



# LEKHA

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Lekha Newsletter  
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Lekha is a Sanskrit word  
for letter or writing

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*Cover image:*  
Jeweled Pagoda Mandala, 13th  
century, indigo-dyed paper with gold  
and silver inks, Ryuhonji, currently in  
Kyoto National Museum.

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## CO-DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

The big news for the Center this year is that, owing to the generosity of the Shinnyo-en Foundation, we have been able to convert our Shinnyo-en Visiting Professorship into a new endowed faculty position in Buddhist Studies at Stanford! After a search for scholars specializing in Tantric Buddhism and/or Buddhism of the Himalayas which yielded an exceptionally strong short-list, the Department of Religious Studies made an offer to James Gentry, who will join our faculty in September as our newest Assistant Professor. Perhaps best known for his book *Power Objects in Tibetan Buddhism: The Life, Writings, and Legacy of Sokdokpa Lodrö Gyeltsen* (Brill, 2017), James specializes in Tibetan Buddhism, particularly the ways in which scripture, material objects and popular practices interact in the formation and transformation of Tantric Buddhist traditions among Himalayan Buddhist communities. After receiving his doctorate at Harvard, James has taught at Kathmandu University and the University of Virginia. Recently, he also took up the post of Editor-in-Chief of the 84,000 Project, a massive endeavor to translate the entire Tibetan Buddhist canon. The new position at Stanford fills a major gap in our program, and, when combined with our endowed center and The Robert H.N. Ho Family Foundation Professor of Buddhist Studies, ensures that Buddhist Studies will have a strong presence at this university well into the future, even after everyone reading this message is long gone. Moreover, James will be the first full-time faculty hire specializing in Tibetan Buddhism in Stanford's history.

This was, as usual, a busy year for the Center, with a film screening, two workshops organized by our graduate students—one on Buddhist poetics and the other on demons—and fifteen talks. We had two visiting scholars—Esther Bianchi, who is working on a project on the role of Theravada Buddhism in modern China, and Michael Radich, this year's Shinnyo-en Visiting Professor, who taught a seminar on the third-century translator Dharmarakṣa. I don't know if it was the particular blend of personalities this year, or the acoustics of the room upstairs in Building 70 where we had our meals, but the post-talk dinners with faculty, students and visitors this year included the liveliest, most stimulating conversations we've had.

We say a reluctant goodbye to our postdoctoral fellow, Eric Huntington, who published this year *Creating the Universe: Depictions of the Cosmos in Himalayan Buddhism* (University of Washington Press, 2018), and has just accepted a fellowship at the Chao Center for Transnational Asian Studies at Rice University in Houston. Two of our graduate students successfully defended their dissertations: Adeana McNicholl, with a thesis entitled "Celestial Seductresses and Hungry Ghosts: Preta Narratives in Early Indian Buddhism," and Dan Tuzzeo, with a thesis entitled "Crafting Cosmologies: Buddhist Cartography and the Spatial Imagination in Medieval China." Adeana is headed to Vanderbilt where she has accepted a job as Assistant Professor in the Religious Studies Department. Dan will finish revisions on his dissertation and teach a course here



*John Kieschnick,  
Co-Director of HCBSS*

at Stanford in the Fall as he enters the job market.

Graduate student Yi Ding was awarded a Robert H.N. Ho Family Foundation dissertation fellowship in Buddhist Studies to work in the coming year on his dissertation: "Sino-Tibetan Divine Transactions: The Transformation of Buddhist Public Liturgies at Dunhuang."

*John Kieschnick,  
The Robert H.N. Ho Family Foundation  
Professor of Buddhist Studies, Religious Studies  
Co-Director of HCBSS*

“Powerful Challenges, Powerful Rewards: Women Awakening Via the Renunciant Path in 21st Century Buddhism”

Venerable (Ayyā) Tathālokā (by Elaine Lai)



Venerable (Ayyā) Tathālokā

Venerable (Ayyā) Tathālokā, an American-born member of the Buddhist Sangha, has been a practicing monastic for the last thirty years and in 2009 was awarded the unique honor of becoming the first Western woman appointed bhikkhunī preceptor. In her talk “Powerful Challenges, Powerful Rewards: Women Awakening Via the Renunciant Path in 21st Century Buddhism,” she spoke about two main topics: 1) the role of renunciation in the Buddha’s Middle Way and 2) why more and more women nowadays are choosing the renunciant life and the challenges that go with it. At the beginning of her talk, Ayyā Tathālokā expressed her willingness to engage in conversation within academic circles, especially given the fact that she has not agreed with everything that has been written about her by scholars. Here at Stanford she had an opportunity to express her own sentiments on renunciation in the 21st century and this article is a glimpse at her story.

On the topic of renunciation, Ayyā Tathālokā emphasized that simply cutting off one’s hair and donning monastic robes

did not qualify as true renunciation. In her case, the very day that she set forth on the path through the formal ritual of taking tonsure and precepts, shortly afterwards she felt irritated due to some incident and then immediately felt bad that a negative emotion like irritation had arisen in the first place. In a moment of crisis, she sought out an elder female monastic and confessed that she didn’t think she had what it takes to live the monastic lifestyle. Reflecting back on this period of her life, Ayyā Tathālokā feels that she was influenced by the particular conditioning of her American upbringing, which ultimately led her to internalize the idea that she was unworthy of a greater spiritual path. In retrospect, she concluded that this feeling of unworthiness is completely debilitating and, in fact, just another form of grasping onto a self-view which prevents one from fully realizing one’s potential. Setting forth on the path of a Buddhist monastic entails a kind of renunciation, but what is to be renounced are the causes of suffering, including these debilitating self-views of unworthiness.

The Buddhist Middle Way and the insight into conditional causality as taught through the Four Noble Truths has served as the lens through which Ayyā Tathālokā has been able to understand and become aware of the conditioning forces which have directly or indirectly contributed to such debilitating views and thus to become free of them. For her, setting forth on the Buddhist path in terms of adopting the monastic lifestyle means that she has made the commitment to engage only in Right Effort, which Tathālokā defines as renouncing any kind of action which is not fulfilling ultimate happiness, peace and freedom for herself and for others. While cutting her hair and donning monastic robes may have marked her “coming out” in terms of renouncing worldly

engagement, it has been her practice and deep reflection on the causes of suffering which have led to a true understanding of what renunciation means.

Included in the audience were several other female monastics whom Ayyā Tathālokā introduced at this point. They came from South Korea, Cambodia, and China and one was a former UCLA graduate. Tathālokā emphasized that none of these women had grown up in a cultural environment where they were compelled by their communities to become bhikkhunīs. Instead, they had engaged very sincerely with their own motivations and had decided to become bhikkhunīs because of their faith in the Buddhist teachings and the lifestyle promised by monasticism, which would allow them to fully realize these teachings. Even today, Ayyā Tathālokā and other Theravadin bhikkhunīs like her continue to make alms rounds, not unlike the first members of the sangha over 2000 years ago, meeting laypeople in a kind of vulnerability and relying on their generosity to provide their daily meal. In this regard, not only Buddhists, but also non-Buddhist lay people have provided the food and sustenance which allow these bhikkhunīs to continue this form of monasticism, and they have done so out of a deep respect for the lifestyle and the spirit of renunciation that these bhikkhunīs represent.

Finally, Ayyā Tathāloka confirmed that there is indeed a growing number of women interested in leading this kind of renunciant lifestyle. Every year there are 50–100 new pledges for her organization. However, of the 50–100 women interested in setting forth on this path, only three to four can be accepted into the community. What this means is that the number of bhikkhunīs visible to the public’s eye is not wholly representative of the number of women

*continues on page 5*

## “Buddhism and Mindfulness in the West”

*Venerable Ajahn Amaro (by Nancy Chu)*

On Nov 7, 2018, Venerable Ajahn Amaro, a bhikkhu in Ajahn Chah’s Thai forest tradition and abbot of Amaravati Buddhist Monastery in England, gave a talk at the Stanford Humanities Center. He drew from his experience as an ordained monastic of nearly 40 years’ standing to discuss the prospects and challenges of teaching and using mindfulness in the contemporary Western world.

Ajahn Amaro began by sharing how he was trained in a traditional form of Buddhism according to which he is distinguished by his robes, shaven head, and the vinaya (monastic discipline) he follows. He presented the Buddhist teachings as a pragmatic set of tools to transform the heart and mind. Mindfulness is attractive to many contemporary mental health practitioners, he explained, with a long tradition to back it up, and it has directly impacted a number of people with depression and anxiety through mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) programs and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy.

