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Editorial

Richard Gombrich

When I started this journal, I hoped that its pages would carry some controversy and debate. While in other respects it has met, or even exceeded, my expectations, so far there has been no debate. But here at last we have some. After reading the book *Buddhism: an Introduction* by our assistant editor Alexander Wynne, Douglass Smith sent us an article disagreeing with his presentation of the Buddha's fundamental metaphysical position, and Alex accepted the challenge and began to write a reply.

At about the same time, our assistant editor specialising in early Buddhist philosophy, Noa Ronkin, decided, to our regret, that she should resign, and John Holder kindly agreed to take her place on the editorial board. John gave Douglass some suggestions how he might clarify his position, and Douglass accepted them.

I wrote in my editorial to vol.4 that there are matters on which scholars disagree, and in such cases "it is the editor's clear duty to publish what the author wants to say, even if it is not his/her own view." I have here followed my own advice, and have not intervened in this exchange.

It is a coincidence that while this pair of articles was being prepared for the press, Geoff Bamford offered me a short article which likewise deals with a fundamental point of the Buddha's teaching – indeed, one which could be said to be related to what Douglass and Alex are discussing. Geoff takes issue with an interpretation currently being offered by the famous Stephen Batchelor – and he has just had time to show Stephen the piece. I hope therefore that this too will lead to further discussion.

Even though there has been no shortage of interpretations of the Buddha's ideas, their breadth and their subtlety ensure that there remains a great deal to say and to ponder over.

The Buddha's Fire Miracles

Anālayo

In this article I examine a few selected early discourses in which the Buddha manifests miracles that involve a display of fire. My main aim in what follows is to attempt to discern stages in the textual depiction of such miraculous performances through comparative study of the relevant passages in the extant parallel versions. The cases I will be studying are Sakka's visit (1), a visit to Brahmā (2), Pāṭikaputta's challenge (3), and the twin miracle (4), after which I will take a brief look at the fire element in the early discourses (5).

1) Sakka's Visit

I begin with the *Sakkapañha-sutta*'s depiction of the first meeting between Sakka, the ruler of the *devas* in the Heaven of the Thirty-three, and the Buddha. The *Sakkapañha-sutta* reports that on an earlier occasion Sakka had already tried in vain to visit the Buddha, not being allowed to disturb the Buddha's meditation. At the end of the discourse he receives on the present occasion, Sakka attains stream-entry.

The story of Sakka's humbled pride on initially not being given an audience with the Buddha and his eventual conversion to the Buddhist fold could be understood as part of a general narrative strategy of "inclusivism"

in early Buddhist texts. This strategy refers to a tendency to include, although in a subordinate position and at times with significant modifications, central elements of other traditions within the framework of one's own.¹ In the case of Sakka, his role in early Buddhist texts involves the transformation of the ancient Indian warrior god Indra into a peaceful and devout Buddhist disciple.² As part of this narrative strategy, the specific significance of the *Sakkapañha-sutta* lies in its recording his successful and complete conversion by dint of becoming a stream-enterer.

Lest I be misunderstood, identifying the *Sakkapañha-sutta* as an instance of the strategy of inclusivism in no way intends to downplay the fact that in the early discourses Sakka and other *devas* feature as actually existing celestial beings. In fact the *Saṅgārava-sutta* and its Sanskrit fragment parallel report a discussion during which the Buddha asserts the existence of *devas*.³ The *devas* feature also as the object of one of the standard recollections described in the early discourses.⁴ Thus in what follows my aim is decidedly not to attempt to

*I am indebted to *bhikkhuni* Dhammadinnā, Mike Running, and Monika Zin for commenting on a draft version of this article.

¹On inclusivism cf., e.g., Oberhammer 1983, Mertens 2004, Kiblinger 2005, and Ruegg 2008: 97–99.

²Cf., e.g., Godage 1945: 70f, Masson 1942: 46, Lamotte 1966: 116, Barua 1967: 184, Arunasiri 2006: 629, Bingenheimer 2008: 153, and Anālayo 2012b: 9f.

³MN 100 at MN II 212,26 and the Sanskrit fragment counterparts in Hartmann 1991: 260 (no. 147) and Zhang 2004: 11 (346v); on the position of this exchange within the overall discourse cf. Anālayo 2011b: 582f and note 269 on the expression *thānaso me taṃ ... veditaṃ yadidaṃ atthi devā*. As pointed out by Harvey 1995: 82, in this passage the Buddha “clearly distinguished between his ‘certain knowledge’ that gods existed and the commonly held belief that they did”. Norman 1977 (cf. also Norman 1985) suggests to emend the question that begins the discussion in MN 100 from reading *atthi devā* to *atthi adhideva*, based on which Norman 1977: 336 then concludes that the Buddha, “far from conceding the existence of the brahmanical *devas* as Saṅgārava presumed, was merely saying that there were in the world earthly princes who were by convention called *devas*”. This is to my mind an unconvincing suggestion and is also without support in the Sanskrit fragment parallels. I find similarly unconvincing the interpretation of the present passage by Marasinghe 1974: 128, who holds that it “does not mean anything more than that the Buddha recognized the fact that the belief in the gods was quite commonly known at that time. Hence, its very wide popularity itself would have convinced the Buddha that a direct denial was not the most expedient method of dealing with it.” As far as I can see the text simply and clearly conveys an affirmation of the existence of *devas*; for further discussion and secondary sources on this passage cf. also Saibaba 2005: 3–6.

⁴Recollection of *devas* is one in the traditional set of six recollections; cf., e.g., AN 6.10 at AN III 287,21 and its parallels SĀ 931 at T II 238a21 and SĀ2 156 at T II 433a22, which agree in

strip early Buddhism entirely of its miraculous elements,⁵ but only to discern, wherever possible, stages in their gradual growth.

The introductory section of the *Sakkapañha-sutta* describes Sakka getting ready for his second attempt to visit the Buddha as follows:⁶

Then Sakka, the ruler of *devas*, surrounded by the *devas* of the Thirty-three and with the *gandhabba* Pañcasikha leading in front,⁷ disappeared from the Heaven of the Thirty-three and, just as a strong man might stretch a bent arm or bend a stretched arm, reappeared in Magadha to the east of Rājagaha, on Mount Vediya, to the north of the Brahmin village called Mango Grove.

At that time, due to the divine power of the *devas*, a very bright light manifested on Mount Vediya and in the Brahmin village Mango Grove, so much so that the people in the surrounding villages said: “Today Mount Vediya is indeed on fire, today Mount Vediya is indeed burning, today Mount Vediya is indeed ablaze. How is it that today a very bright light manifests on Mount Vediya and in the

asserting the existence of various types of *devas* and then direct recollection to the qualities that have led to their celestial rebirth.

⁵Waldschmidt 1930: 8f notes the prominence of the Buddha’s magical powers already in the early tradition and advises against going so far as to turn early Buddhism into a pure philosophy, which would be in contrast to its nature, where the profound and the magic go hand in hand; “es wird im allgemeinen viel zu wenig betont, wie sehr auch im älteren Buddhismus die magischen Kräfte des Buddha in den Vordergrund treten ... man sollte nicht soweit gehen, aus dem älteren Buddhismus eine reine Philosophie zu machen. Das widerspricht ganz und gar dem Wesen der Religion, bei der immer das Tiefsinnige und das Wunderbare Hand in Hand gehen.” Gethin 1996: 204 explains that “there has been a tendency to play down the tradition of the ‘miraculous’ in Buddhism and to see it as peripheral, but it is hard to treat this tendency as anything but revisionist.” Brown 1998: 50 comments that “the attempt to strip the texts of the legendary to reveal the true historical Buddha has been the focus of many scholars. How successful their attempts have been appears to me largely to rely on predetermined notions of the Buddha as a modern man.” Fiordalis 2010/2011: 403 points out that “scholars have been too quick to conclude ... that Buddhism rejects the miraculous wholesale in favor of some sort of rationale humanism that reflects modern predilections ... making this argument requires that one disregard the many Buddhist stories in which the Buddha or his eminent disciples perform acts of ... displaying their superhuman powers. Scholars have suggested that such stories are merely ‘popular’ or represent ‘later’ (often an euphemism for degenerate) traditions. Yet, these are problematic conclusions.”

⁶ DN 21 at DN II 264,10 to 264,25.

⁷ B^c and C^c qualify the *gandhabba* Pañcasikha to be a *devaputta*.

Brahmin village Mango Grove?”, and they were excited with their hair standing on end.

In the *Sakkapañha-sutta* the mountain appearing to be on fire is clearly related to the divine power of the celestial visitors, *devānaṃ devānubhāvena*, whose arrival has caused this effect to manifest.

The *Sakkapañha-sutta* has parallels preserved in Chinese translation as well as in Sanskrit fragments. In what follows I translate the corresponding section from the *Madhyama-āgama* version.⁸

Then Sakka, the ruler of the *devas*, the *devas* of the Thirty-three, and the *gandhabba* Pañcasikha suddenly disappeared from the heaven of the Thirty-three, being no more to be seen and, just as quickly as a strong man might bend or stretch his arm, they reappeared in the country of Magadha to the east of Rājagaha, not far from the cave on Mount Vediya, to the north of the Brahmin village Mango Grove. Then Mount Vediya shone with a bright light like fire. On seeing this, the people dwelling around the mountain thought: “Mount Vediya is on fire, burning everywhere.”

The *Madhyama-āgama* discourse does not have an explicit indication that the mountain’s appearance was due to the divine power of the *devas*, corresponding to the expression *devānaṃ devānubhāvena* in the *Sakkapañha-sutta*. Nevertheless, the same idea is clearly implicit, since the mountain shines with a bright light as soon as the celestial visitors have arrived. Similar references to the mountain manifesting a fire-like brilliance once the *devas* have arrived, but without an explicit attribution of this phenomenon to their power, can be found in Sanskrit fragments,⁹ in a parallel preserved as a discourse translated individually into Chinese, and in another parallel that forms part of a collection of tales, also extant in Chinese translation.¹⁰

The individually translated discourse just mentioned also reports that Sakka and his host disappeared from their celestial abode just as quickly as a strong man

⁸ MĀ 134 at T I 633a8 to 633a13; throughout this paper I adopt Pāli for proper names and doctrinal terms in order to facilitate comparison with the Pāli discourse parallels.

⁹The relevant part of the Sanskrit fragment version, together with translations and a study of the parallels, can be found in Waldschmidt 1932: 65–67.

¹⁰ T 15 at T I 246b21 and tale no. 73 in T 203 at T IV 476a28, translated by Chavannes 1911: 53–69.

might bend or stretch an arm and appeared on the mountain, which thereupon was illuminated by a great light. Its account differs from the other versions in so far as, after describing the reaction of the people on seeing the mountain illuminated in this way, it relates this effect also to the Buddha's presence. This takes the form of an indication given by Sakka to Pañcasikha in the following way:¹¹

Do you see the special appearance of this mountain? This is because the Buddha, the Blessed One, dwells within.

This indication could still be read in line with the passages surveyed so far, in as much as it is the presence of the Buddha in the mountain which motivates the arrival of the *devas*, and their arrival is then what makes the mountain appear as if it were on fire. Taken out of context, however, the statement could alternatively give the impression that the fiery appearance of the mountain is the result of the Buddha's presence. Yet, in this version this fiery appearance also manifests only once the *devas* have arrived.¹² This makes it safe to assume that its presentation is still in line with the basic plot in the versions discussed so far.

The *Dīrgha-āgama* preserved in Chinese translation also has a version of the *Sakkapañha-sutta*, and its presentation foregrounds the effect of the Buddha's presence. The section corresponding to the parts translated from the *Sakkapañha-sutta* and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel proceeds as follows:¹³

Then Sakka, the ruler of the gods, the *devas* of the Thirty-three, and Pañcasikha disappeared from the Dharma Hall, being no more to be seen there and, just as quickly as a strong man might bend or stretch an arm, they reappeared on Mount Vediya to the north of the [village Mango Grove] in the country of Magadha. At that time the Blessed One had entered concentration on fire and Mount Vediya completely appeared to be on fire. Then the country people, on seeing this, said to each other: "Due to the power of the Tathāgata and the *devas*, this Mount Vediya appears to be completely on fire."

¹¹T 15 at T I 246b24f; the significance of this statement has already been highlighted by Waldschmidt 1932: 66f note 2.

¹² After reporting how Sakka and his host came to the mountain, T 15 at T I 246b21 continues by introducing the great brilliance of the mountain with the phrase "at this time", 是時, thereby clearly marking the temporal relationship, also evident in the other versions, between the arrival of the celestial visitors and the effect of their arrival on the mountain's appearance.

¹³DĀ 14 at T I 62c10 to 62c14.

Unlike the other versions surveyed so far, in the *Dīrgha-āgama* discourse the motif of the mountain appearing on fire is due to the power of the Buddha, and not just to the presence of the *devas*.¹⁴ Moreover, the *Dīrgha-āgama* version also furnishes an explanation for how the power of the Buddha leads to this effect by indicating that he was in meditation on the fire element (*dhātu*).¹⁵

In principle this variation could either be a case of loss in the other versions or a case of addition in the *Dīrgha-āgama* discourse. When evaluating these two possibilities, whereas for the Buddha to make a whole mountain appear to be in flames appears to be unique among the early discourses, the description of *devas* who on arrival cause a whole place to be lit up is well attested in other discourses.

One out of numerous examples for the effect associated with the arrival of a *deva* can be found in the *Mahākaccānabhaddekaratta-sutta* and its parallels in a *Madhyama-āgama* discourse, an individual translation into Chinese, and parallels extant in Tibetan translation.¹⁶ The parallel versions agree in describing a *deva* who, on visiting a monk, lights up the whole place with radiance.

Recurrent examples of the same type of description can be found in the *Devatā-saṃyutta* of the *Saṃyutta-nikāya*. Just taking the first discourse in this collection as an example, a description of the brilliant light caused by the arrival of the *deva* protagonist in this discourse can similarly be found in parallels in the two *Saṃyukta-āgama* collections.¹⁷ In sum, the notion that the arrival of a *deva* can result in lighting up a whole place is a common motif in the early discourses.

Another point to be taken into consideration is how far the manifestation of fire

¹⁴Waldschmidt 1932: 66 considers the expression 如來諸天之力 to refer to the divine powers of the Tathāgata, “Götterkräfte des Tathāgata”. It seems to me more probable that the plural indicator 諸 intends the *devas*, wherefore I take the whole expression to refer to the “power”, 力, “of”, 之, “the Tathāgata”, 如來, and “the *devas*”, 諸天. Zwalf 1996: 198 draws attention to a Tibetan biography of the Buddha, translated in Schiefner 1849/1851: 255, which in relation to the Buddha indicates that, after arrival at the venue of the present event, “nahm er in der im *Magadhagebiet* gelegenen *Sālahöhle* von *Indraçaila* Feuergestalt an und erfüllte die ganze Höhle mit seinem Körper. Solche Gestalt behielt er sieben Tage.” I take the idea of the Buddha taking on the appearance of fire to intend an effect similar to that described in DĀ 14, although in this Tibetan biography the Buddha apparently does so for a period of seven days.

¹⁵On meditation on the fire element cf., e.g., Dantine 1983: 272–274.

¹⁶MN 133 at MN III 192,7 and its parallels MĀ 165 at T I 696c5, T 1362 at T XXI 881c8, and D 313 *sa* 161b3 or Q 979 *shu* 171b1 (the discourse recurs in the Tibetan canon as D 617 or Q 599 and again as D 974; cf. the discussion in Skilling 1997: 81–83).

¹⁷SN 1.1 at SN I 1,9 and its parallels SĀ 1267 at T II 348b9 and SĀ² 180 at T II 438c14.

fits the present narrative context. The *Sakkapañha-sutta* and its parallels continue with Sakka asking Pañcasikha to approach the Buddha on his behalf and request an audience. This narrative element needs to be read in the light of his earlier unsuccessful attempt to visit the Buddha. This previous attempt stands in stark contrast to the way in which according to his own report he had been received by other recluses he visited earlier, who got so excited on receiving a visit from Sakka that they wanted to become his pupils. Another element leading up to this second visit is that Sakka had witnessed the rebirth in his heaven of those who during their earlier human existence had become disciples of the Buddha.¹⁸

Against this narrative background, for Sakka not to dare to approach the Buddha directly highlights his humbled pride and throws into relief the appropriate attitude towards the Buddha adopted even by the ruler of the *devas*. It also demarcates the aloofness of the Buddha compared to other recluses Sakka had approached earlier. Sakka's deferential attitude moreover reflects his respect as the result of having witnessed the favourable rebirth of disciples of the Buddha, a message that in an ancient Indian setting would surely not have been lost on the audience listening to the discourse.

These elements get somewhat lost to sight once the Buddha is in fire meditation to the extent that the whole mountain appears to be in flames. This description runs the risk of giving the impression that the Buddha's attainment of fire meditation is what makes Sakka ask someone else to find out if the Buddha is willing to grant him an audience. Such an impression would result in a loss of the humour and of a considerable part of the soteriological message that seem to underlie the scene in the other versions.¹⁹

In view of the general tendency in Buddhist text towards an increasing apotheosis of the Buddha,²⁰ an intentional omission of the fire motif in the other versions is highly improbable. The individually translated discourse in fact testifies to a tendency towards giving more prominence to the Buddha's superior powers, as it already highlights the effect of the Buddha's presence, even though in its presentation the arrival of the *devas*

¹⁸Greene 2013: 290 comments on DĀ 14 that the "episode in the *Dīrghāgama* ... states that Indra came to visit the Buddha because he saw the light emitted when the Buddha entered the 'fire-radiance *samādhi*'." As far as I can see DĀ 14 does not indicate that Sakka came to visit the Buddha *because* he saw any light. The decision to visit the Buddha is simply presented as being a particularly wholesome state of mind making him wish to meet the Buddha, DĀ 14 at T I 62c2: 發微妙善心, 欲來見佛. The fire and light motif comes up only later, after Sakka has assembled his entourage, left the Heaven of the Thirty-three, and arrived at Mount Veditiya.

¹⁹This corresponds to a pattern I noted in Anālayo 2008a: 146 in relation to the tale of Aṅgulimāla where "the introduction of wonders and miracles, as well as the successive amplification of narrative details, can at times obfuscate the main message of the text."

²⁰Cf. Anālayo 2010a: 130.

is still what causes the mountain to appear as if lit up by fire. In fact the individually translated discourse does not provide any indication that the Buddha either manifests fire or is immersed in meditation on it.

In sum, a comparative study of the introductory narration to the *Sakkapañha-sutta* and its parallels shows that the Buddha's performance of a fire miracle is only attested in the *Dīrgha-āgama* version. Given that the illuminating effect of *devas* on the surroundings is well attested elsewhere, and that the fire miracle does not fit the narrative context of the discourse too well, it seems safe to conclude that this is a later addition. In this way the fiery appearance of the mountain, originally seen as the result of the presence of *devas*, has come to be attributed to the Buddha's presence, more particularly to his dwelling in meditation on fire.

The episode described in the *Sakkapañha-sutta* and its parallels has also inspired ancient Indian artists,²¹ with examples from Gandhāra showing the Buddha seated in the cave, surrounded by spectators in respectful adoration.



²¹For surveys of different artistic representations cf., e.g., Foucher 1905: 492–497, Coomaraswamy 1928, Lamotte 1944/1981: 181 note 2, Buchthal 1945: 167f, Soper 1949: 254–259, Zhu 2009, Parlier-Renault 2014, and Rhi (forthcoming). Fāxiān (法顯) and Xuánzàng (玄奘) refer to the location where the present discourse was believed to have been spoken; cf. T 2085 at T LI 862c4 and T 2087 at T LI 925a26.



*Figures 1 and 2: Sakka Visits the Meditating Buddha.*²²

What makes these two iconographies particularly relevant to my present discussion is that in figure 1 from the Buddha's shoulders flames can be seen to emerge, and in figure 2 a circle of flames surrounds the outlines of the cave. Such a mode of depiction would be well in line with the *Dīrgha-āgama* textual account. However, the depiction of flames emerging from the shoulders of someone can also just express that the person in question is meditating.²³ The

²²Figure 1: courtesy Kurita Isao, already published in Kurita 2003: 171 fig. 331; figure 2: after Foucher 1905: 493 fig. 246.

²³Waldschmidt 1930: 4 notes the tendency to depict flames emerging from the shoulders of a Buddha or an arhat as a way of expressing their supernatural power, *ṛddhi*; cf. also Schlingloff (forthcoming): 53, who explains that fire is a symbol for meditation since ancient times and flames emerging from the Buddha or a monk serve to represent their absorbed condition, "Feuer ist das aus alter Zeit überkommene Symbol für die Meditation; Flammen, die ein Buddha oder ein Mönch ausströmt, zeigen seinen Trancezustand an." Rhi 1991: 75 note 76 points out that, in the case of depictions of the fire miracle leading to the conversion of the Kassapa brothers, "no representations of this theme in art depict shoulder flames on the Buddha, although the fire shrine was sometimes represented as being enveloped in flames ... the representation of shoulder flames

same metaphorical nuance is already relevant to the aniconic stage in ancient Indian Buddhist art, where for episodes like the first meditation under the Jambu tree the artists represented the presence of the Buddha-to-be simply by fire.²⁴



*Figure 3: The First Meditation, Bodhgaya*²⁵

Examples for a metaphorical use of the fire motif in relation to this particular episode can also be found in the *Lalitavistara* and the *Mahāvastu*, where the

seems to have been limited to the ‘visit of Indra’.” In relation to figure 2, Coomaraswamy 1928: 37 considers the flames to be just reflecting the “effect produced by the presence of deities, Indra and his following”; cf. also Coomaraswamy 1928: 39, who in relation to DN 21 reasons that “there we learn, not only that the representation of flaming rocks is appropriate in this scene, but that this illumination is not, as usual in Buddhist legend, to be connected with the glory of the Buddha himself, but with that of the gods ... this explains the representation of flames in all the reliefs.”

²⁴Stache-Weiske 1990: 110; for another study of fire symbolism in Buddhist art cf. Taddei 1974.

²⁵Courtesy Monika Zin; figure 3 has already been published in Cunningham 1892 plate 8 figure 11; for further publications cf. the survey in Schlingloff 2000: 56.

bodhisattva's father describes the splendour of his son seated in meditation under the Jambu tree by comparing him to a sacrificial fire on a mountain top.²⁶ In the *Divyāvadāna* the fire image then illustrates the splendour of the Buddha in general.²⁷ A similar usage can be found in the *Dhammapada* and its parallels, which employ the fire motif to describe the Buddha's brilliance;²⁸ and the *Suttanipāta* illustrates the brilliance of the new-born bodhisattva with fire imagery.²⁹ In sum, the relationship of fire in a figurative sense to the Buddha, and in particular to his meditation practice, is well attested in art and texts.

Elsewhere I have argued that, in the case of the Buddha's descent from the Heaven of the Thirty-three, it seems fairly probable that a textual motif inspired art and artistic representation, which in turn gave rise to a literal interpretation evident in textual accounts.³⁰ In the case of my present topic I wonder if a similar process of cross-fertilization between text and art might stand behind textual depictions of the meditating Buddha emanating actual fire.³¹ In this way the metaphorical motif of the 'fire of *samādhi*' used in art would have supported the idea of a *samādhi* that results in the visible appearance of fire as a phenomenon evident to those in the vicinity, independent of their engaging in, or even having any proficiency in, meditative practice.

In view of the well-established notion that the arrival of *devas* can result in lighting up the whole place, the idea that in the scene depicted in the *Sakkapañha-sutta* the Buddha should in some way be responsible for this phenomenon is not natural. Although the fire motif does seem to be a bit out of place and not a natural product of the narrative scene, the present instance is not as unequivocal as the Buddha's descent from the Heaven of the Thirty-three, where the influence of artistic representation must have played a crucial part. In contrast, the description in the *Dīrgha-āgama* parallel to the *Sakkapañha-sutta* could simply be a result of textual literalism, although I would surmise

²⁶Lefmann 1902: 132,13 and Senart 1890: 47,14.

²⁷Cowell and Neil 1886: 158,24.

²⁸Dhp 387 indicates that the Buddha shines like fire, a depiction that has parallels in stanza 50 in the Gāndhārī *Dharmapada*, Brough 1962/2001: 125, stanza 39 in the Patna *Dharmapada*, Cone 1989: 114, and stanza 74 of chapter 33 in the *Udāna-varga*, Bernhard 1965: 501.

²⁹Sn 687 describes Asita seeing the bodhisattva as a young prince who is "blazing like fire".

³⁰Anālayo 2012b: 20; for a discussion of a comparable instance in relation to the narrative and artistic depiction of the conception of the future Buddha cf. Foucher 1949: 38.

³¹Zhu 2009: 501f and 504 argues for another closely related instance of cross-fertilization, where iconography depicting the scene of Sakka's visit would in turn have influenced Buddhist texts in China.

that such literalism, if not originating from artistic representations, would certainly have been encouraged by them. I will return to this hypothesis at the end of my study.

2) A Visit to Brahma

My next example continues the theme of inclusivism and the Buddha's superiority to ancient Indian gods, evident in all versions of the *Sakkapañha-sutta*. In this next example, however, the same tendency manifests in relation to Brahmā instead. The narrative plot in the *Samyutta-nikāya* discourse and its parallels in the two *Samyukta-āgama* collections extant in Chinese depicts the Buddha and some of his senior disciples humbling the pride of a conceited Brahmā, who believed that nobody was able to reach him in his lofty celestial abode. The passage relevant to my discussion occurs at the beginning of the discourse, after the conceited belief of this Brahmā has been introduced. The *Samyukta-āgama* extant in the Taishō edition as entry 99 describes what happens next as follows:³²

At that time the Blessed One knew the thought that the Brahmā had in his mind. He entered a concentration attainment of such a type that he disappeared from Sāvathī and appeared in the Brahmā's heavenly palace, seated cross-legged, with straight body and collected mindfulness, in mid air above the head of that Brahmā.

The *Samyutta-nikāya* version of the same event differs in so far as it brings in the fire element.³³ Here is the relevant passage:³⁴

Then the Blessed One, knowing with his mind the thought in the mind of the Brahmā, disappeared from Jeta's Grove and, just as a strong man might stretch a bent arm or bend a stretched arm, appeared in that Brahmā realm. Then the Blessed One sat cross-legged in the air above that Brahmā, having attained the fire element.

According to the explanation provided in the Pāli commentary on this passage, the expression "having attained the fire element" implies that the Buddha was

³²SĀ 1196 at T II 324c20 to 324c23.

³³I already drew attention to this difference in Anālayo 2011a: 14 note 7; the same has also been noted by Choong 2014: 186 note 27.

³⁴SN 6.5 at SN I 144,13 to 144,17 (in E° the text is partially abbreviated).

manifesting flames emerging from his whole body.³⁵ Another version of the Buddha's visit to this Brahmā, found in the partially preserved *Samyukta-āgama* extant in the Taishō edition as entry 100, does not mention any fire display.³⁶

Similar to the case of the *Dīrgha-āgama* parallel to the *Sakkapañha-sutta*, in the present case, too, the bringing in of the fire motif seems a bit out of place. According to the narrative context the issue at stake is to humble the pride of the Brahmā who had thought himself to be in such an elevated position that nobody could reach him. As the rationale for the Buddha's visit is to dispel this illusory belief of the Brahmā, one would think that an appearance in mid air suffices to make the point. The circumstance that according to all versions the Buddha even sat above the head of the Brahmā fully drives home the message of the Buddha's superiority, visually conveying that the Buddha not only reached Brahmā easily, but is actually superior to him.³⁷ The manifestation of fire seems an unnecessary element in this context.

Whereas the manifestation of fire in the *Samyutta-nikāya* version appears to be a later addition, for the Buddha and his disciples to commute freely to different heavenly realms is a recurrent feature in the early discourses. The three versions of the present discourse in fact agree in this respect. The three versions also agree that not only the Buddha, but also some of his chief disciples joined the meeting, similarly appearing in the realm of this Brahmā. According to the *Samyutta-nikāya* account, these disciples also manifested fire.

The motif of a disciple of the Buddha manifesting fire recurs in the *Udāna* account of an act of actual self-cremation undertaken by the monk Dabba.³⁸ In a comparative study of this tale I suggested that the depiction of self-cremation in this tale might be the result of a literal interpretation of a metaphor that illustrates the nature of an arahant with the example of a burning splinter that

³⁵Spk I 212,19.

³⁶SĀ² 109 at T II 412c22 only reports that "at that time the Blessed One entered concentration and, disappearing from Jambudīpa, he appeared seated in mid air above the Brahmā."

³⁷Conversely, as noted by Strong 2008: 117, "magical flyers of all sorts are unable to fly over the Buddha ... it is as though there is a superior force field that forces them to stop, land, and pay their respects to the Blessed One." On the related motif of the impossibility for anyone to look down on the top of the Buddha's head cf. Durt 1967.

³⁸Ud 8.9 at Ud 92,33 (an event the Buddha then reports to his monks in Ud 8.10) and the parallels SĀ 1076 at T II 280c7 and SĀ² 15 at T II 378b9.

flies up into the air and is then extinguished.³⁹ Several aspects of the resultant story recur in later texts like the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra* and others. These eventually came to provide a model for the actual undertaking of self-cremation in fourth century China and later times,⁴⁰ dramatically showing the impact of literalism on the living tradition.

3) Pāṭikaputta's Challenge

The next example of fire miracles of the Buddha I have chosen for study is found in the *Pāṭika-sutta* and its parallel. The narrative plot of the *Pāṭika-sutta* involves the monk Sunakkhatta, who according to the Pāli commentarial tradition was one of the Buddha's attendants before Ānanda took this role.⁴¹ In the *Pāṭika-sutta* Sunakkhatta wants to disavow the training because the Buddha had not displayed any miracles.⁴² The Buddha clarifies that he had never promised to display miracles in the first place. The discourse continues with some episodes that set a contrast between Sunakkhatta being impressed by some ascetics and the Buddha's ability to predict with precision how these ascetics will soon reveal their lack of true accomplishment.⁴³

³⁹Anālayo 2012a.

⁴⁰Cf. especially the detailed study by Benn 2007 (further references can be found in Anālayo 2012a).

⁴¹Spk I 258,24; cf. also Malalasekera 1938/1998: 1206, Eimer 1987: 110f, and Eimer and Tsering 2012: 1.

⁴²DN 24 at DN III 3,10 and DĀ 15 at T I 66a27; DĀ 15 has been translated into German by Weller 1928. Sunakkhatta recurs in MN 12 at MN I 68,7 and its parallel T 757 at T XVII 591c19, where he has in the meantime disobeyed. Sunakkhatta then defames the Buddha for his presumed inability to perform miracles, a passage which leads Evans 2012: 132 to the conclusion that "one who insists that Gotama lacks superhuman states will be reborn in hell, and this seems to be the case even if the utterer is telling the truth about what he or she believes." This does not seem to reflect the situation depicted in MN 12 correctly. In DN 24 Sunakkhatta still features as a monk, so that this should be considered to be an earlier episode than the one in MN 12. From this it follows that the claims he reportedly makes in MN 12 need to be read as having been made in spite of all the proofs that according to DN 24 the Buddha had given of his abilities. Thus the point made in MN 12 is about intentional defamation, and it is on this account that Sunakkhatta is reckoned liable to rebirth in hell.

⁴³Whereas such predictions are indeed instances of divination (cf. Latin *divinare*: "to foresee, foretell, predict"), the same does not hold for the exercise of the divine eye, *pace* Fiordalis 2014: 97, who holds that "the notion of the divine eye of knowledge of the arising and passing away of beings nicely captures ... the spatial and temporal dimensions of divination." The divine eye rather seems to be conceived of as the ability to witness directly, with the mind's eye as it were, the arising and passing away of beings that takes place at the moment this ability is exercised.

The last of these episodes involves the ascetic Pāṭikaputta, who publicly boasts that he will best the Buddha in performing miracles.⁴⁴ The Buddha goes to Pāṭikaputta's place, predicting that Pāṭikaputta will be too afraid even to meet him face to face. This is indeed what happens. Even after being repeatedly urged by spectators, who have come to witness the anticipated competition in miraculous performances, to come forward to meet the Buddha, Pāṭikaputta is too afraid to face the Buddha and fails to live up to his earlier claims. The scene ends with the Buddha giving a teaching to the crowd that has assembled at Pāṭikaputta's place. In the *Dīrgha-āgama* version, the Buddha concludes his own description of this episode as follows:⁴⁵

I taught the Dharma to that great assembly in many ways, explaining, benefitting, and delighting them. Having in that assembly thrice roared a lion's roar, I rose into the air with my body and returned to the place where I had been before.

In the corresponding section in the *Pāṭika-sutta* of the *Dīrgha-nikāya*, the Buddha reports his departure in this way:⁴⁶

Having instructed, urged, roused, and gladdened that assembly with a talk on the Dharma, having made them become delivered from great bondage, having rescued eighty-four thousand beings from the great abyss, I attained the fire element, rose into the air to the height of seven palm trees, created a flame another seven palm trees high, blazing and fuming, and reappeared in the Gabled Hall in the Great Wood.

Elements specific to the presentation in the *Pāṭika-sutta* are the liberating effect of the teaching given by the Buddha and the indication that he manifested

⁴⁴According to his claim, however many miracles the Buddha might perform, he was ready to perform twice as many; cf. DN 24 at DN III 13,3 and DĀ 15 at T I 67c17, part of this claim has also been preserved in SHT IV 32.7 R, Sander and Waldschmidt 1980: 113. Several sources attribute a similar claim to the six teachers as part of the events leading up to the Buddha's performance of the twin miracle at Śrāvastī; cf., e.g., the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 947a2, the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1451 at T XXIV 329b16 and D 6 *da* 42a2 or Q 1035 *ne* 39b1, the *Divyāvadāna*, Cowell and Neil 1886: 149,4, and the Chinese counterpart to the *Aṭṭhakavagga*, T 198 at T IV 180c14.

⁴⁵DĀ 15 at T I 69a25f.

⁴⁶DN 24 at DN III 27,9 to 27,15.

fire. Given that the *Dīrgha-āgama* discourse does depict the Buddha departing by way of levitation and thus manifesting a supernormal feat, it can safely be assumed that it would also have reported the display of fire, had this idea already been around when the *Dīrgha-āgama* passage translated above reached its present formulation.

A Sanskrit fragment parallel has preserved part of this episode. In the fragment the Buddha similarly reports his “having instructed, urged, roused and gladdened that assembly with a talk on the Dharma”, followed immediately by the name Sunakṣatra Lecchavīputra in the accusative.⁴⁷ Even though the fragment unfortunately stops at this point, it seems unmistakably clear that here the Buddha’s report of what happened continues directly by indicating that he addressed his attendant, instead of giving any description of the way in which he departed.⁴⁸

This suggests that even the ascent into the air, described in the *Dīgha-nikāya* and *Dīrgha-āgama* versions alike, could be a later development. On this assumption, the Sanskrit fragment would have preserved an earlier version in which the Buddha, having described his delivery of a talk on the Dharma to the assembly, simply continues by reporting what he then said to his attendant Sunakkhatta. This would be in keeping with the pattern observed for the previously reported episodes involving Sunakkhatta, where each time the Buddha reports what he has said to his attendant. In line with this pattern the *Pāṭika-sutta* continues, right after the description of the Buddha’s miraculous departure, with his report of what he had said to Sunakkhatta.⁴⁹

Support for the assumption that the Buddha’s miraculous departure is indeed a later element can be found in the *Pāṭika-sutta* itself, precisely in what the Buddha reportedly said to Sunakkhatta at this narrative juncture. After getting

⁴⁷SHT IV 165.3+4 V5, Sander and Waldschmidt 1980: 178: *t(aṃ pariśadaṃ dhārmīyā katha)yā sandarśa(yitvā samādā)[pa]yitvā sa[mu](ttejāyī)tvā saṃpraharṣayitvā (suna)kṣatram lecchav[ī] (putram).*

⁴⁸Schlingloff (forthcoming) 132 note 30 has already pointed out that the Sanskrit fragment version does not report the miracle depicted in DN 24.

⁴⁹DN 24 at DN III 27,9: *taṃ pariśaṃ dhammīyā kathāya sandassetvā samādāpetvā samuttejetvā sampahaṃsetvā*, followed by the reference to the delivery of 84,000 beings and the Buddha’s miraculous departure, and then at DN III 27,18: *sunakkhattaṃ licchaviputtaṃ etad avocaṃ*. The two parts I have given in Pāli match the Sanskrit fragment quoted in the previous note, making it safe to restore it to *taṃ pariśadaṃ dhārmīyā kathāya sandarśayitvā samādāpayitvā samuttejayitvā saṃpraharṣayitvā sunakṣatram lecchavīputram etad avocaṃ*. DĀ 15 at T I 69a27 is of no help here, as it directly turns from the Buddha’s departure to the next episode in the discourse.

Sunakkhatta to confirm that Pāṭikaputta had acted exactly as the Buddha had predicted he would, the Buddha concludes:

What do you think, Sunakkhatta, given that this is the case, has a miracle of a nature beyond [the ability of ordinary] men been performed or not?⁵⁰

Sunakkhatta confirms that this is indeed the case. This exchange relates back to the theme at the outset of the discourse and Sunakkhatta's wish to disavow the training because the Buddha did not display any "miracle", *iddhipāṭihāriya*, "of a nature beyond [the ability of ordinary] men", *uttarimanussadhamma*.⁵¹ Now, had the Buddha at the present narrative juncture been wanting to press the point that he had performed miracles, his act of levitation would certainly have been more impressive than his prediction that Pāṭikaputta will be unable to meet him face to face, and even more impressive would have been his manifesting fire.⁵² The fact that they are not mentioned here at all gives the impression that, at the time when the present passage was formulated, the idea that the Buddha had performed an act of levitation and manifested fire had not yet arisen.

The impression that the episode in the *Pāṭika-sutta* translated above is late is reinforced by its reference to rescuing eighty-four thousand beings from the great abyss and delivering them from great bondage. According to the commentarial explanation,⁵³ the great bondage mentioned here is the great bondage of defilements, *kilesa*, and the abyss stands for the four floods, *ogha*, which are the floods of sensuality, becoming, views and ignorance.⁵⁴ Being delivered from the bondage of defilements and rescued from these four floods would entail that these eighty-four thousand beings all attained full awakening during the talk given by the Buddha.

According to the preceding section in the discourse, Sunakkhatta had called together various Licchavis to witness the contest in miraculous abilities between the Buddha and Pāṭikaputta. It follows that the assembled crowd should be understood to have been various spectators from the nearby location.

⁵⁰DN 24 at DN III 27,24 to 27,26.

⁵¹On the term *uttarimanussadhamma* cf. Anālayo 2008b.

⁵²This has already been pointed out by Weller 1922/1987: 635f.

⁵³Sv III 829,22.

⁵⁴For a listing of the four floods cf., e.g., DN 33 at DN III 230,11 and its Sanskrit fragment parallel, Stache-Rosen 1968: 117.

The presentation in the *Pāṭika-sutta* thereby implies that a single talk on the Dharma turned this whole crowd of spectators into arahants. Although the early discourses do recognize the possibility that lay people can become arahants,⁵⁵ this usually appears to be conceived of as the outcome of considerable practice and acquaintance with the teachings, not as something that such a large group of chance spectators could attain during a single meeting with the Buddha. Such a hyperbolic depiction of the effects of the Buddha's teaching is uncommon, at least among the early discourses.⁵⁶ The apparent lateness of this description further confirms the impression that this part of the *Pāṭika-sutta* has gone through some development.

Given that Pāṭikaputta has been thoroughly defeated, and the whole crowd of spectators has been successfully converted, at the present narrative juncture the performance of any miracle is quite superfluous, be it an act of levitation or the manifestation of fire.⁵⁷

4) The Twin Miracle

A well-known instance of the Buddha manifesting fire is the famous twin miracle. Although not reported in Pāli discourse literature, descriptions of the twin miracle can be found in the Pāli commentaries. According to the *Jātaka* commentary, one of the four instances when (according to the

⁵⁵On laity and the attainment of arahant-ship cf. Anālayo 2010b: 61f note 2.

⁵⁶Another such reference to attainment by 84,000 beings occurs in DN 14 at DN II 44,3 as part of a description of the followers of the former Buddha Vipassī. Having on an early occasion attained stream-entry and gone forth under him, these 84,000 attain full awakening on being "instructed, urged, roused and gladdened with a talk on the Dharma" by the Buddha Vipassī. In the parallels the attainment of full awakening of those monks is not just the result of a talk on the Dharma by the Buddha Vipassī; it rather happens after the performance of the three miracles. According to the Sanskrit fragment version, Waldschmidt 1956: 154f, the two chief disciples of Vipassī, Khaṇḍa and Tiṣya, performed the miracle of psychic power, *ṛddhiprātihārya* and the miracle of telepathy, *ādeśanāprātihārya*, respectively, and the Buddha himself performed the miracle of instruction, *anuśāsanāprātihārya*. DĀ 1 at T I 9c18 and T 3 at T I 157b18 report that the Buddha himself performed all of these three miracles, leading to the attainment of arahant-ship by the 84,000 (or else 80,000) monks. None of these versions comes close to the indication in DN 24 that a similarly sized crowd could reach full awakening on the spot during a single discourse by the Buddha.

⁵⁷Walshe 1987: 598 note 749 comments: "could this peculiarly unnecessary miracle have been inserted later?"; cf. also Rhys Davids 1921: 2f. On the topic of levitation cf. in more detail Anālayo 2016.

Theravāda tradition) the Buddha performed the twin miracle was precisely on the occasion described in the *Pāṭika-sutta*.⁵⁸ Thus by the time this commentarial gloss came into existence, the miracle believed to have been performed by the Buddha after Pāṭika's discomfiture had developed from being a manifestation of fire alone to a miracle that combines this with the simultaneous manifestation of water.⁵⁹

A reference to the Buddha performing the twin miracle can also be found in the *Samyukta-āgama* parallel to the *Āditta-sutta* (or *Ādittapariyāya-sutta*). According to the traditional reckoning, the *Āditta-sutta* is one of the chief discourses delivered by the Buddha soon after his awakening. The *Āditta-sutta* has the three Kassapa brothers and their *Jaṭila* followers as its audience, whom the Buddha had earlier impressed by performing various miracles.⁶⁰ Having become Buddhist monks, at the present narrative juncture they receive a penetrating instruction that leads them to full awakening.

According to the *Āditta-sutta* and its Theravāda *Vinaya* counterpart, the talk delivered by the Buddha on this occasion presented all aspects of sense-experience as being “on fire”,⁶¹ a way of teaching apparently adjusted to the interest of the discourse's audience in fire worship.⁶² The *Samyukta-āgama* parallel reports that on this occasion the Buddha displayed the three miracles (the miracle of psychic power, the miracle of telepathy and the miracle of instruction). The *Samyukta-āgama* discourse's depiction of the Buddha's display of the first miracle of psychic power is as follows:⁶³

⁵⁸Jā I 77,23; in fact Neumann 1912/2004: 778 note 760 sees the present passage in DN 14 as the starting point for a development eventually leading to the depiction of the twin miracle at Sāvattihī (cf. also the parallelism between DN 24 and several depictions of the Śrāvastī miracle in the claim to double the Buddha's abilities, above note 44). On the motif of the twin miracle cf., e.g., Foucher 1909: 10–16, Waldschmidt 1930, Lüders 1941/1966: 62–73, Brown 1984, Verardi 1988: 1540f, Karetzky 1990: 72f, Rhi 1991, Schlingloff 1991 and 2000: 488–515, Skilling 1997: 303–315, Zhu 2006: 255f, Anālayo 2009b, Fiordalis 2010/2011: 401f, and Anālayo 2015.

⁵⁹This seems to be comparable in kind to the apparent development of the miracle related to Sakka's visit where, as mentioned above in note 14, in a Tibetan version translated in Schiefner 1849/1851: 255 the Buddha apparently manifested fire for seven days.

⁶⁰For a survey of textual accounts and artistic representations cf., e.g., Zin 2006: 136–166.

⁶¹SN 35.28 at SN IV 19,24 (= Vin I 34,16). For comparative studies that take into account some of the parallels cf. Bureau 1963: 317–320 and Fiordalis 2010/2011: 398f.

⁶²On the fire imagery cf. Gombrich 2009: 111ff.

⁶³SĀ 197 at T II 50b18 to 50b23.

The Blessed One entered into an attainment of concentration appropriate for the manifestation of his ascent into the air towards the east to perform [miracles] in the four postures of walking, standing, sitting and reclining. He entered into concentration on fire and various types of flames emerged in blue, yellow, red, white, crimson and crystal colours.⁶⁴ He manifested fire and water concurrently. The lower part of his body emitted fire and the upper part of his body emitted water, or else the upper part of his body emitted fire and the lower part of his body emitted water. In the same way he kept going around the four directions. Then, having performed various miracles, the Blessed One sat among the assembly.

After having displayed the miracle of telepathy as well, the Buddha gives his talk on all aspects of sense experience being on fire. The Buddha's display of all three miracles on this occasion is also recorded in a discourse in the *Ekottarika-āgama*,⁶⁵ in the *Catuspariṣat-sūtra*,⁶⁶ in the Dharmaguptaka, Mahīśāsaka, and Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinayas*,⁶⁷ and in some biographies of the Buddha preserved in Chinese translation.⁶⁸

Although the events leading up to the conversion of the *Jaṭilas* are clearly pervaded by the topic of miracle performance, when it comes to the actual instruction at the present juncture in the narrative it seems unnecessary for the Buddha to perform further miracles. Once the *Jaṭilas* have gained sufficient faith to go forth under the Buddha, there would be no need to continue to improve on his earlier performance of miraculous feats by undertaking the twin miracle. Instead, what fits the present occasion well is the “miracle of instruction”, the

⁶⁴A description of the same miracle in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* indicates that the Buddha manifested flames of various colours having attained meditation on fire or the fire element; cf. Gnoli 1977: 230,18: *tejodhātum samāpannasya*, T 1450 at T XXIV 134b9: 入火光定, Waldschmidt 1962: 319,9 (§26.6): *me'i ting nge 'dzin la snyoms par zhugs pa* (the transliteration style has been adjusted).

⁶⁵EĀ 24.5 at T II 622b10.

⁶⁶Waldschmidt 1962: 316,9 (§26.3).

⁶⁷T 1428 at T XXII 797a13, T 1421 at XXII 109b25, and Gnoli 1977: 230,12, with its Chinese and Tibetan counterparts in T 1450 at T XXIV 134b6 and Waldschmidt 1962: 317,12 (§26.3); cf. also Dhammadinnā 2015: 42f.

⁶⁸T 185 at T III 483a11, T 191 at T III 962a14, and T 196 at T IV 152a1; cf. also the brief reference in T 189 at T III 650a23, which appears to intend the same, and the comparative survey in Waldschmidt 1951/1967: 193.

Buddha building his presentation skilfully on a theme of central importance to these *Jaṭilas* before their conversion, putting their concern with fire to use for cultivating liberating insight. In this way, judging from the narrative context it seems more probable that the *Āditta-sutta* and its Theravāda *Vinaya* counterpart have preserved an earlier version of the Buddha's third sermon in this respect,⁶⁹ when the theme of displaying miracles leading to the conversion of the three Kassapa brothers and their following had not yet spilled over into the occasion of giving them the teaching that led to their liberation.

Another miraculous event relating the Buddha to fire is reported in the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta* and a range of parallels. When the Buddha had passed away, his corpse could not be burnt until Mahākassapa arrived. Once Mahākassapa had come and paid his respects, the pyre spontaneously ignited.⁷⁰ In this case, too, some versions do not report such a miracle and instead indicate that either lay people or else Mahākassapa himself ignited the pyre.⁷¹

5) The Fire Element

Among Pāli discourses found in the four *Nikāyas*, the visit to Brahmā (2) and the *Pāṭika-sutta* (3) are the only references to an *attaining* of the fire element

⁶⁹This has already been suggested by Barea 1963: 320.

⁷⁰DN 16 at DN II 164,2, a Sanskrit fragment parallel, Waldschmidt 1951: 430,5 (§49.21), DĀ 2 at T I 29a26, T 6 at T I 190a12, T 7 at T I 207a11, the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 966c11, the Haimavata (?) *Vinayamātrkā*, T 1463 at T XXIV 818a4, the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1451 at T XXIV 401b19, and its Tibetan counterpart in Waldschmidt 1951: 431,12 (§49.21). According to *Mahāvamsa* 17.44 and 31.99, Geiger 1958: 137,13 and 254,11, even the Buddha's relics manifested fire as part of performances of the twin miracle in Sri Lanka, during which the relics rose up into the air to the height of seven palm trees; on miracles in the *Mahāvamsa* cf. also Scheible 2010/2011. Halkias 2015: 178 holds that "self-immolations are intimately related to Buddha Śākyamuni, who is reported by some influential recountings to have ended his own life by auto-cremation." This is not correct. The episode in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa* narrative of the auto-combustion of the Buddha's corpse took place after he had passed away and thus has no direct relationship to the ending of his life. An 'intimate relationship to self-immolation' emerges only much later in the history of Chinese Buddhism, where according to Benn 2007: 37 "the imitation of the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa* and subsequent cremation is suggested in many accounts of auto-cremation in China."

⁷¹ According to T 5 at T I 174b11 and the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1435 at T XXIII 446a20, the pyre was lighted by householders, and according to the Mahāsāṅghika *Vinaya*, T 1425 at T XXII 490b20, by Mahākāśyapa; cf. also Waldschmidt 1948: 305.

that I have been able to identify.⁷² In both cases comparison with the parallel versions makes it fairly probable that these references are the results of later developments.

Elsewhere in the four Pāli *Nikāyas* the fire element occurs regularly in meditative contexts, but in such occurrences the fire element comes together with other elements and is moreover something to be *experienced* instead of being *attained*.⁷³ In such contexts the fire element can be part of a set of four elements or else part of a set of six elements, which in addition to earth, water, and wind also comprises space and consciousness.⁷⁴

The implications of the fire element in such listings are spelled out in the *Mahāhatthipadopama-sutta* and the *Dhātuvibhaṅga-sutta*, together with their parallels. The two discourses differ only in so far as the *Mahāhatthipadopama-sutta* takes up the fire element as part of the set of four, whereas the *Dhātuvibhaṅga-sutta* presents it as part of the set of six elements. The two discourses and their parallels agree, however, that the fire element stands for physical warmth and bodily manifestations of heat.⁷⁵ Here is the relevant passage from the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel to the *Dhātuvibhaṅga-sutta*:

Now in this body of mine there is the internal fire element, which was received at birth. What is it? That is, it is bodily heat, bodily warmth, bodily discomfort, warmth from bodily nourishment, that is, from digesting food and drink, and whatever else is of this nature and exists in this body internally, is contained in it internally, and is fiery, of a fiery nature, and hot internally.⁷⁶

⁷²Instances found outside the four *Nikāyas* are Ud 8.9 at Ud 92,33 (= Ud 8.10), discussed above in note 38, and performances of miracles in the *Vinaya*; cf. Vin I 25,5, Vin II 76,4 (=Vin III 159,21), and Vin IV 109,8. These report the Buddha's subduing of a serpent (as part of the conversion story of the Kassapa brothers), the monk Dabba's ability to set fire to his finger and use this to show the way to incoming monks late at night, and the monk Sāgata's subduing of a serpent.

⁷³An occurrence of the fire element on its own that is related to meditation can be found in AN 1.14.4 at AN I 25,14, which lists the monk Sāgata as foremost in (meditative) ability regarding the fire element, obviously a reference related to Vin IV 109,8, mentioned above in note 72.

⁷⁴An example would be DN 33 at DN III 247,19 (§6.16) and its parallels in Sanskrit fragments, Stache-Rosen 1968: 165 (§6.15), and DĀ 9 at T I 52a6 (§6.10).

⁷⁵MN 28 at MN I 188,5 and its parallel MĀ 30 at T I 465c16; MN 140 at MN III 241,13 and its parallels MĀ 162 at T I 691a5, T 511 at T XIV 780a23, and D 4094 ju 37b3 or Q 5595 tu 41a2.

⁷⁶MĀ 162 at T I 691a5 to 691a8.

This description of the fire element is not concerned with a visual apperception of flames, but rather with the physical experience of heat.⁷⁷ This implication then informs meditative approaches to the fire element, which are about the experience of warmth as one of the characteristics of matter and which do not require any form of visualization. In this sense the fire element features among the objects of *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation,⁷⁸ and can lead to insight into the absence of a self.⁷⁹ For arahants it is in turn characteristic that they will be free from any notion of a self in regard to the fire element (as well as the other elements).⁸⁰

This well attested use of the fire element in the sense of warmth as part of a set of elements contrasts to the fire element in the *Pāṭika-sutta* and the *Samyutta-nikāya* report of the visit to Brahmā, where the fire element is something to be attained and that attainment then results in the visual manifestation of fire. Since these two instances appear to be late, it seems safe to conclude that this alternative use of the term “fire element” reflects a later development.

Fire also features in a list of ten “totalities”, *kaṣiṇa*, where it similarly occurs preceded by the earth and water *kaṣiṇas*, and is followed by the *kaṣiṇas* of wind, space, and consciousness. In addition to these six, the remaining four that make up the full list of ten *kaṣiṇas* are colours.⁸¹

Regarding the colour *kaṣiṇas*, the *Visuddhimagga* describes how one fashions an object of the corresponding colour as the basis for meditation practice;⁸² in fact the commentaries employ the term *kaṣiṇa* for such objects rather than for the

⁷⁷Thus though Soper 1950: 73 reasons, in relation to fire miracles, that “what seems to have begun in the Pāli tradition as a part of the technique of meditation — the adept visualizing fire as he would the other elements — developed in an age of miracles into the exteriorization of the fire element”, it seems to me that the starting point for such a process of exteriorization of the fire element in the Pāli discourses does not yet involve a meditative form of visualization.

⁷⁸MN 10 at MN I 57,37 (= DN 22) and its parallels MĀ 98 at T I 583b18 and EĀ 12.1 at T II 568a24.

⁷⁹AN 4.177 at AN II 165,3 and its parallel SĀ 465 at T II 119a3.

⁸⁰MN 112 at MN III 31,28 and its parallel MĀ 187 at T I 733a5.

⁸¹Cf., e.g., AN 10.26 at AN V 47,11 and its parallel SĀ 549 at T II 143a23 or AN 10.29 at AN V 60,19 and its parallel MĀ 215 at T I 800b5.

⁸²In order to cultivate the meditative vision of the blue *kaṣiṇa*, for example, Vism 173,2 suggests arranging blue flowers on a tray, covering the mouth of a bucket with a blue cloth, or fashioning a disk coloured blue as the basis.

“totality” of experience that is to result from their use.⁸³ Although in the case of colours the situation is quite straightforward, with the remaining six *kasīṇas* the idea of contemplating them as visual objects is not without difficulties. Already the *kasīṇas* of wind and space are not easily experienced as visual objects, as wind can be observed mainly by its effects and space becomes visible only in the form of an absence of visual objects. In the case of the consciousness *kasīṇa*, it seems hardly possible to think of a way of turning this into a visual object. In fact the *Visuddhimagga* drops consciousness from the list in its exposition of *kasīṇa* practice and replaces it with the light *kasīṇa*.⁸⁴

As far as the early discourses are concerned, it seems improbable that the whole set of ten *kasīṇas* was meant to refer to visual experiences, *pace* later exegesis. Besides, even in the *Visuddhimagga* the fire *kasīṇa* is something experienced internally and there is no indication that others, on seeing a meditator engaged in this practice, will also be able to apperceive fire. In fact, had the fire *kasīṇa* been the starting point for the idea of seeing someone emanate fire, one would expect the *Pāṭika-sutta* and the *Samyutta-nikāya* discourse on the visit to Brahmā to speak of attaining the “fire *kasīṇa*”, instead of referring to the attainment of the “fire element”.

In view of this it seems to me quite possible that the notion of fire manifesting outwardly as a result of someone having attained the fire element would have been facilitated by some sort of pictorial depiction. This could have been a sort of canvas taken around to aid oral performance with some visual stimulation, a usage already attested in a discourse in the *Samyutta-nikāya*.⁸⁵ The use of such a type of visual depiction could have influenced the texts already at a comparatively early stage in their transmission.

⁸³Vetter 1988: 66f comments that “in the *Visuddhimagga* we no longer find that a Kasina sphere is considered as being immeasurable. It is even characteristic of the technique that one first concentrates on a limited” object; on the *kasīṇas* cf. also Karunaratna 1996, Wynne 2007: 31–34, and Chapple 2014.

⁸⁴*Vism* 174,19 (although *Vism* 609,14 does refer to the consciousness *kasīṇa* as one of various objects for the cultivation of penetrative insight); cf. also Anālayo 2009a: 668 and 2011b: 592f note 33.

