Funerary Inscription with Preface for the Late Princess Gao of the Dali Kingdom

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Abstract: The Dali kingdom (937–1253) ruled much of what is now southwest China, and though its sources are limited, they uniformly reflect Dali rulers' Buddhist devotion. Given that Buddhism afforded women unique opportunities in other parts of Asia, we might expect to find similar examples of devout Buddhist women ordaining as nuns or sponsoring large-scale projects in the Dali kingdom. The only extant record about a Dali-kingdom woman's life, the funerary inscription for the royal Gao Jinxian Gui, describes the deceased in strongly Confucian terms, with few direct references to Buddhism. Despite these limited references, by reading the inscription carefully, and in relation to other Dali-kingdom sources, it is possible to piece together an image of Gao Jinxian Gui's life in a Buddhist and Confucian environment.

Keywords: Dali kingdom, Yunnan, women, royal, epitaph, Confucianism

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Introduction

The Dali 大理 kingdom (937–1253) ruled a large swath of territory centered in what is now southwest China's Yunnan Province. It developed its own Buddhist tradition that drew on the materials and practices of the preceding Nanzhao 南詔 kingdom (ca. 649–903) as well as its diverse neighbors. Dali territory bordered Song (960–1279) China, the Tibetan region of Khams, Bagan (1044–1287), and Đại Việt (1010–1225), with Pāla (750–1174) India not far beyond Bagan. This diversity is visible in Dali-kingdom Buddhist art and material culture, which drew inspiration from Pāla Buddhism. Buddhist manuscripts from the Dali-kingdom are written primarily in Sinitic script, with dhāraṇī and seed syllables written in the Sanskrit Siddhamātṛkā script. Dali's epigraphic record is similar, especially epitaphs, which follow contemporaneous Chinese conventions in their Sinitic writing style and form, while often also including Sanskrit dhāraṇī or seed syllables.

As in other places and times, epigraphy as a medium offers insights into Dali-kingdom Buddhist women's lives that other kinds of texts do not. In fact, the limited amount of writing that survives from the Dali kingdom means that epigraphy is the only source for information about Dali kingdom women at all. Texts and images from the Dali kingdom are remarkably masculine: textual records, whether epigraphy or manuscripts, are written by and about men, and only a few human women (as opposed to goddesses) are depicted in Nanzhao- and Dali-kingdom art. This omission of women is significant because it challenges theories that women enjoyed a higher status in Dali's Bai 白 ethnic culture.[1] Instead, we find that Buddhist women's roles in the Dali kingdom (and to some extent the Nanzhao kingdom as well) were defined in strongly Confucian terms.

The sole surviving epitaph for a Dali-kingdom woman is the *Funerary Inscription with Preface for the Late Princess Gao of the Dali*

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[1] Yuqing Yang gives an overview of these theories, for which she cites C. P. Fitzgerald, Colin Mackerras, and Li Xinghua. See Yang, *Mystifying China's Southwest Ethnic Borderlands*, 106.

Kingdom (*Dali guo gu Gao ji muming bei* 大理囻故高姬墓銘並序) (Figures 1–2).[2] Gao Jinxian Gui 高金仙貴, who died in the 1230s, was no ordinary woman. As her epitaph explains, her father was the Prime Minister Gao Miaoyin Hu 高妙音護 and her mother was Duan Yizhang Shun 段易長順, of the Dali kingdom's ruling Duan family.[3] It was Gao Jinxian Gui's maternal uncle, Duan Zhixing 段智興 (a.k.a. Duan Yizhang Xing 易長興; r. 1172–1199) who commissioned the Dali kingdom's most famous artistic creation, the *Painting of Buddhist Images* (*Fanxiang juan* 梵像卷), which was completed in 1180.

Gao Jinxian Gui's epitaph stele was recovered from Dali's Tower of Five Glories (Wuhua lou 五華樓) in 1971 (Figure 3); it was the oldest stele found at that site, though many other stelae were destroyed in 1972. Despite the antiquity of these stelae, the Tower of Five Glories in which they were discovered was built in the Ming dynasty. The original Tower of Five Glories (or Tower of Five Flowers 五花樓) was an official guesthouse built by the Nanzhao court, and it probably continued as such through the Dali kingdom.[4] Mongol troops

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[2] From the Dali plain there is also an Uṣṇīṣavijāya funerary pillar that the high official Zhao Xingming dedicated to his late mother around 1195, but the text does not recount anything about the woman's life except her age at death (51). See *Dali guo yanbi Zhao Xingming wei wangmu zao muchuang*. In addition, the many Dali-kingdom funerary inscriptions from Tonghai, to the east of Kunming, include a few that commemorate deceased women, but none gives any details about the women's lives. See Li, 'Tonghai bowuguan cang Dali guo huozang mu jinian bei qianxi', 55, 57–58.

