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Editorial

Richard Gombrich

I find it noteworthy, but also sad, that very few people seem to expect that the academic study of Buddhism will discover anything significantly new about Buddhism – new enough, that is, to interest anyone but other academics. (Maybe this is why so few think the OCBS worthy of financial support.) This number of our journal, though slim, will confound their expectations.

I trust that none of our admirable past contributors will take offense if I declare that we are here publishing an article by the Ven. Anālayo which deserves to become famous as a landmark in the history of Theravāda Buddhism. For about a thousand years no nuns have been ordained in the Theravāda tradition. This is for a reason which the adherents of that tradition consider to be decisive and irremediable. They know that before the lineage of nuns became extinct, an ordinand had to go through a double ritual and be ordained both by a formal gathering of monks and by a similar formal gathering of fully ordained nuns. Once there were not enough such nuns to create a quorum, a new ordination thus became impossible.

We all know that in recent years religious Buddhist women in Theravāda countries have taken vows and adopted life styles which emulate those of nuns, but both by law and by universal acceptance they cannot be called or regarded as actual “nuns” (*bhikkhunīs*), let alone take part in ordaining others. Though the co-operation of some monks and nuns from the Mahāyāna world has made it possible to hold a few ordination ceremonies of international character for nuns, this has not sufficed (and cannot suffice) to create new lineages of nuns in the Theravāda countries. Whatever religious tastes and aspirations individual Buddhist women may hold, the *Bhikkhunī Saṅgha* is regarded as extinct and Theravāda Buddhism cannot offer that status to women. Obviously this cannot

but make Theravāda unattractive to women in the Western world, and it is a grave handicap to the missionising effort.

For some years the Ven Anālayo has been doing research into the origins and early history of the *Bhikkhunī Saṅgha*, and last year he published a book, *The Foundation History of the Nuns' Order*. That book is now available on the internet for free downloading, and I give it a long and very laudatory review in this volume. While working on this book, he noticed that the first nuns were ordained by the Buddha and a gathering of monks, but not by any nuns, because their *Saṅgha* did not yet exist. But he also noticed that one can deduce from the texts that the Buddha must have envisaged that such a situation could recur, for he never rescinded the provision for ordination of a nun by monks alone, should this be necessary. This discovery removes the justification for refusing to ordain Theravāda nuns today. If the authorities, both clerical and secular, do not reverse their stance on this matter, they will be guilty of destroying (or rather: continuing to destroy) the Buddhism which they claim it is their right and duty to uphold.

This momentous article forms no part of *The Foundation History*, but that book is no less worth reading. It has always seemed mysterious that the Buddha, who held women to have the same spiritual and intellectual capacities as men, should have shown reluctance to found an Order for women and predicted dire consequences for Buddhism once it was founded. By meticulous scrutiny of the relevant texts, many of them preserved in ancient Chinese translations from Indian languages, Anālayo has shown how in far too many instances to enumerate in a single review the texts have been subtly (and sometimes not so subtly) altered in a misogynistic direction to distort and blacken the Buddha's views on matters concerning women.

Even though it would be a work of propaganda rather than scholarship, it would be well worth while for someone, while strictly adhering to what Anālayo has unearthed, to publish a rewritten version of what the Buddha seems to have had to say about Buddhist nuns, and about women in general, before the misogynists began tampering with the texts. Alas, misogyny is still so widespread in today's world that I can predict what a struggle it would be to persuade people to read it. Nevertheless, I think it would be worth a try.

The Validity of *bhikkhunī* Ordination by *bhikkhus* Only, According to the Pāli *Vinaya*

Anālayo

Abstract

In this paper I argue that *bhikkhunī* ordination carried out by *bhikkhus* only, “single ordination”, is according to the Pāli *Vinaya* a legally valid procedure in a situation in which, due to the non-existence of a community of *bhikkhunīs*, the standard procedure of granting “dual ordination” by both communities is not possible.

Introduction

A Buddhist society ideally consists of four main parts or “assemblies”, which are *bhikkhus*, *bhikkhunīs*, male lay disciples, and female lay disciples. For several centuries until recently, however, Theravāda societies had to make do with only three assemblies, lacking an assembly of *bhikkhunīs*. These became extinct at some point around the eleventh century when during a period of political turmoil the entire monastic community in Sri Lanka was decimated. To the best of our knowledge, at that time no *bhikkhunīs* were in existence elsewhere in South and Southeast Asia.

Before that happened, Sri Lankan nuns had travelled to China in the fifth century and conferred ordinations there.¹ Yet, in China the Dharmaguptaka

* I am indebted to Bhikkhu Ariyadhammika, Bhikkhu Brahmāli, Bhikkhunī Dhammadinnā, and Richard Gombrich for commenting on a draft version of this article. Needless to say, I remain solely responsible for the article in its final form.

Vinaya came to prevail, as a consequence of which the heirs of the ordination lineage transmitted by the Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs* now follow a different code of rules, adopt different procedures for establishing the boundary, *sīmā*, within which ordination is to be carried out, and do not employ Pāli for conducting legal acts. Each of these aspects would render the ordination of a male candidate invalid in the eyes of many traditional Theravādin *bhikkhus*, making it hardly surprising if all of these aspects together are from their viewpoint considered an unacceptable way of ordaining a female candidate and thereby reviving a community of *bhikkhunīs*.² Therefore it needs to be ascertained if ordination given by Theravāda *bhikkhus* alone would enable reviving the *bhikkhunī* lineage in a way that does not stand in conflict with the Pāli *Vinaya*. This requires a closer look at those parts of this particular *Vinaya* that have a direct bearing on the ordination of *bhikkhunīs*, beginning with the narrative of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī's ordination.

In a monograph on the *Foundation History of the Nuns' Order*, I examined the account of how Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī became the first *bhikkhunī* in different *Vinayas* and other canonical texts.³ Such comparative study of texts transmitted by different reciter traditions enables us to identify their common core and probable later additions.

One significant result from this research concerns an indication still found in some versions, according to which the Buddha's original refusal to permit Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī to go forth occurs together with an alternative suggestion. According to this alternative suggestion, the Buddha permitted Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and her followers to cut off their hair and wear robes, apparently so as to live a celibate life in a more protected environment at home. Other versions, including the Pāli account, that do not mention such a permission nevertheless report that Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and her followers did actually shave off their hair and don robes. What in these versions appears almost like an act of open defiance (an improbable depiction of the stream-enterer Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī) acquires meaning if read in the light of the alternative suggestion still found in other versions.

This in turn conveys the impression that the Buddha's refusal to grant women the going forth could have originally been an expression of apprehensions that conditions were not yet ripe for this move. In other words, it could have

¹ On this transmission cf. in more detail Anālayo 2018.

² A more detailed discussion can be found in Anālayo 2017: 333–338.

³ Anālayo 2016.

reflected concerns regarding how to accommodate women living the holy life in celibacy as homeless wanderers at this early stage in the development of Buddhist monasticism, when safe dwelling places for Buddhist monastics were still scarce and public recognition not yet widespread.

Another finding concerns the prediction of decline, according to which the very fact that now women have been permitted to go forth will halve the lifetime of the Buddha's dispensation. Closer study of the relevant texts, in particular of the contrast this prediction of decline creates with other passages reporting that the Buddha planned from the outset to have an order of *bhikkhunīs*, makes it probable that this element originated as part of the narrative regarding the convocation of the first *saṅgīti*. The very convocation of this *saṅgīti*, a term probably best translated as "communal recitation" rather than "council",⁴ soon after the Buddha's demise, is related to apprehensions of an impending decline in general. Such apprehensions, once they had come to be associated with the *bhikkhunīs*, appear in the course of transmission of the texts to have turned into statements made by the Buddha himself.

Yet another relevant finding concerns a set of principles whose acceptance according to all versions were the condition set by the Buddha for granting Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī ordination. A position taken repeatedly among scholars is that this set of *garudhammas* (Pāli) or *gurudharmas* (Sanskrit) must be a later interpolation, evident from the fact that several of these recur as *pācittiya* regulations elsewhere in the *Vinaya*. Although earlier I let myself be influenced by what seemed to all purposes to be general consensus among academics,⁵ in the meantime I have come to realize that this position is not correct. The *garudhammas* are mere injunctions and do not carry any consequences in cases where they are not followed.⁶ Thus failure to observe a *garudhamma* could have

⁴ In adopting this rendering I follow the example of Gombrich 1990: 25 and Cousins 1991: 27; cf. also the detailed discussion in Tilakaratne 2000.

⁵ This is the position I adopted when putting together a first summary of relevant material and scholarly research in 2006 for presentation at a conference held in 2007 at the University of Hamburg under the auspices of H.H. the Dalai Lama, which was published three years later as part of the proceedings; cf. Anālayo 2010: 82ff.

⁶ Appreciation of this point requires keeping in mind that the term *garudhamma* or its Sanskrit equivalent *gurudharma* is used in different ways. As explained by Nolot 1996: 135 note 52, "the term *garu-dhamma*, 'important rule', that gives its generic name to this as well as to the seven other rules, should not be confused with the homonymous *garu-dhamma* occurring in the text of the fifth one ... where it is syn[onymous] with *garukā āpatti* ... and means 'heavy offence', referring here to the Saṃgh[ādisesa]" type of rules.

motivated the promulgation of a corresponding rule, so as to lay down what such a breach would entail in future. This in turn implies that there is no definite reason to reject the whole set of *garudhammas* as a later interpolation.⁷

At the same time, comparative study shows that some of the *garudhammas* would have gone through a change of wording. This holds for the case of the *garudhamma* on ordination, which in the Pāli version stipulates that a female candidate who has gone through a period of probationary training should receive ordination from both communities, that is, a community of *bhikkhus* and a community of *bhikkhunīs*. From a comparative perspective it emerges that the reference to both communities is not found in all versions, as some only refer to a community of *bhikkhus*. The implications of this difference seem uncertain; at the present stage of my research I fail to see a definite reason for categorically preferring one reading to the other. In the Pāli *Vinaya* the reference to both communities leads up to a whole episode based precisely on this formulation and the resultant need to clarify in which way the followers of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī should be ordained when no *bhikkhuni* community is in existence. This in turn implies that the reference to ordination from both communities must be an early element in the development of this text.

In the case of the stipulation on probationary training the situation is different, however, as the remainder of the narrative would work just as well if the probationary period were not mentioned. The impression that this reference could indeed be a later addition is based not only on its absence in several parallel versions, but also on consulting another episode in the same Pāli *Vinaya*, which reports that a pregnant woman had been ordained.⁸ If from the outset all candidates had been observing the probationary training, which requires continuous adherence to celibacy, this could not have happened. It could of course be imagined that lack of proper adherence to the *garudhamma* led to the ordaining of a pregnant woman. Yet, had the probationary training already been in existence, instead of a rule against ordaining a pregnant candidate, a more natural response would have been a rule against lax observance of the probationary training, thereby also covering breaches of celibacy that do not result in pregnancy.⁹

⁷ I drew attention to this as well as another error (concerning Ānanda and not of direct relevance to the present discussion) in the introduction to my monograph study, Anālayo 2016: 11 note 2; the correction itself can then be found in Anālayo 2016: 99 note 26.

⁸ Pāc 61 at Vin IV 317,20.

⁹ Such as found in Pāc 63 at Vin IV 319,33.

Based on this survey of chief findings from my research, I now turn to the sequence of events as reported in the Pāli *Vinaya*. In what follows I adopt what I like to call a “legal reading”, in the sense that I take the portions of the Pāli *Vinaya* that are of direct relevance to *bhikkhunī* ordination as they have been transmitted and in the way they are now found in the text. In other words, I adopt an emic perspective. This differs from a historical-critical reading of the type I adopted in my monograph study, which requires comparative study of the different versions.¹⁰ At present, my aim is not to reconstruct possible stages in the development of the *Vinaya* narrative on ordination of *bhikkhunīs*. Instead my aim is to understand the Pāli *Vinaya* version on its own terms and in its relevance to Theravāda jurisprudence. From the viewpoint of Theravāda jurisprudence, the text of the Pāli *Vinaya* is the central reference point for deciding legal matters, not what is found in other *Vinayas*.

Since in the Pāli *Vinaya* the rules are embedded in a narrative context which often, although not invariably, can help one to understand their implications and significance,¹¹ in what follows I attempt to develop what, as far as I am able to see, results in “a coherent interpretation” of the narrative background to the rules on ordaining *bhikkhunīs*.

A Coherent Interpretation

The narration relevant to *bhikkhunī* ordination begins with the Buddha stipulating eight *garudhammas*, the acceptance of which will serve as Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī’s ordination. The first of these eight *garudhammas* describes the conduct to be followed by “a *bhikkhunī* who has received the higher ordination a hundred years ago”.¹² The formulation shows that this *garudhamma* is not just concerned with matters right at that time, since no *bhikkhunī* was yet in existence, leave alone a *bhikkhunī* ordained a hundred years ago. It follows that these *garudhammas* are best understood as describing the Buddha’s vision of how the *bhikkhunīs* should behave in future times. In the present setting, where Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī is about to become the first *bhikkhunī*, it would indeed be meaningful for the Buddha to clarify to her what he expects to happen. By accepting these principles she will become the first and most senior of *bhikkhunīs*; therefore as their future leader she is the one to whom such principles need to be conveyed to ensure that they will be implemented.

¹⁰ On legal and historical readings of the Pāli *Vinaya* cf. Anālayo 2014: 1f and 2015: 403–405.

¹¹ A more detailed discussion of this issue by Venerable Brahmāli can be found in Brahmāli and Anālayo 2017.

¹² CV X 1.4 at Vin II 255,6.

The sixth of these *garudhammas* concerns ordination. It stipulates that “a probationer who has trained for two years in six principles should seek higher ordination from both communities.”¹³ This formulation could also not be meant to describe the immediate future, since at that juncture of events only a single community was in existence, namely the community of *bhikkhus*. Nevertheless *garudhamma* 6, just as the two preceding *garudhammas*, refers to “both communities”.

Not only in matters of invitation (*garudhamma* 4), *pavāraṇā*, or the undergoing of penance (*garudhamma* 5), *mānatta*, but also in matters of ordination (*garudhamma* 6), *upasampadā*, the respective procedure could not have been implemented right away. Although by accepting the eight *garudhammas* Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī had become a *bhikkhunī*, she was alone. For the procedures described in these *garudhammas* to be undertaken, first an order of *bhikkhunīs* had to be created by ordaining other female candidates. Yet, even for such an order to come into existence was not possible in the way described in *garudhamma* 6, since Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī could not have gathered the quorum required for forming a *bhikkhunī* community that could cooperate with a *bhikkhu* community in giving ordination to female candidates, simply because there were no other *bhikkhunīs*. “Higher ordination from both communities” was impossible at that time.

This impossibility predictably leads to the situation in which Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī had to come back to the Buddha and ask what she should do in regard to her five hundred followers, who also wanted to become *bhikkhunīs*. Her request afforded the Buddha an occasion for promulgating a rule as follows: “I authorize the giving of the higher ordination to *bhikkhunīs* by *bhikkhus*.”¹⁴

In this way, the standard procedure of dual ordination has found expression among the *garudhammas*, which according to a recurrent indication attached to each of them are to be “revered, respected, honoured, venerated, and not to be transgressed for the whole of one’s life”. This should be considered the basic agreement between the Buddha and Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī regarding how the community of *bhikkhunīs* is to operate, an agreement binding on its future members. The present ruling on single ordination in turn caters for the exceptional case when this standard procedure cannot be followed simply because a community of *bhikkhunīs* is not in existence; but at least a community of *bhikkhus* is in existence.

¹³ CV X 1.4 at Vin II 255,19.

¹⁴ CV X 2.1 at Vin II 257,7.

This ruling in turn can be considered a precedent for contemporary times, in that in a situation where no *bhikkhunī* community is in existence but a *bhikkhu* community is in existence, the *bhikkhus* can give ordination to female candidates on their own.

According to the next relevant episode, the Buddha found it necessary to introduce an enquiry about possible stumbling blocks to ordination. Similarly to the ordination requirements for *bhikkhus*, such enquiry serves to avoid ordination being granted to candidates not considered fit to become full members of the monastic community. This holds for candidates who have various diseases, for example, as well as those with certain sexual deformities. The Pāli *Vinaya* reports that, when the enquiry was implemented, the following happened:

“At that time the *bhikkhus* asked the *bhikkhunīs* about the stumbling blocks. Those who wanted to be higher ordained were abashed; they were embarrassed and unable to reply”, *tena kho pana samayena bhikkhū bhikkhunīnaṃ antarāyike dhamme pucchanti; upasampadāpekkhāyo vitthāyanti maṅku honti na sakkonti vissajjetuṃ*.¹⁵

¹⁵ CV X 17.2 at Vin II 271,31. Horner 1952/1975: 375 translates this passage as: “Now at that time monks asked nuns about the things which are stumbling blocks.” Noteworthy in the Pāli original is the peculiar use of the genitive *bhikkhunīnaṃ* rather than the expected accusative *bhikkhunī*, such as found in the corresponding passage for male candidates, MV I 76.2 at Vin I 93,32: *bhikkhū ananusiṭṭhe upasampadāpekkhe antarāyike dhamme pucchanti*. Probably the simplest solution would be to emend the present passage to read *bhikkhū bhikkhunī antarāyike dhamme pucchanti*. However, Edgerton 1953/1998: 47 (§7.70) reports that “verbs of asking (cf. Sen 33) may take the gen. (1) of the person questioned, as well as (2) of the thing asked about. (1) *mātāpitṛṇāṃ ... pṛche* LV 231.17; *bhikṣūṇāṃ pṛchanti* MV i.300.5, 12”, followed by giving more examples for this type of usage from the same *Mahāvastu* (the first example is from the *Lalitavistara* and the reference before that is to Sen 1928). Although offhand I am not aware of an instance of such usage of the genitive in the Pāli canon, it remains nevertheless possible that the original reading in the present passage conforms to this usage in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit. The alternative of relating *bhikkhunīnaṃ* to *antarāyike dhamme* would not work, as the stumbling blocks are only relevant for those wanting to be higher ordained, not for already ordained *bhikkhunīs*. Suppose a *bhikkhunī* had any of the diseases comprised among the list of stumbling blocks, she would nevertheless remain a *bhikkhunī*. It would also be superfluous to add a specification to the expression *antarāyike dhamme*, as the present sentence is immediately preceded by a detailed listing of the stumbling blocks for female candidates, making it indubitably clear what type of stumbling blocks are meant. In fact a recurrence of the same expression *antarāyike dhamme pucchanti* just a few lines later at Vin II 271,36 stands on its own and is not preceded by a genitive or qualified in some way. Instead, it is preceded by a reference to those wanting to be higher ordained in the accusative, *upasampadāpekkhāyo*.

I have provided the Pāli text alongside my translation since the wording of this passage is of significance. The reference to *bhikkhunīs* here requires further exploration. The term *bhikkhunī* also occurs in the rule on single ordination, where it refers to the candidates for ordination.¹⁶ In that context this is a peculiar but still understandable usage, since the procedure results in making them *bhikkhunīs*. In the present case, however, the passage is not about the whole procedure, but only about the enquiry regarding stumbling blocks. Moreover, due to the embarrassment and consequent lack of reply to these questions, the ordination could not have been carried through to its successful completion. Thus it would not be possible to refer to these candidates of an unsuccessful ordination as *bhikkhunīs*.

It would also not work to assume that the usage of the term *bhikkhunī* implies that the candidates had previously gone through part of their ordination in the community of *bhikkhunīs*. In the Pāli *Vinaya* account this two-stage procedure only comes into being *after* the present incident. Moreover, those who have gone through the first of these two stages are in the Pāli *Vinaya* referred to as “ordained on one side”, *ekato-upasampannā*, but not as *bhikkhunīs*. The phrase *upasampannā* in this compound clearly implies that the procedure conducted by the *bhikkhunīs* on their own should be reckoned a form of ordination, *upasampadā*. At the same time, however, those who have gone successfully through such ordination do not yet deserve to be called *bhikkhunīs*, for which the procedure to be carried out subsequently in the community of *bhikkhus* is required. This in turn supports the impression that the term *bhikkhunīs* in the passage on the inquiry about stumbling blocks would not refer to the candidates for ordination.

That the term *bhikkhunīs* does not refer to the candidates for ordination finds confirmation in the fact that the sentence translated above uses quite another term to refer to the candidates as “those who wanted to be higher ordained”, *upasampadāpekkhā*. The same term *upasampadāpekkhā* is used consistently to refer to the candidates for ordination in subsequent sections of this part of the Pāli *Vinaya*, which is concerned with the enquiry into stumbling blocks.

