

## IKGA NEWSLETTER No. 4 / April 2024

The year 2023 was a very active year, especially in contrast to the quieter period during and immediately following the pandemic. Highlights of the year included the inauguration of a second research project funded by the European Research Council (ERC), the approval and start of the Cluster of Excellence “EurAsian Transformations – Resources of the Past and the Challenge of Diversity”, and the Institute’s move to a new building, the Art Nouveau “Postsparkasse” designed by architect Otto Wagner in 1906.

For more information about the Institute, its history, and its current activities—including upcoming events—please see our [website](#).

### THE INSTITUTE AND ITS ACTIVITIES

The IKGA is one of twenty-five institutes at the Austrian Academy of Sciences (AAS), Austria’s leading non-university institution for research in the natural sciences and the humanities. At the IKGA, long-term research is done on Asian cultures, with an emphasis on cultural and intellectual history. The thirty-two scholars who worked at the Institute in 2023 are specialists in the fields of Buddhist Studies, Chinese Studies, Indology, Japanology, and Tibetan Studies.

The Institute welcomed four new research fellows in 2023:

Dominik A. Haas joined the Institute with a Post-DocTrack fellowship, a special grant awarded by the AAS to only eight applicants a year. The aim of this grant is to support recent graduates in their transition to the post-doc phase, including publication of their dissertation and development of a further research project for applying to national or international funding bodies. Haas’s dissertation, a historical investigation of the *Gāyatrī* mantra, the most important initiation mantra of Brahmanical Hinduism, has now been published with the Austrian Academy of Sciences Press under the title *Gāyatrī: Mantra and Mother of the Vedas*.

Yan Ma joined the IKGA in September 2023 with an AAS DOC grant. Ma completed her Master’s degree at Peking University and is now pursuing a doctorate in Tibetan and Buddhist Studies at the University of Vienna under the supervision of Birgit Kellner. Her dissertation is investigating whether Kamalaśīla’s (c. 740–800) commentary on the *Vajracchedikā* is related to the controversial exchanges between Indo- and Sino-Tibetan currents of Buddhism in imperial Tibet, a controversy commonly called the “Bsam yas debate”.



Yan Ma © private



The Buddhist scholar Nāgārjuna and his disciple Āryadeva (Eastern Tibet, 19th c.)  
© Rubin Museum of Art, New York

Zhouyang Ma came to the IKGA in August 2023 as a postdoctoral research fellow, joining the team of the European Research Council (ERC) funded project “The Dawn of Tibetan Buddhist Scholasticism (11th–13th c.)” ([TibSchol](#)). Originally from Hubei province in China, he obtained an MA in East Asian Studies from Columbia University in 2016 and a PhD in Inner Asian and Altaic Studies from Harvard University in 2023. His doctoral dissertation examined the early adoption of Tibetan Buddhism in the Tangut Xia State (1038–1227 CE; today’s Gansu province). His current research continues that work, focusing on the dynamic Buddhist culture that developed in the Tangut State, especially as a result of the converging of Tibetan and Chinese Buddhist traditions.



Rafal K. Stepień joined the IKGA in July 2023 as the principal investigator in the ERC-funded project “The Ethics of Empty Beliefs: Chinese Buddhist Philosophy in the ‘Period of Disunity’” ([ChinBuddPhil](#)) (see below). In addition to fellowships at Columbia University, the University of Oxford, Heidelberg University, and the University of Cambridge, Stepień was an assistant professor at Hampshire College most recently in comparative religion at Nanyang Technological University. He holds degrees from the University of Western Australia, the University of Oxford, the University of Cambridge, and Columbia University.

In addition, Anissa Strommer joined the IKGA in February 2023 as the Institute’s publications assistant. Strommer has a background in the languages and cultures of South Asia and Tibet, as well as in religious studies and historical linguistics. She currently also holds a position at the Department of Buddhist Religion at the Kirchliche Pädagogische Hochschule Wien/Krems.

