THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Desire, Wealth, and Gender: Anti-Buddhist Prejudice in the Late Qing *Dianshizhai Pictorial*

Yiming Zhao

Master of Philosophy (MPhil)

The University of Edinburgh

2025

Abstract

This research examines prejudice against Buddhists expressed in the late Qing publication *Dianshizhai Pictorial* and its underlying causes. As an influential and widely circulated pictorial of the era, the *Pictorial* exhibited a systematic bias in its portrayal of Buddhist monks and nuns. First, the pictorial depicted them as violators of monastic precepts, highlighting their inability to transcend worldly desires, with a particular focus on behaviors related to sexuality and wealth. Second, its criticism reveals a gender disparity: compared to monks who violated precepts of celibacy, nuns who committed similar transgressions received greater leniency. I argue that this stemmed from the nuns' "liminal" status within the Confucian social order; their conduct both reflected the authors' desires and anxieties, and reinforced beliefs in the necessity Confucian family ethics. Third, the substantial wealth of Buddhist clergy was subjected to widespread condemnation, closely linked to the frequent natural disasters of the late Qing and the quasi-public nature of temple assets. The *Pictorial* subjected Buddhist "unearned income" and use of funds to intense moral scrutiny. Finally, I suggest that public disillusionment with official military forces after the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-5) inspired an embrace of civilian martial traditions, symbolized by the Shaolin Temple. This shift represented a turning point that enabled Buddhists to begin reforming their public image during the late Qing and early Republican period.

Keywords: *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, Buddhists, Gender, Temple economic, Shaolin Temple

Lay Summary

This study examines a distinctive phenomenon captured in the popular late-Qing publication *Dianshizhai Pictorial*: Buddhists who suffered financial loss were often blamed rather than pitied by the public. This reaction stemmed from a social bias against Buddhism during the late Qing, which differed significantly from attitudes in contemporary China.

The bias was gendered. While female Buddhists were generally perceived as ignorant and their male counterparts as wiser, nuns who broke vows of celibacy were treated more leniently than monks. The identity of Buddhist nuns was frequently conflated with those of married women and prostitutes, whereas monks were seen as more independent—and often associated with fraud. When monks and nuns lost large sums of money, they were condemned not only because of these gendered stereotypes, but also due to religious and moral expectations held by the writers of the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*.

The frequent criticism of Buddhists in the *Pictorial* offers researchers valuable clues about the everyday lives and public perceptions of late-Qing Buddhists—topics rarely recorded elsewhere. This focus also reveals how Buddhism functioned as a supplement to the dominant ideology of the time. Following military defeats by the Qing government, the *Pictorial* began expressing hope in civilian martial prowess, signaling an ideological shift in society. This shift allowed Buddhists to begin rehabilitating their public image through martial arts—a practice once suppressed but now reimagined as a potential source of national strength. It also marked Buddhism's transition from being part of the traditional "Three Teachings" to operating within the modern category of "religion."

Acknowledgements

Without the support of my primary supervisor, Dr. Aaron William Moore, I could not have finished this thesis. He is inclusive and patient, listening to my ideas expressed in my less-than-fluent English. He is professional and supportive, and helped me navigate difficult moments during my time as an international student from China. He never dismissed my ideas—rooted in my training in Chinese classics—as heretical, but discussed them with me thoughtfully. He has never wielded his authority over me, as others might have done. This inclusiveness derives from his extensive knowledge and noble personality. I will always be grateful for his support.

I am also deeply grateful to my examiners, Dr. Christopher Rosenmeire and Dr. Henrietta Harrison. They read my thesis with great care and provided insightful feedback. Dr. Harrison encouraged me to look at my materials from a fresh perspective, which opened up new lines of thinking. Dr. Rosenmeire helped me identify and correct several mistakes that I might otherwise have missed. Their professional advice and encouragement made the viva a genuinely positive experience for me.

I am also indebted to Miss Karin Bolton in the Postgraduate Research Office, who guided me through the supervisor change procedure and introduced me to Dr. Moore. She and Mr. Alan Binnie were always prompt and helpful whenever I turned to them with questions. My thanks also go to Dr. Frauke Matthes for approving the supervisor change. I am further grateful to Dr. Xuelei Huang and Dr. Daniel Hammond for their valuable advice during my first-year review and the subsequent repeat review.

I must also leave a special place in this acknowledgement for my parents. Although they may not have fully understood what I was doing, their

unconditional and generous love has been my strongest foundation—the initial capital with which I face the world.

I am equally grateful for the peer support I received from Ager Elisha, Junping Shi, Jingjing Huang, Xinyi Li, Di Zhang, Yizhu Li, Courtney Beale, Megan Robertson, Beth Price, and many other students who shared their experiences and ideas with me, helping me settle into a foreign city. My special thanks also go to my landlady, Claire Milne, who welcomed me into her lovely home and made the move so much easier. Edinburgh is a city I never imagined I would come to—let alone leave with so many unforgettable memories.

Last but not least, I thank all those who crossed my path and left their kindness along my doctoral journey. If this thesis offers any valuable materials or insights, they are owed to the generous people I met along the way. If there remain any mistakes or inaccuracies, they are entirely my own.

Table of Contents

Introduction

The *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, a major illustrated publication of the late Qing, took a great interest in portraying the relationship between China's devout Buddhists, on the one hand, and its Confucian literati, on the other. For example, in one account, a late-Qing civil service examinee encountered an illiterate but devout old woman on his way to his test. She sought his help in reading Buddhist sutras. Instead, the examinee taught her passages from a Confucian classic, assuring her that persistent recitation would attract miraculous results. After the exam, on his return journey, he met the woman again. Hailed by her as a "living Buddha," she demonstrated the power of the Confucian texts: each time she finished reciting, a yellow bean would leap from one bowl to another without visible cause. The woman was profoundly grateful for the "spells" he had taught. The narrator concludes that both the woman's piety and the power of the Confucian classic were essential to the miracle.[1] In this tale, literati and illiterate, male and female, Buddhism and Confucianism, narrator and character all interact. Yet the dominant dynamic remains the tension between Buddhism and Confucianism. Absent the narrator's explicit commentary, the boundary between the two traditions blurred. This ambiguity was not accidental but stemmed from their deep historical entanglement in early modern China.

Since its introduction to China during the late Eastern Han Dynasty (2nd-3rd century CE), Buddhism has engaged in a dynamic and often contentious dialogue with indigenous Confucian and Daoist thought systems. This interaction initiated a multifaceted process of cultural negotiation that persisted throughout Chinese imperial history.[2] In its initial phase, Buddhism

[1] "The Efficacy of Reciting Scripture" (*Songjing zhiyi* 诵经致异), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 木 4, no. 352,1893.
[2] Whether Confucianism is a religion is a matter of debate. See Zhang Dainian 张岱年, "Ruxue yu rujiao" 儒学与儒教[Confucianism and Confucian Religion], *Literature, History and Philosophy*, no.3 (1998): 32-33; Ji Xianlin 季羡林, "Ruxue? Rujiao?" 儒学？儒教？[Confucianism? Confucian Religion?], *Literature,*

accommodated the Chinese fascination with occult practices (*fangshu* 方术), drawing upon Daoist concepts and expressions to facilitate its diffusion.[3] Over time, the relationship among the "Three Teachings" (*sanjiao*) evolved from a tripartite confrontation (*sanjiao dingli* 三教鼎立) during the Sui and Tang dynasties toward a more integrated synthesis (*sanjiao heyi* 三教合一) after the Song and Ming dynasties, with many Buddhist ideas being absorbed and internalized by both Confucianism and Daoism.[4]

By the late imperial period, Buddhist doctrine itself saw little theoretical innovation.[5] Early Qing emperors predominantly favored Lamaism (Tibetan Buddhism 喇嘛教) over the Han Buddhism that had been widespread during the Ming.[6] However, the late Qing and early Republican periods marked a significant turning point. In the context of China's modernization, propelled by the influx of Western learning and waves of national salvation, belief systems like Buddhism were subjected to re-evaluation. They were frequently relegated to the realm of superstition within the prevailing discourse. The Building Schools with Temple Property Movement (*Miaochan xingxue yundong* 庙产兴学运动) emerged during this era, though its impact on temple

---

History and Philosophy, no.3 (1998): 33; Cai Shangsi 蔡尚思, "Ruxue feizongjiao er qile zongjiao de zuoyong"儒学非宗教而起了宗教的作用 [Though Not A Religion, Confucianism Has Served the Purpose of One], *Literature, History and Philosophy*, no.3 (1998): 34;Guo Qiyong 郭齐勇, "Ruxue: rushide renwende youjuyou zongjiaoxing pingede jingshen xingtai" 儒学：入世的人文的又具有宗教性品格的精神形态 [Confucianism: A World-Engaging Humanistic Tradition Yet Imbued with Religious Characteristics], *Literature, History and Philosophy*, no.3 (1998): 35-37.

[3] Occult practices (*fangshu* 方术) were the folk religious practices in the Eastern Han Dynasty. These practices blend three distinct types of knowledge and rituals: science, religion, and superstition. This syncretic tradition has left a lasting intellectual legacy for China's folk religious beliefs. For more details about Chinese occult practices, see Li Ling 李零, *Zhongguo fangshu kao* 中国方术考 [An Investigation on Chinese Occult Practices], (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2019); Li Ling 李零, *Zhongguo fangshu xukao* 中国方术续考[Supplementary Investigations into Chinese Occult Practices], (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2019).

[4] Ren Jiyu 任继愈, *Zhongguo fojiao shi* 中国佛教史 [A History of Chinese Buddhism], (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1993), 4-14.

[5] Qiu Gaoxing 邱高兴, "Qingdai fojiao yanjiu xiankuang" 清代佛教研究现况 [Current Research Status of Buddhism in the Qing Dynasty], *Pumen xuebao* 16 (2003): 311-22.

[6] Jiang Weiqiao 蒋维乔, *Zhongguo fojiao shi* 中国佛教史 [History of Chinese Buddhism], (Wuhan: Wuhan University Press, 2012), 241-250. "Han Buddhism" and "Tibetan Buddhism" are current definitions to distinguish different ethnicized Buddhist traditions. "Han Buddhism" is often considered equal to "Chinese Buddhism." See Raoul Birnbaum, "Buddhist China at the Century's Turn", *The China Quarterly* 174 (2003): 430.

destruction was modest compared to later Communist campaigns.[7] When Confucianism ceased to be the state's official ideology, Buddhism—deeply entangled with it over two millennia—suffered substantial repercussions. Studying Buddhism, therefore, is essential not only for understanding historical shifts in the dominant ideology of each era, but also for recovering the voices marginalized by mainstream discourses, from Confucianism to later "modernization."

Furthermore, contemporary Chinese Buddhism is incomprehensible without a fuller investigation of its modern historical development. As Raoul Birnbaum argues, innovations from the late Qing and Republican periods profoundly influenced modern Buddhist practices. The era's pivotal questions—"What is the Buddhist monastic vocation?" and "What training and leadership are required to safeguard that ideal?"—remain relevant today.[8] Given the scarcity and dispersed nature of historical sources on everyday Buddhist practices in the late Qing—found across official and unofficial histories, personal jottings (*biji* 笔记), novels, local gazetteers, and news publications—Birnbaum focused his analysis instead on the more documentable Republican era.[9] This not only leaves the late Qing Buddhist experience relatively unknown, it also exacerbates a pre-existing methodological problem: most records from the late Qing were penned by Confucian-educated literati, ensuring that a Confucian worldview permeates the historical narrative.

Understanding how intellectual elites—the primary recorders of Buddhist Life in the late Qing and early republican Buddhists—perceived Buddhist clergy is thus crucial. This inquiry is grounded in the historical interplay between Confucianism and Buddhism, which provides an empirical foundation for

[7] Paul R. Katz and Vincent Goossaert, *The Fifty Years That Changed Chinese Religion, 1898-1949*, (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, Inc., 2021), 34; 139.
[8] Birnbaum, "Buddhist China at the Century's Turn", 428-50.
[9] Qiu, "Qingdai fojiao yanjiu xiankuang", 322.

understanding subsequent state-sponsored temple suppression campaigns. A definitive expression of this late Qing perspective comes from Zhang Zhidong 张之洞 (1837-1909), initiator[10] of the late Qing "Building Schools with Temple Property Movement". He argued that Buddhism was in an advanced state of decline, declaring that "should Confucianism regain its vigor and restore stability to China, both Buddhism and Daoism would ultimately thrive under its aegis".[11] In this view, Buddhism was relegated to the status of a declining supplement within a dominant Confucian framework. Later scholars began to reconstitute Buddhist views in contrast to the earlier late Qing and Republican critics, a notable example appearing in Ren Jiyu's 任继愈 (1916–2009) *Zhongguo fojiao shi* (*A History of Chinese Buddhism* 中国佛教史, 1981). While Ren viewed Buddhism as an "opiate of the masses" that dulled the popular will, he also portrayed lay Buddhist practitioners as victims of religious dogma—a sympathetic view that contrasted with earlier polemics:

> We do not believe in Buddhism, nor do we regard its teachings as truth. However, we recognize that the emergence and development of Buddhism were rooted in specific social and ideological conditions… While the path to liberation it proposed was illusory, the social suffering it reflected was real… For millennia, Buddhist adherents have been victims. Their devotion was sincere, their attitude earnest, and they genuinely believed Buddhism could alleviate worldly suffering. Though their actions should not be emulated, their captivity to religious dogma merits sympathy—a phenomenon fully understandable when examined within its sociohistorical context. We must also note that some individuals propagating Buddhism did exploit it as a tool for personal gain, while feudal rulers throughout history unquestionably used Buddhism to numb the people's will to resist.[12]

Ren criticized Buddhism as a religion but he also argued that the vast majority

---

[10] Jiang Tingting 江婷婷, "Huimie yuchongsheng—jindai Zhongguo miaochanxingxue fengchaopingshu" 毁灭与重生——近代中国"庙产兴学"风潮评述[Destruction and Nirvana—on the Phenomenon of Confiscating Temple Property as General School Education in Modern China], *Journal of HIT (Social Sciences Edition)*14, no.3 (2012): 100.
[11] Zhang Zhidong, *Quanxuepian* 劝学篇[Exhortation to Learning], (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2018), 193.
[12] Ren, *Zhongguo fojiao shi*, 16-17.

of Buddhists were victims of the faith. In his subsequent writings, he clarified his stance: the critique of Buddhism was not directed at the faithful populace, but rather at Buddhism's religious worldview. Ren's opposition to Buddhism was not against devout lay and monastic believers, but against Buddhism's "religious essence of narcotizing the people (mabi renmin de zongjiao benzhi 麻痹人民的宗教本质)" as an institution.[13] To understand the lives of ordinary Chinese Buddhists, a deconstruction not only of the religious dogma but also the Confucian and Republican modern attacks is necessary.

Ren's more empathetic approach, while rooted in Marxist theory, draws a stark contrast with other writers; indeed, during the Republican period, harsh criticism of Buddhism as a religion gained momentum. Marxist historians like Lü Zhenyu 吕振羽 (1900–1980), for instance, excoriated all faiths—including Buddhism—in his *Jianming Zhongguo tongshi* (*A Brief History of China* 简明中国通史).[14] Similarly, Li Pingxin 李平心 (1907–1966) asserted that Buddhism was an accomplice of Confucianism in deceiving and manipulating the uneducated public.[15] Spurred by Liang Qichao's 梁启超 (1873–1929) critique, which drew on Spencer's theory of social evolution, many scholars came to view religion as a barrier to social progress and a cause of the Qing Dynasty's decline—though not all extended this criticism to Confucianism.[16] This critical trend permeated the intellectual landscape, shaping even literature sympathetic to Buddhism. A pro-Buddhist work examined by the renowned monk Master Taixu explicitly acknowledged the prevailing anti-Buddhist sentiments, which ranged from Marxist critique to the rhetoric of Chinese modernizers, stating:

[13] Ibid.
[14] Lü Zhenyu, *Jianming Zhongguo tongshi*, (Dalian: Guanghuashudian, 1949).
[15] Li Pingxin, *Lun luxun desixiang* 论鲁迅的思想[Studies on Lu Xun's Thoughts], (Shanghai: Changfeng shudian, 1941), 67.
[16] Xu Yue 徐跃, "Congpaidi fojiao daotichang fojiao: yiqingmo zhangjianweizhu detaolun" 从排诋佛教到提倡佛教——以清末民初张謇为主的讨论[From Criticism to Advocacy: A Discussion Centered on Zhang Jian in the Late Qing and Early Republic Period], *Modern Chinese History Studies*, no.2(2013): 67-68.

> Since the introduction of Western natural and social sciences to China in recent decades, traditional Chinese academic structures have been challenged and dismantled. Among the traditions being re-evaluated, Buddhism is suffering the most devastating blow. Contemporary scholars now regard it as a superstition, a relic of primitive mythology, and an unscientific placebo that lobotomizes the public.[17]

In response to such widespread accusations, Buddhist apologists mounted various defenses and clarifications. These very efforts to counter the critiques attest to the influence of the "scientific" approaches to religion at the time. This critical stance toward Buddhism in the Republican era stood in marked contrast to attitudes held by late Qing intellectual elites.

To understand this shift, it is necessary to examine the pre-Republican context. Before imported categories like "religion," "science," and "superstition" reshaped Chinese thought, opposition to Buddhism among intellectual elites stemmed primarily from Confucian ideology and the imperative of maintaining stable governance. Timothy Brook's research on temple records in North Zhili 直隶, for instance, shows that local gentry supported or opposed Buddhism based on its perceived impact on governance and stability. [18] In other words, local elites did not criticize Buddhism simply because it was a "religion".

In the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, contemporaneous critiques focused not on Buddhist "religious" nature, but on the perceived irrationality of equating Buddhist monks with the Buddha himself. As one commentary put it:

> Filial descendants, fearing divine retribution for their deceased ancestors, seek salvation through Buddhist rituals—this is understandable. However,

[17] Master Taixu examined, Fan Gunong 范古农 proofread, *Wenxüan* 文选[Analects], (Shanghai: Foxue shujü, 1932), 62.
[18] Timothy Brook, "Buddhism in the Chinese Constitution", *The Chinese State in Ming Society*, (Oxford: Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), 158-181.

> the Buddha is not the same as today's monks. These monks are but destitute remnants of society, the epitome of loneliness and hardship. People forget their miserable circumstances and equate them with the Buddha, as if the authority to confer posthumous blessings rests solely with monks, making blessed ancestors rely on the mere utterances of the most impoverished and isolated individuals. Does this make any sense?[19]

Such criticism paradoxically affirmed Buddhism's religious social function in promoting Confucian filial virtues. Buddhism, as one of the Three Teachings, was accepted as an auxiliary to maintaining the Confucian social order, as long as it did not pose a threat to the dominant Confucian teaching. Rather than attacking Buddhist doctrine itself, the critique subtly targeted Buddhist practitioners, a stance diametrically opposed to academic perspectives later, such as Ren Jiyu's.

Unlike Ren Jiyu's view that the majority of Buddhists were victims, during the late Qing period, monastic practitioners who were victims of crime might be condemned rather than pitied. A close reading of *Dianshizhai Pictorial* 点石斋画报 will help to unpack the rationale behind educated Chinese elites' lack of empathy for Buddhist practitioners in the late Qing. I argue that literati condemnation and pillory of monks and nuns was rooted in the "state-oriented Confucian gentry's"[20] scrutiny of Buddhism itself. The focus of elite Confucian intellectuals was on court politics, the emperor's preference for Buddhism, or the central government—topics that were often followed by macroscopic theoretical discussions. However, unlike the most highly-placed scholar-officials, ordinary Confucian intellectuals—those educated in the classics but unsuccessful in the civil examinations (*kejü* 科举)—developed a distinct critique based on lived experience, focusing particularly on the conduct of the Buddhist clergy.

---

[19] "Fervent Devotion to Buddhist Connections" (*Haojie foyuan* 好结佛缘), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 丁 10, no.46, 1885.
[20] Brook, *The Chinese State in Ming Society*, 181.

This hyper-critical environment was not to last, as most Buddhists in contemporary China operate within a significantly more favorable environment. Figures like Shi Yongxin, the former abbot of Shaolin, have wielded significant influence, and public reactions to monastic scandals today often involve humor rather than moral outrage. This stands in marked contrast to the hostility directed toward Buddhists themselves—rather than Buddhist doctrine—in the late Qing. During the Republican period, which bridges these two attitudes, certain intellectuals drew upon Buddhist ideas to articulate nationalist and reformist agendas. Liang Qichao, for example, in his work *On the Relationship Between Buddhism and Governance* (论佛法与群治的关系, first published in 1902), employed Buddhist expressions to articulate connections between translated Western concepts and preexisting Chinese ideas, framing their arguments for national salvation within a Buddhist context.[21] Zhang Taiyan 章太炎 (1869–1936) in *On Establishing a Religion* (建立宗教论, first published in 1906), adopted Buddhist concepts to express their visions for saving the nation.[22] Meanwhile, Buddhists actively engaged in worldly discourse, reinterpreting Buddhist doctrines and aspirations through modern political slogans. A highly influential figure, Master Shi Taixu 释太虚 (1890–1947), for instance, reframed Buddhist ideals through the political language of the Three Principles of the People 三民主义, illustrating how Buddhism could contribute to nation-building.[23] Buddhism has once again become part of educated society's project of cultural construction and, with a few exceptions, avoids controversy.

The trajectory from the late Qing's stigmatized Buddhists to the Republican era's more sympathetic portrayals remains unclear, however. In this

[21]Ma Tianxiang 麻天祥, *Wanqing foxue yu jindai shehuisichao* 晚清佛学与近代社会思潮[Late Qing Buddhism and Modern Social Thought], (Taiwan Gaoxiong County: Foguangshan Foundation for Buddhist Culture and Education, 2001), 2-13. The influence of Buddhism on thinkers in the early Republican period is also discussed in Sin-wai Chan, *Buddhism in Late Ch'ing Political Thought*, (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press), 1985.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid., 95-101.

dissertation I will show how in the late Qing, Buddhist priests suffered from a widespread gendered bias. Prejudice against Buddhist practitioners stemmed from Confucian ideology held both by Qing rulers and local educated elites. At the same time, with the growing public disappointment in the Qing government, Buddhists who were civilian martial arts masters, represented by the Shaolin Temple, were presented with an opportunity to reshape their public image. Following the collapse of the traditional Chinese Three Teachings system, Buddhist priests gradually gained more tolerant treatment during the transformation of China's national ideology. This was because, within the new value categories that emerged, Buddhism was relegated to a more marginalized position as a "religion."

In this inquiry, the *Great Qing Code* (Daqing lüli 大清律例) serves as a collateral illustration of both the pervasiveness of gender bias and its particular manifestation within the Buddhist clergy. Finalized through compilations under the Shunzhi, Kangxi, and Qianlong emperors, with its last revision in 1870,[24] the Code reflects official discourse. This study uses the 1871 edition compiled by Wu Kunxiu 吴坤修 et al., *Daqing lüli genyuan* 大清律例根原,[25] with Guo Chengwei's 郭成伟 punctuated edition as the Chinese source text. This edition chronologically records all revisions and includes officials' memorials proposing changes. For English, it draws on William C. Jones's translation, based on Xue Yunsheng's 薛允升 *Du Li Cun Yi* 读例存疑, punctuated by Huang Jingjia 黄静嘉.[26] The analysis prioritizes the Chinese original while adopting Jones's translations of key statutes. As a code shaped by popular practice rather than abstract ethics, the *Great Qing Code* best

[24] Huang Xiongyi 黄雄义, "Qingdai fadian bianzuan linian zhiyange yixingdian weizhongxin dekaocha"清代法典编纂理念之沿革——以刑典为中心的考察[The Evolution of the Compilation Concept of the Qing Code: A Study Centered on the Penal Code], *Law Review* 41, no. 3 (2023): 194.
[25] Guo Chengwei 郭成伟 ed., *Daqing luli genyuan* 大清律例根原, (Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House, 2012), 2022-2023.
[26] William C. Jones, *The Great Qing Code*, (Oxford University Press, 1994), 29. Jones based his translation on the original 1905 edition (the 31st year of the Guangxu reign).

captures the official perspective on social life. In analyzing late Qing gender biases, this official perspective exhibits both convergence and subtle divergence from that of the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* editors.

1.A Brief Introduction of the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*

Dianshizhai Pictorial was described as a "peerless" illustrated publication of the late Qing by scholars of Chinese literature and history, taking into consideration its widespread cultural influence and documentation of every-day life.[27] It was founded by Ernest Major in 1884, and ceased publication in 1898. It was originally designed as a supplement to news reporting in *Shenbao* 申报, a more serious broadsheet published by Ernest Major's company, but contemporary readers might not have related *Dianshizhai Pictorial* to *Shenbao*, undermining Major's original intention in publishing the *Pictorial*.[28] Run every ten days, *Dianshizhai* attracted a wide audience, which was made possible mainly by its entirely Chinese editorial board: "since the editors no doubt knew the tricks of their trade, and therefore generally would take care to conform to public opinion."[29] The pictorial was "commercial and enlightened, but not politically radical" or, rather, cautious about commenting on current affairs in order to avoid offending the Qing government, which might lead to censorship.[30]

There are no precise historical records available to ascertain the sales volume and distribution areas of *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, so scholars today can only rely

---

[27] Chen Pingyuan 陈平原 and Xia Xiaohong 夏晓红, *Tuxiang wanqing* 图像晚清 [Images of the Late Qing], (Beijing: Dongfang Press, 2014), 4-5, 8-12.
[28] Christopher A. Reed, "Re/Collecting the Sources: Shanghai's *Dianshizhai Pictorial* and Its Place in Historical Memories, 1884-1949", *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 12, no.2 (2000): 56.
[29] Erik Zürcher, "Middle-Class Ambivalence: Religious Attitudes in the *Dianshizhai Huabao*", *Études chinoises* 13, no.1-2 (1994): 111.
[30] Ye Xiaoqing, *The Dianshizhai Pictorial: Shanghai Urban Life, 1884-1898*. (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, the University of Michigan, 2003), 28-33. According to Chen Pingyuan and Xia Xiaohong (2014, 23), the political stance of *Dianshizhai Pictorial* was beyond reproach in the historical context of its time. It was only two or three years after the journal ceased publication—following the Boxer Rebellion, when the Qing government's authority and control had significantly weakened—that unrestrained political criticism and satirical jokes about officialdom became fashionable, with Li Boyuan 李伯元 and Wu Jianren 吴趼人 emerging as leading figures in this trend.

on circumstantial evidence to illustrate its influence and readership. According to an announcement by *Dianshizhai*, it was distributed by the Dianshizhai Printing Company, which was headquartered in Shanghai. Its operation was far more extensive than that, however, with branches across Qing China, encompassing not only major urban centers and coastal provinces such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Fujian, but also remote provinces including Gansu and Yunnan.[31] The branches of the Dianshizhai Printing Company not only sold their own edited pictorial but also other publications. For example, in some provinces, the Dianshizhai Printing Company produced reference books for the civil examination. Apart from the Dianshizhai Printing Company, *Dianshizhai Pictorial* was also distributed by Shenbao agencies and salesmen, companies, foreign firms, and private postal services. Besides, scholars often quote Bao Tianxiao's 包天笑 (1876–1973) recollections and Lu Xun's 鲁迅 (1881–1936) remarks about *Dianshizhai Pictorial* to prove its popularity.[32]

Rudolf G. Wagner situates the birth of *Dianshizhai Pictorial* within the global historical context of expanding public reading in nineteenth-century Europe and North America, driven by the popularization of public education. He points out that, amid the shift of civilizational centers and the transfer of discursive power, China—facing imperialist expansion—was bound to eventually produce a Chinese-language illustrated periodical like *Dianshizhai*, thereby joining the trend of popular visual publications already widespread in Europe and North America.[33] Prior to its launch, Ernest Major, who was considered a "good friend" of the Chinese people, had already made attempts to publish illustrated newspapers in China. However, as many researchers have pointed

[31] Ye, *The Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 36.
[32] See Ye, *The Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 4-11; Chen and Xia, *Tuxiang wanqing*, 8-17; Reed, "Re/Collecting the Sources", 44-71.
[33] Rudolf G. Wagner, *Joining the Global Public: Word, Image, and City in Early Chinese Newspapers, 1870-1910* (Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press, 2007), 105-173.

out[34], unlike his earlier ventures—which largely emphasized foreignness as a selling point—the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* was edited and sourced by Chinese, offering commentary on current affairs from a Chinese perspective.[35]
The *Dianshizhai Pictorial* was published in bound form, released three times per month in Shanghai between May 8, 1884, and August 16, 1898.[36] A total of 528 issues were produced, each containing eight double-page spreads of illustrations accompanied by text and priced at 5 *fen* 分 (one hundred *fen* was equal to one silver tael).[37] This pricing made it relatively accessible to the general public.

