

Poet-Nun of Nanyue: The Mountain Poems of Jizong Xingche (b. 1606)

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Located in central Hunan province, Nanyue 南岳, also known as Hengshan 衡山, is a range of mountains (traditionally said to be comprised of 72 peaks) running north to south parallel with the Xiang 湘 River. In the words of the fifth-century literatus Xu Lingqi 徐靈期 (?-474), Nanyue “encompasses 800 *li*, [is] 4,010 *zhang* high, has seventy-two peaks, ten caverns, fifteen cliffs, thirty-eight springs, twenty-five streams, nine ponds, nine swamps and nine wells. To the southeast it descends to the Xiang River. Looked at from afar, it resembles an army of clouds.”¹ Not only has it long been known for its natural scenic beauty, Nanyue has also long been regarded by Buddhists and Daoists alike as a “particularly efficacious site for engaging in religious practices.”² To give just a few examples, Nanyue was associated with such important religious figures as Lady Wei 魏夫人, the deified incarnation of Wei Huacun 魏華存 (252-334); Huisi 慧思 (515-577), the leading authority on the Lotus Sutra who later taught Zhiyi 智顗 (538-597), the founder of the Tiantai school of Buddhism; and early Chan Buddhist masters such as Nanyue Huairang 南嶽懷讓 (677-744) and Shitou 石頭希遷 (700-790).

Nanyue also appears to have a close connection with the development of Chan poetry and the emergence of Chan poet-monks. James Robson notes the late Tang shift within Chan Buddhist circles from using poems instead of robe and bowl as symbols of dharma-transmission, and suggests that many of the new poet-monks of this period “were either associated with Nanyue or were disciples of Shitou’s.”³ Perhaps the most well-known of these was Qiji 齊己 (fl. 881), who was native of Hunan and felt such a special affinity for Nanyue that he styled himself the “Sramana of Hengyue” (Hengyue shami 衡岳沙彌). Nearly eight centuries later, among the large selection of poems composed by eminent monks and distinguished literati collected in official sources such as the *Nanyue zhi* 南岳誌 (Nanyue Gazetteer) of 1774 and the *Hengshan xianzhi* 衡山縣志 (Hengshan County

Gazetteer) of 1823, we find the only examples written by a woman. She is Jizong Xingche 季總行轍 (b. 1606), a Hunan native who later came to be designated as an official Chan master and dharma successor of Linji Chan master Wanru Tongwei 萬如通微 (1594-1657). Although her life as a Chan master and abbess was spent largely in the Suzhou area, her personal and spiritual connection with Nanyue was such that her biographical notice in the *Wudeng quanshu* 五燈全書 (The Complete Book of the Five Lamps) of 1697 refers to her as the “Nun of Nanyue” (Nanyue ni 南嶽尼). Of particular interest is the fact that her mountain poems, and more specifically, her poems on the Nanyue mountains, comprise up to nearly a third of the approximately one hundred poems included in her four *juan* discourse record collection or *yulu* 語錄, compiled sometime between 1654 and 1656. Both the number of poems and their quality invite us to situate Jizong Xingche firmly within the literary tradition of more well-known Buddhist monk-poets and, in particular, monk-poets associated with Nanyue.

Jizong Xingche (née Liu 劉) was born to a well-off Hunan family with a long tradition of Confucian scholarship and official service, as well as Buddhist sympathies.⁴ Her maternal grandfather, for example, held an official post in southern Jiangxi province, during which time he visited the mummified relics of the eminent late Ming-dynasty monk Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (1546-1623) at Nanhua 南華 temple in Caoxi 漕溪, Guangdong province. It may have been partly due to this early family religious connection that many years later one of Hanshan Deqing’s senior disciples, the scholar-official and loyalist Tan Zhenmo 譚貞默 (1590-1665, *jinshi* 1628), would not only compose a preface for Jizong’s discourse records but actively participate in getting them printed and circulated.⁵

As a young girl, Jizong received a solid classical education and would appear to have had access to a family library that contained both Buddhist and Confucian texts. She writes:

Even at a young age, I disliked eating non-vegetarian food; just one taste of meat and I would spit it out. When I was a little older, I took pleasure in reading Confucian texts and Buddhist sutras. Revolted by the dust and confusion of the world and having thought deeply about the matters of life and death, I begged my father to allow me to dedicate myself to a life outside of the household. But he refused.⁶

We are told very little about the man Jizong married, apart from the fact that his surname was Chen 陳 and he met an untimely death while on official business in western Guangdong province. It is quite likely however, that he was one of the many members of the Fushe 復社 or Restoration Society,

who in the last years of the Ming were persecuted by factions who had earlier been associated with the powerful, and powerfully corrupt, eunuch, Wei Zhongxian 魏忠賢 (1568-1627).⁷ This would explain why his young widow took it upon herself to submit an official memorial to the throne in an effort to clear his name. We do not know if this effort was successful; we do know that it was not long after submitting her memorial that Jizong decided to devote herself solely to her religious practice. As she would relate to her disciples many years later:

