Humor under the Guise of Chan: Stories of Su Shi and Encounter Dialogues

By: Xiao Rao

Abstract:

This article examines a group of Song-dynasty *biji* 筆記 (miscellaneous jottings) anecdotes featuring the Northern Song literary giant Su Shi 蘇軾 (style name Dongpo 東坡, 1037–1101) playfully engaging with Buddhist encounter dialogues. These religious accounts are well known for their riddle-like language and the baffling effect they create among their readers, prompting the question of whether they were read for humor. Previous scholarship on encounter dialogues focuses on the religious perspective, demonstrating that their perplexing language and rhetoric serve pedagogical and monastic functions. By contrast, this article explores Chan Buddhist humor from the perspective of the literati and vernacular culture by examining how encounter dialogues were incorporated in Song-dynasty vernacular plays and literati storytelling. Focusing on stories that depict Su Shi's playful engagement with encounter dialogues as a case study, this article reveals that an important part of Su Shi's humorous image is inspired and shaped by Buddhism. It also shows that humor in these *biji* stories is contingent on the readers' knowledge of Chan literature such as "recorded dialogues" (*yulu* 語錄) and "transmission records" (*denglu* 燈錄), which were popular among literati during the Song. The anecdotal materials preserved in *biji* suggests a mutual influence between Chan literature and vernacular entertainment during the Song. I argue that, in addition to religious functions, literary factors of performance and aesthetics played significant roles in conditioning the entertaining effect of encounter dialogues, particularly when they were received outside of monastic circles.

Keywords: biji | Su Shi | humor | Song dynasty literature

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Humor under the Guise of Chan:
Stories of Su Shi and Encounter Dialogues

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This article examines a group of Song-dynasty *biji* 筆記 (miscellaneous jottings) anecdotes featuring the Northern Song literary giant Su Shi 蘇軾 (style name Dongpo 東坡, 1037–1101) playfully engaging with Buddhist encounter dialogues. These religious accounts are well known for their riddle-like language and the baffling effect they create among their readers, prompting the question of whether they were read for humor. Previous scholarship on encounter dialogues focuses on the religious perspective, demonstrating that their perplexing language and rhetoric serve pedagogical and monastic functions. By contrast, this article explores Chan Buddhist humor from the perspective of the literati and vernacular culture by examining how encounter dialogues were incorporated in Song-dynasty vernacular plays and literati storytelling. Focusing on stories that depict Su Shi's playful engagement with encounter dialogues as a case study, this article reveals that an important part of Su Shi's humorous image is inspired and shaped by Buddhism. It also shows that humor in these *biji* stories is contingent on the readers' knowledge of Chan literature such as "recorded dialogues" (*yulu* 語錄) and "transmission records" (*denglu* 燈錄), which were popular among literati during the Song. The anecdotal materials preserved in *biji* suggests a mutual influence between Chan literature and vernacular entertainment during the Song. I argue that, in addition to religious functions, literary factors of performance and aesthetics played significant roles in conditioning the entertaining effect of encounter dialogues, particularly when they were received outside of monastic circles.

INTRODUCTION

The Song dynasty (960–1279) witnessed a surge of interest in anecdotal writing by educated elites, resulting in a large corpus of personal collections known as *biji* (miscellaneous jottings).[1] The loose structure and informal nature of *biji* allowed literati and literary monks to record gossip, musings, and jokes, forms of writing rarely found in ostensibly more formal genres.[2] Many stories in *biji* during this time feature witty and humorous interactions between Confucian literati and Buddhist monks, providing unique insight into Song cultural

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1. The *Quan Song biji* 全宋筆記 publication project led by Zhu Yian 朱易安 and Fu Xuancong 傅璇琮 was completed in 2018, resulting in a compendium of 102 volumes that include 476 *biji* titles from the Song period.

2. For general information about *biji*, see, for instance, Liu Yeqiu 劉葉秋, *Lidai biji gaishu* 歷代筆記概述 (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 2003); James M. Hargett, "Sketches," in *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature*, ed. Victor H. Mair (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2001), 560–65. For Song-dynasty *biji* written by Chan monks, see Chen Shiqiang 陳仕強, "Zhongguo gudai de fojiao biji" 中國古代的佛教筆記, *Fudan xuebao* (*shehui kexue ban*) 1993.3: 112–13; Chao Zhang, "Aperçu sur les *biji* ou les miscellanées du bouddhisme Chan," *Études Chinoises* 34 (2015): 105–32.

and religious history.[3] Among them, stories of the literary giant Su Shi's playful interactions with Buddhism deserve special attention because Su is not only a paragon of the literati culture, he was also a highly esteemed Buddhist layman. Su Shi's social exchanges with literary monks have been well documented in scholarship.[4] More intriguing and puzzling, however, are stories regarding Su Shi's jocular engagement with a group of religious texts often referred to as encounter dialogues.[5] Although not always reliable as information on the historical Su Shi, these stories unveil a heretofore overlooked aspect of Su Shi's humorous image and provide a unique insight into Buddhism's influence on lay literati.

Key to understanding Su Shi's penchant for playfulness as portrayed in these stories is the knotty problem of how to evaluate and study humor in religious texts at a temporal and cultural remove. Humor, as a phenomenon conditioned by historical and cultural factors, has a clear social dimension: it reflects the shared knowledge and beliefs of a certain group of people in a given society.[6] In premodern societies, humor has an important and complex relationship with religion: on the one hand, didacticism and laughter are intertwined; on the other hand, a great deal of laughter is evoked against normally revered religious scriptures.[7] As with the case of encounter dialogues, what may appear funny to modern readers might actually have been utterly serious.[8] Thus, the first imperative in trying to evaluate humor in

3. The pervasiveness and significance of leading Chan monks' literary interactions with lay literati during the Song has been well accounted for in recent scholarship. See, for instance, Robert Gimello, "Mārga and Culture: Learning, Letters, and Liberation in Northern Sung Ch'an," in *Paths to Liberation: The Mārga and Its Transformations in Buddhist Thought*, ed. Robert Buswell and Robert Gimello (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 1992), 371–437; Mark Halperin, *Out of the Cloister: Literati Perspectives on Buddhism in Sung China, 960–1279* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2006).

4. See Beata Grant, *Mount Lu Revisited: Buddhism in the Life and Writings of Su Shih* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 1994); Sun Changwu 孫昌武, "Su Shi yu fojiao" 蘇軾與佛教, *Wenxue yichan* 1994.1: 61–72; Ronald Egan, *Word, Image, and Deed in the Life of Su Shi* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1994), 134–68.

5. A note on Chan Buddhist genres in this article: "encounter dialogues," coined by John McRae following Yanagida Seizan's 柳田聖山 term *kien mondō* 機緣問答 (Ch. *jiyuan wenda*), refers to Chan dialogues in a monastic setting and among lay Buddhists aimed to trigger enlightenment. They often employ the roles of teacher and student and consist of succinct questions and responses. *Denglu* 燈錄, "transmission records," "lamp records," or "flame records," are officially sanctioned histories of Chan transmission records. They often bear an imperial reign title. Although some forerunners of the *denglu* tradition were compiled before the Song, the name of the genre originates from the *Jingde chuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄 (Records of transmission up to the Jingde reign), which sets the standard for Song *denglu* texts. The term *kōan* 公案 (Ch. *gong'an*), lit., "public cases," was originally used in juridical contexts. In Buddhist contexts, *gong'an* are cases selected from past Chan masters' recorded dialogues (either in *yulu* 語錄 or *denglu*) and complemented with verses and further commentaries in order to present them as exemplary cases that capture the ideal master–student transmission. Scholarship on Chan Buddhist genres is abundant and growing. See, for instance, John McRae, *Seeing through Zen: Encounter, Transformation, and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2003); *The* Koan*: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism*, ed. Steven Heine and Dale Wright (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000); Judith Berling, "Bringing the Buddha down to Earth: Notes on the Emergence of *Yü-lu* as a Buddhist Genre," *History of Religions* 27.1 (1987): 56–88.

6. For the social dimension of laughter and humor, see Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (New York: Macmillan, 1914), 4.

7. Recent studies on laughter in Christianity provide comparative insights. On the intertwined relation between laughter and didacticism, see, for instance, Albert Classen, "Laughter as an Expression of Human Nature in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period: Literary, Historical, Theological, Philosophical, and Psychological Reflections," in *Laughter in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times*, ed. Albert Classen (Boston: De Gruyter, 2010), 75–77, 91–94. On laughter against the revered scriptural background, M. A. Screech has an insightful discussion of Shrovetide laughter in Rabelais's (1494–1553) novels; see Screech, *Laughter at the Foot of the Cross* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), 230–32.

8. For example, R. H. Blyth said that he "laughed at every *koan*" Suzuki quoted in his book *Essays in Zen*, and that the less he "understood" the more he laughed. See Blyth, *Oriental Humor* (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1959), 87.

encounter dialogues is not about whether they are entertaining now, but rather whether they were perceived to be entertaining during the Song, by whom and in what contexts.

On the surface, Chan Buddhist encounter dialogues, most of which were canonized during the Song dynasty, seem to be intrinsically related to humor: explicit laughter as well as comic elements such as paradoxical language and the masters' iconoclastic behaviors have fascinated readers through the ages.[9] Few Buddhologists who study Chinese Chan and Japanese Zen Buddhism regard encounter dialogues as merely joking matters. There are, however, scholars who have explored the place of humor in Chan rhetoric, especially the link between humor and Buddhist wisdom. For example, theologian Conrad Hyers's dated but still insightful work on Zen Buddhist laughter argues that "humor in Zen is both the occasion for and the result of *satori* (enlightenment, Ch. *wu* 悟)."[10] Bernard Faure and Victor Sōgen Hori in their influential studies on Chan rhetoric both unveil the relation between Chan discourses and literary games.[11] In sum, the existing paradigm in religious studies views humor as an integral component of Chan literature: the seemingly witty and entertaining appearance of Chan discourse is regarded as a rhetorical device to convey the Buddhist notions of nonduality and the unmediated transmission of enlightenment. These discourses in fact often have profound doctrinal concerns and serve religious and pedagogical functions for monastics.[12]

However, approaching these religious texts solely from a doctrinal or liturgical perspective hampers a fuller understanding of the important roles humor might have played in the intersecting areas of Buddhist and literati cultures during the Song, where writings more generally tend to be entertaining, irreverent, and amusing. Recently, there has been a growing interest in the intersection between Song Buddhist and literati cultures through the lens of Buddhist monks' poetic productions.[13] Contributing insights from a literary perspective, in this article I read encounter dialogues as Chinese literature by studying representations of Chan humor in an array of genres that were popular in the eleventh-century literati culture.

Viewing humor in Buddhism from a literary perspective has already been proposed by scholars of Indian literature and Buddhism. Gregory Schopen has suggested the idea of "doc-

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9. On enigmatic effects of encounter dialogues, see, for example, Heine and Wright, "Introduction," in Koan*: Texts and Contexts*, 4–5.

10. Hyers, "The Ancient Zen Master as Clown-Figure and Comic Midwife," *Philosophy East and West* 20.1 (1970): 5. Hyers has written extensively on Buddhist laughter and humor. His most representative work on the subject is *Zen and the Comic Spirit* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974). Although his theological approach to Chan/Zen studies has proven problematic in light of recent scholarship, his discussion on Buddhist humor remains helpful.

11. See Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversights: An Epistemological Critique of the Chan Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1993), 195–216; Hori, *Zen Sand: The Book of Capping Phrases for Kōan Practice* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 2003), 41–61.

