

A Song-dynasty Confucian Scholar's Passion for Buddhism:
Jiang Zhiqi 蔣之奇 (1031-1104) and the Spread of the Avalokitesvara Worship

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Since Glen Dudbridge published his monograph thirty years ago, the Miaoshan 妙善 legend has attracted sustained attention from scholars worldwide. Yü Chün-fang's recent study included in her book on the Guanyin cult has elevated our understanding of this intriguing tale to a new level. However, to the best of my knowledge, no serious study has yet been made on the life of Jiang Zhiqi 蔣之奇 (1031-1104), a distinguished Song dynasty Confucian scholar and high-ranking bureaucrat whose memorial inscription of 1099 constitutes the earliest source for the Miaoshan legend and who therefore must be taken as a chief architect for the formation of the Guanyin-Miaoshan cult during the Song dynasty (960-1279).

In this talk, I will attempt to fill this lacuna. I will begin with a reconstruction of Jiang Zhiqi's life on the basis of his major biographical sources; then, I will proceed to examine some traces of evidence that reveal Jiang's interaction with the contemporary *saṃgha*. This talk will end with a brief look at how this historical and biographical study might shed new light on some aspects of the social and religious dynamism underlying Jiang Zhiqi's involvement in the creation and promotion of the Miaoshan legend. Jiang Zhiqi's work, as we shall see, was ultimately to exert an extraordinary influence on the religious life of Song and post-Song people, particularly as part of the complex program of "locating" and "localizing" an Indian bodhisattva in the land of the "Central Kingdom."