¹⁶ CV X 2.1 at Vin II 257,7: *anujānāmi bhikkhave bhikkhūhi bhikkhuniyo upasampādetun ti*, “I authorize the giving of the higher ordination to *bhikkhunīs* by *bhikkhus*.” Similar usage can be found in the *gurudharma* on ordination in some other *Vinayas*; cf. Anālayo 2016: 97 note 22.

This consistent usage of the term *upasampadāpekkhā* for the female candidates for ordination makes it unlikely that the very occurrence of the term *bhikkhunīs* in the passage translated above results from a textual error. Oral transmission in general tends to stereotype. This means that a reference to *bhikkhunīs*, which is out of keeping with the rest of the passage, stands a good chance to be ‘corrected’ to *upasampadāpekkhā*. In contrast, a change in the opposite direction is rather improbable.

At a subsequent point in this part of the Pāli *Vinaya* the two terms *bhikkhunī* and *upasampadāpekkhā* occur again in close proximity, similar in this respect to the passage translated above, although the grammar differs. In this case the two terms clearly refer to different persons, distinguishing the *bhikkhunī*, who has been appointed for the task of rehearsing the enquiry into stumbling blocks, from the *upasampadāpekkhā*, who is being taught how to reply to this enquiry.¹⁷ The same basic difference seems to hold for the passage translated above, in that those referred to as *bhikkhunīs* are different from those referred to as *upasampadāpekkhā*, “those who wanted to be higher ordained”.

In sum, it seems to me that the passage under discussion is best read as a reference to already ordained *bhikkhunīs* taking part in the ordination. This in turn gives me the impression that at this stage in the evolution of the *bhikkhunī* community, as described in the Pāli *Vinaya*, dual ordination had already come into existence. Had the *bhikkhus* given ordination alone, the appropriate formulation would have been to describe that they asked the candidates for ordination about the stumbling blocks, not the *bhikkhunīs*, followed by stating that these same candidates were embarrassed. It should read: ‘At that time the *bhikkhus* asked those who wanted to be higher ordained about the stumbling blocks. Those who wanted to be higher ordained were abashed; they were embarrassed and unable to reply.’

I conclude that the fact that the *bhikkhus* are described as asking the *bhikkhunīs* would imply that the latter took part in the ordination procedure. Since some of the questions are of a rather intimate nature, especially those concerned with sexual deformities, it would be quite understandable if the *bhikkhus* do not ask a woman such matters directly, but rather ask the

¹⁷ CV X 17.5 at Vin II 272,33: *tāya sammataṅgā bhikkhuniyā upasampadāpekkhā upasaṃkamitvā evam assa vacanīyā*, “that nun, who has been agreed on, having approached the one who wants to be higher ordained, is to speak to her like this.”

bhikkhunīs who have brought the candidates for ordination to inquire on their behalf and ask the candidates.¹⁸

Although to a Western mind this might appear a bit beside the point, such indirect questioning is a fairly common occurrence in an Asian setting. An example from the discourses would be the *Nāḷakapāna-sutta* and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel, where the Buddha enquires from the monks in the assembly if Anuruddha and others, who have recently gone forth, delight in the celibate life.¹⁹ Only after not receiving any reply does he finally ask them directly.

When in the case of the enquiry about stumbling blocks even such indirect questioning leads to embarrassment, the Buddha is on record for promulgating the following rule: “I authorize the higher ordination in the community of *bhikkhus* for one who has been higher ordained on one side and has cleared herself in the community of *bhikkhunīs*.”²⁰ This implies a two stage procedure, where the candidate first goes through the first part of the ordination procedure conducted by a community of *bhikkhunīs* on their own and as a result becomes one who is “partly ordained”, *ekato-upasampannā*, followed by approaching a community of *bhikkhus* for the completion of the ordination.

The present episode itself is not just about the need for both *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs* to participate in the ordination, but more specifically about the need for the former *not* to participate in the first part of the ordination when questions about the stumbling blocks are asked. It is not just about dual ordination as such, but much rather about a two stage procedure for dual ordination.

Given the stipulation in *garudhamma* 6, it would in fact be natural if dual ordination was used after a community of *bhikkhunīs* had come into existence through ordination by *bhikkhus* only. In order to follow the *Vinaya* narrative to the letter and thus also take into account the probationary training, one might assume that the next ordinations happened only after an interval of two years. Independent of whether the probationary period should indeed be allocated to the beginnings or rather a later period in the evolution of *bhikkhunī* ordination,

¹⁸ Perhaps this might explain the peculiar use of *bhikkhunīnaṃ* mentioned in note 15, in that an indirect or oblique case might be warranted by the fact that the action expressed by *pucchanti* does not proceed on to the *bhikkhunīs* as its direct object, but has as its target rather those wanting to be ordained. This would concord with the indirect function played by the *bhikkhunīs* with respect to the fulfilment of the action expressed by the main verb.

¹⁹ MN 68 at MN I 463,2 and its parallel MĀ 77 at T I 544b26; for a comparative study cf. Anālayo 2011: 370.

²⁰ CV X 17.2 at Vin II 271,34.

it does seem meaningful to allow for time to elapse before the next ordinations were undertaken. Even though Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and her followers were already in robes and had previous experience as wandering mendicants when they followed the Buddha from Kapilavatthu to Vesālī, the Pāli *Vinaya* shows that it still took some time for the new *bhikkhunīs* to familiarize themselves with various monastic procedures. This would make it natural to allow for some time to pass before the next generation of *bhikkhunīs* was ordained and perhaps also for new candidates, who unlike Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and her followers had not necessarily had experience of living in robes, first to go through some sort of a preparatory training.

That the *Vinaya* does not explicitly mention the shift from single to dual ordination is not surprising, since this had already been regulated with *garudhamma* 6 and thus did not require any further ruling. The section of the *Vinaya* between single ordination and the embarrassment episode reports that in other types of legal actions the two communities did collaborate, showing that they must have developed some formal procedure for doing so. An example is the recitation of the code of rules, *pātimokkha*, where according to the *Vinaya* account at first the *bhikkhus* would recite these for the *bhikkhunīs*, and when this led to problems the Buddha ruled that the *bhikkhunīs* should do that on their own. Ordination seems to have followed a to some extent comparable pattern, in that this would earlier have been done by both communities together under the leadership of the *bhikkhus*, and once the interrogation about stumbling blocks led to the problem of embarrassment, the Buddha ruled that the *bhikkhunīs* should perform the first part of the ordination on their own.

In short, the rule promulgated after the embarrassment episode is not about dual ordination as such, but much rather about a two stage procedure in conducting dual ordination. Its promulgation is an amendment to the basic procedure described in *garudhamma* 6.

The *Vinaya* continues with yet another regulation, according to which in case the candidate's approaching a community of *bhikkhus* for the second part of her ordination puts her in danger, this second part can be performed on her behalf by a messenger.²¹

What results from the above reading of the *Vinaya* is one basic promulgation in the form of *garudhamma* 6, with three subsequently promulgated modalities relevant for mutually exclusive situations. These are:

²¹ CV X 22.1 at Vin II 277,11, etc.

1. a *bhikkhunī* community is not in existence,
2. a *bhikkhunī* community is in existence and the candidate can safely approach the *bhikkhus*,
3. a *bhikkhunī* community is in existence, but the candidate cannot safely approach the *bhikkhus*.

Each of these three situations has its corresponding legislation and the three respective rules can all be valid together; they do not conflict with each other because they refer to distinct situations. It follows that, whenever situation (1) occurs, *bhikkhus* can give ordination on their own.

Another Interpretation

Another and fairly widespread interpretation of this part of the Pāli *Vinaya* is that the regulation on dual ordination in two stages simply replaced the one on single ordination. On this interpretation, it is not possible for *bhikkhus* to give ordination to female candidates even when no *bhikkhunīs* are in existence, because single ordination was only valid during the first few years and implicitly rescinded when dual ordination in two stages came into existence in response to the embarrassment episode.²² The basic logic behind this interpretation is that, even without explicit mention being made, a subsequent ruling implicitly rescinds an earlier ruling on the same matter.

One problem I see with this interpretation is that it does not concord too well with the intention the narrative context suggests to be relevant to all four regulations on *bhikkhunī* ordination. *Garudhamma* 6 is part of a series of guidelines set, according to the *Vinaya* account, by the Buddha in order to start a community of *bhikkhunīs*. The rule on single ordination has the purpose of enabling ordination of *bhikkhunīs* even when the standard procedure cannot be followed. The ruling on two stages in dual ordination serves to ensure that embarrassment does not interrupt the carrying out of ordination. The regulation on a messenger is meant to enable ordination even for a candidate who due to potential danger cannot present herself in front of the community of *bhikkhus*.

²² An example for the type of reasoning behind this position can be seen in the otherwise quite reliable *Vinaya* study by Venerable Thānissaro, in which he comes to the conclusion, Thānissaro 2001/2013: 450, that “in the event that the original Bhikkhunī Saṅgha died out, Cv.X.17.2 prevents bhikkhus from granting Acceptance to women.”

All of these four regulations have as their purpose the facilitation of ordination of *bhikkhunīs*, not its prevention. This makes it to my mind rather doubtful that an interpretation of any of these rules as completely and definitely preventing any ordination of *bhikkhunīs* does full justice to them.

Another problem is that this interpretation does not accommodate the fact that, *before* the promulgation of the rule on dual ordination in two stages, the Pāli *Vinaya* appears to refer implicitly to dual ordination already being undertaken with the formulation discussed above that “the *bhikkhus* asked the *bhikkhunīs* about the stumbling blocks”. This is a detail which is easily overlooked, in fact it took me quite some time to realize its significance myself. Yet, it does seem to imply that the *bhikkhunīs* were part of the ordination procedure and thus that some type of dual ordination was already being undertaken *before* the embarrassment episode resulted in the ruling on dual ordination in two stages. Any such granting of dual ordination before the ruling in response to the embarrassment episode could only have been done in reliance on *garudhamma* 6. Given the function of the rule on single ordination as being meant for a situation in which dual ordination was just not possible, it would be natural for subsequent ordinations to follow the procedure that according to *garudhamma* 6 was how the Buddha preferred the ordination of female candidates to be undertaken. In fact the ruling on the two stage procedure is a modification of *garudhamma* 6, not of the rule on single ordination. The assumption that the rule on single ordination has been invalidated by the two stage procedure for dual ordination fails to do full justice to the existence of *garudhamma* 6.

This brings me to another and in my view the most substantial problem with this mode of interpretation, which is that it makes the Buddha’s promulgation of *garudhamma* 6 become a meaningless act. Even leaving aside the two problems mentioned earlier, this alone suffices to defy the alternative interpretation. On this alternative interpretation, in reply to the request that he allow “women to receive the going forth from home to homelessness in the teaching and discipline made known by the Tathāgata”,²³ the Buddha asked Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī to accept a way of ordaining women that she could not possibly implement. It implies that, when Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī’s coming back and requesting how to proceed in this situation made the Buddha realize this problem, he found himself forced to drop *garudhamma* 6 for good and replace it with another rule, since *garudhamma* 6 was just not appropriate for

²³ CV X 1.2 at Vin II 255,2.

the situation for which he had promulgated it. In fact, on this interpretation *garudhamma* 6 never had any practical function, but was from beginning to end a meaningless regulation.

Elsewhere the Pāli *Vinaya* does report that on a number of occasions the Buddha would amend or change a rule, but in such cases this happens in response to some event or misbehaviour that had occurred in the meantime. I am not aware of any case where the Buddha is on record as promulgating a rule that from the outset was dysfunctional, in the sense that it just could not be implemented at all.

It seems to me that the price to be paid for upholding the alternative interpretation becomes too high, as it requires demoting the Buddha to a short-sighted and careless law-giver. Instead, it would definitely be preferable to assume that, in the account given in the Pāli *Vinaya*, *garudhamma* 6 as well as the other *garudhammas* are meant to encapsulate the Buddha's general vision of the future of the community of *bhikkhunīs* and that consequently the rule on single ordination was meant to be applicable to the specific situation when the standard procedure described in *garudhamma* 6 cannot be followed, because no community of *bhikkhunīs* is in existence. In this way, a depiction of the Buddha as thoughtless can be avoided.

The question remains how this alternative interpretation came to be so influential in the past. This could be related to the report in the *Dīpavaṃsa* on how *bhikkhunī* ordination was transmitted to Sri Lanka. The *Dīpavaṃsa* reports that the arahant Mahinda's arrival from India had led to numerous conversions to Buddhism, including members of the royal family. When the king of Sri Lanka asked Mahinda to grant ordination to the queen and her followers, Mahinda replied that it is not possible for a *bhikkhu* to do so.²⁴ In that particular situation his statement was correct, since *bhikkhunīs* were in existence in India. Therefore the appropriate procedure was to bring *bhikkhunīs* from India to ordain the queen and her followers, which is indeed what happened.

It could easily be that this statement by the famous arahant Mahinda was understood by later generations of *bhikkhus*, once the *bhikkhunī* ordination lineage had been lost in the eleventh century, as implying that it is in principle impossible for *bhikkhus* on their own to grant ordination to *bhikkhunīs*, even in a situation when no community of *bhikkhunīs* is in existence. A close study

²⁴ Dīp 15.76 in Oldenberg 1879: 84,19.

of the Pāli *Vinaya*, however, shows that this is not the case. This is in fact nothing new, as already the Venerable U Narada Mahāthera, also known as the Jetavan Sayādaw, in a commentary on the *Milindapañha* composed in Pāli and originally published in 1949, clarified that *bhikkhus* can give ordination to female candidates when no community of *bhikkhunīs* is in existence.²⁵ The foregoing discussion by me is merely an attempt to relate the implications of his insight to the relevant episodes in the Pāli *Vinaya*.

Conclusion

I conclude that *bhikkhunī* ordination carried out by *bhikkhus* only is indeed a legally valid option according to the Pāli *Vinaya* in a situation where no community of *bhikkhunīs* is in existence. This in turn implies that the ordinations carried out in 1998, which have been crucial for the revival of the *bhikkhunī* lineage in Sri Lanka, and subsequently also in Thailand, are legally valid.²⁶

By now nearly twenty years have passed, and in both Sri Lanka and Thailand steadily increasing numbers of senior *bhikkhunīs* are in existence, some of whom have become capable teachers and are well respected by their lay disciples. Continuing resistance to this beneficial development will weaken the Theravāda tradition, rather than strengthening it.

Abbreviations

CV	<i>Cullavagga</i>
Dīp	<i>Dīpavaṃsa</i>
MĀ	<i>Madhyama-āgama</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
MV	<i>Mahāvagga</i>
Pāc	<i>Pācittiya</i>
Vin	<i>Vinaya</i>

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²⁵ Deshpande 1999: 195–203; translated in Bodhi 2009.

²⁶ Cf. in more detail Anālayo 2013.

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‘Epithets of the *Mantra*’ in the *Heart Sutra*

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Abstract

In this article, I continue a detailed critical re-assessment of the text of the *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya* or *Heart Sutra* begun by Jan Nattier (1992, see also Huifeng 2014, Attwood 2015). Nattier and Yamabe pointed out that where the Sanskrit *Heart Sutra* has the word *mantra*, some parallel passages in the Sanskrit 8,000 and 25,000 line *Prajñāpāramitā* sutras have the word *vidyā* (Nattier 1992: 211, n.54a). I show that in every other occurrence of this passage in Sanskrit and Chinese versions of these texts, *Prajñāpāramitā* is referred to as a superlative kind of practical knowledge or incantation (*vidyā*) and there is no mention of a *mantra*. Nor would we expect one, since these texts predate the assimilation of *mantra* into Buddhism. This suggests that *mantra* in the Sanskrit *Heart Sutra* is a mistranslation of a Chinese rendering of *vidyā*. I explain why this might have happened in semantic and historical terms. Given that the so-called *mantra* itself is better described as a *dhāraṇī*, it is hard to escape the conclusion that there is no *mantra* in the *Heart Sutra* and no mention of a *mantra*. This raises some interesting questions.

Introduction¹

In Jan Nattier's watershed article on the *Heart Sutra*, an extra note was included as the article was going to press (1992: 211-213, n.54a). The subject of note 54a is the section of the *Heart Sutra* often referred to as the "epithets of the mantra,"² i.e.

*tasmāj jñātavyam prajñāpāramitā mahāmantra mahāvīdyāmantra
'nuttaramantro 'samāsama-mantraḥ* (Conze 1948, 1967)

In all English translations to date, *mahā-*, *mahāvīdyā*, *anuttara*, and *asamasama* are epithets that describe a mantra. Since the *Heart Sutra* apparently contains a mantra, the natural conclusion seems to have been that the epithets are epithets of *that* mantra. The *Heart Sutra* also explicitly says, "The mantra spoken in the perfection of wisdom is like this..."³ I will discuss this aspect of the passage below.

Nattier cites two letters sent to her by Nobuyoshi Yamabe who identified a number of passages in Chinese Perfection of Wisdom texts that closely parallel the epithets in the *Heart Sutra*. Nattier cites these with transliterations⁴ and translations and adds two extra passages to those identified by Yamabe. She notes that in Sanskrit counterparts of these occurrences, the word used is not *mantra*, but *vidyā*. Nattier concludes from the passages identified that "mantra" is an example of a back-translation from Chinese attributable to ambiguity in Chinese translations for the Sanskrit word *vidyā*. I will argue that it was more than a simple ambiguity. The context had to have changed significantly for *vidyā* to become *mantra*. In particular, *mantra* is a word that came into use in Buddhist texts only in association with Tantra.

To pursue this issue I identified all the occurrences of the epithets passages by searching the CBETA electronic version of the Chinese Tripiṭaka across the

¹ My thanks to Maitiu O'Ceileachair for his helpful comments on my Chinese translations; to Richard Gombrich for his willingness to support independent scholarship; and to the Ancient India and Iran Trust, Cambridge for access to their library and providing a convivial place to work.

² Nattier herself uses this phrase (1992: 177); it is also used by Lopez (1988: 110, 1990: 353, 1996: 166). The translation of T250 by Rulu (2011) goes further by specifically relating the epithets to "the Prajñā-Pāramitā [mantra]".

³ *Prajñāpāramitāyāṃ ukto mantraḥ tadyathā...* Throughout the text, there is some ambiguity in the word *prajñāpāramitā*: it is the name of the literary genre, a religious practice, the attainment of a religious ideal, and the name of a goddess.

⁴ The Chinese characters had to be left out, and one of my aims is to present the cited passages in Chinese to aid any future attempts to locate them.

Prajñāpāramitā texts that might predate the *Heart Sutra* and cross checked these with the printed Taishō Edition.⁵ This produced many more passages (more than doubling the number previously identified). I also used electronic versions of the parallel texts in Sanskrit, held in the *Göttingen Register of Electronic Texts in Indian Languages* or GRETEL, to identify any Sanskrit counterparts. The full list of occurrences is given in Appendix 1, while in Appendix 2 the epithets are extracted for direct comparison. The passages of most interest are in the Chinese translations of *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (*Pañcaviṃśati*) and *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (*Aṣṭa*) attributed to Kumārajīva (T223, T227) and Xuánzàng (T220-ii, T220-iv), and the Sanskrit counterparts of these, though other texts and versions will help to shed light on our problem.

Conze and the Epithets

In Conze’s translation of his own Sanskrit edition of the *Heart Sutra* (cited above) the “epithets of the mantra” passage reads:

Therefore, it should be known that the perfection of wisdom is a great mantra, a mantra of great insight, an unexcelled mantra, an unequalled mantra. (1948, 1967, 1973, and 1975)

There is little disagreement amongst Conze’s Sanskrit witnesses to complicate his edition at this point. He suggests that these are epithets of the Buddha applied to a mantra as a way of conveying the magical power of the mantra: “The *prajñāpāramitā*... is here envisaged as a spell” (1973: 101-104). The epithets in question are, according to Conze (1975: 102, 104), those from the familiar *Ityapi Gāthā*:

Such is the blessed Buddha: “in that state, worthy, perfectly enlightened, endowed with knowledge and practices, in a good state, a world-knower, unexcelled, a guide for guidable men, a teacher of gods and men, awakened and blessed.”⁶

⁵ Where there are differences between CEBTA and Taishō, I have favoured the printed text. For a complete survey of *Prajñāpāramitā* texts in Chinese, see Orsborn (2008) or Conze (1978).

