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Author(s): Ding-hwa Hsieh and 謝定華

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Buddhist Nuns in Sung China (960-1279)*

Ding-hwa Hsieh 謝定華
Truman State University

Introduction

The Sung has become a major research area of Chinese Buddhism because it was a time when Buddhism flourished and Buddhist monastic institutions became thoroughly integrated into the imperial system. This study is about Buddhist women's monastic experiences in Sung China. It seeks to understand how women during this period pursued their monastic lives and what view the society in general held toward the Buddhist nunnery.

Buddhism was introduced from India to China around the first century. Accompanied with the spread of Buddhist teaching was the establishment of Buddhist monastic order. It seems that few Chinese women became nuns during the first three centuries.¹ In

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1. The convent founded by the nun Chu Ching-chien 竺淨檢 in 317, as Kathryn Ann Tsai has pointed out, can be considered the first in China, though a sixth-century work mentions that there were some nunneries in Lo-yang (Honan) before 317; see Tsai, trans., *Lives of the Nuns: Biographies of Chinese Buddhist Nuns from the Fourth to Sixth Centuries* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 5-6. According to some traditional Chinese historical sources, however, the first Chinese woman who became a nun was Ah-p'an 阿潘 from Lo-yang during the reign of Emperor Ming (r. 58-75) of the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220), and the first nunnery in China started with the donation of the house made by Ho Ch'ung 何充 (292-346) of the Eastern Chin (317-420); see Tsan-ning 贊寧 (919-1001), *Ta-sung seng shih-lüe* 大宋僧史略 (hereafter *SSL*), in Takakusu Junjirō and Watanabe Kaigyoku, eds., *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經 (hereafter *T*) 85 vols. (Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924-1932) 2126, 54.237c22-23 and 245b19-20.

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the following centuries, however, the Buddhist nuns' order apparently flourished. Pao-ch'ang's 寶唱 (dates uncertain) *Biographies of Buddhist Nuns* (*Pi-ch'iu-ni chuan* 比丘尼傳) of 516, a collection of sixty-five nuns' biographies, attests to the prominence of Chinese Buddhist nuns during the period from the fourth to the sixth centuries.² From then on, the *bhikṣuṇī* (fully ordained nuns) lineage in China continued without interruption, and today it is the main source of legitimacy for women in the world who aspire to become fully ordained nuns. Thus, a study of Sung Buddhist monastic women not only yields a more balanced understanding of Chinese *bhikṣuṇī* tradition from its earliest stage to the present time but also helps to clarify the institutional foundation on which contemporary Chinese women's monasticism is predicated.³

2 . *Pi-ch'iu-ni chuan* (hereafter *PCNC*), in *T* 2063, 50.934a-948a. For translation and discussion of this work, see Tsai, *Lives of the Nuns*; Tsai, "The Chinese Buddhist Monastic Order for Women: The First Two Centuries," in Richard W. Guisso and Stanley Johannesen, eds., *Women in China* (New York: Philo Press, 1981), 1-20; and Li Jung-hsi, trans., *Biographies of Buddhist Nuns: Pao-ch'ang's Pi-ch'iu-ni chuan* (Osaka: Tohokai, 1981).

3 . The history of Chinese monastic women has become a major focus of research only during the recent two decades. For early Chinese Buddhist nuns, aside from Tsai, see also Nancy Schuster, "Striking a Balance: Women and Images of Women in Early Chinese Buddhism," in Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Ellison Banks Findly, eds., *Women, Religion, and Social Change* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 87-112. For T'ang (618-907) nuns, see Li Yü-chen 李玉珍, *T'ang-tai te pi-ch'iu-ni* 唐代的比丘尼 (Taipei: Hsüeh-sheng shu-chü, 1989). For nuns' images and the issue of gender in Ch'an Buddhism, see Miriam L. Levering, "The Dragon Girl and the Abbess of Mo-shan: Gender and Status in the Ch'an Buddhist Tradition," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 5.1 (1982): 19-35; Levering, "Lin-chi (Rinzai) Ch'an and Gender: The Rhetoric of Equality and the Rhetoric of Heroism," in José Ignacio Cabezón, ed., *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 137-56; Levering, "Miao-tao and Her Teacher Ta-hui," in Peter N. Gregory and Daniel A. Getz, eds., *Buddhism in the Sung* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 188-219; and Ding-hwa Hsieh, "Images of Women in Ch'an Buddhist Literature of the Sung Period," in *Buddhism in the Sung*, 148-87. For monastic codes for nuns, see Akira Hirakawa, et al., *Monastic Discipline for the Buddhist Nuns: An English Translation of the Chinese Text of the Mahāsāṃghika-Bhikṣuṇī Vinaya* (Patna: K.P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1982); also Karma Lekshe Tsomo, *Sister in Solitude: Two Traditions of Buddhist Monastic Ethics for Women* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996). For nuns in late imperial China, see Li Shiyu and Susan Naquin, "The Baoming Temple: Religion and the Throne in Ming and Qing China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 48.1 (June 1988): 131-88; Beata Grant, "The Red Cord Untied: Buddhist Nuns in Eighteenth-Century China," in Tsomo,

By exploring new sources of information about Buddhist nuns, I will demonstrate that nunneries were an important presence throughout the Sung period. Aside from the claim of tax-free privilege for the land given to the nunnery, financial worries caused by dowry escalation during this period might have led some elite families to look to the nunnery as a solution to disposing of their aged unmarried daughters. I will also show that the nunnery indeed offered women a respected social role other than that of mother and wife; entrance into the monastic life provided career-minded women an opportunity to achieve fame and publicity. The fact that Sung women, particularly among the upper class, could retain considerable control over family proper-ties may have facilitated the flourishing of Buddhist nunneries. Even more important, under the Sung imperial court's segregation policy toward Buddhist monks and nuns, women were allowed to ordain female disciples and manage their monastic affairs without being subordinated directly to monks' authority. This study, in short, is intended to complement other scholars' research on Sung dynasty women while providing a new insight into women's lives in traditional China.

To achieve a better understanding of how Buddhist nuns were perceived by the society of their day, I did not refer to the biographical records of eminent nuns in the Buddhist works. Rather, my sources for discovering nuns' lives and achievements are derived mainly from non-Buddhist literature. First, I studied government statutes and legal codes and glanced scholar-officials' miscellaneous notes to understand the official procedures regulating women's entry into the monastic order. For this, I also made

(..continued)

ed., *Buddhist Women Across Cultures: Realizations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 91-103. For contemporary Chinese nuns, see Tsomo, *Sakyadhīta: Daughters of the Buddha* (New York: Snow Lion Publications, Inc., 1988), 112-123, 189-194; also Nancy J. Barnes, "Buddhist Women and the Nuns' Order in Asia," in Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King, eds., *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movement in Asia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 259-294; and Chien-yu Julia Huang and Robert P. Weller, "Merit and Mothering: Women and Social Welfare in Taiwanese Buddhism," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57.2 (May 1998): 379-96. For a general survey of women and Chinese religions, see Daniel L. Overmyer, "Women in Chinese Religions: Submission, Struggle, Transcendence," in Koichi Shinohara and Gregory Schopen, eds., *From Benares to Beijing: Essays on Buddhism and Chinese Religion in Honour of Prof. Jan Yün-hua* (Oakville: Mosaic Press, 1991), 91-120.

use of scholarly research on Sung government control of clerical recruitment. Next, to gather information about monastic training and clerical hierarchy, I drew on the extant monastic codes for women compiled in pre-modern times, as well as the encyclopedic Buddhist works written by Sung monk-historians. I collected nuns' biographies from the "Biographies" (*lieh-chuan* 列傳) section of the *History of the Sung Dynasty* (*Sung-shih*), the collection of dynastic epigraphic records, and scholar-officials' collected works. I also examined the available materials discovered from the Tun-huang area to find if there were any documents concerning Sung Buddhist nuns' ordination and activity. Finally, to reconstruct the Buddhist nuns' experiences, I relied heavily on local gazetteers and inscriptions written or compiled during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. All of these materials, written mostly from people outside clerical circles, are significant because they reveal the practical aspects of monastic life as well as the relationship between Buddhist nuns and lay patrons.

The first part of this study examines how Sung people in general viewed the nunnery and what procedures a woman in the Sung wanting to join the nuns' order was required to follow. The second part demonstrates why the Buddhist nuns' order under Sung imperial rule was a realm where women could live with less domination and interference from their male monastic counterparts. Finally, the third part explores Sung Chinese Buddhist nuns' lives and activities within and outside the monastic walls.

I. *Entry Into the Nuns' Order: Required Procedures*

A eulogy written by Ch'ao Pu-chih 晁補之 (1053-1110), a Confucian scholar-official, celebrating his niece's ordination ceremony provides a glimpse into why and how average Sung women of the middle- and upper-class families chose to become Buddhist nuns:

When [Miss Tu 杜] was eighteen years old, her family members arranged for her to be married. Thinking that her late mother died while giving birth, Tu became sad that a similar fate would befall her when she became someone's wife. She therefore suddenly cut off her hair like a nun's, abandoned all her ornaments and cosmetics, and abstained from meat. She then requested her parents to let her be a nun in the future so that she could repay their kindness for giving birth to her. All of her family members were saddened by her decision. Her husband-to-be, being particularly upset, withdrew the proposal.

Although Tu's decision to become a Buddhist nun occurred suddenly, for the next twelve years she made tremendous progress in her practice of Buddhism. Finally, Ch'ao's wife, moved by her niece's tenacity, spent 130 strings of cash (*ch'ien* 錢) to purchase an ordination certificate (*tu-tieh* 度牒) and arranged an ordination ceremony for Tu. Ch'ao was pleased to see his niece become a formally ordained nun, regarding this as a great blessing that would create merit for all the members of the Ch'ao and Tu families.⁴

This eulogy, written from Ch'ao's perspective, shows that his niece's decision to join the nuns' order was motivated not by her religious piety but by her wish to escape marriage life. Ch'ao's view of the nunnery may have reflected the general view held by people of his time: that the nunnery served as a haven for women to escape an unwanted marriage or oppressive family life. Although what really motivated Miss Tu to become a Buddhist nun and how Tu herself felt about the nunnery are beyond our knowledge, we can note that she alone made this decision and that once it was made, she pursued her goal wholeheartedly. Moreover, even though Tu's family members were shocked by her decision to become a Buddhist nun, eventually they were supportive of it. It seems that the monastic life was a respected alternative to domesticity; Tu's entry into the nuns' order was acknowledged as a filial act that created merit for her family members and other relatives.

