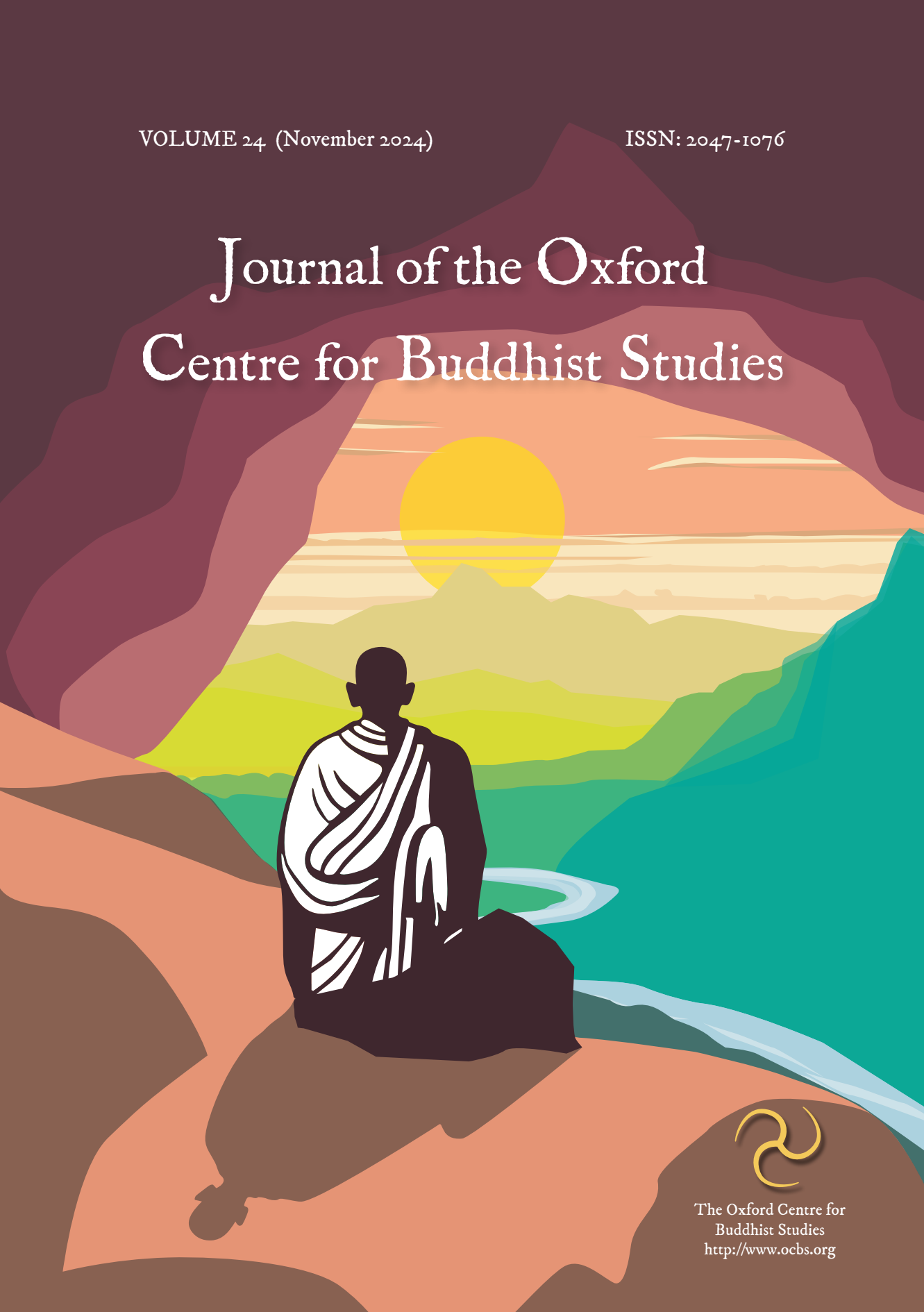
VOLUME 24 (November 2024)

ISSN: 2047-1076

Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies



The Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies
http://www.ocbs.org

JOURNAL OF THE OXFORD CENTRE FOR BUDDHIST STUDIES

Volume 24

November 2024

Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies
Volume 24
November 2024
ISSN: 2047-1076
Published by the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies
www.ocbs.org
Wolfson College, Linton Road, Oxford, OX2 6UD, United Kingdom

Annual Subscription Rates
Students: £20
Individuals: £30
Institutions: £45
Universities: £55
Countries from the following list receive 50% discount on all the above prices:
All African countries, Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam

For more information on subscriptions, please go to www.ocbs.org

Contents

List of Contributors

Alexander Wynne is the chief editorial consultant of this journal, and senior academic consultant at the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies. His work focuses on the intellectual history of Indian Buddhism, and the Pali manuscript tradition of South and Southeast Asia. Email: alexwynne@outlook.com

Nir Feinberg is a Fellow of the Martin Buber Society of Fellows at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He received his Ph.D. in Buddhist Studies from the University of California, Berkeley. He specializes in Indian philosophy, classical Buddhist literature, and phenomenology. His current research focuses on the history and philosophy of emotions in India. Email: nir.feinberg@mail.huji.ac.il

Bryan G. Levman studies the languages of early Buddhism, the languages that the Buddha and his early disciples spoke and the oral transmission of the teachings. Levman holds a PhD from the University of Toronto and is currently a Visiting Scholar at the University of Toronto's Department for the Study of Religion. Email: bryan.levman@utoronto.ca

Bernat Font holds a PhD in Buddhist Studies from the University of Bristol. He translates Pali texts into Spanish and also leads online workshops and residential meditation retreats throughout Europe. He has published in *Eastern Horizon, Buddhistdoor Global,* and *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review.* Email: bernat.font.clos@gmail.com

Brian (Ryōjun) Victoria holds a PhD from Temple University in the US. His major writings include *Zen at War* (2nd, enlarged ed.); *Zen War Stories*; *Gaijin de ari, Zen bosu de ari* (*As a Foreigner, As a Zen Priest: Autobiographical*); *Zen Master Dōgen* (co-authored with Prof. Yokoi Yūhō of Aichi-gakuin University); and a translation of *The Zen Life by Sato Koji*. He is currently a special lecturer at Sōtō Zen-affiliated Hōkyōji temple in Fukui prefecture of Japan, and a Senior Research Fellow of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies. Email: brianvictoria1@yahoo.com

Aleix Ruiz-Falqués is the chief editor of this journal, he holds a PhD in Indian Studies from the University of Cambridge. He is currently the Head of the Department of Pali and Languages at the Shan State Buddhist University, Taunggyi (Myanmar) and Khyentse Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Buddhist Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Email: arfalques@cantab.net

Guidelines for Contributors

The *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies* (JOCBS) is now inviting submissions for Volume 25 of the journal to be issued in November 2025.

The JOCBS is a peer-review and online journal, found at: http://jocbs.org/index.php/jocbs.

The JOCBS accepts articles, notes, review articles and book reviews in any area of Buddhist studies. The editorial board especially encourages submissions pertaining to Pali and Southeast Asian Buddhism on a broad range of disciplinary interests.

To submit your article, please write to chief editor, Dr Aleix Ruiz-Falqués: arfalques@cantab.net.

We ask that articles be submitted according to the guidelines stipulated below:

- Articles should be between 3,000 (minimum) and 15,000 words (maximum).
- Please submit your articles (written in English) in MS-Word (*.doc, *.docx).
- Because this journal is an online publication, authors may include hyperlinks, images, videos, graphics, and so forth, as necessary and without limitation (with proper captions and credit lines).
- Abstracts in English should accompany all article submissions and consist of fewer than 200 words. Please also provide a list of 3 to 7 keywords for articles.
- Please follow the *New Oxford Style Manual* (*New Hart's Rule*) or similar volumes readily available online. British spelling and style preferred.
- We use a mixture of in-text citation following the author/date system (e.g., Gombrich 1978: 78–80) and footnotes, usually reserved for longer citations or additional information that would disrupt the flow of the main text.

- All references should be listed at the end of the articles. See the following examples for clarification:

Bechert, Heinz (1988). Preface. In F. Bizot, *Les traditions de la* pabbajjā *en Asie du Sud-Est. Recherches sur le bouddhisme khmer IV*. Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Rupert, pp. 9–12.

Bernon, Olivier de (2000). *Le manuel des maîtres de kammaṭṭhān. Étude et présentation des rituels de méditation dans la tradition du bouddhisme khmer*. PhD Dissertation. Institut national des langues orientales, Paris.

Bizot, François (1976). *Le figuier à cinq branches*. Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient.

—— (1980). La grotte de la naissance. Recherches sur le bouddhisme khmer II. *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 67: 232–273.

Cousins, Lance S. (1997). Aspects of Southern Esoteric Buddhism. In P. Connolly & S. Hamilton, eds., *Indian Insights: Buddhism, Brahmanism and Bhakti. Papers from the Annual Spalding Symposium on Indian Religions*. London: Luzac Oriental, pp. 185–207.

Li Rongxi, trans. (2000). *Buddhist Monastic Traditions of Southern Asia: A Record of the Inner Law Sent Home from the South Seas by Śramaṇa Yijing*. Berkeley, CA: Numata Centre for Buddhist Translation and Research.

Phra Thep Nyanawisit (พระเทพญาณวิศิษฏ์) (2558 BE/2015 CE). ตำราพระกัมมัฏฐานโบราณ *Tamra Phra Kammatthan Boran* [*Treatise on Traditional Meditation*]. Nakhon Pathom: Mahamakut University.

Revire, Nicolas & Stephen A. Murphy, eds. (2014). *Before Siam: Essays in Art and Archaeology*. Bangkok: River Books & The Siam Society.

Ruiz-Falqués, Aleix (2017). The Role of Pāli Grammar in Burmese Buddhism. *Journal of Burma Studies* 21(1): 1–96.

Skilling, Peter. 1997a. The Advent of Theravāda Buddhism to Mainland South-East Asia. *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 20(1): 93–107.

——. 1997b. New Pali Inscriptions from Southeast Asia. *Journal of the Pali Text Society* 23: 123–157.

Wynne, Alexander (2007). *The Origin of Buddhist Meditation*. London: Routledge.

- References to Pali texts are made to Pali Text Society publications for the most part, in which case publication details are not included in the list of references. All Pali references have been assigned abbreviations by the *Critical Pali Dictionary*, which is recognised and adopted internationally. See: https://cpd.uni-koeln.de/intro/vol1_epileg_abbrev_texts.
- Diacritical marks should be used accordingly for foreign and Indic words, in italics, except in the following cases: Bodhisattva/Bodhisatta, Buddha, Dharma/Dhamma, karma/kamma, nirvana/nibbana, stupa/thupa, yoga, and other Sanskrit and Pali words that have passed into common English usage.
- If you are not a native speaker of English, please have your article proofread by a scholar who is a native speaker before submission.

All non-solicited articles will undergo a thorough review and evaluation by at least two members of the editorial board or other academic peers in the field, with readers' comments made available upon completion of the review for potential revisions.

The decision to accept or reject the articles for publication is made by the editorial board and is final.

Submissions will be accepted until June 1, 2025, to be given full consideration for the next issue.

EDITORIAL
A Fresh Look at Themes Within Early Buddhism

Aleix Ruiz-Falqués

This issue of the *JOCBS* sees the revisiting and re-evaluation of important long-standing themes in Buddhist studies, offering fresh perspectives and insights.

Alexander Wynne opens with a reexamination of Luis Gómez's well-known and yet half abandoned theory of proto-Madhyamaka philosophy in the *Aṭṭhakavagga* of the Pali *Suttanipāta*. Wynne presents new insights, establishing a fascinating correspondence between the apophatic, silence-oriented traditions of early Buddhism—what he calls No-View Buddhism—and the development of Prajñāpāramitā schools in northwestern India, particularly in Gandhāra. One of Wynne's thought-provoking ideas is that the tension between the more radically apophatic tradition of Nāgārjuna and devotional imaginary of the Lotus Sutra is already present in the earliest corpus of Buddhist texts. He further hypothesizes about the role that Kaccāna could have played in the transmission and development of such teaching in western and northwestern India. More broadly, Wynne's paper offers a general view of the ways in which early Buddhist doctrines and traditions of practice could have developed, and it importantly draws attention to the fact that the Prajñāpāramitā literature was not necessarily a response to the rise of Abhidharma/Abhidhamma scholasticism—a tenet that is virtually taken for granted in our field.

The second article is by **Nir Feinberg**, who recently obtained his PhD at UC Berkeley with a thesis that deals with the concept of *saṃvega*—a word he translates as "turmoil". In the present article, he revisits the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* of the *Suttanipāta* and provides a wealth of textual evidence that highlights the place of turbulent emotions in the earlier stages of the path to awakening,

challenging the notion that only peaceful emotions are conducive to enlightenment. In his own words: "The Buddhist tradition has consistently recognized that the path to tranquility is filled with emotional turmoil." His work enriches the growing discourse on the philosophy of emotion in Pali literature that is bringing to light evidence of a more complex emotional landscape within early Buddhist practice.

Bryan Levman contributes the first of a two-part article on Pali textual variants. As is well known, the Pali canonical texts (and the non-canonical too, for that matter), contain thousands of variant readings. Not all of them are of the same nature, and not all of them are of the same significance. Levman provides a thought-provoking first half of his typology of variants, analyzing and categorizing them comprehensively. Of course, since the archive of Pali manuscripts remains largely unexplored, Levman's typology is liable to improvements in the future, working as it does, with such a complex topic, on 'best inference'. But overall it provides a solid basis for students of Pali philology to think about variant readings in a complex and critical way. One special feature in Levman's method, that would alone justify the publication of this article, is the effort in tracing non-Indo-Aryan forms to Dravidian or Munda roots. Particularly in onomastica, this line of research reveals itself as most fascinating. Levman's ambitious article will hopefully invite debate, and prompt further development of this important area of Pali textual studies.

Following on is another up-and-coming scholar, **Bernat Font**, who has recently defended his thesis on *vedanā*, a word that he translates as "feeling", at Bristol University.[1] Font's paper investigates the specific topic of the nature of *pīti* "joy". It is perhaps not known to all that *pīti* is sometimes categorized as *vedanā* "feeling" and sometimes as *saṅkhāra* "conditioning factor". The fact that the Theravāda tradition has firmly opted for the latter has major implications: that joy is not something that is felt, but rather a certain kind of mental anticipation. Font elaborates on the technical reasons that may have motivated Theravādins to distinguish *pīti* "joy" and *sukha* "pleasure" as belonging to two different bundles. In doing so he also exposes the shortcomings of such scholastic commitment to systematicity.

[1] https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/en/studentTheses/what-the-buddha-felt

The final article of the present volume is by **Brian Victoria**, a leading scholar in the field of Buddhism and Violence. His article confronts the sensitive ideas of *karma* and rebirth, taking historical instances where they have been interpreted in ways that legitimize social injustice. Some practitioners, regardless of their Buddhist tradition, may feel challenged by the directness in which Victoria addresses certain issues. However, the central question he raises is essential: "What venues exist in the Buddhist world to address a controversial topic like this one [viz. *karma*], for there can be no doubt that this topic needs to be addressed in light of Buddhism's commitment to reduce suffering in its myriad forms." Such a commitment is, indeed, a foundational aspect of Buddhist ethics. The *JOCBS* wholeheartedly welcomes responses to Victoria's arguments, and those of any other contributors, for the duty of a journal such as this one is to serve as an open platform for academic debate.

This issue also includes a **review** of a recent publication, namely **Javier Schnake**'s critical edition of the *Ekakkharakosa* and its *ṭīkā* (commentary), a medieval Pali grammar, published by the Pali Text Society this year. The *JOCBS* looks forward to expanding its review section in the coming year.

Proto-Madhyamaka in the Pāli Canon Revisited: Early Buddhism, Gandhāra and the Origin of the *Prajñāpāramitā*[*]

Alexander Wynne

Abstract—Buddhist Studies has largely overlooked Luis O. Gómez's 'Proto-Madhyamaka' thesis, according to which apophatic thought resembling later Madhyamaka is found in the Pāli canon. Consequently, little progress has been made in understanding the history of early Buddhist thought, from the Buddha to Nāgārjuna. According to the standard account, a period of spiritual pragmatism, in the canonical suttas, gave way to the reductionism of the Abhidharma, which in turn inspired the Prajñāpāramitā and so laid the foundations for Madhyamaka. Based on Gómez's thesis, this paper suggests a different scheme: that in the late canonical period, an apophatic tradition was transmitted in the western lineage of Kaccāna, before reaching Gandhāra where it was reformulated as the Prajñāpāramitā.

Keywords: *Aṭṭhakavagga*, antirealism, Kaccāna, *prajñāpāramitā*, negation, emptiness, Gandhāra

---

* This is an expanded version of a paper entitled '"Proto-Madhyamaka"' in the Pali canon revisited: reconstructing a foundational spiritual project in early Buddhism', delivered at the 'Madhyamaka in South Asia and Beyond International conference', August 18–22, 2024, Vienna, Austria.

JOCBS 24: 1–41

In his famous article 'Proto-Mādhyamika in the Pāli Canon' (1976), Luis O. Gómez claimed that old parts of the Pāli canon have a rather exceptional content. He argued that the *Aṭṭhakavagga* and *Pārāyanavagga*, 'The Book of Eights' and 'The Book on Going to the Far Shore', the two final books of the *Suttanipāta*, not only 'belong to the oldest of the Pāli texts' but also 'anticipate (rather than foreshadow) some of the key doctrines of the Great Vehicle' (1976: 139). He also claimed that the thought of the *Aṭṭhakavagga* cannot 'be reduced to other, more common teachings of the *Pāli Canon* without doing some violence to the text' (1976: 139), largely due to the fact that they contain 'some of the most explicit and representative statements of an extreme apophatic tendency found elsewhere in Buddhist literature' (1976: 140).

Now almost fifty years on, a critical evaluation is long overdue. I will here address the Proto-Madhyamaka thesis in three ways: first, by clarifying the scope of the concept, based on core teachings of the *Aṭṭhaka*; second, by reconsidering the place of Proto-Madhyamaka within the Pāli canon more generally; and third, by sketching a line of transmission connecting the Pāli canon to the early 'Perfection of Wisdom' (*prajñāpāramitā*) tradition in ancient Gandhāra. I will argue that the Proto-Madhyamaka thesis, properly understood, opens up a hidden spiritual history which changes how we think about Buddhist thought and practice prior to Nāgārjuna.

1. Proto-Madhyamaka in the *Aṭṭhakavagga*

What Gómez termed the *Aṭṭhaka*'s 'extreme apophatic tendency' is most pronounced in the four texts which have given the collection its name: the *Guhaṭṭhaka*, *Duṭṭhaṭṭhaka*, *Suddhaṭṭhaka* and *Paramaṭṭhaka Sutta*s (II–V), each of which contains eight (*aṭṭha*) verses.[1] A prominent theme of three of these texts (III–V), one shared by five other texts of the collection (VIII–X, XII–XIII), is their discourse on views. Views are said to expose a person (789): a

[1] Since the chapters of the *Aṭṭhakavagga* are arranged according to increasing number of verses, the length of verses would seem crucial to its formation; if so, a title based on the length of its fundamental sections, II–V, seems likely. Alternatively, the Chinese and Sanskrit title of the collection assumes that the MI *aṭṭhaka* is to be derived from Skt. *artha* rather than *aṣṭa*. Bodhi (2017: 138): 'There is a Chinese parallel titled 義足經, "The Discourse of Verses on Meaning," which is assumed to be a translation of a Skt title, *Arthapada Sūtra. An English translation is available (Bapat 1951), which also cites parallel verses from Sn. Another Skt form of the title, mentioned in other works, is Arthavargīya.'

normal person fashions them (910), grasps at or embraces them, sometimes passionately (832, 889, 891), rationalises them (892), regards them as truth (882), gets immersed in them (796, 878, 880, 895), and does not transcend them (781), believing that they bring purity (908). The opposite of this is the sage, who lets go of views (785), does not form them (786, 799), does not grasp at or adopt them (802, 837), and so does not rely on them (800), is not led into them (851), does not follow them (911), has 'shaken' them off (787), is released from them (913) and has no conceit because of them (846). The basic didactic orientation of the *Aṭṭhaka* is towards negation, therefore, in the sense that the very prospect of having an abstract view about the world is cut away.

Quite different from this 'no-view' perspective is the group of texts that concludes the *Aṭṭhaka*: the *Tuvaṭaka*, *Attadaṇḍa* and *Sāriputta Sutta*s (XIV–XVI). These suttas are exhortative, offering advice on spiritual practice, while saying nothing about views. This does not necessarily mean that these 'practice suttas' disagree with the eight 'no-view suttas': as long as one accepts that 'views' refer to abstract ways of understanding the world, rather than guidelines for spiritual practice in the here and now, the two groups could represent different aspects of a single spiritual understanding. For the time being, I regard the *Aṭṭhaka* as broadly homogeneous, albeit with different tendencies that might indicate some tension between different perspectives.[2] What ties the 'no-view' and 'practice' suttas together is the collection's consistent focus on cognition and experience. This is usually expressed in the form of a series of interrelated dichotomies: views vs. no views, apperception vs. non-conceptuality, mundane vs. transcendent cognition, attachment vs. non-attachment, and so on. As Gómez has pointed out (1976: 142), in the *Aṭṭhaka* the problem of suffering is caused by the

> misdirected mind, specifically the wrongly applied faculty of apperception (*saññā*). Apperception leads to dualities, graspings, conflicts, and sorrow because of its two primary functions: its power to conceptualize and define (*saṃkhā*) and its tendency towards division and multiplicity (*papañca*).

[2] For a different view, see Vetter (1988: 102). According to Fronsdal (2016, Introduction: Four Themes of the Book of Eights), the four basic themes of the collection are: 'letting go of views, avoiding sensual craving, the qualities of a sage, and the training to become a sage.' These themes, it should be noted, are carefully interwoven throughout the collection.

The key terms of this analysis are 'apperception' (*saññā*), 'conceptual diversification' (*papañca*), 'view' (*diṭṭhi*), and 'clinging' (*nissaya*/*nissita*; Gómez 1976, 149–50). These define the unenlightened mode of cognition, whereas their negation defines the opposite:

> **1. Mundane experience:** views, apperception, attachment, the conceptually diversified world of 'I', 'mine', etc.
>
> **2. Experience of the sage:** no views, no concepts, non-attachment, ineffability.

A couple of further points can be added to this rudimentary definition of Proto-Madhyamaka. The first is an idea that would seem to be implicit in the *Aṭṭhaka*, rather than stated outright: that what we perceive as external reality is fundamentally shaped by the mind. In other words, the metaphysical orientation of the collection is towards antirealism:

> **3. Antirealism:** the dependence of the 'world' on a person's cognitive apparatus.

A final point is that the *Aṭṭhaka*'s focus on cognition and experience is often expressed in descriptions of mindful states, both in terms of how an unenlightened person should experience the world and how a liberated person actually does:

> **4. Present-moment mindfulness**: the way to sagehood, and the nature of the sage's experience.

Only four suttas of the *Aṭṭhaka* make no mention of mindfulness: the *Duṭṭhaṭṭhaka* (III), *Pasūra* (VIII) and *Cūḷaviyūha Sutta*s (XII), which focus on the spiritual ethics of debating and holding views, as well as the *Tissametteyya Sutta* (VII), which is concerned with the secluded, renunciant way of life. As can be seen in Table 1, terms and ideas in the other twelve suttas of the *Aṭṭhaka* presume the practice of mindfulness. In short, mindfulness is a prominent feature of the *Aṭṭhaka*, one that creates an underlying link that draws together its apophatic orientation (especially in III–V) and the exhortative teachings on practice/lifestyle (especially in XIV–XVI).

Table 1. Mindfulness in the *Aṭṭhakavagga*

Mindfulness in general		
upekkhako/upekkhati (Equanimity)	855 911–912 972	X. Purābheda XIII. Mahāviyūha XVI. Sāriputta
sato, sati (Mindfulness)	768, 771 855 916, 933 962, 964, 973–75	I. Kāma X. Purābheda XIV. Tuvaṭaka XVI. Sāriputta
appamatta/na pamajjati/na pamāda (Diligence)	779 925, 933–34 942	II. Guhaṭṭhaka XIV. Tuvaṭaka XV. Attadaṇḍa
Mindful cognitive states		
***diṭṭha, suta, muta,* etc.** (Direct experience: what is seen, heard, thought, etc.)	778 790, 793 797–98, 802 812–13 901, 914	II. Guhaṭṭhaka IV. Suddhaṭṭhaka V. Paramaṭṭhaka VI. Jarā XIII. Mahāviyūha
anupalitta/na (upa-)lippati ('Unsullied')	778–79 790 812 845	II. Guhaṭṭhaka IV. Suddhaṭṭhaka VI. Jarā IX. Māgandiya
no saññā (Non-conceptuality)	779 802 847 874	II. Guhaṭṭhaka V. Paramaṭṭhaka IX. Māgandiya XI. Kalahavivāda
phassa/phuṭṭha (Contact/Experience)	778 851 918	II. Guhaṭṭhaka X. Purābheda XIV. Tuvaṭaka

By 'mindful cognitive states' I especially mean statements which imply present-moment awareness. A few verses from the *Tuvaṭaka Sutta* are characteristic of this feature of the *Aṭṭhaka*:

> ***Tuvaṭaka Sutta* (Sn 917–18)**
> Whatever phenomenon (*dhammam*) he cognises (*abhijaññā*), internal or external, he should not become fixated on (*thāmaṃ kubbetha*), for the good do not called this quenching (*nibbuti*).
>
> He should not think (*maññeyya*) [of himself] as better, worse or the same; touched (*phuṭṭho*) by various forms, he does not linger imagining (*vikappayaṃ tiṭṭhe*) himself (*nātumānaṃ*).[3]

By imploring the practitioner not to 'become fixated' on experiential phenomena, and not to 'imagine' himself when experiencing multiple objects, these verses point towards a certain mindful way of experiencing present-moment phenomena. As Gómez perceptively noted (1976: 142–43), these verses show how mindfulness

> pulls the mind back to the ever-fleeting present, away from its extensions into the past and future. In this way it acts in exactly the opposite direction of the process of apperception, and thus uproots conception.

Similar sentiments are stated in the *Guhaṭṭhaka*, *Suddhaṭṭhaka* and *Paramaṭṭhaka Sutta*s. The motif of the sage remaining 'unsullied [by attachment]' (*lippati*)[4] to what is 'seen, heard (and thought)' is particularly important:

> ***Guhaṭṭhaka Sutta* (Sn 778–79)**
> Dispelling partiality (*chandaṃ*) for both ends, understanding contact (*phassaṃ*), devoid of craving, not doing what he would blame himself for, the resolute one is not sullied (*na lippatī*) by [attachment to] what is seen or heard (*diṭṭhasutesu*).

[3] Sn 917. *yaṃ kiñci dhammam abhijaññā ajjhattaṃ atha vā pi bahiddhā, na tena thāmaṃ kubbetha na hi sā nibbuti sataṃ vuttā.* 918. *seyyo na tena maññeyya nīceyyo atha vā pi sarikkho, phuṭṭho anekarūpehi nātumānaṃ vikappayan tiṭṭhe.* Reading *phuṭṭho* (B^{e}) for *puṭṭho* (E^{e}).

[4] *lippati*, a passive form of *lip*, MMW sv: 'to be attached to (loc.), stick, adhere, Iś Up'.

> The sage, unsullied by [attachment to] possessions (*pariggahesu*), understanding apperception (*saññaṃ*), might cross over the flood. Having plucked out the dart, wandering diligently (*caram appamatto*), he has no longing for this world or the next.[5]

These verses advise a certain attitude towards cognition: without attachment to 'what is seen or heard', one should understand contact and apperception. The implicit meaning is that suffering is overcome by not conceptualising present-moment experience. A similar understanding is stated in the *Suddhaṭṭhaka* and *Paramaṭṭhaka Sutta*s, which speak of a radical detachment from phenomena:

> ***Suddhaṭṭhaka Sutta* (Sn 793)**
> He is disassociated (*visenibhūto*) from all phenomena, whatever is seen, heard or thought (*diṭṭhaṃ va sutaṃ mutaṃ vā*). How, here in this world (*īdha lokasmiṃ*), might one conceive (*vikappayeyya*) the one whose vision is thus, who lives openly?[6]

> ***Paramaṭṭhaka Sutta* (Sn 802)**
> He does not fashion (*pakappitā*) even a subtle apperception (*aṇū pi saññā*), here (*īdha*), with regard to what is seen, heard or thought (*diṭṭhe va sute mute vā*). How, here in the world (*īdha lokasmiṃ*), might one conceive (*vikappayeyya*) that Brahmin, who does not grasp at view?[7]

We here learn that by not conceptualising present-moment experience, and being completely detached from it,[8] the sage cannot be imagined: he is ineffable. This state of non-conceptual awareness does not look anything like a state of insight as defined in standard canonical teachings, such as the 'three

[5] Sn 778. *ubhosu antesu vineyya chandaṃ phassaṃ pariññāya anānugiddho, yad attagarahī tad akubbamāno na lippatī diṭṭhasutesu dhīro.* 779. *saññaṃ pariññā vitareyya oghaṃ pariggahesu muni nopalitto, abbūḷhasallo caraṃ appamatto nāsiṃsatī lokam imaṃ paraṃ cā ti.*

[6] Sn 793. *sa sabbadhammesu visenibhūto yaṃ kiñci diṭṭhaṃ va sutaṃ mutaṃ vā, tam evadassiṃ vivaṭaṃ carantaṃ kenīdha lokasmiṃ vikappayeyya.*

[7] Sn 802. *tassīdha diṭṭhe va sute mute vā pakappitā n' atthi aṇū pi saññā, taṃ brāhmaṇaṃ diṭṭhim anādiyānaṃ kenīdha lokasmiṃ vikappayeyya.*

[8] The term *visenibhūto* (Sn 793), 'disassociated', really means something like 'being unobstructed', which, along with the close parallel in Sn 802, suggests a passive state of cognition beyond conceptualisation.

knowledges' (*tevijjā*). Indeed, the *Suddhaṭṭhaka* is clear that any cognition of an object is the antithesis of liberating awareness:

> ***Suddhaṭṭhaka Sutta* (Sn 788–90)**
> 'I see what is purified (*passāmi suddhaṃ*), the ultimate, beyond disease (*paramaṃ arogaṃ*): a person's purification comes through what is seen (*diṭṭhena saṃsuddhi*).' Understanding [it] thus, knowing [it as] 'the ultimate', [thinking: 'I am] observing the purified', he depends on knowledge (*pacceti ñāṇaṃ*).[9]
>
> If a person's purity is due to what is seen (*diṭṭhena*), or he abandons suffering through knowledge (*ñāṇena*), that one, purified by another (*aññena*) [would] have a [cognitive] substratum (*sophadīko*) — his view, indeed, betrays him as he speaks thus.[10]
>
> The Brahmin does not say that purity [comes] from another (*aññato*), or [lies] in what is seen, heard or thought, or in virtues and vows (*diṭṭhe sute sīlavate mute vā*). Unsullied with regard to merit and evil (*puññe ca pāpe*), abandoning what has been taken up, he does not fabricate (*pakubbamāno*) [anything] here.[11]

The term *upadhi* normally refers to a material substratum or attachment, but that sense is inappropriate here. Since the verses are concerned with cognising an object, *upadhi* must refer to some sort of cognitive or conceptual basis.[12] Cognising an object, something 'other' (*aññā*), apparently betrays an unenlightened state of consciousness. Thus for the *Suddhaṭṭhaka*, being disassociated from phenomena (*visenibhūta*) means not being in a state of cognitive duality. While this idea might seem strange in a canonical Pāli text,

[9] Sn 788. *passāmi suddhaṃ paramaṃ arogaṃ diṭṭhena saṃsuddhi narassa hoti, etābhijānaṃ paraman ti ñatvā, suddhānupassī ti pacceti ñāṇaṃ.*

[10] Sn 789. *diṭṭhena ce suddhi narassa hoti ñāṇena vā so pajahāti dukkhaṃ, aññena so sujjhati sopadhīko diṭṭhī hi naṃ pāva tathā vadānaṃ.*

[11] Sn 790. *na brāhmaṇo aññato suddhim āha diṭṭhe sute sīlavate mute vā, puññe ca pāpe ca anūpalitto attañjaho nayidha pakubbamāno.* Cf. *Jarā Sutta*, Sn. 813: 'A cleansed person does not think (*na maññati*) in terms of whatever is seen or heard, or in terms of thoughts (*diṭṭhasutaṃ mutesu vā*); he does not seek for purity from another (*aññena*): he is neither impassioned or dispassionate.' (*dhono na hi tena maññati yadidaṃ diṭṭhasutaṃ mutesu vā, na aññena visuddhim icchati: na hi so rajjati no virajjatī ti.*)

[12] CPD *upadhi*, 'lit. that on which something is laid or rests, basis, foundation, substratum'.

the cognitive nondualism of the *Aṭṭhaka* was well noted by Gómez,[13] and can be seen in the *Suddhaṭṭhaka*'s notion of 'not being sullied with regard to merit or evil' (Sn 790: *puñña ca pāpe ca anūpalitto*).

It is not the *Aṭṭhaka*'s style to generalise, to state anything in the abstract. But if we were to do so, we might say that, according to the *Aṭṭhaka*, cognitive duality results from the process of apperception and conceptualisation. The world in which we exist, our shared realm of objective experience, is a world we fashion ourselves, whereas liberation is a state in which this cognitive duality ceases. This happens through paying close attention to the workings of cognition, such that apperception falls away. Hence, according to the *Kalahavivāda Sutta*:

> Form disappears for a person whose mode of knowing is thus, for conceptual diversification and naming are founded upon apperception.[14]

The *Aṭṭhaka*'s cognitive nondualism implies a profoundly antirealist view of the world. It suggests that our world of experience, which we assume exists independently of the mind, in fact depends on the workings of our cognitive apparatus. The spiritual task is to stop this, so that 'the world' ceases.

2. Proto-Madhyamaka in the wider Pāli Canon

Negation is a prominent feature of the prose teachings of the Pāli canon. The most obvious 'no view' teachings are those that deal with the ten unanswered questions (*avyākata*), which avoid making any statement on the ultimate reality of the self and the world. With regard to the negation of other views, the most prominent examples are the denials of 'self' (*attā*) found in the *Mahānidāna Sutta* (DN 15) and the *Mahātaṇhāsaṅkhaya Sutta* (MN 38), teachings which specifically address early Upaniṣadic formulations of truth.[15]

[13] The most prominent example is Sn 886ab: 'There are not, indeed, many truths, fixed and varied, in the world, apart from apperception' (*na h' eva saccāni bahūni nānā aññatra saññāya niccāni loke*). Gómez (1976: 147) claims that this is 'a possible reason why such a doctrine [of nonduality] is necessary'.

[14] Sn 874 cd. *evaṃsametassa vibhoti rūpaṃ, saññānidānā hi papañcasaṃkhā*. The first half of this verse (*pāda*s ab) indicates a liberated state of awareness, even if it is not entirely clear what is meant: Sn 874ab. *na saññasaññī na visaññasaññī, no pi asaññī na vibhūtasaññī.*

[15] See DN II.66ff and MN I.256ff respectively, on which see Wynne (2010a: 132ff; 2018).

However, the most famous 'no view' style teaching is that which denies a self (*attā*) in relation to the five aggregates of form, sensation, apperception, volitions and consciousness.[16] This teaching is so well-known that saying anything new about it might be thought impossible. But it is worth pointing out that it negates without asserting anything. Instead, a careful examination of conditioned experience leaves the recipient in a cognitive vacuum, a 'no view' state of mind, as it were, in which incorrect ideas about the self have been negated, thus paving the way towards disillusionment and release,[17] in the sense of a radical detachment from the five aggregates. The *Aggivacchagotta Sutta* (MN 72) explains the transcendence of the aggregates in terms of radical ineffability:

> O Vaccha, the form (*yena rūpena*) with which you would designate the Tathāgata has been abandoned, cut off at its base, uprooted, annihilated (*anabhāvaṃkataṃ*) and is not liable to arise in the future. Released from the category 'form' (*rūpasaṅkhāvimutto*), Vaccha, the Tathāgata is profound, immeasurable, unfathomable, just like a great ocean. The statements 'He is reborn … not reborn … both reborn and not reborn … neither reborn nor not reborn' do not apply.[18]

Thus the Tathāgata is in an unknowable condition in the here and now: ontological definitions do not apply to him.[19] As to the practice leading to this transcendence, present-moment mindfulness does not seem to be an important idea in the wider Pāli canon.[20] A notable exception, however, occurs in a teaching

[16] On this teaching see Norman (1981), Gombrich (1990: 14ff) and Wynne (2010b).

[17] See Wynne (2010b: 210–11).

[18] MN I.487–88: *evam eva kho vaccha yena rūpena tathāgataṃ paññāpayamāno paññāpeyya, taṃ rūpaṃ tathāgatassa pahīnaṃ ucchinnamūlaṃ tālāvatthukataṃ anabhāvakataṃ āyatiṃ anuppādadhammaṃ. rūpasaṅkhāvimutto kho vaccha tathāgato gambhīro appameyyo duppariyogāho, seyyathāpi mahāsamuddo. upapajjatī ti na upeti, na upapajjatī ti na upeti, upapajjati ca na ca upapajjatī ti na upeti, n' eva upapajjati na na upapajjatī ti na upeti.*

[19] According to Siderits (2007: 70), the idea that texts such as MN 72 deal with the ineffability of Nirvana in the present is 'a misunderstanding of certain early Buddhist texts'. A careful analysis of the text (Wynne 2007: 95ff) shows that this is not the case; the statement that the Tathāgata is 'released from the category/concept form' (*rūpasaṅkhāvimutto*) implies an experiential rather than an ontological transcendence. For a similar statement of ineffability in the present, see the citation from MN 22 below (at the end of §4).

[20] On which, see Dreyfus (2011).

to Māluṅkyaputta, a wanderer who is said to have been obsessed with the unanswered questions. At SN 35.95 the Buddha comments on the significance of paying close attention to 'what is seen, heard and thought' as follows:

> Here, Māluṅkyaputta, with regard to phenomena you see, hear, think or will cognise, in what is seen [...] heard [...] thought and cognised, there will be merely what is seen [...] heard [...] thought and cognised. When [... it is so ...] Māluṅkyaputta, then you will [have] no [connection] with it; when you [have] no [connection] with it, you will not be [situated] therein; when you are [not situated] therein, then you will not [be] here, yonder, or in between either. Just this is the end of suffering.[21]

Māluṅkyaputta's interpretation of this sheds some light on how the practice of present-moment mindfulness untangles the cognitive roots of suffering:

> The one who has no passion for forms,
> having seen a form, mindful,
>
> He experiences with a dispassionate mind,
> and does not linger attached to that (object).
>
> For him, seeing form in such a way,
> staying with (*sevato*) the sensation,
>
> [that sensation] wanes away (*khīyati*), and does not accumulate (*nopacīyati*),
> Thus he practices, mindful.
>
> For him, thus reducing (*apacinato*) suffering,
> Nirvana is said to be nearby.[22]

[21] SN IV.73: *ettha ca te mālukyaputta diṭṭhasutamutaviññātabbesu dhammesu diṭṭhe diṭṭhamattaṃ bhavissati, sute sutamattaṃ bhavissati, mute mutamattaṃ bhavissati, viññāte viññātamattaṃ bhavissati. yato kho te mālukyaputta [...] viññāte viññātamattam bhavissati, tato tvaṃ mālukyaputta na tena. yato tvaṃ mālukyaputta na tena, tato tvaṃ mālukyaputta na tattha. yato tvaṃ mālukyaputta na tattha, tato tvam mālukyaputta n' ev' idha na huram na ubhaya-m-antarena. es' ev' anto dukkhassā ti.*

[22] SN IV.74: *na so rajjati rūpesu rūpaṃ disvā patissato, virattacitto vedeti tañ ca nājjhosa tiṭṭhati. yathāssa passato rūpaṃ sevato cāpi vedanaṃ, khīyati nopacīyati evaṃ so caratī sato. evam apacinato dukkhaṃ santike nibbānam uccati.*

Māluṅkyaputta here expands on an *Aṭṭhaka* sort of teaching from the Buddha, on how to experience correctly what is 'seen, heard, thought and cognised'. He takes this to mean that when experiencing things carefully, with no attachment, the mind does not fixate on an object, and the sensations of experience disappear without leaving any trace. Cognitive conditioning is undone, in other words, an understanding of spiritual practice that seems to differ significantly from the various schemes of calm-insight in the Pāli suttas.

These teachings from the wider Pāli canon complement those of the *Aṭṭhaka*. But other prose teachings go further than it on the subject of antirealism. For example, the well-known teaching (SN 22.95) that presents the five aggregates as more or less an apparition:

> Form is like a lump of foam,
> sensation is like a bubble,
> Apperception is like a mirage (*marīcika*),
> constructions are like a banana tree,
> Consciousness is like an illusion —
> (so) taught the Kinsman of the Sun.[23]

The idea that the five aggregates are merely an appearance is in keeping with the statement of MN 72 that they are only conceptually real (e.g. *rūpa-saṅkhā*). Similarly, some prose Pāli teachings regard the 'world' not as an ontological fact out there, but rather as equivalent to a person's cognitive apparatus and the resulting conditioned experience. This can be seen in a number of Saṃyutta texts, where the term *loka* is explained in terms of the sense faculties, their objects and the subsequent forms of consciousness.[24] The *Rohitassa Sutta* (SN 2.26/AN 4.45) similarly understands the world in terms of conditioned experience:

> Where, sir, one is not born, does not age or die, does not fall away and get reborn — not by actually going there is the end of the world to be known, witnessed and attained, I say ... But nor do I

[23] SN III.142: *pheṇapiṇḍūpamaṃ rūpaṃ vedanā bubbuḷupamā, marīcikūpamā saññā saṅkhārā kadalūpamā, māyūpamañ ca viññāṇaṃ dīpitādiccabandhunā*. The teaching is reminiscent of MMK VII.34, XVII.33, XXIII.8.

[24] See SN 35.68, 35.82, 35.84 (= SN IV.39-40, IV.52, IV.53).

> say that one can make an end of suffering without reaching the end of the world. It is in this very fathom-long cadaver, possessed of apperception and mind, that I declare that the world's origin, cessation and way leading thereto.[25]

The motif of 'going to the end of the world' could perhaps be read as a metaphor for spiritual realisation within. On the other hand, stating that the body is endowed with apperception and mind offers a metaphysical perspective, one which suggests that 'the world' depends on our cognitive faculties. The *Kevaṭṭa Sutta* (DN 11) states this more directly, in the form of a story of a *bhikkhu* who travels as far as the Brahma world trying to find an answer to the question 'where do the four great elements cease without remainder?'.[26] Although the *bhikkhu*'s return to question the Buddha symbolises the futility of trying to reach the end of the world out there and stresses the necessity of finding the answer within, the Buddha introduces a metaphysical perspective by explaining that the material elements depend on consciousness:

> Consciousness (*viññāṇaṃ*), which is intransitive (*anidassanaṃ*),
> infinite (*anantaṃ*) and luminous (*pabhaṃ*) all round,
>
> Here water, earth, fire and wind do not stand firm,
> here the great and small, the minute and gross,
> the attractive and unattractive,
>
> Here name and form cease without remainder:
> with the cessation of consciousness, this ceases, right here.[27]

This is the most unambiguous statement of antirealism in the Pāli canon.

---

[25] SN I.62 = AN II.48: *yattha kho āvuso na jāyati na jīyati na mīyati na cavati na uppajjati, nāhaṃ taṃ gamanena lokassa antaṃ ñāteyyaṃ daṭṭheyyaṃ patteyyan ti vadāmī ti. na kho panāhaṃ āvuso appatvā lokassa antaṃ dukkhassa antakiriyaṃ vadāmi. api khvāhaṃ āvuso imasmiññ eva vyāmamatte kaḷevare sasaññimhi samanake lokaṃ ca paññāpemi lokasamudayaṃ ca lokanirodhaṃ ca lokanirodhagāminiṃ ca paṭipadan ti*. Reading *sasaññimhi* (B^{e}) for *saññimhi* (E^{e}).

[26] DN I.215: *bhūtapubbaṃ kevaṭṭa imasmiṃ yeva bhikkhusaṅghe aññatarassa bhikkhuno evaṃ cetaso parivitakko udapādi: kattha nu kho ime cattāro mahābhūtā aparisesā nirujjhanti, seyyathīdaṃ paṭhavīdhātu āpodhātu tejodhātu vāyodhātū ti?* Reading *kevaṭṭa* (B^{e}) for *kevaddha* (E^{e}).

[27] DN I.223: *viññāṇaṃ anidassanaṃ anantaṃ sabbato pabhaṃ, ettha āpo ca paṭhavī tejo vāyo na gādhati, ettha dīghañ ca rassañ ca anuṃ thūlaṃ subhāsubhaṃ, ettha nāmañ ca rūpañ ca asesaṃ uparujjhati. viññāṇassa nirodhena etth' etaṃ uparujjhatī ti*. Reading *pabhaṃ* (B^{e}) for *pahaṃ* (E^{e}).

And, with this, the case for Proto-Madhyamaka in the wider Pāli canon is concluded: there can be no doubt that the teachings of the *Aṭṭhakavagga* — on 'no view', non-conceptuality, ineffability, present-moment mindfulness and antirealism — are found more widely among early Buddhist teachings. Precisely what this means for our understanding of early Buddhism is difficult to say. But rather than explore this subject, I will here try to understand how Proto-Madhyamaka shaped the Buddhist traditions which followed it.

3. From Kaccāna to Subhūti

Gómez did not believe a direct textual relationship between Proto-Madhyamaka and Nāgārjuna could be proved: 'there is no foolproof way of determining specifically which were the texts [Nāgārjuna] was familiar with' (1976: 153). He instead supposed that apophatic discourse was an independently recurring phenomenon in the history of Buddhism, a way of working out the implications of Buddhist spiritual practice in different times and places:

> In the present state of our knowledge it would be more reasonable to discard the possibility of a one-line transmission and assume that the apophatic teachings of the Aṭṭha, the Mādhyamika and, perhaps, the Ch'an, represent one type of path theory. It is also more accurate to envision this type not as a unique and isolated phenomenon, but rather as one tendency among others that grew among a complex of doctrinal attempts to define, refine, or map out the Buddhist mystical path. (1976: 153)

It is not clear why Gómez focused on establishing a connection between the *Aṭṭhakavagga* and Nāgārjuna, given that a more feasible point of connection, lying chronologically and conceptually between the two, is obvious: the early Prajñāpāramitā tradition. In fact, a simple connection can be made between the *Aṭṭhaka*, early Prajñāpāramitā and Nāgārjuna; the key to the puzzle is the figure of Mahā-Kaccāna, regarded by tradition as one of the Buddha's 'great' enlightened disciples. The salient facts are as follows:

- A number of Pāli suttas featuring Kaccāna show that he was a pivotal figure in the transmission and interpretation of the *Aṭṭhakavagga*;

- One of the most important canonical Kaccāna texts, the *Kaccānagotta Sutta* (SN 12.15, SN 22.90), provides the foundations for the earliest formulation of the Prajñāpāramitā;
- A Sanskrit version of the *Kaccānagotta Sutta* is also cited in the *Mūla-Madhyamaka-Kārikā*.

The line of transmission between these three phases of thought, perhaps more meandering than direct, is nevertheless real and significant. The *Kaccānagotta Sutta* is a short but intricate text. A full analysis cannot be given here; for the present purposes, it is important to note its idea that 'existence' and 'non-existence' are merely conditioned aspects of experience:

> As a rule, the world depends on a duality, Kaccāna, of existence and non-existence (*atthitañ c' eva natthitañ ca*). For the one who sees as it really is the origination of the world, with correct understanding, there is no non-existence in the world; (and) for the one who sees as it really is the cessation of the world, with correct understanding, there is no existence in the world.[28]

In this teaching, 'existence' and 'non-existence' are aspects of experience that cease with correct understanding. The teaching also mentions the idea that 'only suffering, arising, arises, and only suffering, ceasing, ceases',[29] indicating that, in the teaching, 'suffering' — i.e. experience — is synonymous with 'world', an idea also stated in the *Rohitassa Sutta* and related texts (above, §2). If so, SN 12.15 can be regarded as another antirealist text, according to which the world is equivalent to what a person experiences, meaning that 'existence' and 'non-existence' are not objectively real.

Elsewhere in the Pāli suttas, Kaccāna is closely associated with the *Aṭṭhakavagga*: in the *Udāna* and Vinaya he is named as the preceptor (*upajjhāya*) of Soṇa, a *bhikkhu* who is said to recite the *Aṭṭhakavagga* in the Buddha's presence (with the Buddha complimenting Soṇa's style of intonation),[30] and

[28] SN II.17: *dvayanissito khvāyaṃ kaccāna loko yebhuyyena, atthitañ c' eva natthitañ ca. lokasamudayaṃ kho kaccāna yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya passato yā loke natthitā sā na hoti. lokanirodhaṃ kho kaccāna yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya passato yā loke atthitā sā na hoti.*

[29] SN II.17: *dukkham eva uppajjamānaṃ uppajjati, dukkhaṃ nirujjhamānaṃ nirujjhatī'ti na kaṅkhati na vicikicchati aparapaccayā ñāṇam ev' assa ettha hoti.*

[30] Ud 5.6 (p.57–59), Vin I.196–97.

at SN 22.3 he analyses a verse from the *Māgandiya Sutta*, an important text of the *Aṭṭhakavagga* (Sn IV.9). A close connection between Kaccāna and Proto-Madhyamaka can also be made out in two of the three Majjhima Nikāya suttas (MN 18, MN 133) in which he figures:

- The *Madhupiṇḍika, Sutta* (MN 18): on non-apperception, non-disputation and 'no view'.
- The *Mahākaccāna-Bhaddekaratta Sutta* (MN 133): on present-moment awareness.
- The *Uddesa-vibhaṅga Sutta* (MN 138): on meditation.

Of these three texts, the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta* is probably the most important Kaccāna text in the Pāli canon apart from the *Kaccānagotta Sutta*. It contains two brief, aphoristic teachings attributed to the Buddha. The first occurs when the Buddha makes a pithy 'no view' statement, in response to the question of Daṇḍapāṇi, the Sakyan, about what he teaches; the second occurs when he is asked to elaborate on it. Both utterances resonate strongly with the *Aṭṭhakavagga*. In fact, the ideas stated and the vocabulary used could almost be drawn directly from it; for example, having no apperception, not being in conflict with the world, having no desire for ongoing becoming, and not taking up the stick and sword.[31] The meaning of these *buddhavacana* is subsequently elaborated by Kaccāna through an analysis of the dependent origination of cognition.

For the present purposes, the content of Kaccāna's teaching matters less than the style of its presentation. Both here and in other important Kaccāna Suttas (MN 133, MN 138, SN 22.3-4, SN 35.130, AN 10.26, AN 10.172), Kaccāna does not meet the Buddha directly but is asked to explain a teaching in the Buddha's absence.[32] As far as I am aware, this peculiar narrative scenario is

[31] Also see Fronsdal (2016, Introduction: Letting Go of Views): 'Composed in prose rather than verse, the first part of this discourse, the Honeyball Sutta, shares so many concepts and so much vocabulary with the *Book of Eights* that the two were undoubtedly composed in the same milieu.'

[32] Apart from MN 18, Kaccāna analyses teachings of the Buddha in his absence at MN 133 (= M III.194–99), MN 138 (= M III.223–29), SN 22.3–4 (= III.9, III.12–13), SN 35.130 (= IV.115–16), AN 10.26 (= V.46–47), AN 10.172 (= V.255–60). Kaccāna does not meet the Buddha directly in a number of other Sutta and Vinaya texts: Vin I.194–96, Vin I.355, Vin II.15–16, Vin IV.66, M (= II.83ff), SN 35.132 (= IV.116–21), AN I.65–69, AN 6.26 (= III.314–17), AN 6.28 (= III.321–22), Ud V.6 (p.57–59).

applied only to Kaccāna and Ānanda in the Pāli Nikāyas.[33] But unlike Ānanda, Kaccāna only really comes into clear focus in texts that maintain a strict distance between him and the Buddha. Indeed, apart from a few rather formulaic texts, Kaccāna barely has any contact with the Buddha in the Pāli canon.[34] This looks very much like an intentional narrative pattern: the emphatic textual distance between Kaccāna and the Buddha suggests that he was not an integral part of earliest Buddhism; that is, he was not a direct disciple of the Buddha. If so, we could perhaps read the Kaccāna texts symbolically, as a code for how *buddhavacana* was transmitted and elaborated within Kaccāna's lineage.

This possibility is suggested by the geographical location of Kaccāna in the Pāli suttas. The *Madhura Sutta* (MN 84) places Kaccāna in the city of Madhurā after the Buddha's *parinibbāna*; other suttas locate him in nearby Avanti, which was apparently politically connected with Madhurā by virtue of the fact that King Mādhura, also called Avantiputta, was the nephew of Pajjota, King of Avanti.[35] Whatever the case, both Madhurā and Avanti lie well beyond the core region of early Buddhism (Kosala/Magadha), in a W/NW region which is marginal in the canonical discourses, but plays an important role in the Pāli account of the Second Council.[36] If we make a loose connection between the Second Council and Avanti/Madhurā, we can assign the Kaccāna texts to roughly this period, or soon afterwards, that is, towards the end of the 4th century BC, when Buddhism was expanding West.

If Kaccāna's lineage was prominent in textual production during the early period of Buddhist expansion, and remained textually active in the soon-to-follow Mauryan period and beyond, when Sthavira traditions began to reach Kashmir and Gandhāra (the latter no later than the 2nd century BC),[37] we might expect to find the imprint of this lineage in the old Buddhist literature of the North-West. Exactly this seems to be the case in the early Mahāyāna literature of Gandhāra.

[33] But there are more Kaccāna texts in this style than Ānanda texts (at SN 22.90, SN 35.116–117 and AN 10.115).

[34] Kaccāna appears with the Buddha in only four suttas: SN 12.15 (SN II.17, repeated in SN 22.90 = SN III.134–35), SN 14.13 (SN II.153–54), Ud 1.5. (pp.3–4) and Ud 7.8 (pp.77–78). Kaccāna is also named as the most prominent analyser by the Buddha in AN 1.197 (I.23).

[35] According to the entries on Madhurā and Avantiputta in DPPN.

[36] Vin II.298–99.

[37] Salomon (2018: Part I, chapter 1: The Indo-Greeks). 'Buddhism was flourishing, or at least was becoming a significant presence there, by the mid-second century BCE.'

A recently discovered Gandhāran manuscript of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* has been dated to the 1st century AD, although the text is probably much older; according to Falk and Karashima (2013: 100), 'locating the Urtext deep in the first century BCE, if not earlier, seems safe'. The Lokakṣema translation of a closely related Gandhāran text is slightly later, and both precede the much-expanded Sanskrit version of the text. However, all three contain more or less the same ancient core, consisting of the initial teachings delivered by Subhūti. The first of these, which negates the Bodhisattva ideal, will be considered in the following section. The dialogue between Subhūti and Śāriputra, which immediately follows it, seems to develop the basic idea of the *Kaccānagotta Sutta*:

> **[Subhūti]:** 'Moreover, the Bodhisattva Mahāsattva, practising and cultivating the perfection of wisdom, should train so that he does not think in terms of the Bodhicitta. Why is that? Because that thought is non-thought — the original nature of thought is luminous (*prabhāsvarā*).'
>
> **[Śāriputra]:** 'But, Venerable Subhūti, does that thought which is non-thought exist?'
>
> **Su:** 'Venerable Śāriputra, can existence or non-existence be found in the state of non-thought?'
>
> **[Śā]:** 'It is not so, Venerable Subhūti ... But what is this state of non-thought?'
>
> **[Su]:** 'Venerable Śāriputra, the state of non-thought is beyond disturbance (*avikārā*), beyond imagination (*avikalpā*).'[38]

[38] Vaidya (1960: 3): *punar aparaṃ bhagavan bodhisattvena mahāsattvena prajñāpāramitāyāṃ caratā prajñāpāramitāyāṃ bhāvayatā evaṃ śikṣitavyaṃ yathā asau śikṣyamāṇastenāpi bodhicittena na manyeta / tatkasya hetoḥ? tathā hi tac cittam acittam / prakṛtiś cittasya prabhāsvarā // atha khalv āyuṣmān śāriputra āyuṣmantaṃ subhūtim etad avocat: kiṃ punar āyuṣman subhūte asti tac cittaṃ yac cittam acittam? evam ukte āyuṣmān subhūtir āyuṣmantaṃ śāriputram etad avocat: kiṃ punar āyuṣman śāriputra yā acittatā, tatra acittatāyām astitā vā nāstitā vā vidyate vā upalabhyate vā? śāriputra āha: na hy etad āyuṣman subhūte ... kā punar eṣā āyuṣman subhūte acittatā? subhūtir āha: avikārā āyuṣman śāriputra avikalpā acittatā.*

The old Gāndhāran version of the text differs slightly from this, by stating that the Bodhisattva ought not to think in terms of 'Bodhisattva' rather than *bodhicitta*.[39] Both the Gāndhārī text and Lokakṣema's translation also lack the Sanskrit text's statement that 'the original nature of thought is luminous' (*prabhāsvarā*), which recalls the *Kevaṭṭa Sutta*'s teaching that intransitive consciousness (*viññāṇaṃ anidassanaṃ*) is 'luminous all around' (*anantaṃ sabbato pabhaṃ*).[40] If this Sanskrit addition indicates that we are in Proto-Madhyamaka territory, the same is true of Subhūti's initial statement that 'thought is non-thought' (*tac cittam acittam*). While this negation is rather baffling, Subhūti goes on to speak more straightforwardly of 'the state of non-thought' (*acittatā*), in which the dichotomy between 'existence' and 'non-existence' cannot be found. Just as in the *Kaccānagotta Sutta*, the fundamental existential duality of the world is said to be a feature of consciousness, one that ceases in a transconceptual state. The basic idea of the *Kaccānagotta Sutta* is thus placed at the forefront of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*'s opening teachings.[41] The same point is made elsewhere in the text,[42] including the following:

> Although those *dharma*s cannot be found, [foolish, unlearned, ordinary people] imagine them, and once imagined (*kalpayitvā*) they adhere to two extremes (*dvayor antayoḥ abhiniviśante*), relying on them as a support, an apprehension (*tan nidānam upalambhaṃ niśritya*). They imagine past *dharma*s, future *dharma*s and present *dharma*s, and once imagined they adhere to name and form. Although not being found, they imagine all *dharma*s. Imagining all *dharma*s, which cannot be found, they do not know and see the path as it actually is.[43]

[39] Falk and Karashima (2012: 34) read '*teṇa yeva bosisa(t)v· (1–18:) + + + + ..*'; the Sanskrit parallel is *tenāpi bodhicittena na manyeta*.

[40] According to Falk and Karashima (2012: 34), the Gandhārī Prajñāpāramitā manuscript lacks a parallel to *prakṛtiś cittasya prabhāsvarā*; their translation of Lokakṣema's translation (2012: 35) also lacks it.

[41] On the relationship between Kaccāna and the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, see Attwood (2015).

[42] The initial exchange between Śāriputra and Subhūti (Vaidya, 1960: 3) is repeated more or less verbatim soon after (*ibid.*: 10). Much later on in the text (*ibid.*: 217), the dichotomy is said to be illusory (*māyā*): *so 'haṃ bhagavan anyatra māyāyā māyopamādvā cittāt taṃ dharmasamanuśyan katamaṃ dharmam upadekṣyāmi astīti vā nāstīti vā? yaś ca atyantavivikto dharmaḥ, na so 'stīti vā nāstīti vā upaiti / yo 'pi dharmo 'tyantatayā viviktaḥ, nāsāvanuttarāṃ samyaksaṃbodhim abhisaṃbudhyate /*

[43] Vaidya (1960: 8): *tasmāt te 'saṃvidyamānān sarvadharmān kalpayanti / kalpayitvā dvāv antāv*

According to this antirealist teaching that all *dharma*s are an illusion, the imagination of two extremes, existence and non-existence, is once again drawn from the *Kaccānagotta Sutta*. All this means that in the earliest sections of the oldest Mahāyāna *sūtra*, and in what is almost certainly the oldest extant statement of the Prajñāpāramitā, we find a clear reformulation of old Proto-Madhyamaka themes, as well as an obvious inheritance from Kaccāna. An appropriate conclusion would be that when the Prajñāpāramitā was first formulated, in Gandhāra and its surroundings, it occurred within a tradition closely associated with a Proto-Madhyamaka lineage stemming from Mahā-Kaccāna.

This finding suggests that further speculation on the late canonical material related to Subhūti is in order. A marginal figure in the Pali canon, the *Udāna* singles out Subhūti for his meditative prowess: he is one who has 'destroyed thoughts' (Ud VI.7, p.71: *yassa vitakkā vidhūpitā*). In the single verse attributed to Subhūti in the *Theragāthā* — the very first stanza of the text — he likewise speaks of meditating in a forest hut (*kuṭikā*).[44] There is also a connection between Subhūti and the North-West, for a verse attributed to Subhūti appears in the fifth and final book of the *Milindapañha*, set in the city of Sāgala (modern Sialkot in Pakistan) and so part of 'Greater Gandhāra'. According to von Hinüber (1996: 83), the original language of the *Milindapañha* was not Pāli, but a different Middle-Indic, possibly Gandhārī. Although Subhūti's verse belongs to what is probably one of the additional books of the *Milindapañha* (*ibid.*: 85), its association with material from the North-West is notable. Like the *Udāna*, this verse is concerned with the secluded life, speaking favourably of ascetics (*tapassin*) who abide in the forest (*vana*).[45]

With regard to the Prajñāpāramitā and early Mahāyāna, the past-life story of Subhūti in the *Therāpadāna* is notable.[46] An ardent ascetic living in the Himalayas in a past life, Subhūti's Buddhist career is said to have begun when

[44] Th v.1 (p.1). *channā me kuṭikā sukhā nivātā vassa deva yathāsukhaṃ, cittaṃ me susamāhitaṃ vimuttaṃ ātāpī viharāmi vassa devā ti. itthaṃ sudaṃ āyasmā subhūti thero gāthaṃ abhāsitthā ti.*

[45] Mil p.386–87: *bhāsitam p' etaṃ mahārāja therena subhūtinā: rāgūpasaṃhitaṃ cittaṃ yadā uppajjate mama, sayam eva paccavekkhitvā ekako taṃ damem' ahaṃ. rajjasi rajanīyesu dussanīyesu dussasi, muyhase mohanīyesu nikkhamassu vanā tuvaṃ. visuddhānaṃ ayaṃ vāso nimmalānaṃ tapassinaṃ, mā kho visuddhaṃ dūsesi nikkhamassu vanā tuvan ti.* Another verse attributed to Subhūti, on the absence of desire, is found at Mil p.391: *sāsane te mahāvīra yato pabbajito ahaṃ, nābhijānāmi uppannaṃ mānasaṃ kāmasaṃhitan ti.*

[46] Ap I.67ff; Apadāna III: Therāpadāna, Vagga III: Subhūtivaggo (21. Subhūti).

he was visited by the Buddha Padumuttara. After worshipping him for an entire week, Subhūti is predicted to have many divine and royal rebirths before being reborn in the lifetime of Gotama and attaining liberation. Padumuttara also teaches Subhūti the 'recollection of the Buddha(s)' (*buddhānussati*), a practice hardly mentioned elsewhere in the *Therāpadāna*.[47] All these features merit the hypothesis that Subhūti was a Buddhist from a north-western Sthavira/Theriya lineage, early enough to be mentioned in the *Udāna* and *Theragāthā*, but late enough for one of his teachings to be transmitted alongside or within the tradition of the *Milindapañha*. If his lineage was associated with the practice of non-conceptuality and recollection of the Buddha(s), a close connection with the nascent Prajñāpāramitā/Mahāyāna seems likely.[48]

4. The Rhetoric of Negation

A connection between Proto-Madhyamaka and the early Prajñāpāramitā can also be seen in the very first teaching of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*. Before Subhūti's dialogue with Śāriputra, the Buddha asks Subhūti to explain the perfection of wisdom, and Subhūti replies as follows (in the Sanskrit text):

> The Blessed One has said 'Bodhisattva, Bodhisattva', but of what *dharma*, Blessed One, is this a designation, that is, 'Bodhisattva'? I do not perceive the *dharma* 'Bodhisattva', and furthermore, Blessed One, do not perceive the *dharma* called 'the perfection of wisdom'. Not finding, not apprehending, not perceiving these *dharma*s, what *dharma* 'Bodhisattva' and what *dharma* 'the perfection of wisdom' could I teach and instruct? But if, Blessed One, when it is being taught thus the heart of the Bodhisattva

[47] The practice of *buddhānussati* is mentioned in v.36, 39–40, 46, 49–51 of the story of Subhuti (Ap I.69–70); elsewhere, it is only mentioned in three places: Ap I.115 (v.7 of Sucintita-thera), I.210 (v.3 of Raṃsisaññaka-thera), II.463 (v.41 of Sugandha-thera).