12. On the doctrinal concerns in Chan *gong'an*, see Robert Sharf, "How to Think with Chan Gong'an," in *Thinking with Cases: Specialized Knowledge in Chinese Cultural History*, ed. Charlotte Furth, Judith Zeitlin, and Hsiung Ping-chen (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 205–43. For the religious functions of laughter in Chan discourses, see Bernard Faure's discussion of "tricksters" in Chan Buddhism in his *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: A Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1991), 115–31. On how encounter dialogues were used in Buddhist monastic life in the Song period, see Morten Schlütter, *How Zen became Zen* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 110–13.

13. See Ding-hwa Hsieh, "Poetry and Chan 'Gong'an': From Xuedou Chongxian (980–1052) to Wumen Huikai (1183–1260)," *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 40 (2010): 39–70; Zhu Gang 朱剛 and Chen Jue 陳玨, *Songdai Chanseng shi jikao* 宋代禪僧詩輯考 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2012); Christopher Byrne, "Poetics of Silence: Hongzhi Zhengjue (1091–1157) and the Practice of Poetry in Song Dynasty Chan *Yulu*" (PhD diss., McGill Univ., 2015); Jason Protass, *The Poetry Demon: Song-Dynasty Monks on Verse and the Way* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2021). However, there has been no research on humor and laughter in the interaction between literati and monks.

trinal jokes," referring to "the citation of doctrine in an incongruous context meant to elicit laughter."[14] By reading Indian Buddhist texts as Indian literature, Schopen demonstrates, in a case study of *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* (Ch. 根本說一切有部毘奈耶), how doctrinal passages might have been read by Indian audiences for amusement.[15] The case for understanding humor in Buddhism from a literary perspective is also valuable for a fuller understanding of the dynamics of Buddhism in Chinese culture during the Song.

Setting aside the work of Buddhologists, scholars in Song literary studies have recently viewed humor in the work of Su Shi as a significant motif fraught with political and aesthetic concerns. Ronald Egan has shown that playfulness in Su Shi's poetry is used as a disguise for satirical political messages.[16] Zhou Yukai 周裕鍇, pioneering the study of "Chan language" 禪宗語言 and its relation to Song poetics, discusses playful poems of Su Shi in the contexts of the Buddhist idea of "play in *samādhi*" (*youxi sanmei* 遊戲三昧) and the so-called Literary Chan 文字禪 movement.[17] However, the exact link between humor and "Literary Chan" remains to be systematically studied. Jason Protass's recent article in this journal traces how a witty and disparaging metaphor by Su Shi—that monks' poetry has a vegetarian stink—became an influential poetological label.[18] Beyond poetry, Zhu Gang 朱剛 has recently emphasized the value of studying the relationship between Chan Buddhist and Song literary cultures in vernacular performative genres such as dramas and plays.[19]

Building on the existing scholarship of religious and literary studies, this article aims to shed new light on the relation between encounter dialogues and entertainment during the Song via the perspective of vernacular plays and literati storytelling.[20] By closely examining stories featuring Su Shi's playful engagement with encounter dialogues, I attempt to unveil how literary factors of genre, performance, and aesthetics in Song-dynasty literati

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14. Gregory Schopen, "The Learned Monk as a Comic Figure: On Reading a Buddhist Vinaya as Indian Literature," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 35.3 (2007): 211.

15. Ibid., 201–26.

16. See Egan, *Word, Image, and Deed*, 169–79. Egan also discusses humor in the private life of Su Shi by focusing on his letters to friends; see "Su Shi's Informal Letters in Literature and Life," in *A History of Chinese Letters and Epistolary Culture*, ed. Antje Richter (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 502–7.

17. See Zhou's *Chanzong yuyan* 禪宗語言 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 1999), 303–20; and "Wenzi Chan yu Songdai shixue" 文字禪與宋代詩學, in *Zhongguo fojiao xueshu lundian* 中國佛教學術論典 (Gaoxiong: Foguang shan zongwu weiyuanhui 佛光山宗務委員會, 2001), 153–71. The notion of "Literary Chan" is believed to have been coined by the Chan monk Juefan Huihong 覺范惠洪 (1071–1128). Scholarship on "Literary Chan" is growing, but there has been no consensus on whether it constitutes a "movement," as described by some scholars. See, for instance, Gimello, "Mārga and Culture," 380–83; George Keyworth, "Transmitting the Lamp of Learning in Classical Chan Buddhism: Juefan Huihong (1071–1128) and Literary Chan" (PhD diss., Univ. of California Los Angeles, 2001); Protass, *Poetry Demon*, 121–42; Chen Zili 陳自力, *Shi Huihong yanjiu* 釋惠洪研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005), 143–74; Hsiao Li-hua 蕭麗華, *Wenzi Chan shixue de fazhan guiji* 文字禪詩學的發展軌跡 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 2012), 181–227.

18. Protass, "The Flavors of Monks' Poetry: On a Witty Disparagement and Its Influence," *JAOS* 141.1 (2021): 125–50.

19. Zhu Gang, "Yasu zhijian: Chanzong wenxue de liangzhong mianxiang" 雅俗之間：禪宗文學的兩種面向, *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* 2020.137: 213–28. For the concept of the "vernacular," see Glen Dudbridge, *Books, Tales and Vernacular Culture: Selected Papers on China* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 217–37; Victor Mair, "Buddhism and the Rise of the Written Vernacular in East Asia: The Making of National Languages," *Journal of Asian Studies* 53.3 (1994): 719–25. On Chan Buddhism and Chinese theater, see Liao Chao-heng 廖肇亨, "Chanmen shuo xi: Yige fojiao wenhua shi guandian de changshi" 禪門說戲：一個佛教文化史觀點的嘗試, *Hanxue yanjiu* 17.2 (1999): 277–98; Kang Baocheng 康保成, *Zhongguo gudai xiju xingtai yu fojiao* 中國古代戲劇形態與佛教 (Shanghai: Dongfang chuban zhongxin, 2004), 266–78.

20. See Manling Luo, *Literati Storytelling in Late Medieval China* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 2014), 5–12. The concept of literati storytelling enables us to see how stories reflect shared values of the literati community (as related to but different from storytelling in vernacular dramas).

culture conditioned the entertaining effect of encounter dialogues. These stories also show how encounter dialogues have shaped the humorous image of Su Shi.

PRELUDE: HUMOR WHILE READING "TRANSMISSION RECORDS"

An important channel through which literati of the Song learned about encounter dialogues was by reading "transmission records" (*denglu* 燈錄).[21] In order to explore in what sense Su Shi and his literati peers perceived encounter dialogues as humorous, it is necessary first to examine how *denglu* texts were read among literati in eleventh-century China. During Su Shi's lifetime, two of these texts were in circulation: *Jingde chuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄 was completed in 1004 and *Tiansheng guangdeng lu* 天聖廣燈錄 was issued in 1036.[22] Among the two, *Jingde chuandeng lu* was the most popular imperially sanctioned *denglu* among literati.[23]

Although Su Shi's literati peers, for instance, his brother Su Zhe 蘇轍 (1039–1112), approached these officially sanctioned religious records piously,[24] one poem attributed to Su Shi shows that he found humor in the very concept of the *denglu* genre. An anecdote containing this poem captures a humorous moment when Su Shi was reading *Jingde chuandeng lu*:

Dongpo lodged at Caoxi for the night. While he read *Records of Transmitting the Lamp*, a piece of ash from his lamp fell on the book and burned a hole on the paper where the character "monk" was written. [Witnessing this scene], he used a brush to write [the following poem] on the panel between the windows on the wall:
東坡夜宿曹溪，讀《傳燈錄》，燈花墮卷上，燒一僧字，即以筆記於窗間曰：「山堂夜岑寂，燈下讀《傳燈》。不覺燈花落，荼毗一箇僧。」

山堂夜岑寂	The night was tranquil in the mountain hall.
燈下讀傳燈	I read *Transmitting the Lamp* beside a lamp.
不覺燈花落	Before I noticed it, ash fell from the lamp,
荼毗一箇僧	"Cremating"[25] a Buddhist monk.[26]

The amusement Su Shi found while reading *Jingde chuandeng lu* was first hinted at by the metaphor of the lamp or flame (*deng* 燈) in the titles of *denglu* literature. The notion that the Chan Buddhist transmission of the *dharma* is like the transmission of the flame from lamp to lamp is a crucial idea behind *denglu* literature.[27] Su Shi is delighted in this sketch by

21. For the significant literati influence on the making and circulation of "transmission records," see Albert Welter, *Monks, Rulers, and Literati: The Political Ascendancy of Chan Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006), 161–208.

22. Ibid., 21. According to Yang Zengwen 楊曾文, the compilation of *Tiansheng guangdeng lu* could have begun as late as 1032. See Yang Zengwen, *Song Yuan chanzhong shi* 宋元禪宗史 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2006), 544–45.

23. Yang Zengwen, *Song Yuan chanzhong shi*, 544. For a recent discussion of its reception among literati, see Feng Guodong 馮國棟, *Jingde chuandeng lu yanjiu* 景德傳燈錄研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2014), 361–402.

24. A popular practice among literati was to copy the *Jingde chuandeng lu*. Su Zhe is said to have copied sections on his belt "so that he might always remember them." See Halperin, *Out of the Cloister*, 68–69; on Song literati copying the *Jingde chuandeng lu*, see also Feng Guodong, *Jingde chuandeng lu yanjiu*, 362–67.

25. *Tupi* 荼毗, a transliteration of Skt. *jhāpita*.

26. Huihong, *Lengzhai yehua*, in *Quan Song biji* (hereafter *QSBJ*), ed. Zhu Yian 朱易安and Fu Xuancong 傅璇琮 (Zhengzhou: Daxiang chubanshe, 2006), series 2, vol. 9, 10.83. See also Huihong, *Lengzhai yehua*, ed. Chen Xin 陳新 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988, hereafter Chen Xin), 10.80; *Lengzhai yehua* (based on the Japanese Gozan 五山 edition) in Zhang Bowei 張伯偉, *Xijian ben Song ren shihua sizhong* 稀見本宋人詩話四種 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 2002, hereafter *Xijian ben Song ren shihua*), 10.96. Su Shi's poem can be found in *Su Shi shiji jiaozhu* 蘇軾詩集校註, ed. Zhang Zhilie 張志烈, Ma Defu 馬德富, and Zhou Yukai (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 2011), 44.5219–20.

27. See Griffith Foulk, "Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice in Sung Ch'an Buddhism," in *Religion and Society*

the joy of experiencing an intriguing moment when the phenomenal world and the brilliant metaphor he is reading about intertwine in a marvelous way. The poetic piece is an exemplar of wit. [28] Su Shi first expresses simple pleasure in the metaphor by playing with the word *deng* 燈 in lines 2 and 3, switching between referring to the physical lamp on his table and the metaphorical lamp in the title of the *denglu*. The punchline comes in the last line when Su Shi brilliantly chooses the verb "cremate" (*tupi* 荼毗), a term used almost exclusively in the Buddhist context, meaning to cremate a Buddhist monk after death. The humor here lies in the unexpected incongruity that Su Shi uses such a formal and sombre term in this lighthearted context, referring to the moment when a piece of ash devoured the character "monk" on the paper.

Although the poem attributed to Su Shi provides light-hearted entertainment in this anecdote, one may still find the attempt to locate humor in *denglu* texts elusive because these imperially sanctioned religious texts were, after all, not compiled for the purpose of entertainment. On a more pragmatic level, however, evidence in the *denglu* suggests a strong correlation between encounter dialogues and various forms of vernacular entertainment that were popular in medieval China when Chan records were taking shape.

VERNACULAR PLAYS

One hypothesis is that jokes and humorous stories originally associated with vernacular plays had close relations to Chan *denglu* narratives. Sources of *Jingde chuandeng lu* were diverse, and many contained coarse and unpolished materials of vernacular culture, as noted by the compiler Yang Yi 楊億 (974–1020). [29] A good example is the famous story of the influential Tang master Mazu Daoyi's 馬祖道一 (709–788) disciple Deng Yinfeng 鄧隱峯, who switched between Mazu and Shitou Xiqian 石頭希遷 (700–790) as his teacher.

