The Flavors of Monks' Poetry: On a Witty Disparagement and Its Influences

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This essay focuses on a humorous metaphor that appears prominently in critiques of Buddhist monks' poetry, from the eleventh century onward. Alluding to the monastic vegetarian diet, critics leveled that monks' poetry had "a whiff of vegetables" (*cai qi* 菜氣), "the flavor of cabbage and bamboo shoots" (*shusun qi* 蔬筍氣), or "the taste of pickled stuffing" (*suanxian qi* 酸餡氣). The double meaning of *qi* 氣 is literally flavor or smell and by extension also refers to an individual's literary style and character. Members of the literati largely agreed that such flavors described what was distinctive about typical monks' poetry, and debated whether monks ought to rid their poems of vegetal qualities such as plainness and narrowly repetitive themes. Other critics argued that monks' poetry is an acquired taste, rich with delicate poetics well worth savoring. I conclude by observing how some modern scholars have uncritically reiterated the logic of this witty disparagement, and I suggest alternative directions for further study of monks' poetry.

This essay discusses one of the most prominent metaphors used in Chinese criticism from the eleventh century onward to debate the value of Buddhist monks' poetry. Referencing a monastic diet, this metaphor mocked monks' poetry for having the same *qi* 氣 as the temple kitchen, "a whiff of vegetables" (*cai qi* 菜氣), "the flavor of cabbage and bamboo shoots" (*shusun qi* 蔬筍氣), or "the taste of pickled stuffing" (*suanxian qi* 酸餡氣). The premodern Chinese writers whose comments are analyzed below all played with the word *qi* as a flavor, a smell, an aura, and by extension a literary style that reveals its author's character.[1] How they used the metaphoric language of bland, sour, and acerbic flavors can provide us a view into competing interpretations of monks' poetry.

WHIFF OF ZEN

The twentieth-century Japanese doyen of the study of Chan literature, Iriya Yoshitaka 入矢義高, once remarked (in the translation by Norman Waddell) that "in the poet-priests of the Song dynasty we see . . . adulation of the secular writers, or, in another direction, a propensity to 'stink' of Zen" 宋代の詩僧には…士大夫の詩に対する媚びと 、それの

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1. For a substantial treatment of this topic, see Zhou Yukai 周裕鍇, *Zhongguo Chanzong yu shige* 中國禪宗與詩歌 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1992), 45–53. Zhiyi Yang, *Dialectics of Spontaneity: The Aesthetics and Ethics of Su Shi (1037–1101) in Poetry* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 42–44, was perhaps first to provide an overview in English. I note some differences of interpretation below. See also the insightful but brief Sun Changwu 孫昌武, *Chansi yu shiqing* 禪思與詩情 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006; rev. ed.), 342–43.

裏返しである禅臭の露出があるだけである.[2] The dominant types of Song-era monks' poetry could be, according to Iriya, either too much like mainstream poetry or too conspicuously removed from the world. In other words, either too Buddhist or not Buddhist enough. In another essay, Iriya developed this division by engaging the Song-era texts from which "stink of Zen" emerged. He suggested that there were two types of "poet-monks" in China: one type (the majority) wrote poems so removed from the world that they then had this whiff of Zen; a second type mastered literary forms and then used poetry to express something transcendent.[3] Iriya himself dismissed the former type and was interested in identifying exemplars of the latter—he championed the legendary persona of Hanshan 寒山 and the historical gentleman-recluse Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365–427) who lived before any historical Chan school—who capture the essence of Zen poetry for the modern world. Iriya hewed closely to Song critics, and therefore the monks of the Song who wrote prodigious amounts of poetry were excluded from his literary study. Because Iriya was dismissive of poetry that supposedly had the whiff of vegetables, it is in pursuit of this influential Song criticism that we depart from the work of Iriya.

Though the *locus classicus* can be placed some decades earlier, as detailed below, the following historically significant entry in *Evening Discussions in the Cold Studio* (Lengzhai yehua 冷齋夜話) by Juefan Huihong 覺範慧洪 (1071–1128) elucidates the meaning of the disparaging witticism. The text is a literary representation by Huihong of an informal "evening discussion." It attributes gossip to two illustrious scholar-officials, Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072) and his junior Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086), each a towering figure in the intellectual life of the Northern Song and whose opinions about poetry were taken seriously. These great scholars are depicted discussing the poetry of Dajue Huailian 大覺懷璉 (1009–1090). Huailian was a renowned Chan master who came from Mount Lu to hold the inaugural abbotship of the newly constructed Jingyin Chan Cloister 淨因禪院 in Kaifeng, from which he ministered to emperors Renzong 仁宗 (r. 1022–1063) and Yingzong 英宗 (r. 1063–1067). In this tale, a young Wang Anshi plays the naïf while his elder Ouyang appraises the poetry of the lofty religious figure Huailian.

> The Chan master Dajue Huailian practiced outer [learning] and was skillful with poetry. When Wang Anshi was young, he interacted with [Huailian]. One time, he showed [Huailian's] poetry to Ouyang Xiu, who said, "This monk has made a bread bun stuffed with fatty liver." Wang Anshi didn't get Ouyang's joke, so he asked what he meant. Ouyang said, "These poems do not stink at all of vegetables."
> 大覺璉禪師，學外工詩。舒王少與遊，嘗以其詩示歐公，歐公曰：「此道人作肝臟饅頭也。」王不悟其戲，問其意。歐公曰：「是中無一點菜氣。」[4]

Huailian's poetry is the subject of a double-edged compliment. The assertion that Huailian's poetry was *unexpectedly* good implies that Ouyang *had* expected the monk's poetry to be inadequate. The joke itself turns in part on the two meanings of *qi* as flavor or aroma as well as literary style. Ouyang declares this monk's poem as rich as fatty meat. The remark

2. Iriya, "Chinese Poetry and Zen," tr. Norman Waddell, *The Eastern Buddhist* 6.1 (1973): 54–67; originally published 1968, and later the eponymous essay in Iriya Yoshitaka, *Gudō to etsuraku: Chūgoku no zen to shi* 求道と悦楽：中国の禅と詩 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2012; rev. ed.), 90.

3. Iriya, *Gozan bungaku shū* 五山文學集 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1990), 327–31.

4. See "Chan Master Dajue Begs to Return to the Mountains" 大覺禅師乞還山, in *Xijian ben Songren shihua sizhong* 稀見本宋人詩話四種, ed. Zhang Bowei 張伯偉 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 2002), 55. Zhang's critical edition of *Lengzhai yehua* is based on a study of the earliest *gozan* editions and is superior to the 1988 Zhonghua shuju publication. Dozens of editions of *Lengzhai yehua* were produced in China and Japan, as described by Zhou Meng 周萌, *Songdai sengren shihua yanjiu* 宋代僧人詩話研究 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2017), 9–11.

would resonate with one's knowledge that Buddhist monks in China were expected to keep to a vegetarian diet. As Kieschnick noted in his study of Chinese vegetarianism, "one of the reasons given for vegetarianism is an aversion to the indulgence in sensual pleasure that eating meat represented."[5] There is humor in pointing out the disparity between a monk's poem that has literary qualities comparable to fatty meat—and in some manner not vegetarian—and the restrained lifestyle of a monk. The witticism comes at the expense of poems by other monks that are not so savory. By reiterating this tale, Huihong affirms that a man like Ouyang would likely prefer the richness of meats to the plainness of vegetables. A typical literati reader could be expected to belittle a typical monk's poem.

Stephen Owen and others have discussed the prominent place of flavor in Chinese poetic theory. The reader may recall the "Poetic Exposition on Literature" (Wen fu 文賦) by Lu Ji 陸機 (261–303) as the locus classicus of the notion that "the poem follows from the affections and is sensuously intricate" 詩緣情而綺靡.[6] References to this line from "Poetic Exposition on Literature" are found across various types of Song Buddhist literature as well.[7] Stephen Owen has written that in this text one finds "one of the most salient characteristics of later literary thought: meaning is an event that occurs 'beyond words' and 'after words have ended', and without that sense of some significance, flavor, or whatever beyond the surface of the text, the literary work seems flat."[8] The language of flavor could gesture toward what was most valuable in literature. "It is not just the concentrated and momentary taste, but the unfolding and savoring of flavor after the initial moment of tasting."[9] Taking flavor as a model, we can imagine that the images, colors, and surfaces reflected in a poem are momentary tastes. One savors the affective experiences that linger.

Another metaphoric use of flavor was composed by Sikong Tu 司空圖 (837–908), whose impressionistic *Twenty-Four Categories of Poetry* (Ershisi shipin 二十四詩品) was prized by writers in the Qing.[10] More relevant here is Sikong Tu's "Letter to Mr. Li Discussing Poetry" (Yu Li sheng lun shi shu 與李生論詩書) and its principle of aesthetic savoring. Therein, Sikong first asserts that "we can adequately speak of poetry only in terms of making distinctions in flavors" followed immediately by a condescending example of bumpkins who lack such sophisticated preferences. This seems similar to the complaint lodged by the fictive Ouyang Xiu above. Sikong writes of such simple men that "if it is a pickled dish, then it is indeed sour—but it is nothing more than sour. If it is a briny food, then it is quite salty—but nothing more than salty."[11] Sour flavors were not undesirable per se, but they were simple. With an ordinary aesthetic palette, one can discern only "the merely sour" and "the merely salty," as Sikong writes. Sikong Tu's concluding suggestion to Mr. Li is not that he blend more flavors into some culinary fusion. Instead, he advises taking "complete beauty as your highest goal, then you will realize those implications beyond flavors."[12] For Sikong,

5. John Kieschnick, "Buddhist Vegetarianism in China," in *Of Tripod and Palate: Food, Politics, and Religion in Traditional China*, ed. Roel Sterckx (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 193.

6. Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1992), 130.

7. This passage from "Wen fu" was reproduced in monastic primers, such as the tenth-century encyclopedia *Shishi liutie* 釋氏六帖. Additionally, Chan master Zhiyuan Yanhua 知遠演化 (n.d.) is depicted alluding to this very passage to rebut a student's extreme stoicism in *Jingde chuandenglu* 景德傳燈錄 (T.2076:51.396b27–c3).

8. Quoted with minor adaptation from Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, 149–50.

9. Ibid., 285.

10. Ibid., 299–303, notes that the *Shi pin* was not especially well read during the Song.

11. Ibid., 351–52.

12. Ibid., 356, with a minor adaptation.

the work of beauty is to communicate something ineffable through careful manipulation of subtle qualities.[13]

Against this background, metaphoric vegetable flavors were disparaging and pointed toward aesthetic naiveté. The meaning of the phrase "whiff of Zen" continued to be refined and debated for hundreds of years, up to at least the late Qing. In broad terms, the phrase most often signified that monks' poetry was boring. It implied that the restricted disposition of a renunciant was manifested in diction and motifs unsatisfying to most literary critics. Other critics observed monks' poetry to be overly dogmatic, unoriginal in theme, or tedious in detail. Some critics took these same qualities of blandness or plainness and reframed them positively. Chinese scholars have documented numerous instances of praise using various compounds involving *qing* 清—limpidity, pureness, or clarity—as idealized aesthetics for poet-monks.[14] A few have suggested that the aesthetics of limpidity are homologous to those of "even and plain" (*pingdan* 平淡).[15] However, this blandness was not necessarily the container of a dialectical non-dualism, as François Jullien suggested.[16] Such an idealized Buddhist reading flattens the actual debates and contested meanings of both "whiff of vegetables" as a criticism and "limpidity" as a rebuttal. To better understand such nuances, I suggest we turn to the historical contexts in which such ideas circulated.