[3] These names illustrate the common regional practice of inserting Buddhist names or titles between the family name and given name. See Tian, 'Song, Yuan, Ming shiqi de Baizu renming yu Fojiao'.

[4] Fan, *Yunnan zhi*, 48. According to the *Yuan shi*, the Nanzhao ruler Quanfengyou 勸豐佑 (r. 824–859) built this tower in 856, which is plausible considering that the *Yunnan zhi* dates to 863. *Yuan shi*, 61:1479. Dali rulers continued to use other Nanzhao structures, such as the main Buddhist temple Chongsheng si 崇聖寺, so it makes sense that they would have continued to use the Tower of Five Glories as well.

FIG. 1 *Dali guo gu Gao ji muming bei*, Dali City Museum 大理市博物館. Author's photo.

were stationed in front of the tower after their 1253 conquest of Dali, and in 1266 the Yuan (1253–1382 in Dali) government had the building repaired.[5] The Tower of Five Glories that now stands in the middle of Dali's Old City is not based on this Nanzhao guesthouse, however. The current structure (Figure 4) is a version of the bell

[5] *Yuan shi* 61:1479.

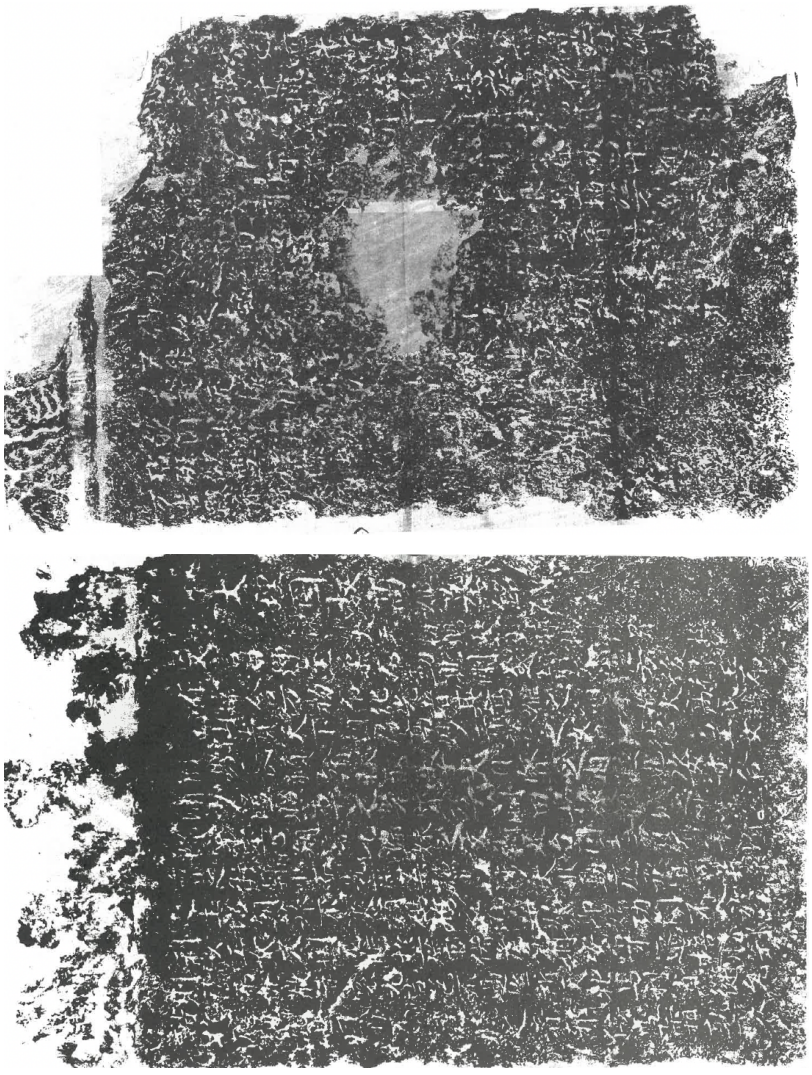

FIG. 2 Recto and verso of the *Dali guo gu Gao ji muming bei*, in *JSP* 1.39–40.

FIG. 3 Tower of Five Glories, in *Atō ingashū* 亜東印画輯 [Collected Prints from East Asia], volume 3. Tokyo: Atō Inga Kyōkai 亜東印画協會, 1928.

FIG. 4 Tower of Five Glories with Tourists 大理古城五華樓–遊人. By Ruili jiang de heshui 瑞麗江的河水, 2019. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

tower erected by the Ming (1382–1644 in Dali) government as part of their project to rebuild Dali's city wall following the destruction wrought by the Ming conquest of Dali in 1382. It was renamed Tower of Five Glories in 1692, under Qing (1644–1911) rule, in homage to local history.[6] The stelae may have been moved inside the tower immediately following the Ming conquest, or this might have been a later development.

