

Buddhism in Central Asia III

Impacts of Non-Buddhist Influences, Doctrines

Edited by

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The Meeting of Religious Traditions and of Beliefs in Eastern Central Asia

Lewis Doney, Carmen Meinert, Henrik H. Sørensen, and Yukiyo Kasai

1 Introduction

The themes chosen for this volume, ‘Impacts of Non-Buddhist Influences’ and ‘Doctrines’, are two of the established research clusters of the *BuddhistRoad* project.¹ They thus form an important part of the research activities that the project carries out with regard to Buddhist Eastern Central Asia, as reflected in the final project conference held on these subjects in July 2021.² Although ‘Doctrines’ and the ‘Impacts of Non-Buddhist Influences’ were discussed on separate days of this conference, mostly for logistical reasons, the themes of inter-religious and intra-religious contact were always present. Furthermore, the contributors welcomed the possibility for dynamic cross-fertilisation of the project’s two topics and meaningfully engaged in the resultant dialogue that took place throughout the event. Despite the conference having to be held online due to COVID-19 restrictions, through the good-natured willingness of our participants to try out new technologies it was nonetheless an enjoyable event and allowed for the robust yet respectful debate of many topics. In that way, the final conference proved a fitting tribute to the aims of the overall *BuddhistRoad* project.

Complex interactions between Buddhism and non-Buddhist traditions and the related theme of Buddhist doctrines mark the period between the 6th and 14th centuries,³ Buddhism continued to spread along the many routes of an ancient, local political-economic-cultural system of exchange that is often referred to as the so-called Silk Roads.⁴ It thereby strengthened its position

1 The research agenda of the *BuddhistRoad* project is sketched in the report. See BuddhistRoad Team, “Dynamics in Buddhist Transfer in Eastern Central Asia 6th–14th Centuries: A Project Report by BuddhistRoad Team,” *Medieval Worlds* 8 (2018): 126–134.

2 The conference programme is available on the BuddhistRoad homepage, <https://buddhistroad.ceres.rub.de/en/activities/organised-conferences/>.

3 BuddhistRoad Team, “Dynamics in Buddhist Transfer,” 126.

4 Christopher I. Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

in China, Central Tibet, and many of the nodes in between and across the wider network, such as Khotan, the Turfan Basin and Dunhuang (敦煌). In these places, Buddhism encountered other religions, from both east and west, indigenous traditions of interacting with superhuman beings, and novel non-religious technologies. Buddhist travellers, missionaries and converts had to negotiate, accept, adapt, or resist these influences, which had subsequent impacts on local forms of Buddhism in minor or major ways. These forms were often then transmitted to the other areas where they experienced multiple new forms of exchange.

The *BuddhistRoad* project is housed within the Center for Religious Studies (CERES) and its head, Volkhard Krech, has outlined various possible effects of inter-religious contact that range from conscious rejection to identification of parts of another religion with parts of one's own.⁵ However, Krech's key insight is that the religions taking part in this meeting are to a lesser or greater extent constituted *by* such interactions, as are their very ideas of themselves and others *as* religions.⁶ He states that possible consequences of "contacts between religions in the religious field can be the adaptation and amalgamation, as well as the eradication, of religious opponents internally or externally, the mystical sublimation and salvation religiosity, as well as inner-worldly radicalization and (missionary or charitable) activism" and that effects can be felt within both inter-religious and intra-religious relationships—but in different ways.⁷

Here especially, we editors find a connection between the impact of non-Buddhist influence and doctrine. Krech has already identified a number of key terms that are related to, but semantically different from, doctrine and that are important to "the trend towards differentiation of the religious from other societal spheres" (and of religions from one other), beginning with: "Certainty, certitude, assumption, wisdom, knowledge, belief, faith."⁸ This cognitive aspect provides people with orientation, one of four key components that go to make up the dialectical process by which a religion distinguishes itself as (a) religion on the basis of contact with other traditions, religions, and so forth—and these four components have been formative in the structuring of the *BuddhistRoad*

5 Volkhard Krech, "Religious Contacts in Past and Present Times: Aspects of a Research Programme," *Religion* 42.2 (2012): 205–210.

