

Women's Ascetic Practices during the Song

This paper investigates the manner in which women of the Song era (960–1279) practiced bodily cultivation. In particular it treats the ascetic practices of seclusion, fasting, vegetarianism, and the related observance of mercy towards all animal life. By discussing foods and diets in a socio-economic context, as well as the religious milieu that shaped women's roles and daily life, I am arguing that the ascetic practices can be deemed a distinct, gendered form of cultivation, more prevalent among women than men in this period of time. I conclude that Song-era women's asceticism, which won high acclaim from male literati, not only served as the paradigm of female virtue that sustained the patriarchal norms, but also provided a means for women to speak out and to gain control over themselves and their surroundings.

ZHAIJIE PRACTICES: FASTING AND VEGETARIANISM

Historical and other sources furnish examples of fasting practices, that is, *zhaijie* 齋戒, among women during the Song period.¹ Both Buddhism and Daoism, each with its own dietary practices, had a profound

¹ *Zhai* refers to purificatory prohibitions observed for rituals and festivals of all kinds; and the word can be traced to China's distant past. *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字, the earliest systemic etymological dictionary of Chinese (compiled by Xu Shen 許慎, d. ca. 147), it is "abstinence and purification" and to be "reverent and refined." Duan Yucai 段玉裁, *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 注 (rpt. Taipei: Liming Wenhua shiye, 1993), p. 3. The character *zhai* is always juxtaposed with *jie* 戒, precepts, to indicate ritual fasting related to worship or sacrifice. *Zhaijie* was a required practice during special occasions, particularly the mourning period, observed by the younger generation for deceased family members. *Li ji* records in detail the different types of *zhaijie* that varied according to the degree of the mourner's kinship to the deceased; *Li ji zhushu* 禮記注疏 (SSJZS edn.), sect. "Jian zhuan" 間傳 57, p. 955; "Sangfu daji" 喪服大記 45, p. 733; "Zaji" 雜記 42, p. 749; "Tangong" 檀弓 9, p. 164; "Quli" 曲禮 3, pp. 77–78. *Zhai*, used to translate the Sanskrit word *uposatha*, refers to the monastic Buddhist practice of *guowu bushi* 過午不食, eating only one meal per day in the forenoon. It could refer simply to the vegetarian feasts held on certain days in each month. The meaning was expanded to describe the vegetarian meals eaten regularly by monks and nuns, and on special occasions by laypeople. Thus, another derivative but broadly-embraced meaning of *zhai* is abstinence from meat and strong flavored vegetables: *bu ruhun* 不茹葷, or *sushi* 素食, a diet which could be practiced either periodically or continually. For Buddhists, *zhaijie* is associated with a key Buddhist teaching that prohibits killing animals. Mahāyāna Buddhist vegetarian diets generally were based on the pre-Buddhist principle of *ahimsā*, the practice of total non-violence and non-injury. On lay-Buddhist vegetarianism in early medieval China, see Valérie Lavoix, "La contribution des laïcs au végé-

impact upon women's ascetic values regarding food. One broadly employed concept of *zhai* was to maintain a diet based on the Buddhist prohibition against taking life, which was also reinforced by Daoist concerns with gaining immortality. The sources view Song women's practice of *zhai*, or vegetarianism, as stemming from religious piety. A typical example has to do with Fan Zhongyan's 范仲淹 (989–1052) mother. Fan extolled her piety and described her avoidance of meat for over twenty years.² Similarly, Su Shi 蘇軾 (1036–1101) related a story of Li Rusun's 李如損 (eleventh century) sister, who was a devout Buddhist. At age fifteen, before she became a Buddhist, she was very sick. After dreaming of taking a vow to become a Buddhist, she immediately recovered, and then observed vegetarian fasting and celibacy for the rest of her life.³

There were women who observed *zhaijie* rigorously – eating only one meal, or only meager portions, per day. Some of them even fasted completely, eating nothing for a certain period. The Song male literati took particular note of such austere women. Zheng Xie 鄭獬 (1022–1072) recalled his grandmother's having eaten only a single bowl of rice every day, even after their family became prosperous.⁴ Like Zheng, another scholar specializing in *daoxue* 道學 philosophy, Ye Shi 葉適 (1150–1223), was impressed by the ascetic practices of a woman from an imperial clan: she only ate a small amount of vegetables once a day

tarisme: Croisades et polémiques en Chine du sud autour de l'an 500," in Catherine Despeux, ed., *Bouddhisme et lettrés dans la Chine médiévale* (Paris: Éditions Peeters, 2002), pp. 103–43. Fasting has played a critical role in Daoist tradition as well. Like their Confucian counterparts, Daoists observed *zhaijie* before rituals in order to make obeisance to the deities. Analogous to the Buddhist approach, fasting was also an important technique by which Daoists pursued spiritual goals. Immortality has always been the ultimate aim for at least some Daoist practitioners, and many practiced asceticism as a means towards that goal. One of the most salient features of Daoist asceticism is its emphasis on fasting combined with celibacy, seclusion, sleep avoidance, and so forth; see Stephen Eskildsen, *Asceticism in Early Daoist Religion* (Albany: State U. of New York P., 1998).

² Fan Zhongyan, *Fan Wenzheng gong nianpu* 范文正公年譜, in *Fan Wenzheng gong ji bieji* 范文正公集別集 (rpt. Taipei: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1965) 18, p. 1b. See Huang Qijiang 黃啓江, *Bei Song Fojiao shi lungao* 北宋佛教史論稿 (Taipei: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1997), p. 138.

³ Su Shi, "Fo shoujie pingyuan" 佛說解平冤, *Su Dongpo quanji* 蘇東坡全集 (rpt. Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 1986) 15, p. 109. In addition, the Great Lady Li studied Buddhism under Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗禩 (1089–1163), a well-known Chan master. In her later life she dressed in simple clothing and became a vegetarian. Han Yuanji 韓元吉, "Taigongren Lishi muzhi ming" 太恭人李氏墓誌銘, in *Nanjian jiyi gao* 南澗甲乙稿 (SKQS edn.) 22, p. 30. Other example includes a Mme. Yang who observed a vegetarian diet and lived alone, daily chanting and studying Buddhist scriptures; Sima Guang 司馬光, "Yuchengxian jun Yangshi muzhi ming" 余鄭縣君楊氏墓誌銘, *Chuanjia ji* 傳家集 (SKQS edn.) 78, p. 15.

⁴ Zheng Xie, "Zhifang langzhong Baogong furen Chenshi muzhi ming" 職方郎中鮑公夫人陳氏墓誌銘, *Yunxi ji* 鄆溪集 (SKQS edn.) 22, p. 6a.

throughout her life.⁵ As with medieval European women, the strict dietary asceticism of Song-era women was one means of enhancing spirituality.⁶ At this time, many Chinese women set themselves apart from the world by living a life of austerity and poverty as a function of religion and won high acclaim from male counterparts. The wife of a Mr. Dou, Mme. Huo 霍, practiced Buddhism and observed *zhaijie* strictly, earning praise from her husband for her piety and ascetic practice.⁷ In addition, the prominent *daoxue* thinker and scholar-official Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) attributed a certain Mme. Yu's ascetic practices to her sudden enlightenment:

Later in life she studied Buddhism. Suddenly one morning, she appeared enlightened as though she had gained understanding in her heart. Thereupon, she cast aside her hair pins and ear ornaments, ... rejected wine and meat, and she wore simple clothes and ate coarse vegetarian food until the end of her life.⁸

Women who observed vegetarian fasting on specific occasions might also be commended by male scholars. Mme. Zhou did not eat meat in the daytime because of her Buddhist beliefs.⁹ The Great Lady Lang never had meat in the morning for fifty years.¹⁰ A general's wife, a certain Yang, abstained from meat on every "rou day."¹¹ Another elite

⁵ Ye Shi, "Zhao ruren muming," 趙儒人墓銘, *Shuixin wenji* 水心文集 (rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), p. 423.

⁶ On dietary habits of religious women in medieval Europe, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1987).

⁷ Liu Zai 劉宰, "Huoshi muzhi ming" 霍氏墓誌銘, *Mantang ji* 漫塘集 (SKQS edn.) 28, p. 5.

A note on translating terms of address: In traditional Chinese society, it was customary to address a woman by her natal family name plus the term *shi* 氏. So a woman *née* Wang would be called Wang *shi*. Most often in women's funeral biographies written by male elite-scholars, polite titles such as *furen* 夫人, *ruren* 儒人, *shuren* 淑人, or *yiren* 宜人 would be added before the family name, with *shi* attached to address one's wives, while *taifuren* 太夫人, *tairuren* 太儒人, *taishuren* 太淑人, *taiyiren* 太宜人, etc. referred to one's mother. In the narrative I use "Mme." for *furen*, *ruren*, and *yiren*, and the term "Great Lady" for someone's mother. In addition, "Woman" and "Old Woman" are used as terms of address for nonelite women, reflecting the Chinese *fu* 婦, *ao* 媼, and *po* 婆.

⁸ Zhu Xi, "Furen Yushi muzhi ming" 夫人俞氏墓誌銘, *Huian ji* 晦庵集 (SKQS edn.) 92, p. 21a. Translation adapted from Bettine Birge, "Chu Hsi and Women's Education," in Wm. Theodore de Bary and John W. Chaffee, eds., *Neo-Confucian Education: The Formative Stage* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1989), p. 358. For over twenty years Great Lady Chen wore poor clothing and ate meager food. Her ascetic behavior was eulogized by Zhu Xi as well; Zhu, *Huian ji* 93, p. 39.

⁹ Qiang Zhi 強至, "Runan Zhoushi furen muzhi ming" 汝南周氏夫人墓誌銘, *Cibu ji* 祠部集 (SKQS edn.) 50, p. 2a.

¹⁰ Yang Wanli 楊萬里, "Taiyiren Langshi muzhi ming" 太宜人梁氏墓誌銘, *Chengzhai ji* 誠齋集 (SKQS edn.) 131, p. 23.

¹¹ Fan Zuyu 范祖禹, "Youtun wei da jiangjun qi jianxian jun Yangshi muzhi ming" 右屯衛大將軍妻吉安縣君楊氏墓誌銘, *Fantaishi ji* 范太史集 (SKQS edn.) 51, p. 15. *Rouri* 柔日 are

woman, named Cai, did not eat meat on the anniversary days of the deaths of family members.¹² Mme. Jiang studied Buddhism when she was a young child and after that she fasted yearly for periods of several months.¹³ Each month, Wang Gongchen's 王拱辰 mother *née* Li observed the Ten Feasts 十齋, a prevalent Buddhist practice among laypeople in the Song period.¹⁴ Such periodic abstinence was duly noted in epitaphs composed by members of the male literati. In addition to the above special Buddhist occasions on which practitioners fasted or maintained vegetarian diets, the sources show that in certain areas Daoist fasting was also popular. Female Daoists would observe it for several months each year.¹⁵

Many women became vegetarians upon the deaths of close family members. After their husbands died, in order to show grief, widows often vowed to abstain from eating flesh for a lifetime. Their fasting, in particular, also served as an expression of their chastity and resolve never to remarry. Many converted and became devout Buddhists or Daoists. Funeral biographies and anecdotal sources yield abundant cases of widows who fasted following the deaths of their husbands. To cite one typical example, Mme. Wang became a widow at a young age, and her uncle tried to force her to remarry, though she refused. To show her resolution, she avoided cosmetics, jewelry, and meat. She ate only one meal every day.¹⁶ Mme. Li wore plain clothes and became a vegetarian after the death of her husband. She became devoted to Buddhist teachings and diligently explored the religion.¹⁷ In the above two cases, the women cannot be viewed as pious Buddhist practitioners. Rather, widowhood led to a life of asceticism, while religious pursuits provided them a shelter from remarriage.

Aside from chastity, female filial piety, another central Confucian virtue, also promoted a life of asceticism. The wife of Li Zhiyi 李之儀 (eleventh century), Hu Wenrou 胡文柔, abstained from meat following

the days bearing the even numbered signs of the Heavenly Stems (*tiangan* 天干), i.e. *yi* 乙, *ding* 丁, *ji* 己, *xin* 辛, and *kui* 癸.

¹² Liu Zai, "Gu Jizhou Wangshijun Caishi xingzhuang" 故吉州王使君蔡氏行狀, *Mantang ji* 34, p. 15.

¹³ Xu Han 許翰, "Jiangshi furen muzhi ming" 蔣氏夫人墓誌銘, *Xiangling wenji* 襄陵文集 (SKQS edn.) 12, pp. 11-12.

