

Canadian Journal of Buddhist Studies

ISSN 1710-8268

<http://journals.sfu.ca/cjbs/index.php/cjbs/index>

Number 11, 2016

A Reflection on McMaster's Religious Studies
Department's First Yehan Numata Reading Group
with Dr. Stuart Young

Crystal M. Beaudoin

McMaster University

Copyright Notice: Digital copies of this work may be made and distributed provided no change is made and no alteration is made to the content. Reproduction in any other format, with the exception of a single copy for private study, requires the written permission of the author.

A Reflection on McMaster's Religious Studies Department's First Yehan Numata Reading Group with Dr. Stuart Young

Crystal M. Beaudoin
MCMASTER UNIVERSITY

On Friday, December 4th 2015, McMaster University's Department of Religious Studies was pleased to commence our 2015-2016 Numata Buddhist Studies Program. Dr. Stuart Young from Bucknell University (Lewisburg, Pennsylvania) joined the department for our first reading group of the school year. Dr. Young introduced his latest project "Bald-headed Destroyers of Living Things: Vinaya Jurisprudence, Mahayana Compassion, and Lay-Monastic Distinctions in Medieval China" to a very enthusiastic group.

Dr. Young's project focuses on ethical issues with a particular focus on the killing of silkworms, as it relates to silk production among Buddhists in medieval China. His sources include sutras, *vinaya* texts, Chinese myths and legends, Chinese classics, Confucian texts, hagiographies and *vinaya* commentaries. Our discussion group discovered the varying perspectives among monks and lay practitioners regarding silk production.

Before Buddhism's arrival in China, sericulture was praised and silk represented prosperity. Unlike Chinese sources, Buddhist texts arriving in China from India did not exalt silk production. While some Indian Buddhist texts emphasized the suffering involved in sericulture, others highlighted the ways in which silkworms represented human self-delusion and continuity in *samsāra*. The *vinaya* texts and commentaries Dr. Young discusses in his study offer a variety of perspectives on monastic silk production and use. These texts, along with their commentaries, tend to share a concern with public perception of the monastic communities. In some cases it was considered inappropriate for monks to participate in or benefit from the harming of living creatures. In other cases *vinaya* commentaries and sub-commentaries express concerns over the laity's perception of monks using such a luxurious material. The relationship between Buddhist monastics, lay Buddhists, and the sericulture industry was therefore quite complex. Dr. Young's intriguing and thorough study provided our reading group with an appreciation for this complexity, as well as an opportunity for engaging and productive discussion.

Several graduate students and faculty members attended the reading group with questions and suggestions in hand. Enthusiastic, fruitful dialogue ensued for the duration of our meeting. We were most grateful to have Dr. Young as a guest in our department.

Our 2015-2016 Numata Buddhist Studies Program will resume on Friday February 12th, 2016. Dr. Costantino Moretti from the École Pratique des Hautes Études (Sorbonne) will present a lecture entitled "Preventive Morality and 'Last Resort' Buddhist Devotion in Chinese Medieval Apocrypha." All are welcome!