Also, Miss Tu did not join the monastic order right away; instead, she stayed home and devoted herself to Buddhist practice for twelve years. It was not until Ch'ao's wife bought Tu an ordination certificate that Tu received tonsure and ordination. She then became a formal member of the nuns' order. Ch'ao's eulogy is therefore important because it contains information about the procedures a woman in the Sung may have needed to follow in order to pursue monastic life.

4. "Sheng tu-shih hsiao-wu-niang p'i-t'i shu-tz'u ping-hsü" 甥杜氏小五娘披剃疏詞并序, in *Chi-le chi* 雞肋集 [1095], 70 ch., in *Ssu-pu ts'ung-kan* (Taiwan: Commercial Press, 1965), v. 56, 70: 3b-6a.

Categories of Buddhist Women

In the Sung monk Tao-ch'eng's 道誠 (dates uncertain) *An Essential Survey of the Śākya Family Lineage* (Shih-shih yao-lan 釋氏要覽) Buddhist women are classified into four categories: *bhikṣuṇī* (pi-ch'iu-ni 比丘尼), *śikṣamāṇā* (shih-ch'a-mo-na 式叉摩那), *śrāmaṇerikā* (sha-mi ni 沙彌尼), and *upāsikā* (yu-p'o-i 優婆夷). The first three categories refer to the groups who "renounce the household lives" (ch'u-chia 出家), the last one refers to lay devotees who "stay home" (tsai-chia 在家).⁵

The category of *upāsikā*, whose male counterpart is *upāsaka* (yu-p'o-sai 優婆塞), is for Buddhist laywomen who have faith in the "Three Jewels" (the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha) and observe the five cardinal precepts (against killing, stealing, adultery, lying, and using intoxicants). The category of *śrāmaṇerikā*, like *śrāmaṇera* (sha-mi 沙彌) in the monks' order, is for women who enter the monastic order as novice nuns. She lives in celibacy and observes ten precepts; aside from the five cardinal precepts, she takes vows not to attend musical performances, not to use ornaments and cosmetics, not to use high or luxurious seats and beds, not to handle gold and silver, and not to take untimely meals.⁶ Normally, the training period for a novice nun would last for one year. Sung law had specific regulations on the minimum age requirement; according to the imperial decree issued in 1001 by Emperor Chen-tsung (r. 997-1022), to be a novice nun one had to be at least fifteen years old.⁷

The category of *śikṣamāṇā* is solely for monastic women and is not found in the monks' order. The reason for this additional stage was the concern that a woman may unknowingly be pregnant when she became a fully ordained nun; to avoid such a kind of situation, a two-year probationary period was required before she

5. The "five groups who renounce household lives" (ch'u-chia wu-chung 出家五衆) include *bhikṣu*, *bhikṣuṇī*, *śikṣamāṇā*, *śrāmaṇera*, and *śrāmaṇerikā*, while the "two groups who stay home" (tsai-chia erh-chung 在家二衆) refer to *upāsaka* and *upāsikā*; see Tao-ch'eng, *Shih-shih yao-lan* (hereafter *SSYL*), T 2127, 54.262b.6-8.

6. Tao-hsüan 道宣 (596-667) of the Tang, *Ssu-fen pi-ch'iu-ni ch'ao* 四分比丘尼鈔 (hereafter *SFPCNC*), reprinted in the Sung, in *Hsü-tsang-ching* (hereafter *HTC*) 150 vols. (Copied by Hsiang-kang ying-yin Hsü-tsang-ching wei-yüan-hui, 1967), 64.33c-d.

7. The minimum age for being a novice monk was eighteen; see *Sung hui-yao* 宋會要 (hereafter *SHY*), 8 vols. (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1957) "Tao-shih," 1: 17b, v. 8, p. 7877b. However, Sung imperial court constantly changed its policy toward the minimum age requirement.

took full ordination (Skt. *upasampadā*). The status of a *śikṣamāṇā* was “ranked below a *bhikṣuṇī*s but above a *śrāmaṇerikā*s.”⁸ A woman usually entered this stage at the age of eighteen, and she observed three kinds of precepts: (1) the “four fundamentals” (*ssu-chung* 四重; not to commit impure conduct, not to steal, not to kill, and not to lie); (2) the “six precepts” (*liu-fa* 六法; the five cardinal precepts plus the abstinence from eating at the wrong time); and (3) the 292 “precepts of daily conduct” (*hsing-fa* 行法; precepts that prepare one for the full ordination).⁹ According to Tao-ch’eng, during the Sung women at the stage of *śikṣamāṇā* were allowed to keep their hair:

This [category] refers to “women who study the Dharma” (*hsüeh-fa nü* 學法女). It is similar to the present-day “nuns who keep their hair long” (*ch’ang-fa ni* 長髮尼).¹⁰

If a woman had already gone through ordination and tonsure ceremonies to become a novice nun, why would she keep her hair at this advanced stage? One possibility was that in China a woman who entered the monastic order could choose to receive ordination (*tu* 度) first and then waited until her full ordination to be tonsured (*t’i* 剃).¹¹ Another possibility would be that by Sung times the stage of *śikṣamāṇā* was somehow blurred with the stage of “women postulants”—a category for women Buddhists who aspired to become nuns but had not yet received official approval to enter the order. As we shall see, the category of “postulants” was a unique feature of Chinese monastic Buddhism, and it can be viewed mainly as a result of the imperial government’s control over clerical recruitment.

The period of a *śikṣamāṇā*’s training ended with her full ordin-

8. *Shih-ch’a mo-na ni chieh-pen* 式叉摩那尼戒本 [1650] (hereafter *SCMNNCP*), by Hung-tsan 弘贊 of the Ch’ing (1644-1911), *HTC* 64.103d11-12. Also see the discussion of this stage in Akira Hirakawa, et al., *Monastic Discipline for the Buddhist Nuns*, 37.

9. *SFPCNC*, *HTC* 64.34d-35c; also see *SCMNNCP*, *HTC* 64.97c104a.

10. *SSYL*, *T* 54.262a23.

11. As Kenneth Ch’en has pointed out, in China “ordination came first, then the tonsure”; this was mainly because the granting of ordination certificates was authorized by the government, whereas the tonsure ceremony was held in the monastery. Ch’en, *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 247.

ation. She then became a *bhikṣuṇī*, which was the highest level of the nuns' order, equal to the rank of *bhikṣu* in the monks' order. A fully ordained nun vowed to live a celibate, ethical life by observing more than 300 precepts, that is, the precepts of the Prātimokṣa, which covered the entire range of monastic rules and regulations.¹²

Finally, a term that should be mentioned here is *hsing-che* 行者, which has often been translated into "practitioner" or "postulant." This category is not found in Indian Buddhism but appears only in the Chinese monastic system. The stage of being a postulant was a period of training and study prior to the novitiate. Practitioners of this category, although living in the monastery, were still connected to secular life; they kept their hair and, most importantly, were not exempt from taxation and labor services. During their period of training, they followed the five cardinal precepts, studied Buddhist scriptures, and worked in the monastery as servants or attendants.¹³ In Tao-cheng's *Essential Survey*, the term *hsing-che* referred specifically to men above the age of sixteen who "did not get immediate admission for joining the order and hence lived in the monastery [waiting to be accepted as novices]."¹⁴ They were called "boy-postulants" (*t'ung-hsing* 童行; lit. child-postulant) or "boys" (*t'ung-tzu* 童子) if under the age of sixteen.¹⁵

Although not mentioned in Tao-ch'eng's work, women postulants were common during the Sung. They were called the "long-haired" (*ch'ang-fa* 長髮) or "girl-postulants" (*ni-t'ung* 尼童; lit.,

12 . According to Tao-ch'eng, nuns observed 350 precepts and monks 250 precepts; see *SSYL*, T 54.272b14-15. For the monastic codes for *bhikṣuṇī* written or re-edited in the Sung, see Tao-hsüan's *SFPCNC* and Yüan-chao's 元照 (1048-1116) *Ssu-fen shan-ting pi-ch'iu-ni chieh-pen* 四分刪定比丘尼戒本, in *HTC* 64.1a-12b. In addition, Yün-k'an 允堪 (dates uncertain) of the T'ien-t'ai school wrote the *Ssu-fen-lü pi-ch'iu-ni ch'ao-k'o* 四分律比丘尼鈔科, in *HTC* 64.13-25.

13 . The term *hsing-che* appeared already in T'ang times; see Eric Zürcher, "Buddhism and Education in T'ang Times," in Wm. Theodore de Bary & John W. Chaffee, eds., *Neo-Confucian Education: The Formative Stage* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 30; also Ch'en, *Buddhism in China*, 245.

14 . *SSYL*, T 54.266c27-267a5.

15 . "From the age of seven to fifteen they all are called 'boys';" see *SSYL*, T 54.266c18-19; see also Zürcher, "Buddhism and Education in T'ang Times," 30. However, Sung government documents show that the distinction between *t'ung-hsing* and *hsing-che* was applied in a very loose way; the term *t'ung-hsing* was used sometimes for all the Buddhist postulants (male and female, young and adult) and sometimes for boy-postulants only.

nun-child) if they were very young.¹⁶ Sung law required a thorough background check prior to one's entrance as a postulant to ascertain whether s/he received parental permission, whether s/he had criminal records or wrongdoings, and whether s/he met the minimum age requirement.¹⁷ The minimum age for being a postulant actually varied widely. According to the decree issued by Emperor Chen-tsung in 1001, to become a postulant, the person, male or female, had to be at least ten years old.¹⁸ In 1030, however, Emperor Jen-tsung (r. 1022-1063) issued an edict ordering the minimum age for postulants to be set at age twenty for men and fifteen for women.¹⁹ Later in the Southern Sung (1127-1279), the law required that a person should not become a "child-postulant" if he was under the age of nineteen and she under fourteen.²⁰ Thus, like her male counterpart, a woman who aspired to join the order could not be ordained immediately but had to be admitted first as a postulant.

