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Editorial

Richard Gombrich

This month will see the launch of a major project in Pali pedagogy: the online Pali course by Alexander Wynne and Alex Wrona. Since this is the third instalment in my attempt to popularise the study of Pali, let me briefly explain the history of that attempt.

From 1965 to 2004 I held positions at Oxford University to teach Sanskrit and Pali, with a strong emphasis on Sanskrit. When I took mandatory retirement on reaching the age of 67, I reflected on why I was dissatisfied with my record as a Pali teacher, despite having had students who were intelligent and gifted, and for the most part highly motivated. The level of their attainment at the end of a two-year course had been judged by a final written examination, tedious for examiner and examined alike.

I felt that several things had been less than ideal. Let me summarise the three which I find the most important: (1) use of time; (2) learning inappropriately in terms of both goals and methods; (3) learning in isolation.

1. By a tradition which would have been difficult to change, the Pali course lasted two years. The University had/has three terms a year, each lasting eight weeks, with two vacations of six weeks and a summer vacation of sixteen weeks. By the same tradition, Pali was taught throughout each term twice a week for one hour. So the Pali course consisted of sixteen contact hours per term, forty-eight hours per year, and ninety-six hours in all. Surely that should be enough to get a good grounding in the language?

The snag is the spacing. Half way through the course, there was a sixteen-week break, long enough to forget almost everything learnt so far. In theory, which generations ago may have had some remote connection to practice, students continued to study (mainly by themselves) during the vacations, but in those days social and economic conditions were very different, and in modern times almost all students find it necessary to take paid employment in the vacations. (Some take paid employment even in term time, even though many universities try to discourage this.)

It is clearly inefficient to study any subject with so spaced out a timetable, and this is likely to apply powerfully to learning a language, the acquisition of which has to be cumulative, particularly in the early stages. Reforming this dysfunctional timetable is not possible so long as achievement is measured by a test on a specified day at the very end of the course.

2. The goal of almost everyone who wants to learn Pali is – and should be – to read the teachings of the Buddha. Of course, most people begin by reading them in translation; but close study requires reading them in the original Pali. Often one learns a language because one wants to be able to speak it, understand it when spoken, write it and read it, but to Pali only the last applies, which means that it makes sense to leave aside several aspects – even if most people will want to know how to pronounce it. As for method, modern technology means that the traditional emphasis on memorisation is outmoded: dictionaries are even more accessible now that they have been digitised, and even grammatical forms can be assimilated by dint of meeting them constantly while reading, rather than spending time and effort on rote learning at the outset.
3. Learning is enhanced if students work together. The present system, focussed on examinations, promotes competition, which is far less efficient than cooperation – partly because most people find cooperation more enjoyable, but more importantly because many minds are better than one. It is possible to get members of a university Pali class to do some work together, but rarely outside term time.

There were other reasons why I found it necessary to write a new Pali course. For example, they deal too little with syntax -- Wilhelm Geiger's authoritative *Pali Grammar* has none at all! -- and their account of the use of the dative is usually wrong. But this is not the place to explore these details.

I began my attempted improvements by holding residential courses for 12 days. The first ones were in Sharpham in Devon, later ones in Oxford. Residential courses were of course particularly successful in tackling problem (3) above, creating an *esprit de corps* among the students. Quite soon we added a significant improvement: Mr (later Dr) Tomoyoki Kono joined us as assistant teacher; he specialised in giving individual attention to the slower students, so that it became rare for anyone to be left behind.

The main drawback of the residential courses was financial: both students and teachers had to pay for board and lodging, and travel to the course venue was too costly for most overseas aspirants. In 2015 a pupil at an Oxford course, Ms Ilona Budapesti, persuaded me to make a second attempt by giving the course **live on-line**, thus in effect opening it up to pupils all over the world; she also demonstrated how to do it, using Zoom. We experimented with different timings and formats, and more or less settled on a course given over 20 days, during which pupils were also expected to do some homework. There was teaching for about half the day on 18 days. I began each teaching day with a lecture, and then students were put into small groups who worked together; there were one or two assistant teachers who visited the groups and helped both groups and individuals, as required. This variety of teaching provision was very effective. We found, however, that there is no one perfect solution: take up of these courses soon became too meagre for them to be economically viable. For some, no doubt, they were too expensive, and probably others found it impractical to dedicate a block of three weeks to almost full time study.

It now seems that we should make a third attempt by offering courses which are easier to attend, because the timing is left to the pupil; they therefore have to be recorded rather than live. Thus they can also be considerably cheaper. Initially we lose all the ways we earlier devised for coping with problem (3), but in the course of time we may introduce such modifications as tutorials, for single pupils or groups. The material is based on the existent OCBS course book (which is copyright), but in the absence of live teaching that has to be heavily supplemented by further detail, and particularly by exercises. Both

Wynne and Wrona have taught on the live on-line course and thus know the material well.

We welcome feedback, and hope that at last we may have hit on a way to spread an understanding of Pali much more widely over the world.

A note on *Niṣṭhānirvāṇaḥ* in the Sanskrit *Heart Sutra*

Jayarava Attwood¹

Abstract

Section VI of Conze's edition of the *Heart Sutra*, containing the word *niṣṭhānirvāṇaḥ* or perhaps *niṣṭhānirvāṇaprāptaḥ*, has given translators and commentators considerable difficulty. *Nirvāṇa* being a neuter noun, the word *niṣṭhānirvāṇaḥ*, in the masculine, has to be a *bahuvrīhi* compound. Conze has divided *niṣṭhānirvāṇaḥ* and two other adjectives from the noun they describe—i.e. *bodhisatvaḥ*²—by inserting a sentence break between them. Removing the extraneous full stop and reuniting the two halves of the sentence resolves many problems with the passage.

Introduction

The word *niṣṭhānirvāṇa* occurs in Section VI of Conze's editions of the *Heart Sutra* (1948, 1967, 1975). Jan Nattier comments,

“... the Chinese expression 究竟涅槃 (lit. ultimate[ly] *nirvāṇa*) is attested in a number of other Buddhist texts, and might well be described as standard (even idiomatic) Buddhist Chinese, while the corresponding Sanskrit phrase *niṣṭhā-nirvāṇa*... strikes the reader as overly abbreviated at best, and has required a certain amount

¹ I'm grateful to Jeffrey Kotyk and Thomas Quinn for their helpful comments on this article.

² In this article I favour the Buddhist Sanskrit spelling *bodhisatva* except where directly quoting another work which uses the (over-corrected) classical spelling *bodhisattva*.

of textual supplementation not only in the English translations of Edward Conze, but even in some of the Sanskrit manuscript copies themselves” (Nattier 1992: 178).³

With reference to “textual supplementation”, Nattier goes on to describe in a note how some Nepalese manuscripts add the verb *prāpṇoti* “he attains” and some add the past participle *prāptaḥ* to the compound giving *niṣṭhānirvāṇaprāptaḥ* (cf. Conze 1948: 152, n.44). The versions of the *Heart Sutra* in the Tibetan *Kanjur* do the same. Conze’s (1975) translation is “in the end he attains to *nirvāṇa*” where “attains” suggests a finite verb *prāpṇoti* but in fact translates the past participle *-prāptaḥ*. Huifeng (2014) has alerted us to deeper problems with Section VI, but in this note I will show that there is a simple way to resolve the problems regarding *niṣṭhānirvāṇaḥ* in Conze’s Edition as it stands.

Conze’s earlier text of Section VI (1948) reads:

*Tasmāc Chāriputra aprāptitvād bodhisattvasya prajñāpāramitām āśritya viharaty acittāvaraṇaḥ. Cittāvaraṇa-nāstitvād atrasto viparyāsa-atikrānto niṣṭhā-nirvāṇaḥ.*⁴

No translation is given with this edition, but a translation of this wording apparently appears in Conze (1973: 143):

“Therefore, O Śāriputra, owing to a bodhisattva’s indifference to any kind of personal attainment, and through his having relied on the perfection of wisdom, he dwells without thought-coverings. In the absence of thought-coverings he has not been made to tremble, he has overcome what can upset, in the end sustained by Nirvana.”

Here Conze is translating *niṣṭhā* “state, condition; completion, perfection” as “sustained”. This translation and the concept of someone being “sustained by Nirvana” are both problematic, but are not repeated elsewhere. In his translation of the extended version of the *Heart Sutra* text in the same volume, Conze (1973: 141) has translated not *cittāvaraṇa* “thought-coverings” but *cittālabana* “an objective support to his thought” and he lists *cittāvaraṇa* as a variant reading. The confusion between these two terms is one of the few textual problems discussed by Conze (1948: 156-7). It falls to Huifeng (2014) to resolve the

³ I have replaced Nattier’s Wade-Giles Romanisation with the appropriate Chinese characters.

⁴ Conze 1967 has a full stop after *viparyāsa-atikrānto*, which seems to be a typographical error.

ambiguity by showing that neither Sanskrit word is a likely translation of the underlying Chinese phrase. I wish to put off pursuing this thread for another article in preparation. Regarding the last phrase, Conze notes that there is a variant reading “and he has attained to final Nirvana” (1973: 141 n.4). This appears to be a translation of *niṣṭhā-nirvāṇa-prāptaḥ*.

In the 1967 revised edition of the Sanskrit text, *bodhisattvasya* is amended to *bodhisattvo* (though *sandhi* rules legislate *bodhisattvaḥ*), and *nishṭhā-nirvāṇaḥ* becomes *niṣṭhā-nirvāṇa-prāptaḥ*. The Sanskrit text and translation that appear in Conze’s popular *Buddhist Wisdom Books* (1957 and 1975: 93) reflect a hybrid of the two versions of his edition:

Tasmāc Chāriputra aprāptivād bodhisattvasya prajñāpāramitām
āśritya viharaty acittāvaraṇaḥ. Cittāvaraṇa-nāstivād atrasto
viparyāsa-atikrānto nishṭhā-nirvāṇa-prāptaḥ

Therefore, O Sariputra, it is because of his non-attainmentness that a Bodhisattva, through having relied on the perfection of wisdom, dwells without thought-coverings. In the absence of thought-coverings he has not been made to tremble, he has overcome what can upset, and in the end he attains to Nirvana.

Nor have other translators and commentators done any better in resolving these issues.⁵

Resolving Conze’s Difficulties

My starting point in parsing the second sentence in Section VI is *niṣṭhānirvāṇaḥ*. The noun *nirvāṇa* is grammatically neuter (*nirvāṇam*). Here, however, it has a masculine nominative singular case ending (*-aḥ*). This means that we must unequivocally read *niṣṭhā-nirvāṇaḥ* as a *bahuvrīhi* compound. As Arthur Macdonnell says, “These compounds are essentially adjectives agreeing with a substantive expressed or understood.” (1926: 175). A *bahuvrīhi* compound takes the gender, case, and number of the substantive it describes. Thus, we expect a noun or pronoun in the masculine nominative singular. However, in this sentence, there is no such noun or pronoun. There are three other words in the sentence. One is *cittāvaraṇa-nāstivād*, which is acting as a qualifier, in the

⁵ See for example, Conze 1973, 1975; Wayman 1984, Nattier 1992, Pine 2004, Jones 2012, Tanahashi 2014, and Hanh 1998, 2017.

ablative of cause, linking this sentence to the previous one. The other words are two more adjectives *atrastaḥ* and *viparyāsātīkrāntaḥ* which we expect to apply to the same (missing) substantive. Notice that the sentence has no verb nor any word acting in the place of a verb. It is not a proper sentence at all. No wonder this sentence causes difficulties and no wonder there is a temptation to add a verb or verbal derivative to make the sentence whole.

However, even with the present sentence structure, there is an *implied* substantive. When Conze translates “*he* has not been made to tremble” the “*he*” is obviously the *bodhisatva* in the previous sentence. There are two simple ways to make this apparent in Sanskrit. For example, the translator or editor might have added a pronoun such as *saḥ*, to the second sentence, e.g. *Cittāvaraṇa-nāstītvāt so atrasto...* Even so, the missing verb is still a problem. While some manuscripts add *prāpṇoti*, this does not work. The verb is transitive, something must *be attained*, but in this sentence, the quality we might expect the *bodhisatva* to attain— *niṣṭhā-nirvāṇaḥ*—is in the masculine nominative singular, meaning that it cannot be the object of the verb. The only verb we could reasonably add would be a copula, i.e. \sqrt{as} or $\sqrt{bhū}$.

The other way to resolve the problem is to remove the full stop after *acittāvaraṇaḥ* and make it a single sentence. By doing this *niṣṭhānirvāṇaḥ* and the other *bahuvrīhi* compounds come into an unambiguous grammatical relationship with *bodhisatvaḥ* and nothing need be added. What’s more, if *niṣṭhānirvāṇaḥ* is a *bahuvrīhi* describing *bodhisatvaḥ*, then no (extra) verb is required. Moreover, nothing is gained by adding *prāptaḥ* to the compound, because having the *attainment* of *nirvāṇa* as one’s ultimate goal is no different from having *nirvāṇa* as one’s ultimate goal. Translating the resulting sentence becomes a straightforward and unambiguous task.

In summary, there is only one sentence here, with *bodhisatvaḥ* as the agent (or subject), *viharati* as the main verb, and a string of adjectives of the *bodhisatva* following the verb. The removal of the extraneous full stop resolves most of the problems that have bedevilled both editors and translators of this section for decades.

Why Was There a Full Stop in the First Place?

The relationship of adjectives to nouns is so very basic in Sanskrit that we may wonder why Conze did not see it (and why none of the many scholars who have followed him also didn’t see it). Does Conze leave any clues as to why he

breaks the sentence where he does? His notes in 1948/1967 unhelpfully avoid any mention of punctuation. Of the manuscripts from Conze's (1967) list that I have access to, we find:

Ja has no punctuation marks.

Jb has a *daṇḍa* where Conze has a full stop.

Cb, Cc, Ce, Cg, Nb, Ne, Nm, and Nn⁶ do not have a *daṇḍa* here.

Two (badly corrupted) manuscripts have a *daṇḍa* displaced by one word.

Ni: *viḥarati* | *cittalamba*

Nk: *acittārambāna mātratvāt* | *anuśapa*

Cd and Nh are partial and lack this passage.

On the whole, then, Conze's sources seem to point away from breaking the sentence where he does. It is significant that Ja—the Hōryū-ji manuscript, the oldest of the Sanskrit sources—lacks any punctuation, as do the earliest Chinese versions of the text. It reminds us that punctuation is a relatively recent invention that postdates the composition of the *Heart Sutra*. However, it is extremely unlikely that Conze had direct access to the Hōryū-ji manuscript. In all likelihood, he was working from Müller's diplomatic edition, which was punctuated by Müller. Conze's full stop corresponds to where Müller has inserted a *daṇḍa* i.e. ...*acittāvaraṇaḥ* | *cittāvaraṇa-nāstitvād*... (Müller 1884: 50). One might argue that there is some kind of hiatus here, even if it is not a sentence break, so a *daṇḍa* might be appropriate, but Müller clearly translates it as a full stop (1884: 50). In T251, by contrast, the Taishō editors have inserted a semi-colon in the corresponding place, though we note that the sentence structure appears to be very different in Chinese.⁷ If anything, Müller's *daṇḍa* seems to have confused the issue.

Conclusion

⁶ This manuscript, British Library Manuscript EAP676/2/5, was not available to Conze, but has been discovered since. This note is based on my transcription and diplomatic edition. <https://prajnaparamitahridaya.wordpress.com/2015/12/01/british-library-manuscript-eap67625-nn/>

⁷ 心無罣礙；無罣礙故 (8.848.c15-6)

Section VI of Conze's Edition of the *Heart Sutra* should be minimally amended by removing the full stop after *acittāvaraṇaḥ* and merging the two sentences into one. Following the argument for it in Attwood (2017), I spell *bodhisatva* the way it is spelt in all *Prajñāpāramitā* manuscripts, with one *t*. This is a ubiquitous *feature* of Buddhist Sanskrit, rather than a bug, and the hyper-correction to *bodhisattva* is unjustified. The amended text reads:

*Tasmācchāriputra aprāptivād bodhisatvaḥ prajñāpāramitām
āśritya viharaty acittāvaraṇaḥ cittāvaraṇa-nāstivād atrasto
viparyāsa-atikrānto niṣṭhā-nirvāṇaḥ.*

I would translate this as:

Therefore, Śāriputra, in the absence of attainment, the bodhisatva who is without mental obstructions dwells having relied on perfect understanding, [and] being free of mental obstructions he is unafraid, overcomes delusions, and his extinction is complete.

Removing the full stop from Conze's edition solves the immediate problems with respect to *niṣṭhānirvāṇa* and Section VI. Taken together with the revision in Attwood 2015, the text now appears to be parsable and translatable, though Section VI could not be described as felicitous or elegant.

Although the grammatical problems are easily recognised and resolved, doing so raises a more difficult issue. Conze's faulty edition and the various faulty translations based on it are widely used, even *revered*, in the Buddhist world. Some of the translators and commentators are high-status individuals, both in their own milieux (whether religious or academic) and in the wider world. In an ideal world, persuading scholars is simply a matter of stating the facts as clearly as possible and the truth will out. Of course, it is never as simple as this. Politics is unavoidable when correcting a text like the *Heart Sutra*. My standing in the eyes of other Buddhist Studies scholars will always be a factor in how my work is assessed (hence the case for *anonymous* peer-review). The scholarly discussion is simplicity itself in contrast with persuading high-status religious and their followers of the same facts. Such attempts invoke all the long-held anxieties that Buddhists have around the issues of authority and legitimacy. High-status religious rarely admit to having made a mistake, especially where it concerns doctrine and the interpretation of core religious texts like the *Heart Sutra*. Buddhists often informally maintain a version of Papal infallibility

with respect to matters of doctrine. Respected leaders *cannot* make the kind of mistake that I am outlining in this article and therefore they do not. On the other hand, Thich Nhat Hanh has recently revised his own translation of the *Heart Sutra* because of a perceived internal contradiction in the Sanskrit text.⁸ While scholars typically try to shy away from such political issues, in this case, they cannot be avoided. My main concern is to eliminate the mistakes introduced into this important Buddhist text by Dr Conze as editor and translator. Nevertheless, if I am right, then a lot of other people are or have been wrong.

However, I am also acutely aware that Huifeng's analysis of this passage (2014) points to deeper *textual* problems. The original translation from Chinese into Sanskrit was flawed in several ways. There are problems with the words *apṛāptitvād*, *viharati*, *cittāvaraṇaḥ*, *-nāstivād*, and probably also with *niṣṭhānirvāṇa*. Also, while the words used are similar, the syntax of the Chinese versions of this passage appears to involve a finite verb with direct and indirect objects rather than three *bahuvrīhi* compounds. This note is thus preliminary to a thorough-going review of Section VI in a future full-length article, with a view to revising the Sanskrit translation of the *Heart Sutra*.

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⁸ The new translation was announced on his website in September 2014 and published in 2017.

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A comparison of the Pāli and Chinese versions of *Okkantika Saṃyutta*, *Uppāda Saṃyutta*, *Kilesa Saṃyutta* and *Rāhula Saṃyutta*, early Buddhist discourses on entering, arising, affliction, and the Venerable Rāhula

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Abstract

This article first examines the textual structure of the *Okkantika Saṃyutta* (no. 25), *Uppāda Saṃyutta* (no. 26), *Kilesa Saṃyutta* (no. 27), and *Rāhula Saṃyutta* (no. 18) of the Pāli *Saṃyutta-nikāya* in conjunction with their Chinese counterparts in the *Saṃyuktāgama* (Taishō vol. 2, no. 99). Then it compares the main teachings contained in the two versions. It reveals similarities but also significant differences in both structure and doctrinal content, thus advancing the historical/critical study of early Buddhist doctrine in this area.

Introduction

The Pāli *Okkantika Saṃyutta* (“connected with entering”), *Uppāda Saṃyutta* (“connected with arising”), *Kilesa Saṃyutta* (“connected with affliction”) and *Rāhula Saṃyutta* (“connected with the Venerable Rāhula”), nos. 25, 26, 27, and 18 in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* (henceforth abbreviated SN) correspond to discourses nos. 892, 899 900, and 897 respectively in the Chinese *Za ahan jing* 雜阿含經 (*Saṃyuktāgama*, henceforth abbreviated SA, Taishō vol. 2, no. 99). These four Pāli *saṃyuttas* can be treated together, because they are all presented with the same arrangement based on major doctrinal groups, and differing only in their

themes. All of these texts contain early Buddhist teachings on the sense spheres, elements and the five aggregates.

In this article the following issues will be addressed. Regarding the textual structure of the Pāli and Chinese collections just listed, why is it that the Pāli versions are presented as four different *saṃyuttas* located in two different *vaggas* (*Khandha* and *Nidāna*), while the Chinese versions are presented as four different discourses? Regarding the content (doctrinal groups), what are the major differences and similarities between the two traditions?

In the following I first examine the textual structure of the two versions. Then I compare the main teachings contained in them, making use of new editions of the *Saṃyuktāgama*: Yinshun's *Za ahan jinglun huibian* 雜阿含經論會編 [*Combined Edition of Sūtra and Śāstra of the Saṃyuktāgama*] (abbreviated CSA) and the Foguang *Tripiṭaka: Za ahan jing* (abbreviated FSA).¹ This will reveal similarities and significant differences in structure and doctrinal content, thus advancing the study of early Buddhist teachings in this area.

Textual structure

The Pāli SN 25 *Okkantika Saṃyutta*, SN 26 *Uppāda Saṃyutta*, and SN 27 *Kilesa Saṃyutta* comprise ten discourses/*suttas* each, located in SN section (3), *Khandha Vagga*; but the Pāli SN 18 *Rāhula Saṃyutta* has twenty-two discourses, located in SN section (2), *Nidāna Vagga*. These four Pāli *saṃyuttas* can be treated together, because they are all presented with an identical structure and style based on ten major doctrinal groups, and differing only in their distinctive topics/subject matter. The ten shared doctrinal groups are: 1. the six internal sense spheres, 2. the six external sense spheres, 3. the six classes of consciousness, 4. ... of contact, 5. ... of feeling, 6. ... of perception, 7. ... of volition, 8. the six classes of craving, 9. the six elements, and 10. the five aggregates. Thus these four Pāli *saṃyuttas* (i.e. SN 25, 26, 27, and 18) are presented in two different locations (i.e. (3) *Khandha Vagga* and (2) *Nidāna Vagga*), although they are constructed with a common structure and style (cf. Bodhi 2000, 531, 849).

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¹ These two new editions incorporate textual corrections, modern Chinese punctuation, comments, and up-to-date information on Pāli and other textual counterparts, including different Chinese versions of the text.

These four Pāli *saṃyuttas* correspond to the Chinese SA 892, SA 899, SA 900, and SA 897 respectively. Each of them has as its Chinese parallel just one single discourse, not a *saṃyukta*, a collection of discourses.

These four Chinese SA discourses were translated by Guṇabhadra in 435-436 CE² from now lost Indic-language originals. They do not have titles. In the *Combined Edition of Sūtra and Śāstra of the Saṃyuktāgama* version, they are treated as part of a grouping whose title, *Ru-jie-yin Xiangying/Saṃyukta* 入界陰相應 (“Connected with Sense Spheres, Elements, and Aggregates”), was supplied by the editor, Yinshun.³ This Chinese *saṃyukta* comprises ten discourses (SA 892-901) located in the *Zayin song* 雜因誦 (“Causal Condition Section”), SA section (3), which corresponds to the Pāli *Nidāna Vagga*, SN section (2). According to Yinshun, this Chinese *Ru-jie-yin Saṃyukta* pertains to *Fo/Rulai suoshuo song* 佛/如來所說誦 (“Section Spoken by the Buddha” Skt. *Buddha-bhāṣita*),⁴ of the *vyākaraṇa-aṅga* (P. *veyyākaraṇa-aṅga*) portion of SA/SN.⁵

There is no clear reason evident in the texts why SN 25, 26, and 27 should be located in section (3) *Khandha Vagga* rather than in section (4) *Salāyatana Vagga*, or in section (2) *Nidāna Vagga*, which includes SN 14 *Dhātu Saṃyutta* (“Connected with elements”); and why SN 18 should be located in section (2) *Nidāna Vagga* rather than in section (3) *Khandha Vagga*. The same issue also applies to the Chinese SA version of the four discourses located in section (3) *Zayin song*.

² Nagasaki (2004, 13). Glass (2007, 38) considers that Guṇabhadra was probably not the translator but rather the one who recited the Indic text.

³ See CSA i 47, 51 (in “Za ahan jing bulei zhi zhengbian 雜阿含經部類之整編 [Re-edition of the Grouped Structure of SA]”), and iii 553-559; Choong (2000, 21, 245).

⁴ Hosoda (1989, 542); Choong (2000, 17, n. 5); Chung (2008, 190). Cf. Mukai (1985, 13, nn. 29, 30).

⁵ Choong (2000, 9-11, 17, 21, 245). *Vyākaraṇa* is one of the three *aṅgas* represented in the structure of SA/SN: *sūtra* (P. *sutta*) “discourse” (short, simple prose), *geya* (*geyya*) “stanza” (verse mixed with prose), and *vyākaraṇa* (*veyyākaraṇa*) “exposition”. These three *aṅgas* are the first three of nine types of early Buddhist text (*navāṅga*) classified according to their style and form. They are regarded by some scholars as the earliest ones to have appeared, in sequence, in the formation of the early Buddhist texts. Also, only these first three *aṅgas* are mentioned in MN 122 (*Mahāsuññatā-sutta*): III, 115 and its Chinese parallel, MA 191: T1, 739c. This suggests the possibility that only these three *aṅgas* existed in the period of Early (or pre-sectarian) Buddhism (cf. Mizuno 1988, 23; Nagasaki 2004, 51-2; Choong 2010, 53-64).

This raises two questions: Why are the Pāli SN versions presented as four different *saṃyuttas* located in two different *vaggas*, while each of the Chinese SA versions is treated as a single discourse, not as a *saṃyukta* collection? And: Which version of the collections is likely to be the earlier one?

It could be that both the Pāli and the Chinese collections are artificial and/or late additions. It could be suggested that in the ancestral version of SA/SN these discourses of the *vyākaraṇa-aṅga* were at first attached to, or subordinated to, the relevant *Sūtra-aṅga* sections, and that the gathering of them into *saṃyuttas/saṃyuktas* grouped in a single section (*vagga/song*) was a later development (cf. Choong 2000, 23, n. 22). Or it could be that the observed structural discrepancies simply reflect differences in how the two schools (Vibhajjavāda/Vibhajjavāda and Sarvāstivāda/Sabbatthivāda) developed after the separation from their common origin (i.e. the Sthavira tradition).

Disagreements on teachings contained in the Pāli SN 25. *Okkantika Saṃyutta* and its Chinese counterpart, SA 892

The Pāli *Okkantika Saṃyutta* (SN 25, ten discourses)⁶ has been translated into English by Woodward (1925) and by Bodhi (2000).⁷ Its Chinese counterpart SA 892, a very short discourse, has not previously been translated. The following is a full translation of it, which I now provide for comparison:⁸

Thus have I heard.

Once the Buddha was staying in Jetavana, Anāthapiṇḍika's park at Śrāvastī.

At that time, the World-Honoured One said to the monks: "There are six internal sense spheres. What are the six? They are the internal sense spheres of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind.

"One who, on contemplating these six teachings, is accepting of them⁹ is called a faith-follower.¹⁰ He will rise above birth and

⁶ SN III 1890, 225-228.

⁷ Woodward (1925, 177-179); Bodhi (2000, 1004-1007).

⁸ T2, 224b-c; CSA iii 553; FSA 2, 984-985.

⁹ 忍 Skt. *kṣānti*?

¹⁰ 信行 Skt. *śraddhānusārin*?

transcend the state of ordinary beings. Even if he has not attained the fruit of stream-entry by the end of this life, [still] he definitely will attain the fruit of stream-entry.¹¹

“One who, on contemplating these teachings, increases in acceptance of them is called a Dharma-follower.¹² He will rise above birth and transcend the state of ordinary beings. Even if he has not attained the fruit of stream-entry by the end of this life, [still] he definitely will attain the fruit of stream-entry.¹³

“One who, on contemplating these teachings as they really are with right insight, having known and made an end of three fetters, namely deluded belief in a self, attachment to rites and rituals, and doubt [about the path],¹⁴ is called a stream-enterer.¹⁵ This person definitely will not decline into an evil rebirth. Assured of enlightenment, after being born seven times [at most] among gods and human beings, he then attains the complete ending of suffering.¹⁶

“One who, on contemplating these teachings as they really are with right insight no longer gives rise to influxes, but is without desire, liberated. He is called an *arhant* (P. *arahant* “supremely worthy one”). All influxes have been eliminated. Done is what was to be done. The heavy burden has been abandoned, self-development has been well attained, all fetters have ceased, [and] with right insight the mind is well liberated.”¹⁷

¹¹ 爾時。世尊告諸比丘。有內六入處。云何為六。謂眼內入處。耳。鼻。舌。身。意內入處。於此六法觀察忍。名為信行。超昇離生。離凡夫地。未得須陀洹果。乃至未命終。要得須陀洹果。

¹² 法行 Skt. *dharmānusārīn*?

¹³ 若此諸法增上觀察忍。名為法行。超昇離生。離凡夫地。未得須陀洹果。乃至未命終。要得須陀洹果。

¹⁴ 三結 Skt. *saṃyojana*: 1. 有身見 *satkāyadrṣṭi*, 2. 戒禁取見 *śīlavrataparāmarśa*, and 3. 疑 *vicikitsā*.

¹⁵ 須陀洹 Skt. *srotaāpanna/srotāpanna*.

¹⁶ 若此諸法如實正智觀察。三結已盡。已知。謂身見。戒取。疑。是名須陀洹。不墮決定惡趣。定趣三菩提。七有天人往生。究竟苦邊。Cf. a Sanskrit fragment for the relevant Chinese words at T2, 224c6-7 (Chung 2008, 154; Pāṣādika 1989, 106): “*saptakṛtvah paramaḥ saptakṛtvo devāṃś ca manuṣyāṃś ca ... duḥkhasyāntaṃ karotīti*” (七有天人往生。究竟苦邊。).

¹⁷ 此等諸法正智觀察。不起諸漏。離欲解脫。名阿羅漢。諸漏已盡。所作已作。離諸重擔。逮得已利。盡諸有結。正智心善解脫。

When the Buddha had taught this discourse, all the monks, having heard what the Buddha said, were delighted and put it into practice.

As with the discourse on the six internal sense spheres, so also with the following the teaching is as spoken above:

the six external sense spheres, the six classes of consciousness, the six classes of contact, the six classes of feeling, the six classes of perception, the six classes of volition, the six classes of craving, the six classes of element, the five aggregates.¹⁸

Thus, the Chinese discourse is about four types/classes of follower:

1. The faith-follower, who is accepting of the six teachings (i.e. the teachings on the six internal sense spheres).
2. The Dharma-follower, who increases in acceptance of the six teachings.
3. The stream-enterer, who has destroyed three fetters through contemplating the teachings as they really are with right insight.
4. The *arhant*, who does not give rise to any influxes, being free of desire and liberated by contemplating the teachings as they really are with right insight.

Also, in place of the teachings about the six internal sense spheres, the same teachings are also applied to the following nine groups: the six external sense spheres, the six classes/groups of consciousness, of contact, of feeling, of perception, of volition,¹⁹ of craving, of elements, and the five aggregates. Thus there are altogether ten groups regarding teachings about the four classes of follower.

The Pāli *saṃyutta* called “Connected with Entering (*Okkantisaṃyutta*)” also records the Buddha as teaching on the same ten Dhamma topics. However, each group is presented as a single discourse/*sutta*, making altogether ten discourses (i.e. from the six internal sense spheres to the five aggregates) in the *saṃyutta*. According to the teaching, each of the ten groups is to be fully seen as “impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise” (*aniccam vipariṇāmicam aññathābhāvī*), which,

¹⁸ 如內六入處。如是外六入處·六識身·六觸身·六受身·六想身·六思身·六愛身·六界身·五陰亦如上說。

¹⁹ Cf. Choong (2000, 28) about 六思身。

however, is expressed in the Chinese version in terms of “acceptance”. Also, the Pāli version speaks of three types of follower, as against four types in the Chinese version. The three types of follower in the Pāli version are as follows:²⁰

1. The faith-follower (*saddhānusāri*), who has faith/confidence (*adhimuccati*) in the *Dhamma* (i.e. the teaching), entering assurance of perfection (*okkanto sammattaniyāmaṃ*).
2. The *Dhamma*-follower (*dhammānusāri*), who is in the *dhammas* moderately accepted by insight (*paññāya mattaso nijjhānaṃ khamanti*), entering assurance of perfection.
3. The stream-enterer (*sotāpanno*), who knows, sees (*jānāti passati*) the *Dhamma*, being of a nature not to decline, assured, bound for enlightenment (*avinipātadhammo niyato sambodhiparāyano*).

Accordingly, the SN version is structurally larger than its SA counterpart regarding the types of follower. The SN 25 collection is possibly derived from a single discourse. The division into ten discourses (SN 25.1-10) likely was for the purpose of making it look like a *saṃyutta*.

However, it should be noted that in SA 892 the standard closing formula *huanxi fengxing* 歡喜奉行 (“were delighted and put it into practice”) is followed by a statement that the nine listed topics are also to be taught in the same way. This could be seen as stating that a further nine discourses are meant to follow, thus indicating that SA 892 is, after all, actually a *saṃyukta*.

Disagreements on teachings contained in the Pāli SN 26 *Uppāda Saṃyutta* and its Chinese counterpart, SA 899

SA 899 is a very short discourse. For the Pāli SN 26. *Uppāda Saṃyutta* (ten discourses)²¹ there already exist translations in English by Woodward (1925) and by Bodhi (2000).²² For the purpose of comparison I now provide the following full translation of the Chinese text:²³

²⁰ SN III 1890, 225-228. Woodward (1925, 177-179); Bodhi (2000, 1004-1007).

²¹ SN III 1890, 228-231.

²² Woodward (1925, 180-182); Bodhi (2000, 1008-1011).

²³ T2, 225b-c; CSA iii 557; FSA 2, 990-991.

Thus have I heard.

Once the Buddha was staying in Kalandaka's bamboo-grove (Veḷuvana) at Rājagṛha.

At that time, the World-Honoured One said to the monks: "Monks, if there is the arising, the establishing, the producing, and the appearing of the eye, then this is the arising of suffering, the establishing of sickness, the appearing of ageing-and-death. The same teaching also refers to the other [internal sense spheres] up to the mind. If there is the ceasing, the calming, the ending of the eye, then this is the ceasing of suffering, the calming of sickness, the ending of ageing-and-death. So also the same teaching refers to the other [internal sense spheres] up to the mind."²⁴

When the Buddha had taught this discourse, all the monks, having heard what the Buddha had said, were delighted and put it into practice.

As with the six internal sense spheres, so also with the external sense spheres [and the other groups] up to the five aggregates it is the same teaching.²⁵

Thus, the Chinese SA version indicates that the arising, the establishing, the producing, and the appearing of the same ten groups (mentioned in SA 892, above) are the arising of suffering, the establishing of sickness, the appearing of ageing-and-death; and the ceasing, the calming, the ending of the same ten groups are the ceasing of suffering, the calming of sickness, the ending of ageing-and-death.

The Pāli SN version also has a similar teaching to the SA version, but it is divided into ten discourses (SN 26.1-10), in a manner similar to the above-mentioned SN 25 *Okkanti Samyutta*.²⁶ For example, SN 26.1 states:

At Sāvatthi. ...

²⁴ 爾時。世尊告諸比丘。若比丘眼生・住・成就顯現。苦生・病住・老死顯現。如是。乃至意亦如是說。若眼滅・息・沒。苦則滅・病則息・老死則沒。乃至意亦如是說。

²⁵ 如內六入處。如是外六入處。乃至五陰亦如是說。

²⁶ SN III 1890, 228-231. Woodward (1925, 180-182); Bodhi (2000, 1008-1011).

“Bhikkhus, the arising (*uppādo*), the establishing (*thiti*), the producing (*abhinibbatti*), the appearing (*pātubhāvo*) of the eye - this is the arising of suffering, the establishing of disease/sickness, the appearing of ageing-and-death. ...

“Moreover, the ceasing (*nirodho*), the calming (*vūpasamo*), the ending (*atthagamo*) of the eye - this is the ceasing of suffering, the calming of disease, the ending of ageing-and-death. ...”

The next nine discourses are on the other nine groups, namely the six external sense spheres up to the five aggregates, in a manner similar to SN 25.1-10.

Accordingly, the SN version is structurally more detailed in style than its SA counterpart regarding the notion of the arising and the ceasing of the ten groups. The SN 26 collection is likely to be derived from a single discourse. Here again the division of the collection into ten parts (SN 26.1-10) was possibly for the purpose of making it look like a *samyutta*.

Here again, however, it should be noted that in SA 899 the standard closing formula *huanxi fengxing* 歡喜奉行 is followed by a statement that the nine listed topics are also to be taught in the same way. This could be seen as stating that a further nine discourses are meant to follow, thus indicating that SA 899 is actually a *samyukta*.

