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***Samādhi* Power in Imperial Japan**  
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## Editorial

*Richard Gombrich*

While preparing this volume, I have had the pleasure of being sent the article by “Melody” Tzu-Lung Chiu on how – to what extent and in what spirit – Buddhist nuns in mainland China and in Taiwan are observing the precepts laid down in the ancient *Vinaya* canon which they have vowed to live by. She has personally interviewed face to face 35 nuns, 20 on the Mainland and 15 in Taiwan; they live at one of 7 nunneries on the Mainland and 4 nunneries in Taiwan, and Dr Chiu chose those nunneries to give the widest range of institutional type. (Dr. Chiu has built her knowledge of the *Vinaya* on the distinguished research of the scholar who supervised her doctorate at the University of Ghent, Ann Heirman, whose own thesis was published in 2002 as *The Discipline in Four Parts, Rules for Nuns According to the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya*. 3 vols. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass; and it gives us great satisfaction that in this same volume we can also publish an article in this area by Prof. Heirman.)

Dr. Chiu’s article is full of interesting information on points of detail; but most interesting of all, to my mind, is the general attitude which the nuns display to living by the rules. Nearly every nun she interviewed spontaneously explained that what was essential was not the letter of the precepts but the spirit. They had learnt that the function of the rules was to achieve nirvana for themselves and all sentient beings. The rules acted as a constant reminder to be alert and so behave that their behaviour could cause no harm or annoyance to others.

Changes in time, place and circumstance could greatly affect how one regarded the letter of the law, but once one had understood the Buddha’s intention when the precept was first promulgated, one could and should use one’s own judgment. One example must here suffice. There is a rule against eating garlic. The Buddha laid it down when nuns and their assistants responded to a donation



of garlic by a layman by digging up his entire crop, leaving nothing. The spirit of the Buddha's ruling, a nun told Dr Chiu, was that monastics should be concerned about their lay supporters' economic condition. Nowadays this would mean, for instance, that if a layman promised to donate \$100 every month for her support, that was acceptable; but she would transgress the precept against eating garlic if she asked the layman to give her \$30,000, leaving him no money for himself.

We students of Buddhism are well aware that when asked by villagers called the Kālāmas how to sort out the variety of advice and instruction they were given on how to behave, the Buddha told them that they should take no teaching on trust, but test it on the touchstone of their own experience. Here, however, we recall another of the Buddha's most basic teachings. In the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* the Buddha preached with great emphasis that it was misguided to attach importance to his precise words: what counted was the message those words were intended to convey. (It is an irony that so many people have failed to understand that this is the message of his famous parable of the raft (*kullūpama*), which comes in this text.) Though this *sutta* was long ago translated into Chinese along with the rest of the *Majjhima Nikāya* = *Madhyama Āgama*, it is most unlikely that the Chinese nuns whom Dr Chiu interviewed know of it. But they do not need to know the words of that text, because they are steeped in the message they convey – and, more broadly, in the pragmatism that the Buddha constantly showed.

It happened that I was teaching the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* to a Pali pupil in the same week as I copy-edited Dr Chiu's article, and it struck me how textual study and anthropological fieldwork can complement each other and enhance our understanding of the Buddhist tradition. I suspect that Buddhism (as taught by the Buddha) is the only religion in the world in which every message is accompanied by another (a meta-message?) which says, "Don't rush to take this message literally. Look at how it originated, and use your judgment."

We must be grateful to Dr Chiu and her informants for the reminder.

## The Luminous Mind in Theravāda and Dharmaguptaka Discourses

*Anālayo*

*I am indebted to Bhikkhu Brahmāli, Bhikkhunī Dhammadinnā, Michael Radich, Daniel Stuart, and Joseph Walser for comments on a draft version of this paper.*

### Abstract

With this article I examine Pāli discourse references to luminosity of the mind in the light of their parallels, with a view to discerning early stages in the development of a notion that has had a considerable impact on Buddhist thought and practice.

### Introduction

The present paper stands in some degree of continuity with another article in which I examined fire miracles attributed to the Buddha in several discourses.<sup>1</sup> Closer study brought to light instances of such miracles that can be identified as the effect of subsequent developments of the texts in question, quite probably resulting from metaphorical references to fire being interpreted literally.

One example from a Theravāda discourse is the *Pāṭika-sutta* of the *Dīghanikāya*, where the Buddha departs by levitation after having attained the fire element and then emanates a flame as high as seven palm trees. No reference to

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<sup>1</sup> Anālayo 2015.

such attainment or the manifestation of a flame is found in the parallels.<sup>2</sup>

Another instance of the Buddha emanating fire occurs during a visit to a Brahmā, reported in a discourse in the *Samyutta-nikāya*. Here, too, a manifestation of fire is not part of the description of his visit in the parallel versions.<sup>3</sup> Based on a close study of these two instances, I have come to the conclusion that it is fairly probable that these fiery effects are additions to the Theravāda versions of the respective discourses.

The same holds for another example in a Dharmaguptaka discourse. This occurs in a parallel to the *Sakkapañha-sutta* of the *Dirgha-āgama*. The *Dirgha-āgama* discourse depicts the Buddha, on the occasion of a visit paid by the ruler of the Heaven of the Thirty-three, seated in “concentration on fire” such that the whole surrounding mountain appears to be burning.<sup>4</sup> In the *Sakkapañha-sutta* and its other discourse parallels, the meditative abiding of the Buddha does not result in any externally visible fire effect.

Another instance, in what is probably a Dharmaguptaka discourse, leads me from the topic of fire miracles to luminosity, a theme that will occupy me in the remainder of this article. This instance concerns a depiction of a footprint of the Buddha in a range of early discourses. A Gāndhārī fragment version of this depiction, which can with high probability be assigned to a Dharmaguptaka line of textual transmission,<sup>5</sup> imbues this footprint with luminescence.<sup>6</sup> It differs in this respect from its discourse parallels. Again, a description of the wheel-mark on the feet of the previous Buddha Vipasyin in a discourse in the Dharmaguptaka *Dirgha-āgama* differs from its Pāli and Sanskrit fragment parallels by endowing the mark with luminescence.<sup>7</sup> Similar to the cases surveyed above, closer inspection makes it highly probable that attributing luminescence to a footprint of the present Buddha or the wheel-mark on the feet of the previous Buddha are subsequent developments of the respective texts in the Dharmaguptaka reciter tradition.

These instances point to a propensity among Theravāda and Dharmaguptaka reciters to improve on early discourse passages by introducing imagery

<sup>2</sup> DN 24 at DN III 27,12; cf. Anālayo 2015: 23ff.

<sup>3</sup> SN 6.5 at SN I 144,17; cf. Anālayo 2015: 20f.

<sup>4</sup> DĀ 14 at T I 62c12: 入火焰三昧; cf. Anālayo 2015: 13ff.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Salomon 1999: 172f and 2014: 13, as well as Cox 2014: 36–39.

<sup>6</sup> Reconstructed by Allon 2001: 124: *aceata prabh(\*a)śp(\*a)ra*; cf. Anālayo 2017a: 24f.

<sup>7</sup> DĀ 1 at T I 5a29: 足下相輪, 千輻成就, 光光相照 (radiance is also mentioned, however, in an Uighur fragment parallel, Shōgaito 1998: 374 line 2); cf. Anālayo 2017a: 84f.

related to fire and luminosity.<sup>8</sup> In what follows I continue studying this apparent tendency in relation to the notion of luminosity of the mind or meditative practices.<sup>9</sup>

### Luminous (*pabha*) Consciousness

An emphasis on imagery related to luminosity among Theravāda and Dharmaguptaka reciter traditions can be seen in two references to a particular type of consciousness. In the Theravāda discourse collections these two references occur in the *Brahmanimantaṇika-sutta* of the *Majjhima-nikāya* and the *Kevaḍḍha-sutta* of the *Dīgha-nikāya*.<sup>10</sup> The latter has a Dharmaguptaka parallel in the *Dīrgha-āgama* extant in Chinese.

The first of the two instances, found in the *Brahmanimantaṇika-sutta* of the *Majjhima-nikāya*, occurs as part of a contest between Brahmā and the Buddha. The episode as a whole reflects a tendency to mock the claim that Brahmā is all-knowing.<sup>11</sup> The *Brahmanimantaṇika-sutta* begins with the Buddha challenging Baka Brahmā's mistaken belief that his heavenly realm is permanent. A debate ensues, in which both the Buddha and Baka delineate the compass of their respective knowledge. This leads up to a warning by Baka Brahmā that the Buddha will not be able to sustain his vain claim. Next comes the reference with which I am concerned here, which describes an “invisible consciousness”, *viññāṇaṃ*

<sup>8</sup> Needless to say, highlighting such a tendency in these two traditions does not imply that at times such propensity might not manifest in texts transmitted by other traditions. For example, a recollection of the Buddha in SĀ 1158 at T II 308b28 (from a Mūlasarvāstivāda discourse collection) and SĀ<sup>2</sup> 81 at T II 401c27 describes the Buddha as endowed with a halo, something not mentioned in the parallel SN 7.1 at SN I 160,10.

<sup>9</sup> A relationship to wisdom in particular can be found in AN 4.141 at AN II 139,16, according to which *paññā* is superior in luminosity (*pabhā*) to the moon, the sun, and fire. A comparable statement occurs in the otherwise unrelated MĀ 141 at T I 647c23: 諸光明，慧光明為第一， “the luminosity of wisdom is foremost of all luminosities” (although here the moon, sun, and fire are not mentioned explicitly). Another occurrence relates to the Buddha more specifically. SN 1.26 at SN I 15,12 reckons the Buddha to be endowed with splendour (*ābhā*) superior to the sun, the moon, and fire; a comparison found also in the parallels SĀ 1310 at T II 360b29 and SĀ<sup>2</sup> 309 at T II 478c27 (which employ 光明 or just 明 respectively). Langer 2000: 54 notes a parallelism to *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.3.6, according to which the light (*jyotir*) of the *ātman* is superior to the sun, the moon, and fire (as well as to speech). This parallelism leaves open the possibility that the type of presentation found in SN 1.26 and AN 4.141, as well as their parallels, could be responses to such imagery by way of replacing self-conceptions with either the Awakened One or else wisdom.

<sup>10</sup> Alternatively titled *Kevaḍḍha-sutta* or *Kevaṭṭa-sutta*.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. in more detail Anālayo 2011a: 12–15.

*anidassanam*,<sup>12</sup> that is “infinite”, *anantam*, and “luminous in every way”, *sabbato pabham*.<sup>13</sup> Then Baka Brahmā attempts to vanish from the Buddha’s sight as a way of proving his superiority.

The commentary attributes the reference to a consciousness that is “luminous in every way” to the Buddha.<sup>14</sup> Thus, from the commentarial viewpoint, the narrative denouement is as follows: in reply to Baka Brahmā’s warning that the Buddha will be unable to sustain his claim, the Buddha responds by describing the luminous consciousness. In reply to that description, Baka Brahmā announces that he will now disappear.

However, the Ceylonese, PTS, and Siamese edition read as if the reference to the luminous consciousness were spoken by Baka Brahmā, as they lack the quotative *iti* before and after the passage in question.<sup>15</sup> Without the quotative *iti* demarcating a change of speaker, the luminous consciousness appears to be part of the continuous speech delivered by Baka Brahmā. On this reading, Baka Brahmā would support his warning regarding the vanity of the Buddha’s claim by referring to the luminous consciousness. Then he would try to prove the worth of his declaration on this particular consciousness by attempting to disappear.

The Burmese edition has the quotative *iti* before the reference to the invisible and luminous consciousness, but even this edition lacks a quotative after it. Thus here, too, the reference to this type of consciousness is not fully demarcated as text spoken by the Buddha.

Given the uncertainty that emerges in this way, it remains to be seen how far the content of the proclamation can help to identify its speaker. The passage under discussion in the *Brahmanimantaṇika-sutta* qualifies the luminous consciousness as “infinite”, *ananta*. The same term occurs regularly elsewhere in descriptions of the attainment of the sphere of “infinite” space. The other qualification of the luminous consciousness in the *Brahmanimantaṇika-sutta* is “invisible”, *anidassana*. This also occurs in a description of space, which is

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<sup>12</sup> My rendering follows Cone 2010: 560 “(what is) invisible; (what is) not accessible to sight” rather than the more commonly used “non-manifestative”; for a survey of various translations of the term *anidarśana/anidassana* cf. Martini 2011: 145 note 20.

<sup>13</sup> MN 49 at MN I 329,30.

<sup>14</sup> Ps II 413,6.

<sup>15</sup> Chalmers 1926: 237 and Horner 1967: 392 translate it as part of Brahmā’s speech; similarly Nakamura 1955: 78 takes the present passage “to have been addressed to the Buddha by Brahmā”. According to Bodhi in Ñāṇamoli 1995/2005: 1249 note 512, the Sinhalese Buddha Jayanti has *iti*, but in the printed edition at my disposal this is not the case.

said to be immaterial, *arūpa*, and invisible, *anidassana*, a context where the two terms seem to function as near synonyms.<sup>16</sup>

The *Mahānīdāna-sutta* and its parallels, as part of an analysis of notions of a self, recognize the designation of a self that is immaterial and infinite, *arūpa* and *ananta*.<sup>17</sup> In view of the apparent similarity in meaning between the adjectives “immaterial”, *arūpa*, and “invisible”, *anidassana*, a reference to a form of consciousness that is *anidassana* and *ananta* could also reflect such a notion of a self. It follows that an invisible and infinite consciousness need not be expressing a realization of Nirvāṇa, but could also be a claim voiced by someone who has not reached awakening, such as a Brahmā.<sup>18</sup> In other words, the statement in the *Brahmanimantaṇika-sutta* could indeed be attributed to Baka Brahmā in as much as neither “invisible”, *anidassana*, nor “infinite”, *ananta*, make it certain that the Buddha must be the speaker. The same is all the more the case for “luminous”, *pabha*. In fact, as pointed out by Brahmāli (2009: 44f)

<sup>16</sup> MN 21 at MN I 127,36: *ākāso arūpī anidassano* and its parallel MĀ 193 at T I 745c16: “this empty space is immaterial, invisible, and without resistance”, 此虛空非色, 不可見, 無對. Here 不可見 could well be a rendering of an original *anidarśana/anidassana*.

<sup>17</sup> DN 15 at DN II 64,9, with parallels in DĀ 13 at T I 62a23 (which seems to involve a mistranslation of *ānantya/ananta* by way of providing a contrast to *parīta/paritta*, 少, with the term 多), T 14 at T I 244b6, and MĀ 97 at T I 580c9. Already Frauwallner 1953: 236 noted the similarity between the luminous nature of ancient Indian *ātmā* conceptions and the notion of a luminous consciousness that is invisible and infinite. Vetter 1988: 65 comments on the description of consciousness in MN 49 that “this statement corresponds to some descriptions of the great self or the Brahman in the Upaniṣads.” Needless to say, noting such parallelism is only meant to support the suggestion that the statement in MN 49 could indeed be placed into the mouth of Brahmā, without going so far as to consider the entire trajectory discussed here as the sole result of Brahmanical influence. As pointed out by Ruegg 1989: 51f in relation to the luminous mind, it will not do to consider such ideas as entirely “foreign imports at some point in the history of Buddhism under the overwhelming influence of Hinduism and/or Brahmanical philosophy. The problem of the natural luminosity of Mind, the ‘buddhomorphic’ Ground of Awakening and the relation between it and buddhahood as the Fruit of Awakening is in fact too deeply embedded in Buddhist thought, and it is too significant religiously and philosophically, for such an explanation to be wholly satisfactory.”

<sup>18</sup> As already noted by Harvey 1995: 200 and Langer 2000: 52, *anidassana* features as one of the epithets of *Nibbāna* in the *Asaṅkhata-saṃyutta*, SN 43.22 at SN IV 370,7. The counterpart SĀ 890 at T II 224b7 does not include *anidassana/anidarśana* in its corresponding listing. The only term related at all to *dassana/darśana* is 難見, “difficult to see”, which probably goes back to an original *durdṛṣa/duddasa*. This leaves open the possibility, although falling short of any certainty, that the occurrence of *anidassana* in the list in SN 43.22 might reflect a later development, in line with the commentarial understandings of the passages in DN 9 and MN 49 (for a critical examination of which cf. Ñāṇananda 2004: 39–42).



in a discussion of the two discourse references to the invisible consciousness,

due to the qualifiers *ananta* and *pabhā* (sic), *anidassana viññāṇa* is described in a way that resembles the description of certain states of *samādhi* ... it seems plausible, perhaps even likely, that *anidassana viññāṇa* refers to a state of *samādhi*.

In the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel, probably reflecting a Sarvāstivāda lineage of textual transmission,<sup>19</sup> the passage in question is indeed spoken by Brahmā.<sup>20</sup> His actual proclamation differs, however, reading:<sup>21</sup>

Because I am conscious of infinite objects, have infinite knowledge, infinite vision, infinite discrimination, I know each and every thing distinctly.

The Buddha then rebuffs Brahmā's claim by pointing out that anyone who still has notions of a self does not really know.<sup>22</sup>

The *Brahmanimantaniṅka-sutta* could be making basically the same point. If the statement in question should indeed be attributed to Baka Brahmā, the discussion would proceed as follows: the Buddha clarifies that he knows realms that are beyond the ken of Baka Brahmā and then proclaims that, as he knows what does not partake of the earthiness of earth (etc.), he does not appropriate or identify with earth (etc.).<sup>23</sup> In reply, Baka Brahmā warns the Buddha that this claim will turn out to be empty. By way of illustrating this warning, Baka Brahmā refers to the luminous consciousness, presumably standing for a *samādhi* experience that does not partake of the earthiness of earth (etc.).<sup>24</sup> In

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Anālayo 2012b: 516–521 (in reply to Chung and Fukita 2011) and 2017b (in reply to Chung 2014 and 2017).

<sup>20</sup> Although it needs be noted that a subsequent passage, which clearly has to be attributed to the Buddha, is also presented as if it were spoken by Brahmā; cf. MĀ 78 at T I 548c2.

<sup>21</sup> MĀ 78 at T I 548b11: 以識無量境界故, 無量知, 無量見, 無量種別, 我各各知別.

<sup>22</sup> MĀ 78 at T I 548b13: 梵天, 若有沙門梵志於地有地想, 地是我, 地是我所, 我是地所; 彼計地是我已, 便不知地, “Brahmā, if a recluse or brahmin in regard to earth has a perception of earth as ‘earth is me’, ‘earth is mine’, ‘I belong to earth’, having reckoned earth as self, he in turn does not [truly] know earth.”

<sup>23</sup> This part of the discourse is similar to an exposition in the *Mūlapariyāya-sutta*, MN 1 at MN I 5,34, and its parallel EĀ 44.6 at T II 766b11, translated in Pāsādika 2008: 145.

<sup>24</sup> In MN 49 at MN I 329,36 a reference to not partaking of various items includes the heavenly realms about whose existence the Buddha had just informed Brahmā. Thus Brahmā presumably just repeats in his claim the items that the Buddha had listed. In MĀ 78 at T I 548b13 Brahmā's

order to substantiate his superiority, Baka Brahmā then unsuccessfully tries to vanish from the Buddha's sight.

Although, from the viewpoint of the Pāli commentary mentioned above, it might seem natural to consider the remark on the luminous consciousness as spoken by the Buddha, a coherent reading of the *Brahmanimantaṇika-sutta* is possible with the same reference being attributed to Baka Brahmā instead.

Turning to the formulation of the corresponding passage in the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel, the notion of an infinite consciousness is common to the two versions. The qualifications of consciousness as “invisible” and “luminous”, however, are not found in the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel.

Of particular interest to my main topic is the absence of any reference to luminosity in this part of the Chinese version. Luminosity does feature in the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel at a later point, however, when the Buddha and Brahmā engage in a celestial hide-and-seek. According to both versions, whereas Brahmā was unable to disappear from the Buddha's vision, the Buddha successfully accomplished this feat. He was able to make himself heard while at the same time remaining invisible to Brahmā and his assembly. Whereas the *Brahmanimantaṇika-sutta* does not specify how the Buddha managed to remain invisible, according to the *Madhyama-āgama* version what happened was as follows:<sup>25</sup>

[The Buddha] sent forth an extremely bright luminosity, illuminating the entire Brahmā [realm] while in turn remaining hidden himself, causing Brahmā and Brahmā's retinue to hear his voice only, without seeing his appearance.

When viewed from its narrative context, the element of luminosity in the *Madhyama-āgama* version serves to explain how the Buddha performed his feat. This is not clear in the Pāli version, which only describes the effect achieved,

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claim only proceeds up to a mention of the Brahmā world in general, in keeping with the fact that in this version he is the first to list different realms, to which the Buddha then responds with his declaration of non-identification (the corresponding declaration in MN 49 at MN I 329,12 comes before the reference to the invisible consciousness). In MN 49 the proclamation of the luminous consciousness itself comes without any reference to the absence of appropriation or identification. Such a reference would indeed be appropriate only for a statement made by the Buddha, as to be free from appropriation and identification is the result of liberating insight.

<sup>25</sup> MĀ 78 at T I 548c14: 放極妙光明, 照一切梵天, 便自隱住, 使諸梵天及梵天眷屬但聞其聲, 而不見其形.

without explaining the means. In contrast to the function of luminosity in the *Madhyama-āgama* discourse as part of a supernormal feat, the qualification of a type of consciousness that is invisible, *anidassana*, as being at the same time also luminous is less self-evident in its narrative context. The point is that if consciousness is invisible, it is less natural for it to manifest luminosity as well, at least as long as such luminescence is understood as something that is visible to others.<sup>26</sup> This makes it possible, although by no means certain, that the element of luminosity was originally related to the feat performed by the Buddha.

Be that as it may, from the viewpoint of my main topic it seems fair to conclude that the speaker of the reference to a luminous consciousness in the *Brahmanimantanika-sutta* is uncertain, with considerable evidence not in agreement with the commentarial standpoint that the proclamation should be attributed to the Buddha. Whatever may be the final word on the speaker of this proclamation, the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel does not qualify consciousness as luminous. In other words, in the case of this discourse the motif of a luminous type of consciousness is only attested in the Theravāda version.

The other of the two references to be discussed in this part of my exploration occurs in the *Kevaḍḍha-sutta* of the *Dīgha-nikāya*. Here the passage is clearly spoken by the Buddha and the narrative context does seem to concern an experience related to awakening. Whereas, in the case of the *Brahmanimantanika-sutta*, the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel did not qualify consciousness as invisible, in the case of the *Kevaḍḍha-sutta* the parallels agree in this respect. This leaves open the possibility, again without implying any certainty, that the reading in the *Brahmanimantanika-sutta* (and the corresponding commentarial gloss) might have been influenced by the passage in the *Kevaḍḍha-sutta* (and its commentary). In fact the episode in the *Kevaḍḍha-sutta* also mocks the claim that Brahmā is all-knowing, a thematic similarity that would facilitate an influence of one discourse on the other (or of one commentary on the other) within the Pāli oral tradition.

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<sup>26</sup> Thompson 2015: xxi proposes that “according to Indian and Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, the definition of consciousness is that which is luminous and knowing. Luminosity means the ability of consciousness to reveal or disclose.” It seems to me, however, that this is not necessarily the case for early Buddhist thought, where consciousness is something that is receptively aware, not something that actively illuminates, hence luminosity is not part of a general definition of the functions of consciousness. In the same vein, as noted by Berger 2015: 5, “initially, for South Asian Vijñānavāda as well as for foregoing scholastic Buddhism, luminosity was the attainment of a specific moment of enlightenment” and not a general quality of consciousness.

The suggestion of some possible influence between these two discourses finds support in the fact that the Sanskrit fragment parallel to the *Kevaḍḍha-sutta* has a brief reference to not partaking of the earthiness of earth as part of its proclamation of the invisible consciousness.<sup>27</sup> The topic of not partaking of the earthiness of earth, as well as of the suchness of various other things, is taken up in detail in the *Brahmanimantaṇika-sutta* and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel, which clearly is its original context.

Be that as it may, the main plot in the *Kevaḍḍha-sutta* involves a monk who proceeds through various heavenly realms up to that of Mahābrahmā with the question of where the four elements cease without remainder. His persistent enquiries force Mahābrahmā to admit his inability to answer the question and to direct the monk to the Buddha for an answer. The Buddha reformulates the question such that attention shifts from a particular location where the four elements cease to the type of subjective experience in which the four elements no longer find a footing, and where concepts based on the experience of these four (such as the distinction between beauty and ugliness, etc.) and name-and-form cease. The reply given by the Buddha in a parallel found in the Dharmaguptaka *Dīrgha-āgama* is as follows:<sup>28</sup>

Consciousness that is invisible,  
 Infinite, and luminous of its own:  
 This ceasing, the four elements cease,  
 Coarse and subtle, pretty and ugly cease.  
 Herein name-and-form cease.  
 Consciousness ceasing, the remainder [i.e. name-and-form] also ceases.

The Pāli editions of the corresponding passage in the *Kevaḍḍha-sutta* are divided on the issue of luminosity; they agree with the passage translated above in mentioning the “invisible consciousness”, *viññāṇaṃ anidassanaṃ*, which is “infinite”, *anantaṃ*. The Ceylonese and PTS editions have the reading *pahaṃ*

<sup>27</sup> Fragment 389v7, Zhou 2008: 9: *taṃ prthivīprthatvena anabhibhūtaṃ*.

<sup>28</sup> DĀ 24 at T I 102c17: 識無形，無量自有光，此滅四大滅，羸細好醜滅，於此名色滅，識滅餘亦滅；parallel to DN 9 at DN I 223,12. For a translation of DĀ 24 cf. Meisig 1995. DiSimone 2016: 155 quotes Karashima to the effect that in the translation of the *Dīrgha-āgama* the character 滅 at times renders *prahāṇa*; cf. also Hirakawa 1997: 738. On such an understanding, one might even wonder if the passage in DĀ 24 has counterparts to both *pabhaṃ* and *pahaṃ* (in its references to 有光 and 此滅). A reference to cessation is also found in the Tibetan parallel, D 4094, ju 65a3 or Q 5595 tu 72a8: 'gog pa, which here occurs just before its version of the line on the invisible consciousness.

instead of *pabhaṃ*, “luminous”.<sup>29</sup> In a detailed study of this passage in the *Kevaḍḍha-sutta* and of its commentarial exegesis, Norman (1987: 29) argues for an original reading *pahaṃ*,<sup>30</sup> reasoning that

it is likely that when the canonical texts were translated or transformed into the language of the Theravādin canon, which we call Pāli, the redactors thought that *-paha* was inappropriate to the dialect and they wished to translate it. This caused difficulties, because they had to decide between the three different forms: *-pabha*, *-papha*, and *pabhū*.

Rhys Davids and Stede (1921/1993: 448) s.v. *paha* comment that

it is not at all improbable to take *pahaṃ* as ppr. of *pajahati* (as contracted fr. *pajahaṃ* like *pahatvāna* for *pajahitvāna* at Sn 639), thus meaning ‘giving up entirely’.

Discourse parallels to the *Kevaḍḍha-sutta* extant in Sanskrit and Tibetan do not qualify the invisible consciousness as luminous.<sup>31</sup> The same holds for a discourse quotation in the *\*Mahāvibhāṣā*.<sup>32</sup> A reference to the present passage

<sup>29</sup> The reading *pahaṃ* is adopted by Rhys Davids 1899: 283, Neumann 1906/2004: 157, Franke 1913: 166, and Harvey 1995: 199.

<sup>30</sup> In regard to the presently found variant *pahaṃ*, however, Norman 1987: 30 comments: “I do not think that this is a trace of the original pre-Pāli reading. It seems rather to be an error in the Sinhalese scribal tradition, where *ha* and *bha* are very similar and easily confused.”

<sup>31</sup> Fragment 389v7f, Zhou 2008: 9: *vijñāyānidarśanam anantaṃ sarva(ṭa)ḥ pṛthum* and D 4094 *ju* 65a3 or Q 5595 *tu* 72a8: *rnam par shes pa bstan du med pa mtha' yas pa thams cad du khyab cing khyab pa de 'byung bar mi 'gyur gyi*. Here the readings *pṛthum* and *khyab*, “expansive; pervasive”, correspond to a sense of *pahaṃ* rendered by Rhys Davids 1899: 283 as “accessible”, based on the commentary’s gloss of the term as conveying the sense of a ford, *tittha*; cf. Sv II 393,18. Regarding the expression *vijñāyānidarśanam* in the Sanskrit fragment, it is perhaps worthy of note that, according to the commentarial gloss on the expression *viññāṇaṃ anidassanaṃ*, consciousness here expresses the sense “should be cognized”; cf. Sv II 393,14: *viññātabbaṃ ti viññāṇaṃ*. This shifts emphasis from consciousness as endowed with certain attributes to the need to experience *anidassana* (in Sn 137 *nidassana* functions as a noun, hence there is no reason why *anidassana* could not function similarly in the present context). Together with the reading *pahaṃ*, this would help reduce the apparent conflict between the first line of the proclamation and the reference in its last line to the cessation of consciousness.

<sup>32</sup> T 1545 at T XXVII 671a17: 識不見無邊, 周遍廣大性; the sense conveyed by 廣大 is similar to the Sanskrit and Tibetan terms mentioned in the previous note.

in the *Ratnāvalī* also does not mention any luminosity.<sup>33</sup>

To summarize, in the passage from the *Kevaḍḍha-sutta* the original reading might well have been *pahaṃ*; the notion of luminosity would consequently be a later development. Understood along the lines of the suggestion by Rhys Davids and Stede, the verse might have been a pointer to consciousness “given up in every way”, *sabbato pa(ja)haṃ*, as the condition for the four elements to cease.<sup>34</sup> Such an interpretation would better concord with the final line of the same poem in the *Kevaḍḍha-sutta*, which concludes that “through the cessation of consciousness”, *viññāṇassa nirodhena*, name-and-form (as well as concepts related to the experience of the four elements) come to cease.<sup>35</sup> The whole passage could then be understood to express poetically the cessation mode of dependent arising, according to which name-and-form cease with the cessation of consciousness.

From the viewpoint of my main topic, it seems safe to conclude that the poem in the *Kevaḍḍha-sutta* originally need not have been concerned with luminosity. In keeping with the passages surveyed at the outset of this article in relation to fire miracles or the luminosity of the feet of a Buddha, and in keeping with the case of the *Brahmanimantanika-sutta*, a comparative study of the *Kevaḍḍha-sutta* shows that here, too, the notion of luminosity manifests only in (some editions of) the Theravāda and in the Dharmaguptaka version of the discourse.

## Luminous (*pabhassara*) Mind or Mental Qualities

From the qualification *pabha*, in what follows I turn to occurrences which relate

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<sup>33</sup> T 1656 at T XXXII 495b15: 如識處無形，無邊遍一切 and D 4158 *ge* 110a7 or Q 5658 *nge* 133a8: *nam shes bstan med mtha' yas pa, kun du bdag po de la ni*. Here *bdag po* conveys a sense of “lordship”, corresponding to the sense of *pabhū* identified by Norman 1987: 29 as one of the possible ways in which *pahaṃ* was eventually transformed in Pāli. The Chinese 遍, “pervasive”, seems to be similar to the renderings discussed in the two previous notes.

<sup>34</sup> Levman 2014: 387 argues that this would align this last qualification with the preceding two, as “of the three epithets for *viññāṇaṃ*, all are negative compounds (*anidassanaṃ, anantaṃ*) except the last (*sabbato-pahaṃ*). Yet the overall sense of this verse is really a description of *nibbāna* as an absence of consciousness ... therefore it makes more sense to take the third compound as a privative as well.”

<sup>35</sup> The understanding of the expression *nirodhena* by Falk 1943/2006: 68 as “the immobilization of” consciousness and the consequent interpretation of the whole phrase as referring to “the transformation of the consciousness-stream into the transcendent, radiant, universal *viññāṇā*” (sic) is unconvincing and clearly influenced by the agenda to argue the thesis that “the transcendent Dharma=Nirvāṇa was conceived in precanonical Buddhism as radiant all-consciousness.”



the similar term *pabhassara* to the mind or to meditative qualities or practices.<sup>36</sup> One such passage involves the Buddha himself and thereby stands in relation to his fire miracles and footprint, mentioned in the introduction to this article. The passage in question describes an iron ball that has been heated all day such that it becomes more light, soft, workable, and luminous. Similar to the condition of such a heated iron ball, as a result of engaging in a certain meditation practice the Buddha's body becomes more light, soft, workable, and luminous.<sup>37</sup> No parallel to this discourse is known to me, wherefore nothing further can be said from a comparative perspective.

Nevertheless, in relation to my present topic I would like to note that for the Buddha's body to become "more luminous", *pabhassarataro*, at least as long as the term is understood in a visible sense,<sup>38</sup> seems less straightforward than for the same to be said of a heated iron ball. This is not to deny that in describing the mind a metaphor has its place or that meditation practice can have visible effects on the body. My point is only that when iron is heated up, it will indeed emit light, whereas for a comparable effect to happen with the human body of someone immersed in meditation is considerably less self-evident.

Luminosity of the mind occurs again in the context of a description of concentration in the *Saṅgīti-sutta*. The passage in question concerns one out of four modes of concentration, where attention to the perception of light (*āloka*) leads to cultivating a mind endowed with luminescence (*sappabhāsa*).<sup>39</sup> The

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<sup>36</sup> Although the two terms differ etymologically, the former derived from *bhā* and the latter from *bhās*, for ease of presentation I translate both as "luminous"; in fact Turner 1966/1989: 537 and 540 gives the same translation "shine" for both *bhā* and *bhās*.

<sup>37</sup> SN 51.22 at SN V 283,11: *tathāgatassa kāyo lahutarō ceva hoti mudutarō ca kammaniyyataro ca pabhassarataro ca*; on the description of the meditation practice that has this effect cf. also Bodhi 2000: 1947 note 277.

<sup>38</sup> A visible sense carried by the term *pabhassara* can be seen, for example, in MN 93 at MN II 152,14, where it serves to qualify the flame of a fire. Here a visible form of luminosity or radiance is clearly implied. The parallel MĀ 151 at T I 663a23 reads 有光, which employs the Chinese character 光 used elsewhere in this collection to render *prabhāsvara/pabhassara* (another parallel, T 71, does not have the comparison to the appearance of a fire; cf. Anālayo 2011b: 553).

<sup>39</sup> DN 33 at DN III 223,4: *ālokaśāññam manasikaroti ... sappabhāsam cittam bhāveti*; cf. also AN 4.41 at AN II 45,11 and AN 6.29 at AN III 323,17 (no discourse parallel is known to me for either of these two). The expression *sappabhāsa* occurs also in SN 51.11 at SN V 263,27 (etc.), SN 51.12 at SN V 267,14 (etc.), SN 51.14 at SN V 271,15, SN 51.20 at SN V 277,4 (etc.), SN 51.21 at SN V 281,19 (etc.), SN 51.31 at SN V 288,17 (etc.), and SN 51.32 at SN V 289,18 (etc.); for none of these discourses a parallel is known to me. In the case of yet another occurrence in AN 7.58 at AN IV 86,24, the parallels MĀ 83 at T I 559c23 and T 47 at T I 837a28 do not have a

same type of concentration is also mentioned in Sanskrit fragments of the *Saṅgīti-sūtra*, although these do not give a full exposition of the topic. A full exposition can be found only in the *Saṅgītiparyāya*, an early Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma work that contains a wealth of discourse quotations and is based on the *Saṅgīti-sūtra*.<sup>40</sup> The relevant passage does not relate perception of light to any luminescence.<sup>41</sup>

Another passage relevant to my present exploration occurs in the *Dhātuvibhaṅga-sutta*, where a detailed analysis of the elements and of the dependent arising of feelings leads to a profound level of meditative equanimity. The equanimity that has been reached finds illustration in the condition of gold that has been heated and refined by a goldsmith, such that it becomes well and thoroughly refined, faultless, rid of dross, soft, workable, and luminous, ready to be fashioned into any kind of ornament. Similarly, the equanimity reached at this point is pure, bright, soft, workable, and luminous.<sup>42</sup>

A parallel in the *Madhyama-āgama* also has the example of gold that has been refined by a goldsmith such that it has become pure, extremely malleable, and luminous.<sup>43</sup> The same discourse does not, however, qualify the condition of equanimity as luminous.<sup>44</sup> The same holds for two further parallels extant as an individual translation in Chinese and a discourse quotation in Tibetan, found in Śamathadeva's *Abhidharmakośopāyikāṭīkā*; in fact these two versions do not even qualify the gold as luminous.<sup>45</sup>

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corresponding passage on the cultivation of *ālokaśāññā*.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Anālayo 2014a: 86f.

<sup>41</sup> T 1536 at T XXVI 395c18: 於光明想俱行心一境性，若習若修堅作常作精勤修習； translated in Stache-Rosen 1968: 113. The Chinese parallels to DN 33 do not mention this particular set of four types of concentration and are thus of no further help.

<sup>42</sup> MN 140 at MN III 243,11: *athāparaṃ upekkhā* (E: *upekkhā*) *yeva avasissati parisuddhā pariyodātā mudu ca kammaññā ca pabhassarā ca*.

<sup>43</sup> MĀ 162 at T I 691c12: 令淨，極使柔軟而有光明。

<sup>44</sup> Throughout this part of the discourse, MĀ 162 keeps referring to “this pure equanimity”, 此清淨捨, without employing any other qualification; cf. T I 691c6+8+17+19+22+25. Although in Chinese translations the terms “pure” and “luminous” are not necessarily clearly distinguished (cf. the discussion in Silk 2015: 135–140), in the present context 清淨 corresponds to *parisuddha* (or *pariyodātā*) in MN 140 and is not a rendering of *prabhāsvara/pabhassara*. This can be confirmed by consulting the same passage in a Tibetan parallel, D 4094 *ju* 39b6 and Q 5595 *tu* 43a6, which reads: *tshor ba btang snyoms 'di ltar yongs su dag cing byang bas*. Here the relevant term is *yongs su dag*, “pure”. The same holds for the corresponding passage in the *Saddharmasmṛtyupsthāna-sūtra*, Stuart 2015: 272 (§4.1.6): *etāṃ upeṅṣāṃ, evaṃ pariśuddhāṃ evaṃ paryavadātāṃ*.

<sup>45</sup> T 511 at T XIV 780c5 and D 4094 *ju* 39b4 and Q 5595 *tu* 43a4.

From a comparative perspective, the fact that the Pāli version stands alone in attributing luminosity to equanimity makes it less probable that this difference should be attributed to a loss, or even intentional deletion, on the side of the reciter traditions responsible for the transmission of the other three versions, which otherwise are sufficiently different from each other as to make it clear that they do not stem from the same reciter lineage.<sup>46</sup> A more straightforward explanation would be the assumption that an addition to the *Dhātuvibhaṅga-sutta* has taken place, as this requires a change to occur only in one reciter lineage.

Nevertheless, before drawing a firm conclusion it seems wise to explore the matter further. Regarding the option of an intentional deletion, another discourse in the *Madhyama-āgama* and another discourse quotation in the *Abhidharmakośopāyikāṭīkā* agree with their Pāli parallel, the *Upakkilesa-sutta* of the *Majjhima-nikāya*, in describing inner light or luminescence experienced during meditation.<sup>47</sup> In the passage in question the Buddha reports his own experiences in this respect, as a way of giving instructions to a group of monastics who had similar meditative visions. This makes it fairly safe to set aside the possibility that the reciters of the *Madhyama-āgama* or those transmitting the discourses now found as quotations in the *Abhidharmakośopāyikāṭīkā* would have had a problem in principle with such descriptions and therefore a wish to delete such a reference intentionally in their versions of the *Dhātuvibhaṅga-sutta*.

Examining the possibility of textual loss, the parallels to the *Dhātuvibhaṅga-sutta* show no evident signs of having lost text at this juncture. By way of illustration, here is the relevant part in the *Madhyama-āgama* version:<sup>48</sup>

This gold has been heated and refined in various ways by the goldsmith so that it has become pure, extremely malleable, and luminous. That goldsmith accordingly fashions it into embroidery to adorn a new garment, or a finger ring, an arm bracelet, a necklace, or a jewelled hair ornament, working it according to his wishes.

<sup>46</sup> Nattier 2008: 165 note 6 points out that T 511 “contains additional material not found in either” MN 140 or MĀ 162.

<sup>47</sup> MĀ 72 at T I 536c20 uses 光明, the same expression as in MĀ 162 (cf. above note 43). MN 128 at MN III 157,31 employs the term *obhāsa*, from the same root *bhās* as *pabhassara*. The discourse quotation in the *Abhidharmakośopāyikāṭīkā*, D 4094 ju 276a4 or Q 5595 thu 20a6, which only parallels this part of the discourse, has *snang ba*.

<sup>48</sup> MĀ 162 at T I 691c13: 此金者, 於金師以數數足火熟煉令淨, 極使柔軟而有光明已。彼金師者, 隨所施設, 或縫繒綵, 嚴飾新衣, 指鐲, 臂釧, 瓔珞, 寶鬘, 隨意所作。如是, 比丘, 彼比丘作是念: 我此清淨捨移入無量空處。

Monastics, in the same way that monastic reflects: “With this pure equanimity of mine, I could proceed to enter the sphere of infinite space ...”

Turning to the option of an addition on the side of the Pāli tradition, a closer inspection of the relevant passage in the *Dhātuvibhaṅga-sutta* brings to light an irregularity in the description of the state of equanimity reached, which is qualified as follows:

*parisuddhā pariyodātā mudu ca kammaññā ca pabhassarā ca,*  
pure, bright, soft and workable and luminous.

My overly literal translation is on purpose, in order to reflect the fact that the first two qualities “pure” and “bright” follow each other directly. In contrast, the qualities “soft”, “workable”, and “luminous” are related to each other with the conjunction “and”, *ca*. Such irregularity is a fairly certain marker of the fact that two lists have been merged.<sup>49</sup> In the *Dhātuvibhaṅga-sutta* such merger holds not only for the description of equanimity, but also for the gold simile, where the three qualities “soft”, “workable”, and “luminous” come with the conjunction *ca*, but the preceding qualities are without it.<sup>50</sup>

In the section that describes the cultivation of the sphere of infinite space based on such equanimity, however, the *Dhātuvibhaṅga-sutta* uses only the two qualities “pure” and “bright”.<sup>51</sup> This confirms that the original description of the equanimity was only concerned with these two qualities, which in the passage given above follow each other without the conjunction *ca*. Clearly, the other three qualities are later additions.

The overall picture that emerges from the above considerations is as follows: at some stage the entire description of equanimity would have been without a reference to luminosity. This stage is still reflected in the individual translation and the *Abhidharmakośopāyikāṭīkā*. In the *Madhyama-āgama* version, an addition of the quality of luminosity to the gold simile did not spill over into the

<sup>49</sup> For a similar case of addition to a list, evident from the irregular use of *ca*, cf. Anālayo 2014a: 101f.

<sup>50</sup> MN 140 at MN III 243,18: *dhantaṃ sudhantaṃ* (E<sup>c</sup>: *suddhantaṃ*) *niddhantaṃ* (all three terms not in S<sup>c</sup>) *nīhaṭaṃ* (S<sup>c</sup>: *nīhaṭaṃ*) *ninnītakasāvaṃ* (C<sup>c</sup>: *nīhaṭakasāvaṃ*) *mudu ca kammaññā ca pabhassarañ ca*.

<sup>51</sup> MN 140 at MN III 243,25: *imañ ce ahaṃ upekkhaṃ* (E<sup>c</sup>: *upekkaṃ*) *evaṃ parisuddhaṃ evaṃ pariyodātaṃ ākāsañāñcāyatanaṃ upasaṃhareyyaṃ*.

description of equanimity. In the case of the *Dhātuvibhaṅga-sutta*, however, not only the gold, but also the equanimity came to be qualified as luminous.

Whereas the application of the quality “luminous” to gold simply draws out another facet of its condition after it has been thoroughly refined, the same does not hold equally for equanimity. At least I do not find it easy to see in what sense equanimity itself can be considered luminous, as long as this qualification refers to the same externally visible luminosity that can be perceived when seeing refined gold. The present instance is thereby similar to the case of the Buddha’s body, mentioned earlier, where the qualification “more luminous” fits a heated iron ball more naturally than a human body. This does not imply that both descriptions could not be read in a metaphorical sense by the reciters of these passages and their audience. My point is only that to qualify heated iron or purified gold as luminous is more straightforward and thus probably the point of origin for this qualification.

In this way these two examples give the impression that an apparent propensity among Theravāda reciters to use fire and light imagery also found expression in a tendency to relate luminosity to the mind or meditation, a tendency also evident in the same tradition’s version of the *Saṅgīti-sutta*. To explore this possibility further, another three Pāli discourses can be examined, which also compare the mind to gold that is “soft”, “workable”, and “luminous”.<sup>52</sup> In each of these three cases, this set of three qualities comes with the conjunction “and”, *ca*. Unlike the *Dhātuvibhaṅga-sutta*, however, these three are not preceded by other qualities, so that no comparable irregularity in the pattern of listing could manifest and then be discerned.<sup>53</sup>

Only one of these Pāli discourses has a parallel, which is found in the *Samyukta-āgama*, probably transmitted within a Mūlasarvāstivāda reciter lineage. In agreement with the Pāli version, this *Samyukta-āgama* discourse compares training in the higher mind (*adhicitta*) to a goldsmith who refines gold. The Pāli version, which in some editions comprises two distinct and consecutive discourses, applies the set of qualities “soft, workable, and luminous” to the refined gold and to the cultivated mind.<sup>54</sup> The *Samyukta-āgama* parallel also

<sup>52</sup> SN 46.33 at SN V 92,3, AN 3.100.11–15 at AN I 257,25, and AN 5.23 at AN III 16,4.

<sup>53</sup> The set of three is followed by noting that the gold and the mind are not *pabhaṅgu*, “brittle”, where the conjunction “and”, *ca*, also occurs. This is clearly another quality appropriate for a description of gold and thus, if an addition should have occurred, it would have been part of that.

<sup>54</sup> AN 3.100.2 at AN I 254,7: *taṃ hoti jātarūpaṃ ... muduñ* (B<sup>c</sup> and C<sup>c</sup>: *mudu*, S<sup>c</sup>: *muduṃ*) *ca hoti kammaniyañ* (E<sup>c</sup>: *kammaniyañ*) *ca pabhassarañ ca* (again at AN 3.100.13 at AN I 257,24)

uses these qualifications for the gold. It does not, however, apply them to the mind.<sup>55</sup> As a result, in the *Samyukta-āgama* discourse the mind is not qualified as “luminous”.

This confirms the impression that there is a recurrent pattern among Pāli discourses to apply a qualification appropriate for gold to the Buddha’s body, concentration, equanimity, and the mind. This is in line with the pattern mentioned in the introduction to this article, in that Theravāda (and Dharmaguptaka) reciters appear to have had a predilection for fiery and luminous effects. In the Theravāda tradition, this predilection even seems to have led to qualifying concentration, equanimity, and the mind as luminous, and whenever a parallel can be consulted, the qualification “luminous” is not applied to concentration, equanimity, or the mind. In the case of the *Dhātuvihaṅga-sutta*, closer inspection makes it quite certain that the Pāli version has undergone an expansion by incorporating additional qualities in its description of equanimity, one of which is precisely its “luminous” quality.

The perspective that has emerged so far provides a background for assessing another reference to the luminous mind, found in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya*. This reference involves consecutive passages placed at the transition from chapter 5 to chapter 6 of the Ones in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya*. No parallels to these passages are extant from other discourse collections. The fifth and sixth chapters in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya*, in which these passages occur, assemble various short sayings, where it is not always easy to say at what point a particular teaching or discourse ends and another begins.

The first passage in question proclaims that the mind is luminous and defiled by adventitious defilements, followed by the next passage stating that the mind is luminous and freed from adventitious defilements.<sup>56</sup> The expression “defiled by defilements”, *upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭhaṃ*, occurs in two of the three Pāli discourses mentioned above that compare the luminous condition of the mind to refined gold.<sup>57</sup> Although in the present instance the image of the refined gold is no

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and AN 3.100.12 at AN I 257,6: *taṃ hoti cittaṃ muduñ ca kammaniyañ* (C<sup>c</sup>: *kammaññañ*, E<sup>c</sup>: *kammaniyañ*) *ca pabhassarañ ca*.

<sup>55</sup> SĀ 1246 at T II 341c23 describes the gold as “soft, not brittle, luminous, and workable according to one’s wish”, 輕軟, 不斷, 光澤, 屈伸隨意; for a counterpart in the *Yogācārabhūmi* cf. Delhey 2009: 225 and 387 (§4.2.10.1.1) and T 1579 at T XXX 343c19.

<sup>56</sup> AN 1.5.9–10 at AN I 10,5.

<sup>57</sup> SN 46.33 at SN V 92,22 and AN 5.23 at AN III 16,18. A similar usage can be found in AN 4.50 at AN II 53,14, where recluses and brahmins are described as *upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭhā*, a



longer mentioned, the notion of the luminosity of the mind and the qualification of the defilements as “adventitious”, *āgantuka*, seem to be inspired by the gold simile. The simile lists iron, copper, tin, lead, and silver as defilements of gold. These can be considered adventitious in the sense of being extraneous and needing to be removed for the gold to become refined and luminous.

The statement on the luminous mind recurs in the immediately ensuing section of the *Āṅuttara-nikāya* with additional specifications. The whole passage reads as follows:<sup>58</sup>

This mind is luminous, monastics, and it is defiled by adventitious defilements; an unlearned worldling does not understand that as it really is. I declare that therefore there is no cultivation of the mind for an unlearned worldling.

This mind is luminous, monastics, and it is freed from adventitious defilements; a learned noble disciple understands that as it really is. I declare that therefore there is cultivation of the mind for a learned noble disciple.

In view of what a comparative study of other references to the luminous mind has brought to light, it seems fair to propose, as a working hypothesis, that the present passage could be building on the same tendency of Pāli discourses to apply a qualification originating from a simile about gold to the mind. The present passage in fact takes this qualification considerably further than the other Pāli discourses examined so far, as it singles out the luminosity of the mind for special attention and no longer mentions other qualities such as softness and workability.<sup>59</sup> In order to explore this working hypothesis further,

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predicament illustrated through a comparison with the moon and the sun. The expression *upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭhaṃ* applied to the mind, however, seems to be specific to the comparison with refined gold found in SN 46.33 and AN 5.23 and the passage under discussion in AN 1.5.9–10 and AN 1.6.1–2.

<sup>58</sup> AN 1.6.1–2 at AN I 10,10: *pabhassaram idaṃ, bhikkhave, cittaṃ, tañ ca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭhaṃ. taṃ assutavā puthujjano yathābhūtaṃ nappajānāti. tasmā assutavato puthujjanassa cittabhāvanā natthī ti vadāmī ti* (B<sup>c</sup> adds *pathamaṃ*). *pabhassaram idaṃ, bhikkhave, cittaṃ, tañ ca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi vippamuttaṃ. taṃ sutavā ariyasāvako yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti. tasmā sutavato ariyasāvakassa cittabhāvanā atthī ti vadāmī ti* (B<sup>c</sup> adds *dutiyaṃ*).

<sup>59</sup> Interestingly, these are mentioned in a preceding passage, where they occur without a reference to luminosity; cf. AN 1.5.7 at AN I 9,32: *cittaṃ, bhikkhave, bhāvitaṃ bahulīkataṃ muduñ* (B<sup>c</sup>, C<sup>c</sup>, and E<sup>c</sup>: *mudu*) *ca hoti kammaniyañ* (B<sup>c</sup>, C<sup>c</sup>, and E<sup>c</sup>: *kammaññāñ*) *ca*. Unlike AN 1.5.9–10, AN 1.5.7 has a counterpart in Sanskrit fragments; cf. Tripāṭhī 1995: 121 (§2.3): *(ci)ttam*

the implications of the above proclamation need to be examined against the background of the type of thought and doctrine reflected in other discourses.

Notable here is the qualification of the defilements as “adventitious”, *āgantuka*. In the context of the gold simile, such a qualification would indeed be meaningful. As mentioned above, defilements like iron, copper, tin, lead, and silver can be considered “adventitious” to gold in the sense that they are extrinsic to it and can exist independently of it. The same does not hold in the same way for mental defilements, however, inasmuch as these cannot exist independently of the mind.<sup>60</sup> Yet this is what the qualification of the defilements as “adventitious”, *āgantuka*, to some extent conveys, as it employs a term which in its usage elsewhere in the *Vinaya* and other Pāli discourses expresses the sense of a recently arrived visitor.<sup>61</sup> From the viewpoint of this usage, it could even seem as if the luminous mind was somehow in existence earlier and the defilements are a sort of visitor that came later.<sup>62</sup> The idea that a mental defilement could somehow be set apart from the mind in which it occurs is to my knowledge not attested anywhere else in the early discourses.

Luminosity makes its appearance in a Buddhist evolution myth, if it can be called such, found in the *Aggañña-sutta* and its parallels. The tale describes how, during one of the cyclic destructions of the material world, living beings are reborn in a higher heaven, corresponding to the second absorption. In that heaven they live in a self-luminous (*sayampabhā*) condition until the material world reappears again and they are in turn reborn on earth.<sup>63</sup> Due to greed, these

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*hi bhikṣavaḥ subhāvitaṃ mī(du bhavati karmaṇyaṃ)*. This makes it possible, although far from certain, that the apparent tendency in Theravāda discourses to add luminosity to such descriptions has in this case led to an adjacent passage on its own, instead of becoming part of AN 1.5.7 itself.

<sup>60</sup> Sferra 1999: 88 summarizes criticism raised in texts of late Indian Buddhism as follows: “impurities, like everything else, do not possess an independent reality ... they could not exist if there were no mind. The adventitious nature of attachment, and so forth, exists in relation to the mind. After all, it is the mind that becomes attached.”

<sup>61</sup> Cf., e.g., Vin II 210,11ff, where monastics who arrive for a visit are qualified as *āgantuka* to distinguish them from resident monastics. A similar usage can be seen, e.g., in MN 67 at MN I 456,16. The motif of visitors occurs also in a simile of a guesthouse that serves to illustrate the arising of various feelings in the body; cf. SN 36.14 at SN IV 219,9 and its parallel SĀ 472 at T II 120c9. Both versions do not apply the qualification *āgantuka* 客 to feelings themselves. On the guest/host motif in Chán (禪) cf., e.g., Berger 2015: 145–147.

<sup>62</sup> This finds reflection in a comment on the *pabhassara citta* in AN 1.6.1–2 by Amaro 2003: 72 to the effect that “the things that appear to defile this purity are only visitors passing through, just wandering or drifting by.”

<sup>63</sup> Cf., e.g., DN 27 at DN III 84,29 and its parallels DĀ 5 at T I 37c1, T 10 at T I 218b17, MĀ

self-luminous beings gradually degenerate and eventually materialize as human beings. The arising of greed already shows that these self-luminous beings are not free from defilements.

Again, a discourse in the *Dīrgha-āgama* depicts how, during a great conflagration that consumes the entire earth, the flames reach up to this particular celestial realm such that several of its inhabitants become afraid.<sup>64</sup> Fear is one of the “defilements”, *upakkilesa*, listed in the *Upakkilesa-sutta* and its parallel.<sup>65</sup> This confirms that these self-luminous beings could not be reckoned as free from defilements. The same conclusion emerges also from a passage in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, according to which some inhabitants of this celestial realm could even be reborn in hell, as animals, or as hungry ghosts.<sup>66</sup> Such rebirth would not be possible if the self-luminous beings had been free from defilements. Hence the notion of an originally luminous mind that in some form was in existence before defilements manifested could not be a reflection of this evolution myth. Instead, it seems to be the result of a literal application of the gold simile to the mind.

In fact for any of these beings to be reborn at all, be it as humans or in lower realms, shows that they are not free from craving for existence. Of such craving for existence, no beginning point can be discerned, before which there was no craving for existence.<sup>67</sup> The same holds for the faring on in the round of rebirths, which extends so far back into the past that a beginning point cannot be determined.<sup>68</sup> In other words, according to early Buddhist epistemology it would not be possible to identify a time in the past at which a supposedly luminous mind was already in existence and after which only it came to be defiled by

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154 at T I 674b18, and D 4094 *ju* 192b2 or Q 5595 *tu* 219b5. The luminous condition of celestial realms recurs elsewhere in the early discourses; cf. also, e.g., MN 50 at MN I 337,26 and its parallels MĀ 131 at T I 622b10, T 66 at T I 866b7, and T 67 at T I 868c4, or SN 6.5 at SN I 145,24 and its parallels SĀ 1196 at T II 325a18 and SĀ<sup>2</sup> 109 at T II 413a9.

<sup>64</sup> DĀ 30 at T I 138b25.

<sup>65</sup> MN 128 at MN III 158,25 and MĀ 72 at T I 537c16.

