

WORKSHOP REPORT: “ON MUZHIMING”

SECOND WORKSHOP OF THE NEW FRONTIERS IN THE STUDY OF
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The second workshop of the New Frontiers in the Study of Medieval China Series on *Muzhiming* was held on May 23–24, 2016, at Reed College in Portland, Oregon. The workshop was organized by Jessey Choo (Rutgers University), Alexei Ditter (Reed College), and LU Yang (Peking University), and funded by the Tang Research Foundation, the Office of the Dean of Faculty and the Chinese Department of Reed College, and the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures at Rutgers University.

This workshop brought together sixteen leading US and international scholars studying medieval China and *muzhiming* from different disciplinary perspectives: Robert Ashmore (University of California, Berkeley), Stephanie Balkwill (University of Southern California), Stephen Bokenkamp (Arizona State University), Jessey Choo (Rutgers University), Tim Davis (Brigham Young University), Alexei Ditter (Reed College), Patricia Ebrey (University of Washington), Paul Kroll (University of Colorado Boulder), LU Yang (Peking University), LUO Xin (Peking University), David McMullen (University of Cambridge), MENG Xianshi (Renmin University of China), RONG Xinjiang (Peking University), Anna Shields (Princeton University), WANG Ping (University of Washington), and YAO Ping (California State University-Los Angeles). In addition, four graduate students who work with *muzhiming* in their research received travel grants to attend—BAI Yuzhou (Princeton), Ken Morrow (UT-Dallas), Lucas Wolf (ASU), and WEN Xin (Harvard).

This second workshop narrowed the spatial focus to *muzhiming* produced within or excavated from the area of medieval metropolises (Yecheng, Chang'an, and Luoyang), while broadening the temporal scope to include *muzhiming* dating from the fifth century. Prior to the workshop, participants circulated brief introductions to and translations of their specific *muzhiming*. In these introductions, they examined these texts in terms of one or more of four areas—historiography, representation, practice, and materiality. At the workshop, they discussed these areas in greater depth, highlighting the broader questions and challenges their texts raised.

Each day of the workshop began with a lecture by one of the participating Chinese scholars with extensive experience working with medieval *muzhiming*. These were followed by five presentations divided between morning and afternoon sessions.

Each day concluded with a roundtable that summed up and further discussed the issues raised in the conversations following each presentation.

Rong Xinjiang delivered the keynote lecture on the first day, titled “Entombed Epitaph of Chisi Shan: A Glimpse of the Life of the *Hu*-barbarians in Tang Dynasty Chang’an” 唐朝長安的胡人生活一瞥——以《熾俟迪墓誌》為中心。The lecture revolved around the *muzhiming* of Chisi Shan, a second-generation Turkic Qarluq leader who lived in Chang’an. Rong examined the relationships Chisi Shan maintained with his own tribe who continued to dwell in the area between Altai and the eastern Tianshan, people of other northwestern tribes, and the Tang court. Along with the entombed epitaph of Chisi Shan’s father, Chisi Hongfu 熾俟弘福, his talk demonstrated that while the Qarluq leaders served in the Tang capital, they remained the chieftains of their own tribe and the head of the Damo (literally the great desert) Area Command 大漠都督府, a frontier commandery in the Western Region. As such, they served as conduits connecting the Tang court with other regimes in that area. Rong also discussed how, by mapping the locations where subjects of *muzhiming* resided in Chang’an, scholars can uncover new information about the backgrounds and social relationships of inhabitants of specific wards, as, for example, that the *hu*-barbarians tended to cluster in wards close to the Western Market where communications with the Western Region was frequent because of the Silk Road trade, and that spaces of worship for non-indigenous religions were also located exclusively in these same wards.