While there are numerous proven practical benefits of mindfulness that have improved people’s lives, Ajahn Amaro critiqued the lack of an explicit ethical component to most contemporary teachings of mindfulness, which are often targeted at reducing stress and other therapeutic benefits. He argued that the teaching of *sīla* (ethics) in conjunction

with mindfulness is an integral part of the broader Buddhist program. In addition, he noted that the teaching of mindfulness and Buddhism in the West, perhaps due to its popularity, has become increasingly commercialized and that dharma teachings are often edited and trimmed to fit people’s preferences.

He suggested that mindfulness has “intrinsic sensitivity to ethics if tuned in to reality.”

He recalled a conversation with Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of the MBSR program, on whether ethics should be explicitly emphasized in the teaching of mindfulness. While acknowledging that there is a delicate balance between honoring the Buddhist roots of mindfulness and making mindfulness as accessible as possible, Ajahn Amaro maintained that leaving ethics merely as an implicit part of the teaching of mindfulness is inadequate. He hopes instead for ethical standards of conduct to accompany mindfulness teachings.

Ajahn Amaro went on to describe the further challenges of adapting a 2,500-year-old religious system to the 21st century and the issues associated with transplanting traditional Asian Buddhist monastic lifestyles and practices to Western societies. One important issue that arose in his community was women’s ordination in the monastic sangha. Elders in his community came up with an 8-precept renunciant form for women who



*Venerable Ajahn Amaro*

want to ordain as a compromise between the Thai and Western communities they serve. Ajahn Amaro acknowledged that women’s ordination is one of the most challenging issues the Buddhist renunciant community faces.

Having shared his insights on the need to include ethics in the teaching of mindfulness in the West, Ajahn Amaro concluded his talk by emphasizing his belief in the human capacity for freedom, peace, and fulfillment, and his understanding of the Buddha’s teachings as tools to develop mental qualities conducive to the flourishing of human excellence and well-being.

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*Venerable (Ayyā) Tathālokā (continues from page 4)*

who would like to become bhikkhunīs. Crucial in these matters is whether or not there is institutional support for female renunciants. Commenting on the boom of mindfulness movements in the U.S. and the fact that, thanks to the internet, more and more meditation teachings as well as translated suttas are readily

available to the general public, Ayyā Tathālokā hopes to see an equivalent revival of *śīla* or moral precepts both within society and within monasteries. It’s clear from Tathālokā’s talk that in this era of technological advancement, there is a need to reset the terms through which laypeople and sangha members engage

with Buddhist doctrine and practice. How Buddhist practice will come to be shaped and adapted, as well as whether or not the bhikkhunī sangha will have the conditions to grow, are issues that Buddhists and non-Buddhists, monastics and non-monastics collectively play a role in deciding.

## TIBETAN STUDIES INITIATIVE

### Film Screening of “The Shepherdess of the Glaciers”

*Stanzin Dorjai Gya (by Irene Lin)*



*Stanzin Dorjai Gya*

Film director Stanzin Dorjai joined us for the screening of his film, “The Shepherdess of the Glaciers,” and took questions from the audience after the showing. The documentary captures the beautiful scenery of Ladakh while telling the moving story of the 50-year old Tsering, Stanzin’s sister, who is one of the last shepherdesses still tending her flock of 350 goats and sheep in Gya-Miru valley in Ladakh. For 11 months out of the year, she lives at an altitude of 4,500 to 6,000 meters and in temperatures ranging from 35 degrees C below zero to 35 degrees C. For the most part, Tsering lives in solitude in the mountains with only the company of her flock and an old battery-powered radio. She regularly

faces harsh weather, spartan living conditions and danger from wild animals, but never complains about her life and the difficulties she faces. Tsering relies on herself as she navigates the steep ridges of the mountains in extreme weather, believing that if you focus your energy in the heart and the head, you can get anywhere you want to go on your own. For now she is the sole breadwinner of her family living down in the village, as they depend on the sale of cashmere wool from her flock. She wonders who will follow her path when she gets too old to do this work, since people today are too fragile to endure such a life of discomfort and solitude in the harsh conditions of the high Himalayas.



*Photo of Tsering - “The Shepherdess of the Glaciers”*

## “Crystals, Introductions to Buddhas, and Other Intimate Experiences”

David Germano (by Elaine Lai)

David Germano’s talk “Crystals, Introductions to Buddhas and Other Intimate Experiences” looked at 11th century Tibetan innovations in tantric practices associated with the Fourth empowerment, also called the Word or Verbal Empowerment. While the first empowerment—the Vase empowerment—corresponds with Creation phase meditation with its emphasis on deity yoga, the second and third empowerments—the Secret Empowerment and the Transcendent Wisdom Empowerment—become subsumed under Perfection phase meditation which initially involved ritualized sexual intercourse, but eventually took the form of somatic practices in which the body’s subtle elements are mastered. Both Creation and Generation phase practice can be viewed as an integration of the two main strands of Indian Buddhist tantra, namely the institutional strand in which the ritually powerful monastic hierarch dominates and the non-institutional strand in which a non-celibate teacher and his female consort take center stage. However, it is in the fourth empowerment that we find a distinctly Tibetan innovation in contemplative practices, which generates direct encounters with Buddhas through aesthetic experiences and dramatic reenactment, all while distorting visual perception.

The backdrop of 11th century Tibet was a rich cultural renaissance in which Nyingmapa religious leaders identified as past incarnations of key Buddhist figures revealed many Treasures (*gtar ma*), the most significant of which is the Seminal Heart of the Great Perfection or Dzogchen Nyingthik. Of these revelations, two texts—the Introductions Tantra and the Vajrasattva Tantra—expound upon the 21 introductions, which represent the Fourth Empowerment. “Introduction”



David Germano

(*ngo.sprod*), as Germano discussed, is itself a colloquial term used to designate making an introduction for someone or inciting a recognition of something. The question then becomes, what do these 21 introductions introduce us to? They introduce us to esoteric visionary encounters of enlightened beings in the form of abstracted images—rainbow-colored lights, luminous circles and zig-zag forms—which slowly assemble into mandalas of Buddhas and Pure Lands. While there are different degrees of variability in the practices associated with the 21 introductions, all of them involve taking a transparent crystal and putting it over one’s eye while looking at different visual objects—sun rays, butter lamps, mandalas of colored powdered dust, a row of bronze bowls, a horse’s tail strung with a line of eggs and so forth. Some of the introductions involve the use of mirrors, swords or other reflective surfaces that are placed in proximity to these objects in order to facilitate the generation of these magnificent light forms. A few of the

introductions involve gazing at another person dressed in black and adorned with bone ornaments whose image, when refracted through the crystal, transforms into the Buddha in wrathful form. And perhaps the most significant visual object of all—the horse’s tail strung with eggs—represents the white spots one sees at the periphery of one’s vision when pressing on the eyes. The very description of this vision derives from a distinctive Tibetan nomadic practice of tying lambs together by the neck and watching as they move across the hillside and its name directly reflects this: “linked little lambs.”

According to Germano, there are four striking points to be observed in these 21 introductions: 1) the Indian empowerment rituals have become displaced by introduction; 2) analogical thinking and playful performative experimentation become dominant; 3) a new and distinctive form of meditation has emerged and 4) the crystal motif. With regard to the first point, it had become standard practice

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## INDIAN BUDDHISM LECTURES

### “The Buddha and History”

Oskar von Hinüber (by Ralph Craig III)



Oskar von Hinüber

On February 7, 2019, Oskar von Hinüber, Professor Emeritus for Indologie of the Albert-Ludwigs Universität in Freiburg, gave the Ho Center for Buddhist Studies at Stanford's first lecture of 2019. Framing his lecture as a response to David Drewes' recently published article entitled, “The Idea of the Historical Buddha,” Prof. von Hinüber lectured on the historicity of the Buddha, and addressed the various arguments made by other scholars on this topic.

David Drewes' article surveys the views of selected nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western scholars of Buddhism regarding whether the Buddha can be considered to have been a historical person. Drewes shows that there was initially no consensus among scholars about the Buddha's historicity during this period. Even within a given scholar's different works, there seemed to be varying opinions. Building his argument on the secondary literature of such scholars, Drewes concludes that there is no conclusive proof that the Buddha was a historical figure.