6 Krech, "Religious Contacts," 195–201. See also Volkhard Krech, "From Religious Contact to Scientific Comparison and Back: Some Methodological Considerations on Comparative Perspectives in the Science of Religion," in *The Dynamics of Transculturality: Concepts and Institutions in Motion*, ed. Antje Flüchter and Jivanta Schöttli (Cham: Springer, 2015), 63–65.

7 Krech, "From Religious Contact," 64; see also Krech, "Religious Contacts," 200.

8 Krech, "From Religious Contact," 47; Krech, "Religious Contacts," 211.

project by means of inter-related research clusters.⁹ Integral to the new Central Asian Buddhist traditions (created in part by these processes) were altered worldviews, beliefs and creeds that were authorised by means of *inter alia* teachings, iconographies and textual commentaries. Should monks remain vegetarian where crops are scarce due to altitude or desert? Which are the acceptable sacred languages? Do certain autochthonous deities exist and, if so, where do they stand in the pantheon and do they represent a benefit or harm to the Buddhist path? Should the accepted understanding of a foetus' gestation depend only on Buddhist texts, or do indigenous or foreign medical traditions also inform this belief? Must one adjudicate or balance the Buddhist doctrines of one Central Asian land against those of another only with reference to Indic Buddhist teachings?

Krech conceptualises the relationship between inter-religious contact and this cognitive aspect of religion in terms of successive processes of transcendence—whether overcoming the 'other', synthesising the two positions in a new description of one's own tradition or 'religion' in general, or relating in a transformed way to the transcendent objects of Buddhism, say, and thereby altering one's relation between it and non-Buddhist people on the immanent plain of this world.¹⁰ Over time, these theoretical movements can also create (more or less porous) boundaries between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. Such distinctions were made, collapsed and re-made in various forms of Buddhism by inter-religious contact and internal developments between the 6th and 14th centuries and tended to either strengthen the bonds between the insiders against a perceived 'other' or create power imbalances by means of identifying some groups of insiders as (in danger of being seen as) outsiders for *inter alia* the 'heretical' views that they were claimed to hold.¹¹ It is thus important not to forget the social context of religious traditions, practices and doctrines, and their relations with empires (be they Indic, Chinese, Tibetan, Tangut

9 Volkhard Krech, "Dynamics in the History of Religions: Preliminary Considerations on Aspects of a Research Programme," in *Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe: Encounters, Notions, and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Volkhard Krech and Marion Steinicke (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2012), 21–22; Krech, "From Religious Contact," 68; Krech, "Religious Contacts," 201; *BuddhistRoad* Team, "Dynamics in Buddhist Transfer," 131.

10 This is most elaborated in Krech, "From Religious Contact," 47–52.

11 Krech describes such doctrinal consequences of inter- and intra-religious contact, including Japanese authors who regarded Christianity as a form of Buddhism, in "Religious Contacts," 200–201 and 203–204; Krech, "From Religious Contact," 65 and 68. Undoubtedly, such contact also affected other aspects of Buddhism that form the basis of the *BuddhistRoad* project, the sacred spaces and pilgrimage, rituals and practices, patronage and legitimisation strategies, and the visual and material transfers found in Eastern Central Asia. Yet, these topics lay beyond the scope of these proceedings.

or (semi-)nomadic Turco-Mongolian), kingdoms, or complex modern states,¹² whose rulers have the power to either weaponise discourses of ‘outsiders’ and ‘heretics’ or create pragmatic checks against over-zealous fence building.

