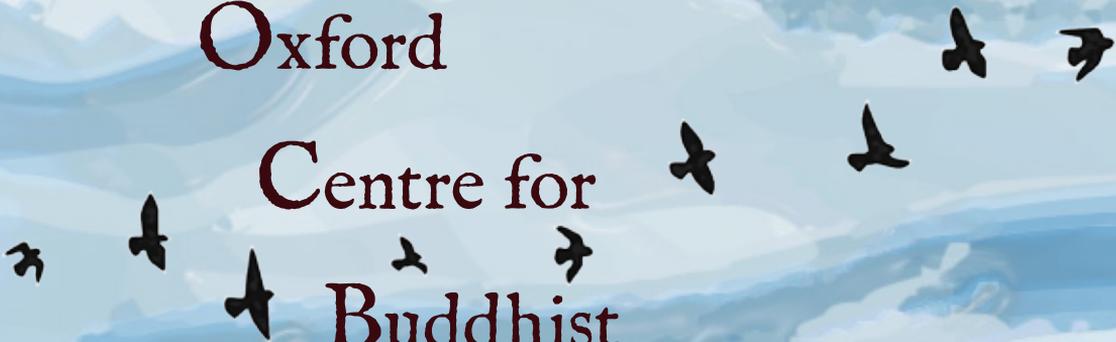


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Contents

Contents	4
List of Contributors	6
Editorial ALEXANDER WYNNE	8
The many voices of Buddhaghosa: a commentator and our times OSCAR CARRERA	11
‘Preconditions’: The <i>Upanisā Sutta</i> in Context DHIVAN THOMAS JONES	30
The language the Buddha spoke BRYAN LEVMAN	63
A Reply to Bryan Levman’s <i>The Language the Buddha Spoke</i> STEFAN KARPIK	106
The Changing Functions of renjian fojiao 人间佛教 in Mainland China CARSTEN KRAUSE	117
Patterns of Ritual Engagements between Buddhist Religious Centres and Their Non-monastic Devotees in the Religious Space of Some Excavated Buddhist Sites of Early medieval Bihar and Bengal: A Study with Particular Reference to the Cult of Votive <i>Stūpas</i>, Votive Terracotta Plaques and Votive Tablets BIRENDRA NATH PRASAD	144

<i>Bodhisattva</i> Precepts and Their Compatibility with <i>Vinaya</i> in Contemporary Chinese Buddhism: A Cross-Straits Comparative Study TZU-LUNG CHIU	193
Abolish Buddhism and Destroy Shakyamuni! BRIAN VICTORIA	225
CONFERENCE REPORT	
2019 International Conference on Buddhist Canons Reviewed by Yi-hsun Huang	255

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Editorial
Once more on the language of the Buddha

Alexander Wynne

In the previous editorial of this journal, Richard Gombrich focused on the language of the Buddha. Since this subject is raised once again in the present issue, it would be worthwhile considering a few key points. We can start with an important contribution by Lance Cousins (JOCBS 5: 89-135, 2013): in a wide-ranging article, Cousins distinguished (p.121) classical Pali (the redacted language of the 4th or 5th century AD) from what he called ‘Old Pali’, equivalent to the common epigraphic Prakrit used in the 1st century BC. Focusing entirely on the written word, Cousins argued that some old texts were probably written in the language of the Mauryan empire, which he calls ‘Old Ardhamāgadhī’:

Such written works (or at any rate some of them) must have been written down in OldArdhamāgadhī... The use of OldArdhamāgadhī is not merely a matter of hypothesis. In the *Kathāvatthu* we have an example of exactly this. The *Kathāvatthu* is traditionally believed to have been written in the Mauryan period and I believe its contents and other evidence support this for the core of the work. Frequently it presents debates between opposing views in a form that still preserves many so-called ‘Eastern’ features. (p.122)

Cousins claims that when a written form of the Pali canon was assembled in the 1st century BC, texts in Old-Ardhamāgadhī would have been transformed into ‘Old Pali’ (p.122):

When written versions of the oral literature were systematically produced, probably in the first century B.C., and existing written works of established authority were joined to them to produce what we may call a Canon, the language which must have been used was a Buddhist version of the standard language known directly to us in its epigraphic form. I am calling both simply Old Pali.

It is surely the case that the extant Pali canon emerged not just from oral *bhāṇaka* traditions, but also to some extent from early manuscript traditions. But this does not necessarily mean that, in the process of canonical formation, in the 1st century BC, the language of any early manuscripts was levelled with that of the oral traditions. Indeed, this does not appear to have happened with the *Kathāvatthu*. Would a team of editors have harmonised its language with the rest of their tradition, and yet left so many ‘Māgadhisms’ in it? Non-standard Pali forms appear right at the very beginning of the text: *āmantā*, *hevaṃ*, *vattabe*, *hañce* etc. Surely these indicate that the *Kathāvatthu* was not harmonised with the rest of the Pali tradition, but must have been preserved in something very close to its original form.

If this suggests that the original language of the *Kathāvatthu* was (Old-)Pali with some Māgadhī/Old-Ardhamāgadhī features, how could this language have been formed? Perhaps we should suppose that the composers of the *Kathāvatthu* used a standard dialect, which would have been (Old) Pali, but were influenced by the local dialect of Magadha. The situation would have been rather like British citizens who migrate to America, and then retain their British accent with the odd Americanism. If we posit a relatively small group of British migrants in America, with a regular influx of British migrants, and lots of movement back and forth between the two countries (imagine also that the two countries are close to each other), a slightly Americanised British accent would probably have resulted.

This scenario explains the language of the *Kathāvatthu*: with the earliest Buddhist tradition based in Kosala, and using a Western *lingua franca*, the smaller Buddhist communities in Magadha would have used the same language, with some local features. If the difference between northern Indian dialects was

marginal in the early 4th century BC, and if for most of that time the ‘headquarters’ of the movement were in Kosala/Sāvattthī, a Western Buddhist dialect would have had sufficient time to become standard. Apart from the *Kathāvatthu*, Aśoka’s Girnar inscriptions indicate that such a dialect already existed, and the widespread use of the same dialect in post-Mauryan India shows that it must already have been established long before Aśoka.

The use of Pali as the pre-Aśokan Buddhist language before Aśoka was explored by Karpik in JOCBS 16 (10-86). In the current issue, Bryan Levman claims that a *koine* or *lingua franca* underlies Pali, but inasmuch as he claims that the language of the Buddha was the direct predecessor of Pali, it must have been more like Pali than Māgadhī. But exactly how much like Pali? This remains unclear, but Levman seems to be saying something like that the Buddha spoke ‘Even Older Pali’ than Cousins’ ‘Old Pali’.

Without wishing to reduce the study of Pali to a Monty Python sketch, we can mention some important areas of progress and future debate. Clearly, the general consensus has moved away from the old assumption that the Buddha spoke something like Māgadhī. And if so, the study of Pali has come back full circle, to a position closer to Rhys Davids’ view that the Buddha spoke Kosalī, not Māgadhī. Apart from this vague consensus, Karpik and Levman disagree on the nature of dialect variation in the Pali canon. According to Karpik, features of other dialects were naturally absorbed in the early history of Pali, given its wide geographic spread and long historical development. But Levman claims that some dialect forms were not absorbed in the historical development of Pali, but can be explained as remnants of an earlier state of affairs, i.e. of a pre-Pali dialect which underlies the language of the Pali canon.

These studies will, we hope, raise more questions, and so fuel further further investigations of the language(s) of early Buddhism. It remains to be seen just how far we can go in imagining Pali as the language of the Buddha. Can the Māgadhī hypothesis be revived? Is the hypothesis of a language underlying the Pali canon plausible, be it ‘Old Pali’ (Cousins) or ‘Even Older Pali’ (Levman)? Can we even say anything sensible about the oral language(s) of early Buddhism if, as Cousins suggests, oral dialects were simply replaced by whatever written dialect was in fashion? The last word on the language of the Buddha may never be reached. But it is to be hoped that the recent papers published by this journal lead to an ongoing debate, one which advances our understanding of long neglected aspects of early Buddhism.

The many voices of Buddhaghosa: a commentator and our times¹

Oscar Carrera

Abstract

This paper examines contemporary dissent from orthodox Theravāda Buddhism. It presents four modern Buddhist thinkers who hold the fifth-century commentator Buddhaghosa responsible for a drastic change in Buddhist doctrine. Several reasons are proposed to explain this ‘distortion’: it may be attributed to an excess of literalism (Shravasti Dhammika) or to the introduction of foreign ideas, drawn from other Buddhist schools (David J. Kalupahana) or from Brahmanism (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, Sue Hamilton). It will be argued that, in such cases, the figure of Buddhaghosa is linked to a particular reconstruction of ‘the Buddha’s Buddhism’, of which he is presented as a semi-legendary antagonist.

The man known as Buddhaghosa (‘the voice of the Buddha’) was a Buddhist monk who flourished in the 5th century CE, travelled to the island of Lanka from the Indian mainland, and is credited with the systematization of a commentarial tradition that would later (much later) be called Theravāda Buddhism. It is no exaggeration to say that Buddhaghosa is, for most contemporary Theravādins, the second highest authority of Buddhism, ranking only below its founder. The volume of his putative works is impressive, so much so that some contemporary

¹ I would like to thank Professor Christopher Handy for his comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

scholars prefer to imagine him at the head of a writing committee (Bodhi 2000, 193; von Hinüber 2015b). This paper deals with Buddhist scholars who take the opposite stance: who, in agreement with tradition, see those writings as the product of a single man. My interest is in how Buddhaghosa's personality is defined and redefined in modern times, according to present-day concerns.

There are still modern writers who replicate the classical depiction of Buddhaghosa as an industrious monk “toiling steadily and indefatigably, year in and year out, [...] immured in a cell of the great monastery at Anurādhapura,” with a life “necessarily devoid of events” (Law 1923, 173). But one can conceive more passion, adventure and even hazards in the life of a man who is remembered as a visitor in such faraway places as Burma (11, 40-41) and Cambodia (42, n. 2). In the first section, I will consider the work of two Buddhist scholars who emphasize how Buddhism can be read very differently from how Buddhaghosa does. The second section addresses three scholars who claim that the commentator was not reading what the original texts say, but a certain foreign tradition that he had learned elsewhere.

In this area, one cannot take the division between ‘Buddhist literature’ and ‘Buddhist scholarship’ very far. In principle, the difference is obvious: the former states what Buddhism is or should be, the latter describes what self-confessed Buddhists have claimed it to be. There is, however, much overlap between the two: ‘Buddhist’ works sometimes contain precious research, and scholarly accounts may conceal prescriptive and normative concerns. That one of the leading scholars on early Buddhism recently accused another leading scholar of disguising religious exegesis under a historical garb (Wynne 2018) shows how the problem, which is perhaps endemic to religious studies, is far from solved—if solvable at all. My concern here is merely to show one of the ways in which the intermarriage between historicizing and chronicling, between earnest study and free reconstruction, has taken shape. The works referenced in this article range from academic articles to religious sermons, but, in my view, they all share one feature: they are examples of modern *Buddhist* writing. Regardless of their factual accuracy or erudition, they are engaged with Buddhism in at least an exegetical way, but often go so far as to develop new Buddhist narratives, which may follow—as we shall see in the conclusion—well-trodden patterns.

In the early 20th century, the French archaeologist Louis Finot argued that Buddhaghosa was a purely legendary figure (Finot 1921). On the opposite side, the contemporary Sinhalese monk Ven. Samādhikusalo claims to have past-life memories of him (Anālayo 2018, 122-123). For the scholars discussed

in this paper, Buddhaghosa is neither pure fantasy nor a vivid presence: he remains open to reinterpretation. Each has his own arguments, outlook and motivations, but what unites them is how they bear witness to the fact that the ghostly old commentator, whether or not he is the voice of the Buddha, cannot yet stop speaking.

Buddhaghosa the prioritizer

Theravāda Buddhists, as long as they identify as such, generally avoid concluding that the main commentator of their tradition got everything wrong. Even some groundbreaking reappraisals of Theravāda Buddhism, such as the work of Ñāṇananda (1971, 11, 46), only blame Buddhaghosa openly for minor mistakes, though their theories and methodologies leave him and his ideas quite aside. Bhikkhu Payutto, a leading Thai scholar-monk, is also cautious when discussing the one-life interpretation of the Buddhist chain of dependent origination in the *Vibhaṅga*, one of the earliest Buddhist scholastic works (Anālayo 2008, 94). This one-life interpretation stands in contrast to the standard interpretation, in which the successive twelve links (*nidāna*) describing the arising of suffering are divided into three lives. Payutto discovers that the canonical text dedicates five pages to the life-to-life version, and 72 to the version that considers only one mind-moment. Buddhaghosa's commentary (*Sammohavinodanī*), however, reflects the opposite: 92 pages for the life-to-life version against 19 pages for the one-mind-moment interpretation. Payutto's tentative explanation for such an obvious contrast is that the commentator may have considered the one mind-moment interpretation as "already explained sufficiently in the *Tipiṭaka*," and seen no need for further commentary (Payutto 1994, 101). "It may also be," he suggests, "that the author felt more comfortable with [the life-to-life] interpretation," since the other had "disappeared from scholastic circles" by his time (100).

Though, as Payutto states, "only traces of it remain in the commentaries," this-life interpretations of dependent origination appear not only in the Theravāda *Vibhaṅga* (on which see Ñāṇaponika 2007, 27), but also in the *Patisambhidāmagga* (Pat 271-275), where four out of five expositions "describe dependent origination in one life" (Ñāṇamoli 2010, 607, n.), and in the Sarvāstivāda *Mahāvibhāṣā* (Iida 1991, 26). The Vibhajyavādins also held a similarly momentary conception of the understanding of the four noble truths (Cousins 1994-96, 52). Having said that, most contemporary sympathizers of

the one-life dependent origination seem to have been influenced primarily by modern authors, such as Paul Dahlke (Ñāṇatiloka 1980, s.v. *paticca-samuppāda*), Ñāṇavīra Thera (2003, 80-83) and Buddhadhāsa Bhikkhu (see below).

While the Ven. Payutto turns out to be a conciliatory scholar, the tactic of comparing canonical texts with Buddhaghosa's writings about them can also be used for polemics. This is what Australian-born monk Shravasti Dhammika does in *The Broken Buddha*, an incisive critique of Theravāda Buddhism. Dhammika wrote this book after he parted ways with a tradition that, in his opinion, sees "the Buddha's words through the lens of these commentaries' turgid and often fantastic pedantry rather than allowing them to speak for themselves" (Dhammika 2006, 6). As a monk inspired by the early Buddhist scriptures but wary of commentaries, he predictably targets Buddhaghosa. Here, again, the perceived difference between the Buddha's Buddhism and Buddhaghosa's is one of emphasis. Like Payutto, Dhammika employs the graphic strategy of comparing the number of pages the commentator devotes to each topic. One of his main objections is the perceived lack of a more active understanding of compassion and kindness in the Theravāda.

The *dvattiṃsākāra* consists of a bare list of body parts and is meant to be reflected upon to help bring about a detachment or, in Theravāda, a revulsion, towards the body. The *Mettā Sutta* is a beautiful and deeply stirring song advocating benevolence towards all that lives. Buddhaghosa expands the meagre thirty six Pali words of the *dvattiṃsākāra* into a commentary thirty six pages long, while the *Mettā Sutta*, which is more than three times the length of the *dvattiṃsākāra*, is expanded into a dull and rather uninspiring commentary of only twenty one pages (30).²

This difference of emphasis is confirmed by another page-count comparison, dealing with a topic we will address in the next section:

Buddhaghosa devotes a full eleven pages to the meditation on death while a generous twenty six pages are devoted to the meditation on the repulsiveness of the body. But it is when describing the contemplation on rotting corpses that Buddhaghosa is really in his element. Through a full nineteen pages he lingers

² I have amended the Pali and the punctuation in this and the next three citations.

lovingly and in minute detail over putrid flesh, bloated viscera and maggots oozing out of eye sockets. By contrast, when he comes to elaborating on meditations that could lift the heart and refresh the mind his imaginativeness seems to dry up. The recollection on generosity, for example, is passed over in less than three pages while the recollection on peace gets only two pages. Other positive meditations like the recollection on spiritual friendship (*kalyāṇamitta-anussati*, A.V,336) are ignored completely (30).

Even though he credits Buddhaghosa with the idea that a minor rule can be broken out of compassion (“one of the few feeble glimmers of light in his otherwise dreary writings”), the commentator’s general attitude is depicted as an almost complete and uncompromising observance of monastic regulations.

For example, [Buddhaghosa] says that even if one’s mother falls into a raging river one must under no circumstances attempt to save her if it means making physical contact. Again, he says that if a monk falls into a pit he must not dig himself out even to save his life as this would be breaking the rule against digging the earth. Now when such petty rules are thought to be more important than the lives of others, more important even than one’s own life, is it surprising that they are given so much attention that the things that really matter are considered insignificant by comparison? (23).

The Ven. Dhammika provides no scriptural reference for the “petty rules” he mentions, nor does he state to what extent he follows them as a Buddhist monk. The English ethicist Damien Keown (1983, 74) agrees with Dhammika in that Buddhaghosa’s moral prescriptions are mostly confined to monastic rules. However, the striking example of the monk letting himself die in a hole to observe the prohibition against digging could once have been seen as an edifying story. In fact, one traditional account of Buddhaghosa’s own death has the moribund commentator mentally revising the three meanings of the word ‘death’ while expiring, and it seems clear that this, rather than a parody of pedantic intellectualism, was intended as praise (Law 1923, 42).

Dhammika is unique among the writers mentioned in this paper in that he openly parts company with Theravāda Buddhism. For him, Buddhaghosa becomes a symbol of the shortcomings of this tradition, rather than a threat to it: the commentator may have been misguided as to the core of the Buddha’s original message, but he is seen

as quintessentially Mahāvihāran, quintessentially Theravādin.³ It is hence fitting that he is invoked once more to embody the ultimate failure of the tradition:

Even Buddhaghosa did not really believe that Theravāda practice could lead to Nirvana. His *Visuddhimagga* is supposed to be a detailed, step by step guide to enlightenment. And yet in the postscript [lacking in the Burmese edition] he says he hopes that the merit he has earned by writing the *Visuddhimagga* will allow him to be reborn in heaven, abide there until Metteyya [Maitreya] appears, hear his teaching and then attain enlightenment. Thus we have the extraordinary and I believe unprecedented situation where the majority of people adhering to a religion, including many of its clergy, freely admit that their religion cannot lead to its intended goal. Is it surprising that so many monks seem to be lacking in conviction? (Dhammika 2006, 13).

In fact, the lack of allusions to his own spiritual practice, and the extreme pessimism he expresses regarding meditative success (Brasington 2018), make it surprising that Buddhaghosa has been chosen as a Buddhist interlocutor to set against some of the greatest mystics of Christianity, such as the Spanish Carmelites Teresa of Ávila (Millet 2017) and John of the Cross (Feldmeier 2006). This attribution of mysticism to the commentator, into which we cannot venture here, seems to be nourished by what Robert Sharf (1995) calls the Buddhist “rhetoric of experience”: taking scholasticism for descriptions of inner experiences.

Like Dhammika, Caroline Rhys Davids prefers to see Buddhaghosa as an uninspiring scholastic: “a striking embodiment of the meticulous erudition, the piety, the complacent sectarian view, the amazing credulity, the absence of curiosity as to the greater world so characteristic of his epoch” (“Preface” in Law 1923, viii). Her husband Thomas Rhys Davids (1909, 887) writes,

of originality, of independent thought, there is at present no evidence. He had mastered so thoroughly and accepted so completely the Buddhist view of life, that there was no need for him to occupy time with any discussions on ultimate questions. [...] Of the higher criticism Buddhaghosa is entirely guiltless. To him there had been no development in doctrine, and all the texts were the words of the Master.

³ As we would call him (only?) today: see Gethin 2012.

Although these might seem (and are clearly intended as) unflattering descriptions, there are reasons to suspect that for an individual known as ‘the voice of the Buddha’ they could amount to the highest praise. The same applies to Dhammika’s criticism of his lack of nirvanic commitment. To be sure, legend has it that after an arduous monastic life (and after having penned some of the most negative descriptions of the body in world literature), Buddhaghosa “was reborn in the Tusita heaven surrounded by divine nymphs in a golden mansion seven leagues broad” (Tambiah 1984, 29). This conclusion, however, was intended to be as flattering for the religion as Dhammika finds it unflattering. If it proves anything, it is merely how long Buddhaghosa has been thought and rethought, made born and made reborn.

Buddhaghosa the infiltrator

In the previous section, Buddhaghosa was seen as a representative of the tradition he claimed to be serving, even typically so. For Payutto, the disproportion between texts and commentaries reveals that the Theravādan corpus is more inclusive than previously thought, and balances itself (see Seeger 2009). For Dhammika, such disparities only indicate how much the Theravāda, pre- and post-Buddhaghosa, has missed the point of the Buddha’s gospel.

There is good reason to believe that the commentator was not original in his ideas. According to Robert Sharf, “only once in the *Visuddhimagga* does Buddhaghosa openly advance an opinion of his own, which consists solely in expressing his preference for one scriptural interpretation over another with regard to a particularly arcane point concerning the recollection of past lives” (Sharf 1995, 239).

Some Buddhist authors, however, reject the classical association between Buddhaghosa’s work and the orthodoxy that precedes him. In a sense, they break the foundation of the Buddhaghosa myth, which lies in continuity. As they see it, the scholar-monk introduced his own ideas into the tradition he was commentating, changing it forever. Theories about the nature of this infiltration and its origins differ wildly, but all face a similar obstacle: the manifest lack of originality of the commentator, who, as shown by his very name, takes pride in being nothing but a loudspeaker. Perhaps it is Buddhaghosa’s conformity that forces these authors to postulate a *subconscious* infiltration, related to his upbringing and unexamined values. The difficulties of such an approach are obvious: it amounts to postulating what is at the back of the mind of someone who almost never speaks his mind, and mapping the socio-cultural

conditioning of someone of whose life we know but one place name. This dearth of personal references does not deter the following authors, whose recreations of Buddhaghosa aim to illuminate other facets of the historical development of Buddhism. If modern, critical Theravāda has some similarities with Protestant Christianity (Johnson 2004), Buddhaghosa is the closest to the figure of a Church Father: understanding him also means understanding what “went wrong”.

An example of this position is the Sri Lankan philosopher David J. Kalupahana. His magnum opus, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy*, is a complete revision of Buddhist thought throughout the ages, and a major effort to reformulate the early Buddhist message in a way stimulating to both traditional Buddhism and—primarily analytical—Western philosophy.⁴

Kalupahana sees the Buddha as a pragmatist and a philosophical non-absolutist, who rejected both ultimate objectivity and extreme scepticism, and developed a contextualist approach to ethics and human experience. That this primordial Buddhist insight has not always been predominant in later traditions requires the elucidation of “continuities and discontinuities”, as set out in the subtitle of the work. As usual, placing Siddhārtha Gautama in a specific square leads to the reassignment of all the major pieces of the Buddhist board, Buddhaghosa among them.

Though he identifies “anti-foundationalism” in the last chapters of the *Visuddhimagga*, Kalupahana ascribes to Buddhaghosa two doctrines which he sees as a reification of a less essentialistic, earlier Buddhist philosophy: the theory of moments (*khana-vāda*), and a fourfold exegetical scheme grounded on the ‘characteristic’ (*lakkhana*). In both cases, he refers to the lack of adequate scriptural support for Buddhaghosa’s position, and postulates that the commentator must have introduced theories learnt in his native South India, perhaps from Mahāyāna or Sautrāntika teachers (Kalupahana 1992, 207-208). Even though he acknowledges that “Buddhaghosa’s life story is cloaked in mystery,” Kalupahana assumes the commentator’s mastery of “a variety of doctrines with which he was familiar before he arrived to Sri Lanka” (208). Such a claim is, however, unsupported, for the only contemporary fact we have about the early life of Buddhaghosa is that he once stayed somewhere in South India (von Hinüber 2015a) and, as far as I know, he does not mention in his writings other “sectarian” influence than the Mahāvihāran ancient commentaries. After

⁴ The fact that ‘David Hume’ and ‘William James’ each have more references in the index than a word like ‘rebirth’ surely bears witness to this concern.

reviewing Buddhaghosa's oeuvre, Law (1923, 174) concludes that Mahāyānism "does not appear to have been studied by him. Nowhere in his works does he make any mention of it," nor did he leave any text in Sanskrit (91).

Even the South Indian connection is historically doubtful. Kalupahana's sources for the biography of Buddhaghosa, which he uses selectively, are not earlier than the 13th century: the first full surviving biography appears in the medieval *Cūlavamsa* and even there, Buddhaghosa is said to be born in North India.

As Kalupahana (1992, 208) presents it, Mahāvihāran doctrine had previously been free from essentialistic underpinnings, and remarkably loyal to the orthodoxy introduced by Mahinda almost one millennium before. This postulate is not only unverifiable, as it is based on later legendary chronicles, but also contradicts Buddhaghosa's allusions to a previous Mahāvihāran commentarial tradition to support most of his exegetical positions, "essentialistic" or not. In fact, the other, "essentialistic" schools were already present in Lanka in Buddhaghosa's time, so that the South Indian connection would seem fortuitous, if not part of a familiar narrative: Sri Lanka as the island where pure Dhamma was introduced and preserved for centuries by the lineage that would become the Mahāvihāra, then Theravāda, facing a "heretical" subcontinent. It seems as if corruption *has* to come from abroad, in the person of a South Indian Brahmin, and this siege mentality comes to the fore when discussing the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*. Kalupahana sees this *sūtra*, which he tentatively renders as *The Invasion of Laṅkā*, as "a textbook for the conversion of Laṅkā to Mahāyāna Buddhism" (244), and finds in it indirect references to "the Sinhala race" and the "Mahāvihāra tradition" (243-244). In the end, however, Mahāyāna transcendentalism failed to conquer the Sinhalese, who were "too deeply rooted in the tradition representing the less mystical, more empirical and pragmatic teachings of the Buddha" (246).

To be sure, as the author himself acknowledges, the contention that Buddhaghosa "was no voice of the Buddha" (xiii) earned him enmity in Theravādin lands, including his native country. However, his retelling of Lankan ancient history seems to be greatly indebted to the Sinhalese nationalistic worldview: Sri Lanka as the island of pristine Dhamma under continuous internal and external threat. Even the introduction of essentialism in the tradition that would become Theravāda Buddhism is seen as comparatively minor and far from complete: in blending essentialism and pragmatism, Buddhaghosa is not considered a corrupter, but "a great harmonizer" of disparate strands (216). He thus serves as a kind of scapegoat, but one that is spared in the end. How "anti-essentialism" can lead to such views on history and its actors is not a question one can attempt to solve here.

The mistrust of Buddhaghosa’s commentarial enterprise reaches its summit in the works of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu. A Thai monk, Buddhadāsa certainly lacks the regional preferences of Kalupahana’s discourse: for him, Buddhaghosa’s alien infiltration is not due to his South Indian origins, but to his high-caste Hindu upbringing. The difference is one of religion, and indeed Buddhadāsa is one of the modern Buddhist masters who have most stressed the gap between Hinduism and Buddhism. Others, like the Burmese monk U Pandita, after studying other reincarnationist doctrines from India or ancient Greece, concluded that “the Buddha was not original in His teaching” (Spiro 1971, 390), but few apart from Buddhadāsa have reached the conclusion that the Buddha may have not taught rebirth *at all*. Rebirth is seen as a Hindu introduction, which early on transformed Buddhism from an immanent, psychological wisdom into cosmological fantasies, legendary lore and the impractical scholastic gymnastics of the Abhidhamma: little wonder that Buddhadāsa is also a staunch defender of the one-life interpretation of dependent origination, against Buddhaghosa’s three.

To his shame, Buddhadāsa’s innovative thought has been positively compared with the *Visuddhimagga*, for never since “has there been such a comprehensive attempt to systematically reinterpret the entirety of Theravāda doctrine in the light of contemporary views and expectations” (Jackson 2003, 2). Its most striking aspect, as a Buddhist system, is that physical rebirth is left out of the picture.

As to who introduced the belief in rebirth into Buddhism, Buddhadāsa’s oeuvre is too vast and unsystematic to find a single culprit. At some times he blames Buddhists themselves and their lack of perspicacity, at others he devises a Brahmanical conspiracy to undermine Buddhism by introducing the idea of a soul (*ātman*), which for Buddhadāsa (1988, 11) seems to be a requisite for any conception of rebirth. By the end of his life, he preferred to portray it as an exercise of skilful means, which the Buddha resorted to because he was unable to counter the beliefs of most of his contemporaries (2016, 5-6). Sometimes, however, Buddhaghosa is to blame:

It must be mentioned that our *Tipiṭaka*, at a certain moment, was retranslated from Sinhalese into Pāli and that the original text was burnt. Buddhaghosa, the most eminent commentator, was the one who did that. He was a Brahmin by birth and this leads many researchers to think that several dozens of Brahmanical themes—heaven, hell, Rāhu eating the moon, etc.—have been inserted into the *Tipiṭaka* afterwards, so that now they are referred to as words of the Buddha (quoted in Gabaude 1988, 107).

The preceding passage belongs to a collection edited by Buddhādāsa's longtime collaborator Pun Chongprasert, who often sharpened the language of the texts at his whim (Payulpitack 1991, 153). This may explain why in other works Buddhādāsa appears more empathetic, and even claims that he agrees "some 95 per cent with Buddhaghosa," which virtually excludes only his *ātmanic* version of dependent origination (Gabaude 1988, 184).

Buddhādāsa does not name those "many researchers" who delineate an opposition between the Buddha and the Brahmin Buddhaghosa. We do find views of that sort among the followers of the Sri Lankan guru D. A. Jayasuriya (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988, 376) or the Thai Marxist theoretician Jit Bhumisak, who accused Buddhaghosa of having introduced non-Buddhist past-life stories into the Canon (Gabaude 1988, 417). Even the 18th-century Japanese critic, Tominaga Nakamoto (perhaps the first modern author to favour a one-life interpretation of dependent origination: Nakamoto 1990, 129), wrote that Buddhist cosmological teachings about Mount Sumeru "were all handed down by brahmins" (88).

Buddhaghosa's Brahmanism is also a concern in Sue Hamilton's article *From the Buddha to Buddhaghosa*. Hamilton's views on early Buddhism are not unlike Kalupahana's, since she also considers the message of the Buddha as anti-metaphysical and focused on experience, on the *how* and not *what* of things (Hamilton 1996). Her promising phenomenological turn is aligned with Buddhādāsa in its tendency to view Buddhist cosmology as "spacial metaphors for spiritual progress" (150), but also in a depiction of Buddhaghosa that stresses his (presumed) Brahmanical upbringing as a major influence on his vision of Buddhism.

A British academic, Hamilton makes many of the same points we have reviewed in South and Southeast Asian Buddhist authors, when examining Buddhist views on corporality. Again, a clear-cut division is made between what she calls "the Buddha's point of view" (Hamilton 1995, 46), in this case an analytical approach to the body, and the "Brahmanized" and less sophisticated point of view of later monks, which is predominantly negative and would become the standard Theravādin position. "The Buddha's point of view,"⁵ as presented by Hamilton, fits almost entirely into what we might call 'philosophical Buddhism', a doctrine in which the body cannot be the source

⁵ The attitude attributed here to the Buddha is sporadically (and somewhat confusingly) linked to "the Pali canon" (Hamilton 1996, 189), "Theravāda" (169) and "Buddhism" (187; 1995, 60).

of all evil, because the mind is the primary karmic agent (48), and because the interrelatedness of the five aggregates (*khandha*) presupposes a mind-body continuum (49-51). Accordingly, negative views, present in even the earliest texts (as she acknowledges: 57), are labelled “non-Buddhist” or “Brahmanical”, since some of their features, such as the dislike of bodily impurities, are shared with Brahmanism.

That there is a recognizable contrast between an analytical or philosophical approach to the body and (not necessarily less sophisticated) negative views does not justify Hamilton’s assumption that the former belongs to the Buddha and the latter to “some monks” (54), responsible for anything that does not fit. Doctrinal heterogeneity is not necessarily a result of the passing of time, and may well have been there from the start. Early Buddhism, an oral, geographically sparse tradition, must have been plural. Besides, there is little reason to think that contempt for the body and its impurities was the preserve of Brahmin priests, and something alien to ascetic movements like Buddhism or Jainism (53)—the evidence at present would rather incline us to label it (ancient) ‘Indian’.

As Liz Wilson comments, “If this focus on bodily impurity is indicative of a Hinduized Buddhism, then I think we must regard Buddhism as Hinduized from the start” (Wilson 1996, 53). Her remark may even have a demographic dimension. The image of a Buddha opposed to a priestly class of Brahmins is a common trope in modern accounts of Buddhism, partly designed to reinforce the parallels with Jesus and Luther (Almond 1988, 70-77). While perfidious and foolish Brahmins are certainly stock characters of Buddhist texts, Buddhaghosa’s purported Brahmin condition can hardly be statistically significant, since everything points towards a disproportionate number of Brahmins among even the earliest converts to Buddhism: Caroline Rhys-Davids calculates 113 among the authors of the *Theragātha*, against 60 *kṣatriyas* and just ten low-caste individuals (C. Rhys Davids 1913, xxviii). This disproportion is no guarantee of Brahmanization, since, as Bronkhorst (2011, 3) reminds us, “a region that has a number of Brahmins living in it but which does not recognize the Brahmin’s claim to superiority is not brahmanized,” and the early Buddhist milieu does not seem a fertile ground for such claims. However, it does suggest that whatever Brahmanization of Buddhism there was must have started many centuries before Buddhaghosa.

From a modern, vitalistic perspective, symptoms of neurosis or morbidity are not difficult to spot in the writings of Buddhaghosa, who may have been so concerned with bodily impurities as to defecate “with distaste, ashamed,

humiliated and disgusted” (Vis 11.22), but that this verdict could also apply to the Buddha would seem to be a taboo in Hamilton’s essay. The story of the sixty monks that committed suicide after hearing the Buddha preaching “again and again” about bodily foulness, attested in several of the earliest texts (Vin 3.68, SN 54.9), is only mentioned in a later re-edition of her article (1996, 81-82), which also includes some qualifications to blur Buddhaghosa’s protagonism (e.g., 190, n. 2). If Hamilton’s final reconstruction of the life and intentions of Buddhaghosa is not as complete as in Kalupahana or Ajahn Buddhādāsa, there is still enough material to sketch a psychological and even ethnic portrait of this self-effacing, almost anonymous commentator, whose proneness to be loved and hated, exalted and reviled, is certainly one of the least expected outcomes of Buddhist history.

Conclusion

Now on that occasion the venerable Mahā Moggallāna was walking up and down in the open. And on that occasion Māra the Evil One went into the venerable Mahā Moggallāna’s belly and entered his bowels. Then the venerable Mahā Moggallāna considered thus: “Why is my belly so heavy? One would think it full of beans” (MN 50, tr. Ñāṇamoli, Bodhi 1995).

Like other devilish creatures, Māra can enter into human bodies (and heavenly ones: MN 49). Moreover, as demons around the world, he can only be exorcised after he is identified *by his name*. Demons often conceal their names to avoid unexpected interferences in their plans, but the early Buddhist community took care to make Māra’s name known to all their members (see SN 4).

In fact, as an archetypal rival of the sages in quest of Awakening, Māra is likely to predate Buddhism. The Jains refer to Māra as a seemingly anthropomorphic creature (note that *māra* means in itself ‘death’) in their own scriptures (Sut 1.1.3.7, AS 1.3.1.3), and present an analogous character in the demon Meghamālin, the tempter of their twenty-third omniscient teacher, Pārśva. Only in Buddhism did this antagonistic figure gain some mythological prominence, but the theme seems to have been old or, at least, appealing to other sects.

Every aspiring saint needs a villain that personifies his or her doubts, desires, pride, guilt, carelessness or even solitude (SN 4.24). In the case of Māra, such polyvalence has inspired some of the most creative works in the history of Buddhist art. The scene where the demon and his legions of monsters disturb

the Buddha is still one of the highlights of a new Theravādan temple, and, one would say, one of the few classical themes that allow for new characters and designs. Māra is an inspiration as well as a temptation.

My suggestion is that, despite the absence of any mythological continuity between the two, Buddhaghosa plays, in most of the works commented and in others, the role of Māra: that is, of the Antagonist of the Buddha and his message. Buddhaghosa has been possessing Buddhist bodies and minds for a much longer time than Māra possessed poor Moggallāna, making them say things they should not, and would not otherwise. Fortunately, he has been identified: now he is pointed out and called by his true name, now Buddhists can come back to their senses and distinguish the pure Dhamma from alluring worldly temptations. What are those temptations? The temptation of essentialism in Kalupahana, the temptation of rebirth folk-beliefs and philosophical eternalism in Buddhadāsa, the temptation of Brahmanical bodily obsessions in Hamilton, the temptation of reducing morality to the dead letter of the rules in Dhammika. Essentialistic philosophies, consolatory afterlives, hierarchies of purity, inflexible codes are no doubt safe, comfortable dwellings. What constitutes a challenge is, respectively, avoiding philosophical foundations, practicing for the sake of this life, analysing one's interior with perfect equanimity, and adjusting the rules to the intentions that generated them. Following the Buddha, and not his cheap imitators.

One could add to this list the temptation to follow standardized commentarial interpretations, instead of allowing the *suttas* to speak for themselves. This sentiment has often been voiced (Dhammika 2006, 6; Ñāṇananda 1971, 133), but the fact that it is voiced in works expressly written to let the *suttas* “speak for themselves” testifies perhaps to its utopian nature. Even a diatribe against commentaries is a commentary on them.

In the *suttas*, Māra's unsuccessful endeavours to tempt Buddhist ascetics often reinforce their own commitment to the Dhamma. Declarations of Awakening and doctrinal statements are typical at the end of such encounters (SN 4.22, 5.1-10). The Lord and the Foe nourish each other, and Buddhaghosa is no exception: both he and the Buddha have to be recast before they are set to fight. In fact, in most of the cases analysed the views credited to Buddhaghosa vary less than those attributed to the Buddha, which is not surprising, as we preserve extensive writings from the former, with a remarkable preoccupation with internal coherence, whereas of the Buddha we keep but a cacophony of dubious rumours and, below them, an ancestral silence waiting to host each one's voice (*ghosa*).

I am sure that other modern Buddhist traditions have their own Buddhas and Māras. I have remarked, for instance, some similarities between these visions of Buddhaghosa and the Critical Buddhism of Noriaki and Shirō (Shields 2011). There remains, however, a major difference: few traditions have placed a single commentator so highly; in few other traditions has a single individual reached a position that would allow him to be remembered as ‘the Buddha’s voice’. This is no miracle, since there is little reason to doubt that most of Buddhaghosa’s work was, as he himself acknowledged, a compilation drawing from a vast literature. Whether he likes it or not, his is the fame, and, if his desire was to be reborn at the feet of the *bodhisatta* Metteyya, he is continuously summoned back to earth, as he was before his last human life (Feldmeier 2006, 20). And, if it is true that he despised this world of coarse bodies, he must be quite unhappy about being forced to take new birth in Dhamma talks, apologetic pamphlets and scholarly volumes here and there—only to be defeated again.

Abbreviations

The numbering of Pāli *suttas* follows the method of *SuttaCentral* (<https://suttacentral.net/>). Jain *sūtras* are referenced according to Jacobi 1964, the *Visuddhimagga* as in Ñāṇamoli 2010:

AS	<i>Ācārāṅga-sūtra</i> (Jain)
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
Pat	<i>Patisambhidāmagga</i>
SN	<i>Samyutta-nikāya</i>
Sut	<i>Sūtrakṛtāṅga</i> (Jain)
Vin	(Theravāda) <i>Vinaya</i>
Vis	<i>Visuddhimagga</i>

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**‘Preconditions’:
The *Upanisā Sutta* in Context**

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Abstract

The *Upanisā Sutta* (Saṃyutta Nikāya 12: 23) has been interpreted as presenting an overarching account of conditionality, joining the twelve *nidānas* of *paṭicca-samuppāda* with a further series of positive factors (*upanisās*) leading to awakening. The discourse has a parallel preserved in Chinese translation. A close reading of these versions shows how the series of *upanisās* belongs to a ‘family’ of *upanisā* discourses. The connection of the series to the twelve *nidānas* appears rhetorical rather than doctrinal. The concept of *upanisā* in Pāli literature is related to the concept of *upaniṣad* in Vedic literature, and *upanisā* was also a topic of debate in the ascetic milieu of ancient India. The Buddhist concept of *upanisā* emerges as that of a supportive inner state that is a necessary condition for achieving the aim of liberation. I propose to translate *upanisā* as ‘precondition’.

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Introduction

In the ‘editorial notes’ to her pioneering 1922 translation of the *nidāna-saṃyutta* (volume 2 of *Kindred Sayings*, her translation of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*), Mrs Rhys Davids deplores the ‘stiff framework of words, of formulas, in which no semblance of the living words remains’ which characterizes the collected discourses on causation.² Then, amidst these ‘swept-up heaps of little Suttas’, she discovers the *Upanisā Sutta*,³ on which she reflects as follows:

But thick as is the crust of the set word-scheme over these records,
some signs of that variety of utterance which is life peep through...
Yet more refreshing is it to find that oasis... where a causal sequence
of joy and happiness is, for this once only, harnessed to the scheme!
How might it not have altered the whole face of Buddhism to the West
if that sequence had been made the illustration of the causal law! –

“Conditioned by suffering [comes to pass] faith;
conditioned by faith [comes to pass] joy;
conditioned by joy [comes to pass] rapture;
conditioned by rapture [comes to pass] serenity;
conditioned by serenity [comes to pass] happiness;
conditioned by happiness [comes to pass] concentration;
conditioned by concentration [comes to pass] knowledge and
insight into things as they really are.”⁴

And how true! Yet how hidden away in this book! How many students of Buddhism have ever seen it? It is true that India, like the rest of the world, was in need of a guide to lead her through the dark valley of the fact that man’s wrongdoing brings misery. But a creed for all time and space needs to give equal emphasis to the joy of the good life, and the insight that comes of moral growth to richer life.⁵

²Rhys Davids 1922 p.vii.

³S 12: 23 PTS ii.29–32.

⁴Her words here in her ‘notes’ do not in fact reproduce her translation, in which each stage of the path is the ‘cause’ and is ‘causally associated’ with the succeeding stage. Rather, this paraphrase in the ‘editorial notes’ seems to be an ideal Buddhist doctrine of Mrs Rhys Davids’ imagination, that, according to her, might have altered the face of Buddhism in the West.

⁵Rhys Davids 1922 pp.viii–ix. On p.26 n.1, amidst the translation of the discourse, she adds: ‘This series has never yet won the notice it deserves as a sort of Causal Law formula *in terms of happiness*.’

Mrs Rhys Davids complains that the constant repetition of the twelvefold formula of dependent arising in the *Nidāna Saṃyutta* (and elsewhere), which concerns the arising and cessation of suffering, has become dead doctrine; but she delights in the *Upanisā Sutta* with its living emphasis on the joy and happiness that comes from spiritual practice, a universal message of hope that could change the perception of Buddhism in the west.

Sangharakshita follows Mrs Rhys Davids’ lead in drawing attention to the unique formulation of causation in the *Upanisā Sutta*; he explains how the discourse presents a complement to the better-known cessation sequence of dependent arising, in terms of ‘the production of positive factors which progressively augment one another until with the realization of *sambodhi* the whole process reaches its climax’.⁶ Bhikkhu Bodhi takes up this same interpretation in ‘Transcendental Dependent Arising’, his study of the *Upanisā Sutta*.⁷ The Buddha teaches a universal principle of conditionality;⁸ its application to the origination and cessation of suffering is expressed in the familiar twelvefold formulation; but several discourses give expression to a less-well-known application of conditionality to the factors that structure the path leading to deliverance from suffering. And hence the peculiar value and significance of the *Upanisā Sutta*:

By linking the two series into a single sequence, the sutta reveals the entire course of man’s faring in the world as well as his treading of the path to its transcendence. It shows, moreover, that these two dimensions of human experience, the mundane and the transcendental... are governed by a single structural principle, that of dependent arising.⁹

⁶ Sangharakshita 2018 p.114. He continues (on p.114): ‘Attention was first drawn to [the *Upanisā Sutta*] in modern times by Caroline Rhys Davids, who... recognizes its importance and who, not without a slight intemperance of expression, refers to it as an ‘oasis’ of affirmation in the midst of an arid desert of negation.’ For Sangharakshita, Mrs Rhys Davids’ perception of the lifeless repetition of the twelvefold formulation of dependent arising is an ‘arid desert’; the *Upanisā Sutta* is an ‘oasis of affirmation’ which brings back life to the teaching of dependent arising, though this is somewhat immoderate since the twelvefold formulation is not really dead so much as full of negation.

⁷ Bodhi 1980; see also the introductory comments in Bodhi 2000 p.524.

⁸ See also Sangharakshita 2018 pp.88–97.

⁹ Bodhi 1980 pp.i–ii.

Following the early exegetical work, the *Nettipakaraṇa*, Bhikkhu Bodhi calls the positive series of progressive stages of the path ‘transcendental dependent arising’ (*lokuttara paṭicca-samuppāda*), in contrast to the ‘worldly dependent arising’ (*lokiya paṭicca-samuppāda*) of the twelve links.¹⁰

All the authors cited above take note of the uniqueness of the *Upanisā Sutta*; it is the only discourse in the Pāli canon, among the very many discourses concerning dependent arising, to present the usual twelvefold *nidāna* chain together with the stages of the path in a single linked series. In this article I seek to explore and even try to explain this uniqueness. I do this in two stages. First, I analyse the structure of the *Upanisā Sutta* and its parallel preserved in Chinese translation, comparing it with related discourses on the theme of a positive series of progressive stages of the path. This analysis suggests some specific literary intentions in the way the *Upanisā Sutta* connects the *nidānas* of dependent arising with the stages of the path. Second, I investigate the word *upanisā*, which is the single term by which the double series of factors is linked. I show how the Pāli *upanisā* is the equivalent of the Sanskrit *upaniṣad*. While in the early Upaniṣads (which were named for this very word) *upaniṣad* means a cosmic ‘connection’ or mystic ‘equivalence’ between levels of reality, in the ascetic culture in which early Buddhism arose, *upaniṣad* appears to have had the significance of a spiritually ‘supportive condition’. I go on to reconstruct the way in which the early Buddhists developed their own sense of *upaniṣad* as the presence of a natural, purposive causal connection or instrumentality between states or qualities that progressively fulfil awakening. The translation of *upanisā* as ‘precondition’ seeks to suggest this, while distinguishing *upanisā* in translation (‘precondition’) from *paccaya* (‘condition’) and *hetu* (‘cause’).

In this way, I argue that the *Upanisā Sutta*, the Discourse on Preconditions, represents a presentation of the Buddha’s teaching that includes the teaching of dependent arising in a series of *upanisās*. The rhetorical nature of this presentation shows up in the tension between two very different kinds of series of conditions. I conclude by arguing that all this has implications for how we interpret the significance of the discourse for an understanding of dependent arising. It suggests that the *Upanisā Sutta* did not originally signify a philosophical statement concerning the scope of dependent arising, but was rather a rhetorical flourish that integrates a knowledge of saṃsāra into the unfolding of the path to liberation.

¹⁰ For more on this topic, see Jones 2019.

1. The *Upanisā Sutta* and its Literary Context¹¹

As Mrs Rhys Davids was so pleased to discover, the Pāli *Upanisā Sutta* is found in the *nidāna-saṃyutta* of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*,¹² among discourses concerned with causation (*nidāna*) in general and with dependent arising (*paṭicca-samuppāda*) in particular.¹³ The discourse presents 23 phenomena, each the ‘precondition’ (*upanisā*) of the next,¹⁴ as follows:

[1] ignorance (*avijjā*) [2] formations (*saṅkhārā*) [3] consciousness (*viññāna*) [4] name-and-form (*nāma-rūpa*) [5] the six sense spheres (*saḷāyatanā*) [6] contact (*phassa*) [7] feeling (*vedanā*) [8] craving (*taṇhā*) [9] appropriation (*upādāna*) [10] continuing existence (*bhava*) [11] birth (*jāti*) [12] unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) [13] faith (*saddhā*) [14] gladness (*pāmojja*) [15] joy (*pīti*) [16] tranquillity (*passaddhi*) [17] happiness (*sukha*) [18] concentration (*samādhi*) [19] knowing and seeing what is actually the case (*yathābhūtañānadassana*) [20] disenchantment (*nibbidā*) [21] dispassion (*virāga*) [22] liberation (*vimutti*) [23] knowledge about the ending (of the corruptions) (*khaye ñāṇa*).

The identity of the first eleven of these preconditions with the *nidānas* of dependent arising is of course not meant to be missed, though in the Discourse on Preconditions, the usual [12] ageing-and-death (*jarāmaraṇa*) of dependent arising has been generalized to [12] unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), which then becomes the launching-point for a series of eleven ‘positive’ factors, from [13] faith (*saddhā*), to [23] knowledge about ending (*khaye ñāṇa*). There is an elegance in this exposition, since elsewhere in the Pāli discourses ignorance (*avijjā*) is said to arise with the corruptions (*āsavas*) as its condition,¹⁵ such that in the list of 23 links, the achievement of the 23rd necessitates the end of the first, and thereby by implication the initiation of the cessation of those very links by which unsatisfactoriness is said to arise.

¹¹ In this article I use the words ‘literary’ and ‘literature’ for convenience, in relation to compositions that were originally ‘oral literature’.

¹² S 12:23 PTS ii.29–32.

¹³ The *nidāna-saṃyutta* also includes discourses on *āhāra*, ‘sustenance’; see the introductory comments in Bodhi 2000 pp.523–4. Choong 2000 pp.150–205 compares the Pāli *nidāna-saṃyutta* with the parallel *nidāna-saṃyukta*, preserved in the Chinese translation of the Sarvāstivādin *Saṃyukta Āgama*, and finds the two collections to cover the same topics of dependent arising and sustenance. But no equivalent to the *Upanisā Sutta* is to be found in the parallel *saṃyukta*.

¹⁴ I explain my translation of *upanisā* as ‘precondition’ below; CPD and DOP i.458 s.v. *upanisā* has ‘cause, basis; condition, prerequisite’; Bodhi 2000 pp.553–6 translates it ‘proximate cause’.

¹⁵ M 9 PTS i.54.

1.1 The *Upanisā Sutta* compared to a parallel preserved in Chinese translation

There is a parallel to the *Upanisā Sutta*, called the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*, preserved in Chinese translation.¹⁶ The *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* is found, not in the *Nidāna Saṃyukta*, the parallel to the Pāli *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, but in the *Mādhyama Āgama* (MĀ), the parallel to the Pāli *Majjhima Nikāya*.¹⁷ The discourse is the 15th of the 17 discourses that make up Division 5 of MĀ, each of which are linked by a common concern with 習 (*xí*), the Chinese character that here corresponds to the Pāli *upanisā*.¹⁸ A comparison of the *Upanisā Sutta* with its parallel shows up three main differences: (i) the *Upanisā Sutta* has an introduction not found in the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*; (ii) the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* lists 29 *upanisā*, whereas the *Upanisā Sutta* lists 23; and (iii) the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* is found amid a family of 16 other *sūtras*, each of which sets out a related series of *upanisās*, whereas the *Upanisā Sutta* is isolated in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, so that its kinship to related discourses is more difficult to perceive.¹⁹ I will explore each of these differences in turn. This will lead to a discussion of the *Upanisā Sutta* as literature.

The *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* is structurally similar to the *Upanisā Sutta*. However, it lacks an introductory section comparable to that found in its Pāli equivalent, which explains that the ‘ending of the corruptions’ (*āsavānaṃ khayō*) is for one who has developed knowledge and vision into the arising and passing away of the five constituents (*khandhas*). However, MĀ 54, the discourse immediately preceding the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*, has a similar introductory section, differing slightly in that it is said that the ending of the corruptions is for one who has knowledge and vision of the four noble truths.²⁰ This kind of difference of detail is an

¹⁶ MĀ 55 (T.26 490c–91a), trans. Bingenheimer, Anālayo, and Bucknell 2013 pp.346–9. Since I do not know Chinese, my discussion of Chinese characters below is merely terminological. Strictly, the title *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* is incorrect, since we know that the original of MĀ was in Prakrit not Sanskrit.

¹⁷ The study on these collections by Minh Chau 1991 includes a summary (p.351) of the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*.

¹⁸ Bingenheimer et al. (2013) translate 習 (*xí*) as ‘condition’; this is in contrast to 因 (*yīn*), the usual translation of *hetu*, ‘cause, reason’; and 緣 (*yuán*), the usual translation of *pratyaya*, ‘condition’.

¹⁹ Another difference is that the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* lacks the simile of water flowing to the sea, which concludes the *Upanisā Sutta* so effectively. I will discuss this simile for progressive fulfilment, as well as a related simile of a tree coming into full flourishing, in a forthcoming article.

²⁰ T 26 490a; trans. Bingenheimer et al. 2013 p.343. MĀ 54 goes on to describe a series of 24 *xí* or *upanisās* that partly differ from those given in MĀ 55. The list of stages of the path in MĀ 54 begins with eight stages not found in MĀ55 or its Pāli parallel at S 12: 23: (1) respect for good friends; (2) approaching a teacher; (3) listening to the true Dharma; (4) hearing [of the Dharma,

example of the slight differences between otherwise similar discourses originally preserved orally and transmitted by communities of reciters (*bhāṇakas*).²¹

The *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* includes 29 *xī* (*upanisās*) as compared to the *Upanisā Sutta*’s 23. Whereas the twelfth link of dependent arising in the Pāli version refers to unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) rather than ageing-and-death (*jarāmaraṇa*), the version in Chinese translation includes ageing-and-death, followed by *dukkha*. Also, between the stages of faith (*saddhā*) and gladness (*pāmojja*) in the Pāli version, the version in Chinese translation has (1) right attention, (2) right mindfulness and right attentiveness, (3) guarding of the sense faculties, (4) keeping of the precepts and (5) being without regrets. As we will see, these stages have parallels in other Pāli discourses in the ‘*upanisā* family’. Finally, the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* concludes with ‘attaining nirvāṇa’.²² In short, what the Pāli version, with its 23 stages, gains in spare elegance, the MĀ version, with its 29 stages, retains in completeness and coherence. Ven. Anālayo, writing on the dynamics of oral recitation and transmission among the early Buddhists, comments that differences of this sort may not signify any deliberate intention on the part of the reciters to vary what was remembered as the teaching of the Buddha.²³ Rather, it seems more likely that differences like this may reflect how the early Buddhist monastics used recitation as a means of meditation as well as for passing on the teachings.²⁴ The difference between 23 and 29 stages in our parallel discourses may reflect a less-than-conscious preference of a monastic reciter or their community for a more elegant or a more complete version of the teaching in their meditative recitation.

connoting the ‘learning’ of it]; (5) reflecting on the meaning of the Dharma; (6) memorizing the Dharma; (7) recitation of the Dharma; (8) accepting the Dharma through reflection. This series of eight very practical conditions have parallels in two Pāli discourses, in M 70 PTS i.480, and in more detail at M 95 PTS ii.173–6. The series is described as ‘gradual training, gradual activity, gradual progress’ (*anupubbāsikkhā anupubbakiriyā anupubbapaṭipadā*), and is supplemented in the Pāli versions by zeal (*chanda*), application (*ussāha*), scrutiny (*tulanā*) and striving (*padhāna*). The remaining 16 factors in MĀ 54 are the same as those in MĀ 55, from faith to the ending of the corruptions, as discussed below.

²¹ Discussed by Anālayo 2011 pp.855–91.

²² This is characteristic of the discourses in the ‘*upanisā* family’ preserved in Chinese translation, whereas equivalent discourses in Pāli conclude with ‘knowledge about ending’ (*khaye ñāṇa*).

²³ See especially Anālayo 2011 p.875.

²⁴ Anālayo 2011 p.859.

1.2 The ‘*upanisā* family’ of discourses

The third difference between the Pāli *Upanisā Sutta* and its parallel in Chinese translation is that the former appears isolated in the *Samyutta Nikāya*, among discourses concerned with dependent arising and related themes, while the latter is found among other discourses concerned, in various ways, with stages of the path to awakening. An examination of the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* in the context of the other discourses in Chapter 5 on *xí* (*upanisā*) reveals that the discourse belongs to a ‘family’ of discourses concerned with *xí*, including more or less of a distinct set of progressive factors. Likewise, the Pāli *Upanisā Sutta* also belongs to a ‘family’ of discourses concerned with *upanisā*, except that these other family members are scattered throughout the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* in accordance with the number of *upanisās* they describe. Nevertheless, each family member has exactly the same structure, presenting a series of states or qualities as the *upanisā* of a further state of quality, up to the goal. The relationships between these various discourses can most easily be represented in a table:

Stages of the path	Pāli discourses							discourses in Chinese				
	A 5:24 A 5:168	A 6:50	A 7:65	A 8:81	A 10:3–5	A 11:3–5	S 12:23	MĀ 47–8 SĀ 495	MĀ 44	MĀ 45–6	MĀ 55	
<i>no. of stages</i>	5	6	7	8	10	11	23	12	14	18	29	
[the goal]	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
liberation							■	■	■	■	■	
dispassion	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
disenchantment	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
knowledge and vision	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
[...]												
concentration	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
happiness					■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
relaxation					■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
joy					■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
gladness					■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
freedom from remorse					■	■		■	■	■	■	
virtuous conduct	■	■	■	■	■	■		■	■	■	■	
restraint of the sense-faculties		■	■	■				■	■	■	■	
shame and remorse			■	■								
mindfulness and clear knowing				■				■	■	■	■	
right attention									■	■	■	
faith							■		■	■	■	
love and respect									■	■	■	
shame and remorse									■	■	■	
unsatisfactoriness							■			■	■	
11 or 12 nidānas							■			■	■	

Table 1: the ‘*upanisā* family’ of discourses

This table requires a few explanatory notes. (1) The ‘stages of the path’ on the left are English translations of Pāli terms, to which the corresponding Chinese terms are presumed to be translations of equivalent terms. (2) I mark the final stage as ‘[the goal]’ since it is given variously as ‘knowledge and vision of liberation’ (*vimuttiñānadassana*) in Pāli (or as ‘knowledge about ending’ (*khaye ñāṇa*) at S 12: 23), but as ‘attaining nirvāṇa’ (得涅槃, *dé nièpán*) in Chinese, though these expressions are presumably synonymous.²⁵ (3) Dark boxes mark the presence of the corresponding *upanisā* in that discourse; white boxes their absence. (4) ‘Shame and remorse’ appears twice in the list of stages of the path to simplify the presentation, since there is a difference in where Pāli and Chinese discourses locate this stage. (5) Many Pāli discourses count ‘disenchantment and dispassion’ as a single stage, whereas other Pāli discourses and all Chinese ones count them separately.

My discussion of the *Upanisā Sutta* and its parallel in Chinese translation suggests that its literary context is the ‘*upanisā* family’ of discourses. There are twelve Pāli and seven Chinese discourses in this family. Common to all of them is a core set of successive factors, from (8) concentration (*samādhi*), through (9) knowledge and vision of what is actually the case (*yathābhūtañānadassana*), (10) disenchantment (*nibbidā*) and (11) dispassion (*virāga*) to (12) the goal. We can call these the ‘insight’ series of factors. All the longer discourses in the *upanisā* family (except the *Upanisā Sutta*) also include an ‘integration’ series of factors, from (1) virtuous conduct (*sīla*), through (2) freedom from remorse (*avippaṭisāra*), (3) gladness (*pāmojja*), (4) joy (*pīti*), (5) relaxation (*passaddhi*), (6) happiness (*sukha*) to (7) concentration (*samādhi*). Twelve factors therefore constitute a common long version of stages of the path. From this point of view, the Pāli *Upanisā Sutta* is a representative example of the ‘*upanisā* family’, except that it includes the factor of faith and does not include the factors of virtuous conduct and freedom from remorse.²⁶ The *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*, in Chinese translation, however, includes all the factors of the long version, along with some additional ones. The different discourses in the family represent, we might say, variations on the theme of a path consisting of successive stages, each the supporting condition for the next. The general theme they have in common is the idea of the Buddhist path as one of progressive fulfilment through successive *upanisās*.

²⁵ Hence the Pāli commentary on S 12: 23 at Spk ii.51–3 glosses ‘knowledge about ending’ (*khaye ñāṇa*) as *nibbāna* and as ‘arahantship’ (*arahattā*); and at Mp iii.381 (on A 6: 50) glosses ‘knowledge and vision of liberation’ (*vimuttiñānadassana*) as ‘reviewing knowledge’ (*paccavekkhañāṇa*) of ‘the fruit of arahantship’ (*arahattaphalaṃ*).

²⁶ This point is explored in Attwood 2013.

1.3 The *Upanisā Sutta* as literature

This comparative analysis of the *upanisā* family of discourses allows me to make some historical conjectures. The existence of parallel versions preserved in Pāli as well as in Chinese translation implies that they belong to a phase of Buddhist literature that existed prior to the separation of oral transmission lineages. The slight differences I have noted between Pāli and Chinese versions of the discourses suggest variations occurring during oral transmission by groups of reciters (*bhāṇakas*). The distribution of these discourses in different canonical collections – in the *Madhyama Āgama* of the Sarvāstivāda school, as preserved in Chinese translation, or in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* and *Samyutta Nikāya* of the Theravāda school – implies some later sorting processes. Judging by the similarities between our discourses, these later processes simply appear to have involved allocating the *upanisā* discourses to different collections.