In addressing Drewes' argument, Prof.

von Hinüber proposed that we turn to primary sources to evaluate their age, and trace possible early fragments containing information on the biography of the Buddha. During the lecture, Prof. von Hinüber conducted linguistic analysis of Pāli sources such as the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, Sanskrit sources such as the *Buddhacarita*, and vinaya material to determine the relative chronology of sources for the Buddha's life. In doing so, he highlighted traces that might point to an early date near to the assumed life of the Buddha, or at least to the date at which a person called the Buddha was created. He paid particular attention to the narrative contradictions that appear both within different accounts of the Buddha's life and within the same account. One narrative, for example, states that the Buddha's mother, Māyādevī, died soon after his birth, but then describes both his mother and father crying as the Buddha left home to begin his life as a wandering ascetic.

Prof. von Hinüber also clarified that his analysis of these sources suggests that the Buddha was born to more humble

origins, rather than as a prince, and that descriptions of him as the son of a king are later attempts to exalt him. As proof of this, Prof. von Hinüber pointed to canonical accounts of the Buddha himself describing his memory of his father working (possibly even plowing) in a field as he himself sat under the shade of a tree, slipping into a concentrated state in the process. Prof. von Hinüber pointed out that if his father were the king, he would not be working in a field (and certainly not plowing it). He said that accounts which claim that the king was working in the field as a special occasion are attempts to explain the incongruity of a king doing such work. He saw such contradictions as indications of the memory of a genuine historical personage. Prof. von Hinüber concluded that, contrary to the views and conclusions presented in David Drewes' article, linguistic analysis of primary source material shows that the Buddha was indeed a historical person, traces of whose memory are preserved in the examined material.

During the Q & A which followed the lecture, it became clear that some of the points made by Prof. von Hinüber overturned conventional knowledge about the Buddha. An undergraduate student at Stanford who attended the talk raised her hand and asked, “Are we talking about the same Buddha?” She described a recent trip to Nepal where local guides showed her ruins which they claimed were “remnants of the childhood palace of Buddha, the prince.” She said this showed that he must have been a prince. Prof. von Hinüber responded to the question and anecdote by directing the audience back to the primary sources and what they tell us. The ensuing conversation both provided a humorous, informative exchange and underscored just what may be at stake in an issue like the historicity of the Buddha.

## “Buddhism as a Cultural Bridge Between India and China”

Seishi Karashima (by Sangyop Lee)



Seishi Karashima

Professor Seishi Karashima’s talk on April 25th highlighted the profound influence of Indian Buddhism on the formation of Chinese culture by using fresh and thought-provoking examples from medieval Chinese language, literature, and linguistics.

Prof. Karashima started his talk with an overview of the historical significance of the Gandhara region and Gandhari language in the transmission of Buddhism into China, and introduced various ways in which the idiosyncrasies of Gandhari as a Middle Indic language left lasting marks on Chinese Buddhist language. Needless to say, the systematic investigation of Gandhari’s influence on early Chinese Buddhist translations is a field pioneered by Prof. Karashima.

Building on this introductory discussion of the historical background, the main part of Prof. Karashima’s talk examined various concrete examples of the influence of Indian Buddhism on medieval Chinese

language, literature, and linguistics, with the typical philological rigor and acumen his scholarship is known for.

With regard to Chinese language, Prof. Karashima first pointed out that the referents of “*tian*” (deity), “*shen*” (spirit), and “*long*” (dragon) in Chinese cosmological idiom were largely shaped by adapting the usages of these words in Buddhist translation. He also demonstrated that words such as “*xianzai*” (present), “*guoqu*” (past), “*weilai*” (future), “*zhenli*” (truth), and “*shijie*” (world) that are commonly used in everyday conversation in modern-day Chinese were also first introduced as translations of Indian Buddhist notions. Furthermore, he argued that there also are medieval Chinese grammatical constructions that were popularized through their common usage in Buddhist translations.

Examples from Chinese literature discussed in Prof. Karashima’s talk included the Daoist canon, Six Dynasties

literature, and medieval poetry. A particularly fascinating example was that of the parable of the skillful archer that appears in the Chinese classic *Liezi*. The professor argued that this parable was borrowed from Zhu Shulan’s third-century translation of the *Larger Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*.

Medieval linguistics was another aspect of Chinese culture that was inspired by the transmission of Indian Buddhism. Prof. Karashima suggested that Chinese people’s contact with Indian phonology that Indian and Central Asian monks brought into China must have provided an opportunity to reflect on various aspects of the Chinese language in a more objective and systematic way, and that this could have led to the emergence of various means for analyzing the phonology of Chinese. He also pointed out that many of the earliest Chinese lexicographical works were produced by Buddhist monks.

Because of our everyday reliance on the notion of “China” as a distinctive, largely independent cultural sphere, we often overlook the role foreign influence played in the development of Chinese culture. Prof. Karashima’s talk was a strong reminder of the ubiquity and variety of Buddhist influence on the formation of Chinese culture and cultural identity.

Prof. Karashima concluded his talk by examining the etymology of the Japanese word “*tera*” (Buddhist temple). Although “*tera*” has usually been thought to be a pure Japanese word, Prof. Karashima convincingly showed that the word must in fact have derived from the Korean word “*chōl*” (Buddhist temple), and ultimately from Central Asian forms of the Indic word “*chattra*” (dish-shaped structure on the top of a *stūpa*). Examples such as this, he reminded us, demonstrate the porous nature of cultural boundaries that we often fail to fully appreciate because of our nationalistic preconceptions.

## HWEI TAI SEMINARS

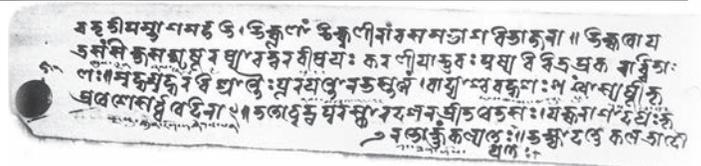
### “Select Readings in the Bhikṣu-vinayakārikā-kusuma-sraj”

Shayne Clarke (by Ralph Craig III)



Top: HCBSS graduate students, faculty and Shayne Clarke (center)

Right: Selections from Viśākha(deva)'s Flower Garland



This year's Hwei Tai Seminar was led by Professor Shayne Clarke from McMaster University. In the seminar, we read selections from Viśākha(deva)'s Flower Garland, a poetic composition which digests the enormous Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya into approximately 62 palm-leaf folios. Fourteen of these were found in 1936 by Rāhula Sāṅkṛtyāyana in Sa skya monastery in Tibet. The seminar took place on the weekend of February 2nd and 3rd, and allowed students and faculty to read and translate 53 verses from the extant Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese text.

On Saturday, after Prof. Clarke was introduced by Prof. Paul Harrison, the seminar began with Prof. Clarke's overview of the material and discussion of the provenance of the manuscript. He also discussed the authorship of the Chinese and Tibetan translations. We then read and translated *kārikās* 24–51

of Viśākha(deva)'s composition, which is unique for being composed entirely in verse. In these *kārikās* Viśākha(deva) discusses topics related to the rules governing the decorum of *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs*. On Sunday, we continued by reading and translating *kārikās* 52–77. As we proceeded, Prof. Clarke pointed our attention to the canonical material which Viśākha(deva) was likely drawing from. This material is primarily found in the *Kṣudrakavastu* of the Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya. Prof. Clarke also paid due attention to previous scholarship on the text and addressed participant questions throughout.

Throughout the seminar, students and faculty were guided by Prof. Clarke's impressive command of the vinaya and related materials. As this text had not been previously translated, a sense of curiosity and discovery permeated the seminar. As we probed the logic of each verse — for

example: bathhouse etiquette (*kārikā* 31) and the intricacies of the guru-disciple relationship (*kārikās* 60–62/70–75) — we were provided an opportunity to speculate upon and search out the canonical referent for the subject matter of the given verse. Input from the participants led to textual emendations and variant readings. By the end of the seminar, we had covered all of the *kārikās* and were able to continue the conversation during a lively dinner.

The Hwei Tai Seminars serve as both a unique opportunity to work with renowned scholars of Buddhist Studies, and an important occasion to sharpen the critical and philological skills of students and faculty. In this year's seminar, Prof. Clarke constantly reinforced the sense of discovery inherent in translation by highlighting the greater vinaya context of the material.

## THERAVADA BUDDHISM LECTURES

### “Modern Buddhism and the Theravāda Model in Republican China”

Ester Bianchi (by Yi Ding)



Ester Bianchi

On April 30, Dr. Ester Bianchi, associate professor at the University of Perugia (Italy), presented a captivating talk about the “rediscovery” of Theravāda Buddhism by modern Chinese Buddhists and its reception in China. The talk demonstrated the spread of the Theravāda model in Chinese Buddhism and examined how and when it took place.