⁶ *ityapibuddhobhagavāṃstathāgato rhansamyaksambuddhovidyācaraṇasampannaḥsugatolokavid anuttaraḥ puruṣadamyasārathiḥ śāstā devamanuṣyāṇāṃ buddho bhagavāniti (Āryatratnānusmṛti Sūtra. <http://www.dsbcproject.org/āryatratnānusmṛtisūtram/āryatratnānusmṛtisūtram>. In Pāli known as the *Itipi so Gāthā*). Though it is traditionally one of the epithets, there is reason to think that *anuttara* in*

Of the terms in *Heart Sutra*, only *anuttara* “unexcelled” has an actual parallel and it is a rather common superlative applied to any and all Buddhist ideals. So Conze’s assertion about the epithets seems implausible. Conze has followed previous translators as translating all of the epithets as *karmadhāraya* compounds: i.e. “a [superlative] mantra”. Richard Gombrich has suggested that the two compounds *anuttaramantra* and *asamasamamantra* might be more naturally read as *tatpuruṣa* compounds, i.e. “the mantra of the [one who is] unexcelled”; and “the mantra of the [one who is] unequalled.”⁷ If this were the case, the epithets would be epithets of the Buddha or of *Prajñāpāramitā*, rather than the *mantra*. However, the other two epithets—*mahāmantra* and *mahāvīdyāmantra*—are clearly *karmadhāraya* compounds and provide a context for reading the others similarly. In the Sanskrit *Pañcaviṃśati*, the compound is replaced by a phrase, e.g. “this unexcelled knowledge” (*anuttaraiṣā vidyā*), which also argues for reading the later compounds as *karmadhāraya*. In the 40 or so published English translations that I have access to, all concur with Conze’s translation, except for Beal (1865) who also reads the compounds as *karmadhāraya*, but has *dhāraṇī* for *mantra*.⁸

From the Sanskrit *Heart Sutra* we now move to the Chinese versions.

The Chinese Heart Sutra Texts

There are three versions of the short text *Heart Sutra* in the Chinese *Tripitaka*, of which we will focus on two:

T2509 摩訶般若波羅蜜大明呪經 = *Mahāprajñāpārami[tā]-mahāvīdyā-sūtra.

T251 般若波羅蜜多心經 = Prajñāpāramitā-hṛdaya-sūtra.

fact goes with *purisadammasārathi*. Cf *Bhagavā pana, bhante, anuttaro purisadammasārathi. "Kathaṃ pana, bhante, bhagavā purisadammaṃ vinetī" ti?* (AN 2.112) Here “*anuttaro purisadammasārathi*” seems to be one unit meaning “the best charioteer of men to be tamed”. This means that the last two words *buddho* and *bhagavān* are two separate epithets.

⁷ Personal communication, 22 Feb 2017.

⁸ A survey of English language translations is beyond the scope of this article.

⁹ When citing texts from the Chinese *Tripitaka* I have adopted the following conventions: when citing a text generally, I refer to it by the running number in the Taishō Edition; when citing a passage from a text I refer to the volume, page, section, and column in the Taishō Ed. When referring to Xuánzàng’s massive *Prajñāpāramitā* compilation I also cite the fascicle number to aid in locating it.

The other text, T256, once connected with Xuánzàng, is now generally considered to be a later version attributed to Amoghavajra (705–774).¹⁰ Another variation can be found in the commentary by Woncheuk (T1711), but it merely adds the character 等 “and so on” twice (Lusthaus 2003:81 ff.), so I won’t consider it here. T250 is attributed to Kumārajīva and T251 is attributed to Xuánzàng, though Nattier has plausibly cast doubt on these attributions because both texts seem to post-date their putative translators (1992: 184ff). The epithets passage is one in which the two texts differ slightly:

T250: “Hence, we know that the Prajñā-Pāramitā [Mantra] is the great illumination [大明呪] mantra, the unsurpassed illumination mantra [無上明呪], the unequalled illumination mantra [無等等明呪]” (Rulu 2011)11

T251: “Therefore know that the Prajna Paramita is the great transcendent mantra [大神呪], it is the great bright mantra [大明呪], utmost mantra [無上呪], is the supreme mantra [無等等呪].” (Mu 2010)12

T220-ii 《大般若波羅蜜多經》 (Vol. 7, Fasc. 401-478), by Xuánzàng. (659-663 CE)

These two recent translations give a flavour of how the Chinese texts are typically translated. In the Chinese epithets there is often a one-to-one correspondence with Sanskrit, e.g. 大 = *mahā* (great), 無 = *a-* (un-, not), 上 = *uttara* (higher, superior), and 等 = *sama* (equal).

The two characters 呪 and 呪 are simple graphical variants and both pronounced /*tjʊs/ in the Zhengzhang reconstruction of Old Chinese (2000), though some texts show a preference for one or the other.¹³ Where they occur in

¹⁰ The preface of T256 in the Taishō edition says that the text was transcribed by Amoghavajra, referring to him by his “imperially conferred posthumous name... (He whose) great deeds are right and broad (大辦正廣),” dating the text to before his death 774 (Hurvitz 1977: 110), even if the preface post-dates him. A Chinese ms. of T256 was found at Dunhuang (British Library Manuscript Or.8210/S.5648), which says that the text was “edited” by Amoghavajra (Tanahashi 2014: 68).

¹¹ 故知般若波羅蜜 是大明呪，無上明呪，無等等明呪，(8.847c24-25)

¹² 故知般若波羅蜜多，是大神呪，是大明呪，是無上呪，是無等等呪，(8.848c18-19)

¹³ Where the printed Taishō edition has 呪, the online CEBTA Tripiṭaka tends inconsistently to favour 呪.

the *Heart Sutra* it is usual to assume that 咒/呪 should be read as a standalone word meaning *mantra*, leading to combinations such as 明呪 or 神呪 being treated as two words (as above). T250 consistently uses 明呪 instead of 呪 for *mantra*, suggesting that we read it as one word. As will become clear, this word ought to be *vidyā*. This is reflected in the title of T250 as well, viz. ...大明呪經, which I translate as *Mahāvīdyā Sūtra* (as does Huifeng 2009). In the first published English translation of the *Heart Sutra* in English, completed before the Sanskrit text or its translations were published, Beal translates 咒 as *dhāraṇī* (1865: 28), a point to which I will return.

T250 omits the epithet “great transcendent mantra” (大神呪), leaving only three epithets. We will see below that the number of epithets varies throughout the parallel passages. T250 only uses the verb 是 “is” in the first instance and leaves it tacit subsequently, whereas T251 repeats it each time.

In T251 only, we find *Prajñāpāramitā* described as 大神呪 “a great transcendent mantra”. 神 is a term from Daoism that generally means “spirit” or “soul” (sometimes translated as “divinity”). It is also used to translate Sanskrit *ṛddhi* “supernatural power”, *anubhava* “power, majesty”, or *deva* “god”. As we will see, the use of 神 in this context is mainly associated with the *Prajñāpāramitā* translations of Xuánzàng, the single exception being T225 《大明度經》 by Zhī Qiān (225 CE). On 神, Nattier says, “My assumption is that the person who translated the text into Sanskrit simply chose not to include an equivalent of this character.” (1992: 213, n.55). The other possibility is that the text used by that translator lacked this term, i.e. that the Chinese source text was more like T250 than like T251. The *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism* lists 神呪 as one of many variant “spellings” of *mantra* used in Chinese texts, so it’s also possible that 大神呪 is a translation of *mahāmantra* and is thus a synonym for 大明呪, though if this is true it is unclear why Xuánzàng might have used both.

Sources of the Epithets

As is now widely known, the core of the Chinese text of the *Heart Sutra* (not including the epithets) is almost identical to Kumārajīva’s translation of *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (*Pañcaviṃśati*) (T223 8.223a13-20). The *Heart Sutra* is not so much a “condensation” as suggested by Conze, but a framed extract. There is a certain amount of continuity amongst the various *Prajñāpāramitā* texts. Longer versions of the text are literally expansions of shorter versions, though the manuscripts of the longer versions are not necessarily

later, since each text appears to have continued to evolve independently. Of these texts, the versions in 8,000 and 25,000 lines¹⁴ were by far the most important in China, as indicated by the multiple translations of each in the Tripiṭaka (seven and four respectively), though an 18,000 line version may have been popular in central Asia (Conze 1978: 10).

Three Chinese translations of *Pañcaviṃśati* are preserved in the *Taishō Tripiṭaka*:

- T221 《放光般若經》 by Mokṣala (291 CE)
 T223 《摩訶般若波羅蜜經》 by Kumārajīva (404 CE)
 T220-ii 《大般若波羅蜜多經》 (Vol. 7, Fasc. 401-478), by Xuánzàng. (659-663 CE)¹⁵

There is also T222 《光讚經》 (8.147-218) a partial translation by Dharmarakṣa (286 CE), which omits our passages. There are two published editions of the Sanskrit *Pañcaviṃśati*: Dutt (1934), which finishes at Chapter 21 (thus does not contain the epithets passage), and Kimura (2010) a new critical edition of the whole text, based on four manuscripts from Nepal. A recent facsimile edition of one of the Gilgit *Pañcaviṃśati* manuscripts by Karashima et al. (2016) makes this text more accessible, but no transcription or edition has been published.¹⁶

Conze’s translation, *The Large Sutra on Perfect Wisdom* (1975a), is based on a patchwork of various Sanskrit manuscripts from the extended *Prajñāpāramitā* tradition. At best, it can only indicate the general outline of the text, which seems to have been Conze’s intention.

¹⁴ Apart from the *Ratnaguṇasaṃcayagāthā*, none of the early *Prajñāpāramitā* texts is written in verse, though *Vajracchedikā* does paradoxically refer to itself as consisting of *catuṣpadikām gātham* (Vaj 8) “verses consisting of four quarters”. The number of lines a text occupied was dependent on the size of the leaves it was written on and the scribe’s handwriting. This may be why it was common to use the *śloka*—a meter of $4 \times 8 = 32$ syllables—as a measure of length. In this measure, *sāhasrikā* works out at 32,000 syllables (Gombrich, personal communication 22 Feb 2017). However, it has become customary in English to treat *sāhasrikā* as referring to “lines”.

¹⁵ Xuánzàng’s translations occur within his 《大般若波羅蜜多經》 *Dābōrēbōluómìduō-jīng*, *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (T220), a compendium of 16 *Prajñāpāramitā* texts in 600 fascicles, covering three volumes in the Taishō Tripiṭaka. Vols. 5-6 are taken up with a version of the 100,000 line text. Vol. 7 contains the remaining texts. The fact that the *Heart Sutra* is not included in T220 is evidence that undermines attribution of T251 to Xuánzàng.

¹⁶ For more information about the state of scholarship on this text and its manuscripts, see Karashima et al (2016).

Nattier (1992: 186ff) conjectures that T250 is extracted from or influenced by T1509 《大智度論》 *Dàzhìdùlùn* = Sanskrit **Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa*, a commentary, attributed to Nāgārjuna, on *Pañcaviṃśati* incorporating the text and also translated by Kumārajīva (and thus employing similar or identical terminology). In the case of the epithets passage, T1509 and T223 are identical, so I will not comment on this issue here.

Nattier and Yamabe identified some epithet passages in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (*Aṣṭa*) translations by Kumārajīva and Xuánzàng. There are seven Chinese translations related to the *Aṣṭa*:

- T224 《道行般若經》 by Lokakṣema (179 CE).
 T225 《大明度經》 by Zhī Qiān (225 CE);
 T226 《摩訶般若鈔經》 by Zhú Fóniàn (382 CE).
 T227 《小品般若經》 by Kumārajīva (408 CE)
 T220-iv 《大般若波羅蜜多經》 (Vol. 7, Fasc. 538-555), by Xuánzàng (660 CE)
 T220-v 《大般若波羅蜜多經》 (Vol. 7, Fasc. 556-565), by Xuánzàng (660 CE)¹⁷
 T228 《佛母出生三法藏般若波羅蜜多經》 by Dānapāla (985 CE).

Further comparative information on the various Chinese *Aṣṭa* translations can be found in Karashima (2011). In Sanskrit, there are two editions, Mitra (1888) and Vaidya (1960). Conze’s translation (1973a) is from the former. I have used Vaidya’s edition, simply because it was available both in print and electronically.

The epithets passage can also be found in the Chinese translation of the *Aṣṭadaśasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* or 18000 line text (*Aṣṭadaśa*), by Xuánzàng (T220-iii; Vol. 7, Fasc. 479-537). Since these are identical to the passages found in T220-ii, I’ve merely noted the bibliographic details alongside references to the *Pañcaviṃśati* passages. Again, the identical passage

¹⁷ A translation of a long fragment of text that closely resembles *Aṣṭa*.

is found in Xuánzàng’s translation of the *Śatasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* or 100,000 line text (*Śata*) (T200-i; Vol. 5-6, fasc. 1-400) and I only note bibliographic details. Conze (1962) has published a partial Sanskrit text of *Aṣṭadaśa*, but no Sanskrit text of *Śata* has yet been published. A 10,000 line version is preserved in Tibetan only (Conze 1978: 45ff). I have not consulted this version.

A translation of *Ratnaguṇasamcayagāthā* (Rgs) was made by Fǎxián 法賢 in 991CE, 《佛母寶德藏般若波羅蜜經》 *Collection of Precious Virtues of the Mother of the Buddhas Perfection of Wisdom Text* (T229). I consulted the Sanskrit edition by Yuyama (1976). Conze places this text alongside *Aṣṭa* or perhaps a little earlier in the timeline of *Prajñāpāramitā* text production, though the text that survives was reorganised by Haribhadra in the 8th century to fit the chapter structure of *Aṣṭa* (1978: 9-10). A fragment of the epithets passage can be identified in both the Sanskrit and the Chinese versions of *Rgs*.

As well as these primary sources, there are a number of ancient commentaries (see Lopez 1988, 1996; Hyun Choo 2006; Shih & Lusthaus 2006). Most of these are from a few centuries after the probable date of composition of the *Heart Sutra* and all are manifestly sectarian. The commentaries by Xuánzàng’s students—Kuījī 窺基 (T1710) and Woncheuk 測撰 (T1711)—are much closer to the time of composition and both presumably influenced by Xuánzàng. Both treat the *Heart Sutra* as epitomising Yogācāra doctrines. Kuījī is considered, along with Xuánzàng, to be the co-founder of the Chinese 法相 Fǎxiàng Yogācāra School. Lusthaus places Woncheuk’s commentary, T1711, shortly after the death of Xuánzàng in 664 (2003: 66).

Despite the proliferating occurrences noted by Yamabe and Nattier and added to in this study, by comparing the context of all of the occurrences we can see that there are in fact just two passages, with minor variations, that are potential sources for the *Heart Sutra* epithets passage, each followed by a distinct identifying passage. To make the subject manageable, all of the parallels will be noted in appendixes, and in the body of the article I will focus on the two passages as they occur in Kimura’s Sanskrit edition of *Pañcaviṃśati* and in Kumārajīva’s (Kj) translation (T223), and make comparisons with other texts where relevant.

Passage One

What distinguishes Passage One is that good-sons (善男子 = *kulaputra*) or good daughters (善女人 = *kuladuhitr*),¹⁸ train (學) in the *Prajñāpāramitā vidyā* (明呪) and it enables them to be peaceful, or to not cause harm (惱)¹⁹ to themselves or others.²⁰ In Kumārajīva’s translation of the *Pañcaviṃśati* (T223) Passage One reads

“The Perfection of Wisdom is a great *vidyā* (大明呪), an unexcelled *vidyā* (無上明呪). If a *kulaputra* or *kuladuhitr* trains in this *vidyā*, then they do not intend harm to themselves, or others, or both.²¹

This passage with minor variations is found in Xuánzàng’s translations at T220-i, 5.568.b19-23 (fasc. 102) = T220-ii, 7.151.a29-b3 (fasc. 428, Chp. 30) = T220-iii, 7.551.b10-14 (fasc. 501). Xuánzàng routinely adds two epithets that don’t have parallels in other Chinese translations or in the extant Sanskrit texts, i.e. “great *vidyā*” or “great supernatural *vidyā*” (大神呪)²² and “Queen of all *vidyās*” (一切呪王 = *sarvavidyārājñī?*). Here 王 means, “king, monarch” and I am reading “queen” because in Sanskrit *vidyā* is a feminine noun. The Sanskrit counterpart to this is:

Kauśika, this perfection of wisdom is a great *vidyā* (*mahāvidyā*);
this perfection of wisdom is an unexcelled *vidyā* (*anuttaraiṣā*)

¹⁸ Both Kumārajīva and Xuánzàng use the same character 善 to translate Skt. *kuśala*, i.e. ‘good, virtuous, kind, friendly’. So in Chinese 善男子/善女人 takes on the connotation of *virtuous* son or daughter, which in China may have had connotations of filial piety (孝 xiào).

¹⁹ “Although the basic meaning of 惱 is vexation, anxiety or worry, perhaps a better translation here is ‘to harm’, or ‘the intent to cause harm.’” (Maitiu O’Ceileachair, personal communication) Compare the translation of T229 below. Xuánzàng has 害 = *vyābādha* “hurt, injury”.

²⁰ Compare *Mahādūkkhakkhandha Sutta* (MN 13) describing someone in the *jhānas*. “At that time he does not intend harm for himself, or harm for another, or harm for both; at that time he experiences only the experience of being free of the desire to harm. I say that the supreme happiness is the experience of [having no desire to] harm.” (*neva tasmim samaye attabyābādhāyapi ceteti, na parabyābādhāyapi ceteti, na ubhayabyābādhāyapi ceteti, abyābajjhamyeva tasmim samaye vedanaṃ vedeti. Abyābajjhaparamāhaṃ, bhikkhave, vedanānaṃ assādaṃ vadāmi.* i.89). Compare MĀ 99: 彼於爾時不念自害，亦不念害他，若不念害者，(T 1.586a19-20). Also MN iii.21f., SN iv.339, AN i.157-9, 216 (*attabyābādhāyapi ceteti...*); and cf. MN i.414 (*attabyābādhāyapi saṃvattēyya...*), MN ii.115, AN i.114 (*attabyābādhāyapi saṃvattati...*).

²¹ 是般若波羅蜜是大明呪，是無上明呪。若善男子善女人，於是明呪中學，自不惱身，亦不惱他，亦不兩惱。(8.283b9-11 = T1509 25.463.c07-8)

²² See the discussion of 神呪 above.

vidyā). For here, Kauśika, a good son or daughter training in this [*vidyā*] does not intend harm for themselves, for another, or for both.²³

Here the Gilgit manuscript describes *Prajñāpāramitā* as, *mahāvidyā*, *anuttarā vidyā*, and *niruttarā vidyā*.²⁴ This passage can be traced back to the *Aṣṭa* in both Chinese and Sanskrit. In Kumārajīva’s translation of *Aṣṭa* T227, we find:

“The *prajñāpāramitā* is a great incantation (大呪術), a supreme incantation (無上呪術). Sons and daughters of good family should learn this incantation.”²⁵

Here *vidyā* is translated by Kumārajīva as 呪術 “incantation”, possibly influenced by Mokṣala (T221, see Passage Two below); whereas a few pages later in Passage Two he uses the more familiar 明呪. This is further evidence that 明呪 was intended as one word elsewhere.

Xuánzàng’s translations are: T220-iv, 7.774.b07-11 (fasc. 540) = T220-v, 7.873.a28-b1 (fasc. 557). Lokakṣema’s 179 CE translation (T224, 8.431.c12-21), the first in Chinese, describes *Prajñāpāramitā* as 極大祝 “an extremely great incantation” and 猛祝 “an outstanding incantation”.²⁶ Zhī Qiān, 46 years later, also has a slightly different terminology (T225, 8.484.a1-4): in his text, the *Prajñāpāramitā* is the *vidyā* (神呪) of all Buddhas (諸佛) and Queen of *vidyās* (呪中之王矣). The phrase “Queen of *vidyās*” is used by Xuánzàng in some of his translations, but not by other translators. This raises the possibility that a particular branch of the Sanskrit manuscript tradition had *mahāvidyārājñī* at

²³ *mahāvidyāyaiṣā kauśika yaduta prajñāpāramitā, anuttaraiṣā* [55] *kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā. atra hi kauśika śikṣamāṇaḥ kulaputro vā kuladuhitā vā nātmavyābādhāya cetayate, na paravyābādhāya cetayate, nobhayavyābādhāya cetayate.* (Kimura PSP_2-3:54-5). Conze’s translation (1975a: 229; Chp 27).

²⁴ *mahāvidyeyaṃ kauśika yaduta prajñāpāramitā | [9] anuttareyaṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā | niruttareyaṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā atra ca vidyāyāṃ ś[i]kṣamāṇaḥ kulaputro vā kuladuhitā vā nātmavyābādhāya. [10] cetayate | na pa[ra]vyā[bā]dhāya cetayate | nobhayavyā[bā]dhāya cetayate ||* (Karashima et. al. 2016, 141v line 8-10; my transcription).

²⁵ 般若波羅蜜是大呪術、無上呪術。善男子、善女人，學此呪術。(8.542.b5-6)

²⁶ Chinese text revised per Karashima (2011: 64). In ancient China 祝 was the title of the person who oversaw ritual offerings or who was in charge of fires and incense in temples. It also meant, “to pray”. (Maitiu O’Ceileachair, personal communication)

this point and others did not. That said, *mahāvīdyārājñī* is not found in any of the extant Sanskrit mss. Finally Zhú Fóniàn (T226, 8.514.a28-03) has just two epithets: “extremely great *vidyā*” (極大呪) and “preserves the excellence of the *vidyā*” (持尊之呪).