The epitaph of Gao Jinxian Gui is carved on a limestone slab 83 cm tall, 51 cm wide, and 16 cm thick, with inscribed writing on both sides.[7] A half-moon-shaped crown originally sat atop the slab, but it has been lost. Each side of the stele has thirteen vertical lines of text, and each line has about twenty characters. However, damage on the verso has made most of its text illegible.[8] Unlike many other Dali-kingdom epitaphs, this record does not include any Sanskrit text, but it is possible that Sanskrit letters had been inscribed on the now missing crown.

Though the stele's verso text is almost completely illegible, the recto text is also unclear in places, which has generated various readings. Having consulted various transcriptions as well as rubbings of the inscription, my translation largely follows the version in *Dali congshu: Jinshi pian* 大理叢書：金石篇 [Dali Collected Works: Epigraphy Volumes].[9] I make note of plausible alternative readings

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[6] Fang and Wang, *Dali Wuhua lou xinchu Yuanbei xuanlu bing kaoshi*, preface 2; *Dali fuzhi*, 6:79.

[7] I follow the dimensions on the plaque at Dali Municipal Museum, which generally agree with the dimensions listed in Fang and Wang, *Dali Wuhua lou xinchu Yuanbei xuanlu bing kaoshi*, 3.

[8] Ibid., preface 1–2; main text, 3.

[9] See *Dali guo gu Gao ji muming bingxu*. The transcription in Fang and Wang, *Dali Wuhua lou xinchu Yuanbei xuanlu bing kaoshi*, 3–5, varies slightly from this and is generally more conservative in not venturing interpretations of unclear characters. Another similar version appears in Yunnan sheng bianji zu, *Baizu shehui lishi diaocha* (4), 107. However, this version seems to accidentally omit several characters that are included in other transcriptions. The Dali Municipal Museum transcription diverges significantly from the other versions in several

in the translation. Despite the stele's wear, its inscription still reveals much about women's lives under the Dali kingdom.

Translation

Funerary Inscription with Preface for the Late Princess Gao of the Dali Kingdom
大理囻故高姬墓銘並序

Written by Yang Junsheng,[10] Grand Master of Remonstrance,[11]

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places, but it and the *Dali congshu* version are the only two to include more of the verso content. See Yang, 'Dali shi shouji de sifang Dali guo moqi de beike', 791.

[10] Yang Junsheng 楊俊昇, like Gao Jinxian Gui, belonged to an illustrious Dali-kingdom lineage. His family name is recorded as both Yang 楊 and Yang 揚, of which I believe the former to be correct from other Dali-kingdom materials. Based on the patronymic linkage system that was practiced in the Dali kingdom, following Nanzhao precedent, sons' given names start with the last character of their fathers' given names. In this case, Yang Junsheng appears to be the son of Yang Longjun 楊隆俊, who was the son of Yang Yilong 楊義隆, who sponsored the creation of the 1136 *Zhu fo pusa jingang deng qiqing yigui* 諸佛菩薩金剛等啟請儀軌 [Rituals to Invite Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Vajra Beings, etc.]. Yang Junsheng's own epitaph survives, as well: the front reads in Sinitic script, 'Yang Junsheng, Grand Master of Remonstrance, Who Governed the Country as Scale and Mirror; posthumously known as Shi Zhaoming, National Preceptor of Perfect Awakening, Buddhist Tortoise-shell and Confucian Mirror' (*hengjian junguo jianyi daifu Yang Junsheng, yi yue shigui rujing yuanwu guoshi Shi Zhaoming* 衡鑑君國諫議大夫楊俊昇, 謚曰釋龜儒鏡圓悟囻師釋照明); the back includes five seed syllables and the *Heart Sūtra* in Siddhamātṛkā script. See *Zhu fo pusa*, 262; Fang and Wang, *Dali Wuhua lou xinchu Yuanbei xuanlu bing kaoshi*, 5.