¹⁴ On the Ten Feast Days, see n. 78, below. On these days people observed a strictly vegetarian diet; Zhao Yushi 趙與時, *Bintui lu* 賓退錄 (in *Biji xiaoshuo daguan* 筆記小說大觀 [Taipei: Xinxing shuju, 1974-1978], hereafter cited as BJXSDG edn., ser. 6, vol.4) 3, p. 3.

¹⁵ Wang Yong 王楙, *Yanyi yimou lu* 燕翼論謀錄 (rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), p. 26.

¹⁶ Chao Shuozhi 晁說之, "Chongde xian taijun Wangshi muzhi ming" 崇德縣太君王氏墓誌銘, *Jingyu sheng ji* 景迂生集 (SKQS edn.) 20, p. 25.

¹⁷ Qiang, *Cibu ji* 35, p. 12.

her mother's death. Her mother-in-law tried to force her to resume her normal diet, but she refused to do so. For the rest of her life she ate only coarse vegetarian food. Hu also studied Buddhism diligently. Her husband extolled her and thought he could never reach her level in the practice and understanding of Buddhist tenets.¹⁸ Another example is found in Mme. Huang's biography. She grieved over her mother's death and subsequently became a vegetarian; from her middle age onward, she was also depicted as a pious Buddhist.¹⁹ We must also consider a filial woman *née* Dong, who desperately strove to rebury her father Dong Yichang 董義昌 (twelfth century) and mother *née* Lin. She was said to have avoided meat and intoxicants for over twenty years in order to express her filiality so that she could arrange her parents' reburial.²⁰ In addition to its function as an expression of filial piety, Dong's *zhaijie* was probably a kind of reverential service, like the preparations for divination and other rituals in the context of grave-site geomancy that were in vogue at the time.²¹

The majority of Song-era women practiced vegetarian fasting or avoided killing animals from their Buddhist beliefs. However, other events led them to take vows to observe long-term or even lifetime abstinence from flesh: the loss of family members, like parents or husbands, as previously mentioned, or concerns over possible economic decline. Zhu Xi commended a woman who abstained from meat for over ten years because of her family's financial straits.²² Another example occurs in a woman's epitaph written by Yuan Xie 袁燮 (1144-1224). Yuan praised Mme. Lin highly for her ascetic practices, such as "eating

¹⁸ Li Zhiyi, "Guxi jushi qi Hu Wenrou muzhi ming" 姑溪居士妻胡文柔墓誌銘, *Guxi jushi qianji* 姑溪居士前集 (SKQS *zhenben* edn., vol. 10) 50, p. 2a.

¹⁹ Li Gang 李綱, "Song gu longtu Zhanggong furen Huangshi muzhi ming" 宋故龍圖張公夫人黃氏墓誌銘, *Liangxi ji* 梁谿集 (SKQS edn.) 170, pp. 11-13. Inspired by her mother-in-law's religious piety, Woman Chen also became a very dedicated Buddhist, and they practiced Buddhism together. When her mother-in-law passed away, Chen was extremely sad and she vowed to eat no flesh for the rest of her life; Xu Yuanjie 徐元杰, "Pucheng Chenshi muzhi ming" 浦城陳氏墓誌銘, *Meiye ji* 楸埜集 (SKQS edn.) 11, p. 4.

²⁰ Zhou Bida 周必大, "Canyi Dongjun Changyi muzhi ming" 參議董君昌義墓誌銘, *Wenzhong ji* 文忠集 (SKQS edn.) 72, pp. 11b-12a.

²¹ Lo Dajing 羅大經 described popular funeral practices of his time and attributed the custom of reburial to the popularity of geomancy. Luo Dajing, *Helin yulu* 鶴林玉露 (rpt. Taipei: Zhengzhong shuju, 1969), p. 6. For scholarship on Song funeral practices see Patricia Ebrey, "The Response of the Sung State to Popular Funeral Practices," in Patricia Ebrey and Peter Gregory, eds., *Religion and Society in Tang and Sung China* (Honolulu: U. Hawaii P., 1993), pp. 209-40; idem, "Sung Neo-Confucian Views on Geomancy," in Irene Bloom and Joshua Fogel, eds., *Meeting of Minds: Intellectual and Religious Interaction in East Asian Traditions of Thought* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1997), pp. 75-107. See also Zhang Bangwei 張邦煒, "Songdai sangzang xisu juyu." 宋代喪葬習俗舉隅, in *Dierjie Songshi xueshu yantao hui lunwen ji* 第二屆宋史學術研討會論文集 (Taipei: Wenhua daxue, 1996), pp. 79-94.

²² Zhu Xi, "Rongguo furen Guanshi muzhi ming" 榮國夫人管氏墓誌銘, *Huan ji* 92, p. 13.

without meat” 食不御肉 when her family fell on hard times; he described her as “unrivaled even by virtuous women in ancient times.”²³ A story recorded in *Kuiche zhi* 睽車志 also deals with fasting and drinking only water as a mark of a woman’s filial piety and destitution:

A woman from Cangzhou 滄州 did not eat, but only drank several cups of water per day. She was already forty-five or forty-six years old but her face looked very fresh and young. People asked her why she fasted. She replied: “When I was young, my mother was very sick and I had no father and brothers. Every day I sold fruit in the market to support my mother but could only earn little money. It was the time of famine. The price of rice was high and food was scarce, so I prayed to Heaven to not let me feel hungry by just taking water, so that I could support my mother with the money I earned from selling the fruit. So I drank a cup of water from the well and I have not felt hungry ever since then.” When, several years later, her mother died, she had fasted for over thirty years.²⁴

The above story, similar to those relating Daoist-type fasting in which the practitioners would eat nothing, reveals the belief that a woman’s filial piety allowed her to fast without hunger for a long time.

We have seen that economic concerns were sometimes the primary reasons for fasting and vegetarianism among women, and among various male scholars as well.²⁵ Especially during famines, food prices soared, and some areas had no available food. In such times, even affluent families could not afford enough meat, so, as just noted, women would eschew meat for the sake of others. Such female behavior would be regarded as particularly virtuous; the Confucian premium on thriftiness was especially pertinent to women. Advice books, such as Sima Guang’s 司馬光 (1019–1086) *Jia fan* 家範, emphasized the importance of female thrift as a sign of household prosperity.²⁶

There is a stereotype that Chinese women usually practice Buddhism during their old age following some life crisis, such as the illness or death of family members.²⁷ While this seems generally to have

²³ Yuan Xie, “Lin Taishuren Yuanshi muzhi ming” 林太淑人袁氏墓誌銘, *Qiezhai ji* 藜齋集 (SKQS edn.) 21, p. 9.

²⁴ Guo Tuan 郭彖, *Kuiche zhi* (BJXSDG edn. *xubian*, vol. 3) 2, p. 5.

²⁵ See Tao Jing-shen 陶晉生, *Bei Song shizu jiazu hunyin shenghuo* 北宋士族家族婚姻生活 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiu so, 2001), p. 210.

²⁶ Sima Guang, *Jia fan* (based on 1626 Xiaxian Sima Lu 夏縣司馬露 edn.; rpt. Taipei: Zhongguo zixue mingzhu jicheng bianyin jijinhui 中國子學名著集成編印基金會, 1977), p. 515.

²⁷ See Patricia Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1993), p. 128; also, Tao, *Bei Song shizu*, p. 162.

been the case, the evidence shows that many women, having studied Buddhism since childhood, became vegetarians at a young age. For instance, as a young girl, Mme. Chen had studied Buddhism and did not eat meat.²⁸ Great Lady Du continued to follow a vegetarian diet from her childhood.²⁹ A woman's biography by Yuan Fu 袁甫 (thirteenth century) concerned his subject's miraculous, repeated dreams of the Pure Land – the Western Paradise. Yuan Fu attributed her dreams to the fact that she had abstained from meat and had chanted the name of Guanyin Bodhisattva every day since her youth.³⁰ Regardless of social rank, young girls' religious practices in the Song period were usually inspired by their mothers. There are numerous cases of this in biographies and other sources, including the religious influence of mothers over both daughters and sons in their mature years, and including examples of ascetic behavior.³¹

The pursuit of an ascetic lifestyle was not confined to members of the elite. Sources mention many examples of ordinary women's piety, and their asceticism was, once again, praised by male literati. Sima Guang once composed a biography for a nonelite woman, Zhang Xingpo 張行婆,³² or, Old Woman Zhang, who had been a servant in Sima Guang's sister-in-law's family. As a pious Buddhist, Zhang left her son and home to live alone in a deserted temple. She studied Buddhist texts and ate one vegetarian meal every day.³³ We also read about Zhou Bida's 周必大 (1126–1204) mother's nursemaid, Woman Meng 孟媪. Meng took a vow to observe Buddhist precepts when she was thirty-five years old. She abstained from meat and wine and constantly recited Buddhist texts. When she died, Zhou's brother cremated her according to Buddhist ritual. It was said that the color of her skull was as white as snow, her tongue remained intact, and copious relics

²⁸ Huang Shang 黃裳, "Furen Chenshi muzhi ming" 夫人陳氏墓誌銘, *Yanshan ji* 演山集 (SKQS edn.) 33, p. 12.

²⁹ Li Shi 李石, "Dushi tairuren muzhi ming" 杜氏太儒人墓誌銘, *Fangzhou ji* 方舟集 (SKQS edn.) 17, p. 18.

³⁰ Yuan Fu, "Tairuren Bianshi muzhi ming" 太儒人卞氏墓誌銘, *Mengzhai ji* 蒙齋集 (SKQS edn.) 18, pp. 18–19.

³¹ For instance, a Song Chan master, Guixiao 歸曉, was influenced by his mother's piety from a very young age. He followed the Buddhist precepts and was instructed by his mother to abstain from meat; Pan Ping 潘平, "Da Song Xiangzhou fengshan yanqing chanyuan chuanfa huiguang dashi shouta beiming" 大宋襄州鳳山延慶禪院傳法惠廣大師壽塔碑銘, in *Quan Song wen* 全宋文 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1988; hereafter cited as QSW) 136, p. 197.

³² The term "xingpo" 行婆 refers to aged women, usually nonelite, who practice Buddhism. It seems to have appeared no earlier than the Tang, and probably became popular in Song times. Several accounts regarding "xingpo" can be found in *Jingde chuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄, completed in 1004; Tno. 2076 (vol. 51). For an English translation of this text, see Ogata Sohaka, *The Transmission of the Lamp: Early Masters* (Wolfeboro, N.H.: Longwood Academic, 1990).

³³ Sima Guang, "Zhang Xingpo zhuan" 張行婆傳, *Chuanjia ji* 傳家集 72, p. 9.

were left after the cremation. Amazed at all this, Zhou recorded the story and thought that even the old Buddhist masters could not reach her level of spirituality.³⁴ In addition, miscellaneous Song notes, such as Hong Mai's 洪邁 (1123-1202) *Yijian zhi* 夷堅志, relate stories about ascetic practices of women from the lower classes.³⁵

DAOIST FASTING AS PERSONAL CULTIVATION

Documentation of Daoist-style fasting, basically avoiding all food, is encountered in the Song materials as well. As we have already observed, traditional Daoist asceticism strongly emphasized such fasting, with such techniques as *bigu* 辟穀, or *jueli* 絕粒, abstinence from grain. The results were that adepts shunned all food, particularly solid fare, as a means to gain longevity. As sources suggest, such Daoist asceticism among women of all classes was not uncommon in Song times. For instance, the sister of the famous official and poet Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045-1105) practiced Daoist ascetic techniques to have her body "released by means of a simulated corpse 尸解."³⁶ Daoist priestesses and laywomen in the Song who partook of *bigu*, for example, were extolled by male literati. Zhou Zizhi 周紫芝 (b. 1082) wrote several poems to eulogize a Mme. Hu 胡, who practiced Daoist fasting and seclusion and healed her granddaughter's eye disease with a talisman:

Mme. Hu from Biling 毘陵, named Yizhen 儀真, was the wife of Mr. Zhongli 鍾離. Zhongli died suddenly in Gaoyou 高郵. Several years after his death, one night Mme. Hu dreamt of a magnanimous Daoist priest in long sleeves waving a sword. He gave Mme. Hu seven dates to eat. The next morning she was delighted as if she had gained [enlightenment]. As a result, Mme. Hu had not eaten food ever since. Her body was light as a cloud, and she never slept at night. The Daoist priest promised her he would come to convert her after she cloistered herself in a Daoist shrine for two years. Mme. Hu was not literate before, but all of a sudden she could write and compose eulogies. In other ways, however, she acted the same as usual. In the morning and evening she respectfully lit incense for the Shangzhen 上真 deity. At times she dreamt of a youngster in green clothing who fed her divine fruits on a jade platter. As red as a bright rosy cloud, the shape of the divine fruits looked like

³⁴ Zhou Bida, "Meng'ao zangji" 孟媼葬記, *Wenzhong ji* 36, p. 20a.