> Deng Yinfeng was taking his leave from Mazu's [monastery]. Mazu asked him, "Where are you going?" Yinfeng replied, "I am going to [see] Shitou." Mazu told him, "Shitou's (Stone) path is slippery." Yinfeng replied, "I will take a wooden stick with me and play my role accordingly on the occasion." Then he went away. As soon as he arrived at Shitou's [monastery], he walked around [Shitou's] meditation seat and made a sound by shaking his stick. [Then] he asked [Shitou], "What is the essential purport of this?" Shitou said, "Heaven! Heaven!" Yinfeng was rendered speechless. Then Yinfeng returned [to Mazu's monastery] and recounted to Mazu what had happened. Mazu told him, "You should go back [to see Shitou again]. After he says, 'Heaven! Heaven!' you should twice make a hushing sound." Yinfeng went back to Shitou's [monastery] one more time. He did as before and then asked [the same question], "What is the essential purport of this?" Shitou made a hushing sound twice. Once again, Yinfeng was rendered speechless. He then returned [to Mazu's monastery]. [When he learned what had happened], Mazu said, "I told you that Shitou's [stone] path is slippery."

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in T'ang and Sung China, ed. Patricia B. Ebrey and Peter N. Gregory (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 1993), 152. The analogy of the transmission of the *dharma* to that of a flame originates with the literati compiler of *Jingde chuandeng lu*, Yang Yi 楊億 (974–1020). See Welter, *Monks, Rulers, and Literati*, 176.

28. Astonished how this piece subverted his expectations of a conventional *shi* 詩 poem, Qing-dynasty scholar Ji Yun 紀昀 (1724–1805) comments: "How could this be a poem?" 此豈是詩; *Su Shi shiji jiaozhu*, 44.5220. The problem of blending humor with Buddhist tropes in poetic genres will be revisited in the section "Humor in Poetic Genres" below.

29. Yang Yi remarked in his preface to *Jingde chuandeng lu* that "in some cases the order of the words was confusing and in some cases the language used was coarse"; *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T no. 2076, 51: 196b–97a. For a translation and discussion of the preface, see Welter, *Monks, Rulers, and Literati*, 176–82. See also Feng Guodong, *Jingde chuandeng lu yanjiu*, 128–47.

鄧隱峯辭師 。師云：「什麼處去？ 」對云：「石頭去 。」師云：「石頭路滑 。」對云：
「竿木隨身，逢場作戲 。」便去 。纔到石頭，即繞禪床一匝，振錫一聲 。問：「是何宗
旨？ 」石頭云：「蒼天蒼天 。」隱峯無語 。却迴舉似於師 。師云：「汝更去 。見他道蒼
天，汝便嘘嘘 。」隱峯又去石頭 。一依前，問：「是何宗旨？ 」石頭乃嘘嘘 。隱峯又無
語 。歸來 。師云：「向汝道，石頭路滑 。」[30]

This episode, often referred to as "Shitou's [stone] path is slippery" 石頭路滑, aptly employs puns and language games. Shitou 石頭, literally, "stone," is the designation of Chan Master Shitou Xiqian; and "path" refers metaphorically to the teaching style of Chan masters. By "slippery," Mazu refers to the difficulty of grasping the teaching method of Shitou Xiqian. In this vignette, Deng Yinfeng's clown-like behavior and Mazu's deft use of puns bring humor to the fore. Moreover, Deng Yinfeng's claim that he would "take a wooden stick and play my role accordingly on the occasion" 竿木隨身, 逢場作戲 is seemingly borrowed from the language of vernacular performers during that period.[31] In his biographical entry in another important Buddhist hagiography of the period, *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳, we are told that Deng Yinfeng performed magical acrobatic tricks that prevented two separate groups of soldiers from killing one another and that he passed away in a performative handstand position, both of which are reminiscent of a vernacular actor.[32] As I will show later, Su Shi enjoyed alluding to this story because he was inspired by its puns and performative nature.

The example of Deng Yinfeng is not the only one, and other metaphors deriving from plays and dramas can also be found in Chan literature.[33] This evidence in the *denglu* and *yulu* literature hints that vernacular plays influenced the making of Chan records. More significantly for the purpose of this article, such an influence is likely to be mutual, and Chan stories, once they began circulating in society, also influenced vernacular performances.

In his seminal cultural criticism of Chan rhetoric, Bernard Faure comments on the performative nature intrinsic to encounter dialogues with the following words: "they are *illocutionary* insofar as they create an 'event' and necessitate some kind of social ceremonial and *perlocutionary* insofar as they indirectly produce effects that are not always perceived by the protagonists."[34] As the encounter dialogues became a highly ritualized form of discourse,[35] they may have been used in situations beyond the monastic setting and produced entertaining effects.

Slapstick

The most suggestive evidence that encounter dialogues were received as entertainment in Song society can be found in dramas and plays. Although many of the original dramatic materials from the Song are no longer extant,[36] indirect evidence from *biji* records[37] sug-

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30. *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T no. 2076, 51: 246b08–b15. Translation modified from Mario Poceski, *The Records of Mazu and the Making of Classical Chan Literature* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2015), 291–92.

31. For the possible influence of vernacular plays, particularly the "Marionette Plays" 傀儡戲, on this episode, see Liao Chao-heng, "Chanmen shuo xi," 283.

32. For his entry in *Song gaoseng zhuan*, see T no. 2061, 50: 847a2–27.

33. Liao discusses examples of Chan masters using theatrical metaphors in "Chanmen shuo xi," 284–87.

34. Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversights*, 213.

35. See McRae, *Seeing through Zen*, 92–93.

36. Zhou Yukai, *Chanzong yuyan*, 305.

37. See William Dolby, "Early Chinese Plays and Theater," in *Chinese Theater: From Its Origins to the Present Day*, ed. Colin Mackerras (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaiʻi Press, 1983), 22–24; Wilt Idema and Stephen West, *Chinese Theater, 1100–1450: A Sourcebook* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1982), 10–11.

gests that Song-dynasty audiences enjoyed the incongruous language and comic gestures in encounter dialogues in a similar way as those typically found in farcical stage genres such as the "Variety Play" (*zaju* 雜劇) or "Farcical Play" (*huaji xi* 滑稽戲).[38] For example, in his *biji* collection, Zeng Minxing 曾敏行 (1118–1175) explicitly articulates that "Chan dialogues are like comic performances" 禪僧問話，語近於俳, before telling two Buddhist jokes.[39] More specifically within the *zaju*, a possible link between Chan Buddhism and the comical performative technique known as "making jokes" (*dahun* 打諢) is discernible in the notion of "penetrating Chan via making jokes" 打諢通禪, a term that originated from plays.[40] Probing this link, Zhou Yukai has shown that there existed a structural resemblance among a crosstalk-style performance called "Adjunct Play" (*canjun xi* 參軍戲),[41] Chan encounter dialogues, and the playfulness in Su Shi's poetry.[42] These preliminary findings suggest that Song-dynasty farcical performances might well have intricate links to encounter dialogues.

One might think that theatrical forms like *zaju* that derived from vernacular culture were primarily targeting audiences in the lower strata of Song society and reflecting their taste. But these vernacular entertainments were also popular diversions for literati and members of the imperial family.[43] It is thus no surprise that Su Shi, a cultural elite, is featured in several Song-dynasty anecdotes about farcical entertainments.[44] Humorous stories about him entertaining others and being entertained during drama performances are numerous in Song-dynasty anecdotes.[45] However, evidence of him explicitly enjoying a performance of encounter dialogues is still difficult to find in Song anecdotal literature. There is indirect evidence suggesting that Su Shi was entertained by slapstick comedy, which would demonstrate the implicit influence of encounter dialogues. The following is an example from Yang Wanli's 楊萬里 (1127–1206) *Chengzhai shihua* 誠齋詩話:

> Dongpo once feasted his guests while a comedian performed various tricks, but Dongpo did not laugh. Another comedian suddenly came forward and forcefully beat the other performer with a cudgel while he was performing the tricks, saying: "The scholar did not laugh! How can you still call yourself a good comedian?" The other said: "It is not that he did not laugh, his not laughing is in fact profound laughing." [Hearing this], Dongpo roared with laughter. The comedians were likely alluding to Dongpo's "A Treatise on 'A Ruler Should Not Rule over the

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38. I use *zaju* in a narrow sense, referring to the Song-dynasty farcical genre that evolved from its Tang predecessors. Humor is a defining element of the Song *zaju*. See Wang Guowei 王國維, *Song Yuan xiqu shi* 宋元戲曲史, ed. Zeng Yongyi 曾永義 (Taipei: Wunan tushu, 2012), 22. See also Hu Ji 胡忌, *Song Jin zaju kao* 宋金雜劇考 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), 43.

39. Zeng Minxing, *Duxing zazhi* 獨醒雜誌, in *QSBJ*, series 4, vol. 5, 200–201.

40. The technique of *dahun* uses verbal performance and comic gestures to illicit laughter. For encounter dialogues and *dahun*, see Wang Jisi 王季思, "Dahun, can Chan yu Jiangxi shipai" 打諢參禪與江西詩派 in *Yulun xuan qu lun* 玉輪軒曲論 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 242–46; see also Zhou Yukai, *Chanzong yuyan*, 305–7.

41. The "Adjunct Play," a stage performance popular from the Tang, is regarded as the predecessor of the Song *zaju*. It is often a small comic piece with a simple but witty plot. An "Adjunct Play" usually involves two comedians: one person plays a wit, known as the "Adjunct" (*canjun* 參軍), and the other plays a stooge, known as the "Grey Hawk" (*canghu* 倉鶻). See Zeng Yongyi 曾永義, *Canjun xi yu Yuan zaju* 參軍戲與元雜劇 (Taipei: Lianjing, 1992), 1–122.

42. See Zhou Yukai, *Zhongguo Chanzong yu shige* 中國禪宗與詩歌 (Taipei: Liwen wenhua shiye gufen youxian gongsi, 1994), 178–87.

43. See Dolby, "Early Chinese Plays," 24–26.

44. For anecdotes of Su Shi entertaining others or being entertained during theatrical performances, see Ren Erbei 任二北, *Youyu ji* 優語集 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1981), 99–105.

45. For anecdotes about Su Shi during the Song and beyond, see Ding Chuanjing 丁傳靖, *Songren yishi huibian* 宋人軼事彙編 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 20.585–640.

Barbarians',"[46] which [has a line that] reads: "It is not that he did not rule, his not ruling is in fact profound ruling."

東坡嘗宴客，俳優者作伎萬方，坡終不笑 。一優突出，用棒痛打作伎者曰：「內翰不笑，汝猶稱良優乎？」對曰：「非不笑也，不笑所以深笑之也。」坡遂大笑 。蓋優人用東坡《 王者不治夷狄論 》云：「非不治也，不治乃所以深治之也。」[47]

On its surface, this joke seems to contain no clear Buddhist elements. The performance depicted in this anecdote is in accordance with a typical Song *zaju*. The comedian doing tricks plays the role of the "clown" (*fujing* 副淨) while his partner who beats him with a cudgel plays the role of "jester" (*fumo* 副末). [48] The humor lies in the duo's parody of a line from Su Shi's exam paper for the civil service, a subject one would typically expect to be presented in a sober manner. Yet probing deeper into the humor in the comedians' performance reveals similar traces of tropes found in encounter dialogues as well.