[11] This title translates *jianyi daifu* 諫議大夫, which was an imperial office since the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). Grand Masters of Remonstrance advised the emperor, and even offered criticisms. The use of this title for Yang Junsheng shows both the Dali-kingdom practice of adopting Chinese official titles (a practice they might have simply inherited from their Nanzhao predeces-

Great Master Who Received the Imperial Purple Robe.[12]
諫議大夫敕賜紫大師楊俊昇撰

The *Wenyan* [commentary on the *Yijing*] states: 'Kun is the utmost yielding, yet its activity is firm. It is the utmost stillness, yet its virtue is upright. By following, it finds a master and has constancy. It embraces the myriad things and its transformations are radiant'.[13] This also describes Princess Gao. The princess belonged to the great Gao family and her given name was Jinxian (Golden Immortal) Gui.[14] She was the daughter of the imperial Prime Minister Gao Miaoyin Hu, her mother was Duan Yizhang Shun, daughter of the Jiande Emperor, and she was the wife of the imperial academician Li Dari Xian.[15] Her countenance surpassed the [brilliance of] Hepu[16] [pearls] and momentarily exceeded the glow illuminating the chariots;[17] her

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sors) as well as Yang Junsheng's very high rank and connections to the Dali court. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, 148 no. 831.

[12] This title translates *chici zi dashi* 敕賜紫大師, which refers to the practice of bestowing purple robes upon those in imperial favor. The practice began under the Tang court and continued through the Song dynasty. This example shows that the Dali court also adopted this practice and its related title. See Hou, 'Dali guo xiejing *Huguo sinan chao* jiqi xueshu jiazhi', 104–05.

[13] Translation adapted from that of Adler, *The Original Meaning of the Yijing*, 72–73. This section of the commentary refers to the *Yijing* line, *junzi you you wang, xian mi hou de, zhu li* (君子有攸往, 先迷後得, 主利), which Adler translates as, 'Wherever the superior person goes, leading is confusing but following is effective; strongly appropriate'. Ibid., 67; *Zhouyi yizhu*, 33.

[14] 'Golden Immortal' (Jinxian 金仙) refers to the Buddha.

[15] The term I translate as 'wife' is *neiqin* 內寢, which literally means 'inner bedchamber' and refers metonymically to the principal wife. However, it is unclear if Li Dari Xian had any concubines.

[16] Hepu was a Han-dynasty garrison in present-day Guangxi known for its pearls. Xiong, 'The Hepu Han tombs and the maritime Silk Road of the Han Dynasty', 1240.

[17] The phrase 'illuminating the chariots', *zhaoche zhi guang* 照車之光, refers to a pearl so bright that it illuminates the chariot in which it is carried. Here, the

appearance encompassed the [shine of] Lantian[18] [jade] and long emitted a luster [worth] several cities.[19]

文言曰, 坤至柔, 而動也剛, 至靜而德方, 后得主而 / 有常, 含萬物而化光者, 其高姬之謂乎. 姬大高氏, 諱 / 金仙貴, 天下相君高妙音護之女, 母建德皇女 / 段易長順, 翰林郎李大日賢之內寢也. 姿過合 / 浦, 少溢照車之光; 質孕藍田, 長發聯城之瑩.

When it was arranged that she be sent down[20] to the residential chambers[21] [in marriage], in her heart she followed the text of 'Marrying Off King Diyi's Daughter'.[22] Her protection extended to [her husband in] the imperial government,[23] and she thought of the

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point is that Gao Jinxian Gui's glow surpasses even that of the chariot-illuminating pearl.

[18] Lantian was a county in Shaanxi known for its jade. Barnes, 'Understanding Chinese Jade in a World Context'.

[19] 'Several cities' (*liancheng* 聯城) alludes to the famous 'jade of Mr. He' (Heshi bi 和氏璧). According to the *Shiji*, when the King of Zhao obtained the precious jade, the King of Qin offered to give him fifteen walled cities in exchange for it. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer who pointed out this allusion.

[20] The term used here is *lijiang* 釐降, which refers to the legendary sage-king Yao's daughters marrying Shun. *Shangshu*, 1.5a.

[21] I follow the *Dali congshu: Jinshi pian* transcription in reading this as 'residential chambers' (*zhaishi* 宅室). Fang Linggui's transcription of 'palace' (*gongshi* 宮室) is plausible orthographically, but its meaning does not work as well because Gao Jinxian Gui did not marry into the palace. See *Dali guo gu Gao ji muming bingxu*; Fang and Wang, *Dali Wuhualou xinchu Yuanbei xuanlu bing kaoshi*, 3.

[22] This refers to a passage from the *Yijing* explaining the fifth line of the hexagram 'Marrying the Daughter' (*guimei* 歸妹): 'Di Yi marries off his daughter: The primary bride's sleeves are not as fine as the secondary bride's; the moon is nearly full: auspicious.' (六五: 帝乙歸妹, 其君之袂, 不如其娣之袂良, 月幾望, 吉.) *Zhouyi yizhu*, 449. Translation from Shaughnessy, 'Marriage, Divorce, and Revolution', 590.