⁸⁵SN 22.100 at SN III 151,23 (the formulation in the parallel SĀ 267 at T II 69c18 could be reflecting a misunderstanding of the translator; cf. Anālayo 2013: 45 note 119) seems to reflect the employment of pictures as aids in oral teaching. According to Spk II 327,18 it refers to a canvas with paintings taken around by wandering Brahmins to illustrate teachings on karma and its fruits; cf. also Mair 1988: 17–37, Dehejia 1990: 377, and Brown 1997: 81, as well as on a similar custom in medieval China Teiser 1988: 446

Conclusion

The selected examples of fire miracles performed by the Buddha surveyed above seem to be for the most part identifiable as later developments, probably the result of literal interpretations of metaphorical usages of the fire motif attested in text and art.⁸⁶ At the same time, examining these instances clearly testifies to other type of supernormal abilities. Celestial travels by the Buddha and his disciples or *devas* lighting up a place on arrival form a common heritage among the early discourses. Taken together this suggests to my mind the appropriateness of a middle-way approach to the topic of supernormal feats and miracles in early Buddhist thought. This middle-way approach steers clear of ignoring supernormal elements and according the status of genuine teachings only to the type of textual material that conforms to modern day Western expectations and values. At the same time this approach also avoids reading the early discourses through the lenses of later tradition and ignoring the development in the depiction of miracles, the historical stages of which can be detected with the help of comparative study of versions of a text transmitted by different reciter traditions.⁸⁷

Abbreviations

AN	<i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i>
B ^c	Burmese edition
C ^c	Ceylonese edition
D	Derge edition
DĀ	<i>Dīrgha-āgama</i> (T 1)
Dhp	<i>Dhammapada</i>
DN	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>

⁸⁶As pointed out by Gombrich 1996: 21, “unintentional literalism has been a major force for change in the early doctrinal history of Buddhism.”

⁸⁷One example for this tendency would be McClintock 2011, who on the basis of some miracle tales in the commentary on the *Dhammapada* comes to the conclusion that in early Indian Buddhist narratives the Buddha functions as a trickster. Such uncritical employment of one Pāli commentary as if it were to reflect the whole of early Buddhist narrative traditions needs to be counterbalanced by taking into account literature reflecting the commentarial period that has been preserved outside the Pāli canon and, even more importantly, historical contextualization of such tales by way of comparison with what can be gathered about the Buddha’s role in the material common to the discourses in the four Pāli *Nikāyas* and their Chinese *Āgama* parallels, where I for one am not aware of evidence that would corroborate an assessment of the Buddha’s role as that of a trickster.

EĀ	<i>Ekottarika-āgama</i> (T 125)
E ^e	PTS edition
Jā	<i>Jātaka</i>
MĀ	<i>Madhyama-āgama</i> (T 26)
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
Paṭis	<i>Paṭisambhidāmagga</i>
Q	Peking edition
SĀ	<i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 99)
SĀ ²	<i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 100)
SHT	Sanskrihandschriften aus den Turfanfunden
Spk	<i>Sāratthappakāsinī</i>
SN	<i>Samyutta-nikāya</i>
Sn	<i>Sutta-nipāta</i>
Sv	<i>Sumaṅgalavilāsinī</i>
T	Taishō edition
Th	<i>Theragāthā</i>
Ud	<i>Udāna</i>
Vin	<i>Vinaya</i>
Vism	<i>Visuddhimagga</i>

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The Uses of Philology: A Case Study in Popularising Buddhism

Geoffrey Bamford

Buddhism has a presence in the public discourse of the ‘Western world’, for instance in the UK. It is a paradoxical presence — powerful in a way, but confused and confusing. This paper offers an illustrative case. A forthcoming contribution will analyse it further and suggest wider conclusions.

The context is two-fold. First, there is an attempt to popularise a general-purpose, non-denominational version of Buddhism for secular Westerners. Then, people in and around the UK policy establishment, who wish to address the fundamental challenges facing British society, are making use of the popularisers’ work.

Against this background, the paper focuses on a passage purportedly translated from the Pali. It shows the actual import of the passage and contrasts this with the way it has been represented. From a scholarly perspective, the attempt at popularisation is unsound; but it has had a significant impact.

Introduction

This paper examines a prominent author’s misunderstanding and mistranslation of some Pali. The case is quite striking, but that is insufficient reason to mention it; the intention is certainly not to embarrass the author. The story highlights the importance of rigour, and the danger of assuming that meditative experience

can trump philology, but it also merits consideration for another reason entirely. This author's presentation of the Ariyapariyesanā sutta has had a remarkable after-life. It figures prominently in a major study¹, issued by the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) in December 2014, on the need to reframe our society's attempt to address long-term challenges.

Why did this unusual version of the Buddha's message appeal? Why should both the author and the RSA wish to present it as coming from the Buddha, rather than simply attributing it, as they also do, to Heidegger and others? Upon such points, readers are for the moment invited to form their own opinions. This paper just presents the translation offered and the use made of it. It is hoped later to offer an analysis of this episode's significance for Buddhism in the West.

I. Reframing our challenges

1) Changing values

In September 2010, some major UK NGOs combined to produce a landmark report: *Common Cause: The Case for Working with our Cultural Values*.² It said that the participating organisations and others like them are failing.

The implication, never too directly stated, was that our current social order is based on untenable assumptions — if we are to escape the worst consequences of climate change and global inequity, economic and social systems must change significantly. But the focus was not on the problems, nor even on the change needed. It was on the NGOs' attempts to trigger such change.

They have encouraged the public to behave differently. They have campaigned in this vein for years, with some success. Yet there is little sign of systemic change. Evidently, the NGOs have come up against opposition. One might conclude that the strategy of driving change from the bottom up will not work, at least not by itself. Instead, *Common Cause* framed the problem in marketing terms.

It was not enough, the argument went, to explain to people the negative consequences of particular behaviours. The time had come for a broader level of campaigning, which would aim for attitudinal and cognitive shifts. People needed – and were ready for – a change in values; NGOs and others must precipitate it.

¹Rowson 2014

²Crompton 2010

This would alter consumer behaviour. That would then in turn force change in markets, and hence in society.

2) Changing ourselves

The RSA, an independent body with influence on UK public policy, took up the *Common Cause* challenge. A series of RSA projects, events and documents sought to highlight ideas and practices likely to facilitate necessary changes in values and hence behaviour.

This activity came under the RSA's 'Social Brain³ project':

The notion of a rational individual who makes decisions consciously, consistently and independently is, at best, a very partial account of who we are. ... [T]he Social Brain project has sought to make theories of human nature more accurate ... [and] explicit, ... [and so ultimately to] ... support personal development and wellbeing, inform social and educational practice and improve financial and environmental behaviour.⁴

In other words:

- Decision-makers and the public at large have tended to assume that, to cope with major challenges, we just need intellect and willpower. But no, we may understand the need for change, and want it to happen, and yet may remain paralysed. Take the climate. In *The Seven Dimensions of Climate Change*, produced with the Climate Outreach & Information Network (COIN), the RSA asks “*why the calls to action are not being heeded*” and concludes that this is a problem of:

³Cf. Dunbar (2009) “species that have pairbonded mating systems [have] the largest brains. ... [A]nthropoid primates may have generalized the bonding processes that characterize monogamous pairbonds...” So being clever is all about getting on with other people, and about being somebody they want to get on with. It is not about manipulating numbers.

⁴Rowson, Kálmán Mezey & Dellot (2012) p 2

'... stealth denial' — ... the majority of those who understand the problem intellectually don't live as though they do'⁵.

- If action is required, we have assumed that experts must collect data and analyse it. But no, the change we need now must involve everyone. If, as a society, we are failing to adapt, that means we have to change *ourselves*. As the RSA paper *Beyond the Big Society* puts it:

*[A]dults vary developmentally, just as children do... [T]hat matters. [It is necessary to] promote adult development.*⁶

For a nation to do well, individual citizens must be doing well — and not just in terms of performance. Individuals must be doing well *in themselves* — behaving in ways that make sense to them, working on themselves and getting wiser.

Government has been thinking on similar lines. The Cabinet Secretary and the Director of the Institute for Government put it this way:

*Many of the biggest policy challenges we are now facing ... will only be resolved if we are successful in persuading people to change ... lifestyles ...*⁷

This was in their introduction to an influential Cabinet Office Paper called *Mindspace: Influencing Behaviour through Public Policy*. Which said:

[T]here are two ways of thinking about changing behaviour. The first is based on influencing what people consciously think about. ... [This is] the 'rational' or 'cognitive' model. ...

⁵Rowson & Corner (2015) p 4

⁶Rowson, Kálmán Mezey & Dellot (2012) p 6

⁷Dolan, Hallsworth, Halpern, King & Vlaev (2010) p 4

*The contrasting model ... shifts the focus of attention away from facts and information, and towards altering the context within which people act.*⁸

3) Spirituality

Last year, in a dense paper entitled ‘*Spiritualise*’, the RSA took the argument significantly further.⁹ Again, it is necessary to distill the meaning from a document which aims to satisfy diverse constituencies. But the thrust is clear.

Yes, values must change. Yes, everyone, policymakers and population alike, must stop pretending that we are supposed to be rational, detached and analytic, and that everything will be alright if we focus on that. Only, how are we to wean ourselves off spurious rationalism? We will need to replace it. If we are going away from *homo oeconomicus*, what are we heading towards?

Answer: spirituality. To flesh out this imprecise term, the RSA document piles up citations from experts in diverse fields and eagerly deploys fashionable tropes¹⁰ — all very defensive. Something is being said that is difficult to say, presumably about a dominant ideology which we need to undermine.

The RSA wants to move us all away from positivism, scientism, reductionism, naïve realism, travesties of neo-liberal economics, crude utilitarianism with shades of social Darwinism, and so on. But it also seeks to maintain good relations with power centres and not to give public offence. So it does not say too directly that we as a society are wedded to non-viable assumptions. The line is, instead, that we are failing to recognise some attractive, alternative assumptions.

Thus ‘spirituality’ is basically anything that is incompatible with positivism etc. This is the label of choice because:

*many if not most people appear to self-identify as being in some way ‘spiritual.’*¹¹

⁸Ibid p14

⁹Rowson 2014

¹⁰The policy establishment has lately been concerned with spirituality in a different context. Since the London bombings (‘7/7’), efforts have been made to engage the Muslim population. Interfaith dialogue has been a policy priority. At the same time, a strident ‘new Atheism’ has raised its voice — and efforts have been made to include this strand of opinion too in the dialogue. The RSA’s discussion of spirituality evidently draws on this diffuse ‘interfaith’ discourse.

¹¹Rowson (2014) p6

Such people are also doubtless likely to recognise the fundamental problem that:

*what passes for everyday consciousness begins to look like a low-level psychopathology.*¹²

So any responses to that problem may usefully be classified under spirituality. We can infer at least three constituencies to which this rhetoric is addressed.

1. Power-holders and their staff may tend to uphold the very ideology that is to be undermined, but it is vital to bring them along somehow.
2. So it is helpful to get support from other established authorities, ranging from neuroscientists to the CofE.
3. Then, among the general public, many are open to the pattern of thinking that is being promoted here. This is the most important constituency. Such ‘spiritual’ people should be ‘early adopters’ of necessary changes in values and behaviour.

II. The uses of ‘Buddhism’

1) A useful cipher

Spiritualise espouses a loose universalism that seems to come out of the UK interfaith environment. That environment is overwhelmingly Abrahamic, so the document offers propositions and pronouncements that make little or no sense in a Buddhist context. Yet it invokes Buddhism, regularly and insistently.

There is evidently support for Buddhism — it is to be included, prominently. But it is to be understood as a *philosophia perennis*, reasonable and undogmatic — a *bona fide* religion that nonetheless somehow lacks the associated disadvantages.

¹²Ibid p7

Like Esperanto, the supposedly inclusive interfaith language reflects its origins in the Western half of Eurasia — but that is not considered. Instead, it seems to be assumed that if you abstract the underlying characteristics of religions you will reach some sort of quasi-Chomskian universal grammar of spirituality, with which Buddhism must necessarily accord. Thus, a Buddhist author is referenced in relation to “*the inherent fragility and virtuality of ... a deluded self, scrambling to make itself real*” and the need to “*work towards its ... transcendence*” — and this transcendence is then said to lead to the ‘Soul’¹³.

2) Ground and Place

The RSA document is in 4 sections: Context, Analysis, Life-Lessons and Social Implications, roughly. The first section ends with a piece entitled *The heart of the spiritual – it’s about our ‘ground’ not our ‘place’*; the second section is headed *In search of our spiritual ‘ground’ — what are we*; the third is *Living from our ground not our place*. The Ground/Place metaphor is therefore central.

It starts with a distinction between three types of spirituality — religious, non-religious and anti-religious (‘secular’). This leads to the question:

Do these three perspectives on spirituality share touchstones...?

Yes, they do:

What they seem to share ...is the importance of our ‘ground’, rather than our ‘place’. This distinction stems from Buddhism, but it can also be inferred in existential and phenomenological thought, particularly Tillich.... And the distinction is evident in Heidegger’s emphasis on ... the lived experience of being human... [Our ‘ground’ consists in] the most basic facts of our existence: that we are here at all, that we exist in and through this body that somehow breathes, that we build selves through and for others, that we’re a highly improbable part of an unfathomable whole, and of course, that we will inevitably die. Another way to characterise the relevance of our ground comes from the psychotherapist Mark Epstein who refers to

¹³Ibid p6 The reference is to David Loy’s *A Buddhist History of the West*, although Christopher Lasch, quite different and free from any Buddhist influence, is mentioned in the same footnote.

*the spiritual as 'anything that takes us beyond the personality.'*¹⁴

3) The Passage

Deep and hard

Spiritualise quotes the Buddha as saying:

*It is hard for people who love, delight and revel in their place to see this ground*¹⁵

Then it offers an explanation from Stephen Batchelor.

The quotation is difficult to identify. It made no sense to me, who have been reading the Pali canon these 50 years or so.

Batchelor's book yielded a fuller version:

*This Dhamma I have reached is deep, hard to see, difficult to awaken to, quiet and excellent, not confined by thought, subtle, sensed by the wise. But people love their place: they delight and revel in their place. It is hard for people who love, delight and revel in their place to see this ground: this conditionality, conditioned arising*¹⁶.

This clearly derives from a famous passage in the Ariyapariyesanāsutta of the Majjhima Nikāya¹⁷.

The philological standard

But Batchelor's partial translation (it stops in the middle of a sentence) is

¹⁴Ibid p 25. Mark Epstein, incidentally, also known as a populariser of Buddhism, is connected with Stephen Batchelor, for instance via the Insight Meditation Society in Barre Massachusetts.

¹⁵Ibid p 26

¹⁶Batchelor (2010) Ch 10 p 178

¹⁷#26 of the Majjhimanikāya, page 167 of the PTS edition:

Adhigato kho me ayaṃ dhammo gambhīro duddaso duranubodho santo paṇīto atakkāvacaro nipuṇo paṇḍitavedanīyo. Ālayarāmā kho panāyaṃ pajā ālayaratā ālayasammuditā. Ālayarāmāya kho pana pajāya ālayaratāya ālayasammuditāya duddasaṃ idam ṭhānaṃ yadidaṃ idappaccayatā paṭiccasamuppādo, idam-pi kho ṭhānaṃ duddasaṃ yadidaṃ sabbasaṅkhārasamatho sabbūpadhipatiṇissaggo taṇhakkhayo virāgo nirodho nibbānaṃ.

idiosyncratic. For Pali scholars, whether from the academy or from monastic learning institutions, have always understood the passage as a powerful but unexceptional presentation of attachment and non-attachment. Thus:

- Thanissaro Bhikkhu offers a standard view of the text:

This Dhamma that I have attained is deep, hard to see, hard to realize, peaceful, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to be experienced by the wise. But this generation delights in attachment, is excited by attachment, enjoys attachment. For a generation delighting in attachment, excited by attachment, enjoying attachment, this/that conditionality & dependent co-arising are hard to see. This state, too, is hard to see: the resolution of all fabrications, the relinquishment of all acquisitions, the ending of craving; dispassion; cessation; unbinding.¹⁸

- Soma Thera's version is much the same:

The truth I have come at is deep, hard to meet with, hard to be awakened to, peaceful, sublime, outside the scope of speculation, subtle, and to be known by the wise. This generation, however, likes attachment, is gladdened by attachment, and delights in attachment. For this generation liking attachment, gladdened by attachment, delighting in attachment, it is hard to meet with this fact, namely, definite conditionality, dependent origination; this too, is a fact hard to meet with, namely the quiescence of all formations, the relinquishing of all essential support, the exhaustion of craving, unstaining, ceasing, extinction.¹⁹

¹⁸<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.026.than.html>

¹⁹<http://www.bps.lk/olib/bl/bl001.pdf>

Both have ‘attachment’ where Batchelor uses ‘place’. This is the word *ālaya*. *Ālaya* is a noun formed by combining a verbal root with a prefix:

- The verbal root is *lī/līyati* meaning ‘cling’ / ‘stick’ / ‘adhere’ / ‘hang on’

The prefix is *ā*, meaning ‘to’ or ‘from’.

So *Ālaya* is ‘clinging on’.

- It can be used for ‘what one clings onto’ — for instance a bird’s roosting-place, or more generally some sort of house or home. This is what *ālaya* means when it refers to something concrete²⁰.
- But otherwise, normally, there is no sense of ‘abode’ or whatever. Instead, the word just means ‘clinging’. Thus, since *gilāna* means ‘sick’, *gilānālaya* means ‘hypochondriac’ — clinging on to being sick.
- The term is commonly used when speaking of the *Dhamma*. Here, *ālaya* carries no overtones of a physical location or of metaphors derived therefrom. A typical usage would be *kāmālaya*: ‘clinging on to sensual gratification’.

Terms of art

So Batchelor’s ‘translation’ (*they delight and revel in their place*) is not well supported. But he expands on it at length:

...people are blinded to the fundamental contingency of their existence by attachment to their place. One’s place is that to which one is most strongly bound. It is the foundation on which the entire edifice of one’s identity is built. It is formed through identification

²⁰The usage is familiar to us in the word *Himālaya*, conventionally ‘abode of snow’.

with a physical location and social position, by one's religious and political beliefs, through that instinctive conviction of being a solitary ego. One's place is where one stands, and whence one takes a stand against everything that seems to challenge what is "mine." This stance is your posture vis-à-vis the world: it encompasses everything that lies on this side of the line that separates "you" from "me." Delight in it creates a sense of being fixed and secure in the midst of an existence that is anything but fixed and secure. Loss of it, one fears, would mean that everything one cherishes would be overwhelmed by chaos, meaninglessness, or madness.²¹

The writer seems to have taken the theme of attachment and started to play with it. He free-associates about things that people get attached to these days.

Some of this strikes a chord: *a sense of being fixed and secure in the midst of an existence that is anything but fixed and secure.* That sounds Buddhist, certainly.

But then he goes on to say:

*Gotama's quest led him to abandon everything to do with his place — his king, his homeland, his social standing, his position in the family, his beliefs, his conviction of being a self in charge of a body and mind— but it did not result in psychotic collapse. For in relinquishing his place (*ālaya*), he arrived at a ground (*ṭṭhāna*). But this ground is quite unlike the seemingly solid ground of a place. It is the contingent, transient, ambiguous, unpredictable, fascinating, and terrifying ground called "life." Life is a groundless ground: no sooner does it appear, than it disappears, only to renew itself, then immediately break up and vanish again. It pours forth endlessly, like the river of Heraclitus into which one cannot step twice. If you try to grasp it, it slips away between your fingers.²²*

Let us start with *ālaya*. The implication seems to be that this is not just about becoming attached. It is, rather, a technical term for a certain type of thing that we get attached to. The word apparently has a range of meanings to do with e.g. social standing and sense of self.

²¹Batchelor op. cit. p 179

²²Ibid

It immediately struck me that no one with formal training in Pali, whether monastic or academic, could make any sense of that proposition. That impression has been confirmed.

In principle, of course, social standing and sense of self would be among the things a person clings on to. But there does not seem to be a single instance in the literature where the word *ālaya* is actually used to make that point, or anything like it.

The other Pāli word (*ṭṭhāna*) is, perhaps, even more interesting. This is presented as if it were a key term, which expresses the fundamental reality of life, as opposed to the illusory quasi-reality *ālaya*.

But it is the most common-or-garden of words, *ṭhāna*.²³ This is not a weighty, doctrinal term at all. It is the simplest possible noun that can be derived from the extremely common verbal root *ṭhā/tiṭṭhati*, meaning ‘stand’ or ‘subsist’.

It is used to mean a place, but most usages are more abstract, e.g. *ṭhāna* means:

- a condition or state, so that *lahu* ‘light’ combines with *ṭhāna* to give *lahuṭṭhāna* ‘lightness’; or
- a basis or opportunity, so that *pamāda* ‘intoxication’ plus *ṭhāna* gives *pamādaṭṭhāna* ‘an occasion’ for intoxication.

Accordingly, one common expression is *ṭhānaṃ etaṃ vijjati*: “this situation occurs”, i.e. “it can happen that...”

In the passage cited, therefore, the word *ṭhāna* barely carries any meaning of its own. It is more of a placeholder — hence the standard translations, ‘state’ and ‘fact’.

Reflections

Moreover, across the long and diverse history of Buddhist tradition there has been resistance to using words like ‘ground’ to put a label on ultimate reality. Pali Buddhism in particular is notoriously apophatic. The focus is on what is not so, what is not helpful, what is illusory and painful. The positive is more or less unstated: you get to it by focusing on the negatives and clearing them away.

²³The form *ṭṭhāna* sometimes arises when this is combined with another word.

Later iterations of the tradition start to offer more positive expressions, sometimes indeed give them pride of place. *Bodhicitta* ‘Enlightenment-mind’ would be an example. But even here, the positive term emerges like a sculpture under the chisel. You start with *śūnyatā* ‘emptiness’ and get to *bodhicitta* from there.

Some traditional teachers in good standing, Tibetan or East Asian for instance, may expatiate on absolute reality. But to understand the message they are transmitting, we need to see the cultural context, surely. We need to look at the forms of words they are using, in their language, and at how those words came down to them from their predecessors. When we do so, we tend to notice that, generally speaking, *bodhicitta* starts with *śūnyatā*.

Buddhists likewise have tended to avoid paradoxical formulations that simultaneously mystify and exalt. It is true that paradoxes like ‘the sound of one hand clapping’ are used — they suggest that we get locked into our conceptual apparatus and prompt us to break out. But such formulations aim, precisely, to counteract the impulse to verbalise transformative experience. They mock that impulse, almost.

It is difficult to see expressions like ‘groundless ground’ in the same way. Such *façons de parler* may seem to offer a useful way round conceptual limitations while suggesting impenetrable secrets, but they tend to take on a life of their own. Buddhists have generally been very wary about that sort of thing.

Inferences

What are we to make of this story? It might at first seem a little depressing. It is good that British people are interested in and attracted to Buddhism — so much so, indeed, that this current of opinion constitutes a significant point of reference in policy debates. But how does Buddhism figure in the public arena? What images are selling today? It seems that sometimes you can’t beat a dollop of existentialism lite.

This might suggest that 150 years of Buddhist Studies may have had limited impact. There is demand for general-purpose presentations of Buddhism in contemporary terms, but the supply is of uneven quality, and the public seems relatively indiscriminating.

I prefer not to take that depressing view, but instead simply to acknowledge that it is difficult to breathe life into the spare formulations of the Pali canon — to make the material *work* for a mass audience. People are keen on it but have

trouble getting their minds around it. There is something about Buddhism that people can recognise and appreciate, and at the same time it is difficult to make that something apparent.

So perhaps there is a more interesting point here. Think about what makes it difficult to present Buddhism in a way that people can latch onto. Then think what makes Buddhism interesting and attractive. Are the two distinct? Not necessarily!

Perhaps what is attractive is precisely what is hard to express. Perhaps the Buddhist approach undercuts habits of language and thought deeply engrained in our culture, and perhaps we *need* to undercut them — and perhaps people recognise that need.

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The Practice of Fasting after Midday in Contemporary Chinese Nunneries

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According to monastic disciplinary texts, Buddhist monastic members are prohibited from eating solid food after midday. This rule has given rise to much debate, past and present, particularly between Mahāyāna and Theravāda Buddhist communities. This article explores Chinese Buddhist nuns' attitudes toward the rule about not eating after noon, and its enforcement in contemporary monastic institutions in Taiwan and Mainland China. It goes on to investigate the external factors that may have influenced the way the rule is observed, and brings to light a diversity of opinions on the applicability of the rule as it has been shaped by socio-cultural contexts, including nuns' adaptation to the locals' ethos in today's Taiwan and Mainland China.

Introduction

Food plays a pivotal role in the life of every human being, as the medium for the body's basic needs and health, and is closely intertwined with most other aspects

of living. As aptly put by Roel Sterckx (2005:1), the bio-cultural relationship of humans to eating and food “is now firmly implanted as a valuable tool to explore aspects of a society’s social, political and religious make up.” In the realm of food and religion, food control and diet prohibitions exist in different forms in many world faiths. According to Émile Durkheim (1915:306), “[i]n general, all acts characteristic of the ordinary life are forbidden while those of the religious life are taking place. The act of eating is, of itself, profane; for it takes place every day, it satisfies essentially utilitarian and material needs and it is a part of our ordinary existence. This is why it is prohibited in religious times.” Fasting, for example, is a common ascetic practice in many world religions.¹ In Buddhism, monks (*bhikṣus*) and nuns (*bhikṣuṇīs*) are expressly forbidden to eat after midday by the *vinaya*, Buddhist disciplinary texts² compiled in India during and after the time of the Buddha.³ According to the *vinaya*, the rules known as the *prātimokṣa* were laid down by the Buddha, one by one, each time a monk or a nun was considered to have done something wrong. In other words, the precepts concerning eating are governed by the principle of establishing rules when and as transgressions occur. The *Dharmaguptakavinaya* presents the origin of an important rule via the following story:

The people of Rājagrha organize festivities. Two *bhikṣus*, Nanda and Upananda, both beautiful men, go to see the festivities. When the people see them, someone proposes to offer them food and drinks. When, in the evening, they return to the monastery, the other *bhikṣus* ask why they are that late, whereupon Nanda and Upananda tell them about the festivities. Late in the afternoon, the *bhikṣu* Kāḷodāyī goes to beg and the night falls. Around that time,

¹Muslims fast in the month of Ramadan. During the Catholic liturgical year, certain fasts are also observed. Jainism has various types of fasting for followers to practise. Fasting is common among most Hindus, who individually have different periods of fasting depending on their beliefs and which gods they worship.

²In the early fifth century CE, four complete *vinayas* – 十誦律 *Shisong lü* (T.1435), *Sarvāstivādinaya*; 四分律 *Sifen lü* (T.1428), *Dharmaguptakavinaya*; 摩訶僧祇律 *Mohesengqi lü* (T.1425), *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya*; and 彌沙塞部和醯五分律 *Mishasai bu hexi wufen lü* (T.1421), *Mahīśāsakavinaya* – were translated into Chinese. For details, see Heirman (2007:167-202).

³This study particularly focuses on the *Dharmaguptakavinaya* (*Sifen lü* 四分律 T.1428) since, due largely to its strong promotion by Master Daoxuan 道宣 (596-667), it has become a major reference point for monastic discipline in China. For details, see Heirman (2002:396-429).

he arrives at the house of a pregnant woman. At the moment that the woman goes out of the house, there is a thunderstorm with a lot of lightning. Just a little while [later], the woman sees his face. She is frightened and she thinks that he is demon. As a result, she has a miscarriage. When Kāḷodāyī says that he is a *bhikṣu*, the woman is very angry and she says that *bhikṣus* should not beg that late[.]⁴

Upon hearing of these incidents, the Buddha admonished Nanda, Upananda and Kāḷodāyī for their misconduct and then established a rule: If a [*bhikṣu*]⁵ eats at an improper time, [he] [commits] a *pācittika* (translated in Heirman, 2002:534).⁶ This leads us to ask why this particularly period of the day was chosen as the improper time. This issue has been discussed in the *Sapoduo pini piposha* 薩婆多毘尼毘婆沙 (*Sarvāstivāda-vinaya-vibhāṣā*):⁷

From midday to night is inappropriate.

From early morning to midday is proper. Why?...

From early morning to midday, it is the time for villagers to engage in all sorts of business and to prepare food.

From midday into the night, villagers hold parties and entertainments that cause *bhikṣus* troubles while wandering.

From early morning to midday, secular people engage in work, during which there is no defilement by sexual indulgence.

From midday to night, people take a rest from work and enjoy games or lovemaking, so that *bhikṣus* sometimes experience criticism and troubles.

From early morning to midday is the proper time for *bhikṣus* to walk into villages for alms-begging. From midday to night, *bhikṣus*

⁴Translation of T22.n1428, p662b08-c24 by Heirman (2002:562-563). For a detailed introduction to this precept in the Dharmaguptakavinaya, see Heirman (2002:498 n54-500 n56).

⁵Because the *bhikṣuṇī* order came into existence after the *bhikṣu* order, some of the *bhikṣuṇīs*' rules have been taken from *bhikṣus*'. For nuns, the rule against eating after midday is found in the *pācittika* rule 24 from the *bhikṣuṇīprātimokṣa* in the Dharmaguptakavinaya (T22.n1428, p735a27).

⁶A *pācittika* is a minor offence that needs to be expiated. See Heirman (2002:141-147).

should focus on meditation and *sūtra*-chanting, instead of entering villages...⁷

In other words, scripture explicitly defines and explains the proper and improper times for monastic members' interactions with secular people on the basis of the latter group's daily schedule. Begging for alms from villagers is thus to be engaged in before midday, after which time village life is likely to be marked by entertainment and sex; and this notion of appropriate and inappropriate times is also formative of the precept of fasting in Buddhism. However, the consumption of food at different times carries additional meanings. In the *Samādhi Sūtra* of Piluo, for example, King Bimbisāra asks the Buddha why he eats food during the middle of the day. The Buddha responds the king: Heavenly beings eat at dawn; the Buddhas of the three periods eat at noon; animals eat in the evening; ghosts and spirits eat at night. In order to eliminate the cause of six destinies (to be reborn in the six realms) for monastic members, the Buddha requires them to eat food at noon, which is the same mealtime as all Buddhas.⁸

From the above, it is clear that abstention from eating at an inappropriate time has a significant connection with spiritual cultivation as presented in Buddhist canonical texts. The precept of fasting is greatly emphasised and applied among the five categories of Buddhist monastics. The most junior, *śrāmaṇera* (male novices) and *śrāmaṇerī* (female novices) are expected to observe the ninth novice rule of abstaining from eating at the wrong time – the right time being after sunrise and before noon. A *śikṣamāṇā* (probationer) should take this precept of fasting even more seriously, because if she transgresses it, she must restart her two-year probation period.⁹ Refraining from taking food at inappropriate times also applies to *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs*. In other words, all classes of monastic members commit a transgression by eating after midday, which illustrates the importance assigned to observance of this fast in the *Dharmaguptakavinaya*.¹⁰

⁷(T.1440). This *sūtra* is a detailed commentary on the SarvāstivādaVinaya, but its translator is unknown.

⁸T23.n1440, p551c5-c18.

⁹T54.n2131, p1173a24-a27

¹⁰Probationers occupy a status between novices and nuns, only applicable to women. During her two years of study, the probationer particularly has to take into account a certain number of special rules. In fact, the *Dharmaguptakavinaya* indicates that a *śikṣamāṇā* must follow the ten precepts of a *śrāmaṇerī* and the six rules of a *śikṣamāṇā*, while she also has to take into account the rules for nuns. The *Dharmaguptakavinaya* (T22.n1428, p924b6–c2) comprises six rules for

This rule against eating after midday, however, is the source of an unresolved debate that can be traced back to the early days of Buddhism. Indeed, the rule has been a controversial issue since the Second Council, which took place approximately one hundred years after the Buddha's demise.¹¹ Nor has a consensus on this rule been reached in modern Chinese Buddhist communities: some monastic members (e.g. Master Hongyi¹² and Master Chan Yun¹³) have insisted upon strict abstinence from eating after midday, while others have taken a more flexible attitude (e.g. Shih Hsing Yun¹⁴, 2009:38; Wu Yin¹⁵, 2001:269).¹⁶ Some scholarly work has explored the experience and enforcement of the prohibition

probationers, the first four of which are compiled in the same style as for bhikṣuṇīs: (1) not to have sexual intercourse; (2) not to steal; (3) not to kill; (4) not to lie about one's spiritual achievements; (5) not to eat at improper times (i.e. after noon), and (6) not to drink alcohol. For details, see Heirman (2002:67–75).

¹¹T22.n1428, p662c09-c18. It is, however, worth noting that Buddhist monks and nuns are allowed to take medicine after midday if they fall ill. Clarified butter, fresh butter, sesame oil, honey and molasses are the five types of medicine that monastic members are allowed to eat at proscribed times (T22.n1428, p0869c03-c09). According to the Sifen lü shanfan buque xingshi chao 四分律刪繁補闕行事鈔 (An Abridged and Explanatory Commentary on the Dharmaguptakavinaya), sick monastic members are allowed to take irregular drinks after midday as medicine (T40.n1804, p0117c18-c19). These drinks are made from beans, grains or wheat cooked for juices; or oil, honey, syrup and fruit liquids, etc (T40n1804, p0118b05-b07).

¹²Dharmaguptakavinaya (T22.n1428, p968c18-971c02), Sarvāstivādinaya (T23.n1435, p450a27-456b08) and Mahīśāsakavinaya (T22.n1421, p192a26-194b20) all record this historical account of the Second Council (or so-called Council of Vaiśālī). For details, see Prebish (1974:239-254). Eating after midday was one of the disputed practices that caused the first schism in the Buddhist saṃgha in this Council. For details, see Pande (1995:23); Reat (1998:22); and Baruah (2000:6).

¹³Ven. Hongyi 弘一 (1880–1942) is a famous Chinese Buddhist monk who deeply researched the vinaya and promoted the strict observance of monastic rules. For details, see Birnbaum (2003:75-124).

¹⁴Ven. Chan Yun 懺雲 (1915-2009) is a well-known monk in Taiwan who strictly adhered to monastic rules and played a key role in introducing Buddhism to university students. He established Zhaijie Xuehui 齋戒學會 (Academic Gathering to Keep the Fast and the Precepts) for Buddhist laity. For details, see Chün-fang Yü (2013:93-97).

¹⁵Ven. Hsing Yun 星雲 (b. 1927) is the founder of Foguangshan monastery, one of the largest Buddhist institutions in Taiwan. He greatly promotes Humanistic Buddhism and stresses Buddhist education and services by opening numerous temples and universities for both monastic members and (lay) people worldwide. For details, see Chandler (2004).

¹⁶Ven. Wu Yin 悟因 (b. 1940) founded the Luminary Nunnery (also Luminary Buddhist Institute) in 1980. She is well known for her research on vinaya, and runs a Buddhist college that provides education for nuns. For details, see Yü (2013).

against eating after midday in Chinese Buddhist contexts, via both historical sources (e.g. Mather, 1981:417-418; Tso, 1983:327-344; Gao, 2002:387-388) and empirical fieldwork accounts (e.g. Welch, 1967:111-112; Prip-Møller, 1982[1937]:221; Bianchi, 2001:81); yet, neither monastic members' *perceptions* of fasting, nor the external factors that may have influenced the way the rule is observed in Chinese contexts, have come under much scrutiny. As aptly put by Thomas Borchert (2011:187), "[m]any statements about the vinaya implicitly assume that what vinaya says is what occurs. If not followed by individuals or the community, then they are bad monks ... [yet] it is also true that monks break rules all the time. Sometimes there are social consequences ... though there is little discussion of why this may be so." To address this absence, this study aims to offer a detailed and balanced overview of how the traditional monastic rule against eating after midday is interpreted and practised in contemporary Buddhist institutions in Taiwan and Mainland China.

As a female researcher, I was at an advantage when seeking access to Buddhist nunneries; partly for this reason, female monastic members became my main research subjects.¹⁷ Additionally, in recent decades, there has been a strong revival of Chinese Buddhism, amid which Buddhist nuns have exerted an ever-growing impact on the monastic environment, and their opinions have gradually become very influential. This runs parallel to developments in the secular world, where the influence of women has also grown significantly, for example, in some women's changed dietary habits – specifically, the eating of less or no food in the evening – apparently for the sake of good health. In selecting interviewees, I focused on senior (teacher) nuns, who exert a disproportionate impact on their younger colleagues and who also collectively provide each monastic institution with a unique concept of the rule against eating after midday.

Taiwan and Mainland China each have a rich monastic scene, but it is difficult or impossible to conduct fieldwork in all monastic institutions. It is, however, crucial to select purposive samples of specific Buddhist institutions to provide variety and a balanced overview. The nunneries have been carefully selected so as to encompass the major different types in the Chinese context, each with their own representative characteristics and attitude towards disciplinary rules with a

¹⁷As a rule, most books and articles today use the pinyin system to transcribe Chinese names, places and terms. We have done the same throughout this article. Still, when referring to Taiwanese authors or masters, we have opted to use their personal Romanization, as they appear on their websites, books or articles.

range of attributes:

1. *Vinaya*-based institutes, such as Nanlin Nisengyuan¹⁸ (Nantou, Taiwan), and Pushou Si¹⁹ (Wutaishan, Mainland China).
2. Buddhist nuns' colleges, such as Dingguang Si²⁰ (Guangdong, Mainland China), Chongfu Si²¹ (Fuzhou, Mainland China), Zizhulin²² (Xiamen, Mainland China), Qifu Si²³ (Chengdu, Mainland China), and Xiangguang Si²⁴ (Chiayi, Taiwan).

¹⁸Nanlin Nunnery 南林尼僧苑 was founded in 1982. There are about seventy resident nuns. It is a strongly *vinaya*-based nunnery, and well known for its rigorous interpretation and practice of monastic rules.

¹⁹Pushou Si 普壽寺, located in Shanxi Province, is a well-known *vinaya*-based monastery and now the largest Buddhist nuns' college in China (around 1,000 nuns), with a tradition of training *śrāmaṇerī* (novice) as *śikṣamāṇā* (probationer) before *bhikṣuṇī* ordination, and offering various *vinaya* study programs.

²⁰Dingguang Si 定光寺, located in Guangdong Province, opened as a Buddhist College with Master Honghui as dean in 1996. It was then promoted to the status of Guangdong Buddhist Nuns' College, the first of its kind in the Buddhist history of Guangdong. The college currently has more than 300 student nuns and twenty teacher nuns. Dingguang Temple provides teaching facilities and has become one of the largest colleges for Buddhist nuns in Mainland China.

²¹Chongfu Si 崇福寺, located in Fujian Province, is a well-known site for nuns' Buddhist spiritual practice, and Fujian Buddhist College for nuns was established in the temple in 1983. Currently, Chongfu Temple is the cradle for the cultivation of a new generation of Buddhist nuns and one of Mainland China's most famous Buddhist monastic institutions to confer ordination. Ca. 300 nuns live and undertake Buddhist study and practice there.

²²Zizhulin 紫竹林, also located in Fujian Province, belongs to Minnan Buddhist College, which is a well-known institution of higher Buddhist learning in Mainland China. Zizhulin Temple became Minnan Buddhist College for female monastic members in 1995; currently, more than 200 nuns live and undertake Buddhist study and practice there.

²³Qifu Si 祈福寺 is famous for its nuns' education, and is also known as Sichuan Buddhist Higher Institute for *Bhikṣuṇīs* 四川尼眾佛學院 (formerly located in Tiexiang Si nunnery, also in Sichuan). The previous abbess, Ven. Longlian 隆蓮 (1909-2006), played a key role in shaping contemporary Chinese nuns' views on, and practice of, monastic rules. She devoted herself to the education of Buddhist nuns for many years. Student nuns in this institute receive the *śrāmaṇerī* and *śikṣamāṇā* precepts and are required to strictly observe Buddhist rules and lawfully follow the Buddhist ceremonies of *poṣadha* (recitation of precepts), *varṣā* (summer retreat), and *pravāraṇā* (invitation ceremony held at the end of summer retreat). The college currently has more than 100 female monastic members (including teacher and students nuns).

²⁴Luminary Nunnery 香光寺 (also Luminary Buddhist Institute) was founded in 1980 by the nun Wu Yin (b.1940). It currently has approximately 120 nuns. Master Wu Yin, who is well known for her research on *Vinaya*, runs a Buddhist College that provides education for nuns.

3. Humanistic Buddhist institutes,²⁵ such as Fagushan/Dharma Drum Mountain²⁶ (Taipei, Taiwan), and Foguangshan²⁷ (Kaohsiung, Taiwan).
4. A non-specific remainder category of institutes, such as Tongjiao Si²⁸ and Tianning Si²⁹ (both in Beijing, Mainland China).

This study constitutes an integral part of a broader study of the interpretation of disciplinary rules in contemporary Taiwanese and Mainland Chinese monastic institutions.³⁰ The research was undertaken via interviews and fieldwork observation, supplemented by the writings of contemporary nuns and monks. Analysis and interpretation were applied to nuns' interview responses and to their independently expressed views on the rule of fasting after midday and related practices.

²⁵Humanistic Buddhism encourages Buddhist monks and nuns to interact closely with the wider community. Some leading contemporary masters in Taiwan - such as the late Sheng Yen (Fagushan) and Hsing Yun (Foguangshan) - advocate Humanistic Buddhism through various objectives and activities, including monastic and secular education, welfare work and environmental protection.

²⁶Dharma Drum Mountain (Fagushan 法鼓山, abbreviated as DDM) is one of the largest Buddhist institutions in Taiwan, currently with about fifty monks and 200 nuns affiliated to the monastery. It was founded by the monk Sheng Yen 聖嚴 (1930-2009), a prominent Chan master.

²⁷Foguangshan, recognized as one of the three largest monastic institutions in Taiwan, was founded by the monk Hsing Yun (b. 1927) in 1967. There are more than 1,000 monastic members affiliated to this monastery, which promotes Humanistic Buddhism in particular.

²⁸Tongjiao Si 通教寺 is a well-known and highly respected Beijing nunnery, whose members focus on vinaya study. Ven. Longlian 隆蓮 studied Buddhism in Tongjiao Si. It is now a place for Buddhist nuns' religious practice and study, holding the Seven-day Recitation of the Buddha's Name every month. Ca. thirty nuns live in the nunnery.

²⁹Tianning Si 天寧寺, also located in Beijing, is one of the earliest temples there, and is famous for its twelfth-century Liao Dynasty pagoda. In 1988, Tianning Si became one of the most important national cultural relic protection units. Currently, around thirty Buddhist nuns reside in this nunnery, which focuses on the combined practice of Chan and Pure Land methods. Ca. thirty nuns live in the nunnery.

³⁰This research has been supported by the Research Foundation of Flanders (FWO).

I. Analysis of the Fieldwork Data

The following sections present my research findings in detail, juxtaposing monastic practitioners' perceptions and practices of fasting after midday in Taiwan and Mainland China, to shed light on the wider viewpoints of the nunneries as institutions and to explore similarities and differences in the following of this rule within Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism. To this end, I have categorised the fieldwork data into four distinct perspectives: 1) Chinese nuns' attitudes and practices with regard to fasting; 2) the impact of workload on the rule's observance; 3) adaptation of diet and local communities' expectations regarding vegetarianism; and 4) a typology of Buddhist institutions and leaders.

II. Chinese Buddhist Nuns' Attitudes and Practices with Regard to Fasting after Midday

Excluding those in *vinaya*-based nunneries, the majority of Buddhist nuns that I interviewed in both Taiwan and Mainland China took a relatively flexible view in regard to the monastic rule on fasting: for the most part, that it should be left to the individual to decide whether to follow it or not. At the same time, however, they expressed a positive attitude towards fasting, regardless of whether it was voluntary or enforced.

Pushou Si: “We do not eat a meal after midday. As Buddhist monastic members, we focus on religious practice and meditation. During the daytime, we need to study Buddhist *dharma*. In the evening, we start meditation after we finish work. We are less sleepy and muddled if we do not eat dinner, which is good for our body and mind while meditating.”

Tongjiao Si: “From the health point of view, it is detrimental to meditate if you eat too much in the evening, as you may feel sleepy or have bad digestion. It is better not to eat dinner if you don't have much physical work to do.”

Dingguang Si: “There are various advantages for our body and mind if we do not eat after midday Fasting can decrease the stomach's burden, which is good for personal health [.]”

Chongfu Si: “People may have delusions if they eat too much. One saying is that those who are well-fed and well-clad breed lewd thoughts[.]”

Zizhulin: “You may feel sleepy or not be clear-headed if you eat too much, which can influence your religious practice in the evening. You are healthier if you eat less, or even do not eat, in the evening, so you may meditate better.”

In short, nuns in a variety of nunneries shared a similar perception of the advantages of not eating a surfeit of food in the evening, a perception that was closely linked to religious practice (e.g. meditation), physical health, and mental conditions. Fasting, in general, seems to be considered beneficial to human health, including that of the clergy, based on Buddhist scripture³¹ as well as scholarly work. For example, it is assumed by Hiroko Kawanami that fasting plays a key role in monastic members’ longevity in Myanmar, based on her observation that Buddhist monks and nuns who fast have a longer life expectancy than local people (2013:96).³² In a similar vein, Melford Spiro explicitly mentions the benefits of fasting based on his informant monks’ responses:

Food is prohibited after noon because ... it helps to control the mind, it decreases mental impurities, it promotes meditation, it provides more time for spiritual activities, it serves to distinguish monks from laymen ... It is instrumental in the acquisition of super mundane powers, it kills lust, it promotes the Buddhist religion, it promotes the attainment of nirvana, it decreases craving, it decreases emotional attachment[.] (1970:299)

Besides the positive health effects of fasting, my informant nuns from Pushou Si, Dingguang Si, Chongfu Si and Zizhulin all mentioned another advantage of this rule: no eating after midday significantly benefits others (e.g.

³¹The prime example is from the Fayuan zhulin 法苑珠林 (Forest of Gems in the Garden of Law), compiled by Daoshi 道世 in 668 CE, which explicitly states five advantages of fasting: 1) less illness; 2) stability in the body; 3) less lust; 4) less sleeping; 5) rebirth in heaven (T53.n2122, p0954a19-a20).

³²It perhaps goes without saying that other factors (e.g. monastic practice, well-supported offerings from laity) might also crucially affect monastics’ life expectancy.

śrāmaṇerīs and laypeople) because they will have more time and energy to study Buddhism or follow their own religious schedule rather than spending time preparing and cooking food all day for *bhikṣuṇīs*. Similarly, it lightens donors' financial burden if monastic members do not eat supper, a point raised by one Dingguang nun; this echoed Mohan Wijayaratna's study that monastic members who are excessive in their food intake cause more problems for the laity providing offerings. The Buddha usually admonished his disciples that their survival should not be "a burden on lay society" (1996:73). It should be clear from this that my interviewees considered the rule of fasting to be altruistic in character. However, a potential paradox appears here: why did most of the nuns I interviewed express a flexible attitude toward the observance or non-observance of the precept, despite recognising various advantages of not eating after midday, for others as well as for oneself? One of the key points frequently mentioned by my informant nuns was the factor of poor physical health, which prevented them from keeping this rule:

Tongjiao Si: "The nuns here keep this rule as their physical health allows. I still eat some fruit in the afternoon but never eat cooked food in the evening."

Tianning Si: "In this nunnery, some nuns are in good health so they do not eat after midday, while others may eat something called 'medical stone'³³ in the evening. Supper is quite simple. It doesn't mean those nuns do not want to keep the rule of not eating after midday, but their bodies do not allow them to keep the rule One Taiwanese senior monk, Master Huilü,³⁴ also kept this rule of not eating after midday, and it made him very ill."

Dingguang Si (A): "I personally do not keep the not-eating-after-midday precept because of my illness, but I really respect those who do In my opinion, Chinese Buddhist monks and nuns should

³³Yaoshi藥石 (medicine stone) means supper. According to Fo Guang Dictionary, the Buddha dictates that monastic members should not consume food after midday. An evening meal is regularly served in Chan monasteries and it is euphemistically called 'medicine stone' to consider the food as nourishment for the frail body (1988:6691). For details, see Yifa (2002:248n28).

³⁴Ven. Huilü慧律 (1953-) is well-known to observe this rule strictly, but he has long had a serious, debilitating stomach condition which affected his religious life, so he finally decided to eat regularly for the sake of his health.

keep this rule but some are allowed not to because of ill-health. Most monastic members initially obey this rule for a long period of time; however, they do not look after themselves very well and it weakens their bodies, so they have to give it up.”

Dingguang Si (B): “I kept the rule before for a while but at that time I did not know how to take care of myself so that I messed up my stomach. Thus, I adopt a pattern of eating smaller, more frequent meals. Dietary guidance is necessary for monastic members on how to fast well.”

Chongfu Si: “It also depends on a nun’s physical condition whether or not she is able to practise this rule. Some student nuns take medicine in order to be able to keep this rule. Some who eat in the evening think of dinner as medicine to sustain the body, which is not the same feeling as eating food.”

Qifu Si: “Here, some monastic members do not eat food in the evening [to keep this rule]. Some eat an evening meal called a “medicine stone” if their physical conditions require it. The core of Buddhism is to let Buddhist followers practise the Middle Way ... [and] eat if their bodies need it.”

Clearly, it is inappropriate to generalise that fasting benefits all people’s health without any side effects. Significantly, the phenomenon of ill-health caused by fasting does not only exist in Chinese Buddhist communities. According to Hiroko Kawanami’s fieldwork in Myanmar, most Buddhist nuns strictly abstained from taking solid food after midday. Hunger from fasting was not a problem for most nuns, since their bodies got used to the practice. A few, however, developed gastric problems (1991:175). Moreover, Kawanami pointed out that gastritis was a “common ailment” among student nuns, to the point that they had to take special food (*satúmadu*) to treat it (2013:97n21).³⁵ Kim Gutschow, researching Buddhist nuns in Zangskar in Northern India, found that many novice nuns could not observe the precept of fasting on physical grounds, even though they had tried to eat all their food before noon for a considerable

³⁵Satúmadu “is a sticky toffee-like fluid made from a combination of pyàye (honey), hnan-hsi (sesame oil), htàwbat (butter) and htanyet (molasses)” (Kawanami, 2013:70n21).

period of time since their ordinations (2000:106). Some medical researchers confirm that peptic ulcer disease has been commonly diagnosed in Buddhist Thai monks (e.g. Tantiwattanasirikul, 2008:53-56). Nevertheless, a nun from Zizhulin opposed the opinion that fasting causes stomach illness, citing her personal experience. She did not agree that the rule set by the Buddha would make people physically unwell. She said she had kept the rule and stayed well ever since she started to teach *vinaya* for years. As we can gather from the above, there is no broad consensus, let alone absolute certainty, that fasting leads to a positive or negative impact on human health. It is indisputable, however, that monastic members are likely to perceive obstacles to their spiritual progress if they are in poor physical condition. One typical example is cited by the Buddha: before achieving enlightenment, the Buddha spent six years living an extreme ascetic life, only eating a grain of rice and a sesame seed per day. But this did not help his religious practice because he was in such poor physical health; so finally he accepted a shepherdess's offering of milk and ate food normally, albeit in moderation, to reach spiritual awakening. The Buddha stressed the Middle Way in his doctrinal teachings and religious practices, and Wijayaratra comments that "[a]n inadequate diet would have been inconsistent" with this general principle (1996:72). In light of this, it is especially interesting that my informant nun from Qifu Si also referred to the Middle Way in saying that fasting depended on individuals' physical needs. In any case, it is apparent that the question of fasting in Chinese Buddhism is a complex one that needs to be contextualized vis-à-vis contemporary society.

III. The Impact of Workload on Fasting-Rule Observance in the Context of Chinese Buddhism

In a comparative study of Sri Lankan and Thai Buddhist clergy who pay close attention to the "dietary schedule", Stuart Chandler comments that East Asian clerics "never" keep the precept of fasting after midday "to the letter", because they assert that "their efforts in saving other sentient beings are too strenuous completely to forsake sustenance in the evening" (2004:179). To a certain degree, his remark resonates with my Taiwanese and Mainland Chinese data: in particular, some of my informants claim that they adopt a flexible stance toward the precept due to their busy monastic schedule and heavy workload.

Dharma Drum Mountain (A): “The Buddhist-education workload is quite heavy in this monastery, so we are not prescriptive about the rule about eating before noon. Some monks and nuns keep this rule if their physical health allows, and those who are less robust eat ‘medicine stone’ in the evening to sustain themselves.”

Dharma Drum Mountain (B): “Our monastery is open to laypeople for many Buddhist activities, which takes a lot of our physical energy.... [W]e need to eat regularly to keep up our strength. Master Sheng Yen tells us we need to eat three meals a day to maintain good health.”

Luminary Nunnery: “In Chinese Buddhism, monastic members need to be able to serve and work, so they use more energy in comparison with those in Buddha’s time, when their ascetic life was spent in meditation.”

Tongjiao Si: “Some monastic members in southern China still do farm work or other jobs, so they need to eat dinner. However, in the Buddha’s time monastic members had less work.”

Tianning Si: “Buddhism in Theravāda countries is practised differently from our Mahāyāna Buddhism, though our main purpose is similar. We hold some Buddhist activities for laypeople, as a way of benefiting people. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, you cannot focus on your religious practice if it only benefits yourself. We have a greater diversity of work and activities [in Mainland China], whereas some [Theravāda] Buddhists spend more time on meditation.”

My fieldwork data touch upon several significant points regarding the precept of not eating after midday and its relationship to the value placed upon monastic work in Chinese Buddhism. First, the account of Chan monks’ busy working lives can be traced back to the early Tang Dynasty,³⁶ when it was particularly highlighted in Chan Master Baizhang’s well-known saying: “A day without

³⁶According to Kenneth Ch’en, Buddhist monks of the early Tang dynasty were involved in various business occupations. For details, see Ch’en (1964:261-271).

work is a day without food”.³⁷ Their work on self-sufficient monasteries’ farmland³⁸ meant that Buddhist monastic members could not be criticised as “social parasites” by the Confucians (Yifa, 2002:73); and the Chan work ethic is quite prominent in the *Chanyuan qinggui*.³⁹

Whenever the monks are summoned to communal labour, all must work except the assembly hall chief and the Sangha hall monitor. If for some reason the abbot does not attend the work session, the rector has the abbot’s attendant expelled from the monastery, unless the abbot is sick or entertaining officials and guests (Yifa, 2002:154).

This emphasis on communal labour is standard practice in Chinese (Chan) monasteries, and might well be a major influence upon adaptations to their members’ dietary abstinence. According to Sze-Bong Tso, the prohibition against eating after midday was observed by Chinese monks after the transmission of the *Dharmaguptakavinaya* to China, during the Liang Dynasty and the early Tang Dynasty.⁴⁰ However, owing to the influence of Baizhang’s code on monastic labour,⁴¹ most Chinese monasteries began to offer a later meal known as ‘medical stone’, to maintain the physical energy of monks (1983:341). Qian Gao points out that Dunhuang monks and nuns in the late Tang and Five Dynasties periods generally observed the rule, though not strictly: three meals a

³⁷The monk Baizhang Huaihai 百丈懷海 (749-814) is said to have established a monastic code for Chan monasteries in the Tang Dynasty. However, the text of Baizhang’s discipline no longer exists, which has given rise to much debate as to its authenticity among scholars. For details, see for example Heirman and Torck (2012:16n65) and Yifa (2002:28-35).

³⁸It is worth noting that monks personally working on monastic lands represent an ideal situation, since as Michael Walsh (2010:56) and Kenneth Ch’en (1973:142) point out, the actual cultivators of such land were mostly tenant farmers, monastery slaves and śrāmaṇeras working on monks’ behalf.

³⁹X63.n1245, p0530c22-23. The *Chanyuan qinggui* 禪苑清規 was compiled by the Chan monk Changlu Zongze 長蘆宗曠 (?-1107?) during the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127). This is regarded as the earliest Chan monastic code in existence. For details, see Yifa (2002).

⁴⁰In total, fifty-eight monks are recorded as strictly fasting after midday in the Biographies of Eminent Monks, Further Biographies of Eminent Monks and Song Biographies of Eminent Monks. Sze-Bong Tso comments that these are the prominent examples of fasting, which is difficult to practise in China. Indeed, these three biographies’ zealous reporting of certain monks’ ascetic fasting reflects the objective difficulty of adhering to the rule (1983:339-340).

⁴¹The eighth code: All members, whether junior or senior, must participate in communal labour (puqing 普請) (translated in Yifa, 2002:29).

day, or perhaps snacks in the evening, were provided when monastic members did manual labour for monasteries or performed Buddhist rituals (2002:387-388). According to Welch's fieldwork data from 1900-1950 China, monks still worked until late in the evening so most of them ate dinner or at least had some porridge (1967:111-112).⁴² Thus, it appears that the rule against eating after noon has only gradually been adopted in Chinese Buddhist contexts. It is worth remembering, however, that current Buddhist monastic members do not necessarily do as much farm work as in the past. As Chandler notes:

Ven. Baizhang's maxim "a day without work is a day without food" has been broadened radically so that, rather than merely justifying farm work as suitable for monastics, it has become a paean exalting various forms of social engagement as an essential part, and potentially the highest form, of religious practice at Fagushan, [and] Foguangshan[.] (2006:188).⁴³

Indeed, many monastic members, particularly in large monastic institutions in Taiwan (and some in Mainland China), have busy schedules filled with various Buddhist activities, teachings and ritual services for laypeople and communities.⁴⁴ Engaging in relevant Buddhist *dharma* work is considered not only to benefit the promotion and development of Buddhism, but also to impact upon monastic members' spiritual cultivation. Master Wu Yin stresses the importance of serving the monastery, citing a *vinaya* story in which one of Buddha's disciples, Dravya-malla-putra, who even had attained *arhat* status, was eager to work for the Buddhist community with *Bodhicitta* mind (T22. n1428, p0587a26-b05). Master Wu Yin also explains how nuns are assigned certain jobs in the management of the nunnery, indicating that working for the Buddhist *samgha* benefits an individual's salvation and merit accumulation

⁴²Chinese monks in Baohua shan were served "hot water" after noon as congee (Welch, 1967:112). Prip-Møller conducted his fieldwork in Huiju Si where offered monks "to drink tea", namely evening meals (1982[1937]:221).