<sup>66</sup> AN 4.123 at AN II 127,10. This discourse does not seem to have a parallel properly speaking; the distantly related MĀ 168 at T I 700c17 only describes rebirth in this celestial realm, but does not broach the topic of what happens subsequently.

<sup>67</sup> AN 10.62 at AN V 116,15 and its parallels MĀ 52 at T I 487c27 and T 36 at T I 819c23.

<sup>68</sup> Cf., e.g., SN 15.3 at SN II 179,21 and its parallels SĀ 938 at T II 240c26 and SĀ<sup>2</sup> 331 at T II 486a19, part of a corresponding statement has been preserved in Sanskrit fragment SHT 1.167 R3, Waldschmidt, Clawiter, and Holzmann 1965, 95. Another parallel, EĀ 51.1 at T II 814a28, has no counterpart to the introductory statement, although the rest of the discourse makes it clear that the same basic principle holds.

craving. Once a time in the past when craving and defilements have not been present in the mind is not discernible, there seems little scope to postulate that the mind is naturally pure. Instead, one might even say that it is naturally defiled. But since defilements are conditioned phenomena, they can be removed. That is, purity and freedom from defilements is a potentiality of the mind that requires being brought about through meditative cultivation, rather than being a return to an already existing inherent nature.

Yet this is to some extent a sense conveyed by the identification of cultivation of the mind in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* passage with knowing its luminous condition. In the early discourses in general the task is to purify the mind gradually through various practices, to be cultivated by avoiding the two extremes of excessive striving and undue laxity. In contrast, the present passage could give the impression that recognition of luminosity is what really matters for “cultivation of the mind”. Although this is just a nuance in the above passage, later tradition will articulate this more fully, in that “cultivation of the mind” comes to be concerned with recognition of its alleged innate purity. I will return to this below.

The *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and its parallels list various states of mind for mindful contemplation, distinguishing between, for example, mind with lust, *sarāgaṃ cittaṃ*, and mind without lust, *vītarāgaṃ cittaṃ*.<sup>69</sup> The contrast between “with lust” and “without lust” made in this way shows that early Buddhist thought was able to express the possibility of mental purification and freedom from defilements without needing to postulate an essential nature of the mind that is in principle unaffected by defilements. By way of illustration, just as for fruit to ripen there is no need to postulate that the ripe fruit already exists in the corresponding flower that has just blossomed on a tree, so for a mind to become purified there is no need to postulate that an intrinsic purity already exists in its present defiled state. Instead of creating a contrast between an allegedly inherent nature of the mind and defilements set apart as something adventitious, in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and other early discourses the mind is simply viewed as an impermanent and conditioned process that can occur either “with” or else “without” defilements. Here *citta* simply refers to a contingent mental state.

Moreover, a state of mind with lust or any other such defilement would not be luminous. According to the *Upakkilesa-sutta* and its parallels, the presence of any out of a range of defilements (*upakkilesa*) results in a loss of whatever

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<sup>69</sup> MN 10 at MN I 59,30, MĀ 98 at T I 584a6, and EĀ 21.1 at T II 568c22.

inner light or luminescence (*obhāsa*) had been experienced during meditation.<sup>70</sup> This confirms that, from the perspective reflected in the *Upakkilesa-sutta* and its parallels, a mind defiled by defilements does not remain in a condition of luminosity.<sup>71</sup> In other words, the luminous mind can be expected to lose its pure condition once a defilement manifests in it.<sup>72</sup>

In this way the *Upakkilesa-sutta* and its parallels show that early Buddhist thought does recognize meditative experience of light or luminescence, but these are meditative visions rather than an intrinsic quality of the mind. In fact references to mental experiences of luminosity are cross-cultural phenomena,<sup>73</sup> thus my exploration in this article is certainly not meant to deny the subjective validity of such experiences. My intention is only to discern developments in the interpretation of these experiences. From the viewpoint of the *Upakkilesa-sutta* and its parallels, it seems clear that inner experiences of luminosity come into being through successful cultivation of concentration and the temporary absence of defilements, but with the arising of defilements and the consequent loss of concentration they disappear.

The simile of refining gold in two Pāli discourses, mentioned earlier,<sup>74</sup> confirms the presentation in the *Upakkilesa-sutta* and its parallels. According to both of these Pāli discourses, when in a defiled condition the mind is not luminous and, comparable to defiled gold that is not fit for work, such a defiled mind does not become rightly concentrated.<sup>75</sup> In other words, here luminosity of

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<sup>70</sup> MN 128 at MN III 158,4, MĀ 72 at T I 536c28, and a parallel to this part of the discourse in D 4094 *ju* 276b1 or Q 5595 *thu* 20b2.

<sup>71</sup> According to the *Atthasālinī*, As 140,27, however, the luminous mind is pure even when in an unwholesome condition, just as a tributary is similar to the river. The simile does not seem to be particularly successful in resolving the problem of how to account for the coexistence of luminosity and defilement.

<sup>72</sup> An objection along these lines can be found in the *\*Mahāvibhāṣā*, T 1545 at T XXVII 140b24, or else in the so-called Spitzer fragment, rendered by Franco 2000: 95f as: “what is luminous cannot be defiled” and “at the time when it is defiled it is not luminous ... nor are the defiled and the non-defiled apprehended at the same time ... therefore, how could it be known that a luminous consciousness is defiled?” Keenan 1982: 11 formulates the same problem from the viewpoint of early Yogācāra as follows: “If the mind is originally pure, then how is one to account for empirical defilement?”

<sup>73</sup> For a study of luminosity of the mind in Indian and Chinese thought cf. Berger 2015.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. above note 52.

<sup>75</sup> SN 46.33 at SN V 92,23 and AN 5.23 at AN III 16,20 present the gain of concentration by the mind free from being defiled by any of the five hindrances as instrumental for progress to the destruction of the influxes.

the mind reflects the successful achievement of concentration.

The same holds for the statement on the luminous mind in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* passage translated above, where “cultivation of the mind” stands for developing concentration. In its present formulation, the reference to luminosity does not imply a form of awakening.<sup>76</sup> As pointed out by Karunaratne (1999: 219):

what is meant by lustrous and pure mind (*pabhassara/prakrtipariśuddha*) is not a state of mind which is absolutely pure, nor the pure mind which is synonymous with emancipation. It may be explained as pure only in the sense, and to the extent, that it is not disturbed or influenced by external stimuli.

Similarly Shih Ru-nien (2009: 168) explains that

the Pali texts only emphasize the knowledge of the innate purity of the mind as a prerequisite step in the cultivation of the mind and the restoration of the purity of the mind is not the end of religious practices. As a matter of fact, after the removal of the defilements, the mind is not only pure, tranquil, and luminous but also soft, pliant, and adaptable. It then becomes suitable for the destruction of all the *āsavas* or the cultivation of the seven limbs of wisdom, and the like. This means that the tranquil, luminous, and pliable mind is just the basis for further religious practices.

Another point worth further exploration is the contrast, drawn in the passage from the *Āṅguttara-nikāya*, between the unlearned worldling and the noble disciple regarding cultivation of the mind. The unlearned worldling does not know the luminous condition of the defiled mind as it really is, whereas the noble disciple knows the luminous condition of the undefiled mind as it really is. Here the worldling fails at something that would seem quite difficult. How could a worldling be expected to know that the mind is luminous when it is in a defiled condition? In contrast, the noble disciple faces

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<sup>76</sup> Such implications are sometimes read into the passage; cf., e.g., Dutt 1960/1971: 285, who assumes that the description in AN 1.6.1–2 points to “the original pure state of mind, to which the perfect reverts after thoroughly purifying his mind of all impurities.” Yet the formulation in AN 1.6.1–2 provides no basis for such suggestions, given that, in its usage in the early discourses, the expression “noble disciple” is not confined to those who have attained a level of awakening.

what appears to be a much easier task, namely recognition of the luminous mind when it is not defiled.

Such unequal treatment is unusual. Other Pāli discourses that also draw a contrast between the unlearned worldling and the noble disciple, in regard to knowing something as it really is, concern the same task.<sup>77</sup> This is indeed what one would expect, in that the difference between the two should manifest in relation to the same requirement. Applied to the present context, a proposal in line with the procedure adopted elsewhere in the discourses would be that the unlearned worldling and the noble disciple differ in their ability to distinguish between a defiled mind and a mind that is not defiled. Whereas the worldling is not able to recognize this indeed crucial difference, the noble disciple does recognize it. Such a contrast could be expressed in a statement of this type:

This mind is defiled by defilements, monastics; an unlearned worldling does not understand that as it really is. I declare that therefore there is no cultivation of the mind for an unlearned worldling.

This mind is freed from defilements, monastics; a learned noble disciple understands that as it really is. I declare that therefore there is cultivation of the mind for a learned noble disciple.

A statement of this type would be fully in line with the position taken in other early discourses. Lack of understanding of what defiles the mind will make it indeed impossible for the worldling to cultivate it. In contrast, understanding what defiles the mind enables the noble disciple to take advantage of those moments when it is free from defilements in order to lead it into deeper concentration. It is only once the qualification “luminous” is applied to the mind and the defilements consequently become “adventitious” that the tasks faced by the worldling and the noble disciple come to differ substantially.

The various points explored so far make it, in my view, safe to conclude that the working hypothesis mentioned earlier is indeed correct. In other words, the present passage in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* does seem to be distinctly late. It builds on and further expands a notion resulting from a description of gold that led to the addition of a qualification of the mind as “luminous”. At the time of

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<sup>77</sup> Cf., e.g., MN 64 at MN I 433,22 or else a series of consecutive discourse, SN 22.126–134 at SN III 171,6.



the coming into being of this apparent addition, the resultant phrasing in the passage in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* need not have carried any special implications. In line with other instances surveyed earlier, it can be assumed to have been just another instance where the fascination exerted by the imagery of luminous gold and its potential as a metaphor influenced the wording of a description originally not concerned with any luminosity of the mind.

Given that the *Upakkilesa-sutta* and its parallels describe inner experiences of light during meditation, a qualification of the mind as luminous is hardly problematic in itself. Even though the use of the same qualification is less straightforward when applied to equanimity or the body of the Buddha, leaving room for a more metaphorical understanding could still accommodate such instances. What does make the above *Āṅguttara-nikāya* passage problematic, however, is the actual formulation that results from this apparent addition, as this can be read in ways that reify the ‘real’ mind as naturally pure and luminous, rather than being simply a series of different states, none of which is more real or natural than the other.

Such a reading would in turn have invested the actual formulation resulting from the introduction of the motif of luminosity in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* passage with increased significance. Once the imagery of luminescence designates a nature of the mind considered to be unaffected by defilements and hence intrinsically pure, inner light-experiences of the type described in the *Upakkilesa-sutta* and its parallels could easily have come to be invested with an increased degree of importance. Instead of being just a reflection of having achieved some degree of concentration, they can be seen as rather profound realizations, authenticating a practitioner as having become a truly noble disciple acquainted with what it takes to cultivate the mind.

Another and perhaps even more powerful stimulant for an increasing interest in the mode of description found in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* passage under discussion would have been the coming into vogue of the theory of momentariness.<sup>78</sup> Once the mind is conceptualized as a series of discrete mind-moments that pass away as soon as they arise, something has to be found to explain continuity, in order to account for memory, identity, and rebirth. A search in this direction would naturally have led to an increased interest in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* passage’s description of a mind that apparently remains in a condition of luminosity independent of the arising and passing away of any defilements.

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<sup>78</sup> On the emergence and early stages of this theory cf. von Rospatt 1995.

Faced with the problems resulting from the theory of momentariness, the Theravāda commentarial tradition relied on the notion of the *bhavaṅga* to explain continuity alongside rapidly arising and disappearing mind-moments.<sup>79</sup> The commentary on the passage under discussion from the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* identifies the *bhavaṅga* with the luminous mind.<sup>80</sup> This confirms that the apparent application of the gold imagery to the present passage came to carry implications for later tradition that can safely be assumed not to have been originally intended.

In line with the shared interest between Theravāda and Dharmaguptaka discourses in imagery related to fire and luminosity, a parallel to the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* passage under discussion can be found in the \**Śāriputrābhidharma*, an Abhidharma treatise quite probably representing the Dharmaguptaka tradition.<sup>81</sup> The relevant part proceeds as follows:<sup>82</sup>

The mind is by nature pure; it is defiled by adventitious defilements. Because of being unlearned, a worldling is unable to know and see it as it really is and does not cultivate the mind. Because of being learned, a noble disciple is able to know and see it as it really is and cultivates the mind.

The mind is by nature pure; it is freed from adventitious defilements. Because of being unlearned, a worldling is unable to know and see it as it really is and does not cultivate the mind. Because of being

<sup>79</sup> According to Gethin 1994: 29, “the notion of *bhavaṅga* is, in part at least, intended to provide some account of why I am me and why I continue to behave like me; it is surely intended to give some theoretical basis for observed consistency in behaviour patterns, character traits and the habitual mental states of a given individual.” In sum, in the words of Gethin 1994: 31, the “notion of *bhavaṅga* as explicitly expounded in the Theravādin Abhidhamma seems certainly intended to provide some account of psychological continuity.”

<sup>80</sup> Mp I 60,10; on which Gethin 1994: 34 comments that this commentarial identification “seems to raise more questions than it answers. For example, in the case of beings reborn in the ‘descents’ where *bhavaṅga* is always unwholesome resultant, how can it be said to be defiled in name only and not truly defiled? In what sense is it pure, clear or radiant?”

<sup>81</sup> Bureau 1950.

<sup>82</sup> T 1548 at T XXVIII 697b18: 心性清淨, 為客塵染. 凡夫未聞故, 不能如實知見亦無修心. 聖人聞故, 如實知見亦有修心. 心性清淨, 離客塵垢. 凡夫未聞故, 不能如實知見亦無修心. 聖人聞故, 能如實知見亦有修心; the first part of this passage has already been translated by Silk 2015: 121. The quoted text occurs at the outset of the Chapter on the Mind (心品) and is not explicitly marked as a discourse quotation. Nevertheless, it might well go back to a no longer extant Dharmaguptaka discourse parallel to AN 1.6.1–2.

learned, a noble disciple is able to know and see it as it really is and cultivates the mind.

The use of the qualification “pure” would more naturally reflect an original reading like *(vi)śuddhi/(vi)suddhi*, although due to the uncertainties involved with translation into Chinese it is also quite possible that the original had instead a term corresponding to *prabhāsvara/pabhassara*. In later tradition both notions occur similarly and manifest in a range of texts.

These two notions often come together with a specification also found in the \**Śāriputrābhidharma*, namely the qualification “by nature”, 性 (*prakṛti*). The mind is “by nature” or “intrinsically” pure or luminous. This makes explicit an understanding of the luminous or pure mind and its relation to cultivation of the mind that in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* passage is not yet articulated, but can easily be read into it. The true nature of the mind is to be pure and/or luminous, and it is recognition of this nature that becomes the object of knowledge and vision, and hence of cultivation of the mind.

The presentation in the \**Śāriputrābhidharma* of the contrast between the noble disciple and the worldling also evens out a problem in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* passage, discussed above, where the worldling’s lack of knowledge relates only to the defiled luminous mind and the noble disciple’s insight only to the undefiled luminous mind. In the passage in the \**Śāriputrābhidharma* the worldling is ignorant of the luminous mind with and without defilements, whereas the noble disciple has understanding of both of these conditions. This is clearly the more meaningful presentation, which in turn makes it quite possible that the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* passage reflects an interim stage when the “luminosity” of the mind and the “adventitious” nature of defilements have recently been combined with the contrast between the worldling’s and the noble disciple’s cultivation of the mind, and the results of this move have not yet been fully smoothed out.

### Luminosity in Later Traditions

Perhaps precisely due to its uniqueness among the teachings found in other early discourses in general, the contrast between the luminous nature of the mind and the adventitious character of its defilements has had considerable impact on later tradition.<sup>83</sup> The notion of a luminous mind defiled by adventitious defilement

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<sup>83</sup> For surveys of relevant passages cf. Ruegg 1969: 411–454 and Radich 2016: 268–279.

became a tenet upheld also by the Mahāsāṅghikas and the Vibhajyavādins.<sup>84</sup>

The same impact can also be seen in a range of texts and forms of practice, a comprehensive survey of which is not possible within the scope of this article. Hence in what follows I merely take up a few snapshots, chosen somewhat at random, in order to exemplify some of the trends that appear to have their starting point in the notion of the luminous mind, in itself apparently a derivative of the simile of purifying gold.

A highlighting of the mind as luminous by nature occurs, for example, in a quote in the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga*, according to which “the mind is by nature luminous, it is defiled by adventitious defilements.”<sup>85</sup> A reference to the luminous mind in the *Lankāvātāra-sūtra* occurs in close proximity to an allusion to the splendour of gold.<sup>86</sup> Although the two are not directly related, it seems fair enough to take this as a reflection of the relationship between the luminous mind and the simile of refined gold, attested in the Pāli discourses surveyed above.<sup>87</sup>

Given that the contrast between the worldlyling and the noble disciple is of less relevance with later tradition, once the aspiration to Buddhahood has come center stage, it is only natural that the *Sāgaramatipariṭṭhā*, as quoted in the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga*, considers the distinct vision of the luminous condition of the mind as a quality of bodhisattvas. Thus “the bodhisattva understands the by nature luminous mind of beings and furthermore sees that it is defiled by adventitious defilements.”<sup>88</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Bureau 1955: 67f and 175; cf. also Lamotte 1962: 53. Frauwallner 1951: 152 refers to Vasumitra’s *Samaya-bhedoparacana cakra* for the Mahāsāṅghika position; cf. T 2031 at T XXXXIX 15c27: 心性本淨客隨煩惱之所雜染.

<sup>85</sup> Nakamura 1961: 87,13: *prakṛtiprabhāsvaraṃ cittam āgantukair upakleśair upakliśyata iti*; with the Tibetan counterpart in Nakamura 1967: 87,10: *sems kyi rang bzhin ni ’od gsal ba ste, glo bur gyi nyon mongs pas nyon mongs pa ’o*, and the Chinese version in T 1611 at T XXXI 833a29: 自性清淨心, 客塵煩惱染.

<sup>86</sup> In Nanjio 1923: 358,5 a reference to the *prakṛtiprabhāsvaraṃ cittam* is followed in the next verse two lines below by illustrating the *ālaya* with the example of the splendour of gold, *kāntir yathā suvarṇasya jātarūpaṃ*; cf. also, e.g., T 672 at T XVI 637c1+3.

<sup>87</sup> On the gold simile in later traditions cf. Goméz 1987/1991.

<sup>88</sup> Nakamura 1961: 95,22: *bodhisattvaḥ sattvānām prakṛtiprabhāsvaratām cittasya prajānāti, tām punar āgantukopakleśopakliṣṭām paśyati*; Nakamura 1967: 95,15: *byang chub sems dpa’ sems can rnam kyi sems rang bzhin gyis ’od gsal bar rab tu shes te, ’on kyang glo bur gyi nye ba ’i nyon mongs pas nyon mongs par mthong ngo*, and T 1611 at T XXXI 834b5: 菩薩摩訶薩亦復如是, 如實知見一切眾生自性清淨光明淨心, 而為客塵煩惱所染. The source of the quote would be D 152 *pha* 85a6 or Q 819 *pu* 91a4: *byang chub sems dpa’ yang sems can thams cad kyi sems rang bzhin gyis ’od gsal bar rab tu shes la de yang zlo bur gyi nye ba ’i nyon mongs pas nyon mongs pa can du byas par mthong ngo* and T 400 at T XIII 511a14: 菩薩亦復如是, 了知眾生心

A passage in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* proposes that the luminous mind is neither conjoined with lust, aversion, and delusion, nor disjoined from these.<sup>89</sup> This sets a contrast to the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and its parallels, mentioned above. In these texts, the mind can be conjoined with lust, aversion or delusion, or disjoined from it. They do not conceive of a mind as apart from these two alternatives.

Another quote in the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* proclaims that this intrinsic nature of the mind is without causes and conditions and hence also beyond arising and cessation.<sup>90</sup> The *Anūnatvāpūṇatvanirdeśaparivarta* provides an additional example for the powerful influence of the notion of a mind that is by nature pure. In the words of Silk (2015: 40),

ultimately the intrinsically pure mind is identified with the *dharmadhātu* itself ... this mind which is so fouled by defilements is actually pure and luminous just as is the *dharmadhātu*, the pure ground of being itself, virtually identical with Buddhahood ...

the initial and innate state of the mind is equivalent to awakening, and realizing this means that no further practice is necessary.

The idea that no further practice is necessary, together with the emphasis on the need to realize the true nature of the mind, have had considerable impact on how cultivation of the mind came to be conceptualized in various practice lineages. Before surveying a few selected examples, I would like to clarify that my intention in what follows is decidedly not to debunk various meditation traditions or to pretend that they are not based on, or conducive to, genuinely transformative experiences. My aim is only to explore the degree to which the powerful imagery of the luminous and/or pure nature of the mind continues to influence the discourse on meditation practice and experience in these traditions.

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之自性, 本來清淨明澈潔白, 但為客塵煩惱之所覆蔽。

<sup>89</sup> Dutt 1934: 121,15: *śāriputra āha: kā punar āyusman subhūte cittasya prabhāsvaratā? subhūtir āha: yad āyusman śāriputra cittaṃ na rāgena saṃyuktaṃ na viṣaṃyuktaṃ, na dveṣeṇa (saṃyuktaṃ na viṣaṃyuktaṃ) na mohena (saṃyuktaṃ na viṣaṃyuktaṃ) ... iyaṃ śāriputra cittaṃ saṃyuktaṃ na viṣaṃyuktaṃ* (the elided passage lists also other items, such as the underlying tendencies, fetters, etc.); cf. also T 223 at T XIII 233c23: 舍利弗語須菩提: 云何名心相常淨? 須菩提言: 若菩薩知是心相與婬怒癡不合不離 ... 舍利弗, 是名菩薩心相常淨。

<sup>90</sup> Nakamura 1961: 87,17: *yā punaḥ sā prakṛtis tasyā na hetur na pratyayo na sāmāgrī notpādo na nirodhaḥ*; Nakamura 1967: 87,13: *rang bzhin gang yin pa de ni rgyu med pa, rkyen med pa, tshogs pa med pa, skye ba med pa, 'gag pa med pa'o*, and T 1611 at T XXXI 833b3: 彼自性清淨心無因無緣故, 無和合不生不滅。

The first topic in my survey is *rdzogs chen*, the Great Perfection. Hatchell (2014: 52) comments on the historically early stages in the development of this particular approach to mental cultivation that

the earliest stratum of the Great Perfection ... presents a blend of radical emptiness and speculation on the agency of a luminous awareness in the universe ... it also shows a disinterest in specifying any kind of structured practices ... rather, the tradition argues, there is nothing to do and nothing to strive for, so the reality ... will manifest in its immediacy just by relaxing and letting go.

According to a *mahāmudrā* text by the eleventh-century Maitrīpa:<sup>91</sup>

The naturally luminous jewel [of this] nature of mind, which is self-awareness, is bright, pure and unobstructed. Natural luminosity is not found through [any] conceptual [state of] meditation or non-meditation: It is the uncontrived, undistracted ease in undistracted non-meditation.

Not to conceptualize anything, not to intend anything, not to grasp anything, devoid of conceptual analysis, and nothing that needs to be done, this is self-luminous awareness, the ornament of natural liberation without having to correct or modify [anything].

Ten centuries later the Tibetan Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche explains (1989: 78):

In Dzogchen the way one behaves in the state of presence is the Fruit, and there is nothing else to obtain. When one has this knowledge, one discovers that everything was always already accomplished from the very beginning. The self-perfected state is the inherent quality of the condition of ‘what is’; there is nothing to be perfected, and all one needs to do is to have real knowledge of this condition.

With what follows I turn from *rdzogs chen* to the Chán (禪) traditions. Sharf (2014: 939) explains that

early Chan documents employ a variety of related analogies to

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<sup>91</sup> Mathes 2016: 277 (§I.20f) and 291 (§II.40).

illustrate the nature and inherent purity of mind: the mind is like a mirror covered by dust; one must focus on the innate luminosity of the mirror rather than the fleeting images that appear within it ... in meditation, one attends to the abiding luminosity of mind or consciousness, which is to realize one's inherent buddha-nature.

In twelfth century China, master Hóngzhì (宏智) offered the following instructions:<sup>92</sup>

Completely and silently be at ease. In true thusness separate yourself from all causes and conditions. Brightly luminous without defilements, you directly penetrate and are liberated. You have from the beginning been in this place; it is not something that is new to you today. From the time before the vast eon when you dwelled in your old [original] home, everything is completely clear, unobscured, numinous, and singularly bright.

At roughly the same time in Korea, master Jinul (知訥) clarified that<sup>93</sup>

the true mind is like space, for it neither ends nor changes. Therefore it is said, “These hundred bones will crumble and return to fire and wind. But One Thing is eternally numinous and covers heaven and earth” ... The nature of the mind is unstained; it is originally whole and complete in itself ...

In the case of a person who has had an awakening, although he still has adventitious defilements, these have all been purified into cream.

In Japan in the eighteenth century, master Hakuin expressed such awakening in poetic form:<sup>94</sup>

He who bears witness to the nature of the Self as Originating  
Essence,  
To such an one singing and dancing are alike the voice of the Law.  
He has opened the gate of the Absolute Undifferentiated Nature,

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<sup>92</sup> McRae 2003: 137.

<sup>93</sup> Buswell 1983: 140f and 149.

<sup>94</sup> Shaw 1963: 183.



When that happens what is there to seek?  
Whether one goes or returns there is no ‘elsewhere’.  
The very body he has is indeed Buddha.

In order to communicate to others how to realize this intrinsic and already present original nature of the mind, some practice traditions employ specific means for this purpose, be this cryptic sayings in order to point to the luminous and/or pure nature of the mind or else other ways of jolting the practitioner in one way or another to its successful recognition. Well-known in this respect is the employment of the *kōan*, a Japanese term corresponding to the *gōng'àn* (公案) in Chinese, a “public case” that involves a “key phrase” or “head word”, *huàtóu* (話頭). Late Chinese master Sheng Yen (2009: 4) explains:

In Chan, a gong'an is an episode or case in the life of a Chan master, an episode that often bears directly upon the enlightenment of that master ... the early Chan masters would extract the essential point or the critical phrase or word from a gong'an and use it as a tool for practice. A huatou may consists of a fragment—a question or a word—derived from a gong'an ... to practice huatou the practitioner recites the sentence or fragment in a questioning manner but without theorizing or analyzing in order to find an answer ... to investigate the huatou means to examine that which occurs before thoughts arise. But what is that which lies before thoughts arise? What does the huatou point to? Our original, liberated mind.

In line with notions evident in the passages quoted above, Sheng Yen (2009: 158) points out that

from the perspective of pure mind, there is no such thing as defiled mind. Pure mind is simply the fundamental, original state of being that has always been there. Furthermore, it is not something that is gained after some time of practice—it has been there all the time ... therefore, the point of practice is not to acquire this pure mind or to gain enlightenment; it is rather more like restoring the mind's original state of purity ... the mind realizes its natural state of purity.

Korean master Sung Bae Park (2009: 49) clarifies that

attaining enlightenment requires nothing other than giving up the

search for it. At the moment we stop seeking, enlightenment is there.  
What is enlightenment? It means returning to our original nature.

According to Japanese master Suzuki (1950/1994: 25 and 29), such enlightenment, *satori*, has the following characteristics:

The *satori* experience is thus always characterized by irrationality, inexplicability, and incommunicability ... [it is] an inner perception, which takes place in the most interior part of consciousness ... though the *satori* experience is sometimes expressed in negative terms, it is essentially an affirmative attitude towards all things that exist; it accepts them as they come regardless of their moral values ... [it] essentially consists in doing away with the opposition of two terms in whatsoever sense.

Regarding the relationship drawn in this quote between *satori* and consciousness, it is of interest to note that, according to an explanation by Hakuin, it is in particular the *ālaya-vijñāna* which is to be transformed by the experience of *satori*.<sup>95</sup>

The appeal of the luminous or pure mind has exerted its attraction not only among Mahāyāna traditions. As pointed out by Gethin (1994: 32),

the fact that the Theravādin commentarial tradition unequivocally states that the radiant mind of the *Aṅguttara* passage is *bhavaṅga-citta* ... adds weight to the suggestion that the notions of *bhavaṅga-citta* and *ālaya-vijñāna* have some sort of common ancestry within the history of Buddhist thought.

A position held by some members of the Theravāda tradition in Thailand stands in continuity with the passages surveyed above, as evident in the following statements by Mahā Boowa Ñāṇasampanno:<sup>96</sup>

where is the real substance behind the shadows of *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā*? Drive on further! Their real substance is in the *citta* ...

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<sup>95</sup> Waddel 2009: 131: “each of us is endowed with eight consciousnesses ... the eighth or ‘storehouse’ consciousness exists in a passive state of utter blankness, dull and unknowing, like a vast pool of still clear water, without any movement whatever ... if a student pursues his religious practice diligently and is able to break through this dark cavern of the mind, it suddenly transforms into a great perfect mirror wisdom shining forth with perfect brilliance in the attainment of enlightenment.”

<sup>96</sup> Mahā Boowa (no date) pages 93 and 78.

the *citta* by its very nature is *amata*—Undying—even when it still has *kilesas* ...

the *kilesas* can't destroy the *citta* ... this nature is unassailable, absolute and permanent ... this nature is complete, perfect and immaculately pure.

## Conclusion

A reference to an invisible and luminous consciousness in the *Brahmanimantaṇika-sutta* could well be a proclamation attributable to Brahmā, a proclamation that in the Chinese parallel does not qualify consciousness as luminous. Another reference to an invisible consciousness in the *Kevaḍḍha-sutta*, here expressing an experience related to awakening, seems to have originally not been associated with luminosity.

A comparative study of passages that compare the condition of a mind free from defilements to the luminosity of refined gold reveals a development where a quality, originally applied to gold, appears to have been attributed to the mind as well. The resultant notion of the mind's luminosity would in turn have inspired a proclamation in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* on cultivation of the mind requiring a recognition of its luminous nature, which stands in contrast to the adventitious nature of defilements. In several respects this proclamation does not sit easily with early Buddhist thought in the way this is reflected in other discourses. Although at present only attested in a Theravāda discourse collection, in keeping with a predilection for light imagery shared by the Theravāda and Dharmaguptaka reciter traditions, a quotation in the \**Śāriputrābhidharma* makes it clear that this proclamation was also known and accepted in Dharmaguptaka thought.

The attraction exerted by the resultant presentation appears to have had a substantial impact on later traditions, both Mahāyāna and Theravāda. Further developments of the notion of an original purity eventually gave rise to approaches to cultivation of the mind informed by an emphasis on the need to recognize its allegedly true nature as equalling awakening.

The present study shows once again the value of a historical-critical study of the Pāli discourses in the light of their parallels in order to develop informed hypotheses regarding early stages in the development of Buddhist thought.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Drawing on the same source material and approach, in Anālayo 2010 and 2017a I have explored

## Abbreviations

AN	<i>Āṅguttara-nikāya</i>
As	<i>Atthasālinī</i>
B <sup>e</sup>	Burmese edition
C <sup>e</sup>	Ceylonese edition
D	Derge edition
DĀ	<i>Dīrgha-āgama</i>
DN	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
E <sup>e</sup>	PTS edition
EĀ	<i>Ekottarika-āgama</i>
MĀ	<i>Madhyama-āgama</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
Mp	<i>Manorathapūraṇī</i>
Ps	<i>Papañcasūdanī</i>
Q	Peking edition
S <sup>e</sup>	Siamese edition
SĀ	<i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 99)
SĀ <sup>2</sup>	<i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 100)
SN	<i>Samyutta-nikāya</i>
Sn	<i>Sutta-nipāta</i>
Sv	<i>Sumaṅgalavilāsinī</i>
T	Taishō edition (CBETA)
Vin	<i>Vīnaya</i>
◇	emendation
[]	supplementation

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the beginnings of the bodhisattva ideal. Even the practice of self-immolation or the aspiration to be born in the Pure Land can be traced back to beginning points reflected in some early discourses; cf. Anālayo 2012a and forthcoming. The same source material of the early discourses is also relevant to *Vīnaya* study; in fact the assumption that texts on monastic discipline are “in-house” literature that is best read in isolation can easily lead to unbalanced assessments; cf. Anālayo 2014b. Thus it does seem worthwhile to include the early discourses among the source material that can potentially shed light on the beginning stages of a range of developments in the Buddhist traditions.

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# Form is (Not) Emptiness: The Enigma at the Heart of the Heart Sutra.

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## Abstract

Connections between *Pañcaviṁśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* and *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* suggest a new interpretation of an important passage in the *Prajñāpāramitā-hṛdaya* or *Heart Sutra*. I am able to show that the four phrases exemplified by “form is emptiness” were once a reference to the well-known simile, “Form is like an illusion” (*rūpam māyopamam*). As the *Prajñāpāramitā* corpus expanded, the simile became a metaphor, “form is illusion”. It was then deliberately altered by exchanging “illusion” for “emptiness”, leading to the familiar phrases. This connection opens the door to reading the *Heart Sutra*, and the early *Prajñāpāramitā* sutras more generally, along the lines of Sue Hamilton’s (2000) epistemological approach to the Pāli suttas; i.e. as focussed on experience and particularly the meditative experience known in the Pāli suttas as dwelling in emptiness (*suññatā-vihāra*). In this view, the *Heart Sutra* makes sense on its own terms without having to invoke paradox or mysticism.

## Introduction

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The *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya* or *Heart Sutra* is often said to be the most popular Buddhist text, and, we are told, it is frequently chanted in Buddhist shrine-rooms and temples all around the world. Within the *Heart Sutra*, a formula consisting of four phrases, in two symmetrical pairs, is seen as the enigmatic essence, not only of the text, but of *Prajñāpāramitā*, and perhaps even of Mahāyāna Buddhism as a whole:

“Form is not different from emptiness; emptiness is not different from form. Form is just emptiness; emptiness is just form.”

These symmetrical affirmations of the identity of form and emptiness lead to the negation of important Buddhist doctrines like the five *skandhas*, twelve *nidānas* and the four truths of the nobles, giving the *Heart Sutra* its distinctive paradoxical flavour.

However, the formula is not easy to understand. At face value, it just about makes sense to argue “form is empty” if one is familiar with Buddhist *dharma* theory. To say, “Form is empty-ness” (using the abstract noun) is less clear. Even when we interpret emptiness as “empty of essence” or “empty of own-being” (*svabhāvaśūnya*), what can it mean to say that form *is* the lack of essence? The typical Buddhist interpretation is to take form as representing the objects of perception. This is an ontological statement, but one that does not seem to make sense (at least in terms of Western metaphysical traditions). If we reverse the formula to say, “Emptiness is form”, the metaphysics is even more problematic. When one turns to the ancient commentaries of this text for guidance,<sup>1</sup> one discovers that, as Alex Wayman observed,

“The writers seemed to be experiencing some difficulty in exposition, as though they were not writing through having inherited a tradition about the scripture going back to its original composition, but rather were simply arranging their particular learning in Buddhism to the terminology of the *sūtra*.” (1984: 309)

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<sup>1</sup> Three Chinese commentaries from the Tang Dynasty are available in English translation: 《般若波羅蜜多心經幽贊》 T1710, by Kuījī 窺基, translated by Shih & Lusthaus (2006); 《般若波羅蜜多心經贊》 T1711, by Woncheuk 圓測, translated by Hyun Choo (2006); and 《般若波羅蜜多心經略疏》 T1712, by Fāzàng 法藏, translated by Cook (1978). These date from the late 7<sup>th</sup> or early 8<sup>th</sup> Century. Kūkai’s commentary from the early 9<sup>th</sup> century treats the text as a tantra (Hakeda 1972). We also have eight Indian commentaries from the 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries preserved in Tibetan, which have been translated and studied by Donald Lopez (1988, 1996).

In other words, each commentator takes the *Heart Sutra* to epitomise their views on Buddhism, *whatever* their views happen to be. Despite widely divergent metaphysics, the *Heart Sutra* is at once the heart of Madhyamaka, Yogācāra, Huayan, Zen, and Tantric Buddhism; and sometimes quantum physics as well! (Mu 1994). Another modern commentator, Malcolm David Eckel, concludes:

“... to approach the Indian commentaries in the hope that they will somehow yield the ‘original’ meaning of the text is to invite disappointment... what they thought it meant was shaped as much by the preoccupations of their own time as it was by the words of the *sūtra* itself. (1987: 69-70)

Similarly, English translations of the text continue to diverge. In each new translation, the translator strives to produce a unique text that reflects their particular understanding, often extemporising and expanding on the text to reinforce the uniqueness of their “translation”. Ironically, the expanding body of commentary seems not to have a heart. In some cases, the translators and/or commentators seem to have paid scant attention to the source text, a complaint Paul Harrison also makes about canonical Chinese translations of the Diamond Sutra (2010: 244). In some cases, the “translation” is simply a paraphrase of some existing translation, with words rearranged or substituted to highlight the preoccupations of the “translator”. Alternatively, the commentator purports to translate the Sanskrit text, thereby gaining the kudos of working with the putative “original”, but in fact translates a Chinese or Tibetan version of the text.

Jan Nattier’s (1992) watershed article demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that the *Heart Sutra* was composed in China using fragments of texts translated into Chinese by Kumārajīva’s translation team. Nattier also identified some problematic aspects of the received Sanskrit text. Inspired by Nattier, some recent research on the *Heart Sutra* (Huifeng 2014, Attwood 2015, 2017) shows that bypassing sectarian commentaries and turning to the early *Prajñāpāramitā* literature can provide an illuminating context for interpreting the *Heart Sutra*. In this article, I employ the same method of tracking the passage of interest back to the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (*Pañcaviṃśati*) and thence to antecedents in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (*Aṣṭa*), to see what light they shed on the enigma at the heart of the *Heart Sutra*.



## The Text

It has been known at least since the time of Kuījī's commentary (T1710), i.e. ca. late 7<sup>th</sup> century CE, that the “form is emptiness” passage is part of a quote from *Pañcaviṃśati* (Nattier 1992: 206-7, n.33). The passage consists of four phrases, in two symmetrical pairs. Conze's Sanskrit edition includes a further pair of statements: *yad rūpaṃ sā śūnyatā* and *yā śūnyatā tad rūpaṃ*. This was, in fact, a minority reading in his witnesses. The extra phrases are absent from the Sanskrit *Pañcaviṃśati*, from all the Chinese texts of the *Heart Sutra* and *Pañcaviṃśati*, and from the Tibetan canonical *Heart Sutra* (Nattier 1992: 204, n.19). I follow Nattier in treating them as a late interpolation and not properly part of the sutra.

The four phrases are shown below in their various versions: from the Gilgit manuscript of *Pañcaviṃśati* (Karashima 2016, and cited in Nattier 1992); two Chinese versions of the short text *Heart Sutra* (T250, T251)<sup>2</sup> attributed to Kumārajīva and Xuánzàng respectively; and the Sanskrit text of the *Heart Sutra* from Conze's edition (1948, 1967). Kumārajīva's Chinese translation of *Pañcaviṃśati* (T233) is problematic and will be dealt with separately below. All of the Chinese texts use 色 for “form” (*rūpa*); 空 for “emptiness” (*śūnyatā*); and 異 for “different”. The translations that follow were chosen to highlight differences in the source texts<sup>3</sup>:

### *Pañcaviṃśati* (Gilgit Manuscript. Karashima et al. 2016, Folio 21, recto)

- |                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 1.nānyā śūnyatā anyad rūpaṃ | Form is not one thing and emptiness another.  |
| 2.nānyā śūnyatā anyad rūpaṃ | Emptiness is not one thing, and form another. |
| 3.rūpaṃ eva śūnyatā         | <i>Form</i> is emptiness.                     |
| 4.śūnyataiva rūpaṃ          | <i>Emptiness</i> is form.                     |

<sup>2</sup> T223 《摩訶般若波羅蜜經》 = *Mahā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*.

T250 《摩訶般若波羅蜜大明呪經》 = *Mahā-prajñāpāramitā-mahā-vidyā-sūtra*.

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

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise stated, translations are mine.

**Heart Sutra attributed to Kumārajīva (T250; 8.847c13-14)**

非色異空	It is not the case that form is different from emptiness.
非空異色	It is not the case that emptiness is different from form.
色即是空	Only form is emptiness.
空即是色	Only emptiness is form.

**Heart Sutra attributed to Xuánzàng (T251; 8.848c08-9)**

色不異空	Form is not different from emptiness.
空不異色	Emptiness is not different from form.
色即是空	Only form is emptiness.
空即是色	Only emptiness is form.

**Heart Sutra, Conze's Sanskrit edition (1967)**

rūpaṃ śūnyatā	Form is emptiness.
śūnyataiva rūpaṃ	Emptiness is form.
rūpān na pṛthak śūnyatā	Emptiness is not different from form.
śūnyatāyā na pṛthag rūpaṃ	Form is not different from emptiness.

The two Sanskrit expressions “*na anya X anya Y*” and “*X na pṛthak Y*”<sup>4</sup> are equivalents. In the latter, X is in the ablative case, so parsing the Sanskrit we get “from X not different Y” and in English, “Y is not different from X”. Similarly, the Chinese expressions “非 X 異 Y” and “X 不異 Y” are equivalent; in these

<sup>4</sup> *Anyā* is a pronominal adjective that takes the case, gender, and number of the noun it relates to, i.e. *anyad rūpaṃ* (neuter nominative singular), *anyā śūnyatā* (feminine nominative singular). Sanskrit *sandhi* rules dictate the spelling *pṛthak* before “ś” and *pṛthag* before “r”.

phrases, 非 negates the whole phrase, whereas 不 negates only 異. In plain English, all of these phrases say, “X is Y”.

In phrases 3 and 4, the syntax is “*X eva Y*” in Sanskrit and “X 即是 Y” in Chinese. In Sanskrit, the copular verb—*is*—is omitted by convention. It may also be omitted in Buddhist Chinese, but the *Heart Sutra* includes 是 “is”. The Sanskrit emphatic particle, *eva*, is represented in Chinese by 即. *Eva* is indicated in translation by the use of italics or by qualifiers such as “only” or “just”. So in plain English, again these statements boil down to “X is Y”. X here is any one of the *skandhas*, so it is not *only* form that is emptiness, but also *only* sensations etc.<sup>5</sup>

Two oddities are found only in the version of the four phrases in the Sanskrit *Heart Sutra*. Firstly, the pairs of phrases 1-2 and 3-4 are inverted; and secondly, it omits *eva* in phrase 1, breaking the symmetry found in all the other versions. I know of no explanation for these oddities.

The four phrases are part of a longer quotation, but since T250 has the 非 X 異 Y syntax and T251 has the X 不異 Y syntax, this has led to some confusion about the source of the quote. The ostensible source of the four phrases, Kumārajīva’s translation of *Pañcaviṃśati* (T223), has X 不異 Y (8.223a13-4). This would make T250 the odd one out, despite the fact that it is attributed to Kumārajīva. The possibility is raised that the quote is from, or at least influenced by, another text translated by Kumārajīva i.e. 《大智度論》 *Dāzhi dū lùn* = Sanskrit \**Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa* (T1509, 25.327c22-23). T1509 is a commentary (*upadeśa*) on *Pañcaviṃśati*, attributed to Nāgārjuna (probably apocryphally) and it has the 非 X 異 Y syntax. This is the only difference between T223 and T1509 in the quoted passage.

Nattier (crediting the late Masatoshi Nagatomi) points out that the Taishō edition footnotes record that in the “Sung, Yüan, Ming, and K’ai-pao [Old Sung]” editions of the Tripiṭaka,<sup>6</sup> T223 uses the 非 X 異 Y syntax instead (8.223, notes 1 and 2). She concludes, “My working assumption, at this point, is that these relatively late editions reflect an editorial emendation introduced on the authority of [T1509] itself” (1992: 215, n.75). History records that Kumārajīva

<sup>5</sup> Mokṣala’s (291 CE) *Pañcaviṃśati* translation (T221) has “Form and emptiness, etc. (等) are not different. And why? Only form is emptiness, only emptiness is form. Just sensation, recognition, volition, and cognition are also empty... only emptiness is cognition.” (色與空等無異。所以者何? 色則是空、空則是色, 痛想行識則亦是空、空則是識。 8.6a05-07). Here 則 stands for *eva*.

<sup>6</sup> Dated 1239 CE, 1290 CE, 1601 CE, and 1104-1148 CE respectively.

and his translation team alternately worked on T223 and T1509 from the summer of 402 CE to 27 Dec 405 CE, proof-reading and revising each in the light of the other (Chou 2004: 298-300). They were also comparing their text to previous texts. I'm not aware of any detailed comparison of the texts of T223 and T1509 so have no point of comparison for judging the significance of this discrepancy, though as far as the quoted passages found in the *Heart Sutra* go this is the only difference. Nor is there any surviving Sanskrit text of the *Upadeśa* for comparison. It does seem strange that Kumārajīva's meticulous translation team should have allowed this trifling discrepancy to remain.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, T1509 became the standard text for understanding *Prajñāpāramitā* in China, so if it were the source of the passage in the *Heart Sutra* this would not be surprising. There is still no way to resolve this conundrum.

In any case, we know where these passages are located in *Pañcaviṃśati*, so I will now move on to discussing possible antecedents for these passages in *Aṣṭa*.

### Form and Emptiness in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā

Since *Pañcaviṃśati* is in principle an expansion of *Aṣṭa*, they have a similar structure.<sup>8</sup> A passage found early in the former ought to have an antecedent early in the latter. We can reasonably expect any predecessor of this passage from Chapter Three of *Pañcaviṃśati* to appear in the first chapter of *Aṣṭa*. However, while *Aṣṭa* is full of references to *emptiness*, they do not occur in the first chapter. There are two passages in Chapter One that seem to shed light on the *Heart Sutra*. The first is:

“Exactly form, Elder Śāriputra, is free from (*virahita*) essence of form (*rūpasvabhāva*); just so for sensation, perception, and volition; exactly cognition, Elder Śāriputra, is free of essence of cognition.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> During this period of translating T223 and T1509, Kumārajīva was dependent on his team. His Chinese was poor enough for his Chinese editor, Sengrui, to complain, “The Dharma Master [Kumārajīva] has great difficulty with the Chinese language” (Chou 2004: 293).

<sup>8</sup> In fact, the text of *Pañcaviṃśati* has “been adjusted to conform to the divisions of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*” (Conze 1975b). The Nepalese manuscripts (Kimura 2010) reflect this, but the Gilgit manuscript (Karashima et al 2016) predates this change.

<sup>9</sup> *rūpam evāyūṣman śāriputra virahitaṃ rūpasvabhāvena | evaṃ vedanaiva saṃjñāiva saṃskārā eva | vijñānam evāyūṣman śāriputra virahitaṃ vijñānasvabhāvena |* (Vaidya 1960: 6).

The problem that passages like this are addressing is assumed to be the incipient realism of the Abhidharma project, which culminates in the *skandhas* being seen as a description of reality. Compare Nyanatiloka in his *Buddhist Dictionary* (s.v. *khandha*), “These are the five aspects in which the Buddha has summed up *all the physical and mental phenomena of existence*” (1980: 98: emphasis added). Here the *skandhas* are an ontology. A complication for this discussion is that existence in this context is often assumed to be absolute. In other words, to say that something exists, at all, is to strongly imply that it exists in and of itself, permanently, and without change over time. Given this, it can be difficult to understand how Ābhidharmikas were drawn into their insistence that some *dharmas* are real (*dravya*).

The Ābhidharmikas started out using the word *svabhāva* to mean a “characteristic quality”. At first, *svabhāva* defined categories into which *dharmas* could be slotted by analysis. For example, a *dharma* might be categorised as good (*kuśala*), not-good (*akuśala*), or indeterminate in this respect (*avyākṛta*). Almost inevitably, the *dharmas* themselves came to be seen as not merely fitting into that category, but actually *possessing* such qualities. Before long, the qualities took on a separate life that did not arise and pass away with other *dharmas*. In this view, *kuśala* and *akuśala* are timeless, permanent qualities that exist above and beyond particularly experiences, in order that any experience may always be slotted into the appropriate category.<sup>10</sup> If this were not true, then a project to categorise all *dharmas* would necessarily fail, precisely because the categories were mutable. Thus any project of categorisation has an inherent tendency to realism.

The Sarvāstivādins, however, were driven by a further problem. The last part of *pratītyasamutpāda* requires that when conditions cease, effects arising in dependence on them also cease (*asya nirodhād idaṃ nirudhyate*). In order to account for *karma* in terms of *pratītyasamutpāda*, Buddhists had to explain how a condition (specifically an action or *karma*), could produce an effect long after it ceased. While most Buddhists opted for the doctrine of momentariness, in which a cascade of infinitesimally short-lived *cittas*—each being the condition for the next—provide the appropriate and timely continuity required between action and consequence, the Sarvāstivādins instead reasoned that if a *dharma* (*qua* mental event) can act as a condition in the future, then it must *exist* in the

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<sup>10</sup> For a description of this process from Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda points of view respectively see Ronkin (2005) and Cox (2004).

future. Similarly, if a past *dharma* is the condition for a consequence now, then that past *dharma* must *still exist* in the present. If karma was to be connected across time to consequences, then *dharmas must* always exist, but only be active in the karma process in the present. The first Sarvāstivādin account of this is explored by Bastow (1995). Counter-intuitive though this seems from a modern Buddhist point of view, in fact it has some advantages. The main alternative approach, the doctrine of momentariness, led to a superstructure of speculative metaphysical entities such as *bhavaṅga-citta* (Theravāda) and *ālaya-vijñāna* (Yogācāra) that have to be taken on faith. On the other hand, the *sarva-astivāda* requires no new axioms and no supernatural entities beyond the *dharmas* themselves. It simply requires that *dharmas* function in particular ways that are implied by *pratītyasamutpāda* itself. However, this argument is academic because momentariness is now universally accepted amongst Buddhists.

I suggest that we can usefully step away from treating the *skandhas* as related to ontology at all. Huifeng (2014: 103) noted that if we read the *Heart Sutra* according to his suggested amendments, then it “shifts the emphasis away from an ontological negation of classical lists, i.e. ‘there is no X’, to an epistemological stance”.<sup>11</sup> This epistemological stance is similar to the reading of early Buddhism described by Sue Hamilton. In Hamilton’s (2000) account, the *skandhas* are the “experiencing apparatus” (81, 96), and “... the teachings are designed to enable to understand one’s world of experience by means of understanding the operating of one’s *khandhas*, and so bring about the ability to achieve liberation from rebirth” (205). Throughout the rest of this article, I explore how this hermeneutic can be applied to the *Prajñāpāramitā* generally and the *Heart Sutra* in particular.

Although we experience form or experience ourselves as having form, there is no self-existent form, no “essence of form”. The experience of “form” arises because a visual sense object (*rūpa-ālambana*) meets the visual sense faculty (*caḥṣu-indriya*) in the presence of visual sense cognition (*caḥṣu-vijñāna*), i.e. because the apparatus of visual experience is functioning. No “essence of form” is required to give being to form, because here “form” refers to an experience rather than a reality. Note especially, that the “object” is only a support (*ālambana*)

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<sup>11</sup> Despite this excellent suggestion, Huifeng’s subsequent work on the “illusion” metaphor in *Prajñāpāramitā* texts (2016) does not seem to follow through on his move in this direction. His view of *skandhas*, for example, seems to be conventionally ontological throughout. This is unfortunate because although he covers exactly which semantic fields are involved he never explains *why* the *skandhas* might be amenable to these analogies, similes and metaphors.

for experience, rather than representing a Platonic ideal or noumenon (I'll return to this). Because experience is constantly arising and ceasing, if only because attention flits between objects, form *as experience* cannot have *svabhāva* in the sense of self-existence. Experience doesn't have "being" in the ordinary sense, let alone in an absolute sense. Experiencing a dependently arisen form does not give us certain knowledge of the corresponding object. Indeed, Buddhists say that we almost inevitably make mistakes when drawing ontological conclusions from experience.

So this first passage from *Aṣṭa* critiques realism with respect to *dharmas* and opens the door to an epistemological reading of the text. However, what we are looking for is a discussion of the emptiness of *dharmas* themselves. The second passage that sheds light is the only time that Chapter One uses the word *śūnya*.

Furthermore, Elder Subhūti, with reference to the *bodhisatva mahāsatva* said thus:... If he practises with respect to [the idea], "form is empty" (*rūpaṃ śūnyam*), he practises with respect to a sign (*nimitta*) .... If he practises with respect to "discernment is empty", he practises with respect to a sign... This *bodhisatva* is to be known as "lacking skilful means" (*anupāyakuśalo*).<sup>12</sup>

This is an unexpected turn. Here "form is empty" is not the essence of *Prajñāpāramitā*, but one of a long list of ideas (abbreviated above) that can become reified and lead the *bodhisatva* into error so that they are "without skilful means" (*anupāyakuśalo*). If one still perceives form, even if one sees it as empty, it is still a sign (*nimitta*) or percept. One of the refined states of awareness involved in Buddhist meditations associated with emptiness is the signless mental concentration (*animittaṃ cetosamādhiṃ*), in which all attention is withdrawn from the signs that constitute experience.<sup>13</sup> The meditative state

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<sup>12</sup> *Punar aparam āyuṣmān subhūtir bodhisatvaṃ mahāsatvaṃ ārabhyaivam āha ... saced rūpaṃ śūnyam iti carati, nimitte carati | ... saced vijñānaṃ śūnyam iti carati, nimitte carati... ayaṃ bodhisatvo 'nupāyakuśalo veditavyaḥ ||* (Vaidya 1960: 6). For the Gāndhārī manuscript and notes on Chinese counterparts compare Falk & Karashima (2012: 57 & n.52). Note that I follow the Buddhist Sanskrit spelling of *satva* thoughtout. Despite the tacit "correction" of this word to *sattva* by virtually all editors in all contexts, Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts and inscriptions invariably spell this word *satva*. See also Bhattacharya (2010) on the spelling of *bodhisatva* and Olivelle (2005) on the problem of Western editors of Sanskrit texts silently "correcting" variant spellings.

<sup>13</sup> Compare the Pāli passages: "Here, friend, a bhikkhu withdraws his attention from all signs and



of emptiness is, like the state of signlessness, a state of awareness with no content: no subject and no object; no arising and ceasing of experience; just an intransitive alertness (i.e. one is aware, but not *of* anything).<sup>14</sup> One comes to this state by progressively withdrawing attention from sensory experience using, for example, the method outlined in the Pāli *Cūḷasuññata Sutta* (MN 121).<sup>15</sup>

In a later chapter, *Aṣṭa* expands on the emptiness of *dharma*s:

Here Subhūti, the *bodhisatvas*, *mahāsatvas*, being fully-enlightened Buddhas, teach the *Dharma* that form has the [same] condition of space in the world. Sensation, perception, and volition are the same. In the same way, Subhūti, all *dharma*s have the condition of space, not coming, not going, just like space. Just as space does not come or go, it is not made or unmade or shaped, it does not last, remain, or endure, it does not arise or cease; so also all *dharma*s do not come or go, they are not made or unmade or shaped, they do not last, remain, or endure, they do not arise or cease, they are not falsely distinguished from these aspects of space. Why is that? Subhūti, the emptiness of form does not come or go. Sensation, perception, and volition are the same. The emptiness of cognitions does not come or go. In the same way, Subhūti, the emptiness of all *dharma*s does not come or go. The reason is that all *dharma*s are in a state of emptiness (*śūnyatāgatikāḥ sarvadharmāḥ*). They cannot escape that state.<sup>16</sup>

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dwells having attained the signless mental concentration.” (*Idhāvuso, bhikkhu sabbanimittānaṃ amanasikārā animittaṃ cetosamādhim upasampajja viharati*. MN i.297); and “He knows that this [signless mental concentration], which is ultimately conditioned and volitional, is impermanent and by nature ceases. Knowing and seeing it this way the mind is freed from the taint of desire, the taint of being, and the taint of ignorance.” (*Yaṃ kho pana kiñci abhisankhataṃ abhisācetaṃ tad aniccaṃ nirodhadhamman ti pajānāti. Tassa evaṃ jānato evaṃ passato kāmāsavāpi cittaṃ vimuccati, bhavāsavāpi cittaṃ vimuccati, avijjāsavāpi cittaṃ vimuccati*. MN iii.107). On signlessness, see also Harvey (1988).

<sup>14</sup> I speculate that ancient Brahmins had the same kind of experience but interpreted it differently, i.e. as Brahman or “being, consciousness, and bliss” (*saccidānanda*), a concept that Richard Gombrich has argued was familiar to early Buddhists (2009: 68-70).

<sup>15</sup> For a practice oriented commentary on this *sutta*, see Satyadhana (2014).