The first similarity is between the formulaic gesture of beating, as seen in this and other Song *zaju* and the iconoclastic "blow" (*bang* 棒) in Chan pedagogical contexts. It has been suggested that the comedic gesture of one performer beating the other in Tang-dynasty Adjunct Plays may have its roots in ancient Indian comedies, and that by the time of the Song, the plot of a jester beating a clown had become a standard gesture to induce laughter in a *zaju*. [49] Scholarship in Buddhist studies has also shown how violent gestures, such as beating and kicking, became defining features in Linji 臨濟 branch teaching scenarios recorded in the *Linji lu* 臨濟錄, a *yulu* text by the founder of the Linji branch, Linji Yixuan 臨濟義玄 (d. 866). [50] Similar to how a Chan master might use physical blows to precipitate a student's enlightenment, the jester in the slapstick comedy used beating to trigger the clown's punchline.

The second and more subtle trace of Buddhism in this anecdote is the pattern of paradoxical or dialectical reasoning lampooned by the clown in the punchline, "not X is in fact X." Wang Jisi notes that similar examples of this pattern of paradoxical reasoning can be found in quite a few of Su Shi's formal writings. [51] It is likely that such a pattern of dialectical reasoning is, although perhaps not solely, [52] the result of a subtle Buddhist influence upon Su Shi's writings, including those lacking Buddhist themes. [53] Meanwhile, parallels to Su Shi's pattern of paradoxical reasoning can be found readily in Buddhist texts. For instance, Chan master

46. The essay is Su Shi's 1061 exam paper. In the essay, Su argues based on a commentary on *The Spring and Autumn* 春秋 made by Eastern Han scholar He Xiu 何休 (129–182) that "a ruler should not rule over the barbarians" 王者不治夷狄. See *Su Shi wenji jiaozhu* 蘇軾文集校註, ed. Zhang Zhilie, Ma Defu, and Zhou Yukai (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 2011), 2.184–88.

47. Yang Wanli, *Chengzhai shihua*, in *Lidai shihua xubian* 歷代詩話續編, ed. Ding Fubao 丁福保 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 150. The line in Su Shi's essay reads: "Ruling by not ruling, this is in fact profound ruling" 治之以不治者，乃所以深治之也; *Su Shi wenji jiaozhu*, 2.184.

48. For a brief description of roles in Song *zaju*, see Dolby, "Early Chinese Plays," 19–22.

49. See Wang Tong 王彤, "Tang Song huaji xi yanjiu" 唐宋滑稽戲研究 (PhD diss., Zhongguo yishu yanjiuyuan, 2017), 69–70.

50. For the functions of using blows in Chan teaching, see Zhou Yukai, *Chanzong yuyan*, 230–34. See also Albert Welter, *The* Linji lu *and the Creation of Chan Orthodoxy: The Development of Chan's Records of Sayings Literature* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), 132.

51. Wang Jisi, "Su Shi shilun" 蘇軾試論, *Wenxue yanjiu* 4 (1957): 111–23.

52. Dale Wright observes that Chinese readers find brilliance in incongruous Chan texts similar to indigenous traditions (such as Daoism) where "paradoxical reasoning is savored and taken to ecstatic conclusions." Wright, *The Six Perfections: Buddhism and the Cultivation of Character* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), 258–62.

53. Buddhist thought penetrated Su Shi's literary mind deeply and had great influence on his writings. For example, see Beata Grant's demonstration that the technique of miniaturization that appears frequently in Su Shi's writing is influenced by the *Vimalakirti Sutra*; Grant, *Mount Lu Revisited*, 131–33.

Yongming Yanshou's 永明延壽 (904–975) *Zongjing lu* 宗鏡錄, which deeply influenced Su Shi, articulated the notion of "no-mind" 無心 in a pattern almost identical to that seen in the comedy, "he who has no body has a great body, he who has no mind has a great mind" 無身 故大身 。無心故大心.[54] This pattern of speech is also featured in Chinese jokes pertaining to Buddhism more generally. For example, a humorous anecdote recorded by Northern Song scholar Zhang Lei 張耒 (1054–1114) reads:

> Deputy Director of Palace Affairs, Qiu Jun (*jinshi* 1027), was a target of gossip. He once paid a visit to Chan Master Shan [Huiming Yanshan 慧明延珊, fl. 1035]) in Hangzhou. Shan welcomed him in a fairly arrogant manner. A while later, a scion from the county commander's family came to visit Shan. [This time,] Shan descended the stairs and received the visitor with all due respect. [Witnessing this,] Jun could not suppress [his irritation]. When the scion left, Jun asked Shan: "Why did you receive me so arrogantly but receive the scion in such a respectful manner?" Shan said: "Receiving is not receiving; not receiving is receiving." Jun stood up suddenly, and slapped Shan several rounds. Then he said slowly: "Please do not blame me. Beating is not beating; not beating is beating."
>
> 殿中丞丘浚，多言人也 。嘗在杭謁珊禪師，珊見之殊傲 。俄頃，有州將子弟來謁，珊降 階接禮甚恭，浚不能平 。子弟退，乃問珊曰：「 和尚接浚甚傲，而接州將子弟乃爾恭 耶？ 」珊曰：「 接是不接，不接是接 。」浚勃然起，摑珊數下，乃徐曰：「 和尚莫怪， 打是不打，不打是打 。」[55]

Considering that paradoxical reasoning is a recurrent pattern in Su Shi's writings, the comedians who were invited to perform at Su Shi's banquet must have been familiar with Su Shi's work. If his reasoning is perceived as being influenced by Buddhism, the fact that it was made fun of in a *zaju* provides a clue to how the literary giant's Buddhist ties were viewed among the vernacular entertainers in the Song.

Didactic Entertainments

The relation between humor and Chan Buddhism, as exemplified in the notion "penetrating Chan via making jokes," is often conceived as one in which "making jokes" 打諢 is a means to achieve "penetrating/comprehending Chan" 通禪. However, evidence from vernacular storytelling, even in ostensibly didactic forms, suggests that the reverse scenario, in which Chan themes and tropes were used by storytellers for entertainment, is equally possible. And Song audiences, at least in part, likely received the enigmatic exchanges between a Chan Buddhist master and student as humorous and as literarily amusing.

Accounts preserved in the Song *biji* corpus provide valuable information on various forms in the vernacular storytelling tradition collectively referred to as "tale telling" (*shuohua* 說

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54. Yongming Yanshou, *Zongjing lu*, T no. 2016, 48: 680b. "Great body" 大身 refers to a body that pervades all of space, "great mind" 大心 refers to the great bodhi-mind; the mind of enlightenment. The notion of "no-mind" is also a prominent theme found in many of Su Shi's writings. See Egan, *Word, Image, and Deed*, 154.

55. Zhang Lei, *Mingdao zazhi* 明道雜誌, in *QSBJ*, series 2, vol. 7, 14. This anecdote was retold to satirize Buddhist monks in the *Xieshi* 諧史 by Shen Chu 沈俶 (fl. 1247). See Wang Liqi 王利器, *Lidai xiaohua ji* 歷代 笑話集 (Shanghai: Shanghai gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1956), 101. Later, the story was further trimmed, with all historical information deleted, and included in the Ming-dynasty jestbook *Xiaozang* 笑贊. See Zhao Nanxing 趙 南星 (1550–1627), *Xiaozan*, in *Ming Qing xiaohua sizhong* 明清笑話四種 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1983), 3. Studies on *Xiaozan* include Matsueda Shigeo 松枝茂夫 and Mutō Sadao 武藤禎夫, *Chūgoku Shōwa Sen: Edo Kobanashi to no Majiwari* 中国笑話選：江戸小咄との交わり (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1964), 316–17; Lutz Bieg, "Laughter in China during the Ming and Qing Era: Preliminary Comments on Zhao Nanxing's *Xiao Zan*," in Wolfgang Kubin, ed., *Symbols of Anguish: In Search of Melancholy in China* (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2001), 55–75.

話).⁵⁶ Closely related to the topic in this article are forms of storytelling with Buddhist messages, which I tentatively call "didactic entertainments." Although in many ways entangled, these didactic entertainments differ from the farcical ones in that the entertaining effect is supposed to convey Buddhist teachings.⁵⁷

The most intriguing among these is a form called "stories of making inquiries" (*shuo canqing* 說參請).⁵⁸ In the Southern Song *biji* collection *Ducheng jisheng* 都城紀勝, which preserves rich information about Song theater, one entry divides the "tale telling" genre into several categories and defines *shuo canqing* as follows: "tale telling has four categories. . . . 'Stories of making inquiries' are about incidents between a student and master in the process of practicing Chan and being enlightened" 說話有四家 。 . . . 說參請，謂賓主參禪悟道 等事.⁵⁹ This definition strongly suggests that the form of an encounter dialogue, derived from the Chan teaching scenario, is a key feature of "stories of making inquiries." Although extant records contain little information about "stories of making inquiries," there are clues suggesting that encounter dialogues and the image of Su Shi were used in "stories of making inquiries" or similar vernacular storytelling forms containing didactic messages. A story that later became influential in shaping Su Shi's image on the vernacular stage, recorded in Wu Zeng's 吳曾 (fl. 1162) *Nenggai zhai manlu* 能改齋漫錄, appears to pertain to "stories of making inquiries":

When Dongpo was at the West Lake, he teased Qin⁶⁰ by saying: "I play the master and you try to ask me questions." Qin said: "What is [meant by] the scene in the lake?" Dongpo answered: "'Autumn waters join the horizon in a swath of color, / The glow of sunset takes flight with the lone wild goose'."⁶¹ Qin said: "What is [meant by] the person in the scene?" Dongpo said: "'Her skirt sweeps six spans of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers, / Her earlocks dangle from a stretch of clouds over the Wu Mountain'."⁶² [Qin] said: "What is [meant by] the intention of the person?" Dongpo said: "[Her talent makes] Scholar Yang regret and Adjunct Bao⁶³ irritated." Qin said: "If it is thus, what should she do in the end?" Dongpo said: "'In front of her gate, deserted, the

56. For a systematic study of "tale telling" during the Song, see Hu Shiying 胡士瑩, *Huaben xiaoshuo gailun* 話本小說概論 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 100–122.

57. Ibid., 114–18.

58. Given the limited information about this form, there has not been a consensus over what "stories of making inquiries" are about, exactly. It has been argued that this form is highly didactic. See Zhang Zhenglang 張政烺, "*Wenda lu* yu shuo canqing" 問答錄與說參請, in *Zhang Zhenglang wenshi lunji* 張政烺文史論集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 238–42; Qing Zhengxuan 慶正軒, "Shuo canqing kaobian" 說參請考辨, *Lanzhou jiaoyu xueyuan xuebao* 1989.2: 33–37.

59. Naide weng 耐得翁 (pseud.), *Ducheng jicheng* 都城紀勝, in *QSBJ*, series 8, vol. 5, 15. Scholars believe that the four categories mentioned by Naide weng presents only a rough number, and the actual number of *shuohua* categories was larger. See Hu Shiying, *Huaben xiaoshuo gailun*, 102–8; Feng Baoshan 馮保善, "Songren shuohua jiashu kaobian" 宋人說話家數考辨, *Ming Qing xiaoshuo yanjiu* 2002.4: 69–76.

60. Refers to a Hangzhou courtesan by the name of Qincao 琴操. In the preceding anecdote Qincao is said to have impressed Qin Guan 秦觀 (1049–1100), a protégé of Su Shi, with her literary talent by rewriting one of Qin's *ci* poems with a changed rhyme.

61. The couplet is from Wang Bo's 王勃 (650–676) "Preface to the Prince Teng Pavilion" 滕王閣序. See *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990), 181.813. The order of the two lines in Wang Bo's original couplet is reversed in the quote.