⁴³In a similar vein, Master Wu Yin, the abbot of Luminary nunnery, has given Baizhang's maxim a new interpretation by stressing that this is still applicable for contemporary clerics' motto to live for the Three Treasures, Buddhism and enlightenment (Yü, 2013:147).

⁴⁴Owing to rapid urbanisation and modernisation in Taiwan, some urban nuns go to bed quite late – nearly at midnight – due to evening workshops or meditation classes. Yu-Chen Li comments that, ironically, laypeople who are much concerned with religion cause monastic members to have a restless busy timetable, which is harmful to their spiritual cultivation (Li, 2000:153-154).

(2001:282-283). While Master Wu Yin certainly does not expect her disciples to prioritise hard physical work, she highlights what she considers the appropriate balance between religious cultivation and monastery jobs.⁴⁵ It is worth noting that working for Buddhist businesses and rendering service to society may involve more physical activity than a life of reading and contemplation, to the point that the majority of my interviewees cite concern for physical health and nourishment as a reason for their flexibility in the observance of fasting after midday.

In discussing the relationship between monastics' working practices and fasting in Chinese Buddhism, one informant nun from Tianning Si explicitly pointed out that Theravāda monastic members may have different religious schedules from Chinese Buddhists, as their religious life might focus more on meditation. Her viewpoint exactly resonates with a strand of scholarly work indicating that Theravāda monks and nuns seem to focus more on sedentary activities: Buddhist learning, chanting, and prayer in a nunnery in Sri Lanka (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988:254); study, meditation and teaching for a monk in Burma (Spiro, 1970:306-307); chanting, study, prayer, begging for alms, and doing personal things for monks in north-eastern Thailand (Tambiah, 1970:117). Ven. Surapornchai Samacitto, a Thai monk, produced a case study of the Thai Dhammakaya Temple where newly ordained monks' daily schedule focused on more or less sedentary activities, such as begging for alms, cleaning the temple, confession, morning and evening chanting ceremonies, and meditation (2006:86).

More broadly, Prebish (2003:65) indicates that most monks in Theravāda countries do not work. Monica Falk provides *maechis'* daily timetable,⁴⁶ which largely consists of chanting, study, teaching and meditation (2007:122). In this context, there is a significant correlation between physical activity and food consumption: Joanna Cook points out that the amount of food Thai monks and *maechis* eat in a day (breakfast and lunch) is sufficient for meditation (2010:136). In any case, it would appear that most Buddhist monastic members in Myanmar, Thailand and

⁴⁵Stuart Chandler points out that some members of Foguangshan left the monastery because its monastic life was so busy that there was not enough time for "sufficient self-cultivation" (2004:209).

⁴⁶*Maechis* are religious women who, without being ordained as *bhikṣuṇīs*, live in nunneries. They observe eight or ten Buddhist precepts, shave their heads and wear white robes. On their wider role in Thai society, see Martin Seeger (2009:806-822).

Sri Lanka concentrate on more sedentary activities;⁴⁷ and this, to a certain degree, might explain why my informant nun from Tianning Si exhibited a defensive attitude towards the question of fasting after midday, which has been adapted due to the difference in the value placed upon monastic work between Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism and Theravāda Buddhism.

IV. Adaptation of Diet and Locals' Expectations in Chinese Buddhism

In discussing the precept against eating food after midday, we must also consider wider dietary customs, as food plays an important role in Chinese culture and its place cannot easily be substituted. As aptly put by Roel Sterckx (2005:1), “[w]hen asked to identify one aspect of Chinese culture that has characterized so much of the cultural capital ... a preoccupation with food would no doubt rank among the most likely answers.” The consumption of food is absolutely one of the important foci in Chinese people’s daily lives; as Kwang-chih Chang remarks: “Chinese people are especially preoccupied with food, and ... food is at the center of, or at least it accompanies or symbolizes, many social interactions” (1977:15). It is in this context that the degree to which religious dietary restrictions (of which fasting after midday is just one example) exert an impact on Chinese Buddhists’ diets, and the degree to which these rules have been adapted to local conditions should be examined. Richard Mather remarks that “in China . . . which has always valued eating, the ideal of renunciation never really took root” (1981:418). One informant nun from Foguangshan stated her view on the relationship between Chinese eating culture and the precept of fasting as follows:

I think Chinese culture plays a key role in this issue: in China eating is the first priority in life. When Buddhism spread from India to China, Chinese Buddhist monastic members continued to respect *vinaya*, and came to think of eating after midday as “medical stone”, not dinner. This is the concept of a medicine meal which nourishes your body and gives you the five contemplations during mealtimes,⁴⁸ which is a good

⁴⁷It is worth noting that some of them might engage in social work, and that we cannot generalise and assume all Theravādan Buddhist clerics are not engaged in labour.

⁴⁸The Chanyuan qinggui X63.n1245,p0525c7-c8. The five contemplations are: 1. Considering the work required in producing this food, I am grateful for its sources; 2. If, on judging my virtues, no faults are found, then I regard myself as worthy of this offering; 3. May I guard my mind

balance. The Chinese Masters were very wise: they respected *vinaya* and extended the spirit of Buddhist *dharma* into Chinese contexts by creating the monastic system and *qing gui*,⁴⁹ due to different (socio-cultural) conditions when Buddhism spread from India to China.

From this nun's saying, it can be inferred that the precept of fasting has been skilfully modified to allow for expedient eating-as-medicinal intake to sustain physical needs, probably by medieval Chinese Chan monks seeking to bridge the gap between precept observance and the priority given to eating in Chinese culture. This clearly echoes Raoul Birnbaum's comment that "[t]he Chinese Buddhist world has never been separate from Chinese society" (2003:113). Additionally, the Foguangshan informant's statement serves as a reminder that Buddhism spread from India to China, which has its own culture and history. When the two cultures collided, with differences in time and space, Chinese monastic members seem inexorably to have adapted the Indian Buddhist inheritance regarding rule observance to the Chinese mainstream view. This process, however, was far from simple, and required cultural integration and re-innovation if it was successfully to maintain and expand Buddhism in Chinese contexts.

That being said, regulating the hours of eating appears not to be regarded as a key priority in the practice of Chinese Buddhism. Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that this attitude goes beyond mere local toleration of those who break the rule, and into a sense that the rule itself is foreign:

Dingguang Si: "In Theravāda Buddhism, monastic members must not eat after midday. They are not allowed to go forth if they do not observe fasting. Those who eat after midday are seen to violate the root of the precepts and are discriminated against by people."

Zizhulin: "The Buddha set up this rule for an original reason. But... [p]eople in China do not criticise Buddhist monks and nuns if they disobey this rule."

against faults, especially greed; 4. To cure the frail body, I consume this food as medicine; 5. To achieve cultivation, I receive this food (translated in Chandler, 2004:178). For the discussion of the five contemplations' origin, see Yifa (2002:263n187).

⁴⁹Qing gui 清規, the so-called "rules of purity", originated in the eighth century CE. They particularly focus on guidelines for large Chinese public monasteries (many belonging to Chan lineages), and many of the qing gui rules still follow the original vinaya texts. For details, see Yifa (2002).

Qifu Si: “Here we belong to Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism, which expediently follows conditions for fasting. . . . In Chinese Buddhism, eating after midday is allowable according to an individual’s condition.”

My informant nun at Dingguang Si explicitly pointed out that monastic members in Theravāda societies pay careful attention to the dietary schedule, which is closely related to monastic identity (as this relates to both strict *vinaya* observance and local people’s expectations).⁵⁰ Based on my fieldwork results, it is clear that my interviewees considered fasting to be the norm in most Theravāda Buddhist communities,⁵¹ in stark contrast with Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism. Moreover, this has been the case for generations: “In China, the stress was not on the hours of eating but on the nature of the food” (Welch, 1967:112). Stuart Chandler resonates with Welch’s data remarking that Chinese clerics would pay attention to what food they eat rather than the regulated fast (2004:181). From the above, including the statement made by my informant at Zizhulin, we can heuristically distinguish a key difference between practitioners of the Theravāda and the Mahāyāna traditions regarding monastic identity: dietary schedule versus the nature of food consumed. In general, abstaining from all meat and fish as part of a lifelong vegetarian diet has become not only a major characteristic of Chinese monastic life, but has emerged as another

⁵⁰For example, Buddhist monks and religious women known as *maechi* in Thailand strictly abstain from eating after midday (Cook, 2010:136; Falk, 2007:121; Tambiah, 1970:118; Battaglia, 2007:252). In Myanmar, according to Hiroko Kawanami’s fieldwork results, those religious women known as *thilá-shin* seem to pay great attention to the precept of fasting, to avoid breaking the prohibition against eating after midday, which is considered key to *thilá-shin* religious identity (2013:96-97). In Sri Lanka, fasting is considered one of three “qualities or virtues” determining monastic identity (Abeysekara, 2002:135).

⁵¹While monastic members in Theravāda contexts are expected to adhere strictly to the rule of fasting, it does not mean that all actually do so. For example, although most Sri Lankan people may have an expectation that monks will fast after midday, some monks do eat meals in the evening as supper, but they must do so in private places. In other words, for monastic members in Sri Lanka to eat food publicly after midday is seen as “highly offensive” (Abeysekara, 2002:136). Similarly, one *bhikṣu* told Stuart Chandler that numerous monks in Sri Lanka privately consume “evening snacks” in their living quarters (2006:333n36). According to Richard Gombrich’s fieldwork observations in modern Colombo, besides their two regular meals (breakfast and lunch), most Sri Lankan monks eat snacks seen as “medicine” around six o’clock in the evening. This “medicine” is like drinking liquid within some food that monks do not need to chew it (1988:102).

modality of “fasting” in Chinese Buddhism.⁵² Indeed, as aptly put by John Kieschnick, “Buddhism is closely associated with vegetarianism in China and [vegetarianism] is an important part of Buddhist identity—monks, [and] nuns ... daily affirm their beliefs and distinguish themselves from others by their diet” (2005:186). Buddhist monastic vegetarianism in China, nevertheless, definitely could not have evolved into its current form in one step; rather, it has been facilitated by multiple key factors since the medieval period.⁵³ For example, lay devotees enthusiastic about the Buddhist doctrines of *karma* and rebirth, along with rulers including the Emperor Wu,⁵⁴ have played decisive roles (Kieschnick, 2005:202). From the sixth century down to the present day, monks and nuns in the Chinese milieu have been strictly required to have a vegetarian diet, to the point that if a monk or a nun is seen to eat meat, it will arouse widespread and serious public criticism, sometimes even in the media. Conversely, this criterion cannot apply in Theravāda countries (e.g. Ceylon, Burma, Cambodia and Thailand) where monks eat meat regularly and without adverse comment (Kieschnick, 2005:187); rather, the most serious eating-related criticism of Theravāda monastic members occurs when the rule of fasting after midday is broken. For example, a Buddhist monk in Sri Lanka, where breaking the rule is “highly offensive”, would be severely criticised for eating supper in a restaurant or other public place (Abeysekara, 2002:136). Clearly, laypeople hold very different expectations regarding monastic identity vis-a-vis fasting and vegetarianism in Theravāda and Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhist contexts. This resonates with Kieschnick’s comment that “in China, as elsewhere, the customs

⁵²Chinese Buddhists are also more influenced by Mahāyāna precepts and texts. For example, they not only follow vinaya but also observe bodhisattva rules based on the Fanwang jing 梵網經 (The Brahmā’s Net Sūtra). The third of its 48 minor precepts states that all Buddha’s followers and bodhisattvas are forbidden to eat the flesh of all sentient beings, and those eating meat will commit an immeasurable offense (T24.n1484, p1005b10-12). The Niepan jing 涅槃經 (Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra), meanwhile, says that “meat eaters cut off the seed of mercy” (T12.n374, p386a16).

⁵³For an overview of the history of vegetarianism, see Kieschnick (2005:186-212). For an introduction to the consumption of forbidden food in Chinese Buddhism, see Heirman and Rauw (2006:57-83). For an introduction to Buddhism and Chinese vegetarian culture, see Lin (2006:537-576).

⁵⁴Emperor Wu, during the Southern Liang Dynasty (502-549 CE), wrote the Duan jiu rou wen 斷酒肉文 (On abstinence from alcohol and meat), and issued a decree that Buddhist monks and nuns in China should not eat meat. Kieschnick remarks that the requirement that Chinese monastic members be vegetarian was crucially set by Emperor Wu’s efforts (2005:198).

of monks and nuns were closely tied to the society in which they lived, and the efforts of interested lay people to shape their practice” (2005:202). The present discussion is a good example of how the locals’ ethos crucially affects modes of observing monastic discipline.⁵⁵

V. The Influence of Institutional Types, Leaders, and Teachers

Thus far, I have attempted to capture contemporary Taiwanese and Mainland Chinese nuns’ perceptions of and practices surrounding the rule against eating after midday. While most of my interviewees expressed a flexible attitude toward the rule’s observance, it would be incorrect to assume that all Chinese monastics pay little attention to it, or even that only a few follow it strictly. Rather, some of my informant nuns suggest that a number of members of non-*vinaya*-based institutions eat food only before noon if physical and contextual conditions allow. Additionally, it would appear that those who strictly abstain from eating food after midday mostly stay in *vinaya*-based institutions, which are known for rigorous interpretation and enforcement of monastic rules. Therefore, we could go so far as to argue that institutional types, their leaders and teachers exert considerable influence on how monastic rules – including the precept against eating after midday – are practised. Nanlin nuns’ dietary style and strict rule observance are confirmed via fieldwork observation: they adhere strictly to the rule of eating food before noon here, beginning quite early (the wooden board was hit to summon the assembly at 10.20AM in the winter and 10.30AM at other times of year), and attempting to maintain traditional ascetic diets. The nunnery has built an alms hall in keeping with the spirit of asking for alms, which can also be hard to practise in the Chinese context. As the mealtime approaches the nuns assemble in the front of the main hall, each holding her own alms

⁵⁵It is worth noting that while most Chinese people only demand that Buddhist monks and nuns eat vegetarian food and not that they fast, some masters have appealed to monastic members to fast strictly after midday. For instance, the *vinaya* master Jitao 濟濤 (1904-1978) commented that Buddhist monks and nuns would be criticised severely if laypeople saw them eating fish and meat, but only mildly if they were seen eating food in the afternoon. In Jitao’s view, monastic members should strictly observe precepts (including fasting) as a priority, irrespective of the severity or lack of severity of public condemnation (2005:82-83). According to my Nanlin informant, Master Hongyi 弘一 (1880-1942) and Guang Hua 廣化 (1924-1996) had difficulty making monastic members observe this rule of fasting in the early days of the Chinese Republic and in the early stages of Taiwanese Buddhism.

bowl, then quietly queue for lunch. Laypeople cook and serve the various dishes placed in each nun's alms bowl, conforming to the rule that monastic members may only eat food that has been given to them.⁵⁶ The meal lasts for about an hour and a half to enable the nuns to eat as much as they need to, as this is their last meal of the day, and they must fast until early the next morning.

One Nanlin nun remarked that the precept against eating after noon has developed significantly as compared to the early period of Taiwanese Buddhism.⁵⁷ She was aware of this change due to Master Guang Hua's teaching and influence.⁵⁸ Nanlin nunnery's key guiding teacher, *vinaya* Master Guang Hua (1924-1996), who is widely recognised as one of the most influential monks in Taiwan, urged Buddhist monastics to practice *vinaya* rigorously. In his well-known book *Jie xue qian tan* 戒學淺談 (*Basic Discussions on Vinaya*), he emphasised the importance of the fast after midday because all the Buddha's followers – laity, male and female novices, probationers, monks, nuns and *bodhisattvas* – should be bound by this dietary rule (2006:305-307). He criticised those who do not adhere to it, and in particular those who use the excuse that they are afraid of starvation and malnutrition. In his opinion, during the war of resistance against Japanese aggression (1937-1946), it is believed that most people ate two meals a day without starving to death; therefore, Buddhist monastic members committing the offence of breaking this rule will suffer in Hell after dying (ibid:309). However, Master Guang Hua also showed empathy for those monks or nuns who are ill or have digestive problems, saying they are the exception to this rule.

⁵⁶T22, no.1428, p0735a29-30. "If a bhikṣuṇī puts food or medicines that have not been given to her in her mouth, she [commits an offense], except if it is water or a toothpick, a pācittika" (Translated in Heirman, 2002:534-535).

⁵⁷Yu-Chen Li did her fieldwork in the Enlightening Light Convent 悟光精舍, another *vinaya*-based nunnery in Taiwan, where nuns also observe the fast strictly, much as in Nanlin Nunnery. For details, see Li (2000:151-152).

⁵⁸However, Master Guang Hua met difficulties while popularising the rule at that time. For example, in 1981 he held a post as the master (asheli 阿闍梨, ācārya) and taught śrāmaṇera precepts in the Ordination Hall. During the lecture, one preceptee asked Master Guang Hua about the rule of eating before noon, because the Ordination Unit did not pay attention to this rule, arranging quite a late lunchtime for the preceptees. Did that mean that the preceptees would be committing an offence if they followed the Ordination Hall's lunch schedule? Master Guang Hua answered him honestly, "Yes". The next day, more than half the preceptees did not eat the lunch which was served after midday. The Ordination Unit objected to Master Guang Hua's teaching, and thereafter he was no longer invited to teach monastic rules in the Ordination Hall (Guanghua lüshi yonghuai ji, 2004:118-119).

Pushou Si is a representative example of a Mainland Chinese *vinaya*-based nunnery, where it is well-known that female novices, probationers and nuns strictly abstain from eating food after midday. As in Nanlin, monastics in Pushou Si eat lunch starting around 11.00AM and then fast until early the next morning, around 5.00AM. Ven. Rurui, the abbess of this nunnery, admonishes her disciples to observe Buddhist rules strictly, and to pay careful attention to the precept of fasting: specifically, that Buddhist monastic members should rather die than eat food after midday. Ven. Rurui also cites Master Ouyi,⁵⁹ who wrote of the ten benefits of the precept against eating at undue times: 1) to eradicate the causes of life and death; 2) to manifest the meaning of the Middle Way; 3) to nurse one's health and experience less illness; 4) to revere religious practice; 5) to keep precepts firmly; 6) to enhance the capability of meditation; 7) to increase wisdom; 8) to avoid the realms of hungry ghosts and animals; 9) not to annoy donors; and 10) not to disturb lay attendants (2012:7-10). Additionally, one nun from Dingguang Si (a non-*vinaya*-based nunnery) expressed her view that nuns in Pushou Si usually do not perform heavy labour in the afternoon. Her saying implicitly reveals that Pushou Si could arrange its daily religious schedule to suit both rule observance and the physical and mental conditions of its members. In any event, we can see that Nanlin and Pushou nuns' strict observance of the fast is crucially influenced by the character and type of their institutions, and by those institutions' key teachers' expectations of their disciples.

Leaders and teachers in non-*vinaya*-based institutes, on the other hand, appear to have conceptions of mealtime that differ starkly from those in, for instance, Nanlin and Pushou Si:

Dharma Drum Mountain: “Our monastery is open to laypeople for many Buddhist activities, which take a lot of our physical energy. It is not an ascetic institution, so we need to eat regularly to keep up our strength. Master Sheng Yen tells us we need to eat three meals a day to maintain good health.”

Luminary Nunnery: “In our nunnery, some nuns may wish to observe this precept, but Master Wu Yin is concerned that we may become ill, as many nuns are still young and would not get enough nutrition from only two meals a day. Our monastery is flexible in the observance of this precept on an individual basis.”

⁵⁹Ven. Ouyi Zhixu 藕益 智旭 (1599-1655) was a famous monk of the Ming Dynasty who wrote various Buddhist works, focusing particularly on the doctrines of the Tiantai School.

Chongfu Si: “Here, most student nuns who have received the *śikṣamāṇā* precepts obey this rule. However, we do not insist that student nuns do not eat after midday, as this religious practice is a matter for the individual[.]”

During my fieldwork observations, I ate with nuns in the Dharma Drum Mountain and Luminary nunnery and found that their evening meal consisted simply of leftovers from lunch. In Foguangshan and its branch in Taipei, Pumen Temple, three meals are provided;⁶⁰ this is likely to be related to the fact that Master Hsing Yun, the abbot of Foguangshan, has written that among the ten precepts of *śrāmaṇera*, some are difficult to observe strictly, including the precept of not eating after midday (2009:38-39). Whether obtained via interviews, observation or documentary sources, my data suggest that leaders and teachers in Humanistic Buddhist institutes and nuns’ colleges maintain flexible attitudes toward fasting, to the extent that their disciples can decide to eat after midday according to personal choice and physical condition. As Xiaochao Wang (2007:175) points out, religious organisations generally revere their founders or leaders, whose words, deeds and writings often become the basis for their institutional norms and systems. In the present context, this dictum helps us to understand how the institutional leader (Master Sheng Yen, Wu Yin, and Hsing Yun) and guiding teacher (in Chongfu Si) influences his/her disciples in their Buddhist beliefs and practices. In other words, this factor exerts considerable influence on how the rules – including the precept against eating after midday – are practised, and plays a crucial role in explaining how Chinese nuns may observe Buddhist precepts differently in various institutions, i.e., as a result of the leaders’ or teachers’ personal interpretation of each rule.

Additionally, it would appear that institutional types have also strongly influenced the way the precepts are observed. Dharma Drum Mountain, Luminary Nunnery⁶¹ and Foguangshan are more closely engaged with society, as they practise Humanistic Buddhism.⁶² My informant nuns in these institutions mentioned that

⁶⁰For detailed introduction to dining conditions in Foguangshan, see Chandler (2004:178-183).

⁶¹The abbess of Luminary Nunnery, Master Wu Yin, has been greatly influenced by Taixu’s and Yinshun’s teachings, and has followed the ideas of Humanistic Buddhism (DeVido, 2010:91; Yü, 2010:191-224).

⁶²A detailed discussion of Humanistic Buddhism is beyond the scope of this research, but these are some general key points: a crucial role was played by Master Taixu 太虛 in the early twentieth century. He advocated “Life Buddhism” (rensheng fojiao 人生佛教) whereby Buddhist monastic members should contribute to society by involving themselves in the world through

they work and render service to society, which may involve relatively high levels of physical activity. This is in line with Humanistic Buddhism's institutional objectives of caring for and contributing to the community and the world, and ensuring the future of Buddhism. Sheng Yen and Wu Yin's greater flexibility with regard to their disciples' adherence to the rule against eating after midday may arise from concern for their followers' physical health and nourishment. On the other hand, the late Ven. Longlian maintained a flexible attitude towards fasting for her student nuns at Sichuan Buddhist Higher Institute for *Bhikṣuṇīs*,⁶³ apparently because she regarded this practice as purely voluntary, though the importance of an adequate diet – especially for young student nuns with many activities, including evening study – also played a role in the development of her stance (Religion in China, 1995:43; Bianchi, 2001:81).

The teacher nun at Chongfu Si does not require her student nuns to strictly observe the precept of not eating after midday, because she considers this to be a matter of individual religious practice. Her statements also implicitly manifest the fact that Chongfu Si, as a nuns' college, emphasises education and Buddhist doctrine more than strict adherence to *vinaya* practices. It would also appear that non-*vinaya*-based institutions in different settings and with various foci exhibit a greater variety of practices with regard to the precept of fasting than *vinaya*-based ones do. Indeed, each nunnery or monastery I have visited exhibits its own unique institutional characteristics and objectives, emphases on religious practices, and viewpoint on the observance of monastic rules. The diversity of opinions on the applicability of the rule against eating after midday reminds us of the wider problem of pluralism: the different attitudes and values surrounding the observation of precepts relate to varying conditions and contexts, religious practices, ways of propagating Buddhism (both individually and institutionally), the adaptability and flexibility of Buddhism, and the level of interaction between society and laity.

Mahāyāna Buddhist teachings (Schak and Hsiao, 2005:3-4). Master Taixu's revival movement has subsequently developed, yielding significant results particularly in Taiwan under his famous disciple Master Yinshun 印順 who arrived there after the Communist takeover of Mainland China in 1949. He continued to follow Taixu's reforming concept, but changed Taixu's previous slogan to "Humanistic Buddhism" or "Buddhism in the Human Realm" (renjian fojiao 人間佛教), and encouraged Buddhist monastic members to practice an active form of Buddhism in interaction with the social community (Chandler, 2006:185-186). Yinshun was also more concerned with the secularisation of Buddhist practice than Taixu had been (Jones, 1999:134). For details, see Pittman (2001).

⁶³The nuns' college which has recently been moved to Qifu Si, a newly built nunnery in Pengzhou, near the modern city of Chengdu.

Conclusion

From the early period of Buddhism to the present day, the precept of not eating after midday has been the subject of considerable debate. Through a contextualised examination of how the rule against eating after midday is interpreted and practised in contemporary Mahāyāna Buddhist nunneries in Taiwan and Mainland China, I have identified variations that can be attributed both to the typology of Buddhist institutions and to crucial socio-cultural contextual factors (e.g. the importance to work and vegetarianism). While most of my informant nuns in Taiwan and Mainland China took a relatively flexible view of observance of the precept, some also stressed that there has been more adherence to fasting recently. Although the monasteries in which my fieldwork has been conducted are not representative of all Buddhist institutions in Taiwan and Mainland China, explorations of specific rules such as this one are potentially crucial to our understanding of the diversity of practices more generally, and for shedding light on that bigger picture. Most importantly, the practice of fasting after midday should not be interpreted in a reductionist mode, as part of a dichotomy between fasting and not fasting, since it has a number of complex implications that have been discussed above; nor can any one of these factors be isolated as a principal driver of current Chinese nuns' perceptions of and practices surrounding the precept.

On the other hand, some monastic members – in the Mahāyāna as well as in the Theravāda tradition – may strictly abstain from taking any solid food after noon as they think that this is fundamental to their religious identity. My fieldwork results, however, remain inconclusive with regard to the question of the precise relation, if any, between level of religious devotion and level of adherence to the fasting precept. One informant nun at Chongfu Si spoke explicitly about this matter: she was quite strongly against the idea that the mere fact of fasting or not fasting could or should be used as a yardstick of monastic members' religious devotion, or even of the strictness of their adherence to monastic rules in general.⁶⁴ In her opinion, the rule against

⁶⁴Her statement clearly echoes the views of the founder of Dharma Drum Mountain, Master Sheng Yen, who does not sanction the notion that following the rule of fasting after midday gives Buddhist monastic members superior minds (2007[1963]:188).

eating after noon is not the root of rules,⁶⁵ but (some) people nevertheless treat it as such to assess monastics. She said that she and other teacher nuns never judge a student's religious devotion by whether or not they eat after midday, and instead judge them by how they treat people and other aspects of behaviour. Uniquely among my informants, this nun suggested that those who insist upon this rule may have themselves harbour thoughts of tasting food without peaceful and pure mind when they see other people eating. She concluded by saying that keeping this rule does not enable you to see clearly into someone else's inner religious nature. Her viewpoint echoes the Sri Lankan monk Dhammadinna's comment that he does not abstain from taking solid food after midday, a practice that "has nothing to with the Buddha's philosophy" (Abeysekara, 2002:136). Dhammadinna likewise disapproved of Sri Lankan people only judging monastic identity according to the presence or absence of fasting, instead of paying attention to Buddhist monks' "inner side" (ibid). In short, the question of fasting after midday – complex and controversial though it is – can provide, at best, a fairly superficial evaluation of individual monastic members' religious devotion and level of rule-observance.

Abbreviations

T. *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經, J. Takakusu, K. Watanabe (eds.), Tōkyō. (CBETA) edition

X. *Shinsan dainihon zokuzōkyō* 新纂大日本續藏經, K. Kawamura (eds.), Tōkyō. (CBETA) edition

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⁶⁵To kill, to steal, to have sexual intercourse and to lie about one's spiritual achievement are such severe offences that any monastic who commits these transgressions can no longer remain a Buddhist monastic and is expelled from the saṃgha.

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The Mass Murderer who owes his Existence to Ignorance of Pali

Richard Gombrich

The Buddhist monastic rule against killing a human being is obviously important, indeed fundamental. But the story of how the Buddha first came to pronounce it is inconsistent and implausible. On the one hand, it occurs in every version of the Buddhist legal code, the Vinaya, and therefore also in commentaries on those texts; on the other hand, it is hardly ever mentioned elsewhere. This article shows that the story came about through a misunderstanding of a phrase which we find in the Pali version of the rule. This misunderstanding is already present in the Pali canonical auto-commentary, so it is very ancient. Since they repeat virtually the same story, this also proves that parallel versions of the Vinaya preserved in Chinese may well depend on the Pali version (or something extremely close to it). On the other hand, evidence preserved in the Mahāsāṅghika Vinaya takes us back further towards the original, quite different, story of how the rule itself came into being. But even this presupposes the wording of the rule which is preserved, albeit with its meaning unrecognised, in the Pali Canon.

I. General Introduction

This is a study of a Buddhist monastic rule. It shows how misunderstanding of a tiny detail, the failure to recognise a single word in a Pali text, has had massive consequences, of several kinds, for the Buddhist tradition. I think this

is so important that Buddhist experts must forgive me if, in order to reach a wide audience, I spell out details which they are entitled to consider elementary.

The most ancient Buddhist texts have always been divided into two categories. One establishes rules for Buddhist monks and nuns, the Saṅgha. Both the texts containing the rules, and the body of rules themselves, are known as the Vinaya, which can be translated “the Discipline”. In the other category are the rest of the Buddha’s teachings, which are conveyed in a huge number of texts, most of them called suttas.

These texts are preserved, in whole or in part, in several languages, but the oldest surviving version is in Pali, a language derived from Sanskrit. Pali is a form of Middle Indo-Aryan, also known as Prakrit, a family of languages descended from Sanskrit. It is not identical with what the Buddha spoke himself, but is not very distant from it. The words and sound changes with which this article is concerned could well occur in another form of Middle Indo-Aryan in which the same text could have existed (see below), but this would barely affect my argument.

Most of the Pali Vinaya has been translated only once: into English, by I.B. Horner. Her translation is admirable as pioneering work, but does contain quite a few mistakes, some of them serious. A commentary on the Vinaya was written, probably in the fifth century AD in Sri Lanka, in the Pali language. Almost none of it has been translated. Though it is perhaps seven or eight centuries later than the text it comments on, it is based on much older material and must be taken into account.

A substantial section of the Vinaya is concerned with the rules of personal conduct for monks and nuns. Those for monks come before those for nuns.

The rules are grouped by gravity of the offense, and the groups are arranged in descending order of gravity. Thus the gravest offenses a monk¹ can commit come at the beginning. There are four offenses in this category, and those who commit them are called *pārājika*; they are debarred from the Saṅgha and automatically revert to lay status. The several views of the etymology of *pārājika* need not concern us.² Horner translates it “one who is defeated”.

¹Since all the material dealt with in this paper concerns monks, from here on I use only the masculine pronoun. The fact that nuns too are forbidden to kill etc. is not relevant to my argument.

²For an excellent discussion of the meaning and reference of *pārājika*, see Juo-Hsüeh Shih, pp.126ff.

The presentation and discussion of the rules in the Vinaya follow a set pattern. A story is told about some episode concerning a monk or monks which has a bad conclusion; often it is that the laity complain about it and wonder whether the monks are worthy of their support. The Buddha gets to hear about it, and often questions witnesses. Then he enunciates a rule, mentioning under which category of gravity it falls. This is not necessarily the end of it. Sometimes there follow one or more subsidiary episodes which lead the Buddha to add to or otherwise modify the rule in some way, until it reaches its final form. Then there is a section of text called the *pada-vañṇanā*, “explanation of the wording”, which in the style of a commentary explains each word of the rule with synonyms and examples.

This is a code of law, not of ethics, and that distinction is often crucial. The most basic and widely used Buddhist ethical code begins with the general undertakings to abstain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct and lying; the four *pārājika* rules deal with the same four areas but each with a much more specific focus. The third *pārājika* listed and discussed is the taking of life. Whereas the general undertaking is not to take any life, the *pārājika* only concerns human life.

A monk can only be guilty of an offense if he knows that it is an offense and admits to having done it. This admission is made to the Buddha. Thus madness is always a defense; and a first offender can never be punished, because when he acted there was no rule yet.

It follows from the above that the exposition of each *pārājika* rule must deal with an occasion on which a monk or monks, for the first time on record, did something which the Buddha decided was incompatible with being a Saṅgha member, so that he enunciated a rule against it. In our particular case, the third *pārājika*, the story must therefore show that one day a monk or monks took human life without thinking that they were doing wrong. A moment’s reflection will show us that there will not be all that many cases in which a monk may take human life while thinking that he is doing no wrong.

II. The strange story of the origin of the third *pārājika*.

The story which leads up to the enactment of the third *pārājika*³ is also to be found, with minor variants, elsewhere in the Canon: *Samyutta Nikāya* sutta 54.9

³Vin III, 68-71.

at SN V 320,7 to 322,13. Both versions are discussed in a fine recent article by Bhikkhu Anālayo, “Asubha Gone Overboard, On the Mass Suicide of Monks in Discourse and Vinaya Literature”.⁴ Anālayo kindly allowed me to provide an “Addendum” to his article in which I cast doubt on the coherence and plausibility of this story; but here I go much further. My article builds on certain parts of Anālayo’s and could not have been written without it.

The Vinaya story goes as follows. The Buddha teaches monks a form of meditation which is always known as the meditation (*bhāvanā*) on asubha. Asubha is hard to translate: it covers a range which includes unpleasant, nasty, unattractive, inauspicious, impure. In this context it refers to taking a negative view of the human body, beginning with one’s own, and it can be seen as a counterweight to sexual desire. After giving this teaching, the Buddha goes into a solitary retreat for a fortnight.

The monks who set about practising this new form of meditation get so nauseated by their bodies that they start killing themselves and each other. Many of them then approach a certain individual and ask him to kill them, in return for which he can have from each the bowl and robe which are normally a monk’s only possessions. He agrees to this bargain, stabbing them with a knife. We shall have more to say about the individual’s identity below. His name varies in the texts.

The hired murderer goes to a river to wash the blood off his knife, and begins to regret what he has done. But he is visited by a female spirit from the retinue of Māra. Māra is the personification of Death and Desire, who on other occasions appears to the Buddha and tries to tempt him to die.⁵ This follower of Māra tells the murderer that he has earned great merit because he has “taken across those who had not crossed”. Life in this world, *saṃsāra*, is often compared to a body of water one has to cross. As the commentary partly explains, for a Buddhist, crossing it means attaining enlightenment, so that one is not reborn; but the wicked spirit is here confusing that with crossing it simply by dying. The murderer is misled, and embarks on a vast slaughter of monks lasting several days. Going from cell to cell, he says, “Who has not crossed? Whom am I to bring across?” The monks who had not yet attained dispassion were terrified, but those who had attained it (i.e., were enlightened) kept calm. However, the text does not tell us that the murderer killed only those in the former category,

⁴JOCBS vol.7, 2014, pp.11-55.

⁵DN II, 104 and 112; Padhāna Sutta (= Sutta-nipāta 446 ff.).

and indeed the commentary implies the opposite, for it says that all five hundred monks were killed.⁶

Emerging from his retreat, the Buddha finds that there are now far fewer monks, and asks why. He is told what has happened. He does not respond directly, but asks that all monks living in that area should assemble. When they do, he teaches them how to concentrate on their breathing, a form of meditation which he says is calming and destroys all wrong states of mind. Only after teaching this does he get back to the problem at hand and ask if it is true that monks have been killing themselves and each other. When they confirm it, the Buddha makes his stereotyped denunciation of wrongdoing, ending as usual with the new rule. Horner translates it: “Whatever monk should intentionally deprive a human being of life, or should look about so as to be his knife-bringer, he is also one who is defeated, he is not in communion.”⁷

The text goes on to describe another, unconnected, episode in which some monks cause a man to die; in this case they do so by encouraging a layman who is ill to bring about his own death by indulging in an unhealthy diet. The Buddha then extends the rule so that it specifically includes commending death, but the first part of it (down to “knife-bringer” in Horner’s version) is unaltered. At this point,⁸ Horner says that “for lack of any better interpretation” she is following the commentary. But alas, she has misunderstood the commentary. This however hardly matters, as the commentary, which offers two possible interpretations, has not understood the passage either.⁹

There are thus three ways in which one may commit the third *pārājika*. Firstly, one may simply murder a human being. Secondly one may seek a person or thing to commit such a murder. Thirdly, one may kill someone by commending death to them so that they cause the death themselves. In this paper I shall be mainly concerned with the second form of the offense. The third will be briefly discussed at the end of this paper.

If we leave the third form of the offense aside, the text that has come down to us cannot possibly be correct. When the Buddha pronounces a new Vinaya rule, he always addresses it to the person (a monk or nun) who has done the act which he now declares to be an offense. But that is not what happens here. The person who,

⁶Sp. II, 401.

⁷Book of the Discipline I, p.123.

⁸Id., p.125, fn.2.

⁹See below; Sp. II, 441.

according to the story, did all the killing is not even a Buddhist (even if we shall see that there is a faint attempt to suggest that he is masquerading as one), is not present when the rule is pronounced, and cannot be within the Buddha's jurisdiction; those who persuaded him to set about the killing are presumably all dead!

There is another important consideration. In a monograph published on the website of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies, www.ocbs.org,¹⁰ two monks of the Theravada tradition, Ven Sujato and Ven Brahmali, argue – to my mind convincingly – that the narratives given in the Pali Canon are mostly sober and coherent. Myths are clearly marked as such, but there is hardly any display of lurid imaginings. They write: “The early Buddhist texts are generally realistic and restrained in their portrayal of the Buddha and his environment, and the details do not seem unreasonable for what we know of the historical period and geographical area” (p.73).

III. Pali words misunderstood: why a silly story was invented.

So how did this nonsensical story come to be composed? The answer must be that a remembered text, including the rule against killing a human being, was misunderstood, and in an attempt to make sense of it the new material was invented.

The problem arose from the words which Horner translates “or should look about so as to be his knife-bringer”, *sattha-hāraṇaṃ vāssa pariyeseyya*. I must account for every detail, so let me clear the ground by saying that in the text:

- *vā* means “or” and serves to connect these words to the previous clause;
- *assa* is the genitive of a common pronoun and means “of him” or “for him”; *vā* and *assa* merge phonetically to form *vāssa*;
- *pariyeseyya* is the optative third person singular of the verb *pariyesati*, which means “look for, seek”. It is in the optative because its subject is the subject of the rule, namely a *pārājika* offender: “whatever monk ... should look for ...”.

¹⁰ Ven. Sujato and Ven. Brahmali, The Authenticity of the Early Buddhist Texts, supplement to vol.5 of the JOCBS, 2014.

So what is still unclear boils down to *sattha-hāraḥaṃ*, the thing or person which is being looked for.

We need help from another canonical text which is not telling the same story but uses the same vocabulary. Fortunately there is one: the *Puṇṇovāda sutta*, *Majjhima Nikāya* sutta 145. In this text, the Buddha and the monk Puṇṇa are discussing the latter's intention to become a missionary in a remote region called Sunāparantaka, where they believe that people may well react to him with active hostility. They consider a series of possible reactions in ascending order of violence, culminating in the possibility that the locals will kill him. What, asks the Buddha, does Puṇṇa think of that?

He replies¹¹ that sometimes people feel such self-disgust that they *sattha-hāraḥaṃ* pariyesanti: “they look for a *sattha-hāraḥaṃ*.” He goes on: *Taṃ me idaṃ apariyitthaṃ*¹² *yeva sattha-hāraḥaṃ laddhaṃ*. In Pali it is a passive sentence; a literal translation would be: “So this *satthahāraḥaṃ* has been acquired by me even unlooked for.” The natural English would be in the active: “So I have acquired this *sattha-hāraḥaṃ* without even looking for it.”

The word *hāraḥa*, the second half of the compound, is an adjective from the common verb *harati*, which basically means “to take, take away”. But other scholars ancient and modern besides Horner have given it the unlikely meaning of “bring”. They did this because they misunderstood *sattha*.

The grammar sets limits to how we can translate *sattha-hāraḥaṃ*. It has to be the grammatical subject of the sentence, and the neuter pronoun *idaṃ* (“this”) agrees with it. Since it is neuter, not masculine or feminine, it cannot refer to a person. It must mean “thing which takes away life”. But can *sattha* mean “life”?

Sattha is a very common word meaning “weapon”, usually a cutting weapon like a knife or dagger, and in a context which concerns killing, it is natural to assume that someone – the murderer – is bringing (though not taking away!) a weapon. But this *sattha* is quite a different word, and because the misinterpretation of the passages that concern us is so ancient, this word *sattha* is not in any dictionary.¹³ However, that does not mean that our understanding of it is dubious or far-fetched.

¹¹MN III, 269.

¹²There is a variant reading *apariyittham*; this makes no difference at all.

¹³This is not strictly accurate, because in the PED it appears as a headword on p.674a, but the dictionary gives neither its meaning nor an example of its use; it only refers the reader to the entry for *vissattha*, which in turn contains nothing relevant. The PED has six headwords *sattha*; the others are however irrelevant here.

IV. So what did this part of the *pārājika* rule originally mean, and how do we know?

Pali is closely related to Sanskrit, and in particular Pali phonetics is related to Sanskrit phonetics in a regular way, which has been described by grammarians. Since Pali has fewer phonemes than Sanskrit, there are many instances where a Pali word is so constructed that it could come from more than one Sanskrit word, and we have to decide from the context which of the homophones is meant. Thus, for example, Pali *sutta* may be derived from Sanskrit *supta*, *sūtra* or *sūkta* – without any context, one cannot decide which.

Pali *sattha* “weapon” derives from Sanskrit *śastra*. In this case, however, *sattha* must derive from Sanskrit *śvasta*. The verbal root *śvas* means “breathe”, and by a normal derivation, its past passive participle, *śvasita*, can mean “breath”. Many Sanskrit past participles which are formed by adding –ta add –ita instead in Pali, and the opposite also occurs; for example, the Sanskrit root *vas* “to dwell” has Pali past participles both *vusita* and *vuttha*. So the extra –i- in the middle of the word is no problem. Therefore Pali *sattha-hāraṇam* would in Sanskrit be *śvasita-hāraṇam*. Both literally mean “taking away breath”. In Pali this is a very common, perhaps the commonest, way of referring to killing. In such a context the word most commonly used for breath is *pāṇa* (from Sanskrit *prāṇa*); for example that is the first word in what in English is usually referred to as “the first precept”, namely the undertaking not to kill.

Thus we should emend Horner’s translation of the rule to read: “Whatever monk should intentionally deprive a human being of life, or should look for something to take away a human being’s life-breath, ...” The second clause describes preparing to commit a murder.

In sum, then, my basic claim – which I believe to be an important discovery – is that where the third *pārājika* rule prohibits looking for something lethal, a means by which to murder someone, this has been misunderstood as looking for a person to do the killing, and this is the origin of the story which precedes the enunciation of the rule.

Note that there is no story here about the first form of the offense, just killing someone. This I shall show to be relevant to my final interpretation.

V. Where did the tradition go off the rails?

The earliest commentary on *sattha-hāraka* is at Vin III 73 in the *pada-vaṇṇanā* (word commentary) which immediately follows the enunciation of the rule in its final form. Glossing the word *sattha*, it takes it as “weapon” and gives eight examples of things that can be used to kill with: sword, dagger, arrow, cudgel, stone, knife, poison and a rope. (The words that I have here translated as “sword”, “dagger” and “knife” are generally synonyms, and the last of them is *sattha*, so that here *sattha* is its own hyponym; but none of this has any bearing on my argument.) By this stage, the tradition has gone comprehensively awry.

From this development, we can draw an important conclusion. The story that resulted from the misunderstanding is also found in the versions of the Vinaya preserved in the canons of other Buddhist sects which have been preserved in Chinese translations. Later I shall show that one version, the *Mahāsaṅghika* Vinaya, contains (in addition to that story) material which appears to derive from a more ancient form of the text, so it is possible that that is where the misunderstanding first arose. But I shall argue that it is more likely that it arose from the Pali version; and if that is so, the other versions are later than the Pali one. (Of course the Pali tradition has itself almost certainly undergone later changes.)

VI. More about the story’s absurdity.

Now let me say more about the imaginary murderer. Anālayo notes that there are slightly different versions of his name, and decides to use *Migalaṇḍika*. This name is found nowhere else. The word *miga* can mean “wild beast”; *laṇḍika* does not exist. One would expect a name which is made up for a colourful character in an invented story to have an appropriate meaning; that is what seems to have happened here.

Laddhi means “wrong view”; PED says it is a later alternative (i.e., synonym) for *diṭṭhi*, which one could describe as an early Buddhist technical term. In the commentary, the murderer’s name is given as *Migaladdhika*, with *Migalaṇḍika* as a variant reading.¹⁴ *Migaladdhika* would mean “holding a bestial wrong view”. The Vinaya commentary explains why this name fits him. The divine acolyte of Māra who encountered him, while he was washing his bloody knife,

¹⁴Sp II p.399.

persuaded him of the wrong view (laddhi) that only dead people could be freed from rebirth in *saṃsāra*, thus giving him the reason to go on killing the monks.¹⁵ This seems neat until one realises that – if he really existed -- presumably he had his name before this encounter with the deity, and of course he had been committing murders before he met her.

This suggests to me that the story arose in two stages. First a bogus ascetic (see next paragraph) is persuaded to kill a monk by being invited to inherit that monk's bowl and robes. Then someone inserts that he killed "lots" (*sambahule*) of monks, and someone else, faced with this version, realises that the pseudo-ascetic killer would hardly want to have lots of bowls and robes, so he needs to find a better motivation, and brings in the heretical view that one cannot be free from rebirth until one is dead. This argument of mine is merely a hypothesis; but it does, I think show that the story is incoherent even internally, and probably arose in more than one stage.

His name apart, the Vinaya text says only one thing about the man: that he is a *samaṇa-kuttaka*. In the *Saṃyutta* version he is said to be a brahmin, but there is no such claim in the Vinaya texts. *Samaṇa* means "renunciate", a term which covers Buddhist monks and many other professional ascetics. The PED 220b gives *samaṇa-kuttaka* as "sham ascetic" but cites only this passage, which thus gets us nowhere: the word *kuttaka* does not appear elsewhere, so it may be a corrupt reading. The Vinaya commentary¹⁶ interprets the expression to mean that he dresses as a *samaṇa*; it gives no

help with *kuttaka*, Monier-Williams' Sanskrit dictionary has a word *kuṭṭaka* meaning "grinder, pulveriser", which might perhaps be thought to fit. But I would prefer to give up this problem, because not much hangs on this word.

The story has other absurdities. Though I have mentioned them briefly in my "Addendum" to Anālayo's article, I shall repeat them here.

We know that Roman warriors sometimes committed suicide by getting someone to hold a sword onto which they threw themselves; Japanese warriors (*samurai*) had almost the same custom; but is there any other trace of this custom, or any similar form of assisted suicide, in India?

Buddhists believed that if one killed oneself, one would not escape from corporeal existence but be reborn in another body – but probably in worse circumstances, because one had died by self-inflicted violence.

¹⁵Sp II p.401, lines 3-6.

¹⁶Sp. II 399.

An even more startling discrepancy is that the story reflects amazingly badly on the Buddha. For a fortnight he stays nearby, quite unaware of the terrible things happening outside his retreat, even though someone arrives daily to provide his food. Not only does this impugn his omniscience: it shows him guilty of a shocking misjudgement: failing to foresee the effect of his own preaching. Anālayo mentions this, most pointedly in notes 119 and 120 and the related text in his article, but goes no further than calling it “remarkable”. Yet is any comparable episode recorded elsewhere?

Indeed, how is it that so spectacular an event is hardly ever mentioned outside this immediate context, either in the Buddhist texts or in the polemics of non-Buddhist religious literature? Did the Buddhists themselves believe this story? What does this tell us about their attitudes to their own texts?

VII. An abbreviated version in the *Samyutta Nikāya*.

In this and the next section I discuss what happened to this story in other Pali texts. Readers who are only interested in the original ruling may wish to skip this part and pick up my argument at section 9.

Anālayo begins his article, which has different emphases from mine, with a short sutta from the *Samyutta Nikāya* (SN V, 320-2); this is the only Pali sutta to mention this episode. The text he translates and discusses for us is not this Pali version but the parallel version in the Chinese translation of the *Samyukta Āgama*, which I shall soon allude to. The sutta follows parts of the Vinaya story very closely, almost verbatim, but leaves a great deal of it out completely.

In this Pali text, the Buddha teaches the meditation on asubha, and starts a fortnight’s retreat. The monks start practising what he has just taught them and become disgusted with their own bodies. The tragic result is described in only just over two lines.

They *sattha-hāraṇaṃ* pariyesanti (p.320 line 23). Ten monks in one day *satthaṃ āharanti*, then 20 do the same in one day, then 30. Then the Buddha comes out of his retreat, his disciple Ānanda tells him what has happened, and his response, exactly as in the Vinaya, is to have Ānanda convene the monks, to whom he then teaches mindfulness on breathing. End of sutta.

There is here no mention of anyone like Migaladdhika. In the Chinese parallel text his story is told exactly as it occurs in the Vinaya, but here there is no trace of it. Has the Pali version simply decided to leave it out?

A close look shows that things are more complicated than that. When on

p.320 line 23 the text says that the wretched monks *sattha-hārakam* pariyesanti, the meaning of that phrase which fits is what we have shown to be the original one: they “look for something to take life”. However, in the very next sentence it says that a lot of monks then *sattham āharanti*. Here *sattham* cannot possibly mean “life”, and the verb meaning “take” has been given a prefix *ā*, which reverses the meaning so that it means “bring”. The monks bring what? Here *sattha* can only mean a cutting weapon. These monks are committing suicide. That is very appropriate for a context which is discussing whether a particular type of meditation is dangerously depressing. But it does not suit a vinaya context, because the only deaths in this version of the story have occurred by suicide, and not even instigated suicide, so there is no basis here for a monastic offense. And indeed, this text does not make any mention of vinaya matters.

As Anālayo points out¹⁷, this short text in the *Samyutta Nikāya* is in a section which is devoted to the meditation on breathing (*ānāpāna*)¹⁸, and the second half of it is about how the meditation on breathing brings calm and happiness. The point of the sutta is clearly to contrast the two types of meditation and their effects. That they are thus juxtaposed makes perfect sense here – in fact, it is the very point of the text; so we may deduce that when this meditation on breathing, in almost the same words, is taught by the Buddha in the Vinaya text, it has been moved to there, inappropriately, from here.

However, this text has its own incoherence, though it is relatively minor. Depressed by this new form of meditation, the monks look for something to take their own lives; here the text has the term from the *pārājika* rule, *sattha-hārakam*, and its original meaning of “something lethal” fits perfectly. But it seems that though the composer of the text understands the general meaning correctly, he does not know enough Pali to understand why it means what it does. He takes *sattha* in its commonest meaning, “sharp weapon”, and since *hāra* in the meaning of “take away” would not fit, he emends the text he inherits by inserting an *ā*.

It is not unusual for people to know the meaning of some text, for example in a liturgy, without understanding the individual words. Fieldwork among rural Buddhists in Sri Lanka has shown that almost everyone can recite the Five Precepts, and most people have a good knowledge of what they mean, but rather

¹⁷I shall not at every point indicate whether I agree or slightly disagree with Anālayo; I merely encourage my readers to read his article too.

¹⁸It is section LIV in the whole *Samyutta Nikāya*, section X in the *Mahāvagga*.

few know the meanings of the individual Pali words.¹⁹

I mentioned above that the version of this sutta preserved in Chinese does include the whole Migaladdhika episode. I think it far more likely that the *Samyutta* text originally did not contain this, as it was irrelevant to the text; but then someone who dealt with this in another branch of the tradition, whether because he wanted to show off his own learning, or because he felt that the more of the tradition he could cram in, the better, “restored” it.

VIII. What about the commentaries?

In the previous section I have argued that the monk who put that sutta together probably understood what was meant where the text said *sattha-hāraṇakaṃ* pariyesanti, but, chiefly because he did not recognise that *sattha* could mean “breath”, then created a muddle in trying to explain the words. We find varieties of the same situation in the Pali commentaries, composed many centuries later.

I begin with the Vinaya commentary²⁰, because I think it may well have influenced the other commentaries on this point. Glossing *sattha-hāraṇaka*, it says that *hāraṇaka* means that it takes (*harati*), and what it takes is life. “Or better (*atha vā*), *hāraṇaka* is what is to be taken, meaning what is to be supplied (*upanikkhipitabbam*); so *sattha-hāraṇaka* is both *sattha* and *hāraṇaka*.” “Looking for it means acting so as to get it, supplying it, and by this he shows that he is not talking about something which does not move, otherwise merely going to look for it would be a *pārājika* offense, which is incorrect.” At this point the commentator seems to say that bringing a movable weapon must be involved for it to constitute a *pārājika* offense. No one else seems to have followed this contorted interpretation. However, other commentators have as it were tried to translate *sattha* twice, glossing it as “life” and then translating it as “weapon” as well.

Thus the commentary on the *Samyutta* begins²¹ by glossing *sattha-hāraṇakaṃ* as *jīvita-haraṇaka-satthaṃ*, a mixture of right and wrong. First the commentator glosses *sattha* as *jīvita*, “life”, which is correct, but then he cannot get rid of the idea that *sattha* means “weapon”, so he inserts it redundantly in the wrong place, and ends up with “life-taking weapon” (*haraṇaka* is equivalent to *hāraṇaka*.) He

¹⁹Richard F. Gombrich, *Precept and Practice*, p.254.

²⁰Sp III 441.

²¹*Sārattha-ppakāsinī* III 268.

goes on to say that not only did the monks seek weapons and commit suicide but they also got hold of the sham ascetic Migalaṇḍika and asked him to kill them. Then he adds that no one who had entered the stream towards enlightenment killed anyone, incited anyone to kill, or approved of killing, but those less advanced (*puṭhujjanā*) did all those things. This reminds us of the distinction made in the Vinaya story between the monks who had attained dispassion and those who had not. Since every monk had to learn the *pārājika* stories as part of his training, it is not surprising that we find such traces of influence.

The commentary on the *Punṇovāda Sutta*²² likewise has the gloss *jīvita-hāraḥ* *sattham*, both right and wrong as above. It adds nothing of interest.

IX. So who did first commit the third *pārājika*?

I have traced a series of stages through which, I argue, the story which we now read in the Pali Vinaya has evolved, but the fact remains that none of this gets us back to a version which remotely resembles what a vinaya rule should look like. What is that? I have explained that the Buddha formulates each rule to meet the case of a monk who has misbehaved, and does so in the presence of that monk, who admits his guilt. That means, of course, that the relevant misbehaviour cannot be suicide.

Several versions of the Vinaya survive in Chinese translation. Of these, four are the Pali version and three others²³ closely parallel to it. One, probably of much later origin, is so unlike the others that it cannot be used to draw deductions.²⁴ This leaves the *Mahāsaṅghika* Vinaya, which is ancient but has important differences from the group of four which I describe as parallel. Those four all contain a very similar account of the third *pārājika*.

When I gave a version of this paper in the Buddhist Studies Centre of Hong Kong University, Andrew Ananda Lau spoke in the discussion and briefly drew attention to the *Mahāsaṅghika* version. Since I know no Chinese, I asked my friend Dr Kuan Tse-fu to tell me what that said; I am much indebted to him for his full reply, which I here summarise.

The *Mahāsaṅghika* version contains no less than four accounts of what led

²²Papañca-sūdanī V 85.

²³The Dharmaguptaka, Mahīśāsaka, and Sarvāstivādin.

²⁴This is the Mūlasarvāstivādin, It is incomplete in Chinese.

up to the Buddha's pronouncing the third *pārājika* rule. The last,²⁵ and by far the longest, is very close to the version in the Pali Vinaya and its three parallels: monks, demoralised by the practice of *asubha bhāvanā*, embark on mass suicide, in which they are much aided by a member of another sect, who is clearly the same as our Migaladdhika. (His name in Chinese means "Deer-stick", which suggests an Indian original something like Migadaṇḍika.) On his return to the scene, the Buddha diverts the monks to the practice of mindful breathing.

But what about the other three stories? Since they come earlier in the text, it is reasonable to suppose that they were there first. Dr. Kuan writes:²⁶ "These three stories all state that an attendant monk was tired of looking after a sick monk, who intended to die.

Story 1: the attendant monk killed the sick monk with his own hand.

Story 2: the attendant monk sought someone who held a knife to kill the sick monk.

Story 3: the attendant monk praised death and incited the sick monk to suicide."

