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A Report on the Symposium

“Buddhist Studies Today”

University of British Columbia, Vancouver

July 7-9, 2015

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Abstract

This report summarizes the proceedings of “Buddhist Studies Today,” a symposium convened at the University of British Columbia and sponsored by the American Council of Learned Societies with support from The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation. It was a three-day symposium to celebrate the first Dissertation Fellows of The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Program in Buddhist Studies and to reflect on their work.

Introduction

The context

On January 1, 1966, a meeting was held at the University of British Columbia to assess the state of the field of Buddhist Studies and to establish an organization to support its scholarship. A report of the meeting by Holmes Welch, titled “Developments in Buddhist Studies,” was published in the May 1996 issue of the now defunct Newsletter (XVII.5, 12-16) of the American Council of Learned Societies. Although the report does not provide a list of those who attended the meeting, the article suggests the presence of many luminaries of the post-war generation of Buddhologists: K.S. Ch’en, Herbert Guenther, Yoshito Hakeda, Leon Hurvitz, Joseph Kitagawa, Arthur Link, Robert Miller, Richard Robinson, Alex Wayman, Holmes Welch, and Philip Yampolsky.

Much of the report is devoted to plans for a “North American Buddhist Studies Group,” something that seems never to have materialized. Still, the report is very much worth reading. We see there, for example, an urgent call for more graduate programs and more scholars of Buddhism to meet the growing demand for scholars to fill positions in Buddhist Studies at the colleges and universities of North America, a state of affairs that one can only dream of today. The report includes a list of the eight most urgent topics of research, among which we find “Buddhism as it is practiced today.” Here, Welch writes (in words that remain worth pondering a half-century later):

With regard to this last topic, it was pointed out that despite the need to understand contemporary Buddhism, there is very little literature that deals with it in a systematic and scholarly fashion. Anyone who has studied Buddhist practice knows that it presents major discrepancies with the texts as we understand them. The discrepancies may, in fact, go so far back that we are misunder-

standing the texts themselves. Besides, the texts do not exhaust the religion. Obviously, the philologist, the philosopher, the student of comparative religion, and the social scientist, each remaining what he (sic) is, must try to understand the others' approach to Buddhism, study the others' discipline, and collaborate in a concrete way so that the results of research may suffer less from the shortcomings that each now finds in the work of the other. (13-14)

The 2015 symposium

Fifty years later, another meeting of scholars of Buddhism was held on the campus of the University of British Columbia, again sponsored by the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), this time with the support of The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation. It was a three-day symposium to celebrate the first Dissertation Fellows of The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Program in Buddhist Studies. Attending the symposium were fourteen of the fifteen 2015 Fellows, as well as five of the six scholars who served on the ACLS Advisory Board for the selection process: James Benn (McMaster University, Canada), Lucia Dolce (School of Oriental and African Studies, University College, London), Guang Xing (University of Hong Kong), Donald Lopez (University of Michigan), and Stephen Teiser (Princeton University). The sixth member, Birgit Kellner (at that time of the University of Heidelberg, Germany) was unable to attend. Joining them were Janet Gyatso (Harvard University), as well as Jessica Main and Jinhua Chen of the University of British Columbia. Also attending were Ted Lipman, CEO of The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation, and Pauline Yu, ACLS President. Accompanying Pauline Yu from the ACLS were Ste-

ven Wheatly, Vice President; Andrzej Tymowski, Director of International Programs; and Elisabeta Pop, Coordinator of International Programs.¹

The symposium began with a public event, consisting of opening remarks by Pauline Yu, Ted Lipman, and by the President of the University of British Columbia, Arvin Gupta, followed by a keynote address delivered by Donald Lopez.

Dr. Gupta praised the central role that the humanities should play and do play at the University of British Columbia, noting that he takes pride in saying this, despite the fact that his own background is in the sciences. He welcomed participants warmly and expressed satisfaction that the University of British Columbia had the honour of hosting the symposium. Ted Lipman followed with a brief statement of The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation's hope that the fellowships and grants managed by ACLS would help establish and expand the academic field of Buddhist Studies. He was delighted at the opportunity to celebrate the accomplishments of the first cohort (2015) of Dissertation Fellows. Pauline Yu recounted the history of the 1966 meeting on Buddhist Studies on the same campus and underscored the significance of bringing together in 2015 not only the leading scholars in the field but also future leading scholars. Dr. Yu welcomed Mr. Robert H. N. Ho to the opening event, thanking him for the vision and leadership that created The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation. She then introduced the keynote speaker, Donald Lopez.²

The two-day Fellows' workshop that followed was organized into six panels and a concluding roundtable. Each panel, moderated by a senior scholar (either from the Advisory Board or from the ACLS), consisted of

¹ See the brochure describing the symposium's program and its participants at <http://www.acls.org/news/07-27-2015/>.

² The opening remarks and the keynote address may be viewed here <http://www.rhfamilyfoundation.org/-/programme/89>.

two or three presentations by the Dissertation Fellows, followed by comments from a senior scholar. The organization of the panels was intentionally random; no effort was made to match the moderator, the panelists, or the commentators by region, research language, historical period, doctrinal expertise, sectarian focus, or scholarly method. In fact, the panels were organized to avoid such pairings. The goal was to produce a wide-ranging discussion and to generate questions that might not have been raised in a more narrowly focused setting. The Fellows' presentations were limited to ten minutes, during which they were asked to respond to two sets of questions:

(1) What were the one or two key problems encountered: practical, intellectual, or in the organization of the dissertation? How was the main problem addressed? Are some aspects still not fully resolved?

(2) How does the project help us understand the condition of Buddhist Studies today? What is its potential contribution to the field?

