

Report to the Panel: *Buddhist Images in Motion—Contexts of Encounter, Codification and Transformation*

**presented at the Fifth International Conference on Tibetan
Archaeology and Art, Beijing, 21-24 October 2012**

Panel chair: Carmen Meinert

**Participants: Christoph Anderl, Carmen Meinert, Henrik
Sørensen (all three are members of the Buddhist Studies
Group of the KHK)**

Three members of the Buddhist Studies Group of the KHK „Dynamics in the History of Religion“, namely **Christoph Anderl**, **Carmen Meinert**, and **Henrik Sørensen**, participated at the *Fifth International Conference on Tibetan Archaeology and Art* in Beijing on 21-24 October 2012 with the panel “Buddhist Images in Motion—Contexts of Encounter, Codification and Transformation”. The conference was a joint Sino-Austrian cooperation, with the Institute for Sino-Tibetan Buddhist Art at Capital Normal University in Beijing as the hosting institution. The conference focused on art history in Central Asia, Tibet and Mongolia, on recent archaeological findings, and on the Tibetan and Chinese interchange in Buddhist art and history.

With the panel “Buddhist Images in Motion” the members of the Buddhist Studies Group continued to present the ongoing research activities of the KHK group on one of the most extensive networks in early Asian history that was established and sustained by the spread of Buddhism. Following a relational approach to religion, their panel investigated how Buddhist art was localised, codified and transformed at various Buddhist sites in Central Asia and China. The investigated sites were regarded as constantly changing nodes within networks of religious cooperation, contest and exchange of various ethnic groups. The phrase “Buddhist Images in Motion” did not refer to the mobility of an (imagined) religious unity-in-diversity on its way across Asia, but expressed the perspective on Buddhism as “something” relational and heterogeneous from the very start, a pan-Asian phenomenon constituting itself as localized densifications of translocal processes.

The three papers explored aspects of Buddhist art at different localities important for the history of Buddhism and characterized by Chinese, Tibetan, Tangut and Mongolian contacts and interchanges. They analyzed processes of resistance and adaptation of Tibetan and Chinese influences as manifested in Buddhist images from the 6th to the 14th centuries with particular emphasis on the respective socio-political contexts.

Christoph Anderl investigated the narratives of so-called *ruixiang* 瑞像 or “Auspicious Statues” connected to the iconic representation of particular

Buddhas or bodhisattvas as they appeared in the Central Asian oasis of Khotan and in Chinese Dunhuang manuscripts from the 6th to the 11th centuries; he thereby showed the flexibility of narratives which allowed an adaptation to “local” sociopolitically determined values. The development of this type of narratives in the context of Dunhuang is also an indication of ongoing processes of localization, sinization, and the production of historiographies. Looking back at the “origins” of Buddhism and its transfer to China, both real and imagined movements were traced or created, and projected on iconic representations. Whereas some of the narratives were based on canonical literature, the development showed specific features in China and subsequently other regions the narratives spread to, including Tibet and Japan.

Carmen Meinert explored another local expressions of Buddhist art in Dunhuang connecting it with manuscript evidences from the Tangut Empire in the 11th and 12th centuries; her contribution contextualized artistic expressions through a micro-historical analysis.

Henrik Sørensen distinguished in his presentation between what constitutes Sino-Tibetan Buddhist art, i.e. a form of Buddhist art made in Tibet in which clear-cut Chinese stylistic and iconic features are discernible, and what constitutes one which can more correctly be defined as ‘Tibeto-Chinese,’ i.e. forms of Buddhist art produced in China under varying degrees of Tibetan influence; through numerous examples from Tangut influences in the 12th century to Mongolian and Chinese examples from the 13th to 14th centuries, he demonstrated the Tibetan heritage in Ming Chinese Buddhist art (14th c.), a so far neglected view. The whole panel stimulated vivid discussions among the more than 80 Chinese and Western experts participating in the conference.