It is immediately obvious that these three stories correspond to the three forms of the offense of taking human life. Moreover, in each story the offender is a monk, so he can be – indeed, he must be – the person whom the Buddha reprimands for having committed the offense.

It is also obvious that the three stories are variants on a single situation and cannot possibly reflect a historical reality. One of them might, but surely not all three. This is of general relevance to our evaluation of Vinaya narratives.

As we have them, these four stories are not presented as wholly independent of each other. Story 4, the final long one, begins by introducing the killer Deer-stick and says of him, "having killed the monk". So story 4 is presented as a sequel to story 2.

Dr. Kuan's summary of story 2²⁷ is as follows:

"A monk was gravely ill. His attendant monk was tired of looking after him and complained. The sick monk said: 'It would be good if you could kill me.' That monk replied: 'The Blessed One has laid down a rule that prohibits killing

²⁵Taishō no. 1425, vol. 22, pp. 254b11–255a11.

²⁶Both here and below I have made a few small changes to his wording.

²⁷Taishō no. 1425, vol. 22, pp. 253c25–254a16.

mankind with one's own hand.' This sick monk said: 'You can seek someone who holds a knife for me.' The attendant monk approached Deer-stick, a follower of another sect, and said: 'If you kill the monk, [his] robe and bowl will be given to you.' He killed him and took his robe and bowl."

From this material, I believe that we can make some extremely important deductions about the development and relative chronology of the accounts of what led up to the third *pārājika*. First, however, we need to advert to the problem of language. We are now dealing with double translations: English from Chinese, and before that Chinese from an Indian language, though precisely what Indian language varies with the different versions.

The language of the *Mahāsāṅghika* Vinaya is particularly problematic. A long text called the *Abhisamācārikā Dharmāḥ* has survived in the Indic original (as well as in Chinese translation) and has recently been published and discussed by Seishi Karashima. It is a part of the Vinaya of a branch of the Mahāsāṅghikas, the Lokottaravādins.²⁸ It has no parallels in other schools and, unfortunately for us, it does not deal with the *pārājikas*. Its relevance here lies solely in its language. So far as we can tell, the canonical language of the Mahāsāṅghikas was what we now call Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit; and Karashima describes this as "the oldest Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit text". It is perhaps our earliest evidence for the gradual Sanskritisation of the earliest Buddhist texts, which were originally in a Prakrit (= Middle Indo-Aryan),²⁹ and even so is unlikely to date much earlier than the turn of the Common Era – which means that it is considerably later than our Pali evidence.

The kernel of our problem remains what is here story 2. It says that the sick old monk says, "You can seek someone who holds a knife for me", or something very like that. This shows that already here the story is built on a failure to recognize *sattha* as meaning "life-breath", and that failure leads on to the misinterpretation of *hāraka*, which, as we have seen, cannot mean "holds". Then *satthahārakaṃ* is taken as a masculine instead of a neuter, thus introducing another person into the story: enter Migaladdhika, the hired assassin.

I have shown how easily all this can occur in Pali. It could not occur in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit. It is possible that it could also occur in some form of Prakrit in which the *Mahāsāṅghika* Vinaya was originally composed, before being semi-Sanskritised, but we have no evidence for any such text and it is

²⁸Karashima p.78.

²⁹Karashima p.84, fn.26

virtually certain that none will ever be found. If we are not looking here at the influence of the Pali version, there remains perhaps one intriguing possibility: that the muddle occurred even before the two traditions had separated, which would mean within a century or so of the Buddha's death. Prohibition of homicide is, after all, likely to be a basic feature of a legal code. If we refer the texts to such an early period, we are dealing with purely oral literature, not written texts. This would not, of course, vitiate my argument in this paper.

My main presentation ends here. I have shown something which surely is remarkable: that down the centuries a text which deals with so important a matter as killing people, and yet deviates so seriously from the norm of how a vinaya rule comes to be made, has been uncritically accepted.

X. The three forms of the 3rd *pārājika*.

I have mentioned above, near the end of section 2, that there are three ways in which one may commit the third *pārājika*. This is true of every version.

Though it must be speculation, it is not difficult to suggest how the muddle which I have analysed then spread further. I have argued for a stage at which the second form of the offense had been newly understood as hiring an assassin. The next part of the text talks about persuading someone to commit suicide. It is easy to jump to the conclusion that the assassin, though he himself carries a weapon, is dealing with suicides. Moreover, the assassin leaves the medical attendant with no further part to play, so he drops out of the story. This also destroys the story for the first, basic, form of the offense: killing someone directly oneself. (I noted above that the Pali has no such story at all.)

Finally, let me consider the third form of the offense: talking someone into suicide (broadly interpreted). By now, the muddle over the second form of the offense has established that this rule is -- however illogically -- mainly concerned with suicide. The story in the Pali Vinaya says that a Buddhist layman was very ill. He had a beautiful wife, and six monks, who formed a group and are not named, were greatly attracted to her. These monks go to see the invalid householder and tell him that he has led a virtuous life, so that he will be reborn in a heaven where he will have a wonderful time. At this he decides to begin indulging himself right away, and takes the wrong kind of food and drink, so that he soon dies. His wife accuses the monks of killing him by praising death to him. The Buddha then adds praising death to the content of the rule.

While I do not wish to propose that this story is historically accurate, it seems to be a more competent invention than the story of Migalaṇḍika. One would expect that the kind of murder that a monk might conceivably commit, especially before there was a specific rule against it, would not involve physical violence, but would be something indirect, like persuading a sick person not to look after himself properly by suggesting that he will be happier in the next life.

The implausible feature of this story is that the miscreants number six. A single bad monk might reasonably hope that a woman whom he desires would fall into his arms if her husband died. But for several monks to plot this together makes no sense at all.

However, this “group of six monks” is an important feature of the dramatis personae of the Vinaya. They crop up when a new rule is being pronounced by the Buddha, but no specific monk is identified as the original miscreant. Since a rule can only be pronounced in reprimand to an identified miscreant, this “group of six” plays that role to fill the gap. Whether there really existed a group of six monks who committed some new offenses we shall probably never know, but even if they existed, it is clear that the tradition has vastly expanded their role. Maybe when they turn up it is because the identity of the monk whose misbehaviour occasioned the rule had been forgotten -- possibly deliberately.

Abbreviations

ARIRIAB --

DN – Dīgha Nikāya

JOCBS – Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies

MN – Majjhima Nikāya

PED – Pali-English Dictionary

Ps – Papañca-sūdanī (= Majjhima Nikāya commentary)

Sāp – Sārattha-ppakāsinī (= Saṃyutta Nikāya commentary)

SN – Saṃyutta Nikāya

Sp – Samanta-pāsādikā (= Vinaya commentary)

Vin – Vinaya

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Phabongkha and the Yoginī: The Life, Patronage and Devotion of the Lhasa Aristocrat, Lady Lhalu Lhacham Yangdzom Tsering

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Phabongkha Dechen Nyingpo (pha bong kha bde chen snying po, 1878-1941) was one of the most popular and influential Gelug religious figures in the Lhasa Valley during the first half of the twentieth-century. His students included not only lay people and monks from all of the most important religious institutions in the region, but also an impressive array of some of the highest-ranking aristocrats and government officials of the day. This article is focused on the life of one of Phabongkha's most important aristocratic students, Lhalu Lhacham Yangdzom Tsering (g.yang 'dzom tshe ring, 1880-1963) and her relationship to her teacher and his lineage teachings. The development of her devotion to Phabongkha, and her and her family's sponsorship of the sustenance and popularization of his lineage in general will be considered with an aim of giving us a wider understanding of Phabongkha and his "movement". The Lhacham's devotion to the controversial protector deity Dorje Shugden (rdo rje shugs ldan), whose practice she received from Phabongkha, will also be discussed in detail, especially with regard to a number of tragedies which befell her, and which were portrayed by the later lineage as being the results of the wrathful activity of this deity.

Phabongkha Dechen Nyingpo (Pha bong kha Bde chen snying po, 1878-1941) was one of the most popular Buddhist teachers in Lhasa during the first half of the twentieth century. Large segments of the Lhasa monastic population were students of Phabongkha or at least, eventually, students of his main disciple,

Trijang Rinpoche Lobsang Ye shes Tenzin Gyatso (Khri byang rin po che Blo bzang ye shes bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho, 1901-1981), who would also later become the tutor of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso (Bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho, b.1935). Phabongkha's closest students in the Tibetan capital included not only members of his direct entourage and other high-ranking Gelug (Dge lugs) teachers, but also numerous aristocratic figures whose financial support was essential for the continued proliferation and upkeep of the lineage.

Out of Phabongkha's many patrons and followers, one of the most important and interesting was the Lhalu (Lha klu) household. The Lhalus were an important aristocratic (*sku drag*) family in Lhasa of the highest *yabzhi* (*yab gzhis*) rank, meaning that they were relatives of a current or previously reigning Dalai Lama. The Lhalu family was, however, exceptional in that they had in fact produced not only one, but two Dalai Lamas: the eighth, Jamphel Gyatso ('Byam dpal rgya mtsho, 1758-1804) and the twelfth, Trinley Gyatso ('Phrin las rgya mtsho, 1856-1875). The family as it existed in the early twentieth century was in reality a product of two combined households, as the relatives of the Twelfth Dalai Lama had been amalgamated into the Lhalu household through marriage. This merging had apparently been organized through an initiative to save large amounts of government lands from being given to *yabzhi* families, of which, due to the untimely deaths of the three previous Dalai Lamas, there was an excess.¹ The family name derives from the *zimsha* (*gzim shag*), or mansion, of Lhalu Gatsel (Lha klu dga' tshal), their principal residence located next to the Lhalu Wetlands (Lha klu 'dam ra) behind the Potala Palace, which they owned together with a number of other manorial estates.

Based on textual sources, as well as interviews, this article will focus on one member of the Lhalu family in particular—Yangdzom Tsering (G.yang 'dzom tshe ring, 1880-1963) who, for much of the first half of the twentieth century, was the towering figure of the family and became Phabongkha's principal aristocratic disciple. Beginning with a discussion of her life from her entry into the Lhalu family onward, the origins and development of her patronage of and devotion to Phabongkha and his lineage will be discussed. Not only was Yangdzom Tsering a devoted student of Phabongkha and a fervent Buddhist practitioner, but during her day she was also one of the most prominent women

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¹See Luciano Petech, *Aristocracy and Government in Tibet, 1728-1959*, p.44 and Tshe dbang rdo rje, "Phran tshe dbang rdo rje rang nyid kyi byung ba rags rim brjod pa", pp.20-21.

in Lhasa, as is evident even from the accounts of foreigners who knew about or met her. Sir Basil Gould, the former British Trade Agent to Gyantse who in 1936 led a British delegation to Lhasa, wrote about her, saying: "One of the events of the Lhasa season was an annual luncheon party which she [Yangdzom Tsering] gave to the Cabinet and other high officials. Her hospitality was so urgent that often the fate of at least a few of her guests was "Where I dines I sleeps". She had a fund of jokes and stories which were reputed to be broad..."² Fredrick Spencer Chapman (1907-1971) also described the lady as being a charming host who wore exquisite jewelry and was "more made-up than any Tibetan woman" he had ever seen.³

The Lhasa in which Yangdzom Tsering lived for most of her life had emerged with an almost exclusively Gelug sectarian landscape from the seventeenth century onward due to the establishment of the central Ganden Phodrang (Dga' ldan pho brang) government in 1642, with the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, 1617-1682) at its head. Although teachers and communities of practitioners from other traditions did exist in Lhasa, all of the most important temples and monasteries in the city were owned by the Gelug establishment or staffed by Gelug monks.⁴ It was in this landscape that Phabongkha rose to prominence and found a large and eager audience.

Phabongkha has often been seen as a sustainer and promoter of Gelug exclusivism, although I believe that the extent to which he is now portrayed as a vehemently sectarian figure is contestable.⁵ Phabongkha and his students, however, appear to have been apprehensive about the authenticity of *certain* teachings within other traditions, which in their opinions rendered the lineages of these sects, as they came to exist in the early twentieth century, corrupt, to varying extents. These views of other traditions, and the Nyingma tradition in particular, is reflected in written and oral histories related to the Lhalu family, as will be demonstrated below.

² Basil J. Gould, *The Jewel in the Lotus*, p.236.

³ Fredrick Spencer Chapman, *Lhasa: The Holy City*, p.319.

⁴ An example of a small temple owned and run by non-Gelugpas was the Shitro Lhakhang (Zhi khro lha khang) in Lhasa, which was used by a lay Nyingma (Rnying ma) association (André Alexander, *Temples of Lhasa: Tibetan Buddhist Architecture from the 7th to the 21st Centuries*, p.271).

⁵ Joona Repo, "Phabongkha Dechen Nyingpo: His Collected Works and the Guru-Deity-Protector Triad", pp.6-7.

During the first half of the twentieth century, the Lhalu family was faced with numerous obstacles with regard to the succession of the family lineage, as well as associations with unfortunate political events. These problems not only helped forge links between the family and Phabongkha but also eventually became incorporated as narratives within the teachings of the lineage itself. This is specifically true for events that would become associated with the activity of the wrathful protector deity Dorje Shugden, who was said to be particularly concerned with preserving the doctrinal purity of the Gelug tradition. Thus this article will also demonstrate some of the ways in which the lineage viewed its great patrons and the ways in which the patrons, in turn, affected the lineage. Indeed, further to being incorporated into the more mystical lore of the lineage, these eminent figures and aristocrats functioned as a source of patronage, were crucial to Phabongkha's success as the toast of Lhasa, and helped ensure the continuation of his legacy through supporting the writing and publication of his many works.

I. Yangdzom Tsering and the Lhalu family in the early twentieth century

Yangdzom Tsering originally entered the Lhalu household in order to produce it an heir, but was instead left to deal with the numerous misfortunes that threatened the future survival of the family.⁶ Yangdzom Tsering was the daughter of the prime minister Silon Paljor Dorje (*srid blon* Dpal 'byor rdo rje, 1860-1919), and was thus a member of the high-ranking aristocratic Shatra (Bshad sgra) family. Oral accounts relate that in her youth she had been a boy and was a candidate for the reincarnation of the previous Twelfth Dalai Lama, although he subsequently transformed into a girl.⁷

According to the memoirs of her future husband, Gyurme Tsewang Dorje ('Gyur med tshe dbang rdo rje, 1914-2011), Yangdzom Tsering had previously been a nun, disrobed and had an affair with Langdun Gung Dondrub Dorje (Glang

⁶Bshad sgra Dga' ldan dpal 'byor, "Sger dga' ldan bshad sgra ba'i khyim tshang mi rabs kyi lo rgyus rags tsam bkod pa", p.422.

⁷Gender transformation at birth or at a young age, colloquially known as lunglog (slung log) or trunglog (krung log) is well-known throughout Tibet. This specific account is according to a student of Phabongkha, interviewed in 2014. Due to the sensitive nature of some of the topics discussed in this article, the names of informants have been kept anonymous. Interviews took place in Tibet, various European countries, Nepal and the US.

mdun *gung* Don grub rdo rje, d.1909), the elder brother of the ruling Thirteenth Dalai Lama Thubten Gyatso (Thub bstan rgya mtsho, 1879-1933).⁸ Langdun and Yangdzom Tsering also had a son, Phuntsok Rabgye (Phun tshogs rab rgyas, *circa* 1903-1920) not too long before the Younghusband invasion of Lhasa in 1904.⁹ Yangdzom Tsering was subsequently married to Lhalu Jigme Namgyal (Lha klu 'Jigs med rnam rgyal, ?-1918), as two of her sisters, Sonam Paldzom (Bsod nams dpal 'dzoms, d.u.) and Namgyal Wangmo (Rnam rgyal dbang mo, d.u.), had been before her. Jigme Namgyal, a relative of the Twelfth Dalai Lama, was the head of the Lhalu family. However none of the Shatra sisters, including Yangdzom Tsering, were able to produce heirs for Jigme Namgyal.¹⁰ Sonam Paldzom did bear a child, although both mother and child soon died of smallpox.¹¹

With Jigme Namgyal's death in 1918, the Lhalu family would have been left without an heir if it were not for Phuntsok Rabgye, who was around fifteen years old at the time, having been adopted into the Lhalu family.¹² Unfortunately Phuntsok Rabgye died soon after, at the age of seventeen. Following this Yangdzom Tsering moved out of the Lhalu mansion, went on pilgrimage to make offerings for her deceased relatives and then upon her return to Lhasa she rented the house of the Kyitoe (Skyid stod) family where she moved into the top-floor apartment.¹³ During this period she had at least one affair with a government official (*drung*) named Chingpa (Byings pa), although she eventually moved back to the Lhalu house.¹⁴ In an attempt to continue the family line, about two years after the death of her son, a short-lived match between Phuntsok Gyalpo (Phun tshogs rgyal po, d.u.) a son of the Rampa household (*gzim* Ram pa) and Yangdzom Tsering followed, ending in failure as Phuntsok Gyalpo was still emotionally attached to his ex-wife.¹⁵ The couple produced no offspring.

⁸Tshe dbang rdo rje, "Yab gzhis lha klu'i khyim tshang gi lo rgyus skor", p.10. The title *gung* refers to a high-ranking official and is often rendered in English as "duke".

⁹Tshe dbang rdo rje, "Phran tshe dbang rdo rje rang nyid kyi byung ba rags rim brjod pa", p.21.

¹⁰Tshe dbang rdo rje, "Yab gzhis lha klu'i khyim tshang gi lo rgyus skor", pp.9-11.

11 Bshad sgra Dga' ldan dpal 'byor, "Sger dga' ldan bshad sgra ba'i khyim tshang mi rabs kyi lo rgyus rags tsam bkod pa", p.422-423.

12 Tshe dbang rdo rje, "Yab gzhis lha klu'i khyim tshang gi lo rgyus skor", p.11.

13 Bshad sgra Dga' ldan dpal 'byor, "Sger dga' ldan bshad sgra ba'i khyim tshang mi rabs kyi lo rgyus rags tsam bkod pa", p.424.

¹⁴Ibid. Furthermore, Jamyang Norbu in "The Lhasa Ripper: A preliminary investigation into the "dark Underbelly" of social life in the holy city", p.233-234, recounts that apart from Chingpa, the Lhacham later (in the late 1920s) had at least one other lover.

¹⁵Tshe dbang rdo rje, "Yab gzhis lha klu'i khyim tshang gi lo rgyus skor", p.12.

The saviour of the Lhalu family line came in the form of Lungshar Dorje Tsegyal (Lung shar Rdo rje tshe rgyal, 1880-1939) and his son, Tsewang Dorje. Lungshar was appointed as caretaker of the Lhalu family by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, of whom he was a favorite. The nature of the relationship between Yangdzom Tsering and Lungshar is not clear, with most existing sources giving conflicting information. Melvyn Goldstein describes Yangdzom Tsering as Lungshar's "common-law wife", Petech states that Yangdzom Tsering was "in love" with Lungshar, whereas Tsering Yangdzom writes that although there were rumors of an affair in Lhasa between Lungshar and Lhalu Lhacham, that is Lady Lhalu, there is no way to substantiate this.¹⁶ Indeed Tsewang Dorje's biography makes no mention of an affair or marriage and sources close to him likewise reject any notion of a romantic or matrimonial relationship, suggesting that most likely Lungshar was no more than guardian to the Lhalu household.¹⁷ Whatever the case, it was at this point in 1926 that Tsewang Dorje, aged twelve, was adopted into the Lhalu family as well.¹⁸ From then on Yangdzom Tsering was addressed by Tsewang Dorje as "*cham kushab*" (*lcam sku zhabs*), a formal title used for the wives of high-ranking aristocrats. The lady in turn addressed Tsewang Dorje as "*se kushab*" (*sras sku zhabs*), or "honorable son", a formal and unintimate title used for the children of nobles.¹⁹

Following the death of the Dalai Lama, several factions, including one headed by Lungshar, contested for supremacy over the Tibetan government. However in 1934 Lungshar was outmanoeuvred by his principal rivals, headed by Kalon Trimon Norbu Wangyal (*bka' blon* Khri smon Nor bu dbang rgyal, *circa* 1874-1945), resulting in his arrest. Tsewang Dorje, along with his brother and other supporters of Lungshar, hatched a plan to break their father out of the Sharchenchok Prison (Shar chen lcog) in Tse Shoel (Rtse zhol), the village at the foot of the Potala Palace. Yangdzom Tsering was understandably extremely concerned by these events, strongly objected and instead insisted that

¹⁶Melvyn C. Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet 1913-1951: The Demise of the Lamaist State*, p. 211, Petech, *Aristocracy and Government in Tibet, 1728-1959*, p.48, Tsering Yangdzom, *The Aristocratic Families in Tibetan History 1900-1951*, p.172. Furthermore Rinchen Drolma Taring, *Daughter of Tibet: The Autobiography of Rinchen Dolma Taring*, p.142, also states that Yangdzom Tsering was "Lungshar's junior wife".

¹⁷Close relation of Tsewang Dorje, interview, 2015.

¹⁸ Tshe dbang rdo rje, "Phran tshe dbang rdo rje rang nyid kyi byung ba rags rim brjod pa", p.21.

¹⁹Tsering Yangdzom, *The Aristocratic Families in Tibetan History 1900-1951*, p.172.

Lungshar's freedom could be secured through petitioning the government and making abundant financial offerings, or bribes, to various officials.²⁰ Despite following her demands, Tsewang Dorje and his brother were arrested as well. Lungshar was accused of a number of crimes, including attempting a Bolshevik take-over of the Ganden Phodrang government and was sentenced to having his eyes taken out of their sockets.²¹ His two sons, one of them being Tsewang Dorje, were each condemned to having an arm amputated.

At this point Phabongkha intervened, met with Kalon Trimon Norbu Wangyal, who headed the rival faction that Lungshar had hoped to displace, and insisted that the arms of the two sons not be cut off. Trimon agreed, stating that "Today due to the power of the vehement requests and insistence of Kyabje Rinpoche (*skyabs rje rin po che*) [i.e. Phabongkha], I have offered Kyabje Rinpoche two human arms".²² Yangdzom Tsering had been extremely concerned, and her very close relationship with Phabongkha, who had visited the Lhalu mansion during the crisis, had undoubtedly helped to save Tsewang Dorje's arm. Lungshar, however, still had to suffer the brutal punishment of having his eyes removed and was kept in prison, where he spent his time reciting prayers and spinning a prayer wheel.²³

While he was in prison Yangdzom Tsering petitioned and wrote to various influential figures, specifically the cabinet, or *kashag* (*bka' shag*), and its *kalon* (*bka' blon*) ministers, for Lungshar's release, emphasising the fact that he was old, in a poor state of health, and was blind.²⁴ As a result he was released in 1938, after which he was allowed to move to Lhalu Gatsel.²⁵

Despite his arm having been saved, Tsewang Dorje was barred from holding government office, although later he did manage to re-enter government, eventually rising to the rank of *kalon*. Due to the misfortunes that had taken place, Yangdzom Tsering told Tsewang Dorje that they must get married as this

²⁰Tshe dbang rdo rje, "Phran tshe dbang rdo rje rang nyid kyi byung ba rags rim brjod pa", pp.62-63.

²¹Ibid., pp.66-67.

²²Ibid., p.67.

²³Ibid., p.96.

²⁴Close relation of Tsewang Dorje, interview, 2015. Jamyang Norbu also notes that his mother remembers Yangdzom Tsering visiting Gyurme Gyatso ('Gyur med rgya mtsho, 1890-1938), then a minister of the *kashag*, in order to petition for Lungshar's release. He also suggests that she visited the other ministers in the cabinet as well (Jamyang Norbu, "The Lhasa Ripper", p.245).

²⁵Tshe dbang rdo rje, " Phran tshe dbang rdo rje rang nyid kyi byung ba rags rim brjod pa", p. 91.

was not only the correct thing to do at this point, but that it would also help him to regain a government post in the future.²⁶ Thus the two were married, with Yangdzom Tsering making it clear that since there was such a large age gap between her and her young new husband, after their marriage it would be fine for him to take another wife.²⁷ Indeed this became a necessity as in 1934, Yangdzom Tsering was already 54 years of age and it would have been difficult for the newlyweds to produce an heir. Yangdzom Tsering suggested that Tsewang Dorje and her niece, Thonpa Sonam Dekyi (Thon pa Bsod nams bde skyid, 1925-?) wed, which they did in 1941.²⁸

II. The devotion of Yangdzom Tsering

As is evident, Phabongkha and Yangdzom Tsering were already in good relations by the time of Lungshar's attempted coup in 1934. Yangdzom Tsering was perhaps the most important aristocratic devotee of Phabongkha and many of those around her were either equally enchanted by the teacher, or became so. Shatra Paljor Dorje, Yangdzom Tsering's father, as well as many of her other relatives, for example, were also students of Phabongkha as well as Phabongkha's teacher, the Gelug mystic Tagphu Pemavajra Jamphel Tenpai Ngodrub (Stag phu Pad ma ba dzra 'jam dpal bstan pa'i dnogs grub, 1876-1935).²⁹

Yangdzom Tsering's devotion to her gurus was well-known to those who knew her or of her, and oral accounts related to this are still alive today. For example she had Phabongkha's semi-circular winter cape (*sku zlam*) hanging in a sack-like bundle from the ceiling over her seat in her altar room, so that it would always be above her crown during her practice sessions, and she always carried with her a rosary that had belonged to Tagphu Pemavajra.³⁰ Even when washing her body she would not part with these beads and would instead place them upon her head. Yangdzom Tsering was in a unique position for a lay Tibetan woman. Following the death of Jigme Namgyal, she became matriarch of one of the most important aristocratic families in Tibet and thus had vast material resources at her disposal. This situation provided her the freedom to

²⁶Ibid., p.70.

²⁷Ibid., pp.70, 101.

²⁸Ibid., pp.101-102. At this time, Tsewang Dorje was 27 and Thonpa Sonam Dekyi was 16.

²⁹According to several close relations of the Lhalu family and Tsewang Dorje, interviewed in 2013 and 2015.

³⁰Ibid.

be able to immerse herself fully in religious practice, something that most lay Tibetan women did not have the luxury of doing.³¹

Yangdzom Tsering's Shatra family were ancient sponsors and students of the Gelug tradition and had apparently been patrons of Tsongkhapa (Tsong kha pa, 1357-1419), the founder of the Gelug school, himself.³² Although we know that she hailed from this devoutly Gelug background, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact beginning of the relationship between Yangdzom Tsering and Phabongkha. The earliest mention of her in Phabongkha's biography, *The Melodious Voice of Brahma (Tshangs pa'i dbyangs snyan)*, is in relation to her requesting a series of *lamrim (lam rim)* teachings on the stages of the path to enlightenment, given in 1921 by Phabongkha at Chubzang Hermitage (Chu bzang ri khrod), near Lhasa.³³ Phabongkha's student, Trijang Rinpoche, later edited and organised a collection of notes on the teachings, together with the help of Phabongkha secretary, Denma Lobsang Dorje (Ldan ma Blo bzang rdo rje, 1908-1975), and published them as *Liberation in Your Hand (Rnam grol lag bcangs)*, undoubtedly Phabongkha's most famous teaching.³⁴ The teachings were requested and sponsored by Yangdzom Tsering in order to accumulate sources of merit (*dge rtsa*) for her recently deceased husband, Jigme Namgyal, and her son by Langdun, Phuntsok Rabgye.³⁵ For the sake of her departed family members, Yangdzom Tsering further sponsored the gilding of the sacred Jowo Shakyamuni in the Jokhang (Jo khang) and offered a jewel for the crown of the statue, along with butter lamp offerings.³⁶ As was already mentioned, it appears that it was around this time that the Lady left the Lhalu house and also went on pilgrimage.

³¹According a close relation of Tsewang Dorje, interviewed in 2015.

³²Khri byang rin po che, "Dga' ldan khri chen byang chub chos 'phel gyi skye gral du rlom pa'i gyi na pa zhig gis rang gi ngag tshul ma bcos lhug par bkod pa 'khrul snang sgyu ma'i zlos gar", pp.41-42. This was also confirmed by a close relation of Tsewang Dorje, interviewed in 2015.

³³Ldan ma Blo bzang rdo rje, Rigs dan dkyil 'khor rgya mtsho'i khyab bdag he ru kah dpal nur smrig gar rol skyabs gcig pha boñ kha pa bde chen sñiñ po dpal bzañ po'i rnam par thar pa don ldan tshañs pa'i dbyañs sñan: The detailed biography of Rje Pha-boñ-kha-pa Byams-pa-bstan-'dzin-'phrin-las-rgya-mtsho (Vol.1), p.482.

³⁴Khri byang rin po che, "Khrul snang sgyu ma'i zlos gar", pp.95-96. Although the work is mainly based on these teachings given at Chubzang, material was also drawn by Trijang Rinpoche from other lamrim teachings given by Phabongkha on other occasions and thus the book could also be viewed as a compilation of his philosophical views and lamrim teachings given throughout his life (Pha bong kha Bde chen snying po, Lam rim rnam grol lag bcangs, pp.528-529).

³⁵Pha bong kha, Lam rim rnam grol lag bcangs, p.528.

³⁶Bshad sgra Dga' ldan dpal 'byor, "Sger dga' ldan bshad sgra ba'i khyim tshang mi rabs kyi lo rgyus rags tsam bkod pa", p.426.

It may well be that it was the death of her husband and son that catapulted Yangdzom Tsering toward Phabongkha and his teachings. According to an oral account of Tenzin Dondrub (Bstan 'dzin don grub, 1924-1990s), a member of the Sampho (Bsam pho) *yabzhi* family, following the deaths of the Lhacham's loved ones, which she had tried to prevent through the performance of numerous rituals, her faith in Buddhism was shaken.³⁷ Tenzin Dondrub says that it was at this time that the Lady Lhalu met Phabongkha. Phabongkha consoled her, telling her that everybody must die, that she should hold on to her faith, and then he gave her practice instructions. Tenzin Dondrub claims that the Lhacham thus shifted her focus from the Nyingma tradition, which her husband Jigme Namgyal had favoured, to the Gelug tradition. It is of course not impossible that the lady may have had a brief loss of faith between the death of her son and her sponsorship of Phabongkha's teachings in Chubzang. Tenzin Dondrub's account which tells of the Lhacham's change in sectarian views, however, is unlikely to be accurate, as will be discussed below in more detail, as Yangdzom Tsering had always been principally devoted to the Gelug tradition. There is, however, no reason to doubt the fact that the Lhacham became close or closer to Phabongkha during this period, especially because, as has already been noted, it is also during this time that she is first mentioned in his biography.

Thus it is clear that Yangdzom Tsering already had a student/patron-teacher relationship with Phabongkha long before the Lungshar incident of 1934, a connection to which she would remain dedicated for the rest of her life. The Lungshar incident and Phabongkha's role in saving Tsewang Dorje's arm created an impression on the young man himself, who, according to his own words, also developed great faith in the teacher:

“One day after being freed I went before the exalted presence of Kyabje Phabongkha. I thanked him for the hardships he had undertaken for my sake and Kyabje Rinpoche replied, giving compassionate advice:

'These were actions which were done in accordance with the teachings of our Dharma. In any case, as you are still young and have no other work, you must read and look into scriptures, as well as histories and sacred biographies (*rnam thar*). This will be of

³⁷Tibetan Oral History Archive Project, "Interview H0205 : with Sambo, Tenzin Thondrub [tib. bsam pho, bstan 'dzin don grub, (India, 1981)".

great benefit. After this, you will know what you should do and what you ought not to do'.

Due to my great faith in Kyabje Rinpoche, according to the guru's advice, I read and looked into sacred biographies and other scriptures. In that year, in order to purify [negativities] and accumulate the preliminary practices (*sngon 'gro*), I performed 100,000 prostrations, offered 100,000 bowls of water and made 100,000 *tsatsa (tsha tsha)* [votive tablets] - [all] in order to practice the virtue of purification".³⁸

Tsewang Dorje also mentions that he, together with Yangdzom Tsering, received *lamrim* teachings from Phabongkha at Lhasa's Meru Monastery (*rme ru dgon*) in 1934, not long before hearing of his father Lungshar's arrest.³⁹ Despite this, it appears that Tsewang Dorje's closeness and faith in the teacher only grew and became cemented after his own arrest and release from prison.

Yangdzom Tsering's own practice appears to have been largely based on teachings that were requested or otherwise received from Phabongkha, as well as his direct teachers and students. The focus of her practice was Vajrayoginī Naro Kechari, a solitary female meditational deity (*yi dam*) derived from the Cakrasaṃvara Tantra.⁴⁰ Although the practice of Vajrayoginī was not one of the main tantric meditational practices emphasised in the writings of Tsongkhapa, the deity had nevertheless certainly been practiced within some influential strands of the Gelug tradition from at least the seventeenth or eighteenth century onward, after having been adopted from the Sakya (Sa skya) school. Although Phabongkha is often accused of having rearranged the central tantric deity and protector practices of the Gelug tradition to focus on Vajrayoginī and Dorje Shugden, this is unlikely.⁴¹ While Phabongkha's many writings are a testament to the wide variety of practices on which he taught, Vajrayoginī was indeed very popular with many

³⁸Tshe dbang rdo rje, " Phran tshe dbang rdo rje rang nyid kyi byung ba rags rim brjod pa", p.68.

³⁹Ibid., p.60.

⁴⁰According a close relations of Tsewang Dorje, interviewed in 2013 and 2015.

⁴¹This idea of a rearrangement of Gelug practice is suggested, for example, in Georges Dreyfus, "The Shuk-Den Affair: History and Nature of a Quarrel", pp.246. For a discussion of this issue see Repo, "Phabongkha Dechen Nyingpo".

of his students, in particular female disciples, who perhaps identified more with this female deity. The relative simplicity of the practice of this deity was certainly appealing for many of Phabongkha's lay disciples in general, female and male, who most likely did not often have the time or opportunity to engage in the study of the more complex and central Gelug tantric cycles of Cakrasaṃvara, Guhyasamāja and Vajrabhairava. Likewise Shugden, although important to Phabongkha, does not feature so extensively in Phabongkha's *Collected Works* and was one of several protectors propitiated by the teacher.

Yangdzom Tsering's affinity to Vajrayoginī is apparent from both the colophons of the texts she requested Phabongkha to compose, as well as several mentions of her in relation to the deity in the teacher's biography. Indeed, one of the most restricted Vajrayoginī texts composed by Phabongkha, *The Uncommon Golden Dharma: The Pith Instructions for Journeying to Kecara* (*Mkha' spyod bgrod pa'i man ngag gser chos thun min zhal shes chig brgyud ma*), which, according to a caveat in the text itself is only to be transmitted to select small groups of advanced practitioners, was specifically written at Yangdzom Tsering's request for her own practice as is recounted in both Phabongkha's biography and the colophon of the text itself.⁴² Yangdzom Tsering also requested Phabongkha to compose the preliminary ritual for engaging in the Vajrayoginī "enabling actions" retreat (*las rung gi bsnyen pa*) entitled *The Messenger Invoking the Hundred Blessings of the Vajra* (*Rdo rje'i byin brgya 'beb pa'i pho nya*), which she also needed for her own use.⁴³

Yangdzom Tsering also engaged in the practice of the self-generation (*bdag bskyed*) and/or self-initiation (*bdag 'jug*) of Vajrayoginī on a daily basis, based on the works composed by Phabongkha, and had a special servant assigned specifically for the purpose of preparing all necessary daily ritual arrangements.⁴⁴ The text which would have been used by Yangdzom Tsering for the practice of self-initiation was requested from Phabongkha by a Lady Dagbhrum Jetsunma Thubten Tsultrim Drolkar (Dwags b+h+ruM sku ngo rje btsun ma Thub bstan

⁴²See Ldan ma Blo bzang rdo rje, Tshañs pa'i dbyañs sñan: The detailed biography of Rje Pha-boñ-kha-pa Byams-pa-bstan-'dzin-'phrin-las-rgya-mtsho (Vol.1), p.580 and Pha bong kha, "Mkha' spyod bgrod pa'i man ngag gser chos thun min zhal shes chig brgyud ma'", p.277.

⁴³Ldan ma Blo bzang rdo rje, Tshañs pa'i dbyañs sñan: The detailed biography of Rje Pha-boñ-kha-pa Byams-pa-bstan-'dzin-'phrin-las-rgya-mtsho (Vol.1), p.580.

⁴⁴According to sources closely related to Tsewang Dorje and the Lhalu family interviewed in 2013 and 2015.

tshul khriims sgrol dkar, d.u.), another of the teacher's female aristocrat followers.⁴⁵

Yangdzom Tsering was thus certainly not the only aristocrat to have requested Phabongkha to compose texts on Vajrayoginī and other practices. Phabongkha was perhaps the most popular teacher amongst the Lhasa aristocracy during the final decades of his life. As Phabongkha's manager (*phyag mdzod*), Trinley Dargye ('Phrin las dar rgyas, d.u.) noted: "there is no place in Tibet, including Sendregasum, the government officials, various small monasteries and villages, where there is no Phabongka disciple".⁴⁶ Although this is surely a vast overstatement as the majority of Phabongkha's students were based in the environs of Lhasa as well as other pockets of Central Tibet and Kham, Trinley Dargye, who must have known well the political and religious landscape of Lhasa itself, was perhaps imposing his observation of the large amount of students Phabongkha had in Lhasa (and Kham), on the whole of Tibet.

Apart from the Lhalus and Shatras, we also find the names of other important Lhasa aristocratic officials, both lay, such as Shengkawa Gyurme Sonam (Shan kha ba 'Gyur med bsod nams, 1896-1967) and monastic, such as Surkhang Khenchung Khyenrab Wangchug (Zur khang mkhan chung Mkhyen rab dbang phyug, d.u.) who are noted, amongst numerous others, as students of both Phabongkha and Trijang Rinpoche in the biographies of the teachers. Indeed between them, Phabongkha and Trijang Rinpoche were the teachers of some of the most influential figures in Lhasa society and government. Other important students included Lhasa members of the fabulously wealthy Khampa Sandutsang (Sa 'du tshang) and Pomdatsang (Spom mda' tshang) trading families, who also branched into politics, as well as members of the noble Lukhangwa (Klu khang ba) family, Yuthok (G.yu thog) family, Trimon (Khri smon) family and many others. Even the regent of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tagdrag Rinpoche Ngawang Sungrab Drubtob Tenpai Gyaltzen (Stag brag rin po che Ngag dbang gsung rab grub thob bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, 1874-1952), was a student of Phabongkha and also had a close relationship with Trijang Rinpoche, to whom he gave occasional teachings. Furthermore, outside of these Lhasa nobles and their families, Phabongkha had numerous students amongst dignitaries and officials, especially in Kham.

⁴⁵ Pha bong kha, "Rdo rje rnal 'byor ma nA ro mkha' spyod dbang mo'i dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga bde chen dga' ston/", pp.128-129. I have not been able to locate any further information about this lady or her family.

⁴⁶Goldstein, A History of Modern Tibet 1913-195, p.362. "Sendregasum" refers to the three main Gelug monasteries of Sera (Se ra), Ganden (Dga' ldan) and Drepung ('Bras spungs).

III. Yangdzom Tsering, the Lhalu Family and Dorje Shugden

On top of Vajrayoginī, Yangdzom Tsering appeared to have also been especially attached to the protector deity Dorje Shugden, today an extremely controversial deity within the Gelug tradition, who was also one of the principal protectors of her teacher, Phabongkha. The Lhacham's affinity to the protector is attested by a number of textual sources including Phabongkha's biography, Trijang Rinpoche's autobiography as well as the colophons of several Shugden-related works in both Phabongkha's *Collected Works*, and those of Trijang Rinpoche. Out of the five texts which Phabongkha composed exclusively on the protector, one, *The Victory Banner Thoroughly Victorious in All Directions: A Presentation of the Approach, Accomplishment and Activities of Shugden, Fulfilling all Needs and Wants* (*Shugs ldan gyi bsnyen sgrub las gsum gyi rnam gzhag dgos 'dod yid bzhin re skong phyogs las rnam par rgyal ba'i rgyal mtshan*), was especially requested by Tsewang Dorje and Yangdzom Tsering.⁴⁷ The two aristocrats offered Phabongkha *khatas* (*kha btags*), a mandala and the three supports (a statue, text and stupa), asking him to compose a new volume on the collected activities (*las tshogs*) of the deity. Both Yangdzom Tsering and Tsewang Dorje, who had "unswerving faith in the guru [Phabongkha] and *dharmapāla* [Shugden]" are also both listed as having been amongst those who requested Trijang Rinpoche to compose his well-known commentary on the history, nature and activities of Shugden entitled *Music Delighting an Ocean of Oath-Bound Protectors* (*Dam can rgya mtsho dgyes pa'i rol mo*).⁴⁸

In his autobiography Trijang Rinpoche recounts the elaborate Shugden rituals that were held in the protector chapel (*mgon khang*) of the Lhalu mansion. Yangdzom Tsering had requested Phabongkha to construct thread-cross structures (*mdos*), which together with Trijang Rinpoche and a group of monks, he then completed and consecrated.⁴⁹ Detailed instructions on the method for constructing these structures were later compiled by Trijang Rinpoche and are included within his *Collected Works*.⁵⁰ Trijang Rinpoche also notes that during

⁴⁷Pha bong kha, "Shugs ldan gyi bsnyen sgrub las gsum gyi rnam gzhag dgos 'dod yid bzhin re skong phyogs las rnam par rgyal ba'i rgyal mtshan", p.609.

⁴⁸Khri byang rin po che, "Dge ldan bstan pa bsrung ba'i lha mchog sprul pa'i chos rgyal chen po rdo rje shugs ldan rtsal gyi gsang gsum rmad du byung ba'i rtogs pa brjod pa'i gdam du bya ba dam can rgya mtsho dgyes pa'i rol mo", p.157.

⁴⁹Khri byang rin po che, "Khrul snang sgyu ma'i zlos gar ", pp.216-217.

⁵⁰Several texts on the subject can be found, all in Vol. 5 of Khri byang rin po che, Yongs rdzogs

this time he, along with Yangdzom Tsering and Tsewang Dorje, received the life-entrustment (*srog gtad*) or life-initiation (*srog dbang*) of Shugden, in which the deity is bound to the practitioner through ritual. Both Yangdzom Tsering and Tsewang Dorje were clearly very committed to Phabongkha, Trijang Rinpoche and the practice of the protector as the life-entrustment can only be given to a select group of two or three devoted students at a time, and they must fulfill certain prerequisites as well as uphold a number of practice commitments.⁵¹ Receiving the life-entrustment also means that the receiver must place the emphasis, if not the exclusive efforts of their religious practice, on the teachings of the Gelug tradition, one of whose most important protectors was believed to be Shugden in this specific lineage.⁵² Some sources within Phabongkha's lineage state that not doing so would and has historically resulted in even well-known high-ranking religious figures experiencing the wrath of the protector, sometimes also in the case of those who did not rely on or make any commitment to the deity.

According to Zemey Rinpoche Lobsang Palden Tenzin Yargye (Dze smad rin po che Blo bzang dpal ldan bstan 'dzin yar rgyas, 1927-1996), a student of Trijang Rinpoche, several of Yangdzom Tsering's close relations suffered grave misfortunes due to their lack of commitment or aversion to the Gelug lineage and more specifically, to the teachings practiced by the Lhacham. Zemey Rinpoche's notorious *Sacred Words of the Competent Father-Guru* (*Pha rgod bla ma'i zhal lung*), an abbreviation of its actual longer title, and more commonly known as *The Yellow Book* (on account of the colour of its original cover), was published in 1975.⁵³ In this now notorious book Zemey Rinpoche recounts what he says is a collection of stories told to him casually by Trijang Rinpoche. If this is indeed true, then we could perhaps assume that some also trace their origination to Phabongkha.⁵⁴ Whatever the case, this continued composition of works associated with Shugden by Phabongkha, his students and his students' students not only demonstrates the regular continuity and even expansion of lineage teachings observed in all Tibetan Buddhist lineages, but due to their recent composition, they also provide insights into the development of political

bstan pa'i mnga' bdag skyabs rje yongs 'dzin khri byang rdo rje 'chang chen po'i gsung 'bum.

⁵¹ Repo, "Phabongkha Dechen Nyingpo", pp.33-34.

⁵² According to a Gelug practitioner interviewed in Lhasa, 2015.

⁵³ Blo bzang dpal ldan bstan 'dzin yar rgyas, "Mthu dang stobs kyis che ba'i bstan srung chen po rdo rje shugs ldan rtsal gyi byung ba brjod pa pha rgod bla ma'i zhal gyi bdud rtsi'i chu gur brtsegs shing 'jigs rung glog zhags 'gyu ba'i sprin nag 'khrugs pa'i nga ro zhes bya ba bzhugs so".

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.577.

and sectarian tensions amongst Tibetans in the twentieth century, and the way in which the authors of the texts saw these developments, especially in the Lhasa Valley.

The accounts within this 40-folio manuscript are stories demonstrating Shugden's extreme wrath toward those who threaten the Gelug tradition or "confusedly and haphazardly mix and pollute (*bslad*) the teachings [of Tsongkhapa] with those of others".⁵⁵ Indeed the majority of victims of Shugden's wrathful annihilations (*drag po'i chad*) were Gelug practitioners, or rather people who appear to have been expected by the author to be (exclusively) Gelug practitioners. Although the book speaks of the corruption of the Gelug teachings with those of "other" sects, it is clear from the contents and accounts given that the principal corrupting forces are seen to be the teachings of the Nyingma tradition, as Donald Lopez notes: "One of Shugs Idan's particular functions has been to protect the Dge lugs sect from the influence of the Rnying ma,... he is said to punish those who attempt to practice a mixture of the two sects".⁵⁶ Phabongkha himself appears to have received numerous Nyingma teachings that he later ceased to practice due to a number of wrathful signs from Shugden.⁵⁷ Although Phabongkha clearly held a number of historical figures central to the Nyingma sect, such as Padmasambhava, in high regard, he appears to have believed that the Nyingma tradition as it existed in the twentieth century had become largely corrupted, particularly due the tradition of discovering hidden treasure teachings (*gter ma*), many of which he saw as nothing short of fabrications.⁵⁸ Furthermore he was also extremely critical of the understanding of ultimate reality, or emptiness, as explained by other currents of thought in the various Tibetan Buddhist traditions apart from the Gelug, as can be deduced from a number of his teachings.

The Yellow Book is particularly interesting with regard to the life of Yangdzom Tsering, as her most tragic losses, that is the deaths of Jigme Namgyal and Lungshar, are all ascribed in it to Shugden's wrath.⁵⁹ According to the book,

⁵⁵Ibid., p.576-577.

⁵⁶Donald S. Lopez Jr., *The Madman's Middleway: Reflections on Reality of the Tibetan Monk Gendun Chopel*, p.238.

⁵⁷Blo bzang dpal ldan bstan 'dzin yar rgyas, "Pha rgod bla ma'i zhal lung", pp.625-627.

⁵⁸Repo, "Phabongkha Dechen Nyingpo", pp.7-8. In *Liberation in Your Hand*, for example, Phabongkha notes that both Śāntarakṣita and Padmasambhava are manifestations (skur bstan) of the Buddha Śākyamuni (Pha bong kha, *Lam rim nam grol lag bcangs*, p.135).

⁵⁹ A brief but incomplete summary of these and other select accounts drawn from *The Yellow*

previous generations of the Lhalu family had firm faith in the Gelug teachings but Jigme Namgyal became close with a Khampa Nyingma lama from Derge (Sde dge) named Tretse-la (Bkras tshe lags, d.u.) who, when in Lhasa, lived near the Lhalu estate at a hermitage in Pari Rikhug (Spa ri ri khug gi ri khrod).⁶⁰ According to this account, the lama did not hold his monastic vows purely. At first Jigme Namgyal only learned poetry, grammar and spelling (*snyan sum*) and other lesser sciences (*rig gnas*) from him but eventually, together with his mother, he received a number of Nyingma teachings from the lama.⁶¹ Furthermore, according to a steward of the Lhalu estate, Jigme Namgyal's mother had also been having illicit sexual relations with the teacher.⁶² Jigme Namgyal's faith in the Nyingma teaching caused conflict with his wife Yangdzom Tsering, because of her strong faith in the Gelug teachings and reliance on Dorje Shugden. Since the time of his youth, Jigme Namgyal had apparently suffered from a variety of misfortunes which *The Yellow Book* appears to attribute to the wrath of the protector: he suffered from lice infestations, then from a difficult and painful illness, and ultimately he died, causing the Lhalu family blood-line to be in danger of becoming extinct. At that time Ganden Serkong Dorje Chang Ngawang Tsultrim Donden (Dga' ldan gser skong rdo rje 'chang Ngag dbang tshul khrims don ldan, 1856-1918) revealed to Lhacham Yangdzom Tsering that these miraculous signs and events were the result of the power of a great wrathful deity—presumably Dorje Shugden.⁶³

As Yangdzom Tsering's husband, Jigme Namgyal, and son, Phuntsok Rabgye, both died in turn so that only the lady herself remained, her household petitioned the government for help. *The Yellow Book* goes on to tell us that the Thirteenth Dalai Lama appointed the Finance Minister (*rtsis dpon*) Lungshar as the managerial head (*'tsho 'dzin*) of the Lhalu estate. Then, according to the

Book was made available by the Tibetan Youth Congress in late 1996 and subsequently circulated on the internet (Tibetan Youth Congress, "Statement on Shugden by TYC, Dharamsala", 1997). The publication and translations were directly intended to turn opinion against Shugden, as is evident from the strongly worded introduction to the accounts. Here, as I have done throughout this article, I have chosen to refer to the complete original Tibetan primary sources instead.

⁶⁰Blo bzang dpal ldan bstan 'dzin yar rgyas, "Pha rgod bla ma'i zhal lung", p.638. It should be noted that according to one oral source (interviewed 2015), the Lhalu family already adhered to Nyingma teachings before Jigme Namgyal.

⁶¹According to a close relation of Tsewang Dorje, interviewed in 2015, this lama had several students among the Lhasa aristocracy.

⁶²Blo bzang dpal ldan bstan 'dzin yar rgyas, "Pha rgod bla ma'i zhal lung", p.639.

⁶³Ibid., p.640.

Dalai Lama's instructions, Lungshar's son, Tsewang Dorje, was also adopted into the Lhalu family. Lungshar received numerous initiations (*dbang*) and oral transmissions (*lung*) from a variety of Nyingma cycles and lamas and did not hold "pure" philosophical views and tenets.⁶⁴ During his time as the managerial head of the Lhalu estate, Lungshar propitiated and relied on the protector (and popular Tibetan folk hero) Gesar Sengchen Gyalpo (Ge sar seng chen rgyal po) as his principal deity. *The Yellow Book* then paints a picture of conflict. We are told that Lhalu Lhacham Yangdzom Tsering held the "pure views and tenets of the Gelug tradition" (*dge ldan gyi lta grub gtsang*) and that she relied on and made offerings to the protector Dorje Shugden of whom she also had a statue amongst her sacred objects in the protector chapel of the Lhalu mansion. As she had lost much of her authority to Lungshar, he managed to order the statue of Shugden to be moved to Tashi Choeling Hermitage (Dben gnas Bkra shis chos gling), Phabongkha's principal residence. Lungshar, due to his great devotion to the Nyingma tradition and dislike of Shugden, furthermore forbade the usual monthly fulfilling and amending rituals (*bskang gso*) of the protector to be performed at the mansion and thus they also had to be performed at the hermitage.⁶⁵ After a long time Lungshar became extremely ill, with a vulture landing on the roof of his house in Tse Shoel. Due to this ominous occurrence, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama was consulted, and he replied, saying that "if the bird suppressed by Vajrabhairava's first left leg [i.e. a vulture] lands on the roof of one's house it is a sign that someone will die".⁶⁶ The Dalai Lama then instructed that a number of *Gurupūjā gaṇacakra* offerings (*Bla mchod dang*

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp.640-641. Lungshar's devotion to the Nyingma teachings is corroborated by his son (Tshe dbang rdo rje, "Phran tshe dbang rdo rje rang nyid kyi byung ba rags rim brjod pa", p.20). Tsewang Dorje notes that his father's root guru was Lama Dza Rongphu (Bla ma Rdza rong phu, 1867-1940/42), a Nyingma teacher from Dza Rongphu Monastery (Rdza rong phu dgon) in the Everest region, who is more commonly known as Ngawang Tenzin Norbu (Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin nor bu).

⁶⁵The creation of a new extensive Shugden fulfillment ritual was commenced by Phabongkha in 1925 and continued for several years. The fully complete work, *Melodious Drum Victorious in All Directions* (Rnam par rgyal ba'i rnga dbyangs), including its colophon and auspicious verses, was completed in 1927, not 1929 as noted in Repo, "Phabongkha Dechen Nyingpo", p.25 (Pha bong kha, "Dge ldan bstan srung dgra lha'i rgyal po srid gsum skye dgu'i srog bdag dam ldan bu bzhin skyong ba'i lha mchog sprul pa'i rgyal chen rdo rje shugs ldan rigs lnga rtsal gyi sger bskang rgyas pa phyogs las rnam par rgyal ba'i rnga dbyangs", pp. 665-666). It is almost certain that this is the text that was used for the fulfillment rituals in the Lhalu household and at Tashi Choeling.

⁶⁶Blo bzang dpal ldan bstan 'dzin yar rgyas, "Pha rgod bla ma'i zhal lung", p.642.

'brel ba'i tshogs mchod) and many great Drukchuma (*Drug cu ma*), or Sixty-Four Part Offerings to the protector Kālarūpa, must be done in order to avert future obstacles or misfortunes.

The Yellow Book recounts that not long after this the Thirteenth Dalai Lama passed away and then provides details of a selection of events from the subsequent Lungshar affair, ending with a description of Lungshar's frightful fate; he had his eyes gouged out and hot oil poured into the sockets, and was then locked up in the Tse Shoel prison.⁶⁷ Although, as has already been recounted, it appears that Lungshar was later released, according to the *Yellow Book* he nevertheless lived the final few years of his life in fear and misery. According to a source close to Tsewang Dorje, despite being sent to the Lhalu mansion after his punishment to live out his final years, Lungshar nevertheless quickly left. Although he no longer had his eyes, he felt uncomfortable living in a mansion that had such close affiliations to Shugden.⁶⁸ Believing that Shugden was intent at harming followers of his Nyingma tradition, he went to live in his house in Tse Shoel instead, where he then soon died.

Thus the losses of Jigme Namgyal and Lungshar are all ascribed to Shugden's wrath as a punishment for corrupting the Gelug teachings with what are seen as "impure" Nyingma teachings, as well as for preventing Yangdzom Tsering from engaging in "pure" Gelug practices. The death of Phuntsok Rabgye soon after that of Jigme Namgyal was a further extension of the tragedy and also exacerbated the succession dilemma in the Lhalu estate, which had arisen due to the extermination of Jigme Namgyal by Shugden. The point of these stories thus is to demonstrate the grave misfortunes that arise from abandoning or defiling the "pure" Gelug lineage. These misfortunes are then interpreted as being manifestations of the enlightened activity of this particular protector. For this reason the book focusses primarily on accounts of figures who the author(s) considered (or expected) to be Gelugpas, but who nevertheless either abandon the exclusive practice of the tradition, or directly threaten it in one way or another.⁶⁹ This is perhaps the reason why those who believe the accounts told in the book do not consider it sectarian; the majority of the stories of misfortune

⁶⁷Ibid. pp.643-644.

⁶⁸This account was told by a close relation of Tsewang Dorje, interviewed in 2015. Indeed, as can be seen from numerous textual sources, the Lhalu household under the Lhacham and Lungshar's son, Tsewang Dorje, enthusiastically continued relying on the protector.

⁶⁹While Lungshar was a Nyingma devotee, he was also a Ganden Phodrang official who explicitly expressed his dislike for Shugden.

relate primarily to practitioners of the Gelug sect. Thus with regard to the Lhalu family *The Yellow Book* is interesting because it is the only textual source that discusses both the Lhacham's devotion to Shugden and the Gelug lineage, while intertwining these with a narrative laden with clearly sectarian and political dimensions, that is, the threat of Nyingma-related eclecticism to the Gelug tradition in general and especially to the Dalai Lama's Ganden Phodrang government.

The Yellow Book describes Yangdzom Tsering as having been exclusively devoted to the Gelug tradition and Shugden at the time of the passing of her husband and son. This is in contrast to the account of Sampho Tenzin Dondrub, which has already been mentioned, who stated that following the deaths of her husband and son, Yangdzom Tsering abandoned her faith in the Nyingma tradition. Tenzin Dondrub specifically mentions a life-size statue of Padmasambhava being a principal object in the Lhalu shrine room and goes on to say that it was specifically due to her meeting with Phabongkha that she switched from the Nyingma to the Gelug tradition.⁷⁰ However the fact that her husband Jigme Namgyal and the Lhalu family in general were Nyingma devotees does not mean that Yangdzom Tsering herself was. We know for a fact that the Shatra family from which Yangdzom Tsering originally came, was completely devoted to the Gelug tradition. Indeed the fact that following the death of Jigme Namgyal, Yangdzom Tsering managed to ground the whole household in the Gelug tradition as transmitted by Phabongkha, is an indicator of her continued adherence to the Gelug sect, which she was already following before being married into the then Nyingma Lhalu family. Whether or not she was indeed already propitiating Shugden at the time of her husband's death is another matter, and is difficult to establish.