62. The couplet "裙拖六幅湘江水，鬢聳巫山一段雲" is from Li Qunyu's 李群玉 (808–862) poem titled "Tong Zhengxiang bing geji xiaoyin xizeng" 同鄭相幷歌姬小飲戲贈. See Yang Chunqiu 羊春秋, ed., *Li Qunyu shiji* 李群玉詩集 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1987), 105. See also Peng Dingqiu 彭定求, *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), 569.6602.

63. Possibly refers to the early Tang poet Yang Jiong 楊炯 (b. 650) and the Six Dynasties poet Bao Zhao 鮑照 (d. 466).

traffic is sparse, / Turning old, she marries a merchant'."[64] [Upon hearing this,] Qin became enlightened, and at that moment she [decided to] cut her hair and become a Buddhist nun.

東坡在西湖，戲琴曰：「我作長老，爾試來問 。」琴云：「何謂湖中景？ 」東坡答云：「秋水共長天一色，落霞與孤鶩齊飛 。」琴又云：「何謂景中人？ 」東坡云：「裙拖六幅瀟湘水，鬢嚲巫山一段雲 。」又云：「何謂人中意？ 」東坡云：「惜他楊學士，憋殺鮑參軍 。」琴又云：「如此究竟如何？ 」東坡云：「門前冷落車馬稀，老大嫁作商人婦 。」琴大悟，即削髮為尼 。[65]

Although it is difficult to tell whether the anecdote itself was used directly in "stories of making inquiries," it may have a close link to vernacular storytelling.[66] Iriya Yoshitaka 入矢義高 and Luo Jintang 羅錦堂 believe that this anecdote is one of the "original events" 本事 whose plots and elements were found in the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) drama "Dongpo's Dream" 東坡夢.[67] They assume that this tale influenced the dramatic plot of "Dongpo's Dream," which combines popular elements of interest: the great scholar Su Dongpo and a courtesan being enlightened and converted to Buddhism. Wilt Idema has also shown that in "Dongpo's Dream," Su Shi's association with Buddhist monks, exemplified by his playful exchanges with Foyin 佛印 (1032–1098), was presented in exemplary and didactic tales of a witty scholar being converted to Buddhism.[68]

One influential feature of the tale not yet fully explored in scholarship is the use of encounter dialogues as a literary game. Sawada Mizuho 澤田瑞穗, in his discussion of "stories of making inquiries," has noted that this tale is "a literary game modeled upon Chan dialogues."[69] On its surface, what begins as a game ends up in a didactic message of impermanence: Su Shi leads the courtesan Qincao through a series of poetic lines to the realization (*wu* 悟) that despite her talent and attractiveness, her "destiny" as a courtesan is as desolate as that described in the couplet quoted from Bai Juyi's poem. Qincao's realization of Dongpo's hidden meanings in the poetic lines prompts her decision to become a nun.

For Song-dynasty and modern readers who are familiar with Chan literature, a more profound and intricate layer of correlation may have existed between this tale and encounter dialogues.[70] The four-step logical progression between Dongpo and Qincao displays a structural resemblance to several Chan pedagogical strategies prescribed in the *Linji lu* 臨濟錄.[71] To

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64. The couplet is from Bai Juyi's 白居易 (772–846) narrative ballad "Pipa yin" 琵琶引. See *Quan Tang shi*, 435.4821–22 (where the sixth character in the first line reads 鞍).

65. Wu Zeng, *Nenggai zhai manlu* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1979), 16.483.

66. Contents of the *Nenggai zhai manlu* were used by Song vernacular storytellers. For example, some of its stories are almost identical to entries in *Lüchuang xinhua* 綠窗新話, a collection used as a sourcebook for vernacular "tale-telling" performers, although *Nenggai zhai manlu* may not be their only source. See Huangdu fengyue zhuren 皇都風月主人 (pseud.), *Lüchuang xinhua* (Shanghai: Gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1957), 2.146–47.

67. See Iriya, "Toba mu" 東坡夢, *Shinagaku* 12 (1947): 348; Luo Jintang, *Xiancun Yuanren zaju benshi kao* 現存元人雜劇本事考 (Taipei: Zhongguo wenhua shiye gufen youxian gongsi ,1960), 175–77. Luo does not mention the *Nenggai zhai manlu* version but quotes from the Ming collection *Xihu youlan zhiyu* 西湖遊覽志餘 by Tian Rucheng 田汝成 (1503–1557). A noteworthy difference between the two is that the roles of asking and answering questions are reversed: in Tian Rucheng's version, Su Shi is the one who asks and Qincao answers with the poetic lines. See Tian Rucheng, *Xihu youlan zhiyu* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1958), 16.304. Luo Jintang says the story is also recorded in Fang Shao's 方勺 (b. 1066) *Bozhai bian* 泊宅編, but it is not found in extant versions of the text.

68. Idema, "Poet versus Minister and Monk: Su Shi on Stage in the Period 1250–1450," *T'oung Pao* 73 (1987): 208–16.

69. Sawada, *Bukkyō to Chūgoku bungaku* 佛教と中国文学 (Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 1975), 179.

70. I thank an anonymous reader for pointing out this correlation.

71. Among the Linji teaching methods, the most relevant are the "Four Relations of Guests and Hosts" 四賓主, the "Four Classifications/Examinations" 四料簡 (or 四料揀), and the "Four Illuminations and Actions" 四照用.

demonstrate the similarity between the tale and Linji teaching scenarios, here is an example from the *Linji lu* where Linji Yixuan articulates the four logical propositions in his instruction: "Sometimes I take away the person but do not take away the surroundings; sometimes I take away the surroundings but do not take away the person; sometimes I take away both person and surroundings; sometimes I take away neither person nor surroundings" 有時奪人不奪境，有時奪境不奪人，有時人境俱奪，有時人境俱不奪.[72] Immediately following is a demonstration of Linji using poetic language to showcase what he meant by these four propositions.[73] As analyzed by Christopher Byrne, these teaching methods, although varying in detail, aim to guide one to break away from delusive thinking by using four logical permutations (A and not B; B and not A; both A and B; neither A nor B) that are possible to assert about the relation between any pair of dualistic concepts, in this case, subject and object (主/賓 and 人/境).[74] Since the Song, the concept of "guest and host" (賓主) was widely adopted in various forms of Chinese literary criticism beyond the Buddhist context, ranging from remarks on poetic composition to commentaries on plot design in novels.[75]

Setting aside this structural resemblance, the logical progression in the tale of Dongpo and Qincao varies significantly from those prescribed in Linji's teaching methods. The dialogue between Dongpo and Qincao does not operate strictly with a set of dualistic concepts; and the message, although a Buddhist one of impermanence, is not about nonduality, as is the case in Linji's teaching methods. To sophisticated readers of Chan literature during the Song, the slight sense of humor in this tale lies in the incongruity that the form of the profound logical exercise of Chan teaching closes, unexpectedly, without a message of nonduality. Although almost certainly made up, this tale shows that the form of encounter dialogues may serve as an instrument for storytellers to amuse their audiences, intellectually and literarily.

This tale also shows the crucial role of poetry in encounter dialogues as well as how the fusion of the two was used in vernacular entertainment. Quoting lines from famous poets is a common practice in Chan Buddhist teaching and examples are abundant in *denglu* texts.[76] The literary allure of using poetry in encounter dialogues that incorporate poetry lies in the mixture of riddle-like ambiguity and philosophical profundity shared by the poetic language and the Chan experience.[77] Such allure continues to be influential in literature in later periods. For example, in the novel, *The Story of the Stone* (*Honglou meng* 紅樓夢) there is an episode of Jia Baoyu 賈寶玉 and Lin Daiyu 林黛玉 exchanging poetic lines in the form of encounter dialogues in a playful manner.[78]

However, there is no consensus among scholars today about how to interpret them. See Du Hanfeng 杜寒風, "Linji Yixuan menting shishe binzhuju tanzhen" 臨濟義玄門庭施設賓主句探真, *Fojiao yanjiu* 1997.4: 63–68.

72. See *Linji lu*, T no. 1985, 47: 497a; tr. Ruth Fuller Sasaki and Thomas Yūhō Kirchner, *The Record of Linji* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 150–51.

73. Ibid., 151–55.

74. For his analysis of the "Four Relations of Guests and Hosts," see Byrne, "Poetics of Silence," 93–101.

75. See Li Zhixu 李志旭, "Lun binzhu shuyu de foxue waiyuan ji pianfa jiexi gongyong" 論賓主術語的佛學外緣及篇法解析功用, *Nanjing daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 2021.3: 62–72.

76. Zhou Yukai lists dozens of examples of Chan masters incorporating secular poets' poems in their teaching; see *Chanzong yuyan*, 363–74.

77. On this point see, for instance, Sun Changwu, *Fojiao yu Zhongguo wenxue* 佛教與中國文學 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1988), 361–62; Hori, *Zen Sand*, 54–61. For a recent discussion on the Song-dynasty monk Hongzhi Zhengjue's 宏智正覺 (1091–1157) use of poetic language in encounter dialogues, see Byrne, "Poetics of Silence," 120–42.

78. The episode is in chapter ninety-one, titled "In a flight of Zen, Baoyu makes an enigmatic confession" 布疑陣寶玉妄談禪; tr. John Minford, *The Story of the Stone* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 4: 1810–11.

HUMOR IN POETIC GENRES

So far, I have demonstrated how Su Shi's relation with encounter dialogues was imagined by Song audiences as entertainment by piecing together indirect evidence from vernacular theatrical genres preserved in *biji*, evidence that does not necessarily reflect Su Shi's own literary production but how his literary style and practices were received. In other words, how he was *imagined* as a poet. More direct evidence comes from the poetic pieces attributed to him.

It has been argued that Su Shi's jocular poetic exchanges with Chan monks prove that he was not an absolute believer of Chan Buddhism.[79] Whether Su's relation with Buddhism was regarded as faithful or not, examples in this section suggest the following hypothesis: Su's innovative but problematic experiments of employing farcical elements in poetry might have been conducted under the guise of Chan Buddhist themes. In the words of the Southern Song monk Xiaoying 曉瑩, Su Shi and his monk friends "enjoyed pleasant diversions with 'Chan delights' via verses" 以詩頌為禪悅之樂.[80]

Do encounter dialogues play a role in Su Shi's celebration of "'Chan delights' via verses?" Some such poems are preserved in *biji* anecdotes that can be loosely categorized as "remarks on poetry" (*shihua* 詩話).[81] Several humorous poems attributed to Su Shi that incorporate encounter dialogues are exclusively recorded by the Chan monk Huihong in his *Lengzhai yehua*.[82] They often contain and provide a context for poems that are inadequately documented in other sources. Due to their questionable reliability as literary writings of the historical Su Shi,[83] these poems were often ignored in modern scholarship on Su Shi's poetry. But the very fact that humorous poems with Chan Buddhist tropes are poorly preserved is worth examining for the purpose of this article. Instead of joining the polemics about authorship, I will attempt to show that the association of humor and Buddhist tropes in these poems might render them aesthetically problematic. These poems are often closely related to the vernacular entertainments I have discussed. I argue that the humor in these poems is contingent on readers' knowledge of Chan literature and that the playful allusions to encounter dialogues are subversive to the aesthetic conventions regulating certain poetic genres.

Parody in Long and Short Lines

The following is a story of Su Shi using a lyric poem known as "long and short lines" (*changduan ju* 長短句) to parody an encounter dialogue situation when visiting his monk friend, Master Datong:

When Dongpo was stationed in Qiantang, there was not a single day that he did not go to the West Lake. He once visited Chan Master Datong (Fayun Shanben 法雲善本, 1035–1109)[84]

79. Zhou Yukai, "Menghuan yu zhenru: Su Huang de Chanyue qingxiang yuqi shige yixiang zhi guanxi" 夢幻與真如：蘇黃的禪悅傾向與其詩歌意象之關係, *Wenxue yichan* 2001.3: 71–72.

