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Medieval and Early Modern China at the  
Buddhism and Business, Market and Merit Conference  
at the University of British Columbia  
(June 16th to 18th, 2017)

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From June 16th to June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2017, I had the good fortune to attend a conference at the University of British Columbia (UBC), entitled “Buddhism and Business, Market and Merit: Intersections between Buddhism and Economics Past and Present.” Sponsored by [UBC Buddhist Studies Forum](#) and the newly funded multi-year, international and interdisciplinary [SSHRC partnership project on Buddhism and East Asian Religions](#), this conference explored the ways in which Buddhists in different societies engaged in various economic activities over time. Scholars of Buddhism, as well as scholars of Economics, are working together in an attempt to find ways to overcome some of our current economic challenges. Academics from all over the world presented at this conference, and I was thrilled to be invited to participate as a junior scholar.

One unique feature of the conference was its use of student roundtables. The purpose of these discussions was for student participants to learn more about the field of Buddhist Economics, while considering the ways in which the conference's themes might relate to our own research interests. Students also had the opportunity to engage with established scholars at these roundtables. In our discussions, we reflected on some key questions: Why is a conference on Buddhism and economics important today? Why Buddhism, as opposed to other religions traditions? How exactly do we define Buddhism? What other kinds of work should scholars be doing in the relatively new field of Buddhism and Economics? The roundtables were very interesting and full of spirited discussion between junior scholars and established scholars alike. Participating in these conversations provided all of us with an invaluable learning opportunity.

The panel presentations were also very fascinating. Due to the large number of panelists at the conference, I will focus here on introducing the work of those scholars who presented during Panel Six, entitled "Intertwined Histories: Buddhism and Economics II." The first to present was Philip Wei-li Hsu, who is a doctoral candidate at the University of California, Los Angeles. The focus of his research is Chinese Buddhist Monasticism from the Song dynasty (960-1279 CE) to the Qing dynasty (1644-1912 CE). The title of his presentation was "Merit and Money in Late Ming Buddhist Society: Yunqi Zhuhong's Perspective." Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲祿宏 (1535-1615 CE) was a Buddhist monk during the late Ming dynasty (1368-1644 CE). While conducting his research, Mr. Hsu studied three of Zhuhong's written works: the *Monastic Codes for Communal Life at Yunqi Temple*, the *Monastic Codes for Communal Life at Nunnery of Filiality and Loyalty*, and the *Record of Self-knowledge*, which was intended for laypeople. Through these morality codes, we learn about the relationship between money and merit at the Yunqi temple. Often, financial restitution was expected from monastics when they violated Zhuhong's

codes. Mr. Hsu noted that the use of monetary fines indicates that monastics must have had a source of personal income, and that many of the regulations for nuns fixated on money more so than merit. Lay Buddhists obtained merit through financial donations to the temple. In all of these cases, the money went toward the monastery. Mr. Hsu concluded that through Zhuhong's works, we can learn about the economics of monasteries during the late Ming period, which was a time of social and economic upheaval.

Dr. Cuilan Liu was the second scholar to present during Panel Six. Dr. Liu is an Assistant Professor of Buddhist Studies in Emmanuel College of Victoria University at the University of Toronto. Her research focuses on Buddhist history, law, and ethics, as well as music and thought in China, India, and Tibet. The title of her talk was "When an Imposter becomes the Victim in a Collective Fraud: A Case Study of the Economics of Merit-Making in Dunhuang from a Legal Perspective." In this presentation, she discussed an interesting legal case from a Puguang 普光 Nunnery in the late eighth century. At that time in China, monastics often supplemented their income by reciting Buddhist texts such as the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* for lay sponsors. A nun named Chang Jingjin 常精進 approached the Buddhist Controller at Dunhuang, seeking out recompense for payment to which she felt she was entitled. A fellow nun named Jianren 堅忍 had fallen ill and was unable to perform her recitation duties. Chang Jingjin performed these services in her stead, so that the nunnery would not suffer a financial loss. Although the earnings were supposed to go to Chang Jingjin, Jianren began to claim them as her own. Dr. Liu noted that in order to claim payment in the first place, Jianren must have pretended to be Chang Jingjin at the recitation ceremonies. The fact that Chang Jingjin went to the office of the Buddhist Controller is significant to Dr. Liu, because in her larger research project, she has identified three approaches to solving disagreements among Buddhist clergy members. The three approaches are as follows: an inner

approach, wherein disputes were solved internally in a monastic court; an external approach, which involved public courts and the state legal code; and a middle-way approach, which involved government-appointed monastic and lay personnel, who solved disputes using a hybrid (state law and canon law) legal code. Dr. Liu concluded that this case, which was preserved on a manuscript in the Dunhuang Mogao cave library, demonstrates the middle-way approach to resolving disputes among Buddhist clergy members. To read more about Dr. Liu's larger research project, please review the [following blog entry](#).

The third and final presenter from Panel Six was Dr. Dewei Zhang from Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, China. He is also a visiting lecturer at the University of Macau. Dr. Zhang's research focuses on the intersection between Chinese religions and socioeconomic/political history. He is also interested in Chinese intellectual history, Chinese book and print culture, and the history of late imperial China. The title of his talk was "Done and Undone: A Revisit of Buddhist Monastic Economy in Early Ming China." Dr. Zhang began his presentation by posing some interesting questions: Why should we study monastic economics? How can we understand the importance of monastic economics in a specific context? He noted that in order to better understand the development of Buddhism in late imperial China, we must consider the economics of Buddhist monasteries, as well as the relationship between Buddhism and the State. For this research project, Dr. Zhang examined the changes in this relationship from the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368 CE) to the Ming dynasty (1368-1644 CE). He found that the Ming government was comparatively reluctant to bestow land and political support upon Buddhist monasteries, and this weakened the monastic economy. While the population of monks was on the rise prior to the early sixteenth century, monastics had to cope with a reduction in resources, including fewer temples. As a result, the sangha became more vulnerable and increasingly dependent on lay people, and had to supplement their income by com-

mercializing services such as funerals. This lack of resources and subsequent commercialization of services weakened Buddhism in China over the long term, and displaced the sangha's original emphasis on true devotion. Dr. Zhang's research reinforces the importance of learning about Buddhist economics in order to better understand the development of Buddhism over time in China.

All of the panels and keynote speeches at this conference were interesting and thought-provoking. In fact, this blog entry is part of a series of student reflections on the Buddhism and Business, Market and Merit conference. Please check our website frequently for blog entries by other student participants, in order to hear their impressions of the conference and learn about the remaining panels. I am certain that I speak for all of the student participants when I say that I was truly grateful for the opportunity to attend. It was wonderful to meet and engage with other junior scholars, as well as the established scholars. Thank you to all of the organizers and participants for this amazing opportunity!