As readers today, it may be more valuable to read the above tale as gossip rather than transcription.[17] Huihong's text was crafted many decades after the purported conversation, and it is unclear to what extent Huihong conveyed something heard versus fabricating embellishments himself. Whether Ouyang really said this (there is no evidence he did) may matter less to us than the fact that so many Song-era readers felt that he could have and perhaps should have said it. Indeed, this story was selected for inclusion in *Classified Tales* (Lei shuo 類說), completed in 1136, and began ever wider circulation.[18] That Huihong's rendition of this clever retelling enjoyed circulation tells us that elite learned men found it worth repeating. Perhaps this is because a famous scholar is depicted rendering a judgment in a humorous and incisive manner. The final elaboration gestures toward an experience likely shared by many among the literati: finding monks' poetry wanting. In addressing this issue in a memorable fashion, the text also educates its readers in how to use metaphors of flavor to critique monks' poetry. In other words, the story is both descriptive and prescriptive. As we will see, later men would reference and allude to this witticism to demonstrate their own status as learned and critical readers. Like other compilers of "remarks on poetry," Huihong likely included this story in *Evening Discussions in the Cold Studio* because he believed it would offer such pleasures of learning.

13. Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101) expressed something similar in his poem to the monk Daoqian 道潛 (1043–after 1111); Ronald Egan, *Word, Image, and Deed in the Life of Su Shi* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard Univ., 1994), 199.

14. For example, see Sun, *Chansi yu shiqing*, 332–37, 342; Gao Shentao 高慎濤, "Shiseng zhi 'shusun qi' yu 'suanxian qi'" 僧詩之「蔬筍氣」與「酸餡氣」, *Gudian wenxue zhishi* 2008.1: 50–57; and Hsiao Li-hua 蕭麗華, *Tangdai shige yu chanxue* 唐代詩歌與禪學 (Taipei: Dongdao tushu gongsi, 1997), 198.

15. See Zhou, *Zhongguo Chanzong yu shige*, 262–69. On the development of *pingdan*, see Jonathan Chaves, *Mei Yao-ch'en and the Development of Early Sung Poetry* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1976), 114–26.

16. Jullien, *In Praise of Blandness*, tr. Paula Varsano (New York: Zone Books, 2004), 118–21.

17. The value of gossip as historical texts is explained in Sarah M. Allen, *Shifting Stories* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2014). Note that Ouyang Xiu did in fact play a role in Huailian's arrival at court, perhaps lending the tale plausibility; Huang Ch'i-chiang, "Elite and Clergy in Northern Sung Hang-chou," in *Buddhism in the Sung*, ed. Peter Gregory and Daniel Getz (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 320.

18. See "A Monk's Fatty Liver *mantou*" 道人肝臟饅頭, in *Leishuo* (*SKQS* edn.), 55.36a–b.

Huihong's *Evening Discussions in the Cold Studio* participated in the genre of "remarks on poetry" that became increasingly popular during the Northern and then Southern Song dynasties. The phrase "evening discussions" in the title likely refers to the non-linear composition of the book and suggests that the work is the pith of many late-night conversations. This idea was suggested by Huihong himself in a quatrain inscribed as a colophon, entitled "When Venerable Ying Showed Me His Personal Record of What Had Been Said in My Cold Studio, I Playfully Inscribed This at the End" 英上人手錄冷齋為示戲書其尾, which includes the lines, "This booklet of things said in Cold Studio during the depths of night / as we sat by gleaming lamplight, listening to autumn sounds" 一帙冷齋夜深話，青燈相對聽秋聲.[19] Monks like Huihong and Venerable Ying surely participated in conversations like those that now constitute the *Evening Discussions in the Cold Studio*, both with and without the presence of non-monastic literati. Comments and poems like these provide glimpses of the sociality of literary criticism among Buddhist monks themselves.

Not all monks were so talented, of course. Huihong's *Evening Discussions in the Cold Studio* enjoyed readership among literati outside the cloister.[20] Zhou Meng's recent quantitative analysis shows that of the 241 entries, only thirty are about other monks.[21] The book was not included in any of the official Buddhist canons, and the title of the book is cited after quotations only several times in the now digitized canons.[22] Though this does not mean Buddhist monks did not read *Evening Discussions in the Cold Studio*, it makes clear that the text was treated as a different genre from most Buddhist literature. *Evening Discussions in the Cold Studio* is an example of a literary monk as an active participant in the broader literati culture. Many people in Song literary culture, however, were ambivalent about the work of literary monks.

SONG-ERA "REMARKS ON POETRY" AND POET-MONKS

"Remarks on poetry" (hereafter *shihua*) is a significant genre of criticism, notes, and remarks about poets and poetry strongly associated with the Song Dynasty.[23] There are texts dating from the Tang and Five Dynasties period that are often anthologized together with *shihua*, including several authored by monks.[24] However, it was only in the mid-Song Dynasty that the genre matured and became widely practiced. Its status as a respectable genre was established, nearly single-handedly, by none other than the real Ouyang Xiu, introduced in gossip above. He composed *Remarks on Poetry from the Retired Scholar with Six Single Things* (Liu yi shihua 六一詩話) (hereafter *Liu yi shihua*), which set a new standard

19. Kakumon Kantetsu 廓門貫徹 (d. 1730), *Zhu Shimen wenzi chan* 注石門文字禪, ed. Zhang Bowei 張伯偉 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 1050–51.

20. Chen Zili 陳自力, *Shi Huihong yanjiu* 釋惠洪研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005), 138–40, surveys the critical reception of this volume by contemporary literati and reviews a history of known editions.

21. Note that Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770), Wang Anshi, Su Shi, and Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045–1105) are discussed by Huihong many times more often than any others. The thirty entries about monks does not include the additional eighteen entries Huihong included about himself. Zhou, *Songdai sengren shihua yanjiu*, 120–24.

22. Based on searches of the CBReader 2016 edition of the CBETA digital corpus.

23. With much recent scholarship on the *shihua* genre, for an introduction, see chapter two of Ronald Egan, *The Problem of Beauty* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2006). Egan hypothesizes that it was the relative freedoms of the *shihua* as a new literary mode that made it so popular with literati.

24. On poetic treatises by monks, including *Shishi* 詩式 by Jiaoran 皎然 (720–ca. 795) and *Shige* 詩格 by Qiji 齊己 (864–937?), see Hsiao Li-hua, *Wenzi Chan shixue de fazhan guiji* 文字禪詩學的發展軌跡 (Taipei: Xiwenfeng chuban gongsi, 2012), 69–97.

of seriousness for this emerging form.[25] Within only a few generations, *shihua* developed, as Ronald Egan writes, into "the principal vehicle for the adjudication of literary standards and taste, to which scores of critics avidly devoted themselves."[26]

The emerging genre of *shihua* fostered particular discourses around poet-monks, beginning immediately with Ouyang's *Liu yi shihua*. Overall, Ouyang critiqued monks for their limited range. In one passage, Ouyang recalled lines of poems by nine monks that he had heard in his childhood. Song critics remarked that the poetry of this loose confederation of monks belonged to the late *kuyin* 苦吟 aesthetics associated with Jia Dao 賈島 (779–843) and his imitators.[27] The phrase *kuyin* had once meant "poetry of suffering," but came to express "painstaking composition" (which poets spoke of as a kind of pleasure).[28] For an advocate of the "painstaking composition" ideal, the long and arduous struggle to produce an outstanding couplet ought to be apparent to the reader, in addition to the impoverished or humble circumstances of the poet himself. Some of this is echoed in Ouyang's *shihua*, especially when he recalls that the nine monks excelled in the composition of exquisite couplets. On the other hand, Ouyang critiqued these monks for selecting only a narrow set of themes.

> Among the monks at the beginning of our [Song] dynasty, there were nine who were renowned for poetry even in their own time. Back then, there was a collection called *Poems of the Nine Monks*, but it is no longer in circulation.[29] When I was young, people often mentioned the name of one, Huichong. As for the eight others, I have forgotten their names. Also, I vaguely recall some lines of their poetry: "I've set free my horse right where I dismounted, / the clouds, like elegant wares, afloat after the war"; and "Spring brings life beyond the cassia cliffs, / where you are west of the sea gates."[30] Their well-turned phrases often were of the same type as these.
> 國初浮圖，以詩名于世者九人，故時有集，號《九僧詩》，今不復傳矣。余少時聞人多稱其一曰惠崇，餘八人者忘其名字也。余亦略記其詩，有云「馬放降來地，鵰盤戰後雲」又云「春生桂嶺外，人在海門西」，其佳句多類此。[31]

Ouyang can only recall a couple of couplets. He concludes that all the best phrases, nonetheless, were just the same as these. In his miscellany *Shibi* 試筆, Ouyang repeats his praise for the monks, stating that "*Poems of the Nine Monks* had many excellent lines" 近世有九僧詩極有好句, superior to those of his contemporaries: "Lettered men of today are not capable of writing such lines" 今之文士未能有此句也.[32] Despite this reverence for the literary tal-

25. The five single things are his books, his collection of inscriptions, his zither, chess set, and wine jug. These five plus one old drunkard, himself, made six.

26. Egan, *Problem of Beauty*, 62.

27. Such comments by a Song writer reproduced by Zheng Fangkun 鄭方坤 (*jinshi* 1723) in his anthology *Quan Min shihua* 全閩詩話 (*SKQS* edn.), 11.23b. This is a large section of unexplored comments on monks' poetry and other Buddhist topics.

28. On Jia Dao and *kuyin*, see Stephen Owen, *The Late Tang: Chinese Poetry of the Mid-Ninth Century (827–860)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2006), 93–112.

29. In fact, several editions of *Poems of The Nine Monks* survive today. Already in the Northern Song, a manuscript was discovered by Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086) who republished the text, per *Xushihua* 續詩話 (*SKQS* edn.), 1.9b–10a. For more background on the Nine Monks, see Chi Kuang-yu 吉廣輿, "Songchu *Jiuseng shiji* kaoshu" 宋初九僧詩集考述, *Pumen xuebao* 2 (2001): 1–29. Selected poems in English translation by Paul Hansen, *The Nine Monks* (Waldron Island, WA: Brooding Heron Press, 1988).

30. Per *Poems of The Nine Monks*, the former is from "At the Frontier, Presented to Grand Defender Wang" (Saishang zeng Wang taiwei 塞上贈王太尉), by Yuzhao 宇昭 (n.d.), which instead reads "the eagles at ease among after-war clouds" 鵰閑戰後雲. The latter is from "Recollecting the Guangnan Transport Commissioner Chen [Yaosou 陳堯叟, 961–1017], First-Ranked Scholar" (Huai Guangnan zhuanyun Chen xueshi zhuangyuan 懷廣南轉運陳學士狀元) by Xizhou 希晝 (n.d.). *Sheng Song gaoseng shixuan* 聖宋高僧詩選 (*XXSKQS* edn.), 1.1b, 3.5b.

31. *Ouyang Xiu quanji* 歐陽修全集, ed. Li Yi'an 李逸安 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001), 1951–52.

32. *Ouyang Xiu quanji*, 1980–81.

ent of these monks, Ouyang also had reservations about their poetry. The couplets quoted are examples of the kinds of turns of phrase at which the monks excelled. But, already embedded in his comment is a hidden barb; either the monks did not excel when writing other styles, or they simply did not write on other things.

In the same passage from *Liu yi shihua*, Ouyang next tells the story of an official named Xu Dong 許洞 (976–1015, *jinshi* 1000 CE) who attended poetry gatherings with poet-monks. At such gatherings, a game was played where lots were drawn. The lots had instructions that determined the subject of the next poem to be written. When monks participated in such gatherings, however, something was notably different.

