

Article

The Transnational Experience of a Chinese Buddhist Master in the Asian Buddhist Network

Xing Zhang 

Research Center of Eastern Literature, Department of South Asian Studies, Peking University, Beijing 100871, China; xing.zhang@pku.edu.cn

Abstract: Wuqian (1922–2010) was one of the most important modern Buddhist masters in the modern history of Sino-Indian Buddhist relations. In his early years, he studied all the major schools of the Buddhist tradition, focusing on Yogācāra philosophy, probably due to Xuanzang’s influence and in alignment with contemporary Buddhist trends. Furthermore, he became one of the few masters from the Central Plains who received systematic training in Tibetan Buddhist tantric rituals. He went to India in the middle of the 20th century. He dedicated his life to the revival of Buddhist thought in India, especially promoting Chinese Buddhism in Calcutta by establishing Buddhist institutions, managing Buddhist sites, organizing Buddhist activities, and building the Xuanzang Temple. In his later years, he devoted himself to facilitating mutual Buddhist exchanges and monastic visits between Buddhist organizations in mainland China, Taiwan, and India. In 1998, he presented two Buddhist relics to the Daci’en Temple in Xi’an. At the beginning of the 21st century, he established the Institute of Buddhist Studies at Xuanzang Temple in Calcutta. He organized the translation of many important Buddhist treatises, again reflecting his intention of following the spirit of Xuanzang to contribute to Chinese Buddhism. His transnational journey manifested that there was an active Asian Buddhist network during the Cold War era, despite various difficulties.

Keywords: Wuqian; Buddhist network; Yogācāra; Xuanzang; Sino-Indian interactions; transnational journey



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1. Introduction

Contemporary scholarship on Sino-Indian cultural and religious relations has focused primarily on the pre-modern periods, especially the experiences of Indian Buddhist missionaries in China and the travels of Chinese pilgrims in India in the first millennium CE.¹ However, in the past two decades, there have been new studies on Sino-Indian interactions during the twentieth century. Indeed, although India and China suffered a turbulent century due to colonial expansion as well as constant wars and revolutions, these new studies have demonstrated that connections between them continued to be vibrant and multifaceted. Such exchanges persisted during World War II and took new shape during the 1950s, after India gained independence in 1947 and the People’s Republic of China was established in 1949 (Ghosh 2017).

As Ji Xianlin 季羨林 (1911–2009) pointed out, Buddhism certainly played a critical role in bridging these two unique cultures in Asia during the pre-modern period (Ji 1996).² This Buddhist connection continued during the modern period as can be discerned from the travels of several Chinese monks to South Asia. They travelled for various reasons, including seeking new intellectual insights for reiving Buddhism in China. Some Chinese monks went to Sri Lanka to study so-called “Original Buddhism”. Justin Ritzinger suggests two possible reasons for such interest in South Asia: the re-evaluation of the status of “Hīnayāna” texts in light of Orientalist scholarship and the perceived crisis in Chinese monasticism (Ritzinger 2016, p. 151). Some of these figures have attracted more attention

from scholars than others, who have remained obscure. For example, Taixu 太虛 (1890–1947), one of the most important Buddhist masters and monastic reformers in Chinese history, left numerous materials for scholars to explore (Pittman 2001). In contrast, Wuqian 悟謙 (1922–2010), a monk who was a leading representative of the Chinese Buddhist community in India in the second half of the twentieth century, is less well known to scholars, though he was well respected and well known to numerous Buddhist monastics and laypeople across Asia. A detailed account of Wuqian’s life, journey, and work in India will not only help us better understand the multifaceted nature of Sino-Indian interactions in the mid-twentieth century but also add to our knowledge about transregional Buddhism in modern Asia. Did he travel to India to look for “Original Buddhism” in order to revive Chinese Buddhism and Buddhist monasticism in China? How did his Buddhist intellectual background contribute to his intention to visit India? How was his journey different from those of his contemporaries who went to India? Why does he deserve to be studied? These are some of the questions this paper will try to address.

Wuqian has appeared only in a limited publications on Buddhist connection in modern Asia. For example, my previous paper on the Buddhist practices and institutions of the Chinese community in Calcutta (now Kolkata) documented his activities in helping establish two Chinese temples in the city (Zhang 2014, pp. 429–57). Li Yuzhen (Yu-Chen Li) 李玉珍 briefly noted that Wuqian was involved in an international full ordination ceremony in 1998 (Li 2013, pp. 168–98). Others have mistakenly mentioned him as a Buddhist missionary from Foguangshan 佛光山 monastic institution in Taiwan (Geary 2017, p. 205; 2007, p. 192).

Wuqian was a unique Chinese monk who lived in India for nearly half a century, attempting to revive Buddhism and maintaining active contacts with the Chinese Buddhist community in Calcutta. There are, it should be noted, difficulties in studying him. Unlike Taixu and other leading Buddhist masters of the time, he was not a prolific writer and did not leave many writings. This lack of sources makes it difficult to study his Buddhist philosophy and teachings from the perspective of intellectual history. Many of his contemporary peer monks in China and India mentioned him, often briefly. His long stay in India may have hindered him from communicating with other Buddhist monks in mainland China. After his passing in 2010, new material, such as letters, memoirs, travelogues, and short commemorative essays³, have been discovered, enabling us to gain better insights into Wuqian and his activities. Wuqian, as illustrated in this paper, was a Buddhist organizer, manager, and practitioner, spending most of his time organizing activities and managing the monastic community, activities that should be considered important for writing a socio-cultural history of transregional Buddhism in the modern period. By focusing on this obscure and understudied monk, this paper contributes to issues related to modern Sino-Indian cultural and religious interactions within a framework of the Asian Buddhist network in the 20th century.

2. Master Wuqian’s Early Monastic Education and Training

Wuqian spent more time in India than in China. Since he passed away in Hong Kong on 8 December 2010, his followers in Hong Kong issued a short obituary that briefly included an account of his life. However, some of his followers published reminiscences of him in both printed materials and on websites of Buddhist organizations, such as the Buddhist magazine *Buddhist in Hong Kong (Monthly)* (Xianggang fojiao yuekan 香港佛教月刊)⁴ and the website of the Hong Kong Vajrayana Association (Xianggang jingangcheng xuehui 香港金剛乘學會).⁵ Many personal communications between Wuqian and his friends also gradually surfaced. Thanks to these new sources, we can now draw a portrait of Wuqian.