³⁵ Hong Mai, *Yijian zhi* (rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), pp. 262, 937, 1665-66.

³⁶ Huang Tingjian, "Hui Bi" 毀璧, in *Huang Tingjian xuanji* 黃庭堅選集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1991), p. 356. I adopt the translation of *shijie* 尸解 from Kristofer Schipper, *The Daoist Body* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1993), pp. 166, 182.

celestial peaches. She then understood that they were cinnabar elixirs. Also, after several months she once more dreamt that the Daoist priest was teaching her to write talismans. She was then able to draw the talismans. People who had illness or were disturbed by evil spirits asked for her help, and Mme. Hu would never reject healing anyone by using talismans. It worked out very well. I have a four-year-old granddaughter whose eyes were inflamed and watery for a long time. Nobody could treat the problem. After my granddaughter swallowed a talisman given by Mme. Hu, her eye disease was entirely cured. Now my granddaughter's eyes are as clear as pure water. In the *bingyin* year of Shaoxing (1146) Mme. Hu moved into a Daoist temple and named herself Chu Chen 出塵 (Leaving the Dusty World). Upon learning of this I felt glad for her. Hence, I dedicate these poems to Mme. Hu.³⁷

The above evidence shows that Mme. Hu, on account of her dream, engaged in Daoist ascetic practices such as the avoidance of food and sleep, as well as that of seclusion. Immortals fed her magical fruit and taught her Daoist techniques, like drawing talismans, which made her literate and able to cure illness. The literatus Zhou Zizhi admired and extolled the practices that allowed her to achieve these powers.³⁸

Records of female fasting, especially Daoist *bigu*, are frequently encountered in the local gazetteers. In these documents, most female ascetics are depicted as having mysteriously encountered somebody who was believed to be an immortal. After such miraculous experiences, the women begin the avoidance of all kinds of food. *Lofushan zhi* 羅浮山志 (*Gazetteer of Lofu Mountain*) describes a Daoist priestess named Wu Miaoming 吳妙明. Originally from an elite family, she had practiced *bigu* since childhood, following a meeting with someone who taught her the technique. The emperor Huizong invited her to court and built a mansion for her.³⁹ In the gazetteer *Yanzhou fuzhi* 嚴州府志,

³⁷ Zhou Zizhi, "Hu furen chuchenan shi" 胡夫人出塵菴詩, *Taicang timi ji* 太倉稊米集 (SKQS *zhenben* edn., vol. 2) 26, pp. 1a–2b.

³⁸ In another interesting case, an ordinary woman from Yongzhou 雍州 abstained from food and lived in seclusion after an unusual encounter with the ingestion of dates. Her new asceticism enabled her to divine the future, and thus she associated with Song officials, sometimes receiving their reverence; Zen Minqiu 曾敏求, *Duxing zazhi* 獨醒雜誌 (rpt. Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1937), p. 29. Another *Yijian zhi* story tells of a young girl, Chen Qiongyu 陳瓊玉, who miraculously met a Daoist deity at the age of seventeen, started to avoid foods, to compose poems, and make prophecy. Every day visitors of various classes stopped by her dwelling to seek her predictions. In 1117 she was summoned to the imperial court and granted the name Master Miaojing 妙靜練師 by Huizong 徽宗 (r. 1101–25); "Miaojing lianshi," in Hong Mai's *Yijian zhi*, pp. 122–23.

³⁹ In *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成, vol. 292, "Nüguan bu" 女冠部 512, p. 54b.

Tang Guangzhen 唐廣真 was said to have separated from her husband in order to practice *Dao* after she had a mysterious dream. She later met three immortals who gave her cinnabar to swallow, and she ceased eating altogether. During the middle of the Chunxi 淳熙 reign period (1174–1189) she was summoned to court and granted the title of *zhenren* 真人, Realized Person.⁴⁰

In all the above cases, women miraculously abstained from food and, because of their exceptional practices, were summoned by emperors. Setting aside the question of historical accuracy, the image that we get is unconventional. These female Daoist practitioners did not perform womanly duties based on Confucian norms, but still they won high regard from the male elite and even from the imperial house. They are celebrated in a number of poems.⁴¹

In Song poetry penned by male authors the motif of Daoist female ascetics is not uncommon. The most popular theme relates to women's miraculous abstinence. Moreover, scholars wrote *zan* 贊 eulogies for such women. Significantly, though, we seldom find miraculous abstinence motifs associated with Song male practitioners of Daoism. In the eyes of the male scholars who composed poems and eulogies, these female practitioners were unearthly and extraordinary. Their abstinence from food made their spiritual pursuits realizable because Daoist fasting, in its special practice of abstinence from food, is believed to purify the human body, a purification that lengthened lives. The image of these female Daoist ascetics can be associated both with the immortals described in *Zhuangzi* who dwelled on Mount Gushe 姑射 eating nothing but rather inhaling vapor, and with the Queen Mother of the West, the highest Daoist goddess, who was associated with immortality.⁴² We should note that the fasting Daoist women apparently

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 55a. Also see Yang Ercao 楊爾曹, *Xinjuan xianyuan jishi* 新鵝仙媛紀事 (rpt. Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1989), pp. 490–92. For poems by Tang Guangzhen, see Thomas Cleary, *Immortal Sisters: Secret Teachings of Taoist Women* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1996), pp. 67–69.

⁴¹ For example, Zhao Shixiu 趙師秀 (*jinsi* 1190) composed a poem entitled “Zhen gu” 真姑 (“True Maiden”): “Suddenly you are able to eat nothing. You only drink water in order to live by in your middle age. It is difficult to tell the truth, but you make people believe in the existence of immortals. Your facial color looks pale. Your sleeves have fragrant mist. The path to the so-called Turquoise Pond, becomes clearly discernible in front of your eyes.” This poem shows that the author was impressed by this woman whose Daoist fasting was leading her toward Daoism's ultimate goal – immortality; Zhao, “Zhen Gu,” *Qingyuan zhai shiji* 清苑齋詩集 (SKQS edn.), p. 203. In two poems both entitled “Bushu gu” 不食姑 (“Maiden Who Eats Nothing”) the female protagonists only drank water and chanted incantations; they were said to have risen to a divine ambit; Xu Ji 徐璣, “Bushu Gu,” in *Erweiting shiji* 二薇亭詩集 (SKQS edn.), p. 170; Weng Juan 翁卷, “Bushu Gu,” *Xiyuan ji* 西巖集 (SKQS edn.), p. 178.

⁴² For the Queen Mother of the West, see Suzanne E. Cahill, *Transcendence and Divine Passion: The Queen Mother of the West in Medieval China* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1993).

represented to male literati the unearthly and the pure, and inspired the male literati's poetic imaginations, which often were linked to a yearning for longevity.

MIXED CULTIVATION

"Mixed cultivation" refers to the fact that some Song women mixed practices that originated in different religious traditions. These women were devout Buddhist believers and, at the same time, practiced Daoist cultivation. For instance, being fond of Buddhist teachings, Mme. Wang ate only one meal, without meat, per day after her husband died and also practiced Daoist breathing techniques, which, it is said, contributed to her long lifespan.⁴³ Another case is Zhao Bian's 趙抃 (1008–1084) sister-in-law, that is, Zhao Yang's 趙揚 wife *née* Su 蘇. She was said to be a practitioner of both Daoism and Buddhism in her middle age. In addition to the Daoist breathing techniques, she also ate nothing, imbibing merely various sorts of herbal medicines 服餌, a traditional Daoist ascetic as well as nutritional technique to gain immortality.⁴⁴ Yang Wanli's 楊萬里 (1127–1206) epitaph for Fang Daojian 方道堅 (1114–1191) depicted the latter as a mixed practitioner. When she was young, she received a Daoist *lu* 籙 (correspondence register) and fasted fifteen days each month. Fang Daojian also studied Buddhist scriptures diligently, and even intended to shave off her hair to become a nun.⁴⁵ The above women received praise from biographers on account of Confucian virtues. Mme. Wang refused to marry after the death of her husband; Fang Daojian took care of family tasks like ancestral rites and catering; Zhao Yang's wife assisted her husband's clan members during a famine. Their practices indisputably mirror a synthesis of various religious traditions in the Song period.

WOMEN'S OBSERVANCE OF NON-KILLING

Women who observed *zhaijie* were usually influenced by the Buddhist proscription against killing living beings. Not killing was one of the Five Precepts generally adhered to by Buddhists, who believed that observing the Five Precepts not only enhanced their spiritual states, but

⁴³ Chao, *Jingyusheng ji* 20, p. 25.

⁴⁴ In her last moment of life, Mme. Su folded her legs and assumed a specifically Buddhist hand gesture; Liu Cizhuang 劉次莊, "Zhao Yang qi Su shi" 趙揚妻蘇氏, in Huang Benji 黃本驥 (Qing dynasty), ed., *Guzhi shihua* 古誌石華 (in *Shike shiliao xinbian* 石刻史料新編, ser. 2 [Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban she, 1979]), vol. 27, p. 1381.

⁴⁵ Yang Wanli, "Tailingren Fangshi muzhi ming" 太令人方氏墓誌銘, *Chengzhai ji* 129, pp. 3–5.

also gained merit that could lead to immortality, good fortune, wealth, and so forth.⁴⁶ Many of the women described thus far concerning *zhaijie* not only were vegetarians, but also abided by the precept of not killing. More cases should be cited here.

A Woman Tang of Yongjia 永嘉 county did not kill living beings and ate no flesh.⁴⁷ Mme. Zheng vowed to observe the no-killing precept and ate only vegetarian food.⁴⁸ Zhang Shi's 張奭 (1133-1180) wife *née* Xiong avoided killing animals. She once had lived near a slaughterhouse, and after hearing the sounds of butchery decided to become a vegetarian. From that day on, she ceased killing.⁴⁹ Some women even persuaded their families to follow them in their practices. Chen Xiang 陳襄 (1017-1080) wrote about a certain Mme. Fu 傅, who abstained from animal killing and had admonished her family against slaughtering animals for food.⁵⁰ Although there are a great number of cases concerning women's observance of non-killing, most of the sources do not mention when in their lives the women stopped the killing, and how they subsequently handled family tasks that may have involved killing for ancestral worship and banquet preparation.

Besides abstinence from killing, women released animals and drew praise for that from male literati. Mme. Wu 吳 was depicted as compassionate and daring in the protection of living animals. She set free tens of thousands of birds and fish annually.⁵¹ Sun Di 孫覲 (1081-1169) recounted a miraculous story regarding a woman's releasing of animals. In it, a Mme. Wang 王 had studied Buddhist texts diligently when young. She had never killed living things for food. Once Mme. Wang dreamt that many people in emerald garments were praying to her for mercy. When she woke up, she realized the meaning of the dream and asked her family to release all the clams that would be served for the meal.

⁴⁶ Since early times the moral conduct of the laity had been prescribed by a set of rules that forbade killing, stealing; sexual misbehavior, lying; and drinking liquor. On the merit derived from observing the five restrictions, see Tokuno Kyoko, "Byways in Chinese Buddhism: The 'Book of Trapusa' and Indigenous Scriptures," Ph.D. diss. (Berkeley: University of California, 1994).

⁴⁷ Cao Xun 曹勛, "Yongjia jun taifuren Tangshi muzhi ming" 永嘉郡太夫人唐氏墓誌銘, *Songyin ji* 松隱集 (SKQS edn.) 36, p. 3.

⁴⁸ Hong Gua 洪适, "Zhengyiren muzhi" 鄭宜人墓誌, *Panzhou wenji* 盤洲文集 (SKQS edn.) 75, p. 11.

⁴⁹ "Zhang Shi qi Xiongshi muzhi ming" 張奭妻熊氏墓誌銘 (in Chen Boquan 陳柏泉, ed., *Jiangxi chutu muzhi ming xuanbian* 江西出土墓誌銘選編 [Jiangxi jiaoyu chuban she, 1991]), p. 32.

⁵⁰ Chen Xiang, "Chongguo taifuren fushi muzhi ming" 崇國太夫人符氏墓誌銘, *Guling ji* 古靈集 (SKQS edn.) 20, p. 19.

⁵¹ Fan, "Suizhou guanchashi handonghou qi Chenliujun jun Wushi muzhi ming" 隨州觀察使漢東侯妻陳留郡吳氏墓誌銘, *Fan taishi ji* 48, p. 4.