Turning specifically to the *Upanisā Sutta* and its parallel in Chinese translation, these discourses represent a unique occurrence within their respective transmission lineages of a member of the *upanisā* family that incorporates the *nidānas* of dependent arising into its series of stages. These discourses (or, perhaps, their hypothetical common ancestor) have evidently been created out of two independent teachings already in existence: that of dependent arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) and that of the stages of progressive fulfilment (*upanisās*).²⁷ We might infer that the literary intention behind linking these teachings in this way was to present an overarching statement of how conditionality works in experience. This, of course, is exactly the inference that the modern authors discussed in the Introduction have made.

Working against this inference, however, is the possibility that the juxtaposition of the two teachings is more of a rhetorical gesture than a doctrinal statement. The message of the *upanisā* discourses, taken as a family, might be said to be that the attainment of liberation and nirvāṇa is the goal of a path with regular and distinct stages. The message of the *Upanisā Sutta* and its parallel, the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*, is then that this path originates from the unsatisfactoriness of the whole round of saṃsāra, described in terms of the links of dependent arising. This is more intended to persuade an audience to take up the path than to formulate a doctrine concerning the range of conditionality.

²⁷ There seems no reason *prima facie* not to attribute this creative teaching to the Buddha; if we do so, we can further conjecture that it belongs to a mature stage of the Buddha’s teaching career, since it appears to link two already well-established teachings.

Two factors suggest such a rhetorical intention: the wording of the discourses, and their respective locations. Firstly, both the *Upanisā Sutta* and the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* first present a sequence of *upanisās* or *xí* beginning from the end.²⁸ The Pāli version begins:

‘Monks, when there is ending, whatever knowledge there may be about ending, I say that it has a precondition (*upanisā*), that it does not lack a precondition. And what, monks, is the precondition of knowledge about ending? The answer to that is *liberation*...

‘I also say, monks, that liberation has a precondition, and does not lack a precondition. And what, monks, is the precondition of liberation? The answer to that is *dispassion*.’²⁹

The *upanisā* or *xí* in both Pāli and Chinese versions are presented in a series working back to ignorance (*avijjā*). Both the discourses go on to present the sequence of factors in forwards order.³⁰ In the Pāli version:

‘So, monks, [1] with ignorance as their precondition [2] there are formations; with formations as its precondition [3] there is consciousness...’³¹

The significance of this wording is that both discourses are concerned with *upanisā* (or *xí*), and neither of them uses the language of dependent arising,

²⁸ Using the terminology of Nakamura 1980, this way of presenting the *upanisās* in backward order corresponds to the ‘discovery’ mode of presenting *paṭicca-samuppāda*, whereas the usual way of listing the links in forward order is the ‘presentation’ mode.

²⁹ S 12: 23 PTS ii.30: *yam pissa tam bhikkhave khayasmiṃ khaye ñāṇaṃ taṃ sa-upanisam vadāmi no anupanisam. kā ca bhikkhave khaye ñāṇassa upanisā. vimuttīti ssa vacanīyaṃ... kā ca bhikkhave vimuttiyā upanisā virāgo ti ssa vacanīyaṃ. virāgam p’āham bhikkhave sa-upanisam vadāmi no anupanisam.*

³⁰ There is another slight difference between the discourses in this regard, since in the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*’s ‘presentation’ sequence, the relationship of terms of dependent arising, from ignorance to suffering is described in terms of 緣 (*yuán*, the equivalent of *paccaya*, ‘condition’), rather than *upanisā*; whereas the relationship of terms of stages of the path, from faith to the attaining of nirvāṇa, is described in terms of 習 (*xí*, the equivalent of *upanisā*). Hence, 緣行識, ‘based on [*yuán*] karmic formations there is consciousness’ (trans. Bingenheimer *et al.* 2013 p.349); and 習苦便有信, ‘conditioned by [*xí*] suffering there is faith’ (trans. Bingenheimer *et al.* 2013 p.349).

³¹ S 12: 23 PTS ii.31: *iti kho bhikkhave avijjūpanisā saṅkhārā. saṅkhārūpanisam* [reading with Be; PTS has *saṅkhārūpanisāṃ*] *viññāṇaṃ.*

which involves such terms as *paccaya*, ‘condition’. I am not aware of any other use in Buddhist canonical literature of the term *upanisā* to describe the relationship of the factors of dependent arising, nor any use of the term *paccaya* to describe the relationship of stages of the path. The implication is that, in the *Upanisā Sutta* and its parallel, the language of *upanisās* is extended backwards in a rhetorical gesture that gathers up the whole of conditioned existence into a precondition for the Buddhist path.

Secondly, the allocation of the *Upanisā Sutta* to the *nidāna-samyutta* of the Pāli canon gives the somewhat misleading impression that it is concerned with *nidāna* or causation, along with the many other discourses in that *samyutta* concerned with dependent arising. However, a familiarity with the family of *upanisā* discourses to which the *Upanisā Sutta* belongs helps to set it into its more proper literary context. By contrast, the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* is to be found among other discourses concerned, one way or another, with *xī* or *upanisā*, emphasizing its primary intention as presenting stages of the path.

I will return to the larger question of the interpretation of the *Upanisā Sutta* in my conclusion. Meanwhile, and to help decide to what degree the literary intention behind the *Upanisā Sutta* and its parallel is rhetorical rather than doctrinal, I turn now to investigate the significance of the word *upanisā* in early Buddhist discourses.

2. The Meaning of the Word *upanisā*

The Pāli commentary on this sutta is straightforward: ‘It has an *upanisā* means it has a cause (*kāraṇa*), it has a condition (*paccaya*)’.³² Elsewhere, the commentary also glosses *upanisā* as it occurs in the ‘*upanisā* family’ of discourses as ‘support’ (*upanissaya*).³³ The dictionary definition of *upanisā* follows this commentarial gloss of *upanisā* as ‘cause, condition, support’.³⁴ The word has been translated in the *Upanisā Sutta* as ‘proximate cause’ and ‘specific basis’.³⁵ The disadvantage of

³² Spk ii.53: *saupanisanti sakāraṇaṃ sappaccayaṃ*.

³³ Mp iii.229 on A 5: 24, a member of the ‘*upanisā* family’, adds *hatūpanisoti hataupanissayo hatakāraṇo*: ‘lacking an *upanisā* means lacking a support (*upanissaya*), lacking a cause (*kāraṇa*)’; on A 6:50 *upanisā* is glossed as *upanissaya* (‘support’); Mp iv.50 on A 7: 65 *hatūpanisā*, ‘lacking *upanisā*’, is glossed as ‘having its condition cut off’ (*chinnapaccaya*).

³⁴ CDP s.v. *upanisā* ‘cause, condition, basis; prerequisite’; DOP i.458 s.v. *upanisā* ‘cause, basis; condition, prerequisite’.

³⁵ ‘Causal association’ (Rhys Davids 1922); ‘supporting condition’ (Bodhi 1980); ‘proximate cause’ (Bodhi 2000, Bodhi 2012); ‘specific basis’ (Gethin 2008 p.213).

such translations, however, is that they do not communicate much of the distinctive semantic character of *upanisā*, but merge its significance into the broad category of words for causes and conditions. In fact, the word *upanisā* is the Pāli equivalent of Sanskrit *upaniṣad*, a word with a long history in Vedic literature, always with distinctive soteriological connotations. These connotations carry over into the distinctive meaning of Pāli *upanisā*, as a kind of condition or instrumentality internal to a person and attained for the sake of a soteriological goal. I propose to translate *upanisā* in the ‘*upanisā* family’ of discourses as ‘precondition’, to distinguish *upanisā* from other words used in translation for ‘cause’ or ‘condition’.

2.1 Pāli *upanisā* and Sanskrit *upaniṣad*

English translations of *upanisā* such as ‘proximate cause’ and ‘specific basis’ do not communicate much about the cultural background or semantic character of *upanisā*. In fact the word *upanisā* is the Pāli equivalent of the Sanskrit *upaniṣad*, which is an important term in Vedic religious thought. This was not clear to the early western scholars of Pāli, perhaps in part because the Pāli commentarial tradition does not make the connection. For the authors of PED and CPD the Pāli *upanisā* seemed to represent a contraction of *upanissaya*, ‘support’.³⁶ But in 1945, French scholar Louis Renou argued convincingly that *upanisā* is without doubt the same word as *upaniṣad*, although it means ‘cause’ in early Buddhism, in contrast to its Vedic sense as ‘connection’.³⁷ He cites an extract from the 2nd c. ce Sanskrit poem *Saundarananda* by the poet Aśvaghōṣa, in which we find the Buddha teaching Nanda in a way which directly parallels the long version of the *upanisā* discourse.³⁸

My friend, you should accept that dispassion is the *upaniṣad* of liberation, understanding of dispassion, and knowledge-and-vision of understanding.

³⁶ PED p.144 s.v. *upanisā*: ‘if = Vedic *upaniṣad*, it would be fr. *upa+ni+sad*, but if, as is more likely, a contracted form of *upanissaya*, it would be fr. *upa+ni+śri*. The history of this word has yet to be written’. CPD s.v. *upanisā*: ‘in Pāli a semantic blend has taken place with *upanissaya*’.

³⁷ Renou 1978 (1945) p.150: ‘*Upanisā* en pāli signifie «cause», comme on sait. On a hésité longtemps à mettre le mot en parallèle avec *upaniṣad* en raison de la différence de sens. On a été jusqu’à supposer que le mot pāli remontait à *upanissaya*. Mais *upanisā* est à *upaniṣad* ce qu’est *parisā* à *pariṣad*, et le Sanskrit bouddhique connaît parfaitement la forme *upaniṣad* (à côté d’*upaniṣā*, mal sanskritisé) au sens de «cause». L’énumération *mokṣasyopaniṣat... vairāgyam, jñānasyopaniṣat... samādhiḥ*, etc. Saundaran. XIII, 22 sqq., qui reproduit celle d’Anguttaranik. V p.311, confirme bien qu’il s’agit d’un doublet pur et simple.’

³⁸ A 11: 3 PTS v.313; with an exact parallel at MĀ 47, which concerns *xi*.

You should consider that concentration is actually the *upaniṣad* of knowledge, and that the *upaniṣad* of concentration is happiness of body and mind.

The *upaniṣad* of happiness is supreme relaxation of body and mind, and you should understand that the *upaniṣad* of relaxation is joy.

Likewise the *upaniṣad* of joy is thought to be the highest gladness, and that of gladness is freedom from remorse concerning what has been done badly or not done.

The *upaniṣad* of the mind’s freedom from remorse is purity of virtue; so purify your virtue, for virtue leads the way.³⁹ It seems likely that Aśvaghōṣa had access to a version of the Buddhist discourses in which the Sanskrit *upaniṣad* appeared as the equivalent to the Pali *upaniṣā*.⁴⁰ This parallelism of *upaniṣā* and *upaniṣad* is confirmed by the BHS dictionary,⁴¹ in which Edgerton cites *duḥkhopaniṣac chraddhā* in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*,⁴² which corresponds to *dukkhūpaniṣā saddhā* (‘with unsatisfactoriness as its *upaniṣā* there is faith’) in Pāli.⁴³

2.2 Sanskrit *upaniṣad*

The Pāli *upaniṣā* like the Sanskrit *upaniṣad* is derived from the verbal root *sad* ‘sit’ with the prefixes *upa* ‘near’ and *ni* ‘down’, hence ‘sitting down near’. Earlier western scholars of Indian religion understood this ‘sitting down near’ to imply a student sitting at the teacher’s feet, hence the ‘secret teaching’ that the teacher imparted, and finally the name of the class of texts (the Upaniṣads)

³⁹ Aśvaghōṣa, *Saundarananda*, 13:22–31: *mokṣasyopaniṣat saumya vairāgyam iti gr̥hyatām | vairāgasyāpi saṃvedaḥ saṃvido jñānadarśanam || jñānasyopaniṣac caiva samādhir upadhāryatām | samādherapy upaniṣat sukhaṃ śārīramānasam || praśrabdhiḥ kāyamanasaḥ sukhasyopaniṣat parā | praśrabdher apy upaniṣat prītir apy avagamyatām || tathā prīter upaniṣat prāmodyaṃ paramaṃ mataṃ | prāmodyasyāpy ahr̥llekhaḥ kukṛteṣvakṛteṣu vā || ahr̥llekhasya manasaḥ śīlaṃ tūpaniṣac chuci | ataḥ śīlaṃ nayaty agryam iti śīlaṃ viśodhaya ||*

⁴⁰ Johnson 1936 p.xxxv argues that Aśvaghōṣa may have belonged to the Bahuśrutikas, a subsect of the Mahāsaṅghikas. Johnston 1932 p.74 notices but cannot quite explain the alternation of *saṃveda* (‘understanding’) in Aśvaghōṣa for *nibbidā* (‘disenchantment’) in the Pali (*nirveda* in Sanskrit).

⁴¹ BHS s.v. *upaniṣad*.

⁴² Bhāṣya on ADK 2.1; Prahlad Pradhan 1967 p.39.

⁴³ In S 12: 23 PTS ii.31.

which concern this ‘secret teaching’.⁴⁴ But more recent scholars present an alternative picture. Brian Black comments:

Although [the student sitting at the teacher’s feet] is undoubtedly what the word has come to mean, scholars have challenged this as the original connotation on the grounds that this is not how the word is employed in its initial occurrences, or indeed anywhere in the texts that we now call the Upaniṣads. Rather than defining the word by its etymology, scholars have noticed that in its earliest textual contexts, *upaniṣad* is used to describe a connection between things, often presented in a hierarchical relationship.⁴⁵

In short, the original meaning of *upaniṣad* in the Upaniṣads and other texts is a ‘connection’ or ‘equivalence’;⁴⁶ it denotes the fact that two things are placed in a relationship.⁴⁷ Within Brahmanical thinking it connects levels of reality in a hierarchy. Joel Brereton has clarified the use of the term *upaniṣad* in the Upaniṣads as follows:⁴⁸

The Upanishadic sages set up a system of levels that shows which powers include other powers or which are dependent on which others. Ultimately, by moving towards progressively deeper levels, the sage identifies the fundamental principle on which everything else is established. In one sense, this is the most characteristic technique of the Upanishads, for it is from it that the Upanishads have their name. The word “*upaniṣad*,” though usually translated “secret teaching” or the like, originally meant the subordination of one thing to another. The purpose of arranging things in such a progression is finally to identify the dominant reality behind an object.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ This point is reviewed in Vacek 1991.

⁴⁵ Black 2007 p.6.

⁴⁶ Olivelle 1998 p.24. On the meaning of *upaniṣad* see Schayer 1925, Renou 1978, Falk 1986, Vacek 1991.

⁴⁷ Gren Eklund 1984 p.117; she goes on to observe: ‘√ *sad* would, in this case, refer to the location of the objects of knowledge and not to the position of the knowing subject.’ That is, *upaniṣad* refers to a relationship between things known, not to the relationship of a pupil who knows things.

⁴⁸ Brereton 1990 pp.124–5.

⁴⁹ Cohen 2008 p.4 also proposes ‘underlying reality’.

A story from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* nicely illustrates the meaning of *upaniṣad*. Indra from among the gods and Virocana from among the demons (*āsuras*) went to Prajāpati to discover the *brahman* which fulfils all desires. Prajāpati first teaches them the *upaniṣad* between the body and the *ātman* or self (the dominant reality), so that dressing up nicely and keeping healthy is the way to fulfil all desires. While Virocana is happy with this false *upaniṣad*, Indra returns to Prajāpati for further study, and learns the *upaniṣad* or connection between the immortal non-bodily *ātman* or self and the *brahman* (the dominant reality).⁵⁰ Such an *upaniṣad* is soteriological; it is a link between levels of reality, and knowing this *upaniṣad* brings Indra to the truth.

The *upaniṣads* discussed in the Upaniṣads are sometimes also a means to achieve an end – not so much a connection but a teaching for attaining a spiritual goal. A good example from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* is the following:

Janaka, the king of Videha, got down from his seat, came up to him [Yājñavalkya the sage], and said: “Homage to you, Yājñavalkya. Please teach me”. Yājñavalkya replied: “Just as a king, when he is about to undertake a great expedition, would equip himself with a chariot or a ship, so have you equipped yourself with these hidden teachings (*upaniṣads*)”.⁵¹

And the *upaniṣads* discussed in the Upaniṣads are also sometimes also presented as chains or series of connections, equivalents, or levels of reality. Another example from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, concerning a series of mystic chants, gives a flavour of this kind of thinking:

When a man knows these hidden connections (*upaniṣad*) of the Sāman chants – speech will yield for him the milk which is the very milk of speech, and he will come to own and to eat his own food.⁵²

These aspects of the meaning of *upaniṣad* in the Upaniṣads suggest some background context for the development of the early Buddhist concept of *upaniṣā*.

⁵⁰ CU 8.7–12; trans. Olivelle 1998 pp.279–87.

⁵¹ BU 4.2.1; trans. Olivelle 1998 p.109; discussed in Vacek 1991 p.260.

⁵² CU 1.13; trans. Olivelle 1998 p.185; discussed in Vacek 1991 pp.261–2; more generally in Gren Eklund 1984 esp. p.117.

2.3 Pāli *upaniṣā* in the context of ascetic debate

Harry Falk, writing on the meaning of *upaniṣad* in Vedic texts more generally, cites a list of *upaniṣads* concerned more with knowledge than with ontological grounding:

There are these eight *upaniṣads* for knowledge (*veda*): intelligence, honour, self-control, faith, inquiry, not making oneself a public object, yoga and obedience to the teacher.⁵³

Falk describes the meaning of *upaniṣad* here as: ‘everything that must necessarily be present for something else to unfold’.⁵⁴ An *upaniṣad*, in other words, is a kind of necessary condition, although Falk adds that thinking of *upaniṣad* in terms of an abstract noun like ‘condition’ fails to take into account the inner state of an agent implied by the term.⁵⁵ We should note too that this inner state is also what is necessary for the sake of a desired aim. In this respect, the method of identifying *upaniṣads* illustrated here is the same as in the Upaniṣads, except that the search for an ontological ground is replaced by a search for knowledge (*veda*).

Falk goes on to point out that this broader Vedic method of identifying *upaniṣads* is also clearly seen in an early Buddhist text. This is the *Sambodhi Sutta* (Discourse on Complete Awakening):

‘Monks, if wanderers of rival religious groups should question you in this way: “Friend, what is the *upaniṣā* for developing those qualities which constitute complete awakening?” – questioned in this way, monks, what should you say in reply to those wanderers of rival religious groups?’⁵⁶

⁵³ *Samhitopaniṣadbrāhmaṇa* 3.20, quoted in Falk 1986 p.96: *athaitā vedasyāṣṭāv upaniṣado bhavanti. vittis copastavaś ca damaś ca śraddhā ca sampraśnaś cānākāśīkaraṇaṃ ca yogaś cācāryaśuśrūṣā ceti.*

⁵⁴ Falk 1986 p.96: *Alles, was notwendigerweise vorhanden sein muß, damit etwas anderes sich entfalten kann.*

⁵⁵ Falk 1986 p.97.

⁵⁶ A 9: 1 PTS iv.350: *sace bhikkhave aññatitthiyā paribbājakā evaṃ puccheyyūṃ sambodhipakkhikānaṃ āvuso dhammānaṃ kā upaniṣā bhāvanāyā ’ti evaṃ puṭṭhā tumhe bhikkhave tesam aññatitthiyānaṃ paribbājakānaṃ kinti byākareyyāthā ’ti.* In a parallel passage in MĀ 57 preserved in Chinese translation, this introductory questioning is not found. The discussion of *upaniṣā* that follows the questioning at A 9: 1 and at MĀ 57 is repeated in the Discourse to Meghiya, found at Ud 4: 1 and A 9: 3 in Pāli, and at MĀ 56 in Chinese translation.

The Buddha answers his own question, teaching that there are five such *upanisās*: (1) spiritual friendship (*kalyāṇamittatā*), (2) virtuous conduct (*sīla*), (3) suitable conversation (*sappāyā kathā*), (4) steadfast energy (*āradhaviṛiya*), and (5) insight (*paññā*); although the Buddha goes on to teach that spiritual friendship is the most important of these conditions. These *upanisās* are not abstract conditions but intentional activities which are conditions for achieving an aim, in this case, the developing of the qualities which constitute complete awakening.

The opening to this discourse implies that religious wanderers were likely to engage Buddhists in debate on the topic of *upanisā*. This in turn suggests that *upanisā/upaniṣad* was a topic of debate in the ascetic culture of the Buddha’s day.⁵⁷ And this in turn implies that the word *upaniṣad* as used in the Upaniṣads, in other Vedic texts, and as discussed by ascetics and the early Buddhists, involves a common element – a purpose or value for the sake of which some human quality is necessary. This is not to say, however, that the early Buddhist texts uncritically accept such a concept of *upaniṣad*. Another discourse once again implies that *upanisā* was a topic of debate:

‘Monks, if someone were to pose the question, “These wholesome qualities that are noble, conducive to leaving [conditioned existence], leading to complete awakening – what is the *upanisā* for learning about them?”, you should reply to them in this way: “Only so far as to exactly know the teachings in pairs”.’⁵⁸

The answer the Buddha gives to his own question appears incongruous, but I suggest that it appears to advise the monks not to involve themselves in debate about *upanisā*, but rather to emphasize the purpose for which debate may be held.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ See Bronkhorst 2007 for a presentation and defence of the thesis that the Buddha’s context was not that of Brahmanical culture, but instead the ascetic culture of ‘Greater Magadha’; an argument made independently in Samuel 2008.

⁵⁸ Sn 3: 12 PTS 139: *ye te bhikkhave kusalā dhammā ariyā niyyānikā sambodhagāmīno, tesam vo bhikkhave kusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ ariyānaṃ niyyānikānaṃ sambodhagāmīnaṃ kā upanisā savanāyā’ti iti ce bhikkhave pucchitāro assu, te evam assu vacanīyā ‘yāvad eva dvayatānaṃ dhammānaṃ yathābhūtaṃ ñānāyā’ti.*

⁵⁹ The commentary at Pj II 503 says: “Those wholesome qualities ... leading to complete awakening” – what *upanisā* is there, what reason, what purpose is there for you to hear about those wholesome qualities... leading to awakening; what value is there that you should learn about those qualities – this is what is meant.’ *tesam vo bhikkhave ... pe ... savanāya, tesam bhikkhave kusalānaṃ ... pe ... sambodhagāmīnaṃ kā upanisā, kiṃ kāraṇaṃ, kiṃ payojanaṃ tumhākaṃ savanāya, kimatthaṃ tumhe te dhamme suñāthāti vuttaṃ hoti.* I suggest that the commentary

The discourse goes on to set out sixteen ‘teachings in pairs’, contemplating any of which may lead to the goal of liberating knowledge.

2.4 Pāli *upanisā* in Buddhist discourses

The word *upanisā* also features in early Buddhist discourses that are not connected with debate, such as in the ‘*upanisā* family’ of discourses, where it occurs with a distinctively ‘Buddhist’ meaning. This implies that the idea of *upanisā* was taken up in early Buddhist thought from Vedic and ascetic religious discourse, like other Buddhist terms borrowed from a Brahminical context.⁶⁰ For instance, in the *Kathāvattu Sutta* (Discourse on Topics of Conversation), after a detailed analysis of the types and value of conversation, the Buddha concludes:

‘Monks, you should decide whether or not someone has *upanisā* in relation to their conversation. Monks, one who does not listen attentively does not have *upanisā*; one who does listen attentively has *upanisā*... Monks, this is the aim (*attha*) of conversation, this is the aim of discussion, this is what *upanisā* aims at, this is the aim of listening attentively – namely, the liberation of the mind through non-appropriation.⁶¹

In this context, *upanisā* stands alongside conversation (*kathā*), discussion (*mantanā*) and listening attentively (*sotāvadhānaṃ*), as a state of the person which acts as a condition for the attaining of a purpose, namely, liberation of the mind (*cittassa vimokkha*).⁶² While *upanisā* is not explicitly defined here, we can easily think of the five *upanisās* of the *Sambodhi Sutta* (spiritual friendship and so on, as listed above) as intentional activities which are conditions for achieving the aim of liberation.

is not here defining *upanisā* as ‘aim’ or ‘purpose’ (pace Bodhi 2017 p.280, p.1000 and p.1505 n.1711), but rather glossing it in this way to highlight the purposive aspect of *upanisā*.

⁶⁰ Discussed for instance by Norman 1991; *upanisā* should perhaps be classed among ‘Terms taken over by the Buddha but used with new senses.’

⁶¹ A 3: 67 PTS i.198: *kathāsampayogena bhikkhave puggalo vedītabbo yaḍi vā saupaniso yaḍi vā anupaniso. anohitasoto bhikkhave anupaniso hoti, ohitasoto saupaniso hoti... etadatthā bhikkhave kathā etadatthā mantanā etadatthā upanisā etadatthāṃ sotāvadhānaṃ, yaḍidaṃ anupādā cittaṃ vimokkhe ṭi.*

⁶² Both DOP i.458 s.v. *upanisā* and CPD s.v. *upanisā* take *upanisā* in this context to mean ‘sitting near (a teacher) to listen; attention; secret knowledge’. But the commentary (Mp ii.312) glosses *upanisā* here as ‘support’ (*upanissaya*), ‘condition’ (*paccaya*), and translators follow. The commentary goes on to interpret conversation, discussion, *upanisā* and listening attentively as a progressive chain.

A related passage in the Vinaya rehearses an extended version of the stages of the path before concluding in the same way:

‘Discipline is for the sake of (*atthāya*) restraint; restraint is for the sake of freedom from remorse; freedom from remorse is for the sake of gladness; gladness is for the sake of joy; joy is for the sake of relaxation; relaxation is for the sake of happiness; happiness is for the sake of concentration; concentration is for the sake of knowledge and vision of what is actually the case; knowledge and vision of what is actually the case are for the sake of disenchantment; disenchantment is for the sake of dispassion; dispassion is for the sake of liberation; liberation is for the sake of knowledge and vision of liberation; knowledge and vision of liberation are for the sake of nirvāṇa without appropriation; conversation has this aim; discussion has this aim; *upanisā* has this aim; listening attentively has this aim – namely, the liberation of the mind without appropriation.’⁶³

Once again, *upanisā* can be understood in these contexts as a supportive inner state that is a necessary condition for achieving the aim of liberation. Indeed, *upanisā* here seems to imply the principle of having such supportive inner states, exemplified by spiritual friendship, suitable conversation and so on.

This Vinaya passage also presents fourteen stages of the path, overlapping with the twelve-stage long version of the ‘*upanisā* family’ of discourses,⁶⁴ with each stage presented as being ‘for the sake of’ (*atthāya*) the next.⁶⁵ When we turn to the ‘*upanisā* family’ of discourses themselves, we find a formulation of the stages of the path in which each ‘for the sake of’ in the Vinaya passage is

⁶³ Vin v.164: *vinayo saṃvaratthāya, saṃvaro avippaṭisārathāya, avippaṭisāro pāmujjatthāya, pāmujjam pītatthāya, pīti passaddhatthāya, passaddhi sukhatthāya, sukham samādhathāya, samādhi yathābhūtañānadassanathāya, yathābhūtañānadassanaṃ nibbidatthāya, nibbidā virāgatthāya, virāgo vimuttatthāya, vimutti vimuttiñānadassanathāya, vimuttiñānadassanaṃ anupādāparinibbānatthāya. etadatthā kathā etadatthā mantanā etadatthā upanisā etadattham sotāvadhānaṃ, yadidaṃ anupādācittassa vimokkho’i.*

⁶⁴ Except that ‘virtuous conduct’ is replaced by ‘discipline’ and ‘restraint’; and with the addition of ‘nirvāṇa without appropriation’ as the goal.

⁶⁵ The commentary (at Sp 1366) adds: ‘*upanisā* means this successive conditionality belonging to the words starting “discipline is for the sake of restraint” and is for the sake of that’ (*upanisā’i ayaṃ ‘vinayo saṃvaratthāyā’i ādikā paramparapaccayatā’pi etad atthāya*).

replaced by an *upanisā*; for instance, ‘gladness is for the sake of joy’ (*pāmujjam pītathāya*) becomes ‘joy has gladness as its *upanisā*’ (*pāmojjūpanisā pīti*).⁶⁶ Not only does *upanisā* in these discourses represent the principle of supportive conditions, but each of these inner states of the Buddhist practitioner is for the sake of the next, with *nirvāṇa* as the ultimate aim. The idea of a series or chain of *upanisās* bears some resemblance to the chains or series of *upaniṣads* of the Upaniṣads. This does not seem to imply any direct influence of the Upaniṣads on the formulation of early Buddhist discourses, but perhaps points to a general tendency of thought in ancient India.⁶⁷

The various discourses belonging to the ‘*upanisā* family’ provide the great majority of instances of the word *upanisā* in the Pāli canon.⁶⁸ This suggests that the main use of the word *upanisā* in early Buddhism is in the specifically Buddhist formulation of the path as characterized by progressive fulfilment. In this formulation, the idea of *upanisā* has developed beyond the idea of a supportive condition for the sake of awakening, into the idea of a chain of conditions, such that each stage of the path is an *upanisā* for the next, where an *upanisā* is both a necessary condition (like a *paccaya*) and a purpose or aim (an *attha*). In this way, we see how a distinctively Buddhist concept of *upaniṣad* developed out of the concept found in Vedic texts and in the culture of ascetic debate. We can trace the stages of the Buddhist transformation of *upaniṣad* as follows:

1. In the early Upaniṣads, *upaniṣad* means a ‘connection’ or ‘equivalence’ between levels of reality; knowledge of these *upaniṣads* is for the sake of realizing the spiritual goal; and these *upaniṣads* may be arranged in chains or series.
2. In other Vedic texts and in the culture of ascetic debate of the Buddha’s day, an *upaniṣad* is a quality or state of the practitioner which is instrumental for realizing the spiritual goal.
3. The Buddha is reported as teaching distinctively ‘Buddhist’

⁶⁶ At S 12: 23 PTS ii.32. Likewise, at A 11: 1 (≠ 10: 1), each stage of the path is the *attha* (‘goal’) and *ānisaṃsa* (‘benefit’) of the one before it.

⁶⁷ This is the line of interpretation taken by Gren Eklund 1984.

⁶⁸ In an Appendix below, I catalogue all the appearances of the word *upanisā* in Pāli discourses, a task which would distract from the main thrust of the argument here, but which is nevertheless of interest in that it confirms how the meaning of Buddhist *upanisā* is continuous with the meaning of *upaniṣad* in wider Indian religious and intellectual culture.

lists of *upaniṣads* for the sake of developing the qualities of awakening, emphasizing the importance of *upaniṣad* as a spiritually supportive inner state.

4. And finally the Buddha is reported as teaching chains of *upaniṣads*, very different from such chains in the Upaniṣads, which set out a series of inner states, for the sake of liberation, in terms of conditionality.

Finally, in the *Upanisā Sutta*, alone among Pāli Buddhist discourses, the series of *upaniṣās* is extended beyond or behind supportive inner states that progress towards awakening, in terms of the *nidānas* of dependent arising. Since these *nidānas* are not usually presented as purposive, nor as intentional inner states of a practitioner, the *Upanisā Sutta* would appear to be a somewhat experimental or rhetorical extension of the full version of the *upaniṣā* series. The extension depends on treating each *paccaya* (‘condition’) of the *nidāna* series as an *upaniṣā*, exploiting the fact that *upaniṣā* implies ‘necessary condition’. The import of this rhetorical presentation might be that knowledge of the twelve *nidānas*, in the sense of a direct appreciation of the conditionality of experience and the inevitability of unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) in conditioned existence, is exactly the kind of inner state which is a necessary condition for embarking on the way to liberation.

2.5 Translating *upaniṣā* in Pāli discourses

This leaves the question of how exactly to translate *upaniṣā*, a word which lacks any obvious parallel in western thought. A translation of *upaniṣā* has to convey the characteristics of (i) an inner state of the person or agent that is (ii) a necessary condition (iii) for attaining a purpose or aim. One possibility is suggested by Linda Covill, in her translation of Aśvaghōṣa’s *Saundarananda*, a Buddhist Sanskrit poem cited above.⁶⁹ In the context of Aśvaghōṣa’s poetic re-working of the stages of the path, she translates *upaniṣad* as ‘secret’:

My dear friend, accept that dispassion is the secret of liberation, understanding of dispassion, and knowledge of understanding. Recognize that concentration is the secret of knowledge, and physical and mental bliss of concentration. Understand that

⁶⁹ See n.38 above.

complete confidence is the real secret of physical and mental bliss, and that joy is the secret of confidence. Likewise, great rapture is considered the secret of joy, and the secret of rapture is a clear conscience in respect of things ill-done or undone. But pure moral self-restraint is the secret of a clear conscience; therefore, purify your moral self-restraint, for moral self-restraint comes first.⁷⁰

The word ‘secret’ here has the sense of ‘that which accounts for something surprising or extraordinary; the essential thing to be observed in order to secure some end’.⁷¹ This neatly captures some of the applied meaning of *upaniṣad*/*upaniṣā* in the context of the ‘*upaniṣā* family’ of discourses in a single English expression.

The English word ‘secret’ also reproduces something of the Upaniṣadic idea of an *upaniṣad* as a ‘secret teaching’. However, the Buddhist idea of *upaniṣā* does not involve any sense of a hidden or mysterious teaching imparted by a guru. In lieu of a better English translation, I therefore propose ‘precondition’ as a general translation of *upaniṣā*, acknowledging that such a translation only partially succeeds in conveying the characteristics of (i) an inner state, (ii) of an inner or ‘secret’ character, (iii) for an aim, that the word *upaniṣā* implies.⁷²

Conclusion: Conditionality and Interpretation

The first part of my investigation has shown that the *Upaniṣā Sutta* and its parallel, the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*, represent quite sophisticated literary attempts to fuse the stages of the path of the ‘*upaniṣā* family’ of discourses with the twelve *nidānas* of dependent arising. The discourses do this by presenting the *nidānas* as *upaniṣās*, suggesting the overlap of the two concepts. However, the second part of my investigation has shown that *upaniṣās* are to be distinguished from *nidānas*, in that they are specifically states of the person and are goal-directed. In conclusion, I suggest that the *Upaniṣā Sutta* and its parallel represent a rhetorical presentation of the Buddhist path that might be taken to mean that a

⁷⁰ Covill 2007 p.247.

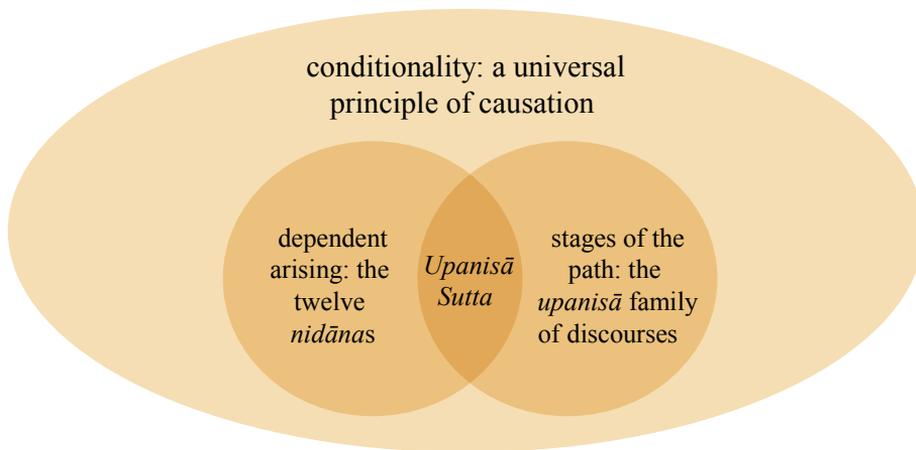
⁷¹ OED s.v. ‘secret’ 4.c.

⁷² The word ‘prerequisite’ is also a possibility, but is often used to translate *nissaya* (PED p.374). I suggest using the words ‘requisite’ and ‘prerequisite’ to render Pāli terms which often connote quite practical forms of dependence, such as *nissaya* and *parikkhāra*, keeping ‘precondition’ specifically to translate *upaniṣā*.

knowledge of the dependent arising of saṃsāra is, poetically speaking, the first necessary condition of the path towards awakening.

This conclusion implies that the original literary intention of the *Upanisā Sutta* was not likely to have been a serious doctrinal attempt to show the overarching nature of the principle of conditionality. However, for modern western Buddhists, whose intellectual context is a thorough-going naturalism, it is attractive to interpret the *Upanisā Sutta* as showing how both the workings of saṃsāra and the path to the attainment of nirvāṇa arise within an overarching principle of conditionality that governs the arising and ceasing of all conditioned things. This naturalistic interpretation of the *Upanisā Sutta* emphasizes the possibility of a path to awakening that unfolds according to causes and conditions that can be studied and put into practice in a systematic fashion. Hence the *Upanisā Sutta* and its parallel, each unique in their respective canonical collections, and each largely neglected by their respective Buddhist traditions, have come to take on new and unintended significance as the Dharma is translated into the modern western context with its own cultural and philosophical commitments. To echo Mrs Rhys Davids, the *Upanisā Sutta* is indeed ‘a universal message of hope’ – but especially for modern western Buddhists.

My conclusions concerning interpretation can be summed up in a simple diagram, which shows the relationships between the formulations of the twelve *nidānas* of dependent arising and the *upanisās* of the ‘*upanisā* family’ of discourses concerning stages of the path, within the conception of an overarching principle of conditionality:



The dotted line representing the overarching principle of conditionality is designed to indicate that the existence of such a universal principle is an *interpretation* of conditionality, rather than a statement of early Buddhist doctrine. Such an interpretation goes back to early post-canonical Buddhism,⁷³ but is especially attractive to western Buddhists who think in terms of the naturalistic worldview of modern science.

Appendix: Catalogue of appearances of *upanisā* in Pāli Discourses

While the following catalogue of appearances of *upanisā* in the Pāli discourses would have distracted from the main argument above, it might nevertheless be of interest for showing the continuity of the Buddhist concept with the use of *upaniṣad* in the wider Indian religious and intellectual culture of the day. I divide the appearances of *upanisā* into five categories.

1. The category of *upanisā* as ‘likeness’:

- i. in **D 20** among a long list of gods who come to visit the Buddha: ‘The gods who are a likeness (*upanisā*) of the moon came, with the moon before them; the gods who are a likeness of the sun came, with the sun before them.’⁷⁴
- ii. in **Jā 548** a female ascetic says to a king (to stop him giving away his mother): ‘Your mother nourished you and for a long time was kind to you. When Chambhī did wrong to you, she was wise and saw your good, and by placing a likeness (*upanisā*) in your place she released you from harm.’⁷⁵

The meaning of *upanisā* as ‘likeness’ corresponds exactly with the meaning of Sanskrit *upaniṣad*, glossed by Pāṇini as *aupamya*, ‘likeness’.⁷⁶ This is a non-religious meaning of *upaniṣad*, which evidently passed over into Pāli.

⁷³ The interpretation of dependent arising and conditionality in Pāli exegetical literature and by modern western Buddhists is explored further in Jones 2019.

⁷⁴ D 20 PTS ii.259: *candassūpanisā devā, candam āguṃ purakkhatvā | sūriyassūpanisā devā, sūriyam āguṃ purakkhatvā* |. The commentary (Sv ii.690) glosses *upanisā* as *nissitikā*, ‘supported by’ (DOP ii.110).

⁷⁵ Jā 546 PTS vi.470: *posetā te janettī ca dīgharattānukampikā | chabbhī tayi padussati paṇḍitā atthadassinī | aññaṃ upanisam katvā vadhā taṃ parimocayi* ||. The commentary (Jā vi.470) glosses *upanisā* as *paṭirūpakam*, ‘likeness’.

⁷⁶ Aṣṭādhyāyī 1.4.79; *aupamya* is an abstract noun from *upamā*, ‘comparison, similarity’.

2. The category of *upanisā* as the instrumental cause for a goal, as a ‘means’:

A stanza at **Dhp 75** runs: ‘The means (*upanisā*) of gain is one thing; that which leads to nirvāṇa is another. In this way having realized this, the monk who is the Buddha’s disciple should not enjoy honour but should practise seclusion.’⁷⁷ Here *upanisā* represents a state of the agent which is instrumental for a goal of life; enjoying honour is a state which leads to gain, but if one’s aim is nirvāṇa, one should instead take up seclusion (*viveka*) as a means.

The meaning of *upanisā* as ‘means’ is not specifically religious, since there is an *upanisā* for the worldly aim of ‘gain’ as well as an *upanisā* for the religious aim of nirvāṇa. The word *upaniṣad* here signifies a kind of cause which is connected with a goal.

3. The category of *upanisā* as an inner state which is a supportive condition:

- i. in **A 3: 67** (discussed above): ‘Monks, you should decide whether or not someone has *upanisā* in relation to their conversation’ and so on.⁷⁸
- ii. in **Sn 2: 8** a stanza runs: ‘In this way, the knowledgeable one, self-developed, who is learned and unshakeable, understands, and convinces others who are possessed of the *upanisā* of listening attentively.’⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Dhp 75: *aññā hi lābhūpanisā | aññā nibbānagāminī | evam etaṃ abhiññāya | bhikkhu buddhassa sāvako | sakkāraṃ nābhinandeyya | vivekam anubrūhaye ||*. A parallel at Udānavarga 13.5 reads *anyā hi lābhopaniṣad*, again showing that Pāli *upanisā* = Sanskrit *upaniṣad*. The commentary at Dhp-a ii.102 glosses *upanisā* as *paṭipadā*, ‘means’, but we should understand this as a gloss concerning the instrumental nature of an *upanisā* and not as a definition. In K.R. Norman’s note on this stanza (1997 p.81), he writes: ‘For the meaning “means, way” for *upanisā*, see CPD (s.v. *upanisā*), and BHSD (s.v. *upaniṣad*).’ This must be a mistake, since there is no such mention of that meaning in either dictionary; indeed BHS s.v. *upaniṣad* reads ‘*anyā hi lābhopaniṣad anyā nirvāṇagāminī, for the cause (basis) of gain is one thing, that which leads to nirvāṇa is another*’; i.e. it takes *upaniṣad* to mean ‘cause, basis’.

⁷⁸ A 3: 67 PTS i.198: *kathāsampayogena bhikkhave puggalo veditabbo yadi vā saupaniso yadi...*

⁷⁹ Sn 2: 8 PTS 56, v.322: *evampi yo vedagu bhāvitatto | bahussuto hoti avedhadhammo | so kho pare nijjhapaye pajānaṃ | sotāvadhānūpanisūpapanne ||*. My translation follows Bodhi 2017 p.209 (‘attentive ears as a supportive condition’), against Norman 2001 p.39 (‘the ability to listen attentively’) who follows the commentary in taking *sotāvadhānūpanisa* as a *dvandva*: *sotāvadhānūpanisūpapanne* ‘i sota-odahanena ca maggaphalānaṃ upanissayena ca upapanne (‘sotāvadhānūpanisūpapanne means possessed of the fruits of the path through listening attentively and through having a support’).

- iii. in **Vin v.164** (discussed above): following a fourteen-stage account of the path, each stage ‘for the sake of’ (*atthāya*) the next, the Buddha concludes: ‘Conversation has this aim; discussion has this aim; *upanisā* has this aim; listening attentively has this aim – namely, the liberation of the mind without appropriation’.⁸⁰

The meaning of *upanisā* in these cases is religious, and connotes the necessary attitude or inner state required to understand and practise the Dharma.

4. The category of *upanisās* as specific qualities for the sake of a goal:

- i. in **A 9: 1** (discussed above): ‘Monks, if wanderers of rival religious groups should question you in this way: “Friend, what is the *upanisā* for the development of those factors leading to complete awakening?” and so on.’⁸¹ The discourse goes on to present five *upanisās* headed by spiritual friendship (*kalyāṇamittatā*).
- ii. in **Sn 3: 12** (discussed above): ‘Monks, if someone were to pose the question, “These wholesome qualities that are noble, conducive to leaving [conditioned existence], leading to complete awakening – what is the *upanisā* for learning about them?” and so on.’⁸²
- iii. in **D 18** a *yakkha* called Janavasabha, who used to be King Bimbisāra, tells Anānda about Brahmā Sanankumāra’s speech to the gods about the Buddha’s teaching, including a teaching concerning ‘right concentration’: ‘noble right concentration is said to have an *upanisā*, and is said to have a requisite (*parikkhāra*)’⁸³ – this *upanisā* consists in the other seven factors of the eightfold path.

⁸⁰ Vin v.164: *etadatthā kathā etadatthā mantanā etadatthā upanisā etadattham sotāvadhānaṃ, yadidaṃ anupādācittassa vimokkho’i.*

⁸¹ A 9: 1 PTS iv.350: *sace bhikkhave aññatitthiyā paribbājakā evaṃ puccheyyūṃ sambodhipakkhikānaṃ āvuso dhammānaṃ kā upanisā bhāvanāyā’i...*

⁸² Sn 3: 12 PTS 139: *ye te bhikkhave kusalā dhammā ariyā niyyānikā sambodhagāmino, tesaṃ vo bhikkhave kusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ ariyānaṃ niyyānikānaṃ sambodhagāmīnaṃ kā upanisā savanāyā’i iti ce bhikkhave pucchitāro assu...*

⁸³ D 18 PTS ii.216: *ariyo sammāsamādhi saupaniso iti’pi saparikkhāro iti’pi.* The commentary (Sv ii.645) adds that ‘it is said to have an *upanisā* means that it is said to have a support’ (*saupaniso iti’pī ti saupanissayo iti pi vuccati*).

- iv. in **M 117** the Buddha says: ‘Monks, I shall teach you noble right concentration with its *upanisā* and its requisite’⁸⁴ – these are the other factors of the eightfold path.
- v. in **S 45: 28** this same teaching is repeated.⁸⁵
- vi. in **A 7: 45** the Buddha teaches the first seven factors of the eightfold path as the ‘requisites’ (*parikkhārā*) of right concentration, and adds: ‘Monks, this is called noble right concentration “with its *upanisā*” and “with its requisite”’.⁸⁶
- vii. as a paracanonical guest item in this catalogue, the ***Peṭakopadesa*** says that meditative absorption (*jhāna*) has an *upanisā*: ‘In this context, what is the *upanisā*? The *upanisā* of meditative absorption is spiritual friendship. The *upanisā* of meditative absorption is spiritual intimacy. The *upanisā* of meditative absorption is guardedness of the doors in respect of the sense-faculties. The *upanisā* of meditative absorption is non-contentment in respect of wholesome qualities. The *upanisā* of meditative absorption is hearing the true Dharma. The deep effort of one with a sense of urgency on an occasion apt to stimulate emotion, this is the *upanisā* of meditative absorption’.⁸⁷

In these cases *upanisās* appear as supportive conditions for religious goals, where these conditions are inner qualities of the practitioner. A Vedic text similarly lists various *upaniṣads* in the same meaning.

⁸⁴ M 117 PTS iii.71: *ariyaṃ vo bhikkhave sammāsamādhim desessāmi saupaniṣaṃ saparikkhāraṃ*. The commentary (Ps v.130) adds that ‘with its *upanisā* means with its condition; with its requisite means with its equipment’ (*saupaniṣan’ti sapaccayaṃ saparikkhāran’ti saparivāraṃ*). There is a parallel to this discourse preserved in Chinese translation, MĀ 189 at T I 735b-736c (studied by Anālayo 2011 p.657f.). The parallel again includes the character 習 *xí* in place of Pāli *upanisā* (translated in Anālayo 2010 p.62 as ‘arousings’).

⁸⁵ S 45: 28 PTS v.21. The commentary again glosses *upanisā* as *paccaya*.

⁸⁶ A 7: 45 PTS iv.40: *ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhave ariyo sammāsamādhi saupaniṣo iti’pi saparikkhāro iti’pi*.

⁸⁷ Peṭ 148–9: *tattha katamā upanisā? kalyāṇamittatā jhānassa upanisā. kalyāṇasampavaṅkatā jhānassa upanisā. indriyesu guttadvāratā jhānassa upanisā. asantuṭṭhitā kusalesu dhammesu jhānassa upanisā. saddhammassavanaṃ jhānassa upanisā. saṃvejanīye thāne saṃviggassa yonisso padhānaṃ. ayaṃ jhānopanisā*. Also trans. Ñāṇamoli 1964 p.202, where he translates *upanisā* as ‘stipulate’.

5. The category of *upanisā* as the relationship between inner states in a series:

In this category are **S 12: 23** and **all twelve discourses** belonging to the ‘*upanisā* family’. In each case, an *upanisā* is a specific state or quality that is a supporting condition for the next, in a series that culminates with attaining the goal. Some Upaniṣads also contain series of items described as *upaniṣads*.

Abbreviations

A	Aṅguttara Nikāya (Morris and Hardy 1885)
BHS	<i>Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary</i> (Edgerton 1953)
CPD	<i>Critical Pāli Dictionary</i> (Trenckner <i>et al.</i> 1924)
CU	Chāndogya Upaniṣad (Olivelle 1998)
Dhp	Dhammapada (Hinüber and Norman 1994)
Dhp-a	Dhammapada-atthakathā (H. C. Norman 1906)
DOP	<i>Dictionary of Pāli</i> (Cone 2001) (Cone 2010)
Jā	Jātaka (Fausbøll 1877)
M	Majjhima Nikāya (Trenckner and Chalmers 1888)
MĀ	Madhyama Āgama (CBETA)
Mp	Manorathapūraṇī (Walleser and Kopp 1936)
Peṭ	<i>Petaḥkopadesa</i> (Barua 1982)
Ps	Papañcasūdanī (Woods and Kosambi 1928)
S	Samyutta Nikāya (Féer 1884)
Sn	Sutta Nipāta (Andersen and Smith 1913)
Sp	Samantapāsādikā (Takakusu and Nagai 1924)
Spk	Sāratthappakāsinī (Woodward 1929)
Sv	Sumaṅgalavilāsinī (T. W. Rhys Davids and Estlin Carpenter 1886)

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The language the Buddha spoke

Bryan Levman

Abstract

This paper argues that the Buddha did not speak Pāli *per se*, but an earlier version of the language – a dialect or *koine* – which, although very similar to Pāli, differed somewhat in word form, morphology and sometimes semantic content. Comparing the different recensions of Pāli (Sinhalese, Thai, Burmese, etc.) to each other and also to parallel Prakrit transmissions uncovers earlier layers and allows us to reconstruct the earlier forms, by comparing cognate sound correspondence sets and reconstructing their earlier ancestors. While it is true that Pāli was affected by the synchronic forces of linguistic diffusion from both coeval Indo-Aryan dialects and non Indo-Aryan indigenous languages, diachronic forces (change over time) are just as important for us to understand earlier forms of the language and how it arrived at its present stage of development.

The language in which the Buddha taught¹ is once again up for discussion in the Academy, with the publication of a new monograph by Richard Gombrich (2018) and a long article by Stefan Karpik (2019) in the *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies*, edited by Prof. Gombrich. Gombrich suggests

¹ The Buddha no doubt knew many languages and used them for the appropriate audience. For example, there is evidence that the Buddha's Sakya clan may have been Munda and/or Dravidian speaking (see Levman 2013), and undoubtedly the Buddha spoke in the autochthonous languages when that was all his audience understood. There were also many Indo Aryan dialects in north-eastern India at the time of the Buddha (Māgadhī, ArdhaMāgadhī,

that “Pāli reflects the idiosyncratic language used by the Buddha as he toured northeast India,” (84) and Karpik arrives at the same conclusion, rejecting various scholars’ assertions like von Hinüber’s unequivocal “The Buddha did not speak Pāli,” (2006: 209).

It has been some time since the subject of the earliest language of Buddhism received so much attention. Gombrich and Karpik are to be commended for venturing into a subject which has been a sticky wicket for decades and bringing it to the public’s attention once again. The last time was the symposium held in July 1976 in Göttingen; its results were published in 1980 as “The Language of the Earliest Buddhist Tradition” (Bechert). Several of the great scholars of the day took part, including *inter alios* Lamotte, Brough, Norman, Waldschmidt, Alsdorf, Bechert, Roth and Caillat.

Some, like Norman, argued that

it seems clear that there was no single language or dialect used by the Buddha for his preaching, and it is therefore incorrect to talk of an “original language” of Buddhism, although it may be possible to deduce something about the characteristics of the language in which one particular text was composed. Since the synonymous variant readings may all have been uttered by the Buddha at varying times, as circumstances demanded, it does not seem possible to say that one, and only one, version of a verse or phrase is correct, or “original” (1980b:75).

There was, however, a long European scholastic tradition that believed that underlying Pāli might be found the original words of the Buddha (or at least something closer to the original words), and as most are aware, Buddhaghosa identified *buddhavacanam* with Māgadhī = Pāli, which he called the original

to name the two most well-known) which the Buddha probably knew, either as a native speaker or as a second/third language learner. By “the language the Buddha spoke” I am specifically referring to the idiom, dialect or *koine* which evolved into Pāli, the only complete record we have of the Buddha’s teachings. It would be hard to believe that during his almost fifty years of teaching, he did not also teach in other languages, but Pāli and its precursor(s) is the only one that has survived as a complete record of his teachings and is therefore the subject of this article. To be wholly accurate I should call this putative *koine* which underlies Pāli “the earliest recoverable language of Buddhism”, for we cannot go back any further than this, given the data currently available to us, nor do we have any hard evidence that the Buddha spoke in this idiom; but it is a logical and parsimonious inference based on the evidence.

language of the Buddha. But most modern scholars have disagreed with Buddhaghosa. Starting with Sylvain Lévi in 1912, there have been a long list of scholars that have discovered an earlier linguistic stratum underlying Pāli which scholars who assert that “the Buddha spoke Pāli” must account for. Lamotte himself, whose chapter on the formation of the Buddhist languages formed the basis for the symposium’s discussions (see Bechert’s Preface to the symposium pp. 7-8) saw Pāli as a composite language composed of many different dialects and linguistically post-Asokan in derivation (1955 [1988]: 563, 567).

It should not be surprising that the *tilakkhaṇa* apply to the Buddha’s words too: they change over time.

Earlier Layer

With so little primary evidence available, any work on linguistic origins is fraught with difficulties and subject to much potential confusion. My view – and I do not claim to speak for other Buddhist academics – is that there is clearly an earlier layer underlying Pāli which can be discovered through the standard techniques of comparative linguistics, and that the Buddha did not speak Pāli but an earlier version of the same which is in fact very close to the Pāli we now have, but different to some extent in lexemic content and morphology, and even meaning, while possessing the same basic structure of a MI demotic SOV (subject-object verb) dialect. These principal areas of difference are:

1. Lexemic: many of the words were the same or very similar (like *dhamma* and *buddha*, for example) but many were different (like *n(n)iv(v)aṇa* for *nibbāna*, *bāhana* for *brāhmaṇa* to name two common examples);
2. Inflectional: some of the inflectional endings were also different (like varied nom. sing. endings in *-e*, *-o*, *-a* or *-u*, rather than just *-o*; and third person sing. verb forms ending in *-a(e)di* or *-a(e)yi* rather than the “standard” *-a(e)ti*); and
3. Semantic: many Pāli words are ambiguous in meaning because of their derivation from an earlier, polysemous form. I provide dozens of examples of these ambiguities in my 2014 monograph (and there are more below in this article), but to give one example here: in the famous description of *nibbāna* in the *Kevaddhasutta* (DN 1, 223¹²) as *sabbato-pamaṃ* (usually

translated as “shining everywhere”), the Sinhalese canon (in PTS) has preserved the earlier, simplified *koine* form, where the *-h-* has replaced an aspirated stop. This has been interpreted as *pabham* in the Burmese recension (< Skt. *pra + bhā*, “shining forth (everywhere)” where *-h-* < *-bh-*); as *prthum* in another Sanskritized recension (“expansive, extensive, spacious (everywhere)” < Skt *prth*, “to extend” where *-h-* < *-th-*; as *prabhu* (= *bdga po*, “lord (of everywhere)”) by the Tibetans who translate *bdga po*; and the commentary relates it to the noun *papam* (“water, a place where one drinks” = *tittham*, “ford”; var *papham* per Sadd 622²¹), related to *patha* (“pathway (to everywhere)”) which is the meaning of *paha* in AMg, another eastern Prakrit (Levman 2014: 378-387; and Norman 1987: 23-31). So, from one underlying form (*-paha*) come many meanings, traces of which are preserved in the Pāli. All these forms can be derived from *-pahaṃ* which presumably was the “original” word the Buddha spoke.

The reader will notice that these three above categories (lexemic, inflectional and semantic) are all interdependent: one simplified verb ending in a glide *-a(e)yi*, where the distinguishing stops have been removed, can have different meanings according to which stop is added back in to “translate” the word into one’s own dialect, and often several meanings are possible, leading to semantic ambiguity. We will see more examples of this process below.

My own opinion is that the Buddha did not speak Pāli, but something earlier than it, but cognate with it. I believe this is what von Hinüber meant when he made the above statement, that the Buddha did not speak Pāli, for elsewhere he has stated that “the very earliest language of Buddhism, which most likely was close to the language of the Buddha himself, was an eastern Middle Indic” which he called “Buddhist Middle Indic” (1983a: 9). Pāli developed from Buddhist Middle Indic. As Wynne concludes in his 2004 study, “there are indeed many different conceptual and chronological strata within the various collections of early Buddhist literature” (p. 124).

In this article I propose to provide some of the evidence for this earlier linguistic layer which has been omitted from Karpik’s article. He suggests that the variants we find in the Pāli transmission can be accounted for by the model of a “single, somewhat fluid, oral transmission”:

the transmission would have been recited by speakers of several varieties who would accidentally introduce their idiosyncrasies, which could become the norm if they were common enough. Inevitably, involuntarily and largely unconsciously the sounds and morphology of the transmission would shift across geographical areas and across centuries through natural variation and transmission errors (19).

In fact I think that much of the variation we find in the received Pāli transmission can be accounted for by the nature of the linguistic stratum underlying it: what I have called a *koine*. This I have defined as “an inter-dialect language which reduced linguistic variability by dialect levelling and simplification, through elimination of interdialect phonological differences which impede understanding, and harmonization of the different dialects to a common language intelligible across all dialects” (2016: 1). When this *koine* was rendered in Pāli variations arose endemic to the “translation” process, if I may use the word in its broadest sense of “change”. The theory that Pāli was, or was derived from, a *koine* is not a new hypothesis, as we shall see below.

Agreeing with Karpik, Gombrich suggests that “it is much simpler to suppose that such variation is a natural feature of recording a language over a number of decades, over a large geographic area.”² There are in fact many elements involved in the variation: dialect idiosyncrasies as Karpik suggests (diffusory influences within the Indian linguistic area); diachronic changes, as I will be illustrating in detail below; and the influence of foreign word borrowing, assimilated to a foreign IA phonetic structure -- to name the three principal ones. I will be discussing all of these below, although I will be focusing on change over time, which is omitted from Karpik’s article. It is a very complex linguistic situation and a very fluid one (see Emeneau’s work in Dil, 1980) and I don’t think one can name any one cause to account for all the variation we see. While it may be simpler to posit all variation as due to coeval linguistic variation, it is not the most parsimonious explanation, as it leaves all change as random and not subject to any linguistic laws. In fact I think there are laws of linguistic evolution at work here, the uncovering of which allow us better to understand the canon and the various layers in it.

I will not here be discussing what Karpik calls the “Single or Multiple Transmission Theories” (SOTT and MOTT). I have always believed in the former, as I think most scholars do; even K. R. Norman, who has indeed

² Gombrich, personal communication.

sometimes mused about MOTT, implicitly adopts SOTT in much of his work on linguistic derivation (for example, 1980a). As Karpik has pointed out, the MOTT theory is not testable (2019: 73).

There are indeed some scholars, as Karpik points out (p. 11) who have “misidentified the language of the Buddha with Māgadhī”, but I would not call it an “academic consensus”. Some believe that an eastern dialect (Māgadhī or another) underlies Pāli; others believe that Pāli owes more of its genesis to a north-western dialect (Waldschmidt *et alii*, see below); others, like Lamotte, see Pāli as a composite dialect, or identify Pāli as a *koine* (Geiger), or see a *koine* as underlying Pāli (like myself). I think most Middle Indic linguists know that Māgadhī per se (*strictu sensu*) could not have been identical with Pāli or its immediate precursor, as it is so different from Pāli. Pāli was not Māgadhī (a dialect of north-eastern India) but *Māgadhābhāsā*, the trans-regional language of Buddhism.³ The Buddha no doubt did speak Māgadhī (among other dialects and languages), but that was not the dialect that developed into Pāli. Pāli developed from the *koine* which was an amalgam of all the dialects of north India, and that is the earliest discoverable language of Buddhism. There has indeed been confusion on this issue – *māgadhābhāsā* vs. Māgadhī – as in Geiger’s 1916 work, where he recognizes that Pāli is very different from Māgadhī, but still opts to use that term for the dialect: “this language could have therefore been well called Māgadhī even if it avoided the gross dialectal peculiarities of this language” (1916 [2004] p. 5). Geiger believed that the language in which the Buddha preached

was however surely no purely popular dialect, but a language of the higher and cultured classes which had been brought into being already in pre-Buddhistic times through the needs of inter-communication in India. Such a *lingua franca* naturally contained elements of all the dialects, but was surely free from the most obtrusive dialectal characteristics (ibid, 4-5).