Wuqian was among the few Chinese masters trained in Chinese and Tibetan Buddhist traditions. His Buddhist life could be divided into three periods: in 1937–1947, he mainly lived in the Sinitic Buddhist tradition centered on several temples in Shaanxi; in 1947–1958, he traveled to Sichuan, Qinghai, and Tibet to seek a teacher and learn about Tibetan Buddhism; in 1958–2010, he was active in India but stayed connected with Buddhists in

the greater China region. While in Shaanxi, he was exposed to many Buddhist traditions, including Chan, Consciousness-Only thoughts, and Tantrism, which laid the foundation for his future experience in Tibet and India. He models Xuanzang in many ways, such as seeking a new adventure in his middle age in India and focusing on Buddhist translations in his later years. The following discussion in this section attempts to reveal his karmic affinity for Buddhist learning for his future career in India.

Wuqian was born on 24 July 24 1922, in the historic town of Xianyang in the Shaanxi province of China. His original surname was Kong. His family was struggling with poverty when he was born. At fifteen, he went to Chongren Temple (Chongren si 崇仁寺) to become a novice monk, studying with Master Chunde 純德/淳德 (active in the 1930s), who offered him some preliminary teachings of Buddhism. When he reached seventeen, he moved to Daxingshan Temple (Daxingshan si 大興善寺) and received full ordination there from Master Xindao 心道 (1905–1968) in 1939. Chunde first ushered Wuqian into Buddhism, but Xindao seemed to be the person who opened a new Buddhist world for him. Xindao was not an ordinary master but belonged to the new generation of Buddhist masters who received a modern Buddhist education. In Xindao's youth in the 1920s, he travelled to many temples to study numerous Buddhist teachings from the traditional monastic perspective. For example, he made pilgrimage trips to Mount Lu and Mount Jiuhua, studied Chan Buddhism at Jinshan Temple (Jinshan si 金山寺) in Zhenjiang, and studied precepts at Tianning Temple (Tianning si 天寧寺) in Changzhou. He also studied doctrines with Xingci 興慈 (1881–1950) at Fazang Temple (Fazang si 法藏寺) in Shanghai and studied Tiantai 天台 tradition at Guanzong Temple (Guanzong si 觀宗寺) in Ningbo. Eventually, he ended up at Minnan Buddhist College (Minnan foxueyuan 閩南佛學院) for modern monastic education. After having served as a faculty member at Minnan Buddhist College, he lectured on Pure Land Buddhism at Wuchang Buddhist College (Wuchang foxueyuan 武昌佛學院). In 1934, Xindao went to Qinghai to study Tibetan Tantrism. He received the Kālacakra-*abhiṣeka* 時輪金剛大灌頂 from the ninth Panchen Lama 九世班禪 (Thubten Choekyi Nyima 1883–1937) at Kumbum (Ta'er 塔爾) Temple in Xining and a title of Pandita from Tibetan Buddhist master Dngul chu 恩久活佛. Thereafter, he stayed in the north-western regions to study and preach Buddhism for two years. In 1937, he was invited by Master Taixu to lecture at Wanshou Temple (Wanshou si 萬壽寺) in Nanjing for the Chinese Buddhist Association. The next year, he was invited by Kang Jiyao 康寄遙 (1880–1968) to lecture on the *Diamond Sutra* in Shaanxi.⁶ Both monastic and lay Buddhists supported him in heading Daxingshan Temple. As Wuqian's first official master, Xindao's rich experience of learning and lecturing on both Chinese and Tibetan Buddhist traditions significantly impacted Wuqian's career path. Under his tutelage, Wuqian must have become interested in both traditions. Xindao might also have made Taixu's modern Buddhist reform known to Wuqian.

Besides Xindao, three other notable Buddhist monks also taught and trained the newly ordained monk Wuqian: Hanjing 含靜 (active in the 1930–1940s) taught him Chan Buddhism, Miaokuo 妙闊 (1878–1960) taught him the Consciousness-Only tradition, and Nenghai 能海 (1886–1967) taught him precepts and Tantrism. Miaokuo and Nenghai were even more instrumental in Wuqian's spiritual and monastic journey in the future. Hanjing was an abbot of Damaopeng Temple (Damaopeng si 大茅篷寺) in Mount Zhongnan. As a master of teaching meditation, Hanjing kept a low profile, leading a very private life in obscurity. However, it seems that other disciples of Xindao and Miaokuo also studied with Hanjing. Besides Wuqian, Xindao and Miaokuo also ordained Honglin 宏林 (Zhigao 智高, 1918–2005) in 1941. After his ordination, Honglin went to Mount Zhongnan to study Chan Buddhism with Hanjing. Unlike Hanjing, Miaokuo and Nenghai led more colorful lives and had greater visibility in the Buddhist community. Like Xindao, Miaokuo was invited to Shaanxi by Li Tongxuan 李桐軒 in 1922 to preach Buddhism. Miaokuo became the abbot of Xingjiao Temple (Xingjiao si 興教寺) under the support of Kang Jiyao and other leading laypeople. Xingjiao Temple was a memorial site for the legendary pilgrim and translator Xuanzang and his leading disciples. Xuanzang's relics were housed and honored at this

temple. Miaokuo was expected to expound Xuanzang's legacy in Chinese Yogācāra Buddhist philosophy.

Originally from the Mount Wutai region, Shanxi, Miaokuo began his monastic career in Shanxi but later became interested in Consciousness-Only Buddhism while studying at Zifu Temple (Zifu si 資福寺) in Mount Hongluo near Beijing. However, this place had a long tradition of practicing the Pure Land tradition. After 1906, he traveled to South China and studied at various traditional Buddhist temples in Nanjing, Shanghai, Hangzhou, and Wuhan and Huayan University, a modern Buddhist college based in Shanghai.⁷ In 1921, he met Taixu in Wuhan. In 1922, Li Tongxuan, at the request of the Buddhist community in Shaanxi, invited Taixu to teach Buddhism there. Taixu recommended that Miaokuo go to Shaanxi in his stead. Miaokuo answered the call and moved to Shaanxi to lecture on the *Treatise on the Awakening of Faith according to the Mahāyāna* (*Dacheng qixing lun* 大乘起信論) for the Shaanxi Buddhist Association. His lecture impressed the association, which led the leaders to convince him to stay to head Xingjiao Temple. He then moved to this temple and lectured on the Consciousness-Only tradition, with a focus on the *Twenty Verses of Consciousness Only* (*Vimśatikāvijñaptimātrāsiddhi* 唯識二十論) and *Thirty Verses on Consciousness Only* (*Trimśikā-vijñaptimātrātā* 唯識三十論). With these lectures, Miaokuo played a crucial role in reviving Xuanzang's legacy in this commemorative temple (Miaokuo [1931] 2006, pp. 178–79; Scott 2020, p. 232). In 1928, Miaokuo led a delegation of this temple to Nanjing to participate in the meeting to establish the Chinese Buddhist Association organized by Taixu. In 1931, Master Taixu eventually visited Shaanxi for a lecture tour focusing on Consciousness-Only teaching (Pittman 2001). In the following years, this tradition was revived and flourished again in Shaanxi. In 1941, Taixu helped Miaokuo organize the World Buddhist College at Daxingshan Temple and established a Pali Tripitika division.

