



# LEKHA

The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Center for Buddhist Studies at Stanford University

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Lekha Newsletter  
Issue 9 • 2020

Lekha is a Sanskrit word  
for letter or writing

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*Cover image:*

Buddha, the Supreme Healer  
Opaque watercolor on cotton,  
Tibet, 15th century  
Edwin Binney 3rd Collection  
The San Diego Museum of Art,  
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## IN THIS ISSUE:

- 3 **CO-DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE**  
Paul Harrison, Co-Director of HCBSS, Stanford University
- 4 **SPECIAL EVENT**  
Court Music and Dances from Japan: A *Gagaku* Performance by  
The Hideaki Bunno Gagaku Ensemble
- 6 **TIBETAN STUDIES INITIATIVE**  
Film Screening of *Becoming Who I Was* (2016)  
James Gentry, Stanford University
- 8 **THE EVANS-WENTZ LECTURE**  
Helen Hardacre, Harvard University
- 10 **TT & WF CHAO DISTINGUISHED BUDDHIST PRACTITIONER LECTURES**  
Bhante Sujato, SuttaCentral, Australia  
Furyu Nancy Schroeder, Green Gulch Farm Zen Center, California
- 12 **JAPANESE BUDDHISM LECTURE**  
Michael Como, Columbia University
- 13 **HWEI TAI SEMINAR**  
Ryūichi Abé, Harvard University
- 14 **RESTARTING THE BUDDHIST COMMUNITY AT STANFORD**  
Elaine Lai, Ravi Jefferson Smith, and Julian Butterfield
- 17 **RESEARCHER IN RESIDENCE REFLECTIONS**  
Ana Cristina O. Lopes, Stanford University
- 18 **STUDENT REFLECTIONS**  
Ralph H. Craig III, Elaine Lai, Kedao Tong, Nancy Chu, Sangyop Lee, and  
Julian Butterfield

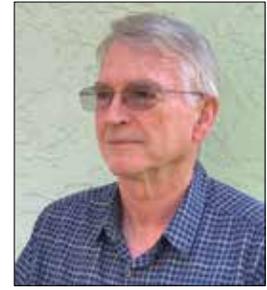
# CO-DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

As I write this the end of May is approaching, and with it the end—at least as things stand at present—of the shelter-in-place orders announced by the six San Francisco Bay Area counties on March 16 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The world-wide death toll continues to rise, as countries finding themselves in different phases of the pandemic either tentatively lift their shut-down orders or impose them. Opening things up again is fraught with peril, since by all accounts we risk a second wave of infections that could be even worse than the first. The future is highly uncertain, and nobody knows how long the crisis will continue into 2021. Like the state of California, Stanford University responded quickly and decisively to the pandemic, sending most undergraduates home and putting all teaching for the Spring Quarter online. We have all become familiar with Zoom—a communication platform many of us were completely unaware of at the beginning of the year—to the point that most of our days are taken up with Zoom sessions with people in the world outside the homes to which we have been confined, apart from occasional shopping expeditions and walks in the neighborhood. Life has changed to an extent that we could not have predicted when this year began, and it may never be quite the same again.

All this is to say that 2019–2020 started out as a normal year for The Ho Center for Buddhist Studies at Stanford, but before it had even reached the halfway mark we found ourselves living through a historical cataclysm whose onward progress and future consequences for our societies, our economies and our political systems we can scarcely imagine. Yet somehow, in the midst of this upheaval, our program and those affiliated with it carry on, with our students continuing their studies and our faculty persevering with their teaching and research, even though the job market will inevitably shrink and all the Buddhist Studies conferences at which we were planning to communicate our findings have one by one been postponed until next year (with no guarantee that it will be any safer to travel in 2021). The Ho Center's programs

may have been brought to a temporary halt, but we can nevertheless look back with pride at our achievements, above all a spectacular *gagaku* concert on March 3 (see pages 4-5 in this issue). The organization of this event, in collaboration with Professor Fabio Rambelli of the University of California at Santa Barbara, would have been demanding and stressful even in the best of circumstances, but as the shadow of COVID-19 spread across the world and started to fall on the United States, we found ourselves balancing on a knife-edge, uncertain whether the performers would even be able to make the trip from Japan, and equally uncertain, if they did come, whether the public would be brave enough to turn out in sufficient numbers. As it happened, the performers arrived, a near-capacity audience turned out for the splendid show of court music and dance they put on, and on the very next day Stanford suspended all public performances. In short, we were extraordinarily lucky to make it through the gate just before it shut, and also extraordinarily grateful that the tenacity and dedication of our Executive Director and her staff had carried the project through to completion.

There have been other achievements to celebrate during this academic year as well, foremost among them the generous endowment by the T. T. and W. F. Chao Foundation of two new graduate fellowships in Buddhist Studies, with additional funding to support a program of lectures, workshops and conferences. We have also greeted the arrival of Dr James Gentry, our most recent addition to the Buddhist Studies faculty in Stanford's Department of Religious Studies, bringing the total number up to four, in fulfillment of a long-held dream. As the year opened, Dr Adeana McNicholl took up her tenure-track position as Assistant Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at Vanderbilt University, while two other Buddhist Studies students have completed their degrees: Daniel Tuzzeo has been offered a postdoctoral fellowship at Columbia University, while Allan Ding (Ding Yi) will be joining the faculty at DePaul University in September. It is always



gratifying to see our students making their way in the world, even if it means saying goodbye to them on their departure from Stanford.

Other farewells, however, have no admixture of sweetness, and are purely bitter. We mourn the loss of our dear friend Professor Stefano Zacchetti of Oxford University, a superbly accomplished scholar who died of a heart condition apparently complicated by COVID-19 on April 29 this year. Stefano had visited us at Stanford several times, giving a very successful and inspiring Hwei Tai Seminar in 2011 on the *Da zhidu lun*, a massive commentary on the *Large Prajñāpāramitā*, which is the subject of the book he finished just before his most untimely death at the age of 52.

It has been a year, then, of gains and losses, of triumphs and tribulations, challenging us in totally unanticipated ways. The Ho Center has been proud to be a small part of the response to those challenges, supporting our students and carrying on its mission in uncertain times, but with unshaken commitment. I thank all of our staff, our faculty and our students who have played their part in this.

Postscript: On the very day I wrote this report, George Perry Floyd Jr. was killed by police in Minneapolis. Since then protests against racism have convulsed the nation and spread around the world. In the light they have cast on our society it is clear that, rather than reflecting that life may never be the same again, I should express the hope that it is not. Sometimes change leads not to suffering, but to its alleviation.

Paul Harrison, Co-Director of HCBSS  
May 25, 2020

## COURT MUSIC AND DANCES FROM JAPAN:

A *Gagaku* Performance by The Hideaki Bunno Gagaku Ensemble

(by Irene Lin)



On March 3, 2020, we had the rare opportunity to watch a *gagaku* performance by the Hideaki Bunno Gagaku Ensemble in the Dinkelspiel Auditorium. *Gagaku* is the classical music and dance of the Imperial Court of Japan and an important component of Buddhist and Shinto liturgies. Maestro Hideaki Bunno, a former Director of the Gagaku Orchestra at the Tokyo Imperial Palace and Living National Treasure of Japan, brought to Stanford his new 17-member *gagaku* ensemble, composed of former directors of the Imperial Palace Orchestra as lead performers, assisted by distinguished *gagaku* musicians gathered from all over Japan.

Produced by Naoyuki Manabe, the performance at Stanford included pieces from all genres of the classical *gagaku* repertory: dance pieces or *bugaku*, representative pieces of instrumental music or *kangen*, and vocal music, including ancient secret songs or *kagura-uta* performed at Shinto ceremonies at the Imperial Palace. The audience was captivated by the alluring dances, elaborate costumes, and the unique

sounds of dissonance. For most people, even those well-versed in Japanese culture, this production was their first live *gagaku* performance.

We are grateful to our collaborators for making this show possible at Stanford. First, my co-organizer, Professor Fabio Rambelli from U.C. Santa Barbara, who approached me with the idea of a duo *gagaku* performance at Stanford and Santa Barbara. Second, our co-host, the Department of Music, under the leadership of Professor Jaroslaw Kapuściński and with the able assistance of production manager Zack Leuchars, helped to make this production possible. In Japan, the Japan Foundation and the Arts Council Tokyo provided a travel grant to the *gagaku* ensemble to transport the instruments, costumes, and stage props to California. At Stanford, our co-sponsors included the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures, the Stanford Humanities Center, the Department of Religious Studies, the Center for East Asian Studies, and the Office for Religious Life.



