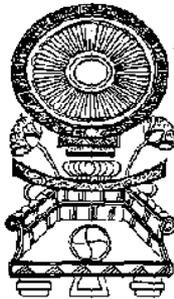


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EDITOR'S NOTE

With this second issue of volume 22 of *Buddhist Studies Review* (2005) my role as interim Editor comes to an end. Beginning with volume 23.1 (2006), Professor Peter Harvey will take on the role of Editor and *Buddhist Studies Review* will be published by Equinox Publishing Ltd. For the new subscription rates please see inside the back cover.

RUPERT GETHIN

Editor for volume 22 (2005)

SOME PALI DISCOURSES IN THE LIGHT
OF THEIR CHINESE PARALLELS
PART TWO *

ANĀLAYO

The present article is a follow up to my examination of the potential of the Chinese Āgamas as a corrective and supplement to the Pali discourses, published in the previous issue of *Buddhist Studies Review*.¹ While in the earlier article I took up examples from the first fifty discourses in the Majjhima Nikāya, the present article treats examples from the remainder of the same collection.

Placing the Pali discourses and their counterparts in the Chinese Āgamas side by side often brings to light an impressive degree of agreement, even down to rather minor details. This close agreement testifies to the emphasis on verbatim recall in the oral transmission of the early discourses. In this respect the early Buddhist oral tradition forms a class of its own in the ambit of oral literature in general, where often relatively free improvisation is the rule. Oral performance of a narrative type in a setting like Africa or medieval Europe demands innovation and improvisation from the performer, whose task is to present the tale in such a way as to best entertain the audience. Such a type of oral literature is thus recreated every time it is told. In contrast, the purpose of the early Buddhist oral tradition was to preserve sacred material, for which free improvisation is not appropriate. Moreover, the performance situation of the early discourses was not only public, but

* I am indebted to Bhikkhu Bodhi, Bhikkhu Ñāṇatusita, Professor Enomoto and Dr. Rupert Gethin for reading an earlier draft of this article and offering me the gift of their comments. It goes without saying that I remain responsible for whatever errors should still be found in my presentation.

¹ *Buddhist Studies Review* 22 (2005), 1–14.

also private, and recitation was often undertaken communally, which leaves little scope for free improvisation.²

In this emphasis on verbatim recall, the early Buddhist discourses stand in the tradition of Vedic oral literature, where verbatim recall was similarly of central importance. Unlike the Brahmin reciters, however, not all Buddhist monk reciters were trained in memorizing texts from their early youth onwards.³ Thus in spite of the formidable feat of transmitting a vast corpus of material to posterity, some of the errors bound to occur during oral transmission have also left their impact on the Pali discourses. Such errors can involve a shift of material to a different place, or even loss of material. At times, due to the need for explanation during oral performance, it might also happen that material which originally was of a commentarial nature influenced a discourse, or even became part of it.

An example of a shift of material to a different place can be found in the *Cūḷasakuludāyi Sutta*. The Pali and Chinese version of this discourse record a discussion between the Buddha and the wanderer Sakuludāyī on the way to an entirely pleasant world, which according to both versions is to be found in the development of the *jhānas*. After describing the attainment of the four *jhānas*, the Pali discourse turns to an account of the gradual path, which depicts how someone goes forth and attains the four *jhānas* and the three higher knowledges.

The *Cūḷasakuludāyi Sutta*'s treatment of the gradual path follows each *jhāna* and higher knowledge with the declaration that this attainment is a state superior to the way to an entirely pleasant world discussed earlier. This procedure creates a somewhat perplexing proposition, as in this way the *Cūḷasakuludāyi Sutta* proclaims that each of the *jhānas* mentioned in its description of the gradual path is superior to the *jhānas* mentioned in its earlier discussion of the path to an entirely pleasant world.⁴

² M. Allon, *Style and Function* (Tokyo, 1997), p. 366.

³ O. von Hinüber, *Der Beginn der Schrift und frühe Schriftlichkeit in Indien* (Mainz, 1989), p. 67.

⁴ MN 79 at MN II 38,8: 'He dwells having attained the first *jhāna*. This ... is a state superior and more sublime' [than the earlier mentioned four *jhānas*] (*pathamajjhānaṃ upasampajja viharati. ayam pi kho ... dhammo uttaritaro ca pañītataro ca*).

The Madhyama Āgama parallel to the *Cūḷasakuludāyī Sutta* treats the gradual path already at an earlier point, when describing the path to an entirely pleasant world.⁵ By doing so the Madhyama Āgama version takes up the *jhānas* only once and thus does not have the perplexing proposition found in the Pali discourse, according to which the *jhānas* are superior to the *jhānas*. Judging from its location in the Chinese discourse, perhaps the gradual path exposition up to the four *jhānas* originally served as an introduction to the attainment of an entirely pleasant world. This would leave only the three higher knowledges in the place where they are found now, three attainments that are indeed superior to the entirely pleasant world of the *jhānas*.

Another meeting between the Buddha and the same wanderer Saku-ludāyī is the theme of the *Mahāsakuludāyī Sutta*. This discourse lists five qualities that cause the Buddha's disciples to respect their teacher. The treatment of the first four qualities is fairly similar in the Pali and Madhyama Āgama version of this discourse.

The fifth quality in the Madhyama Āgama account takes up the Buddha's instructions on the three higher knowledges.⁶ According to the Madhyama Āgama discourse, these instructions inspire confidence in the Buddha's disciples, as it enables them to go beyond doubt and reach the other shore.

The Pali version instead works its way through a long exposition of various aspects of the Buddhist path, covering the four *satīpaṭṭhānas*, the four right efforts, the four roads to power, the five faculties, the five powers, the seven awakening factors, the noble eightfold path, the eight liberations, the eight bases for transcendence, the ten *kaṣiṇas*, the four *jhānas*, insight into the nature of body and consciousness, production of a mind-made body, supernormal powers, the divine ear and telepathic knowledge of the mind of others, before coming to the same three higher knowledges.⁷

⁵ MĀ 208 at T I 785c24.

⁶ MĀ 207 at T I 783b16, which explicitly mentions only the first and the third knowledge, recollection of past lives and destruction of the influxes, though from the context it seems safe to assume that the second knowledge, the divine eye, should be supplemented.

⁷ MN 77 at MN II 11–22.

When considering this exposition in the light of its Madhyama Āgama parallel, it would seem that the Buddha's ability to teach how to attain the three higher knowledges suffices to explain why his disciples respect him. In fact the long exposition given in the Pali discourse appears to be somewhat out of proportion, as a comparatively brief treatment of the first four qualities is followed by a disproportionately long exposition of the fifth quality. Due to this extensive exposition of the fifth quality, the *Mahāsakuludāyi Sutta* has become a rather long discourse and would find a more fitting placement in the Dīgha Nikāya, instead of being included among discourses of 'middle length'. Hence one might wonder if the long exposition in the Pali version could be a later expansion of what originally was only a relatively brief treatment, similar to the treatment in its Madhyama Āgama parallel.

A somewhat similar situation can be found in the case of the *Piṇḍapātāpārisuddhi Sutta*. The topic of this discourse, as indicated in the titles of the Pali version and its Saṃyukta Āgama parallel, is 'purification of alms food'.⁸ In order to undertake such purification, according to both versions a monk should avoid the arising of desire and other defilements while collecting alms food. If on inspection the monk realizes that defilements have arisen in his mind, he should make a determined effort to remove them, whereas if he has remained free from defilements he may joyfully continue to train himself in wholesome states.

The Saṃyukta Āgama version explains that through such training in wholesomeness when walking, standing, sitting and lying down a monk purifies his alms food, after which this discourse concludes.⁹ The Pali version continues instead by treating various other topics. These cover overcoming the five types of sensual pleasures and the five hindrances; understanding the five aggregates; developing the four *satipatthānas*, the four right efforts, the four roads to power, the five faculties, the five powers, the seven factors of awakening, the eightfold noble path, tranquillity and insight; and realizing knowledge and liberation.¹⁰

⁸ MN 151 at MN III 297,36: *piṇḍapātāpārisuddhi* and SĀ 236 at T II 57b₂₅: 清淨乞食.

⁹ SĀ 236 at T II 57b₂₄.

¹⁰ MN 151 at MN III 295,13–297,20.

Though by undertaking all these practices a monk would certainly become a thoroughly purified recipient of alms, the comparatively brief treatment given in the earlier part of the Pali version, found in similar terms also in its Saṃyukta Āgama parallel, would seem to be an adequate and sufficient explanation of how a monk undertakes ‘purification of alms food’. Thus in this case, too, the possibility that the long exposition found only in the Pali version could be due to a later expansion of an originally more concise presentation needs to be taken into consideration.

Another case where a treatment in a Pali discourse is considerably longer than its Chinese counterpart can be found in the *Mahārāhulovāda Sutta*, which presents a range of meditation instructions given by the Buddha to his son Rāhula. The Pali version reports that, on being asked by his son about the development of mindfulness of breathing, the Buddha delivered detailed instructions on how to contemplate the five elements of earth, water, fire, air and space, followed by taking up in brief the *brahmavihāras*, contemplation of the unattractiveness of the body (*asubha*) and perception of impermanence, before giving a detailed exposition of mindfulness of breathing.¹¹

According to the Ekottarika Āgama counterpart to the *Mahārāhulovāda Sutta*, before Rāhula inquired about mindfulness of breathing the Buddha had already briefly instructed him on the *brahmavihāras* and on contemplating the unattractiveness of the body, and it was after Rāhula’s inquiry that the Buddha took up the practice of mindfulness of breathing.¹² The detailed instructions on the five elements, given by the Buddha to his son in the Pali version of the *Mahārāhulovāda Sutta*, are not found at all in the Ekottarika Āgama discourse.

Here again one might wonder whether the Pali version’s exposition on the elements is in its proper place, since in both versions Rāhula had asked the Buddha how to develop mindfulness of breathing so that it will be of great fruit.¹³ In view of such an inquiry one would not expect the Buddha to broach a range of different subjects and give such a de-

¹¹ MN 62 at MN I 421–25.

¹² EĀ 17.1 at T II 581c16 and T II 582a13.

¹³ MN 62 at MN I 421,24: *kathaṃ bhāvitā nu kho, bhante, ānāpānasati ... mahapphalā hoti?* EĀ 17.1 at T II 582a6: 云何修行安般 ... 獲大果報?

tailed exposition of the five elements before taking up the topic of mindfulness of breathing.

A discourse in the Aṅguttara Nikāya and its parallel in the Saṃyukta Āgama also record an instruction on the elements given by the Buddha to his son Rāhula.¹⁴ Though this evidently remains hypothetical, perhaps during the course of oral transmission this instruction on the elements came to be added to the *Mahārāhulovāda Sutta*.

Another instance where comparing the Pali and Chinese versions of a discourse bring to light a noteworthy difference is the *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta*. The Pali version of this discourse examines wrong path factors, right path factors and supramundane path factors. The definitions given to the same wrong and right path factors in its Madhyama Āgama counterpart are similar to the Pali presentation. The Madhyama Āgama discourse differs in so far as it does not treat supramundane path factors at all.¹⁵ A quotation of the same discourse in Śamathadeva's commentary on the *Abhidharmakośa*, preserved in Tibetan, also does not record such a treatment of the supramundane path factors.¹⁶

A closer scrutiny of the *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* brings to light that the terminology employed to define the supramundane path factors is precisely the same as the terminology used in the *Vibhaṅga*'s exposition of the path factors according to the methodology of the Abhidhamma, distinct from the way the same work analyses these path factors when applying the methodology of the discourses.¹⁷ Some of the Pali terms used in the *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta*, such as when defining supramundane right intention as 'fixing' (*appanā*) of the mind and as 'mental inclination' (*cetaso abhiniropanā*), are not found in other discourses and belong

¹⁴ AN 4:177 at AN II 164–65 and SĀ 465 at T II 118c–119a. SĀ 465 takes up six elements, whereas AN 4:177 treats only four elements. The examination of the elements in AN 4:177 is also shorter than its counterpart in MN 62, as it does not list the bodily manifestations of each internal element.

¹⁵ MĀ 189 at T I 735c18; for a detailed study of this discourse cf. K. Meisig, 'Sheng Tao King, die Chinesische Fassung des Mahācattārīsaka Sutta', *Hinduismus und Buddhismus* (Freiburg, 1987), pp. 220–48.

¹⁶ Derge edition *mngon pa nyu* 44a5 or Peking edition *thu* 83b5.

¹⁷ This is the *Abhidhammabhājanīya* treatment of the fourth noble truth at Vibh 106,3, preceded by treating the same subject from the viewpoint of the discourses in the *Suttantabhājanīya*.

to the type of language used only in the Abhidhamma and historically later Pali texts.¹⁸ When applying the supramundane treatment to speech, action and livelihood, the *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* uses a string of terms that does not occur in this way in other discourses, while the same string of terms is found in the definition of these three path factors in the Abhidhamma.¹⁹

Another noteworthy aspect of the *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta's* treatment of the path factors is that it reckons the mundane wholesome path factors to be 'with influx' and as 'ripening in attachment'.²⁰ The way the *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* defines these mundane path factors corresponds to the definitions used in other discourses, where these path factors are part of the noble eightfold path that leads to the eradication of *dukkha*.²¹ Thus what other discourses reckon as an integral part of the path to liberation, the *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta's* treatment considers as something that is with influx and ripens in attachment.

This mode of presentation shows the influence of Abhidhammic type of thought, as works like the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* use the qualification 'without influxes' only for the four paths and fruits, and for the unconditioned element.²² From this perspective, any other type of experience, however wholesome or conducive to liberation it may be, will be reckoned to be 'with influx' and consequently to 'ripen in attachment'.

At this point the question could be posed to what extent the *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta's* overall exposition requires the treatment of the supra-

¹⁸ MN 117 at MN III 73,15 lists *takko vitakko saṅkappo appanā vyappanā cetaso abhiniropanā* to define *sammāsaṅkappo ariyo anāsavo lokuttaro maggaṅgo*. The terms *appanā*, *vyappanā*, and *cetaso abhiniropanā* do not seem to recur in other discourses. The same listing can be found at Dhs 10,17 or at Vibh 86,8: *takko vitakko saṅkappo appanā vyappanā cetaso abhiniropanā*.

¹⁹ MN 117 at MN III 74,9+35 and MN III 75,25: *ārati virati paṭivirati veramaṇī*, a string of terms that recurs in the definition of these path factors at Dhs 63,35 and Dhs 64,2+7 and at Vibh 106,26+30 and Vibh 107,4.

²⁰ e.g. for the path factor of right intention in MN 117 at MN III 73,6: *sāsavo ... upadhivepakko*.

²¹ MN 117 at MN III 73,9, MN III 74,3+30 and MN III 75,20 define mundane right intention, right speech, right action and right livelihood in the same way as e.g. MN 141 at MN III 251,16+19+23+26.

²² Dhs 196,16: *ariyāpannā maggā ca maggaphalāni ca asaṅkhata ca dhātu, ime dhammā anāsavā*.

mundane path factors. According to the preamble found in the Chinese and the Pali versions of this discourse, the main intent of the Buddha's exposition was to show the supportive function of the other path factors for the development of right concentration. That is, the central point at stake was not to present the path factors individually, but rather to show their interrelation as a basis for developing right concentration. To bring out this point, the supramundane treatment of the path factors would not be required.

Hence from the perspective of the central topic of the discourse the treatment of the supramundane path factors does not seem to be indispensable. The same treatment shows distinct Abhidhammic characteristics and vocabulary, and it is absent from the Madhyama Āgama and Tibetan parallels. This suggests the treatment of the supramundane path factors in the Pali version of the *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* to be a later addition. Perhaps an early commentary on this discourse considered the path factors from the supramundane perspective of path attainment, and what originally was only an alternative mode of explanation preserved in an oral commentary was later absorbed into the discourse itself during the process of oral transmission.

Another case where the understanding of the reciters may have influenced the wording of a discourse could be the *Uddesavibhaṅga Sutta*. The Pali version of this discourse and its Madhyama Āgama parallel begin with a short statement by the Buddha, after which he retired to his dwelling.²³ From the perspective of the Pali discourse this comes as quite a surprise, since the Buddha had announced that he would teach the monks a summary and an exposition.²⁴ In spite of this announcement, he left without giving an exposition, after teaching only the summary. According to the Madhyama Āgama account, however, the Buddha did not announce a summary and an exposition. Thus in the Madhyama Āgama version the Buddha's departure does not stand in contradiction to what he said earlier.

²³ MN 138 at MN III 223,14 and MĀ 164 at T 1 694b24.

²⁴ MN 138 at MN III 223,5: 'I will teach you a summary and an exposition, monks, listen and attend well, I am about to speak' (*uddesavibhaṅgaṃ vo, bhikkhave, desissāmi, taṃ suṇātha sādhu kaṃ manasikarotha, bhāsissāmi*).

A reference to a summary and an exposition recurs also in the *Mahākaccānabhaddekaratta Sutta* and in the *Lomasakaṅgiyabhaddekaratta Sutta*.²⁵ According to the introductory narration in both discourses, a visiting *deva* had asked a monk if he knew the ‘summary and the exposition on an auspicious night’, followed by also asking him if he knew the ‘verses on an auspicious night’.²⁶ As the verses correspond to the summary, either the reference to the summary or the reference to the verses seems to be redundant.²⁷

Just as in the case of the *Uddesavibhaṅga Sutta*, in the *Mahākaccānabhaddekaratta Sutta* the reference to a summary and an exposition stands in contrast to the remainder of the discourse, since here too the Buddha announced a summary and an exposition but then got up and left after giving only the summary, without delivering the corresponding exposition.

In all these three cases the Chinese and Tibetan parallels do not refer to a summary and an exposition.²⁸ This suggests that the reference to a summary and an exposition originally might not have been part of these discourses.

The reason for these references to a summary and an exposition in the Pali versions could be that the basic pattern of following a summary with an exposition is a characteristic mark of most of the discourses found in the chapter where these three Pali discourses are located, the

²⁵ In MN 133 at MN III 192,¹⁰ and in MN 134 at MN III 199,²⁷ a *deva* asked a monk ‘do you, monk, remember the summary and the exposition on an auspicious night?’ (*dhāresi tvaṃ, bhikkhu, bhaddekaratassa uddesaṃ ca vibhaṅgaṃ ca?*).

²⁶ After the inquiry mentioned above in note 25, according to MN 133 at MN III 192,¹⁶ and MN 134 at MN III 200,⁵ the *deva* asked: ‘but do you, monk, remember the verses on an auspicious night?’ (*dhāresi pana tvaṃ, bhikkhu, bhaddekaratiyo gāthā?*).

²⁷ MN 133 at MN III 193,²⁴ reports that after the Buddha had spoken the verses without explaining their meaning, the monks wondered who would be able to explain the meaning of this ‘summary’, *uddesa*, thereby identifying the verses as the summary. In fact, apart from the verses it would be difficult to find anything else that could be reckoned as a ‘summary’.

²⁸ The parallels to MN 133 are MĀ 165 at T I 696c7, T 1362 at T XXI 881c11, and a Tibetan parallel found thrice in the Derge edition at *mdo sa* 161b4, *rgyud ba* 56b2 and *gzungs waṃ* 90a5 (the Peking edition has only two versions of this discourse at *mdo shu* 171a and *rgyud ya* 96b). The parallels to MN 134 are MĀ 166 at T I 698c14 and T 77 at T I 886b7. The parallel to MN 138 is MĀ 164 at T I 694b18.

Vibhaṅga Vagga of the Majjhima Nikāya. Perhaps this caused the reciters to make explicit what in some instances was only implicit, by beginning these three discourses with the announcement that a summary and its exposition will be given.

Another case where a passage in a Pali discourse may have been influenced by later developments can be found in the *Dakkhiṇāvibhaṅga Sutta*. In the context of a treatment of different types of offering, the Pali version states that even if an individual monk should be of evil character and of bad morality, as long as a gift to him is given on behalf of the whole community, such a gift will be of immeasurable merit.²⁹ Its Madhyama Āgama counterpart does not speak of a monk who is of evil character and of bad morality, but only of a monk who is not energetic.³⁰ A quotation of this passage in Śamathadeva's commentary on the *Abhidharmakośa* also does not envisage that a monk worthy of offerings could be of evil character and of bad morality.³¹

The Madhyama Āgama version continues by explaining that as even a gift to a monk who is not energetic is of much merit, what to say of the merit of giving to a monk who practises and has reached various accomplishments. The Pali version instead continues by stating that a gift to an individual will never be as meritorious as a gift given to the whole community.³² The commentary adds that even a gift given to an *arahant* individually will not measure up to a gift given to someone of bad morality, as long as the gift is given in the name of the community.³³

This presentation in the *Dakkhiṇāvibhaṅga Sutta* and its commentary is surprising. If mere membership of the Buddhist order would suffice to ensure the worthiness of receiving a gift, one would be at a loss to un-

²⁹ MN 142 at MN III 256,6: 'there will be clan members, with yellow robes around their necks, immoral and of evil character, I say an offering made to those immoral ones in the name of the community ... is incalculable and immeasurable' (*bhavissanti ... gotrabhuno kāsāvakaṅṭhā dussilā pāpadhammā, tesu dussilesu saṅghaṃ uddissa dānaṃ ... asañkheyyaṃ appameyyaṃ vadāmi*).

³⁰ MĀ 180 at T I 722b1: 不精進.

³¹ Derge edition *mngon pa ju* 255a4 or Peking edition *tu* 290b4.

³² MN 142 at MN III 256,10: 'I say that a gift given to an individual monk is never of greater fruit than a gift given to the community', *na ... kenaci pariyāyena saṅghagatāya dakkhiṇāya pāṭipuggalikaṃ dānaṃ mahapphalataraṃ vadāmi*.

³³ Ps v 75.

derstand why in the Pali and Chinese versions of the *Mahā-Assapura Sutta* and the *Cūla-Assapura Sutta* the Buddha gave recommendations on proper conduct to the monks in order to ensure that gifts given to them will be fruitful,³⁴ or why the Pali and Chinese versions of the *Ākaṅkheyya Sutta* stipulate morality as a factor required to make the services and support a monk receives become fruitful.³⁵

As the declaration about the meritoriousness of a gift given to an evil monk of bad morality in the *Dakkhiṇāvibhaṅga Sutta* seems difficult to harmonize with other discourses, one might wonder whether the need to ensure a constant supply of gifts even for less well-behaved monks may have led to a conscious change of the wording of this discourse.

Such conscious changing of the wording of a discourse, however, does not seem to be behind most of the variations found between Pali discourses and their Āgama counterparts, variations that often appear to be just the outcome of the vicissitudes of oral transmission.

A passage where such a simple transmission error may have occurred can be found in the *Dantabhūmi Sutta*, which proceeds from *satipaṭṭhāna* practice without giving room to thought directly to the attainment of the second *jhāna*.³⁶ This passage strikes an unfamiliar note, since it seems to imply that the practice of thought-free *satipaṭṭhāna* corresponds to the attainment of the first *jhāna*.

Though *satipaṭṭhāna* is an important foundation for the development of the *jhānas*,³⁷ in itself *satipaṭṭhāna* does not constitute a form of *jhāna*. A central characteristic of *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation is to be aware of the changing nature of phenomena,³⁸ whereas attainment of a *jhāna* requires concentration on a single and stable object. Therefore one would not expect that practice of *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation enables the direct

³⁴ MN 39 at MN I 271,16 and MN 40 at MN I 281,10; and their parallels MĀ 182 at T I 724c25 and MĀ 183 at T I 725c24.

³⁵ MN 6 at MN I 33,16 and its parallel MĀ 105 at T I 595c23.

³⁶ MN 125 at MN III 136,26: *mā ... vitakkaṃ vitakkesi ti! so vitakkavicārānaṃ vūpasamā ... dutiyajjhānaṃ ... upasampajja viharati.*

³⁷ The foundational role of *satipaṭṭhāna* for deeper levels of concentration can be seen e.g. in DN 18 at DN II 216,12 or in S 52:6–24 at SN V 299–305.

³⁸ MN 10 at MN I 56,30: *samudayadhammānupassī vā ... viharati, veyyadhammānupassī vā ...*

attainment of the second *jhāna*, without any need to develop the first *jhāna*.

In view of this it comes as no surprise when one finds that the Madhyama Āgama counterpart to the *Dantabhūmi Sutta* proceeds from thought-free *satipaṭṭhāna* practice to the attainment of the first *jhāna*, before turning to the remaining *jhānas*.³⁹

Perhaps the occurrence of the word *vitakka* in the passage on *satipaṭṭhāna* without thought led to a lapse on the part of the reciter(s) of the discourse, who continued straight away with the calming of *vitakka* mentioned at the outset of the standard descriptions of the second *jhāna*, thereby unintentionally dropping the first *jhāna* in between.

Another case of accidental loss of text appears to occur in the *Chabbisodhana Sutta*, which describes how to check someone's claim to be fully awakened.⁴⁰ In spite of announcing a six-fold purity in its title, the *Chabbisodhana Sutta* presents only five aspects of the purity of an *arahant*. The Pali commentary notes this inconsistency and quotes an opinion from the 'elders living on the other side of the sea',⁴¹ who explain that the purity of an *arahant's* attitude towards the four nutriments should also be taken into account. This explanation is puzzling, since though in this way a sixth type of purity will indeed be obtained, the *Chabbisodhana Sutta* does not refer at all to the four nutriments.

The Madhyama Āgama parallel to the *Chabbisodhana Sutta* resolves this puzzle, as in addition to the five types of purity treated in the Pali version, it also describes an *arahant's* detached attitude towards the four nutriments.⁴² Thus, unlike the Pali version, the Madhyama Āgama discourse does indeed treat a six-fold purity.

Judging from the title of the Pali version, it seems safe to conclude that a similar treatment of the four nutriments originally was part of the *Chabbisodhana Sutta's* exposition. The 'elders living on the other side of the sea', mentioned in the Pali commentary, were apparently still familiar with the earlier version that included the four nutriments, a treat-

³⁹ MĀ 198 at T 1 758b₂₅. A translation of this discourse is under preparation for *Buddhist Studies Review* 23.1.

⁴⁰ MN 112 at MN III 29-37.

⁴¹ Ps IV 94: *parasamuddavāsīthērā*.

⁴² MĀ 187 at T 1 732b₁₄.

ment lost at some point before or during the transmission of the Pali discourse from India to Sri Lanka.

The variations found between Majjhima Nikāya discourses and their Chinese parallels, selected for the present article, confirm the truth of a statement made in the *Sandaka Sutta*, according to which oral tradition, *anussava*, may be well remembered or else not well remembered.⁴³ The same applies all the more to the discourses found in the Chinese Āgamas, which in addition to transmission errors also sometimes suffer from translation errors. Since, however, the purpose of the present article is to highlight the potential of the Chinese Āgamas as a corrective and supplement to the Pali discourses, I have selected only cases that illustrate this potential.

Thanks to the efforts of the ancient reciters and translators we have a vast corpus of material at our disposal that enables us to place different versions of a discourse side by side. Such comparisons confirm much of what a study of only one tradition will yield, in addition to which they bring out some details with increased clarity. The resultant vision of early Buddhism could be illustrated with the example of a one-eyed man whose second eye had its sight restored. What he now sees with both eyes is the same as what he saw earlier with only one eye, yet his vision has become broader and more precise.

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Abbreviations

AN	Aṅguttara Nikāya	Ps	<i>Papañcasūdanī</i>
Dhs	<i>Dhammasaṅgaṇī</i>	SĀ	Śaṃyukta Āgama
DN	Dīgha Nikāya	SN	Śaṃyutta Nikāya
EĀ	Ekottarika Āgama	T	Taishō
MĀ	Madhyama Āgama	Vibh	<i>Vibhaṅga</i>
MN	Majjhima Nikāya		

⁴³ MN 76 at MN I 520,6: *sussutam pi hoti dussutam pi hoti*.

HOW LONG IS A LIFETIME ?
BUDDHADĀSA'S AND PHRA PAYUTTO'S
INTERPRETATIONS OF *PAṬICCASAMUPPĀDA*
IN COMPARISON*

MARTIN SEEGER

Introduction

Although it is questionable how far Buddhist beliefs in the literal existence of rebirth, hells and heavens are still relevant for Thai modern religious life,¹ it is undeniable that, despite urbanization, advanced education, globalization, and modernisation, these beliefs are still widespread in contemporary Thailand. A survey of 1,482 students at six major Bangkok universities conducted in 1996 revealed that 33.1% of the surveyed students believe in a rebirth that is qualitatively in accordance with the *kamma* (Pali) performed in the current life; 21.9% of the students polled said that they believed in the literal existence of hells and heavens in which one will be reborn in accordance with the moral quality of one's deeds (*kamma*) in this current life. And even more interestingly, according to this survey it seems that belief in literal rebirth, heavens and hells is more ubiquitously held by urban raised, highly educated Thais than by highly educated Thais with a rural upbringing.² This shows that according to this study in the case of Thai-

* This paper is partly a more or less literal translation from parts of my PhD dissertation (Seeger 2005). Many parts, though, are the outcome of more recent ideas and research. I would like to express my deepest thanks to the following persons for their very valuable critique on this paper: Phra Charles Nirodho (Wat Umong, Chiang Mai), Prof. Lambert Schmithausen (University of Hamburg), Prof. Mark Williams (University of Leeds), Dr Mudagamuwe Maithrimurthi (University of Leipzig), Dr Mike Parnwell (University of Leeds), and Dr Rupert Gethin (University of Bristol).

¹ Phra Phaisan Wisalo 2546, 96.