In the pages that follow, there are reports on each of the fourteen Fellows' presentations. The rapporteurs are in every instance other Fellows, as identified below. Their texts have been only lightly edited for stylistic consistency.

Reports on the Presentations

Catherine Prueitt (Emory University): *The Evolution of the Buddhist Apoha (Exclusion) Theory of Concept Formation through Inter-Traditional Debate in Tenth and Eleventh Century Kashmir*

Report by Aleix Ruiz-Falqués

Catherine Prueitt's dissertation explores a philosophical question that has occupied Buddhists and non-Buddhists in India for centuries: how to account for the real experience of subject and object if this division is ultimately unreal. In other words, how to explain the experience of a world that is both shared, through convention, yet idiosyncratic, because each individual experience is unique. Although this debate has appeared in many forms in South Asia over the centuries, the version that Prueitt investigates is particularly interesting because of its linguistic-cognitive turn, in which language is analyzed to understand the nature of sense experience. Prueitt studies the Buddhist theory of meaning through exclusion (*apoha*), propounded by Dignāga in the fifth century CE and refined by Dharmakīrti in the seventh century, and its influence on Hindu philosophers of Kashmir, especially Abhinavagupta (eleventh century).

According to Prueitt, post-Dharmakīrtian philosophy was fluidly received in tenth- and eleventh-century Kashmiri Śaivism. This school of thought not only accepted many of Dharmakīrti's arguments uncritically but pushed them to their logical consequences, using his exclusion theory to confirm the fundamental principle of Śaiva non-dualistic philosophy: that the subject-object duality is unreal. Certain other Buddhist thinkers share this doctrine of non-duality; what distinguishes Dharmakīrti's school is the assertion that this false division between subject and object is non-conceptual (*nirvikalpaka*), whereas the Śaiva philosophers believe that it is conceptual (*vikalpaka*). Prueitt traces the influ-

ence of the exclusion theory in the sixth chapter of the *Īśvarapratyabhijñā* of Abhinavagupta, where it is argued that the knowing subject is born of the appearance of a counterpart that is other (a mental process that is technically called *ahaṃprativimarśa* “the realization of the self”). Śaiva philosophers therefore extend a theory that was originally linguistic-cognitive to the dynamics of subject formation, something that for Dharmakīrti would entail a fundamental error. A future topic of research is how Śaiva philosophers use exclusion to explain the phenomenon of infinite consciousness dividing itself.

When comparing the results of her research with those of modern neuroscience and linguistics, Prueitt has found interesting parallels, especially on the question of whether or not awareness of the subject-object dichotomy is conceptual. At the same time, she has found that such comparisons are not always welcome in scientific circles, where South Asian categories such as “Śaiva” are often met with scepticism.

In the conversation that followed, the question was raised as to whether the Buddhist-Śaiva dialogue is religious or purely philosophical, outside the realm of Buddhism itself. Historical and methodical questions were also discussed, such as the use of late Śaiva philosophy to understand Buddhist thought, and the value of placing ancient Buddhist thought in conversation with modern cognitive science. There was also some discussion of whether it is appropriate to use terms like “Dharmakīrtian School of Buddhism,” a term that Prueitt defended as a historical master-disciple lineage. Given the well-known challenges of translation, there was also some discussion of whether to retain the translation “exclusion” or to use the Sanskrit *apoha*. This is a question for all translation work in Buddhist Studies.

In response to a question about gender, Prueitt explained that the Dharmakīrtian School was male-dominated but that questions about

gender, and especially gender duality, are found in the aesthetics of Abhinavagupta, where the role of the feminine is prominent.

Frank Clements (University of Pennsylvania): *Northern Networks: The Range and Roles of the Dewa Sanzan Cult in Northern Japan*

Report by Dylan Esler

Frank Clements identified several of the research questions that framed his work on the Shugendō tradition of mountain asceticism in northern Japan from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. These questions concerned the ways that religious professionals interacted among themselves as well as the ways that they managed their family relationships within the wider hierarchies of their society. Exploring these problems led him to look closely at the different webs of interaction that characterized the social and economic lives of the married ritual specialists who were the focus of his study. His aim was to prioritize the practical and personal elements of the practitioners whose lives he studied; other scholars have already dealt with the ritual side. He pointed out, however, that for those unfamiliar with the Shugendō tradition it was necessary to provide a broader picture by drawing on Japanese scholarship on contemporary sacred sites.

Seeking to contextualize his findings within the larger framework of Asian Studies, Clements noted that the Shugendō ritual specialists could be seen as a variety of innkeepers (called *oshi*); there is also a possible parallel with the Tibetan *sngags pa* practitioners. These cases are all examples of religious specialists with a semi-lay orientation, whose roles might be said to be located somewhere between those of institutional monastics and of Indian tantric *siddhas*. The family unit is of singular importance, both ritually and practically speaking, and Clements underlined the significant role played by the wives of the *shugenja*, whose re-

sponsibility it was to oversee and manage the functioning of the parish when their husbands were away on pilgrimage for prolonged periods.

In terms of this study's potential contribution to the field of Buddhist Studies, one of the points that Clements made is that Shugendō is a Buddhist (as opposed to a folk) tradition, while indicating its parallels with other semi-lay religious traditions, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist.

In his comments, Professor Teiser remarked that Clements had successfully avoided the somewhat derogatory term "institutional history," preferring to speak of "parish histories" and "networks," providing a sophisticated articulation of the various strategies employed by the shugenja in their pursuit of "growth" and "success." He encouraged Clements to explain which economic model he was using in his work and to reflect on the categories of "materiality" and "asceticism," which occur repeatedly in his discussion.