After a period of training and study, the postulant was eligible to apply for a certificate of ordination issued by the Bureau of Sacrifices (*tz'u-pu* 祠部). As in the case of Miss Tu, an ordination certificate was absolutely necessary if one wanted to become a formal member of the Buddhist monastic order. Materials discovered in the Tun-huang area have preserved two Sung nuns' ordination certificates; one was dated in 965, and the other in 985.²¹ The demand for official approval of one's entry into the monastic order may explain why there was the blurring between

16 . For the use of the term *ch'ang-fa* in Sung imperial decrees, see SHY, "Tao-shih," 1:13a, p. 7875a; also 1: 17b, p. 7877b; etc. The use of the term *ni-t'ung* in Sung official documents to refer to women postulants at a very young age can be found in the Southern Sung legal code *Ch'ing-yuan t'iao-fa shih-lei* 慶元條法事類 (hereafter *CYTFSL*): "[To enter the novitiate], a *hsing-che* has to recite 100 sheets or read 500 sheets, and a *ni-t'ung* has to recite seventy sheets or read 300 sheets"; see Hsieh Shen-fu 謝深甫 (ca. 12th cent.), *CYTFSL*, 80 ch. (Taipei: Hsin-wen-feng, 1976), 50.469.

17 . SHY, "Tao-shih," 1: 22a, p. 7879c; 1: 27b, p. 7882b; also *CYTFSL*, 50.474.

18 . SHY, "Tao-shih," 1: 17b, p. 7877b.

19 . SHY, "Tao-shih," 1: 27b, p. 7882b. It is interesting to note that the term used here is *t'ung-hsing* rather than *hsing-che*.

20 . *CYTFSL*, 50, 474.

21 . Huang Yung-wu 黃永武, ed., *Tun-huang pao-tsang* 敦煌寶藏, 140 vols. (Taipei: Hsin-wen-feng, 1986), no. P3143, v. 126, p. 416; and no. S4115, v. 34, p. 53.

monastic members and lay practitioners in Chinese Buddhism. The granting of ordination certificates, then, was one of the most important policies that were adopted by Sung government to control clerical recruitment.

Methods of Obtaining the Ordination Certificates

The system of granting official certificates for ordination started in 747 when the T'ang (618-907) imperial court tried to stop the rampant practice of private ordination, while at the same time using it as a means to raise the quality of the clergy. As a result, a postulant eligible for initiation had to acquire a certificate issued by the Bureau of Sacrifices. In general, there were three ways that one could obtain an ordination certificate: through success in the clerical examination, imperial favor, and purchase.²²

The practice of granting official certificates was carried over into the Sung dynasty.²³ At the beginning, the Sung government relied mainly on examinations as a major means to select clerical candidates. As an early Sung decree says:

All the Buddhist and Taoist "child-postulants" should register in the Bureau of the Sacrifices every three years. On the thirtieth date of the fifth month, candidates gather in the capital [to take clerical examinations]. The "child-postulant" recites 100 sheets or reads 500 sheets. The "long-haired" recites seventy sheets or reads 300 sheets.²⁴

22. Tsukamoto Zenryū 塚本善隆, "Sō no zaiseinan to bukyō" 宋の財政難と佛教, in *Kuwabara hakase kanreki kinen* 桑原博氏還曆紀念東洋史論叢 (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1931), 552-53; Ch'en, *Buddhism in China*, 245-248; also Jacques Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society: An Economic History from the Fifth to the Tenth Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 50-60.

23. For scholars' studies on this issue, see Tsukamoto, "Sō no zaiseinan to bukyō," 549-94; Tsukamoto, "Sō jidai no dōkōshikyo tokudo no seido" 宋時代の童行試經得度の制度, in *Shina bukyō shigaku* 支那佛教史學 5.1 (June, 1941): 42-65; Takao Gigen 高雄義堅, *Sōdai bukyōshi no kenkyū* 宋代佛教史の研究 (Kyoto: Hakkaen, 1975), 13-33; Chikusa Masāki 竺沙雅章, *Chūgoku bukyō shakaishi kenkyū* 中國佛教社會史研究 (Kyoto: Dohosha, 1982), 17-82; Kenneth Ch'en, "The Sale of Monk Certificates During the Sung Dynasty: A Factor in the Decline of Buddhism in China," *Harvard Theological Review* XLIX.4 (Oct. 1956): 307-27; and Huang Min-chih 黃敏枝, *Sung-tai fo-chiao she-hui ching-chi shih lun-chi* 宋代佛教社會經濟史論集 (Taiwan: Hsüeh-sheng shu-chü, 1989), 349-491.

24. SHY, "Tao-shih," 1: 13a, p. 7875a.

However, like its T'ang predecessor, the Sung government frequently changed its policies regarding the amount of texts tested and the number of qualified candidates in an attempt to control the size of the clerical population.²⁵

Ordination certificates could also be granted by imperial grace. That is, on some occasions the emperor would issue an edict allowing certain clerical candidates to receive certificates for ordination without being tested. Imperial grace sometimes applied only to one monastery or area and sometimes to the whole nation. Occasions for granting ordination by the grace of the emperor included the birthday of the emperor or an imperial visit to a monastery.²⁶ Aside from the purposes of celebration and commemoration, issuing such an order was believed to accumulate merit and hence would bring prosperity and fortune to the imperial family. In 1098, Emperor Che-tsung (r. 1085-1100) issued a decree allowing all the postulants in the capital K'ai-feng (Honan) to be ordained as monks or nuns, perhaps in the hope that this would bring blessings to the empress dowager who had been ill for a long time with no sign of recovery.²⁷ On occasion, imperial grace was also used to support a certain princess who joined the nuns' order. In 1009 when the Wu-kuo Great Senior Princess 吳國大長公主, the seventh daughter of Emperor T'ai-tsung (r. 976-997), became a Buddhist nun, Emperor Chen-tsung ordered that in every Buddhist or Taoist monastery one out of every ten registered postulants

25 . At the beginning of the Sung, for example, clerical candidates were required only to read the assigned Buddhist scripture without being tested on memorization. In 995, however, Emperor T'ai-tsung (r. 976-997) learned that the number of previously ordained Buddhist monks and nuns amounted to several hundreds of thousands, and that there were still more than four thousand persons in Ch'üan-chou 泉州 (Fukien) waiting for ordination. He then immediately ordered that memorization of the texts be tested and that one out of every three hundred, rather than every one hundred, candidates be selected for granting the ordination certificates. See SHY, "Tao-shih," 1: 15b-16a, pp. 7876b-c. For the T'ang government policy toward clerical examinations, see Zürcher, "Buddhism and Education in T'ang Times," 32-39.

26 . To give an example, in 991, Emperor T'ai-tsung ordered that every year on the emperor's birthday, fifty postulants of the monasteries at Mt. Wu-t'ai (Shansi) would be ordained without taking clerical examinations; see SHY, "Tao-shih," 1: 14b-15a, 7875d-7876a. Also see the study by Huang, *Sung-tai fo-chiao*, 362, 366-76.

27 . SHY, "Tao-shih," 1: 30b, p. 7883d.

could receive certificates for ordination without taking the examinations.²⁸

Finally, one could obtain an ordination certificate through purchase. Official sale of the ordination certificates began in the mid-T'ang when the imperial government needed funds to pacify the An Lu-shan 安祿山 rebellion (755-757).²⁹ The Sung government, constantly threatened by foreign invasion on its northern frontiers, likewise viewed the sale of ordination certificates as an effective means to raise money for defense expenditures and peace settlements. During the reign of Emperor Ying-tsung (r. 1063-1067), around 1067, the government began to sell ordination certificates. Once such a policy became a standard procedure, it did not disappear easily. The price of ordination certificates rose steadily between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries—from 130 strings of cash to 800 or 1200 strings of cash.³⁰ By the end of the twelfth century, the practice of buying and selling certificates seemed to have become common among people; certificates were even used as bills of exchange negotiated on the market.³¹

The prevalent sale of ordination certificates made it likely that many Buddhist devotees, both women and men, had fewer barriers to pursue the religious life if their families were amenable. Moreover, the price of ordination certificates sold privately on the market was sometimes much lower than the official rate.³² Although ordination certificates were not readily available all the time because of Sung government's occasional ban, obtaining an

28 . SHY, "Tao-shih," 1: 20b, p. 7878d.

29 . Tsukamoto, "Sō no zaiseinan to bukkyō," 559; and Chikusa, *Chūgoku bukkyū*, 19.

30 . For Sung scholars' comments on the sale and price of ordination certificates, see Li Hsin-ch'uan 李心傳 (1166-1243), *Chien-yen i-lai chao-yeh tsa-chi* 建炎以來朝野雜記 [1216], 40 ch. in 2 parts (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1937), part 1, 15.218; also Wang Yung 王楙 (fl. 1227), *Yen-i i-mou lu* 燕翼貽謀錄 [1227] (hereafter *YIIML*), 5 ch., in *Ying-yin wen-yüan-ko Ssu-k'ü ch'üan-shu* (hereafter *SKCS*) (Taiwan: Commercial Press, 1986), 5: 9b-10b, v. 407, p. 750. Also see the discussion by Takao, *Sōdai bukkyōshi*, 25-28; Tsukamoto, "Sō no zaiseinan to bukkyō," 562-68; and Chikusa, *Chūgoku bukkyū*, 27-65.

31 . Between 1161-1170, for example, more than 120,000 certificates were issued and sold; see Tsukamoto, "Sō no zaiseinan to bukkyō," 566; Ch'en, "The Sale of Monk Certificates during the Sung," 314; Takao, *Sōdai bukkyōshi*, 26; and Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society*, 62.

32 . There existed a private rate sometimes higher and sometimes lower than the official price, and the lowest price of certificates sold in the market was 30 strings of cash in 1136; see Ch'en, "The Sale of Monk Certificates during the Sung," 316-17; also Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society*, 61.

ordination certificate through purchase was still a feasible means for the aspirants.³³ One may assume that with rapid commercial expansion during the Southern Sung, more middle-class urban residents could afford the price of ordination certificates for their pious daughters who wished to join the order.

Arranging ordination for a daughter, furthermore, seemed to be a solution to the problem of dowry escalation in the Sung. According to Patricia Ebrey, the tendency to provide substantial dowries—in particular, among the elite families—during the Sung period was connected to the newly emerging scholar-officials who gained government positions by passing civil service examinations. As a result, marriage in the Sung was often viewed as an alliance between “talents” and “wealth” as well as a means to strengthen connections. That is, if the groom’s family insisted on a large dowry, they could exclude lower-class members as in-laws and could consolidate their social status especially when the bride’s father was a powerful, established official at court. On the other hand, marrying a daughter with a large dowry not only assured their daughter respected status in her new family, but also strengthened affinal relationships; such an investment was of significant worth if their son-in-law had a promising career in the government.³⁴ Under this increasing pressure of dowry escalation, therefore, families who had too many daughters might have

33 . During the reign of Emperor Hui-tsung (r. 1100-1126), from 1120 to 1125 there were no new ordination certificates issued by the government. And then during the period from 1142 to 1160, Emperor Kao-tsung (r. 1127-1162) decreed a ban on issuing the ordination certificates. In 1169, Emperor Hsiao-tsung (r. 1162-1189) also issued a ban on the sale of ordination certificates. See Tsukamoto, “Sō no zaiseinan to bukkyō,” 565-66 and 571-72; and Chikusa, *Chūgoku bukkyū*, 35-36 and 42. Once the invasion of the Chin army became emergent, however, the Sung court began to sell ordination certificates again. Also, there were still some local officials who privately sold certificates with no regard to the official bans. See Tsukamoto, “Sō no zaiseinan to bukkyō,” 566; Chikusa, *Chūgoku bukkyū*, 47; and Huang, *Sung-tai fo-chiao*, 389-94.