² Kaniittha Sipaibun and Kiti Yingyongcaisuk 2539, 22-61.

land it cannot be inferred that urbanization and globalization are necessarily leading to a demythologized worldview, at least amongst better-educated youths. A recently conducted survey which was targeted at Thai students who currently study in the UK confirms the outcome of this study. Out of thirty-six respondents to a questionnaire which I sent out via email, twenty-seven said that they believed in a next life. And twenty-four students replied that they believed in the literal existence of heavens and hells.³

Another important point which can be conjectured from the two surveys is the enormous diversity of beliefs and interpretations of Buddhist doctrines in modern Thai Buddhism. This is also corroborated by the apparent religious kaleidoscope of the many and multifarious movements and belief systems in contemporary Thai Buddhism. Although Thai Buddhism was characterized by its enormous religious diversity before the 1902 Saṅgha Act heralded the 'the beginning of a government policy favouring religious as well as cultural homogenization',⁴ it seems that its current fragmentation into diverse movements and interpretations which was fostered by the rapid economic growth since the 1960s is unprecedented in Thai history.⁵

This paper seeks to explore how the two foremost Buddhist thinkers of modern Thailand, Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu (1906–1993) and Phra Pa-yutto (1939–) interpret the Theravāda Buddhist canon with regard to the beliefs of rebirth, heaven and hells. As has been shown elsewhere,⁶ the Theravāda Buddhist canon, the *Tipiṭaka*, plays a crucial role as a reference and legitimating source in current Thai Buddhist debates about the 'Truth', national and religious identity, gender issues, and ethical norms. And in connection with these debates, the interpretation of canonical text is essential, since the ascertainment of the original meaning and authenticity, and thereby the authority, of the texts of the *Tipiṭaka* is very closely connected to the interpretative approach.

³ Even in the West the belief in reincarnation is held by a 'significant minority', e.g. according to the 1990 European Value Survey (EVS) 24% of the British belief in reincarnation (Walter 2001, 21).

⁴ Kamala Tiyavanich 1997, 254.

⁵ Aphinya Fuengfusakun 2541, 4; Phra Phaisan Wisalo 2546, 147–57.

⁶ Seeger 2005.

There are two tasks required to guarantee the continuity and relevance of Theravāda Buddhist tradition. In order to become a normative, formative and, thereby, relevant text, the text surface of the canon must be preserved and transmitted in its most original form so that the historical connection to the Buddha and his teachings will not be interrupted. At the same time, however, in a process of interpretation the ‘timeless truths’ which are embedded in these texts have to be distilled from its historically grown surface and subsequently accommodated to current socio-cultural reality. In Thailand, the canonical requirements of preservation of text surface with the concomitant accommodation of text content have recently led to various debates about the ‘right’ textual approach, as, for example, in the cases of women’s ordination in the Theravāda tradition, the teachings of the Wat Phra Thammakai temple in Pathum Thani, or the contentious text-criticism of Phra Mano Mettanando. Since I have already investigated this elsewhere,⁷ this article will delve neither into the mechanism, debates and ideas of securing and ascertaining the text authenticity, nor into the debates as to how to approach the text hermeneutically. The aim, here, is to compare the two different readings of canonical teachings which are connected to the core teaching of rebirth. In this way, I shall investigate how the ‘timeless truths’ of the ancient canonical texts can respond to modern beliefs and context. By comparing the interpretations of Buddhadāsa with those of Phra Payutto, it will be argued that the latter’s way of teaching canonical Buddhism can be characterized as inclusive and comprehensive and as an attempt to demonstrate the coherence, doctrinal richness and flexibility of canonical and post-canonical texts.

Buddhadāsa’s and Phra Payutto’s Interpretations of
paṭiccasamuppāda

Arguably, there is no other Buddhist tenet where the concept of rebirth appears in a more elaborate context than in the teaching of ‘Dependent Origination’ (*paṭiccasamuppāda*). This teaching certainly belongs among the most essential and peculiar doctrines of Buddhism. And at the same time, it is undoubtedly one of those Buddhist principles which poses the

⁷ Seeger 2005.

biggest difficulties and challenges for understanding and interpretation. This may be explained by the fact that ‘apart from stating the formula [of *paṭiccasamuppāda*] and using it in a variety of contexts, the earliest [Buddhist] texts give very little explanation of how the formula is to be understood’.⁸ It is only in later text layers of the Theravāda tradition where we come across various more or less detailed explanations of this important teaching, as in the texts of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* or in the more recent texts of the commentarial and post-commentarial Theravāda literature, especially the influential *Visuddhimagga* that was composed by Buddhaghosa. The commentaries (*aṭṭhakathā*) and the *Visuddhimagga*, however, were compiled or composed, respectively, relatively late, namely in the fifth century CE. The endeavour to grasp the ‘original’ meaning of *paṭiccasamuppāda* has thus led to many different interpretations, speculations and theories in the field of both modern Western and Thai Buddhist studies. Indeed, the Pali canon has it that the Buddha already warned his disciple Ānanda of the profundity of *paṭiccasamuppāda* after the latter had characterised this tenet as ‘very clear’ (*uttānakuttānaka*):

Don’t say this, Ānanda. Don’t say this, Ānanda. *Paṭiccasamuppāda* is profound and profound in its appearance. Ānanda, it is because of the not-understanding and not-penetrating of this teaching that beings, like a tangled thread, like a knotted ball of thread, like a weave of grass and rushes, do not escape from the low regions, painful existences and round of rebirths.⁹

In fact, the spiritual comprehension of *paṭiccasamuppāda* is tantamount to awakening or the attainment of *nibbāna*, i.e. the final and ultimate goal of Buddhist soteriology (M 1 190–91). The objectives of this teaching are to show how the arising (*samudaya*) and cessation (*nirodha*) of suffering (*dukkha*) take place.

In the canonical texts *paṭiccasamuppāda* occurs in various forms. In its complete form, though, it consists of twelve components:

⁸ Gethin 1998, 149.

⁹ D 11 55 (= S 11 92): *mā h’ evaṃ, Ānanda, avaca, mā, Ānanda, avaca. gambhīro cāyaṃ, Ānanda, paṭiccasamuppādo gambhīrāvabhāso ca. etassa, Ānanda, dhammassa ananubodhā appaṭivedhā evaṃ ayaṃ pajā tantākulakajātā gulāguṇṭhikajātā muṇḍababbajabhūtā apāyaṃ duggatiṃ vimipātāṃ saṃsāraṃ nātivattati.*

- With (1) ignorance (*avijjā*) as condition (*paccaya*), (2) volitional and affective impulses (*saṃkhāra*);
- with volitional and affective impulses as condition, (3) consciousness (*viññāṇa*);
- with consciousness as condition, (4) name and form (*nāma-rūpa*);
- with name and form as condition, (5) the six senses (*saḷāyatana*);
- with the six senses as condition, (6) contact (*phasso*);
- with contact as condition, (7) feeling (*vedanā*);
- with feeling as condition, (8) craving (*taṇhā*);
- with craving as condition, (9) clinging (*upādāna*);
- with clinging as condition, (10) becoming (*bhava*);
- with becoming as condition, (11) birth (*jāti*);
- with birth as condition, (12) aging and dying (*jarā-maraṇa*), sorrow, lamentation, pain, mental suffering and infuriation.

While this form seeks to show the process of the origination of suffering, there is another form which explains the cessation of it. In this latter form the word *paccayā* ('with ... as condition') is replaced by the word *nirodhā* ('with the cessation of ...').

According to the established Theravāda Buddhist explanation, these twelve components of *paṭiccasamuppāda* comprise three lifetimes, i.e. while ignorance and volitional and affective impulses are positioned in one lifetime, consciousness, name and form, the six senses, contact, feeling, craving, clinging and becoming are thought to take place in a second lifetime. However, the remaining constituents – birth, aging and dying together with sorrow, lamentation, pain, mental suffering and infuriation – occur in another, third lifetime. In order to simplify matters, this explanation of *paṭiccasamuppāda* will be called the 'Three-Lifetimes Theory' (TLT).

In a lecture which he gave in his monastery on the 12 of June 1971, Buddhadhāsa criticised this TLT with sharp words. He compared this presentation of *paṭiccasamuppāda* with 'cancer, an incurable tumour of Buddhist scholarship [*pariyatti*]'.¹⁰ For Buddhadhāsa, this interpretation is 'un-Buddhistic', as it is not coherent with the other canonical teach-

¹⁰ Buddhadhāsa 2538, 123.

ings. According to Buddhādāsa, however, coherence is an essential condition for ascertaining the authenticity of original meaning.¹¹

Buddhādāsa gives several reasons for his assertion: the TLT is contradictory to fundamental characteristics of Buddhist teaching which – according to the Pāli canon – are that the Buddhist teaching ‘can be seen by oneself’ (*sandīṭṭhika*), ‘is timeless’ (*akālika*) and ‘is to be directly experienced by the wise’ (*pacattaṃ veditabbo viññāhi*).¹² Buddhādāsa maintains that by dismantling it into three lifetimes *paṭiccasamuppāda* cannot be practised and loses, therefore, all these three basic characteristics. For this reason, *paṭiccasamuppāda* is in this three-lifetimes explanation ‘completely useless’ and has been reduced to a ‘playful polemic’.¹³

In addition, Buddhādāsa holds that the TLT leads to an ‘extreme view’ (*antaḡāhika-dīṭṭhi*) and to the ‘view of eternalism’ (*sassata-dīṭṭhi*), which postulates a permanent self (*attā*). And, again, these two views contradict a very basic Buddhist teaching, namely the teaching of Not-Self (*anattā*). Buddhādāsa says: ‘The Buddha, [however] taught [*paṭiccasamuppāda*], precisely in order to destroy the *antaḡāhikadīṭṭhi* and the *sassatadīṭṭhi*.’¹⁴ Buddhādāsa sees another argument for the inconsistency of the TLT with the main body of original Buddhist teaching in the biography of the Buddha: if a literal interpretation of *paṭiccasamuppāda* was correct, the Buddha would have died immediately after his awakening, as the elimination (*nirodha*) of *avijjā* brings about the ‘cessation of name and body’ (*nāmarūpa-nirodha*). And the ‘cessation of name and body’ in this interpretation would imply death. But since the Buddha was alive for another forty-five years after his destruction of ignorance, the literal explanation of *paṭiccasamuppāda* can ‘definitively’ not be correct.¹⁵

According to Buddhādāsa a semantic analysis of the term *paṭiccasamuppāda* would give further weight to his proposition of the faultiness

¹¹ Buddhādāsa 2538, 17–18. Buddhādāsa refers here to the famous four *mahāpadesa* in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (D II 123–126; Lamotte 1947, 218–22; Bareau 1970, 222–39; v. Hinüber 2000, 6).

¹² See M I 37; AN III 285.

¹³ Buddhādāsa 2538, 38.

¹⁴ Buddhādāsa 2538, 91.

¹⁵ Buddhādāsa 2538, 97.

of the TLT: ‘the word *paṭicca* means “depending on”, but it is a “depending on” in the sense of an uninterrupted relatedness’,¹⁶ which would not be possible if the components of *paṭiccasamuppāda* were disassembled in three lifetimes.

Buddhadāsa consequently summarizes his multifarious criticism of the TLT by using a canonical dichotomy and says that this reading of *paṭiccasamuppāda* contradicts the original meaning in terms of both the letter (*byañjana*) and meaning (*attha*).¹⁷ For Buddhadāsa

[The TLT causes] great harm, as we lose our freedom to control our mental defilements [*kilesa*] and [our] action [*kamma*], since both are continuously in an existence [*jāti*] other than our [current one]. This life [*jāti*] is the *vipāka* [i.e. the result of former lives], we ourselves are *vipāka*. We who we are sitting here are *vipāka*. The origin of this *vipāka* is the *kamma* and the *kilesas* of that existence, the previous existence. And, therefore, the *kilesas* and the *kamma* of this life will appear, as a result, as *vipāka* in that next life.¹⁸

Buddhadāsa teaches how the canonical texts have to be read with the ‘right’ hermeneutical approach, so that the authentic meaning can be grasped.¹⁹ The Buddha, explains Buddhadāsa, taught on two levels of language: while he used the ‘everyday language’ when he was teaching moral behaviour to ordinary people, he talked in the ‘*dhamma* language’ when he was expounding the ‘higher truths’ (*paramattha*) to people with a high potential of spiritual apprehension.²⁰

By using this hermeneutical concept Buddhadāsa sees himself able to ascertain the ‘real’ meaning of *paṭiccasamuppāda*. In this way, birth or *jāti* does not denote ‘the birth from the belly of the mother’ or that ‘after having entered the coffin, one is reborn anew’.²¹ The real meaning of birth is rather the arising of the fabricated feeling ‘I’ (*tuaku*, T.): ‘*Bhava* or *jāti* in the *dhamma* language take place several times a day. That means that when an ‘I’ (*tuaku*) or a ‘mine’ (*khongku*, T.) arise

¹⁶ Buddhadāsa 2538, 121.

¹⁷ Buddhadāsa 2538, 72.

¹⁸ Buddhadāsa 2538, 91.

¹⁹ See Gabaude 1988.

²⁰ Literally: ‘people with little dust in their eyes’.

²¹ Buddhadāsa 2538, 109, 111.

once, *bhava* and *jāti* become manifest once.²² These ‘I’ and ‘mine’ are therefore

a mental birth, which follows a contact (*phassa*). Wherever a *phassa* that is constituted by ignorance takes place, there is a mental birth. If, for example, the eye perceives a form and ignorance is involved, one is delighted in this form and so forth. This delightedness causes the arising of craving (*taṇhā*), i.e. a feeling (*vedanā*) causes *taṇhā* – a mind (*citta*) that feels craving. Here, we have a craving person. And then the clinging (*upādāna*) onto an ‘I’ arises: I want that, I want this, I’ve got that. If *upādāna* arises in this way, one calls this ‘getting born’, that means [the concept of] an individual is born!²³

According to Buddhadāsa’s reading, *paṭiccasamuppāda* is occurring ‘here and now’ and is a ‘mental process that leads to suffering, and happens quickly and strongly, like a flash, and takes place in our daily life’.²⁴

Buddhadāsa blames the historical loss of the hermeneutic dichotomy of everyday language/*dhamma* language for the misunderstanding of the ‘real’ meaning of *paṭiccasamuppāda*. He surmises that this perversion of the original sense of *paṭiccasamuppāda* began after the Third Rehearsal, i.e. about 300 years after Buddha’s passing away. The oldest traceable testimony of this tendency of misapprehension, though, is the famous and influential compendium of Theravāda Buddhist doctrine, the *Visuddhimagga*, which was composed by Buddhaghosa in the fifth century. Buddhadāsa’s criticism of Buddhaghosa, who is the most important commentator in Theravāda history is severe: he accuses him of having misinterpreted the original meaning of *paṭiccasamuppāda* and, by doing this, making this important Buddhist tenet Brahmanistic.²⁵

For his denial of the traditional TLT and for his interpretation of *paṭiccasamuppāda* as a *hic and nunc* occurring phenomenon, Buddhadāsa was attacked from various sides. This happened amongst other things because his disapproval of the TLT was considered as a negation of physical rebirth or as nihilism (*natthika-dūṭhi*). For many Thai Buddhists, Buddhadāsa’s metaphorical reading of *jāti* implied a blatant undermin-

²² Buddhadāsa 2538, 69.

²³ Buddhadāsa 2537, 286. See also Gabaude 1988, 194.

²⁴ Buddhadāsa 2538, 33.

²⁵ Buddhadāsa 2538, 93.

ing of their traditional Buddhist beliefs.²⁶ In addition, Buddhādāsa's interpretation was perceived as being arbitrary and heterodox.²⁷

In his magnum opus *Buddhadhammā*²⁸ Phra Payutto points out to the critics of Buddhādāsa that the 'one-moment' or 'daily-life' interpretation of *paṭiccasamuppāda* is absolutely justifiable from a canonical point of view. At the same time, however, Phra Payutto does not agree with Buddhādāsa's assertion that the TLT is a perversion of authentic Buddhist meaning. For, according to Phra Payutto, the TLT can be legitimated by the *suttas*.²⁹ What Phra Payutto criticizes in this connection is not the interpretation itself but the one-sided emphasis on the TLT by the Theravāda tradition. According to Phra Payutto this over-emphasizing of the TLT has completely eclipsed the daily-life explanation. He agrees with Buddhādāsa that this extensive accentuation of TLT is a result of the enormous influence of the *Visuddhimagga* which leaves the daily-life interpretation of *paṭiccasamuppāda* entirely unmentioned. Phra Payutto goes on to explain that the author of the *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa, is also responsible for the composition of the commentarial text, the *Sammohavinodanī*, which Buddhaghosa – according to his own statement – has compiled from the 'old commentary texts' (*porāṇaṭṭhakathā*).³⁰ In a nearly identical way to the *Visuddhimagga*, the *Sammohavinodanī* explains the interpretation of *paṭiccasamuppāda* as a three-lifetime phenomenon. But in contrast to the *Visuddhimagga* the *Sammohavinodanī* also treats – although only very briefly – *paṭiccasamuppāda* according to the one-moment interpretation. Phra Payutto's presumption that the complete omission of the daily-life explanation from the *Visuddhimagga* and the only brief mention in the *Sammohavinodanī* indicate that the daily-life interpretation had already disappeared in scholarly circles during the time of Buddhaghosa confirms Buddhādāsa's considerations. However, Phra Payutto does not identify the loss of the hermeneutic everyday-language/*dhamma*-language as a

²⁶ Sathianphong Wannapok 2532, 41–44; Jackson 1988, 143–50; Olson 1989, 337; Suvanna Satha-anand 1990, 398–99.

²⁷ Phra Thammapidok 2538a, 140; interview with Phra Payutto on 20 November 2002.

²⁸ Phra Thammapidok 2538a.

²⁹ Interview with Phra Payutto on 20 November 2002; Phra Thammapidok 2538a, 107.

³⁰ Vibh-a 1.

reason for this, but rather sees the complexity of this teaching as responsible.³¹

For Phra Payutto, the TLT and the one-moment explanation of *paṭiccasamuppāda* are actually one and the same thing:

[I]n order to understand a matter really, it is necessary to see its components ... The consideration of the smallest constituents is an analytical method, [that means that things are] deconstructed [*vibhajja*] so that we can see [their] components ... At the same time we have to connect the components in order to describe them in accordance with the condition [*sabhāva*] of human existence. That means that when we conceive the interrelated micro components occurring in every moment in connection, a long interval will come into existence.³²

In reply to Buddhadhāsa's objection that the TLT is implicitly postulating a permanent self, Phra Payutto states that this is not necessarily the case:

The life process functions according to the law of the three characteristics of being [*tilakkhaṇa*], which is a stable law of nature. [The three characteristics of being] are impermanence [*aniccatā*], suffering [*dukkhatā*] and not-self [*anattatā*]. These become manifest in *jāti*, *jarā*, and *maraṇa*, both in their coarse, superficial and profound meaning ... The life continuum which proceeds according to the natural law and changes according to causes and conditions, while not having a permanent essence, is nevertheless identifiable as a continuum or process that differs from other continua or processes. This life continuum is called conventional self.³³

In order to illustrate this compatibility of continuity and not-self [*anattā*], Phra Payutto gives a metaphor in which he compares the life continuum of an individual with a river. Compared with other rivers this river has individual characteristics. This river can therefore be named

³¹ Phra Thammapidok 2538a, 140–42. Buddhaghosa admits (Vism 522) that the explanation of *paṭiccasamuppāda* poses a problem for him: 'Today I would like to explain the teaching of Dependency, [although] I can't gain ground, as if submerged in a sea.' (*vattukāmo ahaṃ aṭṭha paṭiccasamuppādaṃ | patitthitaṃ nādhigacchāmi ajjhogāḷho va sāgaraṃ*.)

³² Interview with Phra Payutto on 20 November 2002.

³³ Phra Thammapidok 2538a, 91–92.

and is influenced by eternal factors with which it interacts and builds up its individuality.³⁴

In this way the canonical words *jāti*, *jarā*, and *maraṇa* can refer to a physical or literal birth, but also to a mental birth which occurs in mind-moments. In the second book of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, the *Vibhaṅga*, the explanation of *paṭiccasamuppāda* is divided into two sections: the *suttantabhājanīya*, which gives the TLT, and the *abhidhammabhājanīya*, in which the one-moment interpretation is expounded. In addition, Phra Payutto sees the daily-life explanation as legitimized by various *suttas*.³⁵ Moreover, according to him the *buddhavacana* (words of the Buddha) which corroborate the TLT can also be interpreted in the sense of the daily-life interpretation.³⁶

To Buddhādāsa's criticism that with the traditional division of *paṭiccasamuppāda* into three life times the criteria of timelessness and opportunity of direct experience cannot be safeguarded, Phra Payutto replies that the TLT is solely an explanation with a didactic objective that aims in its form to make reality comprehensible: 'We are not able to expound all natural realities [*sabhāva*] at the same time ... We therefore have to proceed step by step... and by doing this we explain things in a way so that they are comprehensible.'³⁷

According to Phra Payutto the various constituents of *paṭiccasamuppāda* are not disconnected in the TLT, but remain connected in causal interdependence. The formal sequence of the twelve components and the division into three lifetimes do not mean that *paṭiccasamuppāda* must necessarily operate along a chronological sequence. That is to say that the three existences (*jāti*) of the TLT overlap. In this way, the current life is at the same time the future life of the past life and also the past life of the future life. Thus, if ignorance (*avijjā*) and volitional and affective impulses (*saṃkhāra*) are located in a former life, it does not imply that these are the only factors present. All the

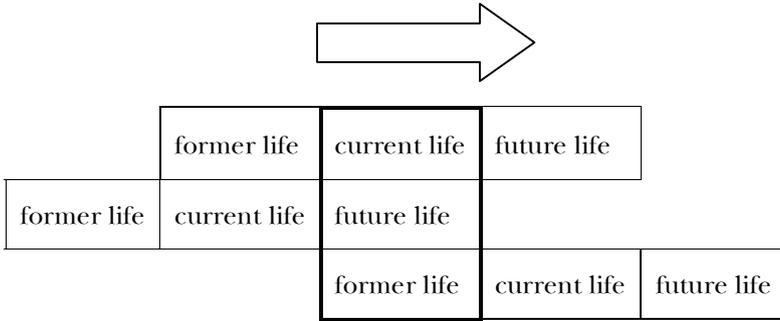
³⁴ Phra Thammapiḍok 2538a, 210.

³⁵ *Cetanāsutta* (S II 65 f.), *Dukkhanirodhasutta* (S II 71-72) and the *Lokanirodhasutta* (S II 73-74).

³⁶ Phra Thammapiḍok 2538a, 107; interview with Phra Payutto on 20 November 2002.

³⁷ Interview with Phra Payutto on 20 November 2002.

other ten factors of *paṭiccasamuppāda* can also be present at the same time. Graphically, this concept can be depicted as follows:



This shows that, according to Phra Payutto, *paṭiccasamuppāda* in its division into three lifetimes has a conceptual, analytical usefulness.³⁸ Apprehended in this way, the TLT is an explanation of ‘natural realities [*sabhāva*]... [that is,] of how things take place ... As things have been taking place, in this way things are still taking place’.³⁹ And in this way this law can potentially be experienced by the human mind at any time and, therefore, fulfil the criterion of ‘timelessness’ (*akālika*).

But Buddhādāsa’s criticism of the traditional interpretation is not limited to the TLT, which he believes to be a post-canonical development. Buddhādāsa distinguishes between three kinds of interpreting *paṭiccasamuppāda*:

- the (‘authentic’) daily-life explanation,
- the (‘faulty’) TLT, and
- the explanation which is given in the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, the third division of the Pāli canon.

About the latter, Buddhādāsa says:

Nāma [name] and *rūpa* [form] arise and cease, arise and cease, arise and cease, arise and cease in every mental moment [ทุกขณะจิต]. This is a level [of explanation of *paṭiccasamuppāda*] about which no one knows and no one wants to know and about which it is not necessary that you know ... That is

³⁸ See Phra Thammapidok 2538a, 102–07.

³⁹ Interview with Phra Payutto on 20 November 2002.

the language of the *Abhidhamma*, which exceeds the normal needs ... The frequency is so high that we are not aware that we are born, cease, are born, cease, are born, cease. We have to rely on this kind of study of the mind so that we know that *nāma* and *rūpa*, i.e. an individual, are born and cease, are born and cease with such a high frequency in every mind moment, and even quicker than the frequency of electricity, which we use day-to-day. This is a kind of being born and ceasing, being born and ceasing, which has nothing to do with *pañiccasamuppāda* ... Thus, it is excessive knowledge in the inflated manner of the *Abhidhamma*.⁴⁰

While Buddhādāsa considers the *Abhidhamma* explanation to be ‘excessive’, ‘inflated’ and ‘not useful’, since it cannot be put into practice, Phra Payutto admits that this explanation cannot obviously be found in the *suttas*, but is a work of the authors of the *Abhidhamma* who ‘had selected the explanations [of *pañiccasamuppāda*] in the *suttas* in order to connect them to one complete systematic structure’.⁴¹ None the less, Phra Payutto stresses the usefulness and importance of the *Abhidhamma* explanation of *pañiccasamuppāda* and perceives it as a testimony for the expertise of the authors of the *Abhidhamma*: ‘The people who were able to compose the *Abhidhamma* ... must have had a really high familiarity with the *suttas*.’⁴² Phra Payutto sees in the *Abhidhamma* explanation of *pañiccasamuppāda* an example of the flexibility of Buddhist teaching, which is able to respond to the individual situation of the interlocutor without having to give up its essential structure.⁴³

From the above, it has become clear that Phra Payutto – in contrast to Buddhādāsa – emphasizes that *pañiccasamuppāda* is primarily a description of a natural process and, therefore, not a teaching instruction for immediate application (*pañipatti*). For, ‘our duty is to know [*pañiccasamuppāda*].’⁴⁴ since *pañiccasamuppāda* is ‘a natural process [กระบวนการของธรรมชาติ] and shows a natural phenomenon. It is not a path of

⁴⁰ Buddhādāsa 2538, 81–82.

⁴¹ Interview with Phra Payutto on 20 November 2002.

⁴² Interview with Phra Payutto on the 20 November 2002. In contrast to this, it seems that for Buddhādāsa the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* does not have a particularly important soteriological value. He says that the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* could be thrown into the sea and the world would miss nothing (Gabaude 1988, 164).

⁴³ Interview with Phra Payutto on 20 November 2002.

⁴⁴ Phra Thammapiḍok 2538a, 570; see also: Phra Thammapiḍok 2538a, 121.

practice [*paṭipadā*].⁴⁵ Or in other words, within the Buddhist teaching, *paṭiccasamuppāda* is located in the area of *dhammadesanā* (teaching of the truth), which aims to establish ‘right view’ (*sammādiṭṭhī*). This right view, however, is ‘only’ one component of the Noble Eightfold Path which in its entirety is the Buddhist practice.⁴⁶

It seems that for Phra Payutto *paṭiccasamuppāda* of the *Abhidhamma* allows a more profound way of looking at reality than Buddhādāsa’s ‘occasional one-mind-moment interpretation’. According to Phra Payutto, *paṭiccasamuppāda* shows that, due to their ignorance, human beings perceive conditioned things as essential and categorize them as ‘being, person, Self, we or he’. But, actually, all these things are only

streams consisting of small material and mental components, which are related to and condition each other ... The individual is a result of feelings, thoughts, wishes, habits, prejudices, views, knowledge, understandings, beliefs [...], opinions, various feelings of value and so on. At any specific point in time, all this is a result of cultural tradition, education and upbringing and all the various reactions, which are happening in the mind and which are directed towards the environment and are taking place permanently ... It does not matter which point in time we take, it is always the case that the human being is seeking a condition which has more happiness than the current moment. Ordinary people, therefore, brush every current moment away or break away from it. Every single moment is a life condition which is unbearable. One wants to disappear, one wants his self to escape [from this condition] in order to attain a condition which satisfies the needs. The will to get, the will to be, and the will not to be, rotate the whole time in the daily life of ordinary people. This is a process that is so subtly taking place in every mind-moment that human beings are not aware that life per se is a struggle in every single moment: one wants to escape from the elapsed moment and to seek for a means of satisfaction in a new life situation.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Phra Thammapiḍok 2538a, 573.

⁴⁶ Phra Thammapiḍok 2538a, 121. This does, of course, not mean that *sammādiṭṭhī* is not important in Phra Payutto’s eyes. Quite the opposite is the case. For Phra Payutto emphasizes the great importance of *sammādiṭṭhī*, which according to him plays a very crucial role in the Buddhist practise: it is the starting point, the leader and the end in the practise of the Noble Eightfold Path (see Phra Thammapiḍok 2538a, 613–16).

⁴⁷ Phra Thammapiḍok 2538a, 123–24.

Whereas Buddhādāsa seems to perceive little value in the preoccupation with the subtler mind-processes, for Phra Payutto the study of the mind on this level allows for a profound understanding of the workings of mind which he deems necessary for the right comprehension of another very central teaching of Buddhism, namely that of *kamma*. Besides, according to Phra Payutto, this approach can be connected to the findings of Freudian psychoanalysis, and thereby facilitate the understanding of the complex *kamma*-tic processes.⁴⁸ Phra Payutto explains these two points as follows: ‘All the things we do, think about ... do not disappear. They are all in our mind. We only are not aware of it and can’t recall them via our consciousness.’⁴⁹ The actual results of our bodily, verbal and, most importantly, mental actions⁵⁰ become mainly manifest in the unconscious mind which forms the huge part of the ‘extremely complex human mind’. In Buddhism the conscious mind-level, which is only the minor part of ‘the iceberg that has its greatest part under water’, is called *vithicitta*. The subconscious mind, though, is called *bhavaṅga*.⁵¹ And it is precisely on this level of the unconscious mind where we normally start to fabricate our own characteristic traits which will cause us to experience or perceive the world in a certain way. The *bhavaṅga* mind therefore is the starting point for the creation of both one’s individual fate (พระตนกรรม) and also of the fate of the whole of society. For it is in the mind where the societal values originate.⁵² His teachings about ‘social *kamma*’ which are based on this idea are a novelty in Thai society, where *kamma* has been taught and understood mostly as an exclusively individual process. Phra Payutto’s emphasis on the social aspects of such basic doctrines as *kamma* and *paṭiccasamuppāda*

⁴⁸ Phra Payutto criticises various misunderstandings and confusions about the Buddhist concept of *kamma* that are very widespread in Thailand (Phra Thammapidok 2538b, 3–12). It is e.g. often believed that *kamma* is a mysterious, wondrous power that ‘floats in an unknown place, ambuscades in order to punish us’ (Phra Thammapidok 2538b, 76). For Phra Thammapidok’s own understanding of *kamma*, see Payutto 1996.

⁴⁹ Phra Thammapidok 2538b, 82.