Dianshizhai Pictorial employed two numbering systems: one for timely reading (cover numbers/dates) and one for binding. The binding system organized issues into 44 thematic volumes (ji 集), each containing 12 issues marked with sequential labels like "Jia Yi 甲一." Continuous page numbers and volume-specific illustration indexes facilitated reader binding. Volumes followed traditional sequences—Heavenly Stems, Earthly Branches, Eight Musical Sounds, Six Arts, Four Confucian Teachings, and the Book of Changes' Four Virtues—reflecting the editors' dual vision: serving immediate news consumption while enabling preservation as collectible books.[38]

Regarding the content of the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, it has a dual identity: either a provider of new learning about modern life or a recorder of premodern everyday life.[39] Research on the publication therefore primarily focuses on these two roles. Early academic engagement with *Dianshizhai Pictorial* was motivated by its panoramic representation of quotidian practices and material

[34] To name a few, Rudolf G. Wagner, Xiaoqing Ye, Pingyuan Chen, Ermin Wang, etc.
[35] Wagner, *Joining the Global Public*, 107.
[36] Ibid., 131.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Qi Xuejiao 漆雪娇 and Wu Ping 吴平, "Dianshizhai huabao bianjitese yanjiu" 《点石斋画报》编辑特色研究 [A Study on the Editorial Features of Dianshizhai Pictorial], *Publishing Research*, no. 12 (2018): 111-113.
[39] Reed, "Re/Collecting the Sources", 44-71.

culture in fin-de-siècle China.[40] Later, the scholarly interest in *Dianshizhai Pictorial* stems from a broader engagement with China's historical modernization process. The *Dianshizhai Pictorial* served dual audiences: those seeking traditional Chinese cultural motifs and those fascinated by Western subjects. Academic consensus holds that it strategically adopted lithography—then a revolutionary printing technique—to disseminate a characteristically "middlebrow" Confucian worldview.[41]

Numerous studies have been conducted to date on the publication background, readership market, editorial purposes, and content of the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*. Most of the scholarship on the publication comes from Rudolf G. Wagner, Xiaoqing Ye, and Pingyuan Chen. Regarding the creators of *Dianshizhai Pictorial's* content, Rudolf G. Wagner conducted in-depth research on Ernest Major's earlier attempts before its foundation. Cai Erkang 蔡尔康(1851–1921) collaborated with Major on a pictorial project and drafted a series of editorial principles, some of which were later reflected in the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*. Wagner also excavated historical materials concerning the group of illustrators involved in the pictorial, particularly the life of Wu Youru 吴友如 (? – c. 1893). He specifically refutes the view that "Youru Wu managed the content selection for the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*," and points out the diversity of its contributors: it frequently featured several illustrators who had their own thematic preferences and distinct artistic styles.[42] Conversely, Xiaoqing Ye investigates the publication's authors, suggesting that most of them were literati who enjoyed the new lifestyle of the foreign settlements, sought solace in wine and women, yet still longed for the scholarly privileges that existed outside the leased concessions. Due to their low wages and indulgent lifestyles, they often lived in extreme poverty,

[40] "In the West, it soon became a collector's item and, at a later stage, a subject of popularizing publications and research." (Zürcher, "Middle-Class Ambivalence", 110)
[41] Especially see Ye, *The Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 6-9.
[42] Wagner, *Joining the Global Public*.

struggling financially and living in precarious conditions. In summary, both the illustrators and textual authors of the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* belonged to the emerging class of urban intellectuals within foreign settlements.[43]

Although often introduced as an enlightenment pictorial, the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* actually featured, according to Ermin Wang's statistics, 778 images—accounting for one-sixth of its total publications—that dealt with bizarre and fantastical deities, ghosts, and supernatural beings, drawing material similar to the stories in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* 聊斋志异.[44] Furthermore, the pictorial frequently sourced its content from *Shenbao*, and its writers themselves admitted that "what the daily newspaper records need not necessarily be true; when a story is strange enough, we simply illustrate it to amuse our readers."[45] In other words, some events that authors presented as real occurrences might actually have been based on unverified rumors. This pursuit of the peculiar and entertaining aligned with the content trends in global illustrated news at the time.[46] At the same time, the *Pictorial* included extensive records of folk religious life, but research on those practices, their believers, and the spiritual views reflected in the publication remains scarce, with only dedicated research on this topic appearing in the works of Xiaoqing Ye and Erik Zürcher.

Influenced by Jacques Gernet, Erik Zürcher observed an ambivalent attitude in the editors' accounts and commentaries regarding late Qing religious life. He noted the pictorial's frequent documentation of Buddhist misconduct, yet

---

[43] Ye, *The Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 13-20. However, a key piece of evidence in Xiaoqing Ye's research misinterprets the term "茶博士" (chá bóshì) in the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* as referring to an intellectual or scholar (p.9). In fact, in this context, the Chinese word "博士" does not denote an educated person, but simply means a waiter or server, who might even be illiterate.

[44] Yang Huidan 杨慧丹, "Guaizihelai: Dianshizhai Huabao dezhiguaituxiangchanshi jiqi kuawenhuashuxing"怪自何来？——《点石斋画报》的志怪图像阐释及其跨文化属性[Where the Weird Being Started: The Illustration and Intercultural Attribute of Mystery Images In *Dianshizhai Huabao*], *Meishu*, no.3 (2019): 95.

[45] "Civil-Military Brawl 文武争殴", *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 1885.

[46] Wagner, *Joining the Global Public*, 105-107.

did not identify the relatively consistent principle underlying these records—namely, the differing attitudes toward religion and its adherents. Zürcher observed that the pictorial generally accepted supernatural elements like ghosts and karma, reflecting contemporary views that saw religious belief as complementing the legal system. However, his study lacked cross-referencing with other sources, preventing him from identifying underlying consistencies in these viewpoints or recognizing the economic factors that might have motivated their criticisms. Furthermore, he did not connect religious phenomena with legal provisions, leaving him unaware that the Buddhists depicted could be categorized into different types, from those in major temples to unauthorized monks. While he compared attitudes toward Buddhists, Taoists, monks, and nuns, he refrained from a closer textual analysis, attributing the phenomena simply to the long-standing Confucian-Buddhist controversy.[47] Xiaoqing Ye's research, which situated the pictorial's records within Shanghai's demographic shifts and thereby offered more nuanced categorizations of religious activities, but she tended to describe phenomena rather than probe their underlying causes.[48] Both Zürcher and Ye demonstrate that *Dianshizhai* was pivotal in its role in China's modernization discourse, as well as possessing exceptional documentary value in capturing daily life, which is crucial for this dissertation's investigation of late Qing critiques of Buddhist practitioners.

2.Buddhist Priests in the Qing Dynasty: A Literature Review

The *Pictorial's* importance is underlined by the general lack of research on Buddhism during the Qing Dynasty, especially when compared to the wealth of studies on the Tang and Song. Furthermore, within Qing Buddhist studies, scholarly attention has been disproportionately focused on the early and high

[47] Ibid., 131.

[48] Most book reviews have also pointed out Ye's inadequacies in theoretical exploration and in-depth analysis. For example, see Madeleine Y. Dong, "Reviews of Books:The Dianshizhai Pictorial: Shanghai Urban Life, 1884-1898 Ye Xiaoqing," *The American Historical Review* 110, no. 1 (2005): 113-114; Marie-Claire Bergère, "Review of *The Dianshizhai Pictorial: Shanghai Urban Life, 1884-1898*", *The China Journal (Canberra, A.C.T.)* , no.52 (2004): 215-216.

Qing periods, leaving the late Qing—particularly the final decades covered by this study (1884–1898)—significantly understudied.

A primary reason for this neglect, as suggested by scholars like Qiu Gaoxing 邱高兴, is the perception that Buddhism had "completely lost its vitality" due to the devastation of the Taiping Rebellion and internal institutional corruption.[49] However, this thesis challenges that assumption. The persistent criticism and documentation of ordinary Buddhists and lay followers in publications like the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* are not evidence of a moribund tradition but rather proof of its ongoing, vibrant presence in popular social life. If Buddhism were truly defunct, then it would have ceased to be a relevant object of public discourse. Qiu Gaoxing's subsequent claim that Buddhism revived due to eminent figures in the post-Qing era is self-contradictory, [50] as such leaders cannot emerge without a vibrant community to nurture them, and these groups do not suddenly spring into existence. Therefore, this study posits that beneath the surface of academic narratives of stagnation, a popular vitality for Buddhism persisted, paving the way for its later revival.

Current historical research on Qing Buddhists can be broadly categorized into two streams, both of which share a common limitation: a focus on elites at the expense of ordinary practitioners. The first stream focuses on Chinese Chan Buddhism.[51] Works like Chen Yuan's 陈垣 *Records of Monastic Debates in the Early Qing Dynasty* 清初僧诤记 provide invaluable insights into the relationship between elite Buddhist factions and court politics, often through the lens of Ming loyalist intellectuals.[52] Similarly, research by scholars like Hsueh Yi Lin examines prominent monks who fell afoul of state censorship. [53]

[49] Qiu, "Research Status of Buddhism in the Qing Dynasty", 311-22.
[50] Ibid.
[51] The designations of the "Han" and "Tibetan" Buddhist sects carry no ethnic connotations; both Han Chinese and Tibetans may choose to practice either Chan (Zen) Buddhism or Lamaism as their faith.
[52] Chen Yuan 陈垣, *Records of Monastic Debates in the Early Qing Dynasty*, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1989.
[53] Hsueh Yi Lin, "Into Buddhism, Yet Hardly an Escape: Monk Dangui and the High Qing Censorship

Nevertheless, these studies focus on Buddhists who entered the purview of the imperial court or high-level intellectual circles. The second stream concerns Tibetan Buddhism/Lamaism. This body of scholarship, often linked to the concerns of the "New Qing History," investigates how the court utilized Tibetan Buddhism as a political tool for governing Mongol populations (e.g., Elverskog)[54] and explores cross-cultural encounters (e.g., Song)[55]. The thematic focus here is distinctly macro-political and institutional, directed away from the everyday lives of ordinary monastic communities. A small number of scholars have begun to address the daily life of the late Qing monastic community, for instance, by using Western travelogues to study specific temple rituals or by outlining the popularity of Buddhist services through official edicts.[56] However, a critical perspective is still missing: the internal Chinese, non-official, and non-elite Confucian intellectual view of Buddhism and Buddhists.

This is precisely the research gap that the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* effectively fills. Unlike the more fact-based reporting of *Shenbao*, the *Pictorial* was filled with emotionally charged opinions and commentary. Its editorial stance was that of the "not top-level Confucianism"[57]—educated but non-elite (that is to say, not in government) urban intellectuals. Consequently, *Dianshizhai's* records of late Qing religious practices were filtered through this specific perspective.[58] Moreover, given its commercial orientation, the viewpoints expressed in the *Pictorial* likely reflected widely prevalent social values of the time.

---

against Him", *Journal of Chinese History* (2025): 1–22.

[54] Johan Elverskog, *Our Great Qing: The Mongols, Buddhism and the State in Late Imperial China*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006; Natalie Köhle, "Why Did the Kangxi Emperor Go to Wutai Shan? Patronage, Pilgrimage, and the Place of Tibetan Buddhism at the Early Qing Court", *Late Imperial China* 29, no. 1 (2008): 73–119.

[55] Nianshen Song, "'Those Ridiculous Monks': The Failed Encounter between Korea and Tibetan Buddhism in Qing Mukden", *Inner Asia* 25, no.2 (2023): 206-226.

[56] For a study using Western travelogues, see Ronghuang Wang, and Wanqing Chen, "A Study on the Funerals of the Han Buddhist Monks of Lingnan during the Late Qing Dynasty via the Haichuang Temple in Guangzhou", *Religions (Basel, Switzerland)* 14, no. 7 (2023), 1-23. For an outline based on official edicts, see Kai Sheng, "Buddhist Faith and Lifestyles in the Ming and Qing Dynasties", In *A History of Chinese Buddhist Faith and Life*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2020), 464-465.

[57] Zürcher, "Middle-Class Ambivalence", 112.

[58] Ibid.

Therefore, it serves as a crucial primary source for recovering how ordinary Buddhists were perceived within the popular Confucian worldview of the late Qing.

3.Methods and Structure

This study employs a qualitative, case-based analysis of the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* to deconstruct the systematic prejudice against Buddhists during the late Qing period (1884-1898). The primary methodology involves a close reading of the pictorial's integrated text-and-image narratives, treating them not as transparent historical records but as culturally encoded artifacts that reveal the anxieties, desires, and moral frameworks of the emerging urban literate class that produced and consumed them. The research structure is designed to move from describing the manifestations of this bias to analyzing its gendered and economic dimensions, and finally to identifying a pivotal historical moment that began to shift public perception, a shift that would fully blossom in the Republican era.

The core primary source for this research is the Shanghai *Daketang* 大可堂 reprint edition of the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, supplemented by the digitized transcriptions and images from the *Hantang Classic Archives: Modern Newspapers and Periodicals Database*. This dual-source approach ensures both the tactile engagement with the original layout and the searchability and accuracy afforded by digital tools. The *Dianshizhai Pictorial* is an ideal source for this inquiry precisely because of its "middlebrow" Confucian worldview—or what Zürcher called a "middle class ambivalence"—and its commercial orientation. As a highly popular and widely circulated publication, its content and commentary were necessarily calibrated to reflect and reinforce the prevailing social values of its urban, educated, but non-elite readership. Therefore, the patterns of Buddhist representation provide a unique window into the "popular Confucian worldview" of the late Qing, distinct from both

high-level intellectual debates and official state documents.

My analytical method is fundamentally interdisciplinary, drawing from visual studies, gender theory, and historical discourse analysis. Each entry concerning Buddhist monks and nuns is examined on three interconnected levels: the textual narrative, the visual representation and the intertextual and legal context. Through textual examination, I will analyze a reported event, the language used to describe it, and the explicit moral commentary provided by the illustrators/writers. My visual analysis includes representations in each news story, scrutinizing image composition—focus, gaze, placement of figures, use of symbolic elements (e.g., Guanyin statues, specific hairstyles)—to uncover implicit meanings and biases that may contradict or amplify the text. Excavating the intertextual and legal context involves situating the narratives within broader cultural discourses, such as literary allusions (e.g., “Miaochang”), and contrasting them with the official legal framework of *The Great Qing Code*. This reveals the gaps between formal statute, social practice, and media representation. The *Pictorial*’s pursuit of the “strange and entertaining” means that many stories may be fictional or heavily sensationalized, but the *consistency* of its biases—the repetitive tropes, the predictable patterns of blame, the stable differential treatment of monks and nuns—is where its historical value lies. The method, therefore, seeks patterns rather than isolated facts, analyzing the *Pictorial* as a barometer of social sentiment rather than a straightforward chronicle of events.

The structure of this thesis is designed to build a cumulative argument, moving from the empirical observation of stigma to an exploration of its underlying causes and its eventual, partial dissolution.

Chapter one establishes the foundational prejudice against Buddhists in the *Pictorial*. It opens with the paradigmatic case of the burglary of the Puxin

Nunnery, where the victims were blamed for their own victimization due to suspicions around their wealth. This case introduces the two primary axes of criticism that the thesis explores: accusations regarding unethical wealth accumulation and violations of celibacy. The chapter demonstrates that the *Pictorial*'s criticism stems from a Confucian expectation that Buddhists must fully "disengage from secular life," an ideal deemed impossible by the illustrators based on their "lived experience." This perspective differed from elite critiques focused on state governance because here, the focus was on the personal conduct of the clergy themselves. The chapter further reveals a crucial gender disparity: while both monks and nuns were censured for sexual transgressions, the commentary and narrative outcomes for nuns were often more lenient. This sets the stage for a deeper investigation into the gendered nature of the *Pictorial's* bias in the following chapter.

Chapter Two delves into the complex and often contradictory portrayal of nuns, arguing that they occupied a "liminal" status within the Confucian social-gender order. Unlike monks, whose religious identity was primary, nuns were perceived first and foremost as women, and only secondarily as clergy. The analysis proceeds through a comparative framework, examining the *Pictorial*'s treatment of three categories of women. First, when female commoners were accused of adultery, the *Pictorial* often displayed a surprising level of sympathy, blaming neglectful husbands and acknowledging male anxiety, thus operating within a flexible moral framework but ultimately reaffirming Confucian ethical system. Second, when nuns were accused of adultery, they also received greater leniency, especially when compared with monks. This is attributable to their perceived "ignorance," their pitiable status as women outside of male protection, the strategic use of their "fallen" state to prove the inhumanity of Buddhist celibacy and, by way of making a philosophical contrast, the necessity of Confucian family ethics. Third, whenever nuns were depicted as active sex workers running commercial operations, they faced the

harshest condemnation, portrayed as dangerous seductresses draining men of their vitality and wealth. This chapter connects these portrayals to visual motifs, such as the "*liuhaiding*" hairstyle and the recurring image of the Guanyin Bodhisattva in scenes of illicit sexual activity. It argues that the nuns' fluid identity—neither a domesticated wife nor a debased-status courtesan—made them a potent screen for the projection of male desires and anxieties.

Chapter Three then investigates another major source of anti-Buddhist prejudice: wealth accumulation that violated Buddhist precepts. Here I show that clergy, often relatively affluent due to temple economies and public donations, became targets of public resentment, particularly in an era of significant wealth disparity and natural disasters. I analyze cases of monks being fined or nuns being robbed to show how their wealth was automatically viewed as illegitimate and their fundraising efforts as competing with more urgent social needs like famine relief. The chapter then identifies a critical turning point in the *Pictorial*'s narrative. Following China's defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) and the strategic retreat of the popular General Liu Yongfu 刘永福, public disillusionment with the official Qing military reached a peak. In this vacuum of confidence, the *Pictorial* began to express hope in civilian martial traditions. This shift is epitomized by the re-emergence of the Shaolin Temple in its narratives. Once suspected for its Ming loyalist associations, Shaolin's martial monks were now portrayed as a potential reservoir of national strength that ought to be harnessed "for the service of our nation." This represents a profound transformation. This shift may represent a turning point that allowed Buddhists, long despised in the late Qing, to regain a positive social reputation in the Republican era. The stigmatized Buddhist, condemned for desire and wealth, could now be reimagined as a patriotic martial hero. This final chapter thus bridges the late Qing's systemic bias with the beginnings of the more sympathetic and utilitarian reevaluation of Buddhism that would characterize the early 20th century.

Finally, I reflect on the discursive construction of gender in the *Pictorial*, as well as the dynamic between Confucian “Self” and Buddhist “Other,” as it was presented by non-elite, but nevertheless well-educated, Confucian writers and their audience. As I outline the contours of anti-Buddhist discourse that emanated from the publications of the leased concessions, I suggest how the agency within narrative practices gradually allowed for a rehabilitation of the Buddhist image amidst the waning of Qing authority.

Chapter 1 Social Stigma and Buddhist Priests

On the night of 1st October 1884, a convent called Puxin 普信 was robbed. The convent received sympathy when the amount of lost money was unknown to the reporter. However, once the scale of their property was known, the convent was criticized even if they were victims of a crime. This connection of lost money and victim-blaming no longer exists in contemporary Chinese media, where theft and robbery of monasteries have nothing to do with victims' responsibility but rather the criminals' conduct. Why the robbed nuns were blamed is a historical puzzle. Psychologically, victim-blaming is to construct a just world for others, and to be reassured that the victims suffer because of their own faults—if people behave well or so, the theory goes, they will never be victims. Blaming victims allows others to feel that they are in control.[59] Regarding the robbed nuns, there was a social context in the late Qing used to justify the blame. Blames on robbed nuns represented a popular concept of justice. And this concept of justice intertwined with Confucian morality and lived experience at that time.

1. Shaming the Victims of Crime

> The Puxin Nunnery in Jia County is well-known. It is believed that nuns in the nunnery are wealthy. Villains desire wealth in the nunnery. On the night of the thirteenth day of the eighth lunar month, more than a dozen bandits masked with painted faces robbed the nunnery. The bandits turned the nunnery upside down and stole about a thousand gold. A nun from another nunnery lodged in the Puxin Nunnery that night was an accomplice. The nuns in the Puxin Nunnery were afraid of gossip, so they didn't report the theft to the responsible official. Didn't *Yijing* say something about it? The careless hoarding of things motivates robbery. Possessing a thousand gold nowadays, one will unavoidably be filled with apprehensions. The converts to Buddhism are not expected to store so much money, so this is fraught with secular considerations. Only by adherence to the Buddhist commandments, can they avoid disasters. As

[59] Melvine J, Lerner, *The Belief in a Just World: A Fundamental Delusion*, 1980.

elephants were captured because of ivories, the nuns were robbed due to their own fault.[60]

This analysis is based on the news report “Nunnery Theft” (*Ni’an beidao* 尼庵被盗) from the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* in 1884. The nuns of Puxin Nunnery, despite being victims of a crime, faced blame and were cast as morally culpable. Their possession of substantial wealth appears to be the primary reason for this victim-blaming. This attitude is further evidenced by a series of similar nunnery theft reports in *Shenbao* (申报).

On October 12th, 1884, *Shenbao* mentioned that the theft happened in Puxin Nunnery with a series of other theft cases in Jia County, appealing to the government to protect the public.[61] On October 21st, 1884, a correction was made that the robbed nunnery was not Puxin Nunnery but Luo Nunnery 罗庵, and some details were added.[62] The reporter felt glad that Luo Nunnery did not lose many valuable things.[63] Nevertheless, the reporter’s attitude changed in the last correction of the news story on October 26th, 1884. It was reported that both Puxin Nunnery and Luo Nunnery were robbed on the same night, though Luo Nunnery’s loss was little, and Puxin Nunnery allegedly lost a thousand gold due to a rich shop assistant taking lots of gold jewellery. Puxin Nunnery did not report the robbery to the government because the robbed nuns were afraid of gossip. The reporter commented that the nunnery was known to be rich, and the nuns might have violated Buddhist *vinaya* rules (Buddhist teachings in scriptures) to collect money. Following another nunnery theft news story after the correction of Puxin Nunnery’s suffering on 1st October, the reporter also expressed their surprise at “why robbers prefer female Buddhists (何该盗之专向优婆夷攘掠耶！)!”[64]

---

[60] “Nunnery Theft”, *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 乙 8, no. 20, 1884.
[61] *Shenbao*, October 12th, 1884.
[62] *Shenbao*, October 21st, 1884.
[63] Ibid.
[64] *Shenbao*, October 26th, 1884.

Compared to the report on *Shenbao*, the illustrators of *Dianshizhai Pictorial* omitted the existence of the rich shop assistant and added the detail of an accomplice in the nunnery. The verbal comments emphasized the loss of Puxin Nunnery over a night—a thousand gold. The loss was enormous, as a robbed temple, which was commented as "just made ends meet" (虽不至炊烟常断，而香积厨中，决无厚藏), only lost twenty to thirty yuan in foreign currency after robbers rummaging around the monastery.[65] The verbal text did not explain why wealthy nuns should be blamed for violating Buddhist commandments, since sutras did not forbid Buddhists dealing with money. Thus, the blame in the comment seems over-demanding based on pure conjecture that the source of the loss was suspicious. It also seems that late Qing literati had a high expectation of nuns' piety. Nonetheless, the visual information (Figure 1) told readers the approach through which nunneries could earn large amounts of money.

In the illustration alongside the text, a nun is looking into a mirror, standing up, possibly appreciating her good-looking face. A younger nun is sitting next to the standing nun, looking at her yearningly. An old woman, the servant, is holding a candle for the elder nun behind her. One of the couplet in the room reads "Xiangqing nengjie foqian yuan" (香情能结佛前缘), which could be understood both as "burning incense to win the favor of the Buddha" and "a romantic affair is witnessed and blessed by the Buddha." Outside the room, several face-painted men are scaling the wall to rob the convent with weapons.

The illustration not only provides crucial information, but also adds dramatic tension. It includes innocent females and dangerous intruders. The depicted

[65] "Temple Robbery" (*Daojie sengsi* 盗劫僧寺), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 丁 2, no. 38, 1885.

females were not those who lived within Confucianism-regulated families. They were nuns, the female clergy, belonging to a third gender.[66] According to the legal pluralism of the Qing Dynasty, treating different social groups accordingly, female clergy were barely mentioned in the code.[67] However, in the illustration, the nuns are in the center of the audience's gaze. The audience of the female clergy include robbers in the picture and readers outside. Following the rule of thirds, nuns are placed at one of the focuses of the picture. Besides, the robbers' viewing of the females leads the audience's eyeline to the same place. Focusing on the females can evoke disbelief and surprise in the audience (at least, the evocation of such feelings is the purpose of such a design). The question of why the female clergy behave just like other ordinary girls their age can arise, as the painter expected. The confusion about the nuns' behavior and the doubt over their piety could also become the focus of the audience's mind as their eyes focus on the nuns. In this way, the tension between the robber and the robbed pales next to that between the ideal image of nuns and reality.

In a word, both the text and the illustration of "Nunnery Theft" lay emphasis on nuns' improper conduct. Readers' attention will be led to scrutinizing the victims of the robbery instead of the perpetrators. The text blamed the nuns because they were rich. Through reading a series of reports about this robbery on *Shenbao*, whether nuns were rich was a key point in deciding reporters' attitudes. Compared with another robbed temple, the Puxin Nunnery did possess so much money that the source could be suspicious. And the illustration exhibited the unspoken part of the news story.

[66] Matthew H. Sommer, *Sex, Law and Society in Late Imperial China*, (Stanford University Press, 2002), 415-416.
[67] "Legal Pluralism" is borrowed from Pär Kristoffer Cassel, *Grounds of Judgment*, (Oxford University Press, 2012).

Figure 1 “Nunnery Theft”

The nuns might violate the Buddhist rules due to the way they made money but not possessing lots of money. The illustrator attracted the audience's attention through their painting techniques to divert their gaze from the robbers to the nuns. Nonetheless, modern readers might still be in the dark about the nuns' source of money, even if the illustrator implied obviously in the painting. The unspoken implication will be explained in the next section.