The five presentations that followed the keynote speech were loosely arranged based on chronology and theme. Timothy Davis examined the *muzhiming* of Tao Jun 陶浚 (d. 492), the purported grandson of Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365?–427), who served the Northern Wei. He concluded that the *muzhiming* was a forgery based on a number of factors: its provenance, deviations from genre conventions, anachronistic phraseology, conflicting portrayals of Tao Jun himself as well as the repeated mention of Tao Yuanming, who at this time had yet been acknowledged as a great poet even in the South. During the discussion, several scholars pointed out additional factors supporting Davis’s identification of this *muzhiming* as a forgery: that titles of officials were mostly from the official histories of Southern dynasties and that the text was written in Southern-style calligraphy; both preclude the possibility that the *muzhiming* was produced in the North.

The next two presentations by Stephanie Balkwill and Luo Xin centered on Buddhist nuns who either belonged or were close to the royal family of the Northern Wei and who had been deeply entangled in court politics during and immediately after the reign of Emperor Xuanwu 宣武帝 (r. 499–515 CE). Balkwill’s subject was the Empress Dowager Gao 高太后 (d. 518), who was first forced to become a nun by her rival, Grand Consort Dowager Ling 靈太妃 (later Empress Dowager Ling; d. 528), and then later assassinated. Balkwill used this *muzhiming* in part to argue where the royal nunnery was located. In her presentation, she also highlighted the peculiar absence of information in Empress Dowager Gao’s *muzhiming* and the startling contrast between the brevity of the written text and the enormity of the *muzhiming* stone, which she speculated were related to the political environment at the time of Empress Dowager Gao’s death as discussed in the dynastic histories. Luo Xin in turn presented on Bhikkuni Controller Ciqing 比丘尼統慈慶 (d. 524). Known as Wang Zhong’er 王鍾兒 before taking tonsure, she was born in the South to a family steeped in classical learning, before being captured and sent as a

slave to serve at the Northern Wei court. Despite her lowly status, over the course of many years she became a close confidante of Empress Dowager Wenzhao 文昭 and the caretaker of the Empress Dowager's son, Emperor Xuanwu. Even after she became a nun in her old age, she continued to live in the palace and advise the emperor on how to govern by Confucian principles until her death. These *muzhiming* therefore shed light on the complexity of women's roles in Northern Wei power struggles, nuances of religio-political practices at court, as well as previously little-known channels of cultural exchanges between Han and Xianbei people.

The final two presentations of the first day continued to explore religious themes, in particular individual religious practices reflected in *muzhiming*. Stephen Bokenkamp's subject of study was the Daoist priestess Han Ziming 韓自明 (d. 831). Han was historically significant for two reasons. First, she was a close friend of Xie Ziran 謝自然 (d. 794) whose realization of transcendence was reported in several contemporary accounts. Second, she was invited to instruct the imperial ladies in Daoist teachings and had multiple audiences with the Tang Emperor Wenzong 文宗 (r. 827–840). Bokenkamp compared and contrasted the depictions of Daoist priestesses in *muzhiming*, hagiography, and contemporary poems. He paid particular attention to the inclusion of supernatural elements in *muzhiming* as well as the unusual emphasis on the female body, especially appearance, when portraying Daoist priestesses in these works. Paul Kroll's presentation focused on two *muzhiming*, that of Li Jing 李敬 (649–722), a former Intendant-in-Chief of Zhuangzhou who was a lay Buddhist, and that of Daoist Master Zhang Chengyun 張乘運 (671–742). Kroll noted the degree to which the accounts of their lives were syncretic at both narrative and lexical levels; not only did the texts detail aspects of their religious practice, but they also employed the language of Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist discourse in so doing. He also used these *muzhiming* to illustrate persuasively why scholars need to pay equal attention to the oft-ignored concluding elegy, noting their richness and sophistication in use of rhyme and allusion, and highlighting intriguing contrasts between the representation of subjects within the prose preface and the concluding elegy.