⁵⁰ *Kāya-kamma*, *vacī-kamma* and *mano-kamma*.

⁵¹ Phra Thammapidok 2538b, 80.

⁵² Phra Thammapidok 2538b, 78–79.

could therefore have enormous implications for further interpretations of the social and structural dimensions of the canonical doctrines.⁵³

With regard to canonical passages which deal with ‘heavens and hells’, when compared with his interpretation of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, Phra Payutto seems to have an equivalent way of reading the texts. For he reads them on three semantic levels: while admitting that according to the Pali canon the existence of ‘heavens and hells’ as actual *post mortem* planes of being cannot be denied, he explains that it is possible to interpret canonical mention of ‘heavens and hells’ in a metaphorical way, as well. At the same time, however, Phra Payutto observes that although the canonical mention of *post mortem* heavens and hells is quite ubiquitous, detailed descriptions of how these modes of being look are not found very often in the canon.⁵⁴ Descriptions of heavens and hells can be most frequently found in the Khuddaka Nikāya. Phra Payutto, though, cautions against understanding these depictions literally, since they are to be understood as literary means which use pictures for didactic purposes. That means that already existing belief systems were used in order to explain the Buddhist teaching. Later, in the commentarial literature, this approach has been expanded, became associated with brahmanastic ideas and was developed into a complex cosmology.⁵⁵ Phra Payutto surmises that the canonical terms for heavens and hells designate concrete levels of existence (*bhava*, *bhūmi*) which are located in ‘another dimension’ (คนละมิติ). According to Phra Payutto, canonical terms like *sahasīlokadhātu* and *dasasahasīlokadhātu* (‘thousand fold universe’ and ‘ten-thousand fold universe’ respectively) suggest the existence of countless universes which have such subtle qualities that mean they cannot be perceived with the human senses under normal circumstances.⁵⁶

⁵³ Payutto 1996, 60–72; Suwanna Satha-anand 2002, 80–82; Phra Phaisan Wisalo 2546, 447–455.

⁵⁴ Especially the *Bālapaṇḍitasutta* (M III 163–78) and the *Devadūtasutta* (M III 178–87) give detailed accounts of heavens and hells. Both *suttas* have had a great influence on descriptions of heavens and hells in the later literature.

⁵⁵ The Thai-Buddhist text *Traiphum Phra Ruang* is a very good testimony to this tendency (Reynolds & Reynolds 1982).

⁵⁶ Interview with Phra Payutto on 15 July 2002.

With regard to the metaphorical level, Phra Payutto discriminates between a coarse state of mind and very subtly proceeding mind processes which

means the mental state, which is the permanent perception or reaction to perceived things in every moment ... it is the permanent fabrication and collection on a very subtle level. Its results become manifest on the second level ... When we talk about the long-term manifestation of these results, we arrive at the hells and heavens of the first level [which is the literal meaning]. All [these three levels] are [in this way] connected ...⁵⁷

Conclusion

It has frequently been noted that Buddhadāsa's way of teaching Buddhist doctrine is indeed able to respond to the religious needs of modern intellectual Buddhists but is asking too much of Buddhists of other population strata.⁵⁸ It seems that – expressed in the words of Max Weber – Buddhadāsa's teachings are missing an accommodation to the 'specifically religious need for emotional experience of the superworldly and for emergency aid in external and inner distress'.⁵⁹ With the help of his hermeneutical theory, Buddhadāsa reduces phenomena like heavens, hells, rebirth and so on (all mentioned in the Pali canon) to mental processes which can be experienced in the here and now. Although, he does not explicitly deny the existence of these things in their literal meaning, his way of teaching Buddhist doctrine has been understood as a narrow, positivistic Buddhism. And it was said about him that he has the belief that 'all Buddhist concepts are empirical and to make them metaphysical is to make Buddhism not Buddhism'.⁶⁰ Also, when viewed from the outcomes of Western historical-philological research in Buddhology which tries to identify the 'original intention' on the basis of 'relevant primary sources' dealing with *paṭiccasamuppāda*, Buddhadāsa's reading seems to be highly problematic. For, according to

⁵⁷ Phra Thammapidok 2545, 46.

⁵⁸ Nithi Iausiwong 2537, 106; Sisak Wanliphodom in Phra Thammapidok et al. 2544, 129; Gabaude 1990, 211–29. In this context, Gabaude refers to Buddhadāsa's teachings as 'a "bitter portion" to swallow for the majority of the Thais' (211).

⁵⁹ Weber 1958, 236–37.

⁶⁰ Somparn Promta 1999, 98.

Schmithausen, the argument that the distribution of *paṭiccasamuppāda* over three existences cannot be found in the canon is not tenable: although this concept cannot explicitly be found in the canon, it is clear that ‘the original intention’ aims to analyze literal rebirth and its conditions.⁶¹ In contrast, Phra Payutto’s explanations of *paṭiccasamuppāda* seem to be more compatible with the position proposed by Western Buddhologists. For Phra Payutto carefully separates and highlights the different stages of the development of the teaching of *paṭiccasamuppāda*. His explanations try to integrate the various explanations of *paṭiccasamuppāda* into one coherent edifice and, by doing this, give legitimacy to all of them.

At this point, however, two things must be emphasized. Buddhadhāsa, and the same applies to Phra Payutto, are primarily not philologists but – in its broader sense – ‘theologians’: their textual interpretations aim to distil truths which can be put into a spiritual practice that leads to the soteriological goal of *nibbāna* and which can be verified by this practice. That means that it is primarily not their objective to understand the canonical texts but reality with the help of these texts. Also, it has to be kept in mind that Buddhadhāsa’s messages – ‘a “bitter potion” to swallow for the majority of the Thais’⁶² – and his sharp language have to be understood in their specific socio-historical context of Thai Buddhism, where popular beliefs in *kamma* and literal rebirth are very often associated with rather materialistic or superstitious notions and practices, which seem to have no canonical legitimacy: life-prolonging ceremonies, donating money in order to be reborn as a millionaire, the amulet-

⁶¹ Schmithausen 2000, 41: ‘soll hier noch einmal versucht werden, anhand der relevanten Primärquellen so nahe wie möglich an die ursprüngliche Intention heranzukommen’. Schmithausen 2000, 74: ‘Auch das Argument, dass die Verteilung der zwölfgliedrigen Formel auf drei Existenzen das Werk der Abhidharma-Systematiker sei und nirgendwo im Kanon vorkommen würde – und deshalb sekundär und der Sache nicht gemäß sei – dürfte sich durch die obigen Überlegungen zur Genese dieser Formel erledigt haben ...’ See also Bodhi 1998a and 1998b. In these two articles, Bhikkhu Bodhi tries to vindicate the TLT against Nāṇavīra’s suggestion that this traditional reading of *paṭiccasamuppāda* is a product of later tradition which is not in conformity with the earliest Buddhist teaching. For Nāṇavīra, the original *paṭiccasamuppāda* is non-temporal and applies to the present life only.

⁶² Gabaude 1990, 211.

market, *nibbāna* imagined as some kind of heavenly paradise, the concepts of an eternal self, and so forth. Buddhadāsa perceived these concepts as ‘wrong views’ which he wanted to ‘destroy’.⁶³

In Thai buddhology, by some of the most influential Thai Buddhist thinkers, canonical sections where demons and gods play a decisive role have been perceived either as later accretions to the original texts or as a metaphorical code which has to be deciphered with the ‘right’ hermeneutical approach.⁶⁴

In this point Phra Payutto’s reading of the Pāli canon differs enormously from Buddhadāsa and other influential Thai thinkers. Without addressing the issue of the ontology of all the things beyond the normal empirical scope, Phra Payutto accepts these things in their literal meaning.⁶⁵ According to this topic, for didactic reasons the Buddha has incorporated these things in his teachings. Following this example in his lectures and books, Phra Payutto uses phenomena like wonders (*iddhi-pāṭihāriya*), past and future lives, deities, heavens and hells both in their literal and their metaphorical meaning. His teaching strategy tries harmoniously to integrate these motives into one system that leads its recipients to the principal doctrines of Buddhism. For him, even the belief in spirits (*phi*, T.) which is very widespread in Thailand can be tolerated and legitimized from a canonical point of view and can be coherent with original Buddhism if the Thais take the right attitude towards the spirits. Furthermore, Phra Payutto argues that even the acceptance of amulets and other ‘magic’ or ‘holy things’ (เครื่องรางของขลัง/สิ่งศักดิ์สิทธิ์) can be legitimized from a canonical point of view given that interaction with these things is coherent with Buddhist teaching.⁶⁶

The comprehensiveness, flexibility and inclusivity of Phra Payutto’s approach can arguably be best demonstrated by his teachings on *paṭiccasamuppāda* and the related teachings about heaven, hell and rebirth, which allow at the same time a macro- and microcosmic level of reading. As a result, this explanation can tolerate the concept of physi-

⁶³ Gabaude 1994, 48. ‘As he grew older, [Buddhadāsa] acknowledged that being so outspoken had never really paid off except in a negative way.’ (Gabaude 1994, 49)

⁶⁴ Seeger 2005, 264.

⁶⁵ Phra Thammapidok 2538a, 455–56.

⁶⁶ Phra Thammapidok 2538a, 474–75.

cal rebirths, which can occur in the different levels of existence, mental conditions and permanently proceeding mental processes on such a subtle level that most people are not even aware of it. However, the objective – and here he is in complete agreement with Buddhādāsa – remains always the same: the motivation for Buddhist practice in the here and now.

Furthermore, as has been shown, his comprehensive and flexible interpretation of *paṭiccasamuppāda* is also a starting point for his teachings about the social dimensions of canonical doctrines which go far beyond the perception that Buddhism is concerned with the individual mind only.

By convincingly explaining a wide range of canonical and post canonical texts as coherent and, thereby, as authentic and authoritative, Phra Payutto is able to incorporate the doctrinal variations of later commentarial Theravāda tradition. He has thereby a wider scope of meaning and, therefore, flexibility in the accommodation at hand. For him, the canon is primarily not a source for the reconstruction of historical events. Rather, he perceives the *Tipiṭaka* as a corpus with a pedagogical purpose. This means that he reads the Pali canon not historically but pragmatically.

Although Phra Payutto's way of teaching Buddhism is distinguished by its comprehensiveness and inclusiveness, it seems that it does not receive much reception from social strata outside the middle-class intellectuals or educated monks. For many Thais, the complexity of his language and argumentations pose too big an intellectual challenge. In this regard, he has been criticised for using language that is too academic and, therefore, hardly comprehensible to non-intellecutuals.⁶⁷ His way of teaching Buddhism is perceived as 'dry' and unattractive.⁶⁸ For these reasons, it is hardly possible that Phra Payutto's teachings will directly expand into the rural or less educated social strata of Thai society. What

⁶⁷ Phra Thammaraksa 2538, 113; Phra Chayasaro Phikkhu 2539, 40; Pricha Changkhwanyuen 2540, 1–54, 161–70; Olson 1989, 376–84, 396. According to Pricha Changkhwanyuen (2540, 51), Phra Payutto books lack a 'motivating character' and are therefore not able to raise faith in the Buddhist religion.

⁶⁸ Phra Thammaraksa 2538, 113; Rawi Phawilai 2539, 104; interview with Sathianphong Wannapok on 21 August 2002.

is needed for this purpose are followers who, having 'digested' his message, convert it into a simpler language.

Unlike Phra Payutto, Buddhādāsa often uses catchy and provocative slogans or titles, like 'Empty Mind', 'nibbāna here and now', 'die before you die' or 'heaven in every movement'. This causes a stir, attracts attention and gives his teachings a lasting effect. Also, in contrast to Phra Payutto, Buddhādāsa is regarded, in addition to his image as a 'monk of wisdom', as a 'master' (*acan*, T.) who teaches the meditative aspects of Buddhism.⁶⁹ Whereas Buddhādāsa has affected Thai Buddhism through his books, his charisma and his monastery Suan Mokh, which is one of the most famous in the whole of Thailand, Phra Payutto is mostly and almost always revered for his intellectual accomplishments of which his many books are testimony.⁷⁰ Buddhādāsa perceives himself as a 'destroyer' – 'not of people but of their wrong views and passion',⁷¹ and tries to galvanize Thai society with his 'shocking' messages.⁷² Phra Payutto's approach, though, is to build up a 'bridge' to the people, in order to lead them from their current standpoints to the canonical ideals.

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⁶⁹ Olson 1990, 261.

⁷⁰ Interview with Phra Phaisan Wisalo on 20 October 2002.

⁷¹ Gabaude 1994, 47–50.

⁷² Jackson 1988, 146; Olson 1989, 257.

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APSARASES: THE BUDDHIST CONVERSION
OF THE NYMPHS OF HEAVEN *

LINDA COVILL

The *Saundarananda*, a *mahākāvya* composed by the Buddhist monk and poet Aśvaghōṣa in the early second century of the common era, contains amongst its *dramatis personae* a pivotal character – or rather, 500 pivotal characters – of whom little notice has been taken by modern scholars but who aroused a great deal of interest in earlier times. This is the minor female divinity known in Sanskrit as an *apsaras* and in Pali as *accharā*, commonly depicted in Indian mythology as an inhabitant of heaven. An accomplished singer and dancer, and always ravishingly beautiful, the Apsaras was a popular subject for artists and sculptors. Sometimes she is shown in flight, sometimes standing in the typical *tribhaṅga* or triple bend pose, which accentuates her curves.¹ Both Indian folklore, especially in its epic-purāṇic phase, and Pali Buddhism include the Apsaras in the heavenly package with which the virtuous are rewarded in the afterlife. However, Buddhism tended to shy away from the open eroticism which the epic-purāṇic imagination invested in the Apsaras, preferring to envisage her as a demure lady-in-waiting. This article summarises these two opposing conceptions of the Apsaras, and also investigates a few traces of her sexuality that remain in early Buddhist literature.

The origin of the Apsarases is attributed in the *Rāmāyaṇa* to the churning of the ocean. However, it is said that when they emerged, neither the gods nor the *asuras* would have them for wives, so they became common to all. Although Vedic literature associates them with trees and

* This article was presented as a paper to the Fourteenth Conference of the International Association of Buddhist Studies, London, on 2 September 2005.

¹ At Angkor Wat in Cambodia there are over 1,600 representations of Apsarases. They are also found in carvings at Borobudur in Indonesia and in frescoes at Sigiriya in Sri Lanka.

water, in later literature they are conceptualised as residing in *svarga* – heaven, specifically the Trayastrimśas heaven presided over by Indra, and in particular, as amusing themselves in the heavenly garden of delight known as Nandana. A man reborn here would find that his experience of heaven consists of the perfect satisfaction of his senses, which all continue to operate. The *Bhagavad Gītā* (IX 20d), for instance, mentions that those who reach the domain of Indra ‘enjoy the divine pleasures of the gods’ (*aśnanti divyān divi deva-bhogān*). The underlying metaphor of eating – *aśnanti*, literally, ‘they eat’ – reveals that this is a heaven in which physical functionality endures. Heaven is beautiful to look at, smells nice, and it is cooled by pleasant breezes. There is plentiful food and drink of a celestial standard, while entertainment is offered by the Apsarases, the heavenly nymphs, who dance and sing divinely. Music and song are not all that they offer, though, for they are also strongly associated with sex, nor do they confine their favours to the Gandharvas, the heavenly musicians with whom they are often paired. Already in the *Ṛg Veda* (RV) passing reference is made to the sexuality of the Apsarases; one passage² refers to the Apsarases as taking lovers (*jāra*), while another³ relates the myth of the Apsaras Urvaśī, casting her as a decidedly sexual being. Temporarily banished from heaven, she comes to earth and becomes the adored lover of King Purūravas, who, it is said, makes love to her three times a day (this story is most famously rendered in Kālidāsa’s drama *Vikramorvaśī*). The *Atharva Veda* (AV) specifies that in heaven the virtuous man is blessed with a perfect body, free of disease and distortion. It also bluntly informs us that a man’s penis is not incinerated in the funeral fire, but is retained in heaven, adding that for such a man, many womenfolk – *bahu straiṇam* – are his.⁴

The popular perception of the Apsarases as celestial paramours for those who have been virtuous in their conduct, zealous in their ritualism, or courageous in battle is embodied chiefly within the epic-purāṇic tradition. The *Mahābhārata* (MBh) stresses the Apsarases’s physical attributes, seductiveness and immodest gestures, and often depicts them

² RV x 123,5.

³ RV x 95. The story is also found at *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* XI 5,1.

⁴ AV vi 120,3 and iv 34,2.

as underdressed, such as Tilottamā who wears just one piece of red cloth,⁵ or even naked, such as Menakā after the wind whips off her skirt.⁶ The epic provides a list of the quintessential features of the Apsaras: she has lotus eyes with which she casts flirtatious glances, a narrow waist, heavy buttocks, and breasts that jiggle as she dances. She invariably disturbs the mind of any man who beholds her.⁷ Typically, an Apsaras is sent by Indra to distract a sage from his *tapas*, since Indra is notoriously jealous of and alarmed by the ascetically derived power of sages. Ironically, those same sages are rewarded for their ascetic restraint by the sexual possession of those very Apsarases in heaven.⁸ In contrast to St. Augustine's wish to be chaste later⁹, it seems that Indian sages are chaste first and are later rewarded with the fleshpots of heaven. At other times the nymphs do act independently. So Urvaśī, bent on the seduction of Arjuna, says:

All [Apsarases] are unconfined in their choice ... [Those] that have come here as a result of ascetic merit enjoy us without incurring any sin. Please do not to send me away tormented and burning with desire. Make love with me who loves you, O hero.¹⁰

Turning to the Pali textual tradition, one discovers that the Accharās appear frequently in similes, where they figure as the conventional *upamāna*, or object of comparison, for the dancing girls who grace the courts of kings. In these similes, the number of dancing girls, and hence of the Accharās, often seems to be fixed at either 8,000 or 16,000.¹¹ The use of an Apsaras as a sexual weapon deployed by Indra is also retained

⁵ MBh I 204, 9

⁶ MBh I 66, 5

⁷ *etāś cānyās ca nanytus tatra tatra varāṅganāḥ | citta-pramathane yukṭāḥ siddhānāṃ padmalocanā || mahā-kaṭi-taṭa-sroṇyaḥ kampaṃānāḥ payodharaiḥ | kaṭākṣa-hāva-mādhuryaiś ceto buddhi-manoharāḥ ||* (MBh III 44, 31–32)

⁸ MBh XIII 109, 52; 110, 12, 15, for example. In the first of these, 'a hundred virgin Apsarases will pleasure that man [who honours the gods]' (*śataṃ cāpsarasāḥ kanyā ramayanti taṃ narām*).

⁹ *Confessions* VIII, 7: 'Give me chastity and continence, but not yet.'

¹⁰ *anāvṛtās ca sarvāḥ... || ... ye ... tv ihāgatāḥ | tapasā ramayanty asmān na ca teṣāṃ vyatikramāḥ || tvat prasīda na mām ārtāṃ viśarjjayitum arhasi | hycchayena ca santaptāṃ bhaktāṃ ca bhaja mānada ||* (MBh III 1858–60, Calcutta edition, 1834)

¹¹ e.g. *Jātaka* I 470, III 408.

in one *Jātaka* story. Indra, here named Sakka, sends the nymph Alambusā to seduce the ascetic Isisiṅga. However, in an interesting Buddhist twist, when Alambusā is later offered a boon, she asks never to have to seduce another ascetic again.¹² Indeed, she had previously requested that some other Accharā be given the job. Such moral misgivings are entirely absent in the stereotypical Apsaras of the *Mahābhārata*. This *Jātaka* story reflects the dilemma for Buddhism which, with its ascetic bent and its emphasis on containment and dispassion, was uncomfortable with holding out a promise of celestial prostitutes as a post-mortem reward for its adherents. Where such a promise is made, as in the well-known story of Nanda to be discussed shortly, it is hedged about with exculpatory justifications. The general unease felt by the tradition in respect of the Accharās is evident in the *Accharā Sutta* of the Saṃyutta Nikāya, in which the Accharās are labelled ‘demons’ (*pisācas*), while Nandana, the Grove of Delight in which the Accharās traditionally besport themselves, is renamed Mohana, or delusion. In his commentary on this *sutta*, Buddhaghosa explains that these words are spoken by a monk who dies of exertion during meditation and is reborn in the Tāvatiṃsa heaven. Fearfully disappointed because he has missed liberation and attained heaven, the wrong goal, he perceives the beautiful Accharās coming towards him and hails them as demons.¹³ How then could Buddhism cope with the wayward reputation of the Apsaras? The answer lay in ignoring their sexual aspect more or less entirely and turning them into heavenly attendants and ladies-in-waiting – still very beautiful, still musical and graceful, but definitely chaste.

In the Pali canon, the Accharās appear most prominently in the *Vimāna-vatthu* stories of the Khuddaka Nikāya. The chief feature of the *Vimāna* stories is that acts of generosity to the Buddha or Sangha are rewarded by rebirth as *devas* in the Tāvatiṃsa heaven. Though generosity is the most celebrated virtue, those who revere their parents, readily pardon others and take no pleasure in quarrels are also reborn in the Tāvatiṃsa heaven. The characters thus rewarded are all lay people, since monks are not depicted as striving for heaven, and most of them

¹² The *Alambusā Jātaka*, no. 523.

¹³ *Saṃyutta Nikāya* I 33, commentary at *Sāratthappakāsinī* I 85–88.

are women, though some are men and two are animals. The underlying structure of the stories is provided by Mahāmoggallāna's visit to heaven, during which he asks those he encounters how they won their position, and they recount the good deed responsible for their current pleasant situation. Each *deva* lives in a sort of aerial palace or *vimāna*, studded with jewels and gold, in which they can travel down to earth, though they cannot go to any region higher than their own. The *devas* have a human form and are endowed with the five senses, but they are far more brilliant and dazzling than anyone on earth. They have unaging bodies, colourful garments and exquisite ornaments. The Tāvatiṃsa heaven in which they live is refined, delicate, and sensuous. There is an abundance of flowers, plants and creepers; breezes are soft and perfumed. The fortunate heaven-dweller frequently has a retinue of Accharās, up to 100,000. Interestingly, the devout lay followers here described are never reborn as Accharās themselves, but only as *devas* or *devatās* attended by Accharās. The Accharās of the *Vimāna-vatthu* appear as attendants, sometimes as ministering with song and dance, but never as potential sexual partners. Outside the Pali tradition there are the texts such as the *Mahāvastu* or the *Lalitavistara* in which the role of the Apsarases is confined to non-sexual activities such as tending to the bodhisattva's mother during her pregnancy and labour, or providing a kind of chorus that miraculously appears during the important moments of the Buddha's life to sing his praises.

It should be noted that in the Pali texts, heaven is softened into a place that women might actually want to be reborn into – perhaps early Buddhism had to find something to offer the female laity, who after all may have been the most regular alms-givers. Thus the promise of a woman-friendly heaven is held out to them, a heaven where women could move about freely, unshackled by husbands and domesticity, and with many attendants. They zoom around in splendid jewel-encrusted *vimānas*, and the Accharās become their servants – an attractive prospect, one should imagine, for the ordinary Indian woman whose life probably consisted of excessive child-bearing and endless domestic labour. Heaven is revised for women residents; in this heaven they are not just part of the engaging furniture, as in the epic-purāṇic conception,

but VIPs in their own right. As one modern Indian woman writer has said:

One day I realised that we [women] don't even have a heaven of our own! When I think of the pictures of Heaven in any religion, I see that it is a man's idea; whether it's apsarases or nymphs or houris, it comes to the same thing really. Only a man could dream of Heaven as a place where he can lie about all day, surrounded by beautiful women, being served by them.¹⁴

The Pali texts, however, do offer a heaven for women too. As a result, in the Pali texts there is only very sporadic mention of the sexual bliss dispensed by the Apsarases. One such is the story of the monk Sudinna.¹⁵ Sudinna's family try to tempt him back to lay life by showing him some enormous heaps of gold. When he tells them to dump it all in the Ganges, they try another tack and bring in his former wife, all decked in her finery. She comes in, touches his feet, and says, rather flirtatiously: 'What are they like, those Accharās for whose sake you practise *brahmacariya* (that is, the life of celibacy and self-control)?' He replies, 'O Sister, I do not practise *brahmacariya* for the sake of the Accharās.' And at being called 'sister' (*bhagini*), the former wife falls down in a faint. It would be difficult to understand why the former wife would mention the Accharās unless she sees them as sexual rivals. Indeed, she hopes that Sudinna can still be motivated by sex. When Sudinna asserts that he is not interested in any sexual relationship, either with the Accharās or with his wife, whom he now regards as a sister, she faints. What is noticeable in this story is the allusion to the epic-purāṇic 'pay now, buy later' conception that the sexual favours of the Accharās can be purchased in advance by a life of celibate restraint.

In the *Udāna*, one of the oldest Pali texts, the monk Mahākassapa is at one time described with the phrase 'having rejected those 500 deities',¹⁶ without any further information as to what situation or context this phrase might refer to. Given their reputation, it is likely that he rejected the sexual blandishments of the Accharās, just as the bodhisattva re-

¹⁴ The novelist Shashi Deshpande, from a talk given on 30 October 1997 in Zurich.

¹⁵ Recounted at *Vinaya* III 17. The same happens to the monk Raṭṭhāpāla, as recounted at *Majjhima Nikāya* II 64.

¹⁶ *Udāna* 4: *tāni pañcamattāni devatā-satāni paṭikkhipitvā*.

jected the temptations of the daughters of Māra. However, hundreds of years later the commentator Dhammapāla specifically identifies the deities as Accharās, and accounts for the phrase by having Mahākassapa refusing to take alms from the Accharās, saying to them ‘Be off with you! You have made merit, you already have great enjoyment; I will act sympathetically towards those who are badly off.’ At this they meekly return to the *deva-loka* whence they came.¹⁷ Dhammapāla’s rather contrived explanation suggests a shift in the portrayal of the Accharās from heavenly temptresses to heavenly devotees interested only in alms-giving.

Apart from these half-hints and intimations, the sexuality of the Accharās is in the foreground in only one early Buddhist legend, and that is in the story of the Buddha’s half-brother Nanda, of which there are several accounts in addition to Aśvaghōṣa’s *Saundarananda*.¹⁸ The basic story runs like this: the Buddha enters Nanda’s house on his wedding day, places his bowl in Nanda’s hand and then leaves. Nanda is forced to follow, with the bowl still in his hand. When Nanda’s new bride is interrupted with the news that the Buddha is taking her husband away, she rushes to the top of the house with her hair half-combed and calls out to him to return soon. In Aśvaghōṣa’s version, Nanda’s wife makes him promise to return before her make-up has dried. However, Nanda does not return; instead, the Buddha leads him to the *vihāra* and has him unwillingly ordained. Though ordained as a monk, Nanda finds the celibate life incredibly hard; as Aśvaghōṣa (*Saund* VII 1) mellifluously puts it, *na nananda nandaḥ* (‘Nanda did not rejoice’). The Buddha summons Nanda and enquires the reason for his depression, and Nanda replies that it is because he cannot forget his beautiful wife. The Buddha then takes Nanda by the arm, and the two immediately travel up to heaven. There they behold 500 Accharās. Nanda almost dies of lust on the spot. The Buddha asks Nanda who is fairer, his wife or the nymphs. Nanda enthusiastically replies that the Accharās are much

¹⁷ *Udāna-aṭṭhakathā* 61–2.

¹⁸ The Nanda story is a popular one and appears in full or in part in Pali sources (*Udāna* 21–24, *Dhammapada* 13–14, *Theragāthā* 157–58, *Jātaka* no. 182, also commentaries on the first three of these and on *Vinaya* I 82), the Chinese *Abhiniṣkramaṇa Sūtra* and the much later *Sundarī-nandāvadāna* by Kṣemendra.

more beautiful. When the Buddha promises that he can earn the five hundred nymphs through ascetic practices, Nanda agrees to persevere with *brahmacariya*. With that they swiftly return to earth. When the other monks come to hear that Nanda is practising *brahmacariya* in order to obtain the Accharās, they mock him, which so humiliates Nanda that he begins to practise diligently and soon attains liberation.

The Buddhist tradition feels considerable unease over this whole business of purposefully exposing Nanda to the irresistible Apsarases. Why would the Buddha seem to act contrary to everything he had ever taught about desire? Why would he actually try to aggravate lust in someone? In his commentary on the *Udāna* version of the Nanda story, Dhammapāla uses a medical model in the Buddha's defence. He explains that a physician, when treating a patient suffering from excessive humours, first exacerbates the symptoms of his patient in order thereafter to purge them completely. So too does the Buddha exacerbate Nanda's symptoms of lust in order to purge them with the medicine of the noble path (*ariya-magga-bhesajja*). He makes the same point in his commentary on the *Theragāthā*, comparing the Accharās to a drink of oil by which a doctor prepares a patient for purging.¹⁹ The *Questions of Milinda* explains that the Buddha has a variety of methods (*anekapariyāya*) for liberating people, just as a physician has a variety of treatments at his disposal. In Nanda's case, the method chosen by the Buddha for the sake of liberating him (*bodhana-hetu*) was to show him the 500 dove-footed Accharās.²⁰ Thus the Apsarases become part of the Buddha's skilful means; they are themselves made an instrument of conversion.²¹ In his poem, the *Saundarananda*, Aśvaghoṣa too justifies the Buddha's action on the grounds that he is like a doctor: just as a doctor expunges the humours from the body by initially exacerbating his patient's pain, so does the Buddha destroy Nanda's lust by first in-

¹⁹ *Theragāthā-aṭṭhakathā* II 33.

²⁰ *Milindapañha* 169.

