lifestyle. In fact, Sun led the life of a beggar until she transformed into an immortal, which suggests that *sanren* might be a required stage for a Daoist adherent before (s)he might transform into a *zhenren*.<sup>14</sup> Sun Bu’er’s title as *sanren*, therefore, indicates that according to the Quanzhen hagiographic tradition she did not reach the same level of transformation as the male disciples, though the hagiographies do not provide us with any further reason for such a reading. Perhaps the answer lies in the other part of her Daoist designation—*qingjing*.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 40-41.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>14</sup> *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian houji* 歷史真仙體道通鑑後, DZ 298, 6 15b-19a.

## 2.2 Sun, the Pure and Quiescent:

In contrast to *sanren*, the *qingjing* part of Sun Bu'er's Daoist name is where we can find clear allusions to her gender identity. In the Daoist context, this term originally appeared in chapter 45 of the *Daode jing*: “Limpid and still, one can be a leader in the empire.”<sup>15</sup> (清靜為天下正). In its essence, *qingjing* represents an ideal state of body and mind, which has been consistently emphasized in the Daoist tradition. The character *qing* 清 can be translated as “clear,” “pure” or “peaceful” while the character *jing* 靜 stands for “quiescent” “serene” and sometimes also “clean.”<sup>16</sup> As a compound word this term has appeared in many early Chinese texts such as the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (around 239 BCE), *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (139 B.C.E.), or Heshang Gong's 河上公 commentary to the *Daodejing* (c.1<sup>st</sup> century CE).<sup>17</sup> It also appears in Buddhist contexts where it means “clear and pure” or “free from defilement.” In some Chinese Buddhist texts *qingjing* might refer to “clarity and purity” rather than “clarity and quiescence,” while in the Daoist context these ideas are often interchangeable.<sup>18</sup>

During the Tang 唐 Dynasty (618-907) this term became the central theme of the anonymous Daoist classic *Wondrous Scripture of Constant Clarity and Stillness, as Spoken by the Most High Lord Lao* (*Taishang laojun shuo chang qingjing miao jing* 太上老君說常清靜妙經), more commonly referred to as the *Scripture of Clarity and Quiescence* (*Qingjing jing* 清靜經; 700-800 C.E.), which states: “The person who is able to awaken to the Dao is continuously

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<sup>15</sup> D.C. Lau trans., *Tao Te Ching*, 50 and Xu Yuanchong 许渊冲 trans., *Daodejing yu shenxian hua* 道德经与神仙画 (Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2005), 104.

<sup>16</sup> Used similarly to *jing* 淨 as in *jiejing* 潔淨 meaning “clean.”

<sup>17</sup> The Gentleman of the River Bank, or Heshang gong 河上公, was said to have been a recluse who instructed Han Wendi 漢文帝 (r. 180-157 BCE.), see T.H.Barrett “*Laozi Heshang gong zhangju* 老子河上公章句” Fabrizio Pregadio ed., *Encyclopedia of Taoism*, 619.

<sup>18</sup> See MIURA Kunio “Qingjing 清靜 Clarity and Quiescence”, 800.

clear and quiescent” (得悟道者, 常清靜矣).<sup>19</sup> This script, blending both Daoist concepts originating in the *Daodejing* and Buddhist ideas originating in the *Heart Sutra* (*Xinijing* 心經), became one of the basic texts for the Quanzhen School.<sup>20</sup>

In the beginning, the *Qingjing jing* borrows heavily from the *Daodejing*, employing a Yin-Yang dichotomy:

Regarding the Dao	夫道者
It is both clear and turbid	有清有濁
It is both active and quiescent	有動有靜
Heaven is clear, earth is turbid	天清地濁
Heaven is active, earth is tranquil	天動地靜
Male is clear, female is turbid	男清女濁
Male is active, female is tranquil	男動女靜 <sup>21</sup>

These lines elucidate the basic cosmological hierarchy. The highest force, the *Dao*, is all encompassing. Therefore, it contains both heaven and earth, male and female, clear and turbid, and active and tranquil. Once the Dao splits into two, the world is constructed in dichotomous terms.<sup>22</sup> The heaven and the male are clear/pure and active, while the earth and the female are correlated with turbidity/impurity and tranquility.<sup>23</sup> The male constitution is similar to that of the heaven, which is airy and clear, while the female constitution is associated with that of the earth, which is muddy and opaque. In other words, as the text unequivocally states “male is clear” (*nan qing* 男清) and “female is turbid” (*nü zhuo* 女濁).

<sup>19</sup> DZ 620 2a.

<sup>20</sup> See MIURA Kunio “Qingjing 清靜 Clarity and Quiescence”, 800

<sup>21</sup> DZ 620 1a-2a.

<sup>22</sup> This separation is illustrated in chapter 42 of the *Daodejing*: “The Dao/Way gave birth to the One; the One gave birth to the Two; the Two gave birth to the Three; and the Three gave birth to the myriad beings” (道生一一生二二生三三生萬物). See D.C. Lau trans., *Tao Te Ching*, 49 and Xu Yuanchong 许渊冲 trans., *Daodejing yu shenxian hua*, 100.

<sup>23</sup> The text is constructed in an antonymous fashion: the opposite of *dong* 動, or the active, is inactive. Therefore *jing* 靜 could also mean inactive, rather than tranquil.

According to Louis Komjathy here *nan* 男 and *nü* 女 do not indicate “man” and “woman,” but rather cosmic ideas of masculine qualities (Yang 陽) and feminine qualities (Yin 陰). However, I do not see a reason why this pair should not be construed as a reference to humans. First and foremost, as early as the Han dynasty Dong Zhongshu (董仲舒 179-104 BCE) interpreted the *Yin-Yang* system in relations to humans. For example, he associated Yang 陽 with *xing* 性 (human nature) and with *ren* 仁 (benevolence), and the Yin 陰 with *qing* 情 (emotion) and *tan* 貪 (greed). His interpretation gendered the *Yin* and *Yang* and over time became the prevailing, ruling philosophy.<sup>24</sup> Though it is true that Dong Zhongshu also spoke of everything between heaven and earth as having both Yin and Yang properties,<sup>25</sup> the *Qingjing jing* is not just speaking of abstract qualities but also of tangible entities associated with such qualities. For example, heaven and earth are respectively active and tranquil. Likewise, the text moves in gradual descending order beginning with the Dao, but then speaking of heaven and earth and then man and woman, without mentioning Yin and Yang. Although I agree that the *nan* and *nü* do not automatically indicate human male and female, women (generally speaking) carry more of the Yin in them, while men carry more Yang. Therefore, following the logic of this text, and taking under consideration the ubiquity of Yin-Yang as a gendered system at the time of its conception (mid-Tang period), I still maintain that there is no need to read *nan* and *nü* with its explicit reference to men and women solely as a metaphor for cosmic principles.

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<sup>24</sup> See Robin Wang “Dong Zhongshu’s Transformation of Yin-Yang Theory and Contesting of Gender Identity,” *Philosophy East and West*, 55 2(2005): 210.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.



The following passage from the *Qingjing jing* continues to develop the construction mentioned in the opening passage of the text. As we read, we need to pay particular attention to how the “clear” and the “turbid”, the “active” and the “quiescent” relate to each other:

Descending from the root, flowing to the branches	降本流末
And give birth to the Myriad Beings.	而生萬物
The clear is the source of the turbid	清者濁之源
The active is the foundation of the quiescent	動者靜之基 <sup>26</sup>

Although Classical Chinese omits the subject in the first sentence, it can be inferred that it speaks of the Dao, as the following sentence speaks of the birth of the Myriad Beings.<sup>27</sup> In the second couplet we are told that the clear and active are the source of the turbid and tranquil, respectively. Since the male is correlated with both clarity and activity, and the female is correlated with turbidity and tranquility, it can be inferred that the male is the source and foundation of the female. In other words, though at its beginning the *Qingjing jing* introduces “man” and “woman” as seemingly equal cosmological categories, in this latter passage the text articulates a clear hierarchy between these two.

The following part links human desire to the cosmological order, adding the duality of the heart and spirit, and further explicating how controlling one’s desires is necessary in order to attain the state of *qingjing*. This is where the text shifts from being descriptive to being instructive:

The human spirit likes clarity	夫人神好清
But the heart disturbs it	而心擾之
The human heart likes quiescence	人心好靜
But desire affects it	而慾牽之
Dispel your desires often	常能遣其慾
And your heart will be naturally quiescent	而心自靜

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<sup>26</sup> DZ 620 2a,

<sup>27</sup> See footnote 41.