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Opposite page: *Bugaku* 舞楽 (Dance Piece) *Hōhin* 白浜 (top); Hideaki Bunno performing *Bugaku* 舞楽 (Dance Piece) *Hōhin* 白浜 (bottom)

This page: 1 Instrumental Pieces (*Kangen* 管絃); 2 Prelude in *Ōshikichō* Mode 黄鐘調調子 (for two *shō*); 3 *Bugaku* 舞楽 (Dance Piece) *Konju* 胡飲酒; 4 *Bugaku* 舞楽 (Dance Piece) *Hōhin* 白浜; 5 *Batō* 拔頭 (Photos by Robert Most)

(scan QR to watch the performance)

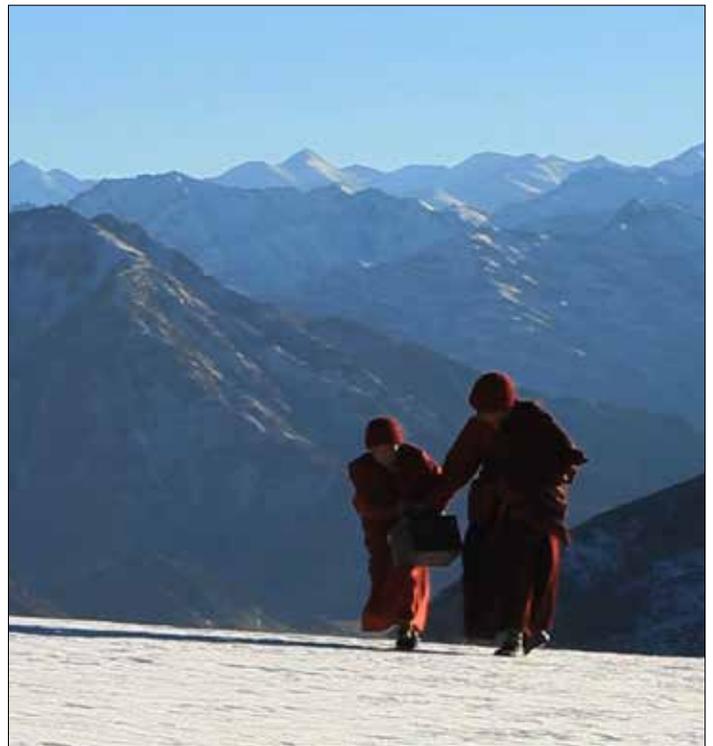


## TIBETAN STUDIES INITIATIVE

### Film Screening of *Becoming Who I Was*

Directors: Moon Chang-yong, Jeon Jin

(by Ralph H. Craig III)



Padma Angdu

On January 30, 2020, The Ho Center for Buddhist Studies at Stanford University hosted a film screening of *Becoming Who I Was*. The event was sponsored by the Tibetan Studies Initiative. The documentary, winner of the Grand Prix for Best Feature Film (Generation Kplus) at the Berlin Film Festival, was shot over a period of eight years and follows the journey of Padma Angdu.

The documentary opens with a mesmerizing cacophony of religious sounds, hinting at the sensory stimulation to come. Amidst a backdrop of breathtaking landscapes, we are introduced to a young Padma Angdu. Born amongst the Tibetan exile community in India's Ladakh region, he has never been to Tibet. However, we learn from his elderly caretaker that at a young age, Padma Angdu began to speak of memories of a life there. His elders suspected that he may be experiencing memories of his

past life, and this led them to seek out a specialist who confirmed that the six year old was indeed the reincarnation of a highly venerated Tibetan Buddhist monk.

While this is good news for the young monk's family, it also poses challenges. Padma Angdu must find a home monastery to further his monastic education while at the same time hoping that his disciples from his previous life will come find him and take him back to his home monastery. He speaks of dreams of his monastery and disciples in Tibet, and of his hopes to be contacted by said disciples and brought back to Tibet. The situation between China, Tibet, and the exile community in India makes such a reunion difficult. The documentary charts these complications, Padma Angdu's growth and development, and the efforts of his caretaker to meet his needs. Eventually, both go on an arduous trek from Northern India to the borders

of Tibet to return Padma Angdu to his rightful home.

The documentary is by turns breathtaking, uplifting, and heartbreaking as it depicts Padma Angdu's separation from his mother and family, his dreams deferred, and the love between him and his caretaker, who is facing his own mortality. These depictions, combined with such heartwarming scenes as Padma playing with his friends and studying for tests in school, set against the beautiful landscapes of Ladakh, make this documentary a must-see.

The film was introduced by Prof. James Gentry who also led a wide-ranging Q & A after its screening, during which, among other questions, audience members asked for clarification about the Tibetan Buddhist understanding of the institution of reincarnating Lamas.

## “Simplicity and Elaboration in Buddhist Theory and Practice: Points of Friction in the Tantric Profile of the Great Perfection”

James Gentry (by Elaine Lai)

Stanford’s newest faculty member, Assistant Professor James Gentry, presented a talk titled “Simplicity and Elaboration in Buddhist Theory and Practice: Points of Friction in the Tantric Profile of the Great Perfection.” The overarching theme of his talk examined how these two seemingly opposing poles—simplicity and naturalness on the one hand and elaboration and contrivance on the other—have actually worked in symbiosis throughout Buddhist history and that it is this rhetoric of undulation between the two that has played pivotal discursive and performative roles in the continuity and spread of Great Perfection (Dzogchen) Buddhist traditions from the 11th century to the present. The particular Tantra that Professor Gentry discussed, titled *Only Child of the Buddhas* (*sangs rgyas sras gcig*) is exemplary of the reproductive and generative potency characteristic of the Great Perfection tradition, oscillating between simplicity and elaboration both in its form and content. The Tantra, which has multiple origins and appeared sometime between the 13th and 14th centuries, claims to be a “self-arisen statement” not produced by any kind of agent, but instead the first emanation to spontaneously arise from the ground of nondual gnosis (*ye shes*), before any duality ever came into existence. As the title suggests, then, the Tantra self-presents as the first and only offspring of the Buddhas, the first resonance of the pristine ground of nondual gnosis, which is often pictorially and discursively represented as Samantabhadra and Samantabhadri in union.

When we look at the terse form of the Tantra, it seems to function as a kind of mnemonic device, as Professor Gentry put it, for those who have already received elaborated instructions on the



James Gentry (Photo by Robert Most)

Dzogchen path. Therefore the Tantra embodies at once the simplified pith of the entire Seminal Heart tradition whose sprawling corpus includes *The Seventeen Tantras*, *The Seminal Heart in Four Parts* compiled by Longchenpa and countless other Treasure revelations claiming to partake in this tradition, yet at the same time acts as a germinal matrix producing further offspring in the form of literary and material production through commentaries, liturgical and contemplative instructions, as well as amulets and diagrams which enact the Tantra’s self-proclaimed liberatory potency through recitation, copying and, most interestingly, through wearing. In its most boiled-down form then, the Tantra is fashioned into a small booklet and placed in an amulet to be worn by the practitioner. Following the logic of the Tantra, because *Only Child of the Buddhas* identifies itself as the first awakened emanation body (*nirmāṇakāya*)

of the ground of nondual gnosis (often associated with the *dharmakāya*), the very act of wearing the amulet is meant to confer Buddhahood, to grant “liberation upon wearing,” and even “liberation upon seeing.” At this point Professor Gentry displayed a close-up of an impressive photo of the Tantra reproduced as an intricate maṇḍala diagram with key mantras and pith instructions ordered clockwise in a sequential way.

Examining more closely the content of the Tantra, the notion of emanation or elaboration, (*spros* in Tibetan), is explicitly referenced fifty-eight times and in every single verse. If we zoom out even further and consider the organization of Longchenpa’s *Seminal Heart in Four Parts* (*snying thig ya bzhi*) which took shape around the 14th century, from that point onwards, the notion of *spros* became the dominant organizing principle of all

## THE EVANS-WENTZ LECTURE

### “The Japanese Enthronement Ceremonies of 2019 in Historical Perspective”

Helen Hardacre (by Elaine Lai)



Helen Hardacre

This year's Evans-Wentz lecture was delivered by Helen Hardacre, Reischauer Institute Professor of Japanese Religions and Society at Harvard University and also the 2018 recipient of an extremely prestigious award granted by the Japanese government called “the Order of the Rising Sun, 3rd Class, Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon,” for her contributions to Japanese studies as well as the promotion of greater understanding of Japanese culture. Her talk, titled “The 2019 Japanese Enthronement Ceremonies in Historical Perspective” traced the developments and changes in the enthronement ceremonies of the Japanese Emperor from the pre-modern period all the way to the present with the enthronement of Emperor Naruhito in 2019.

As Professor Hardacre demonstrated, the enthronement ritual has traditionally followed a three-part structure: 1) the transfer of the regalia—which today consists of a sword and jewels (*kenjiitō*

*shōkei no gi*); 2) a public proclamation of enthronement (*sokui rei*) and 3) extensive ceremonies including the performance of the annual harvest culminating with the Emperor offering and partaking in a meal paying homage to the kami (*daijōsai*). Video footage of the 1928 celebrations of the sacred rice fields revealed that these ceremonies were a highly public and ritualized event. We see this in the initial stages of cultivating the rice, which included shrine dances in the presence of government officials and spectators, all the way down to the final stages of harvesting the rice where giant send-offs led by shrine and government officials accompanied the transportation of the rice to the Kyoto imperial palace where the *daijōsai* was to be performed.

Similarly, when we examine screens representative of the enthronement of Empress Meishō (1629), we see that spectators from the pre-modern period treated the enthronement like a popular entertainment event analogous

to attending the kabuki theater. The relaxed atmosphere in which ordinary people interacted with the enthronement ceremony is perhaps most pronounced in the striking images of women breast-feeding infants and children flying banners nonchalantly, sometimes not even facing the main event at hand. Another unique feature of Edo-period enthronement ceremonies is that women and not men were in charge of the regalia, a feature which became extinct from the Meiji period onward with the increasing militarization of the Emperor's role and of Japan's public image.

