

Biographies of Chinese Buddhists in Past and Present

Interdisciplinary Workshop, 14–15 February 2025

Since the time that Buddhist believers and practitioners began travelling and preaching in China, the stories of important proponents of the faith have been recounted and recorded. Bearing this in mind, the varieties of biographical material about Buddhists has been extracted from all sorts of sources and analyzed by many scholars, past and present. Although scholarship has traditionally been limited to the close reading of extant pre-modern historical sources, new research methods—particularly from the field of the Digital Humanities—have allowed us to gain new insights into the past and its people. At the same time, the study of modern and contemporary Buddhist religious life has greatly developed in the last decade, adopting different philological and ethnographic methods to study the modern genesis of a new Buddhism in China's political and social culture. While the sources and methods adopted in the study of pre-modern and modern Buddhism differ in many respects, there is much to be gained from a discussion between scholars of these two subfields of Chinese Buddhist studies.

This workshop will be a roundtable discussion promoting the exchange of research experiences as well as the development of ideas on various aspects of biographical studies. This discussion will be between senior and junior scholars of pre-modern and modern Chinese Buddhism, as well as leading experts in the Digital Humanities. Topics of discussion will range from the connections between hagiographies, (auto-)biographies, and historiographical sources, to the significance of social networks and geographical mapping in the creation of databases and other Digital Humanities tools.

The workshop will consist of an introductory session featuring four keynote speeches, followed by three sessions, each focusing on a specific discussion topic. Participants are asked to contribute to each session with a statement of up to ten minutes, sharing their insights on the topic at hand, which will then be followed by an open discussion.

Convenors:

Leo Maximilian Koenig, Dr. Carsten Krause

Venue:

Hamburg University

Funded by:

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Numata Zentrum
für Buddhismuskunde

Program

Friday, 14 February

Room 123, Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1, East Wing

9:00–9:30	Welcome	Steffen Döll Co-Director, Numata Center for Buddhist Studies, University of Hamburg Leo Maximilian Koenig, Carsten Krause Converners, University of Hamburg
9:30–10:15	Keynote 1	Christian Henriot Aix-Marseille University <i>Between Digital Archives and Algorithms: A Historian's Approach to China's Biographical Data</i>
10:15–10:30	Coffee Break	
10:30–11:15	Keynote 2	Jen-Jou Hung Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts <i>Historical Background and Future Potential: The Contribution of the Buddhist Authority Database to Buddhist Studies</i>
11:15–11:30	Coffee Break	

Program

Friday, 14 February

Room 123, Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1, East Wing

11:30–12:15 Keynote 3

Daniela Campo (online)

University of Strassbourg

Formats and Genres of Autobiographical Expression in the Chan Buddhist Tradition

12:15–13:45 Lunch Break

13:45–14:30 Keynote 4

Carsten Krause, Leo Maximilian Koenig, Leon Woltermann

University of Hamburg

The Potential of Community-based Collaborative Encyclopedias in Biographical Research on Contemporary Chinese Buddhism

14:30–14:45 Coffee Break

14:45–16:45 Session 1

Sources for Biographical Information Across Time

Which Sources Provide What Kind of Information and What Do They Reveal?

16:45–17:00 Closing Remarks

Program

Saturday, 15 February

Room 123, Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1, East Wing

9:30–12:00 Session 2

Biographies, Social Networks, and the Use of Digital Humanities

How Do Research Questions, Methods, and Opportunities Differ in Research on Past and Present?

12:00–14:00 *Lunch Break*

14:00–16:00 Session 3

Relations Between Biographical Material and Historiographical Frameworks

How Is Biographical Material Used to Write History in Past and Present in Tradition and Modern Research?