Wuqian developed as a newly ordained Buddhist monk in this institutional context. He must have studied with Miaokuo on the Consciousness-Only tradition and also learned about Taixu's teachings. In the meantime, he must also have been aware of the World Buddhist College and its division of studying Pali texts. It would have been natural for Wuqian to think about making a pilgrimage trip to India after learning about Xuanzang and his legacy of the Consciousness-Only tradition from Miaokuo during this period.

Wuqian's other master Nenghai was influential in introducing him to Tantric Buddhism. Nenghai was a native of Sichuan and began his career as a low-ranking military officer in the Qing troops. In 1909, at Yunnan Military College (Yunnan lujun jiangwu tang 雲南陸軍講武堂), he even taught Zhu De 朱德, who later became the commander of the People's Liberation Army and a Marshal (Tan 2008). While struggling with the chaotic situation in Sichuan in the early Republican era, Nenghai turned to Buddhism for help in 1914 when he accidentally listened to Master Foyuan's 佛源 (1923–2009) dharma talk at Sanyi Temple (Sanyi miao 三義廟) in Chengdu. In 1915, he went to Japan for a business trip and came into contact with Japanese Buddhism. After he came back, he devoted himself to Buddhist learning, especially studying the Consciousness-Only tradition with Zhang Kecheng 張克誠 (1865–1922) at Peking University, which reflected the popularity of the Consciousness-Only tradition among intellectuals at that time.⁸ Then in 1924, having deliberated for many years, he eventually received ordination from Master Guanyi 貫一 (1875–1954) and became a monk at Mañjuśrī Temple (Wenshu yuan 文殊院) in Chengdu. At Baoguang Temple (Baoguang si 寶光寺), he studied precepts and Chan traditions. Thus, it was clear that Nenghai also studied the Consciousness-Only tradition and other popular teachings, and thus must have shared some similar interests with Wuqian. While living in Western Sichuan bordering the Tibetan region, Nenghai immediately realized the importance of Tibetan Buddhism. He went to Kangding to study the Tibetan language with a local lama. On 20 June 1928, Nenghai started his journey along with three monks to Lhasa, and they arrived on September 27. He received Tibetan Buddhist teachings from Master Khang-gsar 康薩 (1888–1941) Rinpoche at Drepung Monastery 哲蚌寺 in Lhasa for nearly ten years.⁹ In 1936, Nenghai left Tibet and traveled to Nepal and India before returning to

China. In 1937, he reached Mañjuśrī Temple and established a ritual platform for teaching Tantric Buddhism (Qingding 1997). As the first ritual platform for teaching Tibetan Tantric Buddhism in Chengdu, it attracted numerous Buddhists from the Central Plains. Wuqian was one of the Buddhists who wanted to study with Nenghai.

In the early 1940s, Wuqian went to Chengdu and studied Tantric Buddhism with Nenghai. Nenghai's teacher, Master Khang-gsar Rinpoche, was a well-respected monk in the Gelugpa 格魯 sect of Tibetan Buddhism. When he was only seven, he entered Drepung Monastery to study five Tibetan Buddhism treatises. He received his ordination from the 13th Dalai Lama (1876–1933). In 1904, he received his Geshe degree at Drepung Temple, and later he was regarded as the 27th generation of Je Tsongkhapa 宗喀巴 (1357–1419). As his student, Nenghai was a direct dharma descendant of the Gelugpa sect based on the lineage of Je Tsongkhapa at Drepung Monastery (Qiu 2016; Tan 2008). In his biographical essay on his master Khang-gsar Rinpoche, Nenghai clearly stated that Je Tsongkhapa was the reincarnation of Mañjuśrī. Given this transmission, it should not be surprising that Wuqian eventually also studied at Drepung Monastery (Nenghai 1994). As Esther Bianchi noted, Nenghai advocated the simultaneous practice of Vinaya and tantra from the perspective of exoteric and esoteric combined practice following a Gelugpa model (Bianchi 2021, pp. 225–52; Bianchi 2017, pp. 300–18; Bianchi 2009, pp. 295–346; Bianchi 2003), which exactly matched what Wuqian was trained to do in the course of his monastic journey.

After learning Tantric Buddhism for some time with Nenghai, Wuqian planned to follow Nenghai's steps to Lhasa. In 1946, Wuqian traveled to Tibet via Sichuan and Qinghai. Just as Nenghai, he aimed to study at Drepung Monastery. Fortunately, he was accepted by Blo bzang Smon lam (1898–1989) Rinpoche at Drepung Monastery, who was the Jé Khenpo 傑巴堪布 of a monastic college (Dratsang Jé 傑巴扎倉) there. Wuqian focused on Tibetan Buddhist logic and the *Ornament of Realization*[s] (Abhisamayālaṅkāra 現觀莊嚴論). He stayed in Lhasa for nine years, similar to the length of time of his master Nenghai at Drepung Monastery. Later in 1958, he left for India and arrived in Kalimpong.