<sup>16</sup> *iha subhūte bodhisatvā mahāsatvā anuttarāṃ samyaksambodhim abhisambuddhāḥ santo lokasya ākāśagatikāṃ rūpaṃ iti dharmāṃ deśayanti | evaṃ vedanā saṃjñā saṃskārāḥ | evaṃ eva subhūte sarvadharmā ākāśagatikā anāgatikā agatikā ākāśasamāḥ | yathā ākāśam anāgatam agatam akṛtam avikṛtam anabhisamskṛtam, asthitam asaṃsthitam avyavasthitam, anuṭpannam*

The *bodhisatva* must not identify with the world of experience. The meditating *bodhisatva* (aspiring to liberation) aims at the state of emptiness, i.e. a state in which the world of experience has effectively ceased, but they are still awake and alert. The *Cūḷasuññata Sutta* also describes a “state of emptiness” (*suññatāvihāra*) that, in this case, is attained by gradually eliminating the arising of experience by withdrawing attention (*amanasi karoti*) from sources of experience. Since attention is one of the conditions for the arising of experience, withdrawing attention prevents experience from arising. This can result in “the attainment of the cessation of perceptions and sensations” (*saññā-vedayita-nirodha-samāpatti*), often simply called “cessation” (*nirodha*). In this context, Pāli *suñña* means something like “absent” and *suññatā* “absence”, i.e. the absence of sensory or mental experience. It can also refer to the absence of *ātman* (C.f. Choong 1999: 8-31).

*Aṣṭa* emphasises that “All *dharmas* are in a state of emptiness” (*śūnyatāgatikā sarvadharmāḥ*), which echoes the *Heart Sutra*’s phrase “all *dharmas* are characterised by emptiness” (*sarvadharmāḥ śūnyatālakṣanāḥ*). This is different from how emptiness is used in *Nikāya* and *Āgama* texts (Cf. Choong 1999: 8-31). Here the meditative experience becomes an analogy for the nature of *dharmas*. Presumably, the reasoning was along the lines that, while in the state of emptiness, all conditioned *dharmas* are absent (*śūnya*); and since experience is simply a collection of *dharmas*, if emptiness applies to the whole state, then it applies equally to all aspects of that state. The *dharma* is the microcosm to the psycho-physical macrocosm of the human being. We know from early Buddhist texts that *dharmas* are empty of existence or non-existence, empty of *ātman*. This is extended to deny the Abhidharma *svabhāva*, especially in the later meaning of existing in and of itself. The idea is expressed in the metaphor of the state of emptiness experienced by the meditating *bodhisatva*: all *dharmas* are like space, in that, for ancient Buddhists, the ontological status of space is also indeterminate. None of the metaphysics that applies to objects, such as location, extension in space or time, causality, or dichotomies like “existence/nonexistence” can be applied to *dharmas* or to experience more generally.

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*aniruddham, evam eva subhūte sarvadharmā anāgatā āgatā ākṛtā avikṛtā anabhisaṃskṛtā asthitā asaṃsthitā avyavasthitā anutpannā aniruddhā ākāśakalpatvād avikalpāḥ | tat kasya hetoḥ? yā subhūte rūpasya śūnyatā, na sā āgacchati vā gacchati vā | evaṃ vedanāyāḥ saṃjñāyāḥ saṃskārāṇāṃ | yā subhūte vijñānasya śūnyatā, na sā āgacchati vā gacchati vā | evam eva subhūte yā sarvadharmāṇāṃ śūnyatā, na sā āgacchati vā gacchati vā | tat kasya hetoḥ? śūnyatāgatikā hi subhūte sarvadharmāḥ | te tām gatim na vyativartante | (Vaidya 1960: 148)*

A similar analogy is found in the *Pratyutpanna-buddha-sammukhāvasthita-samādhi-sūtra* (PraS), which applies *Prajñāpāramitā* ideas to Pure Land practices involving the visualisation of Buddhas (*buddhānusmṛti*). According to Paul Harrison:

“[PraS] first underlines the fundamental unreality of the entities experienced during the *samādhi* by comparing them with those things perceived in dreams... and then—often without the shift in focus being made explicit—proceeds to emphasise the emptiness of all *dharmas*, which supposedly constitute the basis of our experience in the waking state” (1990: xix)

Harrison describes this as an “analogical extension or generalisation” from the emptiness of meditative experiences to the emptiness of *dharmas* (xix). Although there is much here that is of interest in understanding *Prajñāpāramitā* generally, we do not seem to have discovered the direct antecedent of the *Pañcaviṃśati* passage that ended up in the *Heart Sutra*. In fact, there is a passage in *Aṣṭa* that has the same syntax as the *Pañcaviṃśati* passage, but with a significant difference.

### Form and Illusion

In Chapter One of *Aṣṭa*, we find a passage that begins with Subhūti asking a question of the Buddha:

“If the Bhagavan were asked, ‘Can the man of illusions (*māyā-puruṣa*) train in omniscience (*sarvajñā*), will he come near it, and will he go forth to it?’ How would the Bhagavan explain the answer to this question?”<sup>17</sup>

Here *sarvajñā* “complete knowledge, omniscience” is a common synonym of *Prajñāpāramitā*.<sup>18</sup> By way of answer, the Buddha asks Subhūti a related question:

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<sup>17</sup> *atha khalv āyusmān subhūtir bhagavantam etad avocat - yo bhagavan evaṃ pariṭṛcchet – kim ayaṃ māyāpuruṣāḥ sarvajñatāyāṃ śikṣiṣyate, sarvajñatāyā āsannībhaviṣyati, sarvajñatāyāṃ niryāsyatīti? tasya bhagavan evaṃ pariṭṛcchataḥ katham nirdeṣṭavyaṃ syāt?* (Vaidya 1960: 8).

<sup>18</sup> “Sarva” here is sometimes interpreted as being related to the Pāli *Sabba Sutta* (SN 35.23) or to the *Āgama* parallel from one of the two Chinese *Samyuktāgama* translations (T99 #319, 2.91a24-b03) (Cox 1995). In this case there may be a link between *sarva* and the Upaniṣadic

What do you think Subhūti: is illusion (*māyā*) different from form? Different from sensation, apperception, or volition? Is illusion different from cognition?<sup>19</sup>

Subhuti answers:

Bhagavan, illusion is not different from form. Bhagavan, *the illusion* is form; *form* is the illusion. Bhagavan, illusion is not different from sensation, from perception, or from volition. *The illusion* is sensation, perception, and volition; sensation, perception, and volition are only illusions. Bhagavan, the illusion is not different from cognition. *The illusion* is cognition; *cognition* is the illusion.<sup>20</sup>

It is this paragraph that uses the familiar sentence structures, but with “illusion” (*māyā*) instead of “emptiness” (*śūnyatā*). In the Gilgit manuscript of *Pañcaviṃśati*:

*nānyad rūpam anyā śūnyatā | nānyā śūnyatā anyad rūpaṃ | rūpam  
eva śūnyatā | śūnyataiva rūpam*

And here in *Aṣṭa*:

*na hi anyā sā māyā anyat tad rūpam | rūpam eva māyā | māyaiva  
rūpam |*

There are some minor spelling differences caused by *sandhi*, and by the use of pronouns and particles in *Aṣṭa*, but these are superficial. The basic sentence

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idiom *idaṃ sarvaṃ* meaning “all of this, all of creation, the entire universe”. See also my notes on *sarva* and these texts (Attwood 2014).

<sup>19</sup> *Bhagavān etad avocat – tat kiṃ manyase subhūte anyā sā māyā, anyat tad rūpam, anyā sā māyā, anyā sā vedanā | anyā sā saṃjñā, anye te saṃskārāḥ | anyā sā māyā, anyat tad vijñānam?* (Vaidya 1960: 8). The form of this question also suggests that Conze has erred in interpreting *māyāpuruṣa* as a *karmadhāraya* “illusory man”, i.e. a man who is an illusion. Rather we should read it as a *tatpuruṣa* the “man of illusions”, i.e. a man who has illusions about experience. The Buddha seems to be asking whether we can separate the man from his illusions about experience.

<sup>20</sup> *subhūtir āha - na hy etad bhagavan | na hi bhagavan anyā sā māyā anyat tad rūpam | rūpam eva bhagavan māyā, māyaiva rūpam | na hi bhagavan anyā sā māyā anyā sā vedanā, anyā sā saṃjñā anye te saṃskārāḥ | vedanā saṃjñā [9] saṃskārā eva bhagavan māyā, māyaiva vedanāsaṃjñāsaṃskārāḥ | na bhagavan anyā sā māyā anyat tad vijñānam | vijñānam eva bhagavan māyā, māyaiva vijñānam ||* (Vaidya 1960: 8-9).

structure is still *na anya X anya Y*, followed by *X eva Y*. *Aṣṭa* only has three phrases instead of four, leaving out the expected first phrase: *na hi anyat tad rūpam anyā sā śūnyatā*. Otherwise, the two passages are too similar for this to be a coincidence. It seems plausible to conjecture that this *Aṣṭa* passage is the source of the passage in *Pañcaviṃśati*, and thus the ultimate source of the passage in the *Heart Sutra*. We may also conjecture that the author of *Pañcaviṃśati* deliberately changed *māyā* to *śūnyatā*.

What Subhūti is saying in this passage is that *māyā* or illusions—i.e. the conditioned experiences that the unenlightened take to be real—are not found outside the five branches of experience (*pañca skandhāḥ*). In fact, experience (in the sense of the operation of the *skandhas*) is the illusion. The *skandhas* working together are experience; they are what we mistakenly take to be existent or non-existent. At least for the unenlightened, experience is an illusion that we buy into. The Buddha can say this because he often dwells, per the *Cūḷasuññata Sutta*, in the state of emptiness (*suññatāvihāra*), i.e. in a state where the *skandhas* are temporarily inoperative.<sup>21</sup> From this perspective, experience, including the experience of having a first-person perspective on experience, is an illusion, but one that a skilled meditator can wake up from. In particular, spending time in the *śūnyatā-samādhi* radically alters one's perspective on experience so that one no longer mistakes it for reality.

The earliest Chinese translation of *Aṣṭa*, completed ca. 179 CE, by Lokakṣema (T224), renders the passage as:

“Illusion (幻) and form are not different; form is illusion, illusion is form; illusion and sensation, perception, volition, and cognition are not different.”<sup>22</sup>

Kumārajīva's Chinese translation of *Aṣṭa* (T227) completed in 408 CE, better reflects the syntax of the passage in T223, and it includes the missing fourth statement that is absent in the Sanskrit edition of Vaidya (1960):

“Illusion is not different from form; form is not different from illusion. Illusion is just form; form is just illusion. Illusion is not different from sensation, perception, volition, or cognition;

<sup>21</sup> E.g., “Now, as before, Ānanda I often dwell in the state of emptiness” (*Pubbepāhaṃ, ānanda, etarahipi suññatāvihārena bahulaṃ viharāmi*. MN iii.103).

<sup>22</sup> 幻與色無異也，色是幻，幻是色，幻與痛痒思想生死識等無異。(8.427a20-1).

cognition is not different from illusion. Illusion is just cognition;  
cognition is just illusion.”<sup>23</sup>

So it seems that *Aṣṭa* is consistent in using *māyā* here. Unfortunately, this passage does not occur in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE Gāndhārī manuscript of *Aṣṭa* published by Falk & Karashima (2012), but we can find a probable counterpart to this passage in the *Ratnagaṇasamcayagāthā* (Rgs).

Here, the one who knows that the five *skandhas* are like an illusion  
(*māyopamaṃ*),

Does not make illusion one thing and the *skandhas* another;  
The one who practises for peace is free of multiplying perceptions,  
He practises the highest perfection of understanding.<sup>24</sup>

Having established that extant versions of *Aṣṭa* and *Rgs* have *māyā* rather than *sūnyatā*, it will be worth reviewing how Buddhists have viewed *rūpa* in the light of the concept of *māyā*.

### The Relation Between Rūpa and Māyā.

In early Buddhist texts, the relationship between form and illusion is usually stated as a simile.<sup>25</sup> For example, in the Pāli *Phenapiṇḍūpama Sutta* (SN 22.95) we find:

Just so, *bhikkhus*, a *bhikkhu* sees some form, past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far away or right here, he studies it, investigates its origins... and to him it appears (*khāyati*) unreal, hollow (*tucchaka*), without substance (*asāraka*). After all, what substance (*sāra*) is there in form?<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> 幻不異色，色不異幻。幻即是色，色即是幻。幻不異受、想、行、識，識不異幻。幻即是識，識即是幻。(8.538b27-9).

<sup>24</sup> *māyopamaṃ ya iha jānati pañca skandhāṃ  
na ca māya anya na ca skandha karoti anyān |  
nānātvā-samjñā-vigato upaśānta-cārī  
eṣā sa prajñā-vara-pāramitāya caryā* || Rgs 1.14 || (Yuyama 1976: 11)

<sup>25</sup> For an exhaustive exploration of this metaphor and the semantic fields involved at different times, see Huifeng (2016).

<sup>26</sup> *Evam eva kho, bhikkhave, yaṃ kiñci rūpaṃ aūtānāgatappaccuppannaṃ [ajjhattaṃ vā bahiddhā vā, oḷārikaṃ vā sukhumaṃ vā, hīnaṃ vā pañītaṃ vā], yaṃ dūre santike vā taṃ bhikkhu passati nijjhāyati yoniso upaparikkhati. Tassa taṃ passato nijjhāyato yoniso upaparikkhato rittakaññeva*

The etymology of the word *sāra* is obscure, but it refers to the essential, inner core of anything, or to the best part of something: the heartwood of a tree, the marrow of a bone, the cream of milk. The point of the simile is that when one investigates the experience of “form”, it has no such core. Significantly, this means that Buddhists did not see the object of perception (*ālambana*) as the core of experience, though it is acknowledged to be present. They also did not see appearance as a manifestation of some ideal (they did not posit a noumenon behind every phenomenon). To reiterate, the ontology of an experience is ambiguous, hence the *Kaccānagotta Sutta* (SN 12:15) says that the experiential world (*loka*) is usually conceived of in terms of existence (*atthitā*) and non-existence (*natthitā*). The Buddha teaches a middle way between these two extremes, which amounts to saying that only *dukkha* arises and ceases.<sup>27</sup> Sue Hamilton has shown that in Pāli *dukkha* is synonymous with the *khandhas*, and both with *loka*, and all three with unenlightened experience (2000: 205). *Pañcaviṃśati*, echoing the Pāli *suttas*, says, “The *tathāgata* calls the five *skandhas* ‘the world’ (*loka*),”<sup>28</sup> implying that Hamilton’s observations also apply in the context of *Prajñāpāramitā*.

We certainly *have* experiences, but they are not real in the way that objects are real. Experiences are not simply subjective, since they require an object to be present; but when we have an experience, nothing comes into existence as a result, nor does anything cease when the experience stops. This view is also informed by the meditative experience of emptiness, i.e. the possibility of being alert, but unaware of any experience. The *Pheṇapiṇḍūpama Sutta* concludes with a well-known verse:

Form is like a ball of foam, sensation like a bubble.

Perception is like a mirage, volition like a plantain.

Cognition is like an illusion. So Ādiccabandhu taught.<sup>29</sup>

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*khāyati, tucchakaññeva khāyati, asārakaññeva khāyati. Kiñhi siyā, bhikkhave, rūpe sāro?* (SN iii.140-1). The Chinese *Samyuktāgama* counterpart has a related pericope at this point “[form] is nothingness (Skt. *ākimcanya*), not-durable, not, real, without substance; like sickness, like a boil, like a stab, like murder; impermanent, disappointing, empty (空; Skt *śūnya*), and insubstantial (無所有、無牢、無實、無有堅固，如病、如癰、如刺、如殺，無常、苦、空、非我。 SA 265 T2.68c1-7). Cf also T105, T106 which are standalone translations of a similar text.

<sup>27</sup> *Dukkham eva uppajjamānaṃ uppajjati, dukkhaṃ nirujjhamānaṃ nirujjhatī ti* (SN ii.17). Compare the *Vajirā Sutta* (SN 5:10) “For only suffering is produced, persists, and ceases. Nothing other than suffering is produced, nothing other than suffering ceases.” (*Dukkham eva hi sambhoti, dukkhaṃ tiṭṭhati veti ca; Naññatra dukkhā sambhoti, naññam dukkhā nirujjhatī ti* SN i.136).

<sup>28</sup> *pañca subhūte skandhās tathāgatena loka ākhyātaḥ* (Kimura PSP 4:58).

<sup>29</sup> *Pheṇapiṇḍūpamaṃ rūpaṃ, vedanā bubbulūpamā / Marīcikūpamā saññā, saṅkhārā*



We also find the simile in *Aṣṭa*, “form is like an illusion” (*māyopamaṃ rūpam*. Vaidya 1960: 9; c.f. *Rgs* 1.14 above). A similar verse occurs at the end of the *Vajracchedikā* (*Vaj*), where the simile becomes a metaphor:

We should see the conditioned as a star, a kind of blindness, a lamp,  
An illusion, a dewdrop, a bubble, a dream, a lightning flash, a cloud.<sup>30</sup>

So there is some continuity of this idea from Buddhist texts in Pāli into the early *Prajñāpāramitā* texts (*Aṣṭa*, *Rgs*, and *Vaj*). Huifeng (2016: 245) notes that, compared to the early and mainstream (i.e. commentarial and Abhidharma) usage, the semantic fields in *Aṣṭa* and *Rgs* are narrowed down to simply “illusion”.

The substitution of *śūnyatā* for *māyā* in *Pañcaviṃśati* is an interesting development in *Prajñāpāramitā* literature, especially as “only form is emptiness” becomes paired with “only emptiness is form”. In the introduction, I pointed out how difficult this is to understand taken at face value. Of course, there are various ways of resolving this difficulty, which are found in commentaries both ancient and modern. How does the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature view the problem?

### The Relation between Māyā and Śūnyatā

*Pañcaviṃśati* also has the expression “form is like an illusion”. More importantly, it has it in conjunction with the phrase “form is emptiness” (*rūpam śūnyatā*). Chapter Three opens with a dialogue between the Buddha and Śāriputra. Śāriputra asks, “Moreover, Bhagavan, how should the *bodhisatva mahāsatva* practise with respect to perfection of wisdom.”<sup>31</sup> The Buddha’s reply is that the *bodhisatva* does not perceive (*na samanupaśyati*)<sup>32</sup> the fact of being a *bodhisatva*, the name “*bodhisatva*”, the practice (*cāryam*) of a *bodhisatva*, or the perfection of wisdom. And they also don’t perceive the *skandhas*. Why not?

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*kadalūpamā; Māyūpamañca viññānaṃ, desitādiccabandhunā* (SN iii.142). The Chinese text of SA 265 closely approximates this: 觀色如聚沫，受如水上泡，想如春時燄，諸行如芭蕉，諸識法如幻，日種姓尊說。(T2 69a18-20).

<sup>30</sup> *tārakā timiraṃ dīpo māyāvaśyāya budbudaḥ |*

*supinaṃ vidyud abhraṃ ca evaṃ draṣṭavya saṃskṛtam || Vaj 22 ||* (Harrison & Watanabe 2006)

<sup>31</sup> *kathaṃ punar bhagavan bodhisatvena mahāsatvena prajñāpāramitāyāṃ caritavyam* (Kimura 2010: 1-1, 53).

<sup>32</sup> Conze translates *samanupaśyati* as “reviews” (1975a: 56) and notes (n.4) that he takes it to mean, “sees repeatedly”, i.e. “re-views”.

Because a *bodhisatva* is indeed empty of self-existence. It is not through being empty that form, sensation, perception, volition, and cognition are empty. *Emptiness is not separate (nānyatra) from form*. Emptiness is not separate from sensation, apperception, volition, or cognition. Form just is emptiness. Sensation, perception, volition, and cognition are only emptiness.

What is the reason? Because *bodhi*, *bodhisatva*, and *sūnyatā* are merely names (*nāmamātra*). Form, sensation, apperception, volition, and cognition are mere names. For this reason, form, sensation, apperception, volition and cognition are like illusions (*māyopama*); and a mere name is not situated or located [anywhere]: non-existent, unreal, false, an illusory idea; essenceless and without essence; non-arising and non-ceasing, not decreasing nor growing, not defiled nor purified.<sup>33</sup>

Note the similarity in meaning of the last part of this passage with a section of the *Heart Sutra*, though the choice of words is different. Here, form is emptiness because “form” is “merely a name” (*nāmamātra*) [for an aspect of experience or a *skandha*] and names are “like illusions” (*māyopama*). It’s not that there is some entity called “form” that is empty; but that emptiness is inseparable (*nānyatra*) from the experience of form; but at the same time “form” is not located anywhere in space, so it is unlike the object that supports (*ālambana*) the experience, which is located in space. Form is not the *object* of cognition; it *is* the cognition. This parallels Sue Hamilton’s observation that *dukkha* “... is not descriptive of the world *in which* we have our experience; it is not descriptive of everything we *perceive out there* and then react to. Rather, it *is* our [unenlightened] experience” (2000: 82; emphasis in the original). This outcome is not the result of the ontology of objects, but of the epistemology implied by the *skandhas* as “the apparatus of experience” (205).

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<sup>33</sup> *tathā hi sa bodhisatvo nāma svabhāvena śunyaḥ na śunyatayā rūpaṃ śunyaṃ na vedanā sañjñā saṃskārā na śunyatayā vijñānaṃ śunyaṃ nānyatra rūpācchunyaṭā nānyatra vedanāyāḥ sañjñāyāḥ saṃskārebhya nānyatra vijñānacchunyaṭā | śunyataiva rūpaṃ śunyataiva vedanā sañjñā saṃskārāḥ śunyataiva vijñānaṃ tat kasya hetoḥ tathā hi nāmamātram idaṃ yaduta bodhiḥ nāmamātramidaṃ yaduta bodhisatvaḥ nāmamātram idaṃ yadutacchunyaṭā | nāmamātram idaṃ yaduta rūpaṃ vedanā sañjñā saṃskārā vijñānaṃ | tathā hi māyopamaṃ rūpaṃ vedanā sañjñā saṃskārā māyopamaṃ vijñānaṃ māyā ca nāmamātram na deśasthā na pradeśasthāḥ asad abhūtaṃ vitathasamaṃ māyādarśanaṃ svabhāvarahitaṃ asvabhāvaścānutpādaḥ anirodhaḥ na hānir na vṛddhiḥ na saṃkleśo na vyavadānam. Gilgit ms. (folio 17 verso) – transcribed with minor corrections from Karashima (2016). Note that the manuscript spells *sūnya(tā)* with short *u* throughout.*

If we read the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature as expounding an epistemology rather than an ontology, some of the apparently paradoxical statements become clearer, especially if we keep in mind the context of meditations in which experiences cease (at least temporarily) without the cessation of consciousness per se.

Having explored the history of these ideas in the *Prajñāpāramitā* texts, I want to say a few words about the introduction of such changes to Buddhist texts.

## Changing Buddhist Texts

When the Pāli texts were written down it was the end of large-scale changes in them. They became a canon. By contrast, evidence from surviving manuscripts and Chinese translations suggests that Mahāyāna texts continued to change and especially to grow over centuries, despite being written down, so that each new translation into Chinese was longer than the previous translations. Some later translators and commentators, not appreciating this, criticised earlier translators for “abbreviating” the texts.

There are many reasons why texts are amended and adapted. These are not always to do with increasing wisdom over time; sometimes the changes are ideological; sometimes texts have been amended in ways that are dubious at best and catastrophic at worst. In the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, for example, during a discussion between the Buddha and Ānanda on the Buddha’s funeral arrangements (between the sections on the four pilgrimage places and how to deal with the Tathāgata’s remains), there is a passage about how *bhikkhus* should have nothing to do with women (DN ii.140-1). It is out of place and destroys the flow of the narrative at a critical juncture. However, for an apposite example of poor editorial choices, we can turn to the *Heart Sutra* itself. Take the line:

No ignorance or end of ignorance... up to... no ageing and death,  
no end of ageing and death (*nāvidyā nāvidyākṣayo yāvan na jarāmarāṇam na jarāmarāṇa-kṣayo*).

This is the standard list of twelve *nidānas*, in both the forward (*anuloma*) and reverse (*pratiloma*) directions at once, with just the first and last items on the list, and using the adverbial pronoun *yāvat* ‘as far as’ to stand for the middle ten items. One could hardly get a more orthodox pan-Buddhist idea than this list, and the Chinese *Heart Sutra* exactly follows the text of T223.<sup>34</sup> However, in the

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<sup>34</sup> *Pañcaviṃśati* again uses a slightly different syntax, e.g. “There is no ignorance or cessation

palm-leaf manuscript held in Hōryūji Temple, probably the oldest extant Sanskrit manuscript of the *Heart Sūtra*, this passage reads (with interpolations underlined):

No knowledge, no ignorance, no end of knowledge, or end of ignorance... up to... no ageing and death, no end of ageing and death (*na vidyā nāvidyā na vidyāksayo nāvidyāksāyo yāvan na jarāmaraṇaṃ na jarāmarāṇakṣayo*)

It's almost as if the editor did not recognise the twelve links here and, noticing two negations, interpolated their opposites as though this was the point of the exercise.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Huifeng (2014) has pointed out that in some manuscripts of the *Heart Sutra* the phrase “no attainment, no non-attainment” (*na prāptir nāprāptih*), which is included in Conze's Sanskrit edition (1967), is problematic. The next phrase in the text attributes the success of *bodhisatvas* to “being without attainment” (*aprāptivād*), so it doesn't make sense to negate non-attainment.<sup>36</sup> None of the Chinese versions have an equivalent of “no non-attainment”.

Another example is found in the study of *śūnyatā* in Chinese *Āgama* texts by Choong Mun-Keat (1999). In the Pāli text SN 22.90, a *bhikkhu* called Channa asks some elder *bhikkhus* to instruct him and they give him a teaching on the impermanence and essencelessness of the *khandhas*. He replies that he also thinks about the *khandhas* the way the elder *bhikkhus* talk about them.

“However, as a result, my mind does not leap towards, gain faith in, settle on, find satisfaction in, or embody the calming of all constructs, the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, or extinction.”<sup>37</sup>

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of ignorance...” (*na tatrāvidyā nāvidyānirodhaḥ*... Gilgit ms. folio 21 verso); or “No arising of ignorance, no cessation of ignorance...” (*nāvidyotpādo nāvidyānirodhaḥ*... Kimura, 1-1: 64). Which is further supporting evidence, if needed, for the Chinese origins hypothesis.

<sup>35</sup> This interpolation also occurs in some of the Dunhuang manuscripts of the *Heart Sutra*. Ben Nourse, personal communication, March 2017.

<sup>36</sup> In fact, Huifeng (2014) problematises the translation of the Chinese phrase 以無所得故 as *aprāptivād*, pointing out that Kumārajīva regularly uses the same characters to translate *anupalambhayogena*, which could mean “due to being engaged in [the practice of] non-perception [of objects]”, which would fit the context of the *Heart Sutra*. This suggests that the original translator of the *Heart Sutra* into Sanskrit was unfamiliar with Sanskrit *Prajñāpāramitā* idiom.

<sup>37</sup> *Atha ca pana me sabbasaṅkhārasamathe sabbūpadhipaṭinissagge taṇhākkhaye virāge nirodhe nibbāne cittaṃ na pakkhandati nappasīdati na santiṭṭhati nādhimuccati* (SN iii.133).

In other words, though he thinks about things the same way as the elder *bhikkhus* talk about them, he is not yet liberated. In the Chinese version of this text, SA 262, the Pāli “calming of all constructs” (*sabba-saṅkhāra-samatha*) has been replaced with “the emptiness of all activities” (一切諸行空寂) (Choong 1995:34-5). Another example is that the classic list of three characteristics (*tilakkhaṇā*) of the *khandhas* (i.e. *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*) is extended by the insertion of “emptiness” giving four characteristics, for example in SA 259 “impermanent, disappointing, *empty*, and essenceless” (無常、苦、空、非我。 Choong 1995 = T2.65b15).

As the Mahāyāna developed, *śūnyatā* became the most important concept, so it may have seemed natural to insert or interpolate this word into texts. Even though these new readings were sometimes grammatically or semantically problematic, they came to signify something important for Buddhists who chanted and studied them.

## Conclusions

By tracking the four phrases—“Form is not different from emptiness; emptiness is not different from form. Form is just emptiness; emptiness is just form.”□from the *Heart Sutra* back into earlier layers of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature, I discovered that an important change had taken place during the composition of *Pañcaviṃśati*. *Aṣṭa*, *Rgs*, and *Vaj*, all look back to existing imagery found in early Buddhist texts. It is only in *Pañcaviṃśati* that this is restated in relation to the experience of emptiness. And from there it appears in the *Heart Sutra*. We can diagram this progression:

**form is *like* an illusion [simile]**  
(*Phenapiṇḍūpama Sutta*, *Aṣṭa*, *Rgs*)

↓

**form is (an) illusion [metaphor]**  
(*Aṣṭa*, *Vaj*)

↓

**form is emptiness**  
(*Pañcaviṃśati* → *Heart Sutra*)

The key to understanding the enigmatic affirmation in the *Heart Sutra*, then, is the old Buddhist simile that form “is like an illusion” or that it is “without substance”, where form represents all of the *skandhas*. As Huifeng (2016) has emphasised, this characterization of the *skandhas* originally referenced a broader set of semantic fields, but subsumed fields like “hollowness” under the concept of illusion (*māyā*).

We have experiences, but ontological terms such as “existence” and “non-existence” don’t apply to the world of experience. This is important because it tells us why the *skandhas* are amenable to the analogies, similes and metaphors in question. Form qua mind-independent physical object is *not* like an illusion. On the contrary, physical objects are the contrast against which an illusion is defined. An illusion is the *opposite* of physical form as interpreted in the usual ontological sense. The figurative use only applies to form qua experience; i.e. form as a mental object. Experience is like an illusion because it is unlike reality. This only makes sense when this contrast between solid objects and ephemeral experience is clear. Even now, the ontology of experience presents a difficult problem for scientists and philosophers alike. Clearly, we *have* experiences, but in the midst of an experience what has come into being? Even with our far more sophisticated understanding of the processes involved in having an experience, there is still no easy answer to this question.

Early Buddhists understood that the presence of an object was required for experience, but they subsequently ignored objects and focussed on the mental and emotional processes that contribute to experience, i.e. the activity of the five *skandhas*. They did not take objects as being real or as collectively constituting a reality; nor did they make a fuss about this conclusion. Early Buddhists vigorously attacked any suggestion of an unchanging entity underlying being or experience, e.g. *ātman*, *satva*, *puruṣa*, *jīva*, and so on. However, they did this on the basis that we never *experience* permanence, because experience itself is always ephemeral, even when objects are not—which is often the case. If experience is always temporary, then we have no way to experience permanence, therefore we never will experience permanence.

What we see in the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature is the meditative attainment of emptiness, being used as an analogy for an anti-realist approach to experience. Rather than there being ultimately real entities in experience as the late Ābhidharmikas proposed, *Prajñāpāramitā* represented the (pre-existing early Buddhist) view that *nothing* in experience was ultimately real: the mental objects that Ābhidharmikas postulated to be real (and thus permanent and unchanging), cease altogether during the *śūnyatā-samādhi*. *Dharmas*, mental

objects, then are *not* like physical objects. Rather they are just like illusions: they have appearance, but not substance.

Buddhists understood that even (or *especially*) the observing self is an experience of the same kind; it can also simply cease. It does so in sleep, of course, but it can also cease while remaining alert in *samādhi*. In the key passage from *Pañcavimśati*, “form” (representing the *skandhas* or experiencing apparatus) is simply a name for an experience that arises and passes away. Along with the Mahāyāna, a new shorthand emerged for the ambiguous ontology of *dharmas*, i.e. that they are *śūnyatā*; or not simply empty, but like the meditator, in the *state* of being empty. Though if we think in terms of “forms are empty”, we are still dealing in signs (*nimitta*), which is not the same as being in the meditative state of emptiness in which there are no signs.

Far from being deliberately paradoxical, read in the light of Sue Hamilton’s work on early Buddhism, the *Prajñāpāramitā* is an attempt to discuss and celebrate the state of being empty: literally and metaphorically. Affirmatively, it tells us that experience is just like the state of being empty. The things we experience are just names, just illusions. Experience is just an appearance in which even the observer of the appearance is like an illusion. Experience arises without existing (i.e. without being permanent and unchanging) and it ceases without being nonexistent. Negatively, it tells us that in that state of being empty, there are no experiences, no categories of experience, no subject, no object, no directions, no time, and so on. This experience is an analogy for how *dharmas* are and how they may be categorised. In other words, when the ideas are appropriately contextualised, there is no paradox in the *Heart Sutra*. In (the state of) emptiness, there is *literally* no form, no sensation, etc.

Changing the simile “form is like an illusion” into the four phrases does more to obscure the message of the *Prajñāpāramitā* than reveal it. Whereas anyone can see what the simile is getting at, the four phrases are esoteric in the sense that they don’t make sense to anyone not *au fait* with the jargon of the sect. One can appreciate the enthusiasm for emptiness, particularly in an environment in which a powerful faction within Buddhism had announced that some or all *dharmas* were real and permanent, while another faction was regularly spending time in the meditative state of emptiness and knew that this could not be the case. Such is the power of this critique of realism, that the *Heart Sutra* had an almost universal and eternal appeal once it was created. It has meant that the *Heart Sutra* has a significance that transcends the grammatically and semantically problematic phrases. Conze typifies the approach of boldly stating something



that does not make sense such as “A is what A is not” (1975a: 84)—and asserting that it makes *perfect* sense, leaving his readers “dazed by so much splendour” (1975a: 90). A clearer case of the Emperor’s new clothes is hard to imagine, but it still draws crowds of admirers.

A secondary conclusion about the text itself is that the four phrases ought to be symmetrical. Where the received Sanskrit *Heart Sutra* has *rūpam śūnyatā; śūnyataiva rūpam*, to fit the pattern of all the other occurrences of this passage, it ought to have *rūpam eva śūnyatā; śūnyataiva rūpam*. We can add this to the list of problems with the received Sanskrit text identified by Jan Nattier (1992) and by subsequent research in the same vein (Huifeng 2014, Attwood 2015, 2017).

## Abbreviations

Aṣṭa	<i>Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra</i>
DN	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima Nikāya</i>
Pañcaviṃśati	<i>Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra</i>
SA	<i>Samyuktāgama (Chinese translation)</i>
SN	<i>Samyutta Nikāya</i>
T	<i>Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō (The Tripiṭaka in Chinese)</i>
Vaj	<i>Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra</i>

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## Portrayal of the Didactic through the Narrative The structure of Aśvaghōṣa's *Buddhacarita*

*Tanya Bharat Verma*

### Abstract

At the end of his text, the *Buddhacarita*, Aśvaghōṣa has written that he has composed this poem for the good and happiness of the people, in accordance with the Sage's Scriptures and out of reverence for the Buddha. The importance that he has accorded to disseminating the doctrine is evident from his emphasis on the discourse. However, this discourse is not communicated in the manner in which one would expect, and this may be attributed to the structure of the text. Since the *Buddhacarita* is a hagiography that traces the life of the Buddha from his birth till the attainment of *Mahāparinirvāṇa*, the expected student-teacher dialogue between the Buddha and his disciples is not present in the first half of the text (until his attainment of *nirvāṇa*). However, this does not mean that there are no such interactions. In this paper, I have examined the interesting manner in which the doctrine has been communicated by Aśvaghōṣa, through the agency of others, as prince Siddhārtha gradually proceeds to his ultimate position as the teacher of the doctrine, and after that as well. The manner in which Aśvaghōṣa has encapsulated the doctrine within the framework of a story, makes it interesting for the reader to probe the fascinating author/speaker and audience/listener dynamic in this text.

## Introductory Remarks

The *Buddhacarita*, a hagiographical account of the life of the Buddha, has been composed and compiled by Aśvaghōṣa. Of its twenty-eight cantos, a little less than half is available in the original Sanskrit, but complete translations in Chinese and Tibetan have been preserved. A. K. Warder has said that this poem falls naturally into four distinct parts of equal lengths – seven cantos each – and these correspond to the four stages of the Buddha’s life. First comes the birth and youth, culminating in his renunciation of worldly life and departure to the forest for living the life of an ascetic. The second quarter of the text ends with the attainment of Enlightenment, after a long quest of studying with various teachers and defeating Māra. The third quarter narrates how the Buddha, by teaching, made his realizations available to all beings. The last quarter describes the events leading up to the *Mahāparinirvāṇa*, his cremation, the enshrinement of his ashes, and the final redistribution of the ashes in *stūpas* constructed by king Aśoka.<sup>1</sup>

A unique feature of this text is that it was composed in a style that made it distinct from the scriptural or canonical works (*āgama*), the tradition or history (*itihāsa*) and the systematic treatises on specific subjects (*śāstra*). This style of writing – *kāvya* – refers to “literature as a form of art”.<sup>2</sup> Warder has regarded the works of Aśvaghōṣa as representing an example of a, “fully developed *kāvya* epic and drama”.<sup>3</sup> Vidya Dehejia has also said that the *Buddhacarita* is a well-planned work, written in Sanskrit by an accomplished poet with a developed skill in the use of the style of ornate court poetry (*kāvya*).<sup>4</sup> She has pointed

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<sup>1</sup> A. K. Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature, Vol. 2: Origins and Formation of the Classical Kāvya*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1972, pp. 146, 147.

<sup>2</sup> A. K. Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature, Vol. 1: Literary Criticism*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1972, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, Vol. 2, p. 142. Warder has said that Vālmīki is referred to as the ‘First Kavi’, and the Rāmāyaṇa was the first epic *kāvya*. However, this genre did not remain static and the pioneers of the epic *kāvya* after Vālmīki transformed it from a continuous narrative to a chain of independent stanzas. Aśvaghōṣa was not the ‘great innovator’ of this new style, but he was one of the poets of the time, who used it in his works. Warder, while praising Aśvaghōṣa’s skills as a writer, has said, “His genius was such that he evidently could take all the intricacies of theory – of language, poetics, the science of pleasure *kāma* and other incidental props of writing – in his stride, and find the process exhilarating and productive of the most spontaneous caprices of his poetic wit”. See, Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, Vol. 2, pp. 76, 145, 172.

<sup>4</sup> Vidya Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art: Visual Narratives of India*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 1997, p. 68.



out that Aśvaghōṣa was as much a court poet, trained in the *kāvya* style, as he was a Buddhist ecclesiast.<sup>5</sup> These two dimensions of Aśvaghōṣa's identity are evident in the praise written for the *Buddhacarita* by Yi-Jing, a seventh century Buddhist monk and traveller. Yi-Jing, as cited by Dehejia, wrote that the *Buddhacarita*, "...is widely read or sung throughout the five divisions of India, and the countries of the South Sea. He (Aśvaghōṣa) clothes manifold meanings and ideas in a few words, which rejoice the heart of the reader so that he never feels tired from reading the poem. Besides, it should be counted as meritorious for one to read this book, inasmuch as it contains the noble doctrine given in a concise form".<sup>6</sup>

This aim of putting across the doctrine has been indicated by Aśvaghōṣa himself at the end of the last Canto of the *Buddhacarita*. He has said that he has composed this poem for the good and happiness of the people, in accordance with the Sage's Scriptures and out of reverence for the Buddha, not to demonstrate his qualities of learning or skill in poetry.<sup>7</sup> The importance that he has accorded to disseminating the doctrine of the Buddha, as contained in the canonical texts, is evident from his emphasis on discourse. In this regard, Warder has said that the works of Aśvaghōṣa are "highly doctrinal" and put forward the Buddha's teachings in full detail.<sup>8</sup> In fact, he is of the opinion that the *Buddhacarita* is much fuller in terms of putting forward a detailed doctrine than the various recensions of the *Tripitaka*.<sup>9</sup> He regards this text as superior even in terms of its skilful presentation. This is because the points are made immediately clear rather than relying on the heavy and repetitive style of the original canonical *sūtras*. Thus, Aśvaghōṣa has, "...simply improved the clarity and acceptability of the exposition without – as far as one can see – modifying the content as he received it through his school".<sup>10</sup> In fact, Warder has pointed out that, later on, the Buddhist scholars valued and appreciated Aśvaghōṣa's works, as statements of the Buddhist doctrine, and they borrowed and quoted from him quite often.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art*, p. 69.

<sup>6</sup> Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art*, p. 68.

<sup>7</sup> *Buddhacarita* (henceforth referred to as *B.*), xxviii. 74., tr. E. H. Johnston, *Aśvaghōṣa's Buddhacarita or Acts of the Buddha*, Part III, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 1995 (First Edition: Lahore, 1936).

<sup>8</sup> Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, Vol. 2, p. 169.

<sup>9</sup> Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, Vol. 2, p. 169.

<sup>10</sup> Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, Vol. 2, p. 170.

<sup>11</sup> Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, Vol. 2, p. 170.

While the portrayal of the discourse, especially in the form of teacher-student interactions, is present throughout the text, it is not always communicated in the manner in which one would expect. In this paper, I have argued that a likely reason for this can be attributed to the structure of the text. Since the *Buddhacarita* is a hagiography that traces the life of the Buddha from his birth till the attainment of *Mahāparinirvāṇa*, the expected student-teacher dialogue between the Buddha and his disciples is not present in the first half of the text (until his attainment of *nirvāṇa*). However, since this appears to have been Aśvaghōṣa's primary aim of writing this text, this does not mean that there are no such interactions in the first fourteen cantos. The prince Siddhārtha (who is not yet the Buddha or the "Enlightened One") is often portrayed as the student and the technique of using monologues and dialogues to put across the discourse is also often utilized. In this paper, I have examined the interesting manner in which Aśvaghōṣa communicated the doctrine through the agency of others, as prince Siddhārtha gradually proceeded to his ultimate position as the teacher of the doctrine. I have also examined how Aśvaghōṣa has represented the Buddha's teachings followed by 'conversions' after his attainment *nirvāṇa*, and the manner in which this can be contrasted with discourses communicated by the other teachers of the Buddhist doctrine. The manner in which Aśvaghōṣa has balanced the two elements of telling a story and communicating the doctrine has given rise to an interesting structure of the discourse.

### **The prince as a student**

The first teacher-student dialogue is depicted as taking place between the *Śuddhādhivāsa* deities<sup>12</sup> (who functioned and spoke through the charioteer) and the prince when the latter insisted on visiting the city. These deities taught him about the realities of life, at a time when all others were deliberately trying to hide it from him. They made the prince witness old age, sickness and death.<sup>13</sup> These realizations, which are clearly laid out in statements made by the prince

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<sup>12</sup> The *Śuddhādhivāsa* deities have been mentioned very frequently as aiding the Buddha in leaving the palace and renouncing the world, despite obstructions by the king and the prince's companions. Olivelle has referred to them as 'Gods of the pure realm', and he has mentioned that they are a particular class of deities within Buddhist mythology. See Patrick Olivelle, *Life of the Buddha*, New York University Press, New York, 2009, p. 434, n. 1.20.

<sup>13</sup> *B.*, iii. 26. onwards, *B.*, iii. 40. onwards, and *B.*, iii. 54. onwards, tr. Johnston (Part II).

while talking to the charioteer, spurred him to renounce.<sup>14</sup> Thus, since this text depicts the journey that culminates in the Buddha becoming a teacher, the initial instances of the teacher-student interaction constitute discourses being imparted to him, rather than by him. This is also evident in the prince's interaction with the mendicant (actually a heavenly being who had come to show him the path that he was to take – that of a *śramaṇa*). Once again the prince is described as a student who learned from the mendicant about how a renunciate is supposed to live his life.<sup>15</sup>

The prince is also depicted as the student in Canto XII, when he visited his first teacher, the sage Arāḍa. However, it is interesting that the teacher is portrayed as speaking to this particular student with “reverence”.<sup>16</sup> Also, sage Arāḍa told him that he was exempt from the rules that normally bind a teacher and a pupil. He said that the doctrine was generally taught only when the student had been tested. However, considering the depth of character and resolution of the prince, he said, “...I need not put you to an examination”. The prince used various metaphors to refer to the kind of guidance that he wanted from this teacher, and this included the correlation between sight and light, travelling and a guide, and a river and a boat. He asked Arāḍa to explain to him how one could attain release from old age, death and disease.<sup>17</sup> This was followed by the teacher's discourse on the senses, the objects of the senses, the *dharma* (as it was laid out in the *śāstras*), the manner in which one could practice concentrated meditation, and finally, the steps for attaining liberation.<sup>18</sup> It is interesting that even here the prince was placed above the teacher, and this is clear from the fact that he was referred to (by Arāḍa) as – ‘O knower of the nature of things’,<sup>19</sup> ‘O knower of the right means’,<sup>20</sup> ‘O prince free from attachment’,<sup>21</sup> ‘O prince free from delusion’,<sup>22</sup> and so on. It is also crucial to note that, at the end, after

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<sup>14</sup> For instance, on seeing an old man and on being told by the charioteer that he will not be exempt from such a fate, he is portrayed as saying, “Thus old age strikes down indiscriminately memory and beauty and valor, and yet with such a sight before its eyes the world is not perturbed”. See, *B.*, iii. 36., tr. Johnston (Part II).

<sup>15</sup> *B.*, v. 17. to *B.*, v. 20., tr. Johnston (Part II).

<sup>16</sup> *B.* xii. 4., tr. Olivelle.

<sup>17</sup> *B.*, xii. 13. and *B.*, xii. 14., tr. Johnston (Part II).

<sup>18</sup> *B.*, xii. 17. to *B.*, xii. 65., tr. Johnston (Part II).

<sup>19</sup> *B.*, xii. 18., tr. Johnston (Part II).

<sup>20</sup> *B.*, xii. 30., tr. Johnston (Part II).

<sup>21</sup> *B.*, xii. 31., tr. Johnston (Part II).

<sup>22</sup> *B.*, xii. 34., tr. Johnston (Part II).

listening to the sage, the prince stated that this doctrine would not lead to “final beatitude”.<sup>23</sup> Aśvaghōṣa had written, the prince “...was not satisfied on learning the doctrine of Arāḍa, and, discerning that it was incomplete, he turned away from there”.<sup>24</sup> It is mentioned that after this, he went to the hermitage of Udraka, but did not accept his system either.<sup>25</sup> These statements can be seen as leading up to Canto XV, in which the Buddha proclaimed himself as ‘*svayambhū*’ or the ‘originator’ of the doctrine.<sup>26</sup>

### Dialogues and monologues

There are instances in the text where the prince is portrayed as having realizations regarding knowledge, and these are sometimes shared with the portrayed listeners, but more often, they are not. Thus, the embedded discourse is presented in the form of dialogues and monologues. For instance, in Canto IV, when the women were trying to seduce the prince and lure him away from his urge to renounce, the prince is portrayed as almost giving a discourse about the impermanence of life to the women and the *purohita*’s son, Udāyin. However, a closer reading suggests that he was not addressing them directly, but rather referring to their ignorance in the third person.<sup>27</sup> The fact that there was no response from them also indicates that this is a silent monologue that the prince may have been thinking of rather than voicing aloud. While it may have been a monologue, as far as the ‘listeners’ in the text were concerned, it is an indirect discourse for the ‘audience’.<sup>28</sup> This may reflect a strategy employed by Aśvaghōṣa to describe the teachings of the Buddha before portraying his renunciation. This monologue/discourse is evident in Canto V as well, when the prince realized the impermanence of life.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *B.*, xii. 69., tr. Johnston (Part II).

<sup>24</sup> *B.*, xii. 83., tr. Johnston (Part II).

<sup>25</sup> *B.*, xii. 84., tr. Johnston (Part II).

<sup>26</sup> *B.*, xv. 4., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>27</sup> *B.*, iv. 56., tr. Johnston (Part II).

<sup>28</sup> It is crucial, at this point, to highlight the difference between what I mean by the ‘audience’ (that is, the readers) of the text, and the ‘listeners’ in the text. In the context of this specific example, while the portrayed listeners may have been the women and Udāyin, the intended audience were those who read or heard the recitation of the *Buddhacarita*, at a later stage. Thus, while this discourse was not communicated to the portrayed listeners, it was indirectly being communicated to the audience of the text. While this author/speaker and audience/listener dynamic, as portrayed in the *Buddhacarita*, forms a fascinating study in itself, it lies beyond the scope of this paper, but it is still worth mentioning as such demarcations are vital for the reader.

<sup>29</sup> *B.*, v. 12. to *B.*, v. 64., tr. Johnston (Part II).

However, this strategy was not used all the time, and there are instances during his ‘studentship’ when the prince is often depicted as giving a discourse. The discourse given to the charioteer Chandaka, in order to convince the latter of his decision to renounce, marks the first instance of such a discourse. The prince asked Chandaka to return his ornaments to his father, and tell him that he had entered the penance grove. This is followed by a dialogue in which he tried to convince Chandaka about the impermanence of life and the certainty of death, as well as the fact that his ancestors had also followed this path of renunciation. Chandaka tried to persuade him to return because he did not deem this to be the correct age for him to renounce. He also quoted *dharma* and referred to the prince’s emotional ties with his family members. However, the prince reiterated his point about the inevitability of separation, and sent Chandaka and the horse Kanthaka back to the palace.<sup>30</sup>

The conversation between the prince and the minister and *purohita* in Canto IX also took the shape of a discourse in which the views of the Buddha related to the inevitability of death, the contrasts between the lifestyle of an ascetic and that of a king, and the *āśrama* system were described by the author.<sup>31</sup> This is also the case with the interaction between Siddhārtha and King Śreṇya. The discourse that followed this interaction mainly focused on the manner in which one should not fall prey to the objects of the senses, and specifically addressed the transitory nature of kingship (since he is portrayed as addressing a king).<sup>32</sup> It is interesting to note that, while the prince is portrayed as giving a discourse to the king and advising him about the transient nature of kingship and the pull of the objects of the senses, he is portrayed as ending the conversation by saying, “...enter into the glories of sovereignty, O king, observe your own *dharma*”. Thus, although Aśvaghōṣa has woven in the discourse of the Buddha in the dialogue, he has not yet portrayed the listeners in the text as students of the Buddha.<sup>33</sup>

An intriguing monologue, takes place in Canto VII, in which the prince is once again portrayed as a student. However, he is portrayed as a student, who learnt and subsequently rejected what he had learnt. When the prince went to the hermitage of the descendants of Bhṛgu, he inquired about their “method of *dharma*”, and what they had resolved to achieve. This inquiry can be deemed

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<sup>30</sup> *B.*, vi. 13. to *B.*, vi. 53., tr. Johnston (Part II).

<sup>31</sup> *B.*, ix. 31. to *B.*, ix. 51., tr. Johnston (Part II).

<sup>32</sup> *B.*, xi. 2. to *B.*, xi. 50. and *B.*, ix. 55., tr. Johnston (Part II).

<sup>33</sup> *B.*, xi. 70., tr. Johnston (Part II).

as genuine from the statement, “As I have never seen a hermitage till to-day, I am unacquainted with this method of *dharma*. Will you therefore kindly explain to me what is your resolve and to what point it is directed?”<sup>34</sup> The brahmins referred to their food habits, the austerities practiced by them, the rituals they performed on a daily basis,<sup>35</sup> and their desire for attaining ‘*divam*’<sup>36</sup> (which has been translated by Johnston as ‘Paradise’<sup>37</sup> and by Olivelle as ‘heaven’).<sup>38</sup> The fact that he learnt from them but rejected their teachings, and subsequently charted his own path is evident from the monologue, in which he did not teach them what he believed to be the correct way, but rather thought to himself what he regarded as incorrect. The prince was of the opinion that ‘*divam*’ was in itself a form of bondage. He also questioned the relevance of the food restraints that were imposed and the rituals that were practiced.<sup>39</sup> The author has stated, “...examining the austerities, and after considering them all and forming a judgement on them, he departed from that place of austerities”.<sup>40</sup>

This may be viewed as an attempt to show the prince as exploring different existing paths before he propounded his own doctrine. Thus, the students of such monologues were probably meant to be the actual audience, without the presence of an intermediary listener in the text. While the prince did not regard the ascetic brahmins as his ‘teachers’ (considering the fact that he rejected what they had told him), it is interesting to note that these brahmins were portrayed as redirecting him to his first teacher, sage Arāḍa. However, here too it was ‘perceived’ by the brahmin speaker that the prince would reject his views and leave him (despite the fact that Arāḍa is referred to as one who had “gained insight into final bliss”).<sup>41</sup>

Another discourse, described by Aśvaghōṣa, which took place in the form of a silent, contemplative monologue, is in Canto XIV. This section of the text describes the prince’s attainment of enlightenment, in which Siddhārtha remembered his past lives and realized the karmic impact of indulging in sense

<sup>34</sup> *B.*, vii. 12., tr. Johnston (Part II).

<sup>35</sup> *B.*, vii. 14. to *B.*, vii. 17., tr. Johnston (Part II).

<sup>36</sup> Aśvaghōṣa: *Buddhacarita*, [http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/1\\_sanskr/5\\_poetry/2\\_kavya/asvbc\\_1u.htm](http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/1_sanskr/5_poetry/2_kavya/asvbc_1u.htm), accessed on 21/01/2015 at 10:13 PM.

<sup>37</sup> *B.*, vii. 18., tr. Johnston (Part II).

<sup>38</sup> *B.*, vii. 18., tr. Olivelle.

<sup>39</sup> *B.*, vii. 21., and *B.*, vii. 28. to *B.*, vii. 33., tr. Johnston (Part II).

<sup>40</sup> *B.*, vii. 34., tr. Johnston (Part II).

<sup>41</sup> *B.*, vii. 54. and *B.* vii. 55., tr. Olivelle.

pleasures, as well as the different levels of consciousness, which finally led to the state of omniscience.<sup>42</sup>

### Transition from student to teacher

At this point, in Canto XIV, the transition from a ‘prince’ to a ‘sage’ takes place. However, he is still not portrayed as a teacher. In fact, there is a point after the attainment of enlightenment, where the sage is depicted as wishing to remain immobile rather than teaching, because he felt that the doctrine of salvation was exceedingly subtle and the world was lost in ‘false views’ and ‘vain efforts’.<sup>43</sup> He is portrayed as being coaxed out of this thought-process by two chiefs of the heavenly realm. They encouraged him to rescue the world that was ‘drowning in suffering’.<sup>44</sup>

After attaining enlightenment, the sage was asked by a ‘pious mendicant’ who his Guru was, from whom he had learnt this accomplishment. The sage is portrayed as replying that he did not have a teacher and he had ‘obtained’ *nirvāṇa*, and was the ‘*svayambhū*’ or the ‘originator’ of the doctrine.<sup>45</sup> He also clearly proclaimed that he had comprehended all that there was to be comprehended, and that which others had not comprehended, and therefore, he categorically stated, “...I am a Buddha”.<sup>46</sup> This marks the transition of the terminology used to address the Buddha from ‘prince’ to ‘sage’ and finally to ‘the Buddha’. This is reiterated in a later section of the Canto where the Buddha is portrayed as saying, “...for salvation’s sake I developed eyesight for an unprecedented method of the Law, which had been hitherto unheard of”.<sup>47</sup> (Emphasis mine.)

After this, he proclaimed to the mendicant that he was on his way to preach the “deathless Law” to those who were “harassed by suffering”.<sup>48</sup> It is interesting to note that, on the one hand, the Buddha is portrayed as proclaiming that he does not have a teacher, and he has originated the *dharma*. On the other hand, he is portrayed as emphasizing on his future role as a teacher to many. With respect to the author’s portrayal of the teacher-student relationship, this may imply that

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<sup>42</sup> *B.* xiv. 6. to *B.* xiv. 86., tr. Johnston (Part II).

<sup>43</sup> *B.* xiv. 96., tr. Johnston (Part II).

<sup>44</sup> *B.* xiv. 101., tr. Johnston (Part II).

<sup>45</sup> *B.*, xv. 4., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>46</sup> *B.*, xv. 5., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>47</sup> *B.*, xv. 38., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>48</sup> *B.*, xv. 6., tr. Johnston (Part III).



this relationship was only relevant when the Buddha takes the role of a teacher, and not when he was the student, and sage Arāḍa, Udraka Rāmaputra or the ascetic brahmins at Bhṛḡu's *āśrama* were the teachers.

It is also noteworthy that after deciding to preach the tranquillity that he had experienced, the Buddha is portrayed as first thinking about his teachers – Arāḍa and Udraka, in order to go and teach them. However, after realizing that they were no longer alive, he decided to go to the five mendicants.<sup>49</sup> This is quite fascinating because Aśvaghōṣa has put forward a reversed teacher-student dynamic.