80. Xiaoying makes this claim in his discussion of Foyin's association with the Su family. See Shi Xiaoying, *Yunwo jitan* 雲臥紀談, in *QSBJ*, series 5, vol. 2, 2.55.

81. See Ronald Egan, *The Problem of Beauty: Aesthetic Thought and Pursuits in Northern Song Dynasty China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2006), 60–108; Guo Shaoyu 郭紹虞, *Song shihua kao* 宋詩話考 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979).

82. The majority of accounts in *Lengzhai yehua* are about "discussing poetry" (*lun shi* 論詩). For *Lengzhai yehua* as a *shihua*, see Guo Shaoyu, *Song shihua kao*, 14–15.

83. Huihong was harshly criticized by contemporaries and modern readers for his fabrications, among other flaws, in *Lengzhai yehua*. See ibid., 14; Chen Zili, *Shi Huihong yanjiu*, 138–39.

84. Shanben served as the abbot of the Jingci Monastery 淨慈寺 in Hangzhou. For Su Shi's association with Shanben, see Yang Zengwen, *Song Yuan Chanzong shi*, 578.

together with some singing girls. The Master's displeasure showed on his countenance. Dongpo composed a "long and short lines" lyric and asked a singing girl to carol:

東坡鎮錢塘，無日不在西湖。嘗攜妓謁大通禪師，慍形於色，東坡作長短句，令妓歌之，曰：

師唱誰家曲	To which house does the tune you are singing belong?
宗風嗣阿誰	From whom did you inherit your clan's style?
借君拍扳及門槌	[May I] borrow your clapper and mallet,
我也逢場作戲，莫相疑	I am just playing my role accordingly on the occasion, so do not cast doubt on me.
溪女方偷眼	The lady by the creek steals a glance.
山僧莫皺眉	Mountain monk, do not[85] furrow your eyebrows.
却嫌彌勒下生遲	It is disappointing that Buddha Maitreya was born into this world too late,[86]
不見阿婆三五，少年時	That you did not get to see me [lit., this old lady] when I was still fifteen.[87]

In this story, Su Shi assumes the voice of the singing girl in the lyric and turns the song into a dialogue with the monk, teasing and joking as if to hint at an affair between the monk and the singing girl. This tale has been highlighted in Lin Yutang's 林語堂 (1895–1976) influential rendition of the enjoyable life of Su Shi during his stay in Hangzhou.[88] But Lin's rendition does not capture the original sense of humor in the lyric since he drops the Chan Buddhist allusions to make it accessible to modern English readers. The amusement Song-dynasty readers might have found in this poem is closely tied to their familiarity with encounter dialogues. The beginning of the lyric—"To which house does the tune you are singing belong? From whom did you inherit your teaching style?"—echoes the highly ritual-ized language employed at the beginning of a Chan teaching setting that gained popularity during the Five Dynasties (907–960), as the following example shows:[89]

[Someone] asked: "To which house does the tune you are singing belong? From whom did you inherit your clan's style?" The Master answered: "When I was staying with Huangbo [Huangbo Xiyun 黃檗希運, d. 850], I questioned him three times and was hit three times."
問：「師唱誰家曲，宗風嗣阿誰？」師云：「我在黃蘗處。三度發問三度被打。」[90]

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85. In Chen Xin's annotated version, based on *Shihua zonggui* 詩話總龜, the third character of the line reads 已 ("already").

86. In Chen Xin's annotated version, the first character of the line reads 莫 ("do not").

87. In Chen Xin's annotated version, the third character of the line reads 老. Su Shi's lyric, to the tune of "Nan gezi" 南歌子, can be found in *Su Shi ciji jiaozhu* 蘇軾詞集校註, ed. Zhang Zhilie, Ma Defu, and Zhou Yukai (Shi-jiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 2011), 2.592–95. This entry is not found in the transmitted version or the *gozan* version of *Lengzhai yehua*, and in modern editions is often placed in the "Restored Lost Fragments" 輯佚 section. The entry is said to be restored from Ruan Yue's 阮閱 (*jinshi* 1085) *Shihua zonggui* and Hu Zi's 胡仔 (1082–1143) *Tiaoxi yuyin conghua* 苕溪漁隱叢話. See Huihong, *Lengzhai yehua*, in *QSBJ*, series 2, vol. 9, 92; Chen Xin, 87; Hu Zi, *Tiaoxi yuyin conghua*, ed. Liao Deming 廖德明 and Zhou Benchun 周本淳 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chu-banshe, 1962; repr. 1993), 57.389.

88. Lin, *The Gay Genius: The Life and Times of Su Tungpo* (Melbourne: William Heinemann, 1948), 133.

89. Many encounter dialogues in *Jingde chuandeng lu* open with this phrase. According to Zhou Yukai, it is first seen in the dialogues of Fengxue Yanzhao 風穴延昭 (896–973). See Zhou, *Chanzong yuyan*, 55.

90. *Linji lu*, T no. 1985, 47: 495b. Translation modified from Sasaki and Kirchner, *Record of Linji*, 120. I thank an anonymous reader for suggesting this example.

In a Chan pedagogical scenario, these formulaic questions are often linked to the teaching style of a specific Chan lineage or clan.[91] In the story, Su Shi, speaking through the female persona of a singing girl, uses this ritualized language in the context of a frivolous banquet performance.

Following the first couplet, in line 3 of the lyric, the female persona moves on to objects used in a ritualized Buddhist teaching environment, the clapper and mallet, to further tease the monk. The prompts in the first three lines set up the last line of the stanza, where the female persona in the lyric rhetorically replies to the rattled reaction the monk may have. The phrase used in the last line, "playing my role accordingly on the occasion," as I have shown above, derives from the *denglu* account of Deng Yinfeng who metaphorically linked himself to a vernacular performer. By cleverly referring to the performative element intrinsic to the ritualized language of encounter dialogues, the female persona makes the case, albeit in a teasing and joking tone, that a commonality is shared between Chan teachings and the frivolous singing of the girl's performance. Her message to Master Datong is also subtly challenging and subversive: if there is a higher ultimate truth behind the playful and paradoxical language in Chan teachings, then there might be an equally profound meaning behind a singing girl's performance too; so why did you appear so unhappy about the singing girls' presence in the monastery?

The second stanza goes further in its playful interaction with the monk. The female persona picks up the master's displeased facial expression mentioned in the narrative, and playfully interprets the displeasure as his dissatisfaction with the performer's physical appearance. In the last two lines, by alluding to the Buddha Maitreya, the female persona teases Daotong as too young, that if he had seen the lady when she was in the prime of her youthful beauty at age fifteen, even he would not have been able to resist her.

A point worth special attention in this entry is the issue of aesthetics associated with farcical elements in the genre of *ci* 詞 poetry.[92] The lyric attributed to Su Shi in this story pertains to "long and short lines"—a form strongly influenced by vernacular entertainment and regarded as a precursor of *ci* poetry.[93] During Su Shi's time, "long and short lines" and subsequently *ci* poetry, became a new form in the Northern Song in which literati could play with humorous themes and motifs. Many prominent writers of the Song, not only Su Shi, left a considerable number of humorous *ci* poems.[94]

Although writing humorous *ci* poems was becoming popular among literati, certain *ci* poems featuring farcical elements were viewed as vulgar in taste and therefore were disparaged by educated elites. Southern Song scholar and *ci* poetry critic Wang Zhuo 王灼 (1105–1175?) provides valuable information on the importance of locating a *ci* poem in its historical context. While discussing various poets' styles of *ci* poetry in his *Biji manzhi* 碧雞漫志, Wang makes a critical comment on the rising popularity of deploying farcical elements in "long and short lines":

91. For teaching styles of the major Chan clans, see Zhou Yukai, *Chanzong yuyan*, 54–102.

92. For *ci* poetry as an innovative poetic genre during the Northern Song and some of its aesthetic problems, see Egan, *Problem of Beauty*, 237–48.

93. See Anna Shields, *Crafting a Collection: The Cultural Contexts and Poetic Practice of the Huajian ji* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2006), 29.

94. For a survey of humorous *ci* poems during the Song, see Wang Yi 王毅, *Zhongguo gudai paixie ci shilun* 中國古代俳諧詞史論 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2013), 54–138.

[The trend of] including farcical and ridiculous words in "long and short lines" started around the Zhihe era [1054–1056], as before the Jiayou era [1056–1063] the practice was not yet prevalent. During the Xining [1068–1077], Yuanfeng [1078–1085], and Yuanyou [1086–1094] eras, Zhang Shanren, a native of Yanzhou [today's Jining 濟寧, Shandong province], was peerless in the capital for his humor. From time to time, one or two lyrics of his were circulated. Kong Sanchuan [1068–1085], a native of Zhezhou [today's Jincheng 晉城, Shanxi province], invented "ancient tales in all keys and modes,"[95] and the literati could all recite [his work]. Wang Qisou, style name Yanling, of the Yuanyou era and Cao Zu, style name Yuanchong, of the Zhenghe era [1111–1118], both excelled at writing.[96] Every "long and short lines" poem they composed gained wide appraisal. . . . Since then, imitators [of these styles] increased. Arrogant, teasing, vulgar, and distasteful as they were, the extent of their popularity was unprecedented.

長短句中作滑稽無賴語，起於至和，嘉祐之前，猶未盛也 。熙 、豐 、元祐間，兗州張山人以詼諧獨步京師，時出一兩解 。澤州孔三傳者，首創諸宮調古傳，士大夫皆能誦之 。元祐間王齊叟彥齡，政和間曹組元寵，皆能文，每出長短句，膾炙人口 。 . . . 其後祖述者益眾，嫚戲汙賤，古所未有 。[97]

Wang's account shows that farce (*huaji* or *guji* 滑稽) in "long and short lines" had become a pervasive trend in literati culture during Su Shi's time and that its aesthetic problems stemmed from its connection with vernacular entertainment.[98] The problem of farce in *ci* poetry is also associated with long-standing negative views on farcical elements in literary writings since ancient times in China,[99] further aided by disparaging literati attitudes toward

95. "All keys and modes" (*zhugongdiao* 諸宮調) is a musical narrative ballad form that flourished during the Northern Song and is regarded as a transitional form between *ci* poetry and the dramatic *qu* 曲 form. Ch'en Lili 陳荔荔 rendered the term as "medley." See Idema and West, *Chinese Theater*, 197–98; Ch'en Lili, "Some Background Information on the Development of *chu-kung-tiao*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 33 (1973): 224–37; Llamas, *Top Graduate*, 11–12.

96. For a brief account of Wang Qishou, a low-level official in Taiyuan, and anecdotes about him, see Tang Guizhang 唐圭璋, *Song ci jishi* 宋詞紀事 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982), 99. For a comprehensive study on Cao Zu, a high official at Emperor Huizong's court, see Bai Shuaimin 白帥敏, "Liang Song fuzi ciren Cao Zu Cao Xun yanjiu" 兩宋父子詞人曹組曹勛研究 (MA thesis, Nanjing shifan daxue, 2008).

97. Wang Zhuo, *Biji manzhi*, in *QSBJ*, series 4, vol. 2, 2.180; Yue Zhen 岳珍, *Biji manzhi jiaozheng* 碧雞漫志校正 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2000), 2.35–36.