²¹ The tradition recognises this to some extent: the *Theragāthā* verses attributed to Nanda (157–58) have him rejoice in his liberation 'by the Buddha, skilled in means' (*upāyakuśalena ... buddhena*). Dhammapāla (*Udāna-aṭṭhakathā* 171) reports that whilst ferrying Nanda to heaven, the Buddha thinks 'I must make his lust subside through [skilful] means' (*upāyenassa rāgaṃ vūpasamessāmi*).

ducing a far greater lust.²² Thus the Buddha is exonerated by repeated comparison to a well-intentioned doctor who is unquestionably wiser than his patient, while the Apsarases are justified as a necessary medication, with nasty side-effects perhaps but efficacious in the long-term.²³

In summary, it is likely that within early Buddhist culture the Apsarases were subject to a process of de-eroticization. While in the epic-purāṇic imagination the Apsarases were seen as dispensers of sexual bliss, in early Buddhism they are allotted the role of graceful attendants only. In the one obvious reminder of their sexual function, which occurs in the story of Nanda, Buddhist interpreters assuage their doubts by redefining the celestial sirens as themselves facilitators of spiritual progress. To conclude: the *Mahāvastu* contains a long hymn of praise for those who offer even the smallest service to the Buddha. Amongst them, it is said that he who has cleaned a *stūpa* will win thousands of Apsarases, lovely and sweet-scented, but never feel any lust for any of them²⁴ – a statement which nicely summarises the Buddhist conversion of the Apsaras from celestial concubine to decorative but decorous divinity.

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²² Saund x 43: *doṣāṃś ca kāyād bhiṣag ujjihīṣur bhūyo yathā kleśayituṃ yateta | rāgaṃ tathā tasya munīr jighāṃsur bhūyastaraṃ rāgaṃ upānināya ||* ('And just as a doctor seeks to draw out humoral faults from the body by further paining it, so the sage, intending to destroy passion in him, first brought about a far greater passion.')

²³ The *Dhammapada* commentary (I 122), rather than resorting to the popular medical metaphor, describes the Accharās as 'bait' (*āmisā*).

²⁴ *Mahāvastu* II 386.

FIFTY YEARS OF BUDDHIST STUDIES IN BRITAIN*

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In 1997 a conference was held in Bangkok to survey the state of Buddhist studies internationally over the previous twenty-five years; it was organised by the Center for Buddhist Studies of Chulalongkorn University under Dr Wit Wisadavet, Director of the Center. A scholar was invited from each of some fifteen countries in which Buddhist studies could be presumed to flourish – which is more or less the same as saying, where the subject could be studied at university level. I enjoyed the conference. I found it entertaining to observe how people conformed to the expected national stereotypes. The Germans (who, incidentally, were represented by an Israeli) equated Buddhist studies with textual and historical research on Buddhism and barely even mentioned the social sciences, even though German scholarship has made notable contributions in that area. The Americans perfectly complemented the Germans, in that they mentioned only work in the social sciences, if one may include under that rubric empirical work on contemporary phenomena carried out under the rubric of ‘religious studies’ – work that so often turns out to be simply rather mediocre anthropology.

While the Germans presented a vast bibliography, the American presentation did not attempt to include anything like a comprehensive bibliography, but instead ran way over time and characterised each individual work discussed as ‘stunning’. The French were lightly ironic and always to the point; the Koreans were humorous; the Japanese earnest. The Burmese delegate was so frightened that he did not dare mention

* This was originally delivered on 15 September 2004 as a paper to the Fiftieth Anniversary Conference of the British Association for the Study of Religion at Harris-Manchester College, Oxford. I was to speak for thirty minutes, so naturally made no attempt to be exhaustive.

any research done within the prescribed period. At least I did not have that problem.

What the Thai organisers really wanted to know was how the rest of the world saw ‘engaged Buddhism’. Were Buddhist studies being pursued only in an entirely detached spirit, or was Buddhism being used to offer values and insights in other academic areas, such as politics or ecology? I suspect that they were rather disappointed at finding themselves alone in this concern; and this may largely explain the somewhat unsatisfactory aftermath of the conference. A volume containing versions (some radically revised) of ten of the papers, plus an introduction, finally appeared in 2000.¹ Thus material which was in any case doomed to obsolescence appeared in print only when approaching its sell-by date. Each contribution was now equipped with a bibliography, but – perhaps through some misguided notion of fairness – this included only books, not articles, so that much of the material some of us had gone to great pains to assemble was wasted.² And misprints abounded. In short, the proceedings as published serve best to illustrate the Buddhist doctrines of impermanence and unsatisfactoriness.

This experience serves me as a kind of parable. *Scripta manent*, the Latin tag rightly has it: It is writings that endure. So yes, there is much to be said for the traditional scholarly view: that a survey of what has been achieved in an academic field should consist first and foremost of a bibliography. Although in general information services have vastly improved in the past fifty years, Buddhist studies are unfortunate: the admirable ongoing bibliography *Bibliographie Bouddhique* stopped publishing in 1967, its last volume covering only up to May 1958. I suppose that as the general rate of publication increased, it became more and more difficult to produce a comprehensive bibliography of the field,

¹ Donald K. Swearer and Somparn Promta, eds, *The State of Buddhist Studies in the World 1972–1997*, Bangkok: Center for Buddhist Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 2000.

² It may however be useful if I reproduce from Donald Swearer’s introduction his first footnote: ‘For earlier assessments of the state of Buddhist studies, see Edward Conze, ‘Recent Progress in Buddhist Studies’, *Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968); J.W. de Jong, *A Brief History of Buddhist Studies in Europe and America* (Tokyo, Kosei Publishing Company, 1997); Hajime Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism: A Survey with Bibliographical Notes* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1987).’ (Swearer and Promta, p. viii.)

while on the other hand search engines such as Google make it seem easy to find what one needs on the Internet, and publishing printed volumes seems impossibly slow by contrast. As anyone can, I have rapidly located on the Internet a 'Bibliography of Buddhist Studies Bibliographies in Western Languages', fourteen pages long; but it was last updated in March 2001, and most of the items are either bibliographies of narrowly defined areas like the Lotus Sutra or of extremely broad areas, such as whole countries or fields like 'Indian philosophy', within which one would have to trawl for oneself. Besides, very few of the bibliographies seem to be critical. Moreover, that they only deal with western languages is obviously a major deficiency. Incidentally, the British contribution in this area has been pitifully modest.

Maybe the very idea of a comprehensive bibliography of Buddhist studies is now obsolete. It could be argued that as it has grown, the field of Buddhist studies has, inevitably, become so divided that such a compilation would interest hardly anyone, since – to take examples at random – a new scholarly edition of the writings of a Korean Soen master would be of no concern whatever to an anthropologist of Sinhalese Buddhism, and vice versa. I would argue nevertheless that specialisation brings losses as well as gains. The hazardous enterprise of trying to grasp the big picture is unpopular, even sometimes despised, within academia, but quite the opposite with the general public on whose patronage the scholarly work so largely depends. So I for one feel that a constantly updated and comprehensive bibliography would still be a valuable work of reference.

However, the lesson I have learnt from the Chulalongkorn experience is that a survey of an academic field should not consist primarily of a list of publications, for besides being indigestible to a live audience this very soon becomes dated. When we assess progress in a field like Buddhist studies which, whether we like it or not, is highly specialised, we need the perspective of a still wider context. The fate of a particular academic field cannot but be linked to that of higher education in general. I know that it constantly appears to us that our field is in decline, if not in crisis, if not under threat of extinction in Britain. And yet when we compare where we are now with where we were fifty years ago, we get a jolt. When I came up to Oxford as a student in 1957, the University

employed no one to teach Buddhism, and I don't think it figured on any syllabus, undergraduate or postgraduate. I believe the same was true of Cambridge. That reminds us, while we bemoan decline, how radically things have improved. It is true that the greatest advances were probably made some time back, in the sixties and seventies. But the main reason for our apparently paradoxical perception must be that higher education overall has so greatly expanded that even if the exiguous percentage of its resources and personnel devoted to studying Buddhism has, say, halved, that still means a huge increase in teaching posts and library facilities.

Another global trend from which we have benefited – as must be obvious to this audience – is the virtual creation of Religious Studies as a separate academic field. (I hesitate to call it a 'discipline'.) The first chair of Comparative Religion in Britain was created at Manchester University in 1903 and its first occupant was the great scholar of early Buddhism, T. W. Rhys Davids. As we all know, however, the establishment of Religious Studies in the British university system must stand largely to the credit of another Buddhologist, Ninian Smart; he first occupied the chair in this subject at Lancaster University, where he set up a department in 1967. Luckily a few of his direct disciples are still among us and provide my story with a pleasing thread of continuity.

The greatly expanded and somewhat systematised study of non-Christian religions must in turn be linked to the fortunes of faith communities, who provide both demand and supply. When this Association was formed in 1954, it was natural to make it primarily an association for the study of the history of religions, i.e., of their past, because their living presence was not a salient feature of the local landscape. The immigration which sharply increased at around that time, and the consequent rise in the population from non-Christian religious traditions, began to make it reasonable to regard Britain as a multi-cultural society. The impact was not immediate; but as the non-Christian immigrants began to send their children to school, it became necessary to cater for them in primary and secondary education. Here too, Ninian Smart was a pioneer: in 1969 he played a leading part in creating the Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education. This small body of volunteers tried to offer the school system – and to some extent also other

public services such as hospitals and the police, plus any inquirers from the general public – at least a minimum of accurate and not unsympathetic information about living non-Christian traditions as now found in Britain. For most of the period under survey, the Shap Working Party has annually published and distributed both a calendar of religious festivals and a compilation (known as the ‘Shap Mailing’), aimed specially at schoolteachers, which takes a new theme each year and contains articles on that theme applied to various religions.

Once these religious traditions were taught in schools, it became necessary to train teachers, and even in due course school inspectors, who knew something about them. This in turn meant jobs for some graduates of university departments of Religious Studies. This then led to a rise in standards and to formal examinations, so that it became possible to take ‘A’ levels in Religious Studies with papers devoted to specific non-Christian religions.

Because of the pattern of immigration, Buddhism benefited less from these developments than did Islam, Hinduism and even Sikhism. When I first joined the Shap Working Party, an extremely well-meaning senior figure, who was I believe responsible for the teaching of non-Christian religions throughout the Birmingham area, told me that Buddhism was not suitable for children, by which he meant that it was too intellectual and abstruse. It was Peggy Morgan who coined the response ‘Buddhists have children too’, and who began producing materials suitable for teaching Buddhism to children in British primary schools.

On the other hand, in higher education Buddhism has benefited from a tragedy and a success. The tragedy has been the Chinese invasion of Tibet. In particular, the conquest of Lhasa and the flight to India in 1959 of the Dalai Lama have had massive consequences for the spread of Tibetan Buddhism across the world and the academic study of Tibet. The Tibetan exodus was initially into India, where the majority of the Tibetan Sangha have stayed, but significant numbers have gone on to North America and, secondarily, to Europe.

Fifty years ago I don’t think there was a department of Tibetan studies at any university in the world, and there was certainly no international organisation for the subject. Now many universities, including Oxford and SOAS, teach the Tibetan language and Tibetan studies; and the

recent international conferences of the International Association for Tibetan Studies have been better attended than the corresponding meetings of the International Association for Sanskrit Studies. Tibetan studies are of course not all about Buddhism, but surely well over half of them are.

The success to which I have just alluded is the Japanese economic miracle. Japanese efforts to export their culture have not been in proportion to their economic clout – and one could say the same, later, of the Koreans. Nevertheless, some Japanese Buddhist organisations have been generous in supporting the study of Buddhism abroad, not least in Britain. The most notable donor has been the Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai, The Society for the Advancement of Buddhist Understanding, also known among us as the Numata Foundation, after its founder. In the 1980s Mr Yehan Numata, from his base in Tokyo, began to found chairs in Buddhist studies in the western world. There was some variation, but the general pattern was for a university to have a visiting scholar to teach each year, paid for by the BDK; and extra money was also paid, with the intention of endowing a permanent chair.

Though Mr Numata himself was an adherent of Jodo Shinshu, the Pure Land Buddhist tradition founded by Shinran, the BDK has wisely and nobly supported Buddhist studies in general. Oxford was the first British university to benefit: an annual visiting fellowship, attached to Balliol College, began in 1989. Later SOAS and Cambridge received benefactions from the same source. With my retirement, it is greatly hoped that the visiting position at Oxford can be converted into a permanently endowed chair, as Mr Numata originally envisaged. This would be the first endowed chair in Buddhist studies not merely at Oxford but at any British university.

In my contribution to the Chulalongkorn survey I published a table headed 'British institutions offering teaching in Buddhism at undergraduate and/or postgraduate level' (pp. 176–8). The only centre for Buddhist studies which then (in 1997) existed in Britain had recently been founded at Bristol University under the leadership of Paul Williams. How did this come about? Bristol's Department of Theology and Religious Studies had already acquired a reputation in Buddhism, and this in turn arose partly because Bristol, alone of all British universities,

had two posts in the field. So how did that happen? Most of the credit must go to Professor Denis Nineham; but a little also to me. When approaching the end of a distinguished academic career, Prof. Nineham made a surprise move: he resigned as Warden of Keble College, Oxford, and went to head the department at Bristol. Whether he went on condition that the department would be expanded or whether he persuaded the university authorities to do it after he got there I do not know, but the university then advertised a new post in Buddhist studies. Two of my pupils, Paul Williams and Steve Collins, both applied. They were close friends and I thought the world of both of them, so I accepted the awkward task of writing a reference for both. I wrote a very long letter, explaining that both of them were so good – and yet so different – that it was impossible for me to give my preference to either: both fully deserved the job. Professor Nineham then managed to offer jobs to both, by appointing Paul to a vacant position in the philosophy of religion. Even after Steve Collins left for America, the two posts were retained and his post was advertised, which is how we come to have Rupert Gethin here with us now.

Certain other institutional landmarks deserve to be at least briefly recorded. In 1976 the energy and vision of Professor A. K. Narain, who had then moved from Benares to the University of Wisconsin, founded the International Association of Buddhist Studies and its journal, the *International Journal of Buddhist Studies*. Here in Britain Peter Harvey, Ian Harris and colleagues founded the UK Association for Buddhist Studies, which has held an annual conference since 1996. Though they published somewhat irregularly, there were already two British journals of Buddhist studies, the *Journal of the Pali Text Society* and the *Pali Buddhist Review*, the latter originally a one-man enterprise by Russell Webb. In 1983–84 Russell's journal broadened its scope and editorship to become the *Buddhist Studies Review*, and in 1998 this became the official organ of UKABS. Russell has recently announced his retirement from the editorship and we must all be grateful to him for his great contribution to our field. Other important innovations have involved use of the Internet. Damien Keown and Charles Prebish were founding editors of the electronic *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* (website: <http://jbe.gold.ac.uk>). Peter Harvey, of the University of Sunderland, has pioneered serious

distance learning with his web-based MA in Buddhist Studies, which began in 2002 (<http://www.sunderland.ac.uk/buddhist>); in 2005, it will include a module on Pali.

If I try to survey the intellectual trends in Buddhist studies in Britain over the last fifty years, I do not see how I can avoid repeating some of what I said in my Chulalongkorn paper.

Perhaps the most notable intellectual development 'has been the growth, from an almost non-existent base, of the anthropological (and, to a lesser extent, sociological) study of Buddhist communities and traditions. In this area it is undoubtedly Theravada Buddhist studies that have led the field,' especially in Britain. In 1971 I published my first book, *Precept and Practice: Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon*.³ This book appeared just after two comparable full-scale anthropological studies of Buddhism in Burma and Thailand respectively: Melford Spiro's *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and Its Burmese Vicissitudes*⁴ and S. J. Tambiah's *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-east Thailand*.⁵ Spiro's book has no connection with Britain, but Tambiah's was written while he was teaching at Cambridge (he later moved to Harvard), and was followed while he was still there by *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background*.⁶ The literature on modern Thai Buddhism was further enriched in this period by Jane Bunnag's *Buddhist Monk, Buddhist Layman: A Study of Urban Monastic Organization in Central Thailand*.⁷

Within Britain this scholarly tradition was carried forward by Michael Carrithers' *The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka*⁸ and David Gellner's *Monk, Householder and Tantric Priest: Newar Buddhism and Its Hierarchy of Ritual*,⁹ both books are based on Oxford doctoral theses. It is regrettable that (so far as I know) Gustaaf Houtman has not published his SOAS PhD

³ Oxford: Clarendon Press. A revised edition was published as *Buddhist Precept and Practice*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991.

⁴ New York: Harper & Row, 1970; 2nd revised edn, Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1982.

⁵ Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970.

⁶ Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

⁷ Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973.

⁸ Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983.

⁹ Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

thesis, 'Traditions of Buddhist Practice in Burma' (1990), which contains much fascinating material. Although it was written while he was teaching in Australia, Geoffrey Samuel's book *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies*¹⁰ must be included in this series of major anthropological monographs. Gananath Obeyesekere and I together published *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka*.¹¹ The works of Carrithers, Gellner and Samuel, as well as (I hope) my own are informed by that sensitivity to a culture which cannot be acquired without a thorough knowledge of its language; they also have in common an interest in the diachronic as well as the synchronic dimension of their subjects. The social study of Buddhism is being carried forward by Cathy Cantwell and Geoffrey Samuel (Tibetan Buddhism), David Gellner (Newar and Japanese Buddhism), Ian Reader (Japanese Buddhism), Hiroko Kawanami (Burmese Buddhism) and several excellent scholars who study Buddhist practice in Britain itself. In the last category I must single out for mention the monograph *A Time to Chant: The Soka Gakkai Buddhists in Britain*¹² by the distinguished British sociologist Bryan Wilson and his Belgian co-author Karel Dobbelaere.

Among the more traditional lines of Buddhological research, it is perhaps philological and doctrinal studies of the Theravāda which have flourished most in Britain. K. R. Norman's contribution to Pali studies can hardly be over-emphasised, and was recognised by a special number of *Indo-Iranian Journal* in his honour (vol. 35, 1992). Besides his magisterial editions and translations of Pali canonical texts, there are his history of Pali literature in the Harrassowitz *A History of Indian Literature* series (1983),¹³ and his *Collected Papers*, so far amounting to seven volumes, published by the Pali Text Society.¹⁴ Many further contributions to scholarship of this general character are gathered in the PTS *Journal*. Dr. Margaret Cone is being employed by the PTS to write what will be essentially a new version of its *Pali-English Dictionary*¹⁵ (originally by Rhys

¹⁰ Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993.

¹¹ Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988.

¹² Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

¹³ *Pāli Literature*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1983.

¹⁴ Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1996–2001.

¹⁵ London: Pali Text Society, 1921–25.

Davids and Stede); the first of three projected volumes has appeared,¹⁶ and this will in due course make an enormous contribution to the study of Pali and hence of Buddhism.

It is not always sensible to try to draw a line between a really good introduction to a subject and a contribution to scholarship. Though there are probably too many introductions to Buddhism on the market, in this area we seem to do rather well. For example, Michael Carrithers' *The Buddha*¹⁷ may contain nothing which a scholar would find absolutely new, but its mere appearance in the Oxford University Press *Past Masters* series (and now in the *Short Introduction To* series) and its excellent literary style make it a significant contribution to Buddhist studies. I hope the same can be said for the lavishly illustrated book which I edited with Heinz Bechert: *The World of Buddhism: Buddhist Monks and Nuns in Society and History*.¹⁸ Similarly, the books which Paul Williams (*Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*)¹⁹ and I (*Theravāda Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*)²⁰ contributed to the Routledge series of books on world religions are primarily intended to serve as college textbooks or introductions for the general reader, but do also contain some original material. Williams' book has been particularly successful and has been translated into Italian; mine has appeared in German. I understand that Andrew Skilton's *A Concise History of Buddhism*²¹ has been used as an introductory course textbook by at least one famous American scholar of Buddhism. Peter Harvey's *Introduction to Buddhism*²² has been even more widely acclaimed and is being translated into several languages. Still more recently, we greeted excellent introductory works by Paul Williams (with Anthony Tribe)²³ and by Rupert Gethin.²⁴

¹⁶ *A Dictionary of Pāli. Part I: a–kh*, Oxford: Pali Text Society, 2001.

¹⁷ Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.

¹⁸ London and New York: Thames & Hudson, 1984.

¹⁹ London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1989.

²⁰ London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988.

²¹ Birmingham: Windhorse, 1994.

²² Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

²³ *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition*, London: Routledge, 2000.

²⁴ *The Foundations of Buddhism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

In the vast field of Mahāyāna studies, it is notable that work on the Indo-Tibetan tradition has been comparatively flourishing, even though until recently SOAS was the only university officially to offer a regular course in Tibetan. David Snellgrove, who for many years was the Tibetan teacher at SOAS, is no longer active in the field, and much of his work is perhaps being superseded, but he deserves great credit (and was accorded a *Festschrift* (1990)) for laying foundations and stimulating interest. The current doyen in this field is Professor David Seyfort Ruegg, whose eminence as a Buddhologist was recognised by his election as President of the International Association of Buddhist Studies, and by a volume of papers published in his honour.²⁵ Important recent translations and monographs in this field include the books of Martin Boord,²⁶ Rob Mayer,²⁷ Ulrich Pagel²⁸ and Bulcsu Siklos.²⁹ Paul Williams, who writes primarily as a philosopher (though his philological skill is impeccable), has been very productive, especially on the dGe lugs pa school.

I have omitted many areas, but I did warn you that I was not out to produce a catalogue. Let me now become a trifle self-indulgent and say that the development in Buddhist studies which interests me most personally is the revival, since about 1990, in investigating the earliest Buddhism, which I take to be that of the Buddha himself and that of his immediate disciples. In this area I think a revolution has occurred, though I am not sure that everyone has noticed. Until about ten years ago, the book that I invariably recommended to beginners was *What the Buddha Taught*³⁰ by Walpola Rahula. That book is still constantly reprinted, and deservedly so. But nowadays when I recommend it I say

²⁵ Tadeusz Skorupski and Ulrich Pagel (eds), *The Buddhist Forum: vol. 3, 1991–1993: Papers in Honour and Appreciation of Professor David Seyfort Ruegg's Contribution to Indological, Buddhist and Tibetan Studies*, London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1994.

²⁶ *The Cult of the Deity Vajrakīla According to the Texts of the Northern Treasures Tradition of Tibet*, Tring: Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1993.

²⁷ *A Scripture of the Ancient Tantra Collection: the Phurpa bcu-gnyis*, Stirling: Kiscadale, 1996.

²⁸ *The Bodhisattvapaṭika: Its Doctrines, Practices and Their Position in Mahāyāna Literature*, Tring: Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1995.

²⁹ *The Vajrabhairava Tantras: Tibetan and Mongolian Versions*, Tring: Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1996.

³⁰ Bedford: Gordon Fraser, 1959.

that I can no longer accept the title at face value. I regard the book as an admirable introduction to the Buddha's teachings as interpreted by Buddhaghosa, in other words to the Theravāda tradition. But I feel that when we study Buddhism as a historical phenomenon we should take seriously the Buddha's own dictum that all phenomena in this world are liable to change and decay. By this I do not mean that I regard all change as bad or undesirable. What I mean is that in the four centuries between the Buddha's lifetime and the writing down of the Pali canon the religion must have changed, and gone on changing thereafter, for there is no recorded example of an institution or ideology remaining unchanged for such a long time. Therefore scholars are free to examine the early texts critically and need not follow the interpretations of the commentaries if they see good reason not to.

The most remarkable application of this principle has perhaps been Sue Hamilton's book *Early Buddhism: A New Approach*.³¹ I feel that this book has not yet had the recognition it deserves. By a most scrupulous examination of the canonical texts, Sue has argued, to my mind convincingly, that the Buddha did not preach that no such thing as a soul (whatever that might be) exists, but that the question of its existence was not relevant to what concerned him and should concern us: how to attain salvation – nirvana. The Buddha, Sue maintains, was not preaching an ontology at all, but was only concerned with experience. Since we could never experience a self, the Buddha argued, we should not bother about it all. In a recent Oxford DPhil Noa Gal builds on Sue's discovery in a most fruitful and interesting way and shows how Buddhism came to develop an ontology and so subtly change its doctrines. Her book is about to be published by RoutledgeCurzon as the first volume in the monograph series of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies.³²

It is not really surprising that the Pali commentaries show little awareness of the Buddha's historical context, and in particular of the teachings which he was opposing. They thus failed to notice that there

³¹ Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000.

³² Now published: Noa Ronkin, *Early Buddhist Metaphysics: The Making of a Philosophical Tradition*, London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005; the subject of a review article in the present issue of *Buddhist Studies Review*, pp. 175–94 (Editor).

are indubitable allusions in the *sutta*-s to the Upaniṣads, especially the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*. It is more surprising that this had until recently also escaped the attention of modern commentators. Moreover, it is quite clear that some passages in the *sutta*-s must have been transferred from their original contexts to others in which they do not make good sense, and that the commentaries ascribed to Buddhaghosa offer varying and inconsistent interpretations of these passages. I gave striking instances of both phenomena in my short article 'Three souls, one or none'.³³ No one who reads that article can remain in doubt that there are inconsistencies both between *sutta*-s and between commentaries, so trusting in the inerrancy of every word is no longer an option.

I suggested in 'The Buddha's Book of Genesis?'³⁴ that the cosmogony propounded in the *Aggañña Sutta* is best understood as a parody of Vedic cosmogony. In my book *How Buddhism Began*³⁵ I combined these concerns with an attention to some of the metaphors the Buddha employed, and showed, for example, that it is the five *khandha* which are normally on fire with greed, hatred and delusion, the *khandha* being the bundles of firewood which it was the daily duty of a brahmin student to collect in order to feed the three sacred fires. The normal translation of *khandha* as 'aggregates' tells us nothing. In the same book I argue that comparison with the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* enables us to say with some certainty that in the *Tevijja Sutta* the Buddha was preaching that kindness (*mettā*) by itself can enable one to attain nirvana; and I enlarge on this in my Gonda Memorial Lecture of 1997, published as *Kindness and Compassion as Means to Nirvana*.³⁶

However, the most remarkable discovery of this kind has been made by Professor Joanna Jurewicz of the University of Warsaw. The chain of dependent origination has to be understood on two levels, the general and the particular. At the general level, it embodies the Buddhist claim that nothing exists without a cause and that indeed there are no 'things' existing in total isolation from other 'things'; there are only causal

³³ 'Three souls, one or none: the vagaries of a Pali pericope', *Journal of the Pali Text Society*, 1987 (11), 73–78.

³⁴ 'The Buddha's Book of Genesis?', *Indo-Iranian Journal*, 35 (1992), 159–78.

³⁵ London: Athlone Press, 1996 (2nd edn, London: Routledge, 2006).

³⁶ Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, Amsterdam, 1998.

processes. Over the centuries Buddhists came to regard the Buddha's teaching as 'the middle way' in this sense: that he proclaimed neither the existence of things in their own right, which we would now call essentialism, nor some kind of nihilism, but that the world of our experience is a world of flux and process. On the other hand, the particular interpretation of the chain of dependent origination has been contested among Buddhists from the earliest days: there is simply no agreement on the matter. In her article 'Playing with Fire: The *pratītyasamutpāda* from the Perspective of Vedic Thought',³⁷ Professor Jurewicz has demonstrated that the Buddha chose to express himself in these terms because he was responding to Vedic cosmogony as represented particularly in the famous 'Hymn of Creation', *R̥g Veda* x, 129, and in the first chapter of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, but also in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and other Upaniṣads. Given the centrality to Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination, I think this may rank as one of the most important discoveries ever made in Buddhology.

Since I am on the point of retiring I suppose this could be regarded as a kind of swansong. I am proud to have played a part in helping to disinter some of the Buddha's meanings, a process which is already being carried forward by my pupils such as Alex Wynne and will no doubt continue. Perhaps perversely, I am also proud that I am still being attacked now and again for my lack of methodology. Just as in some cases theology can act as a kind of surrogate for faith, methodology, in my view, is a blind for having nothing to say. Methodology means 'How do you do it?' Once one realises this simple fact, it becomes obvious that to elevate this straightforward question, necessary at the outset of any enterprise whatsoever, into an alleged academic field is sheer hocus pocus. At least Buddhist studies in Britain have achieved one thing: they have been sincerely interested in Buddhism, and generally avoided fatuous verbiage.

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³⁷ *Journal of the Pali Text Society*, 2000 (26), 77–103

‘ONLY IF YOU LET GO OF THAT TREE’
ORDINATION WITHOUT PARENTAL CONSENT
IN THERAVĀDA VINAYA

KATE CROSBY

This article explores how the Theravāda commentarial tradition, represented by the *Samantapāsādikā* (Sp), the Vinaya commentary attributed to Buddhaghosa, understood the rule that a monk cannot receive ordination (*pabbajjā*) without the permission of his parents, and reflects on the significance of the commentarial interpretation for our understanding of the nature of Theravāda Buddhism.

The rule that a monk cannot receive ordination without his parents’ permission is often cited in general studies of Theravāda monastic life as a simple statement without any indication that its interpretation evolved as the Sangha developed in complexity. This is because even writings which claim to look at the history of this lineage are often based solely on what are regarded as the earliest *strata* of Theravāda literature, namely the Sutta and Vinaya Piṭaka of the Canon, even though much of the Canon is regarded as dating to before the emergence of Theravāda as a distinct strand of Buddhism and overlaps substantially with the earliest literature of other South Asian Buddhist traditions. Thus Wijayaratna in his *Buddhist Monastic Life according to the texts of the Theravāda tradition* twice makes the point that a monk cannot be ordained without parental permission, citing firstly the Vinaya ruling (Vin 1 83) laid down by the Buddha to this effect, and secondly the canonical list of this and the other debarments from ordination, such as certain illnesses.¹ He does not cite any ‘texts of the Theravāda’ from the subsequent two millennia. Likewise, Gombrich, in his *Theravāda Buddhism. A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*, in the chapter on ‘The Sangha’s

¹ 1990: 14, 120.

Discipline' writes that the novitiate 'must have his parents' consent', also citing Vin 1 83, without differentiating between 'original', historical or modern practice.² The same point is briefly made by Vajirañāṇavararasa in the discussion of ordination in his modern guide to monastic practice, the *Vinayamukha*, which, written in a period of reform of the Thai Sangha, also relies heavily on the canonical Vinaya.³ Thus all three authors cited, appropriately drawing on the still authoritative canonical statements, are correct in a narrow sense, but they ignore the evolution of Theravāda monastic law on this issue. The commentarial discussion on this rule examined below demonstrates in microcosm the potential shortcomings of this methodology – not least because it appears that under specific conditions, monks can be ordained without parental consent.