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## RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS 2023

Since July 2023, the IKGA has been hosting a second ERC-funded project: “The Ethics of Empty Beliefs: Chinese Buddhist Philosophy in the ‘Period of Disunity’” ([ChinBuddPhil](#)). Headed by Rafal K. Stepień, the five-year project (2023–2028) will contribute to our knowledge of Chinese Buddhist philosophy by focusing on the Sanlun School, a foundationally important Buddhist movement active from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> century CE, a seminal period in the history of Buddhism in China. Concentrating on the School’s conception of how belief relates to ethical action, the project aims to produce the first comprehensive elaboration of Sanlun philosophy in any Western language. The project will also consider Sanlun philosophy in light of its Indian antecedents, in particular the Madhyamaka philosophical school, the later development of Sanlun ideas within Chinese Buddhism, and analogues in Western philosophy.

In addition to the ten projects funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) already underway at the IKGA in 2023, in March 2023 an FWF ESPRIT project (Early-Stage Program: Research – Innovation – Training) entitled “The future Buddha’s past lives: On the *Maitreya-paripṛcchā*” was commenced. In this project, Channa Li is exploring matters related to the early transmission of Buddhist texts from India to Tibet and China. By examining various versions of the canonical *Maitreya-paripṛcchā* (two Tibetan and two Chinese translations, as well as a single folio in Sanskrit), it is aimed to shed light on how Buddhist Mahāyāna scriptures were formed, how the Maitreya cult and bodhisattva ideals developed, as well as how various sources were selected to create hybrid canonical translations in Tibet.

## CLUSTER OF EXCELLENCE “EURASIAN TRANSFORMATIONS”

In October 2023, the FWF-supported Cluster of Excellence “EurAsian Transformations – Resources of the Past and Challenges of Diversity” took up operations. For the next five years, the Cluster plans to integrate and further develop Austrian strengths in several fields of historical and cultural studies by investigating key issues related to the huge space of interaction across the Eurasian landmass. The activities of the Cluster will include research, training, and knowledge transfer, both within Austria and on a global scale. It will link the Austrian Academy of Sciences with the Universities of Vienna and Innsbruck, as well as with the Central European University in Vienna. At the IKGA, Key Researcher Nina Mirnig will expand her research on the premodern history, religions, and cultural heritage of Nepal within the framework of her new position on “Himalayan Connectivities”. For further information on the Cluster and its many activities, please visit its website at: <https://eurasiantransformations.univie.ac.at/>.



Nina Mirnig © ÖAW

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## COOPERATION ON THE STUDY OF SANSKRIT MANUSCRIPTS FROM THE TIBETAN AUTONOMOUS REGION

Since 2004, the Institute has cooperated with the China Tibetology Research Centre (CTRC) in Beijing in research on Indian Buddhist literature as found in Sanskrit manuscripts from the Tibetan Autonomous Region. Over twenty volumes of text editions have been published in the joint monograph series “[Sanskrit Texts from the Tibetan Autonomous Region](#)”. The 7<sup>th</sup> Beijing International Seminar on Tibetan Studies held from 14 to 16 August 2023 served as a welcome occasion to revitalize cooperation activities on a personal level, after a hiatus due to the SARS-CoV2 pandemic and the associated travel restrictions. IKGA Director Birgit Kellner was invited to give the seminar’s keynote speech, entitled “Cooperative research on Sanskrit manuscripts from the Tibetan Autonomous Region: The first 20 years”. Kellner as well as IKGA fellows Horst Lasic and Miyuki Nakasuka also presented papers at a panel on Sanskrit Studies. The CTCRC awarded the status of (recurrent) “Visiting Research Fellow” to Kellner as well as to Prof. Francesco Sferra (University of Naples, AAS Corresponding Member Abroad), which will serve to further deepen this fruitful cooperation.