[48] The canonical material on Subhūti has been overlooked in the scholarship on early Mahāyāna. Buswell's *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (2004) has no entry on him, the only mention being a short remark by Skilton (Buswell 2004: 233) in the entry 'Disciples of the Buddha': 'In later layers of Buddhist canonical literature a number of these disciples continue to appear as protagonists. Of particular importance is the promotion to chief interlocutor in the PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ LITERATURE of Subhūti, a monk and disciple noted in the *āgama*s and *nikāya*s as chief of those who dwell in the forest and, presumably thereby, also the one most worthy of offerings.'

> does not sink down [...] if his mind does not tremble [...] this very Bodhisattva, a great being, ought to be instructed in the Perfection of Wisdom.[49]

As Nattier has pointed out (2003: 179–80), this teaching follows a negative type of discourse, which she has termed the rhetoric of 'absence' or 'negation':

> In one of the earliest scriptures of the Prajñāpāramitā group, the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines* (*Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*), for example, the term *śūnyatā* appears only rarely in the early chapters, and in the *Diamond Sūtra* (*Vajracchedikā*) it is never used at all. Yet the rhetoric of negation is nonetheless carried on with great intensity through the use of other terminology.

In the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* the 'rhetoric of absence' is often used in statements focusing on what is not 'found', 'obtained' (*na samvidyate*, *nopalabhyate*),[50] or 'not perceived' (*na ... samanupaśyāmi*), as in this opening teaching. Strictly speaking, this is not a teaching about 'emptiness', at least at the formal level: the terms 'empty/emptiness' are not used, and there would seem to be little point in making an ontological point about the Bodhisattva, i.e. that the concept lacks essence or 'own being' (*svabhāva*). For what Buddhist would ever have claimed this? Apart from the first chapter of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, teachings on emptiness are marginal in other early Prajñāpāramitā texts. The *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā* does not use the terms *śūnya/śūnyatā* at all, but instead employs the rhetoric of absence in a

[49] Vaidya (1960: 3): *bodhisattvo bodhisattva iti yadidaṃ bhagavannucyate, katamasyaitadbhagavan dharmasyādhivacanaṃ yaduta bodhisattva iti? nāhaṃ bhagavaṃstaṃ dharmaṃ samanupaśyāmi yaduta bodhisattva iti / tamapyahaṃ bhagavan dharmaṃ na samanupaśyāmi yaduta prajñāpāramitā nāma / so 'haṃ bhagavan bodhisattvaṃ vā bodhisattvadharmaṃ vā avindan anupalabhamāno 'samanupaśyan, prajñāpāramitāmapyavindan anupalabhamāno 'samanupaśyan katamaṃ bodhisattvaṃ katamasyāṃ prajñāpāramitāyām avavadiṣyāmi anuśāsiṣyāmi? api tu khalu punarbhagavan saced evaṃ bhāṣyamāṇe deśyamāne upadiśyamāne bodhisattvasya cittaṃ nāvalīyate na saṃlīyate na viṣīdati na viṣādamāpadyate, nāsya vipṛṣṭhībhavati mānasam, na bhagnapṛṣṭhībhavati, notrasyati na saṃtrasyati na saṃtrāsamāpadyate, eṣa eva bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ prajñāpāramitāyām anuśāsanīyaḥ.* For the Gandhārī and Chinese parallels to this section of text, see Falk and Karashima (2012: 34); for a parallel to the description of the Bodhisattva not losing heart in the Bajaur Mahāyāna Sūtra, see Strauch (2018: 229).

[50] Nattier (2003: 180, n.18).

number of ways.[51] Most typically, it uses statements along the lines 'X is a non-X, that is why it is called X'.[52] Also frequent are outright negations along the lines 'X does not exist' (*nāsti*),[53] along with negations of apperception in statements such as 'the apperception/notion (*saṃjñā*) of X should not occur (*pravarteta*)'.[54]

The situation appears to be the same in the recently discovered 'Bajaur Mahāyāna Sūtra', an old Gandhāran text dating to the 1st or 2nd century AD, which is remarkable for its rather positive attitude towards the Śrāvakayāna. According to Schlosser and Strauch (2016: 331), '[d]espite its clear Mahāyāna character and its concentration on the path to buddhahood, the world of the Bajaur Mahāyāna *Sūtra* is still defined by the values and concepts of the *śrāvaka* path which continue to be recognized and esteemed.' Positioned somewhere between canonical doctrine and the Prajñāpāramitā, the text says very little about emptiness: the term *śūnya/śūnyatā* barely features, and the term *prajñāpāramitā* is not found at all. It instead applies the rhetoric of absence in a number of ways throughout the text, including simple negations ('*na* X'), statements on non-perception (*na sam-anu-paś*) and stipulations not to let the apperception (*saṃ-jñā*) or conception (*pra-jñā*) of something occur.[55] Of these varied forms of negation, the 'non-perception' (*na sam-anu-paś*) of something seems most common, more or less exactly the same method which opens the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*.[56] According to Strauch (2018: 222, on BajC 2: 7C14), the text also advises not forming apperceptions with regard to the terms *ātma*, *sattva*, *bhava*, and *jīva*, a sequence that is also found in the *Vajracchedikā*.[57] This

[51] Zacchetti (2020, 'The Development of Prajñāpāramitā Literature: A Historical Overview'), assigns the Vajracchedikā to a new phase of Prajñāpāramitā literature beginning 'sometime during the 4th century ce'. Harrison (2006: 141) and Schopen (2004: 227) raise the possibility that the text is older than this; according to Harrison, the text has features that 'predate the 2nd century AD'.

[52] Harrison (2006: 136) has called such statements the *Vajracchedikā*'s 'signature formula'.

[53] Such statements usually occur when Subhūti is asked by the Buddha if a certain *dharma* exists (*asti*). According to Nattier (2003: 180, n.18), such language 'is only one of many reasons to suspect that the *Vajracchedikā* is the product of an environment quite separate from the ones that produced most of the other *prajñāpāramitā* texts.'

[54] E.g. Vaidya (1961: 75, §3) = Harrison (2006: 143).

[55] These comments are based on the preliminary online edition of the text prepared by Schlosser and Strauch (http://130.223.29.184/readviewer/BC02.html).

[56] Strauch (2018: 222, 227–28) has noted a number of parallels between the two texts.

[57] E.g. Vaidya (1961: 76, §6): *na hi subhūte teṣāṃ bodhisattvānāṃ mahāsattvānām ātmasaṃjñā pravartate, na sattvasaṃjñā, na jīvasaṃjñā, na pudgalasaṃjñā pravartate.*

similarity suggests that the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, *Vajracchedikā* and Bajaur Mahāyāna Sūtra were composed in related circles in and around Gandhāra.

How are the different applications of the 'rhetoric of absence' in the three texts to be understood? Nothing suggests that it is an offshoot of the teaching of emptiness. In fact, the situation should rather be reversed: since the Bajaur Mahāyāna Sūtra, *Vajracchedikā* and early parts of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* almost completely avoid the idea of emptiness, and instead focus on negation and absence, it would be more accurate to say that the teaching of emptiness was formed within a speculative tradition based on negation and absence, rather than the other way around. It hardly needs to be pointed out that negation and absence, allied with a focus on non-conceptuality and the stilling of apperception, are defining features of Proto-Madhyamaka. Just as in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*'s initial dialogue between Subhūti and Śāriputra, we are here dealing with a reworking of Proto-Madhyamaka themes.

The Proto-Madhyamaka inheritance is most evident in the various negations of apperception (*saṃjñā*) in the Bajaur Mahāyāna Sūtra. According to Schlosser and Strauch (2016: 331), 'the principle of non-apperception is factually present in all parts of the text and underlines the coherent character of the *sūtra* as a literary composition'.[58] Strauch (2018: 235) adds that '[t]he Bodhisattva path leading to awakening is described mainly in terms of a meditational practice characterised by the feature of non-apperception. This mainstream practice is largely based on conceptions developed in Mainstream Buddhism.' In this respect it looks very much as if the Bajaur Mahāyāna Sūtra has taken the *Aṭṭhakavagga*'s teaching (Sn 802) that one should not fashion 'even a subtle apperception', and applied it not just to 'what is seen, heard or thought', but to all aspects of Buddhist thought.

The early Prajñāpāramitā rhetoric of absence/negation is also strikingly similar to negations of self in canonical texts such as DN 15, MN 22 and MN 38. These teachings negate and leave the hearer in a cognitive absence, a state that inclines towards letting go of certain views. The idea of not perceiving the Bodhisattva, or any other entity, has exactly the same trajectory: such Prajñāpāramitā teachings apply to Buddhist doctrine an approach originally concerned with the negation of non-Buddhist ideas. The Prajñāpāramitā rhetoric of absence or negation is therefore little more than a reformulation of the 'no view' tendency within early Buddhism. Buddhist thinkers used

[58] Schlosser and Strauch (2016: 331).

to negating views, to asserting nothing about self or world, to valuing non-conceptuality as the highest form of truth, and to remaining silent when questioned about the Tathāgata, simply applied *via negativa* rhetoric to Buddhist doctrine itself. Precisely why they did this will be addressed in the next section.

That the rhetoric of negation is a reformulation of Proto-Madhyamaka is suggested by another feature of the Bajaur Mahāyāna Sūtra and Subhūti's opening teaching in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*. In the Bajaur Mahāyāna Sūtra, negative rhetoric is most emphatically applied to the non-perception of the Tathāgata (e.g. §1.2.1–1.2.2), which recalls canonical teachings on not being able to define or find the Tathāgata (e.g. Sn 793/802, or MN 72; above, §1–2). The notion that the Prajñāpāramitā built upon this specific aspect of Proto-Madhyamaka is also suggested by a parallel between not finding the Bodhisattva in the opening teaching of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, and not finding the Tathāgata in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* (MN 22):

> When the gods including Indra, Brahma and Prajāpati search for the *bhikkhu* thus released in mind (*cittavimuttaṃ*), they cannot establish that 'the consciousness (*viññāṇaṃ*) of the Tathāgata is located here'. Why is that? Even in the present, *bhikkhu*s, I say that the Tathāgata is untraceable. Speaking and teaching thus, *bhikkhu*s, some ascetics and Brahmins falsely slander me: 'The ascetic Gotama is a nihilist (*venayiko*) who declares the destruction, annihilation and non-existence of an existing being.'[59]

This teaching parallels the opening teaching in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* very closely. Both texts state the inability to find the spiritual adept — the Tathāgata or the Bodhisattva — before commenting on the negative reaction this provokes — the accusation of nihilism, and the Bodhisattva losing heart. The teachings are of course different, but both have exactly the same structure and apply the same type of discourse in making their *via negativa* points.

[59] MN I.140: *evaṃ vimuttacittaṃ kho bhikkhave bhikkhuṃ sa-indā devā sabrahmakā sapajāpatikā anvesaṃ nādhigacchanti: idaṃ nissitaṃ tathāgatassa viññāṇan ti. taṃ kissa hetu? diṭṭhe vāhaṃ bhikkhave dhamme tathāgataṃ ananuvejjo ti vadāmi. evaṃvādiṃ kho maṃ bhikkhave evamakkhāyiṃ eke samaṇabrāhmaṇā asatā tucchā musā abhūtena abbhācikkhanti, venayiko samaṇo gotamo sato sattassa ucchedaṃ vināsaṃ vibhavaṃ paññāpetī ti.*

5. The Genealogy of Emptiness

We have seen that rather than innovating the rhetoric of absence, the oldest parts of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* as well as the *Vajracchedikā* and the Bajaur Mahāyāna Sūtra inherited and developed a negative style of discourse from the canonical teachings. In these early Prajñāpāramitā texts, we see not simply how an important early Mahāyāna tradition emerged, but find something more specific and precise: how Proto-Madhyamaka themes were given a fresh rendering, which in the case of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* was dependent on the canonical tradition related to Kaccāna.

What distinguishes the Prajñāpāramitā rhetoric of absence from Proto-Madhyamaka is its focus on Buddhist doctrine. The point seems to be that from the 'no view' perspective, in which ultimate truth is ineffable, all aspects of discourse, including Buddhist teachings, are conceptual constructs; from the perspective of ultimate truth, they cannot be perceived or found. The denial that fundamental items of Buddhist teaching are ultimately real suggests that the Prajñāpāramitā emerged from the internal dynamics of Buddhist debate. Unlike the canonical period, negation was focused on Buddhist rather than non-Buddhist ideas. But who were the Buddhist opponents of the Prajñāpāramitā? The standard answer to this goes something like the following:

> The early period of the Buddha and his successors was one of spiritual pragmatism. What mattered was the way to Nirvana, the practical focus on which set limits to abstract speculation. But ongoing reflection on the meaning and purpose of the canonical teachings eventually resulted in the Abhidharma. While this analysis was primarily psychological, and focused on elaborating the different mental states discussed in the canonical teachings, especially those concerning the path, it was also philosophically grounded on the idea that that all *dharma*s lack self. Thus Abhidharma philosophy came to espouse a reductionistic vision of a selfless cosmos. This provided the impetus for the Perfection of Wisdom, in which Abhidharmic selflessness was extended to encompass the 'emptiness' (*śūnyatā*) of all *dharma*s. Thus the Prajñāpāramitā emerged in reaction to Abhidharma, or as an extension of it.

An example of this version of intellectual history, at least with regard to the transition from Abhidharma to the Prajñāpāramitā, is contained in Paul Williams' *Mahāyāna Buddhism* (2009):

> [...] in the early Mahāyāna, as well as in some schools with no particular Mahāyāna association as such, the teaching of *dharma*s as those final realities out of which we construct the world was rejected in favour of a teaching of the emptiness of *dharma*s (*dharmaśūnyatā*). *Dharma*s too lack any fundamental status and are not ultimate realities. *Dharma*s too can be analysed away. For these traditions the analysis commonly associated with the Abhidharma had ended too early, and thus such a *prajñā* was a defective *prajñā*, not the perfection of *prajñā*, or no real *prajñā* at all. Now *prajñā* is said to be a state of consciousness which understands emptiness (*śūnyatā*), the absence of 'self' or intrinsic nature, even in *dharma*s. (2009: 50)

> The principal ontological message (message concerning what ultimately exists) of the Prajñāparamitā is an extension of the Buddhist teaching of not-Self to equal no essential unchanging core, therefore no fundamentally real existence, as applied to all things without exception. In context the suggestion is that there simply is no such thing as 'intrinsic nature' [...] for *dharma*s, any more than for anything else, to possess. All things without exception are just pragmatic conceptual constructs. (2009: 52)

> So the terminology of the Perfection of Wisdom is that of the Abhidharma, but the critique is of the claim to have found some things which really, fundamentally, ultimately exist, i.e. *dharma*s. These early Prajñāparamitā texts constantly ask what *dharma* is referred to by the term X; the reply is that no such *dharma* can be found, in reality there is no such thing [...] (2009: 54)[60]

[60] It should be pointed out that Williams also problematises the scheme whereby 'emptiness' emerged as an extension of the idea of the selflessness of *dharmas*, by recognising that the Prajñāpāramitā might have deeper roots in 'teachings akin to those of emptiness in the Sutta Nipāta of the Pali Canon' (2009: 53).

A similar reconstruction is stated in Rupert Gethin's *The Foundations of Buddhism* (1998: 235–37):

> Central to the Abhidharma is the distinction between the conventional truth (that persons and selves exist) and the ultimate truth (that persons and selves are ultimately simply aggregates of evanescent dharmas — physical and mental events). The main teaching of the Perfection of Wisdom is that, from the perspective of perfect wisdom, even this account of the way things are is ultimately arbitrary. [...]
>
> Abhidharma theory and the associated meditations thus provide a way of getting behind appearances to a world that is quite different from the one ordinarily experienced — a way of easing the mind from the ways and patterns of thought it habitually uses to understand the world. [...] Our minds have a predilection to the formulation of views (*dṛṣṭi/diṭṭhi*), to conceptual proliferation (*prapañca/papañca*), and to the manufacture of conceptual constructs (*vikalpa*); it is these which we tend to confuse with the way things are and to which we become attached. In other words, we are always in danger of mistaking our own views and opinions for a true understanding of the way things are. This danger — and this is the really significant point — may apply to views and opinions based on the theoretical teachings of Buddhism (the Abhidharma and the account of the stages of the path) no less than to views and opinions derived from other theoretical systems. Perfect wisdom, however, is what sees through the process of the mind's conceptual construction and is not tainted by attachment to any view or opinion. [...] From the perspective of perfect wisdom all these are seen for what they ultimately are: empty (*śūnya/suñña*). That is, the conceptual constructs of Buddhist theory are ultimately no less artificial and arbitrary entities than the conceptual constructs of the ordinary unawakened mind which sees really existing persons and selves. The mind can grasp at the theory of *dharma*s and turn it into another conceptual strait-jacket. [...]

> The teaching of emptiness should not be read, as it sometimes appears to be, as an attempt to subvert the Abhidharma theory of *dharmas* as a whole. After all it applies to the constructs of all Buddhist theory, including the Mahāyāna and, crucially, itself: there are no bodhisattvas and no stages of the bodhisattva path. [...]
>
> In carving up reality into *dharma*s in the manner of the Abhidharma, we are essentially constructing a theoretical 'model' or map of the way things are. [...] Some maps and models will reflect the way things are better than others, but they nevertheless remain models and maps. As such, none should be mistaken for the way things are. Thus for the Perfection of Wisdom, just as persons and beings are ultimately elusive entities, so too are all *dharma*s. In fact the idea that anything exists of and in itself is a simply a trick that our minds and language play on us. The great theme of the Perfection of Wisdom thus becomes 'emptiness' (*śūnyatā*/*suññatā*) — the emptiness of all things that we might be tempted to think truly and ultimately exist of and in themselves.

A similar reconstruction focused more specifically on the Prajñāpāramitā in Gandhāra is found in Bronkhorst (2018):

> The special point to be emphasised is that the 'Perfection of Wisdom' which is the subject matter of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* in its surviving Sanskrit version, only makes sense against the background of the overhaul of Buddhist scholasticism that had taken place in Greater Gandhāra during the last centuries preceding the Common Era. It was in Greater Gandhāra, during this period, that Buddhist scholasticism developed an ontology centred on the lists of dharmas that had been preserved. Lists of dharmas had been drawn up before the scholastic revolution in Greater Gandhāra, and went on being drawn up elsewhere with the goal of preserving the teaching of the Buddha. But the Buddhists of Greater Gandhāra were the first to use these lists of dharmas to construe an ontology, unheard of until then. They looked upon the dharmas as the only really existing things, rejecting the existence

> of entities that were made up of them. Indeed, these scholiasts may have been the first to call themselves *śūnyavādins*. (2018: 124)
>
> The *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* is largely built on the scholastic achievements of Greater Gandhāra, as are other texts of the same genre; it draws conclusions from these. One of its recurring themes is its emphasis that everything that is not a dharma does not exist. This is the inevitable corollary of the conviction that only dharmas really exist, but one that is rarely emphasised in the Abhidharma texts. The *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* goes further and claims that the dharmas themselves do not exist either, that they are empty (*śūnya*). Once again, all this only makes sense against the historical background of the Abhidharma elaborated in Greater Gandhāra. (2018: 125–26)

These reconstructions are not entirely wrong. They must reflect, to some degree, actual thought processes that occurred to numerous individuals at various points in the formulation of the Prajñāpāramitā. But according to the oldest sources, this was not the primary impetus behind their creation. The dominant feature of the old Prajñāpāramitā literature of Gandhāra is not a critique of Abhidharma essentialism, but the rhetoric of absence directed against standard features of mainstream Buddhism. Contrary to what Bronkhorst claims, one of the recurring themes of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* is not 'its emphasis that everything that is not a dharma does not exist'; his claim that the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* states that 'the dharmas themselves do not exist either, that they are empty (*śūnya*)' is fictitious. Very little in the text, especially its earliest sections, gives the impression that it knows and is reacting to a reductionistic Abhidharma philosophy.

This is not to deny that early Prajñāpāramitā texts critique the Abhidharma. The problem is that such critiques are minor features of these texts, but have been regarded as their primary focus. Thus Section 1 of the Bajaur Mahāyāna Sūtra consists almost entirely of negations and the rhetoric of absence. Alongside this is a rather brief section on not perceiving the 'inherent nature' and 'distinct character' of *dharmas* (*svabhāva*, *lakṣaṇa*), which Strauch (2018: 214) believes is fundamental to the text:

> Based on the notions developed in Abhidharma (and particularly Sarvāstivāda) scholasticism, the initial dialogue provides an extensive discussion of the character of dharmas. In a certain way, the discourse described here paves the way for the teaching of the entire sūtra and establishes a theoretical framework which prepares the listener for the following instruction in the bodhisattva path.

This reading of Section 1 of the Bajaur Mahāyāna Sūtra seems to overstate the importance of its rather brief Abhidharma critique. Strauch further claims (2018: 222) that its brief Abhidharma critique provides the foundations for the *sūtra*'s teaching on the Bodhisattva path, contained in Section 2 of the text:

> The teaching called here bodhisattva training has to be interpreted as a natural outcome of the preceding instruction regarding the character of dharmas. Based on the assumption that all dharmas are empty (*śūnya*) and without an inherent nature (*asvabhāva*), they cannot be apprehended (*anupalambha*). Any notion/apperception (*saṃjñā*) of them as real entities must therefore be considered a false view or error and has to be strictly avoided by a person accepting the doctrine of emptiness. Consequently, the training of a bodhisattva is described as a strict obedience to the principle of non-apperception/non-notion.

This reading of the *sūtra* follows the long-established idea that Prajñāpāramitā is, essentially, a critique of Abhidharma. But while the teaching of emptiness is obviously connected to the rhetoric of silence, the weight of evidence suggests that the logical order is the opposite of what Strauch claims: it is because they cannot be apprehended, and because all apperceptions have been negated, that *dharma*s are said to be empty, rather than vice versa. The Bajaur Mahāyāna Sūtra in fact agrees with the other early examples of Prajñāpāramitā literature, in that very little in it has anything to do with Abhidharma. Zacchetti's presentation of emptiness as a theme within Prajñāpāramitā teaching in general describes the situation more accurately.[61] Schopen is also correct to point out (2004: 495) that the theory that Mahāyāna Buddhism emerged in reaction to Abhidharma and Hīnayāna scholasticism is based on a 'disproportionate' evaluation of the sources:

[61] Zacchetti (2020, 'Doctrinal Aspects of the Prajñāpāramitā').

> The representation of Hīnayāna Buddhism as narrowly scholastic rests almost entirely on a completely disproportionate, and undeserved, emphasis on the Abhidharma. The *abhidharma* was almost certainly important to a narrow circle of monks. But *abhidharma* texts were by no means the only things that Hīnayāna monks wrote or read. They also wrote — especially it seems in what should have been "the Mahāyāna period" — an enormous number of stories, and they continued writing them apparently long after the early Mahāyāna Sūtras were in production. Some of these stories are specifically called Jātaka and they have come down to us as separate Avadāna collections.

If we bear in mind that the 'Hīnayāna' stories Schopen mentions include much mythic material (i.e. Jātaka type narratives) and related spiritual ideals (Bodhisattva type path adventures), we have a much better idea of the sort of Buddhist realism that the Prajñāpāramitā was reacting against. Indeed, Nattier (2003: 180–81) has noted that spiritual realism is deeply embedded in numerous Mahāyāna *sūtra*s; texts such as the *Ugra-paripṛcchā* lack teachings on emptiness and the rhetoric of absence, but take 'a quite literal and affirmative view' of such things as 'Arhatship, Buddhahood, or the path':

> A comparison of the *Ugra* with other early Mahāyāna sūtras shows that it is not unique in this regard. The *Akṣobhyavyūha*, for example, is also quite unselfconscious in urging both *śrāvaka*s and bodhisattvas to hasten their progress toward their respective goals by seeking rebirth in Akṣobhya's (apparently quite real) paradise. Likewise the larger *Sukhāvatīvyūha* seems unconcerned about any possible hazards of reification, and simply devotes its energy to encouraging both bodhisattvas and *śrāvaka*s to seek rebirth in Amitābha's realm. Even the *Lotus Sūtra* — widely read through the lens of "emptiness" philosophy by both traditional East Asian Buddhists and modern readers — only rarely uses the term *śūnyatā*, and in general seems more concerned with urging its listeners to have faith in their own future Buddhahood than in encouraging them to "deconstruct" their concepts.

Nattier (2003: 182) suggests that the general situation is to be understood as follows:

> It is tempting, therefore — and it may well be correct — to view the *Ugra* as representing a preliminary stage in the emergence of the bodhisattva vehicle, a phase centered on the project of "constructing" ideas about the practices of the bodhisattva that preceded a later "deconstructionist" — or better, dereifying — move. Yet it is clear that the move from affirmation to antireification did not proceed in one-way fashion. On the contrary, what we see in later literature is more like a series of zigzag developments, with each new idea about the bodhisattva path first asserted in positive (or "constructionist") fashion, and then negated in subsequent texts.

If the 'deconstructionist' sort of early Mahāyāna, that is the Prajñāpāramitā, stands in a much older Proto-Madhyamaka tradition stemming from the canonical period, there is no need to regard the *Ugra-paripṛcchā* or even Pure Land Buddhism as historically prior. Both should rather be regarded as continuations of trends well established in the canonical period. If, for example, the *Aṭṭhakavagga* is regarded as the oldest source of the negative tradition that resulted in the Prajñāpāramitā, then the *Khandhaka* (Skt. *Skandhaka*) section of the Vinaya plays a similarly foundational role for Bodhisattva realism, especially if, as claimed by Frauwallner, it was originally part of a longer work containing a full biography of the Buddha.[62]

Both texts could not be more different. Whereas the *Aṭṭhaka* focuses on cognition, negation and present-moment awareness, the *Khandhaka* has a more cosmic vision in which Buddhism is part of the fabric of the world, celebrated in the higher, divine realms, and even including the idea that direct contact with the Buddha and reception of teachings from him effects a decisive and irreversible step along the spiritual path — what Peter Masefield (1986) memorably termed 'divine revelation'. We must imagine parallel trajectories stemming from the early traditions defined by these texts, the *Aṭṭhakavagga* (and related *via negativa* teaching) on the one hand, and the *Khandhaka* (and related mythic discourses) on the other, between which there

[62] See Frauwallner (1956, chapter 3: 'The Origin of the Skandhaka').

was much interaction over time, lots of to and fro, resulting eventually in the emergence of Bodhisattva realism and Pure Land Buddhism in opposition to the antirealism of the Prajñāpāramitā.

Within this grand development of Buddhist spirituality, the Prajñāpāramitā critique of Abhidharma would seem to be peripheral. It is not even clear if the discourse about being empty of 'own-being' was originally formulated in opposition to Abhidharma. For all the conceptual tools required for the critique are to be found in the canonical discourses. At SN 35.85, the expression 'the world is empty' (*suñño loko suñño loko ti*) is explained as 'empty of self and what pertains to self' (*suññaṃ attena vā attaniyena*), which is then explained in terms of the six senses, their objects, and forms of sentience/consciousness and experience: all of these are said to be 'empty of self and what pertains to self'.[63] To reach the Prajñāpāramitā, this analysis need only be combined with the teaching of SN 22.95 (§3 above), in which the five aggregates are presented as an apparition ('Form is like a lump of foam … consciousness is like an illusion'). Since the discourse on emptiness in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* is most commonly applied to the five aggregates,[64] what role did the Abhidharma play in the formulation of these teachings? It is not logically required.

6. Conclusion

The general failure to consider Gómez's Proto-Madhyamaka thesis has been a missed opportunity in Buddhist Studies. For as we have seen, a careful reconsideration of it opens up new perspectives on the history of early Buddhist thought. The apophatic thought of the *Aṭṭhakavagga* is much more prevalent in early Buddhist teachings than Gómez believed: silence, negation, non-conceptuality, ineffability, present-moment mindfulness

[63] SN 35.85 follows the format of SN 35.84, on which see n.24 above. These suttas were evidently the work of the same early Buddhist tradition.

[64] The first teaching on emptiness in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* begins as an extension of canonical teachings on the rise and fall of the five aggregates. However, this is not stated as a doctrinal position to be assented to, but is rather presented as a conceptual understanding to be avoided. Vaidya (1960: 6): *saced rūpe carati, nimitte carati / saced rūpanimitte carati, nimitte carati / saced rūpaṃ nimittam iti carati, nimitte carati / saced rūpasyotpāde carati, nimitte carati / saced rūpasya nirodhe carati, nimitte carati / saced rūpasya vināśe carati, nimitte carati / saced rūpaṃ śūnyam iti carati, nimitte carati.*

and antirealism are found throughout the Pāli discourses. These aspects of early Buddhist teaching can be contrasted with the realistic assumptions of Buddhist myth and its spiritual dimensions. The latent tension between these perspectives explodes onto the Buddhist scene in the formative period of Mahāyāna, when the apophatic tendency was reformulated as the Prajñāpāramitā, and mythic/spiritual realism was reformulated into different versions of the Bodhisattva ideal, in particular Pure Land Buddhism.

To understand the relationship between the early Buddhist period and the early Prajñāpāramitā, a 'mapping' approach has been adopted to locate canonical persons, lineages, ideas and practices in time and space. This allows us to situate Kaccāna in the West/North-West of the subcontinent (Avanti/Madhurā) around the end of the 4th century BC. Regardless of the historicity of this individual, we can at least identify a lineage bearing his name that was deeply involved in the textual transmission of Proto-Madhyamaka in (roughly) the mid-canonical period. Buddhist Studies has not yet realised the potential of this approach. But it should be obvious that the 'Kaccāna hypothesis' proposed here, which connects the mid/late canonical period with the nascent Prajñāpāramitā, and situates it within the expansion of Buddhism towards the West, is a considerable advance on previous thinking about Prajñāpāramitā origins, which has focused on minor scholastic developments more or less entirely abstracted from the real world.

One implication of this thesis is that the 'forest hypothesis', i.e. that forest asceticism and/or meditation played a major role in the origins of Mahāyāna, should be revived.[65] In the Pāli canon, Kaccāna is a forest meditator. In Avanti he stays in a forest hut (*araññakuṭikā*) near the market town of Makkarakaṭa (SN 35.132); in Madhurā he stays in the Gundāvana (MN 84), which the commentary calls 'the black Gundā forest' (SN-a III.319: *kaṇhaka-gundā-vane*);[66] and in the *Udāna* (Ud 7.8), he is praised by the Buddha for practising bodily mindfulness.[67] Moreover, the 'practice suttas' of the *Aṭṭhakavagga* (XIV–XVI) suppose a strictly ascetic way of life, close to that described in their sister text from the *Suttanipāta*, the *Khaggavisāṇa Sutta* (Sn I.3). The meditative/ascetic character of Kaccāna, plus his connection with

[65] For critique of the 'forest hypothesis', see Drewes (2010) and Harrison (2018: 9ff).

[66] SN IV.117: *ekaṃ samayaṃ āyasmā mahākaccāno avantīsu viharati makkarakaṭe araññakuṭikāyaṃ*.

[67] Ud 77: *addasā kho bhagavā āyasmantaṃ mahākaccānaṃ avidūre nisinnaṃ pallaṅkaṃ ābhujitvā ujuṃ kāyaṃ paṇidhāya kāyagatāya satiyā ajjhattaṃ parimukhaṃ sūpaṭṭhitāya*.

the ascetically inclined *Aṭṭhakavagga*, should not be overlooked in attempts to trace the origins of the Prajñāpāramitā.

Needless to say, meditating in the forest was hardly an unusual vocation in early Buddhism. One could reasonably argue that the *Udāna* sutta which singles out Kaccāna for his meditative prowess is stereotypical, and repeated for a number of other *bhikkhus*.[68] However, the *Udāna* description of Kaccāna as a skilled meditator puts him in a rather elite group including Sāriputta, Moggallāna and Aññātakoṇḍañña, followed by the lesser known Kaṅkhārevata and Cūlapanthaka, as well as Piṇḍolabhāradvāja and Subhūti. Apart from the very famous disciples, this grouping includes at least one celebrated ascetic, Piṇḍolabhāradvāja, a *paṃsukūlika bhikkhu* according to the *Udāna*, and one extremely marginal figure, Subhūti, possibly a meditation master from the late canonical period (§3 above).

Moreover, with regard to Kaccāna staying in 'forest huts' (*araññakuṭikā*), it should be noted that such abodes are very rarely mentioned in the Pāli suttas, and not at all in the Vinaya. All this adds up to a small but significant collection of evidence supporting the ascetic inclinations of Kaccāna (or the lineage using his name). Thus it is reasonable to suppose that the figures of Kaccāna and Subhūti belonged to successive phases in the spread of an ascetically inclined lineage to the West/North-West, perhaps from the late 4th to late 3rd centuries BC. The origins of the Prajñāpāramitā should be located here, rather than among groups of scholastics poring over Abhidharma lists in the dusty corners of their monastic libraries.

To be sure, the strands of tradition on which these claims are made are rather meagre, especially with regard to Subhūti; sceptics will no doubt retort that any such historical claims are speculative at best. But constructing a theory is preferable to ignoring the evidence. The canonical traditions suggesting that Kaccāna and Subhūti were forest masters of the W/NW *could* be fabrications. On the other hand, why would early Buddhist tradition have placed Kaccāna in such a marginal region, if there were not some truth to it? And when composing new *suttas/sūtras*, surely it would have been preferable to memorialise the venerable teachers of one's lineage, rather than create entirely fictitious characters. Thus it is *preferable* to regard Kaccāna as an eminent figure in an apophatic and ascetic Buddhist tradition, of roughly

[68] See: Ud 3.24–25 (pp.27–28), Sāriputta and Mahā-Moggallāna; Ud 3.36 (pp.42–43), Piṇḍola-Bhāradvāja; Ud 3.40 (p.46), Sāriputta; Ud 3.50 (p.61), Cūḷa-panthaka; Ud 3.57 (p.71), Subhūti; Ud 3.66 (p.77), Aññāsi-Koṇḍañña; Ud 3.68 (p.77), Mahā-Kaccāna.

the mid-canonical period; to view Subhūti as a meditation master from the same tradition in the late canonical period; and to hypothesise that the Prajñāpāramitā emerged from this tradition, some time after Buddhism had become well established in Gandhāra in the 2nd century BC.

While this could be rejected as excessively conjectural, dismissing the historical value of canonical texts out of hand is unwarranted. Unlike Mahāyāna *sūtra*s, the canonical discourses are mostly realistic and early; they were not composed in an historical vacuum.[69] In this context, a recently discovered inscription from Deorkothar, central northern India, containing a lineage stemming from the Buddha via Anuruddha, is important. As Salomon and Marino have shown (2014), this inscription is found in the region where Anuruddha is situated in the Pāli suttas (the Ceti kingdom). The localisation of figures in early Buddhist texts should therefore be taken seriously. If there really was a lineage using Anuruddha's name in the exact same region where Anuruddha is situated in the canonical texts, it is reasonable to suppose that the same applies to Kaccāna and a lineage in his name in Madhurā/Avanti. As Salomon and Marino have warned (2014: 37), we should be careful not to fall into the trap of 'letting skepticism take over one's thinking, leading to the mindset of "In the end, we know nothing"'. It is preferable to formulate a positive hypothesis, to get as much out of the evidence we have, rather than throwing our hands up in the air and exclaiming 'who knows?'.

The background to the Prajñāpāramitā should thus be understood in terms of a tension between an apophatic and ascetic tradition, and the tendency towards Buddhist myth and cosmology. Furthermore, the notion that the Prajñāpāramitā was a scholastic reaction to Abhidharma should be regarded as a projection of later scholastic concerns onto early material which mostly lacks them. From Nāgārjuna onwards, the central tenet of Madhyamaka philosophy was that all *dharma*s are empty (*śūnya*) of own-being (*svabhāva*): Buddhist scholars have taken this philosophical position as intellectual history, it would seem, an historical mistake compounded by the lack of attention given to Gómez's thesis.

All this being said, it should by now be clear that the concept of 'Proto-Madhyamaka' confuses rather than clarifies the intellectual history of early Buddhism. What Gómez termed 'Proto-Mādhyamika in the Pāli canon'

[69] On the realism of canonical texts, see Sujato and Brahmali (2015: 81–83, §4.3.3; 84–89, §4.4.1).

would be better termed 'Proto-Prajñāpāramitā', since the content, style and meaning of the Prajñāpāramitā is anticipated in the Pāli canon, whereas the Prajñāpāramitā itself would be better described as 'Proto-Madhyamaka', since this is clearly the starting point for the later Madhyamaka tradition. However, reading certain teachings of the Pāli canon as 'Proto-Prajñāpāramitā' puts the cart before the horse, and fails to do justice to the breadth and subtlety of the early *via negativa* tradition.

A more suitable emic term to describe this tradition would be 'No View Buddhism', an etic equivalent of which could be 'Apophatic Buddhism'. Thus we can conclude that No View/Apophatic Buddhism, comprising a collection of closely interwoven ideas, themes and practices, fed into the Prajñāpāramitā/Proto-Madhyamaka, which in turn provided the resources for the Madhyamaka philosophical tradition. At all stages of development, from the Buddha to Nāgārjuna, the No View/Apophatic tradition can be distinguished from, and was most likely in dispute with, mythic and meditative realism. While the realism of the Abhidharma was a later addition to the philosophical scene prior to Nāgārjuna, by the 2nd century AD it had become the primary target of the No View/Apophatic tradition. This explains the marginal presence of Abhidharma critique in the Prajñāpāramitā texts, followed by its central position in Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka.

References

All Pāli citations are taken from PTS editions. Abbreviations follow the Critical Pāli Dictionary: https://cpd.uni-koeln.de/intro/vol1_epileg_abbrev_texts.

Attwood, Jayarava. 2015. 'Kātyāyana in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra'. http://jayarava.blogspot.com/2015/06/katyayana-in-astasahasrika.html; last retrieved, Oct 9 2024.

Bapat, P. V. 1951. *Arthapada Sūtra Spoken by the Buddha.* Santiniketan, India: Visva-Bharati. Online English translation, with Pāli parallels, at http://mbingenheimer.net/tools/bibls/Bapat.1951.Arthapadasutra.pdf.

Bodhi, Bhikkhu. 2017. *The Suttanipāta. An Ancient Collection of the Buddha's Discourses Together with Its Commentaries Paramatthajotikā II and excerpts from the Niddesa. Translated from the Pāli.* Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications.

Bronkhorst, Johannes. 2018. 'Abhidharma in Early Mahāyāna'. In Harrison, ed. (2018), pp.119–140.

Buswell, Jr., Robert E. (ed.) 2004. *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*. New York: Macmillan Reference.

Dreyfus, Georges. 2011. 'Is Mindfulness Present-Centred and Non-Judgmental? A Discussion of the Cognitive Dimensions of Mindfulness'. *Contemporary Buddhism* 12 (1): 41–54.

Drewes, David. 2010. 'Early Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism I: Recent scholarship'. *Religion Compass* 4(2): 55–65.

Falk, Harry and Karashima, Seishi. 2012. 'A first-century *Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript from Gandhāra — *parivarta* 1 (Texts from the Split Collection 1)'. *Annual Report of The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University for the Academic Year 2011*, vol. 15: 19–61.

——. 2013. 'A first-century *Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript from Gandhāra — *parivarta* 5 (Texts from the Split Collection 2)'. *Annual Report of The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University for the Academic Year 2012*, vol. 16: 97–170.

Frauwallner, Erich. 1956. *The Earliest Vinaya and the Beginnings of Buddhist Literature.* Rome: Instituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente.

Fronsdal, Gil. 2016. *The Buddha Before Buddhism: Wisdom from the Early Teachings*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications.

Gethin, Rupert. 1998. *The Foundations of Buddhism*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Gombrich, R. F. 1990. 'Recovering the Buddha's Message'. In *The Buddhist Forum, Vol. 1 Seminar Papers 1987 - 1988*. Ed. Tadeusz Skorupski. London: School of Oriental and African Studies, pp.5–20.

Gómez, Luis O. 1976. 'Proto-Mādhyamika in the Pāli Canon'. *Philosophy East and West* Vol. 26, No. 2 (Apr., 1976): 137–165.

Harrison, Paul (ed.). 2006. 'Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā. A New English Translation of the Sanskrit Text Based on Two Manuscripts from Greater Gandhara'. In *Manuscripts in the Schøyen Collection, Volume III: Buddhist Manuscripts* (pp.133–159). Ed. Jens Braarvig. Oslo: Hermes Publishing.

——.2018. *Setting Out on the Great Way: Essays on Early Mahāyāna Buddhism*. Sheffield, Bristol: Equinox.

von Hinüber, Oskar. 1996. *A Handbook of Pāli Literature*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Masefield, Peter. 1986. *Divine Revelation in Pali Buddhism*. London: Allen & Unwin.

Nattier, Jan. 2003. *A Few Good Men: the Bodhisattva path according to the Inquiry of Ugra (Ugraparipṛcchā)*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Norman, K. R. 1981. 'A Note on attā in the Alagaddūpama Sutta.' In *Studies in Indian Philosophy* (Memorial Volume for Pandit Sukhlalji Sanghvi), pp.19–29.

Salomon, Richard. 2018. *The Buddhist literature of ancient Gandhara: an introduction with selected translations*. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications.

Salomon, Richard and Marino, Joseph. 2014. 'Observations on the Deorkothar Inscriptions and Their Significance for the Evaluation of Buddhist Historical Traditions'. *Annual Report of The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University for the Academic Year 2013*, vol. 17: 27–39.

Schlosser, Andrea and Strauch, Ingo. 2016. 'The Bajaur Mahāyāna Sūtra: A Preliminary Analysis of its Contents'. *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* vol. 39: 309–335.

Schopen, Gregory. 2004. 'Diamond Sūtra'. In Buswell, Jr. (ed.), 2004: 227–28.

Siderits, Mark. 2007. *Buddhism as Philosophy. An Introduction*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing; Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.

Strauch, Ingo. 2018. 'Early Mahāyāna in Gandhāra: New Evidence from the Bajaur Mahāyāna Sūtra'. In Harrison, ed. (2018), pp.207–42.

Sujato and Brahmali, Bhikkhus. 2015. *The Authenticity of the Early Buddhist Texts*. (Supplement to *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies*, vol. V).

Vaidya, P. L. (ed.). 1960. *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (Buddhist Sanskrit Texts, 4). Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute. Last accessed online, Oct 19th 2024: http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/corpustei/transformations/html/sa_aSTasAhasrikA-prajJApAramitA.htm.

——. 1961. *Mahayana-sūtra-samgrahah*, *Part 1* (Buddhist Sanskrit Texts, 17). Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute. Last accessed online, Oct 19th 2024: http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/corpustei/transformations/html/sa_vajracchedikA-prajJApAramitA.htm.

Vetter, Tilmann. 1988. 'Mysticism in the Aṭṭhakavagga', in *The Ideas and Meditative Practices of Early Buddhism*. Leiden: E. J. Brill (pp.101–06).

Williams, Paul. 2009. *Mahāyāna Buddhism. The Doctrinal Foundations*. Second Edition. London, New York: Routledge.

Wynne, Alexander. 2007. *The Origin of Buddhist Meditation*. London: Routledge.

——. 2010a. 'The *ātman* and its negation. A conceptual and chronological analysis of early Buddhist thought'. *Journal of the International Association Buddhist Studies* vol. 33 No. 1–2: 103–171.

——. 2010b. 'The Buddha's "skill in means" and the genesis of the five aggregate teaching'. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society,* Series 3, 20, 2 (2010): 191–216.

——. 2015. *Buddhism. An Introduction*. London: I. B. Tauris.

——. 2018. 'Sāti's encounter with the Buddha'. *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies* vol. 14: 108–127.

Zacchetti, Stefano. 2020. 'Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras'. In *Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism Online* ed. Jonathan A. Silk, Richard Bowring, and Vincent Eltschinger. Last accessed October 15th, 2024. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1163/2467-9666_enbo_COM_0017.

Turmoil and Tranquility in the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*: A Study of Emotions in Early Buddhist Scripture

Nir Feinberg

Abstract—Emotions are essential to the Buddhist conception of the Path. The early Buddhist discourses, in particular, rely on emotion terms to discuss the motivations and challenges of renouncing the household life and joining the monastic community. These canonical texts also describe the emotional disposition of the Buddha and his enlightened disciples. The capacity to address the pivotal roles emotions play at different stages on the Buddhist path is fully displayed in the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*. This early scripture depicts the experience of turmoil (*saṃvega*) that set the Buddha on the route to nirvana, as well as the state of tranquility (*santi*) that is exemplary of the liberated sage. In this article, I explore the complex textual representations of these emotions. I argue that the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* describes turmoil and tranquility as existential states, and further suggest that this Buddhist discourse provides a useful framework for comprehending how these contrasting emotions can both be vital to the pursuit of liberation.

Keywords: Emotions, early Buddhism, turmoil, tranquility, *saṃvega*, *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*

JOCBS 24: 42–70 ©2024 Nir Feinberg

The classical Indian ideal of tranquility (Pāli *santi*; Skt. *śānti*) has long been associated with the teachings and practices taught by the Buddha. Yet this prevalent association can be slightly misleading. There is no disputing that one of the main goals of early Buddhism is to attain a quiet and peaceful disposition. However, the Buddhist tradition has consistently recognized that the path leading to tranquility is filled with emotional turmoil. In fact, experiencing some form of turmoil (*saṃvega*) is itself a Buddhist ideal.[1] Various canonical Buddhist texts propose that the process of learning to calm the mind and see reality as it truly is necessarily entails a type of emotional upheaval.[2] The *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, in this regard, is a unique and intriguing early discourse since it includes normative representations of both the Buddhist experiences of turmoil and tranquility. In this relatively short scripture, we have, on the one hand, the Buddha recalling the tumultuous feeling of *saṃvega* that propelled him to renounce the household life, and, on the other hand, several verses praising the deep serenity of the sage (*muni*) who perfected the Dharma. The juxtaposition of these two canonical representations will be at the center of this article. In the following pages, I explore how the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* along with its commentarial literature[3] articulate and illuminate the

[1] One may also refer to *saṃvega*, more broadly, as an Indian śramaṇic ideal found in the Buddhist, Jain, and Pātañjala traditions. For a survey of *saṃvega* in these different traditions of renunciation, see Acri 2015.

[2] On this function of *saṃvega* in early Buddhist canonical literature, see Feinberg 2023.

[3] There are two separate Pāli commentaries on the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*. These commentaries are aligned in the way they interpret and explicate this discourse. The first commentary is the *Attadaṇḍasutta-vaṇṇanā*, which is located in the *Suttanipāta-aṭṭhakathā*. The second commentary is the *Attadaṇḍasutta-niddesa* located in the *Mahāniddesa* of the *Khuddaka Nikāya*. The *Mahāniddesa* commentary is more extensive than the *Aṭṭhakathā* and, at times, it can be quite wordy and repetitive. In many cases, the *Mahāniddesa* works simply like a second layer of commentary, as if it were expounding on the remarks made in the Aṭṭhakathā. Bodhi (2017: 1189–1202) offers a complete translation of the *Aṭṭhakathā* commentary on the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* and a partial translation of the *Mahāniddesa* commentary on this scripture that covers its essential parts.

contrasting Buddhist ideals of turmoil and tranquility.[4] I contend that this early scripture presents these pivotal emotional experiences as existential states. Rather than painting the familiar picture of emotions as private mental events, the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* depicts *saṃvega* and *santi* as modes of existence that can shape the Buddhist disciple's perception, interaction, and basic orientation in the world.[5]

In recent decades, increasing scholarly attention has been given to the subject of emotions in classical Indian Buddhism. One emerging direction of research that is especially germane to this discussion is the study of transformative emotions like *saṃvega*, *bhaya* (fear) and *nibbidā* (revulsion).[6] From a traditional Buddhist standpoint, these emotions are particularly elusive on account of the difficulty to classify and explain them by means of meta-categories like *cetasika,* (mental faculty), *kilesa* (defilement), *vedanā* (feeling) or *saṅkhāra* (volitional activity). Exploring the nature of these emotions, therefore, calls for a close examination of their different functions and meanings in various types of Buddhist texts. The *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, in this context, has not received any careful attention from scholars working on

[4] The relationship between the ideals of turmoil and tranquility in Buddhist thought is occasionally addressed through the traditional pairing of the terms *saṃvega* and *pasāda*. Towards the end of this article, I will bring up the *saṃvega-pasāda* scheme and briefly discuss its relevance to my exploration of turmoil and tranquility in the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*. In the meantime, it is worth keeping in mind that the *saṃvega-pasāda* pairing and the complex understanding of the complementary relationship between these concepts is developed in later phases in the intellectual history of Theravāda Buddhism. In early Buddhist scripture, this pairing is conspicuously absent. In the Pāli canon, for example, we find no *sutta* in which *saṃvega* is followed by or transitions into *pasāda*. In fact, the loaded term *pasāda* (Skt. *prasāda*), which bears different meanings, many of which have little to do with tranquility, is never explicitly combined with *saṃvega* in the early Buddhist discourses. However, the basic idea of *saṃvega* leading to a peaceful state is invoked in the Pāli canon, primarily in the *Khuddaka Nikāya* (see for example KN 4.37). For more on this topic and the use of this pairing in later Pāli and Theravāda literature, see Walker 2018.

[5] I am using here terminology that is prevalent in existential phenomenology. On emotions as perceptual modes that shape how one sees the world, see Carron 2008 and Tzohar 2021; on emotions as ways being embedded in the world, see Ratcliffe 2008 and Kenaan and Ferber 2011; on emotions, phenomenology, and orientations, see Ahmed 2004 and Ahmed 2006.

[6] On *saṃvega*, see Ṭhānissaro 1997; Acri 2015; Brons 2016; Walker 2018; Nguyen 2019; Liang and Morseth 2021; and Feinberg 2023. On *bhaya*, see Brekke 2002; Heim 2003; Giustarini 2012; and Finnigan 2021. On *nibbidā*, see Evmenenko 2012.

such emotions,[7] nor has it been part of the broader scholarly discussion on the classical Buddhist conception of emotions. This is an oversight this study aims to correct.

The *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* is located in the *Suttanipāta* of the Pāli Canon,[8] and a parallel version of this discourse is extant in Chinese translation.[9] Both versions of this text are comprised of exactly twenty verses. The contents of this Buddhist scripture raise various exegetical issues, one of which concerns the compositional logic of the text. Generally speaking, the motives and historical circumstances behind the composition of the scriptures belonging to the vast corpus of early Buddhist discourses is a subject of much scholarly debate. Yet when it comes to the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, there is a particularly glaring issue concerning how the verses constituting this text fit together. Addressing this issue, Bodhi (2017: 147) observes that the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* "seems to be constituted by two sections that sit loosely together". The first of these two sections is comprised of the scripture's five opening verses in which the speaker provides a first-person account of his past experience of

[7] In his fascinating essay on *saṃvega*, Coomaraswamy (1943: 174) quotes the opening verses of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, yet he does not comment on their meaning and significance.

[8] Sn IV.15 (KN V.53). The *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* belongs to a collection of scriptures called the *Aṭṭhakavagga* (The Chapter of Octads). On the key themes and compositional history of this collection, see Bapat 1951: *1-21; and Bodhi 2017: 138-48.

[9] The early Chinese translation of the only existing parallel version of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* (T.198, 189b12-189c22) is dated to the third century AD, and is attributed to the Chinese translator Zhi Qian. This discourse is part of a much longer text called the *King Virūḍhaka Scripture* (*wei lou le wang jing* 維樓勒王經). This extensive scripture places the preaching of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* in the aftermath of a story about a rogue king called Virūḍhaka. In the Pāli tradition, there is a clear editorial distinction between the framing narrative, which appears in the *Aṭṭhakathā* commentary on the *Suttanipāta*, and the twenty verses of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, which are in the *Suttanipāta* compilation itself. The Chinese text does not make the same distinction. However, at the point where the narrative about King Virūḍhaka ends and the verses preached by the Buddha begin, the Chinese text clearly states that this (i.e., the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*) is an "Arthapada scripture" (*yi zu jing* 義足經). In this manner, the Chinese text also indicates that there is a distinction to be made between the framing narrative and the twenty verses preached by the Buddha. (For a translation of the entire *King Virūḍhaka* Scripture, see Bapat 1951: 164-81. On the parallels between the Chinese *Arthapada* and the Pāli *Aṭṭhakavagga*, see Bapat 1951: *1-21.) I would further like to clarify that the Chinese translation of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* is most likely not based on the Pāli version of this text. In fact, many of Zhi Qian's translations were based on earlier Chinese translations of Indic Buddhist scriptures that he merely revised. While the early Chinese translation of the parallel version of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* does not perfectly match the Pāli discourse, it is clearly the same text, and it closely aligns with the Pāli. For more information about Zhi Qian and his canonical translations, see Nattier 2008: 116-48.

saṃvega. The second section begins with a remark that "interrupts" the flow of the text,[10] stating that "At this point, the trainings are recited" (Sn IV.15.6, 183). After this remark, the fifteen remaining verses of the second section consist of more typical Buddhist trainings or teachings on nirvana, the Path, and the *arahant*.

Reflecting on the compositional logic of this discourse, the *Aṭṭhakathā* commentary on the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* offers its own exegetical breakdown of the text.[11] Setting aside for now the question of whether the Pāli commentary provides the most plausible explanation for how the different parts of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* fit together, I would like to begin this discussion by highlighting the commentary's basic division of the scripture into three main sections. The first section is made of the five opening verses, where the Buddha describes the emotional turmoil he underwent when he was initially struck by the horrible violence and misery permeating the world. The second section includes the ten middle verses. In this section, the Buddha delivers a number of doctrinal precepts and speaks about the attainment of peace[12] and other spiritual rewards. The third section consists of the final five verses in which the Buddha lauds the sage for his tranquil demeanor and stoic character.

In this breakdown of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta,* what stands out is the structural symmetry and thematic contrast that the commentary draws out between the five opening verses of the text and the five closing ones. The Buddha's past experience of turmoil and unrest portrayed in the scripture's opening section is counterbalanced with the *arahant*'s tranquility and indifference described in the closing section. The point of this contrast is not to suggest

[10] Bodhi suggests that "this seems to be a remark by the compilers that was absorbed into the *sutta*." For more on this interjection in the *sutta*, see Norman 2001: 383; and Bodhi 2017: 1539, n. 2009.

[11] According to the *Aṭṭhakathā*, the first five verses of the discourse deal with the Buddha's wish to relate in some detail the meaningful experience of *saṃvega* he had when he was "still only a *bodhisatta*," i.e., prior to his awakening (Pj II 566). The commentary then states that in the ensuing sixth verse, the Buddha speaks of the importance of focusing one's training and attention on the goal of nirvana. In the next nine verses, the Buddha elaborates on how to train for nirvana and what it means to attain the state of an *arahant*. Lastly, the *Aṭṭhakathā* explains that in the final five verses of the scripture, the Buddha speaks in praise of the *arahant*, mainly referred to in this text as the *muni* (sage).

[12] Verses twelve and fifteen specifically mention the benefit of attaining peace or living peacefully. The *Aṭṭhakathā* also highlights the phrase "living peacefully," stating that with it, the Buddha shows the attainment of arahantship. (Pj II 568).

that experiencing emotional turmoil is bad and that being tranquil is good, but instead, to demonstrate that both of these emotional states are valuable and play a significant role at different stages on the Buddhist path. This contrast also casts light on what exactly it means to be in a state of *saṃvega* and how it dramatically differs from being in a state of *santi*. In my reading of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, which is largely predicated on the Pāli commentary, I will illustrate how the opening and closing verses come together to illuminate each other. My claim is that the emotions represented in the opening and closing sections of this scripture intentionally correspond with the existential states that characterize the early and late stages of the Buddhist path.

The framing narrative and title of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*

Before analyzing the representations of turmoil and tranquility in the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, I would like to briefly address two important matters that affect my reading of this discourse. The first is the original context in which the Buddhist tradition situates the uttering of this discourse. The second is how to interpret the compound *atta-daṇḍa*, which appears in the title of this Pāli *sutta*.

The *Aṭṭhakathā* commentary on the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* places the preaching of this discourse in the midst of a quarrel between two clans. According to the Pāli commentary, a dispute once broke out between the Sākyans and the Koliyans over a source of water. As the two clans were about to wage war against each other, the Buddha intervened, seeking to prevent any violence from taking place. While deliberately standing between the furious armies of the Sākyans and Koliyans, the Buddha uttered the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*.[13]

In the Chinese *Arthapada*, we find a preamble to this scripture that situates the preaching of this discourse in a different setting. According to the *Arthapada*, a rogue king by the name of Virūḍhaka had directed a terrible massacre in which many Sākyans were unjustly killed.[14] Shortly after the

[13] The Theravāda exegetical tradition also provides another framing narrative for the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*. According to the commentary on the *Purābheda Sutta*, this scripture was originally spoken to the gods at the Great Gathering. For more on the different framing narratives of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, see Bodhi 2017: 147-48.

[14] On the different Chinese canonical versions of the story of Virūḍhaka's massacre of the Sākya (Skt. Śākya) people, see Pu 2013.

carnage occurred, the Buddha arrived in Kapilavastu, the city of the Sākyans, and witnessed the aftermath of the horrible slaughter. Then, in front of a crowd of people consisting of an assembly of monks and the surviving Sākyans, the Buddha uttered a discourse of twenty verses, which is known in Pāli as the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*.[15]

The differences between these framing narratives are substantial and have the potential to significantly alter one's reading of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta.* That said, for the purposes of this discussion, I will merely highlight that both the Chinese *Arthapada* and the Pāli *Aṭṭhakathā* clearly situate the preaching of this discourse in a violent setting. This fact seems especially relevant for explicating the scripture's title and opening lines that include the compound *atta-daṇḍa*.

> Fear is born from one's own stick (*atta-daṇḍa*);
> see the people quarrel.
> I will speak [now] about [my] anxiety (*saṃvega*);
> how I was anxious [in the past].[16]

When examining this verse, the less difficult part to deal with consists of the third and fourth legs, where the Buddha announces he intends to speak about his past experience of *saṃvega*.[17] This announcement sets the stage for the following four verses that expound on the existential crisis the Buddha underwent when he was "still only a *bodhisatta*," i.e., prior to his nirvana (Pj II 566). The more ambiguous part of this verse consists of the first two legs. These legs are made of what seems to be a general statement about the origin of fear—"fear is born from one's own stick (*atta-daṇḍa*)"—followed by the use of the second person to directly address

[15] The Chinese preamble adds that this scripture is a summary of the Buddha's teaching, which is meant to accommodate the transmission of the Dharma to later generations and facilitate the long-term preservation of this teaching in the world.

[16] *attadaṇḍā bhayaṃ jātaṃ,*
janaṃ passatha medhagaṃ.
saṃvegaṃ kittayissāmi,
yathā saṃvijitaṃ mayā. (Sn IV.15.1, 182)

[17] In the fourth leg of the early Chinese translation of this scripture, the Buddha also announces his desire to speak about how he freed himself from fear (T.198, 189b13). The promise of eradicating fear and attaining tranquility is thus already suggested in the opening verse of the Chinese version.

the audience—"see the people quarrel." The crucial question with respect to these opening lines is how to interpret the compound *atta-daṇḍa* in this context and, more specifically, what to make of the statement that fear is born from *atta-daṇḍa*.

The *Aṭṭhakathā* commentary offers an illuminating gloss of *atta-daṇḍa,* clarifying that fear is born "from one's own misconduct" (*attano duccarita-kāraṇā*).[18] The word *kāraṇa* has a double meaning in this exegetical gloss, carrying both the sense of "cause" and "punishment." The claim here is that fear is caused by one's bad behavior and more particularly that it comes from dreading the punishment one will endure because of one's past misdeeds. The Pāli commentary also includes a sophisticated double use of the word *daṇḍa*. The literal meaning of *daṇḍa* is "stick," yet by metaphorical extension, it also refers to "violence" and "punishment," both of which often involved the use of a stick in the ancient world. The *Aṭṭhakathā* thus points out that fear comes from one's own violence and the retribution one will eventually have to face because of it (Pj II 566). The *Mahāniddesa* elucidates this claim, explaining that from a karmic or metaphysical standpoint, the fear, misery, and grief one experiences in the present are simply the result of wrongful actions committed in the past. The *Mahāniddesa* further states that from an experiential perspective, fear often comes in the form of worrying about the consequences of our actions, which, in many cases, means dreading the

[18] Norman and Bodhi, for instance, reject the Pāli commentary's reading of this opening leg. Both scholars provide a translation of the *sutta*'s first leg that deviates from the entire discussion in the commentary regarding one's misconduct as the origin of fear. They do so by considering the first element in the *atta-daṇḍa* compound, i.e., *atta*, as the past participle "taken up" or "embraced." Thus, Norman (2001: 122) translates the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*'s opening leg: "Fear comes from [the one who] embraced violence," and Bodhi (2017: 315) translates it: "Fear has arisen from one who has taken up the rod." The two translations are fairly similar, even though Norman translates *daṇḍa* as "violence," while Bodhi chooses the more literal translation of "rod." Both scholars provide sound philological justification for their translation, referencing at least one example of a canonical case where the compound *atta-daṇḍa* means "one who has taken up the rod" or "one who embraced violence." (Norman 2001: 380-81; and Bodhi 2017: 1539, n. 2003). What I find most intriguing here is the hermeneutical implications of their reading of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*'s opening verse. According to Norman and Bodhi, the *sutta* opens by stating that fear comes from the one who has taken up a stick, i.e., the person who resorts to violence. This interpretation of the text suggests that it is not necessarily one's own misconduct or violence that is the root of fear, as the Pāli commentary states. Instead, it is the general act of embracing violence or the threatening act of taking up a rod that is the origin of fear.

inevitable punishment we will meet because of our past transgressions (Nidd I.15:1, 402–04).[19]

Thus, the Pāli commentary states that the Buddha reproached the Sākya and Koliya people in the opening lines of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*. In so doing, he revealed to them how their wrongful actions in the past have led to the current dreadful situation they perceive around them as they "see the people quarrel." The *Aṭṭhakathā* further explains that the Buddha then proceeded to talk about his past experience of *saṃvega* as he began to deliver a teaching on the appropriate disposition and conduct (Pj II 566). In this manner, the commentary makes it clear that the framing narrative and opening lines of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* do not merely place this text in the context of violence, but also address the predominant emotion of fear (*bhaya*) endemic to those who live in a world of animosity and misery. In contrast to the fear of the Sākyans and Koliyans, or, more broadly, the fear of sentient beings trapped in *saṃsāra*, the Buddha's past experience of saṃvegic anxiety holds the power and promise of pulling one out of the endless cycle of violence and suffering.[20] Therefore, the discourse begins with a depiction of the everyday reality that is characterized by hostility and fear, to which it will first offer an alternative in the form of the Buddha's emotional turmoil, and later in the form of the sage's tranquility.