[23] I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this translation,

strategy Jiang of Qi used to save Jin.[24] Though the [ ] is small,[25] she glorified the concubines' children;[26] with utmost modesty, the great river is crossed.[27] Her actions naturally accorded with propriety, like duckweed growing in a pond.[28] Morning and night she never deviated, akin to the shijiu bird in the mulberry tree.[29]

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which remains somewhat tentative.

[24] Jiang 姜 of Qi 齊 is remembered in the *Lienü zhuan* for her role in convincing her husband, Duke Wen of Jin 晉文公, to leave their comfortable life in Qi and return to his home country of Jin. She murdered a servant girl as part of this plan, and later conspired with her husband's uncle to get him drunk to take him out of Qi. *Lienü zhuan* 265.4b–5b.

[25] The first character in this line is unclear. Yang Shiyu reads it as *feng* 封, referring to a fiefdom, but it may be something else. However, I disagree with Du Chenghui's reading of the character as *lin* 麟 followed by a ditto mark. From the stele rubbing, it appears that the character that Du Chenghui reads as a ditto mark is actually the character *xiao* 小. See *Dali guo gu Gao ji muming bingxu*; Du, 'Dali guo wenxue chengjiu luelun', 3.

[26] The inscription clearly gives the characters *shubo* 庶蘗, which could mean 'many shoots', referring to the branches of the family. However, I treat this as an error for the more common *shunie* 庶孽, which refers to concubines' children. Though this term is pejorative, here the point may be that Gao Jinxian Gui showed selflessness in glorifying the children of concubines, perhaps instead of her own. Indeed, the inscription makes no reference to Gao Jinxian Gui having her own biological children.

[27] The reference to fording a great river with humility comes from the Qian 謙 hexagram of the *Yijing*, which reads, '6 at the beginning: Modest, modest, is the superior person. Crossing a great river is auspicious.' (初六. 謙謙君子. 用涉大川. 吉). Adler, *The Original Meaning of the Yijing*, 115; *Zhouyi yizhu*, 139.

[28] The allusion to duckweed (*xingcai* 荇菜) evokes the first poem in the *Shijing* 詩經 [Book of Odes], 'Guanju' 關雎, which compares the duckweed to a beautiful, virtuous woman. *Shijing* 1.4b.

[29] *Shijiu* 鳲鳩, a kind of bird, has been translated variously as turtledove or cuckoo. In the *Shijing*, the poem 'Shijiu' initially describes the bird in a the mulberry tree with seven children, then goes on to describe the virtuous man's constancy. Though interpretations of this poem differ, in this epitaph it appears to

釐 / 降宅室, 心規帝乙歸妹之文; 衛延台閣, 志慮齊姜濟 / 晉之術. [封]小而光庶蘗; 謙謙以涉大川. 動應承宜, 同荇菜 / 之生沼; 朝暮不爽, 類鳲鳩之在桑.

Through a wife's frugality and labor, no [ ] profit will enter the household;[30] with female needleworkers and scribes, none of the various offices will be neglected in the inner chambers.[31] By preparing for danger, peace of mind can be transferred; by building up this wonderful *kṣetra*,[32] accumulated wealth can be shared.[33] 'The yellow

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equate the mother's equal love for her seven children to the virtuous man's equal treatment of all. According to the *Maoshi* commentary, the *shijiu* bird feeds its children from the oldest in the morning, and from the youngest at night, which relates to the line about Gao Jinxian Gui not deviating morning or night. In addition, the *Lienü zhuan* cites this poem in its entry for Kind Mother Mang of the Wei Kingdom (Wei Mang cimu 魏芒慈母), who treated her stepsons even better than her biological sons, even though the former did not love her. *Shijing* 7.10b–11a; Kinney, trans. and ed, *Exemplary Women of Early China*, 23.

[30] Though the illegible character before 'profit' (*li* 利) frustrates a clear translation, this line may refer to a passage from the *Lienü zhuan* in which the mother of Tian Jizi 田稷子, Prime Minister of Qi 齊, chided her son for taking bribes, saying that for a good official, 'If a profit comes through unprincipled means, it does not enter his house' (*feili zhi li, bu ru yu jia* 非理之利, 不入於家). Kinney, trans. and ed., *Exemplary Women of Early China*, 24; *Lienü zhuan*, 1.28a.

[31] Part of this line comes from the *Shangshu*, where the text instructs the reader, 'Do not neglect the various offices. This is Heaven's work that people must do.' (無曠庶官, 天工人其代之.) *Shangshu* 2.8a.

[32] The character *cha* 剎 transliterates the first syllable of the Sanskrit term *kṣetra*, which can mean world or land, but generally refers to monastery or temple.