Wang thereafter did not eat food with shells.⁵² The following is another story found in the anecdotal sources:

Mr. Sun Weimin's 孫威敏 wife Mme. Bian 邊 was fond of eating fresh fish. She had to watch the fish be chopped while alive before she felt it would be tasty. One day after she personally saw the chef cutting up a fish and putting it into a container, she felt sleepy and took a nap. She then dreamt of the Guanyin Bodhisattva sitting inside the container of sliced fish, luminous. Bian suddenly woke up to see the fish in the container, and she saw all the sliced pieces moving as if alive. She then had it all thrown into the river. Bian became a vegetarian.⁵³

Similar stories are found among funeral inscriptions, as well as in anecdotes.⁵⁴

SECLUSION AS AN ASCETIC PRACTICE

In addition to various types of fasting by Song women, another form of women's ascetic practice also mentioned in Song materials was seclusion, *zhaiju* 齋居, or *yanju* 燕居. Many women, whether from elite families or lower classes, not only lived an austere life of fasting, but also would cloister themselves. Huang Tingjian wrote about a woman who went into seclusion at the age of forty, a practice that Huang approvingly claimed was not even achieved by Buddhist nuns.⁵⁵ Su Song's 蘇頌 (1120–1101) sister withdrew from household affairs, isolated herself from her family, and began studying Buddhist texts after her husband, Zhang Sili 張斯立, died.⁵⁶ According to the renowned poet Lu You 陸

⁵² Sun Di, "Song gu Qinguo furen Wangshi muzhi ming" 宋故秦國夫人王氏墓誌銘, *Hongqing jushi ji* 鴻慶居士集 (SKQS edn.) 40, p. 3.

⁵³ Zhuang Chuo 莊綽, *Jile bian* 雞肋編 (rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), *j. xia*, p. 113.

⁵⁴ A related story concerns the mother of Li Yuanchong 李元冲. In 1078, she dreamt that she approached a big pond, when a three- to four-foot catfish jumped out and became a young girl in black clothing, who bowed to her and said: "Next morning I will be served as your breakfast. Now I am pregnant with five thousand babies in my belly. I beg for your mercy to let me go. If I survive, my five thousand children will be saved as well." Li's mother consented. Next dawn she admonished the servants against purchasing fish, but one already went to the market and came back with a huge-bellied catfish which was exactly the one Li's mother saw in her dream. She ordered the servant to release it into the brook, and thus became a pious Buddhist who abstained from meat for the rest of her life; anon., "Limu fangyu" 李母放魚, *Xinbian fenmen gujin shilei* 新編分門古今事類 (rpt. Taipei: Xinxing shuju, 1937).

⁵⁵ Huang Tingjian, "Yongan xian jun Jinshi muzhi ming" 永安縣君金氏墓誌銘, *Shangu wenji* 山谷文集 (SKQS edn.) 8, p. 20. Another woman, Mme. Wang, also chose to live alone in order to serve the Buddha; *ibid.*, p. 26.

⁵⁶ Su Song, "Wanshou xianling Zhangjun furen Sushi muzhi ming" 萬壽縣令張君夫人蘇氏墓誌銘, *Suweigong wenji* 蘇魏公文集 (SKQS edn.) 62, p. 8. According to Miss Su's epitaph, written by Su Song, her first husband, Lü Changxu 呂昌緒 died fourteen years before her second husband Zhang Sili.

游 (1125-1210), Mme. Chen 陳 cloistered herself after she had helped her husband's family to prosper, and never again stepped outside her room.⁵⁷ Zhong Lingzhan 仲靈湛 (1132-1184) studied Buddhism as a pupil of the famous Chan monk Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲 (1089-1163). She lived in seclusion and ate no meat "in order to cut off worldly desire."⁵⁸ In *Yijian zhi* we learn about a female Daoist practitioner originally from an elite family, He Shiyun 何師韞 (also known as Lanyu Daoren 懶愚道人), who secluded herself after the death of her husband.⁵⁹ In the sources we also come across nonelite women practicing *zhaiju* from religious piety. Old Woman Zhang, mentioned above, was said to have left her family and lived alone in a deserted temple. Hong Mai also reported a case of seclusion on the part of a nonelite woman *née* Liu 劉, who left home and secluded herself out of Buddhist belief.⁶⁰

These notices of women's seclusion imply that women resigned from their domestic duties. However, not all women were privileged enough to be freed from such tasks, which would have included preparations for ancestral rites and the concomitant meal provision. As wives and daughters-in-law, women were expected to do their duties, such as catering, for the entire family and guests, and to perform the ancestral sacrifices. Although in prosperous families the servants would have undertaken all the household chores, sources show that many women from well-to-do families still personally engaged in tasks, a fortiori women in average and poor families were certainly bearing far heavier burdens. They consequently were involved in slaughtering animals.

There is evidence that in their daily lives Song women ran into problems along these lines. For instance, every time she undertook a family sacrifice, a certain woman named Zhu 朱, a Buddhist practitioner, needed to slice up the animals and cook the meals in person.⁶¹ Another, *née* Xia 夏, was told that she might observe the precept against taking life and be a vegetarian except when she needed to conduct sacrificial tasks and prepare banquets for the family and guests.⁶² According to the sources, some women would also fast before they took up ancestor

⁵⁷ Lu You, "Furen Chenshi muzhi ming" 夫人陳氏墓誌銘, *Weinan wenji* 渭南文集 (rpt. Beijing: Xinhua shuju, 1986), p. 222.

⁵⁸ Ye Shi, "Song gu Mengfuren muzhi ming" 宋故孟夫人墓誌銘, *Shuixin wenji*, p. 233.

⁵⁹ "Lanyu Daoren," *Yijian zhi*, pp. 1479-80.

⁶⁰ Sima Guang, "Zhang Xingpo zhuan," *Quanxia ji* 72, p. p; Hong, "Liu Gunü" 劉姑女, *Yijian zhi*, p. 317.

⁶¹ Yang Shi 楊時, "Yangmu Zhushi muzhi ming" 楊母朱氏墓誌銘, *Guishan ji* 龜山集 (SKQS edn.) 30, p. 1.

⁶² "Zeng Dali pingshi Shihu muzhi ming," 贈大理評事史壺墓誌銘, Chen, *Jiangxi chutu muzhi ming xuanbian*, p. 17.

worship. This was a traditional Confucian fasting custom for rituals and sacrifices. Mme. Sheng 盛 would fast prior to every family sacrifice. Whenever guests visited the house, she fêted them with cut up fresh fish, chopped up chicken, and roasted lamb.⁶³ The above biographical subjects, Zhu, Xia, and Sheng, were all said to have been fond of Buddhist teachings. These examples, on the one hand, suggest Song women compromised their ascetic practices in the face of Confucian precepts of female duties that played a vital role in Song neo-Confucian restoration of family rituals. On the other hand, such practices also reveal the flexibility of Song female asceticism.

MALE LITERATI OPINION

Although many similar examples could be cited, a certain pattern has already emerged: these women were dutiful wives who fulfilled household tasks; at the same time, they cultivated their own persons through devotion to a religious practice. Song male literati admired the self-cultivation of women ascetics. They lauded female ascetics who continued to fulfill wifely duties, including the feeding of families and the performance of ancestral rites. How did the Song women reconcile their religious practices with their daily life obligations? How did women succeed in conforming to conventional expectations while pursuing their spiritual cultivation?

As a matter of fact, women who did not do household tasks, such as preparing food for sacrificial rites, tended to be viewed with some disapprobation. Neo-Confucian scholars, like Sima Guang, denounced women's failing in their duty to conduct ancestral rites:

In the past, women in elite families would personally prepare sacrificial foods. Nowadays, women are conceited and no longer are willing to enter the kitchen to do the preparation themselves. Even though they have servants to carry out all the activities, if they are unable to hold the knife (to do the slaughter and cutting of food) by themselves, they need to personally supervise the kitchen work to make all food fine and clean.⁶⁴

Sima Guang did not mention why Song women of his day were unwilling to prepare food in person. It is not implausible that women's ascetic

⁶³ Wu Yong 吳泳, "Shengyiren muzhi ming" 盛宜人墓誌銘, *Helin ji* 鶴林集 (SKQS edn.) 35, p. 18.

⁶⁴ Sima Guang, *Sima shi shuyi* 司馬氏書儀 (rpt. Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1936) 10, p. 114.

practices and their observance of the Buddhist prohibition of killing contributed to their reluctance to perform these duties. Food preparation for ancestral sacrifices, according to Sima Guang, was viewed not only as a woman's job in terms of gender role, but also as representing of an important Confucian value – that of filial piety towards the ancestors.

Another critic, Lu You, wrote a funeral inscription for a dutiful woman from his clan:

[Mme. Lu] had practiced Buddhist teachings since she was a child. She avoided eating meat and she had never violated this principle. However, she served the family shrine filially and respectfully. Every morning and evening she visited the ancestors' tablets to serve them. She took up family sacrifice, and she did all the cooking and cleansing tasks in person. She did not even go to sleep for several nights when she needed to conduct the sacrificial preparation. Her husband, a Gentleman for Discussion, made many friends with eminent men. Every time these friends visited, the Gentleman for Discussion frequently invited them to spend a night in their house. Mme. Lu then held the knife, chopping and cooking to regale them, and she never had an exhausted expression on her face, even in her old age. This is what women's duty is. However, nowadays, the instructions in the inner quarters seem to ignore this. Women who claim to study Buddhism always put aside the tasks of family sacrifice and preparing banquets for guests. They only spend their personal funds on their wishes, and declare: "I am seeking bliss from Buddha." Alas! One marries a wife so that she might perform the ancestral rites and undertake the household affairs. Is it indeed intended that we allow her to seek bliss at all?⁶⁵

Clearly, in the above, Lu You is critical of the practices of contemporary women. He complains bitterly about women's Buddhism, because as a result they neglect their domestic responsibilities. In the eyes of Song male literati like Lu You, women who did not abide by the customs, for example, those who removed themselves from household affairs either because they observed non-killing or were in seclusion, were not play-

⁶⁵ Lu You, "Lu Ruren muzhi ming" 陸儒人墓誌銘, *Weinan wenji*, p. 205. My observation of literati attitudes toward the practice of non-killing among women shared a similar opinion to Wang Pingyu 王平宇. See Wang Pingyu, "Songdai funu de Fojiao xinyang, jian lun shidaifu guandian de quanshi yu piping" 宋代婦女的佛教信仰兼論士大夫觀點的詮釋與批評, M.A. thesis (National Tsing Hua University, 1998), pp. 22-23.

ing their roles as dutiful housewives in the inner quarters.⁶⁶ Accordingly, although Sima Guang wrote the biography for the Old Woman Zhang, he criticized her Buddhist beliefs that led her to abandon her son and family to live alone.

DIETARY CULTURE AND RITUALS IN THE SONG SOCIAL CONTEXT

Song women's ascetic practices like *zhaijie*, fasting, and non-killing, are recorded extensively in many sources, especially in women's epitaphs. A question we must ask, however, is what was the aim of the Song literati in writing women's biographies? To the male elite, the purpose in writing funeral biographies was not only to commemorate the deceased, but also to "conceal the evil and make known the good" among the populace. In other words, the function of writing biographies was to set up paradigms to be emulated and commemorated throughout history. Accordingly, the genre of biography promoted stereotypes and served as models of cultural renovation and morals. Given the seemingly persistent biographical patterns found in women's funeral inscriptions, readers can easily grasp the ideology and core values of the biographers. The motifs in the biographies deal with Song women as "inner helpers," assisting their husbands, taking care of parents-in-law, rearing and educating children, and supporting their husbands' families and clans. However, as the above-mentioned representative group of materials make clear, women's ascetic practices, like fasting and vegetarianism in the service of their personal cultivation, were also acknowledged, and tended to be approved of by the male literati. This raises questions about the nature of the religious milieu and social context that contributed to the prevalence of Song women's self-cultivation through ascetic practices. This question can be answered by analyzing briefly contemporary views of food and diet. How were women drawn into food metaphors and food practices? What constituted the cultural and socio-economic elements regarding female fasting and non-killing practices during the Song era? And how were such practices viewed as gendered practices – that is, practices prevalent among Song women rather than their male counterparts, but eventually accepted by men.