2. The Robbed Nuns' Way to Get Rich

Hair is an essential identity marker in the Buddhist world. Shaving the whole head symbolizes a lay Buddhist's entry into the monastic society.[68] Thus, the nuns' hairstyle in Figure 1 is unusual. The nuns in the illustration did not shave their whole heads. They had an incomplete tonsure, which was a symbol for nuns doing a "sideline" in Jiangzhe 江浙 area—courtesans.

Another news story from *Dianshizhai Pictorial* introduced the social phenomenon: "Nuns in Jiangsu and Zhejiang Provinces often also took jobs as prostitutes…they preserved hair except for the top of their heads. This hairstyle was called 'fringe skirted bald top' (liuhaiding 刘海顶)."[69]

The courtesans-cum-nuns' job did not necessarily include sexual activity in the late Qing. *Dianshizhai Pictorial* said that those dual-role nuns primarily offered conversation and companionship through tea gatherings and banquets within the convent. The sexual service needed vast amounts of money on the premise that the client was a regular patron who had built a close relationship with the nun.[70] Xu Ke 徐珂, a literatus living in the late Qing and early Republic China, wrote in *Categorized Notes on the Qing Dynasty's Anecdotes* (*Qingbai Leichao* 清稗类钞), "Nuns in Jiaxing 嘉兴/嘉郡 have been

[68] Ann Heirman and Mathieu Torck, *A Pure Mind in a Clean Body: Bodily Care in the Buddhist Monasteries of Ancient India and China*, (Gent: Ginkgo Academia Press, 2012), 137.
[69] "Soft and Sweet Bodies" (*Xiangruan hongchen* 香软红尘), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 辛 10, no. 94, 1886.
[70] Ibid.

famous for their love affairs since the Yuan Dynasty 元朝 (1271-1368). Every Qixi 七夕 Festival (Chinese Valentine's Day), you will see tourists accompanied by prostitutes or nuns walking around the Lover's Lake. The most popular nunneries offering the accompanying service are called Hall of Avalokiteshvara (Guanyin tang 观音堂) or Nunnery for Newborn Delivery (Songzi an 送子庵)."[71]

Despite the violation of Buddhist *vinaya*, nuns who got involved in prostitution were also incompatible with secular regulations. *The Great Qing Code* 大清律例 regulated legal prostitution, which was limited to prostitutes having debased status (jianji 贱籍). The nuns who had a sideline were in the grey area. Logically, to "maintain clear status boundaries,"[72] the nuns' activity should not be tolerated, since this activity transgressed the boundaries. Nuns were not in a debased status, and they were not simply commoners (liangren 良人). They held dudie 度牒, which was a certificate of their identity to be a lawful priest. In practice, *The Great Qing Code* did not forbid nuns from love affairs (having love affairs was not necessarily about sexual activity), though they were not encouraged, either. *The Great Qing Code* articulated the punishment for nuns' fornication (jian 奸). In Article 372 for "Those Who Are in Mourning, or Buddhist or Taoist Priests who Fornicate", it was said that:

> If anyone who is mourning for his father, mother, or husband, or if a Buddhist priest or nun, or a Taoist priest or nun, commits fornication, in each case add to the penalty for ordinary persons fornicating two degrees [Art. 366]. The one who fornicates with them will be guilty of the penalty for ordinary fornication. (If there is force, the fornicator will be strangled with delay. The woman will not be punished.)[73]

"Fornication" in the article means that a nun has a sexual relationship with a

[71] Xu Ke 徐珂, *Qingbai leichao* 清稗类钞, (Zhonghua Book Company, 1984), 4867.
[72] Sommer, *Sex, Law and Society in Late Imperial China*, 243.
[73] Jones, *The Great Qing Code*, , 352.

male, and the male does not need to be another woman's husband. In the substatute following Article 372, it was regulated that nuns who committed fornication would also be a public spectacle at the entrance of their convents with cangues (jia 枷) for two months as a punishment.[74] Still, there were no statutes and substatutes about nuns flirting with men or going sightseeing with men in public. Some convents offered exceptional services to males in Jiangzhe 江浙 area in the Qing Dynasty. The content of the exceptional service covered many kinds of interactions between men and women, not only sexual activity. Even if the convent offered sexual service, the service only took place in a private space with wealthy regular patrons, making it hard to sue the convent for lack of evidence.

Although the central government in the Qing Dynasty did not establish legal provisions on the convents skirting or even violating the law, the local government took action. The government of Jiangsu Province issued a decree on 23rd November 1868 to close those convents and seize their property to maintain local free schools (yixue 义学). The decree listed reasons for this action that those convents abetted adolescents, profaned Buddhist deities, undermined local customs and morals, and even caused homicides. The government also predicted possible resistance from local private advisers of government offices and students qualified for the local-level civil examination. So, they warned that they would have a crackdown on private advisers and students who were hostile towards the decree. Besides, clerical assistants of local governments were also dissuaded from taking the opportunity to disturb interested parties.[75] The decree was expected to remain in force since its issuance.

It seems that Zhejiang Province did not ban extra services from nunneries,

[74] Guo., *Daqing luli genyuan* 1604-1605.
[75] *Jiangsu shengli chubian* 江苏省例初编,1869.

despite Jiangsu and Zhejiang being contiguous.[76] That is probably why the reported nunnery was in Jia County, Zhejiang Province in 1884 and was implied to provide the exceptional service.

Even if governments in Zhejiang did not take action, literati were disgruntled with the many ways nuns earned money. Fan Zushu 范祖述, the author of *Hangsuyifeng* (*Customs and Traditions of Hangzhou* 杭俗遗风), was outspoken in his disdain of nuns:

> The ways nuns cheat believers out of money are various. Each time when it is the nativity of a Buddhist deity, nuns will organize assembly for celebration. Nuns can invite wives of benefactors to have Buddhist cuisine, sell scriptures and paper money (zhiqian 纸钱/冥镪), and even chant the sutras (as a part of death ritual). If a benefactor is having a funeral, nuns will send exquisite fruits and vegetables to his family. Receiving boarding children as disciples, helping local wealthy family make silk floss (simian 丝棉) padded clothing, giving out steamed buns (mantou 馒头) and Laba 腊八 porridge, collecting lamp-oil (dengyou 灯油) and containers for religious purposes are all their ways for getting money. They will visit every house and use all means to amass wealth. However, the public is willing to be cheated by nuns because they always have good excuses in line with the goodness of humanity.[77]

The listed common ways for nuns to get money were not approved by Confucian literati, either. Basically, well-educated literati had no fondness for Buddhist activities, not only because of their centuries-old tradition accepted from early childhood Confucian education, but also due to their lived experience. However, the general disapproval of Buddhism as a Confucianist or well-educated literatus was not only against nuns, but also against monks. Lived experience deepened the opposition of Buddhist activities. Nuns, as

[76] Actually, some local authorities in Zhejiang Province issued notices on young nuns who had inappropriate interactions with male patrons. For example, according to *Shenbao*, the Ningbo 宁波 local authority ordered young nuns to return to secular life in 1872. (*Shenbao*, Dec., 17, 1872, No.197.) Though no province-wide decree specifically targeting “impious young nuns” was promulgated by Zhejiang’s provincial government, local authorities were permitted to implement such regulatory measures within their administrative domains.

[77] Fan Zushu 范祖述, *Hangsuyifeng* 杭俗遗风, 1864.

female clergy, were treated differently from their male counterparts. There was a complex discourse of nuns who violated Buddhist teachings. In the next section, how lived experience deepens the literati's stereotype of Buddhist activities and the subtle tolerance they had for female clergy will be analysed.

3. How Lived Experience Deepened Literati's Distrust of Buddhist Priests

During the Qing Dynasty, Neo-Confucianism underwent a significant shift from philosophical debate to philological inquiry. This turn toward evidential research was driven by a pragmatic intellectual ethos that prioritized concrete facts over abstract speculation.[78] Within this climate, Buddhist sutras—often read alongside the Daoist texts Laozi 老子 (lived ca. 6th–5th century BCE) and Zhuangzi 庄子(ca. 369–286 BCE) as spiritual refuge for the disillusioned—stood in clear tension with the prevailing Confucian paradigm. As supplements or even rivals to Confucianism, they were seldom embraced uncritically by the literati, particularly in the realm of religious practice. It is against this backdrop that the editors of the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* predominantly adopted a Confucian standpoint (albeit one distinct from classical exegesis) in their commentary on Buddhist clergy.

Monks and nuns were frequent subjects in the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, typically framed within sensationalized accounts that contravened ideals of Buddhist piety or social propriety. A dominant theme was the implication of their involvement in romantic or sexual affairs.

The editors' commentary on these stories often departed from straightforward Confucian moralizing. Instead, they adopted a deliberately humorous tone, amusing readers through the knowing misappropriation of Buddhist allusions. Two examples were particularly recurrent. "The Heavenly Maiden Scatters

[78] Ying-shihHG Yü, and Michael S Duke. "Qing Confucianism." In *Chinese History and Culture*, New York Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2017, 113–33.

Flowers” (天女散花): In its original context, this story illustrates the attachment to worldly matters of those with an imperfect understanding of Buddhist non-attachment.[79] In the Pictorial, it was repurposed to slyly suggest that the clergy in question remained mired in worldly—especially sexual—desire. This allusion was used in the pictorial to imply the reported Buddhist priest still had secular desires, especially sexual ones. Another frequently quoted story was “modengjia anan 摩登伽阿难”. Originally a parable on the folly of sensual attachment, this tale was cited to insinuate a monk’s actual involvement in sexual activity. This deliberate distortion and subversion of the allusions’ original didactic intent served a dual purpose: it created a potent source of humorous contrast for reader entertainment, and in doing so, performed a pointed act of disrespect toward Buddhism itself.

The nuns and monks were not and could not be detached from the secular world, in the illustrators’ opinion. First and foremost, monks and nuns were not born to be Buddhist priests. So why did they choose to become a monk or nun? An editor of *Dianshizhai Pictorial* listed common reasons for renouncing the family (chujia 出家) under a news story of a monk seeing a play and ordering a prostitute as his companion: “Getting back to why a monk became a monk, he must have parents who gave birth to him but could not afford to raise him, causing being a monk his only way of survival. Or he had been through the wringer, resulting in an abhorrence of the secular noise and the pursuit of tranquillity. Or he committed an appalling crime, therefore he became a monk, to be as good as dead to escape arrest.”[80] As for nuns, an editor said:

> A female is expected to be in a family once she was born. To be in a family means that the female gets married. The deviation from the normal functioning of a female is often due to their children’s death in the early

[79] Robert A. F. Thurma, trans., *The Virmalakirit Sutra*, (The Pennsylvania State University, 1976), 49-54.
[80] “Monk’s Revelry” (*Heshang yeyou* 和尚冶游), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 乙 3, no.15, 1884.

> years. The female lost children who could be counted on in the future and lost hope for life. Females under this circumstance are determined to be nuns, but they still cannot avoid being derided as disqualification, much less maidens! It will be too unnatural for a maiden to spend her best time in a nunnery. In Song County, a young lady who is seventeen or eighteen years old, announced that she had clearly plumbed all secrets of the society and was tonsured to be a nun. Does she view the world as nothingness? Is she free from thirsty desires? Has she mentally burnt out? Has her body lost its vitality? Does she really believe her answers to the above questions?[81]

The editors did not take into consideration reasons such as a genuine interest in Buddhist teachings or a belief that following Buddhist rules could lead to a happy afterlife. Women were not thought to be capable of understanding and practicing the teachings. The series of pointed questions aimed at young nuns required no actual response. The questioners had their answers ready and expected the readers to agree with these predetermined conclusions.

Secondly, maintaining monasteries required money, therefore monks and nuns forged many connections with the secular world. In Nanjing, benefactors of a temple were divided regarding the problem of who should be the next abbot. The benefactors mostly were rich local gentry. The illustrator commented that monks relied on the protection of the gentry, while the gentry amassed wealth through monks. All in all, the gentry and monks in the news story were Confucianist and Buddhist sinners.[82] If a temple was not protected by local gentry, it might be the target of local rogues. Several rogues in Ning County 宁郡 coveted the wealth of a temple located in the mountain. They pretended to be monks and attracted believers by getting in the way of believers going to the real temple. The monks could not endure the scofflaws' undercutting, and they hired musclemen to fight with the rogues with

---

[81]"Seeing Through the Worldly Illusions" (*Kanpo hongchen* 堪破红尘), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 癸 7, no. 115, 1887.

[82] "Monks and Gentry Had a Quarrel" (*Shenseng jusong* 绅僧聚讼), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 丙 8, no. 32, 1885.

weapons. Their fight killed a benefactor by accident.[83] The nuns were blamed in Hanyang 汉阳 because they rent spare rooms to candidates for the Imperial Martial Examination 武举. The tenants from Hanchuan 汉川 ordered service from prostitutes and they were disturbed by other candidates from Xiaogan 孝感 who had a grudge against them because the Xiaogan candidates did not rent rooms successfully.[84] The nuns were blamed for the dispute even though they did not appear in the news story, simply because it took place in their convent. The narrator framed this blame as reasonable on the grounds that the nuns had involved themselves in secular activities.

Generally, Buddhist clergy were expected to remain separate from the secular world—an ideal that was, in practice, unattainable. The inevitable compromises to this rule, however, reveal a subtle distinction in the editors' attitudes toward monks versus nuns. Explanations offered for monks beset by worldly desires were often grounded in a Confucian perspective. Meanwhile, news stories about nuns and monks frequently invoked scenarios reminiscent of traditional Chinese literature, leveraging readers' cultural memory to frame the narratives.

The compromises manifested from various angles. Firstly, one illustrative news story recounted an abbot devoted to daily sutra chanting, of whom the narrator remarked that even if a monk adheres to Buddhist principles, he cannot entirely evade worldly troubles. This abstract dilemma materialized when the abbot's impoverished and "shrewish" sister-in-law, after failing to secure a loan, confronted him at the temple with a knife. Following a commotion, she was found collapsed, gripping the knife and shouting curses, with a non-lethal neck wound, while the abbot stood chanting, as if performing

[83] "Monks and Commoners Fought with Weapons" (*Sengsu xiedou* 僧俗械斗), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 子 1, no.121,1887.
[84] "Prurient and Violent Candidates for Imperial Martial Exam" (*Wutong yinbao* 武童淫暴), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 庚 8, no. 80, 1886.

penitence. The narrator framed this not as a story of the monk seeking worldly connection, but of the world imposing itself upon him, concluding: “when a monastic man is not completely detached from worldly matters, troubles might arise; yet excessive disdain can also breed unexpected calamities. Truly a dilemma of being caught between conflicting obligations!”[85]

This “dilemma” stemmed from the fundamental conflict between Buddhist and Confucian norms. Buddhism enjoins detachment from secular life, whereas Confucianism prioritizes an individual’s embeddedness within the family—the dominant social ethic in Qing society. The narrator, steeped in Confucian classics, thus tacitly presumed that a monk remained bound by the innate “blood bonds” of kinship. His ostensibly neutral commentary therefore problematized the very core of monastic commitment: how can one sever ties when relatives, who are under no obligation to follow Buddhist precepts, persistently assert their claims? The story’s empirical lesson for readers was that worldly connections persist regardless of a monk’s desire to renounce them. Denying one’s familial identity cannot, in practice, sever these relational ties. While the pious monk might strive to become an isolated island, “boats from the mundane world”—guided by their own whims—could always ferry to its shores. Consequently, in this narrative, the abbot himself was not blamed, but the feasibility of absolute Buddhist detachment was placed under profound question.[86]

Secondly, editors would employ news stories about monks as social allegories when their behavior resonated with broader societal failings. A report from Hangzhou serves as a case in point, wherein the editor framed a monk’s

[85] “Asking for Loans Coercively” (*Esuo qianwen* 恶索钱文), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 庚 11, no. 83, 1886.
[86] Given that Buddhist clergy were legally required to greet and prostrate before their parents, conduct ancestral sacrifices, and observe mourning dress codes (Jones, *The Great Qing Code*, 180), the commentator’s demand that monks simultaneously fulfill Confucian familial obligations while adhering to Buddhist precepts cannot be dismissed as mere nitpicking.

dietary transgression as comparatively minor to critique wider hypocrisy:

> When people hear of monks eating meat, they often show disdain. Yet I say that meat-eating alone is not the gravest of sins and can be forgiven. Observe today's monks--opium smokers, adulterers, practitioners of every vice--whose transgressions surpass even those of laypeople. By such degraded standards, meat consumption becomes pardonable indeed. At Hangzhou's Zhaoqing 昭庆 Temple, strict rules prevail. Any monk found violating precepts--be he resident or visiting--faces immediate expulsion upon evidence. Recently, an alms-collecting monk from this temple boldly purchased two pounds of meat at Jianqiao 荐桥 Street's butcher shop. As he departed, a mendicant monk seized him, refusing to release his grip. Bystanders jested: "When monks support monks, Buddhism thrives. Why this discord?" The monk-beggar retorted: "Not so! I have been punished for this, and the report was made by him. He exposed others' faults while concealing his own. By Buddha's grace, I witnessed this transgression and shall not let it go until justice prevails." Thus, the beggar-monk forcibly escorted away the alms-collecting monk to the Zhaoqing temple. Alas! In our age, those who demand virtue from others while excusing their own failings are legion. What surprise then in two quarreling monks?[87]

The editor framed the monks' scuffle and meat-eating not as unforgivable sins, but as pardonable faults—less grave than other prevalent vices like opium addiction or adultery. The narrative's core irony lies in its structure of reciprocal incrimination: the alms-collecting monk, who had reported his peer for the same dietary transgression, was later exposed by the very monk he accused. From a strict Buddhist perspective, both deserved expulsion—the very outcome the accuser sought. The editor's commentary, however, deliberately shifted the ethical framework. Since dietary precepts hold no weight in Confucian classics, the judgment shifted from monastic discipline to shared social morality. The incident became an allegory for a pervasive social ill: the deficiency in self-introspection and the hypocrisy of judging others while excusing oneself. Thus, the two monks were portrayed not as outliers governed by a separate ethics, but as manifestations of a widespread

[87] "Two Monks' Meat Scuffle" (*Liangseng duorou* 两僧夺肉), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 壬 4, no. 100, 1887.

moral failing. Consequently, the editorial lesson aimed beyond the temple walls. Readers were urged not merely to condemn the monks, but to rectify the broader social climate that produced such behavior. The monks themselves served as rhetorical vehicles for this Confucian moral admonition, their story reaffirming that Confucian standards remained the ultimate measure of character for all, monastic or lay.

Thirdly, Buddhist priests occasionally functioned as a *deus ex machina* within the news narratives. Their position outside the regular Confucian moral order granted them a unique mobility, allowing them to appear in almost any social space as unexpected agents. A report from Beijing exemplifies this role.

> In Beijing, an underage prostitute, who was sweet-faced yet iron-willed, committed suicide by drinking poison to resist forced prostitution. The brothel madam feared that the underage prostitute's death would be found by others. Therefore, the madam wrapped the girl's corpse in a quilt and hired a small vehicle to carry the corpse to the wilderness for burial. The scheme might have succeeded unnoticed, but upon reaching Coal Market (meishi 煤市) Street, a monk saw them. The monk broke and halted the small vehicle, and reported the case to the local government. The local government investigated the case and punished the brothel madam according to the law. Had the corpse of the underage prostitute been buried, justice would have been shrouded in darkness. Thanks to the Buddha's light (urna), three thousand layers of hell's obscurity were pierced. Though this monk involved himself in worldly affairs, was this not indeed commendable? [88]

According to *The Great Qing Code*:

> Everyone who for some reason (concerning marriage, farm lands, debts, and the like) puts pressure on another so as to cause (him to cause his own) death (on investigation it must appear that the offender had the capability of putting on pressure [that would make the victim afraid]), then sentence him to 100 strokes of heavy bamboo.[89]

[88] "Monk Intervenes in Secular Affair" (*Sengyu sushi* 僧预俗事), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 子 5, no.125, 1887.
[89] Jones, *The Great Qing Code*, 282.

This is ART. 299 “Putting Pressure on Another so as to Cause Him to Die” in *The Great Qing Code*. Obviously, the brothel madam in the news story put pressure on the prostitute to cause her suicide. Without the monk's chance appearance, this crime would likely have remained concealed. Herein lies the narrative logic: the intervention comes from a figure whose ambiguous identity places him on the periphery of the Confucian ethical order. His action is portrayed as random, unpredictable, and originating from *outside* the secular system—a true "machine of the gods" that descends to rectify a failure of human justice, thereby reinforcing the normative order through the very breach of its ordinary social boundaries.

However, the monk-as-*deus ex machina* did not always receive a favorable editorial judgment; the valuation of his intrusion depended entirely on its conformity to the narrative’s implicit moral framework. This double standard is evident in the disapproving portrayal of an abbot in the news story “A Thunderbolt to the Heart’s Obsession” (*Banghe qingmo* 棒喝情魔).

> In the Xun city 浔城, Jiangxi 江西 Province, a scholar was enchanted by a neighboring maiden while pursuing his studies in a historic temple. One day, the maiden dressed in men’s attire and met him for their secret rendezvous. The scholar was overcome with joy, and his raucous laughter was heard by the abbot of the temple. The abbot angrily rebuked the young lovers.[90]

The scholar and the maiden did not follow Confucian admonitions： “Male and female should not sit together after they reach the age of seven years old. (男女七岁不同席)”[91] Besides, the young generation could not marry whoever they love in the Qing Dynasty. The aim of marriage was to forge an alliance

[90] “A Thunderbolt to the Heart’s Obsession” (*Banghe qingmo* 棒喝情魔), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 子 7, no.127, 1887.
[91] “Neize 内则 [Patterns for the Family],” *Liji* 礼记.

between two families. Marriages of younger generations in a family should be decided by older generations. Having a secret rendezvous was immoral. The abbot followed the mainstream ethics, but the editor commented disapprovingly: “As an outsider, the abbot poked his nose into the worldly business and became a killjoy. He should learn that the Buddha’s compassion and mercy lie in the boundless love.”[92] Here, the editor abandoned the role of Confucian moralist, implicitly siding with the romantic transgression. Regardless of the degree to which this reflects the editor’s identification with the scholar or the influence of popular romantic tales, the story reveals a critical boundary: a monk’s involvement in secular affairs was not a universally sanctioned intrusion. Even when ostensibly aligned with mainstream ethics, he could be framed as an improper outsider. Thus, the tolerance for monastic engagement with the world was subtle, conditional, and far more grudging than that extended to their female counterparts.

The discussion above has centered on male Buddhist clergy and editorial attitudes toward their worldly engagements. When examining nuns, a similar ideal of complete detachment prevailed, yet it was coupled with a pervasive societal suspicion that they frequently fell short. This tension between Confucian ethics and Buddhist precepts manifested most vividly in news stories about nuns, particularly those involving romantic relationships. Notably, editors of the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* often displayed greater leniency toward nuns in such contexts than toward their male counterparts.

A key to understanding this nuanced portrayal is the literary archetype of “Miaochang” (妙常). Originating from a Southern Song Dynasty nun, Chen Miaochang, her story—of a beautiful, accomplished nun who eventually renounced monastic life for a secular marriage—was widely adapted and

[92] “A Thunderbolt to the Heart’s Obsession,” *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, no. 127, 1887.

circulated during the Ming and Qing periods. *Gujin nüshi* 古今女史 [A History of Women, Ancient and Modern] recorded the story:

> Chen Miaochang 陈妙常 of Song was a nun of Nüzhen Guan 女贞观. She was more than twenty years old, in beauty surpassing all others. Her poetry and essays were refined and elegant. She was especially well-versed in music. Zhang Yuhu 张于湖, assigned to Linjiang 临江 as a district magistrate, on the way [to assume the post] spent a night at Nüzhen Guan. When he saw Miaochang, he was startled [by her beauty]. By means of a *ci* 词 he dallied with her. Miaochang wrote a *ci* in return, resisting him with all her might. Later she had an illicit affair with Yuhu's old friend Pan Facheng 潘法成, and had deep affection for him. Pan secretly related this to Yuhu and through a stratagem the latter decided to make them husband and wife.[93]

The story of Miaochang can be traced back to a *huaben* (话本 novel) version recorded by a bibliography edited during 1522-1566, in the Jiajing 嘉靖 reign.[94] Although her precise historicity is difficult to verify, her figure was firmly entrenched in the literary imagination as a historical reality for traditional literati. Miaochang's *ci* (词 poem) was recorded in *Song guiyuan cilu* 宋闺媛词录 [Poems of Accomplished Ladies in the Song Dynasty], a book which is not extant. The original *ci* should be written by a nun according to the tone.[95]

The *Pictorial* strategically invoked this archetype. The name "Miaochang" appears four times, functioning not merely as a historical reference but as a potent cultural shorthand. In one report, "Soft and Sweet Bodies" (*Xiangruan hongchen* 香软红尘), the term is used in a seal signature to label the young nuns of the Weituo Nunnery as "Miaochangs." The story describes a scandal where a young nun and a male patron were discovered in the nunnery. The editor notes that such attractive nuns were mainly from Jiading County and

---

[93] The translation follows Edmond Yee, "Yuzan Ji: Evolution, Legacy and Criticism", *CHINOPERL: Journal of Chinese Oral and Performing Literature* 20, no. 1 (1997): 45-46.
[94] Fu Dixiu 伏涤修, "*Yuzan ji* benshi yu lanben bianyi" 《玉簪记》本事与蓝本辨疑 [The Classical Tale and The Original Version of *Yuzan Ji*], *Journal of National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts* 33, no.2 (2012): 14.
[95] Ibid., 13-19.

that liaisons between nuns and patrons were common in Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces. Here, “Miaochang” acts as a nickname and a pronoun, transforming a literary figure into a contemporary category for young, beautiful nuns suspected of romantic involvements.[96] In its other occurrences, the term further serves as an adjective, directly equating “Miaochang” with the qualities of youth and beauty in a monastic context. Thus, the editors did not need to invent new criticism; they weaponized a pre-existing literary trope. By tagging real-life nuns with the “Miaochang” label, they instantly invoked a narrative of inevitable fallibility, worldly attachment, and aestheticized transgression. This practice allowed them to report on scandals with a tone of knowing amusement rather than stern Confucian condemnation, simultaneously acknowledging and subtly legitimizing a space for female monastic sexuality within the popular imagination.