[33] The character that Yang Shiyu and Zhang Shufang render as *ji* 積, 'accumulation', is not identified as legible in other transcriptions of this text. However, the more unusual character here is *jing* 敬, 'respect', because 'accumulate and be able to distribute' (*ji er neng san* 積而能散) is a phrase from the *Liji* 禮記 [Book of Rites] that also appears in Chinese Buddhist commentaries and compilations. *Liji* 1.1b; *Dafangguang fo huayan jingshu*, *T* no. 1735, 35: 35.776c16;

skirt means great fortune':[34] its color does not surpass that of Heaven. 'The mare is beneficial and steadfast':[35] her strength harmonises in accordance with the Earth. Amidst the storms of a troubled age, there were no [ ] [ ] clear sounds; in the snow and frost of evil, which transformation...

婦節婦功, 門不入於[ ] / 利; 女工女史, 閨無曠於庶官. 備危急則安而可遷, 培勝剎 / 則積而能散. 黃裳元吉, 色不過於所天; 牝馬利貞, 健允 / 諧於應地. 亂世風雨, 不[ ][ ]曉之音; 邪佞雪霜, 孰變...

[reverse]

...the monk in following the traces, the moon [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [that she be] quickly released [ ] [ ]. Therefore her companions grieved morning and night. Her life's suffering ended[36] on [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]. On the eighteenth day of the fifth month of Renshou year 5 [ca. 1231][37] the

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Guang hongming ji, *T* no. 2103, 12: 52.172b28. Based on the Buddhist implications of this line suggested by the use of the term *kṣetra*, and the fact that this character more closely resembles *san* 散 than *jing* 敬, I read this as a reference to sharing one's accumulated wealth or merit.

[34] This quotes a line from the Kun hexagram of the *Yijing*: 'Six in the fifth place. The yellow skirt means great fortune.' (六五: 黃裳, 元吉.) *Zhouyi yizhu*, 30. A yellow skirt can also refer to the primary (or official) wife, based on Zheng Xuan's commentary on a poem in the *Shijing* that describes a yellow skirt paired with a green blouse. According to Zheng Xuan, the skirt and blouse should be the same color, and wearing the yellow skirt on the bottom and green blouse on top symbolizes the inversion of the proper relationships between the wife and concubine(s). I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer who provided this information.

[35] This summarises a line from the Kun hexagram of the Yijing: 'Kun is great, penetrating, and beneficial, with the steadfastness of a mare' (坤元亨利牝馬之貞). *Zhouyi yizhu*, 24.

[36] I read the phrase *hua sheng ku* 化生苦 as 'ending the suffering of life' due to the context, but this translation remains very tentative due to the text's overall illegibility. While *shengku* can also mean 'suffering of birth', that interpretation does not fit the inscription as well.

[37] Dali-kingdom reign dates are difficult to determine with certainty, but contemporaneous inscriptions and Yuan records suggested that the Renshou

orange osmanthus[38] caught cold, and on the ninth day of the sixth month...

...passed away [ ] at age 46.

...僧於往踪月[ ] / [ ][ ][ ]早脫[ ][ ]故伴生悲於晝夜, 化生苦於[ ] / [ ][ ][ ][ ]仁壽五年五月二十八日, 丹桂傷風, 至六月九日[ ] / ...化[ ]春秋四十有六...

Princess Gao's Funerary Inscription and Dali Buddhist Women's History

One of the most striking aspects of Gao Jinxian Gui's funerary inscription is the preponderance of classical Chinese language and relative absence of Buddhist concepts. Given that most of the inscription's Buddhist references appear on the largely illegible verso, it is likely that Yang Junsheng shifted from Confucian to Buddhist language in narrating Gao Jinxian Gui's life. After all, Confucian virtues are more relevant to Gao Jinxian Gui's domestic life, and perhaps she turned to Buddhist devotion as she aged or if she was widowed. Mark Halperin observes that writers of Song-dynasty epitaphs for women often discuss a woman's Buddhist activities only in her middle age or later years, and Dali-kingdom authors might have followed this practice.[39] To make sense of the funerary inscription's asymmetrical Confucian and Buddhist content, I first constellate Gao Jinxian Gui within the scant materials that survive about Buddhist women in the Dali kingdom and compare the religious content of her epitaph to

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era lasted from around 1227–1238. See Wang, 'Nanzhao Dali guo nianhao kao', 556, 580.

[38] Orange osmanthus (*dangui* 丹桂) is a metaphor for both the top graduate in the imperial exam (placing first is known as 'picking osmanthus'), impressive people in general, children, or the moon. Here, I read it as a reference to Gao Jinxian Gui herself as a talented person and a daughter of an illustrious lineage. I am grateful to Kate Lingley and Stephanie Balkwill for suggesting this reading.

[39] Halperin, 'Domesticity and the Dharma: Portraits of Buddhist Laywomen in Sung China', 75.

records about her male Gao relatives.

