

**BUDDHISM AND EAST ASIAN CULTURES: 2018 WINTER PROGRAM, LECTURE SERIES & INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CHAN STUDIES**

Program report - Kai Shmushko, Tel Aviv University 1.2.2018

In this short review, I would like to describe both the unique activity that took place in this year's program, as well as to express my opinion on its content, framework and organization. All from my humble perspective as one of 120 young scholar-participants.

The agenda of the program this year was twofold. In the first two and a half days the Dharma Drum Institute for Liberal Arts (DILA) hosted a conference titled: **“From the CaoXi creek to Mongo cave: interdisciplinary studies of Chan Buddhism and the DunHuang cache”**. The structure of short fifteen-minute presentation was in my opinion, very much effective. As the content that went into a fifteen-minute presentation is limited, it was a great introduction to the topic researched, which is of course followed by the reading of the papers circulated prior to the conference. This way, the variety of materials, research methods and disciplines the participants were exposed to is both rich and broad, which I find immensely important at this stage of our academic career.

The second part of the program was the winter seminar-workshop. An intensive lecture series was led by three distinguished scholars from different fields of study. The balance between the different research methods of Professor Jinhua Chen, Professor Barend ter Harr and Professor James Robson was very interesting. Professor Chen, who is consistently able to shed light on religious and social issues in the Buddhist sphere, gave an eye opening approach to contemporary global matters and their connection and resemblance to the historical events in China. Surrounding this important subject, as well as of the relationship between Buddhism, its history in China and the West today, Professor Robson conducted a comprehensive review on the history of meditation. He introduced some of the questions and problems regarding this ever-evolving field. Professor ter Haar shared with us his fascinating current research concerning sounds in the social and religious sphere. Doing so, he exposed us to various sources and research materials, showing how Buddhist texts can also be used in order to learn about different aspects of society and not only the other way around.

The third part of the program was the “Young Scholars Forum” which lasted for two days. The presenters were divided into panels according to their presentation topics; each of them delivered a ten-minute presentation. This is an extraordinary activity held every year in this seminar, which gives us young scholars a chance to present our work in a critical yet constructive fashion. I found the forum this year to be surprisingly diverse, geographically and disciplinarily.

In terms of the organization of the schedule, the meals, and the accommodation, I wish to point out that each represented an outstanding performance. Taking into consideration that the program this year was an even greater challenge than last year on account of the extra participants in the conference, the staff at DILA, the students and the dear volunteers created a magnificent study atmosphere in spite of all hardships. It is not redundant I believe to add that DILA's location for the seminar is very significant, especially for first comers to “from the ground up” activities. This experience is for some participants a first time to view, observe and

even take part in monastic Buddhist life. And so, the Tea Meditation held on the second day, as well as the partial assimilation into the daily monastic routine was a valuable opportunity.

Finally, the last day was a tour in Taipei, starting with a visit in the Palace Museum. The visit was very good, tough because of the popularity of the museum, and the organization for entering the museum took more time than planned. If I were to contribute a small suggestion for improvement, it would be to leave a bit more time for the visit in the museum. The second destination was the Nong-Chan Monastery, which was important not only for the remarkable Buddhist principles that inspired the designing of the visiting center, but also because this visit familiarized us with the background of the Sheng-yen Foundation and its community establishment. Followed by a quiet lunch efficiently organized on the spot, we were introduced to the life story of master Sheng-yen, and the farm-surrounded little monastery which has grown in activities, volunteers and community members ever since. Ending our tour in the Qingshui Zushi Temple and Sansia Old Street, we witnessed a remarkable example of vivid monastic life supported by the city of Taipei.

To conclude, this was my second time to participate in the Winter Seminar and I found it very successful. I hope to take part in the future activities, as this community of young scholars led and guided by senior experienced scholars continues to grow and create fruitful meetings and cooperation.