³ The *Pāli-Myanmar Dictionary (Pāli Māyanma Abhidhan*, page 9, lists the principal differences between Māgadhī and the *māgadhābhāsā* of Buddhaghosa. The Burmese circumvent this issue by distinguishing between the Māgadhā language, which is the language of the Buddha (*māgadhābhāsā*) and the Māgadhī language which is the vernacular demotic of the kingdom of Magadha, appearing in treatises like the *Rūpasiddhi*, in an early drama of Aśvaghōṣa, in Kālidāsa’s *Sākuntala* and various grammars (p. 8). They acknowledge that the two are different dialects, but do not try to explain their phonological relationship.

In other words, his view then, over a century ago, was very close to my own view presented in this article. With Geiger, the identification of *māgadhabhāsā* with Māgadhī is because it had some of the features of the language; but then, as we shall see, the pre-Pāli *koine* had features of all the dialects, east, west, north and north-west. The oft-noted composite nature of Pāli (starting with Lamotte, see above) and the inability of scholars to localize it to any one area of north India, are due to the fact that Pāli has its source in an underlying, super-regional *koine*, which, by definition, possessed features common to all dialects in a simplified form.

I propose herewith to review some of the principal theories about Pāli over the last century and then provide some examples of the comparative method which I believe points to the existence of this *koine* or *lingua franca*, which developed into Pāli.

Sylvain Lévi was the first to propose that within Pāli was preserved an earlier layer which he called “*une langue précanonique du bouddhisme*”, arguing that Buddhist Sanskrit and Pāli

n'apparaissent plus que comme les héritiers tardifs d'une tradition antérieure, récitée ou rédigée dans un dialecte disparu, qui avait atteint déjà un étage avancé d'usure phonétique (... they appear only as the late inheritors of an earlier tradition, recited or compiled in a dialect which has disappeared, which had already attained an advanced stage of phonetic change [lit: “wear and tear”]) (1912: 511).

What Lévi meant by *usure phonétique* was intervocalic lenition (weakening), that is, the change of intervocalic unvoiced stops to voiced stops or glides and their complete elimination. When these were later redacted, the editors were not sure what the original consonant was and ambiguities in spelling and meaning resulted, which can be clearly seen in the variant forms of the transmission. An example he gives is the Pāli word *opapātika* (“spontaneous rebirth”) which in Buddhist Sanskrit became *aupāpaduka*, wrongly derived per Lévi from the root *upa + pad*, “to be born” while *opapātika* comes from *upa + pat*, “reappearance, an unusual rebirth”. Lévi suggests that the original word from which both *opapātika* and *aupāpaduka* derived was the Prakrit⁴ *uvavāya* (AMg *uvavāia* or

⁴ I define “Prakrit” as the vernacular, demotic languages of north India which developed from and alongside Old Indic and which are collectively labelled by linguists as “Middle Indic”. They all manifest a series of simplifications and changes from OI, the most comprehensive record of which (but by no means complete as it does not include Pali which is itself a Prakrit) is provided by Pischel in

uvavāiṃya), the intervocalic *-y-* being rendered as *-t-* in Pāli and *-d-* in Skt., with subsequent etymological confusion. He provides many other such examples in this seminal study.⁵ The weakening and loss of intervocalic consonants was one of the principal phonetic characteristics of Lévi's "*langue précanonique du bouddhisme*" this lenition being *prima facie* evidence for the advanced phonological evolution of this earlier dialect.

The weakening and loss of intervocalic consonants was most prevalent in the north-west of India, as is evident in Asoka's edicts in Shāhbāzgarhī (Sh) in the north-west of present day Pakistan (Levman 2010a). While scholars have opined that Pāli is closest to the western dialect in Gīrnār (Gir; in present day Gujarat), this in fact does not seem to be the case. Lamotte was the first to outline all these similarities, but as I have noted elsewhere (Levman 2014: 50-53) most of these characteristics are also present in the northwestern dialects of Sh and Mānsehrā (M), and/or the northern dialect of Kālsī (K). Besides, a detailed study of one arbitrarily chosen Rock Edict (number 4) shows that 43% of the words in the northern and north-western dialects (K, Sh and M, taken cumulatively), but only 19% of the Gir vocabulary, are closest to Pāli (Levman 2010b). To give two telling examples of important words: Gir preserves the form *atpā* for self (< Skt. *ātman*) while Pāli has *atta*, the same as K and Sh. For the word *brāhmaṇa*, Pāli has been re-Sanskritized, which form is closest to Sh and M. Other significant differences between Pāli and Gir. are the loss of conjunct consonants such as *-st-*, *pr-*, *tr-* and *kr-* in Pāli, all of which are preserved in Gir. (Levman 2010a: 74-75; Norman 1983: 4; Norman 1997 [2006]: 128).

his 1900 monograph, *A Grammar of the Prākṛit Languages* (hereinafter "Pischel"). As the great 12th century polymath Hemacandra defined it, *prākṛtiḥ saṃskṛtaṃ | tatra bhavaṃ tata āgataṃ vā prākṛtam*, "Sanskrit is the basis, what originated from it or what is derived from it, is called Prākṛit" (trans. by Pischel §1). The word derives from the Skt. *prākṛta*, meaning *inter alia*, "original, natural, unrefined, provincial, natural" (MW). Middle Indic is not a language, as Karpik suggests (p. 11), equating it with Pali, but an umbrella term for Pali, the literary Prakrits and the corresponding inscriptions, per von Hinüber (2001: §1). It is a *Sprachstufe* (linguistic stage) between Old Indic and New Indic.

⁵ Edgerton, BHS, 162, disagrees with Lévi and says that his argument is inconclusive; nevertheless, the process of comparing cognate words in the transmission and explaining phonological differences by postulating a common underlying derivation is a standard technique in comparative linguistics. Norman (1989b:376) believes that Pāli *opapātika* is actually a hyperform and the correct form should have been **opapādika*, the redactor changing the intervocalic *-d-* to *-t-* because he/she thought that the *-d-* had been mistakenly voiced from an original *-t-* and "corrected it". This is called a "hyperform" (forms which are unlikely to have had a genuine existence in any dialect, but which arose as a result of wrong or misunderstood translation techniques," *ibid*: 376). In both Lévi's interpretation and Norman's an earlier, underlying form is evident which changed into the present exemplar.

The re-Sanskritization of *brāhmaṇa* is I think an epitome of what was going on with the dialects at that time. Karpik (p. 57) claims that *brāhmaṇa* is not a Sanskritization but simply a loan word into Pāli from Vedic and Sanskrit. In fact, *brāhmaṇa* in Pāli is similar to the northwest term *bramaṇa* (Sh and M), providing some evidence of possible borrowing from that area. However, as I have shown in a detailed study elsewhere (Levman 2014: 362-66), all the other Asokan edicts have lost the *br-* initial conjunct and in the *gāthās* *br-* does not make position (make a preceding vowel long), indicating that the normal Prakrit pronunciation of the word was without the initial conjunct. I reconstruct this as **bāhaṇa* “which was popularly derived from the verb *bāheti* (“to ward off (evil)” < denominative from *bahi*, “outside”), but was more likely a pun on the two Skt verbs *br̥h* “to grow strong” and *br̥h* “to root up” whose MI form was in both cases *bahati* (or *bāhati* in caus. form)” (p. 365). The fact that *brāhmaṇa* happened to agree with the north-west tendency (present in all Dardic languages of the north-west Indus) to preserve the consonant + *r* conjunct was a happy coincidence, because sociolinguistically the north-west dialects were the most prestigious. I think this is the case for several possible reasons, which I detailed in a 2014 study (p. 352-53; 366):

1. writing was first developed in the Gandhāra area utilizing the Aramaic script. Kharoṣṭhī was older than Brāhmī and quite possibly its precursor and model (Salomon 1998: 46, 54). If Buddhist teachings were first written down in this dialect - because of the rapid spread of Buddhism northwest through the existing trade routes - it is not surprising that the local orthography and pronunciation would have had a major influence on the dialect transmission to other parts of India.
2. sociolinguistically, the north and northwestern dialects were considered superior to those of the east. Although it is a well known fact that the Vedic writings contain many dialects (Bloomfield & Edgerton 1932; 20), it was the dialect of the northwest which predominated in terms of social status.⁶

⁶ See for example, statements in the *Kauṣītaki-Brāhmaṇa* that those who want to learn the best speech go to the north (west), since the best known speech is spoken there, in Keith 1920 [1971]: 387. Also Oldenberg, 1882: 400, note: “With the Buddhists the capital of the Gandhāras, Takkasilā, figures constantly as the place to which anyone travels, when he desires to learn something good, e.g. “Tat. Atṭh.” ii, 2: 39 etc. and already in the *Vinaya Piṭaka*: “Mahāvagga,” viii, 1, 5 seq.” The latter reference is to the story of Jīvaka Komārabhacca, who trained in Taxilā and became a

Pāṇini was himself a north-westerner and it is of course this dialect which he established as the standard in his grammar; the dialect of the eastern tribes was considered inferior to the purer speech of the north and north west.⁷ Norman suggests that the change was made for specific religious reasons, “because of the strongly anti-brahmanical flavour of the Buddha’s teaching,” to ensure that the members of the brahmanical caste who were addressed in the Pāli scriptures recognized their name, which they might not have recognized in its MI form (1989a: 36).

The influence of this dialect on Pāli is therefore an expected sociolinguistic fact (Levman 2014; 52-53)

Karpik himself quotes two well-known quotes from Brahmanical texts about the low status and incomprehensibility of the eastern dialects (50) and mentions a number of prominent Buddhist figures who studied in the north-west (p. 66, 633). He also correctly points out that the nom. sing *-e* ending which various authors have called a “Magadhism” could also well have originated from Gāndhārī (p. 35 quoting Brough 1962: §75, 76; hereinafter GDhp), where it was a standard form along with *-o*, *-u* and *-a*. In fact, I have argued this too, but in a different context, for I suggest that the *koine* that I postulate as an underlying, earlier layer to Pāli was strongly influenced by the north-western or most prestigious dialect (2014: 64; 2018: 140) and other scholars have as well (Waldschmidt 1932; 1980: 137; Dschi 1944: 141-2; Bernhard 1970: 57; Norman 1976: 117-27; Pulleyblank 1983: 84). Corroborating this are recent studies of Chinese translations of the *Āgamas* which go back to a north-western dialect as their source document (von Hinüber 1983b; Karashima 1992; Boucher 1998; Levman 2018).

famous doctor who treated, *inter alios*, King Bimbisāra and the Buddha (Vin 1, 268-81).

⁷ In the Buddhist *Ambaṭṭhasutta*, the brahman Ambaṭṭha insults the Sakyans, the sub-Himalayan eastern tribe to which the Buddha belonged. They are “fierce, rough-spoken, touchy and violent. Being of menial origin, being menials, they do not honour, respect, esteem, revere or pay homage to Brahmins” (Walshe 1995: 113). Jakob Wackernagel 1896 [1895]: vol 1, §53 (c) points out how words containing *-riṣ-* were changed to *-rṣ-* to avoid the epenthetic vowel which was felt to be an eastern vulgarism. This explains why two different forms of the word *pariṣad/parṣad* survive and why in P there are different reflexes for the Skt word *puruṣa*. See Geiger 1916 [2005], §30.3, hereinafter Geiger. Per Deshpande, 1979: 254, “The non-Aryans are hated for being *mūra-deva* ‘with dummy gods, *śiśna-deva*, ‘phallus worshippers’ *adeva* ‘godless,’ etc. and are particularly accused of being *mṛdhra-vācaḥ* ‘with obstructed speech’. See also Oldenberg 1882: 391-411 for a still relevant discussion on the hostility between the eastern non-Brahmanical (and in part non-Aryan) stocks and the western *vaidikas*.

In addition to Lévi, several other scholars have identified this earlier layer underlying Pāli, which influenced some of the lexemic content of Pāli. Smith called it a “*koine* of which Pāli and Ardhamāgadhī represent the oldest normalisations” (1952: 178), Geiger a *lingua franca*, a *Verkehrssprache* or a *Kunstsprache* (Geiger 1916:3-4), Lüders a *Kanzleisprache* (presumably the administrative language of the Mauryan empire, 1954: 7), Bechert, a “poetic language (*Dichtersprache*) which was probably super-regional in use” (1980: 34); von Hinüber, Buddhist Middle Indic, which he defined as a “a *lingua franca* that developed much later than the lifetime of the Buddha” (1983a: 9; 2004: 625) It is true, as Karpik notes, that most of these scholars felt the underlying language was based on an eastern dialect. Lüders called it Old Ardhamāgadhī (1954: 7), Alsdorf called it Ardhamāgadhī (1980:17), Norman Old Māgadhī (1980b: 71).

Koine

We have no direct evidence of a *koine* in use during the Buddha’s time. In fact we have no linguistic evidence at all from that time, as the Asokan edicts post-date the Buddha’s death by about 150 years. But it is highly likely that such a dialect existed for trade and administrative purposes; we do have a lot of evidence for the use of an administrative and trade Greek *koine* in the Mediterranean world (4th century BCE and onwards) and the use of an Aramaic *lingua franca* in the western Persian empire (5th - 3rd century BCE), which certainly may have paralleled and influenced their IA usage (Levman 2016).

By comparing cognate words in parallel passages of surviving witnesses we can isolate an underlying proto-form which accounts for the variability in the surviving transmissions. We can prove they are related to a common ancestor and reconstruct the word’s phonological content. It is this comparative method which led to William Jones’ discovery of the Indo-European language group (Allen 2002: 58-74) and which forms the basis of the geological science of evolutionary biology, the identification of common ancestry through the analysis of shared features; so rather than exploring the method further here, I will instead give some examples. Interested readers who would like to know more about the method should consult Chapter 3 of my 2014 monograph and the references therein. A short summary is also provided in Levman 2016: 4-8. Michael Witzel also provides an excellent short introduction to the scientific method of historical linguistics in his 2005 article (pp. 359-353).

Mutual intelligibility

I have hinted above at the fact that the dialects were not mutually intelligible (page 68). Karpik devotes a lot of space to his assertion that they were. If indeed that is the case, then a *koine* would theoretically not be necessary. Unfortunately Karpik's assertion cannot be proven by any objective measure, nor can mine. All I can say is that as a relatively fluent reader of Pāli, I cannot read and understand Ardhamāgadhī or Gāndhāri, to name two coeval dialects in north India at the time. Karpik may well argue that this is because I am not a native speaker and hearing is quite different from reading, an oral transmission providing other clues as to meaning, suprasegmental articulation for example, or physical gesticulation not present in a written text. One must also keep in mind that many of the speakers of these dialects were, like myself, not native speakers but learned the language as a second or third medium (Levman 2016: 11), and had to adapt their often very different native phonology to the MI system. They were proto-Munda, proto-Tibetan or proto-Dravidian speakers, that is, non-Aryans who formed the majority of the population at the time of the Buddha. So it is highly unlikely that even if they were able to comprehend an eastern dialect they would also be able to understand the same words in a western or northern dialect. The default would be the *lingua franca* or *koine* which removed problematic, difficult to parse consonants and replaced them with simple glides or aspirates. Dravidian speakers, for example, made no distinction between voiced and unvoiced stops, so the *koine* replaced them with a glide or left them out altogether; nor could Dravidian, Munda, or Tibetan speakers hear aspirated stops which were missing in their native language, and we have evidence that these were presented as aspirates only (-h-) in the *koine*.

In support of his argument that Pāli was a single, fixed transmission interwoven with dialect idiosyncrasies, Karpik provides several examples from the English language of dialect variation which are mutually understandable. Gombrich also suggests that “take any large work written in English a hundred years ago and compare it with another large work published just now in America, and surely you will find similar linguistic variation (as in Pāli)”.⁸ So the discussion then turns on how one defines the “same language” – if Pāli is construed over a broader timescale to include the linguistic variation we find therein, then there is no such thing as an earlier or later layer, but simply natural variation within the same language “bandwidth”.

⁸ Gombrich, personal correspondence.

Indeed this is another sticky wicket in linguistics or any descriptive science which theorizes change over time. It is, for example, a well-known problem in palaeontology (the study of ancient life) – when does one species evolve into another? Are the species we find in the fossil record truly distinct, or is one simply a variant (a sub-species) of the other? Palaeontologists decide on the criterion of interbreeding, as a measure of distinctness; when one species can no longer interbreed with its variant, then both are distinct. In linguistics one criterion we use is intelligibility; that is, when one dialect is no longer understandable by the speakers of another, then we would argue they are distinct. So, to use the example from English, one might argue that English in the last four centuries forms a natural continuum, as one language with variation, from Shakespeare’s time to the present; others might argue that Shakespearean English cannot be understood by most without a gloss, so should be excluded from the continuum. All would agree, I think, that Chaucerian English and Old English (the language of Beowulf) are separate languages or dialects altogether.

On this analogy one might argue that Pāli with all its internal variation is simply one language continuum from the time of the ministry of the Buddha to the time it was formalized, probably around the time Mahinda took the *buddhavacana* and commentary to Sihalādīpa circa 250 BCE. This would represent a period of approximately 200 years. In this Gedanken-Experiment one might argue that all the variation we see in Pāli and in the dialects from which this variation was derived and in which *buddhavacana* was presumably transmitted – like ArdhaMāgadhī for loss of intervocalics or loss of aspirated stops and Gāndhārī for intervocalic lenition, etc.,⁹ - was understandable by any “normal” MI speaker. Pāli in this broad sense is more of a continuum of language than a discrete one. Thus all phonological change in Pāli – and variation is quite significant (*vide* Geiger pp. 1-66) – and even in its sister dialects would be “natural variation” as Karpik proposes.

There are problems with this hypothesis.

⁹ We have manuscript evidence from the first century BCE for *Buddhavacana* preserved in Gāndhārī, and although, we have no evidence of *Buddhavacana* in ArdhaMāgadhī, one would assume that it was transmitted in that dialect as well, being the normal *Mahāvīravacana* of the Jains. As to whether these dialects go back to the time of the Buddha, we don’t know, but it is not an unreasonable hypothesis.

It is by no means certain that the dialects are mutually intelligible. This will be discussed in more detail below.

1. The record is incomplete. The analogy with English is perhaps not a good one, as we have an exact record of change in English phonology at least since Chaucer's time, but the record with Pāli is in comparison non-existent. The degree of change over time can only be inferred from internal evidence and comparison of parallel transmissions. It is an axiom of palaeontology (and in this case of MI linguistics) that much more of the (fossil) record has been lost than preserved, and with *buddhavacana* we are working with only a small percentage of the total data set.
2. Pāli shows many signs of interference with its natural development; that is, one may argue that Pāli is not a "natural language" at all, but an artificial one which has been edited by monks for theological purposes, normalized and harmonized, and contains numerous Sanskritizations and composite elements. Many scholars have noted these features in Pāli (Lamotte 1958 [1988]: 563; Bechert 1980: 33; von Hinüber 1982: 133-140; Norman 1983: 4; Norman 1988: 15; von Hinüber, 1996: 190) and it is the subject of my own monograph in 2014. Although much of the canon has been harmonized, thanks to variant Pāli recensions and *buddhavacana* preserved in other traditions (Gāndhārī, BHS, Chinese, Tibetan, the *madhyadeśa* Prakrit of the Patna Dhṛp, etc.), scholars still have a rich record to draw on to show the existence of different strata within the Pāli transmission. This is why scholars have argued that Pāli is a "translation" of earlier forms, but while "translation" may be too strong a term, "change" certainly isn't.
3. Pāli shows a lot of change over time following standard regular, phonological principles of evolution. This allows scholars to reconstruct earlier stages in the language development and postulate underlying forms which condition later ones. This is linguistics' version of *paṭicca samuppāda*, the Buddha's insight of conditioned arising.

I think that, like most things in this world, the answer lies in the middle. Pāli does manifest change from linguistic diffusion influenced by other dialects, but also shows diachronic change over time. This paper is largely concerned with the latter question. To return to the question of mutual intelligibility:

Bollée compares some AMg verses with corresponding verses in Pāli (1983: VI), to take one simple example where the words closely correspond:

Pāli: *sukhumaṃ sallaṃ dur-ubbahaṃ* (*Theragāthā* v. 124)

AMg: *suhume salle dur-uddhare* (*Sūtrakṛtāṅgam* 1, 2, 2, 11)

These phrases both mean the same thing (“a fine dart, hard to extract” (Norman 1969 [1995]: 17), but for someone to be able to parse one as the other, he/she must understand that in AMg the neuter nom. sing ends in *-e*, not in *-aṃ* as in Pāli (and not confuse the *-e* ending with the locative, which it is in Pāli), and that *dur-ubbahaṃ* (“hard to extract”) has the same meaning as *dur-uddhare*, which at first glance seems hard to accept, considering the phonological differences between *-ubbahaṃ* and *-uddhare*. The word *-ubbahaṃ* is derived from Skt *udvahati* (< *ud* + *vah*, “to draw out, carry out or carry up”) which in Pāli becomes *-uvvhati* > *-ubbahati*,¹⁰ but in AMg *-uddhare* is derived from a different root *ud* + *dhr* (“to bring out of, to draw out”) which is why *-uddhare* has an aspirate (while *-ubba-* doesn’t) and an *-r-* in the word (*-uddhr* > *-uddhare*). So even a native speaker could certainly be forgiven if he/she didn’t understand the equivalence in meaning of *-ubbahaṃ* and *-uddhare*. The word *suhume* is simply the AMg reflex of Skt. *sūkṣma* (“fine, thin, narrow”) which in Pāli appears as *sukhumaṃ*. The conjunct *-kṣ-* ordinarily changes to *-kkh-* in the Prakrits, but here changes to *-kh-* probably under the influence of the epenthetic *-u-* which has been added between the *-kṣ-* and the *-m-* in *sūkṣma* (*sūkṣma* >

¹⁰ The question of directionality of change of *bb-* <> *vv-* was raised by Karpik (p. 55) where he infers that Pali retains the older form (*-bb-*) which changes to *-vv-*. I have looked at this question in Levman 2015 where I point out (p. 100) that the oldest Prakrit and Pali inscriptions and mss have *-vv-* instead of *-bb-* and there is no evidence of *-bb-* in the Asokan inscriptions; however, I suggest that the answer to the conundrum of directionality may well lie in the fact that the *-v-* and *-b-* *akkharas* (sounds) were not sonically differentiated, that is, they were not phonemic in early Pali or the dialect(s)/*koine* on which Pali was based (p. 101). For example, the pun on *-vv-* and *-bb-* in Sn verse 537 “only works in a dialect where *-bb-* > *-vv-* or vice versa” (Norman 1992 [2006]: 263). The pun Norman is referring to are the two words *parivajj-* “to shun, avoid, keep away from” < Skt. *pari* + √*vṛj* in causative; and *paribbājaka*, “mendicant” < Skt. *pari* + √*vraj*, “wander about”. Thus the whole issue of directionality or time precedence may well be moot.

sukkhma > *sukhuma*). In AMg and many of the Prakrits including the *koine* we have been discussing, an aspirated stop (-*kh*-) changes to an aspirate only (-*h*-, Pischel §188) so the word *suhume* in AMg would probably be understandable as another form of *sukhumam*, as there is no other logical alternative.

Although both these stanzas voice the same thought, the other three lines are quite different in terms in terms of word content, so I omit their discussion here.¹¹

Another example of mutual unintelligibility within the Pāli tradition occurs in Dhp 335:

*yaṃ esā sahatī jammī taṅhā loke visattikā
sokā tassa pavaḍḍhanti abhivaṭṭham va bīraṇam*

Whomsoever this fierce craving, attachment to the world, overpowers, his sorrows increase like *bīraṇa* grass when rained upon (Norman 1997 [2004]: 49).

There are four variants to *abhivaṭṭham* in the different Pāli recensions: *abhivaṭṭam* (PTS = Sinhalese), *abhivaḍḍham* or *abhivuṭṭham* (Thai), *abhivuḍḍham* (Cambodian). There are two choices for the meaning: “rained upon” (*abhivaṭṭam*, *abhivaṭṭham* or *abhivuṭṭham* < *abhivrṣṭa*) “rained upon”) and “increased/grown” (*abhivaḍḍham*, *abhivuḍḍham* < *abhivrddha*). Though the “normal” translation (and per the commentary) is with the first meaning (*sokā tassa pavaḍḍhanti abhiva(u)ṭṭ(h)am/abhiva(u)ḍḍham va bīraṇam*, “his sorrows increase like the *bīraṇa* grass when rained upon”), the second meaning is equally clear (“his sorrows increase like the *bīraṇa* grass when grown/prospered”). And the speaker may have intended both meanings to be understood.

It is by no means rare in the Pāli canon to have so many variant forms survive in the different recensions. There are thousands of cases like this. How are we to account for this? In the present case there are four possibilities that I can envisage:

1. random drift caused by “speakers of several varieties” (Karpik 2019: 17)

¹¹ For more comparisons between Pāli and AMg see Oberlies’ new book, *Pāli Grammar* (pages 11-14). Oberlies suggests that both these dialects have a common base, that is a “Gangetic Middle Indic *lingua franca*”.

2. the variants are renditions of words in an earlier dialect (or dialects) or *koine*, where, as Lévi suggests, lenition had reached an advanced degree; like, for example, Gāndhārī, which voices most intervocalic stops. This would account for the confusion between *-t̥th-* and *-d̥dh-* in the present instance.
3. the variants are derived from earlier exemplars in a dialect or *koine* where intervocalic consonants were replaced with a *-y-* glide or nothing whatsoever. It would then be up to the hearer to replace the *-y-* glide with whatever consonant he/she thought was suitable (see below).
4. the variants are derived from an earlier dialect which replaced all aspirated stops with a simple aspirate. Again, this is a common feature of many of the Prakrits, including AMg and Gāndhārī. It would then be up to the listener to decide which aspirated stop best suited the context.

These last 3 factors would have been constrained and conditioned by the large number of hearers who spoke MI as a second language. As noted above, for many of these a voiced or unvoiced stop distinction was not phonemic, nor was an aspirated stop part of their consonantal inventory. There are also other typologies for linguistic change which I discuss below (page 28: sibilant levelling, assimilation of consonant clusters, interchange of glides with nasals, palatals, and liquids, etc.).

In the present case the words were probably transmitted as simple aspirated retroflex stops *abhivaḍḍham* or *abhivuṭṭham*). That is how the conjuncts *-d̥dh-* or *-t̥th-* are simplified in Gāndhārī, which would presumably be close to the *koine* form, for the reasons outlined above.¹² The alternation in the first vowel between *-a-* and *-u-*, is due to the presence in the underlying Vedic of the vocalic *-r-* which becomes *-a-*, *-u-* or *-i-* in the Prakrits (Pischel §47-53). Typically, *-t̥th-* > *-d̥dh-* intervocalically (Pischel §198, 239), but that does not tell us anything about priority in this particular instance, whether the earlier transmission was

abhivu(t̥)ṭham
↓
abhivu(d̥)ḍham

¹² In the Gāndhārī *Dhammapada* (GDhp, Brough 1962) *vr̥ṣṭi* is represented by *vuṭhi* (verse 219, 220) and *vr̥ddha* by *vrudha* (verse 146)

which is the normal derivation in the Prakrits (lenition) or

$$\begin{array}{c} abhivu(d)\dot{d}ham \\ \downarrow \\ abhivu(t)\dot{t}ham \end{array}$$

which would be a hypercorrection, that is, a monk/nun hearing *abhivudḍham* and knowing that intervocalic aspirates are often weakened (that is, voiced), “restored” the verb to its “original” form *abhivutṭham*, which he/she had decided was correct according to context. Or the changes might be coeval

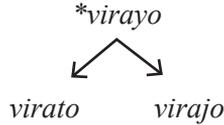
$$abhivu(t)\dot{t}ham \langle \rangle abhivu(d)\dot{d}ham$$

and not represent a directional time line at all, but simply dialect confusion amongst speakers (*bhāṇakas*) and hearers, which is Karpik’s suggestion (above, page 68). In this particular instance all we can be certain of is that there has been change, and that the change leads to ambiguity, so we cannot say for certain “what the Buddha said” or “what the Buddha meant”, whether “rained upon” or “increased” (as the *bīraṇa* grass is omnipresent in India and very fast-growing) or both. In favour of the second interpretation (“increased”) is the verb *pavaḍḍhanti* which appears in line 3 of the *gāthā* (“his sorrows increase”) and gives the parallelism “his sorrows increase as *bīraṇa* grass increases,” so typical of the Dhṛp.

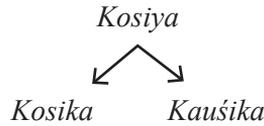
There are two other MI versions of this *gāthā*, one the so-called “Patna *Dhammapada*” (PDhp), and the other the *Udānavarga* (UV), a completely Sanskritized version of the Dhṛp. The PDhp has *ovaṭṭhā* for Pāli’s *abhivaṭṭham*, the *o-* representing a contraction of *ava-* (the prefix of Vedic *ava* + *vṛṣ*, “rain upon”). The UV has *avavṛṣṭa* which is the past participle of the Vedic verb *ava* + *vṛṣ*. Gāndhārī, as we have opined above (footnote 12), would have *abhivutṭha/e* or *ovuṭṭha/e* (neuter sing.) depending on which prefix (*abhi-* or *ava-* > *o-*) it was using. The reader may judge for him/herself whether these are mutually intelligible.¹³

¹³ Karpik disagrees with von Hinüber’s conclusion (1983a: 7) that *-tvā* is a Sanskritization in Pāli (Karpik, p. 56-57). The *Patna Dhammapada*, which is generally considered to be later than Pāli (von Hinüber calls it “more Sanskritized than Pāli, but at the same time more Middle Indic than BHS” 1989: 365-66), yet retains the *-ttā* absolutes typical of the Prakrits (Pischel § 582). There is some evidence as well that the *-ttā* suffix for the absolute has been preserved in

A simpler, and more clear-cut example is one which Norman gives from the *Sabhiyasutta* of the *Sutta Nipāta*. In the two versions that have come down to us in Pāli and BHS of the *Mahāvastu*, parallel passages have two phonologically cognate words, *virato* (“ceased”) and *virajo* (“free from impurity”). Norman concludes that the words “must go back to a common ancestor, which can only have been the Pkt form *virayo*” (1980a: 175).



Lévi gives another simple example of the use of the *-y-* glide in the underlying language as a substitute for an intervocalic stop. Here the name of Sakka is preserved as *Kosiya* in Pāli (“owl” DN 2, 270³⁻⁴), which is the shared, common ancestor of both *Kauśika* in BHS (Levi, p. 499), and *Kosika* in Pāli, which appears as an epithet of the Buddha in the *Apadāna* 414¹⁵.



Another example which Lévi felt was “absolutely decisive” (*absolument décisif*) to demonstrate an earlier phonological layer underneath Pāli is the word *avādesi* (“he played (the lute)”) in *Jātaka* 62, while the Bharhut *stūpa* preserves the form *avāyesi* (Lévi 1912: 497; Cunningham, p. 66, plate 26).

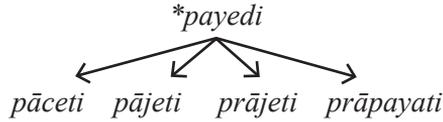


Pāli in the word *mantā*, which Buddhaghosa treats as an absolutive of the verb *man*, “to think, investigate” *mantā ti upaparikkhitvā*, “*mantā* means having investigated” (Sv 3, 892¹⁶). The normal Pali form is *matvā*; *mantā* is an alt. form which occurs in Pāli and AMg; the latter also has the usual form *matvā* (Levman 2014: 288; Mylius 2003: 496). Geiger (§ 210A) provides several other examples. Karpik’s historical argument (that Pāli preserved the *tv-* conjunct from Vedic as an original feature) is questionable, as Pali does not preserve this conjunct anywhere else except in the absolutive (and the personal pronoun *tvaṃ* which also has an alt. *tvaṃ* with epenthetic *-u-*), strongly suggesting that it is a Sanskritisation.

avādesi

The date of the Bharhut *Jātakas* (third century BCE, Cunningham *ibid*: 14-17) is “much more ancient than the Pāli version of Ceylon” (Cunningham, *ibid*: 49), the earliest written recension of which dates to the first century BCE (Norman 1983: 5). Some of the *Jātaka* stories are very ancient and are un-Buddhistic in origin (Chalmers 1895 [2008]: xxiii; Norman *ibid*: 78-79). This particular *Jātaka*, about misogyny, has in fact nothing to do with Buddhism, and probably pre-dates it.

In my 2014 dissertation, I have provided many similar examples pointing to the necessary existence of a common denominator underlying *-y-* glide to account for later variation. Another clear example is GDhp 148, where the Gāndhārī form has *aya payedi pranina* (“drive the life of creatures”) where the verb *payedi* appears to be similar to or the same as the underlying *koine* form, as it results in several different variants:

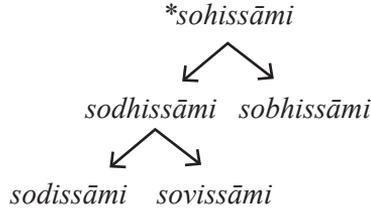


Pāli (Dhp 135) has *pāceti* with *pājeti* as a variant (< S *pra* + *aj*, “to drive forward, urge on”); the first is simply a variant of the second with lenition of *-c-* > *-j-*. The PDhp (verse 200) has *prājeti* with the Sanskritization of the initial *p-* > *pr-*. The UV (1.17) has *prāpayati* (< Skt *prāp*, “to lead or bring, to cause to reach or obtain”), which appears to be a back-formation from *prāpeti*, the intervocalic glide being interpreted as a labial stop rather than a palatal one (*-y-* > *-p-*). Here it seems unequivocal that “the word the Buddha spoke” must have been **payeti* or **payedi* or **paye*’i.¹⁴

In the *Ambaṭṭhasutta* (DN 1, 105¹⁹⁻²⁰) the Buddha says that the questions Ambaṭṭha asks, “I will make clear with answers” (*ahaṃ veyyākaraṇena sobhissāmi*). The Pāli has several variants, including *sobhissāmi*, *sodissāmi*, *sodhāssāmi*, and *sovissāmi* (DTS, p. 96, footnote 1). The verb *sobhissāmi* derives from *sobhati* (< Skt *śubh* “to shine, to be splendid”, caus. “to make resplendent, adorn, grade, to make clear”); the verb *sobhissāmi* < *sodheti*, caus. of *śudh* “to be purified” caus. “to make clean, to purify, examine, search, seek,

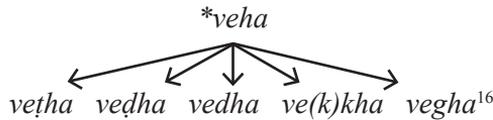
¹⁴ Lüders, Norman and von Hinüber all discuss this verse. Lüders 1954 § 140; von Hinüber 1981: 822; Norman 1997 [2004]: 100.

correct”). The common denominator of these two forms would be **sohissāmi*. The change of *sodhissāma* > *sodissāmi*, that is loss of aspiration (Pischel §213; GDhp §43, 49) is probably later, as is the fairly common Prakrit change of *-dh-* > *-v-* (Norman 2006: 157). The reconstructed derivation is therefore



There are still some elements which are not clear about this particular passage, i. e. why the causative form was not used in *so(d)bhissāmi* (*sobhessāmi* < *sobhessāmi* < *śobhayiṣyāmi*). The form *sodhāssāmi* seems to be a relic of the causative (*sodhāssāmi* < *sodhayiṣyāmi*), but the *-ayi-* form usu. changes to *-e-* not *-ā-* (*sodhessāmi*; von Hinüber 2001: §146).¹⁵

A more complex example occurs in the *Mahāparinibbāna sutta* where the Buddha tells Ānanda that he is eighty years old and his body is falling apart, “held together with straps” (*vegha-missakena*, DN 2,100¹⁴). There are six variant readings for the first word (*vegha-*, *vedha-*, *vekha-*, *veṭha-*, *vekkha-*, and *veḷu-*) in the Sinhalese, Thai, Burmese, and Cambodian traditions. Five of these can be explained by an underlying source word **veha*, where the aspirated stops have been dropped and replaced with an aspirate only.



**veha* is the lowest common denominator to five of the six variants, allowing

¹⁵ The PTS also has two other variants which are not easily derivable from **sohissāmi*, *sossāmi* and *soladdhissāmi*. The former (“I will hear”) results from *-h-* > \emptyset which is possible but not a normal change; the latter seems to be a form of the verb *labh* (“to get, obtain,” p.p. *laddha*, “obtained, received”), which I cannot parse.

¹⁶ The sixth variant, *veḷu* (“bamboo”), seems to be a comment on what the straps are made of, incorporated by mistake into the main text. The change of **veha* > *veḍha* would likely be via *veṭha* (Pischel §198, 239). See also GDhp §40-42 for Gāndhārī.

each dialect speaker to restore the relevant stop, according to how the word was pronounced in his/her dialect. The original Vedic word on which the compound is based is either *vleṣka* or *veṣta*, both meaning “band” or “noose.” Which of these words did the Buddha use? Probably **veha-*, which is why scholars say, “The Buddha did not speak Pāli.” “Natural variation” (Karpik) would not produce five different types of aspirated stops (dental, retroflex voiced and unvoiced and velar voiced and unvoiced); a more cogent explanation must be sought in terms of derivation from a common-aspirate only source.

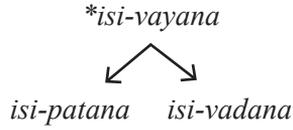
The BHS version of the sutta preserves yet another variant: *dvaiddha-niśrayena* (“depending on two things”). The word *niśrayena* is clearly phonologically related to *missakena* and suggests that both reflexes go back to a source word **Nissayena* (N = nasal) which the Pāli redactor heard as *missayena*, replacing the intervocalic *-y-* with a *-k-* to give the common word *missakena*, “mixed or combined with”. The BHS redactor heard the *nasal* as *n-* and interpreted the geminate *-ss-* as a Prakrit form of the OI conjunct *-śr-* to arrive at *niśrayena* “dependent on”. Both make sense in the context. Whatever first word the BHS redactor had in his exemplar --**veha*, or *vedha* -- appears to have been back-formed to *dvaiddha*, the *-e-* taken to represent an Old Indic lost diphthong *-ai-* (not present in Pāli or the Prakrits) and the initial *v-* (mistakenly) taken to represent the conjunct *dv-*. The expression “dependent on two things” makes no sense in the context. (See Levman 2009 for a fuller discussion.)

Another example is the hyperform¹⁷ *isi-patana* (“descent of the seers”) and *isi-vadana* (“conversation of the seers”) which are mistranslations of Vedic *ṛṣya-vrjana* (“antelope enclosure or pasture”):

This is to be derived < *isi-vayana* < *isi vajana* < *ṛṣya-vrjana*. There is no way in which *vrjana* can develop > *patana*, and we are dealing with a form produced by a redactor who did not recognise the word *vayana*, but knew that *-v-* sometimes developed < *-p-*, and *-y-* developed < *-t-*. He therefore back-formed *patana* < *vayana* (Norman 1989b: 375).

There is another variant form *isi-vadana* (“speaking of the seers”). The underlying source word was **isi-vayana*:

¹⁷ Norman defines a hyperform as a “form which is unlikely to have had a genuine existence in any dialect, but which arose as a result of wrong or misunderstood translation techniques” (1989b: 375)



Interestingly, the commentary retains the correct etymology of the compound *migadāya* (*migānaṃ abhaya-dāna-vasena*, “on account of giving a fearless retreat to animals”) while inventing fake etymologies for *isi-patana* and *isi-vadana*, the location in question being a place where the seers “landed” (*patana*) and/or “conversed” (*vadana*) according to the commentary (Levman 2014: 394–396). *Isipatana* (also known as Deer Park) was just outside of Benares and the location of the Buddha’s first sermon.¹⁸

Things are not always this easily reconstructible. Often there is evidence for more than one transmission. In the *Sakkapañhasutta* Sakka, the King of the Gods, asks the celestial musician Pañcasikha to attract the attention of the Buddha, who is in deep meditation, with a song. Pañcasikha sings a love song comparing secular and spiritual love. The sixth stanza reads:

*tayi gedhitaccittosmi, cittaṃ vipariṇāmitaṃ. paṭigantaṃ na sakkomi,
vaṅkaghastova ambujo (DN 2 266⁷⁻⁸)*

“My heart is greedy for you, it is changed;
I cannot resist, like a fish who has swallowed a hook.”

The word *gedhita* has three variants: *ganthita*, *gacita* and *gaṇita*. They are all past participles with adjectival meanings.

gedhita < *gijjhati*, “to be greedy” (“My heart is greedy for you”)

ganthita < *ganthati*, “to tie, bind, fasten” (“My heart is bound to you”)

gacita < *gajati*, “to be drunk or confused” (“My heart is drunk with you”)

¹⁸ Karpik (p. 72) suggests that “native speaker hyper-corrections based on a confusion over whether the place name **isivayana* meant ‘gathering of the seers’ or ‘wild-animal enclosure’ are an alternative explanation” to Norman’s “proof of translation”. But that is exactly what a hyper correction is: not understanding what a phrase means, inferring an incorrect meaning and changing the phonetics of the word to match that meaning. The point is that a change from the original **isi-vayana* has taken place.

gaṇita < *gaṇeti*, “to count, reckon, take notice of, regard”
 (“My heart is reckoned in you”)

All of these descriptives fit in the context, and all are phonologically related. They point to an underlying *koine* form which removed some of these phonemic differences, like that between a voiced and unvoiced stop or a stop and aspirate, as some dialect users could not hear this distinction. So the earlier *koine* form was a “common denominator” version of the four adjectives where each dialect speaker was left to interpolate the correct phoneme from his dialect. For example, the aspirated stops *-th-* and *-dh-* were replaced with the simple aspirate *-h-* in the *koine* (**gahita* or **gehita*), and intervocalic stops, like *-c-* and *-j-* were replaced with a simple glide *-y-*. (**gayita*). Nasalization of vowels was common and haphazard. The exact transmission sequence in this example is not immediately clear and not easily reconstructible, but it does show the reader how variations crept into the *buddhasāsana* transmission. However it is unlikely that one source word can account for all these variants. Source words **gahita* or **gehita* can account for *gedhita* and *ganthita*, while the underlying word **gayita* would account for *gacita* and *gaṇita*.



One still has to account for the nasalization of *ganthita*, the change of *-a- > -e-*, and the retroflex *-ṇ-* in *gaṇita*, which is not usually substituted for a glide in Prakrit.¹⁹

A similar tangled phonological example (but reducible to a single source word) with several variants occurs in the *Mahānidānasutta* (DN 2, 55) where the Buddha is reported to have said that because of not understanding dependent origination, this generation has become *tantākulakajātā kulaganthikajātā muñjapabbajabhūtā*. The first compound means “become like entangled thread” (*tanta-ākulaka-jātā*) and the third means “become like reeds and bulrushes”. But the second appears to be inconsistent as it says, “become like a knot in the family”

¹⁹ In Gāndhārī, the intervocalic aspirate (*-h-*) can sometimes act as a syllable divider, or glide substitute for an intervocalic stop (see footnote 21). So, if the *koine* was similar in this respect to Gāndhārī then **ga(e)hita* is a possible single underlying source word.

(*kula-gaṇṭhika-jātā*) which doesn't seem to make sense. Both the Burmese and the PTS (based on the Sinhalese recension) have alternate readings, *gulā-guṇṭhika-jātā* and *guṇa-gaṇṭhika-jāta*, and *guḷa-guṇḍika-jāta*, which indicates that the *bhāṇaka* (reciter) tradition wasn't sure about what the correct transmission was. Examining them, it appears that *g-* was heard as *k-* by some dialect speakers who didn't have the phonemic distinction between voiced and unvoiced stops. The word *guḷa* means a "ball" and *gulā* means a "bird who has an entangled nest"; the word *kula* means "family" or "lineage". *gaṇṭhikā* means a "knot" (< Vedic *grath/granth* "fasten, tie or string together") and *guṇṭhika* and also *guṇṭhita* have the meaning "covered over with" (< Vedic *gudh* "wrap, envelop, cover" and also < *guṇṭh* "to enclose, envelop, surround, cover" p.p. *guṇṭhita*).

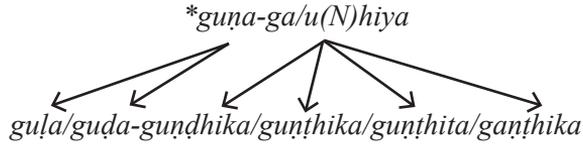
All of these forms can be accounted for by reconstructing a proto-form **guṇa-ga/u(N)hiya*.²⁰

guṇa has the meaning of "ball, cluster, string" and in the Prakrits changes to *guḷa*, which has the same meaning (Pischel 243). **ga/u(N)hiya*²¹ > *guṇḍhika/guṇṭhika/guṇṭhita* ("covered with") depending on how one construes the aspirate as voiced or unvoiced > *gaṇṭhika* ("fastened") is a similar phonological form, but with a different meaning because of the vowel replacement. So, although we're not sure of the phonological form, the meaning is probably what Cone 2010: 59 suggests, "become enveloped in a tangled ball; knotted in a ball; in a tangle of threads", all with a question mark. Edgerton (BHSD, sv *guṇāvagunṭhitabhūta*) provides even more alternate forms, including *guḍā-guṇṭhika-bhūta* and many others. *guḍā* is simply another word for *guḷa* ("ball"), the change *-ḍ-* > *-ḷ-* being quite common in the Prakrits (Pischel §240); he considers *guṇṭhika* "uninterpretable". The first word (*guṇa/guḷa/guḍa*) means ball or string/thread and the second is a mixture of two verbs, "knotted" and "covered", so Cone's definition and Edgerton's – "entangled

²⁰ The alternation of vowel *-a-* <> *-u-* is apparently due to the presence of a vocalic *-r-* in the postulated verb **grnth*, see Cone 2010: 57, sv **guṇṭheti* vol. 2.

²¹ The N stands for a nasal which may or may not have been present, as *gudh* had no nasal, but *guṇṭh* did and *grath/granth* came in both varieties. The *-h-* usually represents an aspirated stop appearing as aspirate only, common in the Prakrits and the *koine* (Pischel §188; GDhp §40-42), but might also be an intervocalic glide (see below). The change of **ga/u(N)hiya* to *guṇḍhika* would likely be through *guṇṭhika* (Pischel §198, 239). Compare the development of nasal + stop in Gāndhārī, which develops to stop or aspirated stop in the case of an unvoiced stop (*-nt-* > *-d-*; *-nth-* > *-dh-*) or to nasal only in the case of a voiced stop *-nd-* > *-n-* or *-ndh-* > *-ñ-* (=nh) GDhp § 46. Also note that in Gāndhārī the *-h-* is used in place of *alif* (the letter which represents an implicit glide) or *-y-* as a syllable divider (GDhp §37, §39), so the *-h-* in **ga/u(N)hiya* might also be interpreted as a sign for a stop that has been weakened to the point of disappearing.

in (or like; a maze or tangle of) cords (threads)” are close to the mark.



The “proof” of this derivation lies in the fact that **ga/uNhiya* is the lowest common denominator of all these four forms. It also explains Edgerton’s “uninterpretable” *guṇḍhika* form, which is only another development of the hypothetical **ga/uNhiya* proto-form where the $N > \ddot{n}$ or $> \emptyset$ and the $-h- > -j-$. The root is *guj* or *guṇj* meaning “to buzz” or “to hum”, which would give the compound the meaning “become like a buzzing ball,” probably referring to a swarm of insects. Another form which could also be derived is *gumphita* (< Vedic *guph* or *gumph*, “to string together, to tie”), which would give the compound the meaning of “tangled strings” (“like strings strung together”). Or *guṇḍhika* is a variant form of *ku/aṇḍhika*, with lenition of the initial velar consonant $k- > g-$, meaning “fibrous plant” (see below).

The commentary here also illuminates the problems in transmission:

g\ddot{u}ḷaṅṭhikaṃ vuccati pesakārānaṃ kaṇḍhiya-suttaṃ; g\ddot{u}ḷā nāma sakuṇikā, tassā kulāvako ti pi eke. Yathā hi tad ubhayam pi ākulaṃ aggena vā aggaṃ mūlena vā mūlaṃ samānetuṃ dukkaran ti purima-nayen’eva yojetabbaṃ. Sv 495³⁰⁻³³.

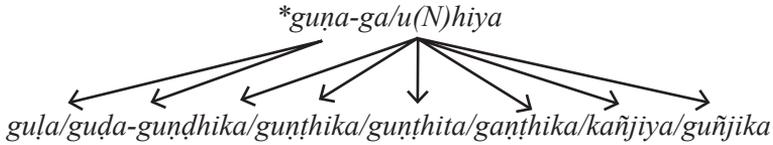
g\ddot{u}ḷaṅṭhikaṃ means the *kaṇḍhiya* (a fibrous plant) string used by weavers. The word *g\ddot{u}ḷā* means a she-bird, some say her nest also. “For just as both of them (the bird and the nest) are tangled together, it is difficult to distinguish, either the top from the top (presumably of the bird) or the root from the root (of the nest).”²² The phrase should be understood as the former meaning (i. e. *tantākulakajāta*, “entangled like a ball of string”).

The word *kaṇḍhiya* commonly means “rice-gruel” but here that makes no sense.

²² The Pali is itself difficult to unravel. The *ṭīkā* says that “both of them” (*tadubhayaṃ*) refers to the weaver’s string and the nest, but it seems to make more sense as referring to the bird and the nest as above. The verbal infinitive *samānetuṃ*, which usually means “to bring together” or “to put together” here means “to separate, to distinguish” (*vivecetum*) per the *ṭīkā* (DN-ṭ 2, 118).

Woodward, at Spk 2, 96¹⁶, footnote 5, commenting on this word, calls it “apparently in Skt. a fibrous plant” and MW (sv *kāñjikā*) has three alternative meanings to rice gruel, “a medicinal plant, an edible legume, a kind of creeping plant.” Note that this word is straightforwardly derivable from **ga/u(N)hiya*, with the fortition of *g-* > *k-*, and treating the consonant *-h-* as an intervocalic *-y-* glide > *-j-*. *kañjiya* is another derivative of the underlying word, adopted by the commentator to explain the meaning of the compound (as a “ball of (tangled) strings” in this case).

Which words did the Buddha speak? Edgerton (BHSD, p. 213) suggests the “original was most likely *gunṭhita*; but possibly *gunṭhika* (Pāli, prob. based on a Middle Indic *gunṭhiya*, really = *gunṭhita*), or *gunḍita* (Amg. *gunḍia*, *gunḍiya*).” In fact, to account for all these variant forms, the earlier form and lowest common denominator is clearly derivable as **ga/u(N)hiya* as we have shown, and this would be the closest word to what the Buddha actually said. We can now expand the derivation chart to include these two new words, the variant *guṇḍika* and the commentator’s *kañjiya*:



Other examples

Even though there are thousands of variants in the canon, most have been interpreted, harmonized and “corrected” by generations of learned monks. The reason we still have so many left is that the different Pāli traditions (Sinhalese, Burmese, Thai, Cambodian and Laos) have preserved them in their own texts (often the most complex ones, resistant to an easy explanation), and we have many parallel texts in other dialects (Gāndhārī, and Buddhist Sanskrit in varying degrees of Sankritization) which also preserve parallel cognate forms. Most of the examples cited above have been from the Pāli canon. One finds the same phenomenon when one compares the Pāli recension with other recensions that have come down to us, for example the Sanskrit *Mahāparinirvānasūtra* (MPS; Waldschmidt 1950-51) and the Pāli *Mahāparinibbānasutta* (MPP). Comparing the two versions we find numerous examples of phonologically cognate words that have been interpreted differently. One example I discussed above (*vedha* et al., and *dvaiddha*). Some other examples from the two *suttas* follow:

MPS	Meaning	MPP	Meaning	Underlying form
<i>dvīpa</i>	island	<i>ḍīpa</i>	light/island (pun)	<i>ḍīpa</i>
<i>kośaṃ</i>	shell	<i>kavacaṃ</i>	armour	* <i>kośaṃ</i>
<i>samraṃjanīyaḥ</i>	delightful	<i>sārāṇīyo</i>	delightful	* <i>sālāyanīya?</i> (Lüders, 1954: 87)
<i>samuddhrtā</i>	rooted out	<i>samūhatā</i>	destroyed	<i>samūhatā</i>
<i>cinna</i> (=chinna)	cut off	<i>tiṇṇa</i>	transcended	<i>tiṇṇa?</i>
<i>Śālavrataṃ</i> (var. <i>Śālavanaṃ</i>)	shrine name	<i>Sārandadaṃ</i>	shrine name	? problematic
<i>āvilāyati</i>	is wearied	<i>āgilāyati</i>	is wearied	* <i>āyilāyati</i> or * <i>āvilāyati</i>
<i>pradeśa-vaktā</i> (< <i>vac</i> , to speak)	to tell	<i>padesa-vattī</i> (< <i>vrt</i> , to move), see Sv 2, 590 ⁹	to move	* <i>vattī/ā</i>
<i>abhiprāyaṃ</i>	intention	<i>adhippāyo</i>	intention	* <i>ahip(p)āya</i>
<i>aughena</i>	flood	<i>odhinā</i>	limit	* <i>ohinā</i>
<i>avigopitaṃ</i>	undisturbed	<i>avikopitaṃ</i>	undisturbed	* <i>aviyōpita</i> or * <i>aviopita</i>
<i>kumbhe</i>	reliquary	<i>tumbaṃ</i>	reliquary	* <i>tumba</i> (Munda word)

A full discussion of the above with references may be found in Levman 2014a. Once again, although it may be argued (as Karpik does) that all these changes result from natural dialect variation (and are therefore all “Pāli”), the techniques of comparative historical linguistics suggest otherwise: that the variation is due to descent from a common ancestor, resulting in cognate sound correspondence sets. This hypothesis then allows scholars to both reconstruct a diachronic time line of change over time, and posit an underlying linguistic form which gave rise to variants. While it is clear that there is a lot of synchronic variation (linguistic diffusion) in the Pāli canon, that is only one factor at work in the formation of the canon as it has been handed down to us. More on methodology below.

Non-Aryan words

There is another problem in the canon which neither linguistic diffusion nor change over time can resolve; that is, when the underlying word has a non-Aryan source, the variants and ambiguities can be quite baffling. Consider the word *jaḷogi*, which occurs in the *Cullavagga* (Vin 2, 301¹¹), and is defined as a “an alcoholic drink which is not [yet] alcoholic, [that is] has not arrived at the condition of being intoxicating”.²³ Horner translates the word as “unfermented toddy” (1952 [2001]: vol. 5, 407). By looking at all the different parallel sources, it is clear that no one knows what the word means. The *ṭīkā* says that *jaḷogi* means “a young spirit...that which has not arrived at an intoxicating state [but] has been made with a collection of intoxicating ingredients; is it permissible to drink it?”²⁴ The Dharmagupta version calls it an alcoholic drink which it transliterates as *ja-ləw-ga*.²⁵ The Mahīśāsaka sect also transliterates the same, and defines it as “an alcoholic drink which is not done yet”.²⁶ The Sarvāstivādin sect seems to translate it as “impoverished residence” and says that the “lack of local resources causes us to drink spirits”.²⁷ Lévi (1912: 509) thinks that this might be a translation of *jaḍoka*, where the intervocalic voiced stop is not heard and the translator hears the *-l-* as a *-d-* (a common Pkt change) or restores it to what he/she thinks is the correct reading; this gives us *jaḍa* + *oka* (“lifeless home”). The Mūlasarvāstivādins substitute “to cure illness” (治病) for the name of the drink; it involves mixing spirits with water and shaking it up.²⁸ The Tibetan parallel version of this text however translates it as *srin bu pad ma*, which is equivalent to the Sanskrit *jalauka* (also spelled *jalikā*, *jalukā*, *jalūkā*) or “leech”.²⁹ Now what drinking like a leech might mean is not clear, but at

²³ Vin 2, 301¹²⁻¹³: *yā sā surā asurātā asampattā majjabhāvaṃ*. The text describes the heretical practices of the monks of Vesālī, 100 years after the Buddha’s death, which are being discussed at the Second Council.

²⁴ Vin-ṭīkā 1, 112: *jalogīti taruṇasurā. Yaṃ majjasambhāraṃ ekato kataṃ majjabhāvamasampattam, taṃ pātuṃ vaṭṭatīti adhippāyo*

²⁵ 闍樓羅 at T22n1428_p0968c22. Transcription as per Pulleyblank 1991.

²⁶ 釀酒未熟者 at T22n1421_p0194a19. The characters transliterating the drink are slightly different (闍樓伽) but have the same sound as per Pulleyblank.

²⁷ 我等住處貧作酒飲 at T23n1435_p0451c29.

²⁸ 以水和酒攪而飲用 T24n1451_p0412c19.

²⁹ Lévi, *ibid*: 509: “The monks of Vesālī drink, sucking like leeches, fermented drinks which they render licit by reason of sickness”. Tibetan *yangs pa tsang gyi dge slong rnam kyis srin bu pad ma bzhin du tshang bzhibs te ‘thungs nas nad pas rung bar byed de*. I am reading *chang* (brewed liquor) for *tshang*.

least it provides a clue to *jalogi/jaloga/jaloka*'s etymology, which is probably Austroasiatic in origin from Santal *jōk*, 'leech' (Bodding 1929-1926 [2013]: vol. 3 p. 329).³⁰ In Santali (and most Munda languages) when a stop is followed by a vowel, the sound is checked and becomes voiced, so it is likely that IA speakers would not be able to distinguish between the *-k-* and *-g-*. In other Austroasiatic languages the word appears as *jēlō* in Senoi, *jhlōng* in Khmer, and *glu* in Stieng and Chrau (Chatterji & Bagchi 1929: xxiii). Now it is quite probable that the immigrant Indo-Aryans adopted the local word for leeches (which are very common in India), and the large number of variant spellings support the hypothesis of an autochthonous word assimilated with difficulty into the foreign phonological structure of IA. Mayrhofer, for example (1963, vol. 1, 423-424), gives well over a dozen variants for the word, including *jalaukā*, *jalūka*, *jalāyukā*, *jalālukā*, Pāli *jalūpikā*, Ardhamāgadhī *jalūgā*, Hindi *jalū*, Bengālī *jōk*, and Nepālī *juko*, citing the large number of transparent folk etymologies, of which Lévi's (ibid: 590-510) *jala* + *oka*, "water resident" is one. He also notes that "Für unarischen Ursprung spricht mancherlei" ("Several things speak for a non-aryan origin"). Although this does not solve the problem at hand — as to what *jalogi* refers to in the *Vinaya* — it does provide a plausible explanation for the confusion over its meaning and spelling and suggests that it may have been used (and then forgotten) as a figure of speech for monks who had violated their vows, "leeching" off the offerings of the laity. A possible derivation is *jala* + *jōk* ("water + leech") > **jalayōk* (-j- > -y-) > **jaloka* (-y- > -ō-; -a- > -ō-) > **jaloga* (-k- > -g-). Judging from the different reflexes of the word, the Santal *-ō-* sound had similarities to both back vowels, *-a-* and *-u-*:

jalogi, jalaukā, jalūka, jalāyukā, jalālukā, jalālokā, jalūgā, jalū,
jōk, juko

Most of these words can be traced back to **jaloga* itself or an earlier form in its development. The unusually large number of variants points to a *desi* (autochthonous) form, adapted by different MI speakers to the sounds of their own dialects.

There are hundreds of *desi* words in the canon, mostly toponyms (place names), personal names and names for plants, animals and special native customs which the Indo Aryan immigrants encountered when they entered

³⁰ The tilde over the *-o-* represents a nasalized sound and the underline an open sound, like the word "awe" in English. It is a "low-back-wide round sound" (vol. 4, p. 486).

the continent. I have discussed some of these in Levman 2013: 148-49 and a near complete list from the MPP and MPS is available in Levman 2014a. Phonological and etymological indeterminacy are a feature of these words. To take one example from MPP and the *Ariyapariyesanāsutta*: en route to Kusinārā, where the Buddha enters *parinibbāna*, he stops at the river (Kukustā, Skt; Pāli, Kukutthā, var. Kakudhā, Kakuthā < Tamil *koṭṭam*, the crape ginger tree, prefixed by *ka-* or *ku-*). Here he meets Pukkusa (Skt. Pukkuśa, Pukkaśa, Pulkasa, “garbage collector,” a Munda word per Kuiper, 1991: 54-6). He is a follower of Ālāra Kālāma (Skt. Ārāḍaḥ Kālāma), who was the Buddha’s teacher as well before his enlightenment (*Ariyapariyesanāsutta* MN 1, 163-65), and is converted to the *buddhadhamma* by the story of the Buddha’s non-perception of a thunderstorm while in deep *samādhi*. The Pāli word *aḷāra* (“crooked, bent”), Skt. *arāla*, is a Munda word (Kuiper 1948: 13-14), and Pāli *kālāma* = Skt. *kālāpa* (MW, “serpent’s hood, demon” < *kalāpa*, “bundle, band”) is also of indigenous origin (< Kannada *kalappu*, “miscellaneous collection” per Turner 1962-1985, item 2931), pointing to Ālāra Kālāma’s connection with the autochthonous serpent (*nāga*) cults.