Dr. Bianchi started her discussion with how Chinese Buddhists understood the term Theravāda and reevaluated the received image of “Hīnayāna” (“lower vehicle”) in the Republican Era. In the first half of the twentieth century, Chinese monks traveled to Sri Lanka and brought back the local usage of the term Theravāda. These monks started to actively promote elements of Theravāda Buddhism in China, sometimes in the form of a critique of contemporary Chinese monasticism. Pāli scriptures were translated into Chinese, and Theravāda Buddhism was depicted as a pristine form of Indian Buddhism. In the meantime, attempts were made to revive those

Theravāda practices that resonated with Chinese vinaya texts. Chinese monks began to notice the lack of attention paid to monastic regulations concerning *poṣadha* rituals, *pravārita*, and *ekabhogya*.

Next, Dr. Bianchi moved on to discuss the reception of Theravāda meditation in China. In terms of practice, vipassanā meditation was incorporated into the hybrid form of meditation offered by Chinese monasteries to the public. Mainstream Buddhist texts in the Chinese Buddhist canon which look similar to Theravādin forms of meditation were rediscovered, foregrounded, and practiced.

Overall, in China, Theravāda Buddhism was generally regarded as a “purer” form of Buddhism and the notion of Buddhism as a pan-Asian religion was developed. Various elements of Theravāda Buddhism were selectively absorbed by modern Chinese Buddhism, even when their hybridity was not mentioned, publicized or well recognized.

Dabaosi 大寶寺, Wutaishan (August of 2015)



## SHINNYO-EN VISITING PROFESSOR LECTURES

### “The Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra in the Religion of Sixth-Century China, as Glimpsed through ‘Sengchou’s’ Cave at Xiaonanhai”

Michael Radich (by Ralph Craig III)



Michael Radich

On April 18, 2019, Michael Radich, Professor of Buddhist Studies at the University of Heidelberg and Shinnyo-en Visiting Professor at Stanford University, delivered the eleventh annual Shinnyo-en Visiting Professor Lecture. The event was co-sponsored by the Ho Center for Buddhist Studies at Stanford and the Humanities Center. Professor Radich’s lecture centered on a rediscovered cave at Xiaonanhai 小南海 in northern Henan 河南, which has close connections with Sengchou 僧稠 (480–560), a famous meditator and leading cleric in Northern China in the sixth century. In particular, the lecture focused upon textual material featured at the cave: unique portions of Dharmakṣema’s version of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* (the version entitled *Da banniepan jing* 大般涅槃經 T374, translated by Dharmakṣema ca. 421–432), parts of which are unparalleled in the other three independent witnesses to the *sūtra*.

In his opening remarks introducing the speaker, Professor Paul Harrison noted

how fitting the subject matter of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* was to the occasion at hand: the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* purports to record the final days of Śākyamuni Buddha, and Prof. Harrison said that, “In effect, this was Śākyamuni’s final lecture.” He went on to inform the audience that Prof. Michael Radich’s lecture was to be the last ever Shinnyo-en Visiting Professor Lecture, as the Shinnyo-en Visiting Professor Fund has been amended to the Shinso Ito Professorship Fund. He also explained that the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* is the principal scriptural authority for the form of Japanese Buddhism represented by Shinnyo-en. He took this as the opportunity to welcome and thank the Shinnyo-en Foundation and the guests from it who were present.

Prof. Radich began by providing a detailed PowerPoint tour of the cave. The lower half of the east wall of the cave features the Buddha flanked by two bodhisattvas, while the top half features reliefs of Śākyamuni teaching and Maitreya preaching. The back wall has a Buddha image in the center, a *jātaka* scene, and Sengchou. The west wall also features an iconic triad and a relief of the nine degrees of rebirth in Amitābha’s pure land. Finally, inside the cave above the door, there is a relief of a scene from the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*. Prof. Radich then discussed the historical context of Sengchou’s cave on the basis of its inscriptions, which date the cave to approximately the middle of the sixth century.

He went on to say more about Sengchou’s life and his meditation practice, the scriptural source for which was inscribed on the cave’s walls. While noting that Sengchou is usually associated with Chan/Zen traditions, Prof. Radich pointed out that prior scholarship has misinterpreted Sengchou’s meditation, by using the

wrong sources. Sengchou’s meditation, represented in the longest passage carved onto the cave, was called the *sinianchu* 四念處, or “Four Bases of Mindfulness.” Previous scholars have missed that Sengchou’s meditation is drawn from the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra*, and that it differs significantly from a meditation of the same name, known from Mainstream Buddhist canonical sources such as the *Mahāsatipatṭhāna Sutta*. Prof. Radich then compared the account of this meditation found in the *Mahāsatipatṭhāna Sutta* which moves through the four bases, to that found in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra*. The latter text features a twelve step progression, including something akin to what Prof. Radich referred to as the “Dem Bones Meditation.” At this point he humorously sang the spiritual hymn, “Dem Bones.” The meditation culminates in the cultivation of *ksānti*, or “patient endurance.” He then discussed some of the major differences between these two presentations of the meditation, noting possible Mahāyāna elements in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra*. He also discussed the consequences of these differences and the passage in the context of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra*.

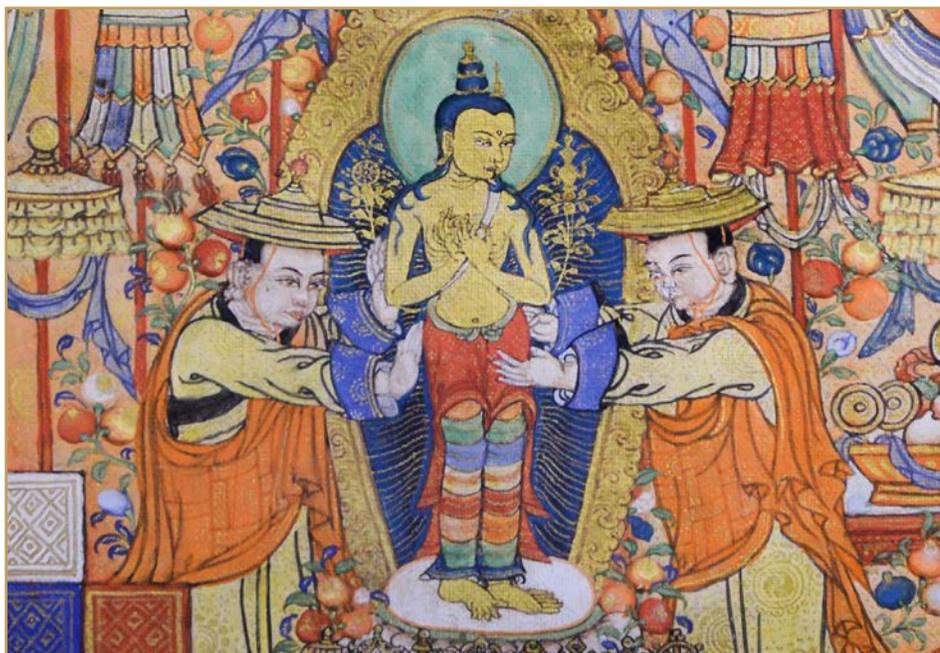
Prof. Radich returned to Sengchou’s cave to contextualize the broader significance of the key points of his analysis. He concluded that this material compels us to pay more attention to the place of the body in soteriologically oriented practices and models in the China of Sengchou’s time. He further concluded that sites like Sengchou’s cave require us to pay closer attention to the actual texts that these sites refer to, and their intertextual dimensions.

Prof. Radich’s insightful lecture was a fitting close to the Shinnyo-en Visiting Professor Lecture series. We look forward to the growth and development of the Shinso Ito professorship.

## POSTDOCTORAL FELLOW LECTURES

### “On Buddhist Images: Materiality and Constructedness in Religious Representations”

Eric Huntington (by Ralph Craig III)



Procession of a sculpture of Maitreya (detail). Painting, Mongolia, 20th century

Eric Huntington, Postdoctoral Fellow at the Ho Center for Buddhist Studies at Stanford, launched the Ho Center’s November programming by delivering the 2018 Postdoctoral Fellow Lecture. Dr. Huntington’s lecture, entitled “On Buddhist Images: Materiality and Constructedness in Religious Representations,” focused on visual and material representation in Buddhist art.

Dr. Huntington opened his lecture by explaining that representation is best understood as a process. He drew upon his interdisciplinary background in philosophy, art, and Buddhist ritual, to present examples of the representation of light in four paintings: *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* by seventeenth century Italian baroque painter Caravaggio; a painting of Padmasambhava’s Rainbow Body; a painting of the fifth Mughal emperor Shah Jahan with a halo; and golden light rays in a Tibetan Buddhist painting. For each painting he discussed how light was utilized to convey information about the subjects. In Shah Jahan’s image, for

example, he noted that the halo conveys to the viewer the Shah’s virtue and regality.