It is not a coincidence that these other materials are also inscriptions, specifically records of women's sponsorship of Buddhist carvings or, in one case, a temple. Three inscriptions record donations by married couples and include the wives' names; two of the husbands served as government officials.[40] The earliest of these date to the Nanzhao kingdom, which set the stage for the Dali kingdom's Buddhist devotion and political structure. An 1198 inscription record of a Buddhist temple's founding credits the woman (or daughter, *nü* 女) Hei'er 黑洱 with donating incense; the same record lists Gao Jinxian Gui's father, Gao Miaoyin Hu, as a donor of land to the temple.[41] In one case, the Dali-kingdom official Zhao Xingming 趙興明 dedicated a Buddhist pillar to his late mother, which suggests that she, too, embraced Buddhism.[42] These examples reveal that elite women were involved in Buddhism as donors, but usually as part of a family unit. Moreover, no textual or visual sources indicate that any Buddhist nuns were present and active in the Dali kingdom. The absence of sources may not reflect the absence of nuns, but the lack of any representation of nuns still makes Dali an outlier. Not only are there many surviving references to nuns from the Song dynasty (and earlier dynasties in China), but references to nuns also survive from Dali's neighbors Bagan, Đại Việt, and Tibet.[43]

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[40] The couples include the local official Zhang Banglong 張傍龍 and his wife Sheng Menghe 盛夢和, who in 850 sponsored statues of Maitreya and Amitābha at cave 12 of the Shadengjing 沙登箐 section at Shibao shan 石寶山, to the northwest of the Dali plain. Yaoshi Xiang 藥師祥 and his wife Guanyin Gu 觀音姑 of the Dali kingdom sponsored a stone carving of Ajaya (Victorious) Avalokiteśvara (Acuoye Guanyin 阿嵯耶觀音) in cave 13 of the same section. Finally, the official Yuan Zhongchang 袁衷長 and his wife Yaoshi Xin 藥師信 sponsored carvings of the deities Mahākāla and Vaiśravaṇa at Midala 米達拉 cliff, near Kunming. *Zhang Banglong zaoxiang ji*; *Yaoshi Xiang furen Guanyin Gu'ai zaoxiang tiji*; *Midala moya zaoxiang tiji*.

[41] *Dali guo Shi shi Jiejing jianhui gaoxing lanruo zhuanzhu bei*.

[42] See note 2.

[43] Luce, *Old Burma–Early Pagan*, 101; Nguyen, *Zen in Medieval Vietnam*,

The scant references to lay women Buddhist donors from the Dali kingdom and the absence of references to Buddhist nuns make it challenging to contextualize Gao Jinxian Gui's epitaph in Dali's Buddhist history, but these materials do suggest that elite women sponsored Buddhist projects. Another set of sources that offers points of comparison are epitaphs for male members of the Gao family. Gao Shengfu 高生福, a distant cousin of Gao Jinxian Gui, passed away in Renshou year 4 (ca. 1230) and was memorialized with a stone epitaph in what is now the Chuxiong region of Yunnan province (located between Kunming and Dali). Gao Shengfu's branch of the family, like that of Gao Jinxian Gui, was known for its sponsorship of Buddhist projects, but Gao Shengfu's epitaph is similar in invoking primarily classical Chinese tradition and alluding to Buddhism only in a reference to cremation.[44] The same phenomenon appears in the inscription lauding the career of Gao Liangcheng 高量成, which dates to the second half of the twelfth century. Gao Liangcheng's son, Gao Chengzhong 高成忠, went on to become a Buddhist monk (and his epitaph is full of Buddhist references), and Gao Liangcheng was known as the 'Brilliant Duke Who Protects the Law' 護法明公, wherein the 'Law' could refer to the Buddhist Dharma. However, the inscription for Liangcheng makes no reference to Buddhist practices or teachings.[45]

With this context in mind, Gao Jinxian Gui's funerary inscription seems more like the standard genre for memorializing nonmonastic members of the Gao family. The inscription presents Gao Jinxian Gui as an ideal Confucian wife, using the language of Chinese classical tradition. Its author, Yang Junsheng, would have been well versed in both the classics and Buddhist tradition, and his choice of classical sources to memorialise Princess Gao was likely appropriate to her domestic life. Yang Junsheng himself seems to have belonged to the category of scholar-monks 儒釋, also known as monk-scholars 釋儒,

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437 n. 612; Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, 293.

[44] *Gao Shengfu muzhiming*.