Disagreements on teachings contained in the Pāli SN 27. *Kilesa Samyutta* and its Chinese counterpart, SA 900

The Pāli SN 27. *Kilesa Samyutta* (ten discourses)²⁷ has been translated into English by Woodward (1925) and by Bodhi (2000).²⁸ Its Chinese equivalent, SA 900, is a very short discourse. In the following I give a full translation of the Chinese version for comparison:²⁹

Thus have I heard.

Once the Buddha was staying in Kalandaka’s bamboo-grove (Veḷuvana) at Rājagṛha.

²⁷ SN III 1890, 232-235.

²⁸ Woodward (1925, 183-185); Bodhi (2000, 1012-1014).

²⁹ T2, 225c; CSA iii 557; FSA 2, 991-992.

At that time, the World-Honoured One said to the monks: “Monks, if there is grasping at the flavour in the eye, then there is the arising and growing of afflictions. The arising and growing of afflictions is due to the mind being unable to detach from desire in all defilements. Its obstacles also cannot be cut off. [As with the eye, so too with the other internal sense spheres] up to the sense sphere of mind it is the same teaching.”³⁰

When the Buddha had taught this discourse, all the monks, having heard what the Buddha said, were delighted and put it into practice.

As with the internal sense spheres, so also with the external sense spheres, up to the five aggregates it is the same teaching.³¹

The Pāli SN version, which consists of ten discourses,³² is not entirely in the same style as the Chinese SA version. The SN text begins:

At Sāvattthī. “Bhikkhus, desire and lust (*chandarāgo*) that are in the eye are a corruption (*upakkilesa*) of the mind (*citta*). (And similarly for the other sense spheres). ... But, when a bhikkhu has put away (*pahīno*) the corruption of the mind in these six cases (*chasu thānesu*), his mind inclines to renunciation (*nekkhammaninnaṃ*). Inspired by renunciation (*nekkhamma-paribhāvitam*), his mind becomes workable (*cittam kammaniyam khāyati*) for those things that are to be realised by direct insight (*abhiññā sachikaraṇīyesu dhammesū ti*).”

The next nine discourses are on the other nine groups, namely from the six external sense spheres, up to the five aggregates, as in the above-mentioned SN 25 and SN 26.

Accordingly, although the SN version is doctrinally similar to the SA version, it is structurally more detailed or specific than its SA counterpart. Here again the division of the SN collection into ten parts (SN 27.1-10) possibly was for the purpose of making it look like a *saṃyutta*. The SN 27 version is likely to be derived from a single discourse.

³⁰ 若比丘於眼味著者。則生上煩惱。生上煩惱者。於諸染污心不得離欲。彼障礙亦不得斷。乃至意入處亦如是說。

³¹ 如內六入處。如是外六入處。乃至五陰亦如是說。

³² SN III 1890, 232-235. Woodward (1925, 183-185); Bodhi (2000, 1012-1014).

However, here again it should be noted that in SA 900 the standard closing formula *huanxi fengxing* 歡喜奉行 is followed by a statement that the nine listed topics are also to be taught in the same way. This seems like the end of the discourse, while what follows seems intended to be a sequence of further discourses based on the same pattern; that is, SA 900 could be regarded as a *samyukta*.

Disagreements on teachings contained in the Pāli SN 18. *Rāhula Saṃyutta* and its Chinese counterpart, SA 897

The Pāli *Rāhula Saṃyutta* (SN 18, comprising twenty-two discourses)³³ has been translated into English by Rhys Davids (1922) and by Bodhi (2000).³⁴ Its Chinese counterpart, SA 897, a very short discourse, has not been translated before. I now provide a full translation of it for comparison:³⁵

Thus have I heard.

Once the Buddha was staying in Kalandaka's bamboo-grove (Veḷuvana) at Rājagṛha.

At that time, the Venerable Rāhula came to where the Buddha was, saluted him by prostrating with his head to the ground and touching the feet of the Buddha, and sat down at one side. He then asked the Buddha: "World-Honoured One, in what way is there knowing, in what way is there seeing such that there is no remembrance and recollection between this my consciousness-body and all external objects,³⁶ through the extinction of all influxes?"³⁷

The World-Honoured One said to Rāhula: "There are six internal sense spheres. What are the six? They are the internal sense spheres of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. If in these six *dhammas* (phenomena) one observes with right insight the extinction of all influxes, [and] the mind is well liberated through right insight, then

³³ SN II 1888, 244-253.

³⁴ Rhys Davids (1922, 165-168); Bodhi (2000, 694-699; cf. 531).

³⁵ T2, 225b; CSA iii 556; FSA 2, 989-990.

³⁶ Cf. Choong (2000, 184-188) about the discussion on "this body with consciousness and all external objects".

³⁷ 時。尊者羅睺羅來詣佛所。稽首禮足。退坐一面。白佛言。世尊。云何知。云何見。我此識身及外境界一切相不憶念。於其中間盡諸有漏。

he is called an Arhant. All influxes have been extinguished, done is what was to be done, the heavy burden has been discarded, self-development has been well attained, all fetters have been ended, [and] the mind is well liberated through right insight.”³⁸

When the Buddha had taught this discourse, all the monks, having heard what the Buddha said, were delighted and put it into practice.

As with the six internal sense spheres, so also with the six external sense spheres, and the other [groups] up to the five aggregates the teaching is the same.³⁹

The Pāli *saṃyutta*, however, has twenty-two discourses arranged in two *vaggas*, as in the following summary.⁴⁰

The ten discourses of the first *vagga* (i.e. SN 18.1-10) record Rāhula as asking the Buddha to teach him a teaching such that he might live alone, secluded, diligent, ardent, and aspiring.⁴¹ The Buddha then in each of the ten discourses teaches Rāhula that each of the ten groups of phenomena (i.e. from the six internal sense spheres to the five aggregates, similar to SN 25-27, above) should be seen (*passaṃ*) as impermanent (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), subject to change (*vipariṇāmadhammaṃ*), and as “this is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self” (*n’etaṃ mama n’eso ’ham asmī, na m’eso attā ti*).⁴²

The first ten discourses of the second *vagga* (i.e. SN 18.11-20) show the Buddha teaching the same ten groups of *dhamma* to Rāhula, but without first being asked by the Rāhula for a teaching.

The final two discourses (SN 18.21-22) record Rāhula as asking the Buddha this:

How, venerable sir, should one know (*jānato*), how should one see (*passato*), so that in regard to both this body with consciousness and all external objects/signs (*imasmiṃ ca saviññāṇake kāye bahiddhā ca sabbanimittesu*),

³⁸ 佛告羅睺羅。有內六入處。何等為六。謂眼入處。耳。鼻。舌。身。意入處。此等諸法。正智觀察。盡諸有漏。正智心善解脫。是名阿羅漢。盡諸有漏。所作已作。已捨重擔。逮得己利。盡諸有結。正智心得解脫。

³⁹ 如內六入處。如是外六入處。乃至五陰亦如是說。

⁴⁰ SN II 1888, 244-253. Rhys Davids (1922, 165-168); Bodhi (2000, 694-699; cf. 531).

⁴¹ “*Sādhū me bhante Bhagavā dhammaṃ desetu yam ahaṃ sutvā eko vūpakaṭṭho appamatto ātāpī pahitatto vihareyyan ti*”.

⁴² Cf. SN 18.21-22: 252-253.

(SN 18.21:) so that there does not occur in him the view of “I, mine, and the bias to conceit” (*ahaṃkāra-mamaṅkāra-mānānusayā na hontī ti*)?

(SN 18.22:) so that the mind (*mānasam*) does not give rise to the view of “I, mine, and conceit (*ahaṅkāra-mamaṅkāra-mānāpagataṃ*), transcending the various conceits (*vidhā samatikkantaṃ*), is at peace (*santaṃ*) and well liberated (*suvimuttaṃ*)”?

The Buddha responds to the question:

Every material form in the past, future, or present, inward or outward, gross or subtle, inferior or excellent, far or near – one sees all form as it really is with right insight (*yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya passati*) thus: This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self. (And similarly for the other aggregates: feeling, perception, activities, consciousness).

Because of the expression, “this body with consciousness and all external objects” (*imasmiṃ ca saviññāṇake kāye bahiddhā ca sabbanimittesu*) - shown in SN 18.21-22, it seems that only these two Pāli discourses are the close counterpart of the Chinese version, SA 897. Thus, the SN version in twenty-two discourses is structurally far larger than its SA counterpart regarding style and content on the Venerable Rāhula.

Here again the SN 18 collection is possibly derived from a single discourse. The division into twenty-two discourses likely was for the purpose of making it look like a *samyutta*.

Here again, however, as stated above, it should be noted that in SA 897 the standard closing formula *huanxi fengxing* 歡喜奉行 is followed by a statement that the nine listed topics are also to be taught in the same way. This could be seen as stating that a further nine discourses are meant to follow, thus indicating that SA 897 is actually a *samyukta*.

Conclusions

Structurally, SN 25 *Okkantika Saṃyutta*, SN 26 *Uppāda Saṃyutta*, and SN 27 *Kilesa Saṃyutta* are located in section (3) *Khandha Vagga*, and SN 18 *Rāhula Saṃyutta* is in section (2) *Nidāna Vagga*. These four Pāli *Saṃyuttas* can be treated together, since they are all presented with the identical construction in ten major doctrinal groups, differing only in their individual topics. Each of their Chinese SA counterparts (SA 892, SA 899, SA 900, and SA 897 respectively), however, is a short discourse and is located in section (3) *Zayin song* (= section (2) *Nidāna Vagga* of the SN).

Nevertheless, as pointed out above, it is not at all obvious whether each of their Chinese SA counterparts is a discourse or a *samyukta*. In all cases the SA discourse looks very like a *samyukta*. The distinction between the two categories, discourse and *samyukta*, is rather blurred; but what is clear is that after the end of the discourse proper a sequence of further discourses based on the same pattern is meant to be included in the collection.

Also, no clear evidence is found in the texts that might constitute a reason why the SN versions are presented as different *samyuttas* located in two different *vaggas*, whereas each of the Chinese SA versions is located in one section and treated as a single discourse, not as a *samyukta* collection.

It could be that both the Pāli and the Chinese collections are artificial and/or late compilations. It is possible that the discourses were at first attached to, or subordinated to, the relevant sections (*vaggas/songs*), and that the gathering of them into *samyuttas/samyuktas* grouped in a single section was a later development. The observed structural divergences would then simply reflect differences in how the two schools (*Vibhajjavāda/Vibhajjavāda* and *Sarvāstivāda/Sabbatthivāda*) developed after their separation from their common ancestor (i.e. the *Sthavira* tradition).

As for the contents, this comparison has revealed the following main points:

1. Ten doctrinal groups are shared by the Pāli SN and the Chinese SA versions: 1. the six internal sense spheres, 2. the six external sense spheres, 3. the six classes of consciousness, 4. contact, 5. feeling, 6. perception, 7. volition, 8. craving, 9. the six elements, and 10. the five aggregates.
2. The four SN versions are structurally far larger in both style and content than their SA counterparts regarding the

notion of entering, arising, and affliction, and regarding the Venerable Rāhula.

3. The Chinese discourse SA 892 is about the four types/classes of follower: (1) faith-follower, (2) Dharma-follower, (3) stream-enterer, and (4) Arhant. However, the Pāli counterpart, SN 25 *Okkantika Saṃyutta*, is about three types of follower: (1) faith-follower (*saddhānusāri*), (2) *Dhamma*-follower (*dhammānusāri*), and (3) stream-enterer (*sotāpanno*).
4. Each item of the ten groups in SN 25 is to be clearly seen as “impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise” (*aniccam vipariṇāmiṃ aṇṇathābhāvi*). However, the Chinese counterpart, SA 892, instead emphasizes “acceptance”, which is rather different in meaning.

It is possible that each of the Pāli SN collections examined is not entirely derived from a single discourse. Although the division of the collections into ten parts (in each of the *saṃyuttas*, SN 25, SN 26, SN 27) and twenty-two parts (in the *saṃyutta*, SN 18) was likely for the purpose of making it look like a *saṃyutta*, the Chinese SA parallels (SA 892, SA 899, SA 900, SA 897) look very like condensed versions of the same pattern: one full-scale discourse followed by numerous condensed ones having the same structure and closely related content. Thus the Chinese SA versions possibly do not entirely preserve the original form as a single discourse.

Overall this study has revealed some substantial disagreements in both structure and doctrine between the Pāli and Chinese versions.

Abbreviations

- | | |
|-----|--|
| CSA | <i>Za ahan jinglun huibian</i> 雜阿含經論會編 [<i>Combined Edition of Sūtra and Śāstra of the Saṃyuktāgama</i>]. 3 vols. Ed. Yinshun 印順. Taipei: Zhengwen Chubanshe, 1983 |
| FSA | <i>Foguang dazangjing ahan zang: Za ahan jing</i> 佛光大藏經阿含藏：雜阿含經 [<i>Foguang Tripitaka Saṃyukta-āgama</i>]. 4 vols. Ed. Foguang dazangjing bianxiu weiyuanhui 佛光大藏經編修委員會. Dashu, Gaoxiong: Foguangshan Zongwu Weiyuanhui, 1983. |

PTS	Pali Text Society
SA	<i>Samyuktāgama</i> 雜阿含經 (T 2, no. 99)
SN	<i>Samyutta-nikāya</i>
T	<i>Taishō Chinese Tripiṭaka</i> (The standard edition for most scholarly purposes) <i>Taishō shinshū daizōkyō</i> 大正新脩大藏經. 100 vols. Ed. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaikyoku 渡辺海旭. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai. 1924–34.

SN refers to the PTS edition.

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Language, Conscious Experience and the Self in Early Buddhism

A Cross-cultural Interdisciplinary Study

Grzegorz Polak

Abstract

To what degree is ordinary conscious experience shaped and mediated by linguistic and conceptual factors? How does this mediation influence human functioning? This article attempts to reconstruct impressive, but unsystematically presented early Buddhist ideas regarding these matters. It takes as its starting point the paradoxical statement in the *Rohitassa Sutta* concerning the world found in the body endowed with apperception (*sasaññimhi*) and mind (*samanake*). The first part of the article examines the early Buddhist concept of apperception (*saññā*). Particular attention is given to its connection with language, and to the way it contributes to arising of the notion of Self (*attā*) as “being” (*satto*), speaker (*vado*) and experiencer (*vedeyyo*). In order better to make sense of these ideas, the article employs a cross-cultural interdisciplinary approach, drawing from what appear to be analogous ideas in Western philosophy of language and cognitive science. The article also discusses the relation of the five *khandha*-s to the individual who takes them to be “Self” and the issues of agency and subjectivity. The early Buddhist ideas explored in this article constitute a conceptual framework necessary for making sense of several key meditative and soteriological concepts. Detailed discussion of these concepts will be taken up in a future paper.

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Introduction

In recent decades, critical research in the field of early Buddhist studies has brought significant progress, leading to a possibility of re-examining the early Buddhist teachings. The approach which interprets early Buddhism according to a paradigm developed by the later, commentarial tradition of Theravāda is no longer taken for granted and is being challenged regarding many aspects. However, there are still several problematic issues which are yet to receive a fully satisfactory explanation. A proper understanding of several difficult early Buddhist concepts is impossible without taking into account their philosophical background. As Alexander Wynne (2010: 166) aptly observes, although “early Buddhist teachings were not presented in the form of a philosophical system, they are at least philosophically grounded.” The image that begins to emerge from recent scholarly research is that early Buddhism was far from being a primitive doctrine, quite the opposite in fact. Richard Gombrich (2009: vii), goes as far as to state that “the Buddha was one of the most brilliant and original thinkers of all time” while Wynne (2015b: 240) states that “The Buddha would seem to occupy a remarkable position in the history of philosophy”. The impressive philosophical and psychological views of early Buddhism are, however, not systematically presented and often not even explicitly expounded. They function as a form of an implicit backdrop to early Buddhist soteriological and meditative teachings. Of particular importance are the ideas concerning the role of language in human cognition and its influence on the structure of conscious experience. They will be the central focus of this article. These ideas constitute a theoretical framework necessary for understanding several central teachings of early Buddhism, including the concept of unconstructed cognition, the notion of the cessation of the “world of human experience” and the idea of ineffability of the state of a liberated person. These issues, however, will become the focus of a future study.

Methodological remarks: the value of cross-cultural interdisciplinary approach

Reconstructing early Buddhist doctrine is in a way similar to solving a puzzle, or an equation with several variables. What I mean by this analogy is that it is not possible simply to recover early Buddhist doctrine by reading it in a straightforward way from Buddhist texts, or by simply adding up data collected by acts of successive readings until it forms a complete picture. As Christian

Coseru (2012: 31) points out: “philology continues to command the study of Buddhist philosophy. The philological approach relies on the principle that texts can (be made to) speak for themselves” This would imply the relative simplicity and straightforwardness of early Buddhist doctrine. If that were the case, then the ancient Pāli speaker (when it was still used as a spoken language) would have no problems understanding the meaning of the teachings in the Nikāyas, being much more predisposed to this task than any modern scholar of early Buddhism. That would imply that their meaning is self-evident, and all one needs to do is to understand the passage linguistically. However, the Buddha himself was convinced that almost no-one in his generation would be able to understand (*ājāneyyūṃ*)¹ him!

This is due to the fact of early Buddhist teaching being inherently difficult to see and awaken to (*duddaso duranubodho*), being subtle (*nipuṇo*) and deep (*gambhīro*),² but also due to its unsystematic presentation in the Nikāyas and the fact that it is often far from being unambiguous, relying on metaphor and apophatic or paradoxical language. To continue with a mathematical analogy, one may have to attempt at some point to substitute an “*x*” for a certain value and see how it fits. Does it solve the interpretative problems? Does it allow us to harmonize seemingly discrepant concepts and make sense of the enigmatic ones? Of course, this substitution of “*x*” is far from being arbitrary, as the earlier philological work has already greatly narrowed down the range of possible “*x*-s” which may be taken into consideration.

It is due to the above-mentioned specifics of early Buddhist teachings that a cross-tradition comparative approach regarding philosophical, psychological and meditative issues is particularly useful. While the post-canonical Abhidhamma and the commentarial tradition are not of much help in this regard, comparisons with non-Theravāda philosophical traditions, both Eastern and Western, can be helpful. For example, as Harvey (1995: 217) rightly points out, “Because a Sutta is among those collected by the Theravādins does not mean that they must therefore have the best interpretation of it!”. There are a limited number of positions and ways of thinking a human mind can assume regarding major philosophical problems. These have appeared in various forms in the history of

¹ MN 26/ī 168: *Ahañceva kho pana dhammaṃ deseyyaṃ, pare ca me na ājāneyyūṃ, so mamaṃsa kilamatho, sā mamaṃsa vihesā*

² MN 26/ī 167: *Adhigato kho myāyaṃ dhammo gambhīro duddaso duranubodho santo paṇīto atakkāvacaro nipuṇo paṇḍitavedanīyo.*

philosophy, both Western and Eastern. One must take into account the possibility of congenial ways of thinking emerging in diverse cultural contexts, even if they have been arrived at by different means. Once the purely philological approach has narrowed down the range of possibilities of interpreting certain enigmatic fragments and has given us a somewhat general picture of a philosophical position functioning as its implicit backdrop, one can then draw from other philosophical traditions to make sense of it, or to show that such a way of thinking is actually possible at all and has its parallels.

Often the early Buddhist idea hinted at by the critical reconstruction may seem inherently impossible when viewed against the backdrop of the orthodox paradigm; it may even defy to a large extent common-sense, ordinary views about reality and psychology. Yet all the textual evidence often points to exactly such an idea. Should it then be taken at its face value or discarded? Someone operating within the confines of a stereotypical paradigm may not realize that certain ideas are actually possible at all and may have been described either by other philosophical traditions or modern cognitive science. This may lead him to ignore stubbornly textual evidence which does not fit his preconceived schemes, which he tries to force on the early texts, or to assume that some crucial information is missing. This type of comparative study helps to make sense of some particularly difficult aspects, as philosophers from other traditions have often systematically presented and thoroughly explained positions and views bearing similarity to the early Buddhist ones. Coseru (2012: 32) summarizes the value of this approach:

Indeed, as some of the most valuable contributions to the study of Buddhist philosophy have shown, one can draw extensively from Western philosophical sources and remain faithful to a historical author without couching one's interpretations as Tillemans puts it "in the same problematic or obscure language that is the author's".

Further philological work can then show that when seen against the backdrop of such a philosophical background, many enigmatic concepts finally make sense and supposed discrepancies are in fact explained away. It's almost as if early Buddhism was too brilliant for its own era, too brilliant for the commentarial tradition of Theravāda, and it is only with the help of other ways of thinking, with other forms of knowledge accumulated over the history of mankind, that we are beginning to catch up with its brilliance.

Therefore many scholars rely on such cross-tradition comparative studies. For example, Sue Hamilton's excellent work is an example of drawing from the Kantian model of transcendental idealism in order to make sense of early Buddhist concepts.³ Wynne (2015b: 240) notices that "similar developments [...] in Western philosophy, have only been reached in the modern age in the works of Hume, Kant, the logical positivists, Wittgenstein". An emerging trend in early Buddhist scholarship is seeing parallels with Nāgārjuna Madhyamaka.⁴ Harvey (1995: 217) also mentions some similarities with the Yogācāra school. To put it in other words, these scholars were able to make sense of certain enigmatic concepts of early Buddhism because they came with a prior perspective of looking at certain philosophical problems gained through the study of other philosophic traditions. It is doubtful whether they would be able to gain such a perspective at all simply by reading the Nikāyas, even if they do indeed represent such a perspective. This is because of the unsystematic, often insufficient presentation, or the merely implicit way in which these teachings function as a sort of backdrop to other ideas.

Cross-cultural comparative study is not the only tool which can be used to make sense of particularly difficult early Buddhist concepts. Buddhism in general has a strong psychological angle, being interested in the workings of the human mind, seeing it as the source of suffering, but also of happiness. Recent decades have seen the spectacular development and progress of cognitive science, which in comparison to traditional, mainstream psychology is much more grounded in natural sciences: neuroscience, studies of artificial intelligence, evolutionary biology and genetics. Cognitive science has brought true qualitative progress regarding human psychology, particularly when compared to the more old-fashioned, unverifiable, "humanistic" forms, such as Freudian psychoanalysis. Cognitive science is greatly interested in the issues of human consciousness, cognition, insight, selfhood, agency and embodiment – all of which are also central to Buddhism. Buddhism challenges many commonly held psychological notions, and so does cognitive psychology (these common-sense notions are labelled as "folk-psychology"). Human psychology has not changed since the time of the Buddha. All this opens up the possibility of a fruitful interdisciplinary study. Johannes Bronkhorst was one of the first scholars to realize the value of such an approach. As he (2012: 73) has pointed out, it is based on an

³ Hamilton, 1999: 76.

⁴ Hamilton, 1996: 56; Wynne, 2015:218, 219, 222; Ronkin, 2005:16; Harvey, 1995:196.

assumption that certain central claims of the early Buddhist texts are true and concern psychological states and processes which though unusual should not be in conflict with established rules of natural sciences or psychology. In their paper, Jake H. Davis and Evan Thompson (2013: 585-597) show the benefits of such an interdisciplinary approach and attempt to “lay the groundwork for a cross-cultural cognitive science”. Tse-fu Kuan (2008) is yet another scholar who has relied on psychological analysis when dealing with the problems of early Buddhism.

It will be claimed here that it is only when viewed against such a backdrop that the problematic ideas make full sense. Then philological analysis may perhaps allow us to elucidate their meaning further and explain what at first sight appear to be irreconcilable discrepancies. The price for such a deconstruction will be relatively small, requiring one to consider certain later developments and interpretations belonging to the commentarial tradition of Theravāda as inadequate. This should however not be a surprise to anyone aware of the current state of research in the field of early Buddhist studies. As critical scholars, including Ñāṇananda⁵, Waldron⁶, Wynne⁷ and Noa Ronkin⁸ have observed, these later developments in many ways represent a fundamental shift away from early Buddhist views.

Ultimately, the solutions proposed in this article must be seen as an invitation to a new way of thinking about some central issues of early Buddhism: a new way of thinking that helps make sense of certain enigmatic concepts, which harmonizes the seemingly discrepant passages and presents early Buddhism as a very impressive doctrine that deserves much greater appreciation than it currently receives.

⁵ Ñāṇananda masterfully shows severe limitations of Buddhaghosa’s commentarial interpretations in his works, e.g. 2012: 7, 10, 53, 65, 67.

⁶ cf. Waldron, 2005:54: “analysis of mind in terms of dharmas inadvertently created a host of systemic problems.”

⁷ Wynne, 2010: 165-166: “this philosophy is incompatible with the philosophy of reductionistic realism later outlined in the various Abhidharmas.”

⁸ Ronkin, 2005: 250: “post- canonical Abhidhamma projects a philosophy of substantiality without substance, or rather smuggles substantiality into process metaphysics. But such an enterprise is, first, at odds with the earliest Buddhist teaching and, second, suffers from several grave weaknesses.”

The “world” in the fathom-long body

Several early Buddhist texts contain a specific idea of the “world” (*loko*) defined in terms of elements constituting the human cognitive apparatus and their respective objects. According to the *Lokāyatika Sutta* (AN 9.38/iv 430) in the discipline (*vinaya*) of the Noble One (*ariyassa*), five strands of sensuality (*pañca kāmagaṇā*) are said (*vuccati*) to be the world (*loko*). The *Lokapañhā Sutta* (SN 35.82/iv 52) defines the world as that which breaks up (*lujjati*), which is further defined as the six senses, their respective objects and consciousness, contact and whatever is experienced/felt as pleasant or painful having this contact as its condition. The *Samiddhilokapañha Sutta* (SN 35.68/iv 39-40) states that the world or concept of the world (*lokapaññatti*) can only exist (*atthi*) to such an extent that there are the six sense bases and *dhmma*-s to be cognized by their respective forms of consciousness (e.g. *cakkhuvīññānaviññātabbā dhammā*). It is worth noticing that the world and concept of the world are mentioned in such a way, as if there was little if any difference between the two, as if to suggest that what one has access to is a “concept of the world” and not the world in itself.

Particularly interesting, however, are the statements which highlight the interrelation of this specific world and human cognitive factors. The *Rohitassa Sutta* (SN 2.26/i 61)⁹ speaks about the world situated in the fathom-long body (*kaḷevare*) which is endowed with perception and mind/intellect (*sasaññimhi samanake*). The *Lokantagamaṇa Sutta* (SN 35.116/iv 93) states that “In the discipline of the Noble One, that is called ‘world’ (*loka*) by which in the world (*lokasmim*) one comes to perceive the world (*lokasaññī*) and [...] is thinking oneself to be the world (*lokamānī*)”¹⁰ to use the translation of Gombrich (2006: 94), who was right to point out the ambiguity of this phrase and the fact that the “term *loka-saññī* does not tell us whether there really is a world ‘out there’ or not”. The peculiarity of the idea conveyed by this text has also not escaped the attention of other scholars. Ñāṇananda (2012: 81) has noticed that “the world is what our senses present it to us to be.” Katz (1979: 55) has

⁹ The same text is also found in the *Catukka Nipāta* of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* in two *Rohitassa Suttas* (AN 4.45/ii 47) and (AN 4.46/ii 49). SN 2.26 has a somewhat more abrupt start with words *ekamantaṃ thito kho rohitasso* (Rohitassa, standing on one side) while *Aṅguttara* versions start with information about the Buddha living in Sāvatthi and the usual exchange of greetings. AN 4.46 has the Buddha retelling the same story to his disciples.

¹⁰ SN 35.116/iv 95: *Yena kho, āvuso, lokasmim lokasaññī hoti lokamānī - ayam vuccati ariyassa vinaye loko.*

stated that “‘the world’ means our experience of the world [...] lived world”. Harvey (1995: 87-88) speaks of “the internal world generated by cognition interpreting”, Hamilton (1999: 83) comments that “what we mean by ‘the world’ is not other than experience”. Waldron (2003: 162) notes that “The ‘world’ (*loka*) [...] was a way of speaking about “the experienced world”, while Wynne (2015a: 30) writes, “A person’s very world of experience and not just particular experiences in that world depend on the workings of the mind”. Coseru (2012: 67) aptly summarizes:

What is meant by ‘world’ in this context, however, is not an independent domain of physical entities and relations, but the ‘phenomenal world of perception’ (*lokasaṃjñā*) that depends on the conceptual and proliferating activities of the mind.

It is very important to realize that this does not imply metaphysical idealism, only the impossibility of experiencing and expressing the world without the medium of cognitive and linguistic factors. The very possibility of the world or its concept is provided by the functioning of cognitive and linguistic factors. Once they are no longer present, one can no longer experience the world or speak about it. One cannot go beyond that, as we are not granted an objective, transcendent perspective *sub specie aeternitatis* which would allow us to make statements about the nature of reality. The mind is not granted an absolute status, being itself dependent on other factors.¹¹ Therefore Ñāṇananda (2012: 81) is correct when emphasizing the fact that “the world is not purely a projection of the mind in the sense of a thoroughgoing idealism; only, it is a phenomenon which the empirical consciousness cannot get behind, as it is itself committed to it”. Katz (1979: 55) points out that simply “any talk about the world apart from someone’s lived experience of the world is impossible [...] and that there could be no coherent notion of ‘the world’ as the *a priori* of human experience”. Waldron (2003:162) and Wynne¹² also rightly emphasize the non-idealistic nature of the early Buddhist view.

¹¹ cf. Ronkin, 2005: 247: “Fundamental to this framework are the notions of dependency on conditions, impermanence and the indeterminacy of knowledge and language. It is a metaphysics that undermines the very epistemology from which it stems.”

¹² Wynne, 2015b: 222-223: “although a metaphysician might try to push beyond the phenomenal limits of language and knowledge, the endeavour is meaningless and to be avoided. No idealistic step is taken to say that cognitive construction is all there is, and thus that the world consists of mind only”

There is always value in examining the parallel versions of Pāli texts, particularly in the case of such unusual and enigmatic statements. Anālayo (2017:199) rightly highlights the importance of such an approach:

For those who wish to distinguish between earlier and later strata among the early discourses, a consultation of the extant parallel versions is in my view an indispensable requirement. Comparative study can show what the common core is among various versions of a text and what the differences are between them, thereby providing clear evidence as a basis for identification of what is early and what is later.

The *Rohitassa Sutta* has Chinese parallels at SĀ 1307/ T 99.1307 and in SĀ 2 306/T 100.306.¹³ Both texts speak of the margin of the world 世界邊 (*shì jiè biān*) where one does not get born 生 (*shēng*), age 老 (*lǎo*), or die 死 (*sǐ*). SĀ 1307 has no parallel for *na cavati na upapajjati*, while SĀ 2 306 renders it as 不沒不出 (*bù mò bù chū*). SĀ 1307 also contains a whole portion of text which is absent in the Pāli version. It speaks of the world in terms of five *khandha*-s 五受陰 (*wǔ shòu yīn*), and contains the formula of the noble eightfold path 八聖道 (*bā shèng dào*) as a way leading to the end of the world.

Interestingly, the parallel versions differ with respect to the crucial phrase: *byāmamatte kaḷevare sasaññimhi samanake*. SĀ 1307 only speaks of 一尋之身 (*yī xún zhī shēn*), while SĀ 2 306 does not have anything corresponding to it. It is very easy here to fall into a trap of translating it as a body 身 (*shēn*) endowed with 尋 (*xún*), where 尋 would correspond to *sasaññimhi samanake*. 尋 is often used to translate *vitakka* (thought/thinking), particularly in modern translations. The meaning would be thus “a body endowed with thought”, which would somewhat roughly convey the idea of the Pāli phrase which speaks of the body and its cognitive factors. However, 尋 was also in ancient times in China a unit of measure roughly corresponding to a fathom and consisted of eight 尺 (*chǐ*). So, the meaning of the parallel version is “one fathom long body” and it does not say anything at all about its cognitive factors. The Āgama text thus speaks only about the fathom long body in which the world etc. is found, but nothing about the way this body is cognizant. What can we make of this difference? If the focus on *sasaññimhi samanake* represented the tendency to development

¹³ Their interesting feature is that they translate the name “Rohitassa” according to its meaning as 赤馬 (*chì mǎ* - red horse), not rendering it phonetically as is often the case.

in the Theravāda as compared to Sarvāstivāda, of which the *Samyuktāgama* is representative, then this could signify the lateness of the text. But this is not the case, and as we shall see, the full implications of passages like this have been fully realized only by modern scholars. So perhaps the lack of mention of *sasaññimhi samanake* is not that significant and does not necessarily point to the relative lateness of the Pāli version.

The difference regarding the same aspect can also be found in the parallel version to the *Lokantagamana Sutta*, the SĀ 234/ T ii 056c12. The parallel to the Pāli passage *yena kho, āvuso, lokasmiṃ lokasaññī hoti lokamānī — ayaṃ vuccati ariyassa vinaye loko* says: 若世間, 世間名、世間覺、世間言辭、世間語說, 此等皆入世間數。Just as in SĀ 1307, we find no 想 (*xiǎng*) which usually in the Āgamas corresponds to the Pāli *saññā/saññīn/saññānāti*. Instead it speaks of 名 (*míng* - naming/calling/expressing/describing), 覺 (*jué* - being conscious of/thinking), 言辭 (*yán cí* - what one says/utterance), 語說 (*yǔ shuō* - language). However, as Hamilton (1996: 55-56) points out, in classical Sanskrit one of the meanings of *saṃjñā*, (Pāli *saññā*) is “name”. The original of the *Samyuktāgama* was apparently written in Sanskrit¹⁴, so perhaps its translator, Guṇabhadra, decided to render this meaning by 名. Our suspicion is confirmed by examination of the surviving fragment of the Sanskrit original from the Turfan mound SHT 6 1404 + 1411 (Vorl.Nr X 318+X345).¹⁵ It is seriously damaged and only small parts of it are readable:

loko lo]ka iti [saṃkhyāṃ gaccha]ti śrotraṃ ghrāṇaṃ jih[v]ā kāya
manasa[m] [lo]kasya lokasaṃjñ[ā] bha[va](ti) lo

Indeed we find *lokasaṃjñ[ā]* corresponding to *lokasaññī*, which must have been translated to 世間名. *loko lo]ka iti [saṃkhyāṃ gaccha]ti* was certainly translated as 入世間數 (*rù shì jiān shù*), with 數 (*shù* - lit. number/count) being the translation of *saṃkhyāṃ*.

Grammatically the Chinese text generally corresponds to the Pāli version¹⁶. 世間覺 can definitely be considered as corresponding to *lokamānī* and 世間名 to *lokasaññī*. However, 世間言辭 and 世間語說 have no direct parallel in the *Lokantagamana Sutta*. Perhaps they can be seen as paralleling the Pāli terms

¹⁴ De Jong, 1981:108, cf. Kuan, 2008: 4, fn. 11.

¹⁵ Wille (1989: 120), I am grateful to Bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā for pointing out the existence of this fragment.

¹⁶ I am grateful to Weijen Teng for this remark.

lokasamaññā (designation of the world), *lokanirutti* (linguistic expression of the world), *lokavohāra* (common ways of speaking of the world) and *lokapaññatti* (concept of the world) which are found in the *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta* (DN 9/i 202).

As we shall see, in early Buddhist teaching the role that language plays in human cognition was considered very important. Thus these texts speak not only of the subjective world of human conscious experience but of the world of human language as well. The Nikāyas seems to suggest that supposedly objective elements of reality cannot be separated from their subjective experience and linguistic concepts, almost to the point of considering them synonymous.¹⁷ Waldron (2003: 162) rightly notes that “one of the chief conditions giving rise to our human experience of the world is language”. And this is the aspect I would particularly like to focus upon below: how the interplay of *saññā* and language conditions the arising of the “world” of human experience and how it ultimately results in our suffering.

Apperception and language

The early Buddhist concept of apperception (*saññā*) has already received much attention from scholars. The complexity of its working and the difficulty of properly translating this term are highlighted by the many renderings of *saññā* offered by modern scholars. Thus, Johansson rendered it as “idea”¹⁸. Harvey, who has done an extensive analysis of the role of *saññā*, suggests that it should be translated as cognition, a “mental process which labels, categorizes and classifies sense-objects”¹⁹; this is an act of “recognition based on first having learnt or assigned the identifying feature of a thing”²⁰ which also cognizes general features possessed by a number of items. Its function is also that of interpretation, a type of interpretation that can occur automatically.²¹ Bronkhorst (1993: 49) translates *saññā* as “ideation”, while Gombrich (2009:145) as “apperception”. Gethin (2001: 41-42), commenting on the role of *saññā* in Abhidhamma, points out that its capacity of labelling or marking must be understood as playing a major role in the psychology of memory. A good summary and discussion of various

¹⁷ cf. Wynne, 2015a: 61: “a nominal theory of reality according to which existence and time are equivalent to words and thoughts”.

¹⁸ Johansson 1979: 93.

¹⁹ Harvey, 1995: 141.