He then led us to consider images of the Buddha. Dr. Huntington received a B.F.A in illustration and an M.F.A in painting and drawing, and this training was on full display as he presented participants with a number of intricate diagrams and illustrations examining images of the Buddha, illustrating that in Buddhist art, these images can function in various ways. They can be seen as reminders of the Buddha’s presence or absence, and can also invoke complex doctrines such as a Buddha’s *dharmakāya* and *rūpakāya*. In a sense, how the image functions is dependent on the viewer. For a viewer of the Buddha’s image, evocation of complex doctrine is dependent upon familiarity with those doctrines. Without this familiarity, the image may merely invoke presence or absence. Dr. Huntington noted that each of these functions have been explored in the literature surrounding Buddhist art and images, such as the *Citrakarmasāstra*. Later in the lecture, he discussed the usage of



Eric Huntington

images in the performance of Buddhist rituals and visualization practices.

After considering the function of images of the Buddha, Dr. Huntington showed paintings and reliefs of the Buddha being presented with images of himself in Gandhāran art as examples of meta-images. As meta-images are examples of the representation of a representation, this facilitated a return to the driving question of the lecture: “what is representation?” Rather than supply concrete answers to this question, Dr. Huntington offered ongoing reflections consonant with his understanding that representation is a process.

A lively Q&A followed the lecture in which participants asked questions such as: “How are mental images to be classified?”; “Did the viewers of Buddhist images distinguish between that which is signified and the signifier?”; and “Is there a degradation of presence when an image is reproduced?” Reflection on these questions by Dr. Huntington and the participants concluded the lecture and provided stimulating dinner conversation.

## THE EVANS-WENTZ LECTURES

### “Buddhist Paths: to the Forest or to the Palace?”

*Louis Gabaude (by Elaine Lai)*

Louis Gabaude presented this year’s Evans-Wentz Lecture in honor of Walter Evans-Wentz, a pioneering scholar in the study of Buddhism and in particular, Tibetan Buddhism, who graduated from our very own Stanford University in 1906. Gabaude, who has lived in Thailand since 1974, is a scholar of Buddhism whose work reflects an interest in pre-modern Buddhism, but also takes seriously the intellectual contributions of elite contemporary Buddhists coming to terms with the challenges of modernity. His talk this evening, “Buddhist Paths: to the Forest or to the Palace?” was exemplary of these intersecting interests and showed how this debate over the terms of worldly engagement on the part of Buddhist renunciants is rooted in the very life story of Śākyamuni Buddha himself.

Throughout the evening’s lecture, Gabaude displayed a panoply of poignant Thai cartoons emblematic of the criticisms that certain contemporary Thai monks harbor towards current monastic trends, possible corruption within the Sangha, and the dangers of intermingling Dharma with politics. Gabaude argued that these tensions between renunciation and worldly engagement, violence and non-violence, religion and politics, have always been at play since the time of Śākyamuni Buddha, but the terms of debate are never uniform. Indeed, Gabaude’s examination of the positions taken by different influential Thai monks—Kittivuddho Bhikkhu (1936–2005), Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (1906–1993), Cha Subhaddo (1918–1992) and Bua Nyanasampanno (1913–2011)—reveal not a unanimous consensus on such debates, but rather a spectrum of attitudes, with some condoning violence, some completely against it, and some occupying a blurry space in between.

Gabaude framed his talk by analogizing the three jewels to different aspects of



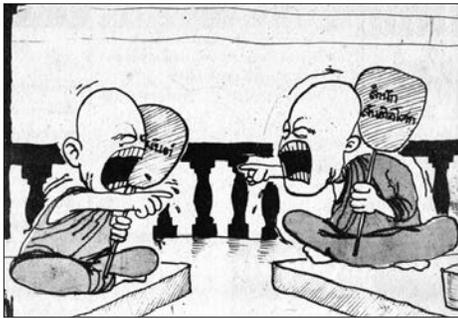
*Louis Gabaude*

a theatrical play in which we have an author (the Buddha), a plot (the Dharma) and actors (the Sangha). In part one “the Author,” he briefly summarized the Buddha’s life trajectory; although the Buddha had opted for a life of renunciation, which in the context of the Indian ascetic traditions he was a part of was defined as abandoning societal interactions with the exception of the daily alms-round, after Śākyamuni was recognized as an enlightened being, people from the very society he renounced began to approach him for advice and counsel. From this latter development it becomes clear that the Buddha’s enlightenment in some ways marked a return to the palace and to the concerns of society. This interplay between renunciation and societal engagement is particularly pronounced when we consider the case of the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682) who not only lived in a palace, but also assumed the full duties of kingship, some of which involved violent persecution of rival religious groups.

In part two of his talk, playfully titled “A dharma for a drama,” Gabaude examined

the interplay between these two poles of religious power and secular power through the analogy of the two wheels—the wheel of the dharma and the wheel-turning monarch. Illustrating this was a series of cartoons which took this motif quite literally. In one image, we saw a large wheel driven by animals, implying that sangha members who are responsible for “turning the wheel of the dharma” are driven by base instincts. In another image, we saw a gigantic wheel about to crush a monk sitting in meditation. As Gabaude later revealed, this drawing represents an actual monk who was well-known for criticizing the sangha community for not taking up proper moral conduct. Almost as if the cartoon foresaw the monk’s demise, Gabaude tells us that a few years after the cartoon’s publication, that very monk who was about to be crushed by the dharma wheel was defrocked by fellow sangha members. Other striking images of the night included an amulet where the nine openings of the body were depicted as closed, suggesting that a true disciple of the Buddha should withdraw inwards, shutting out the external world.

And perhaps most memorable for me was the cartoon which made a bold inversion of typical religious roles by depicting the police and laity teaching the sangha, who are instead blind.



Images: *stephff cartoonist (@stephffart)*  
Twitter

When we turn to look at the views of contemporary elite Thai monks, we see the terms of worldly engagement falling anywhere between the two extremes of pro-Communism and anti-Communism (the major political debate at the time), with Kittivuddho Bhikkhu occupying one end of the spectrum with his statement that murdering communists is *not* demeritorious, and Buddhadasa Bhikkhu

occupying the other end, holding firm that the American military rhetoric of “bombing North Vietnam in the name of morality” was an utter contradiction. However, as Gabaude points out, if we really study Buddhist history, we find many instances in which violence against the enemies of Buddhism was in fact condoned. This was the case with the Sri Lankan Tamils as well as the Fifth Dalai Lama, as mentioned earlier.

Whether we are looking at the Buddha’s life story or the standpoints offered by these elite Thai monks, it is clear that engagement with the world has always been there and that the retreat to the forest never meant a complete divorce from palace affairs. If engagement with the world is the starting point for these Buddhist renunciants, perhaps the more important question is: engagement for what purpose? On whose behalf? To what end? As for Buddhism’s long history with violence, the facts are undeniable, but even so, I find it encouraging that figures like Buddhadasa Bhikkhu found ways to express a strong anti-violence stance.

This shows that the terms of engagement have never been set in stone and that the struggle for proper interpretation necessitates a rigorous engagement within Buddhist traditions on how the Dharma is to be most suitably applied to the contemporary world. Gabaude, quoting a line from the *Dhammapada*, said: “Not by enmity are enmities quelled, whatever the occasion here. By the absence of enmity are they quelled. This is the ancient truth.” (Ch. 1, verse 5). Hopefully Buddhist leaders will call to mind these aspects of



Images: *stephff cartoonist (@stephffart)*

the Buddhist tradition when faced with difficult political realities in the future.

*David Germano (continues from page 7)*

in Tibet by the 11th and 12th century to separate the Fourth Empowerment as a free-standing ritual which could introduce the practitioner to the nature of their mind. Even today this is true and many Tibetan teachers follow a somewhat scripted and formalized ritual of “introduction” which sometimes involves shouting “Phet” in a loud voice in order to spontaneously engender a non-conceptual state of mind for the disciple. Introduction itself is also broadly mapped onto a wider Buddhist concern with encountering and recognizing Buddhas and we can trace this back to Mahāyāna thought in which it is believed that there is a divine, enlightened presence hidden in the interior of all sentient beings—our Buddha nature. However, most interestingly, in the context of the 21 introductions, the interiorized space of the Buddha gives way to exterior forms. That is to say, the practices delineated in the 21 introductions work on two levels. First, it is through these

aesthetically charged and performative environments that the practitioner is able to have flashes of insight and recognition into their own interiorized Buddha ontologies. But ultimately these external visions of light created through looking at various objects with a crystal held over one’s eye is meant to transform the very field of vision into bodies, emblems and maṇḍalas. The meditative experience which results is called Direct Transcendence (*thod.rgal*). What is unique about Direct Transcendence meditation is that it stimulates the encounter with Buddhas through these light forms which initially come from the interior of one’s body, but eventually become exteriorized to one’s sensory experience.