Although Yangdzom Tsering was clearly described as being a devoted follower of Tsongkhapa's teachings and Shugden in *The Yellow Book*, and her son, Phuntsok Rabgye, was never implicated in polluting the Gelug teachings, nevertheless both had to suffer due to the actions of Jigme Namgyal and Lungshar. From the point of view of the author(s) of *The Yellow Book*, their suffering could be seen as an unavoidable necessity in order to fulfill the greater

⁷⁰Tibetan Oral History Archive Project, "Interview H0205 : with Sambo, Tenzin Thondrub [tib. bsam pho, bstan 'dzin don grub, (India, 1981)". Tenzin Dondrub also interestingly notes that despite becoming a follower of the Gelug teachings, the Lhacham nevertheless kept the Nyingma statues in her house.

purpose of protecting the Gelug teachings. However, despite these unfortunate events which befell the family being attributed to Shugden, it is clear from a variety of sources, such the biography of Phabongkha and the autobiographies of Tsewang Dorje and Trijang Rinpoche, the latter from whom these cautionary tales are claimed to originate, that the two teachers had a close and amicable relationship with the Lhalus and clearly sympathized with all three losses. As has already been recounted above, Phabongkha gave his most famous teachings on the *Liberation in Your Hand* in order to create merit for both Jigme Namgyal and Phuntsok Rabgye after their passing and despite the delicacy of the matter, Phabongkha attempted to save the arms of both of Lungshar's sons from being cut off. Trijang Rinpoche also recounts in his autobiography that the Lungshar incident and the problems it resulted in caused him personal sorrow and distress to the extent that it increased his renunciation for *samsāra*.⁷¹ If Trijang Rinpoche, the purported source of the accounts written down by Zemey Rinpoche, appeared distressed with Lungshar's fate then we must question to what extent he would have seen these events as the wrathful activity of the protector, and even if he did, then to what extent did he see them as justified? One could nevertheless argue that due to this series of events, Yangdzom Tsering, despite her personal grief, was left as the most senior member of the Lhalu household, free to continue her religious practices, including her propitiation of Shugden, in peace. She was thus also able to guide Tsewang Dorje towards these same practices and encourage him to have devotion to her own root guru.

Zemey Rinpoche, always a passionate defender of Tsongkhapa's views, was himself on good relations with the Lhalu estate. Two years after completing his Geshe degree, he composed a strongly worded refutation of *The Adornment of Nagarjuna's Thought* (*Klu sgrub dgong rgyan*), a work on Madhyamaka attributed to Gendun Choephel (Dge 'dun chos 'phel, 1903-1951) and which Zemey Rinpoche saw as a heretical work incompatible with Tsongkhapa's teachings on emptiness.⁷² *The Yellow Book* was thus, in a sense, a continuation of Zemey Rinpoche's defense of the Gelug tradition. As with *The Yellow Book*,

⁷¹Khri byang rin po che, "Khrul snang sgyu ma'i zlos gar", p.178.

⁷²The actual full title of Zemey Rinpoche's work is *The Emanated Wheel of Cutting Swords Grinding to Dust the Evil Adversary with a Discourse to Delight Mañjuśrī* (Blo bzang dpal ldan bstan 'dzin yar rgyas, 'Jam dpal dgyes pa'i gdam gyis rgol ngan phyed mar 'thag pa reg gcod ral gri'i 'phrul 'khor), and is discussed in more depth in Lopez, *The Madman's Middle Way*, pp.230-244. Lopez also presents the questions surrounding the authorship of "The Adornment of Nagarjuna's Thought" (Ibid. pp.220-229).

which Zemey Rinpoche stated was based on oral accounts passed on from Trijang Rinpoche, Donald Lopez suggests that Zemey Rinpoche's refutation of Gendun Choephel's work, commonly known as *A Refutation of "The Adornment of Nagarjuna's Thought"* (*Dbu ma klu sgrub dgongs rgyan gyi dgag pa*), was also encouraged, or at least approved of, by Trijang Rinpoche.⁷³ It is, however, impossible to estimate with certainty the extent to which Trijang Rinpoche or his encouragement directly influenced the creation of either work. Whatever the case, the amicable relationship between Zemey Rinpoche and the Lhalu family is evident in the colophon of the original woodblocks of the refutation of *The Adornment of Nagarjuna's Thought*, which notes that Tsewang Dorje, again described as "one with unswerving faith in the victorious teachings of Lobsang [i.e. Tsongkhapa] (*blo bzang rgyal ba'i bstan la mi phyed dad ldan*)", ordered the carving of the new xylographs in 1958.⁷⁴ Tsewang Dorje, who was clearly devoted to his father as attested by his actions during the Lungshar incident, also appears to not have harbored any evident ill feelings with regard to the story of Lungshar as later recounted in *The Yellow Book*.⁷⁵ Tsewang Dorje was touched by these various unfortunate events, but due to his apparently strong faith in his teacher and Shugden, he appears to have viewed all of these situations as manifestation of the enlightened wrathful activity of the protector.⁷⁶ It is difficult to say whether or not the Lhacham herself thought that there was any link between these events and her protector deity, especially as she had already passed away more than a decade before the publication of *The Yellow Book*.

IV. Sponsorship and Legacy

Apart from simply requesting for the composition of certain texts, both Yangdzom Tsering and Tsewang Dorje played a central and direct role in making the works of Phabongkha and his immediate students and teachers available to a wider audience. This was done by providing resources for the composition and editing of texts as well as the actual carving of woodblocks and the printing of manuscripts. Many works in Phabongkha's *Collected Works*, both sūtra and tantra, end with the same stanza indicating that the Lhalu family sponsored

⁷³Ibid., p.239.

⁷⁴Blo bzang dpal ldan bstan 'dzin yar rgyas, 'jam dpal dgyes pa'i gdam gyis rgol ngan phyed mar 'thag pa reg gcod ral gri'i 'phrul 'khor, p.203.

⁷⁵According to a close relation of Tsewang Dorje, interviewed 2015.

⁷⁶Ibid.

the production of these texts. The stanza further functions as a dedication of merit for their continued closeness with Phabongkha in future lives as well as their eventual enlightenment.⁷⁷ The inscription is also found in several Shugden texts, such as the life-entrustment, an associated explanatory text as well as a collection of various rituals dedicated to different wealth-deities and protectors, which also includes a libation (*gser skyems*), exhortation (*'phrin bskul*) and *ganacakra* offering to Shugden.⁷⁸

It was not just individual texts in the *Collected Works* that received the sponsorship of the Lhalus, but the editing and publishing of the whole set of works after Phabongkha's death also, to a large part, depended on their generosity.⁷⁹ In his introduction to Phabongkha's set of works, Trijang Rinpoche makes special note of Tsewang Dorje and Yangdzom Tsering, describing them as "great sponsors" (*rgyu sbyor yon kyi bdag po chen po*) who not only provided money for the carving of the blocks together with many other donors when the *Collected Works* as a whole was being created, but who also supported previous efforts in publishing Phabongkha's works and provided money for extra expenses such as paper, payment for carvers, food and other necessities.⁸⁰ This type of generosity is also noted in specific texts within the *Collected Works*, such as the

⁷⁷"dad dam mtshungs med lha klu dga' tshal bas/ /yon sbyar mthun rkyen 'brel tshad bla ma yis/ /tshes rabs 'bral med mnyes bzhi rjes 'dzin cing/ /zung 'jug rdo rje 'chang dbang myur thob shog/" (See, for example, Pha bong kha, "Lam rim chen mo mchan bu bzhi sbrags kyi skor dran gso'i bsnyel byang mgo smos tsam du mdzad pa", p.191).

⁷⁸Pha bong kha, "'Jam mgon bstan srung yongs kyi thu bo mchog/ rdo rje shugs ldan srog dbang zab mo'i tshul/ byin rlabs rin chen phung po 'dren ba yi/ /yid ches nor bu'i shing rta/", p.523, Pha bong kha, "Rgyal chen srog gtad kyi sngon 'gro'i bshad pa'i mtshams sbyor kha skong", p.540 and Pha bong kha, "Mthu ldan bstan srung khag gi 'phrin bskul gser skyems tshogs mchod sogs dang/ gnod sbyin nor lha'i skor 'ga' zhig phyogs gcig tu bkod pa", pp.457-503. The latter of these three works thus contains several short yet important Shugden-related practices, not just a "brief libation" (see Repo, "Phabongkha Dechen Nyingpo", p.15).

⁷⁹Repo, "Phabongkha Dechen Nyingpo", p.18.

⁸⁰Khri byang rin po che, "Khyab bdag rdo rje 'chang pha bong kha pa dpal bzang po'i gsung 'bum pod ka pa'i dkar chag", pp.4-5. The work of producing the set of collected works took many years to complete. It began soon after Phabongkha's death in 1941, and appears to have continued for almost two decades. The final work of Phabongkha's *Collected Works*, the famous *Liberation in Your Hand*, which takes up the whole of the final volume of the eleven-volume Lhasa edition, was completed by Trijang Rinpoche in 1957 (Pha bong kha, *Lam rim mnam grol lag bcangs*, p.529). This suggests that the set as a whole was only completed and published around a year or two before Trijang Rinpoche's escape from Tibet in 1959. For more on Phabongkha's *Collected Works* see Repo, "Phabongkha Dechen Nyingpo".

colophon to Phabongkha's commentary on the generation and completion stages of Vajrayoginī, *The Heart Essence of the Dakinis of the Three Places* (*Gnas gsum mkha' 'gro'i snying bcud*). This commentary, which was composed after Phabongkha's passing based on his previous oral instructions, states specifically that it was sponsored by the "female sponsor" (*yon gyi bdag mo*), Yangdzom Tsering, who provided accommodation for the writer at the Lhalu mansion, as well as food and funds for the publication in 1954.⁸¹ An example of an earlier publication which was published before Phabongka's death is an initiation manual that the teacher composed for the Thirteen Pure Visions of Tagphu (*Stag phu'i dag snang bcu gsum*), a cycle of teachings associated with the incarnation lineage of his teacher Tagphu Pemavajra. The manual was published by the Lhalu mansion in 1935 following which the blocks were kept at the estate— probably together with the woodblocks of other texts, showing how the sponsorship of the publication of this lineage's works by the Lhalu household lasted for several decades.⁸²

Yangdzom Tsering's generosity was certainly not restricted to donations made to Phabongkha and his direct students, but also included other teachers, especially in the Lhasa Valley.⁸³ According to several sources, at Trijang Rinpoche's urging, she was the principal sponsor of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso's conferral of the Kālacakra initiation at the Norbulingka Palace in the spring of 1954.⁸⁴ Through her sponsorship of these many religious figures, her dedication to her own teachers and practice, and even the stories of her youth (i.e. being a candidate for the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama) she developed a reputation for being someone of great merit (*bsod nams chen po*), and is still remembered as such today both inside and outside of Tibet by every subject interviewed for this article, to the extent that some described her or even describe her today as having been like a “*dākinī*”.⁸⁵ In one of several praises

⁸¹Pha bong kha, "Dpal nA ro mkha' spyod dbang mo'i lam rim pa gnyis kyi zab khrid ji ltar nos pa'i zin bris shin tu gsang ba gnas gsum mkha' 'gro 'i snying bcud", p.724-725.

⁸²Pha-boñ-kha-pa Byams-pa-bstan-'dzin-phrin-las-rgya-mtsho, *dpal stag phu'i gsañ chos rgya can bcu gsum gyi dbañ chog chu 'babs su bkod pa don gñis 'bras bus brijid pa'i yoñs 'du'i dbañ po: Initiation texts for the practice of the visionary teachings received by the Second Stag-phu Sprul-sku Blo bzañ-chos-kyi-dbañ-phyug (gar-dbañ-padma-śwara)*. New Delhi: Ngawang Sopa, 1979, p.439.

⁸³According to a student of Phabongkha interviewed in 2014.

⁸⁴According to several close family relations of Tsewang Dorje, interviewed in 2013 and 2015 and a student of Trijang Rinpoche interviewed in 2014.

⁸⁵For example, according to a Gelug practitioner in Lhasa, 2015.

composed about her by her lover Chingpa, not only are Yangdzom Tsering's physical characteristics praised, but even in these she is described as a *ḍākinī*, and as possessing the mind of *bodhicitta*, perhaps hinting at her religious devotion or a perceived spiritual accomplishment:

"Black shiny hair, with a forehead the shape of a jewel,
 Eyes far apart, with fine eyelashes,
 Your mouth emits the scent of sandalwood and lotus—
 [You are] a *ḍākinī* with a mind of *bodhicitta*."⁸⁶

The Lhalu family as a whole is still seen today by a number of older practitioners of Phabongkha's lineage to be special in this regard and many note how the Lhalu lineage from the Lhacham and Tsewang Dorje onward has produced several reincarnate lamas, who today live both inside and outside of Tibet.⁸⁷

V. Later Life

Despite Yangdzom Tsering's importance in Lhasa society and the high regard in which she was held by many, after the final integration of Tibet into the People's Republic of China and the flight of the Dalai Lama to India in 1959, the Lhacham's life became extremely difficult. During the final years before her death in 1963, the Lhalu mansion had been confiscated by the government and Tsewang Dorje had been imprisoned. Yangdzom Tsering was allowed to keep one of the storerooms of the mansion to live in and only had her former close lady's maid to care for her. By this time the Lhacham's health had declined drastically and she could no longer cook or take care of herself. However even having the assistance of her helper was risky as it was dangerous for anyone to maintain good relations with former aristocrats.

Despite her difficult situation, Yangdzom Tsering maintained her religious

⁸⁶"dbu skra gnag snum dpral ba nor bu'i gzugs/ spyan dkyus ring la rdzi ma phra ba dang/ zhal nas tsan dan pad ma'i dri bro ba/ thugs rgyud byang sems ldan pa'i Da ki ma [sic]" (Bshad sgra Dga' ldan dpal 'byor, "Sger dga' ldan bshad sgra ba'i khyim tshang mi rabs kyi lo rgyus rags tsam bkod pa", p.424).

⁸⁷According to two practitioners of Phabongkha's lineage in Lhasa, 2014.

practice until she passed away at the age of 83. According to several oral accounts her death appears to have been extraordinary. She was discovered sitting upright in the meditation posture, with her hands resting on her lap. Trijung Rinpoche (Khri sprul rin po che, d.u.), a high Gelug lama known by the family, was contacted and he confirmed that although it appeared that the Lhacham had passed away, she was in fact engaged in *thugdam* (*thugs dam*), a tantric meditative practice which uses the subtle states of consciousness that manifest at the time of death in order to reach the state of enlightenment.⁸⁸ Yangdzom Tsering's death meditation lasted for several days. This type of phenomenon, however, is usually only observed following the clinical deaths of spiritually highly attained yogis, suggesting to many that knew her that the Lhacham was herself a highly realized *yoginī*. Following her death, Trijung Rinpoche recounts that some of her remains were sent to him in India where he performed the blessing of her bones (*rus chog*), and then used the remains for making images of various deities in Dharamsala in 1965.⁸⁹

Conclusion

Lhalu Lhacham Yangdzom Tsering's devotion to Phabongkha and her position in the sustenance of his legacy and teachings through her sponsorship of the lineage and its publications is clear. Her importance to the lineage in the minds of Phabongkha's own students is also evident and continues to this day. As an example of this, some years following the Lhacham's death, and the death of Phabongkha Dechen Nyingpo's subsequent reincarnation (1941-1967), Trijung Rinpoche recounts that he had an auspicious dream of the Lhacham during the time of recognizing the current incarnation, Lobsang Thubten Trinley Kunkhyab (Blo bzang thub bstan 'phrin las kun khyab, b.1969), in the early 1970s.⁹⁰ In the dream Yangdzom Tsering, dressed in elaborate clothes and jewels, presented Phabongkha, who was sitting on a high throne, with a white scarf (*mjal dar*),

⁸⁸According to several sources close to the Lhalu family and Tsewang Dorje, interviewed 2013 and 2015.

⁸⁹Khri byang rin po che, "'Khrul snang sgyu ma'i zlos gar", p.396.

⁹⁰Phabongkha Dechen Nyinpo was officially recognized as the reincarnation of an abbot of Phabongkha Monastery and was thus the second incarnation of this line. Counted like this, Lobsang Thubten Trinley Kunkhyab would be the fourth incarnation. However if Dechen Nyingpo were counted as the first incarnation, then Lobsang Thubten in turn, would be the third.

during a celebration.⁹¹

As has been demonstrated, the Lhacham's life story, specifically the tragedies, were woven into the lineage's Shugden lore. In the *Yellow Book* Yangdzom Tsering was represented as an ideal Gelug practitioner, most likely due to her being a close student of Phabongkha. The loss of her loved ones and the catastrophes that the Lhalu estate was flung into were blamed on the "pollution" of the family's allegiance to the Gelug sect. Lhalu Lhacham survived unscathed, as did eventually her young husband, whom she steered towards Phabongkha as well. It also appears that the initial series of unfortunate events that took place were an important causal factor in her finding faith in Phabongkha. Whatever the case, the view of the lineage, according to Zemey Rinpoche, was that Yangdzom Tsering was devoted to Shugden and the Gelug tradition throughout her life. The protector was simply performing his function, that is protecting the Gelug teachings and creating the causes for the Lhalu household to exclusively follow the same. Although we do not know when she began to propitiate Shugden, it does indeed appear that the Lhacham was a Gelug follower from a young age.

What drew the Lhacham to Phabongkha in the first place? Several reasons have been suggested for the growth of Phabongkha's popularity in general and the apparent Shugden-related sectarianism amongst him and his students, including the Lhasa aristocracy. In the early twentieth century the Thirteenth Dalai Lama (r.1879-1933) was engaged in a number of modernisation attempts, including setting up English language schools and a re-organisation of the army. These changes were perceived as a threat by conservative elements in the Tibetan government, especially the Gelug monastic authorities, who eventually helped to ensure the failure of these efforts.⁹² Donald Lopez suggests that as a response to the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's programs, Phabongkha and his teachings gave birth to a "charismatic movement... among Lhasa aristocrats and in the three major Gelug monasteries in the vicinity of Lhasa" which instilled "a strong sense of communal identity at a time when that identity appeared under threat, both by a modernising government and by external forces".⁹³

⁹¹Ibid., pp.512.

⁹²Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet*, pp. 419-426.

⁹³Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-la: Tibetan Buddhism and the West*, p.190. Lopez also states that this "movement" was focused on a trinity of Phabongkha as guru, Vajrayoginī as yidam and Shugden as protector. As already mentioned above, although Vajrayoginī and Shugden were certainly important to Phabongkha, and popular amongst his students, I do not believe Phabongkha aimed at re-inventing the tantric practices of the Gelug tradition with a focus on

Unwelcome changes had also started to take root in Kham under the teachers of the non-sectarian Rime (*ris med*) movement, which encouraged practitioners of all schools to take up a more eclectic approach to the study and practice of Tibet's varied Buddhist lineages. The movement was an apparent response to the supremacy of the Gelug tradition, as is also suggested by the fact that the principal founders of this movement, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo ('Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po, 1820-1892) and Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye ('Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, 1813-1899), promoted primarily Nyingma, Kagyu and Sakya teachings. Although the Gelug lineages were not excluded per se, their views were challenged by Rime masters such as Ju Mipham ('Ju Mi pham, 1846-1912), who was highly critical of current Gelug presentations of Prāsaṅgika philosophy.⁹⁴ Georges Dreyfus suggests that the increased popularity that Dorje Shugden enjoyed during this period as a wrathful protector of the Gelug tradition was a reaction to the rise of the Rime movement.⁹⁵ This is easily extendable to the rise of Phabongkha's brand of Buddhism in general which sought to preserve the Gelug tradition as a distinctive lineage, separate from the eclectic style of the Rime movement which may well have been seen as a threat. This type of caution may have translated into a direct aversion amongst his students on the ground in Kham, where the Rime movement was taking hold. For instance, several accounts of Tsewang Dorje's bias against the Nyingma tradition during his posting as Governor of Chamdo in the late 1940s have been recorded.⁹⁶

Whether or not Phabongkha's was a "charismatic movement" motivated by fear of change in both political and sectarian landscapes or not, it was certainly a continuation of sectarian rivalry that had existed in Tibet throughout most of

these three elements.

⁹⁴Padmakara Translation Group, "Translator's Introduction", pp.48-50.

⁹⁵Georges Dreyfus, "The Shuk-Den Affair: History and Nature of a Quarrel", p.252. Donald Lopez mentions the Rime movement in relation to Shugden's function in opposing the pollution of the Gelug lineage with the teachings of other traditions, however he does not explicitly discuss Shugden and Phabongkha's teachings in general as being a reaction to the movement (Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-la*, p.190).

⁹⁶See, for example, Raimondo Bultrini, *The Dalai Lama and the Kind Demon: Tracking a Triple Murder Mystery Through the Mists of Time*, p. 397- 398. These accounts of Tsewang Dorje's sectarianism originating from Chamdo, of which there are more than one, were doubted by a close family relation of Tsewang Dorje, interviewed in 2015. The interviewee noted that Tsewang Dorje would often commission Gelug monks to perform Gelug prayers, Nyingma monks to perform Nyingma prayers, and so forth. He further noted that Tsewang Dorje's own father and brother were devout Nyingma practitioners and harbored no disdain toward the tradition.

its Buddhist history, which may now look out of place from the perspective of all-embracing twenty-first century Tibetan Buddhism. This is especially true if the enigma that was Phabongkha and his teachings is contrasted to the contemporary, popular and inclusive Rime movement in eastern Tibet. As far as the sources examined here demonstrate, Yangdzom Tsering's motivation for becoming an ardent follower of Phabongkha does not appear to have been explicitly due to concern of extra-Tibetan political forces or of the Rime movement, but rather through being propelled to the teacher because of personal reasons and tragedies. Whether she blamed the Nyingma teachings for the loss of her husband, son and Lungshar, and whether this made her lean even more toward Phabongkha, we will probably never know. According to sources close to Tsewang Dorje, the Lhacham maintained great respect for the Nyingma tradition and kept the Lhalus' large statue of Padmasambhava in her altar room throughout her life.⁹⁷ On the other hand it may well be that the gradual breaking of sectarian boundaries and vast changes that took place in Tibet in the first half of the twentieth century contributed to the types of interpretations espoused by Zemey Rinpoche and the later lineage. This was certainly true in India, where the *Yellow Book* was composed. By this time the Gelug political establishment was in exile and the Fourteenth Dalai Lama was leaning gradually towards an inclusive and ecumenical approach to the various Tibetan religious traditions, in a manner that was perhaps reminiscent of the Khampa Rime masters.

Despite the controversial aura that today surrounds Phabongkha and the analysis of the popularity of Phabongkha's teachings being a reaction to both changing political and sectarian landscapes, the simple spiritual draw of the teacher to followers like the Lhacham cannot be dismissed. Virtually every account given by his students describes the way in which Phabongkha had a humble, humorous and extremely patient personality, and how he was a positively charismatic speaker.⁹⁸ He had a strong voice that could be heard by large assemblies and was able to relate to his audience, making complex topics accessible even to those with little education. Perhaps most importantly, as Geshe Lobsang Tharchin (*dge bshes* Blo bzang mthar phyin, 1921-2004) notes in relation to Phabongkha's public teachings, "The effects on his audience were

⁹⁷According to a close relation of Tsewang Dorje who reports having seen the statue himself numerous times, interviewed 2015.

⁹⁸Geshe Lobsang Tharchin, "Foreword", pp.6-7 and Rilbur Rinpoche, "Phabongka Rinpoche: A Memoir by Rilbur Rinpoche", pp.13-14.

striking and immediate".⁹⁹ Rilbur Rinpoche (Ril 'bur rin po che, 1923-2006) similarly states that, "Whenever he taught, I would feel inspired to become a real yogi by retreating to a cave, covering myself with ashes and meditating".¹⁰⁰ Although we can only speculate, it is probable that Yangdzom Tsering was likewise taken by Phabongkha's charming personality and the immediacy of his teachings, in which she searched for solace due to the turmoil that had taken place in her family. She then eagerly began to undertake a variety of practices including tantric retreats of deities such as Vajrayoginī and Vajrabhairava and undertook an extensive daily practice schedule for the rest of her life.¹⁰¹ Thus in the case of Yangdzom Tsering and many others, the reason for their lifelong devotion to Phabongkha may not have been anything more than an actual attraction to him and a genuine feeling of benefit, which they felt they derived from his teachings.

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⁹⁹Geshe Lobsang Tharchin, "Foreword", p.7.

¹⁰⁰Rilbur Rinpoche, "Pabongka Rinpoche: A Memoir by Rilbur Rinpoche", p.13.

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Khri byang rin po che Blo bzang ye shes bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho. "Dga' ldan khri chen byang chub chos 'phel gyi skye gral du rlom pa'i gyi na pa zhig gis rang gi ngag tshul ma bchos lhug par bkod pa 'khrul snang sgyu ma'i zlos gar", in Vol. 4 of *Yongs rdzogs bstan pa'i mnga' bdag skyabs rje yongs 'dzin khri byang rdo rje 'chang chen po'i gsung 'bum* (8 vols.). s.l. : s.n., 199-. [TBRC W14592]

_____. "Dge ldan bstan pa bsrung ba'i lha mchog sprul pa'i chos rgyal chen po rdo rje shugs ldan rtsal gyi gsang gsum rmad du byung ba'i rtogs pa brjod pa'i gtam du bya ba dam can rgya mtsho dgyes pa'i rol mo", in Vol.5 of *Yongs rdzogs bstan pa'i mnga' bdag skyabs rje yongs 'dzin khri byang rdo rje 'chang chen po'i gsung 'bum* (8 vols.). s.l. : s.n., 199-, pp.5-159. [TBRC W14592]

- _____. "Khyab bdag rdo rje 'chang pha bong kha pa dpal bzang po'i gsung 'bum pod ka pa'i dkar chag", in Vol.1 of *Khyab bdag rdo rje 'chang pha bong kha pa dpal bzang po'i gsung 'bum* (11 vols.). Lhasa: s..n., 199-, pp.1-7. [TBRC W3834]
- _____. *Yongs rdzogs bstan pa'i mnga' bdag skyabs rje yongs 'dzin khri byang rdo rje 'chang chen po'i gsung 'bum* (8 vols.). s.l. : s.n., 199-. [TBRC W14592]
- Ldan ma Blo bzang rdo rje. *Rigs dan dkyil 'khor rgya mtsho'i khyab bdag he ru kah dpal nur smrig gar rol skyabs gcig pha bon kha pa bde chen sñin po pal bzang po'i rnam par thar pa don ldan tshañs pa'i dbyañs sñan: The detailed biography of Rje Pha-bon-kha-pa Byams-pa-bstan-'dzin-'phrin-las-rgya-mtsho* (2 vols.). New Delhi: Ngawang Sopa, 1981. [TBRC W23912]
- Pha bong kha Bde chen snying po. "'Jam mgon bstan srung yongs kyi thu bo mchog/ /rdo rje shugs ldan srog dbang zab mo'i tshul/ /byin rlabs rin chen phung po 'dren ba yi/ /yid ches nor bu'i shing rta", in Vol. 7 of *Khyab bdag rdo rje 'chang pha bong kha pa dpal bzang po'i gsung 'bum* (11 vols.). Lhasa: s.n., 199-, pp.505-523. [TBRC W3834]
- _____. "Dge ldan bstan srung dgra lha'i rgyal po srid gsum skye dgu'i srog bdag dam ldan bu bzhin skyong ba'i lha mchog sprul pa'i rgyal chen rdo rje shugs ldan rigs lnga rtsal gyi sger bskang rgyas pa phyogs las rnam par rgyal ba'i rnga dbyangs", in Vol.7 of *Khyab bdag rdo rje 'chang pha bong kha pa dpal bzang po'i gsung 'bum* (11 vols.). Lhasa: s..n., 199-, pp.611-667. [TBRC W3834]
- _____. "Dpal nA ro mkha' spyod dbang mo'i lam rim pa gnyis kyi zab khrid ji ltar nos pa'i zin bris shin tu gsang ba gnas gsum mkha' 'gro'i snying bcud", in Vol.10 of *Khyab bdag rdo rje 'chang pha bong kha pa dpal bzang po'i gsung 'bum* (11 vols.). Lhasa: s..n., 199-, pp.479-725. [TBRC W3834]
- _____. "Lam rim chen mo mchan bu bzhi sbrags kyi skor dran gso'i bsnyel byang mgo smos tsam du mdzad pa", in Vol.5 of *Khyab bdag rdo rje 'chang pha bong kha pa dpal bzang po'i gsung 'bum* (11 vols.). Lhasa: s..n., 199-, pp.5-191. [TBRC W3834]
- _____. *Lam rim rnam grol lag bcangs*. Lhasa: Ser gtsug nang bstan dpe rnying 'tshol bsdu phyogs sgrig khang, 2009. [TBRC W1KG8583]
- _____. "Mkha' spyod bgrod pa'i man ngag gser chos thun min zhal shes chig

brgyud ma", in Vol.4 of *Khyab bdag rdo rje 'chang pha bong kha pa dpal bzang po'i gsung 'bum* (11 vols.). Lhasa: s.n., 199-, pp. 271-277. [TBRC W3834]

_____. "Mthu ldan bstan srung khag gi 'phrin bskul gser skyems tshogs mchod sogs dang/ gnod sbyin nor lha'i skor 'ga' zhig phyogs gcig tu bkod pa", in Vol.7 of *Khyab bdag rdo rje 'chang pha bong kha pa dpal bzang po'i gsung 'bum* (11 vols.). Lhasa: s.n., 199-, pp.457-503. [TBRC W3834]

_____. "Rdo rje rnal 'byor ma nA ro mkha' spyod dbang mo'i dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga bde chen dga' ston", in Vol.4 of *Khyab bdag rdo rje 'chang pha bong kha pa dpal bzang po'i gsung 'bum* (11 vols.). Lhasa: s.n., 199-, pp.61-131. [TBRC W3834]

_____. "Rgyal chen srog gtad kyi sngon 'gro bshad pa'i mtshams sbyor kha skong", in Vol.7 of *Khyab bdag rdo rje 'chang pha bong kha pa dpal bzang po'i gsung 'bum* (11 vols.). Lhasa: s.n., 199-, pp.525-540. [TBRC W3834]

_____. "Shugs ldan gyi bsnyen sgrub las gsum gyi rnam gzhas dgos 'dod yid bzhin re skong phyogs las rnam par rgyal ba'i rgyal mtshan", in Vol.7 of *Khyab bdag rdo rje 'chang pha bong kha pa dpal bzang po'i gsung 'bum* (11 vols.). Lhasa: s.n., 199-, pp.541-609 [TBRC W3834]

Pha-boñ-kha-pa Byams-pa-bstan-'dzin-phrin-las-rgya-mtsho. *dpal stag phu'i gsañ chos rgya can bcu gsum gyi dbañ chog chu 'babs su bkod pa don gñis 'bras bus brjid pa'i yoñs 'du'i dbañ po: Initiation texts for the practice of the visionary teachings received by the Second Stag-phu Sprul-sku Blo bzañ-chos-kyi-dbañ-phyug (gar-dbañ-padma-śwara)*. New Delhi: Ngawang Sopa, 1979. [TBRC W3838]

Tshe dbang rdo rje, "Phran tshe dbang rdo rje rang nyid kyi byung ba rags rim brjod pa" in Vol. 6 of *Bod kyi lo rgyus rig gnas dpyad gzhi'i rgyu cha bdams bsgrigs* (10 vols.). Chengdu: Si khron dpe skrun tshogs pa/ Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, pp.14-277. [TBRC W1PD96945]

Tshe dbang rdo rje, "Yab gzhis lha klu'i khyim tshang gi lo rgyus skor" in Vol. 6 of *Bod kyi lo rgyus rig gnas dpyad gzhi'i rgyu cha bdams bsgrigs* (10 vols.). Chengdu: Si khron dpe skrun tshogs pa/ Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, pp.1-13. [TBRC W1PD96945]

Was the Buddha an Anti-Realist?¹

Douglass Smith

In the present article I look at some claims that a form of anti-realism about separate material and mental things can be found within early Buddhism. We will see that while such claims bear a certain prima facie force, particularly when isolated to particular passages in the Canon, taken in a broader context they become less convincing. In contrast I will suggest that in the service of his ethical system the Buddha propounded an incomplete or inchoate metaphysics, but one with at least the suggestion of realism.

Following Luis Gomez, Alex Wynne has recently pointed to a number of apophatic strands within early Buddhism which he takes to have anti-realist connotations². He says that “the Buddha was the first person in history to reject, let alone entertain, the notion that the external world apprehended through the senses is a mind-independent reality.”³ In this he appears to be in agreement with Noa Ronkin (2005: 245), who has argued that,

What the Buddha rejects is realism, conceptual and ontological alike:

¹Many thanks to Richard Hayes, John Holder, and Justin Whitaker for helpful commentary on previous versions of this paper.

²Gomez 1976, Wynne 2010, Wynne 2015

³Wynne 2015: 5

the notion that the encountered world is made up of distinguishable substances, and the linguistic theory that words refer to these substances which they represent.

We will look at the question as to whether the Buddha of the Pāli Nikāyas was an anti-realist.

Realism is typically identified in contrast to anti-realism. It might be a claim about the existence of universals as versus a nominalist claim about mere resemblances. It might be a claim about the existence of distinguishable substances or material objects as versus an idealist claim about mere phenomena. It might also be a claim about objective truths as versus a conventionalist claim about mere sentences.

In each of these cases the realist asserts the existence of something objective as against the anti-realist claim that the matter is only subjective. The anti-realist believes that in one way or another the items in question are constituted by, or directly dependent upon, the subject for their existence.

It is perhaps best to illustrate the distinction between realism and anti-realism through paradigmatic examples. A realist about material things will say that material things are not constituted by, nor persistently dependent upon, mental things, although they may be causally interrelated with mental things. Material things therefore exist objectively, “in their own right” as it might be put, and are not constructs formed out of mental things.

An anti-realist about material objects will say the reverse: that material things are constructs formed out of, or immediately dependent upon, mental things.

Similarly, a realist about truth will say that truth is not constituted by convention or opinion (which are themselves mental things), but that instead sentences or propositions may be true objectively, no matter what people may believe.

An anti-realist about truth will say the reverse: that truth is in some sense constituted by convention or opinion: that our beliefs about something make it true.

Sophisticated philosophical theories are generally constituted by a nuanced blend of realism and anti-realism. While they can be sharpened arbitrarily, for the purposes of the *Nikāyas* we will need relatively basic versions to do the work at hand. In the case of the Buddha, realist and anti-realist claims mainly involve issues regarding idealism about objects and conventionalism about truth. There is not much discussion in the *Nikāyas* that bears on the question of universals,

so we will not deal with that here.

The contemporary reconstructions we will be dealing with are apophatic in nature, in which reality is claimed to be ineffable or beyond all positive description.⁴ Taken as such, these theories do not explicitly constitute forms of anti-realism since they support the existence of a reality, albeit a reality which cannot be positively described. For the purposes of this paper therefore we will stipulate “anti-realism” to mean a theory that denies the objective existence of separate, sensible objects that admit of correct, positive (cataphatic) description: material and mental things.

A note about process philosophy

As regards “things”, Ronkin (2005) has ably argued for the position that the Buddha’s metaphysics should be described as a form of “process philosophy”, that is one involving “processes” rather than “things” or “substances”.⁵ She defines “substance” following Aristotle as “that which exists independently of any other thing, ontologically, epistemologically and linguistically.”⁶ Her anti-realist claim above is directed against a *substantival* form of realism, and this is no doubt correct in spirit. The Buddha taught that all compound things were in continual, interdependent flux, so insofar as we define substances as entirely independent and changeless, they would not belong within the Buddha’s metaphysical picture of the world. That said, this transcendental understanding of substance is at odds with a view attributed to W.V.O. Quine and others under the rubric of the “indispensability argument”, whereby we ought to have ontological commitment to all and only the entities that are indispensable to our best empirical theories.⁷ The argument against the Buddha having been a substantival realist does not touch the view that he may have been a different kind of realist.

⁴For more on the apophatic understanding of early Buddhism and its relation to ineffability see Gombrich 2009: 150ff

⁵E.g., “Underlying process metaphysics is the supposition that encountered phenomena are best represented and understood in terms of occurrences — processes and events — rather than in terms of ‘things’”. Ronkin 2009: 14

⁶Ronkin 2005: 55

⁷A dapted from Colyvan 2015. While the argument typically comes up in the context of mathematical realism, it applies equally to other forms of realism such as that of material objects. Cf. Quine’s argument about pennies, below

In any event, it is debatable whether the word “process” adds much more than nuance to the discussion. Vagueness infects all compound objects. We might say that as vagueness increases entities become more process-like, and as it decreases, as they become simpler to individuate, they become more thing-like. Then perhaps we can say processes are things, though at times with less precise identity conditions than those we ordinarily take ourselves to be referring to, such as chairs and mountains.

However we understand them, processes seem to play more or less the same ontological role that substances classically played within western metaphysics.⁸ They can be individuated from one another by their characteristics, and they must at least manifest a difference between essential and accidental properties responsible for their arising, persistence, and eventual demise.⁹ So for example rainstorms, heatwaves, famines, and symphonic performances are all paradigmatic processes.¹⁰ They also manifest certain changes which do not bring about their demise *qua* particular process, and other changes which do. So lowering the temperature during Beethoven’s Fifth does not change the identity of that particular performance, though changing the orchestra and conductor would. Hence *qua* performance, temperature is accidental but composition of the players is essential. (Though quite how many players is essential may be an irretrievably vague matter).

The difference, indeed, between processes and more traditional, substantial things appears somewhat obscure, and may simply amount to processes being rather vaguer and more event-like.¹¹ At any rate, as Nicholas Rescher (1996: 33) says, “process philosophers are not promoting a reformation or transformation of ordinary language.” Hence they have “no wish (and no need) for dispensing with the thing *concept*.”

⁸ “[A]ny of the characterizations of substances in the ontological tradition will, in fact, hold good of particular processes”. Rescher 1996: 30.

⁹ Cf., Rescher 1996: 66-67. He points to an awareness of vagueness as something that sets process philosophy apart from substance philosophy, however even so it will have to rely on (vaguely defined) essential and accidental properties to constitute the coming into being and passing away of processes

¹⁰ Rescher 1996: 52

¹¹ Cf. Ronkin 2005: 67-71. She outlines differences between processes and events, then says the difference between them “is epistemological, not ontological”. If, however, processes can be analyzed in terms of events, then while it may be correct to say that the Buddha rejected conceptual and ontological substance-realism, this would still leave open the question as to whether he also rejected conceptual and ontological event-realism.

As a result in this paper I will persist with talk about things and objects, trusting that it can be translated into process talk if that is so desired.

Anti-realism in the Nikāyas

Luis Gomez locates an apophatic strand within the *Aṭṭhakavagga* of the *Sutta Nipāta* (Sn), perhaps one of the earliest books in the *Nikāyas*. He describes it in mystical terms, and as a form of “proto-Mādhyamika”:

These passages strike the reader as some of the most explicit and representative statements of an extreme apophatic tendency found elsewhere in Buddhist literature. ...

This tendency could be characterized in the theoretical realm as the doctrine of no-views, and in the practical realm as the practice of practicing no dharmas. ... [I]t stands on an ascetic discipline of silence which corresponds and leads to the higher goal of silencing the mind’s imaginative-discursive faculties, whereupon the mystic reaches the ultimate state of inner silence, considered to be itself beyond all possible theoretical description.¹²

The *Aṭṭhakavagga* contains critiques against “views” (*diṭṭhi*, e.g., Sn 889), “arguments and disputes” (*kalahā vivādā*, Sn 862-3), “truth and falsity” (*saccammusā*, Sn 886), and what Gomez translates as “apperception” (*saññā*, e.g., Sn 874); it is the word used for one of the five *khandhas*, often translated “perception”.¹³ On this theory, our apperceptions produce views and opinions in us by dividing up the world into illusory conceptual categories. These views incite disputes, which themselves only produce further suffering. Our proper response should be to abandon all views as inherently tainted and misleading, in order to directly experience reality for itself, which is beyond all views and concepts. Since this theory denies the separate existence of material and mental things, it qualifies as a form of anti-realism for purposes of this paper.

Ronkin (2005) and Wynne (2010) also find apophatic tendencies within the *Aṭṭhakavagga*. Ronkin (2005: 246) says that it “promulgates an ascetic discipline of silence and repudiation of our very cognitive apparatus as based on linguistic

¹² Gomez 1976: 140

¹³ Cf., Gomez 1976: 144

and conceptual delineation”.

To support this claim she refers to a passage that she translates,

Neither conceptualizing, nor conceptualizing wrongly, nor lacking conceptualization, nor conceptualizing nothing — in one who has achieved this state sensory recognizable experience(*rūpa*) ceases, for what is called ‘verbal proliferation’ (*papañca*) has its origin in conceptualization. (Sn 874).¹⁴

Hence it is conceptualization itself that is the basic problem: our cognitive apparatus itself binds us to *samsāra* through our basic tendency to divide the world up into things. This leads to “verbal proliferation”, and *dukkha*. The complete abandonment of proliferation brings an end to *dukkha*, therefore realizing *nibbāna*.¹⁵ However absent proliferation, there is no intrinsic form to reality; it is strictly ineffable.

Wynne takes this apophatic approach to the entirety of the Buddha’s *dhamma*.¹⁶ Looking at the passage above (Sn 874), he says, “According to this enigmatic statement of the Buddha, a person’s physical being is not ultimately real, but depends on the tendency to conceptualise reality in terms of a manifold world of diversity.”

Wynne also takes a look at two other stanzas:

‘Devoid of thirst even before death,’ said the Blessed One, ‘not dependent upon the past, immeasurable in the middle, for him nothing is fashioned with regard to the future. (Sn 849).

He is without attachment for the future and does not grieve over the past. Perceiving detachment, he is not led into sense- contacts and views. (Sn 851).

These, he says, show “that the liberated sage is released from the very notion of time.” Taken together with the above passage (Sn 874), together they demonstrate

¹⁴Ronkin 2005: 246-7

¹⁵E.g., MN 18.8/I.110-111. That the process there described constitutes *nibbāna* can be seen at AN 7.12/IV.9

¹⁶“The basic idea of [the Buddha’s] philosophy is relatively straightforward ... But the radical implications which follow from this have not yet been grasped. For if the perceived world is a conceptual construction, it implies that space, time and individual existence are not objectively real, and that Nirvana is the ineffable truth of phenomena, rather than an absolute reality beyond it.” Wynne 2015: 7.

for Wynne (2010: 163) that notions of existence, non-existence and time are said to be dependent on a person's cognitive functioning, the release from which implies the cessation of a person's awareness of individual existence in space-time.

Since notions of space and time are thus mind-dependent, there is no sense that can be made of material reality except as a kind of cognitive epiphenomenon. As Wynne (2015: 30) puts it, "... [T]he world's existence somehow depends upon a human being, and not the other way around." Insofar as release into *nibbāna* unbinds us from such notions, reality is strictly indescribable in temporal or spatial terms.

The drawback about using poetic verse to ground our philosophical understanding is that, to use Wynne's word, it is "enigmatic". However he identifies other anti-realist strands within the *Nikāyas*, particularly within the *Brahmajāla Sutta* (DN1). The *Brahmajāla* contains, among other things, a rejection of sixty-two wrong metaphysical views about the world. Wynne (2010: 148-9) takes it to constitute a rejection of realist ontology and hence realism generally, by formulating time, space, existence and non-existence as "epistemologically conditioned" conceptual constructs. In Wynne's view this does not lead the Buddha into some version of idealism, however. That would amount only to another form of cognitive conditioning:

For idealism is still an ontology of sorts, and indeed one that can only be imagined under particular cognitive conditions ... [T]he *Brahmajāla Sutta*'s philosophy of epistemological conditioning implies that reality is ultimately ineffable, as is the state of the person who realises it by escaping his cognitive conditioning.

Wynne finds corroborating evidence for a generalized anti-realism in the *Kevaṭṭa Sutta*, in the famous passage where, as Wynne puts it, "the 'end of the world' is to be found in consciousness":

Consciousness, which is intransitive, infinite and luminous all round,

Here water, earth, fire and wind do not stand firm.

Here the great and small, the minute and gross, the attractive and unattractive,

Here name and form cease without remainder.

With the cessation of consciousness, this [i.e. name and form] ceases.¹⁷

This implies that the five *khandas* of name and form are directly dependent upon our conceptual apparatus for their existence as separate, identifiable entities.

Wynne finds further evidence for this view in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*, where the Buddha tells his *bhikkhus* that the gods “cannot establish the location of the Tathāgata’s consciousness.”¹⁸ Wynne (2015: 62) explains,

Since this vital aspect of cognitive conditioning [a liberated person’s transitive consciousness (*viññāna*)] — and thus the mental construction of space-time — is not part of the awakened experience, it follows that a liberated being cannot be spatially located, even if he somehow remains mindful and fully aware.

The problem may be that for the Buddha all consciousness was necessarily transitive.¹⁹ Hence one might say that any sort of consciousness that were not transitive would ipso facto be ineffable.

Another look at the suttas

Wynne’s take on the *dhamma* is perhaps an extreme version of Buddhist anti-realism, however as we have seen it has support from interpretations of the early *suttas*. Most prominently these involve the *Aṭṭhakavagga*, however the anti-realism found there becomes more plausible when interpreted in the light of similar anti-realist passages in the *Kevaṭṭa* and *Alagaddūpama Suttas*, and given a particular understanding of the *Brahmajāla*. While there are a few other, similar passages elsewhere in the *Nikāyas*, these should suffice as a good base for investigation.

I. The Aṭṭhakavagga

Undoubtedly an early text, the *Aṭṭhakavagga* reads as though composed by a

¹⁷DN 11/I.223, in Wynne 2015: 30

¹⁸MN 22.36/I.140

¹⁹MN 38.8/I.259-260. Cf., “The Buddha is saying that consciousness is always consciousness of something.” Gombrich 2009: 120

teacher wearied of continual argument and dispute. This should not be surprising if we consider the environment in which it may have originated. Although the early period in the Buddha's teaching is not well documented, there can be no doubt that life for a young renunciant cannot have been particularly easy in ancient India. It was a time of great intellectual ferment, disagreement, and dispute.²⁰ Before the Buddha had assembled a sizable *saṅgha* he would have been one of the crowd, a likely target or mark for debate. While the *Nikāyas* preserve plenty of evidence of the Buddha's willingness to debate, one also senses that by the time the body of the *Nikāyas* had been composed, the *saṅgha* would have grown to a decent size. By then the Buddha was already a fully accomplished debater in his own right, and one who was looked upon with some regard even by his sometime opponents.²¹ And by that time those who wished to debate him would have had to do so on the Buddha's own terms. For example, Saccaka the son of Nigaṇṭha comes to the Buddha, into the Great Wood, to debate him in the Hall with the Peaked Roof.²² That is, Saccaka comes into the well-appointed territory of a respected sage, no doubt surrounded by many of the Buddha's own monks.

At the beginning of his career the Buddha could not have counted on such support, and one senses that a life of constant struggle to be heard above the crowd was at times wearying. This might have been the stage on which the Buddha composed his verses disdaining arguments and views.

It is important however not to take such verses out of context, even out of the context of the *Aṭṭhakavagga* itself. As Steven Collins (1982: 129) has said, "these poems represent the summation, in *Theravāda* literature, of the style of teaching which is concerned less with the content of views and theories than with the psychological state of those who hold them." The poems in this section of the *Sutta Nipāta* do, in fact, put forward any number of views, even while they disparage putting forward views.²³ For example, the Buddha describes Māgandiya's daughter as "full of urine and excrement" (*muttakarīsapuṇṇam*) in rejecting her hand in marriage. (Sn 835). He disdains calling people "fools" (*bāla*) for their beliefs

²⁰E.g., Kapstein 2001: XVI

²¹E.g., by the Brahmins of Sālā, MN 60.2/I.401: "Now a good report of Master Gotama has been spread to this effect: ..." etc. Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 2009: 506

²²MN 36.3/I.237

²³Cf. "[The *Aṭṭhakavagga* and the *Pārāyanavagga*] have struck many as sounding a silent teaching beyond words. However, these texts are explaining something very definite about views." Fuller 2012: 147

while at the same time calling people “fools” for their beliefs. (Sn 887-893). He describes the path to *nibbāna*, through a practice of mindfulness, ethical behavior, and modesty. (Sn 915ff). He advises against violence, deceit, pride, and greed. (Sn 935ff). And so on. Insofar as there are apophatic passages within the *Aṭṭhakavagga*, they should be taken in this rather more cataphatic context.²⁴

As for the stanza from above in both Ronkin and Wynne (Sn 874), citing it in context illuminates the meaning. It appears at the culmination of the *Kalahavivāda Sutta*, which is a discussion about how to end disputes. The Buddha proposes an analytic formula similar to that of dependent origination:

disputes stem from our desire for this and that (*chanda*). Desire for this and that stems from the distinction between pleasant (*sāta*) and unpleasant (*asāta*). Pleasant and unpleasant arise from contact (*phassa*). And it proceeds:

‘Contact exists because the compound of mind and matter exists. The habit of grasping is based on wanting things. If there were no wanting, there would be no possessiveness. Similarly, without the element of form, of matter, there would be no contact.’ (Sn 872)

‘What pursuit leads a person to get rid of form? And how can suffering and pleasure cease to exist? That is what I want to know about.’²⁵ (Sn 873)

Now we come to the crux of the passage, which as we have seen Ronkin (and Wynne as well) translates in terms of “conceptualizing”.²⁶ The word at issue is “*saññā*”, which is one of the five aggregates often translated “perception”. Saddhatissa (1985: 102) translates the stanza with that term:

‘There is a state where form ceases to exist. ... It is a state without ordinary perception and without disordered perception and without no perception and without any annihilation of perception. It is perception, consciousness, that is the source of all the basic obstacles.’ (Sn 874).

²⁴Here I am in agreement with Fuller (2012: 150) that the *Aṭṭhakavagga* and the *Nikāyas* “both teach the same thing: a non-attached attitude through the cultivation of rightview.”

²⁵Saddhatissa 1985: 102

²⁶Wynne 2010: 162

Gomez (1976: 144) translates it in terms of “apperception”, which may be the more accurate if obscure concept. The point of the stanza is that our problem lies in how we perceive things in the light of previous experience, and in particular in the light of ignorance. This is a more conceptually mediated process than the bare, English word “perception” might suggest, and one that has connotations of naming or labeling, which is no doubt why Ronkin and Wynne chose to translate it in terms of “conceptualizing” rather than “perceiving”. But in reading it that way one may lose sight of the fact that this discussion echoes others within the Canon on the same topic of ending desire for sense objects.

The point of the *Kalahavivāda Sutta* is to end disputes by ending our grasping after pleasant and unpleasant forms. The *Nikāyas* present a well worked-out practice for ending grasping after pleasant and unpleasant forms: *jhānic* meditation, of which the fourth of the so called “formless” or “*arūpa*” *jhānas*, “neither perception nor non-perception” (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*) fits particularly well.²⁷ It is a state one might say, using Sn 874’s formula, without ordinary *saññā*, without disordered *saññā*, without non-*saññā*, without annihilation of *saññā*. In this process, form ceases to exist for the meditator: any contact with form is broken. Being unaware of form, the meditator is no longer swayed by its pleasant and unpleasant aspects. Indeed, this is true for any perception whatever, since the state is one between perception and non-perception. Remaining unswayed, she does not dispute with the world.

If this is correct, and understanding *saññā* as referring to the fourth formless *jhāna* seems to fit Sn 874, then there is no need to interpret it as having any particular anti-realist connotation. It contains no repudiation of our conceptual apparatus, nor any claim about the subjectivity of material and mental things. It simply asserts that to escape dispute, one should engage in deep *jhāna* so as to overcome attachment to sense objects.

As an aside, assuming that the *Aṭṭhakavagga* is a particularly early text, this interpretation of the *Kalahavivāda Sutta* as privileging *jhānic* meditation lends support to Gombrich’s claim (1996: 96-134) that “insight worsted concentration in the Pāli Canon”. It might seem that the younger Buddha was perhaps still not so philosophically distant from his old guru Uddaka Rāmaputta as might otherwise have been expected.²⁸ Or perhaps not: at the end of the *Kalahavivāda*,

²⁷I believe this interpretation is supported by the Mahaniddesa commentary. Viz., Thanissaro 2013

²⁸See e.g., Wynne 2007: 43

the Buddha is pointedly elusive as to whether the state arrived at in Sn 874 is actually *nibbāna*.

Stanzas such as the two at the beginning of the *Purābheda Sutta* (Sn 849-851) are in a similar fashion more simply viewed as arguments against attachment to ideas of future and past rather than claims about the dependence of time upon our cognitive conditioning.²⁹ The above assertion in Sn 849 that the *arahant* is “immeasurable” (*nūpasamkheyyo*) in the present is one we will return to below.

II. The Alagaddūpama Sutta

This, one of the deepest and most rewarding *suttas* in the entire Canon, is also according to Gombrich (1996: 107) “one of the oldest”. As we saw with the *Aṭṭhakavagga*, it contains a complex blend of apparently apophatic and cataphatic teachings. The *sutta* begins with the Buddha’s scolding of the wayward monk, Ariṭṭha for his wrong view about sensual pleasures, and contains one of the Buddha’s best known parables, that of the raft, teaching us not to cling to the *dhamma* beyond its usefulness in crossing the stream of *saṃsāra*.³⁰

In the middle of the *sutta*, the Buddha gives a lengthy description of the *arahant*, which finishes with the rhetorical flourish mentioned above:

Bhikkhus, when the gods with Indra, with Brahmā and with Pajāpati seek a *bhikkhu* who is thus liberated in mind, they do not find [anything of which they could say]: ‘The consciousness of one thus gone is supported by this.’ Why is that? One thus gone, I say, is untraceable here and now.³¹

Much like the earlier passages we saw in the *Sutta Nipāta*, this passage is obscure and in need of exegesis. The point is that one who has attained *nibbāna* is “untraceable”, which Wynne (2015: 62) takes as an anti-realist claim that such a person has transcended “the mental construction of space-time”.

It may also be amenable to a different interpretation. Typically it is said that one escapes Māra through *jhānic* meditation.³² For example,

²⁹Indeed, it is not clear what such a claim could amount to, since cognitive conditioning itself is an essentially temporal process

³⁰It is a parable which also occurs in the *Sutta Nipāta*, at Sn 21

³¹MN 22.36/I.140. Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 2009: 233

³²E.g., Dhammapada 274-276

So too, bhikkhus, when, secluded from sensual pleasures ... a bhikkhu enters and dwells in the first jhāna ... on that occasion it occurs to the bhikkhu: ‘Now I am secure from danger and Māra cannot do anything to me.’ ...

When, with the complete surmounting of perceptions of forms, with the passing away of perceptions of sensory impingement, with non-attention to perceptions of diversity, [perceiving] ‘space is infinite,’ a bhikkhu enters and dwells in the infinity of space, on that occasion he is called a bhikkhu who has blinded Māra, put out Māra’s eyes without a trace, and gone beyond sight of the Evil One.³³

And where is it that Māra and his following cannot go? Here, quite secluded from sensual pleasures ... a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the first [second, etc.] jhāna ... This bhikkhu is said to have blindfolded Māra, to have become invisible to the evil one by depriving Māra’s eye of its opportunity.³⁴

The distinction between one in deep *jhāna* and one who has attained *nibbāna* is that the former is said to have blinded or blindfolded Māra, etc., and the latter is said to have blinded or blindfolded Māra, etc., and also to be “beyond attachment to the world”. But note that it is the same basic concept at work in both cases: one “blindfolds Māra” by being “secluded from sensual pleasures”. In that seclusion, one is also at least temporarily unattached to sense pleasures. The unbinding of *nibbāna* involves making this temporary state permanent. So the *arahant* is not merely temporarily devoid of sensual desire, but is permanently so. Thus to be visible to or discoverable by Māra is a metaphor for having an underlying tendency to sense attachment. This may be what the Buddha means with his obscure claim about being “untraceable” by the gods: he is beyond being located and tempted by their wiles.

This may also be the referent of the term that Wynne translates “immeasurable” (*nūpasamkheyyo*) in Sn 849, saying that the liberated sage is “immeasurable in the [present]”. Or, if that is the correct translation, it may refer to the “maker of measurement” (*pamānakarana*) in SN 41.7/IV.297: “Lust ... is a maker of measurement, hatred ... delusion ...” However the *Pali- English Dictionary*

³³ AN 9.39/IV.434. Bodhi 2012: 1306

³⁴ MN 25.12-20/I.159-160. Ñānamoli and Bodhi 2009: 250-252

analyzes *nūpasamkheyyo* in terms of *na+upasankheyya*, or “unprepared, unproduced, uncontracted” in the present.³⁵ This is once again obscure, but arguably relates to the sage being unattached to anything in the present, or having no present states produced by greed, hatred, or ignorance.