The Sanskrit text of the *Aṣṭa* has the same passage but with six epithets.

Kauśika, the perfection of wisdom is a great *vidyā* (*mahāvīdyā*); the perfection of wisdom is an immeasurable (*apramāṇa*) *vidyā*; the perfection of wisdom is a measureless (*aparimāṇa*) *vidyā*; the perfection of wisdom is an unsurpassed (*anuttara*) *vidyā*; the perfection of wisdom is an unequalled (*asama*) *vidyā*; the perfection of wisdom is a peerless (*asamasameyaṃ*) *vidyā*. What is the reason? For here, Kauśika, a kulaputra or kuladuhitṛ, training in this *vidyā* would not intend harm for themselves, for another or for both.²⁷

Note that *apramāṇa* and *aparimāṇa* are close synonyms, as are *asama* and *asamasama*. As far as extant manuscripts go, *Aṣṭa* is more elaborate than *Pañcaviṃśati* at this point, despite the latter being notionally a development from the former. The texts seem to have continued to evolve independently of the process of expansion, i.e. after Buddhists expanded *Aṣṭa* to produce *Pañcaviṃśati*, they continued to tinker with *Aṣṭa*. The Gilgit *Pañcaviṃśati* has three epithets in Passage One, while the later Nepalese mss. have only two. That the extra terms are not found in any Chinese translation suggests that this feature may be a late addition to the manuscripts from India.

Passage Two

The second passage is very similar in its phrasing, but the epithets are followed by a reference to the Buddhas of the three times and ten directions (*atītānāgata-pratyutpannā daśadiśi*) attaining unexcelled perfect enlightenment (*anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*) as a result of knowledge (*vidyā*) of the perfection of wisdom.

²⁷ *mahāvīdyeyaṃ kauśika yaduta prajñāpāramitā / apramāṇeyaṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā / aparimāṇeyaṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā / anuttareyaṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā / asameyaṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā / asamasameyaṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā / tatkasya hetoḥ? atra hi kauśika [28] vidyāyāṃ śikṣamāṇaḥ kulaputro vā kuladuhitṛ vā nātmavyābādhāya cetayate, na paravyābādhāya cetayate, nobhayavyābādhāya cetayate / (Vaidya 27-28) Cf. Conze 1973a: 104*

In all the texts, Passage Two comes a few pages after Passage One in the same chapter.

Kumārajīva’s translation of *Pañcaviṃśati*, T223, reads:

[Śakra said] “Bhagavan, the Perfection of Wisdom is a great *vidyā* (大明呪), an unexcelled *vidyā* (無上明呪), an unequalled *vidyā* (無等等明呪). Why is that? Bhagavan, because the Perfection of Wisdom can remove all evil *dharmas* (不善法 = *akuśaladharmāḥ*) and enable all good *dharmas* (善法 = *kuśaladharmāḥ*).”

Then the Buddha said to Śakra, Lord of the Devas, “Yes! Yes! Kauśika, the Perfection of Wisdom is a great *vidyā*, an unexcelled *vidyā*, an unequalled *vidyā*. Why is that? Kauśika, because all the Buddhas of the past have used this *vidyā* to attain supreme perfect awakening and all the Buddhas of the future and the Buddhas of the ten directions, because of this *vidyā*, have attained to supreme, perfect awakening.”²⁸

We find this passage in Xuánzàng’s translations at T220-ii 7.156.a17-22; (fasc. 429) = T220-i 5.580.b27-c13 (Fasc. 105)²⁹ = T220-iii 7.556.a24-26; (fasc. 502). Here Xuánzàng refers to the *Prajñāpāramitā* as 大神明呪王, which is probably another rendering of Sanskrit *mahāvīdyārājñī* (compare Zhī Qiān’s, “Queen of *vidyās*” 呪中之王矣 and Xuánzàng’s “Queen of all *vidyās*” 一切呪王 in T225 above). This raises the possibility that Xuánzàng intended 大神明呪 to be read as *vidyā*. Though not found in the Sanskrit *Prajñāpāramitā* texts, the term *mahāvīdyārājñī* is found in Buddhist literature especially in relation to *dhāraṇī* and other apotropaic texts. Xuánzàng doesn’t use the phrase 大神明呪王 in Passage One of T220-iv or in either passage in T220-v. The only other translator who uses the phrase is Zhī Qiān (225 CE) whose 明呪中之王矣 in Passage One also represents *mahāvīdyārājñī*.³⁰

²⁸ 世尊！般若波羅蜜是大明呪、無上明呪、無等等明呪。何以故？世尊！是般若波羅蜜能除一切不善，能與一切善法。」佛語釋提桓因言：「如是，如是！憍尸迦！般若波羅蜜是大明呪、無上明呪、無等等明呪。何以故？憍尸迦！過去諸佛因是明呪故，得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。未來世諸佛、今現在十方諸佛，亦因是明呪，得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。(8.286b28-c7 = T1509, 25.468.b21-25).

²⁹ Here T220-i is elaborated with filler material, mainly extra repetitions, but is essentially the same text.

³⁰ Taishō has a note here to say that Tempyō ms (739 CE) and the Chinese ms of the Sui (531-617) have 祝 for 呪.

Mokṣala, in T221, has a quite different translation:

Bhagavan: this perfection of wisdom is a very great art (極大術),
this perfection of wisdom is an unsurpassed art (無上之術), this
perfection of wisdom is an art without equal (無等之術).³¹

Here *vidyā* is translated as 術 meaning “technique, art, or skill”, cf. Kumārajīva’s “incantation” 呪術 (literally *dhāraṇī*-technique?) above. This conveys the more practical meanings of *vidyā* quite well, but lacks the soteriological connotations that are part of the definition of *vidyā*.

The first part of this passage, Śakra’s declaration to the Buddha, is missing from Kimura’s Sanskrit edition³², but we pick up from the Bhagavan’s reply, which in any case repeats Śakra’s words.³³

This being said, the Bhagavan said this to Śakra, Lord of the Devas, “This is so Kauśika, this is so. Kauśika, perfection of wisdom is a great *vidyā* (*mahāvīdyā*); Kauśika, perfection of wisdom is an unexcelled *vidyā* (*anuttarā vidyā*); Kauśika, perfection of wisdom is an unequalled *vidyā*. What is the reason? Because, Kauśika, all those perfect Buddhas, who are worthy and fully awakened Tathāgatas in the three times and the ten directions, awaken and will awaken in the future to the unexcelled, perfect awakening having arrived at just this perfection of wisdom.”³⁴

³¹ 世尊！是般若波羅蜜為極大術，般若波羅蜜無上之術，般若波羅蜜者無等之術。(8.48.b14-22; fs. 7, chp.25). “In Mokṣala’s very early translation 是 is an anaphoric pronoun, ‘this’, not a verb. Here 為 is the verb ‘to be’. This is characteristic of an early period of Chinese language.” (Maitiu O’Ceileachair, personal communication)

³² In the Gilgit ms. the missing passage reads: “Śakra said: ‘Bhagavan, the Perfection of Wisdom is a great *vidyā*; Bhagavan, the Perfection of Wisdom is an unexcelled *vidyā*; Bhagavan, the Perfection of Wisdom is an unequalled *vidyā*. Why is that? Bhagavan, because the Perfection of Wisdom dries up all unskilful dharmas and upholds all skilful dharmas.’” *śakra ahā | mahāvīdyeyam bhagavan yaduta prajñāpāramitā | anuttareyam bhagavan vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā [13] asamasameyam bhagavan vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā | tat kasya hetoh | tathā hi bhagavan prajñāpāramitā sarvakuśalānam dharmā[nām] uccho[ṣa]yitrī sarvakuśalānam dharmānam dātrī* | (Karashima et. al. 2016, folio 146v. lines 12-13; my transcription).

³³ This passage is omitted from Dutt. Nattier (1992: 213) was writing before the publication of Kimura’s edition of the *Pañcaviṃśati* so was not able to provide a Sanskrit counterpart. Compare Conze (1975a: 237).

³⁴ *evam ukte bhagavān śakraṃ devānāṃ indram etad avocat: evam etat kauśikaivam etat, mahāvīdyeyam kauśika yad uta prajñāpāramitā, anuttareyam kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā, asamasameyam kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā. tat kasya hetoh? tathā hi kauśika ye ‘tītānāgatapratyutpannā daśadiśi loke tathāgatā arhantaḥ samyaksambuddhāḥ*

As with Passage One, we can trace Passage Two in the various versions of *Aṣṭa*. In Kumārajīva’s translation T227 the most pertinent part is:

Prajñāpāramitā is a great *vidyā* (大明呪); *Prajñāpāramitā* is an unsurpassed *vidyā* (無上呪); *Prajñāpāramitā* is an unequalled *vidyā* (無等等呪).³⁵

Again, Xuánzàng’s translation, T220-iv, is more elaborate with five epithets to Kumārajīva’s three:

Prajñāpāramitā is a great *vidyā* (大神呪); *Prajñāpāramitā* is a great *vidyā* (大明呪); *Prajñāpāramitā* is an unsurpassed *vidyā* (無上呪); *Prajñāpāramitā* is an unequalled *vidyā* (無等等呪); *Prajñāpāramitā* is the queen of all *vidyās* (一切呪王).³⁶

Lokakṣema’s translation, T224 (8.433.b22-3), has three epithets compared to the two in Passage One, i.e. “an extremely great incantation” (極大祝), “a supremely venerable incantation” (極尊祝), and “an unequalled incantation” (無有輩祝). Zhī Qiān’s translation, T225, provides only one epithet here, i.e. “greatly honoured *vidyā*” (大尊咒) (8.484.b13-15). Zhú Fóniàn, T226 (8.515.c12-20) has three epithets which, apparently following Lokakṣema, he translates, “an extremely great *vidyā*” (極大呪), “a supremely venerable *vidyā*” (極尊呪), and “an unequalled *vidyā*” (無有輩呪). The counterpart Sanskrit text of the *Aṣṭa* reads:

When this was said Śakra, Lord of the Devas, said this to the Bhagavan: “Bhagavan, the perfection of wisdom is a great *vidyā* (*mahāvīdyā*); the perfection of wisdom is an immeasurable (*apramāṇa*) *vidyā*; the perfection of wisdom is a measureless (*aparimāṇa*) *vidyā*; the perfection of wisdom is an unsurpassed (*niruttarā*) *vidyā*; the perfection of wisdom is an unequalled

sarve te imām eva prajñāpāramitām āgamyānuttarām samyaksaṃbodhim abhisambuddhā abhisambudhyante abhisambhotsyante ca. (Kimura PSP 2-3:70) The Gilgit ms. has the same epithets here.

³⁵ 般若波羅蜜是大明呪，般若波羅蜜是無上呪，般若波羅蜜是無等等呪。(8.543b25-29) In the Taishō Ed. this occurs under a subheading: 摩訶般若波羅蜜明咒品第四 “*Mahāprajñāpāramitā-vidyā*, Section Four.”

³⁶ 甚深般若波羅蜜多是大神呪，是大明呪，是無上呪，是無等等呪，是一切呪王，(7.777.c05-6). Compare T220-v, fasc. 557 (7.875.a2-7).

(*asama*) *vidyā*; the perfection of wisdom is a peerless
(*asamasama*) *vidyā*.³⁷

This is followed, as above, by the Buddha’s reply. Here again, *Aṣṭa* doubles up some of the epithets: *apramāṇa* = *aparimāṇa*; and *niruttara* = *anuttara*; and *asama* = *asamasama*. We saw the use of *niruttara* in the Gilgit ms. parallel of Passage One.

We conclude this survey of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature by noting that we can even get a glimpse of the *Heart Sutra* passage in *Rgs*, T229:

This great *vidyā* (大明) of perfect wisdom is the mother of all Buddhas,
Able to remove distress in all world spheres,
All the Buddhas of the three times and the ten directions,
Schooled in this knowledge are the supreme masters.³⁸

This corresponds to the Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit text:

This perfection of wisdom of the Jinās is a great *vidyā*,
In the realm abounding in beings, whose nature is suffering, grief,
and darkness.
The world protectors of past and future, in the ten directions, who,
Trained in this *vidyā*, are the unexcelled kings of the knowledgeable.³⁹

Here, 大明 corresponds to *mahāvidyā* in the Sanskrit text. Fāxián was constrained to translate each line of verse as seven Chinese characters, so

³⁷ *evam ukte śakro devānām indro bhagavantam etad avocat - mahāvidyeyam bhagavan yaduta prajñāpāramitā / apramāṇeyam bhagavan vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā / aparimāṇeyam bhagavan [37] vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā / niruttareyam bhagavān vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā / anuttareyam bhagavan vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā / asameyam bhagavan vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā / asamasameyam bhagavan vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā / (Vaidya 1960: 36-7).*

³⁸ 大明般若諸佛母，能除苦惱徧世界，所有三世十方佛，學此明得無上師。(8.678.a4-5)

³⁹ *mahavidya prajña ayu pāramitā jinānām | dukhadharmaśokaśamanī pṛthusattvadhātoḥ || ye ‘tīta’ nāgatadaśaddiśa lokanāthā | ima vidya śikṣita anuttaravaidyārājāḥ || Rgs 3.5 || . (Yuyama 1976: 23 = Conze 1973a: 15):*

even though 明 literally means “bright” we have to read it here as a poetic abbreviation of 明呪 i.e. as *vidyā*. If Conze is correct in his assumption that *Rgs* is the earliest of all the *Prajñāpāramitā* texts, then here we see the epithets passage in its earliest form, though we now have reason to believe that *Aṣṭa* was composed in Gāndhārī (Falk & Karashima 2012).

Comparing the two passages in *Pañcaviṃśati*, Passage Two seems more likely to be the source of the epithets passage in the *Heart Sutra* than Passage One. In fact, the wording of Kumārajīva’s *Pañcaviṃśati* (T223) is identical to the *Heart Sutra* text attributed to him (T250). Also the association with the idea of all the Buddhas of the three times awakening through *Prajñāpāramitā* is similar to the immediately preceding part of the *Heart Sutra*.

Vidyā vs. Mantra

Yamabe observed that in Sanskrit *Prajñāpāramitā* is a *vidyā* and not a *mantra* or a *dhāraṇī* (Nattier 1992, n. 54a). The present survey confirms this and across a wider range of texts. The Sanskrit *Prajñāpāramitā* literature *always* refers to *Prajñāpāramitā* as a *vidyā* rather than as a *mantra*. So how did the Sanskrit *Heart Sutra*, which is after all a quote from the Large *Prajñāpāramitā* text, come to have the word *mantra*? I will look at the problem from two angles: semantics and chronology.

Semantics

Conze asserts that *vidyā* is “untranslatable” (1975b: 122) and renders it both as “science” (122) and “lore” (237). *Vidyā* derives from the verbal root √vid “to know, to discover” (cognate with “wise, wisdom” etc). Sometimes *vidyā* is translated as “science”, but the whole context is pre-scientific so this is anachronistic. *Vidyā* refers to knowledge in a particular field: knowledge of the Vedas, knowledge of political governance, etc. Knowledge cultivated through learning and experience, rather than divinely inspired knowledge or insight. It also has a magical connotation. Knowledge in the sense of *vidyā* bestows control over the subject studied; when one thoroughly knows a subject one is said to have “mastered” it. In the context of *Prajñāpāramitā*, *vidyā* seems to mean knowledge in verbal form that has specific apotropaic and/or soteriological value in a Buddhist context.

Knowing, as we now do, that the surviving Sanskrit texts all have *vidyā*, we can confidently read the many Chinese variants—祝, 咒, 呪, 明, 明呪, 術, 呪

術, 神呪, and 神明咒—in this context as translations of *vidyā*. The common element, with a few exceptions already discussed, is a character pronounced /tjus/ in Old Chinese (Mandarin *zhòu*). Lokakṣema’s translations have the synonym 祝 “incantation” pronounced /tjugs/ (Mandarin *zhù*).

The Sanskrit *Heart Sutra* has four epithets. Although numbers vary, only Xuánzàng’s translations have more than three, and specifically the version of the *Heart Sutra* attributed to him (T251) has four. Where most Chinese texts have something resembling the core epithets of “great”, “unsurpassed” and “unequaled” (大明, 無上, and 無等等), the translation of *Aṣṭa* by Zhī Qiān (T225) only has two, i.e. “*vidyā* of all the Buddhas” (諸佛神呪) and “Queen of *vidyās*” (呪中之王矣) corresponding to Xuánzàng’s “great *vidyā*” (大神呪) and “Queen of all *vidyās*” (一切呪王). There is no extant Sanskrit manuscript with these two extra epithets.

Against this reading, we have the commentaries produced by Xuánzàng’s two main students, Kuījī and Woncheuk, both of which understand 明呪 as two words. As noted above, Beal, relying on a Tang Dynasty commentary, renders 咒 as *dhāraṇī* (1865: 28). In Kuījī’s commentary, T1710, he prefaces his gloss on this section of the text with a well known fourfold classification of types of *dhāraṇī* that occurs in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* and the *Yogācārabhūmiśāstra* (translated by Xuánzàng). This suggests that Kuījī is also reading 呪/咒 as *dhāraṇī*, even though both Hyun Choo (2006) and Shih & Lusthaus (2006) render the character as *mantra* in their translations of these early commentaries.

Woncheuk (T1711) glosses 大明呪 as: “[Because] it dispels darkness (暗) and removes ignorance (除癡), it is called the great-bright-*dhāraṇī* (大明呪).”⁴⁰ Woncheuk uses the character 暗 “dark” as a contrast to 明 “bright”, which suggests he understood 明呪 as two words, in this case “bright *dhāraṇī*” rather than *vidyā*. But he also describes it as “removing ignorance” 除癡 so perhaps he was aware of the ambiguity, since *avidyā* is a common word for ignorance. Kuījī glosses 明 as a standalone character: “it breaks through where there is no light.”⁴¹

Woncheuk seemingly had a Sanskrit manuscript of the *Heart Sutra* to consult. Lusthaus refers to it as a Sanskrit “original” (2003:83), though this assertion appears to go beyond the evidence available. That a Sanskrit text was available

⁴⁰ 遣暗除癡稱大明呪。(33.551.c03)

⁴¹ 無幽不燭曰明 (33.0542a17) An alternative reading is: “shining through all darkness” (Shih 2001: 122)

in China after Xuánzàng’s death is not evidence that it preceded any Chinese version. On the contrary, we fully expect a Sanskrit version to be available in China before Xuánzàng’s death, especially if Nattier’s conjecture is right and Xuánzàng himself translated the *Heart Sutra* from Chinese into Sanskrit.

To sum up, we have considered all of the Sanskrit and Chinese versions of the *Aṣṭa* and *Pañcaviṃśati*, plus a few related texts. All the Sanskrit texts have *vidyā* where the Sanskrit *Heart Sutra* has *mantra*. I have shown that all of the Chinese *Prajñāpāramitā* texts have read *vidyā* as well, although Tang Dynasty commentators seem to have understood 咒/呪 to mean *dhāraṇī*. I believe we can explain these discrepancies with reference to Jan Nattier’s hypothesis that the *Heart Sutra* was composed in China, combined with some observations about how the Buddhist lexicon changed over time.

Context and Chronology

The different parts of The *Heart Sutra* tell us that it was composed in an environment of devotion to the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, of meditative practices involving examination of the *skandhas*, and of *dhāraṇī* chanting. These are all mainstream Mahāyāna Buddhist practices in China in the early Medieval Period (cf. Copp 2014).

The presence of a *mantra*, if it is a *mantra*, tempts many commentators to think of this text as tantric (see for example Kūkai’s commentary in Hakeda 1972: 262). Ryūichi Abe (1999) distinguishes Tantra proper from the disparate elements associated with Tantra (specifically a *mantra*) present in Japan before Tantric Buddhism was introduced when Saichō and Kūkai returned from China in the early 9th Century. Similarly, I would argue that the presence of a *mantra* alone, if it is a *mantra*, is not evidence for Tantric Buddhism. Tantra is a context within which elements such as mantras are combined with other essential elements (*mudrā*, *maṇḍala*, *abhiṣeka*, etc), which make a particular kind of sense. Without this context, an isolated element such as a *mantra* cannot be considered Tantric. *Mantra* is a term appropriate to the context of Buddhists involved in bestowing *abhiṣeka* and practising *sādhana*, and arguably not applicable to the environment of the *Heart Sutra*.