A wider question arose concerning which criteria (doctrinal or practice-related) can be used to determine whether a tradition is Buddhist or non-Buddhist. Professor Benn noted the existence of a "Buddhist anxiety" in a number of fields of study. Professor Gyatso questioned the pertinence of a "Buddhist or non-Buddhist" binary, arguing that such strict boundaries can obscure more fundamental issues.

Reflecting on the overall significance of Clements's work, we may note that detailed studies of practical and economic networks are tremendously relevant for understanding the history of the various Buddhist traditions, and that they provide a much-needed complement to research focusing on doctrinal and ritual issues. Moreover, as witnessed by the discussion of Clements's presentation, this work can significantly contribute to scholarly reflection on boundaries (monastic vs. lay; Buddhist vs. non-Buddhist; historical vs. ethnographical approaches) and their intersection, thereby helping us to move from prescriptive defini-

tions towards a more refined analysis of the array of doctrines, practices, and institutions that constitute the field of Buddhist Studies.

Jason Protass (Stanford University): *Poet-monk Daoqian (1043-1112): Buddhist Monasticism and Social Poetry*

Report by Matthew Mitchell

Jason Protass examines Buddhist poetry in Song China, which has been overlooked on two fronts: in Buddhist Studies because it falls neither under doctrinal studies nor institutional history, nor in Chinese literary studies, because they avoid Buddhist topics in general. Protass's focus is the genre of Classical Chinese Poetry (*shi*), and how it was used by Buddhist monastics or used to discuss Buddhist ideas. His dissertation attempts to make sense of these poems in light of Chinese theories of literary criticism while also examining the funds of cultural knowledge drawn upon by monastics.

Protass discussed some of the problems of defining "Buddhist poetry." For example, Buddhist poems written in the Classical Poetry genre differ from other genres of Buddhist poetry, such as doctrinal verse and ecstatic verse. In an effort to better define the specifics of the genre, Protass has turned to contemporaneous literary criticism (*shihua*). He has found that critics of Buddhist poetry felt that it could not express the emotions essential to Song poetry because Buddhists were removed from the world. These critics often described Buddhist poetry as "vegetarian" or of tasting like "sour buns."

Protass argues that the very existence of these criticisms suggests that it is possible to speak of a Buddhist subgenre of Classical Chinese Poetry. It was largely monks who wrote poems in this subgenre, though other poets also wrote "Buddhist poems." Many of these poems arose out

of the social life of the monastery. They include Buddhist allusions, a “Buddhist antilogic,” and a wordplay that imbues non-Buddhist topics with Buddhist overtones, all setting these poems apart from other *shi*.

Comments and questions revolved around two issues. The first concerned the place of passion and emotion in Buddhist poetry. Ethan Bushelle suggested that Buddhist poetry provided a window into how Buddhists grappled with their emotions; Protass concurred, saying that we can see historical actors putting Buddhist principles into practice using Chinese literary forms. Christina Kilby suggested that using *shi* to discuss Buddhist topics was an attempt to reconcile class, culture, and Buddhism, an attempt to be both a gentleman and a Buddhist. Professor Gyatso added that Buddhism raises the problem of the secular world and of attachment to it, and asked if Buddhist poetry was a way to express this problem.

A second issue concerned the boundaries of Protass’s topic. Some wanted Protass to provide a stronger definition of Buddhist poetry. Others encouraged him to see beyond the boundaries he had placed on his work, considering, for example, classical Sanskrit poetics as well as performative and context-specific elements of the poems. Professor Teiser pointed to the strong Chinese tradition of scholarship that considered *shi* to be the most literate form of poetry and asked Jason to consider what would happen if he were to ignore the category of *shi* and examine other literary forms as well.

Philip Friedrich (University of Pennsylvania): *Regional Circulations and the Political Remaking of the Buddhasāsana in Late-Medieval Sri Lanka*

Report by Douglas Gildow

Philip Friedrich introduced the subject of his dissertation, explaining that his focus was regional polities in Sri Lanka from the twelfth to fifteenth centuries, including analyses of fortresses, regional courts, Buddhist temples, and hybrid Buddhist-Hindu temples. He has used a variety of literary sources to reconstruct this history.

He noted that his research is relevant to a number of ideas important to Buddhist Studies and the human sciences more generally, including narratives of the decline of Buddhism, the limitations of the notion that the *saṃgha* primarily served to legitimate royal authority, the character of “medieval” time periods, the social institution of caste, the category of Theravāda Buddhism, and the nature of social identity. For example, his research helps clarify to what extent discourse on decline reflected actual social conditions and to what extent it was a strategic rhetoric. His research also clarifies the manner and degree to which multiple kinds of belonging—as components of identity—were important in various contexts. For example, he explains that in the political realm, caste affiliation was sometimes more salient than Buddhist affiliation.

Friedrich raised two larger questions that arose from his work and that are pertinent to Buddhist Studies: (1) How to make the work intelligible to interlocutors in Asia, who may not think that the research topic deals with Buddhism as they define it? (2) What relationship should one have toward literary sources—in particular, what more should one consider when mining essentially literary sources for narrow historical data?

During the following discussion, Professor Main mentioned that decline narratives are also common in Japanese Buddhism and are often

read as objective history rather than as rhetoric. Professor Gyatso agreed that Friedrich's two closing questions were important but warned that there were no easy answers; Professor Teiser restated the first question in more general terms: How should we deal with strong native traditions of scholarship?