There are hundreds of such words in the canon and any attempt to understand them in terms of orthodox IA phonology or dialectology will not be convincing. They are foreign words assimilated into the IA phonetic structure, and like **jaloga*, discussed above, will have many variations.

Methodology

As the reader has now seen in some detail, the process I and others have been following involves comparing parallel cognate words in different Pāli recensions or between Pāli and other dharma transmissions and isolating earlier forms which account for later reflexes. This shows what Darwin called “descent with variation”, that is, that later forms share common features with their entailed common ancestor. This method lies at the heart of historical linguistics and evolutionary biology; its value in understanding change over time and tracing our origins cannot be overestimated. This method is not without limitations, as diachronic influences are also constrained by the synchronic diffusionary influences of both local language groups and interpretations by local MI dialect speakers. For more on this latter point and the importance of the diffusionary forces in India as a linguistic area, see Chapter 11 in my 2014 monograph (495-

516).³¹ One cannot argue that “the Buddha taught in Pāli” without accounting for all these variants and the underlying forms they clearly point to. It is in my mind impossible to attribute the changes to the random effects of different dialect speakers, when the inductive method applied here reveals otherwise. Even were this possible it still begs the question, when we have multiple reflexes available to us, “What word, case ending, etc., did the Buddha use?”

As I have argued here, the Buddha spoke a vernacular close to Pāli, but with (in some cases) a different lexemic content and different morphological features. We can now spell out some of the principal features of the *koine* which I believe underlies the Pāli transmission. In the following one should keep in mind Edgerton’s Sanskritization \propto (varies as) time rule, i. e. the more Sanskritization in a Prakrit work, the later the time and vice-versa, the more Prakritisms an ms contains, the earlier it is (1953 [1998]: vol. 1 xxv).

1. lenition or loss of intervocalic stops. This is in part a normal evolutionary feature of the development of OI > MI and in part the result of diffusionary influences from other language groups in the linguistic area, which lacked the voiced/unvoiced

³¹ For a short summary of the issues see Levman 2014: 91-95, which problematizes the OI > MI derivational model and summarizes (p. 93) that “We are left then with a very complex tableau of diachronic forces tending towards divergence and synchronic, contact processes tending towards dialect levelling and simplification, the whole a constantly intermixing, constantly changing linguistic continuum which we can only imperfectly grasp.” The linguistic fabric at the time was quite complex, with many MI changes being dialect forms already present in OI, some MI forms being derived from forms which pre-dated OI and other MI forms preserving archaic OI forms which were later lost to standard Skt. Nevertheless, the comparative method, despite its limitations, has great usefulness for establishing earlier forms, because of the availability of numerous correspondence sets which can be demonstrated to be genetically related through standard linguistic techniques, i.e. because of the regularity of sound change, the first and most important of the Neo-grammarians principles. Karpik (page 55, footnote 68) believes that both Pali and Vedic developed in parallel and derived from a pre-Vedic common ancestor, which view he attributes to Wackernagel. A similar view has been argued by Oberlies (2003: 164, “MIA languages...descend from dialects which, despite many similarities, were different from R̥gvedic and in some regards even more archaic”), but Pischel (§6) maintains that “all the Prakrit languages have a series of common grammatical and lexical characteristics with the Vedic language...” (and von Hinüber (2001: §12), after reviewing the evidence, concludes that “*Das Mittelindisch ist also im wesentlichen aus dem Vedischen entstanden.*” (“MI has, therefore, essentially arisen from Vedic”). The actual answer appears to lie in the middle.

Addendum: I have just received Oberlies’ new book on Pāli Grammar where he seems to have modified his view above and now asserts that “Pāli goes back to a Vedic vernacular situated most probably (south-) east of Arachosia near the Bolan pass” (2019: 35), which he calls a “Nebensmundarten” (“nearby dialect”) of the R̥gvedic main dialect (p. 21).

phonemic distinction. By and large most traces of intervocalic stop lenition have been Sanskritized in Pāli, but there are still some remnants remaining (Geiger §36: Skt *śuka*, “parrot” > Pāli *suva/suka*; Skt *khādita*, “eaten” > Pāli *khāyita*; Skt *nija*, “own” > Pāli *niya*; Skt *svādate*, “tastes” > Pāli *sāyati*).

2. The change of aspirated stops to aspirates only. This too is a normal OI > MI change, one that was also influenced by language groups that had no phonemic aspirated stop. Generally Pāli restores the aspirated stop to its “original” (Vedic) form, but not always; sometimes it preserves both the earlier form in *-h-* only and the aspirated one: *lahu*, “light” in Dh 35 beside *laghiman*, “lightness” Sadd 867²; *ruhira*, “red, blood” at Th 568 and *rudhira* in Dh-a 1, 140¹⁴; *sāhu*, “good” Th 43 beside *sādhu*, throughout. There are numerous examples in verb forms where the aspirate only is preserved in Pāli, *bhavati* > *hoti*, “he is” *dadhāti* > *dahati*, “he puts, places” in Sn 841. For more examples see Geiger §37; von Hinüber 2001: §184.
3. Assimilation of consonant clusters. This is close to universal in the Prakrits, including Pāli and the assimilation is a principal argument against Karpik’s suggestion that *-tvā* is an earlier Pāli ending than *-ttā* (above footnote 13). We have also discussed above the conjunct *br-* as a back formation/Sanskritization from the original noun. Gāndhārī preserves the *br-* conjunct in *bramaṇa* and consonant clusters with *-r*, sometimes with metathesis (e.g. S *durga* > Gāndhārī *drugha*, “difficult way”; *durgati* > *drugadi*, “distress”; *durbala* > *drubala*, “weak”), but it is not universal (Skt. *prāṇa* > Gāndhārī *paṇa*). Gāndhārī also maintains some consonant clusters ending in *-v*, like *dvāra*, “door” or *dvayū*, “both.” In many cases these consonant clusters do not make position, indicating they were probably pronounced as single consonants or geminates (see Levman 2014: 61-2). Presumably the underlying *koine* eliminated all conjuncts which would privilege any one dialect over another. This would be especially important for non-IA speakers who did not know Vedic, and who might be confused by an additional metathesized *-r* in a Gāndhārī word like *dhrama* (< Skt *dharma*) which appears in the Asokan inscriptions in Sh and M.

4. Levelling of sibilants. In all of the Prakrits except Gāndhārī the dental (-s-), retroflex (-ṣ-), and palatal sibilants (-ś-) lose their distinction and are replaced by a dental (-s-); Māgadhī replaces them all by a palatal sibilant (-ś-). Gāndhārī maintains the Sanskrit distribution “for the most part” with a few differences (GDhp §50). The *koine* would employ the dental sibilant throughout (-s-) by the “majority wins” principle of linguistic reconstruction (Campbell 1999: 131).
5. Interchange of glides with glides, glides with nasals, glides with palatals and liquids. In MI -y- and -v- were often interchangeable (Pischel §254), as were -y- and -j- (Pischel §236, §252), and -v- and -m- in nasalized contexts (Pischel §248, §250-51, §261); some of this interchange was due to MI dialect idiosyncrasy (or inherited from OI, cf. Bloomfield and Edgerton 1932: §223–240), and the alternation between -m-/-v- which occurs in Dravidian (Zvelebil 1990, xxi), may also be in part attributable to the lack of a -v- sound in some non-IA languages like Munda, Tibetan (Tib) and Chinese. The phonemes *l* and *r* were also interchangeable, usually thought to be because of dialect differences with *l* predominating in the east of India and *r* in the west. In the *koine*, I assume that the phonology followed the dialects of the north-west for the reasons outlined, which would mean a preference for western *r* over eastern *l*. I also postulate that the *koine* would show a preference for -m- over -v- in nasalized contexts as does Gāndhārī (GDhp §36). This could cause confusion in the transmission, if, for example a word like *nirvāna* was sometimes transmitted as *nirmāṇa*, as happens in the *Vimalakīrtisūtra*. The Tibetans correctly interpret the word *nirmāṇa* < *nirvāṇa*, but the editors of the *sutta*, not understanding the phonology, changed it to *vimāna* (“palace”) in their critical edition (Levman 2014: 201-02).³² In the north-west the word *nirvāna* is transmitted both with and without the -rv- conjunct (*nirvaṇa* in GDhp 58 and *nivaṇa* in GDhp 76).

³² Study Group on Buddhist Sanskrit Literature, *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, page 104, footnote 10. For the word *nirmāṇa* see manuscript line 63b6,

Conclusion

I am not the first person to infer a *koine* underlying the received transmission of Pāli. Geiger called it a *lingua franca*, Smith a *koine Gangétique*, Bechert a common super-regional *Dichtersprache* and Lüders an “*Ur-Kanon*” (“original canon”) based on the *Kanzleisprache* administrative language of Magadha. Others like Norman simply see an earlier dialect or dialects, traces of which can be found in Pāli,³³ or like Lévi, or von Hinüber, an earlier layer. The exact nature of this linguistic form will always be putative, unless some very early Buddhist transmissions turn up from the fifth or early fourth century, that is, from the time of the Buddha, who is generally believed to have died around 380 BCE. But, as I hope to have shown in this article, some of the earlier forms of this layer can be isolated and defined, using the techniques of comparative historical linguistics. These point to the existence of a shared common ancestor among many of the Pāli and Pāli/BHS variants that have come down to us. And that is why scholars are hesitant to say the “The Buddha spoke Pāli”, although I think most would agree that the Buddha spoke a MI dialect or *koine* which was close to Pāli, but not identical in lexemic content and morphology.

One last point I would like to make. To many, acceptance of the assertion that the Buddha spoke Pāli is a matter of faith. I understand and respect this position. Such people feel that the argument that Pāli and its precursor dialect(s) changed over time and that the teachings were not fixed and unchangeable from the moment the Buddha spoke them, to be a disparagement of the *dhamma*. This is indeed not the case. In fact the exact opposite is the case. A natural language does indeed change over time; it is subject to *anicca*, in the same way as any other conditioned phenomenon. The Buddha did not espouse the brahmanical view that language was permanent and immortal and had its own unchanging essence; language changed over time, both because of diffusionary influences from other coeval dialects and normal language evolution (Levman 2017). So the presence of the different stratigraphic levels which I have identified above within Pāli are another proof of the historical reality of the Buddha himself and the authenticity of his teachings couched in a naturally spoken vernacular, which like any natural language changed in response to changing linguistic conditions.

³³ For example in his 1997 [2006] lecture he says, “some texts, i. e. the ones in which we find the anomalous forms, existed at an earlier date in a dialect or dialects other than Pali” (p. 81), but see also his 1989a work where he calls Pali “a kind of ecclesiastical *koine*, the *lingua franca* of the Theravādins of the eastern part of India...” (p. 35)

If, as has been suggested recently by David Drewes (2017), the Buddha was not an historical figure then, in order to account for the existence of the *Tipiṭaka* one would have to argue that it was produced by a committee (presumably of monks), a fraudulent, artificial creation which invented the Buddha and his teachings out of whole cloth in a language which was itself artificial and whose “purity” was preserved by this same committee who ensured the language didn’t change. In this scenario, the language of the Buddha, Pāli, and the Buddha himself are created by the committee of monks; Pāli is indeed not subject to normal diachronic and synchronic linguistic change, as it is an invented and artificial communication medium, fixed at one point in time and preserved by this and various subsequent committees. This hypothesis seems *prima facie* absurd, and Alexander Wynne in his answer to Drewes discusses in some detail the illogicality of that position (2019). There is no need to go into the details here except to state that the hypothesis of Pāli as the language the Buddha spoke unchanged since its first utterance by the Teacher is not consistent with both what we know about historical linguistic evolution and what we find in the transmissional record. This is also what I would deduce as a fifth proof of the historicity of the Buddha in my own response to Drewes (2019).

Abbreviations

AMg	ArdhaMāgadhī
BHSD	<i>Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary</i> (Edgerton 1953)
Dhp	<i>Dhammapada</i>
DN-ṭ	<i>Dīgha Nikāya Ṭīka</i> , Lily de Silva, Colombo University, Ceylon, 1960.
DTS	Dhāmachai Tipiṭaka Series edition of the <i>Sīlakhandhavagga</i> of the DN
Geiger	Geiger 1916 [2005], edited by K.R. Norman
Gir	Girnār (Rock Edict)
GDhp	<i>Gāndhārī Dhammapada</i> (Brough 1962)
M	Mānsehrā (Rock Edict)
MI	Middle Indic
MPP	<i>Mahāparinibbānasutta</i>
MPS	<i>Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra</i> (Waldschmidt 1950-51)

PDhp	Patna <i>Dhammapada</i>
Pischel	Pischel 1900 [1981], translated by Subhadra Jhā.
Sadd	<i>Saddanīti</i> (Smith 1928 [2001])
Sh	Shābāzgarhī (Rock Edict)
UV	<i>Udānavarga</i>

Symbols

<	derived from
>	source for

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A Reply to Bryan Levman's *The Language the Buddha Spoke*

Stefan Karpik

Though it is welcome that Bryan Levman's paper (2019) in this issue, *The Language the Buddha Spoke*, seeks common ground with the SOTT (Single Oral Transmission Theory) proposed in my recent paper (Karpik 2019), I hope it does not seem churlish to reject his position almost completely. Examples of the SOTT in my view are the arguments of Gombrich (2018: 84-5) that Pali was the Buddha's idiolect, of Wynne (Gombrich 2018: 82-3) that it was his dialect and mine that Pali was a sociolect.¹ I had not anticipated Levman's innovation of a single transmission having an earlier stratum, a *lingua franca* influenced by the north-western dialect (p.71-2), coeval with the Buddha (p.66), but changing into a later mutually unintelligible stratum represented by Pali (p.74) some 200 years later (p.75). He wishes to call both strata *Pali*, but to avoid confusion, I will call Levman's alleged stratum *pre-Pali* and the attested language *Pali*.

Although I agree with Levman's claim of an underlying language to Pali, I do not think this has any significance; there is an underlying layer to any language. What I do deny is that the available evidence is able to date an underlying layer to the Buddha. The reconstructions suggested by Levman could, if accurate, belong to any time in the millennium contemporary with the Vedas and antedate the Buddha by centuries. Uncovering an earlier layer, even if accurate and even if somehow dateable to the Buddha, does not prove a *lingua franca*. The need

¹Thus, Levman (p.64) misrepresents my view as being the same as Gombrich's.

for communication across language groups could also be met by bilingualism or by adopting a standard language, much as standard English is often used today as an international language. Epigraphical Prakrit provides direct evidence of such a standard language across India, while Levman admits there is no direct evidence of a lingua franca/ koine (p.73).

In common with MOTT (Multiple Oral Transmission Theory) advocates, Levman gives no account of why the underlying layer was discarded and lost, despite repeated injunctions in the suttas to memorise them to the letter (Karpik 2019: 14-15); difficulty in understanding archaic language did not deter Vedic reciters or Catholics worldwide using the Latin liturgy in the last century. Nor does Levman engage with my argument that the alleged composite character of Pali is a feature of natural languages (Karpik 2019: 67-69); he merely reiterates the MOTT position that it 'proves' Pali is an artificial language (p.76).

Moving on to more detailed discussion:

1. Levman (p.80-81, n.13) claims *mantā* is an example of *-ttā* absolutive. It does not look like a *-ttā* absolutive and is more likely to be an instrumental or nominative of *mantā* or *mantar*. The commentary, *mantā mantā ca vācaṃ bhāsati ti ettha mantā ti vuccati paññā, mantāya paññāya. puna mantā ti upaparikkhitvā* (D-a III 892 on D III 106), can be seen as referring to nouns, not verbs. I have yet to see an unambiguous example of the *-ttā* absolutive in Pali; Geiger §210A gives only tentative examples and Oberlies §119.1 admits they are sporadic and mostly unrecognisable. The obvious candidates, such as *kattā* and *chettā*, can also be seen as agent nouns and other supposed examples of the absolutive in *-ttā*, e.g. *sammasitā, āharitā, paccuggatā, parivajjayitā*. do not even look like this absolutive. Wynne (2013:151-156) argues that *puchitā, āpajjitā, apassayitā, upapajjitā, chinditā, nahāyitā, nisīditā, passitā* and *bhuñjitā* may not be agent nouns, but absolutives in *-ittā* which follow the early orthographic convention of not marking geminates. On the other hand, there are over 13,000 *-tvā* absolutives in the Tipiṭaka and, if the *-ttā* absolutive can one day be proven from the above handful of cases, it is surely more likely that these are a few accidental Prakritisations of pre-Aśokan *-tvā* instead of 13,000+ Sanskritisations of *-ttā*.

I agree with Levman (p.80-81, n.13) that the *-ttā* absolutes of the Patna Dhammapada are later than Pali, but that merely strengthens my case that *-tvā* is the original form. Levman does not engage with my point that the alleged Sanskritisation applied only to the alleged *-ttā* absolute and mysteriously avoided the other seven Pali absolute forms (Karpik 2019: 56 fn.71). Pace Levman, the *(-)tv-* conjunct is indeed a feature of Pali as there are 2,000+ examples of *tvam* in the Tipiṭaka, compared to under 300 of *tuvam*, and 400 instances of the sandhi *-tve-*, for which Levman offers no explanation. The 1,900+ *tvāna* forms in the Tipiṭaka not only challenge the Sanskritisation narrative in that they would actually represent a Vedicisation if the Tipiṭaka had been altered, but they are also copious evidence for *-tv-* in Pali. 'Sanskritisation' raises more questions than it appears to solve: why should only *(-)tv-* and *br-* be Sanskritised; do we also have to take *ty-*, *dr-*, *dv-*, *vy-* and *sv-* as 'Sanskritisations' to conform to the dictum of Oberlies §16.1 that only single consonants are allowed in word initial position; what then of medial positions for these clusters; why isn't there *dvitiya* instead of *dutiya*, *iha* instead of *idha*, *prati-* instead of *paṭi-*, etc.; if *tatra* is Sanskritised *tattha*, why was 'Sanskritisation' incomplete; alternatively, why is the 'Sanskritisation' of *-tvā* complete but not of *tuvam*; why does Pali show the same degree of 'Sanskritisation' throughout, unlike BHS? The *-tv-* cluster is indeed original and archaic, along with many other features of Pali (Karpik 2019: 53-8), and supports the claim that Pali is pre-Aśokan.

2. Levman (p.71-72) does not engage with my argument that *brāhmaṇa* is a loan word. He instead claims it is a re-Sanskritisation (implying 3.500+ corrections in the Tipiṭaka) and he reconstructs pre-Pali **bāhaṇa* although several Prakrit inscriptions have *br-* (Shāhbāzgarhī and Mānsehrā *bramaṇa*, Girnar *brahmaṇa*, Bharhut *bram(h)ana*). His argument is confused: he does not acknowledge the Girnar and Bharhut forms; the similarity of the 're-Sanskritisation' with the north-western forms of Shāhbāzgarhī and Mānsehrā is a coincidence;

in contradiction to the last point (p.72) “an underlying, earlier layer to Pāli was strongly influenced by the north-western or most prestigious dialect”. The different treatment of *r* in the north-western dialect from Pali is emblematic of why they have not influenced each other. Pali has *r* dropping (*dhamma* for *dharma*); the north-western dialect not only retains *r*, it sometimes undergoes metathesis (*dhrama* for *dharma*).

3. Levman (p.77 n.10) claims the directionality of *-bb-* > *-vv-* is moot because a pun in Sn 537 could be read as either form. This doesn't address my argument that by the time of Epigraphic Prakrit and the literary Prakrits the change *bb* > *vv* was complete and Pali is earlier. The pun in Sutta Nipāta shows the transition taking place before attested written forms.
4. Levman does not discuss orthographic errors anywhere in his paper. Had he done so, he may have avoided the following error in his discussion (p.78) of Dh 335: “There are four variants to *abhivaṭṭhaṃ* in the different Pali recensions: *abhivaṭṭaṃ* (PTS = Sinhalese), *abhivaḍḍhaṃ* or *abhivutṭhaṃ* (Thai), *abhivuḍḍhaṃ* (Cambodian).” (I would add that this word is also at Th 400 as *abhivaḍḍhaṃ* (PTS), *abhivaṭṭhaṃ* (Burmese), *abhivutṭhaṃ* (Thai), *abhivaḍḍhaṃ* (Cambodian).) Levman considers lenition of *-ṭṭh-* > *-ḍḍh-* to be one explanation of the divergences, but this is the error: geminates do not undergo voiceless to voiced lenition. Kirchner (2000: 510) found this in 272 languages and neither Geiger §38 nor Oberlies §15.2 offer any geminates for this lenition. More likely there have been orthographic errors: in the Pallava script² *t*, *th*, *ḍ* and *dh* all look similar and likely to be readily confused; in Sinhalese script³ *th* to my eye could be confused with *t* or, on the other hand, with *ḍ* or *dh*.

² <https://www.omniglot.com/writing/pallava.htm>

³ http://buddhism.lib.ntu.edu.tw/BDLM/en/lesson/pali/lesson_pali1.htm

5. Levman frequently gets directionality wrong:
- a. In the PTS editions D I 223 has *sabbato-pahaṃ* whereas M I 239, Vv114 and J VI 46 have *sabbato-pabhaṃ* 'shining everywhere'. (Be has only *sabbato-pabhaṃ* in all four cases.) Levman (p.66) considers *paha* to be pre-Pali and is thus alleging a rare fortition. The literature Levman references does not refer to Vv114 or J VI 46, but on the principle of 'majority wins' (Campbell 2004:131), I consider *pabha* the original form and *paha* a later accidental lenition during dictation to a scribe, based on the analogy of Pali *nabha(s)* > Māhārāṣṭrī *naha* 'sky' (Bubenik 1966:56; see also Pischel §188). This directionality is confirmed by Oberlies §15.15 (b) who gives OIA *prabhū-* > Pali *pahu-* 'able' and OIA *prabhūta* > *pahūta* > Pali *bahūta* 'much'. (There is also an alternative explanation of *pahaṃ* as a copyist's error based on a confusion between *bh* and *h*, which are difficult to distinguish in Sinhalese characters.)
 - b. Levman (p.69-70) gives an example from Lévi (1912: 502-3) of Pali *opapātika* and BHS *aupapādika* 'spontaneously reborn'. They claim that both forms are derived from Prakrit **uvavāya* (AMg *uvavāiya*). Geiger (1916: 6) found Lévi's derivations unconvincing and so do I; Geiger §38 attributes the voicing of unvoiced intervocalic consonants, a common lenition, to dialect influence and so do I. My scepticism is based first on the fact that both *utpatti* and *utpāda* are nouns found in Sanskrit with the meaning 'birth' and neither Lévi nor Levman refer to either. They may well be correct in alleging a confusion over whether the root was *pat* or *pad* in the formation of adjectives, but *utpatti* is found in the *Suśruta-saṃhitā*, which may be a late Vedic text, and the Pali *opapātika* appears to have an early provenance based on this form. I doubt that anyone can date the AMg reflex with any certainty as the Jain scriptures were not agreed till the Council of Patiliputra in the 4th century BCE and not written down till the council of Valabhi in the 5th century CE with much scope for inadvertent sound change. My second ground of

scepticism is that unusual fortitions, $-y- > -t/d-$ from pre-Pali to Pali are implicitly being claimed without giving analogies as evidence. I doubt that such analogies exist.

- c. Levman (p.82-83) examines *sobhissāmi* at D I 105 and its variant readings, *sodhissāmi*, *sodissāmi*, *sodhāssāmi* and *sovassāmi*. He provides evidence for the loss of aspiration *sodhissāmi* $>$ *sodissāmi* and for the lenition *sodhissāmi* $>$ *sovissāmi*. I can add an orthographic element to the discussion: in the Pallava script *bh* and *dh* are easily confused and that *dh* and *v* are virtually indistinguishable, so I am not convinced these lenitions did actually occur, even though they are indeed plausible. So far Levman and I are not so far apart, but then he wishes to claim pre-Pali **sohissāmi* as the common ancestor of *sodhissāmi* and *sobhissāmi* without giving any evidence. The change $h > dh/bh$ reverses the directionality and conflicts with Levman's own evidence, Pischel §213 and Brough §43,49; if correct, it would represent not one but two rare fortitions. Of course, some changes move in both directions, but there is no evidence that this change does so. Levman's unattested fortitions are both implausible and pointless, adding nothing to the understanding of the attested forms.
- d. Levman (p.83-84) claims the underlying form of *vegħa*, *vedħa*, *vekħa*, *vekkħa* and *veṭħa* is pre-Pali *veħa*. In the Pallava script, *gha* and *ha* are readily confused, so this appears to support Levman's claim of $ha > għa$. However, his claim of, not one, but five separate unattested fortitions is not credible. I doubt there exists any attested example of five fortitions in any language generated by *h* or any other sound. But according to Levman, there are eight separate rare fortitions of *h*: we have already seen (p.82-83) the claim of $h > dh/ bh$, here we have $h > gh/ dh/ kh/ kkh$ and $ṭh$, and, for *ganṭhita* (p.85-86), we also have $h > th$, thus producing eight separate rare fortitions of *h*! ⁴ Levman does not discuss

⁴ Fortitions are rare in Indo-Aryan. Pischel §267 gives examples of fortitions of nasal

this utterly implausible situation. If he argues that these are hypercorrections and not natural language changes, then without evidence or discussion Levman is free to conjure any pre-Pali form he fancies and call it a hypercorrection in Pali. I don't see how this is helpful to scholarship and it would undermine Levman's claim of a degree of natural evolution of Pali (p.76) as most of his reconstructions follow the pattern of a lenition from OIA to pre-Pali followed implicitly by a fortition from pre-Pali to Pali.

6. Levman claims an astonishingly fast pace of change from pre-Pali into mutually unintelligible Pali in a mere 200 years from 380 BCE to 180 BCE. Yet in the following 400 years inscriptions from Bharhut (2nd century BCE) to Nasik in the time of Vāsiṣṭhīputra Puṣumāvi (2nd century CE) hardly show any change in Epigraphic Prakrit, thus making Levman's thesis improbable. To make a convincing claim of mutual unintelligibility between pre-Pali and Pali, he would need to show different syntax and different lexis. He shows neither; **n(ṅ)iv(v)aṅa* for *nibbāna* and **bāhana* for *brāhmaṇa* are not, as claimed (p.65), lexical differences but phonological, i.e. differences of accent. Significantly, he does *not produce any* syntactical differences. He claims instead that unintelligibility is entirely subjective and states that he can read Pali, but not Gāndhārī and Ardhamāgadhī. Despite his obvious diligence, he cannot hope to replicate the experience of a native speaker of Indo-Aryan and I have never claimed mutual intelligibility without effort for native speakers. There are in fact objective tests: we can objectively infer that Shakespeare is intelligible to modern native English speakers because films of his plays are not shown with modern English subtitles - in Britain at least. Similarly, we can infer that the varieties of Indo-

+ consonant clusters becoming aspirated with the caveat that some may be older forms than classical Sanskrit. Pischel §190,191 gives, $g > k$, $gh > kh$, $j > c$, $jh > ch$, $d > t$, $dh > th$, $d > t$, $dh > th$, $b > p$, $bh > ph$ in Paisācī; Konow (1910) explained these features as either archaic or as the influence of (bilingual) Dravidian speakers. Geiger §39.1 lists sporadic fortitions explaining them as dialectical variation and Oberlies §15.4 lists many of the same under the tendentious heading hyper-translations; I claim they demonstrate hyper-corrections and we should not assume that Sanskrit pre-dates Pali (Karpik 2019: 72).

Aryan were mutually comprehensible in the Buddha's day from Vinaya rules that treat *Ariyaka* as a single language and from arguments about the correct word for *bowl* in different localities and from the similarities of the Aśokan inscriptions in syntax, lexis and morphology (Karpik 2019: 15-17, 58-63).

7. In what I consider to be intellectual legerdemain, change and translation are held to be equivalent (p.67). This entitles Levman to claim that his position has much in common with Geiger (p.68) and von Hinüber (p.66). However, the MOTT in my paper was not restricted to Norman's views, as Levman interprets, but includes those of Geiger and von Hinüber, as they regard the single original language transmission as being intentionally different from the later artificial, literary language, Pali, thus implying at least two oral transmissions. This also entitles Levman to misrepresent me (p.85, n.18) for not understanding that native speaker hypercorrection **isivayana* is a change, whereas I argue it does not prove translation. (I imagine part of the confusion is that Levman believes this well researched reconstruction by other scholars is, like his own reconstructions, datable to the Buddha, whereas I believe **isivayana* may predate the Buddha by centuries.)⁵ Levman further misrepresents Geiger (p.68) as claiming a *koine* underlies Pali; actually Geiger (1916: 4-5) refers to a *lingua franca* which could be described as *Māgadhī* spoken by the educated, and presumably not a simplified dialect.⁶ He again (p.73) misrepresents Geiger as saying the underlying layer was a *Kunstsprache*; actually this is how Geiger described the alleged later literary language of the Buddha's disciples.

⁵ Levman (p.69-70, n.4) also misrepresents me by saying I do not understand the term 'Middle Indic'. In fact, I don't use the term at all and refer to *Ariyaka*, which I translate as 'Indo-Aryan'. If Levman has a better translation, he should say so.

⁶ Levman's use of *koine* is incorrect in modern linguistics, in which *koine* refers to a de-regionalised variety. The original *Koine* lost its Attic features and became a de-regionalised form of Greek. Cf. Kerswill & Williams (2005:1023): "The establishment of new towns in the twentieth century in many parts of the world is a test bed of koineization, the type of language change that takes place when speakers of different, but mutually intelligible language varieties come together, and which may lead to new dialect or koine formation." The original *Lingua franca* was a pidgin, but this is not what Geiger meant and the term appears not to have a precise definition.

Levman claims that he is following procedures established by eminent Indologists and there is some truth to this. In my view, the hunt for the underlying language of Pali has been a disaster for its scholarship. It has used up academic time and energy on a conspiracy theory of hundreds of fortitions/ hyper-corrections and thousands of Sanskritisations, on a fruitless ghost-hunt for the *-ttā* absolute and on ghastly castles in the air consisting of unfounded speculation, where opinion is treated as evidence. For example, Levman (p81-82) follows Lévi's false deduction of *avayesi* > *avadesi*, which flies in the face of the general trend of MIA towards lenition; from the evidence of *avayesi* at Bharhut, a reasonable person would assume that Pali *avadesi* was earlier; instead Lévi claimed that Pali was later and alleged a Sanskritisation to back his claim that Pali is a kind of BHS.

This is a circular argument known as 'begging the question' or *petitio principii*, where one assumes what one wishes to prove – Sanskritisation and therefore a reversal of directionality – in order to prove it. Levman expands this unfortunate inheritance by proposing on the basis of improbable reconstructions, such as the stand-alone aspirate developing eight separate consonant aspirations, a *lingua franca* spoken in the Buddha's day consisting of, *inter alia*, lenition and assimilation of OIA forms which were reversed 200 years later by fortition, hypercorrection and Sanskritisation. This is the antithesis of Occam's Razor. Levman does not refer to the reversals as such, so I wonder if he has noticed the implications of his theory. On the other hand, I propose no such reversals, but a steady development in a consistent direction. This simpler view conforms to the overall directionality of Indo-Aryan linguistics and is more elegant.

I am not unsympathetic to Levman's concept of the development of a simplified *lingua franca* through contact with Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Munda and Tibetan speakers. However, I regard it as helpful to a narrative of the early development of Prakrit in general, rather than Pali in particular, because reconstructions cannot be dated with any precision. The Koine developed in the eastern Mediterranean following Alexander's conquests and there is an obvious parallel with the Aryan invasion of India. However, the concept of a linguistic area in India, which necessarily involves bilingualism, is widely accepted and the effects of bilingual intrusion including retroflex consonants and absolutes (Emeneau (1980: 89ff) can be seen in the earliest Vedas. Trudgill (2010: 1-35) also explores how bilingual contact in the Dark Ages in Britain between Celtic, Latin, Old Nordic and Old English speakers led to lexical intrusion and the simplification of the inflectional system of Middle English. This also parallels the Aryan colonisation of India and the simplification of (pre-)Vedic into Prakrit.

The narratives of *lingua franca* and bilingualism are not necessarily in competition, before the formation of the Vedas, in my view, but bilingualism would predominate in the Buddha's day after centuries of contact. I would like to see Levman's penchant for historical linguistics extend his simplification narrative to Prakrit in general, thus expanding on his work on contact with indigenous peoples (Levman 2013). I will read future work by him on his concept with much interest.

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The Changing Functions of *renjian fojiao* 人间佛教 in Mainland China¹

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Abstract

Since the revival of Buddhism in the People's Republic of China following the Cultural Revolution, *renjian fojiao* 人间佛教, often translated as 'Humanistic Buddhism', has become a very prominent label. It has served as a basic concept for various purposes, from the political self-legitimation of Buddhists, to the revival of traditional(ized) thinking, to religious innovation. It has undergone a continuous process of adaptation to Buddhists' needs at the moment in question. With its initial role, quite early in the 1980s, emphasized officially by Zhao Puchu 赵朴初 (1907–2000), the president of the Buddhist Association of China (BAC), it became an important element of the statutory purpose of the BAC and developed separately from, but not without the influence of, later dynamics in Taiwan. This article reflects on some of the steps in the 40-year development of what has been declared in the People's Republic of China as *renjian fojiao* ('Humanistic Buddhism'). It focuses on its metamorphosis within the context of the BAC's statutory purpose, asking what the concept has been necessary for and how it might still be relevant today.

¹ A first draft of this article was presented at 'The Sixth Symposium of Humanistic Buddhism' (第六屆人間佛教座談會, 26–28 October 2018) of the Fo Guang Shan Institute of Humanistic Buddhism (佛光山人間佛教研究院), and a second draft at 'The Metamorphosis of Buddhism in New Era China' (22–23 March 2019) of the INALCO in Paris. I am grateful for the useful feedback and encouragement provided by the conferences' participants. The topic of this article will be explored on a much larger scale in a separate research project on *renjian fojiao* (人间佛教) in the PR China.

Introduction

Buddhists in the People's Republic of China (PRC) could have celebrated a remarkable anniversary in 2018 (as is true for all world religions permitted by the Communist Party): Exactly 40 years previously, in December 1978, the 3rd Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China had permitted the revival of religious practice in Mainland China. It was a new starting point, after the preceding years had led to the total suppression of religions during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976).

This article reflects on the role that *renjian fojiao* (人間佛教) (which is mostly translated as 'Humanistic Buddhism', though I prefer not to translate it in this paper)² has played in the development of Buddhism in Mainland China during the last 40 years, with a focus on its function since the early years of this century.

The emergence of the term *renjian fojiao* as a core concept in Buddhist intellectual history in the Chinese-speaking world since the 1930s (and 1940s) is regarded as both a reflection and a catalyst of new conceptual thinking. This term has been connected closely to its creator, the reform-minded monk Taixu 太虛 (1890–1947). He called for a renewed focus on original Buddhist values of this-worldly orientation in tandem with ongoing adaptations to modern society. In the course of the political developments of the twentieth century, the conceptual dimensions of *renjian fojiao* were discussed most intensively among Taiwan-based Buddhists, such as Yin Shun 印順 (1906–2005), Hsing Yun 星雲 (1927–), Sheng Yen 聖嚴 (1930–2009) and Cheng Yen 證嚴 (1937–), as well as overseas Chinese Buddhists. It also became the subject of international research.

I am aware of the fact that there are far too many documents and scholarly works on *renjian fojiao* for a comprehensive overview. Yet apart from a discussion in some specific articles,³ this concept seems to have been underestimated in

² For a short (English) overview of the usage of *renjian fojiao* as a fixed term in the early/mid twentieth century see the article by Bingenheimer (2007). Although there are many possible translations of *renjian fojiao*, 'Humanistic Buddhism' has been used widely, and was propagated intensively by the Fo Guang Shan. This implies two unresolved questions: (a) this translation is not perfect, since it may be wrongly associated with the European concept of humanism, and (b) it may be one-sidedly identified with the Fo Guang Shan's specific brand, which does not represent the whole phenomenon of *renjian fojiao*. On Taixu's original motivation regarding the concept of *renjian fojiao* see for example Pittman 2001, Yao/Gombrich 2017. For the Fo Guang Shan's modern adaptation see Chandler 2004, Yao/Gombrich 2017 and 2018.

³ See Ji 2013, Ji 2015, Travagnin 2017.

English secondary literature on Buddhism in Mainland China. It is therefore time to take a closer look at its discursive genesis and current relevance.

For a basic analysis, I first focus on how the Buddhist Association of China (中国佛教协会, hereafter BAC) has treated the concept of *renjian fojiao* in the more official context. By examining recent developments, I then attempt to provide the framework for a discussion about the concept's further relevance in a broader context.

On the role of *renjian fojiao* in the initial phase of revival (1980s)

It is well known that shortly after becoming president of the BAC in 1980, lay Buddhist Zhao Puchu 趙朴初 (1907–2000) paved the way for *renjian fojiao* to become a central term in the further revival process. His first emphasis on this concept was published nationwide in 1982/83 in the very first issues of the BAC's official journal, *Fayin* 法音, which had just been founded one year earlier in 1981.⁴ Zhao Puchu's series of articles was called 佛教常识问答 ('Questions and Answers about Basic Knowledge of Buddhism'), and one year later the same text was transformed into a widely published book that closed at the end of Chapter Five, on 'Chinese Buddhism', with a focus on *renjian fojiao*.

In the same year, at the BAC's Second Meeting of the Board of the Fourth Session (中国佛教协会第四届理事会第二次会议) in December 1983, Zhao Puchu developed *renjian fojiao* into a more comprehensive system of thought. His official report, which was also a commemorative speech on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the BAC, suggested an emphasis on *renjian fojiao* in a very special manner: Zhao Puchu did not explicitly mention the well-known Master Taixu, though it was he who had initiated reforms of Chinese Buddhism some decades earlier and therefore invented the idea of a *rensheng fojiao* (人生佛教) which has always been seen as the immediate blueprint for the later idea of *renjian fojiao*.⁵ Zhao Puchu only spoke of 'predecessors' (前人) who had played a central role in former times.

⁴ Zhao 1982–1983, Zhao 1983. The relevant passage about *renjian fojiao* appeared in May 1983 in *Fayin* 1983, 3 (13), 6-7+13. On Zhao and his approach to *renjian fojiao*, see Ji 2013, Ji 2017.

⁵ As Bingenheimer points out, Taixu himself initially used the term *renjian fojiao*, but shortly thereafter preferred *rensheng fojiao*. Though the term *renjian fojiao* has become increasingly accepted since Taixu's death in the 1950s, partly due to its consistent usage by Yinshun 印顺 (1906–2005), it is still Taixu who is regarded as the mastermind of the term's evolution.

There may be several reasons – direct ones as well as indirect – for this cautious (re)invention of Taixu’s thinking. On the one hand, as has been mentioned by Deng Zimei 邓子美 and Ji Zhe 汲喆,⁶ Zhao Puchu obviously aimed to avoid provoking internal conflict among *Buddhists* themselves, since not everyone appreciated Taixu’s thinking on reforms as a whole. On the other hand, Zhao Puchu was looking for the best compromise with the *political authorities*, since at that early stage of Buddhist revival it could have been problematic to refer to Taixu explicitly because of his efforts not only to improve the Buddhists’ *social* engagement, but also to exercise a more radical influence in the field of *politics*.⁷

Against this historical background, Zhao Puchu developed his own approach to the concept of *renjian fojiao*. Similarly to Taixu’s argumentation, Zhao Puchu referred mainly to categories of traditional Buddhist teachings on this-worldly actions that were to be adapted to modern Buddhist practice (including the historical Buddha’s Five Precepts 五戒, the later teachings of Mahayana Buddhism about the Ten Good Deeds 十善, Four Embracing Dharmas 四摄 and the Six Paramitas 六度).

In addition, Zhao Puchu combined this thinking with a construction of what he called ‘three great and marvellous traditions’ (三大优良传统). These were his central arguments used to convince Buddhists as well as politicians of the necessary compatibility of Buddhism with the social and political circumstances:

The first of these traditions was (1) ‘equal weighting of farming and Chan’ (农禅并重), which picked up the Chinese Chan Buddhist idea of considering agricultural work as one aspect of the daily work of (Chan) Buddhist self-cultivation. This concept had already been ideologized directly after the founding of the People’s Republic of China to secularize the Buddhists’ daily engagement and make it more useful in pursuing socialist purposes.⁸

The second tradition was (2) ‘strong concern for scientific research’ (注重学术研究). This had also become an important issue early in the first half of the twentieth century – for instance, to counter superstitious tendencies. This

⁶ See for example Deng 1998, Deng 2006, Ji 2013, 2015, 2017.

⁷ For more cautious approaches to the idea of *renjian fojiao* at that early stage in Mainland China and Taiwan in comparison, see Deng 2006.

⁸ Especially in the 1980s the slogan of *nongchan bingzhong* appears to have become more of a metaphor where ‘farming’ stood for ‘work in human life’ in general (not necessarily in the field of agriculture) and Chan stood for ‘Buddhist practice’ (although far from Chan Buddhist practice in the narrow sense). I am currently writing a separate article on the evolution of *nongchan bingzhong* and its metamorphosis.

approach complied with the materialistic ideology of the ruling Communist Party and especially with the newly invented concept of the ‘Four Modernizations’ (四个现代化) demanded by Deng Xiaoping 邓小平 (1904–1997).

The third tradition was defined as (3) ‘friendly international exchange’ (国际友好交流). Once again, this had already become a strategic part of the Buddhist self-understanding over the previous decades, with the aim of playing an active role in the country’s intercultural and international exchange and stability.⁹

The historical interpretation of Zhao Puchu’s conceptual framework has been the subject of significant debate. As Deng Zimei has pointed out, Zhao Puchu’s explanation of *renjian fojiao* could have been interpreted as too superficial and different from Taixu’s original intention; yet Deng provides several explanations for it in light of the complicated political and religious circumstances of the time.¹⁰

Ji Zhe, however, has stressed that Zhao Puchu mainly carried forward a way of thinking that had already been shaped in the 1950s, with the result of subordinating Buddhism to political aims. Therefore Zhao Puchu’s concept of *renjian fojiao* was not to be understood as a revolutionary power to actively change the world, but more as an instrument that could be changed to serve the people according to the needs of the Communist Party.¹¹

What all have acknowledged (independently from different interpretations) is that Zhao Puchu’s great merit lies in having paved the way for a new start for Buddhist life in Mainland China under the label of *renjian fojiao*, and in making the latter a general guideline (指导思想 ‘guiding thought’) for Buddhists across the country.

Consequently, just a few months after Zhao Puchu’s initial report of December 1983, the BAC integrated *renjian fojiao* into its congratulatory message (on the occasion of the thirty-fifth anniversary of the People’s Republic of China) in the September 1984 issue of *Fayin*. The editorial’s heading read

⁹ For a discussion of possible historical inspiration as well as the shifts in these categories’ functions, see also Ji 2013, 45-48.

¹⁰ See Deng 1998, 2006.

¹¹ See for example Ji 2013, 2015, similarly, Xue 2015, 477-478. Ji Zhe does not want to underestimate the meritorious efforts of Zhao Puchu. However, he distinguishes between the more political achievements of Zhao Puchu, who paved the way for *renjian fojiao* in general (while also preserving a more intimate, soteriological level of motivation), and, for example, the religious efforts of the later Master Jinghui, who played a more central role in refreshing the idea of Buddhism as a progressive religion by ‘affecting contemporary [society]’ (化现代), see Ji 2015.

‘Advocate the Buddhism of Human Society, Devote One’s Life to the Cause of Four Modernizations’ (社论: 提倡人间佛教·献身四化建设 [translation from the ‘Table of Contents’ in the English version]). While the issue included an article by Master Zhengguo 正果 (1913–1987) entitled ‘Notes on the Buddhism of Human Society’ (人间佛教寄语 [translation from the ‘Table of Contents’ in the English version]), it seems even more remarkable that it also presented a rich collection of ‘Data Concerning the Buddhism of Human Society (Selections)’ (人间佛教思想资料选编 [translation from the ‘Table of Contents’ in the English version]). This collection offered eight pages with 85 quotations from Buddhist scriptures and was intended to serve as inspiration for creating one’s own understanding of *renjian fojiao*. Nevertheless, half a year later another issue of *Fayin* published a more doctrinal article by Ai Wei entitled, ‘On the System of the Idea of Human Society Buddhism’ (试论人间佛教思想体系 [translation from the ‘Table of Contents’ in the English version]).¹²

The most visible landmark in the promotion of *renjian fojiao* took place in May 1987, when the BAC – for the first time since 1953, 1957, and 1980 – revised its statutes and included *renjian fojiao* as an integral part of its ‘statutory purpose’ (宗旨).

In the following, I take this development as the starting point for a comparison of the different versions of the statutes that have appeared up to the present time. The focus is on the dynamic development of the status of *renjian fojiao* in the statutes of the BAC.¹³ Based on this analysis, I then shed some light on the very recent state of discussion about the further relevance of *renjian fojiao*.

1980 statutes

The main ‘statutory purpose’ documented after the Cultural Revolution in the statutes of 1980 focused on five aspects:¹⁴

- a. Assistance to the Government’s Politics for Freedom of Religious Belief
- b. Solidarization of all Buddhists

¹² See *Fayin* 1984, 5 (21), 1985, 3 (25).

¹³ In the preliminary stage, this analysis focuses on the status of the phrases connected with *renjian fojiao* and related to the teachings of Buddhism without a deeper analysis of the other (socialist) phrases – which is also worthwhile and will be undertaken soon in a separate article.

¹⁴ See Table 1. For the years after 1980, see also Table 2.

- c. Promotion of Buddhist Teaching
- d. Participation in Socialist Modernization
- e. Support of the Country's Unification and World Peace

If we look for *Buddhism* in its narrow sense within the statutory purpose, it can be found in the third aspect, where it is stated that Buddhists are encouraged to 'promote the marvellous tradition of Buddhism' (发扬佛教优良传统). This very general phrase was part of the statutory purpose right from the beginning in 1953 and is said to have been added by Mao Zedong personally.¹⁵

1980		1980	
第二条 本会是中国各民族佛教徒的联合组织。 其宗旨为:		Article 2 Statutory Purpose (宗旨):	
A	协助人民政府贯彻宗教信仰自由政策;	A	=Assistance to the Government's Politics for Freedom of Religious Belief
B	团结全国各民族佛教	B	= Solidarization of all Buddhists
C [1]	徒发扬佛教优良传统,	C [1]	= Promotion of Buddhist Teaching
D	积极参加社会主义现代化建设和	D	= Participation in Socialist Modernization
E	促进祖国统一、维护世界和平的事业。	E	= Support of the Country's Unification and World Peace

Table 1

¹⁵ As Li 2005 wrote: 'Li Weigang handed the "Statutes of the Buddhist Association of China (Draft Version)" over to Mao Zedong for review. When Mao Zedong read it and permitted it, he added the sentence "promote the marvellous tradition of Buddhism". From then on, the "Statutes of the Buddhist Association of China" always preserved the sentence "promote the marvellous tradition of Buddhism".' (李维汉将《中国佛教协会章程(草案)》呈送毛泽东审阅时,毛泽东阅批时加进了“发扬佛教优良传统”一句话。从此,在《中国佛教协会章程》中也一直保留了“发扬佛教优良传统”这句话。) On the founding process and the early years of the BAC, see also Xue 2015, esp. 435–486.

1987 statutes

When the statutes underwent their first revision in 1987, the original structure was mostly preserved. But in terms of the Buddhism-related contents, *renjian fojiao* was not only *added* to the ‘Buddhist marvellous tradition’ but was also *set in front* of it with the aim of ‘initiating the rigorous and progressive thinking of *renjian fojiao*’ (提倡人间佛教积极进取的思想). According to the understanding of the time, this special arrangement precisely reflected the newly invented thinking of Zhao Puchu: *renjian fojiao* became the *central label* under which Buddhism should be developed, and the ‘marvellous tradition of Buddhism’ (of 1953) was indirectly transformed into a *specification* in the sense of the above-mentioned ‘three great and marvellous traditions’ (三大优良传统) (of 1983). From now on, such a specified understanding of the ‘Buddhist tradition’ was subordinated under the guideline of *renjian fojiao* (instead of representing the ‘whole’ Buddhist tradition, as it had been understood to do for the previous 35 years). Based on this new arrangement, according to Zhao Puchu’s explanation, Buddhism would serve the aims of socialism and world peace as formulated in the last part of the statutory purpose (D and E).¹⁶

1993 statutes

Although nearly all contemporary Buddhists and scholars now regard the 1987 revision of the ‘statutory purpose’ as a pioneering initiative, it is somewhat strange (to me) that the next revision in 1993 led to the replacement of the label *renjian fojiao* with the more general phrase ‘spreading Buddhist teachings’ (弘扬佛教教义) in front of the phrase ‘promoting the Buddhist marvellous tradition’ as well as two other descriptions of Buddhist activities following it (‘strengthen the building up of Buddhism’s self-standing’ (加强佛教自身建设), ‘raise Buddhist enterprise’ (兴办佛教事业)). In the BAC’s statement with explanations of the revision, Dao Shuren 刀述仁 (1935–) gave no reason for the deletion of *renjian fojiao*. This version remained in effect for almost nine years, until the next revision, in 2002, reintegrated *renjian fojiao*.¹⁷

¹⁶ See the explanation by Zhao 1987. This shift in definition is similar to the added phrase in the field of socialism under (D), which, however, is not part of the analysis here.

¹⁷ Dao Shuren merely introduced the newly *added* phrases with the words: “With regard to the Association’s statutory purpose, according to the needs which evolved from the new circumstances of reform and opening, the step-by-step clarification of the association’s nature as well as the building up and further development of the Buddhist enterprise, in the draft work

2002 statutes

The 2002 revision of the statutes took place after the death of Zhao Puchu. Under the guidance of the new president, Master Yicheng 一诚 (1927–2017), the concept of *renjian fojiao*, together with some other minor additions, was reintegrated into the statutory purpose with slightly simplified wording: ‘pave [the way for] [instead of “initiate” 提倡] the thinking [instead of the “vigorous and progressive thinking” 积极进取的思想] of *renjian fojiao*’ (倡导人间佛教思想). What seems quite significant here is that the new placement of *renjian fojiao* was not within the field of Buddhist contents (C), which would mean close to the phrase ‘promoting the Buddhist marvellous tradition’ (发扬佛教优良传统). It appears to have become more closely related to the phrases at the end of the text which emphasize the contributions of Buddhists to socialism.

Another (re?)invention from that year which is worth mentioning in this context is the phrase ‘realizing a dignified country, bringing happiness to sentient beings’ (庄严国土，利乐有情). This Buddhist phrase, which includes the only original terminology from Buddhist sutras in the statutory purpose, had already been used by Zhao Puchu – for instance, in his 1987 speech on the occasion of the BAC’s Fifth Plenary Session. Now it was inserted in the end of the whole phrase which had been opened by *renjian fojiao*.¹⁸

of revising the relevant clauses of the current Statutes we made some enrichment and adjustment and added: [...]” (本会的宗旨，根据改革开放的新形势，本会性质的进一步明确和佛教事业建设与发展发展的要求，修改草案对现行章程的有关条文作了充实和调整，增加了: [...]), see Dao 1993. I have not found any hint in secondary literature about the reasons for the deletion of *renjian fojiao* in 1993. One (more philosophical) explanation may be that at that time *renjian fojiao* had become regarded as inappropriate *in its combination with* the (*narrow definition of the three*) ‘Buddhist marvellous traditions’, and was therefore replaced with the broader expression ‘Buddhist teachings’ in combination with the *reinterpretation* (according to its original broader sense) of the ‘Buddhist marvellous traditions’. On a more political level, as hinted by several Chinese scholars in my recent discussions, it has been due to internal opposition (since *renjian fojiao* was not accepted broadly enough), or even due to external differences with Taiwan’s Fo Guang Shan, after Master Hsing Yun – who was by then a famous advocate of *renjian fojiao* – had shown some solidarity with the student movement of 1989.

¹⁸ Although it is not very visible here, it could be that ‘realize a dignified country, bring happiness to sentient beings’ could already be interpreted as belonging to *renjian fojiao*, which it would later become closer related to syntactically. The title of Zhao’s 1987 speech even focused on it, Zhao 1987.

2010 statutes

The next revision of the statutes, which took place in 2010 under the political leadership of President Hu Jintao 胡锦涛 (2003–2013), involved much more structural change: the more socialist phrases, which had been located at the end of the statutory purpose since 1993, were completely rearranged and restored to the very beginning of the text (as had been the case in the original version of 1953).

Further, the textual passage describing the contents of Buddhism (C) was reduced to three main aspects, among which a new phrase – ‘to bring into practice’ (践行) – was once again placed in front of *renjian fojiao*. The latter became the arrangement’s climax and was now directly combined with the Buddhist phrase ‘realize a dignified country, bring happiness to sentient beings’ (庄严国土，利乐有情):

‘Spread Buddhist teachings’ (弘扬佛教教义)

‘Promote the marvellous tradition [of Buddhism]’ (发扬[佛教]优良传统)

‘Bring into practice the thinking of *renjian fojiao*’ (践行人间佛教思想)

‘Realize a dignified country and bring happiness to sentient beings’ (庄严国土，利乐有情)

This probably was the most coherent description of all the versions of the statutory purpose with regard to the question of what Buddhist teachings should consist of. The status of *renjian fojiao* underwent a particular shift in the way that it was brought back into a context of Buddhist teaching (C). *Renjian fojiao* no longer served as part of socialist thinking (at least in the narrow sense), as it had in the former version from 2002. It was also no longer specified by the ‘[Buddhist] marvellous tradition(s)’ ([佛教]优良传统), so that it could have been interpreted by the connotation of Zhao Puchu’s threefold definition (in the context of the 1987 version). In contrast, *renjian fojiao* was now placed at the end of the enumeration, with relatively open possibilities for its further interpretation.

While the last sentence of the statutory purpose had changed very little in the previous iterations, the 2010 version added the quite influential political concept of ‘social harmony’ (社会和谐) to frame the overall agenda in a political sense.

2015 statutes

The most recent revision occurred in 2015 under President Xi Jinping 习近平 (since 2013), and was headed by Master Xuecheng, the new president of the BAC. What can be observed here is that the BAC reversed its former *reduction* of the description of Buddhist thought (C) and brought back the additional phrases that had been invented in 1993 – but in another order. However, the really new accent was that the BAC placed the new phrase ‘transmitting the excellent culture’ (传承优秀文化) (probably in the sense of the stronger political demand by Xi Jinping for a general ‘Sinicization’) just behind the phrase ‘promoting the [Buddhist] marvellous tradition’ (发扬[佛教]优良传统), which itself was upgraded to first place in the overall enumeration.

All the other new phrases inserted into this 2015 version were of a much stronger political character than ever before and were placed at the beginning or the end of the text. In spite of this, when one looks for *Buddhist* content in its narrow sense, it appears (to me) that the concept of *renjian fojiao* can still be viewed as the *central doctrinal term* that *Buddhist thinking* should be oriented around.

1980	1987	1993	2000	2002	2010	2015
发扬佛教优良传统			Zhao Puchu's death			
	提倡人间佛教积极进取的思想 发扬佛教优良传统					
		提倡人间佛教积极进取的思想 弘扬佛教教义 发扬佛教优良传统 加强佛教自身建设 兴办佛教事业			弘扬佛教教义 兴办佛教事业 发扬佛教优良传统 加强佛教自身建设 倡导人间佛教思想 庄严国土, 利乐有情	
					弘扬佛教教义 发扬优良传统 践行人间佛教思想 庄严国土, 利乐有情	
						发扬优良传统 传承优秀文化 加强自身建设 维护合法权益 弘扬佛教教义 兴办佛教事业 践行人间佛教思想 庄严国土, 利乐有情

Table 2

Contextualization

Looking back at the four decades and six revisions of the BAC statutes, one may conclude that the status of *renjian fojiao* has undergone quite a dynamic change.

In **1980**, *renjian fojiao* did not play any role at all in Buddhist public discourse. After Zhao Puchu constructed a ‘thinking of *renjian fojiao*’ in combination with the ‘three Buddhist marvellous traditions’, his initiative was finally inserted into the statutory purpose of **1987**. Although this very peculiar construction was not explicitly connected with Taixu in the beginning,¹⁹ it is remarkable that *Fayin* used the fortieth anniversary of Taixu’s death in July 1987 as an opportunity to republish one of his most famous works: ‘Explanatory Notes on the Buddhism of Life’ (人生佛教开题 [translation from the ‘Table of Contents’ in the English version]).

The thinking on *renjian fojiao* had become increasingly more accepted among the BAC elite, and even Taixu, one of the historical roots for better understanding *renjian fojiao*, had become presentable again. But given that *renjian fojiao* again lost its status as part of the **1993** revision of the statutory purpose, it appears that in the 1990s it no longer belonged to the strategic glossary of (Mainland) Chinese Buddhists. More research is needed in this respect.²⁰

Master Shengkai 圣凯 (1972–) mentioned in one article quite recently that Zhao Puchu himself did not talk very often about *renjian fojiao* in the years after 1994. But Shengkai suggests that nevertheless the whole of Zhao Puchu’s work in the 1990s has to be understood in the light of his ongoing efforts to fill the idea of *renjian fojiao* with life.²¹ Ji Zhe goes even deeper

¹⁹ In the *Fayin* of the early 1980s one can find one short report on the stupa that had been (re) erected for Taixu’s relics in Nanputuo Monastery in November 1985, but it only presents him as a ‘leader of Buddhist reform movements in the recent past’ (近代佛教革新运动之领袖) and does not bring him into relation with *renjian fojiao*. At the beginning of 1987, there followed the first article about Taixu in *Fayin*, but it focused merely ‘On the meanings of Master Taixu’s division into three phases of Indian Buddhist history’ (论太虚法师对印度佛教史三期划分的意义).

²⁰ See footnote 17 above.

²¹ See Shengkai 2017a, where he refers to the new important phrases of that time: ‘One cannot interpret his thinking on *renjian fojiao* only based on his writings. One can better understand the consistency of his thinking based on the thought’s thread, its historical phases and the demand of the times. Methodologically it is a “unity in diversity”, so the phrases like “Buddhism is culture” (佛教是文化), “three great Chinese Buddhist traditions” (中国佛教三大传统), “strengthening the building up of Buddhism’s self-standing” (加强佛教自身建设), “adaptation of Buddhism to the socialist society” (佛教与社会主义社会相适应) are all expressions of his thinking and practice of *renjian fojiao*.’ [不能从文字上去理解他的“人间佛教”思想，而是从思想脉络、

with his analysis and refers to documents that make much more explicit how Zhao Puchu appears to have regarded the concept of *renjian fojiao* as a personal legacy of Taixu's, possibly also in the much more revolutionary sense of the 1940s.²²

A similar tendency can be seen in the work of Master Jinghui 净慧 (1933–2013): He did not call his own teaching *renjian fojiao*, but with the BAC as well as 'renjian fojiao thinking' in the background, he has been widely recognized as one of the central figures to begin, early in the 1990s, to create his own system of Buddhist teaching under his newly invented (and relatively independent) label of *shenghuochan* 生活禅 ('Living Chan').²³

Shortly after Zhao Puchu's death (2000), *renjian fojiao* was reintegrated into the BAC's statutory purpose, in 2002. One can perhaps speak of a 'renaissance' of this concept, as more and more conferences were bringing to mind the possible legacy of Zhao Puchu. Again, there are more questions than explicit statements as to why *renjian fojiao* once more became part of the statutory purpose. Strategically speaking, one may assume that the change lay in the popularity of *renjian fojiao* in Taiwan after the 1990s and that relations with Taiwan were becoming more important, whether they were shaped by competition with or inspiration from Taiwan-based Buddhist institutions.²⁴

Over the last 18 years, none of Zhao Puchu's three successors within the BAC – (Yicheng 一诚 (1927–2017): 2002–2010; Chuanyin 传印 (1927–): 2010–2015; or Xuecheng 学诚 (1966–): 2015–2018) – has invented any new personal phrase for insertion into the statutory purpose. *Renjian fojiao* has rather served as an ongoing offering for diverse interpretations according to current needs. This is how it comes across in the words of Master Yicheng, who articulated quite a conventional understanding of the concept of *renjian fojiao* in 2002 as follows:

历史阶段、时代需求中去认识他在思想上的一贯性，在方法上则是“多元一体”，即“佛教是文化”、“中国佛教三大传统”、“加强佛教自身建设”、“佛教与社会主义社会相适应”等都是“人间佛教”的思想与实践。]

²² See Ji 2013, 2017.

²³ See Ji 2015.

²⁴ Thanks go to Barend Ter Haar (University of Hamburg) who brought up the idea of a possible intention by the BAC to renew the status of *renjian fojiao* in order to compete with Taiwan-based Buddhist institutions or to offer them better opportunities for identification with Mainland Chinese Buddhist developments. Yet much has to be done to find more historical facts to explain why the status of *renjian fojiao* within the BAC's statutory purpose changed.

