

UKABS will be holding its annual conference, 25 June 2022, at SOAS University of London. Keynote talks by Matthew Orsborn (Oxford) and Martin Seeger (Leeds). We hope to see you there!

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

To register for the conference, email UKABSmembership@gmail.com with your name, email address, institution if relevant etc. and pay the relevant registration fee with a credit card or Paypal account, use the Paypal “Donate” button below. If not using Paypal, email as above to request alternative payment details. Payment may be made by bank transfer or cheque in addition to Paypal.

Registration Fee for UKABS 2022 conference

Attendance in person (includes coffee and buffet lunch – please notify in advance any allergies, medical conditions, etc, when registering)

UKABS members: £25 (£15 students/monastic members/retired)

Non-UKABS members: £35 (£25 students/monastic members/retired)

Attendance via Zoom (include “Zoom access” comment in your registration)

UKABS members: £10 (£5 students/monastic members/retired)

Non-UKABS members: £15 (£10 students/monastic members/retired)

N.b. The National Rail Strike proposed for 25 June may impact travel to London. Our conference is a “hybrid” event, and we will be sending Zoom details to everyone in advance, even if registered for “in person” attendance. If you are, regrettably, unable to attend in person, you will still be able to participate via Zoom. If you registered to attend in person, but are only able to join via Zoom on the day, please contact us afterwards for a partial refund.

SCHEDULE

UK Association for Buddhist Studies Day Conference 2022

The School of Oriental and African Studies, 25 June 2022

9.30: Arrivals

9.50: Welcome and Notices

10.00 – 11.00: Keynote Address

Dr Matthew Orsborn: *The Grammar of Non-Duality: Structure, Rhetoric, Doctrine*. Chair: Professor Peter Harvey

11.00 – 11.30: Coffee/tea

11.30 – 12.30: Postgraduate Panel 1 (Chair: Carlos Garcia):

1. Ziyi Shao: *Translating Gods: What can the iconographic pantheon in Fanhualou tell?*
2. Oliver Hargrave: *What happens under a tree? A Comparison of Buddhist and non-Buddhist Tree Symbolism in Early Medieval China.*

12.30 – 1.30: Lunch

1.30 – 2.30: UK Association for Buddhist Studies AGM

2.30 – 3.30: Keynote Address

Professor Martin Seeger: *The Importance and Challenges of doing historical research on female monasticism in Thai Buddhism*. Chair: Professor Alice Collett

3.30 – 3.45: Coffee/Tea

3.45 – 4.45: Postgraduate Panel 2 (Chair: Carlos Garcia):

1. Bruno M. Shirley: *Other power, decline and Maitreya Buddha in the Sinhala *Anāgatavaṃśaya*.*
2. Haiying Ni: *Approaching Non-self: Chan Tradition Practised by Lay British Buddhists in Contemporary UK*

4.45 – 5.30: Current Funded Projects in Buddhist Studies (Chair: Dr Elizabeth Harris):

1. Professor Alice Collett: *South Asia History Project*
2. Dr Naomi Appleton and Dr Christopher Jones: *Narrative Buddhology.*

5.30: Conclude

ABSTRACTS

1. Keynote Address 1

Dr Matthew Orsborn (Oriental Studies, Oxford) *The Grammar of Non-Duality: Structure, Rhetoric, Doctrine*

Paul Harrison (2022) has recently stated that: 'It is time to think about writing a grammar of [Mahāyāna] texts that provides a formal description of their stylistic features, their use of language, their literary structures, and their rhetorical devices, so that we may arrive at a better understanding of the religious messages they intend to convey and the effects they aim to evoke.' Here I shall discuss a particular Mahāyānic 'grammatical' cluster featuring three

forms of parallel feature, namely, structural chiasmus, a rhetorical formula, and corresponding apophatic language. Together these are utilized to convey the doctrinal message of non-duality, and ideally evoke an experience of that non-dualistic and empty state within the reader-reciter and their audience.

Chiasmus is a form of inverted parallelism in which paired halves converge on a unique central theme, e.g., A-B-C-...-X-...C'-B'-A'. Coupled with this structure are the rhetorical formulae 'YZ is not-Z, it is called "YZ"' (noun form), 'YZ does not Z,' 'YZ neither Zs nor not-Zs' (verb forms), or other permutations. These apophatic statements are also often based on assertion and negation, paired opposites, nested inside the core of the central point of the chiasmus 'X.' The two sides of the chiasmus, and the negated paired opposites, therefore point to the centre 'X,' an empty space between the dual paired elements. All told, these structural and rhetorical features indicate not merely dogmatic statements of a particular religious philosophy but may aim at the very performance of non-duality itself.