The story of Miaochang, as invoked in the *Pictorial*, served to frame a core conflict between Buddhist asceticism and human nature from a Confucian standpoint. This perspective is made explicit in the commentary to “Disturbance in Nunnery” (*Ni’an zishi* 尼庵滋事): “The natural union between man and woman is not forbidden by the sages. As beings dwelling within the vital transformations of life, how can humanity exist apart from this great furnace of creation? Yet without being regulated by the ritual propriety, what distinction remains between humankind and beasts?”[97] Here lies the Confucian rationale: human desires themselves are not morally condemnable; they are natural and integral to life. Moral judgment falls solely on the means of their fulfillment—specifically, whether they conform to ritual propriety (*li* 礼). The nun in “Disturbance in Nunnery” shaved her whole head but chose to engage in an affair with a barber she was acquainted with. In “Frightened Miaochang” (*Xiasi Miaochang* 吓死妙常), the nun also voluntarily had an affair

[96] “Soft and Sweet Bodies” (*Xiangruan hongchen* 香软红尘), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 辛 10, no. 94, 1886.
[97] “Disturbance in Nunnery” (*Ni’an zishi* 尼庵滋事), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 己 7, no. 67, 1886.

with someone, unable to bear the loneliness.[98] When nuns in stories like "Disturbance in the Nunnery" or "Frightened Miaochang" engaged in affairs, editors presented their actions as understandable failures of celibacy—driven by natural urges and thus, in a sense, "reasonable" violations of Buddhist precepts. This lens of naturalism, however, created a damning paradox for nuns who *did* strive for strict detachment. In "Tempting Wealth and Beauty", a young and beautiful nun incurred the wrath and hatred of a bad member of the gentry 劣绅 after rejecting his advances. The man plotted to slander and fabricated charges against her. Fearing his schemes, the nun ultimately took her own life. The editor pointedly questioned: "Why hasn't the nun received the Buddha's protection, even though she has transcended worldly attachments?"[99] The seal at the end of the text said that "the six senses are still not purified 六根未净."[100] Whose six senses were still not purified was still in question. While the nun claimed detachment, her life was ended by secular malice; the man of the gentry remained mired in worldly desire. The sarcastic outcome served as narrative proof of the impossibility of true worldly transcendence, yet the blame was subtly shifted from the victim to the very ideal of renunciation. This generated a clear editorial double standard: Nuns acting upon natural desires were met with a degree of understanding, their "fall" framed within a Confucian narrative of human nature. In stark contrast, monks who violated celibacy were never accorded such interpretive leniency. For nuns, the failing was in the method (lacking ritual propriety); for monks, the very desire itself was construed as a graver breach of moral and social order.

The visual representations of these "Miaochang" stories employ consistent strategies to underscore their thematic focus. First, unless specified otherwise

[98] "Frightened Miaochang" (*Xiasi Miaochang* 吓死妙常), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 庚 12, no. 84, 1886.
[99] "Tempting Wealth and Beauty" (*Caise xianren* 财色涎人), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 乙 7, no.19, 1884.
[100] Ibid.

in the *Shenbao* source, nuns are depicted with the *liuhaiding* 刘海顶 hairstyle—an incomplete tonsure that immediately signals their ambiguous status. Second, the nuns are invariably positioned as the spectacular center of the illustration, with all other figures oriented toward them in a collective gaze (See Figures 2-5). This orchestration of looking is richly exemplified in Figure 3 “Frightened Miaochang”. Here, a hanging scroll of *Songzi Guanyin* 送子观音 (the Bodhisattva who grants children) forms a deliberate backdrop. Both the nun and the Bodhisattva showed obvious feminine characteristics. The Bodhisattva was holding a baby in the scroll,

Figure 2 “Soft and Sweet Bodies”

while the nun was on the run, fearing that her reproductive act would be discovered by others. According to the text, the nun should be depicted nude, but the illustrator dressed her in clothing and posed her in a posture that accentuated her graceful feminine curves. On the one side, the Bodhisattva

implied motherhood; On the other side, the nun suggested female physical desire. The Bodhisattva was in dignified and proper attire; while the nun's clothing did not align with her monastic vows, as it excessively emphasized feminine charm and sensuality. The juxtaposition of the nun and the Bodhisattva lends a humorous tone to the entire illustration, echoing the textual description of the nun's paradoxical behavior—her prim and proper demeanor in public contrasting sharply with her engagement in clandestine affairs in private. By following the eyelines within the image, the viewer is invited to participate in exposing the desire "hidden under the clothes." Ultimately, in these illustrations, the nun's gender identity is accentuated at the expense of her religious identity.

Figure 3 "Frightened Miaochang"

The above analysis reveals that Buddhist clergy in the *Dianshizhai*

Pictorial were inevitably drawn into narratives of worldly entanglement. While occasionally treated with leniency, they were overwhelmingly evaluated through a Confucian ethical framework. This framework justified compromises by appealing to the tension between monastic discipline and a Confucian understanding of “human nature.” Critically, however, gender constituted the decisive fault line in this evaluation. Nuns were perceived primarily through their gender identity—a perspective shaped by late Qing social realities and entrenched patriarchal norms—rather than through their religious vocation. Consequently, violations of celibacy by nuns received remarkably more tolerant pictorial treatment than those by monks. This editorial tolerance, while diverging from the strictures of *The Great Qing Code*, aligned closely with the sympathetic portrayal of commoner women’s sexual transgressions elsewhere in the *Pictorial*. These findings point toward a broader tension between official regulations, everyday social practices, and the editors’ narrative and visual commentary—a tension that extended to the physical spaces of Buddhist monasteries themselves. The following chapter will explore this dynamic, further analyzing the editors’ divergent attitudes toward nuns and female commoners involved in fornication, and situating these representations within the contested landscape of late Qing law and social life.

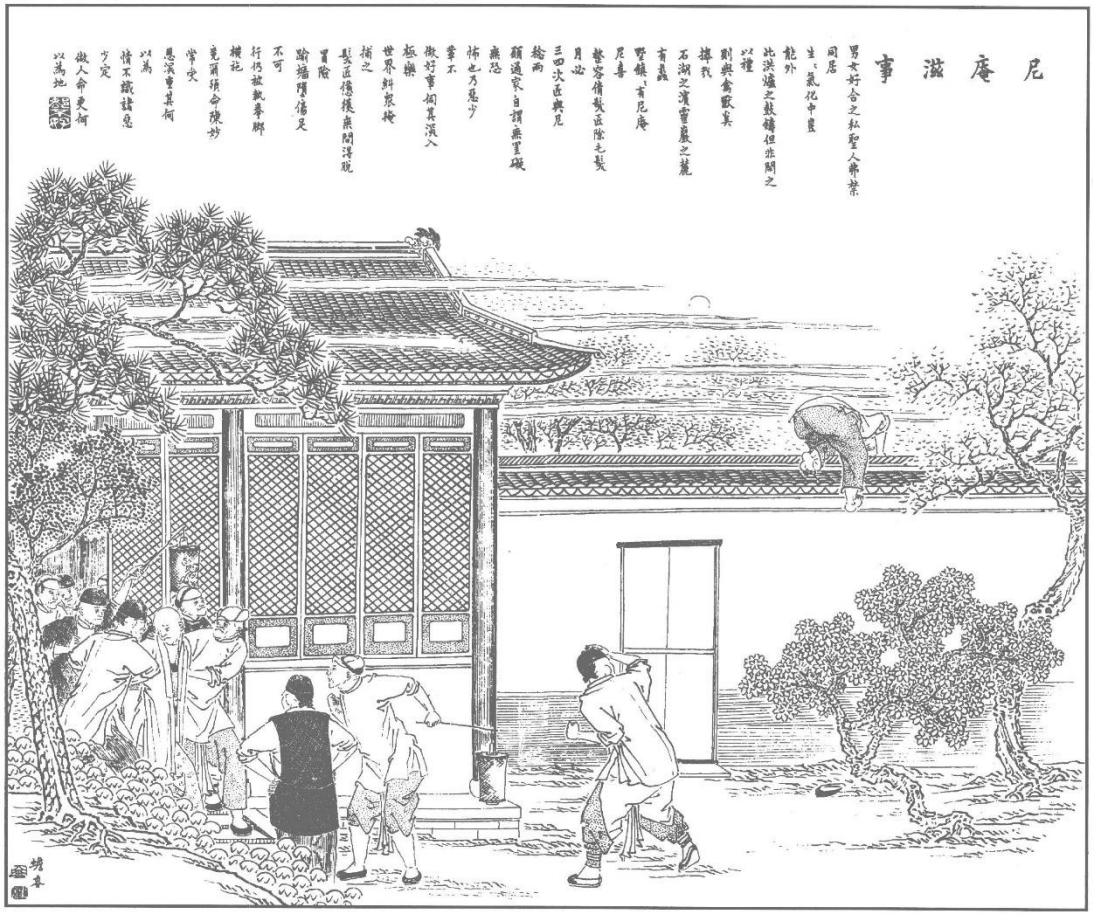

Figure 4 “Disturbance in Nunnery”

Figure 5 “Tempting Wealth and Beauty”

Chapter 2 The Liminal Position of Buddhist Nuns in Official Discourse and Pictorial Commentary

According to *The Great Qing Code*, a husband could kill his wife and her paramour immediately and be immune from penalty when he caught them having intercourse on the spot.[101] This regulation connived at striking a blow for justice by an individual and protected the patriarchal order, but at the sacrifice of the authority of the government and the general legal principle of cherishing human life. By permitting immediate revenge legally, the government lost its absolute authority to enforce justice, to reinforce the moral requirement for female chastity to maintain the social order. The law in the Qing Dynasty did not support wives in punishing their husbands' infidelity and venting their grudge. Instead, a wife's infidelity could cost her life because of her husband's fury, and this price was perfectly legitimate.

Woman chastity, filial piety and being free from jealousy are female virtues most commendable in the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*. Advocating those virtues is consistent with the traditional moral discourse and exhortation. However, *Dianshizhai Pictorial* records large amounts of ordinary people's everyday life, which contains a large number of female images and gender relationships that do not conform to the ideal narrative of "how it should be". The comments alongside the illustrations also express views that are not limited to legal legitimacy and ideal narratives.

Nuns bear comments different from female commoners as members of clergy among all the comments on fornication in the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*. They are both gendered bodies and other-worldly priests. Given that "religion" is an imported concept, nuns are actually more often commented on from a secularized perspective. In other words, the social role of nuns as women

[101] Jones, *The Great Qing Code*, 271.

takes precedence over their status as clergy.

1. Adultery Among Ordinary Woman

Adultery, or illicit sexual intercourse (*jian* 奸) charges, would consider sentencing based on the conduct of both parties involved. Illicit sexual intercourse refers to all intercourse going against the patriarchal social and ritual order, which happens outside of marriage with female free commoners. For free commoners, legally protected sexual relationships were those between a husband and a wife and those between a husband and concubine(s). Prostitution was legal under certain conditions, but prostitution was prescribed rather than protected by the Qing law. Once sexual intercourse was judged as illicit (*jian*), it would be further classified among *qiangjian* 强奸 (rape, or coercive illicit sexual intercourse), *hejian* 和奸 (consensual illicit sexual intercourse) and *diaojian* 刁奸 (crafty illicit sexual intercourse) resting on woman chastity and her effort to defend it.[102] Except coercive illicit sexual intercourse, both male and female involved in illicit sexual intercourse would be judged as guilty and be punished. However, under Qing law, a woman's intent was not the decisive factor in illicit sexual intercourse cases. The criteria for determining rape are: 1) there must be such force that the woman could not break away; 2) the woman must show clear signs of resistance (e.g. the woman must have physical injuries and torn clothing as evidence); 3) there must be witness testimony confirming the assault.[103] Besides, the woman's resistance must continue till the end of the assault. If the woman ceased resisting after the initial struggle, the man's or men's act would not be deemed as rape. Moreover, if the raped woman had a history of an illicit sexual relationship, coercive intercourse with her would not constitute rape, but seducing her into crafty illicit sexual intercourse. Woman

[102] English translations of Chinese legal terms in the Qing Dynasty follow Sommer, *Sex, Law and Society in Late Imperial China*, 66.
[103] Jones, *The Great Qing Code*, 347. Ma Jianshi 马建石 and Yang Yutang 杨育棠 ed., *Daqing lüli tongkao jiaozhu* 大清律例通考校注 [Comprehensive Examination and Annotations on *the Great Qing Code*], (Beijing: China University of Political Science and Law Press,1992), 950.

involved in illicit sexual intercourse could only be exempted from punishment if it was proven that she was raped. But as mentioned, it was hard to prove that coercive illicit sexual intercourse happened.[104]

The official discourse of ordinary women's adultery (*jian*) focused on chastity and status distinction. Though the clear-cut status distinction declined compared to previous dynasties and the emphasis on woman chastity increased in the Qing Dynasty.[105] Not only female free commoners being coerced into sexual intercourse could be legally recognized as raped, but also the law could protect chaste mean-status women.[106] The moral content of *liang* 良 outweighed its socio-status denotation. Woman's chastity (*zhen* 贞) was not only a virtue, but a fact that the woman was not penetrated by the wrong person. Whether a woman was penetrated by the rapist decided whether she could be honoured for her defence of chastity.[107] Historically, the penalties for rape intensified from the Tang to the Qing Dynasty, paralleling a heightened emphasis on women's chastity.[108] In the legal practice of the Qing Dynasty, the Qing judiciary was satisfied with cases that strictly followed the narrow definition of rape by the law.[109] As Qing officials tended to adjudicate according to the code, in order to safeguard their positions in a well-articulated bureaucracy, the official discourse on adultery tended to scrutinize the moral and physical purity of involved women.[110]

Unlike official case records, *Dianshizhai Pictorial* adopted a narrative tone sympathetic to women and critical of men. In its reports on adultery involving

[104] The difficulty of proving being raped perhaps also lies in the punishment for male rapists. Consensual illicit sexual intercourse and crafty illicit sexual intercourse were not capital offences. However, male rapists would be sentenced to strangulation. Perhaps the Qing Dynasty's legal principle of cherishing human life was at work.
[105] Sommer, *Sex, Law and Society in Late Imperial China*, 71-77.
[106] Ibid., 75-77.
[107] Ibid., 78-79.
[108] Ibid., 67-77, 84-93.
[109] Ibid., 101-111.
[110] Philip C.C Huang, *Civil Justice in China: Representation and Practice in the Qing*, (Stanford University Press, 1996), 16-17.

woman commoners, the blame was frequently directed at their husbands or paternal elders. An explicitly demonstrated case can be seen in the following instance:

> Day after day she gazed upon the river,
> Mistaking every passing boat for his return.
> How absolute was this longing in the woman's chamber!
>
> A wife regards her husband as her heaven (*tian* 天). Unless she is extremely dissatisfied with him, she will not seek intimacy outside the marriage. If she does, despite not intending to, it must be because there is a reason that compels her to do so, and thus she turns elsewhere. Have you not heard of the incident in Jinjun 津郡 last month? A certain boatman, let's call him A, made his living by sailing and seldom returned home all year. Even when he did come back, he would leave in haste. His wife, unable to remain chaste like the widow in the poem "The Cypress Boat," (*Baizhou* 柏舟 from the *Shijing* 诗经) took a lover. When A found out, he pretended to leave like Emperor Gaozu of Han's stratagem to arrest Hanxin 韩信 (?–196BCE), a suspected minister, only to sneak back at midnight and catch them off guard. He killed them both and then turned himself in. While northern Chinese culture traditionally valorizes violent displays of masculine honor and prides itself on being heroic, the husband's behavior was hardly commendable. How can a woman from a humble background understand righteousness and propriety when left in solitude all year? And if no precautions were taken early on, it is as good as waiting for her desires to overflow and then ensnaring her. Therefore, we must not forgive the man lightly just because he turned himself in.[111]

According to the law of the Qing Dynasty, the husband could immediately kill his adulterous wife and the adulterer "at the place in the very act of adultery" with impunity.[112] The husband's actions fulfilled all the legal criteria for exoneration—killing both the wife and the adulterer immediately, executing the act at the scene of the adultery, and catching them *in flagrante delicto* before the killing. The only potentially contentious aspect is that the husband had long been aware of his wife's infidelity, thus premeditating this meticulously

[111] "Killing the Adulterers and Turning Himself In" (*Pojian zishou* 破奸自首), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 丁 3, no. 39, 1885.
[112] Jones, *The Great Qing Code*, 271.

planned killing that perfectly aligned with the legal conditions for exemption. However, Qing Dynasty law did not provide detailed stipulations on whether the husband should have prior knowledge of the adultery. The statute, titled “Killing the Adulterous Lover”, was originally intended to uphold the husband’s dignity, allowing him to lawfully vent his rage—particularly toward another man who might threaten the purity of his lineage—and thus assert his masculine authority.[113]

According to supplementary judicial interpretations attached to the statute, the government, out of reverence for human life, imposed strict conditions for a husband to lawfully kill his adulterous wife and her lover: he had to catch them *in the act of intercourse* and execute the killing immediately, while neither had fled. If the lover escaped and only the wife was killed, the husband could still face legal punishment for unauthorized homicide. In such cases, whether the captured adulterous lover later confessed to the adultery would influence the severity of the husband’s sentence. If the lover confessed, the husband could avoid the death penalty, while the lover would face execution.[114] Or, in another scenario, if the husband acted in a delayed fit of rage—after suppressing his anger for days to kill the adulterous wife alone without catching her in the act—he could still receive a death sentence unless the lover’s testimony confirmed the wife’s infidelity. Notably, in such delayed-retaliation cases, as long as the wife’s infidelity was proved, neither the husband nor the confessed lover would face capital punishment.[115] In terms of sentencing severity, while the law sought to discourage husbands from killing

[113] If only the adulterous lover was killed, the wife would simply be convicted of consensual illicit sexual intercourse 和奸—a non-capital offense—and handed over to the authorities to be remarried and sold, with the price going to the state treasury. The husband would not be punished. However, supplementary statutes (substatutes, *li* 例) reveal that killing the adulterer on the spot was more challenging than killing only the adulteress. This is evidenced by provisions addressing situations where the adulterer escaped, as well as substatutes concerning accidental killings of bystanders during the apprehension. Moreover, if the adulterer was a relative of the husband—particularly one of senior generational status—the husband could not be fully exempt from punishment.
[114] Ma and Yang, *Daqing lüli tongkao jiaozhu*, 780-781, 784-785.
[115] Ibid., 780.

their wives purely for vengeance, it nonetheless made such acts a relatively low-risk and low-consequence means of preserving male honor. Therefore, regardless of whether the text in *Dianshizhai Pictorial* reflected prevailing social attitudes of the time—where husbands, instead of disciplining or guiding their wives, killed them for adultery without any self-reflection on their own failings, setting an example that should not be emulated and indeed deserved condemnation—the commentary in the pictorial nevertheless helped counteract the law's implicit endorsement of wife-killing as a means to cleanse shame.

Furthermore, there existed alternative arguments against wife-killing as a means to restore honor—arguments that the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* commentary likewise embodied from a different perspective. Unlike the patriarchal-authoritarian stance discussed earlier (that the husband bore the responsibility to guide his wife and regulate her conduct), this alternative viewpoint adopted a more tender tone, examining gender relations through a humanized lens of mutual affection. It revealed the softer, gentler side of masculinity—even, at times, portraying men as emotionally vulnerable compared to women.

> Adulterous affairs are universally despised. Even the most composed man, when accused of failing to control his household, will flush with rage—no one can bear the shame of the "green hat." In Jiaxing's Weitang Town 魏塘镇, a peasant woman, though rustic, possessed a flirtatious charm. Her husband, toil-worn and preoccupied with his struggling farm, knew nothing of tenderness. One day, returning from the fields, he saw a man dart from his house like an arrow. After a long brooding, the truth dawned on him. Seething, he hacked his wife to death with a sickle. Some defended the slain woman, arguing: "The Cowherd and Weaver Girl—rustics like them—deeply devoted to each other and shared stolen moments on the Magpie Bridge. And still, the Weaver Girl gifted her loom's magical stone to another male. The farmer's physique and temperament were nowhere near the Cowherd's. If even the Cowherd couldn't satisfy his weaver—what hope had this coarse farmer? (Thus, it

is understandable that his wife sought affection elsewhere, if it is not condoned.)”[116]

In this story, the commentator skillfully invoked the allusion to the legend of the Cowherd (*Niulang* 牛郎) and the Weaver Girl (*Zhinü* 织女). The Cowherd (Altair) and the Weaver Girl (Vega) are ancient Chinese names for celestial stars. The Cowherd and the Weaver Girl are their personified forms in folklore. The earliest textual pairing of these stars appears in the “Da Dong” 大东 of *Shijing* 诗经, where they already embody human traits—the Cowherd leading his ox and the Weaver Girl at her loom.[117] The legend evolved with countless variations.[118] By the Western Han dynasty, the magpie bridge reunion motif emerged.[119] The legend exists in two primary versions: one depicting a romance between deities, and another between a mortal and a goddess.[120] While details vary, the core plot remains consistent: the Cowherd and Weaver Girl marry, only to be forcibly separated by external forces. Condemned to live apart, they are permitted to reunite just once a year—on the seventh night of the seventh lunar month—when magpies form a bridge across the celestial river for their fleeting rendezvous. In Zhang Hua’s 张华 (232–300) *Records of Diverse Matters* (*Bowuzhi* 博物志) from the Western Jin Dynasty, the earliest documented account appears of an unnamed mortal intruder who witnessed the daily lives of the Cowherd and Weaver Girl in the heavens.[121] Later, Zhang Qian 张骞 (c. 164–114 BCE), a Western Han minister who pioneered the Silk Road, became this mortal intruder and received a magical stone from the Weaver Girl—a stone she used to support her loom.[122] As for the idea that

[116] “Wife-killing to Wash Away Shame” (*Shaqi xichi* 杀妻洗耻), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 癸 2, no. 110, 1887.
[117] Li Ruoxi 李若熙 and Ding Shumei 丁淑梅, “Hanzu yushaoshuminzu ‘niulangzhinü’ gushimuti degongtongyishi” 汉族与少数民族“牛郎织女” 故事母题的共同意识[Research on Shared Consciousness between Han and Ethnic Minorities Reflected in the Motif of the Cowherd and the Weaver Girl], *Journal of Ethnology* 12, no.5 (2021): 76.
[118] Ibid., 75-82, 115.
[119] Ibid., 76.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Xiao Bo 肖波, “Congqianniu daoniulang: niulangchuanshuo desigechuanbocengmian” 从牵牛到牛郎——牛郎传说的四个传播层面[From Altair to Cowboy —The Four Spread Level of the Cowboy Legend], *Journal of Yangtze University (Social Sciences)* 34, no. 8 (2011): 4. Wang Zijin 王子今, “Zhangqian

the Weaver Girl giving a gift to a man other than her husband might provoke the Cowherd's jealousy, this was a creative elaboration by the Tang Dynasty poet Li Shangyin 李商隐 (c. 813–858 BCE) in his poem *The Seafarer* (*Haike* 海客).[123]

The commentator suggested a rivalry existed between the Cowherd and Zhang Qian, evidently viewing the Cowherd and Weaver Girl as celestial beings living an agrarian existence, while Zhang Qian—a mortal with legendary achievements—proved worthy enough for the Weaver Girl to defy the Cowherd's jealousy. She privately gifted Zhang a token of admiration. In the story, the husband was explicitly portrayed with flaws from the very beginning. He lacked physical charm, failed to show tenderness toward his wife, and remained indifferent to her romantic gestures and longing for love—choosing instead to devote himself entirely to farming. Thus, it was hardly unnatural or unreasonable for a young, love-starved wife, adept at flirtation and embracing her feminine allure, to seek solace outside her marriage when met with her husband's neglect and the presence of a potential alternative. The husband, as a romantic partner, made no effort to earn his wife's affection or nurture their marital bond. This critique of his behavior presented a rarely seen perspective in formal discourse—one that disregarded the Confucian ideal of the husband as a moral guide to his wife and instead examined the relationship through the lens of raw attraction between two individuals. Here, commentators set aside the hierarchical expectations of traditional spousal roles and focused purely on the dynamics of desire and emotional neglect.

Of course, the commentator's sympathy for the wife and his implicit criticism

---

'fucha' gushide shengcheng yuchuanbo" 张骞"浮槎"故事的生成与传播['Floating across the River by a Raft': The Creation and Circulation of the Legend about Zhang Qian], *Literature, History and Philosophy*, no.1 (2023): 74-81, 166.

[123] Liu Xuekai 刘学锴 and Yu Shucheng 余恕诚, *Collected Annotations of Li Shangyin's Poetry* 李商隐诗歌集解, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2004, 637-640.

of the husband may also serve as an alternative argument reinforcing the state's disapproval of uxoricide on grounds of adultery. As stipulated in the Qing legal code cited above, a husband killing his wife did not meet the exemption criteria outlined in the statute on "Killing the Adulterous Lover". The husband neither witnessed his wife and her lover in the act of adultery nor attempted to kill both parties immediately at the scene of their illicit copulation. Instead, he killed his wife alone after the lover had departed. Based on the earlier discussion, it can be theoretically inferred that unless the wife's adultery was conclusively proven, the husband's act of uxoricide could potentially result in a death sentence for himself. Therefore, the commentator's stance actually aligned with the legislative intent behind *The Great Qing Code*'s provisions regarding revenge killings motivated by adultery.

Although *The Great Qing Code* legally sanctioned killing an unfaithful wife and her lover to uphold a husband's honor—intending to reduce such killings—it ultimately created loopholes that encouraged them. Support for this law did not conflict with the distinct male anxiety seen in popular stories, which frequently strayed from traditional Confucian family ideals. While the legislative intent behind the Qing legal code was part of the mainstream official discourse, the aforementioned reflections on physical attraction and marital commitment operate outside Confucian philosophical paradigms. We can observe numerous stories in *Dianshizhai Pictorial* that depict such male anxieties and even portray men as comparatively vulnerable when contrasted with women. Themes of "henpecked husbands" and "uxoriousness" frequently appear in *Dianshizhai Pictorial*. For instance, there was a drunk husband stumbling home, who stumbled upon the wrong house and mistook the locked door for his wife's deliberate rejection. Too intimidated to knock, he leaned against the door and fell asleep. His snores roused the couple inside, but the

good-natured householder prevented him from facing the wife's scolding.[124] Both the householder's wife who appears in the story and the drunkard's wife (who remains offstage) present a more formidable and intimidating image compared to their husbands. This scenario can be considered a classic example of the "henpecked husband" trope found in the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*. At times, the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* would portray husbands as fierce and combative figures in public, only to depict their docile obedience to their wives at home. Their aggressive exterior served solely to highlight their gentle submissiveness domestically—a vivid portrayal of "henpecked husbands". There was one story featuring a male protagonist who defended himself by claiming he doted on his wife rather than feared her. A certain Mr. Yang from Jiaxing 嘉兴—a man known for his fierce temper in public, yet who willingly attended to his wife's daily toilette. When questioned by a visitor about why he, as such a formidable man, couldn't "overcome a mere woman", Yang explained that his wife suffered from liver disease, and he suppressed his anger only to keep her calm and prevent aggravating her condition. No sooner had Yang finished his explanation than a maid announced from the courtyard that his wife was ready for her dressing ritual. Abandoning his guests at once, Yang rushed to her chamber and remained there for a long while.[125] To modern eyes, his behavior might simply be attributed to love. Yet the very concept of "love" remains an awkward fit within traditional Chinese discourse on gender relations.