And finally, what’s with the crystals? In the 21 Introductions, they are the mediums through which one distorts perception, estranging oneself from habitual viewing patterns and instead engaging with the

visual field anew. The crystal-mediated gaze which alters vision in order to experience the truth stands in contrast to Buddhist epistemological schools in Tibet at the time which emphasized correcting and generating precise vision. Germano, displaying a beautiful photo of the glacial mountains in Tibet, pointed out that crystal imagery pervades Tibetan literature. Hence the centrality of the crystal in the 21 introductions was most likely inspired from the Tibetan landscape with its snowy mountains which symbolize original, pristine purity—the heart of the Great Perfection itself. It is thus through the language of crystals that we see how 11th century Tibetans did not merely appropriate tantric rituals from the Indian continent, but also fashioned their own understanding and relationship with contemplative forms of practice through “the crystalline perspective of glacial Tibet herself.”

## JAPANESE BUDDHISM LECTURES

### “Music as Dharma: A Buddhist Philosophy of Music in the Sutra of Kinnara King Druma and Its Impact on Japanese Court Music (Gagaku) and Buddhist Liturgical Dance (Bugaku Hōyō)”

Fabio Rambelli (by Ralph Craig III)



Fabio Rambelli



Kinnara Heavenly Musicians print

On May 10, 2019, Fabio Rambelli, Professor and ISF Endowed Chair of Shinto Studies in Religious Studies and the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultural Studies at University of California, Santa Barbara, delivered a lecture entitled, “Music as Dharma.” The event was co-sponsored by the Ho Center for Buddhist Studies at Stanford and the Humanities Center. Professor Rambelli’s lecture centered on the Sutra of the Questions by Druma, King of the Kinnara (*Daiju kinnara-ō shomon-gyō* 大樹緊那羅王所問經, T. 625; Skt. *Drumakinnara-rāja-paripṛcchā-sūtra*), translated by Kumārajīva in the early fifth century. The lecture was introduced by Dr. Irene Lin, Executive Director of the Ho Center for Buddhist Studies.

Prof. Rambelli began his lecture with an outline of early Buddhist attitudes toward music and dance, as evidenced by the Vinaya codes. These codes of monastic discipline explicitly prohibit monks, nuns, and lay followers from performing,

and from listening to or watching performances. This negative attitude towards music prevails in the literature of Theravada Buddhism. Prof. Rambelli explained that this is not the case in many Mahāyāna Buddhist texts and traditions. In some Mahāyāna traditions, music and dance could be considered offerings to the Buddha or Buddhas. This is supported by canonical descriptions of Pure Lands that are permeated by music and melodious sounds. The Mahāyāna sūtra which formed the basis of his talk is a case in point: the *Daiju kinnara-ō shomon-gyō* (大樹緊那羅王所問經) “presents what Prof. Rambelli described as a Buddhist “philosophy of music.”

Since scholars have paid scant attention to this work, Prof. Rambelli gave a lively overview of the contents of the scripture. In the text King Druma discusses the nature of music from the standpoint of Mahāyāna Buddhist doctrines, such as emptiness. The Buddha then accepts King Druma’s explanation of music and

predicts that he will attain enlightenment. Prof. Rambelli explained that this is significant because it presents the Buddha as endorsing the use of music to convey the dharma. After presenting the content of the text and its significance, Prof. Rambelli discussed its later impact in medieval Japan where it influenced the development of music and dances used at Buddhist rituals (*gagaku* 雅樂 and *bugaku* 舞樂). He also noted that these Buddhist rituals are still performed in Japan today, at Shitennōji temple (四天王寺) in Osaka. In the Q & A that followed the talk, Prof. Rambelli’s enthusiasm for the *Daiju kinnara-ō shomon-gyō* and its philosophy of music shone through.

## “Word Embodied: Entangled Icons in Medieval Japanese Buddhist Art”

Halle O’Neal (by Ralph Craig III)



Halle O’Neal

On May 30, 2019, Halle O’Neal, specialist in Japanese Buddhist visual and material culture at the University of Edinburgh, delivered a lecture titled “Word Embodied: Entangled Icons in Medieval Japanese Buddhist Art.” The lecture was the final event of the year for the Ho Center for Buddhist Studies at Stanford University.

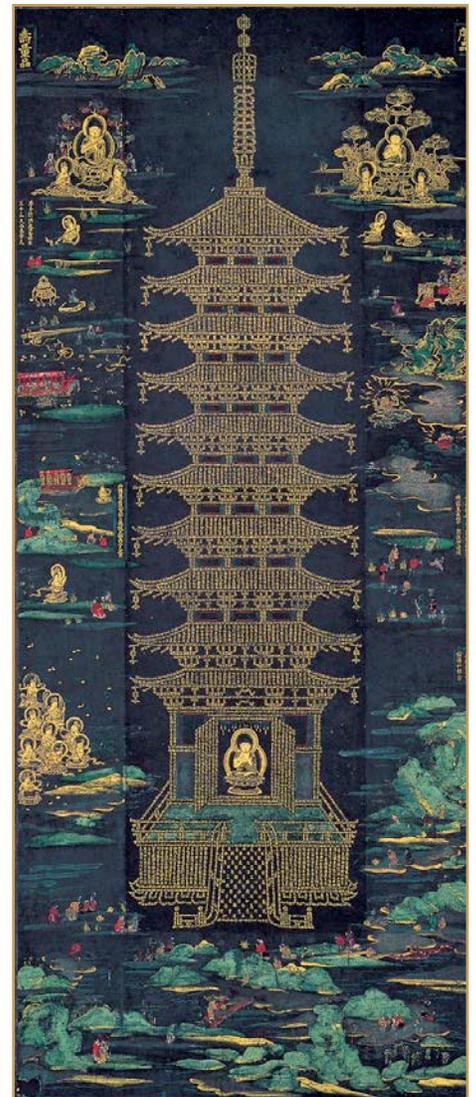
Dr. O’Neal’s lecture focused on Japanese jeweled pagoda mandalas. Created in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, these mandalas use carefully arranged characters from sutras to construct the central icon of the pagoda. Using digital animation, Dr. O’Neal showed how the mandalas display a complex interaction between word and image. She noted that in this interaction the written word of the text “has jettisoned its exegetical purpose as well as the performative engagement that the paintings require of the viewer.” She further explained that “such a performance enables the concepts of sutra, relic, dharma, body, and

pagoda to exist in a fluid and constantly interchanging visual relationship.” This fluidity and the dynamism of the jeweled pagoda mandalas were recurring themes throughout the talk.

The lecture also focused on the materiality of the mandalas and the implications for thinking through text and embodiment. To discuss these themes, Dr. O’Neal provided a detailed analysis of the narrative vignettes that show the content of the scriptures. The point of this analysis was to recover the underlying dynamics of medieval Japanese Buddhist art. During the question and answer session which followed the lecture, she discussed the social history of the mandalas, including issues of gender and class that surround their production.

Dr. O’Neal’s knowledge of and passion for the material shone throughout the lecture. It was clear by the end that the audience came to share her enthusiasm. The lecture was a dynamic and stimulating capstone to the year’s Ho Center activities.

*Jeweled Pagoda Mandala*  
ca. 1170  
Chūsonji 中尊寺  
140cm x 54cm  
(below)



## GRADUATE STUDENTS WORKSHOPS

### “Political Poetics Across Buddhist Traditions: Gandhāra, Sri Lanka, and Tibet”

(by Grace Ramswick)



Stefan Baums,  
Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich,  
Germany

*“The Politics and Literature of  
Gāndhārī Buddhism”*



Stephen C. Berkwitz,  
Missouri State University

*“The Poetics of Buddhist Kingship in  
Sri Lanka”*



José Ignacio Cabezón,  
University of California,  
Santa Barbara

*“A Tibetan Verse Work on  
Political Ethics”*

The first of this year’s two graduate student-organized workshops, held on March 2, sought to explore some of the contexts in which Buddhist communities or individuals have introduced political concerns or images into their poetic works—or, alternately—have had their literary output affected in one way or another by political circumstances. For this event, I invited three guest speakers—Stefan Baums (LMU, Munich), Stephen Berkwitz (Missouri State University), and José Cabezón (UC Santa Barbara)—to share with us some of their previous or ongoing research in connection with this topic.