I then built a hermitage in which I installed a [Buddha] image and began to engage in the cultivation of a merit field. From dawn to dusk, I sat in quiet meditation. I took such delight in adhering to the precepts and [religious] discipline that I became determined to leave the householder's life and in the days that followed, began to seek out teachers of knowledge and wisdom.⁸

It was around this time that, in a local temple, she came across a copy of a recently printed text that would determine the course of her future life. The compiler of this text, Linji Chan master Shanci Tongji 山茨通際 (1608-1645), in 1638 had left Hangzhou and, drawn by its beauty and religious significance, taken up residence on Nanyue. As soon as he had settled into his hermitage, he devoted himself to searching through a wide range of materials, including "Nanyue gazetteers old and new" (新舊岳志) for information on Chan monks associated with Nanyue and the Nanyue lineage of Chan Buddhism. The results of Shanci's efforts were printed with the help of the Ming loyalist-turned monk, Xiong Kaiyuan 熊開元 (1599-1676) and circulated under the title of *Nanyue Chan denglu* 南嶽禪燈錄 (Accounts of Chan Lamps of Nanyue). After reading this text, Jizong made the decision to seek out Shanci personally and at the age of thirty-three took the tonsure and left home to live near her teacher in a small hermitage on Nanyue's Yanxia Peak 煙霞峰. Many of Jizong's mountain poems, although unfortunately not dated, may well have been composed during this time. In any case, these poems show that she had not only visited many of Nanyue's most well-known Buddhist temples and Daoist abbeys but was also highly knowledgeable about their religious and historical significance. They also suggest that Jizong anticipated spending the rest of her life on Nanyue, where she not only could pursue her religious aspirations but also find a measure of safety and solace during a period of increasing turmoil.

This, however, was not to be. In 1645, after leaving Nanyue to take up residence in a monastery in nearby Changsha 長沙, Shanci, who was not much older than Jizong, fell ill and died after eating a meal of wild greens, there being little else to provide nourishment on lands ravaged by rebellion

and warfare. Although she was one of Shanci's senior students, he died before she formally received Dharma transmission. That this was her ultimate goal is indicated by the fact that in 1650, at the age of forty-four, Jizong decided to leave Nanyue and head east. Later, in a preface to Jizong's discourse records, Yan Dacan 嚴大參 (1590–1671), a well-known Ming loyalist turned Buddhist layman, would write with admiration that:

After the passing of Master Shanci, with nothing but her gourd-dipper and walking-staff, the Master sailed down the River Xiang, crossed over Lake Dongting, and fearlessly roamed among the Tiantai Mountains in the south and the Wutai Mountains in the north.⁹

Even in the best of times, for a woman to travel such distances was neither easy nor safe, nor looked upon with approval. In the 1650s during the Manchu conquest of the South, it would have been even more perilous. The following poem by Jizong, entitled "A Chant in Midjourney" (Tuzhong yin 途中吟), while it can be read metaphorically as a description of the spiritual journey, also provides a glimpse of the actual physical trials and dangers of travel.

Gazing towards the rivers and plains, the world's roads twist and turn:	一望川原世路紆
Flailing between difficulties, all turns into foolish ignorance.	周旋維谷轉癡愚
Wind stinking of fresh meat on the wide roads where foxes congregate:	風腥廣陌狐成隊
Sun weak on the cold cliffs where the tigers are pushed against the wall.	日薄寒巖虎負嵎
Lonely and desolate: it is hard to find anyone who can share my way:	落落自難吾道合
Stretching on and on: few are those who can understand my feelings.	滔滔孰識有情殊
Although the hoary heavens weep, I do not rely on anyone for my joy,	蒼天哭在憑誰和
Accompanied only by my carrying pole, I traverse the rugged terrain. ¹⁰	竿木隨身崎嶇

Jizong Xingche's travels, largely made in the spirit of a pilgrimage to sites associated with Linji Chan, took her to Mount Longchi 龍池 in Jiangsu province, where she became the student, and eventually one of the three official Dharma successors of the elderly monk Wanru Tongwei, a Dharma-

brother of Shanci Tongji. As Jizong herself tells us, as soon as she had received this transmission, she began to make preparations to return home to her beloved Nanyue. However, Wanru Tongwei had other plans for her.