The phenomenon of Qing dynasty men displaying both spousal devotion and uxoriousness was real, yet the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* took a critical stance against such practice. The commentators' critiques consistently stemmed from Confucian familial ethics. Take the aforementioned story of Mr. Yang

[124] "Ingot at the Doorstep" (*Yuanbao jinmen* 元宝进门), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 丑 9, no. 141, 1888.
[125] "Poem Mocking the Henpecked" (*Shichao junei* 诗嘲惧内), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 丑 12, no. 144, 1888.

from Jiaxing—the narrator deliberately prefaces it by invoking the classic model of conjugal harmony: Liang Hong 梁鸿 and Meng Guang's 孟光 "holding the tray level with the eyebrows" in the Eastern Han Dynasty. Liang Hong, though working as a servant, received such profound respect from his wife Meng Guang that she would always serve his meals with the tray raised to her eyebrow level. When Liang's employer witnessed this, he concluded that any man capable of inspiring such reverence must possess extraordinary virtue. Consequently, the employer ceased treating Liang as a mere servant and instead provided for him as an esteemed scholar.[126] The commentators argued that even if men could not emulate Liang Hong's moral excellence and get spousal reverence like him, the worst—yet still socially acceptable—outcome would be merely failing to earn their wives' respect. However, they absolutely must not, and should not, behave like Mr. Yang, who instead became obsequiously deferential and subservient to his wife.[127] As articulated in the opening of another story documenting a bizarre marital dispute in Ireland: "The husband is the guiding principle of the wife 夫为妻纲; for a wife to accuse her husband constitutes a grave inversion of human relations(以妻而控其夫，人伦之大变也)." This encapsulates the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*'s orthodox stance.

Although the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* generally adhered to the orthodox stance, such orthodoxy was primarily a matter of broad principle and general direction. In other words, as long as certain boundaries remained unbreached, the commentators' viewpoints retained a degree of flexibility. As for their discussions about uxoriousness—the ultimate boundary was that the roles of husband and wife could never be completely reversed, defying the Confucian ethical framework. Though the boundaries were sometimes ambiguous, the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* acknowledged that within these limits, certain men—

[126] Fan Ye 范晔, *Book of the Later Han* 后汉书, (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1965), 2765-2768.
[127] "Poem Mocking the Henpecked", *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 1888.

lacking specific qualifications—might rightly deem themselves unworthy of their spouses. For instance, commentators bluntly asserted that aging men, unless they were luminaries like Qian Qianyi 钱谦益 (1582–1664, whose brilliance survived dynastic upheavals and won him imperial favor even under the new regime), would inevitably feel inadequate when paired with young, beautiful women. Mediocre old men, they concluded, had no claim to such romantic fortune.[128]

The general orthodox Confucian stance of *Dianshizhai Pictorial* and its inclusion of henpecked-husband anecdotes reflect the same male anxiety. The publication tacitly acknowledges a certain logic behind uxoriousness: when husbands lacking in (or those who feel that they lack in) appearance, intellect, or virtue find themselves paired with beautiful wives or concubines, they inevitably feel inadequate. This partly resonates with a Tang-era theory on fearing wives:

> A wife deserves to be feared for three reasons: First, as a new bride, she sits solemn as a Bodhisattva—who wouldn't fear a Bodhisattva? Then, after bearing children, she rears them like a tigress—who wouldn't fear a tigress? Finally, in old age, wrinkled like a demon—who wouldn't fear a demon? Given this, why shame men for fearing their wives?[129]

In the early days of marriage, the bride's serene grace and beauty commands awe. Upon becoming a mother, she transforms into a formidable guardian—her newfound strength compelling the husband's deference. In old age, her wrinkled visage retains more than just faded beauty: decades of shared life have consolidated her lingering authority. When the husband claims to "fear a demon", we might reconsider—if this trepidation began at the wedding altar, it has long since hardened into psychological habit. This so-called

---

[128] "Leading the Old Man by the Nose" (*Qianshuai laofu* 牵率老夫), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 丑 10, no. 142, 1888.
[129] Li Fang 李昉, *Taiping Guangji* 太平广记, (Beijing: Unity Press, 2022), 4164.

“uxoriousness theory” ultimately reveals male admiration for feminine power and the tacit recognition of women’s domestic influence, as well as the anxiety about masculine self-worth. Such anxiety directly clashes with the patriarchal authority that orthodox social values confer upon men.

In summary, while Qing official discourse emphasized female chastity—canonizing women who rigorously guarded against extramarital penetration—the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* exhibited nuanced sympathy for killed adulterous women. This sympathy stemmed from two paradoxically intertwined motivations: a traditionalist view holding husbands accountable for their wives’ infidelity, and an underlying male anxiety that tacitly acknowledged feminine agency in daily life. Absolute, unilateral gender dominance was pragmatically unsustainable in domestic everyday practice. Notably, this compassion for “unchaste” women, like its reporting on henpecked husbands, operated strictly within Confucian hierarchical ethics. Consequently, the publication maintained an ostensibly contradictory stance: sympathizing with individual women while staunchly reinforcing patriarchal norms. Buddhist nuns, as women existing outside Confucian family structures, complicated this framework. As discussed earlier, their clerical status exempted them from conventional spousal expectations, yet the *Pictorial* still primarily gendered them as women—particularly when contrasting them with household-bound females. However, it often treated nuns’ adultery in a different way to reinforce Confucian domestic ideals. The next section will analyze this disparity through legal statutes and the *Pictorial*’s narratives on adulterous nuns, providing a pointed contrast to the current discussion.

2. Adultery Among Nuns

As previously discussed in Chapter One, the Qing legal code addressed Buddhist nuns’ sexual offenses. The cited Article 372 of *The Great Qing Code* and its substatutes prescribed punishment not by directly specifying beatings

with the heavy bamboo or penal servitude, but rather by stipulating two degrees of increased severity over punishments for commoners' sexual offenses. This legislative phrasing avoids verbosity: Legal provisions concerning "Those Who Are in Mourning, or Buddhist or Taoist Priests who Fornicate" followed the general statutes on sexual offenses. Since commoners' sexual offenses were differentiated into consensual illicit sexual intercourse (*hejian*), crafty illicit sexual intercourse (*diaojian*), and coercive illicit sexual intercourse (*qiangjian*), each with nuanced punitive variations depending on circumstances, this formulation achieved conciseness and generality without needing repetitive specifications for nuns' offenses across all three categories. Furthermore, both this legislative method and the severity of punishment indicate that Qing law regarded clerical sexual misconduct as moral degeneracy requiring punishment—similar to sexual intercourse during mourning periods for parents or husbands—possessing an additional layer of inexcusable specificity based on status or circumstance. While status hierarchy remained significant in Chinese legal tradition, as earlier discussions on female commoners' offenses noted, the Qing dynasty placed greater emphasis on female chastity compared to previous dynasties, with somewhat diminished concern for status distinctions. Since punishments for nuns' sexual offenses were calculated based on those for commoners, we may understand that accused nuns first underwent chastity judgment as ordinary women, then faced moral judgment as religious professionals. This legal formulation effectively diluted the nun's transcendence as a Buddhist disciple, positioning her religious identity secondary to her gender identity.

As previously noted, the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* adopted a discernibly different critical tone toward Buddhist monks versus nuns—resorting to harsher denunciations of the former while maintaining relative moderation toward the latter. This differential treatment persisted throughout the publication's fifteen-year run. A characteristic critique of monks reads: "Monastic transgressions

are too numerous to record. Our studio documents all reported cases not because such scandals are novel, but to demonstrate the futility of seeking refuge in an illusory dharma—hoping to awaken the deluded masses. How else to explain these savage ascetics' utter failure to embody the Buddha's compassion?"[130] This rhetoric systematically amplifies clerical misconduct while erasing any evidence of devout practitioners. In contrast, typical commentary on nuns adopts a more nuanced approach: "While many nuns devoutly cultivate their practice within convent walls, some profane these sacred spaces with carnal affairs."[131] Here, the critique is strategically prefaced by acknowledging pious practitioners—a rhetorical concession never extended to monastic communities, which were routinely subjected to blanket condemnation.

The *Dianshizhai Pictorial*'s relative tolerance toward nuns' sexual transgressions stemmed from a logic akin to that of *The Great Qing Code*—both texts evaluated female clergy against the benchmark of laywomen. The pictorial's rhetorical strategy for criticizing ordinary women visiting temples mirrored its approach to unchaste nuns: "While women's temple visits for incense-burning invite sternest censure, their obstinate devotion proves unshakable. Though sincere devotees exist, many exploit piety as pretext for clandestine affairs with monks."[132] This single sentence performs remarkable discursive acrobatics: first acknowledging the social stigma around female temple-goers, then conceding genuine religiosity among some, before ultimately highlighting the scandalous cases that justified the initial warning. This "critique-by-concession" structure—negating before affirming only to

[130] "Sacrilegious Crimes by a Tonsured Robber" (*Chanmen bufa* 禅门不法), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 未 8, no. 212, 1889.
[131] "Green Bean Chamber Revelations" (*Qingdou fangkai* 青豆房开), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 巳 3, no. 183, 1889. However, if the nun's adulterous partner happened to be a Buddhist monk, the condemnatory rhetoric would escalate significantly, reflecting an absolutist denial of the clergy's spiritual devotion.
[132] "Distress During Spring Outing" (*Taqing shoujiong* 踏青受窘), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 酉 4, no. 232 1890.

negate again—precisely parallels the rhetorical template used for evaluating nuns. The syntactical mirroring creates intertextual resonance between critiques of lay and monastic women, revealing how both groups were measured against Confucian gender norms through identical narrative devices.

Compared to Buddhist monks, nuns convicted of adultery received more lenient treatment in pictorial commentaries—primarily due to the prevailing notion of "women's ignorance," a recurring verdict in *Dianshizhai Pictorial* that essentialized female intellect, worldview, and capabilities. While monks' professional identity stood independently from their "masculinity" (with their misconduct judged chiefly against Buddhist precepts), nuns' vocational status remained inextricably tied to their "femininity" (their transgressions often mitigated by societal perceptions of womanhood).

The vast majority of commentaries on cases of nuns' adultery in the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* lack an indignant tone, typically opting for euphemistic teasing and admonitions directed at society, with few expressions resembling the strong condemnations reserved for cases of monks' adultery. This difference in tone correlates with the punitive measures recorded in the news stories, where public reactions to monks' and nuns' transgressions varied. In cases of nuns' adultery, the nuns involved usually suffered neither financial loss nor physical harm. By contrast, the most severe punishment recorded in the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*—meted out by a Qing government-appointed monastic official to a monk who violated celibacy vows—was death by burning alive. Generally, such cases of clerical adultery were not capital offenses. The most common punishment documented in the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* was flogging followed by an order to return to secular life. Among these records of forced laicization, verdicts mandating nuns to leave the clergy were particularly frequent. Not only nuns who broke celibacy vows but

even those subjected to disputes—such as a disciple reported by her master to the authorities—might be ordered to return to lay life, with the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* praising the official for embodying Buddhism's "mercy of sparing life (好生之德)."[133] In some instances, nuns who had not violated any precepts but were merely entangled in family conflicts could also be forced to grow their hair back and resume secular status. For example, in one case, a man's wife fled to a convent. When he brought the matter to court, the authorities ordered him to take his wife back and commanded the three young nuns (all under thirty) in the convent to grow their hair and move to a charitable institution to await marriage. The older nun, their teacher, was also sent to the institution for elderly care, barred from continuing her religious practice.[134] The *Dianshizhai Pictorial* not only exhibited a discernible bias in its commentary toward monks and nuns but also demonstrated this disparity through its curated selection of news stories. Typically, the narratives culminated in punitive consequences for monks, whereas nuns were seldom depicted facing karmic retribution or punishment—with the exception of state-mandated defrocking. This editorial tendency inevitably shaped readers' perceptions: monks were largely viewed as transgressors of monastic vows who deserved their comeuppance, while nuns were often portrayed as comparatively devout, even "true bodhisattvas." In fact, given the *Pictorial*'s deliberate alignment with the preferences of its Chinese readership, these narrative choices, thematic selections, and attitudinal slants may well be interpreted as reflective of the prevailing societal sentiments of the era.

The nuns were originally renunciants who had left secular family life, but in the commentaries of the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, they—especially those who violated monastic precepts—were often portrayed as individuals who had strayed from the correct path. This perception may be partly linked to the

[133] "Mercy of Sparing Life" (*Haosheng zhide* 好生之德), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 丙 2, no. 26, 1885.
[134] "Grow Hair and Await Marriage" (*Xufa zepei* 蓄发择配), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 寅 8, no. 152, 1888.

backgrounds of some nuns. The *Dianshizhai Pictorial* documented many monks and nuns who had taken monastic vows as a last resort after losing their homes to war or other misfortunes in life.[135] The publication also frequently depicted close interactions between secular women and nunneries—wives fleeing their households often sought refuge in nunneries[136], unmarried girls might view them as sanctuaries or places of solidarity[137], and courtesans might angrily declare their intention to become nuns.[138] Even women of questionable conduct might be allowed by their families to enter convents rather than marry.[139] In short, within the social realities of the Qing dynasty, the identity of a nun largely represented a departure from conventional expectations for women. Confucianism remained the dominant ideology in ancient Chinese society, and the status of a nun existed among the many marginalized alternatives—yet it was one of the more conspicuous voices in this dissonant chorus.

---

[135] Such as “Reunite Siblings” (*Xiongmei xiangfeng* 兄妹相逢,庚 2, no. 74, 1886) tells the story of a brother and sister who, separated during the turmoil of the Taiping Rebellion, meet again after twenty years—only to find that both have entered monastic life, one as a monk and the other as a nun. And “A Broken Dream Restored” (*Haomeng chongyuan* 好梦重圆, 亥 11, no. 263, 1891) tells the story of a husband who fled his debts to become a Taoist priest and a wife who entered a Buddhist nunnery soon after the husband’s departure—only for the couple to reunite after a decade of separation and remarry.

[136] For example, in “Ashamed to Join the Chickens” (*Chiru jiqun* 耻入鸡群, 亨 11, no. 503, 1897) and “Repenting for Her Husband” (*Weifu chanhui* 为夫忏悔, 行 4, no. 448, 1896), both wives chose to renounce the world and become nuns due to their inability to live harmoniously with their husbands. The only difference was that the first one failed in her attempt, while the latter—under her husband’s speechless gaze—packed her dowry and walked out the door with a young nun. In “Defying Mother’s Wishes to Reunite Wife” (*Beimu xunqi* 背母寻妻 书 6, no. 414,1895), the wife, after enduring relentless mistreatment from her mother-in-law, finally reached her breaking point—she cut off her hair and entered a nunnery. While the mother-in-law ceased interfering with her former daughter-in-law, her son would often sneak visits to the convent to see his ex-wife.

[137] “Forbidden Love in the Cloister” (*Chanmen qingzhang* 禅门情障 酉 12, no. 240,1890) tells of a young lady from an official’s family who had been betrothed since childhood but, having grown close to the nuns in a Buddhist convent, resisted marriage on the eve of her wedding. Though later the local government investigated and suspected an improper relationship between the lady and a monk in the convent, the convent may indeed have served as a refuge for unmarried women. In “Pants Down at High Altitude” (*Denggao luoku* 登高落裤, 子 12, no. 132, 1887), two maidservants from Guangdong and a nun went up the mountain together. Maidservants were professional women—often former servants of debased status who had bought their freedom—who remained unmarried for life, passing their trade from master to apprentice, with the apprentice caring for the master in old age. The fact that these unmarried working women traveled alongside a nun highlights the close ties between these two celibate communities.

[138] To name a few, “Doomed by Destiny” (*Shiming buyou* 实命不犹), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 未 5, no. 209, 1889; “Cast Away All Sorrows” (*Bingchu fannao* 摒除烦恼), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 辰 4, no. 172, 1888.

[139] For instance, the heroine of “Harm Set, Harm Get” (*Hairen zihai* 害人自害) 匏 10, no. 322, 1893) was nearly drowned by her husband as extrajudicial punishment for ‘failing to abide by domestic virtue’—until her relatives intervened and persuaded him to let her become a nun instead.

Although the nuns depicted in *Dianshizhai Pictorial* were in fact multifaceted figures playing diverse roles across social incidents, the publication consistently positioned them against an implicit benchmark of “the correct choice” (Confucian feminine ideals). In these illustrations, nuns—as women operating outside domestic spheres—were alternately portrayed as objects of sympathy, educational aids who ought to rectify their “wrong decision” to renounce the world (framed as ignorance), or unexpected supporting characters driving narrative arcs. Fundamentally, nuns faced sharper scrutiny than laywomen yet milder condemnation than monks. This gendered moral calculus exposes the intersectional pressures of religion and patriarchy.

3. Prostitution and Nuns

Among the various roles played by Buddhist nuns in the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, there is one that almost completely deviates from their identity as nuns—the role of prostitutes. The depictions of ordinary prostitutes and those of nuns doubling as prostitutes (whether as courtesans or common sex workers) in the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* share similarities as well as differences. Unlike contemporary Chinese law, prostitution was a legal profession during the Qing Dynasty. However, prostitutes’ household registration differed from that of ordinary commoner women, as they belonged to the “mean” or “debased” status (*jian ji* 贱籍). Qing Dynasty law distinguished between commoners 良 and those of mean status 贱, with male servants, maids, prostitutes, and musicians all classified as the latter. The law prohibited marriages between commoners and those of mean status, whether through formal unions or concubinage. Officials, in particular, were forbidden from purchasing the services of prostitutes or socializing with them over drinks (jiaji yinjiu 挟妓饮酒). According to *The Great Qing Code*, such acts were punishable by sixty strokes of the heavy bamboo.[140] However, nuns did not belong to the mean

[140] Jones, *The Great Qing Code*, 352-353.

status. Although ordinary commoner women were prohibited from entering temples to burn incense[141], men faced no such restrictions when visiting convents. If nuns imitated the practices of prostitutes, they exploited a legal loophole—since they were not of mean status, they were unaffected by the prohibition on marriages between commoners and those of debased status. The only legal risk they faced was violating the statute on “Those Who Are in Mourning, or Buddhist or Taoist Priests who Fornicate”, which could result in a month of public exposure in the cangue, one hundred heavy bamboo strokes, and forced defrocking.[142] The flexibility of a nun’s identity was not only unique compared to ordinary commoner women but also contrasted with another socially recognized role for women outside the family—prostitutes. This distinction allowed nuns a degree of fluidity and adaptability that even courtesans lacked.

As Joan Judge has argued, the issue of women from the late Qing to the Republican period was closely intertwined with China’s modernization and the question of the nation-state.[143] In her book *Dangerous Pleasures*, Gail Hershatter points out that in men’s writings about courtesans, the culture of patronizing prostitutes reflected their nostalgia for a bygone era and the collective memory of male camaraderie.[144] Although courtesans were often criticized in the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* for issues such as spreading venereal diseases and corrupting men’s morals, the tradition of praising loyal and virtuous courtesans still found frequent expression in the publication. For instance, the story of Lü Zhu 绿珠 (Green Pearl), a courtesan from the Western Jin 西晋 Dynasty, was often cited. Favored by her patron, the wealthy official Shi Chong 石崇 (249–300), she caught the eye of his political rival,

[141] Ibid., 174. This statute falls under the charge of “Blaspheming the Spirits”.
[142] Ibid., 352.
[143] Joan Judge, *The Precious Raft of History: The Past, the West, and the Woman Question in China*, (Stanford University Press, 2008).
[144] Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Shanghai*, (University of California Press, 1992).

who sought to claim her. On the eve of Shi Chong's downfall, he lamented that his misfortune stemmed from his association with Lü Zhu. In response, she leapt to her death to preserve her chastity and loyalty—embodying the Confucian virtues of "a chaste woman serving no second husband, just as a loyal minister serves no second master". The *Dianshizhai Pictorial* invoked this allusion 典故 to extol courtesans who demonstrated similar devotion. Moreover, figures like Hong Fu 红拂[145], Mao Xixi 毛惜惜[146], and other historically renowned courtesans, musicians, and actresses also occupied a notable place in the publication. Some courtesans, admired for their refined and aloof demeanor—qualities that resonated with literati tastes—were memorialized in the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* through biographical sketches written in a tone of mutual appreciation. These women, closer to the ideal of the "talented gentlewoman" (才女), were celebrated not just for their beauty but for their intellect and moral stature.

However, in the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, such positive narratives linking courtesans to patriotic virtues were never extended to nun-prostitutes. The latter were predominantly portrayed through the lens of male anxieties about feminine seduction and erotic fantasies. For example, one story tells of a young and handsome man named Chen from Ningbo. One day, while attending a temple fair, he encountered two beautiful nuns. The younger nun, in particular, captivated Chen with her stunning beauty. Amidst their flirtatious

---

[145] "Hong Fu" 红拂 literally means "red horsetail whisk". She is a fictional figure from Tang Dynasty tales, originally a singing courtesan in the household of Sui Dynasty minister Yang Su 杨素. Impressed by the then-unknown Li Jing 李靖, she fled Yang's residence to elope with him. Li Jing later became a renowned general in early Tang. In ancient China, the term "妓" (ji) encompassed not only courtesans and prostitutes but also female musicians and performers.

[146] Mao Xixi 毛惜惜, a courtesan in the late Southern Song Dynasty, served Rong Quan 荣全, a rebel general who feigned surrender to the imperial court while plotting to assassinate an envoy. During a banquet with his conspirators, Rong ordered Mao to entertain the guests. However, she was unwilling to aid in treason. When reprimanded, Mao retorted that she had initially rejoiced at his supposed surrender, only to discover his deceit. "Though I am but a lowly courtesan," she declared, "I will not serve a traitor." Enraged, Rong Quan executed her. Yet Mao Xixi's loyalty became legendary. Despite her status as a *jianji* (debased-status courtesan 贱妓), her moral defiance earned her posthumous reverence—an exceptional honor for a woman in her profession. Her story was enshrined in the *History of Song* (《宋史》), the dynasty's official historical record. This footnote refers to Tuotuo 脱脱, et al., *Songshi* 宋史 (Shanghai: Zhonghua Book Company, 1977), 13493.

exchanges by eyes, a mutual attraction seemed to blossom, prompting Chen to follow the two nuns back to the convent where they resided. The abbess, a woman in her thirties, hosted Chen with wine and later that night invited him to stay for a tryst, which he accepted. The next day, Chen consummated his desire with the younger nun who had first caught his eye. From then on, Chen became utterly absorbed in this life of sensual indulgence, spending his days entangled with the two nuns in their bedchambers. Before long, the younger nun expressed her wish to marry Chen, warning that their prolonged debauchery might harm his health. Though Chen verbally agreed, it was clear he struggled to relinquish the pleasures of his libertine lifestyle. At the end of each story, the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* typically included a brief commentary in the form of a seal-engraved remark. For this tale, the remark read: “Reminiscent of Prince Shensheng 申生 (?–656BCE).”[147] Shensheng was the crown prince of Qi 齐 during the Spring and Autumn period 春秋 (B.C. 770-B.C. 476). After his birth mother passed away early, his father, influenced by his stepmother, sought to depose him in favor of his half-brother. Ultimately, Shensheng fell victim to the woman’s schemes, became estranged from his father, and chose to take his own life. This commentary clearly implies that Chen’s downfall—his ensnarement by lust—was primarily the result of a woman’s cunning seduction, luring him into moral decay. This kind of moral condemnation was quite common in depictions of Shanghai’s decadent living environment (*shili yangchang* 十里洋场), particularly in stories about courtesans seducing and corrupting young men from respectable families who had come from out of town. While these nuns were never associated with the occasional positive portrayals given to courtesans, they received similarly negative criticism—often even harsher in tone.

The activities of nun-prostitutes were essentially acts of adultery, but because

[147] “Preaching Lust in Buddha’s Land” (*Fodi xuanyin* 佛地宣淫), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 申 10, no. 226, 1890.

their methods of soliciting clients and their service models closely resembled those of brothels, they no longer received the lenient narratives or tactful admonishments mentioned earlier. Instead, they were subjected to a harsh, almost exorcist-like narrative of “eliminating evil”—similar to how a Taoist priest might vanquish a fox spirit. The *Dianshizhai Pictorial* includes a story about an official who went undercover to investigate a convent and dismantle its den of vice. Much like Chen from Ningbo, this official was young, handsome, and dignified. Hearing rumors of suspicious behavior at a certain convent, he first made formal inquiries with local authorities but found no evidence of wrongdoing. Undeterred, he decided to personally investigate by requesting lodging there at night. Initially reluctant, the nuns eventually welcomed him warmly—seduced by his good looks—and even hinted at the possibility of a tryst. Playing along, the official feigned interest while gathering information, soon discovering a critically ill man, emaciated as if drained of his vitality. The nuns were dragging him away, intending to kill him now that they had a new “guest”. At this point, the official dropped his disguise. Relying on his exceptional martial skills, he broke through the nuns’ attempts to restrain him, returned to his office, and swiftly meted out punishment: the nuns were arrested, and the convent was razed to public acclaim. The dying man in this story seems to foreshadow the potential fate of Chen from Ningbo had he continued indulging in the libertine life with the two nuns. The nuns’ crimes lie in their destruction of men’s health, embodying both the allure and peril of female seduction—a vivid projection of male anxieties. Notably, this tale culminates in a rare depiction of punishment for adulterous nuns, with the narrative emphasizing the crowd’s satisfaction at the outcome.[148] While the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*’s commentators often exhibited a paternalistic tolerance toward individual nuns who broke celibate vows, their tone shifted dramatically when confronting these incarnations of desire—women

[148] “Cleansing the Buddhist Cloister” (*Fomen chuhai* 佛门除害), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 礼 8, no. 368, 1894.

hungering for male bodies and poised to act. Such stories, though presented as news, should not be taken as factual accounts but rather as ideological artifacts reflecting the psyche of male intellectuals and broader societal attitudes of the era.

In fact, the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* also included analyses of the backgrounds of these prostitution-practicing nuns. From these texts, we can clearly see the other side of the story—that these nuns were not seductive and licentious monsters, but pitiable victims.

Temples and monasteries were commonly referred to as “vulnerable places” (弱门地方). When local bullies targeted them, monks and nuns often had no choice but to endure in silence to avoid further trouble. For instance, one convent’s nun attracted the attention of a certain man, who then conspired with a local ruffian to storm the convent under the pretext of arresting thieves, forcibly abducting the nun.[149] Thus, some of the nuns accused of adultery may have been acting under coercion. Moreover, in the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, nuns who violated their vows of celibacy were often depicted with shaved crowns but short hair remaining on the sides. Beyond being a possible signature hairstyle of nun-prostitutes, as previously discussed, this style carried broader symbolism—it suggested that these nuns were still young, possibly not yet fully tonsured. For example, in the illustrated news story “The Young Nun’s Heroic Bravery 少尼神勇” (Fig. 6)[150], which had nothing to do with adultery, the young nun was still drawn with this partially shaved hairstyle, indicating that it was likely common among novice nuns in certain regions. The story “The Young Nun’s Heroic Bravery” itself demonstrates how most young nuns were perceived by others as weak and vulnerable. In the

[149] “Forcible Seizure of Buddhist Nuns” (*Qingqiangnüseng* 强抢女僧), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 巳 11, no. 191, 1889.
[150] “The Young Nun’s Heroic Bravery” (*Shaoni shenyong* 少尼神勇), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 乐 3, no. 375, 1894.

tale, a young nun goes to the market to buy fish but is mocked by the vendor over bargaining. When she retorts, the vendor attempts to strike her—only to be hurled backward by the nun's unexpected martial prowess before he could even lay a hand on her. The *Dianshizhai Pictorial* commentator marvels, "Who says a delicate woman cannot possess great strength?"[151] Where, then, did these vulnerable young nuns come from? The *Dianshizhai Pictorial* speculated that they were either abducted by elder nuns or groomed as potential disruptors of monastic purity—tools for profit, trained to mimic courtesans by beckoning patrons with feigned smiles at the gate. This suspicion stemmed from the girls' tender age: true renunciation of worldly ties (six roots purified 六根清净) was seen as impossible for those so young. What life experience could these novices possibly have to genuinely forsake earthly desires and submit to a lifetime of austere devotion? [152] While *The Great Qing Code* set no minimum age for women's ordination, it is easy to drew parallels with male monastic regulations: boys under sixteen could only ordain if their family had at least three other male heirs. Moreover, regardless of gender, private tonsure was forbidden—official household registration and government-issued ordination certificates (*dudie* 度牒) were mandatory.[153] These laws implicitly discouraged ordination except for those with no other recourse. From this, it can be inferred that the origins of these young nuns were indeed either suspicious or pitiable—they might have been abandoned by their parents, orphaned, or even victims of trafficking. To people of that era, this should have been common knowledge. Yet, this did nothing to stop them from casting lustful gazes upon these young nuns or voicing prejudiced assumptions about their piety. However, precisely because the public harbored some sympathy and compassion for these vulnerable women,

[151] Ibid.
[152] "Divine Needle Beyond Mortal Realm" (*Fangwai zhenshen* 方外针神), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 竹 1, no. 301, 1892.
[153] For the statute, see Jones, *The Great Qing Code*, 106. For the substatute, see Ma and Yang, *Daqing lüli tongkao jiaozhu*, 406.

young nuns generally received slightly better treatment in societal judgment compared to their male monastic counterparts.