Stephanie Balkwill (McMaster University): *Empresses, Nuns, and Women of Pure Faith: Buddhism and the Politics of Patronage During the Northern Wei*

Report by Shiyong Pang

Stephanie Balkwill's dissertation studies a number of women who were also patrons of Buddhism in the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-535). She argues that three kinds of power—the political dominance of the Xianbei ethnic group, the influence of Han culture, and the development of Buddhism—worked together to enhance women's social status and help women at court survive politically as administrators.

She demonstrated that Buddhist materials provide a new means to construct social history in ways that traditional methods do not. She identified how inscriptional materials yielded solutions to three problems she encountered in her research. First, inscriptions record real-life activities with a religious message, offering a bridge between canonical studies and studies of social history. Second, inscriptional materials supplement insufficient documentary sources in standard histories; when we lack critical historical elements of certain dynasties in the Chinese own records, we can rely on art historical remains, steles, as well as Buddhist texts translated or circulated in that period to produce a better understanding of the history. Third, inscriptions can benefit theoretical discussions in gender studies to create a broader picture of women's lives in East Asia.

In the discussion Professor Teiser raised the issue of the generic nature of genres, arguing that when we encounter materials that are highly conventionalized, we should be aware of the specificity of the subject addressed by the materials before we seek to use them to draw general conclusions about individual actors and social forces. Balkwill discussed what we could gain through generic materials without overlooking the issue of genre, noting that a few pieces may give us a general sense of historical period. She also stated that it is important not to project modern understandings of individuality in such a way that they discount the importance of formulae that may convey meaning in different ways. Professor Gyatso linked the question to the study of sutras, arguing that although canonical texts are highly formulaic, doctrinal differences are visible even in conventional expressions.

Professor Chen pointed out the importance of understanding the mediacy of objects. He asked whether the letters studied by Kilby might be seen more as a medium demonstrating legitimacy than as specific religious messages. Kilby responded that one could approach generic sources by examining the relationship between form and content. We should seek to determine the extent to which generic materials are used creatively to communicate something important, and the extent to which they are participating in the norms of courtesy.

In general, when we deal with these materials, it is important to develop a vision that crosses disciplinary boundaries, “to be methodologically messy,” as Balkwell put it. Donor inscriptions may convey information on the reform of Buddhist mortuary practice and tomb inscriptions of renunciants may reveal changing expectations of ideal male and female behaviour in the secular world. Because conventional structures and formulaic expressions pervade inscriptional materials, it is important to keep both the form and content of our materials in clear focus.

Cameron Penwell (University of Chicago): *The Emergence of Modern Buddhist Social Work in Twentieth-Century Japan*

Report by Ethan Bushelle

How do religious beliefs and values inform approaches to social work within the context of the modern nation state? Cameron Penwell's dissertation project addresses this broad religio-historical question by focusing on the history of Buddhist charity/social work in modern Japan.

In his presentation, Penwell discussed how he arrived at the central question of his project. Noting that modern Japanese Buddhism is relatively understudied, Penwell explains that he began to think about new lines of inquiry by looking at recent historical events and movements, such as 3/11 and the Occupy Movement. The basic question of his dissertation project thus took shape through recognition of questions that concern Buddhist communities and movements today.

Penwell's project comprises both social and intellectual history. Through analysis of specific figures and events in early twentieth-century Japan, he aims to clarify not only how Buddhist charity was theorized but also how it was practiced. The Pure Land priest Watanabe Kaigyoku, for example, is examined as a key figure in the development of a new, emerging form of modern Buddhist social work, and the relief work related to the Ashio Copper Mine Pollution Incident in 1901-02 is identified as a significant turning point in the history of Buddhist social work. In his presentation, Penwell also introduced the Shin Buddhist priest Imamura Shōdō and his theories of the bodhisattva's compassion as a Buddhist theoretical basis for the theory and practice of charity.

In outlining the major problems encountered in his dissertation project, Penwell emphasized the importance of opening up his project beyond the boundaries of the Japanese nation state and bringing it into dialogue with a wider circle of scholars investigating Buddhism in mod-

ern Asia, including Richard Jaffe, Anne Hansen, and Elise Anne DeVido. He suggests specifically that the topic of Buddhist social work, which is often associated with the rise of what is called “socially engaged Buddhism,” can serve as a pivotal point of reference for constructing a global history of modern Buddhism. How, he asks, can we talk across disciplinary area-studies boundaries as well as national-linguistic borders?

In her comments, Professor Dolce raised a number of questions for further reflection. First, how can we traverse the modern/premodern divide? What was charity in early modern Japan? She also introduced the concept of material culture. By looking at material culture, such as the brochures produced by charitable organizations, how can we better understand the agendas that motivated Buddhist social work? And finally, she posed the question of theoretical perspective. Can we make the theory work inside out? That is, in the case of Penwell’s project, how can we use Buddhist notions of charity to recast our understanding of modern Western forms?

Christina Kilby (University of Virginia): *Epistolary Buddhism: Tibetan Letter-Writing Manuals and the Growth of Geluk Buddhism During the Qing*

Report by Luke Noel Thompson

Christina Kilby’s research examines epistolary manuals to explore the role of monks of the Geluk sect of Tibetan Buddhism in the spread of Buddhism in Tibet, Mongolia, and China during the eighteenth century. She argues that by dictating the way in which monks were supposed to interact (when communicating by letter) with other monks and patrons, both Tibetan and otherwise, the authors of these manuals were attempting to control and encourage the establishment of the Geluk institution throughout the Qing empire.

