



## When the Rubber Becomes the Road: Buddhist Enterprise and Economic Power



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**SCHOLARS**  
— IN THE SQUARE —

How does a Buddhist monastic community turn rubber, royal patronage, geomancy, and transregional commerce into lasting religious authority? Focusing on Kek Lok Si Temple in what is now Malaysia, this talk explores how Chinese Buddhism expanded across the shifting borders of colonial Southeast Asia. It argues that the temple community transformed resources moving through ecological, political, economic, and sacred border infrastructures into durable wealth, monumental space, and religious legitimacy—making it not merely a recipient of transregional flows, but an engine of Buddhist expansion

**Todd Klaiman** is the CSRS Program and Research Coordinator. He studies how the movement of people, goods, ideas, and symbols shapes identity, place, and space in East and Southeast Asia.

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