Beyond the shared trope of male anxiety toward feminine seduction that linked nuns and courtesans in public discourse, there was another visual motif accompanying depictions of adulterous nuns and prostitutes in these illustrations: the image of Boddhisattva (Guanyin 观音). In the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, the figure of Guanyin served as a symbolic bridge between courtesans and nuns. Depictions of adulterous nuns—such as in “Frightened Miaochang” (Fig. 3), “Preaching Lust in Buddha’s Land” (Fig. 7), and “Green Bean Chamber Revelation” (Fig. 8)—consistently feature Guanyin imagery in their compositional backgrounds. Meanwhile, in “Doomed by Destiny” (Fig. 9), the courtesan is deliberately positioned by the artist atop an altar, her forehead marked with the *urna* (the sacred white curl characteristic of Guanyin), her hands forming a *mudra* (ritual gesture). Before her lies an offering table with incense, surrounded by a crowd of worshippers. Behind her hangs a vivid portrait of Guanyin herself—lively in demeanor, holding a willow branch and purification vase—glancing back at the courtesan from within the painting.

Guanyin and courtesans, Buddhist disciples and carnal desire—these seem inherently incompatible. Yet, as previously noted with convents covertly operating as brothels under names like “Hall of Avalokiteshvara”, such paradoxes were precisely the result of Guanyin’s cultural domestication in China. According to scholarly research on the Chinese transformation of Avalokiteshvara, the Tang Dynasty witnessed the emergence of the Yanzhou Woman 延州妇人 legend in Shaanxi—a beautiful woman who slept with all who sought her, only to be posthumously identified by a foreign monk from the Western Regions as the Chained Bones Bodhisattva 锁骨菩萨, prompting

worship and a commemorative pagoda.[154] By the Song Dynasty, this figure bifurcated into two narratives: 1) Mr. Ma's Wife (Malangfu 马郎妇) who granted sexual favors to all men on Golden Sands Beach 金沙滩, after which they permanently lost carnal desire; 2) A young bride in Buddhist-skeptical Shaanxi who set escalating demands—memorizing sutras as a marital test—until only one man, surnamed Ma, succeeded. She avoided consummation by dying on their wedding night. These tales of the Chained Bones Bodhisattva and sexualized enlightenment were likely influenced by esoteric Buddhist scriptures.[155] Yet as Guanyin gradually filled China's powerful goddess vacuum, her mythology absorbed Mahayana tropes like the Prostitute Bodhisattva 妓女菩萨—divinities incarnating as prostitutes to save souls. Thus, emerged hybrid narratives: Guanyin disguising as a prostitute or descending to marry men (only to vanish on the wedding night), blending the Yanzhou Woman and Mr. Ma's Wife motifs with her cult. As Reiko Ohnuma observes, both Guanyin and courtesans give themselves to all and strategically seduce—but where the latter are driven by profit, the former proselytize.[156] Chün-fang Yü adds that neither discriminates, embracing all beings.[157] Yü further notes Mahayana's nonduality doctrine permits bodhisattvas to engage taboo acts (like Vimalakīrti visiting brothels or committing the five deadly sins while remaining untainted).[158] Ultimately, Guanyin's courtesan avatars reflect her domestication-feminization process in Chinese history. In her Chinese form, we see indigenous theology: gods 神 /ghosts 鬼 originate from humanity but inhabit liminal spaces after death. Unlike transcendent ideals, Chinese divinities remain world-engaged—neither aloof nor separable from earthly existence. Therefore, equating Guanyin with

[154] Chün-fang Yü, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara*, (Columbia University Press, 2001), 421-424.

[155] Shengli He 何胜莉: "Suogu pusa kao—jianlun tangmi guanniande wenxue jieshou"锁骨菩萨考——兼论唐密观念的文学接受[The Chained Bones Bodhisattva: A Study with an Analysis of the Literary Reception of Tang Esoteric Buddhist Concepts], *Forum on Chinese Culture*, no.1 (2012): 43-48.

[156] Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 424-425.

[157] Ibid., 425-426.

[158] Ibid., 424.

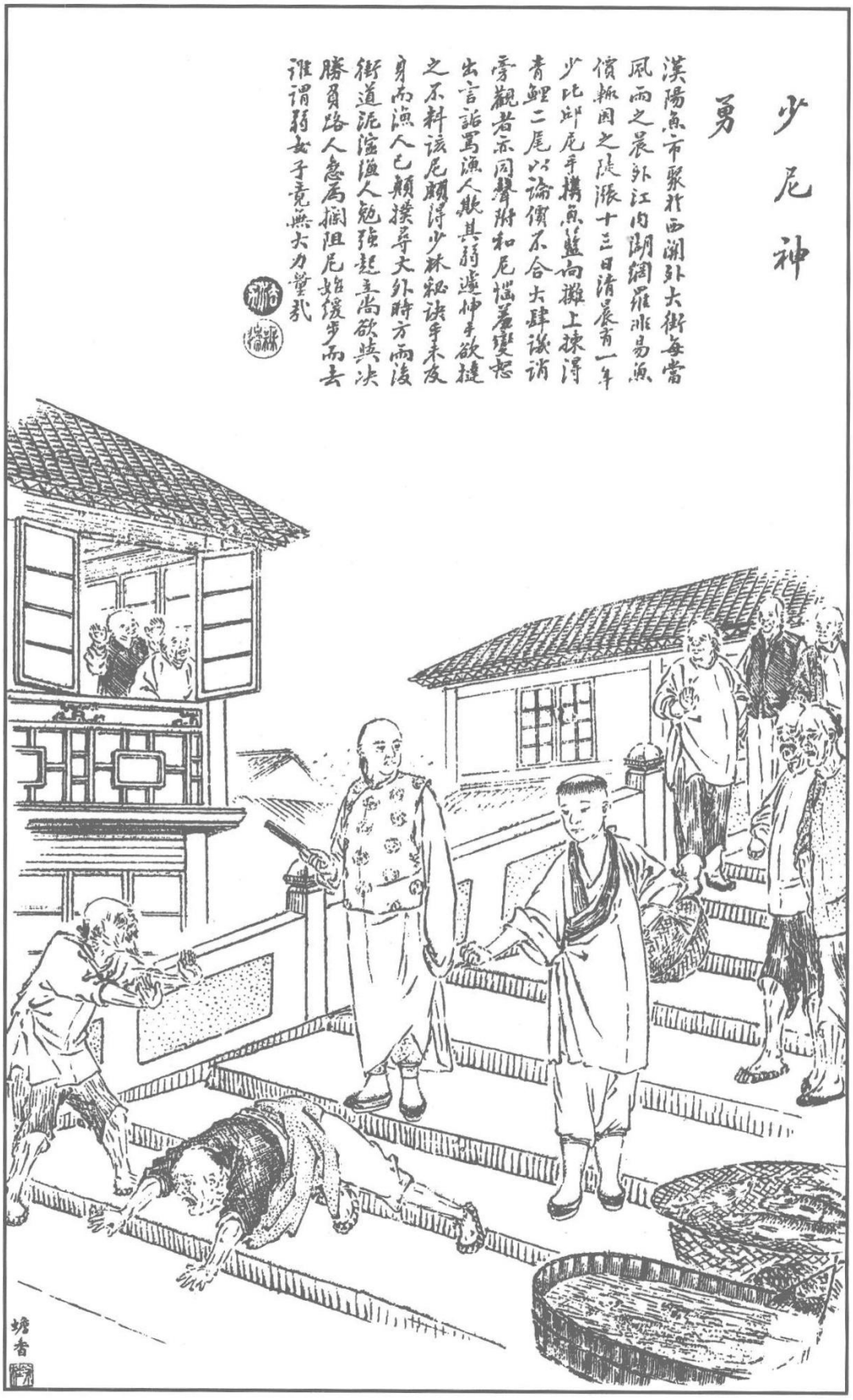

Figure 6. “The Young Nun’s Heroic Bravery”

courtesans—even depicting living prostitutes as the Bodhisattva, or using Guanyin's image as the backdrop for illustrations of adulterous nuns—was not particularly shocking within the mass-market context of the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*. On the contrary, this visual rhetoric aligned seamlessly with traditional Chinese cultural psychology, while also delivering a deliberate, subversive wit.

Like Guanyin Bodhisattva's infinite incarnations, nuns' identities were remarkably fluid. They had stepped out of conventional female familial roles, yet unlike courtesans, they were not legally classified as low-status. From the perspective of late imperial literati in the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, nuns should not have left domesticity and male protection. The ideal Buddhist woman was one who practiced devotion privately at home, never venturing out to religious festivals.[159] The *Pictorial* asserted that the Buddha would not protect nuns—their expressions of piety merely revealed women's inherent ignorance.[160] For both family women and courtesans, men had constructed fixed stereotypes through Confucian pedagogy and literary tradition, linking them to specific masculine anxieties or virtues. Nuns alone defied categorization: Buddhist precepts demanded distance from men, rendering them socially illegible. Adulterous nuns, however, re-entered the male world, exposing the tension between their clerical vows and "womanly" desires. Household women were expected to be chaste and loyal. Even if they committed adultery (though Qing law permitted cuckolded husbands to kill the offenders), they could still garner male sympathy. Their domestic status, however critiqued through *Dianshizhai Pictorial*'s anxious male gaze, remained properly recognized. Female allure, while threatening patriarchal authority, was transmuted into domestic influence—hence the *Pictorial*'s exasperation at henpecked

[159] "Exemplary Chastity and Filial Piety" (*Zhenxiao kefeng* 贞孝可风), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 巳 3, no. 183, 1889.
[160] "Vajrapani Assaulted" (*Weituo bei'ou* 韦陀被殴), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 元 9, no. 489, 1897.

Figure 7. “Preaching Lust in Buddha’s Land”

husbands. Beyond the household, courtesans’ charms could earn state honors if aligned with nationalist causes (though chastity became irrelevant). Yet their sexuality was often demonized as a health hazard to men. Except for cultured courtesans who served as literati alter egos, excessive female authority at home was mocked as “tigress” 母老虎, while courtesans’ allure—though incapable of domestic conversion—was satirized as “female battalion” 娘子军. Men “defeated” by such battalions faced scorn; cuckolded husbands of courtesans were despised more than the courtesans themselves. Nuns who abstained from adultery were simply clergy, their femininity distinct from both wives and courtesans. Like Guanyin’s avatars, their allure was context-dependent. Unchaste nuns could be assigned a paradoxical allure by proving Confucian family ethics necessary, provided they were not part of organized prostitution. Conversely, chaste nuns, like cultured courtesans, could be

praised for piety or beauty—but only if that beauty or piety was framed as an expression of loyalty (to the Buddha). Their liminality shared men's dual fixation on female virtue and anxiety over seduction. Because Buddhist vows should preclude relations with men, nuns' chastity became pragmatically negligible under the Confucian moral framework—yet distinct from courtesans' moral void. Moreover, through Guanyin's Chinese domestication as a female figure, licentious nuns emerged as more titillating fantasy objects than courtesans. *Dianshizhai Pictorial*'s portrayal of nuns—oscillating between wives and courtesans—reflects broader societal tensions. While endorsing official (legal) discourse, its market-driven sensationalism reveals deeper cultural psychologies: the simultaneous fear and fetishization of women who eluded Confucian binaries.

Figure 8. "Green Bean Chamber Revelation"

Figure 9. “Doomed by Destiny”

Chapter 3 Wealth, Resentment, and the Martial Turn: A Shift in the Buddhist Image

The gendered critique constituted only one axis of the systemic prejudice against Buddhist clergy documented in the *Pictorial*. If the nun's ambiguous social position made her a flexible screen for Confucian projections, the very materiality of monastic life—its economic foundations and its entanglement with wealth—provided another, perhaps more visceral, source of public resentment. While the previous chapter (Chapter Two) explored how nuns were disciplined within a Confucian gender order, this chapter shifts the focus to a realm where gender distinctions often blurred: the domain of money, property, and socio-economic power. Here, both monks and nuns faced severe censure, not for their failure to conform to gendered ideals, but for their perceived failure to transcend worldly attachments altogether—a charge rooted equally in Buddhist precepts and Confucian distrust of profit.

Distinct from its Indian origins, sinicized Buddhism developed unique economic models for sustaining its monastic communities. Chinese monasteries primarily engaged in agriculture and handicraft production rather than relying solely on alms.[161] This practice, however, manifestly contravened the *Dhamagupta-vinaya* (*Sifenlü* 四分律), specifically the stipulation in the "Miscellaneous Matters III" (*Za jiandu zhi san* 杂犍度之三) section that forbids monks from owning estates for commercial gain.[162] Such adaptation arose from a cultural context where self-reliance was valued over mendicancy in mainstream Chinese ethics. To legitimize and regulate these economic activities, the monastic community established

[161] Yue Zhang 张越 and Jiang Zeng 曾江: "Shilun fojiao jingjisixiangdui Zhongguo jingjilunli deyingxiang——jianlunqi Zhongguohua fazhan"试论佛教经济思想对中国经济伦理的影响——兼论其中国化发展 [On the Influence of Buddhist Economic Thought on Chinese Economic Ethics—with a Concurrent Discussion on Its Sinicization], *Journal of University of Jinan (Social Science Edition)* 30, no.6 (2020): 97-106.
[162] Ibid., 99.

the *Baizhang Qinggui* (百丈清规, Baizhang's Pure Rules).[163] By incorporating Confucian economic principles—which emphasized righteous means of livelihood and a Spartan lifestyle—the *Baizhang Qinggui* sought to reconcile monastic practice with societal norms and rebuild public trust.[164]

1. Financial Conflicts and Wealth Resentment

In most accounts within the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, Buddhists were invariably subjected to criticism whenever they were associated with money. As discussed in the first chapter, the Puxin Temple chose not to report a theft due to the excessively large amount of money involved, precisely because of their understanding of the prevailing public sentiment at the time. In reality, it was not only nuns who faced baseless suspicions for possessing money—monks did as well.

One story recorded in the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* tells of a monk who lent his monastic robe to an attractive widow. The official presiding over the case fined the monk, and the penalty paid by the monk was used to bring about what was presented as a satisfactory resolution. The official was praised by the *Pictorial* for his wisdom and for preserving the widow's reputation.

The case began when the widow accused her seventeen-year-old son of violating orders and demanded that the official sentence him to death. Despite repeated attempts to reason with her, she remained adamant. The official then pretended to agree and instructed her to raise ten thousand coins to cover the cost of her son's coffin. The widow promptly produced the considerable sum. Suspicious of the money's origin, the official investigated and learned that it had been obtained by pawning items. Among the pawn tickets were several monk's garments. The monk was summoned to the court and questioned:

[163] Ibid., 97-106.
[164] Ibid.

“Why would you assist a mother in killing her own son? Where is your compassion?” The monk kowtowed repeatedly and begged for forgiveness. The official ordered him to pay two thousand coins to redeem himself and avoid corporal punishment. The pawnbroker was also reprimanded for failing to verify the mixed origins of the pawned items—both monastic and secular. The official declared that the punishment would be waived if the pawnshop took on an apprentice. Thus, the son who had been accused by his mother was sent to work as an apprentice at the pawnshop. The official used the coins collected from the widow and the monk to redeem the pawned items. The remaining one thousand coins were given to the son for his living expenses during the apprenticeship. In the end, the only party that suffered financial loss in the incident was the monk—who was also the most innocent. According to the commentator’s praise of the official, the monk was suspected of having an affair with the widow. The seventeen-year-old son, now grown, may have been seen as an obstacle by the monk, hence the mother’s insistence on his execution. The astute official recognized that the widow was not naturally cruel and sensed there was more to the story. However, to protect her reputation, he did not explicitly expose the affair. The commentator indignantly concluded that while the judgment was wise and the resolution appropriate, it still let the “licentious monk” off too lightly.[165]

The logic outlined above may appear self-consistent, yet the entire story lacks any solid evidence to prove that the monk actually had an illicit relationship with the widow. While the monk may indeed have been on good terms with the woman, such a relatively friendly and close relationship does not necessarily imply an affair. Due to the scarcity of records regarding temple activities within local communities during the Qing dynasties, we can draw reference from materials dating to the Republican era. If the widow and the

[165] “A Prefect’s Renowned Virtue” (*Lingyin xiansheng* 令尹贤声), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 酉 1, no. 229，1890. *Shenbao*, May 25th,1890.

monk were so familiar with each other, the monk likely did not practice in a major monastery but rather in a small temple deeply embedded within the community. According to sociological research on Beijing's Double Guandi Temple, these less influential small temples often maintained close ties with neighboring households. For instance, when residents in adjacent courtyard homes held weddings or funerals, the monks would pool money to support the ceremonies—even offering services such as seven days of sutra chanting free of charge for a widowed male resident, which was considered a quite respectable form of funeral support at the time.[166] Thus, the assumption that a close relationship between a monk and a woman—or his willingness to immediately lend his robe to her for pawning—must indicate an affair is ultimately rooted in prejudice. Although this prejudice may be based on certain social practices, it remains a deviation from the truth and ignores factual inquiry. Unlike modern news media, most accounts in *Dianshizhai Pictorial* did not prioritize authenticity. Therefore, the commentators' so-called "insight into the truth" only reflects the prevailing biases against monks at the time, as well as a general disregard for their property rights.

The concept of "property rights" did not exist in the legal framework of the late Qing Dynasty. Applying modern notions of property rights to temples of that era leads to considerable complexity, as temple assets were often considered "public property" (公产 *gongchan*), where possession, use, disposition, and benefits were separated. For example, a temple might be funded and built by an individual, who then donated it to Buddhist monks. In such cases, ownership did not necessarily change; rather, the right to use the temple was granted to the monks, since formal contracts were seldom signed between the donor and the monks. Monks might appoint a secular manager to oversee the

[166] Min Lü(Marianne Bujard), Kang Lu (Luca Gabbiani) eds., *Xianghuo xinyuan: Ming Qing zhi Minguo shiqi Zhongguo chengshi de simiao yu shimin* 香火新緣：明清至民國時期中國城市的寺廟與市民 [The Temple and its Actors: Religious Institutions and Urban Communities in China from the Ming and Qing Dynasties to the Republican Era], (Beijing: Zhongxin chuban jituan, 2018), 312.

temple's operations, resulting in a further separation of control and disposition. Additionally, it was common for a temple to possess farmland, the yields of which were shared between the temple and the peasants. Alternatively, a temple might have been constructed through collective donations solicited by the monks themselves. In such cases, the property naturally took on a public character due to the collective nature of its funding or donation and was thus regarded as "public property". There was also "private property" (私产 *sichan*)—temples built or renovated with individual funds. Even these were typically treated as part of the family estate rather than belonging to a single natural person, and often ended up as clan-held assets. Complete litigation archives from the Republican era regarding temple property disputes illustrate this complex reality, which differs significantly from modern conceptions of ownership.[167] The *Dianshizhai Pictorial* also recorded conflicts between monks themselves, or between monks and Daoist priests, over temple ownership. One story tells of a local gentry member who renovated a temple and invited a Buddhist monk to serve as abbot. When the monk returned after a long journey, he found the temple occupied by a Daoist priest. The conflict between the monk and the Daoist escalated into physical violence. [168] In another case, a monk raised funds through alms-seeking to build a temple. Shortly after its completion, a local bully drove him out. Another monk, learning of the vacancy, quickly collaborated with yamen runners to seize the empty temple. The original monk, refusing to accept this, gathered a crowd in an attempt to retake what he considered his temple.[169] The ambiguity surrounding temple property rights further exacerbated the difficulty for monks to legitimately assert their claims for protection. Although records in the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* suggest that local community opinions

[167] Li Guilian 李贵连, *Jindai Zhongguo fazhi yufaxue* 近代中国法制与法学[Modern Chinese Legal System and Legal Studies], (Peking University Press, 2002), 149-177.
[168] "A Buddhist Monk and a Daoist Priest Brawl" (*Sengdao dajia* 僧道打架), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 午 6, no. 198, 1889.
[169] "Monastic Brawls over Buddhist Cloister" (*Fodi jiaohong* 佛地交哄), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 数 5, no. 425, 1895.

could sometimes influence the outcome of such disputes, the publication often pointed out—particularly when exposing scams involving Buddhist and Daoist clergy—that the public was easily deceived and incited. Consequently, public appeals for justice did not necessarily lead to just outcomes.

In addition to the aforementioned norms of Buddhist precepts, prejudices against Buddhists' perceived susceptibility to violating vows of celibacy, and the ambiguous definition of temple property, the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* also revealed a contemporary resentment toward the wealthy. This sentiment was primarily reflected in a blanket condemnation of affluent families—commentators readily assumed that their wealth was ill-gotten, unquestioningly regarding it as the product of exploitation and morally dubious means.[170] As a result, the publication also expressed praise and admiration for "righteous thieves" (*yizei* 义贼) who robbed the rich to aid the poor.[171] Moreover, the commentators did not view great wealth as a blessing. When particularly wealthy households fell victim to theft, they often placed the blame not on the thieves, but on the wealthy families themselves, accusing them of "loosely storing treasures and thus teaching others to steal" (mancanghuidao

[170] This sentiment is most vividly expressed in "The Terror-Stricken Slave of Money" (*Qianlu sangdan* 钱虏丧胆, *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 木 9, no. 357, 1893). In this account, an old woman tells the story of a wealthy man being punished in the underworld, howling and vowing never to love money in his next life. Seizing this opportunity, the commentator satirizes the rich of the time, suggesting that most of them had accumulated their wealth through unjust means—exploiting those weaker than themselves. They amassed great fortunes yet remained hard-hearted, refusing to donate generously to relieve the suffering of those in hardship. Instead, they indulged in debauchery, committed all manner of evils, and brought disgrace to scholarly refinement. The commentator argues that the wealthy man's punishment in hell is entirely justified, for wealth is inherently external to the self. If one happens to acquire it, it should be used timely for good deeds and helping others—not treated as private property to be spent solely for oneself. However, the vast majority of the unvirtuous rich fail to grasp this truth. As a result, their descendants often cannot long enjoy such wealth; once the rich man dies, his children and grandchildren will in turn experience being bullied by the even wealthier and more powerful, or being treated with cold indifference. This simple folk belief in moral exhortation undoubtedly idealizes a society of common prosperity—one that opposes the inequities of distribution derived from private ownership.

[171] For instance, news stories such as "Miracle of the Greenwood" (*Lulin qiji* 绿林奇迹, *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 金 1, no. 265, 1891) and "As Agile as a Soaring Dragon" (*Jiaoruo youlong* 矫若游龙, *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 丁 1, no. 37, 1885) praised righteous thieves. However, the majority of the reports conveyed the authors' detestation toward thieves. The fundamental reason lies in the fact that although both righteous and unrighteous thieves are referred to by the same name, the difference between them is as vast as that between heaven and earth. Accounts of principled thieves are relatively scarce throughout the publication. What the publication predominantly presents is a broader decline in societal morality.

慢藏诲盗)—that is, failing to properly secure their assets and effectively inviting robbery. A representative example is a news story about the burglary of a wealthy family's private vault in and around Penang, Malaysia. After depicting the vault's extravagance, the report abruptly shifts focus to the captured thieves' suffering under punishment, openly expressing sympathy for their plight. The commentary at the end condemns the cruelty of the wealthy family in meting out justice to the thieves. In the accompanying illustration, which shows a group stealing a gold-cast snake, the two central thieves are portrayed notably well—dignified, well-dressed, and impressively handsome (Figure 10).[172]

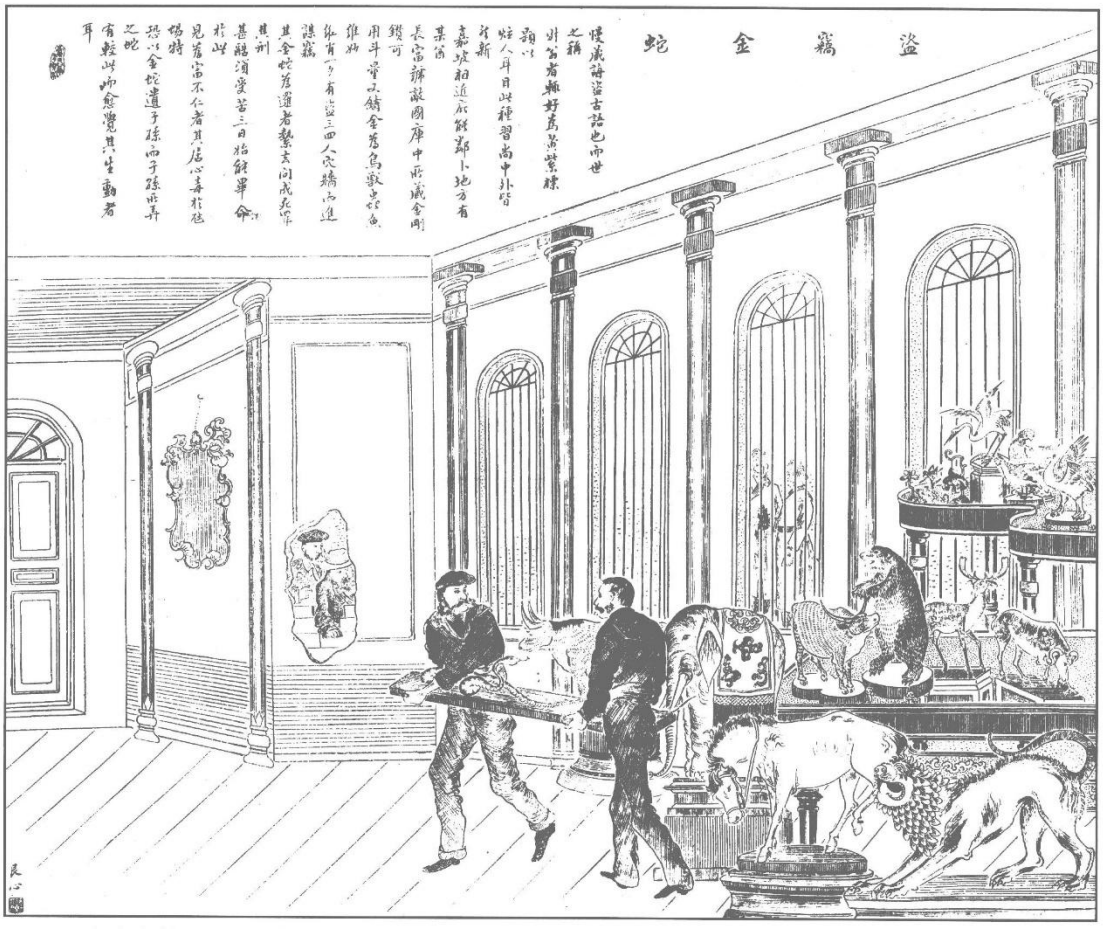

Figure 10. "Theft of the Golden Snake"

The *Dianshizhai Pictorial* was published from 1884 to 1898, precisely during the Guangxu reign. This period saw a significant increase in global silver

[172] "Theft of the Golden Snake" (*Daoqie jinshe* 盜窃金蛇), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 丑 4, no. 136, 1887.

production, while countries around the world adopted the gold standard one after another. China, however, continued to use the silver standard. Coupled with its long-standing trade surplus, China saw a large net inflow of silver by the late 19th century, as its earnings from exports far exceeded its expenditures on imports.[173] This led to a decrease in the purchasing power of silver within China, driving up the price of rice. Although rice prices during the Guangxu reign experienced a slight decline compared to the Tongzhi reign, the overall trend throughout the Qing dynasty was one of rising rice prices and diminishing silver purchasing power. One silver yuan could be exchanged for approximately seventy to one hundred copper coins.[174] In daily life, people in the Qing dynasty primarily used copper coins.[175] The poor needed only ten to twenty copper coins a day to sustain themselves, while those of moderate means required sixty to seventy.[176] Considering the substantial influx of silver and other forms of wealth into China at the time, the daily expenses of the wealthy likely far exceeded those of the poor and the middle class. For instance, the aforementioned monk suspected of adultery with the widow could readily get several thousand copper coins from pawnable clothing, indicating that he belonged to a relatively affluent segment of society. As mentioned earlier, temple assets were inherently public in nature due to their origins in donations from the broader population. This public nature of the monks' wealth made their affluence even more unforgivable in the eyes of many. The phenomenon of accumulating wealth from the people without using it for their benefit particularly incited criticism from commentators advocating for famine relief. In 1888, when the Yellow River burst its banks, leaving countless victims in its wake, the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* dedicated an entire issue with eight illustrations to depict the misery of the affected people and

[173] Ibid., 608-609.
[174] Ibid., 589.
[175] Ibid., 590.
[176] Ibid., 637.

called for public generosity.[177] Against this backdrop, a news story about a monk fasting in seclusion to attract public donations directly quoted a commentary from *Shenbao*, arguing that the monk's death by starvation was undeserving of pity and that the public should redirect their donations from monks to the disaster victims truly in need.[178] In this narrative, the monks' fundraising efforts were portrayed as being in direct competition with disaster relief donations.