²⁰ Harvey, 1995: 142.

²¹ Harvey, 1995: 143.

renderings of *saññā* by other scholars can be found in Kuan (2008: 13-17), who himself simply uses the Pāli term untranslated for the purpose of his book. This is the approach that I will also be adopting, due to the difficulties with arriving at a proper and definite translation of the term.

As noted above, the Āgamas mostly use 想 as corresponding to Pāli *saññā*. It seems to be a particularly good choice, as Chinese 想 carries with it a very strong subjective tone thus properly rendering the nature of *saññā* as conceptually mediated experience and being far from a neutral, transparent looking glass. Another interesting feature is that the Āgamas use 相 (*xiàng*) as corresponding to Pāli *nimitta*, the main characteristic feature of the object which is apprehended by *saññā* in order to recognize it and identify it. 想 and 相 not only look similar, but are also pronounced similarly with the only difference being the tone. Anālayo comments on some potential confusion which may have resulted from it mostly with regard to translating *animitto samādhī* in the parallel versions (Anālayo, 2011: 274-275 fn. 54; 2011: 686, fn. 15; 2012: 331, fn. 13).

A particularly detailed and thorough analysis of the functions of *saññā* has been provided by Sue Hamilton (1996: 53-62). She concludes that *saññā*:

represents the processes of apperceiving and conceptualising, where apperceiving refers to the identificatory process that takes place on receiving incoming sensory data and conceptualising refers to the process of bringing to mind any abstract images, conceptions, ideas and so on which are not co-temporal with incoming sensory data.²²

Of particular significance for our purpose are the passages showing the role of *saññā* as a potential point of vulnerability in the cognitive process prone to distortion and introduction of delusion.²³ Some suttas speak of *saññā* as giving rise to a *papañcasaññāsaṅkhā* (the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta*), or *papañcasaṅkhā* (the *Aṭṭhakavagga*, verse 874 and 916). The *Adantāgutta Sutta* (SN 35.77/ iv 71) speaks of *papañcasaññā*. These terms seem to refer to the same negative cognitive process entangling human beings in the net of suffering. The compound *papañcasaññāsaṅkhā*, as well as the verb *papañceti* itself, is not easy and obvious to translate. According to Ñāṇananda (2016: 257), the term *papañcasaññāsaṅkhā* can be rendered as “reckonings born of prolific perceptions”. Kuan (2008: 18) translates it as “apperception and naming [

²² Hamilton, 1996: 62.

²³ e.g. Kuan, 2008:22: “the sequence from *sañjānāti* onwards is liable to criticism.”

associated with] conceptual proliferation”, Wynne (2010: 131) as “conceptual diffuseness or proliferation”, Levman (2017a: 28) as “proliferation-perception-naming”. Gombrich (2009: 150) renders *papañca* as “conceptualizing”.²⁴

It is at this stage that language, through its interplay with other cognitive factors, starts to play an absolutely crucial part in the process of development of cognitive distortion.²⁵ This issue is unfortunately rarely presented or understood properly. Ñāṇananda (2016: 257) must be given particular credit for highlighting this aspect in his pioneering work, where he notes that “*papañcasaññāsaṅkhā* has a relevance to the question of language and modes of linguistic usages” and that this is connected with “certain peculiarities inherent in the linguistic medium” ultimately leading to investing originally conventional concepts like the label “I” with an objective character.²⁶ Hamilton’s analysis of the term stands out as particularly valuable, as she is able to draw from her understanding of both Western and Eastern philosophy (Kant and Nāgārjuna, respectively) in order to make sense of how the early Buddhist teachings show our experience to be mediated and constructed by cognitive and linguistic factors.

Drawing attention to the fact that in Sanskrit *prapañca* means “manifoldness”, Hamilton suggests that Pāli *papañceti* should be translated as “one causes to become manifold” (Hamilton, 1996: 56). As a result of *papañca*, and “seeing things as manifold one is attributing independent existence to them, and to oneself as perceiver”.²⁷ What has language got to do with it? As Hamilton has rightly noted, *saññā* is connected to language, as one of its aspects is naming. Language brings with it the manifoldness of names, their variety and diversity, and most importantly sharp delineations, as every word is clearly distinct and separated from other words. Thus if we perceive reality based on the categories of language, we are sharpening the delineations in order to clarify things, giving boundaries. “In becoming known [...] things are reified, the experience becomes more and more clearly defined and identifiable, *making manifold and naming* what one is experiencing”.²⁸ The fact that language plays an important role as a cognitive factor shaping our ordinary experience is also raised by

²⁴ Gombrich, 2009: 150: “The very act of conceptualizing, the Buddha held thus involves some inaccuracy. His term for it was *papañca*.”

²⁵ cf. Gombrich, 2009: 145: “Therefore *saññā* is the application of language to one’s experience. This is, however, where the Buddha saw a big problem.”

²⁶ cf. Ñāṇananda, 2012: 6.

²⁷ Hamilton, 1996: 57.

²⁸ Hamilton, 2000: 76.

Gombrich²⁹, Waldron³⁰, Ronkin³¹ and Bronkhorst³². The *Nibbedhika Sutta* (AN 6.63/iii 413) states that *saññā* results in an expression in common language since one expresses (*voharati*) according to the way he perceives (*sañjānāti*).³³ This suggests that effability is inherent to the nature of *saññā*. Much more original and radical is the verse found in an identical form in the *Addhā Sutta* (Iti 63/i 54) and in the *Samiddhi Sutta* (SN 1.20/i 18) which states that beings (*sattā*) perceive in terms of what can be declared/expressed (*akkheyyasaññino*), and thus are established (*patiṭṭhitā*) in the expressible (*akkheyyasmim*), and due to having no complete understanding (*apariññāya*) of what can be declared/expressed they become captured by death (*maccuno*).³⁴ It is important to note that there is a group of suttas (e.g. the *Atthirāga Sutta* 12.64/ii 101) expressing the concept of liberation in terms of the non-establishment of consciousness (*appatiṭṭhitam viññāṇam*). Conversely, if one has a full understanding of what can be expressed, one does not conceive of a declarer/speaker (*akkhātār*) i.e. “the Self”. One can also indirectly infer that this fundamental error concerns the misunderstanding of what should not be expressed, a point raised in many other suttas. The significance of the message of the *Addhā Sutta* cannot be overstated. It not only explicitly states that our experience is mediated by our language, but also points out that it is due to misunderstanding language and its use that one

²⁹ Gombrich, 2009 :149: “To sum up, the Buddha concluded not merely that languages were conventional, but that it was inherently impossible for any language to capture reality. We have to express our cognitions through language, using *saññā*, but that imposes on experiences linguistic categories which cannot do justice to its fluidity.”

³⁰ Waldron, 2003:162: “One of the chief conditions giving rise to our human experience of the world is language, since most moments of awareness are *already* heavily mediated by linguistic categories.”

³¹ Ronkin, 2005: 245: “The Buddha, however, unveils not only the dominance of language and conceptual thought, but also their inherent insufficiency and inadequacy. [...] Whatever we can know is part of the activity of language, but language, by its very nature, undermines certified knowledge.”

³² Bronkhorst, 2016: 15: “Language becomes in this way one of the most important factors, if not the most important factor, contributing to the fact that ordinary awareness is interpreted awareness. Experiments show that language influences perception already at pre-conscious and non-linguistic levels.”

³³ AN 6.63/iii 413: *Vohāravepakkaṃ, bhikkhave, saññāṃ vadāmi. Yathā yathā naṃ sañjānāti, tathā tathā voharati, evaṃ saññā ahoṣinti.*

³⁴ Iti 63/i 54: *Akkheyyaṃ apariññāya, yogam āyanti maccuno. Akkheyyaṃca pariññāya akkhātāraṃ na maññati.*

creates “Self-delusion”, which results in falling under the dominion of death.³⁵ The power of language is confirmed by the *Nāma Sutta* (SN 1.61/i 39) which states that name conquers all (*sabbaṃ addhabhavi*³⁶), and has everything under its power so that no being is free from conditioning by a name (cf. Levman, 2017a: 37).

Language and its misuse: a cross-cultural perspective

This type of realization does not emerge in the West until the linguistic paradigm shift which is typical of the twentieth century philosophy of language. It is in particular associated with the thought of Ludwig Wittgenstein, in both its earlier and later phase. In his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (TLP 5.6) Wittgenstein went so far so as to say that “The limits of language mean the limits of my world”. Roughly at the same time, Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf were developing their own theory of language. Whorf (1940: 229-31) wrote that “We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native language [...] the world is presented in a kaleidoscope flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds—and this means largely by the linguistic systems of our minds.” Sapir (1929: 69), in a similar vein has written that “The fact of the matter is that the ‘real world’ is to a large extent unconsciously built upon the language habits of the group”.

Sapir and Whorf are usually associated with linguistic relativism, a belief that different linguistic groups perceive the world differently due to differences in languages that they use. This element of their theories has perhaps been overemphasized and has not survived well, although in recent years there has been some research showing small differences of perception between users of different languages.³⁷ Such an approach would also be difficult to harmonize with the early Buddhist universalist approach. However, the basic claim of Wittgenstein, Sapir and Whorf that language in general (such as perhaps an innate Chomskian proto-language) shapes our perception and thinking to a great

³⁵ This very important text seems not to have received the attention it deserves. Credit must be given to Ñāṇananda (2012: 81-82) for being probably the first scholar to highlight its significance, although he focuses on its slightly different aspect. Among the exceptions is also Levman (2017a:31), who however refers to it in different context: that the Buddha’s “teachings had to be correctly understood in the first place, before liberation could be achieved and conceivings and language transcended.” Also cf. Bronkhorst (1984).

³⁶ The translation of the verb *addhabhavi* appears to be far from clear and settled, however.

³⁷ cf. Boroditsky, 2003: 917–21.

extent and its structures are inherently built into our cognitive apparatus (as opposed to beings who do not use language, e.g. animals), brings us very close to the early Buddhist view.

This more general version has lasted well. Contemporary philosopher of the mind, John Searle (2001: 156) states that “our main way of dividing things up is in the language. Our concept of reality is a matter of our linguistic categories.” Madison (1988: 13) expresses this idea from a more humanistic, postmodern perspective: “Language is not just the ‘expression’ of experience; it is experience; it is experience which comes to know, acknowledge itself”.

Wittgenstein’s thought has yet another significant feature bringing it close to early Buddhism. As David Blair (2010: 33) observes, for Wittgenstein, language – both the words and the formal structures that determine how they are used – is not only the vehicle of thought, but often the source of our “diseases of thinking”. And the main disease of thinking is, according to Wittgenstein (BB 143), that “which always looks for (and finds) what would be called a mental state from which all our acts spring, as from a reservoir.” In other words, the Self. Actually “there is no such thing as the subject that thinks or entertains ideas.”³⁸ Therefore he can state that “philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language.”³⁹ But is it possible to provide a more in-depth explanation of the mechanism by which misunderstanding of language brings about self-delusion, using early Buddhist texts and concepts? Kuan (2008: 22) has stated that “conceptual proliferation based on subjective experiences stems from a deep-rooted sense of ego.”

That is certainly true, but it raises a further question: how does this deep-rooted sense of ego arise? Or are its origins simply unconceivable? In order to uproot the Self-delusion, one should perhaps understand its origination. As we shall see, the key to understanding this issue lies in the dynamic interplay of language, *saññā*, memory and conscious experience. There are additional interesting passages in the Nikāyas that cast some light on this issue. In order to make sense of them and fully draw out their implications it will be very helpful to consider certain parallels with Western philosophies of the mind and recent developments in cognitive science.

³⁸ TP 5.631.

³⁹ PI §109.

Verse 916 of the *Aṭṭhakavagga* states that the root (*mūlaṃ*) of *papañcasāṅkhā* is (the notion) “I am a thinker” (*mantā asmīti*).⁴⁰ A look at the scheme of the cognitive process given in the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta* shows that *papañcasāññāsāṅkhā* should be distinguished from the process rendered by the verb *papañceti*, being its result.⁴¹ So, it seems that the notion of Self is in itself a product of this manifoldization (if we are to use Hamilton’s reading), giving in turn rise to a cognitive delusion of a higher level. This is confirmed by the very interesting *Yavakalāpī Sutta* (SN 35.248/iv 201), the last sutta of the Saḷāyatana Saṃyutta. In it the thoughts *asmī* (“I am”), *ayam aham asmī* (“I am that”), *bhavissāmi* (“I will be”) are labelled as *papañcita*, *maññita*, *iñjita*, *phandita* (respectively: a manifestation (manifoldization, a conceptualization, a movement, a palpitation) and *māna* (conceit). So it is the process rendered by the verb *papañceti* that introduces the basic form of self-delusion which then gets complicated into higher level cognitive distortions. And according to the scheme of cognitive process given in the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta*, *papañceti* directly precedes *papañcasāññāsāṅkhā*, but is itself preceded by *saññā* and *vitakka*. Therefore what one is conscious of, that one also complicates, conceives, manifoldizes. The *Ambaṭṭha Sutta* (DN 3/i 87) conveys a message that the structure of *saññā* can itself undergo change, reflecting the changes occurring over time in language, knowledge and memory. The text confirms *saññā*’s connection with language, as it states that people now perceive (*sañjānanti*) *pisāca*-s as *pisāca*-s but in the past perceived them as “black ones” (*kaṇhā*).⁴² *Saññā* is succeeded in the cognitive chain by *vitakka* – thought. All the evidence in the Nikāyas suggests that *vitakka* is a verbal type of thought, a type of silent talking to oneself. The *Cūḷavedalla Sutta* states that it is considered to be an activity of speech (*vacīsāṅkhāro*).⁴³ This early Buddhist understanding coincides with Wittgenstein’s (PI §329) remark in the *Philosophical Investigations* that “the language is itself the vehicle of thought”. The content of *saññā* is therefore expressible verbally, due to its linguistically mediated nature. What one is conscious of, one can express in speech or by engaging in inner acts of silent talking to oneself.

⁴⁰ Sn 916: *Mūlaṃ papañcasāṅkhāya, (iti bhagavā) Mantā asmīti sabbam uparundhe.*

⁴¹ MN 18/i 112: *yaṃ papañceti tattonidānaṃ purisaṃ papañcasāññāsāṅkhā samudācaranti*

⁴² DN 3/i 93: *etarahi manussā pisāce ‘pisācā’ ti sañjānanti; evam eva kho, ambaṭṭha, tena samayena manussā pisāce ‘kaṇhā’ ti sañjānanti.*

⁴³ MN 44/i 301: *vitakkavicārā vacīsāṅkhāro.*

The fact that ordinary conscious experience involves simplification and conceptualization of sense input may be considered an important evolutionary adaptation. Evolution promotes efficiency and survival. In order to be efficient, one has no time to contemplate the complexity of reality in its original rich form. A form of simplification and stereotyping is needed, ignoring all unnecessary details. A crucial breakthrough in this regard seems to be brought by the development of language. Language can however be thought to function in different ways: either as a purely pragmatic tool for solving problems or as a representation of reality, its mirror image. A consideration of the two major phases of Wittgenstein's philosophy is especially relevant here. In the first phase, as presented in his *Tractatus*, he believed that the structure of an ideal language corresponds perfectly to the structure of reality. The meaning of the sentence is the state of things which it pictorially represents. Wittgenstein's later philosophy moved on from the conception of an isomorphic relation between language and the world to a much more pragmatic notion of language as a tool. According to this new understanding, language in its original and natural form was never meant to serve as an isomorphic representation of the structure of reality. Sentences and words did not possess any ultimate, objective meaning gained by direct and fixed reference to the objects they signified. They were instead tools used in human communities, and their meaning could only be reconstructed in the context of the social situation in which they were used, a "language game" being part of "the form of life".⁴⁴ Wittgenstein (PI §2) considers a hypothetical situation when the word "Slab" is actually a command for a worker to give a slab, effectively meaning: "give me the Slab", thus belonging to a particular context of social interaction and not meant to simply signify any slab. The meaning of the word "Slab" is not, however, according to Wittgenstein constituted by the inner, psychological intention of the man speaking it, but by the public context in which it is used, thus "one man calls out the words as orders, the other acts according to them."⁴⁵

Even better to understand this difference between two usages of language, let us consider the statement: "I am hungry." When seen according to the early, semantic theory of Wittgenstein, it can be dissected by analysis into parts which possess a meaning independent of any context and isomorphically correspond

⁴⁴ This accords with Ñāṇananda's (2012: 6) observation that "language has an essential public quality about it".

⁴⁵ BB p. 77.

to objective elements of reality. Thus, there is a Self (“I”) which exists (“am”) and has an inner experience of hunger. According to the later Wittgensteinian concept of language, this statement should never be removed from the social context in which it functions, nor be dissected into atomic, meaningful elements. So, it can actually mean: “Bring me food,” or “You should not hold it against me that I am not working well today (because I have not eaten well),” or “This is a sensitive subject I don’t want to talk about, so let’s change the subject of our conversation to food!”. The dynamic and labile nature of *saññā* reflects the changes brought by the introduction of language. New forms of *saññā* are introduced, and as Bronkhorst (2012: 12) rightly notes, the learning of language facilitates the formation of representations. Interestingly, Bronkhorst does not make a direct connection with specific early Buddhist cognitive or philosophical concepts or terms, presenting these reflections purely as a psychological theory.

In early Buddhism there seems to have been an awareness that the natural use of language is pragmatic. If this even concerns the *dhamma*, seen as a “raft” to be used and left behind, then it applies even more to the ordinary usage of language. There is a recognition of the changeable, conventional nature of language, as attested by the Buddha’s critique of adherence (*abhiniveso*) to any local way of speaking/expression (*janapadaniruttiyā*) and overstepping of ordinary designation (*samaññāya*) expressed in the *Araṇavibhaṅga Sutta* (MN 139/iii 237).

As Levman (2017a: 49) and Ronkin (2005: 245) rightly observe, the words cannot directly “correspond” to reality due to their inherent inadequacy. Gombrich (2009: 149) points out that “the Buddha concluded not merely that languages were conventional, but that it was inherently impossible for any language to capture reality.” However, due to the incorporation of categories of language into the cognitive structure of *saññā*, human thinking undergoes a change. Language becomes engraved into the structure of cognition, resulting in a “linguistification of human experience” (Waldron, 2003: 163).

This is however not its original, pragmatic form, but rather its elements are taken out of their original holistic context of a language game and form of life, and are dissected into single meaningful units which then become associated with the objects they are meant to signify. As a further act of cognitive simplification and distortion it makes human functioning more efficient, allowing for better filtering of sense data as well as their storage, first as memory, then as symbolic narratives.

Self and the narrative

The tendency to seek for objective correlates of the elements of language appears to be a natural tendency of the human mind. Ñāṇananda (2016: 231) rightly speaks of the “hypostasizing character of grammar”, of grammatical structure investing words with life. At the next stage, language may come to be seen as essential in itself; some of its words may be considered to carry the essence of the thing they signify in their sound and their repetition may subsequently be believed to have magical power. Despite the Buddha’s warning, the pragmatic understanding of the role of language is lost on the Theravādins.⁴⁶ The Abhidhamma system is somewhat akin to the early phase of Wittgensteinian thought: there is an isomorphism between language and reality. The basic and ultimate constituents of reality can be properly rendered by language; there is nothing ineffable about them, as even Nibbāna itself is now a *dhmma*, an object.⁴⁷ This is an example of a reification of the elements of language, its hypostatizing. Another example of this process can be observed in Western metaphysics. In Aristotle’s thought, nouns often correspond to metaphysical “substances”, adjectives can represent a “substantial form” or an “accidental property”. Abstract and general terms tend to be reified as universals. At some point in the history of Theravāda, Pāli started to be considered a holy language and some of its words were even considered to have arisen spontaneously as if due to some cosmic necessity, as Levman (2017a: 45-49) convincingly shows in his recent paper. This can all be considered forms of *papañca*. What does all this have to do with the arising of self-delusion? Personal pronouns are of course a natural and necessary part of language, functioning as part of pragmatic language games and forms of life, thus being necessary for efficient communication and problem solving. However, the natural tendency to seek objective, real correlates of the elements of language also affects the personal pronouns.⁴⁸ This stage is described by the *Sabbāsava Sutta* (MN 2/i 8). According to the sutta, the one who applies the mind unwisely (*ayoniso manasi karoti*) engages in the following forms of self-reflexive thinking regarding the time that has passed (*atītam addhānaṃ*):

⁴⁶ For an accurate critique of Theravāda commentarial views regarding language, cf. Ñāṇananda, 2012: 7, 43.

⁴⁷ cf. Ñāṇananda, 2016: 13: “They conceived Nibbāna as something existing out there in its own right.”

⁴⁸ cf. Ñāṇananda, 2012:50: “By establishing a correspondence between the grammar of language and the grammar of nature, he sets about weaving networks of ‘papañca’”.

“Was I?” (*ahosiṃ nu kho ahaṃ*), “What was I?” (*kiṃ nu kho ahosiṃ*), “How was I?” (*kathaṃ nu kho ahosiṃ*), “Having been what, what did I become?” (*kiṃ hutvā kiṃ ahosiṃ nu kho ahaṃ*). The same types of questions are then repeated with regard to the future (*anāgatam addhānaṃ*) starting with “Will I be?” (*bhavissāmi nu kho ahaṃ*).

Finally, one is doubtful (*kathaṃkathī*) inwardly/self-reflexively (*ajjhataṃ*) in similar ways regarding the present time (*paccuppannam addhānaṃ*), starting with “Am I?” (*ahaṃ nu kho smi*). The final two types of reflexions are: “This being (*satto*) has come (*āgato*) from where? (*kuto*)” and “Where (*kuhiṃ*) will it be (*bhavissatī*) going? (*gāmi*)”.

Due to such unwise mentation (*ayoniso manasikaroto*) one of the six views (*diṭṭhi*), arises to such a person as true (*saccato*) and firm (*thetato*): “Self (*attā*) exists (*atthi*) for me (*me*)”, “Self doesn’t exist (*natthi*) for me”. “I perceive Self with Self” (*attanā va attānaṃ sañjānāmi*), “I perceive not-Self with Self” (*attanā va anattānaṃ sañjānāmi*), “I perceive Self with not-Self” (*anattanā va attānaṃ sañjānāmi*), and “It is this Self of mine (*yo me ayaṃ attā*) the Speaker and Feeler (*vado vedeyyo*)⁴⁹ (that) experiences (*paṭisaṃvedeti*) here and there (*tatra tatra*) the result (*vipākaṃ*) of good and bad actions (*kalyāṇapāpakānaṃ kammānaṃ*); but this self of mine is permanent (*nicco*), everlasting (*dhuvo*), eternal (*sassato*), does not have a changeable nature (*avipariṇāmadhammo*), and it will last (*thassati*) forever (*sassatisamaṃ*)”.

The *Sabbāsava Sutta* is an extremely important text. Read together with texts such as the *Yavakalāpī Sutta*, the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta* and the *Addhā Sutta*, it provides an in-depth explanation of the mechanism of the gradual arising of Self-view. The terms *papañceti* or *papañcasaññāsaṅkhā* are not explicitly used in the *Sabbāsava Sutta*. It is clear, however, that the text explains in greater detail the arising of the very same misconception connected to personal pronouns which is labelled in the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta* as *papañcasaññāsaṅkhā*. The process starts with a simple act of searching for the objectively existing correlate of the personal pronoun “I”.⁵⁰ A very important step of the process is the introduction of the notion of “the Self” which exists in the past and future. This is yet another aspect of language which contributes to the development

⁴⁹ For an interesting discussion of the term see: Wijesekera, O. H. de A., “Pali ‘Vado Vedeyyo’ and Upanisadic ‘Avāki Anāraḥ’”, *University of Ceylon Review* vol. III, No.2, 1945, pp. 89-95.

⁵⁰ cf. Levman 2017(b): 8: “It is simply an artifact of our dualistic linguistic structure which, in asking a question about an agent, assumes that such must exist, as the word exists to which it presumably refers.”

of the notion of Self. Language of course allows referring to the future and the past, as it is a very useful pragmatic function which improves its efficiency. In the context of the arising of the Self-view this feature allows the creation of an illusion of continuity of the Self by projecting it beyond the present moment. This ability will later become an important source of internal discourse, worries, plans and endless returning to past events. Therefore the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta* states that *papañcasaññāsaṅkhā* assail and beset (*samudācaranti*) a man with regard to the *dhamma*-s that are past, future and presently arisen. While the first step consisted of simply asserting the existence of Self in time, in the second one this Self is constructed as possessing certain qualities, being in certain states, bearing certain attributes, e.g. “What was I?” (*kiṃ nu kho ahoṣiṃ*). Thus, the concept of a being (*satto*) is introduced. Later, the continuity of a thus constructed being can be extended beyond a particular life/existence: “this being (*satto*) has come (*āgato*) from where (*kuto*)?” “Where (*kuhiṃ*) will it be (*bhavissatī*) going (*gāmi*)?”

According to the *Sabbāsava Sutta*, the ability to engage in inner speech seems to play a crucial role in the development of Self-delusion. As with the other aspects of language, this one too seemed originally to perform a neutral and purely pragmatic function. It is possible to point out the benefits of engaging in inner speech from an evolutionary perspective. The ability to use language is a higher-level development which sets us aside from other animals, but as such it must also be quite challenging for our cognitive system. By silently talking to ourselves we can constantly practise this crucial ability, so that in time of need it can be used efficiently. Our success depends to a great extent on our ability to successfully use language in public situations in order to persuade our interlocutors. Secondly, when we examine our inner speech, we find out that it is far from being chaotic as it seems to follow certain patterns. We often engage in inner, imaginary dialogue with people that we know, as if in anticipation of potential real-life events as a form of rehearsing them. The other pattern is constituted by returning to some important conversations from the past and re-enacting them in a better, improved way. This can be seen as an important adaptive mechanism improving our efficiency in using language in public situations for the purpose of persuading our interlocutors. As Mercier and Sperber (2011: 57) convincingly show, its real function is argumentative, as it serves to “devise and evaluate arguments intended to persuade” which also explains our confirmation bias. It actually “falls short of delivering rational beliefs and rational decisions

reliably, [...] it may even be detrimental to rationality.”⁵¹ But just as with other aspects of language, this one too can go wrong and turn against us.

It is only recently that Western thought has started to develop similar concepts. They can be generally described as concepts of the narrative self. Emile Benveniste was one of the pioneers of this way of thinking. In his seminal article *Subjectivity in language*, he (Benveniste, 1971: 224) has stated that “It is in and through language that man constitutes himself as a subject, because the language alone establishes the concept of “ego” in reality.” The category of person, both in language and outside of it, is created by the establishment of subjectivity in language (Benveniste, 1971: 227). Language does not merely constitute “Self/I”, but at the same time also establishes its dualistic relation with “you/that”, because:

Consciousness of self is only possible if it is experienced by contrast. [...] “I” posits another person, the one who, being, as he is, is completely exterior to “me” (Benveniste, 1971: 225).

Several other scholars have been developing the concept of the narrative self after Benveniste. In Madison’s (1988: 12-13) concept, the “I” is not a speaking subject, as it exists only as a spoken subject of its own living discourse, posited in and by means of it. Such a “Self” is not something that is given, it is achieved by means of language as the unity of an ongoing narrative (Madison, 1988: 13). This notion corresponds to the situation described in the *Sabbāsava Sutta*.

While Benveniste and Madison were developing the concept of the narrative self from the perspective of humanistic, postmodern hermeneutics, the more analytic approach of cognitive science arrives at a similar conclusion from a slightly different angle. Thus Daniel Dennett (1992: 103) speaks of “The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity”, being a “fictional character at the center of autobiography”.⁵² In *Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience*, Bennett and Hacker (2003: 331) state that:

The notion of “self” is an aberration. There is no such thing as “self” ... the confusion stems from inserting a space in the reflexive pronoun “myself,” “yourself,” “ourselves” to yield the aberrant expressions “my self,” “your self” and “our selves”. Having opened up an illicit space, we then fall into it.

⁵¹ Mercier and Sperber, 2011: 71.

⁵² Dennett, 1992: 114.

Morin (2007: 117) has suggested that self-awareness relies to a large extent on inner speech, by which he means “the activity of silently talking to oneself”. He goes on to argue that “one becomes self-aware when one engages in self-talk (higher order thought) about one's current mental states and personal characteristics”. This again seems to correspond well to the forms of unwise attention described in the *Sabbāsava Sutta*. Thus the intrusion of language into our ordinary experience may warp it to such an extent that it is not even possible to conceive its original state. The hypostazing of a grammatical structure of language contributes to our experience of reality as a plurality of distinct, sharply delineated entities existing in time. We have seen how language facilitates the introduction of “Self” as a protagonist of a narrative, and “Self” can only constitute itself in contrast to “non-Self”.⁵³ There is however one significant feature that distinguishes these scholars from the early Buddhist perspective. They seem to be entirely oblivious to the negative consequences of the establishment of this “narrative self” and of course are unaware of any possibility of its abolition.

According to the *Sabbāsava Sutta*, the final step of cognitive delusion is constituted by the introduction of the Subject who is the speaker and feeler (*vado vedeyyo*) (that) experiences (*paṭisaṃvedeti*) the results of action. In order to properly understand the nature of this cognitive mistake, we must first turn to a very fundamental question: since the autobiographical Self does not really exist, who is the one who actually undergoes delusion, the real speaker, knower, experiencer, seeker for liberation?

Reductionism, khandha-s and the human being

This problem is nicely summed up by Walpola Rahula (1959: 42):

There is another popular question: If there is no Self, no Ātman, who realizes nirvāṇa? Before we go on to nirvāṇa, let us ask the question: Who thinks now, if there is no Self?

The typical answer that one often finds in Buddhist literature is that the person is a set of five *khandha*-s which are in a state of constant flux. Such a theory

⁵³ cf. Ñāṇananda, 2012:10: “direct relationship between the ego and the non-ego. [...] is an oversimplification of facts characteristic of the realm of language as well as of our ways of thought.”

has severe limitations, however. The five *khandha*-s were not originally meant to provide a “comprehensive analysis of what a human being is comprised of” (Hamilton, 2000: 27), “an analysis of man as object” (Gethin, 1986: 49), but rather as Wynne (2009: 65) puts it, represent an “experiential understanding”. As he rightly remarks:

the five aggregates are aspects of a person that can be observed. Since a person is made up of many things that cannot be observed in this way, it would seem that the list of five aggregates was devised precisely in order that a person could contemplate his phenomenal nature.⁵⁴

Wynne (2009: 77) attributes a type of thinking, which sees the person as made up of five aggregates and nothing more, to a reductionistic tendency in the history of Buddhist thought which contributed to the replacement of the original not-self teaching by the no-self doctrine. Apparently its original aim was to address the problem of personal identity by questioning the identification with phenomenal being (Wynne, 2010: 113). The reductionist account of a human being as five *khandha*-s fails to explain the way it functions.

The two *Gaddulabaddha Sutta*-s (SN 22.99-100/iii 149-152) of the *Khandha Saṃyutta* contain similes which appear to be relevant to this issue. The first of the Suttas talks about a person who sees the five aggregates in terms of self (*attato samanupassati*), in a number of different ways. That person runs around (*anuparidhāvati*) or “revolves” (*anuparivattati*) around the five aggregates, just like a person tied to a stake (*khīle*) or post (*thambhe*) by a leather strap (*gaddulabaddho*).

In the second of the Suttas, the person who identifies with the aggregates as himself (*eso ‘ham asmi* etc.), whatever act he does, he does it in respect of the five aggregates; this is just like the man bound by a leather strap to a post – whether walking, standing, sitting or lying down he does so towards the post. The second *Gaddulabaddha Sutta* ends with a simile of a painter (*rajako*) or a decorator (*cittakārako*) who using various dyes would fashion (*abhinimmineyya*) a shape of a man or woman complete in all features (*sabbaṅgapaccaṅgim*) on a well-polished board, wall or strip of cloth. Likewise, the only thing that an unlearned ordinary person causes to come into being (*abhinibbatteti*) are the five *khandha*-s.

⁵⁴ Wynne, 2009:65.

It is interesting to consider these similes as conveying the idea that an individual is not reducible to the five *khandha*-s. A stake or a pillar is distinct from the one who is bound to them, and a painted figure is different from an artist who has fashioned it. We shall return to these similes below, as they seem to carry additional information which can be seen as relevant with regard to the model of cognitive delusion we will be discussing.

Conscious experience and its misinterpretation: a perspective from cognitive science

The *khandha*-s represent various aspects of the subjective, conscious experience of a human being. Therefore, taking the *khandha*-s to be Self seems to imply that a human being considers his phenomenal conscious experience (or some of its elements) to be the seat of true subjectivity and agency. This corresponds to the commonly held, seemingly obvious view that consciousness is the “place” where thinking, cognizing and decision making occur. However, a human being is much more than his conscious experience and is not reducible to it in any way. According to the new developments in the field of cognitive science, the true role and nature of conscious experience proves to be quite different from that originally assumed. Taking these developments into account will help us to make better sense of the early Buddhist explanation of the arising of Self-view.

One of the most important realizations of modern cognitive science is that higher level information processing occurs simultaneously on multiple parallel levels, which entails the unconscious nature of such processing. The processing capacity of consciousness is simply too small to face this task. Modularity must be considered to be one of the most important features of the human cognitive system. Cognition does not happen according to an “all or nothing” principle; there are many parallel, simultaneous processes occurring to a large extent independently of one another. As long as they all function properly, their end result gives an impression of a single, uniform cognitive process. However, the evidence from psychopathology and various experiments show that particular modules can stop functioning while the other ones continue their operation. This results in various forms of dissociation of cognitive functions and elements of conscious experience which according to common sense should be impossible. (An example is “blindsight”, which implies a sharp dissociation between visual performance and conscious visual awareness). The non-conscious processing modules seem to be somewhat disjointed and unable to directly communicate

with each other. Their output is however processed into a unified, conceptually mediated form characteristic of conscious experience. This involves the object-subject structure and a certain unity of apperception (to use the Kantian term). Only in such form can the content of conscious experience become integrated into a coherent Self-narrative. Thus it is through the medium of conscious experience that a human individual can represent himself in a way that allows him to make sense of his own functioning. Unlike the preconscious data, the information that is consciously experienced can be used in various ways by the individual. It may become the object of introspection, can be stored in memory, can be expressed by speech or movements of the body, can be reflected upon or evaluated and may be used as a basis for long term planning and action guidance. Cognitive models of consciousness, such as Bernard Baars' "Global Workspace Theory" (GWT), describe this feature of consciousness using the term "global availability" and connect it with functioning of working memory. As Baars (2003) puts it, "consciousness in the metaphor resembles a bright spot on the stage of immediate memory, directed there by a spotlight of attention, under executive guidance. The rest of the theater is dark and unconscious." Described in functional terms of GWT, consciousness is "a sort of global workspace, whose contents can be broadcast to the system as a whole".⁵⁵ The information that has become conscious can then be subject to further evaluation and processing by the other non-conscious modules. Thus the initial idea or impulse to act can be reflected upon, modified or rejected.

Using the model of GWT, Baars and Franklin (2007: 958) explain the role of conscious experience in human cognition:

GWT postulates that human cognition is implemented by a multitude of relatively small, special purpose processes, almost always unconscious. Although that may seem commonplace today, the idea of widely distributed specialized processing in the brain was highly controversial at the time it was proposed. Processing coalitions compete for access to a global workspace (and subjectively into consciousness, assessed behaviourally by accurate reports). This limited capacity global workspace serves to broadcast the message from the winning coalition to all the unconscious processors, in order to recruit resources to join in handling novel and high-priority input, and in solving current problems.

⁵⁵ Baars, 1998: 42.

This vision is in contrast with the reductionistic Abhidhammic theories of the mind which fail to explain several crucial aspects of the functioning of human cognition. Gethin (1998: 211) summarizes how the mind functions according to Abhidhamma: “a collection of at least eight *dhammas* (consciousness and associated mental factors) arises for a moment and then falls away to be immediately followed by the next combination of consciousness and associated mental factors. Each combination is conscious of just one object”. As Waldron (2003: 87) points out, “Abhidharma theory cannot fully account for all the unmanifest factors “bound along” (*anubandhu*) in the mental stream that virtually constitute individual samsaric existence” as it emphasizes synchronic discourse at the expense of the diachronic one. Sean M. Smith (2017) has pointed out, in his yet unpublished paper, *The Dynamics of the Subliminal Mind in Theravada Buddhism*, which was presented at the IABS conference in Toronto (2017), that the canonical account found in the Therāvada Abhidhamma commentarial literature has some “inherent philosophical problems”, as it fails to account for multiple forms of consciousness which operate simultaneously, not serially.

Of fundamental importance for our discussion is the distinction between actual active cognitive processing of data and the mode of conscious awareness resultant from this process. The two should be in no way consider synonymous. While we have access to consciously experienced phenomenal content, we do not have access to the actual cognitive process which has produced this content. One can only describe it functionally by focusing on its role and effects, or perhaps speak about the physical mechanism serving as its basis. It is however impossible to describe this process in terms connected with first-person phenomenal conscious experience.