> At that time, there was the presented scholar Xu Dong who excelled at literary arts. He was a truly outstanding official. He attended poetry gatherings with groups of poet monks, where they drew lots that said: "You must not use this word [X]." If the words [on the lots] belonged to types of landscapes, weather, bamboo and rocks, flowers and plants, snow and frost, celestial bodies, or animals and birds, then at that each monk put aside his brush.
> 當時有進士許洞者，善為辭章，俊逸之士也。因會諸詩僧分題，出一紙約曰：「不得犯此一字。」其字乃山、水，風、雲，竹、石，花、草，雪、霜，星、月，禽、鳥之類，於是諸僧皆閣筆。[33]

Monks only write poems about topics found in nature, according to this passage. Aside from such topics, monks hang up their brushes and do not write. Though Ouyang does not speculate why this is so, he elects here to disclose the limits of his praise. Even if monks write well on some topics, these are a circumscribed set of themes. The otherwise praiseworthy talents of these monks are thin when compared with the robust talents of the scholar-official Xu Dong.

In this well-known passage, Ouyang Xiu has described a type of contemporary person whom he calls a "poet-monk" (*shiseng* 詩僧). Remarkably, these monastics attend poetry gatherings, yet they are only interested in certain themes. The list does not include worldly affairs or ordinary human concerns. Poems on the topics of birds, trees, seasonal weather, and rocks seem to correspond with Ouyang's expectations for monks, and through his *shihua* these came to inform the expectations of his readers. By describing what monks' poetry "is," it tells the reader what it "should be." If one reads that Ouyang Xiu is generally of the opinion that monk-authored poetry is boring, then that reader may well conclude that she should think that monk-authored poetry will be boring. Moreover, this passage warned members of the literati against becoming the kind of poet who writes like a monk, and instead encouraged them to strive to be like Xu Dong.

To many Chinese writers it seemed that Buddhist ideals sought to quell the passions while Chinese poetry sought to give voice to them. Under these constraints, could one be both a good Buddhist and a good poet? This tension was particularly acute in debates over so-called poet-monks. It led to a caustic discourse in Middle Period criticism about poet-monks and what became known as "monks' poetry" (*sengshi* 僧詩). Over time, a family of culinary metaphors, which I refer to generally as "vegetables and bamboo shoots," became one of the central motifs in poetic criticism of monks' poetry. This rhetoric signaled a particular set of criticisms that drew its power from the shared image of monks as passionless vegetarians. According to the norms of Chinese monastic behavior, the ideal monk would not eat meat, drink alcohol, or have sex.[34] Having left home, donned robes, and shaved their heads, monks were expected to lead a life of reclusion and piety. This bloodless life would be symbolized

33. Ibid., 1951–52.

34. Though numerous monks may have lived up to such ideals, many monks openly or covertly ate meat

in monks' daily fare—the monastic vegetarian diet. Next, I will examine the major themes of "vegetables and bamboo shoots" criticism from its origins, followed by the historical trajectory of this rhetorical language, especially analyzing how later uses either expanded or cut off nuances in earlier texts.

THE ROOTS OF VEGETAL CRITIQUE

We have already seen one popular story in Huihong's *Evening Discussions in the Cold Studio*. However, the dialogue there between Ouyang Xiu and Wang Anshi cannot be found in earlier sources, nor in any extant writings by Ouyang or Wang. Nonetheless, the wide circulation of this tale suggests that it was a likely enough story. Its popularity tells us that it resonated with readers and writers of the time. It seems probable that someone, possibly Huihong himself, constructed this delightful story based in part on a creative refashioning of already existing fragments.

The origins of the vegetal critique can be traced back at least several decades earlier to a poem by Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101). Near the end of his life, Su composed "Presented to the Poet-Monk Daotong" (Zeng shiseng Daotong 贈詩僧道通), translated below. Not much is known about Daotong. From this poem, we may infer that he showed his poetry to Su Shi and sought his advice. For the most part, Su provided praise tailored for someone in monastic habit, thereby laying out an ideal vision of monks' poetry.

	For poetry that is bold yet subtle, bitter yet savory,	雄豪而妙苦而腴
2	We have had only Zither Cong and Honey Shu.[35]	祇有琴聰與蜜殊
	As for [Li Bo's] "language like clouds in twilight," few ever attained it;[36]	語帶煙霞從古少
4	As for that whiff of vegetables and bamboo shoots, with you there is none.	氣含蔬筍到公無
	[Your poetry is like] entering a fragrant forest, where there is nothing but the joy of smelling *campaka* leaves;[37]	香林乍喜聞薝蔔
6	[Your words are] an old well, my only worry the windlass will snap.	古井惟愁斷轆轤
	In his responses, Han Yu would not give approval easily;[38]	為報韓公莫輕許

and drank wine. For the amusing excuses they made, see the essay "Vegetarians With Impure Minds," in Qian Zhongshu, *Limited Views*, tr. Ronald Egan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998), 405–11.

35. Two monks personally known by Su. He elsewhere remarked that Monk Cong was an impresario playing the *qin*, but gave it up to study poetry, and later gave up poetry to study the Way; see Yang, *Dialectics*, 37–38. Zhongshu was a talented writer, famous for *ci*; he kept a grain-free diet and often ate honey.

36. According to a note appended by Su, the great Tang poet Li Bo used this language; Su Shi is comparing Daotong to the likes of Li Bo. See Yang, *Dialectics*, 43.

37. The *campaka* tree is an aromatic tree with fragrant yellow flowers. *Zhanbo* 薝蔔 is one of several transliterations from Sanskrit.

38. This is the famous *tuiqiao* 推敲 legend of Jia Dao and Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824), translated with exegesis in Owen, *Late Tang*, 96–97.

8 But hereafter, [when compared with you,] Jia Dao and Wuke will be mere servants of poetry.[39] 從今島可是詩奴[40]

This poem heaps praise on monk Daotong. In the first couplet Su says that he compares favorably with celebrated contemporary artistic monks, including the gifted musician Sicong Wenfu 思聰聞復 (eleventh century) and the lyricist Zhongshu 仲殊 (late eleventh to early twelfth century).[41] Su uses an apparent paradox to describe the rarefied aesthetic of all these artistic monks as astringent and yet "savory" (*yu* 腴)—a pleasing mix of the ascetic and the aesthetic. The presence of this "good" flavor is underscored by it being the rhyme-word of line one. This sophisticated sense of the savory in monks' poetry was important to a few astute critics—to which we return below. In the middle couplets, Su employs a metaphor that he explicitly attributes to Li Bo to describe the rare heights achieved by Daotong. When reading the poetry of Daotong, Su suddenly feels transported to a magical forest, like in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, with the joys of sweet perfumes.[42] Daotong's words are like the clear and crisp water from an old, proven well. Su describes the anxiety of possessing such satisfaction, fearing that one day he will come to the well to find no windlass to pull the water up; he would only be able to gaze down into its depths without tasting the refreshing purity of its waters. This likely describes the enduring truth of Daotong's words despite the mortality of his body. In the final measure, Daotong is even superior to past luminaries like Jia Dao and his cousin Wuke, who themselves had earned rare praise from the oft critical Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824).

In the midst of so much praise, it would seem clear that Su intended his remark in line four to be a compliment: "that whiff of vegetables and bamboo shoots, with you there is none." Perhaps both the grammar and pun were difficult, perhaps too original. For whatever reason, Su appended a note to clarify for his audience: "This means that he does not have the whiff of pickled stuffing" 無酸餡氣. This authorial annotation equated the flavor of vegetables and bamboo shoots with the tart stink of steamed buns stuffed with pickled vegetable. The metaphor is quite palpable.

Of course, if Su is praising his friend's poetry for not having the qualities of a temple kitchen, he is implying that an undesirable vegetable aroma infuses the poetry of most monks. Su's criticism crystallized a sentiment that had currency among contemporary critics. Such ambivalent attitudes toward artistic endeavors of monastics did not originate in the Song, of course.[43] Su himself disputed the views of Han Yu on monk Gaoxian's 高閑 (fl. ninth

39. Jia Dao was a monk who returned to lay life to pursue an official career. Ke refers to Jia Dao's younger cousin, Wuke 無可, who remained a monk. Extant poems by Wuke address Jia Dao as a cousin from his mother's family (*congxiong* 從兄).

40. *Su Shi shiji* 蘇軾詩集, ed. Kong Fanli 孔凡禮 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 2451–52. Several original notes by Su are included. Kong Fanli dates the poem to early 1101; *Su Shi nianpu* 蘇軾年譜 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), 1392–93.

41. For the latter, more than seventy *ci* lyrics survive, analyzed in Zhang Ruolan 張若蘭, "Shi Zhongshu de renge tezheng jiqi ci chengjiu de qude" 釋仲殊的人格特徵及其詞成就的取得, *Pumen xuebao* 36 (2006): 129–42.

42. Su is probably recalling the passage in *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* (T.475:14.548a25–26), when falling flowers do not stick to the bodhisattvas but do stick to the Buddha's disciples. Therein, the deva describes the joy of having heard the dharma of the Buddha: "It is like when a person enters a forest of *campaka*, he will only smell *campaka*, and will not smell any other fragrance" 如人入瞻蔔林，唯嗅瞻蔔，不嗅餘香.

43. Tom Mazanec, "The Invention of Chinese Buddhist Poetry: Poet-Monks in Late Medieval China (c. 760–960 CE)" (PhD diss., Princeton Univ., 2017), 52–53, demonstrates that from its Tang-era origins "'poet-monk' is a term of disparagement."

century) calligraphy.[44] There were also those who praised the arts created by monks. The calligraphy of Huaisu 懷素 (725–785), for example, has enjoyed perennial praise. But many of those in the Song who chose to criticize monks' poetry often did so in a categorical manner. That is, they did not criticize individual works as just one bad poem, but as representing a lamentable tendency in the poetry of monks in general. The modern scholar Zhou Yukai summarized these critiques as a perception that monks' poetry was excessively plain, used language cautiously and with little variation, and concerned a narrow set of themes.[45] In other words, typical monks' poetry was flat and clichéd.

Two additional Northern Song examples that also belittled monks' poetry illustrate the main thrust of criticism crystallized by Su Shi. The following excerpt from "Preface to the Collected Poetry of Master Wenying" (Wenying shi shiji xu 文瑩師詩集序) composed by scholar-official Zheng Xie 鄭獬 (1022–1072) dismissed all other monks' poetry for poetic cowardice. This critique predates Su's witty comments but anticipates some of its sentiments.

> As for collections left in the world by Buddhist teachers who excelled at poetry ever since the Tang, it is obvious that they are fettered by their dogmas, without capacity for greatness or the unrestrained, and so use mostly distantly lonesome, enfeebled, and withered words. Only Master Ying is not like that.
> 浮屠師之善於詩，自唐以來，其遺篇之傳於世者，班班可見縛於其法，不能閎肆而演漾，故多幽獨衰病枯槁之辭。若瑩師則不然。[46]

When compared with Ouyang Xiu's somewhat circumspect comments in *Liu yi shihua*, Zheng's statement is explicitly damning. Zheng categorically decried monks' poetry to make an exception for the atypical Wenying 文瑩 (fl. 1058–1078). Wenying was a remarkably talented writer and conversationalist and enjoyed literary friendships with leading scholars and court officials.[47] However, Zheng wrote, other monks are too blunted by piety to write good poetry. What others regarded as the delicacy of monks' diction, Zheng thought was aesthetically deadened. Withered words are not worth savoring. Zheng notes, "I have judged this poetry to be like a mountain without height, or far-off water—without the trace of even an intention to take flight!" 予嘗評其詩，如平山遠水，而無豪放飛動之意. Monks' poetry is uninspiring for Zheng because he was an advocate of the prominence of feelings in poetry. This may be why Zheng would go on to praise Wenying's style for approaching that of Du Mu 杜牧 (803–852), and therefore "absolutely not the same type as what is produced by Buddhist masters" 似杜紫微絶不類浮屠師之所為者.[48] Zheng's encounter with Wenying was an opportunity to express his view that monk-authored poetry is generally unappealing. Wenying's poetry was exceptional for being un-Buddhist, per Zheng.