More recently, Paul Copp has argued that teleological arguments along the lines that a *dhāraṇī* represents a “proto-Tantric” element have blinded scholars to the significance of *dhāraṇī* in medieval China (2014: 198). Like Abé, Copp’s argument points away from treating the *dhāraṇī* as a “proto-Tantric” feature and opens up the possibility of understanding *dhāraṇī* in its own right. Copp’s

comments apply to *Prajñāpāramitā* qua *vidyā* as much as *dhāraṇī*. Although both *dhāraṇī* and mantra might involve spoken (or, especially in China, *written*) phrases or sounds, they are understood as having different functions. Broadly speaking, the former is protective, while the latter is transformative.

Were it not for the recurring word *mantra* in the text, I suggest that we would conclude that the string “*gate gate pāragate pārasaṃgate bodhi svāhā*” is a *dhāraṇī*. For example, unlike almost all mantras, it does not start with *oṃ*⁴²; it does not contain a *bīja* or seed-syllable; and does not relate to a deity or ritual function. On the other hand, it does use a sequence of variants on a word that is characteristic of *dhāraṇī*. Nattier notes (1992: 211, n.52, 53) the similar “spells” contained in the Chinese texts identified by McRae and Fukui, e.g. in T901 《陀羅尼集經》 *Dhāraṇī Collection Sūtra*, are referred to as *dhāraṇī*. The character 心 “heart” (in the title of T251) often corresponds to Sanskrit *citta* and is usually translated literally as “heart”; however, Fukui has argued that 心 can also be read as *dhāraṇī* (cited in Nattier 1992: 175-6; 210, n.47). To this, we can add the observation that some of the Nepalese manuscripts of the *Heart Sutra* explicitly refer to the text as a *dhāraṇī*.⁴³

Although *vidyā* later becomes, at times, almost synonymous with *mantra*, at the time the *Aṣṭa* and the *Pañcaviṃśati* were composed, Indian Buddhists still saw mantra as non-Buddhist. The Pāli *Nikāyas* contain a few passages making it clear that the chanting of mantras is, at the very least, wrong-livelihood and forbidden for *bhikkhus* (DN i.9; SN i.167, Sn 480). In early Mahāyāna texts (i.e. *Aṣṭa* or *Pañcaviṃśati*), *mantra* was viewed quite negatively (see for example, Conze 1973: 160, 205, and 206). By contrast, the chanting of *parittā*, or protective texts, was already established as a popular Buddhist practice by the time of the *Milindapañha* (150-4). The *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra* repeatedly refers to *oṃ maṇipadme hūṃ*, the “*mantra*” of Avalokiteśvara, as *ṣaḍakṣarī mahāvidyā* or “six-syllabled great incantation” (2002: 61; cf. Roberts 2012: 230-231). Studholme dates the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* to the fourth century CE. Peter Roberts, also commenting on the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*, remarks that, in this context, *vidyā* means “spell” or “incantation” and *mahāvidyā* means “great incantation” (2012: 230). He marks the *sūtra* as having many features in common with the *Prajñāpāramitā*

⁴² The only exceptions I am aware of occur in the *Mahāvairocana-abhisambodhi-tantra*, where mantras may begin with *namaḥ samantabuddhānām...* or *namaḥ samantavaṃśānām...* (see Hodge 2003)

⁴³ For example, (using notation from Conze 1948) Ne: *Ārya-pañcaviṃśatikā-prajñāpāramitā-hṛdaya nāma dhāraṇī*, Nh: *Ārya-śrī-pañcaviṃśatikā-prajñāpāramitā-hṛdaya nāma dhāraṇī*.

literature, except that the *ṣaḍakṣarī mahāvīdyā* replaces *prajñāpāramitā* as the “supreme principle of Mahāyāna” (2002: 87). Although there is no evidence that the composer of the *Heart Sutra* was aware of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*, the inclusion of Avalokiteśvara suggests devotion to the cult of the bodhisattva and probably some sympathy with the ideas in the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* that feature Avalokiteśvara in a soteriological role.

All this suggests that *mantra* is not only a back-translation but a *mistranslation* of *vidyā*. Though the words in the epithets passage were originally composed in one milieu—where protective incantations were relevant, but *mantras* were alien and forbidden—by the time the Chinese *Heart Sutra* came to be translated into Sanskrit the religious and linguistic landscape in India and China had changed. In the interim *mantra* had been assimilated into Buddhist practice. In other words, the Sanskrit translation of the *Heart Sutra* must have been produced in a milieu where the two characters 明呪 were naturally taken to be two words, and *mantra* seemed the natural translation of 呪 rather than *vidyā* or *dhāraṇī*. This suggests a context where Tantric Buddhism was prominent, *dhāraṇī* had been assimilated to *mantra*, and the non-Tantric nature of the *Heart Sutra* was easily overlooked. This supports Nattier’s conjecture that the translation into Sanskrit occurred relatively late, probably in the 7th century.

The conclusion seems to be that there is no *mantra* in the *Heart Sutra*. Instead, it contains a *dhāraṇī* and refers to *Prajñāpāramitā* as a superlative kind of practical knowledge or incantation (*vidyā*). This leaves the modern commentator with a problem. If *mantra* is a *mistranslation* based on a misreading of the Chinese text due to historical shifts in Buddhist terminology, should we “correct” the text? Every Sanskrit witness of the *Heart Sutra* understands the mistaken translation as the correct one. Does any modern scholar have the kind of authority that would legitimise overriding traditional witnesses, stretching back over 1000 years?

The Problem of the Heart Sutra Ur-text

As this study shows, we have a particular problem with the *Heart Sutra*. Conze and other editors have treated the *Heart Sutra* as an Indian, Sanskrit, Buddhist *sūtra*. In creating his critical edition, Conze sought to recreate a putative ur-text in Sanskrit, seeing in it the source of the extant texts in many languages. Now, however, we can say beyond any reasonable doubt that this “ur-text” was a translation from a Chinese text that is similar to, but not exactly like T250

or T251. It was probably created some time in the 7th century, much later than Conze thought. Important as it is to establish the earliest Sanskrit text of the *Heart Sutra*, the ur-text itself was almost certainly Chinese. I would argue that the Chinese ur-text is no longer extant, since none of the surviving versions is sufficiently similar to the Sanskrit *Heart Sutra*, or to each other, to have been the source of the others.

A further complication is that our text is a composite made up largely of quotations from other texts. Even if we establish a Chinese ur-text of the *Heart Sutra*, we can still peel away further layers and seek its origins in other texts, mainly of the *Prajñāpāramitā* genre. But the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature is itself far from being fixed. A core text has evolved into a number of species of different sizes, each of which has continued to evolve at different rates so that surviving manuscripts of a supposedly “early” text, *Aṣṭa*, may show features that apparently post-date the “later” text *Pañcaviṃśati*. We have reason to believe that the core *Prajñāpāramitā* text was composed in Gāndhārī and only later translated into Sanskrit (Falk & Karashima 2012). Beyond this, the origins of *Prajñāpāramitā* texts are obscure, though there are some affinities with Pāli texts (e.g. MN 121, 122, SN 12.15 etc.). Each time we approach the horizon we see a new mountain range far off in the distance. Unfortunately, as we go back in time our sources become fewer and less complete. It may be that the very idea of an ur-text is meaningless under these circumstances. All we can really do is establish the text at certain points in space and time and relate it to the appropriate historical circumstances.

Appendix 1: Parallel Passages

Passage One

Pañcaviṃśati

T220-ii, 5.151.a29-b3:⁴⁴ 如是般若波羅蜜多是大神呪，如是般若波羅蜜多是大明呪，如是般若波羅蜜多是無上呪，如是般若波羅蜜多是無等等呪，如是般若波羅蜜多是一切呪王

T221, 8.46a.03-05: 拘翼！是般若波羅蜜者，無上之術。善男子、善女人學是術者，亦不自念惡，亦不念他人惡，亦不念兩惡。

⁴⁴ (fasc. 428, Chp. 30) = T220-i 568.b19-23 (fasc. 102) = T220-iii 551.b10-14 (fasc. 501.)

- T223, 8.283b9-11: 是般若波羅蜜是大明呪，是無上明呪。若善男子善女人，於是明呪中學，自不惱身，亦不惱他，亦不兩惱。
- T1509, 25.463.c07-8: 是般若波羅蜜，是大明呪、是無上呪。
- Kimura PSP_2-3:54-5: mahāvidyaiṣā kauśika yad uta prajñāpāramitā, anuttaraiṣā [55] kauśika vidyā yad uta prajñāpāramitā.
- Gilgit 141v line 8-10: mahāvidyeyaṃ kauśika yaduta prajñāpāramitā | [9] anuttareyaṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā | niruttareyaṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā

Aṣṭa

- T220-iv, 7.774.b07-11: 如是般若波羅蜜多是大神呪，是大明呪，是無上呪，是無等等呪；如是般若波羅蜜多是諸呪王，最上、最妙、無能及者，具大威力，能伏一切，不為一切之所降伏。
- T220-v, 7.873.a28-b1: 如是般若波羅蜜多是大神呪、是無上呪，若能於此精勤修學，不為自害、不為他害、不為俱害，疾證無上正等菩提
- T224, 8.431.c12-21:⁴⁵ 何以故？是般若波羅蜜者極大祝，人中之猛祝。學是祝者，是善男子、善女人不自念惡，亦不念他人惡，都無所念惡，善為人中之雄，自致作佛，為護人民蝸飛蠕動，學是祝者疾成佛道也。
- T225, 8.484.a1-4: 所以然者，斯定，諸佛神呪，呪中之王矣。學是呪者，不自念惡、不念人惡，都無惡念，是為人中之雄，自致作佛，為護眾生。
- T226, 8.514.a28-03: 是般若波羅蜜者，極大呪，持尊之呪。學是呪者，善男子、善女人不自念惡，亦不念他人惡，都不念惡，為人中之雄，自致作佛，當護一切人
- T227, 8.542.b5-6 般若波羅蜜是大呪術、無上呪術。善男子、善女人，學此呪術，不自念惡，不念他惡，不兩念惡；學是呪術，得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提，得薩婆若智，能觀一切眾生心。

⁴⁵ Revised per Karashima (2011: 64).

(Vaidya 27-28): *mahāvidyeyaṃ kauśika yaduta prajñāpāramitā /
apramāṇeyaṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā /
aparimāṇeyaṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā /
anuttareyaṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā /
asameyaṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā /
asamasameyaṃ kauśika vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā /*

Passage Two

Pañcaviṃśati

T220-ii, 7.156.a17-22:⁴⁶ 「世尊！如是般若波羅蜜多是大神呪、是大明呪，是無上呪，是無等等呪，是一切呪王，最尊最勝、最上最妙，能伏一切，不為一切之所降伏。何以故？世尊！如是般若波羅蜜多能除一切惡不善法，能攝一切殊勝善法。」爾時，佛告天帝釋言：「如是！如是！如汝所說。何以故？橋尸迦！過去未來現在諸佛，皆因如是甚深般若波羅蜜多大神呪王，證得無上正等菩提，轉妙法輪度無量眾。

T221, 8.48.b14-22: 世尊！是般若波羅蜜為極大術，般若波羅蜜無上之術，般若波羅蜜者無等之術。

T223, 8.286b28-c7: 世尊！般若波羅蜜是大明呪、無上明呪、無等等明呪。何以故？世尊！是般若波羅蜜能除一切不善，能與一切善法。」佛語釋提桓因言：「如是，如是！橋尸迦！般若波羅蜜是大明呪、無上明呪、無等等明呪。何以故？橋尸迦！過去諸佛因是明呪故，得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。未來世諸佛、今現在十方諸佛，亦因是明呪，得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提

T1509, 25.468.b21-25: as for T223.

Kimura PSP 2-3:70: *evam ukte bhagavān śakraṃ devānām indram etad avocat: evam etat kauśikaivam etat, mahāvidyeyaṃ kauśika yad uta prajñāpāramitā, anuttareyaṃ kauśika vidyā yad uta prajñāpāramitā, asamasameyaṃ kauśika vidyā yad uta prajñāpāramitā.*

⁴⁶ (fasc. 429) = T220-i, 5.580.b27-c13 (Facs. 105) = T220-iii 7.556.a24-26; (fasc. 502).

Gilgit 146v: 12-13 *śakra ahā | mahavidyeyaṃ bhagavan yaduta
prajñāpāramitā | anuttareyaṃ bhagavan vidyā yaduta
prajñāpāramitā [13] asamameyaṃ bhagavan
vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā | tat kasya hetoḥ |
tathā hi bhagavan prajñāpāramitā sarvakuśalānaṃ
dharmā[ṇāṃ] uccho[ṣa]yitrī sarvakuśalānaṃ
dharmānaṃ dātrī |*

Aṣṭa

T220-iv, 7.777.c05-6: 甚深 般若波羅蜜多是大神呪，是大明呪，是無上
呪，是無等等呪，是一切呪王，最尊最勝、最上
最妙，能伏一切，不為一切之所降伏。

T220-v, 7.875.a2-7: 甚深般若波羅蜜多是大神呪、是大明呪、是無上
呪、是無等等呪。

T224, 8.433.b22-3: 極大祝般若波羅蜜，極尊祝般若波羅蜜，無有輩
祝般若波羅蜜。

T225, 8.484.b13-15: 大尊呪

T226, 8.515.c12-20: 釋提桓因白佛：「般若波羅蜜極大呪。天中天！
般若波羅蜜極尊呪、無有輩呪。」佛言：「如
是，如是！拘翼！般若波羅蜜為極大呪，般若波
羅蜜為極尊呪，般若波羅蜜無有輩呪。

T227, 8.543.b28-c3: 「世尊！般若波羅蜜是大明呪，般若波羅蜜是無
上呪，般若波羅蜜是無等等呪。」佛言：「如
是，如是！橋尸迦！般若波羅蜜是大明呪，般若
波羅蜜是無上呪，般若波羅蜜是無等等呪。何以
故？橋尸迦！過去諸佛，因是明呪，得阿耨多羅
三藐三菩提。未來諸佛，亦因是呪，當得阿耨多
羅三藐三菩提。

(Vaidya 36-7): *mahāvidyeyaṃ bhagavan yaduta prajñāpāramitā /
apramāṇeyaṃ bhagavan vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā
/ aparimāṇeyaṃ bhagavan [37] vidyā yaduta
prajñāpāramitā / niruttareyaṃ bhagavān vidyā
yaduta prajñāpāramitā / anuttareyaṃ bhagavan vidyā
yaduta prajñāpāramitā / asameyaṃ bhagavan vidyā
yaduta prajñāpāramitā / asamameyaṃ bhagavan
vidyā yaduta prajñāpāramitā /*

Ratnaguna

T229, 8.678.a4-5: 大明般若諸佛母，

Rgs 3.5 *mahavidya prajña ayu pāramitā jinānām* |

Appendix 2: Epithets Correspondence Tables

Hrd	T251 848c18-19	Xz	大神呪	大明呪	無上呪	無等等呪
Hrd	T250 847c24-25	Kj		大明呪	無上明呪	無等等呪

Passage One

Chinese Texts

100	T220-i 568.b19-23 (fasc. 102)	Xz	大神呪	大明呪	無上呪	無等等呪	一切呪王
25	T220-ii 151. a29-b3 (fasc. 428)	Xz	大神呪	大明呪	無上呪	無等等呪	一切呪王
18	T220-iii 551.b10-14 (fasc. 501)	Xz	大神呪	大明呪	無上呪	無等等呪	一切呪王
08	T220-iv 774.b07-11 (fasc. 540)	Xz	大神呪	大明呪	無上呪	無等等呪	
08a	T220-v 873. a28-b1 (fasc. 557)	Xz	大神呪		無上呪		
25	T1509 463.c07-8 (57)	Kj		大明呪	無上呪	無等等呪	
25	T223 283.b9-11	Kj		大呪術	無上呪		
08	T227 542.b5-6	Kj		大呪術	無上呪		
25	T221 46a.03-05 (fs. 7)	Mo			無上之術		
08	T226 514.a29	ZF		極大呪	持尊之呪		

‘EPITHETS OF THE MANTRA’ IN THE HEART SUTRA

08	T225 484.a1	ZQ	諸佛神 呪				呪中之 王矣
08	T224 431.c12-21	Lk		極大祝	猛祝		

Sanskrit

- 25: *mahāvīdyā, anuttarā vidyā.* (Kimura PSP 2-3:70)
 25: *mahāvīdyā, anuttarā vidyā, niruttarā vidyā* (Gilgit 141v line 8-10)
 08: *mahāvīdyā, apramāṇā vidyā, aparimāṇā vidyā, anuttarā vidyā, asamā vidyā, asamasamā vidyā.* (Vaidya 27-8)

Passage Two

Pañcaviṃśati = Kimura (PSP 2-3:70) = Conze (1975a: 237, Chp 28)
 Aṣṭa = Vaidya (36-7) = Conze (1973a: 108-9)

Rgs	T229 678.a4-5	Fx		大明			
25	T1509 468.b21-25 (58)	Kj		大明呪	無上呪	無等等呪	
100	T220-i 580. b27-c13 (fasc. 105)	Xz	大神呪	大明呪	無上呪	無等等呪	一切呪王
25	T220-ii 156.a17-22; (fasc. 429)	Xz	大神呪	大明呪	無上呪	無等等呪	一切呪王
18	T220-iii 556.a24-26; (fasc. 502)	Xz	大神呪	大明呪	無上呪	無等等呪	一切呪王
08	T220-iv 777.c05-6; (fasc. 540)	Xz	大神呪	大明呪	無上呪	無等等呪	一切呪王
08a	T220-v 875.a2-7 (fasc. 557)	Xz	大神呪	大明呪	無上呪	無等等呪	
25	T223 286.b28-c7	Kj		大明呪	無上明呪	無等等明呪	

08	T227 543.b28-29	Kj		大明呪	無上呪	無等等呪	
25	T221 48.b14-22 (fs. 7) 25	Mo		極大術	無上之術	無等之術	
08	T226 515.c12-20	ZF		極大呪	極尊呪	無有輩呪	
08	T225 484.b13-15	ZQ	大尊呪				
08	T224 433.b22-3	Lk		極大祝	極尊祝	無有輩祝	

- 25: mahāvidyā, anuttarā vidyā, asamasamā vidyā. (Kimura PSP 2-3:70)
- 25: mahavidya, anuttarā vidyā, asamasamā vidyā. (Gilgit 146v: 12-13)
- 08: mahāvidyā, apramāṇā vidyā, aparimāṇā vidyā, niruttarā vidyā, anuttarā vidyā, asamā vidyā, asamasamā vidyā. (Vaidya 36-7)
- Rgs: mahavidya, vidya (Yuyama 1976: 23) = Conze (1973a: 15)

Abbreviations

<i>Aṣṭa</i>	<i>Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra</i>
<i>Aṣṭadaśa</i>	<i>Aṣṭadaśasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra</i>
DN	Dīgha Nikāya
Fx	Faxian
Kj	Kumārajīva
Lk	Lokakṣema
Mo	Mokṣala
<i>Pañcaviṃśati</i>	<i>Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra</i>
PSP	Kimura (2010)
Rgs	<i>Ratnaguṇasaṃcayagāthā</i>

Śata	<i>Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra</i>
Sn	Suttanipāta
SN	Samyutta Nikāya
T	Taishō edition of Chinese Tripiṭaka.
Vaj	<i>Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā</i>
Xz	Xuánzàng
ZF	Zhú Fóniàn
ZQ	Zhī Qiān

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Book Reviews

Anālayo. *The Foundation History of the Nuns' Order*, Hamburg Buddhist Studies 6. Numata Center for Buddhist Studies, Bochum/Freiburg, 2016 (278 pp.)*

Reviewed by Richard Gombrich

In his “Introduction” to this wonderful book, Anālayo writes: “Throughout this study, my intention is not to reconstruct what actually happened on the ground in ancient India, which in view of the limitations of the source material at our disposal would anyway be a questionable undertaking. Instead, my intention is to reconstruct what happened during the transmission of the texts that report this event. In short, I am not trying to construct a history, I am trying to study the construction of a story” (p.13). While one cannot but admire the modesty of this claim, perhaps my only criticism of the book is that it is slightly misleading. Of course, it would hardly be possible to dispute that no account of exactly how the Buddhist Order of Nuns came to be founded is possible. But what can be done, and has been done, is to show how and why many of the details that have come down to us are implausible, and then to show how and why the texts give the accounts that they do; and in performing this latter feat, Anālayo takes us much closer to what must in fact have happened.

After the brief “Introduction” there are 6 chapters, followed by a concise “Conclusion”. Finally come 52 pages of English translations of the seven canonical *Vinaya* texts which describe how the Order of Nuns was founded, all of which are versions of the same basic narrative.

