

Funeral Biographies of Buddhist Monks and Nuns

Principle investigator (PI)

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This research project is a study and annotations of the Funeral Biographies of Buddhist monks and Nuns in the Tang and Song dynasties. Patricia Buckley Ebrey, Ping Yao, and Cong Ellen Zhang, the editors of *Chinese Funerary Biographies: An Anthology of Remembered Lives* have explained the importance funeral biographies quite clearly, because of their inclusion of telling details about personal conduct, family life, local conditions, and social and cultural practices, can be tremendously helpful in giving the reader a sense of the ways of thinking of their period and the realities of daily life, especially among the elite class. Epitaphs are especially valuable for the glimpses they give of the lives of a wide range of people not well documented in such sources as dynastic histories and gazetteers. Women, who rarely enter standard historical sources unless they were celebrated as chaste widows or other paragons of virtue, are well represented in funerary biographies (though still not nearly as well as men). Similarly, one can find many epitaphs for men who never managed to leave much of a mark politically and who are not recorded in any other source. Even boys and girls who died young and were not normally recorded in genealogies or biographies of their parents were subjects of epitaphs and fondly remembered by family members.

The first part is a study and annotation of the Funeral Biographies of Buddhist monks and Nuns in the Tang dynasty. According to Japanese scholar Kegasawa Yasunori who compiled the book *The Newly Compiled Catalogue for the Extant Tang Dynasty Funeral Biographies* (*Shintō Tōdai boshi shozai sōgō mokuroku* 《新編唐代墓誌所在総合目録》 (fourth edition) published in 2017, there are about 12523 funeral stone tablets of Tang dynasty have been discovered. Recently, Jie Yongqiang's 介永強 book 《隋唐僧尼碑志塔銘集錄》 (A Collection of Funeral Biographies of Buddhist Monks and Nuns in Sui and Tang dynasty) published in 2022 in which he has collected 391 biographies. It is simply a collection of funeral biographies without any annotation. I propose to write annotations to these biographies as there are many difficult passages.

The second part is a study and annotation of the Funeral Biographies of Buddhist monks and Nuns in the Song dynasty. A rough search from the *Quan Song Wen* which consists of 360 volumes shows that there are at least more than 200 funeral biographies of Buddhist monks and nuns in the Song dynasty. I will search and collect as much as possible such biographies and write annotations and then followed by study.

One of the very important contribution is the biographies of Buddhist nuns in the Tang and Song dynasties. There is no record of Buddhist nuns after the Liang dynasty during which Bao Chang 寶唱, the eminent Buddhist monk scholar compiled the *Biographies of Bhiksunis* 《比丘尼傳》 in which

he compiled the biographies of nuns during 357CE to 519 CE. Thereafter there is no book dedicated to the biographies of Buddhist nuns. However, in these funeral biographies mention above, we have found many biographies of Buddhist nuns and they had achieved much in their lives, some even became great Chan masters and others became great Vinaya masters. These are valuable information about Buddhist nuns and their lives.

Although Venerable Zhenhua 震華 (1908–1947) compiled the *Continuation of the Biographies of Nuns*, 《續比丘尼傳》, which was published in 1939, it collected only 35 nuns' life stories for the Sui and Tang period, 30 for the Five dynasties and the Song period, and 20 for the Yuan and the Ming period, 86 for the Qing period, 27 for the Republic Period (1912–1949). At the moment, we have around one hundred funeral biographies of nuns in the Tang period alone. This certainly add much more information about Buddhist nuns in the Tang dynasty.