Thoughts, ideas and insights do not actually originate or get consciously produced in the field of awareness. They ultimately find their way to consciousness (often suddenly and unexpectedly) but they have been produced outside of it, by non-conscious cognitive processes. As Dijksterhuis, Aarts and Smith (2005: 81-82) summarize, “consciousness can only deal with a very small percentage of all incoming information. All the rest is processed without awareness”; “thought when defined as producing meaningful associative consciousness, happens unconsciously”. As ground-breaking research by Libet and Wegner shows, the real acts of will resulting in bodily movements and decision making also do not originate from the field of awareness.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ cf. Libet, 1999: 49; Wegner, 2002: 97.

What modern cognitive science suggests, is that the actual neural readiness potential (RP) to act precedes by micro-moments the conscious awareness of the will. The latter merely provides a feeling of agency which is incorporated into a unified Self-narrative in order to provide a sense of meaning to one's own actions. A common sense assumption that by acts of conscious inner speech we are "thinking" in the sense of consciously solving some cognitive problems, gaining insights or producing knowledge must be considered naïve. I have already reviewed the argument by Mercier and Sperber that the original function of inner speech is argumentative, being a form of preparation for public situations. Inner speech also contributes to a narrative through which Self becomes established.

Consciousness is therefore not the actual locus of creating ideas, making acts of will, active cognizing, i.e. the activities constitutive of human agency and subjectivity. However, we have no direct conscious access to these activities. It is only the content of phenomenal consciousness that is available to various modules throughout the cognitive system, which in themselves are non-conscious and disjointed from one another. Phenomenal, conscious experience is also a form of self-representation through which an individual can make sense of his own activities. To use a metaphor, it is a sort of a mirror in which we can reflect ourselves. However, this mirror seems to have a severely limited field of view, failing to reflect many crucial elements of our being and functioning. Furthermore, this mirror does not offer a faithful reflection, but rather a highly warped one. The phenomenal content of conscious experience has a highly processed, synthetic form. I have already discussed the extent to which conscious experience is mediated by conceptual and linguistic factors. All these factors contribute to the arising of Self-view. In misinterpreting the nature and content of his conscious experience, a human individual falls prey to his own intelligence, which works by simplifying, making inferences, looking for regularities, seeing the world in terms of objects, subjects and agents. As we have seen, all this is to a great extent facilitated by the acquisition of language and its misuse. This finally results in misapplying the notions of subjectivity and agency to a sphere which is actually devoid of them. The individual starts to identify with a mental entity, the non-existent centre of an internal narrative. Its thinking, cognitive processes and acts of will originate and are brought about in the stream of consciousness. This entity seems to be inhabiting and controlling the body, but is distinct from it as well as from other beings.

This, however, is a delusion, as the actual locus of agency and subjectivity lies in a sentient, intelligent body. By that, I do not want to say that our “true and ultimate” identity is limited to the body, or that the body is “the Self”. Instead it is better simply to ask about what is in us which makes decisions, solves cognitive problems, undergoes illusions and wants to be liberated. All these processes, constitutive of our agency and subjectivity, are to various degrees focalized and originate within the human body, often in a non-conscious way. The term “individual” in itself must be considered a conventional linguistic designation as there is no corresponding monadic entity separated from its surroundings by fixed boundaries. On the contrary, as modern natural science tells us, the body is interconnected with the environment through a constant flow of energy and circulation of matter, although it maintains a degree of independence and distinctiveness. According to externalism, a branch of thinking within modern cognitive science, “certain forms of human cognizing include [...] loops that [...] criss-cross the boundaries of brain, body, and world. The local mechanisms of mind, if this is correct, are not all in the head. Cognition leaks out into body and world.”⁵⁷

It is interesting to consider the possibility of interpreting early Buddhist texts according to the model I have described above. The *khandha*-s are the elements and aspects constituting the “world” of our subjective, phenomenal experience. It is only through this medium that ordinary individuals may know themselves. According to the *Khajjanīya Sutta* (SN 22.79/iii 87), all the *khandha*-s are made up/constructed (*saṅkhata*). The metaphor of a warped, distorting mirror with severely limited field of view that I have considered above seems pertinent with regard to *khandha*-mediated experience. Therefore taking the *khandha*-s to be self may mean much more than just seeing stability where there are only impermanent and dynamic processes. In early Buddhist terms, due to unwise application of the mind (*ayoniso manasikaroto*), an individual perceives the *khandha*-s as the Self. In harmony with my model, this may mean that a person identifies with the elements of his phenomenal experience. I have suggested that due to its misinterpretation one sees it as a locus of identity, agency and subjectivity. This seems to correspond to the early Buddhist account of the Self as the Speaker and Feeler (*vado vedeyyo*), who experiences (*paṭisaṃvedeti*) and establishes itself through the internal narrative. As I have discussed, this is greatly facilitated by “linguistification” of our experience. Early Buddhist texts

⁵⁷ Clark, 2008: xviii.

convey this message using the concepts of *saññā* and *papañcasaññāsaṅkhā*. The potential for misinterpreting the *khandha*-s as Self is perhaps suggested by the simile in the second *Gaddulabaddha Sutta* which compares the *khandha*-s to an image of a man or woman, “complete in all its parts”. This simile may perhaps be also interpreted as corresponding to the idea in cognitive science that phenomenal, conscious experience serves as our means of self-representation.

I have considered the idea that the actual processes constitutive of our agency and subjectivity are to a large extent focalized in our body, and are not describable in terms connected with phenomenal experience. It is possible to read early Buddhist texts as suggesting modes of functioning and cognizing that need not be reduced to or analysed in terms of the *khandha*-s. Many fragments describe human cognition using the concept of *citta*. One perhaps should not automatically assume that they should be read as implying a certain combination of the *khandha*-s. The relation of *citta* to the *khandha*-s is not made clear in the Nikāyas and may be open to unorthodox interpretations. This is of particular concern with reference to awakened individuals. The *Vāhana Sutta* (AN 10.81/v 151) states that the Tathāgata dwells by means of dissociated mind (*vimariyādīkatena cetasā*), set free (*nissaṭṭo*), dissociated (*visaṃyutto*) and liberated (*vippamutto*) from all the five *khandha*-s. The *Mūlapariyāya Sutta* (MN 1/i 1) contrasts the mode of cognition of an awakened person (the arahant and the Tathāgata) with that of an ignorant ordinary individual (*assutavā puthujjano*). While an ordinary person apperceives reality (*sañjānāti*), an awakened being uses a different, perfect mode of cognition, rendered by the verb *abhijānāti* (usually translated as “directly knows”, but literally referring to “super-knowledge”).

As I have suggested above, processes constitutive of our agency and subjectivity are focalized within the human body, which is not a monadic entity separated from the environment by rigid barriers. Perhaps a similar notion is suggested by the early Buddhist texts describing a meditator contemplating body (*kāyānupassī*) with regard to the body (*kāye*), not only inwardly (*ajjhataṃ*) but also externally (*bahiddhā*), or both inside and outside (*ajjhatabhiddhā*).⁵⁸ Instead of reducing the individual to a combination of the five *khandha*-s, the early texts seemed to have a much more holistic view according to which the human being is often described as a body (*kāya*) – the individual who

⁵⁸ MN 20/1 56: *bahiddhā vā kāye kāyānupassī viharati, ajjhatabhiddhā vā kāye kāyānupassī viharati*. With regard to this fragment, Ñāṇananda (2016: 606) comments that “the aim is to break down the dichotomy between one’s own and another’s.”

experiences through the six senses including the mind (cf. Kuan 2008: 100). Sometimes one finds the phrase “conscious/sentient body” (*saviññāṇaka kāya*), which as Kuan (2008: 102) and Hamilton (1996: 102) rightly point out should not imply any duality of two different principles, but rather implies that the human body is inherently sentient. One can also think of the Buddha’s statement in the *Rohitassa Sutta* where he speaks of the world to be found in the conscious (*sasaññī*) body (*kaḷevaro*) endowed with mind (*samanako*).

Self-consciousness, psychological time and suffering

Falling prey to Self-delusion is not just a matter of holding a mistaken theoretical view, as it has profound consequences for the functioning of the human being. Instead of seeing ourselves as we really are, we start to cognize and act as if our true identity were that of “Self”. To preserve its continuity we engage in constant inner speech, due to the fact that “I” does not exist outside language, outside discourse; it is created and maintained in language and in discourse.”⁵⁹ I have considered the idea that there are aspects of our being in the world and cognizing it which do not necessarily require the medium of verbal thoughts or phenomenal consciousness. But fearing what we perceive to be our supposed annihilation, we interrupt the flow of life trying to experience it through the medium of Self and thought.

However, it seems that maintaining the presence of Self-consciousness is taxing for the individual. Early Buddhist texts consider ordinary phenomenal experience expressed in terms of the five *khandha*-s to be synonymous with suffering (*dukkha*). For an ignorant individual, such experience entails Self-consciousness since he identifies with the *khandha*-s. The whole process wears us down, takes us away from the present and enforces an artificial dichotomy between what we consider to be our identity and our environment. In the pursuit of what we perceive to be our self-safety lies inevitable suffering, as the environment cannot be fully controlled. Due to the fact that Self is constituted in language and discourse, we often interweave views and beliefs into its structure, thus making them something intimate, turning them into objects of clinging. The fact that early Buddhist texts lay so much emphasis on views and rituals as a source of clinging is truly an innovative and outstanding feature which distinguishes Buddhism from other premodern doctrines, both Eastern and Western.

⁵⁹ Anderson, 1997: 219.

There appears to be a correlation between the presence of self-reflexive consciousness, and subjective awareness of psychological time. This relation has been explored by several scholars employing a phenomenological approach. As Zahavi (2011: 71-72) points out, “a mere succession of synchronically unified but isolated momentary points of experience cannot explain and account for our experience of duration. To actually perceive an object as enduring over time, the successive phases of consciousness must somehow be united”. Drawing from Husserl, he proposes that the “unity of the stream of consciousness is constituted by inner time-consciousness.” Therefore, we can say that the psychological sense of time is inherent to the very structure of conscious experience. Thompson (2011: 159) points out that it is also connected with Self, as “our implicit awareness of our experiences as flowing in time—is most fundamentally the pre-reflective self-awareness of the stream of consciousness”. Zahavi (2011: 59) speaks of “experiential core self” “defined as the very subjectivity of experience, and is not taken to be something that exists independently” (2011: 60). This would suggest that phenomenal experience is inherently connected with Self-consciousness and awareness of the passage of time.

It seems that self-reflexive consciousness and subjective awareness of psychological time are also positively correlated with psychological suffering.⁶⁰ When we suffer psychologically, the flow of time seems unbearably long to us. However, at the same time there is a strong presence of Self-awareness. Paradoxically, in the moments of happiness “the Self” is manifested weakly and there is no sense of the dragging of time. That is because just as a second is the unit of measure of physical time, so every act of self-reflective conscious experience provides us with the sense of the passage of time. The more self-referential acts of Self-consciousness, the less happiness and more dragging of psychological time. The other resultant aspect is the misunderstanding of the nature of pleasure. Thinking that we are “Self” we cannot properly understand that the very nature of pleasurable moments is the absence from them of the draining presence of Self-awareness. I have considered the possibility of modes of functioning and cognizing not expressible in terms of phenomenal, Self-

⁶⁰ cf. Csikszentmihalyi, 1990: 71: “Self-consciousness disappears, and the sense of time becomes distorted. An activity that produces such experiences is so gratifying that people are willing to do it for its own sake.” This correlation of course lies at the heart of Csikszentmihalyi’s well known concept of “flow”, but he was by no means the first to notice or discover it. He has been, however, probably the first to elaborate it into a detailed theory and popularize it in mainstream psychology.

conscious experience. Perhaps this is the key to interpreting the paradoxical statement that the fact of nothing being experienced (*n' atthi vedayitaṃ*) may be considered pleasant (*sukhaṃ*).⁶¹ Misunderstanding the nature of pleasure, we try to relive the moments we have found pleasant, but try to experience them through the medium of Self. Of course, this is doomed to failure, as the very introduction of Self-conscious experience takes away what was originally actually pleasant in these moments.

Secondly, we mistakenly associate the pleasurable nature of those moments with the object or activity that allowed us be rid of the Self-awareness by allowing us to forget about ourselves and not notice the lack of Self-awareness and sense of time. This drags us into a pursuit which is doomed to failure and entails suffering.⁶² This explanation has been suggested by Bronkhorst (2012: 147) as part of his theory of absorption:

Many situations, then, are pleasurable because we experience them in a state of absorption [...] The source of pleasure in these cases is the state of absorption and not those particular situations themselves. This means that many of the aims we pursue in life, guided as we are by our memory traces, are fundamentally misguided.

Bronkhorst has suggested that absorption is pleasurable due to a drop in bodily tension. Regarding this issue my model may be harmonized with that of Bronkhorst, by suggesting that absorption equals lack of self-reflexive consciousness, and this in turn relieves much of the strain and tension from the body. His very apt observation was also that absorption does not leave behind any memory traces.⁶³ According to my model, that is due to the way declarable, explicit memory is associated with self-reflexive phenomenal conscious experience. When due to absorption this type of consciousness dissolves, that state cannot become incorporated into the structure of our declarative memory.

⁶¹ AN 9.34/iv 415: “*kiṃ paṇ' ettha, āvuso sārīputta, sukhaṃ yad ettha natthi vedayitaṃ*”ti? “*Etad eva khv ettha, āvuso, sukhaṃ yad ettha natthi vedayitaṃ*...”

⁶² The *Samiddhi Sutta* (SN 1.20/i 9) states that sensual pleasures (*kāmā*) have a temporal nature (*kālikā*). Perhaps the sutta is not just a general allusion to the fact that they are fleeting or time consuming (as translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi) but hints at this deeper psychological meaning.

⁶³ Bronkhorst, 2012: 141: “memory trace produced by absorption does not primarily record the state of absorption but rather the object or event experienced in that state.”

The metaphor of hardware and software used in modern cognitive science can be really useful to explain our situation. The sentient body with its intelligence can be compared to hardware. This hardware can however function in various ways, depending on the software which controls its resources. The Self-delusion is a sort of software, or rather a virus. A virus, whether computer or biological, has no inherent life or will of its own and is completely passive outside the system of a potential host. It is just a code. But due to what in informatics is called a vulnerability in the system of its host, it can become infected, making it function in a different way and actually actively replicate the virus in its own system and spread it on to others. The mutual interrelation of conscious experience, language and intelligence is one of the points of vulnerability, and human culture is the medium by which the virus spreads. One must seriously consider the possibility of vulnerability to Self-delusion being an evolutionary adaptation, however surprising it may sound. Evolution promotes traits that are conducive to survival and replication, and Self-delusion certainly makes us more competitive in the crazy race of natural selection. The human species has been able to dominate the world due to an egoistic drive which is greatly enhanced by the illusion of Self.

It is doubtful whether a society of enlightened beings would be interested in maintaining its existence and continuity at all costs. Therefore, it could be that the inclination to develop Self-delusion is hardwired into our cognitive structure on the genetic level. This would also explain why it is so difficult to break the spell and destroy this fundamental ignorance.

However, if the Self is not an inherent part of our being, it perhaps can be removed from our system, just like software or a virus. The hardware that we are can perhaps also run in a way that is much more natural and does not result in self-inflicted suffering. But how to undo the results of such a severe cognitive error? That is of course the goal of Buddhism, its true *raison d'être*. The psychological and philosophical ideas that we have been discussing in the present article will also prove relevant for understanding several crucial soteriological concepts of early Buddhism. This in particular concerns the idea of unconstructed cognition and the apophatic and paradoxical elements of the early Buddhist doctrine connected with the notion of cessation (*nirodha*). These issues will be discussed in a future study.

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All citations of the Āgama texts refer to the Taishō edition (in) Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association (CBETA). CBETA Chinese Electronic Tripiṭaka.

Abbreviations

AN	<i>Aṅguttara Nikaya</i>
BB	<i>Blue Book</i>
DN	<i>Dīgha Nikāya</i>
Iti	<i>Itivuttaka</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima Nikāya</i>
PI	<i>Philosophical Investigations</i>
SĀ	<i>Samyukta-āgama</i>
SHT	<i>Sanskrithandschriften aus den Turfanfunden. Teil 6</i>
SN	<i>Samyutta Nikāya</i>
Sn	<i>Sutta Nipāta</i>
T	Taishō edition (CBETA)
TLP	<i>Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus</i>
Ud	<i>Udāna</i>
Vism	<i>Visuddhimagga</i>

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Sariputta or Kaccāna?
A preliminary study of two early Buddhist
philosophies of mind and meditation

Alexander Wynne

In a recent edition of this journal (Vol. 11, November 2016), Anālayo has argued against the theory of two early Buddhist paths to liberation, and called on those who disagree to ‘engage seriously with the criticism that has been voiced, rather than ignoring it’ (Anālayo 2016: 41). Although we disagree with Anālayo’s critique of the ‘two path’ thesis, a response to it will have to wait for another occasion. In the present article, we will instead approach the subject of doctrinal difference in early Buddhism from a different, and potentially transformative, perspective. We will argue that the discrepancy between calm and insight is of secondary importance. What preceded this ‘schism’ in thought and practice is far more important: the gradual obscuration, by a non-Buddhist intrusion into the early Saṅgha, of an original philosophy of mind and meditation.

With regard to canonical discourses of early Buddhism, our position is thus that the situation is far more complicated than has hitherto been realised. There is certainly a real and important distinction between calm and insight; but we will argue that all calm-insight soteriologies are philosophically similar, since they are based on the same model of mind, derived from the early Upaniṣads, which was not found in the earliest phase of Buddhist activity. This leads us to conclude that the apparent ubiquity of calm and insight in early Buddhist discourses is an illusion; it is an *impression* created by a very small number of teachings repeated again and again in the canonical Suttas (both in Pali and in parallel collections).

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Our starting point is the question, on what philosophy of mind is early Buddhist soteriology founded? The pragmatic purpose of early Buddhism is clear enough.¹ But early Buddhist teachings frequently stray into the areas of cognition, perception, language and thought, and of the connection between body and mind. It seems to us that not nearly enough attention, in the form of a close conceptual analysis, has been paid to these aspects of early Buddhism. The important questions have been left unsaid, the most challenging and obscure ideas put to one side, and far too much importance assigned to Theravāda exegesis. Here, we will instead place difficulty and peculiarity at the heart of our enquiry. Two concerns are crucial:

1. How is the term *viññāṇa* to be understood in the early Buddhist teachings? It is usually translated as ‘consciousness’, but we will see that this is only partly true.
2. What is the role of the body in early Buddhist soteriology? This problem is curious. For although mindfulness of the body occupies a central position in early Buddhist meditation, bodily awareness plays no higher role in canonical accounts of calm-insight meditation.

These questions come down to two classical issues in the philosophy of mind: what is the nature of ‘consciousness’, and what is the nature of the mind-body connection? We will claim that different evaluations of these problems are connected to the teachings of two important disciples of the Buddha. One philosophy is associated with the figure of Sāriputta, and thus to the calm-insight tradition; but we believe that this philosophy is a deviation from an earlier understanding of mind, one best articulated by Mahā-Kaccāna, which implies a mindfulness-based soteriology.

1. Embodiment and liberation

According to the theory of calm and insight, the mind must become still and concentrated in order to perceive truth. Liberation occurs more or less entirely in the mind, even if it may entail certain desirable bodily experiences (relaxation, bliss, etc.). This means that the cessation of suffering is a sort of ‘enlightenment’,

¹ See Gombrich (2009: 161ff) on the Buddha’s pragmatism; Bronkhorst (2009: ix) offers the superficial opinion that the Buddha ‘did not teach philosophy as such.’

and some texts even use ‘light imagery’ to describe the Buddha’s liberation; a good example is in the Vinaya *Mahāvagga*, where the Buddha explains his understanding of the Four Noble Truths as ‘a vision into previously unheard ideas: knowledge arose, insight arose, understanding arose, *light arose*.’² But this version of liberation is problematic, since it bypasses other texts which emphasise the bodily aspect of liberation. This can be seen in the conclusion of the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, where the Buddha makes the following claim about his body, almost as a coda to the discourse as a whole:

The body of the Tathāgatha remains, *bhikkhus*, but its connection with ‘being’ (*bhavanetti*-) has been severed. As long as his body remains, gods and men will see him; when the body breaks up, after life has been exhausted, gods and men will not see him.³

One would like to translate the word *bhava* as ‘becoming’, and understand this as an entirely normal statement of liberation: of course the Buddha no longer has a ‘connection with becoming’, for his awakening means he cannot be reborn again. But the subject of the statement is the Buddha’s body, and it makes no sense to talk about a *body* lacking a connection to rebirth. In fact, no matter how one translates the term *bhava*, the meaning is peculiar: a body, rather than the person as a whole, cannot be separated from being, becoming, existence or rebirth. Thus T. W. Rhys Davids’ translation makes no sense: ‘The outward form, brethren, of him who has won the truth, stands before you, but that which binds it to rebirth is cut in twain.’⁴ This translation does not work, for a body or ‘outward form’ cannot be bound to rebirth.

Buddhaghosa similarly interprets the statement in terms of the Buddha’s cultivation of the path: ‘one whose connection to being/becoming has been severed (means) his connection to being/becoming has been severed, by means of the sword of the path of arahantship.’⁵ He thus identifies ‘thirst for being/

² Vin I.11. *pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi ñāṇaṃ udapādi paññā udapādi vijjā udapādi āloko udapādi*.

³ D I.46: *ucchinnabhavanettiko bhikkhave tathāgatassa kāyo tiṭṭhati*. *yāv’assa kāyo ṭhassati, tāva naṃ dakkhinti devamanussā. kāyassa bhedā uddhaṃ jīvita-pariyādānā na dakkhinti devamanussā*.

⁴ Rhys Davids (1923: 54).

⁵ Sv I.128: *sā arahattamagga-satthena ucchinnā bhavanetti assā ti ucchinnabhavanettiko*. Reading *arahattamagga* with Be instead of *arahattamagge* in Ee.

becoming' (*bhava-taṇhā*) as the 'rope' or 'connection' (*netti*) which binds.⁶ Hence Buddhaghosa understands the subject of the liberating disconnection as the Buddha himself, not his body, for a body cannot wield the 'sword of arahantship', and only a person as a whole, not the body, can be said to be the subject of thirst. Contrary to Buddhaghosa and Rhys Davids, however, we cannot escape the impression that the Buddha is talking about the somatic implications of his liberated condition. The simile with which the Buddha illustrates his statement seems to confirm this:

It is just like, *bhikkhus*, when a bunch of mangoes is cut off at the stalk: whatever mangoes are connected to the stalk, they all follow the (bunch as it falls).⁷

Just as the mangoes are connected to a mango tree by a stalk, which is severed, so too is the connection of the Buddha's body to 'being/becoming' severed. And just as mangoes remain in a condition disconnected from the mango tree, so too does the Buddha's body remain in a condition disconnected from the 'tree' of being/becoming. This means that the *embodied Buddha* is disconnected from 'being', or becoming, just like mangoes fallen from a tree. But if the body is an integral aspect of the liberated state, it implies that awareness is entangled in embodiment, irreducibly so. Strange as this might seem, exactly this point is made in another mysterious utterance of the Buddha (SN 2.26):

But I do not say, sir, that making an end of suffering occurs without reaching the end of the world. And yet, sir, I declare that the world, its arising, cessation and the way thereto occurs in this very fathom-long 'cadaver' (*kaḷevare*), endowed with perception and mind.⁸

Commenting on this passage, Hamilton (2000: 109) has noted that 'all of the factors of our experience, whatever they may be, are dependent for their existence *as that* on our cognitive apparatus.' This enigmatic statement does

⁶ Sv I.127-28: *idha pana nettisadisatāya bhavataṇhā nettī ti adhippetā.*

⁷ DN I.46: *seyyathāpi bhikkhave ambapiṇḍiyā vaṇṭacchinnāya, yāni kāni ci ambāni vaṇṭūpanibandhanāni, sabbāni tāni tadanvayāni bhavanti.*

⁸ SN I.62: *na kho panāhaṃ āvuso appatvā lokassa antaṃ dukkhassa antakiriyam vadāmi. api khvāhaṃ āvuso imasmiṇṇi eva vyāmamatte kaḷevare sasaññimhi samanake lokam ca paññapemi lokasamudayaṃ ca lokanirodham ca lokanirodhagāminiṃ ca paṭipadan ti.* See also AN II.48, AN II.50.

not merely claim, therefore, that the ‘world’ depends on mind; the dependence is rather on a body and its sense faculties, which include mind. For the present purpose, we note that the peculiar idea of a ‘sentient corpse’ suggests that consciousness, sentience or awareness is inseparable from embodiment, and cannot be reduced to ‘mind’. A similar expression, but with a more regular term for ‘body’, distinguishes the ‘body endowed with sentience’ (*saviññāṇake kāye*) from external ‘objects’ (*bahiddhā ca sabbanimittesu*), both of which are loci for a person’s ‘underlying tendency towards conceit in the terms ‘I’ and ‘mine’, (respectively).⁹

Such texts suggest that body and mind are experientially inseparable. If so, liberation must also affect both body and mind, and meditation should transform both; this would also seem to be the message of the *Brahmajāla Sutta*. And perhaps this should make us wonder: might this understanding of mind and body have anything to do with the early Buddhist practice of bodily mindfulness? Just as important, might there be an early Buddhist philosophy of mind in which awareness is said to be deeply rooted in the body, so that it could even be thought to emerge from it? Although never explained in quite this fashion, a philosophy along these lines is provided by one of the Buddha’s chief disciples, Mahā-Kaccāna, building on foundational Buddhist ideas about cognition.

2. Kaccāna’s philosophy of mind

Our focus on little studied statements about embodiment and experience allows us to read better known Buddhist teachings afresh. Thus we reconsider the early Buddhist account of cognition, as expounded by Mahā-Kaccāna in the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta* (MPS). Kaccāna’s teaching, an elaboration of a brief teaching of the Buddha, is unparalleled in the Pali Suttas. But his ideas are consistent with standard early Buddhist teachings on mind, cognition and language. The starting point of the narrative is a question put to the Buddha by Daṇḍapāṇi, the Sakyan: ‘What is the ascetic’s teaching, what does he say?’ (*kiṃvādī samaṇo kimakkhāyī ti?*). The Buddha replies as follows:

Teaching in such a way, sir, one abides without quarrel in the world with its gods, Māras and Brahmas, and among people, including its ascetics, brahmins, gods and men, and in such a way that

⁹ See e.g. MN III.18 (*ahaṃkāra-mamaṃkāra-mānānusayā*) and MN III.18-19, MN III.32, 36; SN II.252-53, III.80-81, III.103, III.136-37, III.169-70; AN I.132-34, AN IV.53.

conceptualisations do not lie dormant in that Brahmin who abides disassociated from sensual pleasures, who is free from doubt, his perplexity cut away, devoid of thirst for being and non-being: I teach thus, sir, I speak thus.¹⁰

Kaccāna interprets this enigmatic teaching as follows:

I understand, sir, the meaning of the instruction given by the Blessed One, in brief and without a detailed analysis, in detail as follows. Dependent on the eye and forms arises eye-sentience (*cakkhuviññāṇaṃ*), the coming together of all three is contact, from contact there is sensation, what one senses (*vedeti*) one apperceives (*sañjānāti*), what one apperceives one thinks over (*vitakketi*), what one thinks over one conceptually proliferates (*papañceti*), because of which conceptual proliferation, apperception and reckoning (*papañca-saññā-saṅkhā*)¹¹ afflict a person, with regard to (all) forms, of the past, future and present, which can be sensed by the eye.¹²

Although this scheme is unusually subtle and clear, it stands on its own in the Pali discourses. Other Suttanta schemes, based on the same presuppositions, focus on affective rather than cognitive malfunctioning, such as the oft-repeated formula of dependent origination:

And what, *bhikkhus*, is the cessation of suffering? Dependent on the eye and forms arises eye-sentience, the coming together of all three is contact, from contact there is sensation, from sensation thirst. But with the complete cessation and fading away of that thirst,

¹⁰ M I.108: *yathāvādī kho āvuso sadevake loke samārake sabrahmake sassamaṇabrāhmaṇiyyā pajāya sadevamanussāya na kenaci loke viggayha tiṭṭhati, yathā ca pana kāmehi viṣaṃyuttaṃ viharantaṃ taṃ brāhmaṇaṃ akathaṃkathitaṃ chinna-kukkuccaṃ bhavābhava vītataṇhaṃ saññā nānuseti, evaṃvādī kho ahaṃ āvuso evamakkhāyī ti.*

¹¹ Ñāṇānanda (1971: 5) interprets *papañca-saññā-saṅkhā* as ‘concepts, reckonings, designations or linguistic conventions characterised by the prolific conceptualising tendency of the mind.’

¹² M I.111-12: *imassa kho ahaṃ āvuso bhagavatā saṅkhittena uddesassa uddiṭṭhassa vitthārena atthaṃ avibhattassa evaṃ vitthārena atthaṃ ājānāmi: cakkhuñ c’ āvuso paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuviññāṇaṃ, tiṇṇaṃ saṅgati phasso, phassapaccayā vedanā, yaṃ vedeti taṃ sañjānāti, yaṃ sañjānāti taṃ vitakketi, yaṃ vitakketi taṃ papañceti, yaṃ papañceti tattonidānaṃ purisaṃ papañcasaññāsaṅkhā samudācaranti atītānāgatapaccuppannesu cakkhuviññeyyesu rūpesu.*

there is the cessation of grasping, from the cessation of grasping
 there is the cessation of becoming, from the cessation of becoming
 there is the cessation of birth, from the cessation of birth old-age,
 death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, depression and tribulation cease.
 Thus is the cessation of this entire mass of suffering. (SN 12.43)¹³

This formula identifies the affective roots of suffering and so offers a solution in line with the Second Noble Truth. Kaccāna's scheme instead focuses on the subtler cognitive aspects of *dukkha*. Importantly, his scheme avoids positing an essential subject of cognition. A person's awareness of objects arises through no volition: one does not attend to or think about objects until the higher, conceptual, phases of consciousness. Hence 'mind' is merely a faculty through which 'mind objects' (*dhamme*) are sensed, rather than a term for an organ or subject of cognition; *manas* in no way resembles what in modern philosophy is termed 'mind'.

The meaning of the term *viññāṇa* is complicated and difficult. It cannot be simply equated with the term 'consciousness', a word which generally indicates being awake and aware as opposed to being asleep, whereas Kaccāna's cognitive process *could* occur to someone who is asleep and experiencing 'mind objects'. Moreover, *viññāṇa* does not refer to active cognition, as the term 'consciousness' does, for the six types of *viññāṇa* (five senses plus 'mind') occur before 'contact' (*phassa*), the starting point of cognition proper. 'Contact' is the point from which different qualities of experience can be felt as 'sensation' (pleasure, pain or neither), and then known and responded to. This means that *viññāṇa* is not a state of awareness which exists prior to its association with an object, and then averts to it. There is no 'simple' or 'essential' *viññāṇa*, in other words, but only particular, irreducible, types of *viññāṇa* which depend on a particular correspondence between object and sense-faculty.

If *viññāṇa* occurs prior to contact, and hence before 'conscious' experience, it must refer to a basic capacity for sentience with which the human 'cadaver' as a whole is endowed; this sentience is distributed through the human body,

¹³ SN II.72: *katamo ca bhikkhave dukkhassa atthaṅgamo? cakkhuñ ca paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuviññāṇaṃ, tiṇṇaṃ saṅgati phasso, phassapaccayā vedanā, vedanāpaccayā taṇhā. tassā yeva taṇhāya asesavirāganirodhā upādānanirodho, upādānanirodhā bhavanirodho, bhavanirodhā jātinirodho, jātinirodhā jarāmaraṇaṃ sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyā sā nirujjhanti. evaṃ etassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa nirodho hoti. ayaṃ kho bhikkhave dukkhassa atthaṅgamo.*

encompassing the sense faculties and ‘mind’, and only occurs in particular forms, there being no ‘pure’ *viññāṇa*. In relation to this, Davis and Thompson (2014: 589) have usefully referred to the neuroscientific work of Parvisi and Damasio (2001), who have hypothesized ‘a basal, core-level consciousness ... dependent on subcortical structures such as the thalamus and brain-stem, and which occurs independently of the direction of this consciousness to particular objects through selective attention.’¹⁴ The early Buddhist definition of *viññāṇa* seems to be something like this.

In consideration of all this, a useful translation of *viññāṇa* would be something like ‘pre-noetic transitive sentience’.¹⁵ What *we* call ‘consciousness’ in modern parlance is, for Kaccāna, a complex of cognitive events, faculties and abilities which occur from ‘contact’ onwards, all of which arise from the basic forms of pre-noetic transitive consciousness. This means that for Kaccāna, the feeling or sense of being a subject of cognition is an *emergent* state of consciousness defined by the ability to apperceive, verbalise, ideate and intend, and is quite different from *viññāṇa*. Importantly, this understanding of *viññāṇa* goes some way towards explaining the idea of a ‘body endowed with sentience’, and perhaps also provides a conceptual basis for the Buddha’s claim that his ‘body’ has lost its connection to ‘being’. Sentience, cognition and consciousness are all embodied, deeply so.

3. Bare cognition?

Kaccāna has nothing to say about meditation in the MPS. But his analysis has meditative implications, for he identifies the higher ‘waves’ of cognitive

¹⁴ Davis and Thompson’s attempt to formulate a philosophy of mind based on the five aggregates is useful, but the skeleton nature of the list of five aggregates means that the gaps must be filled in from elsewhere. From a text-critical perspective, it is incorrect to utilise the *Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta* (MN 28) to this end; we will show below that its philosophy of mind is different from Kaccāna’s, and hence from that implied by the five aggregates. Davis and Thompson (2014: 589) thus refer to *manasikāra* as ‘a kind of universal attention necessary for any moment of consciousness.’ This is incorrect: *manasikāra* is usually said to be employed correctly or incorrectly (*yoniso/ayoniso*), e.g. in the *Sabbāsava Sutta* (MN 2), the implication being that it refers to what Thompson and Davis term ‘selective attention’, i.e. the volitional application of attention to objects.

¹⁵ For a similar definition of *viññāṇa* as ‘not full cognition, but bare sensation, a sort of anoeitic sentience’ see E. R. Sarathchandra, *Buddhist Psychology of Perception* (Colombo: The Ceylon University Press, 1958: 4), as cited in Jayatilleke (1963: 434).

functioning as that which must be resolved if suffering is to cease; the Buddha's brief teaching also mentions 'conceptual proliferation, apperception and reckoning' as the problems which beset a person. But how can conceptualization be resolved? After his encounter with the Sakyan Daṇḍapāṇi, the Buddha returns to the banyan park in the evening, and in addressing the *bhikkhus* of Kapilavatthu makes a further point relevant to our enquiry:

The source from which conceptual proliferation, apperception and reckoning afflict a person, if it is not delighted in, approved of or clung to, is precisely the end of the latent tendencies towards passion (and: repulsion, view, doubt, conceit, passion for being, ignorance etc.); it is here that these evil, unskilful states cease without remainder.¹⁶

The Buddha here presents the way to liberation as a matter of attending to the source of cognition in a particular manner. This suggests, in Buddhist terms, adopting an attitude of equanimity towards the different elements of simple experience. The 'source' (*nidānaṃ*) of conceptual proliferation and so on is not defined, but in early Buddhist terms must be equivalent with 'sensation', 'contact' or perhaps even 'pre-noetic sentience' (*viññāṇa*). Spiritual practices are not stated, but the teaching at least suggests that in the final analysis a radically simplified awareness is required. Might this imply the practice of mindfulness as 'bare cognition'?

Whether or not mindfulness is a kind of 'bare cognition' or 'bare attention' has attracted some recent scholarly attention. Sharf (2015), Dreyfus (2013), Anālayo (2017: 25-26) and Bodhi (2013) have all argued against the idea that mindfulness, in the canonical teachings, is a sort of 'present-centered awareness in which each thought, feeling or sensation that arises in the attentional field is acknowledged and accepted as it is.'¹⁷ For Bhikkhu Bodhi, the message of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* is that 'the meditator not only observes phenomena but interprets the presentational field in a way that sets arisen phenomena in a meaningful context' (2011: 22). Bodhi also claims that the eightfold path teaches

¹⁶ MN I.111: *yatonidānaṃ bhikkhu purisaṃ papañcasaññāsāṅkhā samudācaranti, ettha ce n' atthi abhinanditabbaṃ abhivaditabbaṃ ajjhositabbaṃ, es' ev' anto rāgānusayānaṃ [...] etth' ete pāpakā akusalā dhammā aparisesā nirujjhantī ti.*

¹⁷ Bishop et al. (20004: 232), 'Mindfulness: A Proposed Definition', *Clinical Psychology, Science and Practice* 11: 230-41, as cited in Dreyfus (2013: 43).

a meditator to ‘evaluate mental qualities and intended deeds, make judgments about them, and engage in purposeful action’ (Bodhi 2011: 26). The gist of these recent studies is that mindfulness is *not* a ‘non-judgmental, non-discursive attending to the here-and-now’ (Sharf 2015: 472) that could be termed ‘bare cognition’. According to Schulman (2010: 419),

The awareness that *sati-paṭṭhāna* attempts to develop is not neutral, certainly not “naked,” but rather one that has been thoroughly habituated according to Buddhist intuitions of truth.