* NB This book is available for free download at <https://www.buddhismuskunde.uni-hamburg.de/pdf/5-personen/analayo/foundation.pdf>

Each of chapters 2 to 6 directly concerns an episode in the foundation of the Nuns' Order. Chapter 1 has no direct connection with this theme, and yet is of paramount importance, requiring to be read and re-read with close attention. It is called "Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī in the *Nandakovāda*". The latter is the name of a *sutta* in the Pali Canon, MN 146; a parallel version of the same content exists in the Chinese translation of the *Samyuktāgama*, and there are also a few other fragments of it in Chinese and Tibetan translation.

Anālayo begins the chapter as follows:

In this chapter my aim is to provide a case study reflecting attitudes towards nuns in early Buddhist canonical narrative, as a preparation for turning to the *Vinaya* accounts of the founding of the nuns' order.

Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī is the central protagonist in the foundation history, as she takes the initiative and petitions the Buddha to allow women to go forth, herself becoming the first Buddhist nun. The way her personality and actions are described elsewhere in early Buddhist discourse literature provides a background for her role in the accounts of how the order of nuns came into being.

... I study the narrative portions of the discourse in particular, as these exemplify tendencies recurrent in other early Buddhist texts that involve nuns ... (p.15)

The "Advice to Nandaka" (*Nandakovāda*) is a short and prosaic, though quite detailed, account of how the monks establish a roster by which they take turns in preaching to the nuns, but when it comes to his turn a monk called Nandaka refuses. The Buddha then tells him to preach, and he does so. Up to this point is what Anālayo calls the "Introductory Narrative".

This "Introductory Narrative" has a parallel in the *Samyuktāgama* (SĀ), so close that a casual reader might fail to notice any differences at all, and will certainly fail to register the significance of the differences. However, Anālayo draws attention to eight points of difference between the two versions. In the cases where there is also a version preserved in one of the other texts, it coincides with the SĀ version. This already suggests that it is the Pali version which is innovating. In some cases, the Pali differs because it omits something which the SĀ says, by doing so shows less respect to the nuns; in others the Pali introduces a tone or suggestion faintly derogatory to the nuns.

One or two such details might well be regarded as accidents of textual transmission, but eight, all pointing in the same direction, surely not.

As Anālayo says, the Theravāda version shows “an attitude of distancing nuns in the sense of narratively positioning them at a distance from the Buddha and other monks, who do not speak to them directly, or treat them in a somewhat off-handed manner” (p.15) If it is shown that text after text of the Pali Canon, when compared to the parallel versions (many of them preserved in Chinese) are characterised by this feature, so that the importance of the nuns is systematically minimised, a penetrating light has been cast on the mentality of those who composed the versions that have come down to us.

Moreover, if their portrayal shows nuns at a disadvantage in an account of an episode in which they play a central role, there is likely to be much room for argument about why this should be so: for instance, the account may be the work of a single misogynist monk; or it may simply reflect what took place.

But if we encounter a whole series of instances which suggest that there is “something slightly wrong” (Anālayo’s extremely apposite expression; see for example p.20 line 8) with how nuns have behaved, instances so trivial that they can easily pass beneath the radar, we have discovered powerful evidence that there was something more than “slightly” wrong with the preponderant attitude of monks toward nuns.

Thus the reader of this review should not be dismayed if I reproduce the eight points of difference between SĀ and the Pali MN versions (pp.25-6; I have made a few small changes in wording). Fully to explain their significance would require me to reproduce almost the whole of pp.17-25, so I must be content with whetting the reader’s appetite. I consider this tactic justified by the fact that readers can now download the whole book for themselves, as stated at the head of this review.

1. SĀ: The nuns are introduced by name and called “great disciples”. MN: neither of these.
2. SĀ: Mahāprajāpatī Gotamī sits down. MN: she remains standing.
3. SĀ: Without being asked to do so, the Buddha twice teaches the nuns. MN: The nuns ask the Buddha to teach them, but he does not.

4. SĀ: The Buddha asks the monks regularly to teach the nuns, because he is too old. MN: Why the monks should do that teaching is not explained.
5. SĀ: The Buddha waits until the nuns have left to enquire which monk has not taken his turn. MN: He ignores the presence of the nuns and discusses this delicate topic in front of them.
6. SĀ: The Buddha gets Nandaka to preach to the nuns by having him follow his own example. MN: He just passes Gautamī's request on to Nandaka.
7. SĀ: Nandaka remains silent, thus acknowledging that he had been at fault in not preaching. MN: Nandaka is praised and replies as if he had not been at fault.
8. SĀ: When Nandaka arrives to preach, the nuns welcome him politely. MN: They are as polite as if he were the Buddha.

Anālayo then goes on similarly to analyse the next section of the *sutta*. Nandaka teaches the nuns twice. According to SĀ, at the end of the first teaching, the Buddha tells the monks that all the nuns have as a result become “non-returners”, which means that they are just one step short of Enlightenment; after the second he announces that they have now all taken that final step and “reached the end of *dukkha*” (pp.28-9). The *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* version says the same. So do three Pali commentaries (on the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, the *Thera-gāthā* and the *Therī-gāthā*) which refer to the episode. In the MN version, by contrast, we are not told anything about their attainments the first time, and the second time “the nuns had only reached various levels of awakening, the most backward among them being a stream-enterer” (p.30), i.e., the “lowest of the four stages”.

At first blush, a modern reader will probably surmise that the Pali version, which appears more sober and is less detailed, is the original – or at least the earlier – one, a hypothesis strengthened by the natural assumption that the text of a commentary is likely to be later than that of a *sutta*. Here again, however, Anālayo springs one of his many surprises. Over several pages (31-34) he shows that a simile which compares the nuns' Enlightenment to the moon reaching its fullest form jars with the explanation, used by the MN commentary, that some nuns “had from the outset only aspired to lower stages of awakening” (p.32). On this Anālayo comments: “I am not aware of a precedent for this idea elsewhere

in the discourses: ... that a monastic ...” wishes “to attain only a lower stage and will be fully satisfied with that.” He concludes that here again “the nuns are presented in a less favourable light,” their motivation being (uniquely?) sub-standard for monastics (p.33).

He goes on to connect another change in this story with a rule in the Theravādin *Vinaya* (*pācittiya* 23). This rule forbids monks to go to the nuns’ quarters to teach them (details on p.35). All versions of the *Nandakovāda Sutta*, however, record at the beginning that Nandaka went to the nunnery. But its final narrative says that Nandaka gave leave to the nuns to depart – as if they were the visitors. By this period, the monks were evidently “used to the idea that monks do not go to nunneries to teach”. This inconsistency in the narrative is further evidence “that presenting the nuns in a less favourable light is a later development that affected the Theravāda version of this discourse” (p.35).

The final section of this chapter (pp.36-9) is titled “Narrative Distancing”. Again, I have to skip much interesting material. I choose one example of what the title refers to, simply because it is so straightforward. It concerns an account “which portrays a nun giving a profound and detailed teaching to a lay disciple” (p.36). There are three versions, one of them in the MN. In the other two, at the end “the nun visits the Buddha herself to report about her teaching activities.” But in the MN it is the male lay disciple who visits the Buddha and delivers that report. “As a consequence, whereas in the parallel versions the nun is present when the Buddha lauds her wisdom, in the Pāli version she ... has no direct contact with the Buddha at all” (p.36).

Summarising the chapter (p.38), Anālayo says it shows “androcentric narrative strategies at work.” Here “the distancing of nuns takes place by ignoring their presence and not replying to their requests” while “presenting those who act without consideration towards nuns in a positive light.” The importance and abilities of the nuns are minimised.

It is striking that in this Pāli text the Buddha does not teach the nuns at all, though they ask him three times to do so; the contrast with his portrayal elsewhere in this literature as a compassionate teacher is glaring. This resembles the contrast “between the Buddha’s flat refusal to found an order of nuns, whose existence allegedly¹ spells decline for the whole tradition, and other passages according to which an order of nuns forms an integral part of the Buddha’s dispensation” (*ibid.*).

¹ The printed text says “presumably” but the author has informed me (private communication) that this is a mistake.

The next six chapters divide the story of the founding of the nuns' order into six episodes: "Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī's Petition", "Ānanda's Intervention", "The Buddha's Permission", "Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī's Ordination", "Decline". (Anālayo points out that his treatment in these chapters "incorporates revised extracts" from two of his previous articles (p.39, fn.1).)

Though some of the texts recounting this narrative are in *sutta* collections, it "is basically a *Vinaya* narrative" (p.41). As such, it is to be understood as a part of monastic education, seeking to inculcate in monastics particular moral values and attitudes; it is not merely "an attempt to present historically accurate information" (pp.41-2).

Anālayo grounds his approach on three principles. (1) "[M]aterial common to the seven canonical versions stands a good chance of reflecting a comparatively early textual layer." (I consider this an understatement.) (2) It is helpful to examine "the internal coherence of a particular passage within the entire foundation history." (3) It should likewise be compared "with other discourses or *Vinaya* passages that have a bearing on [its] narrative or doctrinal content" (p.42).

All versions agree that Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī approached the Buddha and requested ordination for herself and a group of female followers, and he refused (p.43). Three versions report that he suggested the alternative of shaving off their hair and donning robes – apparently to cultivate a life of celibacy in a protected environment at home. The versions that do not record his approving this alternative nevertheless describe that they did shave their hair and put on robes, so it is probable that his making such a suggestion is an early feature of the narrative (pp.51-8). We shall see that this is important.

That the Buddha made this alternative suggestion is often overlooked, and so therefore is its implication that the Buddha did not receive Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī's request with a blank refusal but offered a compromise. But the versions tend to multiply the number of times she made the request. Since all versions agree that in the end the Buddha acceded to the original request, "This final outcome makes a total rejection at the outset ... less probable ..., making it likely that the earlier versions of the narrative had only a single refusal," as two versions still do. So the multiplication of requests would reflect the tendency "to present Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī and her mission in a decidedly negative light" (pp.53-4).

The chapter title "Ānanda's Intervention" refers to Ānanda's mediation on behalf of the would-be nuns, which ends by convincing the Buddha to found a

nuns' order. Both the theme of presenting the suppliant women and that of the compromise offered to them are further pursued, more evidence being supplied to corroborate Anālayo's hypotheses. The women arrive at the entrance to the monastery where the Buddha is staying, exhausted, covered in dust and weeping: the dust is to be taken literally and contrasts with the often mentioned cleanliness of the Buddha and Ānanda, but is also symbolic, since in the Canon the lay life is referred to as "the dusty path" and dust stands for desire for sense objects (p.62, fn.14); similarly, crying is "the opposite of the composure to be expected from a well-behaved monastic" (p.63). Thus, this "portrayal of Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī's condition [though absent from some versions]... provides a clear example of the narrative strategy of distancing" (p.90). At the same time, Anālayo cleverly links this to his deduction that originally the Buddha had proposed a compromise: "neither the Buddha nor Ānanda is depicted as censuring her for having a shaven head and wearing robes" (*ibid.*, see also pp.66-7).

The texts ascribe to Ānanda a variety of arguments with which he tries to persuade the Buddha to change his mind – and finally succeeds in doing so.

Anālayo provides an excursus into MN142, the *Dakkhiṇā-vibhaṅga Sutta*, in which Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī tries to give the Buddha two robes and in the end he accepts only one of them; but the issues are complicated and the results inconclusive. One *Vinaya* account says at this point (p.77) that Ānanda tells the Buddha that former Buddhas have always had four "assemblies": monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen. Since this is mentioned by some traditions in the context of the First Council, and since Anālayo has himself referred to this point in previous publications as part of his more general discussion of the Buddha's attitude to women, the reader is surprised to find that here this is mentioned in only one of the source texts, so it does not seem to be crucial. In the end Anālayo decides – convincingly – that Ānanda's clinching argument was the simple point, found in all versions, that women are fully capable of attaining Enlightenment. According to two accounts, this argument was in fact used by Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī as part of her original petition (p.76).

On his way to this conclusion, Anālayo provides a summary (3.4: "Women's Potential for Awakening") conspectus of the relationship of Māra to women. This turns out to be somewhat tenuous. In particular, we learn that "early Buddhist discourses do not unilaterally consider females as snares of Māra who lure innocent males into sexual desire. ... [I]t is the male Māra – and by definition only a male can be Māra – who stands for sensual temptation and sexual aggression" (p.81). Although surely the best known image of Māra at

work, at least in Theravāda countries, is the episode at the culmination of the Buddha's battle with Māra under the Bo tree, when Māra sends his three nubile daughters, Passion, Lust and Disgust, to seduce the Buddha by dancing before him, this is a later hagiographical development.

The next chapter, "The Buddha's Permission", is mainly concerned with the *gurudharmas*. These are 8 special rules for nuns; the Buddha makes their acceptance a pre-condition to his permitting the founding of the nuns' order. Though they concern *vinaya* matters, they differ from the *vinaya* rules which are found in the *prātimokṣa* codes – even though in content some of them replicate rules in the nuns' *prātimokṣa*. They differ in two features: that the standard narrative of how the Buddha came to promulgate a *prātimokṣa* rule is absent for the *gurudharmas*, and that the statement what penalty a breach of one of these regulations will entail is likewise missing. As for the former, the Theravādin *Vinaya* commentary "notes that the *garudhammas* are the only pre-emptive type of regulation found in the Theravāda *Vinaya*" (p.114 fn.73). The latter is not just of obvious practical importance in a law code; in every *prātimokṣa* code the rules are arranged and classified by the penalty which a breach entails. Anālayo comments that maybe "the *gurudharmas* were not considered to be legal rules properly speaking, but rather practical directives" p.113), but I do not find this helpful, since surely all of the rules were practical directives and the distinction sounds anachronistic.

Anālayo has chosen to approach the complicated topic of the *gurudharmas* by discussing the metaphors which accompany them. I feel that the uninitiated reader might have found the subject more accessible if he had begun by discussing the one positive feature they all have in common, the title *gurudharma*. Perhaps because many scholars have tackled this problem, Anālayo does not make clear his own view how one should translate the term. I disagree with such interpretations as "important rules" (Nolot: p.99 fn.27) and "weighty rules" (Swanepoel: p.101 fn.31); I have long thought that (whether or not one likes my particular choice of vocabulary) what the term refers to is "principles of hierarchy" – in other words, where authority lies. This fits Anālayo's suggestion that these rules may have begun as a "simple set of injunctions by the Buddha on how the order of nuns should relate to the already existing order of monks" (p.112).

He amplifies this: "Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī and her followers have left the lay life behind. They have thereby entered the sphere of the monastic jurisdiction of the Buddha. In reply to their following him on his travels (instead of staying

at home as presumably originally envisaged), the Buddha now regulates how things should proceed in order that they should become fully part of the monastic community. In a way they have overstepped the limits inherent in the earlier permission given to them by the Buddha, who now promulgates a set of regulations on what they should not overstep in future. When considered in this way, the promulgation of the *gurudharmas* no longer creates a narrative incoherence, but rather can be seen as in line with the general procedure of laying down rules depicted elsewhere in *Vinaya* literature in response to some kind of overstepping of boundaries by monastics” (p.115).

Anālayo suggests, convincingly, that originally the Buddha laid down a set of 8 *gurudharmas* to establish how the two orders should cooperate (p.111), and that probably the rules underwent changes as time passed. The tendency built into these rules to subordinate the nuns to the monks must have begun early, and may, in my view, account for the term *gurudharma* itself. But the development was, not straightforward. Similes concerned with water are used for all the *gurudharmas*. The commonest compares each rule to a dyke. To a westerner this suggests restraint or control, and Anālayo quotes two interpretations by modern scholars who see the dyke as intended to hold back “the disruptive power of women”(p.93, fn.9). But Anālayo ripostes that in the Pali texts the dyke simile conveys no sense of destruction and does not relate to a flood (*ibid.*); on the contrary, “The accumulated power of the water which would be available if the dyke were to be opened illustrates the power accumulated through mindfulness of the body” (p.93). So he sees the simile as conveying protection. He thinks that such similes “could have originated from a concern [for the monks] to assist and protect” the new order, while “the remainder of the *gurudharmas* are more clearly aimed at subordinating nuns” (p.101).

An example of the latter is that “nuns are not permitted to criticise monks” (p.108). Here again, development does not seem all to have been in the same direction. Whereas according to several versions nuns may not criticise monks, elsewhere in the *Vinayas* there are reports that the Buddha made rules to restrain monks from behaviour for which they had been criticised by nuns. Furthermore, “according to two *aniyata* regulations found similarly in the different *Vinayas*, breaches of the rules by monks can even be pointed out by a trustworthy laywoman, and the monastic community has to take action accordingly... [S]o it seems safe to conclude that the formulation of the *gurudharma* prohibiting nuns in principle from any criticism of monks reflects concerns of later times” (p.109).

I cannot here even mention all Anālayo's discoveries in this area, but let me finally at least refer to two in passing. He discusses the complex and contentious matter of the monastic status, applicable only to nuns, of "probationer" (*sikkhamānā*), and points out that the recording in some *Vinayas* that a woman was found to have been ordained when pregnant "could hardly have happened if from the outset all candidates had been observing the probationary training, which requires [complete] celibacy" (p.98), so the probationary training was probably instituted later (p.99). He also tells us that "versions differ on whether only the order of monks or both orders are required for granting higher ordination" (p.97). The formulation of this rule (*garudhamma* 6) in the Theravāda *Vinaya* is of momentous importance, "since it provides the basis for a legally valid revival of the *bhikkhunī* order" (p.97 fn.21), as Anālayo explains in detail in the article printed earlier in this issue of the *Journal*.

Chapter 5 is on Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī's ordination. In this chapter we find the misogyny appearing in full bloom. Since it is something of a side issue, I shall omit the discussion of how Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī joyfully accepts the *gurudharmas* as if her head is being wreathed in flowers, and turn to how female renunciation is seen as problematic. The commonest simile describes the result as like a household containing few men and many women, which is therefore easy prey for robbers or rapists. Another simile compares it to a field of crops ruined by disease or bad weather. These similes originally envisage a disaster befalling the nuns which comes *from outside* (p.129), but Anālayo traces the process by which the meaning shifts so that it is the nuns themselves who are held to constitute a danger (p.130). In the end, every version conveys that the nuns are the source of danger, and the similes "illustrate the negative repercussions of founding an order of nuns" (p.130). Moreover, the term *brahmacariya*, which first denotes a life of celibacy, is now taken to refer to the Buddha's dispensation, "which now is being threatened by the existence of nuns" (p.133). Modern readers will be irresistibly reminded how even today it is so often the victims who are held responsible for rapes.

In some *Vinayas*, the thought that Buddhism is spoilt by the presence of nuns leads to fantasies which border on the hilarious. "Had an order of nuns not come into existence, life for the monks would have been a paradise. Instead of having to make an effort to seek out those who give alms, the monks would have found householders waiting by the roadside with food and drinks ready ... [They] would have invited the monks to take anything from their homes and followed behind them with the four requisites, beseeching them to accept offerings. The

monks would also have found themselves being invited to sit down in people's houses, just so that the inhabitants might gain some peace. As if this were not yet enough, householders would have invited the monks to step on their clothes and even on their hair, or they would have used their hair to wipe the monks' feet" (p.135).

This account is found in a Chinese version of a *sūtra*. There it is said to have happened under a past Buddha as a plot by Māra to corrupt monks and gain control over them. It is thus probable that originally it was intended humorously. But in the same *Madhyama-Āgama* the same passage is also used to describe what would actually have happened had no order of nuns been created (p.136).

Anālayo goes on to give several pages of negative statements made about women in various texts, showing how we can deduce that they are later additions. Early in this catalogue he writes: "[S]uch statements stand in direct contrast to the positive image of nuns [discussed below]. ... [A] consideration of women as invariably obsessed with sex and being slanderous and deceptive could not hold for the case of a fully awakened nun. Such statements also do not sit well with the attitude underlying the Buddhist evolution myth ... which sees the distinction between males and females as an evolution from a previous stage of sex-less beings." Thus both males and females derive "from the same type of beings" (p.141).

The chapter concludes: "Comparison of the different versions suggests a process of textual growth that has as its starting point the simile depicting a household with many women. This process of growth would have incorporated various and increasingly strident expressions of a negative attitude towards women in general and nuns in particular" (pp.145-6).

Chapter 6, "Decline", deals with the idea that the creation of an order of nuns was responsible for the fact that Buddhism, which otherwise would have lasted on earth for a thousand years, would die out after five hundred. With only small variations, this appears in all *Vinaya* accounts, and Ānanda is blamed for having persuaded the Buddha to permit it.

Anālayo writes: "The problem that the Buddha knowingly does something so detrimental to the duration of his dispensation is indeed not easy to solve" (p.151), and devotes two short sections to particular reasons for the implausibility of this claim. The first shows that there are canonical lists of nuns who were "exemplary in particular abilities, forms of conduct, or attainments" (p.152); Anālayo comments that "a nun can only be declared foremost in some respect if at the same time there were other nuns who had similar qualities" (p.153).