The narrative context for the establishment of the rule on parental consent as recorded at Vin 1 83 is the ordination of the Buddha's son Rāhula. Rāhula follows his father around, repeatedly pestering him with the demand, 'Father, give me my inheritance.' While the demand might be construed as a criticism of the Buddha's neglect of his son, whom he left behind as a newborn baby when setting out on his quest for enlightenment, the commentary (Sp) provides a kinder interpretation. Rāhula is asking his father for his inheritance only in obedience to his mother. She in turn is curious regarding the whereabouts of a treasure known to have been in the Buddha's possession before his departure, but now mislaid. With it she plans for Rāhula to establish himself as a universal emperor, the role that is his rightful inheritance, a role that had been open to the Buddha himself, but which he rejected when he renounced.

In response to Rāhula's pestering, the Buddha finally turns to the senior monk, Sāriputta, and tells him to ordain Rāhula, thus giving him his true 'inheritance.' This narrative provides the background for the establishment of two rules, the one regarding parental consent for ordination, the other regarding the number of novices a monk may take on at one time.

² 1988, 106 with note 101.

³ 1983, III 97 (English translation of Thai original, which was published in 1921).

According to the narrative framework, it is king Suddhodana, the Buddha's father and Rāhula's grandfather, who instigates the rule on parental consent. He is upset by Rāhula's ordination and reminded of the poignancy of the grief that he felt at the Buddha's own renunciation. Suddhodana explains to the Buddha the grief he felt on both occasions, a grief he experiences in spite of being a supporter of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha.⁴ In the hope of sparing other parents the same grief Suddhodana persuades the Buddha not to allow sons to be ordained without parental permission.⁵ Thus the Buddha lays down the rule that someone may not receive ordination without the consent of his parents. To ordain someone without the consent of that individual's parents is ruled a wrongdoing (*dukkata*) in Sangha law (Vinaya). This is a lower category of offence than the rules contained in the *Pātimokkhasutta*, but it indicates expected good practice.

The Buddha formulates the rule with respect to sons and not daughters. This probably reflects the fact that this rule is laid down before the foundation of the nuns' order in the chronology of the biographical framework in which the rules are set. That the rule applies to daughters as well is clear from the commentary on this passage. Although the rule reads *putta* 'son', Sp takes it to apply to offspring of either gender, as becomes apparent in the clarification of the rule as it pertains specifically to the *duhitā*, 'daughter', of a nun. This is further confirmed by the discussion of the ordination of nuns in the *Bhikkhunīvibhaṅga* section of the Vinaya Piṭaka.⁶ The rule is also included among the rules governing nuns, the *Bhikkunīpātimokkha*. Interestingly, its inclusion among the Pātimokkha rules for nuns makes it a more serious offence for a nun than for a monk to ordain someone without parental permission. For nuns it is one of the offences requiring 'simple expiation [through confession]', *suddhapācittiyā*, no. 80.⁷

⁴ The latter point is made by the commentary, Sp. In the main text Suddhodana describes the poignancy of a parent's grief. The story as found in the main text is partially translated by Wijayaratna 1990: 13–14.

⁵ The motive is made explicit in Sp.

⁶ Translation, Rhys Davids and Oldenberg 1885, III 349.

⁷ Norman and Pruitt 2001, 189.

The rule that parental consent is necessary for ordination is all very well as far as it goes, but since the Vinaya is largely a system of binding monastic law, it had to be applicable to the *realia* of monastic life. If one tries to apply this law in practice, or even if one is of a legalistic frame of mind, a series of objections occurs, such as: What if the parents are dead, disagree or live in another country? What if the candidate for ordination is grown up and long independent of his parents? While one may wish to hazard one's own commonsense answers, a consensus on commonsense may not be achievable between relevant parties. Furthermore, unless laid down in Sangha law, 'commonsense' solutions leave the monk performing the ordination open to the charge of wrongdoing. They might also leave a prospective candidate entirely at the mercy of the character of the individual monk he approaches, the possibility of ordination depending on whether that monk veers towards the literalistic or interpretative in his application of Vinaya law. Further down the line, uncertainties in the validity of the ordination of one member of a particular monastic lineage (*nikāya*) may invalidate the entire lineage. Such weaknesses make a *nikāya* particularly vulnerable in times of competition and reform.

Inevitably, Vinaya traditions responded to such practicalities of actual monastic life in real communities, and for this reason it may be naïve to rely only on the rules issued by the Buddha in the Vinaya Piṭaka for an accurate presentation of early monastic life. The Vinaya Piṭaka itself includes many further adaptations of rules, still attributed to the Buddha himself, including exceptions where infringement is not an offence. After the closure of the Canon, Vinaya experts continued to introduce amendments to rulings which proved in practice to be unrealistic or insufficiently specific, in response to either envisaged or actual exceptions. This process of adaptation and interpretation is one that continues to this day in response to the *realia* of modern, including global, Buddhism.⁸

⁸ Relatively recent developments include the different approaches taken by different *nikāyas* to such problems as the ubiquitous need to handle money in the modern world, and to adaptations of such matters as monastic habit and rules on eating in response to the needs of Theravādin monks now living in colder climes, as missionaries, serving Diaspora communities or for more individual reasons.

Sp provides evidence of such developments as had taken place up to the time of its composition in c. fifth century CE.⁹ In commenting on passages in the Vinaya Piṭaka, it provides additional legalistic interpretations and rules. It also mentions alternative interpretations of monastic law that had been developed in closely related Vinaya traditions, the *Andhaka* and *Kurundi* traditions. In the commentary to the account of Rāhula's ordination, it offers closer definition of the rule on parental consent as well as amendments to it. It includes both a list of situations which, while not straightforward, nonetheless do not present exceptions to the rule and a list of those circumstances which do present exceptions and consequently mean that the performance of an ordination without parental consent is not an act of wrong doing.

No translation of Sp from Pali into a European language has yet been published. Samantabhadra's Chinese translation of Sp has been translated into English, but the Chinese text lacks most of the detail of the Pali passage on this subject, even stating the opposite on one point, an issue to which I shall return below.¹⁰ I therefore offer a translation of the list of amendments as found in the Pali text (Sp v 1011,6–1012,30) in full below. The list includes some of the 'commonsense' answers we might have hazarded, but it also includes some surprising refinements and concessions. For the sake of clarity I have broken up the text, which is otherwise continuous, into separate bullet points. I have also provided a heading of the issue being explained for all but the first two points. These are in square brackets, as are other words I have added for the sake of clarity.

- In this context 'parents' refers to birth parents.¹¹

⁹ See von Hinüber 1996, 104 (§ 209) regarding the nature of the attribution of Sp to Buddhaghosa.

¹⁰ Bapat and Hirakawa 1970. A new translation of the Chinese version is in preparation by Foshiichi Endo.

¹¹ Pāli *jananijanake*, literally, 'set of people producing', i.e. the birth parents. I wondered if this might be a broader reference to members of the direct blood lineage, since the rule is made in response to Suddhodana's situation and one might suppose that it would include natural grandparents and so forth as well. However, this is precluded by the subsequent *dve*, 'both'. Nevertheless, it is interesting that the list of relatives excluded from the required consultative process given below begins with 'aunt' and not 'grandparent'.

- If he still has both parents, both must be consulted.
- [One parent deceased] If the father or the mother is dead, the remaining living parent must be consulted.
- [Parents themselves already ordained] Even if they have themselves been ordained they must still be consulted.
- [Who seeks permission?] The parental consent must be sought in person by the monk planning to carry out the ordination, or he may send someone else in his place. Alternatively he may send the candidate himself with the instruction, 'Go and return once you have consulted your parents.' If the candidate says 'I have received permission,' he can be ordained if the monk performing his ordination regards him as trustworthy.
- [Child following parent into Sangha] A father who has himself been ordained and wishes his son to receive ordination too must still consult the mother before having him ordained. In the converse case, a mother wanting her daughter to receive ordination must still consult the father before having her ordained.
- [Father abandoned family] Suppose the father has deserted his son and wife making no provision for them, and the mother gives the son to the monks saying, 'Ordain him.' If in response to the question 'Where is his father?' she says, 'He has deserted us pursuing his own selfish whims,' then it is permitted to ordain him.
- [Mother abandoned family] Suppose the mother has run off with some man, while the father hands over [the son] saying, 'Ordain him.' The same principle applies in this case as in the previous one.
- [Father away from home] While the father is away from home, the mother instructs, 'Ordain him'. When the question is put 'Where is his father?' [she replies,] 'Why do you need the father, I will vouch for [his answer].' According to the Kurundi [Vinaya tradition] it is permissible to proceed with the ordination.¹²

¹² The implication is that this view is not acceptable in the Sri Lankan Mahāvihāra tradition of which Buddhaghosa, to whom the commentary is attributed, is representative here. Buddhaghosa mentions the contrary opinion of other commentaries. If they go against a statement or implicit understanding in the Canon itself he points this out and rejects them. The Kurundi tradition is currently known only through its mention by Buddhaghosa and later commentators who use Buddhaghosa's work.

- [Relative in *loco parentis*] Suppose the parents are both deceased and the child has been raised by an aunt or other relatives. When he is being ordained his relatives either quarrel or take offence. Therefore, in order to avoid disputes, one should consult [the relatives] before ordaining him. But there is no offence committed by someone who performs the ordination without having consulted them.
- [Adoptive parents] Suppose a child, having been adopted as an infant, calls those who raised him 'mother and father.'¹³ The same principle applies to them as to the last.
- [Ordination of an independent adult] Suppose the son lives independently, while his parents do not. Even if he is the king himself, his parents must still be consulted before he can be ordained.
- [Repeat ordinations] A boy is granted permission by his parents, but after his ordination he leaves the order again. Even if he is ordained and leaves a hundred times, his parents must be consulted again each time before he is ordained. Suppose the parents say, 'He leaves the order and comes back and does no work for us. He is ordained but does not keep your vow. There is no need for him to consult us, ordain him any time.' Once such permission has been given it is permissible to proceed with any further ordination even without consulting the parents. Likewise the boy who was given in his infancy with an agreement such as 'This boy is given to you. Ordain him when you want.' can be ordained time and time again without again consulting the parents. But a child whose parents gave permission when he was still a child with the instruction 'Lord, ordain him,' if they do not give their permission later on when the boy is grown, this person cannot be ordained without again consulting his parents.
- [Threatening behaviour] Someone who has quarrelled with his parents comes demanding to be ordained. On being told to come back after he has consulted his parents, he replies, 'I will not leave unless you ordain me. I shall set fire to the monastery, I shall attack you with a knife, I shall harm your relatives or supporters by damaging the hermitage, etc.'¹⁴, I

¹³ The term is *posanaka*, literally 'nourisher', here 'foster/adoptive parents'. This meaning is not in PED.

¹⁴ I am not sure of 'by damaging the hermitage' as the meaning of *āvāmacchedanādīhi*. It literally means either by 'by park/hermitage-cutting etc.' or 'by stopping, cutting etc.' If we take *āvāma* in the former sense of 'hermitage/park', following its usual use in Pali texts, which gives the meaning of the sentence as 'I shall harm/cause loss to your rela-

shall jump off a tree and die, I shall join a gang of robbers, I shall emigrate.’ If it is in order to protect life itself, it is permissible to proceed with his ordination. Now when his parents come and ask, ‘Why have you ordained our son?’ one should relate the circumstances to them and explain to them, ‘We ordained him for his own protection – verify this with your son.’ When someone has climbed up a tree and is threatening to jump from it, it is only permissible to ordain him once he has released his hands and feet from the tree.¹⁵

- [From another region] Also one who requests ordination after going to a different region should be ordained if he went there after consulting [his parents]. If not, he should be ordained after a young monk has been sent to consult his parents. If it is an extremely long way, it is permissible to establish consent by sending him off with monks even after ordination. In the Kurundi Vinaya tradition, by contrast, it is stated: ‘If it is far away and the road is very difficult, it is permissible to proceed with the ordination after forming the resolution, ‘We shall go and consult them.’”
- [Parental permission not specific to one son] Now if the parents have many sons, and say the following, ‘Sir, ordain whichever of our children you choose,’ [the ordaining monk] may ordain whichever child he wishes after inspecting them.
- [Collective permission not specific to one son] Also if an entire family or village gives the permission with the statement, ‘Sir, ordain whichever member of this family or village you choose,’ the one he chooses can be ordained [without separate consent from that individual’s parents].

tives and supporters by damaging the hermitage, etc.’, this threat does not appear to be in line with the degree of severity of the other threats mentioned here. The verbs *bhedana* and *uddālana* are found for vandalism of monastic property in the Vinaya, but for smaller items, so perhaps *chedana* is possible in this context. I have not found the phrase elsewhere in the Canon or commentaries, which is surprising, given that it appears to be a specific list. Nor have I found a gloss for this phrase in the commentaries either to Sp or to Sāriputta’s *Pālimuttakavinayavinicchaya*, which includes this passage verbatim (for the commentary to the *pabbajjā* section in the latter, see Pannasara and Nanavimalatissa 1908: 69–84).

¹⁵ The wording ‘hands and feet’ here probably reflects the method of climbing tall palm trees by binding the feet and hands together around the tree, then levering oneself up by means of the thongs between the hands and feet, the thongs resting in the horizontal ridges of the trunk.

Perhaps the most surprising adaptation of the rule is that monks are officially sanctioned in bowing to pressure, in that they should give in to what appears to be blackmail if the situation threatens to escalate into life-threatening violence. When the parents of the novice arrive, indignantly demanding to know why the Sangha has ordained their son without consulting them, the monks are to reply that it was for his own safety. In other words, they may invoke the higher consideration of protecting life. A similar consideration is found in canonical stories about reluctant parents giving their consent for ordination in order to prevent their son dying after he has undertaken a hunger strike to persuade them. The most famous such story is probably that of Sudinna, the first member of the Sangha to have sexual intercourse after ordination, narrated in the frame story for the first *pāvāṅgika* rule (offence requiring expulsion from the Sangha). This story, as an aside, gives a further, economic reason for ensuring parental consent prior to ordination, not made explicit in Sp. Sudinna has sexual intercourse for economic reasons – because he had failed to provide his parents with a male heir before ordaining, and the government therefore threatens to appropriate their estate.¹⁶

Avoidance of confrontation more generally, a theme in the narrative framework of rules laid down in the Vinaya Piṭaka itself, continues as the motivation behind a number of the recommendations and rulings here. This is the reason that adoptive parents and relatives who have looked after the child should be consulted anyway, even though their consent is not actually required from a Vinaya perspective. It is curious that, although the rule was, according to both the Canon and the commentary, originally laid down in response to the grief of Rāhula's grandfather, adoptive parents and relatives other than the birth parents do not have the same rights as the birth parents. Even if they are called 'mother' and 'father' by the prospective ordinand, and could presumably experience the same grief as birth parents, they should be consulted only out of politeness to ensure harmony, not because the adoptive parents have the right of veto granted to the birth parents. The compound

¹⁶ For Sudinna's story, see *Suttavibhaṅga pāvāṅgika* 1, Vin I 11 ff.; cf. *Ratṭhapāla Sutta* (no. 82), M II 55–65.

referring to relatives is *cūlamātādīnaṃ*, ‘little mother, etc’, i.e. junior aunt, etc. It is possible that this is meant to indicate relatives who are not direct ancestors. This amendment to the rule suggests that a motive other than grief, such as ancestral rites or inheritance law, may have contributed to this rule.

The statement that deceased parents do not need to be consulted may seem to be stating the obvious, but restricting the requirement for permission to living parents becomes more relevant when one bears in mind that Theravāda thrived in some societies that included in their religious framework both ancestor worship and consultation of spirits and ancestors for permission for personal undertakings.

Interestingly from the perspective of gender relations, mother and father have an equal say in their child’s ordination. A further point worth noting is that even parents who have themselves received ordination still appear to have the right to grant or withhold permission for the ordination of their child. Furthermore, they must still negotiate with the other parent of their child on the subject. Thus the ‘leaving of society’ to join the Sangha does not automatically deprive one of all the rights or duties held as a member of a family. One remains ‘legally’ connected both to one’s offspring and to the other parent in this matter. The continued rights of parents who are ordained contrast with the lack of rights of a father who has abandoned his wife and child, or a woman who has run off with another man. By doing this, the parent has lost his/her legal rights regarding the child according to Sangha law. The reference to a monk seeking to ordain his own son or a nun her own daughter further suggests that it was sometimes practice for people to keep a child of the same sex with them after ordination by also having the child ordained.¹⁷ Perhaps entire families sought ordination at the same time, and same-sex family units could remain intact.

Trust appears to have paid a part in the decision whether or not to ordain a person: thus if the candidate for ordination convinces the ordaining monk that his parents approve, the ordination can go ahead.

¹⁷ This is the implication of the gender-specific instructions, the father in the case of a son (both then become members of the male Sangha), the mother in the case of a daughter (both then become members of the female Sangha).

Similarly, consultation of parents who live very far away can take place after the ordination. The Kurundi tradition appears more disposed to rely on trust in the absence of one parent. For example, it allows a mother to vouch for the response the father would give, were he able to be present. It also allows an ordination to go ahead with a statement of intent to seek the parents' permission on a later, convenient occasion should the journey to reach them be a difficult one. It seems that Sp regards the ordination as fully valid only once the consent has been obtained, even if this is after the ordination has taken place. Unfortunately we know very little about the Kurundi tradition, other than what we glean from Sp, which makes it difficult to contextualise such differences.

It is clear from statements such as, 'Sir, ordain whichever member of this family or village you choose,' that by the time of Buddhaghosa ordination was not always a matter of personal choice. Clearly a family or village could decide it was in their interest to have one of their number ordained, perhaps in the collective desire for the good merit resulting from such an act or in personal response to the monk to whom they offered the candidate. In such instances, a collective will for membership of the Sangha on the part of an individual of that group is expressed. This is far removed from the personal motivations expressed in the testimonies of early members of the Sangha.¹⁸ In a few of the scenarios described above it appears to be the parents who are actively seeking ordination of their child for their own reasons, perhaps when the child is still quite young, rather than in response to their offspring's own desire for ordination. This suggests that the belief that having one's children ordained benefits one's own *karmic* welfare – a belief current in Theravāda countries to this day – was already present by the time of Buddhaghosa. Confirmation of this belief at that period is provided by the c. fifth-century Sri Lankan Theravāda chronicle, the *Mahāvamsa*, which relates how Asoka had his son Mahinda and daughter Saṅghamittā ordained after being informed that this was the highest possible gift to the Sangha. The undated *Upāsakamanussavinayavaṇṇanā*, 'Explanation of the Code of Conduct for Good Buddhists', also advo-

¹⁸ For example in the *Thera-* and *Therīgāthā*.

cates ordination of one's son or daughter as the surest route to a heavenly rebirth: 'Parents who have their son or daughter ordained in the dispensation of the Buddha will be reborn in heaven.'¹⁹ All this reflects a Sangha that had to some extent already become an institutionalised niche within society, without expectations that ordination should necessarily be motivated by personal soteriological aspiration.

The importance of having children ordained as a means of merit-making for parents by this period suggests a further reason for such detailed consideration of the issue of parental consent. Given Buddhist emphasis on intentional action, for merit to be accrued intent is important. Ascertaining parental consent could be viewed from the parental side as a means of ensuring that, through such expressed intent on their part, the resulting merit is guaranteed for them. This outcome could be compromised if the ordination took place without their knowledge, particularly given the mechanisms of merit-making and so-called 'merit-transfer' in Theravāda. Even in highly ritualised Theravāda merit transfer practices, such as those for deceased relatives, the intended recipient of the merit must be named. While the model of such reference to the person in whose name a meritorious act, such as feeding monks or having *paritta* texts recited, may be sacrificial Indian religion, the success of such practices are explained from a doctrinal perspective in Theravāda with reference to the change in consciousness of the recipient of the merit when they witness the good act performed in their name.

The amendments concerning the problem of an individual whose parents live at a distance suggests that seeking ordination in the Theravāda tradition was not necessarily a matter of joining the local religious group, although it is unclear whether this reflects individuals choosing one *nikāya* over another, or the relative inaccessibility of the Sangha for some people, who were nevertheless in some way under its influence.

¹⁹ *ye puttadhūtaṃ buddhasāsane pabbājenti te sagge uppajanti*. Final folio of manuscripts, c. 5 lines from the end. For Sinhalese mss see Somadasa 1987–95. For Iānnā ms see von Hinüber 1996, 196 (§ 424). This text has not yet been published, although an edition and translation are currently under preparation by the present author. For a fuller description see Crosby (in press).

Finally, the fifth-century Chinese translation of Sp by Samantabhadra includes a version of this passage. In their translation of it, Bapat and Hirakawa note, ‘Pali Text does not wholly support this, as it insists upon permission even after an emergency conversion.’²⁰ From this remark it would appear that Samantabhadra’s text is more lenient than the Pali text, in that it allows for ordination without parental consent in some emergency circumstances where the Pali text does not. Bapat and Hirakawa’s translation of the entire passage from Samantabhadra reads:

Therefore, in the original Vinaya, it has been said: ‘If the father and mother do not permit, then he cannot be converted into a recluse’.²¹ If the father and mother permit, then he may be converted. Having once been converted, he may return to worldly life. If he again wants to become a recluse, he has to seek permission from his father and mother. If the father and mother do not permit, he cannot be converted into a recluse.

If a man seeks to become a recluse, the Bhikkhus would ask him: ‘Have your father and mother permitted you to become a recluse?’ He replies, ‘Not permitted.’ If he is thus not permitted, then he cannot be converted into a recluse. If he says to the Bhikkhus: ‘If you do not convert me, then I would burn your monastic establishment’ – under such a difficult situation, if one converts him into a recluse, then there is no offence. If there be [some other province in] a different direction, or if there is another town where he can get converted, then one need not ask about his parents’ [permission].²²

It is immediately clear that Samantabhadra’s text is far shorter and less detailed on the subject of parental consent. It lacks most of the finer points such as the procedure to follow if parents are dead, not one’s birth parents, have abandoned their family, or are in the Sangha. Even where it does cover the same point, such as the need for renewed permission for someone who disrobes and then joins the order again, it does not distinguish between the different types of permission offered by parents. While it states there is no offence committed if the prospective candidate threatens the monastery, it does not discuss threats the candidate makes against himself or other people. Nor does it explain how to deal with aggrieved parents. Contrary to Bapat and Hirakawa,

²⁰ Bapat and Hirakawa 1970, 510, footnote 5.

²¹ i.e. ordained.

²² Bapat and Hirakawa 1970, 509–10.

the ordination does proceed ‘after an emergency conversion’ without the parents’ permission. The last sentence of the passage, which deals with a different direction or another town, appears to waive the need for parental permission if the ordination is taking place in a different region or town from that of the parents. Here the Pali text offers a list of recourses to ensure parental consent in such circumstances. Nevertheless, it is not clear that the Pali text is in fact stricter on this point. The bottom line in both texts is that the ordination can take place without parental consent in such circumstances. The Pali text, however, stresses the need for retrospective permission in the latter cases, and consultation in the former case of emergency ordination. In doing so the Pali text presents fuller advice. As well as laying down the legal requirements the Pali text offers advice on how to deal with the consequences of exceptions. These include how to treat adoptive parents and how to deal with aggrieved parents whose child has been ordained without their consent.²³

In summary, Sp reaffirms the rule that an individual may not receive the *pabbajjā* ordination without their parents’ consent. A number of exceptions nevertheless apply. Most of these exceptions are responses to circumstances in which one or both parents are inaccessible through death or desertion. Absence of a parent through travel or the distance of their residence from the proposed place of ordination does not warrant an exception to the rule, although consent may be sought retrospectively in some conditions. The only genuine exception, which undermines the general rule in that it allows ordination without parental consent even when those parents are available for consultation, is the ruling that one should give in to the threats of someone seeking ordina-

²³ See Bapat and Hirakawa 1970, xlv ff. for a discussion of the differences between the Chinese and Pāli texts. The differences between the two texts may reflect later refinements to Sp in the Pali tradition or deliberate abridgement by Samantabhadra of the text on which he based his translation. Although we would not expect Samantabhadra to choose to abridge this very passage because of the emphasis placed on filial piety in Chinese Buddhism, the fact that the divergence between the Pāli and Chinese texts increases as the work progresses has led Toshiichi Endo to conclude that the divergence is indeed due to increasing abridgement by Samantabhadra (personal communication, 10 May 2003). This passage occurs towards the final stages of the commentary, where divergence is greater.

tion if life is at stake. If somebody threatens extreme harm to themselves, the Sangha or those connected with the Sangha, one should ordain that person. Aggrieved parents are then advised to sort out the matter with their child after the ordination has taken place.

This list of endorsements and amendments to the rule regarding parental consent provides practical advice on how to proceed if the permission of both parents is not readily available for any reason. The text also reveals certain attitudes towards ordination, endorsed by Buddhaghosa in the fifth century, that may seem removed from the original spirit of Buddhist renunciation yet can be recognised in modern Theravāda. These include the move towards childhood ordination, the decision to ordain being a family or collective decision rather than an individual's, and family responsibilities continuing after ordination.

The statements of Sp on such matters are important because they indicate the developments that took place within the monastic life of Theravāda within the first millennium of Buddhism. They are also important within Theravāda itself, because Buddhaghosa came to be regarded as the authority in matters of Vinaya. This is particularly true for all those *nikāyas*, ordination lineages, which regarded themselves as heirs to the reformed Mahāvihāra tradition of twelfth-century Sri Lanka, because Sāriputta, the leading light of the Mahāvihāra reform at that time, based several of his own Vinaya writings on Sp.²⁴ The prestige of the twelfth-century Sri Lankan reform, in conjunction with the authority of Buddhaghosa, led to the Vinaya as seen through Sp being taken as ideal monastic law throughout much of medieval Theravāda.

This exploration of the rule on parental consent demonstrates that the Vinaya is not monolithic and indicates how important it is not to take the canonical component of Theravāda Vinaya to represent the whole of this tradition and the life of the Sangha throughout its history. In practice and for a very long time Theravāda Vinaya has not consisted solely of precepts enunciated by the Buddha, but has been highly productive in terms of subsequent development and adaptation. The Vinaya, whatever its origin, came to be a sophisticated legal system even

²⁴ See Pecenko 1997 for an overview of Sāriputta's writings, and Crosby 2006 regarding the three texts he compiled on the basis of Sp.

within the first millennium of its existence. This should warn us that the tendency to view the Theravāda tradition as simple, unevolved, original Buddhism, is achieved only by ignoring the two and half millennia of development which can to some extent be followed through the commentarial and paracanonical literature. Thus writers on Theravāda Buddhism, such as the authorities Wijayaratna and Gombrich cited at the outset, representing ‘the texts of the Theravāda tradition’ and its ‘social history’ respectively, are misleading when they take modern Theravāda as an expression of original Buddhism through an anachronistic reference to the earliest level of Theravāda literature. They do so in part for simplicity’s sake, but in so doing they inhabit or at least confirm the worldview of intentional reformers and apologists of Theravāda, such as Vajirañāṇavarorasa, also cited at the outset, who sought to make the claim that Theravāda was original Buddhism and must be adapted to appear as such. It is important to remember the extent of reforms throughout Theravādin history and that modern conformity with the most emphasised features of canonical Buddhism may be an indication of intentional changes made in this lineage rather than of a stagnation maintained since the canonical texts were established.

To some extent, those post-canonical texts that have survived in Theravāda are from those traditions that were most conservative or anxious to reform Theravāda, to establish their *nikāya* as orthodox with reference to the authority of the Canon, of which Sp is an example. Nevertheless, developments within Theravāda can still be traced through such post-canonical literature. Such development is more easily seen through the pragmatic concerns of Vinaya and in the open intellectual discourse of Abhidhamma than through the relatively overworked material of the Sutta Piṭaka, yet post-canonical Vinaya and Abhidhamma materials are still little represented in accounts of Theravāda Buddhism. Here one small example has been used to show how looking into such post-canonical material may tell us a great deal about Theravāda’s development into an institutionalised religion, with a sophisticated and divergent legal system, designed not solely for those in pursuit of Nibbāna.

Finally, the interpretation of the rule on parental consent in Sp poses questions regarding its application in modern globalised Theravāda. The requirement for parental consent is embodied in all Theravāda

litanies for ordination, so ordaining monks remain aware of this requirement and ask about parental consent as part of the ritual, even if they are unfamiliar with the commentarial analysis of this requirement.²⁵ However, cultural differences in attitudes towards parents mean that Western converts to Buddhism seeking ordination are less likely to ask their parents for permission. How should the ordaining monks respond to this attitude in the light of Sp? The perception of greater independence of Westerners from their parents should not waive the regulation, given the statement that even a king needs his parents' consent. The modification of the rule in distant lands does not apply, given that modern technology removes any difficulties of communication. The grief experienced by the parent, which instigated the laying down of the rule in the first place, may still apply. From these perspectives, monks ordaining Western converts should therefore still require the parents' consent. However, parents of Western converts are less likely to believe in merit-making or in the necessity of a lineage of progeny for welfare after death. They are less likely to need children for economic reasons. If these appear to be strong considerations in the commentarial insistence on keeping to the letter of this rule, then the case for insisting on parental consent in the case of converts is weakened. Another factor is that Western converts are more likely to have explicitly soteriological rather than social motives for ordination, and are also more likely to be eclectic in their acceptance of textual authority. Familiar with the story of the Buddha's own renunciation against his father's wishes, they may see his biography as holding greater authority in their

²⁵ See Bizot 1988 for the ordination litanies used in Theravādin traditions.

own case than the requirement for parental consent stipulated by the Buddha at a later stage in his life.²⁶

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Abbreviations

M Majjhima Nikāya

PED *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*, T. W. Rhys Davids and William Stede, Pali Text Society, 1921–1925, repr. Oxford, 1986

Sp *Samantapāsādikā*

Vin Vinaya Piṭaka

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Bizot, F. (1988). *Les traditions de la pabbajjā en Asie du Sud-Est: Recherches sur le bouddhisme khmer* IV, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen.

²⁶ While I have not conducted a systematic study of this issue in the ordination of Western converts, I am aware of many cases of converts not seeking parental consent, and of a few where the parents have been against the ordination. I have also several times encountered Diaspora Buddhists who have been attracted to the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, designed as a form of Buddhism suited to Western culture, explicitly because it authorises its attitude to filial obedience with reference to the Buddha's biography, rather than to the Vinaya rule that the tradition accepts as replacing that authority. The approach taken to this regulation by some scholars and convert practitioners is of relevance to discussions of so-called protestant and orientalist influences in the cultures of both.

