

祇園禪師像



Chan Master Qiyuan and Her Poems

祇園禪師和她的詩

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Poet and Linji Chan Master Qiyuan (1597-1654) lived through the end of the Ming Dynasty and early Qing Dynasty in China. She was one of

those very few female cultivators in history whose teaching was preserved in writing. I tried to use translation as a hermeneutic tool to understand Chan Master Qiyuan as a cultivator and the meaning of her poems.

How does Poetry Relate to Cultivation?

As Yuan Haowen (元好問), a Chinese poet from the 13th century, put it, “*Poetry provides Chan cultivators additional embroidery and Chan is the jade cutter for poets.*” These words elucidate incisively the connection that may lie between poetry and Chan: Chan leads cultivators to dive deeper into poetry and poetry then further enables cultivators to understand Chan. Poetry embellishes Chan and Chan deepens poetry. When Chan is woven into poetry, poetry then is able to glimpse into the unspeakable Chan.

Poetry and cultivation both submit to a constrained form or style, generally speaking, with poetry written in metrical feet and cultivation practiced with precepts. Both go deeper with less, with poetry reaching profundity with fewer words and

祇園禪師 (1597-1654) 是中國明末清初，詩人和禪師集於一身的臨濟宗女法師。她是歷史上極少數有文字保留至今的女修行者之一。我試著以翻譯的方式去解讀祇園禪師和她的詩。

爲什麼詩和修行會有關聯呢？

正如13世紀中國詩人元好問所言：「詩為禪客添花錦，禪是詩家切玉刀。」此言透闢了詩文和禪修之間可有的關聯：禪修可引領修行者深入於詩，繼而再通過詩意去進一步闡釋禪境。詩點綴了禪，而禪深化了詩。當禪思融入於詩，以詩窺禪，可略見一斑那不可言說的禪。

寫詩與修行，都得遵循一種形式。一般來說，寫詩講究押韻，而修行需要持戒。兩者都以精簡的方式往深處走，詩的深刻性是用精闢的語境去達意，而修行是通過少欲來挖掘內在的真正財富。兩者都為獲取更多自由：詩傾向於創造性和想像力的自由，而修行是為求解脫。從某種意義上講，我們都需要以某種形式為基礎，去革新和蛻變。詩與修行，兩者在表面上都似乎被一種外在的

cultivation fostering inner wealth with fewer desires. Both aim for more freedom, with poetry for creativity and imagination and cultivation for liberation. In a sense, one needs to be in a form in order to reform and transform. Both poetry and cultivation provide a form which constrains on the outside, but liberates on the inside, the deeper level. A metrical foot in poetry pushes one to think outside of the ordinary; a precepted simple life helps cultivators to reduce their burdensome desires and impulses and simplify and purify their actions done by body, speech, and mind. Both poetry and cultivation are meant to transcend the ordinary, if done well. Chan Master Qiyuan was both a Chan practitioner and a poet. Did her poetic way of thinking help her cultivate? Or did her Chan cultivation help her write better poems?

Through reading Chan Master Qiyuan's poems over and over and then translating them along with her life story, I hope to connect with a true cultivator in a way, from inner to inner, across time and space.

Brief Account of Chan Master Qiyuan's Life

Chan Master Qiyuan was born in Jiaying in Zhejiang Province. At a young age, she recited the Buddha's name and bowed to the buddhas every morning and evening. At age 18, she was married to a young scholar, who died shortly after. But she still fulfilled her filial duty by attending to her parents-in-law.

One day, she suddenly fell into a sense of despair while reflecting on the emptiness of this fleeting life without a way out. Day and night, she knelt before the Buddha and vowed to commit her life to becoming awakened to the Way. After both of her parents passed away, she gave away her properties, clothing and jewelry and went to the Linji Chan School to receive full monastic precepts.

After receiving guidance from two most prominent Linji Chan masters of the time, respectively, Chan Master Qiyuan practiced her meditation with great vigor. Three years later, she had a significant breakthrough in her cultivation, which was confirmed by her teacher.