Danger vs. security

In the opening verses of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, the Buddha recollects the experience of saṃvegic turmoil that set him on the path to Buddhahood. The depiction of this transformative experience begins with an emphasis on feeling fear. The Pāli term *bhaya*, which appears in the scripture's first couple of verses, can denote both fear and danger. Hence, *bhaya* may refer to the frightened attitude one has towards an object as well as to the frightening object itself. With this in mind, I would argue that the notion of *saṃvega* articulated in the opening verses of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* involves realizing what is objectively dangerous and, accordingly, feeling the appropriate fear. The Buddha describes this experience as follows:

[19] The *Mahāniddesa* provides both a "worldly" version of retribution for misconduct that is enacted by the state or the king, as well as a "cosmic" one, which is meted out in hell according to one's karma.

[20] On the different modes and roles of fear (*bhaya*, *saṃvega*, etc.) in classical Buddhist thought, see Brekke 2002; Acri 2015; Finnigan 2021; and Feinberg 2023.

When I saw the people quivering,
like fish in [a river with] little water;
when I saw them hostile towards each other,
fear came upon me.[21]

The first thing the Buddha perceived in his saṃvegic state was people quivering. The *Aṭṭhakathā* commentary hones in on what causes people to quiver, stating that "in this context, 'quivering' [means] trembling out of thirst and so forth."[22] "Thirst" (*taṇhā*) here is a prevalent technical Buddhist term that refers to one's primal craving as the source of suffering. The *Aṭṭhakathā* mentions that thirst is only the first element in a list of reasons why people in the world quiver. The *Mahāniddesa*, in its more exhaustive style, names many other such reasons, including misconduct, lust, and delusion (Nidd I.15:2, 407–08). The main point both Pāli commentaries make is that fundamentally, people in the world are perpetually shaking because they are conditioned to suffer. It is not the case that they are temporarily afraid of a specific threat or some other provisional reason. The trembling people suffer from is inherent to the type of lives they are leading. Nevertheless, most people remain in some form of denial of their trembling and the great danger that is intrinsic to their preconditioned situation. When the Buddha first noticed this, he could not help but feel deeply concerned and anxious.

In the second leg of this verse, the fish simile appears, illuminating the first leg and adding a poetic component to the Buddha's account of his emotional turmoil. The Buddha says he saw people in the world quiver or flounder[23] like fish swimming in shallow water. The *Mahāniddesa* unpacks this simile, explaining that just as fish flounder in a river where the water is evaporating while different birds are attacking from the air, grabbing the fish with their claws, and devouring the fish's flesh, so people in the world quiver with

[21] *phandamānaṃ pajaṃ disvā,*
macche appodake yathā.
aññamaññehi vyāruddhe
disvā maṃ bhayam āvisi. (Sn IV.15.2, 183)

[22] *tattha phandamānan ti taṇhādīhi kampamānaṃ.* (Pj II 566)

[23] Norman (2001: 122) uses "floundering" to translate the Pāli word *phandamānam*. It is an excellent translation that works particularly well with the simile that compares the movement of people in the world to that of fish in shallow water. Nevertheless, I chose to translate *phandamānam* as "quivering" based on the Pāli commentary, which glosses *phandamānam* with *kampamānaṃ*, a word that means to shake, quiver, or tremble nervously. (Pj II 566).

thirst (Nidd I.15:2, 408). The commentary's graphic unpacking of this simile highlights the anguish and hopelessness that people in the world share with these miserable fish. This simile, therefore, is designed to stress that for the person driven by craving, dangerous threats are coming from every direction. The constant trembling the Buddha witnessed in his *saṃvega* is part of a growing recognition of the great threat of saṃsāric existence. Consequently, the fear the Buddha experienced is a direct result of perceiving the reality of danger that is endemic to the human condition.

The simile of the fish floundering in a river with little water is operating here on at least two levels. The first level relates directly to the *Aṭṭhakathā*'s framing narrative, which situates this discourse in the midst of a dispute between two clans over water. The Buddha thus compares the alarming situation of the Sākyans and Koliyans, who are fighting over a source of water, to the state of the frantic fish swimming in a river whose water is quickly evaporating. However, the commentary makes it clear that on a more abstract level, the Buddha is also making a general statement about the precarious situation of sentient beings living in a world driven by craving and permeated by suffering. The second verse in the early Chinese translation of this scripture can help us better understand the abstract level on which the fish simile operates.

> The people of the world were[24] all rolling around in agony,[25]
> like fish in a dry [body of] water that was cut from its stream.
> Living in agony, their minds wished harm [on others],
> replacing their fears with deluded pleasures.[26]

In this parallel version of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, it is apparent the text is making general statements about the nature of saṃsāric existence. The first leg of this Chinese verse simply tells us that in his *saṃvega*, the Buddha became

[24] I translate the opening verses of this Chinese scripture using the past tense. My reason for doing so is predicated on the Pāli version of this text in which the Buddha speaks about his past experience of *saṃvega.* Bapat (1951: 172-173) also elects to translate the opening verses in the past form.

[25] Instead of the more literal translation of 展轉苦 as "rolling around in agony," one could simply translate this phrase as "repeatedly suffering."

[26] 展轉苦皆世人
如乾水斷流魚
在苦生欲害意
代彼恐癡冥樂. (T.198, 189b14-189b15)

aware of the pervasiveness of human suffering. Then, in the second leg, the fish simile appears as it does in the Pāli version, yet with a slightly different emphasis. The Chinese text states that people were rolling around in agony "like fish in a dry [body of] water that was cut from its stream." Along with the emphasis on the misery and helplessness that both fish and people share, this version of the fish simile strongly underscores the resemblance between the world and a body of water in a dire state. Finally, in the third and fourth legs of this verse, we find the claim that people's hostility and intention to harm others are rooted in their suffering and, more precisely, in their habit of replacing fears with deluded pleasures. The Buddha expresses here a critique of the prevalent human failure to face the facticity of suffering and feel appropriately terrified. Shirking from embracing the emotion of existential dread, people remain occupied with casting their frustrations on others and searching for temporary distractions that will allow them to continue living in denial of their truly agonizing situation.

The notion of a positive and useful experience of fear is strongly insinuated in the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* by the fact that in this scripture, the Buddha himself shares with a crowd of people an intimate account of the pivotal moment in his past when he was overtaken by fear. In the second verse of the Pāli version, the Buddha explicitly says: "when I saw them hostile towards each other, fear came upon me." The *Mahāniddesa* explains that during this transformative experience, the Buddha plainly saw the ubiquity of violence and animosity in the world and realized that all of this hostility leads to nothing but suffering and death (Nidd I.15:2, 408). The feeling of fear the Buddha describes in this scripture is presented as an essential phase in the process of coming to terms with the perils of *saṃsāra*. This saṃvegic turmoil involved in perceiving the terrifying aspects of sentient existence is taken as necessary and therefore should be considered a Buddhist ideal.

Nevertheless, the closing verses of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* make it fairly obvious that while *saṃvega* is vital for facing reality and shifting one's attitude from complacency to urgency, the ultimate goal of the Buddhist path is to eventually transcend this state of anxious agitation and attain peace. In contrast to the emotional turmoil depicted in the opening verses as a fearful attitude towards the danger that is *saṃsāra*, the tranquility of the sage is described in the closing verses as a feeling of total security in the world. In the Pāli version of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, the fearlessness of the *arahant* is articulated in the nineteenth verse.

For the one who has no lust, the knower,
there is no accumulation [of merit or demerit] at all.
Abstaining from instigating,
he sees security everywhere.[27]

The *Aṭṭhakathā* explains that this verse portrays the *arahant* as one who no longer initiates any type of volitional activity (*saṅkhāra*). Free of desire and endowed with understanding, he transcends the karmic framework of intentionally engaging in actions that are either meritorious or not. While inhabiting this position that is beyond good and evil, the *arahant* "sees security everywhere" (*khemaṃ passati sabbadhi)*. The commentary glosses this expression with the phrase "he only sees fearlessness all around" (*sabbattha abhayam eva passati*), (Pj II 569). The translation here is challenging since the word *abhaya* means both "lack of danger" and "fearlessness." With these two meanings in mind, I believe the commentary conveys the notion that the *arahant* does not see danger anywhere, i.e., he perceives only safety, as well as the idea that all the *arahant* witnesses in his vicinity are other beings demonstrating fearlessness.

The *Mahāniddesa* comments on the expression "he sees security everywhere," by explaining that the defilements (*kilesā*), beginning with passion, hatred, and delusion, produce fear (*bhaya*), and thus, the one who has abandoned the defilements sees security everywhere. We find here the same line of reasoning used earlier in the Pāli commentary, which considers fear to be rooted in misconduct and the possibility of eradicating fear to be the result of removing the root causes of one's detrimental behavior (i.e., the defilements). The *Mahāniddesa* also offers several glosses for the word "security" (*khema*) in the context of this verse, stating that wherever the *arahant* looks, he perceives no danger (*abhaya*), no misfortune (*anupaddava*), no trouble (*anupasagga*), and no disturbance (*anupasaṭṭha*), (Nidd I.15:19, 443).

Considering these exegetical explanations, there are at least two plausible possibilities to interpret the claim that the *arahant* "sees security everywhere." The first is that the sage no longer perceives anything as dangerous. Having

[27] *anejassa vijānato,*
n'atthi kāci nisaṅkhati.
virato so viyārabbhā,
khemaṃ passati sabbadhi. (Sn IV.15.19, 185)

attained nirvana, the worldly threats of violence, pain, and even death no longer concern him. Such is the case since the Buddha's Dharma holds the promise of eradicating all fear. For the Buddhist practitioner, "When fear comes, it must be noticed and seen to be a creation of the imagination, something we choose to construct. Once identified as such, it can be dismantled, leaving a peacefulness in its wake." (Heim 2022: 85). The *arahant* is one who has mastered this practice, ceasing to construct a reality of danger that routinely elicits feelings of dread and terror.

Another exegetical possibility of interpreting the *arahant*'s pervasive perception of security and the claim that he "only sees fearlessness all around" alludes to the power of the sage to extend his peacefulness to his surroundings. The idea of possessing the capacity to spread one's tranquility and non-violence to one's environment is not exclusively Buddhist. We find this idea in other classical Indian traditions of renunciation; for example, fragment II.35 of Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra* states that "In the presence of (a yogin) firmly established in *ahiṃsā* (nonviolence), violence ceases" (Raveh 2012: 132). Interestingly, Gokhale (2020: 98) suggests that, like many other notions in the *Yoga Sūtra*, this fragment might be rooted in Buddhist thought. He adds that supernormal powers (such as spreading peacefulness) are commonly invoked in Buddhist texts. These powers arise from perfecting certain meditation practices and are often considered among the fruits of renunciation. Gokhale further explains that from a rational standpoint, the idea of extending one's fearlessness and perceiving it all around reflects the possibility that one's temperament and way of life can profoundly influence the sentient beings in one's vicinity. Perhaps the Pāli framing narrative of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* may serve as an example of this power. According to the *Aṭṭhakathā*, on the occasion when the Buddha uttered the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, his presence resulted in creating peace between the hostile Sākyans and Koliyans and inspiring members of both clans to renounce the household life and join the monastic community (Pj II 566).

There is a striking contrast in the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* between the saṃvegic perception of reality as dangerous in the opening verses, and the serene vision of the world as completely secure in the closing section. This contrast reveals two "ways of seeing" that are absolutely essential to the

Buddhist path.[28] The emotions of turmoil and tranquility are represented in this scripture as different existential modes that shape and color one's reality. The former places the unenlightened subject in a world of fear and terror, while the latter situates the liberated being in a secure and peaceful environment.

Searching for a home vs. renouncing all possessions

The commotion the Buddha experienced in his *saṃvega* also involved feelings of disorientation and alienation. In the third verse of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, for example, the Buddha describes a world characterized by disorder and instability, in which he once struggled to find a place where he could truly feel safe and at home. In the Pāli version, this existential struggle is expressed in the third verse of the scripture.

> The entire world had no essence,
> all directions were in chaos.
> Searching for a place for myself,
> I did not see [one that was] unoccupied.[29]

The first leg of this verse presents the world as completely devoid of essence. The Pāli commentary elects to explain the essencelessness of the world in metaphysical terms. What I mean by that is twofold. First, the *Mahāniddesa* hones in on the word "entire" (*samanta*), which modifies the "world" in this verse. By doing so, the commentary explains that when saying "The entire world had no essence," the Buddha is stressing that there is no essence in this world or in the many heavens and hells that make up the Buddhist universe. The essencelessness of this world is not juxtaposed with the substantiality of another world. Since there is nothing permanent and stable one can hold onto anywhere, there is no solid ground to be found in the entire cosmos. The second point made in the *Mahāniddesa* clarifies what it means to have no essence. When the Buddha describes the world as "essenceless" (*asāra*), he is stating that *saṃsāra* is bereft of substance, permanence, stability, and

[28] On emotions as "ways of seeing" in classical Buddhist thought, see Tzohar 2019; and Tzohar 2021.

[29] *samantam asāro loko,*
disā sabbā sameritā.
icchaṃ bhavanam attano,
nāddasāsiṃ anositaṃ. (Sn IV.15.3, 183)

so forth. Having established that, the commentary proceeds to compare the world to a mirage or a magical illusion (Nidd I.15:3, 409–10).

The second leg of the third verse continues to depict the world the Buddha inhabited in *saṃvega*, yet this time with a focus on what was happening on the ground. The text describes a world where chaos roams in every corner and peace cannot be found. The emphasis on physical mayhem joins the metaphysical characterization of the world as devoid of substance and permanence. In this manner, the first two legs of the third verse in the Pāli version offer a glimpse of reality shaped by *saṃvega*. The third verse in the Chinese version of this scripture can help us gain a more vivid picture of the world in this state of emotional turmoil.

> The entire world was in flames,
> all ten directions in disorder with no peace.
> Proud of themselves, [people] did not abandon desire.
> Because they did not see [the world burning], they latched onto
> deluded thought.[30]

The fire imagery invoked in this verse is ubiquitous in Buddhist literature. Typically, Buddhist texts use fire to represent passion, change, instability, and danger.[31] When the Buddha says in this scripture that the world is burning, he is likely stating that everything is in flux and nothing permanent or stable exists. At the same time, through the fire imagery, the Buddha also conveys that the world is a dangerous and terrifying place. Much like the famous burning house parable in the *Lotus Sūtra*,[32] the image of a world in flames calls

[30] 一切世悉然燒
悉十方亂無安
自貢高不捨愛
不見故持癡意. (T.198, 189b16-189b17)

[31] On the fire imagery in early Buddhist literature, see Gombrich 2006: 65–66; and Hamilton 2000: 100–02.

[32] The fire imagery is prevalent in early Buddhist literature and even the specific burning house metaphor appears in the Pāli canon (see for example AN 1.101). Therefore, it is possible that Zhi Qian, the Chinese translator of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, was familiar with the image of a world on fire from his work on *āgama* literature. However, Zhi Qian also translated serval Mahāyāna scriptures, including the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* and the *Aṣṭsāhasrika Prajñāparamitā.* Now, given that this image of a world on fire is one of the most obvious instances where the Chinese translation is clearly different from the Pāli version (Bapat 1951: 174, n. 17), I wonder whether Zhi Qian had in mind here the famous *Lotus Sutra* parable of the burning house.

for immediate action. The urgency often associated with *saṃvega* thus comes to the forefront through the figurative use of fire. Moreover, considering that in the third leg of this verse, the Chinese text also mentions the detrimental force of desire, one might also consider fire here to be a figure used to describe a world driven by passion and lust. In the fourth and final leg of this verse, the Buddha explains that people's inability to see the world burning is the reason why they continue clinging to their ignorant views. In other words, the scripture suggests that one must experience reality as terrifying or alarming in order to abandon the primal confusion that is the root of saṃsāric existence.

That said, the Buddha's initial understanding of the human existential predicament in the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* goes beyond seeing that everything is burning. In his *saṃvega*, the Buddha also realized that there is nowhere to hide in the world. The third verse of the Pāli version ends with the Buddha recalling the experience of searching for a place for himself and failing to find one that was not occupied. The Pāli commentary claims that the Buddha is lamenting here over the fact that there is no place that truly offers refuge or shelter in the world. Such is the case because every place is occupied by suffering. The *Mahāniddesa* states that in his *saṃvega*, the Buddha realized that "all youth is occupied by old age, all health is occupied by sickness, all life is occupied by death, all profit is occupied by loss, all glory is occupied by disgrace, all praise is occupied by insult, and all happiness is occupied by suffering."[33]

Along with the overwhelming feeling of fear, the emotional turmoil the Buddha describes in the opening verses of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* expresses a sense of disorientation. In his *saṃvega*, the Buddha searched for a home (*bhavana*) that would offer him stability but quickly recognized that there was no place in the world where he could genuinely be secure and at peace. The feeling of having no abode to dwell in, no solid ground to stand on, no truth to abide by, and nowhere to turn to in a time of need was crucial in encouraging the Buddha to seek the path of liberation. *Saṃvega* here entails an experience of searching for a home and realizing the world has nothing permanent and stable to offer that may qualify as such. This disorienting feeling of having no direction and nothing constant to depend on is represented in the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* as part of the vital experience of emotional turmoil. On the contrary, the

[33] *sabbaṃ yobbaññaṃ jarāya ositaṃ, sabbaṃ ārogyaṃ byādhinā ositaṃ, sabbaṃ jīvitaṃ maraṇena ositaṃ, sabbaṃ lābhaṃ alābhena ositaṃ, sabbaṃ yasaṃ ayasena ositaṃ, sabbaṃ pasaṃsaṃ nindāya ositaṃ, sabbaṃ sukhaṃ dukkhena ositaṃ*. (Nidd I.15:3, 411)

scripture describes the *arahant*'s tranquility as a permanent state of having no abode and no possessions. This Buddhist ideal is explicitly expressed in the closing verses of the Chinese version.

> Having abandoned all name and form,
> one is not attached to the thought of having something.
> One who has no possessions, also has no abode.
> That person feels no resentment towards the entire world.[34]

It is made fairly obvious here that the opposite of the saṃvegic search for a home or anything stable to rely on is not about finding a lasting physical abode or some permanent metaphysical assurance. Instead, the tranquility of the *arahant* is articulated as a radical form of renunciation that entails no attachments, no possessions, and no abode of any kind. In this state of peace, one is not merely free of experiencing agony but also devoid of any feelings of bitterness or animosity towards others. This Buddhist notion of having no possessions is further developed in the closing verses of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*'s Pāli version.

> One who does not claim as 'mine'
> anything at all here in name-and-form,
> who does not sorrow over what is nonexistent,
> truly does not lose out in the world.
>
> One for whom nothing is taken
> as 'this is mine' or '[this belongs] to others,'
> not finding anything to be taken as 'mine,'
> does not sorrow, thinking: 'It is not mine.'[35] (Bodhi 2017: 317)

---

[34] 一切已棄名色
不著念有所收
已無有亦無處
一切世無與怨. (T.198, 189c15-189c16)

[35] *sabbaso nāmarūpasmiṃ,*
yassa n'atthi mamāyitaṃ.
asatā ca na socati,
sa ve loke na jīyati.

yassa n' atthi idaṃ me ti,
'paresaṃ' vā pi kiñcanaṃ.
mamattaṃ so asaṃvindaṃ,
n' atthi meti na socati. (Sn IV.15.16-17, 184)

The argument in the first of these two verses is that the *arahant*, being one who does not consider anything to be his own, never loses because he has nothing to lose. According to the Pāli commentary, the *sutta* is working with the notion that losing must entail the loss of something and, therefore, the one who has no possessions to begin with simply never loses.[36] In this respect, the *Aṭṭhakathā* explains, for example, that when it says in the third leg that one feels no sorrow over what is nonexistent, the point is that the person who never claims anything as 'mine' never grieves once something is gone, i.e., becomes nonexistent (Pj II 568). The second verse presents a similar argument, yet it seems to push this line of reasoning a step further by deconstructing the notion of ownership. While in the first verse, the text states that after ridding himself of a sense of ownership, the *arahant* overcomes any sorrow triggered by loss, in the second verse, the *arahant* is described as one who does not even make the distinction between what is his and what belongs to others. Avoiding making this distinction establishes the sage in equanimity and allows him to never experience anguish over not owning something.[37]

With respect to both of these verses, I should mention that the Buddha's attack here on the concept of possession or ownership is quite germane to the context in which the Pāli commentary situates the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*. As I have mentioned, according to the *Aṭṭhakathā*, the Buddha delivers this discourse in order to resolve a conflict between two clans over water. It seems these verses work particularly well as a direct response to the hostile dispute over the possession of a precious resource.

In the larger sense, the sage's tranquility is characterized in this scripture as a state of non-attachment. The *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* thus outlines the stark difference between the desperate search for something reliable to hold onto associated

[36] It is worth mentioning that if we follow this logic, the one who never claims anything as 'mine' also never wins.

[37] One issue worth raising concerns what the text means exactly when it says in the second leg that the *arahant* does not consider anything to belong to someone else. Is the *sutta* stating that the *arahant* does not acknowledge the property of others? Unfortunately, the commentary does not expound much on this issue. (The commentary, Nidd I.15:17, 438, does, however, quote different *sutta*s in which the Buddha encourages his disciples to abandon everything. For an example of such a *sutta*, see SN 22.33.) The way I make sense of this claim is by gathering that if one has no notion of "this is mine," then the notion of "something [belonging] to others" is rendered meaningless. That is because the concept of something belonging to someone else can only exist in contrast to the concept of something belonging to oneself. The meaningfulness of these opposite concepts is interdependent. In this sense, the *arahant* ultimately transcends the binary distinction between owning and not owning something.

with *saṃvega*, and the complete renunciation of all possessions linked to *santi*. The ideals of turmoil and tranquility are represented here as two opposite forms of existential orientation. The former entails a restless striving to find a home or a direction that offers assurance and stability, while the latter involves fully giving up on this pursuit and arriving at a homeless form of peaceful dwelling.

Seeing the dart vs. witnessing cessation

The *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*'s canonical representation of emotional turmoil ends with a moment of penetrating vision. In verses four and five of the Pāli version, the Buddha's experience of *saṃvega* begins to shift dramatically as he realizes that there is a possible way out of the cycle of violence and suffering. This epiphany is a significant part of the Buddha's saṃvegic crisis. It counters the overarching pessimistic view of the human condition with a productive insight into the prospect of eliminating suffering.

> Even at the end, when I saw [them still] hostile,
> dissatisfaction came over me.
> Then I saw the dart, here,
> difficult to see, stuck in the heart.
>
> Pierced by that dart,
> one flees in all directions;
> but after pulling out the dart,
> one does not flee nor does one sink.[38]

These verses begin with the Buddha's last disappointing look at the people around him before he keenly perceived the source of their misery. What the

[38] *osānetv eva vyāruddhe,*
disvā me aratī ahu.
ath'ettha sallaṃ addakkhiṃ,
duddasaṃ hadayanissitaṃ.

yena sallena otiṇṇo,
disā sabbā vidhāvati
taṃ eva sallaṃ abbuyha,
na dhāvati na sīdati. (Sn IV.15.4-5, 183)

Buddha saw next is a dart situated in the heart.[39] The Pāli word for "dart" here is *salla*, which also may be translated as "arrow." I am following Norman and Bodhi's lead in translating this as a small object that is harder to see, like a dart or a barb. This translation maintains the ambivalence regarding whether the Buddha actually saw a subtle object or merely realized something fundamental about the human existential predicament.

The *Aṭṭhakathā* commentary specifies that the dart the Buddha perceived was situated in the heart of the hostile beings of the world mentioned previously. This dart is glossed in the *Aṭṭhakathā* as "the dart of passion and so forth" (*rāgādi-salla*). As usual, the *Mahāniddesa* fills in the blanks, identifying this dart with seven defilements, namely, passion, hatred, delusion, pride, views, sorrow, and doubt. The *Aṭṭhakathā* also glosses the word "heart" (*hadaya*) with "mind" (*citta*), suggesting that the dart of which the Buddha speaks here is figurative rather than literal, mental rather than physical (Pj II 567; and Nidd I.15:4, 412).

In the second of these verses, the Buddha says that the person pierced by this dart runs in every direction, but once the dart is removed, that person does not run, nor does he sink. The Pāli commentary elaborates on this, explaining that the one struck by this dart flees in every direction both in a literal and figurative sense. That person runs in the different geographical directions as well as in the directions of misconduct and other such bad habits. This frantic fleeing in every direction ties to the saṃvegic sense that people in the world are moving fast yet going nowhere. As for the person who has removed the dart, the commentary explains that he does not run in those directions and does not sink in the four floods.[40]

The Pāli commentary's remarks on the dart perceived by the Buddha indicate that the Theravāda exegetes consider the Buddha's "seeing" in these verses primarily as a cognitive act. Thus, if we follow the Pāli commentary, the scripture's description of the moment the Buddha saw the dart of passion and ignorance lends a strong cognitive component to the experience of saṃvegic turmoil. This component also appears in other early Buddhist discourses that draw on the connection between feeling fear and perceiving the three marks of existence.[41]

[39] This turn occurs in the Chinese translation at exactly the same point in the scripture (T.198, 189b19).

[40] According to the commentary, the four floods are the flood of desire, the flood of existence, the flood of views, and the flood of ignorance (Pj II 567; and Nidd I.15:5, 420).

[41] On the relationship between fear and knowledge in the *Lion Sutta* (AN 4.33), for example, see Feinberg 2023: 85–95.

Addressing this cognitive aspect of *saṃvega*, Coomaraswamy explains that the saṃvegic feeling of shock must include a "second phase"[42] that transcends the sensory and affective experience alone. In Coomaraswamy's words:

> "[*S*]*aṃvega* is a state of shock, agitation, fear, awe, wonder or delight induced by some physically or mentally poignant experience. It is a state of feeling, but always more than a merely physical reaction. The 'shock' is essentially one of the realisation of the implications of what are strictly speaking only the aesthetic surfaces of phenomena that may be liked or disliked as such. The complete experience transcends this condition of 'irritability.'"[43]

The *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* clearly describes the Buddha's past experience of turmoil as one involving a second phase that has a substantial reflective character. The saṃvegic insight reveals to the Buddha the disturbing reality of people desperately running in every direction because of a poison dart that is stuck in their hearts. Yet at the same time, this insight also opens a horizon of hope, as the Buddha becomes aware of the possibility of pulling out the dart and ending the condition of suffering. Hence, the ideal experience of *saṃvega* in this scripture involves coming to terms with the human condition and realizing that something can be done about it.

The Buddha's awareness of the facticity of suffering and his alarming sense that immediate action is required for the sake of changing one's fate is directly opposed to the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*'s account of the *arahant*'s dispassionate temperament and his tranquil view of the world.

> Not following anyone, he arrives at this [liberating] wisdom.
> What he seeks is truly impossible to learn.
> Being dispassionate, he relinquishes [everything] and has no karmic bonds.
> That person reaches peace as he witnesses cessation.[44]

[42] Trainor (1997: 175–76) offers insightful comments on Coomaraswamy's conception of *saṃvega* as comprised of two phases.

[43] Coomaraswamy 1943: 176.

[44] 不從一致是慧
所求是無可學
已厭捨無因緣
安隱至見滅盡. (T.198, 189c19-189c20)

Unlike the insight into the condition of suffering gained in the experience of *saṃvega*, the wisdom of the enlightened sage has no clear thematic content. The Chinese version of the scripture, in particular, grants this wisdom a kind of ineffable quality. The figure of the *arahant* is repeatedly depicted in the closing verses of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* as one who is not stirred or affected by his perception of reality. Dispassionate and detached, he cuts off all ties to the world. The last line of the verse quoted above specifically states that the *arahant* "reaches peace as he witnesses cessation." This portrayal of the *arahant* provides us with a mirror image of the Buddha's saṃvegic perception. To recall, the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* speaks of the fear and restlessness the Buddha once experienced as he saw an essenceless world burning in the flames of impermanence. Even in his moment of saṃvegic insight, the Buddha perceived the disturbing image of a person pierced by a dart running frantically in every direction. On the other hand, the scripture says that the *arahant* attains tranquility as he witnesses the transient nature of phenomena. Bapat translates this line: "And Peace doth he attain, having seen the destruction of things" (Bapat 1951: 180). The vision of everything passing away and turning into nothing does not elicit from the *arahant* feelings of fear, despair, or melancholy; on the contrary, it leads him to a deep state of quiescence.

Finally, just as the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* begins with the anxiety and emotional turmoil that once overwhelmed the Buddha, it ends with the equanimity and peacefulness that characterize the *arahant*.

> The sage does not speak [of himself]
> as among equals, inferiors, or superiors;
> peaceful (*santo*), without malice,
> he does not take nor does he reject.[45]

The *Mahāniddesa* points to an etymological feature that is highlighted in this verse. The Pāli for sage is *muni*, which is derived from the word *monam* (silence). The verse thus explicates that the quintessential silence of the sage is a refusal to speak about himself out of pride (Nidd I.15:20, 443). More specifically, the sage avoids comparing himself to others by claiming he is equal, superior, or inferior

[45] *na samesu na omesu,*
na ussesu vadate muni.
santo so vītamaccharo,
nādeti na nirassati. (Sn IV.15.20, 185)

to someone else.[46] The tranquility of the *arahant* is paired here with silence, while the experience of saṃvegic turmoil involves voicing one's shock, fear, and dismay.[47] The silence of the sage underscored in this closing verse goes beyond the physical binary of speaking or remaining quiet. It is a silence that reflects the calmness and stillness of the *arahant*'s state of mind as opposed to the unrest and commotion that is experienced in *saṃvega*.

Conclusion

In this article, I proposed that the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* provides an outlook on the Buddhist pursuit of nirvana that highlights the predominant emotional states one is expected to inhabit in the early and late stages of the Path. The opening verses of the scripture focus on the experience of turmoil that can propel one to renounce the everyday life, while the closing verses center on the state of tranquility that is exemplary of the enlightened sage. In between these opening and closing stanzas, the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* lays out some of the fundamental precepts taught by the Buddha. Through this unique compositional structure, the text underscores the crucial role *saṃvega* has in driving one to take on the Dharma and practice it with urgency. Yet at the same time, this discourse exposes the limits of the saṃvegic impetus by contrasting it with the coveted emotion of *santi* that characterizes the affective terrain of the *arahant*.

As a whole, the structure and contents of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* speak to the power of engaging with the Buddha's teachings in a state of *saṃvega*. What makes this scripture special is the fact that the Buddha reiterates his past experience of turmoil in the first five verses before preaching the Dharma in the following ten verses. In this regard, the text first provides an account of the ideal emotional response to the truth the Buddha realized about the nature of reality, and then proceeds to give the audience a taste of that truth. Another way of looking at this dynamic involves considering that within the affective logic of this text, the Buddha is using his past experience to set an example of how a saṃvegic reaction should pan out, and then, he invites his audience to

[46] Both the Pāli *sutta* and the commentary commend the *arahant* for not comparing himself to other people at all. Even the perception of others as equals is considered harmful. The Chinese text articulates this in a slightly different way: "When superior he is not arrogant; when inferior he does not dread. Nor is he seen abiding [only] among equals" (上不憍下不懼, 住在平無所見, T.198, 189c121).

[47] For canonical examples of verbalizing the feeling of *saṃvega*, see AN 4.33; and SN 51.14.

react in a similar manner to the teaching he delivers in the following verses.[48] To this dynamic, the scripture adds a depiction of the *arahant*'s tranquility in the final five verses, which underlines the ultimate benefit of engaging with the Buddha's Dharma in a saṃvegic mode.

In my reading of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, I addressed how the juxtaposition of turmoil and tranquility can help us better comprehend the depth, character, and function of these emotions in early Buddhism. For many centuries, Theravāda thinkers have been reflecting on the relationship between turmoil and tranquility by using the terminological pairing of *saṃvega* and *pasāda* (serene confidence). While the explicit pairing of these Buddhist terms does not appear in the early *sutta*s nor is it prominent in the early Pāli commentaries,[49] invoking this pairing here can help to clarify what exactly the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* contributes to our understanding of the relationship between turmoil and tranquility in Buddhist thought. In the Theravāda tradition, the *saṃvega-pasāda* scheme captures two essential modes of the aesthetic experience. These two modes, which may also be rendered the poles of our affective experience in general, are stirring (*saṃvega*) and stilling (*pasāda*) the mind and body.[50] Various Buddhist practices, texts, and images are designed to elicit turmoil and tranquility, for these two emotions have a significant soteriological purpose in the Buddhist conception of the Path. The pairing of *saṃvega* and *pasāda* is thus used by scholars to outline two noticeably distinct emotional registers of the Buddhist practitioner. Yet the phenomenology of these emotions and the matter of how they manifest, operate, and interact with each other remains much less clear. In this article, I highlighted what the contrasting framework developed in the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* can reveal about the different aspects of the early Buddhist conception of turmoil and tranquility. On the one hand, I addressed the association of *saṃvega* with the reality of danger, the feeling of alienation, and the understanding of the human condition, and on the other hand, the relationship of *santi* with total security, non-attachment, and the dispassionate attitude towards the transient nature of things.

Finally, I argued that turmoil and tranquility are presented in the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* as existential states. The emotions of *saṃvega* and *santi* are described

[48] On this notion of guiding the audience's emotional response to the Buddha's word, see Feinberg 2023: 60–98.

[49] See n. 4.

[50] On *saṃvega* and *pasāda* in Theravāda Buddhism, see Walker 2018; Scheible 2016: 28; and Collins 2003: 652, n. 3.

in this discourse as ways of being embedded in the world. Everything one perceives in these existential states is touched by an emotion that completely reconfigures one's field of experience. In this regard, the scripture's notion of *saṃvega* and *santi* challenges the supposition that emotions in Buddhist thought are merely considered private mental events. There is a tendency to rely heavily on the metaphor of inwardness when contemplating the nature of emotions in early Buddhism.[51] It is often taken as a forgone conclusion that emotions simply reflect an internal commotion or inner calm. However, in the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, the depiction of experiencing turmoil and tranquility is predominantly pointing at the world. The Buddha, for example, does not elect to articulate in this discourse his experience of *saṃvega* by focusing on his past internal struggles, nor is there an introspective character to the text's description of the *arahant*'s state of *santi*. Instead, these emotional states are expressed by speaking of what the Buddha and the *arahant* experience all around them, as if their emotions are plastered all over the phenomenal world. The crux of my argument concerning the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*'s description of *saṃvega* and *santi* points to the interactive aspect of these existential feelings and how they shape one's reality.

[51] For a study that challenges the prevalent rhetoric of "inwardness" in the discussion of emotions in classical Buddhism, see Tzohar 2021: 284. The tendency of which I speak here specifically stands out in the way *saṃvega* is often defined and explained. For example, Bodhi (2012: 40) suggests that "*saṃvega* might be described as the inner commotion or shock we experience when we are jolted out of our usual complacency by a stark encounter with truths whose full gravity we normally refuse to face." This is a solid explanation; yet, my main concern with it is the characterization of *saṃvega* as an "*inner* commotion." Bodhi seems to take it as a given that the experience of *saṃvega* is a private internal event.

Abbreviations

AN	Aṅguttara Nikāya
DN	Dīgha Nikāya
KN	Khuddaka Nikāya
MN	Majjhima Nikāya
Nidd I	Mahāniddesa
Pj II	Paramatthajotikā II (Suttanipāta-aṭṭhakathā)
SN	Saṃyutta Nikāya
Sn	Suttanipāta
Skt.	Sanskrit
T.	Taishō edition (SAT)

References

Acri, Andrea. 2015. "Between Impetus, Fear and Disgust: 'Desire for Emancipation' (Saṃvega) from Early Buddhism to Pātañjala Yoga and Śaiva Siddhānta." In *Emotions in Indian Thought-Systems*, eds. Purushottama Bilimore and Aleksandra Wenta, 199–227. Delhi: Routledge.

Ahmed, Sara. 2004. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

——. 2006. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Bapat, P. V., trans. 1951. *Arthapada sūtra: spoken by the Buddha, translated by the Upāsaka Che-Kien under the Wu dynasty (222–280 AD)*. Santiniketan: Visva-Bharati.

Bodhi, Bhikkhu, trans. 2017. *The Suttanipāta: An Ancient Collection of the Buddha's Discourses and Its Commentaries*. Somerville: Wisdom Publications.

——, trans. 2012. *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Brekke, Torkel. 2002. *Religious Motivation and the Origins of Buddhism: A social-psychological exploration of the origins of a world religion*. London: Routledge Curzon.

Brons, Lajos L. 2016. "Facing Death from a Safe Distance: Saṃvega and Moral Psychology." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 23: 83–128.

Carron, Paul. 2008. "Turn your gaze upward! emotions, concerns, and regulatory strategies in Kierkegaard's Christian Discourses." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 84.3: 323–43.

Collins, Steven. 2003. "What Is Literature in Pali?" In *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock, 649–88. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Coomaraswamy, Ananda. 1943. "Saṃvega, 'Aesthetic Shock'." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 7(3): 174–79.

Evmenenko, Evgenia. 2012. "Samvega, Pasāda, and Nibbidā as Key Concepts in Early Buddhism." *Sri Lanka International Journal of Buddhist Studies (SIJBS)*, 2: 212–24.

Feinberg, Nir. 2023. *The Concept of Saṃvega in Early Buddhist Scripture*. Ph.D. dissertation. University of California, Berkeley.

Finnigan, Bronwyn. 2021. "The Paradox of Fear in Classical Indian Buddhism." *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 49: 913–29.

Giustarini, Giuliano. 2012. "The Role of Fear (*Bhaya*) in the *Nikāya*s and in the *Abhidhamma*." *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 40: 511–31.

Gokhale, Pradeep P. 2020. *The Yogasūtra of Patañjali: A New Introduction to the Buddhist Roots of the Yoga System.* London: Routledge.

Gombrich, Richard F. 2006 [1996]. *How Buddhism Began: The Conditioned Genesis of the Early Teachings*. London: Athlone.

Hamilton, Sue. 2000. *Early Buddhism: A New Approach: The I of the Beholder*. Richmond: Curzon Press.

Heim, Maria. 2003. "The Aesthetics of Excess." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 71.3: 531–54.

——. 2022. *Words for the Heart: A Treasury of Emotions from Classical India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Kenaan, Hagi, and Ilit Ferber. 2011. "Moods and Philosophy." In *Philosophy's Moods: The Affective Grounds of Thinking*, eds. Hagi Kenaan and Ilit Ferber, 3–10. Dordrecht: Springer.

Liang, Lisa, and Brianna K. Morseth. 2021. "Aesthetic Emotions: The Existential and Soteriological Value of Saṃvega/Pasāda in Early Buddhism." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 28: 205–39.

Nattier, Jan. 2008. *A Guide to the Earliest Chinese Buddhist Translations: Texts from the Eastern Han* 東漢 *and Three Kingdoms* 三國 *Periods*. Tokyo: Soka University.

Norman, K. R., trans. 2001 [1992]. *The Group of Discourses (Sutta-Nipāta): Translated with Introduction and Notes*. Pali Text Society Translation Series 45. Oxford: Pali Text Society.

Nguyen, Dat Trong. 2019. *Saṃvega and Upanisās as Resolution of Paṭiccasamuppāda: With Phenomenology as Framework*. Ph.D. dissertation. University of the West.

Pu, Chenzhong. 2013. "Chinese Versions of the Virūḍhaka's Massacre of the Śākyans: A Preliminaries Study." *The Indian International Journal of Buddhist Studies*, 14: 29–48.

Ratcliffe, Matthew. 2008. *Feelings of Being*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Raveh, Daniel. 2012. *Exploring the Yogasūtra: Philosophy and Translation*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Scheible, Kristin. 2016. *Reading the Mahāvamsa: The Literary Aims of a Theravada Buddhist History*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Thanisarro, Bhikkhu. 1997. "Affirming the Truths of the Heart: The Buddhist Teachings on Samvega & Pasada." *Access to insight* [database online]. Accessed July 14, 2024. https://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/affirming.html

Trainor, Kevin. 1997. *Relics, ritual, and representation in Buddhism: Rematerializing the Sri Lankan Theravada tradition.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tzohar, Roy. 2019. "A Tree in Bloom or a Tree Stripped Bare: Ways of Seeing in Aśvaghoṣa's Life of the Buddha." *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 47.2: 313–26.

——. 2021. "How does it feel to be on your own? Solitude in Aśvaghoṣa's Saundarananda." In *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Emotions in Classical Indian Philosophy*, eds. Maria Heim, Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, and Roy Tzohar, 277–301. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Walker, Trent. 2018. "Saṃvega and Pasāda: Dharma Songs in Contemporary Cambodia." *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 41: 271–325.

Pāli Variants: A Typology (Part I)

Bryan G. Levman

Abstract—There are thousands of variants in the Pāli canon. This paper examines the reasons and processes by which they arise with many examples. There are eight major factors involved: 1) The nature of the source transmission, i.e. the different dialects and/or *koiné* in which the Buddha taught prevalent in north India (§2.1). 2) Natural, diachronic language change over time which tended to simplify by, for example, voicing or eliminating unvoiced stops, replacing aspirated stops with aspirates only, etc. (§2.2). 3) Sanskritizations which acted to "restore" Pāli to its putative "original" OI form (§2.3). 4) Linguistic diffusion from neighbouring IA languages and dialects where one dialect might interact with and alter another (§2.4.1); linguistic diffusion from autochthonous languages (§2.4.2); linguistic diffusion due to bilingual speakers of Dravidian and Middle Indic (MI), whose native language was non Indo-Aryan (IA), and who had to adapt a foreign phonemic system into the MI transmission (§2.4.3); linguistic diffusion due to foreign word borrowing from non-IA languages into MI, confusion due to the transcription of these "foreign" words, and lack of knowledge of the Pāli language (§2.4.4). 5) Oral transmission ambiguity and errors due to memory, recitation and auditory issues (oral/aural);

JOCBS 24: 71–143 ©2024 Bryan G. Levman

a pot pourri category subsuming all seven of the above processes (§2.1–§2.4.4) and additional variants which are purely sonic in nature (§2.5). 6) The introduction of explanatory glosses into the main transmission, a practice which was going on probably from the time of the Buddha himself (§2.6). 7) Orthographic variation in spelling and copyist errors, sometimes due to the influence of the copyists' native language, whose phonetic/phonemic system was foreign to MI (§2.7). 8) Harmonization and standardization of the canon by the later grammarians (§2.8). All of these factors introduce changes into the *Buddhavacana* which are preserved in the canon (or can be reconstructed from it). A series of examples from the *Theragāthā*, one of the oldest of Buddhist works, is given to illustrate these processes.

Keywords: Pāli language, Dravidian language, Munda language, Sanskritization, *koiné*, oral transmission, diachronic change, dialect change, Theragātha

1. Introduction

There are thousands of variants in the Pāli canon. This paper is about the types of variants that are found and the reasons and processes by which they arise. Variants arise in the transmission of the *Buddhavacana* from one generation to another in both the oral and written tradition, according to the Buddha's teaching of *anicca* ("impermanence") which affects all phenomena. As is well known, according to tradition, the teachings of the Buddha were memorized by Ānanda as he taught, and later were transmitted by Ānanda to the core of five hundred monks at the First Council after the Buddha's *parinibbāna*. Upāli provided the same service for the Vinaya.[1] As we learn from Ven. Purāṇa in the Vinaya (see below §1.2), each *bhikkhu/bhikkhunī* was in effect his/her own tradent of the teachings, memorizing and passing on the *Buddhadhamma* to the public and to other religieux as he/she remembered it. There was also a

[1] To avoid confusion, all Pāli words discussed here are italicized (except place names, and words borrowed into the English language and found in the Oxford English Dictionary), including proper names, when their etymology is being discussed, since most of the proper names are equivalent to or derived from ordinary Pāli words which would normally be italicized.

specialized group of *bhāṇaka*s ("reciters") appointed by each Sangha (as the original Sangha diversified into many immediately after the Buddha's passing), who specialized in one or more *Nikāya*s or the Vinaya and transmitted the teachings to their successors for approximately three hundred years, until they were written down in Sri Lanka in the first century BCE. Along the way many changes were introduced, especially in the oral phase, most probably involuntarily, as the tradents and *bhāṇaka*s tried to preserve the Buddha's teachings to the best of their abilities.

The PTS edition of the canon is usually based on just two manuscript traditions, the Sri Lankan and the Burmese, and usually includes the *mūla* text and the commentary where available; occasionally the Thai/Khom lineage has been consulted if manuscripts, or printed editions, were available; the PTS DN, for example, sometimes references a Thai manuscript in "Kambojian" script marked "K" in DN 2: viii.[2] Even when only two traditions are employed, variants are considerable. In the new Dhammachai Tipiṭaka project, which has so far produced a pilot edition of the *Sīlakkhandhavagga* of the *Dīghanikāya* (2013), there are thousands of variants compiled from Burmese, Sinhalese, Khom (central Thai) and Tham (northern Thai) manuscripts (Levman 2016b).

1.1 Pāli recensions

There are four primary recensions of the Pāli canon: Sinhalese, Burmese, Central Thai (Khom/Cambodian) and northern Thai (Tham); there is also a Laotian canon in Pāli. The PTS or European edition (Ee) a composite, diplomatic version, may be considered another recension. The Sinhalese is considered to be the oldest, (but not on that account necessarily the most accurate, because of the very complex interaction with other parts of south-east Asia, especially Burma), while the others are thought to be younger.[3] In addition, we have fragments of the canon composed in other MI languages such as Gāndhārī and Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit (Edgerton 1953/98), which may be viewed as a Prakritized Sanskrit or a Sanskritized Prakrit, depending on the extent of change (e.g. the Patna *Dharmapada*, the *Mahāvastu*, etc.).

[2] For a detailed discussion on text critical practices in PTS editions, see, for instance, Chris Clark's PhD thesis (2015: §3.6, pp. 65–80).

[3] However, note that in the Thai tradition, coeval with Mahinda bringing the canon and commentary to Sri Lanka, another group brought the *Buddhadhamma* to Suvaṇṇabhūmi (Thailand) in the third century BCE (Kusalasaya 1965/2005: 4).

From Sri Lanka, monks exported the teachings of the Buddha to south-east Asia under a "highly complex system of intertwining historical, geographic, political, and cultural circumstances" (Keown 2003/2004: 275), which naturally involved various to and fro movements between south-east Asian polities. Although the canon was allegedly written down in Sri Lanka in the first century BCE, its oral transmission continued for centuries afterwards and variants continued to accrue, through inexact memorization and recitation, faulty or idiosyncratic recollection or deliberate attempts to improve the text, through dictation process errors (such as faulty pronunciation by bilingual speakers or faulty hearing by bilingual scribes), manuscript copying faults and many more issues discussed below (§2.1–§2.4.4).

An attempt was made to fix the commentary to the canon (and to that extent, the canon itself) in the fourth/fifth century by Buddhaghosa, but changes continued to accrue and were harmonized in part by Aggavaṃsa in his grammar of the twelfth century CE in Burma. The oldest Pāli manuscript we possess (part of the Vinaya) is dated to the ninth century CE (von Hinüber 1991) and continues to show numerous variants from the "standard" Sinhalese, Burmese or Thai recensions. Even after Aggavaṃsa, thousands of variants are found in the manuscripts utilised by the Dhammachai Tipiṭaka Series, which generally are to be dated between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. No attempt is made here to unravel the canon's complex history of exportation and transmission across south-east Asia. There is, however, a rationale underlying this paper that a good deal of the variants are due to the oral transmission process and the various phonological and phonetic variations which are inherent in it. As noted, the manuscripts are not old, but the age of the manuscript has nothing to do with the age of the content; the inference here is that many if not most of the significant phonological and phonetic variations discussed below stem from the oral practices (memorization, recitation and dictation) of the *bhāṇaka*s, and that many of them go back to the earliest Buddhist traditions, although it is impossible to date them, except (sometimes) relatively. Presumably, if manuscripts had existed at the time these variants occurred, they would have constrained and prevented many of the sound-type *anicca* witnessed here; I am not suggesting that all phonological/phonetic variants occurred in the absence of manuscripts (which, especially in CE times would not be true), but that the oral/aural tradition of memorization, recollection, recitation and interpretation (and later, dictation) exercised sway even over manuscripts; before the

manuscript tradition emerged, it was the only source of transmission. There are of course variants introduced due to the writing process itself (§2.7), but these are of secondary importance to the oral transmission. See "A Note on Theragāthā Recensions" below, under Works Cited.

1.2 The variant process

Although variation is a natural process and occurs at every stage in the chronology of the canon, this paper is principally concerned with variation in the oral transmission process (which includes of course the later aural scribal rendition of the oral transmission). It is generally believed that the Buddha taught in many different dialects (Norman 2002: 111 and also perhaps in non-IA languages as well; Levman 2023a), and that these teachings were memorized by Ānanda and others tradents and transmitted orally through generations of *bhāṇaka*s whose job was to memorize the *Buddhavacana* and preserve its integrity. The Buddha himself may have used two different forms of one word to communicate to different dialect speaking audiences, or more likely, the *bhāṇaka*s interpreted the transmission they received in terms of the phonemic structure of their own dialect or language, which resulted in variation. The various *reasons* for variation are discussed in detail below; the *fact* of variation is indisputable and no doubt in part paralleled the branching of the teaching into various sects, which happened from the earliest times, certainly no later than the Second Council. Considering Ven. Purāṇa's statement, who declines to join the First Council recitation because "he would bear in mind the Buddha's teachings as he heard it," not as the Council prescribed,[4] variation probably occurred right after the Buddha's *parinibbāna*. There is of course the possibility of two separate transmissions from the Buddha in similar contexts,[5] but when the words are phonologically related, a much more parsimonious inference is that different *bhāṇaka*s and tradents

[4] "Your reverences, well chanted by the senior bhikkhus are *Dhamma* and discipline, but in that way that I heard it in the Lord's presence, that I received it in his presence, in that same way will I bear it in mind" (Horner 1938–66/2001–07: 2396–97). Se Vin 7, 389[10–12]; PTS Vin 2, 290[6–8]: *susaṅgīt' āvuso therehi bhikkhūhi dhammo ca vinayo ca, apica yath' eva mayā bhagavato sammukhā sutaṃ sammukhā paṭiggahitaṃ tath' eva ahaṃ dhāressāmī ti.*

[5] A suggestion made to me by Stefan Karpik (pers. communication). Possible examples of which are discussed in Levman 2025b: §4.3.18, the *Pāsādikasutta*, where the verb *sarissāma* occurs in Se ("we will/can go") while *passāma* ("we see") occurs in the other three recensions and both are possible. They are not phonologically related. See also examples §4.3.21c and §4.3.22 in the same study.

heard certain words differently for the reasons discussed below, and since both forms were suitable to the context, they were preserved from the earliest times. This paper gives several examples of phonologically similar variants from the *Theragāthā*; Levman 2025a (xvi–xvii) gives several other examples from the *Dīgha Nikāya*[6] where one may conclude that the fact of the variants' preservation points to different, independent *bhāṇaka* traditions, which were retained despite the fact that they contradicted some manuscripts.

The Buddha himself recognized that variant teachings would beset the Sangha after his demise and according to tradition, he provided a means of establishing their authenticity in the *Catu-mahāpadesa-kathā* ("Discourse on the four great precedents") of the *Mahāparinibbānasutta*, shortly before his *parinibbāna*. He instructed that the "words and letters/phrases" (*pada-byañjanāni*) of such teachings were to be compared to the sutta and Vinaya and "if they did not fit," (*na c' eva sutte otaranti, na ca vinaye sandissanti*) they were to be rejected. But the case where both words suited the context was not discussed. And of course there is the question of *which* suttas and Vinaya were to be consulted? It is highly unlikely that such a canon existed before the Buddha had passed away, where there was a "standard" to consult; the whole *mahāpadesa* story is probably a later interpolation. Nevertheless it shows that the Sangha recognized the fact of variants from a very early stage and provides an authority for preserving both variants where they "fit" the context.

1.3 Objections

One might object that this is all surmise, and it is impossible to determine whether the variants discussed here can be traced back to the early oral

[6] For example Se *sutvā* ("heaving heard"; transmitted as *suttā*, *sutvā* being a Sanskritization) vs. Be/Ce/PTS *suddhā* ("pure") in the *Mahāgovindasutta*; Se *suddha-āvāsa* ("pure abode") vs. the other recensions *satta-āvāsa* ("abode of beings") in the *Mahāpadānasutta.* These words are also confused in the *Brahmajālasutta* commentary (Sv 1 87[11–12]), which notes that *kosiya-sutta* ("silk thread") interchanges with var. *suddha-koseyya* ("pure silk") in the Vinaya. Se *kammaniya* ("skilful"), Ce, PTS (*kamanīya*, "beautiful"), Be *khamaṇīya* ("bearable") in the *Mahāsudassanasutta*. Se and PTS *amūḷha-pañha* ("successful in questioning") vs. Be/Ce *amūḷha-paññā* ("unconfused wisdom") in the *Sakkapañhasutta*; or Se *bandhanti pārā pāraṃ*, Be *bandhanti apārā pāraṃ*, Ce *bandhanti orā paraṃ*, PTS *bandhanti aparāparaṃ* in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* (re: building a raft to go from the near to the far shore). The close phonological similarity of all these forms "proves" that they had to come through the oral tradition, and probably are pre-ms, as if there were a ms to refer to, presumably they would have been harmonized to one standard.

transmission of the canon. There are thousands of manuscripts available in each tradition, none earlier than the 9th century CE (von Hinüber 1991), and given the complexity of the manuscript situation and the approximately 2500 years that have elapsed since the death of the Teacher, it is impossible to establish a critical edition of what the earliest or "original" transmission might be. This objection has some validity and Buddhist scholars have attempted to ascertain the authenticity of early Buddhist transmissions (of which the *Theragāthā* is one) for over a century;[7] the general consensus among scholars who specialize in the transmission of early Buddhist teachings is that the transmission is, by and large, authentic and goes directly back to the Founder (Rhys Davids, 1877: 15–17; Wynne 2005: 35–66; Sujato and Brahmali 2014: §3.7 and many references therein). The conclusion is based on many factors including the internal consistency of the Pāli canon itself and the lack of any significant additions to it in the post-Asokan (mid-third century BCE) and Sri Lankan periods (first century BCE), with the exception of minor emendations and harmonizations (Norman 1983: 5; Norman 2002: 140; Wynne 2005: 65–66). Anālayo (2012: 246) notes that the canon was "fairly closed" by the first century BCE and argues, along with Rhys Davids (1911: 174), Geiger (1916/2004: 7) and Pande (1974: 16) that the absence of the mention of King Asoka in the canon points to its completion prior to his reign, that is, the mid-third century BCE (p. 243). Von Hinüber (2006: 202) makes a similar observation with regard to the lack of mention of Pāṭaliputra in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* as the capital of the Maurya empire, suggesting that the text is likely pre-Mauryan. Epigraphical confirmation that some form of canon existed in Asokan and probably pre-Asokan times is provided by the Asoka Bhabra Edict, which mentions several canonical works by name and by almost coeval epigraphical evidence at the Sanchi and Barhut *stūpa*s where the terms *dhamma-kathika* ("preacher of the Dhamma"), *peṭakin* ("one who knows the *piṭaka*"), *suttantika/suttantakinī* ("a man/woman who knows a *suttanta* by heart") and *pañca-nekāyika* ("one who knows the five *nikāya*s by heart") are inscribed (Bühler 1894: 92; Rhys Davids 1911: 167–68). A comparison of the Pāli with the oldest surviving Buddhist manuscripts in Gāndhārī, dating from as early as perhaps the first century, provides confirmation of this hypothesis of the antiquity of the Pāli canon: in

[7] "Early Buddhist Texts" are usually taken to include the first four *Nikāya*s, the *Sutta Nipāta*, *Dhammapada*, *Thera-* and *Therīgāthā*s, the *Udāna* and *Itivuttaka*, the *Pāṭimokkha* and other parts of the *Vinaya* (e.g. *Khandhaka*); for a useful definition see Sujato and Brahmali 2014: §0.1.

substance and often word-for-word, they agree with the Pāli. Within the Pāli tradition itself over 98% of the material is the same amongst the four main recensions.[8] This is not to maintain that there was an "original" Buddhist transmission, as a more likely scenario is that there were multiple *bhāṇaka* traditions from the earliest times, even if the variation was quite small (but nevertheless significant).

1.4 Reasons for retention

Where there is retained variation (aside from minor orthographic differences), their presence in the canon either argues for a retention from the very earliest transmission layers, where the variant was not understood or could not be rationalised, or represented variation in the early teachings and therefore was preserved by the different *bhāṇaka* traditions as a potentially valid reading. Eschewing "scribal errors" as a sole reason, Norman (2002: 113–15) cites this possibility—tradents not understanding the derivation or meaning of a word—as one of the principal causes of variation retention. This is especially applicable to technical terms, where, in some cases, there are dozens of variant forms that have been preserved (see, for example, a partial list of variants on the word *pācittiya* in Levman 2023a: 90, n. 59).

Variant retention was not idiosyncratic to the Buddhist *bhaṇaka* tradition. Bloomfield and Edgerton (1932/1979: §1) report thousands of phonetic variants in the Vedic oral tradition, "accompanied by or resulting in lexical and morphological change at the same time." They note that rime and phonetic confusion constitute the "prime motive "in the variation, but that lexical change was a "real fact of the tradition of a given school" and that these secondary readings have "their own right to exist ... the genuine readings of their respective schools" (§3). Most if not all of the variants found in the Buddhist transmissions are also found in the Vedic tradition. Bloomfield and Edgerton summarize the findings of their study *Vedic Variants* as follows:

> There is, however, one kind of interchange which runs as a

[8] See Levman 2025a (introduction, page xii) which compares the Thai recension to Be, Ce and PTS and concludes that there is a 98.5% concordance between the four. Of the 1.5% which consists of variant readings, only 0.005% represents "significant" variants, which means 0.5% of the variants readings.

> thread through Vedic tradition, and which is so important that it should receive special treatment and emphasis. We refer to shifts which suggest possible dialectic influence from popular speech, by their resemblance to the phonetics of the later Middle-Indic dialects ... The large mass of variants of this kind, clearly pointing to extensive influence of Middle-Indic phonetics in the earliest periods of the languages seems to us one of the most important results of this volume of the *Vedic Variants* ... We find, all in all, the most definite proof of phonetic changes not only in the direction of Prakritism, but also (no less interesting) in the reverse direction, 'hyper-Sanskritism,' which latter indicates a rather definite consciousness, on the part of the handlers of the texts, of the antithesis between the phonetics of the high speech and of the popular dialects (§20).

Such variants as consonant lenition, interchange of aspirate and non-aspirate stops, or replacement of the latter with aspirate only, interchange of labials *m* and *v*, reduction of sibilants, assimilation of conjuncts, etc. are provided in detail; often the variant is purely phonetic but many have lexical (semantic) import as well. Each case has to be individually considered; in the Buddhist tradition the situation is equally complex. Sometimes the variant was preserved because it was not understood or the tradent considered it a potentially valid dialect form. In other cases the variant was understood, but it was not clear which variant was "correct," so both were preserved, either by the individual tradent or *bhāṇaka*, or by different *bhāṇaka* traditions. Or the variant was simply a mistake, a "slip of memory" by a senior monk, which was not corrected and transmitted to the next generation (Anālayo 2022: 36). Often the variant seems to be purely phonetic; but often there can be a change in meaning. In the *Mahāgovindasutta* Se DN 2, 278[2]; PTS DN 2, 244[11]), the Thai recension has *sutvā* ("having heard") vs. Be/Ce/PTS *suddhā* ("purified"), which could only have occurred and been preserved in an oral environment. Both were understood, but the Thai tradition preserved *sutvā* as *Buddhavacana*, while Be/Ce preserved *suddhā*. Since we know that *sutvā* was in fact a later back-formation/Sanskritization for MI *suttā* (von Hinüber 1983/2005: 7–8/190–91), it makes the argument for confusion during the earlier oral tradition even more compelling; that is, the Thai *sutvā* was probably transmitted as *suttā* and the difference between the two *suttā/suddhā* would not be apparent to a Dravidian bilingual who had no phonemic voiced stops or aspirates in his native

language. This is also useful for dating; as von Hinüber notes (*ibid.*: 8/191), because of the presence of both forms in the older part of the *Milindapañha*, the Gāndhārī *Dharmapada* and the *Buddhavaṃsa*, "it may be assumed that the restoration of the absolutive ending in *-tvā* had indeed begun before the Theravāda canon was written down in the first century B.C. [...] the roots of the shaping of this particular linguistic form of Pāli must reach back into the last centuries B.C." OI conjunct absolutives were already assimilated by Asoka's time (e.g. *-tvā* > *-tu* in Shāhbāzgaṛhī, Kālsī, Dhauli and Jaugaḍa; Hultzsch 1924/1969: lxxxiv, xcvii, cxi), and may well go back to the time of the Buddha. As Norman points out (2002: 148) "these features may have formed part of some of the very earliest texts. They may indeed go back to the original language or languages of Buddhism ...."[9] In the examples below the reader will find many instances of variant readings preserved where both make sense in the context—probably one of the main reasons for their preservation—while in other cases they were preserved because, although they were not understood, they were deemed potentially valid readings.

A reasonable approach is to examine the manuscript variants (evidenced in the following examples) together with other supporting factors, ascertain where the evidence points, and evaluate the cogency of the conclusions; that is, to adhere to the methodology of standard historical, comparative linguistics (see Norman 1997/2006: Chapter 4 and throughout; Levman 2016a: 5–8). Rejecting this hypothesis based on the lack of a critical edition and the lateness of the mss on which the printed recensions are based would imply dismissing all of the work of historical phonology done by scholars like Norman and von Hinüber in the last few decades—indeed, all

[9] How far awry this can go in the oral transmission is illustrated by one (not uncharacteristic) example of oral confusion from the *Nāmasutta* (PTS SN 1, 39[3–6]) of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, *Sagāthāvagga*, one of the very oldest of the early Buddhist transmissions (von Hinüber 1996/2008: §74, "some parts of the *Sagāthavagga* seem to be very old, actually very near to Vedic texts"). Here we have six phonologically/phonetically related variants for the word *addhabhavi* (PTS, Be), *anvabhavi* (Se, Ce), *andha-* and *andabhavi* (Se vars.), *aṭṭhabhavi* (Sī v.l.) and *adanvabhavi* (Cambodian v.l.). Bodhi (2000: 130) translates "What has weighed down everything?" taking *addha-bhavi* as an aorist of *abhi* + *bhū* "to master, command of", while Se has *anva-bhavi*, the aorist of *anu* + *bhū* ("to enclose, embrace") which requires no change of *abhyabhavi* > *abbhabhavi* > *addhabhavi* (cp Oberlies 2019, § 76). Other variants are equally cogent, like *addha-bhavi* ("being in the past") which is how the *ṭīkā* takes it (Be Spk-ṭ: 1, 132: *kāmaṃ pāḷiyaṃ atīta-kāla-niddeso kato, taṃ pana lakkhaṇa-mattaṃ*, "surely in the *mūla* this refers to a past time, but is merely a characteristic") or *andha-bhavi* ("being blind"), or *aṭṭha-bhavi* ("carrying the meaning") or *anda-bhavi* ("being a fetter" < OI *and* "to bind," *ānda* "one who makes fetters") or *adanva-bhavi* (?). Except for this last (which may be a typo) all of these are possible in the context, which is presumably why they were retained and transmitted.

work on the historical linguistics of the canon, which seems hardly plausible.

These "supporting factors" are also for the most part pre-canonical (Dravidian language influence, bilingualism, the influence of other dialects and/or *koiné*, etc.), which strengthen the argument presented here as to the antiquity of the variants. The variations preserved in the transmission, or "anomalous forms" as Norman calls them (2002: 141), or "oddities" as Wynne calls them, "are likely to be significant—not produced by the random variation of an oral tradition, but by causes that in theory can be discovered" (Wynne 2004: 124). As Norman intuits, "We can also assume that traces of this linguistic diversity were retained when the Buddha's sermons, which had been preached in different areas, were first collected together" (2002: 145). This might refer to the retention of two different dialect forms of a word in two different passages of the canon, or it might refer to the same word in the same teaching, either spoken by the Buddha in a different form at a different time, or differentially remembered by the Buddha's bhikkhu-tradents and/or *bhāṇaka*s.