The interactions with the five mendicants are interesting because these mendicants are portrayed as transitioning from associates of the prince to the first students of the enlightened Buddha. Hints of this transition are indicated by the author right from the beginning of their interactions (even before he attained *nirvāṇa*). For instance, it is written that they saw him and, “desiring liberation”, approached him. It is also stated, “...they served him reverently, abiding as pupils under his orders...”<sup>50</sup> While the prince is almost depicted as their teacher, it is interesting that he is portrayed as practicing the same severe austerities to end the cycle of birth and death, and in fact, this was a practice that they had vowed to follow before they even met him.<sup>51</sup> This path was later rejected by the prince due to the belief that the desired result could not be attained by one who was worn out and exhausted due to hunger and thirst.<sup>52</sup> The five mendicants (who had earlier approached him as his pupils) decided to leave him because they thought that he had “renounced the holy life”.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, when the Buddha went to the mendicants after his enlightenment, the mendicants criticized him because they felt that he had chosen a path of ease and abandoned the path of severe austerities.<sup>54</sup> However, despite this, they are still

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<sup>49</sup> *B.*, xiv. 106., tr. Johnston (Part II).

<sup>50</sup> *B.* xii. 92. and *B.* xii. 93., tr. Johnston (Part II).

<sup>51</sup> *B.* xii. 91. to *B.* xii. 95., tr. Johnston (Part II). Although not directly related to the issue at hand, it is significant to note that Aśvaghōṣa has glorified the prince even in the state of emaciation that was brought on by these austerities. This can be contrasted with the Buddha's firm stance against the severe austerities and self-mortification practiced by the naked ascetic Kassapa as portrayed in the *Dīgha-nikāya*. See *DN.*, 8.15. and *DN.*, 8.16., tr. Maurice Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, Wisdom Publications, Boston, 1995, and *B.* xii. 97. to *B.* xii. 99., tr. Johnston (Part II).

<sup>52</sup> *B.* xii. 103., tr. Johnston (Part II).

<sup>53</sup> *B.* xii. 114., tr. Johnston (Part II).

<sup>54</sup> *B.*, xv. 17., tr. Johnston (Part III).

represented as treating him with respect and reverence. For instance, it is stated, “Showing Him many attentions...they all treated him as their Guru...”<sup>55</sup> This may reflect the manner in which Āśvaghōṣa’s perception of the Buddha (as his teacher) had an impact on the depiction of these interactions. Another possibility is that since the mendicants were in any case going to become his students, the author may have created such a description in order to ultimately lead up to that moment.

The first proper teacher-student interaction that is portrayed in the *Buddhacarita* takes place in Canto XV, when the mendicants questioned him about why he abandoned severe austerities, and expressed skepticism regarding his attainments.<sup>56</sup> The Buddha is, in turn, portrayed as questioning the role of severe austerities on the path to enlightenment while also speaking against severe indulgences.<sup>57</sup> He laid down the teachings associated with the ‘Middle Path’<sup>58</sup> and the ‘Eightfold Path’.<sup>59</sup> With this portrayal of students who are active listeners in the text, the teachings were no longer recorded in the form of a monologue.

### **Discourses followed by ‘conversions’**

There are many instances of discourses followed by ‘conversion’ in the second half of the *Buddhacarita*. In fact, Canto XVI has been translated by Johnston as “Many Conversions” (although he has acknowledged in a footnote that the literal translation would have actually been “Having/Who has many disciples”).<sup>60</sup> This Canto refers to the manner in which many people became a part of the Buddhist fold. This is evident in the Buddha’s interactions with Yaśas and King Śreṇya in Canto XVI;<sup>61</sup> the brahmin Upatiṣya and the brahmin who went on to become the Arhat Mahākāśyapa in Canto XVII;<sup>62</sup> the wealthy householder Sudatta in Canto XVIII;<sup>63</sup> the Buddha’s own father, King Śuddhodhana in Canto XIX;<sup>64</sup>

<sup>55</sup> *B.*, xv. 21., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>56</sup> *B.*, xv. 25. and *B.*, xv. 26., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>57</sup> *B.*, xv. 27. to *B.*, xv. 31., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>58</sup> *B.*, xv. 34., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>59</sup> *B.*, xv. 37., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>60</sup> Johnston, *Āśvaghōṣa’s Buddhacarita*, p. 15, n. 1.

<sup>61</sup> *B.*, xvi. 3. onwards, tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>62</sup> *B.*, xvii. 4. onwards, tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>63</sup> *B.*, xviii. 1. onwards, tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>64</sup> *B.*, xix. 16. onwards, tr. Johnston (Part III).

King Prasenajit in Canto XX;<sup>65</sup> Amrapālī in Canto XXII;<sup>66</sup> the Licchavi nobles in Canto XXIII;<sup>67</sup> Ānanda in Canto XXIV;<sup>68</sup> the Mallas in Canto XXV;<sup>69</sup> and the wandering ascetic Subhadra in Canto XXVI.<sup>70</sup> Āsvaghoṣa has conveyed the major tenets of Buddhism through the portrayal of these discourses.

It is interesting that the kinds of teachings that are portrayed are often context-specific. In Canto XX, King Prasenajit admitted that he was being harassed by passion and the ‘kingly profession’. The response of the Buddha seemed to be aimed at stirring his mind to come out of this, and rule his kingdom in accordance with the Law.<sup>71</sup> This was also the case with the teachings imparted to Sudatta, the wealthy householder, who was told about the fruits that followed the act of giving.<sup>72</sup> Also, when the courtesan Amrapālī approached the Buddha, he is portrayed as telling the monks to be aware of the knowledge and keep their passions in check, because he perceived the ‘impact’ that Amrapālī had on men. The sole aim of women is depicted as distracting men from the ‘true goal’.<sup>73</sup> At the same time, her intentions to come to the Buddha are described by him as virtuous and she is portrayed as reverently doing obeisance. However, he discouraged her by saying that the Law could not be attained by a woman who was so young and ‘in the bloom of her beauty’.<sup>74</sup> After this, the tone of the conversation suddenly changed. Amrapālī is praised for desiring to know the Law, and the Buddha is depicted as describing this as her real wealth. This is followed by a discourse on impermanence.<sup>75</sup> In Canto XXIII, before the discussion takes place between the Buddha and the Licchavis, there is a description of their elaborate clothing and ornamentation. It is interesting that the basic premise of the discourse given to them was related to the fact that a man may live in a palace and dress elaborately. However, if he has cultivated

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<sup>65</sup> *B.*, xx. 5. onwards, tr. Johnston (Part III). Legitimacy for the Buddha is sought from the King Prasenajit. He is depicted as saying, “O Saint, no gain is known outside this, namely the sight of your doctrine”. See, *B.*, xx. 10., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>66</sup> *B.*, xxii. 16., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>67</sup> *B.*, xxiii. 20. to *B.*, xxiii. 56., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>68</sup> *B.*, xxiv. 8. to *B.*, xxiv. 18., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>69</sup> *B.*, xxv. 68. to *B.*, xxv. 81., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>70</sup> *B.*, xxvi. 2. to *B.*, xxvi. 20., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>71</sup> *B.*, xx. 10. to *B.*, xx. 48., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>72</sup> *B.*, xviii. 61., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>73</sup> *B.*, xxii. 20. to *B.*, xxii. 36., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>74</sup> *B.*, xxii. 41., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>75</sup> *B.*, xxii. 44. to *B.*, xxii. 49., tr. Johnston (Part III).

discipline, then his way of life is equal to that of a seer.<sup>76</sup> Thus, the listeners that were portrayed in the text were kept in mind while putting forward the discourse. It is also possible to see this in another way – the listeners in the *Buddhacarita*, such as the king Prasenajit or the courtesan Amrapālī, were portrayed in accordance with the kind of discourse that the author wished to put forward for the audience that would listen to or read the text later on.

The interaction between the Buddha and his last disciple, the wandering ascetic Subhadra, is especially significant for two main reasons. Firstly, the straightforward and categorical manner in which the superiority of the Buddha's discourse is highlighted seems to clearly indicate the aim of Aśvaghōṣa's work – to convince the readers of the supremacy of the Buddha's doctrine. Secondly, the depiction of the last student of the Buddha entering the final *nirvāṇa* before his Teacher makes this dialogue stand apart from the other teacher-student interactions, in terms of the desired impact on the intended audience.<sup>77</sup>

### **The teacher's expanded reach**

With the portrayal of 'conversions', it is also interesting to note that the reach of the Buddha's knowledge expanded quite substantially. The impact of the knowledge was not just restricted to the five mendicants. It is mentioned that this knowledge was heard by a member of the Kauṇḍinya clan and a hundred deities, who "...obtained the insight that is pure and free from passion (*rajas*)".<sup>78</sup> There is also a general reference to the "certain self-controlled dwellers in the heavens", who reached a stage of tranquillity on hearing the Buddha's words.<sup>79</sup> In fact, it was not the mendicants, but rather the members of the Kauṇḍinya clan, who were the first to grasp the knowledge and understand the Law from, "...the holy Guru, the Tathāgata".<sup>80</sup> There are other similar instances as well. After teaching Yaśas, it is stated that fifty-four friends of Yaśas (out of attachment to him) "gained the Law".<sup>81</sup> This was also the case with the conversion of the Kāśyapa seers. When the Buddha used magical powers in order to demonstrate his superiority over the Kāśyapa seers, it is stated that Auruvilva Kāśyapa's five hundred followers

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<sup>76</sup> *B.*, xxiii. 20., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>77</sup> *B.*, xxvi. 22., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>78</sup> *B.*, xv. 51., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>79</sup> *B.*, xv. 57., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>80</sup> *B.*, xv. 53., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>81</sup> *B.*, xvi. 16., tr. Johnston (Part III).

saw the seer's sudden change of heart and also adhered to the Law.<sup>82</sup> Also, after the Buddha gave a discourse on salvation to the three Kāśyapa seers, it is stated that the thousand mendicants who heard these sermons of the Holy One were, "released from the infections".<sup>83</sup> It is also stated in the context of King Śreṇya, "Many men who dwelt in the capital of Magadha and the inhabitants of heaven became pure in mind in that assembly, on hearing the Sage's preaching..."<sup>84</sup>

### The other teachers

The transition of the characters of this story from the stage of a student to a teacher is not just portrayed in the context of the Buddha. In Canto XVI, the mendicants who were taught by Tathāgata were told to "help others who are still suffering". They were asked to, "...traverse this earth and impart the Law to mankind out of compassion for their affliction".<sup>85</sup> However, despite the fact that other teachers have been referred to, Aśvaghoṣa seems to have made a conscious attempt throughout the text to emphasize on the Buddha's predominant role as a teacher above all others, whether they were teachers of other traditions or even his own disciples. The teachers of other traditions like Arāḍa, Udraka and the ascetic brahmins have already been referred to in the previous section. The assessment of the Buddha's disciples, who were later represented as teachers, has been examined subsequently.

The first example is an instance where the student, who could have easily been portrayed as a teacher of the doctrine, continued to be portrayed as a student. After the 'conversion' of the Kāśyapa seers, they are portrayed as accompanying the Buddha to Rājagṛha. The Kāśyapa seer, after stating in an assembly that he had abandoned austerities and fire-worship, was told by the Buddha to demonstrate his miraculous powers, rather than teach the people gathered there. The people are portrayed as doing obeisance to the Kāśyapa seer with reverence after he demonstrated these magical powers.<sup>86</sup> However, at this point, it is clarified by the author (through the Kāśyapa seer himself) that he was the pupil, and his master was the 'Holy One'.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> *B.*, xvi. 37., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>83</sup> *B.*, xvi. 45., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>84</sup> *B.*, xvi. 95., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>85</sup> *B.*, xvi. 19. and *B.*, xvi. 20., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>86</sup> *B.*, xvi. 65. to *B.*, xvi. 69., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>87</sup> *B.*, xvi. 70., tr. Johnston (Part III).

Even when the students were portrayed as preaching the Buddha's message, they continued to identify themselves more as his pupils than as teachers of the doctrine. For instance, in Canto XVII, there is a reference to Aśvajit, who was approached by a mendicant of Kapila's sect. The latter is portrayed as asking the former who his teacher was, what did he teach, and how did these teachings lead to such a fresh appearance and inner tranquillity in Aśvajit. The student Aśvajit is then portrayed as referring to the Buddha and saying that since he was new to the path, he could only explain a small portion of "the words of the Great Sage".<sup>88</sup> This is followed by a discourse, which led to the realization of the truth by the brahmin, Upatiṣya.<sup>89</sup>

It is further stated that Upatiṣya repeated the doctrine to another and that person also attained the "right eyesight".<sup>90</sup> Immediately after acquiring the knowledge, they felt drawn to the Teacher (that is, the Buddha) and went to visit him immediately.<sup>91</sup> It is interesting to note that when they visited the Buddha, they were still portrayed as brahmins bearing the triple staff and twisted locks. However, after the Buddha taught them the Law, his 'might' turned them into mendicants dressed in ochre-coloured robes.<sup>92</sup> It is significant to note that this transformation did not take place when they attained the knowledge for the first time from the disciples of the Buddha, but rather, when they were taught directly by him. These examples highlight the manner in which Aśvaghōṣa has referred to other teachers of the doctrine, but at the same time, consciously tried to focus only on the Buddha's role as the teacher.

An exception to this is evident from the unique portrayal of the brahmin Droṇa. After the Buddha's *Mahāparinirvāṇa*, the kings were preparing to fight a war in order to receive a share of the relics. This situation was averted by the brahmin Droṇa. Droṇa represents a very interesting character of this text because, while he is clearly referred to as a brahmin, he is also a proponent of the Buddha's teachings. An interesting dialogue has been portrayed between Droṇa and the kings. Droṇa told them to practice forbearance according to the teachings of the Śākya Sage, whom they wished to honour by taking a share of the relics. The kings acknowledged their mistake and referred to his words as friendly and wise, but also pointed out that they had a right to fight in order to display their devotion to the Supreme Master. They referred to the purity of their intentions and criticized the miserliness of the Mallas (who were not ready to distribute the relics of the Buddha among the

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<sup>88</sup> *B.*, xvii. 7., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>89</sup> *B.*, xvii. 9., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>90</sup> *B.*, xvii. 18., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>91</sup> *B.*, xvii. 19., tr. Johnston (Part III).

<sup>92</sup> *B.*, xvii. 22., tr. Johnston (Part III).

kings). In response to this, Droṇa drew upon the teachings of forbearance by the Buddha and asked them to share the relics and allow the Law to endure, despite the passing of the Master.<sup>93</sup> The emphasis on Droṇa's identity as a brahmin as well as a teacher of the Buddhist doctrine can probably be associated with Aśvaghōṣa's own amalgamated identity, because of his upbringing as a brahmin, the shift caused by his inclination towards ideas associated with renunciation and asceticism, and his devotion towards the Buddha and his teachings.

### Concluding Remarks

In this way, although Aśvaghōṣa has primarily put across the life story of the Buddha, by his own admittance, he has focused on communicating the Buddhist doctrine as well. Since the doctrine has been encapsulated within the framework of a story, the teachings have been put across through specific speakers, and to specific listeners in the text. It is interesting for one analysing the text to make sense of this author/speaker and audience/listener dynamic. While the author was Aśvaghōṣa, the speakers, as far as the first half of the text is concerned, included King Śuddhodana, the Buddha's companion Udāyin, the charioteer Chandaka, the Buddha's wife Yaśodharā, the *purohita* and the councillor, who went to the forest in order to convince the Buddha to return, the ascetic brahmins of Bhrgu's *āśrama*, King Śreṇya and Māra. However, since these people were voicing the perception of the 'older' order or how things *were* understood and practiced, they were not portrayed as advocating the Buddhist teachings. The teachings were put across by the prince either in response to their views through a dialogue, or through a silent contemplation of why their views were incorrect, which could essentially be seen as a monologue.

The former approach reached out to the listeners in the text, whereas the latter was meant to communicate the teachings directly to the intended audience. This strategy changed in the second half of the text, once the Buddha started being depicted as the teacher. This transition marked an increase in the number of people who were brought into the fold as well as the degree to which the doctrine was spread by the Buddha as well as other teachers appointed by him. However, as the analysis has indicated, the Buddha was consciously put on a pedestal above the other portrayed teachers. Aśvaghōṣa, in this manner, effectively wove together the discourse and the life story of the Buddha.

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<sup>93</sup> *B.*, xxviii. 16. to *B.*, xxviii. 51., tr. Johnston (Part III).



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# Sleeping Equipment in Early Buddhism From India to China

*Ann Heirman*

## Abstract

Sleeping constitutes an important part of our daily routine, and this is no different for Buddhist monks (*bhikṣu*) and nuns (*bhikṣuṇī*)<sup>1</sup> Still, while sleeping is often perceived as an innocent time during which one cannot incur any guilt, it is not as harmless as one might think. During sleep, one can unwittingly cause a loss of respect or self-respect and damage one's reputation or, by extension, the reputation of one's community. As a result, the community tries to impose strict control over all aspects of sleeping, including the nature of beds and mats.<sup>2</sup> It is on this material aspect that the present research focuses. How is sleeping equipment described in early (Indian) Buddhist disciplinary texts? Which guidelines have to be taken into account? What may we learn from them? And how have these Indian guidelines been interpreted in China?

## Introduction

In Buddhist disciplinary texts, the principal focus is on the *prātimokṣa*, a list of rules that is to be recited every two weeks at the *poṣadha* ceremony.<sup>3</sup> These rules

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<sup>1</sup> Indian words in this article are Sanskrit unless otherwise stated.

<sup>2</sup> For sleeping practices in Buddhist disciplinary rules, see in particular Heirman, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> A ceremony that is attended by all monks and nuns of the monastery district (*sīmā*), so that the unity of the community is reaffirmed.

are extensively commented upon in *vinaya* texts, which provide the community with many explanatory details. In addition, the *vinayas* offer extra guidelines in chapters named *skandhakas* or *vastus*, which cover a variety of monastic business, including legal procedures and material aspects of monastic life. Extra information on sleeping equipment and practice is given especially in the chapter on lodging and furniture (Pāli *senāsanakkhandhaka*, Skt. *śayanāsanavastu*).<sup>4</sup> The *vinayas* thus outline precisely what an ideal monastic setting should provide.

It is hard to know the extent to which monks and nuns observed all of the rules prescribed by disciplinary and thus normative texts. Yet the equipment and practices mentioned in these texts are at least conceivable, and as such they help us to understand the monastic ideal. As for material equipment, the *vinayas* shed light on which objects should be available in a monastery and how to utilise them.

Sleeping equipment is generally referred to as ‘lying material’ (*wo ju* 臥具, *śayyā* or *śayanāsana/śayyāsana*). More specifically, monks and nuns are instructed to sleep on a bed (*chuang* 床, *mañca*), fitted with a bottom sheet (*ru* 褥, *āstarāṇa*) and a covering (*bei* 被, *prāvaraṇa*), and to use a pillow (*zhen* 枕, probably *brsī*) and possibly also a footrest (*zhi zu* 稽足), as mentioned in the *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya*.<sup>5</sup>

The correct use of sleeping (and sitting) equipment is a sensitive issue, as is obvious from two prime examples. When, according to tradition, the Buddhist community split into two groups – the Sthaviravādins and the Mahāsāṃghikas – in the second century after the demise of the Buddha, the Mahāsāṃghikas were accused of using a mat (Pāli *niṣīdana*) without a border, along with nine other offenses.<sup>6</sup> So, at least for the Pāli chronicle that issued this reproach – the *Dīpavaṃsa* – the size of sleeping and sitting equipment contributed to a profound schism in the Buddhist community. The second example relates to the first step that every candidate for ordination must undergo, namely the ‘going

<sup>4</sup> For a description, see Frauwallner 121–124.

<sup>5</sup> *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya*, T.1425: 392b7–8.

<sup>6</sup> *Dīp*, vol. 5, 41. The *Dīpavaṃsa*, a fourth-century Sinhalese chronicle (cf. von Hinüber 89), is one of the many different sources on the split between the Sthaviravādins and the Mahāsāṃghikas. It pays particular attention to the alleged *vinaya* laxity of the latter school (see, among others, Nattier and Prebish). Other sources hold different opinions. Still, the impact of the *Dīpavaṃsa* was quite extensive. As further shown by Nattier and Prebish 241–246, the ten points of laxity cannot be verified in the *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya* and seem to be unfounded. In the context of the present research, the fact that is most striking is the immense importance attached to the use of proper sitting material, to such an extent that – together with nine other claims – it can be considered as a basis for the split between the rival Buddhist groups.

forth' (*chu jia* 出家, *pravrajyā*). At this moment, he or she accepts the ten rules of the novice – *śrāmaṇera* (f. *śrāmaṇerī*). One of these rules stipulates that the monk or nun may not use a 'high', 'large' or 'big' bed.<sup>7</sup> So the use of modest sleeping equipment is stipulated at the very outset of monastic life.

These two examples highlight the importance of rules relating to sleeping equipment for all Buddhist monastics. This is also obvious in the disciplinary texts, which go into some detail about the equipment that should be used. Moreover, they stipulate how monastics should behave during sleep. The main sources for these disciplinary rules are, as mentioned above, the *vinayas*, six of which are fully extant. Of these six, one is preserved in an Indian language – the Pāli *vinaya*. Although a Pāli *vinaya* was translated into Chinese at the end of the fifth century, the translation was never presented to the emperor and was subsequently lost.<sup>8</sup> The five other *vinayas* are extant only in their Chinese translations. The most active translation period was the beginning of the fifth century, when four Chinese *vinayas* appeared. In chronological order, these are: *Shisong lü* 十誦律 (T no. 1435, hereafter *Sarvāstivādinaya*); *Sifen lü* 四分律 (T no. 1428, hereafter *Dharmaguptakavinaya*); *Mohesengqi lü* 摩訶僧祇律 (T no. 1425, hereafter *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya*); and *Mishasai bu hexi wufen lü* 彌沙塞部和醯五分律 (T no. 1421, hereafter *Mahīśāsakavinaya*). Much later, at the beginning of the eighth century, the *bhikṣu* Yijing 義淨 translated large sections of the *vinaya* of the Mūlasarvāstivāda school (T nos. 1442–1451, hereafter *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya*), as well as other *vinaya* texts belonging to that school.<sup>9</sup> In the meantime, however, the *Dharmaguptakavinaya* had been

<sup>7</sup> Pāli *vinaya*, Vin vol. 1, 83–84; *Mahīśāsakavinaya*, T.1421: 117a2–3; *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya*, T.1425 (a detailed exposition of the ten rules is lacking); *Dharmaguptakavinaya*, T.1428: 810b25–27; *Sarvāstivādinaya*, T.1435: 150a27–28; *bhikṣukarmavācānā* of the Mūlasarvāstivādins, T.1453: 456b27.

<sup>8</sup> See Heirman 2004, 377–378; Heirman 2007, 190–192. In addition, the chapter for nuns (*bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga*) of the Mahāsāṃghika–Lokottaravādins has been preserved in a transitional language between Prākṛit and Sanskrit (Roth LV–LVI). It was never translated into Chinese.

<sup>9</sup> A Tibetan translation as well as many Sanskrit sections of the *vinaya* of the Mūlasarvāstivāda school are also extant. The Chinese titles of the *vinaya* texts show considerable variety in the way they were composed. Some traditions have a specific Chinese title, such as *Shisong lü* 十誦律, *Ten-Recitation Vinaya* (*vinaya* of the Sarvāstivāda school) and *Sifen lü* 四分律, *Four-Part Vinaya* (*vinaya* of the Dharmaguptaka school). The title *Mohesengqi lü* 摩訶僧祇律 is based on a transliteration of the name Mahāsāṃghika followed by *lü* 律, *vinaya*. *Mishasai bu hexi wufen lü* 彌沙塞部和醯五分律 (the *vinaya* of the Mahīśāsaka school) is composed of *Mishasai* (in all probability a transliteration of Mahīśāsaka), *bu* (school), *hexi* (exact meaning unclear), *wufen*

strongly promoted by influential Buddhist masters, and around 705–710 the emperor insisted that no other *vinaya* should be followed in the Chinese Empire.<sup>10</sup> The *Dharmaguptakavinaya* consequently became the principal reference point for monastic discipline in China. That is why the present research focuses on this text, although it is compared to the other *vinayas* when relevant.

## 1. Sleeping equipment in *vinaya* texts

The *Dharmaguptakavinaya* refers to sleeping equipment as ‘lying material’, *wo ju* 臥具, explained as something on which one either lies or sits.<sup>11</sup> A more detailed description (T.1428: 644c9–10) defines the term ‘lying material’ as a rope bed (*sheng chuang* 繩床, *chuang*: *mañca*),<sup>12</sup> a wooden bed (*mu chuang* 木床), a bottom sheet to lie on (*wo ru* 臥褥, *āstarāṇa*),<sup>13</sup> sitting material (*zuo ju* 坐具, *niṣīdana*),<sup>14</sup> a pillow (*zhen* 枕, probably *br̥sī*),<sup>15</sup> a floor mat (*di fu* 地敷, possibly equivalent to the Pāli *bhummattharaṇa*)<sup>16</sup> or a mat to lie on (*wo zhan* 臥氈, possibly *goṇikā*).<sup>17</sup> In a commentary on a dispute between two monks or two groups of monks over a dwelling place (T.1428: 645b27–28), the term is further clarified as a mat made out of grass (*cao fu* 草敷, *tr̥ṇasaṃstara*),<sup>18</sup> a mat made out of leaves (*ye fu* 葉敷, *parṇasaṃstara*),<sup>19</sup> a floor mat (*di fu* 地敷) or a mat to lie on (*wo zhan* 臥氈). These objects may belong to an individual monk or to the

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(‘in five parts’, a Chinese reference to the *vinaya* of the Mahīśāsakas) and *lū*, *vinaya*. Finally, the title *Genbenshuoyiqieyou bu pinaie* 根本說一切有部毘奈耶 is a translation of the title *Mūlasarvāstivādivinaya*. For the sake of clarity and consistency, I have followed the convention of referring to the *vinayas* by the name of their tradition. However, it is important to note that these titles should not be seen as reconstructions of original Indic titles. For details, see Yuyama; Clarke.

<sup>10</sup> See Heirman, 2002b, 414, 419–423; Heirman, 2007, 192–195.

<sup>11</sup> T.1428: 644a4–5. Sanskrit equivalents are *śayyā*, *śayanāsana*/*śayyāsana*; cf. Wogihara 1313; Heirman, 2002a, part 2, 552, note 46.

<sup>12</sup> *Chuang* 床 is a translation of *mañca*, ‘bed’ (Wogihara 985).

<sup>13</sup> *Ru* 褥 is a translation of *āstarāṇa*, ‘a carpet, a rug’ (cf. Heirman, 2002a, part 2, 721–722, note 61).

<sup>14</sup> Wogihara 700, s.v. *niṣīdana*; Ciyi, vol. 3, 2836–2837, s.v. 坐具. Sitting material (*zuo ju* 坐具 or *nishitan* 尼師檀, *niṣīdana*; cf. Heirman, 2002a, part 2, 309, note 175) forms part of each monk’s standard objects (*nishitan* 尼師檀, T.1428: 619c1–2 *et passim*; *zuo ju* 坐具, T.1428: 619c17–18 *et passim*).

<sup>15</sup> Wogihara 931, s.v. *br̥sī*.

<sup>16</sup> Heirman, 2002a, part 2, 552, note 46.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Wogihara 436, s.v. *goṇikā*: *xi zhan* 細氈, ‘fine mat’, *bai zhan* 白氈, ‘white mat’. See also Heirman, 2002a, part 2, 672, note 354.

<sup>18</sup> Wogihara 548, s.v. *tr̥ṇasaṃstara*.

<sup>19</sup> Wogihara 762, s.v. *parṇasaṃstara*.

*saṃgha*,<sup>20</sup> but two *pācittika* rules clearly indicate that the *saṃgha* is collectively responsible for them:<sup>21</sup>

T.1428 (643c26–28): If a *bhikṣu* takes a rope bed, a wooden bed, lying material, or a bottom sheet of the *saṃgha*, and spreads it out himself in the open air or tells someone else to spread it out, and if he then goes away and does not collect it himself or does not tell someone else to collect it, he commits a *pācittika*.<sup>22</sup>

The introductory story relates how a householder invites the *saṃgha* to eat and drink with him. A group of monks accepts the invitation and then leaves sitting material belonging to the *saṃgha* out in the open. During their absence, wind, dust and animals soil the material. The monks' carelessness fills other monks with indignation as there has been clear neglect of collective responsibility for the *saṃgha*. Moreover, the community's reputation has been damaged as it may now be linked to negligence and filth.

T.1428 (644c6–8): If a *bhikṣu*, in a dwelling of the *saṃgha*, takes lying material of the *saṃgha*, spreads it out himself or tells someone else to spread it out, and then sits or lies on it, but when he leaves the place does not collect it or does not tell someone else to collect it, he commits a *pācittika*.<sup>23</sup>

The introductory story for this rule again relates to the spoiling of *saṃgha* property. This time visiting monks do not collect their lying material when leaving the monastery. Instead, they just leave it in the room where they stayed,

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<sup>20</sup> In the *skandhaka* on lodgings and furniture, the *Dharmaguptakavinaya* indicates that private use of lying material belonging to the *saṃgha* is prohibited. *Saṃgha* property and personal property should be clearly distinguished; to avoid confusion, marks should be used to identify the owners of pieces of furniture. In addition, furniture that has been assigned to one room may not be moved to another room. Its designated place should be indicated with clearly visible marks (T.1428: 937c18–938a4). For a discussion on private and monastic property, see, in particular, Schopen.

<sup>21</sup> *Pācittika* and variants: offences that must be expiated (cf. Heirman, 2002a, part 1, 141–147).

<sup>22</sup> All other *vinayas* have a parallel rule: Pāli *vinaya*, Vin vol. 4, 39–40; *Mahīśāsakavinaya*, T.1421: 42b27–43b4; *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya*, T.1425: 341c14–342b29; *Sarvāstivādavinaya*, T.1435: 76c24–77b27; *Mūlasarvāstivādavinaya*, T.1442: 779c12–783c10.

<sup>23</sup> All other *vinayas* have a parallel rule: Pāli *vinaya*, Vin vol. 4, 41–42; *Mahīśāsakavinaya*, T.1421: 43b5–17; *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya*, T.1425: 342b29–343a11; *Sarvāstivādavinaya*, T.1435: 77c6–78b6; *Mūlasarvāstivādavinaya*, T.1442: 783c11–785c21.

where it rots, is eaten by insects and fades. When other monks discover it, they criticise the visiting monks. Again, collective responsibility for the *samgha*'s property has been neglected, this time inside a monastery. Clearly, then, the community's reputation must be upheld in dealings with the outside world *and* among fellow monastics.

Besides general regulations relating to lying material, the *vinayas* pay a great deal of attention to individual pieces of sleeping equipment. The most important of these are the bed, the bottom sheet and the bed covering, followed by the pillow.

### 1.1. Bed, *mañca*

With respect to the proper manufacture of sleeping equipment, most attention is paid to the bed (*chuang* 床, *mañca*), which clearly has to be a practical object while also conforming to the expectations of monastic life. The *Dharmaguptakavinaya* (T.1428: 644a2–4) enumerates five different types of rope and wooden beds. The differences all relate to the beds' legs, with spiral-shaped legs (*xuan jiao* 旋脚), straight legs (*zhi jiao* 直脚), curved legs (*qu jiao* 曲脚), legs that fit within the bed's frame (*ru bi* 入陛)<sup>24</sup> and no legs (*wu jiao* 無脚) all mentioned.<sup>25</sup> The importance of a bed's legs is also highlighted by the fact that two *pācittika* rules are devoted to this issue:

T.1428 (646b14–15): If a *bhikṣu* on the upper floor of a room with different levels sits or lies on a rope bed or on a wooden bed with removable legs, he commits a *pācittika*.

The introductory story tells of a bed leg falling through a crack in the floor and striking the head of a monk one storey below. The focus here is on irresponsible behaviour: the monk on the upper floor's lack of caution has caused him to injure a fellow member of the monastery. It was dangerous for him to use 'removable legs', *tuo jiao* 脫脚, explained as legs that fit within the frame of the bed (T.1428: 646b17). This term corresponds to the Sanskrit word *āhāryapādaka*, 'having removable (or more literally insertable?) legs'.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> The term *bi* 陛, 'steps, stairs', in all probability should be interpreted as *gai* 楷, 'model, frame', as indicated in three variant readings (cf. T.1428: 646b17). On these variant readings, see Heirman, 2002a, part 1, 60–61, note 165.

<sup>25</sup> For more details see also Heirman, 2002a, part 2, 551, note 40 and 555–556, note 56.

<sup>26</sup> Edgerton 112, s.v. *āhārya-pādaka*. For more references to Sanskrit and Prākṛit equivalents,



Given the above *Dharmaguptakavinaya pācittika* rule and a further one mentioned below, it seems that it was not uncommon to make holes in a bed frame in order to insert removable legs. This is further corroborated by the other *vinayas*, which contain the same story with a similar focus on the care that is expected from a monk.<sup>27</sup> The Pāli *vinaya* (Vin vol. 4, 39–40, 45–46) provides further clarification on what is meant by ‘a removable leg’. Using the term *āhaccapādaka*, ‘removable leg/foot’, it explains that the ‘limbs’ (*aṅga*) of the bed have been pierced. The *Samantapāsādikā*, a commentary on the Pāli *vinaya*, probably compiled in the fourth or fifth century,<sup>28</sup> explains that the *aṭanī* is pierced before the top of a foot (*pādasikha*) is pushed into the hole. Then a ‘pin’ (*āṇi*) is placed on top.<sup>29</sup> As Isaline Blew Horner points out, it is logical to assume that the leg may be removed after first removing this retaining pin.<sup>30</sup> However, the meaning of *aṭanī* is less clear. Horner translates it as ‘notched end’, whereas Thomas William Rhys Davids and Hermann Oldenberg suggest ‘lowermost piece of the bed frame’.<sup>31</sup> Finally, *The Pali Text Society’s Pali-English Dictionary* defines it as ‘a support, a stand inserted under the leg of a bedstead’.<sup>32</sup> To me, certainly in this context, it seems unlikely that *aṭanī* would refer to a support that rests on the floor and into which a leg is inserted. In the latter case, even if the pin were removed and the leg were loosened from the support, the leg would not fall through a gap in the floor, as it would remain attached to the bed frame. So it is more likely that the *aṭanī* is indeed the ‘lowermost piece of a bed frame’ into which a hole is bored for the purpose of inserting a leg. This interpretation corresponds closely to another *Dharmaguptakavinaya pācittika* rule and to parallel rules outlined in other *vinayas*:

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see Heirman, 2002a, part 2, 555–556, note 56.

<sup>27</sup> The term used is either ‘sharp legs’ or ‘removable legs’: Pāli *vinaya*, Vin vol. 4, 39–40: *āhaccapādaka*, ‘removable legs’; *Mahīsāsakavinaya*, T.1421: 44b29: *jian jiao* 尖脚, ‘sharp legs’; *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya*, T.1425: 344c17: *jian jiao* 尖脚, explained (344c19) as legs that resemble a stake; *Sarvāstivādinaya*, T.1435: 79b9: *jian jiao* 尖脚; *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya*, T.1442: 789a26: *tuo jiao* 脫脚, ‘removable legs’.

<sup>28</sup> See von Hinüber 104.

<sup>29</sup> Sp vol. 4, 774. With many thanks to Dr Claire Maes (University of Texas, Austin) for help with deciphering this passage.

<sup>30</sup> Horner, vol. 2, 240.

<sup>31</sup> Rhys Davids and Oldenberg, part 1, 53.

<sup>32</sup> Rhys Davids and Stede, 14–15, s.v. *aṭanī*.

T.1428 (693a29–b1): If a *bhikṣu* makes a rope or a wooden bed, the legs (*zu* 足) should be eight finger breadths of the Buddha high. If, after shortening, they are longer than that, he commits a *pācittika*.

The parallel rule for nuns provides more guidance on how the leg should be measured:

If a *bhikṣuṇī* makes a rope or a wooden bed, the legs should be eight finger breadths of the Buddha high, with the exception of the upper part that fits in the hole of the frame (*ru bi kong shang* 入陸孔上).<sup>33</sup> If, after having shortened them, they are longer than that, she commits a *pācittika*.<sup>34</sup>

A few details are added in the chapter on lodgings and furniture: after stipulating that a bed may have legs to protect the monk from snakes, scorpions, centipedes or poisonous insects, the text specifies that these legs should be one foot and ‘five’ (*chi wu* 尺五)<sup>35</sup> or one hand span of the Buddha (*jie* 揲, *vitasti*) high.<sup>36</sup> Although it is impossible to say precisely what is meant

<sup>33</sup> On *bi* 陸, see note 23.

<sup>34</sup> T.1428: 736b29–c1.

<sup>35</sup> Presumably ‘five’ refers to five thumbs (*cun* 寸), which would be half a foot if we follow the decimal system (see next note).

<sup>36</sup> T.1428: 937b15–18. When measures are mentioned in the *vinayas*, they are usually based on *sugata* measures, interpreted as measurements of the Buddha (see, for instance, Schlingloff 544–545). It is unclear, however, how exact values may be calculated. The influential Chinese *vinaya* master Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667) says in a commentary compiled in 626 CE (*Sifen lü shanfan buque xingshi chao* 四分律刪繁補闕行事鈔, *An Abridged and Explanatory Commentary on the Dharmaguptakavinaya*, T.1804: 108c5–8) that there is no consensus on the size of a hand span. He prefers the *Mahīśāsakavinaya* interpretation (T.1421: 35c23), which says that a hand span corresponds to two feet (*jie shou zhe fang er chi* 揲手者方二尺), as opposed to the *Dharmaguptakavinaya*’s definition, mentioned above. Daoxuan then adds that two Indian feet corresponds to the one foot, six thumbs and a bit of the standard Chinese Tang foot measure (*zhun Tang chi* 準唐尺). This is the so-called Ji Zhou measure (*Ji Zhou* 姬周; Ji is the clan name of the rulers of the Zhou dynasty), which dates back to the late Zhou dynasty. One Ji Zhou foot equates to approximately 23.1 centimetres and follows a decimal system: one foot = ten thumbs (cf. Ferguson). So, the length of a hand span and the maximum length of bed’s leg is about 23.1 + 13.86 (and a bit) = 36.96 (and a bit) centimetres. Interestingly, a note (T.1804: 108c8) adds that the Tang rulers changed the standard measure in order to make one (new) Tang foot equivalent to one Ji Zhou foot and two thumbs (which Daoxuan seems to regret, since he states that rulers had never previously changed their standards), which means the new Tang foot measures 27.72 centimetres. Daoxuan himself acknowledges this measurement in another passage of his commentary (T.1804: 89b2–3), where he calculates the length of a ‘finger breadth’ (*āṅgula*). First he refers back to the Ji

by the hand span of the Buddha, the implication is clear: a bed's legs should not be too high.

In the *Dharmaguptakavinaya*'s introductory story, a monk proudly shows the Buddha his bed, which has very high legs. The Buddha is unimpressed, however. He views such a high bed as an indication of evil or at least foolish practice.<sup>37</sup> In this sense, the monk's behaviour clearly fails to conform to the modesty that is expected from a member of the monastic community.

Interestingly, according to the *Dharmaguptakavinaya*, when a leg is measured, the part that fits into the hole in the bed frame is not included in the calculation. Moreover, the other *vinayas*' parallel rules all say something similar.<sup>38</sup> Invariably, each *vinaya* stipulates that a bed's legs may be a maximum of eight finger breadths in length, but this does not include the portion that fits into the *aṭani* (in the Pāli *vinaya*); the section that slots into the *bi* 髀, literally 'buttocks', 'thigh', here possibly meaning the underside of the bed frame (in the *Mahīśāsakavinaya*); or the part that fits into the *bi* 柱, literally 'stockade', probably meaning the frame (in the *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya*,<sup>39</sup> the *Sarvāstivādavinaya*<sup>40</sup> and the *Mūlasarvāstivādavinaya*<sup>41</sup>). On the one hand, these rules indicate that monastic furniture could be relatively sophisticated; on the other, they demonstrate that the monks were expected to project an image of modesty through the strict and precise regulation of the height of their beds' legs.

Three of the other *vinayas* – the Pāli *vinaya*, the *Mahīśāsakavinaya* and the *Sarvāstivādavinaya* – include similar introductory stories to the one found in the *Dharmaguptakavinaya*, with a monk attempting to show off in front of the

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Zhou standard, stating that one finger equals two thumbs, and eight fingers equal one foot and six thumbs (about 36.96 centimetres, as one finger breadth equals about 4.62 centimetres). Then he adds that according to the new Tang standard measure this equals one foot, three thumbs and a bit.

<sup>37</sup> T.1428: 693a20–21.

<sup>38</sup> On *bi* 柱, see note 23.

<sup>39</sup> Pāli *vinaya*, Vinvol. 4, 168–169; *Mahīśāsakavinaya*, T.1421: 70b20–21; *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya*, T.1425: 391c18–20; *Sarvāstivādavinaya*, T.1435: 127b29–c2; *Mūlasarvāstivādavinaya*, T.1442: 895b16–17.

<sup>40</sup> Compare Sarvāstivāda Sanskrit fragments in Rosen (211) and von Simson (233): 'with the exception of the *araṇi*', translated by Valentina Rosen as '[ohne den] Teil, der zum Rahmen gehört' ([with the exception of ] the part that belongs to the frame), and by Georg von Simson (300) as 'Rahmenstange' (stick of the framework). See also von Simson et al. 141, s.v. *araṇi*: 'Rahmenstange, Rahmen (eines Schemels oder eines Bettgestells)' (stick of the framework, framework (of a seat or of a bed)).

<sup>41</sup> In the Sanskrit *Mūlasarvāstivāda prātimokṣasūtra*, an exception is made for the *aṭani* (cf. Banerjee 44).

Buddha.<sup>42</sup> The story in the *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya* is rather different.<sup>43</sup> One day a prince goes to worship with two monks. When he arrives at their dwelling place he notices that they own a number of impressive objects, including a large, high bed. He argues that such a display of material wealth is inappropriate for monks as it resembles the lifestyle of a royal family – precisely what the Buddha abandoned in order to search for the path to enlightenment. The monks reply that the Buddha became a wheel-turning king (*fa lun wang* 法輪王) after giving up his royal life. Hence, all of his disciples are princes, so they are entitled to possess regal wealth. The prince feels deep shame for questioning the two monks, but other monks then criticise them strongly for their ostentation. This story suggests that luxury goods may have been quite prevalent in some monasteries. Nevertheless, monks would attempt to avoid criticism of their lifestyles, especially from lay donors.

Two further stories focus on the health and safety aspects of beds. The *Mahīśāsakavinaya* briefly mentions old or sick monks who may injure themselves when climbing onto or out of a high bed.<sup>44</sup> One might expect this story to be followed by a comment on the safety of sleeping furniture, but instead the *vinaya* refers to the frequently used *topos* of indignant lay people, who criticise the monks for behaving like rich people, with no modesty whatsoever. Two instructions are thus delivered in a single story: one should take care not to injure oneself or others; and one should maintain modesty at all times. Finally the *Mūlasarvāstivādivinaya* insists that sleeping on a very low bed is dangerous because a poisonous snake might kill the monk during his sleep.<sup>45</sup> Therefore the Buddha permits a higher bed. Unfortunately some monks use this concession as an excuse to construct extraordinarily high beds, which has the potential to fill lay followers with indignation.

In conclusion, we can say that the *vinayas* have myriad reasons to regulate a bed's dimensions. On the one hand, a high, large bed may be seen as inappropriately luxurious. In this sense it will attract criticism, especially from lay followers, who are likely to emphasise that monks should conduct themselves with more modesty. Such criticism should be avoided, and a monk should certainly never boast about a particularly lavish bed. On the

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<sup>42</sup> Pāli *vinaya*, Vin vol. 4, 168–169; *Mahīśāsakavinaya*, T.1421: 70b13–18; *Sarvāstivādivinaya*, T.1435: 127b22–27.

<sup>43</sup> T.1425: 391b18–c15.

<sup>44</sup> T.1421: 70b11–13.

<sup>45</sup> T.1442: 894b18–895b10.

other hand, a monastery should be a safe place for all its members. Therefore a bed should be neither too high nor too low. Moreover, potentially dangerous furniture should be avoided in order to reduce the risk of injuring other members of the community.

### 1.2. Bottom sheet, *āstarāṇa*

The bottom sheet (*ru* 褥, *āstarāṇa*) is used as a kind of mattress and should not be too luxurious:

T.1428 (693b25–26): If a *bhikṣu* covers a rope bed or a wooden bed, or a small or big bottom sheet (*ru* 褥), with cotton, then, upon finishing it, he commits a *pācittika*.<sup>46</sup>

A monk may sit upon a small bottom sheet, and sit or sleep upon a big bottom sheet.<sup>47</sup> In its chapter on lodgings and furniture, the *Dharmaguptakavinaya* recommends the use of a sheet for health reasons, as not using one may induce illness.<sup>48</sup> One is allowed to add a covering or stuffing of grass, down (or fine wool) or *karpāsa* (*jiebei* 劫貝, a kind of cotton).<sup>49</sup> The *vinaya* also offers guidance on how to use and repair the sheet: if it is small, it should be stitched to the four sides of the bed; if the hem is torn, it should be mended; if the covering or stuffing sticks to one place, this should be rectified; if the sheet is dirty or oily, another layer should be added; and if the additional layer gets dirty, a sleeping mat (*wo zhan* 臥氈)<sup>50</sup> should be placed on top of it.

There is a quite detailed discussion of the material that is suitable for covering or stuffing. From the introductory story to the above *pācittika*, it is clear that cotton (referred to as *douluo mian* 兜羅綿, *tūla*) is considered a luxury item.<sup>51</sup> From the text of the *vinaya*, it is obvious that the term *tūla* can refer to more than just cotton: the *Dharmaguptakavinaya* uses it when discussing flowers of the aspen or the willow, and rushes.<sup>52</sup> Notwithstanding this broad definition of the word, however, lay followers severely criticise monks' use of *tūla*:

<sup>46</sup> The Chinese expression translated as 'to cover' can equally imply the idea of 'stuffing' (see Heirman, 2002a, part 2, 656–657, note 117).

<sup>47</sup> T.1428: 693b29–c1.

<sup>48</sup> T.1428: 937b1–10.

<sup>49</sup> See Ciyi, vol. 3, 2815, s.v. 劫貝樹: *jiebei* tree, a kind of cotton tree.

<sup>50</sup> See note 16.

<sup>51</sup> T.1428: 693b9–25.

<sup>52</sup> T.1428: 693b27–28.

The *śramaṇas*, sons of the Śākya, do not know shame. They do not have a compassionate heart and kill living beings. To outsiders they say that they practise the truthful law, but then they cover a wooden bed, a rope bed, or small and big bottom sheets with cotton, just like a king or an important minister.<sup>53</sup>

Clearly, monks lose credibility not only because of their possession of a luxury but with respect to other essential aspects of Buddhist law. The use of *tūla* is thus generalised as a sign of improper behaviour. Yet *tūla* is not fully prohibited: it can be used to make a shoulder strap or a pillow for use in a carriage.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, stuffing or covering a bed or bedding material is allowed and even encouraged. The *Dharmaguptakavinaya* may ban the use of *tūla* for this purpose, but it recommends the use of materials such as *jiuluoye cao wen* 鳩羅耶草文, possibly a fabric (*wen*) made of *kulāya* grass (*jiuluoye cao*),<sup>55</sup> *cao suopo cao* 草娑婆草, an unidentified species of grass, and *yi cui jiebei sui bi wu* 以毳劫貝碎弊物, possibly silk (*bi wu*) objects with (*yi*) additional pieces (*sui*) of down (*cui*) and *karpāsa* (*jiebei*) cotton.

The other *vinayas* mention the same rule, albeit sometimes with different introductory stories. For instance, the Pāli *vinaya* and the *Sarvāstivādivinaya* criticise the use of *tūla* as a sign of luxury.<sup>56</sup> The *Mūlasarvāstivādivinaya* rejects the use of several kinds of cotton (and of sheep's wool) without offering any explanation.<sup>57</sup> In the *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya*, the introductory story is similar to the one that introduces the precept on high beds: once again, a prince condemns the material wealth of a monk, this time focusing on a covering or stuffing made from various types of cotton.<sup>58</sup> However, exceptions are allowed for a pillow and for a foot support for a sick monk. The *Mahīśāsakavinaya*'s introductory story stands in marked contrast to all of these.<sup>59</sup> Here, monks use *tūla* that is malodorous, dirty and infested with small insects, which generates criticism among their lay followers. The types of *tūla* that are forbidden by this *vinaya*

<sup>53</sup> T.1428: 693b11–14.

<sup>54</sup> T.1428: 693c7.

<sup>55</sup> See Monier-Williams 295, s.v. *kulāya*: a woven texture.

<sup>56</sup> Pāli *vinaya*, Vin vol. 4, 169–170; *Sarvāstivādivinaya*, T.1435: 127c17–128a10.

<sup>57</sup> T.1442: 895b27–c16.

<sup>58</sup> T.1425: 392a8–b18.

<sup>59</sup> T.1421: 70a25–b10. In addition to the types of *tūla* banned by the *Dharmaguptakavinaya*, the *Mahīśāsakavinaya* forbids one more – *shanpo hua* 蔕婆花, possibly a rendering of *śaṇaphalā* (cf. Monier-Williams 1048, s.v. *śaṇa*: -*tūla*, fibres of hemp; -*phalā*, species of plant).

are almost identical to those that are banned by the *Dharmaguptakavinaya*, but the reason for the prohibition is entirely different.

Clearly, then, there is a lack of consensus over why cotton should not be used as stuffing or a covering. While one *vinaya* condemns it as a sign of luxury, another prohibits its use largely on the basis of hygiene. Cotton was probably also used to soften the surface of a bed, so the *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya* permits its use on sickbeds. For most traditions, an important point to note is that *tūla* seems to have symbolic value, so its use is generally forbidden to preserve the status of the monastic community. However, the *vinayas*' guidance on how and why monks should protect this status varies and can even be quite contradictory.

### 1.3. Bed covering, *prāvaraṇa*

In addition to a bottom sheet, monks and nuns could make use of a bed covering (*bei* 被, *prāvaraṇa*),<sup>60</sup> as can be deduced from a rule for nuns:

T.1428 (744c25–26): If *bhikṣuṇīs* sleep together with the same bottom sheet (*ru* 褥) and with the same covering (*bei* 被), they commit, except in particular circumstances, a *pācittika*.

The commentary that follows this precept clearly distinguishes between two pieces of sleeping equipment. If *bhikṣuṇīs* sleep together with the same bottom sheet and the same covering, they commit a *pācittika*. If they use the same bottom sheet but separate coverings, they commit a *duṣkṛta*.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, if they use the same covering but separate bottom sheets, they also commit a *duṣkṛta*. Most of the other *vinayas* include the same rule, although the distinction between the sheet and the covering is sometimes less clear.<sup>62</sup> The introductory story does not focus on the bedding, but on the sleeping practices of members of the monastic community: any suspicion of inappropriate behaviour should be avoided.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>60</sup> On this term, see Heirman, 2002a, part 2, 721–722, note 61.

<sup>61</sup> *Duṣkṛta*, literally 'a bad deed', is a minor offence (see Heirman, 2002a, part 1, 160).

<sup>62</sup> Pāli *vinaya*, Vin vol. 4, 289; *Mahīsāsakavinaya*, T.1421: 95b4–27 (four *pācittika* rules dealing with either the same bed sheet or the same covering, and with sleeping with monastic or non-monastic partners); *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya*, T.1425: 538b18–c2; *Sarvāstivādivinaya*, T.1435: 320c25–321b7 (three *pācittika* rules concerning sleeping on the same bed with the same sheet or the same covering).

<sup>63</sup> For more on this issue, see Heirman, 2012, 431–435.



#### 1.4. Pillow, *bṛsī*

At the very start of its chapter on lodgings and furniture, the *Dharmaguptakavinaya* provides a short description of the pillow (*zhen* 枕, probably *bṛsī*).<sup>64</sup> Although there is no accompanying *prātimokṣa* rule, the *vinaya* still presents some interesting information on why a pillow should be used. For instance, it suggests that monks who sleep without a pillow or a headrest suffer from pain. Hence the Buddha permits their use, with the proviso that they should be made out of stone, mud bricks or wood. One or more of ten fabrics – including silk, wool, linen and some types of cotton – may be used for the ‘arms of the headrest’ (*zhen bei* 枕臂), perhaps meaning the sides or the ends.<sup>65</sup> The headrest itself may be square, round or triangular.<sup>66</sup>

#### 1.5. Some concluding remarks

In conclusion, it is clear that when the *vinayas* discuss sleeping equipment, the principal focus is on maintaining exemplary standards of behaviour, in part to ensure that the lay community perceives monks and nuns in a positive light. Criticism – especially from the outside world but also from inside the walls of the monastery – should be avoided at all times. Hence, luxury items are condemned because they signal a lack of modesty and invoke disapproval from the lay community. However, the *vinayas* are highly selective in terms of their rules on this subject. For instance, they go into considerable detail about the appropriate height of a bed, yet seem uninterested in other features that could be considered purely decorative – and therefore luxurious – such as elaborate carving of the bed’s legs. By focusing on relatively minor details – such as not including the portion of a bed’s leg that slots into the frame when measuring the leg’s length – the *vinayas* reveal a shift from a general concern for modesty to a more symbolic, but still highly relevant, outward expression of it.

A secondary concern for the *vinayas* is the health and safety of the monastic community. For instance, removable bed legs are forbidden in the interests of safety, not because they are considered luxurious. Similarly, the use of a pillow or headrest is advocated because this promotes a healthy sleeping position.

As we will see, both of these concerns – following a modest communal life in order to preserve a high reputation among lay followers, and caring for the

<sup>64</sup> T.1428: 936b29–c2. For the term *bṛsī*, see note 14.

<sup>65</sup> For details, see Heirman, 2002a, part 2, 518–522, note 207.

<sup>66</sup> T.1428: 937b10–11.

health and safety of monks and nuns – are equally important in the commentaries of the Chinese masters who strove to establish a Chinese monastic community.

## 2. From India to China

In the first centuries of Chinese Buddhism, disciplinary and organisational guidelines were often lacking, as is clear from the testimony of the traveller monk Faxian 法顯. At the end of the fourth century, he ventured from Chang'an to India with the primary intention of obtaining an original version of a *vinaya* text.<sup>67</sup> Shortly afterwards, four full *vinayas* were translated into Chinese, presenting the Chinese community with a quite sudden and overwhelming wealth of source material. This prompted Chinese *vinaya* masters to write extensive commentaries and compile new anthologies for the Chinese monastic community. In addition, traveller monks such as Yijing 義淨 (635–713) continued to produce personal accounts of organisational and disciplinary matters as practised in India. These texts became the basis for monastic guidelines in the new environment of China.

### 2.1. First commentaries on *vinaya* rules

Buddhist rules and guidelines were widely disseminated in China after the translation of four complete *vinayas* in the early fifth century, which in turn led to a series of commentaries and additions by local *vinaya* masters.<sup>68</sup> One of the most influential of these masters was Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667), who

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<sup>67</sup> *Gaoseng Faxian zhuan* 高僧法顯傳, T.2085: 857a6–8, 864b17, 864c1–3. On the dates of Faxian's life and travels, see Deeg, 2005a, 22–30.