Purify your heart  
 And your spirit will be naturally clear  
 Then naturally the six desires<sup>28</sup> will not surface  
 The three poisons<sup>29</sup> will be extinguished

澄其心  
 而神自清  
 自然六慾不生  
 三毒消滅<sup>30</sup>

These lines introduce additional correlations between the spirit and clarity, the heart and quiescence. Based on the previously mentioned correlations between the male and clarity and the woman and turbidity, we can infer the following parallels: the male, the spirit, and clarity, as well as the female, the heart and quiescence. If “desires affect the heart,” as the text suggests, which in turn disturbs the spirit, then we can also determine the female is more affected by desire than the male and desire is in fact the source of her turbidity. Subsequently, the hierarchy between “man” and “woman” does not simply exist in cosmological terms, but also in practical term—the male is superior to the female as he is more resistant to desire.

In the figure below I have used a flow chart in order to aid the reader in understanding the cosmological hierarchy described in the *Qingjing jing*:

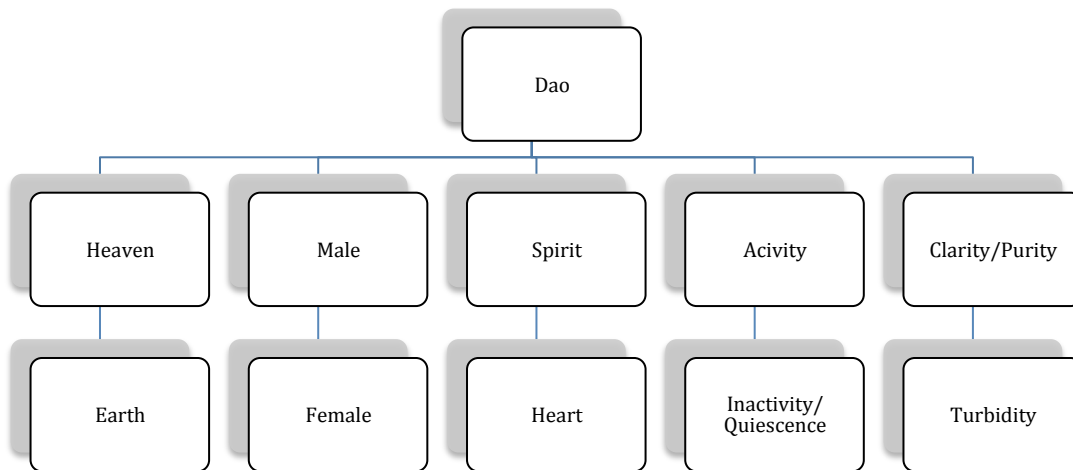


Figure 1: The Cosmological Hierarchy as described in the *Qingjing jing*

<sup>28</sup> The desires associated with the six sense organs: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind.

<sup>29</sup> The three poisons are desire (or greed), anger, and ignorance.

<sup>30</sup> DZ 620 2a.

How can we relate the cosmological hierarchy to the attainment of the state of *qingjing*? The state of *qingjing* is a required step if one wants to “unite with the Dao.”<sup>31</sup> Therefore, we can draw a parallel between the state of *qingjing* and the Dao. The previous passage from the *Qingjing jing* describes how to achieve the state of *qingjing*. The process is visualized in the following figure:

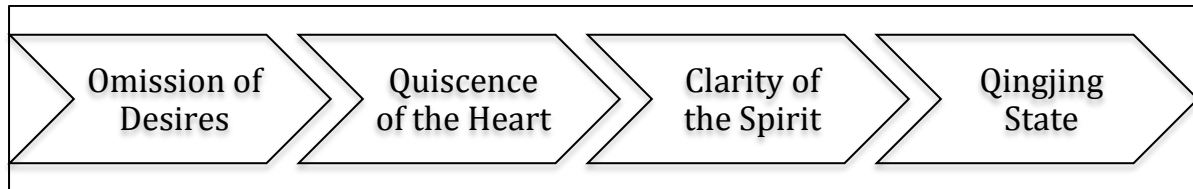


Figure 2: How to attain the state of *qingjing*

Interestingly, the cosmological hierarchy described in the *Qingjing jing* indirectly tells us that the attainment of the state of *qingjing* is different for men and women. According to the cosmological hierarchy in the *Qingjing jing* the male is one step closer to the *Dao*. The male also contains the female, thus he possesses her quiescence. Consequently, it will be easier for men to achieve the state of *qingjing*. The female, on the other hand, is located one level beneath the male. She is inherently quiescent, or *jing*, yet she either lacks or possesses less of the clarity/purity of the male, which is the component that she needs, in order to complete the merging of *qing* and *jing*. Therefore, it will be more difficult for the woman to achieve this state of clarity and quiescence. We can see then that within the *Qingjing jing*'s cosmological hierarchy, there is a veiled gender hierarchy. This text is essentially a manual for achieving the state of *qingjing*, and the correspondences it provides imply that women are innately spiritually inferior to men as their turbid nature makes them more prone to desire and muddies the clarity of their heart.

<sup>31</sup> Uniting with the Dao or returning to the Dao is the ultimate purpose of Daoist practitioner. On page 19 I have mentioned Sun's so-called enlightenment in Daoist context means understanding the Dao, or *chengdao*, which is essentially the same idea as uniting with the Dao.

It would be somewhat challenging to claim that Sun Bu'er's sobriquet is directly linked to this text; at the same time it would be similarly wrong to completely deny such an association, particularly when considering the significance of this text in the Quanzhen movement and the careful choice of names during ordination rituals. The nature of this text and the distinctions it makes between male and female, confirm that gender hierarchy indeed existed in the context of the Quanzhen.<sup>32</sup> This hierarchy is clearly reflected in the hagiographic narrative. The male inherently possesses both *qing* and *jing*, which is why it was apparently unnecessary to emphasize these elements in the sobriquets of the male disciples. In contrast, the female who is inherently turbid must attain the *qing* quality first before she can meld *qing* and *jing*. In other words, Sun's sobriquet emphasizes the two states a woman must attain before she may become enlightened.

### **2.3. A Woman among Men:**

With the exception of the hagiographic collection of *Lishi tongjian*, where Sun's hagiography is recorded among accounts of other female immortals, all other three collections are Quanzhen collections. In the three Quanzhen collections *Jinlian ji*, *Jinlian xiangzhuan*, and *Jindan liexian zhi*, Sun's hagiography stands out among the hagiographies of the Seven Perfected. As previously mentioned, each one of the male hagiographies in *Jinlian ji* includes the highest Daoist designation, Perfected Person (*zhenren* 真人), which marks the ultimate goal of transformation for Daoist adherents.<sup>33</sup> In *Jinlian xiangzhuan*, in Sun's hagiography she is referred to simply as *qingjing sanren*, while the male hagiographies' titles include both their Daoist sobriquet and the designation *zi*, commonly translated as "master." Finally, in *Jindan*

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<sup>32</sup> See Miura Kunio "Qingjing 清靜 Clarity and Quiescence," 800.

<sup>33</sup> See Julian F. Pas and Man Kam Leung eds. *Historical Dictionary of Taoism*, 162.

*liexian zhi* Sun is referred to as Primordial Goddess of Clarity and Quiescence (*Qingjing yuanjun* 清靜元君). Here, although I am using Louis Komjathy translation of *yuanjun* as “Goddess”,<sup>34</sup> *Jun* 君 can also be translated as “monarch”, “sovereign”, “lord” or “supreme ruler.” It is routinely associated with men, yet it has been used for women as well, particularly as a title conferred by the emperor in the Warring States period. It can also mean deity, as in Li Bai’s poem “Chanting Farewell to Tianlao while Sleepwalking” (“*Meng you Tianlao yin liubie*” 夢遊天姥吟留別).<sup>35</sup> We can therefore conclude that Sun’s title in the *Jindan liexian zhi* hagiography is the least gendered of the four. Nevertheless, Sun is still distinguished from the men disciples, as the other six male hagiographies are titled with the person’s Daoist sobriquet and the designation Perfected Gentleman (*zhenjun* 真君). The discrepancies in the titles are meaningful for two reasons; first, the title of a hagiography is part of the introduction of a religious figure, and therefore it is an indication of how that figure is perceived within the tradition it belongs to; second, the significance of a Daoist designation is evident in the custom of name-conferring, which takes place once the adherent has been ordained. In other words, the titles of Sun’s hagiographies, as well as her Daoist designation, inform us of her position both within the Quanzhen School and within the Daoist tradition.

Admittedly, Sun Bu’er’s hagiographies emphasize her immortal status by repeatedly referring to her as *xiangu* 仙姑 throughout the text.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, the *Lishi tongjian houji* hagiography is titled “Immortal Lady Sun” (“Sun Xiangu” 孫仙姑) and three of the

<sup>34</sup> Louis Komjathy, “Sun Bu’er,” 200.

<sup>35</sup> See the entry for “*jun* 君” in *Gudai hanyu cidian* 古代汉语词典 (Beijing: Guoji youxian gongsi 国际有限公司 2012), 861.