34 . Patricia Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 99-113; and Ebrey, “Shifts in Marriage Finance from the Sixth to the Thirteenth Centuries,” in Rubie S. Watson and Patricia B. Ebrey, eds., *Marriage and Inequality in Chinese Society* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 112-23.

considered sending some of their daughters to nunneries because it appeared cheaper to support their daughters' entry into the nuns' order than to supply them with substantial dowries.³⁵

The point made here is speculation with only Ebrey's study of dowry escalation as evidence. A similar situation, however, also existed in medieval Europe. Penelope D. Johnson, in her study of female monastics in Medieval France, mentions that "[g]iving a child to the religious life could relieve a family of some of its financial worries," and that "parents placed their little daughters in nunneries because it was cheaper to endow the girls' entry into the religious life than into the married state."³⁶ Bruce L. Venarde, in his work on the nunneries in medieval France and England, suggests that even though the old generalization that "it was cheaper to place a daughter in a religious house than to provide a dowry" is hard to prove, "it is worth considering whether the striking prevalence of members of northwestern Europe's lower aristocracy in the foundation and support of nunneries might reflect at least some measure of economic calculation concerning provision for daughters."³⁷ In the case of Sung China where the pressure for substantial dowry became increasingly heavy, one may assume that for some elite families, arranging their daughters' monastic entry was perhaps a viable option.

Nevertheless, upper-class families' endowments of their daughters' entry into the nuns' order was by no means motivated simply by financial worries. At least by the end of the Sung, the nunnery still had a positive reputation among secular elite, much more positive than in later periods. Ch'ao Pu-chih, who wrote the eulogy celebrating his niece's ordination, was not the only scholar who acknowledged the appeal of the monastic life for women. In Sung funerary biographies written by scholar-officials, we occasionally find references that the deceased had daughters who were Buddhist nuns. Hu Su 胡宿 (996-1067), in his funerary inscription for Li Ts'ung-fu 李從甫 (946-995), mentioned that two of Li's daughters were Buddhist nuns of the inner palace nunnery (*nei-ssu* 內寺) and that both were bestowed the purple robes by the emperor.³⁸ Han Ch'i 韓琦 (1008-1075), in his inscription for Sun Yu 孫佑

35 . According to Ebrey, Su Shih (1036-1101) "reportedly borrowed two hundred strings of cash to supply the dowry for a female relative." Ebrey, *Inner Quarters*, 101.

36 . Penelope D. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession: Religious Women in Medieval France* (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1991), 23-24.

37 . Bruce L. Venarde, *Women's Monasticism and Medieval Society: Nunneries in France and England, 890-1215* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 115.

38 . *Wen-kung chi* 文恭集, 36: 3b, in *SKCS*, v. 1088, p. 931.

(921-1017), said that two of Sun's four daughters had been nuns since childhood.³⁹ Liu Ch'ang 劉敞 (1019-1068), in his funerary inscription for Ms. Li, wife of Sun K'o-chien 孫克堅 (fl. mid-11th cent.), mentioned that one of her daughters was a Buddhist nun residing in the Tzu-sheng Ch'an Cloister 資聖禪院.⁴⁰ Yeh Shih 葉適 (1150-1223), in his funerary inscription for Lin Cheng-chang 林政章 (1142-1190), recorded that Lin's eldest daughter was a Buddhist nun.⁴¹ The fact that these scholar-officials did not hesitate to include pious daughters in their funerary eulogies for the deceased may indicate that during the Sung the upper class in general still viewed the monastic life as an acceptable vocation for its women to pursue.

II. Sung Segregation Policy Towards Monks and Nuns

The assumption about gender hierarchy within the monastic order is often based on the "Eight Chief Rules" (*pa ching-fa* 八敬法; Skt. *gurudharma*), the rules that required nuns to live under the authority and supervision of monks and hence placed them in a position inferior to monks.⁴² Interestingly, however, Tao-ch'eng in his *Essential Survey* makes the following remark:

尼有八敬法。去聖已遠，不復遵行。繁不錄也。
Nuns have the "Eight Chief Rules." It is now far away from [the time of] the sage (that is, the Buddha); [these "Eight Chief Rules"] are no longer observed [in the monastic order]. They are too complicated and so are not recorded here.⁴³

39 . *An-yang chi* 安陽集, 47: 14b, in *SKCS*, v. 1089, p. 515.

40 . *Kung-shih chi* 公是集, 52: 14b-15c, in *SKCS*, v. 1095, p. 871.

41 . *Shui-hsin chi* 水心集, vols. 576-77, in *Ssu-pu pei-yao* (Taiwan: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1965), v. 577, 16: 8a.

42 . Tradition has it that when the Buddha founded the monastic order for women at the request of his aunt and also stepmother Mahāprajāpatī, he laid down eight rules to enforce a strictly hierarchical relationship between monks and nuns. These eight rules can be found in a fifth-century translation text, *Ta-ai-tao pi-ch'iu-ni ching* 大愛道比丘尼經, in *T* 1478, 24.946b24-c21; for the origin of the "pa-ching-fa," see *T* 1821, 41.222c8-11 and 282a12-14; 1822, 41.643c24, 644a1-4, and 802c1-2.

43 . *SSYL*, *T* 54.262a21.

It appears that by Tao-ch'eng's time the "Eight Chief Rules" had become part of history rather than an experienced reality in monastic circles. Tao-ch'eng's remark thus calls into question the validity of the monks' domination over nuns. An examination of the nuns' order under Sung imperial rule may further illuminate why this marked decline occurred in Buddhist monks' authority over their female counterparts.

Perhaps the most important policy that the Sung imperial government adopted to regulate the relationship between monks and nuns was to separate them by prohibiting women from being ordained by monks. According to the Indian Vinaya tradition, women must be ordained in the presence of at least ten monk masters and ten nun masters—a ceremony called "dual *bhikṣuṇī* ordination." Without the participation of both monks and nuns, the ordination ceremony for women was considered incomplete. This tradition had been maintained since the fourth century when the Chinese Buddhist nuns' order was formally established with the help of Singhalese Buddhist nuns.⁴⁴ In 972, however, the first Sung emperor, T'ai-tsu (r. 960-976), issued an edict as follows:

Men and women should be physically segregated, and this is based on the *Book of Rites* (*Li-ching* 禮經). [However, the fact that] there is no separation between monks and nuns really violates the [Confucian moral] teaching and order. From now on a nun [candidate] who is qualified for ordination should only receive ordination at the ordination platform of that nunnery.

Emperor T'ai-tsu furthermore ordered Buddhist nun masters to take charge of their own ordination ceremonies and manage their nunneries without direct contact with monks.⁴⁵

Tsan-ning 贊寧 (919-1001), an early Sung monk-historian, was opposed to this new rule and urged Emperor T'ai-tsung, the successor of T'ai-tsu, to restore the old rule. He wrote:

In recent years Emperor T'ai-tsu issued an edict prohibiting nuns from being ordained by monks, and

44 . According to Tsan-ning, the nun Hui-kuo 慧果 (ca. 364-433) was the first to receive ordination from both congregations; see *SSL*, T 54.238c2. See also the biography of Hui-kuo, in *PCNC*, T 50.937b19-c7. For discussion of the "dual *bhikṣuṇī* ordination," see Tsai, "The Chinese Buddhist Monastic Order for Women," 6-8. The "dual *bhikṣuṇī* ordination" ceremony is still observed in the Taiwanese nuns' community.

45 . *SHY*, "Tao-shih," 2: 1a-b, pp. 7889a-b.

since then nuns have received ordination from only one congregation. As a result, the matter of ordination becomes imperfect. Now our emperor [that is, T'ai-tsung] is intelligent and determined, and so those who want to protect the Dharma should request him to return to the old practice so as to avoid the extinction of the Dharma in a very short period.⁴⁶

Despite the opposition from Tsan-ning, however, the separation of the nuns' order from the monks' was incorporated into Sung legal codes like *Classified Laws [Compiled] in the Ch'ing-yüan Era* [1195-1200] (*Ch'ing-yüan t'iao-fa shih-lei* 慶元條法事類): "All the Buddhist nuns are ordained in nunneries and monks are not allowed to intervene."⁴⁷

In addition, the writings by the Buddhist monk Chih-p'an 志磐 (1220-1275) and the Confucian scholar Wang Yung 王楙 (fl. 1227) give us an interesting contrast in terms of Sung men's views of this regulation. Chih-p'an writes:

The court policy only wants to separate monks from nuns, but it fails to understand that women who wish to become nuns must follow monk masters [to receive ordination]. There is no rule in the Vinaya [allowing nuns] to establish [ordination] platforms and ordain [disciples] by themselves. This [order that permits women to be ordained by nuns] is only a temporary remedy and should not be taken as [part of] the Dharma. [That is why] in these days this rule is no longer observed [in monasteries].⁴⁸

Wang Yung, on the other hand, comments:

In recent years monks openly invite new nuns to receive ordination in their ordination platforms. If the woman refuses to come, she will be accused of violating the [Buddha's] teaching. Some nuns also do not know that the [imperial] law has already forbidden monks [from

46 . *SSL*, T 54.238c5-8.

47 . *CYTFSL*, 50.475.

48 . Chih-p'an, *Fo-tsu t'ung-chi* 佛祖統紀 [1269] (hereafter *FTTC*) 43, in T 2035, 49.396b4-9.

having any contact with them] and believe that it is right [to be ordained by monks]. Government officials should set forth the rule to effectively enforce such a ban.⁴⁹

Both of them were clearly aware of the existence of the segregation law imposed on Buddhist clergy, and both also mentioned its loose practice in their time. While Chih-p'an, like Tsan-ning of the early Northern Sung, expressed his concern that this ruling issued by the state seriously violated the Buddhist Vinaya tradition, Wang Yung criticized male clergy for luring women to receive ordination in the monks' monasteries and urged the government to strictly enforce the rule.