3. Promoting and Practicing Buddhism in India

Wuqian's journey to India began in Kalimpong. He arrived in this region with his Chinese friend Liu Ruizhi 劉銳之 (1914–1997). Liu was a layperson sponsored by Li Shihua 李世華 and influenced by Buddhist Yogi C. M. Chen (Chen Jianmin 陳健民, 1906–1987).¹⁰ When Liu first decided to travel to India, he could not begin his trip without Wuqian. Chen suggested that Wuqian serve as Liu's interpreter because Liu's Tibetan language was insufficient. Liu studied with Kyabje Dudjom 敦珠 Rinpoche (Dudjom Jikdral Yeshe Dorje, 1904–1987) in Kalimpong, and Wuqian served to facilitate communication between Dudjom and Liu. When Wuqian had just arrived in Kalimpong and was translating for Dudjom, Dudjom was focusing on teaching *Bdad-'joms 'Jigs-bral-ye-ses-rdo-rje* 大幻化網導引法. This text was translated into English as *A Torch Lighting the Way to Freedom: Complete Instructions on the Preliminary Practices of the Profound and Secret Heart Essence of the Dakini* in 2011. In the beginning, Wuqian could only understand half of Dudjom's teachings. One month later, he could understand more than 90 percent of Dudjom's teachings. Liu later translated this teaching into Chinese, based mainly on Wuqian's translation. Liu also received the Narak Dong-truk Tantra and the title of Lama Sonam Chokyi Gyaltsan from his master. Later, Liu returned to Hong Kong and promoted Vajrayana teachings.¹¹

On 18 April 1959, along with three British Buddhists and Liu, Wuqian received the bestowing of the Tibetan *Consecration Ritual of the Vajrasatva with a Hundred peaceful and wrathful deities* 金剛薩埵寂忿百尊灌頂 from Dudjom Rinpoche, which was the first time this ritual was performed for non-Tibetan Buddhists. These three British Buddhists included monk Sangharakshita (Dennis Philip Edward Lingwood; 1925–2018) and two laypeople, John Driver and John Blofeld. In his memoir, Sangharakshita often mentioned Wuqian as his friend studying in Kalimpong (Sangharakshita 1997; Viehbeck 2017). Sangharakshita was a close associate of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956), who converted hundreds of thousands of Dalits to Buddhism and contributed considerably to the revival of Buddhism

in India (Sangharakshita 2007). John Blofeld was a little bit different. He was interested in various aspects of Eastern culture, not limited to Buddhism. He claimed to convert to Buddhism, but his contributions went far beyond translating Buddhist texts; he also translated many texts of Chinese Daoism into English (Blofeld 1988, 2002).

Only in the past two decades have scholars begun to study Sino-Indian Buddhist exchanges in the second half of the twentieth century. Although in the 1950s, with the founding of the People's Republic of China and the independence of the Republic of India, there were frequent political and cultural connections between these two nations, subsequently these connections were disrupted following the Sino-Indian military conflicts over the border dispute in 1962. Some significant Chinese Buddhist figures such as Taixu, Xudan 許丹 (1891–1953), and Wanhui 萬慧 (1889–1959) made visits to India in the 1940s (Wang 2020). Yet, since the 1950s, the Chinese Buddhist community in India, mainly in Calcutta, has suffered political turmoil. A few books and articles have offered some preliminary study on the Buddhist activities of the Chinese diasporic community in India, including those of eminent scholar Tan Yunshan 譚雲山 (1898–1983) and Master Fafang 法舫 (1904–1951), as well as the monastic members of the Chinese Indian communities in Calcutta (Zhang 2014).

Wuqian, in contrast to Xuanzang, was not a prolific translator or writer of Buddhist texts. But he was a devoted administrator, supporter, and practitioner of Buddhism. While Wuqian was indeed trained in many Buddhist traditions in central China, Tibet, and India, when he found himself in India, the political and religious environment was complicated¹² and might not have allowed him to devote himself to writing commentaries and works, even though he attempted to model himself on Xuanzang. Instead, he devoted himself to maintaining Buddhist teachings and stabilizing the local Chinese Buddhist community. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Chinese Buddhist community remained a marginal minority group, politically, religiously, and culturally powerless. In Calcutta, particularly, the Chinese Buddhist community had to face challenges from both the Hindu and Islamic communities. The first challenge was the need for more institutional establishments. After all, the monks and nuns needed their institutional foundation for spiritual cultivation and ritual performance, and the laypeople needed a monastic community to practice as lay Buddhists. Therefore, Wuqian spent most of his time planning and founding temples for the diasporic Chinese Buddhists, which was very important for preserving the identity of the Chinese Buddhist community.

As one of the Buddhist leaders who stayed in India for the longest time, more than half a century, Master Wuqian played a vital role and made tremendous contributions to Buddhist interactions across India, bridging India and China and connecting with Taiwan and Hong Kong. He has been ignored by mainstream scholarship on modern Buddhism and China–India studies. By concentrating on Wuqian's actions in India, on his contributions to reconstructing the Chinese monastic community in Calcutta and revitalizing Chinese Buddhism in India and beyond, this section will restore a lost chapter of Sino-Indian Buddhist links in the second half of the twentieth century.

Even before the People's Republic of China and the Republic of India established formal diplomatic relations in 1950, there were already thousands of Chinese settlers in Calcutta and other towns and cities of India. These Chinese migrants, who first arrived in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, brought to India a diverse set of local religious traditions, including the veneration of the female Bodhisattva Guanyin 觀音 and other local deities associated with Chinese Buddhism (Zhang 2015, pp. 181–82). These deities were usually housed within the *Huiguan* 會館 (Native-Place Association) buildings, where migrants from specific regions of China congregated. Buddhist temples specifically for the Chinese communities were set up in Sarnath in 1921, at the Chinese Buddhist Temple (Zhonghua fosi 中華佛寺), in Bodhgaya in 1923, at the Mahabodhi Chinese Temple (Zhonghua dajue si 中華大覺寺), in Balrampur in 1923, at the Temple of Chinese Light (Huaguang si 華光寺), in Gorakhpur in 1927, at the Twin Grove Temple (Shuanglin si 雙林寺), and at Nalanda in 1931, at the China Temple (Zhongguo miao 中國廟). Additionally, the Buddhist Association of the Chinese in India (Yindu Huaren fojiaohui

印度華人佛教會) was established in Ajmer in 1932 (Zhang 2008, pp. 50–53; Zhang 2014, p. 433).