<sup>36</sup> *Xian* 仙 meaning “immortal,” while *gu* 姑 here indicates her gender and could be translated to “aunt” or “lady”. It can also mean “nun” as in Buddhist nun *nigu* 尼姑.

hagiographies begin with the words *xiangu*. However, within the Daoist immortal world there is a hierarchy of immortals, which places *zhenren* above *xianren*, even though both refer to individuals who have achieved immortality. Daoist scriptures such as the *Scripture of the Great Peace* (*Taiping jing* 太平經) establishes the following hierarchy:<sup>37</sup>

The Spirit Person rules the heaven; the Perfected Person is in charge of the earth; the Immortal is in charge of the wind and rain; the Daoist devotee is in charge of religious conversion, fortune, and misfortune; the sage is in charge of ruling the common people; the venerable person assists the sage

神人主天，真人主地，仙人主風雨，道人主教化吉凶，圣人主治百姓，賢人輔助圣人。<sup>38</sup>

These lines describe a descending order of power from being in control of heaven, earth, the weather, religion and empire to local communities, demonstrating very clearly that *zhenren* is superior to *xianren*. It would seem, at least based on the *Lishi tongjian houji*, that it was not common for female devotees to receive the designation *zhenren* with the same frequency as men. Among the 126 female hagiographies in the *Lishi tongjian houji* there is only one, the hagiographical account of Yu Zhenren 虞真人, that uses the designation *zhenren*.<sup>39</sup> Though Yu received this title, her hagiography is substantially shorter than the one of Sun Bu'er, provides very little information about this figure and does not mention her immortal status. As a result, it is impossible for us to examine why she deserved this title.

Based on the findings in this chapter, the gendered tone Sun Bu'er's Daoist designation carries is palpable. We may not be able to link this designation to the classic text the *Qingjing jing* directly, but we do know this text was one of the central texts the Quanzhen adopted.

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<sup>37</sup> This is one of the earliest Daoist texts, part of which derives from the Later Han dynasty, possibly even earlier. The text's main idea is that an era of Great Peace (*taiping* 太平) will descend on the empire if its government will return to the Dao. See the *Encyclopedia of Daoism*, 939-940.

<sup>38</sup> *Taiping jing*, DZ 1101,71. 8-9.

<sup>39</sup> *Lishi zhenian tidao tongjian houji*, DZ 298, 6.8-9.

Therefore the component “qingjing” in her name seems to echo the gender hierarchy described in this text. Wang Chongyang conferred this designation on her, and it is thus telling of Quanzhen gender practices. It is possible that by conferring such a designation on her, Wang Chongyang sought to emphasize that *qingjing* is the factor Sun should focus on in order to achieve transcendence since it is more difficult for women to attain this state.

In the next chapter we will carefully examine Sun Bu'er's hagiographic narratives in the *Jinlian ji* and the *Lishi tongjian houji* anthologies in order to showcase that gendered elements did not only factor into the creation of Sun's designation but also into the formation of her sacred biographies.

## Chapter 3: Gendered Narratives

### 3.1 Hagiographic Consistencies and Inconsistencies

In the previous chapter I concentrated on the Daoist designation of Sun Bu'er's hagiography, arguing that this designation reflects gender concerns. In this chapter I will present a few central themes within the narratives of her hagiographies that further highlight her femaleness and distinguish her from the other six male disciples. I will primarily focus on two hagiographies, the one in the *Jinlian ji* and the one in the *Lishi tongjian houji*, as these are significantly longer, more detailed, and include all the materials provided in the other two.

As previously mentioned, in his essay about Sun Bu'er Komjathy insists that her gender identity is less important than her Daoist identity and she can be viewed as a Daoist first and a woman second. However, the hagiographic narratives I will examine in this section indicate a more complex relationship between the two. For the sake of clarity I should emphasize that I am not arguing that her gender identity was more significant than her Daoist identity. In fact, since we are examining hagiographies and not first-person narratives written by Sun Bu'er herself, I would suggest that the term "identity" is irrelevant and we should instead treat hagiographies as what they are, texts that have the primary aim of praising a religious figure and create a flattering construction of that figure's image. Whether the details of Sun Bu'er life provided in her hagiographies are accurate or not, when fashioning her image, the writers clearly considered her gender. This is particularly evident when they portray her relationship with Wang Chongyang and when they stress her initial reluctance to join the movement. This reluctance clearly stems from considerations strongly interconnected with her gender. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, Sun Bu'er's hagiographies draw the readers' attention to the dilemma faced by women when confronted with the choice to pursue an ascetic and isolated Daoist lifestyle.



Therefore, I would argue that issues concerning gender facilitated and dictated the construction of Sun Bu'er's Daoist image and should not be downplayed.

Generally speaking, the two hagiographies are part of two different collections. The *Jinlian ji* is a Quanzhen anthology, while the *Lishi tongjian houji* is a collection of writings about Daoist female saints. Sun Bu'er's accounts within these hagiographic collections largely overlap, and both similarly incorporate conventions typical of texts about women, as well as texts about religious women. Both succeed in constructing Sun Bu'er as an exceptional figure and a Daoist saint. At the same time, the two vary in length and exhibit significant discrepancies, based on which we can extrapolate each writer's agenda. While exploring these narratives for features highlighting Sun's gendered image, I also compared and contrasted these narratives, and through this comparison, the writers' distinctive outlooks became quite apparent. Some of the anecdotes featured in the *Jinlian ji* were omitted from the *Lishi tongjian houji* hagiography, which was written approximately fifty years later (c.1294 versus 1241). The writer of the *Lishi tongjian houji* added also many anecdotes to the narrative, in order to enhance Sun Bu'er's image of a faithful wife. These perceptible alterations can be indicative of the didactic purposes the writer might have had in mind.

In the following parts I will focus on particular issues in these narratives, which correspondingly highlight Sun Bu'er's gendered image, in order to demonstrate that gender considerations were indeed part of the writing process. Such issues include considerations of Confucian ideals, chastity, and the dilemma of leaving the home, among others. Since the discrepancies between the hagiographies are also of consequence to my argument, as they illuminate how one writer might be more concerned with gender than the other, I discuss those within the context of these issues.

### 3.2 From Birth to Marriage: Balancing Between Daoist Ideals and the Confucian Ideals.

When writing about ideal Buddhist women Bret Hinsch argues that, “Hagiographies of devout women faced a perplexing problem. Authors, subjects, and readers all shared a complex jumble of Confucian and Buddhist values. These women were supposed to be paragons who concretely embodied Buddhist virtue. Yet by Confucian standards the behavior of outstanding nuns might seem extremely irresponsible or even downright evil.”<sup>1</sup> Even though Hinsch is referring here to the construction of the Buddhist female ideal, parallel concerns can be applied to the construction of the images of Daoist women. In fact, in her study of the *Records of the Assembled Transcendents of the Fortified Wall* (*Yongcheng jixian lü* 壙城集仙錄), a Tang dynasty collection of biographies of female Daoist figures, assembled by the Tang Daoist Master Du Guangting 杜光庭 (850-933 C.E.), Suzanne Cahill has indicated that hagiographic accounts of Daoist women were often influenced by the *Lienü zhuan* and by earlier biographies of Buddhist nuns, such as the Liang dynasty (502-557 C.E.) anthology *Lives of the Nuns* (*Biqiuni zhuan* 比丘尼傳), compiled by Monk Baochang 釋寶唱 (495~528 C.E.).<sup>2</sup> Similar to Buddhist nuns, Daoist women who decided to become devoted adherents had to deal with social conventions dictated by Confucian ideals. Likewise, writers of Daoist hagiographies, as Hinsch indicates, were members of society and like their subjects, they had to consider social conventions and perform a balancing act between Daoist and Confucian ideals.

Sun Bu'er's hagiographies display a fusion of feminine, Daoist, and Confucian ideals; this fusion is particularly prominent when examining the part chronicling her life before she was

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<sup>1</sup> Bret Hinsch, “Confucian Filial Piety and the Construction of the Ideal Chinese Buddhist Woman”, *Journal of Chinese Religions*, 30 1(2013): 54.

<sup>2</sup> Suzanne Cahill, “Biography of the Daoist Saint Wang Fengxian By Du Guangting (850-933),” in *Under Confucian Eyes: Writings on Gender in Chinese History*, eds. Susan Mann and Yu-Yin Cheng (Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2001), 18.

ordained as a member of the Quanzhen Order. Likewise, for the most part, her hagiographies follow a pattern similar to that of the hagiographies of Daoist female saints chronicled in Du Guangting's *Yongcheng jixian lü*. Such patterns consist of chronologically following the lifecycle of the Daoist female practitioner, beginning from childhood and addressing certain key questions she might grapple with as well as citing ordeals and tests she faced.<sup>3</sup>

Typically, Daoist ideals refer to evidence of the saint's special selection such as magical powers or visits from divinities. In the case of Sun Bu'er, once the hagiography provides details of her place of origin and locates her in time, we learn that a prophetic dream predicted her birth and future Daoist vocation:

(Her) mother dreamt that seven cranes shook their feathers and danced in the family courtyard. One of the cranes flew into her bosom and then she woke up to find that she was pregnant.<sup>4</sup> 母夢七鶴毳毳舞於家庭，一鶴漸入於懷，覺而有娠。<sup>5</sup>

In this dream the seven cranes symbolize the seven disciples of Wang Chongyang who became known as the *Qizhen* and the crane flying into the mother's bosom is Sun Bu'er. According to this dream Sun's spiritual calling was already determined prior to her birth. In fact, it seems that the very purpose of her conception is her future calling. However, based on her hagiographies and unlike many of the female Daoist saints in the *Yongcheng jixian lü*, who entered the Daoist at a very young age, Sun Bu'er did not realize her religious calling until she is in her late forties.

