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# Student Reflection on the 2020 Tianzhu International & Intensive Program on Buddhism with McMaster University

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The 2020 Tianzhu International & Intensive Program on Buddhism has served as my first formal introduction to the Buddhist Studies community at large. It was refreshing to be engaged in discussions about Buddhism rather than working on my own, or with a single professor as I have been used to. As I begin my final year of undergraduate study and apply to graduate schools, I cannot help but acknowledge my gratitude to The Tianzhu Global Network for the Study of Buddhist Cultures and From the Ground Up: Buddhism and East Asian Religions (Frogbear) for giving me the opportunity to be an active and engaged member of such an invaluable community. The hospitality and attention to detail of McMaster University and the University of British Columbia were not lost in the online format—rather, it has been emphasized. This intensive program has enabled me to witness first-hand the importance of cultivating communities of international learning in which diverse experiences foster academic growth. I have been able to learn more about relevant research and discourses within Buddhist Studies. My interest in

translation and unearthing what texts really say has been fueled through my participation in this intensive program.

Each of the lecturers and seminar leaders offered unique tiles that ultimately make up the complex mosaic that is Buddhist Studies. The program was comprised of four seminar series and four individual lecturers. The first week of the program consisted of seminars led by the University of British Columbia's Dr. Jinhua Chen on Buddhism-related networks in East Asia, and McMaster University's Dr. Shayne Clarke on Buddhist monastic law codes (*vinaya*) and commentaries from India to China. During the second week, seminars were given by Dr. Zhe Ji (The Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales and Centre d'Etudes Interdisciplinaires sur le Bouddhisme) on Buddhism and the state in modern and contemporary China, and by Dr. Monika Zin (Leipzig University) on Buddhist arts along the Northern Silk Road.



Instructors: Prof. Jinhua Chen, Prof. Shayne Clarke, Prof. Ji Zhe, and Prof. Monika Zin.

Screenshots courtesy of Carol Lee (UBC Frogbear). Reprinted with permission.

Additionally, the program's individual lectures were diverse and intriguing. Our journey consisted of a lecture on new discoveries among the Old Dunhuang Documents, looking at the ritual exchange between Tibetan and Chinese Buddhist esoteric or tantric lineages by Dr. Amanda Goodman (University of Toronto). Dr. Chün-fang Yü (Columbia University) shared information on the twin Bodhisattvas and paired worship of Guanyin and Dizang. Dr. Mikael Bauer (McGill University) then took us to Japan to explore lineage and ritual with a seminar titled "Buddhism and State in Classical and Medieval Japan." Finally, the lecture series concluded with an expedition of the mind as Dr. Robert Sharf (University of California, Berkeley) shared with us Buddhist theories of consciousness and non-conceptual cognition.



Lecturers: Prof. Amanda Goodman, Prof. Chün-fang Yü, Prof. Mikael Bauer, and Prof. Robert Sharf. Screenshots courtesy of Carol Lee (UBC Frogbear). Reprinted with permission.

Although each professor taught us about different and equally fascinating topics, they collectively uncovered the beauty and humanity that is integral to Buddhist teachings. As seen in their diverse backgrounds and institutions, the seminars and lectures contributed to the global aspect of the program. The group discussions following their presentations were always lively and insightful. I am grateful for the professors' time and willingness to share their knowledge and interests so openly.

Similarly, the Student Forum gave my peers and me an opportunity to share our unique voices within the study of Buddhism through presenting our own research. I have enjoyed engaging with and learning from each of the students in this program. Their feedback, sharing of resources, and attention to detail throughout the intensive program has been a delight.



Group photo of the 2020 International and Intensive Program on Buddhism with McMaster University closing ceremony. Screenshots courtesy of Carol Lee (UBC Frogbear). Reprinted with permission.

Finally, I am especially thankful for the kindness and administration of the lovely program managers, Carol Lee and Vicky Baker. Their thoughtfulness and commitment allowed students to have an interactive and meaningful experience despite the barriers created by COVID-19. They implemented a creative solution of blocking out informal tea times where students could chat and get to know one another. I am thankful for the jovial atmosphere they so intentionally cultivated. The academic caliber of my fellow students and the integrity of their character have truly been a gift. Their passion and kindness has encouraged me as I move forward in my own academic pursuits. I hope to remain in contact with the Tianzhu Global Network for the Study of Buddhist Cultures, Frogbear, and McMaster University as I continue forward in my own exploration of Buddhism.

### **Notes on the Contributor**

Emily Hunt holds degrees in philosophy and English from Belmont University. She is currently undertaking a Masters of Philosophy at the University of Oxford in Tibetan and Himalayan Studies. Hunt is interested in how the conservation of Tibetan poem-songs can be used to inform knowledge on climate change in the Himalayas and Siberia. She is passionate about the intersection of human rights, language conservation, and climate justice.

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