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ON THE NATURE OF *DHAMMAS*
A REVIEW ARTICLE

RUPERT GETHIN

Noa Ronkin's book, *Early Buddhist metaphysics: the making of a philosophical tradition*,¹ is a revised version of her Oxford DPhil dissertation.² It is concerned with the development of systematic Buddhist thought, specifically the Theravādin Abhidhamma, both canonical and commentarial. In particular she focuses on the fundamental Abhidhamma notion of a *dhamma*. This is an important topic that hitherto has had insufficient attention paid to it.

Demonstrating how the notion of a *dhamma* shifted over the centuries involves Ronkin in trying to trace the precise lines of development of not only the specifically Theravādin conception of a *dhamma* but also, in as much as it both coincides and contrasts with the Theravādin, the Sarvāstivādin. To accomplish this she employs two main strategies in addition to straightforward exegesis of Buddhist texts. First, she considers the development of Buddhist thought within the wider context of the history of Indian ideas, providing helpful accounts of particular Buddhist ideas in relation to developments in Indian thought more generally, but especially the Vaiśeṣika school. Secondly, she elucidates the general philosophical ideas under discussion – substance, process,

ABBREVIATIONS: Abhidh-s = *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*; Abhidh-s-mhṭ = *Abhidhammatthavibhāvīnūṭikā*; As = *Atthasālinī*; Dhs = *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*; Dhs-mṭ = *Dhammasaṅgaṇī-mūlaṭṭikā*; M = *Majjhima Nikāya*; MW = Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford); Nett = *Nettipakaraṇa*; Nidd-a 1 = *Mahāniddesa-aṭṭhakathā*; Moh = *Mohavicchedanī*; Paṭis = *Paṭisambhidāmagga*; Paṭis-a = *Paṭisambhidāmagga-aṭṭhakathā*; Paṭṭh = *Paṭṭhāna*; Peṭ = *Peṭakopadesa*; S = *Samyutta Nikāya*; Vibh-a = *Vibhaṅga-aṭṭhakathā*; Vism = *Visuddhimagga*. Unless stated otherwise, editions are those of the Pali Text Society.

¹ *Early Buddhist metaphysics: the making of a philosophical tradition*. Noa Ronkin. London & New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005. xiii, 279 pp. £70/\$105. ISBN 0415345197.

² Noa Gal, 'A metaphysics of experience: from the Buddha's teaching to the Abhidhamma' (2003).

events, categories, individuation, causality – by references to western philosophical debate both historical and contemporary.

In both these respects her study is a model of academic method and provides an essential resource for anyone interested in the development of Indian Buddhist philosophy. Much of Ronkin's thesis I find broadly persuasive. Certain details and aspects of her understanding of the development of the Abhidhamma notion of a *dhamma*, however, I find problematic. Nevertheless there is no doubt that Noa Ronkin's book makes an important contribution to the scholarly discussion of the issues, shifting it to a new level of sophistication. Since the notion of a *dharma/dhamma* is basic to Buddhist thought, while the published scholarly discussion of particularly the Theravādin understanding is limited, it seems worth considering Ronkin's study at some length.

1. From *dhamma* to *dhammas*

She begins by suggesting that the gap between the Nikāyas and at least the canonical Abhidhamma in terms of epistemology and metaphysics may not be as wide as it is sometimes portrayed. The Buddha's refusal to answer certain questions does not amount to a rejection of metaphysics *per se*, since choosing to leave certain matters 'unexplained' has philosophical significance; she argues that 'despite the Buddha's silence on certain ontological matters, he clearly had a distinctive epistemology, subject to the constraints of which there followed, if only implicitly, a particular kind of metaphysics' (p. 12). Briefly, she sees the Buddha as rejecting 'the notion that the encountered world is made up of distinguishable substances, and the linguistic theory that words refer to these substances which they represent' (p. 245); instead he offers a 'radical metaphysics' that 'undermines the very epistemology from which it stems', advancing 'a deflationary theory of truth' epitomized by the *paṭiccasamuppāda* formula (p. 247). While the Abhidhamma enterprise may end in an account of the world in terms of *dhammas* conceived of as ultimate 'realities', nevertheless, argues Ronkin, the concerns which motivate it, especially in the canonical period, remain consonant with the Nikāyas' epistemological, psychological and soteriological preoccupations; it is only in the period of the Abhidhamma commentaries that

the ontology of *dhammas* becomes an issue, and even here the earlier concerns are not entirely lost sight of.

Following Richard Gombrich,³ she suggests that the usage of the word *dhamma* (singular and plural) in the sense of teaching(s) is primary and its usage in the sense of ‘psychological characteristic(s)’ develops from the way in which texts such as the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* is present meditation as contemplation of such things as the four truths, which are *dhammas* in the sense of the Buddha’s teachings, but also, crucially, the objects of experience in insight meditation (pp. 37–38). From this derives the Nikāya usage of the term *dhamma* to refer to the objects of experience more generally: ‘all knowable sensory phenomena of whatever nature’ (p. 39). The totality of these phenomena is analysed by way of various schemes – the five *khandhas*, the twelve *āyatanas*, the eighteen *dhātus* – but, Ronkin emphasizes, the concern of these different ways of analysis is with the processes that govern our experience, not with the nature of the sensory phenomena themselves. The latter, however, does become a concern of the Abhidhamma.

The Abhidhamma’s *dhamma* theory is, suggests Ronkin, the product of an attempt to clarify the workings of the processes that govern our experience in ever greater detail. This involves a shift of focus from mental processes to the discrete events – *dhammas* – that make up these processes: the processes are reduced to fundamental events which cannot be analysed further. This shift, at least initially, is not so much a shift in ontology as in epistemology. The Nikāyas and the Abhidhamma are in accord in rejecting a substance metaphysics (p. 71); they differ in the details of their conception of that metaphysics. Moreover, the focus of at least the canonical Abhidhamma remains essentially epistemological: it is concerned ‘with psycho-physical occurrences that arise in consciousness – and in this sense form one’s “world” – not with what exists *per se* in a mind-independent world’ (p. 76).

The kind of account Ronkin offers of the semantic evolution of *dhamma* (in the sense of the teaching) to *dhammas* (in the sense of ‘ob-

³ Richard F. Gombrich, *How Buddhism Began: The Conditioned Genesis of the Early Teachings* (London: Athlone, 1996), pp. 34–37.

ject of thought') might be questioned.⁴ Certainly there are other possible models. The Geigers, for example, saw matters rather differently,⁵ and more recently I have suggested that the Nikāya usage of *dhamma* at the end of a *bahuvrīhi* compound in the sense of a particular nature or quality possessed by something is adequate to explain the basic usage of *dhamma* in the sense of a psychological quality or characteristic in the Nikāyas and canonical Abhidhamma: the shift of focus is simply from the nature, quality or characteristic of some particular thing, to qualities or characteristics conceived more generally; in fact, the usage of *dharma* in the sense of 'property' or 'characteristic attribute' would seem to derive directly from the Vedas, Brāhmaṇas and early Upaniṣads.⁶

2. *Sabhāva* as the individuator and cause of a *dhamma*

Precisely how *dhamma* comes to be used in the early Abhidhamma in the sense of psycho-physical event is incidental to Ronkin's main focus, which is how the Abhidhamma understood the 'true nature' of the psycho-physical occurrences termed *dhammas*. The key concept here, she suggests, is that of *sabhāva*, and she devotes some considerable space to its development in Buddhist doctrinal thought. She cites Ñāṇamoli's observation that the term *sabhāva* seems to appear only once in the canon (Paṭiṣ II 178), yet goes on to note that it is also found in the canonical *Buddhavaṃsa* (twice) and in the paracanonical *Peṭakopadesa*, *Net-*

⁴ In their review of Gombrich's *How Buddhism Began*, Maithrimurthi and von Rospatt have pointed out that the evidence of other early accounts of *smṛtyupasthāna* in Buddhist Sanskrit and Chinese translation shows that 'the scope of the term *dharma* in the *Smṛtyupasthānasūtra* came to be extended because *dharma* was already used in other contexts in its broad meaning as referring to any thing or phenomenon, and not vice versa, as [Gombrich] suggests' (*Indo-Iranian Journal*, 41 (1998), 164–79 (175, n. 11)).

⁵ The Geigers tend to see *dhamma* in the sense of the 'law' of the world – or, perhaps, ultimate 'truth' about reality – as basic. Because the *dhamma* – the law of the world and nature consisting in the arising and disappearance, the fleetingness and emptiness of reality – becomes manifest in the 'things' that constitute the world of experience as perceived by the mind, they come to be designated 'laws', 'norms' or 'truths', because seeing them, one sees the Law, the Truth. See Magdelene and Wilhelm Geiger, *Pāli Dhamma vornehmlich in der kanonischen Literatur* (Munich: Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1920), pp. 8–9.

⁶ Rupert Gethin, 'He who sees *dhamma* sees *dhammas*: *dhamma* in early Buddhism', *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 32 (2004), 513–42 (530–34).

tiṭṭhakarāṇa and *Milindapañha* (p. 87).⁷ She suggests that in these texts *sabhāva* is used in a variety of senses (nature, essence), but – with the exception of the *Peṭakopadesa* and *Nettipakarāṇa* – without a specific technical meaning related to the notion of a *dhamma*. She moves on to consider the concept of *sabhāva* in the Pali commentarial texts. She concludes that in these, in contrast to the earlier texts, *sabhāva* is unambiguously used for the first time in the sense of ‘an atemporal category determining what each and every single *dhamma* is’; a *sabhāva* is ‘a determinant of a *dhamma*’s individuality’ (p. 114).⁸ Nevertheless, Ronkin again stresses that this is not so much a question of ontology as psychology; the concern is ‘[to determine] the individuality of the *dhammas* as psycho-physical events as they appear in consciousness, not their existence *per se*’ (p. 111). In this connection she suggests that Paul Williams may be overconfident in his claim that the Sarvāstivādins and Theravādins straightforwardly agree that ‘it is the presence or absence of the *svabhāva* that renders the entity a primary existent’.⁹ As she notes (pp. 111, 226), it is significant that the Theravādin Ābhidhammikas rejected the Sarvāstivādin equation of *dharma* with *dravya*, a term used in the technical sense of ‘substance’ by the Vaiśeṣikas.

None the less, Ronkin argues (p. 122; see also pp. 153, 161), the Theravādin commentarial Abhidhamma does draw a specific ontology from its account of the world in terms of *dhammas* determined and individuated by their *sabhāvas*. For once every possible event presenting itself to consciousness is knowable and nameable, ‘the words and con-

⁷ In fact searchable digital texts allow us to add occurrences in the verses of the *Apadāna* (p. 319), *Cariyāpīṭaka* (79) and *Jātaka* (III 523).

⁸ Given her earlier discussion (pp. 98–103) of the use of *sabhāva* in the *Peṭakopadesa*, and *Nettipakarāṇa*, it is not clear to me why she regards the sense of ‘a determinant of a *dhamma*’s individuality’ as first found in the commentaries. In both these texts (Peṭ 104, Nett 78–81) the ‘cause’ (*hetu*) of a *dhamma* is explained as the *sabhāva*, its ‘own-nature’, in contrast to its condition (*paccaya*) which is the *parabhāva* or ‘nature of another’ (or perhaps better, ‘that which has a different nature’); she comments (p. 100) that here ‘*sabhāva* is what determines the individuality of a *dhamma* as this particular instant rather than that’. It seems that she takes the *dhammas* referred to in these passages as the Buddha’s teachings or ‘*dhamma* series’ rather than specific psycho-physical occurrences; I am not convinced this is warranted.

⁹ Paul Williams, ‘On the Abhidharma Ontology’, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 9 (1981), 227–57 (242).

cepts employed in the systematic discourse that is thus developed uniquely define their corresponding referents'; and this

paves the way for conceptual realism – a world view that is based on the notion of truth as constituted by a correspondence between our concepts and statements, on the one hand, and the features of an independent, determinate reality, on the other hand. (p. 122)

Indeed, there can be little doubt that the final outlook of the Theravādin Abhidhamma should be characterised as involving some form of 'conceptual realism'. In fact this seems most clearly articulated in connection with Abhidhamma theory of concepts, which involves a distinction between concepts of things which are existent (*vijjamāna-paññatti*) and nonexistent (*avijjamāna-paññatti*),¹⁰ but Ronkin only briefly considers the notion of *paññatti* (pp. 28, 161, 179).

A difficulty with the details of Ronkin's account of the evolution of the concept of *sabhāva* in the Theravādin Abhidhamma, however, is that at crucial points she is swayed by earlier scholars' specific translations of the word in particular contexts, which causes her sometimes to over interpret the term. I suggested above that the technical Abhidhamma use of *dhamma* might be seen as deriving from a more general usage in the sense of 'quality' or 'characteristic'; this helps us to make sense of the commentarial equation of *dhamma* and *sabhāva* (noted by Ronkin on p. 114), and specifically the statement that *dhammas* are so-called 'because they support (*dhārenti*) their own particular natures, or because they are supported (*dhāriyanti*) by causal conditions'.¹¹ Both *dhamma* and *sabhāva* thus start as different words for the 'condition', 'quality', 'nature' or 'characteristic' of something, and the etymological explanation might then be understood, I think, as a direct counter to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika idea of *dharma*s as 'properties' that are 'supported' by or possessed by an

¹⁰ e.g. Abhidh-s 43, Abhidh-s-mhṭ 194.

¹¹ As 39: *attano paṇa sabhāvaṃ dhārenti ti dhammā. dhāriyanti vā pacceyehi, dhāriyanti vā yathā sabhāvato ti dhammā.* (cf. Nidd-a 1 16; Paṭi-a 1 18; Moh 6.) The same basic definition is also found in the northern sources; see Collett Cox, 'From category to ontology: the changing role of *dharma* in Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma', *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 32 (2004), 543–97 (558–59, n. 70).

underlying substance (*dharmīn*) distinct from themselves;¹² Buddhist *dhammas*, in contrast, are not the properties of anything. This reinforces a point that Ronkin makes in several places, namely, that the development of Abhidharma thought should be understood against the background of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika thought.

It seems clear that the Buddhist usage of *sabhāva* derives from the ordinary Sanskrit sense of *svabhāva*, which would seem to be the ‘natural condition’ or ‘inherent nature’ of something.¹³ Note that it is *bhāva* in the sense of ‘condition’, ‘state’ or ‘disposition’, rather than ‘being’ or ‘existence’ that seems primarily relevant to *svabhāva*.¹⁴ Ronkin begins her own discussion with the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* (II 178) statement: *jātaṃ rūpaṃ sabhāvena suññāṃ*. She initially translates (partially): ‘Born materiality is empty of *sabhāva* ...’ This begs the question of the force of the instrumental *sabhāvena*. The phrase might be translated ‘produced materiality is *by* nature (i.e. naturally, intrinsically) empty’.¹⁵ In fact this seems to fit Ronkin’s understanding of the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* here better than her implied ‘born materiality is empty of nature’:

Taking into account the context, namely, expounding the predication of the world by the term ‘empty’, and which *dhammas* are listed in the above *mātikā*, this extract means that the totality of human experience is devoid of an enduring substance [...] because this totality is dependent on many and various conditions, and is of the *nature* of being subject to a continuous process of origination and dissolution ... In this context, then, the term *sabhāva* appears to be interchangeable with *dhamma* in its sense of ‘nature’. (pp. 92–93)

¹² W. Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), p. 334. That the commentarial definition of a *dhamma* as that which carries its ‘own nature’ should not be interpreted as implying that a *dhamma* is a substantial bearer of its qualities or ‘own-nature’ has been pointed out by Nyanaponika Thera, *Abhidhamma Studies*, 4th edn (Boston: Wisdom, 1998), pp. 40–41, and Y. Karunadasa, *The Dhamma Theory*, The Wheel Publication 412/413 (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1996), pp. 14–16. Ronkin notes this (p. 112), but does not attach particular significance to it.

¹³ cf. MW, s.v. *svabhāva*, cites its usage in the *Śvetāśvatara-Upaniṣad*, *Manusmṛiti* and *Mahābhārata*; the use of the term in Buddhist literature generally is clearly relatively late.

¹⁴ cf. MW s.v. *bhāva*; among the meanings included for *bhāva* here are nature, temperament, character.

¹⁵ MW (s.v. *svabhāva*) gives *svabhāvāt*, *svabhāvena*, *svabhāvatas* all as meaning ‘by nature’, ‘naturally’, ‘by oneself’.

An argument for translating ‘empty of *sabhāva*’ might, however, be made on the basis of context. The *Paṭisambhidāmagga*’s ‘discourse on the empty’ (*suññakathā*) (II 177–83) begins by quoting a Nikāya discussion of emptiness where it seems we must translate an instrumental with *suñña-* as ‘empty of ...’.¹⁶ The *Paṭisambhidāmagga* then proceeds by explaining a series of twenty-five types of emptiness. Mostly this involves specifying how something is *empty of* something else. This suggests that when we come to ‘the emptiness that is change’ (*vipariṇāma-suñña*) we should translate accordingly: ‘produced materiality is empty of *sabhāva*; materiality that has departed is both changed and empty’ (*jātaṃ rūpaṃ sabhāvena suññaṃ. vigataṃ rūpaṃ vipariṇatañ c’ eva suññañ ca*). The problem is then to decide what precisely *sabhāva* means. Given the clear emphasis on materiality – and all the other 198 items specified here – as ‘produced’ (*jāta*) and ‘departed’ (*vigata*), it seems quite possible that it is materiality’s own existence, rather than nature, that is intended. But the argument for translating ‘empty of *sabhāva*’ here remains inconclusive, since in the case of some kinds of emptiness we have a different construction.¹⁷

A little later Ronkin turns to the Mahānāma’s commentarial exegesis of this passage (Paṭis-a III 634–35). Ñāṇamoli provides a translation of this in a note to his translation of the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*.¹⁸ I think there are a number of problems with Ñāṇamoli’s interpretation; in particular his translation of *bhāva* as ‘essence’ obscures the different explanations of *sabhāva* offered in the commentary. Ronkin does not offer her own translation, and it seems clear that her interpretation is largely based on Ñāṇamoli’s:

Mahānāma initially analyses the compound *sabhāva* as *sayam bhāvo*, or *sako bhāvo*, that is, ‘essence by itself’ or ‘essence of itself’, explaining this to mean ‘arising by itself’ (*sayam eva uppādo*) or ‘own-arising’ (*attano yeva uppādo*).

¹⁶ S IV 54: *yasmā ca kho, Ānanda, suññaṃ attena vā attaniyena vā tasmā suñño loko ti vuccati*. This kind of usage of the instrumental is, of course, quite regular; see also M III 104: *ayaṃ migāramātupāsādo suñño hatthigavassavaḷavana*.

¹⁷ Paṭis II 179: ‘by means of desirelessness, sense-desire is both suppressed and [made] empty’ (*nekkhammena kāmacchando vikkhambhito c’ eva suñño ca*).

¹⁸ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, *The Path of Discrimination* (London: Pali Text Society, 1982), p. 362, n. 1.

Given this interpretation, to translate *bhāvo* as ‘nature’ is inappropriate, for the commentator points to the narrower and more technical sense of essence. Mahānāma then turns to an explication of the coupling *sabhāvena suññam*. First, he states that essence, *bhāva*, is but a figurative designation for *dhamma*, and since each single *dhamma* does not have any other *dhamma* called ‘essence’, it is empty of essence other than itself. This, in fact, reveals a different analysis of *sabhāva*, as ‘the essence that it has of itself’ (*sakassa bhāvo*). It thus follows that every single *dhamma* has a single ‘essence-hood’ (*ekassabhāvatā*). (pp. 93–94)

Following Ñāṇamoli, Ronkin here takes *bhāva* in the context of what are two quite distinct explanations of *sabhāva* as meaning ‘essence’. She also suggests that the second of Mahānāma’s initial analyses of *sabhāva* is as *sako bhāvo*. In fact there is a variant here in the different editions; the Burmese and Thai editions both read not *sako vā bhāvo* but *sato vā bhāvo*, and three times *attato* where the PTS edition has *attano*.¹⁹ The ablatival *sato* (Sanskrit *svatas*) and *attato* seem to make better sense.²⁰ I would thus translate Mahānāma’s first explanation as follows:

Sabhāva here is self (*sayam*) existence (*bhāvo*); ‘arising just by itself’ is what it means. Alternatively, *sabhāva* is existence (*bhāvo*) from self (*sato*); ‘arising just of itself’ is what it means. Because of [materiality’s] occurring depending on conditions, there is no existence within it just by itself, there is no existence just of itself without a causal condition, and so it is empty of self-existence; ‘it is empty of existence just by itself, just of itself’ is what is being said.²¹

As my translation indicates, I agree that here, in the context of Mahānāma’s explanation, we must take the instrumental *sabhāvena* in the sense of ‘of *sabhāva*’. Yet, while I think Ronkin is right in suggesting that ‘to translate *bhāvo* as “nature” is inappropriate’, I do not think ‘essence’ works here either – notwithstanding her distinction (p. 94) between the

¹⁹ My comments are based on the texts of the ‘Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana’ (Vipassana Research Institute, Igatpuri) and BUDSIR (Mahidol University, Bangkok) CD-ROMs.

²⁰ cf. the play on *svabhāva* at *Mūla-madhyamakakārikā* 1 3–5 *na svato nāpi parato na dvābhyāṃ nāpy ahetutaḥ | utpannā jātu vidyante bhāvāḥ kva cana ke cana || ... na hi svabhāvo bhāvānāṃ pratyayādiṣu vidyate | avidyamāne svabhāve parabhāvo na vidyate ||*

²¹ *sabhāvena suññan ti ettha sayam bhāvo sabhāvo, sayam eva uppādo ti attho. sato vā bhāvo sabhāvo, attato yeva uppādo ti attho. paccayāyattavuttittā paccayaṃ vinā sayam eva bhāvo, attato eva vā bhāvo etasmim natthi ti sabhāvena suññam, sayam eva bhāvena, attato eva vā bhāvena suññan ti vuttaṃ hoti.*

epistemological and ontological senses of ‘essence’. Mahānāma glosses *bhāva* with *uppāda* and his explanation seems concerned with how something comes into existence: he suggests that something such as materiality cannot be said to come into existence by itself in the absence of causal conditions.

Mahānāma goes on to offer an alternative explanation where I think the sense of ‘nature’ is appropriate. I would translate as follows:

Alternatively, *sabhāva* is the nature (*bhāvo*) of an associate (*sakassa*). For a particular *dhamma* among the various material and immaterial *dhammas* such as earth, etc., is called ‘an associate’ with reference to another [*dhamma*]; *bhāva* is also a synonym for *dhamma*, and one particular ‘quality’ (*dhamma*) does not belong to another ‘quality’ (*dhamma*) – here termed ‘nature’ (*bhāva*). Therefore [materiality] is empty of the different nature of an associate; ‘an associate is empty of a different nature’ is what it means. By this it is stated that one particular *dhamma* has one particular nature.²²

It seems that, like Ñāṇamoli, Ronkin misunderstands *saka* in the above passage, which must be being used in the general sense of ‘what belongs to’ (i.e. friends, relatives, property) and I have rendered as ‘associate’. Although certainly contrived as an explanation of *sabhāvena suññam* in its *Paṭisambhidāmagga* context,²³ it says nothing more than that a *dhamma* is to be defined as a single distinct ‘quality’ in relation to other qualities. Yet Ronkin goes on to suggest that:

Mahānāma oscillates between an epistemological and ontological interpretations of *sabhāva* as essence: his initial explanation of *sabhāva* as *sayaṃ/sako bhāvo* draws on the epistemological sense of essence as an individuator of a *dhamma*. His analysis of *sabhāva* as *sakassa bhāvo/ekasabhāvatā*, though, relies on the ontological aspect of essence as the cause of a *dhamma*’s being. The meaning suggested here is that a *dhamma* is independent of other *dhammas* for its existence; it bears its own reality all by itself. (p. 94)

²² *atha vā sakassa bhāvo sabhāvo. pathavīdhātu-ādīsu hi anekesu rūpārūpadhammesu ekeko dhammo paraṃ upādāya sako nāma. bhāvo ti ca dhammapariyāyavacanam etaṃ. ekassa ca dhammassa añño bhāvasaṅkhāto dhammo naṭhi, tasmā sakassa aññena bhāvena suññam, sako aññena bhāvena suñño ti attho. tena ekassa dhammassa ekasabhāvatā vuttā hoti.*

²³ It seems Mahānāma wants to avoid contradicting the commentarial dictum that a *dhamma* upholds its own nature (*sabhāva*); he therefore contrives a way of interpreting *sabhāvena suññam* as saying a *dhamma* is empty not of its own nature but of another *dhamma*’s nature (*sakassa bhāvo*).

But all that Mahānāma is doing here, I think, is offering two different explanations of *sabhāva* based on two quite distinct senses of *bhāva* – ‘existence’ and ‘nature’.²⁴ Moreover, Mahānāma’s *initial* explanation of *sabhāva* precisely denies that ‘a *dhamma* is independent of other *dhammas* for its existence’; while ‘his analysis of *sabhāva* as *sakassa bhāvo/ekassabhāvatā*’ does not explicitly go beyond the epistemological sense of *sabhāva* as an individuator of a *dhamma*. I see no evidence in this passage for the claim that Mahānāma understands that ‘*sabhāva* is the cause of the *dhamma*’s actual existence’ or that he ‘begins by analysing *sabhāva* as *sva+bhāva*, “own-nature”, but eventually divides the compound into *sat+bhāva*, “real essence”’.

I render Mahānāma’s third explanation of *sabhāva* as follows:

Alternatively, ‘empty *sabhāvena*’ means ‘empty because of being empty in nature’. What is being said? That it is empty simply because of the emptiness of what is empty, not because of other alternative senses of emptiness.²⁵

Ronkin suggests (p. 95) that this explanation is more in harmony with the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*’s spirit, and I think she is right. What I think Mahānāma wants to suggest here is that the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* phrase might be taken (as I initially suggested above) as meaning ‘produced materiality is inherently empty’. But rather puzzlingly Ronkin seems to conflate this third explanation with the second when she claims that in this context Mahānāma ‘refers to “every single *dhamma*” (*ekassa dhammassa*), thus attesting to the view that the emptiness of essence is a distinguishing mark unique to every single *dhamma*’, a view she considers out of harmony with the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*. Yet it is a single nature (*ekasabhāvatā*) that Mahānāma says ‘every single’ *dhamma* has, not ‘emptiness of essence’.

Appended to Mahānāma’s three explanations is a further discussion of the implications of saying that something is empty *sabhāvena*. It seems worth offering a full translation as an alternative to Nāṇamoli’s:

²⁴ Richard Hayes argues that Nāgārjuna exploits the same two senses of *svabhāva* at *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 1 3–5; see ‘Nāgārjuna’s Appeal’, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 22 (1994), 299–378 (308–15). Hayes also offers a clear account of the possible meanings of *svabhāva* based on the principles of Pāṇinian grammar (316–17).

²⁵ *atha vā sabhāvena suññān ti suññāsabhāven’ eva suññāṇ. kiṃ vuttaṃ hoti? suññāsuññātāya eva suññāṇ, na aññāhi pariyāyasuññātāhi suññān ti vuttaṃ hoti.*

However, suppose some should argue as follows: ‘*Sabhāva* is something’s own (*sako*) nature (*bhāvo*), so what is meant by saying something is “empty of its own nature”? A *dhamma* is a “nature” and when it is distinguished by its own position in relation to another it is called “that which has its own nature” (*sabhāva*); [and so] when it is said that produced materiality is empty of its own nature, because of the non-existence of any *dhamma*, the non-existence of materiality is stated.’ In that case it conflicts with the words ‘produced materiality’, for something which lacks arising cannot be called ‘produced’. Indeed, nirvana lacks arising and it cannot be called ‘produced’; and birth, old age and death lack arising and cannot be called ‘produced’. It is precisely for this reason that in the present context [Paṭiṣ 11 178] the words ‘produced birth is empty of its own nature, produced old age and death are empty of their own nature’ are not included, and the explanation ends with ‘becoming’. If it were valid to say of something even though it lacked arising, ‘it is produced’, then ‘produced birth ... produced old age and death ...’ should have been stated [here]. Since the word ‘produced’ is not used of birth, old age and death which lack arising, the statement that what is by its own nature empty is non-existent conflicts with the statement that it is something ‘produced’, since something that is non-existent lacks arising. Moreover, that the statement ‘it is empty’ applies to something that is non-existent conflicts with ordinary usage of language as stated above, and also with the words of the Blessed One, and with statements in the books of grammar and logic; indeed, it conflicts with several rational arguments. Therefore the statement should be discarded as rubbish. Both on account of several authoritative statements of the Buddha such as [... S III 138–39] and of several arguments the conclusion to be reached about this matter is that *dhmmas* certainly exist in their own moment.²⁶

²⁶ *sace pana keci vadeyyuṃ ‘sako bhāvo sabhāvo, tena “sabhāvena suññan” ti kiṃ vuttaṃ hoti? bhāvo ti dhammo, so paraṃ upādāya sapadena viseto sabhāvo nāma hoti. dhammassa kassa ca avijjamānatā “jātaṃ rūpaṃ sabhāvena suññan” ti rūpassa avijjamānatā vuttā hoti’ ti. evaṃ sati ‘jātaṃ rūpan’ ti vacanena virūjjhati. na hi uppādarahitaṃ jātaṃ nāma hoti. nibbānaṃ hi uppādarahitaṃ, taṃ jātaṃ nāma na hoti, jātijarāmaraṇāni ca uppādarahitāni jātāni nāma na honti. ten’ ev’ ettha ‘jātā jāti sabhāvena suññā, jātaṃ jarāmaraṇaṃ sabhāvena suññan’ ti evaṃ anuddharitvā bhavam eva avasānaṃ katvā niddiḥhaṃ. yadi uppādarahitassāpi ‘jātan’ ti vacanaṃ yujjeyya, ‘jātā jāti, jātaṃ jarāmaraṇan’ ti vattabbaṃ bhaveyya. yasmā uppādarahilesu jātijarāmaraṇesu ‘jātan’ ti vacanaṃ na vuttaṃ, tasmā ‘sabhāvena suññaṃ avijjamānan’ ti vacanaṃ avijjamānassa uppādarahitattā ‘jātan’ ti vacanena virūjjhati. avijjamānassa ca ‘suññan’ ti vacanaṃ heḍḍhā vuttena lokavacanena ca bhagaravato vacanena ca nāyasaddaganthavacanena ca virūjjhati, anekāhi ca yuttīhi virūjjhati, tasmā taṃ vacanaṃ kacavaram iva*

With reference to this further discussion, Ronkin points out that Mahānāma thus rejects the inference that being empty *sabhāvena* entails non-existence – ‘that *dhammas* are completely empty having no reality at all’ (p. 95). I agree. Mahānāma is clearly concerned to avoid the suggestion that *dhammas* do not really exist, and may well have as his target here the Mādhyamika notion of *śūnyatā*. Nevertheless, I think Ronkin over interprets Mahānāma’s account of *sabhāva* when she suggests that he presents the *sabhāva* as ‘the cause of the *dhamma*’s actual existence and its evidence’ (p. 94).²⁷ The *sabhāva* here is what a *dhamma* is, rather than the cause of its existence.