These critiques present us with a considerable problem. In the MPS conceptualization is a major aspect of suffering that must be transcended, perhaps by attending to simple experience. But according to recent studies, conceptualization, discrimination and judgement are intrinsic aspects of mindfulness practice; specifically Buddhist notions, of a metaphysical or ethical character (impermanence, compassion, etc.), must not be forgotten on the path. Mindfulness would thus seem to require the inculcation of certain ideas; one must substitute one type of thought for another. But if so, how can a person be freed from the conceptualizations which the MPS says ‘assail’ him? Have we misunderstood Kaccāna and the Buddha?

It is more likely that Sharf et al. have *misunderstood* mindfulness by focusing almost entirely on the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. We believe that this text, despite the overwhelming amount of attention it continues to attract, is still poorly understood, and in great need of a close conceptual and historical analysis. This is not our purpose, however. Here, we would rather focus on a lacuna in the works of Sharf et al., by drawing attention to other early Buddhist teachings and perspectives on mindfulness, in particular, those of a non-discursive nature. Bhikkhu Bodhi is partly right when he notes that

[i]n certain types of mindfulness practice, conceptualization and discursive thought may be suspended in favour of non-conceptual observation, but there is little evidence in the Pāli Canon and its commentaries that mindfulness *by its very nature* is devoid of conceptualization.’ (2011: 28).

The first part of this statement is correct, but the second part is misconceived: while non-conceptuality is an obvious aspect of early Buddhist teaching, these teachings do not present mindfulness as a *thing* or *mental quality* which

has a particular *nature*, and which a person *has* or *uses*. This essentialised understanding of mindfulness is distinctly Abhidhammic, but quite alien to the early teachings, which focus on the *bhikkhu* who abides or practices *mindfully*, and who could therefore be said to be *mindful*. In other words adjectives (*sato*, *satimā*, *sampajāno* etc.), rather than nouns, dominate the canonical accounts of mindfulness. The vital question is not what mindfulness essentially *is*, or whether 'mindfulness' consists of a broad range of practices, but what the mindful meditator *does* and *how* he is liberated, that is to say, *how* his path culminates in Nirvana. Considered from this perspective, some vitally important early teachings relate mindfulness practice to non-conceptual states of meditation; that is to say, the practice of mindfulness as bare cognition occupies the decisive stages of the path, rather than calm-insight practices.

The eightfold path is a simple but useful guide. Although 'right mindfulness' (*sammā-sati*) is grounded in understanding, morality, and ethical introspection (i.e. the path from 'right view' to 'right effort'), it also precedes the *jhānas*, states in which conceptual thought is abandoned and which culminate in 'the complete purification of equanimity and mindfulness' (*upekkhāsati-pārisuddhiṃ*). The classical account of the four *jhānas* is, of course, found in the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, a text which certainly grounds the path in Buddhist ideas, values and judgements. But at its higher levels it mentions only two practices prior to the *jhānas*: 'guarding the senses' (*indriya-saṃvara*) and maintaining 'mindfulness and clear awareness' during mundane daily activities (*sati-sampajañña*). The latter is described as follows:

The *bhikkhu* is **fully attentive** when going forward or back, when looking forward or backwards, when bending or stretching, when holding his outer robe, bowl and robe, when eating, drinking, chewing or tasting, when defecating or urinating, when going, standing, sitting, sleeping, waking, speaking or being quiet.¹⁸

This seems to be a close fit to Sharf's definition of 'bare attention' as 'a sort of non-judgmental, non-discursive attending to the here-and-now'. Moreover, the practice is positioned at an advanced point of the path, after moral judgements

¹⁸ DN I.70: *bhikkhu abhikkante paṭikkante sampajānakārī hoti, ālokite vilokite sampajānakārī hoti, sammiñjite pasārite sampajānakārī hoti, saṃghāṭipattacīvaradhāraṇe sampajānakārī hoti, asite pīte khāyite sāyite sampajānakārī hoti, uccārapassāvakamme sampajānakārī hoti, gate ṭhite nisinne sutte jāgarite bhāsīte tuṇhībhave sampajānakārī hoti.*

have been cultivated and internalised; being habitual, one could say that ethical and even metaphysical ideas need no longer occupy the thoughts of the *bhikkhu*. Other teachings describe the culmination of the path as a state of bare cognition, for example the *Paramatṭhaka Sutta* (*Sutta-nipāta* IV: *Aṭṭhakavagga*, 5):

For whom, right here, there is no inclination towards either ‘extreme’ - for being or non-being, in this world or yonder - for him, after contemplating grasping at doctrines, there are no attachments.

He does not construct even the subtlest apperception with regard to what is seen, heard or thought; how would one conceptualise that Brahmin in this world, who does not appropriate a view?

They do not fabricate, they do not prefer, they do not accept any doctrines. The Brahmin cannot be inferred through virtue or vows, such a person has gone to the far shore and does not fall back (on anything).¹⁹

In the *Aṭṭhakavagga* the motif of ‘what is seen, heard or thought’ stands for cognition in its simplest form. The idea of not constructing an ‘apperception’ (or conceptualisation, *saññā*), with regard to ‘what is seen etc.’ thus indicates attending to the bare ‘stuff’ of experience. Although commonly ignored in the study of early Buddhism, this source is of tremendous significance: we believe that the *Aṭṭhaka*- and *Pārāyana-vaggas* (Sn IV-V) are *the key to understanding early Buddhism*.

This simple and brief survey shows that ‘bare cognition’, as a sort of passive awareness, is an important aspect of early Buddhist teachings. The recent failure to register the understanding of mindfulness as ‘bare cognition’ is based primarily on a misuse of sources, but is also due to a confusion of spiritual means and ends, and to assigning far too much explanatory

¹⁹ Sn 801-03. *yassūbhayante paṇidhīdha n’atthi, bhavābhavāya idha vā huraṃ vā / nivesanā tassa na santi keci, dhammesu niccheyya samuggahītaṃ* // 801 // *tassīdha diṭṭhe va sute mute vā, pakappitā n’atthi añū pi saññā / taṃ brāhmaṇaṃ diṭṭhim anādiyānaṃ, kenīdha lokasmiṃ vikappayeyya* // 802 // *na kappayanti na purekkharonti, dhammā pi tesam na paṭicchitāse / na brāhmaṇo silavatena neyyo, pāraṃgato na pacceti tādī ti* // 803 //

Reading *samuggahītaṃ* in 801 with Be, rather than *samuggahītā* in Ee; compare Sn 785, 837, and 907.

significance to Theravāda exegesis. The latter is especially misconceived, for an abundance of recent research has painted a very different view of early Buddhist speculation.²⁰ While the seeds of the Theravāda position are certainly contained in the Pali discourses, in the next sections (4 & 5) we will see that these 'seeds' are a minor, and relatively late, formulation within early Buddhism; even in this preliminary study, we have identified a very different understanding of *viññāṇa*, and of the mind-body connection, than is normally read into early Buddhism. So we believe that bare cognition makes sense given Kaccāna's analysis of consciousness, and of the Buddha's implied spiritual method in the MPS. But can this understanding - of sentience, consciousness, the body and mindfulness - be equated with, or even fitted into, a calm-insight soteriology? This does not seem possible.

4. Sāriputta and the calm-insight tradition

The calm-insight ideal, as formulated in the Pali discourses, has no place for bare cognition at the higher reaches of the path, and does not attribute any essential importance to the cultivation of mindfulness, in the sense of bare cognition, i.e. as a passive awareness of sensory stimuli. This can be seen in the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* (DN 2), the conceptual core of the early calm-insight tradition. It describes the state which occurs after the fourth stage of meditation (*catutthaṃ jhānaṃ*), and which directly precedes insight, as follows:

When his mind (*citte*) is thus concentrated, purified (*parisuddhe*), cleansed (*pariyodāte*), without blemish, devoid of defilement, supple, workable, still, and in a state of imperturbability, the (*bhikkhu*) directs and turns (it) towards the knowledge of the destruction of the corruptions.²¹

So the 'mind' (*cittaṃ*), a state of lucidly pure consciousness, can apparently be *turned* towards specific objects to be fully known, at a higher level than ordinary. The *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* also identifies this 'mind' as the subject of the liberating experience:

²⁰ Especially Hamilton (1996, 2000), Gombrich (1996, 2009), Wynne (2007, 2015) and Polak (2011).

²¹ DN I.83: *so evaṃ samāhite citte parisuddhe pariyodāte anaṅgaṇe vigatūpakkilese mudubhūte kammaniye ṭhite ānejjappatte, āsavānaṃ khayaññāya cittaṃ abhinīharati abhininnāmeti.*

When the (*bhikkhu*) knows and sees thus, his mind is freed from the corruptions of sensual pleasure, becoming, and ignorance. When (it) is released, there is the knowledge ‘(it is) released’,²² and he understands: ‘birth is exhausted, the holy life has been lived, done is what had to be done, nothing more is required for the state thus.’²³

The ‘purification’ and ‘turning’ of the mind towards a pre-ordained end is a basic presupposition of both insight and calm approaches to liberation. The only difference between calm and insight lies in what is to be done to the mind once it has been sufficiently prepared: whether to apply it to pure ideas, or whether to purify it into complete inactivity, to the point of attaining the ‘cessation of sensation and perception’ (*saññāvedayita-nirodha*), also called the ‘deathless element’ (*amatā dhātu*).²⁴ In some insight texts, meditation is not even mentioned. This ‘dry insight’²⁵ approach can be seen in the account of Sāriputta’s liberation in the *Dīghanakha Sutta* (MN 74):

At that time venerable Sāriputta was stood right behind the Blessed One, fanning him. He then had this thought: ‘The Blessed One, apparently, advises the abandoning of all of these phenomena through understanding, the Blessed One, apparently, advises the relinquishing of all of these phenomena through understanding’. While he was reflecting (*paṭisañcikkhato*) thus, the mind (*cittaṃ*) of venerable Sāriputta was released from the corruptions without grasping.²⁶

²² On the expression *vimuttasmiṃ vimuttam* see Schmithausen (1981: 205 n.20).

²³ DN I.84: *tassa evaṃ jānato evaṃ passato, kāmasavā pi cittaṃ vimuccati, bhavāsavā pi cittaṃ vimuccati, avijjāsavā pi cittaṃ vimuccati, vimuttasmiṃ vimuttam iti ñāṇaṃ hoti, khīṇā jāti vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ kataṃ karaṇīyaṃ nāparaṃ itthattāyā ti pajānāti.*

²⁴ On the identification of cessation and the ‘deathless element’, see Wynne (2007: 119).

²⁵ See Gombrich (1996: 125) on the expression *sukkha-vipassaka*, ‘dry intuiters’, which is found in the commentaries, not the canon.

²⁶ MN I.500-01: *tena kho pana samayena āyasmā sāriputto bhagavato piṭṭhito ṭhito hoti, bhagavantaṃ vījamāno. atha kho āyasmato sāriputtassa etad ahosi: tesaṃ tesaṃ kira no bhagavā dhammānaṃ abhiññā pahānaṃ āha, tesaṃ tesaṃ kira no sugato dhammānaṃ abhiññā paṭinissaggam āhā ti. iti h’ idam āyasmato sāriputtassa paṭisañcikkhato anupādāya āsavehi cittaṃ vimucci.*

The ‘phenomena’ contemplated by Sāriputta are mentioned immediately prior to this: a person’s experience of the three types of feeling (pleasant, painful and neither).

Sāriputta is, of course, the exemplar of the Abhidhamma tradition and hence the insight approach. But early Buddhist composers, at least in the Pali tradition, made exaggerated insight claims on his behalf. In the Vinaya account of Buddhist beginnings, venerable Assaji, one of the first five disciples, explains the essence of the Buddha's teaching to Sāriputta as follows:

And then venerable Assaji uttered this Dhamma teaching to Sāriputta, the wanderer: 'Those phenomena which originate from a cause, the Tathāgata teaches their cause, and their cessation; the great ascetic teaches thus.' And then, having heard this Dhamma teaching, the spotless, untainted insight into Dhamma (*dhamma-cakkhu*) arose in Sāriputta, the wanderer: 'whatever has the nature of arising, all that has the nature of cessation.'²⁷

In this Vinaya narrative, the attainment of 'insight into Dhamma' is usually preliminary; when it occurs for venerable Koṇḍañña and the four other first disciples, it is followed up by insight proper, after they have heard further not-self teachings (Vin I.11-14). But things are different with Sāriputta. When he meets Moggallāna shortly after his encounter with Assaji, he claims to be liberated:

'Your faculties are tranquil, sir, the colour of your skin is pure and clear. Perhaps you have attained the immortal?'

'Yes, sir, I have attained the immortal (*amataṃ adhigato*).'²⁸

This is exactly the same language used by the Buddha when he tries to convince the five *bhikkhus* of his own awakening:

The Tathāgata is an arahant, *bhikkhus*, (and) fully awakened: focus your hearing, *bhikkhus*, the immortal has been attained (*amataṃ adhigataṃ*), I will instruct (you), I will teach the Dhamma.²⁹

²⁷ Vin I.40: *atha kho āyasmā assaji sārīputtassa paribbājakassa imaṃ dhammapariyāyaṃ abhāsi: ye dhammā hetuppabhavā, tesaṃ hetuṃ tathāgato āha, tesaṃ ca yo nirodho, evaṃvādī mahāsamaṇo ti. atha kho sārīputtassa paribbājakassa imaṃ dhammapariyāyaṃ sutvā virajaṃ vītamalaṃ dhammacakkhuṃ udapādi: yaṃ kiñci samudayadhammaṃ, sabbaṃ taṃ nirodhadhammaṃ ti.*

²⁸ Vin I.41: *vippasannāni kho te āvuso indriyāni parisuddho chavivaṇṇo pariyodāto. kacci nu tvaṃ āvuso amataṃ adhigato ti. ām' āvuso amataṃ adhigato ti.*

²⁹ Vin I.9: *arahaṃ bhikkhave tathāgato sammāsambuddho, odahatha bhikkhave sotaṃ,*

This Vinaya account, and the *Dīghanakha Sutta*, lie towards one end of a soteriological spectrum, ranging from pure insight at one end to pure meditation at the other, with the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* providing the conceptual centre of gravity, with its balance of calm and insight, in the middle. Towards the meditative end of the spectrum, a rather different account of Sāriputta's liberation is found in the *Anupada Sutta* (MN 111).³⁰ This text first states that Sāriputta spent 'half a month gaining insight into phenomena, in stages' (MN III.25: *sāriputto bhikkhave aḍḍhamāsaṃ anupadadhammavipassanaṃ vipassati*), before going through all the meditative states from the first *jhāna* to the 'sphere of nothingness'. Within each of these states, Sāriputta practices insight meditation as follows:

Here, *bhikkhus*, Sāriputta, separated from sensual desire and unskilful states, passed his time having attained the first *jhāna*, a state of joy and bliss born from seclusion, possessing reasoning and reflection. The phenomena which (occur) in the first *jhāna* - reasoning, reflection, joy, bliss, oneness of mind, contact, sensation, apperception, volition, consciousness, will, determination, energy, mindfulness, equanimity and attention - these phenomena were noted, in stages.

These phenomena were known as they arose, as they endured, and then as they faded away. He understood thus: 'Thus, apparently, these phenomena, having not been, come into being, having come into being, they disappear'. Neither attracted nor averse to these phenomena, independent, unbound, detached and released (from them), he abided with an unrestricted mind, and understood: 'There is a higher release'. Through focusing on this (idea), he became (certain) 'there is (a higher release)'.³¹

amatam adhigataṃ aham anusāsāmi ahaṃ dhammaṃ desemi.

³⁰ On this text, see Schmithausen (1981: 231-32).

³¹ MN III.25: *idha bhikkhave sārīputto vivicc' eva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkaṃ savicāraṃ vivekaṃ pītisukhaṃ paṭhamajjhānaṃ upasampajja viharati. ye ca paṭhamajjhāne dhammā, vitakko ca vicāro ca pīti ca sukhañ ca cittekaggatā ca phasso vedanā saññā cetanā cittaṃ chando adhimokkho viriyaṃ sati upekhā manasikāro, tyāssa dhammā anupada-vavatthitā honti, tyāssa dhammā viditā uppajjanti, viditā upaṭṭhahanti, viditā abbhataṃ gacchanti. so evaṃ pajānāti: evaṃ kira 'me dhammā ahutvā sambhonti, hutvā paṭiventī ti. so tesu dhammesu anupāyo anapāyo anissito apaṭibaddho vippamutto viṣaṃyutto vimariyādikatenā*

It is hard to escape the feeling that this is a relatively late account, which applies Sāriputta's insight into 'rise and fall', as stated in the Vinaya, to a new, meditative, understanding. Sāriputta's insights are said to occur in all meditative states up to and including 'nothingness'. But since no phenomena occur in the 'sphere of neither perception nor non-perception', and since thought is thus rendered impossible within it, Sāriputta's contemplation occurs after emerging from it:

Having emerged, mindful, from that attainment (of 'neither perception nor non-perception'), he saw into those phenomena which had passed away, ceased, altered (as follows): 'Thus, apparently, these phenomena, having not been, they come into being, having come into being, they disappear'.³²

The text then returns to the same formula of Sāriputta realising there is a higher release, before moving on to the final attainment of the 'cessation of perception and sensation'. Sāriputta is liberated:

Having transcended the 'sphere of neither perception nor non-perception', Sāriputta abided having attained the cessation of perception and sensation. And having seen with insight, his corruptions were destroyed (*paññāya c' assa disvā āsavā parikkhīṇā honti*). He emerged mindful from that state, and saw into those phenomena which had passed away, ceased, altered, (as follows): 'Thus, apparently, these phenomena, having not been, they come into being, having come into being, they disappear'. Neither attracted nor averse to these phenomena, independent, unbound, detached and released (from them), he abided with an unrestricted mind, and understood: 'There is no higher release' (*so n' atthi uttari nissaraṇan ti pajānāti*). Through focusing on this (idea), he became certain 'there is no (higher release)'.³³

cetasā viharati. so atthi uttari nissaraṇan ti pajānāti. tabbahulīkāra atthi t' ev' assa hoti.

³² MN III.28: *so tāya samāpattiya sato vuṭṭhahitvā, ye dhammā atītā niruddhā vipariṇatā te dhamme samanupassati: evaṃ kira 'me dhammā ahutvā sambhonti, hutvā pativedentī ti.*

³³ MN III.29: *sāriputto sabbaso nevasaññānāsaññāyatanaṃ samatikkamma saññāvedayitanirodhaṃ upasampajja viharati. paññāya c' assa disvā āsavā parikkhīṇā honti. so tāya samāpattiya sato vuṭṭhahati, so tāya samāpattiya sato vuṭṭhahitvā ye dhammā atītā niruddhā vipariṇatā te dhamme samanupassati: evaṃ kira 'me dhammā ahutvā sambhonti, hutvā pativedentī ti.*

Although Sāriputta must emerge from cessation in order to contemplate phenomena, and gain insight, a vague, unspecified, form of insight said to occur in cessation itself: ‘having seen with insight...’. This text thus points out that insight meditation is impossible in cessation (and in neither perception nor non-perception), and yet claims that a sort of insight (*paññā*) occurs in it. This makes no sense, and the pericope *paññāya c’assa disvā, āsavā parikkhīṇā honti* is best viewed as an addition, made to adapt the idea of cessation to the insight ideal. Path accounts which culminate in cessation thus suggest, essentially, a purely meditative or concentrative type of liberation.³⁴

5. A typology of calm-insight soteriologies

The three accounts of Sāriputta’s liberation provide a rough guide to the dominant calm-insight trends in early Buddhism. This can be seen in the following typology, which is based on accounts of what happens at the higher, decisive, stages of the path, in particular the states which immediately precede liberation:

1. Pure insight, e.g. the *Dīghanakha Sutta* and Vinaya Mahāvagga, where liberating insight is instantaneous and meditation does not figure directly.
2. Meditation plus insight i), e.g. the *Aṭṭhakanāgara Sutta* (MN 52), where insight occurs at different levels of meditation, as in the *Anupada Sutta*, but leads to liberation directly.
3. Meditation plus insight ii), e.g. the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, where insight occurs at the end of a meditative progression culminating in the 4th *jhāna*.

so tesu dhammesu anupāyo anapāyo anissito appaṭibaddho vippamutto viṣaṃyutto vimariyādikatenā cetasā viharati. so n’atthi uttarim nissaraṇaṇ ti pajānāti. tabbahulīkāra n’atthi t’ev’assa hoti.

³⁴ On *paññāya c’assa disvā...*, see Schmithausen (1981: 216-17).

4. Meditation plus insight iii), e.g. the *Anupada Sutta*, where insight occurs at different levels of meditation, but only to direct an adept onwards towards a final state of concentration, in which liberation occurs.
5. Pure Meditation, e.g. the Nivāpa (MN 25) or *Mahācunda Suttas* (AN 6.46), which focus on the attainment of the ‘cessation of perception and sensation’ or the ‘deathless element’, and have no interest in or are outright hostile to insight practice.

This typology shows that calm and insight can sometimes stand in almost complete opposition: reducing the mind to a state no thought or experience is quite different from having experience and contemplating its true nature. But this difference is not our present focus: we are attempting to understand if there is any room for a mindfulness-based soteriology within these calm-insight schemes. And the results seem negative. Despite our initial enquiry into embodiment and cognition, nothing like bare cognition, bodily mindfulness or passive awareness plays anything more than a preparatory role in the dominant Suttanta formulations of calm and/or insight.

We thus seem to have identified a major conceptual difference in early Buddhist teaching. According to Kaccāna, a person’s normal waking state of consciousness, and the normal exercise of one’s cognitive powers, are *constructions* that *emerge* from simple, transitive, sentience. The soteriological solution to this problem, we suspect, on the basis of the MPS and a few other important texts, is for cognitive conditioning to be *deconstructed* through the practice of *bare cognition*. On the other hand, calm-insight soteriologies instead suggest that *highly constructed* states of consciousness should be *harnessed*, intensely, and then *applied* to a pre-ordained end. Whereas calm-insight soteriologies *require* carefully constructed states of consciousness, Kaccāna’s teaching implies the mindful *dissolution* of all such forms of cognitive conditioning.

Kaccāna

The experience of ‘mind’ or ‘consciousness’ is constructed/conditioned.

Implications: conditioning must be undone, ‘consciousness’ must be deconstructed, through paying mindful attention to the sensory and somatic roots of experience.

Sāriputta and the calm-insight tradition(s)

The experience of ‘mind’ or ‘consciousness’ must be conditioned in a certain way.

Proper conditioning allows either for a higher form of knowledge, or a state of non-experience, both of which were believed (probably by different Buddhists) to be liberating.

6. Sāriputta’s philosophy of mind

We seem to have detected an apparent dichotomy within early Buddhist thought and practice. Kaccāna’s philosophy seems to have been discarded, or was unknown, by whoever formulated the calm-insight soteriologies. But if so, what is the philosophical basis of these calm-insight soteriologies? We do not have to look very far for an answer. Curiously, the Pali discourses contain a philosophy of mind different from Kaccāna’s, but related most prominently to Sāriputta and in close conceptual agreement with the calm-insight ideal. In the *Mahāvedalla Sutta* (MN 43), in response to the questions of Mahā-Koṭṭhita, Sāriputta presents *viññāṇa* almost as an organ of perception, or even an essential subject of experience:

‘One perceives (*vijānāti*), one perceives’, sir, therefore (it) is called ‘perception’ (*viññāṇan ti*). And what does one perceive? One perceives ‘pleasure’, one perceives ‘pain’, one perceives ‘neither pleasure nor pain’.³⁵

³⁵ MN I.292: *vijānāti vijānātī ti kho āvuso tasmā viññāṇan ti vuccati. kiñ ca vijānāti? sukhān ti pi vijānāti, dukkhan ti pi vijānāti, adukkha-m-asukhan ti pi vijānāti.*

A virtually identical statement is made about ‘sensation’ (*vedanā*) soon afterwards: *vedanā* is so called because ‘one senses pleasure, one senses pain, one senses neither pleasure nor pain’.³⁶ The only difference between the definitions is the use of the quotation mark *ti* in the definition of *viññāṇa*: whereas *viññāṇa* is involved in the awareness of ‘pleasure’ (*sukhan ti*), *vedanā* is involved in the awareness of just pleasure (*sukham*). The lack of the quotation mark in the definition of *vedanā* indicates a simpler mode of awareness, perhaps even a mere registering of sensory *qualia*; its presence in the definition of *viññāṇa* instead suggests a knowledge of what is happening. Whatever the case, *viññāṇa* is a factor involved in cognition after ‘contact’, not before it as in Kaccāna’s philosophy, and seems to correspond to a person’s sense of being the observer of experience.³⁷ A similar idea is formulated in the *Mahā-hatthipadopama Sutta* (MN 28):

But when, sir, a person’s eye is not impaired, and external visible forms come into its range, and there is an appropriate act of attention (*samannāhāro*), thus the appearance of that type of consciousness comes to be.³⁸

There can be little doubt about the meaning of this teaching, since the verb *samannāharati* is equivalent to the verb *manasi-karoti* in numerous Suttas.³⁹ Both refer, unmistakably, to volitional or ‘selectional’ acts of attention. A similar volitional direction of attention or ‘consciousness’ (*viññāṇa*) is mentioned in the soteriological scheme of the *Dhātuvibhaṅga Sutta* (MN 140). After outlining a non-self contemplation of the six elements, the Buddha states that the resultant state of ‘purified’ consciousness allows a person to comprehend experience accurately:

And then only consciousness (*viññāṇam*) remains, purified (*parisuddham*) and cleansed (*pariyodātam*), by which one knows

³⁶ MN I.293. vedeti vedetī ti kho āvuso tasmā vedanā ti vuccati. kiñ ca vedeti? sukham pi vedeti dukkham pi vedeti adukkha-m-asukham pi vedeti.

³⁷ Hamilton (2016: 55) has noted that the ‘discrimination between feelings according to pleasure, pain and their absence is also mentioned in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas*, but there it is mentioned as part of the process of attaining insight rather than as a brief definition of the function of *viññāṇa*: the cognitive verb used is *pajānāti* rather than *vijānāti*.’

³⁸ MN I.190: yato ca kho āvuso ajjhattikañ c’ eva cakkhum aparibhinnaṃ hoti bāhirā ca rūpā āpātham āgacchanti tajo ca samannāhāro hoti, evaṃ tājassa viññāṇabhāgassa pātubhāvo hoti.

³⁹ E.g. DN II.204-5, MN I.325, MN I.446, SN I.112, SN I.190, AN II.116 etc.

something: one perceives pleasure, one perceives pain, one perceives neither pleasure nor pain.⁴⁰

The understanding of a consciousness (*viññāṇa*) in this insight teaching restates, at a higher level of consciousness or perception, exactly the same understanding of cognition stated by Sāriputta in the *Mahāvedalla Sutta*. In both discourses, ‘mind’ or ‘consciousness’ (*viññāṇa*) perceives the qualities of sensation (*vedanā*). Moreover, the understanding of a ‘purified’ consciousness in the *Dhātuvibhaṅga Sutta*, which can be directed towards the knowledge of objects, is similar to the idea of a ‘purified’ mind (*citta*), which in the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* is said to be directed towards insight. Both texts use the same vocabulary to indicate that intentional awareness can be ‘purified’ (*parisuddha*) and ‘cleansed’ (*pariyodāta*).

We thus see that in the *Mahāvedalla*, *Mahāhatthipadopama* and *Dhātuvibhaṅga Suttas*, the term *viññāṇa* stands for ‘consciousness’ or ‘mind’, and is used in a manner similar to Descartes: *viññāṇa* is that through which intentional moments of awareness are enacted. But according to Kaccāna, a person’s *conscious experience* emerges in a gradual process of conditioning. While *viññāṇa* here plays a foundational role as transitive sentience, it does not correspond to what we call ‘consciousness’; the latter is, for Kaccāna, a complex of cognitive abilities and functions which depend on a cognitive process which begins with the arising of simple transitive sentience (*viññāṇa*).

7. Conflation and misunderstanding

We have seen that Sharf has criticised the ‘bare cognition’ focus of modern therapeutic applications of mindfulness as a simplification of tradition. He also claims that ‘this notion of mindfulness as bare attention would seem tied to a view of the mind as a sort of *tabula rasa* or clear mirror that passively registers raw sensations prior to any recognition, judgment, or response.’ (Sharf 2015: 474). By this Sharf means that the idea of bare cognition presumes a particular philosophy of mind, one in which the ‘recognition of and response to an object is logically and/or temporally preceded by an unconstructed or “pure” impression of said object’ (Sharf 2015: 474). Sharf has further argued that the idea of non-conceptual cognition is at odds with Theravāda Abhidhamma:

⁴⁰ MN III.242: *athāparaṃ viññāṇaṃ yeva avasissati parisuddhaṃ pariyodātaṃ, tena viññāṇena kiñci jānāti. sukhan ti pi vijānāti, dukkhan ti pi vijānāti, adukkha-m-asukhan ti pi vijānāti.*

In Theravāda abhidharma, consciousness and the object of consciousness emerge codependently and are hence phenomenologically inextricable ... objects of experience appear not upon a preexistent *tabula rasa*, but rather within a cognitive matrix that includes affective and discursive dispositions occasioned by one's past activity (*karma*). The elimination of these attendant dispositions does not yield "non-conceptual awareness" so much as the cessation of consciousness itself. (Sharf 2015: 474-75)

These points have very little value for the understanding of early Buddhism. The standard early Buddhist position differs from Sharf's Abhidhammic understanding: the general position of the canonical discourses is that affective and discursive dispositions can and should be eliminated, without the cessation of consciousness. In fact the philosophy of Kaccāna does not view the mind 'as a sort of *tabula rasa* or clear mirror' which registers pure impressions received from the senses. The *tabula rasa* model of mind corresponds neither to the standard Suttanta account of 'contact', nor to Kaccāna's exposition of it, but is close to Sāriputta's philosophy. Although Sharf does not realise it, his critique of 'privileged access' is applicable to the teachings in which *viññāṇa* is imagined as an organ of perception (e.g. in the *Mahāvedalla*, *Mahāhatthipadopama Suttas* etc.).

Sharf's misreading of early Buddhist philosophies of mind and meditation is based on a conflation of sources. First, it is a mistake to conflate the Suttanta and Abhidhamma portions of the Tipiṭaka; the two belong to quite different periods of thought. But it is also a mistake to treat the Pali Suttas as a homogeneous whole, since this blurs the boundaries between very different ideas. This mistake is at least understandable, since reliable scholars of early Buddhism have not yet been able to disentangle the philosophies of Kaccāna and Sāriputta.⁴¹ And there is certainly some merit to the idea that the canonical discourses forms a homogeneous whole, which can be attributed to the historical Buddha.⁴² But this position should be balanced by a sensitivity to conceptual difference; text-critical study should *expect* to find different ideas in the early discourses, given the very long period over which they were gathered.

⁴¹ Hamilton (1996: 88-89), Jayatilleke (1963: 433-36).

⁴² In this respect, the recent study of Sujato and Brahmali (2015) stands out for its clarity, thoroughness and insight.

Of course, the problem of conflation in early Buddhism goes much further than the attribution of different ideas to the figures of Kaccāna and Sāriputta. A variety of ideas were collected and preserved as teachings of the historical Buddha. With regard to the present context, we might ask, how did these different ideas come about? How did different early Buddhists come to adhere to different philosophies? The *Mahāvedalla Sutta* helps us understand the situation better, through the following question put to Sāriputta by venerable Koṭṭhita:

The five sense faculties, sir, have different objects (*nānā-visayāni*) and different areas of activity (*nānā-gocarāni*), (and) do not experience each others' areas of activity and objects, namely, the faculties of vision, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. Of these five sense faculties, sir, which have different objects and different areas of activity, (and are) not experiencing each others' areas of activity and objects - what is (their) resort, and what experiences (all) their areas of activity and objects?⁴³

The answer, replies Sāriputta, is mind: 'mind (*mano*) is the resort, mind experiences (all) their areas of activity and objects.' (*mano paṭisaraṇaṃ, mano ca nesaṃ gocara-visayaṃ paccanubhotī ti*). Sharf has noted that this answer addresses what in modern philosophy is called the 'binding problem', that is, the fact of the 'synthetic unity of apperception or cognitive binding' in which there is a 'semblance of a unified and integrated phenomenal domain' (Sharf 2018: 5). As Sharf points out, this asymmetry between 'mind' and the other five six faculties – mind as a sense faculty standing over and above the other sense faculties – 'turns out to be crucial for the Buddhist analysis of mind and cognition, and the Ābhidharmikas develop it at length' (Sharf 2018: 6).

Sharf is correct to note that this asymmetry 'seems to have been introduced in later texts such as the *Mahāvedalla* and early commentarial works' (Sharf 2018: 6). But in further stating that this idea renders 'the Buddhist model of distributed cognition intelligible' (Sharf 2018: 6), he implies that a Cartesian philosophy

⁴³ M I.295. *pañc' imāni āvuso indriyāni nānāvisayāni nānāgocarāni, na añña-m-aññaassa gocara-visayaṃ paccanubhonti, seyyathidaṃ cakkhundriyaṃ sotindriyaṃ ghānindriyaṃ jivhindriyaṃ kāyindriyaṃ. imesaṃ kho āvuso pañcannaṃ indriyānaṃ nānāvisayānaṃ nānāgocarānaṃ, na añña-m-aññaassa gocaravisayaṃ paccanubhontānaṃ, kiṃ paṭisaraṇaṃ ko ca nesaṃ gocaravisayaṃ paccanubhotī ti?*

of mind was required to fill in the mistakes, or lacunae, in an earlier Buddhist account of cognition. In fact the *Mahāvedalla Sutta*'s solution to the 'binding problem' is susceptible to the problem of privileged access, the *tabula rasa* model of mind he himself critiques. Moreover, Kaccāna's idea that the six types of sense contact undergo the same process of cognitive conditioning explains the binding problem, without the need for 'mind', as a sort of disembodied person watching the 'film' of sense data.

These observations emphasise the fact that the question 'who' or 'what' experiences sense objects is a very peculiar Buddhist question to ask. It seems to assume a type of essentialism alien to the early Buddhist tradition. But a very similar approach is attributed to the *bhikkhu* Sāti in the *Mahā-taṇhā-saṅkhaya Sutta* (MN 38). Sāti believed, erroneously, in 'consciousness' (*viññāṇa*) as a transmigrating substance, and essential subject of experience:⁴⁴ 'that which speaks, feels, (and) experiences the result of good and bad karma, here and there'.⁴⁵ As pointed out elsewhere in this volume of JOCBS, Sāti's reification of consciousness is probably due to an Upaniṣadic influence.

The *Mahā-vedalla Sutta* shows that a subtler form of Upaniṣadic influence had a more profound and far reaching effect in the early Saṅgha. Apart from Sāti's crude and obvious attempt to bring the Upaniṣadic self into early Buddhism, it seems that others began to think in Upaniṣadic terms. Early Buddhists were having Upaniṣadic thoughts, asking Upaniṣadic questions, and providing neo-Upaniṣadic answers. Although Sāriputta's *viññāṇa* is not technically a 'self', it performs the cognitive function of the Upaniṣadic self: it senses and experiences, functions which Sāti also attributes to *viññāṇa*. Hence Sāti represents the tip of an iceberg, an outlier whose thesis engulfed, and then transformed, early Buddhist thought and practice. It seems that Sāriputta was used as a more acceptable cipher to introduce alien notions into early Buddhism; these ideas, acceptable because they do not actually assert a self, were conflated with an earlier doctrine of cognition, and from this conflation the calm-insight tradition was born.

⁴⁴ MN I.256: *tathāhaṃ bhagavatā dhammaṃ desitaṃ ājānāmi, yathā tad ev' idaṃ viññāṇaṃ sandhāvati saṃsarati anaññaṃ ti*. 'As I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, it is the very same consciousness which transmigrates, and not another'.

⁴⁵ MN I.258: *yvāyaṃ bhante vado vedeyyo tatra tatra kalyāṇapāpakāṇaṃ kammāṇaṃ vipākāṃ paṭisaṃvedetī ti*.

8. Two philosophies of mind, two ideals of meditation

We have seen that there are two fundamentally distinct understandings of ‘consciousness’ or ‘mind’, and two related soteriologies, in the early Buddhist discourses. It is difficult to see how they could be reconciled, for both suggest different outcomes towards the end of the Buddhist path. According to our reading of Kaccāna, liberation requires mindfulness in the sense of bare cognition; but according to our reading of Sāriputta, liberation is attained by minimising experience to its most refined state, which confers the ability to see ideas clearly, or to comprehend the refined contents of this state, or else to jump into a state of non-experience.