With regard to the scientific connotation of *renjian fojiao* thought, the Chinese Buddhist community should further explore it in theory and continue to summarize it in practice. In my opinion, spreading *renjian fojiao* thought in a proper way includes the following practical contents: Training talents through education, [which means that] training qualified Buddhist talents through [Buddhist] academy education, monastic education, and lay education is the key to the rise and fall of Buddhism. Purifying a person's mind through practice and theory, [which means] diligently practising the Three Teachings of Morality, Meditation and Wisdom (戒定慧), plays an important role in making the Buddha's disciples aware of human life and purifying the people's minds. To provide feedback to society with charity, [that means] to respond to the country's and all sentient beings' kindness, is the Buddhists' positive outlook on human life based on recognizing and giving feedback to their kindness, compassionately rescuing the world and altruistically benefitting others. The spirit of compassion and devotion should be vigorously advocated in Buddhist circles. Only in this way can we gain further social recognition and achieve a better standing in society. Let us unite and promote progress, unite the Buddhist patriots of all nationalities in the country to contribute to the prosperity of our motherland and contribute to the development of the Buddhist cause.

关于“人间佛教”思想的科学内涵，我国佛教界还要进一步在理论上进行深入探讨，同时在实践中不断加以总结。契理契机地弘扬“人间佛教”思想，我认为有如下几个方面的实际内容：以教育培养人才，通过院校教育、寺院教育、居士教育培养合格佛教人才，是佛教兴衰存亡的关键所在；以修学净化人心，如法如律地勤修戒定慧三学是佛弟子觉悟人生、净化人心的重要内容；以慈善回报社会，报国土恩、报众生恩是佛教徒知恩报恩、慈悲济世、无我利他的积极人生观。慈济和奉献的精神要在佛教界大力倡导，只有这样才能进一步获得社会的认同，才能更好地立足于社会；以团结促导进步，团结全国各民族佛教爱国人士，为祖国的繁荣昌盛，为佛教事业的发展贡献力量。²⁵

²⁵ Yicheng 2002.

Over time, however, commemorative events under the umbrella of the BAC have led to a new consciousness: While in the 1980s and the 1990s the BAC was only (to a certain degree) able to commemorate Master Taixu as the individual who had originally provided the inspiration for the idea of *renjian fojiao*, the years following 2000 have led to a new challenge in terms of history. There is no longer only the legacy of Taixu; now there is also the question of how to deal with the legacy of Zhao Puchu and other Buddhist thinkers of his generation.

The preliminary result can be seen in the commemorative events of **2017**, which partially constructed a new combination of the seventieth anniversary of Master Taixu's death and the 100th anniversary of Zhao Puchu's birthday (as well as the 180th anniversary of another important Buddhist reformer – Yang Renshan 杨仁山 (1837–1911)). The concept of *renjian fojiao* was once again the main subject of discussion, and resulted in the compilation of a new publication under the umbrella of the State Bureau of Religious Affairs, the BAC and the Religious Culture Publishing House (宗教文化出版社) entitled, 'Library of *Renjian Fojiao* Thought' (人间佛教思想文库). The book collection was edited by BAC president Xuecheng and Lou Yulie 楼宇烈 (Beijing University) and released in August 2017.²⁶

The publication was in effect a 'canonization' intended to lay the foundation for what should serve to provide a better understanding of *renjian fojiao* from the BAC's point of view. The book's 'inclusion' (or 'emphasis on') as well as its 'exclusion' of Buddhist thinkers and authors may tell us a great deal about the newest common sense regarding *renjian fojiao* in Mainland China. It includes the following 'thinkers', presented by the following authors:

²⁶ On the press conference of 18 August 2017, see *Fojiao zaixian 2017*, and the publication by Xuecheng, Lou 2017.

'Thinker'	Author
《太虚卷》 Taixu (1890–1947)	邓子美老师编 Deng Zimei
《法航卷》 Fahang (1904–1951)	梁建楼老师编 Lian Jianlou
《巨赞卷》 Juzan (1908–1984)	黄夏年老师编 Huang Xianian
《赵朴初卷》 Zhao Puchu (1907–2000)	圣凯法师编 Shengkai
《净慧卷》 Jinghui (1933–2013)	明海法师编 Minghai
《惟贤卷》 Weixian (1920–2013)	宗性法师编 Zongxing
《隆根卷》 Longgen (1921–2011)	惟俨法师编 Weiyang
《当代人间佛教传灯录》 (Diverse Generations of Masters arranged according to those from Mainland China, Taiwan and Overseas)	邓子美、陈卫华教授编著 Deng Zimei, Chen Weihua

The central message accompanying the publication was expressed by the slogan 'Diversity in Unity, Coexistence without Contradiction' (多元一体、并行不悖). At least with regard to that slogan, much speaks for quite an open-minded understanding of *renjian fojiao*. But it underlies a specific condition: because President Xi Jinping had emphasized the 'Sinicization' of religions in China in his speech at the 'Religious Affairs Work Conference' (全国宗教工作会议) in April of 2016, the book collection also had to fulfil that kind of political expectation.²⁷

Challenges of diffusion: Debate about what?

While the developments outlined above mainly reflect the path of consolidation for *renjian fojiao* as the general guideline for Buddhist circles in Mainland China, the concept finally appears to have become a much more serious topic than ever before.

²⁷ See the foreword by the publication committee, Xuecheng et al. 2007, 1-9, and the similar article by Shengkai 2017b. In my further analysis, there will be a more detailed discussion about this book collection, as well as a comparison of the Taixu-related commemorative events of 2017 with those of former times.

The impetus for a severe dispute about *renjian fojiao* came from the ‘Second Seminar for Hermeneutic Studies of Buddhism’ (第二届佛教义学研讨会) on 29–30 October 2016 in the Huishan-Monastery 惠山寺 in Wuxi. The seminar was organized by the Research Group for Hermeneutic Studies of Buddhism (佛教义学研究会), which was founded by Zhou Guihua 周贵华 (1962-) et al. in 2014/2015.²⁸

Approximately 40 participants presented and discussed papers on the seminar’s topic, ‘Master Yinshun’s Buddhist Thinking: Reflections and Discussions’ (印顺法师佛学思想：反思与探讨), which was dedicated to commemorating the 110th anniversary of Yinshun’s 印顺 (1906–2005) birthday. A significant share of the papers levelled harsh criticism at Master Yinshun’s promotion of *renjian fojiao* and his related influence. A central point of their criticism was directed at Yinshun’s so-called opinion that ‘Mahayana is not the saying of the Buddha’ (大乘非佛说). This statement would lead to dangerous secularization, so that the seminar was summarized in the following conclusion by Fazang 法藏:

The greatest threat to [China’s] Buddhism is not the [Mahayanistic] power of the ghosts and of the [realms of] deification, it is the secular Confucian ideology, the high degree of secularization, and the utilitarian social ethics. That is why the main task for Chinese Buddhism is to defeat secularization and anti-deification. The automatism of [grasping for] the medicine of rationalism and anthropocentrism according to Western-style secularization cannot in any way at all defeat the fundamental disadvantages of Chinese Buddhism; on the contrary, it will aggravate its vulgarization.

²⁸ Zhou Guihua’s main work appeared in January 2018 with the title “批判佛教”与佛教批判 (*Critical Buddhism’ and Criticism of Buddhism*), Zhou 2018. On Zhou’s self-understanding regarding the ‘Research Group’ and the multifaceted meaning of *yixue* (义学, here preliminarily translated as ‘Hermeneutic Studies’), cf. also Zhou 2014, 2016. As Zhou initiated his criticism of Yinshun early in 2006 (Zhou 2006), one may see an initial reaction in Deng et al. 2009, 7–9, 83f. He actually ran a homepage (www.fojiaoyixue.org), which is still cited here, although it appears to have been offline since at least March 2019, because I have preserved the main contents. For a summary of the second seminar and how the ‘Research Group’ dealt with the consequences of the dispute (“Zhendan shihong”: fansi Yinshun fashi “dasheng fei foshuo” sixiang wangluo wenji’ 《“震旦狮吼”：反思印顺法师“大乘非佛说”思想网络文集》(‘The Lion’s Roar of China’: Online Collection of Reflections about the Thinking of Master Yinshun according to which ‘Mahayana is not the Saying of the Buddha’)), see Fojiao yixue yanjiuhui.

佛教面临的重大威胁不是神权、天化，而是世俗的儒家意识形态和高度世俗化、功利化的社会伦理。因此，对于中国佛教而言，基本的任务是对治俗化而非天化，机械地照搬西方世俗的理性主义、人本主义的药方，并不能对治中国佛教的根本弊端，反而会加重其俗化。²⁹

While the main criticism focused on ‘Yinshun-style *renjian fojiao* thinking’ (印顺版“人间佛教”思想) and in some cases explicitly distinguished between the latter and Taixu’s more Mahayanistic interpretation, the seminar as a whole provoked every kind of online and offline reaction in Mainland China and Taiwan, many of which defended the concept of *renjian fojiao* in general.

Against this background, it is remarkable that the debate did not directly affect the above-mentioned book collection. Not surprisingly, the personal role of Yinshun, as described in the above-noted book review by Shengkai, was mainly restricted to Yinshun’s famous emphasis on the formula of *qiliqiji* (契理契机).³⁰

Nevertheless, apart from the BAC’s official publication project, scholars as well as monastics have published numerous articles, not only in order to defend the works by Yinshun but also to defend the more general idea of *renjian fojiao*. Some of the most renowned and energetic statements by Mainland and Taiwanese scholars and monastics have been concentrated in the organs of the ‘Hongshi Cultural and Educational Foundation’ (弘誓文教基金會), which is closely related to Yinshun’s teachings and heritage.³¹

Some of the debates have been accompanied by severe allegations. The representatives of the seminar regarded themselves as the ‘party of reflective

²⁹ Fazang 2016. Compare with the critics of Taixu in 1943, as summarized in Bingenheimer 2007, 148: ‘Apart from the desire to set Buddhism apart from Confucian “narrowness”, another reason for Taixu to prefer *rensheng* [人生] over *renjian* [人间] was perhaps the homophony with an important concept in his *panjiao* [判教]: i.e. the idea of the “human vehicle” (*rensheng* 人乘). Taixu held that in the current age it is the “human vehicle” that should be practised. At one point, in his critical remarks on Yinshun’s *Yindu zhi fojiao* 《印度之佛教》(1942), Taixu cautioned Yinshun directly against the tendency to limit Buddhism to the “human realm” [人间]. He might have accused him of anthropocentrism (人本主义), if the term had entered Chinese parlance already.’

³⁰ This formula can be interpreted as ‘taking advantage of the opportunity in line with the Buddha’s teachings’; it is part of the title of Yinshun’s book *Qiliqiji zhi renjian fojiao* 《契理契机之人间佛教》(1993). Huayu ji 華語集 5 vols. Taipei: Zhengwen.

³¹ Hongshi 弘誓 (2017) 145, *Fayin xuebao* 法印學報 (2017) 8, Hongshi 弘誓 (2018) 152.

thinking’ (反思派) and their critics as the ‘party of Yin[-shun’s] protectors’ (护印派), comparing some of their critics’ behaviour with methods during the Cultural Revolution.³² On the other side, the Taiwanese journal *Hongshi* 弘誓 distinguished between those ‘respectful of Yin[-shun]’ (尊印) and the ‘Yin[-shun]-bashers’ (批印), and its editorial went so far as to compare the latent production of a ‘collective hysteria’ (集體歇斯底里) by the so-called ‘Huishan-group’ (惠山眾) with methods preferred by the German Nazi Dr. Joseph Goebbels.³³

The questions that arose out of the debates in 2016/2017 around Master Yinshun appear to represent a new stage of reflection about the current situation and future challenges to Chinese Buddhism, for which the further understanding of *renjian fojiao* plays quite a significant role. Whereas many doctrinal aspects of the debates are not really new, they reflect (or are interpreted by different participants as) controversies at another level between traditionalists and reformers, scholars and monastics, representatives from Taiwan and the Mainland, etc. They also raise various questions about religious vs. political influences. This article cannot provide an answer to all the different layers inherent in these debates, but a deeper analysis will be undertaken in another work.

As a result of these debates, the central point is to ask to what extent *renjian fojiao* will be questioned in the long term.

Outlook

Coming back to the history of the statutory purpose of the BAC, one may envision three possible developments if one contemplates the future role of *renjian fojiao*:

1. Omission of *renjian fojiao* or replacement of the term with another label [similar to the 1993–2002 version]
2. Preservation of *renjian fojiao* as a concept open to interpretation [similar to the 2010–2015 version]
3. Development of *renjian fojiao* as a concept with a more specific definition [similar to the 1987–1993 version]

³² Jiang 2017a, Jiang 2017b.

³³ Zhaohui 2017. The ‘Huishan group’ is used here as a generalized designation of those who had supported the seminar (with the explicit exception of those few participants who did not support it).

With regard to option 1, the abandonment of *renjian fojiao* does not appear likely in the near future. The concept is still necessary in times of ongoing modernization (as well as political development). Eleven years ago, in 2008, Master Jinghui was asked about this in an interview:

The concept of '*renjian fojiao*' should be said to have played a very positive role in history and should be fully affirmed. But for nearly 80 years, after having been shouted as a slogan over 80 years, can it always adapt to the needs of the times? The slogan and concept are not the Noble Truths of Shakyamuni. The Noble Truths, which were transmitted for two thousand years, were never to be changed. However, as '*renjian fojiao*' has come into the present time, it is facing unprecedented peace and prosperity, towards a well-off and harmonious society. Isn't it necessary to propose new ideas based on this era that are more suitable for the needs of our time? That is to say, isn't it necessary to push the idea of '*renjian fojiao*' further?

“人间佛教”的理念，应该说是在历史上发挥了非常积极的作用，应该是值得充分肯定的。可是将近八十年了，一个口号喊上八十年，是否能够始终适应时代的需要？口号、理念，不是释迦所说的佛法真谛，真谛说了二千年也改不了，但是作为“人间佛教”走到了今天，已经面对着前所未有的一个太平盛世，一个走向小康的构建和谐的社会，是不是需要根据这个时代提出一些更适合我们时代需要的新理念？就是说，是不是需要把“人间佛教”的思想再向前推进一步？³⁴

Instead of abandoning or changing the thinking of *renjian fojiao*, Jinghui gave the following summary:

The modernization of Buddhism began with Master Taixu, and the slogan of Buddhist modernization is just '*renjian fojiao*'. Everything we have done so far has not reached the goals that Master Taixu proposed at the time, so the course of Buddhist modernization still continues. Today's question is nothing more than how to modernize Buddhism, how to make Buddhism move with the times, take advantage of the opportunity and reach a new

³⁴ Jinghui 2008.

development. How to modernize Buddhism and how to affect contemporary [society] is still a goal of today.

佛教现代化是从太虚法师开始的，佛教现代化的口号就是“人间佛教”。我们现在所做的一切还没有达到太虚大师当时提出来的那些目标，佛教现代化的历程还在继续走。今天的问题无非就是要怎么样使佛教现代化，怎么样使佛教能够与时俱进，契理契机，有一个新的发展。目前还是一个目标，佛教如何现代化，如何化现代。³⁵

If one envisions a new concept that could be of interest for replacing the status of *renjian fojiao*, one might look at the potential of the concept that Master Xuecheng developed in recent years under the label of the so-called ‘Culture of the Heart’ (心文化). This concept appeared to be suitable for the culturalist (secularizing) approach of the politically desired ‘Sinicization’ (中国化) on the one hand, and for the more general Buddhist purpose of ongoing ‘internationalization’ on the other. But as Master Xuecheng had to give up all his functions within the BAC, it is unlikely that this approach will be of further relevance in the near future.³⁶

With regard to options 2 and 3, despite the debates mentioned above, *renjian fojiao* still appears to be (politically) irreplaceable. However, promoting the ‘historical necessity’ (历史必然性) of *renjian fojiao* – as Cheng Gongrang 程恭让 ((1967–) formerly Nanjing University, now Shanghai University) did in a November 2016 article – with a bias toward Master Hsing Yun’s model of the concept³⁷ does not seem to be very promising either.

All in all, the question of whether *renjian fojiao* will be needed by the BAC in the sense of option 2 or option 3 appears speculative, as well as controversial. One of Master Xuecheng’s last official statements, in November 2017, about the role of *renjian fojiao* still seems to speak for quite a free interpretation in the sense of option 2:

³⁵ Jinghui 2008.

³⁶ It will be an open question for a long time, until it is possible to see what the impact of the group around Xuecheng and his Longquan Monastery on Buddhist thinking in contemporary China has been. According to an interview with a representative of the Longquan Monastery in April 2019, the idea of a ‘culture of the heart’ is still alive and part of the monastery’s doctrinal development – however, without ongoing support from Xuecheng.

³⁷ Cheng 2016.

The very direction of the new phase (新阶段) of promoting the ‘*renjian fojiao*’ thought is as follows: On the basis of the Buddha’s wisdom, the Bodhisattvas’ vigour and the worthy predecessors’ experience, we should explore how to build up, develop and improve the establishment of the original foundation of the Buddha; we should carry forward the marvellous tradition(s); we should adapt to the spirit of the times; we should embody the Chinese characteristics and serve the system of ‘*renjian fojiao*’ thought (“人间佛教”思想体系) according to contemporary society. Therefore, we should take the lead in the healthy development of Chinese Buddhism in the new era (新时代中国佛教健康发展), giving full play to the functions of Buddhism for purifying humans’ minds, enriching morality, enlightening wisdom, transmitting culture, improving human life, helping diverse groups, serving society, and benefiting all beings.

开启弘扬“人间佛教”思想新阶段的致力方向，就是要在佛陀智慧、菩萨愿行、先贤经验的基础上，探索建立、发展完善立足佛陀本怀、发扬优良传统、融入时代精神、体现中国特色、服务当代社会的“人间佛教”思想体系，引领新时代中国佛教健康发展，更好发挥佛教净化人心、涵育道德，启迪智慧、传承文化，改善人生、利益人群，服务社会、广利众生的积极作用。³⁸

What is remarkable here and in the official speeches of recent years is that Xuecheng framed *renjian fojiao* within a ‘new historical phase’ (新阶段，新时代) which it is going to be directed at. This is obviously a more or less direct reference to President Xi Jinping’s ‘Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era’ (新时代有中国特色色社会主义). Only three months earlier, however, in his opening speech on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of Taixu’s death, Xuecheng made a reference to Taixu’s essay ‘How to Build up a Modern Chinese Culture’ (《怎样建设现代中国的文化》), in which the latter demanded the ‘creation of a new culture (新文化) in order to “revive the Chinese Nation” and “protect against the global crisis”’. Xuecheng thus led away from (or merged with?) Xi Jinping’s ‘new’ direction by calling to mind Taixu’s legacy in relation to *renjian fojiao*, concluding with the remark:

³⁸ Xuecheng 2017a.

In today's era of globalization, we should merge Buddhist thought with the marvellous traditional Chinese culture (中华优秀传统文化) and the essence of world culture (世界文化精华) and jointly construct a new world culture (世界新文化) that adapts to the needs of China's modern development and opens up a new paradigm of human civilization.³⁹

在当今全球化时代，我们应将佛教思想与中华优秀传统文化及世界文化精华相融通，共同建构适应中国现代发展需要、开启人类文明新范型的世界新文化。

This article has served as a starting point for looking back at the discursive developments of at least four decades in the PR China. Much more material from religious, political and academic discourses is going to be analysed in a following work to shed new light on the impact of *renjian fojiao* in the PR China's recent history, and to obtain an understanding of its future relevance. Since the fall of Xuecheng (July 2018), the question of how the BAC will define its understanding of *renjian fojiao* in the long term has remained an open and exciting one. As long as *renjian fojiao* maintains its position in the statutory purpose of the BAC, Chinese Buddhists will have to continue to explore what it is about.

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³⁹ Xuecheng 2017b.

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Patterns of Ritual Engagements between Buddhist Religious Centres and Their Non-monastic Devotees in the Religious Space of Some Excavated Buddhist Sites of Early medieval Bihar and Bengal: A Study with Particular Reference to the Cult of Votive *Stūpas*, Votive Terracotta Plaques and Votive Tablets.

Birendra Nath Prasad

Abstract

Through an analysis of the spatial distribution pattern of the published corpus of votive stūpas, votive terracotta plaques and tablets in the religious space of excavated Buddhist religious centres of early medieval Bihar and Bengal, this paper attempts to analyse the patterns of ritual engagements between Buddhist religious centres of this area and their non-monastic non-aristocratic devotees. We have argued that Buddhist religious centres of Magadha made determined efforts of attracting and retaining pilgrimage by non-monastic non-aristocratic devotees by offering the most sacred spots within their religious space to non-monastic devotees for ritual activities. The pattern was fundamentally different in Bengal, where most of the excavated monastic centres largely functioned as political institutions, established and patronized by their political patrons, who established them for political motives. These monastic centres of Bengal did not feel the need of entering into ritual engagements with non-aristocratic devotees. With different kinds of support systems, the process of the decline of Buddhism in early medieval Bihar and Bengal could not have been the same.

Introduction

In Indian historiography, the issue of patterns of ritual engagement between Buddhist religious centres and their non-monastic devotees during the early medieval period (c. 600 -1200 CE) has invited some interesting studies. In some text-based studies, it is generally believed that this phase witnessed some fundamental problems within the ritual sphere of Buddhism: ‘Vajrayāna esoteric excesses’, which turned the common population against it (Bhattacharyya 1993,15; Sarao 2012,128); the ‘complete’ ‘unwillingness’ and ‘inability’ of Buddhism to guard its ritual and institutional distinction in the face of an expanding and assimilative Brahmanism (Sarao 2012, 258-59)¹; and the ‘unwillingness’ of Buddhist monks and monasteries to enter into ritual engagement with the non-monastic devotees almost everywhere in India where Buddhism was still present as an institutional religion (Bhattacharyya 1993, 15; Sarao 2012, 205-210). It is often argued that these factors precipitated the ‘disappearance’ of Buddhism almost suddenly with the Turkic destruction of some of its monastic centres in the early 13th century (Bhattacharyya 1993, 15). These theorizations are mostly based on the analysis of Vajrayāna textual material. A study of this issue from the ‘archaeology of religion’ perspective may offer an altogether different kind of picture.

In the present paper, an attempt will be made to understand the patterns of ritual engagement between Buddhist religious centres of Bihar and Bengal and their non-monastic devotees during the early medieval period through an analysis of a particular kind of published archaeological data: votive stūpas, votive terracotta plaques and votive tablets. These objects have been rightly treated as important archaeological markers of pilgrimage to Buddhist religious centres (Willis 2008, 139-40; Mishra 2009, 142).² Through an analysis of the spatial distribution pattern of these objects in the religious space of some excavated Buddhist religious centres of early medieval Bihar

¹ The view of Buddhism as a passive recipient of Brahmanical appropriation has been contested in some recent writings ((Bautze-Picron 1996: 109–135; Linrothe 1997: 193–98; Amar 2012: 155–185; Prasad 2013b; Prasad 2014a; Prasad 2014b; Prasad 2018a; Prasad 2019a; Prasad 2019b).

² We are studying Bihar and Bengal together in this paper, mainly because for a significant part of the early medieval period--- from the middle of the 8th century CE to the end of the 12th century CE--- much of Bihar and Bengal were ruled by the same dynasty: Pāla or Sena. The Sena dynasty supplanted the Pāla dynasty by the middle of the 12th century in a significant portion of the area under study.

and Bengal, we will try to analyse the extent, if any, to which these religious centres were willing to ‘open up’ to their non-monastic devotees. Did every Buddhist religious centre of early medieval Bihar and Bengal interact with the non-monastic devotee in the same way? If the pattern was not homogenous, do we see any difference when we move to Bengal from Bihar? What bearings did these patterns have on the issue of the decline of monastic Buddhism in these areas? Was the process of the decline of monastic Buddhism different in Bihar from in Bengal?

Some limitations of this paper may be put on record at the outset. This paper is not based on any kind of primary documentation. It is based totally on analysis of the published archaeological data.³ This kind of study may, at best, be regarded as exploratory in nature and its findings tentative. It is hoped that this study may induce some more in-depth studies based on primary documentation of the archaeological data.

³ Through an analysis of some textual sources, Peter Skilling has attempted to show that the term ‘votive’ may not be used for these objects (small/miniature stūpas, clay tablets and clay sealings) as they were not ‘dedicated, consecrated, ordered, erected, etc., in consequence of, or in fulfilment of a vow’ (Skilling 2006, 677). He has further argued that these objects were not ‘ex-voto’ as they were not ‘offering made in pursuance of a vow’ (Skilling 2001, 677). This attitude is problematic as it overlooks some epigraphic evidence related to the practice of dedication of these stūpas, sealings and tablets. Many stūpas, sealings and tablets discovered from the Mahābodhi area do contain epigraphic evidence that these objects were donated in fulfilment of vows. So some of them were both ‘votive’ and ‘ex-voto’. A similar possibility for the large number of uninscribed miniature stūpas, sealings and tablets cannot be ruled out. But, despite having this evidence, we cannot claim that every single miniature stupa, clay tablet or sealing dealt with in the present paper was ‘dedicated, consecrated, ordered, erected, etc., in consequence of, or in fulfilment of a vow’. Yet, we are forced to use the term ‘votive’ for the small/miniature stūpas, clay tablets and terracotta plaques because we have based our study totally on the published data. In the published archaeological records and secondary literature based on the analysis of such records of early medieval Bihar and Bengal, barring the solitary exception of Prof. Skilling, only this term (‘votive’) has been used ever since the days of Alexander Cunningham. As our study is based totally on the analysis of the published archaeological data, we are forced to inherit this term.

Early Medieval Buddhist monasteries as nuclei of ‘institutional esoterism’ and the question of the access of non-monastic devotees to the monastic religious space in early medieval Bihar and Bengal

In many available studies on the Buddhist religious centres of early medieval Bihar and Bengal, one generally encounters an *a priori* assumption that esoteric Vajrayāna was the only form of Buddhism practised in those centres. In fact, this point has been highlighted to such an extent that one scholar has argued that all monasteries of Bihar and Bengal served as nuclei of ‘institutional esoterism’ (Davidson 2002, 114-115).⁴ It is also argued that all monastic centres, depending totally on royal patronage, were institutional centres for the practice of esoteric Vajrayāna, so that they hardly felt any need to enter into ritual engagement with their non-monastic non-aristocratic devotees (Bhattacharyya 1993, 15). It is also claimed that this was the general pattern across those areas of India where monastic Buddhism survived in the early medieval period (Bhattacharyya 1993,15; Sarao 2012,205-07).⁵

In this context, the core question that needs to be explored is: is this ‘institutional esoterism’ also reflected in the archaeological records? Vajrayāna was not a homogenous religious system and it needed to keep a distinction between the extreme esoteric practices that were to be practised by its advanced initiates (monks) and those aspects of its ritual practices that were to be offered to the masses in order to attract their patronage. After all, in the long run it was only patronage from, and association with, the masses that would ensure the survival of Buddhist religious centres. An open display of extreme practices might turn away devotees, resulting in the shrinkage of the patronage base of the Buddhist religious centres. In the context of monasteries of early medieval Orissa, it has been found that the introduction of esoteric practices in monastic Buddhism entailed a neat segregation of the sacred space of Buddhist monasteries into ‘restricted space’ where secret esoteric rituals were/could be performed, and ‘unrestricted space’ where lay devotees had unrestricted access to undertake their own ritual activities (Mishra 2009,151-52). Do we see a similar arrangement of monastic space in early medieval Bihar and Bengal? Esoteric Vajrayāna did involve some extreme esoteric rites, some explicit sexual imagery (*Yab-yum* deities) and sometimes open display of confrontation in some

⁴ For a review of Davidson, see Prasad 2008

⁵ Lars Fogelin, through an analysis of archaeological data, has arrived at similar conclusions (Fogelin 2015, 202).

sculptures (Trailokyavijaya, Aparājītā, Heruka/Cakrasaṃvara etc.). Did the non-monastic devotees have unrestricted access to such spots within the monasteries where such rites took place and such imagery was worshipped/ displayed? In other words, what did the monks practise in private and what did they intend to display to the public at large? How many excavated monastic centres of early medieval Bihar and Bengal show archaeological evidence for the practice of esoteric forms of Vajrayāna? How do the excavated data from monastic sites of Bihar and Bengal reflect on this issue? Which part of the monastic religious space was made available to the non-monastic devotees to undertake rituals? Which part of the monastic religious space was not accessible by them? In the space available to non-monastic devotees for their ritual activities, did the monastic authorities devise any special mechanism to monitor their activities? Did the monastic authorities undertake any especial measure for the protection of relics and/or some specific cult objects in their sacred spots?⁶

Let's begin with an analysis of an issue that is quite fundamental to the issues raised above: accessibility of the religious space within the religious centres by non-monastic devotees. Which part of the religious space of a particular religious centre was accessible by the non-monastic devotees, and what was the importance of that part in the overall religious personality of that particular religious centre? Did that part have a significant role in forming the 'core personality' of that particular religious centre? An analysis of this issue will provide some important clues to the extent to which a particular Buddhist religious centre was willing to 'open up' to its non-monastic devotees.

It may be added that no monastic centre would provide unrestricted access to the monastic cell area for the non-monastic devotees. Our prime avenue of enquiry in this section would thus be access to the sacred spots within the monastic establishments in general and temples within the monastic establishments in particular. We will begin with an analysis of some excavated sites (Mahābodhi and Nālandā) of Magadha, and then move to Aṅga (i.e. the site of Antichak), sites in Rāḍha, Varendra, Vaṅga and Samatāṭa-Harikela.⁷ We will begin our

⁶ For an interesting analysis of this issue in the case of early medieval Buddhist monasteries in the Sanchi area, see Shaw 2009, 131-132. She has argued that 'the need to protect the relics by regulating access to the *stūpa* and maintaining close surveillance on them is also a factor in the positioning of the monuments' (p.132).

⁷ In an important study of the political geography of early medieval Bengal on the basis of analysis of copper plate inscriptions, B.M. Morrison (Morrison 1980: 38) has observed that early medieval Bengal had four sub-regions: Rāḍha (covering the areas to the west of the Bhagirathi - Hughli

analysis with an analysis of the alignment of votive *stūpas* vis-à-vis the religious space of the main Buddhist religious centres of our study area. We will also look into votive terracotta plaques and tablets, and seals and sealings inscribed with the Buddhist Creed Formula, in understanding this issue.

Votive *stūpas*, votive terracotta plaques and votive tablets as archaeological markers of pilgrimage to Buddhist religious centres

There has been a heated debate on the basic nature and function of these miniature *stūpas*. In many cases, as Schopen has shown, many of them were meant to be ‘burial *ad sanctos*’, intended to contain the bodily relics of important monks/nuns or important non-monastic devotees (Schopen 2010a, 119-120). By allowing the common devotees to bury the relics of their loved one within the monastery or inside the compound of a Buddhist temple site, the monastic authorities granted them a chance to be near to the Buddha even after their death, as the Buddha was believed to be physically present inside the *stūpa* or monastery in many parts of India’ (Schopen 2010b, 258-289).

But in many other cases these *stūpas* may have been purely dedicatory in nature, made and donated to acquire religious merit. This has been noted particularly in the context of the Buddhist sites of the Middle and Lower Ganga valley, 5th -- 6th century CE onwards, when the installation of such *stūpas* and votive tablets inscribed/not inscribed with the Buddhist Creed Formula began to be regarded as significant acts of religious merit (Skilling 2008: 514-518).

That the donation of these *stūpas* brought religious merit to their donors has been argued by some earlier scholars as well. Cunningham, on the basis of observations on this practice in living Buddhist traditions of South-East Asia in the 19th century, as well as on the basis of analysis of votive *stūpas*, votive tablets and plaques that were found at the Buddhist sites excavated/explored by him within India, provides some interesting observations in this regard. He has noted that whenever Buddhist pilgrims visited any famous Buddhist religious centre, it was their inevitable custom to make some offerings, no matter how small or poor, to the shrine and, at

ivers); Varendra (covering the area of North Bengal, more appropriately the tract of land bounded by the Mahananda river in the west, Karatoya/ Brahmaputra in the east, and Padma in the south); Vaṅga (the tract of land lying to the south of the Padma river, bounded by the rivers Hughali in the west and Meghna in the east) and Samatāṭa- Harikela (area lying to the east of the Surma- Meghna rivers: roughly corresponding to Sylhet, Comilla and Chittagong areas). We have largely followed the scheme of Morrison in delineating the boundaries of Rāḍha, Varendra, Vaṅga and Samatāṭa-Harikela.

the same time, to set up some memorials of their visit (Cunningham 1972,46). For the rich, offerings included money, precious stones, vessels and costly fabrics, and they installed big *stūpas* or temples as memorials. For the poor devotees, offerings generally took the form of flowers and fruit, and their memorials included small *stūpas* and small inscribed seals and sealings (Cunningham 1972,46). Generally, both categories of devotees took some mementos with them to be installed in their village/city shrines or to be kept in their homes as objects to ward off evil and ensure good luck. Such mementos included miniature replicas of some famous Buddhist temples, or seals carrying the official emblem of the monastery to which they made pilgrimage inscribed with the Buddhist Creed Formula. They also included seals and sealings and terracotta tablets stamped with the figure of some particular Buddhist deity, with or without the Buddhist Creed Formula.⁸ Seals and sealings inscribed with the Buddhist Creed Formula were also offered to important Buddhist religious centres as votive offerings (Das1967, 64; Cunningham 1972, 52). Before being dedicated to important religious centres by the pilgrims, or being carried back as mementos, they were sacralised by the monks/ priests through some particular ritual process (Mishra 2009,142). This process, then, involved a close ritual interface between the monks and non-monastic devotees.

It may be noted that Cunningham's observations are largely corroborated by the writings of the 7th century Chinese pilgrims to India, who observed the cult of votive *stūpas* minutely. Itsing, in the context of eastern India (Bihar and Bengal) recorded that

The priests and laymen in India make *Chaityas* or images with earth, or impress the Buddha's image on silk and paper, and worship it with offerings wherever they go. Sometime they build *stūpas* of the Buddha by making a pile and surrounding it with bricks. They sometime form these *stūpas* in lonely fields, and leave them to fall in ruins. Anyone may thus employ himself in making the objects for worship. Again, when the people make images and *Chaityas* which consist of gold, silver, copper, iron, earth, lacquer, bricks, and stone, or when they heap up the snowy sand (lit. sand-snow), they put in images or *Chaityas* two kinds of Śarīras. 1. The relic of Great Teacher. 2. The *Gāthā* of the Chain of Causation (Takakusu 1982, 151)

⁸The significance of these objects in the archaeology of Buddhist pilgrimage has been reaffirmed by John Guy (1991, 356).

And

If we put these two [Śarīras] in the images or *Chaityas*, the blessings derived from them are abundant. This is the reason why the *sūtras* praise in parables the merit of making images or *Chaityas* as unspeakable. Even if a man makes an image as small as a grain of barley, or a *Chaitya* the size of a small jujube, placing on it a round figure, or a staff like a small pin, a special cause for good birth is obtained thereby, and will be as limitless as seven seas, and good rewards will last as long as the coming four births (Takakusu 1982, 151).

Making images and donating them to some Buddhist monastic/ *stūpa* centre could have been a costly affair, but the miniature *stūpas* could have provided an easier and cheaper alternative. Many lay devotees could have acquired religious merit by making and donating them. According to Xuan Zang:

It is a custom in India to make little *stūpas* of powdered scent made into paste; their height is about six or seven inches, and they place inside them some writing from a *sūtra*; this they call a *dharmasārīra*. When the number of these becomes large, they then build a great *stūpa* and collect all others within it, and continually offer to it religious offerings (Beal 1981, 146-47).

This practice ensured a close interface between such devotees and the Saṅgha. Xuan Zang, with reference to Jayasena, a Kṣatriya Upāsaka, originally from Western India, but settled near Yaṣṭivana (modern Jethian on the borders of Gayā and Nālandā districts in Bihar) has also noted that

During thirty years, he had made seven *koṭis* of these *dharmasārīra-stūpas*, and for every *koṭi* that he made he built a great *stūpa* and placed them in it. When full, he presented his religious offerings and invited the priests; whilst they, on their part, offered him their congratulations. On these occasions, a divine light shone around and spiritual wonders exhibited themselves; and from that time forth the miraculous light has continued to be seen. (Beal 1981, 147).

Leaving aside the exaggeration (appearance of miracles, divine light etc. at the time of installation of such miniature *stūpas*) in Xuan Zang's narratives, we may infer that many such devotees did offer some gifts to monks when they installed such *stūpas*. This could have been, then, another important source through which the Saṅgha mobilized resources and ensured closer interaction with its common devotees.

These objects -- votive *stūpas*, seals and sealings inscribed with the Buddhist Creed Formula, terracotta votive tablets inscribed with or without the Buddhist Creed Formula – are important archaeological markers of pilgrimage to Buddhist religious centres (Willis 2008, 139-40; Mishra 2009, 142). Their study may unravel some important aspects of the pilgrimage network of Buddhist religious centres. Such study has been attempted in the cases of Buddhist monasteries of early medieval Orissa and coastal Andhra Pradesh.⁹ Despite some early observations by Cunningham on the importance of votive *stūpas* of Bodh Gaya in the reconstruction of its pilgrimage history, this line of enquiry has not been pursued in tracing the patronage aspect of Buddhist religious centres of early medieval Bihar and Bengal. One notes this gap particularly in the study of votive *stūpas*, which have been rightly termed an 'archaeological barometer of pilgrim flow' (Mishra 2009, 82). The issues to be probed in this connection are: which spot within the Buddhist religious centres were made available to the devotees to install dedicatory *stūpas*? Did they have access to the most sacred spots within the religious centres for this purpose? How did the pattern evolve across Bihar and Bengal? Do we see any difference in the spatial alignment of votive *stūpas* vis-à-vis sacred spots within the religious centres as we move to Bengal from Bihar? To what extent was the cult of votive *stūpas* monastically controlled or regulated? Which section of society took the lead in donating votive *stūpas*? My enquiry into this issue will involve an analysis of published dedicatory inscriptions on votive *stūpas*.

We shall begin with an analysis of votive *stūpas* of the Mahābodhi complex, the biggest pilgrimage centre of Buddhism.

⁹For Orissa, see Debala Mitra (1981, 31). She has noted the number of votive *stūpas* in Ratnagiri to highlight its role as a significant pilgrimage centre (p.31). This work was carried forward by Mishra (2009, 141-46), who concentrated more on the spatial alignment of votive *stūpas* vis-à-vis the *Mahāstūpa* area of Ratnagiri, Udayagiri, Khandagiri and Langudi, to arrive at some generalizations regarding the differential access lay devotees had to the most sacred spots within these religious centres. H.P. Ray (Ray 2008, 119-138) has undertaken a similar study of votive *stūpas* associated with early medieval monasteries of Orissa and coastal Andhra Pradesh. 'Eastern India' in her paper does not include Bihar or Bengal.

Spatial alignment of votive *stūpas* within the Mahābodhi complex and its implications for the organization of religious space

In terms of the findings of votive *stūpas*, the Mahābodhi complex, the holiest centre for Buddhist pilgrimage, emerges as the most important centre. The findings of votive *stūpas* from this site largely corroborate Xuan Zang's statement on the findings of such objects within the Mahābodhi complex: "within the surrounding wall the sacred traces touch one another in all directions. Here there are *stūpas*, in other places, Vihāras. The kings, princes, and great personages have erected these memorials" (Beal 1981, 215). These *stūpas*, as well as terracotta votive plaques containing the figure of some Buddhist deity and generally inscribed with the Buddhist Creed Formula, were dedicated to the Mahābodhi temple complex by pilgrims to earn merit. They also served as pilgrims' mementos (Lawson 1988, 64).

In the excavations of the Mahābodhi complex by Cunningham, three types of votive *stūpas* were unearthed:

(A) Structural *stūpas* built up of separate stones and bricks: in this category, he includes around 200 *stūpas* in the courtyard of the Mahābodhi temple, which shows only the lower stratum of earlier *stūpas*. Above these, he found four tiers of similar monuments in a still more ruinous condition from their exposure to the ravages of the villagers (Cunningham 1972, 46). The finding of 'four tiers of similar monuments in a still more ruinous condition' indicates that the actual number of even these structural *stūpas* built up of separate stones and bricks must have been much bigger than the 200 pieces that survived till the time of Cunningham. Votive *stūpas* in this category were generally donated by more well-to-do devotees (Lawson 1988, 63-64).

(B) "Thousands of monolithic *stūpas* of all sizes, their diameter ranging from 2 feet to 2 inches" (Cunningham 1972: 46).

(C) The most numerous were little clay *stūpas*, baked and unbaked. Cunningham found 'hundreds and thousands' of such *stūpas*, their size ranging from '2 to 3 inches in height to the size of a walnut' (Cunningham 1972, 46). In excavations at the site, 'hundreds of such clay *stūpas* were found inside the larger *stūpas*, enclosing small clay seals inscribed with the Buddhist Creed Formula' (Cunningham 1972, 46). It has rightly been noted that these miniature clay votive *stūpas* were the common form of memorial for the poor pilgrims (Cunningham 1972, 46; Lawson 1988, 63-64).

Cunningham's excavations indicate that the courtyard near the Mahābodhi

temple was made available to the devotees to install votive *stūpas*. In other words, the authorities of the Mahābodhi allowed the non-monastic devotees to undertake some of their ritual activities in the precincts of the Mahābodhi and devotees took full advantage of this. Cunningham has observed that “carved stones of an early date were frequently found in the bases of later monuments, and as the soil got silted up, the general level of the courtyard was gradually raised, and the later *stūpas* were built over the tops of the earlier ones in successive tiers of different ages’ (Cunningham 1972,49). And ‘so great was the number of these successive monuments, and so rapid was the accumulation of stones and earth that the general level of the courtyard was raised above 20 feet above the floor of the Great Temple’ (Cunningham 1972, 49). All this indicates that the Mahābodhi attracted pilgrimage on a substantial scale and pilgrims installed *stūpas* within the precincts of the Mahābodhi in a sustained manner.¹⁰

Most of the surviving pieces in the Mahābodhi complex have been dated to the Pāla period (Lawson 1988, 64-65). But the accounts of Xuan Zang indicate that such objects were dedicated at Mahābodhi in the earlier period on a significant scale as well. We infer that this trend continued in a significant manner in the Pāla period.

What was the social background of persons who installed dedicatory *stūpas* in the precincts of the Mahābodhi? Some clues to this question are provided by dedicatory inscriptions on some votive *stūpas* from this site. We shall begin with an analysis of those inscribed dedicatory *stūpas* that contain the name of the donor. We shall base our analysis mainly on the catalogue provided by Claudine Bautze-Picron.

¹⁰The same pattern is reflected in another archaeological marker of pilgrimage: dedicatory inscriptions on sculptures donated by non-monastic devotees, which have been analysed in Prasad 2019.

The social background and expectations of donors who donated votive stūpas at the Mahābodhi as reflected in dedicatory inscriptions

12 votive *stūpas* inscribed with the names of donors have been reported from Bodh Gaya by Claudine Bautze-Picron and others. The data from them are summarized in the following table:

Donated by	Social background of the donor	Expressed motive behind donation	Period	Reference ¹¹
Jaya	non-monastic, non-aristocratic man	None expressed	10 th century.	p. 56.
Sabhokā	non-monastic and non-aristocratic woman	Do	10 th or 11 th century.	p. 55
Geghāḍhar-aka	non-monastic, non-aristocratic man	Do	10 th or 11 th century.	p. 58.
Rāṇaka Śrī Golika	non-monastic, aristocratic man	Do	11 th century.	p.53
Vaṇika Ajhuka	Mercantile	Do	11 th century.	p.54.
Dhammajīva	non-monastic, non-aristocratic man	Do	11 th century.	p.56
Semideva	Do	Do	11 th century.	p.57.
Dānapati Maṇo	Do	Donated to fulfil a religious vow.	11 th century.	p. 58.
Mahādevī	non-monastic and non-aristocratic woman	None expressed	11 th -12 th century.	p. 57.
Dākokā	Do	Do	12 th century.	p.66.
<i>Dānapati</i> Māvuka	non-monastic, non-aristocratic man	Donated to fulfil a religious vow.	12 th century.	p.66.
Saḍhaladevī	Queen of a local state in the Bodh Gaya area	None expressed	12 th century	Bhattacharya (1995-96,178-79)

¹¹ Unless otherwise stated, all references in this table are to Bautze-Picron1998.

In terms of sheer number, evidence of votive *stūpas* inscribed with the name of the donor is much less than what we see in the case of inscribed sculptures. Most of the pieces published by Claudine Bautze-Picron are inscribed with the Buddhist Creed Formula only. Probably that had much to do with the devotee's perception of the nature of these *stūpas*. As Itsing has narrated, inscribing the Buddhist Creed Formula was believed to be sufficient to gain great religious merit. It was probably for this reason that only a few donors inscribed their name on such *stūpas*. Fewer have left details of their social background. As noted earlier in the analysis of dedicatory inscriptions on sculptures of early medieval Bihar and Bengal (Prasad 2010; Prasad 2014a; Prasad 2016; Prasad 2017, 182-285; Prasad 2018c; Prasad 2019a; Prasad 2019b), all those persons who have not left any detail of their social background and have not claimed to be a monk/nun were most probably from the 'non-monastic non-aristocratic' section of society. Accordingly, in the 10th century, we see three men and one woman donor, all belonging to the non-monastic non-aristocratic category. None of the donors expressed any Buddhist identity (*Pravara-Mahāyāna-Anuyāyin*, *Paramopāsaka* etc.) in the epigraphic record left by them.¹² None of the donors in any century has any expressed motive behind their donation. So far, we have also not come across the donation of an inscribed *stūpa* by any monk or nun at Bodh Gaya in this century or any other century.

In the 11th century, we see a diversification in the social background of donors: this century witnessed donation not only by a *Rāṇaka*, but also by a merchant (*Vaṇika*). This century also witnessed the dedication of a votive *stūpa* by a *Dānapati* donor. In the context of dedicatory inscriptions on Buddhist sculptures of early medieval Bihar and Bengal, it has been observed that the word '*Dānapati*' occurs in the context of a person who has installed an image for worship for the fulfilment of a vow (Sircar 1953-54, 85). A person would aspire for some worldly wish; he would pray to a chosen deity that if his wish were fulfilled by the deity, he would install the image of the deity in some religious centre. Once his wish was fulfilled, it was his

¹²In the context of dedicatory inscriptions on the Buddhist sculptures of early medieval Bihar and Bengal, the presence of some characteristic terms has been used in attributing an expressed Buddhist identity to the donors of such sculptures. Similarly, an absence of such characteristic terms in the dedicatory inscriptions on such sculptures has been used to attribute 'persons without expressed Buddhist identity' status to their donors (Prasad 2013a; Prasad 2013b; Prasad 2014a; Prasad 2016; Prasad 2017, 182-285; Prasad 2018a; Prasad 2019a; Prasad 2019b).

obligation to install the image of the deity, and in such cases he would use the technical term *Dānapati* for himself (Sircar 1965-66, 41; Bhattacharya 2000, 226-27). In some cases, when a man was not able to fulfil this obligation for some reason (death etc.), it would be fulfilled by his wife or son (Sircar 1965-66, 41; Bhattacharya 2000, 226-27). The occurrence of the term '*Dānapati*' in the votive inscription on a votive stūpa at Bodh Gaya indicates that even the dedication of votive *stūpas* had a significant element of fulfilling worldly wishes of devotees.

In this century, we don't see any donation by a woman. Three male donors belonged to the non-monastic non-aristocratic category. In the 12th century, we see women from two different sections of society donating such *stūpas*: Saḍhaladevī, who donated a bronze stupa, was the queen of the local *Pīṭhipati* dynasty, but Mahādevī, the donor of an inscribed stone votive *stūpa*, has not claimed any such pedigree for herself.

The Buddha in different *mudrās* was the deity most chosen to be depicted on the votive *stūpas*. We see no depiction of the *Pañcatathāgatas* on them. We see no depiction of ferocious Vajrayāna deities (Aparājitā, Trailokyavijaya, Saṃvara, Heruka etc.) in the niches or on the pedestal of votive *stūpas*, either in this century or in any other century. Even Tārā is rare. So far, we have not come across any example of depiction of a Brahmanical deity in the niches or on the pedestal of votive *stūpas*. Bodh Gaya, the site of the Enlightenment of the Buddha, continued to be identified predominantly with the Buddha by devotees who donated votive *stūpas*. None of the donors have mentioned their extra-local origin, if any, though this possibility cannot be ruled out.

Let's sum up the situation now. The Mahābodhi complex was able to attract patronage from a cross section of society till the end of the 12th century. Women donors, except in the 11th century, had a significant presence. Barring one queen and one *Rāṇaka*, all other donors belonged to the common section of society. Monks are not met with in the reported corpus of inscribed votive *stūpas*. We see a similar pattern in the donation of inscribed votive tablets in the Mahābodhi area, a theme we shall turn to now.

Inscriptions on terracotta votive tablets from Bodh Gaya and the social background of some pilgrims to the Mahābodhi.

12 Inscribed terracotta votive tablets have been reported from Bodh Gaya by Claudine Bautze-Picron.¹³ No donor has recorded any motive behind their donation.

The data from them are summarized in the following table:

Depicted deities and motifs	Donated by	Social background of the donor	Period	Reference ¹⁴
Devotee kneeling in front of offerings: two cones on small cups, flowers on a high and circular stand, a garland, a lamp stand.	Śauma-naratha	A man, non-monastic and non-aristocratic, without expressed Mahāyāna identity.	10 th century	p. 73, item no. 184.
Devotees kneeling in front of offerings: flowers and cakes. No depiction of any monk or deity.	-----	A Mahāyāna lay follower (<i>Pravara-Mahāyāna-Anuyāyina</i>)	11 th century	p. 73, item no. 183.
A priest and offerings	Dānapati Bhalaka	A man, non-monastic and non-aristocratic, with expressed Mahāyāna identity.	11 th century	p. 74, item no. 187.
A priest and offerings	Vovāṇatārakā	A woman, non-monastic and non-aristocratic, without expressed Mahāyāna identity.	11 th century	p. 74, item no. 188.
Offerings and devotee	Paramopāsa-ka Thaku	A man, non-monastic and non-aristocratic, with expressed Mahāyāna identity.	11 th century	p. 75, item no. 193.

¹³ We have not considered those inscribed terracotta votive tablets that contain the Buddhist Creed Formula only, as no information about the donor is available in them.

¹⁴ Unless otherwise stated, all references in this table are to Claudine Bautze-Picron 1998.

PATTERNS OF RITUAL ENGAGEMENTS

Depicted deities and motifs	Donated by	Social background of the donor	Period	Reference ¹⁴
Offerings ¹⁵ in the lower part, row of eleven seated Buddhas in the upper part.	<i>Sādhunī Śrīsomaṇo, wife of Sādhu Śrī Simharatna.</i>	A woman, non-monastic and non-aristocratic, without expressed Mahāyāna identity.	11 th century	p. 75, item no. 196.
In the upper part: row of seated Buddhas, all in <i>Samādhimudrā</i> . In the lower part: <i>Saptaratna</i> .	Ratanadevikā, wife of Raṇa-Śrī- Jakhvāla.	Wife of an officer, without expressed Mahāyāna identity.	11 th century	p. 76, item no. 198-99.
Devotees kneeling in front of offerings: flowers and cakes. No depiction of any monk or deity.	Sachadeva, wife of Bhadū	A woman, non-monastic and non-aristocratic, without expressed Mahāyāna identity.	11 th or 12 th century.	p. 73, item no. 182.
Offerings and devotee	Nīsohacikā	A woman, non-monastic and non-aristocratic, without expressed Mahāyāna identity	12 th century.	p. 75, item no. 194.
Devotees, offerings including <i>Saptaratna</i> displayed on either side of a manuscript.	-----	Mahāyāna lay follower or monk	12 th century.	p. 75, item no. 195.
In the upper portion: row of 15 seated Buddhas, all in <i>Samādhimudrā</i> . In the lower part: a Burmese inscription.	-----	A donor from non-monastic and non-aristocratic background, from Burma	12 th century.	p. 76, item no. 197.
A priest and offerings	Dānapati Gopadeva-sāmī	A man, non-monastic and non-aristocratic, without expressed Mahāyāna identity	11 th –12 th century.	p. 74, item no. 189.

¹⁵Incense brazier in front of a lamp, a bowl with offerings, a stand on which a manuscript and

In the inscriptions on votive tablets, we get some interesting glimpses of the social background of devotees that were attracted to the Mahābodhi, and also of the kind of offerings they made to the same. The first thing to be noted is that many donors have used the term ‘*Deyadharmā*’, thus indicating that the tablets were actually donated. These tablets were not just a pilgrim’s memento to be carried back home after their pilgrimage to the Mahābodhi.

In terms of the depiction of offerings on such tablets, we see the evolution of an interesting pattern. No such inscribed piece which is datable before the 10th century has been reported so far. In the tenth century, and also in most of the inscribed tablets of the 11th and 12th centuries, we generally see a devotee or more than one devotee kneeling in front of the offerings made by them. Occasionally we also see donors in *anjālimudrā* in front of offerings made by them. Depicted offerings are basically the objects associated with their *pūjā* or ritual offerings: flowers, garlands, lamp stands, cakes, incense braziers, conic cups placed on a large jar etc. Generally, the figure of the Buddha in *Dhyānamudrā* or *Samādhimudrā*, or one or more monk is depicted in the upper or lower part of the tablet. To date, we have not come across any other Buddhist or Brahmanical deity depicted on such tablets from Bodh Gaya. Bodh Gaya primarily remained the seat of the Enlightenment of the Buddha till the 12th century, at least for such common devotees. In the 11th and the 12th century, we also see devotees paying their respect to a manuscript, which is generally prominently displayed in the tablet. Preserving, copying and studying manuscripts were important functions undertaken by monks in Buddhist monasteries, so the depiction of common devotees making offerings to the manuscripts was a symbolic depiction of their respect for the textual tradition of the Buddhist Saṅgha.

As a whole, we see a great diversity in the social background of donors. During the 10th century, we see the donation by a man without any expressed Mahāyāna identity, belonging to the non-monastic, non-aristocratic section of society. In the 11th century, we see a significant diversification in the social background of donors, which now include three men with expressed Mahāyāna identity in the epigraphic records, indicated by the use of the Buddhist Creed Formula or some characteristic definitional term: *Pravara- Mahāyāna –Anuyāyina* etc. Women donors occupy a significant place in this century (four out of the seven recorded instances) and their background ranges from the wife of an officer (Ratanadevikā, wife of *Raṇa Śrī Jakhvāla*; we may assume that ‘*Raṇa*’ was

some flowers are depicted.

an incorrect rendering of *Rāṇaka*) to two women donors from non-aristocratic background (Vovānatārakā, who has not mentioned the name of her husband or father; and Svahādevī, wife of Bhadū). The case of *Sādhunī Śrīsomaṇo*, wife of *Sādhu Śrī Simharatna*, as pointed out by Bautze-Picron, indicates a donation by the wife of a merchant (Bautze-Picron 1998,75). As we have seen in the case of the donation of an image of Khasarapaṇa Avalokiteśvara by *Vanika Sādhu Saharaṇa*, son of *Sādhu Bhadulva*, in the 11th century, *Sādhu* was one of the titles used by merchants in this century in Magadha (Prasad 2017,226). *Sādhunī Śrīsomaṇo*'s husband was a *Dānapati*, who probably undertook the vow of making offerings to the Mahābodhi complex and its monastic community for the fulfilment of a worldly wish. Similar was the case with another *Dānapati* donor: *Dānapati Gopadeva-sāmī*.

In the 12th century, female patronage continued, but on a much lesser scale (only one example). As indicated by Burmese inscriptions on two votive tablets, two donors came from Burma. One of them has recorded that at the place of the liberation (i.e. Enlightenment) of the Buddha, he/she donated an umbrella (Bautze-Picron 1998, 76). The name of the donor has not been recorded, so we are not sure if that was a man or a woman. That they were not from an aristocratic background is indicated by the fact that they could donate only an umbrella, for which many resources were not required. Priests of the Mahābodhi were open to accepting even such small donations. Contrary to the opinion of Bautze-Picron (Bautze-Picron 1998,76), we have nothing to suggest that the donor was a monk. The case with the donor of another terracotta votive tablet appears to be similar. Due to the highly fragmented nature of the inscription, the name and title of the donor is not clear, though the surviving portion indicates that the donor was a follower of the Mahāyāna. Bautze-Picron has claimed that the donor was a monk (Bautze-Picron 1998,75). But in the absence of any categorical evidence this claim is questionable.

Barring the wife of a *Rāṇaka*, all other donors appear to be from non-aristocratic backgrounds. The Mahābodhi complex attracted patronage from such donors and accepted their donations. By depicting priests or manuscripts on these tablets, male and female donors paid their respects to the textual tradition of Buddhist monasteries.

Monks could never become the dominant donors of votive tablets at Bodhi Gaya and nuns are totally absent. This practice remained dominated by non-monastic donors. None of the donors mentioned his/her *Varṇa* or *Jāti* status, indicating that the Mahābodhi complex provided an avenue for the

marginalization of these social categories. Similarly, an increase in the number of donors in the late Pāla period (11th and 12th centuries) indicates a spurt in pilgrimage to this site in these centuries.

It may be noted that the exact find-spots of the published inscribed votive tablets have not been provided by Claudine-Bautze Picron. But the accounts of Dharmasvāmin, a Tibetan monk who visited the Mahābodhi in 1234 CE informs us that “to the east of Vajrāsana there was a hole the size of a human head in the wall of a small building where clay votive offerings (*tsha-tsha*) were kept” (Roerich 1959: 66). It is apparent that the monastic authorities of the Mahābodhi offered a place for the performance of this practice by the non-monastic devotees near the most sacred spot: the Vajrāsana.

Pilgrims’ mementos: the case of the miniature models of the Mahābodhi temple.

Many terracotta votive tablets inscribed with the Buddhist Creed Formula could have been taken back to their homes by pilgrims as memento or magical talisman (Guy 1991, 356). Many miniature votive *stūpas* would have served the same purpose. But the Mahābodhi complex specialized in the production of a kind of memento that was sold to pilgrims: the miniature models (average height: 20 cm) of the Mahābodhi temple that have been found in different parts of India, South-east Asia, Tibet and China. In an interesting study, 20 such models kept in different museums have been noted (Guy 1991, 356-367).¹⁶ The actual number (i.e. those that got destroyed due to the vagaries of time or other factors) could have been much greater. These models, made of dark grey schist or graphitic phyllite, were made in the Gaya-Bodh Gaya area, with the motive of selling them to pilgrims (Guy 1991,362). They ‘served not only as souvenirs but as proof of the journey successfully completed’ (Guy 1991,362). We are not sure if the authorities of the Mahābodhi had any control over the production and sale of these mementoes. But it cannot be ruled out that many of them may have been sacralised through some ritual by a monk or priest of the Mahābodhi area.

The chronology of the surviving pieces is significant: ‘all belong to the late Pāla-Sena period (tenth- twelfth century)’ (Guy 1991,364). We have also noted

¹⁶For an earlier discussion of this theme, see Sinha (1977, 159- 64). Sinha has also reported discovery of such items in Burma and Thailand, as well as at many sites in Bihar.

the spurt in the donation of inscribed votive *stūpas* and terracotta tablets in this period. They are all indicators of increasing pilgrimage to the Mahābodhi. In other words, at least in the case of the Mahābodhi complex, we need to question those theories that postulate a ‘systemic crisis’ in Buddhism in the late Pāla-Sena period.

Spatial alignment of votive *stūpas* and the articulation of monastic religious space within the Nālandā Mahāvihāra.

Compared to the Mahābodhi, the evidence for the cult of votive *stūpas* at Nālandā is less, but it is much more than at any other monastic site of early medieval Bihar and Bengal. Before analyzing the alignment of votive *stūpas* vis-à-vis the religious space of this monastic site, let us first briefly analyze the spatial alignment of the main monuments of the site. That will provide the context to understand the alignment of votive *stūpas*.

It may be assumed that the excavated ruins of Nālandā do not represent the full extent of the site in the past. Excavated ruins reveal the presence of eleven monasteries (numbered 1B, 1A, 1, 4, 5, 6,7, 8, 9, 10, 11) and six Temples (numbered 2, 3, 12, 13, 14, Sarai mound)(Asher 2015,42). The numbering of sites (i.e. monastery site 4.5,6 etc. or Temple Site 2, 3, 12 etc.) is not by their chronology but according to the sequence of excavations by the Archaeological Survey of India. Nālandā was not a single, unified monastery centering on a single shrine like later monasteries of Paharpur, Antichak or Salban Vihara. Unlike Paharpur, Antichak or Salban Vihara, no trace of any enclosure wall enclosing all the monasteries and temples of Nālandā has been found so far. At the available stage of our data base, none of the monasteries antedate the 5th century and none of them seems to have continued beyond the early decades of the 13th century.

Barring Temple/Stūpa Site 3 and the Sarai mound temple, temples generally face east and are in alignment with the monastery sites that generally face west. This may be taken as an indication of the intention of the monastic authorities to keep a watch on devotees visiting the temple sites. Similarly, if it is proved that temple sites were frequently visited by non-monastic devotees, then we may infer that the monks may have been forced to ensure that their practice of esoteric forms of Vajrayāna, if any, remained either invisible to non-monastic pilgrims or remained visible to as few as possible: too explicit a display of such practices might have turned away the non-monastic devotees, resulting in the

loss of their patronage. It has been argued elsewhere that unlike most of the monasteries of Bengal, Nālandā did try to attract non-monastic non-aristocratic patronage on a sustained basis.¹⁷

The question that needs to be explored, then, is: did the monastic authorities of Nālandā allow non-monastic devotees to undertake ritual activities in or near important temple sites within the Mahāvihāra? We shall analyse this question with special reference to Temple/*Stūpa* site 3 and 12.