Secondly, there is a whole range of evidence that on many occasions and in various contexts the Buddha said that he had to have four kinds of disciples: monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen. There is a stanza in some canonical texts which highlights that nuns particularly contributed to the dispensation through their learning (p.157), while monks did so through their virtue; and there is historical evidence suggesting that nuns were noted for their preaching (p.155 fn.24). Nuns can hardly have had a poor self-image, for in one *sutta* a nun tells her colleagues that “having performed an act of merit in a past life as a male, (s)he aspired to rebirth as a woman, and from then on kept doing acts of merit, repeatedly and explicitly choosing to be reborn as a woman” (p.153). “[T]he belief that being reborn as a woman is the result of bad karma is not reflected in the early discourses and the *Vinaya*, but is only found in commentarial literature” (*ibid.*). The increase in misogyny evidently continued for centuries.

At the first Council Mahā Kassapa, its convenor, forced Ānanda to confess that in persuading the Buddha to allow the formation of the nuns’ order he had done wrong. Mahā Kassapa “is the champion of asceticism, being himself foremost in the observance of ascetic practices” (p.173). He is also a brahmin who “represents the influence of brahminical thought. This influence is fairly evident in the accounts of the first *saṅgīti*, where several of the accusations levelled against Ānanda seem to originate from brahminical preoccupations, instead of being actual *Vinaya* offences” (p.174). That is indeed a noteworthy point; but can it bear the weight of the conclusion that follows?

Anālayo thinks it can. “It is in this setting that the negative appraisal of the existence of an order of nuns appears to have its home” (*Ibid.*) In particular, some texts put the dire prediction that because of the nuns the Buddha’s teaching will last much less long on earth than it would have otherwise into the mouth of Mahā Kassapa. “During the process of oral transmission, these attitudes would have migrated to become part of the foundation history of the order of nuns and thereby inevitably be attributed to the Buddha himself” (p.177).

Having read the whole book with care and admiration, I am disappointed to find that I am not convinced by this final point. Throughout the book we have read a series of demonstrations of how, albeit irregularly and inconsistently, misogyny distorted many textual accounts of how things came to be. This process began during the Buddha’s lifetime and evidently continued long after his death. The accounts of the first *saṅgīti* must originate from a time when the event was well within living memory, so I find it implausible that what Mahā Kassapa said on that occasion could have been represented as something the Buddha said

many years earlier. I have quoted just above Anālayo's conclusion on pp.145-6 to the previous chapter. It is the view of "the process of growth" which he there states that convinces me, not the dramatic and conspicuous distortion involved in this final hypothesis. As I see it, to accept this interpretation undermines the rest of the book.

In his four-page "Conclusion", Anālayo presents what he calls the "basic storyline" which he has teased out, and shows how the textual developments follow three "trajectories", which they share with other developments in the Buddhist tradition which began soon after the Buddha's death. The changes in how the Buddha himself was viewed Anālayo published in *The Genesis of the Bodhisattva Ideal* (2010), those in how the teachings were formulated he published in *The Dawn of Abhidharma* (2014); in all three cases his results – which I believe are going to stand the test of time – have come from meticulous study of the early canonical sources, mainly those preserved in Chinese and in Pali.

Both of these earlier books, along with an awe-inspiring torrent of articles, represent an extraordinary achievement, to which no other scholar of early Buddhism now alive can hold a candle. But I believe that Anālayo would himself agree that his personal achievement, however impressive and however gratifying, almost pales into insignificance compared to the dazzling revelation he has provided into what the Buddha achieved, and what we can learn from him if we are but willing to listen.

This book gives us a completely new picture of the Buddha's attitude to women and his treatment of them. Anyone with a grain of critical intelligence who learns about the Buddha cannot fail to be puzzled by the apparent inconsistency between his view of general human equality and his alleged reluctance to found an order of nuns, his alleged unequal treatment of nuns and monks, and his alleged prediction that the creation of an order of nuns would damage Buddhism so badly that it would halve the time when Buddhism would exist on this earth. Anālayo has shown that all these allegations, along with many others associated with them, are false; and he has done so by showing how they arose and gradually gained popularity.

Nor does the story end there: it is still alive and kicking – viciously. Those who survey world religions have come to take it for granted that none of them accords full honour and equality to women. In some cases – one only has to think of Christianity and Islam – these distressing facts are thrust before our

eyes almost every time we open a newspaper or turn on the TV news. So we take it for granted that every religion is bound to have this dark side – and maybe we attribute it to the antiquity of the religious traditions, and mutter to ourselves that this is how the world used to be, always and everywhere, and that one can but hope that over the centuries it will improve.

But Anālayo has shown that this passive acceptance will not do: it is based on lies. In the countries dominated by Theravāda Buddhism – Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand – the order of nuns died out just about a thousand years ago. At that point in Buddhist history, a woman could not be validly ordained as a nun unless she underwent a double ceremony, one held by nuns and the other by monks. So when, in a period of war and chaos, the nuns' order died out, it apparently could not be revived – ever.

However, in the article published earlier in this issue, Anālayo goes into full detail to prove that this is wrong. For when the order of nuns was founded, their ordinations were, of necessity, conferred by monks alone. The history of Theravāda jurisprudence tells us that the Buddha allowed this, because there was no other possibility, and he stated repeatedly that in a Buddha's dispensation there had to be nuns.

Now that women are beginning to assert their rights all over the world, it seems to me that Theravāda Buddhism is in a very dangerous position. Women can be ordained in the Mahāyāna traditions of East Asia, but not in those of Tibet or SE Asia (including Sri Lanka). Unless the religious authorities in those countries which for nearly a millennium have not ordained women act fast and decisively to reverse their position, they are committing mass suicide, and the religion they claim to venerate will surely be dead within a couple of generations.

Michael Jerryson (ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Buddhism*, Oxford University Press, 2017. (737 pp.)

Reviewed by Richard Gombrich

After the editor's introduction, this book has 41 chapters by as many authors. It is in two sections: the first, of over 400 pages, can be characterised as historical; it is mainly divided geographically and also deals with globalization, international organizations, and diasporic communities. The second part deals with themes, which it also calls "modalities": economics, politics, media technologies, ecology, gender, music, death, etc. There is an index of 23 pages (enough?). Each chapter has a substantial bibliography, which may indeed turn out to be the volume's most useful contribution. There are a very few figures scattered in the text, but, strangely, they do not seem to be listed.

A work of this size and scope cannot but be primarily a work of reference, virtually impossible to judge until one has used it – and even then, one will only venture to judge the sections used. On taking a quick look at a few chapters, I surmise that the volume is unlikely to draw many criticisms for acts of omission. The editor (presumably helped by his team) has seen to that. It is possible – though this is intended only as a suggestion, not as a firm claim – that he might have done better to risk a few such criticisms in favour of a sharper focus here and there: we all know that less can be more. It will be interesting to see within the next few years how many new perspectives on Buddhism will acknowledge their origin in a reading of this volume.

Since this book has tried to be so comprehensive, it has faced some unusual opportunities – which it has missed. Most obviously, why is there not even one chronological table? These could have brought a vast amount of clarity and useful information at the cost of very little space. This point struck me when, very near the beginning of the first article, I read that "Buddhism began in the sixth century BCE." This is just the traditional Theravādin chronology,

nowadays accepted hardly anywhere outside the Theravāda countries. I would have made it a high priority to have an appendix which included a chart of the calendars adopted by the various Buddhist traditions, also perhaps finding room for the most received modern scholarly opinion.

Another efficient way of conveying information, and even of answering questions which one may not have thought to ask, is to have some maps.

Maps could tell us not only about movements of pilgrims, armies, and diaspora communities, but also about the spread of ideas and institutions.

A more unusual but extremely useful contribution to knowledge would be a tabulation of texts regarded as canonical: where and when the translations and editions were created, which Buddhist communities use texts in which languages, and so forth. Gathering the material for this tabulation would be a major enterprise, but the resulting document need not be too large if it made good use of references to the internet. It is not often that a team of people qualified to create such a document are already assembled.

Batchelor, Stephen. *Secular Buddhism: Imagining the Dharma in an Uncertain World*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017.

Reviewed by Katie Javanaud

The credibility of this book hangs on a single question: stripped of three of its core concepts, *nirvāṇa*, karma and rebirth, can Buddhism survive?

For those disillusioned with institutionalised religion, Batchelor's call to reconfigure the dharma for a secular age may inspire hope for a morally enlightened future that is freed from dogma. Others will see his proposed reconfiguration as too radical. Even if they share his commitment to promoting human flourishing, many will feel uncomfortable with describing the resultant reconfiguration as a form of Buddhism. As a former Buddhist monk, the reticence Batchelor shows towards breaking with the tradition is understandable. However, he fails to explain why other Westerners (who meditate but who are unconvinced by the theories of karma and rebirth) might self-identify as Buddhist. He anticipates the most serious objection to his thesis: to deny the validity of Buddhism's soteriological goal is to risk undermining the "entire edifice of Buddhism itself" (p.79). In response he argues that it is crucial to disentangle those aspects of the dharma which speak to universal human concerns from those which address problems particular to fifth century BCE India. If the contemporary Western outlook cannot accommodate the theories of karma and rebirth, could the secularization of Buddhism ensure the value of traditional meditative *practices* in our world today? For the past forty years, Batchelor has grappled with the task of applying ancient Buddhist insights to the problems of the present. This preoccupation has led to his advocacy of what he now describes as a "fully-fledged" form of secular Buddhism (p.ix).

Batchelor's objectives, methodology and conclusions have often sparked controversy and at times he has experienced the "backlash" of his provocative assertions (p.154). Nevertheless, while those who agree with his unorthodox

position may be in the minority, his ideas are worth taking seriously. There seems to be a growing interest in the possibility of non-religious spirituality – as the popularity of such books as *Religion for Atheists* (by Alain de Botton), *Taking Leave of God* (by Don Cupitt) and, now, *Secular Buddhism* attests. Batchelor is one of the few contemporary writers addressing the uneasy relationship between Buddhist and Western thought head on. Even those who fundamentally disagree with him cannot but appreciate the fearlessness with which he advances his radical arguments. In short, he succeeds in eliciting a response even from those whom he fails to convince. At the very least, his argument suggests that the role Buddhism can play in an increasingly secular world needs to be re-examined.

Structurally, the book feels a little disjointed. There is some repetition, with ideas overlapping across chapters, and some loose ends; but, whatever the weaknesses of such a structure, one senses that this is deliberate. In the final part of the book Batchelor explores the symbiotic relationship between his written work and his artistic output. Since the mid-90's he has been creating collages from discarded objects and, gradually, these have come to represent for him a “silent counterpoint” to his written work (p.252). For him, meditation and artistic creativity are mutually supportive practices. In a concluding remark, he toys with the idea of integrating the two dimensions of his work but concludes that that task is for another day. However, there is a sense in which *Secular Buddhism* is itself a collage. Only the introductory and concluding essays, as well as his interview with Peter Maddock, are published here for the first time. In organizing pre-existing materials in the way he does, Batchelor deploys the structure of his book to convey an important point: whatever we make of *Secular Buddhism*, it is but a “work-in-progress” (p.4). The task of articulating secular Buddhism remains incomplete and so the reader is invited to participate in the on-going discussion.

“Conversation” is a central theme throughout the book. Batchelor sees his expression of secular Buddhism as the product of “conversations” he has had with thinkers within and beyond the Buddhist tradition. He attributes the successful spread of Buddhism over the last 2,500 years to the fact that Buddhists have been remarkably willing to engage with, rather than dismiss out of hand or dogmatically suppress, alternative worldviews. From this perspective, he argues, secularization is the natural next step for Buddhism as it encounters the scientifically attuned modern West. If Buddhism is to avoid becoming “ghettoized” (p.192) or “remaining a marginal interest” (p.143), then, he argues, conversations on the dharma can no longer be confined to universities and

monasteries. Not only must practitioners of Buddhism be invited to explore how they understand the relevance of Buddhism today, but the idea of the saṅgha as essentially monastic needs to be rethought altogether. The reader is encouraged to abandon the “dinosaur mentality” of the religiously conservative and to embrace and celebrate the adaptability of Buddhism (p.130). For Batchelor, the West’s inability to accept the classical Buddhist worldview as literally true does not mean that nothing of value can be salvaged for our times. He implores us to focus more on the practical insights and less on the abstruse metaphysics and cosmology of classical Buddhism.

In the introduction, “In Search of a Voice”, Batchelor identifies four figures who have profoundly influenced the development of his ideas: Śāntideva, Augustine, Gotama and Feuerbach. The cultural/ historical situation and the spiritual/ political objectives of these four figures could hardly be more different, yet each has been an invaluable interlocutor. His assessment of the relationship between the mythic and historical dimensions of the Buddhist narrative has been shaped by the respective attitudes of these four figures towards matters of historicity. When properly appreciated, both myth and history can conduce to human fulfilment. However, given the West’s “heightened sense of historical consciousness”, the time has come to return to the message of the historical Buddha (p.16). Essentially, this is a message of hope in the face of the psychologically afflictive states – greed, hatred and delusion – by which sentient beings are bound. This message Batchelor considers “truly original” in so far as it delivers a secular outlook (p.162).

In describing the Buddha’s teachings as secular, Batchelor exposes himself to accusations of anachronism and cherry picking. His insistence that we disentangle the culturally specific from the universally applicable parts of the Buddha’s teaching will not resolve matters here: the Buddha’s belief in supernatural beings and his commitment to the operation of the karmic law according to which beings are reborn in accordance with their actions are not on a par. While it might be possible to strip Buddhism of the supernatural, to strip it of karma is to leave a gaping hole in the principle of conditionality and to risk undermining the very foundation of Buddhist ethics. Batchelor’s willingness to “bracket off” (p.161) anything attributed to the Buddha which could just as easily have been said by a Brahmin priest or Jain monk will not work in the case of karma: for while belief in karma is almost a pan-Indian phenomenon, each tradition nuances its account of karmic operations in accordance with other factors of its worldview – not least its position on the reality or otherwise of an

inherently existent substantial self. There is already a large body of literature dedicated precisely to establishing that, far from being merely inherited from Brahmanism, the Buddha's karmic theory was original.

The main thesis of the book is that Buddhist thought and practice remain coherent and purposeful even when divested of nirvāṇa, karma and rebirth. In part two, entitled "Buddhism 2.0", he presents his case for radically reconfiguring Buddhism so as to achieve a "gestalt switch" in the prioritization of metaphysical and practical concerns (p.96). For Batchelor, this amounts to reconceiving the *four noble truths* in terms of the *four tasks*. Batchelor recommends, then, that secular Buddhists should cease thinking of the first noble truth, "existence is suffering", and instead should take up the task of "embracing" their suffering. He summarizes the *four tasks* as follows: Embrace, Let go, Stop, Act. He sees the shift of emphasis from *truth* to *task* as so momentous that it heralds the collapse of traditional Buddhism ("Buddhism 1.0") and the birth of secular Buddhism ("Buddhism 2.0"). However, the idea that the four noble truths are to be acted upon has a long precedent in classical Buddhism so it is unclear why Batchelor sees his idea as something completely new. As the Buddha himself emphasizes in the First Sermon, *recognizing* the truth is not enough: it must also be *realized*. This means that mere cognitive assent is insufficient to bring about moral and spiritual transformation in a person: the truth must also be *internalized* so that one comes to live in accordance with it.

Moreover, contrary to Batchelor's claim, Buddhists have not traditionally drawn a dividing line between believers and non-believers on the basis of assent to or rejection of the four noble truths. Of the many differences between the monotheistic traditions of the West and Buddhism, perhaps the most noticeable is that whereas the former place great emphasis on confession of faith, the latter has always been more concerned with practice. In any case, unlike the so-called "revealed truths" of the Abrahamic faiths, the four noble truths are supposed to be empirically verifiable. It is therefore not so much a question of *assenting* to the truth claims as *testing out* the propositions.

In part three, "Thinking Out Loud", Batchelor develops his case for the secularization of Buddhism and, with appeals to the *Cūḷa Māluṅkya Sutta*, calls for the resurrection of Buddhist agnosticism. Meanwhile, he heavily criticizes those who have used their positions as spiritually revered masters as tools for oppression. In part four, "Conversations", he writes: "claiming to have insight into an ultimate metaphysical truth is how representatives of a given orthodoxy maintain their authority over the unenlightened... You can't separate metaphysics

from issues of control and power.” (p.202) Batchelor offers *Secular Buddhism*, in part, as a protest against hierarchical structures and institutionalised religion: it is clear that he regards the secularization of Buddhism as important to the progress of civil, as well as spiritual, liberty.

While the “dogmatic ossification” and abuses of power referred to may be deplorable, it is uncertain that a return to Buddhism’s agnostic roots will be sufficient to solve these problems, which, after all, are regrettably universal (p.225). Again, whilst a “democracy of the imagination” (according to which practitioners create, rather than merely passively receive, spiritual truths) might sound appealing, we have to ask ourselves whether our present theory of truth can accommodate such a transition and, if it cannot, whether we are willing to revise it (p.227). The philosophical implications of embracing secular Buddhism may, therefore, turn out to be too costly. Is ‘truth’ the correspondence between mind-independent reality and propositions or is it something merely invented? Finally, that Batchelor has drawn the right conclusion from the *Cūḷa Māluṅkya Sutta* is something only those persuaded of the legitimacy of secular Buddhism will concede. Insofar as he reads the text as subordinating metaphysical concerns to the task of eradicating suffering, there is nothing new or controversial in his analysis. However, the Buddha’s refusal to comment on such matters as the eternity or otherwise of the world is to be *contrasted* with his unambiguous affirmation that beings are reborn in accordance with their karma. Unlike those posed by Māluṅkyaputta, questions pertaining to nirvāṇa, karma and rebirth are soteriologically relevant: without the karmic mechanism moral and spiritual transformation is impossible, regardless of the eternity of the world.

The adoption of an agnostic stance towards karma and rebirth is reasonable given the absence of definitive evidence either way. Why exactly Batchelor regards his agnosticism as unusual is hard to say: as the *Tevijja Sutta* points out, only those who have attained enlightenment for themselves can be said to have *knowledge* of karmic operations. Hence, regarding karma, the main difference between conservative and secular Buddhists is that for the former the theories of karma and rebirth are morally motivational, whereas for the latter they are not. Batchelor offers a sound reply to those who worry that without karma Buddhists will become moral nihilists: “One of the most lasting and powerful realizations of the [European] Enlightenment was that an atheistic materialist could be just as moral a person as a believer, and maybe even more so.” (p.118)

While Batchelor may experience no loss of spiritual motivation by replacing the goal of nirvāṇa with the aim of achieving “moment-to-moment flourishing

of human life...here on earth,” it is reasonable to suspect that others might (p.150). In the face of the harsh reality of many people’s lives – poverty, disease, political oppression and personal abuses – Batchelor fails to explain why meditation should necessarily be a preferable option to suicide. To accept the first noble truth/ task but not to accept the possibility of final emancipation (nirvāṇa) seems overwhelmingly pessimistic. If suffering is pervasive, if the chances of alleviating one’s suffering are slim, and if there is no life after death in which one would reap the consequences of one’s actions, why not commit suicide? The main defect of this book, then, is Batchelor’s failure to address the question of how secular Buddhism makes sense of suicide and death. However, this question casts a shadow over much of the work and the theme of death recurs throughout. From part one onwards, in which the suicide of the renowned monk and Pāli scholar Ñāṇavīra is recounted, the reader is left wondering how to contextualize the human flourishing Batchelor mentions alongside such horror. Although he does not settle on any one interpretation of Ñāṇavīra’s suicide, at one point he speculates that it might be regarded as an act of “enlightened euthanasia” (p.59). Similarly, in part five Batchelor struggles to make sense of the mysterious deaths of his acquaintances Gert Bastian and Petra Kelly. For Batchelor to persuade his reader that the practice of secular Buddhism is both more *rational* and psychologically *preferable* to suicide, a more detailed and robust account of his conception of the goal of that practice is required. This is not to say that the dawn of secular Buddhism would see an increase in suicidal acts, only that there is no *reason* why it should not.

Secular Buddhism is a thought-provoking and interesting book. It makes an original contribution to the emerging literature on the intersection between traditional and secular values as articulated by new religious movements. Readers must decide for themselves whether they can accept the central argument; I, for my part, cannot. There are too many reasons for scepticism about the prospects of articulating a philosophically coherent as well as psychologically satisfying version of secular Buddhism. Despite this, Batchelor’s work is to be recommended in so far as it encourages reflection on problematic issues which are too often glossed over by the mainstream Buddhist academic community. To find his answers unsatisfactory is not at all the same thing as to find the questions illegitimate.

