

ERC project BuddhistRoad, final conference

## **Establishing of Buddhist Nodes in Eastern Central Asia 6<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> C. - Part III: Impacts of Non-Buddhist Influences and Doctrines**

July 12th–14th, 2021, Online and hosted by CERES/RUB (Germany)

Following an introductory address by Prof. Michal Biran, charting the spread of Islam through eastern Central Asia and its multifaceted interactions with Buddhism there, the conference began with a series of papers concerning the many other impacts of non-Buddhist influences in the same region between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century. These ranged from large levels of mutual influence from religions like Daoism (Henrik H. Sørensen) to the minor impact of Christianity in China (Max Deeg). In between, speakers assessed the evidence for the effect of Manichaeism (Jens Wilkens) and indigenous Khotanese (Diego Loukota) and Tibetan religious substrata (Daniel Beronský and Lewis Doney) on Buddhism, as well as the importance of textual repositories for knowledge transfer in this area and our knowledge of that transfer (Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim). The second part of the conference focused on doctrines. This included contextualising Chan (also known as Zen) Buddhist thought within eastern Central Asia (Carmen Meinert). It also covered esoteric Buddhism, whether through orthodoxy in Vinaya monastic regulations (Haoran Hou) or the movement of terms from the tantric community in Dunhuang to Tangut Buddhist usage. Finally, this section dealt with the manner in which doctrine was transmitted at a key moment in Dunhuang history, as it passed from Tibetan rule to the Guiyijun (851–1036?, 歸義軍, Return-to-Allegiance Army) period (Meghan Howard). Although non-Buddhism and doctrines were originally conceived as separate foci, multiple areas of overlap and cross-fertilisation emerged and inspired the convener to think of bringing together the two themes in the eventual proceedings.

Thus the conference, which had to be held online due to COVID-19 restrictions, was nonetheless an enjoyable event and allowed for the robust yet respectful debate of many topics. Interaction among the participants was enhanced by keeping the numbers low, so that generally 25 people (one ‘screen’s worth’) were present at one time, and by the use of Wonder.me for longer breakout sessions. The latter platform proved very popular as a convenient way to meet individually and in small groups, in a friendly way that is not possible on Zoom. Through these technologies and the good-natured willingness of our participants, the conference formed a highly satisfying end to the project’s period of interaction with the wider scholarly world, and a fitting tribute to the energetic, inquisitive and collegial example of our group leader, Carmen Meinert.

Lewis Doney