Then she went back to her solitary place to continue her practice in the following nine years until the faithful lay followers implored her to come out. She finally agreed to assume the role of the abbess of the Crouching Lion Chan Monastery (伏獅禪院). During her abbess years, she taught and transformed the multitude with wisdom and compassion, which earned her great reverence and love by a great number of followers. After eight years, she let go of all her duties as an abbess and returned again to her solitary place to continue her practice. Chan Master Qiyuan often shared her states in her cultivation through poems.

形式約束著，但在內部深層次上得到的卻是一種自由。詩的韻腳能促使寫詩者跳出慣性思維，而修行者通過持戒的簡單生活來減少累贅的慾望與衝動，以此簡化和純化身口意業。兩者都期望超越庸常。祇園禪師既是禪師又是詩人：她寫詩的思維方式幫助她修行了嗎？還是她的禪修讓她寫出了更好的詩？

通過一遍又一遍地讀誦閱讀，並且翻譯祇園禪師的詩和她的人生故事，我希望能夠用此方式，穿越時空，與一位真正的修行者有種內對內的聯結。

祇園禪師生平故事簡述

祇園禪師出生於浙江嘉興，年少時喜好念佛並晨夕禮拜，18歲那年嫁給一位年輕的秀才。婚後不久，丈夫便過世，她繼續盡心孝敬公婆。

一天，她忽然感到光陰似箭，人生空洞無望，難有出離，於是日夜長跪佛前，並誓願此生悟道。父母雙親去世後，她捨去所有屋產及衣服首飾，35歲時在臨濟宗門下受具足戒。

在當時最有名望的兩位臨濟禪師的先後指導下，祇園禪師精進苦修。三年後，她在修行上有重大突破，並得到師父認證。

此後，她歸隱禪修九年，直至信眾懇請出山，最終答應擔任伏獅禪院的住持。住錫期間，她智慧開示，慈悲廣度，深得信眾的敬重與愛戴。八年後，她卸下一切職責，再次返回到她那歸隱處修行。祇園禪師經常以詩文表其境界。

Chan Master Qiyuan's Chan Practice and Her Poems

Investigating Chan in sitting meditation was Master Qiyuan's main practice. She vigorously investigated Chan with the meditation topic: "What's your original face before your parents gave birth to you?" (如何是父母未生之前本來面目?) One day in her meditation, she experienced a state. Due to the intensity of her eagerness, she vomited three bowls of blood, but didn't cease her quest. With further guidance from her Linji Master, one day, she finally had a breakthrough with the huatou (話頭) and felt her body and mind were suddenly shattered. Linji Master Shiche Tongcheng (石車通乘) later certified her spiritual breakthrough. She responded with a verse:

"One's essential nature is perfectly luminous throughout the great thousand worlds. True reality is manifested in all phenomena without obstruction. Only what's true is shown in the eternal light that shines. It illuminates beyond heaven and earth and reveals the realm outside time and space."

Here I will share three of Chan Master Qiyuan's poems that I have translated. The first one is *The Meditation Cushion*.

The Meditation Cushion

*A single piece of circular mat has no cover or fence,
[yet even if] heaven and earth were overturned, here is peace.
Both sage titles and worldly fame lose their grip in the sitting,
and the infinite worlds are reduced to the tip of a hair.*

This poem describes meditation as such a supreme state which might give the readers some romantic ideas about Chan meditation. But after having read Chan Master Qiyuan's life story, I know that such a fearless, peaceful, and liberated state in sitting came from her years of vigorous practice in meditation and enduring what ordinary people couldn't endure.

After having her breakthrough with the meditation topic, Chan Master Qiyuan went back to her own solitary place to continue her meditation for the following nine years. The poem below, *A Poem Written at Leisure in the First Month of the Summer Retreat*, might have been written during that period.