We have pointed out that Sāriputta’s philosophy is similar to Sāti’s Upaniṣadic understanding of ‘consciousness’; both reify the complex process of perception into an essential subject of experience. To this we can add that some of the basic Buddhist ideas about calm and insight resemble Upaniṣadic ideas about liberation. It has been pointed out elsewhere that the notion of ‘cessation’ (*saññā-vedayita-nirodha*) is little more than a Buddhist version of the Upaniṣadic *brahman*.⁴⁶ But it is not just ‘cessation’ that is an Upaniṣadic idea in Buddhist garb. The calm-insight ideal is stated in the pre-Buddhist *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* account of gaining a liberating insight into the ultimate reality, when the mind is calm:

Therefore knowing this (teaching), having become calm (*chānto*),
tamed, quiet, patient (and) absorbed (*samāhito*), he sees (*paśyati*)
the self in the self, he sees the self as everything.⁴⁷

The vocabulary of this early Upaniṣadic account of calm and insight is the same as that found in early Buddhist teachings: being calm (*chānto*) or concentrated (*samāhito*), is said to lead to insight (*paśyati*). All this implies that the Upaniṣadic influence on early Buddhism was profound, and transformed an earlier understanding of mind and meditation. It is difficult to know exactly when this transformation took place. But if Frauwallner (1956: 67) is correct in stating that the Vinaya Mahāvagga ‘must have been composed shortly before or after the second council’, the Upaniṣadic impact must have been well underway within 50-100 years after the Buddha’s death. In support of this, it

⁴⁶ See Wynne 2007, especially pp.118-19.

⁴⁷ BU IV.4.23: *tasmād evaṃvic chānto dānta uparatas titikṣuḥ samāhito bhūtvātmany evātmānaṃ paśyati sarvaṃ ātmānaṃ paśyati*.

can be further pointed out that many of the texts related to the calm-insight ideal contain late elements:

The *Aṭṭhakanāgara Sutta* (MN 52) is set after the Buddha's death, and mentions the town of Pāṭaliputta, which did not exist in his lifetime (according to the early discourses).

Sharf (2018: 5) has noted that the *Mahāvedalla Sutta* is 'technical' and 'likely belongs to a relatively late strata of the Suttapiṭaka'.

The teachings of the *Mahāhatthipadopama*, *Aṭṭhakanāgara* and *Mahāvedalla Suttas* are not attributed to the Buddha.

There is no parallel to the *Anupada Sutta* in the Chinese corpus of canonical Buddhist texts, an indication of lateness (Anālayo 2011: 635). The 'insight' vocabulary of this text is also unusual.

The *Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta* (MN 28) contains 'reductionistic' elements which appear to be a no-self development of the original not-self analysis of the five aggregates. (Wynne, 2010: 158-59)

Schmithausen (1981: 203-05) has highlighted logical problems in the theory of liberating insight into the Four Noble Truths, and the same pattern applied to the corruptions.

Much critical work remains, of course. How should we imagine the early Buddhist path in its entirety, if not in terms of calm and insight? Is there a relationship between bare cognition and *jhāna*, and if so what is it? And what is the exact relationship between bare cognition, non-conceptuality and specifically Buddhist ideas and sentiments demanded on the *bhikkhu*'s path? We will return to these questions in future studies. Here, we will finally note that we are not arguing against calm and insight *per se*. Both have an important role to play in the Buddhist path. Our argument is against interpreting the fourth *jhāna* as a state of inner concentration, and against interpreting insight or understanding as knowledge of a particular object. We instead argue that Kaccāna's philosophy suggests mindfulness as bare cognition or (passive awareness), and that just this is meant by the expression *upekhā-sati-pārisuddhi* (in the fourth *jhāna*). Hence the fourth *jhāna* was originally understood to be quite different from the concentrative ideal of trying to confine the mind within a box, as suggested in the Dharmaguptaka version of the *Ambaṭṭha Sutta*:

It is just like a private room that has been plastered inside and outside, and whose door has been firmly shut and locked, with no wind or dust [entering]. Inside a lamp has been lit, which nobody touches or agitates. The flame of that lamp rises quietly and without perturbation.⁴⁸

We claim that such formulas are not integral to the original description of the state, but were added afterwards, under the influence of Sāriputta's philosophy, when absorption was reimagined as inner concentration. Likewise, we are not arguing against the necessity of understanding at the higher stages of the path, but merely point out that the notion of directing the mind towards a pre-ordained object to be known was not the original way of understanding insight.

Most of the Suttanta accounts of the path can in fact be separated from these calm-insight additions, and quite easily. Unfortunately, however, critical attention has hitherto been focused mostly on the calm-insight conclusions to the path, rather than the practices leading up to them. It is from this perspective that Gethin has claimed (2004: 217-18) there is 'a broadly consistent and definite theory of meditation practice ... a clear and definite theory, a proper acknowledgement and appreciation of which is lacking in much of the scholarly discussion of early Buddhist meditation'. But Gethin's 'clear and definite' theory is simply a version of a sort of insight meditation hardly mentioned in the canonical discourses:

the method of developing insight (*vipassanā*) is to direct the perfect mindfulness, stillness and lucidity that has been cultivated in the *jhānas* ... to the contemplation ... of 'reality'—reality in the sense of the ways things are, or, perhaps better, the way things work. This involves watching dhammas—the mental and physical qualities that constitute our experience of the world. The meditator is instructed to watch the rise and fall of dhammas and see them as impermanent (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and not self (*anattā*). (Gethin, 2004: 215)

In the early Pali discourses, this version of insight is stated in the *Anupada Sutta*, a late text, as we have seen.⁴⁹ Focusing on such texts and similar passages

⁴⁸ Anālayo (2017: 79).

⁴⁹ Similar accounts are found in a few related texts, e.g. the *Mahāmlāunkya Sutta* (MN 64), AN 4.124/126, AN 9.36.

results in a selective account of the Buddhist path, and hence a distorted understanding of early Buddhist thought in general. In reality, the absence of a ‘proper acknowledgement and appreciation’ of early Buddhist thought and practice is a failure of those works which do not see that early Buddhist texts are heterogeneous. Thus we conclude by noting that contrary to Anālayo, the theory of two early Buddhist paths to liberation has not been ‘successfully refuted’ and should not ‘be set aside’ (2016: 41). We claim, rather, that the situation is far more complicated and problematic than has previously been realised. The debate is really only just beginning.

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Sāti's encounter with the Buddha

Alexander Wynne

The *Mahā-taṇhā-saṅkhaya Sutta* (MN 38: MTSS) is famous for the entertaining and illuminating episode involving Sāti, a fisherman's son and Buddhist *bhikkhu* who got it wrong. Sāti's mistake was to have understood the Buddha's teaching on consciousness and personal identity as a form of Upaniṣadic essentialism:

As I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, it is the very same consciousness which transmigrates, and not another'.¹

Sāti is of course condemned, both by the *bhikkhus* who first hear this view, and then by the Buddha himself. After asking whether Sāti has 'become warm' (*usmī-kato*) in the Dhamma-vinaya ('no' is the inevitable answer),² the Buddha states that Sāti 'insults us, destroys himself, and keeps on generating much demerit'.³ The episode involving Sāti is reminiscent of the Buddha's encounter with Aritṭha, recorded in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* (MN 22). Both texts have a complicated narrative structure, and are of considerable importance for the correct understanding of early Buddhist thought.⁴

¹ MN I.256: *tathāhaṃ bhagavatā dhammaṃ desitaṃ ājānāmi yathā tad ev' idaṃ viññāṇaṃ sandhāvati saṃsarati anaññaṃ ti.*

² MN I.258: *taṃ kim maññatha bhikkhave, api nāyaṃ sāti bhikkhu kevaṭṭaputto usmīkato pi imasmiṃ dhammavinaye ti? kiṃ hi siyā bhante, no h' etaṃ bhante ti.*

³ MN I.259. *atha ca panāyaṃ sāti bhikkhu kevaṭṭaputto attanā duggahitena amhe c' eva abbhācikkhati, attānañ ca khaṇati, bahuñ ca apuññaṃ pasavati pasavati. taṃ hi tassa moghapurisassa bhavissati dīgharattaṃ ahitāya dukkhāya.*

⁴ For an analysis of the structure of the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*, see Wynne 2010.

1. The structure of the MTSS

It is surprising that the structure of the MTSS, such an important and complicated discourse, has not yet been analysed in detail. We will here attempt to rectify the situation. Through a conceptual analysis we will try to reconstruct the textual history of the MTSS, and draw some important conclusions about intellectual history. The basic textual divisions of the MTSS are as follows:

1. The account of Sāti's wrong view, culminating in the Buddha telling the *bhikkhus* that Sāti has not 'warmed up' and has generated much demerit (Ee I.256-59, Be paragraphs 396-99).
2. A short account of the dependent origination of cognition, likened to various types of fire (Ee 259-60, Be 400).
3. The Buddha questions the *bhikkhus* on 'what has come into being' (*bhūtam idan ti*; Ee 260-61, Be 401).
4. A section on the four 'nutriments' or 'foods' (*āhāras*: material food, contact, intention, and 'consciousness'), and their conditioned genesis, running into a general account of the twelve links of dependent origination (Ee 261-64, Be 402-06).
5. The Buddha questions the *bhikkhus* about their understanding of personal identity with regard to the past (*pubbantam*) and future (*aparantam*), and related matters, culminating in the statement that the *bhikkhus* have been well inducted into the Dhamma, which is directly evident, timeless etc. (Ee 264-65, Be 407).
6. A section on the maturation of a person, and the conditioning of experience, starting with the 'descent into a womb' of a *gandhabba*, and ending with a teaching on the dependent origination of cognition (Ee 265-67, Be 408-09).
7. A long version of the *bhikkhu*'s path to liberation, focusing on renunciant disciplines and the four *jhānas*, and finally culminating in a cessationist version of dependent origination (Ee 267-71, Be 410-14).

This brief synopsis shows that the MTSS is rather long for a Majjhima discourse, so much so that it is hard to fathom the Buddha's statement that he has given a 'concise' teaching:

Remember this as my concise (account of) liberation by destroying thirst, whereas the *bhikkhu* Sāti, the fisherman's son, has got tangled up in a great net of thirst'.⁵

If the MTSS ever was a 'concise' discourse it must have been expanded in the course of its transmission. We will keep this in mind as we analyze the different portions of the text, for a redaction of a concise discourse into a very complex one is unlikely to have been carried out seamlessly. Redactors leave 'fingerprints': if the text was expanded, a close analysis might reveal thematic and terminological discontinuities..

2. Sections 1-2: *viññāṇa*, cognitive conditioning and fire (Ee 259-60, Be 400)

When the Buddha asks Sāti what he means by a transmigrating *viññāṇa*, Sāti states 'it is that which speaks, feels, (and) experiences the result of good and bad karma, here and there'.⁶ The Buddha's problem is not the idea of karmic retribution, but Sāti's reification of 'consciousness' or 'sentience' (*viññāṇa*) into a person's feeling of being the experiencer of things. The Buddha thus responds that *viññāṇa* is dependently originated (*paṭiccasamuppannaṃ*), i.e. not generated without appropriate causes.⁷ This point is illustrated by likening *viññāṇa* to fire, which differs depending on what is burnt: logs, tinder, grass, cow-dung, chaff, rubbish, and so on. Whatever *viññāṇa* is, it comes in different, basic, forms, there being no essence common to all.

If *viññāṇa* is conditionally generated, it cannot be an organ or faculty, or even an *essence*, which 'averts' to an object. Hence it cannot correspond to the English term 'consciousness'. The standard early Buddhist analysis of cognition, not stated here, states that 'the coming together' (*saṅgati*) of

⁵ MN I.270-71: *imaṃ kho me tumhe bhikkhave saṅkhittena taṇhāsaṅkhayavimuttiṃ dhāretha, sātīṃ pana bhikkhuṃ kevaṭṭaputtaṃ mahātāṇhājālatanāhāsaṅghāṭapaṭimukkan ti.*

⁶ MN I.258: *yvāyaṃ bhante vado vedeyyo tatra tatra kalyāṇapāpakāṇaṃ kammāṇaṃ vipākaṃ paṭisaṃvedetī ti.*

⁷ MN I.258. *nanu mayā moghapurisa anekapariyāyena paṭiccasamuppannaṃ viññāṇaṃ vuttaṃ mayā, aññatara paccayā n' atthi viññāṇassa sambhavo ti.*

object, organ and *viññāṇa* results in 'contact' (*phasso*). 'Contact' is the actual point at which cognition begins, and the starting point for what we would call 'consciousness' proper – the point from which the different qualities of experience can be felt as 'sensation'. As already explained in the current issue of this journal, the term *viññāṇa* must instead refer to a more basic level of awareness, a sort of pre-noetic, transitive, sentience.

It is important to bear in mind these points about 'contact', in order to understand the Buddha's response to Sāti. As we have seen, Sāti thinks *viññāṇa* is a person's sense or 'feeling' of being an experiencer. Sāti is a sort of Cartesian, or rather, an ancient Indian version of it, in that his ideas are similar to early Upaniṣadic teachings, in which *viññāṇa* really is a person's sense of being a perceiver, and so is an essential substance which perceives. This understanding is repeatedly stated in the Yājñavalkya section of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*:

- The one here, consisting of consciousness among the vital functions (BU IV.3.7. *yo 'yaṃ vijñānamayaḥ prāṇeṣu*).
- This immense, unborn self, which consists of consciousness among the vital functions (BU IV.4.22. *sa vā eṣa mahān aja ātmā yo 'yaṃ vijñānamayaḥ prāṇeṣu*).
- The unseen seer, the unheard hearer, the unthought thinker, the unperceived perceiver (BU III.7.23. *adr̥ṣṭo draṣṭāśrotaḥ śrotāmataḥ mantāvijñāto vijñātā*).
- Consciousness, bliss, *brahman* (BU III.9.28. *vijñānam ānandaṃ brahma*; Gombrich 1990: 15).
- This great being, without inner and outer, a single mass of consciousness (BU II.4.12. *idam mahad bhūtam anantam apāraṃ vijñāna-ghana eva*; Norman 1997: 92).

Although these early Upaniṣadic ideas go beyond Sāti's definition of *viññāṇa*, it is easy to see that the latter belongs among them. According to the pre-Buddhist understanding of Yājñavalkya, the self is the perceiver lying behind cognitive acts, a pure consciousness which transmigrates from one lifetime to the next. Why did Sāti come to hold this distinctly un-Buddhist view? A further reason for Sāti's error might be inferred from the Buddha's similar exchange with Aritṭha in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* (MN 22). On this dialogue, Gombrich (1996: 24) has commented as follows:

The occasion for this whole discourse is given by Arittha, who obstinately declared that he understood the Buddha's teaching in a certain sense. The Buddha repudiated Arittha's interpretation of his words with an attack on clinging to the words rather than the spirit. In effect the Buddha said, 'Whatever precise words of mine Arittha may be quoting, he has missed what I meant.

Exactly the same could be said of Sāti. Given the very flexible use of the term *viññāṇa* in the Pali discourses, it is possible that Sāti willingly misinterpreted a metaphorical use of the term, in order to read his own Upaniṣadic preferences into it. There is some Suttanta evidence for this. At SN 12.59, the Buddha talks about the 'descent of consciousness' (*viññāṇassa avakkanti*),⁸ although this seems to be a metaphor for the dependent origination of experience:

For (a person) abiding, *bhikkhus*, observing the 'taste' in phenomena, which leads to bondage, there is a descent of 'consciousness'; from consciousness there is name and form ... etc. ...⁹

Metaphorical accounts of cognition such as these could have given support to Sāti's predilection towards Upaniṣadic thought.

3. Section 3: *bhūtam idan ti* (Ee 260-61, Be 401)

The scene is thus well set. Sāti's view has been stated, clearly and adamantly, and the Buddha has responded even more decisively. But the next part of the discourse begins rather opaquely, with the following exchange between the Buddha and the *bhikkhus*:

Do you see, *bhikkhus*, that 'this' (*idan*) has come into being (*bhūtam*)?

Yes, venerable sir.

Do you see that its arising is due to its own food (*tad-āhāra-sambhavan*)?

⁸ The term 'descent' is used later on in the MTSS (MN I.265) to refer to the 'descent into a womb' (*gabbhassāvakkanti*) of a *gandhabba*.

⁹ SN II.91: *saññojaniyesu bhikkhave dhammesu assādānupassino viharato viññāṇassa avakkanti hoti. viññāṇapaccayā nāmarūpaṃ ...pe...*

Yes, venerable sir.

Do you see that with the cessation of its food, what has come into being is subject to cessation (*nirodha-dhammaṃ*)?

Yes, venerable sir.¹⁰

The Buddha then asks whether a person might become perplexed due to doubt (...*kañkhāto uppajjati vicikicchā ti*) about certain related matters. These correspond to the three questions he has just asked:

- a. whether 'this' has come into being,
- b. whether 'this' is caused by food/nutriments, and
- c. whether 'this' will cease with the cessation of its nutriment.

After this, the Buddha asks whether such perplexity can be abandoned when one sees 'this', its nutriment and cessation as they really are (...*yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya passato yā vicikicchā sā pahīyatī ti*). The Buddha then asks whether the *bhikkhus* have any perplexity about these matters (...*vo ettha nibbikicchā*), before finally asking if they have seen each point well, with correct understanding, as it really is (...*yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya sudiṭṭhan ti*). This cross-questioning is fairly clear, but none of it explains the really difficult issue: what does the expression *bhūtaṃ idan* mean?

The commentary takes *bhūtaṃ idan* to refer to the group of five aggregates: 'therein, *bhūtaṃ idan* (means) this (group) of five aggregates, which has been born, has come into being, and is produced...'.¹¹ This seems a little forced. Buddhaghosa wants *bhūta* to refer to an individual being, and so evades the neuter gender of the pronoun *idan* by creating a neuter derivative, *khandha-pañcakaṃ*. But this has nothing to do with the previous discussion of *viññāṇa* and fire; Buddhaghosa's explanation is almost certainly based on what he knows is contained in the next part of the text (section 4). It is important, however, that the compound *nirodha-dhamma-* here qualifies *bhūtaṃ*, since it usually qualifies aspects of experience such as the aggregates, the links of dependent origination,

¹⁰ MN I.260: *bhūtaṃ idan ti bhikkhave passathā ti. evaṃ bhante. tadāhārasambhavan ti bhikkhave passathā ti. evaṃ bhante. tadāhāranirodhā yaṃ bhūtaṃ taṃ nirodhadhamman ti bhikkhave passathā ti. evaṃ bhante.*

¹¹ Ps II.307. *tattha bhūtaṃ idan ti idaṃ khandhapañcakaṃ jātaṃ bhūtaṃ nibbattaṃ...*

vedanā etc. It does not normally qualify the person as a whole: the Suttapiṭaka contains no statement like 'a being (*bhūtaṃ*) is subject to cessation'. The 'thing' which has 'come into being' cannot, therefore, refer to a person as a whole.

In fact, the simple and obvious referent of *idan* is the neuter noun *viññāṇaṃ*. We have seen that immediately before this, the Buddha's response to Sāti (section 2) focuses on the different categories of *viññāṇa*. The Buddha points out that 'sentience' (*viññāṇaṃ*) is dependently originated, stating 'there is no arising of sentience without a cause (*aññatra paccayā n' atthi viññāṇassa sambhavo*)?'.¹² The term *sambhava* (production, origination, arising etc.) is also used in section 3, when the Buddha asks 'do you see, *bhikkhus*, (that this) has its arising through its own nutriment' (*tadāhārasambhavan ti bhikkhave passathā ti*). Since the Buddha talks about the arising (*sambhavo*) of both 'sentience' and 'this thing', in quick succession, the two are likely to be synonymous. Indeed, 'nutriment' (*āhāra*) can easily be equated with the 'fuels' which define the different types of fire to which *viññāṇa* is likened (section 2). The Buddha has switched metaphors, but the meaning is essentially the same: sentience is likened to a fire which requires fuel or nutriment. If so, sections 1-3 of the MTSS form a coherent whole.

4. Section 5: the thicket of views (Ee 264-65, Be 407)

In the final part of section 3, the Buddha reflects on the correct attitude with which this teaching is to be approached:

If, *bhikkhus*, you were to cling to this view, thus purified and cleansed - to cherish, treasure, and make it one's own - would you understand, *bhikkhus*, that the Dhamma has been taught to be like a raft, for crossing over, not for grasping?

We would not, venerable sir.¹³

The Buddha then puts the same question in the negative 'If you were not to cling...', and the *bhikkhus* answer in the affirmative, agreeing that Dhamma

¹² MN I.258. *nanu mayā moghapurisa anekapariyāyena paṭiccasamuppannaṃ viññāṇaṃ vuttaṃ, aññatra paccayā n' atthi viññāṇassa sambhavo ti.*

¹³ MN I.260. *imaṃ ce tumhe bhikkhave diṭṭhiṃ evaṃ parisuddhaṃ evaṃ pariyodātaṃ allīyetha kelāyetha dhanāyetha mamāyetha, api nu tumhe bhikkhave kullūpamaṃ dhammaṃ desitaṃ ājāneyyātha nittharaṇatthāya no gahaṇatthāyā ti. no h' etaṃ bhante.*

is 'like a raft, for crossing over'. So far, the text is subtle but coherent. Sāti has misunderstood the Buddha, and in response the Buddha has clarified his understanding of *viññāṇa* as conditioned sentience, and made sure that the *bhikkhus* understand this, with the aid of two metaphors for its origin (fuel and food/nutriments). Finally, the Buddha has also pointed out that these ideas would be subverted if a person grasps at them, as seems to be the case with Sāti. These questions, which end section 3, run naturally into the questions which begin section 5, on the various conceptual forms that grasping might take:

Bhikkhus, knowing and seeing thus, would you refer back to the past (thinking), 'Did we exist in the past, or did we not? What were we in the past; how were we in the past; having been what, what did we become in the past?'

We would not, venerable sir.

Bhikkhus, knowing and seeing thus, would you look forward to the future (thinking), 'Will we exist in the future, or not? What will we be in the future; how will we be in the future; having been what, what will we be in the future?'

We would not, venerable sir.

Bhikkhus, knowing and seeing thus, would you have doubts about yourselves now, in the present (thinking), 'Do I exist, or not? What am I; how am I; this being has come from where, and where will it go?'

We would not, venerable sir.

Bhikkhus, knowing and seeing thus, would you say: 'Our teacher is respected, we speak out of respect for our teacher'?

We would not, venerable sir.

Bhikkhus, knowing and seeing thus, would you say: 'An (other) ascetic speaks thus, we and (other) ascetics speak thus'?

We would not, venerable sir.

Bhikkhus, knowing and seeing thus, would you refer to another teacher?

We would not, venerable sir.

Bhikkhus, knowing and seeing thus, would you fall back on the various vows and auspicious ceremonies of the many other ascetics and Brahmins?

We would not, venerable sir.

Good, *bhikkhus*, I have inducted you into this teaching which is directly evident, timeless, 'come and see', leading on, to be known by the learned for themselves.¹⁴

In this exchange, 'knowing and seeing thus' must refer to 'this view, thus purified and cleansed', mentioned at the end of section 3. In other words, 'this view' refers to the Buddha's analysis of cognition, and his negation of Sāti's view: 'this view' is the conceptual basis on which questions such as 'Did I exist', 'What will I be in the future?', 'Where have I come from?' would not even be asked. The Buddha's point is that once one has understood that there is no such thing as an essential experiencer, this wrong way of thinking simply stops; the questions about individual existence *do not apply*.

¹⁴ MN I.264-65. *api nu tumhe bhikkhave evaṃ jānantā evaṃ passantā, pubbantaṃ vā paṭidhāveyyātha: ahesumha nu kho mayaṃ atītaṃ addhānaṃ, na nu kho ahesumha atītaṃ addhānaṃ, kin nu kho ahesumha atītaṃ addhānaṃ, kathan nu kho ahesumha atītaṃ addhānaṃ, kiṃ hutvā kiṃ ahesumha nu kho mayaṃ atītaṃ addhānaṃ ti. no h' etaṃ bhante. api nu tumhe bhikkhave evaṃ jānantā, evaṃ passantā aparantaṃ vā ādhāveyyātha: bhavissāma nu kho mayaṃ anāgataṃ addhānaṃ, na nu kho bhavissāma anāgataṃ addhānaṃ, kin nu kho bhavissāma anāgataṃ addhānaṃ, kathan nu kho bhavissāma anāgataṃ addhānaṃ, kiṃ hutvā kiṃ bhavissāma nu kho mayaṃ anāgataṃ addhānaṃ ti. no h' etaṃ bhante. api nu tumhe bhikkhave evaṃ jānantā evaṃ passantā, etarahi vā paccuppannaṃ addhānaṃ ajjhantaṃ kathaṃkathī assatha: ahan nu kho 'smi, no nu kho 'smi, kin nu kho 'smi, kathan nu kho 'smi, ayaṃ nu kho satto kuto āgato, so kuhiṃgāmī bhavissatī ti. no h' etaṃ bhante. api nu tumhe bhikkhave evaṃ jānantā evaṃ passantā, evaṃ vadeyyātha: satthā no garu, satthugāravena ca mayaṃ vademā ti. no h' etaṃ bhante. api nu tumhe bhikkhave evaṃ jānantā evaṃ passantā, evaṃ vadeyyātha: samaṇo no evaṃ āha samaṇā ca, na ca mayaṃ evaṃ vademā ti. no h' etaṃ bhante. api nu tumhe bhikkhave evaṃ jānantā evaṃ passantā, aññaṃ satthāraṃ uddiseyyāthā ti. no h' etaṃ bhante. api nu tumhe bhikkhave evaṃ jānantā evaṃ passantā, yāni tāni puthusamaṇabrāhmaṇānaṃ vatakotūhalamaṅgalāni tāni sārato paccāgaccheyyāthā ti. no h' etaṃ bhante. nanu bhikkhave yad eva tumhākaṃ sāmaṃ ñātaṃ sāmaṃ diṭṭhaṃ sāmaṃ viditaṃ, tad eva tumhe vadethā ti. evaṃ bhante. sādhu bhikkhave, upanīta kho me tumhe bhikkhave iminā sandiṭṭhikena dhammena akālikena ehipassikena opāyikena paccattaṃ veditabba viññūhi.*

The close of section 3 and the beginning of section 5 thus bring to attention a general convergence of ethical and theoretical malpractice: Sāti has violated the ethics of the Dhamma through selfish grasping, based on a misunderstanding of the Buddha's critique of self. Whereas section 3 had concluded by focusing on the ethical aspect of this grasping, section 5 brings attention back to the analytic point of the Buddha's critique of self. An important parallel to the questions of section 5, from the *Sabbāsava Sutta* (MN 2), makes this quite clear.¹⁵

In MN 2, after outlining the very same ways of thinking about individual destiny as are found in the MTSS (regarding the past, present and future), the Buddha adds that for the person who 'attends incorrectly' by thinking in this way, one of six views will arise (*tassa evaṃ ayoniso manasikaroto channaṃ diṭṭhinaṃ aññatarā diṭṭhi uppajjati*). The last of these views is an expanded version of Sāti's idea: 'that which is my self, (which) speaks, feels, (and) experiences the result of good and bad karma, here and there; that self of mine, permanent, fixed, eternal, not subject to change, will remain the same forever'.¹⁶ We see here the full implications of Sāti's view spelt out: he is indeed offering a version of the Upaniṣadic self, based on using his mind wrongly.

The *Sabbāsava Sutta* parallel reinforces the point that the Buddha's focus in section 5 is wrong thought. The queries one might have about individual existence are the product of *thinking wrongly*, and lead to such incorrect notions as the idea of a reified substance of personal experience. Exactly this has happened to the *bhikkhu* Sāti. His belief in a reified substance of personal experience is due to thinking wrongly, involving no little amount of selfish grasping. It seems that sections 1-3 & 5 of the text are closely connected. A couple of further points support this.

¹⁵ MN I.8: *so evaṃ ayoniso manasi-karoti: ahoṣin nu kho ahaṃ atītaṃ addhānaṃ, na nu kho ahoṣiṃ atītaṃ addhānaṃ, kiṃ nu kho ahoṣiṃ atītaṃ addhānaṃ kathaṃ nu kho ahoṣiṃ atītaṃ addhānaṃ, kiṃ hutvā kiṃ ahoṣiṃ nu kho ahaṃ atītaṃ addhānaṃ? bhavissāmi nu kho ahaṃ anāgataṃ addhānaṃ, na nu kho bhavissāmi anāgataṃ addhānaṃ, kiṃ nu kho bhavissāmi anāgataṃ addhānaṃ, kathaṃ nu kho bhavissāmi anāgataṃ addhānaṃ, kiṃ hutvā kiṃ bhavissāmi nu kho ahaṃ anāgataṃ addhānaṃ ti? etarahi vā paccuppannaṃ addhānaṃ ajjhataṃ kathaṃkathī hoti: ahaṃ nu kho 'smi, no nu kho 'smi, kiṃ nu kho 'smi, kathaṃ nu kho 'smi, ayaṃ nu kho satto kuto āgato, so kuhiṃgāmi bhavissatī ti?*

¹⁶ MN I.8. *yo me ayaṃ attā vado vedeyyo tatra tatra kalyāṇapāpakānaṃ kammānaṃ vipākaṃ paṭisaṃvedeti, so kho pana me ayaṃ attā nicco dhuvo sassato avipariṇāmadhammo sassatisamaṃ tath' eva ṭhassatī ti.*

First, the Buddha's point in section 5, that his teaching is 'directly evident' (*sandiṭṭhiko*) and 'leads on' (*opanēyyiko*), is related to his point in section 3, about the Dhamma being like a raft, for crossing over (*nītharaṇatthāya*) not for grasping onto. In both sections the Buddha is at pains to point out the pragmatic purpose of his Dhamma, in contrast to Sāti's misconceived grasping at it. Second, in section 5 the Buddha asks the *bhikkhus* if they would say 'an (other) ascetic speaks thus, we and (other) ascetics speak thus'? This seems to be a clear reference to the fact that Sāti has voiced a non-Buddhist opinion, and so relates section 5 directly to the rebuttal of Sāti in sections 1-3.

In the *Sabbāsava Sutta*, views such as Sāti's are said to be 'the thicket of view, the wilderness of view, the twitching of view, the writhing of view, the fetter of view' (MN I.8: *diṭṭhigahanaṃ diṭṭhikantāraṃ diṭṭhivisūkaṃ diṭṭhivipphanditaṃ diṭṭhisamyojanaṃ*). The terms 'twitching' (*visūka*) and 'writhing' (*vipphandita*) suggest cognitive malfunctioning, a state in which the mind does too much and a person gets lost in thought.¹⁷ This analysis is particularly appropriate to the Buddha's exposition in the MTSS so far: Sāti has lost his way in the 'thicket' of thought, due to cognitive malfunctioning. Sections 1-3 & 5 thus form an integral whole. What then of section 4?

5. Section 4: *āhāra & paṭiccasamuppāda* (Ee 261-64, Be 402-06)

In section 4 the Buddha discusses the four nutriments (*āhāras*) and the doctrine of dependent origination. We have seen that in section 3, the term *āhāra* refers to the 'nutriment' which generates 'this (thing) come into being' (*bhutam idan*); 'this' (*idan*) probably stands for *viññāṇa*, and if so *āhāra* refers to its cognitive causes, i.e. sense faculty and object. But the 'nutriments' of section 4 are entirely different. For they are said to generate not *viññāṇa*, but are rather the necessary preconditions 'for the endurance of beings who have come into being, and the assisting of those (beings) seeking birth'.¹⁸ The Buddha has apparently gone off on a tangent. What had been a discussion of Sāti's error, the dependent nature of *viññāṇa* and its 'nutriment' or generation, is now an analysis of individual continuity over time (and lifetimes).

¹⁷ This usage can be compared to the use of the same terms in the *Brahmajāla Sutta* and elsewhere, on which see Wynne (2010a: 147-48).

¹⁸ MN I.261. *cattāro 'me bhikkhave āhārā bhūtānaṃ vā sattānaṃ ṭhitiyā, sambhavesīnaṃ vā anuggahāya*.

The overall result is confusing, if not baffling. The four nutriments of section 4 are material food (subtle or gross), contact, mental intention (*mano-sañcetanā*) and 'sentience' (*viññāṇa*).¹⁹ This disagrees with section 3, which talks about *viññāṇa* not as a nutriment, but as a result of nutriment. There are further problems. In section 4 the Buddha then asks what the cause of the four nutriments is (MN I.261: *kiṃnidānā kiṃsamudayā kiṃjātikā kiṃpabhavā*); the answer is thirst, which depends on sensation, which depends on contact, which depends on the six senses, which depend on name and form, which depend on *viññāṇa*, which depends on mental constructions, which depend finally on ignorance. This means that, according to this cessationist version of dependent origination, the four nutriments are said to depend on a causal sequence which *includes* some of the four nutriments: *viññāṇa* and 'contact' are 'nutriments', but they are apparently caused by themselves. In other words, they are both cause and effect, and the same is probably true of the third nutriment – 'mental intention' – if this is equivalent to mental constructions/volitions (*saṅkhārā*), the second link in the chain of dependent origination.

Gombrich (1996: 48) has correctly pointed out that the causal sequence explaining the generation of the four nutriments depends on 'a different process' from that outlined in the analysis of cognition to Sāti. The obvious explanation for this is that section 4 is an interpolation: it is less an attempt to explain the gist of the Buddha's critique of Sāti's Upaniṣadic essentialism, and more an attempt to add other teachings to the text, on literalist, scholastic, grounds.²⁰ A redactor probably noticed the terms 'nutriment' (*āhāra*), origination (*samabhava*) and a thing coming into being (*bhūtam idan*), in section 3, and so added extra teachings on the nutriments, which are supports for beings in existence (*bhūtānaṃ ... sattānaṃ*) and those seeking or coming into being (*sambhavesīnaṃ*). But the addition of a twelvefold version of dependent origination creates incoherence, and directs attention away from the meaning of the Buddha's encounter with Sāti.

Hence section 4 is out of step with the teaching to the teaching on personal identity which surrounds it. It says nothing about the key issue, which is how to understand a person's sense of being an experiencer of things; it rather explains further causal factors necessary for an individual existence and continuity in

¹⁹ MN I.261. *kabaḷiṃkāro āhāro oḷāriko vā sukhumo vā, phasso dutiyo, manosañcetanā tatiyā, viññāṇaṃ catutthaṃ.*

²⁰ Gombrich (1996: 22) has pointed out that the Buddha's rebuke of Ariṭṭha in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* is a critique of literalism. The redactors of the MTSS unfortunately did not notice or understand the meaning of this teaching.

the first place. Sāti's 'doctrinalism' – his turning away from the pragmatic point of the Buddha's Dhamma and into the realm of *belief* – is thus lost sight of. So when the Buddha asks, in section 5, whether the *bhikkhus* would say 'an ascetic speaks thus, we and (other) ascetics speak thus', the force of the question is diluted by the long digression into dependent origination.

The end result of adding section 4 before the questions of section 5 is that an analysis of cognition, and the rebuttal of the incorrect idea that *viññāṇa* is a person's sense of being an experiencer, is turned into an exposition of personal continuity. This creates an entirely different *impression* of the Buddha's rebuttal of Sāti. Why will the *bhikkhus* not refer back to the past, nor look forward to the future nor have doubts about the present (section 5)? According to section 4, it is not because the *bhikkhus* understand that such questions are inappropriate, but rather because *the correct answer has already been given*.

In short, to the questions 'did we exist in the past ... what were we in the past?', dependent origination in its twelvefold form provides an answer along the lines 'yes we did exist in the past, in the form of a specific sequence of individual continuity'. To the questions 'will we exist in the future ... what will we be in the future?', dependent origination answers that 'yes we will exist in the future, in the form of a specific sequence of individual continuity'. And to the questions, 'this being has come from where, and where will it go?', dependent origination answers that 'it has come from a specific sequence of individual continuity, and will continue likewise'. The doctrine of dependent origination in its twelvefold form does not so much as hint that such questions are *inappropriate* or *fundamentally misguided*, as give answers to them. Section 4 thus obscures the meaning of a very important aspect of early Buddhist thought: the Buddha's encounter with Upaniṣadic essentialism.

6. Section 6-7: a person's habituation to pleasure, the path to awakening (Ee 265-71, Be 408-14)

Section 6 marks another abrupt departure in the MTSS, by introducing a new topic: the development of a person, from embryo until adulthood, focusing on the maturation of the sense faculties and the habitual indulgence in sensual pleasure (MN I.265-66). The teaching thus describes how a human being comes to be trapped in desire, attachment, becoming, and future birth and suffering. Part of this analysis is therefore identical to the last few links of the standard twelvefold version of dependent origination, from 'grasping' onwards (*upādāna*, *bhava*, *jāti*, *jarāmaṇa*).

In section 6, the item before *upādāna* is *nandī*, which can easily be identified with *taṇhā* in the standard doctrine. Prior to this, however, this version of dependent origination is quite different from normal. A *gandhabba*'s descent into the womb, the baby's nourishment through the breast-milk (or 'blood') of the mother, the maturation of a boy through adolescence until adulthood – none of this resembles the twelvefold version of the doctrine. It is rather an independent development of the idea of conditioning without any apparently prior knowledge of the seven causal factors which appear in the classical teaching before *upādāna*; at the least, there is no obvious way to connect the two teachings.

