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# Performing the Doctrine of Nonduality: The Forgotten Theme of Wu Bin's *The Sixteen Luohans*

## Abstract

Breaking free from the limitation imposed by the painting's title, this essay proposes that the subject of Wu Bin's *The Sixteen Luohans* is the visit of Mañjuśrī to Vimalakīrti and the doctrine of nonduality taught by the most famous lay Buddhist, Vimalakīrti. Along with a thorough iconographic study of figures in the scroll, the essay explores lay Buddhists' intellectual, doctrinal, and social interests during the late Ming dynasty (1368–1644). Wu Bin's methods of artistic inventiveness are analyzed, especially in aspects of trans-medial dimension, as manifested in incorporating elements from woodblock-printed illustrations and sculptural sources into his painting. Most importantly, Wu Bin's selection of plots in the *Vimalakīrti Sutra* to be illustrated in the scroll and the designs of figures in this painting attest to his interpretations of the *Vimalakīrti Sutra* and his deep knowledge of Buddhist teachings.

*Keywords:* Wu Bin; Sixteen Luohans; arhat painting; Mañjuśrī; Avalokiteśvara; Vimalakīrti; Hou; nonduality; Chan, lay Buddhist.