Within the Buddha’s *dhamma*, *jhāna* acts as a key deterrent to sensual desire. At the Buddha’s first experience of *jhāna* as a young child he realized that it had “nothing to do with sensual pleasures and unwholesome states.”³⁶ Sense perceptions and sense pleasures are the domain of Māra, they are his “realm”, “domain”, “bait”, and “hunting ground”.³⁷ The metaphors are of a space of danger in which Māra has his home. This constitutes *samsāra*. To say that the Buddha is not localizable by the gods is at least to say that he does not dwell in that range. These metaphors may well have other connotations more directly associated with *anatta* or non-self. Those need not retain us here, since the point of this paper is to look into the Buddha’s realism or anti-realism generally. In so doing we may set aside the question as to whether the Buddha was an anti-realist when it came to the self in particular: this is a separate and perhaps less questionable thesis.³⁸

We should also say a word about the famous parable of the raft, since it may be taken in a similar anti-realist spirit to the sections of the *Aṭṭhakavagga* that pertain to views. While the raft is an apt illustration of the pitfalls of clinging to views, it does not therefore imply that there are no right and wrong views, nor that there are no true and false ones. After all, the raft parable occurs in the context of a *sutta* that begins with the Buddha castigating a wayward monk for wrong view, and includes parables illustrating the right and wrong way to grasp the *dhamma*.

The *Alagaddūpama*’s cataphatic background may at times be lost in the glare of its most famous parable, but it is well to recall that one may believe a view true, or believe it skillful (*kusala*), without thereby clinging to it. Indeed, the Buddha tells us how within that very same *sutta*:

³⁵Rhys Davids and Stede 1921: 147. “Vemajhe” (“in the present”): 649

³⁶MN 36.32/I.246-7. Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 2009: 340. Also see MN 13.32/I.90, 27.19/I.181

³⁷MN 106.2/II.262

³⁸Cf., “All such terms as soul, self, individual, etc., are mere conventional terms ... In due course this doctrine of essence-lessness came to be applied to everything, not just living beings, and Buddhism took an extreme nominalist position, ultimately to the point of paradox.” Gombrich 2006: 64

Bhikkhus, both formerly and now what I teach is suffering and the cessation of suffering. If others abuse, revile, scold, and harass the Tathāgata for that, the Tathāgata on that account feels no annoyance, bitterness, or dejection of the heart. And if others honour, respect, revere, and venerate the Tathāgata for that, the Tathāgata on that account feels no delight, joy, or elation of the heart.³⁹

In this paragraph we have the merging of a cataphatic teaching with the fruits of non-clinging to views. If we do not cling to views, we are not swayed by the worldly winds of debate, disagreement, and dispute. This demonstrates that we can hold views as truthful without thereby clinging to them; indeed, that is the very point of the teaching.⁴⁰

III. The Brahmajāla Sutta

At the end of the *Brahmajāla*, the sixty two wrong views listed are all said to be “the agitation and vacillation of those who are immersed in craving” (*taṇhāgatānaṃ paritasitavipphanditaṃ*). They are also labeled kinds of “feeling” (*vedayita*) with the formula, “that is only the feeling of those who do not know and do not see”.⁴¹ They are wrong view both in terms of their content and in terms of how they are held: due to craving. This *sutta* follows the same form as the *Kalahavivāda Sutta* that we saw before: it locates the key problem at contact (*phassa*). Contact conditions the feeling which constitutes each wrong view.

The *sutta* is directed at ending craving for views, following the formula of dependent origination; craving is responsible for producing all and only these views. “Outside of these there is none.”⁴² In a sense this can be seen as a meta-linguistic claim about the causes responsible for bringing about wrong or speculative views, particularly when we understand that right view does not arise in that fashion: right view is not similarly conditioned by craving.

³⁹MN 22.38/I.140. Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 2009: 234

⁴⁰Cf., “The simile of the raft (M I 134-5) suggests that the teachings should not be grasped, not that the teachings are only of pragmatic value: the dhamma is both true and of value.” Fuller 2012: 19

⁴¹DN 1, I.40, Bodhi 2013

⁴²DN 1, I.38

I say this is similar to a meta-linguistic claim because the structure of dependent origination, which from an external perspective may be seen as a kind of ‘view’, is not seen as such from within the system. This may be because as Fuller (2012:157) says, “right view” involves a kind of “transcendence of views”, requiring a particular affective relation to truth claims, one that is without clinging. Nevertheless we can see that the *Brahmajāla* assumes the correctness of at least a certain portion of the formula of dependent origination insofar as it adverts to contact, feeling, and craving to explain the origin of speculative views. That is to say, the *Brahmajāla* cannot be a formula for an apophatic nor an anti-realist approach to the *dhamma* since it affirms this explicit process for the production of views.

As regards space and time, the *Brahmajāla* makes no positive claims outside of the formula of dependent origination; however since that formula is essentially diachronic, it requires at least that certain key concepts hold true: if contact conditions feeling, then there must be a before and an after, such that conditioning can take place. Further, if we are to take contact seriously, then there must be certain sense objects and sense bases in particular spatial relations, however that may be understood.

This raises the question as to a missing sixty third position, one that would not amount to another kind of “speculative view” but that would accurately describe the Buddha’s own metaphysical position. It is perhaps uncontroversial that a view which best describes the Buddha’s own does not appear among the sixty two: namely, a position based upon the three marks of existence, following the formula of dependent origination. I do not think that can have been an oversight. If the Buddha had wished to claim in the *Brahmajāla* that reality were ineffable, one would have expected him to include among the sixty two speculative views the very cataphatic position he appears to hold.

IV. The Kevaṭṭa (Kevaḍḍha) Sutta

The relevant portion of this *sutta* revolves around an unnamed monk who wants to know “where the four great elements cease without remainder.”⁴³ When the Buddha eventually answers this question, he does so in a particularly cryptic fashion, as we have seen above. The main thrust of his message to this

⁴³D 11/I.215, Walshe 1987: 177

monk appears to be that the cessation of the elements is achieved when we can achieve (as Ñāṇananda puts it)⁴⁴ “non-manifesting” or (as Wynne puts it) “non-transitive” consciousness. However consciousness for the Buddha was necessarily “manifesting” or “transitive”; it was always consciousness “of” something, due to contact with sense objects and sense bases. For there to be “non-transitive” consciousness is for consciousness to be stopped. And indeed that is what the Buddha says at the end of his cryptic utterance: “With the cessation of consciousness, this [i.e. name and form] ceases.” That is where the elements cease without remainder.

As we have seen in the *Aṭṭhakavagga*, this appears to be a description of some form of *jhānic* state. Indeed, it is described as “luminous all round” (*sabbatopabham*); elsewhere in the *Nikāyas* luminosity of mind is associated with absence from defilements, and *jhāna* in particular.⁴⁵ Perhaps it refers to the state of “neither perception nor non-perception”, or even to the state of “cessation of perception and feeling” (*nirodha samāpatti*). In these states perception either becomes so refined as to be in a kind of liminal state, or it ceases altogether. There is no clear contact with sense objects, and no discursive consciousness whatsoever. Seen in this light, the passage does not set forth an anti-realist *dhamma*, but is instead an obscure and poetic description of certain *jhānic* states of consciousness surrounding the experience of *nibbāna*.

That works for the experience itself, but what of the claim that this cessation is “without remainder” (*aparisesa*)? What has ceased without remainder is not the “four great elements” themselves; those still exist for the Buddha after his attainment of *nibbāna* as much as they exist for the rest of us. What has changed is that he has extinguished “without remainder” attachment to those elements, and in particular the unskillful states associated with such attachment: greed, hatred, and ignorance.⁴⁶

Realism in the Nikāyas

We have touched on the role of contact (*phassa*) within the exposition of *suttas* in the *Aṭṭhakavagga* and elsewhere. Metaphysically, the concept of contact must

⁴⁴ Ñāṇananda 1971: 61

⁴⁵ AN 1.51-60/I.10-11

⁴⁶ Cf., Madhupiṇḍika Sutta, MN 18.8/I.109-10

be regarded as particularly interesting, since it involves three elements, only one of which is strictly mental. Contact is the meeting of sense object, sense base, and consciousness. In this formula, sense object and sense base appear to be external to, and hence distinct from, consciousness. If they were not, there could be no contact between them.

The formula therefore suggests, although it does not prove, that there may be objects external to consciousness: the reason we do not experience all perceptions at once is that certain sense objects are in contact with each sense base and sense consciousness, and other objects are not. The formula also seems to require a concept of spatial displacement so that sense objects may move into and out of contact with sense bases. As Gombrich (2009: 120) has put it, the Buddha's analysis and its implication that consciousness must always be of something outside of itself "separate[s] ontology from epistemology", in opposition to the Upaniṣadic doctrines of his day.

Although there is no detailed analysis of contact within the *Nikāyas*, the Buddha does provide an explanatory analogy:

Bhikkhus, just as heat is generated and fire is produced from the conjunction and friction of two fire-sticks, but when the sticks are separated and laid aside the resultant heat ceases and subsides; so too, these three feelings [pleasant, painful, neither-painful-nor-pleasant] are born of contact, rooted in contact, with contact as their source and condition. ... [W]ith the cessation of the appropriate contacts the corresponding feelings cease.⁴⁷

Contact is like the friction of fire sticks. The analogy is not perfect, in that it leaves out the role of consciousness; the friction appears to be between sense object and sense base alone. Nevertheless it suggests that even in the absence of contact there is some sense to be made of objectively existing material objects, in that they may be "separated and laid aside" when not in "conjunction and friction" with our sensory apparatus.

The notion that objects may exist separately even when we are not in perceptual conjunction with them may also be related to the contemplations of internal (*ajjhatta*) and external (*bahiddhā*) body, element, and charnel ground

⁴⁷SN 36.10/IV.215. Bodhi 2000: 1270. Also at SN 12.62/II.97, SN 48.39/V.212-213, MN 140.19/ III.242-243.

contemplations in the *Satipaṭṭhāna* and *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Suttas*.⁴⁸ It is key to the awareness of non-self that one contemplate the various ways in which material form both internal and external to one's body are identical in nature. While such contemplations could be restricted to those objects with which one was in direct sensory contact, there is no reason for believing such contact is necessary, nor that those objects were understood as mere aspects of one's own phenomenal awareness. Indeed it is hard to see how one could contemplate one's body as a mass of scattered bones in any way other than as an object separate from one's perceptual apparatus.

This is not to say that such contemplations could not be modeled as (e.g.) examples of the perception of mental objects and nothing more; as simple exercises in imaginative construction. However insofar as they are supposed to be revelatory of the truth that "This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that,"⁴⁹ etc., they must be more than simply daydreams.

There is a sense in which the Buddha's world was a "world of experience" in Sue Hamilton's (2000: 109) phrase: our world exists and has its origin and cessation within "this fathom-long body", focus of the Buddha's ethical program.⁵⁰ One might say that the body is our domain, bait, and hunting ground. But note that the metaphor puts primacy on form: it is the body "endowed with perception and mind" that contains the world, rather than the mind "endowed with body" that does. While this claim echoes the Vedic notion of a correspondence between micro- and macrocosm, its oddity argues that perhaps it should not to be taken too literally.

Just as the Buddha analyzes the mind (not the self) into the five *khandas*, and lived experience into the formula of dependent origination, so too he analyzes form into the four elements. The flip side of analysis is reduction. Although Wynne (2010: 157ff; 2015: 85-6) locates "reductionistic realism" at a later stage than the Buddha,⁵¹ synchronic and diachronic analyses of all manner of

⁴⁸MN 10.5/I.56ff, DN 22.2/II.292ff. Cf.: "Practiced in this way, satipaṭṭhāna contemplation shifts towards an increasingly 'objective' and detached stance, from which the observed phenomena are experienced as such, independent of whether they occur in oneself or others." Anālayo 2003: 98

⁴⁹MN 10.14-30/I.58-59

⁵⁰AN 4.45/II.48

⁵¹He suggests that this is particularly true of the analysis of form into the four elements, saying that the Mahā-hatthipadopama Sutta "considers the first aggregate of 'form' not as an aspect of experience, but rather in terms of the ontological factors of which it consists (the four material

causal processes is a hallmark of the Buddha's method throughout the *Nikāyas*. As we have seen, we even find analytic treatments of the origin of contention, quarreling, and violence within the *Aṭṭhakavagga* itself. Though the *Mahā-hatthipadopama Sutta* (MN 28) may be spoken by Sāriputta rather than the Buddha, the understanding of form in terms of the four elements is widespread in the *suttas*. We have seen it in the *Kevaṭṭa*'s cryptic search for where "water, earth, fire and wind do not stand firm". It appears in the *Brahmajāla*'s description of annihilationism (*ucchedavāda*). We also see in the *Mahāgopālaka Sutta* (MN 33),

How has a bhikkhu no knowledge of form? Here a bhikkhu does not understand as it actually is thus: 'All material form of whatever kind consists of the four great elements and the material form derived from the four great elements.'⁵²

While it is possible to understand these elements merely as qualitative aspects of subjective experience, there is nothing in the *Nikāyas* that forces such an interpretation.

In the *Assutavā Sutta*, the Buddha makes an odd argument for taking the body rather than the mind as "self":

It would be better, bhikkhus, for the uninstructed worldling to take as self this body composed of the four great elements rather than the mind. For what reason? Because this body composed of the four great elements is seen standing for one year, for two years,

... for a hundred years, or even longer. But that which is called 'mind' and 'mentality' and 'consciousness' arises as one thing and ceases as another by day and by night.⁵³

This is a remarkable passage. It is clear from the commentary that later exegetes had problems taking its claims of bodily persistence onboard.⁵⁴ This oddity makes it unlikely to have stemmed from a period heavily

elements of earth, water, fire and wind)." Wynne 2015: 85

⁵²Nānamoli and Bodhi 2009: 313. (Also at AN 11.17/V.347). This passage is retained in the Chinese and Sanskrit redactions. See: Anālayo 2011: 216-7

⁵³SN 12.61/II.94-5. Bodhi 2000: 595

⁵⁴Bodhi 2000: 770

influenced by abhidhamma exegetics, and more likely to have been original to the Buddha.

It also makes the case that the text's author was not averse to considering form, as composed of the four great elements, to exist at least somewhat independently of our perceptions of it. The claim is that the body is more stable than the mind, since it may stand for a hundred years and yet the mind changes within a single day. The Buddha well knew that the body grows and changes regularly, that is hardly the point. If the body (or its elements) were understood solely as aspects of subjective experience, the body would not persist for as long as a few moments at a time: we see a hand out of the corner of an eye, then it moves behind a sleeve.

One can cram fourscore-year persistence into the procrustean bed of fleeting perception, but it makes better sense of the passage if we consider form to exist external to consciousness, changing slowly but constantly, rather than considering it to exist merely as an aspect of subjective experience.

There is a role for a basic realist ontology even within a generally empiricist picture of the world. W.V.O. Quine (1953:17) put it this way when discussing the advantages of talking in terms of external objects:

By bringing together scattered sense events and treating them as perceptions of one object, we reduce the complexity of our stream of experience to a manageable conceptual simplicity. ... [W]e associate an earlier and a later sensum with the same so-called penny, or with two different so-called pennies, in obedience to the demands of maximum simplicity in our total world-picture.

Quine is not the Buddha, but he helps illustrate the pitfalls of understanding the world solely in terms of subjective experience. It makes complexity out of simplicity, particularly when it comes to the appearance of persistence.

It may be said that the Buddha was talking only about uninstructed worldlings in the *Assutavā*, and that hence his claims bear no force with the wise. Yet the central portion of his claim is not stated with caveat: this body is seen standing for years. It may undergo constant change, indeed it must if we are to understand *anicca*, but that change takes place before a background of rough constancy, a constancy that would be masked were we to consider the elements in fleetingly subjective terms alone.

Since we are considering the status of material objects in the Buddha's *dhamma*, it will also be instructive to consider the character of the Buddha's arguments against the thoroughgoing materialists of his day, in particular the hair-shirted ascetic Ajita Kesakambalī. The Buddha's epithets for his view did not have anything to do with the positing of material entities. Instead his view was termed either "annihilationism" (*ucchedavāda*) in the *Brahmajāla*, or "nihilism" (*natthikavāda*) in the *Apaṇṇaka Sutta*.

As one of the sixty two wrong views listed in the *Brahmajāla* (DN 1.3.10/I.34), Kesakambalī's annihilationism stems from the process of contact, feeling, and craving.⁵⁵ However the *Brahmajāla* itself contains no particular argument for why the view would involve craving, except the bare suggestion that annihilationism must involve a craving for annihilation of the self. This is an odd result, since ontologically speaking materialism appears not to require any kind of annihilation, although it is consistent with it.

It is in other texts such as the *Apaṇṇaka* and *Sandaka Suttas* (MN 60/I.400ff, MN 76/I.513ff) that we find arguments arrayed against this form of materialism.⁵⁶ Once again the arguments do not turn on Kesakambalī's ontology.⁵⁷ Indeed, much the opposite: they turn on his "nihilism":

There is nothing given, nothing offered, nothing sacrificed; no fruit or result of good and bad actions; no this world, no other world; no mother, no father; no beings who are reborn spontaneously; no good and virtuous recluses and brahmins in the world who have themselves realized by direct knowledge and declare this world and the other world. A person consists of the four great elements. ... Giving is a doctrine of fools. ... Fools and the wise are alike cut off and annihilated with the dissolution

⁵⁵Annihilationism in the *Brahmajāla* consists of seven alternatives (wrong views 51-57). However only view 51 corresponds to materialism

⁵⁶Neither of these suttas appears to have parallels within the Chinese Āgamas, although they do have fragmentary parallels in the Sanskrit. See Anālayo 2011: 339, 413. In addition to the *Brahmajāla*, Kesakambalī's annihilationist doctrine is expressed at DN 2.23/I.55, SN 24.5/III. 206-7, SN 42.13/IV.348-351 (with a sketch of an argument akin to the *Apaṇṇaka*). Kesakambalī is also mentioned at MN 30.2/I.198, MN 36.48/I.250, MN 77.6/II.2, SN 3.1/I.68, and SN 44.9/IV. 398, the last in a questionable context

⁵⁷They do turn to a certain extent on Kesakambalī's view of the self as made up of living matter, but that is something we can leave to one side in our investigation into the general question of realism and anti-realism

of the body; after death they do not exist.⁵⁸

“No this world” perhaps refers to the world of experience, which for the Buddha was gained through contact and conscious perception. Otherwise however the argument is ethical in character. (As it is in the *Apaṇṇaka*, but in more explicitly prudential terms). The argument appears to be that materialist wrong view implies ethical nihilism which leads to wrong intention (“giving is a doctrine of fools”), and eventually to bad rebirth.

We do not find any claim that Kesakambalī’s view inappropriately requires belief in independently existing material things, nor any claim that his view would cause clinging to independently existing material things. While it is possible that the Buddha would have agreed that these were other problems with materialism, they do not appear to have been the primary concern in these texts. And perhaps this should not surprise us, since elsewhere we find the Buddha saying,

Bhikkhus, I do not dispute with the world; rather it is the world that disputes with me. ...Of that which the wise in the world agree upon as not existing, I too say that it does not exist. And of that which the wise in the world agree upon as existing, I too say that it exists. ...

And what is it, bhikkhus, that the wise in the world agree upon as existing, of which I too say that it exists? Form that is impermanent, suffering and subject to change ... Feeling ... Perception ... Volitional formations ... Consciousness ...⁵⁹

This does not elucidate much about the ontological character of the *khandas*, and in particular the *khandā* of form, however it does help establish its bare existence, as versus a more anti- realist view of the *dhamma*. In other words, it sounds as though regarding the bare existence of form, the Buddha does not disagree with the annihilationist Ajita Kesakambalī. The claim is not that Kesakambalī is too profligate with his metaphysics (requiring separately existing material entities), but instead that he is too spare (not requiring minds, actions, *kamma*).

⁵⁸MN 76.7/I.515. Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 2009: 619

⁵⁹SN 22.94/III.138. Bodhi 2000: 949-950. This sutta is followed by the famous analogy of the lump of foam, which expresses much the same conclusion: the *khandas* are impermanent, suffering, and subject to change

Interestingly, the Buddha appears to have held that annihilationism was “foremost” (*aggam*) among “outsider” (*bāhiraka*) views, “For it can be expected that one who holds such a view will not be unrepelled by existence and will not be repelled by the cessation of existence.”⁶⁰ Indeed, the Buddha’s peers seem at times to have believed that he himself was a kind of annihilationist.⁶¹

Perhaps the foregoing evidence goes some way towards establishing that the Buddha may not have been an anti-realist about material form, and *a fortiori* about the space and time that form inhabits. Indeed, the space element is, if rarely, added onto the list of *mahābhūtas*.⁶² These may be later, Abhidhamma-inspired interpolations, but since any conception of form requires a conception of space (form is at least extension into, or a shape carved out of, space), if it is an interpolation it is one that follows reasonably from previous *dhamma*.⁶³

Let us turn then to issues regarding semantic realism, which is separate from though related to ontological realism. One cannot avoid the fact that the Buddha’s paradigmatic statement of the *dhamma* was in terms of the Four Noble Truths, complete understanding of which constituted the Buddha’s attainment of *nibbāna*. Even if we do not believe that the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (SN 56.11/V.420ff) constitutes an accurate recounting of the Buddha’s first sermon, there is little doubt as to its status as a central exposition of the *dhamma*. So while the precise definition of “Right View” in terms of the Four Noble Truths is recorded as stemming from Sāriputta (MN 9/I.46ff) rather than the Buddha himself, nevertheless this definition is in the spirit of the Buddha’s teaching elsewhere in the *Nikāyas*. Although I think Fuller’s claim that Right View is non-

⁶⁰AN 10.29.8/V.63. Bodhi 2012: 1383

⁶¹E.g., MN 22.20/I.136-7, MN 22.37/I.140, AN 8.11/IV.174, AN 8.12/IV.182

⁶²E.g., DN 33/III.247, MN 62.12/I.423, MN 140.8/III.239, SN 27.9/III.234. Apparently though only the first four are “mahābhūtas”; when the list is expanded to five or six they are “dhātus”. (Karunadasa 1967: 16)

⁶³It is not entirely clear how space (*ākāsa*) is defined in the *Nikāyas*. Perhaps the clearest definition is found at MN 62.12/I.423, as apertures, gaps, or holes in the body, although this passage is not found in the *Āgama* version. (Anālayo 2011: 348). It also plays a role related to lack of material obstruction in the first immaterial *jhāna*.

Significantly later, the *Visuddhimagga* provides a definition similar to that of a field of extension: “The space element has the characteristic of delimiting matter. Its function is to display the boundaries of matter. It is manifested as the confines of matter; or it is manifested as untouchedness, as the state of gaps and apertures. Its proximate cause is the matter delimited. And it is on account of it that one can say of material things delimited that ‘this is above, below, and around, that’.” (XIV.63). Nāṇamoli 1999: 448

propositional is correct (Right View essentially involves non-attachment to all views), nevertheless it can be said to have propositional *content*, at the very least from an external perspective: its content is constituted by the Four Noble Truths.⁶⁴

There are other truth-claims the Buddha makes that are of similar importance, such as that reality should be seen according to the three marks of *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anatta* (*tilakkhana*), and that beings undergo causal transformations according to the formula of dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*). Both of these are said to hold whether or not there is a Tathāgata, and to which he “awakens and breaks through” (*abhisambujjhati abhisameti*) or which a noble disciple “has clearly seen with correct wisdom as it really is” (*yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya sudiṭṭha*).⁶⁵ These are skillful ways of looking at the world, but they are not *merely* skillful. As Paul Williams has said,

The teachings of the Buddha are held by the Buddhist tradition to *work* because they are factually *true* (not true because they work). ... The ‘ought’ (pragmatic benefit) is never cut adrift from the ‘is’ (cognitive factual truth). Otherwise it would follow that the Buddha might be able to benefit beings (and thus bring them to enlightenment) even without seeing things the way they really are at all. And that is not Buddhism.⁶⁶

It is not clear that this is compatible with a semantically anti-realist take on the *dhamma*. If our conceptual apparatus has no purchase on the way things really are, if reality correctly understood is simply ineffable, this calls into question the status of these conceptual and linguistic expressions as “factually true”.

It may be said in response that the Buddha’s realism in this regard is only contextual or pragmatic: that the semantic and ontological claims apparent in the *Nikāyas* are only made in the service of ridding oneself of *dukkha*, and that separate from that purpose the Buddha makes no such claims at all. That may be, however to my knowledge the Buddha never explicitly deals with this meta-philosophical question, perhaps because it did not occur to him, perhaps because

⁶⁴E.g., “When right-view abandons wrong-view craving and greed are abandoned. It is the opposite to craving, not a correct proposition. Right-view is not essentially a type of knowledge, but a way of seeing that is free from defilement.” Fuller 2012: 116-7

⁶⁵ETilakkhana: AN 3.134/1.286. Paṭiccasamuppāda: SN 12.20/II.25-27. Bodhi 2000, Bodhi 2012

⁶⁶His emphasis. Williams, Tribe, and Wynne 2012: 28-9

he did not believe it worthwhile. We are therefore left with little more than informed speculation. I would suggest however that his usage of expressions such as “*yathābhūtaṃ*” (“as it really is”) mitigate against such an interpretation. He does not, for example, say that the noble disciple “has clearly seen with correct wisdom as is most skillful”, although most skillful such seeing would be.

It is banal to say that language cannot entirely encompass reality or our experience thereof. Someone with normal vision cannot completely describe what it is like to see a particular color to one who is colorblind, in the sense of being able to elicit the same qualitative experience in them that one has oneself.⁶⁷ Similarly, the Buddha realized that any merely conceptual understanding of the *dhamma* was insufficient to bring *nibbāna*. Instead he saw the process along the path as akin to physical training. When learning a sport or game, one typically takes verbal instruction first, but that is insufficient to learn properly how to play. Note that this does not imply that the verbal instruction is useless, nor that it is necessarily inaccurate. Instruction may be both useful and accurate, and yet in order to become proficient we must turn concepts and words into effortless and unselfconscious behavior.

We find a description of the path in very similar terms in the *Bhaddāli Sutta* (MN 65/I.437ff), where the Buddha compares a monk in training to a thoroughbred colt, who through guidance, repetition, and practice learns the skills necessary for the king’s service. In the *Gaṇakamoggallāna Sutta* (MN 107/III.1ff), he compares his instruction method to showing someone the road to Rājagaha. When his method works, it works because “Rājagaha exists and the path to Rājagaha exists”, and because his instruction was understood and followed correctly. When his method does not work, it is because the person “would take a wrong road”,⁶⁸ that is, misunderstand the instruction or follow it improperly.

As we have noted, Fuller (2012: 107) claims that Right View is non-propositional, in the sense that it is not another kind of view, but it is rather “that aspect of *paññā* that realises non-attachment from all cognitive acts.” That said, Right View *has propositional content*; it is simply that in order to be called “Right View” that content itself must be held with a particular mental attitude, one of non-attachment. This is a reasonable analysis of Right View in the *Nikāyas*, or at least a reasonable analysis of how an advanced practitioner would understand Right View, but not one that would support a semantically anti-realist interpretation of the *dhamma*.

⁶⁷E.g., Jackson 1982

⁶⁸MN 107.14/III.5. Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 2009: 878

Was the Buddha a realist?

Now that we have gone some way towards undermining the thesis that the Buddha was an anti-realist, it will be beneficial to turn to the alternative thesis, which is that the Buddha was a realist, either in the ontological sense (that he taught that there exist separate things that are not entirely constituted by nor wholly dependent upon the mind⁶⁹) or in the semantic sense (that he taught that sentences and propositions are true objectively, and not solely because of convention or opinion).

Of the two, it is easier to support his acceptance of something akin to semantic realism. Indeed, the Buddha famously believed that conventional opinion about certain words was wrong, in particular words involving the self, which he called “mere names, expressions, turns of speech, designations in common use in the world, which the Tathāgata uses without misapprehending them.”⁷⁰ One might think that this would make him a kind of semantic anti-realist, however the better argument is on the other side: the fact that he did not extend this analysis to the rest of language, even though he was perfectly capable of doing so, gives some reason to take him as something of a semantic realist. He was not a *naïve* semantic realist in the sense that the Vedic Brahmins were: the fact that this sound referred to that part of the world was a matter of sheer convention for the Buddha.⁷¹ But once the basic phonetic conventions were in place, the Buddha did not seem to have any problem with reference. As we have already seen, the Buddha unproblematically asserted the existence of the five *khandas*, so long as they were correctly understood to be “impermanent, suffering, and subject to change.” He did not, for example, say that words referring to them were “mere

⁶⁹Given the formula of dependent origination, form is causally dependent upon consciousness in some sense; the question is precisely what sense that is. This is explained as a result of prior-life consciousness causing the arising of name-and-form (*nāmarūpa*) in the new zygote through the *gandhabba*. E.g., MN 38.26/I.265-266, MN 93.18/II.157, DN 15/II.63-4. For more on the role of the *gandhabba* see Anālayo 2011: 254n243.

The process may indeed have Vedic connotations as Jurewicz (2000) has argued, however that does not demonstrate that it is anti-realist. As outlined in DN 15/II.63-4 the process is strictly causal and does not (e.g.) imply that form (*rūpa*) depends continually for its existence upon conscious attention. Rather the passage describes the growth and development of a particular individual (*nāmarūpa*) as dependent upon their remaining conscious

⁷⁰DN 9.53/I.202. Walshe 1987: 169. See also SN 1.25/I.14

⁷¹Thus the Buddha saw no problem in people studying the dhamma in their own language. E.g., Ñāṇananda 1971: 43-46, Gombrich 2009: 195-6

names”. And then there are the Four Noble Truths themselves, understood by very few and paradigmatically beyond mere convention or opinion: they express reality “as it really is” (*yathābhūtam*).⁷²

Although the Buddha did elaborate an ontology of sorts, involving the aggregates (*khandas*), elements (*mahābhūtas*), sense bases (*āyatanas*), and realms of existence (*lokas*), ontology was not the point of his teaching, except insofar as it did not include a notion of self.⁷³ As Gombrich (2009: 36) said, “there is no suggestion that within this classification (or others) the number of kinds of things is finite.” I would prefer to say that it is pragmatically unbounded. It really did not matter very much if one included space or consciousness as one of the elements; four or six *mahābhūtas* made no real difference to the *dhamma*. Similarly the Buddha elaborated longer or shorter lists of feelings (*vedanā*) in different *suttas*: this is something that he expressly acknowledges.⁷⁴

Further, his analysis of contact, and of the sense object in particular, is incomplete. As we have already discussed, the Buddha’s understanding of the roots of perception in contact gives some weight to the idea that there are objects external to consciousness, and hence independent of mind altogether: they are (or may include) the sense objects. While these objects are formally separate from consciousness, and interact with it by contact, nevertheless they are also spoken of as aspects of direct awareness. For example in the *Bāhiya Sutta* the Buddha tells Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth,

[Y]ou should train yourself thus: In reference to the seen, there will only be the seen. In reference to the heard, only the heard. In reference to the sensed, only the sensed. In reference to the cognized, only the cognized. ... [T]hen, Bāhiya, you will not be ‘with that’ ... This, just this, is the end of suffering.⁷⁵

This is a training in undoing mental proliferation (*papañca*), which can perhaps be better seen in a more detailed presentation of the same material in the *Samyutta Nikāya*.⁷⁶ There a *sutta* makes plain the role those sense objects

⁷²E.g., DN I.83-4, SN 56.22-24/V.432-434

⁷³We may, following Gombrich (2009: 85) and Hamilton (2000: 186-7), wish to claim that certain of the realms of existence were a later ontological accretion. That does not dispute the basic point

⁷⁴E.g., MN 59.5/I.397-8, SN 36.19-20/IV.224ff, SN 36.22/IV.231-2

⁷⁵Udāna 1.10. Ireland 2010

⁷⁶SN 35.95/IV.72ff. Thanks to Jayarava Attwood for noting the parallel

play in disturbing the mind with various defilements related to greed and hatred. This disturbance is proliferation.

Proliferation amounts to mental conditioning that goes on under conditions of ordinary perception, conditioning that constitutes misperception. There are typically said to be four kinds of misperception: taking the impermanent to be permanent, taking what is suffering to be pleasurable, taking what is non- self to be self, and taking what is unattractive to be attractive.⁷⁷ The question is how the mechanism of this misperception works in terms of contact and the sense object. In the case of the unattractive, the form itself is unattractive, and yet there is a perception — a misperception — of an attractive form. It seems as though there are two different perceptions going on at the same time, or perhaps two levels of perception, one manifest and the other merely potential. It is not entirely clear how this distinction can be made simply in terms of the single sense object making contact with the sense base and an apperceptive consciousness. It would seem we need some other ontological category, for example something like a ‘way of seeing’ or an ‘intension’.

To put it another way, if we take the sense object to be some real, external form, then perception of that form cannot simply involve taking the form itself onboard into consciousness. If it were, there would be no misperception. The same, in fact, is true if we take the sense object to be a phenomenal object with an actually unattractive character.

There are various potential moves that could be made in response, but to my knowledge this is not the kind of question well worked out in the *Nikāyas*. It is clear on the Buddha’s picture that perception is very often mistaken; in this sense our world is “conditioned” or “constructed” (*saṅkhata*) by our minds; the Buddha certainly was no *naïve* realist.⁷⁸ The anti-realist view is that this error runs so deep that literally nothing can be recovered: all perception is radically misleading. But to counter this it seems we can point to the many statements within the *Nikāyas* that explain precisely the mistakes we make, and describe what is involved in correct perception. For example, correct perception is to see the world as manifesting the three marks of existence: impermanence,

⁷⁷E.g., AN 4.49/II.52

⁷⁸E.g., SN 22.79/III.87. This conditioning through ignorance is opposed to “seeing things as they really are” (*yathābhūta*). In a sense the entire *samsāric* world is conditioned. The question is precisely the nature of this conditioning, and if it nevertheless allows of an accurate, objective description of a world separate from (if interdependent with) subjectivity. The possibility of “seeing things as they really are” suggests accuracy may be achievable

unsatisfactoriness, and non-self. One is able to see clearly, and to see clearly a world that is amenable to accurate, if incomplete, description.

That said, it is probably correct to claim, as Gombrich (2009: 134) does, that the Buddha “had no interest in the world as such”; in looking to refine perception he was not after anything like a kind of Vedic correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm. Ontology or metaphysics for its own sake, by which we may understand grand theories of universal origination or grounding, were not his game at all. What he cared about was our experienced reality, how it led to *dukkha*, and how that *dukkha* could be overcome.

It is not only the case that the Buddha’s metaphysical picture was incomplete (any theoretical construct must reach an end somewhere), but rather that it was intentionally so.⁷⁹ Justin Whitaker and I have argued that the Buddha’s philosophical approach was first and foremost ethical, in the sense of illustrating the best sort of life to live.⁸⁰ While this theoretical approach did require (as one might put it) the internal mechanics that only metaphysics can provide, the point wasn’t the engine, it was the destination.

There is an important difference between being a pragmatic non-foundationalist and being an anti-realist. (I do not say the Buddha was an anti-foundationalist; I believe the program simply did not interest him). A pragmatic non-foundationalist will decide to leave the metaphysics inchoate, with things dangling out the ends, because the point isn’t to search for logical or rational foundations. Those may be of interest to the logician, or to philosophers of a certain rationalist stripe, but they are not essential to the ethical path that the Buddha saw as of paramount importance. Nevertheless a pragmatic non-foundationalist may admit that his system will allow of reasonable sharpening: if six elements works better than four, then go with six. An anti-realist may be opposed to such monkeying, since it simply substitutes illusion for illusion.

I also think seeing the Buddha as a pragmatic non-foundationalist with an incomplete or inchoate metaphysics may make better sense of later developments within Buddhist philosophy than viewing him as an anti-realist. On the former view, what had originally been left inchoate was reasonably sharpened in one direction by the ābhīdhammikas, perhaps even beginning with Sāriputta himself.

⁷⁹Cf., “In my view, he did not see an object like a stone or a table as changing from moment to moment Nor did he hold the opposite view. Such an analysis of the world outside our minds was to him irrelevant and a mere distraction from what should be commanding our attention, namely, escape from saṃsāra.” Gombrich 2009: 67

⁸⁰Smith and Whitaker (Forthcoming)

Later on this sharpening was rejected by philosophers like Nāgārjuna, perhaps aware that certain earlier sharpenings were not entirely in the spirit of the ethical pragmatism of the original teaching. They instead decided to sharpen the theory in another direction, taking inspiration from the apparently apophatic strands within the *Nikāyas*.

On the latter view, Sāriputta and the ābhidhammikas, great thinkers in their own right, and historically very close to the Buddha, were quite radically wrong about his teachings, in a way not understood until centuries later by thinkers like Nāgārjuna. While this latter view is certainly possible, I think on balance it is unlikely.

Indeed, the turn towards foundationalism was a general feature of all or nearly all later Buddhist philosophy. By “foundationalism” I mean an attempt rigorously to demonstrate the limit, source, or ground of thought or reality. Foundationalism is a project of great interest to scholars and philosophers, among whom were many in the Abhidhamma and Madhyamaka, although one may debate whether any of it is entirely in the spirit of the earliest tradition.

Conclusion

First and foremost the Buddha propounded an ethics to be acted upon in the world: “both formerly and now what I teach is *dukkha* and the cessation of *dukkha*.” This involved a global attitude of non-attachment to all things, including our own views and opinions. In many texts he prescribed a practice of deep mental absorption, including the attainment of the formless *jhānas*, as a method for ridding ourselves of attachment to sense objects, and thereby for attaining final release into *nibbāna*. In particular he promoted this practice in the *Aṭṭhakavagga* as a way to escape the dangers of hatred and violence occasioned by argument, quarrel, and debate. The text was perhaps composed around the time that the Buddha himself was contending with his own fierce intellectual competitors.

The *Aṭṭhakavagga* and *Brahmajāla* both make incisive use of the concept of “contact” (*phassa*) to explain the arising of greed, hatred, and wrong views. “Contact” is a paradigmatically realist concept, since it involves an interaction between separable mental and physical things. Although contact is not given any detailed analysis within the *Nikāyas*, it is analogized as friction between fire sticks which may be separated and laid aside, suggesting some modicum of ontological independence for the components involved.

While in a sense all of reality is interconnected for the Buddha through the formula of dependent origination, interdependence is not in itself an argument for ontological anti-realism. Interdependence requires plural objects to interrelate: there is no contradiction in mutually interdependent objects being separate. Or put more simply, it takes two to tango.

We have seen that there is no particular reason to interpret key phrases or stanzas in the *Nikāyas* as anti-realist; indeed, to do so would take them out of a generally cataphatic context, as for example we saw in the case of the *Kalahavivāda Sutta*. Although taken in isolation they admit of apophatic or anti-realist readings, taken in context they do not. Instead they consistently argue for a complex causal picture explaining the arising of unskillful views and actions, and for an attitude of modesty and non-attachment in response. Non-attachment to views is not the same as having no views. Instead it is an affective attitude towards views as being “not I, not mine, not myself”, and hence an imperturbability in the face of the worldly winds of praise and blame.

We have also taken a quick look at Ronkin’s understanding of the Buddha as opposed to a substantialist form of realism. While the Buddha did not believe in substances as fully independent, changeless entities, that is only one form of realism. Ronkin’s anti-realist claims for the Buddha would not touch a form of realism involving causally interdependent events, nor a realist ontology derived from our best empirical theories of the world. Either of these is arguably a better rough fit for the Buddha’s own view than is Aristotelian substance theory.

In contrast to these anti-realist claims we have looked at some passages and features of the *dharmā* that seem to argue for a realist ontology and semantics, such as the claim that form tends to last longer than other aggregates, perhaps even years or decades. We have seen that although the Buddha disagreed with materialist philosophers of his age, his disagreement appears to have been ethical in character rather than ontological. We have seen that insofar as his disagreement was ontological, his argument was for a fuller ontology rather than an emptier. This raises the possibility that the Buddha was not as averse to a realist ontology as is sometimes assumed.

Finally we have argued that the Buddha’s attitude should be seen as in favor of a realist semantics allied to a kind of inchoate metaphysics rather than as one that was anti-realist. However this still leaves open the question as to whether that inchoate metaphysics was a version of inchoate *realism*, or whether it was left entirely open to either interpretation. Here I tend to follow Gombrich (2009: 197):

[T]he Buddha's theory of cognition does not settle the issue between realism and idealism, and indeed can be interpreted either way, that is only true when the theory is taken in isolation, ignoring the Buddha's soteriology — which for him is what really mattered! He would have agreed with modern psychologists in declining to accept idealism: there really is a world out there, even if we cannot know it precisely.

In this sense the Buddha could correctly be described as an *inchoate realist*, although with the caveat that that is a label he might not have accepted, for the simple reason that he might have viewed the distinction between realism and anti-realism as entirely theoretical, hence beside the point.

By throwing into doubt the existence of the external world, and even the existence of other minds, idealism and anti-realism complicate our attitude towards all that arises within consciousness. Hamilton (2000: 184-6) expressed well and at some length the problem of solipsism that dogs any subjectivist view of reality. As she notes, the farthest thing from the Buddha's mind was solipsism. Indeed we might say his entire public career was based upon an assumption of solipsism's falsity, or perhaps the simple failure to countenance it as a live possibility:

[O]ut of compassion for beings I surveyed the world with the eye of a Buddha. I saw beings with little dust in their eyes and with much dust in their eyes, with keen faculties and with dull faculties, with good qualities and with bad qualities, easy to teach and hard to teach, and some who dwelt seeing fear and blame in the other world.⁸¹

“Compassion for beings” is an externally oriented, cognitive affect, as are the claims about those same beings caught within *saṃsāra*. While later philosophers have come up with sophisticated systems to model such externally directed cognitive states solely as subjective aspects of experience, or as mere aspects of a conventional reality, I do not believe that the *Nikāyas* support such a view.

⁸¹MN 26.21/I.169. Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 2009: 261. Also at MN 85/II.93, SN 6.1/I.138

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An Ethical Critique of Wartime Zen

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This article explores the ethical implications of those numerous Japanese Zen masters who so strongly and unconditionally supported Japanese aggression during the Asia-Pacific War (1937-45) and before. It asks the question whether such masters may rightly be considered to have been enlightened/awakened in a Buddhist sense. If not, what are the implications for such foundational Zen doctrines as “a separate transmission outside the sūtras” and “no dependence on words and letters”?

This article further raises the possibility that the Zen school, at least during wartime, may have forfeited its right to be considered a legitimate part of Buddhism. Is this because the Zen school in Japan, during the war if not earlier, lost its connection to Buddhist ethics? If so, is this loss in any way connected to Zen’s heritage as one expression of Mahāyāna Buddhism? While providing no definite answers to these questions, the article suggests that it is long past time for these questions to be seriously considered.

Introduction

Many years ago, when I first began my research on the relationship of Zen Buddhism to Japanese aggression during WW II, I had no idea that it would one day lead me to open a veritable Pandora’s box of ethical questions related to Zen and the larger Mahāyāna tradition of which it is a part. For starters, it led me to examine two of the foundational teachings, distinguishing characteristics of the

Chan/Zen school, from an ethical viewpoint. It also raised the question whether the Chan/Zen school is, ethically speaking, a legitimate part of Buddhism. Still further, it even raised the question of whether the Mahāyāna school as a whole should be considered legitimate.

Scholars have already examined many of the questions raised in this article. However, for the most part, their examination has taken place from a historical, doctrinal or cultural viewpoint. This study raises the same questions but within an ethical or moral context. First and foremost, the question will be asked how Zen leaders could have so enthusiastically embraced and supported the massive killing machine that was the Japanese Imperial military during the Asia-Pacific War (1937-45). Could they have been “Buddhists”, let alone genuinely “enlightened”?

Foundational Questions

The first foundational teaching to be examined is Zen’s claim to be “a separate transmission outside the sūtras.”¹ Inasmuch as this transmission can allegedly occur only within the confines of a close relationship between Zen master and disciple, the master-disciple connection is of paramount importance to all schools of Zen.

On the surface there would appear to be little or no connection between this claim and the teachings of the Zen school, both Rinzai and Sōtō, in wartime Japan, i.e., during the Asia-Pacific War of 1937-45 and even before. The latter topic lies in the realm of the historian of religion while the former belongs to the realm of the “faithful”, in this case the faith of the Zen practitioner.

However, when examined within its Chinese cultural context, it is clear that the claim to be a separate transmission outside the sūtras inevitably leads to a disciple’s dependence on the Zen master’s approval, aka “patriarchal Zen.” As Piya Tan notes, “Unlike the other major schools of East Asian Buddhism that legitimized their existence and teachings by centering themselves around a

¹This forms one part of the central teachings of Zen Buddhism. Specifically, it is the second set of four Chinese characters in the four-line saying: 1) 不立文字 2) 教外別傳 3) 直指人心, and 4) 見性成佛 (J. 1) *furyū-monji*, 2) *kyōge-betsuden*. 3) *jikishi-jinshin*, and 4) *kenshō-jōbutsu*): “1) no dependence on words and letters, 2) a separate transmission outside the sūtras, 3) pointing directly to the human mind, and 4) seeing the nature of the self and becoming a Buddha. Note that all English translations in this article, unless otherwise noted, are by the author.

particular Mahāyāna text, the Chan [Zen] tradition, in rejecting the scriptures as final authority, had to resort to other means of legitimization of its authenticity, that is, the lineage of patriarchs.”²

The focus of this article, however, is not on the historical origins of the Zen disciple’s dependence on a master, but on the *ethical results* this dependence has created even to the present. This dependence is nowhere more clearly evident than in the closely related question of what constitutes “Dharma transmission”. This in turn inevitably leads to the question of *what* it is that is being transmitted, i.e., the very nature of enlightenment itself. An examination of this question constitutes the second foundational teaching to be considered in this article, for wartime Zen history has brought the nature of enlightenment as understood within the Zen school into question as never before.

Enlightenment, of course, is not the sole possession of Zen or any other school of Buddhism; rather it constitutes the shared heritage, or ultimate goal, of all Buddhists. Thus, if only to more fully understand the distinguishing features of the Zen school’s understanding of enlightenment, it is necessary to examine enlightenment, or at least elements of it, within the broader context of the Mahāyāna and even Theravāda schools. This is a daunting task, and let me apologize to the reader for the length and complexity of this paper.

The Challenge Posed by Wartime Zen “Enlightenment”

If we assume that enlightened Buddhist practitioners were once present in Japan (as in other Asian countries), the first question to be asked is whether any *wartime* Zen masters were enlightened. To answer this question in the negative further raises the question of whether Zen-based enlightenment exists in Japan at present.

To assert there were no enlightened Zen masters in the wartime era is a prospect fraught with momentous if not frightening implications for the Zen

²Piya Tan, *Transmission Outside the Scriptures?*, p. 158. Tan also points out that a second reason Chan maintained that it was a teaching outside the scriptures was to prove its superiority over other competing schools in China, e.g., the Tien-t’ai and Pure Land schools, that had their own distinctive canon (p. 159). Additionally, Tan quotes John McRea, who asserts “the proliferation of Chan lineages mimics that of conventional family genealogies, creating a parallel realm of filiation between living and dead.” (p. 172). Available on the Web at: <http://terebess.hu/zen/mesterek/40b.5-Transmission-outside-the-scriptures.pdf> (accessed 9 July 2015)

school, at least in Japan. Why? Because, as noted above, unlike other Buddhist traditions based on teachings contained in one or more Buddhist sūtras, the Zen school validates itself on the basis of being “a transmission *outside* the sutras” (*kyōge betsuden*). That is to say, a transmission of the *Buddha-dharma* from the enlightened mind of a Zen master to his/her disciple(s). This, however, raises the question of what happens in those cases when the “enlightened master” isn’t truly enlightened? Can an authentic transmission of the *Buddha-dharma* between master and disciple then take place? Is it possible for the disciple’s enlightenment to be genuine in the absence of a master who was enlightened?

In Sōtō Zen

Harada and Yasutani To understand just how serious this question is, let us briefly examine just two of many wartime Zen masters, i.e., Sōtō Zen Master Harada Daiun Sōgaku and his better-known Dharma heir, Yasutani Haku’un. I have selected these two masters because in the postwar period both men were introduced to the English-speaking world as the very embodiment of Zen enlightenment.

American Zen priest Philip Kapleau, author of the best-selling *The Three Pillars of Zen*, described Harada as follows: “Nominally of the Sōtō Zen sect, he [Harada] welded together the best of Sōtō and Rinzai and the resulting amalgam was a vibrant Buddhism which has become one of the great teaching lines of Japan today. Probably more than anyone else in his time he revitalized, through his profound spiritual insight, the teachings of Dōgen-zenji, which had been steadily drained of their vigor through the shallow understanding of priests and scholars of the Sōtō sect in whose hands their exposition had hitherto rested. . . .”³ As for Yasutani, Robert Aitken, founder of the Hawaii-based Diamond Sangha, praised Yasutani, saying: ““He devoted himself fully to us. We felt from him the importance of intensive study, of dedication and also something of lightness.”⁴

It was not until the publication of my two books, *Zen at War* and *Zen War Stories* in 1997 and 2003 respectively, that what can only be described as the wartime fanaticism of these two Zen masters, and many others like them, became known in the West. Their rhetoric was not simply patriotic, but they

³Quoted in Victoria, *Zen at War*, pp. 135-36.

⁴Quoted in “Yasutani Hakuun Roshi – a biographical note” by Paul David Jaffe

twisted and reconstituted the *Buddha-dharma* into a “selfless” (*J. muga*) and “mindless” (*J. mushin*) creed that demanded absolute subservience to the state and its military. This contributed to the deaths of millions of Japanese and many more millions of Chinese and others. Yasutani even went so far as to invoke the *Buddha-dharma* to justify his virulent anti-Semitism. Readers unfamiliar with the wartime writings of these two masters will find selected quotes included in the Appendix to this article.

Bernie Glassman In the postwar years, Yasutani became one of the most influential Zen masters to teach in the U.S. Thus, once his war-affirming and anti-Semitic remarks were discovered, they posed a major problem for his American disciples, not least for those who came from a Jewish background. One of the latter, Bernie Glassman, addressed the problem as follows:

So if your definition is that there’s no anti-Semitism in the state of enlightenment [sic]. If your definition of enlightenment is that there’s no nationalism, or militarism, or bigotry in the state of enlightenment, you better change your definition of enlightenment. For the state of enlightenment is *maha*, the circle with no inside and no outside, not even a circle, just the pulsating of life everywhere.⁵

David Brazier In rebutting Glassman’s position, the American Pure Land Buddhist priest, David Brazier, wrote in *The New Buddhism*:

Glassman is willing to say that if your definition of enlightenment does not allow for anti-Semitism within enlightenment then your definition is not big enough. For Glassman, who is Jewish, to say such a thing is, in one sense, big-hearted. I acknowledge Glassman’s big heart. Nonetheless, I assert that he is wrong. My definition of enlightenment does not have room for anti-Semitism. I do not think that the Buddha’s definition of enlightenment had room for anything similar either. The Buddha had compassion for bigots, but he did not think they were enlightened.⁶

Bodhin Kjolhede Philip Kapleau’s Dharma heir, Bodhin Kjolhede, current abbot of the Rochester Zen Center, provided yet another view of this question.

⁵Quoted in Victoria, *Zen at War*, p. xi

⁶Ibid., p. xi

While admitting that Yasutani's political views raise questions about the meaning of enlightenment, Kjolhede stated:

Now that we've had the book on Yasutani Roshi opened for us, we are presented with a new *kōan*. Like so many *kōans*, it is painfully baffling: How could an enlightened Zen master have spouted such hatred and prejudice? The nub of this *kōan*, I would suggest, is the word enlightened. If we see enlightenment as an all-or-nothing place of arrival that confers a permanent saintliness on us, then we'll remain stymied by this *kōan*. But in fact there are myriad levels of enlightenment, and all evidence suggests that, short of full enlightenment (and perhaps even with it—who knows?), deeper defilements and habit tendencies remain rooted in the mind.⁷

Kubota Ji'un Meanwhile, back in Japan, Kubota Ji'un, third abbot of the lay-oriented Sanbō Kyōdan (Three Treasures Religious Foundation) originally founded by Yasutani in 1954, took a significantly different stance from Glassman, Brazier or Kjolhede. In February 2000 Kubota wrote:

I personally became Yasutani Haku'un Roshi's disciple at the age of 17 and kept receiving his instructions until his death. So I know very well that Yasutani Roshi did foster strongly right-winged and anti-Semitic ideology during as well as after World War II, just as Mr. Victoria points out in his book. If Yasutani Roshi's words and deeds, now disclosed in the book, have deeply shocked anyone who practices in the Zen line of the Sanbō Kyōdan and, consequently, caused him or her to abhor or abandon the practice of Zen, it is a great pity indeed. For the offense caused by these errant words and actions of the past master, I, the present abbot of the Sanbō Kyōdan, cannot but express my heartfelt regret.

If I may speak as an insider, however, during the 25 years of my practice under him I never saw Yasutani Roshi ever force his students to accept his political ideology. After all, it was his Dharma that we wished him to transmit to us; never have I aspired, therefore, to learn

⁷Quoted in the fall 1999 issue of *Tricycle*, "Yasutani Roshi: The Hardest Koan, Part 4". This article is available on the Web at: Tricycle.com (accessed 14 March 2013)

his ideological standpoint.⁸

Kubota's attempt to divorce Dharma transmission, with its attendant enlightenment, from strongly pro-war and anti-Semitic "political ideology" is noteworthy in that the Sanbō Kyōdan believes that it, and it alone, now embodies the authentic teachings of Zen. The essence of these teachings is that enlightenment, as expressed by the term *kenshō* (seeing one's true nature), is equally attainable by both lay practitioners and priests, the sole criteria being sufficient motivation and diligence. Needless to say, both Harada and Yasutani are viewed as exemplars of this possibility. Recognition of a *religiously* flawed founder is not an option.

In Rinzai Zen

While the above commentators are, for the most part, associated with the Sōtō Zen sect, numerous examples in *Zen at War* demonstrate that wartime Rinzai Zen sect leaders were equally fervent in their endorsement of Japanese aggression on the basis of their Buddhist faith. Here, however, what is of interest is how contemporary Rinzai leaders attempt to explain their sect's support for WW II (aka the Asia-Pacific War of 1937-45) with regard to their allegedly enlightened wartime predecessors.

Harada Shōdō In the 2009 video documentary, "Zen and War", Harada Shōdō, abbot of Sōgenji in Okayama Prefecture, provides this explanation for the conduct of wartime Zen masters:

The state of enlightenment means to achieve the same kind of enlightenment as the Buddha. It brings a noble and spacious heart. It brings us back to a compassionate, open heart. This is only right and proper, and I believe it should be so. But I don't think that ordinary people have the omnipotence (*zennō*/全能) that Buddha had. There is, however, a general tendency for [Zen masters] to be seen as an absolute presence, as a dignified presence.

⁸*Kyosho* #281 [March/April 2000], translated by Satō M. Available on the Web at: <http://www.thezensite.com/ZenEssays/CriticalZen/Apology.html> (accessed 23 December 2014). Note that while the website of the Sanbō Kyōdan's website originally posted Kubota's apology, it was posted only in English, not Japanese. It appears the apology was only for foreign consumption. Moreover, the apology is no longer publicly accessible on their website

I think that everybody believes that Zen enlightenment gives us access to the golden rule. That means that we feel absolute love towards the universe and all the human beings in it. But the things people do can't be done all at once, done solely on a conceptual basis. If we don't surrender our whole life to the existing world and don't jump into the mud even when that means we have to suffer, or if we don't fulfill our faith without experiencing fear, then we can't claim that we have awoken to the true state.⁹

Kono Taitsū In the same documentary, Kono Taitsū, former chief administrator of Myōshinji, the largest branch of the Rinzai sect, provides the following explanation:

Some people's enlightenment (*satori*) can be dubious. But I have no doubts with respect to enlightenment itself. However, it is very difficult to maintain this state of enlightenment twenty-four hours a day. This is called "*shonen shozoku*" [preserving total awakening] and is very difficult to maintain. They [wartime Zen masters] were not able to keep up this continuous state of enlightenment and were incorporated into the social framework of their time. Some people weren't incorporated, but even if they felt something was wrong, they still turned themselves over to the stream of the big river [of society at large]. I believe that many of them felt deeply ashamed, but they lacked courage [to speak out].¹⁰

D.T. Suzuki Readers may be surprised to learn that D.T. Suzuki also commented on the enlightenment of Zen's wartime leaders. In fact, dating to October 1945, his comments were the first to be made in postwar Japan. Unlike Kono Taitsū, Suzuki didn't find the problem to be Zen masters' inability to maintain their enlightened state, but it was rather a lack of "intellectuality"

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Video documentary, "Zen and War," directed by Alexander Oey, produced by the Buddhist Broadcasting Foundation of the Netherlands, 2009. This video, with English subtitles added by the producers,, is available for purchase through the amazon.com website at: http://www.amazon.com/Zen-War-Alexander-Oey/dp/B00BF36WU8/ref=sr_1_2?s=movies-tv&ie=UTF8&qid=1419436014&sr=1-2&keywords=zen+and+war (accessed 25 December 2014)

(*chisei*) on the part of all Zen priests. Suzuki wrote:

In any event, today's Zen priests lack "intellectuality." . . . I wish to foster in Zen priests the power to increasingly think about things independently. An enlightenment that lacks this element should be taken to the middle of the Pacific Ocean and sent straight to the bottom! If there are those who say this can't be done, those persons should confess and repent all of the ignorant and uncritical words they and others spoke during the war in their temples and other public places.¹¹

Were Suzuki the "man of peace" that his many admirers have portrayed him to be, and given that Japan literally lay in ruins at the time, Suzuki's words may be understood as well justified "righteous anger." The problem is that Suzuki takes no ownership for his own wartime words and actions. To give but one example, in June 1941 Suzuki published an article in the *Kaikōsha-kiji*, the Imperial Army's premier journal for its officer corps. Entitled "Rush Forward Without Hesitation" (*Makujiki Kōzen*), Suzuki exhorted Japan's officer corps as follows:

In one sense it can be said that "rush forward without hesitation" and "cease discriminating thought" are characteristics of the Japanese people. Their implication is that, disregarding birth and death, one should abandon life and rush ahead. It is here, I think, that Zen and the Japanese people's, especially the warriors', basic outlook are in agreement.¹²

One can only speculate how many of Japan's officers took Suzuki's words to heart, that is to say, disregarding birth and death, abandoning life and rushing ahead – to their own deaths, not to mention the deaths of their victims. Needless to say, Suzuki never attempted to answer, or reflect on, his own involvement in this question.