<sup>68</sup> In addition to the commentaries, the fifth century witnessed significant growth in the popularity of so-called *bodhisattva* rules, which were intended to provide the Chinese Buddhist community with guidelines of Mahāyāna moral precepts. The most influential of these texts was the *Fanwang jing* 梵網經 (T.1484; literally *Brahmā's Net Sūtra*), which contains a set of fifty-eight precepts in the second of its two fascicles. Although, traditionally, it was said that Kumārajīva translated the *Fanwang jing* from Sanskrit into Chinese in 406, in fact it was probably composed in China around the middle of the fifth century (Groner 253–257, 278; Funayama 111). It is not known precisely when the text started to play an important role in Chinese Buddhism, although Paul Groner argues that it must have been within one or two centuries of its compilation. The second fascicle was certainly circulating as an independent text by the end of the fifth century. While the *Fanwang jing* does not provide guidelines on the use of sleeping equipment, it does include a rope bed in its list of a monk's eighteen essential possessions (T.1484: 1008a15). It also states that a travelling monk should be provided with a rope or wooden bed (1007a6). Little is said on the precise nature of sleeping equipment. The text merely states that, as with monastic robes, faded colours (1008b25–26) should be used as an expression of modesty.

is considered to be the founder of the Nanshan lüzong 南山律宗, ‘the *vinaya* school of Nanshan’. This school promoted the *vinaya* rules, and in particular the *Dharmaguptakavinaya*, the tradition on which the first Chinese ordinations were based. Daoxuan himself wrote several *vinaya* commentaries, and actively promoted Buddhism at the imperial court.<sup>69</sup> In his *Sifen lü shanfan buque xingshi chao* 四分律刪繁補闕行事鈔, *An Abridged and Explanatory Commentary on the Dharmaguptakavinaya* (T.1804), he comments on the *pācittika* rules for monks and nuns. With respect to the rules on sleeping equipment, he offers sometimes detailed analysis of the information provided by several *vinayas*, but adds no new ideas of his own. For instance, he discusses the rules relating to abandoning ‘lying material’, the use of removable legs, the proper length of a bed’s legs and the use of cotton (*tūla*).<sup>70</sup> On the length of a bed’s legs, Daoxuan takes great care to convert the *vinaya* guidelines into contemporary Chinese measurements, so the eight finger breadths stipulated by the *vinayas* correspond to one foot and six thumbs in the Ji Zhou 姬周 system (approximately 36.96 centimetres) or one foot, three thumbs and a bit in the (new) Tang system.<sup>71</sup> He adds that this stipulation is valid for monks and for lay people who follow the eight rules.<sup>72</sup> Referring to the *vinayas*, he highlights the risk of incurring criticism from lay donors if monks display a lack of modesty by neglecting to follow the rule.<sup>73</sup>

The symbolic importance of furniture legs is also evident in a lengthy comment by one of the most famous early Chinese traveller monks, Yijing, who discusses the manufacture of a bed or a couch.<sup>74</sup> In much the same way as Daoxuan, Yijing focuses on the length of the legs, and stipulates that this should be eight finger breadths of the Buddha, following the *vinayas*’ traditional guideline. He explains that this corresponds to twenty-four ordinary fingers, or one and a half standard feet.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, he complains that couches are more

<sup>69</sup> For details, see Wagner 46–90; Yifa 23–28.

<sup>70</sup> T.1804: 77c17–78a18.

<sup>71</sup> See also note 35.

<sup>72</sup> The eight rules that lay people follow during a period of retreat are identical to the first eight rules for novices. One of these is the prohibition against the use of a high, large or big bed.

<sup>73</sup> T.1804: 89b4–5.

<sup>74</sup> T.2125: 206c22–207a16.

<sup>75</sup> T.2125: 206c28–29. For Yijing, twenty-four fingers correspond to one and a half standard feet (*hu chi chi ban* 笏尺尺半, ‘standard foot, one foot and a half’. The character *hu* 笏 refers to a ceremonial tablet used by state administrators to identify them as properly appointed officials; in this context, I have interpreted this as ‘standard’ (i.e. officially recognised by the state). The

than two feet high in many Chinese monasteries, although some adhere to the stipulated height restriction. Yijing stresses that those who exceed the height limit are committing an offence and should change their habits. The length of a couch's leg is thus perceived as an outward symbol of the moral standards of a monastery and its members.<sup>76</sup>

## 2.2. New monastic guidelines

In addition to the commentaries, increasing appreciation of the value of disciplinary rules gave rise to extensive new compilations written by Chinese *vinaya* masters, with the intention of providing guidance for the burgeoning Chinese monastic community. One well-known disciplinary text is the *Da biqiu sanqian weiyi* 大比丘三千威儀, *Great (Sūtra) of Three Thousand Dignified Observances of a Monk*, probably compiled in China in the fifth century (T.1470).<sup>77</sup> The text discusses many aspects of everyday life, including the correct protocols to follow during sleeping hours.<sup>78</sup> The avoidance of noise plays an essential role here. Life in the monastery should be relatively quiet at all times, and especially when the monks are asleep.<sup>79</sup> A monk should be as quiet as possible when stepping into or out of bed, wiping the top of his bed, or opening the door to the sleeping room. He should equally avoid noisy yawning or sighing (while thinking of daily business). The text also recommends some precautions: a monk should always shake his shoes before putting them on (probably to ensure no creatures are inside) and should snap his fingers three times before opening a door (to avoid injuring someone who might be standing on the other side). Finally, some stipulations underscore the proper use of sleeping furniture and the correct sleeping position: a monk should never crawl onto the bed, nor lean against or even face the wall while sleeping. Nor should

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precise length of the foot (*chi* 尺) to which Yijing refers is unclear, but it might be the standard measurement mentioned in note 37 (approximately 27.72 centimetres). This would make the proper length of a bed's leg approximately 41.58 centimetres, which is slightly longer than Daoxuan's calculation.

<sup>76</sup> On Yijing's attitude to the *vinaya* rules, see also Heirman, 2008, 266–271. For a detailed study on the impact of Buddhism on the construction of chairs in China, see Kieschnick, 2003, 222–249.

<sup>77</sup> Although the colophon to the text presents it as a Han translation by An Shigao (安世高; second century), the *Da biqiu sanqian weiyi* was probably compiled in China in the course of the fifth century (Hirakawa 193–196).

<sup>78</sup> T.1470: 915a24–28, 915c11–17 and 915c24–27.

<sup>79</sup> For a discussion on silence, see Heirman, 2009.

he lie on his stomach or assume an improper position, such as lying with his knees tucked up.<sup>80</sup> He should dry his feet before going to bed, and should get dressed before leaving the sleeping place.

Clearly, then, the *Da biqiu sanqian weiyi* expands on the *prātimokṣa* rules by focusing much more closely on decorum. This pattern is followed in another text that had a similarly profound influence on the organisation of the growing Chinese monastic community, the *Jiaojie xinxue biqiu xinghu lüyi* 教誡新學比丘行護律儀, *Exhortation on Manners and Etiquette for Novices in Training* (T.1897), compiled by the aforementioned *vinaya* master Daoxuan.<sup>81</sup> In this very instructive text on the teaching of disciplinary rules to new members of the monastic community, Daoxuan discusses suitable sleeping equipment and also offers a number of guidelines relating to correct behaviour in the dormitory.<sup>82</sup> He stresses that a monk should never allow his bed to become dirty, and that bedclothes should be dried in the sun during the summer months. The dormitory should be kept clean, too. When taking care of his attire, a monk should fold up his *uttarāsaṅga* and place it on the bed, and he should use his *saṃghāṭī* as a pillow.<sup>83</sup>

### 2.3. Yijing's travel account

As mentioned above, the traveller monk Yijing, who resided in India and South Asia between 671 and 695, recorded his experiences in an account entitled the *Nanhai jigui neifa zhuan* 南海寄歸內法傳, *Account of Buddhism Sent from the South Seas*, T.2125. Although it would be foolhardy to interpret this account as an objective eyewitness report, it still provides the reader with valuable information on how an eminent Chinese monk perceived monastic life. In this

<sup>80</sup> On the proper sleeping posture, see also Heirman, 2012, 438–439.

<sup>81</sup> On the influence of this text, see, in particular, Yifa 26–28 (on the attribution of the text to Daoxuan, see Yifa 226, note 103).

<sup>82</sup> T.1897: 871a5–b2.

<sup>83</sup> A monk has a standard set of three robes: the *antarvāsaka* (inner robe), the *uttarāsaṅga* (upper robe) and the *saṃghāṭī* (outer cloak). See, for instance, Horner, vol. 2, 1–2, note 2: ‘The *antaravāsaka* is put on at the waist, and hangs down to just above the ankles, being tied with the *kāyabandhana*, a strip of cloth made into a belt or girdle ... The *uttarāsaṅga* is the upper robe worn when a monk is in a residence. It covers him from neck to ankle, leaving one shoulder bare ... The *saṃghāṭī* is put on over this when the monk goes out. It may be exactly the same size as the *uttarāsaṅga*, but it consists of double cloth, since to make it two robes are woven together.’ For the significance of these robes in China, see, in particular, Kieschnick, 1999, 12–14 and 2003, 90–92. For an extensive study of Chinese monastic guidelines on robes, see Guo.

sense, it is often similar to a normative text, presenting the (Indian) ideal as a kind of mirror for the public back home in China.<sup>84</sup>

In his account, Yijing discusses several guidelines relating to how to use sleeping equipment.<sup>85</sup> He describes Indian monastic dormitories as quite narrow rooms that are also used as study quarters. Beds and mattresses (*ru xi* 褥席)<sup>86</sup> are two ‘elbows’ (*zhou* 肘) wide and four and a half elbows long.<sup>87</sup> Yijing does not offer any opinion on whether these dimensions are proper or improper, but he does insist that the bed should always be covered, as stipulated by the Buddha. If a monk fails to do this, he might end up with a black back. The sitting cloth (*zuo ju* 坐具), one of a monk’s essential items,<sup>88</sup> may be used for this purpose.

Aside from his detailed discussion of the correct length of a bed’s legs (see above), Yijing pays most attention to the use of a pillow (*zhen* 枕). He remarks that the Chinese custom is to support the head on a wooden headrest during sleep, whereas in India and the islands of the South Seas this function is performed by a pillow in the form of a cotton or silk bag that is one and a half elbows long and half an elbow wide. The pillow is stuffed with whatever wadding is available locally, such as wool, fibres, leaves, moss or cassia, and its depth depends on the season. Most importantly, it must provide a comfortable night’s sleep and should never be hard or stiff. Yijing suggests that such a pillow has several health advantages over a wooden headrest: for instance, it keeps the head warm at night and so prevents diseases caused by the cold; and it is beneficial for the user’s eyesight. The use of a headrest is not explicitly condemned, but Yijing does warn his fellow monks of potential drawbacks: for instance, he says the hard wooden surface allows draughts to pass across the neck, which could cause headaches; and the greater exposure

<sup>84</sup> For a discussion, see, in particular, Deeg, 2005a, 37–39 and 2005b, 101–103.

<sup>85</sup> T.2125: 221a18–b20. For a translation into English, see Li 105–107.

<sup>86</sup> In his translation of Yijing’s travel account, Li (105) interprets *ru xi* 褥席 as two different items. However, since both *ru* and *xi* refer to a kind of covering or mattress, I have interpreted these characters as indicating one and the same object.

<sup>87</sup> It is impossible to give precise conversions for these measurements. The monk Xuanzang, who travelled to India about forty-five years before Yijing, states that an ‘elbow’ (*zhou* 肘) is usually divided in twenty-four ‘fingers’ (*zhi* 指; T.2087: 875c10) in India. As we saw earlier, for Yijing, twenty-four fingers correspond one and a half standard feet (approximately 41.58 centimetres; see note 74).

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Yijing, T.2125: 212b25, where a *ni-shi-dan-na* 尼師但那 (*niṣīdana*) is mentioned as one of the essential items. A *niṣīdana* may be translated as *zuo ju* 坐具 (Wogihara 700, s.v. *ni-ṣīdana*).

to the cold may result in fever. Finally, he questions the wisdom of the Chinese proverb *dong ding wen zu* 凍頂溫足, ‘keep the head cold, but keep the feet warm’.

Aside from his aforementioned guidelines on the length of a bed’s legs, Yijing does not attach any sense of morality to his instructions on the use of sleeping equipment. Yet he does advise everyone to follow the Buddha’s rules in order to avoid unnecessary problems. Decorum may have been on his mind when he stated that a bed covering should always be used to avoid a black back, but equally he may have considered this no more than a piece of sensible, practical advice. And the maintenance of good health, rather than propriety, is certainly paramount when he lists the numerous benefits of a soft pillow. His account therefore stands in stark contrast to the previously discussed early Chinese disciplinary texts and their overriding concern with proper behaviour.

### 3. Conclusion

The Indian *prātimokṣa* rules focus on collective responsibility and modesty, often with the intention of safeguarding the reputation of the *saṃgha*. Decorum is essential for Buddhist monks and nuns, and, by extension, for the wider Buddhist community. A subsidiary issue in the *vinayas*’ guidelines on sleeping equipment relates to preserving the health and safety of members of the monastic community, which again helps to promote the image of a vigorous and exemplary *saṃgha*. When the guidelines spread from India to China, these two principal issues – decorum and health – remained.

Normative texts offer detailed insights into the material aspects of sleeping behaviour. We learn that Indians tend to sleep on beds covered with sheets and with their heads resting on cotton or silk pillows. Chinese beds are similar, although the dormitories are larger than those in India, and a wooden headrest is used, rather than a soft cloth pillow. Strikingly, in both countries sleeping equipment seems to play a crucial symbolic role. This is most obvious in the meticulous guidelines relating to the appropriate length of a bed’s legs. Adhering rigidly to these precise measurements provides the lay community with irrefutable evidence of proper behaviour among the monastics, and as such their beds symbolise a perfect community that does not allow any flaws.



## Abbreviations

- Dīp            *Dīpavaṃsa: The Chronicle of the Island of Ceylon or the Dipavamsa*. Ed. Bimala Churn Law. Maharagama: Saman Press, 1959.
- Sp             *Samantapāsādikā*. Ed. Takakusu Junjirō and Nagai Makoto [1927–1947]. Reprint, London: Pali Text Society, 1966–1975.
- T              *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經. 85 Vols. Ed. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–1934.
- Vin            *Vinaya Piṭakaṃ: One of the Principal Buddhist Holy Scriptures in the Pāli Language*. 5 Vols. Ed. Hermann Oldenberg [1879–1883]. Reprint, London: Pali Text Society, 1969–1993.

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**Putting *smṛti* back into *sati***  
**(Putting remembrance back into mindfulness)**

*Bryan Levman*

*Dutiyavibhaṅghasuttaṃ* (SN 5, 198<sup>16-22</sup>): *katamañ ca bhikkhave satindriyaṃ. idha bhikkhave ariyasāvako satimā hoti paramena satinepakkena samannāgato, cirakatam pi cirabhāsitam pi saritā anussaritā. so kāye kāyānupassī viharati ātāpī sampajāno satimā, vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassaṃ. vedanāsu ... pe ... idaṃ vuccati satindriyaṃ. “And what, monks, is the faculty of memory? Here monks, a noble disciple who possesses recollection is endowed with the highest memory and wisdom, he remembers and recollects what was said and what was done a long time ago. He abides reflecting on the body as a body, ardent, perfectly knowing, remembering, having done away with covetousness and distress in regards to the world. He abides reflecting on feelings... this is called the faculty of memory.”*

*Saranti tāya, sayamaṃ vā sarati, saraṇamattam eva vā, esā ti sati. Sā apilāpanalakkhaṇā, asammoharasā... Vsm 464<sup>25-26</sup>*

“With it (*sati*), he remembers, or it itself remembers or it is just mere remembering, that is *sati*. *Sati*’s characteristic is to call to mind, to memorize, not to forget (*apilāpana*), its essence is absence of confusion”

## Abstract

The word *sati* today is usually translated as “mindfulness”, despite the fact that it is derived from the Old Indic word *smṛti* meaning “remembrance”, “memory”, and “tradition”. Some scholars even distinguish between the two words as different in meaning, suggesting that *sati* usually refers to present awareness in the Pali scriptures, not to the past, as the word *smṛti* does. Since the Buddha was familiar with the Brahmanical teachings, including the six *Vedāṅgas* (linguistic analysis, etymology, etc.) which are part of the *smṛti* tradition, it is unlikely that he would have used the vernacular form of the word (*sati*) in a way inconsistent with its heritage. This article argues that the word *sati* incorporates the meaning of “memory” and “remembrance” in much of its usage in both the *suttas* and the commentary, and suggests that without the memory component, the notion of mindfulness cannot be properly understood or applied, as mindfulness requires memory for its effectiveness. Although *sati* is a polysemous word whose semantic field extends beyond mere memory (with overtones of mindfulness, wisdom, awareness, restraint, equanimity, etc.), the notion of memory is central to the denotative and connotative core of the word.

## Introduction

It is quite common today for the word *sati* to be translated as “mindfulness”, despite the fact that its pedigree derives from the Old Indic (OI) word *smṛti*, “remembrance”, “memory”, “the whole body of sacred tradition or what is remembered by human teachers (distinguished from *śruti*, or what is directly heard” (MW). Many scholars even go so far as to distinguish between the two words as different in meaning. For example, Bhikkhu Nyanaponika in his well-known book *Heart of Buddhist Meditation*:

In the compound Pāli term *sati-paṭṭhāna*, the first word, *sati* (Sanskrit: *smṛti*), had originally the meaning of ‘memory’ ‘remembrance’. In Buddhist usage, however, and particularly in the Pāli scriptures, it has only occasionally retained that meaning of remembering past events. It mostly refers there to the present, and as a general psychological term, it carries the meaning of ‘attention’ or ‘awareness’. But still more frequently, its use in the Pāli scriptures is restricted to a kind of attentiveness that, in the sense of the Buddhist doctrine, is good, skilful or right (*kusala*). It

should be noted that we have reserved the rendering ‘mindfulness’, for this latter use only. *Sati* in this sense is the seventh factor of the Noble Eightfold Path, under the name of *Sammā-sati*, i. e. Right Mindfulness, being expressly explained as the fourfold ‘Foundations of Mindfulness’ (*Satipaṭṭhāna*). pp. 9-10.

Ven. Nyanaponika’s well-known student Bhikkhu Bodhi treats *sati* in a similar fashion, in the *Majjhima Nikāya* translation he wrote with Ven. Ñāṇamoli: “The first part (of the compound), *sati*, originally meant “memory”, but In Pali Buddhist usage it far more frequently bears the meaning of attentiveness directed to the present – hence the makeshift rendering “mindfulness” (1995: 1188, footnote 136). In a later article (2011: 22) he argues that *sati* “no longer means memory. Rather, the Buddha assigned the word a new meaning [“watchfulness,” “lucid awareness,” p. 21] consonant with his own system of psychology and meditation.” Bhikkhu Bodhi translates *sati* as “mindfulness” throughout his influential English translations of the *Majjhima Nikāya*, *Samyutta Nikāya* and *Aṅguttara Nikāya*. Most non-specialists might assume that the equivalence of *sati* = mindfulness is established, and that indeed mindfulness and remembrance have little to do with each other. But this would be a mistake, as the above quotes from the *Samyutta Nikāya* and the commentator Buddhaghosa would indicate. Nor is this an isolated incident in the *suttas*. The definition of *sati* as “memory” attributed to the Buddha in the *Dutiyaṅgārasuttaṃ* (above) occurs thirteen times in the *suttas* in various forms.<sup>1</sup> There are also many references to *sati* and memory in the commentaries which we will be examining below, including an old definition from the *Niddesa*, an early canonical commentary on parts of the *Sutta Nipāta* (Sn) from about the third century BCE (Norman 1983: 86) which was repeated several times by Buddhaghosa and others.<sup>2</sup> Although some scholars

<sup>1</sup> *Sekkhassuttaṃ* MN 1, 356<sup>17-19</sup>; *Saṅgītisuttaṃ* DN 3, 268<sup>10-14</sup>; *Dasauttarasuttaṃ* DN 3, 286<sup>2-4</sup>; *Pathamavibhaṅgasuttaṃ* SN 5, 197<sup>10-14</sup>; *Dutiyaṅgārasuttaṃ* SN 5, 198<sup>16-22</sup>; *Āpaṇasuttaṃ* SN 225<sup>20-22</sup>; *Vitathasuttaṃ* AN 3, 11<sup>8-10</sup>; *Vitathabalasuttaṃ* AN 4, 4<sup>9-11</sup>; *Nagaropamasuttaṃ* AN 4, 111<sup>1-3</sup>; *Anuruddhamahāvitakkasuttaṃ* AN 4, 234<sup>16-18</sup>; *Paṭhamanāthasuttaṃ* AN 5, 25<sup>6-8</sup>; *Dutiyanāthasuttaṃ* AN 5, 28<sup>18-22</sup>; *Bhaṅḍanasuttaṃ* AN 5, 91<sup>12-16</sup>; and twice in the *Niddesa II* (p. 263 ad *Khaggavisāṇasutta* 45, 70)

<sup>2</sup> This passage also directly equates *sati* with memory (*yā sati anussati paṭissati saraṇatā...* see below page 134). It occurs three times in Nidd I Commentary on Sn’s *Aṭṭhakavagga*, four times in Nidd II (commentary on Sn’s *Pārāyanavagga*), once each in the commentary on the *Mahāsatiṅgārasuttaṃ* and the *Satipaṭṭhānasuttaṃ*, and was quoted 17 times in the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, so it was very well known.

downgrade the value of the commentaries as late additions from Buddhaghosa's time or after, much of the material is very early and some (like the *Pātimokkha* or the *Niddesa*) may go back to the Buddha's time (Norman 1997 [2006]: 206).

Anālayo recognizes that there are a “plurality of conceptions of mindfulness” (2017:20), and argues against a direct equivalence of mindfulness (*sati*) and memory in early Buddhism (pp. 26-34). Mindfulness, he maintains, cannot be directly equated with memory, citing “semantic memory” – that facility which allows us to understand a language – as present all the time, and not something to be brought into being like mindfulness (27), and “episodic memory” – remembering things from one's past, as in daydreaming – as sometimes the “very opposite of being mindful” (30). He concludes that mindfulness “strengthens and enhances memory” but it is not equivalent (32). Yet in the *Dutiyavibhaṅghasuttam* cited at the head of this article, the Buddha is quoted as indeed equating *sati* with “remembering and recollecting what was said and done a long time ago” (*cirakatam pi cirabhāsitam pi saritā anussaritā*). What Anālayo has failed to take into consideration is the Buddha's statement that the one who possesses *sati* (*satimā*) is “endowed with the highest memory and wisdom” (*satimā hoti paramena satinepakkena samannāgato*); *sati* is not any memory – semantic, episodic or otherwise – but that special faculty which is also united with wisdom. More on this below.

The word mindfulness is itself ambiguous in English. “Mindful” (Old English *gemyndful*) translates Latin *memoriosus*, “having a good memory” *per* the *OED*, and originally had that meaning, as well as “having recollection and remembrance”, and “to remember to do something”; today these meanings are largely obsolete and have been replaced by the Buddhist meaning, “fully aware of the moment, whilst self-conscious and attentive to this awareness” (*OED*). Perhaps a better definition, without the self-referentiality element (which is contentious) is “thoughtful, heedful, attentive, being conscious or aware”. Whether it is possible to be attentive and heedful without memory is something we will discuss below. This paper argues, if not for the equivalence of *sati* and memory, at least for the centrality of memory and remembering to the denotative and connotative core of the word.

### ***Smṛti***

The Prakrit word *sati* derives straightforwardly from OI *smṛti* with the loss of the conjunct *sm-* > *s-* and the change of vocalic *-ṛ-* > *a*. *smṛti* > *sati*. It



occurs in the Gāndhārī dialect as *svadi* where *sm-* > *sv-*, where a bilabial nasal changes to a labiodental glide, a characteristic of the NW dialect and the intervocalic unvoiced stop *-t-* is voiced to *-d-*, and it occurs in other Prakrits as *sai* (Mahāraṣṭī, Ardha-Māgadhī) with the loss of the intervocalic stop altogether, or *samii* with the insertion of an epenthetic *-a-* between *s-* and *-m*. There does not appear to be any doubt that *sati* in its various forms derives from OI *smṛti* (Turner, entry 13868). Originally it meant “remembrance” and in the Prakrits including Pali it took on the additional connotation of “lucidity of mind”, which it does not have in Sanskrit. In his BHS dictionary, Edgerton defines it exclusively in the second meaning “mindfulness, (full) consciousness or awareness,” although he does say that is “hardly distinguishable from some aspects of Skt. id.”

In the Brahmanical tradition, *smṛti* included both the 6 *Vedāṅgas* (proper articulation and pronunciation of the Vedas, metre, linguistic analysis and grammar, etymology, astronomy and ceremonial observance), the *Śrauta* and *Gṛhyasūtras*, the law books of Manu, the *Itihāsas*, the *Purāṇas* and the *Nītiśāstras*. If we believe his later biographers like Aśvaghōṣa in his *Buddhacarita*, the Buddha himself was trained in the Brahmanical tradition; he certainly knew Vedic etymological procedures as he used them himself (Levman 2017: 35), and various scholars have shown that his teachings (like *anattā* reinterpreting *ātman*, and *kamma* as ethical action rather than sacrificial works) were directly responding to Brahmanical notions of the nature of the world (Collins 1982: 40; Gombrich 2009: 29f). So when he talked about *sati* (= *smṛti*) he was certainly aware of the “memory” connotation of the word, as the quote at the head of this paper demonstrates. When people of fifth century BCE India heard *sati*, their first thought was “memory”. Perhaps this fact accounts for the relative paucity of internal definitions of *sati* found in the *suttas* and commentaries.

In what follows it will be necessary to suspend one’s propensity to automatically equate *sati* with mindfulness, and, in examining the context in which the word occurs, to question whether another word (memory, recollection, calling to mind, remembering, keep in mind, think about, retain in mind, reflect on, not to forget, etc.) might be equally or more appropriate. Thus in most cases – except where I am actually quoting a writer or translator – I leave *sati* (and its other nominal form *sato*, “remembering, mindful, recollecting, attentive”) untranslated, in the interests of unbiased critical examination.

## Early translations

The ambiguity of how the word was dealt with in the early English translations reflects *sati*'s polysemous nature. Childers appears to be the first English speaking scholar to use the word “mindful” in his 1875 *Dictionary of Pali* s.v. *sato* (p. 467). Presumably this definition influenced Rhys Davids’ choice of the term “mindful” for *sato* in 1881 when he published his translation of seven *suttas* from the *Dīgha* and *Majjhima Nikāyas* (Rhys Davids, 1881: 29, 38; Gethin 2011: 264). Monier Williams, a Sanskritist, was one of the first to use the word “mindfulness” (1890: 44) to translate the nominal form of *sato*, that is *sati*, pointing out that “right mindfulness” (*sammāsati*) is for the purpose of “keeping in mind the impurities and impermanence of the body” (pp. 44-45). “Keeping in mind” is a form of memory, and elsewhere he simply calls *sati* “recollection” when referring to the seven *bojjhaṅgas* or limbs of enlightenment (p. 50); the four *satipaṭṭhānas* (usually translated as “Foundations of Mindfulness” after Vens. Nyanaponika and Bodhi above), he calls “earnest reflections on the body's impurities, on the impermanence of the sensations, of the thoughts, of the conditions of existence” (p. 127). Rhys Davids, in his translation of *Milindapañha*, also in 1890, uses several different words to translate *sati*, and most are associated with memory, both in the English and the Pāli. This translation is well worth taking a further look at, to gain insight into how the word *sati* was understood in the first century BCE (when the *Milindapañha* was thought to have been composed), and later in its first English translation.

The conversation on *sati* starts with King Milinda asking Nāgasena, “What is the characteristic mark of mindfulness?” (1890: 58; *kiṃlakkaṇā sati?* Mil 37<sup>5</sup>); note that here Rhys Davids translates *sati* as “mindfulness” but in a footnote says, “I have sometimes rendered it ‘self-possession’. It means that activity of mind, constant presence of mind, wakefulness of heart which is the foe of carelessness, inadvertence, self-forgetfulness.” Again the theme of memory, of keeping a close eye on oneself so as not to be oblivious of one’s actions.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In 1910, when Rhys David published his second volume of Buddhist *sutta* translations, he says this about *sati* (p. 322): “Etymologically Sati is Memory. But as happened at the rise of Buddhism to so many other expressions in common use, a new connotation was then attached to the word, a connotation that gave a new meaning to it, and renders ‘memory’ a most inadequate and misleading translation. It became the memory, recollection, calling-to-mind, being-aware-of, certain specified facts. Of these the most important was the impermanence (the coming to be as the result of a cause, and the passing away again) of all phenomena, bodily and mental. And it included the repeated application of this awareness, to each experience of life, from the ethical point of view.”

Nāgasena replies that *apilāpana-lakkhaṇā* and *upagaṇhana-lakkhaṇa* are the two characteristics of *sati*. The word *apilāpana* literally means “not allowing any floating”, that is “not to forget, to call to mind, to remember.” (CPD sv *apilāpeti*).<sup>4</sup> The compound *upagaṇhana-lakkhaṇa* means “having ‘taking up’ as a distinguishing mark” (CPD), and refers to taking up a beneficial meditation subject and avoiding what is unsuitable. In the ensuing dialogue Nāgasena tells the king that the practitioner uses *sati* to call to mind and not forget the four foundations of mindfulness, the five powers, the seven limbs of enlightenment, the noble eightfold path, etc., and to practise what should be practised and avoid what shouldn’t be; that is, to remember the teachings of the Buddha. *Sati* is like the treasurer or governor of a universal monarch who constantly reminds the king of his treasures and points out which *dhammas* it is beneficial to adopt and which not.

In the next section on *sati*, the King asks, “In how many ways, Nāgasena, does *sati* spring up?” (p. 122; *katihī ākārehi sati uppajjati?* Mil, 78<sup>11-12</sup>). Here, Rhys Davids translates *sati* by “memory”, for indeed there are seventeen ways in which *sati* arises and they are all associated with memory:

- 1) some people remember (*saranti*) former births, so *sati* arises from recollection (*abhijānato*).
- 2) some people who are naturally forgetful (*pakatiyā muṭṭhassatiko*) are made to remember (*sarāpana*) through others’ urging.
- 3), 4) & 5) for others *sati* arises from recalling a happy occasion (*oḷārikaviññānato*, “consciousness of something material or manifest” CPD), or in recalling something beneficial (*hitaviññānato*) or non-beneficial (*ahitaviññānato*).
- 6) & 7) or *sati* arises from similarity of appearance (*sabhāganimitto*) or difference in appearance (*visabhāganimitto*).
- 8) & 9) or *sati* arises from recollection due to speech (*kathābhiññānato*), especially for people who are ordinarily forgetful (*pakatiyā muṭṭhassatiko*), or through urging a forgetful person (*sarāhi bho, sarāhi bho tī*), causing him again and again to remember (*punappunaṃ sarāpeti*).

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion on the meaning of *apilāpana* and its later Sanskrit form *abhilāpana*, see Cox 1992/1993: 79-82. She concludes that the word’s meaning is not univocal but suggests an “attentive noting or fixing” (82).

10) *sati* can also arise due to a particular characteristic (*lakḥhaṇato*) which triggers remembrance, like the brand of a cow.

11), 12) & 13) *sati* also arises from writing (*muddāto*) and from numbers (*gaṇanāto*), from learning by heart or memorization (*dhāraṇato*). In each case, the discipline provides the training to keep the mind focused on its object.

14) *sati* arises from meditation (*bhāvanāto*), for a monk successful in meditation recalls his former lives with their characteristics and details.

15), 16) & 17) *sati* may also arise from reference to a book (*poṭhaka-nibandhanato*) in which past decisions have been made and written down; through association of ideas (*upanikkhepa*); and through experience (*anubhūto*).

In each of the above causes, *sati* has a different nuance of meaning that cannot be captured by any one word like “mindfulness,” yet they all have the common denominator of being subsumed by the memory function, and incorporating a potential vector of spiritual transformation through increased self-awareness and analysis, insight into experience and mental concentration. Arguably, *sati* cannot exist without memory. To take an everyday example of a person assaulted with one of the three poisons. Awareness that one’s mind is *sarāgaṃ*, *sadosaṃ* or *samohaṃ* is not enough in itself to overcome the afflictions. One must also remember the Buddha’s teaching on the subject, *netam mama, nesohamasmi, na meso attā* (“that it is not mine, I am not that, it is not myself”) in order to separate the emotion or feeling from the so-called “self” which is arising through craving, and see it fade away. In other words, *sati* is not a passive act of receptive awareness, but requires memory of the *Buddhadhamma* to motivate and catalyze transformation (Thanissaro 2012: 113-115). More on this below.

### **The *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta***

*Milindapañha* is a fairly late work and is only canonical in the Burmese transmission. Nevertheless it is useful to illustrate the tradition’s early attitudes towards *sati* and how the first English language translators attempted to deal with the multifarious denotations and connotations of the word. One would expect to find this same broad spectrum of associative semantic implications in the *suttas*, to which we now turn.

In the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta* itself the word *sati* does not occur very often by itself. It occurs once in the *ānāpānapabbaṃ* section where the *bhikkhu* is

enjoined *parimukhaṃ satim upaṭṭhapetvā* (“after putting forth *sati* in front...”) to breathe in and out *sato va* (“just mindful” or “just remembering”). Then the word *sati* occurs in every “refrain”, the repeated section throughout the *sutta* punctuating each meditative instruction: observing the body in the body (and so on with the feelings, mind and mental phenomena) internally, or externally or both; or observing rising or falling phenomena in the body, etc., or both; or establishing *sati* in the meditator that “there is a body, feeling, mind or mental phenomena” to the extent necessary for the full measure of wisdom and memory.<sup>5</sup> The use of the word *paṭissati* in this culminating section is telling, as the word usually means “remembrance” in the *suttas* (< OI *prati* + *smṛ*, “to remember, to recollect”) and emphasizes the equivalence of *sati* = *patissati* = memory.

### ***Sato sampajāno***

The words *sato* and *sampajāno* are usually taken to be “almost synonymous” (PED, p. 690, Childers p. 467) in their interpreted meaning of “mindful and clearly aware,” etc. They are a well-known feature of the third *jhāna*, and indeed, they also occur several times in the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna sutta*, starting with the introductory *Uddeso* (and also in the final *maggasaccaniddeso* section describing *sammāsati*, “correct *sati*”) where the *bhikkhu* who participates in *satipaṭṭhāna* practice is described as *ātāpī* (ardent), *sampajāno*, and *satimā* (possessed of

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<sup>5</sup> DN 2, 292<sup>6-7</sup>: ‘*Atthi kāyo’ ti vā pan’assa sati paccupaṭṭhitā hoti yāvadeva ñāṇa-mattāya paṭissati-mattāya*. Translated by Bodhi & Ñāṇamoli as “to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and mindfulness” (1995: 150), and by Soma Thera as “to the extent necessary for just knowledge and remembrance” <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/soma/wayof.html#top>. Thanissaro Bhikkhu’s translation is similar:

“Or his mindfulness that ‘There is a body’ is maintained to the extent of knowledge & remembrance” at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.010.than.html>. Anālayo translates “Or mindfulness that ‘there is a body’ is established in him just for the sake of bare knowledge and for the sake of continuous mindfulness” (2013: Kindle 6594). The use of “bare knowledge” to translate *ñāṇa-mattāya* by Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi and Anālayo is questionable; it appears to be influenced by Nyanaponika’s translation of *sati* as “bare attention” (see discussion below, page 133). These translators are taking *mattāya* in the sense of “only” or “mere” which is possible, but the word’s primary meaning is “quantity” or “measure”, “the full measure of anything” (MW s.v. *mātrā* and *mātra*), which is indeed how the commentary interprets it, that is, for the sake of increased knowledge and remembrance: *yāvadeva ñāṇamattāya, aparāparaṃ uttaruttari ñāṇapamāṇatthāya c’eva satipamāṇatthāya ca. Satisampajāññānaṃ vuddhatthāya*, “For the purpose of a measure of knowledge again and again, higher and higher just for the purpose of an amount of knowledge and an amount of *sati* for the growth of *sati* and wisdom” (Sv 3, 766<sup>3-5</sup>)

*sati*). The commentary, however, does not take these words as equivalents: Someone who lacks ardency is indolent and bars the way; someone who is not *sampajāno* forgets the taking up of proper means and the avoidance of wrong means; and someone who is not possessed of *sati* is forgetful (*muṭṭhassati*) and is not skilful in the non-abandonment of proper means nor in the non-acquisition of wrong means, therefore he does not succeed with his meditation subject.<sup>6</sup>

In fact, while there is no definition of *sampajāno* in the *suttas* that I am aware of, the commentary routinely defines the word as different from, but complementary to *sati*. *Sati* is remembering and *sampajāno* is “perfectly knowing” (< Skt. *sam* + *pra* + *jñā*), and associated always with knowledge and wisdom. Of the six *abhiññās* (supernormal knowledges), for example, three of them are directly associated with memory: *pubbe-nivāsa-anussati-ñāṇaṃ*, recollecting one’s previous births, *ceto-pariya-ñāṇaṃ*, knowing others’ rebirths and *āsava-kkhaya-ñāṇaṃ*, the destruction of the fetters through knowledge of suffering, its origin, its cessation and the path. As Anālayo has argued (2017: 32-34), when one knows something thoroughly with proper attention and clear awareness, that facilitates its recollection. But they are not the same thing. In the commentary to the *Udāna’s Kammavipākajasuttaṃ* (Ud. 21), a monk abided *sato sampajāno*, enduring without complaining the ripening of his former *kamma*. Here, both factors of memory and wisdom work together, as the Buddha’s *udāna* makes clear (“he has abandoned all action and shaken off the dirt of former deeds,” *sabbakammajahassa bhikkhuno, dhunamānassa pure kataṃ rajam*), which is further explained in the commentary:

***sato sampajāno***: he remembers, he knows perfectly on account of memory and wisdom being included in feeling, that is, “What is called feeling is impermanent because of its meaning of disappearance, it is dependently arisen because of having arisen dependent on causes, beginning with an undesirable sense-object (*aniṭṭh’ārammaṇā*), and having arisen, certainly because of their nature of breaking up they are subject to destruction, to ceasing, to fading away, to cessation.” *sato* = the performance of *sati* on account of the discernment of the state of impermanence of feeling. *sampajāno* on account of the comprehension of its (feeling’s) true

<sup>6</sup> Sv 3, 758<sup>20-24</sup>: *Atha vā yasmā anātāpino anto-saṅkhepo antarāyakaro hoti, asampajāno upāya-pariggāhe anupāya-parivajjane ca sammuyhati, muṭṭha-ssati upāya-pariccāge anupāyāpariggāhe ca asamatto hoti; ten’assa taṃ kammaṭṭhānaṃ na sampajjati.*





reborn.<sup>9</sup> *Sampajāno* is a process requiring time and memory; it is not simply being “clearly aware”. This is further emphasized in the *Sampasādanīyasuttaṃ*, where the fourth mode of rebirth is entering the womb perfectly knowing, staying there *sampajāno* and leaving there *sampajāno*;<sup>10</sup> and in the *Satisuttaṃ*: “And how *bhikkhus*, does a *bhikkhu* exercise clear comprehension? Here *bhikkhus*, for a *bhikkhu* feelings are understood as they arise, understood as they remain present, understood as they pass away. Thoughts are understood as they arise...pass away. Perceptions are understood as they arise... pass away. It is in this way, *bhikkhus*, that a *bhikkhu* exercises clear comprehension.” (Bodhi 2000: 1657).<sup>11</sup> Clear comprehension or perfect understanding cannot take place without memory.

It is unclear how memory was lost in translation. The *Dutiyavibhaṅghasuttaṃ* definition noted above attributed to the Buddha is unequivocal, yet we find *sati* translated as “bare attention” (Nyanaponika 1954 [2014]: 15) where remembrance is not only omitted, it is actually gainsaid as a valid *sati* component (Thanissaro 2012: 21). Nyanaponika writes:

It is called ‘bare’, because it attends just to the bare facts of a perception as presented either through the five physical senses or through the mind which, for Buddhist thought, constitutes the sixth sense. When attending to that sixfold sense impression, attention or mindfulness is kept to a bare registering of the facts observed, without reacting to them by deed, speech or by mental comment which may be one of self-reference (like, dislike, etc.), judgement or reflection (17).

To Nyanaponika, any reflective mental activity in regard to things observed is the function of *sampajaññā* which, as noted above, occurs quite often with *sati* in the compound *sati-sampajañña* and which he labels “clear comprehension”

<sup>9</sup> DN-a-ṭ (Līnatthavaṇṇanā) 2, 23<sup>29-32</sup>: *Ñāṇena paricchinditvā ti pubbabhāge pañcamahāvīlokanāñānehi c’eva*: ‘Idāni cavāmīti cutiparicchindanañāṇena ca aparabhāge: ‘Idha mayā paṭisandhi gahitā’ti paṭisandhiparicchindanañāṇena ca paricchijja jānitvā.

<sup>10</sup> DN 3, 103<sup>15-18</sup>: *puna ca paraṃ bhante idh’ekacco sampajāno mātu kucchim okkamati, sampajāno mātukucchismiṃ thāti, sampajāno mātu kucchimhā nikkhamati.*

<sup>11</sup> SN 5, 180<sup>29</sup>-181<sup>5</sup>: *kathaṃ ca bhikkhave bhikkhu sampajāno hoti. idha bhikkhave bhikkhuno viditā vedanā uppajjanti. viditā upaṭṭhahanti. viditā abbattham gacchanti. viditā vitakkā uppajjanti. viditā upaṭṭhahanti. viditā abbattham gacchanti. viditā saññā uppajjanti. viditā upaṭṭhahanti. viditā abbattham gacchanti. evaṃ kho bhikkhave bhikkhu sampajāno hoti.*

(15). He seems to be treating the two words as near-synonyms – a practice which is quite common in the *suttas* – where *sati* takes on some of the meaning of *sampajañña* (awareness, or wisdom) and *sampajañña* takes on some of the meaning of *sati* (reflection). Since there is no clear differentiation of the two words in the *suttas* (just in the commentaries), this is understandable, and we have seen above that his lead has been followed by other translators.

Another definition of *sati* attributed to the Buddha is found in the *Sīlasuttaṃ* (SN 5, 67f) where the Buddha recommends hearing the *dhamma* from an accomplished bhikkhu; when one hears the *dhamma* from such monks, one dwells withdrawn in body and mind and “remembers (*anussarati*) the *dhamma* and ponders on it (*anuvitakketi*), and at that time the enlightenment factor of *sati* is activated... cultivated... and perfected.” This leads to the cultivation of the other six enlightenment factors, investigation of the *dhamma*, diligence, joy, tranquillity, concentration and equanimity.<sup>12</sup>

Another important definition of *sati* occurs in the canonical *Niddesa*, the third century BCE commentary on the Sn, which is quoted by Buddhaghosa and others several times (see footnote 2 above).

*satimā ti tattha katamā sati? Yā sati anussati paṭissati sati saraṇatā dhāraṇatā apilāpanatā asammusanatā sati satindriyaṃ satibalaṃ sammāsati, ayaṃ vuccati sati. imāya satiyā upeto hoti ... pe ... samannāgato, tena vuccati satimāti.* Sv 3, 760<sup>5-8</sup>. Nidd I, 10<sup>9-14</sup> ad Sn 768.

Possessed of *sati*: in this regard, what is *sati*? This is called *sati* which is *sati* as *anussati* (“remembrance, recollection,” cf. the ten recollections, below), as *paṭissati* (“remembrance, memory”); *sati* as *saraṇatā* (“remembering”), as *dhāraṇatā* (“retaining, preserving, keeping in mind”), as *apilāpanatā* (“not to forget, to call to mind”), *asammusanatā* (non-distraction, non-forgetfulness), *sati* as the faculty of *sati*, as the power of *sati*, as right *sati*; one who is endowed with this *sati*, is called *satimā*.

<sup>12</sup> SN 5, 67<sup>29</sup>-68<sup>6</sup>: *Yasmim samaye bhikkhave bhikkhu tathā vūpakaṭṭho viharanto taṃ dhammam anussarati anuvitakketi satisambojjhaṅgo tasmim samaye tassa bhikkhuno āraddho hoti. Satisambojjhaṅgaṃ yasmim samaye bhikkhu bhāveti. satisambojjhaṅgo tasmim samaye bhikkhuno bhsmim pāripūriṃ gacchati.*

*Satimā* then is someone who remembers. Although *dhāraṇatā* has the additional and perhaps primary meaning of concentration (and other secondary meanings of understanding, possession, etc), all the other synonyms highlight memory. What is it he/she is supposed to remember? The path, for although there are four *satipaṭṭhānas*, there is only one path leading to *nibbāna*. Here is the commentary:

“But in the commentary, on account of remembering (*saraṇavasena*) and on account of their convergence as a unity, there is just one *satipaṭṭhāna*, (but) four are told because of the (four) sense-objects [that is, body, feelings, mind and mental objects]. For just as people coming to a four gated city from the east, with goods originating in the east, enter the city only by the eastern gate, and those coming from the south, from the west, from the north, with goods originating in the south, west and north, enter the city only by the south, west and north gates, etc; thus, it should be understood, that is how it is. Like the city is *nibbāna*, like the gates of the city is the eightfold supramundane path and like the eastern direction, etc., is the body, etc.,

Like coming from the east, with goods originating in the east, and entering the city through the eastern gate, in the same way, coming by means of observing the body and cultivating the observation of the body through 14 methods, they come into just one *nibbāna* through the noble path which has arisen through the power of meditation and observation of the body. Just as coming from the south...in the same way coming by means of observing feelings, cultivating the observation of the feelings in nine ways, they come into just one *nibbāna* through the noble path which has arisen through the power of meditation and observation of the feelings...western gate...observation of the mind...nothern gate... observation of mind-objects. Thus it should be understood, that on account of refuge and on account of convergence as a unity, there is just one *satipaṭṭhāna*, (but) because of the sense-objects, there are said to be four.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Sv 3, 754<sup>34</sup>- 755<sup>30</sup>: *Aṭṭhakathāyaṃ pana saraṇa-vasena c'eva ekatta-samosaraṇa-vasena ca ekam eva satipaṭṭhānaṃ ārammaṇa-vasena cattāro ti etad eva vuttaṃ. Yathā hi catu-dvāre nagare*

It is *nibbāna* that the meditator must remember and the path that leads there. The *ṭīkā* glosses *saraṇa-vasena* (“on account of remembering”) as on account of *upadhāraṇa* (reflection/meditation/holding in mind) of virtuous phenomena, starting with the body. “They remember, they go to *nibbāna* because of *sati*.” *ekatta-samosaraṇa* (“convergence in unity”), coming together, meeting in the goal, in unity, in the single nature of *nibbāna*.<sup>14</sup>

It is arguably impossible to be “mindful” of anything without this function of memory present. The *satipaṭṭhāna* exercises themselves are a good illustration of that. One observes the body to remind oneself of its impermanence, its nature as suffering, its lack of essence, its disgustingness, in order to separate oneself from it and recognize that it is not the self. This is implicit in the exercises, but explicit in the commentary. Feelings and mental states are observed in the same way, as changeable, dysphoric and not self, and with mental phenomena we are reminded of almost the entire Buddhist path, from elimination of the *nīvaraṇas*, to fostering of the *saṃbojjhaṅgas*, to the eightfold path itself. We are constantly reminding ourselves of the path, how to avoid the pitfalls of falling off it, and how to ensure

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*pācīnato āgacchantā pācīna-disāya uṭṭhānakaṃ bhaṇḍaṃ gahetvā pācīna-dvārena nagaram eva pavisanti, dakkhiṇato... pacchimoto...uttarato āgacchantā uttara-disāya uṭṭhānakaṃ bhaṇḍaṃ gahetvā uttara-dvārena nagaram eva pavisanti: evaṃ-sampadam idaṃ veditabbam. Nagaram viya hi nibbānam; nagaraṃ, dvāraṃ viya aṭṭhaṅgiko lok’uttaramaggo, pācīna-dis’ādayo viya kāy’ādayo. Yathā pācīnato āgacchantā pācīna-disāya uṭṭhānakaṃ bhaṇḍaṃ gahetvā pācīna-dvārena nagaram eva pavisanti evaṃ kāyānupassanā-mukhena āgacchantā cuddasa-vidhena kāyānupassanaṃ bhāvetvā kāyānupassanā-bhāvanānubhāva-nibbattena ariya-maggena ekaṃ nibbānam eva osaranti. Yathā dakkhiṇato āgacchantā dakkhiṇāya disāya uṭṭhānakaṃ bhaṇḍaṃ gahetvā dakkhiṇa-dvārena nagaram eva pavisanti evaṃ vedānupassanā-mukhena āgacchantā nava-vidhena vedānupassanaṃ bhāvetvā vedānupassanā-bhāvanānubhāva-nibbattena ariya-maggena ekaṃ nibbānam eva osaranti. Yathā pacchimoto āgacchantā pacchima-disāya uṭṭhānakaṃ bhaṇḍaṃ gahetvā pacchima-dvārena nagaram eva pavisanti evaṃ cittānupassanā-mukhena āgacchantā soḷasa-vidhena cittānupassanaṃ bhāvetvā cittānupassanā-bhāvanānubhāva-nibbattena ariya-maggena ekaṃ nibbānam eva osaranti. Yathā uttarato āgacchantā uttara-disāya uṭṭhānakaṃ bhaṇḍaṃ gahetvā uttara-dvārena nagaram eva pavisanti evaṃ dhammānupassanā-mukhena āgacchantā pañca-vidhena dhammānupassanaṃ bhāvetvā dhammānupassanā-bhāvanānubhāva-nibbattena ariya-maggena ekaṃ nibbānam eva osaranti. Evaṃ saraṇa-vasena c’eva ekatta-samosaraṇa-vasena ca ekaṃ eva satipaṭṭhānaṃ āramaṇa-vasena cattāro va vuttā ti veditabbā.*

<sup>14</sup> DN-ṭ 2, 366<sup>25-29</sup>: *Saraṇavasenāti kāy’ādīnaṃ, kusaladhamm’ādīnaṃ ca upadhāraṇavasena. Saranti gacchanti nibbānaṃ etāyāti satīti imasmiṃ atthe ekatte ekasabhāve nibbāne samosaraṇaṃ samāgamaṃ ekattasamosaraṇaṃ.* The *ṭīkā* goes on to say that *sati* means “that very remembrance” (of *nibbāna*; *dhāraṇatā va*) and is a word intermediate in meaning (*sati-sadd’atth’antarābhāva*) between the initial condition of *sati* and final *nibbāna*.

its successful completion. “Mindfulness” – if we choose to translate *sati* in this fashion – is inconceivable without a solid foundation in memory.

There are cases in the *suttas* where *sati* has the unambiguous sense of “memory” or “remembering”, as in the *Vitakkasaṅṭhāna sutta* (MN 20) on getting rid of distracting thoughts, where the second solution is *asati-amanasikāraṃ āpajjato* (MN 1, 120<sup>7</sup>: “then he should try to forget those thoughts and should not give attention to them,” Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi 1995: 212). Here the Buddha is not talking about an “absence of mindfulness” when the word *a-sati* is used, but an “absence of remembering”, or forgetting. In the *Nandiya sutta* (AN 11.13) the Buddha instructs Nandiya to establish *sati* internally in regard to five things: with reference to the Tathāgata, the *dhamma*, good friends (*kalyāṇamitte*), based on one’s own generosity and based on deities. Although Bodhi translates *sati* here as “mindfulness” throughout (Bodhi 2012: 1569-70), the *suttas* employ the verb *anussareyyāsi* (“you should remember, recollect”), and is clearly talking about *sati* as “remembrance”, which is the more appropriate term. In other cases the sense may be ambiguous and could be interpreted either way. In the *Mahānāma sutta*, for example, the Buddha says *upaṭṭhitassati ārādhako hoti , no muṭṭhassati* (AN 5, 329<sup>6-7</sup>. “One with mindfulness established succeeds, not one who is muddle-minded”, Bodhi 2016: 1565), but *muṭṭha* means “forgotten” p.p. of *mussati* < OI *mṛs*, “to forget”) and this injunction might just as easily and correctly be translated, “One whose memory is well established...who is forgetful,” especially in this case when the Buddha is discoursing on the ten recollections (see below). And in other places, even when present awareness seems to be the forefront meaning, the connotation of “remembering” is clearly audible.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Sutta Nipāta***

The *Sutta Nipāta* contains some of the earliest of the Buddha’s teachings; we have already seen how the *Niddesa* commentary on the Sn defines *sati* in terms of memory, so we would expect to find this confirmed in the Sn itself. One of the dominant themes here is *sati*’s function as a guard and protection of the senses, epitomized in the metaphor of *sati* as a goad and ploughshare (*sati me phālapācanaṃ*) in Sn 77:

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<sup>15</sup> According to the CPD, *asati* can mean either “forgetful, heedless,” presumably negativising *sati* as “memory” and “want of memory, attention or presence of mind” indicating a “lack of mindfulness”. As the example above shows, these meanings can also overlap and dovetail.

saddhā bījaṃ, tapo vuttīhi, paññā me yuganaṅgaṃ,  
hirī īsā mano yottaṃ, sati me phālapācanaṃ.

“Faith is the seed, penance is the rain, wisdom is my yoke and plough; modesty is the pole, mind is the [yoke-]tie, mindfulness is my ploughshare and goad” (Norman 2006: 9).

Note that Norman translates *sati* in the “usual” way as “mindfulness”, but the commentary interprets *sati* in terms of memory. *Sati* offers the practitioner protection because it does *not forget*; it knows the wrong path and prevents the meditator from taking it. Once again, present awareness must be coupled with knowledge of the teachings, knowledge of how non-beneficial *dhammas* have arisen in the past, knowledge of how to abandon them, and knowledge of how to prevent their arising again in the future (*sammāvāyāmo*, right effort). “Bare attention”, as Ven. Nyanaponika translates *sati*, can only be achieved through combining past, present and future to effectively eliminate time altogether. The commentary reads:

With this (*sati*) a person remembers, starting with very early incidents in his/her life,<sup>16</sup> or *sati* itself remembers; *sati*’s characteristic is non-forgetfulness/non-distraction (*asammussanalakkhaṇā*). *phāleti* (“it splits”) = ploughshare (*phālo*). *pājeti* (he drives) with that = goad (*pājanaṃ*); that here which is called a goad (*pācanaṃ*), is a designation for a driving stick. And a ploughshare and a goad = *phālapācanaṃ*. For just as a brahman has a ploughshare and a goad, so the Bhagavā has *sati* which is devoted to insight meditation and devoted to the path. In that respect, as a ploughshare protects a plough by going in front of it, in this way *sati* goes together with the course of virtuous *dhammas* or, keeping attention on the sense-object, it guards the plough of wisdom; thus, regarding such statements as, “he abides with his mind whose protection is *sata*,” it (*sati*) is called *ārakkhā* (“protection, watch, guard, care”).

<sup>16</sup> cf. Sv 2, 530<sup>18-20</sup>, commentary on the *Mahāparinibbāna sutta* section on monks living in harmony, where monks who are *upaṭṭhita-ssatī* (whose *sati* is established) similarly have a good memory for early incidents in their lives, like Mahāgatimbayābhayathero, Dīghabhānakābhayathero, and Tipiṭakacūlābhayathero. *Upaṭṭhita-ssatī ti cira-kat’ādīnaṃ saritā anussaritāro; Mahāgatimba-Ayābhayathera-Dīghabhāṇaka-Abhayathera-Tipiṭakacūlābhayatherā viya.*

On account of non-forgetfulness, it goes in front of him; when a dhamma is attended with *sati*, one knows with wisdom, it is not forgotten (*no ammuṭṭhe*). Just as a goad does not allow oxen to sink (into idleness), showing them the fear of being struck, but prevents them from going on the wrong path, in this way *sati*, showing the fear of hell to the oxen of vigour (*vīriyabalibaddānaṃ*) does not allow sinking into idleness, prevents them from going into the wrong field called sensual pleasure, and, urging to the meditation subject, prevents going on the wrong path. Therefore he said, “*sati* is my ploughshare and goad.”<sup>17</sup>

Restraint of the senses is a common theme associated with *sati*. In Sn 340, *sati* is associated with recalling the rules of the *pātimokkha* and following them:

Samvuto pātimokkhasmiṃ indriyesu ca pañcasu,  
sati kāyagatā ty-atthu (kāyagatā te atthu), nibbidābahulo bhava.

Be restrained in respect of the rules of discipline and in the five sense-faculties. Be mindful concerning the body. Be full of disgust [with the world] (Norman 2006: 40).