After relating this dream, the hagiographies begin to praise her character and intellect. The *Jinlian Ji* tells us that she was very intelligent and wise and that while dwelling in the women's quarters, she followed the rules attentively. Subsequently, she became skilled at

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid 18-19

<sup>4</sup> Cranes are a symbol of longevity and of the immortals in Daoism and Chinese culture. For Daoists the crane is also the mythical mount of Lao Zi and of other immortals. See Julian F. Pas and Man Kam Leung, eds., *Historical Dictionary of Taoism*, 52.

<sup>5</sup> DZ 298, 6.15a.

calligraphy and excelled in reciting. The *Lishi tongjian houji* further emphasizes her femininity and chastity, by adding that she was also gentle (*rou* 柔), pure (*shu* 淑), genuine (*zhen* 真) and virtuous (*yi* 懿).

Interestingly, while the hagiographies in *Yongcheng jixian lü* suggest that childhood is the time when saints first experience conflicts between filial piety and their religious vocations; Sun Bu'er's hagiographies do not refer any conflict of this sort.<sup>6</sup> In fact, Sun is described as a paragon of Confucian ideals; she is studious, obedient, and virtuous. When she turns fifteen, her father Sun Zhongyi 孫忠翊 marries her off to Master Ma (Danyang) and she gives birth to three sons, whom she teaches how to be righteous. In female saints' lives marriage often serves as yet another conflict, since according to tradition, to be considered a filial daughter and a loyal subject a woman must marry. Many Daoist saints refuse to get married, and some even went as far as to mutilate themselves in order to be considered unmarriageable.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, Sun Bu'er's hagiographies do not provide any details denoting a conflict. On the contrary, her narratives imply that it was through marriage that she found her way to Daoist practice. The *Lishi tongjian houji* relates that an alchemist named Dreamless (Wumeng 無夢) was involved in the process, as Sun's father heard him saying that Master Ma has the potential to become a Perfected Man.<sup>8</sup> We find further confirmation for this in Ma Danyang's hagiography in the *Jinlian ji*, where Master Wumeng is mentioned as an alchemist who for three years engaged in the refinement of an elixir in the Kunyu 昆崙 Mountains but without success. Master Wumeng was convinced that the elixir would be refined once a spirit immortal descended to supervise it.

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<sup>6</sup> Suzanne E. Cahill, *Divine Traces of the Daoist Sisterhood*, 18.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>8</sup> The name Wumeng 無夢 echoes a passage from the "Great Ancestral Master" ("Dazongshi" 大宗師) chapter of the *Zhuangzi* that depicts the *zhenren* as someone does not dream when (s)he sleeps and does not worry when (s)he is awake. See Victor H. Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, 52.

One day, Ma Danyang, in the company of other ministers, wandered to this location and they found that the elixir was refined. Amazed, Master Wumeng turned to Ma Danyang and told him that he had the makings of a great immortal. He also composed an ode praising Ma Danyang's appearance, his dignity, and his familial loyalty. Sun's father heard these words of praise and decided that his daughter would marry Ma Danyang.<sup>9</sup>

Aside from the oracular dream antecedent to her birth, as a young woman Sun Bu'er is not described as possessing special spiritual attributes. This distinguishes her not only from the female saints chronicled in Du Guangting's *Yongcheng jixian lü*, but also from the other Quanzhen disciples. Ma Danyang was not the only one possessing special qualities making him exceptionally fitted for Daoist practices. Qiu Changchun for example is compared to a tortoise, an animal traditionally associated with divination. Since he possessed these tortoise-like unique features people said that he would certainly become an emperor, a king or a master.<sup>10</sup> Wang Chuyi possessed a strong physique and he enjoyed chanting transcendental language as a young boy. When he was seven he met Dijun 帝君 who is considered one of the Quanzhen founders, from whom he received lessons regarding the prolongation of life.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, both the *Jinlian ji* and the *Lishi tongjian houji* describe the young Sun Bu'er by reference to traditional feminine ideals: she was skillful in calligraphy, she exhibited a good moral character, and she was an obedient child as well as a dutiful wife and an exemplary mother. Still, the *Lishi tongjian houji* places more emphasis on her femininity and chastity by adding the adjectives gentle, pure, genuine, and virtuous. In subsequent parts, as we dive deeper into the

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<sup>9</sup> See Louis Komjathy, *The Way of Complete Perfection*, 243.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 257.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 286-287.

hagiographies, it will become even more evident that the compiler of this particular hagiography was very concerned with Sun Bu'er's chastity.

### 3.3 A Reluctant Believer.

Sun Bu'er's seemingly peaceful domestic life was interrupted and forever changed in one pivotal moment when the mysterious mendicant Wang Chongyang showed up at the Ma family estate. Curiously, the *Jinlian ji* and the *Lishi tongjian houji* offer seemingly contradicting accounts of Sun's reaction to Wang Chongyang. The *Jinlian ji* records her suspicious attitude in the following part: "The female immortal did not completely believe him and then locked the master inside the hut." (仙姑未之純信乃鎖先生於庵中).<sup>12</sup> Since Wang Chongyang was the founder of the movement and a highly revered figure, Sun Bu'er treatment of him could be interpreted as an act of dissidence.

How does this somewhat hostile interaction stand in comparison to the hagiographic accounts of the six male Quanzhen disciples? The male disciples' hagiographies detail descriptions of meaningful interactions with Master Chongyang, where he schools them individually or passes down instructions for religious praxis. Moreover, it is clear that both her own accounts and her husband's accounts claim that Ma Danyang was more inclined to acknowledge and follow Master Chongyang. He welcomes Wang Chongyang to his estate, actively helps him to set his meditation enclosure, and generally is more responsive to the Master's persuasive ways.

Considering Sun's depiction as a skeptic in the hagiographies, it is surprising that Ma Danyang's hagiography in the *Jinlian ji* offers a portrayal of an astute Sun Bu'er, indicating that it was Sun who was the first to perceive Master's Chongyang unique, sage-like qualities:

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<sup>12</sup> DZ 173, 5.9a.

When his wife, whose birth name was Fuchun, opened the curtains and saw Perfected Chongyang, she addressed Master Ma, saying ‘I noticed that Master Wang’s face resembles an open lotus flower. His eyes are as beautiful as opaque jade. His voice is like finely crafted bell, and his speech resembles a gushing spring. Eminent and dignified, he has the manner and qualities of aligned yang. We should treat him with deep respect and reverence.’<sup>13</sup> 其妻富春氏開簾視之謂先生曰：我觀王公面如芙蓉紅目勝瑠璃碧聲若巨鍾語如湧泉堂堂然有正陽之風采當可傾心禮敬。<sup>14</sup>

By first recognizing Master Chongyang’s spiritual properties, her words underline her perceptiveness and sagacity, further elevating her spiritual status. Moreover, this is one of the only places where Sun has a voice and we learn of her poetic expression, persuasiveness, and eloquence. Given that Sun was the one to spot the Master’s spiritual attributes, it is therefore unclear why Sun’s own hagiography did not contain this monologue. This discrepancy could simply have been an oversight on the part of the compiler. Still, in this paragraph Sun also speaks in length and detail of the physical qualities of Master Chongyang to her husband and her words could be interpreted as an expression of desire for Master Chongyang. If we were to read sexual undertones in her speech, then her forwardness would be considered as inconsistent with proper female behavior. If this is indeed the case, it could explain why in order to protect her virtuous image, this exchange was omitted all together from her own hagiographies.

As we can see there are discrepancies between Sun’s reception of Master’s Chongyang in her hagiography in the *Jinlian ji* and the hagiography of Ma Danyang in the same anthology. Interestingly, these discrepancies are corrected in the *Lishi tongjian houji*. The writer of this hagiography omitted the incident where Sun locked Wang Chongyang in his hut, as well as her comments on the Master’s appearance and instead recorded a respectful and even adulating

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<sup>13</sup> Louis Komjathy, *The Way of Complete Perfection*, 245

<sup>14</sup> DZ 173, 5.4b-5a.

treatment of Master Chongyang: “The husband and wife respected the master as a deity and served him as a lord” (夫婦敬之若神事之若君).<sup>15</sup> The suspicious Sun Bu’er is replaced with an obedient one, which treats the Master with reverence matching to that of her husband. It is possible that the *Lishi tongjian houji* hagiography, which was composed approximately 50 years later than the one in the *Jinlian ji*, sought to correct and soften the image of a distrustful Sun Bu’er. Nonetheless, both hagiographies indicate Sun was not immediately convinced by Chongyang’s creed. The depiction of her as a skeptic could potentially explicate why within the seven disciples of Master Chongyang she is not as eminent as the male disciples. At the same time, Sun Bu’er’s reaction to the master is also understandable. After all, Chongyang was ultimately the catalyst for the disintegration of her marriage and family life.