祇園禪師的禪修與詩

參禪打坐是祇園禪師的主要修行法門。她以「如何是父母未生之前本來面目？」這一話頭精進參禪。一日禪坐中，她有一些境界，由於過於心切，竟吐血三碗，不能進食，但不甘放棄。有了臨濟師父進一步的點撥，一天，她終於在話頭上破參，頓覺「身心粉碎」。臨濟禪師石車通乘，後來認證了她修行上的證悟，祇園禪師以偈對答：

「體性圓明遍大千，如如無礙任隨緣；一真獨露常光現，照破乾坤劫外天。」

在這裡，將分享三首我翻譯的祇園禪師的詩。第一首是〈蒲團〉。

蒲團

蒲團一片絕遮攔
覆天翻地在處安
聖號凡名都坐斷
大千收在一毫端

這首詩，描述了禪修的一種至高境界，這也許會讓有些讀者對參禪打坐產生帶有浪漫色彩的想像。但是讀了祇園禪師的生平故事後，我知道她在禪坐中的無畏、安寧與自在，是她多年的精進修行，以及她忍人所不能忍，才獲得的境界。

在話頭上破參後，祇園禪師返回到以往的住處歸隱九年，繼續禪修。下面這首〈孟夏關中閒詠〉，大概是在那段時期寫的。

A Poem Written at Leisure in the First Month of the Summer Retreat

*Because of the reputation of preceding masters, the lineage flourishes.
Knowing myself, boorish and blunt, I find peace in the hermetic life.
Wondrous truth, strikes and shouts are all put to rest.
All dharmas are empty and yet interconnected; do not ask Chan for answers.
A worn, patched robe hangs upside down from my shoulders.
When hunger comes, I eat; when tired, I sleep.
Sitting firmly on a meditation mat, I completely forget the world,
while the sun and moon shift as they please outside the window.
Lying high on lofty clouds, my illusory body rests;
toward each other, white clouds and green bamboo lean.
Before the eyes, delusive phenomena keep changing;
hidden deeply behind the wood gate, joy overflows.
A thatched hut in the midst of blowing gale, who would dare come near?
Strike the wind and shout at the moon, even misty clouds linger not.
Solemnly, the empty space upholds a treasured bowl,
and plain rice and yellow pickles are ready to eat.*

“Wondrous truth, strikes and shouts are all put to rest. Because all dharmas are empty and yet interconnected, do not ask Chan for answers.” With merely a meditation mat, a patched robe, and a bowl of plain rice and pickles, she found peace and joy in “a thatched hut in the midst of blowing gale.” This poem reveals Chan Master Qiyuan’s fearless, free, and joyful state in her solitary meditation.

Chan Master Qiyuan later was invited to come out of her solitude and to take the role as the abbess of Crouching Lion Chan Monastery. Despite her initial unwillingness to be the abbess, Chan Master Qiyuan devoted herself to serve the monastic sangha and the lay community. As her disciple Chan Master Yikui Chaochen (一揆超琛) described her: As the abbess, each word Chan Master Qiyuan spoke and each action she took were to benefit others. Whenever she was given something, she always shared it with others, while living a very simple life herself. When her disciples were sick in bed, she served them medicinal soup. When they wanted to visit their parents, she reminded them that filial respect for their parents was more important than respect for her. The disciples looked up to her with great reverence and deeply felt her compassion and kindness whenever they approached her. Under her guidance, they progressed quickly and were willing to serve the Dharma for life.

Chan Master Qiyuan treated all who came to her equally, disregarding their social status. Her compassion, like an all-encompassing ocean, transformed numerous minds. After meeting her, wrongdoers began

孟夏關中閒詠

諸老門庭家業盛
自知疏拙隱為安
玄機棒喝都休歇
萬法虛融莫問禪
百結鶉衣倒掛肩
饑來喫飯倦時眠
蒲團穩坐渾忘世
一任窗前日月遷
高臥雲嶂寄幻軀
白雲翠竹兩依依
眼前幻境隨遷變
深掩柴扉樂有餘
茅舍風高孰敢親
棒風喝月走煙雲
儼然寶鉢虛空托
淡飯黃齏自現成