In chapter four of her book, Ronkin explores in precisely what way the terms of Abhidhamma discourse ‘uniquely define their corresponding referents’. As Ronkin points out, *dhammas* as they actually occur are conceived of as unique ‘individuals’, differing in quality and intensity from other instances of a *dhamma* of the same kind (pp. 147–50). With reference to the philosophical concept of an ‘individual’ and the history of ‘categories’, both western and Indian, Ronkin concludes:

[*Sabhāva*] denotes a structural constituent that is essential to a *dhamma* and that enables us to fathom why that *dhamma* possesses the characteristics it has. *Sabhāva* is what determines the *dhamma*’s internal organization or disposition, which makes it behave in a certain way or fulfil a specific function. We are now in position to say that *sabhāva* is the principle cause of the *dhamma*’s individuality; what makes the *dhamma* the very particular it is rather than any other individual of the same kind. (p. 170)

Certainly, as she points out (p. 171), ‘there is a close connection between being an individual – being distinguishable, determined and definable – and existing’, but as I indicated above, it is not clear to me precisely on what grounds Ronkin identifies the *sabhāva* as the cause of

chaḍḍitabbaṃ. [... S III 138–39] *ādīhi anekehi buddhavacanappamāṇehi anekāhi ca yuttīhi dhammā sakakkhaṇe vijjānā evā ti nīttam ettha gantabbaṃ*.

²⁷ In her note (p. 125, n. 49) Ronkin abbreviates the commentary so drastically as to misrepresent it. I take *keci vadeyyuyṃ* as referring to everything from *sako bhāvo sabhāvo* to *rūpassa avijjānatā vuttā hotī ti*, and *kiṃ vuttaṃ hoti* as referring only to *sabhāvena suññan ti*. What is to be rejected ‘as rubbish’ is not the statement ‘*sabhāva* is its own existence and hence it is empty of its existence’ (as she translates) but the inference that saying something is ‘empty’ applies to a non-existent thing.

a *dhamma*'s existence; it seems in part based on her interpretation of the Abhidhamma notion of *hetupaccaya*, which I shall return to below.

3. *Sabhāva*, individuation and categorial theory

Ronkin emphasizes (pp. 154–56) that the theory of *dhammas* must be seen as a categorial theory rather than a system of classification. Her point, as I understand it, is that a particular instance of, say, *lobha* occurring in one's mind individuates the *lobha* category by conforming to the *lobha* 'blueprint'; it is not that a *dhamma* has occurred possessing (among perhaps other properties) the property of *lobha* (allowing it to be classified as a member of the *lobha* class), for *lobha* is what the *dhamma* is.

As I have already indicated, it seems to me that the technical understanding of *sabhāva* that Ronkin advances is not always as clearly and consistently articulated as she suggests. In a *ṭīkā* passage that she herself quotes (p. 115) in explanation of the statement that 'either the specific nature (*sabhāva*) or general nature (*sāmañña*) is termed "the characteristic" of the various *dhammas*',²⁸ we find the following:

The specific nature (*sabhāva*) is what is not common, such as being hard, etc., and touching, etc., [of earth and contact respectively]. The general nature is the specific nature (*sabhāva*) of being impermanent, etc. But in the present context [Dhs 1], the characteristic of being wholesome should be regarded as the general nature since it is the specific nature (*sabhāva*) common to all that is wholesome; or [it can be regarded] as the specific nature (*sabhāva*) because of its not being common to what is unwholesome.²⁹

Such a passage shows *sabhāva* being used rather loosely in the sense of a particular property specific to – and this is crucial – certain classes of things. For clearly something may have the specific nature or property (*sabhāva*) of being wholesome, but that does not define it as an individual, since many things will also have that property, and what will distinguish it from other wholesome things are other properties it possesses.

²⁸ As 63: *tesaṃ tesaṃ dhammānaṃ sabhāvo vā sāmaññaṃ vā lakkhaṇaṃ nāma.*

²⁹ Dhs-ṃṭ B^c 64: *sabhāvo kakkhālādi-phusanādiko asādhāraṇo. sāmaññaṃ sādāraṇo aniccādi-sabhāvo. idha ca kusalalakkhaṇaṃ sabbakusala-sādhāraṇasabhāvattā sāmaññaṃ daṭṭhabbaṃ, akusalādīhi asādhāraṇatāya sabhāvo vā.*

This makes it difficult to be certain that *sabhāva* is not being used in a similar manner in relation to individual *dhammas*, that is, a given occurrence of a *dhamma* is an instance of, say, *dosa* because it has the characteristic or specific nature of anger (*caṇḍikka-lakkhaṇa*) (As 257), which defines it as belonging to the *dosa* class of events.

Such a model, of course, poses certain difficulties for the coherence of the Abhidhamma system, since it undermines the notion of *dhammas* as instances of the fundamental and final categories of experience. As Ronkin makes clear, the Abhidhamma understands that instances of a given *dhamma* category differ, but how exactly? Certainly it seems *dosa* is meant to cover individual mental occurrences that range from mild irritation to raging anger, but then this suggests that instances of the same *dhamma* have different qualities. Yet if *dhammas* are themselves the basic qualities of experience, they cannot themselves have further qualities since this would render them capable of further analysis, of being broken down into more basic qualities. The Ābhidhammika might be able to respond that relative strength or intensity are general qualities that apply across the categories and do not undermine the notion of a distinctive category being individuated. Moreover, while *dhammas* cannot themselves *have* further qualities, they can nevertheless be *associated* with further qualities. Thus the Ābhidhammika can distinguish the experience of envy from mere hate by suggesting that it is the function of two separate *dhammas* – *dosa* and *issā* – arising in association: envy is thus hate that has, or is associated with, the further quality of being directed towards someone else's good fortune. And yet it is hard to see how the Abhidhamma analysis of experience can avoid talking at some point in terms of subcategories of what are meant to be basic *dhamma* categories.

The problem can be illustrated by reference to the absence of a *dhamma* category that might be taken as specifying the emotion of fear from the Theravādin list of fifty-two *cetasikas*. It would seem that we should not conclude from this that fear was not identified by the Ābhidhammikas as a real emotion. Indeed on occasion it is considered an emotion of some significance. In the context of the ten defilements of insight (*vipassanupakilesa*) and the completion of 'purification by knowing and seeing what is path and not path', the *Visuddhimagga* tells the story of a certain Mahānāga Thera who had considered himself an ara-

hat for sixty years, until he was persuaded by his wiser pupil to use his own *iddhi* to conjure up an angry elephant. This causes Mahānāga to jump up in fear, whereupon his pupil asks him: ‘Sir, does one whose taints are destroyed have fear?’ At this point Mahānāga realises that he is not an arahat.³⁰

Our storyteller does not tell us which of the eighty-nine types of *citta* is supposed to have arisen in Mahānāga’s mind at the moment he felt fear, but let us conduct an Abhidhamma thought experiment. It seems that from the start we can rule out the types of wholesome *citta*. And it does not seem that Mahānāga’s mind felt attracted to the elephant, so we can also rule out the eight unwholesome *cittas* rooted in greed. Nor would it seem that his mind was characterised by doubt (*vicikicchā*). This leaves just three possibilities: the two types rooted in hate, and the one rooted in delusion associated with ‘agitation’ (*uddhacca*).³¹ In terms of specific *dhammas* it would seem that *dosa* and *uddhacca* are the most likely places to locate the specific emotion of fear: Mahānāga did not like the elephant and it caused him strong agitation. This leaves the two rooted in hate as the only types of *citta* that combine both *dosa* and *uddhacca*. Common experience, however, suggests that not all instances of *dosa* and *uddhacca* are characterised by ‘fear’. But unless one is prepared to maintain that ‘fear’ can be regarded as simply different intensities of hate and agitation, then its experience can only be accounted for within the Theravādin Abhidhamma analysis as instances of *dhammas* with the particular characteristic (*lakkhaṇa*) and intrinsic nature (*sabhāva*) of *dosa* and *uddhacca*, but with the further quality of ‘fear’, making it *dosa-uddhacca* of the ‘fear’ type.

Thus, even though from a theoretical philosophical perspective it should not (since *dhammas* are supposed to be the ultimate individuated unites of experience), the Abhidhamma framework none the less seems

³⁰ Vism 634–35 (xx 110–13); the same story is told in a different context at Vibh-a 489–90. The word for ‘fear’ here is *sāraja*, a synonym for *bhaya* (see M 1 72, Vibh-a 506). The term *bhaya* is used in a positive sense of fear of unpleasant consequences in the definition of *ottappa* at As 124–27, but this kind of ‘fear’ cannot be what is meant in the present context.

³¹ Vism 454 (xiv 93).

in practice to operate sometimes as a classificatory system rather than a categorical theory

4. The notion of *hetupaccaya*

In her final chapter Ronkin examines Buddhist theories of causality, considering both the theory of the twelve *nidānas* of dependent arising and the *Paṭṭhāna*'s theory of twenty-four causal conditions (*paccaya*). She draws attention (p. 206) to certain peculiarities of the Nikāya notion of causation: it concerns 'not the production of entities but the arising and ceasing of psycho-physical processes', not physical causality but connections between mental conditions, not a binary connection between a single cause and a single effect but 'a manifoldness of supporting conditions'; and while the latter is not to be construed in terms of a 'network of interrelated conditions', it none the less does involve some sense of mutual conditioning (p. 208). She concludes (p. 230) 'that the *Paṭṭhāna* theory of *paccaya* is not about causation at all' in the sense of causal production; rather it 'is intended to account [...] for the individuality of each and every *dhamma* as a capacity of a certain mental event that occurs within a network of interrelations of causal conditioning'; but this, she suggests involves a circularity since 'causal conditions individuate *dhammas* only if the latter are already individuated' (p. 252).

She emphasizes (pp. 206–08) that there appear to be no grounds for distinguishing between *hetu* and *paccaya* as 'cause' and 'condition' respectively in the Nikāyas; such a distinction is characteristic of especially the Sarvāstivādin theory of the six *hetus* and four *pratyayas*, although she suggests that something of the distinction is found within Theravādin sources as well, arguing (pp. 226–32) that the *Paṭṭhāna*'s and subsequent commentarial understanding of *hetupaccaya* has a certain affinity with the Sarvāstivādin discussions.

Unfortunately her discussion is premised on a basic misunderstanding of the Abhidhamma notion of *hetupaccaya* as referring to an 'essential causal condition' that 'individuates its related *dhamma*' and can be equated with *sabhāva* (pp. 214, 222–26). This is not so. For the Theravādin Abhidhamma, *hetupaccaya* refers to the way in which six specific *dhammas* (*alobha*, *adosa*, *amoha*, *lobha*, *dosa* and *moha*) act as 'cause' (*hetu*)

by being a ‘root’ (*mūla*) in relation to certain other *dhammas* that are associated it and have arisen together with it in the same moment.³²

5. Abhidhamma and the art of mapmaking

Throughout her study Ronkin seeks to demonstrate that especially the canonical – but also in large part the commentarial – Abhidhamma’s concerns are epistemological, ‘meta-psychological’, and soteriological rather than ontological *per se*, to this extent ‘the Abhidhamma systematic and allegedly divergent method’ (p. 236) is consonant with the Nikāyas. Yet the Abhidhamma project of naming the world and creating ultimate units of categorization in the end ignores what Ronkin sees as the Buddha’s critique of language (p. 246) and results in the espousal of a conceptual realism that takes the *dhammas* named as real existents. Such a realism, she suggests, is at odds with the metaphysics of the Nikāyas. It is also philosophically problematic, for ‘to draw ontological conclusions on the grounds of linguistic practice is a non sequitur’ (p. 251). Indeed, Ronkin concludes, Nāgārjuna and the Mādhyamikas’ critique can be seen as justified both philosophically and on the grounds of reasserting the original message of the Buddha.

At the beginning of her study Ronkin comments (p. 10) that her approach at times involves ‘philosophical reconstruction’ and that therefore she does not want to claim that ancient Buddhists would have understood their positions in precisely the philosophical terms in which she articulates them. These are important caveats. In part her philoso-

³² The crucial definition of *hetu* is found at Dhs 242–43; Paṭṭh (B^o) 1 1 gives a succinct definition of *hetupaccaya*, and its application is set out e.g. at Paṭṭh (B^o) III 1 ff.; see also Abhidh-s-mhṭ 184. Ronkin’s misunderstanding appears to be based in part on conflating the identification of *sabhāva* as the ‘cause’ (*hetu*) of a *dhamma* (at Peṭ 104, Nett 78–81) with the *Paṭṭhāna*’s understanding of *hetupaccaya*. Yet the position of Peṭ and Nett in the development of the specifically Theravādin Abhidhamma remains problematic. These texts seem not to be based on exclusively Theravādin traditions. Indeed, the passage she cites on p. 101 (Peṭ 158) is an example. It suggests that of the five hindrances four are intrinsic defilements (*sabhāvakilesa*) while *thīna-middha* is a secondary contributory defilement (*nīvaraṇapakkhopakilesa*). This seems to assume a system in which *thīna-middha* is not exclusively unwholesome, that is, a non-Theravādin system; significantly the *bhāṣya* to *Abhidharmakośa* II 26a–c cites a canonical Abhidharma list of *dharma*s universal to all unwholesome (*kleśamahābhūmika*) *citta* that does not include *styāna*.

phical reconstruction involves filling in gaps and making explicit what is implicit in order to reveal the logic underlying certain developments. And she does this very well. Yet one might view the gaps as in some sense intrinsic to the Abhidhamma project: the fact that the system is not always completely worked out might be seen as one of its strengths.

Ronkin makes the general observation that, despite its concluding in an ontology that conceives of *dhammas* as real existents, the Abhidhamma in large measure remains faithful to specific themes of the Nikāyas' metaphysics: a 'process' philosophy and progress along the Buddhist path. One might seek clarification over a certain underlying assumption in her book that somehow epistemology is 'a good thing' but ontology 'a bad thing', and question whether the Nikāyas really eschew questions of ontology so completely. Yet her overall thesis that the final Abhidhamma conception of a *dhamma* presents certain philosophical difficulties is difficult to deny. But despite what one might see as a certain attempt on her part to reassess aspects of Abhidhamma thought, she ends on a note that implies that the Abhidhamma edifice stands or falls on the philosophical coherence of the concept of a *dhamma*. Yet at precisely this point one might seek to reinforce her more general point that the philosophical coherence of the ontology of *dhammas* was not always of central concern to the Ābhidhammikas. I do not mean to suggest by this that the exponents of Abhidharma had no interest in demonstrating the rationality and coherence of their systems. Clearly the Sarvāstivādin Vaibhāṣikas who formulated the account of *prāpti* and a *dharma's* existence in past, present and future were very much driven by principles of rationality and coherence, and demonstrated considerable philosophical sophistication and ingenuity. Yet their fellow Ābhidhammikas to the south seem to have been less embroiled in such matters. This does not mean that they regarded their Abhidhamma system as any less a true and final representation of reality, but it does perhaps mean that at certain points their system shied away from certain more purely abstract and philosophical issues.

Perhaps the art of mapmaking offers a certain analogy for the development of the Abhidhamma. Maps serve a practical purpose: a map is ultimately only useful if it helps us find our way around. To do this a map must represent the terrain accurately. But this can mean different

things. Harry Beck's 1930s map is an efficient tool for negotiating the London Underground system, but if one wanted to walk from, say, Leicester Square to Russell Square over ground, it might not be so helpful. For that one would require a different kind of map, in part more detailed, in part more accurate – or at least more accurate in a different way. The Abhidhamma's shift of focus from the more general processes that govern progress along the Buddhist path to the events that constitute those processes, might be viewed as an attempt to provide a more detailed and accurate map of the path. Indeed, some of the Ābhidhammika 'mapmakers' seem to have regarded the final Abhidhamma map as the ultimate map – a map that showed everything.

Lewis Carroll tells of a people who produced a map of their country 'on the scale of a mile to the mile', but it was never spread out: 'the farmers objected: they said it would cover the whole country, and shut out the sunlight! So we now use the country itself, as its own map, and I assure you it does nearly as well.'³³ In similar vein, Jorge Luis Borges tells of cartographers who 'struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it'; subsequent generations, however, 'who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast Map was Useless, and [...] delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters'.³⁴

Perhaps it is the case that the ancient Ābhidhammika mapmakers eventually lost their way in an obsession with mapping the paths of the mind in every detail, and mistook their map for reality itself. But as Carroll's and Borges's tales suggest, a map that succeeded in showing everything would be redundant. Paradoxically, then, it may be precisely in so far as the Ābhidhammikas failed in the task of producing the ultimate map that their map is useful.

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³³ Lewis Carroll, *Sylvia and Bruno Concluded* (chapter xi, 'The Man in the Moon'), 1893.

³⁴ Jorge Luis Borges, 'On Exactitude in Science' in *Collected fictions*, translated by Andrew Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1998), p. 325.

BOOK REVIEWS

Der Ursprung der japanischen Vinaya-Schule, Risshū 律宗, und die Entwicklung ihrer Lehre und Praxis. László Hankó. Göttingen: Cuvillier Verlag, 2003. xiii, 433 pp. €50. ISBN 3898736202.

László Hankó's work aims at providing an overview of the history of the Japanese Vinaya School (the Risshū School) from its very beginning, i.e. the *vinaya* of the Indian Dharmaguptaka School, to the time of the monk Gyōnen (1240–1321), author of the 律宗綱要 *Risshū kōyō*, a history of the Vinaya School. The work is divided into five chapters.

The first chapter provides an annotated translation into German of the *prātimokṣasūtra* (list of rules) for monks of the Dharmaguptaka School: the 四分僧戒本 *Sifen seng jieben* (T. 1429), the Chinese translation of which is attributed to the fifth-century Indian master Buddhaśāśa. Most probably, however, the text is a seventh-century compilation by the monk 懷素 Huaisu. Interesting is that László Hankó's annotation is not limited to an analysis of the translated text itself, but also gives some information on later Mahāyāna reactions. The translation is introduced by a short history of the Dharmaguptaka texts and of the Vinaya School in China. The focus lies on the most important branch, the Nanshanlüzong, the school founded by the vinaya master 道宣 Daoxuan (596–667).

It is a pity that the introduction is not written in a more critical way, but often just repeats some traditional viewpoints, even when these have already been severely criticised by several other researchers. This is the case for instance for the date of the death of the Buddha, and for the dates of the first councils: the date of death is placed in 486 BC (p. 328, note 758), the council of Rājagṛha in 483 BC (p. 2), the second council in 383 BC (p. 2). No critical note is given, despite the many works that discuss these and other dates related to the historical Buddha. Neither do we find any more critical information on the events that were attrib-

uted to these councils: the first recitation of vinaya rules, the first schisms in the Buddhist community.

Similarly, we read on p. 3 and p. 10 that the Dharmaguptaka School had no doctrine, but only focussed on rules and on correct ceremonies. Although most texts attributed to the Dharmaguptakas are certainly vinaya texts, to say that this school had no doctrinal viewpoints ('Lehre') at all seems too farfetched to me, certainly when no comment whatsoever is given. On p. 10, the founder of the school is said to be Dharmagupta, an ascetic of Ceylon. A note refers to the work of E. J. Eitel originally published in 1904. Again, this viewpoint is highly controversial and most modern scholars consider Dharmagupta to be a legendary person (see, for instance, E. Lamotte, *Histoire du Bouddhisme indien des origines à l'ère Śaka*, Louvain, 1958, p. 575).

The translation is generally quite correct. Still, a comparison with the Vinayas of other schools¹ and with the Indian texts or fragments that are still extant could have prevented several errors. For instance, the first *pārājika* rule² says: 'If a *bhikṣu* undertakes the same training (戒, *śikṣā*) as the other *bhikṣus*, if he does not disavow the training, and if he does not confess to be weak with respect to the training, and if he has impure conduct, and if he does impure things, also with an animal ...'³ László Hankó's translation (pp. 19–20) is as follows:

Wenn der Mönch mit einem (anderen) Mönch, dem die selben Gebote gelten, unsaubere Handlungen eingeht und unkeuschen Begierden erliegt, sogar wenn er (die sexuellen Handlungen) mit einem Tier tut, ohne (erst) die Gebote zu verwerfen [...] – in denen er schwach ist und (dafür) nicht (einmal) die Reue zeigt [...]

László Hankó thus says that 'when a monk does impure things with another monk who follows the same rules', he commits a *pārājika* offence. This is clearly an erroneous translation, which further leads to the strange statement (p. 20) that this precept is commonly seen as a pre-

¹ As already done by W. Pachow (1955), *A Comparative Study of the Prātimokṣa on the Basis of Its Chinese, Tibetan, Sanskrit and Pali Versions*, Santiniketan.

² A monk or nun who commits a *pārājika* offence permanently loses his/her monastic status.

³ For details, see A. Heirman (2002), *The Discipline in Four Parts, Rules for Nuns according to the Dharmaguptakavinaya*, Delhi, Part II, pp. 278–79, note 35.

cept on sexual contact with women although only sexual acts with other men or animals are pointed at.

Also in other rules, a comparison with other texts could have been very useful. So, for instance, in the first *naihsargika-prāyaścittika* rule,⁴ it is said: 'If a *bhikṣu*, when the robes have already been finished and the *kathina* cloth has already been removed, keeps an extra robe, he may keep it for ten days without assigning it.' *Kathina* is generally explained as 'raw cotton'. The *kathina* cloth refers to a ceremonial cloth that was spread out near the monastery to inform the lay people that the period for the donation of robe material had come. Contrary to what László Hankó says on p. 35, this period can be as long as five months (and not just one month). At the end of this period, the *kathina* cloth is removed (出 *chu*).⁵ This can be done for one individual monk (for instance when he leaves the district without the intention to come back) or for the whole community. During the *kathina* period it is allowed to have an extra robe. Outside this period, this is forbidden.⁶ Due to a misinterpretation of the technical term 出, László Hankó's translation (p. 35) tells a different story: 'Wenn der Mönch seine (drei) Gewänder schon bekommen und die Kathina-Gewänder bereits weggegeben hat, kann er seine überzähligen Gewänder, die er besitzt, zehn Tage lang behalten, ohne dass er sie seiner Reinheit wegen verspenden muß.' The monk has not, as translated by László Hankó, *given away* his *kathina* robes, but, in fact, the *kathina* period has come to an end.

The explanatory notes on the translation are generally interesting, but unfortunately not always consistent. For instance, for three out of the four *pārājika* rules for monks, a comparison is made with the rules for nuns. For the third *pārājika*, the *pārājika* on murder, the comparison is missing. The explanatory notes, further, do not always rely on the same tradition as the translated text. Note 2 on p. 35, for instance, says that nuns have five robes: three of these robes are the same as for monks, two are additional. According to note 2, these two additional robes are an undergarment (*saṃkakṣikā*) and a loincloth (*kusūla*). In

⁴ A monk or a nun who commits a *naihsargika-prāyaścittika* offence has to give up an unlawfully obtained object and has to repent of his/her offence.

⁵ See Heirman, op. cit., Part II, p. 487, note 9, on 捨 *she*, variant of 出 *chu*.

⁶ See Heirman, op. cit., Part I, pp. 221–26.

fact, the Dharmaguptaka tradition has the following two additional robes: a breast band (*saṃkaksīkā*)⁷ and a robe that covers the shoulder (*gaṇḍapratichchādana* (?*paṭa*)). The two robes mentioned by László Hankó appear in the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition.⁸

Very interesting, though, are the many cross-references between the earlier Hīnayāna and later Mahāyāna rules. For this aim, the rules have been analysed and divided in several categories according to their content. This method makes it possible to compare the viewpoints of the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna vinaya masters on every detail treated in the disciplinary texts (pp. 92–104, pp. 182–91, and pp. 218–32).

The second chapter of László Hankó's work gives an introduction to and a translation of the 梵網經 *Fanwang jing*, the *Brahmā's Net Sūtra* (T. 1484), a Mahāyāna text that contains a set of fifty-eight precepts valid for both lay followers and monastic disciples. Although according to the introduction to the *Fanwang jing*, the text has been translated from Sanskrit into Chinese by Kumārajīva in 406, the text has in fact been compiled in China in the fifth century. It became the basic text of the Mahāyāna, so-called bodhisattva, ordinations, first in China and later in Japan. The first translation of the *Fanwang jing* into a Western language was made by J. J. M. De Groot, *Le code du Mahāyāna en Chine, Son influence sur la vie monacale et sur le monde laïque*, Amsterdam, 1893. It is a pity that the latter work has not been used by László Hankó who has made a new annotated translation into German. A short introduction (pp. 106–24) comments on the coming into being of the *Fanwang jing*.

The structure of the translation takes into account the Mahāyāna views on what a Buddhist rule should preferably be (based on T. 1581, a fifth-century translation into Chinese of the *Bodhisattvabhūmi, Stages of the Bodhisattva*): the actual rule, an exhortation to perform good deeds, and an exhortation to perform charity for living beings. If possible, the rules have been divided in these three aspects. This structure certainly allows a fuller understanding of the message of the *Fanwang jing*. The annotations to the translation are generally useful, and contain some

⁷ On this term, see O. von Hinüber (1975), 'Kulturgeschichtliches aus dem *Bhikṣuṇī-Vinaya: die saṃkaksīkā*', *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 125, 133–39.

⁸ See A. Heirman, op. cit., Part II, pp. 802–05, note 199.

interesting references to earlier disciplinary texts. Just as in the translation of the Dharmaguptaka *prātimokṣa*, however, the information is quite often insufficient or unclear. All precepts, for instance, have been given a short title based on the opinion of Chinese masters, such as Zhiyi, Fazang or Mingkuang. Who these masters were, what role they played in the commentaries on the *Fanwang jing*, or why they have been chosen, is not said. For several notes, the source of information is unclear. Note 3 on p. 126, for instance, tells us that a bodhisattva is allowed to kill a human being, if by doing so he can save the life of many others. The source of this information is not given. Many other notes explain a technical term without referring to the disciplinary tradition on which the explanation is based, as if all vinaya traditions were exactly the same. On p. 137, for instance, it is said that in ‘old Buddhism’ one could, under certain circumstances, eat meat or fish. Five kinds of pure (and thus allowed) meat, 五種淨肉 *wu zhong jing rou*, are opposed to five kinds of impure (and thus forbidden) meat: human beings, elephants, horses, dragons and dogs. László Hankó does not tell us on which vinaya tradition the latter enumeration is based. It might be the Dharmaguptaka tradition, since the *Dharmaguptakavinaya* (T. 1428, pp. 868b9–869a18) gives us the same list of forbidden meat. On another page of the *Dharmaguptakavinaya* (p. 1006a19–21), however, we find a list of ten forbidden kinds of meat. Also, the term 五種淨肉 *wu zhong jing rou* does not appear in the Dharmaguptaka tradition. Instead we find the 三種淨肉 *san zhong jing rou*, ‘three kinds of pure meat’ (p. 872b11 et passim): the consumption of meat is permitted as long as a monk or a nun has not seen or heard, or does not suspect that the animal has been killed especially for him or her.

The third chapter consists of a short introduction to and a translation of the 大乘授戒淨 *Daijō jukaiyō*, *Sūtra on the Mahāyāna Ordination*, a text that claims to contain 250 rules for monks, but actually only gives 248. The text also gives a short explanation on the ordination ceremony and a brief history of the *Daijō jukaiyō* itself. It is claimed that the text has been translated into Chinese by the Indian master Amoghavajra (705–774), and that it has been brought to Japan shortly after it was translated. As shown by László Hankó, however, the *Daijō jukaiyō* has in all probability been written in Japan between 819 and 822 (pp. 195–

96). As a vinaya document, the text is quite interesting as it seems to be an attempt to establish a kind of middle way between the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna traditions. The attempt failed, however, and the text only played an insignificant role in the establishment of an ordination ceremony in Japan (p. 236). In the present work, the text has been translated, and the content of the rules has – as was also the case in the first two chapters – been compared with the other vinaya traditions. The annotation is short, but useful. Sometimes, however, one would have liked to receive a little bit more information. Why, for instance, is the Yinyang School mentioned in rule 212, if this school did not exist in Japan, as said on p. 214?

A very interesting chapter is the fourth one. It contains a study and a translation of the biography of 鑑真 Jianzhen (Jap. Ganjin, 688–763) as originally written by his disciple 思託 Situo.⁹ Jianzhen belonged to the Nanshanlüzong, the Vinaya School founded by the monk Daoxuan. Jianzhen had received both the Dharmaguptaka and the bodhisattva (Mahāyāna) ordination. On the invitation of Japanese monks, he sailed to Japan in 753/754, bringing with him many Chinese Buddhist texts. In Japan, he established an ordination ceremony that was based on the Dharmaguptaka tradition (for monks and nuns) and on the bodhisattva ordination (only for lay people). It was the beginning of the Japanese Risshū School. Jianzhen's journey to Japan was not without numerous obstacles. Only after several failed attempts did he reach his goal. His adventures have been recorded by Situo who was with him from the first attempt to go to Japan. Situo's account has been summarised into a lively report by the Japanese 淡海真人三船 Oumi no Mabito Mifune in 779. This summary is in all probability very faithful to Situo's account (pp. 308–310). László Hankó offers us a carefully annotated translation that makes the reading of Jianzhen's journey into an interesting and pleasant experience.