The question of identity looms large in Kilby's inquiry. First, the language prescribed in the manuals aims to assert Geluk religious superiority over the Qing court; this reflects the Geluk monks' own ideas about their rightful social position vis-à-vis the Qing imperial institution. Second, while Kilby seeks to understand Tibetan Buddhist identity largely through a synchronic analysis, locating it within its eighteenth-century context, she notes that the tradition itself constructs identity according to vertical lineages. She is therefore analyzing Tibetan Buddhist identity in terms that the tradition itself would not recognize. Kilby also raised the issue of Geluk sectarian identity, admitting that it is not always clear how strongly the monks in her study felt themselves to be first and foremost members of the Geluk tradition.

Two important issues concerning the use of sources were raised during this panel that pertain to Buddhist Studies more broadly. Kilby mentioned that it is not always clear if the letter-writing manuals are prescriptive—attempts to dictate epistolary practices in such a way as to spread and strengthen Buddhism (or at least Geluk institutions)—or descriptive—records of contemporary epistolary norms. A similar distinction is difficult to discern in certain cases of religious edicts and Buddhist moral and monastic codes, an issue that Gregory Schopen has raised with regard to the disparity between the monk as textual ideal (often taken by scholars as a description but seen by Schopen as a prescription) and what archaeological evidence tells us about how Indian Buddhist monks actually lived.

Professor Teiser raised a question pertinent to both Kilby's sources and the inscriptions used by Balkwill. He observed that both letter-writing manuals and inscriptions are "generic" in that they are highly formulaic and conventional with regard to content, style, and the actual words and idioms used. This presents problems for using such sources, since they potentially reveal little about individual intention

and the relationships between the individuals involved in letter writing and the commissioning and execution of votive inscriptions, respectively. This was a helpful reminder for all research on Buddhism, since Buddhist textual sources are full of stock phrases and verbal formulae that are not always recognized as such when first encountering an unfamiliar genre or literary style.

Aleix Ruiz-Falques (Cambridge University): *A Firefly in the Bamboo Reed: Chapata Saddhammajotipala and the Intellectual Foundations of Burmese Theravada Buddhism*

Report by Catherine Prueitt

Aleix Ruiz-Falques's presentation served as a reminder that path-breaking scholarship does not always seek what it finds. A fifteenth-century Burmese monk named Chapata Saddhammajotipala, reputed to be both a reformer and a grammarian, inspired his original project. However, upon examining the relevant manuscripts, Aleix discovered that there were in fact two Chapatas: the fifteenth-century monk who wrote the grammatical work that was Ruiz-Falques's original focus and a twelfth-century figure who was primarily a reformer, but was also a grammarian. This greatly complicated the historical frame of the project. Instead of examining one specific figure, he had to take into account a much longer period. Moreover, the relative lack of historical sources made it difficult to understand the larger social context.

Despite these significant setbacks, Ruiz-Falques delved into the fascinating relationship between grammar and philosophy in medieval Burma. For the Pāli Burmese traditions of this time, grammarians served as the arbiters of the words of the Buddha. In these traditions, grammar was the instrument used to interpret texts. In addition to engaging in "textual purification," a subgenre of grammatical analysis concerned

with manuscript editing and text criticism, they dealt with theories of meaning, sound, inference, and so on. Philosophy, hermeneutics, and grammar are intimately linked in these traditions, leading to distinctive styles of interpretation influenced by the particulars of the Pāli language.

Many of the questions during the discussion focused on the relationship between grammar and philosophy as evidenced in Ruiz-Falques's texts. Professor Benn pointed out that while the connection between grammar and philosophy might be somewhat intuitive for Buddhologists with knowledge of Sanskrit commentarial styles, it would not necessarily be obvious to a larger audience. He encouraged Ruiz-Falques to reflect specifically on this connection and how to communicate its significance. He also asked if it is possible to understand Pāli without knowing about Buddhism. Ruiz-Falques indicated that, at least for the tradition he studies, the idea of studying Pāli without reference to the Buddha's words would make little sense. Interpreting the Buddha's words is precisely why one would study Pāli, with the structures of Pali giving insight into their meaning. He noted that in the Burmese tradition he studies, the text is held to be more important than any practice since the text holds the key to interpreting, understanding, and correctly performing any practice.

Matthew Mitchell (Duke University): *Beyond the Convent Walls: The Local and Japan-wide Activities of Daihongan's Nuns in the Early Modern Period (c. 1550 - 1868)*

Report by Stephanie Balkwill

Matthew Mitchell presented his work by asking three simple questions: (1) Why study nuns? (2) What do nuns do? and (3) Is their activity Buddhist? Specifically, Mitchell engaged in a discussion of the necessity of

studying nuns and their activities through introducing the social worlds of his object of study: the Daihongan Pure Land nuns of Zenkōji temple in Japan's early modern period. Mitchell has come to know these women through the documents preserved in the temple archive.

On the topic of why study nuns, Mitchell argued that nuns are often overlooked in studies of the tradition of Japanese Buddhism, recounting an incident when he had been asked directly by a Japanese historian why he would undertake such a study. His answer was that the study is necessary because, although nuns do many of the same things as monks, they also do different things as well, and these different things are worthy of scholarly attention. Professor Chen praised Mitchell's attention to the study of nuns as an opportunity to revise the traditional picture of the *saṃgha* to which we have long adhered and challenged Mitchell to think further about the nature of his sources, such as why the specific temple he studied had retained an archive.

As for the activities that nuns undertake, Mitchell discovered in the course of his archival research that the majority of a nun's time was spent in legal, economic and social activities and not so much in the pursuit of Buddhist doctrine, which was what he had expected when beginning his study. For example, he cited the fundraising lotteries that the community held in order to support itself economically; they lacked the funding of a major temple, funding that monks would have received. Mitchell thus situated the nuns' relations with the laity in terms of their need to raise funds. Professor Gyatso asked Mitchell to think about foundational questions in gender and women's studies, such as whether or not there is something in the nature of women that ties them to interactions with the laity for reasons other than economics. In a similar vein, Stephanie Balkwill raised the question of whether or not the nunnery offered women social opportunities that they may not have had in other social institutions and, relatedly, if that opportunity shaped their inter-

actions with the laity and the larger social environment. Finally, Kilby asked how ritual and devotional practice related to the nuns' fundraising activities. Mitchell explained that some of their activities are indeed tied to a ritual calendar.