When we turn to the 20th century enthronement ceremonies, beginning with those of 1915 and 1928, we see an increase in this trend of militarization, particularly in the way that reviewing the fleet and the troops became attached to the ceremony. A further development of this time is that celebrations geographically expanded to shrines in every town and city throughout the entire Japanese empire. Technological developments—in particular the invention of the radio—allowed Japanese everywhere to participate in and celebrate the enthronement. The next major turning point came with the post-war era enthronement of 1990, when a new constitution was in effect in which one of the Articles (89) prohibited the state from funding religious activity or ritual. Based on Article 89, there were massive protests which resulted in violence and even the burning of shrines as well as a number of lawsuits.

Moving forward now to the 2019 enthronement, we see that in contrast to previous enthronements where the location and cultivation of the rice harvest was a public, ritualized event, now the Imperial Household Agency is maintaining utmost secrecy in terms of the location of the rice fields as an attempt

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Helen Hardacre (continues from page 8)

to prevent the potential destruction of these fields by protestors. Now too, the advancement of technology plays a role in that advanced GPS systems and drones make the tracking of and destruction of these fields infinitely easier to accomplish. Whereas previously technology was an aid to magnifying the glory of enthronement celebrations, now it poses a real threat to the successful completion of a key component of these celebrations.

However, this year we simultaneously see a revealing of secrets in the form of NHK's reenactment of the sacred *daijōsai* through broadcast video. In this video we see what was never before displayed for the public's eye, and that is the ceremony in which the Emperor partakes in the offering and consumption of the feast for the kamis. A more recent interpretation of enthronement offered by Okada Shōji, who has done research on the history of Shinto, suggests that the nature of the *daijōsai* is of a harvest festival. He denies the claim made by Orikuchi Shinobu years earlier that some kind of mystical transformation or divinizing of the Emperor takes place

within the Enthronement Palace.

Through Professor Hardacre's survey of the historical permutations in Japanese enthronement ceremonies we see how ritual enactments as well as forms of participation in and interpretation of these ceremonies have changed in accordance with the state of the government and the state of politics at different times throughout Japan's history. As such, new interpretations and meanings have arisen as to the significance of aspects of the

enthronement, in particular the *daijōsai*. Regardless of what the significance of the *daijōsai* may be, it is clear from the NHK broadcast that at this particular juncture in history, there has been a push to give transparency to processes that previously were opaque to the public. As to what the results and reactions to this year's enthronement might be—whether there will be more violence or greater acceptance or perhaps even indifference—that remains to be seen.



Emperor's Throne, *Takamikura* and Empress' Throne, *Michōdai* (Enthronement Ceremony of the Emperor of Japan)

James Gentry (continues from page 7)

later initiations of the Great Perfection tradition. *Spros* is present in the titles of all four initiations: 1) Elaborate (*spros bcas*); 2) Unelaborate (*spros med*); 3) Very simple (*shin tu spros med*) and 4) Utterly simple (*rab tu spros med*). This dialectical interplay between simple and elaborate is reinforced again at the level of the various topics covered in its content, which include: extolling the Tantra's virtues, how it is to be practiced in this lifetime through the contemplative techniques of Cutting Through and Direct Transcendence, ancillary practices of dream yoga, sexual yoga and elemental yoga, instructions on liberation through wearing and an emphasis on the unconditioned nature of the Tantra.

The Tantra, despite representing the most "seminal" form of the Great Perfection tradition, contains within itself all the complexity typical of tantric practices of Mahāyoga and later Indian tantric traditions, with deities, mantras, mudrās and maṇḍalas. And yet the fullest expression of these elaborate practices is imbued with a distinct resignification—all elaborations are regarded merely as emanations of the intrinsic nondual awareness that characterizes the enlightened ground from which the Tantra arose in the first place. And in a compellingly simple move, the complexity of the entire path and the expansive Seminal Heart tradition which the Tantra

is the offspring of and for, is reabsorbed into a single, tiny amulet which bestows liberation upon contact and nothing further. I suspect that Professor Gentry is right in claiming that this dialectic between the simple and the elaborate has always been at play, not only in the Great Perfection tradition, but in many other Buddhist traditions as well, and to attempt to disentangle these components would be a moot point. Indeed, it is the tension and friction produced by their interplay which has produced, both literally and figuratively, the rich and diverse forms of practice whose efficacy seems to collapse ontological, epistemological and cosmogonic boundaries.

## TT & WF CHAO DISTINGUISHED BUDDHIST PRACTITIONER LECTURES

### “Translating a 2,500 year-old Sacred Text for a Modern Audience”

Bhante Sujato (by Grace Ramswick)



Bhante Sujato (Photo by Robert Most)

Bhante Sujato is an Australian-born Theravāda bhikkhu ordained in the lineage of the Thai master Ajahn Chah. After several years of training in Thailand, he returned to Australia and resided at Ajahn Brahm’s Bodhinyana Monastery near Perth. In 2003, he established the Santi Forest Monastery for female renunciants in New South Wales, where he served as abbot until 2012.

Sujato visited us in October to discuss his ongoing SuttaCentral project ([suttacentral.net](http://suttacentral.net)), which provides free online access to the major collections of early Buddhist suttas as they are preserved in Pāli, full or partial parallels to these suttas found in the Chinese canon (and, when available, Sanskrit or Gāndhārī manuscripts), as well as translations into English and dozens of other languages.

Beginning the talk by inviting the audience to participate in ten minutes of meditation, Bhante Sujato asked those who had observed their breath during this exercise if they would say that their focus on the breath had been interrupted by various distracting thoughts. Most in the room agreed that it had. But the question did not lead, as one might have expected, to any instruction on how to

better deal with this wandering mind — instead, Sujato turned our attention to the language typically used to describe mindfulness of breathing. He suggested that, while for most, speaking in terms of the object (breathing) and distractions from that object may seem quite natural, the Buddha’s words of instruction in the early suttas are of a different flavor: “Mindful, one breathes in. Mindful, one breathes out.” The former and more familiar type of language, he proposed, comes from more recent styles of meditation instruction. This prelude to the rest of his talk was just the first of many moments at which he would exhibit a sincere concern with the nuances of language and with the intersections between text and practice.

While acknowledging that for many Buddhists around the world—monastics included—study of the early suttas is not required or encouraged, Sujato expressed his belief that it is important for all Buddhists to acquire some familiarity with them, in order to better see how they differently inform various traditions and teachers, often via commentaries or other later compositions. After a brief discussion of how the early suttas have been transmitted in different modes, languages,

and media across time, Sujato went on to describe his own fairly recent undertaking of translating the four main collections (*nikāya*) of suttas—the Long (Dīgha), Middle (Majjhima), Linked (Saṃyutta), and Numbered (Aṅguttara) discourses—from Pāli into English. He explained that he deemed this to be a necessary step in developing the SuttaCentral site, since many existing translations were unsatisfactory or, more significantly, protected by copyright (the current practices surrounding which he finds highly problematic, based on established Buddhist attitudes toward the word of the Buddha). By completing his own translations, he was able not only to ensure that they would be freely available, but also to aim for greater accuracy, the use of “plain English” (free of unnecessary jargon or “Buddhist Hybrid English”), and consistency (continuing the efforts toward this made by previous *nikāya* translators Ñāṇamoli Thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi).

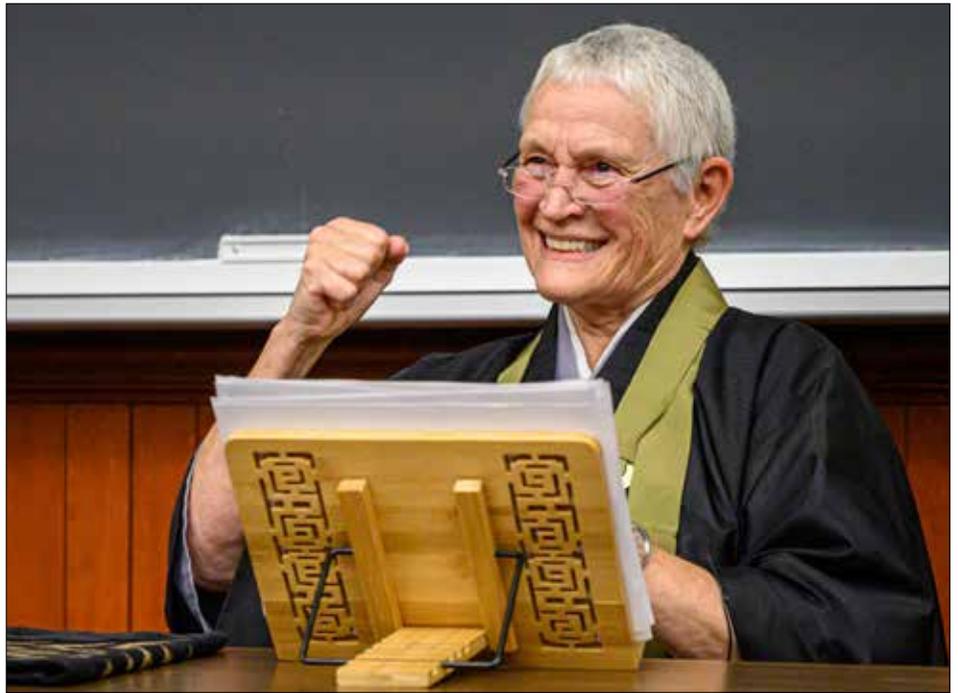
Bhante Sujato also took time to answer questions about his translation methods and to highlight several other components of SuttaCentral, such as the voice feature—allowing those who need or prefer audio support to listen to recitations of the suttas—and the discussion forum where he and other visitors to the site regularly offer their reflections or concerns about a given topic or term. He furthermore expressed his commitment to using gender-neutral terminology in his translations whenever the Pāli is ambiguous, and offered an example of a phrase that has consistently resulted in sexist English translations (involving celestial maidens purportedly fleeing “in fear and shame” from the Buddha’s disciple Moggallāna when he calls on the god Sakka at his palace in the Tāvātimsa heaven). We much appreciated Bhante Sujato’s candidness surrounding such issues, and equally so the dash of lighthearted humor that he brought to the evening.