Food Practices – Rituals and Women

In traditional China, every family, from rulers to the ordinary people, was expected to perform ancestral sacrifices. Confucian teaching

⁶⁶ Sima Guang, *Chaungjia ji* 72, p. 10.

viewed individual perfection in terms of one's contribution to the general welfare by means of respect for the great sages of the past, conformity with the ways of heaven, and obedience to the customary practices of family and society. Among those practices, dating to early history, were rites involving blood sacrifice supported by the Confucians in their ceremonial and moral aspects. In particular from early times, the practice of *san sheng* 三牲 ("Three Animals") required that oxen, goats, and pigs be sacrificed in honor of the sages and ancestors.⁶⁷

In traditional Chinese society, ritual was closely tied to food, and the duty of food preparation and offerings for the sacrificial rituals were to be done by a woman's hand. Ancient Chinese classics, such as the *Book of Changes* and *Book of Odes*, teach that the woman's role is confined to the inner quarters and that her duty involves only household tasks, like cooking and sacrificial rites.⁶⁸ Such a conventional view is outlined in *Li ji* and in later instructional books like Ban Zhao's 班昭 (45-120 AD) *Nüjie* 女誡 (*Admonitions for Women*), in which the most important duty assigned to women was to "keep wine and food pure and orderly, in order to serve them to guests."⁶⁹

During Song times there was a revival of Confucianism as a response to Buddhist and Daoist influences upon society. Scholars attempted to return to the roots of Confucian inspiration by restoring the values of the ancient classics as sources of moral and political strength. Ancient rituals, particularly family rituals manifesting the very core Confucian values, were highly emphasized by Song neo-Confucian writers, officials, and local leaders. As Patricia Ebrey states, of all the family rites, sacrifice to ancestors had always had the closest connection to social and political rank:

In the classics rulers, nobles, great officers, and ordinary officers were all to perform ancestral rites differently. They were to express the gradations of their ranks through the frequency with which they performed sacrifices, the kinds and quantities of offerings they made, and the number of generations of ancestors they served. Detailed schedules incorporating these principles were provided by the T'ang government in its ritual code, the *K'ai-yüan li*. In neither the classics nor the *K'ai-yüan li* were there schedules for ancestral

⁶⁷ The other term is *tailao* 太牢. See Zuoqiu Ming 左丘明, *Guoyu* 國語 (rpt. Shanghai: Guji chuban she, 1978), pp. 564-65.

⁶⁸ See the commentary on the hexagram statement in the *Book of Changes*; *Zhouyi yinde* 周易引得 (in Harvard-Yenching Concordance Series) 23, p. 37; also "Si Gan" 斯干, Mao 189, *Shi jing* 詩經.

⁶⁹ Ban Zhao, *Nü jie*; see Nancy Lee Swann, *Pan Chao: Foremost Woman Scholar of China* (New York: Century, 1932), p. 86.

rites for those without office, even well-educated ones who would consider themselves *shih*. To establish how the educated elite in Sung times should sacrifice to their ancestors would serve symbolically to establish their position in Sung society.⁷⁰

In these ancestral sacrifices, food preparation and food-offerings, which involved the killing of animals, were central to the whole ceremony.⁷¹

Ordained by the classics, female labor in food preparation was an inescapable necessity. For centuries, typically a woman's food-related duties were not only to cook and cater, but also to undertake food preparation for family rituals. The Song period was no different. Women prepared food for the sacrifices, and indeed played an indispensable role in the Song family rituals. Ideally, women could not avoid this role and duty, and yet the role and duty allowed them to have control over all food related work, even over their own food behaviors, such as vegetarianism and the refusal to kill animals.

Dietary Culture in Historical Context

Evidence for the Song amply attests vegetarianism as a frequent way that women fasted. But was that practice also prevalent among the male populace? What are the underlying causes contributing to female fasting and vegetarianism? In Chinese, *shushi* 蔬食 (or *sushi* 素食) connotes a diet comprised only of vegetables, fruits, and the like, without meat or alcohol.⁷² According to Buddhist teachings, the diet should also be free of onions, garlic, and leeks.⁷³ At the same time, animal sacrifice was central to the Chinese ritual tradition. Although the types of offerings differed with one's social status, each offering involved blood-sacrifice. Further, in ancient China, meat was consumed after

⁷⁰ Patricia Ebrey, *Confucianism and Family Rituals in Imperial China: A Social History of Writing about Rites* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1991), p. 47.

⁷¹ Sima Guang, "Sang Yi" 喪儀, *Sima shi shuyi*, 10, pp. 114–116. Zhu Xi, *Jia li*, on which see Ebrey, *Chu Hsi's Family Rituals: A Twelfth-Century Chinese Manual for the Performance of Cappings, Weddings, Funerals, and Ancestral Rites* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1991), pp. 157–60.

⁷² This gloss of *sushi* was provided by Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581–645), in his *Kuangmiu zhengsu* 匡謬正俗 (rpt. Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1936), p. 31.

⁷³ The so-called *wuxin* 五辛 or *wuhun* 五葷 are the five forbidden pungent roots, including garlic, leeks, onion, and two other strongly flavored onion-like vegetables. According to Buddhist sutras, these five pungent root vegetables cause irritability of temper if eaten raw; and, if eaten cooked, act as an aphrodisiac. Also, the breath of the eaters will drive away the good divinities and evoke evil spirits; see the Song-era monk Zhipan 志磐, *Fozu tongji* 佛祖統紀 (Tno. 2035, vol. 49) 33, p. 323A. See Zunshi 遵氏, "Jie wuxin pian" 戒五辛篇, in QSW 203, pp. 508–10; also William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous, eds., *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1982), p. 128.

being offered in sacrifice. Although there are records of fasting and abstinence from meat in early China, it was only with the introduction of Buddhism around the first century AD that vegetarianism became known. It became particularly important after emperor Wu of Liang 梁武帝 (r. 502–552 AD) in 511 prohibited the *sangha's* use of alcohol and meat.⁷⁴ He further banned all types of blood-sacrifice, including the state sacrifice that symbolized the establishment of the reign and was regarded as an indispensable tradition.⁷⁵ The prohibition on blood-sacrifice, however, lapsed in the ensuing political chaos. A later historical document attributed the ruin of his regime to that particular ban.⁷⁶

Under the powerful centralized Tang court, Buddhism and Daoism influenced the practices of animal slaughter and vegetarianism, and Buddhism influenced the way Daoist centers began to ban slaughter on their sacred days.⁷⁷ In 619, inspired by these religious teachings, emperor Gaozu of Tang 唐高祖 (r. 618–625 AD) issued a decree considerably broader in scope, prohibiting the slaughter of animals and fish during the “Three Long Fasting Months,” that is, the first, fifth, and ninth lunar months. The decree further banned the execution of criminals on the “Ten Feast Days” of each month.⁷⁸ As Liu Shufen suggests, Gaozu’s decrees banning slaughter affected the daily lives of the common people because they indirectly forced people to adopt a vegetarian diet for longer periods, there having been no sure way to preserve previously slaughtered meat over those on-and-off days of no slaughtering during the three months.⁷⁹ The ban on animal slaughter was no longer practiced in the Song period, but practitioners continued the avoidance of meat on those same Ten Feast Days.⁸⁰ During the Song, in the northern region, laypeople abstained from flesh and alcohol on

⁷⁴ Emp. Gaozu of Liang, “Duan jiurou wen” 斷酒肉文, in Dao Xuan 道宣, *Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集 (Tno. 2103, vol. 52) 26, pp. 294B–303C.

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 293B–C.

⁷⁶ See biog. of Xiao Yan 蕭衍, *Wei Shu* 魏書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974) 98, p. 2187.

⁷⁷ For the mutual influence between Buddhism and Daoism regarding vegetarianism and slaughter, see Liu Shufen 劉淑芬, “Nian san yue shi, Zhonggu houqi de duantu yu zhaijie,” 年三月十中古後期的斷屠與齋戒, *Dalu zazhi* (2002) 104.1, pp. 15–33.

⁷⁸ These days fell on the 1st, 8th, 14th, 15th, 18th, 23d, 24th, 28th, 29th, and 30th days. In 719 a legal code was promulgated to change the prohibition period of Ten Feast Days to be in the 1st, 5th, and 9th months only. For the records regarding the decree see Song Minqiu 宋敏求, “Guannei zhuzhou duantugu zhao” 關內諸州斷屠酤詔, in *Tang dazhaoling ji* 唐大詔令集, vol. 108, p. 7. Also see *Tang huiyao* 唐會要 (rpt. Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1974), p. 733; and Liu Shufen, “Nian san yue shi,” pp. 15–16.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Lu You, *Laoxue’an biji* 老學庵筆記, in *Tang Song shiliao biji congkan* 唐宋史料筆記叢刊 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), p. 110. Dai Zhi 戴埴, “Zheng wujian changyue” 正五九三長月, *Shupu* 鼠璞 (BJXSDG edn., ser 8, vol 2), pp. 994–95.

the third and seventh days of each month in compliance with a Daoist custom associated with the practice of the Ten Feast Days.⁸¹

Although some rulers in medieval China promoted vegetarianism and the avoidance of killing, actual practice was far from this ideal. As mentioned above, the policy against blood sacrifice promulgated by emperor Wu of Liang ultimately failed. Also, in 692 empress Wu 武后 (r. 690–704) issued an imperial edict that the slaughter of animals and the catching of fish were forbidden. This angered Confucians because of the impediment to their ancestral sacrifices. This edict, too, eventually lapsed.⁸² Nevertheless, vegetarianism, especially to perpetuate fasting, was embraced by the Buddhist clergy and some pious laypersons in the observance of the precept against killing. As analyzed previously, the Chinese had no general opposition to animal slaughter or consuming meat before the advent of Buddhism. Rather, because meat was not always available to the common people, meat eating seemed to serve in the Confucian classics as a measure of the well-being of the nation.⁸³ Unlike the upper class, which was identified as “meat eaters 肉食者,” the masses in early Chinese society seldom ate meat except that obtained in the context of special sacrifices and festivals. Hence, in the Chinese mind, meat was regarded as precious and nutritious, and as a symbol of high rank in society.⁸⁴

Until about the tenth century, the production of meat was not sufficient to feed the masses. Individual families or villages raised their own domestic animals.⁸⁵ Subsequently, thanks to the shifts in agriculture and population that spurred trade and urban growth, commerce grew enormously, and specialized shops, like meat markets, became widespread in cities and towns.⁸⁶ Shiba Yoshinobu has pointed out

⁸¹ Wang, *Yanyi yimou lu*, p. 26.

⁸² In 734 the emperor Xuanzong 宣宗 (r. 712–755) ordered that the ban on slaughter be limited to a three-day period in the first, seventh, and tenth months, which had been regarded as sacred by Daoists since the earlier Northern Wei period; see Stanley Weinstein, *Buddhism under the Tang* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1987), p. 43; p. 123.

⁸³ For instance, according to Mencius, an ideal society is one where, “if a mulberry is planted in every homestead of five *mu* of land, then those who are fifty could wear silk; if chicken, pigs and dogs do not miss their breeding seasons, then those who are seventy could eat meat; if each lot of a hundred *mu* was not deprived of labor during the busy seasons, then families with several mouths to feed would not go hungry... When those who are seventy wear silk and eat meat and the masses are neither cold nor hungry, it is impossible for their ruler not to be a true Lord.” trans. D. C. Lau, *Mencius* (Penguin Books, 1970), pp. 51–52.

⁸⁴ *Chunqiu zuozhuan zhengyi* 春秋左傳正義 (SSJZS edn.) 8, p. 22b. See also Terry Kleeman, “Licentious Cults and Bloody Victuals: Sacrifice, Reciprocity, and Violence in Traditional China,” *AM* 3d ser. 7.1 (1994), p. 189; and Chen Weiming 陳偉明, *Tang Song yinshi wenhua fazhan shi* 唐宋飲食文化發展史 (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1995), pp. 21–22.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁸⁶ On specialized meat markets, see Li Tao 李燾, *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian* 續資治通鑑

that “in spite of Buddhist taboos, it seems that meat-eating was widespread and the price of meat was rising. Thus a number of small-scale disreputable butchers, slaughtering and selling in covert fashion, were to be found scattered in the corners of rural markets and around the outskirts of villages.”⁸⁷ According to the description in *Dongjing menghua lu* 東京夢華錄 and *Mengliang Lu* 夢梁錄, in both Kaifeng 開封 and Hangzhou 杭州, butcher shops abounded, and the demand for meat dramatically increased:

Numerous butcher shops throughout the city prepared meat. In Kaifeng, butcher shops were “a meat table, where three to five men are lined up wielding knives, and the meat is broadly cut, sliced, finely slivered, or pounded with a blade, according to the desires of the customer.” In Southern Sung Hangchow, such butcher shops abounded, and “each day each shop hangs sides of pork—not less than ten sides. In the two holidays of wintertime, around New Year’s, each shop sells several tens of sides daily.” Other kinds of meat readily available to the urban cook included beef, horse, donkey, venison, rabbit, a variety of fowl, fish, and seafood of all kinds.⁸⁸

This detailed passage regarding the popularity of the butcher shops explicitly indicates the prevalence of a meat diet among the urban populace during the Song.