The next day I went to take leave of Master Wanru and return to Nanyue. But Master Wanru said: “It is very difficult for those who have [mistakenly] left the road to study the way. So put an end to your thoughts of returning to the mountains. When this old monk is gone, your work will be to liberate those who have missed the path.” He then presented me with the lineage records and the flywhisk. I vigorously declined since I wanted to return home. But Master Wanru said, “It is best if you remain in the Jiangnan area so that you may contribute to the revival [of Linji Buddhism].”¹¹

Jizong reluctantly agreed to her teacher’s request, and over the next decade or so, served as abbess of at least three different convents, including the Huideng 慧燈 Convent in Suzhou.¹² She also traveled and preached widely in the Zhejiang-Jiangsu area. As Yan Dacan writes:

The gentry-officials all looked up to [Jizong Xingche] with admiration; the four-fold sangha (monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen) flocked to her in droves: and there were none who did not wish to extend her an invitation to preach the Dharma. Her blows and shouts were delivered with the power and swiftness of lightning; her preaching of the Dharma was of benefit to sentient beings, and among those who filled her quarters, there were many who achieved deep insight.¹³

Nevertheless, Jizong appears never to have entirely abandoned her desire to return to Nanyue, and in many of her mountain poems speaks longingly of going back to live among its peaks and valleys. Although we do not know the date of her death, it would appear that she finally did indeed manage to return to spend her last years on Nanyue’s Jingping Cliff 净瓶岩, not far from where she had first studied and practiced with Shanci.

The Mountain Poems

Shanju 山居 (dwelling in the mountains) poems are by no means uncommon in Buddhist poetry by male monastics. Just a few examples of many such sequences are the twenty-four *shanju* poems by the famous Tang dynasty artist and monk-poet Guanxiu 貫休 (832-912), the several hundred such poems by the Yuan dynasty Chan master Shiwu 石屋 (“Stonehouse”; 1272-1352), and, closer to Jizong’s own time, the many sequences of such

poems by Hanshan Deqing, the eminent late Ming teacher mentioned earlier.¹⁴ Indeed, it was in the late Ming and early Qing that *shanju* poetry appears to have enjoyed particular popularity, such that the Chan master Shiyu Mingfang 石雨明方 (1593-1648) would declare that “Nowadays, collections of Chan sermons must also include poetry, and the poetry must include *shanju* [poems].”¹⁵ This great popularity can be attributable at least in part to the fact that *shanju* poetry lent itself particularly well to the translation of abstract notions of transcendence of the mundane into concrete poetic evidence of its accomplishment. The suitability of this genre lay partly in its association with previous monk-poets, including Han Shan 寒山 (fl. 9th c.), many of whose originally untitled verses were given the title of *Shanju* by the late Ming editors of a popular anthology of Buddhist poetry called *Gujin Chanxiao ji* 古今禪藻集 (Collected Chan Writings of Past and Present).¹⁶ As a poetic form, the *shanju* combined the poetic discipline of regulated verse (*jinti shi* 近體詩) and the flexibility afforded by the use of relatively straightforward concrete language and imagery, for the most part unburdened by the use of literary or highly doctrinal allusion. Also adding to this flexibility was the fact that *shanju* poems were most often composed in sequences or sets, ranging from three to over a hundred poems, all of which allowed for a more extensive and often more nuanced, exploration of different dimensions of the experience, whether metaphorical or actual, of “dwelling in the mountains.” In other words, monastic poets could, by means of these poems, demonstrate their aspiration for, and ultimately, their personal realization of a joyous inner life despite external worldly (and specifically political) turmoil and turbulence. Thus, in composing her many *shanju* poems, Jizong was not only situating herself within a longer tradition of largely male monastic poets but also within the historical, religious and literary context of her own particular time and place.

Jizong’s extant collection contains no less than four different sets or sequences of mountain poems composed in five and seven-syllable regulated verse. One set of eight poems is entitled simply “Dwelling in the Mountains” (*Shanju* 山居); the other three, which include two sequences of ten poems each and one of twenty-five, all refer explicitly to Nanyue.

Let us begin with a ten-poem sequence that offers what one might call the “tourist’s perspective”—a poetic catalogue of ten sites regarded even today as being among Nanyue’s most scenic as well as most historically important.¹⁷ They are not necessarily “the” ten sites, however; rather, they appear to be places that Jizong found particularly meaningful. The sequence begins with a poem about “Yanxia Peak” (Yanxia feng 煙霞峰), the place where Jizong Xingche lived during the time she was studying with Shanci Tongji, and thus a natural place to begin her “poetic tour.”

Staff in hand, I wander up to the very highest of the mountains;	策杖遙登最上山
Authentic teachings can surely be drawn from these green cliffs.	真風須向翠巖攀
It is hard to give oneself to ordinary mundane concerns of the world;	世間濁質難相許
Beyond the clouds I can surely roam free and find my own ease.	雲外清游信自閒
Strange-looking boulders as if about to fly, looking almost alive:	怪石欲飛形躍躍
Rushing waters pouring straight down with a roar and a rumble.	驚流直下響潺潺
In my wandering, I happened to stumble upon this secluded spot:	行來不覺幽玄處
Now, after having scattered the misty clouds, I leisurely return. ¹⁸	蹋碎煙霞信步還