¹¹ Quoted in Victoria, *Zen at War*, p. 149.

¹² Quoted in Victoria, "Zen as a Cult of Death in the Wartime Writings of D.T. Suzuki." This article is available on the Web at: <http://japanfocus.org/-Brian-Victoria/3973/article.html>

Irreconcilable Differences

In reviewing the preceding statements made by two American Zen priests, one American Pure Land priest, three Japanese Zen masters in both the Sōtō and Rinzai sects, and D.T. Suzuki, the question is which, if any, of their explanations is correct? Their explanations/interpretations/rationalizations are clearly mutually exclusive and therefore cannot all be right. In fact, it is possible they all are wrong.

One American Zen priest justified Yasutani's near fanatical support for mass killing and anti-Semitism on the basis of what he claimed to be a false understanding of enlightenment. According to Bernie Glassman, a correct understanding of enlightenment means that it is *all*-inclusive, including Buddhist affirmations of killing and anti-Semitism.

On the other hand, Bodhin Kjolhede informed us that there are "myriad levels of enlightenment, and all evidence suggests that, short of full enlightenment (and perhaps even with it—who knows?), deeper defilements and habit tendencies remain rooted in the mind." Thus, for Kjolhede the problem is that while a fervent Zen supporter of Japanese aggression like Yasutani was enlightened, he just wasn't sufficiently or completely enlightened.

Kubota Ji'un expressed what might be deemed the most 'clever' solution of all. He didn't have to worry, like Glassman, that nationalism, militarism and bigotry are contained within enlightenment or, like Kjolhede, that Yasutani just wasn't enlightened enough. Instead, Kubota solved the dilemma by strictly divorcing what he designated as Yasutani's "political ideology" from his *Buddha-dharma*. This made it possible for Yasutani's enlightenment, i.e., his *Buddha-dharma*, to remain authentic even as his warmongering and bigotry were rejected. Kubota claimed that both he and Yasutani's other disciples were only interested in the former, not the latter. In this way, Kubota and other members of the Sanbō Kyōdan were able to claim they remained untainted by Yasutani's "errant words and actions" even as Kubota apologized for them.

The only problem with Kubota's clever solution is that, as we have seen, Yasutani identified killing as the very essence of Mahāyāna Buddhism:

"Those who understand the spirit of the Mahāyāna precepts should be able to answer this question immediately. That is to say, of course one should kill, killing as many as possible."

Are the disciples of an enlightened master allowed to select what aspects of their master's *Buddha-dharma* they will, and will not, adhere to as if they were

ordering from the menu in an ‘enlightenment restaurant’?

In contrast, Harada Shōdō tells us that the enlightenment of ordinary human beings can’t measure up to that of the historical Buddha due to the latter’s “omnipotence”. Thus, ordinary human beings, Zen masters included, can’t always act in an enlightened state of mind. They have to jump into the “mud” (of war and other defilements) even if they and millions of others have to suffer for it. In the face of an omnipotent Buddha, the lot of the ordinary human being, Zen master or not, enlightened or not, is a sad one indeed.

Rinzai Zen Master Kono Taitsū began by suggesting that at least some wartime Zen masters may not have been enlightened, i.e., “Some people’s enlightenment can be dubious.” But then he retreated, as it were, to the position that they were indeed enlightened but just weren’t able to maintain or continue their enlightened state. He also suggested that some of them were actually opposed to the war but simply too cowardly to express their opposition.

Finally, Suzuki identified the problem as the lack, on the part of all wartime Zen priests, of “intellectuality”, something he explained as the inability to “think about things independently”. While few, especially in the West, would quarrel with these words as an admirable goal, they nevertheless contrast sharply with his earlier admonition of many years standing to “cease discriminating thought.” Did Suzuki himself have ‘second thoughts’ about this?

Other Voices

D.T. Suzuki also famously wrote: “Besides its direct method of reaching final faith, Zen is a religion of will-power, and will-power is what is urgently needed by the warriors, though it ought to be enlightened by intuition.”¹³

If Suzuki is correct, does this mean that Zen-derived “will-power” can be acquired only by warriors but not by Zen masters who dare oppose wars initiated by their government? Further, Suzuki’s linkage of Zen to the warrior class indicates that the problem of Zen’s connection to warfare has roots reaching back beyond Japan’s modern wars. In fact, roots reaching back to Zen’s introduction to Japan in the early 13th century just at the time the warrior class had taken over political power from the emperor and aristocracy.

In Japan’s modern history, Zen support for war began even prior to the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-5. For example, in October 1887 General Nogi Maresuke

¹³Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism and its Influence on Japanese Culture*, p. 37.

(1849-1912), hero of both the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars, began his Zen training under the Rinzai Zen Master Nakahara Nantembō (1839-1925). Nantembō was so confident in his own enlightenment that he said: “I am the only one in Japan who possesses the true transmission of the Buddhas and Patriarchs. Zen that only looks like Zen must be smashed.”¹⁴ For their part, the leadership of the Myōshinji branch of Rinzai Zen requested Nantembō to investigate and rule on the authenticity of all that branch’s Zen masters.

Nantembō had nothing but the highest praise for his disciple, General Nogi,:

I have no doubt that Nogi’s great accomplishments during the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars were the result of the hard training that he underwent. The ancient [Zen] patriarchs taught that extreme hardship brings forth the brilliance [of enlightenment]. In the case of General [Nogi] this was certainly the case. . . . All Zen practitioners should be like him. . . . A truly serious and fine military man.”¹⁵

Nantembō later added, there is “no bodhisattva practice superior to the compassionate taking of life.”¹⁶

During the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5, one allegedly enlightened Zen master, Shaku Sōen (1860-1919), went directly to the battlefield as a military chaplain. Sōen’s enlightenment had been attested to by his master, Imakita Kōsen (1816-1892), who in 1883 granted him his seal of approval (*inka shōmei*) certifying that an authoritative transmission of enlightenment had taken place. Sōen described his decision to become a military chaplain as follows:

I wanted to have my faith tested by going through the greatest horrors of life, but I also wished to inspire, if I could, our valiant soldiers with the ennobling thoughts of the Buddha, so as to enable them to die on the battlefield with the confidence that the task in which they are engaged is great and noble. I wished to convince them of the truth that this war is not a mere slaughter of their fellow human-beings, but that they are combating an evil, and that, at the same time, corporeal annihilation really means a rebirth of [the

¹⁴Quoted in Victoria, *Zen War Stories*, p. 36.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 37

¹⁶Ibid., p. 37

soul], not in heaven, indeed, but here among ourselves. I did my best to impress these ideas upon the soldiers' hearts.¹⁷

Yet, how was Sōen able to justify his war support with his Buddhist faith, the first precept of which is “not to take life”? In 1904 Sōen wrote a letter in response to a peace appeal from the great Russian writer, Leo Tolstoi. Sōen's letter contained the following passage: “Even though the Buddha forbade the taking of life, he also taught that until all sentient beings are united together through the exercise of infinite compassion, there will never be peace. Therefore, as a means of bringing into harmony those things that are incompatible, killing and war are necessary.”¹⁸

When these early pro-war expressions of allegedly enlightened Japanese Zen masters are taken into account, the inaccuracy of Kono Taitsū's proposition that it is difficult to maintain the state of enlightenment “twenty-four hours a day” is readily apparent. To be accurate, Taitsū should have admitted the difficulty Japanese Zen masters had in maintaining their state of enlightenment not for twenty-four hours but *for more than fifty years!*

Further, are we to suppose that Suzuki, as Shaku Sōen's disciple, was also critical of his own master's “ignorant and uncritical words [he] and others spoke during the [Russo-Japanese] war”? Or was the massive bloodletting, on both sides of the conflict, that accompanied the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5 of no concern to Suzuki? Nothing in Suzuki's writings suggests he was critical of Sōen's words.¹⁹ In fact, quite the opposite, for in 1904 Suzuki had concluded his English language article on the Buddhist view of war as follows: “Let us then shuffle off this mortal coil whenever it becomes necessary, and not raise a grunting voice against the fates . . . Resting in this conviction, Buddhists carry the banner of Dharma over the dead and dying until they gain final victory.”²⁰

¹⁷Ibid., p. 26

¹⁸Ibid., p. 29

¹⁹D.T Suzuki was, in fact, an ardent supporter of the Russo-Japanese War which opened the way for Japan's subsequent colonization of Korea. For details, see “The ‘Negative Side’ of D. T. Suzuki's Relationship to War,” p. 104. This article is available on the Web at: <http://web.otani.ac.jp/EBS/The%20NegSide%20of%20DT%20Suzuki%20Relationship%20to%20War.pdf>

²⁰Suzuki, “A Buddhist View of War.” *Light of Dharma* 4, 1904, pp. 181–82

Searching for Solutions – Alternative Possibilities

Is there no convincing rationale for why so many allegedly enlightened Zen masters could have supported Japanese military aggression for more than half a century? Of course, the obvious answer would be to simply admit these masters “weren’t enlightened.” But this would be a difficult, if not impossible, position for current day Dharma successors of these masters to accept, for it would call into question their own enlightenment or at least their qualification to teach. Is there no other possibility?

There is, of course, the “bad apple” theory, i.e., these war-supporting Zen leaders were merely “bad apples” in an otherwise pure tradition. In recent years, for example, the “bad apple” theory has been widely used in the Roman Catholic Church, among other religious bodies, to explain the sexual abuse perpetrated by members of its clergy. Additionally, many Western Zen practitioners have adopted a similar rationale to explain the multiple incidents of sexual misconduct on the part of Zen masters, both Japanese and non-Japanese, that have occurred at Zen centers in the West.

Yet, as previously noted, Zen practitioners are faced with a unique problem regarding the alleged transmission of the *Buddha-dharma* from the enlightened minds of Zen masters to the enlightened minds of their disciples. To admit that one’s master was a “bad apple” is tantamount to admitting that he or she was “unenlightened,” or, at best, “not yet fully enlightened.” This, in turn, makes the disciple’s attainment questionable. Among other things, this means that the disciple’s claim to be a bona fide “Zen master” may no longer be tenable since no authentic *Buddha-dharma* existed to be transmitted.

Are there no other possibilities?

Satō Kemmyō Taira Although the Jōdo Shinshū sect rejects the practice of meditation as an expression of “self-power” (*J. jiriki*), a priest in that sect and postwar disciple of D.T. Suzuki, named Satō Kemmyō Taira, claimed that meditation is itself “value-neutral.” Therefore it is quite possible that an enlightened person might decide to support a particular war without the least contradiction to his or her state of enlightenment. Satō wrote:

Meditation. . . is the infinite openness in which there is no self and other; it is the mind prior to thought, and thus prior to the distinction between good and evil. Being prior to the arising of good and evil

means also, of course, that it is value-neutral, with all the dangers that accompany this. It can be employed equally for either good or evil; when misused it can enable killing unrestrained by pangs of guilt or conscience, but when used in conjunction with an ethical system that stresses benevolence, magnanimity, and compassion, it can provide an important spiritual foundation to that system and help minimize the ego concerns that form “the root of all quarrels and fightings (sic).”²¹

As my research, as well as that of others, reveals, there can be no debate about the dangers that accompany a value-neutral understanding of meditation. Nor is there any doubt about the fact that value-neutral meditation “can be employed equally for either good or evil; when misused it can enable killing unrestrained by pangs of guilt or conscience.” This leaves us with the question of whether for at least fifty years, if not before, Japanese Zen masters simply forgot or ignored “a [Buddhist] ethical system that stresses benevolence, magnanimity, and compassion.”

The fundamental question that needs to be addressed here is whether *Buddhist* meditation can be accurately categorized as “value-neutral”.

Borrowing an insight from the Theravāda school of Buddhism, we find that in the *Gopaka Moggallāna-sutta* (Moggallāna, the watchman), Ānanda, one of Śākyamuni Buddha’s chief disciples, points out to Vassakāra (the chief minister of the country of Magadha) that Śākyamuni did not praise every form of meditation:

What kind of meditation, Brahman, did the Lord [Śākyamuni] not praise? . . . He [who] dwells with his thought obsessed by ill will, and does not comprehend as it really is the escape from the ill will that has arisen; he, having made ill will the main thing, meditates on it, meditates absorbed, meditates more absorbed, meditates quite absorbed. . . . The Lord does not praise this kind of meditation, Brahman.²²

²¹Satō Kemmyō Taira, “D.T. Suzuki and the Question of War,” p. 99. This article is available on the Web at: <http://web.otani.ac.jp/EBS/DT%20Suzuki%20and%20the%20Question%20of%20War.pdf>

²²Quoted in Walshe 1987, pp. 63–64 (italics mine).

Meditating “obsessed by ill will” is not, of course, the only misuse to which meditation can be put. Śākyamuni also criticized meditation obsessed with “sensual passion,” “sloth and drowsiness,” “restlessness and anxiety,” and “skeptical doubt,” collectively known as the “five hindrances” (Pāli, *pañca nīvaraṇāni*). Further, it should be noted that the word translated as “meditation” above is *samādhi* (in both Pāli and Sanskrit). *Samādhi*, of course, refers to the state of mental one-pointedness or concentration most readily, though not exclusively, achieved through the practice of meditation in the seated, cross-legged position, i.e., *zazen*.

Significantly, the Pāli word for these five mistaken types of *samādhi*, i.e., *micchā-samādhi*, appears to have no Mahāyāna equivalent. It further appears that the Zen school, and perhaps even Mahāyāna Buddhism as a whole, have refused, purposely or not, to recognize that *samādhi* can be misused. Note, too, that the promise of employing the mental power arising out of *samādhi*, i.e., *J. zenjōriki* (禅定力), on the battlefield first made Zen attractive to the warrior class in pre-modern Japan and later to the modern Japanese military, especially its officer corps.

The argument can be made, of course, that neither during Japan’s pre-modern period nor its subsequent militarist epoch did Zen masters urge their warrior/military followers to practice *zazen* “obsessed with ill-will.” Yet, one of the distinguishing features of traditional Buddhist ethics is its stress on “intentionality.” In determining whether an action is wholesome/skillful (Pāli *kusala*, Skt. *kuśala*) one must look at its impelling cause or motive. An act is considered unwholesome if it is rooted in one or more of the three poisons, i.e., greed, hatred and delusion, while it is wholesome if rooted in non-greed (i.e., generosity), non-hatred (loving kindness or compassion), and non-delusion (wisdom).

Apart from members of Japan’s right wing, there are today few knowledgeable observers who would claim that the Japanese imperial military’s forceful takeover of Taiwan, Korea and Manchuria, etc., so strongly supported by allegedly enlightened Zen masters, was *not* based on one or more of Buddhism’s traditional three poisons, most especially greed. Nor are they likely to assert that Japan’s unprovoked invasion of China, resulting in the deaths of many millions, was accompanied by loving kindness and compassion, not hatred. Or that Imperial Japan’s belief in its ability to conquer all of Asia, let alone defeat the Allied forces, wasn’t delusional.

Thus, if Satō’s claim that meditation is completely value-neutral cannot be sustained within at least a Theravāda Buddhist framework, have all of the alternatives been exhausted?

Robert Gimello Buddhist scholar Robert Gimello has provided one additional possibility, although it is a possibility that will not be attractive to many, this author included. This is because Gimello's position would, in effect, see all Buddhists who value an ethical life either abandon their faith or, at the very least, not become Buddhists in the first place. Gimello asserts: "The Buddhist doctrine of the emptiness of all things (which implies also the *nairatmya* and *anitya* character of all things) denies any stable foundation for the moral life and that is one reason why I am not a Buddhist."²³

Gimello's position, it must be said, at least has the advantage of brevity. However, for those readers who might wish to remain Buddhists, or at least maintain a certain degree of sympathy for this faith, Gimello's position offers little. Is there truly no hope?

Damien Keown When this author interviewed Damien Keown, Emeritus Professor of Buddhist Ethics at the University of London, on this topic, he shared perhaps the most helpful, and certainly the most logical, response so far. Furthermore, a response that also has a high moral threshold. In doing this, however, Keown also challenges us to expand our search to consider enlightenment within the context of the Theravāda school as well.

Keown began by saying:

Ethics is a subversive subject, because once you start exploring ethical issues it can lead you to question other teachings. From a Theravāda point of view, it is believed to be psychologically impossible to have an *arhat* or Buddha break the precepts. They are said to be incapable of doing it, and in my view this is because they know it's morally wrong. That's a part of their enlightenment: you could even say it's what constitutes their enlightenment to a large extent. This is because enlightenment (or awakening) is not just a kind of knowledge. It is not simply a mystical intuition like *satori*, or an intellectual grasp of metaphysical truth. Enlightenment is also a personal moral transformation, an emotional as much as intellectual experience.

²³Spoken to the author in a conversation with Robert Gimello during the Guanyin Seminar held in Singapore in April 2015

So being enlightened means you have understood that a certain way of *living* is morally better. If you went against the precepts you would be going backwards in terms of the process of self-development, and it would mean that you couldn't be regarded as having achieved the goal. This is why you never see the Buddha doing anything immoral, not telling a lie, and certainly not killing anybody. As mentioned, it's said in the Pāli canon that it's simply impossible for those things to happen.

This view of things shifted in the Mahāyāna, where according to some sources it is permissible to break the precepts for two main reasons. First of all, out of compassion. Compassion as an emotional response to suffering becomes extremely important and tends to eclipse the earlier view that compassion must be balanced by wisdom. According to some Mahāyāna sources, compassion becomes the paramount virtue, and as a consequence anything justified on grounds of compassion is seen as morally acceptable. This is the rationale of the *Upāyakauśalya Sūtra* and a whole line of related thought derived from the principle that so long as you are a *bodhisattva* and act from a compassionate motive you can do no wrong.

The other strand that comes into play is a metaphysical one based on the notion of emptiness. On this view, nothing has any real essence so concepts like good and evil are simply relative. They don't have any real ontological status, and to imagine that good and evil exist in any real sense is seen as the product of a deluded mindset.

So you have these two notions of compassion and emptiness independently justifying antinomianism, which makes a powerful combination. From a moral point of view it means anything can be justified, and this is what we see from the beginnings of Mahāyāna Buddhism down to the present day. There are plenty of examples of this in recent historiography. For example, during the Korean War, Chinese monks justified violence on the basis of the dubious proposition that it was legitimate to kill the American "demons" out of compassion. This is a significant departure from early Buddhist teachings.

By contrast, my own view, based on Theravāda Buddhist teachings, is that ethics, including respect for the precepts in a conventional sense, is integral to the enlightenment experience. As you develop your wisdom you develop your ethics, and the two can't be disentangled. An early source compares wisdom and compassion to two hands washing one another, and the Mahāyāna has a similar image comparing wisdom and compassion to the two wings of a bird. One wing represents an intellectual understanding of the truth, and the other denotes an emotional understanding of what the truth requires in terms of our relationship to other people. Those two things need to be developed in conjunction.

Those Zen teachers who have historically justified killing seem to have based their justification on the antinomian idea mentioned above that in the last analysis the moral concepts of good and evil are not found in reality. This is linked to the idea that there are no individual selves, so in taking life we cannot say that anyone is killed or anything wrong is done. To me this seems to be little more than sophistry, and gives strong reasons for doubting the validity of the claim of any teacher who expresses such a view to have achieved awakening.

So, the Zen enlightenment experience which masters claim to have had is an imbalanced state of being which isn't, I would say, a true kind of enlightenment. Complete enlightenment must include the perfection of ethics. You can't disentangle ethics from wisdom, and if you try to do that, you achieve something that is not really an authentically Buddhist state of awakening. It is only a partial awakening and not the complete transformation of being that enlightenment requires.

Keown's words, at least to this point, appear to leave little room for a teaching role on the part of the "unenlightened" in Buddhism, Zen included. In fact, Keown's understanding of enlightenment, based on Theravāda, basically excludes Zen enlightenment from being authentically Buddhist, or, at best, recognizes it as only a "partial awakening." Needless to say, this is a highly controversial position, certainly within Zen circles. As important as this question is, an in-depth exploration lies beyond the confines of this article and must await another opportunity.

Keown, however, goes on to specifically address the nature of “Dharma transmission”:

If the idea of Dharma transmission is that the master transmitted some enlightenment to the student, then someone expressing antinomian views of the kind described above couldn’t transmit anything of value to anyone else.

I must confess I don’t really understand what is meant by the transmission of enlightenment from master to student. According to Theravāda teachings, anyone can become enlightened whether they have a master or not. The master doesn’t transmit his own enlightenment to his student, although he may recognize that the student has achieved enlightenment. There is nothing mysterious about this. I think we can all recognize if a person is spiritually enlightened. It’s not hard to recognize people who are saints, good role models, inspiring individuals, and so forth. I think even the Buddha’s disciples could recognize that he was enlightened even though they weren’t. So in that sense it doesn’t take one to know one.²⁴

According to Keown, if “Dharma transmission” consists not in the “transmission” of a mysterious something called enlightenment but only a Zen master’s *recognition* of the disciple’s spiritual attainment, then such recognition is possible even if the master is not enlightened. This is definitely an attractive proposition for those disciples who find value in the traditional Zen master-disciple relationship, for they can thereby utilize the master’s recognition as proof of their own spiritual attainment or credentials.

William Bodiford As attractive as Keown’s proposition appears, it nevertheless has a clear defect. This defect becomes clear when we look at William Bodiford’s explanation of the nature of Dharma transmission in Zen:

The Zen school places great importance on the master-disciple relationship. According to modern descriptions of this discipleship, the master’s goal is to cause his disciple to recreate through his

²⁴This personal interview took place in Bangkok, Thailand on May 30, 2015. Prof. Keown subsequently edited his words on September 2, 2015

own training the same intuitive cognition of reality that the master himself experiences. When the master successfully leads him to a level of understanding that has the same content as his own experience, the minds of the teacher and student are said to be one. Traditionally referred to as the “transmission” of the teacher’s mind to the disciple, this method has been termed the crucial ‘pivot of the Zen teaching method’. In this method both the enlightenment and the transmission are essential.²⁵

Even if somewhat idealized, it is clear from Bodiford’s description of Dharma transmission that unless the master has her/himself already experienced an authentic “intuitive cognition of reality” then there would be no possibility for the disciple to have the same experience. Of course, it is always possible that even an unenlightened master might “successfully lead [his or her disciple] to a level of understanding that has the same content as his own experience.” In that case, however, it would be an example of “the blind leading the blind.” In fact, in addition to warmongering Zen priests, the numerous illicit sexual scandals that have rocked Western Zen centers in recent years suggest this to be the case.

Thus, once again we are left to ask, have all of the options been exhausted?

Enlightenment without a Master

While all of the ‘reasonable’ alternatives may have now been exhausted, two alternatives still remain. These two, however, must be identified as the most ‘radical’ alternatives. The first of these, hinted at by Damien Keown, may not appear so radical in that, albeit minor, it does have historical precedent both in Korea and Japan if not other Asian countries.

In Japanese Zen the first alternative is known as either “*mushi-dokugo*” (無師独悟/enlightened alone, without a master), or “*jigo-jishō*” (自悟自証/ self-enlightened and self-certified). Its origins in Japan can be traced back at least as far as Nōnin (fl. 1190s). Originally a Tendai monk, Nōnin later established his own school of Zen called Daruma-shū (Bodhidharma sect) all without the benefit of formal “Dharma transmission” from an acknowledged master. Although the Daruma-shū eventually disappeared, many of the prominent disciples of Zen Master Dōgen, founder of the Sōtō Zen sect, were originally Nōnin’s students or those of his successors.

²⁵ William Bodiford, “Dharma Transmission in Sōtō Zen,” p. 423.

As for Dōgen himself, Hee-Jin Kim notes:

Consider enlightenment-by-oneself, without a teacher" (*mushi-dokugo*), the ultimate Zen principle that every practitioner had to actualize, even while studying under competent teachers and reading the *sūtras* for a number of years. Dōgen provided this well-known dictum with a specific methodological/hermeneutic key that allowed one to unlock the mystery of existence—that is, to open the self and the universe. That key amounted, in essence, to critical, reflective thinking as an integral part of meditation. Without this key, it was impossible to attain one's own salvific independence [...] Meditation and wisdom alike had to be subjected to critical scrutiny and reassessed in the changing situation.²⁶

The denial of the need for formal Dharma transmission from a qualified master is, at first glance, an attractive proposition, for the enlightenment of the disciple is possible irrespective of whether one's master was, for example, a warmonger or even a sexual predator. Indeed, without the need for either an enlightened master or Dharma transmission, the entire discussion up to this point is irrelevant. Yet, *in practice*, history demonstrates just how dangerous this possibility is, for as William Bodiford notes: "An enlightenment experience in and of itself (*mushi dokugo* 無師独悟, that is, one attained without a master's guidance) is usually considered suspect since the risk of self-delusion or 'fake Zen' is always high."²⁷

Historically, we need go further than Zen monk Suzuki Shōsan (1579-1655), nominally affiliated with the Sōtō Zen sect, to see an example of Bodiford's concern. Claiming to be self-enlightened, Shōsan, a former samurai, did not hesitate to teach:

It's best to practice *zazen* from the start amid hustle and bustle. A warrior in particular absolutely must practice a *zazen* that works amid war cries. Gunfire, crackles, spears, dash down the line, a roar goes up and the fray is on; and that's where, firmly disposed, he puts meditation into action. At a time like that, what use could he have for a *zazen* that prefers quiet? However fond of Buddhism a warrior may be, he'd better throw it out if it doesn't work amid war cries.²⁸

²⁶Hee-jin Kim, *Dogen on Meditation and Thinking: A Reflection on His View of Zen*, p. 122

²⁷William Bodiford, "Dharma Transmission in Sōtō Zen," p. 423

²⁸Quoted in Victoria, *Zen at War*, p. 219

Thus, Shōsan’s self-generated enlightenment taught him that “if [Buddhism] doesn’t work amid war cries,” it should be discarded. Suzuki is indeed one example of what can happen when a Zen monk conflates his former profession, that of a samurai, with his status as a monk. Shōsan clearly had no use for “peace”, with the exception, perhaps, of the “peace of the dead.”

Zen is not Buddhism?

Piya Tan Now for a second and even more radical alternative. Just how radical this alternative is can be seen if we postulate that yes, warmongering Zen masters et al. were truly enlightened within the Zen tradition, but the problem is that the Zen tradition isn’t *Buddhist*! Piya Tan, previously introduced, explains this alternative as follows:

I have always taken care to use the expression Chan enlightenment (and avoided the term —awakening) so that we do not confuse the Chan or Zen idea with the early Indian notion of awakening (*bodhi*). Indeed, it is germane to speak of Chan *enlightenment*—a fitting imagery reflecting the transmitting of the Chan lamp—as against early Indian Buddhist *awakening*, which is a matter of self-effort. Whatever our terminology, the two should not be misunderstood as referring to the same idea. . . .

Mahāyāna *enlightenment* and Hīnayāna *awakening* are literally and spiritually *worlds* apart. The two should not be confounded or conflated with each other. Any Chan [Zen] priest who claims to be suddenly enlightened and places himself on the same level as the Buddha (indirectly claiming supreme awakening), could be said to be guilty of an offence entailing defeat (*pārājika*), that is, automatically falling from the state of monkhood or nunhood. However, no such offence is entailed if we do not equate any terms of Chan enlightenment (Ch. *wúwéi*, J. *satori*, etc.) with the early Buddhist conception of *bodhi*, etc. Since Chan and other forms of Chinese Buddhism and East Asian Buddhisms are effectively different Buddhist religions in their own right, there is no problem of their transgressing the monastic rules of early Buddhism. . . .

Chan Buddhism is changing to stay relevant in our own times.

Chan monastics are aware, after a century of open critique in the light of what might be called “**open**” **Buddhism**—a holistic and interdisciplinary study and practice of Buddhism—that Chan has become more *Chinese* (or Japanese, or Korean) than Buddhist. Such a bent may serve well in implementing a nationalist state ideology but it may fall back into a recidivist Chan of the 8th century China. Chan Buddhism adapted well to Chinese society, and it will surely adapt well to our contemporary world. For this, Chan will need to re-chart its course by re-orienting itself to the north star that is early Buddhism.

For this reason, for example, the serious Chan meditators of all traditions in our times at least never fail to make the early Buddhist texts a part of their compulsory reading. We need not throw out the baby along with the bathwater, especially when the baby has the potential of maturing into a wise adult, that is, carries the Buddha-seed in him.²⁹

I have no doubt that many readers, particularly Zen practitioners, will disagree with Piya Tan’s assertions, not to mention those of Damien Keown. In this regard, however, it would be good to recall the words attributed to Śākyamuni Buddha in the *Kālāma Sutta*:

Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor tradition; nor rumor; nor what is in a scripture; nor surmise; nor axiom; nor specious reasoning; nor bias towards one’s beliefs; nor upon another’s seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, “The monk is our teacher.” When you yourselves know: “These things are good; these things are not blamable; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness,” enter on and abide in them.

Additionally, the Zen school itself has a long tradition of “Dharma combat” (*hōssen*) in which a serious attempt is made on the part of the practitioner to better understand the Dharma through a series of challenging questions to the

²⁹Piya Tan, *Transmission Outside the Scriptures?* pp. 172-73. The quote has been slightly modified to make it read more smoothly

master. In the author's opinion, it is a matter of great regret that Dharma combat in Japan has today become, for the most part, a stylized ceremony in which both questions and answers are memorized prior to the ceremony and then simply regurgitated. For the Zen tradition to "adapt well" to contemporary society, as well as return to the best of its history, the practice of serious and "unrehearsed" questions and answers must be resurrected.

David Loy It should also be pointed out that Piya Tan and Damien Keown are not the first to challenge Zen's Buddhist credentials. For example, in 1995 Zen scholar/practitioner David Loy wrote an article entitled "Is Zen Buddhism?" Unfortunately, although Loy identified the problematical nature of the relationship between Zen and the samurai class from a Buddhist viewpoint, he failed to come to any conclusion other than his final paragraph, which reads:

The Meiji restoration remains an ambiguous legacy. Traumatized by its brutal forced opening to the rest of the world, acutely aware of the need to adopt Western technology as quickly as possible in order to defend itself from the imminent colonization that devastated the rest of Asia, not only Japan's self-confidence but its very self-identity were badly shaken. It is not surprising, then, that Zen and the samurai spirit became understood to exemplify the superior soul of the Japanese – which happened to fit nicely into a concern that arose in certain quarters of the West to find a superior "other" with which to flog itself. We may sympathize with Japan's need to establish its own identity on the world stage, and Japanese intellectuals' need to avoid the "hegemonic discourse" of the West. Nonetheless, the resulting self-understanding of Japanese Zen Buddhists cannot be accepted uncritically.³⁰

In the end, the only conclusion Loy arrived at was, "the resulting self-understanding of Japanese Zen Buddhists cannot be accepted uncritically." This is clearly not an answer to the question Loy raised in the title of his article.

Paul Swanson and "Critical Buddhism" Even prior to Loy, Paul Swanson wrote an article in 1993 entitled, "Zen Is Not Buddhism." Swanson took his title from the work of two Sōtō Zen-affiliated Buddhist scholars, Hakamaya Noriaki and Matsumoto Shiro, founders of the "Critical Buddhism" movement.

³⁰David Loy, "Is Zen Buddhism?" *The Eastern Buddhist*, p. 286

These two scholars both taught at Sōtō Zen-affiliated Komazawa University. Separately and jointly, they wrote a sophisticated critique of key doctrinal underpinnings of contemporary Japanese Zen, especially *hongaku* thought, i.e., the idea that all beings are “inherently” enlightened. They claimed this idea was antithetical to such basic Buddhist ideas as *anātman* (“no-self”) and called for its rejection in order to return to “true Buddhism.”

According to Hakamaya and Matsumoto, true Buddhist virtue is both anti-violent and requires a critical stance against discrimination and injustice.

In stressing the anti-violent nature of Buddhism, not to mention its opposition to discrimination and injustice, these two scholars made it clear, as I detailed in *Zen at War*, that the Zen school’s unconditional support of wartime Japan served as the catalyst for their attempt to identify and rectify what they considered to be Zen Buddhism’s past (and ongoing) doctrinal errors.³¹ Thus, this author is not alone in having been deeply affected by the Zen school’s war collaboration.

Matsumoto further pointed out that such ideas as “no thought and no conceptualization” (*munen musō*), “direct intuition” (*chokkan*), and “non-reliance on words” (*furyū monji*) that have been introduced in the West as representative of “Zen,” are in fact ideas based on *tathāgata-garbha* and *hongaku* thought, and should not be considered positive Buddhist virtues. The term *tathāgata-garbha* means that every sentient being has the inherent possibility to attain Buddhahood.

According to Matsumoto, while the idea of a universal inherent buddhahood of all appears optimistic, it actually serves to enhance the status quo and inhibit improvement of the human condition. This is because it leads to, or is based on, the non-Buddhist assumption that there is a single, underlying reality for all things. Thus, good and evil, strong and weak, rich and poor, right and wrong, are fundamentally “the same.” Given this, there is no longer a need or incentive to correct any injustice or right any wrong.

Hakamaya insisted that the moral imperative of Buddhism is to act selflessly (*anātman*) for the benefit of others. The *hongaku* thought that “grasses, trees, mountains, and rivers have all attained buddhahood; that sentient and non-sentient beings are all endowed with the way of the Buddha” leaves no room, he claimed, for this moral imperative. Buddhism requires faith, words, and the use of the intellect (wisdom, *prajñā*) to choose the truth of *pratītya-samutpāda*

³¹See Victoria, *Zen at War*, pp. 174-79

(causality/dependent origination/interdependent co-arising). Zen's allergy to the use of words is more native Chinese than Buddhist, and the ineffability of "thusness" (*shinnyo*) claimed in *hongaku* thought leaves no room for words or faith.

For Hakamaya, true Buddhist faith requires one's intellect to respond critically to mistaken notions and activity with both words and actions. This critical response extends to the words and actions of a so-called Zen master or teacher. The disciple must completely reject the authoritarian idea so typical of Japanese Zen that the teacher is absolute and never mistaken, or must never be criticized.

Unsurprisingly, Matsumoto and Hakamaya's criticisms of Zen, and Japanese Buddhism in general, have themselves been the subject of numerous critiques, first and foremost by Zen scholars but also by scholars in the mainstream of Japanese Buddhist scholarship. In a section entitled "some personal observations," Swanson responds to these critiques as follows:

Apart from the technical arguments as to whether Buddha-nature ideas and *hongaku shisō* [thought] are "orthodox" or "not really Buddhism," it cannot be denied that this ethos has failed to provide a broad ethical dimension or stimulate a social ethic in Japanese society. Japanese Buddhists may – and in fact have – argued that this is not a problem, and that for Zen the priority is for the individual to realize one's own enlightenment, after which compassion and concern for others should "flow forth spontaneously." Nevertheless history has shown that this ethos tends to support the status quo; it provides neither a stimulus for necessary social change and altruistic activity, nor a basis to resist social structures that prey on the weak and oppressed.³²

This in itself is a severe ethical critique of Zen, as well as Japanese Buddhism overall, by a leading Western Buddhist scholar who has resided in Japan for many years. While there may, and ought to be, debate over the cause of Zen's malaise in Japan and beyond, the result is all too plain to see. Or, given the general indifference to such critiques displayed by Western Zen practitioners, perhaps it would be better said, "the result *ought to be* too plain to see."

³²Paul Swanson, "'Zen is not Buddhism,' Recent Japanese Critiques of Buddha-Nature," p. 142

Erik Storlie Finally, and returning once more to the nature of Dharma transmission, we have the words of Erik Storlie, a longtime Zen practitioner, author and meditation teacher in the Sōtō Zen tradition. Storlie’s critique is perhaps the most telling of all:

[The belief] that an unbroken chain of “mind to mind” transmissions has descended, generation after generation, in a known lineage, down to today’s living dharma heirs, is simply false on historical grounds. As Edward Conze, the great scholar of Indian Buddhism noted, “much of the traditions about the early history of Chan are the inventions of a later age” – inventions befitting a Chinese culture that deeply honored family lineages traced through renowned ancestors. . . .

Stated simply, the doctrine of dharma transmission is just one more among the many attractive delusions held by human beings. Unfortunately, adherence to it gives the dharma heir a very powerful – and potentially dangerous – authority within the community of Zen practitioners.³³

Conclusion

Is Dharma transmission no more than an “attractive delusion” as Storlie claims? Can the same be said about the nature of “enlightenment” as understood in the Zen tradition? Or can the same be said about Zen (and Mahāyāna’s) claim to be an authentic expression of the *Buddha-dharma*, and hence “Buddhist,” when viewed through an ethical prism?

This article does not pretend to have answers to the many questions that have been raised. At best it hopes to open the door to a wider and long overdue conversation in which what has frequently been camouflaged, or accepted uncritically, is addressed openly in hopes that a significantly more

³³Erik Storlie, “Lineage Delusions: Eido Shimano Roshi, Dharma Transmission, and American Zen.” Quotation edited slightly with the permission of the author. Available on the Web at: <http://sweepingzen.com/lineage-delusions-eido-shimano-roshi-dharma-transmission-and-american-zen/> (accessed on 9 August 2015)

honest, ethical and less self-validating version of Zen Buddhism can evolve. The accomplishment of this, however, may require nothing less than a "Zen Reformation." While the nature of such a Zen Reformation lies far beyond the confines of this article, its purpose will be accomplished if the need for such a conversation is now clear. Clear not just from an academic point of view but, far more importantly, from an ethical one.

Appendix

Introduction

This appendix contains a series of war-related quotations, chronologically listed, by both Sōtō Zen Master Harada Sōgaku and his disciple, Yasutani Hakuun. Inasmuch as the meaning of these quotations is abundantly clear, there is no need for additional discussion or commentary. The original English quotations for Harada are found in *Zen at War*, pp. 135-38. Similar quotations for Yasutani are found in *Zen War Stories*, pp. 66-91.

I. Select Wartime Quotations of Sōtō Zen Master Harada Sōgaku

1. In the March 1934 issue of the magazine *Chūō Bukkyō* (Central Buddhism), Harada wrote:

The Spirit of Japan is the Great Way of the [Shintō] gods. It is the substance of the universe, the essence of the Truth. The Japanese people are a chosen people whose mission is to control the world. The sword that kills is also the sword that gives life. Comments opposing war are the foolish opinions of those who can only see one aspect of things and not the whole.

Politics conducted on the basis of a constitution are premature, and therefore fascist politics should be implemented for the next ten years. Similarly, education makes for shallow, cosmopolitan-minded persons. All of the people of this country should do Zen. That is to say, they should all awake to the Great Way of the Gods. This is Mahāyāna Zen.

2. In the November 1939 issue of the magazine *Daijō Zen* (Mahāyāna Zen), Harada wrote an article entitled, "The One Road of Zen and War." It read in part:

[If ordered to] march: tramp, tramp, or shoot: bang, bang. This is the manifestation of the highest Wisdom [of Enlightenment]. The unity of Zen and war of which I speak extends to the farthest reaches of the holy war [now under way]. Verse: I bow my head to the floor in reverence for those whose nobility is without equal.

3. In the February 1943 issue of the periodical *Zen no Seikatsu* (The Zen Life), Harada wrote:

It has never been as necessary as it is today for all one hundred million people of this country to be committed to the fact that as the state lives and dies, so do they. . . . We must devote ourselves to the practice of Zen and the discernment of the Way. We must push on in applying ourselves to "combat *zazen*," the king of meditation (*samādhi*).

4. Finally, Harada wrote the following article entitled, "Be Prepared, One Hundred Million [Subjects], for Death with Honor!" in the July 1944 issue of *Daijō Zen*:

It is necessary for all one hundred million subjects [of the emperor] to be prepared to die with honour. . . . If you see the enemy you must kill him; you must destroy the false and establish the true -- these are the cardinal points of Zen. It is said that if you kill someone it is fitting that you see their blood. It is further said that if you are riding a powerful horse nothing is beyond your reach. Isn't the purpose of the *zazen* we have done in the past to be of assistance in an emergency like this?

II. Select Wartime Quotations of Sōtō Zen Master Yasutani Hakuun.

In February 1943 Yasutani published a book entitled, *Dōgen-zenji to Shūshōgi* (Zen Master Dōgen and the *Treatise on Practice and Enlightenment*). The following quotations are selected from that book.

1. Yasutani opened his book by explaining its purpose:

Asia is one. Annihilating the treachery of the United States and

Britain and establishing the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere is the only way to save the one billion people of Asia so that they can, with peace of mind, proceed on their respective paths. Furthermore, it is only natural that this will contribute to the construction of a new world order, exorcising evil spirits from the world and leading to the realization of eternal peace and happiness for all humanity. I believe this is truly the critically important mission to be accomplished by our great Japanese Empire.

In order to fulfill this mission it is absolutely necessary to have a powerful military force as well as plentiful material resources. Furthermore, it is necessary to employ the power of culture, for it is most especially the power of spiritual culture that determines the final outcome. In fact, it must be said that in accomplishing this very important national mission the most important and fundamental factor is the power of spiritual culture. . . .

It is impossible to discuss Japanese culture while ignoring Buddhism. Those who would exclude Buddhism while seeking to exalt the spirit of Japan are recklessly ignoring the history of our imperial land and engaging in a mistaken movement that distorts the reality of our nation. In so doing, it must be said, such persons hinder the proper development of our nation's destiny.

For this reason we must promulgate and exalt the true *Buddha-dharma*, making certain that the people's thought is resolute and immovable. Beyond this, we must train and send forth a great number of capable men who will be able to develop and exalt the culture of our imperial land, thereby reverently assisting in the holy enterprise of bringing the eight corners of the world under one roof.

2. Yasutani interpreted the precept forbidding killing as follows:

At this point the following question arises: What should the attitude of disciples of the Buddha, as Mahāyāna Bodhisattvas, be toward the first precept, that forbids the taking of life? For example, what should be done in the case in which, in order to remove various evil influences and benefit society, it becomes necessary to deprive birds, insects, fish, etc. of their lives, or, on a larger scale, to sentence

extremely evil and brutal persons to death, or for the nation to engage in total war?

Those who understand the spirit of the Mahāyāna precepts should be able to answer this question immediately. That is to say, of course one should kill, killing as many as possible. One should, fighting hard, kill everyone in the enemy army. The reason for this is that in order to carry [Buddhist] compassion and filial obedience through to perfection it is necessary to assist good and punish evil. However, in killing [the enemy] one should swallow one's tears, bearing in mind the truth of killing yet not killing.

Failing to kill an evil man who ought to be killed, or destroying an enemy army that ought to be destroyed, would be to betray compassion and filial obedience, to break the precept forbidding the taking of life. This is a special characteristic of the Mahāyāna precepts.

3. Yasutani expressed his anti-Semitic views as follows:

We must be aware of the existence of the demonic teachings of the Jews who assert things like [the existence of] equality in the phenomenal world, thereby disturbing public order in our nation's society and destroying [governmental] control. Not only this, these demonic conspirators hold the deep-rooted delusion and blind belief that, as far as the essential nature of human beings is concerned, there is, by nature, differentiation between superior and inferior.

Jews are caught up in the delusion that they alone have been chosen by God and are [therefore] an exceptionally superior people. The result of all this is a treacherous design to usurp [control of] and dominate the entire world, thus provoking the great upheavals of today. It must be said that this is an extreme example of the evil resulting from superstitious belief and deep-rooted delusion.

4. Yasutani concluded his book:

At this point in time, nothing is more urgent than the clarification of the true Dharma of Zen Master Dōgen, thereby extolling the great duty of reverence for the emperor, and, at the same time, rectifying numerous unsound ideas, cultivating proper belief among the

Japanese people as leaders of the Orient, one hundred million [people] of one mind, equipped with a resolute and immovable attitude.

In this connection I have provided a brief and simple outline of Zen Dōgen's *Buddha-dharma*. Nothing could bring me greater joy than, if through the dissemination of this book, the true Dharma becomes known once again, resulting in the total and complete exaltation of the Spirit of Japan and benefitting both the state and humanity.

Moreover, I am convinced this will become the spiritual foundation for the establishment of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, the standard for cultural activities, and the pillar for the construction of a new world order.

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Early Buddhist Teaching as Proto-śūnyavāda

Alexander Wynne

This article argues that the search for a metaphysical foundation to early Buddhist thought is futile. For if the world of experience is a cognitive construction, as implied in a number of early discourses, it follows that thought cannot transcend its limits, and cannot attain an objective picture of reality. Despite this sceptical anti-realism, the Buddha's focus on the causes of suffering also suggests that phenomena – although constructed and ultimately unreal – follow a regular order, and so are in some sense objectively real. Two orientations to the Buddha's Dhamma can thus be identified, 'anti-realism' and 'constructed realism', which are roughly equivalent to what the canonical teachings term 'no view' and 'correct view'.

1. In the ninth chapter of the *Perfection of Understanding in Eight Thousand Lines* (*Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā*), the Buddha warns the Bodhisattva Subhūti of the dangers which face the exponents of emptiness:

Well now, Subhūti, many obstacles will arise when this profound perfection of understanding is written down, expounded, learnt by heart, preached, mastered, disseminated, taught, instructed, and recited. Why is that? It is just so, Subhūti, that very precious jewels incite many enemies, the enemies being even more terrible according to the quality (of the jewel). And this precious jewel is unsurpassed

in the entire world, that is to say the perfection of understanding, which is put into practice for the benefit and happiness of the world, and which is established for the non-arising, non-cessation and non-defilement of all *dharmas*, because of their non-destruction.¹

This short statement suggests that the problem with the perfection of understanding is not merely, or really, the contentious claim that it is the authentic teaching of the Buddha, but rather the fear generated by its core idea, that phenomena (*dharmas*) are not ultimately real since they are ‘empty’ (*śūnya*) of their ‘own-being’ (*sva-bhāva*). A similar warning is voiced in chapter IV of the *Ratnāvalī*, when after a series of typical Madhyamaka-style negations, the text describes the Bodhisattva’s critics as follows:

The Bodhisattva with this understanding is considered bound for complete awakening, although out of sheer compassion he continues in existence until then (66). The Tathāgatas have taught the Mahāyāna requisites of the Bodhisattva, but just these are reviled by those who are deluded and full of hate (67). The one who reviles the Mahāyāna is either unaware of what is virtue and what is vice, or regards virtue as vice, or simply hates virtue (68). Since they know that a person who harms another is full of vice, whereas the one who acts kindly towards another is full of virtue, the reviler of the Mahāyāna is said to hate virtue (69).²

Since the term ‘requisite(s)’ must refer to the dyad of compassion and wisdom, and occurs immediately after typical teachings on emptiness, this passage would seem to refer to the critics of the *śūnya-vāda*, and not just those opposed to the Bodhisattva ideal. Indeed, the text goes on to note the inability of these critics

¹Aṣṭasāhasrikā IX (Vaidya 1960: 101): *api tu khalu punaḥ subhūte bahavo 'ntarāyā bhaviṣyanti asyā gambhīrāyāḥ prajñāpāramitāyā likhyamānāyā udgrhyamānāyā dhāryamānāyā vācyamānāyāḥ paryavāpyamānāyāḥ pravartyamānāyā upadiśyamānāyā uddiśyamānāyāḥ svādhyāyamānāyāḥ. tat kasya hetoḥ? tathā hi subhūte bahupratyarthikāni mahāratnāni bhavanti, yathāsāraṃ ca gurutarapratyarthikāni bhavanti. anuttaraṃ cedaṃ subhūte mahāratnaṃ lokasya yaduta prajñāpāramitā hitāya sukhāya pratipannā lokasya, sarvadharmāṇām anuṭpādāyānirodh āyāsaṃkleśāyāvināśayogena pratyupasthitā.*

²Rat IV.66-69 (Tucci 1936: 250): *bodhisattvo 'pi drṣṭvaivaṃ sambodhau niyato mataḥ, kevalaṃ tv asya kāruṇyād ābodher bhavasamītiḥ (66). bodhisattvasya saṃbhāro mahāyāne tathāgataiḥ, nirdiṣṭaḥ sa tu sammūḍhaiḥ pradviṣṭaiś caiva nindyate (67). guṇadoṣānabhijñō vā doṣasamjñī guṇeṣu vā, athavāpi guṇadveṣī mahāyānasya nindakaḥ (68). paropaghātino doṣān parānugrahiṇo guṇān, jñātvocyate guṇadveṣī mahāyānasya nindakaḥ (69).*

to comprehend the Mahāyāna path of merit and understanding,³ and seems to state that these critics misconceive emptiness as nihilism,⁴ an accusation also recognised – and refuted – in Nāgārjuna’s *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā*.⁵ But if the critics of the *śūnya-vāda* were disquieted by its entirely negative dialectic, so too it would seem were the *śūnyavādins* themselves, at least in the early steps of mastering the teaching. The *prajñā-pāramitā* corpus often describes the fear faced by those who encounter teaching of emptiness, for example a short statement near the beginning of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, where Subhūti points out the lack of both an essential subject and the liberated goal (as ultimately real ‘things’, *dharmas*):

³Rat IV.83 (Tucci 1936: 251): *punyajñānamayo yatra buddhair bodher mahāpathaḥ, deśitas tan mahāyānam ajñānād vai na drśyate.*

‘Within the (Buddha-vacana), the great path to awakening, consisting of merit and knowledge, has been taught by the Buddhas, but this great way is not seen because of sheer ignorance.’

⁴ See Rat IV.86-87 (Tucci 1936: 251): *anutpādo mahāyāne pareṣāṃ śūnyātā kṣayaḥ, kṣayānutpādāyoś caikyam arthataḥ kṣamyatām yataḥ* (86). *śūnyatābuddhamāhātmyam evaṃ yuktānupaśyatām, mahāyānetaroktāni na sameyuḥ kathaṃ satām* (87).

‘Non-arising in the Mahāyāna, for others is emptiness, annihilation. But since the ultimate unity of annihilation and non-arising must be accepted, the great eulogy of the Buddha(s) must also be seen thus, correctly, in terms of emptiness. So how come the various statements of the Mahāyāna not accepted by the good?’

⁵See MMK XXIV.16-17. There is not sufficient space to consider in detail the contentious issue of whether the author of the *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā* also authored the *Ratnāvalī*, but Walser’s conclusion on the matter seems to be rather optimistic (2005: 278): ‘Overall, then, the evidence supporting Nāgārjuna’s authorship of the *Ratnāvalī* is strong. It is ascribed to Nāgārjuna by multiple sources beginning in the sixth century and shows an affinity for common Mādhyamika doctrine. Finally, the *Ratnāvalī* contains many of the peculiar stylistic elements found in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* that are not found in other authors of the early Mādhyamika school, such as Āryadeva, Buddhapālita, and the author of the *Akutobhayā*.’

In fact Walser’s discussion shows that Candrakīrti, Haribhadra, Śāntarakṣita and Prajñākaramati all cite the *Ratnāvalī* without attributing it to Nāgārjuna (Walser, 2005: 278), and that stylistic correspondences between the *Ratnāvalī* and MMK are limited. Moreover, Walser does not consider the very important didactic difference that the overt Mahāyāna agenda of the *Ratnāvalī* is completely absent from the more conservative Sūtra-based approach of the MMK. It is partly true that both the *Ratnāvalī* and MMK refer to the *Kaccāyanagotta Sutta* (Walser 2005: 274). But this correspondence is more limited than Walser claims: although Rat I.38/46 refer to this discourse, Rat I. 42/71 do not, suggesting the more likely scenario that the *Ratnāvalī* expands upon the MMK’s use of this Sutta, rather than the Sutta itself. It also goes without saying that the argument that Āryadeva et al. are less likely authors of the *Ratnāvalī* than Nāgārjuna is an argument from silence that proves little. If these sceptical remarks are closer to the truth than Walser’s analysis, Nāgārjuna would have to be dated slightly earlier than the late 2nd century AD date assigned to the *Ratnāvalī* by Walser (2005). Schopen (2005: 7ff), in his typical, hectoring, fashion, makes rather a lot out of the problem of the *Ratnāvalī*’s authorship without saying anything useful.

Not finding, perceiving or seeing the Bodhisattva or his *dharma*, Blessed one, or even the perfection of understanding, what Bodhisattva and with regard to what perfection of understanding shall I instruct or teach? But if, Blessed One, while it is being spoken, pointed out and instructed thus, a Bodhisattva's heart does not sink or slump, does not become dejected or despondent, if his mind does not become disaffected or shattered, if he does not tremble, quiver or shake, this very Bodhisattva, great in essence, is fit to be instructed in the perfection of understanding.⁶

The unease caused by the teaching of emptiness, recognised even within the community of *śūnyavādins*, arises from its emphatic negation and almost complete avoidance of positive religious language; the complete denial of conventional reality (*saṃvṛtti-satya*) is generally not complemented by more positive definitions of ultimate truth or reality (*paramārtha-satya*). This negative approach is based on the idea that the entire content of consciousness – including basic structural aspects such as personal identity, existence and non-existence – are constructs which lack any essential reality outside a person's thoughts. Thus the teaching of emptiness was not exactly for the philosophically lighthearted members of the Buddhist community in India, and was viewed even less charitably by those outside the Buddhist fold. Śāṅkara, for example, in his commentaries on the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* and *Brahma Sūtra*, while happy enough to engage with various sorts of Buddhist realism and idealism, on the assumption that he can disprove their heretical ideas, is at something of a loss when it comes to the doctrine of emptiness, at which he can hardly hide his disgust:

But the position of those who advocate emptiness is contradicted by all valid means of acquiring knowledge. Hence no care has been taken to refute it. Worldly usage, accepted in all valid means of acquiring knowledge, cannot possibly be denied without coming

⁶Aṣṭa (Vaidya 1960: 3): so 'haṃ bhagavan bodhisattvaṃ vā bodhisattvadharmaṃ vā avindan anupalabhamāno 'samanuṣāyaṃ, prajñāpāramitāṃ apy avindan anupalabhamāno 'samanuṣāyaṃ, katamaṃ bodhisattvaṃ katamasyāṃ prajñāpāramitāyāṃ avavadiṣyāmi anuśāsiṣyāmi? api tu khalu punarbhagavan saced evaṃ bhāṣyamāṇe deśyamāṇe upadiṣyamāṇe bodhisattvasya cittaṃ nāvalīyate na saṃliyate na viśīdati na viśādamāpadyate, nāsyā vipṛsthībhavati mānasam na bhagnapṛsthībhavati, notrasyati na saṃtrasyati na saṃtrāsam āpadyate, eṣa eva bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ prajñāpāramitāyāṃ anuśāsiṣyāḥ.

upon another truth, for the absence of the exception only proves the general rule.⁷

Quite apart from the debate between Buddhists and Brahmins over the existence or reality of the self (*ātman*), in this citation Śāṅkara seems to be more troubled by the *prāsāṅgika* method of negation, and the unsettling conclusion to which this leads – that metaphysical statements of truth are ultimately impossible. But in this respect, neither Śāṅkara nor the opponents of the *prajñā-pāramitā* were the first to object to a *via negativa* Buddhist dialectic.

2. In a number of Pali discourses the Buddha is accused of being a nihilist (*uccheda-vādo*, *venayiko*), without the reason for the accusation being made clear, and the Buddha's usual response – of adapting his critics' language of nihilism to his ethical ideals – does not help us understand what their problem was. Saying something like 'I am a nihilist in the sense of advocating the dispelling (*uccheda*, *vinaya*) of passion, hatred and delusion' does not explain the initial accusation.⁸ While it might be assumed that it had something to do with the denial of self, when the Buddha reveals the content of his opponents' critique – in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* – he makes no mention of the *anātman* teaching, and instead focuses on the ineffability of the liberated person:

In this very life, *bhikkhus*, I say that the Tathāgata is untraceable (*ananuvijjo*). Speaking and explaining thus, *bhikkhus*, some ascetics and Brahmins accuse me falsely, vainly, incorrectly and without foundation: 'The ascetic Gotama is a nihilist (*venayiko*) who proclaims the cutting off, annihilation and non-existence of an existent being'. Although I am not, *bhikkhus*, and do not speak thus, even so those venerable ascetics and Brahmins accuse me falsely, vainly, incorrectly and without foundation: 'The ascetic Gotama is a nihilist who proclaims the cutting off, annihilation and non-existence of an existent being'. Both formerly and now,

⁷Brahmasūtrabhāṣya II.2.31 (Bākre: 479): *śūnyavādiḥ pakṣas tu sarvapramāṇavipratīṣiddha iti tannirākaraṇāya nādaraḥ kriyate. na hy ayaṃ sarvapramāṇasiddho lokavyāvahāro 'nyattattvam anadhigamya śakyate 'pahnotum apavādābhāve utsargaprasiddheḥ*. The same text (up to ... *kriyate*) is repeated at the end of section IV.3.7 of Śāṅkara's commentary on the *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad*. On the general content of this passage, which includes a number of arguments against Buddhist schools, see Ingalls (1954: 302-03).