We see from the foregoing discussion that practices having to do with blood sacrifice pervaded traditional Chinese society. Many types of sacrifice, including those performed by popular cults, involved the killing of animals. As Valerie Hansen points out, the Song era witnessed the growth and formation of the popular pantheon, which led to an increase in temple building by local officials and wealthy merchants.⁸⁹ Frequently, butcher shops were located around local temples

長編 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), p. 490.

⁸⁷ Shiba Yoshinobu, *Commerce and Society in Song China*, trans. Mark Elvin (Ann Arbor: U. of Michigan P., 1970), p. 100; see also idem, “Urbanization and the Development of Markets in the Lower Yangtze Valley,” in John Winthrop Haeger, ed., *Crisis and Prosperity in Sung China* (Tucson: U. of Arizona P., 1975), pp. 13–48.

⁸⁸ The entire passage is from Michael Freeman, “Sung,” in K. C. Chang, ed., *Food in Chinese Culture: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1977), p. 149. Freeman’s sentences in quotation marks are, respectively, from Meng Yuanlao 孟元老, *Dongjing menghua lu* 東京夢華錄, in *Dongjing menghua lu wai sizhong* 東京夢華錄外四種 (rpt. Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), p. 27, and Wu Zimu 吳自牧, *Mengliang lu* 夢梁錄, in *Dongjing menghua lu, waisizhong*, p. 270.

⁸⁹ Valerie Hansen, *Changing Gods in Medieval China, 1127–1276* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1990).

and shrines because of the need for meat in sacrificial ceremonies.⁹⁰ Unsurprisingly, the upper classes and well-to-do had ample opportunities to lay out meat-offerings and consume meat. Humble families in the Song period, however, also managed with great effort to obtain inferior meat for sacrifices.⁹¹ Additionally, numerous restaurants and food stands, which supplied various meat dishes, were located throughout cities and towns.⁹² Thus the ubiquity of temples and meat vendors provided another factor to spur the consumption of meat among the masses. Shio Takugo has argued that meat eating was very common for all strata of Chinese society in the Southern Song period. Some members of the affluent official class consumed lamb and mutton, and regarded pork as inferior. Pork and fish, together with rice, formed the main diet of the lower classes.⁹³

Vegetarianism and Related Practices in the Song

But in general what were the attitudes toward vegetarianism? Under the impact of Buddhism, the concept of vegetarianism began to be advocated particularly by the Buddhist clergy and the upper classes as an expression of religious piety.⁹⁴ In Song times, scholars like Huang Tingjian frequently undertook vegetarian diets out of Buddhist beliefs.⁹⁵ Wang Shu 王曙, fond of Buddhist teachings, abstained from meat.⁹⁶ Another vegetarian was Lu You, whom we have encountered already. But unlike Huang Tingjian and Wang Shu, who believed in Buddhist tenets,

⁹⁰ *Dongjing menghua lu*, p. 22; Hong, *Yijian zhi*, “Yongkang taishou” 永康太守, pp. 1017–18; Fan Chengda 范成大, *Wuchuan lu* 吳船錄 (CSJC edn.) 1. Also see Chen, *Tang Song yinshi*, p. 127. Shiba Yoshinobu also shows that “at the Chung-te Temple in Szechwan, in front of which several hundreds of butchers are said to have resided, up to 40,000 sheep were slaughtered each year in sacrifice”; *Commerce and Society*, p. 102.

⁹¹ For instance, see Hong, “Hujiang saishen” 胡匠賽神, *Yijian zhi*, p. 457.

⁹² Meng, *Dongjing menghua lu*, pp. 13–14, 16–17, 20–23, 26–27; 耐得翁, *Ducheng jisheng* 都城紀勝, in *Dongjing menghua lu waisizhong*, pp. 93–94; anon., *Xihu laoren fansheng lu* 西湖老人繁盛錄, in Meng, *Dongjing menghua lu wai sizhong*, pp. 115–116; Wu, *Mengliang lu*, pp. 241–45, 264–271; and Zhou Mi 周密, *Wulin jiushi* 武林舊事, pp. 444–45, 447–49.

⁹³ Shio Takugo, “A Popularization of a Meat Diet during the Song Dynasty: Focusing on the Case of Jiang Nan during the Southern Song Dynasty,” *Shūkan Tōyōgaku* 集刊東洋學 79 (1998), pp. 69–86. For other information on meat, see Chen, *Tang Song yinshi*, pp. 119–36; Wu Tao 吳濤, “Bei Song dongjing de yinshi shenghuo” 北宋東京的飲食生活, *Shixue yuekan* 史學月刊 2 (1994), pp. 22–29; Gernet, *Daily Life*, p. 136.

⁹⁴ As mentioned, Liang Wudi is the best example. During Tang, Cui Anqian 崔安潛, a pious Buddhist scholar-official, often served imitation meat made of soybeans; and was probably the inventor of vegetarian imitation-meat; Sun Guangxian 孫光憲, *Beimeng suoyan* 北夢瑣言 (rpt. Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), p. 19.

⁹⁵ Huang Tingjian wrote several poems on his vegetarian diet; Tao, *Bei Song shizu*, p. 212.

⁹⁶ See biog. of Wang Shu, in *Song shi* 宋史 (rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977) 286, pp. 9632–33.

he was in favor of vegetarianism for the sake of nourishing life 養生. He wrote several poems on the advantages of vegetarianism.⁹⁷ As the sources suggest, however, not many male scholars observed the long-term vegetarian fasting practiced by women in Song China.⁹⁸ Most of the Song literati preferred meat eating to a vegetarian diet. Many of them must have had meat on a daily basis. Su Shi, who ate meat at least one meal per day,⁹⁹ once remarked that, just as in the case of avoiding meat, it was very difficult to abstain from desires 絕慾, and that he definitely was not willing to eat only vegetables all his life.¹⁰⁰ A pious Buddhist follower, the renowned scholar-official Zhang Shangying 張商英 (1043–1122) was not a vegetarian, but ate meat every day. In a letter to Zhang Zhiping 張質平, he said:

I am by now seventy-four years of age. Each day I read four to five scrolls of Buddhist writings. Every day I eat one *sheng* of rice, five *liang* of noodles, eight *liang* of meat, and supplements of fish and wine. I have followed this routine constantly. I do not take warm medicine, but only practice breathing techniques, harmonizing the heavenly grades day and night.¹⁰¹

Sima Guang once wrote a letter to a friend who had avoided meat and wine for a long period, advising him that flesh and alcohol were indispensable for life. Sima Guang even thought the vegetarian diet would cause some types of colds.¹⁰² Likewise, Yang Zonghui's 楊宗惠 (tenth century) family believed his illness and early death resulted from a vegetarian diet.¹⁰³ A belief that vegetarianism caused poor health thus seems to some extent to have entered the thinking of the male elite.

In addition to notions concerning health problems, the rarity of vegetarian fasting among the literati could also be ascribed to conven-

⁹⁷ Chen, *Tang Song yinshi*, pp. 46–47.

⁹⁸ Tao Jing-shen points out that there were not many male scholars who practiced vegetarianism during the Northern Song; *Bei Song shizu*, p. 211. After investigating over 400 women's biographies and approximately 150 males in both Northern and Southern Song, I have the same doubts about the popularity of vegetarianism among Southern Song male elites. There are very few cases of it.

⁹⁹ Tao, *Bei Song shizu*, p. 211.

¹⁰⁰ Su Shi, "Da Zhang Wenqian shu" 答張文潛書, *Dongpo quanji*, p. 52.

¹⁰¹ Hong Mai, *Rongzhai suibi sibi* 容齋隨筆四筆 (rpt. Shanghai: Guji chuban she, 1978), p. 631. The translation is based on Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer's with some changes; Schmidt-Glintzer, "Zhang Shangying (1043–1122): An Embarrassing Policy Adviser under the Northern Song," in Tsuyoshi Kinugawa, ed., *Ryū Shiken hakushi shōju ki'nen Sōshi kenkyū ronshū* 劉子健博士頌壽紀念宋史研究論集 (Kyoto: Dōhōsha, 1989), p. 524.

¹⁰² Sima Guang, "Da Li Daqing Xiaoji shu" 答李大卿孝基書, in *Sima Wengong quanji* 司馬溫公全集 (given in Tao, *Bei Song shizu*, p. 210).

¹⁰³ Tao, *Bei Song shizu*, p. 211.

tional Confucian values. Consider the comment on *rusu* 茹素 (vegetarian diet) by Li Zhiyan 李之彥 (twelfth to thirteenth centuries):

Nowadays people regard *rusu* (vegetarian diet) as *zhaijie*. Do they know the true meaning of *zhaijie*? According to the sages, *zhai* means to regulate, namely, to rectify one's mind; *jie* denotes to be against the wicked mind and delusions. Therefore, to Confucians there is no single day without *zhai*, no single day without *jie*. People now always avoid meat on certain days, like the *gengshen* 庚申 and *jiazi* 甲子 dates. They call this *zhaijie*. I really don't know what their intention is in observing such a practice.¹⁰⁴

In this passage, the real *zhaijie* does not mean a vegetarian diet but rather a regulation of the mind, a definition derived from the classics.¹⁰⁵ Another scholar, Luo Bi 羅璧, argued that, like the Buddhists, Confucians were also against taking the lives of living beings, and that the key was to stay away from the kitchens and to abide by appropriate rites. For Confucians, vegetarianism or fasting was regarded as proper and necessary only on certain occasions and for short periods of time, such as during a mourning period or before ancestral rites. He also argued strenuously that killing animals for sacrifices was necessary since it was an important Confucian principle. Therefore, Confucians would not consider Buddhist vegetarianism and precepts to be proper conduct.¹⁰⁶

Collective Vegetarianism among the Populace in Song China

The foregoing analysis suggests why fewer male literati observed vegetarian fasting than did their female counterparts. Furthermore, during the Song, vegetarianism seems to have been connected with occasional religious fervors. Song government officials were concerned about the practice of vegetarianism among the populace and were even annoyed by such collective observances. In traditional China, the bureaucratic elite always felt threatened by the pervasive existence of outlawed religious groups. One sect was the Manichaeans, a religion originally from Persia and having entered China around 675 AD.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Li Zhiyan, "Rusu," *Donggu suibi* 東谷隨筆 (BJXSDG edn., ser. 6, vol. 3), pp. 1687–88.

¹⁰⁵ For example, *Zhuangzi* 莊子 (sect. "Renjian shi" 人間世) contains this conversation between Yan Hui 顏回 and Confucius. Yan Hui asked: "I haven't drunk wine or eaten any strong flavored foods for several months because of destitution. So can I be considered as having fasted?" Confucius replied: "That is the fasting one does before a sacrifice, not the fasting of the mind." I have based the above translation on that of Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1996), pp. 53–54.

¹⁰⁶ Luo Bi, *Luoshi shiyi* 羅氏釋遺 (BJXSDG edn., ser. 6, vol. 4), p. 2257.

¹⁰⁷ See Zhipan, *Fozu tongji* (T no. 2035, vol. 49) 33, pp. 430C–431A. For a discussion of

Members were largely concentrated in the south, in such regions as Fujian and Zhejiang.¹⁰⁸ Sect members were always depicted as not only “practicing vegetarianism and worshipping demons 吃菜事魔,” but also as “gathering at night and dispersing at dawn 夜聚曉散” and “mixing men and women without proper distinction 男女混雜,” which violated conventional Chinese values. As Masaaki Chikusa points out, the derogatory name “vegetarian demon worshippers” was used only in the Song period.¹⁰⁹ The Song government regarded the sect as a matter of concern because the practice existed in rural, remote areas that were only loosely under government control.¹¹⁰ In addition, the practitioners were suspected of involvement in some uprisings against the Song court.¹¹¹

Numerous documents record details of vegetarian practices and related laws and policies issued by government. In general, punishment for the practitioners, including women, was severe:

Those who practice vegetarianism, worship demons, gather at night and disperse at dawn, and transmit and practice evil teachings shall be sentenced to strangulation. The followers are liable for penal registration at three thousand *li*. The women will be under registered control at one thousand *li*. Those who play magical tricks are reduced by one degree and sentenced to penal registration at one thousand *li*. Their women will be under registered control at five hundred *li*. If there are criminals who do not obey, they shall be sentenced to strangulation. The above shall not be reduced through amnesty. If they do not transmit devilish teachings but practice them, exile them to three thousand *li*. The law will be tolerant if they are killed while being arrested. In addition, their property should be confiscated. If they are not followers but

Manichaeans, see Samuel Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey* (Manchester: Manchester U.P., 1985), and idem, *Manichaeism in Central Asia and China* (Leiden: Brill, 1998). For Manichaeans in the Song, see Brian McKnight, *Law and Order in Sung China* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1992), pp. 75–79.