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## DIGITAL HUMANITIES AT THE IKGA 2023

As part of the ERC-funded TibSchol project, a handwritten text recognition (HTR) model for Tibetan cursive script was successfully developed by Rachael Griffiths. In the fall of 2023, the models “Tibetan cursive Drutsa” (for *’bru tsha* script) and “Tibetan cursive Betsug” (for *dpe tshugs* script) were made public on the Transkribus platform (<https://readcoop.eu/transkribus/>). Moreover, a layout recognition model specific to the oblong format characteristic of Tibetan manuscripts was developed and placed on the same platform. The Transkribus platform is an innovative AI-powered platform designed for text recognition, transcription, and searches of historical documents. Based in Austria at the University of Innsbruck, the platform has been developed by a consortium of leading research groups from all over Europe. With the above models of Tibetan scripts, it is now possible to generate manuscript transcriptions in (nearly) a single click.



## GUESTS IN 2023

In 2023, the Institute welcomed four guests from abroad for collaborative work as part of the IKGA Visiting Fellows Programme.

During the visit of Dr. Hisayasu Kobayashi from Chikushi Jogakuen University, Fukuoka, Japan, a workshop was conducted together with IKGA fellows Patrick McAllister and Hiroko Matsuoka on a section of Prajñākaragupta's *Pramāṇavārttikālaṅkārabhāṣya*, a commentary on Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttika*.

Prof. Kei Kataoka from Kyushu University, Fukuoka, Japan, and Prof. John Taber from the University of New Mexico, USA, joined the Institute for reading sessions on Kumāriḷa's *Ślokavārttika* and its commentaries together with members of the IKGA's Indology and Buddhist Studies working groups. The sessions focused on the *śūnyavāda* chapter as a key source for Buddhist–brahmanical debates on the nature and structure of consciousness. In addition to students and researchers from the IKGA and the University of Vienna, several experts from abroad were able to join the online hybrid sessions.

Dr. Kyeongjin Choi from the University of Tokyo came to Vienna as a research guest of the TibSchol project. Choi conducted joint source readings of treatises by Gtsang nag pa with the TibSchol team.

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## PUBLICATION HIGHLIGHTS 2023

Haas, Dominik A., *Gāyatrī: Mantra and Mother of the Vedas*. (BKGA 110). Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, XXIII + 359 pp. (open access [link](#)).

Haas, Dominik A.; Li, Channa; Angermeier, Vitus; Ferstl, Christian (eds.), *Puṣpikā : Tracing Ancient India through Texts and Traditions: Contributions to Current Research in Indology. Vol. 6 : Proceedings of the 12<sup>th</sup> International Indology Graduate Research Symposium (Vienna, 2021)*. Heidelberg: Heidelberg Asian Studies Publishing, VI + 364 pp. (open access [link](#)).

Muroya, Yasutaka; Ono, Motoi; Watanabe, Toshikazu (eds.), *Jinendrabuddhi's Viśālāmalavati Pramāṇasamuccayaṭikā, Chapter 6*. (STTAR 25). Beijing/Vienna: China Tibetology Publishing House/Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, XXVIII + 120 pp. (open access [link](#)).

Schmücker, Marcus (ed.), *Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa : Changing Forms and the Becoming of a Deity in Indian Religious Traditions*. (VSKS 40). Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 500 pp. (open access [link](#)).

Tropper, Kurt, *The Jātaka Inscriptions in the Skor lam chen mo of Zha lu Monastery : Edition and English Translation of Panels 1–8 : With a Text-Critical Appraisal and a Stemmatic Study of the Sixteen Collated Witnesses*. Bhairahawa: Lumbini International Research Institute, VIII + 107 pp.

To purchase copies of Austrian Academy of Sciences Press publications, please visit its [website](#).

## EVENTS 2023

The IKGA held seventeen academic events in 2023. Of these, five were organized in cooperation with other institutions. Together with the University of Vienna, the Institute also organized the second Vienna Summer School on the Cultural and Intellectual History of Asia. For more details, see below.