Another important point is the presence of variants in the commentaries, many examples of which will be shown below from the different commentarial recensions. As Norman and Endo have noted, parts of the commentary may go back to the time of the historical Buddha where the teacher and/or his immediate disciples tried to clarify certain obscure points in the doctrine (Norman 1997/2006: 149; Endo 2013: 5). If these were simply "scribal errors" then the commentators would have corrected them. But not only are variants preserved in different manuscripts, but the commentary itself embeds several alternate readings within its own transmission, with the expression *ti pi pāṭho*, i.e. "so is another reading"; a quick search shows that there are over six hundred of these in the commentaries, again attesting to the antiquity of the variants. Some of these may date from the earliest transmission, others to the time of Mahinda's transport of the canon and commentary to Sri Lanka in the third century BCE (Endo 2013: 20 calls this SRIOC, "Sinhala Rendition of the Indian Original Commentaries"), others to later versions of the commentary formulated in Sri Lanka.

Although some parts of the commentaries may go back to the *mūla* transmission, they are by and large later than the *mūla*. A peculiar idiosyncrasy of the Se variant transmission is the large number of cases where the *mūla* text is different from the other recensions, but the Se commentary preserves the variant readings of Be and Ce in the headword. The Thai editors were

obviously aware of the variant forms (as they were preserved in their own commentary), but retained the Se reading as a valid Thai tradition, differing from the others, despite the commentary. The *mūla* text here clearly pre-dates the commentary.[10]

Charles Hallisey (2024: 92) notes that "one of the services of the commentaries in the Pāli canonical texts is to establish the text, and careful attentiveness to textual differences and variants eventually became a standard component in the normative practices of Theravādin Buddhist commentators." The expression *ti pi pāṭho* was only used for variants which were considered "significant," that is, "worthy of consideration, reflection and preservation"; other variants which were not significant were deemed "careless" (*pamāda-pāṭha*) in the commentaries (p. 92). Each (of the former, significant) variants has its own narrative, enhancing and potentially revising our knowledge of the history of the Pāli language and its transmission, and suggesting heretofore unimagined possibilities (99–100). Hallisey does not attempt to deal with the very complex question of the chronology and interweaving of oral and textual transmission, other than noting that the Pāli was "unitary without being uniform," a general condition which would simultaneously create a comfort with received textual variants ..." (p. 96). The word "textual" here is not accurate, as Hallisey acknowledges (referring to Gāndhārī manuscripts) that "both oral transmission and written transmission co-existed and interacted with each other in multiple ways and awareness of it enhances what we know about other oral aspects of Pāli textual culture" (p. 101).

Richard Salomon (2024: 20) has also reflected on the importance of variant readings in the canon, noting that "the variants were already present from the beginning of the textual tradition ..." and that the "variability *precedes* [italics in original] the fixity and stability of the received, canonized texts of the Bible or of the Buddhist sūtras ... discoveries of manuscripts have made it clear that they involved the suppression of innumerable variants, any of which probably had an equal claim to originality."

A second objection might relate to the manuscripts scribal tradition, where the canon was copied between various Indic (Brāhmī, Sinhalese, Karoṣṭhī—

[10] For example, Levman 2025b: §4.2 has 9 examples of Se *mūla* differing from the Se comm. (in the DN) and Levman 2025c, has 15 examples of the same phenomenon in the MN. These instances are very useful for establishing time-lines, showing *mūla* forms as preserving forms different from and pre-dating the commentary.

actually a Semitic script in which Gāndhārī was written) and other south-east Asian scripts (Burmese, Lanna, Khom, Thai). Certainly mistakes in the rendering of one script in another did introduce variation into the canon (discussed below §2.7); especially problematic in some south-Asian scripts where certain letters were very similar to each other (e.g. Sinhalese *ha* and *bha*; Norman 1987: 30). These changes are all post-oral, however, largely orthographic and are by and large not significant in terms of the change of the transmission's meaning. They should be the subject of a separate study of *Theragāthā* manuscripts, which looks at the similarity between letters and the effect this may have had on variants in the written transmission tradition. As noted above, this study argues that the significant phonological variants mentioned can be traced back to the oral tradition, which is the main subject demonstrated below.

1.5 Caution

Historical linguistics is the study of the history and evolution of language by comparing cognate forms and, where possible, tracing back their history to a shared, common ancestor. It is considered a descriptive science, because of its rigorous methodology and the potential for falsifying its result; but like its sister, the descriptive science of palaeontology which proposes cladistic trees of species based on shared characteristics, its results cannot be considered "proof," but only best inference. So, while we can establish that phonologically cognate forms evolved from a common ancestor and in some cases propose what that ancestor might be, we cannot consider the result to be definitive; it is a hypothetical reconstruction, which is why the ancestral form is prefixed by an asterisk (*-), as are all the proto-Indo-European roots reconstructed by comparing cognate words in the various daughter languages. Timelines can only be considered relative, not absolute.

The sine qua non of language is sound, and sound like all other elements changes over time, due to the factors discussed below (§2.1–2.5). There are thousands of variants which can be attributed to the manuscript copying traditions; the kind of changes that occur here and their causes have been well established in biblical text-critical studies (Tov 1992/2001). This paper is principally concerned with changes that may be attributed to the oral tradition by examining phonologically cognate forms in parallel passages of the different recensions. They are not copyist or scribe "mistakes"; presumably, if they were, they would have been corrected long ago. They are, for the most part, valid readings preserved by the different *bhāṇaka* traditions, either because they were *Buddhavacana*, or not understood and preserved for that

reason. Although one cannot "prove" that they pre-date the written manuscripts, it is a logical and cogent inference based on the data at hand. By and large they are not minor orthographic peculiarities and idiosyncrasies but significant variants which often affect the meaning of the passages and/or etymology of the words.

To return to our main subject: why so many variants? Here follows a short summary of the principal causes.

2. Principal causes of word variation in Pāli

2.1 The Prakrits and *koiné*

The linguistic situation at the time of the Buddha was very complex. In addition to the Vedic language (which was exclusively reserved for the religious purposes of Brahmanism), there were several dialects in use in the north-west, west, central and eastern regions of north India. The Asokan edicts, inscribed 150–200 years after the Buddha's ministry, provide detailed evidence of the linguistic structure in the different regions. Scholars believe the Buddha taught in an eastern Prakrit but his teachings were also restated into other Prakrits, either by himself or his successors, resulting in transmission errors. In addition there is a lot of linguistic evidence which provides a convincing argument for the existence of a cross-India *koiné*, lingua franca or common language that was used to simplify inter-dialect and inter-language communication, in trade and government (Geiger 1916/2004: 3–4; Smith 1952: 178; Norman 1989: 35; Levman 2016a, 2019a); this too led to potential confusion when the simplified word was interpreted by the receivers. Based on the linguistic evidence, it is also reasonable to assume (see below §2.4.2–2.4.3) that the Buddha spoke in one or more indigenous languages, or—since it is not possible to definitively identify the historical Buddha's teachings—that his early tradents did so.[11] See discussion on the language that the Buddha and early tradents spoke in Levman 2023a: 60–63. As Norman has opined (2002: 111), it is a reasonable assumption that many of the variants are preservations of dialect anomalies due to the Buddha's sermons being preached in different dialect areas.

[11] I omit from discussion here the whole question, recently brought up again by Drewes (2017), of the existence of a historical Buddha. This has already been answered by von Hinüber (2019), Wynne (2019) and Levman (2019b); Drewes' recent response (2022) does not advance his hypothesis. His suggestion, for example, that "it would be very difficult to get to the idea that early Buddhism focused on either the quest for religious experience or the practice of meditation" (*ibid.,* 20) is ludicrous to anyone who has actually read the Pāli canon, where meditation is an integral part of the three-fold training (*sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā*).

2.2 Diachronic language change

In India we can trace a history of change from Old Indic (OI) to Middle Indic (MI) and New Indic. Most of the changes from OI > MI were already present in the Vedas in inchoate form (Bloomfield and Edgerton 1932/79: §20), and they continued and accelerated in the centuries before and after the Buddha, often under the influence of indigenous language speakers. These took such forms as: the weakening of conjunct consonants > geminates; the weakening and loss of intervocalic stops; the levelling of all sibilants; the loss of aspirated stops and their change to aspirates only; the interchange of labials and glides, etc., to name a few of the major changes. These changes are very old and most are preserved or foreshadowed in the Asokan dialects, dating the anomalous features in Pāli to pre-Asokan times (Levman 2010; Norman 2002: 111).[12] Again, this introduced uncertainties into the transmission. Did a geminate (e.g. *-tt-*, as in *satta*) indicate the conjunct *-pt-* (*sapta* "seven" or *śapta* "cursed", since *s-* and *ś-* > *s-*), *-kt-* (*sakta* "clinging" or *śakta* "competent"), *-tv-* (*satva*, "warrior") or *-tt-* (*satta*, "seated")? The meaning was often clear from the context, but not always.

2.3 Sanskritization

The priestly language (OI) and a form of the vernacular Prakrits have co-existed since Vedic times (Wackernagel 1896: xvii-xviii), along with the tendency towards Sanskritization, that is, the action of purifying the ritual language of Prakritic influence (Edgerton 1930: 27; Bloomfield and Edgerton 1932/1979: §20, this article §1.4). The ultimate hegemony of the Sanskrit language as a pan-Indic phenomenon began in earnest after the time of the Buddha, as early as the Asokan edicts when it became increasingly important as a unifying cultural and political force in India; from the 3rd century BCE on, Pāli has a lot of words that have been Sanskritized, their Prakrit form "restored" to their earlier OI form (Norman 1983: 4–5; 1997/2012: 95–112; von Hinüber 1982: 138, 1996: 190; Salomon 1998: 84; Levman 2020; Levman 2021a: 266-67; 290–91; for a summary, see Levman 2023b: 6–8). Sometimes the transmitter who interpreted the Prakrit word did not do so correctly. Pāli, for example, retains most intervocalic stops and aspirated stops whereas other Prakrits do not; some of these are interpretative restorations, and these interpretations

[12] For example, the various ambiguities we see between intervocalic voiced and unvoiced stops in the canon (Levman 2014: 475–94), or the voicing of *-ṭṭh-* > *-ḍḍh-* etc., all of which we find in the Asokan edicts (Norman 2002: 142).

are subject to variations and error. Pāli has many anomalous forms where a simplified Prakrit form is preserved alongside a Sanskritized form: e.g. *pahā* alongside *pabhā*, "shining" (Levman 2021a: 285); *khāyita* alongside *khādita*, "eaten" (PED);[13] *goyāna* alongside *godāna* (proper name); *avāyesi* alongside *avādesi* (Levman 2023b: 3, note 2); *āchāya* ("gift") alongside *āchāda* (BHSG §2.32); words ending in *iya*, alongside the same word in *-ika*, etc., Lüders 1954: §133–38); and many forms where a simplified Prakrit form has been interpreted in variant ways: e.g. *vijita/vidita* pointing to the existence of an earlier form *viẏita* (Levman 2023b: 3, 11); *virato/virajo* < *viẏato*, (Norman 1980: §3.2). These date from the earliest layer of the transmission, at least from as early as Asokan times (Norman 1997/2006: 125–26) or earlier, as Bloomfield and Edgerton have provided evidence that Sanskritizing of Prakrit was taking place as early as Vedic times (Bloomfield and Edgerton 1932/1979: §20).

2.4.1 Linguistic diffusion (synchronic change) from neighbouring IA languages

Different Prakrit speakers pronounced words in different ways. Some tending to voice intervocalic consonantal stops and others tended to devoice them. Some

[13] While it has been suggested that *khādita* may be a retention of an Old Indic form or dialect variation (rather than a Sanskritization), it is clear from the appearances in the canon that *khāyita* pre-dates *khādita* and that the latter is therefore a restoration. DPD reports 19 instances of *khāyita* in the first four books of the Sutta Piṭaka and three in the early *Cūḷa-* and *Mahāvagga* of the Vinaya, while for *khādita* there is only one occurrence in the AN (none in the other three *Nikāya*s) and one in the *Mahāvagga.* Most of the occurrences of *khādita* occur in the commentary (68 in total) as opposed to 20 appearances in the commentary for *khāyita.* Total statistics per DPD are (for Be):

Appearances	Mūla	Aṭṭhakathā	Ṭīkā
khāyita	57	20	40
khādita	11	68	30

See DPD for breakdown by *Nikāya*. Mallik (1970) reports a number of cases which he calls "Sanskritisms" and treats as retentions, but by the same process many of these can be shown to be restorations, where the Sanskritized form post-dates the Prakrit (e.g. *citta*, *citra*, "bright-coloured", *bhadda*, *bhadra* "good, excellent"; *uddaya*, *udraya* "result, profit, outcome"; *udraya* perhaps a wrong reconstruction of *udaya* "rising, profit, outcome, result" per Cone). One form that is ambiguous is *uttasta/uttrasta*, "frightened" as both conjunct (*-tr-*) and geminate (*-tt-*) forms of this verb (*uttasati*, "to be frightened, terrified") occur in early works.

omitted the stops altogether or replaced them with a *-ẏ-* glide,[14] a hiatus bridging sound connecting two vowels. Retroflex stops, an innovation in IA from the Dravidian languages, were often confused with dental stops (Geiger §41.3, §42).[15] Pāli is a mixed language containing dialect forms from different parts of India; for example the OI word *kṣaṇa* ("instant"), which occurs in Pāli in its eastern form (*khaṇa*) and its western form (*chaṇa*), or the word *arya* ("noble") which occurs as both eastern *ariya* with an epenthetic *-i-* added and western *ayya* with a geminate; or the western word *taṇhā* ("craving") which, along with eastern *tasiṇā*, derived from OI *tṛṣṇā*. We could also consider a basic word like *loka*, "world". Pāli treats the word the same as Sanskrit. In the Asokan edicts it is written as *loga* in the northern Jaugada edict; Ardhamāgadhī transmits it as *loẏa* or *loa*; Gāndhārī has several possibilities including *loga*, *loku* and *loo*. The evidence suggests that the form transmitted to us in Pāli, which one might reasonably expect to be similar to one of the Prakrit forms (Norman 1983: 4–5) was subject to linguistic diffusion and later back-formed to *loka*, that is, it was Sanskritized (Levman 2021a: 276–88).

2.4.2 Linguistic diffusion from autochthonous languages, bilingualism and word borrowing

When the Indo-Aryans migrated into northern India they encountered a settled population of Dravidian and Munda speaking peoples (Emeneau 1954: 282). A strong argument can be advanced that the Buddha's Sakya clan were historically a Dravidian speaking people in the process of being assimilated into

[14] The *y*-glide was used as a substitute for a weakened or vanished intervocalic stop in the Prakrits, notated with an overdot *-ẏ-* in ArdhaMāgadhī and just a *-y-* in other Prakrits. Pischel (§187) calls it a weakly articulated *ya* (*laghu-prayatnatara ya-kāra* "Lightly articulated *-ya-*syllable"). Von Hinüber (2001: §171) calls it a "hiatus-eraser" (Hiattilger in German). It is also found in Vedic writings; Bloomfield & Edgerton note the "similar use of the sound [*-y-*] in Prakrit and Pāli" (1932/1979: §338), but this is more for external sandhi usage, than representing the loss of a consonant. Vedic has examples of stop disappearance, but not, that I am aware of, where they are replaced with a *y*-glide; see von Hinuber op. cit. §170, Vedic *maireya* "intoxicating drink" <* *madireya* (Vedic *madirā*); Vedic *prayuga* "forepart of the shafts of a chariot" > *prauga* (Wackernagel 1896: §37b)

[15] Hallisey quotes an illustrative example from the *Sutta Nipāta*, where, in the first verse of the *Uragavagga*, PTS has *visata* (< *vi* + *sṛ*, p.p. *visṛta*, "spread"), while all the other recensions (Be, Ce, and Se) have *visaṭa* with retroflex *-ṭ-*, although Norman (1990: 34; CP 4: 84) writes that Ce has a dental *-t-* (but not present in the BJT version of the text). This may in fact be a difference in MI dialect pronunciation, as Norman suggests, where the vocalic *-ṛ-* has changed the dental *-t-* > *-ṭ-* in some, but not all cases. The OI rules of retroflexion do not require such a change.

an IA culture, judging by the toponyms of the towns they lived in, the names of many of the monks which are of Dravidian origin (Levman 2021b: 181) and the linguistic and cultural borrowings from Dravidian found in the Pali scriptures (Levman 2021a: Chapters 1–4; Thomas 1931: 23 thought their native language was Munda).[16] This extends far beyond simple word borrowing and includes phonological borrowing, morphological and syntactical influence. We find a significant imprint of Dravidian language features on Pāli from the earliest parts of the language, that is, the early Buddhism of the early *Nikāya*s, the *Sutta Nipāta*, the *Dhammapada* and *Thera/Therīgāthā* (for summary see Levman 2021b: 170–72).[17] The eastern clans were looked down upon by the western Indo-Aryans; their speech was considered *mṛdhra-vācaḥ* ("obstructed"; Deshpande 1979: 254; Levman 2013: 154–55), which is not surprising considering the very different phonetic/phonological system in the indigenous Dravidian and Munda languages. Linguistic diffusion from indigenous south-Asian languages is often not distinguishable from intra-dialect IA language changes (as discussed above §2.4.1). Either one could be the cause of, for example, the weakening or strengthening of an intervocalic stop, or, inter-dialect variations could be catalyzed and accelerated by the constraints of bilingual speakers' native phonological systems. Included in this category as well, is tradents'

[16] Dravidian Buddhism (which I define as "Buddhism among Dravidian speaking peoples, in Dravidian speaking areas and influenced by Dravidian culture"; Levman 2023a: 59) is a largely unstudied chapter in the history of Buddhism in India. It is a matter of Buddhist history that the Damiḷas (or at least some of them) were at one time part of the Buddhist Saṅgha. Asoka brought his *dhamma* message to the south, beyond the frontiers of the Coḷas and the Paṇḍyas (including present day Tamil Nadu) all the way to Taprobana (i.e. Sri Lanka, Rock Edict 13, Bloch 1950: 130), through the missionary work of his son Mahinda. The Nāgārjunikoṇḍa inscription (3rd–4th century CE) congratulates the Buddhist monks for having converted the Damiḷas to Buddhism (Lamotte 1958/88: 342). Buddhaghosa himself, who went to Sri Lanka and translated all the lost Pali commentaries from Sinhalese back into Pāli, was a southerner who lived for sometime in Kañcī in Tamil Nadu (von Hinüber 1996/2008: §207; Mp 98[4]), and undoubtedly spoke a form of Old Tamil. Dhammapāla, author of the *Paramattha-dīpanī* (commentaries on the *Thera-* and *Therīgāthā*) was a native of Padaratittha, near Kañci (Lamotte, *ibid.*, p. 350). Buddhadatta, commentator on the Vinaya and *Buddhavaṃsa*, was born in Uṟaiyūr and wrote many of his works in the Bhūtamangalagāma monastery in the Coḷa country. For a comprehensive treatment of the "Dravidian connection", see Levman 2023a.

[17] On page 172 of Levman 2021b I say "there is no mention in the commentaries of the Buddha actually teaching in a non-IA language and that teaching being translated into a *koiné* or Pāli." While there is no explicit statement to that effect, Étienne Lamotte describes an incident in the Sarvāsativāda *Vibhāṣā* where the Buddha speaks in Dravidian, and the commentary to the *Parisāsutta*, strongly suggests that the Buddha was speaking non-IA languages. See below, §2.4.3.

lack of knowledge of the Pāli language which often leads to a confusion of Pāli verbal forms and roots.

2.4.3 Linguistic diffusion: bilingualism

It is quite possible that the Buddha himself was bi- or multi-lingual and certainly the early tradents were, teaching in one or more MI dialects (including the aforementioned *koinḗ*) as well as one or more autochthonous languages. Lamotte (1958/88: 550) remarks that "there is no doubt that the Buddha possessed the gift of tongues and that occasionally, to make himself better understood or to respond to the preferences of his listeners used non-Āryan languages." He describes a famous incident in the *Vibhāṣā* (3rd–4th century CE) where the Buddha converts four kings, first by speaking in Sanskrit to the first two, then, when the second two do not understand, speaking in Dravidian and then in Mleccha.[18] Although this is the only incident I am aware of where the Buddha is said to speak Dravidian,

[18] The *Vibhāṣā* is a Chinese translation of a lost OI work. A similar text occurs in the Gilgit Manuscripts (Dutt, 1947: 256–60), from the Mūlasarvāstivādin Vinaya, the relevant section of which reads:

"He addressed the great king Dhṛtarāṣṭra as follows: 'O Great King, the body is old, feeling has been tranquilized, perception has ceased, mental intentions are calmed, consciousness has disappeared. This is the end of suffering.' When this Dharma was being taught, the stainless Dhamma eye arose for the great king Dhṛtarāṣṭra and some of his hundred thousand *gandharbhas* in regards to the Dhamma ..." (*... iti hi mahārāja jīrṇaḥ kāyo vedanā śītī-bhūtā saṃjñā nirūddhā saṃskārā vyupaśāntā vijñānam-astaṃ-gatam | eṣa eva-anto duḥkhasyeti ...*, pp. 258[8–9]).

"... Then the Bhagava addressed the great king Virūḍhaka as follows: 'In the seen let there be merely the seen, in what is heard, in what is thought, in what is cognized, let there be merely what is cognized.' When this Dharma was being taught the stainless Dharma eye arose for the great king Virūḍhaka and some of his hundred thousand kumbaṇḍhas ..." (*... iti hi mahārājā dṛṣṭe dṛṣṭa-mātraṃ bhavatu śrute cintate vijñāte vijñāta-mātram ...* p. 258[13–15]).

"... Then the Bhagava addressed the great king Virūpākṣa as follows: *ene mene daṣphe daṇḍaṣphe* that is the end of suffering ... When this Dharma was being taught the stainless Dharma eye arose for the great king Virūpākṣa and some of his hundred thousand *kumbaṇḍhas* ..." (*... iti hi mahārāja ene mene daṣphe daṇḍaṣphe eṣa eva-anto duḥkhasyeti ...* p. 259[1–2] with footnote: "Tibetan *e ne me ne dab phye daḍap phe* (ཨ་ནེ་མེ་ནེ་དབ་ཕྱེ་དཱ་ཌཔ་ཕེ). "... Then the Bhagava addressed the great king Vaiśravaṇa, 'Here, for you Great King, *māṣā tuṣā saṃśāmā sarvatra virāṭhi*, that is the end of suffering.' When this Dharma was being taught the stainless Dharma eye arose for the great king Virūḍhaka and some of his hundred thousand *nāgas* ..." (*... atra te mahārāja māṣā tuṣā saṃśāmā sarvatra virāṭhi eṣa eva-anto duḥkhasyeti ...* p. 259[6–7]).

According to Lamotte (1958/88: 551) *ene mene...* represents a Dravidian language and *māṣā tuṣā...* a Mleccha language, but this is not stated in the Sanskrit text. The words *ene mene...* do not appear to be Dravidian, nor is the *māṣā tuṣā* language identifiable.

there are references in the commentary to various monks who spoke non-Aryan languages (including Dravidian speakers; the Kirātas, perhaps of the Tibeto-Burman group; the Savaras, Munda speakers; and the Yavanas or Greek speakers) whose mispronunciation of the Dhamma would invalidate a *kammavācā* (an official act of the Sangha; Levman 2017: 31–33). There is also one statement in the *Parisāsutta*, where, in reference to the eight assemblies, the Buddha is quoted as saying "I appeared just like them, and my voice became like their voice" (Bodhi 2012: 1212); "whatever their language that became mine" (Hare 1935/2006: 205); which suggests that he indeed spoke the Dhamma in many other (non-IA) languages, and the "otherness" of the languages is so stated in the commentary.[19] Although the commentarial references are late, it is clear that the tradition believed the Buddha was bi- or multi-lingual and it should not be discounted out of hand; given all the linguistic data, it is highly unlikely that the Buddha did not speak a non-IA language like Dravidian.

Murray Emeneau identified bilingualism as the major catalyst of change in what he called the "Indian Linguistic Area" (1956; 1974; 1980). The indigenous peoples had to learn the language of the new IA immigrants, a language which was fast becoming politically, economically and culturally dominant. But the Dravidian and Munda languages also left a strong imprint on IA; a

[19] AN 69 (9), 4, 307[21–23]: *tattha yādisako tesaṃ vaṇṇo hoti tādisako mayhaṃ vaṇṇo hoti, yādisako tesaṃ saro hoti tādisako mayhaṃ saro hoti*. The comm. (Mp 4, 148) says they are "different languages" and describes them as: "Their sounds are broken/interrupted/not continuous/cut off (*chinna-ssarā*), they are incomplete/defective (*khaṇḍa-ssarā*) or roaring (*gaggara-ssarā*), declining/sloping (*pabbharā*), confused, rumbling, stammering, stuttering (*babbhara* < Skt. *balbalā-kṛ* 'to stammer or stutter,' *barbara* = Gr. βάρβαρος 'stuttering; people of an unknown language'), the sound of the crow (*kāka-ssarā*). The Teacher is like the voice of Brahma (*satthā brahma-ssaro va*, the supreme voice that can create all sounds). This is said in respect of different languages." *te chinna-ssarā pi honti khaṇḍa-ssarā* (vars. *gaggara-ssarā*, *babbhara*, *pabbharā*) *pi kāka-ssarā pi*, *satthā brahma-ssaro va. idaṃ pana bhāsa-antaraṃ sandhāya kathitaṃ.* For a similar description of the "obstructed speech" of the non-Aryans in the *Śatapatha Brāhamaṇa,* see Levman 2013: 255; see also Levman 2017: 32 for a similar description of the *milakkhānaṃ bhāsā* ("language of the barbarians," the non-Aryans, at Sv 1, 176[26]). Although the above compound *bhāsā-antaraṃ* may also be translated as "different way of speaking" (as well as "different languages"), I interpret it as referring to both the different languages and the different manner in which they are articulated. The *mūla* and comm. passages are also repeated in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* DN 2, 109[13–15] and Sv 2, 560[22–24]. The Buddha's supernatural ability to adopt the appearance, vocal mannerisms and (in my interpretation) languages of his audience as recounted in the Mp and Sv commentaries suggests a relatively late date for their composition (like the *Vibhāṣā*, probably early medieval); nevertheless they do shed some light on the tradition's belief in the Teacher's putative bi- or multi-lingualism.

good summary of some of the features shared by Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages (but not by Iranian, Indo-Aryan's closest Indo-European relative) is found in Masica 1976: 178–86, Sjoberg 1992: 55–69, and Krishnamurti 2003: 38–42. These include, inter alia, the use of retroflex consonants, the extensive use of non-finite verbs in strings as a compositional principle, the use of the quotative marker in reporting direct speech, syntactic parallels between the proto-Dravidian *-um* suffix and IA *api*, and the use of "echo words" or "expressives."

Some of the phonological features of the Dravidian and Munda languages led to confusion in the Dharma transmission, if one of the monks (the transmitter or receiver) was a bilingual, MI-as-a-second-language-speaker. Dravidian lacked voiced stops and aspirated stops, to name two major impediments to accurate Dharma transmission; many variant readings which show both voiced and unvoiced stops, aspirated and unaspirated stops are possibly attributable to this cause. Judging from the bilingual or non-IA names of many of the monks in the earliest transmissions (mentioned above §2.4.2), Dravidian speaking monks were present right from the beginning of the Sangha formation, which again points to the antiquity of many of the phonological anomalies to be discussed below.

2.4.4 Linguistic diffusion: foreign words, word borrowing

The IA immigrants naturally adopted many of the foreign words of the indigenous inhabitants for biota they were unfamiliar with. They also adopted foreign technical terms for cultural practices like the *kaṭhina* practice (Bechert 1968: 324; Hu-von Hinüber 1994: 4–5) and the *kuṭi* meditation hut which they borrowed from the locals (Levman 2021a: 154–56). Since these words were native to a foreign phonetic system, when imported into MI various attempts were made to render them accurately in the IA system and this naturally resulted in variant interpretations and spellings. There are hundreds, perhaps thousands of foreign words in the canon (no complete inventory has been attempted). A good example of the phonetic problems that result from the importation of a non-IA word is the word *jaḷogi* (an alcoholic drink), which occurs in many different variant forms, many or all of which must have been present from the earliest strata of the canon, as the word featured prominently in the second council debates, one hundred years after the Buddha's passing (Levman 2019a: 91–92).

2.5 Oral transmission confusion, ambiguity

For over three hundred years the teachings were transmitted orally from *bhāṇaka* to *bhāṇaka* without the aid of a written guide. It is inevitable that mistakes would happen, especially when facilitated by some of the pathways outlined above, the propensity of dialect speakers to communicate their own dialect idiosyncrasies, the natural evolution of language towards simplification over time, and the constraints of MI speakers who learned the language late in life and for whom certain sounds were not natural. Along with oral transmission confusion should be grouped variation due to lack of knowledge of the Pāli language (as demonstrated in Levman 2021b) and the imperfect memory of the *bhāṇaka*, including for example his addition of material that never existed due to the "vicissitudes of memory" (Anālayo 2009); these largely unintentional changes were caused by a "lack of systematic training of the Buddhist reciters" comparable to Vedic reciters, resulting in memory slips not being corrected and being incorporated into the transmission (Anālayo 2022: 36, 202). Exacerbating this phenomenon was the *bhāṇaka*'s imperfect pronunciation, or the imperfect auditory skills of the scribe, when MI was not their native language. To this last factor may be added the influence of the copyists' language on manuscript transmission, e.g. the Thai language, which lacks certain elements phonemic in Pāli—voiced aspirates, all retroflexes, palatal and velar voiced stops, and palatal nasals—and which may be a factor in some Thai variants.

While it is impossible to quantify this factor, it no doubt had a role to play in the transmission of variants; the *suddhā/suttā* confusion discussed above (§1.4) may be due to this factor, exacerbated perhaps by phonological confusion caused by the linguistic diffusion issues (§2.4). In effect this category is a "pot pourri" which subsumes all the seven processes discussed in §§2.1–2.4.4 above, where it is impossible to determine which one(s) of these processes are operant for a given variant, or where none of these processes are operant but there is nevertheless oral confusion that is purely sonic in nature (like incorrect word division in the example *karontā-gacchanti* and *karontā-āgacchanti* from the *Agaññasutta*; Levman 2025a: v3: 94, n. 204 or syncope (syllable loss) and confused word division in the *Cakkavattisutta*: *tapasa-brahmacāri*, vs. *tapa-brahmacārī* vs. *tava sabrahmacārī*, *ibid.*, v3: 30, n. 52); oral confusion and ambiguity are a common denominator of them all.[20]

[20] The interested reader should look these examples up in the Pāli index, as the pagination is likely to change on final printing.

2.6 Commentarial glosses

As Endo and Norman have opined, many parts of the commentary may go right back to the time of the Buddha, and possibly even the Buddha himself, when monks would ask the teacher to explain certain points (Norman 1997/2006: 195; Endo 2013: 5). In his mission to Sri Lanka in the mid-3rd century BCE, Mahinda brought a complete commentary to the island and translated it into Sinhalese, according to Buddhaghosa's introductory verses to the *Dīgha Nikāya Commentary*.[21] The commentary often has variants which do not exist in the main text, some of which are the commentators' attempt to make sense of a problematic passage, others which may be synonyms for certain words, spoken by the Buddha and remembered by the monks. Sometimes the commentary is misplaced in the *mūla* text (Norman 1997/2006: 200, 206, 210; Anālayo 2022: 147–51). Often the commentary itself talks of alternate readings (*ti pi pāṭho*, discussed above §1.4).

2.7 Written transmission errors

Once the text was written down, orthographic variation (differences in transcription protocol) and copying errors, common in the transmission of manuscripts could, and did take place, that is, errors such as incorrect spelling, wrong compound and sentence division, haplography, misreading, dittography, etc. (Tov 1992/2001: 199–286 for the Hebrew Bible). There were also particular problems with Indic scripts like Brāhmī where geminates were not written down and the marks for long vowels were frequently omitted (Norman 1997/2006: 107), and Karoṣṭhī where neither geminates nor long vowels were shown (von Hinüber 2015). Several of the south-Asian scripts (Burmese, Thai, Sinhalese) had letters very similar to each other which could be easily misunderstood. Nevertheless, most of the phonological (sound transmission) confusions would not have occurred if a firm base text was present as a guide. I attribute most of the variants discussed below to the oral tradition, but I also identify instances where orthographic variation may have played a role.

---

[21] *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* 114–17: verse 6: *attha-ppakāsana-atthaṃ, aṭṭha-kathā ādito vasisatehi. pañcahi yā saṅgītā, anusaṅgītā ca pacchā pi.*

"For the sake of explaining the meaning, the commentary, etc., was sung and afterwards repeated by the five hundred Masters [i.e. arahats],

verse 7: *sīhaḷa-dīpaṃ pana ābhatātha, vasinā mahāmahindena.*
ṭhapitā sīhaḷa-bhāsāya, dīpa-vāsīnam atthāya.

"and brought to the island of Sīhaḷa, by the Great Master Mahinda and translated there into the Sīhaḷa language, for the sake of the residents of the island."

2.8 Harmonization and standardization

Many problematic areas of the canon were harmonized and standardized by the medieval Pāli grammarians. For example, the absolutive in *-ttā* (OI *-tvā*) was restored throughout the canon to its OI form, although some vestiges still remain (von Hinüber 1983: 7). Problematic passages, especially those involving foreign words were often preserved since no one knew what they meant. Helmut Smith hypothesized that the Pāli that has come down to us is really the product of the medieval grammarians ("la conviction que notre pali est une fonction de celui du 12^{me} siècle," referring to Aggavaṃsa's *Saddanīti*; 1928–54/2001: vi), who standardized the language. Although Smith's view is certainly an exaggeration, there is nevertheless some truth to the fact that Burmese grammarians exerted a not insignificant influence on the canonical tradition, especially in Burma. These changes, however, are limited and do not affect Norman's observation (1983: 5–6) that only minor changes to the canon took place after it was written down in the first century BCE. In any case, this discussion is concerned mainly with changes that can be attributed to the oral transmission tradition.

There is one other possible source of variation, only touched on in this study (§4.7 below), as it is rarely found in the *Theragāthā* verses explored here: the possibility of two separate transmissions, not phonologically/phonetically related, where the Buddha may have used different words and phrases in similar contexts or they were (mis-)remembered that way by different tradents (n. 5 above).

3.1 The *Theragāthā*

In the following I chose nineteen examples from the *Theragāthā*, illustrating the processes listed above in section §2.1–2.8. It is one of the oldest of Buddhist works which Norman dates between the end of the sixth century BCE to the middle of the third century BCE (1969/95: xxix). These are utterances of the monks from the early Sangha, most of whom are said to have been contemporaneous with the Buddha. In many cases these verses antedate their rendering into Pali,[22] which began to take place from sometime around the 3rd

[22] According to Norman (1990: 34), all Buddhist transmissions we possess are translations of earlier compositions. This applies as well to the *Theragāthā* which were probably originally transmitted in the same dialect/*koiné*/language that the Buddha and his early tradents used. Evidence of this earlier form will be adduced in the examples below.

century BCE, perhaps around the same time as when Mahinda and associates brought the then inchoate canon and the commentary to Sri Lanka (Warder 1967: §13; Norman *ibid.*, p. xxix). The examples could have been taken from any of the early works, such as the *Sutta Nipāta*, *Dhammapada*, early *Nikāya*s, etc., which all exhibit the same variant phenomena. I identify the major categories of variation before each example, grouped according to the above list, and highlight some of the important elements, for ease of organization. The category of harmonization and standardization has been omitted as this is difficult to date, and in any case, I am primarily interested in changes during the early oral transmission stage.

3.2 Variant summary

As the reader has no doubt noticed, there are a lot of interconnections and overlapping in the above categories. The majority may be grouped under the general category of "oral transmission confusion and ambiguity" (§2.5) with the other processes (seven categories, §2.1–2.4.4) being in effect the causes of this ambiguity. Diachronic variation (lenition and loss of intervocalic stops; loss of aspirated stops and their replacement by an aspirate only; assimilation and/or resolution of consonant clusters; leveling of sibilants and glides, etc.) is a natural process, but is catalyzed and accelerated by a putative *koiné*, which, for ease of inter-communication, removes distinctive dialect differences which might obstruct understanding. A *koiné* might be conceptualized as a logical development of dialect diffusion, where the unpredictable effect of one dialect on another (e.g. a dialect that regularly voices intervocalic consonants vs. one that devoices them) is neutralized by removing the consonant altogether and replacing it with a *-y-* glide. This in itself led to further variation as tradents tried to interpret what the glide meant, when "restoring" the word to its earlier form. At the same time many of the IA phonemic differences, which do not exist in a native language like Dravidian, are not even perceived by bilingual, non-IA first language speakers, again acting as an accelerant to change and simplification, like, for example, eliminating aspirated stops (not phonemic in Dravidian) and replacing them with an aspirate only. Word borrowing is a particularly good example of the change that results from the other vector, that is, IA speakers trying to interpret how a native, borrowed word or phrase should be spelled and understood in Pāli with a very different phonemic system.

All of these changes were actualized and amplified by the oral/aural[23] vagaries of live communication, recitation, dictation and audition, and alongside these processes was the inchoate impulse to Sanskritize which began as early as the third century BCE (Levman 2023b: 5–8) with the aim of clarifying, defining and fixing the meaning. The transmission process was very complex. Its sole goal was the preservation of the *Buddhadhamma* in its "original" form; but nothing could escape the basic rule of the universe: *anicca*, change (including even the fabled Veda memorization process, which itself contains thousands of variants, §1.4 above), and so, through the mixture of these various factors, thousands of variants resulted, sometimes with quite different meanings equally contextually plausible, but adding a slightly different or very different nuance to the passage, or variants not—or imperfectly—understood and (presumably) preserved for that reason.

4. *Theragāthā* examples

4.1. *Theragāthā* 118, *Kimila-ttheragāthā* (vars. *Kimbilo*, *Kimilo*, *Kimmilo*)

Linguistic diffusion from autochthonous languages and the influence of bilingualism
Geminate/aspirated geminate ambiguity (*-tt-/-tth-*)
retroflex/dental ambiguity (*-ṭṭh-/-tth-*)

Diachronic change
(*-mb-/-mm-*)

Oral transmission ambiguity
(*abhisatto/abhisitto*)

> *Abhisattho* (vars. *abhisatto*, *abhisaṭṭho*, *abhisitto;* comm.: *abhisāpakato*, *abhisankappa*, *abhisāmakato*, *abhilāsapito*, *abhilapaṃkato*) *va nipatati vayo, rūpaṃ aññam iva c' eva santaṃ; tass' eva sato avippavasato*

[23] By oral/aural I mean transmission of the *Buddhadhamma* from the Buddha to his disciples, from his disciples to other tradents including *bhāṇaka*s, from *bhāṇaka*s to other monks and other *bhāṇaka*s and from *bhāṇaka*s to scribes. Along each step of the transmission process there is an oral communication and aural listening process involved whereby variants can be introduced.

aññass' eva sarāmi attānan ti.[24]

> "(Old) age falls upon one as though ordered (*abhisattho*); the shape, although the same, is as though different. I remember my own self as though of another, although I am the same, not having been away" (Norman, 15).
>
> or
>
> "As if cursed (*abhisatto*), old age falls ..." or "As if anointed (*abhisitto*), old age falls ..."

The PTS has the reading *abhisattho*, while the Burmese, Sinhalese and Thai have *abhisatto*. There are also other variant readings as noted.

A major phonological difference between Dravidian and IA is the former language's lack of phonemic voiced stops and aspirated stops, a very prominent feature in Pāli. So when a word like *abhisattho* is heard by a Dravidian tradent (someone speaking IA as a second language), he or she would probably hear it without the aspirate, i.e. *abhisatto*. This is likely why both readings are recorded in this poem, which, however, mean different things. *Abhisattho* is the past participle of *abhisaṃsati* (< OI *abhiśaṃs*, "to blame, accuse" which per the commentary has the meaning here of *abhiśās*, "order, direct, assign, allot"); both meanings would work in the context; *abhisatto* is the past participle of OI *abhiśap*, "to curse" so the intended meaning in the *gāthā* is unclear as both make sense.

The commentary glosses *abhisattho* by *anusiṭṭho*, *āṇatto* and *abhisaṭṭho*, all meaning "ordered" (Be *abhisatto*, instead of PTS *abhisaṭṭho*); *abhisaṭṭho* is an alternative way of spelling *abhisattho*; here the variation is due to retroflex/dental ambiguity. As is well known, retroflex letters were borrowed from Dravidian into IA and Dravidian speakers had a threefold discrimination of dental, alveolar (not in OI/MI) and retroflex stops, more subtle than native IA speakers; any slight allophonic variation in pronunciation might easily result in this kind of refinement of a dental to a retroflex consonant.

The poem is uttered by *Kimila* in response to the Buddha's creation of the

[24] Burmese: *abhisattho* (Be); *abhisatto*, *abhisaṭṭho*; *abhisāpakato*, *abhisāmakato* (comm.). Sinhalese: *abhisitto*, *abhisattho* (Ce); *abhisankappa*, *abhilāsapito*, *abhilapaṃkato* (comm.). Thai: *abhisattho* (Se); *abhisatto*. CPD (s.v. *abhisattha*): *abhisatthalāpito*, *abhisatthasapito*.

Burmese: *Kimilo* (Be); *Kimmilo*. Sinhalese: *Kimilo*, *Kimmilo*, *Kimbilo* (Ce). Thai: *Kimbilo* (Se). Pāli quotes are from the PTS edition, unless otherwise noted.

form of a woman in front of him, standing in the first wave of youth; gradually he showed her overpowered by old age, disease and distress.[25] He recalls how his own youth has so quickly passed away and realizes the truth of *anicca* and with this as a springboard, soon attains to arhathood.

In a previous life *Kimila* venerated the relics of the Buddha *Kakusandha* with garlands of *saḷala* flowers and by building a *maṇḍapa* ("pavilion").

Kimila is itself spelled in three different ways, with a geminate *-mm-*, *Kimmila*, and with the conjunct *-mb-*, *Kimbila*. See below discussion ad Th 95 re: *pakkhando/ pakkhanno* for diachronic change of *-nt-/-nd- > nn-* (nasal + stop > geminate nasal). He was a Sakyan convert so his name was probably not IA, but Dravidian or Munda, perhaps related to OI *kṛmi* ("worm") cp DED #1614 *kīri* "intestinal worm" and the Munda language, Korku *kiṛa* "worm, insect, germ"; in Th-a 1, 244 the Buddha conjures up the picture of a beautiful woman disintegrating into old age and disease which spurs Kimbila on to reach arhathood. These forms of *asubha* meditation invariably show worms crawling out of the corpse's nine holes.[26] The change of *-mb- > -mm-* may be IA dialectal in origin or more likely appears to be a normal diachronic conjunct weakening and assimilation over time (cp Gāndhārī, Brough 1962: §46 where *mbh-* appears as *-mm-* and *-nd-* as *-n-* or *-nn-*. This also occurs in Munda (Kuiper 1948b: 383, *-nd- > -n-*, *-mb- > -m-*), and historically in Telugu, a Dravidian language (Emeneau 1970: 109, **-mp- > -mm-*).

The two meanings—cursed (*abhisatto*) and ordered (*abhisattha*)—are quite different, although they do not change the overall message. The *mūla* text has yet another reading *abhisitto* ("sprinkled" < *abhisiñcati*), which is less apt; this appears to be the case of an oral transmission confusion (*abhisatta > abhisitta*).

The commentary then gives five other variants or glosses (*abhisāpakato*, *abhisaṅkappa*, *abhisāmakato*, *abhilāsapito* and *abhilapaṃkato*) a sure sign of an oral transmission issue, and the CPD lists two others without giving the source (*abhisatthalāpito* and *abhisatthasapito*).

What we apparently have here is a Dravidian speaking monk(s) wrestling with the word *abhisatta/abhisattha*, trying to decide what it meant and which

[25] Th-a 1, 244[28–30]: *Satthā paṭhama-yobbane ṭhitaṃ dassanīyaṃ itthi-rūpaṃ abhinimminitvā, purato dassetvā, puna anukkamena yathā jarā-roga-vipattīhi abhibhūtā dissati tathā akāsi. Taṃ disvā Kimila-kumāro ativiya saṃvegaṃ pakāsento ...*

[26] As in the Buddha's graphic presentation of a corpse to Kulla the monk (Th-a 167[23–25] ad Th 393–98): *Atha naṃ Satthā tassa pekkhantass' eva navahi vaṇa-mukhehi paggharamānā suciṃ kimi-kulākulaṃ ativiya bībhacchaṃ duggandha-jeguccha-paṭikkūlaṃ katvā dassesi.*

root it came from (*abhisattha* < *abhiśaṃs* or *abhiśās* or *abhisatta* < *abhiśapta*) with several other suggestions arising both phonologically very close (*abhisitta*, "sprinkled"; *anusiṭṭho*, "ordered") with commentarial glosses (the variants above starting with *abhisāpakato*).[27]

4.2 *Theragāthā* 3, *Kaṅkhārevata-ttheragāthā*

Diachronic language change, influenced by bilingual speakers

> *Paññaṃ imaṃ passa tathāgatānaṃ: aggi yathā pajjalito nisīthe* (vars. *nisīve*, *nisive*, *nissive*).[28]
> *āloka-dā cakkhu-dadā bhavanti ye āgatānaṃ vinayanti kaṅkhan ti.*
>
> "See this wisdom of the *Tathāgata*s, who, giving light and vision like a fire blazing in the night, dispel the doubt of those who come" (Norman, 2).

The PTS, Thai and Burmese all have *nisīthe* "at midnight, at night" which the commentary glosses *rattiyaṃ*, idem. The OI word is *niśītha* < *ni* + *śī*, to lie down, but the verb is not attested with this prefix, as *śī* already means "to lie down" so the prefix seems superfluous; a better etymology should be sought elsewhere. The word occurs in several forms in OI, all meaning "night": *niśitā* (*Taittirīya Saṃhitā*),[29] *niśā* (*Sūtra*s), *niś* (*Manu*), as well as *niśītha* (*Mahābhārata* = MBh), per Mayrhofer (1956–76: vol. 2: 168). The Pāli form occurs also as *nisīthe* with three variations *nisīve*, *nisive*, *nissive*. There is also a later form *nisā* which occurs in Mil and later Pāli works. In AMg the form is *ṇisā*, *ṇisi-* (in compounds, e.g. *ṇisi-bhatta*, "night-meal") and *ṇisīha*, "midnight"; there is also a Prakrit form *ṇisā*, *ṇisi-* (compounds), *ṇisīha* and *ṇisīḍha*.

[27] *Abhisāpakāto*, "curse made" = "as if cursed"; *abhisankappa* ~ OI *saṃkḷp*, Pāli *sankappa*, "thought, intention" = "as if intended"; *abhisāmakāto*, "to make like (*sāma*)"?; *abhilāsapito* "desired" (caus.) < *abhilaṣ* "to desire, wish for, covet, crave" = "as if wished for"; *abhilapaṃkato*, "to make talk"? (< *abhilap*, "to talk or speak about"?).

[28] Burmese: *nisīve*, *nisive*, *nisīthe* (Be). Sinhalese: *nisive*, *nisīthe* (Ce); *nisīve*, *nīsice* (comm.). Thai: *nisīthe*, *nisīve* (Se); *nissive* (comm.).

[29] The brackets show the first occurrence of the word, which is included for dating purposes, when appropriate.

Although the etymology is not clear,[30] assuming the earliest form is *nisitā* (< OI *niśitā*), all the variants seem to be normal diachronic changes, probably influenced by bilingual speakers, viz.:

niśitā > *niśītha* > *nisītha* > *nisīdha* > *ṇisīha* (AMg), *nisīva* (Pāli)

The interpretation of the dental *-t-* as an aspirate stop *-th-* is probably due to bilingual speakers who had no phonemic aspirate stop; the dental *t*^{h}- has a natural allophonic aspirate and was probably interpreted in terms of the IA phonological system. As an intervocalic consonant, Dravidian speakers would automatically strengthen it and pronounce it as *-d*^{h}-. The reason for the vowel change of *-itā* > *-ītha* is not clear, but probably due to a change of accent from the ultimate to the penultimate syllable. The AMg/Prakrit *ṇisīha* is the normal change of an aspirated stop into an aspirate (Pischel §188). The change of *-dh-* > *-v-* is, however, a little unusual. Norman (1992/2006: 157) cites serveral examples of a *v/dh* alteration (*dhīro/vīro* Sn 44, 165, 439, 531, 646; *vaṃkaṃ/dhaṃkaṃ* Sn 270–71; *avibhū/adhibhū* Sn 684; *vimutta/'dhimutta*, Sn 1071, 1114; Dhp 193) which he says (1997/2004: 117) arise from "the similarity of the two characters in early Brahmī script";[31] however, there are too many of these for this to be considered a "scribal error," and in any case the characters are quite different. The *-dh-* > *-v-* change is more likely a not uncommon dialect change (weakening), as there are a number of examples in the Vedic writings of *d* and *v* alternation (Bloomfield and Edgerton 1932/79: §869; e.g. *diśa/viśa*), and as we have seen, the addition of an aspirate to a stop was a common phenomenon amongst bilingual speakers (and also Prakrit speakers, Geiger §40). The *dh/v* alternation also occurs in BHS (e.g. *avodigbhāga/adhodigbhāga*, Study Group 2006: Chapter 9, 56a1). Alternatively the *-v-* is simply a hiatus glide (usually pronounced as a *-w-* in Indic languages); similar in function to *-ẏ-* (von Hinüber 2001: §171), replacing the dental stop,

[30] Pokorny (1959/1969: 762–63) derives the English word "night" from root *nok*^{w}*t-* f., *nok*^{w}*ti*, *nok*^{w}*tu*-f., *nok*^{w}*t*(*e*)*r* from which OI *nak*, *naktam* are also derived; but this of course is a long way from *nisitā/nisītha/niś/niśā*. M1 (op. cit.) suggests *niśitā* and the other words were substitutes for the "Scheu gemiedene alte 'Nacht' wort" ("shyly avoided old 'night' word") through the newly imagined derivation from *śī* ("to lie"). Dravidian has the words *narkam* ("night") and *nallam* ("darkness" < PD root *nāl/naḷ* "night"; Kirshnamurti 2003: 528) and the compound *nisa narkam* (Gadba) which means, "night stands (still)" pointing to another possible derivation from the proto-Dravidian verb *nil-/nit-/nitt-* "to stand" (Krishnamurti, *ibid.*). The etymology requires further research.

[31] The same phenomenon happens in Gandhārī, e.g. v. 173 where Gandhārī has *viru* and the Pāli Dhp has *dhīro*.

which is also sometimes the case in Gāndhārī with the sound *-h-* (Brough 1962: §39); so *niśitā* > *nisitā* > *nisīva*, *nisīha.* If this is the case there would then be two phonetic pathways involved: this one and *niśitā* > *nisītha* (as above). The variant with geminate *-ss-* appears to be orthographic.

4.3 *Theragāthā* 7, *Bhalliya-tthera,* (vars. *Bhallika, Bhalluka*, also *Bhaddiya* (group of five monks))[32]

Variation due to word-borrowing from non-IA languages

Dialect diffusion due to bilingualism and different IA dialects
aspirate ambiguity
retroflex/dental ambiguity
phonetic equivalence of *-ll-* and *-dd-*

Variation due to Sanskritization

> *Yo pānudi Maccu-rājassa senaṃ, naḷa-setuṃ va* (vars. *naḷaṃ*, *daḷaṃ*, *daḷha-aṭṭhaṃ*, *nala-*) *sudubbalaṃ mah'-ogho*[33]
>
> *vijitāvī apeta-bheravo hi, danto so parinibbuto ṭhita-atto ti.*
>
> "He who has thrust away the army of King Death, as a great flood pushes down a very weak bridge of reeds, is victorious, with fears truly gone, tamed, quenched, with steadfast self" (Norman, 1).

Balliya-tthera's name in the *Apadāna* was Vallikāraphaladāyaka; he gave the fruit of a creeper plant (*valli-kāra-phalaṃ*) to the Buddha Sikkhi in a previous life.[34] In the time of Buddha Gotama, Bhallika and his brother Tapussa were the first people the Buddha met after his *bodhi*; they were going along the high road from Ukkalā to the district where the Buddha was staying.

The change of *naḷa* to *daḷa* (*n-* > *d-*) is not common in the Prakrits, but does occur, e.g. *namayanti*, "they lead" vs. *damayanti* "they tame" in variant versions of *Theragāthā* 19/Dhp 80; Se *diyyamāna* ("being offered") vs. ka. *niyyamāna*

[32] Burmese: *Bhalliya* (Be, PTS). AN 1, 26[1]: *Bhallika*. PTS Jā 1, 80[16]: *Bhalluka*. Thai: *Bhalliya* (Se); *Bhallika.* Sinhalese: *Bhalliya* (Ce).

[33] Burmese: *naḷaṃ*, *naḷa* (Be); *daḷaṃ*, *nala*. Sinhalese: *naḷa* (Ce); *daḷhaṭṭhaṃ*. Thai: *naḷa* (Se).

[34] Walters (2018: 777) suggests that this might be the *vallikā* plant, a climbing edible plant with red berries, *Vitis quadrangularis*.

("being taken") at Sv 2, 355[6]. The word *daḷa* has the meaning of "petal, leaf" so would fit the context ("bridge of leaves"), while the aspirated form *daḷha* ("firm, strong, solid, steady"), does not suit, nor does *-aṭṭhaṃ* ("goal" or "meaning"). The word probably intended here is *attham* (< OI *astam* "home"), "like a flood destroying a very strong house"; this is variation due to retroflex/dental ambiguity because of bilingualism, as is most likely the confusion of *-ḷ-* and its aspirated form (*ḷh-*), which a Dravidian tradent could not hear as it is phonemically absent in his/her language. As for the variation of *-l-* and *-ḷ-* (*nala* vs. *naḷa*) this is probably orthographic (Pischel §226, §240) as they are often interchanged in Pāli, without any change of meaning, as they are here (e.g. see *ala/aḷa* "crab claw"; *unnala/unnaḷa* "vain, insolent"; *galati/gaḷati* "to drip, flow"; etc.). Dravidian has a finer resolution of the liquids with three "*l*" sounds, normal *l*, retroflex *ḷ* and a voiced retroflex fricative or retroflex approximant (ɻ) variously represented as *l*, *ṟ*, *ṛ, zh*, and *ẓ*, and transliterated as *ṇ*, *ḍ*, *ḷ*, *y*, *r* and *l* in Dravidian and IA languages (n. 40); Caldwell 1875: 59; Emeneau 1970: 98–99).

The variants are perhaps influenced by the similar sounding Dravidian words *taḷ* "palmyra tree, toddy palm" and *aṭṭam* "terraced roof" or "scaffold" (DED #93); so the compound *taḷ-aṭṭam* (echoing *daḷha-aṭṭhaṃ*) would mean "a scaffold made of palm trees" ("... like a great flood destroying a scaffold of palm trees"), but the "bridge of reeds" *naḷa-setuṃ*) metaphor seems more apt.

A more important clue to the indigenous influence is in the name of the monk Bhalliya, with two variants *Bhallika* and *Bhalluka*. The word *bhallŭka* means "bear" in OI (attested in the MBh, but in Pāli, it occurs only in Sadd, outside of this variant); *Bhalliya* and *Bhalluka* are just variants, partially Sanskritized with presumably the same meaning "bear." The word may also be cognate with *Bhaddiya* (rather than *Bhaddiya* < OI *bhadra*, "auspicious"), one of the group of five monks who were the Buddha's first converts, as *da* and *la* are often interchangeable in the Prakrits (Pischel §244),[35] as they are in some of the Dravidian languages (Caldwell 1875: 52). M1 vol. 2: 485 says the word

[35] This would not normally apply to a geminate, but in the oral tradition they might be heard as single consonants if not pronounced distinctly or pronounced quickly, in continuous flow (*eka-baddha*), that is, with degemination (Levman 2021a: 298). Consider these word sets which demonstrate the validity of this hypotheses: *adda/alla* "wet, moist, slippery"; Pāli *khudda*, *culla*, OI *khulla* "small" OI *kṣulla* idem; Pāli *chidda*, AMg *chilla* "hole"; etc., and so *Bhadda-/Bhalla-*.

bhallūka is "nicht sicher gedeutet" (not determined with certainty); Przyluski takes the word as derived from AA (1929: 196), relating *bhalluka* to *mallu* (both meaning "bear"), both because of the graphic similarity between *bha* and *ma* in most Indian alphabets and because in AA various dialectal forms coexist with a *b-* and *m-* initial consonant (see also Levman 2011: 52–53 and refs. therein; also in 2021a: 222–24). Przyluski's AA connection is supported by the Munda Etymological Dictionary (Stampe): cp Bodo-Gadaba, Bondo *balu*, "bear"; Mundari *baluk*; Korku, Birhor, Ho, Kol, Mahali, Santali, *bana*; Juang *banae*, *banai*, *bhalu*; Sora *bud-ən*; Birhor *buria*, *bānā*, *bir-miṇḍi*, *bir-būrhiā*; Mundari *buɽi*; Kharia *bɔˈnəi*; Koda, Santali, Mundari *bʰaluk*; all meaning "bear." The words *bʰaluk* and *bhalu* are almost identical to OI *bhallūka*, with the *-l-* gemination and the addition of an IA ending *a* or *-ka*. Such a wide distribution in most of the Munda language families suggests an old age for the word, well before its first appearance in the MBh; Southworth opines mid-second millennium BCE for proto-Munda words (2005: 195). Since the word is foreign to MI and has various spellings in the different Munda languages, its variant orthography in Pali is to be expected.

As a final note, the same *thera* in the *Apadāna* is called Vallikāraphaladāyaka, because he gave the fruit of a *vallikāra* plant to the Buddha Sumana (per the *Apadāna*, Sikkhi per Th-a). The *vallikāra* plant is derived from the Dravidian root *valli*, "creeper"; see DED #5317 and cp Tamil, Malayalam *vaḷḷi*; Telugu *valli*, *vallika*, and others, all with the meaning "creeper, climbing plant" (Caldwell 1875: 466; Burrow 1946: 15; M1 vol. 3: 167). Bhallika's counterpart at the time of the Buddha Sikkhi was the son of a caravan leader named Ujita, who gave that Buddha (with his friend Ojita) his first meal. *Ujita* is a Dravidian name (< *ucitam*, pronounced *ujitam*) with the meaning "propriety, suitability, fitness; excellence, good quality, transcendence." *Vallika* = *Bhallika* = "creeper" is another possible derivation of this person's name, with Sanskritization of *v-* > *bh-*, the change *bh-* > *v-* being a common OI > MI diachronic change (see below, §4.5).

4.4 *Theragāthā* 19, *Kula-tthera* (vars. *Kuḷa, Kula, Kūla, Kuḍḍa, Kuḍḍha, Kuḍḍala, Kuṇḍa, Kuṇḍala*)[36]

Variation due to word-borrowing from non-IA languages and their interpretation by bilingual speakers

ambiguity of the letter *-ḷ-*, *-ḷ-*
alternation of NC and CC (N = nasal; C = consonant; *-ṇḍ-* and *-ḍḍ-*)
alternation of *-l-* and *-ḷ-* with *-t/d-* and *-ṭ/ḍ*

Different interpretation of an underlying *koiné*

Sanskritization
addition of IA suffixes

> *Udakaṃ hi nayanti nettikā, usu-kārā namayanti* (var. *damayanti*) *tejanaṃ.*
> *dāruṃ namayanti* (var. *damayanti*) *tacchakā, attānaṃ damayanti subbatā' ti.*
>
> "Truly canal-makers lead water, arrow-makers bend the bow, carpenters bend wood, men of good vows tame the self" (Norman, 3).

For discussion on *kula* etymology, see Levman 2021a: 160–63.

Kula is a non-IA name, derived from Dravidian, which accounts for its different spellings, as *kula* (Burmese, Sinhalese), *kuḷa* (Burmese, Thai, Cambodian) and *kūla* (Sinhalese); in addition there are five other variants *kuṇḍa*, *kuṇḍala* and *kuḍḍa*, *kuḍḍha*, *kuḍḍala* (Sinhalese comm.). In Pāli the word *kula* means "clan, family, household" and goes back goes back at least to the earliest recorded Buddhist transmissions in the *Sutta Nipata* and the *Nikaya*s; in OI the first occurrence is in the late RV (book 10; *kula-pā*) with the meaning "chief of a family or race or tribe"; there is an earlier occurrence in RV book 1 which Mayrhofer translates as "hollow" or "cavity" referring to a goblet (M1 238). This probably comes from a different root or is a mis-translation (Levman 2021a: 160, n. 256).

[36] Burmese: *Kula* (Be); *Kuḷa*. Sinhalese: *Kūla*, *Kula*; *Kuḍḍala*, *Kuṇḍa*, *Kuṇḍala* (Ce); *Kuḍḍa*, *Kuḍḍha* (comm.). Thai: *Kuḷa* (Se, also PTS); *Kula*, *Kuṇḍala* (comm.). Burmese: *namayanti*, *namayanti* (ka. var. *damayanti*), *damayanti* (Be). PTS *namayanti*, *namayanti* (var. *damayanti*), *damayanti*; Sinhalese, Thai: *namayanti*, *namayanti*, *damayanti* (Se, Ce). Dhp v. 145 shows one var. ms (C) where all three verbs have *damayanti*.

Kula in the meaning of "family, herd, multitude" is derived from Dravidian *kuḻu* (*kuṛu*) "assembly, flock, herd, heap" (DED #1821; Burrow 1943: 139; 1946: 23; Kuiper 1948a: 55 agrees) as well as *kulai/kula* "bunch" (DED # 1810; Levman 2021a: 160–63).[37] These are both very old Dravidian roots. *Kuḻu* exists in PSD (Proto South Dravidian; Southworth: 50) and PCD (Proto Central Dravidian) and may be dated to the earlier part of the second millennium. *Kulai/kula* exists in PSD1 and PSD2 which may be dated to c. 1750–1500 BCE. Both of these words go back to a PD root **kul* ("to accumulate"). A third root traced back to PD **kul* is *kuḻi* "pit, hollow, hole, pond, well" (DED #1818), which exists in all Dravidian language groups (PSD, PCD, and PND, Proto North Dravidian) and may be dated to c. 2500–2000 BCE.[38] This latter word is probably the source of OI *kūla* which has the meaning "declivity, slope, bank, pond, pool, heap" and Pāli "river-bank, embankment, edge of a well." Krishnamurti (2003: 526) lists two PD roots: **kuḻ* "pit, hollow" (however, the *Paragaramuthali* takes this root back to **kul*), as well as **kuḷ*, "lake"; cp Tamil *kuḷam* "tank, reservoir, lake," < PD **kuḷ*, which itself is derived from**kul* (**kul* "to accumulate" > **kuḷ* "lake" or accumulation of water).[39]

Another potential source of variation is the letter *-ḻ-* in Dravidian (a retroflex voiced fricative per Zvelebil 1990: §1.7.1),[40] which is transliterated as ("interchanges with") *ṇ*, *ḍ*, *ḷ*, *y*, and *r* per Caldwell (1875: 59; also Emeneau 1970: 98–99) and I would add "normal" *-l-* as well. OI speakers had no equivalent to

[37] A Dravidian word for family, Tamil *kūḷi* "company, multitude, family" (DED #1915) is fairly late and restricted to PSD1 (the southern branch which excludes Telugu and associated languages; Southworth: 50). It is derived from the PD root **kūḷ* ("crowd together, assemble, muster") which comes from the PD root **kuḷ* ("lake"). *Paragaramuthali*, p. 666 TAMIL VIRTUAL ACADEMY (tamilvu.org)). See n. 39 below. The usual Dravidian word for family is *kuṭumba* < *kuṭi* "house" (DED #1655) > OI/MI *kuṭumba* "household, family."

[38] The dates are rough estimates based on Southworth (195).