2. Keynote Address 2

Professor Martin Seeger (University of Leeds) The Importance and Challenges of doing historical research on female monasticism in Thai Buddhism.

Hagiographies of and texts authored by male charismatic Buddhists have been popular in Thai Buddhism for a long time. Often these texts are given away for free at monasteries, are sometimes produced with obviously high costs and are sold at bookstores throughout the country. However, one of the biggest challenges when researching female renunciation in Thailand from a historical perspective is the deplorable scarcity of sources on the lives, soteriological practice and teachings of Buddhist women, and female monasticism. While there has been an increase of publications about or by individual Thai female practitioners during the last 30 years or so, only in a rather small number of cases do we have texts about or by female renunciants before 1950. In my talk, I will not only discuss the reasons for this scarcity of sources but also look at some remarkable exceptions in this regard. This will allow me to discuss the importance and challenges of doing historical research on female renunciation and monasticism in Thai Buddhism.

3. Postgraduate Panel 1

Ziyi Shao (PhD Student, SOAS): Translating Gods: what can the iconographic pantheon in Fanhualou tell?

It is widely known that a large outpouring of Tibetan Buddhist images were made in and for the Qing court as the result of imperial Manchu's enthusiastic support and patronage of Tibetan Buddhism. As one of the important religious monuments in the Forbidden City, Fanhualou contains one of the most complicated Tibetan Buddhist pantheons. It houses more than 700 different small statuettes, and over 50 large sculptures of Tibetan Buddhist deities, categorised in six rooms according to the doxographic concept "Four Classes of Tantra". Commissioned by Qianlong emperor and constructed from the 37th year of the Qianlong reign (1772), Fanhualou is also one of the eight

“liupinfolou”, which literally means the six classes of Buddhist shrine. This form of Tibetan Buddhist monument was replicated eight times only during the Qianlong reign and was constructed in both the Forbidden City and the Manchu imperial gardens in Chengde and Yuanmingyuan. The symmetrical and systematic architectural design as well as the repetitive display of the iconographic pantheon in each of the six side rooms entail disparate opinions on the religious meaning and the function of the building. On one hand it has been described as the most authentic and complete Tibetan Buddhist iconographic pantheon throughout history, while on the other hand, it is regarded as extremely dense, random, hard to be comprehended and as Berger describes, “contingent, phenomenal and empty, with no claim whatsoever to permanence.” By identifying each of the deities and investigating the inscriptions of each room, I discover that surprisingly, the overwhelmingly huge display of Tibetan Buddhist deities does not thoroughly correspond to Tibetan Buddhist doctrines, nor was it solely designed by Tibetan clergy. Only the nine main deities and nine guardian deities of each room, which were elucidated and translated in the polyglot inscriptions written by Changkya Rolpai Dorje (1717-1786), reflect the doxographic development of Tibetan Buddhism at the 18th century in the unique perspective of the Geluk school. I will also demonstrate that the iconographic contents which are absent in the inscriptions, including the six cloisonné stupas, the deities in the cabinets, as well as the unconventional display methods of the pantheon in Fanhualou, are not able to be understood purely within Tibetan Buddhist contexts. These unprecedented features are the result of cross-cultural collaborations and it signifies the Manchu court's deliberate efforts on translating Tibetan Buddhist pantheons for crafting a unique Manchu imperial authority. By reconceptualising Tibetan Buddhist doxographic and iconographic traditions, the pantheon served as a mechanism for incorporating a wide range of visual styles in order to convey the careful rhetorics of the Qianlong emperor, who is represented as the apparition of Tsongkhapa in the central room, as the ideal, universal cakravartin.

Oliver Hargrave (PhD Student, University of Oxford): *What Happens Under a Tree? A Comparison of Buddhist and Non-Buddhist Tree Symbolism in Early Medieval China*

This paper will examine the influence in both directions between Buddhist and non-Buddhist tree symbolism in China by comparing visual and textual depictions of various human figures in relation to trees. Chinese deities like Xiwangmu are often depicted sitting on mountains and/or plant-like objects, and several culture heroes are described as being born from trees. The Buddha and other Bodhisattvas are commonly depicted sitting beneath trees, an iconographic tradition that may have influenced depictions of Chinese figures such as the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove. This paper will attempt to illuminate not only interconnections between Buddhist and non-Buddhist iconographic traditions in China, but also will describe conceptions of the relationships between human beings and the natural world in Early Medieval China, especially regarding the connection between trees and the sacred.

4. Postgraduate Panel 2

Bruno M. Shirley (PhD Student, Cornell University): Other-power, decline and Maitreya Buddha in the Sinhala *Anāgatavaṃśaya*.