Two major events were the following:

### *Advanced Computational Methods for Studying Buddhist Texts*

The rapidly expanding field of digital humanities employs computational and quantitative methods to process, analyze, and model complex data. Within Buddhist Studies, such techniques are proving crucial not only for text analysis, but also for text preservation and accessibility. They are also offering innovative ways for visualizing and comprehending data. In April 2023, the symposium “Advanced Computational Methods for Studying Buddhist Texts” was held at the University of Vienna. It was organized by Patrick McAllister and Rachael Griffiths from the IKGA, together with Markus Viehbeck from the University of Vienna’s Tibetan Manuscript Project Vienna (TMPV). The symposium brought together scholars using various techniques to analyze Buddhist texts, including natural language processing, optical character recognition, geographic information systems, cross-linguistic alignment, and content analysis. In his keynote address, Marcus Bingenheimer (Temple University, Philadelphia) spoke about the potential and limitations of machine translation of Buddhist literature. Considering the linguistic complexity of Buddhist transmission, this vital topic is currently generating much controversy.

### *Early Medieval Irrigation Systems in the Kathmandu Valley: Evaluating Lessons from the Past for the Future*

In December 2023, an interdisciplinary workshop co-organized by Nina Mirnig and Robin Coningham (UNESCO Chair at Durham University, UK) was dedicated to Nepal’s unique medieval irrigation infrastructure of channels (*rajkuḷos*) and so-called *hitis*, sunken brick-lined tanks with stone spouts. This infrastructure still forms part of the social and ritual landscape in many parts of the country. Together with representatives from relevant Nepalese authorities – including Bharat Mani Subedi, Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, and Saubhagya Pradhananga, Director General of the Department of Archaeology, Government of Nepal – several international experts on epigraphy, archaeology, cultural studies, engineering, and conservation explored the potential for regenerating these irrigation systems and how they might become low-cost alternatives for sustainable water supply in Nepal. Various aspects were discussed, including how these systems originated during the Licchavi Period (c. 3<sup>rd</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> centuries CE), how they continued to be constructed and how they were managed through history, and how their use gradually declined in recent centuries. The workshop was co-sponsored by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF V 755), the IKGA, and an APEX-Award from the British Academy (APX\R1\231178)

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## IKGA LECTURES 2023

The following five lectures were held at the IKGA in 2023:

- ❖ March 2023: *Teaching śūnyatā and the role of Buddhist doctrine in the Madhyamaka system*  
**Arihiro Kosaka** (University of Hamburg)
- ❖ April 2023: *Views from Tibet: A guided walk through the forest*  
**Tom Tillemans** (University of Lausanne)

- ❖ June 2023: *Neues zu einer alten buddhologischen Streitfrage: Aśvaghoṣa und sein Sūtrālamkāra*  
Numata Chair Lecture  
**Jens-Uwe Hartmann** (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich)
- ❖ June 2023: *Tanzen für Hideyoshi: Das Toyokuni Fest von 1604 als politische Propaganda*  
Vortrag  
**Anton Schweizer** (Kyushu University, Fukuoka)
- ❖ October 2023: *Hanamatsuri: A late-medieval rural festival and its Edo-period transformation*  
**Mark Teeuwen** (University of Oslo)

## IKGA LECTURES 2024

In the remainder of the first half of 2024, the IKGA is presenting the following six lecture events:

- ❖ *Beyond India - about scratchings, scribbings and Buddhists in the west of the Indian Ocean*  
Bühler lecture  
**Ingo Strauch** (University of Lausanne)  
16 April 2024
- ❖ *Hidden in Plain Sight: Identification and Analysis of the Earliest Sāṃkhya and Yoga Texts. Part I and II*  
**Diwakar Acharya** (University of Oxford)  
22 and 23 April 2024
- ❖ *The 23rd letter of the Tibetan alphabet: the controversy continues*  
**Nathan W. Hill** (SOAS University of London)  
25 April 2024
- ❖ *Uncanny Divine Bodies in Late Medieval Narratives of Empress Jingū*  
**Emily Simpson** (Dartmouth College, USA)  
3 May 2024
- ❖ *Discussing the Dharma: Answers to questions (Dris lan) by 15<sup>th</sup>-century Kagyupa masters as sources for the study of Tibetan religious history*  
**Jim Rheingans** (University of Vienna)  
13 May 2024
- ❖ *The Formative History of Buddhism in Mongolia in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries: A Reassessment*  
**Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz** (University of Bern)  
17 June 2024

For details about these and other events, as well as information on how to register for online participation, please visit the IKGA's [website](#).

## THE INSTITUTE'S NEW HOME

In July, the Institute moved to the historically significant Art Nouveau “Postsparkasse”, or Postal Savings Bank, designed by architect Otto Wagner in 1906. With its altogether 40,000 square meters, the building accommodates several higher education and research institutions, as well as the offices of the Austrian Science Fund. Ten institutes and divisions of the AAS in both the humanities and natural sciences are now housed in the building. Together with the main building of the Academy and the “Kollegiengebäude”, both situated in close proximity, the Postsparkasse now constitutes part of the “Campus Akademie”. The complex renovation and construction activities in this historical part of Vienna’s first district mark a significant investment in research infrastructure. Science and scholarship have found a new home at the very heart of the city.

Postsparkasse © Klaus Pichler/ÖAW



Library of the Institute  
© A. Wedekind



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## PUBLIC OUTREACH

As part of the AAS public outreach initiative “Akademie im Klassenzimmer” (Academy in the Classroom), Brigitte Pickl-Kolaczia held a workshop for six- to ten-year-old elementary school students about Japanese ghosts and monsters. The aim was to introduce the children to one of the cultures being studied at the Institute through age-appropriate stories, in this case, Japanese folk tales.

The former director of the IKGA, Ernst Steinkellner, was interviewed as part of the project “The Oral History of Tibetan Studies – collecting the memories of the pioneers of Tibetan studies”, a project based at the University of Oxford. In a four-hour conversation, he provided insights into his long academic career. The interview can be watched at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xx7qNu2J4XA>.



## VIENNA SUMMER SCHOOL ON THE CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF ASIA/ EurAsia ACADEMY



The second Vienna Summer School, July 2023  
© Himani Tripathi 2023

In 2023, the IKGA and the Department of South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies of the University of Vienna joined forces to host the second Vienna Summer School on the Cultural and Intellectual History of Asia. The emphasis of the 2023 course was on epistemological texts in Sanskrit. Mirroring the success of the inaugural Vienna Summer School in 2022, the event drew the participation of thirteen students and scholars from around the world. Encouraged by this dynamic response, the two institutes are now planning a third summer school in July 2024 on the South Asian philosophy of language, to be held as a EurAsia Academy with support from the Cluster of Excellence “EurAsian Transformations”. Interested participants should contact Marco Ferrante ([marco.ferrante@oeaw.ac.at](mailto:marco.ferrante@oeaw.ac.at)).

In addition, a EurAsia Academy entitled “Art, Culture and History Across the Himalayas” will take place at the Himalaya Centre for Asian Studies (HiCAS) at Kathmandu University 16– 28 September 2024, in collaboration with the University of Oxford and Peking University. The program will offer a combination of Sanskrit reading courses and field trips on the topics of the Avalokiteśvara cult in Kathmandu Valley, early Vaiṣṇava religious culture, early medieval tantric iconography, and the history and culture of the early Licchavis. Interested participants should contact Nina Mirnig ([nina.mirnig@oeaw.ac.at](mailto:nina.mirnig@oeaw.ac.at)).

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