In conclusion, we can see then that the hagiographic accounts portray Sun Bu’er reaction to Master Chongyang in three distinct ways: suspicious, (possibly) lustful, and finally respectful, following the lead of her husband. All of these depictions can be correlated to her gender. The vindictive and seemingly impulsive action of locking him in the hut seems to be a response based in her viewing him as an intruder and a threat to her domestic life. Likewise, if we are to interpret her attention to Mater Chongyang’s facial features and voice as lustful, then it underlines sexual tension, which in turn further highlights her gender identity. Finally, in the latter portrayal the writer omitted what was formerly revealed as a defiant nature, a behavior inharmonious with the appropriate behavior expected of women, and matched her attitude with that of her husband’s.

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<sup>15</sup> DZ 298, 6.16a.



### 3.4 A Paragon of Female Chastity:

One of the highly discernible distinctions between the narration of Sun Bu'er and the narration of the six male disciples is the writers concern with Sun Bu'er chastity. This concern is present in both hagiographies, but is largely more emphasized in the *Lishi tongjian houji* than in the *Jinlian ji*, as the former contains many narrative additions and alterations portraying Sun as a chaste and loyal woman, even after her husband divorced her. In the following sections I will recount all the hagiographic episodes evoking questions related to gender.

#### 3.4.1 Fidelity Test:

The first and perhaps most notable expression of this concern is reflected in the anecdote of an awkward interaction between Sun Bu'er and Master Chongyang, which emphasizes her qualities of propriety and chastity. The following account detailing this interaction stresses her fidelity to her husband:

One day Lady Sun saw Master Chongyang drunk. He followed the path to her residence and lay down on her bed. Lady Sun reproached the Master for being improper and angrily locked the door. She then sent her servant to let Ma Danyang know of this matter. Ma Danyang said: Master Chongyang and I have been discussing the Dao and never left the banquet.<sup>16</sup> How could this be? When he arrived home they opened the lock and saw that Sun's bedroom was empty. Then they peeped through the keyhole of the Master Chongyang's hut and saw him inside sound asleep. That is when Lady Sun began to believe and trust the Master.

一日見祖師大醉徑造其宅臥於仙姑寢室。姑責其非禮，怒鎖之門。使家僕呼宜甫於市而告之。宜甫曰：師與予說道不離几席。寧有此事。至家開鎖其室已空。窺所鎖之庵，祖師睡正濃矣。姑始生敬信。<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Ji* 几 is a small table/stool people placed objects on or leaned against *xi* 席 can indicate a seat or a mat. In other words, Master Chongyang and Ma Danyang were out in the marketplace drinking or dining together and discussing matters related to the Dao.

<sup>17</sup> DZ 298, 6.16a.

In the context of the Quanzhen this episode, depicting Wang Chongyang tempting Sun Bu'er in order to test her, was merely one of the many methods the Master used to challenge all of his disciples. Quanzhen hagiographical sources repeatedly describe him as a demanding teacher who required all of his students to lead an extremely austere lifestyle.<sup>18</sup> However, the particular emphasis on chastity and fidelity in the case of Sun Bu'er requires our careful attention, as chastity and fidelity in a marriage are inherently gendered issues.

### 3.4.2 Physical Separation from the Male Disciples:

In addition to Wang Chongyang testing Sun Bu'er for a weakness directly linked to her gender, the *Lishi tongjian houji*, in various junctions throughout the narrative, places great emphasis on the physical distance between her and the other disciples, particularly between her and Ma Danyang. This emphasis is evident in the description of her ordination. Once Sun leaves her home, she makes her way to the Golden Lotus Hall and asks Master Chongyang to be ordained as a disciple. As soon as she appears, Master Chongyang asks Ma Danyang to leave the room: “The Immortal Maiden abandoned her three sons and severed her family ties, in the spring she made her way to the Golden Lotus Hall to begin her conversion. That day the Master urged Danyang to leave the hall” (仙姑拋親三子屏絕, 萬緣詣堂以期開度, 是旦祖師逐丹陽出堂).<sup>19</sup> It is clear from these lines that Master Chongyang wants to keep the husband and wife separated, as he views her as a source of temptation for Ma Danyang—a desire that may muddy his clear heart to use the *Qingjing jing*'s terminology.

Another indication of her separation from the group is reflected in the events following her ordination. The *Lishi tongjian houji* describes how Master Chongyang trained her for a

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<sup>18</sup> See Stephen Eskildsen, *The Teaching and Practices of the Early Quanzhen Taoist Masters*, 39-56.

<sup>19</sup> The Golden Lotus Hall in Ninghai, Shandong was established for Wang Chongyang and his disciples by a patron named Zhou Baitong 周白通. See DZ 297, 1.5b.

period of time, but then decided to travel back to Bianliang with the four male disciples, Qiu, Liu, Tan, and Ma, leaving her behind.<sup>20</sup> Sun Bu'er does not travel alongside the other male disciples who, by travelling together, share a sense of community and solidarity. Although the text never discloses the reason for this separation, it is reasonable to infer this is due to her gender, as Wang Chongyang emphasized celibacy.

Likewise, in her travelling west, Sun Bu'er meets Danyang one more time and he dedicates a poem to her. The hagiography describes how she thanks him from afar: "Danyang dedicated *Langtaosha* to her; the maiden expressed her gratitude while keeping her distance." (丹陽作浪淘沙以寄, 姑姑致禮遙謝).<sup>21</sup> In these lines we see once more the importance of Sun Bu'er keeping her distance from her former husband.

As mentioned above, when training his disciples Wang Chongyang stressed asceticism and celibacy, which is why in order to join the Quanzhen, Ma Danyang and Sun Bu'er were required to divorce one another. In other words, in the context of the Quanzhen's religious practices the emphasis on chastity would require Sun to maintain her distance from the other male disciples as well. Therefore, the description of physical separation highlights her as upholding the tenets of the religion rather than emphasizing her compliance with Confucian rules of propriety. Nonetheless, these incidents do not show up in the *Jinlian ji*, which is a Quanzhen anthology and thus should give expression to the tenets of the religion more than the *Lishi tongjian houji*. Since the *Lishi tongjian houji* is a collection of female hagiographies, I see this emphasis on physical distance as yet another example through which the writer wishes to convey the importance of chastity.

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<sup>20</sup> DZ 298, 6.17a.

<sup>21</sup> DZ 298, 6.17b. *Langtaosha* 浪淘沙 means Great waves Washing Sand, is a famous poetical collection composed by Tang dynasty Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772-842).

### 3.4.3 The Dangers of a Woman Travelling Alone:

The hagiographies tell us that approximately a year after Sun's ordination, Master Chongyang passed away and transcended. In both the *Jinlian ji* and the *Lishi tongjian houji* this event marks the beginning of her journey to the west. The *Jinlian ji* portrays this excursion as an arduous one:

When the immortal maiden Sun heard this (the news of Master Chongyang's death), she began to meander westward. She passed through the clouds and crossed over the moon. She lay down in the snow and slept in the frost. She damaged her facial appearance without feeling any bitterness.<sup>22</sup>

仙姑聞之迤邐西，邁穿雲度月，臥雪眠霜，毀敗容色而不以為苦。<sup>23</sup>

This paragraph marks a shift in the image of Sun Bu'er within the *Jinlian ji* narrative; before she was a hesitant housewife, yet now she has transformed into a resilient traveler, enduring harsh weather conditions and navigating through difficult geographical terrain. Moreover, she was rid herself of vanity and decided to harm her facial appearance. In his translation of this hagiography Louis Komjathy commented that Sun Bu'er was simply not concerned with conventional notions of beauty.<sup>24</sup> Still, we could also relate the corruption of the face to the principle of chastity, because as a woman traveling on her own, Sun would attract undesired attention, therefore, it is possible that she was simply apprehensive about men harassing her during her journey. In this case, ruining her appearance would be more indicative of her commitment to Quanzhen values of celibacy than of the absence of vanity.

The writer of the *Lishi tongjian houji* omitted this depiction of Sun Bu'er ruining her facial appearance, and instead linked her with a female traveling partner. After Sun Bu'er says

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<sup>22</sup> See Louis Komjathy, *Way of Complete Perfection*, 269.