[39] The etymologies are taken from the Tamil Etymological Dictionary (*Paragaramuthali*, vol. 2 part 2): *kulai* < *kul* (p. 518); *kuḻi/kuḷa* < *kul* (p. 536); *kuḻu* < *kul* (p. 543). For the root *kul* see p. 506, entry 3 "to collect, to accumulate, to heap, to assemble." The root *kul* itself is derived from *ul* per the dictionary; see vol. 1 part 3, p. 109, entry 3 for *ul* with the meaning "to originate, to appear, to sprout, to grow big." *kuṭam* < *kuḷ* (p. 344), and *kuḷam* < *kuḷ* (p. 556). Other words to be discussed below are *kuṭṭam* < *kuḷ* (p. 333), *kuṇṭam* < *kuḷ* (p. 377). All are derived from *kuḷ* per the *Paragaramuthali*, with the meaning "lake" (per Krishnamurti 2003: 526; *kuḷ* is not found in the *Paragaramuthali*, only *kuḷam* on pp. 555–56 with the meaning "tank, pond, reservoir, lake").

[40] The different ways of writing this letter (ழ) in Roman script can be quite perplexing: *ṟ* (Emeneau and Burrow), *ḻ*, (TL and modern writers), *ṛ* (Caldwell), as well as *zh*, and *ẓ*.

the letter *-ḻ-* and approximated it in different ways. So the Tamil word *kuṟu/kuṟām* (*kuḻu/kuḻām*, "herd, flock, crowd") might be transcribed as *kuḍu/kuḍām*, similar to *Kuḍḍa* (see below).

There are then two basic PD roots **kul* and **kuḷ*, both related, that account for the four Dravidian words above and the Pāli names *Kula* ("family"), *Kuḷa* ("lake") and *Kūla* ("pond, pool, heap"). This explains the different spellings and meanings behind these words, in that they are derived from different, but related Dravidian roots. All are united by the general meaning of "accumulation" or "assemble, gathering together."

The other names for the *thera* are also related phonetically and semantically through the same roots and the propensity in Dravidian (e.g. *kuḷam* "waterpot" ~ *kuṭam* "tank, reservoir" ~ *kuṭṭam* "pond"; see Emeneau 1970: 98–99 for *-ḻ-*, *-ḷ-*, *-ṛ-*, *-ṭ/ḍ-* correspondences and others) and the Prakrits for the alternation of *-l-* and *-ḷ-* with *-t/d-* and *-ṭ/ḍ-* (Pischel §226, §244), and CC > < NC (as in Tamil *kuṭṭam* ~ *kuṇṭam* "pond, pool" and Pāli *santa* ~ *sanna*, "bond, chain";[41] *Chanda* ~ *Channa*; *ālambana* ~ *ārammaṇa*, "support"), which is not uncommon in both Pāli and Dravidian (also in Gāndhārī, Brough 1962: §46; Geiger §6.3; Norman 2002: 144; Levman 2022: 21).

The noun *kuṇḍa* has several different meanings in Pāli: "water pot, pitcher; hole; iguana (?); bran (?); crippled" (Cone vol. 1: 706; OI "water pot, hole, pit, well, spring"). Here it probably means "water pot" which is derived from the Dravidian *kuṭam* (Tamil "water pot" < **kuḷ*; Kannada *guṇḍi*, "jug"; DED #1651/1669, M1 vol. 1: 226); or "spring" < Tamil *kuṭṭam* "pond"; *kuṇṭam* "pool"; Kannada *kuṇḍam* "pit, pool, pond" (also < **kuḷ*, see DED #1669 and many more cognates in PD and PCD).[42]

With the meaning "water-pot" the word appears again in Th 15 in the monk's name *Kuṇḍa-dhāna thera*, which appears to be a bilingual translation ("water pot-receptacle"), the second word *dhāna* being an IA calque of the Dravidian-derived Pāli word *kuṇḍa*; a *kuṇḍa* is also the bowl of Gāṅgatīriya-tthera (Th 127), which he describes as *chava-sitto'va me patto* ("my bowl is just a sprinkled corpse") and the commentary explains as *matānaṃ khīra-*

[41] *Nāgo 'va santāni guṇāni chetvā* (Se); *nāgo 'va sannāni guṇāni chetvā* (Be); "Like an elephant who has broken his ties and bonds" at Se Sv 2, 324[13–14]. PTS has *Nāgo va sandāna-gunāni bhetvā* at PTS Sv 3, 708[23–24]. See Levman 2014: n. 1100.

[42] Compare also OI *kūṭa* "vessel, heap, multitude" which combines the meaning of *kula* "multitude" and *kuṇḍa* "vessel." For the meaning "crippled," see Dravidian *kuṇṭan* "cripple" DED #1688.

secana-kuṇḍa-sadiso ti attho, "like a water pot pouring milk on the dead" Th-a 2, 8[31–32]). The word *kuṇḍa* is derived from the same PD root **kuḷ* ("lake") and also takes on the meanings of words derived from **kul* (OI/MI *kūla*: "declivity, pond, pool" ~ Tamil *kuḻi*, "pit, pond, well"). *Kuṇḍa* may also be phonetically related to Pāli *kullaka* ("little basket" and *kulla* "belonging to the family" < OI *kulya*) because of the equivalence of *-ṇḍ-* and *l*(*l*)- sounds in OI and MI (e.g. *galla-gaṇḍa* "cheek"; *malla-muṇḍa* "tribal name"; *daṇḍa-dala* "stick"; *caṇḍa* "glowing," *cullī* "fireplace," etc. (Woolner 1926–28: 67; Levman 2011: 51, also in Levman 2021a: 220). Notice again that all these words (IA *kuṇḍa* and Dravidian *kuṭam*, *guṇḍi*, *kuṭṭam*, *kuṇḍa*) share a meaning based on the root etymology **kuḷ* ("lake"), that is "holding water" and **kul* "accumulation."

The name *Kuḍḍa/Kuḍḍha* goes directly back to Dravidian *kuṭam* ("water-pot, well, spring") and *kuṭṭam* ("pond"), either through the weakening of the geminate *-ṭṭ-* > *-ḍḍ-* or because *kuṭam* in Dravidian is pronounced *kuḍam*, allophonically weakened between vowels. It is also related, as stated above, to the word *kuḻām*, ("herd, flock, crowd"), which might be transcribed as *kuḍām*, because of the ambiguity of the Dravidian *-ḻ-* sound. The *-la* suffixes for *Kuṇḍa* (*Kuṇḍala*) and *Kuḍḍa* (*Kuḍḍala*) are adjective derivatives in OI (Whitney §1189)—that is, Sanskritization.

All the Dravidian words are much earlier than the first appearance of *kula* in the RV (perhaps around 1200 BCE), going back to the third millennium or mid-to-late second millennium (Southworth: 51, 60, 195, 252, 330; Krishnamurti 2003: 501). Since *kula* has no convincing IE etymology (for some speculation, see M2 vol. 1: 372–73), a Dravidian borrowing seems cogent and is corroborated by the various words and meanings outlined above. In sum, what we have here is an attempt to interpret a whole series of names (eight in total) based on the PD roots **kuḻ*, **kuḷ* and **kul* (*Kula*, *Kuḷa*, *Kūla*) in a foreign phonological system which, because of the ambiguity of the *-ḻ-* sound, the alternation of *-l-* and *-ḻ-* with *-t/d-* and *-ṭ/ḍ-*, and NC > < CC, resulted in several more forms (*Kuḍḍa/Kuḍḍha*, *Kuṇḍa*, *Kuḍḍala*, *Kuṇḍala*) with similar underlying meanings. Since this is very complicated, the following table may help to clarify:

Dravidian	Root	Pāli	Root	Notes
kuḷu “assembly, flock herd”	PD **kul* “to accumulate”	*kula* “family”	*kul* “to accumulate” (OI)	Pāli root is a Dhātup[43] root only, back-formed from *kula*
kulai/kula “bunch”	PD **kul*, “to accumulate”	*kula* “assemblage, multitude, herd”	*kul* “to accumulate”	
kuḷi “pond, well, pit, hollow”	PD **kuḷ* “pit, hollow” < PD **kul* “to accumulate”	*kūla* “heap, mound, pond, pool; shore, bank; declivity”	*kūl* “cover, hide; keep off obstruct” (OI); Pāli, *kulati* “obstruct, constrain”	Pāli root is a Dhātup root only, back-formed from *kūla*
kuḷam “lake”	PD **kuḷ* “lake” < **kul* “to accumulate”	not in Pāli or OI; *kuḷa* in Prakrits alt. form of *kula*	n/a	Pischel §260. Cp Pāli *kuḍuba* “measure of volume” (change of *-ḷ- > -ṭ/ḍ-*)
kuṭam/kuṭṭam/ kuṇṭam “water-pot,” (*kuṭam*) “reservoir, pond, pool”	PD **kuḷ* < PD **kul*; *-ḷ- > -ṭ-*; *-ṭṭ- > -ṇṭ-* (CC > NC); weakening of *-ṭ- > -ḍ-*	*kuṇḍa* (also OI) “spring, well; water-pot, basin, bowl”	< Dravidian *kuṭam*, Kannada *guṇḍi* per M1 vol. 1: 226; or < *kuṭṭam/kuṇṭam*	*kuṇḍala*, Sanskritization of *kuṇḍa* with *-la* suffix (Whitney §1189)
kuṭṭam “pool, pond”	PD < **kul* “to accumulate”	*kuḍḍa* (proper name), *kuḍḍha*	< Dravidian; aspirate geminate *ḍḍh-* due to bilingual Dravidian speakers	*kuḍḍala*, Sanskritization of *kuḍḍa* with *-la* suffix (Whitney §1189)
kuṭṭu/kuṭṭi “to pound”	PD < **kuḷ* “lake” (per *Paragara-muthali*)	*kuṭṭa/kuḍḍa* “wattle and daub wall”	< *koṭṭeti* (OI *kuṭṭayati*) “to pound”	Clearly a Dravidian word but etymologically unclear in Dravidian with root **kuḷ* “lake”

[43] Dhātup = *Dhātupāṭha* (“recital of grammatical roots”) is the name of an ancient list of roots ascribed to Pāṇini (MW).

There is a Sanskritized version of *pāda* 19-a (*udakaṃ hi nayanti nettikā*, "canal makers lead water"), in the *Udānavarga* 17.10 that reads *udakena nijanti nejakā* ("washer-persons purify with water"), and also a Chinese version (水工調舟船 "sailors control their boats"); for a discussion of these three versions and a reconstruction of the underlying *koiné* which gave rise to the variants, see Levman 2023b: 9.

4.5 *Theragāthā* 22, *Cittakatthera*

Natural, diachronic language change over time
-bh- > *-v-*
nasalization, de-nasalization,
vowel lengthening/shortening

Sanskritization
restoration of *-bh-* < *-v-*

Orthographic variation
presence or absence of nasal and *niggahīta*

Foreign word borrowing
< Munda word *karam* (*Adina cordifolia*)

> *Nīlā sugīvā sikhino, morā Kāraṃviyaṃ* (vars. *Kārambhiyaṃ*, *Kāraviyaṃ*, *Kāyaṃviya*) *abhinadanti.*
> *te sīta-vāta-kīḷitā* (vars. *kīlitā*, *-kalitā*, *-kaḷibhā*, *-kadditā*; comm.: *sañjāta-kalitā*, *kilitā*, *kilī*, *-kalī*, *kaddita-kalitā*), *suttaṃ jhāyaṃ* (vars. *jhānaṃ*, *jhāyiṃ*) *nibodhentī ti.*
>
> "Blue, with beautiful necks, the crested peacocks call in *Karaṃvī*; urged on by the cool breeze they awaken the sleeper to meditation" (Norman, 3).

There are four variants in the *mūla* text as above and the commentary has many more. The PTS edition of the commentary reads (with variants in brackets from Sinhalese, Burmese and Thai recensions; capitalization is varied as per the editions).[44]

> *Kāraṃviya* (vars. *Kārambhiya*, *Kāraviya*), *kāraṃva-rukkhaṃ* (vars. *karambha-rukkhe*, *kārambha-rukkhe*, *kāraṃva-rukkho*, *kāravaṃ rukkhaṃ*). *Kāraṃvī tī vā* (vars. *kāravani vā*, *Kārambhiya*, *Kāravīti vā*) *tassa vanassa nāmaṃ*; *tasmā Kāraṃviya* (var. *kārambhiya*) *kāraṃvi-* (vars. *Kārava-*, *kārambha-*) *nāmake vane ti attho.*
>
> "*Kāraṃviyaṃ*" = the *kāraṃva* tree. Or "*kāraṃvi*" is a name for that forest; therefore "*Kāraṃviyaṃ*" means "in the forest whose name is *kāraṃvi*" (with suitable changes *pari passu*).

This is a hapax legomenon in the canon, only occurring in Th 22, representing the name of a tree or a forest; the Th-a commentary is not sure of which. The word occurs in the Böhtlingk and Roth dictionary as *kārambhā*, "name of a plant bearing a fragrant seed (commonly *priyaṅgu*)" but it is not attested in the literature (*Amarakośa* 2.4.2, 26 only). There is also the *karambhā* plant with a short initial *-ă-* which refers to two plants, *priyaṅgu-vṛkṣa* (*Asparagus racemosus*) and fennel. The word *priyaṅgu* refers to several different plants (q.v.). The only Pāli dictionary which defines the word is the Burmese *Pāli Myanmā Abhidhān* where it is called the *upāsakā* (vol. 5, p. 668), referring to a tree/shrub or forest; the word *upāsakā*, per the Myanmar–English Dictionary (p. 609) refers to the sarsaparilla shrub, *Hemidesmus indicus*. The roots are used as Ayurvedic medicine throughout India, ground into a drink.

The large variety of variants and lack of attestation show that this is a foreign word. For a full list of variants see note 44.

[44] The variations in the recensions are as follows: Mūla: Burmese, *Kārambhiya* (Be), *Kāraṃviya*. Sinhalese, *Kāraṃviya* (Ce). Thai, *Kāraviya* (Se), *Kāraṃviya*, *Kāraṃbhiya* (Mc). Commentary: Burmese, *Karambha*. Sinhalese, *Kāraṃviya*, *kāraṃva*, *kāraṃvī*; *kāraṃva*, *kāraṃvǐ*; *kāravaṃ*, *kāravani*, *kārava-nāmake*. Thai, *Kāraviya, kāraṃviya, kārambhiya; kārambha, kāraṃva, kāraṃvi, kāravi-nāmake*. In addition, the CPD lists the following variants not covered above: *Kārambha*, *Kāramba*, *Kāraṃbhī*, *Kārambhiya*, *Kārambiya*, *Kārambhī*. The variants are only given the first time they appear. For vars. *kīlitā*, etc., see n. 48.

The alternation of *-bh-* > *-v-* is a dialectal variant per Norman (1989: 373; CP 4: 52), which also occurs in *Vedic Variants*, so it is quite old; however, Bloomfield and Edgerton (1932/79: §220–22) note that the change is "not purely phonetic but always involves tolerable lexical shifts" and that in the change between *abhi* and *vi* "most, probably all" of the former are prior. So it may indeed be a diachronic indication of normal consonantal weakening over time. Von Hinüber (2001: §101) notes the occasional ("vereinzelt") change in late Pāli ("späten Pali" *abhiyutta* > *aviyutta*) and it is a normal change in Gāndhārī (*-bh-* > *v*(*h*)) and in the Niya documents, both later than early Pāli, as is the change of Pāli *paṭisambhidā* > BHS *pratisaṃvid*, noted by Norman (*ibid.*) and Lüders (1899: 493; also in 1973: 170). Brough (1962: §44) says that *-bh-* has four possible spellings in Gāndhārī (*-bh-*, *-vh-*, *-v-*, and *-h-*) but notes that it is probable that *-bh-* is "merely a historical spelling" for *-vh-*; in other words it was pronounced as a glide, regardless of how it was written. It is likely that in the *koiné* or common form underlying Pāli it was pronounced as a glide (*-v-*) or aspirate only (*-h-*) as in Gāndhārī, i.e. that *Kāraṃviya* or *Kāraṃva* was the earlier form and the change to *-b-* or *-bh-* was a Sanskritization, restoring the word to its "original" form; this is at least partly confirmed by Sn 443, where variant *vecchāmi* ("I will break")[45] appears opposite *Mahāvastu bhetsyāmi* (Pāli *bhecchāmi*, "I will break" Mv 2, 240[11]). Here the Mv is definitely later than Pāli and, therefore, a Sanskritization.

The variation between *-b-* and *-bh-* is either because bilingual Dravidian speakers couldn't hear the aspiration, which is allophonic in their language, or the restoration of *-v-* > *-b*(*h*)- was just a guess, the two being almost identical. The only other variation of any significance is the *niggahīta -ṃ-* in the second syllable, which is omitted in two cases (*Kāraviyaṃ* and *Kāravi*); the variation in orthography of writing a pure nasal (*-m-* or a *niggahīta ṃ-*) before the labial consonant is only a minor point of spelling. Usually there is no *niggahīta* if the nasal is of the same class as the consonant (which *-m-* and *-b-* are); the consonant *-ṃ-* before *-v-* would usually have the *niggahīta* underdot; and sometimes both the nasal and *niggahīta* is omitted, due to oral or written transmission anomalies (as in Gāndhārī, Brough 1962: §48, "sporadic weakening or loss of nasal before voiced consonants"), or because

[45] The Sn editor (p. 77) takes *vecchāmi* as derived from the root *vyadh*, but that form would be *vacchāmi* (*vatsyāmi* in OI).

the vowel was nasalized anyways, but not so written (Fussman 1989: 478).[46] The variant of intervocalic *-y-* with *Kāyaṃviya* is probably just a mistake, as intervocalic *-r-* never changes to *-y-*.

This leaves the question of the derivation and meaning of the word. There are three suggestions (PMA (*Pāli-Maynamā Abhidhān*) = *kārambhā* = *upāsāka* = Indian sarsaparilla; OI *karambhā* "*Asparagus racemosus*, fennel"; OI *karambhaka*, "a kind of Achyranthes"), for what the tree/shrub and/or forest might represent, none of them more compelling than the other. I cannot find any reference to the *upāsakā* plant in the canon or commentary or in any dictionary except the Burmese, and they do not give any reference; in addition the PMA provides the wrong spelling *upāsakā* as a Buddhist lay devote (male), it should read *upāsaka*, and the female *upāsikā* (609).

The word itself appears to be derived from the Munda word *karam* which is a popular festival involving cutting branches off the *karam* tree (*Adina cordifolia*, another possible meaning of *kārambh-*, but at least one with some phonetic correspondence).[47] See Bodding 1929–36: vol. 3: 451–52 for a detailed write-up on the festival, where the tree plays the central role. There is no difference in Munda between *kăram* and *kāram*, as vowel length is not phonemic. The word exists today in Santali, Kharia, and pre-Mundari (*karam* = "a kind of tree") and there are similarities in other Munda languages, like Bondo *kumbi* "tree"; Korku *kumbi* "variety of tree"; Ho *karam* and *kuumba*, idem, and a near exact correspondence in Juang *kərəmbɔ* "a kind of large tree"; see also Juang *gombari* "gambari tree" and *ḍumburi* "tree" noting Kuiper's observation of the "many Munda synonyms with varying initial gutturals, dentals and labials" which he calls "rhyme words" (1948a: 7). Note that some words preserve the nasal and others omit it; also aspiration is not phonemic in Proto Munda (PM). There are also some echoes of the AA affiliation of the word in Mon-Khmer (Shorto 2006: §1570 and §935) **[d]ker* "tree, plant" and **krwaaŋ*, "a kind of spice-yielding tree." Witzel (1999: 8) also considers the word to be AA in origin

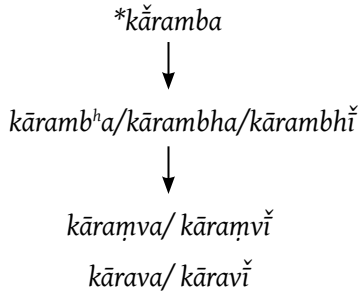
[46] "Toute syllabe ouverte lourde comporte des vibrations nasales, que sa voyelle soit une voyelle étymologiquement brève et nasalisée ou que sa voyelle soit une voyelle étymologiquement longue, étymologiquement non nasalisée ..." ("Every heavy, open syllable was nasalized whether the vowel was etymologically short and nasalized or whether the vowel was etymologically long and not etymologically nasalized.")

[47] Dhammika 2015: 63 says that the *kāra* tree is the "curry leaf tree." It occurs in the *Jātaka*s.

but he is referring to the word *karambha* with two short -*ă*-s (*karambha*, meaning "groats"), which, however, must be related to *kărambhă*.

In summary then, the word is an unknown native tree with a Munda pedigree, imported into OI and MI and subject to varied changes according to its interpretation by MI speakers. Since neither aspiration nor vowel length are phonemic in PM (nor does PM have a letter -*v*-) the earliest form of the word was probably *kărămba* to which aspiration was added (*kārambʰa/kārambha*), and the long vowel confirmed because of accent; the word was then subjected to consonantal weakening (-*bh*- > -*v*-, *kāramva*), vowel nasalization (*kāraṃva*), or loss of nasalization (*kārava*), and variant vocalic interpretation (*kāravĭ*). This accounts for most of the variation that we find above.

This may be charted as follows, with the vertical order representing a very rough relative timeline:



The change of -*b*- > -*bh*- > -*v*- is diachronic; the (de-)nasalization and vowel changes cannot be dated.

4.6 *Theragāthā* 22

Diachronic change over time
-ḍ- > -ḷ- > -l-
-t- > -ẏ-

Sanskritization
-ẏ- > -t-, *-ẏ- > -b- > -bh-*

Different interpreation of an underlying *koiné*
kaḷiẏā > kaḷibā > kaḷibhā, *kaliẏā > kilitā*

Foreign word borrowing or influence
< Dravidian *kali*, *kaḷi*, *kaṭi*

Orthographic variation
-l- and *-ḷ-*

> *Nīlā sugīvā sikhino, morā Kāraṃviyaṃ abhinadanti. te sīta-vāta-kīḷitā* (vars. *kīlitā*, *-kalitā*, *-kaḷibhā*, *-kadditā*; comm.: *sañjāta-kalitā*, *kilitā*, *kilī*, *-kalī*, *kaddita-kalitā*), *suttaṃ jhāyaṃ* (vars. *jhānaṃ*, *jhāyiṃ*) *nibodhentī ti.*
>
> "Blue, with beautiful necks, the crested peacocks call in Karaṃvī; urged on by the cool breeze they awaken the sleeper to meditation" (Norman 3).

In *pāda* c of the verse, there are six variants for the word *kīḷitā*: *kiḷitā*, *kilitā*, *kīlitā*, *kalitā*, *kadditā*, and *kaḷibhā.* The commentary has the additional variants *-kilī* and *-kalī*.[48]

These all have different meanings:

> **var. #1 *kīḷitā*** "having played, having sported" (p.p.); "play, sport, amusement" (noun) < Pāli *kīḷati*, ~ OI < *krīḍati/krīḷati* < root *krīḍ/krīḷ*, "to play, to sport" (RV, earliest occurrence), but perhaps from the causative *kīḷeti* > *kīḷitā* (same p.p.p. as non-caus.) "made to play, made to sport." *kiḷitā* is a variant with short *-ĭ-*.

[48] Mūla: Burmese, *kīḷitā* (Be), *kiḷitā*, *kaḷibhā*, *kadditā*; Sinhalese, *kaddita-kalitā* (Ce), *kalitā*, *kadditā* (comm.); Thai, *kalitā* (Se), *kīlitā*, *kīnitā* (Mc). Commentary: Ce *-kilī*, *-kalī*; Se *kīḷitā*. Be *kilitā.*

var. #2 *kilitā* "having played" < Pāli *kilati* (Cone vol. 1: 691, "is joyful, plays?" [? in original]), OI *kilati*, not attested in the literature, just in the dictionaries.

var. #3 *kīlitā* "bound, tied" < Pāli *kīlati* "to bind, fasten" OI, idem, not attested in Pāli or OI literature, just in the dictionaries.

var. #4 *kalitā* "impelled, driven, urged, made, formed, furnished, divided, sounded indistinctly" < Pāli *kalati*, OI < idem "to impel, incite urge on" (MBh). Compare OI *kaḍ/kaḍita*, "to be confused or disturbed by pleasure or pain" (change of *-ḍ-* > *-ḷ-* > *l-* per Pischel §240).

var. #5 *kadditā* "made an unpleasant noise" < Pāli *kaddati*, OI < *kardati* Dhātup only, "rumble, caw, make any unpleasant noise." Not attested except in dictionaries.

Compare also *kaḍḍati/kaḷati* "is elated": OI *kaḍati* "to be confused, disturbed by pleasure or pain; to be elated or intoxicated" and OI *kaḍḍati* "to be harsh or severe"; Dhātup only for all.

var. #6 *kaḷibhā* ? "appearing in anger" < *bhā* "to shine, appear, show, manifest" + *kali* "anger, strife, discord." Possibly an *upapada-tappurisa* (like *loka-vid*, "knowing the world").

Note that the PTS editors (Oldenberg & Pischel 1883/2006: 4) have *kalitā* in the main text, so they have decided that was the original (or at least a better) reading. The Burmese has *kīḷitā* and only lists two variants (*kaddita-kalitā* and *kalitā*).

So the possible translations are:

1. "Caused to play by the cool wind ..." *kīḷitā*, *kilitā*. vars. #1, #2.
2. "Bound by the cool wind ..." *kīlitā* (with var. *kīḷitā* with vocalic *-ḷ-*). var. #3.
3. "Urged by the cool wind ..." *kalitā*. var. #4.

   (Norman 1969/95: 3, "urged on by the cool breeze"; Rhys Davids (1913: 27) has "by cool and humid winds made musical" taking her cue from the commentary *madhura-vassitam vassantā* (Th-a 1, 82[11]), translated as "musical call"; lit.: "uttering a sweet call").
4. "Having made an unpleasant noise (or causative, "an unpleasant noise having caused to be made" (*kaddayitā*, *kadditā*) because of the cool wind (or along with the cool wind) ..." *kadditā* < *kaddeti*. var. #5.
5. "Appearing in anger because of/along with the cool wind ..." *kaḷibhā* (and should be *kalibhā* with regular *l-*). var. #6.
6. In addition Mc has the var. *kīnitā* (presumably v.l. for *kīṇitā* < *kiṇāti* "to buy, purchase"), "Bought by the cool wind ..." which makes no sense in this context; also the commentary has two variants *sañjāta-kilī ti* and *sañjāta-kalī ti*. *kali* means "distress" which is the opposite of *madhura vassitaṃ* (no. 3 above), so this may be a mistaken shortening for *sañjāta-kalitā* ("sweet sound urged on, produced by the cool wind"). *kili* is a clicking sound which is presumably made by the peacocks ("the sweet sound of clicking ...").

Now the commentary, itself with many variants—some of which Oldenberg and Pischel call "nonsense"—seems to be clear on one point: that the peacocks are disturbed by the roar of the storm clouds (*megha-gajjitaṃ*) and they in turn raise a noise (*abhinadanti*), drowning out the other birds and waking up those sleeping.

> *pāvusa-kāle megha-gajjitaṃ sutvā: ke-kā-saddaṃ karontā utu-sampadā-siddhena sare haṃsādike abhibhavantā viya nadanti.* Th-a 1, 82[7–9], "Having heard the roar of the clouds at the time of the rainy season, uttering a *kekā* (cry of a peacock) sound, because of the weather, they roar as if drowning out the sounds of the swans and others.

All the translations except nos. 2 and 6 ("bound by..."; and "bought by...") would work, whether one takes the peacocks as simply urged by the roar of the storm, taking it in a positive sense as Rhys Davids does ("roused to make music"), and as *kīḷitā* seems to suggest ("roused to play"), or whether one takes it in a negative way, as nos. 4 and 5 do (and *-kali* in no. 6)—the peacocks are disturbed and/or angry because their tranquility has been broken by the sound emanating from the clouds. The word *sīta* itself (*sīta-vata-*, OI *śīta*, "cold, cool, chilly, frigid") suggests an unpleasant awakening.

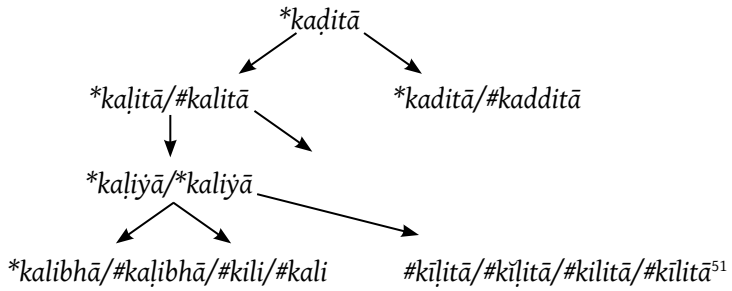
In trying to establish the original (or at least earliest) reading, one may hypothesize, then, that it was ambiguous (in terms of being semantically positive or negative), suggesting the verb *kaḍ/kaḍati* ("to be confused, disturbed by pleasure or pain; to be elated or intoxicated") p.p. *kaḍitā* as the original reading, or its MI cognate *kaḷitā*; OI *-ḍ-* regularly changes to MI *-ḷ-* (Pischel §240/244; Geiger §38.6;) and often this is written as *-l-*, or *kalitā*, the variant chosen by the PTS editors. This alternation of *-ḷ-* and *-l-* is not just an orthographic issue, but is also due to the phonetics of Dravidian languages. In any case, *kalitā* with normal *-l-* primarily means "impelled" whereas *kaḷita* has the meaning of "to be confused, disturbed by pleasure or pain; to be elated or intoxicated." The change of *kaḷitā/kalitā* > *kĭḷitā/kilitā* arises with a change of *-a-* > *-ə-* (interpreted as *-ĭ-*).[49] One or more of these variants would presumably substitute the intervocalic *-t-* for a *-ẏ-* glide (Pischel §186, e.g. *kaḷiẏa/kaliẏa*), which, with the substitution of an intervocalic *-b-* and its aspiration[50] would results in *kaḷibhā/kalibhā*, the sixth variant. Variant #5 *kaddita* ("an unpleasant noise caused to be made") may have been derived from the original *kaḍitā*

[49] Pischel §101 *-a-* > *-i-* (schwā, *-ə-*) in syllables before the accent. This assumes that *kīḷíta* ("caused to play") is interpreted as a causative verb *kīḷéti*, p.p. *kīḷíta* with the accent on the second syllable (which is always the case with a causative verb, cp Whitney §1041).

[50] My working assumption is that bilingual Pāli speakers whose first language was Dravidian (and who were not yet skilled in MI) were probably unsure if a stop was aspirated or not, because it was not phonemic in Dravidian languages.

form with the mixing of dental and retroflex consonants (Geiger §41.3; Pischel §218, 225) because of dialect ambiguities, or the influence of Dravidian verb forms (see below).

So a possible sequence may be hypothesized as:


[51]

(Those marked with * are reconstructed, those marked # are attested variants in the *mūla* or *aṭṭhakathā* transmissions.)

For the reader who finds this reconstruction overly complex, the following Dravidian analogies may help to convince him/her; for Dravidian has three very similar verbs and near-homonymic forms which appear to have influenced the Pāli and which confirm the priority of the *kaḍi-* (*kaṭi-*) and *kaḷi-* (*kali-*) forms.

Potential Dravidian correlates:

1. *kaḷi* "to be intoxicated, be in rut, exult, rejoice, be proud" (DED #1374) < root *kaḷ* "liquor, honey, toddy". Past participle *kaḷitta*. In Old Tamil (OT) *taṇ-vaḷi* (= *sīta-vata*) *kaḷitta*, "rejoicing because of the cool wind." This is close to the meaning of *kaḍita* and *kaḷita*, "being elated or intoxicated by the cool wind."

[51] This derivation chart works well in terms of the diachronic, phonological changes. Stefan Karpik (pers. comm.) suggests that *kiḷitā* should be the earliest reading, as it is an early, attested Vedic form. It is a possibility, but requires a different interpretation of the passage's meaning. The Dravidian correspondences also reinforce the interpretation above (with **kaḍitā* as the earliest reading); against **kaḍitā* as the earliest reading is the fact that it is an unattested Dhātup verb (< OI *kaḍ*, *kaḍati*). Nevertheless it works well semantically, provides a cogent diachronic source for all the variants, and is closest to the postulated Dravidian correlates.

2. *kaṭi* "to reprove, rebuke, chide" (DED #1126; pronounced *kaḍi* in Dravidian) < root *kaṭu* "to be angry". Past participle *kaṭinta*, earlier, pre-Tolkāppiyam (Tolk) form *kaṭita* (Paramasivam 1979: 4 note 4; pronounced *kaḍita*).[52] Old Tamil *taṇ-vaḷi kaṭita*, "having rebuked the cold wind." This is close to the meaning of #4 and #5 where the peacock is angry with the wind for disturbing it and responds noisily.

3. *kali* "to sound, clamour, roar; to flourish; to appear; to rejoice" (missing in DED but appears in Sangam literature, e.g. *Aiṅkuṟunūṟu* (Aiṅk) 65–1 *kalitta āmpal*, "flourishing waterlilies"). Past participle *kalitta*, Old Tamil *taṇ-vaḷi kalitta*, "clamouring/roaring because of the cold wind or "appearing/rejoicing because of the cold wind." This verb has either a positive or negative meaning. The present participle of *kali* is *kalippa* which may be the source of the strange form *kaḷibhā* (var. #6 above).

So in Dravidian we have three near homonyms *kaḷitta*, *kaṭi*(*n*)*ta* and *kalitta* whose meaning fits the context and appears to have influenced the meaning (and confusion of meaning) in the Pāli. It confirms that the original or earliest transmission was probably a root beginning with either *kaḍi-* (*kaṭi-*) or *kali-/kaḷi-*. All of these are old roots in Dravidian,[53] whereas IA words like *kadditā/kaḍitā/kilitā* are either from the lexicography only (unattested except for the Dhātup), or quite young (e.g. *kalitā*, MBh, later than their appearance in Th). The reconstruction suggests that the Th 22 is either a translation from a poem originally written in Dravidian or, at the very least, that the large number of variants arose because of these three Dravidian roots, for which a bilingual Dravidian speaker tried to find an equivalent in Pāli, with the results that we see, variant after variant, each with a different meaning, but all apparently going back to the Dravidian source. In the end it is probably impossible to

[52] The past marker *-nt-* occurs in class 4 and class 12 verbs; the past marker *t*(*t*)- or *-ṭ-* occurs in classes 1, 2, 6, 7, 9. and 11, confirming its priority. See Krishnamurti 2003: §5.3 where the nasal is an optional element, (N)P signalling intransitive, and geminate (N)PP signalling transitive verbs.

[53] *kaḷi* is widespread amongst all the Dravidian languages. *kaḷippu* is the Old Tamil word for "intoxication, pride, delight" (cp *kaḷibhā* above). For Sangam appearances of *kaḷi* and derivatives, see Anon., *Index des mots*, vol. 2 1968: 486–87. For *kaṭi* and derivatives 423–24. For *kali* 464–65.

reconstruct the exact sequence of events in this *gāthā*; but it does appear very probable that a Dravidian influence is at least in part responsible for all the variant confusion.

The cry of a peacock (a word of Dravidian origin, cp Tamil *mayil*; Levman 2021a: 171–73) is particularly loud and grating; I would hardly describe it as "musical" as Rhys Davids suggests. Based on all the above I would translate:

"Disturbed by the chilly wind, the crested, blue-necked peacocks screamed raucously in the *Kārambhī* forest, waking those sleeping to meditation."

This translation uses var. #5 above, *kaddita*, which includes the sense of its correlate *kaḍita/kaḷita* and incorporates some of the meaning of all three Dravidian terms (*kali/kaḷi/kaḍi*), transferring some of the sense of these words to *abhinandanti* in *pāda* b.

4.7 *Theragāthā* 26, *Abhayatthera*

Orthographic variation
-ă- for *-ā-*, *-b-* for *-v-*, *saccha-* for *sacca-*

Different verb forms of the aorist
-(a)vijjhim, and *avyādhiṃ*

Diachronic change/dialect change/bilingual influence
-t- > *-dh-* (*avyātsīt* > *avyādhi*)

Commentary misplaced in the *mūla*
saccavyādhi, *sacchavyādhiṃ*, *saccappādī*

or

Oral transmission confusion
pacca- mis-heard as *sacca-*

> *Sutvā subhāsitaṃ vācaṃ, buddhassa-adicca-bandhuno.*
> *paccavyādhiṃ* (var. *paccabyăddhiṃ*, *sacchabyādhiṃ*, *saccappādī*, *saccabyādi*, *paccavyādiṃ*, comm. *paccavyādhiṃ*, *paccabādhiṃ*, *saccavyādhi*, *paccabyadhiṃ*) *hi nipuṇaṃ*, *vāla-aggaṃ usunā yathā' ti*.[54]

[54] Mūla: Burmese, *sacchabyādhiṃ*, *saccabyādi*, *paccabyadhiṃ* (Be), *paccavyādhiṃ*. Sinhalese, *pacccavyadhiṃ* (Ce), *saccappādī*. Thai, *paccabyādhiṃ* (Se). Comm.: Sinhalese, *paccabādhiṃ*, *saccavyādhi*. Thai, Sinhalese, and Burmese, *paccabyadhin ti paṭivijjhiṁ*, PTS *paccavyādhin ti* (var. *saccavyādhi*, *paccabādhiṃ*) *paṭivijjhiṃ*.

> "Hearing the well-spoken utterance of the Buddha, the sun's kinsman, I pierced the subtle thing indeed, as one pierces the tip of a hair with an arrow" (Norman, 4).

The verbs with their various meanings and derivation:

> **var. #1 *paccavyādhiṃ*** < verb *paṭivijjhati*
> Note that the OI form *prativyadh* "to shoot against, hit, wound" (RV) has changed in meaning somewhat: cp Pāli "pierce penetrate, see into, comprehend" (Cone vol. 3: 129) and BHS *pratividhyati* "penetrate, reach, attain, comprehend." The aor. 1st sing. of *paṭivijjhati* = *pratyavyādhim* aor. *prati* + *y* + *-avyādhi* (OI *-avyātsīt*, sigmatic aorist). This root *vyadh* has two aorist forms (Whitney §767), one based on an abbreviated form of the root (*vyadh-* > *vidhyate*, a class 4 verb), and one based on the root *vyadh-* itself: 1) aor. *avidhyi/-avidhyiṃ* > Pāli –(*a*)*vijjhi/*(*a*)*vijjhiṃ*, and 2) based on the root *vyadh*, *avyādhi/avyādhiṃ* (*prati* + *y* + *avyādhiṃ* in OI > *paccavyādhiṃ* in Pāli; although per Fahs 1985: 369 this form of the aorist does not usually take the augment). The form *paccabyadhiṃ* is simply a variant spelling with a short *-ă-* (an error apparently, although Cone gives it as a possible variant) and *-b-* substituting for *-v-*, fairly common, especially in the Burmese recensions.

> **var. #2 *sacchabyādhiṃ*** "I have penetrated the truth," with *sacca* misspelled as *saccha*, and a short *-a-* which is normally a long *-ā-* in sandhi > *sacca-abyādhiṃ* = *saccābyādhim*.

> **var. #3 *saccappādīhi*** corr. to *-dhīhi.*
> Presumably this is a spelling mistake for *sacca-apādi*(*ṃ*) *hi* ("indeed I have attained truth" *saccāpādiṃ*) < root *pad*, usually with the prefix *paṭi-*, aorist *paccapādi*, *paccupādi*, or *paṭipajji*. I am not clear on what the editors say in the footnotes "*saccappadīhi* (corrected into *-dhīhi*)." They (Oldenberg & Pischel) seems to be taking the *hi* particle as part of a 2nd pers. sing. imperative suffix of the verb *pra* + *dhi* "long for, strive after, look out, be on the watch," *sacca-pradhīhi*, "strive after truth." However, the verb is not attested in Pāli (although it does occur in the RV); since it is a class three verb (*dīdhīte*), the imperative form would be *didhīhi*, which presumably

could be shortened to *dhīhi* before a prefix, *pra-dhīhi*. However, the commentary specifically says the *hi* is merely a particle or a particle signifying cause (*nipāta-mattaṃ ... vā hetu-aṭṭhe nipāto* Th-a 1, 89[1–3]) and equates *paccavyādhiṃ = paṭivijjhiṃ* ("I have penetrated," the alternate aorist form, see above var. #1). Plus the context, explained in the *kā uppatti* story, makes it clear that Abhaya is proclaiming his attainment of arhathood, so it should be first person. For treatment as a possible instrumental plural see below (discussion).

var. #4 *saccabyādihi* = *sacca-byādi hi*. The same as var. #2 above, with the *hi* particle joined to the verb, and with *sacca* spelled correctly, "Indeed he has penetrated the truth." Should read *sacca-abyādhi hi*, with the aspirate *-dh-* and augment *a-* for the aorist.

var. #5 *paccavyādiṃhi* = *paccavyādiṃ hi*, same as var. #1 above, with the *hi* particle joined to the main verb. "Indeed I have penetrated the truth." Should read *paccavyādhiṃ hi.*

var. #6 commentary: *paccavyādhin ti* (PTS vars. *saccavyādhi*, *paccabādhiṃ*) *paṭivijjhiṃ.* The gloss *paṭivijjhiṃ* is the alt. form of *prati + vyadh* (as above, var. #1) without the augment. *saccavyādhi* is a form of var. #4 above. *paccabādhiṃ* is a different verb < *bādhati*, "oppress, afflict" *pratibādh* "to check, restrain, ward off, repel" which makes no sense in the context; it is just a mistake for *paccabyādhiṃ*. Se, Ce and Be have *paccabyadhiṃ* with a short *-ă-* which is also a mistake for *paccabyādhiṃ/paccavyādhiṃ.* The gloss *paṭivijjhiṃ* also has a var. *paṭipajjhi*(*ṃ*) ("I have entered upon a path" < *paṭipajjati* ~ OI *pratipadyate*).

Discussion

Here we have eight different variants of the main verb *paccavyādhiṃ* ("I have penetrated, understood") from the verb *paṭivijjhati*; the OI root (*prati + vyadh*, class 4) has a different meaning ("to shoot against, hit, wound"), as the meaning changed in Pāli and BHS. Whitney (§767) notes that the root is abbreviated to *vidh-* which is how it appears in BHS (*pratividhyati* "penetrate, reach, attain" = Pāli *paṭivijjhati*). There are two forms of the aorist here from both roots *vyadh-*

and *vidh-*. *paccavyādhiṃ* is from the sigmatic 3rd person aorist *prati* + *avyātsīt* = *pratyavyātisīt* > *paccavyāti* > *paccavyādhi*, or *paccavyādhiṃ* (1st person) and has the variant with a *-b-* instead of a *-v-* (usually shown this way in the Burmese), so *paccabyādhiṃ*); note the change of *-t-* > *dh-*, which may be dialectal or more likely is caused by bilingual Dravidian speakers who automatically pronounced the intervocalic *-t-* as *-d-*, and add the aspirate which is an allophone of *-tʰ-*. The root with *vidh-* does not take an augment here (although it could) > *prativid*hyi > *paṭivijjhi* in Pāli or *paṭivijjhiṃ* in the 1st person.

The commentary glosses the word *paccavyādhiṃ* as *paṭivijjhiṃ*, which is, as we have seen, just an alternate form. There are two variants of this ilk, *paṭipajji* the aorist of *paṭipajjati* "practice, follow a path" which would fit the context and is phonologically related and the verb *paccabādhinti*, I assume the *ti* is simply an end quote mark, i.e. *paccabādhiṃ* < *pratibādhati* "to oppress, afflict" which makes no sense in the context, so it must be another variant of *paccabyādhiṃ*, with the *-y-* missing; in other words, a spelling mistake.

This accounts for all the variants except the three starting with *sacca-/saccha.* The editors (p. xiii, note 1) call this a "blunder" which is, however, common to all three manuscripts (two Burmese and one Sinhalese), which they opine are derived from the same original, now lost. These are *sacchabyādhiṃ* (ms A). *saccabyādhihi* (ms B) and *saccappādīhi*, corrected by the editors to *saccappādhīhi* (ms C).

The simplest way to rationalize these variants is to identify a separate tradition with *sacca* + *vyadh*, i.e. "I have penetrated the truth" (var. #2 above). The *hi* particle is then detached from the verb and treated as a separate emphatic ("certainly, truly") with *saccabyādhi* and *saccappādīhi* treated as above (var. #3 and var. #4). The other possibility is to treat *saccappādīhi* as an imperative, discussed above (var. #3), which does not seem very cogent. A third possibility is to treat the latter two variants (*saccabyādhihi* = *saccabyādhīhi* and *saccappādīhi*) as instrumental plural commentarial glosses, which have got mixed up in the *mūla* text.

In this last scenario, *sacca-byādhihi* is a compound in the instrumental meaning "truth and disease/illness/sickness" (*satya* + *vyādhi* in OI); *sacca-ppādhīhi* is also a *dvandva* in the instrumental plural meaning "with truth and great intelligence" (*satya* + *pradhī* in OI, verb, "strive after"; noun "great intelligence; *padhī* is not atttested in Pāli), or it might be construed as a *tatpuruṣa/tappurisa* compound ending in a verb root (like *loka-vid*, "world-knower"), with the meaning "by those who strive after truth." This would then be a commentary on *paccavyādhiṃ* mistakenly written into the *mūla* text. The realization takes place for "those who

strive after truth" or "I realize by means of truth and great intelligence." The same explanation goes for the first compound (*sacca-byādhihi*): "I have realized (the Buddha's teaching) by means of truth and suffering ...", a reference to the four noble truths. The commentary also equates *paccavyādhiṃ* with penetrating the subtle four noble truths (Th-a 1, 89[4]: *paccavyādhiṃ nipuṇaṃ catu-saccaṃ*, the truth of cessation or just the four noble truths (*nirodha-saccaṃ, catu-saccam eva vā*; 89[2–3]). It seems highly unlikely that all these were just spelling mistakes, occurring independently in three different manuscripts, copied blindly from a lost manuscripts and never corrected by any scribe; one could have made the mistake, but others would certainly have corrected it. However, since these are all hapax legomena in the canon (and they are not listed in the PMA), the argument that they are a mistake is certainly possible.

4.8 *Theragāthā* 31, *Gahvara-tīriya-tthera* (with vars.: *Tahūrati-tīriya*, *Tahūra-tīriya*, *Gahva-tīriyo*, *Gavha-tiriyo*, *Gahava-tiriyo*; commentary: *Gangā-tīre*, *Gavhara*, *Nahūrati-tīriya*, *Gahura-*, *Gahavara-*)[55]

Diachronic change
-hv- > *-vh-*

Foreign word borrowing
Gahva- < Dravidian *kahpa*, *kaḻuvu* "to wash, purify." Gaṅgā < proto Mon-Khmer **kaŋ* "transverse, to branch, stretch horizontally" < Dravidian *kavar*, "to separate into various channels, to bifurcate (as a tree or river)"

Oral transmission confusion
metathesis of *kaḻuvu* > *Gavuru*

Commentarial gloss in the *mūla*
Gaṅgā-tīre

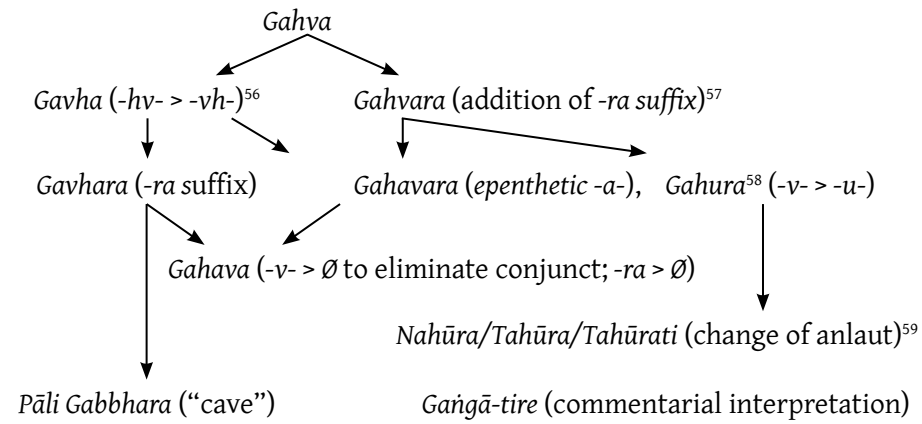
> *Phuṭṭho ḍaṃsehi makasehi araññasmiṃ brahā-vane*
> *nāgo saṃgāma-sīse va sato tatra-adhivāsaye 'ti.*
>
> "Tormented by gnats and mosquitos in the forest, in the great wood, like an elephant in the van of the battle, one should endure there mindful" (Norman, 5).

[55] Burmese: *Gahvara-* (Be), *Gahva-*, *Tahūrati-*, *Tahūra*, *Gavha-tiriyo*, *Gangā-tīre*. Sinhalese: *Gabbhara* (Ce), *Gahava-tiriyo*, *Gavhara-*, *Nahūrati-*. Thai: *Gahura-* (Se), *Gahavara-*.

The monk's name comes from the place where he lived, *Gahvara-tīra*, which sounds like the shore of the *Gahvara* river. *Gahvara* is a Sanskrit word meaning "cavern, arbour, bower" (TS, 4th–5th century BCE), "place, thicket, wood" (*Atharvaveda*, MBh, *Rāmāyaṇa*) and cavern (lex.); M1 vol. 1: 332 and M2 vol. 1: 481 connect it to *gahana*, "deep dense, impenetrable, abyss, depth" which they connect to *gambha* "depth" < IA root **gambh/*gabh* "deep" with *-bh- > -h-*. The Pāli equivalent is *gabbhara* ("cave, cavern" Sn; AMg *gabbhiya* "hollow"). However, this root does not explain the *-hv-/-vh-* conjunct which is an integral part of the variants.

There are 11 variants, an astonishing number which points to a possible foreign source.

Purely on technical (diachronic change) grounds we can postulate the following (very approximate) time sequence:



[56] Woolner 1928/96: §54, *-hv- > -vh- > -bbh-* (e.g. Pāli *gabbhara*, "cave"). Some examples of a similar Prakrit change, *-hm- > -mh-* changes may be found in the Asokan edicts with the word *brāhmaṇa > bāmhaṇa* (Levman 2014: 362).

[57] Whitney §1188. For epenthetic insertion, see Campbell 2004: §2.7.2. Change of *-v- > -u-* is called *samprasāraṇa* (see MW) and is not time correlated; for possible change of *-ava- > -u-* (*Gahavara > Gahura*), see von Hinüber 2001: §139.

[58] There is a river called the Gaula/Gaura which *Gahura* may refer to. It is a branch of the Ganges, starting in the Lesser Himalayas, joins the Ramganga river and then the Ganges. The *Gahvara* is probably just another dialect name for it.

[59] Note Kuiper's observation of the "many Munda synonyms with varying initial gutturals, dentals and labials" which he calls "rhyme words" (1948a: 7).

Since there is no known IE derivation for Gahvara, one must look to the indigenous languages. Here we find two possibilities in Dravidian and Munda. The more compelling source is Dravidian where the phonetically equivalent word to Gahva is found in Kui a central Dravidian language (*kahpa*[60] "to lave, anoint, wash the face") with cognates in all the other language branches (DED #1369): Tamil *kaḻuvu* "wash, rinse, purify"; Telugu *kaḍgu*, *kaḍuvu* "wash, scrub, bathe"; etc. The meaning is also appropriate for the name of a river. With a presence in PSD, PCD and PND the word has a very old pedigree extending back into the third millennium BCE per Southworth (2005: 195); since the first appearance of *gahvara* (in the meaning of "thicket, wood") is the AV (perhaps 900 BCE; in the meaning of "deep" it first appears in the TS, perhaps 500 BCE), its Dravidian usage pre-dates OI by perhaps one thousand years. While it is impossible to reconstruct a PD root, the Kui correspondence is intriguing and the Tamil word *kaḻuvu* with metathesis > *Gavuru*[61] would provide another logical variant. Dravidian also has the root *kavar* (DED #1325), "to separate into various channels, to bifurcate (as a tree or river)" which is another possible source, also with a wide distribution. If OI *gahvara*/Pāli *gabbhara* are indeed derived from a native word (of which *kahpa* is one reflex), one would then have to re-evaluate the traditional association (as in DPD) of Pāli *gabbhara* with *gabbha*/*garbha* ("womb"). Mayrhofer uncertainly identifies OI *gahvara* with *gambha* ("depth") and *gahanaḥ* ("deep"; M1, vol. 1: 324, 332).

Since the Gangā river is one of the variants (or a commentarial interpretation), one wonders if there is a phonetic relation to the *Gahvara*. The name *Gaṅgā* is "probably a foreign (Austro-Asiatic?) river name" per M1 vol. 1: 313, for which cognates appear in Indo China and south China. Sanskritized (and etymologized) to *Gaṅgā* because of the similarity to the root *gam* (MW *Gaṅgā* = "swift goer"). The word conceals a pre-IE river name per M2 vol. 1: 457. Compare Munda names for river, *gāḍa*, *gaˈḍa*, *gaɽa* (Santali); *gada* or *gaḍa* (Korku); *gaḍaṭala* "river bed" (Korku); *gaɭ□a:/gaḍa:* "river" (Ho); *gaɽˈha*, *gaˈḍa*, *gaˈɽa* (Mundari); *gaˈɽa* (Ho); all with the meaning "river." Compare also AA cognates in Shorto 2006: 496, Vietnamese *ngánh* "branch of a river" < Khmer *ka:ŋ* "to spread," proto-MK (Mon-Khmer) **kaŋ*; **kaaŋ*;**kaiŋ[ ]*; **kiəŋ*; **kaik* (& **kaak*?) "transverse, to branch, stretch horizontally."

[60] "Intervocalic **-p-* > *-v-* is almost universal in Dravidian" (Zvelebil 1990: §1.7.7). Although the *-v-* here is not intervocalic, other cognates of the word (like Tamil *kaḻuvu* "to wash"; Telugu *kaḍuvu* occur with the intervocalic *-v-*. PD had no voiced stops so *g-* was an allophone of *k-*.

[61] The letter *-l̤-* in Dravidian is transliterated as *ṉ*, *ḍ*, *l̤*, *y*, and *r* per Caldwell (1875: 59). See n. 40

4.9 *Theragāthā* 32, *Suppiyatthera*

Oral transmission confusion
ad hoc glosses on words not understood
confusion of roots *ni* + *me*, *ni* + *mā*, *ni* + *mi*

Diachronic language change
simplification of OI *dhātu*s and inflections.

Bilingual speakers
lack of knowledge of Pāli

Orthographic variation
various spelling "mistakes"

> *Ajaraṃ jīramānena tappamānena nibbutiṃ*
> *nimmissaṃ* (vars. *nimmisaṃ*, *nimiyaṃ*, *nimissaṃ*, *nirāmisaṃ* "corrected to *nimissaṃ* per eds.", *nimineyyaṃ*, *nibbana-mīyanti*, *nimiyan ti, namiya, niyaṃ*)[62] *paramaṃ santiṃ yoga-kkhemaṃ*
> *anuttaran ti.*
>
> "I shall exchange the ageing for agelessness, the burning for quenching, for the highest peace, for unsurpassed rest-from-exertion" (Norman, 5).

There are five different forms here: *nimiyaṃ*, *nimmissaṃ*, *nimissaṃ nirāmisaṃ* and *nimineyyaṃ*, and three more in the commentary *nibbana-mīyanti*, *namiya*, *niyaṃ.*

Burmese has *nimiyaṃ* in the *mūla* while the PTS has *nimmissaṃ* (Sinhalese, var. *nimissaṃ*) < *ni* + *me*, "to exchange"; future is *ni* + *meṣyāmi* (OI) = *ni-messāmi* in Pāli ("I will exchange"), with an alternate future *ni-missāmi* or *ni-missaṃ*. The PTS takes *nimissāmi* as the future of the verb *mināti* ("to measure"; *nimināti* "to exchange, to barter; to change"), which is not an extant form in OI, where the form would be *nimāti* as a class 2 or *nimimīte* as a class 3 or *nimāyate* as a class 4 verb based on the root *mā* or *niminoti*, *niminute* based on the root *mi*. It derives *nimissāmi* from the roots *mā* and *mi*, a cross between the two; there is no form *ni-miṣyati* in OI, the future of *mā* would be *nimāṣyati* and the future of *mi* is

[62] Burmese: *nimiyaṃ* (Be), *niyaṃ*. Sinhalese: *nirāmisaṃ* > *nimissaṃ*, *nimmissaṃ* (Ce), *nibbana-mīyanti*, *nimiyan ti, namiya*, *niyaṃ* (comm.). Thai: *nirāmisaṃ* (Se). Unknown *nimineyyaṃ* (? var. in Be).

nimeṣyati. ni-missati is an artificial, simplified form to match the root vowel. The form with the double *mm-* is probably just a mistake (see below).

The Burmese commentary takes *nimiyaṃ* as an optative glossing it with *parivatteyyaṃ cetāpeyyaṃ* (both meaning "to exchange" Th-a 1, 98[13–14]). The ending *-yaṃ* (OI *-yām*) is first person thematic ending; the "correct" OI form would be *nimayeyam/nimayeya* for the optative of *mi* (class 1), or *nimāyām* for the optative of *mā* (as a 2nd class verb; Pāli *nimineyyaṃ* or *nimine*).

The Thai *nirāmisaṃ* is viewed as a mistake by the PTS editors, who correct it to *nimissaṃ*. It is actually an adjective form with the meaning *nir-āmisa* ("not worldly"), to which a first person ending has been added. One might consider it a regular form of a denominative *nirāmisaya*, 3rd person *nirāmisayati*, 1st person *nirāmisayāmi/ nirāmisayaṃ* with *-aya-* > *-ā-* (von Hinüber 2001: §142) > *-ă-* before *niggahīta* > *nirāmisaṃ*. "I spiritualize old age into agelessness, asceticism into extinguishment ..." (lit.: "I spiritualize agelessness by means of old age ..."). Nevertheless it is a hapax legomenon in the canon (as a verb form) which suggests it is a mistake.

nimineyyaṃ is the first person optative of the verb *nimināti*. This is formed as if the stem were *min-* with regular optative endings. The OI endings are as above.

There are three roots here: *ni* + *me* "to exchange"; *ni* + *mā* "to measure, adjust"; *ni* + *mi* "to perceive, notice, understand"; *mi* also has the meaning of "measure" which is presumably how it was combined with *mā* to form *nimināti* (as above). It shows several simplifications typical of Pāli's treatment of the complex OI verbal forms: 1) the future form *nimessaṃ* regularized to *nimissaṃ* so the *-i-* matches the root form *mināti*; 2) same with *nimiyaṃ* where the form *nimāyām* in OI is changed to *nimiyaṃ* (with *-ā-* > *-i-* to match the root; the *-ā-* in the final syllable is automatically shortened before a *niggahīta*; 3) the formation of the optative *nimineyyaṃ* is as if the root were *min-*. Altogether we have two optatives (*nimiyaṃ*, *nimineyyaṃ*) a future *nimissaṃ* and an indicative *nirāmisaṃ*. If we take future variant *nimmissaṃ* as more than just a mistake, then it is derived from the verb *nir* + *mā* which means "to build, to construct, create" and whose OI future is *nirmāṣyati* or *nimmāssati* (*nimmissāti* with change of *-ā-* > *-i-* consistent with the above), 1st person *nimmissaṃ*, "I will create agelessness with old age, extinguishment with asceticism ..." or "I will measure agelessness with old age ..." The meaning holds good, but "exchange" is still the better reading and so confirmed by the commentary. It was probably just a mistake for *nimissaṃ* in the oral transmission where the scribe imagined he/she heard a closed first syllable (*nim-missaṃ*) rather than an open one *ni-missaṃ*).

For the commentarial variations: *nibbana-mīyanti*. The verb is 3rd person plural, passive of *mināti*, "to measure" so would mean that agelessness (*ajaraṃ*) and extinction (*nibbutiṃ*) are measured by means of ageing and burning which is not particularly coherent, especially since *ajaraṃ* and *nibbutiṃ* are in the accusative here and should be in the nominative for this kind of structure. The word *nibbana* is an adjective meaning "desireless" without a modificand, unless *nibbanā* was the word intended ("those who are without desire"), so the meaning might be: "Those without desire are measured by ageing (turning into) agelessness, by burning (turning into) extinction"; I suppose that is possible, but not very likely. The word *niyaṃ* (Pāli *niya* = "one's own") is presumably a mistake for *nimiyaṃ* with *-im-* > *Ø*; if an adjective it would modify *paramaṃ santiṃ* ("one's own highest peace"), but then the *gāthā* has no verb and the metre is short. The word *namiya* looks like yet another verb form (< *nam*, "to bow down"), employing the OI optative form *nameya* ("with ageing, I should turn towards agelessness ..."), misspelled as Pāli *namiya* (which would ordinarily be *name* or *nameyyaṃ* in Pāli).

How did this happen where one verb has diversified into so many different forms? First, one must assume that it took place in the oral tradition; if the words had been written down, presumably tradents would have been able to look up the words and clarify any confusions. Many or all of the variations were probably ad hoc glosses on an original word which was not understood; the verb *nimināti* is very rare in the canon (PTS lists four instances in the *Jātaka*s and one in Mil; Cone lists the same and a few from *Cariyāpiṭaka*), so presumably it was not understood—especially if the tradent's first language was not IA but Dravidian or Munda—and attempts were made to understand what was meant. Its occurrence here in Th was probably its first occurrence anywhere in IA as the OI form *ni + me* ("to exchange") first occurs in the MBh, which likely postdates Th. The verb *ni + mā* ("to measure") does occur in the RV but the meaning is off. The word *nirāmisa* probably got included because of its phonological similarity and because it was fairly common in the canon and had the right sense for the context ("spiritual"). The commentarial variations look like further attempts to interpret the meaning, as noted above. The exact sequence is impossible to reconstruct but it does provide some insight into the vagaries of the oral transmission of the *Buddhadhamma*.

END OF PART I.

Part II will be forthcoming in JOCBS 2025.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to editors Aleix Ruiz-Falqués and Alex Wynne for their important suggestions and comments on this paper which have helped to improve it. Thanks also to Stefan Karpik for reviewing the article and for his suggestions, even though we still disagree on a number of points.

Abbreviations

Aiṅk	*Aiṅkurunūru*
AMg	Ardha-Māgadhī
AA	Austro-Asiatic (of which Munda is a sub-branch)
AV	*Atharvaveda*
Be	*Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana* Burmese recension
BHSD/G	*Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary/Grammar* (Edgerton 1953/1998)
BJT	*Buddha Jayanti Tipiṭaka*
comm.	commentary
C	consonant
Ce	*Buddha Jayanti* Sinhalese recension
CP	*Collected Papers* (Norman)
DED	*Dravidian Etymological Dictionary* (Burrow and Emeneau 1984)
DPD	Digital Pāli Dictionary Home - Digital Pāḷi Dictionary (digitalpalidictionary.github.io)
Geiger	1916/2005
IA	Indo-Aryan
ka.	Cambodian var.
MBh	*Mahābhārata* (4th century BCE–4th century CE)
M1	Mayrhofer 1956–76
M2	Mayrhofer 1992–96
Mc	*Mahācuḷā* Thai recension (1963)
MI	Middle Indic
MED	*Munda Etymological Dictionary* (Stampe, D.)

