



Center for Contemporary
Buddhist Studies
University of Copenhagen

MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE
FOR SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY



CALL FOR PAPERS

Workshop

Buddhism in the Anthropocene

14–15 July 2022

Organisers: Saskia Abrahms-Kavunenko, Center for Contemporary Buddhist Studies

Jovan Maud, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology

Venue: Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle (Saale), Germany

This workshop will bring together scholars working on Buddhist responses to the array of concatenating phenomena that characterize the Anthropocene, the epoch defined by the unprecedented impact of human activity on global environmental processes. These include, but are not limited to, the climate crisis, extreme weather events, radical environmental degradation, plummeting biodiversity, the near ubiquity of pollution, melting glaciers, and rising sea levels.

Around the world, Buddhists are grappling with the global dimension of the Anthropocene. Extinction Rebellion Buddhists have been meditating in protest at the recent COP26 in Glasgow, and have issued a “Declaration of Interdependence,” while venerable engaged Buddhism advocate Thich Nhat Hanh has recently published *Zen and the Art of Saving the Planet*. Buddhist notions of interdependence or interbeing are evoked in the hope of generating a new appreciation of human–nonhuman entanglements. Mindfulness and other contemplative practices are being marketed as not only helpful for dealing with everyday stresses but as aiding in producing cognitive and social resilience in the face of climate catastrophe.

The workshop will focus both on empirically based ethnographic and historical studies of Buddhist responses to, and entanglements with, anthropogenic phenomena as well as broader attempts to think about the Anthropocene through Buddhist concepts, frameworks, and assumptions. We are particularly interested in contributions that think beyond disciplinary boundaries and individual case studies to engage with broader debates on the Anthropocene and its ramifications.

Questions that participants could address include, but are not limited to the following: If the Anthropocene is, in part, a state of consciousness (Howe 2019) in which the dominant geological force is aware of its impact on the planet, what does it mean to be “awake” to this situation as a

Buddhist (Schneiderman 2012)? What modes of action (or inaction) become available? How can Buddhist notions help us to rethink the Anthropocene? How do Buddhists navigate the tensions between individual spiritual cultivation and engagement with worldly issues? And how do Buddhist ideas, approaches, strategies interact with those coming from other, “non-Buddhist” contexts? Finally, if the Anthropocene challenges modernist dichotomies, including those between “religion” and “the secular” (Latour 2017), does it also require us to rethink longstanding debates on Buddhist modernism, for example the distinctions between modernist and “traditional” Buddhism, including practices and beliefs—geomancy, spirit beliefs—within the framework of a “non-secular Anthropocene” (Bubandt 2018).

The workshop will not only consider Buddhism as a “solution”. It will work against romanticized imaginings of Buddhism as inherently environmental, sustainable, and “in tune with nature”. We are just as interested in exploring ways in which Buddhist practices or attitudes perpetuate environmental decline, sustain climate change denial, and generate waste.

We expect participants to pre-circulate their papers and, after the workshop, to revise them for a special journal issue in the *Journal of Global Buddhism*.

Abstracts of proposed papers (500 words maximum) should reach all the convenors **by 28 February 2022** (s.abrahms.k@hum.ku.dk; maud@eth.mpg.de). We ask that abstracts include details of how the paper will address broader debates on the Anthropocene or engage in interdisciplinary dialogue. Please send inquiries to both convenors.

The Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology will cover travel and accommodation costs for accepted speakers. Currently we are hoping to hold an in-person workshop, though hybrid elements may be included. Naturally, given the unpredictable nature of the current pandemic, all plans may be subject to change.