The commentary spells out the connection with the *pātimokkha* precepts:

Thus the Bhagavā, having incited Ven. Rahula to purity of livelihood, now in order to incite him to tranquillity and insight meditation in the rest of the moral practice, said “Restrained in the precepts,” etc., (*saṃvuto pātimokkhasmiṃ*). In regard to *saṃvuto pātimokkhasmiṃ* here *bhavassu* (“Be!”) is another reading

<sup>17</sup> Pj 11, 147<sup>9-27</sup>: *Sarati etāya cirakatādim atthaṃ puggalo, sayam vā saratī ti sati, sā asammussanalakkhaṇā; phāletī ti phālo. pājeti tenā ti pājanaṃ, taṃ idha pācanan ti vuccatī, patodass’etaṃ adhivacanam, phālo ca pācanan ca phālapācanam. yathā hi brāhmaṇassa phālapācanam, evaṃ Bhagavato vipassanāyuttā maggayuttā ca sati; tatha, yathā phālo naṅgalam anurakkhati purato c’assa gacchati, evaṃ sati kusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ gatiyo samanvesamānā ārammaṇe vā upaṭṭhāpayamānā paññānaṅgalam rakkhati, tathā hi satārakkhena cetasā viharatī tiādīsū ārakkhā ti vuttā. asammussanavasena c’assa purato hoti, satiparicite hi dhamme paññā pajānāti no pammuṭṭhe. yathā ca pācanam balibaddānaṃ vijjhanabhayaṃ dassentaṃ saṃsīdanaṃ na deti uppathagamanaṃ ca vāreti, evaṃ sati vīriyabalibaddānaṃ apāyabhayaṃ dassentī kosajjasamsīdanaṃ na deti kāmaguṇasaṅkhāte agocare cāraṃ nivāretvā kammaṭṭhāne nīyojenti uppathagamanaṃ ca vāreti, tenāha: sati me phālapācanan ti.*



(*pāṭhaseso*). Or one should make the connection with the final word in the stanza (*bhava* = “Be!”), and likewise vice versa. Thus with these two words he instigated behaviour in the restraint of the *pātimokkha* and behaviour in the restraint of the senses. And here the five faculties are mentioned, as they are well-known. But it should be understood that the sixth is also mentioned only by its characteristic. May you who are established in the four pure behaviours have *sati* centered on the body, with the different types of meditation including analysis of the four elements, the four-fold *sampajaññas* [*sāthaka*° (advantageous), *sappāya*° (beneficial), *gocara*° (suitable place), *asammoha*° (absence of confusion)], in-and-out-breathing *sati*, the idea that food is disgusting (*āhārapaṭikkūlasaññā*), etc., “Cultivate it” (*sati*) is the meaning. Be full of disgust: have great dissatisfaction with *saṃsāra*, do not see delight in the entire world.<sup>18</sup>

*Sati* centered on the body is probably an allusion to the *Kāyagatāsati Suttam* (MN 119) which includes meditation on the six bodily *satipaṭṭhānas* and the four *jhānas*; since the latter are included under the *sammāsamādhi* meditation in the *satipaṭṭhāna* mental phenomena meditation (*dhammānupassī*) on the eightfold noble path, this is probably what the commentary means by the sixth faculty (*mano*) being present through its characteristic.

This same theme of *sati* as restraint is also central to its meaning in Sn 435 and 444; in the former *sati* is associated with wisdom and *samādhi* and the absence of longing for sensual desire.<sup>19</sup> In the latter *gāthā*, *sati* underpins

<sup>18</sup> Pj II 343<sup>2-15</sup>: *Evaṃ Bhagavā āyasmantaṃ Rāhulaṃ ājīvapārisuddhisīle samādapetvā idāni avasesasīle samathavipassanāsu ca samādapetuṃ saṃvuto pātimokkhasmin ti ādim āha. Tattha saṃvuto pātimokkhasmin ti ettha “bhavassū” ti pāṭhaseso, “bhavā” ti antimapadenavā sambandho veditabbo, tathā dutiyapade. Evaṃ etehi dvīhi vacanehi pātimokkhasaṃvarasīle indriyasaṃvarasīle ca samādapesi, pākaṭavasena c’ ettha pañc’ indriyāni vuttāni, lakkaṇato pana chaṭṭham pi vuttaṃ yeva hoti ti veditabbaṃ; sati kāyagatā ty atthū ti evaṃ catupārisuddhisīle paṭiṭṭhitassa tuyhaṃ catudhātuvavatthānacatubbidhasampajaññānāpānasati āhārapaṭikkūlasaññābhāvanādibhedā kāyagatā sati atthu bhavatu, bhāvehi tan ti attho; nibbidābahulo bhavā ti saṃsāravatṭe ukkaṇṭhanabahulo sabbaloke anabhiratasaññī hohi ti attho.*

<sup>19</sup> cf. Ps 3, 30<sup>8-10</sup>: *kasmā pana satibhājaniye paññā āgatāti? satiya balavabhāvadīpanatthaṃ. paññāvippayuttā hi sati dubbalā hoti, sampayuttā balavatīti.* “But why is wisdom associated with *sati*? For the purpose of explaining its condition of strength. For *sati* disconnected from wisdom is weak, connected it is strong.”

*sammāsaṅkappo*, right intention (Pj II 392<sup>15-17</sup>: *satiñca sūpatiṭṭhitaṃ ti kāyādāsu catūsu thānesu attano satiñ ca suṭṭhu upaṭṭhitaṃ karitvā; evaṃ vasīkatasāṅkappo suppatiṭṭhitassati*, “when one’s own *sati* is well established in the four positions of the body; thus intention which has been brought under control will be well established.”

*Sati* is also associated with *upekkhako* (“indifference, equanimity”) in Sn 515 (*sabbattha upekkhako satimā*, “Being disinterested in everything, possessing mindfulness,” Norman 2006: 62),<sup>20</sup> and in the third and fourth *jhānas*, the latter of which is described as *upekkhāsati* *parisuddhiṃ* and explained in the commentary as “the purity of *sati* generated by equanimity.”<sup>21</sup> *Sati* is also linked to the state of nothingness in the *Upasīvamāṇavapucchā* (Sn 1069-76), where the Buddha advises Upasīva to cross the flood, “Having regard for [the state of] nothingness, possessing mindfulness...” (*ākiñcaññaṃ pekkhamāno satimā*, Norman 2006: 129). In the *Niddesa* commentary to Sn 768 (*so imaṃ visattikaṃ loke sato samativattati*, “he [being] mindful passes beyond this attachment to the world,” Norman 2006: 98), the link between avoiding attachment and *sati* as memory is made explicit. *Sati* is associated not only with the four *satipaṭṭhāna* meditations, but also with not forgetting, and various other etymological twists of the word itself:

<sup>20</sup> PJ II 425<sup>24-29</sup>: *evaṃ pavattāya chaḷaṅgupekkhāya upekkhako, vepullappattāya satiyā satimā, na so hiṃsati n’eva hiṃsati kañci tasathāvarādibhedam sattaṃ sabbaloke sabbasimpi loke, tiṇṇoghattā tiṇṇo, samitapāpattā samaṇo, āvilasaṅkappappahānā anāvilo*. “He is indifferent because of an ongoing six-part neutrality. Because of fully developed *sati*, he is *satimā*, *na so hiṃsati* he does not harm, *kañci*, anyone, a being either moving or unmoving, *sabbaloke*, in the whole world, because of having crossed over the flood (*tiṇṇo*), because of having appeased evil, he is an ascetic (*samaṇo*), because of having abandoned agitation and intention (*āvila-saṅkappa*, or “agitated intention”), he is *anāvilo*, undisturbed, pure.

<sup>21</sup> Sp 1, 155<sup>17-26</sup>: *upekkhāsati* *parisuddhiṃ* *ti upekkhāya janitasati* *parisuddhiṃ, imasmim jhāne suparisuddhā sati, yā ca tassā satiyā parisuddhi sā upekkhāya katā na aññena, tasmā etaṃ upekkhāsati-parisuddhiṃ ti vuccati. Vibhaṅge pi vuttaṃ, ayaṃ sati imāya upekkhāya visadā hoti parisuddhā pariyodātā tena vuccati upekkhāsati* *parisuddhiṃ* *ti, yāya ca upekkhāya ettha satiyā parisuddhi hoti sā atthato tatra majjhataṭṭā ti veditabbā. na kevalaṃ c’ettha tāya satiy’eva parisuddhā api ca kho sabbe pi sampayuttadhammā, satisīsenā pana desanā vuttā. upekkhāsati* *parisuddhiṃ* (purity of *sati* by equanimity) = the purity of *sati* generated by equanimity. For in this (the fourth) *jhāna*, *sati* is very pure. That purity which is the purity of this *sati*, is made by equanimity, not by anything else. Therefore that is called “the purity of *sati* by equanimity”. In the *Vibhaṅga* it is said: “This *sati* is pure by virtue of this equanimity, it is purified, it is very clean, therefore he says, *upekkhāsati* *parisuddhiṃ*.” That equanimity by which *sati* is purified, is here known according to the meaning as impartiality (*majjhataṭṭā*); not only here is *sati* purified by it, but also all connected *dhammas*; but under the heading of *sati*, this discourse is given.

*sato* (“remembering, mindful”), (he/she is) *sato* for four reasons, *sato* by cultivating the *satipaṭṭhāna* of observing the body in the body;...feelings;...mind;...mental phenomena.

He/she is also *sato* for four other reasons: *sato* through the avoidance of *asati* (forgetfulness and/or negligence); *sato*, because of having done those phenomena which should be done through *sati*; *sato* because of having destroyed those *dharmas* which are obstacles to *sati*; *sato* because of not forgetting those phenomena which are the cause *sati*.

He is also *sato* for four other reasons: *sato* because of being endowed with *sati*; *sato* because of mastery of *sati*, *sato* because of experience of *sati*, *sato* because of not slackening of *sati*.

He is also *sato* for four other reasons, *sati* because of the state of remembering<sup>22</sup> *sato*, because of being peaceful, *sato* because of the state of being equal,<sup>23</sup> *sato* because of being endowed with peaceful phenomena (*santadhamma*), *sato* in the recollection of the Buddha (*Buddhānussati*), ...in the recollection of the *dhamma*, ...in the recollection of the *saṅgha*, ... in the recollection of the rules of behaviour (*sīla*), ... in the recollection of abandonment, ... in the recollection of the gods, .... in the recollection of in-and-out-breathing, ... in the recollection of

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<sup>22</sup> *sattattā* with var. *satattā*. I am not sure what this word means. If, with the PTS edition, we read *satattā*, then we would translate as above, “The condition of having remembered or recollected, the condition of what has been taught, prescribed or handed down.”

<sup>23</sup> *samitattā*, or “the state of being calmed.” This may refer to the commentary on the *bojjhaṅga* section of the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*. *Sati* comes first and is a necessary precondition to the other six limbs of enlightenment. “Therefore as salt is in all curries, and as a minister responsible for everything is in all the king’s affairs, *sati* is everywhere to be desired. Therefore he said, “And *sati* is said by the Bhagavā to be all-useful. Why? For the mind is *sati* and remembering and *sati* appears as a guard and without *sati* the mind has neither support nor restraint” Sv 3, 788<sup>28-31</sup>. *Tasmā sā loṇa-dhūpanaṃ viya sabbabyañjanesu, sabbakammika-amacco viya ca sabba-rāja-kiccesu, sabbattha icchūtabbā. Ten’āha — ‘Sati ca pana sabbatthikā vuttā Bhagavatā. Kim-kāraṇā? Cittaṃ hi satipaṭṭisaraṇaṃ. Ārakkha-paccupaṭṭhānā ca sati. Na vinā satiyā cittaṃ paggaha-niggaha hotī ti. ĩkā: “For the chief object of the mind is *sati* and remembering (*paṭisaraṇaṃ*), in order to accomplish what has not been accomplished, in order to attain what has not yet been attained. DN-t 2, 415<sup>28-416</sup>. *Tassa hi sati paṭisaraṇaṃ parāyaṇaṃ appattassa pattiyā anadhigatassa adhigamāya.**

death, ... in the recollection centered on the body, ... in the recollection of tranquillity.<sup>24</sup>

## The Ten Recollections

Of the forty meditation subjects discussed by Buddhaghosa in his Vsm, the third decad contains the ten *anussatis*, usually translated “recollections” as listed above. Although *anussati* is sometimes translated as “mindfulness,” it clearly is a mindfulness in the sense of proper attention to and recollection of the qualities of the Buddha and the other listed subjects. For we have already seen that, per Buddhaghosa, *sati*’s characteristic is to call to mind, to memorize, not to forget...” (*Sā apilāpanalakkaṇā, asammoharasā... Vsm 464*<sup>26</sup>). The section on the *anussatis* in the Vsm begins,

“Because it arises again and again, *sati* is just *anussati* (remembrance). Or, the *sati* that is proper for a young man of good family who has gone forth out of faith is remembrance, because it occurs just in the place where it should occur” *punappunam uppajjanato sati yeva anussati. Pavattitabbaṭṭhānamhi yeva vā pavattattā saddhā-pabbajitassa kulaputtassa anurūpā satī ti pi anussati. Vsm 197*<sup>1-4</sup>.

As Vsm-a points out, the prefix *anu-* is neither meaningless (as for example the prefix *upa-* in *upalabbhati*, “it is found” where *labbhati* without the prefix means the same thing), nor does it indicate a difference in meaning (as the prefixes *sam-* and *pa-* in the words *sañ-jānanam*, “perception” and *pa-jānanam*, “knowledge”); the memory arises again and again in the time and

<sup>24</sup> Nidd 9<sup>24-29</sup>-10<sup>9</sup>: *sato ti catūhi kāraṇehi sato, kāye kāyānupassanāsatiṭṭhānam bhāvento sato, vedanāsu citte dhammesu dhammānupassanāsatiṭṭhānam bhāvento sato.*

*Aparehi pi catūhi kāraṇehi sato, asatiparivajjanāya sato, satikaraṇīyānaṃ ca dhammānam katattā sato, satiparibandhānam dhammānam hatattā sato, satinimittānam dhammānam asammūṭṭhattā sato.*

*Aparehi pi catūhi kāraṇehi sato, satiyā samannāgatattā sato, satiyā vasitattā sato, satiyā pāguṇṇatāya sato, satiyā apaccorohaṇatāya sato.*

*Aparehi pi catūhi kāraṇehi sato, sattattā sato, santattā sato, samitattā sato, santadhammasamannāgatattā sato. Buddhānussatiyā sato, dhammānussatiyā sato, saṅghānussatiyā sato, sīlānussatiyā sato, cāgānussatiyā sato, devatānussatiyā sato, ānāpānassatiyā sato, maraṇassatiyā sato, kāyagatāsatiyā sato, upasamānussatiyā sato.*

place when it should arise, therefore it is appropriate (*anurūpa*). This is of course exactly what happens in *sati* meditation; one recalls the teachings of the Buddha, or his example, or the *sīlas*, etc., and using this knowledge is able to restrain these doors of the senses and prevent afflictions from taking hold. Even the focus on *ānāpāna*, in-and-out-breathing is itself both a recollection, – of the air element which the breath is a sub-set of and one of the four elements our bodies are composed of – and an admonition, to leave nothing unquestioned or unexamined about the body or its functioning, to take nothing for granted, and to remember that the body is not-self.<sup>25</sup>

In his commentary on the third *jhāna* in *Vsm*, remarking on the couplet *sato sampajāno* (usually translated “mindful and fully aware”), Buddhaghosa says

Now “*sati* and fully aware”: here “he remembers” (*sarati*) = mindfulness (*sato*), “he has full awareness” = *sampajāno*. This is said about a person who has *sati* and is fully aware. In this respect mindfulness has the characteristic of remembering. Its essential

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<sup>25</sup> See, for example, the following from the *Satipaṭṭhānasuttāṃ* commentary, which describes what goes through the meditator’s mind in *sati* meditation. Sv 3, 757<sup>30-33</sup>-758<sup>1-10</sup>: *Api ca: Imasmiṃ kāye aniccato anupassati no niccato ti, ādinā anukkamena Paṭisambhidāyaṃ āgata-nayassa sabbass’eva anicca-lakkhaṇ’ādino ākāra-samūha-saṅkhātassa kāyassa anupassanato pi kāye kāyānupassī ti evam pi attho daṭṭhabbo. Tathā hi: Ayaṃ kāye kāyānupassanā-paṭipadaṃ paṭipanno bhikkhu imaṃ kāyaṃ aniccānupassanādīnaṃ sattannaṃ anupassanānaṃ vasena aniccato anupassati, no niccato, dukkhato anupassati, no sukhato, anattato anupassati no attato, nibbindati no nandati, virajjati no rajjati, nirodheti no samudeti, paṇinissajjati no ādiyati: so taṃ aniccato anupassanto nicasaññaṃ pajahati, dukkhato anupassanto sukha-saññaṃ pajahati, anattato anupassanto atta-saññaṃ pajahati, nibbindanto nandiṃ pajahati, virajjanto rāgaṃ pajahati, nirodhentō samudayaṃ pajahati, paṇinissajjanto ādānaṃ pajahatī ti veditabbo. Moreover, because of observing the whole body as what is called a collection of parts whose characteristics begin with impermanence, etc., as handed down in due course in the *Paṭisambhidā* with statements like “He observes the body as impermanent, not permanent,” the meaning of “He observes the body in the body” is to be so understood. Likewise this monk has entered the path of contemplating the body in the body and contemplates this body as impermanent, not permanent, as suffering, not pleasure, as not-self, not self, under the influence of the realizations of those beings, starting with those who contemplate impermanence. He is disgusted with it (the body), he does not delight in it, he detaches himself, he finds no pleasure in it, he causes (lust) to cease (*nirodheti*), he does not make it arise (*samudeti*), he renounces, he does not grasp. So seeing the body as impermanent, he abandons perceptions of permanence, seeing the body as suffering, he abandons perceptions of pleasure, seeing the body as not-self, he abandons perception of self, being disgusted, he abandons delight, detaching himself, he abandons attachment (*rāga*), causing cessation, he abandons arising, renouncing, he abandons grasping (*ādānaṃ*).” So it should be understood.*

property (*rasā*) is not to forget, its manifestation (*paccupaṭṭhāna*) is guarding; full awareness has the characteristic of absence of confusion/delusion (*asammoha*); its essential property is judgment; it manifests as investigation (*pavicaya-* *paccupaṭṭhānaṃ*).<sup>26</sup>

The commentary points out how this process of *sati* as remembering helps one overcome the afflictions and cross to the far shore of liberation:

“He remembers” = *sato* (*saratīti sato*), he has stated the definition of the word by way of the action (of remembering), “he knows completely,” (*sampajānāti*) = he knows thoroughly, completely.

*saraṇalakkhaṇā* (“the characteristic of remembering”), “The characteristic of it (*sati*) is remembering, thought, awareness,” *saraṇaṃ cintanaṃ upaṭṭhānaṃ lakkhaṇametissāti*.

*asammussana-rasā* (“the essence is non-forgetfulness”), non-forgetfulness opposes forgetfulness, that is its (*sati*’s) function (*kiccaṃ etissā ti*).

*ārakkha-paccupaṭṭhānā* (“its manifestation as a protection/guard”), “Being a protection from the afflictions, it is present, or it provides (makes present, calls forth, manifests) protection from that (the afflictions).”

*asammoho* (“not forgetting”) = *asammuyhanaṃ* (id.), knowing perfectly, or, opposing delusion.

*tīraṇaṃ* (“decision, judgement”), (*sati*’s) function of going to the opposite shore.

*pavicayo* (“investigation”) = *vīmaṃsā* (id.).<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Vsm 162<sup>26-30</sup>: *Idāni sato ca sampajāno ti ettha saraṭī ti sato, sampajānātī ti sampajāno. Puggalena sati ca sampajāññāñ ca vuttaṃ. Tattha saraṇalakkhaṇā sati, asammussanarasā, āraḁkḁhapaccupaṭṭhānā. Asammohalakkhaṇaṃ sampajāññāṃ, tīraṇa-rasaṃ, pavicaṃpaccupaṭṭhānaṃ.*

<sup>27</sup> Vism-a 187 (*Paramattha mañjūsā* , Myanmar edition): *saraṭī ti sato*”ti padassa kattusādhanatam āha. sampajānātī ti sammad eva pajānāti. saraṇaṃ cintanaṃ upaṭṭhānaṃ lakkhaṇaṃ etissā ti *saraṇalakkhaṇā*. sammussanapaṭipakkho asammussanaṃ, taṃ kiccaṃ etissā ti *asammussanarasā*. kilesehi āraḁkhā hutvā paccupaṭṭhāti, tato vā āraḁkḁhaṃ paccupaṭṭhāpetī

Throughout the *Vsm* one finds this balance between full awareness of the present (*sampajāno*), remembrance of the teachings re: how afflictions arise in the first place and how to abandon them, and anticipation of the future goal where they will not arise again when one has achieved the state of arhathood. The goal of *sati* is *nibbāna*, which transcends time. In the Tibetan *rdzog-chen* (“great perfection”) tradition *sati* (= *dran pa*, “remembrance”) is, *inter alia*, remembering one’s primordial purity “standing outside of time” (Kapstein 1992: 259, echoing AN 1, 10<sup>5-6</sup>, *Pabhassaram idaṃ bhikkhave cittaṃ tañ ca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭham*, “The mind is resplendent but stained with adventitious impurities”).

## Conclusion

How then do we define and translate *sati*? Although I have argued for the centrality of “memory” at the semantic core of the word, I do not assert that the word should be so translated in all, or even most cases. The word is polysemous and is closely associated with wisdom (*nepakko*), perfect awareness and understanding (*sampajāno*), restraint (*saṃvuto*), equanimity (*upekkhako*) and attentiveness, mindfulness or heedfulness; all of these factors are supported by memory, either of one’s past in this and former lives, one’s struggle with afflictions, or the *Buddhasāsana* which makes liberation possible. Context is critical. “Mindfulness” only captures one aspect of *sati*’s semantic field, and, to the degree that “memory” is not inherent in the overtones of that word, it may well be unsuitable in various settings where “remembering” is the forefront meaning. But if the reader of Buddhist scriptures is aware of the etymological and semantic pith of *sati*, its grounding in “memory” and the various related meanings described above, he or she will have a much clearer grasp of what was intended in the *Buddhadhamma* when the word *sati* is used.

I would hazard a definition of *sati* as follows: *Sati* is that special faculty of memory, supporting and supported by wisdom and heightened mindfulness, which bears in mind the Buddha’s teachings and their relevance to one’s own personal spiritual quest, facilitating detachment, equanimity and liberating insight.

In conclusion, I essay a creative, non-literal translation cum paraphrase of the first of the famous refrain sections from the *Satipaṭṭhānasuttaṃ*,

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*ti ārakkhapaccupaṭṭhānā. asammuyhanaṃ sammad eva pajānanaṃ, sammohapaṭipakkho vā asammoho. tīraṇaṃ kiccassa pāragamaṇaṃ. pavicayo vīmaṃsā.*



taking some license with respect to word order, extended word meaning and commentarial glosses.<sup>28</sup>

Here, monks, a monk is ardent, perfectly understanding, and establishes memory at the forefront of his/her mind. Having removed the five obstacles, beginning with covetousness and discontent, he/she abides, reflecting on the body as just a body, internally in the so-called “self”, externally, with respect to “others”, and both together. From moment to moment he/she observes phenomena rising and ceasing in the body separately and together, and he/she observes bodies rising and ceasing from lifetime to lifetime. Recognizing that there is indeed a body, he/she is fully aware just to the degree necessary for the establishment of wisdom and memory in full measure; and he/she abides independent, not grasping anything in the world. It is in this way, monks, that a monk lives reflecting on the body as just a body.

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<sup>28</sup> The full text reads: DN 2, 292<sup>1-10</sup>: ‘*Iti ajjhataṃ vā kāye kāyānupassī viharati, bahiddhā vā kāye kāyānupassī viharati, ajjhata-bahiddhā vā kāye kāyānupassī viharati. Samudaya-dhammānupassī vā kāyasmim viharati, vāya-dhammānupassī vā kāyasmim viharati, samudaya-vāya-dhammānupassī vā kāyasmim viharati. ‘Atthi kāyo’ti vā pan’assa sati paccupaṭṭhitā hoti yāvadeva ñāṇa-mattāya paṭissati-mattāya. Anissito ca viharati, na ca kiñci loke upādiyati. Evam pi kho bhikkhave, bhikkhu kāye kāyānupassī viharati.* The reader will notice that I have incorporated other phrases into the translation which occur just before the refrain, viz., *Idha bhikkhave bhikkhu kāye kāyānupassī viharati ātāpī sampajāno satimā, vineyya loke abhijjhā-domanassaṃ* (DN 2, 290<sup>12-14</sup>), and *parimukhaṃ satim upaṭṭhapetvā* (DN 2, 291<sup>5</sup>). The notion that *abhijjhā* (covetousness) and *domanassaṃ* (discontent) represent the five *nīvaraṇas* (obstacles) comes from the commentary, Sv 3, 759<sup>4-8</sup>: *yasmā pan’ettha abhijjhā-ggahaṇena kāma-cchando, domanassa-ggahaṇena byāpādo saṅgahaṃ gacchati, tasmā nīvaraṇa-pariyāpanna-balava-dhamma-dvaya-dassanena nīvaraṇa-ppahānaṃ vuttaṃ hotī ti vedītabbaṃ*. “It should be understood that, because here attachment to sensual pleasure with the grasping of covetousness/greed (*abhijjhā*), and malevolence by the grasping of distress/dejectedness are included, the abandonment of the (five) *nīvaraṇas* is stated, by showing these strong two-fold phenomena (covetousness and discontent/dysphoria) which are included in them (the five *nīvaraṇas*).” Viewing *ajjhataṃ* as self and *bahiddhā* as others also comes from the commentary (Sv 3, 765<sup>13-15</sup>). For the impermanence of the body see footnote 25, also from the commentary. For the notion of “just a body” see Sv 3, 765<sup>32-34</sup>: *kāyo ‘va atthi, na satto, na puggalo, na itthī, na puggalo, na attā, na attaniyaṃ, nāhaṃ, na mama, na koci, na kassaci, ti evam assa sati paccupaṭṭhitā hoti*. “He has full awareness present that, ‘There is just a body, no being, no person, no person, no woman, no man, no self, no belonging to a self, no I, no mine, nobody, no belonging to anybody.’”

## Abbreviations

AN	<i>Aṅguttara Nikāya</i> , R. Morris, E. Hardy, PTS London 1885-1900
BHS	Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit
CPD	<i>Critical Pāli Dictionary</i> .
DN	<i>Dīgha Nikāya</i> , ed. T.W. Rhys Davids, J. E. Carpenter, PTS London 1890-1911.
DN-ṭ	<i>Dīgha Nikāya Ṭīka (Līnatthavaṇṇanā)</i> , Lily de Silva, Colombo University, Ceylon, 1960.
Mil	<i>Milindapañha</i> , V. Trenckner, PTS London 1890-1986
MI	Middle Indic
MN	<i>Majjhima Nikāya</i> , ed. V. Trenckner, PTS London 1888-2009
MW	<i>Monier Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary</i>
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
OI	Old-Indic (Vedic)
Nidd I	<i>Mahāniddeśa</i> , ed. L. de La Vallée Poussin, E.J. Thomas, PTS London 1978
Nidd 2	<i>Cullaniddeśa</i> , ed. W. Stede, PTS London 1916.
PED	Pali English Dictionary, T. W. Rhys Davids & William Stede, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, reprint 2003 (originally published London 1921-1925).
Pj I	<i>Paramatthajotikā 1 (Khuddakapāṭha-aṭṭhakathā)</i> , ed. H. Smith, PTS London 1915.
Pj II	<i>Paramatthajotikā 2 (Suttanipāta-aṭṭhakathā)</i> , ed. H. Smith, PTS London 1916-1918.
Ps	<i>Papañcasūdanī (Majjhimanikāya-aṭṭhakathā)</i> , ed. J. H. Woods, D. Kosambi, I. B. Horner.
PTS	Pali Text Society
Sn	<i>Sutta Nipāta</i> , ed. D. Andersen, H. Smith, PTS London 1913.
SN	<i>Samyutta Nikāya</i> , ed. M. Léon Feer, PTS London 1884-2006.
Sp	<i>Samantapāsādikā (Vinaya-aṭṭhakathā)</i> , ed. J. Takakusu, M. Nagai, PTS London 1924-47.

Spk	<i>Sāratthappakāsinī (Saṃyuttanikāya-aṭṭhakathā)</i> , ed. F. L. Woodward, PTS London 1929-37
Sv	<i>Sumaṅgalavilāsinī (Dīghanikāya-aṭṭhakathā)</i> , T. W. Rhys Davids & J. E. Carpenter, PTS London 1886-1932.
Vism	<i>Visuddhimagga</i> , ed. C.A.F. Rhys Davids, PTS London 1920-21

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## **An Overview of Buddhist Precepts in Taiwan and Mainland China**

*Tzu-Lung Chiu*

### **Abstract**

*In Buddhism, monastic disciplinary texts embody the ideal of how followers should regulate their daily lives, and Buddhist monks and nuns are required to observe Buddhist precepts that were compiled nearly 2,500 years ago in India, a context dramatically different from contemporary monastic conditions. This study explores how Buddhist nuns in two widely divergent Chinese socio-cultural contexts experience the observance of Vinaya precepts that originated in India. The first section summarises female practitioners' general perceptions of Buddhist precepts. Then certain monastic rules are selected for more in-depth discussion. By juxtaposing the perceptions of nuns from these two Chinese regions, I have identified similarities as well as differences between them, and among the various institutions involved. This research thus provides a detailed overview, based on a cross-regional empirical study, of nuns' perceptions of whether there is a disjunction between ideal monastic life as regulated by Vinaya and the way nuns in Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism actually live.*

## Introduction

In Buddhism, monastic rules embody the ideal of how followers should regulate their daily lives, and Buddhist monks and nuns are required to observe precepts established nearly two thousand five hundred years ago. A saying recorded in the *Sifen lü shanfan buque xingshi chao* 四分律刪繁補闕行事鈔, one of the most important commentaries by Master Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667),<sup>1</sup> illustrates the pivotal role that monastic rules play: “The *Vinaya Piṭaka* is about the lifespan of the Buddhist *Dharma*; as long as the *Vinaya Piṭaka* exists, the *Dharma* exists.”<sup>2</sup> Similar comments have been made by numerous modern scholars. As Michael Carrithers puts it, there is “[n]o Buddhism without the Sangha, and no Sangha without the Discipline” (1984: 133). However, it is important to bear in mind that the Buddhist precepts were compiled in Ancient India, a context dramatically different from contemporary Chinese monastic conditions. Stuart Chandler reminds us that not many monastic members, in any Buddhist tradition, are doing exactly at all times what the *Vinaya* requires (2004: 165).

Indeed, some great Chinese masters have expressed their reflections on the difficulties of observing (some) Buddhist precepts to the letter, as commented on by Master Zhumo 竺摩 in the preface to Shih Sheng Yen’s classic book *Jielü xue gangyao* 戒律學綱要 (Essentials of the Study of Buddhist Discipline).<sup>3</sup> In this preface, Zhumo first takes Master Hongyi as an example.<sup>4</sup> While Hongyi was renowned for his *Vinaya* study and strict observance of monastic rules, he did not consider himself fit to be a *bhikṣu*, a *śrāmaṇera* or even an *upāsaka* (layman) because, after closely examining his practice when following the rules, he realised that he could not observe the five precepts to the letter (Cai, 1976: 1603; Shih Sheng Yen, 1997: 3). Similarly, a famous Ming Dynasty monk also

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<sup>1</sup> As a rule, most books and articles today use the *pinyin* system to transcribe Chinese names and terms. I have done the same throughout this article. Nevertheless, when referring to Taiwanese authors, I have opted to use their personal romanization, as it appears in their publications.

<sup>2</sup> T40.n1804, p50b18–19.

<sup>3</sup> Zhumo 竺摩 (1913–2002) was Ven. Taixu’s highly accomplished disciple, skilled in poetical work, prose, and painting. He advocated Buddhism in Hong Kong before the War of Resistance against Japan. In 1953, he moved to Malaysia for the promotion of Mahāyāna Buddhism and Buddhist education.

<sup>4</sup> Ven. Hongyi 弘一 (1880–1942) was a famous Chinese Buddhist monk who deeply researched *Vinaya* and promoted the strict observance of monastic rules. For a detailed introduction, see Birnbaum (2003: 75–124).

referred to by Zhumo, Master Zibo 紫柏,<sup>5</sup> was said to meditate alone throughout the night and to never have lain down to sleep on a bed as an ascetic practice for more than forty years; nevertheless, he would not confer *bhikṣu* and *śrāmaṇera* precepts upon young monks because he considered that he had failed to follow some minor rules (Cai, 1976: 1461; Shih Sheng Yen, 1997: 3). To some extent, then, we can infer how difficult it is to strictly observe monastic rules from the cases of Hongyi and Zibo, who are both regarded as eminent masters in the history of Chinese Buddhism for their religious devotion. It is worth noting that, despite the following of all rules being difficult or even impossible, Master Zhumo still suggests that monastic members should try their best to do so (ibid: 4).<sup>6</sup>

As aptly argued by Chandler, there are four general causes for the many differences that exist between the ideal theory (the precepts) and actual practice of monastic life:

Some precepts have long been incompatible with the mores of particular indigenous cultures; others have no significance in particular social contexts; sometimes the *Vinaya* does not cover the needs of particular monasteries; and, finally, some precepts are at odds with important strands of twentieth-century thought. (2004: 166)

Chandler introduces various examples to demonstrate how some *Vinaya* rules are, in his estimation, irrelevant to or incompatible with the current life of monastic members in Chinese contexts. These include the precepts against handling money, fasting after midday, digging the land, and so on (ibid: 166–167). Chandler’s stance on Chinese Buddhists’ precept observance more or less corresponds to Holmes Welch’s:

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<sup>5</sup> Ven. Zibo 紫柏 (1543–1603) is regarded as one of the four great masters of the Ming dynasty.

<sup>6</sup> The claim that it is difficult to observe precepts to the letter is also voiced by some monastic members in the Theravāda tradition. Some nuns in Thailand and Sri Lanka were unwilling to receive full ordination because of the difficulty of strict adherence to monastic rules. Lindberg Falk investigated *maechis*’ views of the re-establishment of *bhikṣuṇī* ordination in Thai Buddhism and found that some chose to continue as a *maechi* rather than become a *bhikṣuṇī*, because “[m]ost Thai nuns are scrupulous about following the precepts and they anticipate difficulties in maintaining the more than three hundred precepts needed for full ordination, some of which are outmoded and therefore hard to follow today” (2000: 47). Similarly, a ten-precept Sri Lankan female monastic disapproved of receiving full ordination, because “it was impossible to observe all the 311 [*bhikṣuṇī*] precepts” (Cheng, 2007: 170).



[H]ow closely was it [Buddhist law] followed [by Chinese monks]? We know that much of it was ignored. The Pratimoksa, for example, includes vows not to handle gold, silver, or copper; to bathe no more than twice a month... These vows were accepted by Chinese monks but regularly violated[.] (1967: 105–106)

These remarks imply that Chinese monastics often do not strictly apply Buddhist law.<sup>7</sup> In this context, some scholars indicate that Theravāda monastic members appear to have a broadly negative impression of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhists with regard to the latter group's observance of *Vinaya* rules. For instance, Richard Gombrich (1988: 12) has noted that monastic members in the Mahāyāna tradition were mistrusted by Theravāda Buddhists for not observing monastic rules strictly. Fieldwork by Gombrich and Obeyesekere, meanwhile, reported that “most Sinhala Buddhists — including most nuns we have spoken to ... believe that the *bhikṣuṇī-sangha* in Mahāyāna countries is corrupt” (1988: 274). A Sri Lankan informant nun interviewed by Wei-Yi Cheng said that “Mahāyāna monastics do not observe precepts strictly” (2007: 180); while Hiroko Kawanami found that some nuns in Myanmar “did not relish the possibility of ‘Mahāyāna’ influence on their religious practice, as it was considered that they were lax in discipline” (2007: 238). These examples raise a number of significant questions. Do Chinese monks and nuns acknowledge the accusation of being “lax in discipline” that is so often levelled at them by Theravāda Buddhists? What does ‘laxity in discipline’ actually mean? Regardless of the answer to the preceding question, which cultural and social factors influence Chinese Mahāyāna monastics’ practice of the precepts? What difficulties do they encounter when observing *Vinaya*?<sup>8</sup> How have they adapted the precepts in, or for, modern times? These questions should be borne in mind when embarking upon any examination of current Chinese nuns’ perspectives. Therefore the purpose of this research is to explore what interpretations and practices of

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<sup>7</sup> Welch’s judgment seems to be both unsound and simplistic. Take, for instance, the rule about bathing: a Buddhist monk or nun is allowed under certain circumstances to bathe more than twice a month. These not very special circumstances include when the weather is hot, very windy or rainy; and when the monastic member is ill, working, or travelling long distances. For a detailed discussion on bathing practice and *Vinaya*, see Heirman and Torck (2012: 27–66).

<sup>8</sup> This study particularly focuses on the *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya* (*Sifen lü* 四分律 T.1428) since, due largely to its strong promotion by Master Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667), it has become a major reference point for monastic discipline in China. For the historical background and subsequent development of the *Dharmaguptaka* tradition, see Heirman (2002: 11–61).

traditional precepts are applied by Chinese *bhikṣuṇīs* in the modern world. It is hoped that this exploration will provide a clearer understanding of how nuns in Chinese social-cultural contexts experience the observance of *Vinaya* precepts which originated in India, and, on a broader level, whether in their perception there is a disjunction between ideal monastic life as regulated by *Vinaya* and the way nuns in Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism actually live. While *Vinaya* has been extensively studied in recent years, this study offers a more comprehensive overview and comparison by discussing fieldwork data firsthand from various nunneries across different regions, exploring similarities and differences in their viewpoints and actual practices. Due to the time constraints of conducting interviews with my informant nuns and the relatively limited scope of the paper, it will not be possible to discuss the complete list of *bhikṣuṇī* precepts in detail. However, before commencing fieldwork, I selected certain monastic rules for particular attention, on the grounds that these rules have attracted considerable interest among academics and/or are considered especially difficult to observe by monastic members in modern contexts.

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

1. *Vinaya*-centric institutes, such as Nanlin Nisengyuan<sup>9</sup> (Nantou,

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<sup>9</sup> Nanlin Nunnery 南林尼僧苑 was founded in 1982. There are about 70 resident nuns. Its name ‘Nanlin’ 南林, Southern Grove, is highly symbolic. It is taken from the name of the monastery where, according to the *Biqiuni zhuan* 比丘尼傳 (‘Biographies of Nuns’), a compilation of biographies of Buddhist nuns traditionally attributed to the monk Baochang (ca.466–?), a second ordination ceremony for Chinese nuns was held in c. 433 (T50.n2063, p939c21–c24): more than 300 women received full ordination from a dual *samgha* with the help of a quorum of Sinhalese nuns. The name clearly indicates how Nanlin Nunnery sees itself as part of a development relating back to India and to the first (lawful) dual ordinations of medieval China. It also demonstrates its reliance on a strict observance of the *Vinaya*. As already noted by Li Yu-Chen, numerous young nuns regard Nanlin Nunnery’s strict training and ascetic lifestyle highly, seen as a ‘symbolic revitalization of the [*bhikṣuṇī*] vinaya’ (2000: 153)

Taiwan), and Pushou Si<sup>10</sup> (Wutaishan, Mainland China).<sup>11</sup>

2. Buddhist nuns' colleges, such as Dingguang Si<sup>12</sup> (Guangdong, Mainland China), Chongfu Si<sup>13</sup> (Fuzhou, Mainland China), Zizhulin<sup>14</sup> (Xiamen, Mainland China), Qifu Si<sup>15</sup> (Chengdu, Mainland China), and Xiangguang Si<sup>16</sup> (= Luminary Nunnery) (Chiayi, Taiwan).

<sup>10</sup> Pushou Si 普壽寺, started to rebuild in 1991. Located in Shanxi Province, it is a well-known *Vinaya*-centric monastery and now the largest Buddhist nuns' college in China (around 1,000 nuns), with a tradition of training *śrāmaṇerī* (novice) as *śikṣamāṇā* (probationer) before *bhikṣuṇī* ordination, and offering various *Vinaya* study programs.

<sup>11</sup> In this study, '*Vinaya*-centric' institutions are defined as those whose members eagerly follow rigorous interpretation and practice of traditional *Vinaya* rules to the letter, as a priority of their religious lives. These monasteries rigidly observe some rules (e.g. the *gurudharmas*, not touching money, and fasting after midday) that others might treat more flexibly. However, it would be wrong to assume that other monasteries outside the category of '*Vinaya*-centric' institutions are lax in discipline or not based on *Vinaya*. Each has its own representative characteristics and different foci in its religious practices (see further analysis).

<sup>12</sup> Dingguang Si 定光寺, located in Guangdong Province, opened as a Buddhist College with Master Honghui as dean in 1996. It was then promoted to the status of Guangdong Buddhist Nuns' College, the first of its kind in the Buddhist history of Guangdong. The college currently has around 300 student nuns and twenty teacher nuns.

<sup>13</sup> Chongfu Si 崇福寺, located in Fujian Province, is a well-known site for nuns' Buddhist spiritual practice, and Fujian Buddhist College for nuns was established in the temple in 1983. Currently, Chongfu Temple is the cradle for the cultivation of a new generation of Buddhist nuns and one of Mainland China's most famous Buddhist monastic institutions to confer ordination. Ca. 300 nuns live and undertake Buddhist study and practice there.

<sup>14</sup> Zizhulin 紫竹林, also located in Fujian Province, belongs to Minnan Buddhist College, which is a well-known institution of higher Buddhist learning in Mainland China. Zizhulin Temple became Minnan Buddhist College for female monastic members in 1995; currently, around 200 nuns live and undertake Buddhist study and practice there.

<sup>15</sup> Qifu Si 祈福寺 is famous for its nuns' education, and is also known as Sichuan Buddhist Higher Institute for *Bhikṣuṇīs* 四川尼眾佛學院 (formerly located in Tiexiang Si nunnery, also in Sichuan). The previous abbess, Ven. Longlian 隆蓮 (1909–2006), played a key role in shaping contemporary Chinese nuns' views on, and practice of, monastic rules. She devoted herself to the education of Buddhist nuns for many years. Student nuns in this institute receive the *śrāmaṇerī* and *śikṣamāṇā* precepts and are required to strictly observe Buddhist rules and lawfully follow the Buddhist ceremonies of *poṣadha* (recitation of precepts), *varṣā* (summer retreat), and *pravāraṇā* (invitation ceremony held at the end of summer retreat). The college currently has more than 100 female monastic members (including teacher and students nuns).

<sup>16</sup> Luminary Nunnery 香光寺 (also Luminary Buddhist Institute) was founded in 1980 by the nun Wu Yin (b.1940). It currently has approximately 120 nuns. Master Wu Yin, who is well known for her research on *Vinaya*, runs a Buddhist College that provides education for nuns.

3. Humanistic Buddhist institutes,<sup>17</sup> such as *Fagushan*/Dharma Drum Mountain<sup>18</sup> (Taipei, Taiwan), and *Foguangshan*<sup>19</sup> (Kaohsiung, Taiwan).
4. A non-specific remainder of institutes, such as Tongjiao Si<sup>20</sup> and Tianning Si<sup>21</sup> (both in Beijing, Mainland China).

The research was undertaken via interviews and fieldwork observation, supplemented by the writings of contemporary nuns and monks. A total of 35 face-to-face interviews were conducted in four Taiwanese and seven Mainland Chinese monastic institutions, with 15 of the interviews taking place in Taiwan and 20 on the Mainland.<sup>22</sup> Analysis and interpretation were applied to nuns' interview responses and to their independently expressed views on *Vinaya* rules.

This research paper is divided into four parts. The first part discusses practitioners' general views on *Vinaya* rules. Part two explores nuns' attitudes in relation to the number of *bhikṣuṇī* precepts, an often debated issue. The third part

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<sup>17</sup> Humanistic Buddhism encourages Buddhist monks and nuns to interact closely with the wider community. Some leading contemporary masters in Taiwan – such as the late Sheng Yen (Fagushan) and Hsing Yun (Foguangshan) – advocate Humanistic Buddhism through various objectives and activities, including monastic and secular education, welfare work and environmental protection.

<sup>18</sup> Dharma Drum Mountain (*Fagushan* 法鼓山, abbreviated as DDM) is one of the largest Buddhist institutions in Taiwan, currently with about fifty monks and 200 nuns affiliated to the monastery. It was founded by the monk Sheng Yen 聖嚴 (1930–2009), a prominent Chan master.

<sup>19</sup> *Foguangshan* 佛光山, recognised as one of the three largest monastic institutions in Taiwan, was founded by the monk Hsing Yun 星雲 (b. 1927) in 1967. There are more than 1,000 monastic members (of both genders) affiliated to this monastery, which promotes Humanistic Buddhism in particular.

<sup>20</sup> Tongjiao Si 通教寺 is a well-known and highly respected Beijing nunnery, whose members focus on *Vinaya* study. Ven. Longlian 隆蓮 studied Buddhism in Tongjiao Si. It is now a place for Buddhist nuns' religious practice and study, holding the Seven-day Recitation of the Buddha's Name every month. Ca. thirty nuns live in the nunnery.

<sup>21</sup> Tianning Si 天寧寺, also located in Beijing, is one of the earliest temples there, and is famous for its twelfth-century Liao Dynasty pagoda. In 1988, Tianning Si became one of the most important national cultural relic protection units. Currently around thirty Buddhist nuns reside in this nunnery, which focuses on the combined practice of Chan and Pure Land methods. Ca. thirty nuns live in the nunnery.

<sup>22</sup> Taiwan (total of 15 interviewees): Nanlin Nunnery (2 interviewees); Luminary Nunnery (8); Dharma Drum Mountain (3) and Foguangshan (2). Mainland China (total of 20 interviewees): Pushou Si (5); Tongjiao Si (2); Tianning Si (2); Dingguang Si (4); Chongfu Si (3); Zizhulin (2) and Qifu Si (2).

focuses specifically on one *bhikṣunī* precept (the seventh *saṃghāvaśeṣa*), which only applies to nuns and thus serves as an exemplary precept that illuminates the particular situation of nuns. Finally, in the fourth part of the study, two ‘impractical’ precepts (the use of a chamber pot and food kept overnight) are chosen to investigate how nuns interpret and deal with them in modern contexts.

## 2. General Viewpoint on Buddhist Precepts

This section summarises Mainland Chinese and Taiwanese nuns’ general perceptions of Buddhist precepts as observed in contemporary society. By juxtaposing the perceptions of nuns from these two Chinese regions, I hope to identify similarities as well as differences between them, and between the various institutions involved. To this end, six distinct issues are categorised as these are often mentioned or emphasised by my informant nuns while discussing *Vinaya*: (1) Laity should not read *Vinaya*; (2) Understanding the spirit and background of each precept; (3) Observance of rules is flexible; (4) *Vinaya* adapted by local communities; (5) Application and reinterpretation of *Vinaya* in modern times and (6) Effects of institutional type on the manner of practising rules.

### 2.1 Laity Should Not Read *Vinaya*

During my fieldwork in Mainland China and Taiwan, nearly all my informant nuns repeatedly stressed that laypeople are generally not allowed to read the content of Buddhist precepts for *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣunīs*. Though it exists everywhere, this consensus appears particularly strong among those monastics who adhere to these rules most strictly. In certain Buddhist canons, laypeople and monastic members who have not yet received full ordination should not read *Vinaya* rules.<sup>23</sup> Buddhist monks commit an “infringement of the *Vinaya*” (*vinayātikrama* 越毗尼) if they discuss *bhikṣus*’ *niḥsargika pācittika*<sup>24</sup> and

<sup>23</sup> For instance: the *Mūlasarvāstivādivinaya* (T23.n1442, p672c4–c05: *Vinayapiṭaka* is for monastics’ rules, lay people should not hear it); the *Fenbie gongde lun* 分別功德論 (*Treatise on Analysing Merit*), a commentary on the *Ekottarāgama*, traditionally said to have been translated into Chinese in the Later Han (25–220 CE) dynasty (T25.n1507, p32a14–a15: *Vinayapiṭaka* should not be heard or seen by novices or laypeople); or the *Da zhi du lun* 大智度論, *Mahāprajñāparamitāśāstra*, attributed to Nāgārjuna and said to have been translated (or compiled) by Kumārajīva in the Later Qin (384–417) dynasty (cf. Williams, 1989:74–75) (T25. n1509, p66a12–a13: *Vinayapiṭaka* should not be heard by laypeople).

<sup>24</sup> A *niḥsargika pācittika* is an offence that concerns an unlawfully obtained object that needs to be given up. For details, see Heirman (2002: 138–141).

*pācittika*<sup>25</sup> rules with people who have not yet received full ordination; similar discussion of *bhikṣuṇīs' pārājika*<sup>26</sup> and *saṃghāvaśeṣa*<sup>27</sup> rules is considered a *sthūlātyaya*<sup>28</sup> offence (T22.n1425, p338a22–29).

Being a scholar, not a Buddhist nun, I have thus inevitably encountered various data-collection difficulties. The majority of my interviewees in Mainland China were initially reluctant or unwilling to talk about *Vinaya* rules.<sup>29</sup> While nuns in Taiwan appear to enjoy more freedom and a more open environment than those in Mainland China, as DeVido claims (2010: 7), most Taiwanese nuns I interviewed were as opposed to *Vinaya* rules being read by laypeople as their Mainland counterparts were. At the start of my fieldwork in Taiwan, a few nuns at first agreed to be interviewed but withdrew when they heard that my research questions were about *Vinaya* rules. A nun at Nanlin (a *Vinaya*-centric nunnery) finally accepted my request to interview her, but suspended the session prematurely, citing her belief that monastics should not talk about *Vinaya* to laypeople. If I had any questions about the *Vinaya*, she said, I would have to read it for myself to find the answers.

Nuns at Pushou Si, Dingguang Si, and Chongfu Si took an even stronger view, explaining that *Vinaya* should not be read or researched by laypeople. In their views, nuns and monks are ordinary people who, though on a religious path, have not yet attained enlightenment. If (lay)people were to read monastic rules, they might “misinterpret” monastic members’ behaviour as not being in accordance with Buddhist rules, and criticise them inappropriately, speaking negatively about them and accruing bad karma. My informant from Foguangshan even strongly questioned some laypeople’s and researchers’ purposes in reading *Vinaya*. In her opinion, certain non-monastic readers merely wanted to use Buddhist rules to criticise monastics, or perhaps wished to see them break the precepts. It was clear that, on this matter, Taiwanese and Chinese nuns shared

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<sup>25</sup> A *pācittika* is a minor offence that needs to be expiated. For details, see Heirman (2002: 141–147).

<sup>26</sup> A *pārājika* offence is regarded as the most serious transgression “as if one cuts off someone’s head and he cannot stand up again” (Heirman, 2002: 244). For details, see Heirman (2002: 119–127).

<sup>27</sup> A *saṃghāvaśeṣa* offence is an offence that leads to a temporary exclusion from the main activities of the community. For details, see Heirman (2002: 128–138).

<sup>28</sup> A *sthūlātyaya* offence is a serious transgression close to a *pārājika* or a *saṃghāvaśeṣa* offense. For details, see Heirman (2002: 158–160).

<sup>29</sup> In order to build nuns’ trust to ensure the success of the interviews and obtain important data, I first needed to introduce myself, explaining that I come from a Buddhist family, and that my mother has received lay *Bodhisattva* precepts. Only then did they consent to share their views about Buddhist precepts.

a similar consensus that too much familiarity with monastic rules among laypeople was harmful.

## 2.2 Understanding the Spirit (*Jingshen* 精神) and Background of Each Precept

My informant nuns from various institutions in Mainland China all emphasised that one needs to understand the spirit and background of each precept while observing it. In this context, two teacher nuns explained their methods of teaching Buddhist precepts to student nuns. One, from Dingguang Si, stressed that monastic members needed to understand the spirit of Buddhist rules while practising them. The other, from Zizhulin, said she taught her students to underline the connection between the precepts and religious practice: “First of all, we (teacher nuns) stress the importance of *Vinaya* since each precept has its function(s). In Buddhism, to achieve *nirvāṇa* for yourself and sentient beings, you must protect and obey precepts.” In her view, once students understood the cause-and-effect background of precepts, they spontaneously followed these rules rather than being forced to. Stretching this idea somewhat further, a nun from Qifu Si told me that as long as nuns understood the spirit of rules when practising Buddhism, and contributed to their fellow human beings and to society, then they would not really be disobeying the precepts. One Pushou nun told me that monastic members needed to see the essence of *Vinaya* to extend the meaning of its rules. Following the rules reminded her to think whether her behaviour might cause accidents or annoyance to other people. The *Vinaya* rules the Buddha established can thus be applied, by extension, to similar cases to which monastic members therefore need to pay attention. In this context, the rule on the chamber pot cited by the nun is a good example.<sup>30</sup> Although the chamber pot is currently no longer used by most of monastic members, the rule can still be valued: it is important to behave well; less educated people might throw things out of a window or building.

In a similar vein, my Taiwanese informant nuns from Dharma Drum Mountain (DDM), Luminary Nunnery and Foguangshan all stressed the importance of understanding the historical origins of the precepts, so that they could see the Buddha’s real purpose, learn the spirit of precepts, and adapt these rules to the modern environment. The nun from Foguangshan

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<sup>30</sup> According to the *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya*, “If a *bhikṣuṇī*, at night, relieves herself in a pot, and if, in the daytime, she throws it over the wall without looking, she [commits] a *pācittika*” (translated in Heirman, 2002: 608).



even explicitly stated that scholars often made the mistake of reading *Vinaya* too literally and superficially, just examining the letter of the precepts. She used as an example the rule against nuns eating garlic,<sup>31</sup> and asked: would the *Vinaya* have forbidden nuns from eating apples, if the nuns in the story had picked all the apples rather than digging up all the garlic?<sup>32</sup> In her opinion, there was no intrinsic fault in either apples or garlic;<sup>33</sup> rather, the spirit of this rule was that monastic members should be aware of and concerned about their lay supporters' economic conditions. The nun gave a further, extensive explanation of the precept's spirit in the modern context: a layman promised to donate \$100 to her as support every month, which was acceptable; but she would transgress the precept against eating garlic if she asked the layman to give her \$30,000, leaving him no money for himself.

As is clear from the above, a consensus on the importance of understanding the background and spirit of Buddhist precepts could be discerned among my informant nuns from both Mainland China and Taiwan. More specifically, this held that monastic members living in modern contexts are aware of religiously appropriate ways of dealing with situations that may not be covered by the 348 *bhikṣuṇī* precepts.<sup>34</sup> This is achieved by extending the meaning and applying the spirit of certain rules in their religious life.

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<sup>31</sup> T22n.1428, p0736c04–p0737b15. The *bhikṣuṇīs*, probationers and novices dug up all of a layman's garlic, so that nothing was left. These female practitioners' behaviour caused damage to the benefactor's economic interest. Therefore the Buddha asked nuns not to eat garlic. However, it is worth noting that monks in the *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya* and other *Vinayas* (e.g. *Sarvāstivāda Vinaya*, *Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya*, *Mahīśāsaka Vinaya* and Pāli *Vinaya*) are forbidden to eat garlic due to the bad smell it produces, unless there are medical reasons (T22n.1428, p0956b14–b19).

In addition to the *Vinaya* rules, Chinese monks and nuns in the Mahāyāna tradition also should observe *bodhisattva* precepts based on the *Fanwang jing* 梵網經 (The Brahmā's Net Sūtra) or the *Pusa jie ben* 菩薩戒本 (The Bodhisattva-sīla sūtra). According to one precept in the *Fanwang jing* (T24n.1484, p1005b14–b16), Chinese monastic members are not allowed to eat garlic, categorised as the "five pungent plants" (*wuxin* 五辛). For details see Kieschnick (2005: 191–192) and Heirman and De Rauw (2006: 61–64).

<sup>32</sup> This informant nun's viewpoint partly echoes Heirman's comment on the prohibition against garlic eating: "This explanation is somehow strange, since it could just as well be applied to every product nuns like to eat" (Heirman and De Rauw, 2006: 62)".

<sup>33</sup> The informant nun's main point of this precept is not to be greedy when receiving donations from the laity.

<sup>34</sup> For concrete examples, see further section 2.5: Application and Reinterpretation of *Vinaya* in Modern Times.

### 2.3 Observance of Rules is Flexible, not Rigid

When I asked my informant nuns how they generally felt about observing rules, they responded in a similar fashion. A nun from Pushou Si indicated that the way to observe rules is smooth, not a rigid adherence to what the Buddha said. In her opinion, it was necessary for Buddhists to follow rules according to particular circumstances: each monastic should observe each rule that is applicable to their current circumstance, and keep that rule in mind even if it is not applicable in all situations. In the future, you may need to observe it again, depending on the conditions you encounter.

A nun from Tongjiao Si provided me with a lively explanation of this point. She stressed that monastic members needed to understand clearly what was allowable and what was prohibited, and also know the conditions under which something would be an exception to these rules, and when it was a violation of the *Vinaya*. So on this principle, monastic members learned that the precepts are flexible rather than rigid. The nun interestingly referred to some colleagues as “Buddhist precept-worms” (cf. “bookworm”), because they did not dare to do this or that, restraining themselves more than was really necessary. She thought the *Vinaya* was not so rigid, and so long as you really understood the precepts you could practise well. She further compared the Buddhist *Vinaya* to national laws, insofar as people do not have to be constrained as long as they do not violate the law. If people wonder why the law, or precepts, are controlling them, it means they are restricting themselves internally. One teacher nun from Chongfu Si said she instructed her students that each precept had its background and meaning, and taught them not to consider Buddhist precepts as restricting their religious life. A nun from Qifu Si expressed an opinion similar to that of the Tongjiao nun: the Buddha established the monastic rules as a guide, and made Buddhist precepts quite flexible; so monastic members could do or not do something, depending on certain conditions and exceptions.