After Su Shi, men of letters frequently preferred to repeat Su's joke to describe what they disliked about monks' artistic endeavors, not just poetry. Both of the phrases put forward

44. Han Yu, "Song Gaoxian shangren xu" 送高閑上人序, *Han Changli wenji jiaozhu* 韩昌黎文集校注, annot. Ma Qichang 馬其昶, ed. Ma Maoyuan 馬茂元 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 269–72. For more on Su Shi's disputation of Han Yu's views on Buddhist art and creativity, see Egan, *Word, Image, and Deed*, 198–99; and idem, "Shi Poetry: Ancient and Recent Styles," in *How to Read Chinese Poetry: A Guided Anthology*, ed. Cai Zong-Qi (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2008), 313–15.

45. Zhou, *Zhongguo Chanzong yu shige*, 45–53. This is summarized and expanded in Gao, "Shiseng," 51–54.

46. From *Yunxi ji* 鄖溪集 (*SKQS* edn.), 14.12b–13b.

47. To my knowledge, in two extant miscellanies, *Xiangshan yelu* 湘山野錄 and *Yuhu qinghua* 玉壺清話 (sometimes called *Yuhu yeshi* 玉壺野史), Wenying seldom discussed monks' poetry and did not discuss the vegetable flavors in question here. Wenying was from Hangzhou, and resided in the small ornate Puti Temple 菩提寺 on West Lake, then unexpectedly retired to Jingzhou 荊州 (modern Hubei). This and more details in Cheng Mingming 成明明, "Song dai shiseng Wenying yanjiu" 宋代詩僧文瑩研究, *Qi-Lu xuekan* 2014.3: 152–56.

48. *Yunxi ji*, 14.13b.

by Su, "flavor of vegetables and bamboo shoots" and "whiff of pickled stuffing," are found throughout later writing. Huang Bosi 黃伯思 (1079–1118, *jinshi* 1100) used the vocabulary of flavor in his criticism of calligraphy by unnamed late-Tang monks, entitled "Colophon to a Scroll of Grass-Script Calligraphy from the Jingfu Period [892–893]" (Ba Jingfu caoshu juan hou 跋景福草書卷後).

> The calligraphy on this scroll accords with precedent and conforms to standards, and so traces of the models are still present, and as such, the excessive whiff of vegetables and roots in monks' calligraphy past and present is the same.
> 此卷作草書，應規入繩，猶有遺法，然僧書多蔬茹氣，古今一也 。[49]

Signed and dated in 1110 CE, this is, to my knowledge, the earliest text to extend the whiff of vegetables to other arts. Huang asserts that this calligrapher has not surpassed the level of imitating masterworks. And it is in this way, he says, that the air of vegetables hangs over the work of monastics, past and present. His damnation pivots on what he perceives to be monks' slavish mimicry and restraint. In the above cases, this plant-based metaphor is used to critique works for being plain, uncreative, and predictable.

However, other writers played with this vegetal metaphor to different effect, revealing a range of attitudes toward the practice of monastic poetry at this time. Another writer from the late Northern Song, Ouyang Che 歐陽澈 (1097–1127), wrote about this in a poem preserved in his *Collection of Refined Selections by Mr. Ouyang* (Ouyang xiuzhuan ji 歐陽修撰集).[50] From the poem's long title, it is clear that Che imagined that this poem would serve its recipient as instructions for poetic composition. Perhaps because his advice was meant for a novice poet, it discloses an ideal for Buddhist poet monks different from that of other appreciators:

> 瓊上人留意學詩，惑於多岐，未明厥趣，作四
> 韻寤之；了此一話則能詩三昧不出箇中矣 。
> Venerable Qiong[51] is interested in studying poetry, but is confused on many points, and has not yet clearly seen its purport. I made this with four rhymes to aid him. If one understands these words [correctly], the ability to enter poetry samādhi[52] is found therein.

	[The thoughts you] harbor in your breast should be magnanimous, rich in the sentiments of the *Odes*.	襟懷磊落富詩情
2	The phrases you polish should be honest and bright, modeled after the melodies of the *Hymns*.	琢句端明法頌聲
	For form robust: remove any flavor of vegetables or bamboo shoots;	格健要除蔬笋氣
4	For words well crafted: bring in the purity of snow and frost.	語工須帶雪霜清

49. *Dongguan yulun* 東觀餘論 (*SKQS* edn.) 2.15a–b. Huang notes that the calligraphy was signed in the third year of the Jingfu era, and thus was likely from the first month of 894, before the new Qianning era (894–898) was announced.

50. To spare the reader from confusing the three men surnamed Ouyang referenced in this essay, I refer to Ouyang Che and Ouyang Shoudao by their personal names. In the case of Ouyang Che, the first three words in the title of his collection *Ouyang xiuzhuan ji* are further misleading, and already in the Southern Song the book was mistakenly attributed to the more famous Ouyang Xiu. Misattribution in Ouyang Shoudao's *Xunzhai wenji* 巽齋文集 (*SKQS* edn.), 7.14, is translated and discussed in the body of text below.

51. One possible identity of this monk is Deshan Qiong of Changde 常德府德山瓊禪師, in *Jiatai pudenglu* 嘉泰普燈錄 (ZZ.1559:79.356c20).

52. The term "poetry samādhi" refers to the pleasure of composing poetry and being swept up in concentration. It does not imply poetry made while in formal Buddhist meditation. See similar comments about the extended connotations of samādhi among Middle Period Chinese literati, in James Benn, *Tea in China: A Religious and Cultural History* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 2015), 129.

	Take "clouds in sapphire"[53] as a model, preserve the *Airs* and *Elegantiae*;	碧雲矜式存風雅
6	Immerse yourself in yellowed scrolls and study the achievements of elders;	黃卷沈潛學老成
	Hammer and smelt, improve your abilities, take Jia Dao and Wuke as your teachers.	鍛鍊更能師島可
8	Surely you will become well known among the forests of Chan.	禪林無患不知名[54]

Ouyang Che advised Qiong to "remove any flavor of vegetables" in poetic style (line 3), and to "harbor [thoughts] . . . rich in the sentiments of the *Odes*" (line 1). Taking these together, the whiff of vegetables and rich poetic feelings appear to be mutually exclusive. For Che, inspiration comes from potent feelings. On the other hand, stale or bland language obfuscates the vitality of feelings.

Che also strongly favored *qing*, here perhaps "purity." As noted above, modern Chinese scholars have argued that a discourse coalesced around this term *qing* to praise an ideal aesthetics for poet-monks, similar to that of "even and plain." If this is correct, then it seems that Ouyang Che advised Qiong to write poetry appropriate for a Buddhist monk. The remainder of his advice for monk Qiong is to study the classics, search for images that resonate across time, and work hard to imitate the poetic masters including Jia Dao. Relatedly, we might note that the foundational Song-era monastic legal code *Rules of Purity for Chan Monasteries* (Chanyuan qinggui 禪苑清規, preface 1103) offered to monks in the role of "temple scribes" (*shuzhuang* 書狀) the opposite advice regarding Jia Dao precisely because he abandoned the monastic path for life as a secular official. Instead, monks are advised to learn the classics to improve their ability to proselytize, and likewise not to become someone "known merely as a poet-monk," as, for instance, Guanxiu 貫休 (832–913) or Qiji 齊己 (864–937?).[55] The Buddhist ideals espoused by the monastic legal code and the literary advice offered by members of the literati like Che appear to be in tension.

Though some writers used the language of flavor to engage with monks' poetry, the turn of phrase began to be clichéd. An influential example of the categorical dismissal of monk-authored poetry came in the writings of Ye Mengde 葉夢得 (1077–1148), a significant figure in late Northern and early Southern Song official circles. Ye, on the one hand, developed innovative ideas about the connections between Chan and poetry, most notably his experiment to use Yunmen Wenyan's 雲門文偃 (864–949) "three sayings" 三句 to illustrate Du Fu's 杜甫 (712–770) poetry.[56] On the other hand, despite this apparent interest in Chan as an intellectual pursuit, Ye generally had unfavorable things to say about many individual monks.[57] In his *Remarks on Poetry by the Scholar of Stone Forest* (Shilin shihua 石林詩話), Ye reiterated the gist of Su Shi's critique. Ye's comments further circulated through their inclusion in the late Southern Song anthology *Jade Chips of the Poets* (Shiren yuxie 詩人

53. Sapphire refers to the sky. The Song-era Chan dictionary *Zuting shiyuan* 祖庭事苑 (ZZ.1261:64.342a3–7 and ZZ.1261:64.356b21–c1) has two erudite entries discussing "clouds in sapphire" (*bi yun* 碧雲), from which it is clear that many readers and writers in the Song understood this to be an allusion found in the sixth-century *Wen xuan* 文選 and attributed it to the erstwhile monk Tang Huixiu, while it is in fact a poem composed in imitation of the former by Jiang Yan 江淹 (444–505). Jiang's poem is translated in Nicholas M. Williams, *Imitations of the Self: Jiang Yan and Chinese Poetics* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 208.

54. *Ouyang xiuzhuan ji* (*SKQS* edn.), 6.1a–b.

55. *Chanyuan qinggui* (ZZ.1245:63.532a2–3). Translation modified from Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 158–59.

56. *Shilin shihua* 石林詩話 (*SKQS* edn.), 1.4b–5a.

57. *Bishu luhua* 避暑錄話 (*SKQS* edn.), 2.33b–34a, 42b–45b.

玉屑).[58] In the latter, these comments earned pride of place as the first entry in the book's chapter collating views of monks' poems. Here, the vegetal flavor of monks' poetry became foremost among all critiques.

In contrast to the above criticisms lodged within double-edged compliments of individuals, Ye's topic was "monastic style" (*sengti* 僧體) poetry in general. Before arriving at the language of flavor, he recited a withering overview of the history of Tang poet-monks seen from the vantage of the Song.

> As for Tang poet-monks from the middle of that dynasty, although we glimpse the names of many mentioned by their contemporaries, none of their poems were transmitted down to us. Couplets such as [Lingche's] "Sūtras arrived at White Horse Monastery / when monks came in the Red Crow year" are only to be found in the records of men of letters [like Liu Yuxi].[59] The situation only gets worse when one arrives at the likes of Guanxiu and Qiji [in the Late Tang]. Although their poems are extant, they are not worth reading aloud! From the middle [of the dynasty], Jiaoran's poetry is most outstanding, but the only reason is because his poetry collection is uniquely complete and not because he particularly exceeded others.
> 唐詩僧，自中葉以後，其名字班班爲當時所稱者甚多，然詩皆不傳，如「經來白馬寺，僧到赤烏年」數聯僅見文士所録而已。 陵遲至貫休、齊己之徒，其詩雖存，然無足言矣。中間，雖皎然最爲傑出，故其詩十卷獨全，亦無甚過人者。[60]

Ye's description echoes Ouyang Xiu's earlier recollection of only two couplets by the Nine Monks. Though the names of these Tang poet-monks were recorded here and there in the writings of others, a lot of their poetry had already been lost by the Song. As for the thousands of poems that were extant, for instance, the poetry of writers like Guanxiu and Qiji, Ye roundly dismissed them as not even worth reading. He slights Jiaoran's 皎然 (720–ca. 795) renown and attributes it to the sheer good luck of having a collection preserved intact. This view of Jiaoran was not shared by all, as Ye himself hints.[61] Finally, after denigrating all poet-monks of the past, Ye moved on to the shortcomings of his contemporaries.

