

# Song-era depictions of women based on epitaph inscriptions

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This study considers the image of women during the Song dynasty using epitaph inscriptions on gravestones as the primary research material. The practice of inscribing epitaphs for women began during the Six Dynasties and became widespread by the time of the Tang dynasty. Many of the epitaphs that exist today are not from the excavated gravestones themselves but from records in written anthologies that have been passed down through generations. Therefore, as the number of surviving anthologies increased after the Song dynasty, the number of surviving inscriptions has also increased.

Epitaphs are currently used as a new historical source to study how women were depicted in the Song dynasty, and they are the primary source material for this paper. Although epitaphs have been used previously, only a portion were used for this paper. The subjects were 1,018 married women selected from the 1,075 women whose epitaphs are recorded in the Song Biographical Index.

The details from the epitaphs concern the women's lives and family circumstances, including family and given names, primary area of residence, father's official occupation, age when married, husband's given name and official post, personality and everyday behavior, and date and location of death and burial; the number and occupations of any children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren at time of death; and the names and occupations of any sons-in-law. The records of daily living circumstances particularly distinguish women's epitaphs from those of men. It is possible that certain details, such as personality and everyday behavior, were enhanced to honor the deceased; despite this, details such as court rank, ages at marriage and death, the family into which she married, and number of children, family occupations, and birthplaces may be treated as reliable. This paper seeks to depict an image of women during the Song dynasty based on these details.