## “Are You Awake?”

Furyu Nancy Schroeder (by Ralph H. Craig III)

On February 6, 2020, Abbess Nancy Schroeder delivered a lecture at Stanford University’s Pigott Hall, titled “Are You Awake?” The lecture was sponsored by The Ho Center for Buddhist Studies at Stanford University, as a part of the TT & WF Chao Distinguished Buddhist Practitioner Lecture series. Furyu Nancy Schroeder was introduced by Prof. Michaela Mross.

In her lecture, Abbess Schroeder used the first two cases from the “Gateless Gate” (*Mumonkan*) *kōan* collection to discuss the challenge of finding one’s way into spiritual practice. Beginning with the story of the wordless transmission of dharma between Mahākāśyapa and Śākyamuni—often considered to be the foundational narrative of the Chinese Chan/Japanese Zen tradition—she stated that for her, Zen is the gateless gate. She went on to say that in her experience, Zen practice is a response to the question that titles her talk, “Are you awake?” The implication of this question is of course that one might not be awake. Abbess Schroeder went on to discuss her own spiritual journey and path. In a poignant reflection, she said



Abbess Nancy Schroeder (Photo by Robert Most)

that, “finding your own questions might be the most important part of the spiritual path.”

Throughout the lecture, Abbess Schroeder made frequent reference to the Buddhist formulation of the two truths regarding conventional

and ultimate reality, and Nāgārjuna’s *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, the foundational text of the Madhyamaka school of Buddhist thought. In a particularly illuminating part of the lecture, she discussed the differences between Rinzai Zen and Sōtō Zen. She explained that the former focused on the sudden, eureka! experience of the emptiness aspect or ultimate reality, while the latter emphasizes the interfusion of emptiness and conventional reality, taking a gradual approach. Thus, through an extended reflection on the question of being awake, Abbess Schroeder taught the finer aspects of Zen praxis.

During the Q & A which followed the lecture, audience questions ranged from the nature of non-duality, free will, and practice, to questions about mental health and race. In answering these questions, the abbess spoke of the importance of community and of developing the ability to practice under any circumstance.



Green Gulch Farm Zendō (Photo by Margo Moritz)

## JAPANESE BUDDHISM LECTURE

### “Roadways, Shrines and Spirits in Ancient Japan”

Michael Como (by Kedao Tong)



Michael Como (Photo by Robert Most)

On October 17, Michael Como, Tōshū Fukami Associate Professor of Shinto Studies at Columbia University and an alumnus of Stanford’s Buddhist Studies program, delivered a fascinating talk on how urbanization and corresponding changes in material contexts impacted ritual practice in ancient Japan.

In this talk, Professor Como focused on the late Nara and early Heian period, specifically, the late 8th century and the early 9th century. He began by introducing a scroll-painting depicting a demon-eating insect and went on to discuss the changing material character of places where gods were worshipped and superhuman spirits were engaged. According to Professor Como, this change in material contexts is conditioned by an ongoing process of urbanization and the construction of road networks in this period. Roadways, shrines, and spirits are closely tied together, creating new ritual

contexts and triggering transformations in Japanese ritual life. While the worship of the kami (gods) was carried out in built structures like shrines, propitiation of spirits worthy of ritual attention often took place in roadways as a result of road system developments and more extensive migration.



*Gaki-zoshi (Scroll of the Hungry Ghosts)*

Throughout the lecture, Professor Como emphasized the materiality of new forms of ritual activities by situating them in their social-historical context. His study challenged the traditional approach to studies of Japanese deities and rituals, which tends to focus exclusively on imperial chronicles and the political-ideological aspect. Drawing on archaeological evidence, Professor Como brought to the fore ritual practices outside the purview of many previous historical accounts—ones in which ordinary people engaged on a daily basis, such as roadside offerings made to disease-causing spirits.

Professor Como concluded by exploring how the court and denizens of the capital responded to changes in material contexts, and how that shaped their conception of deities and spirits in different ways. As part of the Japanese Buddhism Lecture Series, this talk provided a new lens through which the audience could look at Japanese religion. We are very much looking forward to a fuller treatment of this topic in Professor Como’s forthcoming monograph.

## HWEI TAI SEMINAR

### “A Lady Holding a Dagger and Water Vase”

Ryūichi Abé (by Simona Lazznerini)



Ryūichi Abé

This year's Hwei Tai Seminar was led by Prof. Ryūichi Abé from Harvard University and focused on the *Lotus Sūtra*, more specifically on the episode of the nāga girl and her enlightenment. The workshop took place on the rainy weekend of December 7th and 8th, right before the holiday break. Graduate students and faculty, guided by the expertise of Prof. Abé, learned about the *Heike Nōkyō's* frontispieces and translated different passages of the *Lotus*.

On Saturday morning Prof. Abé gave a lecture on the *Heike Nōkyō* 平家納経, a beautiful set of illustrated *Lotus Sūtra* scrolls (produced in 1164) which have been designated a National Treasure and are enshrined at Itsukushima 厳島. Prof. Abé particularly focused on scroll fifteen, featuring one of the ten rākṣasī women (*jūrasetsunyo* 十羅刹女), which he identified with Taira no Tokiko 平時子 (1126–1185), one of the most powerful court ladies of the late Heian Japanese imperial court. Then, Prof. Abé explained his reading of the episode of the nāga girl

from the Devadatta chapter of the *Lotus*. He argued that she is probably the most misunderstood character of the scripture, remembered only for her sex change, and debunked this popular androcentric reading of this character.

In the afternoon we translated chapter twelve of the *Lotus Sūtra* from Chinese and Sanskrit into English, and often consulted the commentaries of Zhiyi 智顛 and Jizang 吉藏 for further explanations and clarifications concerning the nāga girl.

On Sunday we read and translated excerpts from chapter two of the *Lotus*, a very important chapter, in order to understand the entire structure of the text. We also translated the parable of the burning house and the role of expedient means from chapter three. From our translation workshop we learned about the *Lotus Sūtra's* power of telling stories, and how illustrations (in our case, the illustrated scrolls) can often provide a deeper reading of a text.

As in every academic year, the Hwei Tai Seminar is a unique opportunity to sharpen students' and faculty's philological skills, but also to meet and work with a renowned scholar of Buddhist Studies. Prof. Abé invited us to reflect on how to teach Buddhism and Buddhist texts to undergraduate students in a meaningful way, so that they can make sense of this tradition and get excited about it. Prof. Abé also insisted on the importance of keeping our field strong and healthy so that graduate students can get jobs, and undergraduates will keep taking Buddhist Studies courses. He suggested that scholars, especially graduate students, should reinvent how they do scholarship, in order to ensure a healthy field in the future. Prof. Abé advocated for the importance of interdisciplinary studies and he splendidly showed us how to put this concept into practice by fusing philological and art-historical work while reading the *Lotus Sūtra* and the nāga girl episode.



HCSS graduate students, faculty and Ryūichi Abé (under the clock)

## RESTARTING THE BUDDHIST COMMUNITY AT STANFORD

### “Reflection on Restarting the Buddhist Community at Stanford”

by Elaine Lai

One of the biggest highlights of this 2019–2020 school year for me has been revamping the Buddhist Community at Stanford (BCAS) with undergraduate Ravi Smith (co-president) and my Buddhist studies PhD colleague Julian Butterfield (Financial Officer). In the fall, when The Ho Center for Buddhist Studies at Stanford (HCBSS) informed me that Ravi had recently contacted them about restarting the club, it felt like my prayers had been answered—to find a Buddhist friend and ally who was equally devoted to building a Buddhist community here. We immediately set up a Skype meeting where we exchanged stories about our Buddhist paths, and then over the course of several meetings thereafter, we completed all the necessary paperwork, secured the previous e-mail list-serve, and decided upon a new mission for BCAS, which we hoped would endure for years far beyond our short time at Stanford:

The Buddhist Community At Stanford provides the conditions and support for members of the Stanford community to further their personal cultivation in line with Buddhist teachings. We have two main approaches: 1) to connect the BCAS with resources such as respected teachers, books, films and other media; 2) to be the place on campus where Buddhists and those who are interested in Buddhist ideas can engage with one another and practice together. BCAS is open to practitioners of all forms of Buddhism and who hold all levels of experience, including those who may not identify as “Buddhist” per se. Ultimately, we aspire to bring people together in such a way that will allow for each person’s individual—and collective—growth and flourishing.