「玄機棒喝都休歇，萬法虛融莫問禪。」僅僅一個蒲團，一件打滿補丁的僧袍，一碗白飯加鹹菜，她在「茅舍風高」中體驗到內心的靜謐和喜樂。這首詩描述了祇園禪師在歸隱獨修時的無畏、自在和法喜之境界。

祇園禪師後來應邀出山擔任伏獅禪院住持。儘管最初不願意出山，然而成為住持後，她全心致力於教化僧俗大眾的事務中。正如她的弟子一揆禪師如此描述她：祇園禪師的一言一行，皆以饒益眾生為目的。每當別人供養她什物，她總是與大眾分享，而自己卻過得極為簡樸。當弟子們臥病在床，她親自餵湯藥。當弟子們想回去探望父母，她提醒她們對父母親的孝敬要比尊敬她更重要。弟子們都對她敬仰萬分，每當與她接觸時，能深深感受到她的慈悲與關愛。在她的教導下，弟子們進步很快，並且樂意為佛

to repent and renew, members from the noble class became humble, and eloquent intellectuals suddenly lost their wits. One time, she was asked to travel to a place to bless a newly structured Chan hall. Before her boat reached the bank, thousands of people were already kneeling there waiting to request the Dharma. During her stay in that town, day and night, the streets and alleys were filled with sincere lay people. Many came from out of town just to catch a glimpse of her compassionate look. Chan Master Qiyuan declined many invitations and offerings. Unaffected by all these, she was like a wild crane gliding through floating clouds.

After eight years of serving and teaching the assembly at Crouching Lion Chan Monastery, Master Qiyuan retired from her role as the abbess and returned to her hermetic life to continue her practice. The following poem, *Closing The Door*, was written after she had retired.

Closing The Door

*After years of running about with responsibilities,
I close the door and rest in a forest hermitage.
After kicking open heaven and earth,
I pulled back my foot and turned around.
By the cold window I sat alone, a bright moon hangs full outside.
All day long I appear foolish, as the calculating mind has suddenly ceased.
Amid all this, there is no right or wrong.
Sitting straight and tall, I cut off both sagehood and the worldly path.
From ancient times to the present day, it has always been so.*

This poem, *Closing The Door*, describes her action moving from doing to being, from active outer service to deeper inner service. “By the cold window I sat alone, a bright moon hangs full outside.” The moon feels still and full here, as if the present moment is being paused and being amplified, while in *A Poem Written at Leisure in the First Month of the Summer Retreat*, the moon feels different. “Sitting firmly on a meditation mat, I completely forget the world, while the sun and moon shift as they please outside the window.” Though the poet sits still in both poems, the moon moves and changes in the previous poem, while in this poem, the moon becomes still. In the former, there is movement on the outside and yet, stillness on the inside; while in the latter, stillness is on both the outside and the inside, inner and outer corresponding to each other.

“All day long I appear foolish, as the calculating mind has suddenly ceased. Amid all this, there is no right or wrong.” If I use Chan

法奉獻一生。

祇園禪師對前來參訪者，一概平等對待，無論其屬何社會階層。她的慈悲心如同無所不容的大海，廣度群生。與她會面後，惡人開始懺悔，貴人變得謙和，文人頓失辯聰。一次，祇園禪師受邀前往某地隨喜一新建禪堂，她的小船尚未靠岸，上千人已在河邊跪著等待請法。信眾們晝夜擠滿了街衢巷陌，一些人還專程從他城趕來，僅為了一睹祇園禪師的慈顏。祇園禪師謝絕了很多邀請與供養，如行雲野鶴般無染著。

在伏獅禪院接引教化大眾八年後，祇園禪師卸下住持一職，並返回到她原來的隱居獨修生活。下面〈掩關〉這首詩，寫於她退隱之後。

掩關

挈挈波波多少年
杜門息影隱林泉
乾坤踢破腳收轉
獨坐寒窗皎月圓
終日如愚頓息機
箇中無是亦無非
堂堂坐斷聖凡路
互古彌今一本如

〈掩關〉這首詩，描述了她從動轉入靜，從積極的對外服務轉向更深層的內在服務。此詩描述了「獨坐寒窗皎月圓」的情境，這裡的月亮渾圓而寂靜，當下這一刻似乎停止被放大。而先前的〈孟夏關中閒詠〉，月亮給人的感覺不同，「蒲團穩坐渾忘世，一任窗前日月遷。」儘管詩人在兩首詩中都是靜坐，但月亮在前詩是一直變遷著，而在這首詩中，月亮是寂靜不動的。前者是外動內靜，而後者是外止內靜，內外相應。