MKED	*Mon-Khmer Etymological Dictionary* (Stampe, D.)
MW	Monier-Williams, Sanskrit English Dictionary
ms(s)	Manuscript(s)
N	nasal
non-IA	non-Indo-Aryan
Norman	Norman 1969/95
OI	Old Indic (Vedic)
OT	Old Tamil
P	plosive
(p.) p.p.	(passive) past participle
PCD	Proto Central Dravidian
PD	Proto Dravidian
Pischel	Pischel 1900/1981
PM	Proto Munda
PMA	*Pāli-Maynamā' Abhidhān'* (Burmese-Burmese Pāli dictionary)
PND	Proto North Dravidian
PSD	Proto South Dravidian (for PSD1 and PSD2, see Southworth 50)
PTS	Pali Text Society
OT	Old Tamil
RV	Rig Veda
Sadd	*Saddanīti* (Smith 1928–54/2001)
Se	Thai *Syāmaraṭṭha* recension
Sī	Sinhalese recension
Sn	*Sutta Nipāta* (4th–5th centuries BCE)
Southworth	Southworth 2005
Spk	*Samantapāsādikā*
ṭ	*ṭīkā*
Th	*Theragāthā*
Th-a	*Theragāthā aṭṭhakathā* (*Paramattha-Dīpanī*)
TL	Tamil Lexicon Tamil Lexicon (uchicago.edu)

Tolk	*Tolkāppiyam* (mid-1st millennium BCE)
TS	*Taittiriya Saṃhitā*
var(s).	variation(s), variant reading(s)
v.l(l).	*varia lectio*, (*variae lectiones*), variant reading(s)
Whitney	Whitney 1879/2000
~	Alongside, corresponding to, allophone, compare to

Works Cited

A Note on *Theragāthā* recensions

The principal reference is the Oldenberg and Pischel edition of the *Thera-* and *Therī-gāthā*, originally published in 1883, reprinted with additions by Norman and Alsdorf in 2006. Oldenberg and Pischel made use of four different manuscripts of Th and Th-a (*Paramattha-Dīpanī*) in Burmese and Sinhalese (p. xii). Woodward's edition of the commentary, published in three volumes (1940/1995, 1952/1977 and 1959/2004), has many variants and has also been used; it draws on five Burmese and Sinhalese manuscripts. In this article, Burmese readings are referred to as "Burmese" except for the reading in the *mūla*-text of the *Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana* recension from 1956 which is labelled "Be." Thai readings and variants (not found in the above) are from the *Syāmaraṭṭha* 1927 edition and the reading in the *mūla* is labelled "Se" (available at https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1gvEv87JkQijpSmBM1jjpuJ1_XIOpJYBV).I have also consulted the 1963 *Mahācuḷā* edition (Mc) of the Thai canon (which, however, has very few variants not mentioned in the other recensions). Sinhalese readings are drawn from all the above and are so labelled except for the reading from the *mūla* of the Buddha Jayanti edition (1957–1993) which is labelled "Ce"; a roman version of this exists at the Sri Lanka Tripitaka Project (Sri Lanka Tripitaka Project: Pali Tipitaka Source Texts (accesstoinsight.org)), which is not a 100% accurate transcription of the Sinhalese original, but in the process of being revised/corrected. The Ce readings in this paper have been taken from a romanized version of the Buddha Jayanti edition (original PDFs available at http://dr.lib.sjp.ac.lk/handle/123456789/2123), which were transcribed by Ven. Bodhirasa for the author, to whom I offer my sincere thanks. The commentary has very few other readings not in the other *mūla* texts or commentaries. Khom Cambodian variants where available in the above

are so listed. Variants from other parts of the canon in parallel passages are included where relevant. PTS *mūla* readings are not usually listed, where they are the same as one of the other recensions. Variants are usually not repeated; if they occur in two or more recensions, they are only given in the first one listed, unless they occur as the *mūla* text. "Comm." usually refers to the PTS edition of Th-a, which has the most variants; occasionally the Burmese, Thai and Sinhalese commentaries have variants not covered by the PTS and they are included.

Primary Sources

Oldenberg, H. and R. Pischel. 1883/2006. *The Thera- and Therī-gāthā (Stanzas ascribed to Elders of the Buddhist order of Recluses)*. Second edition with Appendices by K. R. Norman and L. Alsdorf, 2006. Lancaster: Pāli Text Society.

Woodward, F. L. 1940/1995–1959/2004. *Paramattha-Dīpanī Theragāthā-Aṭṭhakathā. The Commentary of Dhammapālācariya.* Three volumes. Oxford: Pāli Text Society.

Mahācuḷā edtion of the Thai canon 1963. No editor given. Bangkok: Mahācuḷālaṅk araṇarājavidyālayena.

Buddha Jayanti edition of the Sinhalese canon (1957–1993), available in Sinhalese at http://dr.lib.sjp.ac.lk/handle/123456789/2123; Volume 22 contains the *Theragāthā*. The Sri Lanka Tripitaka Project. (Sri Lanka Tripitaka Project: Pali Tipitaka Source Texts (accesstoinsight.org), is a romanization of the original. This paper used a romanized version of the Sinhalese prepared by Ven. Bodhirasa for the author; it differs somewhat from the Sri Lanka Tripitaka Project which has some typos.

Syāmaraṭṭha edition of the Thai canon 1927. Volume 26 of the *mūla* contains the *Theragāthā*. Volumes 32 and 33 of the commentary contain the *Paramattha-Dīpanī.* Edited by Somdej Phra Ariyavaṁsāgatañāṇa (Pussadevamahāthera). Bangkok: Mahāmakut Rajavidyalaya.

Secondary Sources

Anālayo, Bh. 2009. "The Vicissitudes of Memory and Early Buddhist Oral Transmission." *Canadian Journal of Buddhist Studies.* Vol. 5: 5–20.

——. 2012. "The Historical Value of the Pāli Discourses." *Indo-Iranian Journal* 55: 223–53.

——. 2022. *Early Buddhist Oral Tradition, Textual Formation and Transmission*. Somerville: Wisdom Publications.

Anon. 1967–1970. *Index des mots de la littérature tamoule ancienne.* Vols. 1, 2, 3. Pondicherry: Institut Français d'Indologie.

Bechert, H. 1968. "Some Remarks on the Kaṭhina Rite." *Journal of the Bihar Research Society* 54: 319–29.

Bloch, J. 1950. *Les Inscriptions d'Aśoka*. Paris: Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres."

Bloomfield, M. and F. Edgerton. 1932/1979. *Vedic Variants*. Vol. 2, Phonetics. Philadelphia: Linguistic Society of America.

Bodding, P. O. 1929–36. *A Santal Dictionary*. Oslo: I kommisjon hos J. Dybwad.

Bodhi, Bh. 2000. *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

——. 2012. *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha. A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya.* Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Böhtlingk, O. and R. Roth. 1855–75/1990. *Sanskrit Wörterbuch*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd.

Brough, J. 1962. *The Gāndhārī Dharmapada*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.

Bühler, G. 1894. "Votive Inscriptions from the Sanchi Stūpa." In Jas Burgess, ed., *Epigraphia Indica*. Vol. 2: 87–115. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Burrow, T. 1943. "Dravidian Studies III." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*. 11(1): 122–39.

——. 1946. "Loan-words in Sanskrit." *Transactions of the Philological Society*. Vol. 46: 1–30.

——. 1948. "Dravidian Studies VII. Further Dravidian words in Sanskrit." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London. Vol. 12, 2: 365–96.

Burrow, T. and M. B. Emeneau. 1984. *A Dravidian Etymological Dictionary*. Second Edition. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Caldwell, R. 1875. *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South-Indian Family of Languages*. London: Trübner & Co., Ludgate Hill.

Campbell, L. 2004. *Historical Linguistics*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Clark, C. 2015. *A Study Of The Apadāna, including an Edition and Annotated Translation af the Second, Third and Fourth Chapters.* PhD thesis, University of Sydney. https://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/handle/2123/13438

Cone, M. 2001–2020. A Dictionary of Pāli. Bristol: Pali Text Society.

Deshpande, M. M. 1979. "Genesis of Ṛgvedic Retroflexion: A Historical and Sociolinguistic Investigation". In M. M. Deshpande and P. E. Hook eds., *Aryan and non-Aryan in India*: 235–315. Ann Arbor: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, The University of Michigan.

Dhammika, S. 2015. *Nature and the Environment in Early Buddhism.* Singapore: Buddha Dhamma Mandala Society.

Dharmakāya Institute 2013. *Dīghanikāya. Volume 1. Sīlakkhandhavagga.* Thailand: Dhammachai Institute, Dhammakāya Foundation.

Drewes, D. 2017. "The Idea of the Historical Buddha." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 40: 1–25.

——. 2022. "The Buddha and the Buddhism that Never Was." Paper presented at the XIXth Congress of the International Association of Buddhist Studies, Seoul, August 15–19.

Dutt, N. 1947. *Gilgit Manuscripts*. Vol. 3, Part 1. Calcutta: Calcutta Oriental Press.

Edgerton, F. 1930. "Dialectic Phonetics in the Veda: Evidence from the Vedic Variants." in *Studies in Honor of Hermann Collitz.* Baltimore: John Hopkins Press.

——. 1953/1998. *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.

Emeneau, M. B. 1954. "Linguistic Prehistory of India." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*. Vol.98 No. 4: 282–92.

——. 1956. "India as a Linguistic Area." *Language* 32: 3–16. Also available in Emeneau 1980: 126–166.

——. 1969. "Onomatopoetics in the Indian Linguistic Area." *Language*. Vol. 45 No. 2, Part 1: 274–99.

——. 1970. *Dravidian Comparative Phonology*, *A Sketch*. Tamil Nadu: Annamalai University.

——. 1974. The Indian linguistic area revisited. *International Journal of Dravidian Linguistics.* Vol. 3: 92–134.

——. 1980. *Language and Linguistic Area*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. A collection of essays edited by A. S. Dil published between 1954–1974.

Endo, T. 2013. *Studies in Pāli Commentarial Literature. Sources, Controversies and Insights*. Hong Kong: Centre of Buddhist Studies The University of Hong Kong.

Fahs, A. 1985. *Grammatik des Pāli.* Leipzig: VEB Verlag Enzyklopädie.

Fussman, G. 1989. "Gāndhārī écrite, Gāndhārī parlée." In C. Caillat ed., *Dialectes dans les littératures indo-aryennes*: 433–501. Paris: Collège de France, Institut de Civilisation indienne.

Geiger, W. 1916/2004. *Pāli Literatur und Sprache*. Strassburg: Verlag from Karl. J. Trübner. English translation in Geiger, W. 2004. *Pāli Literature and Language*, translated by Batakrishna Ghosh. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers. Originally published in 1943.

——. 1916/2005. A Pāli Grammar, translated into English by Batakrishna Ghosh, revised and edited by K. R. Norman. Oxford: The Pali Text Society.

Ghosh, A. 2008. "Santali." In G. D. S. Anderson, ed., *The Munda Languages*: 11–98. New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Hallisey, C. 2024. "Seeing Shadows in the Shade. The Narrative Quality of Textual Variants and the History of Buddhism in South and South-east Asia." In Glenn W. Most, ed., *Variants and Variants in Classical Textual Cultures*: 85–108. Boston/Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Hare, E. M. 1935/2006. *The Book of the Gradual Sayings* (*Aṅguttara-Nikāya*) *or More-Numbered Suttas*, Volume 4. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.

Hinüber, O. v. 1982. "Pāli as an Artificial Language." Indologica Taurinensia 10: 133–140. Also published in Harry Falk und Walter Slaje eds., *Kleine Schriften*, *Teil 1* (2009): 451–58. Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag.

——. 1983. "The Oldest Literary Language of Buddhism." *Saeculum* 34 (1983): 1–9. Also published in *Selected Papers on Pāli Studies* (2005): 177–94. Oxford: The Pali Text Society.

——. 1991. *The Oldest Pāli Manuscript, Four Folios of the Vinaya-Piṭaka from the National Archives, Kathmandu.* Mainz, Stuttgart: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur; Franz Steiner Verlag.

——. 1996/2008. *A Handbook of Pāli Literature.* New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd.

——. 1996. "Linguistic Considerations on the Date of the Buddha." In H. Bechert ed., *When did the Buddha live? The Controversy on the Dating of the Historical Buddha*: 185–94. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications.

——. 2001. *Das Ältere Mittelindisch im Überblick*. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

——. 2006. "Hoary past and hazy memory. On the History of early Buddhist texts." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies.* 29(2): 193–210.

——. 2015. "Languages: Indic." In J. Silk, R. Bowring and V. Eltschinger eds., *Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism Online.* Leiden, The Netherlands; Boston: Koninklijke Brill NV.

——. 2019. "The Buddha as a Historical Person." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*. Vol. 42: 231–64.

——. 2001. *Das Ältere Mittelindisch im Überblick.* Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

Horner, I. B. 1938–66 /2001–07. *Book of the Discipline*. Six volumes. London: Pali Text Society.

Hultzsch, E. 1924/1969. *Inscriptions of Asoka*, *New Edition.* Delhi: Indological Book House.

Hu-von Hinüber, H. 1994. *Das Poṣadhavastu Vorschriften für die buddhistische Beichtfeier im Vinaya der Mūlasarvāstivādins*. Hamburg: Dr. Inge Wezler Verlag für Orientalistische Fachpublikattionen.

Jones, J. J. 1949–1956. *Mahāvastu*. Vols. 1, 2, 3. London: Luzac and Co.

Keown, D. 2003/2004. *Oxford Dictionary of Buddhism*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.

Krishnamurti, Bh. 2003. *The Dravidian Languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kuiper, F. B. J. 1939. "Indoiranica." *Acta Orientalia Ediderunt Societates Orientales Batava Danica Norvegica*. Vol. 17: 17–64.

——. 1948a. *Proto-Munda Words in Sanskrit*. Amsterdam: N.V. Noord-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatschappij.

——. 1948b. "Munda and Indonesian." *Orientalia Neerlandica*, *A Volume of Oriental Studies*. 372–401. Leiden: A. W. Sijthoffi's Uitgeversmaatschappij N. V.

——. 1954. "Two Rigvedic Loan-words." In *Sprachgeschichte und Wortbedeutung*; *Festschrift Albert Debrunner*. 241–50. Bern: Francke.

Kusalasaya, K. 1965/ 2005. *Buddhism in Thailand Its Past and Its Present*. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society.

Lamotte, É. 1958/1988. *History of Indian Buddhism: From the origins to the Śaka Era*. Sara Webb-Boin, trans. Louvain-laNeuve: Université Catholique de Louvain Institut Orientaliste.

Levman, B. G. 2010. "Asokan phonology and the Language of the Earliest Buddhist Tradition." *Canadian Journal of Buddhist Studies*. Vol. 6: 59–88.

——. 2011. "The *muṇḍa/muṇḍaka* crux." What does the word mean? *Canadian Journal of Buddhist Studies.* Vol. 7: 45–78. Also in Levman 2021a: 210–35.

——. 2013. "Cultural Remnants of the Indigenous Peoples in the Buddhist Scriptures." *Buddhist Studies Review*. Vol. 30, No.2: 145–80.

——. 2014. "Linguistic Ambiguities, the Transmissional Process, and the Earliest Recoverable Language of Buddhism." PhD diss., University of Toronto, Department for the Study of Religion. Available from Dissertations & Theses @ University of Toronto; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1566171666).

——. 2016a. "The Language of Early Buddhism." *Journal of South Asian Languages and Linguistics.* Vol. 3, No. 1: 1–41.

——. 2016b. "Towards a Critical Edition of the *Tipiṭaka*." *Ñāṇasaṃvara Journal of Buddhist Studies*. Vol. 1: 83–120.

——. 2017. "Language Theory, Phonology, and Etymology in Buddhism and their relationship to Brahmanism," *Buddhist Studies Review*. Vol. 34, No. 1: 25–51.

——. 2019a. "The language the Buddha spoke." *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies.* Vol. 17: 63–105.

——. 2019b. "The Historical Buddha: Response to Drewes." *Canadian Journal of Buddhist Studies*. Vol. 14: 25–56. https://thecjbs.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Levman_The-Buddha-as-An-Historical-Figure.pdf

——. 2020. "Sanskritization in Pāli." *Journal of South Asian Languages and Linguistics*. Vol. 7, No. 1: 105–49. doi.org/10.1515/jsall-2021-2030.

——. 2021a: *Pāli and Buddhism Language and Lineage*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

——. 2021b. "A Dravidian Poem Translated into Pāli? Apadāna-aṭṭhakathā/ Visuddhajanavilāsinī (53413-53728, vv. 12–48)." *Buddhist Studies Review*. Vol. 38, No. 2: 169–223.

——. 2022. "The influence of Proto-Dravidian on Indo-Aryan Phonology, Morphology and Syntax." Part 1. *International Journal of Dravidian Linguistics*. Vol. 51, No. 2: 11–65. Part 2 in *IJDL*, Vol. 52, No. 1.

——. 2023a. "Dravidian Buddhism." *Buddhist Studies Review.* Vol. 38, No. 1: 59–114.

——. 2023b. "Descent with Variation." *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies*. Vol. 23: 1–40.

——. 2025a. *Dīgha Nikāya, a New Translation.* Alexander Wynne, ed. Bangkok: Royal Thai Translation Project. Forthcoming.

——. 2025b. "The Thai Pāli Tradition, A Prolegomenon, Part I." *Ñāṇasaṃvara Centre for Buddhist Studies.* Forthcoming.

——. 2025c. "The Thai Pāli Tradition, A Prolegomenon, Part II." *Ñāṇasaṃvara Centre for Buddhist Studies*. Forthcoming.

Lüders, H. 1899. "Bemerkungen zu dem Kharoṣṭhī Manuscript des Dhammapada (MS. Dutreuil de Rhins)." *Nachrichten der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse Berlin*: 474–94. Also in *Kleine Schriften* 151–171.

——. 1954. *Beobachtungen über die Sprache des buddhistischen Urkanons*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.

——. 1973. *Kleine Schriften*. Oskar von Hinüber, ed., Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH.

Mallik, M. 1970. "Sanskritism in Pāli." *Vishveshvaranand Indological* Journal: 103–08 (no volume given). Hoshiarpur: Vishveshvaranand Institute of Sanskrit and Indological Studies, Panjab University.

Masica, C. P. 1976. *Defining a Linguistic Area.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Mayrhofer, M. 1956–76. *Kurzefasstes etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindishchen. A Concise Etymological Sanskrit Dictionary*. Three volumes. Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag.

——. 1992–96. *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindoarischen.* Two volumes. Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag.

Mehendale, M. A. 1968. *Some aspects of Indo-Aryan linguistics*. Bombay: University of Bombay.

Monier-Williams, Sir. M. 1899/1986. *A Sanskrit English Dictionary.* New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Norman, K. R. 1965. "Middle Indo-Aryan Studies V." *Journal of the Oriental Institute (Baroda)*. Vol. 15: 113–17.

——. 1969/1995. *The Elders' Verses I Theragāthā.* Oxford: Pali Text Society.

——. 1980. "Four Etymologies from the Sabhiya-sutta." *Buddhist Studies in Honour of Walpola Rahula*, Somaratna Balasooriya (et al.) eds., 173–184. London: Gordon Fraser. Reprinted in Norman, K. R., *Collected Papers 2* (1991): 148–161. Oxford: Pali Text Society.

——. 1983. *Pāli Literature*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.

——. 1987. "An epithet of Nibbāna." *In Śramaṇa Vidyā: Studies in Buddhism (Prof. Jagannath Upadhyaya Commemoration Volume)*: 22–30. Also published in *Collected Papers 3* (1992): 183–89. Oxford: Pali Text Society.

——. 1989. The Pāli language and scriptures. In Tadeusz Skorupski ed., *The Buddhist Heritage*, 29–53. Tring, UK: Institute of Buddhist Studies. Reprinted in Norman, K. R. 1993. *Collected Papers 4*: 92–123. Oxford: The Pāli Text Society.

——. 1990. "Pāli philology and the Study of Buddhism." In T. Skorupski ed., *The Buddhist Forum*. Vol. 1. London: School of Oriental and African Studies: 31–39. Also published in *Collected Papers 4* (1993): 80–91. Oxford: Pali Text Society.

——. 1992/2006. *The Group of Discourses*. Lancaster: Pali Text Society.

——. 1997/2004. *The Word of the Doctrine (Dhammapada)*. Oxford: Pali Text Society.

——. 1997/2006. *A Philological Approach to Buddhism. The Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai Lectures 1994*. Lancaster: Pali Text Society.

——. 2002. "Pāli and the languages of early Buddhism." In Nicholas Sims-Williams ed., *Indo-Iranian Languages and Peoples*, Proceedings of the British Academy: 135–50. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Also published in *Collected Papers 8* (2007): 96–120. Oxford: Pali Text Society.

Oldenberg, H. and R. Pischel 1883/2006. *The Thera- and Therī-gāthā (Stanzas Ascribed to Elders of the Buddhist Order of Recluses)*. Lancaster: Pali Text Society.

Osada, T. 2008. "Mundari." In Gregory D. S. Anderson, ed., *The Munda languages*: 99–164. New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Pāli Myanmā Abhidhān'. 1964–2014. Myanmar: Ministry of Religious Affairs Department.

Pande, G. C. 1974. *Studies in the Origins of Buddhism*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Paragaramuthali, 1985–2007. *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Tamil Language.* Eight volumes. Tamilnadu: Government of Tamilnadu. http://www.tamilvu.org/ta/library-ldpam-ldpam00-html-ldpam00hom-244696.

Paramasivam, K. 1979. *Effectivity and causativity in Tamil*. Trivandrum: Dravidian Linguistics Association.

Pischel, R. 1900/1981. *Comparative Grammar of the Prākṛit Languages*, Subhadra Jhā trans., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Pokorny, J. 1959–69. *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch.* Bern: Francke. Available online at J. Pokorny's Indo-European Etymological Dictionary

Przyluski, J. 1929. "Emprunts Anaryens en Indo-Aryen." *Bulletin de la Société Linguistique, Paris*. Vol. 30: 195–201.

Rajams, V. S. 1992. *A Reference Grammar of Classical Tamil Poetry*. Philadelphia: Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society, Vol. 199.

Rhys Davids, C. A. F. 1913. *Psalms of the Early Buddhists II. Psalms of the Brethern*. London: Henry Frowde, Oxford University Press.

Rhys Davids, T. W. 1877. *Buddhism, being a sketch of the life and teachings of Gautama the Buddha.* London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

——. 1899/1923. Dialogues of the Buddha. London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press.

——. 1911. *Buddhist India*. New York: Putnam.

Salomon R. 1998. *Indian Epigraphy, A Guide to the Study of Inscriptions in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and the Other Indo-Aryan Languages*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd.

——. 2000. *A Gāndhāri Version of the Rhinoceros Sūtra.* British Library Kharoṣṭhī Fragment 5B. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press.

——. 2024. "Forgotten Buddhist Literatures as Revealed by Manuscript Discoveries in India and Beyond." *Philological Encounters* (published online ahead of print 2024). https://doi.org/10.1163/24519197-bja10054

Shorto, H. 2006. *A Mon-Khmer comparative dictionary.* Paul Sidwell ed., Assisting editors, D. Cooper and C. Bauer. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies The Australian National University.

Sjoberg, A. F. 1992. "The impact of Dravidian on Indo-Aryan: An overview." In Edgar C. Polomé & Werner Winter eds., *Reconstructing languages and cultures*: 507–29. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. Reprinted in Sjoberg, A. F., *Dravidian language and culture*, (2009): 55–80. Srinivasavanam: Dravidian University.

Smith, H. 1928–54/2001. *Saddanīti, la grammaire palie d'Aggavaṃsa*. Vols. 1–4. Oxford: Pali Text Society.

——. 1952. “Le futur moyen indien et ses rythmes.” *Journal Asiatique.* Vol. 240: 169–83.

Southworth, F. C. 2005. *Linguistic Archaeology of South Asia*. London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon.

Stampe, D. *SEAlang Munda Etymological Dictionary.* http://www.sealang.net/munda/dictionary/

Stampe, D. *SEAlang Mon-Khmer Etymological Dictionary*. http://sealang.net/monkhmer/dictionary/

Study Group on Buddhist Sanskrit Literature. 2006. *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, A Sanskrit Edition Based upon the Manuscript Newly Found at the Potala Palace. Tokyo: The Institute for Comprehensive Studies of Buddhism, Taisho University, Taisho University Press.

Sujato Bh. and Bh. Brahmali. 2014. *The Authenticity of Early Buddhist Texts.* https://bodhi-college.org/wp-content/uploads/Sujato-und-Brahmali_2014_The-authenticity-of-Early-Buddhist-Texts.pdf

Thomas, E. J. 1931. *The Life of Buddha as Legend and History*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Tov, E. 1992/2001. *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Wackernagel, J. 1896–1954. *Altindische Grammatik*, Part I–III. Göttingen: Dandenhoeck und Ruprecht.

Waldschmidt, E. 1979. “The *Varṇaśatam*, An Eulogy of One Hundred Epitheta of Lord Buddha Spoken by the *Gṛhapati Upāli*(*n*).” *Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen I. Philologisch-Historische Klasse*. Jahrgang 1979, Nr. 1: 3–19.

Walters, J. S. 2018. *Legends of the Buddhist Saints. Apadānapāli*. Whitman College: Jonathan S. Walters and Whitman College.

Warder, A. K. 1963/2001. *Introduction to Pali, Third Edition.* Oxford: Pali Text Society.

——. 1967. *Pali Metre, A Contribution to the History of Indian Literature.* London: Pali Text Society.

Whitney, W. 1879/2000. *Sanskrit Grammar*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.

Witzel, M. 1999. “Substrate Languages in Old Indo-Aryan (Ṛgvedic, Middle and Late Vedic).” *Electronic Journal for Vedic Studies* Vol. 5: 1–67.

——. 2009. “South Asian Agricultural Terms in Old Indo-Aryan.” In Toshiki Osada ed., *Linguistics, Archaeology and Human Past in South Asia*: 79–100. New Delhi: Replika Press Pvt. Ltd.

Woolner, A. C. 1926–28. "Prakritic and non-Aryan Strata in the Vocabulary of Sanskrit." In *Sir Asutosh Memorial Volume*: 65–71. Patna: J. N. Samaddar.

——. 1927–32. *Ardha-Māgadhī Koṣa*. London: Probsthain and Co. Four Volumes.

——. 1928/96. *Introduction to Prakrit*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Wynne, A. 2004. "The Oral Transmission of the Early Buddhist Literature." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*. Vol. 27, No.1: 97–129.

——. 2005. "The Historical Authenticity of Early Buddhist Literature". In: *Vienna Journal of South Asian Studies.* Vol. 49: 35–70.

——. 2019. "Did the Buddha exist?" *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies.* Vol. 16: 98–148.

Zide, N. H. 2008. "Korku." In Gregory D. S. Anderson, ed., *The Munda Languages*. London: Routledge.

Zvelebil, K. V. 1990. *Dravidian Linguistics, An Introduction*. Pondicherry: Pondicherry Institute of Linguistics and Culture.

Is joy (*pīti*) a feeling (*vedanā*)? Perspectives from early Buddhism

Bernat Font[1]

Abstract—Different schools of systematic Buddhist thought disagree on whether joy (*pīti*) belongs to the bundle of feeling (*vedanakkhandha*) or to the bundle of conditioning factors (*saṅkhārakkhandha*). In this paper I suggest this discrepancy may stem from how different traditions solved a scholastic problem concerning the meditative states known as *jhāna*. Scholars have projected the Theravādin conception of *pīti* as a *saṅkhāra* back onto the *sutta*s, interpreting it as a conative element, mostly intense or agitating, and bodily, none of which is apparent in canonical *pīti*. Instead, I argue we have grounds to read joy in the Pali suttas as a feeling (*vedanā*), and as roughly synonymous with happiness (*somanassa*). I base this on texts that show *pīti* and *somanassa* as interchangeable, therefore possibly pointing to the same experience; and on how their subtypes—domestic/renunciant (*gehasita*, *nekkhammasita*) for somanassa, carnal/spiritual (*sāmisa*, *nirāmisa*) for

[1] I am grateful to the two reviewers who helped me greatly improve this paper with their numerous suggestions, as well as to editor Aleix Ruiz-Falqués. All remaining errors are my own. I am also indebted to my doctoral supervisor, Rupert Gethin, for his wise comments and support throughout my research, which was assisted by a Dissertation Fellowship from The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Program in Buddhist Studies administered by the American Council of Learned Societies.

JOCBS 24: 144–180 ©2024 Bernat Font

pīti—seem equivalent as well. These equivalences reveal how various early Buddhist practices have basically the same outcome in affective-hedonic terms, allowing us to see the underlying hedonic curve of that soteriology. But they also raise the question of why have different terms, which I explain with recourse to the parallelism between Buddhist *pīti* and Brahmanical *ānanda*.

Keywords: *pīti*, *vedanā*, happiness, pleasure, positive affect, *jhāna*, meditation, early Buddhism, Pali Buddhism

Introduction

When discussing *pīti*, some scholars of early Buddhism (Arbel 2017: 59; Bucknell 1993: 381; Gunaratana 1980: 82) specify that it is not a *vedanā*, but a *saṅkhāra*. In doing so, they are aligning themselves with the Theravāda interpretation.[2] While the early discourses do not always classify things into neat categories, we must approach them with the awareness that later exegeses disagreed on what category *pīti* belonged to. So, relying exclusively on the Theravādin view does not do justice to the early discourses, even the Pali *sutta*s. It can hinder seeing how *pīti* works in them, how it relates to other skilful positive affective states, and how the concept of *pīti* evolved in Pali literature.

Imagine a tomato. People think of it as a vegetable, even though botanically it is a fruit—a berry, to be specific. But given how I use tomatoes and how I use strawberries in the kitchen, I am unlikely to group them together in my mind, no matter my botanical knowledge. Similarly, we must emphasise how joy *functions* in the texts besides how it may (or may not) be defined and classified. For, in a way, the *sutta*s' undefined stance on joy foretells the later abhidharmic disagreement over classifying it.

I aim to establish that reading *pīti* as a feeling in the *sutta*s is very plausible and reveals correspondences between various descriptions of how spiritual progress is supposed to feel. If we go beyond 'category politics', we can see how even in the later Pali tradition *pīti* retains much in common with the feeling called *somanassa*—though of course, perfect synonyms rarely exist. While my

[2] This is not necessarily a criticism. Gunaratana, for example, is studying the *jhāna*s in the Theravāda tradition.

focus is the Pali tradition, I use other texts and existing comparative works when relevant to emphasise possibilities of interpretation and engage with *pīti* in a way that facilitates discussing positive affective states in early Buddhism.

This paper begins with the canonical raw material on *pīti*. Then it compares that data to scholarly views that *pīti* is mainly intense, even agitating, and bodily. Following this, the third section looks at the exegetical debate on classifying *pīti* and suggests why abhidharma schools may have ended up with different views. In the fourth section, I assess arguments for reading *pīti* in the Pali discourses as pleasant mental feeling and as a synonym of *somanassa*. I suggest both terms have roughly the same experiential referent, and in the fifth section I establish the centrality of such positive affective state in early Pali Buddhist soteriology. In the sixth and final section, I explore the parallelism between Buddhist *pīti* and Brahmanical *ānanda*, since I believe this can help us understand why and how the Pali *sutta*s use two different terms—*pīti* and *somanassa*—for the same affective experience.

1. What is this thing called joy (pīti)?

I translate *pīti* as 'joy'.[3] The PTS dictionary defines it as 'emotion of joy, delight, zest, exuberance' (Rhys Davids and Stede 1966: 462); Margaret Cone's (2020: 484) as 'joy, pleasure'; Stefan Baums' and Andrew Glass' dictionary of Gāndhārī renders *pridi* as 'happiness';[4] and for *prīti*, the Sanskrit dictionary of Monier-Williams (1994: 711) has 'any pleasurable sensation, pleasure, joy, gladness, satisfaction', 'joy at having done anything', as well as friendly disposition, affection, love, and 'joy or gratification personified'. So, what is this thing? Just once do the early discourses give us something like a definition. We find it in the Discourse on the Spiritual (*Nirāmisa Sutta*, SN 36.31) of the *Vedanā Saṃyutta*. This presents three types of joy: carnal, spiritual and beyond-spiritual.[5] First, the text explains carnal joy (*sāmisā pīti*) as follows:

[3] Many others have translated 'joy' (Anālayo 2019b; Gethin 2008: 28; Rhys Davids 2002: 2:84; Arbel 2017; Cousins 1973: 121; Bareau 1955, 175; Harvey 2018: 6). Others choose 'rapture' (Kuan 2005; Bronkhorst 2009: 124; Bodhi 2005), 'delight' (Walshe 1995: 95) or 'zest' (Bodhi and Narāda 2016; U Thittila 2002: 335).

[4] Available at https://gandhari.org/dictionary [Accessed: 13 November 2020].

[5] I choose the term 'spiritual' with some reservations, but it is quite common and it reflects the opposition between flesh (*āmisa*) and spirit, that is, what is not 'of the flesh'. Margaret Cone (2001: 318) gives 'not worldly; not physical or material; pure', and the PTS dictionary has 'free from sensual desires, disinterested, not material' (Rhys Davids and Stede 1966: 370).

> What are the five strands of sense desire? Forms known by the eye that are desired, pleasing, arousing … tactile sensations known by the body that are desired, pleasing, arousing. These are the five strands of sense desire. The joy that arises conditioned by the five strands of sense desire is called carnal joy.[6]

Secondly, spiritual joy (*nirāmisā pīti*) is identified as the first and second *jhāna*s. The third type, 'beyond-spiritual' joy (*nirāmisā nirāmisatarā pīti*), refers to 'the joy that arises when a mendicant who has eliminated the intoxicants reviews their mind free from lust, aversion, and delusion'.[7] A more phenomenological description of joy, together with pleasure,[8] is found in the verses of the elder Khitaka:

> So light is my body
> Touched by great joy and pleasure.
> Like cotton shaken by the wind,
> So much my body floats.[9]

Joy shows up mostly, and almost invariably, in descriptions of progress towards awakening. Thus, in the early discourses we find joy in four formulaic places: in descriptions of *jhāna*, in the feeling section of mindfulness of breathing, as the fourth awakening factor (*pītisambojjhaṅga*), and in a sequence I call 'the gladness formula'. We do not find it in *satipaṭṭhāna* instructions—

[6] SN iv 235: *katamā ca, bhikkhave, sāmisā pīti? pañc' ime, bhikkhave, kāmaguṇā. katame pañca? cakkhuviññeyyā rūpā iṭṭhā kantā manāpā piyarūpā kāmūpasaṃhitā rajanīyā … pe … kāyaviññeyyā phoṭṭhabbā iṭṭhā kantā manāpā piyarūpā kāmūpasaṃhitā rajanīyā. ime kho, bhikkhave, pañca kāmaguṇā. yā kho, bhikkhave, ime pañca kāmaguṇe paṭicca uppajjati pīti, ayaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, sāmisā pīti.* All translations from Pali texts are my own.

[7] SN iv 235.

[8] *Pīti* and *sukha* stand often, though not always, next to each other. In some contexts they appear to happen simultaneously (*jhāna*), in others sequentially (the gladness and '*bojjhaṅga* process' formulas), and still in others it is ambiguous (mindfulness of breathing). It is hard to tell how significant this is, but the terms are not equivalent, or at least that is not always a possibility. *Pīti* is mental in nature, as I argue below, whereas *sukha* can be both mental and bodily. This could suggest that the latter aspect is stressed when paired with *pīti*. The *sutta*s do not solve these questions.

[9] Th 104: *lahuko vata me kāyo, phuṭṭho ca pītisukhena vipulena. / tūlami vaeritaṃ mālutena, pilavatīva me kāyo ti.*

except in one *satipaṭṭhāna* text featuring the gladness formula[10]—nor in general definitions of *vedanā*. In what follows, I look first at formulaic, then non-formulaic appearances of joy.

To begin with, *pīti* appears in the first and second *jhāna*s. In the first, the pair 'joy and pleasure' (*pītisukha*) are said to be born of withdrawal (*viveka*) from the hindrances, whereas in the second one they are born of collectedness (*samādhi*). All traditions coincide in these features (Bucknell 2019, 394). Here is a stock passage for the first *jhāna*:

> Quite withdrawn from sense desires, withdrawn from unskilful qualities, they[11] enter and dwell in the first *jhāna*, which is the joy and pleasure born of withdrawal,[12] with thinking and reflection. They fill, drench and pervade their body with the joy and pleasure born of withdrawal, so that no part of the entire body is unpervaded with the joy and pleasure born of withdrawal.[13]

Secondly, we encounter joy in step five of mindfulness of breathing, the first of the *vedanā* section, immediately followed by pleasure. This is also shared by different transmission lineages (Anālayo 2007: 139). The mendicant trains as follows:

[10] SN v 156.

[11] While the subject in the Pali text is masculine ('*bhikkhu*'), Collett and Anālayo (2014) have argued this functions as a gender-inclusive term that addresses a broader audience, not just male mendicants/monastics. Today, this is expressed with the singular gender-neutral pronoun 'they', and I follow this habit in this paper.

[12] Often translators treat joy and pleasure (and thinking and reflection) as things that the first jhāna *has* or *is accompanied with*, rather than what it *consists of* or *is*. I take *pītisukhaṃ* as being in apposition with *paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ*, the implication being that 'first *jhāna*' is a name for a particular kind of joy and pleasure that the formula describes. As Rāhula (1978, 105) writes: 'a *dhyāna* is merely a designation for the arising of a certain number of psycho-physical qualities in a given combination. (...) For the convenience of linguistic expression we generally say that such and such a *dhyāna* has so many factors, but in fact we should say that such and such a *dhyāna* is the combination of such and such factors.'

[13] DN i 73: *so vivicc' eva kāmehi, vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkaṃ savicāraṃ vivekajaṃ pītisukhaṃ paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati. so imam eva kāyaṃ vivekajena pītisukhena abhisandeti parisandeti paripūreti parippharati, nāssa kiñci sabbāvato kāyassa vivekajena pītisukhena apphuṭaṃ hoti.*

> 'I will breathe in experiencing joy', 'I will breathe out experiencing joy', 'I will breathe in experiencing pleasure', 'I will breathe out experiencing pleasure'.[14]

Thirdly, joy is the fourth of the seven awakening factors. Here are two passages describing it:

> A: When a mendicant's energy is activated, spiritual joy arises. On that occasion the awakening factor of joy is activated in the mendicant, they cultivate it, and it becomes fully developed in them.[15]

> B: When there is joy with thinking and reflection, and when there is joy without thinking and reflection, that is the awakening factor of joy.[16]

Passage A shows it is spiritual joy that constitutes the awakening factor of joy. To identify this awakening factor with spiritual and therefore jhānic joy, as Arbel (2017: 107) has done based on an observation by Gethin (2001: 170–72), finds further support in passage B, which strongly suggests the first and second *jhāna*s, and in two other texts that define spiritual joy as jhānic joy: the *Nirāmisa Sutta* (SN 36.31), seen earlier, and the *Subha Sutta* (MN 99). The latter compares a fire that burns without depending on fuel to a joy that does not depend on sensory desire and unskilful qualities—the definition of spiritual joy—and explains it as the first and second *jhāna*s.[17] In spite of all this, Anālayo has argued that the joy awakening factor need

[14] MN iii 82: *pītipaṭisaṃvedī assasissāmī ti sikkhati, pītipaṭisaṃvedī passasissāmī ti sikkhati, sukhapaṭisaṃvedī assasissāmī ti sikkhati, sukhapaṭisaṃvedī passasissāmī ti sikkhati.*

[15] SN v 68: *yasmiṃ samaye, bhikkhave, bhikkhuno āraddhavīriyassa uppajjati pīti nirāmisā, pītisambojjhaṅgo tasmiṃ samaye bhikkhuno āraddho hoti, pītisambojjhaṅgaṃ tasmiṃ samaye bhikkhu bhāveti, pītisambojjhaṅgo tasmiṃ samaye bhikkhuno bhāvanāpāripūriṃ gacchati.* Also found at SN v 332, where it is addressed to Ānanda.

[16] SN v 111: *yada pi, bhikkhave, savitakkasavicārā pīti tada pi pītisambojjhaṅgo, yada pi avitakkaavicārā pīti tada pi pītisambojjhaṅgo.*

[17] MN ii 204: *katamā ca, māṇava, pīti aññatreva kāmehi aññatra akusalehi dhammehi? idha, māṇava, bhikkhu vivicceva kāmehi ... pe ... paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati. ayam pi kho, māṇava, pīti aññatreva kāmehi aññatra akusalehi dhammehi. puna c' aparaṃ, māṇava, bhikkhu vitakkavicārānaṃ vūpasamā ... pe ... dutiyaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati. ayam pi kho, māṇava, pīti aññatreva kāmehi aññatra akusalehi dhammehi.*

not be jhānic joy, for it can come from insight.[18] He points to some verses in the Dhammapada where contemplating the impermanence of the *khandha*s gives rise to joy and gladness (*pītipāmojja*).[19] However, it does not seem his inference is textually supported. The commentary does not see that joy as an awakening factor, instead glossing it as 'joy in the dharma, gladness in the dharma'.[20] It never calls that joy 'spiritual', whereas as we are seeing, the discourses *do* call the awakening factor of joy 'spiritual', and they explicitly define spiritual joy as jhānic joy.[21] Here we have a lot of consistent internal cross-references, fingers pointing at the same moon. Instead, Anālayo's example belongs to a sometimes ambiguous type of *pīti* that is skilful and ethical, yet it is not called spiritual, and which I address below.

The last of the formulaic places to house joy is 'the gladness formula':[22]

> When one is glad, joy is born. When the mind is joyful, the body relaxes. With a relaxed body, one experiences pleasure. When one experiences pleasure, the mind becomes collected.[23]

In the Fruits of the Ascetic Life (*Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, DN 2), this sequence is triggered when the mendicant sees (*samanupassati*) that the hindrances are

[18] Despite acknowledging that *pītisaṃbojjhaṅga* refers to *nirāmisā pīti*, he considers this need not be jhānic. He also contests generally that *jhāna* is attained by cultivating the awakening factors despite the overlap shown here (Anālayo 2006: 234 n. 17; 2017a: 133).

[19] Dhp 373–74: *suññāgāraṃ paviṭṭhassa, santacittassa bhikkhuno. / amānusī rati hoti, sammā dhammaṃ vipassato. / yato yato sammasati, khandhānaṃ udayabbayaṃ. / labhatī pītipāmojjaṃ, amataṃ taṃ vijānataṃ.*

20 Dhp-a iv 110: *pītipāmojjan ti evaṃ khandhānaṃ udayabbayaṃ sammasanto dhammapītiṃ dhammapāmojjañ ca labhati.*

[21] I cannot know if this was Anālayo's reasoning, but while it may seem logical to infer that a joy arising from insight, such as contemplating the impermanence of the *khandha*s, contributes to awakening and is thus an awakening factor, even in that case I do not see why this would weaken the association between the awakening factor of joy and the label 'spiritual'—and therefore jhānic. Anālayo seems to rely on a preconception that *jhāna* happens from and only from '*samatha* meditation' and cannot be triggered by insight, a preconception Arbel (2017; 2015: 179–206) challenges.

[22] The gladness formula appears at: DN i 73, DN i 182, DN i 207, DN i 250, DN iii 242, DN iii 279, MN i 37, MN i 283, SN iv 78, SN iv 351, SN v 156, SN v 398, AN i 243, AN iii 21, AN iii 284, AN v 329, AN v 333. In some of these discourses it appears multiple times.

[23] DN i 73: *pamuditassa pīti jāyati, pītimanassa kāyo passambhati, passaddhakāyo sukhaṃ vedeti, sukhino cittaṃ samādhiyati.*

absent in them[24]—in other words, that their mind is quite skilful. The gladness formula, which appears in Chinese texts as well and may even be more emphasised there (Sujato 2012: 321), strengthens further the connections we have seen. First, it is virtually identical to a segment of the awakening factors: joy → relaxation → collectedness. So much so that, in a presentation of this teaching Rupert Gethin (2001: 168ff) termed 'the *bojjhaṅga* process formula', pleasure (*sukha*) pops up between relaxation (*passaddhi*) and collectedness (*samādhi*) and thus gets included in the unfolding of the awakening factors.[25] Secondly, the gladness formula is also the central segment of transcendental dependent arising (*lokuttara paṭiccasamuppāda*), also called the 'spiral path',[26] where faith (*saddhā*) bridges the *lokiya* chain of dependent arising and the gladness sequence, which continues to liberation.[27] To sum up: the gladness formula is where most models of progress to awakening overlap.[28]

As for non-formulaic appearances of *pīti*, for carnal joy I have only found two examples. The first is the *Lakkhaṇa Sutta*, which speaks of layman's joy (*gihissa pīti*) when illustrating the prosperous life of a king who has many children.[29] The second is in the opening poem of the *Aṭṭhakavagga*, the *Kāma Sutta*, where it portrays the joy of succeeding at getting sense pleasures.[30] While neither of these use the term 'carnal' (*sāmisa*), they clearly match descriptions

[24] DN i 73: *tass' ime pañca nīvaraṇe pahīne attani samanupassato pāmojjaṃ jāyati, pamuditassa pīti jāyati, pītimanassa kāyo passambhati, passaddhakāyo sukhaṃ vedeti, sukhino cittaṃ samādhiyati. so vivicc' eva kāmehi, vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkaṃ savicāraṃ vivekajaṃ pītisukhaṃ paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati.*

[25] E.g., SN v 68.

[26] On the spiral path, see Bodhi (1980), Attwood (2013) and Jones (2019).

[27] For a good survey of all the variants of this sequence, see Attwood (2013: 6–13).

[28] Peter Harvey (2018: 3–4) explains the gladness formula as 'what later came to be called access (*upacāra*) concentration', following the commentary to the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*—Sv i 217. This view relies a lot on that particular context, where the process of the gladness formula is followed by the process of *jhāna*, a phenomenon exclusive to the *sīlakkhandha vagga* (DN 2, 9, 10 & 13). I argue that these two processes rather cover the same ground. Yet texts can only be sequential, they cannot say several things simultaneously, so if equivalent formulas meet in one text they will inevitably stand in succession, leading to interpretations like the one followed by Harvey. But I see no reason why the *jhāna* formula, instead of describing something happening *after* the gladness formula, in temporal succession, could not just be explaining it further. Lance Cousins (2022: 33), who takes the same view as Harvey, says the gladness formula is absent 'in some (or all?) other recensions' of this text, but provides no references.

[29] DN iii 162.

[30] Sn 772.

of carnal joy—and also of domestic happiness (*gehasita somanassa*), which is relevant for the third section. More common are instances that refer to an 'ethical', skilful joy: *pīti* felt in an encounter with a Buddha[31] or the community of mendicants,[32] upon hearing the word *sambuddha*,[33] or in connection to faith directed at Gotama;[34] *pītisomanassa* felt by gods listening to the praise of Sāriputta[35] and by a Koliyan man reflecting on how the Buddha's words helped his wife give birth;[36] and *pītipāmojja* arising in Channa when he is reassured of his capacity to grasp the teachings,[37] arising in a mind with faith, ethics, learning, generosity, and wisdom,[38] or arising through mindfully observing the bundles of clinging (*upādānakkhandha*) arise and pass away.[39] *Pītipāmojja* is also used to describe an affective state that the Buddha instructs disciples to dwell in when, upon review (*paccavekkhamāno*), they know (*jānāti*) that there are no unskilful qualities in their mind regarding sense experience,[40] that an act they have done is not harmful but skilful,[41] or other examples of knowing that the mind is skilful.[42]

All examples in the paragraph above show a skilful, ethical *pīti* which is not called spiritual (*nirāmisā*), and yet it is certainly not carnal (*sāmisā*). This is probably because they mostly do not portray meditation, whereas it

[31] Sn 692, MN ii 45.

[32] MN iii 258, SN i 71, SN i 126.

[33] Sn 1000.

[34] Sn 1149.

[35] SN i 146.

[36] Ud 16.

[37] SN iii 134.

[38] AN iii 181.

[39] Dhp 373–74.

[40] MN iii 294: *sace pana, Sāriputta, bhikkhu paccavekkhamāno evaṃ jānāti 'yena cāhaṃ maggena gāmaṃ piṇḍāya pāvisiṃ (...) natthi me tattha cakkhuviññeyyesu rūpesu chando vā rāgo vā doso vā moho vā paṭighaṃ vāpi cetaso' ti, tena, Sāriputta, bhikkhunā ten' eva pītipāmojjena vihātabbaṃ ahorattānusikkhinā kusalesu dhammesu.*

[41] MN i 417: *sace pana tvaṃ, Rāhula, paccavekkhamāno evaṃ jāneyyāsi 'yaṃ kho ahaṃ idaṃ kāyena kammaṃ akāsiṃ idaṃ me kāyakammaṃ nevattabyābādhāyapi saṃvattati, na parabyābādhāya pi saṃvattati, na ubhayabyābādhāya pi saṃvattati, kusalaṃ idaṃ kāyakammaṃ sukhudrayaṃ sukhavipākan' ti, ten' eva tvaṃ, Rāhula, pītipāmojjena vihareyyāsi ahorattānusikkhī kusalesu dhammesu.*

[42] MN i 98 (reflecting on one's relationship to views), AN iii 307 & iv 321 (being mindful of death).

is in meditative settings that 'carnal' and 'spiritual' tend to be contrasted.[43] Nevertheless, they strengthen a canonical overall image of *pīti* as a mainly positive, pleasant quality. Essentially, *pīti* describes a religious sentiment: in both formulaic and non-formulaic instances, it tends to arise in connection to something skilful and religiously significant, be that a person, an action, or a mind state.

2. Intensity, body and soul

Here I address two points of interpretation about the nature of *pīti*: first, whether it is intense and agitating, and secondly, whether it is mental or physical. (There is a third point about whether *pīti* is linked to anticipating something or to experiencing it either in the present or in review. I address this point in the next section because it relates to classifying *pīti* as a *vedanā* or a *saṅkhāra*.)

As for the first issue, I believe the discourses paint a picture of joy as something more uplifting than agitating—let us remember Khitaka's poetic reference to the lightness of cotton, as well as examples from the previous section such as encountering a Buddha or being reassured of one's capacity to grasp the teachings. Yet many scholars say *pīti* is intrinsically or mainly intense and even agitating, often in a comparison with *sukha*, which is viewed as calmer (Guenther 1974: 51ff; Anālayo 2015: 61; Cousins 1973: 122; Griffiths 1983: 60; Harvey 2018: 7; Payutto 2017: 1066). Since this difference in intensity is not explicit in the *jhāna* formulas or in mindfulness of breathing, where does the idea come from? It could be explained, on the one hand, because of joy's location in the awakening factors—between energy (*viriya*) and relaxation (*passaddhi*)—and on the other, due to how the concept of *pīti* evolved in Pali literature.

According to the *Aggi Sutta* (SN 46.53),[44] joy is an energising awakening factor: the meditator should cultivate it when their energy is low in order to add vitality. But in both this model and the gladness formula joy flows into

[43] There can be ambiguity sometimes, as in the example of observing arising and passing away in the *khandha*s, which one could argue *is* a meditative exercise. Anālayo uses it to argue that the joy awakening factor need not be jhānic, as I have discussed earlier in this section.

[44] SN v 113.

calm—because, say the commentaries, one has no distress when one is joyful.[45] So joy is also calm inducing; it is distress that seems to bring up agitation. What might influence the aforementioned common scholarly view? If joy leads to relaxation (*passaddhi*), joy must be more agitated than relaxation itself or whatever follows it, which is often *sukha*. One reasons: therefore, *sukha* must be calmer; and in turn, this feeds the image of *pīti* as agitating. Cousins (1973: 120–22), who takes this perspective himself, grounds it in two things: the expression *cetaso uppilāvita*(*tta*) or 'mental excitement', and the commentarial view that *pīti* is the delight at attaining the desired object while *sukha* is the experiencing of its flavour. But a difference in intensity does not follow from this commentarial distinction—which I tackle in the next section. As for 'mental excitement', the expression appears in three early texts, mostly referring to the elation that may arise from being praised.[46] The one time that mental excitement explicitly refers to *pīti* and to a context of formal meditation is a passage from the *Brahmajāla Sutta* (DN 1) that discusses how each *jhāna* is coarse compared to the next:[47] the joyful mind (*pītigataṃ cetaso*) of the second *jhāna* is described as *uppilāvitatta*. Since this is a comparison in a meditative context we could be speaking of very subtle differences, which then get magnified. Moreover, that the passage calls out joy in particular rather than mentioning the second *jhāna* as a whole, and that joy falls away in the third *jhāna* while pleasure stays on, may lead to regarding the latter as calmer than the former—at least it must be more *capable* of calm, have more 'quiet range'.

On top of this, the *Visuddhimagga* presents a gradation of joy in intensity and pervasiveness whose lowest of five levels already makes body hairs rise, albeit moderately, while the next one is compared to lightning flashes.[48] Lance Cousins (1973: 130 n. 46) observed that this presentation is not found (nor anticipated, I would add) in the discourses, and is exclusively Theravādin[49]—although the Sarvāstivādins also acknowledge a gradation in

[45] Sv i 217: *pītimanassa kāyo passambhatī ti pītisampayuttacittassa puggalassa nāmakāyo passambhati, vigatadaratho hoti.*

[46] DN i 3, MN i 140, Ud 37. In these instances, it is connected to the terms *ānanda* and *somanassa*, certainly close to *pīti*, as I address later on in the dissertation. The expression also appears at Mil 183.

[47] DN i 37: *yad eva tattha pītigataṃ cetaso uppilāvitattaṃ, etenetaṃ oḷārikaṃ akkhāyati.*

[48] Vism 143 (IV 94–99).

[49] See Cousins (1973: 120–22) for an overview of the commentarial view on *pīti*.

that they mention a joy in approaching the first *dhyāna* which is unlike that of *dhyāna* (La Vallée Poussin 1923: 180, n. 1). Compared to the canonical data gathered up until this point, the Theravādin 'five joys' shade towards the excited side of the spectrum. I find the term 'uplifting' more fitting for the early conception of *pīti*—it even connects to literal meanings of *uppilavati*, to float or rise up (Cone 2001: 497; Rhys Davids and Stede 1966: 152). Such uplift can of course get intense and shade into exhilaration, and Theravāda exegesis seems to have developed along those lines: it came to associate joy mostly with the intense segment of the whole range, but there is little indication that the *sutta*s did the same. I am not saying the exegetical view departs drastically from what we find in the discourses, but its emphasis is not so evident in them either, so it does not seem justified to project the later conception back onto the discourses.

The Theravādin 'five joys' also relate to the second issue of interpretation, for they are very bodily. Certainly in the *jhāna*s the meditator feels *pīti* (and *sukha*) with the whole body,[50] though it arises from mental contact. The Theravādin view has led Peter Harvey (2018: 8) to emphasise the physicality of *pīti* versus the mental nature of *sukha*. Here we can identify a shift of emphasis in how joy is presented, since I would argue that the early discourses actually stress the mental nature of *pīti*. We shift from speaking of joy as a mental brightening to a bodily energy that can be agitated. The gladness formula says: 'when there is joy *in the mind*, the body relaxes.' Several examples from the previous section showed that often joy arises from a skilful mind, even from the practitioner's knowledge of that. These things do not mean that joy cannot have a physical counterpart,[51] but that it is born of mental contact and the mental aspect is emphasised.

The gladness formula describes a mind-body feedback loop of increasing calm and well-being, and I take *pīti* to be on the mental side and *sukha* on the bodily side. Some commentaries identify this *sukha* as both mental and bodily,[52] others as only mental,[53] but mostly they de-emphasise bodily experience by interpreting *kāya* in its sense of collection or group (Cone 2001: 670) as the

[50] DN i 73.

[51] Indeed, in *jhāna* the meditator suffuses the body with both joy and pleasure, as seen in the stock *jhāna* formula above, see also Th 382.

[52] Sv i 217: *sukhaṃ vedetī ti kāyikam pi cetasikam pi sukhaṃ vedayati.*

[53] Ps i 174: *passaddhakāyo sukhan ti evaṃ vūpasantakāyadaratho cetasikaṃ sukhaṃ paṭisaṃvedeti.*

mental *khandha*s (*nāmakāya*)[54] or, in another context, as the 'body of in-breath and out-breath'.[55] This may be due to the exegetical idea that *jhāna* does not admit sensory awareness.[56] But I would apply the following philosophical razor: when a phenomenology of meditation says that a mental quality affects the body, the body just means the body, even if only a *subtle* or *perceived* body—or to use a term by Harvey (2018: 6), the 'experienced body'. While discussing this in more depth would be a distraction, we can summarise that the Buddhist textual tradition tries to account for the *embodied* nature of meditative experience but without giving the impression that it arises from stimulating the sense of touch, which is the specific meaning of *kāya* in the abhidharma.[57] What is clear is that, in the Pali discourses, *pīti* arises from mental contact and there is no evident emphasis on its bodily manifestation, at least not in comparison with *sukha*.

3. You say vedanā, I say saṅkhāra

Let us move on to how systematic Buddhist thought conceived of joy (*pīti*), beginning with the Theravādins. The *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* classifies joy in the bundle of conditioning factors (*saṅkhārakkhandha*),[58] as do the *Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha*[59] and, implicitly, the *Vibhaṅga*.[60] Buddhaghosa treats joy as a *saṅkhāra* and defines it as 'the satisfaction of obtaining a desirable object'.[61] He distinguishes it from *sukha* using the following simile: a tired person in the desert would feel *pīti* upon seeing a pond, whereas *sukha* would be the satisfaction of actually drinking from it. This simile, cited by virtually every scholar discussing *pīti*, may have shaped the Theravādin conception of *pīti*, or at least the scholarly understanding of it. Karunadasa (2010: 133) writes:

[54] Sv i 217: *pītimanassa kāyo passambhatī ti pītisampayuttacittassa puggalassa nāmakāyo passambhati, vigatadaratho hoti.*

[55] Spk i 187: *passaddhakāyo ti catutthajjhānena assāsapassāsakāyassa passaddhattā passaddhakāyo*.

[56] Also to not suggest *jhāna* can be achieved by regularly stimulating the body.

[57] Some discussion of this embodiment can be found in Anālayo (2014: 47) and Harvey (2018: 14).

[58] Dhs 17.

[59] See Bodhi and Narāda (2016, 57 (I 18–20)).

[60] Vibh 257 explains *pīti* as *pāmojja* and without mentioning feeling, which it does when explaining *sukha*.

[61] Vism 145 (IV 100): *iṭṭhārammaṇapaṭilābhatuṭṭhi pīti* (...) *saṅkhārakkhandhasaṅgahitā pīti.* As I argue in the next section, this hardly differs from the canonical definition of 'domestic happiness' (*gehasita somanassa*)—a *vedanā*.

> Pīti is a conative factor included in the aggregate of mental formations. Sukha is a variety of feeling and is therefore included in the aggregate of feeling. What the Theravādins mean by pīti is not pleasant feeling but pleasurable interest or zest. It is a conative factor dissociated from any hedonic content.

I find his 'dissociated from any hedonic content' incoherent with characterising joy as *pleasurable* interest or zest, but besides that, he reads Buddhaghosa's definition of joy as 'delight that *results in* attaining a desired object' (my emphasis).[62] There seems to be no grammatical justification for his rendering, making me wonder if it is rather influenced by Buddhaghosa's imagery, which suggests anticipation. Similarly, Gunaratana (1980: 82) speaks of *pīti* as 'not hedonic but directive' and includes it in the *saṅkhārakkhandha*, pointing out how Shwe Zan Aung (1910: 243) explains it as interest in an object felt desirable. And Bucknell (1993: 381) too treats *pīti* as 'a conative factor (placed under *saṅkhāra-khandha* in the Abhidhamma classification)'. All this reflects the Theravāda abhidhamma understanding but is not much evident in the discourses, as surveyed in the previous section. In the discourses, *pīti* is clearly a hedonic factor related to the present or reviewed experience of a desired object, not the anticipation of it—the conative or directive element that seems to support considering it a *saṅkhāra* is just not there.

In contrast to the Theravādins, the Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣika school considers joy (*prīti*) to be a *vedanā* and treats it as a synonym of happiness (*saumanasya*). Occasionally, they even have a *prītīndriya* instead of *somanassindriya* (Dhammajoti 2009a: 96). Their view is found in Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (from here onwards, AKB).[63] The equation seems to be so self-evident for the Vaibhāṣika that they are shocked when questioned: 'What else would it [*prīti*] be?' (*kim anyat bhavatu*).[64] It is less clear what opinion Vasubandhu himself holds, or who is his interlocutor holding the view that joy is *not* pleasant mental feeling, if not an account of Theravādins. According to P'ou Kouang and Fa Bao, it is the Sthaviras.[65] Louis de la Vallée Poussin (1923: vol. V, 159) assigns it to the Sautrāntikas, a view followed by Gethin (2001: 155).

[62] He cites the Pali slightly different (*iṭṭhārammaṇapaṭilābhe tuṭṭhi pīti*), although I think this makes no difference.

[63] See La Vallée Poussin (1923: vol. II, 114; vol. V, 147, 151).

[64] AKB 440.14 (La Vallée Poussin 1923: vol. V, 159).

[65] See footnote 3 in La Vallée Poussin.

On their part, the Yogācārins did not consider *prīti* a separate dharma, so they must have understood it as pleasant mental feeling (*saumanasya*)—are there other candidates? Xuanzang assigns *sukha* (樂) and *somanassa* (喜) to the first two *dhyāna*s (Li 2023: 704). Yogācārins thus agree with the Sarvāstivādins. Interestingly, in a passage of Asaṅga's *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, Pradhan's Sanskrit reconstruction has *saumanasya* while Walpola Rāhula argued that *prīti* suits the context best because it mentions *dhyāna* (Bon-Weibb and Rāhula 2001: 108). In a footnote, Rāhula comments that '*Prīti* is a member of *dhyāna* but not of [sic] *saumanasya*'. One could wonder if Rāhula was influenced by the Theravāda take on this. Lastly, the *Tattvasiddhi-śāstra*, whose school affiliation is disputed, names *prīti* as a dharma separate from *vedanā* like the Theravādins (Lin 2015: 82).

In recounting the Buddhist disagreement on joy, the AKB may contain the clue as to why different schools put joy in different baskets. It could be that the various positions relate to each school's attempt to make sense of *jhāna/dhyāna*. All, except the Dārṣṭāntikas, need to interpret dhyānic *sukha* as not bodily, since they hold that sensory awareness does not happen in *dhyāna*.[66] Since dhyānic *sukha* cannot mean bodily pleasant feeling, now two factors compete for the position of mental pleasant feeling—*sukha* and *prīti*—and only one can get the job. The Vaibhāṣikas give it to *prīti* and relocate *sukha* to the relaxation (*praśrabdhi*) department.[67] Another view in the AKB, from an unnamed school, chooses *sukha* over *prīti*, and then argues that the latter is not *vedanā*. So the reason both this unidentified school and the Theravādins regard joy as a separate dharma could well be that they take *sukha* to mean *somanassa/saumanasya* in the *dhyāna*s.[68] Vasubandhu spells this out: if *prīti* is other than *sukha*, then it must also be other than *saumanasya*.[69] Joy becomes the victim of the previous doctrinal commitment that sensory awareness does not happen in *dhyāna*. Lacking such a commitment, the Dārṣṭāntikas remain the only ones who take dhyānic *sukha* to be bodily.[70] Strangely, though, they argue that for the first three *dhyāna*s there is no mental pleasure whatsoever,

[66] AKB 438.24 (La Vallée Poussin 1923: vol. V, 150ff).

[67] AKB 438.21–26.

[68] Vibh 257: *tattha katamaṃ sukhaṃ? yaṃ cetasikaṃ sātaṃ cetasikaṃ sukhaṃ cetosamphassajaṃ sātaṃ sukhaṃ vedayitaṃ cetosamphassajā sātā sukhā vedanā: idaṃ vuccati sukhaṃ.*

[69] AKB 440.14–16 (La Vallée Poussin 1923: vol. V, 159).

[70] AKB 439.01–07 (La Vallée Poussin 1923: vol. V, 151ff).

but only bodily pleasure. I wonder if this is why La Vallée Poussin sees the Dārṣṭāntikas—often identified with the Sautrāntikas[71]—as holding that *prīti* is not *saumanasya*. Because, on the other hand, they could see it as *saumanasya* if they wanted to, whereas other schools *cannot* unless they shuffle other dharmas around.

To summarise, there were broadly two understandings of joy (*pīti*) among early Buddhist interpreters: those who thought of it as a *vedanā* (Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣika, Yogācāra and possibly Dārṣṭāntika) and those who saw it as a *saṅkhāra* (Theravāda, unidentified school). It is a plausible hypothesis that their view ultimately stems from how they conceived of *jhāna/dhyāna*, which required them to (re)interpret *jhāna/dhyāna* factors accordingly. For there seems to be no other apparent benefit to classifying joy as a *saṅkhāra* than solving these technical problems of interpretation. Even Buddhaghosa's definition of joy, cited at the beginning of this section, could easily be read as describing a *vedanā*. Yet since this was not an option for Theravādins, they may have needed to introduce a distinction—the element of anticipation—to justify considering it a *saṅkhāra*.