16:00–17:00 Final Discussion

Key Takeaways and Perspectives with

Marcus Bingenheimer (online)
Temple University

John Kieschnick (online)
Stanford University

Keynote Abstracts

Between Digital Archives and Algorithms: A Historian's Approach to China's Biographical Data

Christian Henriot (Aix-Marseille University)

This presentation examines the intersection of digital archives and computational methodologies in the identification, retrieval, and curation of biographical data, with a focus on advancing the historian's study of elites in modern China. Using the *Shenbao* corpus and the Modern China Biographical Database as case studies, it highlights the challenges and opportunities introduced by digital tools and algorithms in historical research. The talk explores how data-driven approaches, employing advanced computational techniques such as named entity recognition, topic modeling, and network analysis, can extract, standardize, and visualize data with precision. These methods enable a detailed reconstruction of individuals, organizations, and events, offering fresh insights into the networks and social hierarchies that defined modern Chinese society. By integrating textual resources with biographical databases, the presentation demonstrates how digital methodologies harness the power of algorithms to enhance both the depth and scope of biographical research, illustrating their transformative potential in historical scholarship.

Historical Background and Future Potential: The Contribution of the Buddhist Authority Database to Buddhist Studies

Jen-Jou Hung (Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts)

Buddhism was introduced to China in the 2nd century and, through its integration with local cultural and philosophical ideas, gradually gained acceptance across different social classes. Over time, it became one of the most important religions in China's 2,000-year history. Throughout its development, many Buddhist figures played important roles in translating scriptures, spreading teachings, and promoting Buddhism at the grassroots level. These figures significantly influenced the spread and development of Buddhism. Therefore, understanding Buddhist figures has become an essential part of studying Buddhist philosophy and culture. However, the long history of Buddhism in China involves a large number of key figures. Their information is often scattered, and issues such as name duplication and limited records make research difficult.

To solve these problems, the Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts launched the Buddhist Authority Database project. The goal of this project is to collect biographical information on Buddhist figures and build a well-structured database. Each figure in the database is

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Keynote Abstracts

assigned a unique identifier, which allows for accurate searches and integration with other systems. The database also offers multiple methods for accessing its data, including TEI-compliant XML export files and an easy-to-use Web API. Additionally, the project uses Linked Open Data (LOD) technology to create the "DILA Linked Open Data Platform," which offers RDF-format datasets, SPARQL query interfaces, and a clear ontology model to support data sharing and further applications.

In today's era of rapid advancements in artificial intelligence, the Buddhist Authority Database holds significant potential. By combining the database with AI technologies, researchers can improve the analysis and understanding of Buddhist texts. This includes creating chronological timelines of figures and conducting more effective searches within classical texts. Such developments not only promote the digitization and modernization of Buddhist studies but also provide new possibilities for using AI in cultural and historical research.

This presentation will discuss the contributions of the Buddhist Authority Database to academic research, explain its technical features, and explore its future potential as a key tool for preserving and advancing Buddhist cultural heritage.

Formats and Genres of Autobiographical Expression in the Chan Buddhist Tradition

Daniela Campo (University of Strassbourg)

This presentation will highlight the special connection existing between autobiographical writing and the Chan school of Buddhism, and more specifically between autobiographical expression and Chan instructions for meditation, from the Song dynasty up to present times. I will introduce long-established formats and new genres of Chan autobiographical expression, including, in the twentieth century, religious instructions styled *kaishi* 開示. I will also formulate hypothesis to explain the close relationship between Chan and autobiography in Chinese Buddhism.

Keynote Abstracts

The Potential of Community-based Collaborative Encyclopedias in Biographical Research on Contemporary Chinese Buddhism

Carsten Krause, Leo Maximilian Koenig, Leon Woltermann
(University of Hamburg)

Biographical recording in Chinese Buddhism has a century-long tradition. While continuing to be upheld today, it has been shaped by the recording methods of the digital age. Community-based collaborative encyclopedias have emerged as important sources for the life stories of Buddhists, both past and present, with particular relevance for research on contemporary Buddhism.

In our keynote, we aim to present the benefits and challenges of using Chinese Wikipedia and Baidu Baike for biographical research and social network analysis. What are the characteristics of these sources and to what extent can they serve as primary or secondary biographical sources in the field of Buddhist studies? How can methods of digital humanities serve as creative tools for their exploration and analysis on a larger scale? In an attempt to answer these questions, we will present and discuss case studies, ultimately exploring the possibility of creating a person database of contemporary Chinese Buddhist Elites.

Keynote Speakers

Christian Henriot

Aix-Marseille University

Christian Henriot is a historian of modern China. His research interests focus on social history, especially urban history (Shanghai) and the history of elites in China. Over the last two decades, he has also created a number of digital platforms for historical research to lay the foundations of digital Chinese studies, among them the “Modern China Biographical Database,” that is based on a variety of biographical sources.