⁸Vin I.235, III.2-3; AN IV.174-75, IV.183.

bhikkhus, I only proclaim suffering and its cessation. If, therein, *bhikkhus*, others abuse, revile, offend and harass the Tathāgata, therein, *bhikkhus*, for the Tathāgata there is no anger, discontent or dissatisfaction.’⁹

A similar response to the accusation of nihilism is possibly contained in the *Vajjiyamāhita Sutta* (AN IV.189ff), where some wanderers query whether the Buddha is a nihilist ‘who refuses to make declarations’ (*venayiko appaññattiko*), in response to which the lay-disciple Vajjiyamāhita asserts that the Buddha teaches what is good and bad (*kusala, akusala*). While there is no comment on whether or not the Buddha was a nihilist (*venayiko*) in the sense of not making declarations (*appaññattiko*) on certain important metaphysical issues, such as the ontological status of the liberated person, the text suggests an aversion, on the part of some, similar to that found in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*, to the Buddha’s philosophical reticence.

Whatever the case, the alarmist reaction to the Buddha, suggested by a number of texts but only spelt out in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*, seems to have been focused on a very specific philosophical orientation – the avoidance of ontology through the idea of ineffability – which was later conceptualised in terms of the *śūnya-vāda*. For the animating fear of the Buddha’s critics in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* seems to have been that if any particular state of affairs cannot be conceptualised, then it cannot really exist; this seems to imply, in turn, the realistic presupposition that that concepts denote ultimately real things. The opponents of the Buddha thus emerge as philosophical realists reacting to a doctrine of non-conceptuality.

If this interpretation is correct, the Buddha could be regarded as a sort of proto-*śūnyavādin*, whose realisation of ineffability in the present was elaborated into a nominalistic doctrine, according to which existent things (such as ‘consciousness’) are equated with concepts which are then negated. Such

⁹MN I.140: *diṭṭhe vāhaṃ bhikkhave dhamme tathāgataṃ ananuvejjo ti vadāmi. evaṃvādiṃ kho maṃ bhikkhave evamakkhāyiṃ eke samaṇabrāhmaṇā asatā tucchā musā abhūtena abbhācikkhanti: venayiko samaṇo gotamo sato sattassa ucchedaṃ vināsaṃ vibhavaṃ paññāpetī ti. yathā vāhaṃ bhikkhave na yathā cāhaṃ na vadāmi tathā maṃ te bhonto samaṇabrāhmaṇā asatā tucchā musā abhūtena abbhācikkhanti: venayiko samaṇo gotamo sato sattassa ucchedaṃ vināsaṃ vibhavaṃ paññāpetī ti. pubbe cāhaṃ bhikkhave etarahi ca dukkhaṃ c’eva paññāpemi dukkhassa ca nirodhaṃ. tatra ce bhikkhave pare tathāgataṃ akkosanti paribhāsanti rosentī vihesenti, tatra bhikkhave tathāgatassa na hoti āghāto na appaccayo na cetaso anabhiraddhi.*

a reading of the Buddha is at least consistent with Nāgārjuna's *śūnyavādin* interpretation of the canonical teachings, in which the notion of liberated ineffability in the present is similarly connected to an anti-realistic position, most strongly stated in one of the more difficult statements of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (XXV.17-20):

Beyond death, it is not said that the Blessed One exists, does not exist, both exists and does not, or neither exists nor does not exist (17). Even while the Blessed One remains it cannot be said that he exists, does not exist, both exists and does not, or neither exists nor does not exist (18).

There is no deviation between *saṃsāra* and Nirvana, and no deviation between Nirvana and *saṃsāra* (19). Nirvana and *saṃsāra* share the same threshold: there is not even the slightest difference between them (20).¹⁰

Nāgārjuna's identification of *saṃsāra* and Nirvana makes sense on the basis that the phenomenal world is an illusion. For if the entire content of mundane consciousness (*saṃsāra*) is unreal, it follows that linguistic conventions and conceptual distinctions, including that between Nirvana and *saṃsāra*, are ultimately meaningless. Hence there is no meaningful sense in which Nirvana and *saṃsāra* can be spoken of as separate 'things': whether a person is entangled in the illusion that is phenomena, or released from it by realising it is an illusion, the locus, or 'threshold', of cognition – liberated or mundane – remains the same. This anti-realistic doctrine thus explains the Tathāgata's liberated state in the present, for if the Tathāgata has understood the illusory nature of phenomena, and is out of it, in the sense of realising the experiential deconstruction of ordinary awareness, his liberation must necessarily involve the negation of all phenomenal categories: ideas about being and non-being do not apply to him.

It is easy to see why all this would be troubling to the philosophical realist. For Nāgārjuna expresses nominalistic ideas in a manner that apparently dissolves

¹⁰MMK XXV.17-20 (on which see Wynne, 2015: 151-52): *paraṃ nirodhād bhagavān bhavatīty eva nājyate, na bhavaty ubhayaṃ ceti nobhayaṃ ceti nājyate* (17). *tiṣṭhamāno 'pi bhagavān bhavatīty eva nājyate, na bhavaty ubhayaṃ ceti nobhayaṃ ceti nājyate* (18). *na saṃsārasya nirvāṇāt kiṃcid asti viśeṣaṇam, na nirvāṇasya saṃsārāt kiṃcid asti viśeṣaṇam* (19). *nirvāṇasya ca yā koṭiḥ koṭiḥ saṃsaraṇasya ca, na tayoṃ antaraṃ kiṃcit susūkṣmam api vidyate* (20).

liberation into the world; both here and in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*, the subject of religious truth seems to slip away through one's fingers. Perhaps to opponents of the *śūnya-vāda*, such as Śaṅkara and many Indian Buddhists, it seemed as if the metaphysical rug of reality was being pulled away from under their feet, leaving a vast, unforgiving void. The charge of nihilism is easy to understand.

The canonical discourses suggest the fear of annihilation evoked by negative, *śūnyavāda*-style teachings is significantly older than Nāgārjuna. Indeed, the case that early Buddhist thought should be regarded as a sort of 'proto-*madhyamaka*' has already been formulated by Gómez (1976), on the basis of the final two books of the *Sutta-nipāta* (*Aṭṭhakavagga* and *Pārāyanavagga*): the fact that a similar tendency can be identified in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* suggests that the proto-*śūnyavāda* tendency is more generally applicable to the canonical teachings as a whole. Other teachings of a similar nature are not difficult to find, for example the Buddha's argument in the *Mahā-nidāna Sutta* that the notion of 'self' is cognitively dependent:

Therein, Ānanda, to the person who claims "my self (*me attā*) is beyond sensation (*na... vedanā*) and experience (*appaṭisaṃvedano*)," one should say: "Is it possible to have the notion 'I am' (*asmī ti*) when there is no sensation whatsoever (*sabbaso vedayitaṃ n' atthi*)?"

'It is not so, master.'

Therefore, Ānanda, it is because of this reason that it is not suitable (*na kkhāmati*) to think that one has a self beyond feeling and experience.¹¹

The Buddha here points out that the idea of a transcendent self comes about under particular cognitive circumstances, and so must be a conceptual construct, a phenomenon without substance. While the *prajñāpāramitā* literature expresses this idea more directly, by stating that all things (*dharmas*) – including typical

¹¹DN II.67 (on which see Wynne 2010: 134): *tatr' ānanda yo so evam āha: na h' eva kho me vedanā attā appaṭisaṃvedano me attā ti, so evam assa vacanīyo, yattha pan' āvuso sabbaso vedayitaṃ n' atthi api nu kho tattha ayam aham asmī ti siyā ti? no h' etaṃ bhante. tasmā-t-ih' ānanda etena p' etaṃ na kkhāmati: na h' eva kho me vedanā attā appaṭisaṃvedano me attā ti samanupassitaṃ.*

terms of Buddhist discourse – are ‘empty’,¹² the Buddha here undermines the idea of substance, or objective reality, by noting the phenomenal dependence of an idea on dependently originated states of consciousness. A subtler way of expressing the same idea is found in the *Kevaṭṭa Sutta*, which uses a poetic allegory about the attainment of Nirvana – a tale on reaching the place where the material elements ‘cease without remainder’ – to indicate the dependence of substance on mind:

Consciousness, which is intransitive, infinite and luminous all round,

Here water, earth, fire and wind do not stand firm.

Here the great and small, the minute and gross, the attractive and unattractive,

Here name and form cease without remainder.

With the cessation of consciousness, this ceases, right here.¹³

¹²For a typical statement see e.g. Aṣṭa (Vaidya 1960: 89): *na cānyatra skandhadhātāvāyatanebhyaḥ prajñāpāramitā avaboddhavyā. tat kasya hetoḥ? skandhadhātāvāyatanam eva hi subhūte śūnyam viviktaṃ śāntam. iti hi prajñāpāramitā ca skandhadhātāvāyatanam ca advayam etad advaidhikāram śūnyatvād viviktatvāt, evaṃ śāntatvān nopalabhyate. yo 'nupalambhaḥ sarvadharmānām sā prajñāpāram itety ucyate, yadā na bhavati saṃjñā samajñā prajñaptir vyavahārah, tadā prajñāpāram itety ucyate.*

It should also be noted that the relentless negation of the Aṣṭa also means that the idea of emptiness itself is also denied, e.g. Aṣṭa p.96, which denies the 5 aggregates (e.g. *sacen na vijñāne carati, carati prajñāpāramitāyām*), the typical Buddhist idea that they are impermanent (e.g. *saced vijñānam anityam iti na carati, carati prajñāpāramitāyām*) as well as the idea that they are empty (e.g. *saced vijñānam śūnyam iti na carati, carati prajñāpāramitāyām*).

Even when the Aṣṭa uses canonical modes of expression, it does so alongside newer concepts, e.g. p.121: *uktaṃ hīdaṃ bhagavatā: acchaṭṭasamghātamātrakam apy ahaṃ bhikṣavo bhavābhinirvṛttiṃ na varṇayāmi, sarvaṃ hi saṃskṛtam anityaṃ sarvaṃ bhayāvagataṃ duḥkhaṃ sarvaṃ traidhātukaṃ śūnyam sarvadharmā anātmānaḥ.*

This passage differs from the canonical material in using the term *anātmāna* as a bahuvrīhi (‘selfless’) rather than *karmadhāraya* compound (‘not-self’). On the general distinction between the two types of compound see Collins (1982: 95-96); such a distinction in the Aṣṭa probably does not indicate a philosophical change from not-self to no self (on which see Wynne 2010: 157ff), but perhaps reflects the formal use of the compound in Buddhist circles at the time.

¹³DN I.223: *viññānaṃ anidassanaṃ anantaṃ sabbato pabhaṃ, ettha āpo ca paṭhavī tejo vāyo na gādhati, ettha dīghaṃ ca rassaṃ ca aṇuṃ thūlaṃ subhāsubhaṃ, ettha nāmaṃ ca rūpaṃ ca asesam uparujjhati. viññānaṃ nirodgena etth' etaṃ uparujjhatī ti.*

Reading *pabhaṃ* for *pahaṃ* with Be; the two characters are easily confusable in Sinhalese script.

The statement that the material elements cease in intransitive consciousness, taken literally, suggests the phenomenal world is a mental construct. This could mean that the verse implies idealism, a problem not properly understood in the Theravāda tradition, where consciousness – ‘intransitive, infinite and luminous all round’ – is believed to be an epithet of Nirvana.¹⁴ But this possibility is ruled out by the cessation of consciousness in the final stanza, even if the referent of the final pronoun (*etaṃ*) is not clear (although the neuter case suggests *dukkha*). Nevertheless, the suggestion that things depend on thought, and the failure to declare any positive metaphysic, is typical of proto-*śūnya-vādin* teaching in its initial, canonical phase.

3. This brief sample of material, from the *Alagaddūpama*, *Mahā-nidāna* and *Kevaṭṭa Suttas*, forms a coherent proto-*śūnyavādin* position which can be extended to much of the canonical Pali discourses. The evidence is, indeed, abundant: in the not-self teaching, the teachings on dependent origination and cognition, the discourses to Vacchagotta and Kaccāyana, and those of the *Aṭṭhakavagga* and *Pārāyanavagga*, as well as in subjects as diverse as cosmology, meditation and miracles, a *śūnya-vāda* sort of nominalism can be identified.¹⁵

Three fundamental *śūnyavādin* principles can thus be generalised to the teachings of the four principle Nikāyas, and the older portions of the Khuddaka Nikāya: that the world of experience is a cognitive construction which is essentially unsatisfactory; that there is no point in metaphysical explanations of the ‘what’, ‘why’ or ‘how’ of this construction, which are pragmatically pointless and philosophically impossible; and that Nirvana, the dissolution of construction, is necessarily ineffable since it consists of cognitive deconstruction, and thus transcends language. By this estimation the Buddha’s Dhamma is profoundly anti-realistic, since the world as it appears in normal experience, including all things within the realm of space-time, is said to be unreal.

A positive metaphysic is not revealed in this negative dialectic: the nature of the system indicates that although a metaphysician might try to push beyond the phenomenal limits of language and knowledge, the endeavour is meaningless and to be avoided. No idealistic step is taken to say that cognitive construction is all there is, and thus that the world consists of mind only. Nor is philosophical

¹⁴Norman (1992)

¹⁵A fuller consideration of the material is presented in Wynne (2010, and 2015 chapters 2 & 3)

realism affirmed: there is no assertion that cognitive construction depends on, and is a sort of representation of, things that really do exist in space-time. The philosophical world of the *śūnya-vāda* thus culminates in a non-foundational silence, in which it is implied that the ultimate truth of things is ineffable and beyond articulation. This non-foundationalism is easy to as nihilism, as can be seen in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*, in the criticism of the *prajñā-pāramitā* and in Śaṅkara's disdain. Douglass Smith's article (in the present volume) also shows that anti-realism can also be misconstrued as idealism::

By throwing into doubt the existence of the external world, and even the existence of other minds, idealism and anti-realism complicate our attitude towards all that arises within consciousness. Hamilton (2000: 184-6) expressed well and at some length the problem of solipsism that dogs any subjectivist view of reality. As she notes, the farthest thing from the Buddha's mind was solipsism. Indeed we might say his entire public career was based upon an assumption of solipsism's falsity ... (p.157 above)

Even if anti-realism need not be essentially idealistic, one might reasonably object that the Buddha was surely some kind of realist. After all, did he not teach things he believed to be objectively true, and surely this assumes the objective reality of the realm of space-time in which individuals hear the teachings, and follow the eightfold way to Nirvana? It could thus be argued that an anti-realist interpretation of the Dhamma is based on reading Madhyamaka thought back into the canonical teachings, which are implicitly realistic, and that the Buddha's mission implies he had an 'inchoate metaphysics', essentially realistic, since realism must be the natural counterpart to compassion:

"Compassion for beings" is an externally oriented, cognitive affect, as are the claims about those same beings caught within *saṃsāra*. (p.176 above)

It hardly needs to be pointed out that the Buddha's entire teaching career was not the action of a solipsistic idealist, for if this were the case the Buddha would probably have remained under the tree of awakening, enjoying the peace of liberation rather than re-entering a world which he had found to be unreal. At the least, then, the Buddha's teachings must be realistic in a semantic sense (p.166ff), and one could be confident of speaking of the Dhamma as a system of

‘contracted realism’ (Wynne 2015: 30ff), that is to say, that the laws by which experience is constructed are objective real. But does this imply, in turn, that these teachings rest on ontological realism? Does the semantic truth that people can realise Nirvana through certain meditative procedures say anything about the ontology of Nirvana?

The fact that phenomena (*sabbe dhammā*) are characterised by impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self proves nothing in this regard (p.172), for this teaching notes a phenomenological rather than ontological truth, ‘unsatisfactoriness’ being a comment on the experiential quality of things rather than an ontological property. Indeed, the Buddha nowhere states that the content of conditioned experience is a representation of substances that exist in the mind-independent realm of space-time. If so, the argument for an ontological reading of the Buddha’s Dhamma requires more than teachings on experience, perhaps some sort of indication that either the sense objects or the material elements are real in the way they are perceived.

A simple argument for realism could be that in the early Buddhist analysis of cognition, the sense objects are distinguished from an individual’s cognitive apparatus, both of which precede apperception or conceptualisation (*sañjānāti*). As explained in texts such as the *Madhupīṇḍika Sutta*, apperception occurs after the coming together of the sense and sense object, with the implication that the two need not come together,¹⁶ and so exist separately in the world. But this only implies that the laws of construction allow for an objective order with public objects; it does not necessarily follow that this order is situated in a realm of space-time beyond consciousness.

Sense objects could be explained in any number of ways – perhaps through the claim that the laws of karmic retribution allow for co-ordination between individuals, so that individual streams of consciousness interact resulting in common objects of experience; or perhaps by means of the Kantian idea that things in themselves (*noumena*) are beyond time and space, but assume such a form, as *phenomena*, due to the construction of sense impressions by the mind’s categories; or even by claiming that objects are fluctuations in an energy field, which is situated in beyond the dimensions of space-time, and behaves differently in the various stations of consciousness (*viññāṇa-ṭhiti*). If one objects that a Kantian metaphysic is not made clear in the canonical teachings, this only

¹⁶MI.111: *cakkhuñ c’āvuso paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuvīññāṇaṃ, tiṇṇaṃ saṅgati phasso, phassapaccayā vedanā, yaṃ vedeti taṃ sañjānāti...*

proves the point that the canonical teachings are not metaphysically grounded.¹⁷

The cessation of sense contact, brought about through the disjunction of sense and object – likened by the Buddha, in the *Dhātuvibhaṅga Sutta* and elsewhere, to the separation of two sticks which had been rubbed together to produce heat and fire (p.160),¹⁸ need not imply that the object exists ‘out there’ in the world of space-time. For the Buddha likens the friction between sticks to the quality of feeling – pleasant, unpleasant or neither – which suggests an experientially grounded, phenomenological metaphysic would perhaps be more suitable in this place. A similar point could be made about the Buddha’s teaching to his son Rāhula that he should cultivate a meditation ‘like the earth’, which receives impurities passively. Since this instruction concerns the correct meditative attitude, a phenomenological rather than ontological reading would seem more appropriate.¹⁹

Other Suttas on meditation hardly seem a suitable starting point for metaphysics: the bodily contemplations of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas*, and the *Assuataṅga Sutta* – which points out that the body endures changes less quickly than the mind, and so is a better candidate to be considered as the self (pp.161-62)– all assume that phenomena are public, and that experience is shared, but no comment is made on the true nature of this shared domain. Analogies which illustrate the quality of sensation, or from meditations and contemplations, thus go no further than emphasising the fact that the phenomenal world is public, not private, and are not a very convincing source for metaphysical speculation.

A different metaphysic is not only plausible in other teachings that could be cited in support of ontological realism, but is in fact much more likely. Thus the *Puppha Sutta* (SN III.138) does not make any statement about ‘the ontological character of the *khandhas*, and in particular the *khandha* of form’, and so does not help establish the bare existence of form ‘as versus a more antirealist view of the dhamma’ (p.165). This teaching states nothing more than the Buddha’s agreement that the five aggregates exist ‘in the world’ (*loke*) when considered in the sense of ‘impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self’

¹⁷A Kantian metaphysic has been suggested by Sue Hamilton, 1999. 'The "External World": Its Status and Relevance in the Pali Nikayas', in *Religion* (1999), 29, pp 73-90.

¹⁸MN III.242-43.

¹⁹M I.423: *paṭhavīsamaṃ rāhula bhāvanaṃ bhāvehi, paṭhavīsamaṃ hi te rāhula bhāvanaṃ bhāvayato uppannā manāpāmanāpā phassā cittaṃ na pariyādāya ṭhassanti.*

(*aniccaṃ dukkhaṃ vipariṇāmadhammaṃ*), but do not exist when considered as ‘permanent, fixed, eternal and not liable to change’ (*niccaṃ dhuvam sassaṭṭaṃ avipariṇāmadhammaṃ*), a very typical Buddhist statement about the unsatisfactory nature of experience.

This experiential point is made clear when the Buddha equates the five aggregates with ‘worldly phenomena in the world’ (*loke lokadhammo*),²⁰ a statement which suggests that the Buddha here deals with the world in a phenomenal sense (*lokadhamma*); indeed, the term ‘world’ (*loka*) often denotes the world of experience.²¹ The Sutta’s enigmatic conclusion on the Buddha’s transcendence also seems to transgress the presuppositions of philosophical realism:

Just as a waterlily, lotus or blue lotus, originated and grown in water, emerges from the water and stands tall without being daubed by water, so too is the Tathāgata born and grown in the world, and yet he overcomes it, and abides without being tainted by the world’.²²

The notion of the Buddha’s ‘mastery’ or ‘overpowering’ of the world (*lokam abhibhuyya*) does not completely rule out a realistic metaphysic. But it goes much further than merely noting the Buddha’s therapeutic detachment from objects that are ontologically real: if the idea of mastering the world and abiding untouched by seems more than a statement of indifferent aloofness, the teaching can perhaps be more easily read as an apophatic statement about the Buddha’s immanent transcendence.

²⁰S III.139: *kiñ ca bhikkhave loke lokadhammo yaṃ tathāgato abhisambujjhati abhisameti, abhisambujjhivā abhisametvā ācikkhati deseti paññāpeti paṭṭhapeti vivarati vibhajati uttānīkaroti? rūpaṃ bhikkhave loke lokadhammo taṃ tathāgato abhisambujjhati abhisameti ...*

‘And what, bhikkhus, is the worldly phenomenon in the world to which a Tathāgata awakens, which he comprehends, having awakening and comprehended (which) he explains, teaches, declares, establishes, reveals, analyses and makes clear? Form (and: feeling, aperception, constructions, consciousness), *bhikkhus*, is the worldly phenomenon in the world to which the Tathāgata awakens, which he comprehends.’

²¹On early Buddhist teachings on the world ‘out there’ as ‘worlds of experience’ see Hamilton (2000, chapter 6).

²²S III.140: *seyyathā pi bhikkhave uppalaṃ vā padumaṃ vā puṇḍarīkaṃ vā udake jātaṃ udake saṃvaḍḍhaṃ udakā accuggamma ṭhāti anupalittaṃ udakena, evam eva kho bhikkhave tathāgato loke saṃvaḍḍho lokaṃ abhibhuyya viharati anupalitto lokenā ti.*

In the final clause after *evam eva...*, Be reads *loke jāto loke saṃvaḍḍho* instead of *loke saṃvaḍḍho*.

All these teachings suggest that while there may well be ‘nothing in the Nikāyas that ‘forces’ a phenomenological metaphysic upon the Buddha’s teachings (p.162), there is far less which instead suggests ontological realism. Indeed, the most likely ontologically focused discourse – the *Mahā-hatthipadopama Sutta* (MN 28), in which the human being is compared to a house constructed in space – is attributed to Sāriputta, and generally seems to stand apart from the mass of Nikāya teaching in terms of its analytical style and method.²³ If the text’s didactic peculiarity suggests it is a sort of proto-Abhidharma work, it should not be construed as a typical Nikāya teaching as follows:

The flip side of analysis is reduction. Although Wynne (2010: 157ff; 2015: 85-6) locates “reductionistic realism” at a later stage than the Buddha, synchronic and diachronic analyses of all manner of causal processes is a hallmark of the Buddha’s method throughout the Nikāyas. As we have seen, we even find analytic treatments of the origin of contention, quarreling, and violence within the *Aṭṭhakavagga* itself. Though the *Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta* (MN 28) may be spoken by Sāriputta rather than the Buddha, the understanding of form in terms of the four elements is widespread in the suttas. (p.161)

But there is no reason why analysis need be reductionistic, in an ontological sense, and in any case the analysis of form in terms of the four elements is not the issue in question. What matters is the text’s application of the not-self teaching to an almost exhaustive list of bodily parts, along with the analogy between a house and the body, the constituent parts of both being said to enclose ‘space’. There being such obvious differences between this teaching and, for example, the didactic style and content of the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*, an ontological reading of the Buddha’s teachings would seem to lack foundation.

5. Apart from in their more recent strata, it would seem that the principal Nikāyas do not provide decisive support for ontological realism. Furthermore, the Buddha’s focus on experience, and especially the experience of liberation in the present, must surely place philosophical limits on his teachings: while metaphysical silence necessarily stops short of explaining the ultimate way of things, it at least seems to negate certain philosophical interpretations of the

²³On this text see Wynne (2010: 158ff).

Dhamma.²⁴ This can be seen especially in apophatic teachings which declare that the liberated sage is beyond reckoning. In such cases ontological realism seems far from the Buddha's mind, as can be seen in the following verse from the *Purābheda Sutta*:

‘Devoid of thirst even before death,’ said the Blessed One, ‘not dependent upon the past, immeasurable in the middle, for him nothing is fashioned with regard to the future.’

One could perhaps interpret this verse to mean that the sage is ‘unattached to anything in the present’ or has ‘no present states produced by greed, hatred, or ignorance’ (p.156). On the other hand, the Buddha's words seem to be a rather strong way of stating non-attachment: one could object that the person who has no attachment or greed can still be measured, so why use the language of ‘immeasurability’? Perhaps we can allow the Buddha some poetic license, but if so this would seem to have been a liberty he used rather freely, and even excessively, for example in the *Kalahavivāda Sutta*, an important text in the *Aṭṭhakavagga* (*Suttanipāta* IV):

Not cognisant of conceptualisation, not cognisant of misconceptualisation, not uncognisant but not cognisant of what is untrue: form disappears for the one who has reached this state, for the discernment of manifoldness (*papañcasankhā*) originates in conceptualisation (*saññānidānā*).²⁵

The context of this verse, rather than its content, is at least fairly straightforward: since the preceding verses (872-73) mention the compound ‘name and form’, the teaching must concern a person's psycho-physical being. The term *rūpa* cannot refer to a sense object, for this term only ever refers to the visible aspect of a sense object, rather than the sense object itself. If so, the verse certainly does not echo ‘others within the Canon on the same topic of ending desire for sense objects’; does not assert that in order to ‘escape dispute, one should engage in deep *jhāna* so as to overcome attachment to sense objects’; and does not come close to advising ‘a meditative retreat from form’ through the attainment of the fourth formless meditation (p.153).

²⁴Sn 849: *vītataṅho purā bheda ti bhagavā, pubbam antam anissito, vemajjhe nūpasamkheyyo tassa n'atthi purekkhatam.*

²⁵Sn 874. *na saññasaññī na visaññasaññī, no pi asaññī na vibhūtasaññī: evaṃsametassa vibhoti rūpaṃ, saññānidānā hi papañcasamkhā.*

Taken at its own word, on the assumption that the Buddha means what he says, this verse states that a person's physical form can disappear if the cognitive conditions are altered, which means that matter depends on thought. This could perhaps mean that a person's perception of form ceases, in a transformed state of consciousness. But since the verse deals precisely with the perception of things, one could legitimately expect the Buddha to specify that the perception of form ceases, rather than form itself. A more likely interpretation is that the verse belongs to the collection of apophatic teachings on liberation – those charismatic utterances which typically negate certain aspects of mundane experience, such as the five aggregates, as a way of indicating the attainment of liberation, without making any positive statement about the liberated person's condition. A good example is the Buddha's claim, in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* (p.217) that the liberated person is 'untraceable' (*ananuvijjo*) and cannot be found even by the Gods:

Therefore, bhikkhus, I say that when the gods including Indra, Brahma and Prajāpati search for the bhikkhu thus released in mind, they cannot establish that 'the consciousness of the Tathāgata is located here.'²⁶

The drama of this teaching is supplied almost entirely by the fact that it is gods who fail to find the liberated *bhikkhu*; it would not have the same impact if other beings without the gods' divine power were mentioned. Hence the teaching would not work if Māra was the protagonist, for Māra is the demon who in canonical stories habitually tries to tempt *bhikkhus* back to the world of sensory pleasures, or else divert the Buddha from his mission. The teachings of the *Nivāpa* and *Ariyapariyesana Suttas*, which describe how Māra cannot gain a foothold in a *bhikkhu* who attains various meditative states, such as the four *jhānas*, four formless spheres and finally cessation (a state in which the *bhikkhu* is apparently liberated),²⁷ merely extend the teaching on being beyond sensual pleasure in the first *jhāna* (*vivicceva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi*), and thus being beyond Māra's temptation, whose 'eye has been slain (so that it) lacks a foothold'.²⁸

²⁶MN I.140: *evaṃ vimuttacittaṃ kho bhikkhave bhikkhuṃ sa-indā devā sabrahmakā sapajāpatikā anvesaṃ nādhigacchanti: idaṃ nissitaṃ tathāgatassa viññāṇan ti.*

²⁷As indicated by the pericope *paññāya c'assa disvā āsavā parikkhīṇā honti* (M I. 160, 175).

²⁸MN I.159: *kathaṅ ca bhikkhave agati māraṃ ca māraparisāya ca? idha bhikkhave bhikkhu*

This is entirely different from the idea of the gods being unable to locate the liberated *bhikkhu*'s consciousness.

These three teachings from the *Purābheda*, *Kalahavivāda* and *Alagaddūpama Suttas* all articulate, in different styles and from different perspectives, the idea of the liberated person's ineffability in the present. The urge to explain such teachings away is easy to understand, for this idea might seem absurd in the modern age; a contemporary reader might reasonably object that the Buddha cannot have meant such teachings literally. But before rushing to claim that such statements do not mean what they actually say, we should first of all take them seriously, considering whether they have possible philosophical implications, and if so, whether these implications make sense within the wider context of early Buddhist teachings.

6. Rather than trying to second guess the Buddha, by formulating an inchoate metaphysic to fill in the gaps left by his enigmatic silence, it would be more useful to study his philosophical reticence and negations, and assess the extent to which, or even whether, these place limits on his system of thought. We can begin by noting that if the world is an unsatisfactory ontological reality – a painful realm of space-time that actually exists outside a person's head – then liberation from it would require a person to escape from the world, literally understood. But if so, the idea of liberation in life is logically impossible, and would have to be viewed as a poetic way of stating a person's anticipation of final liberation to be achieved at death, but guaranteed in life through a special type of realisation, in which the forces that bind a person to *saṃsāra* are temporarily stopped.

From this perspective the statement of the *Puppha Sutta*, that the Buddha is 'untainted' by the world, could just mean that he is no longer affected by the forces that bind him to *saṃsāra* after death. But we have seen that the *Puppha Sutta*'s statement that the Buddha 'masters' the world is a strange way of articulating such poetic realism; indeed, the image of a lotus emerging from water suggests the Tathāgata is out of the world right now, rather than in it until he dies and finally realises liberation. In a similar vein, the teachings of the *Kalahavivāda* and *Alagaddūpama Suttas* do not suggest that the liberated person is poetically liberated, in the sense that he remains in a detached, aloof state until

vivicc' eva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkaṃ savicāraṃ vivekaṃ pītisukhaṃ paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati. ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhave bhikkhu andham akāsi māraṃ apadaṃ vadhitvā māracakkuṃ adassanaṃ gato pāpimato.

death, at which point he is actually liberated from the unsatisfactoriness that is existence in space-time.

All these teachings rather imply that something has happened to the Tathāgata which literally places him outside space-time in the present. This idea is incompatible with philosophical realism, according to which the liberated person should still be measurable, should still be embodied, and should still have a particular kind of detached consciousness. Apophatic teachings, negations and silence, on the other hand, only make sense according to the anti-realistic understanding that the things of experience and knowledge – bodies, brains, individual beings, objects, matter, the world – are merely ideas or concepts which can therefore be stopped, rendering the Tathāgata actually immeasurable and really lacking a body and consciousness.

Charismatic statements about the ineffability of the person liberated in the present (*diṭṭhe va dhamme*), taken literally, presume the nominalistic understanding that the world is essentially an idea, a construction in experience, that can therefore be dismantled.²⁹ Thus the idea of liberation in the present implies that the world is not real in the sense normally imagined, that is in an ontological sense, as a realm governed by the objectively real laws of time and space. It is of crucial importance, therefore, to understand correctly a couple of texts which seem to state exactly this. In the *Rohitassa Sutta*, a highly peculiar discourse found identically in both the Saṃyutta and Aṅguttara Nikāyas, the Buddha teaches that the origin and end of the world are not to be found externally, out there, but should instead be located in the body and cognition:

Where indeed, sir, one is not born, does not age, does not die, does not fall away or arise – I do not state that the end of the world is to be known, seen or attained through ‘going’. But nor do I declare, sir, the making an end of suffering without having reached the end of the world. Indeed, sir, I declare that the world, its origination, cessation and conduct leading thereto is to be in this very fathom-long body, endowed with apperception and mind.³⁰

²⁹It is highly relevant that the expression *diṭṭhe va dhamme* does not simply mean ‘liberation in the present’, but can be translated more accurately as ‘when the truth is seen’; this more dynamic sense of the expression emphasises the immediacy, potency and transformative power of the liberating cognition.

³⁰S I.62, A II.48: *yattha kho āvuso na jāyati na jīyati na mīyati na cavati na upapajjati, nāhaṃ taṃ gamanena lokassa antaṃ ñāteyyaṃ daṭṭheyyaṃ patteyyan ti vadāmi. na kho paṇ’*

By speaking of the origination and cessation of the ‘world’, the Buddha equates the term *loka* with *dukkha*, and so appears to be talking about the world of experience. This looks like a very direct statement of the dependence of phenomena on a person’s cognitive apparatus, and the attempt to explain it otherwise makes little sense:

One might say that the body is our domain, bait, and hunting ground. But note that the metaphor puts primacy on form: it is the body “endowed with perception and mind” that contains the world, rather than the mind “endowed with body” that does. While this claim echoes the Vedic notion of a correspondence between micro- and macrocosm, its oddity argues that perhaps it should not be taken too literally. (p.161)

It would indeed be odd if this teaching expressed the Vedic identity of micro- and macrocosm. Clearly, however, no such equation is made, and the text cannot be dismissed as a peculiarity not to be taken seriously. Instead, the text seems to present a variation on the teaching of the *Kevaṭṭa Sutta* (p.221): according to the *Rohitassa Sutta* the end of the world is found in the body (endowed with apperception and mind), whereas the *Kevaṭṭa Sutta* states it to be in intransitive consciousness. To make much of the difference would be unnecessarily literalistic.

The teachings of the *Rohitassa* and *Kevaṭṭa Suttas* cannot easily be read in terms of philosophical realism. Both use the allegory of reaching the end of the world (or elements) as a way of indicating that liberation requires the cognitive deconstruction of the ‘world’ of normal experience. The teaching in the *Kevaṭṭa Sutta* probably indicates that this is enabled by attaining an advanced meditative state, in which consciousness first becomes radiant (*sabbato-pabhaṃ*) and intransitive (*anidassanaṃ*: without an object).³¹ It is not obvious what sort of Buddhist meditation might lead to such a state, but one can at least rule out the formless meditations, which are not normally connected to the idea of radiance.³²

A more likely identification is the 3rd ‘release’ (*vimokkha*), the object of which

āhaṃ āvuso appatvā lokassa antaṃ dukkhassa antakiriyaṃ vadāmi. api khv āhaṃ āvuso imasmiñ ñeva vyāmatte kaḷevare sasaññimhi samanake lokañ ca paññāpemi lokasamudayaṃ ca lokanirodhaṃ ca lokanirodhagāminiṃ ca paṭipadan ti.

Reading *upapajjati* and *sasaññimhi* with *Be* instead of *uppajjati* and *saññimhi*.

³¹It is also possible that the term *pabhaṃ* could be a misinterpretation of an older, underlying Middle Indic form; on this see K.R. Norman: "An epithet of Nibbāna".

³²Smith (p.159 n.45) also cites AN I.10, but this has only a tangential connection to meditation.

is the thought ‘(it is) radiant’ (*subhan ti*), or the 4th *jhāna*, for the person who attains it is said to be as if completely covered by a pure white cloth. Whatever the case, it is plausible to assume that the *Kevaṭṭa Sutta* assumes a meditator on the threshold of liberation, a luminous state in which the conditioned realm of *samsāra* ceases. If an identification with the 4th *jhāna* is supposed, it could further be assumed that the person has ‘no discursive consciousness whatsoever’, although not necessarily that he has ‘no clear contact with sense objects’ (p.159), for this meditation is said to be ‘the purification of equanimity and mindfulness’ (*upekkhāsati-pārisuddhiṃ*), and mindfulness in Buddhism is always mindfulness of something.

The mode of expression preferred in the *Kevaṭṭa* and *Rohitassa Suttas* is certainly ‘poetic’, and implies that the ‘experience of *nibbāna*’ is connected to ‘certain *jhānic* states of consciousness’ (p.159). But the use of allegory does not further entail that the Buddha does not mean what he says. There is no suggestion that the meditator has merely ‘extinguished without remainder attachment to those elements’, along with the ‘unskillful states associated with such attachment: greed, hatred, and ignorance’ (p.159). When the canonical teachings speak about something ceasing ‘without remainder’, they usually mean what they say; in any case, attachment to the material elements, rather than the objects made of them, is not normally how early Buddhist teachings imagine the cause of suffering.

7. The attempt to read ontological realism into the *Purābheda*, *Kalahavivāda*, *Alagaddūpama*, *Rohitassa* and *Kevaṭṭa Suttas* requires complex hermeneutic manoeuvres: poetic license is presumed since what the texts actually say is apparently unacceptable, or else the immediate context of the teachings is often avoided, and is instead supplied by other teachings. This style of interpretation, in which a teaching’s actual statements are interpreted from the perspective of other canonical material, even if no ostensible connection is apparent, or even overlooked in favour of one’s doctrinal preferences, is exegetical rather than historical. From a text-historical perspective, however, and taking it at its word, the *Aṭṭhakavagga* is much closer in spirit to Gómez’s impression of the *Mahāvīyūha Sutta*, one of its most important dialogues:

When I first read the *Mahāvīyūha-sutta* of the Suttanipāta I was impressed not only by its freshness and directness, but also by its originality. Somehow its advocacy of abstention from disputes

and arguments stood out as a unique stance that could not be easily reduced to a simplistic doctrine of abstention from disputes for the sake of the peace of noninvolvement. It also seemed evident that the pronouncements made in this sutta could not be reduced to other, more common teachings of the Pāli Canon without doing some violence to the text.³³

Gómez's estimation of the *Mahāvīyūha Sutta* is a fairly good representation of the *Aṭṭhakavagga* as a whole. The text reads quite naturally as a set of dialogues between a charismatic teacher and curious enquirers, and cannot easily be read as follows:

[T]he *Aṭṭhakavagga* reads as though composed by a teacher wearied of continual argument and dispute. This should not be surprising if we consider the environment in which it may have originated. Although the early period in the Buddha's teaching is not well documented, there can be no doubt that life for a young renunciant cannot have been particularly easy in ancient India. It was a time of great intellectual ferment, disagreement, and dispute. (pp.150-51)

... one senses that a life of constant struggle to be heard above the crowd was at times wearying. This might have been the stage on which the Buddha composed his verses disdaining arguments and views. (p.151)

While philosophical dispute is the ostensible subject of some of the *Aṭṭhakavagga*, its teachings are not confined to just this; nowhere is the Buddha depicted as a figure wearied by disputes, and nowhere does the text touch on the Buddha's difficulties in trying to gain support or be heard. But such an interpretation allows the *Aṭṭhakavagga's* apophatic teachings to be downplayed, as advice encouraging detachment from a tiresome world, a perspective which inclines towards an entirely cataphatic reading of the text as a whole (pp.151-52).

Thus the denial that there is any apophatic tendency in the *Aṭṭhakavagga*, with its negative statements and pronouncements of ineffability explained away as poetic statements of therapeutic detachment, is taken to support the idea that

³³Gómez (1976: 139).

the ‘no view’ strand of early Buddhist thought really indicates ‘a non-attached attitude through the cultivation of rightview’.³⁴ This would mean, for example, that when the Buddha claims that he or the liberated sage has no views – for example the *Purābheda Sutta*’s claim that the liberated sage (*muni*) is not ‘led into views’ (Sn 851: *diṭṭhīsu ca na nīyati*) – what he really means is the sage has reached a state of therapeutic detachment through correct view. Is this plausible? Probably not. Explaining away the mystically charged aspects of early Buddhist teachings looks rather like an attempt to deny that there is any ‘no view’ dimension to the Buddha’s thought – against the explicit testimony of the early texts themselves.

The Buddha claimed to teach suffering and its cessation, and avoided metaphysical subjects such as those contained in the list of ten questions. The teachings on suffering and its cessation encompass such things as ethics, psychology, meditation and spiritual practice, and although they could be said to be metaphysical in the rather weak sense of accepting karma and rebirth, they offer no positive metaphysic, that is to say, a comprehensive account of the human being’s existence in and knowledge of the world. All this is correct view: no view, on the other hand, is the Buddha’s metaphysical silence, which is partly pragmatic – since such speculation serves no soteriological purpose – but which also expresses the idea of liberation in the present, in which the negation of ontology is actualised through the cessation of cognitive conditioning.

From an anti-realist perspective, this means that the Buddha will give guidance on all aspects of constructed or conditioned reality that pertain to its undesirability and the way out of it, but will not say anything about what lies beyond the construction. This remit allows the Buddha to outline the cognitive and volitional forces which cause and maintain the construction, in a variety of ‘stations of consciousness’; to talk about the correct ethical attitudes which lead towards the ultimate religious good that is deconstructed reality; and to give teachings on the meditative states in which constructed reality is unravelled, and Nirvana realised. On all of these points – *dukkha*, *samudaya*, *nirodha* and *paṭipadā* – there can be correct (*sammā-*) and wrong view (*micchā-diṭṭhi*). But with regard to what lies beyond construction, the Buddha remains silent.

The Buddha’s lack of views on the ultimate reality of the self or world is

³⁴See p.151 n.23; this opinion is based on Fuller (2012: 150).

thus of a piece with his lack of view on the ultimate reality of the Tathāgata: in both cases he remains silent because his liberated state is the dissolution of the epistemological processes by which the everyday world of individual existence is constructed. Correct view and no view are therefore inextricably intertwined, and consistently expressed in a diversity of canonical teachings: correct view is structured in such a way that it leads to no view, in particular by avoiding aspects of enquiry – particularly ontology – which are realised to be ultimately unreal at the path’s culmination in cognitive deconstruction. The Buddha’s avoidance of ontology in positive teachings on correct view is thus complemented by his quiescent negation of ontology in apophatic utterances on the liberated being.

There is no conflict between these two didactic orientations, both of which place restrictions on how the Buddha’s teachings are understood. This is most clearly expressed in the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, a discourse which shows how metaphysical doctrines depend on particular cognitive conditions, and also points out that liberation from conditioning must necessarily be the realm of no view. The text makes these points very clearly and explicitly: it states that when various ascetics and Brahmins expound their metaphysics, this is ultimately due to the fact that (*tad api*) their direct experience (*vedayitam*) is subjected to ‘trembling and quivering’ (*paritassita-vipphanditam eva*), that is to say, it is cognitively distorted.³⁵ This means that the pursuit of metaphysical truth depends on the vagaries of ‘contact’ (*tad api phassapaccayā*), and that apart from contact, philosophers would not have the experiential constructions from which to formulate metaphysical theses (*te vata aññatra phassā paṭisaṃvedissantī ti netam thānaṃ vijjati*).

The analysis of the *Brahmajāla Sutta* extends the teaching of Dependent

³⁵D I.41: *tatra bhikkhave ye te samaṇabrāhmaṇā pubbantakappikā ca aparantakappikā ca pubbantāparantakappikā ca pubbantāparantānudiṭṭhino, pubbantāparantaṃ ārabha anekavihitaṃ adhivuttipadāni abhivadanti dvāsaṭṭhiyā vatthūhi, tad api tesam bhavataṃ samaṇabrāhmaṇānaṃ ajānataṃ apassataṃ vedayitaṃ taṅhāgatānaṃ paritassitavipphanditaṃ eva.*

Translation from Wynne (2010: 147). Bhikkhu Bodhi’s translation (2013, on Be para 117) is closer to this, for it recognises the difficulties surrounding *tad api* and does not claim that the views of ascetics and Brahmins are feelings: ‘When those recluses and Brahmins ... assert... that too is only the feeling of those who do not know and see; that is only the agitation and vacillation of those who are immersed in craving.’ But this translation is still somewhat problematic in that it identifies the metaphysical formulations of the various ascetics and Brahmins as a sort of agitation or vacillation.

Origination, and as such comprises the correct view aspect of the Buddha's teachings, albeit in a form which makes clear the reason for the Dhamma's metaphysical silence. But the soteriological purpose of this analysis is also stated in a 'no view' culmination to the teaching:

When, *bhikkhus*, with regard to the six spheres of sense contact, a person understands their rise, fall, pleasure, danger and release (from them), he understands what lies beyond all these (views).³⁶

The *Brahmajāla Sutta* thus points out the limits of knowledge and the need to go beyond it. Given the clarity with which the text expresses these ideas, it is surprising that it has been consistently misinterpreted. The grammar of the Pali text does not permit the notion that the 62 wrong views are all 'the agitation and vacillation of those who are immersed in craving' (*taṇhāgatānaṃ paritasitavipphanditaṃ*) which are 'kinds of "feeling" (*vedayita*).³⁷ In Pali and Sanskrit, and even English, 'views' are not usually spoken of as 'feelings' or 'vacillations', and indeed cannot be. This passage thus does not state that 'contact conditions the feeling which constitutes each wrong view' (p.157), for nowhere does the text state that feeling and views are the same thing. A more serious misunderstanding is the confusion of correct view and no view:

Nevertheless we can see that the *Brahmajāla* assumes the correctness of at least a certain portion of the formula of dependent origination insofar as it adverts to contact, feeling, and craving to explain the origin of speculative views. That is to say, the *Brahmajāla* cannot be a formula for an apophatic nor an anti-realist approach to the dhamma since it affirms this explicit process for the production of views.

³⁶D I.45: *yato kho bhikkhave bhikkhu channaṃ phassāyatanānaṃ samudayaṃ ca atthagamaṃ ca assādaṃ ca ādīnavaṃ ca nissaraṇaṃ ca yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti, ayaṃ imehi sabbeḥ'eva uttaritaraṃ pajānāti.*

The referent of *imehi sabbeḥ'eva* is not entirely clear. In the text that follows, *te sabbe* refers to the ascetics and Brahmins who hold views, but it seems more natural to take it as a reference to the 62 views, as the commentator Buddhaghosa seems to understand (Sv I.127): *uttaritaraṃ pajānāti ti diṭṭhigatiko diṭṭhiṃ eva jānāti. ayaṃ pana diṭṭhiṃ ca diṭṭhito ca uttaritaraṃ sīlasamādhīpaññāvimuttin ti yāva arahattā jānāti.*

'He understands what is beyond'. The person caught up in views knows only view. But this person understands (everything) as far as Arahantship, i.e. view and what lies beyond it – the release that results from virtue, absorption and understanding.'

³⁷See p.157 above.. For the full Pali text see n.35.

The idea that the *Brahmajāla*'s teachings about *dukkha* and *nirodha* imply that early Buddhist teaching is entirely cataphatic is based on a misunderstanding, through mistranslation, of key terms which in this discourse demarcate the limits of valid discourse. This, in turn, allows a blind eye to be turned to the *Brahmajāla Sutta*'s culmination in an apophatic statement of the transcendence of views. Properly understood, the teaching expands on the Buddha's metaphysical silence, explaining why his teachings are limited to suffering and its cessation (correct view), and why he refused to comment on the liberation achieved through transcending the cognitive causes of suffering (no view).

8. The terminology 'constructed realism' and 'anti-realism' can be equated with what the Buddha taught and that which he left unsaid, respectively. 'Constructed realism' is thus an attempt to encapsulate the general worldview in which the teachings about *dukkha* and *nirodha* are situated: the objectively governed world of phenomena, that is to say, the realms of *samsāra*, regarding which the Buddha outlined the key facts of individual experience, its problematic nature and how to stop it. All this constitutes correct view (*sammā-dit̥ṭhi*) without providing a metaphysical explanation of the world and a person's place within it.

'Anti-realism', on the other hand, refers to the culmination of Buddhist thought in Nirvana. Since numerous teachings indicate liberation is achieved not through actually escaping a really existent world of space-time, but through dissolving it as an experience, which requires the cessation of cognitive conditioning which fashions the world of *dukkha*, Nirvana must therefore be beyond description. Since language has meaning only within the realm of *dukkha*, concepts and apperceptions are not valid beyond it, meaning that the Buddha could only explain Nirvana – or merely point towards it – by means of apophatic teachings on the liberated person, many of which consist of quietistic refusals to provide a metaphysic as well as claims to have 'no view' (*no dit̥ṭhi*).

The Buddha's spiritual pragmatism directs his teachings on *dukkha* away from a metaphysical grounding; in the end, salvation is not a philosophical problem to be solved. But apart from this pragmatic non-foundationalism, the presentation of the order of *samsāra* in entirely phenomenological terms, and negative statements on the cessation of suffering, place philosophical limits on correct the interpretation of the Dhamma. Both ontological realism and solipsistic idealism are apparently negated: the former by teachings on dependent origination and Nirvana, which imply that language cannot offer an objective perspective from which the world can be known, and that a Tathāgata

has dissolved the world as an ontological fact; the latter by the fact that *saṃsāra* is governed by laws and is shared by individuals, for whom the Buddha feels compassion.

The Buddha's approach to teaching, which negates and implies rather than positively asserts, is characteristic of what in later times was termed *śūnya-vāda*, the 'doctrine of emptiness', a form of metaphysical quietism in which philosophical realism is negated, for philosophical and spiritual purposes. The idea of 'emptiness', although not used by the Buddha as such, denotes the ultimate insubstantiality of things, and hence the unreality of the world of normal experience, an unsatisfactory state of affairs from which liberation must be sought. All this means, in short, that it is philosophically impossible to read a metaphysic into early Buddhist teaching.

The early or proto-*śūnyavāda* phase, that of the canonical discourses, is marked by apophatic teachings on Nirvana and the liberated person, by arguments that negate the notion that the different aspects of conditioned experience are substantially real, and by positive teachings on the workings of *dukkha*. All this is taken for granted when the *śūnya-vāda* emerges proper, in the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*, a body of literature in which conventional terms are said to be 'empty' (*śūnya*), and which was formulated in opposition to two forms of realism, that of the Abhidharma and that of the mythic belief in Bodhisattvas. The mature, philosophical *śūnya-vāda* is heralded by Nāgārjuna's *Madhyamaka*, which probably emerged in the 2nd century AD, and attempts to prove the world's lack of substantial reality through a highly refined dialectic.

These three stages of *śūnya-vāda* development are a shorthand for a much more complicated intellectual history; many further developments could be noted within the canonical teachings, the *prajñā-pāramitā* canon and the philosophical works of Nāgārjuna's school. But this rough sketch at least provides the outline of a different approach to the history of Indian Buddhist thought, one which sees anti-realistic aspects of the canonical texts and for the first time places them at the heart of the Buddhist mission in India. Such a version of history provides a more insightful explanation of the subtle co-ordination of themes in the Buddha's teachings, in particular the relationship between correct view and no view.

While the Buddhist and non-Buddhist opponents of the *śūnyāvādins* were frustrated by their non-foundationalism, and even fearful of a perceived nihilism, such reactions are obviously unnecessary in the modern philosophical world,

in which metaphysics has largely been bypassed by more rigorous forms of conceptual analysis. The *śūnyavādins*, starting with the Buddha, need no longer be regarded as the rabble-rousers and trouble-causers of Indian philosophy, and should rather be given credit for fashioning remarkably advanced forms of metaphysical scepticism, far ahead of similar developments which, in Western philosophy, have only been reached in the modern age, in the works of Hume, Kant, the logical positivists, Wittgenstein and so on.

It goes without saying that if any of this is even remotely true, the Buddha would seem to occupy a remarkable position in the history of philosophy. And this fact that should bring into sharp focus an even more significant achievement, that is to say, the highly curious fact that a form of philosophical scepticism lies at the heart of an unprecedented spiritual movement, one which inaugurated a major change in the religious life of mankind. To understand how peculiar the situation is, one need only remind oneself of the fact that a figure as important as Socrates did not establish any such movement, nor even a philosophical school, that has survived to the present. All this goes to show that the Buddha's religious programme – the working of his anti-realistic insights into a path of spiritual cultivation – is still in need of a careful reconsideration, even after so long and with so much already said about it.

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Book Review

Eric Reinders, *Buddhist and Christian Responses to the Kowtow Problem in China*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015. £65. pp. 187

In his important work *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), Herbert Fingarette challenged the conventional understanding of the Confucian *Analects* as primarily teaching a this-worldly, practical humanism. Instead, Fingarette argues, at the core of the *Analects* is a ‘magical’ power exercised through ritual propriety which underlies the essence of morality. Holy ritual shapes virtuous living. A key dimension of the Confucian (and the broader Chinese) conception of ritual propriety is expressed through the act of bowing or kowtowing, the main concern of the book under review. These are acts of reverence, whether it be to one’s elders and ancestors, or to a person worthy of honour such as the Son of Heaven – the Chinese emperor.

Eric Reinders’ book *Buddhist and Christian Responses to the Kowtow Problem in China* engages this Chinese understanding of ritual in terms of the conflicts that two ‘foreign’ religions have had on the Chinese soil. After an initial chapter which provides a topographical analysis of ritual in the architecture and the layout of Buddhist temples, Reinders spends the next three chapters expounding the seventh century Chinese Buddhist understandings of obeisance and the conflicts that arose with the imperial government through acts of disobedience. Chapter 2 focuses on the painstaking writings of the monk Daoxuan on how one shows obeisance. For the monk, this includes the physical and the mental orientation of the bowing person, but further includes concerns around who is a worthy object to be bowed to and what happens to the person bowing. Chapter 3 focuses on a key imperial debate in the year 662, in which the emperor mandated monks to recognise his supremacy and bow to him, but also forbade monks to receive homage from their parents. In conventional Chinese

practice, one's parents and one's emperor are recipients of homage, but Buddhist teachings underscore the opposite, since monks and nuns are never to bow to the laity. The next chapter summarises the arguments used to support the view that Buddhist monks did not need to bow to their parents or to the emperor; these mainly revolve around a view that monks stand in the place of spirits and the Buddha. Having a kind of supernatural influence, monks should be recipients of homage, since they bring benefits to the realms of the living and of the dead.

While the first chapters of the book provide a detailed analysis of a specific event and the issues surrounding it, the last chapters of the book provide a broad overview of the implications of obeisance in a number of other situations. Chapter 5, entitled 'Christian Objections', looks at a series of engagements by Westerners with the Chinese context, and the debates that arose around the question of whether or not one bows. Firstly, this chapter looks at Catholic and Protestant missionaries who provided different views on whether Chinese converts should bow and venerate/worship ancestors and Confucius. Do such acts constitute a form of blasphemous idolatry? Secondly, the chapter discusses the diplomatic mission of George Macartney, who presented gifts from King George III of England to the Emperor of China, Qianlong, but refused to kowtow in full prostration as was the expected convention. Chapter 6 moves on to speak about various social scientific theories about obeisance, and Chapter 7 concludes the book by speaking about contemporary practices of disobedience, such as the choice of certain Americans not to salute the flag.

Contrary to what is implied in its title, the book under review is less a comparison of Buddhist and Christian responses to the kowtow problem than a focused discussion on the seventh century Chinese Buddhist understandings of obeisance and the conflicts that arose during that time; it also refers to other religious understandings of obeisance, such as some within Christianity in China and American civil religion. Reinders does an excellent job in engaging historical primary source materials from Chinese Buddhism, and explaining very technical writings in a lucid and engaging manner. However, as opposed to the four chapters on Buddhist obeisance and disobedience, the single chapter on 'Christian Objections' is not limited to Christianity, but includes a key non-Christian example of diplomatic exchange. The objects of obeisance are different as well: the Christian examples focus on bowing to ancestors and Confucius, whereas the non-Christian example focuses on bowing to the emperor. Moreover, the Buddhist cases concern indigenous Chinese whereas the 'Christian' cases concern Westerners. Finally, this reviewer would have appreciated an earlier

chapter orienting readers to the complex historical Confucian and imperial understandings of obeisance to set the scene in preparation for the more detailed engagement provided in the rest of the text.

Despite these concerns, Reinders' volume is meticulous, accessible and well-researched, and will undoubtedly prove to be an important resource for academics and students of the history of Chinese Buddhism interested in the '662 debate' and, more broadly, the conflicts and negotiations that have arisen within sangha-state relations in imperial China.

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