The Reigning Emperor	Average Price per Hectoliter (Unit: Kuping System of Qing Dynasty)	Number of Silver (in Grams) per Hectoliter
Shunzhi (1644-1661)	1.15	43.00
Kangxi (1661-1722)	0.59	21.91
Yongzheng (1722-1735)	0.87	32.34
Qianlong (1735-1796)	1.48	55.19
Jiaqing (1796-1820)	2.10	78.31
Daoguang (1820-1850)	2.16	80.75
Xianfeng (1850-1861)	1.99	74.34
Tongzhi (1861-1875)	2.27	84.84
Guangxü (1875-1908)	2.17	80.84
Xuantong (1908-1912)	4.04	150.91

Price List of Rice in the Qing Dynasty[179]

2. Disappointment with Official Military Preparedness and the Popular Interests in Shaolin

The *Dianshizhai Pictorial*'s bias against Buddhists, particularly monks, may also be linked to the influence of Shaolin Temple. Since the late Ming Dynasty, Shaolin Temple had endured repeated devastation and destruction due to rebellions, largely because its reputation—especially within the martial

[177] "Poetic Illustrations of a Flood Survey" (*Kanshui shitu* 勘水诗图), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 寅 6, no. 150, 1888.
[178] "Fasting in Seclusion" (*Ren'e zuoguan* 忍饿坐关), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 寅 8, no. 152, 1888.
[179] Peng Xinwei 彭信威, *Zhongguo huobi shi* 中国货币史[A History of Chinese Currency], (Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1958), 602.

world—was closely tied to its loyalty to the Ming regime.[180] Prominent early Qing scholars such as Huang Zongxi 黄宗羲 (1610–1695) and Gu Yanwu 顾炎武 (1613–1682), who remained loyal to the fallen Ming Dynasty, turned their expectations toward Shaolin Temple's martial arts after becoming disillusioned with the official Ming military forces in the face of Qing's foreign armed conquest.[181] In addition to admiration among elite intellectuals, the Tiandihui (Heaven and Earth Society, also known as "Triads" in Western Literature)[182] made use of the reputation of the "Shaolin Temple" in southern China to carry out clandestine activities aimed at "overthrowing the Qing and restoring the Ming" (fanqingfuming).[183] The Tiandihui was a well-known secret society organized around the cause of resisting Qing rule and reviving the Ming Dynasty, making it a perennial target of Qing government suppression. Although the Qianlong Emperor once visited Shaolin Temple and even composed poems in its honor, the temple's association with the martial world and rebellious elements continued to easily provoke the government's sensitive nerves. There existed a tension between the martial skills of the Shaolin monks and their identity as Buddhists. The Qing government remained wary of Shaolin's martial traditions and even explicitly prevented Xu Ji 徐绩 (1732–1811), the Governor of Henan, from using Shaolin monks to train troops.[184] Although Buddhist activities received financial support from the Qing court, the martial monks and fighting traditions of Shaolin never regained the prominence they had enjoyed during the Ming Dynasty—a time when the state directly recruited warrior monks into military service.[185]

Similar to the reasons why scholars in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties developed an interest in the martial arts of the illiterate class and the rise of

[180] Meir Shahar, *The Shaolin Monastery: History, Religion and the Chinese Martial Arts* (Honolulu: Hawaii University Press, 2008), 185, 188-189.
[181] Ibid., 175-184.
[182] Ibid., 184.
[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid., 191.
[185] Ibid., 182-195.

Shaolin Temple, *Dianshizhai Pictorial*'s expectation toward Shaolin's martial skills emerged after the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895). Prior to this, the national hero prominently and repeatedly featured in the pictorial was Liu Yongfu 刘永福 (1837–1917). The publication also extensively covered official military exercises, often with lavish praise. However, a noticeable shift in public opinion occurred following China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War. For instance, in 1897, *Dianshizhai Pictorial* reported a military drill in which torpedoes failed to function and artillery shells accidentally injured the soldiers themselves during battery exercises. Confronted with such an embarrassment, the pictorial pointed out that China had spent a long time training these soldiers at great expense, then remarked with palpable disappointment:

> The above account of failures in Chinese military drills comes from official circles. If this is how our soldiers perform in peacetime, what will become of us when real conflict arises? How can we not be deeply worried?[186]

Such criticism had never appeared in *Dianshizhai Pictorial* before. The magazine had consistently aligned itself with the government's stance, making this bitter reflection on official military affairs highly unusual. This clearly demonstrates the profound impact of the defeat in the Sino-Japanese War on the Chinese societal psyche.

The public's disappointment with the official armed forces was not solely due to the defeat in the Sino-Japanese War. Judging from the coverage in the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, the experiences and military achievements of the earlier national hero Liu Yongfu, commander of the Black Flag Army (*heiqijun*), also contributed to this popular sentiment of disillusionment with official forces and the prevailing spirit of concerned patriotism.[187] Born into poverty, Liu

[186] "A Startling Debut" (*Yiming jingren* 一鸣惊人), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 戊 2, no. 242, 1897.
[187] Rudolf G. Wagner provided a detailed introduction to the texts and illustrations in the *Dianshizhai*

Yongfu had been a member of a local peasant uprising.[188] He later fled to Vietnam, where he led the Black Flag Army and made significant contributions during the Sino-French War, achieving repeated military successes. *Dianshizhai Pictorial* did not mention Liu's involvement with anti-Qing forces; instead, it consistently praised his accomplishments and legendary status during and after the Sino-French War. Carrying such expectations for Liu Yongfu, even after China's defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War and the cession of Taiwan to Japan by the Qing government, *Dianshizhai Pictorial* continued to cover local resistance in Taiwan and also mentioned anti-Japanese sentiments within mainland China. In addition to reporting on Taiwan's resistance efforts, the pictorial featured Liu Yongfu in 14 news stories in 1895. Initially portraying him as the "Great Wall" defending Taiwan, it later documented the actions of Liu and his forces, clearly expressing the editorial team's admiration and high hopes for him. Even when Liu Yongfu, isolated due to a lack of support and cooperation from his colleagues, was forced to flee Taiwan after being unable to sustain the resistance, *Dianshizhai Pictorial* maintained its appreciation for him and lamented his plight:

> When Liu Yuanting 刘渊亭[Yongfu] defended Tainan, everyone expected extraordinary achievements from him. When he found himself isolated and exhausted, seeking refuge to survive, could anyone not feel compassion and regret for him, and sigh at the difficulty of his escape? Alas! Thus concludes the affair of Taiwan—should we not all understand the dedication and hardship of the commander?[189]

The publication sincerely wished for Liu's successful escape, and its writing was filled with affection for the general. *The Draft History of Qing* 清史稿 also

---

Pictorial and other contemporary pictorials that reported on Liu Yongfu's remarkable performance in the Sino-French War. See Wagner, *Joining the Global Public*, 122-125.

[188] Tang Sang 唐桑 et al, "Wuyazhong shiqi liuyongfu shishikao"吴亚终时期刘永福史事考"[On Liu Yongfu's History in Period of Wu Yazhong], *Journal of Qinzhou University* 34, no.2 (2019): 34-37.

[189] "The General's Narrow Escape" (*Jiangjun chuxian* 将军出险), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 数 12, no. 432, 1895.

lamented that Liu was already in his later years during the Taiwan campaign and, lacking cooperation from his peers, it was inevitable that he would suffer defeat alongside them.[190] Both Liu Yongfu and the Shaolin Temple originated from non-state armed forces and carried associations with anti-Qing, Ming-restorationist organizations. After being incorporated by the Qing government, Liu's official career never prospered. It was not until his final years in Taiwan, where he faced defeat due to a lack of support from colleagues, that his story reached its conclusion. Although *Dianshizhai Pictorial* rarely criticized official affairs by name, it was undoubtedly aware of Liu Yongfu's situation in Taiwan. It is hard to imagine that this did not contribute to its disillusionment with the Qing government's military capabilities.

Amid this prevailing disappointment with the Qing government's military capabilities, *Dianshizhai Pictorial* increasingly featured reports on the martial arts prowess of civilian heroes. Even monks—long despised in the publication—and the martial strength of Shaolin Temple gradually entered the editors' field of vision. It was evident that the editorial team was attempting to place hope in these warrior monks. During the Qing dynasty, Shaolin's martial arts practice had gone underground. In the year following China's defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War and Liu Yongfu's retreat from Taiwan, *Dianshizhai Pictorial* published a story titled "Shaolin Reborn." After vividly depicting a scene where travelers witnessed monks in a temple in the mountains of Anhui demonstrating exceptional martial skills, the author specifically noted that a visitor said to the monk leading the training:

> Are all the brave warriors of the world gathered here? In these times of great hardship, we ought to preserve such talented men for the service of our nation—so that they may contribute their strength to the state, rather

[190] Ma Kefeng 马克锋, "Minguoshiqi liuyongfu minzuyingxiong xingxiangdesuzao" 民国时期刘永福民族英雄形象的塑造[Shaping of Liu Yongfu's National Hero Image in the Republic of China], *Journal of Qinzhou University* 33, no.6 (2018): 21.

than drift into lawlessness.[191]

The Qing government had always viewed Shaolin Temple's martial traditions and its monks with suspicion, believing they maintained ties with rebel forces. Moreover, official policy did not support monastic life. Although *Dianshizhai Pictorial* had consistently aligned itself with the Qing court, the defeat in the Sino-Japanese War prompted it to turn its attention toward armed forces that had long been regarded with official mistrust.

Meir Shahar has pointed out that modern readers would find it difficult to imagine the extent of suppression Shaolin Temple endured during the Qing dynasty, citing Shi Yongxin as a contrasting example. Shi Yongxin enjoys the full trust of the Communist government, shares a degree of political influence, and benefits from the immense economic value placed on Shaolin Temple. Related cultural products are highly popular, and Shaolin martial arts, recognized as a form of national arts (*guoshu* 国术), have gained acclaim both domestically and internationally.[192] From the coverage in *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, we can trace some of the missing links between the marginalization of Shaolin Temple and Buddhists during the Qing era and their prominent status in the contemporary era. It is also likely that the patriotic intellectuals of the Republican era, who were deeply concerned with their nation's fate, drew inspiration from this societal expectation toward folk martial traditions when creating their captivating martial arts novels.

---

[191] "Shaolin Reborn" (*Shaolin fusheng* 少林复生), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 忠 1, no. 457, 1896. For other examples praising the use of remaining Shaolin martial arts in resisting violent robbers, see "Shaolin tradition Lingering on" (*Shaolin shangzai* 少林尚在), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 贞 7, no. 523, 1898, and "Fight Before the Temple's Gate" (*Dada shanmen* 大打山门), *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 贞 11, no. 527, 1898. These news stories stand in stark contrast to earlier narratives such as "A Buddhist Monk and a Daoist Priest Brawl" and "Buddhist Robber" (*Chanmen bufa* 禅门不法, 未 8, no. 212, 1889), in which monks are portrayed as unstable or dangerous elements in society.

[192] Shahar, *The Shaolin Monastery*, 195-196.

Conclusion

This study has examined the discursive construction of gender and Buddhism in the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, tracing how a new class of writers in the foreign concessions articulated critiques of Buddhism through specific narrative strategies. A central finding is the periodical's systematic, negative portrayal of Buddhist clergy—ranging from insinuations to explicit accounts of clandestine sexual conduct, and even extending to the blaming of affluent Buddhist victims of theft. Within this general censure, however, a marked gendered disparity emerged: the non-elite male Confucian editors consistently treated female Buddhists with greater leniency than their male counterparts.

To understand this disparity, the analysis focused on three interrelated roles ascribed to late-Qing Buddhist nuns in the *Pictorial*. These representations, which subtly deviated from official and legal discourse, functioned as discursive repetitions of a constructed ideal. Prevailing gender norms positioned female Buddhists as "particular and internal" to the social order—their piety recognized only contingently, and they were often dismissed as ignorant women who had renounced secular life without understanding the consequences. In contrast, male Buddhists were framed as a "universal and external" social group, whose monastic status severed them from familial roles and exposed them to the most severe Confucian criticism. Although both genders faced censure, female Buddhists received notably more mitigated treatment.

These dynamics illustrate how norms are constitutive: the very act of repeating an ideal demarcation between "Self" and "Other" can activate previously suppressed possibilities. The late-Qing context—defined by military defeat, an unfavorable international environment, and the symbolic downfall of popular heroes like General Liu Yongfu—shifted public hope toward the latent

power of civilian martial arts. In this reconfigured symbolic landscape, the entrenched Confucian-Buddhist dynamic was challenged, opening a discursive space that allowed the previously maligned Buddhist clergy an opportunity for reputational rehabilitation.

Through this investigation, three primary Self/Other distinctions operative in the *Pictorial* have been delineated: Confucianism versus Buddhism, male (monks) versus female (nuns), and editors versus reported subjects. In this framework, the Self represented the dominant pole, while the Other constituted the subordinate. These distinctions operate across three distinct dimensions: national ideology, gender, and narrative. In terms of thematic content, the Confucian/Buddhist distinction was the most dominant in many of these reports, but this dynamic faced a significant challenge at the end of Chapter Three. In terms of practical execution, the narrative distinction (editors vs. subjects) ultimately governed all others, as the repetition of the ideal Confucian/Buddhist distinction is entirely dependent on editorial mediation. From this perspective, the relationship between Confucianism/Buddhism and editors/reported subjects parallels that between the soul and the body.

As Judith Butler contends, the body is essentially porous, its boundaries perpetually unsealed.[193] Consequently, the intelligible self—whether conceived as identity or subject—emerges as a fluid construct. The editors and the subjects depicted in the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* were both cultivated within and immersed in a world defined by the enduring dialectic between Confucianism and Buddhism. From this theoretical vantage point, the journal's narratives can thus be understood as a material embodiment of this tension, a transient instantiation within the *longue durée* of interaction between the two

[193] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, 2007), 181-182.

traditions. Refusing a pure Confucian or Buddhist stance, the *Pictorial* itself functioned as a porous site of negotiation, a discursive body that actively mediated between ideological poles.

The editors of the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* framed their narratives within a constructed Confucian-Buddhist dynamic, projecting an idealized gender distinction onto male and female Buddhists that was itself a pastiche of Confucian gender norms—which were, in turn, a pastiche of an ever-elusive ideal. Viewed through the biased lens of non-elite Confucianism, both monks and nuns were thus routinely cast in a negative light. Yet this very act of editorial reframing constituted a distinctive form of repetition, one that embodied both cultural domination and the potential for subversion.[194]

This reframing was not a one-sided process. While Buddhism selectively adapted to Confucian criteria by amplifying or suppressing certain of its own inherent possibilities, it never fully shed its status as the discursive "Other" in formal literati discourse, a persistence owed to its foreign origins. In the realm of everyday practice, however—as chronicled by the *Pictorial*—Buddhism functioned effectively as one of the Three Teachings, providing tangible solace and alternative moral frameworks. Significantly, even the *Pictorial*'s non-elite Confucian editors frequently invoked Buddhist allusions, a practice that reveals the porous and negotiated boundary between "Self" and "Other" in the social imaginary of late-Qing China.

Ultimately, because both "Self" and "Other" are discursively manufactured, the repetition meant to enforce their demarcation inevitably generates

[194] According to Amy Hollywood, theorists such as Derrida and Butler have helped reframe our understanding of the "misfiring of the performative." This misfiring may result from a performative act being applied to new contexts or extended to include new communities. Rather than merely signaling failure, such moments can thereby open up new possibilities within dominant discourses. (See Amy Hollywood, "Performativity, Citationality, Ritualization," in *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler*, ed. Ellen T. Armour and Susan M. St. Ville [New York: Columbia University Press, 2006], 252–69.)

adjustments and activates suppressed possibilities. The *Dianshizhai Pictorial* stands as a testament to this fluidity—a discursive body that mediated, negotiated, and, in the very act of repetition, opened new spaces for agency and reinterpretation in a time of profound transformation.

Appendix A. List of Figures from the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*

1.Figure 1: Wu Youru 吴友如. ”Nunnery Theft (尼庵被盗).” *Dianshizhai Pictorial*. 1884. Hantang Classic Archives: Modern Newspapers and Periodicals Database 瀚堂近代报刊数据库. Accessed December 5, 2025. https://elib.nblib.cn/SSO/goto/98/++9mdngxstmf9bnl/viewTextImgUD.htm?sid=bmMuXIT7f5adJ/P2iO4Ar74w5j7tgmeB1uY/QiwEDjKKJe5ec2DQPzg6vvnKjMyPkLUE8MK3fl2G0cythxaZFwSFEmRLCV7HLHRM08kR6OgWd/xzo5QXEC/6xLlBxGRdgGwZq6l58rXx8KJg1AHL3nUWZt1nMrA1Ry%2B2%2B9eg4l6CVBsnZtRnzljW7485ROBHbmNXny21gWNZ4RLXtgZwpipvUNTET7wyOeqnIuqd4Qfu/kuWRww1dzZbijjme8g8%2BpVc3y5ajikSzZwtR9wlrEYtHTPTF72MQJsPpII13H9unVdhc6nCMX55kmHeGFlBl9VNxAQOOkLmcgGhRDzXxkCdR5WCTmRUU6lnJMTzioL7BrysZO9/lUCRfeAR0RrJ

2.Figure 2: Fu Genxin 符艮心. “Soft and Sweet Bodies (香软红尘).” *Dianshizhai Pictorial*. 1886. Hantang Classic Archives: Modern Newspapers and Periodicals Database. Accessed December 5, 2025. https://elib.nblib.cn/SSO/goto/98/++9mdngxstmf9bnl/viewTextImgUD.htm?sid=bmMuXIT7f5adJ/P2iO4Arx5s05t3kLaodj1Ggx8%2BLoIHri7oN3eDl4lGB3dvF9Clx6FMDjCLOIaZ3sGgGmLqr/CWFojcMMVhjxL4Rbxwo13tHxHE00GNyAZfliVJ/rQDjPkl77cOLt8HJbqDe%2BYTRn5N52WCQCxO0kmswz61uxWmCH8NTVBTwvlBB2tHHXSEsOT72rbPsBXf7J0zDATegXKSm/1nGKxCiYcNGoyON10FavPNMg/pjgAPtd1xZzDLL0WTBpTcnkhB3yfpUB8yP/P9Y5ETMZyvegyFtlH5EvSpdPorSKCGBcLTGkKOGCFPivNctc0FgHqWPOOKDZ3/%2BF/ZkIPHO%2BhOnoVoXCC0frS01IclWoQvUzmZA2fwsQV%2B

3.Figure 3: Xueming 学明. “Frightened Miaochang (吓死妙常).” *Dianshizhai Pictorial*. 1886. Hantang Classic Archives: Modern Newspapers and Periodicals Database. Accessed December 5, 2025. https://elib.nblib.cn/SSO/goto/98/++9mdngxstmf9bnl/viewTextImgUD.htm?sid=bmMuXIT7f5adJ/P2iO4Ar%2BLvlC3/KE81NqkynnMDbbaMvUEsNkv1QRpx6L%2BaW2J4gdLe%2BhA5lVBJbM0nZl71v4kGH6mSsUldJoAaJf0iCiVMEQ8f

R6YzOQIDAt6A%2BBqXhCDjItz2M5NzE7w9tcqsZAALPDRR4Iu5M828r/aam
LxwMUbn2f2P3tWbzvqgnZjp8S%2B0yLCStfpWOIuqYz/M31n8a/drRqWWaIm
VrqgyYVOnTla%2BxmQyIK3nSwwm8nw3ybR8hULfoL1le//GOfd90dXbjCPm
R5RP2c39MVnvtapWlndrg%2BsWmjoTvAmqvsQCLb8uGPS5iIXqBrcbvUl6s
mPxW0y6Iay8nJdFpjqnbY37vMoPSwutLTe5YPvopGYe

4.Figure 4: Jin Chanxiang 金蟾香. “Disturbance in Nunnery (尼庵滋事).” *Dianshizhai Pictorial*. 1886. Hantang Classic Archives: Modern Newspapers and Periodicals Database. Accessed December 5, 2025. https://elib.nblib.cn/SSO/goto/98/++9mdngxstmf9bnl/viewTextImgUD.htm?sid=bmMuXIT7f5adJ/P2iO4Ar0N/uwNhDlDwG%2BWpag5uQkaEHfwcC7/dA8Qu7SPQsGWfONR8jgfAPzi5xpoAfUbHmKsOoW4dqoVycXsKU23ibud6FnBIrd1skfXjlz31ykvEmLhnvVQ9N4PeqYM%2Bn8p2UeI1rN7MdQk3sdMUOs1Mgok2FZAHvwi3riZCcgvmWCUBaVUymiJU%2BYyqSI5fZMTYPnRExDBG94n/LLvIFCfvHVVPb67/nbEctZmKjP/rMyK8mrqZlEJeoivNBzvEs%2BqLlenzhCnIkxZqHtXDgItVogkmjNZYf7k16s8FZjJw6Ocxci6uAUdZK%2B3WgjftRgsw8nF1lly6oxawHOMiYYsA7JwmK3P4LXagCmg2crGanpW1

5.Figure 5: Zhou Muqiao 周慕乔. “Tempting Wealth and Beauty (财色涎人).” *Dianshizhai Pictorial*. 1884. Hantang Classic Archives: Modern Newspapers and Periodicals Database. Accessed December 5, 2025. https://elib.nblib.cn/SSO/goto/98/++9mdngxstmf9bnl/viewTextImgUD.htm?sid=bmMuXIT7f5adJ/P2iO4Ar%2BCRcgvJHhmXgafWMGLtYqmRY3CQFaBitvS24IUmwVpUYE8PWQOEj5/gKMZONLkFW/rn8CLICoda/8IyUWe236uq34s7nku8KveOdpv1ts%2Bk6SSu1mXqJbQ0XDS/xIk2tQjoxNkhwyT7hG9xI8zBHcYIAQnuXYPr%2B4uIySo5UF6O%2BVuSbIiA6g%2BZFV1QgYMau5HDS/hAOEIK66BSbFoB9A1UT70HzkY/kz4AeOuyt/OFmKEk8or/3VLROq/Bt5%2BjEKQuKMr2wnmYjy7AMwpJjW1JQ2zLT/liG2P6Wq/ZpNggqo4ybur1Oe9rYpSxcSdYD3kVl%2Bf0nszGeAodd/upDjq9csLNXWkhDYfEE6tO/9Bv

6.Figure 6: Jin Chanxiang 金蟾香. “The Young Nun’s Heroic Bravery (少尼神勇).” *Dianshizhai Pictorial*. 1894. Hantang Classic Archives: Modern Newspapers and Periodicals Database. Accessed December 5, 2025.

https://elib.nblib.cn/SSO/goto/98/++9mdngxstmf9bnl/viewTextImgUD.htm?sid=bmMuXIT7f5adJ/P2iO4Ar3HYdylcJv9UHEyAazxBbspbJ9ju%2BCg5YG4HsBk1LdxFhmv4fYzK%2Ba%2BBhejXVu9ppENzXcPc42MGqTXpGiLAYGpW5PlgWxA0A%2BfGmjEPv9VaSCQzV3Q9vGIUVrcgJ/g58qjZ4NHpliWolse8RzC%2B0fqAeVlMY%2BKO8KYetSA%2Bgh1Hek8MU0onavYzoJpFkutTme6d514g75AizvmwmpcU0IZ2%2BAV4Td2kZku6tqu8oLZMn%2B0jtpMDpd30QwOCdvoGz6O5RsVdF/HA8w/4RmY%2BdYreRSi6RIgh8dia7p9r1uwXqWdTW%2Bq993vNwkulx2usEyGB3eNfXVTbXWC5r6nWPOoOnxr3GOY/FOc3nxxSz1XC

7.Figure 7: Fu Genxin 符艮心. “Preaching Lust in Buddha’s Land (佛地宣淫).” *Dianshizhai Pictorial*. 1890. Hantang Classic Archives: Modern Newspapers and Periodicals Database. Accessed December 5, 2025. https://elib.nblib.cn/SSO/goto/98/++9mdngxstmf9bnl/viewTextImgUD.htm?sid=bmMuXIT7f5adJ/P2iO4Ar/h0AfyVbwsfaId/nQdioWORbgkLvqWFg8kjICAhNeR0HJB%2BmcNMY0WHXFYtTSizJgdYryhS5Q5HhU3oi550/eeLTDOkedOU09uBt5%2BPlb/wSJxveVLf90K8YfvFGgxSAQg9Ha%2BKy2qZUs2rD7eij3TlQTbCQoUS0skmbc3ZhbQ4SVGuSK/aqfbxU7/VrUFOD3TTO5b%2BR05bbjG2pnmKel9ZRBmBh2HzHU39nkBCdaD8XUhkFbFPvjAtJ6Ow4VeVMNk2fWMU3GJBacfmpPCCHfpRky%2BlqteGPU/6W7bmWu2vKjJHN/pxXv5hYOWW6sRLB8LcT9ulwGA4cGllZRCiZxs6f%2BmTDePG71T/yzdm6T0u