It may be inferred that the Temple/*Stūpa* Site 3 was the most ancient, most important and most sacred site among the excavated ruins of Nālandā.¹⁸ This site is the tallest surviving monument among the excavated edifices of Nālandā. It formed the node in the neighbourhood of which different monasteries and temples/*stūpas* of Nālandā emerged and developed in the later phase. Excavations indicate that the Site 3 represents the result of seven accumulations, the earliest three of modest dimensions being buried deep under the later ones. The temple of the fifth stage, with four corner towers, had its facade ornamented with stucco figures of Buddha and *Bodhisattvas* in Gupta tradition, which were encased within the extension of the sixth stage. The level of the shrine at the top rose with each reconstruction with a resultant higher flight of each stage. The ruins of the shrine of the last stage with a pedestal for the installed Buddha image are seen at the top. *Each stage had its own votive stūpas all around, often engulfed in the latter's extensions.* One of such *stūpas*, of the fifth stage, contained in its core a clay tablet inscribed with the sacred text *Pratītya Samutpādasūtra* and dated A.D. 516-17. Another manifestation of devotion is the enshrinement within votive *stūpas* of clay lumps or miniature clay *stūpas*, each having in its core two “clay tablets impressed with the Buddhist creed formula (*ARASI 1925-26*, reprint Delhi 2002, 101).

¹⁷ This inference has been arrived at on the basis of analysis of inscriptions on seals and sealings, dedicatory inscriptions on sculptures, inscriptions on stones, pillars etc., and spatial alignments of votive *stūpas* vis-à-vis the main temples of the Mahāvihāra (Prasad 2017, 2018-219; 299-314). In fact, such was the willingness of the Mahāvihāra to attract non-monastic non-aristocratic patronage that a non-monastic non-aristocratic Mahāyāna Upāsaka from a Brahmin background was given the honour to donate and install the tutelary deity--- Nāgarāja---of Temple Site 3 in the 8th century (Prasad 2017, 213-14).

¹⁸ As the superstructure of the site has collapsed, it is difficult to determine whether it was a *stūpa*, a *stūpa*-shrine or a *stūpa* site that evolved into a temple site at a later date. Shrine-like structures have been found at the top of the 5th, 6th and 7th phase of the site (Mani 2008, 15). So we cannot rule out that in some phase of its life this monument could have served as a temple.

The earliest phase of the occupation of this site, as recently argued by B.R.Mani, could go back to the Mauryan period, marked with the presence of a square brick-*stūpa* (Mani 2008, 18-19). It may be noted that the early phases of Site 3 antedate the earliest monasteries of Nālandā by many centuries. The earliest phase (Mauryan period) of structural activities at Site 3 could very well have been the *stūpa* built in the memory of Śāriputra as referred to by Faxian (Legge 1991, 81). Site 3 of Nālandā, presumably associated with the memory of Śāriputra, continued for almost one millennium after the Maurya period.¹⁹ In effect, if Nālandā could not claim direct association with the Buddha, it could claim association with some of his *aggasāvakas*. This could have been one of the factors in attracting pilgrimage to the site.

If the Mahāvihāra was founded at the place where it was in the 5th century, it was, presumably, to take advantage of the established sanctity of Site 3. The earliest monastic site that emerged at Nālandā---1B-- faced Temple Site 3 (Asher 2015, 69). The emergence of this monastery in the close proximity of Site 3 suggests that it wanted to take advantage of the pre-existing sacrality of Site 3.

As indicated by alignment of votive *stūpas*, Site 3 was the most popular pilgrimage destination within the Mahāvihāra, even before the emergence of any monastery at the site. The central shrine area of Salban Vihara in Mainamati also attracted the installation of votive *stūpas* in the phase before the emergence of the monastery, but this practice came to an end with the foundation of the monastery that eventually enclosed the central shrine area.²⁰ This kind of situation did not develop at Temple Site 3 of Nālandā, indicating that it remained accessible to non-monastic devotees.

We may explore the question of accessibility through one more perspective. If Site 3 was regarded as the holiest centre within the Mahāvihāra and was the most popular pilgrimage destination within the same, then its overall location within the Mahāvihāra must have had a special significance. As regards its overall location within the Mahāvihāra, we may point out its location at the southern end of the excavated ruins of the Mahāvihāra. Even when monastic sites emerged at the Mahāvihāra, no attempt was made to enclose Site 3 by monastic cells.

¹⁹ Recently, another *stūpa* site associated with another *aggasāvaka* of the Buddha (Maudgalyāyana) has been excavated at the neighbouring village of Juafardih, located at a distance of three km from the excavated ruins of Nālandā. The mud *stūpa* at Juafardih, founded in the Mauryan period, was in visible decline in the Śunga period. It does not seem to have continued beyond that period. For details of this site, see Saran et al 2008, 59-73.

²⁰ For an analysis of the pattern at Salban Vihara, see Prasad 2017, 410-411.

The pattern is, thus, fundamentally different from the pattern observed at later monasteries of Antichak, Paharpur, Salban Vihara, Ananda Vihara and Bhoj Vihara, where central shrines are located in the centre of a courtyard enclosed by a number of monastic cells. So far, we have not come across any evidence of enclosing this site by a boundary wall either. All this indicates that the authorities of the Mahāvihāra did not want to put much restriction on access to the site by monastic and non-monastic devotees. Site 3 of Nālandā was certainly more accessible by non-monastic devotees than were the central cruciform shrines of Antichak, Paharpur, Salban Vihara, Ananda Vihara and Bhoj Vihara.

Available data indicate that this site received votive *stūpas* in considerable number on a sustained basis. This is indicated by the fact that as the main monument increased in size with each addition, the level of the court gradually rose, and many small votive *stūpas* are found in several places completely or partially buried under the different floors and walls that have been exposed (Ghosh1939, 4). Not only the area around the main monument, but also the area around a subsidiary shrine (the shrine of Avalokiteśvara, at the north-east corner of the main monument) shows evidence of donation of votive *stūpas* (Ghosh1939, 4).

None of the votive *stūpas* reported in the neighbourhood of the site is inscribed with the name of the donor, so it is difficult to ascertain if they were donated only by non-monastic devotees or some monks were also involved in the process. It may be noted that the authorities of the Mahāvihāra allowed the installation not only of the votive *stūpas*, but also of sculptures by non-monastic devotees in or in the immediate neighborhood of Temple Site 3. One such sculpture (Nāgarāja) donated by a Mahāyāna Upāsaka was, as we have analysed earlier, the tutelary deity of the site (Prasad 2017,213-214). In other words, non-monastic devotees not only had access to this most sacred spot within the Mahāvihāra, sometimes they had privileged access: they could even install the tutelary deity of the site to earn merit. In the analysis of inscribed terracotta seals and sealings from Site 3, we have seen an overwhelming dominance of persons of ‘non-monastic non-aristocratic’ category (Prasad 2017,306-307). The case with votive *stūpas* at this site is unlikely to have been fundamentally different.

A similar process, though on a much smaller scale, appears to have been in operation at Temple Site 12, where ruins of a very big temple (plinth: 52x50 meters), built in two phases, have been found. The original temple, most probably similar to the Mahābodhi temple in design, was built in the late 6th or early 7th century, and was contemporary with the fifth phase of Site 3 (Ghosh 1939, 17;

Asher 2015, 53-54). The main shrine and subsidiary shrines were enclosed by a boundary wall (Ghosh1939, 17). That indicates that the authorities of the Mahāvihāra wanted to regulate access to the temple. That does not seem to have had much impact: a large number of votive *stūpas* were dedicated in the compound of the temple (Ghosh1939, 17). That indicates pilgrimage and patronage by non-monastic devotees. The second phase temple, built over the ruins of the temple of the first phase after its destruction by fire, was built through the patronage of a non-aristocratic Mahāyāna Upāsaka Bālāditya, a person from Kauśāmbī, who had settled at Telāḍhaka (modern Telhara) (Prasad 2017,313). The very fact that the second phase of this temple was constructed through the patronage of a Mahāyāna Upāsaka indicates that it was accessible by non-monastic devotees. We may infer the same pattern for temple site 13. A large forecourt to the east of this Temple contained many votive *stūpas* (Ghosh1939, 18).

Before we conclude our analysis of the alignment of votive *stūpas* vis-à-vis the monastic religious space, we need to highlight two broad features: (1) their absence in the area adjacent to the ‘outer’ structures such as Nālandā Temple Site 2 and Sarai mound temple, and (2) their concentration near the sacred centres in the ‘inner’ parts: near Temple/Stūpa Sites 3, 12 and 13. The most remarkable concentration is seen near Temple/Stūpa Site 3 and Temple Site 12. If we consider the fact that Site 3 was the holiest spot within the Mahāvihāra and Site 12 was probably its loftiest temple, we may easily infer that even the most sacred spots within the Mahāvihāra were accessible to the monastic and non-monastic devotees for the installation of votive *stūpas*. The pattern is thus similar to the Mahābodhi and different from Antichak, Paharpur and monasteries on the Mainamati ridge. That may also partially explain why we see their absence from Nālandā Temple Site 2 and Sarai mound area. When the most sacred spots were made available to devotees to install votive *stūpas*, they probably did not have much motivation left to undertake this act in the neighbourhood of Temple Site 2 and Sarai mound area. Additionally, the non-monastic devotees might have wanted to keep a distance from the contentious attempt at subordinate integration of Brahmanical deities to Buddhism.²¹

Let us sum up the pattern at Nālandā. Every temple of Nālandā seems to be accessible to non-monastic devotees. At the available stage of our data base, none of the temples indicates the performance of any secret, esoteric rite within

²¹ Within the Nālandā Mahāvihāra complex, Temple Site 2 was one of the sites where Buddhism attempted a subordinate integration of Śaivism. For details, see Prasad 2017, 437-438.

their religious space. If all temples were accessible to non-monastic devotees, then it was unlikely that esoteric Vajrayāna rituals, if practised within the confines of the monastic sites that generally face the temple sites, were intended to be publicly visible to non-monastic devotees.

Pilgrims' mementos or dedications: the case of votive terracotta plaques from Nālandā

Votive terracotta plaques either dedicated by pilgrims or to be carried by them back to their homes as mementos have not been reported as profusely as in the case of the Mahābodhi. Such plaques reported from Nālandā basically represent *Aṣṭa-mahābodhisattva-maṇḍala*: a maṇḍala on a plaque in which the central figure of the Buddha is surrounded by eight different Bodhisattvas (Mitra 2005,32). Mitra has rightly highlighted that 'evidently, such inexpensive plaques were in great demand among the devotees and pilgrims of meagre and moderate means, desirous of earning merit by their gifts at Buddhist centres and also by carrying these portable objects to their countries' (Mitra 2005,32).

It is not clear if the central figure in the plaque is that of the Buddha Śākyamuni or Vairocana, but Debala Mitra is more inclined to identify them with Buddha Śākyamuni (Mitra 2005, 32). Her inference is supported by some circumstantial evidence. In early medieval Bihar and Bengal, some Buddhist religious centres were famous for particular deities that were supposed to be especially attached to that particular religious centre. That found manifestation in the terracotta plaques distributed to/purchased by the pilgrims as mementos. Thus the terracotta plaques from Bodh Gaya generally highlighted the *Māravijaya* episode or the miniature image of the Mahābodhi temple; both symbolizing the Enlightenment of the Buddha. Terracotta plaques from the Tārā temple at Satyapir Bhita (Paharpur) depicted some form of Tārā for which this temple seems to have been especially famous.²² In the available data from Nālandā, Vairocana does not appear to be the main cult figure of the Mahāvihāra: only three sculptures (one in bronze, two in stone) of this deity has been reported so far and sculptures of other *Pañcatathāgatas* are equally rare (Paul 1995, 104).²³

²²For details, Prasad 2017, 405-409.

²³Paul has noted the paucity of sculptures of the Crowned Buddha at the site as well (p. 91). 10th century onwards, the Crowned Buddha was regarded as a form of Mahāvairocana (Woodward 1990, 20). That also indicates that the cult of the *Pañcatathāgatas* could never have been very important at Nālandā.

In contrast, big, or rather colossal, images of the Buddha in *Bhūmisparśamudrā* (Dhelva Baba, Teliya Baba, Jagadishpur Buddha etc.) were the most important sculptures for public display and worship. All this makes us conclude that the figures depicted in the centre of the *Aṣṭa-mahābodhisattva-maṇḍala* plaques from Nālandā were most probably intended as the Buddha Śākyamuni.

It may also be added that Nālandā was most probably the centre where Tārā emerged as an independent object of worship in the 6th century A.D. (Ghosh1980, 31; Paul 1995, 102). Yet Tārā did not find depiction in the available assemblage of terracotta votive plaques of Nālandā. Buddha Śākyamuni in *Aṣṭa-mahābodhisattva-maṇḍala* remained the popular theme in the plaques.²⁴

Spatial alignment of votive *stūpas* and the question of accessibility of monastic religious space by non-monastic devotees at Antichak

As we move to the east of Magadha, archaeological markers of access to the inner parts of the monasteries by non-monastic devotees decrease considerably at most of the excavated sites. In general, we may infer reluctance of the monastic authorities to allow the installation of votive *stūpas* in the ‘inner space’ of monasteries. This was most probably related to the basic difference in the nature of excavated Buddhist sites of Magadha (Mahābodhi, Nālandā) and the sites located to the east of it in Aṅga (Antichak, identifiable with the Vikramaśilā Mahāvihāra), Varendra (Jagajjibanpur, Paharpur, Sitakot, Jagaddala etc.) and Samataṭa (monasteries on the Mainamati ridge). Mahābodhi was the holiest Buddhist pilgrimage centre. The monastic site of Nālandā, though established through royal patronage, took steps to attract ‘non-monastic non-aristocratic’ pilgrimage on a substantial scale. Sites like Antichak, Paharpur or monasteries on the Mainamati ridge, on the other hand, radiated some particular political and religious symbolism: they were believed to function as *Maṇḍala* monuments offering magico-ritual protection to the patron state.²⁵ They did not feel much need to enter into ritual engagement with the non-monastic devotees. This

²⁴ Till the late 12th century, big stone sculptures of the Buddha Śākyamuni remained the cultic foci of the Nālandā Mahāvihāra. The Mahāvihāra retained its basic Mahayanist orientation till its very end. This remained the situation not only within the Mahāvihāra, but also in its archaeological landscape. A recent documentation of early medieval Buddhist sculptures in the modern Nālandā district indicates that stone sculptures of the Buddha, most of which were obviously objects of public worship in Buddhist shrines and temples, far outnumbered the sculptures of other Buddhist deities (Chowdhary 2015; Prasad 2017, 74-77).

²⁵ For details, see Prasad 2017, 416-422; Prasad 2018b.

pattern is reflected in site morphology as well, an issue we will turn to now. That will form the backdrop to our analysis of the alignment of votive *stūpas* vis-à-vis the arrangement of monastic religious space. We will begin with Antichak, commonly identified with the site of the Vikramaśilā Mahāvihāra founded by the Pāla king Dharmapāla.

In basic plan, this monastery consists of a central cruciform shrine set in the middle of the monastic courtyard, surrounded by a series of monastic cells numbering approximately 208 (Verma 2015, 77-78). With this basic plan, this site had a marked emphasis on security: in fact it gives an impression of being a ‘fort-monastery’. The outer walls of the monastery are marked with circular projections alternating with rectangular projections at regular intervals. The corner projections are larger in size (Verma 2015, 78). Apart from the circular corner projection, each side has yielded four circular and four corner projections. They have been constructed alternately at a distance of about 22 to 23 meters from each other (Verma 2015, 78). These bastion-like features imparted a distinct fort-like look to the monastery; a feature observed on a lesser scale in the later monastery of Jagajjibanpur. This ‘fort-like’ look was further accentuated by the imposing gateway complex on the northern side of the monastery guarding the main entrance to the same, and also by the double layers of enclosure walls.²⁶ Traces of an enclosure wall were found beyond the northern gateway complex of the monastery, thus confirming the Tibetan sources which record that the whole monastery was surrounded by a massive enclosure wall (Verma 2015a, 83). This enclosure wall was also provided with a small gateway complex, which was paved with stone slabs with provision for sockets on either side (Verma 2015a, 83). This small gate was in alignment with the central shrine and the north gate of the Mahāvihāra. On either side of this small gate complex, remnants of a defence wall 1.5 meters thick and about eight courses of bricks were found running in the eastward direction (Verma 2015a, 83).

The available data indicate that this monastery put a great emphasis on regulating the access of non-monastic devotees to the inner parts of the monastery. Crossing two gateway complexes to reach to the inner parts of the monastery would never have been an easy task for an outsider. Within the monastery too, there seems to have been a great emphasis on the privacy of monks. Excavations in the inner part of the monastery led to the discovery of 12 monastic cells with underground chambers. The maximum depth of these

²⁶ For an analysis of the architecture of the gateway complex, see Verma 2011, 9.

underground chambers was about 1 meter (Verma 2011, 7). The single point of access to these underground chambers was through a narrow manhole in one of the corners of the cells through which one would have to drop a person into them (Verma 2011, 7). Though the excavator has not attributed any particular function to them, considering the reputation of Vikramaśilā as one of the most renowned centres of esoteric Vajrayāna, we may infer that these underground cells were used for some secret rites. In literary sources, Vikramaśilā is depicted as the one of the most renowned centres for esoteric Vajrayāna.²⁷ This inference is also supported by the features of monastic religious space noted above. If this was the case then it was but natural for the monastic authorities of Vikramaśilā to discourage the access of non-monastic devotees to the area enclosed by monastic cells.

That the common devotees did not have any access to the area enclosed by the inner enclosure wall is indicated by the absence of archaeological markers of pilgrimage to that area: votive *stūpas*, votive tablets, inscribed seals and sealings etc., a theme we will analyze now.

The pattern of alignment of votive *stūpas* at Antichak displays a transitional trait between Magadha and Varendra/Samatata. Here votive *stūpas* were not allowed inside the monastery: either near the central shrine or in the monastic courtyard. The votive *stūpa* complex of this site is just in front of the main gate of the monastery: 150 votive *stūpas* (40 in stone, 110 in brick) were found located on either side of the passage leading to the main gate (Verma 2011, 65-66). As indicated by two floorings on which they were built; they show at least two phases of construction (Verma 2011, 65). It has been rightly claimed that these *stūpas* were raised by devotees who intended to earn merit by installing them near the main gate of the monastery, suggesting that the site was held in high veneration (Verma 2011, 65).

Even in the first phase the monastic authorities of Vikramaśilā seem to have imposed some regulations on the installation of votive *stūpas*. This is indicated by the finding of an enclosure wall, which was provided with a small entrance (measuring 3.30 1.90 m) with a door-sill, about 2 m wide (Verma 2011, 66). The gate of this enclosure wall corresponded to the main gateway of the monastery.

²⁷ In Tibetan accounts, Vikramaśilā stands out as the most important institutional centre from where the Tibetans received a significant part of their Tantric leanings. It became one of the most renowned centres of the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* and made determined efforts to purge every kind of Śaiva influence from this text, another reflection of its esoteric Vajrayāna orthodoxy (Loseries, 2015, 142-155).

The provision for enclosure did not dent the spirits of non-monastic devotees, which is reflected in the increase in the number of votive *stūpas* in the next phase. In the first phase, votive *stūpas* were constructed following a plan in rows, but when the paucity of space was felt, they were constructed at a convenient point, i.e., wherever space was available, overlooking the arrangement of rows (Verma 2011, 65). The pattern is somewhat similar to Ratnagiri, where too the paucity of space resulted in the similar placing of votive *stūpas* wherever space was available (Mishra 2009, 146).

Only four inscribed votive *stūpas*, all datable to the 12th century A.D. on palaeographic grounds, have been reported from this site. Three of them just contain the names of donors: Śrīdhamma (Verma 2011, 171), Hadrava (Verma 2011,171), and Śrīdha (Verma 2011,171).²⁸ Their social backgrounds are not recorded, but we may infer that they were from the non-monastic, non-aristocratic segment. Their *Varṇa* and *Jāti* status, professional occupation, gender, and places they came from are not recorded. None of them had any expressed Buddhist identity. Women donors are not met with in the available corpus of inscribed votive *stūpas*. Nor do we see any donation by a person from a mercantile background at Antichak. One *stūpa* has a legend in *Bhikuni* characters (Verma 2011, 171).²⁹ This script was used by Buddhist monks only, so we may infer that this *stūpa* was donated by a monk.

Spatial alignment of votive *stūpas* and the question of accessibility of monastic religious space by non-monastic devotees in Varendra monasteries (other than Paharpur)

As we move from Antichak to the Varendra sites, the distance between the spot where votive *stūpas* were allowed to be installed and the monastery increased. That may indicate a lesser ritual engagement between the monasteries and their non-monastic devotees. At the ‘fort-like’ monastery of Jagajjibanpur, which has a moat all around the monastery with circular bastions at the corners and a wide enclosure wall (Roy 2002, 576), and was established through the initiative of a Pāla *Senāpati* (Vajradeva), we have nothing to suggest that non-monastic devotees had any kind of access to any part of the monastery. Throughout its life, it seems to have remained a ‘fort-monastery’, with very little recorded attempt

²⁸ As the *stūpa* is partially broken, we cannot determine if the original legend referred to Śrīdhamma, though it cannot be ruled out.

²⁹ The reading of this inscription has not been provided by the excavator.

to attract additional sources of patronage. Instances of the donation of inscribed sculptures and inscribed terracotta plaques by non-monastic devotees have not been reported from the site so far. So far, only one terracotta votive *stūpa* has been reported from the site (Roy 2012,94). We have nothing to suggest that it was donated by a non-monastic devotee.

Sitakot, another ‘fort-like’ monastery (Ahmed 1979b, 27) having its earliest phase of occupation in the 7th -8th century A.D., had a massive gateway complex with an 82 feet wide frontage, which was guarded by two big guard rooms, each measuring 27 feet 24 feet 6 inches (Ahmed 1979b, 25). The monastic courtyard area, the cellas in the middle of the eastern, western and southern wings of the monastery, and the area just adjacent to the outer walls of the monastery do not show any evidence of ritual engagement with the non-monastic devotees. Excavations at the site have produced no report of votive *stūpas*, inscribed sculpture donated by any non-monastic devotee, or seals/sealings inscribed with the name of non-monastic devotees.

In the case of the excavated sites of Bihar Dhap, which most probably represented the ruins of the *Po-shi-Po* monastery seen by Xuan Zang on the outskirts of the urban centre of Mahasthan, a monumental gateway complex set in the middle of the eastern wing of a monastery, flanked by guard rooms, has been reported (Alam et al 2000a, 11). In its heavily guarded nature, this monastery anticipated the later monasteries of Antichak, Paharpur, Jagajibanpur, Jagaddala and many monasteries on the Mainamati ridge. The inner parts of this monastery were not easily accessible to outsiders, resulting in the absence of archaeological markers of pilgrimage to this site. This is intriguing, because the monastery was located on the outskirts of the city of Mahasthan and one would have expected a flow of patronage from the residents of the city to the monastery.

The case with the site of Vasu Vihar, located 4 miles north-west of Mahasthangarh, is not very different. Excavations at this site have resulted in the unearthing of two monasteries and a cruciform shrine that served as the common shrine of both monasteries (Ahmed 1979c, 40- 45). Unfortunately, excavations at the site were confined to the upper level of the site (datable to c. 10th -11th century A.D.) (Chakrabarti 1992, 101). For this reason we are not sure of the earlier levels of occupation, if any, of the monastery. The first monastery at the site had 26 cells of largely uniform size (12 feet by 11 feet, separated from one another by partition walls) enclosing a courtyard (Ahmed 1979c, 40-41). This monastery had an impressive gateway complex (75 feet 6 inches) set in

the middle of the eastern wing, projecting outwards (Ahmed 1979c, 40). On the outer side, the entrance complex was guarded by two guard rooms, each 10 feet square (Ahmed 1979c, 40). This monastery does not seem to have any shrine. It did not have any other entrance, and the presence of a massive gateway complex and guard rooms indicate that the non-monastic devotees could only have regulated access to the inner parts of the monastery. In the case of the second excavated monastery at the site, bigger than the first one, the single entrance to the monastery was provided through an impressive gateway complex (72 feet by 21 feet) projecting outward in the middle of the southern wing (Ahmed 1979c, 42). Some terracotta seals and sealings, inscribed with the names of non-monastic individuals, serve as the only archaeological marker of ritual interface with non-monastic devotees. No votive *stūpa* has been reported either from the inner parts of the monastery or in the area adjacent to it.

The sites analysed above give the impression that Varendra monasteries did not have much ritual engagement with non-monastic devotees. This feature is also apparent in the recently excavated monastic site at the village Jagaddala (located 20 km to the northwest of Paharpur) in Dharmoirhat Upazilla of Bangladesh. It is claimed to be the ruins of the site of Jagaddala Mahāvihāra established by the Pāla ruler Rāmapāla in the 11th century after the *Kaivartta* rebellion (Miah 2003,147-166). Excavations at the site have exposed the remains of a monastery with 32 cells, a shrine with *maṇḍapa* in the western wing of the monastery, a gateway complex in the middle of the eastern wing; and bastions at the four corners of the monastery (Miah 2003,147-166). Excavations at this site are incomplete and they are limited to the latest occupation phase of the site (Miah 2003,149). Excavations have also revealed the presence of four bastions at the four corners of the monastery. The entrance to these bastions was from inside the monastery through the narrow passages that spring from the corner cells (Miah 2003,156). The excavator has rightly argued that these bastions probably served the purpose of watch towers intended to keep watch on the enemies or outsiders who might approach the site and cause harm to it (Miah 2003,156). This was probably natural for a monastery established by a dynasty that had just recovered from a serious rebellion, especially in a phase when we get at least one epigraphically recorded example of the plundering of a ‘royal monastery’ (Somapura Mahāvihāra, identifiable with the excavated ruins of Paharpur) in Varendra by a political rival.³⁰ These bastions, along with the massive gateway

³⁰ In the 11th century, the Somapura Mahāvihāra was vandalised by an invading army of

complex in the eastern wing of the monastery, gave a ‘fort-like’ look to the monastery. It would not have been an easy task for the common devotees to access the inner shrine of the monastery. This monastery, like Jagajibbanpur, seems to have retained its core character of being a ‘fort-monastery’ built through state patronage and surviving largely on state patronage, with minimum interaction with the non-monastic non-aristocratic devotees. In terms of its cultic focus too, this monastery had a feature unique in the whole of early medieval Bihar and Bengal: the provision of large image pedestals in every single cell of the monastery, converting the cells, in effect, to shrines. We have treated this as an indication of some sort of deification of monks, with which non-aristocratic non-monastic devotees had little concern.³¹

Due to the incomplete nature of excavations at the sites of Rajabadidanga, it is difficult to ascertain the question of accessibility of non-monastic devotees to the inner parts of the monastery by analyzing the spatial alignment of votive *stūpas* vis-à-vis monastic religious space.

Spatial alignment of votive *stūpas* and the question of accessibility of monastic religious space by non-monastic devotees at Paharpur.

Among Varendra sites, votive *stūpas* in any significant number have been reported from the neighbourhood of Paharpur only. In terms of architecture, this site is very similar to the site of Antichak: a central cruciform shrine surrounded by a number of monastic cells, with a monumental gateway complex set in the middle of the northern wing of the monastery, guarding access to the inner parts of the monastery. We have nothing to suggest that the non-monastic non-aristocratic segment of society had access to the area enclosed by monastic cells. Like at Antichak, votive *stūpas* are absent in the area enclosed by monastic walls at Paharpur. They have not been reported from the area near the central cruciform shrine, in the monastic courtyard, or even near the later period cells containing ornamented pedestals. Only two circular structures, which were most probably votive *stūpas*, have been reported from the area outside the northern gateway of the monastery (Dikshit 1999, 18).

Vaṅgāla. Karuṇāśrīmitra, who was most probably the abbot of this Mahāvihāra, was killed in this attack. Later a monk (Vipulaśrīmitra) repaired the Mahāvihāra (Majumdar 1930-31, 97; Prasad 2017, 405-406).

³¹ For details, see Prasad 2017, 425-426.

At Paharpur, a concentration of votive *stūpas* is seen at the site of a temple dedicated to some form of Tārā at Satyapir Bhita, which is located at a distance of about 300 yards from the eastern exterior wall of the Mahāvihāra. At the available stage of our data base, we don't know the exact relationship this site had, if any, with the Mahāvihāra, though a monk of Somapura Mahāvihāra (Vipulaśrīmitra) did repair it in the later phase. Dikshit's excavations at this site led to the unearthing of an oblong temple (48 feet in width and at least 80 feet in length) facing south, with at least two phases of structural activity (Dikshit 1999, 80-81). The original plan of this temple consisted of a sanctum and a pillared hall surrounded by an ambulatory path, and an entrance hall that provided passage to the whole complex (Dikshit 1999, 81). This temple stood in the midst of a courtyard. This structure, as indicated by the discovery of a large quantity of charcoal lying on the floor at the north-eastern end of the floor of the first period, was destroyed by fire (Dikshit 1999, 81). This temple was rebuilt, most probably in the middle of the 11th century (Sengupta 1993, 75; Gill 2007, 177). In this phase, a buttress wall enveloping the walls of the original temple on the sides and carrying the projection in front of the temple still farther, thereby covering the earlier flight of steps, was added. In course of this reconstruction a fresh concrete floor was laid almost throughout the courtyard and over the main temple (Dikshit 1999, 81).

As indicated by the discovery of around 50 circular terracotta plaques depicting either Aṣṭamahābhaya Tārā or Sitātapatrā which are inscribed with the Buddhist Creed Formula in 11th century A.D. characters in different places in the courtyard in the south and southwest of the main temple, the temple was dedicated to some form of Tārā, most probably to her *Aṣṭamahābhaya* form (Dikshit 1999, 82). This temple attracted considerable pilgrimage in both phases of its history, which is indicated by the discovery of structural votive *stūpas*. 132 structural votive *stūpas* of various shapes and sizes (ranging from 25 feet in diameter to 2 feet 9 inches) have been discovered in the courtyard of the temple (Dikshit 1999, 82). Votive *stūpas* of the earlier period are simpler in plan, but the later ones are ornate in design (Dikshit 1999, 82-83). The only inscribed votive *stūpa* of this site, which contains the name of the donor in 11th century A.D. characters, records the donation of the *stūpa* by *Sthavira* Praśāntamati (Dikshit 1999, 83). That indicates that some votive *stūpas* were donated by monks as well, though, as in the Mahābodhi and Nālandā, we may assume that non-monastic devotees perhaps formed a significant portion of donors.

It is interesting to note that in the relic chamber of a square votive *stūpa* which was positioned close to the main temple in the south-eastern section, a thick deposit of miniature votive clay *stūpas* ‘numbering several thousands’ was found (Dikshit 1999, 83). Two tiny circular clay tablets, inscribed with the Buddhist Creed Formula, were also found inside the chamber (Dikshit 1999, 84). Dikshit has rightly treated these materials as archaeological markers of the significant scale of pilgrimage to the Tārā temple (Dikshit 1999, 84).

We agree with his contention that the Tārā temple at Satyapira Bhita commanded considerable pilgrimage. But how did that affect the Somapura Mahāvihāra? His observations force us to explore the ‘exact relation of the Tārā temple in the general layout of the site’ of Paharpur.³² Technically speaking, it was outside the monastic enclosure, and thus was not a part of the Somapura Mahāvihāra. Yet, being in close proximity to the Mahāvihāra, it could not have been totally immune to the developments in the Mahāvihāra. In fact, when the Mahāvihāra was burnt down by the army of Vaṅgāla in the middle of the 11th century, the Tārā temple also bore the brunt. Later it was rebuilt by the monk Vipulaśrīmitra of Somapura Mahāvihāra. That, however, does not fully explain the nature of the institutional relationship between the Mahāvihāra and the Tārā temple. Available epigraphic data from the Mahāvihāra does not throw any light on this issue. We have no evidence to suggest that this temple was founded by the same patron who founded the Mahāvihāra.

Some aspects of this complex question may be explored by looking into two issues: (a) Do we see any kind of cultic parallelism between the Mahāvihāra and the Tārā temple at Satyapira Bhita? That is to say, if the ritual focus of the Satyapira Bhita temple was on the worship of Tārā the saviouress, did the monastery too show the same feature? (b) If the monastery did not show the same feature, then did it make any attempt to appropriate the pilgrimage potential of the temple of Tārā for increasing its own patronage base?

Available data indicate that a disjuncture did exist between the ritual focus of the temple of Tārā and that of the Mahāvihāra. The Mahāvihāra focused more on things with which non-monastic devotees had little concern: the cult of the *Pañcatathāgatas* in its central cruciform shrine; an attempt to integrate Brahmanism in a manner, such as a subordinate union, in its

³² The need to analyze the ‘exact relation of the Tārā temple in the general layout of the site of Paharpur’ has been recently pointed out by Gill (2007, 181). She has, unfortunately, not looked into this issue in her paper.

central cruciform shrine; and, later, through the attempted deification of some monks, approximating to an architectural *Vajradhātu-maṇḍala*.³³ It basically functioned as a state-sponsored monument, intended to offer magical protection to the state.³⁴ It was probably for this reason that this Mahāvihāra did not make much effort to attract lay patronage and pilgrimage. The Tārā temple at Satyapira Bhita does not seem to have formed part of its functional or ritual matrix.

That the Mahāvihāra was reluctant to be associated with, or appropriate the popularity of, the Tārā temple at Satyapira Bhita becomes quite apparent when we contrast the situation with Ratnagiri in Orissa, where a conscious attempt was made to associate the Ratnagiri Mahāvihāra with the cult of Tārā. Ratnagiri was a great centre for the cult of Tārā and it attracted considerable pilgrimage due to this factor. Many monastic seals of Ratnagiri, containing the legend *Tārāśraya* (literally meaning ‘taking refuge in Tārā’), were considered to be some sort of amulet or talisman. However, when the sealings with the *Tārāśraya* legend were struck with the monastic sealing of Ratnagiri, it indicated that there was a conscious attempt on the part of the monastic establishment to associate this monastery as an important cult centre of Tārā (Mishra 2009, 150). This sort of evidence has not come to light from Paharpur as yet, forcing us to conclude that the monastic authorities maintained a deliberate policy of not appropriating the popularity of the Satyapira Bhita Tārā temple for their own advantage. An individual monk (Vipulaśrīmitra) repaired this temple after its destruction, but the monastery did not lend its institutional name either to the Satyapira Bhita temple or to the cult of Tārā: no seal or sealing recording that the Tārā temple was officially part of the Somapura Mahāvihāra (or this temple was under the official control of the monastic authorities of Somapura) has been found so far. Similarly, no Tārā plaque of the type discovered within the Satyapira Bhita complex has been reported from the Mahāvihāra. Nor do we see any non-monastic devotee donating any inscribed sculpture of Tārā within the Mahāvihāra. That also indicates that those pilgrims who thronged to the Tārā temple most probably did not visit the inner parts of the monastery. Even if they made a visit, the Mahāvihāra authorities did not allow them to undertake those rituals that would survive in archaeological records: donation

³³ For details, see Prasad 2017, 422-426.

³⁴ Ibid.

of structural and clay votive *stūpas* or donation of inscribed sculptures.³⁵ The Nālandā Temple Site 3 kind of pattern did not develop here.

Spatial alignment of votive *stūpas* and the question of accessibility of monastic religious space by non-monastic devotees at Moghalmari

At Moghalmari, five small votive *stūpas* were discovered at MGM2 mound (Datta 2010, 281; Mukherjee & Mukherjee 2014, 4). This mound is a little away from the main mound where the monastery was excavated. A votive *stūpa* has been discovered in the *Pradakṣiṇāpatha*, which is located in the southern part of the monastery (Mukherjee & Mukherjee 2014, 8). As none of the discovered pieces are inscribed with the names of donors, it is difficult to ascertain whether they were donated by monks or non-monastic devotees. That some of them could have been donated by non-monastic devotees cannot be ruled out, especially in view of the fact that in its basic characteristic, Moghalmari is different from the ‘fort-like’ monasteries of Bangladesh.

17 terracotta votive tablets have also been discovered from the site. They basically represent the Buddha Śākyamuni in different *mudrās*, and a *stūpa* surrounded by many other miniature *stūpas* (Mukherjee & Mukherjee 2014, 9-10). They indicate the basic Mahayanist character of this site. They most probably served as pilgrim’s mementos.

Spatial alignment of votive *stūpas* and the question of accessibility of monastic religious space by non-monastic devotees in the case of Buddhist monasteries on the Mainamati-Lalmai ridge

In the case of Buddhist monasteries on the Mainamati-Lalmai ridge, we see a tendency to enforce a deliberate isolation from the non-monastic devotees. This tendency is quite marked at the site of Salban Vihara. Among the Mainamati monastic sites, the highest number of copper plate inscriptions and silver and gold coins have been reported from the site of Salban Vihara. All this indicates

³⁵ The three reported inscriptions from the central cruciform shrine area of Somapura Mahāvihāra record the donation of pillars by three monks: *Bhikṣu* Ajayagarbha (in the latter half of the 9th century), *Sthavira* Śrīgarbha (in the 10th century) and Daśabalagarbha (in the 12th century). They all belonged to a single lineage of monks—monks whose name ended with *Garbha*---- present at this site. It is apparent that only the monks of this lineage had privileged access to the central cruciform shrine area of this site (Prasad 2017, 340-341).

that, at the available stage of our database, it was the most important Buddhist establishment on the Mainamati ridge, despite being smaller than Ananda Vihara. As indicated by the discovery of terracotta sealings inscribed with the legend ‘Śrī-Bhavadeva-Mahāvihāra-Ārya--Bhikṣusaṅghasya’ (Rashid 2008, 104), this monastery seems to have been founded in the 8th century A.D. by the Deva ruler Bhavadeva. This monastery developed around a shrine that antedated the monastery. Later the shrine was rebuilt at the time of the foundation of the monastery, as a part of the monastery. In plan and features, this monastery antedated the plans of Paharpur and Antichak monasteries.

The structural remains at the central shrine area of this site indicate a series of structures built over the remains of previous structures. Five such structures have been unearthed in excavations (Rashid 2008, 64). Each phase of occupation at the central shrine is represented by a separate structure. At the beginning of the new phase of occupation, a new structure covered the significant portions of the older structure. In Period II (later part of 7th century A.D.) of the central shrine of Salban Vihara, ‘no less than 15 basketfuls of clay votive *stūpas*, sealings and a number of Buddhist images were recovered’ from the shrine area (Rashid 2008, 66). No trace of any monastery associated with the shrine has been found in this period (Rashid 2008, 66). In this aspect, the shrine area of Salban Vihara offers a striking parallel to the Nālandā Temple/*Stūpa* site 3, which commanded sanctity even before the emergence of any monastery in the neighbourhood. As the monastery had yet to emerge in this phase at Salban Vihara, we may infer that these votive objects were donated by non-monastic devotees. In the next period (8th century A.D.), the shape of the shrine was converted into cruciform: it was built with the monastery as a single complex, and on the same stupendous scale (Rashid 2008, 66). Two clear phases of occupation, associated with two distinct floors, have been found in this period: below the original brick floor, a layer of earth filling, masses of clay votive *stūpas*, seals and sealings and Buddhist images were found, which were apparently deposited before the laying of the foundation of the shrine (Rashid 2008, 67). The floor of the second phase in this period, constructed with reddish brick concrete with *Surkhi* plaster, was built over the floor of the first floor (Rashid 2008, 67). We have no categorical information as to who were the donors of the clay votive *stūpas* and the seals and sealings inscribed with the Buddhist Creed Formula. It may not be ruled out that some of them could have been from a non-monastic background. In Period III (latter part of the 8th century A.D.), a decrease in the number of unbaked clay votive *stūpas*, seals and images has been noted (Rashid 2008, 68). A total

absence of such materials in the next period (Period IV, roughly 9th century) in the shine area was quite pronounced (Rashid 2008, 68). All this indicates that as the monastic cells emerged around the central shrine and enclosed it from all sides, that heralded a lesser ritual interface with the non-monastic devotees. Even this decreased interface ceased to survive in the next period (i.e., the Candra period). Votive *stūpas* were not allowed to be installed inside the area enclosed by monastic cells (either near the central shrine or in the verandah that separated the central shrine from monastic cells) or just outside the monumental northern gateway complex, or at a little distance from the monastic site. No pattern like Antichak or Satyapira Bhita could emerge here.

This was most probably related to the way the monastery evolved at this site. From the very beginning of the monastery (8th century), we see a great emphasis on its security. The only point of entry to the monastery was through a monumental gateway complex set in the middle of the northern wing. Guarded by four guardrooms, this monumental gateway complex imparted a distinct ‘citadel-like look’ to the monastery (Rashid 2008, 43). In other words, the access to the inner parts of the monastery was regulated by the monastic authorities. It would not have been an easy task for non-monastic devotees to enter into the monastery.

A related feature was a great emphasis on ensuring the privacy of monks. In every cell of the monastery, there was no arrangement of window or any other kind of ventilation. The door served the purpose of light, ventilation and entrance and exit. Moreover, most of the cells had provisions for cooking, indicated by the findings of fire places associated with large quantities of household pottery, grinding stones, pestles and ashes (Rashid 2008, 46). This feature emerged in the very first phase of the monastery. Occasionally, a separate portion within the cell was earmarked for hearth and kitchen material by erecting a low partition wall (Rashid 2008, 46). Though traces of a community kitchen have been found in the archaeological excavations of the site, most of the monks preferred to cook their meal individually (Rashid 2008, 46). It seems that monks of this monastery had very little interaction with one another. If they maintained a deliberate distance from non-monastic devotees, that should not come as any surprise.

In the case of other excavated monastic sites on the Mainamati-Lalmal ridge --- Ananda Vihara, Rupaban Mura Vihara, Itakhola Mura Vihara, and Bhoja Vihara— evidence of ritual engagements between the monasteries and their non-monastic devotees is less than that found at the Salban Vihara. All of them

had monumental gateway complexes guarding access to the inner parts of the monastery.³⁶ None of these monasteries developed around a shrine that antedated the foundation of the monastery. Votive *stūpas* were not allowed to be installed inside the area enclosed by monastic cells (either near the central shrine or in the verandah that separated the central shrine from monastic cells) or just outside the monumental northern gateway complex, or at a little distance from the monastic site. Nor do we get any evidence of dedication of inscribed sculptures by non-monastic devotees. Similarly, terracotta seals/sealings inscribed with the names of non-monastic devotees and votive plaques inscribed with the names of non-monastic devotees or with the Buddhist Creed Formula have not been reported from these sites.

This evidence, though, should not make us infer that the entire Mainamati-Lalmai ridge was out of bounds for non-monastic devotees. A separate site--Kutila Mura-- away from monastic centres was earmarked for this purpose. The site of Kutila Mura, located about three miles north of Salban Vihara and nearly a mile to the north of Ananda Vihara, offers evidence of considerable ritual engagement with non-monastic devotees. Before analyzing the pattern of this engagement, we will mention the general features of this site to understand the context.

Kutila Mura basically contains three *stūpas* in a row, on a common plinth. In each *stūpa*, the drum in cylindrical shape supports the hemispherical dome (Haque 2008, 34). The ground plan of the central *stūpa* is in the shape of a *Dharmacakra* or Wheel of Law. The hub of the *Dharmacakra* is represented by a deep central shaft and spokes by brick walls which have formed eight cells or box-chambers (Alam 1982, 47). The two other *stūpas* are believed to symbolically represent the Buddha and the Saṅgha, and, as such, the three *stūpas* are together referred to as *Triratnastūpas* (Alam 1982, 47; Haque 2008, 33-34). These *stūpas* are surrounded by other *stūpas* and structures spread over an area measuring about 280 feet from north to south and 225 feet from east to west. The entire area is enclosed by a massive boundary wall decorated with recessed panels (Alam 1982, 47). That indicates that access to this area was sought to be regulated by some authority.

Despite the enclosure, the three *stūpas* seem to have provided avenues for ritual activities by non-monastic devotees. This aspect is clearest in the central

³⁶For a general review of architecture of excavated sites on the Mainamati ridge, see Haque 2008. For Ananda Vihara, Ahmed 1979a ; Alam & Miah 1999. For Rupaban Mura, see Alam 1992 ; Alam et al 2000.

stūpa, which, instead of being solid, is hollow inside, the radiating eight partition walls meeting the circular wall (Haque 2008, 33). The cells thus created are filled with stone and clay sculptures and numerous miniature *stūpas* of unbaked clay, produced from moulds (Haque 2008, 33-34). The chambers also contained minute round sealings impressed with the Buddhist creed (Haque 2008, 33-34).

The other two *stūpas*, representing the Buddha and the Saṅgha, are made of solid brick masonry. Each *stūpa* has a deep central shaft which also contained a large number of clay miniature *stūpas* and terracotta sealings (Alam 1982, 47). Moreover, the nine brick *stūpas* that were found to the west of the *Triratnastūpas* also contained many miniature clay *stūpas* in their central shafts (Alam 1982, 48). These are all indicators of the flow of pilgrims to these *stūpas*.

In sun-baked clay votive *stūpas* found in the *Triratnastūpas* as well as in the nine other *stūpas* referred to above, figures of the eight-handed Tārā (i.e., *Aṣṭamahābhaya* Tārā) and Jambhala occur frequently (Alam 1982, 59). That is an indication of the cult preference of lay devotees, as well as of the emergence of this site as a great centre for the worship of *Aṣṭamahābhaya* Tārā.

One more inference is quite likely. A disjuncture seems to have developed between the cultic practices observed by the devotees who donated votive *stūpas* to the sites of Kutila Mura and Satyapira Bhita and the kind of Buddhism practised within the monasteries of Paharpur and monasteries in the neighbourhood of Kutila Mura. At both Kutila Mura and Satyapira Bhita, *Aṣṭamahābhaya* Tārā was the most preferred deity for depiction on votive *stūpas* and plaques. In many Mainamati monasteries with central cruciform shrines, the cultic focus was on the cult of the *Pañcatathāgatas* (Prasad 2017, 419-422; Prasad 2018b). Similar was the case with Paharpur (Prasad 2017, 419-422; Prasad 2018b). It could have been one of the reasons why the non-monastic devotees generally kept a distance from such monasteries.

Summing up: differential patterns of alignment of votive *stūpas* in Bihar and Bengal and their implications.

Let me sum up the patterns of alignment of votive *stūpas* vis-à-vis the main religious monuments from Magadha to Bengal. We notice some fundamental differences in the pattern as we move from Magadha to Bengal. Within Magadha, lay donors could install stone, terracotta or sun-baked clay votive *stūpas* in the

courtyard of the Mahābodhi temple, the holiest Buddhist site. They could also do the same in or near the most sacred site within the Nālandā Mahāvihāra: the Temple/*Stūpa* Site 3. They could do the same in the courtyard of the loftiest temple of Nālandā (Site 12). That is to say that the most sacred avenues located in the inner parts of the Mahāvihāra were available to non-monastic devotees for the dedication of votive *stūpas*. These votive *stūpas* were, in other words, parts of the monastic fabric: a pattern fundamentally different from Paharpur and Mainamati monasteries, where the Saṅgha did not allow the dedication of votive *stūpas* either near the central cruciform shrine or near the outer walls of the monastic enclosure. They testify to the willingness and enthusiasm of monastic authorities of Nālandā to enter into ritual engagement with their non-monastic devotees.

The pattern changes when we move to Antichak. At Antichak, no votive *stūpa* has been reported from within the area enclosed by monastic cells. They are, rather, found just outside the northern gate of the monastery. There too, a separate area was earmarked by an enclosure wall with a gate for the dedication of votive *stūpas* by non-monastic devotees.

The distance between the main monastery and votive *stūpas* increases as we move to Bengal. The monastic authorities of Paharpur seem to have taken a decision not to allow the erection of votive *stūpas* anywhere within the monastic enclosure or just outside its northern gate. This was allowed at Satyapira Bhita (located 270 m to the east of the monastery) but we don't know what kind of relationship the monastery had with the Tārā temple at Satyapira Bhita. The monastery did not attempt to appropriate the cult of Tārā at Satyapira Bhita to diversify its own patronage base.

In other Varendra monasteries, votive *stūpas* have generally not been reported either from inside the monastery or just near it. Nor could a Satyapira Bhita kind of phenomenon ever evolve in the neighbourhood of any excavated monastic site of Varendra. They seem to be reluctant to enter into ritual engagement with non-monastic devotees.

Barring the Period II shrine of Salbana Vihara, more or less similar was the case with the Mainamati monasteries. Here Kutila Mura seems to have offered the only avenue for the installation of dedicatory *stūpas*. The nearest known monastic centre is at least one mile away from Kutila Mura. In other words, a distinction was maintained between the main monasteries (which generally did not favour installation of votive *stūpas* by non-monastic devotees within the space enclosed by the monastic walls

or the area adjacent to the outer walls of monasteries) and Kutila Mura, which was made available to non-monastic devotees for the dedication of votive *stūpas*. Like the Satyapira Bhita Tārā temple, *Aṣṭamahābhaya* Tārā was the main cult figure at Kutila Mura. No monastery on the Mainamati ridge seems to have attempted to appropriate the popularity of the cult of *Aṣṭamahābhayā* Tārā at Kutila Mura to augment and diversify its own patronage and pilgrimage base.

All this indicates that monasteries of Bengal had less ritual interface with non-monastic non-aristocratic devotees than what we find in Bihar monasteries. Patronage provided by pilgrims does not seem to have formed the main component of their resource base. This inference tallies well with the epigraphic data associated with the Buddhist monastic centres of early medieval Bengal. Published epigraphic data associated with the Buddhist monastic centres of early medieval Bengal indicate patronage of monasteries mainly by two categories of donors: Sāmantas (subordinate rulers), who, in the garb of establishing Buddhist monasteries as an act of religious piety, tried to enhance their own authority and encroach upon the same of the state in the donated tract of land (Furui 2011: 151); and kings, who expected to use some particular political and religious symbolism radiated by some monasteries for their own benefit (Prasad 2017, 316-342). Non-aristocratic devotees either did not have much interest in patronising such monasteries or were not allowed to do so. That the Buddhist monastic centres of early medieval Bengal were reluctant to invite patronage from the non-monastic non-aristocratic devotees is indicated by one more fact: a general paucity of inscribed sculptures installed within the religious space of such monasteries by such devotees. In contrast, a big landed magnate like the Nalanda Mahāvihāra allowed the installation of the tutelary deity of the site---a stone sculpture of Nāgarāja, installed in Temple Site 3--- by a non-aristocratic Mahāyāna *Upāsaka* (Prasad 2017: 341). To sum up, some fundamental differences are discernible in the support systems of Buddhist monastic centres of early medieval Bihar and Bengal. Thus the process of the decline of monastic Buddhism in Bihar and Bengal could not have been the same.

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***Bodhisattva* Precepts and Their Compatibility
with *Vinaya* in Contemporary Chinese Buddhism:
A Cross-Straits Comparative Study**

Tzu-Lung Chiu

Abstract

Bodhisattva ideas have steadily developed since medieval times, to become key characteristics of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism. Monks and nuns in the Mahāyāna tradition generally have bodhisattva precepts conferred upon them while undergoing the Triple Platform Ordination, and adhering to both these precepts and the bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī precepts is a conspicuous feature of Mahāyāna monastic practice. Against this backdrop, it is worth exploring Chinese monastics' perceptions of the bodhisattva precepts and ideal, and the practices surrounding them, in the current sociocultural contexts of Taiwan and Mainland China. Though both these regions share the same tradition of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism, it has very different manifestations. This long-term, cross-Straits comparative study also reveals a hitherto under-theorised conflict between vinaya rules and the bodhisattva ideal.

Introduction

In Buddhism, *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs* are required to obey the rules of monastic disciplinary texts (*vinaya*), which are deemed crucial to their daily religious lives

and spiritual cultivation. *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya* (*Sifen lü* 四分律 T.1428)¹ has become a major reference point for monastic discipline in the Chinese Mahāyāna tradition. In addition to the *vinaya* rules, Chinese monks and nuns generally have *bodhisattva* precepts conferred upon them while undergoing the Triple Platform Ordination (三壇大戒 *San tan da jie*).² Incorporating novice (*śrāmaṇera* and *śrāmaṇerī*), full (*bhikṣu* and *bhikṣuṇī*) and *bodhisattva* ordinations in sequence, the Triple Platform is the key characteristic of Chinese Buddhist ordination that differentiates it from its Theravāda and Tibetan Buddhist counterparts (Li, 2000b: 171). The component of ordination in which *bodhisattva* precepts are conferred is based on either the *Fanwang jing* 梵網經 (the *Brahmā's Net Sūtra*)³ or the *Pusa jie ben* 菩薩戒本 (the *Bodhisattva-śīla Sūtra*).⁴ Yu-chen Li comments that “[i]ncorporating the *bodhisattva* precept ceremony into the Triple Platform Ordination procedure illustrates how Chinese Buddhism integrates Mahāyāna doctrine and Dharmagupta [*vinaya*] into the ordination ... [and] demonstrates the importance of the *bodhisattva* ideal for their Mahāyāna identity” (2000b: 171). Against this backdrop, all Chinese nuns (and monks) I met and/or interviewed have taken the *bodhisattva* precepts while being ordained as well as observing both *bodhisattva* precepts and the *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* rules in contemporary practitioners’ religious life.

¹ For the historical background and subsequent development of the *Dharmaguptaka* tradition, see Heirman (2002, 11–61).

² For an overview and discussion of the Triple Platform Ordination in modern Chinese Buddhism, see Welch (1967: 285–300), Bianchi (2001: 89–95), Hsieh (2005: 28–37), and Wen (2010: 1–19). However, not all Chinese monastics undergo Triple Platform Ordination, as some monasteries’ traditions do not include it. For example, members of a *vinaya*-centric nunnery such as Nanlin or Pushou Si will receive novice precepts, *śikṣamāṇā* precepts, full precepts and *bodhisattva* precepts separately on different occasions. It is worth noting that nuns in Pushou Si also participate the Triple Platform Ordination because of the normal ordination procedure in Mainland China.

³ The *Fanwang jing* (T24.n1484). Kumārajīva translated this *sūtra* in 406 CE, though some regard this scripture as apocryphal. It consists of two fascicles, with the second – comprising the 10 major and 48 minor precepts – differing markedly from the first in both style and content. The authenticity of the *Fanwang jing* has given rise to much debate among scholars and monastic members. An in-depth discussion of whether the *Fanwang jing* was an authentic *sūtra* is beyond the scope of this work, but for details, see Shih Sheng Yen (1997: 336–340) and Satō (1997: 618–621).

⁴ The *Pusa jie ben* (T24.n1500) is derived from a chapter of *Yogācārabhūmi Śāstra* 瑜伽師地論. *Pusa jie ben* introduces the stages of development of the *bodhisattva* and *bodhisattva* precepts, and was translated by Dharmarakṣa in Guzang, the capital of Northern Liang, around the fifth century CE.

This study will mainly focus on the *Fanwang jing*, which has been popular and influential in China since the fifth century CE. Hōdō Ōno (1954: 265) notes that *the Fanwang jing* received the most attention of all *sūtras* of Mahāyāna precepts. It has proved eminently suitable for extension and adaptation to China's culture and its changing societal priorities, while also absorbing various Indian sources. This adaptability is especially evident in the codes of the major⁵ and minor precepts,⁶ where the *Fanwang jing* takes into account various walks of life across different socio-economic classes in society, creating a classic scripture for a living morality (translated in Shih Sheng Yen, 2008: 67). Additionally, as Ann Heirman has pointed out, the *Fanwang jing*'s *bodhisattva* precepts “provide the Chinese Buddhist community with a guideline of [Mahāyāna] moral precepts ... seen as a [Mahāyāna] supplement, a guideline ... for [monastic members] on their way to enlightenment” (2009: 83). In this context, Chinese monks' and nuns' monastic activities seem to connect strongly with the *bodhisattva* precepts; and all my informant nuns in various institutions told me that they recited the *bodhisattva* precepts (and *bhikṣuṇī* precepts) at the *poṣadha* ceremony.⁷ Both the existing literature and my fieldwork data suggest that adhering to both *bodhisattva* precepts and Buddhist *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts is a conspicuous feature of monastic practice in Mahāyāna Buddhism in both Mainland China and Taiwan today.⁸

⁵ The 10 major precepts in the *Fanwang jing* are: (1) not to kill; (2) not to steal; (3) to observe sexual abstinence; (4) not to lie; (5) not to sell or trade alcohol; (6) not to speak of monastic members' faults; (7) not to praise oneself and disparage others; (8) not to be stingy and abuse others; (9) not to bear resentment and refuse apologies; and (10) not to denigrate the Three Treasures (the Triple Gem). Those who commit major transgressions will not only lose all merit in this life but will also fall after death into one of the three lower realms: hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals (Heirman, 2009: 83).

⁶ The 48 minor precepts in the *Fanwang jing* are less serious offences; they can be fully expiated by face-to-face confession and repentance (T24.n1484, p1008c19–c20).

⁷ Traditionally, at the twice-monthly *poṣadha* ceremony, the *prātimokṣa* (list of rules) is recited. In this way, the ceremony serves as a bond between the members of the same *vinaya* tradition.

⁸ In the Theravāda tradition, there seems to be considerably less emphasis on becoming a practitioner of the *bodhisattva* path. For example, Wei-Yi Cheng's fieldwork data revealed that *bodhisattva* precepts and practices were not widely approved of by Buddhist monastics in modern Sri Lanka (2007: 23–25). Similarly, Kawanami has pointed out that some nuns engaged in “this-worldly” philanthropic matters were considered “foreign” and divergent from the tradition of Theravāda Buddhism (2013: 47–50). That being said, however, not all monastics in the Theravāda tradition pay so little attention to the *bodhisattva* ideal; as Anālayo points out, “[t]he path of the *bodhisattva* has for a long time been a recognized vocation in the Theravāda tradition, and some

Before discussing my fieldwork findings, it is first necessary to juxtapose the *bodhisattva* precepts of the *Fanwang jing* to the *vinaya* rules, given that these two sources of sets of rules have hitherto only been studied in isolation, and usually as part of a relatively narrow quest for particular issues or methods. In principle, the major precepts (*pārājika*)⁹ of *vinaya* and the *bodhisattva* precepts are the same, but differences exist in their functions or range, as noted by Shih Sheng Yen (1997 [1965]: 343). For example, the main root of *śrāvaka* precepts concerns killing, stealing, sexual misconduct and lying (on spiritual matters). The ten major *bodhisattva* precepts of the *Fanwang jing* likewise include killing, stealing, sexual misconduct and (spiritual) lying, but also go beyond these four aspects. In the same vein, a careful reading of the minor precepts of both sets of rules reveals considerable complementarity. Specifically, the 2nd minor precept of *Fanwang jing* (T24.n1484, p1005b06-09), on drinking alcohol, is connected to the 36th *pācittika*¹⁰ offence (T22.n1428, p0735b24), and the 4th minor precept of *Fanwang jing* (T24.n1484, p1005b14-16), on eating garlic, to the 70th *pācittika* offence (T22.n1428, p0736c05- p0737b15). Likewise, the 9th minor *bodhisattva* precept (T24.n1484, p1005c08-13) relates to the 93rd *pācittika* offence (T22.n1428, p0745b08-p0745c06), on care for the sick; the 10th minor *bodhisattva* precept (T24.n1484, p1005c14-17) to the 46th *pācittika* offence (T22.n1428, p0735c21), on the killing of animals; the 12th minor *bodhisattva* precept (T24.n1484, p1005c24) to the 11th *nihsargika pācittika*¹¹ (T22.n1428, p0728a24), on business activities; the 13rd minor *bodhisattva* precept (T24.n1484, p1006a02-6) to the 2nd and 3rd *saṃghāvaśeṣa*¹² offences (T22.n1428, p0718b09-24), on slander; and the 14th minor *bodhisattva* precept (T24.n1484, p1006a06-9) to the 11th *pācittika* offence (T22.n1428, p0734c26), on destroying nature, land and villages. The 19th minor *bodhisattva* precept

renowned *bhikkhus* in Sri Lanka occupying high ecclesiastical positions, like the late Balangoda Ānanda Maitreya or Nauyane Ariyadhamma, are well known for being practitioners of the *bodhisattva* path” (2013: 128-129). For further details, see for example Anālayo (2013: 129 n53).

⁹ 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 further details, see Heirman (2002: 119-127).

¹⁰ A *pācittika* is a minor offence that needs to be expiated. For details, see Heirman (2002: 141-147).

¹¹ A *nihsargika pācittika* is an offence that concerns an unlawfully obtained object that needs to be given up (Heirman, 2002: 138-141).

¹² A *Samghāvaśeṣa* offence is one that leads to temporary exclusion from the main activities of the community (Heirman, 2002: 128-138).