The question of whether or not these activities are Buddhist was considered only briefly, but Professor Benn encouraged Mitchell to see his data horizontally, that is, as part of a larger economic history of Buddhism, and thus escape narrow definitions of the tradition that are usually presented in linear ways by the tradition itself. Noting that the data Mitchell retrieved from the archive could make a viable digital humanities project, Professor Benn suggested that he offer more description of, and context to, the materiality of this archive as one mode of framing his project.

Shiyong Pang (University of California, Berkeley): *Seeking for the Dharma Body: A Preliminary Study on the Notion of Dharmakāya Bodhisattva in Prajñāpāramitā Literature and Its Commentary*

Report by Philip Friedrich

Shiyong Pang's presentation introduced us to a rather unusual group of bodhisattvas (the *fashen pusa*, or *dharmakāya* bodhisattvas) that she has repeatedly encountered in her research on the fourth chapter of the *Dazhidu lun* (Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom). Pang illustrated how this group of bodhisattvas is inserted by the author into interstitial levels of religious achievement between buddhas, on the one hand, and *pratyekabuddhas* and *arhats*, on the other. Yet, the introduction of this group of bodhisattvas does not simply represent the grafting of different Buddhist concepts and technical terminology onto others. Rather, the group of bodhisattvas, and specifically their approach to the "bodies" of their final rebirths, constitute an object of discourse for the au-

thor. That is, their *dharmakāya*, while approaching the transcendent quality of that of a buddha, is theorized as distinct because of its effectiveness in producing practical outcomes on the bodhisattva path.

Pang's research takes a seemingly lofty Buddhist concept like the *dharmakāya* and situates it along a continuum of advanced Buddhist practices—one that extends deeply into the details of the bodhisattva path as it is rearticulated through textual commentary. Indeed, she remarked that strict adherence to the notion of *dharmakāya* as a transcendent body has hindered a richer understanding of its complex range of uses in commentarial texts.

The discussion focused on the importance of tacking between close textual analysis and broader questions about the ritual and devotional life of the bodhisattva cult, which was seen as an excellent model for how philology can have renewed relevance for Buddhist Studies, shedding new light on seemingly old, well-worn topics like the *dharmakāya*, or the figure of the bodhisattva more generally. The importance of destabilizing the notion of “commentary” was also discussed. While commentary generally implies a kind of fealty to the text being commented upon, Pang's materials and research suggest a more tenuous relationship to authoritative texts.

Dylan Esler (Université catholique de Louvain): *The Lamp for the Eye of Contemplation, the bSam-gtan mig-sgron by gNubs-chen Sangs-rgyas ye-shes: Hermeneutical Study, English Translation and Critical Edition of a Tibetan Buddhist Text*

Report by Frank Clements

Dylan Esler's research consists of a three-part hermeneutical study of a tenth-century Tibetan Buddhist text on contemplation/meditation that

considers four varieties of the practice: “Mahāyāna,” Chan, Tantra, and Dzogchen. He began his presentation by identifying two problems he encountered in the course of his research. The first of these was how to organize the material contained within the long and complicated text. He was divided between following the text’s own order or devising his own, but ultimately chose to adhere to the text’s structure in order to avoid repetition and excessive cross-referencing. His second difficulty involved determining what he needed to explain and how thoroughly he had to explain it in order to make the material understandable to an audience unfamiliar with the topic. After considering this, he decided to use hierarchically numbered paragraphs and to divide his study into three parts. He then described the potential contributions of his research to the field of Buddhist Studies. For one, he focuses on an era before commonly known conceptions of meditation became entrenched in Tibetan Buddhism; his research can thus be used to trace the initial spread of Chinese and Indian ideas on meditation to Tibet. Furthermore, his work provides a detailed treatment of Dzogchen Buddhism, emphasizing its distinction from Chan and from other forms of tantric Buddhism.

From here, Esler argued for the importance of philological analysis in the study of Buddhism. He cited the religious and literary value of the texts themselves, the large number of texts that survive, and the benefit of translations and critical editions to non-academics interested in Buddhism. However, he also acknowledged that philology raises complicated issues involving the relationship between textual meanings, contextual meanings, and the philologist’s own meanings. Esler’s approach is inspired by hermeneutical phenomenology, which reveals religious meaning. He is especially influenced by European traditions of esotericism and their understanding of the sacred as a kind of metaphysical hermeneutics.

There were several comments on Esler's research by the assembled scholars. Professor Guang Xing admired the amount of material that Esler works with, but wanted more information on the author of the text, its date of composition, and the potential influence of Chinese Chan. Professor Lopez encouraged him to be aware of the problems of anachronistic language or excessive comparativism, a point reiterated by Professor Gyatso. Ruiz-Falques asked Esler why he chose to use the terms meditation or contemplation instead of *dhyāna*. In his response to these comments Esler provided more information on the text's author and the influence of Chan thought on its contents. He also stated that his comparisons were a way to build bridges with other perspectives, not a systematic project, and that their removal would make the hermeneutics section more dry.