Especially towards the end of our time frame, Buddhist missionary activity in Eastern Central Asia was increasingly joined by Islamic and Christian proselytism. In response, many modern Buddhists have attempted to move from theological notions of different religious traditions and religions (with the ecumenicism and inter-religious dialogue that this entailed) to ‘scientific’ descriptions of religion. This has influenced Buddhist doctrines concerning non-Buddhists and led to a general over-emphasis on doctrines as the meeting and sticking points between ‘religions’ both in inter-religious dialogue and religious studies. Krech outlines how the creation of ‘religion’ as a collective singular category, encompassing all scholastically defined ‘religions,’¹³ has led to such comparison and paved the way for the field of religious studies, in which many of the conference’s contributors situate themselves (at least in part), whose inheritance of doctrinal categories has caused problems for the study of religious traditions.¹⁴ More recent work in religious studies has done much to overcome this latter bias, including Carmen Meinert’s choice to include doctrines as only one of six aspects of Buddhism that together make up the *foci* of the project.¹⁵

Addressing issues of historical and ongoing inter-religious contact, resultant processes of transcendence and immanence,¹⁶ as well as notions of ‘religion’

12 See especially Krech, “From Religious Contact,” 53–62.

13 Krech, “Religious Contacts,” 197. See also the classic Jonathan Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 269–284; and more recently, with respect to pre-modern East Asia, Christoph Kleine, “Religion als begriffliches Konzept und soziales System im vormodernen Japan: polythetische Klassen, semantische und funktionale Äquivalente und strukturelle Analogien,” in *Religion in Asien? Studien zur Anwendbarkeit des Religionsbegriffs*, ed. Peter Schalk (Uppsala: Uppsala Universität, 2013), 225–292.

14 Krech, “Religious Contacts,” particularly 197–198; Krech, “From Religious Contact,” 39–45 and 63–70. His analysis and use of the term *Kollektivsingular* follows, *inter alia*, Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik vergangener Zeiten* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1979).

15 See BuddhistRoad Team, “Dynamics in Buddhist Transfer,” 126 and 131.

16 Transcendence arises out of the contact since applying a transcendent meaning to certain dialectical processes (which are based on the above-mentioned four dimensions including the cognitive) “is a special form of dealing with contingency” or the immanent problem of the ‘other’ which is encountered in inter- and intra-religious contact (Krech, “Dynamics in the History of Religions,” 22). These insights are applied to our Eastern Central Asian context in Carmen Meinert, “Beyond Spatial and Temporal Contingencies: Tantric Rituals in Eastern Central Asia under Tangut Rule, 11th–13th C.,” in *Buddhism in*

that we have inherited as a result, leads back to engaging with the data of Buddhist religious traditions in new ways that thereby suggest new ways of re-considering the field in general.

Each of the contributors to these conference proceedings have their own comparative frameworks drawn from historical (Biran, Deeg, Sørensen, Meinert, and Doumy and van Schaik), philological (Doney, Berounský, and Howard Masang) or linguistic disciplines (Wilkins, Kasai, and Loukota), or they use more than one of these methods to stand back from and then carefully illuminate their chosen time periods and regions of Eastern Central Asia. Those addressing the impacts of non-Buddhist influence touched on doctrinal contexts and consequences of such interactions, while those focusing on doctrines were aware of the rich interplay of inter- and intra-religious contact that had created them. These conference proceedings thus simultaneously embrace the complex interactions between Buddhism and non-Buddhist traditions, and the multifaceted aspects of Buddhist doctrines in the same region.

We are happy that these proceedings bring out multiple areas of overlap between what were originally conceived as separate *foci* of the *BuddhistRoad* project, non-Buddhism and doctrines, and this has inspired us constantly through the editing of this volume.

2 Contents of This Volume

As stated above, this volume comprises two inter-related parts: Part 1 covers ‘Impacts of Non-Buddhist Influences’ primarily and Part 2 deals for the most part with ‘Doctrines’. The first part focuses on regions containing a whole spectrum of religious traditions that made slight or serious impacts on Buddhism. Chapter 1 is Michal Biran’s “Islamic Expansion into Central Asia and Muslim Buddhist Encounters.” Biran analyses Islamic expansion into Central Asia from the rise of Islam in the 7th century up to the division of the Eurasian Steppe between Islam and Tibetan Buddhism in the 16th century, with a focus on the 10th–14th centuries, and on Islamic connections—political, economic, intellectual—with Eastern Central Asia’s Buddhist communities and polities. While this process has often been told as a violent struggle between Islam and Buddhism in which Islam eventually had the upper hand, the chapter reveals a more complex, less linear, relationship. It highlights the interplay between political power and religious expansion, the central position of Transoxania in

Central Asia II: Practices and Rituals, Visual and Material Transfer, ed. Yukiyo Kasai and Henrik H. Sørensen (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 313–365.