When he arrived in India, Master Wuqian became active in several of these organizations, significantly impacting the Indian Chinese communities. He maintained strong ties with Buddhist institutions and groups in the greater China region. Master Wuqian, who lived in India for several decades, should be regarded as a critical figure in the Buddhist linkages within and outside India during the second half of the twentieth century. Wuqian arrived in India when the Sino-Indian cultural exchanges peaked. After the Chinese premier Zhou Enlai visited India in 1956, the Chinese government also donated money to build the Xuanzang Memorial Hall at Nalanda. Tan Yunshan, the director of Cheena Bhavana in Santiniketan, had proposed to the Indian government that the Xuanzang Memorial Hall at Nalanda could be utilized as a Chinese Buddhist Research Institute “with a specific task of study of and research in Chinese Buddhism, its background, introduction, development and spreading” (NAI 1957). Tan, himself a lay Buddhist, had been interested in developing the study of Chinese Buddhism in India. In the 1930s and 1940s, he brought Chinese Buddhist monks such as Fafang and Wang Pachow 巴宙 (1918–2017) to Santiniketan. It should be mentioned that both Fafang and Pachow noted the importance of early Buddhism or original Buddhism in resolving the crisis of modern Chinese Buddhism, as they engaged in studying early Buddhism. Pachow completed his Ph.D. thesis on the comparative study of Pratimokṣa precepts, and Fafang noted that the four Āgamas are the core of original Buddhism and the foundation of the Greater as well as the Lesser Vehicles.¹³ Their approaches are very different from Wuqian’s vision, which focused on Mahāyāna Buddhist teachings. Tan was also deeply involved with the monk Taixu’s visit to India in 1940. After retirement, Tan settled in Bodhgaya, where he wanted to establish a Buddhist studies center at the Mahabodhi Chinese Temple.

While Tan Yunshan seems to have been more interested in the academic study of Chinese Buddhism, Master Wuqian engaged with the practice of Buddhism and promulgated it among the Chinese migrants in India. Initially, he was involved in the Buddhist activities of the Chinese migrants in Calcutta. Then, in the 1960s, Wuqian served as the abbot of the Twin Grove Temple in Gorakhpur and the Chinese Temple in Sarnath. In 1966, Wuqian established the Buddhist Sangha Council and functioned as its president. He also attended a meeting of the Chinese Buddhist Society as a representative of the Chinese Buddhist monks residing in India (Zhang 2014, pp. 225–53).

In 1967, when he was the abbot at Sarnath, Master Wuqian started planning for the Xuanzang Temple in Calcutta. Since all the Chinese Buddhist temples in India were built by lay Chinese immigrants, Master Wuqian thought Chinese monks should also have their own monastery. He soon purchased 70,000 sq. ft of land about 5 km from Tangra, one of the areas where the Chinese, especially the Hakka community, had settled in Calcutta. Due to insufficient funds, the construction progressed slowly. In 1971, while supervising the construction work, Master Wuqian was robbed at gunpoint and lost all the money and his ribs were broken. Despite all the difficulties, his faith in building the temple remained unaffected. The main building of the temple was finally completed towards the end of the 1970s (Zhang 2014). Master Dongchu 東初 (1908–1977) from Taiwan, who visited India in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, met with Master Wuqian and wrote a detailed account of Buddhist interactions between China and India called *ZhongYin fojiao jiaotong shi* (History of Buddhist Exchanges between China and India). He noted that Xuanzang Temple was built to commemorate the monk Xuanzang as the leading contributor to China–India cultural exchange, as well as in the hope of promoting friendship between China and India in the future (Dongchu 1972, p. 522).

Wuqian established the above-mentioned temple in honor of the great pilgrim Xuanzang and named this temple after Xuanzang. As the preface written by Wuqian’s friend dedicated to the founding of this temple indicates, at that time the political turbulence disturbed the Chinese Buddhist community in India, leading many to believe that they were living in the age of the final Dharma. The age of the end of the Dharma is thought to come

not only from natural disasters but also from human misfortune. Wuqian aimed to transform this situation by expounding Buddhist teachings. For Wuqian, Buddhism was instrumental in rebuilding morality to save sentient beings from the corrupted and decaying worldly realm. In 1971, during his visit in Calcutta, Master Dongchu gave a speech at Xuanzang Temple, explaining Buddhist developments in Taiwan and describing the journey of the skull relics of Xuanzang from Japan to Taiwan. He also reported that at a celebration attended by over 1000 local Chinese and Indian residents, a plaque with the name of the Xuanzang Temple calligraphy was presented to Master Wuqian by Ye Ganzhong 葉幹中, one of the local Chinese community leaders (Guoche, 1988; Dongchu 1972, pp. 522–23).

This plaque was placed on top of the Chinese-style gate at the entrance to the Xuanzang Temple complex. Nowadays, through this gate is an open space where the main structure of the two-story Xuanzang Temple can be seen. On both floors, prayer halls are dedicated to Śākyamuni Buddha and Guanyin and Maitreya Buddha. The hall on the ground floor is decorated with brightly painted frescoes. Next to the temple is also the Xuanzang Memorial Hall, where a golden statue of Xuanzang, covered in glass, is placed in the center. This hall also doubles as a library, housing a collection of Buddhist scriptures and rare Chinese religious books neatly arranged on shelves. In the courtyard is a statue of the White Guanyin and a small fountain, and a small Chinese cemetery is adjacent to the monastic complex.

Another Buddhist temple was also constructed in Calcutta in the early 1970s. This was the Chinese Buddhist Temple (Zhonghua fosi 中華佛寺), the construction of which was conceived by a local Chinese named Pan Songmei 潘松妹. Pan and twelve other Chinese residents of Calcutta fundraised for the temple and purchased 8640 sq. ft. of land in the city's northern suburbs (the Xuanzang Temple is in south Calcutta). In 1960, when the temple construction started, 170 other Chinese residents joined the project and contributed much-needed funds. The Chinese Buddhist Temple, with a statue of Śākyamuni Buddha, was completed on 5 February 1962. Later, halls dedicated to Guanyin and the Dizang (Ksitigarbha) Buddha were added to the temple. On 12 October 1972, the Chinese Buddhist Temple was formally opened to the public with Buddhist ceremonies conducted by N. Jinaratna, the head of the Mahabodhi Society (Zhang 2014, pp. 225–53).

The two temples mentioned above were built in Calcutta at a time when ties between China and India were at their worst. The 1962 Sino-Indian confrontation led to ongoing hostility between the two nations. The Chinese community in India witnessed various persecutions, including restrictions on movement within India and forced deportation (Zhang 2015). These two temples were built specifically for Chinese Buddhists in the 1960s and 1970s and Master Wuqian continued to spread Chinese Buddhism during this period of political conflict between China and India. It is unclear what role he may have played in the founding and administration of the Chinese Buddhist Temple. It is most likely because of the presence of Dongchu during this time that Master Wuqian established close links with Buddhist monks and institutions in Taiwan (Xiao 2023).