¹⁰⁸ Zhuang, *Jile bian*, p. 11; Lu, *Laoxuan biji*, p. 90; Zhipan, *Fozu tongji*, pp. 430c–431a.

¹⁰⁹ Masaaki Chikusa 竺沙雅章, *Chūgoku Bukkyō shakaishi kenkyū* 中国佛教社會史研究 (Kyoto: Dōhōsha, 1982), pp. 200–1.

¹¹⁰ Zhang Shou 張守, “Cuozhi mozei jizi” 措置魔賊劄子, in *Biling ji* 毘陵集 (SKQS edn.) 7, pp. 4–5; Liao Gang 廖剛, “Qijin yaojiao jizi” 啓禁妖教劄子, in *Gaofeng wenji* 高峰文集 (SKQS edn.) 2, pp. 22–23; *Song huiyao* 宋會要 (rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1957), sect. “Xingfa” 刑法 2, p. 81; Masaaki, *Chūgoku Bukkyō shakaishi*.

¹¹¹ The most notorious rebellion was that led by Fang La 方臘 in 1120; see Masaaki, *Chūgoku Bukkyō shakaishi*, pp. 229–59; Brian McKnight, “The Rebellion of Fang La,” M.A. thesis (University of Chicago, 1964).

have been seduced by others, and they do not transmit the teachings, their penalty can be reduced by two degrees.¹¹²

According to the above passage from the *Song huiyao*, women who observed vegetarianism collectively were to be viewed as practitioners of the devilish religious sect and chastised relentlessly by the law.

In a case cited in the Song legal document *Qingming ji* 清明集 (*Enlightened Judgments*), a female practitioner named A Mao 阿毛 was beaten sixty blows as a punishment for her ignorance, while another woman, A He 阿何, was ordered to be married off.¹¹³ Likewise, Li Shouqian 李守謙 (Southern Song era), composed ten poems as admonitions against demon worship. One of them described the women involved in the practice:

Foolish are those womenfolk
 Inflicting themselves with vegetarianism.
 Imagine A Tong: once flogged;
 It is too late for regret.¹¹⁴

In the eyes of the bureaucratic elite, women practiced vegetarianism from ignorance, and because they were gullible. As I have already noted, officials, ever vigilant concerning any form of popular collective, were on guard against organized groups. We cannot arbitrarily conclude that the Song male literati always upheld the practice of vegetarianism among women, particularly when the women did not come from elite households. As we have seen, the prosperous economy of roughly the eleventh through thirteenth centuries allowed people other than the truly destitute to consume meat. For nonelite women, if there was no economic reason for practicing vegetarianism, such behavior might have drawn notice to themselves.

¹¹² *Song huiyao*, "Xingfa" (on Shaoxing 2, 11th lunar mo., 17th day), p. 112. Penal registration at a distance (often reflected by the term 配) was a punishment combining features of penal servitude and exile. Convicts subjected to this penalty were registered in special units of the army and in some senses kept under the watchful eye of the military; for this system during Song, see McKnight, *Law and Order*, pp. 385-445.

¹¹³ Wu Yuyan 吳雨巖, "Tongzhi chuanxi shimo dengren" 痛治傳習事魔等人, in an unknown compiler's *Minggong shupan qingmingji* 名公書判清明集 (rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), p. 537. For a similar case regarding "vegetarian demon worship," see Brian McKnight and James T. C. Liu, trans., *The Enlightened Judgments Ching-ming ji: The Song Dynasty Collection* (Albany: State U. of New York P., 1999), pp. 476-78.

¹¹⁴ Li Shouqian 李守謙, "Jie shimo shishi," 戒事魔十詩, idem, *Jiading chichengzhi* 嘉定赤城志 37, p. 7582, as printed in *Song Yuan fangzhi congkan* 宋元方志叢刊 (rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990). The original wording is: "蚩蚩女婦太無知, / 喫菜何須自苦爲。 / 料想阿童鞭背後, / 心中雖悔可能追?" I thank the anonymous referee who revised my translation. Also, see Lieu's chap. "Polemics against Manichaeism as a Subversive Cult," in idem, *Manichaeism in Central Asia and China*, pp. 150-51.

In summary, in Song China the observance of vegetarianism was a controversial issue. While some male scholar-officials preferred vegetarianism, most of them did not observe it for lengthy periods. Furthermore, out of concern for their health and a regard for the dominant conventional values reflected in the appropriate Confucian rites, the majority of Song male literati were reluctant to remain on a vegetarian diet as a means of cultivation as did their women folk. It is risky to speculate on the deeper psychological motives for Song women's practices of vegetarianism and seclusion. However, one can explore the factors which gave rise to such practices, practices which met with the approbation of many male literati.

MOTIVATION, INFLUENCE,
AND OTHER UNDERLYING ELEMENTS

As we have shown, many women from elite families observed *zhai-jie* (generally, vegetarian fasting) as a function of their beliefs. The Song era not only witnessed great socio-economical and political changes, but was also a period of religious efflorescence. Buddhism became fully sinicized and laic-centered: the imperial house actively patronized it in order to consolidate their regime; the literati often found unique companionship and shelter in Buddhist monasteries;¹¹⁵ and Buddhism was incorporated into the lives of ordinary people through beliefs, rituals and festivals. No matter what the social stratum of the lay believer, Buddhist practices and tenets penetrated deeply into the patterns of daily life in China of the late-tenth through thirteenth centuries. Buddhist rituals for the dead (as with those concerning cremation), the Retreat of Water and Land 水陸齋,¹¹⁶ the Ghost Festival, the Festival of Bathing the Buddha, and the release of living creatures on special occasions were performed by all classes. The tenet against the killing of living beings, the concept of reincarnation, and the idea of *karma* (in its sense as retribution) also affected views and values profoundly. Believers, observing Buddhist precepts on a daily basis, derived solace in the face of an uncertain and unpredictable life.

¹¹⁵ For literati Buddhist practices during Tang and Song, see Mark Halperin, "Pieties and Responsibilities: Buddhism and the Chinese Literati, 780-1280," Ph.D. diss. (U. of California, Berkeley, 1997).

¹¹⁶ According to Edward Davis, the Retreat of Water and Land was a distinctively Song phenomenon; Davis, "The Buddhist Retreat of Water and Land," in *Society and the Supernatural in Sung China* (Honolulu: U. of Hawaii P., 2001), appendix. Daniel Stevenson, "Text, Image, and Transformation in the History of the *Shuilu fahui*: The Buddhist Rite for Deliverance of Creatures of Water and Land," in Marsha Weidner, ed., *Cultural Intersections in Later Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: U. of Hawaii P., 2001), pp. 30-72.

Vegetarian fasting is inseparable from the concept of non-killing, which stems from a compassion toward animals. Such compassion is common among humans in many parts of the world; however, this does not always lead a person to reject all animal sacrifices or turn one to vegetarianism.¹¹⁷ Apart from this sort of compassion toward animals, avoiding meat may reflect an attempt to gain merit, whether for the present or a future life. According to a popular Pure Land Buddhist treatise written by Wang Rixiu 王日休 (Northern Song era), vows to avoid meat usually would not only enhance spiritual purity, but would also produce other benefits and merit, aiding both ancestors and descendants who might enjoy longevity, fortune, salvation, and the like.¹¹⁸

Buddhists thought that vegetarian practice brought rewards; the practice is also linked to the idea of requital or retribution (*bao* 報, *baoying* 報應). With the introduction of Buddhism, the concepts of *karma* and of reincarnation reinforced traditional Chinese thinking about retribution. Out of this joining of views on retribution evolved the concept of *guobao* 果報, *karmic* recompense. The above coalescence developed into a dominant belief that penetrated Chinese thinking for centuries. In the Song period, the idea of requital was prevalent. It often appears in admonitory writings, such as Yuan Cai's 袁采 (fl. 1140–1195) *Yuanshi shifan* 袁氏世範 (*Precepts for Social Life*), and Lu You's *Fangweng jiaxun* 放翁家訓 (*Lu You's Family Instruction*), which advise readers to do good deeds and avoid evil behaviors that would bring retribution.¹¹⁹

One of the earliest treatises concerning rewards and punishments in the schema of “response 應” and retribution is *Taishang ganying pian* 太上感應篇 (*Treatise on the Most High as Stimulus-Response*), which first appeared in Song China.¹²⁰ As a generic form of a Daoist admonitory book, it adapted earlier Daoist ethics, which emphasized that doing good deeds and avoiding evil behavior was the way to the ultimate goal – immortality.¹²¹ This text, which disseminated the idea of *guobao*,

¹¹⁷ An e.g. is that of Zhang Shangying, a devout lay Buddhist who admonished against killing animals. However, he ate flesh daily. Another was Su Shi, who once wrote against the killing of living creatures, but could not resist the flavor of meat. Ironically, Su later commented that there was no chicken that should not be slaughtered.

¹¹⁸ Wang Rixiu, “Shirou shuo” 食肉說, *Longshu zenguang jingtuwen* 龍舒增廣淨土文 (*T* no. 1979, vol. 47) 9, p. 279A–C.

¹¹⁹ Yuan Cai, *Yuanshi shifan* (CSJC *xinbian*, vol. 33) 2, pp. 28–29; Lu You, *Fangweng jiaxun* 放翁家訓, (in CSJC *xinbian*, vol. 33) 3.

¹²⁰ This work is believed to have appeared as early as roughly the last years of Northern Song; anon. (Northern Song), *Taishang ganying pian* (rpt. Beijing: Yanshan chuban she, 1995), p. 1.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 33; see Eva Wong, trans., *Lao-tzu's Treatise on The Response of the Tao* (HarperCollins, 1994), p. 3.

was particularly advocated by the upper class and was widely distributed among the populace from the eleventh century onwards.¹²² The compendium of sins listed in the book included the killing and hurting of living creatures. Noteworthy here too is that slaughtering animals without following ritual principles 非禮烹宰 was regarded by the text as immoral. In other words, such a view of animal slaughter clearly reflects the influence of Confucian dictates regarding animal sacrifices for ancestral rites.¹²³ As Terry Kleeman has shown, this is a process of an accommodation of various Chinese traditions that resulted in the syncretic Chinese religious world of later times.¹²⁴

In addition to religious and Confucian viewpoints, one also finds among miscellaneous notes and anecdotal sources evidence of the widespread influence of the idea of retribution among the populace. For example, Hong Mai's *Yijian zhi* (one of our most valuable extant private writings) has numerous cases of bad consequences resulting from killing living creatures. Of these stories, more than ten concern women involved in animal slaughter. In particular, one woman, who suffered greatly in the afterlife because she was involved in too much animal killing, deserves full quotation:

Cong Si 從泗 of Fuli 符離 resided in Jushang 灘上. He came from a wealthy family. Cong was a gourmand: he often brewed alcohol, heated tortoises, and hashed carp for his meals morning and night. His wife *née* Yuan 袁 was thoughtful and understood his intentions very well. She herself thus held the knife and slaughtered animals to prepare meals for Cong every day. The living creatures she killed were countless. Yuan later died during childbirth. Cong missed her very much, so he went on a pilgrimage to Mt. Dai to make a ritual offering for his wife. One day, on the way to the temple he ran into her with some followers. He felt both sad and pleased to see her. Yuan was choking with sobs, saying: "I was so sinful and accumulated bad *karma* too long. Everyday I suffer so much torment. If you have pity on me please think of a way to release me." Cong was crying: "It is my fault to have caused you to suffer so much. I am alive but no better than dead. I must spend all the family fortune to redeem you by holding religious rituals even though it makes me broke." Yuan said: "It's no use to say so. Just stop by the temple to visit me tomorrow around the time of *shenyou* 申酉, and you will believe in what I have said." Cong

¹²² *Taishang ganyingpian*, p. 5.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

¹²⁴ Kleeman, "Licentious Cults," p. 211.