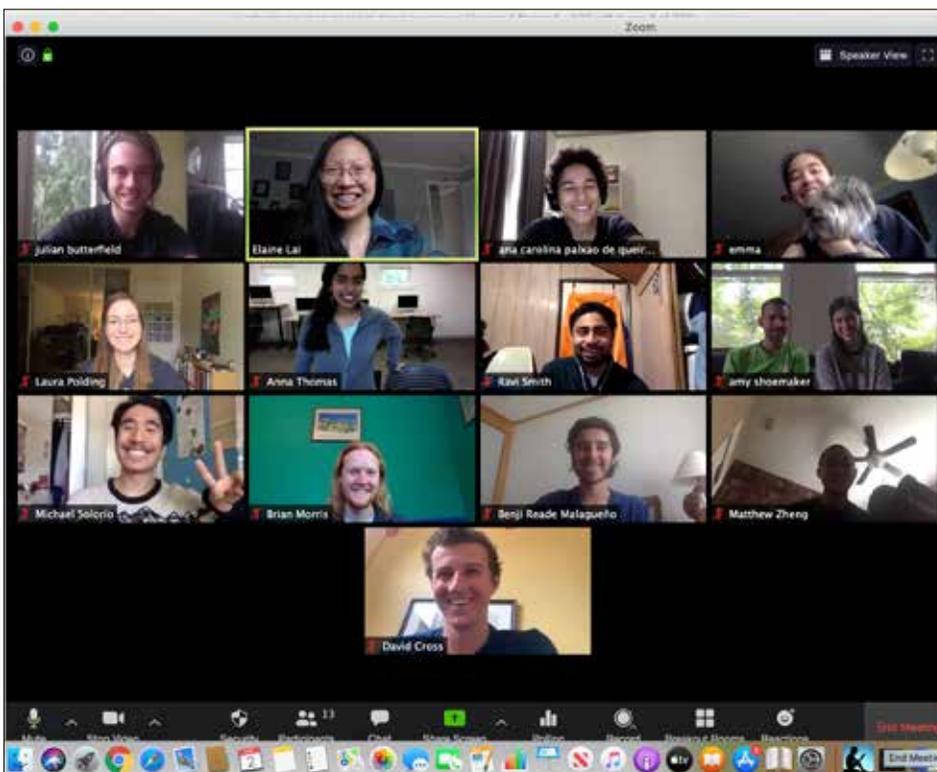
When Julian heard that we were revamping BCAS, he warmly offered his help, and so when the Office of Student Engagement informed us that we needed



Julian Butterfield and Elaine Lai at the Stanford Sanctuary, Old Union

a Financial Officer, Ravi and I appointed Julian immediately. Working and planning together as a group, we held our inaugural meeting in October 2019 with staff, faculty, graduate and undergraduate students attending. Together, we developed a set of community norms to ensure that everyone could participate in a space in which they felt safe and supported. When we began to hold regular morning meditation sittings from 8:30–9:00 am three times a week, we didn’t know who would show up, but the three of us committed to showing up with the good wish that at least with the three of us there would be sangha, community. Gradually, more people started coming, some regularly, some not, some experienced practitioners, some newcomers. We welcomed everyone without partiality. My fondest memories of meditating together in the Sanctuary at Stanford are those early mornings watching as Julian or Ravi set up our temporary shrine with a statue of the Buddha, and sometimes a white *khatag* (scarf) as an offering in front. I remember also at the end of the formal meditations, looking on to see fellow practitioners continue to meditate while others silently put back their cushions and began their day.

I’m so grateful for Ravi and Julian, and the kind of selfless work that they have been doing to ensure that all our activities—our trips to monasteries,



BCAS weekly Saturday discussions over Zoom

community meetings, and discussion groups—run smoothly and are fruitful. It is rare to have friends who are all willing to equally divide the labor, and to listen to each other’s opinions so intently. The fact that we are able to do this gives me great hope that the future institutional and work spaces I partake of can also be this harmonious. Since the shelter-in-place order, we have continued our meditations and Saturday discussions over Zoom. New friends have joined and we have had extremely meaningful conversations about compassion and what it looks like to act compassionately in face of difficult circumstances. In May we plan to host my friend and teacher at East Bay Meditation Center, Christian Howard, to engage a conversation about compassion and intersectionality.

Because of BCAS, I have had the pleasure of meeting so many wonderful members of the Stanford community that I otherwise would not have ever met. Some of these friendships have extended beyond the club, and I imagine will continue on for years after. The biggest inspiration and support I have received from BCAS has been to be in the presence of people who care deeply not only about self-transformation, but are equally invested in transforming the greater social realities we live in, and are willing to nourish their compassion in ways which will truly be of benefit to others. Finally, I want to thank the people at The Ho Center for their financial and moral support. With their help, we have been able to hold all of our community meetings over shared meals, and to visit temples where we experience different Buddhist communities. I look forward to continuing to build and grow the BCAS for all those with an inclination towards Buddhism at Stanford, and to help to create the conditions where our communities can be in dialogue with one another, as well as with different Buddhist traditions, and ultimately to be supported in all of our spiritual pursuits.



Ravi Smith

### “The Noble Friendship of BCAS”

by Ravi Smith

One afternoon this past fall, I was looking through the books and papers in the Buddhist office in Old Union. The office bookshelf is an archaeological gold mine from the previous life of the Buddhist Community at Stanford. Tucked in one corner among dozens of copies of the *Lotus Sutra* was a folder with “BCAS” scrawled on it. I took the folder out and flipped through various handouts dating back to the early 2000s.

At this time, Elaine and I had completed the initial steps to get the club re-registered and we were organizing our first meeting. As I was combing through the documents, one long-lost handout in particular gave me a window into the earlier version of the organization. The BCAS practitioners of old were long gone, but at least I could still appreciate their teachings.

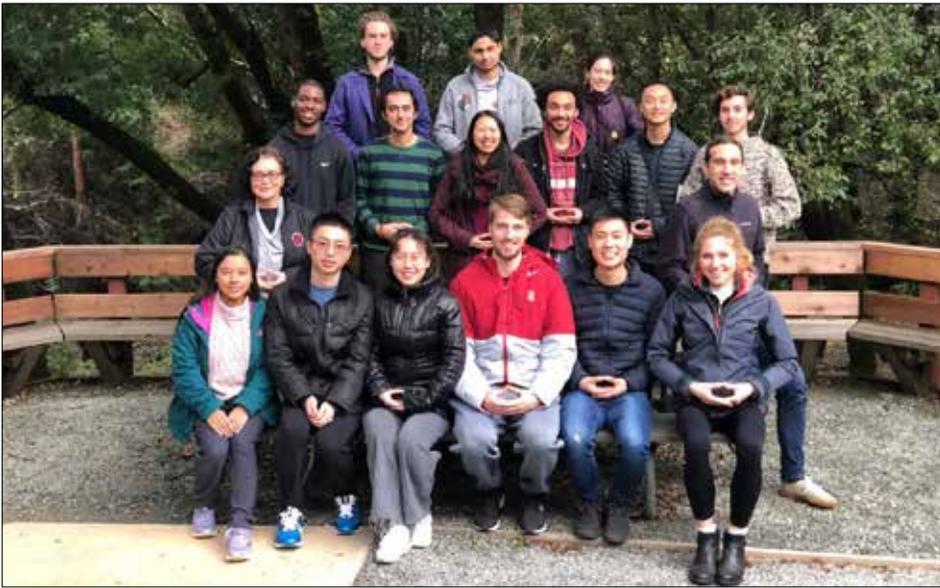
On that handout there was an excerpt of the *Upaddha Sutta* on kalyana-mitta or “noble friends.” Venerable Ananda is quoted telling the Buddha: “This is half of the holy life, lord: admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie.” And following that was the Buddha’s response:

Don’t say that, Ananda. Don’t say that. Admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie is actually the whole of the holy life. When a monk has admirable people as friends, companions, & comrades, he can be expected to develop & pursue the noble eightfold path. (Translated by Thanissaro Bhikkhu)

After finding this note, it became more clear to me how the forebearers of BCAS had led the club: they had created an environment where members could be surrounded by noble friends practicing with similar goals.

Since the re-founding of BCAS, cultivating a community of noble friends has been our main focus, as well. To be sure, our community still has many facets and focuses. I personally tend to enjoy the insular practitioner side: meditating and discussing teachings from the suttas. BCAS’s thrice-weekly sittings have helped me a lot by building structure into my attempts at a daily sitting practice. That’s a great thing about a community of noble friends—even the people who are leading receive the benefits.

Being a group for all Buddhist sects still



BCAS's first half-day retreat at the Jikoji Zen Center, Santa Cruz Mountains

has its challenges. Instead of an impartial amalgam of different traditions, we inevitably foreground some perspectives over others. Sometimes we even have to navigate conflicting doctrines. I think it would be incorrect to say that the Buddhist traditions all believe the same things but express them in different languages: some Buddhist sects have legitimate differences in their means and aims. As stewards of the community, the leaders must balance between these differing views.