The name Yanxia, which can be translated as misty clouds, is also used to refer to the obfuscations of the mundane world: this might explain the last line in this poem, where the speaker appears to delight in having scattered, or literally, “stomped to smithereens” the misty clouds. The last poem of this series, entitled “The Stupa of Ancestor Huairang” (Huairang zu ta 懷讓祖塔), reflects Jizong Xingche’s institutional identification with Nanyue Huairang 南嶽懷讓 (677-744), the Tang dynasty master considered to be the founder of the branch of the Linji Chan lineage represented by Shanci Tongji. His stupa, which can still be seen today, is located on Zhurong Peak, not far from the Mirror Grinding Terrace (Mojing Tai 磨鏡臺) where Nanyue Huairang is said to have taught Mazu an important lesson about the futility of trying to polish a brick into a mirror. Of the remaining sites poetically described by Jizong, two are associated with the long Daoist presence on Nanyue: Nine Perfected Ones Abbey (Jiuxian guan 九仙觀) and Divine Transcendent Grotto (Shenxian dong 神仙洞). The last two couplets of the poem composed in commemoration of the latter read as follows:

The evening rain moistens the path beneath the wisteria;	暮雨濕侵藤下路
The slanting sunlight illumines the moss inside the cave.	斜陽光襯洞中苔
Although I have never studied any of the arts of immortality,	從來不學長生術
Here at this place my thoughts turn again to	到此還思一溯洄

tracing my way back to the source!¹⁹

These ten poems reflect not only Jizong Xingche's mastery of the conventions of such poetry, they also hint at her personal experience of Nanyue—these were places she had lived among for years and knew well—as well as her historical knowledge of the religious landscape of Nanyue, a landscape shaped over the centuries by Buddhists and Daoists alike.

The eight poems in the series entitled simply “Shanju” are rather more reflective in both content and tone. In these poems, the mountain, which is not specified as being Nanyue, is used more generically as a code word for the alternative space to which the speaker has turned for both refuge and inspiration. These poems also make relatively greater use of explicitly Chan language. An example is the fourth poem of the series, which reads as follows:

I realize that the family jewels are not to be sought outside;	識得家珍不外求
As always, the winding waters encircle the mountain towers.	依然曲水遶山樓
I have split wide open the triple-mystery words of Linji;	劈開臨濟三玄語
I have seen through the one-finger teaching of Tianlong. ²⁰	看破天龍一指頭
Several gusts of clear wind: the neighing of the wooden horse;	幾度清風嘶木馬
A half-window of bright moon: the bellowing of the mud ox.	半窗明月吼泥牛
Ever since I laughingly put a halt to it all and returned home,	自從笑罷歸來後
I've rested in the shade of the pine, listening to the waterfall. ²¹	高枕松陰聽瀑流

While the speaker in this poem does not necessarily refer to Jizong herself, it does reflect the confidence of someone who is no longer a seeker of enlightenment, but rather someone quite advanced in terms of religious practice. The suggestion of spiritual goals attained and its fruits there to be enjoyed recurs in many of the poems in this sequence. The fifth poem, for example, reads:

I have come to sit among these boulders retired in pure seclusion:	坐來石上卻清幽
The moon glows, the clouds have already left	月皎長空雲已收

the endless skies:	
When one is dreaming, how does one know it is a dream?	人在夢中誰識夢
The cicada chirps when fall arrives, not knowing it is fall.	蟬隨秋喚不知秋
When the mind turns to ashes, why hanker after the lotus world;	心灰豈羨蓮華國
When the thoughts are purified, kingfisher towers are no obstacle.	念淨何妨翡翠樓
If one trusts in the Way, that one's self is none other than Buddha,	信道自身元是佛
Then why would one want to aspire to high rank in the human world? ²²	人間何事覓封侯

In this poem, the insistence that turning one's mind to ashes and purifying one's thoughts will obviate any desire for the pleasures found in the ordinary world of love and work does, however, suggest that these are desires with which the speaker still struggles, if only occasionally. Elsewhere in these poems, there are also hints of the social and political turmoil that not only took the life of Jizong's husband, but which continued to send its refugees, whether political or religious, to the mountains, where they can, hopefully, regroup their strength. In general, however, Jizong follows the pattern of many of her contemporary *shanju*-writers in placing emphasis on the inner joy that can be achieved within, regardless of external circumstances:

The parrots hide in the willows: the evening lights descend:	柳藏鸚鵡夕陽斜
Secluded valley, cloudless spring: something to boast about!	幽谷晴春實可誇
Beneath the trees the breeze rises: tigers and leopards relax,	林下風生閒虎豹
In pools and mountain streams, dragons and serpents bathe.	澗邊水溢浴龍蛇
A ramshackle hut, a grass bench, and clouds for a roof above.	敝廬草座雲為蓋
The ancient trees make a grassy shrine, mushrooms for decor.	枯木蘿龕菌作華
That which I delight in are just these kinds of boundless joys.	為喜者些窮快活
Wrapped in a tattered robe, I keep company with the clouds. ²³	兩肩破衲伴煙霞