8.Figure 8: Zhang Zhiying 张志瀛. “Green Bean Chamber Revelation (青豆房开).” *Dianshizhai Pictorial*. 1889. Hantang Classic Archives: Modern Newspapers and Periodicals Database. Accessed December 5, 2025. https://elib.nblib.cn/SSO/goto/98/++9mdngxstmf9bnl/viewTextImgUD.htm?sid=bmMuXIT7f5adJ/P2iO4Ar8W4TW0MrKcGiDeF1XJTJa9FUpxUQOspuOU5dvibJzGsrtg6Ks0Et9VxIWLhzxdb%2BilAxOtxfg7BONwXUrwcEPmn%2Bupnjs5dWgCK9Aw6JxPM3gaIlyxJve8nSHRQLRuxMQ4y12pp1tW5jbI1h9S/CIO8slsgEMcriaBAthrLbaGagqFvwHZ9HNVejo1yHTM/UGNWFAQQPzdmTMBgKhtqhTX%2BWvlt9QPpXAZYIeNAl3qzXWx1ztAJ5ekmgI%2BIE6WYdAW%2B82eTfGcHI%2BVo8RmLPG2AQfi4L7nTOO5nTRtbrB%2BjV/5Yq6/vi7rM6oTXMqKIFTGXglu2LHDLo1hdp11eKpVV55pdEi%2BTpWwHuWtDqHU3

9.Figure 9: Zhang Zhiying 张志瀛. “Doomed by Destiny (实命不犹).” *Dianshizhai Pictorial*. 1889. Hantang Classic Archives: Modern Newspapers and Periodicals Database. Accessed December 5, 2025. https://elib.nblib.cn/SSO/goto/98/++9mdngxstmf9bnl/viewTextImgUD.htm?sid=bmMuXIT7f5adJ/P2iO4Arz2NfUD0LsnS9agajLz4WjUTlcS8QKDkY9/r1aOWkshprBVICKvR6078yZz0uS1tRoulpDJIparv%2Bl4yFU4Rdh2o%2BaxGPQpPUDe0Onx7xcWXz8fKoLSmgRUrNChKbga4BoI1ckbcGlJtwD8o5/RvsbZRaYO/mybEZjkQJzY9iTjhWjLEmp%2BnXnkQJDEEVTEvlt2Ea5%2BJOY5fQnkhcz9F2I5a7mU/KWx%2BknKl4edq5j9Cm/0/noDXgut4/olZIMJUU5aL0rs1b4B9UpzsdXqDKYqCmz5UKl8cPEoPTIwGeP9%2B4MDyFHkwlwxQ1A42tnvWMKbVBjJXhVQgO/JotZ9U27SHzFwB5gnnTZOMM42n/VEj

10.Figure 10: Fu Genxin 符艮心. “Theft of the Golden Snake (盗窃金蛇).” *Dianshizhai Pictorial*. 1887. Hantang Classic Archives: Modern Newspapers and Periodicals Database. Accessed December 5, 2025. https://elib.nblib.cn/SSO/goto/98/++9mdngxstmf9bnl/viewTextImgUD.htm?sid=bmMuXIT7f5adJ/P2iO4Ar6YUMGYCziC/DeJqUG4eDvBCDCqQzI6E43DJGH67eW204ES/A4Ln9mv6t%2Bdk%2BWGhsQn68B9dHk3lb8C6e5WF7bCI3vyIffDzR7xWpu4dZzfm6jkB3fDLln8f3GuqqZYmiHOa0kC9cARSXnuJOEKVI7HKbNT/YQ7msdNyGlaxZcPGBpectgdlbi5zdiD3bn1LsSrrzjrx%2BBfCvmqN08zCcOis0IShqDpawH/%2BoBRSnNGlJt1n25XScYcYypIkYK3Egic/LJdhFOO7W6i/eH1VfTn/Ujaunfyc8Qx6Uz%2B7cq64Z6NiKXwOV1oDgsJ5LXxC1fZpTQFhAT28jG9VtlNZWAuDflikvf0TcqQMJyDCeYgH

Appendix B. Original Chinese Texts

Note 12, pp. 9: 我们不信仰佛教，也不认为佛教宣传的是真理。但是我们认为佛教的产生和发展，有它的社会根源，思想根源……它所指出的解脱道路是假的，它所反映的当时的社会苦难却是真的……几千年来的佛教信奉者是受害者。他们信仰虔诚，态度严肃，真心相信佛教可以帮助摆脱现实苦难。他们的行为虽不足效法，但他们成为宗教的俘虏是值得同情的，放在一定的社会历史条件来看待这一现象，是完全可以理解的。我们也还要指出宣传佛教的人们中间确有一些利用佛教作为工具谋取私利的，历代封建统治者确曾利用佛教麻痹人民的反抗意志。

Note 19, pp. 11-12: 孝子慈孙，虑亡人身后获冥谴，冀藉佛力以资超度，固也，虽然，佛非今之和尚也，而和尚者，则固冻馁之孑遗，而孤苦之极品也。世人忘其孤苦，与佛等视，一似冥福之权，惟和尚是操，而使福德具备之家之祖宗，转于至孤极苦之人之吻喙而是赖，天下宁有是理乎。

Note 60, pp. 28-29: 嘉郡普信庵香火素盛，庵尼著有富名。无赖辈涎之久矣。八月十三夜，特纠匪党十数人，面敷五色，往庵行劫。倾筐倒箧，约计千金。他庵某尼寄宿庵中，亦预是祸。庵尼恐遭物议，遂隐忍之而不敢鸣官焉。夫《易》不云乎？慢藏悔（sic., it should be “诲”.）盗。今人间抚有千金，犹不免抱火厝薪，寝食不安之虑，况受菩萨之戒，为清净之依，乃复尘垢未离，满储阿堵。是非夙敦苦节，安能免于降殃哉！象齿焚身，其亦自贻之戚乎！

Note 69, pp. 33: 尼而兼妓，江浙两省多有之……不蓄发，而四周茸茸覆额被颈，即世所谓刘海顶也者。

Note 70, pp. 33: 客至可茗话，可筵宴，身价颇自高，求欢好须极亲密而不吝多金。

Note 71, pp. 33-34: 嘉兴女尼，自昔著称，效摩登伽摄阿难故事者不少。元之

慧秀，明之娟娘、惠容，皆以能诗善画闻。五百年来，流风未沫。鸳鸯湖畔，禅宇颇多。禾俗七夕，烟雨楼游人，挟妓之外，有挈尼而游者。其著称于城中者，曰观音堂，曰送子庵。

Note 75, pp. 35:佛门原清净之区，岂可纳污藏垢，女僧以修行为愿，乌容卖俏诲淫。乃访闻锡金、太湖等处尼庵，有所谓师姑者，妄托香火因缘，居然青楼面目，招引少年子弟，尽入迷途。顿教禅院庄严，化为秽地。伤风败俗，端人咸切痛心；亵渎神灵，菩萨亦当怒目。甚而酿成命案，尤应严速驱除。札司即便妥派廉洁干员，会同厅县，将锡金有名各庵，并太湖等庵，清查封闭，妥令该尼还俗从良。庶几慧剑一挥，情魔永断，不独众生免沉孽海，即舍利亦放光明。所有屋宇租石，一概归入义学，如有劣幕劣衿从中庇阻，并即一体严办，其书差人等，尤不准藉端滋扰，致干严咎。

Note 77, pp. 36: 尼姑之撮头大矣哉。每逢观音地藏药师等诞辰则起忏会，纠斗纷金，邀请施主之内眷吃面摆斋，并出卖经卷冥镪，甚至亦会念材经，修大悲。施主有素事则备精致蔬果往送，收寄孩子做徒弟，相帮大户人家翻丝棉衣服，分斋馒头、化雨雪粮、送腊八粥，募化灯油及各器皿，斗造百家，欢门帷幔，无一非取钱手段，然而人之甘受其撮者，总缘善念为辞也。

Note 80, pp. 38: 乃前日本埠老丹桂戏园夜演时来一和尚，手摇雕扇，身服罗襦，高坐正厅，妄谈时事，嗣又唤到一妓，就坐其旁，以遨以嬉，相偎相倚，种种丑态，不可描摹。夫原其出家之始，必其父母生而不能育，穷而无所归也。不然，历尽艰苦，厌履尘嚣，薙去头毛，期清心地；又不然，身犯巨案，遁入空门，匿迹销声，视生如死，从未有忘却本来，绝无忌惮，荒淫谬妄，至于如此之极者。是直人妖而已矣。有司官宜确切访拿，置诸站笼中，以著罪恶而昭炯戒。

Note 81, pp. 38-39: 女子生而愿为之有家。有之云者，言梱所归也。乃反乎有家之常而偏为出家之想。或者所夭早丧，膝下无依，寄迹空门，余生断送，心

迹非不清也。而旁观者尤讥以不出闺门之套话也。况乎以待字年华，强销磨于暮鼓晨钟之地哉！松郡乡间一女子，年十七八，自言堪破红尘，祝发于西门外之福庵。四大空耶，六根净耶，心其死灰耶，形其槁木耶，然耶否耶，其自言之而自信之耶？

Note 85, pp. 41: 夫僧尘缘未断，易滋事，而嫉俗过深者，亦不免生意外忧，好教我左右做人难！

Note 87, pp. 42: 人闻和尚食肉，每不齿，予谓和尚仅仅食肉，犹非恶之甚者，可以恕。请观今之和尚，吸鸦片、偷老婆，无恶不为，且将出俗家人之上，降格以求，则食肉转在可恕之例矣。杭省之昭庆寺，寺规颇严，有犯规者禀方丈，无论为常住僧、为挂单僧，查有证据，斥逐即随之。日前城内荐桥大街有该寺募缘僧，毅然入肉铺购肉二斤，将出，被一丐僧揪住不释手，或戏之曰：僧赞僧，佛法兴，何计之左也？丐僧曰不然，予因此获戾，发难即彼也。翘人之过而护己之短。幸我佛有灵，适被撞见，誓不休。扭结而去。嗟乎！生今之世，责人以君子而自待不妨不肖者，触目而皆是，两僧何足责焉！

Note 88, pp. 43: 金台某院一雏伎，以桃李姿挟冰霜性，受逼不任，饮毒死。鸨惧其事之觉也。秘尸于衾中，雇小车送荒野以埋之。亦既一人不觉矣。抵煤市，突一僧觑之，破止厥车，以鸣于官。发尸究凶，罪如律。碧血埋来，黯青天之一片；白毫放去，洞黑狱之三千。诚如此僧也，虽曰预俗事，不亦可乎！

Note 90, pp. 44: 僧以方外人而管此间事，未免太煞风景。要知我佛多情，正是慈悲极处。

Note 97, pp. 47: 男女好合之私，圣人弗禁。同居生生气化中，岂能外此洪炉之鼓铸，但非闲之以礼，则与禽兽奚择哉！

Note 99, pp. 48: 何该尼既已堪破红尘，而犹不得慈云庇护耶？

Note 111, pp. 57: 朝朝江上望，错认几人船？闺中怨望之情，何等专一。女子适夫，以夫为天，苟非有甚不满于其夫者，必不自外于其夫。不自外而至于不能不外度其夫，必有所可外者，而妇乃从而外之。不观前月津郡一事乎？津郡之某甲，操舟以为业，终年不一归。即归亦匆匆出门去，其妇不能为柏舟操，遂有外好。夫知之，伪托为游云梦之汉高祖，而于夜半返身掩入，两杀之而自首。北方风气刚劲，且以好汉自居，然而无足取也。小家妇乌知义理，终年离索，而防范又不早为之地，是不啻俟其人欲之横流而罔之也。正不得以其自首而曲恕之也。

Note 116, pp. 59-60: 中冓之言，人人羞之，即有涵养深沉者，犯之不狡，唾之不拭，试诋以帷簿不修，未有不勃然怒，奋然起者，一顶绿头巾，送遍天下人，皆不合头寸也。嘉兴魏塘镇人某妻虽村妇，颇解风情，夫则胼手胝足，惟以百亩之不易为己忧。怜香惜玉，非所素谙。一日，从田间来见，有人自房中逸出，其快如飞，某寻思良久，忽然大悟，忿不可遏，以刈草具斫妻至死。有不直于妇死者，为之说曰：牛郎织女，亦农家者流也。鹊桥把袂，何等缠绵，尚且支机片石，私赠张公，况某之体态温柔，又万不及牛郎者乎？

Note 129, pp. 65: 妇当怕者三，初娶之时，端居若菩萨，岂有人不怕菩萨耶。既长生男女，如养儿大虫，岂有人不怕大虫耶。年老面皱，如鸠盘荼鬼，岂有人不怕鬼耶。以此怕妇，亦何怪焉。

Note 130, pp. 67-68: 僧人犯戒，罄竹难书，本斋有闻必录者，非不知数见不鲜也，亦以见佛法渺茫，皈依无益，使愚夫愚妇或知猛省，不然何头陀之凶悍不能化为我佛之慈悲耶？

Note 131, pp. 68: 尼庵中清修练行者固不乏人，而有借清净地结欢喜缘。

Note 132, pp. 68: 夫妇女入庙烧香最干物议，无如佞佛之性牢不可破，其诚心皈依者虽不乏人，而藉为口实阴与寺僧结欢喜缘者亦所在多有。

Bibliography

Bergère, Marie-Claire. “The Dianshizhai Pictorial: Shanghai Urban Life, 1884-1898.” *The China Journal (Canberra, A.C.T.)*, no.52(2004): 215-216.

Birnbaum, Raoul. “Buddhist China at the Century’s Turn.” *The China Quarterly* 174 (2003): 428–50.

Brook, Timothy. *The Chinese State in Ming Society*. Oxford: Taylor & Francis Group, 2004.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex.”* Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 2nd Edition. Oxford: Routledge, 2007.

Cai Shangsi 蔡尚思. “Ruxue feizongjiao er qile zongjiao de zuoyong” 儒学非宗教而起了宗教的作用 [Though Not A Religion, Confucianism Has Served the Purpose of One]. *Literature, History and Philosophy*, no.3 (1998): 34.

Cassel, Pär Kristoffer. *Grounds of Judgment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Chan Sin-wai. *Buddhism in Late Ch’ing Political Thought*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1985.

Chen Pingyuan 陈平原 and Xiaohong Xia 夏晓红. *Tuxiang wanqing* 图像晚清 [Images of the Late Qing]. Beijing: Dongfang Press, 2014.

Chen Yuan 陈垣. *Qingchusengzhengji* 清初僧诤记 [Records of Monastic Debates in the Early Qing Dynasty]. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1989.

Dianshizhai Pictorial. Daketang. Shanghai: Shanghaihuabao chubanshe, 2001.

Dong, Madeleine Y. “Reviews of Books:The Dianshizhai Pictorial: Shanghai Urban Life, 1884-1898, Ye Xiaoqing.” *The American Historical Review* 110, no.1 (2005): 113–14.

Elverskog, Johan. *Our Great Qing: The Mongols, Buddhism and the State in*

Late Imperial China. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006.

Fan Ye 范晔. *Houhanshu* 后汉书[Book of the Later Han]. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1965.

Fu Dixiu 伏涤修. "*Yuzan ji* benshi yu lanben bianyi" 《玉簪记》本事与蓝本辨疑 [The Classical Tale and The Original Version of *Yuzan Ji*]. *Journal of National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts* 33, no.2 (2012): 13-19.

Guo Chengwei 郭成伟 edit. *Daqing luli genyuan* 大清律例根原. Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House, 2012.

Guo Qiyong 郭齐勇. "Ruxue: rushide renwende youjuyou zongjiaoxing pingede jingshen xingtai" 儒学：入世的人文的又具有宗教性品格的精神形态 [Confucianism: A World-Engaging Humanistic Tradition Yet Imbued with Religious Characteristics]. *Literature, History and Philosophy*, no.3 (1998): 35-37.

He Shengli 何胜莉. "Suogu pusa kao—jianlun tangmi guanniande wenxue jieshou"锁骨菩萨考——兼论唐密观念的文学接受 [The Chained Bones Bodhisattva: A Study with an Analysis of the Literary Reception of Tang Esoteric Buddhist Concepts], *Forum on Chinese Culture*, no.1 (2012): 43-48.

Heirman, Ann and Mathieu Torck. *A Pure Mind in a Clean Body: Bodily Care in the Buddhist Monasteries of Ancient India and China*. Gent: Ginkgo Academia Press, 2012.

Hershatter, Gail. *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Shanghai*. University of California Press, 1992.

Hollywood, Amy. "Performativity, Citationality, Ritualization." In *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler*, edited by Ellen T. Armour and Susan M. St. Ville. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.

Huang, Philip C.C. *Civil Justice in China: Representation and Practice in the Qing*. Stanford University Press, 1996.

Huang Xiongyi 黄雄义. "Qingdai fadian bianzuan linian zhiyange yixingdian

weizhongxin dekaocha”清代法典编纂理念之沿革——以刑典为中心的考察 [The Evolution of the Compilation Concept of the Qing Code: A Study Centered on the Penal Code]. *Law Review* 41, no. 3 (2023): 187-196.

Ji Xianlin 季羡林. “Ruxue? Rujiao?” 儒学？儒教？[Confucianism? Confucian Religion?]. *Literature, History and Philosophy* 文史哲, no.3 (1998): 33.

Jiang Tingting 江婷婷. “Huimie yuchongsheng—jindai Zhongguo miaochanxingxue fengchaopingshu” 毁灭与重生——近代中国“庙产兴学”风潮评述[Destruction and Nirvana—on the Phenomenon of Confiscating Temple Property as General School Education in Modern China]. *Journal of HIT (Social Sciences Edition)* 14, no.3 (2012): 100-105.

Jiang Weiqiao 蒋维乔. *Zhongguo fojiao shi* 中国佛教史 [History of Chinese Buddhism]. Wuhan: Wuhan University Press, 2012.

Jiangsu shengli chubian 江苏省例初编.1869.

Jones, William C. *The Great Qing Code. Oxford University Press*, 1994.

Judge, Joan. *The Precious Raft of History: the Past, the West, and the Woman Question in China*. Stanford University Press, 2008.

Katz, Paul R. and Vincent Goossaert. *The Fifty Years That Changed Chinese Religion, 1898-1949*. Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, Inc., 2021.

Köhle, Natalie. “Why Did the Kangxi Emperor Go to Wutai Shan? Patronage, Pilgrimage, and the Place of Tibetan Buddhism at the Early Qing Court.” *Late Imperial China* 29, no. 1 (2008): 73–119.

Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*. New York: Basic Books, 1999.

Lerner, Melvine J. *The Belief in a Just World: A Fundamental Delusion*. New York: Springer, 1980.

Li Fang 李昉. *Taiping Guangji* 太平广记. Beijing: Unity Press, 2022.

Li Guilian 李贵连. *Jindai Zhongguo fazhi yufaxue* 近代中国法制与法学 [Modern Chinese Legal System and Legal Studies]. Peking University Press, 2002.

Li Ling 李零. *Zhongguo fangshu kao* 中国方术考 [An Investigation on Chinese Occult Practices]. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2019.

Li Ling 李零. *Zhongguo fangshu xukao* 中国方术续考 [Supplementary Investigations into Chinese Occult Practices]. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2019.

Li Ruoxi 李若熙 and Shumei Ding 丁淑梅. "Hanzu yushaoshuminzu 'niulangzhinü' gushimuti degongtongyishi" 汉族与少数民族"牛郎织女" 故事母题的共同意识[Research on Shared Consciousness between Han and Ethnic Minorities Reflected in the Motif of the Cowherd and the Weaver Girl]. *Journal of Ethnology* 12, no.5 (2021): 75-82.

Lin Hsueh-Yi. "Into Buddhism, Yet Hardly an Escape: Monk Dangui and the High Qing Censorship against Him." *Journal of Chinese History* (2025): 1–22.

Liu Xuekai 刘学锴 and Shucheng Yu 余恕诚, *Lishangyin shigejijie* 李商隐诗歌集解 [Collected Annotations of Li Shangyin's Poetry]. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2004.

Lü Min (Marianne Bujard) and Kang Lu (Luca Gabbiani) eds. *Xianghuo xinyuan: Ming Qing zhi Minguo shiqi Zhongguo chengshi de simiao yu shimin* 香火新缘：明清至民国时期中国城市的寺庙与市民 [The Temple and its Actors: Religious Institutions and Urban Communities in China from the Ming and Qing Dynasties to the Republican Era]. Beijing: Zhongxin chuban jituan, 2018.

Ma Jianshi 马建石 and Yutang Yang 杨育棠 eds. *Daqing lüli tongkao jiaozhu* 大清律例通考校注 [Comprehensive Examination and Annotations on *the Great Qing Code*]. Beijing: China University of Political Science and Law Press,1992.

Ma Kefeng 马克锋. "Minguoshiqi liuyongfu minzuyingxiong xingxiangdesuzao" 民国时期刘永福民族英雄形象的塑造 [Shaping of Liu Yongfu's National Hero Image in the Republic of China]. *Journal of Qinzhou University* 33, no.6 (2018): 19-25, 34.

Ma Tianxiang 麻天祥. *Wanqing foxue yu jindai shehui sichao* 晚清佛学与近代社会思潮 [Late Qing Buddhism and Modern Social Thought]. Taiwan Gaoxiong County: Foguangshan Foundation for Buddhist Culture and Education, 2001.

Peng Xinwei 彭信威. *Zhongguo huobi shi* 中国货币史 [A History of Chinese Currency]. Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1958.

Qiu Gaoxing 邱高兴. "Qingdai fojiao yanjiu xiankuang" 清代佛教研究现况 [Current Research Status of Buddhism in the Qing Dynasty]. *Pumen xuebao* 16 (2003): 311-22.

Qi Xuejiao 漆雪娇 and Wu Ping 吴平. "Dianshizhai huabao bianjitese yanjiu" 《点石斋画报》编辑特色研究 [A Study on the Editorial Features of Dianshizhai Pictorial]. *Publishing Research*. no. 12 (2018): 111-113.

Reed, Christopher A. "Re/Collecting the Sources: Shanghai's 'Dianshizhai Pictorial' and Its Place in Historical Memories, 1884-1949." *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 12, no. 2 (2000): 44–71.

Ren Jiyu 任继愈. *Zhongguo fojiao shi* 中国佛教史 [A History of Chinese Buddhism]. Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1993.

Shahar, Meir. *The Shaolin Monastery: History, Religion and the Chinese Martial Arts*. Honolulu: Hawaii University Press, 2008.

Sheng Kai. "Buddhist Faith and Lifestyles in the Ming and Qing Dynasties", *In A History of Chinese Buddhist Faith and Life*, (Leiden: Brill, 2020)

Sommer, Matthew H. *Sex, Law and Society in Late Imperial China*. Stanford University Press, 2002.

Song Nianshen. "'Those Ridiculous Monks': The Failed Encounter between Korea and Tibetan Buddhism in Qing Mukden", *Inner Asia* 25, no. 2 (2023): 206-226.

Tang Sang 唐桑, Xiangyu Tang 唐湘雨, and Junhui Gong 龚军慧. "Wuyazhong shiqi liuyongfu shishikao"吴亚终时期刘永福史事考" [On Liu Yongfu's History in Period of Wu Yazhong]. *Journal of Qinzhou University* 34, no. 2 (2019): 34-37.

Thurma, Robert A. F. trans. *The Virmalakirit Sutra*. The Pennsylvania State University, 1976.

Tuotuo 脱脱, et al., *Songshi* 宋史. Zhonghua Book Company, 1977.

Wagner, Rudolf G. *Joining the Global Public: Word, Image, and City in Early Chinese Newspapers, 1870-1910*. Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press, 2007.

Wang Ronghuang, and Chen Wanqing. “A Study on the Funerals of the Han Buddhist Monks of Lingnan during the Late Qing Dynasty via the Haichuang Temple in Guangzhou”, *Religions (Basel, Switzerland)* 14, no. 7 (2023) 924. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14070924.

Wang Zijin 王子今. “Zhangqian ‘fucha’ gushide shengcheng yuchuanbo” 张骞“浮槎”故事的生成与传播 [‘Floating across the River by a Raft’: The Creation and Circulation of the Legend about Zhang Qian]. *Literature, History and Philosophy* 文史哲, no.1 (2023): 74-81, 166.

Xiao Bo 肖波. “Congqianniu daoniulang: niulangchuanshuo desigechuanbocengmian” 从牵牛到牛郎——牛郎传说的四个传播层面[From Altair to Cowboy —The Four Spread Level of the Cowboy Legend]. *Journal of Yangtze University (Social Sciences)* 34, no. 8 (2011): 1-6.

Xü Yue 徐跃. “Congpaidi fojiao daotichang fojiao: yiqingmo zhangjianweizhu detaolun” 从排诋佛教到提倡佛教——以清末民初张謇为主的讨论 [From Criticism to Advocacy: A Discussion Centered on Zhang Jian in the Late Qing and Early Republic Period]. *Modern Chinese History Studies*, no.2(2013): 65-78.

Yang Huidan 杨慧丹. “Guaizihelai: Dianshizhai Huabao dezhiguaituxiangchanshi jiqi kuawenhuashuxing”怪自何来？——《点石斋画报》的志怪图像阐释及其跨文化属性[Where the Weird Being Started: The Illustration and Intercultural Attribute of Mystery Images In Dianshizhai Huabao]. *Meishu*, no.3 (2019): 95-100.

Ye Xiaoqing. *The Dianshizhai Pictorial: Shanghai Urban Life, 1884-1898*. Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, the University of Michigan, 2003.

Yee, Edmond. “Yuzan Ji: Evolution, Legacy and Criticism.” *CHINOPERL: Journal of Chinese Oral & Performing Literature* 20, no. 1 (1997): 45–69.

Yü Chün-fang. *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara*. Columbia University Press, 2001.

Yü, Ying-shihHG and Michael S Duke. *Chinese History and Culture*, New York Chichester. West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2017.

Zhang Dainian 张岱年. “Ruxue yu rujiao” 儒学与儒教[Confucianism and Confucian Religion]. *Literature, History and Philosophy*, no.3 (1998): 32-33.

Zhang Yue 张越 and Jiang Zeng 曾江. “Shilun fojiao jingjisixiangdui Zhongguo jingjilunli deyingxiang——jianlunqi Zhongguohua fazhan”试论佛教经济思想对中国经济伦理的影响——兼论其中国化发展[On the Influence of Buddhist Economic Thought on Chinese Economic Ethics—with a Concurrent Discussion on Its Sinicization]. *Journal of University of Jinan (Social Science Edition)* 30, no.6 (2020): 97-106.

Zhang Zhidong 张之洞. *Quanxuepian* 劝学篇[Exhortation to Learning]. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2018.

Zürcher, Erik. “Middle-Class Ambivalence: Religious Attitudes in the Dianshizhai huabao.” *Études chinoises (Paris)* 13, no. 1 (1994): 109–43.