Still, in spite of the loose practice of this segregation law in later Sung times, were there any women who went to nun masters for ordination with no regard to the traditional Vinaya rule? According to the local gazetteers compiled in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, at least two of the nunneries had their own ordination platforms; one was established in the Ta-ch'ing Nunnery 大慶尼寺 of K'uai-chi, Chekiang, and the other in the Ching-hsing Nunnery 景星尼院 in Tsai-ch'eng 在城, Fukien.⁵⁰ Although these cases are too few to be more than persuasive, it is not too far-fetched to see them as evidence that toward the end of the thirteenth century some nuns would still observe this segregation order issued by the first Sung emperor and ordained their female disciples without monks' participation.

Given the fact that Sung government had never formally abolished this law (as indicated in the words of Chih-p'an and Wang Yung), we may say that throughout the Sung period a woman was allowed, and actually required, to receive ordination from nun masters in nunneries. The law also prescribed that nuns should not have any contact with monks. Such a separation between monks and nuns, as decreed by the Sung imperial court, surely had a positive impact on Buddhist nuns' monastic autonomy. Segregation of the sexes not only allowed women to

49. *YIIML*, 3: 14a-b, *SKCS*, v. 407, p. 729.

50. Shih Su 施宿 (1150?-1213), *Chia-t'ai K'uai-chi chih* 嘉泰會稽志 [1201] (hereafter *KCC*), 8: 37b, in *SKCS*, v. 486, p. 164; and Liang K'o-chia 梁克家 (1128-1187), *Ch'un-hsi San-shan chih* 淳熙三山志 [1182] (hereafter *SSC*), 42 ch., 33: 8a, in *SKCS*, v. 484, p. 484. Also see the discussion by Hsieh, in "Images of Women in Ch'an Buddhist Literature of the Sung Period," 160. Huang Min-chih has mentioned the existence of the ordination platforms in the nunneries. However, she also points out that ordination platforms for nuns were very few, and so if in places where there were no nuns' ordination platforms, nuns were still ordained by monks in the monasteries; see Huang, *Sung-tai fo-chiao*, 382.

gain some control and influence over their own religious lives but also enabled them to establish their leadership in the Buddhist community.

III. *Lives and Activities of Buddhist Nuns in Sung China*

The Prominence of Nuns in the Early Sung

During the first one hundred years of the Sung dynasty, information concerning the numbers of Buddhist nuns was well documented by the imperial court. In 1019, the officially registered numbers of Buddhist monks and nuns were 230,127 and 15,643 respectively (ratio 14.7:1).⁵¹ In 1021, the number of Buddhist monks rose to 397,615 and the number of nuns to 61,239 (6.5:1). Then in 1034, the number of the monks fell to 385,520, while the number of the nuns shrank to 48,740 (7.9:1). In 1068, the number of Buddhist monks furthermore dropped to 220,761 and the number of nuns to 34,037 (6.5:1). Finally, in 1077 the number of monks was 202,872 and the number of nuns 29,692 (6.8:1).⁵² Note, however, that the numbers here, as Huang Min-chih has pointed out, did not include those of postulants, novices, and *śikṣamānās*, but referred only to fully ordained monks and nuns. Neither did these numbers include the ones who were privately ordained or who bought "blank ordination certificates" (*k'ung-ming tu-tieh* 空名度牒). In other words, it is reasonable to assume that the real population of Buddhist aspirants was much larger than these officially registered numbers.⁵³

Standard historical sources have preserved a few instances of early Sung imperial women's entry into the nuns' order.⁵⁴ In 982,

51 . SHY, "Tao-shih," 1: 23a, p. 7880a.

52 . SHY, "Tao-shih," 1: 13a-14a, pp. 7875a-c. The ratios are drawn from Huang, *Sung-tai fo-chiao*, 355.

53 . Huang, *Sung-tai fo-chiao*, 349.

54 . Of the eighty-four imperial princesses included in the *Sung-shih* (hereafter *SS*) biographical section, three had master titles. In addition to the Pin-kuo and Wu-kuo princesses, the Sheng-kuo Great Senior Princess 昇國大長公主 was bestowed the title "Great Master Ch'ing-hsü Ling-chao" ("Ch'ing-hsü Ling-chao ta-shih" 清虛靈照大師) in 1033, but there is no specific mention that she joined the Buddhist monastic order to become a nun; see T'o-t'o (1313-1355) et al., eds., *SS*, (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1977), 248.6156.

the Pin-kuo Great Senior Princess 邠國大長公主 (d. 983) became a Buddhist nun under the name "Great Master Yüan-ming" 員明大師.⁵⁵ In 1009, the Wu-kuo Great Senior Princess 吳國大長公主 (d. 1024), the seventh daughter of Emperor T'ai-tsung, decided to join the monastic order, and her request was granted by Emperor Chen-tsung. More than thirty palace women followed her to become nuns, and the emperor also issued an edict allowing certain numbers of postulants in the nation to be ordained. The princess became a nun in the Tzu-sheng Cloister 資聖院 under the Buddhist name "Great Master Pao-tz'u Cheng-chüeh" 報慈正覺大師. She was honored with an imperially bestowed purple robe and the master title "Ch'ing-yü" 清裕. The princess had been a nun for sixteen years and died at the age of thirty; her posthumous title was "Tz'u-ming" 慈明.⁵⁶ Recorded in the official history, the Wu-kuo Great Senior Princess's monastic entry was apparently considered a blissful event for the imperial family to celebrate.

In addition, two pieces of funerary inscriptions for nuns carved onto stone are found in the collection of dynastic epigraphic records. One piece was written in 1007 to commemorate a nun named Shen-ting 審定 (933-1004). Shen-ting, surnamed Li 李, left home for the Ch'ung-hsia Nunnery 崇夏(尼)寺, where she received ordination in 951. In 968, she decided to travel around the nation to study Buddhist teachings. Finally, she arrived at Lo-yang (Honan) and resided in the Ta-pei Cloister 大悲院 until her death in 1004. The inscription also mentions that Shen-ting had a younger Dharma sister named Shen-chen 審貞, who was granted a purple robe by the emperor and who often lectured on the Vinaya texts to the general public.⁵⁷ The other inscription dated in 1091 was written to commemorate the pious devotion of a nun named I-ming 義明. At the age of twelve, she decided to leave the secular world to become a nun. She was ordained in the Ching-pao Ch'an Cloister 淨寶禪院 at Lo-yan, and since then she lived a rigorous life devoted to religious pursuit. She died at the age of fifty-two and was buried in Lung-men 龍門, Honan.⁵⁸

55 . SS, 248.8773.

56 . The Wu-kuo princess was sometimes recorded as the princess of Ch'en-kuo 陳國 or Shen-kuo 申國. See note 28; also SS, 248.8774; SHY, "Tao-shih," 2: 14a, p. 7895c; also Wen-ying 文瑩 (fl. 11th c.), *Hsiang-shan yeh-lu* 湘山野錄, in SKCS, v. 1037, p. 239; and FTTC 44, T 49.404a7-10.

57 . Lu Tseng-hsiang 陸增祥 (1816-1882), *Pa-ch'ung-shih chin-shih pu-cheng* 八瓊室金石補正 [1865] (Peking: Wen-wu ch'u-pan-she, 1985), 87.616. Because it is a stone rubbing, most of the characters, including the name of the person who wrote it, are unclear.

58 . See Mao Han-kuang 毛漢光, ed., *Chung-yang yen-chiu-yuan li-shih yü-yen yen-*

These two epigraphs give us a glimpse into local people's acknowledgment to respected women monastics during the early Sung period. Both Shen-ting and I-ming were admired for their tenacity in Buddhist practice and their dedications to monastic life. In the case of the nun Shen-ting, moreover, she was seemingly not a native of Lo-yang, and yet she was able to win local people's support and respect. The fact that people spent money and time to erect stone-carved inscriptions to memorialize them is a clear indication of these two nuns' success in gaining public recognition.

Perhaps the most significant evidence for the prominence of Buddhist nuns in the early Sung period is a lengthy epigraphic inscription written in 1039 by Hsia Sung 夏竦 (984-1050), a court historian.⁵⁹ Hsia, under the order of Emperor Jen-tsung, wrote an inscription to record the construction of the Great Peace Stūpa (Ta-an t'a 大安塔), which was located beside the Hu-kuo Ch'an Nunnery 護國禪院 in the capital K'ai-feng. Hsia mentions two abbesses of the Hu-kuo Ch'an Nunnery, the nun Miao-shan 妙善 and her disciple Tao-chien 道堅, because these two nuns' efforts allowed the construction of this magnificent stūpa to be completed.

According to Hsia, Miao-shan was a native of Ch'ang-sha (Hunan) and her secular name was Hu Hsi-sheng 胡希聖. When still young, she devoted herself to Buddhism. However, during the turmoil of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms (907-960) when Ma Yin 馬殷 (d. 931) had made himself a king and founded the Ch'u kingdom in Hunan, Miao-shan was abducted and became a concubine of the Ma family. Whenever she suffered Ma's abuse, she chanted the chapter of "Universal Gate" (P'u-men 普門) in the *Lotus Sūtra* to gain peace of mind. As a result of this practice, a relic of the Buddha became visible on her forehead. From then on, Ma treated her with respect. After the founding of the Sung regime, a military officer named Li Ch'u-yün 李處耘 (914-960) pacified the rebellion in Hunan and took her with him. Miao-shan's decision to join the nuns' order eventually moved Li; a year later, Li donated a house and helped her to receive tonsure and ordination in the T'ien-nü Nunnery 天女(尼)寺 at Lo-yang.

(..continued)

chiu-so so-ts'ang li-tai pei-chih-ming, ta-chih-ming, tsa-chih-ming t'o-p'ien 中央研究院歷史語言研究所藏歷代碑志銘塔志銘雜誌拓片 (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1987), no. 02138. It is not clear who wrote this inscription.

59. Hsia Sung, "Ta-an-t'a pei-ming" 大安塔碑銘, in *Wen-chuang chi* 文莊集, 27.1a-11a, in *SKCS*, v. 1087, pp. 268-73.

Miao-shan was active and influential in the capital area. Her lofty conduct and profound understanding of the Dharma received high esteem from Emperor T'ai-tsung and his palace women. Yüan P'u 袁溥 (dates uncertain), a wealthy patron in K'ai-feng, donated his house to build her a nunnery, which was named "Miao-chüeh Ch'an Nunnery" 妙覺禪院. Miao-shan, who was the abbess of the nunnery, "observed the Ch'an rituals, practiced the Vinaya, taught yoga, and preached the Hua-yen Buddhist teachings." Later, the nunnery was further granted with the imperially bestowed name plaque "Hu-kuo Ch'an-yüan" 護國禪院. Miao-shan had been a Buddhist nun for fifty-five years when she died at the age of seventy-six.⁶⁰ Her greatest achievement lay in her efforts to build a stūpa for worshipping the Buddha's relic with the permission from Emperor Chen-tsong. Miao-shan died before the completion of the stūpa, and her disciple Tao-chien continued supervising this giant construction project.