Yuki Sirimane. *Entering the Stream to Enlightenment: Experiences of the Stages of the Buddhist Path in Contemporary Sri Lanka*. Sheffield: Equinox, 2016. (366pp)¹

Reviewed by Mark Leonard

In this book Sirimane compares the experience of accomplished Buddhist practitioners in Sri Lanka with ancient Buddhist texts. Her field research produces fascinating material which offers new understanding of the Buddhist Path and which, she finds, provides evidence for its authenticity. However, her work is built on assumptions that need to be examined with a critical eye.

Yesterday I gave a lift to a couple from deep in the Blackdown Hills on the Dorset-Somerset border to Birmingham. It was a ragtaggle gathering of three hundred or so assorted Buddhists, environmental activists, and mudlarks living in social bubbles experimenting with zero carbon footprint living.

Buddhafield Green Earth Awakening was blessed by the spirits of the four directions. The Dhamma burned through the morning mist of an Indian summer and shining under a hunters' moon at night, two and a half thousand years on, shaping new ways of applying its principles to the challenges of our times. A palpable sense of renewal was in the air.

It was a tribal gathering. There were workshops, discussions, pujas, neo-pagan ceremonies in the open air and under canvas stretched over geodesic domes. There were encounters around the fire accompanied by the songs of reborn hippy troubadours late into the night.

My companions on the journey to Birmingham embody the equanimity produced by Goenka style *vipassanā* practice. This system was designed to

* This review originally appeared in our previous issue, JOCBS vol.11, but unfortunately it contained many mistakes, so we have decided here to print a corrected version. We apologise to the author and to our readers

address the needs of another social context in another continent in another time. First to give new life to the Dhamma in colonial Burma when institutions of Sangha and State were crumbling under British rule, and then on to India in a form accessible to modern educated Brahminical society. From India, the Dharma travelled on a new “silk road”, carried by hippies from East to West, the basket of the Dhamma shape-shifting at each turn to address the needs of the times.

Now, with the confluence of different tributaries rising in the lofty peaks of Asian Buddhist meditation styles, mindfulness meditation has become, among other things, the new caffeine of Silicon Valley. There is increasing interest in what is actually going on when we pay attention to sensations of breathing, and increasing interest in what the Buddha actually thought and taught.

Meanwhile in Sri Lanka Yuki Sirimane has been exploring a fascinating question. She has gathered first hand accounts from persons, both monks and lay-practitioners, who are reputed to be Noble Persons. She has recorded their experiences, recounted to her in interviews, and looks for themes that seem to confirm their attaining stages of realisation on The Path.

As is proper, Sirimane must first define her terms: Noble Persons and Supramundane Fruits of the Path. There are eight categories of persons: Stream Enterers, Once-returners, Non-returners, Arahants, and those on the way to becoming Noble persons of each description. Most the field research examines the experiences of “Stream Enterers”. There is one interview with an individual who may be an “Arahant”.

Now I am writing in a seminar room in the Knowledge Hub of the Royal Orthopaedic Hospital, between mindfulness classes for NHS staff. This week’s class focuses on how posture affects the way we see ourselves in a social context and how this seems to be reflected in hormones and mood. A submissive posture seems to produce increased levels of stress hormones. A confident posture seems to produce increased levels of testosterone.

As social beings, a sense of threat is often related to the way we feel that people in positions of authority may be evaluating our performance. One example of how this can have a negative impact on the work we do is “sunk-cost bias”. We dedicate resources to a project and feel more and more committed to making it work. Costly projects may run over budget and fail to meet deadlines. The more we invest in a project the less willing we are to scrap it even if the cost-benefits move deeper and deeper into negative returns. Mindfulness has been found to make people better able to drop projects like these. With mindfulness, people are more prepared to appraise current conditions and make judgments based on

what is actually happening rather than basing their judgments on an unrealistic hope and a prayer.

In a medical environment, this is particularly important in diagnosing a patient's condition. A practitioner comes to a diagnosis on the basis of their expertise. We invest in our judgments and subconsciously give less import to information that conflicts with our notions of what is going on. Our perception is selective and the more our sense of things is threatened, the less we notice. We resist change. It's only natural for a practitioner to register symptoms that confirm their diagnosis and pay less attention to indications that confound their expectations. Their reputation is built on their knowhow and a misdiagnosis becomes a threat to their sense of self. This sense of threat further impairs their ability to notice what is actually going on and compounds the tendency to fall prey to what is termed "confirmation bias".

It therefore makes sense to work with posture. In many meditation styles, it is thought to be important to sit in an upright posture. This upright posture then will have an effect on hormones. A posture that produces a sense of confidence will not only reduce the activity of the mind and produce a calming effect in meditation, it will reduced the sense of the risks of getting things wrong. This helps people to be more aware of what is actually going on and helps people to adapt to changing conditions more responsibly and so reduce the effects of cognitive bias.

The practice of developing mindfulness clearly has benefits in terms of more skilful action in society, but where might this practice lead? Perhaps understanding more about the origins of this practice in a Buddhist context will help us to answer this question.

Sirimane derives her definitions from the Pali Canon and from the *Visuddhimagga*, which was compiled in Sri Lanka by a fifth century monk, Buddhaghosa, to elucidate a systematic "Path of Purification". Buddhaghosa's work aimed to summarise the Tripitaka almost 900 years after the Buddha's living teachings were delivered to the inhabitants of Northern India; it is described as "the hub of a complete and coherent method of exegesis of the Tipitaka, using the 'Abhidhamma method' as it is called. And it sets out detailed practical instructions for developing purification of mind." (Bhikkhu Nyanamoli 2011 p. xxvii.)

Sirimane's work, comparing descriptions of development in ancient texts with living experience, is significant not least because of the challenges of doing such research. In a Buddhist context, many are reluctant to relate personal experiences,

as this can be seen as self-promotion; besides, the accounts may even become objects of attachment to themselves or to others seeking similar attainments. (Thus the suspected Arahant talks to Sirimane only because his teacher asks him to do so.) Sirimane recognises this and other potential difficulties in her field research, many of which must be comparable to any qualitative study of this kind. She is Sri Lankan, so one may perhaps suggest that her sense of identity, personal, spiritual and national, is wrapped up in this study.

Notwithstanding this potential for bias, Sirimane comes to what I believe is a very significant conclusion. Her interviewees all describe specific “fetter-breaking” peak experiences that act as milestones on the way to becoming Noble Persons and subsequent attainment of Supramundane Fruits of the Path. She identifies a further requirement of soteriological development: that the peak experience be later conceptually framed in terms that comply with that stage of progression along the path as identified in source texts. The peak experience has then passed, but its after effects and its conceptual framing are the criteria for deciding which “Noble stage” has been attained. The memory of the peak experience in its conceptual frame then becomes firmly fixed in the mind of the Noble Person and so penetrates every aspect of their being.

Could it be that all that we are seeing in this study is a set of experiences predicted by the model of development as it is understood and practised? Are the very experiences described and recorded just the product of the construction of the path as it is taught in a particular social context? Perhaps we should not be so concerned about this as an object of academic curiosity or even from a personal perspective as a Buddhist. What I regard as of much greater social significance is how this framing of the Dhamma is dependent on its re-reading at different times and in different social contexts.

I have always been quite suspicious of what seems to me to be a nihilistic interpretation of the Dhamma: that the intention of practice is to stem the operation of higher functions of the human mind by habituating the nervous system to deconstructing experience down to elements of sensory input. On this interpretation, ability to do this in all circumstances seems to be exactly what defines an Arahant.

On my journey with my companions from the Blackdown Hills to Birmingham, I pressed them to describe what they learned on their *vipassanā* courses. I said I had heard the story of the dependent origination of experience many times before. What was it that was really going on for them? What is “ultimately real”, my new friend said, was the process involved and the sensory experience.

My friend could not tell me why reducing experience to perception of sensory input was different from the experience of an animal. They had posited a reality in the process of deconstruction of their personality reducing self to sensory experience in order to escape from existential pain. This is, I believe, is the danger of trying to understand the Dhamma from a modernist perspective, and it goes back at least as far as the origins of the practices taught today in Sri Lanka.

This process is often described by an analogy: “There is no wood, there are only trees.” This analogy is said to help practitioners to understand that deconstructing self enables them to be free of the existential suffering that arises from a constructed sense of self. However, I believe this view is only, at best, half the story and that it fails *to see the wood for the trees*.

What is left, after the experiential sense of self that we cling to has been completely lost? It is not until the final section in the penultimate chapter of Sirimane’s book, which concerns her sole interview with a suspected Arahant, that the subject of compassion is mentioned. But where does this compassion actually arise from if the sense of self is gone? Of course, this is not the first time this question has been asked!

The standard explanation goes something along the following lines: Once a person thoroughly deconstructs the process of creating the self, they are free from the suffering created by it. Then they are grateful to the Buddha for the Dhamma that has liberated them from suffering and grateful to the Sangha for support along the way, for which some vestigial remnant of self is required. Then, seeing the suffering of other beings, they wish to teach the Dhamma to alleviate their suffering also: the vestigial remnant of self is generating empathy for the illusion of a self.

If we are Buddhists, we may believe this theory. If we are academics, we may find it an interesting subject for research. However, with the growing interest in mindfulness in contemporary society, there is a far more significant issue at stake. Can a critical understanding of Buddhist practice help us to find ways of changing society to shape a world in which the threat to survival of future generations is reduced. If we don’t find new ways of living together and of relating to the natural resources that sustain life on this planet, our collective extinction is a real possibility.

We have evolved as social apes whose survival is dependent on our ability to cooperate. Our individual survival is dependent on our ability to build mutually supportive relationships with others in a group, but our success comes from our ability for abstract thought and language. With this ability we create new

technology, stories of who we are and how we relate to each other within a group. As a group we create a culture in which we enact our lives and shape the world around us.

Whatever we see, we seek to comprehend from the perspectives that have shaped us. Because of our power to make the abstract real, disentangling the real and meaningful from the imaginary and fantastic becomes profoundly significant, not least in the way we recreate the Dhamma in different places and different times. It is this overview that Sirimane and many others, at least since colonial times and quite probably as early as Buddhaghosa, have failed to recognise in their attempt, each in their time, to understand, apply and preserve the Dhamma.

So what is the relevance of Sirimane's findings today? We appear to be witnessing early stirrings of a social revolution that has been precipitated by the Dhamma's most up-to-date tool-kit, which has emerged to meet the needs of society today – *mindfulness*. Sirimane describes “fetter-breaking” peak experiences that, with reflection, lead to progress along the path. This observation seems to make a great deal of sense, but how are we to understand this in a contemporary context?

This is an important question, not only because more and more people are engaging in the practice, but also because we need better to understand its potential implications for society. There are two questions here: What is going on in the individual, and how then does this interact with social change?

On an individual level, contemporary understanding of the mechanisms of mindfulness have been shaped by cognitive therapy. Redirecting attention to sensory experience has a number of therapeutic benefits that seem to fit quite well with a modern Buddhist understanding of Insight Meditation (a common translation of Pali *vipassanā*). This enables a person to disengage from unhelpful or unrealistic ideas and thinking; it opens the gate to experientially based insight into the way thoughts and emotions shape our lives. This gives us a degree of autonomy to choose not to cultivate unhelpful or unrealistic beliefs and the moods they precipitate. Even engaging in short mindfulness meditation practices can produce profound changes; but there are also reports of damaging effects of more intense regimes like the Goenka version of *vipassanā* retreats.

What is lacking is an understanding of how the simple practice of paying attention to sensory experience has these results and what, if any is the function of the Brahma Vihāras? A psychological understanding may well be part of the story, but what is going on in the body when beliefs change as a result

of direct experience? How do these changes then precipitate “fetter-breaking” experiences? Sirimane explains the importance of a conceptual framing of the experience as a defining characteristic of the Noble Person but hardly mentions compassion!

Perhaps we can better understand this process by recognising that the self-construct becomes imprinted on physiology as a result of a complex series of processes. Hormonal states produced by prevailing moods and emotional reactivity result in epigenetic change at a cellular level. Neuroplastic change in the brain takes place as a result of patterns of thinking and behaviour. Activity and diet have an effect. And all of these processes are shaped by how we see ourselves – the self-construct -- in relation to others.

When the self-construct is deconstructed in Insight Meditation, the force that shapes the embodied imprint is released and physiological homeostatic processes of the “organism” return to normal function. The physiological regeneration and neuroplastic change that takes place as a result of this process produces changing body states and changes in perception and cognition that are experienced subjectively. These changes then may precipitate peak experiences, that Sirimane identifies as “fetter breaking experiences”, and long-term shifts in cognition and perception which follow: Supramundane Fruits of the Path.

Of key significance here is sensitivity to internal body states that reflect a more equanimous mind state with low mental activity. Sensitivity to this “base state” takes place via afferent function of the ancient and primitive portion of the vagus nerve, which informs the central nervous system of changes in visceral function that take place as a result of changing states of arousal. When we settle into a relaxed state a number of things take place; digestive organs function; biochemical processing in the liver takes place, removing toxins etc; breathing settles into a rhythm and Heart Rate Variability becomes optimal.

Recent research has begun to understand the function of thin films of connective tissue, the fascia, which hold all of the soft tissue of the body in place. As well as literally “holding us together” the fascia also act as a simple vascular system that enables lymph to remove waste products from bundles of muscle fibres, which they hold together. Stiffness in the body is associated with reduced elasticity and malformation of fascia which impairs their vascular function and can cause pain.

These translucent layers of connective tissue also act as a sense organ. There are as many nerve endings in the fascia as there are in the eyes. The fascia are our “internal eyes”. They tell us where the hand is when we scratch an itch in the

dark. They tell us about our posture, and this informs the central nervous system of our social status, and then the central nervous system instructs the endocrine system to regulate hormone levels to reflect our social status and so our self-image. Developing interoception (awareness of internal body states - a “sense-base” not identified by the Buddha but potentially described as Mindfulness of Body) and increased sensitivity to body-based experience that take place as a result of Insight Meditation (also known as mindfulness) may play a significant role in how the practitioner is affected.

How do the Brahma Vihāras fit in? From a psychological perspective, developing a sense of ease is only possible when a person feels safe. In the Tradition, this sense of safety is afforded by the support of the community of Monks and Nuns. Here, the role of the Saṅgha is only made possible by almsgiving by the lay community, and the practitioner co-opts pro-social mind-states – kindness, compassion and empathetic joy – as the means to establish equanimity in the service of the ultimate goal of Nibbāna.

In our evolution we have gained this sense of safety in a social group that ensures our individual survival. We have developed an advanced capacity for abstract thought shaped by language. We have developed a sense of self that relates to others, the social group and our environment, and this imaginary world has become the window of our experience. We have survived individually and collectively by developing complex relationships with our companions that enable us to co-operate and share resources according to daily need.

As society has evolved we have needed to create increasingly well-defined symbolic references of self and how these relate to others within increasingly complex social structures. It was when agrarian technology provided a food surplus, so that society and language developed in Northern India, that the Buddha taught there. We could say that the whole of the path he taught was to counteract the trend towards the construction of a new sense of self that arose out of these conditions. If so, how do we understand the world-view that informs Sirimane’s study and its implications in contemporary society?

I suggest the answer to this question lies in understanding self as socially constructed. From this perspective it then becomes possible to evaluate the framework of commonly held assumptions about the Buddha’s teachings, which shape Sirimane’s perspectives, her methodology and her findings in a way that is relevant to contemporary society.

The self-construct acts in various ways to acquire the resources needed to ensure the organism’s survival. However, satisfying this need is entirely

dependent on a person's ability to be valued by others in the community. As population density has grown, the social self has had to become increasingly well defined and with this process it has sought to project its need for safety by establishing its position in an increasingly stratified social structure.

Where resources are distributed unequally and privilege accompanies high social status, the weak are disadvantaged and the strong have to protect their gains. Social inequity drives competitive self-interest and individualism. Stress produced under these social conditions creates increasing levels of self-definition, individualistic motivation and strategic manoeuvring to acquire status, which devalue cooperative and pro-social behaviour and select for sociopathic traits.

Deconstructing the self with mindfulness then can be used to diffuse the existential suffering that is produced, but this technique can also be used a means to diffuse the distress caused by perceiving the suffering of others. Then mindfulness becomes a means of maintaining the status quo, and one could then argue, I believe, that the stress on the ideal of the Arahant, who has taken The Path to its logical end, becomes the keystone of a patriarchal State Buddhism. Sirimane's study is not the first time that there has been an attempt to understand Buddhist practice from a rationalistic perspective which, intentionally or otherwise, may act in the service of these ends.

This trend towards seeking scientific validation for Buddhist thinking and practice has shaped the Tradition at least since colonial times. Sirimane's study appears to follow this trajectory in the service of contemporary Theravada Buddhist identity. However, this does not mean that we should not employ empirical methods to study the tradition: we just need to do it better.

The problem arises when we see the self as an internal subjective process. The development of the modern sense of self has come from an idea that subjective experience is an individual process. This is closely linked to the notion that natural selection operates at an individual level and all complex phenomena can be understood by defining the parts which function together. This way of thinking has shaped the idea of the nation state and defined the way Buddhism has been understood, becoming a state religion in Buddhist countries.

This modernistic perspective, which may well go back to Buddhaghosa's time, creates the idea of a separate spiritual realm of experience and downplays the importance of social engagement. Was this really the Buddha's intention? If mindfulness in today's society is not just going to be a tool that supports the status quo by enabling people to cope with the stress of modern life and which is creating dangerously unstable levels of social inequity and destroying the

planet's life support systems, we need to find a way of finding a social antidote to the social forces that are creating the problems humanity faces today. Here the need is not to escape rebirth by snuffing out the burning fire of self-construction, it is to evolve a self-construct that can engage in skilful action to make a better world with others.

Can mindfulness in contemporary society become the bridge between deconstructing the causes of a sick psychology and constructing a foundation for secular ethics based on a greater awareness of our socially embodied experience? If so, the practice of mindfulness in contemporary society will need to be re-evaluated in social terms. This will involve extracting it from its use as a value free intervention that acts to correct stress related psychopathology expressed on an individual by individual basis. From a Buddhist perspective, this will also require reviewing the prominent rationale for its practice as an individual soteriological endeavour. The Brahma Vihāras need to be understood as a driving force to construct a pro-social self framed within an understanding of how we construct self socially and how this self changes in different social contexts to make Buddhism relevant in a modern world. Buddhists then needs to find a way of explaining how equanimity arises out of a sense of embodied meaning and purpose in society, not as a means of escaping it.

Halvor Eifring (ed). *Asian Traditions of Meditation*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016, xv + 254 pp.

Reviewed by Peggy Morgan

This volume began its life as conference papers shared at an Acern Retreat Centre, Oslo, Norway in 2010. It is a collection of twelve essays by eleven different authors and seeks to attempt cross-cultural comparisons. It is the editor Halvor Eifring that addresses this task in the most focused way in his *Introduction* and subsequent two chapters. For example, he acknowledges the difficulty and unsatisfactory nature of distinguishing what is 'Asian' from Judaic, Christian, Islamic and Ancient Greco-Roman traditions of meditation and prayer. The initial two chapters ask *What is Meditation?* and focus on *Types of Meditation* and provide some explicit, critical and useful cross-cultural comparisons with reflections on various alternative methods of doing so which include references to those traditions which lie outside the main brief of the 'Asian' as well as drawing on aspects of the discussions in later chapters of the book.

The chapters then move on to various experienced specialist authors' presentation of 'Hindu' (two chapters) Jaina and Sikh (one chapter each) three chapters on Buddhist and two on indigenous Chinese practices with a final chapter on scientific approaches. There is a more specific focus in the chapters than these broad and contested terms indicate, though we are not told why the authors chose their specific topics as an appropriate contribution to the project as a whole. Edwin F Bryant writes on *Samādhi in the Yoga Sūtras*; Madhu Khanna on *Yantra and Cakra in Tantric Meditation*; Johannes Bronkhorst on the *History of Jaina Meditation*; Kristina Myrvold on *Nām Simran in The Sikh Religion*; Sarah Shaw on *Meditation Objects in Pāli Buddhist Texts*; Geoffrey Samuel on *Tibetan Longevity Meditation*; Morten Schlutter on *Kānhuà Meditation in Chinese Zen*; Harold D. Roth on *Meditation in The Classical Taoist Tradition*; Masaya Mabuchi on *'Quiet Sitting' in Neo-Confucianism*. I suspect that readers

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will go mainly to the specialist and all very interesting chapters which most inform their own research or practice or to extend these out of general interest and in that way I much appreciated the discussions by Shaw and Samuel and Myrvold. The final chapter, which in many ways I found the least well focused and unsatisfactory, is by Hare Holen on *The Science of Meditation*, but perhaps that is the nature of the issues and range of researches involved in this area, not least what we mean by 'science'.

All chapters have informative endnotes, there are glossaries of terms, useful bibliographies and a final index.