Jizong's longest sequence of Nanyue poems is the set of twenty-five poems entitled "Living in the Nanyue Mountains: Random Verses" (Nanyue shanju zayong 南嶽山居雜詠). These poems reflect a fuller acceptance of both the life and the role of the mountain dweller or recluse. The emphasis is less on historical figures or religious sites, and more on natural phenomena, sometimes specific to Nanyue, but just as often to more universal clouds, waterfalls, creeks, woodland breezes, etc. This simplification can even be seen in the fact that the poems in this sequence, while still composed in regulated verse, make use of the five-syllable line rather than the seven. By the same token, many of the anxieties and aspirations made explicit in the Shanju poems, while not entirely absent, are less evident. The last two couplets of the third poem in this series, for example, allude to a visit by someone who wears "old-style" clothes and hat, not the attire (including the shaved head) of the Manchu invaders, and the fact that there are still heroes, that is to say Ming loyalists (*yimin* 遺民), to be found in the southern mountains.

The wanderer's clothes and hat are old-fashioned:	遊客衣冠古
The foolish monk's manner and bearing are pure.	憨僧風度清
We lift our heads and gaze towards the empty horizon:	舉頭空際望
There are plenty of heroes still in the marshes of Chu. ²⁴	楚澤有餘英

Nevertheless, again the overall tone of these twenty-five poems is one of contentment. "Three lifetimes seem no more than half a day" 三生如半日, she writes in poem fourteen, "From where then, can there rise any sorrow?" 何處得愁來. And in poem eighteen, she writes, "Feeling free and uninhibited, disturbing passions forgotten / The breezes are gentle, the trees again in bloom" 嘯傲忘情處 / 風和樹又春. In other words, while it may be the autumn of her life, she has found the source of what the Daoists would call "eternal spring" (*changchun* 長春) that is, a constant inner joy unaffected by changing external circumstances. It is probably not incidental that the allusions in these poems are as much, if not more, to well-loved poets such as Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (372?-427) as they are to Chan texts. Thus, in poem twenty, Jizong Xingche writes:

A windowful of green reflects the purest brilliance;	窗碧映清輝
An open door lets in the view of kingfisher-	開門納翠微

green hills.	
From out of the rosy mists, the solitary crane	離霞孤鶴迴
returns;	
Encircling the boulders, the scattered clouds	繞石亂雲飛
float by.	
A low bed of moss can be used as a [meditation]	矮榻苔為席
mat;	
The leaves on the bamboo screen can serve as a	疏簾葉作衣
robe.	
The sinking sun has disappeared far into the	斜陽西去遠
west;	
The weary birds instinctively know to return	倦鳥自知歸
home. ²⁵	

If Tao Yuanming (regarded by many monk-poets as an honorary Buddhist) is a recurrent presence in these poems, so is Hanshan, even though Jizong only mentions him once by name in the twelfth poem of this set, where she refers to the legend that the elusive poet inscribed his poems on leaves and flower petals, leaving others to find and transcribe them. In other words, it is not so much the textual memory she refers to, as the spirit of Hanshan inscribed in the natural world around her that she is personally reliving and recreating.

Forested ravines swathed in bright clouds;	林壑晴雲鎖
Scattered plum trees in solitary splendor,	亭亭幾樹梅
Off singing to draw water from the spring;	汲泉吟詠去
Returning perfumed from gathering herbs.	採藥帶香回
On the leaves: the gathas of Hanshan;	葉上寒山偈
Up in the clouds: the terrace of Prajña.	雲中般若臺
A walking stick to go with me everywhere;	杖藜隨所至
And a stone table with a covering of moss. ²⁶	石几布蒼苔

While there does not appear to be any particular order or narrative to the twenty-five poems in this series—indeed Jizong herself refers to them as “random verses”—the final poem felicitously encapsulates the intimate connection between monastic and mountain celebrated within the series as a whole, not to mention the attraction, albeit idealized, of this particular life.

To live in lofty seclusion has been the dream of	高隱平生志
a lifetime;	
From this day onwards, I will live here on this	今來住此山
mountain.	

All dusty illusions have been exposed for what they are,	幻塵都覷破
And I have nothing more to do with the floating world.	浮世漫相關
Tea from the stony cliffs for sipping when I feel so inclined,	石乳隨時汲
And wisteria blossoms for picking when I get the whim.	藤花任意攀
The emptiness of Heaven and earth is so great and vast:	乾坤空浩大
Who understands the tranquility to be found in all this? ²⁷	誰識此中閒

