



PUBLIC LECTURE

A *Cento* of Mahāyāna Sūtras in Khotanese

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The oasis kingdom of Khotan is well known as the stronghold of Mahāyāna Buddhism in Pre-Islamic Central Asia. However, very little textual evidence for the incipient circulation of Mahāyāna sūtras among Khotanese-speaking Buddhists has hitherto come to light, insofar as only a handful of Mahāyāna sūtras are attested in extant Sanskrit and Khotanese manuscripts produced in this region prior to the 6th century AD. This situation is now drastically changed with the identification of quotations from twenty-odd Mahāyāna sūtras in Chapter 6 of the *Book of Zambasta*, which is a unique *cento* made up of quotations from Mahāyāna sūtras. The identification, resulting from a collaborative project of Dr. Diego Loukota and the present speaker, extends the scope of textual witnesses to the inchoate stage of Mahāyāna Buddhism in Khotan, and provides *terminus ante quem* for quite a number of Mahāyāna sūtras which have otherwise come down to us merely in later versions.

This lecture will offer an introduction to preliminary results of this project. The speaker will explore the ambiguous role played by the Khotanese *poeta doctus* as ‘tradent’ of Mahāyāna sūtras by addressing the following issues: How are Indian Buddhist ideas understood in Khotanese terms? What is the position of the Khotanese quotations in the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the Mahāyāna sūtras? What is the *Sitz im Leben* of such a *cento* made up of quotations bereft of context?



Ruixuan Chen is Assistant Professor in Buddhist Studies at the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies (HCTS). He received a Magister Artium in Classical Indology from the University of Munich (2014) and a PhD in Buddhist Studies from Leiden University, the Netherlands (2018). His main field of specialization is the history of Buddhism in ancient and early medieval South and Central Asia. He investigates, first and foremost, processes of scriptural formation, issues of canonicity, interplays between religious idea(l)s and practices, the institution of Buddhist kingship etc., against the backdrop of the transmission of Buddhism from Indian subcontinent to various cultural spheres along the ancient Silk Routes.