> The number of monks in recent generations who study poetry has been extremely many. However, they all lack the spirit (*qi*) to break through and get it for themselves, and they often revert to gathering or imitating the discarded scraps of men of letters. What's more, they make for themselves a monastic style of poetry, but it is unrefined. We say it has the taste (*qi*) of pickled stuffing. Su Dongpo had that poem "Sent to [Dao]tong"[62] that went, "Since antiquity, rare is the language that carries fog and cloud / In [Dao]tong's work, there is no flavor of vegetables or bamboo shoots," and Su once said to someone, "Don't you get what I mean by language of vegetables and bamboo shoots? It's not having any taste of pickled stuffing!" Everyone who hears this laughs.

58. See the comprehensive and creative studies of the *Shiren yuxie* that extend to the book's place within the *shihua* genre and relationships to print culture, circulation, and libraries by Zhang Gaoping 張高評, *Shiren yuxie yu songdai shixue*《詩人玉屑》與宋代詩學 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 2012).

59. The couplet rehashes the traditional narrative of how Buddhism first entered Chinese territory. This couplet was attributed to Lingche 靈澈 but is found in Liu Yuxi's 劉禹錫 (774–842) preface to his works, in *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 605.6113–14, and *Liu Yuxi ji jianzheng* 劉禹錫集箋證 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1989), 19.519–24. My thanks to Tom Mazanec for explicating this detail.

60. *Shilin shihua*, 1.31a–b.

61. Ye's views are in direct disagreement with the later Yan Yu 嚴羽 (fl. 1191–1241) who clearly stated that "Jiaoran's poetry was the most excellent of all monks in the Tang." *Canglang shihua jiao shi* 滄浪詩話校釋, ed. Guo Shaoyu 郭紹虞 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1961; rpt. 1983), 188–89.

62. Emended from Huitong to Daotong. *Huitong* appears in a widely attested variant for the poem sent to Daotong discussed above.

近世僧學詩者極多，皆無超然自得之氣，往往反拾掇模倣士大夫所殘棄。又自作一種僧體，格律尤凡俗。世謂之酸餡氣。子瞻有贈惠通詩云：「語帶烟霞從古少，氣含蔬筍到公無。」嘗語人曰，「頗解蔬筍語否。爲無酸餡氣也。」聞者無不皆笑。

Per Ye, many monks wrote poetry, however, whatever these Song-era monks were writing was something that Ye called a monastic style, something distinct from and lesser than poetry proper without qualification. It is tempting to speculate about connections between this monkish style and the kinds of verse found in Chan *yulu* 語錄 (recorded sayings); however, Ye may also be referring to the *shi* poetry of monks who participated in the mainstream world of letters. Regardless, what is clear is that Ye was critical of slavish mimicry. He vividly depicts monks gathering discarded scraps to search for secondhand phrases to emulate. As for the flavor a reader may find in these poems, Ye reiterated the well-worn story of Su's poem to the monk Daotong. The rhetoric of vegetable flavor combined wry humor with a perceptive critique, and so, we are told, everyone would laugh at such a witty denigration.

The above analysis of writings during the first fifty years after Su's death demonstrates the rapid circulation of this critical metaphor. Loose adaptation of the metaphor reveals that from early on it was used in a variety of contexts, including poetry tutoring as well as calligraphy criticism. By the end of the Northern Song, judging by the written comments of men like Huihong and Ye Mengde, the opinions of Ouyang Xiu and Su Shi concerning monks' poetry were already becoming canonized in poetic treatises. Many used these ideas, and few challenged them. In the next section, I will show that as the cluster of metaphors was interpreted, applied, and reinterpreted, the creativity in these critiques became exhausted. Nonetheless, the extent to which these terms were repeated is a measure of their influence in structuring criticism. Even when critics abandoned the playful edge of culinary metaphors, they continued to reiterate them.

BRANCHES OF REITERATION AND TRANSFORMATION

Next, during the Southern Song, opinions and debates about monks' poetry reiterated many of the same positions. However, a sharp division appeared between literati writers who appreciated monks' poetry and writers who advised monks to abandon the Buddhist path. Those who praised monks' poetry continued to characterize monks as otherworldly figures or recluses who ought to specialize in subtlety. Critics, on the other hand, suggested that monks with poetic talents exceeding vegetarian aesthetics had the potential to succeed as Confucian scholar-officials. The following examples will illustrate how the metaphor of vegetables and bamboo shoots became a touchstone in the reception of monks' poetry.

Ouyang Shoudao 歐陽守道 (1208–1272) appreciated monk-authored poetry and reiterated the now familiar vegetable vocabulary. A revealing letter written by Shoudao to a monk named Venerable Fu was prompted by viewing a scroll of the latter's poetry. I will translate several sections of Shoudao's prose. The text begins with a conversation with Fu as recalled by Shoudao.

Venerable Fu showed me a copy of his *Songs of the Bamboo House* and asked, "When I travel with literati, they often remark that monks' poetry would be better if they got rid of the flavor of vegetables and bamboo shoots. What do you make of that?"
福上人以竹房吟卷示予而問曰「予從士大夫游，多言僧詩宜脱去蔬筍氣。君以爲何如？」[63]

63. "A letter given to Venerable Fu" (Zeng Fu shangren xu 贈福上人序), in *Xunzhai wenji* 巽齋文集 (*SKQS* edn.), 7.14a.

This initial passage attests to the circulation of poetic comments between poets and monks in the mid- to late Southern Song. According to Fu, the men of learning he encountered advised him that monks ought to remove the whiff of vegetables from poems. Though we do not learn whether Fu ever followed this advice, he continued to wonder about this problem as he carried about a scroll of his own poetic works. The result was an encounter between Fu and Shoudao that the latter stylized and represented here.

Next, Ouyang Shoudao laid out the thesis that writers succeed when they write poetry suited to their position in the world. For comparison, Shoudao offers the example of a child from a wealthy family for whom it is impossible to understand the life of a pauper. Just so, he says, a monk should not pretend in his poetry to be something he is not. He asserts "the proper flavor for a monk's poetry is vegetables and bamboo shoots. Why would it be necessary to eliminate it?" 蔬筍僧詩正味，何必他脱去耶. Shoudao's suggestion appears to move beyond the widely circulating culinary criticism. Why should one endeavor to artificially remove that very flavor that defines the poetry of a monk? Shoudao's concerns were not limited to poet-monks. He notes that many of his contemporaries had become preoccupied with avoiding simple aesthetic flavors.

> It is not only for monks' poetry, but our whole generation is worried about avoiding vegetables and bamboo shoots, as if there can be no purity when there are vegetables and bamboo shoots. . . . [However,] when it comes to compositions about the height of early autumn, a monk will best intone [its song].
> 且非特僧詩，吾輩正患不蔬筍， 如蔬筍其何潔。…絶頂新秋之章，僧家絶唱 。

An anxiety over bland aesthetics in literary writing had become nearly ubiquitous in the late Southern Song, if Ouyang Shoudao can be trusted on this matter, and was no longer a dilemma for only monks. Though not something to pursue further here, we may wonder if the literati criticism of monks' poetry was sometimes intended as a critique of poetry by fellow scholar-officials. It is also possible Shoudao overstated the case to emphasize his contrary point of view. He asserted that certain topoi exist for which the aesthetics honed naturally by a monk are most appropriate. The "height of early autumn" directly references the opening line of the beloved poem "Spending a Night at the Chan Temple of Jinzishan" (Su Jinzishan chansi 宿巾子山禪寺) by Ren Fan 任翻 (fl. 840s) which describes the quiet synchrony of the cool evening moon, drops of pine dew, and a reclusive monk.[64] In this vein, Shoudao finally turns to the virtues of Fu's poetry.

> Venerable Fu has already picked 'Bamboo Quarters' as his self-sobriquet. When I read from his scroll poems about mountain and riverside dwellings, it feels as though I am suddenly among these places. Moreover, the things that Fu is able to articulate are things I am unable to articulate. If Venerable Fu has attained to a place of profound constancy amid mountain green, sitting quietly in a single room, and completely tossed off the dust of the world and social interactions—then he has attained lofty integrity and the tones of reclusion. He is beyond outstanding. Among the four or five hundred years of "intoning monks" who reverently praised the buddhas and ancestors, there ought to be a distinct place of appreciation for him.[65]
> 福上人既摘「竹房」二字自號矣。予讀卷中，山宿溪宿之作，便恍然如身歷其間。而上人能道者，予不能道也。使上人遂得翠微深稳處，宴坐一室，而塵緣酬應之作盡罷，則高標幽韻。豈特傑出。四五百年吟僧向上佛祖，當別有點頭處也 。

64. *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩, ed. Peng Dingqiu 彭定求 (1645–1719) et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), 727.8335.

65. "Intoning monks" (*yin seng* 吟僧) was used as early as the Tang to refer to monks who compose poetry.

Ouyang Shoudao embraced those very qualities that would make monks' poetry uniquely valuable. He says the strength of monks' writing is suited for the most refined aspects of seasonal change, and likewise seasonal change is best represented by the strengths of a monk's poetry. Shoudao also implies that men who deal mostly in realms of human affairs, by comparison with monkish writers, are not as able to discern the subtler transformations of the world. We may disagree with this latter pronouncement about the perceptive powers of poets, yet it is here that Shoudao has staked out a space for monk-authored poetry.

Nevertheless, this passage reaffirms the notions that monastic Buddhists ought to be recluses who are aloof, transcendent, and not involved in the world of men. Their poetry ought to be a poetry of mountains and rivers, birds and flowers. Of course, in the view of Ouyang Shoudao, the world is lucky to have just such a thing. The subtlety in monks' poetry perceived by numerous Song Dynasty readers was not in dispute. It is instead the value assigned to these qualities that is different here. Shoudao appears to have cleverly re-inscribed the flavor of vegetables as the most fitting poetics for natural scenes. However, his observations are hardly different from the ideas first presented by Ouyang Xiu in his *Liu yi shihua* nearly two centuries earlier. Shoudao's praise is based on observations one would expect to find in a preface of this kind. By the Southern Song, the idea that monks were supposed to be otherworldly seems to be well established in considerations of monks' poetry.

Another critic from the late Southern Song, Yao Mian 姚勉 (1216–1262), had a very different perspective when writing an inscription for a collection of poems by Venerable Zhen 真 (n.d.), arguing that Venerable Zhen's writing was simply too good to be called monks' poetry.

> Earlier generations said monks' poetry was flawed when it had the whiff of vegetables and bamboo shoots. Because of this, monks merely worry about their type of flavor when they make poetry. As for this monk's poetry, the flavor is not vegetables and bamboo shoots. Indeed, this is not monks' poetry. The poems by Zhen enter into the place of absolute clarity, like the rhymes of wind in pine, the moonlit cries of a crane, and when he writes about the place of remote stillness, it is like a perched goose in autumn reeds, a cold duck in the evening sun. His continual development is without cease. Though he and Jia Dao are of different eras, they join in harmony.
> 前輩言僧詩患其有蔬筍氣。由是僧人作詩，惟恐其味之類。此僧詩味不蔬筍，是非僧詩也。眞詩，入清絶處，如風松韻澗，月鶴唳皐；寫荒寂處，如宿鴈秋蘆，寒鴉晚日。益進不已。直與賈島異時同調也。[66]

Yao praised the very qualities in Venerable Zhen's poetry that are similar to those qualities criticized elsewhere. Zhen's poems offer refreshing coolness (entering "into the place of absolute clarity") and a resilient silence (writing "about the place of remote stillness"). These are the qualities that were expected in monks' poetry. At the same time, Yao Mian argues that Zhen's poetry by definition cannot be monks' poetry because Venerable Zhen's work did not suffer the flaws of vegetable flavors. In other words, the term monks' poetry simply could not be used for praise. The category "poet-monk" was saturated with disparagement.