Douglas Gildow, (Princeton University): *Educating Chinese Buddhist Monastics in the People's Republic of China: Seminaries, Academia, and the State*

Report by Cameron Penwell

The contentious politics of knowledge-production figure prominently in Douglas Gildow's research into the history and current development of Buddhist seminaries in post-Mao China. Gildow analyzes the complex triangular relationship that exists among seminaries, secular universities, and state bureaucracies and, in the process, sheds light on how actors across these three institutional blocs influence the location of Buddhism within the rapidly evolving religious landscape of contemporary China. Indeed, Gildow identifies seminaries as the central site for current discussions regarding what Buddhism in China is and what its future will be. Much of the research for this project has been based on fieldwork, with Gildow concentrating primarily on the country's largest seminary, located in Beijing, where gaining official access proved difficult. Never-

theless, he conducted informal interviews with students, faculty, and administrators, studied published curricula, and audited classes at smaller, more regional seminaries. In concentrating on Beijing, his stated goal was to produce an impressionistic study of a centrally placed institution as opposed to a more concrete study of a peripheral one. Furthermore, centering the study on the capital region brings into clearer focus the important role of state bureaucracies in shaping the relationship between Buddhist seminaries and secular universities.

Gildow notes an interesting parallel between institutional Buddhism and the Chinese Communist Party, namely, both appeal to “fixed, core beliefs derived from unquestionable sources.” In contrast to these two, secular academia officially follows a mode of scientific inquiry based on what Gildow describes as “abstract canons of evidence and logic.” In this sense, they produce two different discourses on “Chinese Buddhism;” one purports to speak from a position of authenticity within the tradition itself, while the other makes claims to scientific objectivity in portraying what the tradition is or has been.

One point of debate in the discussion that followed was the extent to which Buddhist clerical education is open to all manner of inquiry, or if there are certain core beliefs and assumptions that cannot be challenged—such as the authenticity of Mahāyāna texts—lest they undermine the foundation of the tradition itself. While this topic is a fascinating area of inquiry for those in Buddhist Studies in general, it also raises a pressing question for those working in this field as researchers—what is our own role vis-à-vis the traditions we study, analyze, and perhaps even criticize? This question grows more complex for scholars who see themselves as active participants in Buddhism qua religion while also pursuing it as an object of academic inquiry.

Thinking more broadly, Gildow’s research offers a window onto the Buddhist experience of what many see as a defining aspect of mod-

ernization, namely, the differentiation of religion from the spheres of the state, economy, and science. On the issue of religion and education, France is perhaps the best documented historical case; beginning in the nineteenth century, the Catholic church engaged in a long and intense struggle with the secular French state over the status of religious instruction in public schools and the maintenance of Church prerogatives in the realm of education. In the case of China, however, the Buddhist *saṃgha* never occupied a similar position of dominance in education. Instead, tensions exist in the area of epistemology—where seminaries must contend with the authority of scientific objectivity of the secular academy—and in the constraints placed on institutional Buddhism within a secular society in which Buddhists must submit to state authority, which itself is primarily concerned with how Buddhism can serve ends that buttress the state and promote social stability. At the same time, the social reproduction of Buddhism—at least through the training and ordination of monks—has grown more reliant on the authority granted by expert knowledge, thus requiring deepening ties both with secular academia and authority-conferring offices of the state bureaucracy. Gildow's conclusions speak not only to the question of how Chinese Buddhism has adapted to the tumultuous political and social changes of the past century, they also offer a comparative perspective for those studying the relationship between religion and education in relation to the on-going project of secularism(s) globally.

Luke Thompson (Columbia University): *Returning to the Founder: Śākyamuni Devotion in Early Medieval Japan and Japanese Buddhist Conceptions of History*

Report by Christina Kilby

Luke Thompson's dissertation examines the emergence of Śākyamuni devotion in eleventh- to twelfth-century Japan as a way to understand how Buddhism responded to a shift in historical consciousness in the medieval Asian world. He argues that prior to the medieval period, Śākyamuni Buddha was primarily seen as a mythical or transcendental figure (this view corresponds to what Jerome Bruner has identified as "paradigmatic" or "systemic" thought). During the medieval period, several texts and thinkers emerged that explored and lamented the death of the historical Buddha, thereby placing Śākyamuni in historical time (corresponding to Bruner's "narrative" thought). These texts were also concerned with locating the geographical position of Vulture Peak and understanding Japan's relationship to the historical Buddha and his world. Thompson asks, "Does a new Japanese historical consciousness determine the conditions for a longing for Śākyamuni Buddha during this time?" In addition to detailing a paradigm shift in medieval Japanese Buddhism, Thompson's work helps elucidate contemporary understandings of Buddhist history in Japan.

Discussion centered on the question of what we mean by "historical consciousness." Professor Dolce challenged us to consider the extent to which we can excavate indigenous Japanese theories of history, rather than adapting modern Western theoretical constructs, to analyze medieval Japanese Buddhism. Professor Gyatso encouraged Thompson to consider the relationship between historical consciousness and human agency; if things are always changing, then the role of human action to affect change takes primacy. This view contrasts with the idea, prominent in the *Lotus Sūtra* cult of the medieval period, of a salvific Buddha

who serves as the ultimate actor. Matthew Mitchell suggested that Thompson investigate whether there was a continental (i.e. Chinese) influence on the Japanese shift in historical consciousness.

Ethan Bushelle (Harvard University): *The Joy of the Dharma: Esoteric Buddhism and the Early Medieval Transformation of Japanese Literature*

Report by Jason Protass

In what way does “ritual” invite cultural productions? How do particular rituals invite particular forms of literature? Ethan Bushelle’s project examines how Buddhism is essential to understanding Japanese literature during the tenth to twelfth centuries. What we call “literature” was performative and embedded in a ritual culture. Ritual theory can shed light on the development of specific religious technologies that in turn informed literary productions in early medieval Japan. Bushelle’s application of ritual theory deviates from the usual study of rituals as instantiations of politics and power. Instead, ritual is not just an instrument of power, but is also part of the creation of culture.