(T24.n1484, p1006b07-8) is connected to the 3rd *pācittika* offence (T22.n1428, p0734c13), on speaking divisively and on duplicity. The 21st minor *bodhisattva* precept (T24.n1484, p1006b21) partly connects to the 62th and 63rd *pācittika* offences (T22.n1428, p0736b15-18), on striking others. The 27th minor *bodhisattva* precept (T24.n1484, p1007a13-16) is related to the 22nd *pācittika* offence (T22.n1428, p0735a19-21), on eating apart from the assembly. The 29th minor *bodhisattva* precept (T24.n1484, p1007a23-27) relates to the 169th *pācittika* offence (T22.n1428, p0774c21-775a14), on making a living by means of worldly skills. The 30th *bodhisattva* precept (T24.n1484, p1007b01) is connected to the 1st *saṃghāvaśeṣa* offence (T22.n1428, p0718b06-b08), on matchmaking. The 33rd *bodhisattva* precept relates to the 33rd, 35th and 79th *pācittika* offences (T22.n1428, p0735b18; T22.n1428, p0735b22; T22.n1428, p0740a27-b23), on military parades and entertainment. The 37th *bodhisattva* precept (T24.n1484, p1008a25-29) connects to the 97th and 98th *pācittika* offences (T22.n1428, p0746c22-747b25), on dangerous wandering. And lastly, the 46th *bodhisattva* precept (T24.n1484, p1009b02-8) is connected to the 86th, 87th, 88th and 89th *śaikṣa*¹³ offences (T22.n1428, p0712b29-c14), which involve the location/position of Dharma teaching.¹⁴ From this, it is fairly clear that some of monastic precepts and *bodhisattva* precepts complement each other, at least when it comes to what a monastic member ought not to do. The guiding purpose of this general category of prohibitive precepts (*Zhi chi* 止持), to which the *prātimokṣa* (list of rules) belongs (Shih Sheng Yen, 1997: 251; *Fo guang da ci dian*, 1988: 204), is the avoidance of wrongdoing. However, the 10 major and 48 minor precepts of the *Fanwang jing* include not only prohibitive precepts, but also prescriptive ones (*Zuo chi* 作持), which positively require various right and good actions. In other words, individuals observe prohibitive rules by not doing wrong, because they transgress precepts when behaving wrongly, whereas they observe prescriptive rules by doing things to benefit others, because not doing so offends the rules. Therefore, while multiple versions of *bodhisattva* precepts exist,¹⁵ their general principles can be summed up as the Three Cumulative Pure Precepts (*San*

¹³ There is a list of 100 rules for both *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs* concerning decency in the category of *śaikṣa*, which means “rules of good behaviour” (Heirman, 2002: 148-149).

¹⁴ An in-depth comparison of *vinaya* and *bodhisattva* precepts is beyond the scope of this study, but further documentary research in this area is needed.

¹⁵ For example: *Fan wang jing pu sa jie ben* 梵網經菩薩戒本; *Ying luo pu sa jie ben* 瓔珞菩薩戒本; *Yu qie jie ben* 瑜伽戒本; *Di chi jie ben* 地持戒本; *Shan jie jie ben* 善戒戒本; and *You po sai pu sa jie ben* 優婆塞菩薩戒本.

ju jing jie 三聚淨戒).¹⁶ They are: (1) renounce evil deeds by keeping the precepts (*she lü yi jie* 攝律儀戒); (2) accumulate merit by performing beneficial deeds (*she shanfa jie* 攝善法戒); and (3) work for the salvation of all sentient beings (*she zhongsheng jie* 攝眾生戒) (Shih Seng Yen, 1997: 329; Shih Hsing Yun, 2009: 34; Shih Wu Yin, 2009: 8).

Nevertheless, it should not be overlooked that a close reading and careful comparison of *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts and *bodhisattva* ones reveals various crucial differences between these two codes of conduct. For example, Shi Ruijin 釋瑞金 offers a detailed explanation of the differences between these two sets of precepts, such as the timing of establishing rules, the qualification of ordination preceptees, the presence of ceremony masters, the names of transgressions, the ways of repentance, and so on (2008: 287–295).¹⁷ Most importantly, the fundamental spirit of Mahāyāna Buddhism is to focus on the path of the *bodhisattva* who liberates all sentient beings from suffering through a compassionate mind, and to stress the practice of the *bodhisattva* ideal.¹⁸ The means a *bodhisattva* uses to benefit others, however, may deviate from monastic ethics, and may even go against common worldly criteria. As Peter Harvey points out, “skilful means” and “overriding the precepts” are sometimes utilised compassionately to save or teach those in need. Different Mahāyāna scriptures also express varying degrees of permissiveness regarding *bodhisattvas*’ breaking of *vinaya* rules or committing other minor transgressions in the service of this greater good (2000: 134–135). For this reason, Donald Lopez has commented that “[t]he tension between the demands of the monk

¹⁶ The term “Three Cumulative Pure Precepts” originated in *Zui wu bi jing* 最無比經 (Supreme Incomparable *Sūtra* T16.n0691, p0787c26 and T16.n0691, p0787c29) translated by Xuanzang 玄奘 in 649 CE. Shih Sheng Yen comments that the term “The Three Cumulative Pure Precepts” in this *sūtra* neither clearly explains the contents of the term nor its implications (2008 [1996]: 44–45). The contents of the Three Cumulative Pure Precepts were later explained in the *Ying luo jing* 瓔珞經 (*Yogācāra bhūmi sūtra*), translated by *Zhufonian* 竺佛念 between 376 and 378 CE. This *sūtra*, however, did not directly mention the term but stipulated the major precepts, and rituals of conferment and confession (ibid: 45–46). Sheng Yen comments that the requirements of the Three Cumulative Pure Precepts can be either simple or complex: either difficult to receive and difficult to observe, or easy to receive and easy to observe. The contents of the Three Cumulative Pure Precepts can be performed either strictly or less strictly, so they can be adapted to meet the needs of time and place (ibid: 54–64). For details, see Shih Sheng Yen (2008 [1996]: 19–75).

¹⁷ See also Fu (1994: 246–249).

¹⁸ For a general introduction to the discourse of compassionately saving others in the Mahāyāna tradition, see Harvey (2000: 124–126).

and the demands of the bodhisattva are illustrated in some of the secondary infractions of the bodhisattva vows” (2001: 149). Some scholars thus have stated explicitly that one set of precepts takes priority over the other. Christoph Kleine, for example, suggests that “the traditional monastic code of the ‘Lesser Vehicle’ [Hīnayāna] ... [was] invalid when it conflicted with the precepts or ethical principles of the ‘Great Vehicle’ [Mahāyāna]” (2006: 164). Likewise, the nun Shih Nengrong has remarked that Chinese monastics place greater emphasis on *bodhisattva* precepts than on *śrāvaka* ones;¹⁹ and that if there is a contradiction between *bodhisattva* precepts and *vinaya* rules, they choose the former (2003: 477). In short, among some Chinese masters dealing with such conflicts, Buddhist *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts appear to be de-emphasised while *bodhisattva* ones are regarded as the supreme criteria.²⁰

Building on the above introduction to some key issues surrounding the *bodhisattva* precepts, the remainder of this study will present monastic practitioners’ general views on the *bodhisattva* precepts, with particular reference to nuns’ perspectives on the potentially contradictory relationship between *vinaya* rules and the *bodhisattva* precepts/ideal in the sociocultural contexts of Taiwan and Mainland China. Since *bodhisattva* ideas have steadily developed since medieval times, and are key characteristics of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism as practised in both Mainland China and Taiwan today, they should not be overlooked in any discussion of the Mahāyāna tradition among either monastics or the laity.²¹ As my first step towards achieving that aim, I set out to capture present-day Chinese nuns’ general perceptions of and practices involving *bodhisattva* precepts.²² My data indicate that, within the two

¹⁹ *Śrāvakayāna* is the vehicle of the hearers, a term used by Mahāyāna Buddhists to describe early Buddhist followers who heard the teachings of the Buddha and who, by practising them, sought to become *arhats*. In the eyes of Mahāyāna polemicists, disciples of the vehicle of the hearers are only focused on individual salvation, which is opposed to the path of the *bodhisattva*, which calls for all beings’ liberation.

²⁰ Self-immolation is a key example: while Yijing greatly disapproved of the act of burning the body and fingers, some masters, such as Zanning 贊寧 (T50.n2061, p0861c19–c25), Yuanzhao 元照 (T40.n1805, p0285a05–a24) and Congyi 從義 (X28.n0586, p0323c15–p324a05), openly criticised his viewpoint, exalting *bodhisattva* precepts/practice above the *śrāvaka* ones approved in Mahāyāna teachings.

²¹ In this study, however, Buddhist nuns rather than the laity are the main research focus, and an in-depth discussion of lay *bodhisattva* precepts is beyond its scope. For further details on this issue, see Jones (1997: 113–139).

²² An in-depth discussion of the *bodhisattva* doctrine and *bodhisattva* ordination in Chinese contexts is beyond the scope of this research. For details, see Satō (1997: 427–563); Shih Sheng Yen (1997 [1965]: 305–405; 2008 [1996]); and Huang (2006).

regions I studied, observing *bodhisattva* precepts is seen as more “advanced” and/or difficult than following *vinaya* rules, on the grounds that the former must be policed within the mind rather than in the sphere of external behaviour. However, in the course of that research, I tentatively identified subtle but important differences in the practice of the *bodhisattva* path in Taiwan vs. Mainland China – differences to which scant scholarly attention has hitherto been paid, in spite of (or perhaps because of) the similar permeation of both regions by Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism.

1.1 Selection of Buddhist Nunneries in Taiwan and Mainland China

Buddhist nuns rather than monks are the main subjects of the present research. As a female researcher, I was at an advantage when seeking access to Buddhist nunneries.²³ But more importantly, amid a revival of Buddhism taking place in China, the population of Buddhist nuns there is increasing dramatically, along with their educational standards and influence within Chinese Buddhist monasticism as a whole.

Though Taiwan and Mainland China both have rich monastic scenes, it is impossible to conduct fieldwork in all monastic institutions. It is thus crucially important to select samples of those Buddhist institutions that do allow fieldwork, to ensure a balanced overview. My target nunneries were carefully selected as encompassing the major types, not least in terms of their attitudes towards disciplinary rules. These types can be summarised as follows:

1. *Vinaya*-centric institutes,²⁴ such as Nanlin Nisengyuan (Nantou, Taiwan), and Pushou Si (Wutaishan, Mainland China). Nanlin Nunnery 南林尼僧苑 was founded in 1982, and there are about 80 resident nuns there today. Its name, meaning “southern grove”, was taken from the name of the monastery where a second ordination ceremony was held ca. 433 for more than

²³ Similarly, Holmes Welch explored the Chinese Buddhism of both Republican and Communist China during the 1960s and 1970s. He considered that a female researching Buddhist nuns and nunneries would be more effective, and thus did not interview any female monastics (1967: v).

²⁴ 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 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, as will be further explained in the main text.

300 Chinese nuns, who received full ordination from a dual *saṃgha* with the help of a quorum of Sinhalese nuns according to the *Biqiuni zhuan* 比丘尼傳 (T50.n2063, p939c21–c24). This choice of name clearly indicates how Nanlin Nunnery sees itself as part of a development traceable back to India and to the first lawful dual ordinations of medieval China, and also highlights its strict observance of the *vinaya*. As already noted by Yu-chen Li, numerous young nuns regard Nanlin Nunnery's strict training and ascetic lifestyle highly, seeing these features as a "symbolic revitalization of the [*bhikṣuṇī*] *vinaya*" (2000a: 153). Pushou Si 普壽寺, which started to rebuild in 1991, is located in Shanxi Province. It is a well-known *vinaya*-centric monastery and now the largest Buddhist nuns' college in China (with around 1,000 nuns). Its tradition includes the training of each *śrāmaṇerī* (novice) as a *śikṣamāṇā* (probationer) before *bhikṣuṇī* ordination, and offers various *vinaya* study programs.

2. Buddhist nuns' colleges, such as Dingguang Si (Guangdong, Mainland China), Chongfu Si (Fuzhou, Mainland China), Zizhulin (Xiamen, Mainland China), Qifu Si (Chengdu, Mainland China), and Xiangguang Si (= Luminary Nunnery) (Chiayi, Taiwan). Dingguang Si 定光寺 opened as a Buddhist college with Master Honghui as its 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 20 teacher nuns. Chongfu Si 崇福寺, located in Fujian Province, is a well-known site for nuns' 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. Around 300 nuns live and study there. 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 monastics in 1995; currently around 200 nuns live and undertake Buddhist study and practice there. 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), devoted herself to the education of Buddhist nuns for many years and played a key role in shaping contemporary Chinese nuns' views on, and practice of monastic rules. Student nuns in this institute receive the *śrāmaṇerī* and *śikṣamāṇā* precepts and are required strictly to 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 the summer retreat). The college currently has more than 100 female monastic members, including teacher as well as student nuns. Luminary Nunnery 香光寺 (also known as Luminary Buddhist Institute) was founded in 1980 by the nun Wu Yin (b. 1940), who is well known for her research on *vinaya*, and currently has about 120 nun members.

3. Humanistic Buddhist institutes,²⁵ such as such as Fagushan (Taipei, Taiwan), and Foguangshan (Kaohsiung, Taiwan). Dharma Drum Mountain (Fagushan 法鼓山, sometimes abbreviated to DDM) is one of the largest Buddhist institutions in Taiwan, currently with about 50 affiliated monks and 200 nuns. It was founded by the monk Sheng Yen 聖嚴 (1930–2009), a prominent Chan master. 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 male and female monastics affiliated with this monastery, which promotes Humanistic Buddhism in particular.

²⁵ 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 in various ways, including monastic and secular education, welfare work, and protection of the environment.

4. Institutions that do not fit neatly into any of the above three categories, including Tongjiao Si and Tianning Si (both in Beijing, Mainland China). 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. Around 30 nuns live there. Tianning Si 天寧寺, also located in Beijing, is one of the oldest temples there, and is famous for its twelfth-century Liao Dynasty pagoda. It was declared a national site of cultural preservation in 1988. Currently around 30 Buddhist nuns reside in this nunnery, which focuses on the combined practice of Chan and Pure Land methods.

When studying Chinese Buddhism (or indeed any other Chinese religion), it is necessary to apply historical, textual, and fieldwork approaches. As Daniel Overmyer has pointed out (1998: 4), "knowledge of history and texts can enrich field observation, and field observation can often provide a sense of context for past practices." Following Overmyer's recommendations, this study's primary method for gathering information was fieldwork (including observation and interviews), combined with historical/documentary study of Buddhist scriptural texts. A total of 35 face-to-face interviews were conducted in four Taiwanese and seven Mainland Chinese monastic institutions, 15 in Taiwan and 20 on the Mainland.²⁶

2. General Viewpoint on *Bodhisattva* Precepts

The following sections present my fieldwork data in detail, juxtaposing Taiwan- and Mainland-based monastic practitioners' general perspectives regarding *bodhisattva* precepts as a means of exploring the similarities and differences in practising the *bodhisattva* path/ideal in various Mahāyāna contexts. To this end, I have categorised these data into two distinct dimensions: (1) the relationship between *bodhisattva* and *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts; and (2) social engagement by practitioners of the *bodhisattva* path.

²⁶ Taiwan (total of 15 interviewees): Nanlin Nunnery (2 interviewees); Luminary Nunnery (8); DDM (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).

2.1 Congruence between *Bodhisattva* and *Bhikṣu/Bhikṣuṇī* Precepts

Before turning to a closer examination of my fieldwork findings, it is first worth exploring the broader context of how my informant nuns perceived the relationship between *bodhisattva* and Buddhist *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts. Some responded that the former precepts represent an advanced stage for monastic members, with stricter demands than the latter, and can be adhered to by focusing the mind. My interviewees at Dingguang Si and Qifu Si both stated that it was much harder to practise *bodhisattva* precepts because they require more detailed observation than *vinaya*. From their perspective, Buddhist *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts focus on outward behaviour, while *bodhisattva* ones focus on the mind. One Dingguang nun then used an example to stress the difficulty of controlling the mind: you may outwardly follow the rule of not eating after midday, but still be envious when you see others eat. One nun at Zizhulin shared a similar view, that being a *bodhisattva* means you have an inner *bodhisattva* mind, as well as observing Buddhist precepts externally. She also indicated that the *bodhisattva* criteria are much stricter and more detailed than the *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts: that is, you disobey the former if you have bad thoughts, whereas you do not offend the latter by such thoughts unless you also take action. A similar viewpoint was shared by one informant nun at Chongfu Si, who described *bodhisattva* precepts as an “upgraded” version of *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts, which mainly focus on monastic members’ behaviour and speech rather than their minds. One Taiwanese nun, at Nanlin, echoed the Mainland nuns’ view that monastics practising the *bodhisattva* precepts should eradicate defilements and bad habits, and that this placed greater spiritual demands upon them. In sum, it appears that *bodhisattva* precepts are commonly regarded as more advanced and difficult to follow than *vinaya* rules among current monastic practitioners at various nunneries in Mainland China and Taiwan.

Broadly speaking, the receiving of *bodhisattva* precepts represents the final stage of ordination criteria and procedure, for both monastic members and laypeople. For instance, a layperson must first receive the Three Refuges and Five Precepts (or Eight Precepts) prior to receiving Mahāyāna *bodhisattva* precepts.²⁷ Monastics must also first receive the Three Refuges and Five Precepts,

²⁷ The Three Refuges are the initial stages whereby non-Buddhists convert to Buddhism, by reciting the formula “I take refuge in the Buddha; I take refuge in the Dharma; I take refuge in the Sangha”, which is done formally in lay and monastic ordination ceremonies. The Five Precepts constitute the basic Buddhist code of ethics, adhered to by lay followers: (1) not to kill; (2) not to

the *śrāmaṇera/śrāmaṇerī* precepts,²⁸ and the *bhikṣu* or *bhikṣunī* precepts, prior to receiving *bodhisattva* precepts. The transmission of the latter thus clearly involves a gradual process from the basic level of the Three Refuges to the more advanced levels.

Readers will have noted how often my interviewees referred to the “mind” when discussing *bodhisattva* precepts. The founder of Foguangshan, Master Hsing Yun, has stated that a *bodhisattva* who develops *bodhi* mind will help to liberate sentient beings. Those who lack *bodhi* mind to attain awakening and liberate living beings, cannot call themselves *bodhisattva* (2009: 41). While the *bodhisattva* precepts include the 10 major precepts and 48 minor ones, their shared fundamental principle is to initiate the *bodhi* mind; and a person’s failure to develop it strikes at the fundamental spirit of the *bodhisattva* precepts (ibid). Unsurprisingly, then, the *bodhi* mind indeed plays a key role in many Mahāyāna scriptures, texts and ordination ceremonies, especially in relation to saving sentient beings through the *bodhisattva* ideal.²⁹ In this context, mind also appears to be closely related to the observance of *bodhisattva* precepts in terms of spiritual cultivation, since some of my interviewees expressed how hard it was

steal; (3) not to engage in sexual misconduct; (4) not to lie; and (5) not to drink alcohol. The Eight Precepts are for Buddhist laypeople who wish to practise Buddhism more strictly than those who adhere only to the Five Precepts. They are: (1) not to kill; (2) not to steal; (3) to observe “sexual abstinence”; (4) not to lie; (5) not to drink alcohol; (6) not to eat at improper times; (7) not to wear flowers, sing, dance or make music or use perfume; and (8) not to sleep in a high and luxurious bed. For further details of the eight precepts, see Gomes (2004: 47–63).

²⁸ Before they receive full ordination, both male and female novices are required to follow the Ten Precepts. The *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya* (T22.n1428, p924a2–a16) specifies them as follows: (1) not to kill; (2) not to steal; (3) not to have unchaste behaviour; (4) not to lie; (5) not to drink alcohol; (6) not to wear flowers, perfume or jewels; (7) not to sing, dance or make music, or go to see singing, dancing or music; (8) not to sleep in a high, large or big bed; (9) not to eat at improper times (i.e., after noon); and (10) not to handle gold, silver or money. These precepts are described in very similar terms in the other *vinayas*. For further details, see Heirman (2002: 66).

²⁹ For example, the *Pusadich jing* 菩薩地持經 (*Bodhisattvabhūmi-sūtra*), translated in the fifth century CE by Dharmakṣema, holds that those who have the *bodhisattva* nature (sacrificing oneself and benefiting others), but lack the *bodhi* mind and cultivation, cannot attain *Anuttarasamyaksambodhi* (T30.n1581, p888a26–a28). Another example is the *Wuwei sancang chanyao* 無畏三藏禪要 (*Tripitaka Master Śubhā’s Guide to Meditation*), which is a record of Śubhākarasimha’s lecture on meditation. It states that people who want to enter the Mahāyāna *dharma* must initiate the *bodhi* mind and receive *bodhisattva* precepts with a pure body (T18.n0917, p0942c06–c7). And in the *bodhisattva* ordination ceremony, precept masters ask both the laity and monastics whether they have developed the *bodhi* mind as a *bodhisattva* before they confer the precepts (Shih Sheng Yen, 2008 [1996]: 162).

to control the mind or avoid improper thoughts.³⁰ From this, we can surmise that present-day Chinese nuns share a broad consensus on the relationship between *bodhisattva* and *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts. The next section, however, will dig deeper into nuns' perspectives on the contradictory relationship between these two sets of precepts.

***Bodhisattva* and *Bhikṣu/Bhikṣuṇī* Precepts in Conflict**

While some existing literature has explicitly discussed the differences between *bodhisattva* and *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts (e.g., Fu, 1994: 246–249; Lopez, 2001: 149–150; Shi Ruijin, 2008: 287–295), it is not unsurprising that some of my Mainland informant nuns referred spontaneously to the compatibility of these two sets of precepts. For example, my interviewees at Qifu Si and Zizhulin both volunteered that *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts and *bodhisattva* precepts complement each other without conflict. One interviewee at Dingguang Si even responded to one of my questions by saying straightforwardly that there is no conflict between *śrāvaka* precepts and *bodhisattva* ones, and asking rhetorically how monastic members could attain Buddhahood if their minds were in conflict between one *dharma* (the *bodhisattva* precepts) and another (*vinaya*)? Even this nun, however, indicated that *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts and *bodhisattva* ones differed, at least in emphasis: the former focusing on self-benefit and the latter on benefiting others.

Additionally, two Mainland informants provided interesting answers to my questions about the issue of *bodhisattva* practice within Mahāyāna Buddhism. One, at Dingguang Si, used a story of the Buddha to clarify her standpoint: Buddhists cannot tell a lie.³¹ When the Buddha was alive, he saw a rabbit running away, and a hunter asked him whether he had seen the rabbit. The Buddha said no, so the hunter left. Then Ānanda asked the Buddha why he had lied, and the Buddha answered that the rabbit would have met its death if he had told the hunter where to find it.³² As the nun saw it, this story meant that the Buddha told an expedient ‘white lie’ to save another sentient being, which was in keeping with the Mahāyāna *bodhisattva* tradition. By way of conclusion, she remarked that Chinese Buddhist monastics do not forget receiving *bodhisattva* precepts, even as they

³⁰ Shih Sheng Yen explains how an inappropriate mind crucially affects the action of body and speech so as to transgress the 10 major precepts of the *Fanwang jing* (1997 [1965]: 345–346).

³¹ According to the 1st *pācittika* rule, “[i]f a *bhikṣuṇī* deliberately lies, she [commits] a *pācittika*” (translated in Heirman 2002: 529).

³² The nun, however, did not give me concrete textual references for this story.

observe *śrāvaka* ones in the meantime. Similarly, a nun from Chongfu Si gave an example of an exception to the rule that monastic members may not have physical contact with the opposite sex. According to the 5th *pārājika* rule, “[i]f a *bhikṣuṇī* has defiled thoughts and has physical contact with a man with defiled thoughts below the armpit and above the knee ... this *bhikṣuṇī* [commits] a *pārājika*... That is ‘to have physical contact’” (translated in Heirman, 2002: 252). This rule would even forbid a nun from saving a man who has fallen into a river because she would have to touch him. However, according to the *bodhisattva* precepts, the nun *must* save the drowning man because she must show mercy to all sentient beings. From these two nuns’ comments, we can see that some behaviours forbidden in the *vinaya* are deemed acceptable within the spirit of the *bodhisattva* ideal, provided that they occur under certain specific conditions involving compassion for others.

While some Mainland nuns’ perceptions that there is no incompatibility between these two systems may be based on textual references, their responses nevertheless revealed a cautious or even defensive position when discussing these issues with me, perhaps because I was not a member of the monastic community.³³ Another group of my informants, meanwhile, also conceded the existence of some differences or tensions between *bodhisattva* precepts and *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* ones, but did not use concrete textual references or examples from their daily lives to support the positions they took. It is also worth noting that, broadly speaking, the views of Mainland interviewees on these matters were more conservative than those of their Taiwanese counterparts. One senior nun in Taiwan’s Luminary Nunnery, for example, explicitly presented a theorised conflict between the *vinaya* rule against money-handling (T22.n1428, p618c22–619c25) and the *bodhisattva* precept that allows the acceptance of money on behalf of sentient beings in the *Pusa jie ben*:

Not Accepting [an] Offering: If a Bodhisattva, out of anger or pride, resists and rejects offering[s] of gold, silver, pearls, wish-fulfilling pearls, lazurite and various treasures, this is named a transgression, multiple transgression, is a transgression of a defiled nature because one forsakes sentient beings. If [done] out of laziness or slackness, such a transgression is of an undefiled nature (*Selected Translations of Yogācārabhūmi-Śāstra*, 2012: 108).³⁴

³³ 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 outsider criticism.

³⁴ T24.n1500, p1107c06-9.

As interpreted by this Luminary nun, the precepts suggest that a *bodhisattva* is allowed to accept gold, silver, money and treasures for the sake of sentient beings. The *bodhisattva* precepts, according to this nun, are more open than Buddhist *śrāvaka* precepts because *bodhisattva* and *śrāvaka* precepts have vastly different standpoints and foci, compounded by various interpretations. She commented that those who follow Buddhist precepts strictly believe that accepting gold or silver from others one has breached the rule of not touching money. Those who follow the *bodhisattva* precepts hold the belief that accepting valuable offerings will benefit sentient beings, even though it sits uncomfortably alongside their own adherence to the precept of not touching money.³⁵ However, being a *bodhisattva* does not imply that monastic members may accept anything without restrictions. Those who have attachment to treasures transgress another *bodhisattva* precept in *Pusa jie ben*, which was also mentioned by the Luminary nun I interviewed:

Being Greedy for Material Wealth: If a Bodhisattva, with much desire and discontent has greed for and is attached to material wealth, this is named a transgression[.] (*Selected Translations of Yogācārabhūmi-Śāstra*, 2012: 107).³⁶

The nun explicitly used textual references to support a position on the contradiction between the *bodhisattva* precept (of accepting money) and the *vinaya* rule (against touching money). This shows that those who follow the *bodhisattva* precepts and path may compromise themselves in terms of transgressing a rule in order to benefit others. Another senior Luminary nun also shared an explicit example about the differences between the *bodhisattva* and *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts as applied in day-to-day life:

Some nuns from other institutions came here to study at Buddhist College but many found it hard to adapt to our lifestyle here. For example, here we monastics cook for laypeople.³⁷ They wonder why we cook for students and laypeople. However, in Mahāyāna

³⁵ The Luminary nun stressed that Buddhist monks and nuns following the *bodhisattva* precepts strictly would not transgress *pārājika* and *saṃghāvaśeṣa* offenses in *śrāvaka* precepts unless they want to renounce the precepts and return to secular life.

³⁶ T24.n1500, p1107 b14-b15.

³⁷ Nuns are assigned to work in the kitchen as trainees. The nunnery regularly holds activities and Buddhist courses for laypeople and young students.

Buddhism, I as a *bodhisattva* am willing to do everything, as long as it benefits all sentient beings. No matter who you are, whether a layperson or not. I am willing to do anything meaningful, and offer it to all sentient beings and future Buddha. Do you see the difference between *śrāvaka* precepts and *bodhisattva* precepts? This [cooking for laypeople] is the difference: the *śrāvaka* precept is strict [i.e., makes a strict distinction between monastics and laity]. Mahāyāna *bodhisattva* precepts treat both equally, as long as you have the *bodhi* mind that everyone is a future Buddha. That is the difference.

The example of cooking for laypeople raises an important possibility for rethinking how the *bodhisattva* ideal is put into practice. According to the 113th *pācittika* rule, “[i]f a *bhikṣuṇī* carries out orders for a lay person, she [commits] a *pācittika*” (translated in Heirman 2002: 753). A *pācittika* is a minor offence that can be dealt with by making a formal act of repentance. The Luminary nun’s comments above implicitly reveal that cooking for laypeople is not a perfect observance of the *śrāvaka* precepts. However, as she saw it, this action was compatible with *bodhisattva* practice, since it benefits others, all of whom are regarded as having the potential to become a future Buddha. The same nun also commented that no differentiation or discrimination should be made between laity and non-laity, since both are treated equally as a future Buddha in terms of *bodhisattva* practice. Her viewpoint reveals how *bodhisattva* precepts (and in particular, their starting-point of benefiting others) contribute to monastics’ openness and flexibility when dealing with various events they encounter in daily life. Meanwhile, the fact that nuns from other institutions who were studying at Luminary Nunnery temporarily found it uncomfortable serving laypeople, interpreting this as transgressing *śrāvaka* precepts, signally reminds us of another phenomenon that we cannot neglect: that monastics’ divergent attitudes and values regarding precept observance relate to individual and/or institutional conditions and contexts; the adaptability and flexibility of Buddhism; and the local level of interaction between society and laity. This being the case, the atmosphere of Luminary Nunnery generally appears to be more open and active than that of some of other nunneries in Taiwan. It regularly holds activities and courses for laypeople and young students as a means of propagating a form of Buddhism that includes close interaction with society at large. However, it remains an open question whether Luminary nuns’ flexible

views of the observance of precepts is more a cause, or a consequence, or both, of the high value they place upon the practice of the *bodhisattva* ideal for the sake of benefiting sentient beings.

From the above, it might seem that the views of my Mainland informants, or at any rate the answers they provided to me, were less sophisticated than those of their Taiwanese counterparts. Therefore it seemed worthwhile to ask explicitly about Mainland nuns' attitudes toward the act of burning the fingers or body encouraged in the *Fanwang jing*, as a means of probing deeper into the question of the contradiction between *bodhisattva* and *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* precepts. According to the 16th minor precept in *Fanwang jing*, which mentions the action of finger and body burning as an offering to the Buddha,

when you see a newly initiated bodhisattva who has come from as far away as a hundred or a thousand li [kilometres] for the Great Vehicle scriptures or Vinaya, you should, according to Buddhist doctrine, explain all of the arduous practices, such as the burning of the body, burning of the arm, and burning of the fingers. If he will not burn his body, arms, or fingers, as offerings to the Buddhas he is not a renounced bodhisattva[.]³⁸ (Muller, 2012: 349)

According to a Chongfu Si nun, Buddhist monastics “offend the precepts if they hurt themselves; but they violate *bodhisattva* precepts if they do not burn their fingers or body”. A Zizhulin nun had a similar response: “You don’t offend the precepts if you don’t burn your fingers, but if you burn your fingers you must practise the *bodhisattva* path.” These two nuns’ statements clearly suggest the existence of a paradox. Interestingly, the same Chongfu Si nun told me about her personal experience of witnessing a monk’s ascetic practice of burning his fingers over a period of years. She said he did not feel physical pain because he was separated from his body, adding that “[t]he *bodhisattva*’s state of mind transcends experiencing physical pain. Conventional explanations do not capture the *bodhisattva*’s experience – only a sage can understand this.”³⁹ This monk’s experience of painless burning, however, was not seen

³⁸ T24.n1484, p1006a17–a20.

³⁹ This monk may have achieved the status of non-self-attachment through *bodhisattva* practice. Jianguang Wang annotated the 16th minor precept in the *Fanwang jing*, to the effect that if Buddhists do not follow this burning practice, they are regarded as still having bodily attachment; but that this opinion is not the way of the *bodhisattva* (2005: 181). One who lives an ascetic life for

as an exceptional case.⁴⁰ Rather, his ascetic practice was seen as illustrative of how bodily form can be eradicated, and how there is no suffering in the state of formlessness. However, this abstract state of mind and level of religious devotion are difficult for ordinary people to comprehend, since it would be normal to feel pain if they burned their finger or arm, never mind the whole body; and as such, the Chongfu Si nun remarked, only a sage could understand the *bodhisattva* experience. As for Buddhist immolation, the Zizhulin nun offered an interesting observation: “Buddhist monastics burn their fingers with great faith and mind to substitute for people’s suffering, showing that the body is impermanent”. This suggests that this practice is a form of self-sacrifice to benefit all sentient beings. This nun’s comment on burning also corresponds to the stories of Sengyai. A monk asked Sengyai whether it was possible to substitute for sentient beings’ suffering. Sengyai replied that this was unworkable, unless their minds can substitute for others’ sufferings. The monk then asked: “*Bodhisattvas* burn themselves and sentient beings commit transgressions. Each bears their own hardship. For what reason to substitute?” Sengyai replied that it is like burning one’s fingers, thinking of it only as a wholesome way to eradicate evil (T50.n2060, p679c14–c17).

The above discussion reveals a number of facets of opinion regarding immolation in monastics’ religious faith, which is explicitly countenanced in the *Fanwang jing*. It is, however, worth mentioning in this context that the Buddhist Association of China (BAC)⁴¹ has forbidden monastic members to burn their fingers.⁴² Due to the limited scope of this study, burning acts in

years will achieve the status of not seeing him- or herself, and reduce attachment to self. One begins to see the *dharma* body when there is no appearance of form in the self (ibid: 180 n4).

⁴⁰ According to the *Xugaoseng Zhuan* 續高僧傳 (*Further Biographies of Eminent Monks*), the monk Sengyai 僧崖 (488-562 CE) was asked whether he felt pain while burning himself. He replied that pain arose from the mind, so why would his fingers suffer when the mind was not in pain? (T50.n2060, p0678c21–c23). Another monk asked Sengyai why *bodhisattvas* did not experience physical pain when they were on fire. Sengyai replied that sentient beings have forms precisely so that they may feel pain when burning (T50.n2060, p0679c11–c13).

⁴¹ The BAC, founded in 1953 as the official organisation of Buddhism in Mainland China, but suspended between 1966 and 1980, today has branches on the provincial, county and sometimes city levels. It supports Buddhist educational and research institutions, and assists local efforts to build and maintain temples and safeguard holy sites.

⁴² In Chinese history, many rulers opposed burning, probably because the masses of people who gathered to witness it were seen as a potential threat to the ruling class’s governance (Lin, 2001: 99–101). For example, the *Biqiuni zhuan* (T50.n2063, p941b13–b20) records that the nun Huiyao 慧耀 was prevented from burning her body as a worship offering by a local governor.

medieval Chinese Buddhism will not be further explored here.⁴³ On the other hand, the practice of burning scars on the scalp as a means of demonstrating one's religious faith and devotion (which is similar to the act of burning discussed above) should not be overlooked in studies of the contemporary Buddhism of Taiwan and Mainland China, whether it is actually practised or not. The ordination-ritual custom of placing incense balls on preceptees' head and burning them to make a scar⁴⁴ plays an important role in the final stage of Triple Platform Ordination in Taiwan, and has resulted in most monastics having had at least three scars on their scalps since 1953 (Jiang, 2000: 126).⁴⁵ One of my informants, who came from Hong Kong but was ordained a nun in Taiwan in 2009, described the final stage of the Triple Platform Ordination as follows:

The preceptees continued rehearsing for *bodhisattva* ordination and practised repentance ritual, to complete the third ordination on Days 40 through 51. On Day 52, the preceptees engaged in visualisations of Sakyamuni Buddha, Manjushri and Maitreya Buddha conferring *bodhisattva* precepts, gently inviting the ordinands with three *vinaya* master monks. One teacher explained to the student

Examples of Chinese monks who requested the ruler's permission to burn themselves also can be found in the *Hongzan Fahua zhuan* 弘贊法華傳 (e.g., Sengming 僧明, T51.n2067, p24b27–c13; Daodu 道度, T51.n2067, p24c14–p25a21) and in the *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (e.g., Fayu 法羽, T50.n2059, p404c11–c18) (Lin, 2001: 100–101).

⁴³ For details, see Benn (2007) and Lin (2001: 57–120). For instance, Hui Sheng Lin indicates that self-immolation has been prevalent among Buddhist monastics since the Sixth Dynasty (2001: 60). The prime examples can be found in the *Biqiuni zhuan* 比丘尼傳 (T.2063), which recounts that six nuns took their own lives by burning themselves (2001: 65–67). Additionally, the translation of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* suggests that in the Tang Dynasty, monastics worshipped Buddhist relics (*śarīra*) with the admiration and support of the Tang Emperor Xianzong (憲宗). Acts of finger- or body-burning attracted numerous Buddhists to follow suit (Lin, 2001: 90). Several monks in medieval China were also recorded as having undergone self-immolation in the *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (T.2059), *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 (T.2060) and *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 (T.2061) (ibid: 65–72).

⁴⁴ The practice of burning at ordination occurs only in Chinese Buddhism. For a detailed introduction to the custom's history and the practice in China, see Benn (1998: 303–310) and Welch (1967: 298–300).

⁴⁵ After the PRC government came to power in Mainland China in 1949, many refugee Mainland monks came to Taiwan. In 1953, the Buddhist ordination ceremony was regarded as the first postwar transmission of higher ordination by Taiwan's Buddhist Association of the Republic of China (BAROC). For details, see Jones (1999: 97–136).

preceptees why following the traditional way of personal religious practice was necessary, even though certain alternative methods are permitted when preaching Buddhism in ways appropriate to modern people's needs. It was also deemed important to follow the older generation's way of chanting Buddhist *sūtras* rather than casually amending it, because chanting to the Buddha is very solemn. In the evening there was another incense-burning ritual to worship the Buddha. Preceptors put three incense balls on preceptees' heads, burning it to make a scar, after which ritual *Parināma* was practised. The final day consisted of *bodhisattva* ordination for the preceptees, who received the precepts' substance via visualisation.

In my personal experience of living in Taiwan, authentic monastics there are recognisable by these scalp scars. Ven. Ching Hsin 淨心,⁴⁶ honorary president of the Buddhist Association of the Republic of China (Taiwan), said of this burning practice in the ordination ceremony:

There is no practice of burning scars in Mainland China because it is against government regulations. Monastic members in Theravāda Buddhism do not receive *bodhisattva* precepts so they have no burning practice. This practice of burning scars originates in *bodhisattva* precepts in the *Fanwang jing*, which asks monastic members to burn their body or arms as an offering to the Buddha while receiving Mahāyāna precepts. We, however, cannot burn our arms or bodies, so we burn three scars on the scalp to show religious determination and destroy self-attachment. Thus, the ordination hall still practices this custom for monastic members who receive *bodhisattva* precepts, for this reason[.] (Hsieh, 2005: 105)

Counterintuitively, the act of burning appears to be more important in *vinaya*-centric monasteries than in others. Yet must monastics and laypeople receive burn scars on their arms while receiving the *bodhisattva* precepts? Are there exceptions? The answers given by the *vinaya* discussion group of *Zheng jue*

⁴⁶ Ven. Ching Hsin (b. 1929) is a well-known senior monk in Taiwan, who has more than 40 years' experience of conducting the Triple Platform ordination ceremony held by the BAROC.

jing she 正覺精舍律學研討小組 imply that people should burn scars onto their arms and fingers as an offering to the Buddha in accordance with the scriptures regarding *bodhisattva* precepts. That is, if people cannot tolerate the minor pain of a burn, it is questionable that they will they will be able to practise and tolerate the hard path of the *bodhisattva* (Luxue shiyi, 2008: 397).

The ordination custom of putting incense balls or *moxa* on a preceptee's head for the purpose of scarification was officially abolished in the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1983, by the Second Conference of the Fourth Standing Council of the BAC 中國佛教協會第四屆理事會第二次會議. This ban had two grounds: (1) that it was not an original Indian Buddhist ritual, and (2) that it impairs monastics' physical health (Fayin zazhi, 1984: 5–6).⁴⁷ The BAC's decision, however, may have had a political subtext, insofar as the PRC government directly controls all decisions or policies made by the BAC.⁴⁸ The PRC government announced that this ritual custom was 'illegal' and rejected 'any form of self-mortification (Bianchi, 2001: 94). Bianchi's fieldwork data confirmed that *moxa* was not performed in Mainland monasteries (2001: 94), and my fieldwork observations resonate with hers: i.e., most nuns I met or interviewed in the PRC do not have scalp scars, with some citing a preference for expressing their religious devotions in private.⁴⁹ One senior nun stressed that current religious regulations regarding ordination are more detailed and standardised (than they were in the past); and in combination with reasonable fears about ordinands' physical safety, this has made the ritual custom of burning scalp scars at ordination ceremonies effectively impossible. However, one of my Mainland informants shared different information: i.e., that the custom of burning scalp

⁴⁷ "Decision Concerning the Tonsure and Ordination Problems in Monasteries of Han People's Buddhism" 關於漢族佛教寺廟剃度傳戒問題的決議. The ninth article of Chapter 1 of the Procedures for the Management and Administration of Three Platform Monastic Ordination in Chinese Buddhist Temples Nationwide 全國漢傳佛教寺院傳授三壇大戒管理辦法, as revised and approved by the BAC, required that "The ordination ritual custom of putting incense balls on preceptees' heads and burning it to make a scar shall be abolished." See also the website of the PRC's State Administration for Religions Affairs.

⁴⁸ For example, the PRC government has the power to decide "which monasteries should be reopened, how many monks and nuns should be recruited, and which monks and nuns should be restored to leadership positions. None of these key matters were decided democratically by the Buddhist populations" (Qin, 2000: 238).

⁴⁹ According to Amandine Péronnet's fieldwork observations in Pushou Si, many nuns there had the scalp scars. The guest prefect (*Zhike* 知客) of the same nunnery had nine scalp scars when I met her.

scars was held at the end of Triple Platform ordination in Baochan Si 褒禪寺 in 2016. This was not a compulsory option, but decided upon by each preceptee. In the same vein, one teacher nun from another nunnery also told me that the ordination hall could help fulfil the wishes of those preceptees who wanted scalp scars. From the diverse opinions I collected, the extent of the practical effect of official abolition of this ritual custom is questionable.

To sum up, while Mainland China and Taiwan both share similar contexts of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism, one key difference – the burning of scalp scars in ordination ceremonies – reminds us that we cannot ignore the ways in which various regions' politics and government policies exert important influences on Buddhist religious practices. Even more significantly, the *bodhisattva* ideal/path itself appears to be developing differently in these two regions, as will be discussed in detail below.

2.2 Socially Engaged Practitioners of the *Bodhisattva* Path

In the previous sections, I have attempted to capture contemporary Mainland Chinese and Taiwanese nuns' perceptions of abstract issues: the sometimes contradictory relationship between *vinaya* rules, on the one hand, and on the other, the *bodhisattva* precepts and the *bodhisattva* ideal of benefiting others. In this section, I will focus on nuns' practical experience of socially engaged practice in both regions, with special attention to cross-Straits differences in the manifestations of such practice arising from differences in their historical and political development and current socio-economic situations. I shall thus discuss the nuanced differences in how monastics in these two states engage in social work and religious life.

Ching-chy Huang has suggested that Humanistic Buddhism (*renjian fojiao* 人間佛教)⁵⁰ in Taiwan represents the modern promulgation and development of the Mahāyāna *bodhisattva* path, citing Ven. Taixu, Yinshun, Hsing Yun and Sheng Yen's viewpoints on the *bodhisattva* precepts, which have become greatly valued in Humanistic Buddhism (2006: 113–127). In practice, the nuns from DDM, Luminary Nunnery, Foguangshan and other institutions whom I

⁵⁰ Some leading contemporary masters in Taiwan – such as the late Sheng Yen (Fagushan) and Hsing Yun (Foguangshan) – have advocated Humanistic Buddhism through various objectives and activities, including monastic and secular education, welfare work and environmental protection. For overviews and discussions of Humanistic Buddhism, see especially Long (2000: 53–84) and Pittman (2001).

met during my fieldwork have engaged in a variety of forms of public service: some have preached Buddhist Dharma to laypeople; some have been engaged in education, running Buddhist monastic colleges and presses or teaching in universities; some have devoted their time to philanthropic activities; and some have worked in palliative care in hospitals, hospices, and so on. These Taiwanese nuns' commitment to serving society, with the wider aim of liberating and benefiting all sentient beings, undoubtedly embodies the spirit of Humanistic Buddhism in Taiwan.⁵¹

In sharp contrast to this, my fieldwork observations in Mainland China indicated that some nuns focused mainly on individual spiritual cultivation in their own rooms,⁵² and/or on their teaching inside Buddhist colleges, and seldom left their nunneries to make contact with people in the local community, except as part of a monastic travel group. The main exceptions to this pattern of behaviour were high-ranking administrative nuns or famous nuns.⁵³ In other words, the influence of Humanistic Buddhism – so strong in Taiwan – appears to be quite weak there. Raoul Birnbaum points out that monks in Nanputuo Monastery 南普陀 (whose former abbot, Taixu, was a founding figure of Humanistic Buddhism) and *Shishi chanyuan* 石室禪院 have engaged in charity work for the elderly, ill and infirm, as well as in children's education (2003: 444); but while these two Chinese monasteries are currently serving their community, “reflect[ing] a modernist understanding of the process necessary to establish a pure land in the human realm,” this is “an exception to the general conservative trend”

⁵¹ While DeVido notes that many Buddhist organisations and individual monastics in Taiwan contribute to the promulgation of Humanistic Buddhism (2010: 93), this socially-engaged work appears to inevitably affect monastic members religious practice. For example, Stuart Chandler points out that some monks and nuns decided to leave Foguangshan order and join other monasteries since the Humanistic Buddhism has diverted themselves from their personal spiritual cultivation (2004: 209).

⁵² Some of my Mainland informant nuns also specifically confirmed my general observations regarding their religious schedule and practice. It is, however, worth noting that some nuns in Taiwan before the end of the War of Resistance Against Japan also engaged in similar religious cultivation via chanting and ritual – until the arrival of Mainland Chinese monks, who taught the nuns Buddhist *dharma* and education (Shih Heng-Ching, 1995: 174-177).

⁵³ The nunneries I visited, however, are not representative of all Buddhist institutions in Mainland China and Taiwan, since the fieldwork results may be affected by the selection process, and by the fact that researchers are not admitted by a number of them. As such, findings about the socially engaged practitioners of the *bodhisattva* path in Chinese Buddhist institutions at different institutional or school types (e.g., pure land, Chan, *Vinaya* schools, and so on) and/or in different regions will inevitably vary. Other researchers should bear this in mind when evaluating their own fieldwork data.

(Chandler, 2006: 192). Unlike those in the two above-mentioned monasteries, the majority of current monastics in Mainland China hold a “consciousness-only pure land” view, with a traditional focus on *sūtra* reading rather than on the translation of *renjian fojiao* into social action that was remarked upon by Chandler (ibid). Wen-jie Qin’s findings likewise resonate with Chandler’s:

The social movement inspired by these contemporary teachings [i.e., Humanistic Buddhism] is taking place mostly in Taiwan and the overseas Chinese Buddhist communities. In Mainland China, due to the political restraints on religion, this notion has so far remained largely a guide for meditation rather than for social campaigns (2000: 405).

In other words, the PRC’s government appears to be the key obstacle to the emergence of Buddhist social services there. Similarly, recent research on Buddhist charities in contemporary Mainland China by Zhe Ji and André Laliberté more or less echoes Qin’s above-quoted remarks. On the one hand, the PRC government has allowed, and even encouraged, certain Buddhist institutions to become involved with some philanthropic activities and social services.⁵⁴ However, these religious groups still lack autonomy, as political restraints on religion still exist in Mainland China today. Laliberté nevertheless comments optimistically on the charitable works engaged in by some Mainland Buddhist institutions that Laliberté deems a “new development” in China (2012: 113). On the other, Ji calls these philanthropic services “mere monetary donations” rather than direct assistance to people (2013: 20). In short, no Buddhist charitable activities in Mainland China can escape governmental surveillance, to the point that “Chinese Buddhism not only cannot function as a source of civil religion, but actually becomes a conservative force in politics” (Ji, 2013: 21). My fieldwork data resonate somewhat with Ji’s comments on monetary donations. Some of my Mainland Chinese informants told me about their charity work during discussions focused on the issue of whether it is acceptable for monastics to touch money.⁵⁵ Just like their counterparts in Luminary nunnery, many were said to spend their money helping people, (re)printing Buddhist books and *sūtras* to aid the spread of Buddhism,

⁵⁴ For a detailed discussion of recent Buddhist charities in Mainland China, see Laliberté (2012: 101-112).

⁵⁵ For detailed discussion of money-handling precept, see Chiu (2014: 9–56).

and supporting Buddhist education projects (Wu Yin, 2001: 237). While Mainland China does not frown upon charitable activities, potential monastic philanthropists there may nevertheless encounter restrictions -- notably, that they keep such activities within their own monasteries. In other words, it is not possible for them to provide help in public places such as hospitals or accident sites, due to various civil regulations and restrictions. Monetary donations thus appear to be an important, yet safe and uncontroversial, way for them to engage in charity work.⁵⁶ From the above, we can see that the sociopolitical context of Mainland China is not an entirely free or open environment for monastic members' development of relevant charitable work in public. This factor would tend inevitably to influence the mode of practising the *bodhisattva* path in the contexts of Mainland Mahāyāna Buddhism.

It is clear that monastics' socially engaged practices are manifested differently in Taiwan and Mainland China, and that this may be partly due to the closed nature of the Mainland Chinese political system, especially as regards religion. Moreover, monastic practitioners' perceptions of the applicability of the *bodhisattva* ideal in Mainland China should not be dealt with out of context, but seen as closely related to that country's socio-political development and present-day conditions. It would seem that a variety of factors, also including differential levels of Humanistic Buddhism's popularity and sociopolitical contexts have influenced these two regions' divergent modes of practising the *bodhisattva* precepts and path. Certainly it would be inaccurate to assert that all Chinese Buddhist monastics in Taiwan and Mainland China practise the *bodhisattva* path similarly.

3. Conclusions

Since the medieval period, the steady development of *bodhisattva* ideas has seen them emerge as key characteristics of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism. My fieldwork data reveal a strong general consensus among my informant nuns in Taiwan and Mainland China regarding the nature of the *bodhisattva* precepts and ideal, but sharp differences in the details of such views. These findings can be summarised as follows. First, most of the respondents in both regions regarded *bodhisattva* precepts as more advanced and/or difficult to follow than

⁵⁶My fieldwork observations correspond closely to those of Amandine Péronnet, to whom I am grateful for sharing her insights.

vinaya rules, since the former must be policed within the mind rather than in the sphere of external behaviour. Second, while Taiwan and Mainland China share similar traditions of Mahāyāna Buddhism, Buddhist practices connected to the *bodhisattva* precepts and ideal are manifested differently across the Straits. For example, the practice of burning an incense ball on a preceptee's head during the ordination ceremony has customarily been performed in Taiwan for the past half century, but was officially abolished in Mainland China in 1983. Also, owing partly to the divergent historico-political development and distinct socio-economic situations of these two regions, the various Buddhist institutions I visited in Mainland China and Taiwan as part of the present research differed markedly in the amount of socially engaged work they performed for the sake of *bodhisattva* practice. Finally, a comparison of the rhetoric used by my Taiwanese and Mainland interviewees revealed nuanced but important differences in their analyses of and feelings about conflicts or tensions between *bodhisattva* precepts and *vinaya* rules. Specifically, the Mainland nuns tended to speak of these two sets of precepts as fundamentally consistent, albeit perhaps defensively; whereas two of the Taiwanese nuns referred explicitly to mismatches between them.

To sum up, while Taiwanese nuns' and Chinese nuns' religious practices differ to a perhaps unexpected extent, nearly all of my informants shared a broadly similar way of reciting *bhikṣuṇī* precepts and *bodhisattva* precepts at their *poṣadha* ceremonies. In any case, the rich and complex relationship between *vinaya* rules and *bodhisattva* precepts is a conspicuous feature of monastic practice in contemporary Chinese Buddhism and is ripe for further investigation.

Abbreviations

- T. *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經. 100 vols., edited by Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭. Tōkyō: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–1934.
- X. *Shinsan dainihon zokuzōkyō* 新纂大日本續藏經. 90 vols., edited by Kawamura Kōshō 河村孝照. Tōkyō: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1975–1989.

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Abolish Buddhism and Destroy Shakyamuni!

Brian Victoria

Preface

This is the second part of an article concerning the ethical and doctrinal changes to Japanese Buddhism that occurred as a result of its centuries-long, syncretistic connection to the indigenous religion of Shintō. The first part of this article, entitled “Counting the Cost of Buddhist Syncretism”, may be read here: <http://www.jocbs.org/index.php/jocbs/article/view/186>. While reading the first article is not required, its contents will nevertheless provide a helpful context for the events described in this article.

Introduction

The greatest danger Buddhism, regardless of sect, ever faced in its 1,500 year old history in Japan occurred in the beginning years of the Meiji period (1868-1912). It was then that outside forces attempted to destroy Buddhism, both ideologically and physically, in a movement known as “abolish Buddhism and destroy Shakyamuni” (J. *haibutsu kishaku*). This movement resulted in the destruction of tens of thousands of Buddhist temples throughout the country together with their statuary, the forced laicization of large numbers of Buddhist priests and widespread attacks on Buddhist doctrine and praxis, among other repressive measures. In short, Buddhism was attacked as a superstitious, *foreign* religion that had no place in a Japan modernizing at breakneck speed.



Image 1: Headless stone Buddha Statues in Kawasaki city, Kanagawa Prefecture



Image 2: Broken Buddha Statue

At the same time, in order to unite what had previously been a loose federation of semi-autonomous units (*J. kuni*), suspicious of central authority, into a modern, centralized state, Meiji political leaders strongly supported a Shintō revival, for they felt Shintō could be used as the spiritual axis around which to build a modern, united nation. They sought to turn the throne into a sacred object based on the emperor's divinity, a divinity acquired by his mythological descent from the Sun Goddess Amaterasu. The government also took control of shrine finances and the training of Shintō priests in order to promote this indigenous, animistic faith. This control was exercised through a newly created entity called "State Shintō" (*J. kokka Shintō*), which became the vehicle used to promote national unity and absolute obedience to the emperor's dictates. As an essentially political, not religious, construct, State Shintō was never designated as a "state religion" (as is widely but mistakenly assumed), though its emperor-centric rituals certainly had religious overtones. It would remain in place until Japan's defeat in August 1945.

Unsurprisingly, at the time of the Meiji Restoration, Shintōists enthusiastically welcomed the opportunity the new central government provided to free themselves from over a thousand years of Buddhist control. No longer was Shintō placed in a subservient position, one in which Shintōists were relegated to the role of protecting the Buddhist faith, all the while remaining under the control of various Buddhist sects. At long last, Shintō could be independent, though the cost of this independence was the requirement that Shintō leaders conform to government dictates. For example, Shintō priests were henceforth appointed by the state as government officials rather than acquiring their status through hereditary succession.

As Japan expanded and became an empire in the 1900s, Shintō also became an important ideological support mechanism used to justify Japanese expansion. This may be considered the Achilles heel of not just Shintō but all animistic faiths, for they are easily captured by the tribal or ethnic *Zeitgeist* of a nation, especially in wartime. Thus, Shintō leaders readily supported the policies of their ethnic political leaders, no matter how aggressive those policies were. With Shintō's support, the Japanese people were taught to regard Japan as a divine land, protected by divinities (*kami*) and ruled over by a divine emperor, himself the alleged descendant of the Sun goddess.

Buddhism's reaction to the attacks against it was both dramatic and far-reaching. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that in the long run Buddhism was substantially weakened, an effect lasting even to the present day. This is the story of what happened and why.

The Background

Buddhism was formally introduced to Japan from Korea in the middle of the sixth century. By the Tokugawa era (1600-1867) Buddhism had, outwardly at least, reached the pinnacle of power, functioning as a *de facto* state religion. This meant that each and every household in the country was *forced* to affiliate itself with one or another nearby Buddhist temple. The result was an explosive growth in the number of Buddhist temples, from only 13,037 temples during the Kamakura period (1185-1333) to 469,934 during the Tokugawa, each entitled to a government stipend.¹ Outwardly, Buddhism appeared to be flourishing as never before.

There were, however, a number of hidden costs associated with Buddhism's effective establishment as a state religion. First, mandatory temple affiliation turned a large part of the Buddhist clergy into little more than government functionaries at the village level. Concurrently, membership in a particular sect often became less a matter of religious conviction than political expediency or, simply, geographic location.

These developments are hardly surprising since the catalyst for according Buddhism a privileged position at the beginning of the Tokugawa era was the military government's determination to expel Christianity, something they believed would reduce the danger of Japan being colonized by one of the Western powers. Though not by its choosing, Buddhism thus became a mechanism to enforce religious intolerance. At the same time, the regime wished to insure that indigenous religious institutions, like all other institutions in society, were firmly under its control.

The Tokugawa government exerted control over institutional Buddhism through such policies as dividing the powerful Shin (True Pure Land) sect into two branches, popularly known as the Nishi (West) Honganji and Higashi (East) Honganji after their respective head temples in Kyoto. The government further made sure that every temple in the land, no matter how humble, was made subservient to a higher grade temple in pyramidal fashion, with an all-powerful central temple (*honzan*) controlling each sect at the top. While sectarian differences were tolerated, the central temple of each sect was made responsible, and held accountable, for the actions of its subordinate temples and affiliated clerics.

¹ See Kitagawa. *Religion in Japanese History*, p. 164.

A second, and perhaps more severe, hidden cost to institutional Buddhism was what Robert Bellah described as the “general lethargy and uncreativity of Buddhism in the Tokugawa period.”² Anesaki Masaharu was even less flattering when he wrote: “The majority of the Buddhist clergy were obedient servants of the Government, and in the long period of peace they gradually became lazy, or else effeminate intriguers.”³

There were, of course, some clergy, typically living in richly endowed temples, who devoted themselves to learning. There were also reformers and innovators who attempted with some success to revitalize their respective sects. Yet many if not most others took advantage of their prerogatives as agents of the government to suppress or economically exploit their helpless parishioners. Joseph Kitagawa notes, somewhat ominously, that “the moral and spiritual bankruptcy of established Buddhism inevitably brought criticism and rebellion from within and without.”⁴ It was all but inevitable that institutional Buddhism, regardless of sect, would face a day of reckoning.

Government Measures directed towards Buddhism

On January 3, 1868 the young Emperor Meiji issued a proclamation announcing that he was resuming the reins of government although, initially at least, only very limited power had been restored to the throne. Nevertheless, a scant three months later, on April 6, 1868, the Emperor promulgated the Charter Oath, a document consisting of five articles which clearly expressed the anti-feudal aspirations of the new government.

The Charter Oath stated:

1. Councils widely convoked shall be established, and all affairs of State decided by public discussion.
2. All measures, governmental and social, shall be conducted by the united efforts of the governing and the governed.
3. The unity of the Imperial and the feudal governments shall be achieved; all the people, even the meanest, shall be given full opportunities for their aspirations and activities.

² Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion*, p. 51.

³ Anesaki, *History of Japanese Religion*, p. 260.

⁴ Kitagawa, *Religion in Japanese History*, p. 166.

4. All absurd usages of the old regime shall be abolished and all measures conducted in conformity with the righteous way of heaven and earth.
5. Knowledge shall be sought for all over the world, and thus shall be promoted the imperial polity [i.e. state structure].⁵

Though the preceding seems, as far as Buddhism is concerned, to be innocuous in its content, Article 4 was a harbinger of the impending storm. What, exactly, were “all absurd usages of the old regime” that were to be “abolished”?

As far as Buddhism was concerned, part of the answer had already been made known, for a few days earlier, i.e. on March 28, 1868, the first of the “Separation Edicts” (*Shinbutsu Hanzen-rei*), designed to divorce Buddhism from Shintō, had been issued by a newly established governmental bureau known as the Office of Rites (*Jingi-kyoku*). The initial edict stated that all Buddhist clerics of any type were to be removed from Shintō shrines throughout the nation. Henceforth, only *bona fide* Shintō priests were to be allowed to carry out administrative and religious duties at shrines.

In a second edict, issued less than two weeks later, the use of Buddhist names for Shintō deities (*kami*) was prohibited. Not only that, Buddhist statuary could no longer be used to represent Shintō deities, or, for that matter, even be present in a shrine compound. Whatever the authors’ original intent may have been, these edicts were often interpreted at the local and regional levels as meaning that anything having to do with Buddhism could and should be destroyed.

In his excellent book on this period, *Of Heretics And Martyrs In Meiji Japan*, James Ketelaar points out that these separation edicts “necessarily included as an integral part of their formulation a direct attack on Buddhism.”⁶ This is because, first of all, nearly every member of the Office of Rites was an active proponent of “National Learning” (*Kokugaku*). This Shintō-dominated school of thought taught that while both the Japanese nation and throne were of divine origin, their origin had been obscured and sullied by foreign accretions and influences, especially those coming from China, let alone India. Adherents of this school believed one of the first and most important jobs of the new government was to cleanse the nation of these foreign accretions, Buddhism first and foremost.

⁵ Quoted in Anesaki, *History of Japanese Religion*, p. 331.

⁶ Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*, p. 9.

Closely associated with the National Learning school, at least in terms of its disdain for Buddhism, was the “Mito school” (*Mitogaku*). The origins of this school, located in the Mito domain north of Tokyo, lay in Neo-Confucianism, the political ideology adopted by the Tokugawa Shogunate. Like its Chinese counterpart, Neo-Confucianists were strongly opposed to Buddhism even though Neo-Confucian metaphysics had, in large part, been derived from that of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Nevertheless, and like their Confucian predecessors, Neo-Confucianists charged that Buddhism was nothing more than superstitious mumbo-jumbo, with its non-productive clergy little more than social parasites.