For Yao, this view stemmed in part from his belief that the composition of poetry should be a Ruist pursuit, and, likewise, the proper study of Buddhism ought to exclude poetry. He may have deliberately flattened the nuances of each tradition for polemical effect.

> At the same time, one could say of Zhen's poetry, "This is outside of Chan. I don't know why it is called Chan." Indeed, I have heard him explain that words should be cut off and thoughts

66. "An inscription on Venerable Zhen's poetry manuscript" (Ti Zhen shangren shigao 題真上人詩稿) in *Xuepo ji* 雪坡集 (*SKQS* edn.), 41.14b–15b.

cast aside,[67] that every single phrase and line of thought are all cataracts over the eye, dust on the mirror.
亦有一説真之詩藁，曰「禪外，余不知所謂禪也。」然聞其説，絶文字，屏思慮。有一語文字，一毫思慮，皆目之眚也，鏡之塵也。

Yao called Zhen's poetry "outside of Chan" (*chan wai* 禪外), a term related to the concept of "outer learning" (*wai xue* 外學), a long-standing Buddhist monastic norm that treated all non-Buddhist learning, including poetry, to be peripheral to the *summum bonum* of monastic commitment.[68] Yao also paraphrases the famous Chan dictum, "do not establish words and letters," to suggest that Buddhist teachings themselves are incompatible with poetry. This permits Yao to raise the interesting question of what a monk ought to be doing with his days.

And so to be able to spend whole days, for the shoulder of a heron or the mouth of a cricket, laying out and planning the phrases of a poem—to strain one's thinking until life grows thin; to strain one's heart to the point of nausea—surely this is not right! We Confucians are fond of learning, and thus poems accumulate. You Buddhists renounce such learning, and thus poems are superfluous![69] You have not turned away from Confucian [learning], so to forsake your [Buddhist] learning to study [Confucian learning]—that would be right. If your only wish is to [study] Chan, then put a stop to [the literary writing] of which you are already capable and pursue that [Chan] of which you are not yet capable—that too would be right.
而可終日，鷺其肩，蛩其吻，營度詩句哉。苦思而緣之瘦，劇心而病之嘔，可乎否耶。吾儒之善學者詩則贅，汝教之絶學者則詩贅。子未忘儒乎，棄其學而學焉，可也。惟欲禪乎，息其所已能而進其所未能，亦可也。

Yao raises the question of the propriety of a monk obsessing over poetry. Indeed, Venerable Zhen's fine poetry—with focused depictions of heron shoulders and cricket mouths—implies a lot of time spent not doing certain other things, such as the daily monastic rigors! Yao may have implied that such carefully constructed lines of poetry perhaps participated in "painstaking composition," as suggested by his comparison of Zhen with Jia Dao above. Altogether, I suspect Yao Mian was encouraging Venerable Zhen to defrock like Jia Dao and dedicate himself to Confucian learning. Though we do not have evidence of how Venerable Zhen responded to this criticism, colophons such as this were one means by which literati ideas about monks' poetry circulated directly into monastic literary culture.

A related example, "The Poet-Monk Returned to Being Confucian" (Shiseng gui Ru 詩僧歸儒) by Ye Yin 葉茵 (n.d.), also from the Southern Song, explicitly celebrates a poet-monk who defrocked.

	Under societal pressure you became a porridge-eating monk,	厭作人間粥飯僧
2	Then in leisure you continued the lamp of Yixian.	等閒來續義銛燈
	Now, your intoning has no taste of vegetables or bamboo shoots,	近吟氣味無蔬筍
4	Despite the [ascetic] efforts of your former studies, you prefer entangling-vines [of literature].	舊學工夫尚葛藤
	Now, amid blossoms you brandish a riding crop, your body unrestrained,	花下飛鞭身灑落
6	Into the wind with headcloth in hand, your locks flow wild.	風前扶帽髮鬅鬠

67. This phrase is more commonly given as *binglü* 屏慮.

68. Buddhist attitudes toward outer learning and its influence on monastic poetry is discussed at length in chapter 4 of my book, *The Poetry Demon: Song-Dynasty Monks on Verse and the Way* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 2021).

69. This clever sentence turns on two meanings of the single word *zhui* 贅: "to accumulate" and "to be superfluous."

	The roaming immortal [Jia Dao] never kept polite correspondence,	浪僊素不修書問
8	For which he was shamed by Han Yu[70] and admired by Kepeng.[71]	有愧昌黎詫可朋
	(Poet's note: Yixian was the monastic name of Ge Tianmin)	自注：義銛乃葛天民之僧名。[72]

Ye Yin addressed the erstwhile monk in a bold manner, asserting that this man chose to become a monk only for the food security promised by monastic life, without religious aspirations. In line two, Ye alludes to Ge Tianmin, briefly an eccentric monk (then named Yixian) who delighted in poetry and painting and ultimately defrocked to live a lay life in Hangzhou where he corresponded with prominent literary figures.[73] He became a symbol of that type of monk who could realize that the Buddhist path does not suit him and then leave the order. Therefore, Ye Yin's line "the lamp of Yixian" is rather witty. To transmit the flame of a lamp is a well-known image for the Chan school's vision of its own orthodox lineage tracing back to the Buddha Śākyamuni. Ye Yin's suggestion that this poet-monk transmit "the lamp of Yixian" turns this piety on its head, and encourages all poet-monks to join a "tradition" of abandoning monastic life for literature and Confucian learning. Thus, in line four, contrary to this former poet-monk's former efforts to achieve a Buddhist liberation free from worldly karma, he in fact found his freedom within the so-called entangling vines (*geteng* 葛藤), a common Chan expression for worldly language and its tendency to lead only to more discursive thought. This newfound freedom is described in lines five and six as being manifested by the physical body that rides horses to look at blossoms and has unkempt hair, superseding the ostensibly quiet asexual deportment and shaven head of a monk. In the final lines, Ye Yin alludes to legends of Jia Dao and the reputation of Kepeng, the latter of whom adopted the moniker "Drunken shavepate" 醉髡. Both monks achieved poetic renown and abandoned the ordinary expectations of behavior for a Buddhist monk. Of note to us here, this laicizing is supposedly accompanied by a transformation in aesthetics. The poet-monk who defrocks no longer writes with that monastic taste of vegetables.

Overall, a set of assumptions were shared by Ouyang Shoudao, Yao Mian, and Ye Yin. Even as each argued for or against the value of monk-authored poetry, they could take for granted the aesthetic associations of the general vegetal critique. For several more centuries, the vocabulary of flavor remained so compelling that writers through the Ming and early Qing continued to discuss and debate the flavor of vegetables and bamboo shoots. The discourse of vegetable flavors informed new critical terms to disparage monks' poetry, including "flavor of the begging bowl" (*boyu qi* 鉢盂氣), "whiff of robes" (*na qi* 衲氣), and even the innocuous-sounding "taste of mountain forest [temple]" (*shanlin qi* 山林氣).[74] Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀 (1329–1410) wrote about both Buddhist monks' poetry and the poetry

70. Though in historical fact Jia Dao corresponded with Han Yu and received his support, this was eclipsed by a popular story about Jia wandering lost in thought and literally running into the Governor Han Yu. See "The Jia Dao 'Legend'," in Owen, *Late Tang*, 94–99.

71. Kepeng (tenth century) was a monk of the Sichuan area who embraced the archetype of a wine-loving poet, and was compared with Jia Dao; Mazanec, "Invention of Chinese Buddhist Poetry," 379.

72. *Quan Song shi* 全宋詩, ed. Fu Xuancong 傅璇琮 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1991–98) 61.38227. The "poet's note" is found in the text.

73. Roughly one hundred poems by Ge survive. Several editions of the collection known as *Wuhuai xiao ji* 無懷小集 are widely available. Some of Ge's poems and paintings were also transmitted to Japan by Shunjō 俊芿 (1166–1227), as noted by the monk Kokan Shiren 虎関師錬 (1278–1346). Details reproduced in *Buke cha'na wu ci jun* 不可剎那無此君 (ZZ.962: 57.121c18). In addition, while still a monk, Yixian adopted the cognomen Poweng 朴翁, under which name later Song and Yuan monks collected and commented on his works.

74. Gao, "Shiseng," 50.

of religious Daoists, including a Buddhist "flavor of vegetables and roots" (*shuru qi* 蔬茹氣) and a Daoist "flavor of rose-pink clouds" (*yanxia qiwei* 煙霞氣味).[75] The important critic Yang Shen 楊慎 (1488–1559), when writing about Tang monk Jiaoran, concurred "to not have the taste of 'pickled stuffing' is most excellent" 無酸餡氣佳甚.[76] More examples from the late imperial period show the sustained influence of this culinary metaphor. The Qing-era "extracted essentials" (*tiyao* 提要) for two collections of works by Chan monks of the Song Dynasty offered similar justifications for the inclusion of these books within the imperial *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書. In one, "structure and meaning are lucid and refined, and it is utterly without the flavor of vegetables and bamboo shoots" 格意清拔自無蔬筍之氣;[77] and in the other, the poems "were not that type of coarsely composed pickled stuffing words by Chan masters" 固非概作禪家酸餡語也.[78] These brief examples should suffice to illustrate the longevity of these vegetal metaphors as well as the continuity of the underlying assumptions about a tension between literary aesthetics and the proper deportment of Buddhist monks narrowly conceived.

In general, the clichéd gastronomic trope was often repeated without a careful reconsideration of its specific language and to what it pointed. This framework resulted in criticisms that fixated on the same qualities: monks' poetry is boring for being imitative and limited to a narrow set of themes; monks' poetry is best when it attains lucidity or otherworldly qualities and is especially suited to a narrow set of themes. Moving on, not all critics mechanically repeated Su's originally witty comment. In fact, some writers tried to take apart the metaphor. As a result, they did not repeat the same criticisms seen above; more sophisticated critiques disclose a nuanced appreciation of monk-authored poetry.

BUILDING APPRECIATION FOR MONKS' POETRY

For a few critics, the category of "poet-monk" itself needed to be rethought. In overcoming the limits of the received discourse, several strategies were employed that I illustrate in three examples. First, assumptions about the identity of an author as a monk were insufficient for interesting poetic criticism. Second, the all-too-human everyday experiences of monks were appropriate poetic topoi. And third, a new positive language revalorized vegetables as rich flavors.

I begin with the major northern critic Yuan Haowen 元好問 (1190–1257) of the Jin Dynasty (1115–1234) and early Mongol conquest period, who spoke with a fresh sense of joy when encountering that old criticism of monks. Yuan was an ardent supporter of Confucian learning, however, he does not seem to have harbored especially strong anti-Buddhist sentiments, perhaps because Buddhism was popular among the Han people living under Jin rule.[79] In "A Preface for *Mu'an's Collected Poems*" (Mu'an shiji xu 木庵詩集序), Yuan

75. Found in *Shushi huiyao* 書史會要 (*SKQS* edn.) 5.53a–57b. One recognizes traces borrowed from Huang Bosi's criticism. Entries for Du Guangting 杜光庭, Liang Yuanyi 梁元一, and Yu Youxuan 魚又玄 also shared qualities of otherworldliness: they "possess an attitude transcending the world and cutting off the ordinary" 有超世絶俗之態; "do not fall into the habits of the ordinary world" 不墮世俗之習; and attain "that which is not attainable by the ordinary world" 非世俗所能到.