Tao-chien was the daughter of a secretarial receptionist (T'ung-shih she-jen 通事舍人) named Tu Chih-ju 杜志儒 (dates uncertain). After her father's death, her mother remarried Yang Hsin 楊信 (dates uncertain), a palace military commander and the commissioner in charge of the armies of the capital (Tien-ch'ien chih-hui-shih wu-ch'eng-chün chieh-tu 殿前指揮史武成軍節度). Beginning at the age of nine, Tao-chien undertook a vegetarian diet, and at eleven she decided to become a nun. In 983, she received ordination and tonsure, and in 984 she was bestowed a purple robe by Emperor T'ai-tsung. Her mother also followed her to become a nun, but died several months later. At the age of sixteen, Tao-chien was given the master title "Tz'u-i" 慈懿 and was appointed by imperial decree to manage the monthly salary and supplies of the Miao-chüeh Ch'an Nunnery. Each year she ordained two persons and recommended two names to the court to receive purple robes. Hsia praised Tao-chien for "having the manner of a great hero" (*ta-chang-fu feng-kai* 大丈夫風概). Moreover, she was well versed in many Buddhist scriptures, like the *Lotus Sūtra*, the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra*, and the *Sūtra of Perfection of Enlightenment*. During the Ming-tao period (1032-1034), Emperor Jen-tsong bestowed on her the name "Fu-hui" 福慧 and constantly invited her to lecture on the Buddhist scriptures in the Kuan-wen Hall 觀文殿 of the imperial court. Tao-chien was still alive when Hsia wrote this inscription to celebrate the completion of the Great Peace Stūpa.⁶¹

Hsia Sung's inscription provides valuable information regarding

60. "Ta-an-t'a pei-ming," 27: 1a-2b.

61. "Ta-an-t'a pei-ming," 27: 5a-b.

these two eminent nuns' family backgrounds, monastic experiences, and religious achievements. As imperially appointed abbesses, not only did Miao-shan and Tao-chien receive purple robes and honorary master titles from emperors, but they were also granted with certain privileges to exert their influence. They assumed full authority over the management of their nunnery, ordained female disciples, conducted monastic rituals, and gave public sermons. Most importantly, the inscription shows how both nuns used their fame and influence to raise funds for maintaining Buddhist activities. The completion of the Great Peace Stūpa itself was a testament of these two nuns' success in drawing support and patronage from the imperial family members and court officials at the capital area. The construction began in 1017 and ended around 1037. The stūpa was 260 feet high (高二引有六丈) and occupied 300 square feet (規平三百尺), and the total amount of expense was more than one hundred million strings of cash (經用一億). Members of the imperial family and high-ranking officials all wholeheartedly supported this huge project, and the empresses and imperial concubines offered a large sum of precious jewels and treasures to decorate it.⁶²

These accounts of Buddhist nuns, though very few, provide evidence for the prominence of Buddhist nuns during the early Sung period. Nuns were depicted either as dedicated practitioners or as influential teachers. Renowned masters like Miao-shan and Tao-chien enjoyed eminence not only within clerical circles but also among secular elite members. The positive image of these nuns would undoubtedly facilitate the spread of Buddhist teachings and brought new aspirants to the Buddhist path to liberation.

The Continuing Growth of Buddhist Nunneries in the Southern Sung

From the latter half of the Northern Sung period onward, however, there is hardly any reference to Buddhist nuns' population and activities in Sung government documents. As far as the number of clerical members is concerned, what we usually find is the collective population of the Buddhist clergy (*seng*) or, most commonly, the Buddhist and Taoist clergy (*seng-tao*) combined. Moreover, the numbers were subject to dramatic fluctuation. In

62 . "Ta-an-t'a pei-ming," 27: 6a-b.

1082, the total number of Buddhist and Taoist clergy was 240,000, but in 1125 the total number of Buddhist and Taoist clergy was more than one million. And in 1143 and 1157 the numbers of the religious clergy again dropped to 200,000.⁶³ These statistics were far from precise, probably in large part because during the transitional period from the Northern Sung to the Southern Sung, many people died in war and many northerners moved south to escape foreign invasion. Toward the end of the Southern Sung, the rampant sale of ordination certificates probably further added to the difficulty of keeping precise records of the clerical population.

Although information of Buddhist nuns virtually disappeared from Sung official documents, gazetteers compiled by individual local literati of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are a rich source for monastic women's lives and activities. These local gazetteers usually devoted one section to "nunneries" (*ni-ssu*) in the chapter of "Buddhist and Taoist monasteries" (*ssu-kuan* 寺觀). The section on "Buddhist nunneries" contains detailed records concerning the founders or sponsors of nunneries or the dates of nunnery construction, renovation, and/or destruction. Some of the gazetteers furthermore give information about the nuns' population or list the nunneries' assets, such as the acres of fields and land owned by the nunnery.⁶⁴ The fact that the compilers of these local gazetteers made efforts to collect distinguished nuns' records and include detailed data of local nunneries' construction and restoration indicates that not only did Buddhist nunneries continue to prosper in the Southern Sung, but they also constituted a significant part of local society.

Buddhist monasteries of the Sung in general were of two classes: public and private. As T. Griffith Foulk has pointed out, the public monasteries, also known as "monasteries of ten directions" (*shih-fang ch'a* 十方刹), were public because "they were supposed to be open to all officially ordained Buddhist clergy and were sanctioned and sometimes supported by the state." They were granted official monastery name plaques (*o* 額) and were often used for various religious rituals of the imperial house or the state. Monasteries of this class also enjoyed the privileges of

63 . Cited from Huang, *Sung-tai fo-chiao*, 352.

64 . For the population of Buddhist clergy, see Hsu Shuo 徐碩 (dates uncertain), *Chih-yuan Chia-ho chih* 至元嘉禾志 [1288] (hereafter *CHC*), 6: 1a-3b, in *SKCS*, v. 491, pp. 47-8; also Ch'en Ch'i-ch'ing 陳善卿 (*chin-shih* 1214), *Ch'ih-ch'eng chih* 赤城志 [1223] (hereafter *CCC*), 15: 6a-7b, in *SKCS*, v. 486, pp. 724-725. For the fields, land, and mountains owned by nunneries, see *CCC* 14: 1a-37b, in *SKCS*, v. 486, pp. 702-20.

ordaining a certain number of postulants annually and received the imperial bestowal of purple robes and master titles on their monastic residents. Private monasteries, on the other hand, “were known as ‘disciple-lineage cloisters’ (*chia-i t’u-ti yüan* 甲乙徒弟院) and were distinguished by the fact that the abbacy was passed down directly from master to disciple within a single teaching line.” During the Sung, many of the privately maintained monasteries or cloisters were likewise granted with the imperial name plaques as a sign of official recognition and protection. Since the practice of bestowing official name plaques became prevalent, the possession of a name plaque no longer entailed much special treatment for a monastery. As a result, perhaps for the sake of a further differentiation, “the prestige, privileges, and duties that formerly had been the lot of the monasteries with imperial plaques shifted about this time to the newly formalized class of public monasteries.”⁶⁵

While studies of Sung dynasty monasticism are many, little has been mentioned about Buddhist nunneries, which likewise had two classes—public and private. The Hu-kuo Ch’an Nunnery, of which the nuns Miao-shan and Tao-chien were abbesses, possibly belonged to the class of public monasteries. Although it is unclear whether its abbacy was confined only to a single master-disciple lineage, we do know that it was given special privilege by the court to ordain two nuns annually as well as to recommend two nuns for imperial bestowal of purple robes and master titles. Moreover, it was granted with an imperially bestowed name plaque 護國禪院, indicating explicitly that there was a close link between this nunnery and the prosperity of the state. The Northern Kuang-fu Nunnery 北廣福尼寺 in Ch’ung-te district 崇德縣 (Chekiang) is explicitly listed as a public nunnery under imperial patronage. It was originally the site of an age-old nunnery and its

65 . T. Griffith Foulk, “Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice in Sung Ch’an Buddhism,” in Patricia B. Ebrey and Peter N. Gregory, eds., *Religion and Society in Tang and Sung China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), 163-64. For more discussion on the granting of name plaques in the Sung, see Takao, *Sōdai bukkyōshi*, 57-74; Chikusa, *Chūgoku bukkyō*, 83-110; and Huang, *Sung-tai fo-chiao*, 301-48. As Chikusa has pointed out, it was particularly during the reigns of Emperor Chen-tsung and Ying-tsung that large numbers of plaques were granted and that the granting of imperial plaques were not limited to large monasteries but extended to smaller local monasteries with a total of thirty bays or more; see Chikusa, *Chūgoku bukkyō*, 87-92 and 109.

history can be traced back to the early sixth century. In 943, it was rebuilt and gained the name "Miao-shan" 妙善 and, in 1067, Emperor Ying-tsung bestowed it with the name plaque "Shou-sheng" 壽聖. After the Shao-hsing period (1131-1163), it was renovated and expanded, and finally in 1177, was officially designated as a "monastery of the ten directions."⁶⁶

As to the privately founded nunneries, like those private monasteries for monks, they were often used by wealthy families or members of the imperial family and clan as "merit cloisters" (*kung-te an/yüan* 功德庵/院) or "incense-burning cloisters" (*hsiang-huo yüan* 香火院). That is, a rich family built a monastic house on its own land, and then used it as a site for ancestor commemoration and worship.⁶⁷ Such a practice was already followed in the T'ang and flourished even more during the Sung. One of the practical concerns behind such an establishment was the claim of the tax-free privilege for the land given to the cloister.⁶⁸ However, religious motives should also be included here; people in traditional China believed that the establishment of such merit cloisters was not only a filial act to commemorate their ancestors but also could bring peace and blessings upon all family members, both living and the dead.

