

From *Sūtra* to *Jiyuan*: Poetic Rhetoric, Misprision, and Gender in the Chan Anthology

The Chanzong songgu lianzhu tongji 禪宗頌古聯珠通集

The Chan anthology *Chanzong songgu lianzhu tongji* 禪宗頌古聯珠通集 (*The Complete Anthology of the String of Pearls Verse Commentary of the Chan Lineage*; hereafter *Tongji*), compiled in the Southern Song (1127-1279), is a collection comprised of *jiyuan* 機緣 (salvific encounters) followed by verse commentary of Chan masters in the form of *songgu* 頌古 (eulogies of ancient cases). The anthology offers a version of the Chan case of *Nūzi chuding* 女子出定 (“A Woman Coming Out of Samadhi”), which is more well-known through the *Wumen Guan* 無門關 (*Gateless Barrier*). This encounter, involving the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, is the first one among a series of encounters collectively referred to as *Pusa Jiyuan* 菩薩機緣 (“Bodhisattva Salvific Encounter”), and it is based on the sūtra *Zhufo yaoji jing* 諸佛要集經 (**Buddha-sangīti*). The sūtra relates a philosophical debate between Mañjuśrī and a woman named Liyi 離意, at the end of which Liyi attains *samādhi* first, despite of being a woman.

In this essay, I will offer a cross-textual analysis arguing that the version recorded in the anthology necessarily misinterprets the sutra by shifting the focus from the woman to the male bodhisattvas. It will also demonstrate that while the encounter completely obscures the agency attributed to Liyi in the sūtra, some of her agency and authority are recovered in the subsequent *songgu* commentary. The initial misprision of the sūtra followed by a “resurrection of agency” performed through the medium of verse, highlights the complexity of Chan attitudes towards women during the Song.