76. *Sheng'an shihua* 升庵詩話, in *Lidai shihua xubian* 歷代詩話續編, ed. Ding Fubao 丁福保 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 12.880.

77. From the *tiyao* appended before *Beijian ji* 北磵集 (*SKQS* edn.).

78. From the *tiyao* appended before *Zuying ji* 祖英集 (*SKQS* edn.).

79. Yao Tao-chung, "Buddhism and Taoism under the Chin," in *China under Jurchen Rule*, ed. Hoyt Tillman and Stephen West (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 167–68.

sought to breathe new life into what he saw as stale criticism. Yuan returned to Su Shi's original witty comment.

> I alone regard it as just a one-time statement by Su Dongpo, and not some fixed principle. As for the poems of a poet monk, [most think] that they are naturally distinct from [the works of] poets because of the presence of vegetable and bamboo shoot flavor. However, if [poet-monk] Master Canliao had composed the poem "Rising at Daybreak in Master Chao's Cloister and Reading Chan Scriptures"[80] instead of [the actual author] Liu Zongyuan, entering the depths of principles and emerging beyond the limits of language, would Su have thought it appropriate to belittle that with flavors of vegetable and bamboo shoots?
> 予獨謂此特坡一時語，非定論也。詩僧之詩所以自別於詩人者，正以蔬笋氣在耳。假使參寥子能作柳州「超師院晨起讀禪經」五言，深入理窟高出言外，坡又當以蔬笋氣少之耶。[81]

With all due respect to Su Shi, Yuan found it absurd that later critics had created a universal principle about monks' poetry based on Su's response to a particular poem. To test the limits of this idea, Yuan posed a hypothetical situation. If a talented poet-monk such as Daoqian 道潛 (1043–after 1111) had written an excellent poem instead of the actual author Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819), would a critic as savvy as Su have then joked about the taste of vegetables? By implication, Yuan is asserting that the clichéd use of the popular critique turns on the identity of the author as a monk and not the literary qualities of monk-authored poetry. Yuan wished to discuss Mu'an's poetry, not the mere fact of his monasticism.

At great length, Yuan describes the life and achievements of Mu'an, as well as why he was motivated to write this preface. He includes the titles of his favorite poems and several exemplary couplets, none of which otherwise survives today. If we jump to the end of the preface, Yuan there expresses esteem for the traits of a mountain hermit, just as many appreciators had before him, but he uses new and specific language to describe Mu'an's achievement. He says,

> In this world [Mu'an] employs a human form, but his awareness communes with the divine; thus he has the ability to wander freely in the sacred spaces of brush and ink; he moves through and gets free of the set patterns of Buddhist institutions; and amid the vegetables and bamboo shoots, he separately creates a flavor of no flavor. This is what Jiaoran called, "Beyond feelings and nature. The words of the unknowable." There is much to admire!
> 境用人勝，思與神遇，故能游戲翰墨道場，而透脫叢林科臼，於蔬笋中，別為無味之味。皎然所謂「情性之外，不知有文字」者，蓋有望焉。

This passage shows how Yuan valued originality. Yuan is inherently accusing other members of Buddhist institutions of being constrained by tradition. Performing his own virtuosity, Yuan creates novel images from traditional religious language. The more common Middle Period phrase "arena of brush and ink" (*hanmo chang* 翰墨場) is here changed into a "sacred space of brush and ink" (*hanmo daochang* 翰墨道場).[82] These religious-sounding phrases, however, are used to describe how Mu'an is not constrained by religious ideology. The compound verb "moving through and getting free of" is found in many Buddhist texts,

80. The received title of this poem is "At Daybreak Calling on Master Chao's Cloister and Reading Chan Scriptures" 晨詣超師院讀禪經, in *Quan Tang shi* 351.3929.

81. *Yishan xiansheng wenji* 遺山先生文集 (*SBCK* edn.), 37.6b–7b.

82. The phrase *daochang* has narrow denotations in many Buddhist texts, and may refer to the site of the Buddha's awakening (*dao*), or to the ritual arenas in which practices and worship of the Buddha take place. The word *dao* has broader connotations as well and may refer to a generalized spiritual attainment. I suspect Yuan did not use the term in a narrow technical sense.

especially Chan literature, where it vividly describes liberation. Here, Mu'an is free of such traditions. The concept "a flavor of no flavor" is not exclusively Buddhist, and appears in other contexts, including Confucian and Daoist literatures, where it can describe the virtues of a spiritual attainment that is not separate from the world. Similarly, here it describes Mu'an's attainment as being both among vegetable flavors, and yet not of it. Mu'an's poetry is not constrained by the ordinary flavors of monastic life. This is a high compliment that turns the culinary metaphor on its head. Mu'an's poetry was written from the point of view of someone with monastic experience, and yet, at least for Yuan Haowen, also transcends this identity.

Another critic also articulated the value of poets writing from their own experiences. Fan Xiwen 范晞文 (thirteenth century) simply and clearly endorsed Buddhist monks writing in a manner authentic to their lived experiences. In his straightforwardness, he does not describe monks as wholly transcendent or otherworldly. Fan selected several of his favorite lines to emphasize the way that monks simply are in the world.[83]

> "A dove's white feathers fall on a meditating monk"; "A cold cicada emerges from your meditation robes"; "I sit [still] on a rock, birds suspect I am dead"; and "A firefly steals into the robes of a monk in meditation"—if monks had not personally experienced such things, they could not have been articulated! Likewise, "After ten thousand *li* in eight or nine months, / all over my body is that northwesterly wind"; "More than seven thousand *li* from my whole family, / I walk alone before these twelve peaks," are lines written after itinerant practice.
> 「鴿墜霜毛落定僧」，「寒蜨發定衣」，「坐石鳥疑死」，又「螢入定僧衣」， 非衲子親歷此境，不能道也。若「萬里八九月，一身西北風」，「七千里外一家住，十二峯前獨自行」，行脚之作也。

Fan revels in the expression of experiences. For him, it is obvious that these lines are based in the actual lives of monks. They speak of things that for others are inexpressible, not because of unfathomable principles, but because the clarity and specificity of articulation requires personal experience. Fan favors the authenticity of monks who write about things they themselves experience, rather than their trying to remove traces of monastic experience from their poetry.

My final example was written by Zhang Yun'ao 張雲璈 (1747–1827), the prolific scholar active during the reigns of the Qianlong Emperor (r. 1735–1796) and the Jiaqing Emperor (1796–1820), known especially for his scholarship on *Selections of Refined Literature* (Wen xuan 文選). Zhang took up the question of writing from experience, queried Su Shi's famous remark, and passionately defended the poetry of the late Venerable Pinlian 品蓮上人 (n.d.). To my knowledge, no other records survive regarding Pinlian, and his poetry collection is now lost as well. However, Zhang obtained a unique copy in Pinlian's own brushwork and composed the undated "Preface for Venerable Pinlian's Posthumous Manuscript" (Pinlian shangren yigao xu 品蓮上人遺稾序).[84] Zhang began the preface with quotations of Su Shi's couplet and auto-commentary, and then remarked:

83. Fan Xiwen 范晞文, *Duichuang yeyu* 對床夜語, in *Lidai shihua xubian*, 5.446. I emend 將 to 蜨 on the basis of *Quan Tang shi*. The first four quotations are from Zilan 子蘭 (fl. 873–904), "Spending a Night at Shuilu Temple Together with My Companion-on-the-Way" 與道侶同於水陸寺會宿, *Quan Tang shi* 824.9287; Zheng Chao 鄭巢 (fl. 847–860), "To Dharma Master Zhen" 寄貞法師, ibid., 504.5734; Kezhi 可止 (860–934), "To the Elder Fanchuan" 贈樊川長老, ibid., 825.9291; and Liu Deren 劉得仁 (fl. 820–860?), "Overnight in the Monks' Cloister" 宿僧院, ibid., 544.6281.

84. There is some confusion about the dates of Zhang's life. The *Qing shi liezhuan* 清史列傳 records 1712–1804, but this seems unlikely. New evidence for 1747–1827 includes discussions of Zhang's activities by his contemporaries as well as the recovered *muzhiming* tomb inscription, discussed by Wang Shucai 王書才, "Zhang

> First, to gloss vegetables and bamboo shoots as pickled stuffing, Su Dongpo's words do not make sense. Moreover, if there is poetry by a monk that is without the whiff of vegetables and bamboo shoots, then his thoughts must have gone beyond his station, his words departed from the whole lineage. Not only would [such a monk] not be seeking the depths of the principles of the Five Vehicles and Eightfold Path,[85] but he would be the same as a non-Buddhist, [seeking after] the inner purport of the Four Beginnings and Six Principles [of poetry].[86]
> 夫以蔬筍為酸餡，坡之言亦不達於理矣 。僧詩而無蔬筍氣，則思必出位，語將離宗 。不惟五衍八正之旨，無所幽求 。卽四始六義之蘊，亦同外道 。[87]

Here, Zhang presents two possible problems for the coherence of Su's critique. First, he points out that vegetables and bamboo shoots do not taste the same as pickled stuffing. It may be witty to conflate the two flavors as equally "monastic," but it is not accurate in terms of their aesthetic qualities. Second, if one takes seriously the idea that the flavor of vegetables and bamboo shoots is the mark of monk-authored poetry, then it would impugn a monk's virtue to praise him for not possessing this distinction. Zhang has exposed the peculiar assumption that had been nestled within a desire to remove the whiff of vegetables. Was the goal to encourage monks to be less Buddhist? As he goes on, it becomes clear that Zhang was not advising monks to act in a particularly sour or vegetal way. He, too, wanted monks to write of the human truths in their own experiences.

> [Eating mostly] dusty gruel and dirty rice, where is there even the flavor of vegetables and bamboo shoots—is it something in his bosom? Venerable Pinlian practiced the way with great clarity. Although his poems are few, they are pellucid and effortlessly fluent; his intentions were high above the clouds; the aura (*qi*) of rose-pink mist hovered near the tip of his brush. In what place was there room for dust? This is the true flavor of vegetables and bamboo shoots, the flavor that is clear yet savory.
> 塵羹塗飯，豈復有蔬筍之味，在其胷次也？ 品蓮上人道行澄澈，詩雖不多，皆清絶滔滔，意在雲表，煙霞之氣，縈繞筆端 。何處更容埃堨？此正蔬筍味也 。蔬筍味之淸而腴者也 。

Zhang probes the culinary metaphor as he praises Pinlian's upright character. Zhang admires the *qi* that flows from the tip of the monk's brush. He describes it as clear, lucid, lofty, and wondrous. And, finally, Zhang declares the proper essence of vegetables is not only pure (*qing*), but also rich (*yu*). Zhang's choice of the word "savory" was especially clever. He is demonstrating his appreciation of monk-authored poetry by using a vocabulary of robust flavor. Moreover, this word alludes back to the rhyming word in the first line of Su Shi's poem to Daotong translated above: "bold yet subtle, bitter yet savory" 雄豪而妙苦而腴. Zhang elaborates with a personal example and a different allusion to another text by Su Shi:

> Once, I packed my things and went off into the mountains. I stopped at the home of a backwoodsman. Though he offered me boiled sunflowers and roasted bamboo shoots, which I accept-

Yun'ao shengping zhuzuo kaoshu" 張雲璈生平著作考述, *Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan yanjiu shengyuan xuebao* 2004.1: 99–101, 143.

