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Propositions for PhD Dissertation “Buddhist Astrology and Astral Magic in the Tang Dynasty”
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1. Astrology is an inherently important component within Buddhadharma, and has played a major role in Buddhist cultures throughout history.
2. Chinese Buddhist astrology rapidly developed starting from the mid-eighth century as a result of the newly introduced systems of Mantrayāna that required astrological knowledge.
3. Buddhist astrology in China was initially Indian, but after the turn of the ninth century, a significant part of it became Iranian, which was a result of popular Chinese interest in the systems of horoscopy translated by ethnically Iranian men.
4. Monastic regulations proscribing the practice of divination by monks never deterred Chinese Buddhists from practicing astrology.
5. An apotropaic practice of astral magic – comprised of Indian, Iranian and Chinese elements – accompanied astrology in Tang China, which indicates that Chinese belief in astrology was not fatalistic, especially since the planets were conceived of as deities with whom one might negotiate fate and fortune.
6. Buddhist fears of planetary influences led to the emergence and development of the cult of *Tejaprabhā Buddha in China.
7. Modern scholarship has failed to separate the historical astronomer-monk Yixing (683–727) from the later pseudo-Yixing, to whom several texts explaining astral magic are attributed, which has led to fatal misunderstandings about the history of Chinese Buddhism.
8. The constant practice of astrology by Buddhists throughout history is not adequately recognized in Buddhist Studies at present, which constitutes a major gap in modern scholarship.
9. Buddhist astral magic as a unique practice within Chinese Buddhism arose alongside, but independent of, other major contemporary movements, such as Chan and Pure Land.
10. Buddhist belief in astrological determinism challenges us to consider how Buddhists in the past actually conceived of karma, fate and the causes of suffering in real life terms, in contrast to what canonical texts describe.
11. In addition to India and Central Asia, the Near East was another source of religious lore in the development of East Asian Buddhism.
12. Astrology, like karma, promises that you will suffer in life, yet foreknowledge calms the mind.