then went back home and fasted. The next day when he arrived at the temple, he saw Yuan wearing a pillory and fetters. She was led by numerous ghosts. The ghosts then took off her clothing and tied her with grass, poking and hacking her into threads with a sickle. Her blood flowed all over the ground. All of a sudden, one poltergeist called Yuan's name and spit water on her. She then resumed her original shape. The ghosts then tortured her again similarly six or seven more times. Cong felt immensely horrified and aggrieved. He left for home and couldn't sleep all night. The next day he met Yuan again, and Yuan asked him: "Do you believe now?" Cong replied: "Yes. I do." Yuan said again: "So do not eat your words." Cong parted from her in great sorrow. After he came home, Cong strived to do good deeds and for the rest of his life no longer killed living beings.¹²⁵

In the above story, Yuan was sinful and received the penalty – endless torment after death – because she had "slaughtered countless living creatures" in her cooking. It is noteworthy that she took the lives of living creatures in order to satisfy the tastes of her gluttonous husband. The Confucian judgment of Yuan would be to commend her as a dutiful wife: she was obedient to her husband and diligent in the discharge of household tasks. It seems ironic that those who executed the killings – the women, rather than the men who ate the meat – would be the only ones who received punishment. This vignette also reflects the notion, embedded in the matrix of popular religion, that women were doomed to punishment and awaited redemption by men.¹²⁶ Similarly, the other female protagonists of the stories in *Yijian zhi* also suffered the dire consequences of killing. They either suffered from incurable illnesses or were incarnated into the very animals they had killed in their past life.¹²⁷

Unlike such formal prose documents as biographies and grave inscriptions, *Yijian zhi*, is primarily a record of personal experiences and a document of private lives, and it reveals an overwhelming concern with beliefs in the supernatural, in hell, and in spirits. Together with *Taishang ganying pian*, which addresses in detail the strict moral injunctions arising out of the concept of retribution, it reflects the mentality

¹²⁵ Hong, "Cong Si qi Yuanshi" 從泗妻袁氏, *Yijian zhi*, p. 781.

¹²⁶ One popular story, *Mulian jiumu* 目連救母, derived from both the orthodox and popular Buddhist texts regarding a monk, Mulian, who redeemed his mother from hell; it depicts the stereotype that women were always sinful and waited for salvation by men.

¹²⁷ E.g., Hong, "Zhang Shi qi" 張氏妻, p. 196; "Chang Lohan" 程羅漢, pp. 385–86; "Tang Qiniang" 湯七娘, p. 1577.

and religious expectations of all strata of Song society. According to evidence from the two works, it is possible to conclude that the notion of *guobao* would indisputably have had an effect on women's avoidance of animal killing and meat eating in the time period under discussion.

Another source also explains the attitude toward animal killing. Wang Yanwu 王炎午 (thirteenth century) recalled that his younger brother Fangsheng 方升, who followed Buddhist teachings, was especially concerned about his mother's duty to kill animals because of frequent family banquets. Fangsheng often advised his mother not to take the lives of living creatures. Instead, he suggested that she assign the duty to her daughters-in-law. She agreed but still failed to follow through on the advice.¹²⁸ The younger brother wanted to spare the mother's need to slaughter out of a commitment to Buddhist teaching, and his tactical solution indicates that lower-status women in the family like wives and daughters-in-law could not avoid being saddled with such domestic duties, usually until they themselves grew old.

A glance at the liturgical genre in the Song, particularly liturgies composed for women, further reveals the popular viewpoint on killing animals. A *qingci* 青詞, a Daoist liturgy employed in the Daoist death ritual, by Wang Yanwu contains a prayer for his deceased mother. He needed to ask for forgiveness for his mother, because she had performed household tasks like cooking, catering, and ancestral sacrifice when she was young, and in old age was nurtured through meat consumption,¹²⁹ things that broke precepts about saving or preserving living beings. However, she had done many good deeds, including philanthropic work in their community, and this would atone for her sins. Wang proposed that if Heaven would not forgive the guilt from animal killing, he himself would do penance for her sins, and he was even willing to receive punishment for his mother.¹³⁰ This Daoist liturgy is evidence that women's killing of animals was seen as sinful from the Daoist perspective, even though according to Confucian principles women were just doing their jobs. From the point of view of the literati, Wang's mother served as a role model who took care of family tasks including ancestral rites and family feasts. However, in the minds of people subscribing to the idea of retribution, a hybrid of traditional Chinese

¹²⁸ Wang Yanwu, "Xianfu Huaipo jushi xianmu Liushi ruren shizhuang" 先父槐坡居士先母劉氏儒人事狀, *Wuwengao* 吾汶稟 (SKQS edn.) 9, p. 14.

¹²⁹ In traditional Chinese society, people believed that meat was an important nutrient for old people.

¹³⁰ Wang, "Xianmu jianxiu" 先母薦修, *Wuwengao* 9, p. 7.

thought that wedded Buddhist and Daoist tenets, such killing would not be forgiven by Heaven.

As we have seen, for example, in evidence like that of Luo Bi's statement, Confucians' emphasis on "staying away from the kitchens and conforming to the rites" seems to have been a principle to follow in daily life. In the eyes of male Confucians, the slaughtering involved in ritualistic food preparation was acceptable. Zhu Yi's 朱翌 (1098-1167) argument enunciates this basic Confucian stance:

From the Three Dynasties to the present, sages like the Duke of Zhou and Confucius have never encouraged us to take the lives of living beings. As long as people do not waste food and seek to indulge their taste [the killing of animals for food is implicitly permitted]. The expenses of ancestor sacrifices and banquets cannot be subtracted, and the nurturing care for the aged cannot be disregarded. Thus, we have never heard that they [family rites, feasts, and care for the aged] disappear because of the admonition against taking the lives of living creatures.¹³¹

Here, family rites and festivities, as well as caring for the aged, were considered to be women's normative responsibilities within the inner quarters. We have already discussed the dilemma Song women faced between not killing and their domestic food-related responsibilities. The case of Wang Yanwu's mother reflected this predicament.

Moreover, in contradistinction to Wang Yanwu and his brother's supportive attitudes, there was an opposite male opinion reflected in Confucian values that condemned women's avoidance of household tasks because of their beliefs. As conservative neo-Confucian literati, both Sima Guang and Lu You strenuously criticized women who did not do their household jobs.

Although many of the women whose ascetic practices included the observance of strictures against killing received high acclaim from the male literati, we must note that such acclaim was usually garnered by women later in their lives. As mentioned above, frequently women became religious devotees in their later years. We might conclude, therefore, that many women did not take up ascetic practices until the last stages of life, when they already had discharged their household obligations, such as giving birth, caring for parents-in-law, managing ancestral rites, and perhaps, if they came from the wealthy or high-ranked elite families, teaching their children texts and skills. After ful-

¹³¹ Zhu Yi, *Yijue liao zaji* 猗覺寮雜記 (rpt. Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1939), pp. 54b-55a.

filling such duties, they would have then won the privilege of shifting those burdens to the next generation of women. Nevertheless, there are cases where some women were still unable to escape their duties, as shown in the above account of Wang Yanwu's mother.

Although roles assigned to women under Confucianism posed a decided handicap to some practices, such as not killing and seclusion, some popular perceptions of what constituted the "feminine" might actually have facilitated women's spiritual pursuits. One tantalizing reference gleaned from a Song morality tract written by Chen Lu 陳錄 (Southern Song era) infers that feminine traits offered women a way to involve themselves in religious practices. For example, Su Shi's concubine Wang Zhaoyun 王朝雲 (1062–1096) became a vegetarian and out of religious piety observed the precept against killing. Su's uncle advised her that it was unnecessary to abstain from meat because doing so was merely a formal practice, whereas the true Buddha nature was the mind. In other words, a practitioner should not abide by the precepts alone but should instead realize the true *dharma* that transcends the precept. For Su Shi, women, like inferior men, "are difficult to inspire and become unstable easily," thus it is necessary for women to maintain their vegetarian practice in order to uphold their beliefs.¹³² While literati like Su Shi expected women to stick to their observances, they did not apply the same standards to themselves. It has already been noted that Su Shi believed that it was very difficult to abstain from meat, and he was definitely unwilling to eat only vegetables for the rest of his life. He even commented, "There is no chicken which should not be slaughtered [for food] 世無不殺之雞."¹³³ It is of course impossible to ignore the note of condescension towards the female. It was such dismissals of women as inferior beings that in fact permeated society and often permeated women's own self-perceptions, thus creating rationalizations and ideals for women's pursuits of self-cultivation.

Food-related behavior was central to women's lives in Song times – in the family, and socially and religiously. Food preparation was squarely in women's spheres. Not only was food a resource that women controlled, but also women controlled themselves and their world by means of food. Numerous women chose to be vegetarians or to fast because food and their own bodies, under certain circumstances, were the only things they could control. Through that control they could then

¹³² Chen Lu 陳錄, "Dongpo fangsheng" 東坡放生, *Shanyou wen* 善誘文 (BJXSDG edn., ser. 8, vol. 2), p. 982.

¹³³ Shen Zuojie 沈作喆, *Yu Jian* 寓簡 (BJXSDG edn., ser. 6, vol. 1), p. 589.

order their surroundings. Food asceticism therefore provided a channel for women to express themselves and to achieve a limited measure of self determination. It was indeed a manifestation of women's spiritual pursuits, virtue, filial piety, and penance. It was also a way to accumulate merit and to avoid demerit. But most importantly, food asceticism was a method for women to become their own agents, and provided a means whereby to negotiate with both their male counterparts and the stifling patriarchal system.

CONCLUSION

Asceticism, expressed in fasting, vegetarianism, and withdrawal from mundane life, entailed the renunciation of worldly desire because of religious piety or moral conviction. During Song times, Buddhism flourished in particular among the laity, allowing Buddhist practices to infiltrate secular people's daily lives. This process helped women to arrive at asceticism in its varied forms: seclusion, fasting, vegetarianism, and abstinence from animal slaughter. The idea of retribution also played a critical role in food asceticism. As our sources show, some women, particularly aged women, or those who cloistered themselves or observed non-killing precepts, abstained from food-related tasks that required slaughter. However, most were not so privileged and could not escape from obligatory household and ancestral duties that frequently required it. In order to do penance for their sins and to prevent themselves from gaining too much bad *karma* or retribution resulting from the slaughter of living things, they felt they must abstain from flesh periodically, or even for a lifetime. In addition, the discernible trend of this admixture of personal cultivation undertaken by women contributed to a syncretistic in which women drew on all of the Three Teachings – Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism.

Male literati would often consider women's vegetarianism and other such practices as reflections of female filial piety and chastity. Furthermore, female fasting and vegetarianism might be commended by the male elite as demonstrations of thrift. The male elite themselves, for a variety of reasons, did not engage in vegetarianism or fasting as much as women. First, according to Confucian ideals, meat was considered an emblem of state prosperity. Moreover, a vegetarian diet or complete fasting was only required on specific occasions, such as the mourning period, in order to demonstrate specific principles governing sacrificial and mourning rituals. Furthermore, thanks to economic prosperity and the growth of commerce, in conjunction with the neces-

sity of animal sacrifices for the various domestic and public rites, meat became available to every stratum of society, and flesh eating gradually turned into the major dietary habit of all classes. Finally, literati believed that a vegetarian diet would hurt one's health. Therefore, most of them ate vegetarian food only for limited periods.

Since Confucian rites frequently involved animal sacrifices, and meat eating was associated with both affluence and good health, vegetarianism was not considered a proper practice. Also, as the foregoing analysis showed, vegetarianism aroused the concern of the elite and officials because of its connection with demonic practices. Female vegetarianism among the general public, especially women's collective vegetarianism, was not tolerated because of its association with the Manichaeans and the demon cults, which were always viewed as immoral and potentially subversive. An intriguing question emerges here: since male scholars of Song times themselves did not particularly favor vegetarian fasting, why were their female counterparts allowed and even encouraged to observe it? Women's ascetic practices won high acclaim from many male literati because these womanly practices bolstered conventional values, such as chastity, filial piety, and thrift. In a word, such female ascetic behaviors essentially served as a paradigm – elements contributing to the framework of patriarchal norms. It is also noteworthy that many cases of female asceticism are attributed to women's Buddhist or Daoist beliefs, which suggests that Song women enjoyed a certain autonomy in cultivating themselves without being confined to Confucian norms. At the very least, they were assured of the right to practice a vegetarianism derived from non-Confucian tenets within the household, and to have a certain agency in controlling themselves and their surroundings.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>BJXSDG</i>	<i>Biji xiaoshuo daguan</i> 筆記小說大觀
<i>QSW</i>	<i>Quan Song wen</i> 全宋文