In Japan, the advocates of the Mito school advocated isolationism, nativism, and reverence of the emperor even as, at the end of the Tokugawa era, they sought to prevent the steadily weakening Shogunate from being overthrown. However, unlike the advocates of National Learning, adherents of the Mito school did not reject Chinese learning in its entirety, only Buddhism. The result was the closing of over 40,000 temples nationally, coupled with the destruction of countless temple artifacts and the forced laicization of thousands of priests.⁷ Once again, it should be noted that the enforcement (and interpretation) of the Separation Edicts was, in general, left to the regional authorities. Hence, those areas where there was the greatest support for National Learning among local and regional officialdom were also those areas where the greatest destruction occurred.

⁷ Ibid., p. 7.



Image 3: Destroyed 1870_dug up 1935



Image 4: Namu Amida Butsu

For example, in the former Satsuma domain (present-day Kagoshima, southern Miyazaki, and Okinawa prefectures), whose leaders played a leading role in the Meiji Restoration, Buddhism had almost completely disappeared by the end of 1869. That is to say, approximately 4,500 Buddhist temples and halls were destroyed.⁸ The priests housed in these temples were returned to lay life, with (former) priests between the ages of eighteen to forty-five immediately drafted into the newly formed Imperial Army. Those over forty-five were sent to become teachers in domainal schools while those under eighteen were sent back to their families.

Institutional Buddhism's Response

In the face of these very real threats to its continued existence, it did not take long for some elements of institutional Buddhism to initiate a series of countermeasures. One of the first of these was undertaken primarily by the Higashi Honganji and Nishi Honganji branches of the Shin (True Pure Land) sect. On the surface, at least, it was a rather surprising measure: lending substantial amounts of money to the then cash-starved Meiji government. In effect, these two branches sought to bribe the government into ameliorating its policies of repressive rulings and restrictions.

The same two branches also took the lead in the summer of 1868 in forming the Alliance of United [Buddhist] Sects for Ethical Standards (*Shoshū Dōtoku Kaimei*). This was an unprecedented action for institutional Buddhism since under the previous Tokugawa regime all Buddhist trans-sectarian organizations had been banned. The new organization pledged itself, first of all, to work for the unity of *Rājā Dharma* (Law of the Sovereign) and *Buddha Dharma* (Law of the Buddha). Secondly, it called for Christianity to be not only denounced but prevented from reentering Japan as the Western powers were demanding.

Buddhist leaders were quick to realize that the best hope of reviving their faith was to align themselves with the increasingly nationalistic sentiment of the times. They concluded that one way of demonstrating their usefulness to Japan's new nationalistic leaders was to support an anti-Christian campaign which came to be known as *haja kenshō* (i.e. refuting evil [Christianity] and exalting righteousness).

As early as September 17, 1868 the new Ministry of State responded to the

⁸ Ibid., p. 65.

above noted “positive actions” on the part of Buddhist leaders by sending a private communique directly to the leaders of the Higashi Honganji and Nishi Honganji branches of the Shin sect. This letter contained a condemnation of those members of the Imperial court who wrongfully, and in contradiction to Emperor Meiji’s will, were persecuting Buddhism. The letter further noted, that in so doing, these “foul-mouthed rebels . . . antagonize the general populace.”⁹ Nevertheless, repression of Buddhism continued in the countryside.

Just how antagonized the general populace became is shown by the strong protest actions that arose in opposition to the continuing repressive, anti-Buddhist measures undertaken by local authorities. These protests started in Toyama region in late 1870 and were followed by two riots in Mikawa (present-day Aichi prefecture) and Ise (present-day Mie prefecture) in 1871. In each of the following two years there were also two major protests in widely scattered parts of the country.

The 1873 peasant protests in three counties of Echizen (present-day Fukui prefecture) were so large they had to be put down by government troops, the lower ranks of which were composed of peasant youth. It can be argued that it was the central government’s fear of these protests, possibly from among the troops themselves, which finally forced it to pay serious attention to the plight of the Buddhists. The government reached the conclusion that the suppression of Buddhism by local authorities could not be allowed to continue. Something had to be done.

Note, however, that the cause of the peasant uprisings did not lie in the laity rising up to protect the “Buddha Dharma” in the abstract. Instead, it was about protecting the spirits of generations of the laity’s ancestors, whose cremated remains were, in part, enshrined in charnel houses (*nōkotsudō*) on the temples’ precincts and/or in temple cemeteries. Thus, the peasant uprisings were concerned with the continuation of ancestor veneration rituals, one of the main services Buddhist clergy provided for the laity. These rituals, meant to console the spirits of dead ancestors, were too deeply engrained in the laity to be erased, especially as there was, at the time, nothing similar in Shintō. Shintō had long regarded death as a form of both physical and spiritual pollution, thus providing Buddhism, with its ancestor-veneration rituals, the opportunity to take root in Japan among the populace.

⁹ Ibid., p. 13.

Resolution of the Conflict

The first nation-wide change in the Meiji government's policy toward Buddhism came in early 1872. It was at this time that what was then known as the Ministry of Rites (*Jingi-kan*) was transformed into the Ministry of Doctrine (*Kyōbushō*). This new ministry was given administrative responsibility for such things as the building or closing of both Shintō shrines and Buddhist temples, the approval of all priestly ranks and privileges, etc. However, by far its most important function was to propagate the “Great Teaching” (*Daikyō*) which had been developed the previous year. The three pillars of this teaching were as follows:

1. The principles of reverence for the (national) Deities and of patriotism shall be observed.
2. The heavenly Reason and the Way of Humanity shall be promulgated.
3. The Throne shall be revered and the authorities obeyed.¹⁰

Charged with promulgating these principles, the Ministry of Doctrine created the position of Doctrinal Instructors (*Kyōdō-shoku*). These instructors were to operate through a nation-wide network of Teaching Academies (*Kyōin*) which would be established in both Buddhist temples and Shintō shrines. The significance to Buddhism of this development is that for the first time Buddhist priests were given permission to serve in a state-sponsored institution, together, of course, with Shintō priests and scholars of National Learning.

By establishing the position of Doctrinal Instructor, the state was in effect creating a *de facto* state priesthood. Anyone outside of this system, that is to say, anyone uncertified by the state, was barred from either lecturing in public or performing ceremonial duties. They were also prohibited from residing in either shrines or temples. Nevertheless, Buddhists saw this as a way to escape from their ongoing oppression and eagerly took advantage of this new opportunity.

How successful Buddhists were in taking advantage of this opportunity can be seen from the fact that eventually more than 81,000 out of a total of some 103,000 officially recognized Doctrinal Instructors were Buddhist priests. Of this number, Shin-sect affiliated priests numbered nearly 25,000 and were the largest single group.¹¹

¹⁰ Quoted in Anesaki, *History of Japanese Religion*, p. 335.

¹¹ See Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*, p. 105.

Inclusion into a new state religion, however, carried a heavy price for Buddhists, for it was clearly Shintō-inspired and controlled. Thus all Doctrinal Instructors were expected to wear Shintō robes, recite Shintō prayers, and perform Shintō rituals. Further, although the Ministry of Doctrine selected the famous Pure Land sect temple of Zōjōji in Tokyo as the administrative center, i.e. the Great Teaching Academy, for the national doctrine system, the Ministry demanded that the temple be extensively renovated for its new role.

Zōjōji's 'renovation' included replacing the statue of Buddha Amitābha (J. Amida) on the main altar with four Shintō deities (*kami*) and building a Shintō gate (*torii*) at the entrance to the temple. The Buddhist leadership of this sect was so anxious to support the new scheme that they even arranged to have their subordinate temples pay the renovation costs. Yet despite this seemingly cooperative beginning, conflict inevitably occurred between Buddhist and Shintō elements within the national doctrine system. Thus, as the anti-Buddhist movement began to subside, the Buddhist leaders sought to free themselves from Shintō domination.

An additional cause of friction was an announcement made on April 25, 1872 by the Ministry of State. This announcement, known as Order No. 133, stated that Buddhist priests could, if they wished, eat meat, get married, grow their hair long, and wear ordinary clothing. Although this decision neither prohibited anything nor ordered anything, it was seen by many Buddhist leaders as yet another attack on Buddhism. In their minds, Order No. 133 represented a further extension of the earlier separation of Shintō and Buddhism. That is to say, it represented the separation of Buddhism from the state itself. Buddhism would now have to fend for itself, no longer being of any concern to the state.

While it might be thought that this new found "freedom" from state control would have been welcomed by Buddhist leaders, such was not the case. On the contrary, strong Buddhist opposition to this measure took the form of numerous sectarian protest meetings and petitions criticizing the Ministry's decision, at least one of which was signed by over two hundred Buddhist priests. Some angry priests even went directly to the Ministry's offices to express their opposition. The irony of these actions is that Order No. 133 was one directive that had been taken at the request of a Buddhist, i.e. the influential Sōtō Zen sect priest Ōtori Sessō (1814-1904).

Ōtori was in a unique position to make his views known since, at the time the new Ministry of Doctrine was created, he had been asked to serve as a representative of Buddhist clerics (though he himself was required to return

to lay life during the duration of his government service). Ōtori's overall goal was ending the government's anti-Buddhist policies, and like his Buddhist contemporaries he believed the best way of achieving this goal was to demonstrate once again how useful Buddhism could be to the state, this time through promulgation of the Great Teaching.

Ōtori recognized that despite government regulations during the Tokugawa era forbidding clerical marriage, many Buddhist priests in the countryside had common law wives and were therefore, technically at least, criminals. This meant these priests were in no position either to become Doctrinal Instructors or effectively to fight Christianity. In Ōtori's mind, by lifting the government's ban on clerical marriage, etc., Buddhist clergy would be enabled to render more effective service to the nation. Despite many protests from sectarian leaders, Ōtori's reform effort was ultimately successful, and the new law remained. However, this effectively spelled the end of any traditional Buddhist precepts which the clergy were expected to follow.

In light of their defeat, Buddhist leaders came to realize that they not only had to free themselves from Shintō control but government control as well. Once again, the Shin sect played a leading role. It was leaders of this sect, particularly in the person of Shimaji Mokurai (1838-1911), who led the movement for change. Mokurai was particularly well suited to the challenge, not least because he had personally led troops in support of the Meiji Restoration.

As early as 1872, Shimaji wrote an essay while studying in Paris critical of the three principles contained in the Great Teaching. His basic position was that there was a fundamental difference between politics (*sei*) and religion (*kyō*). Accordingly, his essay called for the separation of the two (*seikyō bunri*). While it took some years for Shimaji and those who agreed with him to have a discernable impact on the Ministry of Doctrine, eventually, at the beginning of 1875, the government gave the two Shin branches permission to leave the Great Doctrine movement, and shortly afterwards the entire institution of the Great Doctrine was abolished. A new solution had to be found.

The Buddhists were not the only religious group to benefit from changing government policy. In 1871 a diplomatic mission sent to the West, headed by Senior Minister Iwakura Tomomi (1825-83), had recommended that if Japan were to successfully revise what it regarded as unequal treaties with the Western powers, it would have to adopt a policy of religious freedom.

The Western powers were, as far as religion was concerned, dedicated to ending the ongoing prohibition of Christianity in Japan. As a result, in 1873 the

government reluctantly agreed to abolish this prohibition, a decision which led to a rapid increase in the numbers of Western Christian missions and missionaries entering the country. However, even as they continued their own struggle to free themselves from government control, many Buddhist leaders took this occasion to renew and deepen their earlier attacks on Christianity. The irony was that in doing so, they allied themselves with their previous detractors, i.e. Shintō, Neo-Confucian and other nationalist leaders.

Shintōists, too, were undergoing changes at this time. Shintō's strongest supporters, the proponents of National Learning, had demonstrated to Meiji political leaders that they were "too religious to rule".¹² This in turn led to a reduction in their political power as evidenced by the 1872 changes in the government's religious policy toward Buddhism. Yet key members of the government were still dedicated to the proposition that one way or another the emperor system, as an "immanent theocracy" with roots in the ancient state, should be used to legitimate the new government. The question was, in the face of earlier failures, how could this be accomplished?

Part of the answer came in 1882 when the government 'divided' Shintō into two parts, one part consisting of cultic (emperor-related) practices and the other so-called "religious" practices. While the religious side of Shintō, i.e. Sect Shintō (*Kyōha Shintō*), received nothing from the government, the cultic side of Shintō, i.e. "State Shintō," received both financial subsidies and various other governmental privileges.

The government maintained this policy was justified because cultic practices relating to the emperor were patriotic in nature, not religious. Even today there are Japanese Buddhist scholars who continue to support this position. Professor Shibata Dōken of Sōtō Zen sect-affiliated Komazawa University, for example, maintains that "given the fact that Japan is a country consisting of a unitary people, with shared customs and mores, the assertion that [State] Shintō was not a religion can be sanctioned, at least to some degree."¹³

Other contemporary scholars of that era, however, hold a differing view. Joseph Kitagawa, for example, maintains that "'State Shintō' was essentially a newly concocted religion of ethnocentric nationalism."¹⁴ In a similar vein, Helen Hardacre provides a more detailed description, writing:

¹² Ibid., p. 130.

¹³ Shibata, *Haiibutsu Kishaku*, p. 195.

¹⁴ Kitagawa, *Religion in Japanese History*, p. 213.

State Shintō [was] a systemic phenomenon that encompassed government support of and regulation of shrines, the emperor's sacerdotal roles, state creation and sponsorship of Shintō rites, construction of Shintō shrines in Japan and in overseas colonies, education for schoolchildren in Shintō mythology plus their compulsory participation in Shintō rituals, and persecution of other religious groups on the grounds of their exhibiting disrespect for some aspect of authorized mythology.¹⁵

Ironically, the creation of State Shintō actually served as a mechanism to facilitate the government's recognition, or at least toleration, of a certain degree of religious plurality within Japanese society. With a powerful, ostensibly *non-religious* legitimization of the new order in hand, the leaders of the Meiji government could finally address the question of religious freedom, something that was implicit in the call by Shimaji and others for the separation of government and religion.

The final, formal resolution of the religious question appeared in the Meiji Constitution of 1889. Chapter Two, Article Twenty-eight, reads as follows: "Japanese subjects shall, within limits not prejudicial to peace and order, and not antagonistic to their duties as subjects, enjoy freedom of religious belief."¹⁶ It appears that within limits, not only Buddhism but Christianity and other religions would now be free of government interference or suppression. For Buddhists, the long, dark night of its first major suppression in Japanese history appeared to have come to an end. Appearances, however, were to prove deceiving.

Ongoing Effects

In reality, the Meiji government granted only a nominal guarantee of religious freedom. "State Shintō," the government's non-religious artificial construct, was purposely and deliberately designed as a cult of national morality and patriotism. As such, it was held to be applicable to all religions. The Meiji government's policy was, in fact, "nothing but an ingenious (and dangerous) attempt at superimposing 'immanent theocracy' on the constitutional guarantees of religious freedom."¹⁷

¹⁵ Hardacre, *Shintō and the State, 1868-1988*, p. 6.

¹⁶ Quoted in Matsunami, *The Constitution of Japan*, p. 136.

¹⁷ Kitagawa, *Religion in Japanese History*, p. 213.

There were still many influential people both within and without the government who remained highly suspicious if not directly opposed to religion in any form, Buddhism included. Representative of these was Inoue Tetsujirō (1855-1944), an influential professor at Tokyo University. In his opinion, religion was by its very nature “prejudicial to peace and order”, and, furthermore, those who practised it could not escape being “antagonistic to their duties as subjects”.¹⁸ Inoue’s opinions are significant in that the Meiji government looked to him for the philosophical groundwork of its 1890 “Imperial Rescript on Education” (*Kyōiku Chokugo*). This key document proclaimed loyalty to the Throne and filial piety to be the cardinal virtues to which all Imperial subjects should adhere.

It was under these circumstances that Japanese Buddhists, with their newly won yet limited religious freedom, attempted to develop what came to be known by the late 1880’s as “New Buddhism” (*Shin-Bukkyō*). New Buddhism was designed to answer the anti-Buddhist critique of the early and middle years of the Meiji period. That is to say, it set out to demonstrate how priests and temples could make a valuable contribution to the nation’s social and economic life. Although Buddhism was admittedly “foreign-born” New Buddhists claimed that Buddhism could nevertheless effectively promote loyalty to the Throne, patriotism, and national unity. They maintained that Buddhism’s basic doctrines were not mere superstition but, on the contrary, were fully compatible with the Western science and technology then being so rapidly introduced into the country.

The World’s Parliament of Religions

In order to demonstrate to doubters both at home and abroad Buddhism’s compatibility with Western science and technology, an eight member delegation was dispatched to attend the 1893 World’s Parliament of Religions held in Chicago, Illinois as part of a World Fair. Three of the eight delegates were Buddhist priests affiliated with various sects while the others were interpreters and laymen. The Parliament had great consequences in that it set in motion a chain of events that was destined to significantly alter the religious consciousness of the Western world. At the same time, it demonstrated to domestic antagonists that even scientifically advanced Westerners respected Buddhism’s tenets.

¹⁸ Quoted in Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*, p. 132.

For the first time in world history representatives of all the major religions gathered together under the same roof in peaceful conference. Although on the surface the conference appeared to be a model of interreligious cooperation and mutual respect, there existed, just beneath the surface, a profound discord between the Western, predominantly Christian, and the Eastern, Buddhist and Hindu, delegates. Yatsubuchi Banryū (1848-1926), a Shin priest and delegate from Kumamoto, went so far as to state that in light of this underlying tension, the Buddhist delegates saw themselves engaged in a “peaceful war”. In this war, Buddhism would emerge, at least in his eyes, “having won the greatest victories and the greatest honor.”¹⁹

Given the strong Christian influence manifested in the overall conference, Banryū’s assertion may seem somewhat exaggerated, if not self-serving. Whatever the reality may have been, the Japanese delegates were convinced that Mahāyāna Buddhism was exactly what the West needed. In their eyes, Westerners were saturated with material comforts but were sadly lacking in the life of the spirit. The ‘formless form’ of Mahāyāna Buddhism as found in Japan was, therefore, the perfect antidote.

The Japanese delegates sought to recast Japan’s version of Mahāyāna Buddhism as a true world religion, if not *the* true world religion. This redefinition of their faith gave Japanese Buddhists a mission both at home and abroad. A kind of “Japanese spiritual burden” was born which included a duty to actively share their faith with the benighted peoples of the world. In 1899, Anesaki Masaharu (1873-1949), one of the most noted Buddhist scholars of that period, expressed this burden as follows: “Our Nation [Japan] is the only true Buddhist nation of all the nations in the world. It is thus upon the shoulders of this nation that the responsibility for the unification of Eastern and Western thought and the continued advancement of the East falls.”²⁰

Buddhist Responses to Domestic Critics

The Buddhist delegates to the World’s Parliament of Religions returned to Japan as conquering heroes. They were invited to give talks throughout Japan on the material progress they had seen in the West and their own progress in promulgating the teaching of the Buddha to receptive Western audiences. An

¹⁹ Yatsubuchi, *Shūkyō Taikai Hōdō*, pp. 35-40, 44-45.

²⁰ Anesaki, *Bukkyō Seiten Shiron*, p. 17.

observer of the time, Ōhara Kakichi, applauded their efforts by stating that it was now possible for “Buddhism in Japan in the Far East to turn the wheel of the Dharma in America in the Far West.”²¹

What had particularly impressed observers in Japan was the alleged ability of the Japanese delegates to not only hold their own against the far greater number of Christian participants, but to express the nationalistic aspirations of the Japanese people in the process. Hirai Kinzō (1859-1916), a lay Buddhist and the delegation’s only fluent English speaker, provided the best example of what was possible in this regard.

Hirai’s paper was entitled “The Real Position of Japan Toward Christianity”. It began with a defense of the Tokugawa Shogunate’s banning of Christianity in the seventeenth century as a legitimate response to the possibility of Japan’s being colonized by Western nations proclaiming themselves to be Christian. He went on to point out that once again in the Meiji period allegedly Christian nations threatened his country through their imposition of unequal treaties which unilaterally guaranteed these nations the right to extraterritoriality and the regulation of tariffs. In concluding, he invoked America’s founding fathers and the preamble to the U.S. Declaration of Independence in defense of his call for true equality among nations.

Hirai succeeded in driving home his point of view as few foreign delegates were able to do thanks to the fact that he had ‘out-Christianized’ the Christians and ‘out-Americanized’ the Americans.²² The fact that the predominantly American audience had cheered Hirai at the conclusion of his speech was used as further evidence in Japan to show just how effective Buddhists could be in advancing the nation’s interests abroad.

Based on their success in America, the Buddhist delegates, especially Shin priest Yatsubuchi Banryū (1848–1926), eagerly called for increased missionary work as they travelled and spoke throughout the country. Yatsubuchi emphasized the importance of both foreign language and secular education for aspiring missionaries, not to mention rigorous spiritual training. He advocated that such missionaries should first work among Japanese immigrants to other nations, but he also saw other uses for them. Foreshadowing the future, one of these other uses was the provision of spiritual training for the Japanese military. “‘Flashing like a sword and glittering like a flower’ . . . the Imperial Army and

²¹ Ōhara, *Bankoku Shūkyō Taikai Enzetsushū*, pp. 5-6.

²² See Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*, p. 171.

Navy can, like the faithful Muslims who defeated the Russians in the Crimea, or the soldiers of the Honganji who held back the armies of Nobunaga, face all trials and tribulations with confidence and strength.”²³

Yatsubuchi and his colleagues were not the first to call for Buddhist missionary work. Even in the darkest days of the repression of Buddhism in the early Meiji era, the Shin sect had actively participated in the Meiji government’s effort to colonize the northern island of Hokkaido. Hokkaido had long been the home of the non-Japanese, Ainu minority and was then only under nominal Japanese control. The Japanese government feared that Imperial Russia, having taken over Siberia, might also be interested in Hokkaido.

The Higashi Honganji branch initially dispatched more than 100 priests to Hokkaido and spent over 33,000 *ryō* (approx. 110 lbs. of gold in 1871) on constructing roads. Hokkaido was seen as a further opportunity to prove that Buddhism could make a valuable contribution to the state. This meant, however, that Buddhists would themselves become “colonizers” in the process.

Based on the success of this ‘internal’ missionary work, the Higashi Honganji branch next sent a group of priests headed by Ogurusu Kōchō (1831-1905) to establish a temple in Shanghai, China in June 1876. Yet another group headed by Okumura Enshin (1843–1913) was sent to Korea in September of the following year. As in the case of Hokkaido, these missionary activities were carried on in close collaboration with the government, for from the Meiji period onwards Japan was determined to advance onto the Asian continent. In fact, after the first Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 these missionary efforts became so closely associated with Japan’s continental policies that after each war Japan fought the missionary efforts expanded accordingly.²⁴

Ogurusu, mentioned above, was not simply interested in missionary work abroad. In 1877 he wrote: “Priests of this sect should use aid to the poor as a method of propagating the faith.”²⁵ Ogurusu, in common with many of his contemporaries, understood that the Buddhist reformation they advocated, popularly known as “New Buddhism” (J. *Shin-Bukkyō*), had to become active in charitable work. This interest came as a result of the threat the Buddhists recognized from primarily Protestant-based charities. While, on the one hand, Buddhist leaders typically pointed out what they considered to be the

²³ Quoted in Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*, p. 168.

²⁴ See Daitō, *Otera no Kane wa Naranakatta*, p. 58.

²⁵ Quoted in the October 8, 1877 issue of the *Meikyō Shinshi* (No. 534).

shallowness of Christian doctrines, they were forced to recognize the remarkable effectiveness of Christian philanthropy as a means of recruiting converts.²⁶

Rinzai Zen Master Shaku Sōen (1859-1919) was abbot of Engakuji in Kamakura and would become best known in the West as D.T. Suzuki's Zen master. He urged Buddhists to overcome the practical superiority of Christianity by "establishing schools for the poor, charity hospitals, and reformatories; organizing work among soldiers and criminals; correcting the corruptions of society; and engaging in active work in every department of life."²⁷ Yet another advocate of this position was Inoue Enryō (1858-1919), a Shin priest, Buddhist scholar and reformer. Like Sōen, Enryō hoped to outdo the Christians by copying their educational institutions, hospitals and reformatories.

Yet for all their desire to emulate Christian social work, the New Buddhists did not change their longstanding negative attitude toward Christianity. Enryō in particular was one of the most articulate of the anti-Christian Buddhists. Typically, Enryō would criticize the alleged "irrationality" of Christianity as contrasted with the "rationality" of Buddhism. He based his arguments on a simple comparison drawn between the theism of Christianity and the non-theism of Buddhism. Inoue maintained that the latter position was in harmony with Western philosophy and science. The fact that Christianity was the religion of the powerful Western nations and seemingly inseparable from their political structures and imperial ambitions further bolstered his antagonism.²⁸

In January 1889 Inoue joined other Meiji Buddhist leaders, including Shimaji Mokurai and prominent Buddhist layman Ouchi Seiran (1845-1918), to form a new popular Buddhist organization, the "United Movement for Revering the Emperor and Worshipping the Buddha" (*Sonnō Hōbutsu Daidōdan*). The organization's prospectus described its purpose as follows:

The goal of this organization is to preserve the prosperity of the Imperial Household and increase the power of Buddhism. The result will be the perfection of the well-being of the Great Empire of Japan. . . . The time-honored spiritual foundation of our Empire is the Imperial Household and Buddhism. The independence and stability of our Empire cannot be maintained if so much as the

²⁶ See Yoshida, *Nihon Kindai Bukkyō Shakaishi Kenkyū*, p. 44.

²⁷ Quoted in Thelle, *Buddhism and Christianity in Japan*, p. 198.

²⁸ See Kitagawa, *Religion in Japanese History*, p. 230.

slightest injury is inflicted upon it. How can true patriots not be inspired and aroused to defend against such injury?²⁹

In concrete terms, the founders of this new organization hoped to exclude Christians from all positions of power in society, especially those connected with politics. Toward this end they worked to induce some 130,000 Buddhist priests throughout the country to become politically active and ensure the election of Buddhist candidates. Some members, especially those living in regions where the Shin sect was strong, went so far as to violently disrupt religious services in local Christian churches.³⁰

The establishment of the *Sonnō Hōbutsu Daidōdan* represented the organizational birth of a Buddhist form of Japanese nationalism which was both exclusionist and aggressively anti-Christian in character. The press, however, severely condemned the disruptive and sometimes violent tactics of its regional supporters, which in turn led to police intervention. Having turned out to be a political liability, these tactics were relatively short-lived. However, just as they were being abandoned, a new form of violence arose, a form of violence that was on a far, far grander scale than ever before. This violence was employed by the Japanese state itself, for the nation's leaders had decided to go to war.

Buddhist Responses to Japanese Expansion Abroad

The Sino-Japanese War formally began in August 1894. In discussing the war, Ienaga Saburo, a noted historian of modern Japan, wrote the following: “Government leaders . . . started the quest for glory by fighting China for hegemony in Korea. Domination of Korea became a national goal shared by successive administrations and the public at large.”³¹

The “public at large,” of course, included Japan's Buddhist leaders. Not surprisingly, these leaders collaborated very closely with the ethnocentric nationalism that was by then so prevalent in society. For example, by this time Inoue Enryō had become a spokesman for the “Imperial Way” (*Kōdō*). In a work published in 1893 entitled “Treatise on Loyalty and Filial Piety” (*Chūkō Katsu-ron*), he wrote that due to the existence of the Imperial

²⁹ Quoted in the March 11, 1889 issue of the *Daidō Shimpō* (No. 1).

³⁰ For details, see Yoshida, *Nihon Kindai Bukkyō-shi Kenkyū*, pp. 166-201.

³¹ Ienaga, *The Pacific War, 1931-45*, p. 6.

Household, Japan, its land, and its people were, like the emperor himself, all “sacred and holy”.³²

Enryō went on to assert that in Japan, unlike China, let alone the West, loyalty to the sovereign and filial piety were one and the same. This was because all Japanese were offspring of the imperial family. Thus the imperial family was the “head family” of all Japanese, which is to say, the emperor and his subjects were all part of “one large family”.³³ This led Enryō to conclude: “From ancient times, sacrificing one’s physical existence for the sake of the emperor and the country was akin to discarding worn-out sandals. . . . It is this unique feature of our people which has caused the radiance of our national polity and produced the supreme beauty of our national customs.”³⁴

In 1894 Enryō also published an article on the ‘philosophy of war’ which, echoing the preceding sentiments, was strongly militaristic in temper.

As for the war itself, the Nishi-Honganji branch of the Shin sect was one of the first to comment. As early as July 31, 1894, the sect’s headquarters issued the following statement. It read in part:

Since the occurrence of the recent emergency in Korea, the head of our branch has been deeply concerned about the situation, acting on the truth of repaying one’s debt to the country through absolute loyalty to it. This is in accordance with the sect’s teaching that the Law of the Sovereign is paramount. . . .

Believing deeply in the saving power of Buddha Amida’s vow, and certain of rebirth in His Western Paradise, we will remain calm no matter what emergency we may encounter, for there is nothing to fear. . . . We must value loyalty [to the Sovereign] and filial piety, work diligently, and, confronted with this emergency, share in the trials and tribulations of the nation.³⁵

For its part, the Jōdo (Pure Land) sect established, in 1895, the “Assembly to Repay [One’s] Debt to the Nation” (*Hōkoku Gikai*). Its purpose was defined as follows: “The purpose of this assembly shall be, in accordance with the power

³² Inoue, *Chūkō Katsu Ron*, pp. 61-66.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp.66-70.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

³⁵ Quoted in the July 31, 1894 issue of the [*Honganji-ha*] *Honzan Rokuji*.

of religion, to benefit both those in the military and their families, to conduct memorial services on behalf of fallen patriots, and to provide relief for their families and relatives.”³⁶

While there was almost no peace movement among Buddhists, there was no lack of Buddhist leaders who justified the war. One line of reasoning was based on Japanese Buddhism’s supposed preeminent position within all of Asian Buddhism. Thus an editorial entitled “Buddhists During Wartime” appeared in the August 8, 1894 issue of the newspaper *Nōnin Shinpō*. It asserted that Japanese Buddhists had a duty to “awaken” Chinese and Korean Buddhists from their indifference to the war, an indifference which allegedly stemmed from the pessimistic nature of the Buddhism present in those two countries.

Only a few days later, in the August 16-18th issue of the same newspaper, Mori Naoki expanded on this theme in an article entitled “The Relationship of Japanese Buddhists to the Crisis in China and Korea”. He identified both Indian and Thai Buddhists as being indifferent to the development of their own countries, once again because of the pessimistic nature of the Buddhism found there. Mori went on to advocate that Japanese Buddhists consider the battlefield as an arena for propagation of the faith, holding high the banner of “benevolence and fidelity”.

Coupled with the above was the viewpoint represented in an editorial entitled “Buddhism and War” which appeared in the July 25, 1894 issue of the newspaper *Mitsugon Kyōhō*. This editorial began by acknowledging that the destruction of all weapons of war was the Buddhist ideal. It then went on to assert, however, that when a war was fought for a “just cause” it was entirely appropriate for Buddhists to support it.

Another proponent of this point of view was Shaku Unshō (1827-1909), a Shingon sect priest and pioneer of Meiji Buddhist charitable activities. In an article entitled “A Discussion on the Compassionate Buddhist Prohibition against Killing”, which appeared in the newspaper mentioned above on January 25, 1895, he stated that there were two types of war: a “just war” and a “lawless war” (*bōsen*). While Buddhists should oppose the second type of war, they should support, as in this case, a just war because such a war prevents humanity from falling into misery.

In a short but none the less prophetic reference to a Zen connection to war, the Buddhist reformer Katō Totsudō (1870-1949) wrote the following in the

³⁶ Quoted in the April 15, 1895 issue of the *Jōdō Kyōhō* (No. 213).

February 1895 issue of *Taiyō* (Sun) magazine: “The Zen that philosophers and poets are well acquainted with has [due to the war] also become familiar to military men. Even though the principle of transcending life and death is the basis of all Buddhist schools, Zen has a quality that is most welcomed by soldiers, for it possesses a special kind of vigor.”³⁷

It should be noted that despite all the preceding declarations of Buddhist war support, it was actually Japanese Christians who took the lead in such practical activities as providing medical help for wounded soldiers and relief for families who had become poverty-stricken as a result of the war. The patriotic fervor of the Christians naturally had a favorable effect on public opinion, and even Buddhists reluctantly expressed admiration for their strenuous efforts. On the other hand, because of their own slow and relatively passive response, Buddhist leaders were widely criticized for their lack of patriotic spirit.

The fervent patriotism of Japanese Christians became the catalyst for not only a new (and positive) relationship with the state but with institutional Buddhism as well. Specifically, Christian patriotism fostered a new climate which promoted Buddhist-Christian cooperation, while emphasizing Christianity’s spiritual solidarity with the East. The end result was that both religions succeeded, in varying degrees, in entrenching themselves in the same citadel of nationalism. In light of the Christian emphasis on love, and the Buddhist emphasis on compassion, it is highly ironic that it was war-generated patriotism, and the death and destruction which it entailed, that provided the initial stimulus for a reconciliation between these two religions which had been bitter foes for so long.

Japan’s victory over China at the end of the first Sino-Japanese War in 1895 brought with it not only increased power over affairs on the Korean peninsula, but the island of Taiwan, torn from China, became its first overseas’ colony. However, due to the so-called Tripartite Intervention of 1895, not all of Japan’s territorial ambitions were met. Three Western powers, led by Imperial Russia with the support of France and Germany, forced Japan to give up its newly won control of the Liaotung peninsula in China. This would have been its first colony on the Asian mainland.

Japan regarded this intervention as a national humiliation and was more determined than ever to develop its military capabilities. For example, it

³⁷ Quoted in Kirita Kiyohide in his article, “*Seinen Suzuki Teitarō Daisetsu no Shakaikan*” (*Young D.T. Suzuki’s Views on Society*) in *Zengaku Kenkyū* 72 (January 1994), p. 21.

added six new divisions to the regular army in 1896, thereby doubling its first-line strength. In addition, in 1898 it organized both cavalry and artillery as independent brigades, while at the same time establishing factories for the domestic production of modern armaments. By 1903 Japan could also claim to have a modern navy with some seventy-six major war vessels, including four battleships, sixteen cruisers and twenty-three destroyers. The Triple Intervention became the pretext, or excuse, for the further development of Japan's military might, despite the heavy tax burden it placed on the general populace.

In this atmosphere, the need for continued support of the military was also recognized by Buddhist leaders. In 1898, for example, Higashi Kan'ichi edited a book entitled, *Proselytizing the Military (Gunjin Fukyō)*. The purpose of this work was to advocate Buddhism's usefulness in imparting courage to soldiers on the battlefield. Just how seriously institutional Buddhist leaders took their responsibility in this regard is attested to, among others, by Ōtani Kōzui (1876-1948), chief abbot of Nishi-Honganji branch of the Shin sect.

The Buddhists had learned from the Christians just how closely linked their own survival was to their fervent support for Japan's overseas wars of expansion. By the time of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5, fought once again for control of Korea, Buddhist leaders like Ōtani were ready to play a leading role, so much so that the emperor commended him for the important role he played in sustaining the soldiers' morale. He was, of course, only one of many, many Buddhist leaders who would devote themselves to promoting Japan's ever expanding empire, requiring ever greater sacrifices of both wealth and life on the part of the Japanese people.

Conclusion

There was no more important factor in fostering the final end to Buddhism's suppression than the unconditional support it gave to modern Japanese nationalism, something that quickly morphed into Japanese imperialism and its attendant wars of aggression. Sectarian leaders' unconditional support succeeded in establishing Buddhism as an authentic part of Japan's newly created national polity (*J. kokutai*), anchored, as it was, in unconditional loyalty to the emperor and his policies. New Buddhists found acceptance in 20th century Japan by further embracing what they had already become by the end of the 19th century, i.e. super patriots, ever ready to meet the needs of the state.

While the embrace of modern nationalism was a new experience for Japanese Buddhists, readers of the first part of this article will realize that Buddhism's willingness to accommodate itself, if not accept, the prevailing beliefs of its host country had long been the norm. It was, for example, this willingness that long ago allowed Buddhism to recognize animistic Shintō deities as the local manifestations of universal Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Among other things, this meant that from an early date, Hachiman, the Shintō god (*kami*) of war, was recognized as a compassionate Bodhisattva, i.e. *Hachiman Bosatsu*. Thus this compassionate Bodhisattva was prayed to for victory up through Japan's defeat in 1945.

Although Buddhism's acceptance of animistic Shintō was unique to Japan, Buddhism has long accepted the animistic deities of all the Asian nations to which it expanded. In addition, Buddhism underwent many other changes before it finally reached Japan in the sixth century CE. One of the most momentous of these, even prior to its arrival to Japan, was the performance of esoteric rituals designed to protect the state from evil forces and invasion. Thus Buddhism effectively became an organ of the state in both China and Korea as well as other Asian countries. It is therefore not surprising that it performed this role in Japan as well.

Given this history, it was only natural that the Tokugawa Shogunate called on Buddhism to enforce its proscription of Christianity at the beginning of the 17th century, for because of its close connection to Western imperialist powers, Christianity was perceived as a threat to the Japanese polity. This resulted in the construction of temples in every village, no matter how small, and resulted in a vast expansion in Buddhist adherents in Japan. While this can be viewed as a positive development for Buddhism, history demonstrates that the forced imposition of any religion on pain of imprisonment and death ultimately leads to its degradation from within. Moreover, forced adherence to Buddhism is repugnant to the teachings of the Buddhism's historic founder, Shakyamuni Buddha.

With this background in mind, it can be seen that Buddhism in Japan, through its subservience to the state, beginning in the premodern period, ultimately dug its own grave, or at least paved the way for its repression at the outset of the Meiji era. Buddhism was then regarded, and properly so, as part and parcel of Japan's feudal past, a past that needed to be discarded if Japan were to become a modern state. What appeared to be Buddhism's strength, i.e. large numbers of temples in the Edo period (1603-1868), was, due to its role as an appendage of the state, including forced adherence, the source of its greatest weakness.

True, unlike the exclusivist Abrahamic faiths, Buddhism tolerated, even embraced, competing faiths like Shintō in Japan. Yet for centuries Buddhism had relegated that faith to a subordinate role in the land of its birth, placing Buddhist priests in charge of major shrine-temple complexes. Unsurprisingly, when given the chance, Shintōists sought to rid themselves of Buddhist control, if not take revenge on their longtime oppressors. Added to this was the fact that many of the Buddhist priests, living alone in countryside temples, had taken common law wives, compromising themselves still further in the eyes of both laity and government.

It can be claimed that Buddhism's adoption of modern Japanese nationalism/imperialism was, at least initially, an imminently successful strategy in ending the oppression it experienced at the beginning of the Meiji period. Yet in doing so Buddhism paid a heavy price in terms of twisted doctrine, abandoned ethics and militarist praxis that resulted in what turned out to be an ephemeral acceptance, lasting only until the Japanese empire's defeat and dissolution in August 1945. Inasmuch as I have written in detail about this period in my books *Zen at War*, *Zen War Stories* and *Zen Terror*, I will not repeat that here.

In defense of Japanese Buddhism, one can certainly ask what any religion would do upon finding itself under physical, even deadly, attack by the leaders of a country, together with a sizable segment of the common people, of which it had long been a part. Although years later, I vividly recall an elderly Zen priest who, at the end of my lecture on Buddhism in wartime Japan, said, "As a foreigner you can't understand what it was like to live in a Japan where there was no freedom of speech. What could we have done?" In response, I said, "You're right, I've never lived in a totalitarian society, and I'm sure I would have been frightened to speak out. Nevertheless, there is one thing you could have done – you could have remained silent. There was no requirement to become cheerleaders of the war." The elderly priest remained silent.

When this question is viewed from a transnational viewpoint there are few if any religions that have dared to challenge the modern state and the nationalist fervor it generates. The idiom, "go along to get along" seems to be the operating principle for all religions, or at least their leaders. Yes, there are sometimes "martyrs" for their faith who choose to take a stand on the basis of their conscience. Typically, however, they pay for their courageous stance with their lives, abandoned by their leaders and co-religionists and serving as a stern warning to any others who might be inclined to follow their lead.

Buddhism's longstanding syncretism clearly contributed to its readiness to serve as a useful adjunct of the state, beginning from the time it was first introduced to Japan. It continued to fulfill this role in one capacity or other down through the centuries, recovering from its severe suppression in the early years of the Meiji period by embracing and promoting modern Japanese nationalism/imperialism. In the postwar era, however, it paid a heavy price for having served as 'cheerleader-in-chief' of a disastrous war. For the most part, it is today a religion relegated to the role of caring not for the living but the dead, performing funeral services and ancestor memorial rites. Thus, although it is no longer in danger of persecution, this is largely because its teachings are regarded as irrelevant to the living.

Some might claim, myself included, that the suppression of Buddhism at the beginning of the Meiji period and subsequent developments were, in large part, Buddhism's just "karmic recompense" (*gōhō*). If so, it must not be forgotten that, in accordance with karmic doctrine, Japanese Buddhists have the opportunity to create a new future, i.e. new karma, no matter how heavily they may have been conditioned by past events. As Rupert Gethin notes: "From the Buddhist perspective certain experiences in life are indeed the results of previous actions; but our responses to those experiences, whether wished for or unwished for, *are not predetermined* but represent new actions which in time bear their own fruit in the future."³⁸ (Emphasis mine)

Like new growth on a gnarled plum tree, there are even now new developments in Japanese Buddhism occurring here and there. Will they be sufficient to regenerate the tree? Will they be sufficient to escape the dead weight of past karma accumulated over centuries? It is, frankly, difficult to be sanguine about the future, especially when so few contemporary Japanese Buddhist leaders seem aware of the true nature of the crisis they face. Can these leaders distinguish between the polluted 'bath water' of the past and the living 'baby' of the Buddha Dharma? Can they discard the former even while preserving (or restoring) the latter? Only time will tell.

For Buddhism as a whole, it is certainly true that its adaptability has been a major factor in its acceptance in the various countries to which it has spread. Viewed in a positive light, the doctrine of *upāya-kaushalya*, i.e. "skill in means", in the Mahāyāna tradition has allowed Buddhism to mould its message to fit a wide variety of circumstances, cultures and personalities. Buddhist history bears

³⁸ Gethin, *Foundations of Buddhism*, p. 27.

ample witness to the contribution this has made to the spread of the Buddha Dharma throughout Asia and now the West. Yet, as both parts of this article demonstrate, Buddhism's "skill in means" can lead, and has led, to a betrayal of some of its core teachings.

This betrayal, moreover, is certainly not limited to Japanese Buddhism. One only needs to look at the current anti-Muslim *Bodu Bala Sena* (Buddhist Power Force) movement in Sri Lanka and the *Ma Ba Tha* (Association for the Protection of Race and Religion) movement in Myanmar to see how the adoption of violence-prone, ethnic and religious chauvinism by some (but not all) Buddhist leaders in those countries has betrayed Buddhism's concern for the wellbeing of *all* sentient beings. Given this, the lesson for Buddhism, if not for all religions, may well be found in the eternal, yet easily forgotten, verity spoken by Polonius in Act I, Scene III of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: "This above all: to thine own self be true."

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2019 International Conference on Buddhist Canons

Report by Yi-hsun Huang

The Center for Buddhist Studies at Fo Guang University and the Fo Guang Shan Institute of Humanistic Buddhism (Taiwan) held an “International Conference on Buddhist Canons,” August 9–11, 2019. After the keynote speech by Professor Lewis Lancaster, a total of sixteen scholars presented papers on the Indian, Chinese, and Tibetan canons. Papers were presented in either English or Chinese. Eleven of the papers rely on one (or two) of the following methodologies: studying the compilation history of a given canon, doing a comparative analysis of parallel texts from multiple canons, studying texts that are not yet included in any canons, and examining the relationship between religious practice and the structure of a Buddhist canon. The remaining five papers report on current projects in various countries aiming to make the Chinese canon more accessible and more deeply understood, through translation, editing, and the creation of digital tools.

This conference has shown that scholars continue to produce interesting and important research on Buddhist texts. Ordinary Buddhists, especially in Asia, have also demonstrated interest in the Buddhist canon not only by financially supporting canon-related projects, but also through their personal use of such projects, whether they are digital or print-based. As more work is done on Buddhist canons, we will gain a better understanding of the various Buddhist traditions and their interrelations.

Keynote Speech by Lewis Lancaster (Professor Emeritus, University of California, Berkeley, US), “Exploration of Buddhist Texts: Traditional Methods in a Digital World”

This talk contextualized the current state of digital tools for Buddhist studies and offered insights about how to proceed in the future. In the earliest stages

of digital projects, the goal was simply to input enough data to be useful. Then concordances could be generated. Now, digital tools such as search engines are increasingly able to identify meaning through artificial intelligence. Scholars should embrace such tools and maintain a critical attitude about the results. At the same time, digital tools should have the functionality to assist with the tasks of textual scholars, such as critical textual comparisons. In the future, digital tools will influence the methods that scholars use not only to uncover the historical complexities of a given Buddhist canon, but also to discover the interconnections among Buddhist canons of different languages. It is hoped that new digital technologies can inspire new methods of research and a revival of textual studies.

1. Kin-tung Yit 越建東 (National Sun Yat-sen University, Taiwan), “Introduction to Abhidhamma literature”

This paper introduces Abhidhamma literature not familiar to Chinese scholars. The author classifies Abhidhamma literature into seven categories: 1. Abhidhamma-piṭaka, containing *Dhammasaṅgaṇi*, *Vibhaṅga*, *Dhātukathā*, *Puggalapaññatti*, *Kathā-vatthu*, *Yamaka* and *Paṭṭhāna*; 2. *aṭṭhakathā*, commentaries to the texts in the first category; 3. *ṭīkā*, sub-commentaries to the texts in the second category; 4. handbooks or manuals for the Abhidhamma-piṭaka; 5. commentaries to *ṭīkā*, *porāṇa-ṭīkā* and *navatīkā*; 7. other texts related to Abhidhamma-piṭaka. There are also new Abhidhamma commentarial works composed in this tradition by monastic authors in southeast Asia. This paper emphasizes the abundance of Abhidhamma literature. The author also encourages the use of Abhidhamma literature in the fields of psychology and philosophy.

2. Liu Guo-Wei 劉國威 (National Palace Museum, Taiwan), “A Study of the Tibetan Versions of the Āryamañjuśrīnāmasaṅgīti”

The *Āryamañjuśrīnāmasaṅgīti* is a short text with 167 verses in the *anuṣṭubh* style. The main purpose of its compilation is to expound the ultimate truth and the provisional teachings of Mañjuśrījñānasattva in order to help practitioners to attain the path and wisdom of the bodhisattva. In addition to the Sanskrit version, there are also Tibetan and Chinese translations. Moreover, it was translated into Tangut, Uyghur, Mongolian and Manchu from Tibetan. Modern scholars have carried out studies on this text by collating its Sanskrit and Tibetan versions. An English translation has also been made. This paper introduces commentaries

by Indian Buddhist masters to this text in the Tengyur, Tibetan translations in different Kanggyurs, manuscripts (*bris ma*) and other Tibetan translations that are not included in the Tibetan canons.

3. Sueyling Tsai 蔡穗玲 (Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Germany), “The Stone Buddhist Sculptures and Sutras at Wofu Yuan, Anyue, Sichuan”

A significant number of stone Buddhist icons and carved sutras are found at Wofu Yuan 臥佛院 in a small valley in Anyue 安岳, Sichuan. Beginning in the 8th century in the Tang dynasty, Buddhist sculptures and sutras were carved into rock. The author surveys the content which includes icons, and passages from the following categories: *Nirvāṇa sūtra*, *Lotus sūtra*, *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*, *dhāraṇīs*, texts relating to the Buddha, texts relating to the Saṅgha, to lay Buddhism, and rituals. There is a strong emphasis on practice and ritual, including a carved sutra catalogue which Stefano Zacchetti argues was used as an object of worship. The author cites Richard Salomon’s distinction between comprehensive canons and practical canons.¹ The former represents an ideal collection, while the latter is a specific collection of texts actually used for practice and ritual. The author argues that the Sichuan inscriptions represent the latter, a practical or ritual canon.

4. Jiang Wu 吳疆 (University of Arizona, US), “The Carving of the Kaibao Canon in Tenth-century Chengdu”

In Kaibao 開寶 4 (971), Emperor Taizu 太祖 of the Song dynasty ordered the engraving of a set of printing blocks for the Chinese Buddhist canon. The Kaibao canon 開寶藏 or the Shu edition 蜀版 is a significant milestone in the history of Chinese Buddhism. However, not only do its content and history of production need to be scrutinized against existing canons such as the Goryeo 高麗 and Zhaocheng 趙城 canons, more importantly, the Kaibao canon has to be situated in the rise of printing culture in the ninth and tenth centuries as new studies have suggested. This paper focuses on the history of the Kaibao canon’s carving and printing in Chengdu. For the first time, the author proposes the hypothesis that

¹ Richard Salomon, “An Unwieldy Canon: Observations on Some Distinctive Features of Canon Formation in Buddhism,” in *Kanonisierung und Kanonbildung in der asiatischen Religionsgeschichte* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2011), pp. 179–180.

the Kaibao canon was carved in Chengdu under the supervision of a monastic institution, most likely, Jingzhong Monastery 淨眾寺, where a sutra printing agency was located. In sum, the author intends to situate the canon in the wider printing culture of the Song and provide a new account of how the use of printing gave birth to the first printed canon. It is possible that after the blocks were carved by individual workshops, the blocks were amassed to a famous temple in Chengdu such as Jingzhong before its transport to Kaifeng 開封.

5. Yoo Boo-Hyun 柳富鉉 (Daejin University, Korea), “The Structure of the Kaibao Canon, Jin Zhaocheng Canon, the First Edition of the Goryeo Canon, and the Second Edition of the Goryeo Canon”

The Jin Zhaocheng canon 金趙城藏, the first edition 初雕 of the Goryeo Canon 高麗藏, and the second edition of the Goryeo canon are all considered to be reprints of the Kaibao canon. However, the details of how the Kaibao Canon was reprinted have not been well researched. By using the information from the *Yuzhi mizang quang* 御製秘藏詮 and *Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集, the author argues that there are in fact three versions of the Kaibao canon: the original version of the Kaibao canon, the first edition of the Kaibao canon, and the second edition of the Kaibao canon. The Jin Zhaocheng canon is the reprint of the second edition of the Kaibao canon while the first edition of the Goryeo canon and the second edition of the Goryeo canon are the reprints of the original version of the Kaibao canon and the first edition of Kaibao canon. Thus, when scholars do research collating different versions of texts from the Jin Zhaocheng canon, the first edition of the Goryeo Canon, and the second edition of the Goryeo Canon, they should pay careful attention to which base version they are using in order to have a complete understanding of its textual background.

6. Wan Chin-chuan 萬金川 and Shi Jueguan 釋覺冠 (Fo Guang University, Taiwan), “A Study of Ji shamen buying baisu dengshi 集沙門不應拜俗等事—Analysis of its Variant Readings and Different Versions”

The text entitled *Ji shamen buying baisu dengshi* 集沙門不應拜俗等事 (Śramaṇas shall not bow to lay people and related matters) is three fascicles long and found in the Jin Canon 金藏 found at Guangsheng Si 廣勝寺. This paper collates the different versions of this text found in other Buddhist canons in

order to clarify their relations through variant readings. The author has carefully collated all the information about variant readings from the footnotes of the Taishō canon 大正藏 and Zonghua canon 中華大藏經. These variant readings not only show the omissions in previous canons, but also their mistakes. This paper assesses the accuracy of these variant readings.

7. Lin Hsin-yi 林欣儀 (Fo Guang University, Taiwan), “A Study of Foshuo changshou miezui huzhutongzi jing 佛說長壽滅罪護諸童子經: The Relationship Between the the Dali Congshu 大理叢書 and Canonical Versions”

The *Foshuo changshou miezui huzhutongzi jing* 佛說長壽滅罪護諸童子經 (The sutra of long life, elimination of sins, and protection for children) is found in the first volume of the Zokuzōkyō canon 續藏經. It consists of three parts, dealing mainly with the topics of abortion and how women can protect their infants. According to the Zokuzōkyō version, this sutra was translated by Buddhapāli 佛陀波利 and arrived in China in 676. However, based on information in Buddhist catalogues, Buddhapāli could not have been the translator. In the beginning of 20th century, a corpus of Buddhist texts was discovered at the Fazang Si 法藏寺, Dali, Yunnan. There is also a version of this sutra in this corpus which provides helpful information for the compilation date of the Dali version. It was probably carved and printed in the first half of 13th century before being transmitted to Dali.

8. Long Darui 龍達瑞 (University of the West, US), “Colophons in the Yongle Northern Canon”

The making of the Yongle Northern canon 永樂北藏 began in 1419 (Yongle 17), and was finished twenty-one years later. Since the Yongle Northern canon was printed with wooden blocks, the contents of various reprints are the same. However, the colophons of the different printings vary because of different donors, publication locations (Buddhist monasteries), and times. The colophons of the Yongle Northern canon held at Princeton University and the Liaoning 遼寧 Province Public Library provide precious information about the locations of Buddhist monasteries where they were originally stored. The colophons of the Yongle Northern canon in the Chongqing Library provide precious information about Chinese Buddhism in the Republican era. Thus, the colophons in the Yongle Northern canon contain important information that scholars should not ignore in their research.

9. Ven. Dingyuan 定源法師 (Shanghai Normal University, China), “A Study of the *Mingseng zhuan chao* 名僧傳抄”

The compilation of the *Zokuzōkyō* canon began in 1905 and was completed in 1912. Since its publication, it has become an important collection of source material for Buddhist studies. However, important issues remain unresolved—which versions were used for the *Zokuzōkyō* canon’s base texts, and how they were chosen. By using the *Mingseng zhuan chao* 名僧傳抄 (Z 2B:7 or X77, no. 1523), an important collection of biographical material for the study of Chinese Buddhism, this paper tries to determine which text was used as the base text by the *Zokuzōkyō* canon. After collating these two texts, the author finds that there are discrepancies, mistakes and omissions between these two texts. Thus, based on the case of the *Mingseng zhuan chao*, the author suggests that while using texts from the *Zokuzōkyō* canon, scholars should pay attention to their base texts and do collation work before their research.

10. Yi-hsun Huang 黃繹勳 (Fo Guang University, Taiwan), “Rare Books by Ming Chan Master Hanyue 漢月 held at the Shanghai Library and Xiyuan Si”

In 2016, the Center for Buddhist Studies at Fo Guang University started a research project entitled “Texts and Studies on East Asian Buddhism from the 16th to 19th Centuries.” Through this project, the Center has found 250 rare Buddhist texts not included in the *Jiaxing* 嘉興 or other canons. Among the Center’s collection of rare Buddhist Books from the Ming and Qing, there are six rare books by Ming Chan Master Hanyue 漢月 (1573–1635) originally held at the Shanghai Library and Xiyuan si 西園寺 in Suzhou. They are: 1. *Yumishen ti jiyin zunzhe zhezhenzhuan* 於密滲提寂音尊者智證傳 (Hanyue’s Guiding Words on the *Zhizheng Zhuang*); 2. *Yumishen chanbing ji* 於密滲禪病偈 (Hanyue’s verses on meditation sickness); 3. *Yumishen canchanji* 於密滲參禪偈 (Hanyue’s verses on Chan practice); 4. *Haiyu sanfeng yumi zangheshang pushuo* 海虞三峰於密藏和尚普說 (Hanyue’s talks at Sanfeng si); 5. *He yinzenzi quanxiuji* 和隱真子勸修偈 (Hanyue’s verses on advocating practice); 6. *Yumishen songyuan sanzunsu zuogongfu yinyuan xiezheng zhu* 於密滲宋元三尊宿做工夫因緣邪正註 (Hanyue’s commentary on three elders’ practices). These rare books are all important sources for future studies of Hanyue’s thought and practice with regard to Chan, Pure Land and discipline. It is the Center’s goal to continue research on recently discovered rare books from the Ming and Qing dynasties in order to complete the puzzle of the history of Chinese Buddhism.

11. Ven. Fachuang 法幢法師 (Fo Guang University, Taiwan), “A Study of Chan Master Shuokui’s Recorded Sayings”

There are three versions of *Chan Master Shuokui’s Recorded Sayings* (*Shuokui chanshi yulu* 碩揆禪師語錄). One version is found in the Jingshan canon and the other two versions are found in the National Library of China in Beijing. These three versions of the recorded sayings of Shuokui (1628–1697) were published and circulated in both manuscript and woodblock print forms. A study of Shuokui’s recorded sayings will help us to understand the print culture in Buddhist monasteries and their economic development in the Ming and Qing dynasties. In addition, Shuokui’s talks, exchanges with his disciples, letters and writings in his recorded sayings also provide important material for scholars to study Chan Buddhism in early modern China.

12. Kenneth K. Tanaka (Musashino University, Japan), “The Dream and Work of the English Tripitaka Translation Project”

This is a report introducing the BDK English Tripitaka project. In China, the translations of Buddhist texts were often carried out as a national project supported and funded by emperors and political leaders. This project, on the other hand, began as a dream and a commitment of one individual. In January 1982, Dr. Yehan Numata (1897–1994), the founder of Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai (Society for the Promotion of Buddhism or BDK), initiated the monumental task of translating the entire Taishō edition of the Chinese Tripitaka canon into English. Soon after Mr. Numata initiated this translation project, a special preparatory committee was organized in April 1982. After holding planning meetings on a monthly basis, the committee selected 139 texts to be translated in the First Series. These texts are comprised of 70 Indian works, 35 Chinese works and 34 Japanese works. As of today, the project has completed about 65 percent of the 7,185 Taishō pages of the works in the First Series, and continues to work with scholars to bring this stage to completion.

13. Ven. Manji 滿紀法師 (Fo Guang Buddhist Canon, Taiwan), “Introduction to the Structure of Fo Guang Buddhist Canon 佛光大藏經”

The compilation of the Fo Guang Buddhist canon started in 1977, initiated by Master Hsing Yun’s dream of publishing a Buddhist Canon that is easily

understandable by ordinary people. Master Hsing Yun used sixteen divisions for the canon: Agama 阿含, Prajnaparamita 般若, Chan 禪, Pure Land 淨土, Lotus 法華, Avatamsaka 華嚴, Yogacara 唯識, Guhya 祕密, Sravaka 聲聞, Vinaya 律, Jataka 本緣, Biography 史傳, Images and Sculptures 圖像, Ritual 儀誌, Literature and Arts 藝文, and Miscellaneous 雜藏. The Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Canon Editorial Committee has also adopted a method called “*yishu lishu* 以疏隸書,” clarifying the text by using its commentaries in order to understand the later development of the text in history. It is Master Hsing Yun’s hope that the Fo Guang Buddhist canon can play a helpful role in the development of humanistic Buddhism.

14. Kiyonori Nagasaki (International Institute for Digital Humanities, University of Tokyo, Japan), “Toward an Ecosystem for Digital Research Environment for Buddhist Studies”

Just as Buddhist studies has relied on the academic print media ecosystem of authors, publishers, readers, and libraries, Buddhist studies also has also become a part of the new ecosystem of digital humanities. Further, as digital tools are developed that handle Buddhism’s multi-cultural, multi-lingual, and multi-regional scope, they are certain to expand existing boundaries of digital humanities. The online SAT project provides a digital text version of the Taishō Buddhist canon that is freely accessible online. Although the inputting of texts has been completed, the project continues to move forward by adding interoperability with external digital resources, such as the Digital Dictionary of Buddhism and the BDK English translations of Taisho texts. Further, SAT continues to add new functionality within its own system, such as linking textual content with portions of images of texts, using international standards.

15. Jen-Jou Hung 洪振洲 (Dharma Drum College of Humanities and Social Science, Taiwan), “Using Information Linking to Develop Smart Digital Tools for Research in Buddhist Studies”

The Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association’s (CBETA) digitization of the Taishō edition of the Chinese Buddhist canon, begun in the 1980s, has provided an important tool for scholars of Chinese Buddhism which allows them to carry out research in ways not previously possible. In 2013, the digital team at the Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts began work on a new project, the CBETA

Research Platform. This combines a concordance with authority information about the dates, authors, and translators of texts to provide new dimensions of information to search results. For example, users can sort results by time or by translator in order to see when and with whom a term originated. It will also include a tool for internal structural analysis of texts. In addition, the team has just created DEDU, an online tool allowing users to line up different versions of the same text, whether by different translators or in different languages, for easy comparative analysis. Any work done by the user can be saved online and accessed later.

16. Ven. Xianchao 賢超法師 (Longquan Si 龍泉寺, China), “The Chinese Buddhist Canon from the Perspective of Artificial Intelligence”

Longquan monastery in Beijing is working on several digital tools for the handling of Chinese Buddhist texts. Optical character recognition identifies the characters and structure of printed pages. It utilizes deep learning and can also be used to find input errors that exist in contemporary editions such as the Taishō when provided with images of the source text. Deep learning is also used in other tools, such as an automated punctuator for Chinese texts (<http://gj.cool/>), and information extraction tools that can be applied in the areas of machine translation and automated answering of questions posed by humans regarding the text.