98. Liu Yongji 劉永濟 and Deng Kuiying 鄧魁英 view *huaji* as a third major "school" (*pai* 派) of *ci* poetry in the Northern Song in addition to the well-established "delicate restraint" (*wanyue* 婉約) and "heroic abandon" (*haofang* 豪放) schools. Unlike these two, however, the *huaji* style never reached its culmination and was not formally recognized by major poets. Liu Yongji, *Tang Wudai liang Song ci jianxi* 唐五代兩宋詞簡析 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1981), 總論, 5–6; Deng Kuiying, "Liang Song cishi shang de huaji ci pai" 兩宋詞史上的滑稽詞派, *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiu* 1996.4: 96–103. Since the professional vernacular performers Zhang Shanren and Kong Sanzhuan mentioned in Wang's account do not belong to the scholar-official group, most of their compositions, despite their popularity as described by Wang, were not preserved. On Zhang Shanren, see Tanaka Kenji 田中謙二, "Gendai sankyoku no kenkyū" 元代散曲の研究, *Tōhō gakuhō* 40 (1969): 17–18; Hu Shiying, *Huaben xiaoshuo gailun*, 58–59. On Kong Sanzhuan, see Ch'en, "Some Background Information," 224–25.

99. See David Knechtges, "Wit, Humor, and Satire in Early Chinese Literature (to A. D. 220)," *Monumenta Serica* 29 (1970): 82–94; Karin Myhre, "Wit and Humor," in *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature*, ed. Victor Mair (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2001), 132–48. Knechtges argues that early Chinese literature is essentially nonhumorous but full of wit. Cf. Christoph Harbsmeier, "Humor in Ancient Chinese Philosophy," *Philosophy East and West* 39.3 (1989): 289–310. More recently, Giulia Baccini has argued that witty stories in the *Guji* chapter of Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (?145–?86 BCE) *Shiji* were "originally" recorded as successful examples of remonstrance, but that this intent was later "mostly replaced by a reading which saw in them primarily a collection of entertaining stories." Baccini, "The *Shiji* Chapter 'Guji Liezhuan' (Traditions of Witty Remonstrants): A Source to Look for Rhetorical Strategies in Early China," in *Views from Within, Views from Beyond: Approaches to the* Shiji *as an Early Work of Historiography*, ed. Hans van Ess, Olga Lomová, and Dorothee Schaab-Hanke (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2015), 124.

ci poetry's intrinsic links to femininity, eroticism, and entertainment during the Song.[100] In view of these repressive factors against the inclusion of farce in *ci* poetry, the fact that Su Shi's humorous *ci* poem survives only in a secondary source quoting a *shihua* is unlikely to be a mere coincidence.

Yet can we automatically assume Su Shi's humorous *ci* poem in the anecdote falls neatly into the *huaji* style described in Wang Zhuo's account?[101] One key differentiator is the central role Buddhist tropes play in generating a humorous effect in Su Shi's lyric. In fact, by examining the entire corpus of *ci* poems attributed to Su Shi in *Quan Song ci* 全宋詞, a deeper connection surfaces: *ci* poems attributed to Su Shi that contain clear Buddhist tropes can be systematically linked to humor.[102]

First, among all the *ci* poems attributed to Su Shi, only a few clearly incorporate Buddhist themes. Second, most of these are also comic and playful. And last, these poems survived only in anecdotal sources of questionable reliability. In addition to the lyric already discussed, there are two *ci* poems, both to the tune of "Rumeng ling" 如夢令, recorded in Su Shi's own anecdotal collection *Qiuchi biji* 仇池筆記.[103] Those two *ci* poems, as a set, parody the Buddhist idea of purification. Su Shi imagines a dialogue, during a bath in a monastery, between himself and a monk serving in the bathhouse. Another one, to the tune of "Tasha xing" 踏莎行, is preserved in Luo Ye's 羅燁 *Zuiweng tanlu* 醉翁談錄, possibly a "tale-telling" performer's sourcebook.[104] This poem, however—a "humorous verdict" (*huapan* 花判) Su Shi was said to have given on a judicial case in which a Buddhist monk was charged with killing a courtesan—is unlikely to have been written by Su Shi.[105] Although encounter dialogues are not explicitly incorporated into these *ci* poems, they reveal that Buddhist tropes in general may be a key instrument in deploying the farcical and comic elements of *ci* poetry attributed to Su Shi.

It is not only this poem about the farcical verdict that is directly related to vernacular plays. By the time of the Southern Song, the anecdote about Su Shi asking a singing girl to perform a humorous *ci* poem in front of Master Datong may have also been absorbed into "tale-telling" performances. One piece of supporting evidence is that this story is included in *Lüchuang xinhua*, another sourcebook for vernacular "tale-telling" performers.[106] At the end of the *Lüchuang xinhua* version of the story, Su Shi's close friend Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045–1105) makes an interesting comment: "[these words are] not composed by someone who acts out of [mere] whimsy" 非取次者所為爾.[107] Anticipating the potential skepticism toward the practice of playfully deploying Chan language for mere entertainment, the comment attributed to Huang Tingjian seems to hint at a deeper meaning masked in this ostensi-

100. On these problems, see Egan, *Problem of Beauty*, 237–94.

101. It has been noted that several subcategories might exist within the so-called playfully composed (*xi zuo* 戲作) *ci* poems. See Li Jing 李靜, "Songdai xizuo ci de tilei jiqi shanbian" 宋代戲作詞的體類及其嬗變, *Beijing daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 2014.5: 70–77.

102. *Quan Song ci*, ed. Tang Guizhang 唐圭璋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), 277–336.

103. See Su Shi, *Qiuchi biji* (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1983), 卷上, 222. See also *Quan Song ci*, 311; *Su Shi ciji jiaozhu*, 2.495–97.

104. See Ling Yuzhi 凌郁之, "Luo Ye xinbian *Zuiweng tanlu* kaolun" 羅燁新編醉翁談錄考論, *Zhongguo wenxue yanjiu* 2013.10: 217–36. See also Alister Inglis, tr., *The Drunken Man's Talk: Tales from Medieval China* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 2015), xv–xxi.

105. See Luo Ye, *Zuiweng tanlu* (Shanghai: Gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1957), 庚集 卷二, 79; *Quan Song ci*, 333; *Su Shi ciji jiaozhu*, 附編, 855; Alister, *Drunken Man's Talk*, 100.

106. See *Lüchuang xinhua*, 2.157–58. The collection is also listed as a source in *Zuiweng tanlu*. See Luo Ye, *Zuiweng tanlu*, 3.

107. *Lüchuang xinhua*, 2.157. In Buddhist contexts, the term 取次 means "behave carelessly/on a whim." See, for example, in the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* 六祖壇經, T no. 2008, 48: 359b13–15.

bly frivolous poem: that enlightenment can be achieved even via the erotic performance of a singing girl. However, viewed in the aesthetic context I have just shown, this comment also appears to be a rhetorical means to justify the problematic practice of using Buddhist tropes to write humorous *ci* poems, particularly when such a practice is said to be adopted by the great poet Su Shi.[108]

Playful Gāthā

A further intriguing case of humor in incorporating encounter dialogues in poetic writings attributed to Su Shi can be found in the loosely defined genre of Chinese *gāthā* (*ji* 偈 or *jisong* 偈頌).[109] In another story in Huihong's *Lengzhai yehua*, Su Shi was said to have teased his friend Liu Anshi 劉安世 (style name Qizhi 器之, 1048–1125) who was too enthusiastic about "discussing Chan" 談禪, by beguiling him into going on an excursion. Finding this experience hilarious, Su Shi was said to have written a humorous *gāthā* for the occasion.

[Dongpo] once asked Liu Qizhi to visit a certain monk named Yuban [lit., jade tablet] with him. Qizhi did not like going into the mountains, but when he heard they were going to visit "Jade Tablet," he accepted the invitation with delight. When they arrived at Lianquan Monastery, they cooked bamboo shoots and ate them. Qizhi found their taste delicious, so he asked: "What is the name of these bamboo shoots?" Dongpo said: "Jade Tablet. This master is good at preaching the *dharma*. He is able to give people a taste of Chan delights." Then Qizhi realized Dongpo was teasing him, and he burst out laughing. Dongpo was also delighted and composed a *gāthā* on this occasion:
又嘗要劉器之同參玉版和尚，器之每倦山行，聞見玉版，欣然從之。至廉泉寺，燒笋而食，器之覺笋味勝，問此笋何名，東坡曰：「即玉版也。此老師善說法，要能令人得禪悅之味。」于是器之乃悟其戲，為大笑。東坡亦悦，作偈曰：

叢林真百丈	The "forest" is truly "A Hundred Staves" high,
嗣法有橫枝	The transmission of the *dharma* has many "side branches."[110]
不怕石頭路	We did not fear the [slippery] "Stone" path,
來參玉版師	And we came to visit "Master Jade Tablet."
聊憑柏樹子	We talked while leaning on the "cypress tree,"
與問籜龍兒	You asked me about "bamboo shoots."[111]
瓦礫猶能說	Even "tiles and rubble" are able to preach [the *dharma*],
此君那不知	How can "this gentleman"[112] not know [how to preach].[113]

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108. Interestingly, Huang himself was an active writer of erotic *ci* poems meant for entertainment; he was criticized by Buddhist monks for doing so. See Egan, *Problem of Beauty*, 243–44.

109. For a recent study on the development of *gāthā* as a poetic genre in medieval China up to the tenth century, see Thomas Mazanec, "The Medieval Chinese *Gāthā* and Its Relationship to Poetry," *T'oung Pao* 103 (2017): 94–154; for the influence of *gāthā* on Su Shi's poetics, see Hsiao Li-hua, "Fojing jisong dui Dongpo shi de yingxiang" 佛經偈頌對東坡詩的影響, in *Tongsu wenxue yu yazheng wenxue quanguo xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* 通俗文學與雅正文學全國學術研討會論文集 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 2003), 543–83.

110. The "side branches" not only refer to bamboo, but also metaphorically to the branches in the charts of Chan Buddhist transmission lineages.

111. *Tuolong er* 籜龍兒 is vernacular for bamboo shoots.

112. "This gentleman" 此君, a popular personified reference to bamboo, is an allusion to an entry in *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語; see Xu Zhenge 徐震堮, ed., *Shishuo xinyu jiaojian* 世說新語校箋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984; repr. 2001), 2.23.408; Richard B. Mather, tr., *Shih-shuo Hsin-yu: A New Account of Tales of the World*, 2nd ed. (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2002), 418–19.

113. Huihong, *Lengzhai yehua*, in *QSBJ*, series 2, vol. 9, 7.63. See also Chen Xin, 7.54–55; Zhang Bowei, 7.64. For Su Shi's *gāthā* titled, "Qizhi was fond of discussing Chan [. . .]" 器之好談禪 [. . .], see *Su Shi shiji jiaozhu*, 45. 5300–5301.

The sense of humor in this tale is at least twofold. The narrative presents an amusing account of Su Shi tricking Liu Qizhi by concocting a certain "Master Jade Tablet." "Yuban" refers to a kind of bamboo originally from Jiangxi 江西 that was named after the jade-like appearance of its bamboo shoots. The second layer of humor resides in Su Shi's *gāthā*, which elaborates the first layer of humor in the narrative with Buddhist tropes, particularly those related to encounter dialogues.

The Chinese *gāthā* arose from the translation of Buddhist sutras' verses as early as the second and third centuries.[114] According to Thomas Mazanec's recent study, by the time of the tenth century, formal differences between Chinese *gāthā*s and regular *shi* poems in terms of tonal pattern, meter, and prosody had already diminished and *gāthā* had evolved into a poetic genre closer to the more prestigious *shi* poetry, written by both Buddhist monks and lay literati.[115] During the Song, Chinese *gāthā* underwent further changes and the distinctions between *shi* poetry and Chinese *gāthā* became dynamic concepts that needed to be negotiated case by case.[116] Protass has aptly pointed out in his study of parting verses written by Buddhist monks that humor in these verses operates on incongruities to express notions of emptiness and subvert expectations of sadness in parting poetry.[117] Due to the strong moral restraint on comic expression in Chinese poetry,[118] it is tempting to view humor in Buddhist poetry as a rhetoric that always serves religious and social purposes. However, I suggest that Su Shi's playful *gāthā* in the tale poses a curious case in which the genre of the *gāthā* and its underlying Buddhist connotations are utilized for the purpose of humor.