<sup>23</sup> DZ 173, 5.10a

<sup>24</sup> See Louis Komjathy, *Way of Complete Perfection*, 269.

goodbye to Ma Danyang, she heads to Luoyang 洛陽 and encounters on her way another female immortal named Immortal Maiden Feng (Feng Xiangu 風仙姑).<sup>25</sup> When the two reached Luoyang, they made their way to the dwelling of Immortal Maiden Feng, which was comprised of two caves. She ordered Sun Bu'er to occupy the bottom cave while she lived in the top one. While living in this cave and carrying on her Quanzhen praxis, she still maintained her commitment to remain chaste. This is highlighted in the following lines: "She would often amass bricks at the entrance of her cave. She tossed these bricks at every man who passed by her cave" (常積磚石於前, 凡男子過下洞者必以磚石擊之).<sup>26</sup>

As we can see, the importance of Sun Bu'er's propriety and chastity is apparent in both of these hagiographies. However, the narratives differ in their details as well as the amount of emphasis they place on this issue, with the *Lishi tongjian houji* hagiography assigning higher importance to this matter. These discrepancies between the narratives imply the writer of the *Lishi tongjian houji* was decidedly more concerned with Sun's image as a proper and chaste woman. We need to reflect on why he deemed these alterations necessary.

One way in which we could explicate these incongruities is by looking at the social and political transformations, which took place between the composition of the *Jinlian ji* and that of the *Lishi tongjian houji*. As Patricia Ebrey demonstrated, during the Song a married woman who committed adultery was punishable by law, but a married man was not.<sup>27</sup> Sun Bu'er's hagiographies were composed during a time when ideas propagating fidelity to one's husband,

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<sup>25</sup> The hagiography relates that Feng Xiangu was a nun from the "west of the Pass (i.e., Shaanxi). She went to train in Dongzhou 東周, a place around Luoyang. No one knew her name or age, but they recognize that she spoke with a Qin dialect (Shaanxi dialect). She went about begging with her hair disheveled and her face and body covered with grime. She pretended to be mad and slept in temples. See DZ 298, 6 17b.

<sup>26</sup> DZ 298, 6.18a.

<sup>27</sup> Patricia Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Song Period* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1993), 250.

originally emphasized by Song neo-Confucian philosophers, were already prevalent in Chinese society. Zhu Xi (朱熹 1130-1200) for example, stressed that a wife must regard her husband as she would Heaven and just like a faithful minister should never serve two lords.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, this hagiography was written following the Mongol conquest when the Southern Song dynasty fell in 1276. According to Susan Mann, “The Mongol (Yuan) period was critical to shifts in women’s status for other reasons: the ravishing of Chinese women by Mongol invaders increased concerns about cloistering women, and also about female chastity, in the population at large.”<sup>29</sup> Hence, it is quite possible that the additional incidents displaying Sun’s chastity and her commitment to celibacy incorporated into the *Lishi tongjian houji* hagiography reflect how Zhao Daoyi, who composed this hagiography during the early years of the Yuan, was highly influenced by contemporary notions concerning female chastity.

Regardless of the inconsistencies we find in the *Jinlian ji* and the *Lishi tongjian houji*, each one of these incidents mentioned above draw the reader’s attention to Sun Bu’er’s gender. Although Wang Chongyang treated each of his disciples in a distinct fashion, drawing their own attention to their respective fragilities and aiding them in overcoming their weaknesses, in Sun Bu’er’s case her so-called weakness is in direct relation to her gender and to social expectations concerning women. Consequently, it is problematic to claim that Master Chongyang’s treatment of Sun Bu’er, not to mention the male authors of her hagiographies, did not take her gender into account.

The issue of gender can also be treated as yet another example of the reconciliation between Daoist outlooks and Confucian outlooks. The Quanzhen hagiographic accounts tell us

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<sup>28</sup> Susan Mann, “Women in East Asia: China, Japan and Korea” in *Women’s History in Global Perspective Vol. 2*, ed., Bonnie G. Smith (Urbana& Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 71.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

that traveling great distances was indeed an integral part of Quanzhen disciples' lifestyle, as it was a way for disciples to spread their creed and proselytize new adherents. Still, the notion of women travelling unaccompanied deviates from Confucian ethical codes of behavior, which situated the realm of women in the inner quarters, as we will see in the next section.

Accordingly, Sun Bu'er was paired with a female traveling companion. For this reason in the *Lishi tongjian houji* Sun Bu'er is always depicted in the company of others. By deductive reasoning the reader can realize that she probably did spend time alone, whether meditating in her hut or traveling west, but the narration of the hagiography attempts to conceal this by always portraying her in the company of others.

### 3.5 The Dilemma of *Chujia*

After Wang Chongyang conducted the Dividing of the Pear into Ten Pieces (*fenli shihua* 分梨十化) Ma Danyang was at last convinced he should become the Master's disciple and so he divorced his wife, left his family and followed the master to the Golden Lotus Hall.<sup>30</sup> As for Sun Bu'er, both the *Jinlian ji* and the *Lishi tongjian houji* relate she left her home to join the Quanzhen one year later than her husband. Why did Ma Danyang join to Quanzhen so rapidly, while Sun deliberated on whether to leave her home for an entire year? What were the reasons behind her hesitation to leave? What motivated her to finally leave?

One major feature of Chinese life at the time, that might aid in explicating the difference between the promptness of Ma Danyang's initiation into the movement and Sun's slower admission, is the predominant social separation of the sexes in pre-modern China and during the

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<sup>30</sup> Wang Chongyang's attempts to convert Sun Bu'er and Ma Danyang are documented in *Chongyang's Anthology of Ten Conversions by Dividing Peaches (Fenli shihua ji 分梨十化集)* in DZ 1155). According to the preface of this collection, he sent poems accompanied with divided pear to the couple every ten days, with the purpose of convincing them to separate. See Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian *The Oxford Book of Religious Conversion*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 521. For a brief discussion of dividing the pear (*fenli*) as an allusion to divorce (also *fenli* 分離) see footnote 36.

Song in particular. As Patricia Ebrey points out “This dimension of the separation of the sexes tended to merge with the differentiation in duties and proprieties of husbands and wives within families. In fact, it was in terms of husbands and wives that inner and outer were conceived as complementary spheres, with men dominant in one and women in the other.”<sup>31</sup> In other words, though the inner and outer sphere merged on occasion and complemented each other, they were mostly separated according to men and women’s diverse duties and roles. Traditionally speaking, as women’s duties were associated with taking care of the home and the family, their ties to the domestic sphere were deeper than those of the men.

Leaving the home and renouncing one’s family life (*chujia* 出家) was a prerequisite to joining the Quanzhen, as their activities were conducted in the outer sphere, independent from the home. Since men existed in the outer sphere, outside the home, it was easier and socially more acceptable for male adherents to join such a movement.<sup>32</sup> By comparison, women adherents were more attached to their families, so leaving home would have meant severing deeper ties.

The emotional underpinning of Sun’s dilemma is made explicit in the *The Jinlian ji*: “After ten occasions of dividing pears and six moments of offering Taro, Xuanfu (Ma Danyang) accordingly became his disciple and entered the Dao. However, after that immortal maiden Sun’s feelings of affection were not yet extinguished” (十度分梨六番賜芋宜甫隨從師入道仙姑尚且愛未盡,猶豫不決.更待一年始拋三子).<sup>33</sup> These lines highlight Sun’s emotional attachment to

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<sup>31</sup> Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters*, 24

<sup>32</sup> Leaving the home or *chujia* 出家 is a long-standing Buddhist tradition, which some Daoists began to emulate by the fifth or sixth century. However, the Quanzhen School was the first and only to establish a monastic order. See Stephen Eskildsen, *Asceticism in Early Daoist Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 36. Also See Miura Kunio “Zhenren” in *Encyclopedia of Taoism*, 1265.

<sup>33</sup> DZ 173, 5.19b. English Translation from Louis Komjathy, *The Way of Complete Perfection*, 269.



her sons. The depth of the attachment is further emphasized with the expression *shipao* 始拋, meaning “began to abandon.” This expression suggests that even when she physically left home, she was only beginning to leave her sons emotionally, which indicate detaching from home was very difficult for her.

Similar to the discrepancy in Sun and Ma’s respective inclination to leave the home, there is also a judgmental tone on part of the writer when describing their respective decisions. The judgment is exposed through one particular choice of words. When describing Sun’s leaving, both the *Jinlian ji* and the *Lishi tongjian houji* use the verb *pao* 拋, meaning “abandon” or “give up”. However, the *Jinlian ji* describes Ma Danyang’s leaving as “following the teacher and entering the Dao” (*suicong shi rudao* 遂從師入道).<sup>34</sup> Likewise, his own hagiography in the same anthology mentions he divorced his wife, yet there are no remarks regarding the abandoning of his sons. Sun’s hesitation implies that the decision of leaving home probably weighed more heavily on women than it did on men. Moreover, the writers’ harsher treatment of Sun’s decision to leave home indicates that this issue is inherently gendered.

Aside from understanding Sun’s hesitation to leave home as based in her emotional attachment to her family, we can also interpret this hesitation as intentionally constructed, in order to represent her as a loyal mother and wife. Bret Hinsch argued for similar writing practices in the hagiographies of Buddhist nuns. According to him, writers of hagiographies, whose mission is to create a complimentary image of a saint, often take the liberty to reconcile conflicts, such as the conflict faced by Sun Bu’er, while writing about a female saint’s life. Hinsch discusses similar challenges in the *Lives of the Nuns*, which was written by Monk Baochang during the Liang dynasty. In this hagiographic collection Baochang created a vision of

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<sup>34</sup> DZ 173, 5.9b.