85. The Five Vehicles and Eightfold Path are used here as a synecdoche for the Buddhist path, and are not engaged on a deep technical level. In many Song-era Chan texts, a series of numbered teachings is tossed off to gesture toward the vastness of Buddhist learning. There are variations on the list of the Five Vehicles, but it may include: the teachings of men; of gods; of the śrāvaka, or arhat; of the *pratyekabuddha*; and of the bodhisattva. The Eightfold Path is the fourth of the Four Noble Truths.

86. Again, the pair of lists are a synecdochic reference, this time to the Chinese poetic tradition. The Four Beginnings refer to four distinct sources that constitute the *Classic of Poetry*, the *feng* 風 *xiao ya* 小雅, *da ya* 大雅, and *song* 頌. The Six Principles are the *feng* 風, *fu* 賦, *bi* 比, *xing* 興, *ya* 雅, and *song* 頌.

87. *Jiansong caotang wenji* 簡松草堂文集 (*XXSKQS* edn.), 5.12a–b.

> ed with gruel and rice, it felt like feasting on sacrificial ox! [Similarly, Su] Dongpo wrote in a preface about planting vegetables, "Their flavor is of the lush soil, their essence (*qi*) full with dew and frost"; clearly, with these two phrases, Su deeply grasped the authenticity of vegetables and bamboo shoots! Therefore, no one discussing this monk's poetry should say it was unbefitting—not to speak of calling it pickled stuffing!
> 予嘗襆被入山，止於野人之家。煮葵燒筍以爲供，引羹御飯如享太牢。 東坡種菜詩序云：「味含土膏，氣飽霜露」二語蓋深得蔬筍之真者。印以論上人之詩，誰曰不宜，豈酸餡之謂哉。

The urbane scholar-official Zhang tells of a journey through mountains, during which he ate the rustic fare offered by local people. Under these conditions, his experience of modest porridge was transformed into a savory feast. Zhang likens this to a different statement by Su Shi, one from the preface to the poem "Gathering Vegetables" (Xie cai 擷菜).[88] This poem was probably written during Su's days of poverty in exile in Huangzhou. Through poetry, Su celebrated the flavor of his homegrown food seasoned by his knowing the dirt, the frost, and dew. Cleverly, Zhang has drawn an example wherein Su Shi praised the authentic flavors of vegetables, and used this allusion to Su's praise to argue against a narrow interpretation of Su's criticism.

Zhang's line of thought resonates with that of Fan Xiwen, who valued the poetry of Buddhist monastics because it gave voice to genuine experiences. This is presumably better than composing verse about things one knows nothing about. Zhang then concludes his preface:

> After the master [Pinlian] passed away, his direct disciples, together with more distant branches and various good friends, sought to create an authoritative text. Once someone is gone, we only learn of their karmic accomplishments from such mere surfaces. I regret that we never sat together in Reverend Si's thatched cottage writing poems among tea and melon, pillows and mats.[89]
> 上人既寂，弟子將謀，諸梓介子戚好，屬為點定；既卒業因識於簡端。惜乎！未嘗一坐已公茅屋同賦詩於茶瓜枕簟之間也。

Zhang appears to discuss how Pinlian's disciples gathered the collection, to which he is now adding a preface. As he appreciates the late Pinlian's poetry and calligraphy, he laments that he has arrived too late and was not able to do so together with Pinlian before his death. The final line alludes to a poem by Du Fu, "The Thatched Study of Reverend Si." That poem in turn concludes with an allusion to the story of the Eastern Jin writer Xu Xun 許詢 (d. 361) and the famous monk Zhi Dun 支遁 (ca. 314–366), who were equals in dialogue. Stephen Owen adds that Du Fu "modestly claims not to be the equal of Xu Xun, while Reverend Si is comparable to Zhi Dun."[90] Zhang Yun'ao, for his part, laments that he could not even match Du's modest claim of sitting together to write new poems, let alone the ideal of Xu Xun and Zhi Dun. Pinlian may have been like Reverend Si and Zhi Dun, but Zhang encountered only written traces after the man was gone. With a sense of melancholy, he finds the dominant metaphors to critique monks' poetry are inadequate.

There are significant parallels between Yuan Haowen's comments and Zhang's preface. They similarly oppose a dogmatic repetition of Su's comment. Yuan referred to the flavor of no flavors in his description of the accomplishment of monk Mu'an, an attainment realized

88. *Su Shi shiji*, 2202.

89. Emending *yi* 已 with *si* 巳. An allusion to Du Fu's "The Thatched Study of Reverend Si" 巳上人茅齋, in *The Poetry of Du Fu*, tr. Stephen Owen (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2016), 1.11. The phrases "pillow and mat" as well as "tea and melon" are from lines three and four of Du Fu's poem.

90. Owen, in idem, *Poetry of Du Fu*, 1.11, n. 3.

through personal experience of the monastic order. Somewhat similarly, Fan Xiwen emphasized a monk's experience as the grounds for authenticity. Surely many other literati also believed that the poetry of monks was worth savoring. However, a fixed culinary metaphor designed for belittlement could not convey what was most valuable and worth appreciating about Buddhist poetry.

CONCLUSION: THE SHADOWS CAST ON MODERN CRITICS

The use of vegetable flavor as criticism varied widely in the hands of different critics. There were those, like Ye Mengde, who saw monks' poetry as an aberration. In the olfactory imagination, "pickled vegetable stuffing" palpably conveyed a negative criticism. Monks' poetry was supposedly narrow in scope, imitative, and uninteresting. Some supporters of monks' poetry shared this same judgment, and either admonished monks to eliminate any offending flavor, or praised monastic writing that was not *too* religious. Other critics identified the whiff of vegetables as the very mark of monks' poetry. Ouyang Shoudao, for example, stated that the flavor of vegetables makes monks' poetry unique. He seems to have cultivated a taste for this literature. A similar assumption informs some modern scholarship, such as Zhou Yukai's careful analysis that resulted in a well-defined list of how vegetable flavor served as a technical term in the reception of Buddhist poetry. Other forms of praise included variations on *qing*, which could be compared with the discourse centered on flavors. A minority of historical critics directly challenged the critique grounded in metaphors of vegetable flavors. To do so, they engaged further culinary metaphors to resolve the perceived incompatibility of Buddhist and Chinese poetic ideals. These critics, like Yuan Haowen and Zhang Yun'ao, praised clerics' poetry.

As a brief conclusion, I would like to suggest that this history matters today because the frameworks used by premodern critics have analogues in modern scholarly criticism of Buddhist poetry. We saw one example in the work of Iriya Yoshitaka, above. Similarly, Qian Zhongshu 錢鐘書 in his *Tanyi lu* 談藝錄 came to the conclusion that the successful poet-monks "possess the feelings of wind and moon and lack the whiff of vegetables and bamboo shoots" 有風月情，無蔬筍氣. He also wrote that these poet-monks "despite their outward appearance in monastic robes, in reality are not Chan disciples" 貌為緇留，實非禪子, and that they are little different from those who defrocked and became scholar-officials.[91] Qian Zhongshu embraced two aspects of the historical criticism. He praised poet-monks who are free of vegetable flavors, and at the same time critiqued these monks for not being Buddhist enough.

In response to Qian, Sun Changwu raised a deceptively simple counterpoint: monks who continued to live as monks were different from those who defrocked to become secular officials in terms of their everyday experience.[92] I agree with Sun that it matters that those who remained in the monastery (ideally) followed a rigorous daily schedule and maintained codes of purity. The people who donned the Buddha's robes had to negotiate a set of social expectations that differed from other members of society, and this difference probably manifested in their poetry. However, Sun then makes a subtle leap to assert that these daily experiences are what is expressed in monks' poetry. Of course, traditional Chinese poetry is replete with autobiographic details and self-representation, however, these are not necessarily literally true. Poets regularly engaged in acts of imagination. One need not have firsthand experience of being a bird in flight to write about birds.

91. Qian Zhongshu, *Tanyi lu* (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2001; rev. ed.), 650.
92. Sun, *Chansi yu shiqing*, 316–17.

Contrariwise, we run the risk of concluding that monks' poems lacking these or other qualities somehow are not Buddhist enough. Stephen Owen once remarked of Jiaoran and his poet-monk contemporaries that "they were in no sense religious poets";[93] and of monk Lingyi's poem in particular that "exactly the same poem might have been written by a secular poet."[94] These poems are not sufficiently "Buddhist." In this case, Owen argued that only a reader's foreknowledge of the author's identity as a monk provides the "situational frame of reference" that allows a reader to project the presumed religious concerns of the author onto the natural imagery of the poem. More recently, Owen similarly argued that "truly 'religious'" poetry does not depend on "the use of Buddhist terms" but instead "a possible flash of faith."[95] He favors those Tang poems that speak to his preferred conceptions of religious literature. Therefore, Owen centers questions about what kind of "faith" lay at the heart of good religious poetry, rather than close analysis of religious praxis, social formations, or explicit themes.[96] As a result, the poems by monks (except a select few late Tang poet-monks) are at once too Buddhist and not Buddhist enough.

I would here suggest some alternatives. First, that we analyze the categories that monks and literati themselves used to debate the various verse forms and genres authored by Buddhist monks. What conceptions of poetry were at work among monastic authors? If premodern Buddhist monks themselves expressed concerns over whether they were "Buddhist enough," that would then raise further questions. Thus, second, we might foreground how historical categories used by premodern Chinese critics were active agents within their literary cultures. This disparaging critique circulated back among monks, as reported by Venerable Fu, and as directly evidenced by the colophons and poems addressed to monks. Brief descriptions that monkish writers were responding to criticism suggest that future research may illustrate how this feedback shaped how monks wrote poetry. In other words, one way to historicize these criticisms would be to focus on the sociality of literary criticism.

Third, "vegetables and bamboo shoots" was primarily a discourse of disparagement, and yet was also the site of a productive conversation about the value of Chinese Buddhist poetry. Some writers wrested positive appreciation from the clichéd metaphor of vegetable flavor, such as the mid-Qing preface by Zhang Yun'ao. This family of critical metaphors, however, from its beginning crystallized a complex attitude towards Buddhist monks' poetry within the broader Chinese literary culture. The literati reception of monks' poetry was one that generated both positive and negative evaluations, often mixed into a single statement.

A nuanced understanding of the literati reception history of monk-authored poetry may indicate new directions for future research and interpretation. Recent and emerging scholarship have already begun to renew our explorations of the diverse types of Buddhist poetry in China. Indeed, the bulk of China's monks' poetry remains to be studied.

ABBREVIATIONS

T: *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經, ed. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次朗 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭 (Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924–1932), accessed in the CBETA electronic edition (2016). Citations provide the sequential text number, followed by volume, page, register (a, b, or c), and line number(s).

ZZ: *Shinsan Dai Nihon zoku zōkyō* 新纂大日本續藏經, ed. Nishi Giyū 西義雄 et al. (Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 1975–1989), 90 vols. [Revised and expanded reproduction of *Dai Nihon zoku zōkyō*

93. Owen, *The Great Age of Chinese Poetry: The High T'ang* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1981), 282.
94. Ibid., 283.
95. Owen, "How Did Buddhism Matter in Tang Poetry?" *T'oung Pao* 103.4–5 (2017): 390.
96. Ibid., 404–5.

大日本續藏經, ed. Maeda Eun 前田慧雲 and Nakano Tatsue 中野達慧 (Kyoto: Zōkyō shoin, 1905–1912).] Accessed in the CBETA electronic edition (2016). Citations provide the sequential text number in the revised *Shinsan* edition, followed by volume number, page number, register, and line.