The contentment and even joy expressed in these poems might lead one to assume that they were composed towards the end of Jizong's life. However, given that they were included in the collection of discourse records printed before her return to Nanyue, it is more likely that they were composed much earlier, perhaps at a time when she anticipated spending the rest of her days living in seclusion and had no idea of the direction her life would actually take following the unexpected demise of her teacher. As we have seen, after Jizong left Nanyue, she spent a decade or more actively traveling and teaching in the Jiangnan area. However, she never relinquished the hope that she might one day return to Nanyue, expressions of which appear in a number of occasional poems written to send off fellow monastics returning to Hunan. These longings assume an even fuller expression in yet another ten-poem sequence, entitled "In the Manner of 'Returning Home to Nanyue'" (Ni gui Nanyue 擬歸南嶽). The poems from the longer ten-poem sequence are written, often quite explicitly, in the spirit of the well-known and well-loved "Returning Home" (Gui yuantian ju 歸園田居) poems of the fourth-century poet-recluse Tao Yuanming. In general, the emphasis is on the completion of duties, the approach of old age, and the desire to return to life of quiet reclusion. Given that Jizong had lived through some of the most difficult years of the Ming-Qing transition, and, as we can tell from some of her other writings, shared many of the loyalist sentiments of other educated men and women, taking refuge in the crags and crannies of Nanyue had a political as well as a religious significance for her. "Having thoroughly looked into hot and cold, I return to the mountains / Without leaving even the slightest footprint in the world of men below" 探盡炎涼又住山 / 不留朕跡落人間, she writes in the second poem of this series, "No knight-errants left in the world so it is useless to brandish a sword / But in the woods there is a brushwood gate that can be closed in retreat" 世無俠士空呈劍 / 林有柴扉且閉關.²⁸ And in the seventh poem

Jizong appears to echo the famous poem by the great Tang dynasty poet Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770), written in the wake of the disastrous An Lushan rebellion that left the capital in ruins but the mountains still standing.

Heart-breaking autumn grasses extend to the edge of the sky:	斷腸秋草滿天涯
Faraway floating orphan clouds: where is it they call home?	飄渺孤雲何處家
In the south, the chrysanthemums of Qin have bloomed and withered;	南國開殘秦地菊
The west wind has completely brought down the Han palace flowers.	西風落盡漢宮花
Living in seclusion I am fortunate that the blue mountains still stand.	活埋幸有青山在
Age and sickness come in quick succession, my white hair grows long.	老病頻添白髮賒
The peaks along the Xiang are surely filled with dragon and tiger lairs,	湘嶺豈無龍虎穴
If we band together, we need not mingle with the crabs and foxes. ²⁹	成群何必混狐蝦

The last two lines of this poem point to Nanyue's long history of not only being a place of refuge for hermits but also a traditional place of exile, whether imposed or self-chosen, for those out of synch with the times. The anticipation of return, then, is characterized by a combination of factors: a weariness with the busy life of an abbess, a despair at the turbulent state of the world, and an acute awareness of the coming of illness and old age. The Zhurong peak that she refers to in the fourth poem of the series is the tallest of the seventy-peaks of the Nanyue mountain range and the one that towered over Yanxia, where she and her teacher Shanci had once lived.

Pull in the line and put a halt to your angling, you old ascetic:	收綸罷釣老頭陀
Would it not be much better to return to live on Zhurong Peak?	歸踞融峰不較多
Rather than planting among stones, think of digging up purple bamboo,	種石且圖抽紫筍
Rather than raising pine trees, consider tugging at green creeper-vines.	培松寧羨引青蘿
The mountain colors beyond the railing will surely not have changed;	檻前山色應如舊
Even if the valley entrance and human feelings	谷口人情任易他

have become different.	
If only I can manage to take this body and	但得此身還故隱
return to my old hide-away,	
There in my grass hut, I'll dance and whirl with	草堂風月自婆娑
the wind and the moon. ³⁰	

Concluding Remarks

The Buddhist layman Wang Xianshuo 王相說 (*jinshi* 1622) wrote a preface to Jizong Xingche's discourse record collection, which, together with Tan Zhenmo, he helped to have printed and circulated. In this preface, Wang exclaims with admiration that Jizong's writings not only point to that "which lies beyond language and words," but that they also serve as testimony to the fact that "the Great Way is not divided into male and female" (大道不分男女相).³¹ Jizong does indeed appear to have almost completely assumed the masculine performative mode, not only in her life as a Chan master, traveling and delivering Dharma talks to men and women alike, but also in her poetic writing. One striking indication of this is the fact that of her poems with a named addressee, nearly two thirds are addressed to either male literati-officials or known male monastics. In other cases, it is difficult to ascertain the gender of the monastics to whom Jizong's poems are addressed. There is one poem, however, that contains a clue not only to the gender of the person referred to, but also to Jizong Xingche's aspirations towards the transcendence of gender distinctions.