In the end, however, the views a group of people hold are just views. The Dhamma is seen for oneself. As a community of practitioners, we exist not to collectively subscribe to a set of dogmas, but to aid one another in furthering our own practices. And as leaders, our goal is to create the best environment for everyone's Buddhist practices to deepen.

Fortunately, I believe each of the BCAS leaders is grounded deeply in their own personal practice. With our own experiential understanding of the teachings, we try our best to set up the club in a manner most conducive to spiritual growth. As a community, we practice to reduce greed, hatred and delusion within ourselves. And hopefully, our efforts also have a positive effect in the Stanford community and the world. This is the fruit of noble friendship.

### “Reflection on Becoming the Financial Officer of BCAS”

by Julian Butterfield

When Elaine approached me in October 2019 with news that she and Ravi were in the process of resuscitating the long-dormant Buddhist Community at Stanford, I immediately felt that I wanted to be involved. With the academic year off to a great start, I was already getting my fill of Buddhist history, literature, and philosophy in the classroom, but I knew it would be important for me to balance scholarship with practice, in one way or another. I volunteered to help out with whatever this burgeoning Sangha needed. However, when Elaine suggested that I take on the role of Financial Officer, I was trepidatious to say the least: never much good at managing my own finances, how could I take on such a responsibility for an entire community? This was not the kind of Buddhist practice I had imagined.

Yet, in the spirit of adventure and service, and with the kind encouragement and guidance of Elaine and Ravi as well as The Ho Center for Buddhist Studies administrators Irene, Tatiana, and Stephanie, I agreed. Working with the very generous fund granted to us by The Ho Center, I learned how to negotiate the financial life of the Buddhist Community at Stanford as we grew from a three-

person executive board to a regularly meeting, dynamic, and enthusiastic group of practitioners from all walks of Stanford life. It's been a great pleasure to participate with Elaine, Ravi, and the new members of BCAS to bring Buddhist practice to life at Stanford, providing the opportunity for members of our broader community to explore and deepen their connection to Buddhist traditions (as I do the same).

Apart from slowly coming into my roles as Financial Officer, I've enjoyed hosting group meditation sessions, arranging community dinners and discussions, and helping our community forge connections with Sangha members elsewhere in the Bay Area. One such opportunity came when BCAS took our first half-day retreat of the year at the beginning of Winter Quarter — at the beautiful Jikoji Zen Center, nestled in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Guided by Jikoji teachers, we practiced seated and walking meditation, listened to a Dharma talk by Shoho Michael Newhall, and enjoyed a home-cooked lunch, all while getting to know one another and the areas around Stanford better. It was a wonderful, memorable day, and I know a few BCAS members have returned to Jikoji to deepen their own practice since then. I'm so glad I had the opportunity to facilitate this experience and can't wait to organize similar events once we've all returned to Stanford campus. In the meantime, we've been able to continue and even strengthen our community remotely, meeting online four times a week for meditation and discussion—even hosting Dharma talks from distinguished practitioners digitally.

Without the generosity and encouragement of The Ho Center for Buddhist Studies, none of this would be possible. I'm so grateful to Elaine, Ravi, Irene, Tatiana, and Stephanie for trusting me to learn the ropes and for their spirit of innovation, openness, and optimism. I've learned a lot about service and community with BCAS throughout this year, and I'm looking forward to our future together.

## RESEARCHER IN RESIDENCE REFLECTIONS

by Ana Cristina O. Lopes



Ana Cristina O. Lopes (Photo by Chris Zvitkovits)

In my first year at Stanford, I have been building upon my previous work on the transnationalization of Tibetan Buddhism by investigating the encounter between this tradition and science and technology. Two distinctive features of this encounter are currently my focus.

Firstly, I am exploring how our notions of human flourishing and well-being are changing in light of scientific research on contemplative practices and the consequent popularization of these practices in contemporary societies. The Mind & Life network of organizations

founded by the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and others is my main focus. Last October, I conducted ethnographic research at the symposium “Beyond Confines - Integrating Science, Consciousness and Society” organized by Mind & Life Europe. A paper related to this research was accepted for the Dis/Entangling Technoscience Conference in Italy, which has been postponed for next year.

Secondly, I am investigating how modern technology is impacting the way Tibetan Buddhism is spreading throughout the world. Tara’s Triple Excellence, a daily guided online Tibetan Buddhist meditation program available in seven European languages and Chinese, is a case in point. I am looking into how this program is changing the way practitioners relate to Tibetan Buddhism, while also preserving core elements of this tradition. The preliminary findings of this research will be presented in a panel to be held virtually by the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) this July. Some important scholars in the area of digital

anthropology, such as Daniel Miller and John Postill, will also present in this panel.

Finally, last February, at the Teaching Buddhist Studies Conference held by The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Centre for Buddhist Studies at the University of Toronto, professor James Gentry and I presented our idea for an immersive summer course about Buddhism and science to be taught in Austria this year. This course was postponed, but we will teach an adapted version of it here at Stanford University in the fall.



A Tara’s Triple Excellence practitioner meditating at home (Photo by Mikki Eisenbach)

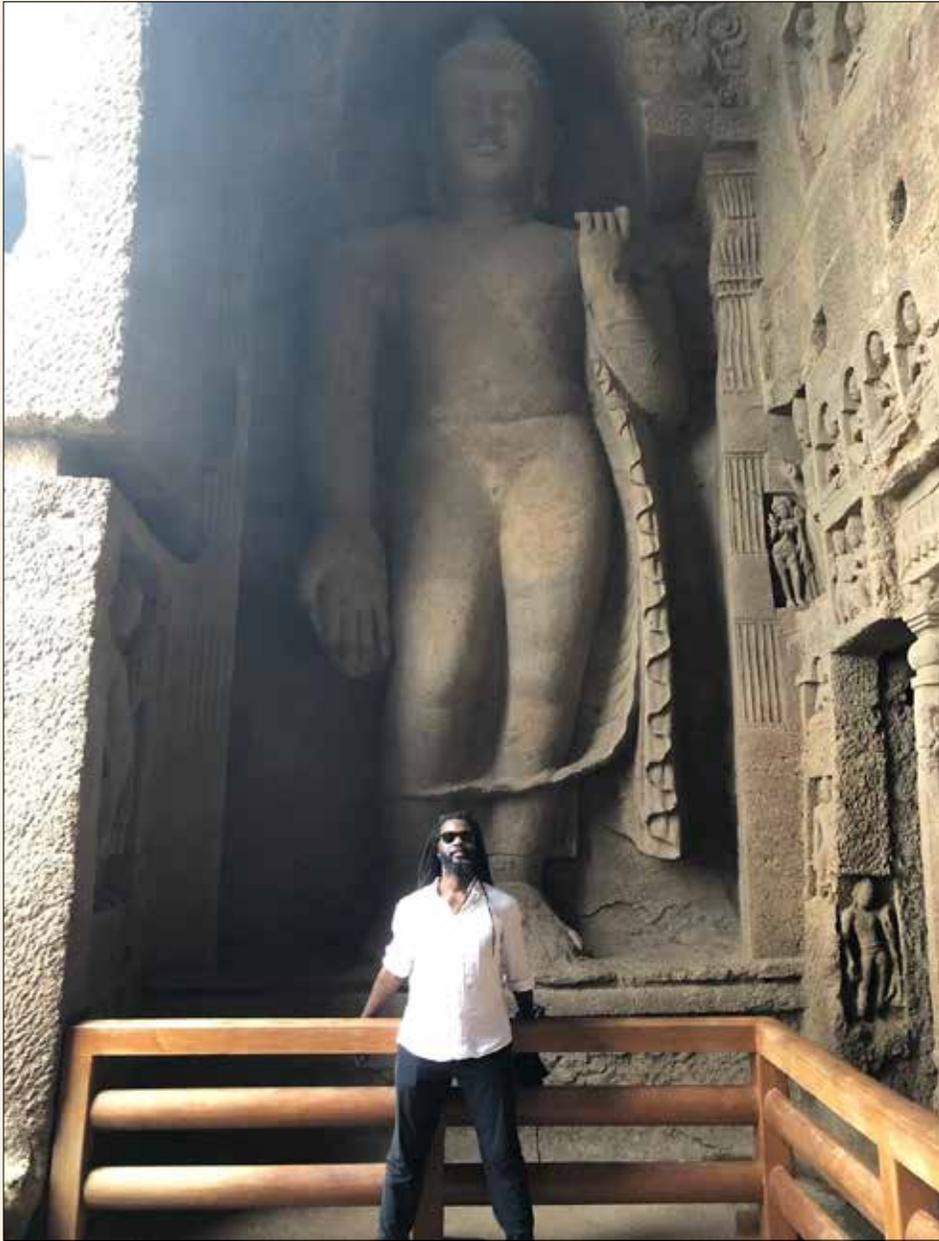


A scene from the visualization section of one of Tara’s Triple Excellence’s video-liturgies (Reproduced with permission from DharmaSun)

## SUMMER REFLECTIONS

### “Summer in Pune”

by Ralph H. Craig III



Ralph H. Craig III at the Ajanta Caves, India

This past summer, with the support of my advisor, Prof. Paul Harrison, and Prof. Elaine Fisher, I participated in the American Institute of Indian Studies (AIIS) Summer Sanskrit program in Pune, India. The AIIS Summer Sanskrit program is unique in that one of their pedagogical methods is to teach Sanskrit as a living, spoken language. In many ways, this mirrored the Latin training that I had in high school. This helped the

language become familiar in a way that I had not previously experienced. I was also able to work with a teacher personally on the *Mañjuśrī-Mūla-Kalpa*, an early esoteric Buddhist scripture. As we worked through some of the complex chapters, I discovered much that I hope to use in my future research. My participation in the program was made possible by a Foreign Language and Area Studies grant, and I deeply appreciate receiving it.