Jen-Jou Hung

Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts

Jen-Jou (aka “Joey”) Hung 洪振洲 is an expert in digital tools for the study of Chinese Buddhism, focusing on digital archives and text processing. For nearly two decades, he has been closely associated with the Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts (DILA), engaging in various projects such as the Buddhist Studies Authority Database Project. A key component of this project is the Person Authority Database, which compiles biographical information on individuals mentioned in historical Buddhist sources.

Daniela Campo

University of Strassbourg

Daniela Campo is a sinologist and historian focusing on the evolution of institutions and practices of Chinese Buddhism, and of the Chan school in particular, in the twentieth century. She has worked extensively on religious biographies and autobiographies, and the relationship between hagiographical writing and the formation of religious leadership. Her current work focuses on the transmission of religious knowledge from the Republican period to post-Mao China through the case study of Dajinshan Chan female Monastery in Jiangxi, and on the emergence of the new genre of religious instructions styled *kaishi* 開示.

Participants

Michael Kinadeter

Hamburg University

He is currently part of a research project that centers on genealogical diagrams of Zen Buddhist lineages, utilizing extensive data on monks and nuns in Japan from the past to the present. Furthermore, in his dissertation he laid the basis for a prosopographic study of medieval Sanron monks, tracing the lineages of transmission of Sanron monks and their close affiliation with Shingon.

Leo Maximilian Koenig

Hamburg University

His current research focuses on the revival of Sanskrit studies and the associated interactions between Buddhist figures in Republican China. He is also co-architect, together with Carsten Krause and Leon Woltermann, of the database project on Buddhist elites in contemporary China.

Carsten Krause

Hamburg University

His earlier research focused on the emergence of Buddhist schools in medieval China, including the analysis of hagiographic material on a large scale. In the context of his more recent research on contemporary Chinese Buddhism, he compared biographical self-representations and initiated a database project on Buddhist elites.

Nelson Landry

Hamburg University

His past research examined Daoxuan 道宣 (596-667), the Vinaya master and compiler of monastic hagiographies. His focus was on miracle tale collections such as the *Ji Shenzhou Sanbao Gantong Lu* 集神州三寶感通錄 which contains a great deal of biographical and historiographical material.

Mariia Lepneva

Ghent University

Her latest studies examined Buddhist renewal movements during the Ming and Qing dynasties, along with the analysis of associated social networks, drawing on both her own data and that provided by the databases of Marcus Bingenheimer and the DILA.

Participants

Lin Xueni

Heidelberg University

Her dissertation project at Heidelberg University explores the dynamics between Mahāyāna and non-Mahāyāna traditions through an examination of the **Tattvasiddhi* 成實論 and the Chengshi-shi 成實師. In addition to doctrinal issues, her current research focuses on the biographies of the Chengshi-shi and related networks in Daoxuan's writings.

Peng Tsintsin

University of Göttingen

Her previous research has focused on the historiography of Buddhism in modern China (1902-1965), addressing questions of how Chinese Buddhists and scholars re-evaluated hagiographic data and integrated it into their understanding of Buddhist history.

Amandine Péronnet

Inalco (Paris) and
Aix-Marseille University Marseille

Her current work examines the social networks of elite Buddhist nuns in post-Mao China, particularly those leading Buddhist academies, and uses available biographies to compare their individual trajectories. Building on this research she has organized the lecture series "Mapping Networks of Modern Chinese Buddhism" and the corresponding symposium in Paris in 2025.

Shi Tianyu

Hamburg University

His current research focuses on the circulation of funeral texts and their role in shaping public memory, which involves the interpretation of a vast amount of paratexts and the retrieval of information about infamous literati, leading to new research methods using the CBDB and ChatGPT as tools for studying Neo-Confucianism Philosophers' not-well-known disciples.

Leon Woltermann

Hamburg University

His latest research, drawing on his expertise as a Master of Digital Humanities, examines the representation of Indonesian politicians on Wikipedia. He is also co-architect, together with Carsten Krause and Leo Koenig, of the database project on Buddhist elites in contemporary China.