One of the leading causes of Master Wuqian's engagement with the Buddhist community in Taiwan was his Bodhgaya activities. Master Wuqian began managing the Bodhimandala at the Mahabodhi Chinese Temple in Bodhgaya in 1983. He also renovated the Mahavira Hall and the residence for monks at the Chinese temple. When the General Association for Chinese Buddhists in India (Yindu Huaqiao fojiao zonghui 印度華僑佛教總會) was founded in 1985, Wuqian was elected to become the first president. Wuqian declared that all participants automatically became board directors at the first meeting of the founding of this association. In addition, two foreign members were appointed to be the association advisers. Wuqian was also elected to become chair of the executive board. Wuqian organized a lecture on the *Kṣitigarbha Sūtra* (*Dizang jing* 地藏經). He considered that the weather in Calcutta was humid and hot and that there were not enough crops to eat in India, particularly in Calcutta, which led to heat death and famine. Many of the dead were not allowed to rest in peace, leading the locals to seek assistance from the Buddhist mas-

ters. Wuqian thought that talks on this sutra which dealt with assisting the dead would be advantageous to the community.

In 1989, when the famous Taiwanese Buddhist master Sheng Yen 聖嚴 (1931–2009) visited Bodhgaya, he praised Master Wuqian for his Buddhist activities in Calcutta and Bodhgaya. In his travelogue, Master Sheng Yen points out that Master Wuqian had taken over the responsibilities of administering the Mahabodhi Chinese Temple from a Tibetan monk (Sheng Yen 2014, pp. 106–8). This Tibetan monk was most likely Fujin Lama, who in 1967 had presented Master Dongchu with three pieces of relics when the latter, accompanied by Master Wuqian, paid a visit to the temple in Bodhgaya. These relics are preserved at the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Culture in Taipei. After Master Wuqian took charge of the Mahabodhi Chinese Temple, the new hall that he built inside the temple started accommodating 200–300 people. However, since this hall did not have an image of the Buddha, Master Wuqian requested Master Sheng Yen to gift one from Taiwan (Sheng Yen 2014, pp. 106–8). Through this temple, Master Wuqian seems to have played an important role in furthering ordination activities for monks and nuns from different parts of Asia. In 1998, for example, Master Wuqian, in collaboration with the Foguangshan organization in Taiwan, organized a pilgrimage for about 1200 lay Buddhists and 300 monks and nuns to Bodhgaya. Master Wuqian from India, Master Yongxing 永惺 (1926–2016) from Hong Kong, the President of the Hong Kong Buddhist Association, and Master Xingyun 星雲 (1927–2023) from Taiwan, the founding abbot of the Foguangshan order, presided over the activities of these participants. In her study on Taiwanese nuns, Li Yuzhen documented Wuqian's participation in the full ordination ceremony in Bodhgaya. According to Li, she learned from the Foguangshan members about the plan to conduct an international full ordination ceremony in February 1998. She arrived in Calcutta on February 14 with about 40 ordination candidates. They traveled with a large group of lay pilgrims from Foguangshan. Following the Chinese Buddhist tradition, three leading precept masters officiated at this full ordination ceremony: Xingyun as *sīla-upādhyāya* (precept-teacher), Wuqian as *dharma-ācārya* (preceptor of teachings), and Yongxing as the instructing *ācārya* (instructing preceptor). Li pointed out that Xingyun was the leading proponent of this international ordination ceremony for women. Xingyun pointed out that excluding women from being ordained as nuns was wasting half of the Buddhists' potential energy worldwide. Li noted that Wuqian was the abbot of the Xuanzang Temple in Calcutta and the abbot of the Chinese Buddhist Temple in Bodhgaya. Taiwanese nuns regarded him as a remarkable figure and well-respected monk who devoted himself to Buddhist missionary activities in India by overcoming immeasurable difficulties in India. Wuqian's leadership brought two Chinese temples to life with the support of the overseas Chinese community in Calcutta (Li 2013, pp. 172, 194).¹⁴

4. Networking Buddhism and Translating Buddhist Texts in China and India

Master Moru 默如 (1905–1991), a leading Buddhist master from Taiwan, recounted his pilgrimage to India in a memoir, describing his encounter with Wuqian and his significant role in the Chinese Buddhist community in India. As a disciple of Master Taixu, Moru inherited the modern Buddhist legacy from Taixu and subsequently received his early monastic education at Minnan Buddhist College. He later moved to Taipei and spent most of his later life at Fayun Temple (Fayun si 法雲寺) in Taipei. Moru went to India for a pilgrimage trip in 1984. In India, he visited Xuanzang Temple in Calcutta. He recollected that the abbot of Xuanzang Temple, Wuqian, was a preeminent monastic leader with a clear mind and broad vision. He made a detailed plan for Moru and his fellow pilgrims. According to him, Wuqian was devoted to expanding the influence of Xuanzang Temple, often offering dharma talks and bestowing precepts on local Buddhists (Moru 1990).

Master Wuqian's connections were not limited to Buddhist institutions in Taiwan. In the late 1980s, Master Wuqian re-established his links with Buddhist temples and organizations in mainland China. As early as May 1992, Wuqian began hosting visitors from mainland China. He hosted Professor Dong Shuangchang 董雙長 and his wife, who lived

at Mahabodhi Chinese Temple for over a month. Dong was a professor of foreign languages from Hebei Medical College and was sponsored by a government grant to India. On 31 October, he met Zheng Weihong, a professor focused on Buddhist logic. Master Wuqian noted that the young generation should learn Buddhist and non-Buddhist logic. Later, when he was interested in translating Buddhist logic works into Chinese, he also read some works by Chinese scholars. In the meantime, he invited Chinese Buddhist logic scholars to India for scholarly exchanges (Zheng 2019, p. 477). On 12 November, he met calligrapher Liu Ping 劉平 and his wife from Xi'an and hosted them for nearly a month (Lin 2016). Later, on 10 June 1998, Master Wuqian gifted two relics to the Daci'en Temple (Daci'en si 大慈恩寺) in Xi'an. This is the temple where Xuanzang was engaged in translation activity after his return from India in the mid-seventh century. The relics that Master Wuqian gifted were housed in the central arena of the third floor of the Giant Wild Goose Pagoda (Dayan ta 大雁塔) at the temple.¹⁵