I stayed in a lovely homestay, hosted by a homemaker and painter. While in Pune, I took harmonium and singing lessons with a local music teacher. Living with colleagues from the program, and staying with such a lovely host family helped to offset the rigorous nature of the program. All summer intensives are difficult, and this one was no exception: we spent five to six days a week working, four and a half hours per day. In the beginning of the program the students were told that there would be a final paper and presentation, both in Sanskrit! For my project, I decided to translate a portion of Toni Morrison's novel, *Beloved*, into Sanskrit. By the time I finished the project, Toni Morrison had passed away. Thus, I performed my presentation as a memorial to her.

The camaraderie and friendships that I developed with my colleagues and fellow Sanskrit students were highly rewarding and very valuable. On a (rare) weekend off, I went to the Kanheri Caves, a Buddhist heritage site in Mumbai. I did not use a guide, so I was able to explore each cave at my leisure, lingering in some caves just to imagine what life might have been like for the monks who used them. When the program finished, my wife and two friends joined me in Pune, and together we traveled to Aurangabad, Mumbai, Jaipur, Agra, and Delhi. In each city, we had guides to explain and explore the local history with us. The most profound portion of the trip was seeing the Ajanta and Ellora cave complexes. Seeing the architecture, art, and stories of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism vividly before my eyes was illuminating. With the addition of the Kanheri Caves, visiting these sites enhanced my understanding of the Buddhist tradition and provided rich context to my studies at AIIS.

## “Summer in Pune”

by Elaine Lai

This past summer 2019 I received the FLAS grant for the eight-week summer Sanskrit intensive with the American Institute of Indian Studies (AIIS) in Pune, India. My colleague and good friend Ralph Craig and I shared a homestay with our lovely homestay mother Sharda, whose hospitality and care made this trip to India incredibly memorable and worthwhile. Aside from taking care of our frequent stomach upsets and providing us delicious home-made meals which thankfully did not upset our stomachs, she also invited us to partake in her family pujas, took us to see the local Hindu temples and even kindly arranged for a Hindustani music teacher to come give me singing lessons when she discovered my penchant for Indian music. I consider myself incredibly lucky to have met

sentences in Sanskrit without using any English. This was both a challenging but also rewarding endeavor as it allowed me to think and respond completely in Sanskrit and thus deepened my engagement with the language. Overall, the highlight of the language program for me was my personal tutorial teacher Jyotsna, who skillfully led me through the tenth chapter of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. Her ability to reference Sanskrit terms and ideas across a number of Sanskrit texts deepened my appreciation and understanding of Sanskrit literature and all the different valences a particular word could have. Most enjoyable about our process of exchange was that I was able to reference the Tibetan translations and commentary as well as a few contemporary Chinese translations, while



Ajanta Caves, India



Elaine Lai (center) with her host family and Ralph H. Craig III (right)

Sharda and her husband Mohan, who more than the language program itself, gave me a real taste of what life is like in Pune, India and how gracious people can be without asking for anything in return.

The biggest difference between my study of Sanskrit in the U.S. and in Pune is that in Pune they use spoken Sanskrit to teach and we are required to rephrase

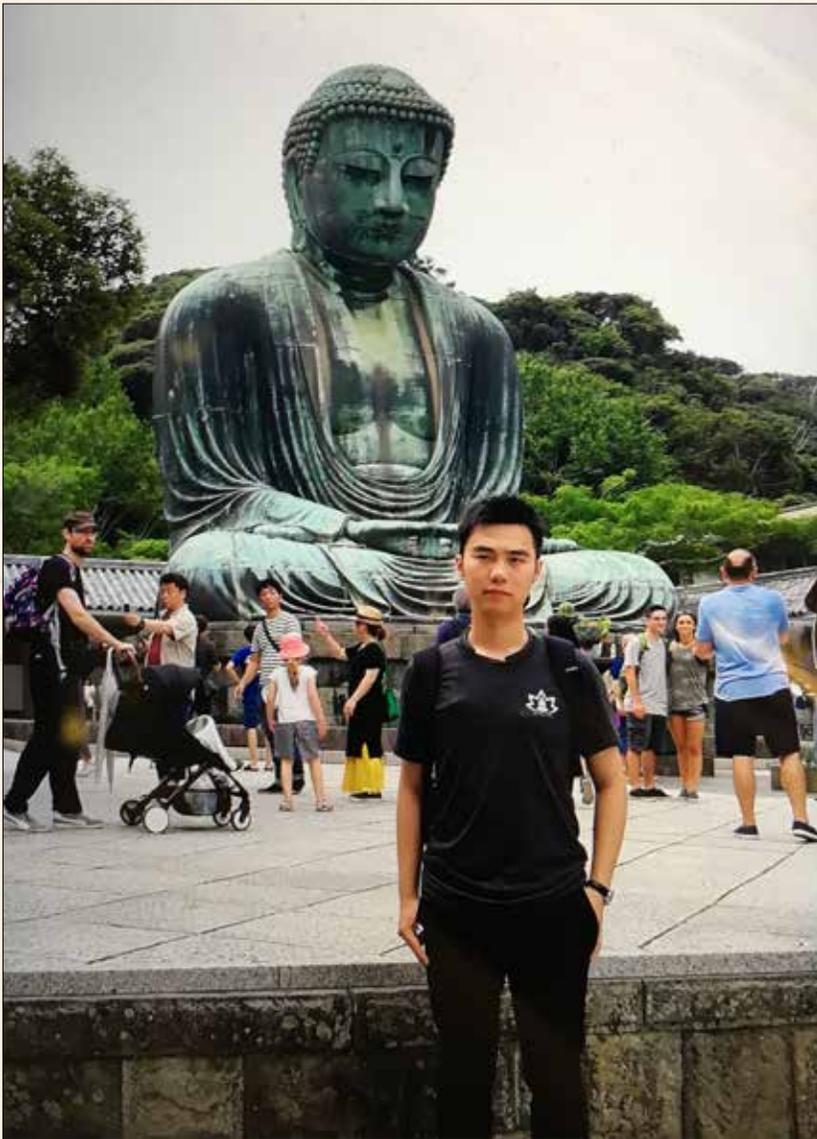
she was able to reference a Hindi version of the text, and thus together we were able to discuss how different interpretations or mis-interpretations could have emerged. As the weeks proceeded, I found myself enwrapped in many meaningful conversations and interactions with classmates in the Sanskrit language program as well as the Prakrit, Pali and

Marathi language programs which are also based in Pune. These memories of our time together and the friendships born from this brief period of interaction, I will continue to remember in the years to come.

Finally, the most moving part of the entire trip for me was the pilgrimage I took to the Ajanta and Ellora caves where I had the opportunity to see beautiful Buddhist, Hindu and Jain paintings and sculptures. The Ajanta caves are particularly famous for the Buddhist religious art depicted on its walls, but for me it was walking through and sitting in the retreat rooms of the Buddhist monasteries in Ellora that was the most impactful. For a blissful moment, I was able to reimagine the monasteries crowded with practitioners and also lifelong retreatants in each and every solitary retreat room. It is amazing to think that Buddhism was once flourishing in India at such a scale and what these spaces must have looked like in their full glory.

## “Summer in Japan”

by Kedao Tong



This past summer was filled with exciting events and unexpected challenges. Looking back on it, I realize it is one of the most rewarding summers I have ever had.

I spent much of my time traveling and studying in Asia. From June to July, I attended a Japanese language program at Waseda University, Tokyo. The intensive program there offered a comprehensive course that I really liked, and thanks to it now I feel much more comfortable speaking and writing in Japanese in different contexts. Moreover, living in Japan gave me a great chance to apply language skills I learned in class to various everyday situations. Also, from the Manpukuji temple near Uji, to the Sanjūsangendō in Kyoto, for the first time I had the chance to visit many famous temples in the Kansai region.

In August, I participated in a workshop/conference on East Asian Buddhism and Cultures in Kunming, southwest China. It not only enabled me to have an immersive and entirely new experience of monastic life at a modern temple, but also provided me with a rare opportunity to take classes and have conversations with a remarkably diverse group of students, in terms of cultural and research backgrounds, from all over the world.

In addition, I have been working on two paper projects and took the time to read primary texts that I didn't get the chance to do during a busy quarter, including the *Lunheng* and the *Huainanzi* (partly for fun, partly for research). One project explores the formative stage of the Maitreyan cult in China, and the other one examines the conception of ghosts/demons in some early medieval Buddhist-Daoist texts.