The spiritual solution to this version of conditioning is outlined in section 7 (Ee 267-71; Be 410-14), which describes a *bhikkhu*'s path to liberation, focusing on renunciant disciplines and the four *jhānas*. None of this has anything directly to do with the episode involving Sāti, although at the end of these sections the Sutta's title appears, '(the account) of liberation by destroying thirst (*taṇhāsaṅkhayavimuttiṃ*)'; the Buddha also states that 'the *bhikkhu* Sāti, the fisherman's son, has got tangled up in a great net of thirst (*mahā-taṇhā-jāla-taṇhā-saṅghāta-ppaṭimukkan*).'

This is rather odd. The term *taṇhā* figures repeatedly in section 4 of the Sutta, although no more than any other item in the account of dependent origination; it would be strange to refer to the twelvefold version of dependent origination as if exclusively dealing with 'the destruction of thirst'. But the notion of a 'discourse on liberation through the destruction of thirst, in brief' makes sense of sections 6 and 7 of the Sutta: even if these sections lack the term *taṇhā*, they cover the five types of sense pleasure, delight (*nandī*), the process of becoming based on them, and their 'destruction'. More important than this, however, is the reference to Sāti's entanglement in a 'great net' of thirst, a clever joke on the fact that he is a fisherman's son. This must refer to the core of the text, i.e. sections 1-3 & 5. Indeed, these sections show that Sāti's idea is a form of grasping, in other words an expression of thirst or desire; they also contain an analysis by which the *bhikkhus* are said to be in a state of non-grasping, and so it is appropriate to talk about the destruction of the 'net of thirst'. If so, the text's conclusion probably refers to the original core of the text: sections 1-3 & 5.

7. The Chinese parallel (MĀ 201)

Anālayo has studied the Pali MTSS and its Chinese Madhyama Āgama parallel (MĀ 201),²¹ but found very few differences. The only difference between sections 1-3 of the texts is that in the Chinese MĀ version, after mentioning the simile of the raft, the Buddha ‘also asks the monks how they would answer if they were to be questioned by an outsider on the purpose and benefit of their view. The monks reply that the purpose of their view is disenchantment and dispassion.’ (Anālayo 2011: 253). In section 4 the only difference is a small addition in the Pali text (Anālayo 2011: 253), which includes the summary formulae of Dependent Origination: ‘when this is, that is; with the arising of this, that arises’ and ‘when this is not, that is not; with the cessation of this, that ceases’ (MN I.262-64).

The Chinese MĀ has an addition in section 5: apart from the questions about the existence of the self in the three times, according to the MĀ the *bhikkhus* make a number of further statements, ‘such as that they would be incapable of committing any of the five heinous crimes, or would never go so far as to forsake their precepts and give up their practice of the path.’ (Anālayo 2011: 253). In section 6, the Pali version goes into more detail on the development of an embryo, by specifying the absence of necessary conditions, because of which an embryo would not develop; Anālayo notes that ‘while the *Madhyama-āgama* version simply enumerates the three conditions, the *Majjhima-nikāya* discourse also mentions the possibility that the mother is not in season or that the being to be reborn is not present, both of which would prevent conception from taking place’. (Anālayo 2011: 254).

All this shows that the two texts are more or less identical. The only difference between the two texts that could be significant is found in section 7, where the Chinese MĀ version lacks almost the entire text on the path outlined in the Pali Sutta. Since this difference could be of great significance, we will treat it separately and in some detail in a future issue of this journal.

8. The original form of the MTSS

Our analysis has attempted to identify terminological and thematic discontinuities in the MTSS. And we have found that sections 4 & 6-7 diverge from the core of

²¹ Anālayo (2011: 251-52, n.227-28), has also noted that there are a number of Sanskrit fragments of the text.

the text, which is made up of sections 1-3 & 5. The initial episode involving Sāti (section 1), the Buddha's analysis of *viññāṇa* (2-3), and his cross-questioning of the *bhikkhus* to ensure they do not ask misconceived questions about personal identity (5), all form a coherent whole.

Section 4, on the four *āhāras* and dependent origination, is a later addition; at a certain point in the text's transmission, some redactor(s) could not help interpolating new teachings on the terms *bhūta*, *āhāra* and *sambhava*. All these terms are found in sections 1-3, albeit in a quite different sense from the same terms as used in section 4. The addition of section 4 subverts the meaning of the earlier text, so that the original focus on cognition is adapted to a new focus on the causal factors which enable personal continuity. The meaning of the original teaching was therefore obfuscated, especially since there is a fundamental flaw in the doctrine of four *āhāras*: a causal sequence in which some factors are said to *cause themselves* was a step into the doctrinal abyss.

The original text was also expanded by adding sections 6-7, on the human habituation to pleasure, and the path to awakening. Perhaps it was felt that a solution concerning the transformation of consciousness was required to conclude the Sāti episode; on the other hand, perhaps there really was a particular occasion when the Buddha responded to Sāti, and then went on to give another teaching on the path. The latter explanation should not be overlooked as a possibility. But a text-critical analysis should be based on what we know about the early texts (that they were all redacted), rather than what we suspect they might be (authentic teachings of the Buddha). This approach does not necessarily detract from the historical value of sections 4 and 6-7. The fact of their interpolation does not mean that they are inauthentic, although this point must be qualified by the facts that only one other Sutta mentions the *gandhabba* as the subject of rebirth, and that the four *āhāras* are a marginal aspect of the canonical Pali Suttas.²²

We conclude by noting that the extant MTSS, in both its MN and MĀ redactions, has three different versions of dependent origination: the dependent origination of cognition in sections 2-3; the standard twelvefold form of the doctrine in section 4, in connection to the four nutriments; and the peculiar version based on the descent of the *gandhabba* into a womb in section 6. It is correct, but hardly informative, to note that 'the present discourse's main concern ... is

²² On the descent of the *gandhabba*, see MN 93. Apart from the MTSS, the four *āhāras* are only mentioned in 7 Suttas: DN 33, 34; MN 9; SN 12.11-12, 12.63-4.

dependent arising' (Anālayo 2011: 256). This judgement overlooks significant differences within the text, and papers over the cracks that run through the early Buddhist textual tradition.

The same tendency to homogenise can be seen in Anālayo's description of the account of personal maturation and habituation to pleasure, in section 6, as 'a practical application of the previous treatment of dependent arising by way of its twelve links in forward and backward order, illustrating how delight in feeling leads to clinging and therewith to the conditioned arising of *dukkha*' (Anālayo 2011: 255). This is not quite correct. The account of personal maturation, from the descent of a *gandhabba* until the arising of grasping (*upādāna*), is a *particular* version of Dependent Origination, rather than a 'practical application' of its twelvefold form: there is nothing 'practical' about the idea of a *gandhabba* descending into the mother's womb, and in no way is the statement that the young boy starts to play games an *application*, of any sort, of the twelvefold chain of Dependent Origination.²³

In fact, the account of personal maturation in section 6 is an entirely original, in fact original, formulation of the basic idea of experiential conditioning. It is important to point out subtle differences between ideas such as these; in the present case, the fact that there are three versions of dependent origination, and a very clumsy handling of at least one of these (section 4), should be taken as a sure sign of redactional interference. These are exactly the 'fingerprints' of the redactors which we initially set out to investigate. A close analysis of these fingerprints reveals something very important, which had been obscured by the treatment of the MTSS as a homogenous whole: the meaning of the Buddha's critique of Upaniṣadic essentialism, by means of the dependent origination of cognition.

9. Appendix: Internal Parallels to the MTSS

A number of the sections of the MTSS have parallels in the Pāli Saṃyutta and Aṅguttara Nikāyas:

Section 3 is given an expanded treatment at SN 12.31 (Ee II.47-50), where the Buddha refers to what has been spoken 'in the Pārāyana, in the enquiry of Ajita' (SN II.47: *vuttam idaṃ sārīputta pārāyane ajitapañhe*), and cites Sn 1038 of that text;

²³ MN I.266. *yāni tāni kumārakānaṃ kīlāpanakāni tehi kīlāti.*

the focus is the statement in Sn 1038 that there are ‘those who have contemplated/understood the Dhamma, and also the many in training’ (*ye ca saṅkhātadhammāse, ye ca sekhā puthū idha*). In effect, the Buddha makes a rather artificial connection between the *Ajita-māṇava-pucchā* and the MTSS: when Sāriputta is unable to explain the meaning of Sn 1038, the Buddha asks the first question of the section 3 of the MTSS: ‘Do you see that this (thing) has come into being, Sāriputta?’ (*bhūtam idan ti sāriputta passasī ti*). The rest of the Sutta consists of Sāriputta giving a slightly altered version of section 3 of the MTSS. This looks like a relatively late redactional use of one text (the MTSS) in an exegesis of another (the *Ajita-māṇava-pucchā*).

Much of **Section 4** is stated at **SN 12.11** (Ee II.11-12), except that the latter does not go into as much detail as section 4 (it lacks the sections contained in Be paragraphs 403, 405-06). Either section 4 of the MTSS is an expansion of SN 12.11, or else SN 12.11 is a contraction of MTSS (4).

Sections 4 & 5, on the twelvefold version of dependent origination and the questions about individual existence in the three times, is given a fresh treatment at **SN 12.20** (Ee II.25-27). SN 12.20 looks like a fairly late composition, containing expressions only occurring here (e.g. SN II.26. *yā tatra tathatā avitathatā anaññathatā idappaccayatā, ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhave paṭiccasamuppādo*), or more or less only here (e.g. SN II.25 = AN I.286: *ñhitā va sā dhātu dhammaññhitatā dhammaniyāmatā idappaccayatā*). SN 12.20 also states that after discovering and revealing dependent origination, the Buddha then asks (his *bhikkhus*) ‘Do you see (dependent origination)’; the question ‘do you see (SN II.25. *passathā ti*) is reminiscent of section 3 of the MTSS. Apart from its relatively late features, this use of *passathā ti* suggests that Sn 12.20 is derived from the MTSS.

Much of **sections 6 & 7**, on a child’s maturation, the adult’s habituation to pleasure, the rising of a Tathāgata in the world, and the *bhikkhu*’s path to liberation, is repeated at **AN 10.99**. But the context is different. The point of AN 10.99 is to emphasise that

each level of the path is superior to what comes before. Hence the Buddha repeatedly asks Upāli, ‘So what do you think, Upāli, is this abiding more excellent and supreme than the previous abidings?’ (AN V.207: *taṃ kiṃ maññasi upāli nanvāyaṃ vihāro purimehi vihārehiabhikkantataro ca pañītataro cā?*). Besides the four *jhānas*, the path scheme includes the four formless states and culminates in *saññāvedayitanirodha*, the highest attainment. Whatever the relationship between the texts is, the MTSS is certainly not derived from AN 10.99. It is more likely that AN 10.99 is a new application of the MTSS.

Some parts of sections 6 & 7 are found in a number of SN Suttas (SN 35.115, 35.196, 35.197 and 35.200). These SN Suttas use the MTSS text on faulty cognition (section 6, Be paragraph 409) and transformed cognition (section 7, Be paragraph 414) to explain the terms *(a)guttadvāra*, *(an)avassuta* and *(a)samvara* (twice). The SN texts seem to have used the MTSS account of faulty and transformed cognition to a new end. For in section 7 of the MTSS, the *bhikkhu* is said to abide ‘with mindfulness of body established, with an immeasurable mind; he realises as it really is, the release of mind, release through understanding’ (MN I.270: *upaṭṭhitakāyasati ca viharati appamāṇacetaso. tañca cetovimuttiṃ paññāvimuttiṃ yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti*). This is obviously an account of liberation, rather than just an account of ‘restraint of the senses’ and so on, as the SN texts state.

These internal parallels suggest a general direction of influence from the MN to the SN (and AN). All of the SN and AN texts were possibly derived from the MN, which shows that the MTSS was a rich source for early Buddhist speculation.

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Pali citations are taken from the PTS (Ee) editions; Be refers to the Burmese Chaṭṭhasaṅgāyana, accessed from the electronic edition of the Vipassana Research Institute. Pali citations are numbered according to the volume and page numbers of Ee; the numbering of individual Suttas, as mentioned in the main body of text, follows the method of SuttaCentral (<https://suttacentral.net/>).

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Fo Guang Shan seen through Telescope and Microscope

Yu-Shuang Yao and Richard Gombrich

Abstract

FGS (“Buddha’s Light Mountain”) is the largest of several Buddhist movements in today’s Taiwan which draw their inspiration from the “Humanistic Buddhism” of the mainland Chinese monk Tàì Xū (1890-1947). It was founded in 1967 in southern Taiwan by the Master Hsing Yun (b.1927), also from the mainland, who came to Taiwan as a refugee in 1946. Initially FGS was almost exclusively for monastics, but a lay branch, the Buddhist Light International Association (BLIA), was founded for the laity in 1991 and both organizations have spread across the globe.

The Master is both charismatic and immensely practical, combining aspects of Chinese cultural conservatism with imaginative flexibility to adapt to modern tastes and requirements.

So active and varied an organization cannot easily be summarised, so we are writing a series of articles on some of its aspects. In this paper we try to combine a view of it as if seen through a telescope, i.e., viewed as a whole, with a close up of detailed features which have built it up over time.

In the telescopic view, we suggest that in many different ways the FGS offers its followers features which *prima facie* appear to contradict each other. Sometimes this may be a matter of ambivalence, sometimes an astute realisation that a religious or political movement has a better chance of success if it answers disparate requirements.

When we apply our microscope, we hope to enhance understanding by summarising the careers and contributions of ten members of the

movement: five nuns, two monks, and three laity. We also offer details of the movement's organization, which combines a Chinese hierarchic flavour with a somewhat modernised (rationalised) Confucian style bureaucracy.

Part 1: Wood and Trees

Fo Guang Shan (FGS), literally “Buddha’s Light Mountain”, is a contemporary Buddhist movement with its headquarters in southern Taiwan and branches scattered over the globe. Founded in 1967, it now has several million adherents. It is the creation of one man, nowadays known as the Most Venerable Master¹ Hsing Yun² (b.1927). The founder’s personality and talents have moulded the movement even beyond the stage at which (as we have argued elsewhere³) the movement has made the transition from sect⁴ to denomination.

FGS is the largest of several Buddhist movements in Taiwan which consider themselves (albeit in very different ways) heirs of the movement founded in mainland China by the monk Tàì Xū (1890-1947). Though it is now most commonly known in English as “Humanistic Buddhism”, the movement’s original name was “Buddhism for Human life” (Chinese: *rén shēng fó jiào*). This name is more informative, in that the most important of Tàì Xū’s many ideas was that traditional Chinese Buddhism was far too much concerned with funerary rites and the worship of ancestors. We have shown elsewhere⁵ that Tàì Xū took the lead in shifting the emphasis to this-worldly activities, above all to education, and that Hsing Yun can claim to be his foremost disciple.

When he was a young monk in China, most of Hsing Yun’s teachers had been pupils of Tàì Xū, and he himself read Tàì Xū’s publications. In 1946 he attended a training programme given by Tàì Xū on how Chinese Buddhism

¹ Honorifics naturally accumulate with seniority, age and fame.

² In Pinyin, the most modern transliteration, Hsing Yun would be written Xīngyún, but he himself prefers to use the old (Wade Giles) spelling, and without diacritics, so we follow his preference.

³ Richard Gombrich, “Max Weber’s Work and the Study of Buddhism Today”, paper delivered at conference “Max Weber’s Hinduism and Buddhism 100 Years on”, SOAS, University of London, 9.9.2016 and accepted for publication in journal *Max Weber Studies* vol.18.1.

⁴ We return below to the matter of calling it a “sect”.

⁵ Yu-Shuang Yao and Richard Gombrich, “Christianity as Model and Analogue in the Formation of the ‘Humanistic Buddhism’ of Tàì Xū and Hsīng Yún”, *Buddhist Studies Review* v.34.2, 2017, pp.205-37.

should be administered. Under his influence, Hsing Yun strongly took the view that the Sangha should work to help the laity: monks and nuns should teach the dharma and nuns should also take nurturing roles; human life should be presented as valuable and as to be enjoyed. He has written: “[E]ver since I started propagating the Dharma, I have been following the teachings of Master Taixu. ... Buddhism is not a religion of empty talk. We have to start by improving people’s lives.”⁶

While he has consistently followed this line both in principle and in practice, one may ask how far Hsing Yun has managed to maintain Tàì Xū’s wish to drag Chinese Buddhism away from preoccupation with the dead. It seems to us that the more one studies FGS, the more often one observes a kind of compromise between two polarities. In this case, we have shown in our recent article that the further FGS has spread in Taiwan, the more it has been preserving, or even reviving, the traditional rites for the dead. At the same time, however, when we look at how Hsing Yun built up his movement, how he recruited and what kind of institutions he was keen to create, we find a strong bias towards catering for the needs and feeding the enthusiasms of young people. The Buddha established his religion as the “middle way”. Hsing Yun has perhaps achieved a similar result by other means, repeatedly offering at the same time both X and non-X, thus attracting a wide variety of support. Sometimes this may be a matter of ambivalence, sometimes an astute realisation that a religious or political movement has a better chance of success if it answers disparate requirements. We shall give examples of this below in Part 4.

Hsing Yun is an exceptionally active and energetic person, with the result that the organization he has founded has been extremely busy throughout the half century of its existence. Much has been published about FGS, not least by Hsing Yun himself, and yet all the publications have barely scratched the surface.⁷ According to the yearbook of 1997, the headquarters in Kaohsiung had at that time 16 administrative departments (we list them below in our Appendix 1), with a couple of extra ones added in the yearbook’s *Appendix*, and that does not include the branches both in Taiwan and overseas, so that to document them all would require a cross between a chronicle and an encyclopaedia; to create it would require a team of writers and editors, and it could only be used as a work

⁶ Hsing Yun 1987, p.30, quoted in Pittman 2001, p.273.

⁷ All the primary sources are of course in Chinese. The scarcity of material in English is, naturally, even greater.

of reference. Our original impulse, to write “a book” about FGS, was obviously naïve. Besides, for such an enterprise our own resources of time and money are utterly inadequate.

Consequently, having produced two articles on aspects of FGS, one primarily historical⁸ and the other sociological⁹, we have decided that the next thing to do is to resort to the English cliché about the wood and the trees. To do so, in this article we make an attempt, however foolhardy, to point out some salient characteristics of FGS as a whole -- in other words to give our public some idea of the character of “the wood”, as if seen through a distant telescope, and to combine this with a very close look at two cohesive masses of microscopic detail, masses important enough to be integral to any account of the whole, even though by their very nature they do not reveal the same characteristics. For “the trees” we have chosen to look at an array of the first individuals whom Hsing Yun recruited to form his following, in particular its core institution of the Sangha, the body of ordained monks and nuns. Many of the individuals who played a part in this development have by now passed on, and others are reluctant to make themselves available for interview; but we do have some reliable data. We have then added to this (a) in Part 3: information about three individuals who have given crucial lay support to FGS; and (b) in three appendices: some further details from the 1987 *Yearbook*. Out of these contrasting but complementary ingredients, we have made a sandwich of an article, beginning and ending with views of the wood formed by the trees described in between.

First, however, let us briefly explain our claim that even when seen through a telescope the FGS movement appears as ambivalent or two-sided. In his book *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State 1660-1990* Charles Brewster Jones caught this rather well. In a footnote near the end of his book he summarises from Bryan Wilson’s work eight defining characteristics of a sect. Wilson was working in the Weberian tradition, and so were we in the article we cite in the first paragraph of this article. Jones, however, takes a far simpler view. He writes: “...[O]ne may view FKS¹⁰ as a sectarian phenomenon based on the following criteria: (1) It is based upon a comprehensive religious vision as articulated by its founder, Xingyun. Furthermore, both he and his followers see this vision as sufficiently different from Buddhism as practiced elsewhere in

⁸ See fn.4 above.

⁹ See fn.3 above.

¹⁰ Jones writes “FKS” where we prefer “FGS”.

Taiwan that it may only be actualized within the context of the FKS or one of its subsidiaries; one may not practice “FKS Buddhism” in other temples.”¹¹ Jones adds two further criteria but they do not supplement or modify this first one in any important way. Moreover, the eight criteria he cites from Wilson fit very poorly, if at all: for example, FGS does not claim a monopoly of the truth, show an anti-sacerdotal bias, demand total allegiance, or originate as a protest group.

What it boils down to is that FGS is a separate organisation within the far larger unit of Chinese (not merely Taiwanese) Buddhism because its founder has made it that way and keeps it that way in practice, preserving his own unique authority. Incidentally, such a thing is possible only because it exists within a pluralistic democracy: a totalitarian government would not permit it.

We close this Part with one illustration of what this means in practice. At the beginning of his classic account *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism 1900-1950*, Holmes Welch explains that in China there used to be two kinds of Buddhist temple, the public (*shí fāng cóng lín*) and the hereditary (*zī sūn miào*). “The essential characteristic of the hereditary temple was private ownership. It belonged personally to a monk or group of monks, who operated it as they pleased. On the other hand, the public monastery was supposed to be the property of the whole Buddhist sangha and to be operated in accordance with a common monastic rule ...”¹² FGS is a private temple owned by Hsing Yun, but he has given it features otherwise found only in public temples; the most important is that a member of the Sangha is not admitted (ordained) into the lineage of a current monastic individual but acquires the whole ordaining generation as his/her collective master. We believe this hybridity of temple type to be unique.

Part 2: Some Trees

Hsing Yun came to Taiwan in 1949 with the Sangha medical relief team of the Nationalists (Guomintang/GMD).¹³ He first stayed at Yuan Guang Temple in Zhongli (near Taipei), then joined the seminary founded by Ven. Ci Hang. He, Ci Hang and other fellows of the seminary were accused of being in contact with the Chinese Communists, and were sent to prison. With the help of some influential Buddhists, Hsing Yun was released after 23 days, and advised to become a member of the Guomintang. In the early 1950s, Hsing Yun was

¹¹ Jones, p.197.

¹² Welsh, p.4.

¹³ Also anglicised as Kuomintang/KMT. Even today it is one of the two main parties in Taiwan.

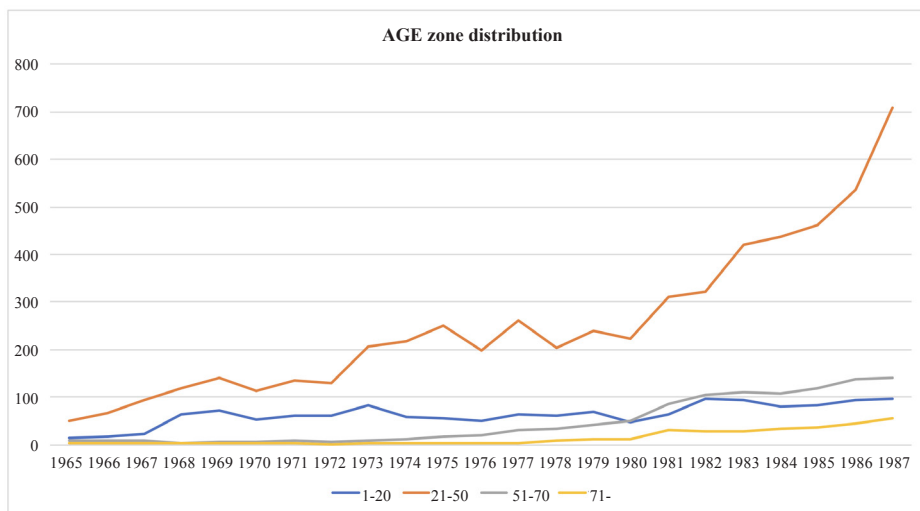
wandering among Taiwanese temples and editing a few Buddhist magazines, though he was still under suspicion of links with mainland Chinese.

On taking power in Taiwan, the Guomindang under Chiang Kai Shek arranged to control Buddhism through a continuation of the organisation which had played this role in mainland China, the BAROC.¹⁴ In 1952 in Yilan (the NE district of Taiwan), a wealthy Buddhist layman called Li Juiher, who owned Yilan's first department store, had been trying in vain to invite a Buddhist monk from Taipei to come and preach in Yilan. At a BAROC meeting he met Hsing Yun and persuaded him to take charge of Leiyin temple. There Hsing Yun launched his career as a Buddhist leader. Mr Li and his wife visited the temple almost every day to act as interpreters between the locals and Hsing Yun, who did not speak the local dialect.

In 1967 Hsing Yun bought some barren land in the southern district of Kaohsiung and there founded Fó Guāng Shān, building first a seminary and then a monastery; the latter soon became his headquarters, which it remains to this day. In this period FGS was purely a clerical organization, though it had a few lay supporters. Its lay counterpart was founded only in 1991. Moreover, until 1963 all the Sangha members were nuns; and even after the foundation of FGS monks remained very much in the minority. When we refer to a monastic member of FGS, the reader should assume that it is a nun unless specifically told otherwise.

Besides this sheer imbalance in gender, we note that it has been the general practice in FGS for men to be ordained at a younger age than women. The reason is not entirely clear. It could be because of opposition from the families of the women, who retain hopes that their daughters will marry and produce offspring until that becomes unlikely. Another factor could be that men are allowed to leave the robes and then re-ordain, whereas for women the first decision to be ordained has to be final.

¹⁴ The Buddhist Association of the Republic of China; its antecedents go back to the foundation of that republic in 1911. Until the end of the GMD dictatorship in 1989 all ordinations in Taiwan had to be performed and registered by BAROC



We have obtained a copy of the 1987 FGS *Yearbook*. It marks the 20th anniversary of FGS and contains a vast amount of information, though not all of it is self-explanatory. In what follows we have relied mainly on this source, but supplemented it with material from Fu Zhiyin's book *Xin Huǒ: Fó Guāng Shān chén xiān qǐhuò de gùshì* ("The story of Fo Guang Shan's transmission").¹⁵ Our first biography, that of Xin Ping, is entirely from the latter source, because by 1987 he had died.

Xin Ping, b.1938 in Yilan, became the second abbot of FGS. He was born in the family of Wu, whose home was very close to Leiying Temple. He regularly prayed at the temple on the first and the fifteenth days of the lunar month. Early on, he joined the students' committee of the temple and thus got to know the Master better.

He was trained as a printer and often printed material free of charge for FGS. After his military service he was working at a printing factory when Hsing Yun phoned to ask him for help. At this he left his job and moved to live with Hsing Yun (in Taipei). He formally ordained (was tonsured) on 1 January 1963, and was officially announced as Hsing Yun's first disciple. More than a thousand people attended this ceremony. He was fully ordained in the same year in Hai

¹⁵ Taipei, Commonwealth Publishing, 1997.

Hui Temple in Jilong. He was sent to study in the Buddhist seminary and the Chinese Buddhist Academy, both in Taiwan. In 1973, when FGS founded its own Sangha, he was its first leader, and Hsing Yun again publicly declared him to be his first disciple. When Hsing Yun resigned as abbot in 1985, Xin Ping became his successor and received the Dharma scroll from him. By this act he became the 49th patriarch in the lineage of Lin Ji Chan.

For many years he was the only male in the FGS Sangha. His work focussed on the production and distribution of publications. When Hsing Yun moved the HQ to Kaohsiung, Xin Ping was usually the only FGS person to stay on the site. His life style was primitive: he had his own small hut, drank water from the stream, collected firewood for cooking, and lived on fresh vegetables. He recorded the local geography, flora and fauna, and climate. Hsing Yun said he was the person who had to be given the credit for their buildings there. When Hsing Yun was on his travels, Xin Ping took over his duties and responsibilities back at base. Though modest about his gifts, he was known to sing beautifully, had excellent visual taste, and was a superb cook. However, he died of liver cancer in 1995, aged 58. See also Appendix A below.

Although Xin Ping was at least twice declared to be Hsing Yun's first disciple, within the movement great importance is also attached to the first nuns. Sometimes, ignoring Xin Ping, five of them are referred to as the first disciples. One may presume that this is because when the Buddha began to preach, he first converted five disciples, who then became remembered as a group. Similarly, Ci Zhong, Ci Hui, Ci Rong, Ci Jia and Ci Yi have a special place at the top of the FGS hierarchy. All five were sent to be educated in Japan. But one also notices something else about them: they specialised in different areas so that their responsibilities were arranged to be complementary. This may recall how the Buddha in the *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (1.23-6) declared of the leading monks and nuns how each was pre-eminent in a different respect.

First came Ci Zhong (b.1931), daughter of the Mr Li who brought Hsing Yun to Yilan. She was at that time a high school graduate and was working in the local school office. She was very good at maths, English and Japanese, and regarded Buddhism as a superstition fit only for the elderly. She wondered why her parents were so interested in this young monk, so she visited the temple. At New Year 1954 Hsing Yun led his followers on a tour and Mr Li registered his daughter to go on it. On getting to know Hsing Yun, she found him unselfish and compassionate, and began to take a more favourable view of Buddhism. She started to do voluntary work at the temple, and joined the choir. She frequently

heard Hsing Yun lecture, both at the temple and on tour, and passed exams that he set. After following him for 12 years, in 1965, she took ordination as the Ven Ci Zhong. By then, FGS had its own temple in Kaohsiung. In the same year she took triple ordination in Fa Yun temple in Miaoli. Later her father, aged 73, also became a monk; so did her two nephews. In 1959, she founded the Buddhist Culture Service Centre. She imported many publications from Hong Kong, and gradually took charge of all FGS publications; this induced local Buddhists to read books, rather than merely to chant from memory. She also imported from Hong Kong such items as Buddhist shoes and robes, and instruments such as the wooden fish; and she became a conduit for passing such materials on to monasteries in SE Asia. All this brought a remote provincial monastery to learn and adopt more traditional practices.

Hsing Yun arranged for her to study in Kyoto; on her return in 1974 she persuaded him to found the first two branches of the FGS in Taipei; in 1978 she inaugurated the branch called Pu Min, which became famous. This is Taipei's oldest Buddhist temple to be distinctively urban, being in one large building rather than spread over a campus. She also inaugurated the custom of holding a weekly pilgrimage from Pu Min to Fo Guang Shan. Such pilgrimages have become a means by which some people, such as Yung Ping, abbess of the Taipei branch, and Yung Wen, former President of Hsi Lai Chinese school in the U.S.A., have been drawn into joining the FGS Sangha.

Two months after inaugurating Pu Min, Ci Zhong was sent by Hsing Yun to the U.S.A., to set up the FGS there. She arrived with only twenty thousand U.S. dollars, and encountered opposition from several American local communities. After ten years of hard work, including six public judicial hearings and more than a hundred public meetings, she had set up the organization Friends of Hsi Lai, and created in Los Angeles the first American "Forbidden City". This title refers to the architectural style, which emulates the great imperial palace in the centre of Beijing, with yellow roofs and red columns. The LA version was used for a huge triple ordination ceremony (the first held anywhere by FGS), a "Water and Land" Dharma meeting (to expel ghosts and gain merit), and a meeting of the World Fellowship of Buddhists. Since then, she has travelled over much of the world, often in the course of setting up new branches of the FGS.

In sum, Ci Zhong created the FGS as an international institution, and is venerated as the doyenne of the Sangha of FGS nuns.

Ci Hui, b.1934, was also born in Yilan. She was tonsured in 1965, and received full ordination in that year in Fa Yun Temple in Miaoli. She is the first

Taiwanese nun to have earned a Master's degree in Japan. Hsing Yun gave FGS four missions: education, culture, charity and collective cultivation (worship, liturgy and meditation, usually practised in groups). He put Ci Hui in charge of education – particularly for the monastics -- and culture. From 1964 she was dean in charge of Shou Shan, the first FGS seminary, which was originally in Kaohsiung district and then in the Kaohsiung HQ. FGS now has eleven seminaries, covering three levels.

More than 800 members of the FGS Sangha, including all the abbesses, have been educated under her supervision. In 1957 she founded in Yilan an FGS kindergarten for the public, the first Buddhist kindergarten in Taiwan. Over five years she founded for the public in Kaohsiung a kindergarten, a junior high school, a senior high school and a night school. She then moved to Hsi Lai, where she headed the department of education and then became Vice-President and President of the University. Back in Taiwan, she was in charge of the founding of Fo Guang University and Nan Hua University, and she chairs the Board of Trustees at both universities. She is chief editor of FGS's two main journals, *Awakening (Juě Shì)* and *Universal Gate (Pǔ Mén)*. Since 1982 she has also organised many international Buddhist conferences, and arranged various international academic exchanges and co-operative schemes.

She is Hsing Yun's chief interpreter into Hokkien, the Taiwanese form of the Chinese language. He says that without her he would not be able to convey his message in Taiwan, for she not only conveys the content but also his style and spirit, and he has recounted that when he has tried to preach by himself people have complained that they prefer to listen to her.

Ci Rong, b.1936 in Yilan. Ordained 1969 at Jilong, Hai Hui. She took a university degree in social welfare in Kyoto. She knew Ci Hui and Ci Zhong. When she was 18 her mother took her to hear Hsing Yun speak, hoping to improve her health and peace of mind. She joined a Buddhist study group and became a Buddhist. She followed Hsing Yun on a 44 day trip round Taiwan to popularise the Tripitaka by distributing photo-copies. She wanted to be ordained like her friends, but her mother was upset, so she held back for some years, while working in the kindergarten. After ordaining she edited *Awakening*, and was in charge of the FGS orphanages and their homes for old people. She insisted that material charity should always be accompanied by Buddhist preaching.

When Hsing Yun moved the HQ to Kaohsiung, he asked her to take over Pu Min temple in Taipei. She so managed Pu Min that each month there were at least 70 regular activities, not counting special events. Every day the temple

offers a free vegetarian lunch. It has acted as the main host centre for overseas visitors to FGS.

On 3 Feb 1991 she founded the Buddha Light International Association (BLIA), with an initial membership in Taipei of 3,000, and it expanded so fast that on 16th May 1992 the Los Angeles branch (Hsi Lai) was inaugurated. Within another 4 years it had 2 HQs (Taipei and Los Angeles), 79 international branches, 27 offices, 30 committees, and over a million lay members in 51 countries. She herself founded the Australian branch, which was important because both Australia and New Zealand have many immigrants from Taipei. Her younger sister followed her into FGS, and she herself gave her inheritance from her mother, ten million Taiwanese dollars (about 250,000 UK pounds), to FGS.

Ci Jia, b.1939 in Yilan. Tonsured 1965, fully ordained in Miaoli Fa Yun Temple. Graduated in social welfare from Buddhist college in Kyoto. The first person to be tonsured by Hsing Yun. She was the Master's personal assistant for very many years.

She lived close to Leiyin temple but did not go there much. However, she went to Hsing Yun's lecture series and passed the exam, for which he gave her a prize, which led to her moving into the temple at the age of 18. She was at first in charge of the housekeeping. She was considered outstanding for her domestic skills and Buddhist learning. She used the latter in writing many articles for the FGS magazines. She became a lecturer at the Buddhist seminaries, typically lecturing for 12 hours a week or more; and she was warden of the seminaries. When FGS moved into the cities, she lectured to the public on such topics as the Buddhist precepts. At the three platform ordination in Hsi Lai in 1988, she became for a month the Master of Precepts.

Her talent for technology led to her spearheading computerisation at FGS.

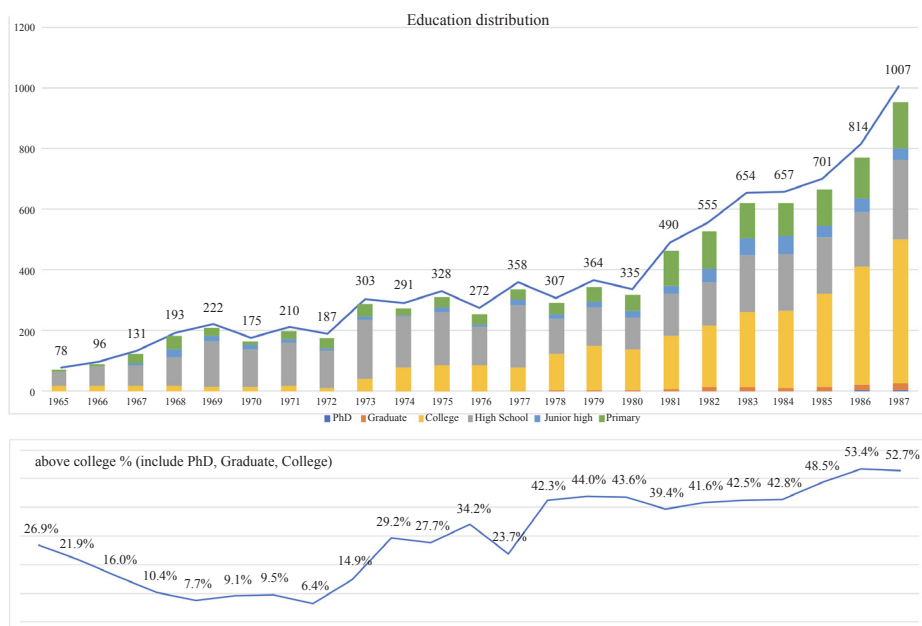
Ci Yi b.1943 in Taichung. Tonsure and ordination as for Ci Jia. BA and MA at Tokyo Buddhist College, then studied for a Ph.D. there in 1996, while abbess of FGS Osaka.