Over the course of their talks, these three scholars covered an array of literary productions from c. third-century BCE–second-century CE Gandhāra (Baums), twelfth–sixteenth-century Śrī Laṅkā (Berkwitz), and nineteenth–twentieth-century Tibet (Cabezón), along the way highlighting a number of possible intersections between the political and

the poetic: royal patronage of monastic institutions (especially the relic cult, which in some cases prompted [semi-]literary inscriptions); Buddhist participation in the praise of local kings and in court poetry; praises of the Buddha-as-king and king-as-bodhisattva; and the composition of didactic verse letters or treatises that present themselves as words of advice from prominent Buddhist monks directly to kings.

These lectures also temporally and geographically framed—and thereby drew our attention to—the mid-first-millennium efflorescence of Sanskrit high court poetry (*mahākāvya*) and eulogistic inscription (*praśasti*) on the Indian subcontinent. We were prompted to discuss how Buddhist traditions fit into this equation, and the degree to which certain Buddhist literary activities in languages other than Sanskrit (e.g. Gāndhārī, Sinhala) complicate Sheldon Pollock’s now-well-known presentation of the rise of the “Sanskrit cosmopolis.”

Our final discussion was further animated by questions surrounding the categorization of all verse texts in these cultural contexts as “poetic” (or “poetry”), given that the wide deployment and varied levels of “ornamentation” of metrical compositions in South Asia do not fully align with Euro-American preconceptions about the aesthetic qualities and societal functions of poetry. Though we came to no tidy conclusions, I much appreciated my colleagues’ willingness to reflect on these issues, and am grateful to Professor Baums, Professor Berkwitz, and Professor Cabezón for their time and thoughtful contributions.

## “Conjuring Demons: Buddhist Narratives of Encounters with the Demonic”

(by Simona Lazzerini)



Workshop attendees and presenters: Christine Mollier (far left), Jacob Dalton (center), Michael Foster (far right)

In the spring of 2019 the Ho Center for Buddhist Studies hosted the Fifth Graduate Student Workshop, “Conjuring Demons: Buddhist Narratives of Encounters with the Demonic,” organized by Simona Lazzerini (Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Religious Studies). In the workshop, we examined the role that demons play in Buddhism, Himalayan, and East Asian religions, more specifically how demonic beings can help us make sense of the world we live in. For this occasion, three scholars were invited: Dr. Christine Mollier (Research Director at the Center for Research on the Civilizations of East Asia in Paris), Dr. Michael Foster (Professor of Japanese and Department Chair of East Asian Languages and Cultures at UC Davis), and Dr. Jacob Dalton (Professor in Tibetan Buddhism at UC Berkeley).

In the morning, Dr. Foster introduced the Namahage なまはげ ritual of Akita Prefecture in Northern Japan, a New Year’s Eve event during which men dress up as demons (oni 鬼) and visit people’s homes to bless families and scare the children. The ritual, inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity,

is not associated with institutional religion, but clearly incorporates different types of sacred behavior. Based on his ethnographic work, Dr. Foster showed us how Namahage has changed over time and regions, and how people have very different opinions and interpretations concerning this fascinating practice, as well as the demons animating the festival.

Dr. Mollier then gave a talk on Buddhist and Daoist eschatology in medieval Chinese texts, more specifically on the creation of demonological inventories and taxonomies, which were meant to identify and get rid of all sorts of demons that harmed humans and inflicted diseases. At the same time, talismans, incantations, and prayers were employed to fight demonic entities and ensure people’s safety and protection. Dr. Mollier also demonstrated how fifth- and sixth-century apocalyptic literature, both Buddhist and Taoist, represented the height of Chinese demonology, and reflected people’s anxiety and terror in the face of the imminent end of the world.

Finally, in the afternoon, Dr. Dalton discussed the Tibetan ritual of “Oath-Breaker Suppression” (dam sri mnan pa), its origin and context, as well as the ritual

manuscripts describing this practice. Dr. Dalton showed that the ritual, meant to avert all kinds of trouble, can also shed light on other important aspects of Tibetan Buddhism and society, including the creation of a centralized Tibetan identity, the need to protect the land, the issue of center vs. periphery, and the suffering inflicted by the Mongol invasion.

The workshop helped students and faculty reflect on the ambiguity and ambivalence of demons, as well as the feelings of attraction and repulsion that human beings have for them. Studying demons in religious context can also allow us to create bridges with other fields, such as medicine, traditional sciences, and politics. Finally, by analyzing sources dealing with the demonic we can also uncover important cultural trends, understanding how they change over space and time, and how they affect people in their everyday lives.

The Ho Center for Buddhist Studies Graduate Student Workshop is a unique opportunity for students to meet and exchange ideas with influential scholars in our field, to investigate specific themes and issues, and to learn about new ways of conducting research.

## FIRST YEAR REFLECTIONS

### Ralph Craig III



The late great author and poet Maya Angelou once said, "There is nothing greater than thank you. That's what you say to God: you say 'thank you.'" In that spirit, I'd like to say a big thank you to the Ho Center for Buddhist Studies at Stanford! Of course, the Ho Center is nothing apart from its staff: Irene Lin, Tatiana Deogirikar, and Stephanie Lee. They have made my first year in the Ph.D. program in Religious Studies at Stanford a dream come true.

Like all good dreams, my dream to study at Stanford was hard won: though my interest in Buddhism and South Asian religions began at a young age in New Orleans, LA, my ability to formally pursue this interest was interrupted on a number of occasions. Nevertheless, my interest continued unabated and was nurtured through many trips to Asia. By the time I returned to school, I was even firmer in my determination that becoming a scholar of Buddhism and South Asian Religions was the right path for me. Thus, I am grateful to be able to pursue my studies in the department of Religious Studies

and the Ho Center for Buddhist Studies, at Stanford, as this academic environment is helping me broaden my knowledge base, define my goals, and work with world-class faculty members and fellow graduate students.

Over the course of this year I had a great time taking Sanskrit reading courses with my advisor Professor Paul Harrison, studying with faculty outside my area of focus, and defining my research interests. Especially rewarding has been attending the many lectures and events organized by the Ho Center. At these events I had the opportunity to meet and learn from distinguished scholars in the field. Last, but certainly not least: it has been my good fortune to work closely with the other graduate students in Buddhist Studies.

During my first year at Stanford, the Journal of Buddhist-Christian Studies published a comparative paper on Nichiren Daishonin, liturgy, and trauma theory that I wrote prior to beginning my program. Though this paper was written before I began my Ph.D., my fellow graduate students and the department faculty all warmly supported my first publication. I am currently writing two book reviews for publication: a forthcoming review of Levi McLaughlin's book Soka Gakkai's Human Revolution, for the AAR's website, "Reading Religion;" and a forthcoming review of Richard Payne's book Language in the Buddhist

Tantra of Japan, for the Japanese Journal of Religious Studies. I have been fully supported in these endeavors by my colleagues and professors. The support that I have received for my work makes it clear to me that Stanford is the right environment for me, as I am able to grow and develop in an environment of mutual support. My research is currently focused on ritual, liturgy, and philosophy of language in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism. I have started to think about what primary sources to focus on and how to conduct my research. In order to work with the greatest range of primary sources, I have taken reading courses in Sanskrit and Tibetan throughout the year, and I also began learning Chinese. As I write this reflection, I am in Pune, India furthering my Sanskrit studies.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my first year in the Ph.D. program at Stanford. The faculty, students, and staff of the department and the Ho Center have supported me all the way, and together we have created a "family." When I interviewed at Stanford, Professor Harrison told me that it has been his experience that you learn more from your fellow graduate students than any faculty. In my case, this has proven true, and I am especially grateful to my colleagues. I look forward to growing as a human being and as a scholar, and to continuing my journey at Stanford with the Ho Center. Thank you!