Lastly, I am really grateful for the generous support of The Ho Center and the Department of Religious Studies. I believe that all of these experiences will build into my research in the future, and I am so excited to have started another academic year at Stanford.



Top: Kedao Tong in Kamakura, Japan  
Bottom: Panlong Monastery in Kunming, Yunnan, China

## “Reflections on Summer Language Study in France”

by Nancy Chu

Thanks to the support of a language grant from the Dean’s Office at Stanford, I was able to attend a two-month intensive French course in Paris this past summer. The course, which was offered by the Sorbonne’s language center, the Cours de Civilisation Française de La Sorbonne (CCFS), was located in Montparnasse, not far from the Alliance Française and the Paris Catacombs. It was founded in 1919 and has a long history of French language and culture instruction. 2019, when I was there, happened to be the centennial of its founding. A fellow student from Stanford was also enrolled there at around the same time and we were able to meet up during the summer.

My language course consisted of five hours of class each day, which added up to a total of 200 hours of instruction over the summer. Between classes, I enjoyed going to the nearby Montparnasse Cemetery, one of the larger cemeteries in Paris, where Samuel Beckett, Charles Baudelaire, and Susan Sontag were buried. It was my favorite place to go for a quiet stroll during lunch hour. One day, I found Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir’s graves next to each other near one of the entrances. Sartre’s gravestone had some flowers laid on it but de Beauvoir’s was covered in lipstick kisses, which I loved.

During the course, I stayed with Loan, a Vietnamese-French woman who lived in a charming half-circle of houses not too far from the language center. There was so much to do in Paris that it truly felt like a feast (and sometimes was). During the weekends, I visited the Grand Mosque of Paris and people-watched in the local parks, checked out some of the city’s fabulous museums and bookstores, frequented the cafés in Montparnasse, and in July went back to the University of Cambridge in England to officially graduate from my master’s program. It was a wonderful celebration. My parents came all the way from California, and a fellow student from Stanford, Simona, and her husband John were also able to attend. During the trip, I squeezed in a meet-up with one or two old classmates who were still there and got to see my former supervisor.

Our instructor at CCFS kept us busy with French grammar and vocabulary, but I made sure also to go to the Musée Guimet, the national museum of Asian art founded by the industrialist Émile Guimet. I had heard about a special exhibition on Buddhist art going on in August and September and when I visited, I made the most of my opportunity to view the rest of their extensive collection. Overall, it was a summer filled with a wonderful variety of people, delicious pastries, verb conjugations, and countless trips on the metro. In addition to the language learning, I enjoyed the different pace of life and the rich cultural offerings in France and came back feeling energized and recharged for another year.



Top: Nancy Chu in Paris, France  
Bottom: Eiffel Tower

## “Summer Research Trip in China”

by Sangyop Lee



Sangyop Lee (right) giving a paper at Hunan University, China

In September 2019, I had the opportunity to conduct research in China as a Pre-doctoral Fellow of the Stanford University Center at Peking University. In addition to studying rubbings of early medieval Chinese inscriptions, I attended a conference on early Chinese Buddhism, and gave a talk on my dissertation project at Hunan University.

The primary purpose of this trip was to study the archive of rubbings of early medieval Chinese inscriptions stored at the Peking University Library. In my dissertation, I argue that the indigenous Chinese Buddhist practices and theories that emerged during the “era of isolation” in the fourth century (ca. 310–ca. 380) exerted lasting influence on the later development of Chinese Buddhism. I show this primarily by studying the ways in which the unique religious and philosophical ideas developed in the Chinese Buddhist discourse on the imperishability of the soul (*shen bumie* 神不滅) in the fourth century informed the interpretation of new Mahāyāna texts introduced into China from the fifth century and onwards. As part of this project, I am studying the usage of the word *shen* in medieval Buddhist inscriptions. For example, in two Northern Wei inscriptions (A1367; A1368) dated to the year 502, we read the donors’ wish for their family members that “their souls would transcend the nine heavens

(a possible variant of *jiu ju* 九居, or *navasattvāvāsa*) and their traces would ascend to the tenth stage (*daśabhūmi*)” (神騰九空迹登十地). I think that this kind of understanding could have developed from the interplay between the *shen bumie* theory and *Daśabhūmika* scholarship as exemplified by Sengwei’s 僧衛 commentary on the *Shizhu jing* 十住經 in the early fifth century.

Although, contrary to my original expectations, I was not able to find more examples of similar usages of *shen* that were not already published, I instead was able to find some rubbings of fifth-century Chinese Buddhist statues that, to the best of my knowledge, have not been published or discussed previously. “*Du Efei zao xiang*” 杜阿妃造像 (C3334; image attached to this article) dated to the year 410 would be one example. I think that a future study of these artifacts would allow us to further our understanding of the interaction between the abstract and symmetric style of Chinese Buddhist statues that developed during the era of isolation, and the concrete and realistic style of Indian Buddhist statues that was reintroduced after the era of isolation.

The conference on Six Dynasties Buddhism held at Peking University on September 7 (“胎动与蜕变中的六朝佛教”) was an exciting opportunity to learn from emerging scholars of early Chinese

Buddhism active in China. Chen Zhiyuan’s 陳志遠 presentation on Northern Dynasties inscriptions provided an informative overview of the history and the current state of the field and introduced his own project of constructing a database of the rubbings stored at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Cao Ling’s 曹凌 paper on Lushan Huiyuan 廬山慧遠 proposed that we recognize the multivalence of Huiyuan’s writings that resulted from his attempt to engage with both contemporary *xuanxue* discourse and Buddhist doctrinal discourse. There were many more excellent papers presented at this conference, and I look forward to the publication of these works.

On September 10, I gave a talk titled “The Theory of the Imperishable Soul and Buddhist Scholarship in the Jingzhou Region in the Fifth Century” at Yuelu shuyuan 岳麓书院 at Hunan University. In this talk, by drawing on the writings by Huiguan 慧觀 and Sengwei, I highlighted the importance of the Jingzhou 荊州 region (corresponding roughly to present-day Hubei and Hunan Provinces) as the point of intersection in the fifth century of the Indian Buddhism propagated by Kumārajīva’s Chang’an community and the indigenous Chinese Buddhism developed by the Lu shan 廬山 and Jianye 建業 communities.



“*Du Efei zao xiang*” 杜阿妃造像 (C3334)

## “My First Year at Stanford”

by Julian Butterfield



Julian Butterfield

When I first visited Stanford’s The Ho Center for Buddhist Studies, in November 2018, I had recently completed an MA in Religious Studies at the University of Toronto and had very little idea what I would do next. I knew I loved to read Buddhist literature and felt acutely that I wasn’t finished answering the questions my previous studies had posed. Coming to Stanford at that time felt like stepping into a dream world. This was not only a place in which my questions and ideas resonated with others: it seemed to be brimming with enthusiasm, fellowship, and innovation in pursuing them.

In this sense, my first year as a PhD student in Religious Studies at Stanford has truly been a dream come true. Even before I moved to campus, The Ho Center faculty, administrators, and fellow students have nurtured my studies with insight, vigor, and kindness. In Spring 2019, my advisor, Professor John Kieschnick, welcomed me into academic life at Stanford by setting up a reading

course in Chinese Esoteric Buddhist texts that I could participate in digitally, from Canada. Over the summer of 2019, I traveled to Hong Kong, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou to present research on the bodhisattva precepts literature alongside my Stanford *senpai* Sangyop Lee, who helped clarify many aspects of my work. With the generous support of the Department of Religious Studies, I then traveled to Leiden University, where I studied various Central Asian languages alongside another Stanford *senpai*, Grace Ramswick, and then to the Turfan archives of the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften to start sketching out my current research project.

On Stanford campus at last, I hit the ground running with academic work that has helped me to both enrich and clarify my research specializations. Long interested in visionary aspects of medieval Central Asian and Chinese literature, a Fall Quarter course on the *Lotus Sūtra* as well as Professor Ryūchi Abé’s Hwei Tai

Seminar on the same text encouraged me to translate a *Lotus*-related visualization text, *the Scripture on the Method of Visualizing Bodhisattva Samantabhadra*, under the supervision of Professor Paul Harrison. In this I was able to draw many connections from my summer studies and am now using my translation as the basis of my primary research into visionary experience and repentance rituals in medieval Central and East Asia. Coursework in Religious Studies, Art History, Comparative Literature, and East Asian Studies has further helped me flesh out this interest, as well as my secondary research into the reception of Buddhist literature in modern Europe.

With the encouragement and support of The Ho Center administrators and my colleague Elaine Lai, I also deepened my connection to Buddhist traditions by taking on the role of Financial Officer in the newly resuscitated Buddhist Community at Stanford. It’s been a great pleasure to help grow a space for Stanford affiliates of all walks to explore Buddhist practice on campus. Even as I returned to Canada with the onset of COVID-19 social distancing, I’ve felt closely connected to all these components of my life at Stanford and continue to forge ahead. It’s been a truly wonderful year, despite its adversities, and I want to thank everyone at The Ho Center for welcoming me and furthering my adventure in Buddhist Studies with such a spirit of fellowship.

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