Muslim networks, the connections of Muslims of different ethnicities and doctrines with various Buddhist centres (notably of India, China and Tibet), and aspects of Muslim-Buddhist crosspollination. It then focuses on the 'Mongol moment' (1206–1368) in Central Asia to compare Islamic and Buddhist conversion tactics among nomads and more sedentary peoples and investigate the elusive evidence of influence from Islam on Buddhism in this area.

Chapter 2, "Witch Women and Amorous Monkeys: Non-Buddhist Substrata in Khotanese Religion" by Diego Loukota, explores how the growing Buddhist culture of early historic Khotan was founded in part on non-Buddhist religious traditions beneath the surface. Its search for evidence of these traces centres on terminology, but takes into account the historical and geopolitical context of this oasis at the time. It uncovers indigenous Iranian and also 'foreign' Indic and Sinitic influences, including the presence of Iranian and possibly Greek gods in Khotan, non-Buddhist Indic deities and Sinitic cosmological notions, and practices of blood sacrifice, fire worship, mountain libations, fertility cults, zodiacal prognostication and funeral geomancy. Since Khotan was transformed again with the advent of Islam and the gradual death of Khotanese, such traces are hard to find. Yet, the importance of showing such non-Buddhist influences of an early age is still a vital part of demonstrating the variety of religious traditions interacting on the Silk Roads during the first millennium CE against a simplistic description of the mere transposition of an Indic model into the region.

Chapter 3, "Uyghur Buddhism and the Impact of Manichaeism and Native Religion: The Case of Religious Terminology" by Jens Wilkens, investigates traces of the indigenous religion of the Uyghurs in inscriptions from the Mongolian Plateau and Buddhist and Manichaean texts from the Turfan oasis and from Dunhuang. It also examines the impact of Manichaeism itself on Uyghur Buddhism (from the 9th to the 13th c.), along with the Buddhism of Tocharian, Chinese, Sogdian, and (from the 13th century) Tibetan types. The chapter shows the problems of relying on certain sources that are themselves part of the process of interreligious dialogue, and limitations of the applying certain comparative approaches that have been taken up in more recent scholarship. Nonetheless, it reveals a particular local form of Buddhism in the West Uyghur Kingdom and gives clues from terminology in usage there of the influence of non-Buddhist concepts and deities upon it.

Chapter 4, "The Christian Communities in Tang China: Between Adaptation and Religious Self-Identity" by Max Deeg, asks why there is no (apparent) impact of Tang Christianity on Chinese Buddhism. In pursuing this question, Deeg examines the self-representation of the Christian minority and diaspora community living under the Tang (618–907, 唐) regulations in a society

where Buddhism and Daoism were more widely favoured. Textual witnesses (especially from Dunhuang) suggest a Christian adaptation of Buddhist and, to a lesser degree, Daoist terminology and concepts rather an attempt to produce an independent religious vocabulary in Chinese. The stele inscription of Xi'an, the *Daqin jingjiao liuxing zhongguo bei* 大秦景教流行中國碑 [The Stele Inscription of the Radiant Teaching of Daqin Transmitted to the Middle Kingdom] from the year 781 rather shows Christians using a strategy of portraying their strong links to the court and the Tang emperors, and their distinctive religious features, when presenting themselves semi-officially.