The status of joy has attracted little interest from scholars of early Buddhism, who tend to simply follow the Theravāda tradition.[72] Keren Arbel (2017: 59) argues that Buddhaghosa's understanding of *pīti* as a *saṅkhāra* fits the early discourses given its mental nature. But this is not enough justification, for it does not rule out mental feelings. In contrast, Tse-Fu Kuan (2005: 302) agrees with the Sarvāstivādins and others that *pīti* should be classified as a feeling, and Robert Buswell (2018: 78) suggests seeing it as a form of spiritual feeling (*nirāmisā vedanā*).[73] However, Kuan adds, the early discourses do not support the Sarvāstivāda view that joy refers to the faculty of happiness (*somanassindriya*). Perhaps Kuan wants to be cautious here, but if joy is a feeling, can it be anything other than pleasant mental feeling? Joy is clearly of a pleasant hedonic tone and, in terms of origin, mental—and is that not the definition of the pleasant feeling known as the faculty of happiness?

> This is called the faculty of happiness: mental pleasure and

[71] On the relationship between these two school names, see Dhammajoti (2016: 230–33).

[72] Bucknell (1993: 381), Cousins (1973: 120ff), Guenther (1974: 51–57), Gunaratana (1980: 82). Guenther mentions the different interpretation of *prīti* and *sukha* in the AKB, but does not go beyond that.

[73] See also Meyers (2012: 275).

> comfort, the pleasant and agreeable feeling born from mental contact.[74]

> Anything that is experienced bodily or mentally as pleasant or agreeable is pleasant feeling.[75]

Joy (*pīti*) falls within these definitions. Even if we understood it as a subtype of pleasant mental feeling, it functions similarly and inhabits similar spaces as does happiness (*somanassa*). In the following section, I continue where Kuan stopped and offer some arguments for why accepting at least a rough equivalence between *pīti* and *somanassa* makes more sense than not doing so, while supporting the thesis of *pīti* as *vedanā* more broadly.

4. Come joy or come happiness

Here I explain why I think it reasonable to regard *pīti* in the early discourses as a *vedanā*,[76] roughly synonymous with *somanassa*. To begin with, carnal joy (*sāmisā pīti*) and domestic happiness (*gehasita domanassa*)—which is a *vedanā*—are defined very similarly. Let us remember carnal joy:

> What are the five strands of sense desire? Forms known by the eye that are desired, pleasing, arousing … tactile sensations known by the body that are desired, pleasing, arousing. These are the five strands of sense desire. The joy that arises conditioned by the five strands of sense desire is called carnal joy.[77]

---

[74] SN v 209: *katamañ ca bhikkhave somanassindriyaṃ? yaṃ kho bhikkhave cetasikaṃ sukhaṃ cetasikaṃ sātaṃ manosamphassajaṃ sukhaṃ sātaṃ vedayitaṃ, idaṃ vuccati bhikkhave somanassindriyaṃ.*

[75] MN i 302: *yaṃ kho, āvuso Visākha, kāyikaṃ vā cetasikaṃ vā sukhaṃ sātaṃ vedayitaṃ ayaṃ sukhā vedanā.*

[76] On the notion of *vedanā* in the *sutta*s, see Heim (2021) and Font (2023: chpt. 1). In the latter, I defend that something belongs to this category when its hedonic aspect dominates; it does not depend on whether something is a physical or mental sensation, a mood or even a thought, nor on its intensity or duration.

[77] SN iv 235: *katamā ca, bhikkhave, sāmisā pīti? pañc' ime, bhikkhave, kāmaguṇā. katame pañca? cakkhuviññeyyā rūpā iṭṭhā kantā manāpā piyarūpā kāmūpasaṃhitā rajanīyā … pe … kāyaviññeyyā phoṭṭhabbā iṭṭhā kantā manāpā piyarūpā kāmūpasaṃhitā rajanīyā. ime kho, bhikkhave, pañca kāmaguṇā. yā kho, bhikkhave, ime pañca kāmaguṇe paṭicca uppajjati pīti, ayaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, sāmisā pīti.*

Now let us compare it with domestic happiness:

> Happiness arises for one who considers it a gain to obtain forms known by the eye that are desired, pleasing, connected to worldly matter … phenomena known by the mind that are desired, pleasing, connected to worldly matter; or for one who recalls those previously obtained that have gone, ceased, changed. Such a happiness is called domestic happiness.[78]

Both passages use almost the same adjectives (*iṭṭha*, *kanta*, *manāpa*) to denote the objects' desirable and pleasing nature. I would argue they describe the same sort of pleasant feeling that arises from the valued acquisition or consumption of sense experience.[79] In other words, both 'domestic' and 'carnal' describe feelings conditioned by an unskilful perception. A linguistic point hiding in the *Nirāmisa Sutta* supports this: carnal joy, pleasure and equanimity are described using the phrase *ime pañca kāmaguṇe paṭicca uppajjati* ('conditioned by the five strands of sense desire there arises …'), which is also used for joy in the *Subha Sutta* (MN 99).[80] I would argue that the language and structure of this phrase logically require a *vedanā.* In fact, all other thirteen occurrences of this phrase in the *sutta*s are followed by a *vedanā.*[81]

Moving on to the skilful, in the Fruits of the Ascetic Life (DN 2), right before one realises that the hindrances are absent, the discourse compares the hindrances to being ill or in servitude, and abandoning them to recovering one's health or gaining freedom, among other similes.[82] It then relates how the healthy or freed person, thinking of

[78] MN iii 217: *cakkhuviññeyyānaṃ rūpānaṃ iṭṭhānaṃ kantānaṃ manāpānaṃ manoramānaṃ lokāmisapaṭisaṃyuttānaṃ paṭilābhaṃ vā paṭilābhato samanupassato pubbe vā paṭiladdhapubbaṃ atītaṃ niruddhaṃ vipariṇataṃ samanussarato uppajjati somanassaṃ.*

[79] We have also encountered this feeling under the alternative name of 'layman's joy' (*gihissa pīti*, DN iii 162), a lexical midpoint between *gehasita somanassa* and *sāmisa pīti*. *Gihi*, layman or householder, is related to Sanskrit *gṛha* and Pali *geha* meaning house, from where we get *gehasita*. It is usually contrasted with *pabbajita*, ascetic, whereas *gehasita* pairs with *nekkhammasita* (Cone 2010: 53; Rhys Davids and Stede 1966: 250).

[80] MN ii 203.

[81] MN i 85, MN i 92, MN i 398, MN i 454, MN ii 43, MN iii 233, SN iv 225, AN iv 415, plus the other occurrences in the *Nirāmisa Sutta* itself (SN iv 235).

[82] The similes begin at D i 72.

their newfound desirable condition, would obtain gladness (*labhetha pāmojjaṃ*) and happiness (*adhigaccheyya somanassaṃ*). Like a trailer of the full movie that is about to screen, starring the gladness formula and the *jhāna*s, this is a partly overlapping description where *somanassa*, instead of *pīti*, follows *pāmojja*.

Another example of *pīti* and *somanassa* as interchangeable or equivalent is as follows:

> Realising the transiency of forms, their change, fading, and ceasing, for one who truly sees with perfect wisdom that all forms, both before and now, are transient, unsatisfactory, and subject to change, happiness arises.[83]

This defines renunciant happiness (*nekkhammasita somanassa*). But in the Dhammapada this insight is connected to the arising of *pīti* and *pāmojja* instead of *somanassa*:

> Because of thoroughly knowing
> the rise and fall of the bundles,
> they acquire joy and gladness
> —they know this as the deathless.[84]

While one passage uses the template of the six sense fields (*saḷāyatana*) and the other that of the bundles (*khandha*), it does not seem the insights differ really—and crucially, they are both 'insight' exercises. It seems the terminology 'carnal/spiritual' and 'domestic/renunciant' are themselves more or less equivalent and interchangeable, as Anālayo (2009: 84; 2013: §VII.5) and Boisvert (1995: 74–76) have observed. The *Cūḷavedalla Sutta* (MN 44) supports this. There, Dhammadinnā presents three feelings that are not conditioned by the habitual tendencies (*anusaya*) and should be cultivated. She identifies the skilful pleasant feeling as the first *jhāna*—that is, *spiritual*

[83] MN iii 217: *rūpānaṃ tv eva aniccataṃ viditvā vipariṇāmavirāganirodhaṃ, pubbe c' eva rūpā etarahi ca sabbe te rūpā aniccā dukkhā vipariṇāmadhammā ti evametaṃ yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya passato uppajjati somanassaṃ.*

[84] Dhp 374: *yato yato sammasati / khandhānaṃ udayabbayaṃ; / labhatī pītipāmojjaṃ / amataṃ taṃ vijānataṃ.*

joy and pleasure (*nirāmisā pīti* and *nirāmisa sukha*)[85]—whereas the skilful unpleasant feeling is explained with a passage that elsewhere[86] refers to *renunciant* unhappiness (*gehasita domanassa*):

> 'When will I enter and dwell in those spheres in which the noble ones enter and dwell now?' For one who establishes such a yearning for the unsurpassed liberations, unhappiness arises conditioned by it.[87]

Lastly, Dhammadinnā's skilful neutral feeling is the fourth *jhāna*—that is, *spiritual* equanimity (*nirāmisā upekkhā*).[88] As we can see, she switches back and forth smoothly from one terminology to the other, even though it is clear that certain terms settled into particular contexts.[89] On the basis of this and the previous equation of carnal joy and domestic happiness, it is hardly a leap to consider that spiritual joy (*nirāmisā pīti*) may more or less correspond to renunciant happiness (*nekkhammasita somanassa*). Perhaps the latter stresses the cognitive dimension and the former its felt aspect, but these need not be too different anyway: insight into the nature and drawbacks of sense desire is linked to renunciant happiness and helps settle the mind into *jhāna*, which is a spiritual pleasant feeling—see the examples of the *Tapussa* and *Nibbānasukha suttas* in the next section. In short, in both their skilful and unskilful strands, it

[85] *Nirāmisā pīti* is defined as the first and second *jhāna*s, and *nirāmisa sukha* as the first three *jhāna*s. SN iv 236: *idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu vivicceva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkaṃ savicāraṃ vivekajaṃ pītisukhaṃ paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati.* (...) *dutiyaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati. ayaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, nirāmisā pīti.* (...) *idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu vivicceva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkaṃ savicāraṃ vivekajaṃ pītisukhaṃ paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati.* (...) *dutiyaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati.* (...) *tatiyaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati. idaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, nirāmisaṃ sukhaṃ.*

[86] MN iii 219.

[87] MN i 303–04: *'kudāssu nāmāhaṃ tadāyatanaṃ upasampajja viharissāmi yadariyā etarahi āyatanaṃ upasampajja viharantī' ti iti anuttaresu vimokkhesu pihaṃ upaṭṭhāpayato uppajjati pihāppaccayā domanassaṃ.* The only difference with the passage at MN iii 218 is the odd spelling *pihāppaccayā/pihapaccayā*.

[88] SN iv 237: *idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu sukhassa ca pahānā, dukkhassa ca pahānā, pubbeva somanassadomanassānaṃ atthaṅgamā, adukkhamasukhaṃ upekkhāsatipārisuddhiṃ catutthaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati. ayaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, nirāmisā upekkhā.*

[89] Keren Arbel has linked renunciant unhappiness to the second and third *jhāna*s. However, as contended by Anālayo (2016: 276), this is a dubious claim. An argument he does not bring up is how the *Pīti Sutta* (at AN iii 207) says the joy of seclusion, i.e. the first *jhāna*, is devoid of pain and sadness connected to the skilful.

seems reasonable to consider that happiness (*somanassa*) and joy (*pīti*) inhabit the same 'space' and have the same experiential referent, or almost.

Indirectly, these correspondences support the plausibility of reading joy as a feeling in the Pali *sutta*s. Treating joy as a feeling is further suggested by two 'variables' of joy: the analysis into carnal and spiritual itself, and whether it is accompanied by thinking (*vitakka*) and reflection (*vicāra*). The latter is a subclassification of spiritual joy, which, as seen in the first section, means jhānic/awakening-factor joy. While some could argue this is a mark of *samādhi* in general,[90] to me it seems to qualify the felt, affective dimension of experience specifically. In Sakka's Questions (*Sakkapañha Sutta*, DN 21), the Buddha sifts happiness (*somanassa*), unhappiness (*domanassa*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*) each into two piles: those types that should not be developed and those that should be. Among the latter, the Buddha declares that those without thinking and reflection are better.[91] Then the text moves on to other phenomena—some of them, like bodily and verbal conduct (*kāyasamācāra*, *vacīsamācāra*), quite identifiable with the bundle of *saṅkhāra*—but to none does it apply the distinction of 'with or without thinking and reflection'.

Regarding the analysis into carnal and spiritual, as far as I know nowhere do the Pali *sutta*s apply it to other categories like *saññā* or *saṅkhāra*, but only to *vedanā*.[92] 'Carnal' and 'spiritual' show up, famously, under the contemplation of feelings (*vedanānupassanā*) in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10),[93] as well as in two discourses of the *Vedanā Saṃyutta*.[94] The *Nirāmisa Sutta* (SN 36.31), which is one of them, applies that analysis to liberation (*vimokkha*) as well—and liberation is not a *vedanā*. But we must note this is the single one occurrence in the whole of the early discourses of such an idea.[95]

However, beyond quantitative arguments, this evidence is not without

[90] DN iii 219, SN iv 360, SN v 111, AN iv 299.

[91] DN ii 278.

[92] Morrison (2001: 107) says other elements are applied the label *āmisa*. These are listed in AN i 92–94 as follows (in order): *dāna*, *yāga*, *cāga*, *pariccāga*, *bhoga*, *sambhoga*, *saṃvibhāga*, *saṅgaha*, *anuggaha*, *anukampā*, *santhāra*, *paṭisanthāra*, *esanā*, *pariyesanā*, *pariyeṭṭhi*, *pūjā*, *ātitheyya*, *iddhi*, *vuddhi*, *ratana*, *sannicaya*, *vepulla*. The contrasting label for those items, though, is *dhamma*, not *nirāmisa*.

[93] MN i 59.

[94] *Agāra Sutta* (SN iv 219) and *Nirāmisa Sutta* (SN v 235).

[95] The next and only other canonical instance of it is in the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, dating from the Common Era (von Hinüber 1996: 59–60).

problems. While, according to the *Nirāmisa Sutta*, joy, pleasure, and equanimity are carnal (*sāmisa*) when they derive from the five strands of sense desire, spiritual (*nirāmisa*) when in *jhāna*, and beyond-spiritual (*nirāmisā nirāmisatara*) when they spring from the self-review of a liberated mind, liberation does not follow this symmetry. Carnal liberation (*sāmisa vimokkha*) is liberation connected to form, spiritual liberation (*nirāmisa vimokkha*) is connected to the formless, and beyond-spiritual liberation (*nirāmisā nirāmisatara vimokkha*) arises in the self-review of a liberated mind. The first we can easily understand as *jhāna*, as liberation *from* the carnal; but the second introduces the formless, which is a new element; and the notion of a liberation that arises upon the self-review of a liberated mind is slightly odd. In the other cases, 'beyond-spiritual' refers to feelings that arise from recognising that the mind is liberated. But this does not work in the case of liberation: can one get even more awakened? ... by simply reviewing that one already is?[96] Also, as expected, carnal liberation does not use the phrase *ime pañca kāmaguṇe paṭicca uppajjati* ('conditioned by the five strands of sense desire there arises ...'), which I have argued must be followed by a feeling. It seems reasonable to consider that the terms carnal (*sāmisa*) and spiritual (*nirāmisa*) originally referred to feelings. In correlating feelings with liberation states, the terms extended to *vimokkha*, and in so doing its meaning had to adapt, with somewhat confusing results. But these only foreground the symmetry between *sukha* and *upekkhā* and *pīti*.

Another challenge lies in how the *Nirāmisa Sutta* defines carnal pleasure (*sāmisa sukha*) as 'the pleasure *and happiness* that arise conditioned by the five strands of sense desire'. In including happiness (*somanassa*) within carnal pleasure, this passage seems to say that carnal joy (*sāmisā pīti*) is something different.[97] It could also be acknowledging *pīti* as a subtype of pleasant mental feeling, more specific than the generic *somanassa*. But given how *sukha* sometimes means pleasant bodily feeling alone (as *sukhindriya*) and sometimes

[96] The Chinese parallel to the *Nirāmisa Sutta* (SĀ 483) assigns these three labels differently, especially 'beyond-spiritual', which it uses to denote something superior to whatever it has deemed 'spiritual': if spiritual pleasure corresponds to the second *jhāna*, beyond-spiritual pleasure is the third; if spiritual equanimity means the third *jhāna*, beyond-spiritual equanimity means the fourth. It lacks the notion of the self-review of a liberated mind, and beyond-spiritual liberation is simply the cessation of desire, hatred, and delusion (Choong 2000: 128).

[97] SN v 237: *yā kho bhikkhave ime pañca kāmaguṇe paṭicca uppajjati pīti, ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhave sāmisā pīti ... yaṃ kho bhikkhave ime pañca kāmaguṇe paṭicca uppajjati sukhaṃ somanassaṃ, idaṃ vuccati bhikkhave sāmisaṃ sukhaṃ.*

pleasant feeling generally (as *sukhā vedanā*, encompassing both *sukhindriya* and *somanassindriya*), it is not surprising to find both terms here. This may be due to reciter habits, since this description of the type of pleasure that should not be pursued is a stock passage that happens elsewhere in the canon without *pīti* lurking around, as in the *Araṇavibhaṅga Sutta* (MN 139).[98] The compilers or reciters could have kept *somanassa* in a common, memorised formula although this particular context did not need it. Curiously, the Chinese parallel to the *Araṇavibhaṅga Sutta* contains this formula with the characters for *pīti* (喜) and *sukha* (樂),[99] which is not strange considering the Sarvāstivāda leanings of the *Madhyama Āgama* (Anālayo 2017b)—remember that Sarvāstivādins see *prīti* as a synonym of *saumanasya*. In isolation, this second challenge could weaken my theory, but we need to take it together with the previous evidence that points to an overlap (to say the least) between *pīti* and *somanassa* and between the terminologies 'carnal/spiritual' and 'domestic/renunciant'.

5. In a pleasant tone

Despite the diversity of practices found in the Pali *sutta*s, most (if not all) eventually lead to the same place: a wholesome positive feeling. The experience of something that feels good but is unrelated to defilement, cognitive or affective, seems to be what pushes forward the rolling dharma wheel, mirroring the Buddha's own spiritual journey upon experienceing the first *jhāna*, under the rose apple tree. Evidence of this, gathered in this paper so far, sometimes uses happiness (*somanassa*)—insight into the impermanence and unsatisfactoriness of sensory experience—and others joy (*pīti*)—insight into the impermanence of the *khandha*s, the *jhāna*s, mindfulness of breathing, the awakening factors, and the gladness formula. The latter, besides arising from the absence of the hindrances as mentioned under section 1, can also arise from lack of remorse (*avippaṭisāra*) due to good conduct,[100] restraint of the senses (*indriya saṃvara*),[101] visceral attention (*yoniso manasikāra*),[102] dwelling vigilantly (*appamatta*) in

[98] MN iii 233.
[99] T i 0702c04.
[100] AN v 1–7, AN v 311–17.
[101] SN iv 78.
[102] DN iii 288.

solitude,[103] experiencing 'the point of the teaching'[104] (*atthapaṭisaṃvedin*, *dhammapaṭisaṃvedin*),[105] the practice of the recollections,[106] and meditation on rejoicing (*muditā*).[107] To all this we can add how both *satipaṭṭhāna*[108] and the *brahmavihāras*[109] lead to a pleasant dwelling and should be cultivated with joy and pleasure.

The Discourse on the Cooks (*Sūda Sutta*, SN 47.8)[110] illustrates well how successful *satipaṭṭhāna* practice leads to a positive affective state of '*sukhavihāra*':[111] just as a cook who prepares dishes for the king must ensure the king enjoys them and must adjust the recipes to the king's liking, the meditator must ensure the mind finds comfort and pleasure, adjusting the meditation to that end.[112] The simile emphasises a meditative hedonic dimension. We find another interesting perspective in the Discourse to Tapussa (*Tapussa Sutta*,

[103] SN v 399.

[104] The meaning here seems to be to experience the benefit or goal (*attha*) of the teaching (*dhamma*), the truth (*dhamma*) it points to, namely, a liberated mind—one without lust, aversion and delusion—which, according to AN iii 357, is visible here and now (*saṇḍitthiko*) by discerning whether those three forces are present in oneself or not.

[105] DN iii 241, DN iii 279, AN iii 22. Inspiration can arise from hearing, teaching, reciting or reflecting on the teachings, as well as by properly attending to a sign of collectedness (*samādhinimitta*).

[106] AN iii 285, AN v 329–34, SN i 203, Th 382.

[107] AN i 243.

[108] SN v 150 (and its parallel SĀ 616 at T ii 172b23), SN v 156.

[109] AN iv 300.

[110] SN v 150 and SĀ 616 at T ii 172b23.

[111] The expression *sukhavihāra* features in the stock definition of the third *jhāna* (DN i 75); it is an epithet of all four *jhāna*s (DN iii 113, DN iii 223, MN i 33, MN i 41, MN i 354, MN iii 11, MN iii 97, SN ii 278, AN ii 23, AN ii 36, AN ii 88, AN iii 114, AN iii 131, AN iii 262, and a few more in AN); it appears related to mindfulness of breathing (SN v 326, AN v 328)—including in Chinese parallels (Dhammajoti 2008: 1); and to meditation more generally (SN ii 239, SN iii 169, AN iii 212). But we also find it in not overtly meditative usages (MN i 23, AN iv 363, MN i 459, MN iii 153).

[112] A related scholarly debate, which would distract us from our aim now, is to what extent the outcome of *satipaṭṭhāna* is *jhāna*. This discourse (*Sūda Sutta*, SN 47.8) mentions abandoning defilements, both part of *satipaṭṭhāna* and the starting point of *jhāna*—MN i 181, MN i 270, MN iii 136, EĀ 12.1 (Sujato 2012: 294). Right mindfulness—the four *satipaṭṭhāna*s—and right collectedness—often the four *jhāna*s—appear in that order on the noble eightfold path. For different views on this, and on whether the four *jhāna*s are the original definition of *sammā samādhi*, see among others Anālayo (2019a; 2021: 118–37), Kuan (2001: 179–81), Arbel (2017: 88), Gethin (2019: 182), Sujato (2012: 182), and a response to Sujato (Anālayo 2019c: 2342).

AN 9.41)[113] and the Discourse on Nirvanic Pleasure (*Nibbānasukha Sutta*, AN 9.34).[114] In these two texts, the inadequacy of the sensory domain—and of each subsequent state one reaches—is compared to feeling pain; and tasting a superior state to feeling happy. I believe this is more than just a metaphor. The notion of seeing the drawbacks of pursuing sensory pleasures reminds us of renunciant happiness (*nekkhammasita somanassa*), presented as an insight:

> Realising the transiency of forms, their change, fading, and ceasing, for one who truly sees with perfect wisdom that all forms, both before and now, are transient, unsatisfactory, and subject to change, happiness arises.[115]

In the *Tapussa Sutta*, the insightful seeing of drawbacks in sensory experience matures instead into the first *jhāna*, not coincidentally labelled 'the pleasure of renunciation' (*nekkhammasukha*),[116] marked by spiritual joy and pleasure (*nirāmisā pīti* and *nirāmisa sukha*). We have all this overlapping terminology with overlapping definitions: spiritual joy, spiritual pleasure, renunciant pleasure, renunciant happiness. And we have its centrality in early Buddhist soteriology. All main models of progress studied here describe a hedonic curve that, leaving behind carnal pleasures, leads to (a skilful) pleasantness, just as the Analysis of the Six Spheres (*Saḷāyatanavibhaṅga Sutta*, MN 137)[117] instructs the mendicant to move from domestic happiness to renunciant happiness. (The hedonic curve later mellows into neutral feeling or equanimity.) The language differs depending on the case and context, and terms may not be used with the technical precision one might expect from later systematic Buddhist thought. Yet the general message of how spiritual progress is meant to feel, according to the discourses, is clear and fairly consistent.

None of this is to paint the way to awakening as a bed of roses. Mendicants face—and are meant to face—difficult, unpleasant experiences which

[113] AN iv 439.

[114] AN iv 415. I translate 'nirvanic pleasure' idiomatically, but the Pali is best read as 'nirvana is pleasure'.

[115] MN iii 217: *rūpānaṃ tv eva aniccataṃ viditvā vipariṇāmavirāganirodhaṃ, pubbe c' eva rūpā etarahi ca sabbe te rūpā aniccā dukkhā vipariṇāmadhammā ti evametaṃ yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya passato uppajjati somanassaṃ.*

[116] MN i 454, MN iii 233.

[117] MN iii 220.

are part of the path too.[118] My argument is that a very central strand, at least, in the Pali *sutta*s presents progress as involving an affective-hedonic transformation *towards* pleasantness. There is of course soteriological value in unpleasant meditation objects and reflections,[119] which one text calls 'the unpleasant path' (*dukkhā paṭipadā*).[120] Exercises like contemplating corpses or the unattractive (*asubha*) use the affective pull of unpleasant *vedanā*—to turn away from it—in order to counter unskilful qualities such as craving (*taṇhā*) and bring about valued ones like renunciation (*nekkhamma*). But as they do that, they eventually lead to positive affective states; the feeling evolves.[121] Similarly, recognising that the experience of *dukkha* triggers search (*pariyesanā*)[122] and urgency (*saṃvega*), early Buddhists devised systematic reflections on what Liang and Morseth (2021) have called 'aesthetically unpleasing existential truths'. Again, these difficult experiences are said to evolve towards faith (*saddhā*) and the spiral path, which includes the gladness formula—and therefore joy.[123] Fear (*bhāya*) plays a key role in early Buddhist soteriology as well (Brekke 2005, chpt. 5), and Shulman (2019: 101–10, 125–26) has noted how, in various narratives of the Buddha's awakening, after *overcoming* fear come *samādhi* and *jhāna*. Thus, often, 'negative' or unpleasant affective states in the path are framed within a progression that includes positive ones later on.

[118] Staying alone in the forest is not easy. SN 9.9 (SN i 202) portrays a mendicant feeling lonely and defeated, who is then reassured by a deity and gains a sense of urgency (*saṃvega*).

[119] For a related contemporary reflection, see Obeyesekere (1985).

[120] AN 4.163 (AN ii 151) mentions the perceptions of the unattractive in the body, of the disagreeable in food, of non-delight in the whole world, of impermanence in all conditioned things, and of death. AN 7.49 (AN iv 47) breaks down the last one into three: the perception of impermanence, of suffering in what is impermanent, and of not-self in what is suffering. The same list is found in a Chinese text (T i 11c26). On this topic, see Dessein (2014), Shaw (2016: 130), Kong (2019) and Dhammajoti (2009b).

[121] Anālayo (2017a, 54ff), Giustarini (2011, 109, n. 33), and Dhammajoti (2009b, 275, 279), who mentions the *Atthasālinī* image of feeling better after vomiting—I wonder if we should take it as illustrating this—and explains how the Sarvāstivāda expanded this exercise into a visualisation and experience of the body as fantastically beautiful.

[122] AN 4.255 at AN ii 247.

[123] On the spiral path, see n. 26.

6. That old feeling

In this last section I look at *pīti* in its religious context, which helps explain the use of the term *pīti* and why it seems to be specific to accounts and formulas of spiritual progress, whereas *somanassa* features less frequently in those but shows up in generic explanations of feeling. I argue that, against the popular image of Buddhism and Brahmanism as confronted,[124] and despite differences in doctrinal and metaphysical teachings, early Buddhism has affective continuities with Brahmanism.

The old Vedic religion places great emphasis on prosperity, both in this life and in the world of the ancestors (Witzel 2003, 84), and sexuality and offspring often connect and symbolise both things. In this way, Vedic religion affirms sensual pleasure. Crucial is the central role of ritual as a means to achieve prosperity. During a ritual, the priest consumes the sacred drink *soma*, a mind-altering substance that induces intense pleasure (*ānanda*).[125] *Soma* not only leads to the goal of prosperity symbolised by sex and offspring, but is itself compared to semen, and so *soma*-induced ecstasy mirrors sex-induced ecstasy.

Then, in the late Vedic period, a soteriology emerges and offspring is replaced as a religious good with knowledge of the Self (*ātman*).[126] But while the goal shifts, the idea of pleasure and its sexual connotations linger on. The blissful union of two persons is now the blissful union with the absolute; the organ connected with that religiously significant pleasure is now the mind instead of the penis; the *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* articulates the equation of *ānanda* and mind with reference to sexual desire (Olivelle 2012: 89). As Patrick Olivelle (2012: 77–78) puts it, there is an 'explicit and unambiguous connection between *ānanda* as orgasmic rapture and *ānanda* as the experience of *brahman*/*ātman*'. Religious practice is still often pleasurable (Wynne 2007: 98, 112), but chronologically, this Vedic religious pleasure has shifted from something more carnal to something more 'spiritual'.

In contrast, for Jains it is physical pain that has soteriological value and helps effect liberation. While their goal may be described in terms of pleasure or bliss,[127] or at least as a state where pain is blocked, the

[124] For a survey of scholarly views on the Buddhist–Brahmin relationship, see Walser (2018: 98–106).

[125] Some explanation of the drink and its ritual can be found in Witzel (2003: 74) and Galewicz (2020: 37).

[126] Bṛh-Up 4.4.22, cited in Olivelle (2003: 276).

[127] US 23.83, US 32.2 (see Jaini 1977: 155; 1979: 104; Colette 2003: 115; Dundas 2002: 104).

same cannot be said about their *way towards* liberation: by inflicting pain on themselves, Jains would speed up the burning of past deeds and precipitate liberation, thus conforming to an instrumental model of (religious) pain[128] which early Buddhists strongly criticise. In this sense, early Buddhists are closer to mainstream Brahmanism, and to an extent the heterodox and unaffiliated wanderers, *paribbājaka*s, who often have Brahmanic influence, and whom Buddhists recognise as practising on a similar wavelength.[129]

There were Vedic strands of asceticism too that granted liberating power to painful experiences, but against Bronkhorst, Alexander Wynne (2007: 98, 112) has argued that while there may have been Brahmanic ascetics, the mainstream meditative tradition was not painful. Cezary Galewicz (2020: 39) shows that ascetic elements can be found already in early Vedic hymns and, like Wynne, sees it as a tradition outside the mainstream *soma* sacrifice. Given the lively circulation of ideas and practices in the Indian period around the Buddha's life, Vedic and non-Vedic ascetics surely cross-pollinated; but in comparison, the Brahmanic traditions clearly ascribed less of a role to painful feelings than did Jainism, and they had a positive discourse around pleasure that Jains (and Ājīvakas) lacked.

A key to the affinity between early Buddhists and Brahmins lies in the parallelism between *pīti* and *ānanda*. Brahmanic *ānanda* bridges sexual and meditative bliss—the Upaniṣads openly compare the two. While early Buddhist texts do not, in them *pīti* still bridges those two kinds of pleasure. Like *ānanda*, *pīti* has specific romantic connotations that a term like *somanassa* lacks (Cousins 1973: 121), and it refers to mental joy, just like *ānanda* came to denote the joy of erotic union rather than its physical pleasure. When the *Brahmajāla Sutta* (DN 1) speaks of an excited mind, in one place it uses *ānanda* and in the other *pīti*—and the commentary understands that '*ānanda*' as *pīti*.[130] Moreover,

[128] Self-inflicted pain is a widely known religious phenomenon. The belief that one will avoid future suffering by experiencing it now, or a symbolic link between pain and ideals of compassion and harmlessness, can lessen one's perception of pain and give it meaning. Furthermore, the stimulus overload that is intense pain can alter the sense of self, which would fit Jain ideas of liberation as isolating the *jīva*. See Salim (2020: 511), Dundas (2002: 166), Fuller (2008: 133–37) and Glucklich (2001: 42–44, 52ff, 60, 99).

[129] Sujato (2012: 179) remarks how the early discourses attribute Buddhist attainments to these wanderers very generously.

[130] DN i 3 (Sv i 53), DN i 37.

both terms tend to be preceded by words from the root √*mod*—Sanskrit: *moda*, *pramud/pramoda* (Olivelle 2012: 78ff; van Buitenen 1979: 29); Pali: *pāmojja*. The continuity is clear. From a purely affective-hedonic stance, the experience of union with *ātman/brahman* has resemblances with Buddhist forms of spiritual pleasure as described in *jhāna* or the gladness formula. In fact, when the *Yoga Sūtra* lists *samādhi* factors, in spite of Buddhist influence it retains the 'native' terminology of *ānanda* instead of *pīti*.

We should note it is only in the Yajurvedic Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads where we find *brahman* defined as pleasure (*ānanda*) (Olivelle 2012: 87, 99; van Buitenen 1979: 30–32), and scholars generally agree these are precisely the Brahmanical teachings most likely to have interacted with early Buddhism.[131] In examining parallels between the Upaniṣadic contemplation of *upāsana* and Buddhist *satipaṭṭhāna*, Sujato (2012: 156, 160) notes certain meditation objects are common to both, like bliss, and that the *satipaṭṭhāna*s of *vedanā* and *citta* correlate to *brahman*'s attributes of *ānanda* and *cit*.

We can make yet another observation here. The early Buddhist hedonic training, in commanding to replace carnal with spiritual pleasure, or lay with renunciant happiness, essentially mirrors the Vedic history regarding positive religious affect—namely, that it came to replace a more sensual pleasure with a more spiritual one. In the centrality it gives to pleasure on the path, it seems to me early Buddhism is influenced by a Brahmanical trend, and since Buddhist spiritual pleasure is not as sexualised—the only remnant being the term *pīti*—it represents a further step in Indian religion's movement to decouple religious pleasure from sensual and ordinary ones. It makes more sense to understand early Buddhism in light of this history than vis-à-vis non-Vedic asceticism, which swaps sensual pleasure for self-inflicted pain.

Now we can answer the main question of this section: why have two words (*pīti* and *somanassa*) if, as I have been arguing, they are basically synonyms? Because *pīti* belongs to a lineage of celebrating meditative pleasure in comparison and reference to sensuality. While *pīti* is often paired with generic words and quasi-synonyms, acknowledging a certain non-specialness, at the

[131] See, for example, Wynne's (2010: 206–09) defense that the *Yājñavalkyakāṇḍa* circulated around Magadha as an independent work before being incorporated into the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, against Bronkhorst's famous challenge to the scholarly consensus.

same time its special presence in models of spiritual progress sends a message *somanassa* would not. *Somanassa* is rather used generically, when presenting models of *vedanā* and displaying all options, as in 'things can feel *dukkha*, *sukha*, *domanassa*, *somanassa*, *upekkhā* ...' Spiritual seekers may have picked up on the undertones of *pīti* and its affinity with Brahmanical practice. Perhaps this is why Brahmins and *paribbājaka*s were drawn to the Buddhists, and why Jains thought Buddhists were indulgent, given to pleasures. Using *pīti* rather than *sukha* alone, or *somanassa*, clarifies how the early Buddhist path feels *precisely because of* the historical religious context.

Conclusions

I have argued it is reasonable to read joy (*pīti*) as a pleasant mental feeling, a *vedanā*, in the early (Pali) discourses. Here is the main evidence summarised: we find *pīti* in the *vedanā* contemplation of mindfulness of breathing and in the *Vedanā Saṃyutta*; we have *sukha*, *pīti*, and *upekkhā* as carnal and spiritual, which is *vedanā* language, as is the phrase '*ime pañca kāmaguṇe* ...' used to describe carnal *pīti*; *pīti* and *somanassa* are often associated, defined very similarly, and sometimes replace each other, both in their skilful and unskilful strands. All this is worth contrasting with gladness (*pāmojja*), another related term but about which these lines could not have been written, despite Theravādins equating it with *pīti*.[132]

Most exegetical schools saw *pīti* as *somanassa*, a view which I have argued can be seen, implicitly, in the canonical discourses. I have suggested that Theravādins classified it as a *saṅkhāra* to solve the problem of interpreting *jhāna* factors when sensory awareness is off the table. Scholarly reliance on the Theravādin account alone downplays the hedonic aspect of *pīti* and its centrality in a conversation early Buddhists had with other schools regarding how the path to liberation feels. Yet when we read *pīti* as a synonym of *somanassa*, we see more easily how many formulas and accounts of progress to liberation involve a similar—if not the same—positive affective state, and how they share an underlying hedonic curve to awakening. Moreover, projecting Theravādin understandings onto the Pali *sutta*s hinders seeing how its conception of *pīti* evolved towards the physical and intense sides of the spectrum.

[132] Dhs 20-21, Vibh 257.

Abbreviations

I follow the abbreviation and citation methods of the Critical Pali Dictionary, except I do not indicate line numbers. When I use discourse numbers, these follow the 6th Council edition, which is my main source for Pali texts, as available on SuttaCentral or the Digital Pali Reader, comparing it with the Pali Text Society's edition. To *Visuddhimagga* references, I add between parenthesis the chapter and paragraph number of Bhikkhu Ñāṇamolī's English translation.

AKB: *Abhidharmakośabhāsya*, digital edition by Dan Lusthaus and Paul Hackett, from 2020.

US: *Uttarādhyāyana Sūtra*, 1997 transcription by Yumi Ousaka and Moriichi Yamazaki.

References

'Abbreviations Vol. I - Critical Pali Dictionary'. n.d. Data Center for the Humanities – University of Cologne. Accessed 15 July 2023. https://cpd.uni-koeln.de/intro/vol1_epileg_abbrev_texts.

Anālayo, Bhikkhu. 2006. *Satipaṭṭhāna: The Direct Path to Realization*. Birmingham: Windhorse Publications.

——. 2007. 'Mindfulness of Breathing in the Saṃyukta-Āgama'. *Buddhist Studies Review*, no. 2, 137–50. https://doi.org/10.1558/bsrv.v24i1.137.

——. 2009. *From Craving to Liberation – Excursions into the Thought-World of the Pāli Discourses (1)*. New York: Buddhist Association of the United States.

——. 2013. *Perspectives on Satipaṭṭhāna*. Cambridge: Windhorse Publications.

——. 2014. 'The Second Absorption in Early Buddhist Discourse'. In *Buddhist Meditative Traditions: Dialogue and Comparison*, edited by Kuo-pin Chuang, 25–58. Taipei: Dharma Drum Publishing Corporation.

——. 2015. 'Understanding and Practicing the Ānāpānasati-Sutta'. In *Buddhist Foundations of Mindfulness*, edited by Edo Shonin, William Van Gordon, and Nirbhay N. Singh, 55–69. Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-18591-0_4.

——. 2016. 'On the Supposedly Liberating Function of the First Absorption'. *Buddhist Studies Review* 33 (1–2): 271–80. https://doi.org/10.1558/bsrv.31649.

——. 2017a. *Early Buddhist Meditation Studies*. Barre Center for Buddhist Studies.

——. 2017b. 'The "School Affiliation" of the Madhyama-Āgama'. In *Research on the Madhyama-Āgama*, edited by Bhikkhunī Dhammadinnā, 55–76. Taiwan: Dharma Drum Publishing Corporation.

——. 2019a. 'Definitions of Right Concentration in Comparative Perspective'. *Singaporean Journal of Buddhist Studies* 5: 9–39.

——. 2019b. 'Meditation on the Breath: Mindfulness and Focused Attention'. *Mindfulness* 10 (8): 1684–91. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-019-01169-9.

——. 2019c. 'The Role of Mindfulness in the Cultivation of Absorption'. *Mindfulness* 10 (11): 2341–51. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-019-01206-7.

——. 2021. 'The Interplay Between Meditation Theory and Practice'. *Insight Journal* 47: 131–37.

Arbel, Keren. 2015. 'The Liberative Role of Jhānic Joy (Pīti) and Pleasure (Sukha) in the Early Buddhist Path to Awakening'. *Buddhist Studies Review* 32 (2): 179–206. https://doi.org/10.1558/bsrv.v32i2.28328.

——. 2017. *Early Buddhist Meditation: The Four Jhānas as the Actualization of Insight*. Routledge Critical Studies in Buddhism. New York: Routledge.

Attwood, Jayarava. 2013. 'The Spiral Path or Lokuttara Paṭicca-Samuppāda'. *Western Buddhist Review* 6: 1–34.

Aung, Shwe Zan, trans. 1910. *Compendium of Philosophy <Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha> by Anuruddha*. London: Pali Text Society.

Bareau, Andre. 1955. *Les Sectes Bouddhiques Du Petit Véhicule*. Saigon: École Française d'Extrême-Orient.

Bodhi, Bhikkhu. 1980. *Transcendental Dependent Arising*. The Wheel Publication 277/278. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society. http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/upanisa_sutta.pdf.

——. 2005. *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyutta Nikaya*. Wisdom Publications.

Bodhi, Bhikkhu, and Narāda, trans. 2016. *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma <Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha> by Anuruddha*. 4th edition. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.

Boisvert, Mathieu. 1995. *The Five Aggregates: Understanding Theravāda Psychology and Soteriology*. Vol. 17. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

Bon-Weibb, Sara, and Walpola Rāhula, trans. 2001. *Abhidharmasamuccaya: The Compendium of the Higher Teaching (Philosophy) by Asanga*. Fremont, California: Asian Humanities Press.

Brekke, Torkel. 2005. *Religious Motivation and the Origins of Buddhism*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203994832.

Bronkhorst, Johannes. 2009. *Absorption: Two Studies of Human Nature*. Lausanne.

Bucknell, Roderick S. 1993. 'Reinterpreting the Jhānas'. *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 16 (2): 375–409.

——. 2019. 'What Is the First Jhāna? The Central Question in Buddhist Meditation Theory.' In *Engaging Asia: Essays on Laos and beyond in Honour of Martin Stuart-Fox*, edited by Desley Goldston, 392–415. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.

Buitenen, J. A. B. van. 1979. '"Ānanda", or All Desires Fulfilled'. *History of Religions* 19 (1): 27–36. https://doi.org/10.1086/462834.

Buswell, Robert E. 2018. 'The "Sensation of Doubt" in East Asian Zen Buddhism and Some Parallels with Pāli Accounts of Meditation Practice'. *Contemporary Buddhism* 19 (1): 69–82. https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2018.1443556.

Choong, Mun-keat. 2000. *The Fundamental Teachings of Early Buddhism: A Comparative Study Based on the Sutra-Anga Portion of the Pali Samyuta-Nikaya and the Chinese Samyukta-Agama*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.

Collett, Alice, and Bhikkhu Anālayo. 2014. 'Bhikkhave and Bhikkhu as Gender-Inclusive Terminology in Early Buddhist Texts'. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 21: 760–97.

Colette, Caillat. 2003. 'Mysticism and Mystic Experience in Yogīndu's Poem Paramātmaprakaśa'. In *Jainism and Early Buddhism: Essays in Honor of Padmanabh S. Jaini*, edited by Olle Qvarnström, Part I: 113–28. Fremont, California: Asian Humanities Press.

Cone, Margaret. 2001. *A dictionary of Pāli. Pt. 1: A - kh*. Oxford: Pali Text Society.

——. 2010. *A dictionary of Pāli. Pt. 2: G - n*. Bristol: Pali Text Society.

——. 2020. *A dictionary of Pāli. Pt. 3: P - bh*. Bristol: Pali Text Society.

Cousins, L. S. 1973. 'Buddhist Jhāna: Its Nature and Attainment According to the Pali Sources'. *Religion* 3 (2): 115–31. https://doi.org/10.1016/0048-721X(73)90003-1.

——. 2022. *Meditations of the Pali Tradition: Illuminating Buddhist Doctrine, History, and Practice*. Edited by Sarah Shaw. Boulder: Shambhala.

Dessein, Bart. 2014. 'Contemplation of the Repulsive: Bones and Skull as Objects of Meditation'. In *Hindu, Buddhist and Daoist Meditation: Cultural Histories*, 117–47. Hermes Academic Publishing. http://hdl.handle.net/1854/LU-8554807.

Dhammajoti, K. L. 2008. 'The Sixteen-Mode Mindfulness of Breathing'. *Journal of the Centre for Buddhist Studies, Sri Lanka* VI: 1–38.

——. 2009a. *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*. 4th ed. Hong Kong: Centre of Buddhist Studies, Universtiy of Hong Kong.

——. 2009b. 'The Aśubhā Meditation in the Sarvāstivāda'. *Journal of the Centre for Buddhist Studies, Sri Lanka*, January, 248–95.

——. 2016. 'The Contribution of Saṃghabhadra to Our Understanding of Abhidharma Doctrines'. In *Text, History, and Philosophy: Abhidharma across Buddhist Scholastic Traditions*, edited by Bart Dessein and Weijen Teng, 50: 223–47. Brill's Indological Library. Leiden; Boston: Brill.

Dundas, Paul. 2002. *The Jains*. London: Routledge.

Font, Bernat. 2023. 'What the Buddha Felt: A Study of Vedanā in Early Buddhism'. PhD thesis, University of Bristol. https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/en/studentTheses/what-the-buddha-felt.

Fuller, Robert C. 2008. *Spirituality in the Flesh: Bodily Sources of Religious Experiences*. New York: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195369175.001.0001.

Galewicz, Cezary. 2020. 'Ritual, Ascetic, and Meditative Practice in the Veda and Upaniṣads'. In *The Oxford History of Hinduism: Hindu Practice*, edited by Gavin Flood, 35–61. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198733508.003.0002.

Gethin, Rupert. 2001. *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oneworld.

——, ed. 2008. *Sayings of the Buddha: A Selection of Suttas from the Pali Nikāyas*. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

——. 2019. 'The Jhānas in the Buddhist Path to Liberation: The Theravāda Perspective'. In *Meditación Y Contemplación: Caminos Hacia La Paz (Budismo Theravada Y Mística Teresiana): Meditation and Contemplation: Pathways to Peace (Theravada Buddhism and Teresian Mysticism)*, edited by Francisco Javier Sancho, 177–206. Burgos: Grupo Editorial Fonte.

Giustarini, Giuliano. 2011. 'The Truth of the Body: The Liberating Role of Physical (and Mental) Boundaries in Asubhabhāvanā'. *Thai International Journal of Buddhist Studies* II: 96–124.

Glucklich, Ariel. 2001. *Sacred Pain: Hurting the Body for the Sake of the Soul*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

Griffiths, Paul J. 1983. 'Buddhist Jhāna: A Form-Critical Study'. *Religion* 13 (1): 55–68. https://doi.org/10.1016/0048-721X(83)90005-2.

Guenther, Herbert V. 1974. *Philosophy and Psychology in the Abhidharma*. 2nd rev. ed. Dehli: Motilal Banarsidass.

Gunaratana, Henepola. 1980. *A Critical Analysis of the Jhānas in Theravāda Buddhist Meditation*. Buddha Dharma Education Association. http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/scrnguna.pdf.

Harvey, Peter. 2018. 'The Four Jhānas and Their Qualities in the Pali Tradition'. *Buddhist Studies Review* 35 (1–2): 3–27. https://doi.org/10.1558/bsrv.36750.

Heim, Maria. 2021. 'Some Analyses of Feeling'. In *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Classical Indian Emotions*, edited by Maria Heim, Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, and Roy Tzohar, 87–106. London: Bloomsbury.

Hinüber, Oskar von. 1996. *A Handbook of Pāli Literature*. Indian Philology and South Asian Studies, vol. 2. Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter.

Jaini, Padmanabh S. 1977. 'Saṃskāra-Duḥkhatā and the Jaina Concept of Suffering'. In *Revelation in Indian Thought: A Festschrift in Honour of Professor T. R. V. Murti*, edited by Harold Coward and Krishna Sivaraman, 153–58. Emeryville, California: Dharma Publishing.

——. 1979. *The Jaina Path of Purification*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Jones, Dhivan Thomas. 2019. '"Preconditions": The Upanisā Sutta in Context'. *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies* 17.

Karunadasa, Y. 2010. *The Theravāda Abhidhamma: Its Inquiry into the Nature of Conditioned Reality*. HKU: CBS Publication Series. Hong Kong: Centre of Buddhist Studies, The University of Hong Kong.

Kong, Man-Shik. 2019. 'Variations in the Contemplation of the Repulsiveness of Food, Āhārepatikūlasaññā: Canonical, Theravāda, Sarvāstivāda and Mahāyāna Forms'. *Contemporary Buddhism* 20 (1–2): 95–110. https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2019.1599568.

Kuan, Tse-Fu. 2001. 'The Four Satipaṭṭhānas in Early Buddhism'. *Satyābhisamaya: A Buddhist Studies Quarterly* 17: 154–209.

——. 2005. 'Clarification on Feelings in Buddhist Dhyāna/Jhāna'. *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 33 (3): 285–319. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10781-004-7378-6.

La Vallée Poussin, Louis de. 1923. *L'Abhidharmakośa de Vasubandhu*. 6 vols. Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises.

Li, Jingjing. 2023. 'Joy as Contextualized Feeling: Two Contrasting Pictures of Joy in East Asian Yogācāra'. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 91 (3): 698–713. https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfae024.

Liang, Lisa, and Brianna K Morseth. 2021. 'Aesthetic Emotions: The Existential and Soteriological Value of Saṃvega/Pasāda in Early Buddhism'. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 28: 205–39.

Lin, Qian. 2015. 'Mind in Dispute: The Section on Mind in Harivarman's *Tattvasiddhi'. PhD thesis, University of Washington.

Meyers, Karin. 2012. 'The Pleasant Way: The Dhyānas, Insight and the Path According to the Abhidharmakośa'. *International Association of Buddhist Universities, 2nd Conference*.

Monier-Williams, Monier, E. Leumann, and C. Cappeller. 1994. *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. New Delhi: Munshiram Monoharlal.

Morrison, Robert G. 2001. 'Two Cheers for Tanhā'. *Contemporary Buddhism* 2 (1): 99–116. https://doi.org/10.1080/14639940108573741.

Obeyesekere, Gananath. 1985. 'Depression, Buddhism, and the Work of Culture in Sri Lanka'. In *Culture and Depression: Studies in the Anthropology and Cross-Cultural Psychiatry of Affect and Disorder*, edited by Arthur Kleinman and Byron Good, 134–52. Berkeley: University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520340923.

Olivelle, Patrick. 2003. 'The Renouncer Tradition'. In *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, edited by Gavin Flood, 271–87. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

——. 2012. *Language, Texts, and Society: Explorations in Ancient Indian Culture and Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.7135/UPO9781843318859.

Payutto, Prayudh. 2017. *Buddhadhamma: The Laws of Nature and Their Benefits to Life*. Translated by Robin Philip Moore. 4th ed. Bangkok, Thailand: Buddhadhamma Foundation. https://buddhadhamma.github.io/.

Rāhula, Walpola. 1978. *Zen and the Taming of the Bull: Towards the Definition of Buddhist Thought*. London: Gordon Fraser.

Rhys Davids, Thomas Williams, ed. 2002. *Dialogues of the Buddha*. 4th ed. vol. 2. Oxford: Pali Text Society.

Rhys Davids, Thomas Williams, and W. Stede. 1966. *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*. Luzac.

Salim, Emil. 2020. 'Senseless Pain in the Phenomenology of Religious Experience'. *Open Theology* 6 (1): 510–19. https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2020-0105.

Shaw, Sarah. 2016. 'Meditation Objects in Pali Buddhist Texts'. In *Asian Traditions of Meditation*, edited by Halvor Eifring. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Shulman, Eviatar. 2019. 'Looking for Samatha and Vipassanā in the Early Suttas: What, Actually, Are the Texts?' *The Indian International Journal of Buddhist Studies* 20: 95–141.

Sujato, Bhikkhu. 2012. *A History of Mindfulness: How Insight Worsted Tranquility in the Satipatthana Sutta*. Revised ed. Santipada.

U Thittila, trans. 2002. *The Book of Analysis (Vibhaṅga): The Second Book of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka*. Pali Text Society Translation Series 39. Oxford: Pali Text Society.

'Uttarajjhaya'. n.d. GRETIL. Accessed 15 July 2023. http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/2_prakrt/uttaraju.htm.

'Vasubandhu: Abhidharmakośabhāṣya'. n.d. GRETIL. Accessed 15 July 2023. http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/corpustei/transformations/html/sa_vasubandhu-abhidharmakozabhASya.htm.

Walser, Joseph. 2018. 'When Did Buddhism Become Anti-Brahmanical? The Case of the Missing Soul'. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, January.

Walshe, Maurice O'C., ed. 1995. *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*. The Teachings of the Buddha. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Witzel, Michael. 2003. 'Vedas and Upanisads'. In *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, edited by Gavin Flood, 66–101. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Wynne, Alexander. 2007. *The Origin of Buddhist Meditation*. New York: Routledge.

——. 2010. 'The Buddha's "Skill in Means" and the Genesis of the Five Aggregate Teaching.' *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 20 (2): 191. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186309990496.

Can Karma Cause Suffering?

Brian Victoria

Abstract—Needless to say, the Buddhist doctrine of karma is one of the central tenets of the faith. In his book *What the Buddha Thought*, Richard Gombrich describes karma as "a kind of lynchpin which holds the rest of the basic tenets together by providing the perfect example of what they mean". Gombrich explains this is because the Buddha taught that all thoughts, words and deeds derive their moral value, both positive or negative, from the intention behind them, making intention the basic criterion for morality. As positive and attractive as this understanding appears on the surface, this article raises the question of what this understanding of karma has led to when put into practice in various Buddhist-influenced countries in Asia over the centuries and continuing to the present.

On the one hand, there can be no doubt that a belief in karma, in combination with compassion, has led socially engaged Buddhist groups like Tzu Chi, based in Taiwan, to engage in a wide range of charitable activities throughout the world. Followers believe the world can be made a better place by planting good karmic seeds. They view these "seeds" as the prerequisite for flowers to bloom and bear fruit. In other words, they believe the workings of karma lead to the creation of a better society as a result of good actions and pure thoughts.

JOCBS 24: 181–215 ©2024 Brian Victoria

While this article is not meant to denigrate, much less ignore, the wonderful work of karma-inspired Buddhist charitable organizations like Tzu Chi, there is another side to karma, one to which little attention has been paid, i.e. the negative effects that alternative interpretations of karma have produced, especially in Japan but also in other Buddhist-influenced Asian countries. Inasmuch as Buddhism is a religion dedicated to the removal of suffering, it is deeply ironic, if not contradictory, that these alternative, and widespread, interpretations of karma have been the cause of so much suffering, both past and present. How is this possible?

Keywords: karma, suffering, fate, intention, socialism, capitalism, rebirth, killing, Zen

Introduction

"Karma" (Pali: *kamma*) is one of the relatively few words of Buddhist/Hindu origin, like the word "Buddha" (lit. "awakened person") itself, to have become so anglicized that it no longer needs to be italicized when written. Thus, when discussing what happened to a particular person, typically something negative in character, it is unsurprising to hear someone say, "It was his karma." In this case, karma becomes very close to meaning "fate," suggesting a power outside of one's control that determines what happens to a person. Karma thus becomes a synonym for an "act of God" in which the person acted upon has almost no control, including no responsibility, for what occurs.

"Karma" (*kárman*) is a Sanskrit word that originally simply meant "action." This early understanding of karma can be traced back to the Vedas, a large body of religious texts in ancient India predating Buddhism. From the early Vedic period, the term karma appears in the *Ṛgveda* (c.1500–1000 BCE) about forty times where it only means work or deeds, although embodying a degree of moral significance connected to the proper performance of purification rituals and sacrifices. In this extended meaning of karma we can see the seeds of the belief that actions have consequences.

The doctrine of karma was further developed in the Upaniṣads, a series of philosophical texts composed from the 6th to 4th centuries BCE. In the Upaniṣads we find, albeit briefly, the introduction of the idea that karma

refers not just to ritual acts but ethical acts as well, including the teaching that every person will eventually reap the rewards of their good deeds and the consequences of their bad deeds. Yet, at the same time, primary emphasis remained on karma-producing actions that are *ritually* correct.[1]

While, on the one hand, the historical Buddha incorporated the concept of karma into his teachings, he stressed that karma is most definitely not a power outside of one's control. He asserted that every intentional action we undertake, whether mental, verbal, or physical, creates an imprint that influences our future experiences. The quality and intention behind these actions shapes the nature and intensity of their outcomes. In short, positive actions generate positive karma (aka spiritual merit), leading to favorable consequences, while negative actions result in negative karma (aka demerit, or evil: *pāpa*) and unfavorable outcomes.

The key contribution the Buddha made to an understanding of karma is the central role played by intention, thereby turning karma into an ethical concept. The Buddha is recorded as having taught:

> I say that intention, *bhikkhu*s, is kamma. Having intended, one does kamma by way of body, speech, & intellect.[2]

Note, however, that in addition to "intention" Sanskrit/Pāli *cetanā* can also be translated as "volition," or "directionality," i.e. a mental factor that moves or urges the mind in a particular direction, toward a specific object or goal.[3]

Thus, when the Buddha sought to explain the workings of karma, he emphasized that the quality of an action is determined by the intention or volition behind it, with special reference to its influence on the development of moral character. As recorded in the *Dhammapada*, he said:

> Phenomena are preceded by mind, superseded by mind, consist of mind. If with a corrupt mind one speaks or acts, then unhappiness will follow them like the (wagon) wheel follows the foot of the (animal) that pulls it.[4]

---

[1] Richard Gombrich, *Theravāda Buddhism*, p. 46.

[2] The classical definition of *kamma* is at AN III.415 (*Nibbedhika Sutta*, AN 6.63): *cetanāhaṃ bhikkhave kammaṃ vadāmi, cetayitvā kammaṃ karoti kāyena vācāya manasā.*

[3] See: https://encyclopediaofbuddhism.org/wiki/Cetan%C4%81 (accessed April 17, 2024).

[4] Dhp 1: *manopubbaṅgamā dhammā manoseṭṭhā manomayā, manasā ce paduṭṭhena bhāsati vā karoti vā, tato naṃ dukkham anveti cakkaṃ va vahato padaṃ.*

Therefore, while two individuals may engage in what appears to be the same outward action, their karma will differ based on the intentions behind their behavior. If one seeks to generate positive karma, cultivating wholesome intentions is of crucial importance. As Richard Gombrich has noted, "the Buddha took the extremely bold step of claiming that we are the masters of our own destinies, each responsible for our fates."[5]

Origins of thecontroversy

To some extent the origins of the controversy can be traced to a statement attributed to the Buddha himself:

> I am the owner of my actions [karma], heir to my actions, born of my actions, related through my actions, and have my actions as my arbitrator. Whatever I do, for good or for evil, to that will I fall heir ...[6]

The controversial aspect of these words lies when they are combined with the commonly accepted Buddhist belief that the effects of karma, good or bad, extend beyond a single lifetime. This is reflected in the allied concept of rebirth which maintains that there is a continuous cycle of birth and death. That is to say, the actions we perform in our current lifetime create the karmic conditions that shape our circumstances in future lives.

On the one hand, this cyclical nature of existence encourages individuals to be mindful of their actions, for they can exert a positive or negative influence on future rebirths and experiences. Buddhist scholar Stephen Jenkins notes: "Karma is often used in classical narrative to tell the wealthy that, if they are not generous in uplifting the poor, they will find themselves impoverished in this life and the next. In this way kindness and generosity are seen as protective, even as a kind of armor."[7]

On the other hand, karmic reward and punishment resulting from actions in past lives can be, and frequently has been, used to explain if not justify the

[5] Richard Gombrich, *What the Buddha Thought*, p. 195.

[6] *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, (*Upajjhaṭṭhana Sutta* (AN 5. 57): *kammassako 'mhi kammadāyādo kammayoni kammabandhu kammapaṭisaraṇo. yaṃ kammaṃ karissāmi kalyāṇaṃ vā pāpakaṃ vā, tassa dāyādo bhavissāmī ti.* For the translation see: https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/AN/AN5_57.html (accessed April 17, 2024).

[7] Jenkin's comments were included in an e-mail sent to the author on January 14, 2024.

situation one finds oneself in one's current life. In so doing karma comes close to becoming a sociological if not political doctrine or ideology. In short, it has been used as an instrument to justify the status quo, no matter how unjust or unfair to those involved.

One of the best examples of this latter usage occurred at the time Japanese Buddhist leaders faced the need to clarify the workings of karma in the face of Christianity and Western thought. For example, in September 1893, in an address entitled, "The Law of Cause and Effect, As Taught by the Buddha," Shaku Sōen addressed the World's Parliament of Religions held in Chicago, Illinois as follows:

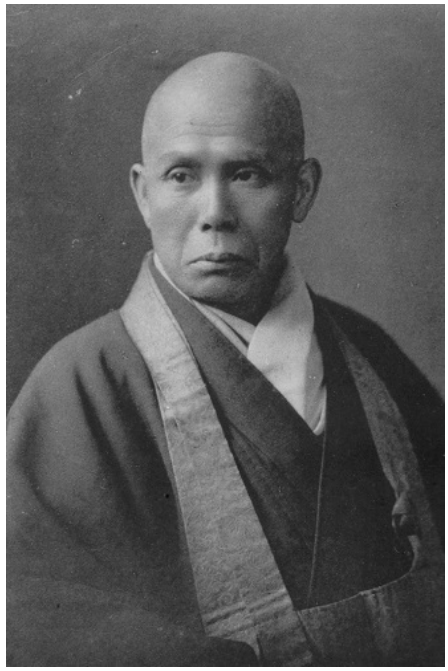
> We are here enjoying or suffering the effect of what we have done in our past lives ... We are born in a world of variety; some are poor and unfortunate, others are wealthy and happy. This state of variety will be repeated again and again in our future lives. But to whom shall we complain of our misery? To none but ourselves![8]

On the one hand, Sōen was clearly attempting to refute God as the determinative factor in events in this world, including the fates of individuals. Yet at the same time, he was also asserting that something as abstract as "social injustice" let alone the class-based, capitalist society of his day could be the cause of one's poverty and low social status. Equally, those who were wealthy and of high status were so as a reward for their previous good deeds, i.e. good karma, accrued over previous lifetimes.

Interestingly, it was D.T. Suzuki, Sōen's lay disciple, who would later refute Sōen's understanding of karma. In *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, published in 1907, Suzuki first dismissed advocates of the traditional understanding of karma as no more than "pseudo-Buddhists" (p. 187) before claiming:

> No, the doctrine of karma certainly must not be understood to explain the cause of our social and economical [sic] imperfections. The region where the law of karma is made to work supreme is our moral world, and cannot be made to extend also over our economic field. Poverty is not necessarily the consequence of evil deeds, nor is plenitude that of good acts. Whether a person is affluent or needy is mostly determined by the principle of economy as far as our present social system is concerned.[9]

[8] Quoted in Victoria, *Zen War Stories, 2nd ed.*, pp. 81–82.
[9] Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahayana*, p. 189.



D.T. Suzuki as a young man

A further quotation from the same book makes clear that Suzuki's criticism of Sōen was derived from the former's embrace of socialism:

> As long as we live under the present state of things, it is impossible to escape the curse of social injustice and economic inequality. Some people must be born rich and noble and enjoying a superabundance of material wealth, while others must be groaning under the unbearable burden imposed upon them by cruel society. Unless we make a radical change in our present social organization, we cannot expect every one of us to enjoy an equal opportunity and a fair chance. Unless we have *a certain form of socialism* installed that is liberal and rational and systematic, there must be some who are economically more favored than others. [Italics mine][10]

[10] *ibid.*, p. 191.