The interaction between Master Wuqian and Master Jingtian 淨天 (1925–2004) is also worth mentioning. Master Jingtian was Wuqian's dharma brother back in the Republican era, and he was three years younger than Wuqian. However, he also received his full ordination from Master Xindao, but a little bit later, in 1942. Jingtian later studied the Consciousness-Only tradition with Miaokuo and Tantric Buddhism with Nenghai. Therefore, Jingtian shared the same master–disciple relations with Xindao, Miaokuo, and Nenghai as Wuqian. In 1991, when the Xuanzang Memorial Hall was completed in Calcutta, Wuqian invited the Chinese Buddhist Association to send a delegation to participate in the ceremony. The Chinese Buddhist Association sent a delegation under Master Chuanyin 傳印 (1927–2023) to Xuanzang Temple, and Jingtian was one of the delegation members to visit Xuanzang Temple. Wuqian noted in his letter to Jingtian that this was their first meeting in forty-five years since they had parted in 1946. In the letter, Wuqian recollected that Jingtian and he discussed Buddhist teachings for more than one month until Jingtian was troubled by the hot and humid weather in India and returned to China via Thailand. After that, they did not communicate for more than a decade until 2003, when Master Jiping 濟平 (1930–) from Hong Kong made a pilgrimage to the Buddhist sites in South Asia. Wuqian and Jiping met in Kathmandu, and Jiping told Wuqian that Jingtian had gone into retreat at a temple in Sichuan. On 2 May 2004, Wuqian and Jingtian met again at the newly opened Xifang Temple (Xifang si 西方寺) in Hong Kong. Then they went to Famen Temple (Famen si 法門寺) in Shaanxi together to welcome the Buddha's finger relics to Hong Kong on 23 May. They attended the ceremony to pay homage to the relics and pray for blessings together. They also practiced the ritual of bathing the Buddha's statue in Hong Kong during the Buddha's birthday celebration on 26 May. However, on this day, Jingtian fell ill and collapsed. He passed away the next day. Wuqian then went to pay a final homage to Jingtian at Hongfa Temple (Hongfa si 弘法寺) on 28 May.¹⁶ Jingtian was one of the fellow monks who came from the same Dharma lineage as Wuqian. Their friendship remained for more than half a century.

On 24 November 2010, Wuqian conducted a Buddhist ceremony in Bodhgaya in collaboration with Buddhist organizations from Hong Kong and Guangdong province. He invited Master Rizhao 日照 (1971–), abbot of Lifo Temple (Lifo Chansi 禮佛禪寺) in Guangdong, to perform the Chinese tradition of the Buddhist Rite for Deliverance of Creatures of Water and Land (Handi shuilu fahui 漢地水陸法會), which had not been performed for more than one thousand years. This ritual performance turned out to be very successful, and it attracted many Buddhists in the local community. Unfortunately, less than a month after this ceremony, Master Wuqian passed away in Hong Kong on December 8 at the age of 88. Prior to his death, he invited Rizhao to succeed him as the abbot of the Mahabodhi Chinese Temple. Wuqian's body was taken to Nanhua Temple (Nanhua si 南華寺) in Guangzhou for cremation, which took place on 17 December 2010.¹⁷ Rizhao, the new abbot of Mahabodhi Chinese Temple, oversaw the cremation of Wuqian and the burial rites.

Master Wuqian's many contributions also included the setting up of the Buddhist Studies Institute at the Xuanzang Temple in 2000 and an initiative to translate several Bud-

dhist texts that he launched in 2002. In 2002, Wuqian launched a project of translations to revive Xuanzang's legacy of translating Indian Buddhist texts into the Chinese language. Most translations in this project focused on Buddhist logic. However, soon this project was paused due to financial difficulty. Wuqian visited Hong Kong to seek additional resources to continue this translation project. There he went on to complete the translation of three major works, including the *Hetuvidyā* texts that were first introduced to China from India by Xuanzang.

5. Conclusions

As one of the most important Chinese Buddhist masters of the twentieth century, Wuqian played a vital role in furthering the Asian Buddhist network. Unlike other monks who went to South Asia to seek "Original Buddhism" or "Authentic Buddhism" to revive modern Chinese Buddhism, Wuqian was more interested in the Mahāyāna tradition in Tibet and India. He particularly contributed to rendering Yogācāra Buddhist texts into Chinese and benefited the Chinese Buddhist community. His interest in India came from his early Buddhist training and background as well as the state of Buddhism in his hometown in China. Some of the most eminent figures in Chinese Buddhism, including Miaokuo and Nenghai, nurtured his early intellectual development in Buddhism. Wuqian also learned other Chinese Buddhist traditions, such as Chan, Consciousness-Only, and Tantrism. Although Wuqian was originally ordained in a traditional Buddhist temple in a remote region near his hometown, he received monastic education in both traditional and reformed Buddhism. His teachers had worked with the prominent Chinese Buddhist reformer Taixu, who brought new vision and new monastic education to the Shaanxi region in the Republican era.

Wuqian embraced both Chinese and Tibetan Buddhist traditions. On the one hand, he received training in the most dominant Chan tradition; and on the other hand, while receiving his education at the Daxingshan Temple, he was inspired by Xuanzang's legacy of learning Consciousness-Only teaching. His two masters, Miaokuo and Nenghai, introduced him to the Tantric tradition in Tibetan Buddhism. As a Chinese monk, Wuqian was a pioneer for his generation in studying Tibetan Buddhism directly and seriously in Tibet. The decade he spent at the Drepung Monastery enabled him to understand Tibetan Buddhism, especially the teachings of the Gelugpa sect, comprehensively. His interest in Buddhist logic might have started during this intellectual journey at Drepung. In the meantime, his fellow Chinese Buddhist, Liu Ruizhi, benefited from his interpretation of Tibetan teachings by the Rinpoche. To a great extent, Liu Ruizhi's translation of Tantric rituals was undertaken with assistance from Wuqian. His other fellow Buddhist learners included three British Buddhists who later became influential advocates of Tibetan Buddhism in the West.

