

Report of the Guest Lecture of the BuddhistRoad project

06 December 2023 Yi (Allan) Ding (Chicago)

LIGHT FROM THE NORTH—TIBETAN MANUSCRIPTS FROM THE NORTHERN-SECTOR CAVES AT DUNHUANG AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

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

The team of the *BuddhistRoad* project invited Dr. Yi (Allan) Ding, Assistant Professor at DePaul University, Chicago to give a BuddhistRoad Guest Lecture on the northern caves at Mt. Mogao, Dunhuang (敦煌). In this talk, Dr. Ding discussed the possibility to reevaluate Tibetan manuscripts from the Northern Section of the caves and their relationship to the history of Tibetan Buddhism at Dunhuang.

Because scholars of Tibetan Buddhism at Dunhuang have been primarily focusing on Tibetan manuscripts from Mogao Cave 17 (a.k.a. the Library Cave, Chin. Mogao ku 莫高窟), few have attempted to address the question of how Tibetan Buddhism existed at Dunhuang after the sealing of the so-called ‘Library Cave’ around 1006. In his lecture, Dr. Ding used some of the post-10th-century Tibetan manuscripts to discuss the survival of Tibetan Buddhism from the 11th century to the 16th century. And that after Dunhuang lost most of its population in the 15th and 16th centuries, Tibetan Buddhism seemed to have lost its local vitality.

Dr. Ding showed that these Tibetan manuscripts demonstrate that although modern excavations of these caves have been conducted, we still need to reconsider the dating, use, and function of these caves and the manuscripts from these caves. Some manuscripts also suggest that there was an institutional base for Tibetan Buddhism in the Tangut (1036–1227) and Mongol periods (1227–1368). Various ritual activities may have taken place in some of the Northern Section of the caves, including the tantric feast, the longevity rite, and other devotional acts. In addition, he showed that the Tibetan manuscripts also demonstrate a possible cultural connection between the Kan lho region southeast of the Blue Lake and Dunhuang.