Buddhist womanhood that would not clash with Confucian ideals of filial piety. To achieve this he constructed images that overcame conflicts between Buddhism and Confucianism. For example, he showed how a nun excelled in practicing Confucian values before becoming a Buddhist nun, or he transformed Buddhist practice into Confucian practice.<sup>35</sup>

In the case of Sun Bu'er, if she exhibited keen interest in Master Chongyang's doctrine from the very beginning, and promptly left her family without any lengthy reflection, she might have been viewed as selfish, ambitious and perhaps immoral.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, the writers emphasized how Wang tried to persuade her to leave and how hesitant she was. Finally, she did make the choice to leave home, yet as the text accentuates her doubt, we can infer that this decision was possibly motivated by matrimonial piety rather than by religious zeal, thus it can be viewed as "the ultimate fulfillment of wifely duty."<sup>37</sup> The part of the narrative relating her lengthy deliberation highlights her as a good mother and wife according to Confucian ideals. However, the prophetic dream predicting her birth at the beginning of the hagiography already established this choice as her religious calling. Therefore, the hagiography represents her according to Daoist ideals, without compromising more conventional ideals of womanhood.

### **3.6 A Woman After All:**

According to the *Lishi tongjian houji* Sun Bu'er stayed in Luoyang for six years. During this time she followed the Quanzhen praxis. She also gathered followers and converted many people.<sup>38</sup> At the end of this period she became realized (*daocheng* 道成). In contrast to the earlier sections of the hagiographies, the description of Sun Bu'er's life in Luoyang does not expose any particular gender-related incongruities. On the contrary, since this section builds up to the zenith

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<sup>35</sup> Bret Hinsch, "Confucian Filial Piety and the Construction of the Ideal Chinese Buddhist Woman," 54-56.

<sup>36</sup> Ma Danyang's hagiography in the *Jinlian ji* already showed that she had interest in the Master.

<sup>37</sup> Catherine Despeux and Livia Kohn, *Women in Daoism*, (Cambridge MA: Three Pine Press, 2003), 145

<sup>38</sup> See DZ 173, 5.10a and DZ 298, 6.18a. Also See Louis Komjathy, *Way of Complete Perfection*, 270.

of the narrative, when her spiritual and physical transformation takes place, she is correspondingly painted as a genuine Daoist master: she engages in rigorous religious praxis and achieves mastery, she gathers devotees and disciples, and she even ordains some of them.

Nonetheless, the *Jinlian ji* concludes with the following poem, written in her memory by Zhang Shentong 張紳童 :

Though she wiped off the rouge, both cheeks are rosy	洗盡胭脂兩臉霞
She toiled for ten years to cultivate the Yellow Sprout	十年辛苦種黃芽
With accomplishments complete, she mounted an azure Luan-bird	功成穩跨青鸞背
She bloomed into the seventh petal of the Golden Lotus. <sup>39</sup>	開到金蓮第七華 <sup>40</sup>

This poem contains some imagery that conclusively points out Sun's gender. The first line unambiguously describes Sun Bu'er removing her makeup and can be construed as her washing off the conventional feminine concern with appearance in favor of loftier spiritual pursuits. Furthermore, in the third line the poet mentions the Luan-Bird 鸞, a mythical creature often confused with the phoenix yet more akin to the "simurgh," the fabulous bird in Persian legend. This mythical bird is occasionally associated with the Queen Mother of the West, who is the epitome of female immortals and the founder and patron of Daoist female Transcendents.<sup>41</sup>

Correspondingly, the *Lishi tongjian houji* concludes with the imperial title conferred upon Sun Bu'er in 1269,<sup>42</sup> by Emperor Kublai Khan (Shizu 世祖; r. 1260-1294). Her title is, "Perfected of Purity and Tranquility, Profoundness and Chastity, who Follows Virtue." (*Qingjing*

<sup>39</sup> Louis Komjathy, *Way of Complete Perfection*, 270. (Translation modified)

<sup>40</sup> DZ 173, 5.11b

<sup>41</sup> See James H. Hargett, "Playing Second Fiddle: The Luan-Bird in Early and Medieval Chinese Literature" in *T'oung Pao Second Series* 75 4/5 (1989): 253. Also see Suzanne E. Cahill, *Divine Traces of the Daoist Sisterhood*, 43.

<sup>42</sup> The Lunar calendar date for 1269 given in the hagiography is *Yuan yisi zhengyue* 元巳巳正月.

*yuanzhen shunde zhenren* 清靜淵貞順德真人).<sup>43</sup> The character 貞 (*zhen*) in this title, meaning “chaste” can also act as a variation of 真 (*zhen*) meaning “real” or “perfected.” However, since other specifics featured in the hagiographies reveal an emphasis on Sun Bu’er’s gender, and since the character 真 meaning “perfect” is also included the honorary title, I believe here the 貞 refers to Sun Bu’er safeguarding her chastity.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> See DZ 298, 6.19a. Also see Louis Komjathy, “Sun Buer,” 196.

## Conclusion

Although Louis Komjathy curtailed the of role gender in Sun Bu'er's image in the Yuan hagiographies by suggesting that her Daoist identity is more important, the discernably gendered features found in these hagiographies are numerous. The gender constructions begin with Sun's Daoist designation *qingjing sanren*, which echoes the gender hierarchies found in the classic text *Qingjing jing*. We learn that even though Sun was canonized as one of the *Qizhen*, she received a designation distinguishing her from the men disciples and she is not described as a *zhenren*. In addition, I have employed various portions from the hagiographic narratives in the *Jinlian ji* and the *Lishi tongjian houji* to illustrate how she is chronicled with gender considerations at play. These gender considerations are manifested in several junctions; she is portrayed according to feminine ideals of gentleness and obedience; we detect the writer's emphasis on her chastity and her hesitation to leave the home probably related to her motherly love towards her children. In contrast, the hagiographies of the male disciples, particularly her husband's, do not exhibit similar concerns.

In light of these findings I would argue that it is quite unreasonable to determine that her Daoist identity is primary and her gender identity is secondary, as Komjathy suggested. Indeed, the hagiographies also portray her as an effective Daoist master and teacher and record her successful transcendence. These features undoubtedly highlight her Daoist identity. Yet, throughout the narrative many descriptive details are firmly linked to her womanhood. Furthermore, the usage of certain words, such as the verb "abandon" when describing her leaving her children, suggests that even the writers' might be criticizing her choices and judging her choices and construing her according to traditional concepts of gender roles. Due to these

discernible gender-based sections, I cannot see how we can argue for a hierarchical relationship between her religiosity and her gender.

In the process of exploring Sun's hagiographies for gender evidence, I have discovered some unmistakable inconsistencies between the *Jinlian ji* and the *Lishi tongjian houji* hagiographies. Although both narratives reflect concerns vis-à-vis Sun's chastity, the degree of the emphasis on her chastity varies. The *Lishi tongjian houji* places considerably more emphasis on her commitment to her chastity and celibacy, thus incorporating more anecdotes highlighting this theme. Though we cannot reconcile these differences with certainty, it is possible that the *Lishi tongjian houji*, being the later hagiography, sought to correct some of the unflattering or simply equivocal elements in the *Jinlian ji* narrative. Likewise, it is possible that concerns with chastity are more prevalent in the *Lishi tongjian houji* hagiography as it is part of an anthology about female Daoists. Either way, the emphasis on female chastity is in accord with earlier writings about women, as well as with contemporary social perceptions of the Yuan.

In this research project I concentrated on comparing Sun Bu'er to her male counterparts, because my main goal was to argue that her hagiographic image is gendered. I did not compare Sun Bu'er to other Daoist female immortals, as it did not directly relate to my argument. Moreover, as I mentioned in my introduction, I believe focusing on women in the Daoist tradition in a way, which isolates them from men, might give a false impression of the position of women within Daoism. Nevertheless, a comparison of Sun Bu'er to other Daoist women could prove valuable, as it will show that Sun Bu'er is an anomaly within the Daoist tradition.