[45] *Hufa Minggong Deyun beizan moya*; *Dali guo Yuangong ta zhi beiming bing xu*. For Gao Chengzhong's epitaph, see Bryson, 'Southwestern Chan', 84–93.

who were conversant in both Buddhism and classical Chinese tradition, especially Confucianism.[46] The emphasis on Confucian values in the legible parts of Gao Jinxian Gui's funerary inscription thus does not signal that Buddhism was unimportant in Gao Jinxian Gui's life. Instead, this emphasis reflects the complementarity of Buddhism and classical Chinese tradition in the Dali kingdom. Unlike in Song China, where some Confucians railed against Buddhism's harmful influence, no such criticisms of Buddhism appear in Dali-kingdom sources, and by all accounts Dali-kingdom elites fully embraced Buddhism.

Though Buddhism is not center stage in Gao Jinxian Gui's funerary inscription, it is still present both directly and indirectly. The phrase that I read as 'by building up this wonderful kṣetra, there is accumulated wealth that can be shared' (培勝剎則積而能散) invokes both the Sanskrit term *kṣetra*, which usually means Buddhist monastery or temple, and the reference to distributing excess wealth that first appears in the *Liji* 禮記 [Book of Rites] and is quoted in several Chinese Buddhist commentaries.[47] Its inclusion in this epitaph showcases Yang Junsheng's mastery of both canons and suggests that Gao Jinxian Gui herself was raised with both the Buddhist and classical traditions. It might even indicate that she donated some of her family's wealth to Buddhist institutions or the less fortunate. Additional references on the verso side to a monk, 'liberation' 脫, and life's suffering 生苦 hint at the Buddhist concepts and institutions

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[46] One of the earliest appearances of the term 'scholar-monk' is in the dedicatory inscription of the dhāraṇī pillar at Dizang si 地藏寺 in Kunming, which dates to the early thirteenth century. The inscription identifies its author as the scholar-monk Duan Jinquan 段進全. This pillar was sponsored by the high official Yuan Douguang 袁豆光 in honour of the recently deceased Gao Mingsheng 高明生 (a.k.a. Gao Guanyin Ming 高觀音明), yet another prominent member of the Gao family. See *Dali guo fo dizi yishi buxie Yuan Douguang jingzao Foding zunsheng baochuang ji*; Howard, 'The Dhāraṇī Pillar of Kunming, Yunnan', 36. For further discussion of the scholar-monk or monk-scholar role, see Hou, *Yunnan yu Ba Shu Fojiao yanjiu lungao*, 13–14.

[47] See note 29 above.

that Gao Jinxian Gui would have known. Most significantly, Gao Jinxian Gui's own name, Jinxian, or 'Golden Immortal', probably refers to the Buddha in this context.[48]

Indirectly, by identifying Gao Jinxian Gui's family members, the inscription reveals that she was surrounded by Buddhist devotion. The Buddhist terms in her relatives' names—especially Miaoyin and Dari—illustrate their commitment to Buddhism. Her father's 1198 contribution to the construction of a Buddhist temple and her maternal grandfather's sponsorship of the *Painting of Buddhist Images* indicates that she would have grown up surrounded by Buddhist art, texts, and practices. As the daughter of two powerful, elite families, Gao Jinxian Gui may have even sponsored her own Buddhist projects, as other women did in the Nanzhao and Dali kingdoms, but any direct evidence of this activity has not survived. Finally, though the surviving parts of the inscription do not mention Gao Jinxian Gui's funerary rites, her service was probably carried out by Buddhist monks.

The funerary inscription for Gao Jinxian Gui may initially seem to disclose little about Buddhist women's lives in the Dali kingdom, but reading the text carefully in relation to other sources from this period reveals more. While elite women like Gao Jinxian Gui likely received a classical Chinese education that encouraged them to follow the gendered norms laid out in texts like *Yijing* 易經 [Book of Changes], *Lienü zhuan* 列女傳 [Biographies of Exemplary Women], and *Shijing* 詩經 [Book of Odes], this is not the whole picture. Gao Jinxian Gui was also surrounded by Buddhism, and there is no indication that the Dali elite viewed Buddhism and Confucianism as incompatible. Reading between the lines of her funerary inscription reveals a woman who did not need to choose between being a good Confucian wife and mother on one hand, and a good Buddhist on the other.

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[48] Though the same name carried Daoist connotations for the Tang princess Jinxian, the Gao family's Buddhist devotion and the lack of attested Daoist institutions in the Dali kingdom suggest a Buddhist meaning. See Yao, 'Contested Virtue', 2; Nakamura, *Bukkyō-go daijiten*, 248.

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Abbreviations

JSP *Dali congshu. Jinshi pian* 大理叢書. 金石篇. See Secondary Sources, Yang and Zhang, eds.
SBCK *Sibu congkan* 四部叢刊. See Secondary Sources, Zhang, ed.
T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. See Secondary Sources, Takakusu and Watanabe, eds.

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