The second day opened with a lecture by Meng Xianshi titled “Assessing the Rise and Fall of the Family of the ‘Meritorious Minister’ of an Era [Zhangsun Wuji 長孫無忌 (594–659)] from the Entombed Epitaph of Zhangsun Quanyi” 從《長孫全義墓誌》看一代功臣之家的沈浮. The lecture focused on the political struggles that led to the political downfall of Zhangsun Wuji, the eminent statesman who helped Emperor Taizong 太宗 (r. 626–650) to seize the throne and consolidate Tang rule, and its impact on Zhangsun's family. He pointed out that “meritorious minister” was not a description but an honor bestowed only to those who had made extraordinary contributions to an emperor's ascension or the founding of the state. There were only a limited number of meritorious ministers and they enjoyed exceptional treatment under the law. An individual could only be stripped of this honor if they committed treason. The reinstatement of Zhangsun Wuji's status as a meritorious minister after the An Lushan Rebellion showed that the impact of his political fall and rehabilitation on his family could be ascertained by understanding a single term and its full range of institutional connotations within the *muzhiming*.

Jessey Choo gave the first presentation of the morning session, focusing on commemorative inscriptions produced for two highborn laywomen from families steeped in Confucian learning—Lady Zhangsun 長孫夫人 (d. 701), the grand-niece

Zhangsun Wuji, and Madame Liu 劉氏 (d. 754), the granddaughter of Liu Yanyou 劉延祐 (d. 687), a prominent literati-official during the reigns of Emperor Gaozong 高宗 (r. 649–83) and Empress Wu 武后 (r. 690–705)—both of whom chose to follow the Buddhist practice of exposing their own corpse rather than having a burial. Lady Zhangsun's *muzhiming* was particularly interesting in its description of her family's struggles with her request. Choo compared these two commemorative inscriptions, noting that, while they included the same types of information arranged according to the conventions of the *muzhiming* genre, Madame Liu's inscription was nonetheless referred to as a niche inscription. Finally, Choo pointed out how the use of variant characters (e.g., the new characters created by Empress Wu) offered clues about the intended audience of these texts and how the differences between transcriptions might affect their meaning. Her presentation illustrated the significance of working with rubbings (or, in this case, multiple rubbings); such information could not have been gleaned from only transcriptions of these texts.

David McMullen's presentation discussed the *muzhiming* of Li Jian 李建 (764–821) written by his close friend Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779–831). Li Jian was an imperial clansman who rose to political prominence through passing the *jinshi* examination. In coordination with other historical sources, McMullen highlighted how Li's *muzhiming* helps clarify the degree of consanguinity required for an individual to be recognized as belonging to the imperial clan and also illuminated the prestige and career opportunities associated with imperial clan membership. Mention within the *muzhiming* of Li Jian's composition of a satirical poem, "Betraying One's Office," to critique the commander general Pei Jun 裴均, suggested, McMullen also argued, that *Xin yuefu* 新樂府 were practiced by other literati and not just by Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846) and Yuan Zhen, as literary scholars have previously assumed.

There were three presentations in the afternoon, given by Yao Ping, Anna Shields, and Alexei Ditter. Yao focused on the *muzhiming* of Wang Lie 王烈 (d. 677), who committed suicide at the age of sixteen. This *muzhiming* and many like it—Yao identified 117 written for subjects who died before the age of twenty—makes information about children and teenagers, a demographic not otherwise easily accessible, available to scholars. These *muzhiming* were almost evenly split between those written for boys and for girls. Yao catalogued the diverse causes of early death. While illness was the most common cause, deaths were also attributed to other factors—violence, accident, and suicide. Yao noted moreover that expressions of parental grief often responded to the specific circumstances of death: death during a family's travel with expressions of guilt and regret, suicide with attempts to make sense of a senseless death.

The two *muzhiming* discussed by Anna Shields, written for Li Cui 李璿 (677–748) and Li Ye 李燁 (826–860), shifted the topic from depictions of parental grief to representations of the extraordinary filiality of orphaned sons. The former, written by the famed poet Wei Yingwu 韋應物 (737–791), described how Li Cui's son, Wei's close friend Li Huan 李澣, had dreamt of multiple appeals from his father to have his coffin moved from its provisional gravesite outside of Luoyang to the family cemetery in Henan, a request he was finally able to complete sixteen years after his initial dream. The latter, written by the deceased's cousin Li Jun 李濬 (fl. ca. 860–880?), documented its subject's transport of the coffin of his father, Li Deyu 李德裕 (787–850), his stepmother, several siblings, and household servant back to

Luoyang for reburial. In both examples, Shields noted how these accounts of filiality were corroborated or reflected in other sources. She also noted the ways these accounts frame their subjects' careers in relation to those of more illustrious ancestors, and highlight the unanticipated setbacks that could occur in the course of an official's professional life.

