

## **How to Deal with Sex — monks and sexual crimes in the Sung**

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### **Abstract**

In theory Buddhist monks should commit less crime than ordinary people, but in the Sung, by proportion, they committed more. This essay examines why and how Sung monks committed sexual crimes and how the judiciary dealt with them.

Reasons for committing sexual crimes came from both inside and outside the Buddhist community. Internally, ascetic suppression of sexual release (even masturbation) by Buddhist precepts might produce anti-effects, and some adherents of the Tantric and Ch'an Schools maintained that enlightenment could be achieved through sexual intercourse. Externally, both elites and common people ignored and even allowed sexual misconduct by the monks who could provide desired services.

To commit sexual crimes, the monks resorted to (1) their identity as a monk to which the believers were required to defer as well as the favorable preconceptions of a monk that most people held, (2) their positions in the monastery hierarchy and their power as monk-officials, (3) money, (4) mutual need or interests, (5) misusing of Buddhist concepts, (6) plots, and (7) violence. Among their victims and partners are both men and women of a variety of professions, beliefs, and social classes, including scholar-officials, nuns, prostitutes, ordinary women, and elite women. The crimes occurred at all times of day and night in all sorts of places, from city streets, homes, motels, and brothels to temples.

Some judges punished the criminal monks in compliance with the law. Some exceeded the law, for example, by plotting to execute the monk secretly, approval of which appears in the judges' biographies in the dynastic history and is replayed in popular literature. Some judges, however, hesitated to punish monks who had connections with people in high places.

Keywords : Sung monks, Sexual crimes, Judiciary