In the world how many of the same kind	世間同隊幾同脩
practice in the same way?	
I admire the way you have managed to achieve	獨羨君能得自繇
your own freedom,	
How you have smashed the gates of emotion,	截斷情關如水冷
and as cool as water,	
Completely understand how life's bitter sea is	了知苦海若雲浮
but a floating cloud.	
Your breast has been cleansed completely of the	襟懷灑落塵緣累
dust of the world;	
In bearing and in extraordinary talent, a	骨格英奇佛祖伴
companion to the Buddha.	
Having thus seen through the outer forms of	勘破箇中男女相
both male and female;	
Where in all of heaven and earth will you not	乾坤何處不風流
feel totally at ease? ³²	

This poem is addressed to a certain “Yizhen daoren” 以真道人 who may possibly have been Wang Jingshu 王靜淑, the older sister of the famous woman writer-editor and loyalist Wang Duanshu 王端淑 (1621–1685?), and who, after the fall of the Ming and the death of her husband, became not only a Buddhist nun, but a Chan master much like Jizong herself.³³ As it happens, Wang Duanshu included three of Jizong’s poems in her 1667 anthology *Mingyuan shiwei* 名媛詩緯 (Classic Poetry by Notable Women). In her editorial comments, Wang Duanshu compares Jizong’s poems to the poetry of the male Tang poets Meng Jiao 孟郊 (751–814) and Jia Dao 賈島 (779–843).³⁴ Meng Jiao spent much of his early life as a mountain recluse before attempting, without success, to seek official appointment. Jia Dao, on the other hand, was a Buddhist monk who renounced his vows in the hope of finding a place in the political arena. It was Su Shi 蘇軾 (1036–1101), not a particular fan of either poet, who linked Jia Dao and Meng Jiao together with his oft-quoted comment that “Jia Dao is lean, Meng Jiao is cold” (島瘦郊寒).³⁵ Although Jia Dao at first wrote in the rather mannered style of the Yuanhe 元和 period (806–820), he later turned to writing the five-syllable line regulated verse for which he is best known. According to Stephen Owen, in so doing Jia Dao was “situating himself in a lineage of poet-monks who had been practicing this craft since the period after the An Lushan Rebellion.”³⁶ The aesthetics of this type of monastic regulated verse was characterized by a meticulous observance of the rules of poetic craftsmanship, a discipline mirroring that of the monastic vinaya or disciplinary code. The result was that, to again quote Owen, “[i]n striking contrast to the Yuanhe poets, for whom establishing poetic identity was central, the craftsmen of regulated verse are remarkably impersonal, even in their expressed sentiments.”³⁷ I would suggest that in comparing Jizong Xingche’s work to these two late Tang poets, Wang Duanshu may have used Meng Jiao to indicate the experiences of Jizong’s life, including her time spent as a mountain recluse, and Jia Dao to refer to the meticulous craftsmanship of her five- and seven-syllable regulated verse and perhaps even its relative impersonality and non-gender specific language. However, whereas Jizong’s *shanju* poetry may appear quite impersonal in comparison to secular verse, during the Ming-Qing transition at least, such poems were regarded by many not only as personal demonstrations of poetic skills but, perhaps even more importantly, as personal testimonies of hard-earned skills at living a joyous life amidst the uncertainty of the times. Be that as it may, not only was the loyalist Wang Duanshu happy to include Jizong’s poems in her anthology of women poets, she also tells her readers that when reading the nun of Nanyue’s poems, she “could not help but feel spiritually transported” (*bujin shenwang* 不禁神往).³⁸

Endnotes

1. James Robson, *Power of Place: The Religious Landscape of the Southern Sacred Peak (Nanyue 南嶽) in Medieval China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009), 99.
2. Robson, *Power of Place*, 97.
3. Robson, *Power of Place*, 297.
4. Although I refer to her as Jizong Xingche (or simply Jizong) throughout this paper, this was of course the religious name she received only after having been ordained. For a detailed study of Jizong Xingche and the larger religious and cultural context in which she lived, see Beata Grant, *Eminent Nuns: Woman Chan Masters of Seventeenth-Century China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), esp. 107-129.
5. Tan Zhenmo, whose lay religious name was Fuzheng 福征, edited several of Hanshan Deqing's works; he is particularly known for having produced an annotated edition (published in 1651) of Hanshan Deqing's autobiography, *Hanshan dashi nianpu shu* 憨山大師年譜疏. Jizong Xingche's poems include several addressed to Tan Zhenmo, whom she knew personally. Jizong Xingche's discourse records, *Jizong Che chanshi yulu* 季總徹禪師語錄, can be found in volume 28 of the *Mingban Jiaxing Dazangjing* 明板嘉興大藏經 (Ming edition of the Jiaxing Buddhist Canon) (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 1987), 441-488.
6. Jizong, *Jizong Che chanshi yulu*, 453.
7. Many years later when Jizong had become a full-fledged Chan teacher, she was invited by a group of male literati patrons to assume the leadership of the Huideng 慧燈 Convent in Suzhou. Of the thirty names that are appended to the official invitation text, more than half can be identified as literati-officials associated with the Restoration Society including, for example, all three sons of Zhou Shunchang 周順昌 (1524-1626), a well-known Ming official who lost his life because of the machinations of Wei Zhongxian.
8. Jizong, *Jizong Che chanshi yulu*, 453.
9. Jizong, *Jizong Che chanshi yulu*, 442.
10. Jizong, *Jizong Che chanshi yulu*, 465.
11. Jizong, *Jizong Che chanshi yulu*, 453.
12. Interestingly, the layman who took the initiative to invite Jizong to assume the abbacy of the Huideng Convent was Ye Shaoyong 葉紹顒 (1594-1670, *jinshi* 1625), who as a young man had studied for the examinations together with his cousin Ye Shaoluan 葉紹袁 (1589-1649), known primarily for preserving the writings of his wife Shen