The final presentation of the workshop was given by Alexei Ditter. Focusing on two nominally self-authored *muzhiming* produced during the 850s written by Han Chang 韓昶 (799–855) and Pei Gong 裴珙 (795–859), Ditter argued that these texts were primarily written under extraordinary circumstances—when their subjects faced imminent and unexpected death due to sudden and acute illness or extreme danger—and often when their authors were away from home. In terms of content and structure, Ditter noted that, while self-authored *muzhiming* were for the most part similar to conventional examples of the genre, they differed in the degree to which they drew greater attention to compositions the subject had produced during his lifetime. Finally, he cautioned against viewing these texts as offering better access to the interiority of their authors, pointing out how they had undergone posthumous editing and revision by family prior to entombment.

In the roundtable discussions, the comments of the four discussants—Patricia Ebrey, Wang Ping, Robert Ashmore, and Lu Yang—centered around five interconnected topics theorizing about the nature and value of *muzhiming*. The first was how *muzhiming* exist in a dialectical documentary relationship with transmitted sources—anecdotes, dynastic histories, hagiographies, religious inscriptions, and contemporary literary works—as a supplement to transmitted sources, as contextualized by transmitted sources, and as constructed from and by other sources so as to contextualize and shed light on previously little-known historical figures, religious practices, social interactions, and facets of significant historical events. Whether *muzhiming* have a superior claim to truth compared to other sources was also discussed.

The second was how to understand information conveyed by the materiality of the *muzhiming* that could impact interpretation of the text. Specific examples raised included the unusual ratios between the length of an inscription and the surface size of the stone, variant characters and/or their alternative transcriptions, and that contemporary transcriptions, or even rubbings, might be incomplete or corrupted. Two aspects of materiality recognized as requiring further inquiry in particular were the need to examine more closely the calligraphic styles or scripts chosen for inscription, and the need to be able to examine the object and not just the rubbing (which at best provides only the surface that bore the inscription).

The third was the need to recognize and contextualize religious (and especially burial) practices reported in *muzhiming*; even the presence or absence of something as simple as “in accordance with the Rites” (*li ye* 禮也) following a description of the burial arrangement can help nuance our understanding of the socio-religious positions of the deceased and their families. Particularly challenging has been the lack of awareness among scholars of the presence of these specialized terminology within *muzhiming*, and therefore only rare attempts to interpret their meaning.

The fourth was the issue of representation. *Muzhiming* drew upon a number of different sources in the process of portraying their subjects. On one level, participants explored deliberate variations in styles and conventions used in portraying people of different backgrounds (e.g., Daoists vs. Buddhists, officials vs. non-officials,

Hu-barbarians vs. Han-Chinese) and the variations in portraying the same individuals or events in different genres (e.g., hagiography vs. *muzhiming*). More abstractly, participants examined how those representations were constructed, with information reiterated or distributed across different sections of the *muzhiming*. They noted as well that the manner in which information was communicated could similarly vary from explicit to allusive, in part based on the sensitivity of the issues discussed, in part on the section of the *muzhiming* within which it appeared (prose prefaces, for example, are conventionally more direct, rhymed elegies more allusive). The constructedness of representation at times became particularly visible when tensions between individual and group identities arose, or when attempts, at times quite contentious, were made to reconcile the existence of unpalatable truths or competing claims.

The final issue was that scholars must be careful not to treat *muzhiming* simply as transparent documentary evidence of social life or burial practices, but rather recognize that they possess a distinctive literary identity as a genre, one uniquely distinct from other forms of commemorative writing. It also means understanding how the literary practice of this genre evolved in relation to broader patterns of literary history, such as the rise of *qingliu* 清流 culture and the development of ancient style prose.

The materials from this and the previous workshop are in preparation for publication. The organizers are also currently planning for the next workshop to take place in 2017.