Unlike many prolific scholarly Chinese Buddhist monks in his era, Master Wuqian was the only one involved in the practice of Chinese Buddhism in India. For over five decades he was instrumental in administering and setting up important Chinese Buddhist temples in different regions of India. He also organized pilgrimage and ordination activities for Chinese monks, nuns, and lay followers at sacred Buddhist sites in India. The Xuanzang Temple, which he helped found, became a hub of Chinese Buddhism and culture in South Asia. It hosted numerous pilgrims from mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and other Chinese communities across Asia, which constructed the Asian Buddhist network. In this sense, his contribution can be viewed as a continuation of Taixu's legacy of this network in the early twentieth century, binding the Buddhist monastic community, local lay network, and international pilgrims together (Chia 2020, pp. 34–36).

In addition, Wuqian invited Chinese masters to perform many Chinese Buddhist rituals at the Xuanzang Temple in the 1990s, contributing to the sustaining of Chinese Buddhism in India. In other words, during the late half of the twentieth century, his role was not to introduce South Asian Buddhism to East Asia or greater China regions, but to maintain a stronghold of Chinese Buddhism in India. While Sino-Indian foreign relations suf-

ferred in the 1960s and 1970s, the community he served became a hub for the Chinese immigrants in India and the Buddhist pilgrims from mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.

Besides focusing on his administrative and organizing contributions to the Asian Buddhist network, Master Wuqian engaged in a translation initiative to make numerous works on Buddhist logic accessible to a Chinese audience. He also contributed to the material exchange related to Buddhism by presenting two Buddhist relics to the Daci'en Temple in emulation of Xuanzang's legacy within Chinese Yogācāra tradition. Wuqian hosted many Chinese visitors, including pilgrims and scholars, to promote Buddhism and Buddhist scholarship. In sum, recovering his legacy in the history of twentieth-century transregional Buddhism is crucial. However, much more needs to be explored about Master Wuqian and his contributions to the Buddhist linkages between China and India during the second half of the twentieth century. Although some Chinese language materials suggest his intimate relationship with South Asian Buddhist monks and Indian Buddhist institutions, an in-depth study into this facet of Master Wuqian's life still needs to be undertaken. Such an examination would also provide insights into contemporary Buddhism in India, the practice of Buddhism among Chinese residents of India, and Buddhist connections and exchanges between India and China during the twentieth century.

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Notes

- ¹ Many works by Ji Xianlin, Victor H. Mair, Wang Bangwei, and Tansen Sen have focused on various aspects of Sino-Indian Buddhist connections and exchanges, which cannot be listed here exhaustively due to the scope limit.
- ² Ji Xianlin first received his initial training from Chen Yinke (1890–1969) at Tsinghua University in the 1930s and was inspired by Chen to study Indology in Germany. Ji made significant contributions to the Chinese understanding of Indian Buddhism and culture, ranging from early Buddhist literature, including Tocharian manuscripts, Buddhist material culture, such as the cultural history of sugar, and Buddhist history. For his contributions, see *Ji Xianlin wenji* 季羨林文集 (A Collections of Ji Xianlin's Writings) in 24 volumes by Jiangxi Educational Press in 1996.
- ³ As this paper will show, Wuqian's fellow monks, disciples, and friends left many notes on him and his activities in India, Hong Kong, and mainland China.
- ⁴ <https://www.hkbuddhist.org/zh/page.php?p=booklet&cid=7&scid=6&kid=2> all materials of this monthly magazine have been online available (accessed on 3 August 2023).
- ⁵ <http://www.vajrayana.org.hk/> (accessed on 3 August 2023) it offers numerous materials for the history of this organisation and its associated masters.
- ⁶ Kang was a leading lay Buddhist who sponsored the trip of Taixu to Shaanxi and wrote a detailed record of Taixu's journey (Kang 1997; Chen 2000).
- ⁷ This university and its network have recently become the focus of contemporary scholarship (Hammerstrom 2020).
- ⁸ At Peking University, Zhang Kecheng was the first Buddhist to introduce the Consciousness-Only (or Chinese Yogācāra) school of thought. Many Chinese intellectuals developed an interest in Consciousness-only philosophy in the 1910s and 1920s (Makeham 2014).
- ⁹ Khangsar, meaning "new house", is a family of the Begu clan, a branch of the Gyer clan. They are based in the Ganze region of Kham. See <https://treasuryoflives.org/zh/institution/Khangsar> (accessed on 2 March 2023). He was born in the year of rat in the Tibetan calendar, and he received his Geshe degree in 1904; see <https://fofars.com/1034.html> (accessed on 6 March 2023).
- ¹⁰ For their biographies, see (Chen 2002).

- ¹¹ Later, he played a key role in advancing Vajrayana in Hong Kong. He also exchanged Tantric Studies with some preeminent Tibetologists in mainland China including Chen Qingying 陳慶英 (1941–2022) and Wang Yao 王堯 (1928–2015) (Chen 2006, p. 269).
- ¹² Many scholars have written about the Sino-Indian relations in this period; see (Lüthi 2012, pp. 95–119; Ghosh 2017, pp. 697–727; Sen 2017).
- ¹³ Pachow was a Chinese scholar from the Wang family in Wanxian, Sichuan Province. He was educated in India and taught in India, Sri Lanka, and the United States. see (Wang 2010). For Fafang, see Ritzinger 2016, p. 152; Tuttle noted the role of Tibetan Buddhism in modern China (Tuttle 2005).
- ¹⁴ Other notable Buddhist monks from South Asia and other parts of the world were also there. Information about this historical event, which included lectures and the ordination of candidates at the Mahabodhi Chinese Temple, can be found in Li's dissertation, "Crafting Women's Religious Experience in a Patrilineal Society: Taiwanese Buddhist Nuns in Action (1945–1999)," (Li 2000) as well as other articles.
- ¹⁵ See Wuqian's letter to Jingtian on 1 July 2010, reprinted in Liu Yaowu 劉耀武's edited volume dedicated to Jingtian in 2020.
- ¹⁶ Wuqian's obituary of Master Jingtian, 19 June 2004, reprinted in a volume in memory of Jingtian edited by Liu Yaowu in 2020 (Wuqian [2004] 2020).
- ¹⁷ After the passing of Wuqian, his appointed Dharma heir of Mahabodhi Chinese Temple Rizhao wrote an obituary for him, which was published along with a brief introduction of his biography (Rizhao 2011a, 2011b).

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