Many of the private nunneries apparently served such a function. Especially in the disaster of 1126 when the Jurchen captured the Northern Sung capital K'ai-feng and forced the court to move its capital to Lin-an, many elite families migrated south and settled there. As a result, a great number of nunneries located in south China (such as Kiangsu, Chekiang, and Fukien provinces) were affiliated with, or sponsored by, these wealthy and powerful families. The Ning-kuo Nunnery 寧國尼院 in Wu-hsing (Chekiang) was a "merit cloister" built in 1168 by Cheng Tsao 鄭藻.⁶⁹ The Kuang-en Cloister 廣恩院 in Lin-an, built during the Ch'un-hsi period (1174-1190), was an "incense-burning cloister" of a certain

66 . *GHC*, 11: 14b, in *SKCS*, v. 491, p. 90. In 1067 when Emperor Ying-tsung was seriously ill, the court ordered all the monasteries/nunneries with thirty bays or more and with the statues of Buddhas to be granted with the name plaque "Shou-sheng," in the hope that the emperor could recover from illness; see Chikusa, *Chūgoku bukkyō*, 92-93; also Huang, *Sung-tai fo-chiao*, 304 and n. 15, 336.

67 . See the discussion by Chikusa, *Chūgoku bukkyō*, 111-19; and Takao, *Sōdai bukkyōshi*, 69-73.

68 . Ch'en, *Buddhism in China*, 272; and Foulk, "Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice," 164.

69 . T'an Yao 談倫 (ca. 1150-1220), *Chia-t'ai Wu-hsing chih* 嘉泰吳興志 [1201] (hereafter *WHC*), 20 ch., in *Wu-hsing ts'ung-shu* 吳興叢書, 238 vols. in 39 cases (Nan-lin Liu-shih Chia-yeh-t'ang Press, 1914-1927); see case 14, v. 64, 13: 45b.

member of the imperial clan.⁷⁰ The Tz'u-kuang Nunnery 慈光(尼)寺, also located in Lin-an, was built in 1226 as a "merit cloister" of the Chang 張 family.⁷¹ Some of the nunneries in Lin-an were used as temporary sites to dispose of the imperial family members' corpses. In 1268, for example, Emperor Tu-tsung (r. 1264-1274) ordered that the body of his daughter, the Jun-kuo princess 潤國公主, be placed temporarily in the K'ai-hua Nunnery 開化(尼)寺.⁷²

In addition to the above functions, some private nunneries were endowed by upper-class families as houses for settling their pious daughters or childless widowed relatives who wished to pursue a religious life. The Fa-yün Cloister 法雲庵 in Sung-chiang prefecture 松江府 (the present Shanghai), for example, was built in the Ch'un-hsi period by the son of Kuo San-i 郭三益 (metropolitan graduate of 1088) for his older sister, Mrs. Yeh 葉, who was well known for her poetic talent. Yeh, widowed early, vowed to become a Buddhist nun and her religious name was Cheng-chüeh 正覺.⁷³ The Pao-t'ien Nunnery 報天尼寺 in Chia-hsing 嘉興 (Chekiang) was built by Liu Han-chieh 劉漢傑 (dates uncertain) for his pious daughter. Liu, a county governor (Chün-shou 郡守), dreamed of the Bodhisattva Kuan-yin, and soon after his dream, his wife gave birth to a daughter. From childhood, the girl did not eat meat and wanted to be a Buddhist nun. Moved by her sincerity, Liu donated his house as a nunnery for her.⁷⁴ Finally, the Hui-kuang Cloister 慧光院 in Lin-an was built during the Ch'ien-tao period (1165-1174) by an imperial relative surnamed Chang 張 for his granddaughter, Chen-chi 真寂, who also was known as "Great Master Miao-ming hui-i" 妙明惠懿大師. Chen-chi was a nun since childhood and was ordered by the emperor to supervise the ritual services of "incense-burning" (*hsiang-huo*) in the Tz'u-fu Palace 慈福宮. Therefore, a cloister was built for her. Later, because the statue of the Buddha in the cloister emitted light from its fingers, Emperor Hsiao-tsung (r. 1162-1189) bestowed the name plaque "Hui-kuang" 慧光 (Light of Wisdom) upon it. As a tradition, the

70 . Ch'ien Shuo-yu 潛說友 (13th cent.), *Hsien-ch'un Lin-an chih* 咸淳臨安志 [1268] (hereafter *LAC*), 82: 1a, in *SKCS*, v. 490, p. 866.

71 . *Hsien-ch'un Lin-an chih*, 82: 2b, p. 866.

72 . *Hsien-ch'un Lin-an chih*, 82: 6b, p. 868.

73 . *Sung-hsiang fu-chih* 松江府志 [1630] (hereafter *SCFC*), 58 ch., 2 vols. (rpt., Peking: Shu-mu wen-hsien ch'u-pan-she, 1990), 52: 43a-b, v. 2, p. 1377.

74 . *CHC*, 10: 5b-6a; in *SKCS*, v. 491, p. 77.

abbacy of the Hui-kuang Cloister was passed down among the daughters of the Chang family.⁷⁵

The Southern Sung period thus witnessed a thriving growth of Buddhist nunneries.⁷⁶ Indicated in these local sources, many of the nunneries were founded and endowed by the wealthy and prestigious families on their own estates. The public nunneries, though their number incomparable to the number of monks' monasteries, also prospered under the patronage and protection of the imperial court. Aside from responding to the religious needs of this period, these nunneries, public and private, provided ritual functions and funerary services for local people. In a way, they also reduced some of the worries or concerns for the upper-class families by serving as secure havens for widows without children or daughters who did not wish to marry.

From these local gazetteers, we also find that there were cases where a nunnery was converted into a monastery, and vice versa. Most of these changes are simply recorded without further explanations. The Shen-ching 神景(尼)寺 and Lung-yen Nunneries 龍嚴(尼)寺 in Yen-chou (Chekiang) were originally inhabited by nuns, but became monasteries in the Southern Sung.⁷⁷ The Ching-lin Cloister 淨林院 in Fukien originally was founded by a nun named Fa-cheng 法政 in 912, but was changed to a monastery in 1033.⁷⁸ Occasionally, however, the gazetteers tell us why such a change occurred. The Jui-hsiang Cloister 瑞相院 in Chin-ling (present Nanking, Kiangsu) was originally a nunnery built in the Eastern Chin period (317-420). In 975, however, it was destroyed by fire and in 977, a monk requested to use the land to build a monastery.⁷⁹ The Shan-fa Nunnery 善法尼院 of K'uai-chi was built during the Wu-yüeh period (908-978). However, in 1075 the administrator of prefecture Chao Ch'ing-hsien 趙清獻 removed all its nuns to the Ta-ch'ing Nunnery 大慶尼寺 and changed this place to a residence for monks (*seng-fang* 僧坊), because this location

75 . LAC, 82: 2a-b, in SKCS, v. 490, p. 866.

76 . According to the *Gazetteer of Lin-an*, for example, two nunneries were built in Northern Sung, and eighteen nunneries were founded in the Southern Sung; see LAC, 82: 1a-9a, in SKCS, v. 490, pp. 866-870.

77 . Cheng Yao 鄭瑤 (*chin-shih* 1256) and Fang Jen-jung 方仁榮 (13th cent.), *Ching-ting Yen-chou hsü-chih* 景定嚴州續志 [1262], 6: 6b-c, in SKCS, v. 487, p. 570.

78 . SSC, 35: 22a, in SKCS, v. 484, p. 528.

79 . Chang Hsüan 張鉉 (dates uncertain), *Chih-ta Chin-ling hsün-chih* 至大金陵新志 [1344], 11B: 27a, in SKCS, v. 492, p. 435. In addition to this Yuan edition gazetteer, Chou Ying-ho 周應合 (fl. 1213-1280) wrote *Ching-ting Chien-k'ang chih* 景定建康志 [1261], 50 ch., in SKCS, v. 488, but he did not include any nunneries.

was too secluded to be inhabited by nuns.⁸⁰

The Shou-ch'ang Cloister 壽昌院 of T'ai-chou 臺州 (Chekiang), on the other hand, was a ruined monastery and was later converted into a nunnery in 1222 at the request of a person named Ch'i Shou-shuo 齊守碩.⁸¹ The Yung-shou Nunnery at the Upper Shih-lung Mountain 上石龍永壽(尼)寺 in Lin-an was originally inhabited by monks, but in 1265 was converted to a nunnery.⁸² In addition, both the Chün-an 郡安院 and P'u-ning Cloisters 普寧院 of Wu-hsing were monasteries built by a local official named Li Shih-yüeh 李師悅 during the Kuang-ch'i period (885-887) of the T'ang, but were later converted to nunneries in the Southern Sung.⁸³ Sometimes, the change from nunnery to monastery shifted back and forth, such as in the case of the Ts'ui-feng Monastery 翠峰寺 at Wu-hsing. This monastery was built in 424 and its abbot was a monk named Fa-yao 法瑤. It was converted into a nunnery in 485, and then in 1008, it was restored as a monastery for monks.⁸⁴

Whether the new establishment was a Buddhist monastery or nunnery, it seems clear that local people were willing to preserve the land for monastic establishment rather than for any other usage. District officials such as Chao Ch'ing-hsien showed concern for the security of the nunnery and took efforts to protect nuns from danger and disturbance outside. The new monastic foundations for women in local areas also indicate that nunneries provided services to meet the religious and social needs of the surrounding community and hence continued to be seen as places worthy of endowment through the end of the thirteenth century.

Indeed, there were many newly founded or renovated nunneries during the Sung, and a few of them were built or rebuilt under nuns' own names. The Ching-hsing Nunnery built in 570 in Fukien province, for example, was rebuilt by a nun named Tsai-ch'un 在淳 in 1079. As mentioned earlier, it had its own ordination platform for ordaining women disciples. Further testimony to the prosperity of the Ching-hsing Nunnery is the fact that in 1130, 398 women were ordained as novice nuns.⁸⁵ The Miao-hsiang Cloister 妙相院 in Chekiang, built during the Hsüan-ho period (1119-

80 . KCC, 7: 44a, in SKCS, V. 486, p. 145.

81 . CCC, 27: 30a, in SKCS, v. 486, p. 822.

82 . KCC, 7: 44a, in SKCS, v. 486, p. 145.

83 . WHC, 13: 24b-25a.

84 . WHC, 13: 39a.

85 . SSC, 33: 8a; also see n. 50.