Although Suzuki, following his return to Japan in 1909, never again wrote about the need for a socialist society in his voluminous writings in Japanese, he had previously shared his interest in socialism while still in the U.S. in private letters written to his good friend, Yamamoto Ryōkichi. On January 6, 1901 Suzuki wrote:

> Recently I have had a desire to study socialism, for I am sympathetic to its views on social justice and equality of opportunity. Present-day society (including Japan, of course) must be reformed from the ground up. I'll share more of my thoughts in future letters.[11]

True to his word, on January 14, 1901 Suzuki wrote Yamamoto:

> In recent days I have become a socialist sympathizer to an extreme degree. However, my socialism is not based on economics but religion. This said, I am unable to publicly advocate this doctrine to the common people because they are so universally querulous and illiterate and therefore unprepared to listen to what I have to say. However, basing myself on socialism, I intend to gradually incline people to my way of thinking though I also believe I need to study some sociology.[12]

In addition to introducing us to an almost completely unknown side of Suzuki, i.e. as a left-wing radical, the above quotes raise the even more intriguing question of whether it was possible to oppose the prevalent understanding of karma in Japan without having first embraced socialism, with its understanding of social injustice as the product of a class-based society in which the ruling classes ensure their ongoing wealth and power through the creation and maintenance of unjust social structures rather than the karmic consequences of actions, wholesome or unwholesome, undertaken by members of the working class. Unfortunately, for reasons of space, this is a question that cannot be addressed in this article.

It should also be noted that Suzuki was not the only Japanese Buddhist to criticize what was then a widely accepted understanding of karma as it related to social inequality. A Sōtō Zen priest and self-identified anarcho-communist

[11] Quoted in Victoria, *The "Negative Side" of D.T. Suzuki's Relationship to War*, p. 106.
[12] Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 106.

by the name of Uchiyama Gudō wrote the following in a 1909 pamphlet he addressed to tenant farmers:

> Is this [your poverty] the result, as Buddhists maintain, of the retribution due you because of your evil deeds in the past? Listen friends, if, having now entered the twentieth century, you were to be deceived by superstitions like this, you would still be [no better than] oxen or horses. Would this please you?[13]

Uchiyama Gudō

In 1911 Gudō was executed for his alleged participation in a plot to assassinate the emperor, not to mention his radical writings. At his trial, Chief Prosecutor Hiranuma Kiichirō identified Gudō's writing, including a scathing denunciation of the imperial system, as "the most heinous pamphlet ever written since the beginning of Japanese history."14 Further, Gudō's status as a Zen priest served as the pretext for Toyota Dokutan,

[13] Quoted in Victoria, *Zen at War, 2nd ed.*, p. 43.
[14] Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 46.

administrative head of the Myōshinji branch of the Rinzai Zen sect, to condemn Japanese socialists and anarchists as follows:

> The essence of the Rinzai sect since its founding in this country has been to protect the nation through the spread of Zen. It is for this reason that in front of the central Buddha image in our sect's temples we have reverently placed a memorial tablet inscribed with the words, 'May the current emperor live for ten thousand years', thereby making our temples training centers for pacifying and preserving our country ...
>
> We make certain that adherents of our sect always keep in mind love of country and absolute loyalty [to the emperor] ... that they don't ignore the doctrine of karma or fall into the trap of believing in the heretical idea of 'evil equality' [as advocated by socialists, et al.][15]

The designation of socialism as promoting the heretical idea of "evil equality" was a common criticism made by Buddhist leaders up through the end of the Asia-Pacific War (1937–45). As early as 1879, for example, the noted Shin sect priest and scholar Shimaji Mokurai wrote an essay entitled "Differentiation [Is] Equality" (*Sabetsu Byōdō*). Shimaji asserted that distinctions in social standing and wealth were as permanent as differences in age, sex, and language. Thus, those struggling for social equality, most especially socialists and the like, were fatally flawed because they failed to understand that differences in social and economic status were not the result of either social injustice or economic exploitation but were, instead, solely the reward (or punishment) for an individual's actions in past lives. That is to say, without going into detail, Shimaji maintained that socialists failed to understand what these Buddhist leaders claimed was the basic Mahāyāna Buddhist teaching that "differentiation is identical with equality" (*sabetsu soku byōdō*).[16]

While the teaching that "differentiation is identical with equality" may seem puzzling, even contradictory on its surface, it encapsulates the belief that on a moral plane, differences in one's station in life, or physical condition, etc., are the result of one's past karma. Therefore, inasmuch as the law of karma applies equally to everyone, it becomes possible to equate "differentiation" in status with "equality."

[15] Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 50.
[16] See discussion and quotation in *ibid.*, pp. 41–42.

Doctrinal justification

As demonstrated above, it is relatively simple to demonstrate that by ethicizing the concept of karma, focusing on the intention behind the act, the historical Buddha's formulation of karma was meant to encourage a moral life, not serve as a justification for social injustice and economic exploitation. Nevertheless, there are Buddhist sutras, claiming to contain the Buddha's teachings, that suggest persons beset by one or more physical ailments are experiencing the just desserts of their unwholesome actions in past lives. One of the clearest examples of this interpretation of karma is found in what is perhaps the most famous and influential of Mahāyāna scriptures, the Lotus Sutra. In Chapter 28 of this Sutra, we learn:

> "O Samantabhadra! Those who preserve and recite this Sutra in the future world will not be greedy for clothes, bedding, food and drink, and the necessities for life. Their aspirations will not be unrewarded, and their happy reward will be attained in this world. If there is anyone who despises them, saying: 'You are mad. This practice of yours is in vain and will attain nothing at the end,' *they will have no eyes in life after life as a reward for this wrongdoing.* If there is anyone who pays homage and praises them, he will attain tangible rewards in this world. *If anyone sees those who preserve this Sutra and speaks maliciously about their faults, whether true or not, such a person will suffer from leprosy in this life. If anyone scorns them, that person's teeth will be either loose or missing; their lips will be ugly, their nose will be flat, their limbs will be crooked; they will squint; their body will stink and be dirty, suffering from evil tumors, oozing pus; their belly will swell with water; and they will have tuberculosis and other evil and serious illnesses.*" [Italics mine][17]

Such is the karmic fate of those who dare to criticize followers of the Lotus Sutra. And since they will be born eyeless, etc., "in existence after existence," it is clear that the blind, lepers and the physically deformed of this world are themselves at fault for their afflictions. In short, they had it coming. Or as Shaku Sōen expressed it: "But to whom shall we complain of our misery? To none but ourselves!"

[17] *The Lotus Sutra*. Berkeley, CA: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1993, p. 339.

In light of this understanding of karma, it is no wonder that when wedded to the strong, Confucian-influenced familialism of East Asian countries, physical or mental impairment as well as serious disease has long been a source of great shame for not only the affected individuals themselves but for their entire family. Over the centuries many thousands of such individuals and their families have had to endure discrimination, blame, ridicule, isolation, harsh treatment and worse because of the alleged "evil" they were believed to have committed in past lives. For example, Susan Burns of the University of Chicago, wrote about the connection between karma and leprosy in premodern Japan:

> For one, leprosy – long endemic to Japan – was the object of particular stigma from the medieval period onward. As Buddhism became an object of popular faith, leprosy became known as the "karmic retribution disease" (J. *gōbyō*). As this term suggests, it was regarded as divine punishment for evil acts committed in the present or former incarnations. As a result, according to Kuroda Hideo, by the eleventh century, sufferers of 'leprosy,' a term which undoubtedly encompassed a wide range of skin diseases in addition to true leprosy, were already among those categorized as *hinin* (non-people) who congregated on the road that led to the Kiyomizu Temple in Kyoto ... Sufferers were often forced from their homes by family members to become itinerant beggars, while some came together to form so-called 'leper villages,' organized communities of sufferers.[18]

Note, however, that according to Burns, even during the medieval period, leprosy sufferers were somewhat ambivalent figures in that even while discriminated against as the physical manifestations of past bad karma, they were potentially capable of providing a chance for salvation to those who showed compassion toward them. It was the latter attribute that led priests such as Ninshō, Eizon, and others to create shelters for leprosy victims in the thirteenth century.

[18] Burns, Susan L. "Making Illness into Identity: Writing 'Leprosy Literature' in Modern Japan," *Japan Review*, p. 16.

Contemporary manifestations of karmic punishment

No doubt some readers will attribute the above interpretation to a uniquely Mahāyāna aberration or misunderstanding of karma that can be safely dismissed as a relic of Buddhism's feudal past, an understanding that may have crept into the Mahāyāna sutras themselves. In this regard, however, I recall a conversation I had with a senior Thai monk while participating in the 13th Congress of the International Association of Buddhist Studies held at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok in 2002. Having long been aware of, and concerned about, the plight of child prostitutes in Bangkok, I asked the Venerable, "Why doesn't the Thai Sangha speak out against the rampant sexual slavery imposed on children in Bangkok and other Thai cities?" He immediately replied, "Oh, you must understand, these girls did something evil in their past lives, perhaps they committed adultery. That is why they are being punished as prostitutes in this life. Of course, there is hope for them in their future lives if they act properly in this life."

I responded to the Venerable, saying, "Do you really believe these children are being punished for their evil deeds in past lives?" The Venerable took my hands in his own, looked me in the eyes and replied, "You must be a bodhisattva!" With that our conversation ended.

However, my concern about the exploited and sexually abused children did not end there, for in 2012 I was invited to make a presentation at the annual conference of the World Federation of Buddhists (WFB) held in Yeosu, South Korea. In my address I recounted my earlier experience in Bangkok and asked the assembled delegates if they thought the senior Thai monk I had talked to accurately explained the Buddhist understanding of karma. Before I could elicit a response from members of the audience I was abruptly interrupted by the senior Sri Lankan monk serving as the conference's moderator. In a loud and irritated voice, he informed me and the assembled delegates that "the WFB does not tolerate criticisms of any of its members. Your comments are unacceptable."

WFB Conference (author seated third from left)

However, that evening, when conference delegates lined up for a buffet-style meal, I was approached by a group of young Thai monks who, somewhat to my surprise, thanked me for having brought up the issue of child prostitutes in my earlier presentation. "We needed to hear that," said one of them while the others nodded in assent. While I was gratified to learn that at least some young Thai monks shared by concerns, I could not help asking myself why these monks had chosen to remain silent when I had been so severely criticized earlier. Yet I also knew the answer to my question, i.e. in the rigidly hierarchical communities of Buddhist clerics in Asia, no junior monks would dare to speak out against their monastic superiors. This, too, is a topic worthy of further discussion but lies beyond the scope of this article.

With regard to this episode, it might be comforting to supporters of Theravada Buddhism to identify the senior Thai monk's understanding of karma as uniquely his own distortion, unsupported by anything written in the Pali canon upon which this Buddhist tradition is based. Alas, that is not the case, as demonstrated by 'The Shorter Exposition of Action Sutra' (Pali: *Cūḷa-kammavibhaṅga-sutta*). Its opening paragraphs contain the following:

> Then the brahmin student Subha, Todeyya's son, went to the Blessed One and exchanged greetings with him. When this courteous and amiable talk was finished, he sat down at one side and asked the Blessed One:
>
> "Master Gotama, what is the cause and condition why human beings are seen to be inferior and superior? For people are seen to be short-lived and long-lived, sickly and healthy, ugly and beautiful, uninfluential and influential, poor and wealthy, low-born and high-born, stupid and wise. What is the cause and condition, Master Gotama, why human beings are seen to be inferior and superior?"
>
> "Student, beings are owners of their actions, heirs of their actions; they originate from their actions, are bound to their actions, have their actions as their refuge. It is action that distinguishes beings as inferior and superior."[19]

On the one hand it is true that the Buddha only addressed how actions determine one's position as either an inferior or superior being. On the other hand, the Buddha didn't dispute that the characteristics of such beings are manifested in their wealth or poverty, health, intelligence, etc. These attributes were assumed to be an integral, if not determinative, part of inferiority and superiority, the differences in which were all determined by "the owners of their actions," i.e. their positions were due either to their credit or to their fault. Thus, the senior Thai Buddhist monk who determined that the actions of child prostitutes in their past lives were responsible for their sexual exploitation did indeed have a canonical basis for his position.

Returning to Japan, we find yet another example of finding fault with the victim(s) in connection with the massive earthquake and tsunami that struck the Fukushima area of northern Japan on March 11th, 2011. On March 14th, 2011 Tokyo Governor Ishihara Shintarō held a press conference at which he stated:

[19] This sutta is contained in the *Majjhima Nikāya* 135. Available on the Web at: https://suttacentral.net/mn135/en/bodhi?reference=none&highlight=false (accessed April 17, 2024).

> The identity of the Japanese people is greed. This tsunami represents a good opportunity to cleanse this greed (J. *gayoku*), and one we must avail ourselves of. Indeed, I think this is divine punishment ... though I do feel sorry for the disaster victims.[20]

Ishihara Shintarō

It should be noted that in making this claim, Ishihara was following a well-established Buddhist precedent in Japan, one that can be traced at least as far back as priest Nichiren in the thirteenth century. In 1260, with Japan facing a series of calamities at home and the threat of Mongol invasion from abroad, Nichiren submitted his famous *Risshō-ankoku-ron* ('Treatise on Pacifying the Country through the Establishment of True [Buddhism]') to Japan's warrior rulers in Kamakura. The first dialogue contained the following passage:

[20] *Risshō-ankoku-ron.* Available on the Web at: https://nichiren.info/gosho/RisshoAnkokuRon.htm (accessed April 17, 2024).

> The people of today all turn their backs upon what is right; they give their allegiance to evil. That is the reason why the benevolent deities have abandoned the nation, why sages leave and do not return, and in their stead come devils and demons, disasters and calamities that arise one after another.[21]

Depiction of Nichiren

Although Ishihara spoke of divine punishment and Nichiren to the abandonment of Japan, their references to "greed" (one of the three Buddhist poisons) and failure to do "what is right" are clear reflections of the doctrine of karma. Interestingly, while Nichiren never renounced his views, Ishihara's attempt to fault the victims for their victimization created such an uproar that he was almost immediately forced to apologize. His apology took the form of a second press conference on the following day, March 15th, at which he took back his remarks and offered "a deep apology" for having made them.

[21] *ibid.*

Like the young Thai monks who approached me in South Korea, this episode reveals, I believe, the need, even the necessity, to change the long established, karmically justified, practice of finding the victim(s) of misfortune at fault for what has befallen them.

Can karma kill?

While the questions raised above are in serious need of addressing, there is yet one more topic, perhaps the most controversial of them all, that needs to be addressed, i.e. can karma kill? If, as was made clear at the beginning of this article, the historical Buddha's formulation of karma was meant to encourage wholesome acts leading to a moral life, then the very idea that karma could in any way be connected to, let alone excuse, killing would appear to be an oxymoron of the first order. Could killing ever be considered to be a moral act? Isn't the first precept undertaken by all Buddhists, lay and cleric, of whatever tradition, school or sect, to abstain from taking life?

Unfortunately for those who believe it to be a religion of peace, Buddhism has, over the centuries, developed sutras that muddy the waters concerning the act of killing. Perhaps the best known of these is the "Skill in Means Sutra" (Skt. *Upāyakauśalya Sūtra*). This Mahāyāna Buddhist sutra aims to show that the life of a Buddha is not determined by karma, but rather that his deeds depend on the needs of the present and are inspired by the skill in means he demonstrates. Specifically, the sutra includes a story about Śākyamuni Buddha when he was still a Bodhisattva. On board a ship he captained, Śākyamuni discovers that there is a robber intent on killing all passengers and, after debating with himself about what to do, decides to kill the robber, not only for the sake of the passengers but also to save the robber himself from the karmic consequences of his horrendous act.

According to traditional karmic doctrine, the negative karma from killing the robber should have accrued to Śākyamuni, consigning him to a long period of punishment in the future. However, according to the sutra, Śākyamuni explained: "Good man, because I used ingenuity out of great compassion at that time, I was able to avoid the suffering of one hundred thousand *kalpas* of *samsāra* [the ordinary world of form and desire] and that wicked man was reborn in heaven, a good plane of existence, after death."[22] In short, the

[22] Quoted in Victoria, *Zen Terror in Prewar Japan*, p. 206.

Buddha's compassionate intent saved not only the ship's passengers but even the robber himself, and, still further, had the effect of eliminating the negative karmic consequences of his murderous act.

Given its date of composition, the content of the Skill in Means Sutra can safely be dismissed as containing, at most, a semi-fictional account of the Buddha's life. Nevertheless, it can be shown to have played a significant role in the ethical history of East Asian Buddhism up to the modern era, for it provided the basis for the belief that selfless, compassionate intent had the power to overcome or erase any negative karma that might result from the normally proscribed act of killing. In fact, in prewar, 1930s Japan this sutra even formed the ethical basis for acts of domestic assassination directed against Japan's business, political and military leaders. This in turn led to the end of democratic governance, known as Taishō democracy, and the assumption of total political power in the hands of Emperor Hirohito and his advisors.[23] Note that, as Herbert Bix shows, the postwar assertion by US military occupation authorities that Emperor Hirohito was a peace-loving monarch controlled by the Japanese military was a falsehood created for the preservation of an anti-communist, capitalist regime in Japan.

While an extended discussion of this period is beyond the scope of this article, interested readers are invited to read my book, *Zen Terror in Prewar Japan: Portrait of an Assassin*. Inoue Nisshō was the Zen-trained layman who headed a band of Buddhist assassins described in this book. As revealed by the photograph Inoue included of himself in his autobiography, he included an inscription of four Chinese characters, i.e. *issatsu tashō* (Kill One [in order to] Save Many, 一殺多生) that drew its ethical justification from the Skill in Means Sutra.

[23] For further details, see Herbert Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan.* pp. 533–646.

Inoue Nisshō

Inoue and his fellow assassins believed that by killing a small number of corrupt business, political and military leaders, they would be able to save the many, i.e. the Japanese masses, especially tenant farmers and factory workers, from the dire economic straits they faced in depression-era Japan. Inoue and his band fervently believed in something they called the "Shōwa Restoration" (J. *Shōwa Ishin*) in which complete political power would be restored to Emperor Hirohito who, as the alleged benevolent 'father' of the Japanese people, would act to save his children, the Japanese people, from the severe economic hardships they were undergoing.

While the doctrine of karma cannot be held directly responsible for the emergence of Buddhist terrorists like Inoue and his band, the Skill in Means Sutra propagated the belief that the purity of one's intention, i.e. being completely and self-sacrificially compassionate, meant that the perpetrator(s) would be free of karmic punishment in future lives. This belief further allowed

the perpetrators to believe that acts of killing, so long as they were grounded in genuine compassion, were fully compatible with the teachings of the Buddha. In short, the message of this sutra served as a "get out of jail free card" with no need to fear karmic punishment.

For adherents of Theravāda Buddhism, however, this is one instance where the responsibility for this understanding of karma can be fairly placed on the Mahāyāna tradition, for the Skill in Means Sutra is clearly a product of that tradition.

Seeking venues to address the nature of karma

Let us next turn to the question of how, exactly, karma influences an individual's rebirth. In doing so, the first question to be asked is how and where such a resolution could be reached. In other words, the question is what venues exist in the Buddhist world to address a controversial topic like this one, for there can be no doubt that this topic needs to be addressed in light of Buddhism's commitment to reduce suffering in its myriad forms. Rightly or wrongly, the understanding of karma expressed above clearly serves to *increase* suffering rather than reduce it. Further, it is equally clear that this a *pan*-Buddhist topic that needs to be addressed by all traditions of Buddhism, Mahāyāna and Theravāda alike.

But where to address this topic? In the Japanese Zen school, a cleric, prior to formal Dharma transmission, is required to engage in a ceremony literally known as "Dharma combat" (J. *hōssen*) in order to demonstrate that s/he has mastered the fundamental teachings of Buddhism. At least in theory this might be a place, or an opportunity, to address controversial topics. Unfortunately, "Dharma combat" in today's Japan is no more than a mere ritual in which questions related to the nature of the Dharma, and the answers given are memorized in advance. Thus, it is unthinkable that controversial questions like the workings of karma could be discussed in this venue.

In Tibetan Buddhism there remains to this day a strong emphasis on monastic debates. At least in theory, these debates could serve as a venue to explore the negative social effects of karma. Unfortunately, similar to its present-day Zen counterpart in Japan, contemporary monastic debates have also been criticized for, among other things, their emphasis on a rigid and dogmatic understanding of Buddhist philosophy; the focus is on formalism, logic, and memorization leading to a lack of effective application to real-life situations, not to mention an ossification of certain dogmas and practices inhibiting adaptation to contemporary challenges and cultural shifts.

Despite these criticisms, Tibetan Buddhism does have one additional authoritative resource, i.e. the Dalai Lama, who might, again at least in theory, address the problematic application of karma. However, as the following quotation makes clear, the Dalai Lama's explication of karma reveals that he, too, finds nothing problematic about the manner in which karma is popularly understood:

> As an adult, when either good or bad things happen to us, it is quite common for we Tibetans to think of karma as the fruition of actions we committed in the past.
>
> "This year has been full of tragedy and misfortune. This is my bad karma." We believe that the seed for this current tragedy was planted at some time in our past, and is now bearing fruit.
>
> Even when bad things happen to good people, we think of the misfortune as consequences of past bad actions. We believe that somewhere in his or her past, perhaps even in a long-ago lifetime, she or he performed some bad actions and *now must face the consequences.* [Italics mine][24]

Thus, the question remains – how and where can Buddhists, especially in an international context, address an understanding of karma which, at least in part, can be seen as increasing rather than eliminating suffering? It is here that scholars of Buddhism may be able to offer assistance, for it is generally recognized that the Lotus Sutra was composed in stages over time. Earlier versions were possibly written in Prakrit or other early Indic languages with the final version only emerging sometime between the 1st and 2nd centuries CE. Eventually, the Lotus Sutra was translated into Chinese, with the most famous and best-known translation by Kumārajīva in the early 5th century CE. Kumārajīva's translation went on to become the standard version in East Asia and significantly influenced the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism in East Asia as a whole.

[24] Quoted in "What is Karma and How Does it Work?" Available on the Web at: https://www.yowangdu.com/tibetan-buddhism/karma.html (accessed September 16, 2023).

In terms of karma, the question scholars may help answer is at what point in the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism did diseases like leprosy, tuberculosis, blindness, etc., become identified as forms of karmic retribution? Was this karma-linked identification present in the earliest stages of this sutra, or Buddhist sutras as a whole at that time? Was the section in question part of the earliest formulations of this sutra or was it a later accretion? Was the attribution to religion of illnesses whose causes were unknown at the time part of a general societal trend or was it unique to Buddhism? The exploration of these and related questions are well suited to the expertise of not only scholars of Buddhism but of the history of religions in general.

That said, it is too often the case that sophisticated Buddhist scholarship, and the conclusions arrived at, remains in the hands of scholars themselves, confined to the scholarly journals in which they publish. This is compounded by the fact that there are today few venues available in the Buddhist world for actively debating questions like the nature of karma, especially at the international level, i.e. debating questions related to Buddhist praxis as it exists in a country (or even a sect) other than one's own.

While it is true that there are online publications such as the *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* or the *Journal* of *Global Buddhism* that do allow for robust debate, this debate seldom reaches the broader Buddhist community. Additionally, as these journals demonstrate, English has come to serve as a common means of communication among Buddhists internationally. This means that their discussions remain limited to a small portion of the broader Buddhist community, i.e. those who are fluent in English.

Scholars speak

Walpola Rahula's stance

In his discussion of karma, the distinguished Buddhist monk and scholar, Walpola Rahula, pointed out that karma should not be confused with either moral justice or reward and punishment. He noted that the idea of moral justice or reward and punishment stems from the belief in a supreme being, e.g., God, who acts as both a law-giver and judge of what is right and wrong. These insights led him to conclude: "Every volitional action produces its effects or results. If a good action produces good effects and a bad action bad effects, it is not justice, or reward, or punishment meted out by anybody or any power sitting in judgement on your action, but this is in virtue of its own nature, its own law."[25]

Inasmuch as Buddhism does not assert the existence of a supreme being, Rahula is certainly correct in rejecting an understanding of karma based on rewards or punishment meted out by a God-like being. But the question must be asked, does this rejection address, let alone alleviate, the plight of child prostitutes in Bangkok? Inasmuch as Rahula's explanation still allows for the possibility that the destiny of child prostitutes is the result, or fruit, of their own past actions, we are still left with the possibility that the Buddhist interpretation of karma presented in this article can serve to enhance suffering by blaming the victims for what has befallen them.

Peter Harvey's stance

In his discussion of karma in *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, Peter Harvey, focused on a lengthy description of the series of rebirths that are ordered and governed by the law of karma, i.e. beings are reborn according to the nature and quality of their actions in this and past lives. Thus, acts of hatred and violence lead to rebirth in a hell while acts of greed lead to rebirth as a ghost or an animal. On the other hand, abstaining from evil actions and encouraging others to do so leads to a heavenly rebirth.

Harvey notes, however, that while none of these realms lasts forever, they all end in death and then (for the unenlightened), another rebirth. Thus, even life in the hells, though long lasting, is not eternal. To illustrate his point Harvey goes so far as to point out: "This means that there is hope even for

[25] Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, p. 32.

Adolf Hitler: at some time in the far, far distant future, he might even become enlightened! – *if* he were to strive to develop moral and spiritual perfection."[26]

More importantly, at least in terms of this article, Harvey claimed: "Poor, ill or ugly people are not to be presently blamed for their condition, however, for the actions of a past life are behind them, and the important thing is how they behave in the present and how others act towards them."[27] However, in claiming this, Harvey is not necessarily denying the understanding of someone like Shaku Sōen who, it will be recalled, simply said, "We are here enjoying or suffering the effect of what we have done in our past lives ... But to whom shall we complain of our misery? To none but ourselves!"

In saying this, Sōen was not attempting to blame others for their condition, however miserable, but, instead, sought to explain why they, and they alone, were reaping, as a result of their past actions, whatever ills had befallen them. It was they who were at fault. Given this, one would like to ask Harvey, just how child prostitutes in Bangkok should "behave in the present" as they ply their 'trade'?

A further point Harvey made is one that the Buddha himself made in the Sīvaka Sutta (SN 36.21). In this sutra the Buddha emphasized that while karma plays a role in the experiences we undergo, it is not the only factor, for other natural, physical, and mental causes can also lead to various outcomes in life. Thus, the Buddha did not teach everything that happens to a person is due to their past karma. Harvey summarized the Buddha's teaching as follows; "any unpleasant feelings or illnesses that one has can arise from a variety of causes: 'originating from bile, phlegm, or wind, from union (of bodily humours), born from seasonal changes, born from disruptive circumstances, arriving suddenly [due to the action of another person], or born of the fruition of karma'."[28]

Nevertheless, Harvey goes on to claim that "aspects of life which are seen as the result of past karma include one's form of rebirth, social class at birth, general character, crucial good and bad things which happen to one, and even the way one experiences the world."[29]

While the preceding quotations make it appear that Harvey was himself unaware, or at least uncritical, of the harmful aspects of the popular Buddhist

[26] Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, p. 14.
[27] *ibid.*, p. 16.
[28] *ibid.*, p. 23.
[29] *ibid.*

understanding of karma, this was not the case. While not criticizing this understanding of karma, he did comment:

> As an aid to planning courses of action in a karma-influenced world, many traditionalist Buddhists use divination methods such as astrology at certain points in their lives, so as to try to gauge what their karma has in store for them. The idea of the influence of karma, while not fatalistic, does encourage a person to live patiently with a situation. Rather than making new bad karma by getting angry with society, family, or other people, blaming them for his or her lot, he or she can view the situation as the result of his or her own past actions ... Like people of other religions, however, Buddhists sometimes have an idea of fate, in parallel with their idea of karma, or they may even use past karma as an excuse for continuing with present bad karma.[30]

Harvey is not alone in pointing out the historical fatalistic understanding of karma in Asian societies. For example, Buddhist scholar Marte Nilsen wrote:

> Regardless of its philosophical basis, the concept of karma has been used to cement social hierarchies and, ultimately, evaluate people's worth. These hierarchies are often pivotal in the justification of violence in Buddhist societies.[31]

Despite the earlier section on the relationship of karma to killing, readers may be surprised to learn of the connection between karma and war. However, inasmuch as it is axiomatic that war involves killing on a massive scale, one question that inevitably arises is who is responsible for the killing. During the Asia-Pacific War there was only one acceptable answer to this question in Japan, for under no circumstances could a soldier's death on the battlefield be associated in any way with the Imperial military's supreme commander, i.e. Emperor Hirohito. Instead, Satō Gan'ei, a military chaplain with the True Pure Land sect (J. Jōdo Shinshū), explained the situation as follows, to family members worried that their loved ones might die on the battlefield:

---

[30] *ibid.*, pp. 23–24.

[31] Nilsen, reviewer. "Buddhist Violence and Religious Authority: A Tribute to the Work of Michael Jerryson". *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, Volume 30 2023. Available at: https://blogs.dickinson.edu/buddhistethics/files/2023/09/Nilsen_Review_of_Kitts_Juergensmeyer_Buddhist_Violence_and_Religious_Authority.pdf (accessed April 17, 2024).

> Everything depends on karma. There are those who, victorious in battle, return home strong and fit only to die soon afterwards. On the other hand, there are those who are scheduled to enter the military yet die before they do so. If it is their karmic destiny, bullets will not strike them, and they will not die. Conversely, should it be their karmic destiny, then even if they are not in the military, they may still die from gunfire. Therefore, there is definitely no point in worrying about this. Or expressed differently, even if you do worry about it, nothing will change.[32]

On the one hand, it can be said that Satō Gan'ei invoked karma in this manner in an attempt to reduce the suffering caused by the death of a loved one on the battlefield, i.e. reduce the suffering experienced by those close to the deceased. Viewed objectively, however, it also served once again as a mechanism to find the victim at fault for his own death rather than finding fault with a dictatorial, militarist and aggressive government, headed by an allegedly divine emperor whose orders could not be questioned. In so doing it contributed to the ongoing willingness of the decease's loved ones to continue their support of, and participation in, the war effort, no matter how many of their fellow Japanese, let alone the 'enemy,' died in the process. Can the increased suffering that came about as a result be denied?

Satō Gan'ei's understanding of karma was by no means limited to priests of the True Pure Land sect. Yet another example is provided by the wartime writings of Sōtō Zen scholar-priest, Yamada Reirin. In a 1942 book entitled, *Evening Talks on Zen Studies (Zengaku Yawa),* he wrote:

> The true form of the heroic spirits [of the dead] is the good karmic power that has resulted from their loyalty, bravery, and nobility of character. This will never perish ... The body and mind produced by this karmic power cannot be other than what has existed up to the present ... The loyal, brave, noble, and heroic spirits of those officers and men who have died shouting, 'May the emperor live for ten thousand years!' will be reborn right here in this country. It is only natural that this should occur.[33]

[32] Quoted in *Zen War Stories*, p. 153.
[33] Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 156.

By claiming that those Japanese soldiers who died on the battlefield would be reborn "right here in this country" Yamada was making quite a surprising assertion. Surprising in that, as Harvey has pointed out: "The full details of [the fruits of the volition associated with actions], in specific instances, are said to be 'unthinkable' (Skt. *acinteyya*) to all but a Buddha."[34]

Perhaps this assertion is not so surprising to adherents of the Sōtō Zen sect, for in postwar years Yamada was never criticized for his wartime writings. Instead, he rose steadily through the ranks until becoming the seventy-fifth head of Eiheiji, the monastery established by Zen Master Dōgen, the 13th century, founder of Sōtō Zen in Japan. At least for Sōtō Zen adherents, Yamada remains a worthy successor to Dōgen and, as such, a "Buddha" to this day.

Richard Gombrich's positive evaluation

In his book, *What the Buddha Thought*, Richard Gombrich of Oxford University provided a highly positive view of karma: "I believe that it [karma] is not only fundamental to the Buddha's whole view of life, but also a kind of lynchpin which holds the rest of the basic tenets [of Buddhism] together ..."[35] Like previous commentators, Gombrich pointed out that, in accordance with karmic doctrine, humans have free will and are wholly responsible for their own actions. Gombrich was, however, not unaware of what may be called the 'dark side' of karma. He wrote:

> This picture of a universe under control [due to one's own actions] is from one angle reassuring; but in its belief that there is really no undeserved suffering it can also be harsh. Logically it solves the problem of theodicy, but at a price.[36] Many have found this solution as unbearable as the situation it resolves, and it is hardly surprising that Buddhism as it developed after the Buddha's death became rich in ways of obscuring or escaping such an intransigent law of the universe, often at the cost of logical consistency.[37]

[34] Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, p. 24.

[35] Gombrich, *What the Buddha Thought*, p. 11.

[36] Theodicy is defined as "the vindication of divine goodness and providence in view of the existence of evil."

[37] Gombrich, *What the Buddha Thought*, p. 26.

Nevertheless, Gombrich remained firmly convinced in the importance of karmic retribution on the part, not of a god-like figure, but what he identified as a "law of nature" stemming from a belief in karma. He wrote:

> Making the individual conscience the ultimate authority is both a liberating and a dangerous move. What if someone acts on wrong moral reasoning? Society needs a sanction. That is why it was immensely important for the Buddha, and indeed for the whole tradition that followed him, to keep stressing that the law of moral reckoning worked throughout the universe: that good would be rewarded and evil punished in the end.[38]

However, Gombrich was aware that belief in karmic justice occurring in some future life is beyond empirical proof. He attempted to solve this problem by introducing what he called a necessary "leap of faith" on the part of Buddhist adherents, something he described as follows:

> When one introduces the Buddha's teaching to a modern audience, one very often stresses at the outset – as indeed I have done – that he asked people to use their own judgement, to go by their own experience and take nothing on trust. One soon has to qualify this, however, by saying that there was one belief which he held himself and relied on in his teaching, the belief in the law of karma; and if that was not to be obviously falsified by every cot death, it had to entail belief in rebirth. One tends to add, perhaps in an apologetic tone, that these were beliefs that the Buddha inherited and simply could not shake off ... The Buddha's version of the law of karma was entirely his own; but to accept it was the leap of faith he demanded of every follower.[39]

Note that even prior to Gombrich, modern scholars of Buddhism were aware of the need for faith over reason when it came to the acceptance of various beliefs, e.g. the existence of heaven and hell, related to the law of karma. For example, in his 1886 book, *Shinri kinshin* (Golden Compass of Truth), Inoue Enryō, a Japanese scholar-priest active during the second half of the Meiji

[38] *ibid.*, p. 27.
[39] *ibid.*, pp. 27–28.

era (1868-1912) who was affiliated with the True Pure Land sect of Buddhism, championed the law of karmic retribution as follows:

> Upon teaching the cause and effect of good and evil [i.e. karmic retribution], the need to suppose heaven and hell follows a natural course of thinking. It is not necessarily irrational or illogical. The stories of devils and [boiling] kettles in hell or lotus flowers and music in heaven are simply beyond reason. Seen from a nonreligious standpoint, they are nothing but illustrations of happy or painful conditions. In other words, these are questions of faith, not of reason.[40]

Based on Gombrich and Inoue's viewpoints, it is clear that the need for faith in various aspects of karma is beyond empirical proof. Thus, one question to be asked is what happens to those who otherwise accept the Buddha's teachings but are unwilling to accept the need for faith in some kind of karmically-influenced afterlife? Is their unwillingness sufficient reason to be expelled from the community of Buddhists?

In addition, what if there were those who accepted the concept of "rebirth" but interpreted it to mean rebirth, or continuation, of "life" writ large. That is to say, for example, in the form of life-producing rain resulting from the evaporation of the approximately 60% of the decease's body composed of water, plus the "recycling" of the remaining 40% carbon and other chemicals comprising the decease's body that, once returned to the earth, also serves as the basis for new life forms. This understanding of rebirth would, needless to say, be readily empirically verifiable, thereby satisfying the need for a scientifically grounded explanation of its meaning.

The problem is that a cyclical, life-producing rebirth would take place without the need for a karmically-determined entity continuing in one of the traditional six realms of existence, i.e. the realms of gods, pugnacious demi-gods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and numerous hells. These realms would be seen to be no more than a form of Buddhist "expedient/skillful means" (Skt. *upāya-kauśalya*) created to convince/frighten otherwise recalcitrant Buddhist clerics and laity into living moral and wholesome lives.

[40] Schulzer, Rainer. Quoted in "Religion as Political Postulate in the Writings of the Modern Buddhist Philosopher Inoue Enryō"; *The Eastern Buddhist* 3/2: pp. 21–42.

Nevertheless, even while refusing belief in the traditional six realms of existence, it would still be possible to accept, from an empirical viewpoint, not simply rebirth as life writ large, but also the fact that life, even in the midst of repetition, is a continuously evolving process. In the human species, for example, if the past did not influence the future we would still be moving about on all four limbs rather than walking upright on two. That is to say, it would be possible to understand rebirth as synonymous with, or occurring together with, evolution. It would not, however, be a rebirth in one of the six realms dependent on the moral quality of one's acts in previous lifetimes.

In short, it would be an understanding of rebirth differing substantially with the traditional view of karma, something that many, if not most, Buddhists would likely be unwilling to accept. This leads to the question of whether belief in rebirth based on the continuous, unending, yet everchanging evolution of life, albeit lacking a karmically determined rebirth in one of the six realms, should be considered a form of litmus test, used to determine who is, and is not, a Buddhist.

As important as these questions are, they lie beyond the scope of this article and must await future exploration. Here, the key question to be answered is whether the acceptance of the prerequisite "[leap of] faith" would do anything to extricate child prostitutes in Bangkok, dead soldiers on the battlefield, people with physical or mental impairments, et al. from their karmic fates due to the unwholesome acts they had allegedly committed in their past lives?

Conclusion

In light of the many negative examples presented above, one is forced to ask, how did it come to pass that so many millions of Japanese Buddhists, like many others in Asian Buddhist countries, have remained uninformed of how karma actually functions? How did all of these Buddhists 'get it so wrong'? Or, alternatively, can this be explained as one of the 'subtleties' of this Buddhist doctrine that somehow 'got lost along the way'?

By now the answer to the title of this article should be clear. As demonstrated above, a popular and widespread interpretation of karma can be, and definitely has been, the cause of suffering (and continues to be so). This is amply illustrated by statements made by leading clerics in all of Buddhism's major traditions, past and present. While scholars like Rahula and Harvey are correct, at least doctrinally, in their exposition of the workings of karma, they

both fail to acknowledge just how harmful some aspects of the actual historical practice have been. In particular, the fatalism stemming from the "victim is at fault" is, and remains, as widespread in Buddhism as it is harmful, having been incorporated even into major Buddhist writings like the Lotus Sutra.

Given this, has not the time come for both scholars and practitioners alike to reexamine the doctrine of karma, purging it of its socially reactionary uses? Fortunately, I am not alone in calling for this reexamination. In an article entitled "Buddhism and Disability" Stephen Harris of Leiden University first noted: "Negative effects of karmic action include not only rebirth in a negative realm, a short life, or poverty but also a number of conditions that overlap with certain kinds of disability."[41] This led Harris to conclude: "The traditional view that disabilities are negative results of past karmic action can be rethought."[42]

Isn't it time for Buddhists to examine, if not revise, an understanding of karma that has been used to increase, rather than decrease, suffering? Isn't it time for Buddhists to have a serious debate concerning the implications of D.T. Suzuki's comments as introduced at the beginning of this article? Note, too, that Suzuki further asserted the traditional understanding of karma was closely linked to social injustice. He wrote: "Do we not thus see many good, conscientious people around us who are wretchedly poverty-stricken? Shall we take them as suffering the curse of evil karma in their previous lives, when we can understand the fact perfectly well as a case of social injustice?"[43]

The reader will recall that in *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, Suzuki made it clear that socialist teachings lay at the heart of his criticism of the popular understanding of karma. At the same time, Suzuki revealed his criticism of Shaku Sōen, his own Zen master, was derived from the former's embrace of socialism:

> As long as we live under the present state of things, it is impossible to escape the curse of social injustice and economic inequality. Some people must be born rich and noble and enjoying a superabundance of material wealth, while others must be groaning under the unbearable burden imposed upon them by cruel society. Unless we make a radical change in our present

[41] Harris, "Buddhism and Disability," in *Disability and World Religions: An Introduction*, p. 37.
[42] *ibid.*, p. 45.
[43] Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, p. 189.

> social organization, we cannot expect every one of us to enjoy an equal opportunity and a fair chance. Unless we have *a certain form of socialism* installed that is liberal and rational and systematic, there must be some who are economically more favored than others.[44] [Italics mine]

As previously noted, following his return to Japan in 1909, Suzuki never again wrote about the need for a socialist transformation of society in his numerous Japanese language writings. On the one hand, it is understandable that Suzuki never put at risk his increasingly prestigious teaching positions in Japan to engage in the very risky political actions that would have been necessary to reform Japanese society in line with socialist ideals "from the ground up." Even then, i.e. the early years of the twentieth century, socialism and socialists were the enemy of the state, for Japan was well on its way to embracing imperialism based on capitalist expansion. How many of us would have risked our livelihoods, let alone the danger of incarceration, or even death, to act differently than Suzuki did?

Even while recognizing that wealth and social status, etc., have been explicitly identified as the result of good karma from Buddhism's earliest teachings, isn't it time for contemporary Buddhists to become aware of, if not welcome, the insights provided into the structural origins of poverty and exploitation by the social sciences, including socialism and similar ideologies? Isn't it far more likely that child prostitutes in Bangkok are the victimized offspring of poverty-stricken tenant farmers in rural Thai society (and those of neighboring countries) than they are of transgressions allegedly committed in their past lives?

Failure to investigate, or be concerned about, the suffering caused by structural inequality within society suggests a bleak future for Buddhism in an increasingly globalized world. People of good will can hardly be blamed for rejecting a religious faith in which some adherents have engaged over the centuries in one of the classic rationalizations for justifying oppression and social discrimination: "the victim is at fault."

As for those readers who state that, for better or worse, there is ample evidence in the sutras that the historical Buddha himself embraced an understanding of karma that, at least in effect, allowed victims to be faulted

[44] *ibid.*, p. 191.

for whatever befell them, it is important to recall what the Buddha taught in the well-known Kālāma Sutta. That is to say, he advised the Kālāma people not to accept teachings simply through tradition, speculative reasoning, personal preferences, what one thinks should be true, or respect for a particular teacher. Rather, he taught:

> When you, O Kālāmas, know for yourselves: 'these states are unwholesome and blameworthy, they are condemned by the wise; these states, when accomplished and undertaken, conduce to harm and suffering', then indeed you should reject them.[45]

Even if it could be demonstrated that the Buddha failed to recognize the many expressions of economic and social discrimination caused by a class-based social structure, he can hardly be faulted for having failed to anticipate the emergence of a capitalist society in future millennia. However, what he did anticipate, and quite correctly, was that any teaching conducive to harm and suffering was to be rejected.

Given this, it can be assumed that even a presumed teaching of the Buddha himself that can be shown to result in harm and suffering should be rejected. This suggests that the Buddha Dharma is not a 'closed book,' impervious to change. Instead, as new insights into the causes of suffering are discovered, or at least better understood, Buddhism can *and should* change accordingly.

In the case of karma, when there is a clear need, new understandings or interpretations are required that do not serve to find victims at fault (nor excuse the larger Buddhist community from striving to ameliorate social or structural injustice when it plays a role). Contemporary Buddhist charitable organizations like Tzu Chi exemplify the promise that a positive understanding of karma can offer Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike.

As we survey the world around us today, it could not be clearer that whole groups or classes of human beings are being made to suffer not because of their individual acts, whether wholesome or unwholesome, whether done with good intent or ill, but simply because they were born as members of a particular group or class. Would any Buddhist claim, for example, that the thousands of children killed in Gaza had, on an individual basis, done something so horrendous in their past lives as to deserve their present fate?

[45] Quoted in Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, p. 10.

If not, then it is clear there exists something called "collective punishment", i.e. punishment based on membership in an ethnic, national, economic, racial group, etc., that plays a decisive role in the fate of each member of the group irrespective of the actions of individual group members. About this possibility, traditional Buddhism appears to have said relatively little. Once again, this silence can only serve to provide those responsible for collective punishment with a mechanism to deny or at least evade their responsibility. This question, too, must be addressed in any reformulation of the doctrine of karma.

Should Buddhists fail to seriously address the issues raised in this article they will be left to answer the question that Uchiyama Gudō so insightfully and presciently raised more than a century ago:

> Listen friends, if, having now entered the twentieth century, you were to be deceived by superstitions like this, you would still be [no better than] oxen or horses. Would this please you?

Works Consulted

Bix, Herbert P. *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan.* New York: HarperCollins, 2000.

Burns, Susan L. "Making Illness into Identity: Writing 'Leprosy Literature' in Modern Japan". *Japan Review*, no. 16 (2004): pp. 191–211.

Gombrich, Richard. *Theravāda Buddhism. A social history from ancient Benares to modern Colombo*. Second Edition. London: Routledge, 2006.

_____. *What the Buddha Thought*. UK: Equinox Publishing, 2009.

Harris, Stephen E. "Buddhism and Disability", in *Disability and World Religions An Introduction*; Darla Y. Schumm and Michael Stoltzfus eds. Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2016.

Harvey, Peter. *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Nilsen, Marte, reviewer. "Buddhist Violence and Religious Authority: A Tribute to the Work of Michael Jerryson". *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, vol. 30, 2023.

Rahula, Walpola. *What the Buddha Taught. 2nd ed.* New York, Grove Press, 1959.

Schulzer, Rainer. Quoted in "Religion as Political Postulate in the Writings of the Modern Buddhist Philosopher Inoue Enryō". *The Eastern Buddhist* 3/2, pp. 21–42.

Suzuki, Daizetz Teitaro. *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism.* London: Luzac and Company, 1907.

Victoria, Brian. "The "Negative Side" of D. T. Suzuki's Relationship to War". *The Eastern Buddhist,* no. 41/2, pp. 97–138.

_____. *Zen War Stories.* Boulder, CO: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003.

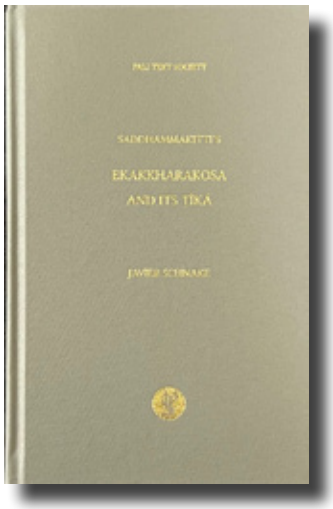
_____. *Zen at War. 2nd ed.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006.

_____. *Zen Terror in Prewar Japan: Portrait of an Assassin.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020.

Yamada, Reirin. *Zengaku Yawa (Evening Talks on Zen Studies)*. Tokyo: Daiichi Shobō, 1942.

Saddhammakitti's Ekakkharakosa *and its* Ṭīkā edited by Javier Schnake

Reviewed by Aleix Ruiz-Falqués



The present book by Javier Schnake consists of a critical edition of a short grammatical text called the *Ekakkharakosa* "Treasure of Monosyllables" by the Burmese scholar-monk Saddhammakitti, along with its *ṭīkā*, or commentary. The latter provides a detailed exegesis of the main text, elucidating its meaning with examples, making its sources and references explicit, and containing an historical introduction and colophon. The editions of these two texts are presented separately and are preceded by a general introduction touching on the works' significance and historical background, issues of authorship and dating, a survey of the structure of the texts, and a note on the methodology of the critical edition. This introductory section builds on an earlier paper by Schnake, published in 2021, entitled "Pali *ekakkhara*s Revisited" (*Journal of the Pali Text Society* XXXIV 2021, pp. 125–50). The edition is exemplary in its use of a large number of manuscripts and in providing a friendly layout that clearly distinguishes two sections in the critical apparatus: variant readings and references. The effort of the Pali Text Society for improving the presentation of their critical editions, such as the implementation of LaTeX, is commendable and credit must be given to the editorial team for their work.

Saddhammakitti's *Ekakkharakosa* is one of the well-known "Minor Pali Grammars" in Burma—a set of fourteen, or sometimes fifteen, texts belonging to different periods ranging from the 11th to the 15th century CE and dealing with particular aspects of Pali grammar.[1] It was composed around 1525 (p. xxvii), which corresponds to the date given in the *Sāsanavaṃsa*, namely 887 of the Burmese Sakkarāj era (cf. *Sāsanavaṃsa*, ed. Bode, p. 76). A number of scholars had previously proposed a date of 1465, but this no longer seems tenable after Schnake's careful scrutiny of several manuscripts. The author of the *ṭīkā* remains unknown, although presumably it was someone close to the scholarly circle of Saddhammakitti (p. xxvii).

As Schnake explains in his introductory essay, the role of lexicons of monosyllables transcended mere grammatical scholarship and was linked with traditions of numerical and alphabetical symbolism. As I will exemplify subsequently, this is not a mere practical dictionary, but in a sense a structured inventory of syllables of different types, arranged in a manner that, on first appearances, seems artificial and somewhat impractical. However, this organisational rationale can be explained, on the one hand, as a reflection of the elevated, transcendental status of Pali language and grammar as a "scientific" medium to master the sacred word of the Buddha, and, on the other, by the belief that syllables (*akkhara*s) are the ultimate constituents of the Buddha's language (see *Kaccāyanavutti* ad Kacc §1). As Schnake explained in his most-informative 2021 article (cited above), a lexicon such as the *Ekakkharakosa* was intended to be both playful and entertaining, at the same time as pedagogical. This subject is one that Schnake had already explored in detail in his PhD thesis entitled "Le Dhamma par le jeu desprit et de la langue: le *Vajirasāratthasaṅgaha*, texte pāli du Nord de la Thaïlande (XVIe siècle)" ("The Dhamma through wit and word play: the *Vajirasāratthasaṅgaha*, a Pali text from northern Thailand, 16th century"), PhD Thesis, University of Paris, 2018, and his work on such dimensions of language-play speaks to his suitability to present this critical edition.

The body of the *Ekakkharakosa* consists of 130 mnemonic stanzas, written in a typical scholastic style that does not lend itself to easy comprehension, without assistance. For instance, these are the first two stanzas for syllables beginning with *p-* (p. 15):

[1] There are actually many more minor grammatical texts, but they were not "canonized" in the anthology of fifteen minor grammars of the Icchāyasa Press, 1954, published as part of the Chaṭṭhasaṅgāyana (Sixth Council) series.

70. *vātuṇhe paramatthe po roge vise apāyake*
hirikopīnapaṅkesu / pā tu vāte ca pītari.

71. *pi bhattari kalattamhi / pu karīsamhi niraye*
pā tu pānāvane patte pūraṇe / pi tu tappane, etc.

70. The syllable ***pa*** [is used] in the sense of wind (*vāta*), heat (*uṇha*), ultimate reality (*paramattha*), disease (*roga*), poison (*visa*), misfortune (*apāyaka* = cty. *apāya*), private organs (*hirikopīna*) and mud (*paṅka*). / The syllable ***pā*** [is used] in the sense of wind (*vāta*), father (*pītā*).

71. The syllable ***pi*** [is used] in the sense of husband (*bhattā*) and wife (*kalatta*) / The syllable ***pu*** [is used] in the sense of faeces (*karīsa*) and hell (*niraya*). / Again, √***pā*** [cty. "as a verbal root (*dhātu*)", [is used] in the sense of drinking (*pāna*), protecting (*avana*), obtaining (*patta*), and filling (*pūraṇa*). / In turn, [the verbal root (*dhātu*)] **√*pi*** [is used] in the sense of warming (*tappana*), etc.[2]

The commentary is therefore essential for understanding the cryptic style of the verses. The material is arranged alphabetically, beginning with vowels and moving on through the consonants (i.e., *k*, *kh*, etc.). The dictionary includes a wide range of monosyllabic words, from adverbs to verbal roots. It is designed as a resource for grammarians, or at least for those who are familiar with the grammatical system of Kaccāyana and Saddanīti. For instance, in the letter *ch*, we find the monosyllable *(c)cha* (spelled in the nom. sg. *ccho*). This is not a conventional word but a *paccaya* ("affix") taught in Kaccāyana's grammar (see Kacc §478). Another example: the syllable *gha* used in the sense of feminine *-ā* stems, following the conventional nomenclature of Kaccāyana (see *Ekakkharakosa-ṭīkā* 56,2ff. and Kacc §60 *ā gho*). These suffixes, namely *ccha* and *gha*, are not natural Pali words, but they are used in the Kaccāyana, Saddanīti, and similar systems of classical Pali *byākaraṇa* ("grammar").

Javier Schnake's critical edition of the *Ekakkharakosa* with its *ṭīkā* represents a landmark in the philology of medieval Pali texts. His work typifies the efforts of the broader scholarly trend of the past decade, a period that has witnessed a remarkable growth in academic publications about medieval and

[2] My translation. cty = commentary.

early-modern Pali literature from South and Southeast Asia.[3] The edition under review offers an exemplar of editorial practices that other scholars will hopefully adopt. Indeed, despite the relatively wide circulation of Mabel Bode's *Pali Literature of Burma* (1909), the large majority—over 95%—of the Pali texts produced in Burma and mentioned by Bode have not yet been critically edited. Notwithstanding that most of them are now available in local editions—even Guṇasāgara's *Mukhamattasāra*, a text that most Burmese Pali scholars had never seen and for which I myself was preparing a critical edition based on five manuscripts, has now been published in Mandalay by Sayadaw U Kesara—a thorough critical edition of such works, in Roman script, remains a desideratum.

There are likely several reasons for this gap in our access to editions of younger Pali texts, one being the perceived irrelevance, for the modern student, of some of these manuals and commentaries. It is understandable that readers may feel discouraged by the dry scholastic style of composition, which requires some familiarity with the idiosyncratic nomenclature of Pali classical grammars. Even when the system is learnt, its relevance to the study of canonical Pali texts remains unclear and, *prima facie*, the texts do not seem to add any relevant insight regarding the teachings of the Buddha.

But medieval Pali scholars saw things in a different way. They argued that scholastic works are essential in preserving and perpetuating the Teachings of the Buddha. A famous poem by Raṭṭhasāra, a 15th-century Burmese poet-monk, directly links salvation to the mastery of scholastic texts. Describing the spiritual quest of a young monastic, perhaps an ideal one, Raṭṭhasāra states:

> He must be familiar with verses in Pali,
> Various forms of address and old difficult words,
> He must know the meanings and formations,
> Of elements, use of metaphors and versification,
> Grammatical method and annotation,
> And how to reason forwards and backwards.

[3] For more information on the mentioned publications, a detailed list of publications is included in the bibliography at the end of the article. See also Trent Walker, "Theravada Literature After 'Roads Taken and Not Taken': Reflections on Recent Textual Studies," *Journal of Global Buddhism* 2021, Vol. 22 (1): 199–209. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.4727617

> Then if he knows all this he will have recognition.
> He will be celebrated in this life as a man of erudition.
> In future rebirths in this *Saṃsara*
> He will come near *Buddha Arya Maitreya*.
> Then for him not too far distant will be *Nirvana*.[4]

Beyond personal salvation, the work of the grammarians was also aimed at the salvation of the Buddha's word. This is particularly true with Dhammakitti's *Ekakkharakosa*. As Schnake explains in his introduction:

> The end of Buddhist time is here depicted as the driving force underlying the composition of the *Ekakkharakosa*. Buddhaghosa's conceptualizations regarding the end of the Sāsana are put in the foreground, notably the trio *paṭivedha-paṭipatti-pariyatti* (penetration of the meaning/practice/study), the last of which plays an essential role in the preservation of the sacred texts. (p. xxx)

Of course, now that we have preserved the sacred texts, one might argue that we could do without the study of grammatical treatises. But what Dhammakitti and his fellow scholars, and poets such as Raṭṭhasāra, meant was that their works were instrumental in the right interpretation and moral assimilation of the texts, not simply to their mechanical replication. To this end, maintaining a system of Pali learning within the monastic institution was crucial. The *Ekakkharakosa*'s commentary offers illustrative historical notes that depict the dramatic context of Dhammakitti's labours and somehow suggests that Dhammakitti had already redirected his focus—away from the wider dissemination of Pali scholarship within his own lifetime, and towards providing resources from which future monastics could retrieve the extensive knowledge that Dhammakitti saw slipping away before his own eyes:

> For at this time, because of the fear of the tribe that inhabited the distant kingdom of the Northern part, that plundered, was violent, and had wrong views, and because of the people's fear of famines, thieves and diseases that had arisen in this very Tamba

[4] Friedrich V. Lustig, *Burmese Classical Poems*, undated, online access: https://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/Lustig-ed-burmese_classical_poems-bu+en-tu.pdf [accessed 30/10/2024]

> country, by means of death and by means of being separated from other regions, the beings—house-holders, monks, and even animals—for the most part encountered great misfortune and misery in this Tamba contry.
>
> [...]
>
> The texts of the canonical and commentarial books encountered great destruction, by virtue of being taken to other countries, and being dispersed, scattered, broken up and being burnt. Few were liberated from the fear mentioned above; and the remaining monks because of the fear arising again as aforementioned, had their mind disturbed and bewildered, completely oppressed by the disorder due to the king's actions. And as it was said regarding the texts, they had the mind unavailable for sustaining and learning their pure words. And at this moment, the master[5] [thought]: "The tradition of the Sāsana through the study [of texts] (*pariyatti*) developed in this country will be interrupted soon. [...] As I am composing this work, once in a future time, when the aforementioned fears will be appeased, the sons of good families, modest and devoted, confident, will leave the household life for the sake of salvation in the Sāsana. Through the support of this work [i.e. the *Ekakkharakosa*], they will again and again produce effort for hearing, memorizing and learning, etc., of canonical texts, commentaries, etc., and will have the true understanding". (pp. xxviii–xxix)

Assuming that this report contains an element of truth, it is noteworthy that, among all options to preserve Pali grammatical knowledge, Dhammakitti decided to compose a book on monosyllables. The main sources of the *Ekakkharakosa* are Sanskrit *Ekakṣarakośa*s and Pali grammatical texts (for more details, see Schnake 2021), with only relatively little material coming from canonical and commentarial usages of monosyllables—only in the commentary do we find more examples taken from the older Pali literature. However, that is not to imply that the *Ekakkharakosa* and its commentary blindly follow Sanskrit models. For instance, when it comes to the syllable *ṅa*, older

[5] This refers to Saddhammakitti, the author of the *Ekkharakosa*.

treatises on monosyllables are acknowledged. The commentary explains that "even though the monosyllable has two meanings in ancient *Ekakkharakosa*s, namely 'The syllable *ṅa* represents Bhairava (a form of Shiva), and it also means desire for sensual objects (*visayappihā*)', nevertheless, in the Kaccāyana and similar Pali grammatical treatises, the syllable is found separately simply expressing its own phonetic form. But because it is not found in the canon and the commentaries that are composed in the original language of Magadha, in this treatise no specific meaning for this syllable is given" (my translation).[6] This passage from the commentary evinces clear intention to preserve words that are relevant to canonical Pali, referred to here as "the original language of Magadha".

For the large majority of Pali scholars in pre-modern Burma, the vocabulary of grammar formed the foundation of their Pali knowledge. Hence many suffixes that are monosyllabic, for instance the verbal ending *-ti* of the 3rd person singular of the Present, were considered as Pali monosyllabic words. Likewise, verbal roots (*dhātu*s) are often monosyllablic and therefore were incorporated into the *kosa* ("treasure [of words]", i.e. "dictionary", see the English word 'thesaurus'). Thus it would be reductive to dismiss the work as empty scholastic fireworks (2021: 141 n. 21) citing R.O. Franke's assessment of the Ekakkh, a work "without importance for our knowledge of Pali".

As Schnake has insightfully argued, "the compilation of what best embodies the value of the syllable, because of its range of meanings, is considered [...] as a concentrate of the Buddhist doctrine" (Schnake 2021: 143). Indeed, monosyllables and particles are one of the most fascinating areas of Pali grammar, for, on the one hand and in many cases, they are redundant or inconsequential, but in others, the precise interpretation of a passage hinges on the correct understanding of a single monosyllable. All Pali students are acquainted with ubiquitous particles such as *kho*, *hi*, *pi*, *va*, *nu*, etc., sometimes combined with adverbs, as in *atha kho*, *tena hi*, *tathā pi*, *na nu*, etc. A well-known principle among Pali grammarians is that "particles have many meanings" (*anekatthā nipātā*, cf. *Mukhamattadīpanī*, Burmese

[6] Ekakkh-ṭ 57,$_{16–20}$: *ṅakāro pana yadi pi porāṇekakkharakose ṅakāro Bhedavakhyāto ṅakāro visayappihā ti atthadvaye pavatti vuttā Kaccāyanādīsu ca sarūpavasen' eva visuṃ vuttā sabhāvaniruttimāgadhabhāsāsu pana pāḷiaṭṭhakathādīsu visuṃ avijjamānattā na-y-idha tass' atthabhedā vuttā*. The Sanskrit model is quoted in note iii Ekāk I §11 *ṅa-kāro bhairave prokto ṅakāro viṣayaspṛhā.*

edition of 1933, 27,$_{28}$). The Devil is in the details, and mastery in such minute and seemingly innocuous words is praised by medieval scholars such as Ariyavaṃsa Dhammasenāpati of Sagaing (also 15th century, Burma). In his *Ganthābharaṇa* "Ornament of the Books", a monograph devoted to *nipāta*s, he writes the following stanzas:

> 88. If someone studies a book without having mastered indeclinables, his mind, like a bottle gourd on the water, will never reach any depth.
>
> 89. Without knowledge of indeclinables, whatever that fool says, even if it is on worldly matters, will sound as disgraceful as the rambling of a mad man.[7]

Ariyavaṃsa was likely Dhammakitti's teacher or, at least, very close precursor.[8] However, there are interesting differences between the *Ganthābharaṇa* and the *Ekakkharakosa*. For instance, in the *Ekakkharakosa* particles such as *pi* and *ti* and *va* are not covered, which suggests they were taken as *api*, *iti* and *eva*, not as authentic monosyllables. In contrast, Ariyavaṃsa's *Ganthābharaṇa* includes them (see stanzas 6 for *api*, 40 for *eva*, 64 for *iti*). Similarly, Ariyavaṃsa seems more grounded in commentarial explanations of adverbs, whereas Dhammakitti exhibits a special interest in completing the alphabet. This formal aspect cannot pass unnoticed. For even when certain monosyllables hold no particular interest or meaning beyond their standard grammatical application, they are included for the sake of comprehensiveness. For instance, the last item of the dictionary is the syllable *aṃ* (Ekakkh-ṭ 169,$_{15}$), the last "letter" of the Pali alphabet. This syllable is explained as meaning Mādhava and Vāsudeva, two explanations clearly borrowed from Sanskrit/Hindu sources and hardly applicable to Pali texts. In addition to that, the author adds usages of *aṃ* in Pali, but they are restricted to grammar: *aṃ* is the *bindu* or the "dot" graphically representing the nasalised vowel; *aṃ* is also taken as the suffix of the accusative singular

[7] Ganthābharaṇa 88–89:

asikkhitvā nipātānaṃ yo ganthaṃ v' idha sikkhati
alābu v' assa toyamhi cittaṃ n' ādhimutaṃ sadā.
yaṃ yaṃ bhāsati so mando lokiyam pi ca taṃ vinā
ummattakavacanaṃ va asobhaṃ tassa bhāsitaṃ.

[8] Mabel Bode, *Pali Literature of Burma*, Royal Asiatic Society, London, 1909, p. 45.

ending *aṃ*; and finally, it is described as a replacement of *m* before a consonant (Kacc §30). In such cases it is clear that the author/s of Ekakkh and Ekakkh-ṭ follow the general trend of taking the language of grammar as part of the Pali that students need to master. As previously noted, there are cases such as *ṅa* that, strictly speaking, do not warrant inclusion, since they do not function in Pali as monosyllables. But the fact that such "words" are included should be taken as indicative of Dhammakitti's aim at comprehensiveness.

All in all, the *Ekakkharakosa* and its commentary, presented now in an excellent edition by Javier Schnake, perfectly encapsulate the development of scholastic Pali in the second millennium. The use of Sanskrit sources and the primacy of Grammar as the queen of scholastic sciences are common features of Pali works written in Southeast Asia from the 11th century CE onward. The corpus of philological texts such as the *Ekakkharakosa* is indeed a treasure in helping us understand the systems of thought of those who edited and transmitted the Pali canon for centuries. Schnake's pioneering edition is not only a precious contribution to our understanding of this fascinating aspect of medieval Theravāda Buddhism, but also an exemplary model for future scholarship to follow.

Saddhammakitti's Ekakkharakosa *and its* Ṭīkā is published by the Pali Text Society, 2024. (xlviii + 203 pp.) £45.50. ISBN: 978-086013- 544-9.