「終日如愚頓息機，箇中無是亦無

Master Qiyuan's life as an example, "all this" here can include the different phases in her life: leading a worldly life before and after she got married; leaving the homelife and practicing Chan in solitude; taking the role of the abbess; and then retiring from "all this." *"There is no right or wrong. Sitting straight and tall, I cut off both sagehood and the worldly path."* Having deepened her practice, Master Qiyuan has gone beyond right and wrong, and both the worldly path and the sagehood.

Passing On With A Smile

Two months prior to her passing, Chan Master Qiyuan told a disciple that her worldly affinity was coming to end. Sure enough, she became slightly ill a month later, not eating any food. But her appearance looked normal. Her disciples knelt down in tears, begging her to see a doctor. She said it was her time. Another month passed, she appointed her Dharma heirs and arranged things. Three days prior, she called in the disciples and said, "You all have followed me for many years. After I die, you should follow my wishes. Do not use the worldly filial custom to grieve for me." Three days later, after bathing and changing her clothes, she sat in full lotus and spoke a verse, and then left her body with a smile. She was 58.

The last verse she spoke before entering stillness was:

"Being reflected in a thousand rivers, there is only one bright moon. Today I'll demonstrate it by sitting in full lotus, so living beings can look and see it through. If you ask what's the last sentence of this verse, I can only clap my hands and say, 'It's only thus.'"

Conclusion

Through poems, Chan Master Qiyuan, a highly regarded female Chan master, shared her illuminating insights with modern day readers and cultivators across space and time. Through translating her poems, I found great inspiration in both poetry and in Chan. I don't know if Chan Master Qiyuan's disciples followed her wish not to mourn her passing in worldly custom, but the most fortunate thing that came out of their mourning process was the circulation of *Written and Spoken Words by Crouching Lion Chan Master Qiyuan*. Through her words in print, Chan Master Qiyuan's wisdom that was realized through her Chan practice will continue to benefit many to come. For that, I am forever grateful. ❀

非。」如果以祇園禪師的人生為例，「箇中」可以囊括她生命中的不同時期：結婚前後的世俗生活；出家隱居修行；出任伏獅禪院住持；再次退隱獨修。「箇中無是亦無非，堂堂坐斷聖凡路。」隨著修行的深入，祇園禪師超凡越聖，出離了是非之觀。

含笑離世

圓寂前兩個月，祇園禪師告訴一弟子，世緣已盡。果然，一個月後，示疾微恙，不再進食，但她容顏如常。弟子們涕淚跪拜，懇求她去請醫進藥，她說自己的時間到了。又過了一個月，她選定傳人並交代了一切。走前三天，她召集弟子們說，「你們都跟隨我多年。我走後，你們要遵照我的心願，不要用世俗的禮儀來哀悼我。」三天後，她沐浴更衣，結跏趺坐，說完最後一偈，微笑而去。世壽五十八。

她的最後一偈是：

「如月映千江，一輪光皎潔；今示以趺坐，眾生瞻覲破。若問末後句，撫掌云：『只者是』」。

結語

通過詩，祇園禪師這樣一位德高望重的女禪師，能夠穿越時空來與現代讀者和修行者分享她可以照亮人心的智慧。透過翻譯她的詩，我在禪修和詩文上都倍受啟發。我不知道祇園禪師的弟子們是否遵從了她的意願，不用世俗的禮儀去哀悼她的離去。但最值得慶幸的是，《伏獅祇園禪師語錄》在此過程中得以問世並流傳。通過此語錄，祇園禪師在禪修中體悟到的智慧，將繼續饒益無數後來者。為此，我將永遠感恩。❀