1126), was a result of the nun Te-ch'i's 德基 renovation of her own house.⁸⁶ On occasion, nuns who founded nunneries are given detailed biographical accounts. Such was the case of Ju-chan 如湛 (fl. 1195-1200), who was the main contributor to the construction of the P'u-ning Nunnery 普寧(尼)寺 in Sung-chiang prefecture around 1199.⁸⁷

Part of the reason why many Buddhist nunneries in Sung China had strong financial support may be attributed to Sung women's property rights. The issue of Sung women's property rights (share of family property and ownership of dowry) is a complex one by taking various groups' interests into account. Still, on the whole, Sung women seemed to have enjoyed stronger claims to family property than in later imperial periods. As scholars have pointed out, the Sung was a period when women from elite families were often property holders and had considerable control over their own wealth before and after they married. Sung law made clear that unmarried daughters were entitled to shares in the family property as their dowries; in particular, orphaned daughters had legal claims for their dowries in the division of family property, and daughters without any male heirs enjoyed a greater claim to property. Married women could maintain separate ownership of their personal assets, including their dowries and other land or goods purchased after the marriage. Moreover, divorced or widowed women were allowed to retain their dowries if they returned home or remarried.⁸⁸

Because women among the upper class were usually allowed to dispose of their personal property, we may assume that some of them may have used their own dowries to build or renovate a nunnery if they chose to enter the monastic life. Similarly, the nuns' financial resources may also have come from the donations—land, money, and daily supplies—of wealthy female patrons. During the Sung, laywomen commonly endowed the construction or renovation of Buddhist monasteries, donated alms

86 . CCC, 24: 30a, in SKCS, v. 486, p. 822.

87 . SCFC, 52: 41a-43a, p. 1376.

88 . Kathryn Bernhardt has shown that the Sung state itself had a great interest in confiscating the property of "extinct households," that is, the household without male heirs. For discussion of Sung women's property rights, see Bernhardt, "The Inheritance Rights of Daughters," in *Modern China* (July 1995): 269-309; Bernhardt, *Women and Property in China, 960-1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Ebrey, *Inner Quarters*, 103-109; Ebrey, "Shifts in Marriage Finance from the Sixth to the Thirteenth Centuries," 97-132; and Bettine Birge, "Women and Property in Sung Dynasty China (960-1279): Neo-Confucianism and Social Change in Chien-chou, Fukien" (Ph. D. diss., Columbia University, 1992).

to the clergy, and patronized Buddhist activities.⁸⁹ Although almost all the extant sources of laywomen's patronage record their involvement in the construction of monks' monasteries, several sources indicate that women in the Sung were engaged in nunnery endowment and construction as well.

Most female patrons recorded in gazetteers were members of the imperial family. In the Southern Sung capital, Lin-an, several nunneries were founded or renovated under the patronage of imperial women. The Ch'ing-hsiu Nunnery 清修(尼)寺 was built during the Shao-hsing period by the nun Shan-pien 善辨 under the patronage of Empress Hsien-su 顯肅皇后 (dates uncertain).⁹⁰ The Miao-ching Nunnery 妙淨(尼)寺 was rebuilt by Empress Kung-shu 恭淑皇后 (d. 1200), wife of Emperor Ning-tsung (r. 1194-1224). According to the record, it was founded by a nun named Tsung-p'u 宗普 at the beginning of the Ch'ien-iao period. Later, her disciple Miao-ch'in 妙懃 requested a name plaque to be bestowed and hence the name "Miao-ching." In 1220, however, it was destroyed by fire, and so Empress Kung-shu sponsored a rebuilding. After the Pao-yu period (1253-1259), mainly owing to the nun Chih-hsin's 智信 management, it grew into a very large nunnery.⁹¹

Nunneries located in the capital city Lin-an thus often had close connections with women of the inner court, who were eagerly involved in the construction and renovation of nunneries. Cultivating good relationships with wealthy, prestigious women appeared to be a good strategy to safeguard the nunnery's monastic status and gain extra protection and privilege from the court. Not only would these women's generous donations help sustain nuns' religious activities, but their devout support might also have exerted a positive impact on the general public's attitude toward Buddhist nunneries.

Occasionally, laymen also made donations of houses or land to support the construction of nunneries, as in the cases of the Ch'i-

89 . Local epigraphic records contain considerable information about laywomen's financial support for the Buddhist activities. For a list of laywomen and the amount of their donations of land or money, see, for example, Juan Yuan 阮元 (1764-1849), *Liang-che chin-shih chih* 兩浙金石志, 18 ch. (rpt., Chekiang shu-chü, 1890), ch. 5-13 for Sung. Huang Min-chih has mentioned lay people's donations of land in her discussion of the monastic economy of the Sung; *Sung-tai fo-chiao*, 27-35.

90 . LAC, 82: 5a, in SKCS, v. 490, p. 868.

91 . LAC, 82: 4b-83: 5a, p. 867.

lin Nunnery 棲林尼院 and the Yung-shou Nunnery 永壽尼院 in Fukien province. The Ch'i-lin Nunnery was founded by the nun Shan-yüan 善緣 in 937, but the house was donated by a layman named Ch'en Yu 陳由. The Yung-shou Nunnery was built in 970 by the nun Shou-yüan 守緣, who received a donation of land from a man named Huang Shao 黃韶. Both of these nunneries still existed when the local gazetteer was compiled during the end of the twelfth century.⁹² Once again, the evidence presented here demonstrates Sung Chinese local people's persistent eagerness to endow the monastic houses for women.

Nuns, however, not only received donations but also offered generous gifts themselves. The extant epigraphic records list many individual nuns who donated money to endow the printing of Buddhist scriptures, or to support the construction or renovation of Buddhist temples, pagodas, steles, and statues.⁹³ Seijin 成尋, a Japanese monk who went on a pilgrimage to Mount Wu-t'ai in China during the Hsi-ning period (1068-1078), furthermore witnessed the generous activity of a respectful T'ien-t'ai nun master named Fa-kuei 法貴. Fa-kuei, the abbess of the Ch'ung-te Cloister 崇德院, was bestowed a purple robe and the master title "Great Master Miao-yin" 妙因大師 by the emperor. At that time, though already seventy-nine years old, she still preached the Dharma and lectured on the *Lotus Sūtra* every day. On one occasion, she sponsored a feast large enough to feed more than one hundred people and, moreover, offered generous gifts, including money and daily supplies like socks and handkerchiefs, to the visiting monks and nuns.⁹⁴ Fa-kuei was therefore not only an eminent teacher but also a remarkable benefactress. Her capacity to make good use of her financial resources must have impressed her male colleague, Seijin, who recorded in detail her monastic activity in his diary.

Sung Chinese nuns were also engaged in income-generating activities. Many nunneries, as mentioned earlier, were landholders, thus their revenue may have come from selling agricultural products or renting farm land to peasants. Two sources, moreover, give evidence that nuns could support themselves by spinning silk cloth for a living. According to the Confucian scholar Chu Yü 朱彧 (fl. 11th cent.), nuns of a certain Lien-hua (Lotus) Nunnery 蓮花(尼)寺 in Fu-chow 撫州 (Kiangsi) were very good at

92 . SSC, 35: 22b and 35: 24b, in *SKCS*, v. 484, pp. 528-9.

93 . See, for example, *Liang-che chin-shih chih*, 8: 46a-b and 10: 16a; many nuns' names were listed in the inscriptions as donors.

94 . Hirabayashi Fumio 平林文雄, ed., *San Tendai Godaisan ki* 參天台五臺山記 (Tokyo: Fukan shobō, 1978), 200, 251.

spinning thin silk cloth. Their silk cloth, called "Lotus silk" (*lien-hua sha* 蓮花紗), was regarded as the best in the Fu-chow area. Since they would not reveal their silk-making techniques to outsiders and the quantity of silk was limited, each year local people vied with each other to buy the "Lotus silk" for summer clothes. The price of "Lotus silk" was about twelve or thirteen percent higher than that of the cloth produced outside the nunnery.⁹⁵ The other source, recorded in the *Gazetteer of K'uai-chi*, says that the nuns residing in the Hsien-chiao Cloister 顯教院, which was one of the branches of the Ta-ch'ing Nunnery 大慶尼寺, were well known for producing fine silk cloth as their main source of income.⁹⁶ Thus, aside from fulfilling religious functions, Buddhist nunneries also served as the base of daily supplies and the center of economic activity for local residents.

These extant sources show the relationship of Buddhist nunneries to lay devotees and indicate the social and religious functions nunneries served in local areas. The society in general seemed to have considered monastic life a positive option and accepted the nunnery as a respected place for women who wished to pursue full-time religious devotion. Especially in the South, nuns received high esteem and generous support from their communities, and many had influential roles in local affairs. Some nuns, moreover, actively participated in the construction and restoration of local nunneries and thus helped to spread Buddhist teachings at the popular level. The nunnery in turn had attractions for women, particularly among the middle and upper classes; entrance into the nuns' order not only freed a woman from domestic life but also offered her the possibility of a celebrated career.

Conclusion

Several favorable conditions initially contributed to the prominent growth of nunneries in Sung China. The decree of 972 issued by the first emperor T'ai-tsu forbade nuns from being ordained by monks and ordered nun masters to manage their monastic affairs, thus making the nuns' order, to some extent at least, free from monks' domination. Abbesses were given more

95 . Chu Yü, *P'ing-chou k'o-t'an* 萍州可談, in *SKCS*, v. 1038, p. 298.

96 . *KCC*, 7:43b-44a, in *SKCS*, v. 486, p. 145.

room to assume authority over their nunneries and to exercise influence on their communities. Patronage from the imperial family and local elite created further opportunities for some extraordinary nuns to achieve positions of prominence and gain public recognition. Sung upper-class women's property rights may have also facilitated the prosperity of the nuns' community; women could make large donations to the nunneries that they entered or patronized. As property holders, moreover, women from elite families were the ones most able to purchase ordination certificates if they decided to become nuns. The prominence of the Buddhist nuns' order during the period from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries, as this study has shown, thus sheds some light on the long duration the *bhikṣuṇī* lineage in China has enjoyed.

One final point is worthy of mention here: Nancy J. Barnes has noted that Buddhist nuns in contemporary Taiwan do not keep the "Eight Chief Rules," nor do monks expect them to. As she says:

The traditional sharply drawn hierarchical relationship between male and female monastic is not observed, according to the Venerable I Fa, a *bhikṣuṇī* of Fo Kuang Shan temple. The eight rules are there, in the Vinaya that is transmitted to each *bhikṣuṇī* when she is ordained, but though known, they are not acted upon.⁹⁷

The preceding examination of the Sung nuns' order, therefore, helps to clarify that such a development is not a recent occurrence but has a long history in Chinese Buddhist monastic tradition that can be traced far back to the Sung.

97 . Barnes, "Buddhist Women and the Nuns' Order in Asia," 283.