According to some Qing-dynasty critics, this *gāthā* is curious in the sense that the combination of Chan tropes and humor challenges traditional aesthetic notions regarding what a laudable poem with a Buddhist theme should be. We have already seen Ji Yun's skeptical comment on Su Shi's humorous verse, "How could this be a poem?" The practice of directly incorporating Chan language into *shi* poetry was generally denounced by Qing literary critics. In the words of Ji Yun, "poetry should [make us] contemplate the taste of Chan, but should not employ Chan language" 詩宜參禪味，不宜作禪語.[119] Within these aesthetic values, Su Shi's playfulness in this *gāthā* was regarded as innovative because it is difficult to fit into a conventional genre or mode of poetry—it is neither a regular *gāthā* nor a neat *shi* poem with a Buddhist theme but more like a literary game of wit and humor, albeit with a Buddhist message, delivered in poetic form. Impressed by Su Shi's humor in this *gāthā*, another Qing-dynasty critic, Zha Shenxing 查慎行 (1650–1727), comments: "this poem is full of metaphors in Chan language. Indeed, it excels at [word] play" 此詩盡用禪家語形容，可謂善於遊戲者也.[120] Although these aesthetic values were voiced by later critics, they hint at why this playful poetic piece is difficult to fit into conventional rubrics governing Chinese Buddhist poetry.

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114. Mazanec, "Medieval Chinese *Gāthā*," 102–5; Protass, *Poetry Demon*, 43–51.

115. Mazanec, "Medieval Chinese *Gāthā*," 127–40; Stephen Owen, "How Did Buddhism Matter in Tang Poetry," *T'oung Pao* 103 (2017): 388–406.

116. Byrne, "Poetics of Silence," 147–223; Protass, *Poetry Demon*, 94–101.

117. Protass, *Poetry Demon*, 230–35.

118. Myrhe, "Wit and Humor," 133.

119. Although this is a comment on Tang poets, modern researchers believe these notions were influential among literati across different periods. On the traditional opposition against incorporating Chan language in *shi* poetry, see Sun Changwu, *Fojiao yu Zhongguo wenxue*, 104–5; Qian Zhongshu 錢鐘書, *Tanyi lu* 談藝錄 (Beijing: Sanlian, 2007), 557; Du Songbo 杜松柏, *Chanxue yu Tang Song shixue* 禪學與唐宋詩學 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 2008), 490–98.

120. *Su Shi shiji jiaozhu*, 45.5301. Zha's comment, however, might be a quotation from previous commentaries on Su Shi's poetry.

The *gāthā* is full of verbal gymnastics meant to be amusing. In each couplet, there is at least one pun or a playful allusion to encounter dialogues. In line 1, *conglin* 叢林 (forest) is a technical term in medieval Chinese referring to the monastery where Buddhist monks live together. *Baizhang* 百丈, in addition to its literal meaning of "a hundred staves," is also a designation of the Tang-dynasty Chan master Baizhang Huaihai 百丈懷海 (720–814). The term "side branches" in line 2 may metaphorically refer to the many Buddhists who have "received the *dharma* transmission" 嗣法 but were otherwise not known to people like Liu Qizhi.

Line 3 alludes to, again, the *denglu* account of Deng Yinfeng mentioned previously. Su Shi must have found this vignette so amusing that he incorporated the pun from the original encounter dialogue into his idea of making up a Chan master named Yuban to tease his friend. Line 5 alludes to another well-known *gong'an*, "the cypress tree in the courtyard": "a monk asked Zhaozhou: 'What was the patriarch's [Bodhidharma's] intention in coming from the west?' Zhaozhou replied: 'The cypress tree in the courtyard'." 趙州因僧問：如何是祖師西來意？州云：庭前柏樹子.[121] By juxtaposing the cypress tree and the bamboo shoots, Su Shi jokingly hints at a more profound meaning in the image of bamboo shoots. In the juxtaposition, Su Shi expresses his opinion that like Zhaozhou's cypress tree, the bamboo shoots could also trigger enlightenment. Su Shi's nuanced attention to words constructs a neat parallel. Like many encounter dialogues that feature vernacular vocabulary,[122] *baishu zi* 柏樹子 is also a colloquial expression. In line 6, Su Shi matches the vernacular tone by using *tuolong er* 籜龍兒, a vernacular reference to bamboo shoots. These vernacular vocabularies, although increasingly common in Song poetry, still pose a contrast to the refined tone of conventional *shi* poetry.

In line 7, "Tiles and Rubble are able to preach the *dharma*" is an allusion to a medieval debate over whether nonsentient beings, like tiles and rubble, possess Buddha-nature.[123] In *Jingde chuandeng lu*, a dialogue between a student and Huizhong 慧忠 (Nanyang Huizhong 南陽慧忠, 675–775) addresses the debate:

A monk asked: "What is the meaning of the saying 'the mind of an old Buddha'?" The Master said: "Insentient things such as walls, fences, tiles, and stones." The monk said: "But this is at odds with the scriptures. The *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* (*Da niepan jing* 大涅槃經, *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra*) says: 'Everything apart from insentient things such as walls, fences, tiles and stones is called Buddha-**nature**'. Now you say that all insentient things are the **mind** of Buddha, but you have yet to consider whether there is a difference between 'mind' and 'nature'." The Master said, "To the deluded they are different; to the enlightened they are not different."
僧又問：「阿那箇是佛心？」師曰：「牆壁瓦礫是。」僧曰：「與經大相違也。涅槃云，離牆壁無情之物，故名佛性。今云是佛心，未審心之與性爲別不別。」師曰：「迷即別，悟即不別。」[124]

By alluding to this dialogue, Su Shi reminded Liu Qizhi of the conceptual trap he had fallen into: obsessed with his fixed assumption of a certain Chan Master Jade Tablet Liu Qizhi

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121. Wumen Huikai 無門慧開 (1183–1260), *Wumeng guan* 無門關, T no. 2005, 48: 297c08.

122. On vernacular language in *denglu* and other Chan texts, see Christoph Anderl, "Chán Rhetoric: An Introduction," in *Chán Buddhist Rhetoric in China, Korea, and Japan*, ed. Christoph Anderl (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 16–24.

123. While this debate continued, by the Song, the notion that insentient beings possessed Buddha-nature had gained wide acceptance. See Sharf, "How to Think," 210–24.

124. *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T no. 2076, 51: 0438a09–12. Translation modified from Sharf, "How to Think," 220. On Huizhong as promoting the teaching that insentient beings like tiles and rubble can preach the *dharma*, see Zhou Yukai, *Chanzong yuyan*, 301. For a slightly different reading see Albert Welter, *Yongming Yanshou's Conception of Chan in the* Zongjing lu (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011), 150–51.

failed to realize that even insentient beings like bamboo shoots could embody a Chan message. In short, the *gāthā* ends with a message not rare during the Song that an enlightened mind perceives everything, sentient as well as insentient, as being able to spread the *dharma*. What makes this message so appealing, however, is the humor of the *gāthā* offering "a taste of Chan delights."

CODA: SU SHI, BUDDHISM, AND THE CULTURE OF MIRTH

The humorous effect of and performative elements intrinsic to encounter dialogues have long been read as part of the "skillful means" (*fangbian* 方便, *upāya*) used by Buddhists to communicate ultimate truth.[125] Examples in this article demonstrate that although encounter dialogues serve monastic functions, those religious elements are closely intertwined with their literary qualities, particularly when they are used outside the monastic context.

On the one hand, the entertaining effect of these religious texts became so prevalent that it led educated elites, both during the Song and in modern times, to view it as a problematic trend in Buddhism. Twentieth-century scholars often attributed the so-called decline of Buddhism in China at least partially to frivolity that began in the Song dynasty.[126] Su Shi, like many serious-minded Buddhists of his time, also expressed harsh criticism toward the trend of playfulness among Buddhists and lay persons in several of his essays.[127] An examination of the historical Su Shi that is limited to his formal genres might result in the impression that his approach to Buddhism is serious in nature, and that the humorous image of the literary giant stems from his inherent disposition rather than being influenced by Buddhism.[128]

Anecdotal materials suggest, however, that various forms of vernacular entertainment both influenced and were influenced by Buddhist encounter dialogues. The impact was not limited to vernacular culture but was also strongly felt in elite literati culture. Chan records such as *denglu*, *yulu*, and *gong'an* fueled literati interest in Chan Buddhism, and the humor in many Su Shi anecdotes is contingent on readers' knowledge of Chan literature. Stories discussed in this article show that Song storytellers believed Su Shi's competence in deploying wit and humor was at its best when it came to incorporating encounter dialogues. This article has attempted to demonstrate that an important part of Su Shi's humorous image is in fact inspired and shaped by Buddhism.

This article also shows that allusions to encounter dialogues appeared in poetic genres such as *ci* and *gāthā* as novel motifs of the comic, despite the aesthetic problems associated with these practices. By attributing those poems to Su Shi, some Song storytellers might have intended to construct a link between Chan humor and Su Shi's poetry. In effect, the

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125. See, for instance, McRae, *Seeing through Zen*, 88–93. Hori also remarked that "the fundamental problem in solving a *kōan* is religious. It is not merely a literary matter of understanding allusion and analogy." Hori, *Zen Sand*, 51.

126. Until recent decades, when scholarship began to challenge this notion, older paradigm views held that Buddhism in China reached its apogee during the Tang and started to decline in the Song. For instance, Kenneth Ch'en in his influential survey of Chinese Buddhism proposed that Chan Buddhism "advocated intuition, quickness of mind, keenness of wit, and lightning decisions. . . . Such features might make Buddhism fascinating and attractive, but they did not enrich the religious life nor were they conducive to lively discussion on points of doctrine, so necessary for intellectual stimulation." Ch'en, *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1964), 398–99.

127. On Su Shi's criticism of indulging in "Chan delights," see Grant, *Mount Lu Revisited*, 18–20.

128. Studies that view humor as inherent of Su Shi's disposition include Liu Zunming 劉尊明, "Lun Su Shi de rensheng youmo jiqi wenhua neihan" 論蘇軾的人生幽默及其文化內涵, *Hubei daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 1994.4: 32–38; Qing Zhenxuan 慶振軒, "Dongpo youmo huixie xingge lun" 東坡幽默詼諧性格論, *Lanzhou daxue xuebao* 1995.3: 120–26.

Chan Buddhist slogans of nonduality and enlightenment were used as justification and disguise for both literati and literary monks to incorporate encounter dialogues in their writings for the purpose of subverting conventional limitations that repressed the comic element in poetic genres. In this sense, as Su Shi says, in his own literary writings he might also just be "engaging in humor under the guise of Chan" 借禪以為詼.[129]

Although this article is narrowly focused on a few stories about Su Shi, the culture of mirth celebrated by both Buddhist monks and literati that I have attempted to address represents a pervasive cultural phenomenon during the Song. I suggest that a full understanding of the intersection between the literary and religious cultures in Middle Period China cannot be achieved without paying due attention to the laughter of monks and literati.

129. A line from Su Shi's poem "Wen Biancai fashi fugui shang Tianzhu yi shi xiwen" 問辯才法師復歸上天竺以詩戲問; *Su Shi shiji jiaozhu*, 16.1718–21. The topic of Su Shi using Buddhist tropes in humorous poems requires another piece of scholarship to address. For an overview of this topic, see Hsiao Li-hua, "Fojing jisong," 578–80.