In the fifth and last chapter, László Hankó describes the establishment of the Japanese Risshū School on the basis of the account by the monk Gyōnen (1240–1321): 律宗綱要 *Risshū kōyō*, *The Essentials of the*

⁹ For an earlier translation, see J. Takakusu (1925), *Kanshin's (Chien-Chên's) Voyage to the East, A.D. 742–54*, by Aomi no Mabito Genkai (A.D. 779), London.

Vinaya Tradition. Of the latter work, László Hankó has translated the part on Japan.¹⁰ In his commentary on Gyōnen's work, the author refers to other relevant sources, such as the 日本紀 *Nihongi*, a history of early Japan compiled at the beginning of the eighth century (pp. 334–36) and the 僧尼令 *Sōniryō*, *Rules for Monks and Nuns* (pp. 336–38), a list of twenty-seven law articles of the very beginning of the eighth century (based on the seventh-century Chinese 道僧格 *Daosengge*). Very interesting are the genealogical tables on the different branches of the Vinaya School in China, and on the Risshū School in Japan (pp. 356–58).

To summarise, the book mainly offers a compilation of translated texts important for our understanding of the development of the Vinaya School in the East. All these texts give us a huge amount of information on the way one attempted to regulate monastic life. Secondary literature, including the works of many Japanese researchers, has been intensively consulted. A detailed research of this mass of information is in fact too much for one single book, and inadequacies are unavoidable. Still, the translations are useful and offer the reader a general understanding of the disciplinary tradition in China and Japan. It is a pity, however, that the basic translation of the Dharmaguptaka *prātimokṣa* contains several, mostly technical, mistakes. It is also to be regretted that, due to the overwhelming task that the author has given himself, the introductions and annotations to the translated disciplinary texts had to remain brief, or even incomplete. One often feels the need for some more critical research. The explanatory notes, albeit generally interesting, have to be read with caution. The source of information is often lacking, or is not consistent with the tradition of the translated text. The last two chapters, on Jianzhen's travels and on the establishment of the Risshū School, are actually the final goal of László Hankó's work. These translations have been more extensively annotated and offer the reader a lively account. This is especially true for the chapter on Jianzhen's adventures. To conclude, László Hankó's work has its ups

¹⁰ For an earlier translation, see L. Pruden (1995), *The Essentials of the Vinaya Tradition*, Numata Center, Berkeley, pp. 122–42 (not annotated).

and downs. Sometimes inadequate, sometimes very interesting and lively, it leaves the reader with mixed feelings.

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Buddhist Practice on Western Ground: Reconciling Eastern Ideals And Western Psychology. Harvey B. Aronson. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, 2004. xiii, 253 pp. \$14.95. ISBN 1590300939.

Aronson is a psychotherapist in a private practice in Houston, Texas, and is meditation teacher-in-residence and founder of the Dawn Mountain Tibetan Temple, Community Centre and Research Institute in Houston.

The book is presented as addressing three fundamental questions, from a Western American psychological perspective, as it examines the differences between Asian and Western cultural and spiritual values. Aronson's assessment of his own anxiety and that of a number of clients in fictional composites provides an intriguing insight into the difficulties experienced by Western meditators, who, for a variety of reasons find that meditation practice does not address all the psychological concerns that they hold, and some of whom find themselves confused or disappointed as a result. Issues addressed include:

- The cultural belief that anger should not be suppressed versus the Buddhist teaching to counter anger and hatred.
- Psychotherapists' advice that attachment is the basis for healthy personal development and supportive relationships versus the Buddhist condemnation of attachments as the source of suffering.
- Western culture's emphasis on individuality versus the Asian emphasis on interdependence and fulfilment of duties, and the Buddhist teachings on no self, or egolessness.

In his introduction (p. xiii) he claims that Western meditators require culturally appropriate interventions such as psychotherapy, to help deal with 'anxiety, depression, isolating narcissism, or numbed disengagement'.

Aronson suggests there is a cultural conflict ongoing between meditators and traditional teachers. The meditator who requires therapy is taught to meditate by developing patience, abandoning anger and giving up attachment in the context of community-sangha. A western psychotherapy on the other hand would encourage those with emotional shutdown to express their feelings of anger, etc., to facilitate the quest for relationship and intimacy in the context of self-assertion and individuality (p. xiv). He further argues that teachers of meditation could compound issues by their implicit encouragement of students towards what may be seen as passivity and self-denial. The cultural gaps that appear are consequently breeding grounds for misunderstanding between teacher and student often resulting in 'alienation, and emotional injury' (p. xiv). Failing to understand these cultural differences results in benefits from profound spiritual teachings being lost. The answer to these difficulties is, in part, he claims, to come out from the protective canopy of Buddhism and seek additional perspectives.

The abandoning of cultural values and habitual inclinations is seen as a great obstacle to practice in a world where he claims a ubiquitous influence of therapy. Such an influence it is suggested results in time spent on the cushion immersed in the content of our minds as opposed to following the processes of traditional instruction. To overcome the problems he presents, he somewhat paradoxically claims that continued practice over time would enhance understanding of the tradition and the psychological processes that affects it from a Western cultural perspective. In so doing it seems he is arguing that by discerning differences it is possible to reflect on 'who we are and what we may wish to become' (p. xvi).

A number of psychological propensities and vulnerabilities lend themselves to certain interpretations of Buddhist teachings. The outcome of which can be for the psychologically needy to find refuge in a Buddhism that counsels renunciation and nonattachment. If this is the case then there is only a psychological picture available to the student

limiting their ability to absorb from the tradition, and thereby simulating change without any real shift of consciousness. It is to this process Aronson reflects on four themes in Buddhist and psychological practice that he claims are at once significant and yet confusing. They are: self, anger, love and attachment. He draws on his own experiences as a psychotherapist and Buddhist teacher to consider both forms of experience, based on the four themes above. This implicitly supposes that by taking a view of Buddhist practice encompassing the psychological, in Western terms, Western practitioners can see anew the positive effects of a combined approach in reducing harm to themselves and to others.

In chapter one Aronson reflects the differences in cultural understanding of a classic Buddhist approach, that of the meditation retreat. He compares the emotional stance of a group of white American participants compared to that of an ethnic Chinese group on the same retreat, run by a Chinese Zen master. The White Americans reinforced their individuality and sense of self-realization in the process, whilst the Chinese group exclaimed deep emotional responses to the retreat, based on repentance and shame and a sense of greater responsibility to their elders. This example of cultural differentiation is highlighted by Aronson's own dilemma of the 1970s. Whilst practicing meditation he found he was suffering severe anxiety attacks. He reluctantly entered into psychotherapy and found it unlocked his deep psychological concerns resulting in his adopting a 'both/and approach' (p. 9) to his practice. This is the approach he is advocating to Western practitioners of Buddhism, as complimentary forms of practice.

In chapter two and three consideration is given to the needs of Western practitioners, inferring they should understand the background to Buddhist/Asian culture in order to grasp the nature of the differences that ultimately affect one's relationship to traditional forms of Buddhist experience in the West. He uses examples of extended familial relations and monasticism that encouraged a culture of duty, which focused on roles, as opposed to Western cultures, which, emphasizes rights and individuals.

The culture of separateness is a theme taken up here, a prominent aspect of Western societies, where individuality based on feelings and choice (which includes romantic love), are seen as areas difficult to rec-

oncile with some forms of traditional Buddhist teaching, which emphasise duty and passivity. The cautious note intended here is not to expect too much from meditation, or Eastern cultures that support its origins, a failing often of Western practitioners. He poses an important question for Western minds in asking, if understanding our relatedness in Buddhist terms does not impair a sense of individual freedom.

In chapters four, five and six there is a gradual development from understanding the basic background of Western rational, scientific knowledge in comparison to Asian societal and personal obligations developed out of a culture that subordinates the individual for the sake of others. Using a model developed by Shweder (psychologist) called 'thinking through culture' (p. 35), Aronson investigates the ways in which Westerners understand the 'other' in a cultural context, and how that affects many who he claims suffer 'Dharma loneliness', in practicing with others whom they never come to know. He highlights the difference in practice between content and process, and recommends trying alternative methods of meditation as an experiment in integration, in order to understand one's own needs using psychology as well as traditional practice. The specific alternative he cites (p. 46) is Ira Progoff's system of 'Mantra Crystals', a seven-syllable phrase that reflects mood and can be co-ordinated with the breath. Unusually it requires one to make notes of experiences in meditation as they occur. This outlines the difference in the approaches to attention in therapy and meditation. He goes on to discuss with some clarity the ways in which Westerners assimilate Buddhist practice (using Piaget's theory) putting new information into old patterns, which affectively acts as a barrier to change. This discussion is made more lucid using existing psychological modes of understanding to explain the predisposition of Western practitioners to the needs of a wider psychological understanding of self, and how that creates and affects tensions with traditional Buddhist practice.

Chapters seven to ten deals with self and pride, anger, a middle path for anger and embodied love. He examines pride and ego and the cultural and spiritual differences that are found where, for example, Western self-assertion can often be seen as part of self-expression. For many, according to Aronson, it is a fundamental part of their psychological makeup. He advocates the need to readdress certain attitudes (p. 90)

towards self-assertion and gender hierarchy in light of cultural expectations in the West. He takes time here to present a nuanced understanding of what it means to give up 'I am', both spiritually and psychologically. His treatment of anger deals with a fundamental question, to express it (in psychological terms) or abandon it (in the Buddhist context). This again raises the issue of the tension between traditional Buddhism and Western psychology, when it comes to understanding emotions. The discussion suggests that emotion can be seen as psychologically manifest in Western thought and manifests itself more in physical terms in traditional Asian cultures. The question of intervention leads to a debate about a middle path to anger in the ninth chapter. Here the representative view put forward is to deal with the two extremes of emotion, the 'under-expressive' and the 'over-expressive'. Aronson suggests a middle way of integration using psychological techniques, but is well aware of the danger of 'over-psychologizing the dharma'. He suggests internal and external sharing as a method to greater freedom and liberating insight, (p. 126). In chapter ten he builds on this method by offering and investigation of *mettā* practice and the Mahāyāna development of love and compassion. The use of interrelatedness and how that is viewed relative to Western understandings of rebirth and *karma* also highlights cultural differences in the nature of understanding interdependence and reciprocity. A model of the 'true self/false self' is investigated which delineates a Western propensity to be restrained, emotionally. This feeds into a discussion of how difficult it is for Western practitioners to deal adequately with generosity, without psychological support in developing the mind of enlightenment, common to the *Bodhisattva*.

Chapters eleven to thirteen deal with attachment in various forms, and how to deal with the concept beyond the abstract. A number of misunderstandings arising from a Western view (often verging on the annihilation of activity altogether) are delineated in this section. Fundamental to the discourse is the polemic that is set up by the negative connotation of attachment from a Buddhist view, and the positive notion of psychological attachment theory from a Western standpoint. The differences in approach develop the fixated notion of mind and action in comparison to a non-attached understanding, reducing clinging and

developing through practice, internal freedom. Aronson advocates healthy attachment in adults, acknowledging ourselves and others fully, whilst embracing our differences – ‘connection without fixation’ (p. 161). He draws a clear distinction between detachment – meaning psychological disengagement and the Buddhist usage of nonattachment. In this context the subtleties of Aronson’s writing are in his ability to explain (using examples of realized Tibetan teachers in his own experience) to present the paths to nonattachment, in Theravāda, Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna/Tantrayāna teachings. The tension of the paradox that knows of something in the future (the ‘Enlightened’ state) that is only achieved when one is fully present is discussed at length.

The concluding two chapters address the nonattachment issue using a Western model, which highlights the difficulties Westerners have in developing a secure family attachment, due to cultural and economic pressures, compared to the extended family relations that Asian children grow up with. Thus making Asian children and adults more readily comfortable with a community of practitioners. The paradox here for Western children is in their ability to accept being alone whilst growing up only in the presence of their mothers. This paradox creates, according to Aronson, ‘the creative true self’ (p. 187). The parent’s unintrusive silence helps develop this skill in children. Western psychotherapy opens up a position of mutual understanding with classical Buddhism here. The source of the ‘true self’ of the child is the non-attached parent, who allows the child to feel securely attached (in the psychological sense) by his/her actions. This course of development is in preference to ‘reactive defensive detachment’ caused by injury or abuse as a child, which can later manifest as ‘distance-as-a-refuge’, and find in Buddhism, mistakenly, detachment they perceive to be congruent with their own emotional state. This is not however what is being discussed in the Buddhist presentation. The suggestion is, the need once more for a synergy of both meditation and psychotherapy where this type of problem arises.

Aronson sets out, and largely achieves his aim in presenting a little discussed dimension in the transmission of Buddhism to the West: that of the differences between traditional Buddhist societies, which have for generations developed a psycho-spiritual environment, and a Western

society in which it is not as easy to replicate such an environment. His thorough investigation of this issue supports his contention that 'it is not possible to replicate all segments of that web [language, philosophy and social customs] when we incorporate Buddhist practice into our lives'. The only reservation with the content of this book is for the reader to be aware of the tendency to psychologize the Dharma. It nonetheless rings true empirically of experience in modern Western societies and the encounter with Buddhism.

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Buddhism, War, and Nationalism. Chinese Monks in the Struggle against Japanese Aggressions, 1931-1945. Xue YU. London: Routledge, 2005. xiii, 278 pp. £46.00 (hardcover). ISBN 0415-975115.

In the first three decades of the twentieth century, the very existence of monastic Buddhism in China was threatened by a state hungry for new forms of revenue and public space. Reform-minded officials campaigned successfully for the confiscation of fertile monastic lands, and suggested that monastery buildings might be put to better use as public schools. Just as leading monks began to mount a defence against these new encroachments on their livelihood, Japanese military aggression, culminating in full-scale invasion of China, made matters even worse. Against the backdrop of these desperate times, Xue Yu chronicles the response of monks, nuns and lay Buddhists to the challenge of foreign invasion and the moral quandaries it brought with it. As detailed by Yu, some monks did their best to ignore the unignorable, hiding away in their monasteries and waiting for the dark days of war to pass in the conviction that Buddhist monks should have nothing to do with armies, guns and bloodshed. Indirect evidence suggests that some monks actively opposed monastic participation of any kind in the war (p. 58). Most, however, chose to participate in the war in one way or another.

Many of the monks who did participate in the war went to some lengths to justify what on the surface seems to be a clear violation of the

Buddhist prohibition on killing. Some literally demonized the enemy, saying that, as Buddhists were permitted to fight against demons, they could exterminate Japanese invaders without compunction (p. 48). More commonly, monks claimed that by 'killing one they could save many,' thus rendering shooting a Japanese soldier a 'compassionate act'. Indeed, far from causing bad karma, killing with a compassionate mind was said to reap merit (p. 50). Arguments such as these, occasionally supported by scripture, allowed monks to at least consider a wide range of responses to the Japanese invasion, including armed combat.

With such rhetoric as background, perhaps the most interesting chapters of Yu's book are those that describe the various actions Chinese monks took during the war years either to support resistance to the Japanese military, or, in Japanese-occupied territories, to support the Japanese cause. Following on a long-standing tradition, monks conducted large-scale public rituals to provide spiritual support to the Chinese resistance, though even monks questioned the efficacy of ritual against machine guns, flamethrowers and bombs (p. 72). Others contented themselves with the grim work of burying the war dead. Leading monks threw themselves into another traditional monastic role, soliciting donations for public works, with the funds collected going towards the purchase of fighter planes (p. 117). Probably more important for the war effort than any of these measures were the 'Sangha Rescue Teams' – a sort of Buddhist Red Cross – formed by monks to provide elementary medical care to Chinese soldiers on the battlefield. Yu's discussion of the efforts of leading monks to maintain these 'Rescue Teams' – plagued by insufficient funding, poor organization, and scepticism – are among the most compelling parts of the book. By order of the state, all monks of fighting age were in theory to have received military training, but relatively few monks seem to have joined in the actual fighting. And those who did join the army in general abandoned all outward sign of their original vocation – there were no battalions of *keśāya*-clad infantry. Just as Chinese monks in Nationalist or Communist controlled areas justified support for the war as an expedient means to a loftier end, Chinese monks in Japanese-occupied territories justified their support of the Japanese military (through prayers for the success of the Japanese army and in one case by raising funds to purchase a

Japanese war plane!) by claiming that the Japanese were the only hope for protection of the Dharma from the atheist communists gathering power in the northwest.

Yu relies almost exclusively on Buddhist sources – chiefly the writings of prominent monks and publications in Buddhist journals. While this provides a detailed picture of the Buddhist view of the role of monks in the war, it gives little sense of how others viewed Buddhism at the time, or of the impact of the activities of monks on the war. Though young ‘revolutionary monks’ wrote enthusiastically of their contributions to the war effort, one wonders what weight generals gave to their activities. Nor does Yu examine his sources critically. Hence, we are told that a monk named Hongming who had organized a Sangha Rescue Team ‘became arrogant and began to associate with gangsters’, and later that he had been ‘framed’ when arrested for treason (p. 126). But without confirmation from other sources, what are we to make of such claims? Similarly, references to monks acting as double agents (p. 142) and to Japanese atrocities (p. 147) are based on one biased source each, giving such claims little more credibility than rumour.

Finally, the author was not well served by his publisher. I have never read a book, academic or otherwise, as poorly edited as this one. Run-on sentences, missing prepositions and articles, misspellings, incorrect Romanization of Chinese terms, wrong tenses, lack of subject-verb agreement and generally unidiomatic English run from the first page to the last. Scarcely a page can be found without jarring errors. Apparently, Routledge did no editing whatsoever of a manuscript written in ungrammatical English by a non-native speaker. The poor English is extremely distracting, even when the general meaning is clear. It is nothing short of disgraceful that Routledge should publish a book in this condition. This complete lack of editing is unfortunate as the book contains much valuable information on a fascinating period of Chinese Buddhist history.

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OBITUARY

HEINZ BECHERT

26 June 1932 – 14 June 2005

Following two strokes, the world of academe has lost the European doyen of Buddhist studies in the fields of South-East Asia (principally Sri Lanka) and Central Asian lexicography.

Professor Dr Bechert inherited the mantle of Ernst Waldschmidt, continuing his studies and initiating new ventures at Göttingen University. Their most notable, enduring and ongoing serial publications are the *Sanskrihandschriften aus den Turfanfunden* (9 fascicles, 1965–2004, with Bechert co-editing Nos. 6–9) and the accompanying *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch der buddhistischen Texte aus den Turfanfunden* (17 fascicles, 1973–2004, with Bechert supervising the meticulous work of an editorial team). Sponsored by the Kommission für buddhistische Studien of Göttingen's Akademie der Wissenschaften, no less than four symposia were convened by Bechert between 1974 and 1988. From the titles of the published Proceedings (edited by him), these spanned the fields of *Buddhism in Ceylon and Studies on Religious Syncretism in Buddhist Countries* (1978), *The Language of the Earliest Buddhist Tradition* (1980), *Zur Schulzugehörigkeit von Werken der Hīnayāna-Literatur* (2 vols, 1985–87) and *The Dating of the Historical Buddha* (3 vols, 1991–97). To reach a wider readership, the English-language entries and most of the German entries in translation also appeared in a single volume entitled *When Did the Buddha Live? The Controversy on the Dating of the Historical Buddha* (Delhi, 1995). Moreover, Bechert not only contributed to all these Proceedings but also penned numerous articles, particularly on the last-named symposium to relevant journals around the world. Also under his editorship and the auspices of the Akademie, the *Bibliographische Erfassung der buddhistischen Sanskrit-Literatur* was launched in 1972, although to date only two surveys have actually appeared: Akira Yuyama's *Systematische*

Übersicht über die buddhistische Sanskrit-Literatur I. Vinaya-Texte (1979) and Ernst Steinkeller and M. Torsten Much's *Texte der erkenntnistheoretischen Schule der Buddhismus* (1995).

Heinz Bechert was born in Munich but spent his youth in Rosenheim (near Salzburg in Austria). In 1949 he returned to Munich where his father hoped that he would also qualify as a lawyer. However, the son enrolled at Munich University where he read Classical Philology and History, Indology and Tibetology (1950–56) and at Hamburg (1954), his tutors including Helmut Hoffmann and Helmut Humbach. He obtained his doctorate from Munich in 1956 for an edition of the *Anavataptagāthā* and *Sthaviragāthā* published under the title *Bruchstücke buddhistischer Verssammlungen aus zentralasiatischen Sanskrithandschriften* (Berlin, 1961). He served as a research assistant at Saarbrücken (1956–61), Research Fellow at Colombo (1958–59) and a research assistant at Mainz (1961–64) from where he was 'habilitated' by his thesis on the 'Geschichte der Sanskritliteratur bei den Singhalesen'; this was revised for publication as *Eine regionale hochsprachliche Tradition in Südasiens: Sanskrit-Literatur bei den Buddhistischen Singhalesen* (Vienna, 2005). Appointed Reader at Mainz, after six months he was invited to join the Oriental faculty at Göttingen and, in 1965, succeeded Waldschmidt as Head of the Seminar für Indologie und Buddhismuskunde. Later, he was twice invited to Yale as Visiting Professor (1969–70 and 1974–75).

Regarding South-East Asian textual studies, he has, for example, co-edited *Singhalesische Handschriften* (3 fascicles, Wiesbaden, 1969–97) and *Burmese Manuscripts I* (Wiesbaden, 1979 – upto 2004 a further 4 fascicles have been compiled by different authors); these works were based on the Seminar's library of 30,000 volumes. He also edited *Sanskrittexte aus Ceylon*, including some of the prescribed texts in the monastic curriculum (Munich, 1962), and, with Heinz Braun, *Pāli Nīti Texts of Burma* (PTS, 1981). His magnum opus is undoubtedly the definitive survey of *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft in den Ländern des Theravāda-Buddhismus* (3 vols: I Frankfurt-Hamburg, 1966; II and III Wiesbaden, 1967–73; I Grundlagen. Ceylon (Sri Lanka), repr. Göttingen 1988; II Birma, Kambodscha, Laos, Thailand, rev. ed. Göttingen, 2000), the most comprehensive study in this field.

He contributed numerous papers on the Theravāda Buddhist culture and institutions, past and present, in South and South-East Asia (including Nepal, Bangladesh and Indonesia) together with the indigenous and Sanskrit literature of Sri Lanka, supplemented with essays on what he termed 'Buddhist Modernism' (the preferred term to the somewhat misleading 'Protestant Buddhism' adopted by other scholars). To him, it denoted 'modern Buddhist revivalism', applied to the context of post-colonial societies of which that of Sri Lanka was the pre-eminent example. He outlined twelve features which encapsulate this essentially twentieth-century phenomenon: (1) a tendency towards relying on an independent and non-traditional understanding of the Buddha's teaching as found in the early sources; (2) a process of 'demythologisation' of Buddhism; (3) the characterisation of Buddhism as a 'scientific religion'; (4) the emphasis on Buddhism as a 'philosophy' rather than a creed or religion; (5) on its being a 'philosophy of optimism' in contrast to Western criticism of 'Buddhist pessimism'; (6) in terms of more practical issues the emphasis on 'activism' as forming an important feature of the Buddhist way of life; (7) in terms of social relations setting great store by 'social work'; (8) the claim by modernists that Buddhism 'has always included a social philosophy' which is described as a 'philosophy of equality'; (9) the demand that a Buddhist society should be democratic; (10) the emergence of Buddhist nationalism; (11) a tendency of modern Buddhists towards 'rewriting history in accordance with their particular understanding of national history'; (12) the revival and popularisation of Buddhist meditation as an important development in Buddhist religious practice. He followed up this formula by highlighting 'new trends in contemporary Buddhism': (1) its contribution to environmentalism (the worldwide Green Movement); (2) emphasising 'the Buddhist concept of universal tolerance'; (3) reacting against modernism by 'reasserting the teachings and values of traditional Buddhism'; (4) attempting a 'radical return to the roots of Buddhism'; (5) aiming at the 'renewal of the ideals of the forest-dwelling monks'; (6) reviving *samatha* meditation (*vipassanā* having already become part and parcel of standard Buddhist modernism); (7) the 'revival of ritualism and spread of Tantrayāna' in countries such as Taiwan, Singapore or in Buddhist communities in the West; (8) the emergence of a 'new type of Buddhist

syncretism, viz. the combination of various Buddhist traditions'; (9) a 'tendency towards a "re-mythologisation"'; (10) a strong tendency towards the 'reassertion of women's rights in contemporary Buddhism'; the attempts and subsequent actions taken to restore the Order of fully-ordained nuns in both the Theravāda and Vajrayāna.

Bechert also turned his attention to the broad field of Indian Buddhology (e.g. he co-edited, with Georg von Simson, *Einführung in die Indologie*, Darmstadt, 1979, rev. ed., 1993) and the Sanskrit text-based remains of the former Buddhist kingdoms of the Silk Road.

With regard to the *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch*, it was decided to limit the material used to the Buddhist texts from the Turfan collection (acquired by the four German expeditions to the modern Chinese province of Xinjiang before the First World War) and to include the evaluation of canonical and semi-canonical texts only. Thus, *kāvya* texts, including *stotras*, fragments of Buddhist dramas and similar material would be held in reserve for a possible, future second part of the dictionary. As for the textual material which is included in the dictionary, the following decisions were made: with two exceptions of the Sarvāstivādin *Prātimokṣasūtra* and the Sanskrit-Tocharian bilingual text of the *Karmavācānā*, only published texts are quoted. It is planned as a dictionary of the Sarvāstivādin texts to which most of the Central Asian Hīnayānist Sanskrit texts belong, but it also includes a few Mūlasarvāstivāda and Dharmaguptaka fragments. The citation of other Central Asian material, including Mahāyāna works, *dhāraṇī* and *mantra* texts, etc., was discontinued after fascicle two in order to arrive at a more homogeneous selection of texts. Starting with fascicle four, the published Central Asian MSS from other collections in France, England, Russia and Japan were also evaluated. In this way, the dictionary will constitute a thesaurus of all known Sarvāstivāda texts. During a meeting of the supervisory committee in 1982, it was also decided that the Mūlasarvāstivādin Abhidharma texts should be similarly evaluated.

Bechert contributed a guide to this ambitious lexicographical project, 'Das 'Sanskrit-Wörterbuch der Turfan-Funde' als Hilfsmittel für die Zentralasienforschung' (Klaus Röhrborn [Head of Dept of Turkology and later successor to Bechert as Editor-in-Chief of the *SWTF*] and W. Veenker, ed., *Sprachen des Buddhismus in Zentralasien*, Wiesbaden, 1983).

His edition of the 'Marburger Fragmente' of the *Saddharma-puṇḍarikasūtra* (NAWG, 1972) constituted a pioneer piece of detective work. He established that (1) this text had been originally transmitted orally in a Middle Indic (i.e. Prakrit) language before being committed to writing; (2) it comprised only two recensions (Nepalese-Kashmiri and Central Asian) by proving that the Gilgit mss represented an earlier stage of the Nepalese version; and (3) five incomplete Central Asian folios belonged to a single ms, different portions of which had been sold to the Russian, Aurel Stein, German and Otani expeditions.

Insofar as textual studies are concerned, attention should be drawn to his summaries, *viz.*, 'The Importance of Central Asian Manuscript Finds for Sanskrit Philology' (*Proceedings of the First International Sanskrit Conference* [New Delhi, 1972], ed. V. Raghavan, Section Two, Part 1, 1975; *Journal of the Bihar (and Orissa) Research Society* 63-64, 1977-78), 'Cataloguing of Buddhist Manuscripts from Sri Lanka, from Burma and from Central Asia in Germany' (*International Association of the Vrindaban Research Institute Bulletin* 4, SOAS, 1978), 'Central Asian Manuscripts and Buddhist Studies' (*All India Frontier Bauddha Sammelan. International Buddhist Conference*, ed. Lodi G. Gyari, Delhi, 1978), 'The Catalogue of Sinhala Manuscripts in Germany and the Present State of Cataloguing Sinhala Manuscripts' (*Spolia Zeylanica* 35, Colombo, 1980) and 'Die Handschriftensammlung des Seminars für Indologie und Buddhismuskunde' (*250 Jahre George-August-Universität Göttingen*, 1987). Related literary ventures include extensive entries on Pali and Sinhala Buddhist texts (*Kindlers Literatur Lexikon* 5-7, Zürich, 1969-72), the religious traditions of India, Tibet and South-East Asia (*Taschenlexikon. Religion und Theologie*, ed. Erwin Fahlbusch, 4 vols, Göttingen, 1971, 5 vols, 1983) and the invaluable research tool distilled from *A Critical Pāli Dictionary* and those text editions and dictionaries he compiled, *Abkürzungsverzeichnis zur buddhistischen Literatur in Indien und Südostasien* (Göttingen, 1990).

On the occasion of his sixtieth and sixty-fifth birthdays, commemorative volumes were produced, respectively, *Studien zur Indologie und Buddhismuskunde* (ed. Reinhold Grünendahl, Jens-Uwe Hartmann and Petra Kieffer-Pülz, Bonn, 1993) and *Bauddhavidyāsudhākaraḥ* (ed. P. Kieffer-

Pülz and J-U. Hartmann, Swisttal-Odendorf, 1997). These tomes include the subject's vast bibliography.

From his youth, Bechert's prime pastime was mountaineering: unless he was undertaking fieldwork in Sri Lanka or South-East Asia, he was to be found climbing in the Alps. Like Anton Gueth (who became the first German *bhikkhu*, Nyānatiloka), he also played the violin and participated in an orchestra conducted by one of his tutors, Hoffmann.

He leaves behind a widow, Marianne (née Würzburger), who acted as his 'manager', secretary and chauffeur. His mourning card was adorned with the Dharmacakra flanked by the two deer as at Sarnath. However, since the funeral was a strictly family affair, we may never know whether he actually professed Buddhism – such declaration being almost inconceivable in his public position as perhaps was realised by T. W. Rhys Davids (the founder of the Pali Text Society) over a hundred years ago.

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