

## **BUDDHISM AND EAST ASIAN CULTURES: REPORT ON THE 2019 WINTER PROGRAM**

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From January 7 to January 13, over 110 students and monastics came together at the Dharma Drum Institute for Liberal Arts for the annual Winter Program on Buddhism and East Asian Cultures. Participants included a range of people, from burgeoning undergraduate scholars to well established academics. The program consisted of three parts: it began with an international academic conference, followed by a three-part lecture series and ended with a young scholars forum where students could present their work. Each day of the program was filled with informative lectures and presentations. In between, participants gathered together and enjoyed delicious vegetarian meals prepared by volunteers at Dharma Drum.

The program kicked off with a conference titled, “Unfolding of Modern Chan & Meditation and their Challenges in the Global Modernity.” This conference brought together top scholars from around the world to present their research in English and Chinese. The presenters included Karma Lekshe Tsomo, Weindi Leigh Adamek, Weilong Huang, Roe Kwak, Ngar-Sze Lau, Yifeng Liu, Yiqei Qiu, Jia Wang, Gang Yang and Dong Zhao. Over the course of the three-day conference, junior scholars in attendance were able to experience an academic conference and get a first look at new work in Buddhist studies that these scholars may not have even published yet. The short presentations, followed by time for questions, was effective and allowed participants to learn about a range of topics in a succinct manner. It was especially helpful for young scholars to be confronted with such a broad range of fieldwork, research techniques and disciplines within Buddhism and East Asian studies as they continue to grow in their own academic careers.

The academic conference was followed by a three-part lecture series presented by Dr. Jinhua Chen (University of British Columbia), Dr. Sarah Fraser (Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg), and Dr. Masahiro Shimoda (University of Tokyo). These distinguished scholars each delivered interesting presentations on diverse topics. Dr. Chen discussed the relationship between technology and religion. His presentation gave insightful analysis on how they may have evolved together and incited good conversation among the students. Dr. Shimoda gave an in-depth reexamination of a Mahayana Buddhist text. His detailed work is impressive and gave students a look at his meticulous research methods. Dr. Fraser presented on Buddhist archaeology from the twentieth century, primarily looking at excavations from the 1940s. She provided a lot of incredible pictures and videos from archaeological dig locations along with her presentation. All three scholars delivered their lecture series on diverse topics, which allowed students to see a range of research from multiple perspectives. Dispersed throughout this lecture series were additional lectures by scholars based in Taiwan and Mainland China.

The third part of the Winter Program was a Young Scholars Forum, where students had the opportunity to demonstrate their own research interests, techniques and disciplines. Each student was allotted ten minutes to present their paper. After all of the young scholars in each forum group presented, the room was opened up for the presiding scholar, as well as other members of the audience, to ask questions about their work. This was a prime occasion for these scholars to

get experience with showing their own research and for them to get feedback on their work from other knowledgeable people in the field.

After the completion of the academic conference, lecture series, and young scholars forum, the final day of the program gave participants the option to join in a tour of notable sites in Taipei. The tour began at the Palace Museum, where participants were free to examine the museum's exhibits. Next, participants were bussed to Nong-Chan Monastery, where participants learned about the foundations of the Sheng-yen Foundation and immersed themselves in the beautiful architecture of the monastery. Following the visit to Nong-Chan Monastery, participants went to Sanxia to explore the Qingshui Patriarch Temple and Sanxia Old Street.

One of the best parts of this program is the time scholars get to talk to each other over communal in between sessions over vegetarian meals or tea during breaks. This time is invaluable for making connections and having the opportunity to bounce research ideas off of other students who are interested in the same topics. Not to mention, this is a great place for young scholars to engage with future colleagues and well-known scholars in Buddhist studies from around the world. It was amazing for me to be able to meet scholars whose work I have been reading for years and to see them present their most recent research interests! On top of this, the program also gives young scholars a low stress environment to experience attending an academic conference and demonstrating their own work, while learning from some of the best and picking up new techniques and ideas in the meantime. It is truly a fruitful time for up and coming scholars to become integrated into the world of Buddhist studies.