Reliance on the salvific “other-power” of Buddhas beyond Śākyamuni has historically been viewed, with some suspicion, as a development only found within some East Asian traditions (Amstutz 1997; Nattier 2000; Jones 2019). In contrast, Pali-oriented Buddhism(s) have been considered almost monolithically oriented towards the self-power *śrāvakayāna*, the slow progression towards *nirvāṇa* within the *sāsana* of the Buddha Śākyamuni. But this view overlooks the considerable, and considerably under-studied, body of literature from medieval South and Southeast Asia which also concerns itself with the salvific powers of another Buddha, Maitreya. Through a close reading of the fourteenth-century *Anāgatavaṃśaya* – a Sinhala retelling of the tenth-century *Amatarasadhārā*, itself a commentary on the Pali *Anāgatavaṃsa* – I complicate this narrative and provide evidence for a significant “other-power” movement within Southern Asian Buddhism.

First, I locate the *Anāgatavaṃśaya* within a wider genre of Maitreya-oriented texts from across the medieval Bay of Bengal (including, but not limited to, those surveyed in Collins 1998, ch. 5). These texts encourage their adherents to seek rebirth in Maitreya’s *sāsana* through a variety of devotional and disciplinary practices. Second, I argue that the *Anāgatavaṃśaya* strongly suggests that these texts, and the turn towards Maitreya generally, constituted one response to the inevitable decline of the *buddhaśāsana*, itself one of many such millennial concerns in the Indian Ocean region (Subrahmanyam 1998; Frasc 1998; Blackburn 2017). Finally, I gesture towards an intra-Buddhist comparative theory by reading these texts alongside parallel attempts in East Asia, particularly by Hōnen and Shinran, to address the same problematic of decline.

Haiying Ni (PhD Student, University of Kent): Approaching Non-self: Chan Tradition Practised by Lay British Buddhists in Contemporary UK

Buddhism distinguishes itself from other religions due to its ‘Non-Self’ philosophy (Morris 1994: 49- 69). This philosophy is close to the creative self in anthropology, which expresses the agency of one’s different identities and social relationships (Cohen 2002, Zigon 2008). However, it is beyond the creative self in the non-spiritual territory due to the nonduality nature of Buddhist ideology. This study, therefore, aims to focus on the ‘self’ dimension to investigate Buddhist practitioners’ spiritual journeys. It will examine Buddhist practitioners’ recognition of and compassion towards their own and others’ ‘self(selves)’ in cultivations in the Western Chan Fellowship (WCF) community, a UK-based Buddhist association of lay Chan practitioners, in a British Buddhist context (Bluck 2006, Kay 2007). The WCF has a formal Chinese Chan Dharma lineage from the late Ven Master Sheng Yen, an eminent Taiwanese Chan master who delivered the dharma lineage of Linji and Caodong to five non-Chinese practitioners. The WCF founder, the late Dr John Crook, and the current Head Teacher, Dr Simon Child, are two. As the first European Dharma lineage from the Chinese Chan school, Crook sought to practise Chinese Chan because he regarded that it could correct the problems

in Japanese Zen practice in Europe (Crook 2000). To set the whole Chan tradition more adaptative to the European environment, Ven Master Sheng Yen's Silent Illumination retreat was developed into Western Zen Retreat. Crook had his first meditation-like experience when he listened to birds twittering as a boy. Later in his academic career, Crook trained as an ethologist who studied birds and primates, broadening out into psychology and anthropology, including an ethnographic study of a Himalayan people. According to the WCF community, he was a fun person, a good teacher, and a friend. This community has healthcare and academic professionals as core members. It might be the only British Buddhist Sangha practising mainly Chinese Chan tradition by non-ethnic Chinese people.

The fieldwork for this study started in November 2020 and continued until March 2022. Due to the Covid-19 situation in the UK, a critical methodology was online interactions with and observations of communities' events, such as meditations, Dharma talks, and retreats. In addition, individual interviews have been conducted by Zoom and in person after the policy allowed this. From the perspective of an ethnic Chinese Buddhist practitioner and researcher engaged in communities in mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, the WCF online retreat and practice have adapted to British culture. However, they have picked up the traditional Chinese Chan spirit. This research project witnessed senior practitioners' responses to the Covid-19 pandemic and vaccination, the UK's withdrawal from Afghanistan, the passing away of Thich Nhat Hanh, and the ongoing Russian and Ukraine War. Given the increasing public awareness in mental health and mindfulness, this exploration in self/non-self hopes to answer why the Buddhist teachings behind meditation are crucial in a secular age for continuous self-improvement, rather than mindfulness accepted in a more fashionable way. This study also hopes to understand the western way of Chan practice and why it works.