In Taiwan, the DDM nun told me that Buddhist precepts and monastery regulations have fitted into her daily life without causing her to feel restricted by rigid rules. This was because of the influence of Ven. Sheng Yen, who emphasised that obedience to rules should be underpinned by having correct concepts. Similarly, one nun from Luminary told me that nuns there applied precepts to their daily lives practically rather than literally. Everything, including getting along with other people in community life and work, involved precepts. This informant told me that Master Wu Yin (the abbess of this nunnery) disapproved

of those who observed precepts rigidly without balancing this against how to relate to others appropriately. In Wu Yin's opinion, cultivation of the mind and religious practice should keep abreast of each other. From this it would appear that integrating Buddhist precepts with monastic daily life was considered crucial by at least two institutional leaders who played key roles in influencing the manner of observing precepts among their disciples.

#### 2.4 *Vinaya* Adapted by Local Communities

One nun from Pushou Si indicated that the principle of *Vinaya* "is in accordance with the region where it is applied" (隨方毘尼),<sup>35</sup> therefore Buddhist monks and nuns should not break local lay customs even though the Buddha did not lay down any rule specifically requiring this. The nun took smoking<sup>36</sup> as an example: many people smoke, but it is unsuitable for Buddhist monastic members to do so. There is no rule forbidding monks and nuns from smoking, but smoking may attract laypeople's criticism or annoy them, which in this nun's opinion is detrimental to Buddhism. Similarly, a nun from Zizhulin explained that monastic members must follow certain rules to avoid criticism, even though the Buddha did not establish them. She also took smoking as an example, for the same reason, but made a further argument regarding the different customs or traditions that exist in different Buddhist communities. For example, in Theravāda communities, monks do not eat after midday, but eat meat without attracting criticism. In China, by contrast, the precept against eating in the afternoon was flexibly observed,<sup>37</sup> but monastic members attract severe criticism if they eat meat,<sup>38</sup> since from a Chinese point of view doing so offends against the core Buddhist precept against killing.

My informant nun from Nanlin Nunnery in Taiwan also stated the principle that *Vinaya* rules are adjusted "in accordance with the region", but considered

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<sup>35</sup> This concept is applied in early Chinese Buddhism allowing more flexibility in *Vinaya* matters. For details, see *Fo guang da ci dian* (1988: 6345) and Heirman (2008a: 265).

<sup>36</sup> According to the *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya*, smoking is allowed for medical purposes (T22. n1428, p877a12–a19).

<sup>37</sup> For a detailed discussion on the precept of fasting in contemporary Chinese Buddhism, see Chiu (2015: 57–89).

<sup>38</sup> Abstaining from all meat and fish as part of a lifelong vegetarian diet has become a major characteristic of Chinese monastic life. For details see Kieschnick (2005: 193–202) and Heirman and De Rauw (2006: 60–64).

that Buddhist robes should not vary in this way, because in her opinion the Buddha's rules about robe-wearing had clear causes and reasons. She even suggested that Buddhist robes should be standardised across the Mahāyāna and Theravāda traditions, because the principles of making robes set forth in all versions of the *Vinaya Piṭaka* are the same. This same informant nun told me that she knew her institution's robes differed from those of other Taiwanese nunneries in both colour and style (see Figures 1 and 2), and she also said that her colleagues and she did not fear criticism for this, because in their view they were following and expressing the reality of Dharma and *Vinaya*.



*Figure 1. Nanlin nuns' robes*



*Figure 2. Nanlin nuns' daily dressing style*

In sharp contrast to this plea for standardisation, Master Wu Yin, the abbess of Luminary nunnery, explicitly defended changes to the styles and colours of monastic robes to fit Chinese culture:

For example, having bare arms was considered impolite, so Chinese monastic members wore garments with sleeves. Since only the emperor was allowed to wear gold-colored garments, and bright colors did not seem fitting for renunciants in China, the color of the robes was changed to black and gray. (2001: 264)

This suggests a division between Nanlin and Luminary on whether robes should be adapted in accordance with the local customs, with the former emphasising the importance of strictly following the original style required in the *Vinaya*, and the latter embracing the principle of adaption to local cultural conditions.<sup>39</sup> On a broader level, the statements cited above reveal different perceptions of the principle of adjusting *Vinaya* rules regionally.

## 2.5 Application and Reinterpretation of Vinaya in Modern Times

Despite the flexibility we have noticed above, it is rather interesting that none of my Mainland informant nuns said that ancient Indian Buddhist rules were out of date or impractical in modern times;<sup>40</sup> rather, they stressed the Buddha's great wisdom in establishing rules for his disciples. For example, a nun from Pushou Si told me that the Buddha laid down the *Vinaya* rules not only for his followers in his time, but also for future followers, because he foresaw what offences his disciples might commit. The *Vinaya* rules have remained the same throughout history, she added, and will remain unchanged in the future; the Buddha never stated which rules were not applicable in modern times.

A nun from Chongfu Si said that monastic members should conduct self-examinations with a mind of shame if they could not obey certain rules because of conditions and their bad *karma*, rather than claim that the Buddha's precepts

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<sup>39</sup> An in depth discussion of the style of monastic robes in China is beyond the scope of this research. For the discussion of *bhikṣuṇīs*' robes, see Heirman (2008b: 145–158). For a study on the robes of the Chinese Buddhist community, see Kuo (2001). For a discussion on redesigned monastic vestments by Taixu, see for example Pittman (2001: 232n87). For the debate about the reform of monastic robes since the early Republican period, see (Qingde Shi, 2001: 197–200).

<sup>40</sup> Ven. Yifa was said to have advanced thought of reforming and updating the *Vinaya* to fit modern contexts, while other Foguangshan monastic members were discomfited by Yifa's radical claims (Chandler, 2004:167).

are impractical. She stressed that it was inappropriate for a person to deny the Buddha's rules just because he or she could not follow them. One nun from Zizhulin explicitly stated that the precepts have never become outdated, as their main function is to regulate the vexations that distract monastic members. She speculated that those who feel monastic rules are outmoded may not truly want enlightenment.

The Zizhulin nun used an additional example to support her viewpoint, citing the great grasslands of Mongolia and the ocean near Xiamen. She said: "The maritime law of a nation does not apply in Mongolia, but this does not prove that the law is out of date or ineffectual. When you go to Mongolia, you don't offend maritime law, because you do not need to observe it there. In the same way, the grassland law cannot be practised in Xiamen. Is the law behind the times?"

In Taiwan, my DDM informant said that monastic members in Fagushan were not like Buddhists in Theravāda Buddhism, who practised the precepts to the letter. Interestingly, this same individual also pointed out that monastic members of the Theravāda tradition had made changes to the system, as it was impossible for them completely to obey the rules established in ancient Indian contexts.<sup>41</sup> In this informant's view, precepts need to be adapted to changed circumstances in both time and space because they have to relate to the reality of daily life. On the other hand, the Nanlin nun told me that she and her colleagues tried their best to maintain the traditional ascetic life, but that in one particular aspect the world had unavoidably changed: transport. In modern times, for longer journeys they have replaced walking with riding in a car, even though Buddhist monastic members are strictly forbidden to ride in vehicles.<sup>42</sup> "It is impossible to swim to Thailand," as the nun put it! I was told, however, that such situations were reviewed carefully and seriously, and exceptions were not made lightly.

With regard to the reinterpretation of precepts in modern times, one senior Luminary nun presented a rather interesting example that connected past to present. Explaining that the modern era is different from the time and space when the *Vinaya* was compiled, she cited as an example that monastic members

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<sup>41</sup> Walpola Rahula, for instance, indicated that Theravāda monks found some rules impractical, because times and circumstances have changed (1978: 62–63). This resonates with what the DDM informant said.

<sup>42</sup> T22n.1428, p0771b07–p0771c09. The 159<sup>th</sup> rule states: "If a *bhikṣuṇī* who is not sick goes in a vehicle, she [commits], except in particular circumstances, a *pācittika*" (translated in Heirman, 2002: 921).

are not allowed to attend entertainments, to forestall criticism by the laity;<sup>43</sup> but there was no internet or (social) media in the past, so that people went to cinemas to watch movies or theatres to watch plays. Thus monastic members could (easily) be observed by people if they went to a cinema for entertainment. She (re)interpreted this rule in modern contexts:

Nowadays you can use the monastery's internet to download a film and watch it, or you can watch a lot of entertainment channels when turning on the computer, and listen to popular songs on MTV and in movies. Who would know that you are watching entertainment if you close your office door? Do you transgress the precept? In the past the Buddha set up the rule to prevent people's criticism. In my opinion, in current times, you have offended the precept if you indulge yourself in computer [entertainment] as you have neglected the Buddhist practice. This is why I think the *Vinaya* in different time and space needs to be re-interpreted and reviewed[.]

This same nun took as another example the precept against drinking alcohol on the grounds that it causes mental confusion.<sup>44</sup> In her perspective, this can be interpreted broadly today: “Monastic members who take drugs or psychedelics offend this precept, as these things confuse people's minds [similarly to alcohol]. We cannot do it [drug taking], even though ancient *Vinaya* does not forbid us”. This sheds considerable light on monastic practitioners' perspectives regarding how traditional precepts are reapplied and reinterpreted in the face of the realities of today's religious life. It can also be tentatively suggested that Mainland nuns' views are more conservative, as they tended to stress that the Buddhist precepts were never out of date, while Buddhists in Taiwan seemed to focus more on how to adapt or reinterpret traditional precepts in accordance with the present era and society.

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<sup>43</sup> T22n.1428, p0740b13–p0740b23. The 79<sup>th</sup> rule states: “If a *bhikṣuṇī* goes to see music, she [commits] a *pācittika*” (translated in Heirman, 2002: 610).

<sup>44</sup> T22n.1428, p0735b24. The 36<sup>th</sup> rule states: “If a *bhikṣuṇī* drinks alcohol, she [commits] a *pācittika*” (translated in Heirman, 2002: 537).



## 2.6 Effects of Institutional Type on the Manner of Practising Rules

During my fieldwork on the realities of *Vinaya* observance, many Mainland informants from non-*Vinaya*-centric nunneries stated that monastery contexts or environments affected the way they practised rules, with the precepts about money-handling<sup>45</sup> and fasting being mentioned frequently. A teacher nun from Dingguang Si repeatedly stressed that each monastery had a different situation and different priorities. At the Buddhist College, she said, the emphasis was on education and Buddhist doctrine; *Vinaya*-centric monasteries adhered to the *Vinaya* practice, but each one observed the precepts differently. However, altering how they (multiple members of multiple institutions) observed the rules did not seem to change their view of enlightenment. In other words, different environments and leaders of monasteries had a considerable influence on how the rules were practised. This Dingguang nun also provided one vivid example: only *śrāmaṇerīs* and *śikṣamāṇās* serve food to *bhikṣuṇīs* in Pushou Si (which is *Vinaya*-centric); but in Dingguang Si, the Buddhist College, all student nuns serve food by turns, regardless of their status.

My informant from DDM explicitly indicated that the monastery was based on Chan Buddhism, and that it promoted this tradition by holding religious activities for laypeople outside. In this informant's view, this outreach activity made it impossible to practise each precept strictly, but it was still vital to follow the important root precepts. A nun from Nanlin, on the other hand, referred to the Nanlin nunnery as a place that enabled nuns to observe rules strictly. In her view, Buddhists practising precepts to the letter handled everything smoothly because many protective deities helped them to overcome any difficulties. These comments reflect that Nanlin Nunnery and DDM represent different types of institutions focused on different Buddhist objectives: the former pays close attention to the *Vinaya*, and the latter emphasises Humanistic Buddhism for people and society. One nun from the Luminary Nunnery stressed that each monastery or organisation had its own viewpoint on the observance of the *Vinaya* rules. There was no absolute right or wrong against which to judge the various ways of interpreting and practising rules, but, a pluralistic way of observing *Vinaya*. The different attitudes and values that one can observe in regard to observing the precepts relate to differing conditions and contexts, educational backgrounds, religious practices, ways of propagating Buddhism

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<sup>45</sup> For a detailed discussion on the precept against touching money in contemporary Chinese Buddhism, see Chiu (2014: 09–56).

both individually and institutionally, and levels of interaction with the laity, as well as the adaptability and flexibility of Buddhism more generally.

From the above it is clear that different monastery types and contexts exert considerable influence on how the rules are practised in real-world situations. My current fieldwork results resonate significantly with Stuart Chandler's argument that a particular organisation within a given tradition will base its assertion "that it adheres to the pratimoksha on a strict observance of ... certain key precepts that are compatible with its own style of cultivation" (2004: 165).

To sum up, there was a significant consensus among my informant nuns in Taiwan and Mainland China regarding the general conception of Buddhist precepts as follows: nearly all interviewees told me that laity should not read or research *Vinaya*. They stressed the importance of understanding the spirit and background of each precept so that it could be observed flexibly. In the next section, I explore Chinese nuns' attitudes in relation to the number of the *bhikṣuṇī* rules, often considered to be a controversial topic in that the number of rules for nuns is higher than that for monks.

### 3. Nuns Having More Precepts than Monks Have

Generally, and across various traditions, Buddhist nuns have to observe more rules than monks do. For example, Chinese Buddhist nuns following the *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya* observe 348 rules,<sup>46</sup> monks, 250 rules. Nuns who are fully ordained as *bhikṣuṇīs* in the Theravāda tradition follow 311 rules while monks in the same tradition have 227 rules; and in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda* tradition there are 371 rules for female monastics and 257 rules for males. Nancy Barnes comments that "it is already evident ... that more restrictions are placed on women than men in the Buddhist monastic order ... nuns' lives are definitely more closely regulated than those of monks" (1994: 142). One could

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<sup>46</sup> Besides, all female Buddhist monastic members, present and future, were required to follow the *gurudharma* rules, which are thus most frequently mentioned in explorations of the position of women in Buddhism. For the discussion on how these eight fundamental rules have potential to cause gender discrimination against nuns, see Horner (1930: 118-161); Gross (1993: 36-38); Owen (1998: 20-26); Dewaraja (1999: 72-74).

Any discussion of the *gurudharmas* should commence with the hotly debated actions of the Taiwanese nun Shih Chao-hwei 釋昭慧, who has criticised the overall tendency to observe these rules, claiming that some monks, together with 'slavish *bhikṣuṇīs*', continuously adopt the custom of discriminating against nuns. For detailed discussion on Chao-hwei and *gurudharmas* applied in Taiwan and Mainland China, see Heirman and Chiu (2012: 273-300); Chiu and Heirman (2014: 241-272).

easily extend this into an argument that the relative over-regulation of nuns is either a reflection or a cause of their lesser status. Masaaki Chikusa, for instance, relates it to the notion that women are “inferior to men” (2002: 19), quoting the monk Zhu Fatai:<sup>47</sup> “The Hearts of women are weak and frequently given to debauchery. The Buddha, realizing that detailed measures to guard against this were needed, in all instances provided twice as many precepts for women as for men” (T55.n2145, p80a4–a5; Chikusa 2002: 19). It is thus interesting to explore the views on this matter held by present-day nuns as they practise these rules in their daily lives.

Two main themes are shared across several nunneries in Mainland China: Tianning Si, Dingguang Si, Chongfu Si and Zizhulin. These are 1) protection for females due to their physical weakness and 2) negative female characteristics including mental weakness. First, my informant nuns from these four institutions expressed a belief that the Buddha formulated more precepts for *bhikṣuṇīs* because he wanted to protect nuns, who are seen as physically weaker than monks and generally more vulnerable to sexual abuse. While it might seem that nuns were limited by more rules and stricter regulations, this was given a positive interpretation by my informant nuns, as a modern extension of the Buddha’s wish to protect nuns. They considered the Buddha as their father who gave special care to nuns as his children; and as in many modern families, daughters are obliged to follow more rules than sons – e.g., coming home earlier and dressing appropriately – on the grounds that girls are more vulnerable in public.

Secondly, my informant nuns emphasised that they must follow more precepts because of females’ negative characteristics or mental weaknesses. A Chongfu Si nun explicitly referred to *Da’aidao biqiuni jing* 大愛道比丘尼經 (T.1478 *Sūtra on the Bhikṣuṇī Mahāprajāpatī*),<sup>48</sup> which mentions negative views on womanhood. The abbess of Luminary Nunnery, Ven. Wu Yin, claims that Buddhist nuns have more rules than monks – and are more likely to refuse to accept admonition – because of their innate characteristics. “Women are

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<sup>47</sup> Zhu Fatai 竺法汰 (320–387), a disciple of Dao’an 道安, was a well-known Chinese Buddhist scholar.

<sup>48</sup> This is a later *Vinaya* text that takes a misogynistic attitude toward nuns. It is uncertain when and by whom the text was translated into Chinese, but it was extant in the first half of the fifth century CE. Moreover, although the text was classified as a translation in the earliest catalogues, it cannot be totally excluded that it is an original Chinese composition. For details, see Heirman (2001: 284–285).

mostly emotional; they tend to be influenced by personal feelings. Also, women are often driven by emotions; consequently, they do not differentiate principle from individual cases” (Wu Yin and Jen Han 1997: 22).

However, it is also worth noting that none of my Buddhist nun informants voiced any complaint that the mere arithmetical quantity of precepts constituted unfair treatment of nuns on the part of the Buddha. Some of my informants drew a broad comparison between Buddhist precepts and national, secular laws: while those who flout the law may feel they are being constrained, law-abiding people do not feel restricted by laws. A Dingguang Si nun said that it does not matter if nuns have more rules, as long as they follow the spirit of Buddhism. Thubten Chödrön, a Western Buddhist nun in Tibetan Buddhism, expressed a similar view: “[H]aving more precepts than a monk does not bother me. The more numerous and strict the precepts, the more my mindfulness improves. This increased mindfulness aids my practice and helps my progress on the path” (2000: 94–95). Still, we should not overlook the possibility that the above statements could be interpreted from the Buddhist apologist viewpoint: Buddhist followers understandably defending their faith against outsiders’ criticism.

When I asked Taiwanese nuns for their perspectives on the discrepancy in the number of precepts between monks and nuns, their responses clearly resonated with those of the Mainland Chinese nuns. For example, Master Sheng Yen taught nuns that *bhikṣuṇīs* received more precepts due to the Buddha’s protection of nuns in the Indian context of his own time. Similarly, a Foguangshan informant stated that woman’s physical attributes are related to the larger number of precepts. Many men are disrespectful of women, she explained; the issue of women’s and girls’ safety has always existed in society, and Buddhism reflects this social reality: gender inequality is a social problem, not a problem of the Buddhist *saṃgha* or *bhikṣuṇīs*’ precepts. One nun, from Nanlin, associated characteristic female weaknesses with specific *bhikṣuṇī* precepts, in an echo of Mainland informants’ statements. Interestingly, she also spoke of some monastic rules that were formulated specifically for monks. Indeed, when one compares the *bhikṣuṇī* and *bhikṣu* precepts in the category of *saṃghāvaśeṣa* offences, some rules are clearly shared by both nuns and monks,<sup>49</sup> while some *saṃghāvaśeṣa* rules apply only to monks. Take,

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<sup>49</sup> In Young Chung has compared the *bhikṣuṇī* and *bhikṣu* precepts based on *Dharmaguptakavinaya*. Some *bhikṣuṇī* precepts also apply to *bhikṣus*; some are particularly for monks. For details, see Chung (1999: 29–105).

for instance, the first *saṃghāvaśeṣa* rule on not intentionally emitting semen. Clearly, the rule is specifically designed for monks, and could not be applied to *bhikṣuṇīs*. Likewise, some precepts were specifically set up for nuns to deal with menstruation.<sup>50</sup> Master Wu Yin, the abbess of Luminary nunnery, explicitly rejected the argument that nuns' larger number of precepts equates to greater restrictions, countering it with a question: "Some rules about women's menses garments are impossible to apply to *bhikṣus*. Do we have more restrictions of this kind?" In her book, Ven. Wu Yin does not agree that it is unjust for nuns to obey more rules than monks, since the formulation of *bhikṣuṇīs'* precepts stems partly from monks' inappropriate actions as well as nuns' flaws (2001: 32). In Wu Yin's view, the additional precepts enable Buddhist nuns to behave themselves better (ibid). Another Luminary nun, who was sitting next to the abbess (Wu Yin) during the interview, told me that she did not feel any constraints even if she had to observe a thousand rules, as she can interpret them from the Buddhist spirit. Her view clearly corresponded to the statements of the Mainland nun from Dingguang Si.

In conclusion, Buddhist nuns I interviewed in both Mainland China and Taiwan did not express any feeling of oppression or discrimination due to the larger numbers of *bhikṣuṇī* precepts. Rather, they suggested that men's and women's different physical structures and mental characteristics meant that some rules had to be gender-specific. The nuns' responses contradict some academic scholars' arguments that Buddhist nuns having more rules proves that they suffer discrimination (e.g. Chikusa, 2002: 19). It may of course be fruitless to attempt to triangulate between these two opposing positions. As Jens-Uwe Hartmann puts it: "to argue from an academic standpoint against a Buddhist view or vice versa may lead to a futile dispute between positions marked by either belief or rationality" (2010: 25). In the next part of this paper, I will focus on one of the particular precepts for nuns, specifically set up for reasons of safety.

#### 4. Not Being Alone

According to the seventh *saṃghāvaśeṣa* rule of the *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya*, Buddhist nuns should abstain from four practices that are considered dangerous: 1) crossing

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<sup>50</sup> Taking one rule as a representative example: "If a *bhikṣuṇī* promises a menses cloth to another *bhikṣuṇī*, and if, afterwards, she does not give it, she [commits] a *niḥsargika pācittika*" (translated in Heirman, 2002:473).

water alone; 2) entering a village alone; 3) sleeping alone; and 4) walking alone.<sup>51</sup> This is because a nun may run the risk of being physically attacked or sexually abused when alone, because of her weaker physique. The same *DharmaguptakaVinaya* rule also states that the Buddhist community wants to ensure that a nun travelling alone does not commit any offence, especially of a sexual nature. Following the principle of establishing rules as and when problems occurred, the Buddha laid down rules in response to specific wrongdoing by his monastic followers. According to this tradition, the seventh *saṃghāvaśeṣa* rule has its origins in a particular incident.

**Crossing water alone:**<sup>52</sup> A *bhikṣuṇī* hitched up her clothes to cross a river alone in the rainy season. Heavy rains caused floods, soaking her clothes as she crossed to the other bank. There the nun was sexually harassed by an ill-intentioned man. Some people witnessed the incident and criticised the nun's behaviour, in crossing water alone with her clothes hitched up, as being like that of a prostitute. This led them to question the *dharma*.

**Entering a village alone:**<sup>53</sup> A nun, Kṣemā, had many disciples in her Buddhist community. One day she entered a village without any of her pupils for company. People seeing her alone in the village suspected that she had come there to see a man.

**Sleeping alone:**<sup>54</sup> Kṣemā stayed one night in the village instead of returning to her community, and local villagers gossiped, saying she must be sleeping with a man.

**Walking alone:**<sup>55</sup> A nun, Sthūlanandā, and a group of six nuns walked behind another group of Buddhist nuns in the wilderness. The leading group asked the stragglers why they walked so slowly; the latter explained that they lagged behind because they wanted to get a man.

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<sup>51</sup> T22.n1428, p720b16–721a29. The seventh *saṃghāvaśeṣa* rule of the *Dharmaguptakavinaya*: “If a *bhikṣuṇī* crosses water alone, if she goes alone to a village, if she spends the night alone, or if she stays behind alone, she violates an immediate rule, a *saṃghāvaśeṣa*, that has to be given up” (translated in Heirman, 2002: 345).

<sup>52</sup> T22.n1428, p720b16–b22.

<sup>53</sup> T22.n1428, p720b22–b26.

<sup>54</sup> T22.n1428, p720b26–b27.

<sup>55</sup> T22.n1428, p720b28–c07.

These four incidents led the Buddha to formulate the seventh *saṃghāvaśeṣa* rule forbidding nuns to be alone in these four situations. In the following parts we explore, based on an analysis of our fieldwork findings, contemporary Buddhist nuns' perceptions of the application of the precept in the Chinese context. However, the incident of crossing water alone will not be discussed in this study since in most modern contexts many bridges have been constructed over water. The incident of entering a village alone will be discussed together with that of walking alone, since these two activities could be considered to be very similar. I will first focus on Mainland China, and then on Taiwan.

#### 4.1 Not Being Alone

According to my fieldwork observation, most of Mainland senior nuns I interviewed have their own room. In the 1980s, the government of the People's Republic of China began to revive Buddhism by reconstructing places of pilgrimage (albeit primarily for tourists) and monasteries. When conducting fieldwork in Mainland China in 2010, I found that most of the nunneries I visited had either recently been enlarged or were still undergoing reconstruction. Most senior teacher nuns in Tongjiao Si, Tianning Si, Dingguang Si and Zizhulin had individual rooms and slept alone.<sup>56</sup> As a female researcher, I was allowed to interview my informant nuns in their own rooms, so I was able to observe each nun's living environment. I found that some had comfortable rooms with cooking and ensuite facilities. When I asked nuns in various nunneries about their living conditions, I received similar replies. A Tianning Si nun told me that the abbess believed it enabled each nun to follow her own schedule without affecting other nuns. When two nuns shared a room, their religious schedules might come into conflict – one nun might be chanting while the other wished to meditate, etc – so, as there was enough space, each nun had her own room. A senior Dingguang Si nun said that the advantage of individual accommodation was that nuns did not impinge on each other when chanting *sūtra* or worshipping the Buddha. A Zizhulin teacher nun added that not all nuns were willing to occupy a single room. However, when two nuns shared a room, sometimes one stayed up late preparing tomorrow's lecture, while the other slept. These responses indicated that most current senior Buddhist nuns, except in *Vinaya*-centric nunneries, usually sleep alone in their own rooms to accommodate their personal schedules.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> A group of four to eight student nuns was arranged to share a room in Dingguang Si (fieldwork observation 2010).

<sup>57</sup> According to Yu-Chen Li's comparative study, Mainland monasteries have larger monastic



By contrast, Ven. Wu Yin, the abbess of Luminary Nunnery, strongly disapproves of nuns having their own rooms in the nunnery, and emphasises the importance of interaction with other practitioners for the progress of spiritual cultivation (2001: 172–173). Not interacting with other nuns in daily activities could hinder someone’s Buddhist practice, because it is human nature to treat oneself well.<sup>58</sup> A nun living alone in a well-furnished, comfortable room might “either isolate herself from the community or turn her room into a special place for her friends” (ibid: 173). Wu Yin takes the matter of nuns sleeping alone seriously, believing that it has an impact on personal religious practice that negatively influences the atmosphere of entire Buddhist organisations.

When exploring the issue of living quarters, it is best to observe them personally. However, monastics’ living quarters are generally off limits to guests. When I conducted fieldwork in Nanlin Nunnery, I luckily was allowed to live in an otherwise unoccupied wooden house that had been built for nuns, so I was able to obtain a basic picture of monastic rooms. When entering such a house through the main door, one first encounters a communal living space in which the nuns can study at two or three tables. Beyond this, each house has two or three rooms in which nuns sleep in small groups. In other words, Nanlin nuns’ living accommodation is arranged based on what *Vinaya* requires: that nuns should not sleep alone.<sup>59</sup>

In DDM, my informant told me that three nuns slept together in a small room with three beds and individual wardrobes, and that such rooms were intended only for sleeping. Those who want to study, meditate or chant go to a separate study room within the nuns’ dormitory building.<sup>60</sup> This same nun further explained that Ven. Sheng Yen prefers this arrangement for his disciples: doing things in appropriate places avoids the problems encountered by some Mainland Chinese nuns who share sleeping accommodation. In Foguangshan, monks and

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populations and are architecturally bigger than Taiwanese ones (2000: 302). The sheer size of Mainland Buddhist nunneries enables most senior nuns there to sleep alone in private rooms, and this environmental factor possibly affects Mainland nuns’ observance, not least in terms of the precept against sleeping alone

<sup>58</sup> Wu Yin’s viewpoint corresponds to that of a Dingguang nun who told me in November 2011: “It is good for two people to be together, as a person may become lax on her own.”

<sup>59</sup> It is worth noting that Nanlin nuns had moved out from the wooden houses to newly constructed building as living quarters when I revisited this nunnery in 2016 and 2017.

<sup>60</sup> Similarly, Foguangshan monastic students sleep in open rooms without desks, since they are supposed to study in the library or classroom, not in their dormitories (Chandler, 2004: 177).

nuns' living accommodation varies greatly depending on their monastic rank. For example, those who are promoted to the highest positions live in single rooms with their own bathrooms, while those of low rank need to share a room with five or six other people and use a public bathroom down the hall (Chandler, 2004: 177).

To sum up, my fieldwork results indicate that my informant nuns had a variety of viewpoints and practices regarding the acceptability of sleeping alone. Some believed that a single room enabled a nun to follow her own individual schedule without detriment to others, while others opposed it on the grounds that it affected their spiritual practice.

#### **4.2 Not Going Alone - Mainland China**

Most of my informant nuns in Mainland China expressed a belief that the Buddha formulated the rule against going out alone to protect Buddhist nuns, because they are physically more vulnerable than monks:

**Pushou Si:** We understand that the Buddha made this rule to protect nuns.

**Tongjiao Si:** There are more physical drawbacks to being a nun than to being a monk, because we are women, so we have more precepts. For example, a nun is not allowed to go out alone. The Buddha set up this rule to protect nuns, because two nuns walking together were less likely to be attacked.

**Dingguang Si (A):** The wise Buddha laid down this precept because he understood nuns' physical and mental weaknesses. It is good for two people to be together, as a person may become lax on her own. Try to keep this rule if you can find a companion to go out with you[.]

**Dingguang Si (B):** The Buddha's main concern expressed in this rule is to protect his disciples. Two nuns can look after each other while they are out. And sometimes, your companion can vouch for you if someone thinks you have been away from the monastery for too long.

**Dingguang Si (C):** The disadvantage of going out alone is that you are vulnerable if you meet a bad person. You cannot be looked after or get any help if you are ill.

**Chongfu Si:** Women, unlike men, are physically weak and vulnerable. The Buddha said a nun should be accompanied[.]

However, this consensus regarding the rule's origin did not result in a uniform way of observing it. My interviewees' attitudes toward the practice of the rule against going alone can be placed in two categories.

*a. Strict Observance*

**Pushou Si:** [W]e follow this rule strictly. Our teachers emphasise that we must always have a companion when we go out of the main gate of Pushou Si. Moreover, our companion must be a *bhikṣuṇī*, not a layperson. We must observe this rule carefully. Because we have a large number of people in this monastery, [it is easy for] each monastic member to help the others keep this rule. If a nun needs to go out, another nun will accompany her wherever she goes.

**Chongfu Si:** Here a nun is normally accompanied when going out for shopping or on business. She may attend special meetings alone, so the nunnery provides a driver. The advantage of being in a big monastery is that we have many nuns who can accompany someone if required. In a small monastery, it is harder to find a nun to go with you, so they may ask a laywoman for company.

*b. Difficulties in Observance, or Non-Observance*

**Tongjiao Si:** If I need to go somewhere outside the nunnery, I must find a companion, and usually someone is free; but it is not easy to find a companion if I have to go further afield for more than ten days.

**Tianning Si:** This rule can be a bit of a problem ... For example, I have a good relationship with [my senior classmate], so she can accompany me if I go out. However, sometimes you may need to go somewhere, but you cannot force someone to come with you, because she might want to do her religious practice ... The advantage of this rule is that it protects nuns from risky situations and two nuns can look after each other.

**Dingguang Si (A):** I sometimes break this precept. For example, I will need to find a nun to go to Mongolia with me if my parents die. If that happens, it will be hard to keep this rule: I have enough money for my own fare but would not be able to pay for my companion's. And another nun would lose teaching time in the Buddhist College if she accompanied me. I try my best to keep this precept, but it is not always possible.

**Dingguang Si (B):** [I]t can be hard to obey this rule in certain circumstances, and it may cause an inconvenience for the monastery. For example, how can a monastery provide accommodation for two people if they only have one bed?<sup>61</sup> It can also be awkward because you must look after the other nun, who helps you keep this rule. Sometimes people don't want to help you even when they could, or they might not be used to accompanying someone else.

**Dingguang Si (C):** In our modern times and contexts, it is more convenient and economical to go alone, and it saves you the time it would take to find a person to accompany you.

As we have seen, many reported difficulties in observing the precept for various reasons, and across my fieldwork sites, only Pushou Si nuns claimed to follow the rule strictly. As a *Vinaya*-centric nunnery, its members – including the laity – are famous for rigorously interpreting and strictly observing Buddhist precepts. In this context, Pushou Si nuns reported that it was easy for them to find a *bhikṣuṇī* companion, because everyone in their nunnery understands the importance of observing the rule and is willing to help their colleagues adhere to it. In other words, Pushou Si's atmosphere of mutual support plays an important part in enabling the nuns to follow the rule. Nuns at Tongjiao Si, Tiannin Si, Dingguang Si and Zizhulin all stated that Pushou Si nuns have no problems or challenges in following this precept, simply because it is a *Vinaya*-centric institute; but my Pushou Si informant provided me with an additional important point indicating how seriously they take the precept there. A Pushou Si *bhikṣuṇī* who accompanies another *bhikṣuṇī* while outside the monastery should be in the

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<sup>61</sup> T22n.1428, p0744a25–p0744c05. The 90th precept of the *pācittika* states that if *bhikṣuṇīs* who are not sick sleep two together on the same bed, they commit a *pācittika* (see Heirman, 2002: 682).

same group or of the same rank.<sup>62</sup> This was because only a *bhikṣuṇī* of the same level knows how to assist another *bhikṣuṇī*'s practice of rules and *karman*, such as the repentance *karman* (ritual act through which a nun can repent to another nun) between two nuns. When a *śikṣamāṇā* goes out, another *śikṣamāṇā* must accompany her, and so forth. But there is, she continued, an exception: two *śrāmaṇerīs* can accompany a *śikṣamāṇā* when she is out. It would seem that Pushou Si nuns follow this rule more strictly than those in other institutions; some nuns in other nunneries either find a lay companion or travel alone.

The scale of a nunnery would appear to be a crucial factor in nuns' observance of the rule. My informant nuns from Pushou Si and Chongfu Si both asserted that because their large monasteries have more people, they were better able to find companions and thus to abide by the rule.<sup>63</sup> This tends to explain why Buddhist nuns in Tongjiao Si and Tianning Si, which are home to only about 30 nuns each, say it is difficult to find a *bhikṣuṇī* companion if someone needs to travel far.<sup>64</sup> This echoes the Chongfu Si nun's remark that "[i]t is harder to find a nun to go with you in a small monastery, so they may ask a laywoman for company." Clearly, then, asking a layperson to accompany a nun is a solution that bridges the gap between strict observance of the rule and what is possible under real-world conditions.

My fieldwork data further indicate that nuns in Tongjiao Si, Tianning Si and Dingguang Si find it difficult to observe the rule. In these cases, finding a companion can be hard because everyone is busy with her own religious business and is unable or unwilling to help, or perhaps merely unaccustomed to doing so. Thus, we can argue that the type of Buddhist institution equally plays an important role in determining whether nuns can lawfully follow the rule or not. The informant nuns from these three institutions emphasised that observance of this rule may be modified by external circumstances, such as limited finances. Three nuns from Dingguang Si expressed concerns about travel expenses. It is generally considered discourteous for a *bhikṣuṇī* to ask a

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<sup>62</sup> When I revisited the Dingguang Si in 2017, one leading nun and a junior nun both emphasised that a *bhikṣuṇī* should be accompanied by another female practitioner with the *same rank* while going out of a monastery, if this *bhikṣuṇī* wants to lawfully observe the precept of not being alone (2017 fieldwork note).

<sup>63</sup> Around 1,000 Buddhist nuns live in Pushou Si, and about 300 in Chongfu Si.

<sup>64</sup> A Tianning nun told me that recently a nun needed to go out but could not find another nun to accompany her, because only 30 nuns live in this nunnery, so in the end a layperson went with her instead.

companion to pay her own fares and expenses when helping her to observe the rule of not going alone. So a nun going on a long journey must save up for her companion's and her own travel expenses, which often represent more money than the average Buddhist nun can afford. For instance, Ven. Longlian's social and religious status<sup>65</sup> distinguished her from the generality of nuns, but she shared this concern about travel expenses, and was reluctant to attend some Buddhist meetings as she grew older due to both physical and monetary considerations; in particular, she was reluctant to claim college expenses for her companion whenever she went out (Qiu, 1997:271).<sup>66</sup> Clearly, travelling expenses represent an obstacle for nuns who wish to observe the rule of not going out alone. A monastery or nunnery may subsidise a nun going out on Buddhist business with a companion, but it may be harder for a nun to obtain such financial support when travelling on private business, such as attending a parental funeral in a different province or region, as mentioned by the Mongolian nun in Dingguang. The informant nuns all indicated that they understood the Buddha's purpose in setting up the rule and wanted to follow it if they could. From the above, we can see that an unavoidable dilemma exists here between observing precepts and economic reality. Teaching schedules posed an additional concern for teacher nuns at Dingguang Si, which is a Buddhist nuns' college. Apart from student nuns, most of the nuns there are teachers of various scriptural courses. Absences by individual teachers are inconvenient enough, but the scheduling problems created by absence are compounded when a teacher nun asks permission to go somewhere and requests another teacher nun's company. Some nuns from non-*Vinaya*-centric nunneries reported that they felt shame when they could not observe the rule: in other words, it was not their intention to deliberately transgress the rule or to take the breaking of it casually or for granted.

So far, I have tried to capture contemporary Mainland Chinese nuns' perceptions of and practices related to the rule on going alone. In the next part, I analyze and compare fieldwork data of Taiwanese nuns.

### 4.3 Not Going Alone - Taiwan

My interviewees' attitudes toward the practice of the rule against going alone can be placed in two categories.

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<sup>65</sup> For a detailed introduction of Longlian, see Bianchi (2001) and Qiu (1997).

<sup>66</sup> Longlian strictly followed the rule of not going out alone, asking someone to accompany her whenever she went out for Buddhist work. For details, see Qiu (1997: 142, 169, 190).

**a. Strict Observance in Nanlin Nunnery (Fieldwork observation and notes):**

- i. I observed Nanlin nuns' strict observance of the rule. One evening I was in a guest room where a senior nun, a female *kalpikāra*<sup>67</sup> and a male architect were discussing the construction of new buildings at the nunnery. The *kalpikāra*, needing to leave for something, asked me if I would stay with the senior nun, demonstrating how carefully they protect themselves against being alone with a male person.
- ii. During the development of the nunnery, the abbess was usually occupied with the business side of affairs. I found out that whenever the abbess went out, a senior nun had to accompany her.
- iii. My informant nun told me a personal story about how she strictly observed the rule by taking a companion with her on a journey back home from Taiwan to Malaysia.

These excerpts, interestingly, indicate that Buddhist institutions in Taiwan and Mainland China share some similarities regarding the practice of this rule. Firstly, nuns in Nanlin Nunnery (which is *Vinaya*-centric, like Pushou Si) adhere strictly to the precept of not going out or travelling alone, taking the rather cautious attitude that a nun should not be left unaccompanied in any situation. The cases of Nanlin and Pushou Si provide strong support for my argument that the type of Buddhist institution plays an important role in determining whether or not nuns can lawfully follow the rule.

Secondly, the remaining three Buddhist monasteries in Taiwan – DDM, Foguangshan, and Luminary Nunnery – all follow Humanistic Buddhism<sup>68</sup> and

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<sup>67</sup> *Kalpikāra* (Pāli *kappiya-kāraka*): a lay attendant whose role is as an intermediary for monastic members' financial transactions and economic activities, which under *Vinaya* rules monks and nuns are strictly prohibited from conducting themselves. The role of the *kalpikāra* is not limited to the economic realm, however, and may include a number of other acts that monastic members are forbidden to perform.

<sup>68</sup> Master Taixu 太虛 played a crucial role in early twentieth century Chinese Buddhist reform, advocating “life Buddhism” (*rensheng fojiao* 人生佛教), whereby Buddhist monastic members should contribute to society by involving themselves in the world through Mahāyāna Buddhist teachings, rather than concentrating primarily on other-worldly funeral rituals. For details, see Pittman (2001). Yin Shun 印順 (1906–2005) was a Chinese monk famous for having promoted Humanistic Buddhism (*renjian fojiao* 人間佛教) in Taiwan. Humanistic Buddhism encourages



observe this precept more flexibly:

***b. Flexible Observance***

**DDM:** Some nuns leave the monastery unaccompanied to teach or conduct monastic affairs. However, a nun must not see a doctor alone, because most doctors are male.

**Luminary Nunnery:** We will accompany a nun if she is ill and needs to see a doctor. However, a nun may go to the bank or shop for food alone. It is appropriate, however, to write a note to other nuns when leaving the monastery, but we must always accompany *śrāmaṇerīs* wherever they go.

**Foguangshan:** Why should I not go alone if I go to safe places? According to one of the Buddhist rules, a Buddhist nun may not be alone with a man.<sup>69</sup> When I studied at XX<sup>70</sup> University, I had to take a companion with me whenever I discussed my research with my male professor. This was impractical because I had to pay for her accommodation and airfares.

Due to the influence of Humanistic Buddhism as advocated by Ven. Taixu, Yin Shun, Hsing Yun and Sheng Yen, some Buddhist monks and nuns in Taiwan have become closely engaged with local communities, in stark contrast with those in Mainland China. Most Taiwanese nuns I met from the three above-named institutions spend much of their time spreading Buddhism and serving

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monks and nuns to interact closely with the wider community. The three leading Buddhist organisational leaders or founders in Taiwan— Sheng Yen (Fagushan), Hsing Yun (Foguangshan) and Cheng Yen (Tzu Chi) – advocate Humanistic Buddhism through various objectives and activities, including monastic and secular education, welfare work and environmental protection. For an overview, see Long (2000: 53–84) and Pittman (2001). This study will not research the Tzu Chi Foundation since most of its members are laypeople. For a detailed introduction to the Tzu Chi Foundation, see Huang (2009) and Yao (2012).

<sup>69</sup> T22n.1428, p0740c11–12. For example, the 80th precept of the *pācittika* states that “If a *bhikṣuṇī* goes to a village and stands or talks together with a man in a secluded place, she [commits] a *pācittika*”. T22n.1428, p741a11-a12. The *bhikṣuṇī* 81st precept of *pācittika* states that “If a *bhikṣuṇī* enters a screened place together with a man, she [commits] a *pācittika*” (translated in Heirman 2002: 612, 614).

<sup>70</sup> Here I make the nun’s university anonymous. The nun was famous and had a high-ranking position in Foguangshan in the past.

the community. My fieldwork data indicate that some senior nuns from DDM and Luminary Nunnery sometimes went outside their institutions alone for the purposes of Buddhist social work and religious teaching. In modern Taiwanese society every nun is busy with her own monastic duties, so it is usually hard to find a companion; this is similar to some nuns' experiences in Mainland China. However, both DDM and Luminary nuns insisted that a *bhikṣuṇī* companion was required when a nun needed to see a doctor. It is worth noting that most places Buddhist nuns visited on monastic business were regarded as safe. This may explain why the nuns at my research sites in Taiwan exhibited a more flexible attitude toward the rule about not going out alone, but nevertheless adhered to it when they went to see a male doctor. Some medical examinations or treatments may involve physical contact or even invasive procedures, and women are seen as vulnerable to sexual abuse and harassment, which tends to explain why a nun (or indeed any woman) may feel safer if a companion stays with her when she sees a male doctor. Luminary Nunnery *śrāmaṇerīs* always go out accompanied because they are usually quite young and inexperienced.

By way of reply to one of my questions to her, my Foguangshan informant explicitly asked me why she should not be alone in safe conditions. She also shared a financial concern with some nuns in Mainland China, deriving from her personal experience of studying abroad at XX University. Though Foguangshan has sufficient funding to support its members studying abroad,<sup>71</sup> the monastery was not necessarily willing or able to provide extra

<sup>71</sup> There four different kinds of education fees provided by FGS to its disciples, set forth in Table 1; it clearly indicates how well-funded this monastery is:

Type	Specific items	Subsidy criteria	Paying institute
Education fees for disciples	Disciples are permitted by the monastery to study abroad	Full payment	Monastery local branch(es)
	Disciples are permitted by the monastery to study abroad, by correspondence course or the National Open University	Full payment	Dharma Transmission Centre
	Disciples are permitted by the monastery to study at 'cramming' school as preparation for overseas study	Full payment	
	Tutoring for refresher courses/On the job training	Full payment	Affiliated unit

Table 1: The Criteria for FGS Disciples' Welfare and Payment. Sources from *Fo Guang Shan Guidebook for Disciples* (2006: 156).

living expenses for a second nun whose sole role was accompanying my informant to meetings with her supervisor. She said it was impractical in those circumstances. The FGS nun's statement clearly responds to the case of a Dingguang nun, who experienced difficulties paying her companion nun's traveling expenses (for her parental funeral), so that she could not observe the rule of not going out alone.

Besides, if we were to exclude the impact of finances on adherence to the rule, as discussed above, female students would be likely to find themselves alone with their male teacher frequently, in tutorials or office hours, as is common in most universities and other academic institutions. In this Foguangshan nun's view, such a situation did not usually require a companion – unlike a girl or woman undergoing a physical examination in a hospital. Most of my Taiwanese informant nuns from DDM, Foguangshan, and Luminary Nunnery flexibly interpreted and practised the rule of not going out or travelling alone, while those in *Vinaya*-centric nunneries adhered strictly to the precept by not going out unaccompanied under any circumstances.

Though questions about the external factors that may influence the observance of the rule against going out alone elicited a multiplicity of responses from my interviewees in various types of Buddhist institutions in Taiwan and Mainland China, these may not adequately represent the viewpoints of all Buddhist nunneries in both regions. Nevertheless, the interviewees' answers provided a broad overview of contemporary Buddhist nuns' perceptions of the applicability of the precept in the Chinese cultural context.

## **5. 'Impractical' Rules**

The last part of this study discusses rules seen as 'impractical' in modern times. One is the above mentioned rule on the chamber pot, seldom seen in modern contexts. A second example is the rule on keeping food overnight. These two examples provide interesting information on how monastics, particularly nuns, in the framework of this paper, deal with these kind of rules.

### **5.1 The Use of a Chamber Pot**

Before presenting the fieldwork data, it is helpful to examine the background of the rule. According to the *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya*, a nun who shared a room with five others defecated and urinated in the chamber pot at night, then threw the waste over the nunnery wall – without looking – early the next morning.

The contents hit a minister who was passing by on his way to see the king. The nun's waste stained the minister's body and clothes, making him angry at what she had done. This incident was later settled with the help of a *brāhmaṇa*. On hearing of this incident, the Buddha established the rule that<sup>72</sup> "If a *bhikṣuṇī*, at night, relieves herself in a pot, and if, in the daytime, she throws it over the wall without looking, she [commits] a *pācittika*" (translated in Heirman, 2002: 608). My interviewees' attitudes toward the chamber pot rule can be placed in two categories.

#### *a. Possibility of Use*

**Pushou Si:** Take the rule of using a night pot, which you have mentioned as an example. This rule does not apply in Taiwan or *Wutaishan*. When I went forth and stayed in a small rural temple, however, I still used a chamber pot at night and threw the waste away the next day. This illustrates how something that seems unlikely to happen in our current daily life may occur elsewhere or at other times.

**DDM:** It is convenient to use the toilet at night because modern *saṃgha* quarters are well designed. Unless they were ill, it is unlikely that anyone would use a chamber pot. If someone uses it, they will empty it down the toilet. It is rare to see anyone throwing waste over the wall.

These comments raise some interesting points: first, that it is important not to arbitrarily assume something is definitely old-fashioned or no longer in use; as the Pushou Si nun mentioned, modern-day nuns may still need to follow the rule if they find themselves in a particular environment. In other words, a rule must not be assumed to have lapsed from disuse, simply because most people would tend to think it has. The DDM informant nun, meanwhile, reminded us that the severely ill continue to use chamber pots since they do not have enough strength to get out of bed to go to the toilet, even if most healthy people or non-caretakers would seldom think of this.

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<sup>72</sup> T22.n1428, p739c17–p740a26. For details, see Heirman (2002: 607–609). For a full discussion on the historical setting of this rule, see Schopen (2008).

***b. Daily Proper Etiquette***

**Tongjiao Si:** Now that we have toilets and don't need to use chamber pots, the main purpose of this rule concerns proper etiquette. We must be very careful whatever we do, not to annoy people or attract criticism. Religious practice is about learning better behaviour.

**Zizhulin:** This rule is redundant. As I said, you do not transgress the rule if you do not need to practise it. You can extend the meaning of this rule to include throwing something away without affecting people adversely.

**Nanlin Nunnery:** You need to be careful not to splash the contents of a chamber pot for hygiene reasons. Nowadays, we do not use a chamber pot, but we are careful not to splash anyone when pouring anything down the drain.

**Luminary Nunnery:** We not only read the chamber-pot rule, but we also need to know the origins of why the rule was established. Meanwhile, it is still possible nowadays to accidentally stain someone's clothes, or we might spill water when washing the floors, and splash the people below.<sup>73</sup>

My informant nuns from both Mainland China and Taiwan clearly shared a viewpoint that extended the meaning of the night-pot rule to modern contexts, even though they no longer used such items. Some interpreted it as meaning that they should be careful when cleaning or disposing of waste liquids, to avoid causing trouble or inconvenience. Some extended the rule even further: into a general admonition to avoid attracting criticism through inattentiveness or inconsiderateness when performing tasks of any kind. Collectively, my informant nuns' interpretations of and attitude toward the night-pot rule represent an important demonstration of how contemporary Buddhist monastic members extend the meaning of certain rules, even or especially if they seem to be inapplicable in modern times.

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<sup>73</sup> This is not directly coming from interview data but from Master Wu Yin's teaching on *bhikṣuṇī* precepts in the Ordination Hall of the Sun-Moon Temple in Kaohsiung, Taiwan in 2002 (Wu Yin Shih 2003 CD 6).

Further, it should be noting that the mere 348 rules found in the *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya* can hardly be expected to cover all aspects of contemporary nuns' daily lives. Communications, transport, and sanitation have changed beyond recognition, to be sure, but so have many other aspects of society. During the interviews many informant nuns emphasised the importance of understanding the background and spirit of monastic rules and practising them appropriately in modern daily life, even though some of them are no longer applicable.

## 5.2 No Keeping of Food Overnight

In this section I discuss the rule of not keeping food overnight as applied in contemporary institutions. Prior to the twentieth-century development of refrigeration, food kept overnight could easily go bad. Today, however, storing food in a refrigerator is quite common in most modern societies.

The origins of this precept lie in a *bhikṣu*'s story. An honourable monk, Kāḷa, found it fairly easy to obtain food in the city of Rājagṛha, so he stored some food to eat later, which spared him from joining the other monastic members asking for daily alms. But when the other monks did not see Kāḷa, they wondered if he was dead, or perhaps hurt by thieves or wild animals. Some days later one of the other monks saw Kāḷa and asked him where he had been, so he told them how he had kept enough food for several days in order to focus on his religious practice. The Buddha heard about Kāḷa's behaviour and admonished him that keeping food was inappropriate and set a bad example for other members. The Buddha thus established the precept that Buddhist monastic members are not allowed to keep food for themselves: "If a [*bhikṣu*] keeps food [until the next day] and [later] eats it, [he] [commits] a *pācittika*" (translated in Heirman, 2002: 534).<sup>74</sup> We turn now to an examination of how Chinese nuns practice this rule in modern times, which can be categorised into two perspectives:

### i. Yes

**Pushou Si:** In Pushou Si monastery we follow this rule strictly. We give our leftovers to *kalpikāra* or laypeople. We never eat yesterday's food[.]

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<sup>74</sup> Because the *bhikṣuṇī* order came into existence after the *bhikṣu* order, some *bhikṣuṇī* rules have been adapted from those governing *bhikṣus*. For nuns, the rule against keeping food overnight is found in the 25th *pācittika* rule from the *bhikṣuṇī prātimokṣa* in the *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya* (T22.n1428, p0662c25–663b9).

**Nanlin Nunnery:** The monastic members' food consists entirely of lay offerings. From sunrise to noon, Buddhists accept and eat donated food. After midday, all unfinished food is regarded as leftovers, and monastic members would transgress the rule if they were to keep leftovers overnight rather than giving them to laypeople to eat.

**ii. No**

**DDM:** In this monastery we do not follow the rule strictly. It was established to encourage monks to ask for alms every day, which is rather different from our current living environment ... To show our gratitude for food each day's leftovers are served the following day to monastic members. Monks and nuns must eat each meal unless they are ill and have no appetite for food.

**Luminary Nunnery:** There is a difference between modern and historical times: now that we have fridges to keep food longer, we can keep unfinished food and eat it the next day. Although we cannot observe this precept, it is good to know that eating leftover food will not make us ill. Everyone knows the precept about not eating food from the previous day, but no one feels she is transgressing by doing so.

These excerpts show very significant divergences between my informant nuns' various practices surrounding the overnight storage of food. Food is particularly cherished in DDM, where the daily leftovers are served to monastic members the following day. According to one of his disciples, this practice of gratitude for food in DDM may stem from the founder, Master Sheng Yen, who was personally thrifty and ate nearly rotten fruit (*litchi*).<sup>75</sup> This might partly explain that the precept of not keeping food overnight is not rigidly implemented in DDM. By contrast, Pushou Si and Nanlin are *Vinaya*-centric monasteries, so it is unsurprising that the nuns there emphasise that they do not keep or eat leftovers, instead re-distributing them to *kalpikāras* or laypeople. Additionally, I noticed that my Nanlin informant nun always asked me the exact date I would

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<sup>75</sup> Online news about Master Sheng Yen. Retrieved 26 October 2017 from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=txJ8sPeGT8c>



be visiting Nanlin, so that appropriate quantities of food could be prepared, to avoid having any leftovers. Her above-quoted statement on this matter contrasts strikingly with those of Luminary nuns. In short, different Buddhist institutions have opposing practices of this rule, depending on their focus (food gratitude versus precept observance).

Besides, keeping food overnight in the fridge was considered acceptable by the Luminary nun, who believed that modern technology means eating leftovers from the fridge does not pose a health risk, in stark contrast to the Mainland China nuns' views. Nuns from Tongjiao Si, Zizhulin and Pushou Si were concerned that keeping food in the fridge might give rise to harmful bacteria.

**Pushou Si:** The Buddha laid down this rule for health reasons; to improve his followers' physical condition by not eating food which had been kept overnight[.]

**Tongjiao Si:** [F]ood kept overnight could go off in hot weather in India. Eating food kept overnight is hygienic, though, now that we have a fridge.

**Zizhulin:** Whether we have a fridge to keep food fresh is not the point – and food kept in the fridge usually contains unhealthy bacteria.

Interestingly, it can be seen that my informant nuns in Taiwan and Mainland China had opposing views on storing food in the fridge in terms of hygiene and health. In addition, some of my Mainland informant nuns considered that this rule is strongly related to religious practice for the prevention of attachment. Nuns from Pushou Si, Tongjiao Si and Zizhulin emphasised that not keeping food overnight prevents monastic members from becoming attached to food. Since most Buddhist monastics are ordinary people on a religious path who have not yet attained enlightenment, their greed may tempt them if food is kept overnight in their living quarters:

**Pushou Si:** This rule has several layers of meaning: not eating leftover food makes us less greedy. For example, if I eat delicious food today, I may crave more of it tomorrow, giving rise to greedy thoughts. In religious practice, it is crucial for monastic practitioners to avoid attachment and obsessive thoughts ... When we go to the dining hall, we eat food to maintain our body but

without any thoughts of food. I eat whatever food is provided in the dining hall. The Buddha's intention in establishing rules for his disciples was to help them to avoid committing offences related to desire, hatred and ignorance[.]

**Tongjiao Si:** The Buddha set up this rule to prevent monastic members being distracted by thoughts of food[.]

**Zizhulin:** The Buddha laid down this rule to prevent monastic members being distracted by food. We are ordinary people and may still think about eating food if there is some in the room. The greedy mind is an obstacle to religious practice, so the Buddha's rule protects us from conditions leading to desire[.]

These excerpts clearly show my Mainland informants from various nunneries considered that the rule is crucial to their religious practice for the sake of eradicating greed.

