

Beyond Translation:
Multilingual Manuscripts, Marginalia, and
Knowledge Organization in Dunhuang (8th–10th Centuries)

Channa Li

Abstract

This lecture argues that Dunhuang became an important Buddhist intellectual centre between the 8th and 10th centuries, especially under Tibetan rule and in its aftermath. On the one hand, Dunhuang developed into a bilingual translation centre, where Chinese and Tibetan, and Indian Buddhist traditions came into close contact. But translation was only one part of a much broader intellectual transformation. The rise of Dunhuang as a translation centre also stimulated [or mutually stimulated] another important role: Dunhuang became a centre for organizing and systematizing Buddhist knowledge drawn from Indian, Tibetan, and Chinese traditions.

This is especially visible in the works associated with Chos grub / Facheng. Dunhuang monks developed sophisticated techniques for organizing, visualizing, teaching, annotating, classifying, and synthesizing Buddhist knowledge across multiple languages. In this sense, Dunhuang was not simply a place where texts were translated. It was a multilingual scholastic environment in which Buddhist knowledge was actively reorganized, taught, and further developed.