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“Diverse Textual Sources in the Study of Buddhism” at Congress 2018

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In an age when, according to Buddhist tradition, the Dharma is in decline, and it often seems as if the Social Sciences and Humanities are too, it was a relief to attend the 2018 meeting of the Congress for Canadian Learned Societies in Regina, Saskatchewan.

The University of Regina hosted over 5200 attendees from seventy scholarly associations at Congress this year. And, since graduate students can sometimes be fruitful *puṇyakṣetrāṇi* (fields-of-merit), the university kindly provided a number of Graduate Student Travel Awards for those who applied early and were presenting at Congress. Thank you, University of Regina.

I attended a couple of well-organized panels on Buddhism at the annual meeting of the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion (CSSR) and participated in one of these panels, “Diverse Textual Sources in the Study of Buddhism,” on Sunday, May 27th. I discussed the results of some of my work at McMaster University’s Centre for Research in the Empirical Social Sciences (CRESS) and how I experimented with textual collation software in an attempt to trace the textual overlap in *vinaya* commentaries extant in the *Tibetan Buddhist Canon*.

I was ultimately successful in mapping some of the intertextuality in three *Prātimokṣasūtra* commentaries, each attributed to different authors. However, even though my work is often literally just turning pages, my paper wasn't exactly a page-turner for the modestly sized audience in attendance.

Stephanie Balkwill (University of Winnipeg), on the other hand, had a much more exciting presentation titled "Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha as a Gendered Medium: on the Sutra on Transforming the Female Form." Balkwill is one of the most forward-looking scholars of Buddhist studies in Canada. She focuses not only on apocrypha, an undervalued yet highly valuable source for the study of Chinese Buddhist history, but also takes a serious look at women's issues in Buddhist texts. Balkwill used one such apocryphal text to shed new light on the doctrinal position that women are incapable of achieving Buddhahood.

This panel also featured Diego Loukota (University of California, Los Angeles), who presented his paper "Kumārāśīlā's 'Garland of Examples' and Narrative Naturalism in Buddhist Literature." Loukota's enthusiasm for Buddhist literature is contagious. Loukota explored descriptions of contemporary life in Indian narratives from a period in which urban life in classical India began to decline.

Our panel's respondent, Christopher Jensen (Carleton University), concluded his response with a metaphor comparing our efforts to grapple with the history of Buddhist textual production in the premodern world to the concept of wave-particle duality in 20th century physics.

I enjoyed talking shop with peers at "Diverse Textual Sources in the Study of Buddhism," and look forward to 2019's meeting of the CSSR in Vancouver.