Chapter 5, “On the Presence and Influence of Daoism in the Buddhist Material from Dunhuang” by Henrik H. Sørensen, explores the presence of original Daoist elements in the Buddhist sources from Dunhuang. Over the course of its history in China, Buddhism went from being a foreign religion to a fully domesticated one, a process which owed much to the meeting with, and adaptation of, local traditions. Daoism in particular was responsible for the process through which Buddhism became a *bona fide* Chinese religion. When viewing the relevant material, it becomes evident that specific areas of Buddhist practice were more susceptible to Daoist influence than others. These include: divinities and spirits; production of apocryphal literature; conceptions of the netherworld; spell casting including formal curses; talismans and seals; various forms of issues for which ritual remedies and beliefs can be had; longevity practices; and astrology and divination. Finally, the chapter outlines a model for analytical analysis of the areas of Buddhist belief and practice where the foreign elements are most prevalent.

Chapter 6, “Non-Buddhist Superhuman Beings in Early Tibetan Religious Literature” by Lewis Doney, focuses on superhuman beings (‘radically other than’, though not necessarily ‘better than’, humans) in order to survey some of the many non-Buddhist religious elements left over from the Tibetan imperial period (ca. 600–850) in Buddhist and especially in established Bönpo (Tib. *Bon po*) literature and practice. Though also offering a number of useful caveats for such an enterprise, the chapter identifies certain continuities in myth and ritual between earlier and later times across the Tibetan cultural sphere. These are connected to community, post-death states, and the status of royalty and priests in the society. It lastly shows the shifts in their depiction that range from positive inclusion to negative portrayal and rejection in Buddhist writings after the fall of the Tibetan Empire. Some of the imperial-period traditions have been identified as Bön, but this chapter argues that such an over-simplistic correspondence should be resisted.

The final chapter of Part 1 is Chapter 7, “The Fluid Lives of Tibetan Ritual Narrations during the Imperial and Post-Imperial Period” by Daniel Berounský.

This piece focuses on Tibetan fierce spirits (Tib. *gnyan*) and ‘earth-lord’ spirits (Tib. *Sa bdag*) using mainly little-studied collections of myths entitled *gNyan ’bum* [Fierce Spirit Collection] and *Sa bdag ’bum* [Earth-Lord Collection], which were included into the Bönpo canon. Much later Bönpo chronicles claim that these scriptures were unearthed in West Tibet around the turn of the 10th and 11th centuries. Regional associations of the ‘fierce’ spirits with the Dong clan (Tib. lDong, often represented in Chinese chronicles as Qiang [羌]) and the north-eastern part of the Tibetan Plateau stand out from the myths of the *Fierce Spirit Collection*. The ‘earth-lords’ are seen as a part of the original Chinese lore, which found its way into Tibet in a form fitting the expectations there. Yet in both cases, one can discern features showing the development of the locally based ritual traditions towards universal ones, which were in turn easily absorbed into Buddhist ritual.

The second part of this proceedings volume interrogates *inter alia* themes of orthodoxy, as well as the transmission and geographical instantiation of belief. Thus, Part 2 begins with Chapter 8, “People, Places, Texts, and Topics: Another Look at the Larger Context of the Spread of Chan Buddhism in Eastern Central Asia During the Tibetan Imperial and Post-Imperial Period (7th–10th C.)” by Carmen Meinert. This contribution highlights the importance of the region of the Blue Lake especially, connecting with the final chapter of the Part 1 as a result. The region was important for the Tang and Tibetan Empires, and later became part of the Tangut Empire, and thus an important multi-cultural area connecting the equally diverse oasis towns of the Hexi Corridor and the Tarim Basin with Sinitic and Tibetan cultural areas. This chapter explores the development of the contested space between these cultures in a broader historical context and explores the strategies through which religion (institutions as well as doctrines) were employed in a power struggle spanning the 9th and 10th centuries that touches on the influence of Chinese Chan Buddhism in Tibet far beyond the famous 8th century debate believed to have been held at Samyé (Tib. bSam yas) Monastery. This chapter thus brings together information on people, places, texts and topics related to Chan Buddhism in order to clarify how Chan masters, Chan texts and topics might have been used in local and transregional exchanges in Eastern Central Asia.

