



Report of the Guest Lecture of the BuddhistRoad project

23 April 2020 Lewis Doney (Trondheim)

LOCALISING TIBETAN BUDDHISM IN DUNHUANG

invited lecture at the BuddhistRoad project, CERES, Ruhr University Bochum

The BuddhistRoad team invited Lewis Doney, Associate Professor of Religious Studies at NTNU Trondheim, to give a virtual presentation on 9th to 10th century Buddhist communities in and around Dunhuang. He first outlined what could be said about the scribes (mostly laity) and editors (mostly ordained) employed for the early-9th century Tibetan imperial copying project, producing large tomes of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsūtra* (Chin. *Mohe bore boluomiduo jing*, 摩訶般若波羅蜜多經), and *Śatasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra* (Tib. *Shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa stong phrag brgya pa*) and thousands of the shorter *Aparimitāyurnāmamahāyānasūtra* (Chin. *Foshuo wuliangshou zongyao jing* 佛說無量壽宗要, Tib. *Tshe dpag tu med pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo*). He then compared the doctrinal worldview of the latter work with evidence of the beliefs of members of the *scriptoria* and others associated with the project around Dunhuang, based on material evidence left in the famous library cave, Mogao 17.

Lewis Doney showed how the many copies of the *Aparimitāyurnāmamahāyānasūtra* (*Ap*) at Dunhuang gives a false indication of its popularity within the Dunhuang Buddhist community, but that not only its imperial promotion but also the directive in the *Ap* itself to recite, write or have copied the *Ap dhāraṇi* and benefits that the *Ap* promises will accrue from these practices ensured its reproduction and spread. In contrast, notes in the margins of the imperial *Ap* copies and the other uses to which *Ap*-type paper was put suggest more popular beliefs surrounding inter alia the Tibetan emperor, Amitābha, the Four Great Kings and Yoga tantra, as well as a concern with replacing non-Buddhist doctrines with those of Buddhism.

This talk thus questioned whether *Ap* contained the most popular *dhāraṇi* practiced at Dunhuang, and the second part instead focused on ritual use of the *Uṣṇiṣavijjāyadhāraṇi* (Chin. *Zunsheng zhou* 尊勝咒, Tib. *gTsong tor nam par rgyal ba'i gzungs*) and its connections with the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatantra* (Chin. *Dasheng guanxiang mannaluo jing zhuequ jing*



大乘觀想曼拏羅淨諸惡趣經, Tib. *Ngan song thams cad rnam par sbyong ba'i rgyud*), or SDP. Both the *dhāraṇī* and *SDP* are ritual means of praying for the dead and played a role in Buddhism on the Tibetan plateau. In central Tibet, the *SDP* was a closely guarded ritual ensuring imperial power and its translation and dissemination seem to have been strictly controlled (yet an 8th-century commentary is recorded in the imperial *Lhan kar ma* catalogue). At Dunhuang, Tibetan transliterations of the *dhāraṇī* abound (e.g. IOL Tib J 466/2), and the library cave also contained Tibetan translations of it (IOL Tib J 322 and IOL Tib J 348/3) and the *sūtra* that sometimes accompanies it (P. T. 6, P. T. 54 and P. T. 368). The talk discussed these sources in relation to ritual manuals related to the *SDP* (IOL Tib J 439, 712 and IOL Tib J 579), comparing form, function, handwriting and common narratives across works from the Dunhuang corpus. In this way, Lewis Doney worked towards describing a nexus of doctrinal and ritual tradition in imperial and early post-imperial Tibet and identifying a tantric Buddhist community in Dunhuang after the end of Tibetan control over the region in mid-9th century.



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