

Inner Asian and Altaic Studies Lecture Series, Harvard University

October 7th, 2020

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A Tangle of Hair-Knots: Uṣṇīṣa Buddhas and Intertextuality in Early Tibet

As Buddhism first arrived in Tibet in the eighth and ninth centuries, the Pugyal Empire was at the height of its power, controlling much of Inner Asia. One of the first points of contact, and conflict, between Indian Buddhism and Tibet's pre-Buddhist religion was funerary practice. Modern scholarship has highlighted the central role of the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana* (*Purification of All Negative Rebirths*) *Tantra*, with its elaborate funerary rites, in the Buddhist project to supplant the pre-Buddhist Bön funeral cult. This talk looks more closely at the Buddhist funerary practices that arrived in early Tibet. Closer examination reveals a more complex picture, of which the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana* was just one element. Several additional texts, mostly *dhāraṇī-sūtras*, were also involved, comprising a larger tangle of Uṣṇīṣa Buddhas and intertextual borrowing in which Tibetans were engaged. The talk ends with some brief observations on one *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*-based funerary rite as represented in an unstudied manuscript from Dunhuang.