Discussion of the precept of not keeping food overnight elicits a range of opinions and practices about rule-observance, and is just one typical example of the variety of opinion that exists in current Chinese Buddhist institutions. On the one hand, the two broad types of monastic institutions (i.e. *Vinaya*-centric and non-*Vinaya*-centric) play key roles in influencing how precepts are followed. On the other hand, the different interpretations and practices my interviewees described also reflect a condition common to both contemporary and historical Chinese Buddhist circles: there is no absolute or prescribed way of observing *Vinaya*. Indeed, as Master Hsing Yun, the founder of Foguangshan, aptly comments:

When I was young, I noticed that the most serious problem for Buddhism is [that it may become] a community without systems, which leads to *disunity* when each Buddhist monastic does things in his or her own way. Problems arise when there are no regulations about robes, going forth, tonsure, ordination and education. (Hsing Yun Shih, 2009: 29)

The rule against keeping food overnight is one example of how things can be considered in different perspectives regarding the absence of standardisation in many aspects of Chinese Buddhism. I have personally observed that this disunity in rule-observance sometimes causes members of various monasteries

to privately discuss their disapproval of the way others follow *Vinaya*. This is hinted at by Hsing Yun as a potentially serious problem of unity and harmony for the development of Chinese Buddhism, the full scope of which remains an open question worthy of further exploration in Buddhist studies.

## 6. Conclusion

My fieldwork observations and interview data confirm that differences indeed exist between Taiwanese and Mainland Chinese monastic communities with regard to Buddhist precepts. Nevertheless, there was a significant consensus among my informant nuns in Taiwan and Mainland China regarding the general conception of the precepts. For example, nearly all respondents, except those in Luminary nunnery told me that the laity should not read or research *Vinaya*. The majority of nuns who participated in the study stressed the importance of understanding the spirit and background of each precept so that it could be observed flexibly. It was likewise generally agreed that nuns were required to follow more rules than monks because of females' physical weakness and other sex-specific characteristics, and the Buddha's concomitant wish to protect them; and no nun in the study regarded the greater number of rules as discriminatory or otherwise unfair. And it was widely believed that, in addition to the precepts established by the Buddha, monastic members should respect and follow local customs and practices so as to avoid local laypeople's criticism.

Some minor precepts could not be observed to the letter, partly due to the type of institution or its immediate cultural/geographical context. Nuns in Taiwan and Mainland China shared broadly similar views on such issues, but a comparison of the rhetoric of their responses reveals a subtle point: Mainland nuns tend to interpret these minor rules more traditionally and conservatively, while Taiwanese ones took a more open and flexible stance, a nuance in the interview data that should not be overlooked.

As for the actual practice of certain precepts (e.g. not going out or sleeping alone, or not keeping food overnight), we have seen that the various opinions and approaches crucially depend on each institution's internal policy as much as individuals' personal convictions and choices. Certainly, the present research on precept observance has confirmed that every informant nun and each institution maintains a somewhat different approach to *Vinaya*, and each such unique approach has the potential to cause ill-feeling within the Buddhist community, as would happen within any human institution. This also leads us to rethink the

degree to which Buddhist monastics can be flexible in observing the rules before they are questioned or challenged by members of different traditions. Indeed, a dispute over whether to observe the precepts flexibly or not still exists between modernists (Humanistic practitioners) and traditionalists (non-Humanistic ones). As Chandler has noted,

Along with downplaying asceticism, Humanistic Buddhists believe that treading the middle path implies a certain openness to altering aspects of Buddhist practice, especially those concerning monastic life that, having been rendered outmoded by current circumstances, have become obstacles to benefiting others. Any literalist interpretation of the Vinaya or of tradition, in fact, is said to contradict the founding teacher's exhortation that each person is to think for himself or herself so as to respond appropriately to every new situation. This understanding of how to emulate the Buddha has the advantage of allowing for flexibility. The hermeneutical challenge is to determine the degree to which such flexibility is permissible (2006: 186).

Monastic members who do not follow Humanistic Buddhism accuse those affiliated with Foguangshan, DDM, and Tzu-Chi<sup>76</sup> (all Humanistic Buddhist institutes) of being lax in the practice of monastic discipline, and thereby of weakening the whole edifice of Buddhist monastic ethics; they also specifically reject the Humanists' claim that the latter's "adaptation of precepts and custom in light of current conditions" is acceptable (Chandler, 2006: 186–187). The Humanistic groups refute the charge, saying that "it is easy to claim complete purity for oneself when one remains behind shut doors and therefore has almost no interaction with others" (ibid). This Humanist counter-claim echoes Welch's compelling remark: "In general, observance of the rules was in inverse proportion to contact with the populace" (1967: 128), a view which partly resonates with my fieldwork results. Inevitably, a gap exists between ideal religious practice and daily life in a monastic community, unless a monastic member chooses to live a completely detached life in the

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<sup>76</sup> The Tzu Chi Foundation (or Ciji Gongde hui) 慈濟功德會, founded by Ven. Cheng Yen in Taiwan, has been recognised as the largest non-governmental and international humanitarian organisation for worldwide social welfare and charity. For details see C. Julia Huang (2009) and Yao (2012).

forest or some other isolated place where s/he has little or no contact with people or society.<sup>77</sup> In short, no consensus on the degree of flexibility that should be discerned in *Vinaya* rules has yet been reached even within Taiwan's Buddhist communities, let alone in Chinese Buddhist contexts across both Taiwan and Mainland China.

## Acknowledgement

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## Abbreviations

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

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<sup>77</sup> Yu-Chen Li states that Nanlin Nunnery's location in a remote mountain area of Taiwan enables its members to maintain Buddhist asceticism without being interrupted by "demanding urban life" (2000: 145).

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## ***Samādhi* Power in Imperial Japan**

*Brian Victoria*

### **Abstract**

*Samādhi* and the mental power associated with it form the foundation upon which the Zen school is built. Without *samādhi*, “Zen”, i.e. “meditation”, would become just another “mental health” practice rather than the basis for a profound realization of the true nature of the self. Yet, inasmuch as this long-acknowledged mental power constitutes an indivisible and integral part of *samādhi*, there is the ever-present danger that it can be misused or abused by oneself and/or others. The abuse described in this article, while rooted in premodern Japan, was most clearly visible during the period of Japan’s modern military aggression, beginning with the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 and extending through Japan’s ultimate defeat in the Asia-Pacific War on August 15, 1945. During this period, *samādhi* power was, among other uses, employed to enhance the meditator’s ability to kill others. This article focuses on the abuse of *samādhi* power within Imperial Japan (1868-1945) with the express hope that once exposed and understood, its abuse will never be repeated.

## Introduction

The distinguished scholar of religion at the University of Chicago, Emeritus Professor Martin Marty, described one aspect of religion as follows:

Positive thinkers and public relations officers for the faiths would repudiate this notion or evade the fact. They want religion to be nothing but gospel, good news. Apologists for the faiths usually minimize the distress that can come with religion or that religion can produce. You will not read about the destructive element in religious impulses in the advertisements for the church of your choice. Yet if the pursuit of truth is still to be cherished as a foundational theme in the academy, one must note the feature of religion that keeps it on the front page and on prime time: it kills. Or if, as the gun lobbies say of weapons—that they do not kill: people do—one must say of religion that if it does not kill, many of its forms and expressions motivate people to kill. Experts on what motivates the scores of wars or, as some would have it, “tribal conflicts.” today know that not only do many belligerent partisans wear names like “Protestant” and “Catholic,” “Shi’ite” and “Sunni,” “Jewish” and “Sikh,” but leaders and followers alike fire on the demonized Other, the enemy, in the name of God or the gods.<sup>1</sup>

In reflecting on Marty’s comments the first thing to note is that while he states that it is “religion” that kills, the examples he provides do not include Buddhism. Why not?

Buddhists, this author among them, would like to believe that Buddhism is the one great exception to the rule that religion kills, for the very first precept both lay and clerical Buddhists commit themselves to observe is “not to kill”. Therefore Buddhists unconditionally pledge not to engage in killing, especially of their fellow human beings. Yet knowledgeable readers know that, unfortunately, this is not true.

Historically speaking, there have been many instances in Buddhism’s long history in Asia where people identifying themselves as Buddhists have not only killed but asserted their deadly actions were in accord with the Buddha *Dharma*. To give but one example, in Chapter Five of the Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇa*

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<sup>1</sup> Marty, “An Exuberant Adventure: The Academic Study and Teaching of Religion,” p. 14

*Sūtra*, Shākyamuni Buddha is quoted as instructing Bodhisattva Kāśyapa: “The reward for protecting Wonderful Dharma is extremely great and innumerable. O good man! Because of this, those *upāsakas* [laymen] who protect *Dharma* should *take the sword and staff* and protect such a *bhikṣu* [male cleric] who guards *Dharma*.”<sup>2</sup> (Emphasis mine)

However, the focus of this article is not on the larger question of the relationship of Buddhism to violence and/or war. Instead, it looks at just one particular use (or abuse) of Buddhism in Imperial Japan (1868-1945) in support of Japanese aggression in Asia and beyond. It focuses on the employment of meditation-derived *samādhi* power (*zenjō-riki*, 禪定力) in support of war and violence in modern Japan, most especially, but not exclusively, during the Asia-Pacific War (1937-45). In addition, this article addresses the question of whether this use of *samādhi* power can be said to have been a “misuse” or “abuse” of that power.

### ***Samādhi* Defined**

Let us begin with a definition of *samādhi*. *Samādhi* refers to a state of meditative consciousness. The term *samādhi* derives from the Sanskrit root *sam-ā-dhā*, which means 'to collect' or 'bring together' and is often translated as 'concentration' or 'unification of mind'. In early Buddhist texts, *samādhi* is associated with the term *samatha* (calm abiding). In the *suttas* (Skt., *sūtras*), *samādhi* is defined as one-pointedness of mind, a meditative absorption attained through the practice of meditation, i.e. *dhyāna* (Kor. Seon, J. Zen, Ch. Chan).

*Dhyāna*, a core Buddhist practice commonly translated as meditation, is a state of ‘no mind’, referring to a series of cultivated states of mind which lead to a state of perfect equanimity and awareness (*upekkhā-sati-pārisuddhi*). Upon entering into *samādhi*, the mind becomes still, yet totally aware of the present moment: a one-pointedness of mind. As such, *samādhi* also lies at the heart of the last of the eight elements of the Buddhist Noble Eightfold Path.

Because “one-pointedness of mind” is an intrinsic and indivisible part of *samādhi*, the *mental* power produced by this concentrated state of mind is a potent force for understanding the nature of the self in the hands of an experienced meditator. Given their indivisible nature, the terms *samādhi* and *samādhi* power are used interchangeably in this article.

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<sup>2</sup> Yamamoto, Kosho, trans. The *Mahayana Mahaparinirvana Sutra*, Chapter Five, p. 39, available on the Web at: <http://info.stiltij.nl/publiek/meditatie/soetras/mahaparinirvana.pdf>.

### ***Samādhi* Power Weaponized**

For those who have experienced it, *samādhi* is a luminous experience that seems to the meditator to be beyond time and place, though it is definitely not a trance-like experience in which the meditator is transmitted to a supernatural realm. In fact, if anything, the meditator is more fully “present” in the realm of the “here and now” than ever before. Not only that, the meditator has a wonderful sense of “oneness” with his or her surroundings. Thus, the use of anything related to *samādhi* to harm another sentient being, would appear, on the face of it, to be utterly impossible.

Nevertheless, before and during the Asia-Pacific War Japanese Zen leaders, including D. T. Suzuki, often wrote about this meditation-derived mental power, emphasizing the effectiveness of *samādhi* power (*J. jōriki*) in battle. On the military side, one of the first men to write about the importance of *samādhi* power was Vice Admiral Yamaji Kazuyoshi (1869-1963). Yamaji wrote a book entitled *Zen no Ōyō* (“The Practical Application of Zen”), in which he described how he put his many years of Zen training to practical use during the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5). He discussed *samādhi* in a section of his book entitled “The Realm of *Samādhi*” as follows:

In Zen there is something called “*samādhi*”. This is a realm where there is neither “self” nor “others”, neither mountains nor rivers; the entirety of one’s whole mind becomes the character *mu* (*muji*), [the sound of] one hand (*sekishu*). If you do not endeavor to sit quietly in this realm you will never realize enlightenment.

At first, I was unable to unify my spirit by becoming the character *mu* or [the sound of] one hand for even three to five minutes. I was attacked by various illusory and worldly thoughts from the front, rear, left and right. However, as I continued to practice, it gradually became easier to enter *samādhi*. And after sitting quietly in the realm of *samādhi* I was finally able to penetrate my assigned *kōan*, achieve great peace of mind (i.e. become enlightened) and experience a feeling of great exultation. It was then I realized the mental state where “throughout heaven and earth I alone am honored”.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The words “throughout heaven and earth I alone am honored” are alleged to have first been

In the midst of war, each time I sat quietly and entered *samādhi* a wise plan would suddenly appear. Furthermore, the moment I saw the enemy a countermeasure would emerge. Still further, when faced with various problems in daily life, I found my practice of *zazen* very helpful to their resolution.<sup>4</sup>

In this passage, we learn of the wide usage enjoyed by *samādhi* power. First, it allowed the Vice Admiral to devise a “wise plan” even in the midst of war. Moreover, when the enemy appeared, *samādhi* power facilitated “countermeasure(s)”, i.e. countermeasures to *more effectively kill the enemy*. And even in “daily life” *samādhi* power was a valuable resource for solving various problems. If not precisely a “man for all seasons”, *samādhi* was definitely a “power for all seasons”.

With the advent of the Asia-Pacific War (1937-45), meditation-derived *samādhi* power became even more prominent, as demonstrated by the life and death of Zen adept Lt. Col Sugimoto Gorō (1900-1937). Sugimoto died on the battlefield in China in 1937, and his Rinzai Zen Master Yamazaki Ekijū (1882-1961) offered the following eulogy:

A grenade fragment hit him in the left shoulder. He seemed to have fallen down but then got up again. Although he was standing, one could not hear his commands. He was no longer able to issue commands with that husky voice of his. . . . Yet he was still standing, holding his sword in one hand as a prop. Both legs were slightly bent, and he was facing in an easterly direction [toward the imperial palace]. It appeared that he had saluted though his hand was now lowered to about the level of his mouth. The blood flowing from his mouth covered his watch. . . . From long ago, the true sign of a Zen priest had been his ability to pass away while doing *zazen*. Those who were completely and thoroughly enlightened, however, . . . could die calmly in a standing position. . . . This was possible due to *samādhi* power...

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spoken by Shākyamuni Buddha shortly after his birth. In quoting these words the author is claiming that he became enlightened at that time, i.e. he became a “Buddha” (*lit.* an awakened one).

<sup>4</sup>Yamaji, *Zen no Ōyō* (“The Practical Use of Zen”), pp. 29-30. I wish to express my appreciation to Alice Freeman for having introduced me to this book.



Although it can be said that his life of thirty-eight years was all too short, for someone who has truly obtained *samādhi* power, long and short are not important. The great, true example of Sugimoto Gorō was that of one who had united with emptiness, embodying true loyalty (to the emperor) and service to the state. I am convinced he is one of those who, should he be reborn seven times over, would reverently work to destroy enemies of the emperor (written on the 11<sup>th</sup> of February of the 2,598<sup>th</sup> year of the imperial reign) [1938].<sup>5</sup>

These descriptions by Yamazaki make it clear just how wide-ranging *samādhi* power was believed to be. It provided Sugimoto with the same power as that of ancient Zen masters, i.e. the power to choose one's posture at the time of death even when mortally wounded. Additionally, it facilitated a state of true loyalty to the emperor such that an early death on the battlefield was "not important". In fact, Sugimoto's death was regarded as no more than a prelude to his being reborn and repeatedly killed in loyal service to emperor and state.<sup>6</sup> Needless to say, Rinzai Zen Master Yamazaki Ekijū expressed no concern for the "all too short" lives of slain enemy soldiers.

As for Sugimoto himself, he described the importance of his meditation-based Zen practice as follows:

The reason that Zen is important for soldiers is that all Japanese, especially soldiers, must live in the spirit of the unity of sovereign and subjects, eliminating their ego and getting rid of their self. It is exactly the awakening to the nothingness (*mu*) of Zen that is the fundamental spirit of the unity of sovereign and subjects. Through my practice of Zen I am able to get rid of my ego. In facilitating the accomplishment of this, Zen becomes, at it is, the true spirit of the imperial military.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Victoria, *Zen at War*, pp. 125-26.

<sup>6</sup> The reference here is to Kusanoki Masashige (1294-1336), a 14th-century samurai and devout Buddhist, who fought for Emperor Go-Daigo in an attempt to wrest rulership of Japan away from the Kamakura shogunate. In post-Meiji Restoration Japan, the Japanese government promoted Kusanoki as the ideal of *samurai* loyalty and a model for all Japanese soldiers. According to legend, when his army was completely surrounded, with only 50 of his original 700 horsemen still alive, Kusanoki and his brother pledged to be reborn seven times to serve the emperor.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Victoria, *Zen at War*, p. 124.



The unit officers were all assembled in the martial arts hall to practice *zazen*.

Note that Sugimoto’s claim Zen practice makes it possible “to get rid of my ego” is not simply the distortion of an Imperial military officer. In January 1937, for example, Ishihara Shummyō, a Sōtō Zen priest and editor of the Buddhist magazine *Daihōrin*, wrote:

I believe that if one is called upon to die, one should not be the least bit agitated. On the contrary, one should be in a realm where something called “oneself” does not intrude even slightly. Such a realm is no different from that derived from the practice of Zen.<sup>8</sup>

Unlike Yamazaki, his Zen master, Sugimoto did not emphasize the importance of *samādhi* power in describing what he had gained from Zen meditation. Instead, he credited his acquisition of egolessness to Zen, an accomplishment that allowed him to “live in the spirit of the unity of sovereign and subjects”. And thanks to this, Zen became nothing less than “the true spirit of the imperial military”.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.



*The 'god of war' (J. gunshin), Imperial Army Lt. Col. Sugimoto Gorō.*

Had the preceding quotations appeared in a Zen sectarian publication, one might question their effect on the Japanese public as a whole. However, these quotations were included in a book entitled *Great Duty (Taigi)*, of which more than 100,000 copies were printed. Okuno Takeo, then a middle school student, described the effect this had:

By 1943 and 1944, the war situation in the Pacific War had gradually worsened. Middle school students began to read Sugimoto Gorō's *Great Duty* with great enthusiasm.... By word of mouth we got the message, "Read *Great Duty*, it's terrific! It teaches what true reverence for the emperor really is." I was then attending Azabu middle school [in Tokyo].

In 1943 my friends and I took turns in reading a single copy of *Great Duty* that we had among us. As a result, we decided to form a student club we called the Bamboo-Mind Society (Chikushin-kai) to put into practice the spirit of *Great Duty*....

We brought in instructors from the outside and held study meetings. The same kind of *Great Duty* study circles sprang up in all the middle schools in Tokyo. We then started to communicate among ourselves.... I later learned that in almost all middle schools throughout Japan *Great Duty* had been fervently read and student study societies had been created.<sup>9</sup>

As this quotation reveals, Sugimoto's book had a major impact on Japanese youth, for it taught them "true reverence for the emperor." True reverence was, of course, acquired through the egolessness derived from Zen meditation, not to mention semi-miraculous *samādhi* power. Was the influence of *Great Duty* limited to youth alone?

Although a printing of more than 100,000 copies suggests the book was influential, it is impossible to accurately gauge its impact. What can be said is that the book included endorsements from two Imperial Army generals as well as a high-ranking government official. They clearly had no difficulty with the book's Zen-related content. In this they were no different than school officials throughout the nation. Why this broad support for what was clearly a publication promoting a sectarian viewpoint? Moreover, the publication dared to state that Zen was "the true spirit of the imperial military"!

At least part of the explanation is provided by Leonard Humphries in his book, *The Way of the Heavenly Sword*:

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

[In Japan] the overriding lesson of the [Russo-Japanese] war appeared to be the decisive role of morale or spirit in combat. Japan's centuries-old samurai tradition had strongly emphasized the importance of the intangible qualities of the human spirit (*seishin*) in warfare, and this war served to reestablish their primacy.... After fifty years of borrowing from the West, the Army, like the people, was now relieved and proud to find new relevance in the nation's traditional values.<sup>10</sup>

Humphries' quote is interesting for a number of reasons. As we have seen, Zen's connection to the Russo-Japanese War was clear, including both Zen leaders and major military figures. In the ensuing decades, this relationship grew ever stronger for the reason that Humphries mentions, i.e. "the decisive role of morale or spirit in combat." Partial to Zen as always, D.T. Suzuki was in complete agreement with Humphries:

Zen discipline is simple, direct, self-reliant, self-denying, and this ascetic tendency goes well with the fighting spirit. The fighter is to be always single-minded with just one object in view: to fight and not to look either backward or sidewise. To go straightforward in order to crush the enemy is all that is necessary for him.... Good fighters are generally ascetics or stoics, which means to have an iron will. When needed, Zen supplies them with this.<sup>11</sup>

One point not included in the quotes by Humphries and Suzuki is that it was the officer corps of the Imperial Army that considered itself to be the rightful inheritors, the modern embodiment, of the *samurai* class. Having read dozens of descriptions of Imperial military-related Zen practice, the author can attest to the fact that the practitioners themselves were always officers, and senior ranking officers at that. This is not surprising in that the *samurai* were an elite class within Japanese society. Moreover, officers in the Imperial military, especially high-ranking officers, often came from former *samurai* families. Therefore, if the spirit of Japan's "centuries-old *samurai* tradition" were to be carried on it would be done by the officer corps, especially its leaders.

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<sup>10</sup> Humphries, *The Way of the Heavenly Sword*, p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture*, p. 35.

This does not mean, however, that Japan's lower-ranked, conscripted soldiers, mostly from a rural background, were without a Buddhist means of support for their fighting spirit, and more importantly, willingness to die. Just as in premodern Japan, the rural population remained, for the most part, adherents of the faith-based, True Pure Land (Shin) sect. It was the Russo-Japanese War that first demonstrated to the officer corps just how important this faith-based form of Buddhism was to Japan's war effort. Imperial Army General Hayashi Senjūrō (1876-1943) wrote:

At the time of the Russo-Japanese War, the Ninth Division formed the center of General Nogi's lines as we advanced on Port Arthur. During the initial attack the division was almost entirely destroyed, losing some four out of six thousand soldiers. Furthermore, due to the enemy's fierce bombardment, we were unable to rescue the hundreds of casualties left on the battlefield for some seven days. Many of these casualties were severely wounded and in great pain, but not a single one cried out for help. Instead, they recited the name of Amida Buddha in chorus, even as they died. I was deeply moved by the power of the Buddhist faith as revealed in these soldiers' actions.... When people possessing religious faith stand at the verge of death, they are truly great.<sup>12</sup>

If the preceding is spoken from the viewpoint of a military leader, Shin sect-affiliated scholar-priest Ōsuga Shūdō (1876-1962) provided a doctrinal explanation of the Shin sect soldier's conduct on the battlefield:

Reciting the name of Amida Buddha makes it possible to march onto the battlefield firm in the belief that death will bring rebirth in paradise. Being prepared for death, one can fight strenuously, knowing that it is just a fight, a fight employing the compassionate mind of the Buddha, the fight of a loyal subject. Truly, what could be more fortunate than knowing that, should you die, a welcome awaits in the Pure Land [of Amida Buddha].<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Victoria, *Zen at War*, p. 31.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

Given this background, it will come as no surprise to learn that Shin-affiliated soldiers would, up through Japan's defeat in August 1945, launch their often suicidal attacks on enemy positions repeatedly shouting "*Namu Amida Butsu*" (I take refuge in Amida Buddha). While the conscripted, lower-ranked soldiers of the Shin sect were not expected to have the leadership abilities of the Zen-trained officer corps, the two Buddhist groups had in common the willingness to die.

### Zen in Premodern Japan

Another point Humphries made was that "Japan's centuries-old *samurai* tradition had strongly emphasized the importance of the intangible qualities of the human spirit (*seishin*) in warfare." If so, did Zen play a role in promoting the importance of the human spirit in warfare?

Inasmuch as D.T. Suzuki was a strong proponent of the Zen connection to the *samurai* spirit, he provided numerous examples demonstrating this connection. For example, Suzuki relates a story set less than one hundred years after the Zen sect's introduction to Japan at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It concerns Hōjō Tokimune (1251-1284), the eighth regent (*J. shikken*) of the Kamakura shogunate (military government). Tokimune, like his father Tokiyori, was a devoted Zen practitioner. In 1279 he invited Mugaku Sogen (Ch. Wuxue Zuyuan, 1226-1286) from the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279) to become the abbot of Kenchōji temple in Kamakura.

Not long after Mugaku's arrival, in 1281, Kublai Khan ordered his troops to invade Japan a second time, having failed on their first attempt in 1274. Upon receiving word that the Mongol soldiers were on their way, Tokimune went to Mugaku (aka Bukkō Kokushi) and said:

"The greatest event of my life is at last here."

Bukkō asked, "How do you plan to face it?"

Tokimune uttered "*Kwatsu!*" as if he were frightening away all the enemies actually before him.<sup>14</sup>

Bukkō was pleased and said, "Truly, a lion's child roars like a lion!"<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Kwatsu* (aka *Katsu*) is a piercing shout, thought to reveal the awakened state (*J., satori*) of the Zen master, and/or to induce the initial awakening experience in a student. It gives concrete form to the Zen belief that "reality" cannot be expressed with words and letters.

<sup>15</sup> Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture*, p. 41.



When Tokimune died, Mugaku eulogized him as a *bodhisattva* whose Zen practice had led to his enlightenment. For his part, Suzuki claimed that Tokimune's life demonstrated that "Zen is for the warrior."<sup>16</sup> True, Suzuki did not specifically attribute Tokimune's fearless attitude to *samādhi* power, but inasmuch as acquisition of this power is an integral part of Zen meditation, there can be no doubt that Tokimune's possession of this power contributed to, or may even have enabled, his fearlessness.

It is noteworthy that Mugaku was a Chinese priest, a fact that suggests the employment of Zen meditation in preparation for battle was not excluded from the Chinese Chan (Zen) tradition. Mugaku's acceptance, however, may also have been connected to the fact that, while yet in China, Mongol soldiers had nearly killed him at the time they invaded Southern Song.<sup>17</sup> Thus it would hardly be surprising if he harbored more than a little antipathy toward the Mongols and the prospect of once again coming under their control. After all, had the Mongols succeeded in conquering Japan, where else could Mugaku have fled?

A second illustration provided by Suzuki includes the great *samurai* general of 16<sup>th</sup> century Japan, Uesugi Kenshin (1530-1578). Kenshin instructed his retainers as follows:

Those who cling to life die, and those who defy death live. The essential thing is the mind. Look into this mind and firmly take hold of it and you will understand that there is something in you which is above birth-and-death and which is neither drowned in water nor burned by fire. I have myself gained an insight into this *Samādhi* and know what I am telling you. Those who are reluctant to give up their lives and embrace death are not true warriors.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>17</sup> In 1275 the Mongols were completing their conquest of China, and enemy soldiers scoured the countryside looking to suppress pockets of resistance. A group of these raided Mugaku's temple, intending to put any monks they found to death as they had elsewhere. Although the other monks fled the temple, Mugaku remained. When a Mongol soldier drew his sword to kill him, Mugaku didn't move an inch. Instead, he recited the following poem in a loud voice: "Throughout heaven and earth there is not a piece of ground where a single stick can be inserted; I am glad all things are empty, including myself and the world; Honored be the sword, three feet long, wielded by the great Mongol swordsmen; For it is like cutting a spring breeze in a flash of lightning." Hearing this, the soldier was touched and sheathed his sword. He expressed his respect for Mugaku and left.

<sup>18</sup> Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture*, p. 56.

In this quotation, Suzuki is expressing Kenshin's belief that it was hesitation on the battlefield, stemming from fear of death, that would lead the warrior to lose his life by providing his opponent with an opening to strike him down. *Samādhi* power, on the other hand, supplied fearlessness in battle, i.e. transcendence of "birth and death", leading to victory. Suzuki, like virtually all Zen leaders of wartime Japan, agreed that the Zen practice of seated, cross-legged meditation (J. *zazen*), was the fountainhead of the mental power derived from *samādhi*, a power that was as available to modern Japanese soldiers as it had once been to *samurai* warriors.

Finally, Hakuin Ekaku (1686-1768), the great revitalizer of the Rinzai Zen sect in Japan, first provided Zen practitioners with an effective method for entering into the state of *samādhi*: "Straighten your spine and let your body become well settled. Then you must begin *susokukan* (breath-counting concentration). Among innumerable ways to enter *samādhi*, breath counting is the best."<sup>19</sup>

For Hakuin the state of *samādhi* was open to any Zen practitioner, yet he was convinced the warrior class had a distinct advantage in accomplishing what he considered to be "true meditation". Toward the end of a letter written to one of his feudal lord patrons, Hakuin wrote:

In my later years, I have come to the conclusion that the advantage in accomplishing true meditation lies distinctly in favor of the warrior class. A warrior must from the beginning to the end be physically strong. In his attendance to his duties and in his relationships with others, the utmost punctiliousness and propriety are required... With this exact and proper deportment, true meditation stands forth with an overflowing splendor. Mounted on a sturdy horse, the warrior can ride forth to face an uncountable horde of enemies as though he were riding into a place empty of people. The valiant undaunted expression on his face reflects his practice of peerless, true, uninterrupted meditation sitting. Meditating in this way, the warrior can accomplish in one month what it takes a monk a year to do; in three days he can open up for himself benefits that would take a monk one hundred days.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Hakuin, *Rohatsu Exhortations*, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Yampolsky, trans. *The Zen Master Hakuin*, p. 69.

Needless to say, Hakuin expressed no concern about, let alone opposition to, the deaths of an “uncountable horde of enemies”. As the two previous examples have shown, the Zen sect had, from its introduction to Japan, expressed little or no concern for the very first precept all Buddhists, both lay and cleric, pledge to follow, i.e., not to take life. Of course, a good argument can be made that Zen, or even Buddhism as a whole, would not have survived in a warrior-dominated society like Japan had it maintained its doctrinal commitment not to kill. Zen’s longstanding embrace of the warrior class led, during the later Asia-Pacific War, to a flood of comments by Zen leaders like this one by Sōtō Zen Master Harada Sōgaku (1870-1961):

[If ordered to] march: tramp, tramp, or shoot: bang, bang. This is the manifestation of the highest Wisdom [of Enlightenment]. The unity of Zen and war of which I speak extends to the farthest reaches of the holy war [now under way]. Verse: I bow my head to the floor in reverence for those whose nobility is without equal.<sup>21</sup>

In postwar years, Harada became well-known in Zen circles in the US for his dedication to the practice of *zazen*. His well-known American disciple, Philip Kapleau, praised Harada as follows: “Probably more than anyone else in his time, he revitalized, through his profound spiritual insight, the teachings of Dōgen-zenji, which had gradually been drained of their vigor through the shallow understanding of priests and scholars of the Sōtō sect in whose hands their exposition had hitherto rested.”<sup>22</sup> While Harada’s interpretation of meditation may have been quite “vigorous”, not unlike that of his premodern Zen predecessors, the fundamental nature of his wartime vigor was dedicated to one thing and one thing only – the application of Zen meditation to the battlefield – and death.

### **Samādhi Power as Terrorism**

Before attempting to consider to what extent the application of *samādhi* power to the battlefield is Buddhist, there is one further use of *samādhi* power in modern Japan that deserves to be adduced, i.e. Buddhist-related acts of terrorism in 1930s Japan. As is well known, the first victims of Hitler and the Nazis’ rise to

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Victoria, *Zen at War*, p. 137.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 135-36.

power were not foreign nations or even German Jews. It was Hitler's political enemies, especially but not exclusively German communists, socialists and other predominantly domestic forces who dared oppose Hitler and the Nazis. Sometimes these forces were imprisoned and murdered in concentration camps and at other times they were murdered in the streets or at their homes in domestic incidents of Nazi-sponsored acts of terror.

Something similar occurred in 1930s Japan. Thus *samādhi* power was utilized by Zen-trained Buddhist terrorists of that era. For example, Onuma Shō (1911-1978) assassinated Japan's former finance minister, Inoue Junnosuke (1869-1932) in February 1932. At his trial Onuma stated:

After starting my practice of *zazen*, I entered a state of *samādhi* the likes of which I had never experienced before. I felt my spirit become unified, really unified, and when I opened my eyes from their half-closed meditative position I noticed the smoke from the incense curling up and touching the ceiling. At this point it suddenly came to me — I would be able to carry out [the assassination] that night.

Quotations like the above cannot but give further urgency to the question, should the employment of *samādhi* power in warfare and killing, including assassination, be considered a legitimate expression of the Buddha *Dharma*? Did Shākyamuni Buddha, in his many teachings, fail to address this question?

### **Samādhi Power in Mahāyāna**

In determining whether *samādhi* power's connection to violence and warfare is a legitimate expression of the Buddha *Dharma*, let us first look at the written record, i.e. Buddhist *sūtras*. Inasmuch as the Zen sect is part of the Mahāyāna school of Buddhism, the question is, are there any *sūtras* in this school that address the topic? The answer is yes, there is at least one that appears to, i.e. the *Surāṅgama Sūtra*. Chapter Six of this *sūtra* contains the following passage:

The Buddha told Ananda, “You constantly hear me explain in the *Vinaya* that there are three unalterable aspects to cultivation. That is, collecting one's thoughts constitutes the precepts; from the precepts comes *samādhi*; and out of *samādhi* arises wisdom. *Samādhi* arises from precepts, and wisdom is revealed out of *samādhi*. These are called the Three Non-Outflow Studies.” . . .

Ananda, I permit the *Bhikshus* to eat five kinds of pure meat. This meat is actually a transformation brought into being by my spiritual powers. It basically has no life-force. You Brahmans live in a climate so hot and humid, and on such sandy and rocky land, that vegetables will not grow; therefore, I have had to assist you with spiritual powers and compassion. Because of the magnitude of this kindness and compassion, what you eat that tastes like meat is merely said to be meat; in fact, however, it is not. After my extinction, how can those who eat the flesh of living beings be called the disciples of Shakyā?

You should know that these people who eat meat may gain some awareness and may seem to be in *samādhi*, but they are all great *rākshasas* [demons]. When their retribution ends, they are bound to sink into the bitter sea of birth and death. They are not disciples of the Buddha. Such people as these kill and eat one another in a never-ending cycle. How can such people transcend the Triple Realm?

*When you teach people in the world to cultivate samādhi, they must also cut off killing.* This is the second clear and unalterable instruction on purity given by the Thus Come Ones and the Buddhas of the past, World Honored Ones.

Therefore, Ananda, if cultivators of Chan *samādhi* do not cut off killing, they are like one who stops up his ears and calls out in a loud voice, expecting no one to hear him. It is to wish to hide what is completely evident.

*Bodhisattvas* and *Bhikshus* who practice purity will not even step on grass in the pathway; even less will they pull it up with their hands. How can one with great compassion pick up the flesh and blood of living beings and proceed to eat his fill?<sup>23</sup> (Emphasis mine)

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<sup>23</sup> The English translation of this *sūtra* appears on the Webpage of the “City of Ten Thousand Buddhas,” available on the Web at: <http://www.cttbusa.org/shurangama/shurangama3.asp> (accessed January 8, 2017).

On the one hand, this Mahāyāna *sūtra* makes it clear that those who “cultivate *samādhi*, they must also cut off killing.” However, when read in context, it is equally clear that the proscription against killing refers, in this instance, to the killing and eating of animals. In other words, it serves to promote vegetarianism for Buddhist practitioners. However, the strict vegetarianism promoted in this *sūtra* is one reason it has long been regarded as apocryphal, i.e. originating in its present form in China inasmuch as strict vegetarianism was not required of Buddhist clerics in India. Be that as it may, while the author cannot claim to have conducted an exhaustive study, it appears there are no passages in this or other Mahāyāna *sūtras* that explicitly prohibit, or even warn against, the application of *samādhi* power to warfare and violence.

There are no doubt apologists of Mahāyāna Buddhism who would claim that whether one is discussing the *Surāṅgama Sūtra* or similar writings, the opposition contained in them to all forms of killing is plainly visible. In principle I agree with this position, but unfortunately I have seen wartime Japan’s allegedly fully enlightened Zen masters draw semantic distinctions concerning killing that reveal just how easily Buddhist doctrines that appear to prohibit killing can be employed *in support of* killing and destruction.

I have introduced above the Japanese Buddhist terrorist, Onuma Shō, who killed Japan’s former finance minister Inoue Junnosuke in 1932. Almost unbelievably, it was one of the Rinzai sect’s most highly respected Zen masters of that era, Yamamoto Gempō (1866-1961), abbot of Ryūtakuji, who testified during the subsequent trial in support of Onuma and his fellow band of terrorists. The band was headed by Yamamoto’s lay disciple, Inoue Nisshō (1886-1967), and popularly known as the “Blood Oath Corps” (J. *Ketsumeidan*). Yamamoto stated:

In light of the events that have befallen our nation of late, there is, apart from those who are selfish and evil, no fair and upright person who would criticize the accused for their actions in connection with the Blood Oath Corps and 15 May Incidents.<sup>24</sup> Since agreeing to appear in court on behalf of the defendants, I have received several

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<sup>24</sup> The May 15th Incident refers to the second stage of the Blood Oath Corps Incident, i.e., an attempted *coup d'état* in Japan, launched on May 15, 1932 by reactionary elements of the Imperial Japanese Navy, aided by cadets in the Imperial Japanese Army and civilian remnants of the Blood Oath Corps. The Incident centered on the assassination of Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi (1855-1932) by 11 young naval officers.

tens of letters. All of these letters, with but one exception, have expressed support for the defendants, identifying their actions as being at one with the national spirit. Notwithstanding this, however, it is utterly impossible to express by the spoken or written word the true meaning and intent of either Inoue or those allied with him in these two incidents.

No doubt there are those who would ask why, in light of his devotion to religion, a believer in Buddhism like Inoue would act as he did? This is especially true given that Buddhism attaches primary importance to social harmony as well as repaying the four debts of gratitude owed others and practising the ten virtues.<sup>25</sup>

It is true that if, motivated by an evil mind, someone should kill so much as a single ant, as many as one hundred and thirty-six hells await that person. This holds true not only in Japan, but for all the countries of the world. Yet, the Buddha, being absolute, has stated that *when there are those who destroy social harmony and injure the polity of the state, then even if they are called good men killing them is not a crime.*

Although all Buddhist statuary manifests the spirit of Buddha, there are no Buddhist statues, other than those of Shākyamuni Buddha and Amitābha Buddha, who do not grasp the sword. Even the guardian Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva holds, in his manifestation as a victor in war, a spear in his hand. Thus Buddhism, which has as its foundation the true perfection of humanity, has *no choice but to cut down even good people in the event that they seek to destroy social harmony.*<sup>26</sup> (Emphasis mine)

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<sup>25</sup> The four debts of gratitude are: 1) the debt of gratitude to be paid to one's father and mother; 2) the debt of gratitude to be paid to the ruler of the nation; 3) the debt of gratitude to be paid to all living beings; and 4) the debt of gratitude to be paid to the three treasures [the Buddha, the *Dharma*, and the *Sangha*]. The ten virtues are: 1) No killing; 2) No stealing;

3) No improper sexual activity; 4) No lying; 5) No slandering; 6) No harsh words; 7) No gossip; 8) No coveting; 9) No aversion; 10) No incorrect views.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Victoria, *Zen War Stories*, pp. 216-1



On the one hand, Yamamoto sought to preserve the Buddhist precept forbidding killing by consigning those who killed with an evil mind so much as “a single ant” to one hundred and thirty-six hells. On the other hand, killing even good people who were guilty of destroying social harmony was “not a crime”.

Social harmony is a major goal of Confucianism. Placing preeminent value on this Confucian ethic allowed Yamamoto to abrogate the Buddhist precept not to kill. Readers acquainted with the wartime Zen masters introduced in *Zen at War* will realize that Yamamoto was only one of many who acted similarly. Nevertheless, only a few Zen masters went as far as Yamamoto did by invoking a Confucian-tainted understanding of the Buddha *Dharma* to support domestic acts of terrorism. Notwithstanding this, Yamamoto was so highly regarded by his fellow Zen masters of wartime Japan that he was selected to head what was then the unified Japanese Rinzai Zen sect in 1946, in the immediate aftermath of Japan’s defeat.

### **The Nature of *Samādhi* Power According to Zen Masters**

**In postwar Japan no Japanese Zen leaders have attempted to address, let alone critique, their wartime advocacy of *samādhi* power on the battlefield, let alone its use in domestic terrorism.** This is despite the fact that both the Rinzai and Sōtō Zen sects have issued statements, however belatedly, repenting their support of Japan’s wartime aggression.<sup>27</sup> This does not mean, however, that no Zen masters have addressed this question. However, those who have done so are all Chinese Chan masters.

For example, there is a record of questions and answers between Master Ling Yuan and Master Xuyun during a seven-day winter retreat held in 1947. The record is entitled, “When the Mind Is at One Point, There Is Nothing That Cannot Be Accomplished” and contains the following passage:

The Grand Master (Xuyun) asked me (Ling Yuan): “What method are you using?” I (Ling Yuan) said: “Reciting Buddha’s name and investigating Chan. Both Chan and Pure Land are practised.”

Question: “How can you be investigating Chan when you are reciting Buddha’s name?” I said: “When I recite the Buddha’s name, there is this doubt of who is reciting Buddha’s name hidden

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<sup>27</sup> For an introduction to these apologies, see Victoria, *Zen at War*; pp. ix-xii, 152-57.

in my consciousness. So even though I'm reciting Buddha's name, I'm also investigating Chan."

Question: "Are there wandering thoughts or not?" Answer: "When the right thought (method) are [sic] brought forth, often wandering thoughts are there along with it. However, when the right thought is put down neither are there wandering thoughts, pure and at ease."

The Grand Master said: "This pure and at ease state is laziness, (You're already off the method.) like a rock soaking in cold water. If one is like this, even if he practises for one thousand years it is still useless. One must bring forth the right thought with a bold and persevering mind investigating till the end and really see through just who is reciting the Buddha's name. Only then can the investigation be shattered. You should really practise with great determination."

Question: "I have heard that the Grand Master had entered *samādhi* for eighteen days in Chung Nan Mountain, was there a mind to enter? or no mind to enter?" Answer: "If there is a mind to enter *samādhi* then one cannot be in *samādhi*. If there's no mind to enter *samādhi* then it's like a statue made out of wood or mud. *When the mind is at one point, there's not a thing that cannot be accomplished.*"<sup>28</sup>

It would be ridiculous to claim that when Ven. Ling Yuan stated, ". . . there's not a thing that cannot be accomplished," he was alleging, let alone promoting, the use of *samādhi* on the battlefield. Yet, in light of the way in which *samādhi* power was employed on the battlefield in Japan, both past and present, it can be said that claiming that *anything* can be accomplished by virtue of *samādhi* opens the door to the *possibility* of its misuse or abuse.

A second, seemingly more relevant, example is provided by the Master Ling Yuan's disciple, Master Sheng-Yen (1930-2009) in a *Dharma* talk entitled, "Supernormal Power", delivered on June 9<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of 1985:

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<sup>28</sup> Master Ling Yuan and Master Xuyun, "When The Mind Is At One Point, There Is Nothing That Cannot Be Accomplished." The article consists of questions and answers between Master Ling Yuan and Master Xuyun in a seven-day winter retreat in 1947. Available on the Web at: <http://chancenter.org/cmc/2011/10/13/when-the-mind-is-at-one-point/> (accessed January 3, 2017)

The emphasis of the *Surāṅgama Sūtra* is on *samādhi* and the power of *samādhi*, the concentration of the mind. Through *samādhi*, the Buddha radiates his power, his teaching. Only through personal realization and experience attained through practice can *samādhi* be developed. Otherwise, it is impossible to achieve any real power or strength. Simply being associated with a powerful being or receiving the help of a deity is not enough. . . .

The practice and experience of *samādhi* generate mental power. This power does not necessarily have to be supernatural, but it can be. The important point is that *samādhi* can help increase mental power.

The practice of *dhyāna* and *samādhi* can clear a scattered mind, and bring it to a state of concentration. The mind can become so concentrated, in fact, that you can keep it on one single thought, *whatever thought you choose*. . . .

What you can do depends on the power of your *samādhi*. If you have enough power, you can hold a piece of iron or steel in your hand and turn it into gold, then you could take it to a jewelry store and exchange it for cash. All of you in business should learn this technique. Of course, *the consequences of trying something like this are that you will probably get yourself killed or end up killing someone else*.<sup>29</sup> (Emphasis mine)

According to Master Sheng-Yen, there is no question that great mental power can be acquired through the practice of *samādhi*. In fact, so great is this power that it is possible for the meditator to “hold a piece of iron or steel in your hand and turn it into gold.” Yet, Master Sheng-Yen warns that the consequence of doing so would “get yourself killed or end up killing someone else.” In the context of the Master’s talk, however, his reference to killing appears more as a warning against the misuse of supernatural powers than an admonition against using *samādhi* power as an instrument to kill. Thus, while both of these Chinese masters address, at least obliquely, the possibility of *samādhi* power’s

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<sup>29</sup> Master Sheng-Yen, “Supernormal Power.” Available on the Web at: <http://chancenter.org/cmc/1986/05/12/supernormal-power/> (accessed January 3, 2017).

connection to killing, when read in context their respective discussions have no connection to the use of this power on the battlefield.

### ***Samādhi* Power in Theravāda**

If neither Mahāyāna sūtras nor Zen/Chan masters address this question, does this mean that the Buddhist tradition as a whole has failed to recognize this topic? Fortunately, when examining the Theravāda textual tradition, it is clear that Shākyamuni Buddha was well aware of the possibility of misusing *samādhi* power and criticized it accordingly. Proof of this is found in the following passage from the *Gopaka Moggallāna Sutta* (“Moggallāna the Guardsman” *Sūtra*), contained in the *Majjhima Nikaya* (the Middle-length Discourses):

The Blessed One, brahmin, did not praise every type of meditation, nor did he condemn every type of meditation. What kind of meditation did the Blessed One not praise?

Here, brahmin, someone abides with his mind obsessed by sensual lust, a prey to sensual lust, and he does not understand as it actually is the escape from arisen sensual lust. While he harbours sensual lust within, he meditates, pre-meditates, out-meditates, and mis-meditates.

*He abides with his mind obsessed by ill will, a prey to ill will ...*

With his mind obsessed by sloth and torpor, a prey to sloth and torpor ...

With his mind obsessed by restlessness and remorse, a prey to restlessness and remorse ...

With his mind obsessed by doubt, a prey to doubt, and he does not understand as it actually is the escape from arisen doubt.

While he harbours doubt within, he meditates, pre-meditates, out-meditates, and mis-meditates.

The Blessed One did not praise that kind of meditation.<sup>30</sup>  
(Emphasis mine)

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<sup>30</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi & Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, trans. “Gopakamoggallāna Sutta: With Gopaka Moggallāna.” Available on the Web at: <http://www.wisdompubs.org/book/middle-length-discourses-buddha/selections/middle-length-discourses-108-gopakamoggallana-sutta>

Inasmuch as becoming “obsessed by ill will” is the *sine qua non* for killing another human being, it would appear to be self-evident that, according to this *sūtra*, Shākyamuni Buddha (aka the Blessed One) proscribed the use of meditation for the purpose of killing, among a number of other misuses. Despite this, however, it must be acknowledged there are Buddhists, even in the Theravāda school, who circumvent this prohibition by asserting it is permissible to kill if it is done *without ill will*.

For example, Capt. Somya Malasri, a former Thai monk, is currently one of two active duty US Army Buddhist chaplains. He explained the Buddhist rationale for warfare as follows:

A lot of people ask if a Buddhist can be a soldier because the first precept is no killing. The answer is yes. You can protect yourself or sacrifice yourself to do the righteous thing. You can sacrifice yourself to protect your country because if there's no country, there's no freedom and you cannot practise your religion. In Buddhism, if you go to war and kill others, it's your duty, not your intention to kill other people. If a person dies of your intention, and you have anger, that is wrong in Buddhism. *When soldiers go to war, they don't have any intention to kill others and they don't have hatred in their minds.*<sup>31</sup> (Emphasis mine)

On the one hand, it must be admitted there is doctrinal support for Capt. Malasri’s position. Significantly, the clearest expression of this support is to be found in the Mahāyāna school, not in Theravāda. The *Upāyakauśalya Sūtra* (“Skillful Means Sūtra”) contains a story about Shākyamuni Buddha in a former life, i.e. when he was yet a *bodhisattva* on his way to Buddhahood. As a ship’s captain, named “Greatly Compassionate”, Shākyamuni discerned that there was a robber onboard whose intent was to rob and kill all five hundred of the passengers who were themselves *bodhisattvas*. Although reluctant to take life, Shākyamuni ultimately decided to kill the robber. He did so, however, not only without ill-will but, on the contrary, with compassion for both the would-be victims and even for the robber himself, for Shākyamuni sought to prevent the latter from being reborn and suffering in hell as karmic retribution for his evil deed.

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<sup>31</sup> Quotation posted on Friday, August 17, 2007 on the “Buddhist Military Sangha” website. Available on the Web at: <http://buddhistmilitarysangha.blogspot.jp> (accessed on January 9, 2017).

On the one hand, Shākyamuni's act of killing is presented in accordance with the view that acts of killing are instances of unwholesome karma, given the latter's universal and inescapable nature. Nevertheless, although the negative karma resulting from his killing of the robber should have accrued even to Shākyamuni, it did not, for, as he explained: "Good man, because I used ingenuity [skillful means] out of great compassion at that time, I was able to avoid the suffering of one hundred thousand *kalpas* of *samsāra* [the ordinary world of form and desire], and that wicked man was reborn in heaven, a good plane of existence, after death."<sup>32</sup> In the Mahāyāna school, this *sūtra* has often been used to support those like Capt. Malasri who claim that a good Buddhist may kill if the act is done without ill-will toward the victim.

At least doctrinally, the Theravāda school takes a strong position against the use of violence and war. As the Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi notes: "The *suttas*, it must be clearly stated, do not admit any moral justification for war. Thus, if we take the texts as issuing moral absolutes, one would have to conclude that war can never be morally justified."<sup>33</sup> The *Seyya Jātaka*, for example, conveys a story about yet another of Shākyamuni's former lives as a *bodhisattva*. According to this story, the future Shākyamuni was a king of Benares and ruled well. However, he discovered one of his courtiers was involved in an intrigue in his harem and punished him with banishment. Angered, the banished courtier went to the court of an enemy king and persuaded him to lead an army against the king of Benares. When attacked, the king, i.e. Shākyamuni, offered no resistance, and was captured and imprisoned. While in prison Shākyamuni manifested such great compassion towards his enemy that, as a consequence, the latter's body was filled with great physical pain. Upon realizing the cause of his pain, the conquering king regretted his actions and set Shākyamuni free, returning his kingdom to him without any loss of life.<sup>34</sup>

In comparing these two stories, it is important to note that the Theravāda and Mahāyāna schools are united in emphasizing both the intention and goal of the actor in judging the karmic merit (or demerit) of a particular act. Yet, as Rupert Gethin noted, the Theravāda view is that killing can never be based on auspicious, *kuśala*, or neutral, *avyākṛta*, states of mind. Gethin writes:

In the Theravāda exegetical tradition, the notion that intentionally

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<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Chang, ed., *A Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras*, pp. 456-57.

<sup>33</sup> Bodhi, "War and Peace: A Buddhist Perspective," *Inquiring Mind*, p. 5.

<sup>34</sup> For a complete recounting of this *Jātaka* story, see: <http://.sacred-texts.com/bud/j2/j2135.htm>

killing a living being is wrong involves a claim that when certain mental states (such as compassion) are present in the mind, it is simply impossible that one could act in certain ways (such as to intentionally kill). . . . The only criterion for judging whether an act is “moral” (*kusala*) or “immoral” (*akusala*) in Indian systematic Buddhist thought is the quality of the intention that motivates it.<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, according to Gethin, the Theravāda position is that killing can never truly be based on compassion, nor can it be auspicious. Gethin provides an additional example concerning a laughing king who orders the execution of a criminal. Buddhist commentaries state that in doing so the king’s mind, on a subtle level, is still qualified by aversion. Nevertheless, the Theravāda view does recognize that not all killing is equally inauspicious, e.g. killing a mosquito does not result in the same karmic recompense as killing a human being. Gethin recognizes there are a broad range of conditions in Theravāda serving to qualify the act of killing, including the moral status of the victim.<sup>36</sup>

By comparison with the Theravāda school, Mahāyāna appears, at least doctrinally speaking, to have a less stringent attitude toward the act of killing. Yet, as a *practical matter*, is it reasonable, or even possible, to expect participants in warfare, inevitably involving the killing of mass numbers of human beings, both civilians and military, to kill without “ill-will” or “compassionately”? As those who have been in the military well know, in reality, harboring “ill-will” toward an inevitably “evil” enemy is the *sine qua non* required to kill them. This is what soldiers tell them themselves in their attempt to morally justify their deadly acts.

Even were one to accept the doubtful premise that it was possible for a Buddhist soldier to go into battle without ill-will toward the enemy, i.e. to kill compassionately, how realistic is it to expect that same soldier to maintain this attitude after he has seen one or more of his fellow soldiers killed by the enemy? And what is a Buddhist soldier to do if he realizes that, for whatever reason, he is unable to kill without ill-will? At that point should the Buddhist soldier report his crisis of conscience to his military superior and ask to be relieved of duty? Or should he nevertheless kill the enemy, filled with ill-will, knowing that according to traditional Buddhist doctrine he is heading for one or another of various Buddhist hells for a very lengthy stay?

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<sup>35</sup> Gethin, “Can Killing a Living Being Ever Be an Act of Compassion? The analysis of the act of killing in the *Abhidhamma* and Pali Commentaries,” p. 167.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 177-82 for further discussion.



In light of these eminently *practical* questions, it is clear how little of the preceding nuanced discussion provides a practical guide to today's modern Buddhist soldier, whether affiliated with the Theravāda or Mahāyāna schools. Note, too, that despite a lack of doctrinal justification, both lay and clerical Theravāda Buddhists in contemporary Thailand, Myanmar (aka Burma) and Sri Lanka have shown they can also be violent *in practice*.<sup>37</sup>

In this connection, it is important to recall an exchange contained in the *Yodhājīva Sutta*. When Shākyamuni Buddha was asked whether it is true that soldiers who die on the battlefield are reborn in heaven, Shākyamuni remained silent. A second request elicited the same response. Finally, on being asked a third time, Shākyamuni replied by informing the questioner that soldiers dying on the battlefield will not be reborn in heaven. As Daniel Kent notes, “He [Shākyamuni] explained that those who die on the battlefield are *inevitably* overcome with hatred and pain and are born, according to those feelings, in a hell realm.”<sup>38</sup> (Emphasis mine)

## Conclusion

There can be no doubt that there have been those in the Mahāyāna school, most especially in Japan, who have utilized meditation-derived *samādhi* power as a useful tool to kill, especially on the battlefield. And despite the doctrinal disavowal in the Theravāda school, we have seen Theravāda adherents assert what might be described as a “get out of (karmic) jail free card,” making killing possible in this school as well, i.e. so long as the killing is done *without ill will*. This assertion, however, runs contrary to the Theravāda *Yodhājīva Sutta*, that states Shākyamuni Buddha explained those who die on the battlefield are *inevitably* overcome with hatred. By contrast, the Mahāyāna school, in doctrine as well as practice, appears to have either overlooked or ignored this issue altogether, thus facilitating the application of *samādhi* power to death and warfare without prohibition or condemnation.

Given this, I end with the hope readers realize that *samādhi* power can be used to promote and deepen self-understanding as well as bring harm to others, either singly, as in assassinations, or in mass, in the case of warfare.

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<sup>37</sup> For an introduction to Buddhist-related violence in contemporary Sri Lanka and Thailand, see *Buddhist Warfare*, Chapters Seven and Eight.

<sup>38</sup> Kent, “Onward Buddhist Soldiers: Preaching to the Sri Lankan Army,” *Buddhist Warfare*, pp. 157-58.

In other words, as liberating and sublime as *samādhi* power can and *ought* to be, it is also open to misuse and abuse. In short, when *samādhi* power is removed or disconnected from Buddhist ethics and its precepts, as occurred in the case of *samurai*-patronized Zen in Japan, it can easily be utilized to accomplish any narrow, self-centered and *deadly* purpose its practitioners choose to apply it to.

If Buddhism is truly to become a religion of peace, this and related issues can no longer be ignored. Needless to say, the abuse of *samādhi* power is only one part, albeit an important part, of the larger question of the overall relationship of Buddhism to violence and warfare. It is, however, the author's conviction that the most effective and convincing way to approach this larger question is to carefully examine each example, both in text and in practice, in which Buddhism has been linked to violence and war. For that reason, much research remains to be done before any overall conclusions can be reached. But, as the Chinese maxim states, "A journey of ten thousand miles begins with the first step."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> From the quote 千里之行，始於足下, by the Chinese philosopher Laozi in the *Tao Te Ching*, chapter 64.

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