

“Action Buddhism” in the Medieval Chinese Empire

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In my paper I will look at how the Tang (618-907) empire, partly drawing on precedents established by earlier polities such as the Liang (502-587) and Sui (581-618), managed Buddhism and channelled its power for the benefit of the empire by working with elite members of Buddhist institutions so as to establish and maintain orthodoxies of doctrine and practice. In particular, I will outline the state-promoted forms of practice that have been dubbed “action Buddhism.” In that context, I will explore how Buddhist institutions debated potentially destabilizing extreme Buddhist practices such as self-immolation and worked to tame their subversive or disruptive aspects.