Chapter 9, “Sino-Tibetan Scholasticism: A Case-Study of the *Pratītyasamutpādahṛdaya* in Dunhuang” by Meghan Howard Masang, stresses the importance of textual formats for understanding how specific threads of Chinese, Tibetan, and Indic exegetical traditions were woven together in the Dunhuang materials related to the *Pratītyasamutpādahṛdaya* [Epitome of Interdependent Origination], a short Sanskrit work also found in the Chinese and Tibetan canons. The chapter engages in codicological, palaeographic, and orthographic analysis of

Dunhuang Tibetan texts related to the *Pratīyasamutpādaḥṛdaya*, focusing on a preface (P. T. 767) that was likely scribed by the famous Sino-Tibetan translator Wu Facheng (d. ca. 864, 吳法成), also known as Go Chödrup (Tib. 'Go Chos grub) and a set of Tibetan annotations to the *Pratīyasamutpādaḥṛdaya* that most probably were intended to circulate with the preface (P. T. 762 and P. T. 766). It argues that these materials may reflect the early stages of creating a Chinese commentary that may have been authored by Facheng, the *Yinyuan xin shilun kajue ji* 因緣心釋論開決記 [Notes that Lay Open and Resolve the Meaning of the (Auto-)Commentary to the Treatise on the Heart of Causation] (T. 2816.85).

Chapter 10, “Prostration as *wuti toudi* 五體投地 or *wulun toudi* 五輪投地? A Possible Trace of Contacts between Certain Uyghur Translators and Esoteric Buddhism” by Yukiyo Kasai, uses the Old Uyghur translation for the Buddhist term *wuti toudi* 五體投地, whose worldly meaning is ‘to throw five (parts of the) body to the ground’ (*Skt. *pañcamaṇḍala-namaskāra*) and which describes a way of performing five-limbed prostration, to show that Esoteric Buddhist teaching left its trace in Old Uyghur Buddhist literature. Esoteric Buddhism experienced its heyday under the Tang Dynasty and was also transmitted in the Tang’s neighbouring regions like Dunhuang. There, numerous texts connected with Esoteric Buddhist teaching are found. Dunhuang was closely connected with the Turfan oasis under the Uyghur rules, so the further transmission of Esoteric Buddhism into that oasis is to be expected. Because of a dearth of materials, however, the flourishing of Esoteric Buddhism among the Uyghurs has not so far been well discussed. This chapter demonstrates that the study of a key term can help to clarify the transmission of Buddhist teachings through the difficult Old Uyghur material conditions.

The final chapter of Part 2 is Chapter 11, “The Funerary Context of Mogao Cave 17” by Mélodie Doumy and Sam van Schaik. It concerns the original and changing context of Mogao Cave 17 near Dunhuang, which has been so important to all of the above studies that it is fitting to end the proceedings with it. The cave was a funerary shrine for a monk called Hongbian (d. 862, 洪辯), whose statue, originally situated in the cave, had been moved at some point as the cave was filled with other material including non-Buddhist texts and objects. What ended up in the cave was an assemblage of items representing the everyday life of Dunhuang’s monasteries but also non-Buddhist cultural practices (both ‘secular’ and those of ‘other’ religions). Over the decades, scholars have offered various speculations concerning how the material came to be stored in the cave, and the reason(s) for its sealing. However, this chapter considers the matter from a comparative perspective, exploring the Buddhist ritual context (rather than an archival one) for the interment of manuscripts

and other religious objects in *stūpas* and shrines in funerary practices, and argues that the funerary context of Cave 17 has to inform any of our future theories about the cave's contents and closing.

Each of these 11 chapters contributes to the further development of the already rich tradition of research into Buddhist doctrines, as well as into the less tangible impact of non-Buddhist influences in Eastern Central Asia. These topics have been brought together in fruitful and often surprising ways, and we hope that the present volume thus inspires further studies on the important aspects of Central Asian Buddhism covered over the following pages.