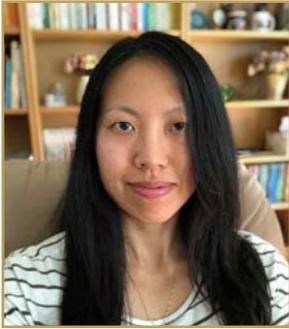
Sangyop Lee, Yi Ding and Ralph Craig III



Ralph Craig III and Nancy Chu



Ralph Craig III, Elaine Lai and Tatiana Deogirikar



Looking back on this past year 2018–2019, my first year of PhD studies at Stanford, and also my first time living in the United States in over ten years, I feel that there has been both continuity and also change in my journey and goals, on an academic and on a personal level. Having previously been exposed to Buddhism primarily through practitioner communities and through classes set in monasteries, since coming to Stanford I have developed a new kind of appreciation for the academic study of Buddhism where I am given the full freedom to explore other intersecting religious traditions. I took advantage of this freedom my first semester with a course on Hindu Tantra and a reading course in Hindu Texts under the guidance of Professor Elaine Fisher, which opened my eyes to a range of Sanskrit literature and forms of yogic practice that find parallels in many Buddhist traditions. I plan to continue such explorations in comparative religious studies in my future education.

The Ho Center for Buddhist Studies and especially Irene Lin has been a wonderful support for me institutionally, financially and also morally, and my Stanford experience has been greatly enriched thanks to their tireless efforts. For example, it is thanks to the financial support of the Ho Center for Buddhist Studies that I was able to attend the annual American Academy of Religion conference in Colorado where I witnessed first hand the kinds of interests, challenges and dynamics which characterize the current field of Buddhist studies and Tantric studies. This exposure, coupled with my exchanges with other

scholars in the field throughout the school year, all of whom were invited by the Ho Center for Buddhist studies to Stanford—Michael Radich who was this year’s Shinnyo-en Visiting Professor, Shayne Clark who hosted our annual Hwei Tai translation seminar, David Germano who was visiting professor at U.C. Berkeley this year and whose Tibetan reading course I cross-registered in, Seishi Karashima, Fabio Rambelli and other, as well as the participants of the two graduate student conferences held this year—has given me a taste of the diverse spectrum of approaches and intellectual interests that Buddhist Studies scholars have engaged in thus far. I have found many great role models and positive qualities to emulate, but I have also come to recognize that I may represent a different kind of voice in academia and that this is perfectly okay as well.

I feel very blessed to have Paul Harrison as my advisor, especially since the suggestions that he has given me have continually served to broaden my perspective and thinking. From observing the way that Professor Harrison works with the texts we are translating, whether it is the Vajracchedikā, the Saddharmasmṛtyupasthānasūtra, or the Vimalakīrtinirdeśa, I have begun to cultivate an eye for small details while translating from Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan. More than once, when I have been ready to give up on a seemingly impossible translation, Professor Harrison has chosen instead to ponder a minute longer and in doing so he has often come up with a solution for interpreting challenging sentences that render them both meaningful in terms of the doctrinal viewpoints they are meant to represent and also comprehensible within the languages that they have been translated into. From Professor Harrison I have learned that perseverance, stamina and most importantly kindness and patience are the qualities that I want to take on the path with me in my future scholarly pursuits. John Kieschnick has similarly guided me in my readings of Chinese



Elaine Lai, Ralph Craig III at the Religious Studies Fall 2018 Reception

Buddhist texts and this last Spring quarter he has very kindly taken the time to lead me in an independent reading course where we are going through his online Primer for Chinese Esoteric Texts. Every question I have ever asked, Professor Kieschnick has duly noted down with a sticky note and come back to me with a response the following week. He has lent me more books than I have managed to finish and has inspired within me a newfound appreciation for Chinese Buddhist texts and the different genres of literature that they represent.

On a personal level, I have come to realize that true fulfillment is not dependent solely upon my academic progress, but equally on the kind of interactions and impact that I have in both the immediate and broader community around me. TAing for Exploring Buddhism this Spring Quarter has allowed me to take a step back and to think about the broader applications of Buddhism to the Stanford community as well as my initial desire to go back to school in the first place: to somehow be of benefit to more people in whatever capacity possible. As I move forward in my education, I hope that all the work I engage in and the relationships that I form will serve these ends and that I can help to discover new ways of presenting scholarship and of bridging practitioner and scholarly communities so that more people can benefit from the kind of knowledge and practices that Buddhism and Buddhist Studies have to offer.

## Nancy Chu



*My first year as a Buddhist Studies student at Stanford is drawing to a close, and what a rich and eventful year it has been at 450 Serra Mall. I have fully enjoyed my coursework in religious studies and anthropology and the many talks and workshops sponsored by the Ho Center for Buddhist Studies, which have contributed deeply to my education in Buddhist Studies.*

*My background growing up in a Mahāyāna Buddhist monastic community in Ukiah, California led me, after completing my undergraduate*

*studies in Chinese and English literature at Swarthmore, to study Buddhism at Harvard Divinity School as a Master of Divinity student. I found the model of studying religion there to be deeply compelling. A summer project on Buddhist nuns in Taiwan and an outstanding professor sparked an interest in learning more about anthropology. Following divinity school, I pursued further study in social anthropology at the University of Cambridge and, eventually, a residency in chaplaincy and spiritual care at the University of California, San Francisco Medical Center. In each of these places, I found thoughtful and generous individuals who were profoundly formative in some way.*

*My current interests lie at the intersection of the anthropology of Buddhism and medical anthropology. I am planning to work on the anthropology of pain and contemporary Buddhism in China and Taiwan. I have benefited from the support and mentorship of my advisors, John Kieschnick and Tanya*

*Luhrmann (Anthropology). This year, I translated medieval Chinese Buddhist texts in a seminar with John Kieschnick and learned about meditation from Paul Harrison. I also observed a palliative care physician at Stanford Medical Center over spring break, proposed a graduate student workshop on Buddhism and medical anthropology through the Ho Center for next year, served as teaching assistant for Religion Around the Globe with Barbara Pitkin and Elaine Fisher, and will be learning French over the summer in Paris.*

*I have also been enjoying getting to know the other faculty and students of the department better over the course of the year – these relationships have enriched my life. Finally, the Ho Center has comprised a major part of my life here and is supported by dedicated staff who are warm and irrepressibly fun. Though this has been a long and full year, it has flown by too, and I look forward to continuing my studies in this department in the fall.*

## Kedao Tong



*This past year was my first year as a PhD student in Buddhist Studies at Stanford. Before this, my training focused on Chinese literature and intellectual history. I am grateful to have been offered the opportunity to study Buddhism and Chinese religion here with a remarkable group of professors, staff, and colleagues at the Religious Studies Department and the Ho Center. Their warm support has made my transition to a new field and environment a lot easier than I imagined.*

*One of the best things about doing*

*research here is the chance not just to work on your field of specialization but also to explore the religious and cultural traditions that have been shaping the broader social-cultural contexts of the religion you study. The classes, workshops, lectures, and even conversations in the hallway have often inspired and challenged me in unexpected, exciting ways. Even though my research is focused on the socio-cultural aspects of Chinese Buddhism, especially the history of Maitreya in China, I am increasingly drawn to the Buddho-Daoist interaction in the early medieval period and the richness of early Chinese Buddhist translations. I will continue to explore different topics and approaches while I strive to refine the subject of my dissertation.*

*Over the course of the first year, I have been taking Japanese, which is an essential research language in Buddhist Studies. With the hope of improving my speaking and listening skills, I will be*

*in Japan this summer to complete an intensive Japanese language program at Waseda University, Tokyo. After Japan, I will participate in a one-week program on East Asian Buddhism in southwest China, which will give me the chance to share my work with and talk to students and scholars from all over the world. Since the summer is the only time when we are not preoccupied with coursework, I am also planning to work on a number of side projects.*

*It is both a privilege and an honor to be part of such a vibrant Buddhist Studies community. I am looking forward to learning new things, creating new karmic connections, and meeting new challenges in the years to come. It is my hope to become not just a better scholar, but also a better person. I am convinced that the Ho Center and Stanford offer everything that anyone on that arduous path might need.*

## STUDENT LIFE

### GRADUATION 2019



Left to right (front): John Kieschnick, Adeana McNicholl and Paul Harrison (back)



Left to right (front): John Kieschnick and Daniel Tuzzeo

### AAR CONFERENCE, DENVER



Left to right: Nancy Chu, Ralph Craig III, Charlie Hallisey, Elaine Lai



Left to right: Eric Huntington, Simona Lazerini, Nan Ouyang, Adeana McNicholl, Daniel Tuzzeo, Ralph Craig III, Yi Ding, Sangyop Lee

### HOLIDAY GATHERINGS



Left to right: Adeana McNicholl, Simona Lazerini, Jem Jebbia, Ralph Craig III, Yi Ding, Kedao Tong, Sangyop Lee



Left to right: Yi Ding, Nancy Chu, John Kieschnick, Paul Harrison, Irene Lin, Simona Lazerini, Elaine Lai, Michaela Mross, Kedao Tong  
Front: Tatiana Deogirikar, Stephanie Lee

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