To rationalize this claim I will refer once again to Du Guangting's anthology *Yongcheng jixian lii*, which relates many accounts of female immortals. The immortals incorporated into this anthology vary in age and social status, as do the lengths and details of their accounts. Some of

the female figures were goddesses to begin with, like the Queen Mother of the West who is the founder and patron of the lineage of female transcendence. Some are matriarchs like Mother Liang, who, similar to Sun, was an ordinary woman, a benevolent innkeeper who encountered a Daoist Master Xu one day and subsequently transcended. Some female immortals were very young when they entered the Way and became devout to avoid marriage, while others are older married women, who like Sun entered the Way later in life. Nevertheless, unlike Sun's hagiography, many of the hagiographies included in the *Yongcheng jixian lü* are not very detailed. In addition, most of the hagiographies emphasize the spiritual propensities of these women, relating miraculous events and mysterious occurrences. These women's children and family life are frequently not mentioned. In comparison, Sun's hagiographies for the most part are realistic, as they contain many true-to-life details, regulating most of the fantastic details to the end of the narrative when she transcended. Likewise, Sun Bu'er also differs from the female immortals in the *Yongcheng jixian lü*, as she is not solely anthologized alongside other Daoist women but also other Daoist men. Since in the *Jinlian ji* she is chronicled as "one of the boys," gender considerations become more discernible. For this reason, I argue that it is problematic to reliably claim that within the early Quanzhen Movement, her gender was not as important as her Daoist identity, nor can we claim the compilers of her hagiographies gave a priority to her Daoist identity over her female identity. These two "identities" are interdependent and indivisible. In any case, I believe this Daoist figure merits our attention, if not for her religious significance, then for social concerns reflected in her hagiographies. In other words, the study of Sun Bu'er can bring us closer to understanding the challenges Daoist women faced when confronted with the demands and constraints of a social milieu heavily infused by Confucian ideals.

One might ask why is it significant to go to such lengths in order to demonstrate that Sun Bu'er's image was gendered, pointing out that when discussing the men and women of ancient China, gender hierarchy is a given. Undoubtedly, this counterargument has its validity. Still, as scholars of China who often engage with these gender constructions, we sometimes take them for granted or we tend to ignore them all together. More importantly, the gendered image of Sun Bu'er is not just regulated to the Yuan hagiographies, but also follows this figure as she resurfaces in later periods. The Quanzhen enjoyed growing popularity during the Ming and the Qing, and so Sun emerged again in later periods, fulfilling two capacities. In the first capacity she remained within the boundaries of religion, but experienced an elevation to the status of a Daoist matriarch, as well as the transmitter of *nüdan* practice and poetry. In the second capacity she, alongside the other Qizhen, became the subject of religious novels published during the Qing, chronicling the adventures of the Seven Perfected. Both these capacities added significant variations to her image.

Even in these later periods we can see that her image continues to evolve in correlation to her gender. She becomes closely associated with the practice of *nüdan* and she is also further popularized, alongside the other disciples, in the Qing period through vernacular novels such as the *Arranged Biographies of the Patriarchs, the Seven Perfected* (*Qizhen zushi liezhuan* 七真祖師列傳, republished with 1893 and 1903 prefaces), *Stories of the Karmic Links of the Seven Perfected* (*Qizhen yinguo zhuan* 七真因果傳, written in 1893, printed in 1906), *Biographies of Chongyang and the Seven Perfected* (*Chongyang qizhen zhuan* 重陽七真傳, written in 1899 and printed in 1919), and *History of the Golden Lotus Immortals* (*Jinlian xianshi* 金蓮仙史, written



in 1904, published 1908).<sup>45</sup> In the *Qizhen yingguo zhuan*, for example, she is introduced as Sun the Deeply Chaste (Yuanzhen 孫淵貞, the character 貞 *zhen* meaning chastity). In addition, the writer eliminates any details that might deviate from Confucian values. In this version of their story, Ma Danyang's parents died when he was young and the couple is childless, therefore there are no obstacles preventing Sun from leaving home. The writer even tells us that even though she looks like a woman, she has a man's spirit.<sup>46</sup> This discernible evolution of Sun Bu'er's image and the fashion in which writers, whether of hagiographies or novels, shaped her image is symptomatic of gender-related outlooks circulating in Chinese society. Her story, or rather the production of her story, is telling of the relationship between Daoism and women as well as the relationship between Chinese religions and gender.

As a religious tradition Daoism has closely engaged with women and continues to do so today. This is evident in the rich pantheon of Daoist goddesses and female immortals, as well as in the rise of women to prominent positions within the Daoist clergy in modern times. This palpable presence of the feminine in the Daoist tradition enables modern scholars to approach this tradition from a female and even a feminist perspective. Nonetheless, Daoism has evolved in a social milieu where hierarchical constructions of gender were prevalent, therefore I am not certain we can prove those constructions did not influence the gender perceptions of the Quanzhen School even though many of these paradigms developed in Confucian context. It is possible that the writers' of Sun's hagiographies consciously incorporated their gender perceptions into her hagiographies. It is equally possible it was done subconsciously. After all,

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<sup>45</sup> See Vincent Durand-Dastès, "A Late Qing Blossoming of the Seven Lotus," 79-80.

<sup>46</sup> Yang Aiqun 杨爱群 ed. 编辑 *Quanzhen qizi quanshu* 全真七子全书, (Shenyang 沈阳: Chunfeng wenyi chubanshe, 春风文艺出版社, 1989), 26-27.

these writers were not concerned with gender in the same manner contemporary scholars are. Nevertheless, gender considerations are present in her hagiographic accounts.

As gender is a modern and largely western concept, we should probably exercise caution when employing it in discussion concerning pre-modern figures such as Sun Bu'er. At the same time, how can we understand how women interacted with the Daoist tradition without considering their gender? We tend to think a religious tradition treats all its followers equally and similarly we do not consider religious practices as inherently gendered, but rather uniform for both men and women. However, the example of Sun Bu'er demonstrates that gender considerations played a role in early societies, whether people were aware of them or not. For example, the practice of *chujia* could mean something very different for men and women.

Likewise, why do the hagiographies describe Sun as achieving transcendence prior to her husband and place her in a prominent position alongside six male disciples, yet simultaneously her hagiographic narrative is significantly shorter, she is placed last in the anthology, and she does not achieve the same transcendence status as the other disciples? Could we dismiss the idea that her marginalization within early Quanzhen hagiographies is based in gender considerations? After all, this inequitable hagiographic treatment of Sun corresponds with the marginalization of women in history, society, and culture.<sup>47</sup>

Consequently, despite the contemporaneousness of the term “gender,” comparing and contrasting Sun Bu'er to the male patriarchs of the Quanzhen and in the process contemplating her gender could aid us in achieving a more comprehensive understanding of this figure. Such evaluation highlights the differences between men and women when interacting with the

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<sup>47</sup> Ursula King, “Gender and Religion: An Overview” in *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. Lindsay Jones (Farmington Hills, MI: Thompson Gale, 2004), 3296.

Quanzhen tradition. These differences can in turn aid us to attain a more accurate and less idealized understanding of the role of women in the Daoism.

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# Appendix

一十四第 傳像源仙宗正蓮金

元年壬申臘月晦日無疾端坐留頌而逝有太古集心經解救苦經解及示教直言行於世今寧海先天觀即師登真之所也

元世祖皇帝封號廣寧通玄太古真人

武宗皇帝加封廣寧通玄妙極太古真君

贊曰賣卜人間回頭已早瓦觀衲衣語默皆道雲迷查洞水繞石橋易圖一卷千古寥寥

清淨散人

改九

五十一



仙姑姓孫名不二號清淨散人寧海人也生於宋徽宗宣和元年己亥正月初五日父曰忠顯母夢六鶴飛舞於庭一鶴飛入懷中覺而有娠乃生仙姑性聰慧嚴禮法長適州之馬宜甫即丹陽先生也生三子曰庭珍庭瑞

二十四第 傳像源仙宗正蓮金

庭珪大定七年閏七月重陽抵寧海築金真庵於南園十月朔重陽於庵鎖環明年正月十一日出環仙姑夫婦悟分梨十化之教二月初八日宜甫棄家從道九年重五日仙姑詣金蓮堂師重陽出家重陽乃贈以詩為立

冷名號遂授以道要其冬重陽携馬譚劉丘四師遊汴梁明年春聞重陽仙化四師舉仙蛻歸終南之劉蔣仙姑就金蓮堂居環大定十五年夏仙姑西入關致醮祖庭未幾即出關遊洛陽居風仙姑洞接引弟子甚眾二十

二年壬寅十二月二十九日忽沐浴更衣冠

改九

三十五

問弟子天氣早晚對曰卓午矣遂援筆書卜算子云握固披衣候水火頻交構萬道霞光海底生一棹三關透仙樂頻頻奏常飲醍醐酒妙藥都來頃刻間九轉丹砂就書畢謂弟子云吾今歸矣各善護持乃跌坐而化時丹陽在文登七寶庵忽拂衣起舞歌醉仙令謂門人曰今日有非常之喜眾叩其故丹陽曰孫仙姑今日已仙去明年春報者至云仙姑於是日返真於洛陽矣有詩詞行於世

The first page of Sun Bu'er's hagiography in the *Illustrated Biographies of the Orthodox Immortal Stream of the Golden Lotus* (Jinlian zhengzong xianyuan xiangzhuān 金蓮正宗仙源像傳).



Late Imperial portrait of Sun Bu'er, Source: *Daoyuan yiqi jing* (from Catherine Despeux and Livia Kohn, *Women in Daoism*, 141).