- Yixiu 沈宜修 (1590-1635) and their three talented daughters. After the fall of the Ming, Ye Shaoyong became a devoted lay Buddhist.
13. Jizong, *Jizong Che chanshi yulu*, 442.
 14. For a recent English translation of Shiwu's *shanju* poems, see Red Pine, trans., *The Zen Works of Stonehouse: Poems and Talks of a Fourteenth-Century Chinese Hermit* (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1999). For a brief but insightful discussion of some of the reasons for the popularity of *shanju* poems during the early seventeenth-century, see Liao Zhaozheng 廖肇亨, "Wan Ming sengren 'Shanju shi' lunxi: yi Hanyue Fazang wei zhongxin" 晚明僧人山居詩論析: 漢月法藏為中心, in *Zhongbian, shichan, mengxi: Mingmo Qingchu fojiao wenhua lunshu de chengxian yu kaizhan* 中邊, 詩禪, 夢戲: 明末清初佛教文化論述的呈現與開展 (Taipei: Yunchen wenhua shiye gufen youxian gongci, 2008), 273-300.
 15. See Liao, "Wan Ming sengren 'Shanju shi'," 282-83.
 16. "He Youtang shi xu" 和侑堂詩序, in *Shiyu chanshi fatan* 石雨禪師法壇, in *Mingban Jiaying Dazangjing*, 27:137a.
 17. These ten poems appear in sequence in the collection but, unlike the others, are not grouped under a single title. However, given their placement and their shared theme, I am treating them as a set of poems.
 18. Jizong, *Jizong Che chanshi yulu*, 463.
 19. Jizong, *Jizong Che chanshi yulu*, 463. Given the context of this verse, the image of swimming against the stream (back to the source) can refer to the Daoist notion of returning to the undifferentiated Dao or source of all being, although Buddhism also speaks of going against the flow of hatred, greed and attachment as the heart of spiritual renunciation.
 20. Here I am taking the *sanxuan yu* 三玄語 as a variant of Linji's famously enigmatic "three statements" (*sanju* 三句) or "three essentials" (*sanyao* 三要), for which there have been numerous interpretations. Tianlong was the 9th-century Chan master in the line of Nanyue Huairang who enlightened his disciple Juzhi Yizhi 俱胝一指 by holding up one finger. Interestingly, the story also goes that Juzhi had been living alone in the mountains meditating when he was visited by a nun who challenged him to say a word of Chan, at which he found himself speechless. It was this that led him to seek instruction from Tianlong.
 21. Jizong, *Jizong Che chanshi yulu*, 463.
 22. Jizong, *Jizong Che chanshi yulu*, 463.
 23. Jizong, *Jizong Che chanshi yulu*, 463.
 24. Jizong, *Jizong Che chanshi yulu*, 462.

25. Jizong, *Jizong Che chanshi yulu*, 462. Tao Yuanming, of course, in many poems compares his leaving the world of official ambition and living the simpler life of a gentleman farmer in the countryside to that of weary birds who return to roost in their nests.
26. Jizong, *Jizong Che chanshi yulu*, 462.
27. Jizong, *Jizong Che chanshi yulu*, 462.
28. Jizong, *Jizong Che chanshi yulu*, 466.
29. Jizong, *Jizong Che chanshi yulu*, 466.
30. Jizong, *Jizong Che chanshi yulu*, 466.
31. Jizong, *Jizong Che chanshi yulu*, 443.
32. Jizong, *Jizong Che chanshi yulu*, 464.
33. One of Wang Jingshu's religious names was Yizhen daoren 一真道人: Jizong Xingche's poem is addressed to Yizhen daoren 以真道人. This may, however, just be a copyist error. For more on Wang Jingshu see Beata Grant, "Chan Friends: Poetic Exchanges Between Gentry Women and Buddhist Nuns in Seventeenth-Century China," in Grace Fong and Ellen Widmer, eds., *The Inner Quarters and Beyond: Women Writers from Ming Through Qing* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), esp. 226-233.
34. Wang Duanshu, *Mingyuan shiwei*, 26.5.
35. See Su Shi, "A Memorial to Liu Ziyu" (Ji Liu Ziyu wen 祭柳子玉文), in *Su Shi wen ji* 蘇軾文集, 6 vols., ed. Kong Fanli (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 5:1939.
36. Stephen Owen, "Eagle-shooting Heroes and Wild-goose Hunters: the Late Tang Moment," *Hsiang Lectures on Chinese Poetry* 3 (2005): 49-65, see p. 57.
37. Owen, "Eagle-shooting Heroes," 57.
38. Wang Duanshu, *Mingyuan shiwei*, 26.5a.