Bushelle’s basic finding is that the introduction and acceptance of new religious and ritual technologies (such as repentance, offering, parting, and death rituals) or esoteric doctrines had profound impacts on other cultural projects and can be demonstrably linked to concrete transformations within literary genres. Each of his dissertation chapters focuses on a disparate genre of literature (*waka*, *kanshi*, and *monogatari*) and the distinct ritual or doctrinal history that shaped its production and reception. In all, this challenges the idea that Buddhism is a religion of renunciation and instead considers how Buddhism can be a creative cultural force.

Bushelle concludes that an esoteric poetics was at work in the late Heian period. He argues against understanding all of Japanese literature through the lens of Zen and mystical meditation, a view introduced to the West during the twentieth century by D.T. Suzuki. Bushelle's approach also provides an important counter-narrative to the Japanese nationalist sentiment that Buddhist poetry cannot qualify as Japanese poetry. By attending to esoteric ritual performance rather than Zen contemplation, he offers a new perspective on a corpus of poetry that is at once decidedly Buddhist and directly influential upon Japanese cultural developments in the literary arts.

In the discussion that followed, Bushelle conceded that his usage of "esoteric" is not entirely in line with certain technical denotations; for example, there are no mantras or *goma* fire rituals. Rather, "esoteric" can be used to refer to the spread of the notion of *honji suijaku* ("original substance") that transforms local *kami* deities into manifestations of buddhas and to the transformation of emotions from afflictive to liberative. Buddhist love-poetry, once deemed impossible, comes to life in *kanshi* dedicated to Samantabhadra, who eliminates sinfulness. The local *kami* are understood as manifestations of the Buddha and take joy in offerings of "dharma-joy," expressed in *waka* poetry in the local Japanese language. Questioning the assumption that Buddhism requires the rejection of pleasure and emotion, Bushelle argues that the Buddhist poetry he studies draws explicitly on emotional experience in order to mediate and transform emotion in distinctly Buddhist ways.

Participants encouraged Bushelle to consider what insights his material might bring to bear on the nature of ritual itself; on the tension between ritual as universal, rote, and generalizable on the one hand, and the individual performance of a particular ritual at a particular time on the other. Poetic offerings represent a creative aspect within rituals and challenge conceptions of ritual being monolithic.

One thread running through Bushelle's presentation and the discussion was an abiding interest in attending to how Buddhism can be a creative force. There was an interest in articulating positively the cultural creativity that results from the articulating the influence of historical contexts on literary production.

Conclusions

A number of conclusions emerged from the workshop. Beginning with institutional questions, in an academy that is increasingly obsessed with "time to degree" and attendant challenges to the value of the dissertation, it was clear that detailed and specific studies at the doctoral level are essential to the health of our field.

Perhaps the largest question to emerge from the workshop was the nature of the boundaries that have long defined the field of Buddhist Studies, boundaries of language, period, region, genre, and sect and dichotomies between doctrine and social history, textual analysis and devotional cult and root text and commentary. Over the course of three days, many of these boundaries were expanded, crossed and blurred. By the end, it was clear to all participants—both the Fellows and the senior scholars—that a plurality of approaches is not only desirable but essential for the field of Buddhist Studies to grow, not only in the scope of its study but also in its audience.

Participants concluded that objects of study falling under the rubric "Buddhist Studies" are so diverse that the question of what is uniquely Buddhist about this or that "Buddhist" phenomenon is always worth pondering. At the same time, it is rarely a question that can be easily answered outside of a very specific historical context. This is not to say that this diversity need entail fragmentation. The question of the

1990s of whether the object of study should be referred to as “Buddhism” or “Buddhisms” seems to have been answered in favour of the singular.

The participants considered the extent to which Buddhist Studies scholars should embrace a premodern/modern periodization as well as the extent to which they can apply modern Western critical theory to non-Western traditional contexts. It became clear that the field will benefit from more creative and insightful ways of describing the influence of Buddhism on culture and vice versa, considering the moments in which “Buddhism” and “culture” integrate and disintegrate, investigating what those moments indicate about the place of Buddhism in the larger socio-cultural landscape. Genre was also a major theme, with scholars of Buddhism developing analyses drawing on insights from literary studies. Major questions included: How do we engage with generic sources? How may religious practices and the materials related to such practices respond to needs and concerns beyond the strictly religious sphere, such as gender, modernity and institutional authority?

Recalling Holmes Welch’s call fifty years ago to undertake the study of modern Buddhism and to listen to the voices of contemporary Buddhists, it was noteworthy that all of the participants understood fully that Buddhists—both traditional scholars and local practitioners—have important insights on almost every topic within the large field of Buddhist Studies. In the workshop we saw Buddhist Studies in conversation with the Buddhist tradition, and also with strong and thriving Asian traditions of scholarship.

The symposium demonstrated the many benefits of the workshop model for Buddhist Studies, especially one that works across geographical, linguistic, and temporal divides in an atmosphere of collegiality and cooperation. These benefits were enhanced by the presence of both emerging scholars and senior scholars, with opportunities for conversation, comment, as well as polite disagreement in a range of settings; it

was helpful for the Fellows to see how senior scholars might respectfully disagree, allowing creative tensions to remain unresolved. Rather than being dizzied by the range of topics and approaches, Fellows and advisors came away feeling empowered and assured of the validity and importance of their research. There is clearly much to be learned from taking time to dwell in the different genres and moods of Buddhist Studies.

Bibliography

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