She was born in the Yang family; her great grandfather passed a Ching imperial exam. Her grandmother was a devout Buddhist who took her to visit temples, after which visits she gave her biscuits. She was beautiful, and passed the exam to become a stewardess. But she happened to be lent Hsing Yun's biography of Śākyamuni. Then when he came to lecture she met him, and he showed her his other books. She read that a Buddhist seminary in Hong Kong was recruiting pupils, and applied, but was rejected because she was not a nun.

She told Hsing Yun and he said no matter, she could come and study at the Kaohsiung seminary. But her parents were dismayed and fetched her back home. She tried several more times and her father even reported to the police that the temple were kidnapping her. Then he tried to kidnap her to get her married. She went on hunger strike, then escaped. Her father announced that he was disowning her. At the seminary she thereupon decided on immediate tonsure.

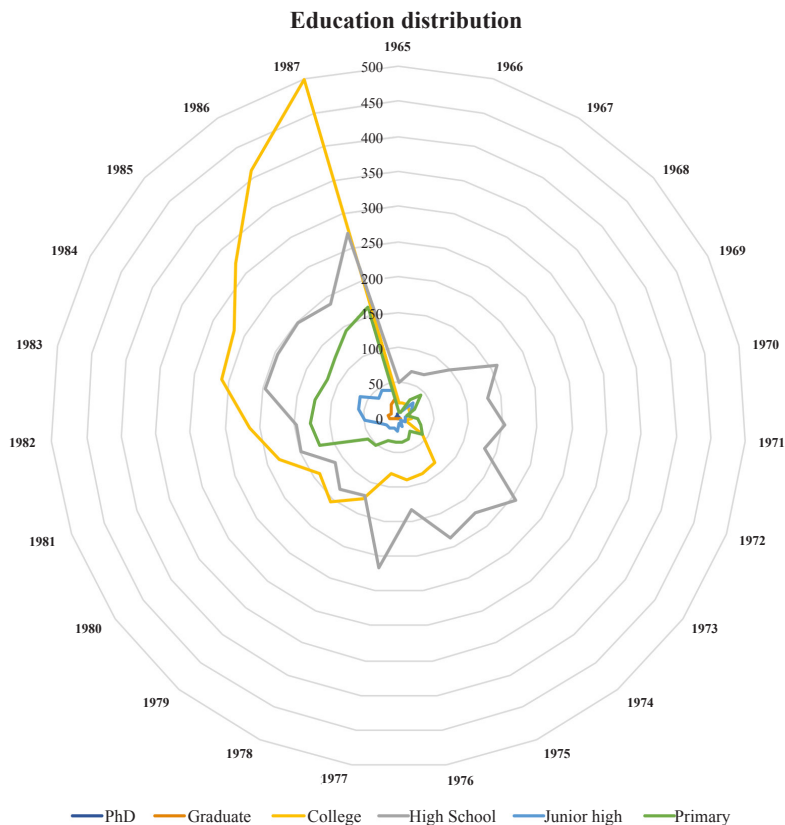
Two years later she published her diary. She went with two companions to study in Kyoto. On return to FGS she became dean of the orphanage and abbess of Fushan temple and dean of the Fushan seminary.

She took charge of re-editing the Chinese Tripiṭaka (= *Agon shu*) for easier reading and has so far helped to edit 4 vols of it; she is also chief editor of the FGS Buddhist dictionary. She has been editing a history of every aspect of Buddhism throughout the world from the beginning until now; so far it is about 7 million words long.



Xin Ding, monk, b.1944 in Yinlin (central Taiwan). In 1968 he was tonsured in FGS, next year received full ordination in Hai Hui temple, Jilong. He is known as the first monk “made in Taiwan”. Born in the Shi family, who were farmers. A.k.a. Hui Xi, he was the 49th generation of the Lin Ji lineage. While on military service on a remote island he began to read Buddhist books, and was impressed by a senior soldier who was always chanting. When posted with his troop to Kaohsiung, he visited FGS HQ. Hsing Yun gave him literature. After military service he did voluntary work at FGS HQ. Hsing Yun offered him more education; he accepted and was sent to the FGS Eastern Buddhist Academy. He took tonsure inspired by the example of Xin Ping, and thus became the third monk in all. He took an MA in Indian studies for 2 years at Wen Hua University. He was admired for his strength and fitness, which he would make evident by taking direct part in building work, and in particular by installing all the Buddha statues. As Secretary for Religious Affairs, he played a major part in creating the codes of conduct rules for promotion to the various categories of FGS membership, and was in overall charge of lay membership. As the movement expanded throughout Taiwan, he planned and directed the foundation of new branches.

As the audiences became ever larger, he invented and supervised the arrangements for the Master’s lectures; for instance, he bought and installed a projector – an innovation for Buddhist preaching. He was a gifted singer and knew both Cantonese and English, and used these gifts to create albums of chants, and composed (with others) a musical on the life of the Buddha. When he became abbot of FGS in Malaysia, he preached in the local form of Chinese. He is now abbot in the Philippines. Since the death of Xin Ping he has been second in the Sangha hierarchy.



Part 3: A few more trees

The most basic reason why Fo Guang Shan should interest historians of Buddhism is that it has attracted so many followers: hundreds of thousands in Taiwan, and millions overseas. We do not know how many of the lay followers give FGS their exclusive religious allegiance; that is not demanded of them and normally nobody asks. Chandler has written in some detail about FGS finances, and though his information could be updated, that is always a tricky subject, and perhaps not of fundamental importance. We think it may be more significant to record cases of individuals who have used influence to ease the way for FGS; using influence of course does not preclude giving cash, but may be even more valuable.

Eminent lay members.

There have been at least three important lay patrons of FGS, apart from its hundreds of thousands of BLIA members.

- (a) Sun Zhang Qing Yang (f.), in the 1987 yearbook is classified as on scale 8 of sponsors.¹⁶ picture p.75. She was born in 1913 in Funan, China, in a rich family. Her mother was a devoted Buddhist. RC high school. 1923 studied in Nanjing, at Jing Ling girls' high school, at which time she met her future husband, Sun Liren, who was an officer. Married 1930 in Shanghai. In 1934 she had a dream: a Bodhisattva came to her with a bottle of water and said she was related to Buddhism so should begin self-cultivation asap. Her mother and husband told her to learn more about it before she left home. In 1935 her mother gave her a rosary. She was not keen on chanting but liked to visit temples with her mother. In 1936 she took Bodhisattva vows at Qi Xia Shan under Ven Zhou Chen, while HY was a novice at that temple. Summer 1946 was very hot and she had a heart problem. She wrote a letter to Ven Dong Chu (who later became the master of Sheng Yen of Dharma Drum) at the Ding Hui temple in Jiaoshan, asking to be allowed to stay in the monastery to recuperate, and spent the summer there.

In 1948 her husband was posted to Kaohsiung Feng Shan (near FGS). The chief BAROC temple in Taiwan was the Shan Diao temple in Taipei. It was occupied by the Taipei City government and a few Buddhist nuns. BAROC wanted it back in order to devote it to collecting and studying Taixu's writings and property, which they had brought over from China. She donated ten million dollars to pay to recover the temple for BAROC, while another devout and influential Buddhist, Li Zikuang, paid 5 million. This became the HQ of BAROC. In 1949 many Buddhist monks in Taiwan were imprisoned, including Hsing Yun. Mrs Sun and Mr. Li used their connections to have them released. They also got other important monks out of China. They organised a dharma *pūjā* for soldiers killed in the wars, a "Royal Ceremonial to Protect the Country from Calamity and to induce Prosperity in the Country and Society". Chiang Kai Shek lent his support. She further organised the Taipei Chanting Association. In 1955 she arranged for the army to bring a copy of the Japanese version of the Tripiṭaka to Taiwan

¹⁶ Biog on internet, <http://buddhism.lib.ntu.edu.tw/museum/formosa/people/3-sun-zhang-qing-yang.html>.

when there was no other means to transport it. When her husband became Commander-in-Chief of the army, and got the UK CBE, she persuaded many politicians and other leaders of society to become Buddhists. In 1956 her husband was put under house arrest. She later donated her house to the FGS. She always valued Hsing Yun. Died 1992, aged 80.

- (b) Wu Boxiung is the honorary Chairman of the BLIA. He was born in 1939, in Taoyuan, Taiwan, to a wealthy and powerful political Hakka family. His uncle was killed in the “228 incidents” of February 1947, in which mainland Chinese immigrants massacred many Taiwanese. Wu himself has been Home Secretary, Secretary General of the R.O.C., Head of the National Security Council, Secretary-General of the Presidency, Mayor of Taipei and KMT chairman. The FGS record says that four generations of Wu’s family have been devotees of FGS. Wu’s father, Wu Honglin (1899-1995), was one of those who helped Hsing Yun and other Buddhist clerics to leave prison in 1949. When Hsing Yun was released, Wu Honling, then a MP for Taoyuan, helped Hsing Yun to register residency, which enabled Hsing Yun to stay in Taiwan rather than move to Hong Kong.

Though Wu Boxiung was a very high profile politician, he declared that he was a volunteer for FGS. Hsing Yun has acted as Wu Boxiung’s mentor in many of his political decisions. A famous one was in 1995, when Wu competed with another KMT candidate to be elected Governor of Taiwan. Having two candidates would weaken KMT power, so that the KMT might lose the election. Hsing Yun invited Wu to FGS Taipei branch and had a talk with him for three hours. Wu listened to Hsing Yun’s advice: he renounced his candidacy on the following day, and the KMT won the election.

When Wu’s father died, Hsing Yun made a special trip from abroad and presided at a grand funeral for him. In 1995 there was a lot of bad publicity for religions, which led to attempts to stop religious education in Taiwan schools. Hsing Yun spoke publicly in Taipei on “Buddhist wisdom and life”. Wu Boxiung, who was then KMT Secretary-General, attended the meeting and supported the FGS, who successfully opposed the move.

In 1987, when FGS was preparing to found the lay Buddhist association which became the BLIA, Wu wholeheartedly supported the idea and spread the news to other eminent politicians. When in 1991 the BLIA was founded in Taipei, he came to the opening ceremony and invited others to support the event; he even got a congratulatory telegram from the President of Taiwan,

Li Deng-hui, a Presbyterian. The BLIA was and remains the biggest religious organisation ever founded in Taiwan. When it was formally inaugurated in 1992 in Los Angeles, an event attended by 4,000 people from 45 countries, Wu was elected as one of four vice-chairs. He later became its president, and now he and Master Hsing Yun are the honorary Presidents of BLIA World. Wu gave his family home in Zhongli as the FGS provincial office. He attends most of the important FGS public meetings. He has promoted July in the lunar calendar, which the rest of Chinese culture considers to be the month of ghosts, to be the month of compassion (*ci bei*), and in cooperation with FGS he launched the campaign to promote the Three Virtues (*Shan Hao*: good deeds, good words and good intentions). Wu also accompanied Hsing Yun and other dignitaries in leading hundreds of Buddhists on a trip to Thailand to bring back the third Buddha tooth to Taiwan in 1989 (Chandler 2004: 250-1).

- (c) Another important lay patron of FGS is a lady, Zhao Liyun, b.1952, a politician. She was President of BLIA for five years (2013-2018). She was born into a Hakka family in Xinzhu; her mother is a famous Hakka folk song singer. Zhao has an Ed.D. from Columbia University in New York. She has been a high civil servant, Chief of Sport Administration in the Ministry of Education. Zhao's political career in the KMT has been very successful. She has been, a National Assembly Representative and President of it, and a member of the KMT General Council, and is currently a Legislator and a member of the National Examination Council.

Zhao became a Buddhist due to her husband, Jian Wenfeng who was a very successful architect. In the 80s, Jian had already made lots of money, but he was upset that he had to go to many entertainments with his business clients. While Jian was wondering about the meaning of life, he was given a book on Buddhism. It changed his life. In 1982, he had an opportunity to meet Ven. Jin Kong (Pure Land master, b. 1927 in China). Jian learnt from him that it would be a great meritorious act if he could find a place where they could preach Buddhism and educate others to become preachers. Since Jian was an architect, he knew of a piece of land which they could use. There Jian and Jin Kong founded a foundation called *Fotuo Jiaoyu Jijinhui* (The Foundation for Buddha Education). The aim of the foundation was to create a Buddhist library and distribute Buddhist books free of charge, including free copies of the Chinese Tripitaka. In the

90s the foundation had developed a scheme to print and distribute series of Master Jin Kong's lectures on cassettes and videos, and to broadcast them on television, and to hold free lectures. This campaign has made Jin Kong one of the pioneers to preach in China; his Buddhist lecture cassettes are very easy to obtain on the mainland, and lots of Chinese listen to and watch his lectures.

Nevertheless, Zhao preferred a more visual approach to Buddhism. While she was working in the Ministry of Education, she was looking for some teachings which she could put to use in her job. She was very happy to discover Hsing Yun's teaching on Four Gifts (*ci ji*): to give happiness, to give support, to give hope and to give help. Zhao then became a follower of FGS. She organised some of the male members of BLIA into teams (*jing gang*) dedicated to particular tasks, such as standing guard in temples, acting as receptionists, being stewards at events, acting as chauffeurs. Because of her social credentials she was made President of Fo Guang University for a while, and she is the current President of Chinese BLIA¹⁷, the first woman to hold this position.

Part 4: Back to the wood

In the final part of this article we return to general features of FGS. Of course, hardly anything of what we have here recorded could have taken place without the Master himself; so in this final section on FGS, his creation, he will figure as an individual. Overall, he may perhaps be summed up as resembling the Buddha himself in his combination of charisma and pragmatism. This combination has enabled him to say (in an FGS promotional video) that FGS is like a "department store that sells many things."¹⁸ He embodies, among other things, the unlikely combination of traditional Chinese patriotism with American capitalist salesmanship.

So far we have said next to nothing about the soteriology of FGS: how it considers that the individual may attain salvation. This may strike a reader from a monotheistic culture as strange; but it reflects not merely the religion of FGS but that of a large segment of Chinese Buddhism in modern times, for it combines two soteriological traditions which at first appear antithetical: Zen and Pure

¹⁷ The Chinese BLIA and the World BLIA have become different organizations.

¹⁸ Quoted by Madsen, p.58.

Land Buddhism (also known as Amidism). In Japan Zen is held to be typical of *jiriki*, literally “own power”, meaning that one can only reach Enlightenment by one’s own efforts, while Pure Land Buddhism is typical of *tariki*, literally “other power”, according to which Enlightenment can only come through the help of Amida Buddha. For a clear description of how the two are combined in daily monastic practice see Holmes Welch, pp.398-9. One can call this a soteriology of “belt and braces”: if one form of practice does not satisfy, one is free to try something quite different – and need not even entirely abandon the first option.

However, this still understates the case. After giving the “department store” quote, Richard Madsen has written:

Buddha’s Light Mountain also intends to unify the eight major lineages of Chinese Buddhism. Almost any kind of Buddhist practice can be engaged in at the temple – from the austere practices of Chan (Zen) meditation to colorful folk Buddhist devotions. Since most people in Taiwan engage in some form of Buddhist practice at some phase of their lives, the complex of symbols offered by [FGS] contains something that can speak to almost everyone. Its symbolic net is wide enough to be able to represent much of the diversity of the society as a whole. It is wide enough even to include non-believers. ‘This isn’t a religion,’ said one of the [FGS] nuns ... ‘It is our cultural tradition.’¹⁹

Let us now approach this subject from a slightly different angle. In 1998 Hsing Yun was entrusted with the custody of a relic, one of the Buddha’s teeth; the ceremony took place in Bangkok at the HQ of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, of which Hsing Yun remains Hon. President. In order to house this in sufficient sanctity and splendour, he had built at FGS the Buddha Memorial Center, which is not a single building but a huge complex which exhibits to the public what Hsing Yun, who designed it, considers the essentials of Buddhism. This complex was opened to the public late in 2011, and at the time of writing (2017-8) has recently been finished by erecting in the middle a new College of Humanistic Buddhism.

It also features a Historical Museum. This issues an illustrated folding leaflet, from which we learn that FGS has “the objectives of propagating Buddhism through

¹⁹ *Democracy’s Dharma*, p.58. Madsen goes on to give a range of ever more “demanding options” for those who want to engage more fully with FGS religion; we cannot recommend his account too highly.

culture, fostering talent through education, benefiting society through charity, and purifying the human mind through cultivation to advance Buddhism past the new milestone of modernization and spread Humanistic Buddhism from Taiwan to the world.” The aim of Buddhism is thus not to help people to escape from life, but to show them how to solve its problems by deploying their talents. They should engage with society, not avoid it, and eliminate obsolete customs and prejudices.

In this same pamphlet we read of Hsing Yun: “His arhat shoes leave behind traces of four-colored lotus flowers, and his waving robe sleeves produce Pure Lands with seven gems.” In the very next paragraph we read: “Throughout his life, the Venerable Master Hsing Yun never received a formal education and never received an official diploma. ... His every thought, spoken word, and action all abide by the principle of being an ordinary monk who never does anything that is not for Buddhism.”

This well illustrates the double vision presented to devotees throughout the FGS: the Master is at the same time an enlightened being (the charismatic side) and an ordinary monk without even the advantages of a superior education (the pragmatic side). Similarly, FGS pragmatically sets about turning our world into a Pure Land (a heaven on earth, a Christian would say), but in fact that Pure Land is already here, constantly evoked in art, music, rituals, and the never failing benignity of the Master.

Let us take money as an example. In 1961, Hsing Yun wrote in an article:

I think that nowadays our society has changed from being agricultural to being industrial. Money is the food which nourishes learning dharma and is the basis of Buddhist activities. The buildings and institutions we use to promote dharma cannot survive without money. Some think that poverty is how one shows one is a good Buddhist and they are afraid of being attacked for being rich, but ironically the same people go and beg money from others. Contemporary Buddhists need to change their views: there is no shame in being rich. It is poverty that is evil. We should not be jealous of the rich, or sarcastic. We hope that everyone will be rich: that will make Buddhism prosperous... Don't make money by lending at high interest. At death Buddhism does not know where you have put your money, so lending it out would be a huge mistake.²⁰

²⁰ Article in *Awakening*, 1 October 1961, reprinted in *Writings in Awakening*, 1982, pp.48-50: “Everybody Rich” (*Dà jiā fā cái*). Fo Guang Publications, *Collection on Buddhism* vol.6. This is our translation.

One may comment on this that while outsiders have estimated that FGS is enormously rich, Hsing Yun has tended to give away money so fast – sometimes before it even reaches him – that he can at the same time maintain the image of the worthy mendicant.

In early Buddhism, monks were not allowed to handle or possess any money at all, and their begging bowls were used only for daily collecting the food to maintain their lives. It conveys something of the flavour of Hsing Yun's innovations that his monks and nuns use their begging bowls as collection boxes.

Let us return to the pamphlet from the Historical Museum. The attitude to education is striking; in this case one can call it an ambivalence. Hsing Yun has followed Tàì Xū in attaching paramount importance to educating his Sangha. When other founders of religious movements would probably begin by building a shrine, Hsing Yun founded the HQ of FGS by establishing a seminary, and the early years of FGS saw a seemingly non-stop flow of foundings of educational institutions from kindergarten to night school. Rank within the Sangha was largely determined by educational achievement (see Appendix A below), and formal examinations played as great a part as in any Confucian establishment. Hsing Yun himself has been a tireless author and educator.

Yet when in 2013 FGS established at Fo Guang University a Research Centre of Buddhist Studies and the Master came to open it, his short speech declared that research into Buddhism was not an important goal!²¹ While FGS nuns have been working for years to produce an edition of the Canon which they claim will make it more accessible, for instance by adding punctuation, nobody concerned seems to envisage that this could result in anyone finding out anything new. The key probably lies in his *Biography of Śākyamuni*: p.3 says that the B's teachings "are still hampered by those who mystify the teachings and ignore the spirit of the Buddha coming into this world. When their philosophy transcends the practical, they fail to experience the Buddha's intention."²²

Is there one final point which could encapsulate the flavour of the Grand Master's pragmatic and compassionate adaptability?

There are so many ... So let us arbitrarily choose a favourite, a gobbet of "inside information". Many westerners find their access to Chinese rituals

²¹ We owe this information to our colleague Prof. Stefano Zacchetti, who was present as an invited guest.

²² Originally pub 1955 as *Shìjiāmóuni fó zhuàn*, Foguang Publications. Trans. Alex Wong, 1913, Buddha's Light Publishing, L.A.

impeded by the strict convention that they must kneel or sit cross-legged for long periods. So the Ven. Hsing Yun permits people – even monastics ---to sit on chairs.

Appendix A

FGS code for ranking the Sangha: our translation. 20th Yearbook, 1987. Ed. by the Religious Affairs Committee, headed by Shì Xīn Píng, FGS Kaohsiung, pp.38-40.

Translators' note: "monks" here always refers to both monks and nuns.

Rule 1: The seniority of the Sangha has the following 6 grades:

Qīng jìng shì. The 6 grades of elementary school.

Xué shì. This has 3 levels, each of which covers 3 years.

Xiū shì. This has 3 levels, each of which covers 4 years.

Kāi shì. This has 3 levels, each of which covers 5 years.

Master, or Elder (*zhǎng lǎo*).

Rule 2: If any member fulfils the above requirements but has no outstanding achievements, they are categorised as *ān shì*.

Rule 3: Anyone categorised as *ān shì* is further categorised by the first 3 categories in Rule 1: as *qīng ān shì*, *xué ān shì* or *xiū ān shì*. One can be promoted from any of these categories after one year.

Rule 4: Newcomers will be categorised according to their previous backgrounds, which have 6 facets:

Educational level

Length of participation in Buddhism as a layman

Social experience

Career

Special skills or talents

Time since ordination

Educational level. *Qīng jìng shì* has 6 scales, *Xué shì* has 2.

If educational level is only elementary, use scale 2, which starts from year 2 of *Qīng jìng shì*. Scale 3 starts with Senior High School, including starting at a Buddhist Seminary. Scale 4 starts with a High School degree, including

Vocational High School or Advanced Buddhist Seminary. Scale 5 is for college students of 5 years standing or 2 years after High School. Scale 6 is for monks with a university degree.

Scale 1 of *Xué shì* is for a fully ordained monk with a graduate degree below PhD. Scale 2 of *Xué shì* is for a fully ordained monk with a PhD.

Length of participation in Buddhism as a layman.

Every 2 years of service count as one year after ordination. Graduates of seminaries count their time in the seminary as years of service.

Social experience

If one has not taken the precepts in full, one cannot advance beyond scale 6 of *Qīng jìng shì*, but this does not apply to those with a special talent or contribution. Once one has taken the full precepts, length of time in Buddhist service, in Buddhist education, career in Buddhism and commitment to Buddhism are taken into consideration for promotion. For those with special skills or talent, there are 4 criteria: special relationship with Buddhism or contribution to Buddhism; experience and achievement in society; personality, education, morality; usefulness for the monastery.

Rule 5: Anyone who enters FGS as a dharma disciple is credited for every two years of service he has rendered to Buddhism in another institution as if it were one year in FGS.

Rule 6: Anyone ordained in FGS when over 60 cannot rise higher than scale 6 of *Qīng jìng shì*.

Rule 7: Criteria for promotion within the Sangha.

- a. Study of Buddhism. Study Buddhist practice with deep understanding of the Teaching; progress in preaching and lecturing; publish theses or other writings; move to a higher level of education.
- b. Career in FGS. Be dedicated, diligent and responsible; make outstanding contribution to temple management; implement new ideas on how to preach Buddhism.

- c. Self-cultivation. Attend morning and evening services with alert participation; go to breakfast regularly and following a daily routine; maintain a good demeanour and follow the precepts.
- d. Anyone sent abroad by the FGS in order to study for an MA is promoted immediately; if for a PhD, promotion is to *Xiū shì*.
- e. If the Religious Affairs Committee regards a monk as having made a special contribution, he can be promoted. Should a monk's administrative position require it, he may be given the appropriate promotion.
- f. For a monk to be promoted from *Qīng jìng shì* to *Xué shì*, the head of his unit must report favourably to the Religious Affairs Committee; anyone not qualified both in the five kinds of practice²³ and in the use of tools cannot be so promoted.

Rule 8: Those who promise to serve FGS and take salaried positions with them will be categorised in the above manner, but every two years that they fulfil a requirement will count only as one year, and they cannot rise above category 3, *Xiū shì*. For lay followers the rules are different.

Rule 9. Those conscripted into the army retain their status and on return they will be credited with the time present serving there.

Rule 10. Leaving the temple to study or go abroad without the consent of FGS will lead to loss of rank and status. On return they will still be credited with their educational background but not with their time of participation. However, the meeting of FGS abbots may take special circumstances into account.

Rule 11. All the above rules have been passed, and also their draft form emended, by the Religious Affairs Committee.

²³ These are morning chanting; evening chanting; morning breakfast; lunch; feeding the hungry ghosts during evening chanting.

Appendix B

In the 20th Yearbook on pp.40-41 we find a “catalogue of FGS members by name and rank”. For ranks see **Appendix A**. We may add that ranks also serve to grade salaries.

Sangha.

Head: Grand Master Hsing Yun.

2nd scale of Kai shi: 5 members (4 nuns, 1 monk).

3rd scale of Xiu shi: 3 members (2 nuns, 1 monk)

2nd scale of Xiu shi: 9 members (8 nuns, 1 monk)

1st scale of Xiu shi: 15 members (10 nuns, 5 monks)

3rd scale of Xue shi: 38 members (36 nuns, 2 monks)

2nd scale of Xue shi: 55 members (51 nuns, 4 monks)

1st scale of Xue shi: 84 members (72 nuns, 12 monks)

6th scale of Qing jing shi: 69 members (61 nuns, 8 monks)

5th scale of Qing jing shi: 64 members (59 nuns, 5 monks)

4th scale of Qing jing shi: 47 members (42 nuns, 5 monks)

3rd scale of Qing jing shi: 6 members (6 nuns, no monks)

2nd scale of Qing jing shi: 7 members (5 nuns, 2 monks)

1st scale of Qing jing shi: 4 members (4 nuns, no monks)

Total: 407 members (360 nuns, 47 monks)

Total: 407 members (360 nuns, 47 monks).

Laity.

All of these were women and some had the same surnames and middle names, which suggests that most of them were related.

2nd scale of Xiu shi: 1 member

1st scale of Xiu shi: 2 members

3rd scale of Xue shi: 1 member

2nd scale of Xue shi: 2 members

1st scale of Xue shi: 4 members

6th scale of Qing jing shi: 1 member

Total: 11, all female

Why so few laity? The BLIA (Buddhist Light International Association) was only founded in 1991 and before that lay supporters of FGS were not organised.

There were 24 apologies for absence, which indicates a formal meeting. The apologies were from Sangha members and their names are listed.

Ages of Sangha members (pp.44-5).

21-30: 383 members

31-40: 262 members

These 2 groups together are said to be 64% of the whole.

Education.

In 1967 only one third of Sangha members had high school or college degrees. In 1987 twice as many had college degrees as high school degrees. The number of those with graduate degrees below Ph.D. was 1 in 1967, in 1987 it was 26. The number of Ph.D.s was 1 in 1967, in 1987 it was 5.

Origin (patrilineal) of Sangha members numbering 983.

Appendix C

The 16 admin. depts of FGS according to a chart in the 30th Yearbook, 1997.

Published by Kaohsiung Religious Affairs Committee.

1. The elderly. Two sections: patrolling; heads of dioceses (American, European, Pacific, Africa, Taiwan (divided into N, central, S and E)).
2. Inspections in Taiwan. Four sections.
3. Inspections overseas.
4. Education.
5. Culture.
6. FGS Tripiṭaka editing.
7. FGS Cultural Foundation. Digitising Tripiṭaka. Museums.
8. Pure Land Cultural Foundation.
9. Donors' association.
10. University education: preparatory committee. [This was before their own Taiwanese universities had started.]
11. TV and satellite.

12. IBLA Committee.
13. International Buddhist Progress Association.
14. Religious Affairs Development Committee.
15. Meditation Centre.
16. Religious Affairs office.

The volume's appendix says that this omits the College for Transmitting Light, and the Secretary of Dharma Hall.

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Gilles Béguin (English translation by Narisa Chakrabongse), *Buddhist Art: An Historical and Cultural Journey*. Bangkok: River Books, 2009, 400 pp., 680 colour illustrations, 22 maps and 78 plans

Reviewed by Nicolas Revire

Gilles Béguin's new, voluminous and richly illustrated book, originally published in French (2009), and skillfully translated into English by Narisa Chakrabongse, represents a rare and successful attempt to draw on the large panorama of Buddhist art over the Asian continent in a single volume penned by a sole author (for another recent attempt, see Leidy 2008). Ten years in the making, the book is the result of a life's work and celebrates the culmination of a career dedicated almost entirely to the study and conservation of Asian arts in such prestigious collections as the Guimet (from 1971 to 1994) and the Cernuschi museums (1994–2011) in Paris. It is a valuable contribution to the field, due to the wealth of information and illustrations that it presents. The clarity and straightforward style of Béguin's writing, through the English translation, also helps to ensure that his work is accessible to new readers in the field, as well as undergraduate students. As such, it will serve well in introductory courses on Buddhist and Asian art, just as the issues that it engages may surely be of interest to Buddhist scholars, monks and laity, since the latter are overwhelmingly focused on textual or *dharma* studies and often neglect artistic production.

A first, general essay on the Buddhist "doctrine" (pp. 9–25) is immediately followed by a section on "Buddhism and Art" (pp. 27–61), which lays down the basic theories and principles of art and iconography. This is followed by a long chapter on Buddhist art in India (pp. 63–106), the art's motherland, and then a brief section on the expansion of Buddhism into the rest of Asia (pp. 107–110). These introductory chapters, in which the terminology and definitions are properly presented item by item, pave the way for the rest of the volume and should be read by everyone, especially the neophyte, before moving ahead

to their favourite destination or chapter. As with a travel atlas, the rest of the book is comprised of fourteen geographical chapters that take the reader on a “historical and cultural journey” along the path of Buddhist penetration into Asia. This journey takes us, on the one hand, along the (essentially) maritime routes via Sri Lanka (pp. 111–125) and Java (pp. 127–143), to the rest of mainland or peninsular Southeast Asia including the Khmer empire (pp. 145–163), the kingdom of Campā (pp. 165–167), Śrīvijaya (pp. 169–171), Thailand (pp. 173–189) and Burma/Myanmar (pp. 191–203); and, on the other, along the land route of the “Silk Road” from Gandhāra and West Central Asia (pp. 205–225), to the deserts and oases of the Tarim Basin with their cave temples (pp. 227–245), or the “Himalayan kingdoms” of Nepal (pp. 247–255), Tibet and Mongolia (pp. 257–277), and then to China (pp. 279–331), Korea (pp. 333–347), and eventually to Japan (pp. 349–387). The book ends with a carefully selected bibliography, arranged thematically in accordance with the previous chapters, and a general index.

Some broad considerations to be addressed in this review include the relationships between Buddhist art, rituals, and texts in different contexts and periods across Asia. As Béguin states (p. 27):

It is paradoxical that one of the major manifestations of spiritual art was born of a religion that initially needed no buildings to assemble the faithful nor possessed a fundamental liturgy. Even more disconcertingly—when the majority of the components of Buddhism are justified by sacred texts, themselves a continuation of oral teachings—nothing, at first glance, would seem to lead to the creation of any artistic practice.

In fact, as I argue below, this constant dialogue between the material and ritual cultures should be approached in tandem. The textual tradition, often produced much later, does not always have to explain or justify the presence (or absence) of a material object such as a Buddha image or painting.

For several centuries the Buddha was not portrayed anthropomorphically. This phase is generally called “aniconic” in art historical literature, including the volume under review. This common assertion is somewhat problematic, not least because a Buddha footprint (*buddhapāda*), a Bodhi tree, or a *stūpa*, for instance, can also serve as a focal point for worship and commemoration, and hence function as a sort of “icon” or image on its own. The issue at

stake is rather that the Buddha was not initially represented as a human figure but only symbolically through what Béguin calls “non-manifested images”, perhaps echoing ancient Vedic traditions of not representing gods anthropomorphically (p. 39). Bodhi trees, *stūpas* and Buddha footprints as cult objects are widespread in Sri Lanka and mainland Southeast Asia. Hence it would be wrong to believe, as the author seems to hold, that there was once an “aniconic” phase that would have preceded an “iconic” period, for such representations could often be used side by side. In other words, Buddha images did not suddenly replace *stūpas* and other indexical symbols of the Buddha—rather they have coexisted over a long period of time up until this day.

Another important factor to consider, and one which Béguin seeks to avoid, is the possible impact of art on narrative texts concerned with the life of the Buddha. Indeed some of the earliest Buddhist narratives in India are not literary texts, but sculpted low reliefs from Bhārhut and Sāñcī (*circa* second–first centuries BCE). A case can be made that these works of art chiseled in stone could easily have influenced the biographical and oral tradition dealing with the Buddha’s life. For example, one of the pillars at Sāñcī *stūpa* no. 1 has a representation of a monkey making an offering of a bowl of honey to the Buddha, whose presence is suggested by a tree and an “empty throne” (p. 71, fig. 22). This of course brings to mind the miraculous episode that supposedly took place at Vaiśālī, commonly found in the art of India, but not in the literary texts until centuries later. Étienne Lamotte (1976: 738) has pointed out that often “artists” drew their inspiration from the texts, but then in turn the texts were sometimes influenced by the works created by the sculptors in ancient India. Another possible bearing of artworks on texts relates to the peculiar characteristics of the great man (*mahāpuruṣalakṣaṇa*), that is, the Buddha, of which Béguin does not dare to explain the complex origins (p. 41). Several of these distinctive marks, such as the cranial protuberance said to be like a turban (*uṣṇīṣa*) or the tuft of hair between the eyebrows (*ūrṇā*), have elicited much speculation among scholars. One physical sign, in which the explanation is found in many texts, is that the Buddha had “webbed fingers (and toes)” like the feet of a swan. This is probably the result of some confusion caused by the technical exigencies of the sculptural medium, which must leave a “web” of stone between the unfolded fingers of the Buddha image to avoid breakage. It thus appears clear that texts may have been regularly revisited and interpreted in light of these artistic practices.

However, Béguin draws a crucial distinction between “style” and “iconography”. Buddhist iconography is prescriptive and fixed, and so does not easily change from one region to another except when certain “iconographic” innovations are introduced. Conversely, style reflects the diversity of regional aesthetics and cultures, as well as historical developments. In essence, it is quite fluid, depending on the date and the geographical origin of the material object or structure, although some Indian artistic schools, such as the Gupta or Pāla styles, enjoyed “international” fame. So the architectural structure of the *stūpa*, for example, has widely spread across Asia, taking on many diverse forms and names as details specific to different regions were incorporated into the design. Yet the *stūpa*’s overall function remains the same, a tomb-like structure where sacred relics can be kept safe and venerated. In the same vein, Buddha or Bodhisattva images, irrespective of where or when they were created, are normally clearly identifiable by Buddhists as such, thanks to iconographic devices or specific attributes. According to the textual tradition, the representation of the Buddha, for instance, should convey the ideals of the thirty-two major characteristics of the great man, although two of these distinctive marks are not publicly visible and many others are rarely depicted on Buddha images or sculptures. While all Buddhas are alike, and I agree with the author when he writes that the iconography of Śākyamuni conditioned those of past Buddhas, I disagree, however, with his following statement that Maitreya, the Buddha of the future, has an iconography of his own, frequently represented seated with his legs pendant (p. 52). As I have written elsewhere (Revire 2010, 2014, 2016), this peculiar posture (*bhadrāsana*) is not exclusively reserved for Maitreya or any other Buddhas. Positive identification of such pendant-legged Buddhas remains problematic, unless backed by epigraphic or textual evidence, since each case also depends on its specific cultural and archaeological context (e.g. Griffiths, Revire and Sanyal 2013).

Presumably for the sake of simplicity, the publisher of the English translation chose not to employ diacritical marks when using either Sanskrit or other indigenous terms, although these diacritics are present in the original French version. In the same vein, Béguin eschews the excessive use of those technical terms that are the hallmark of Buddhist scholars and art historians. However, a glossary of such terms, some of which have passed into common English, would have been a welcome addition for the benefit of the general reader. For example, it would have been useful to make clear distinctions between a *stūpa* (*thūpa*), a *caitya* (*cetiya*)—which apparently gave rise to the words *chedi* in Thailand

and *zedi* in Burma—a *dhātugarbha* (*dägaba* in Sinhalese, later transliterated as “pagoda” by Westerners of the colonial era), and the Tibetan *chörten*. Often these terms are considered synonyms in English, but they are not and should have been explained by the author. A *caitya* (“object of veneration,” pp. 31, 66) is not necessarily a *stūpa*, although all *stūpas* are regarded as *caityas*. A Buddha image or a Bodhi tree can also be regarded as a *caitya*. The word pagoda, on the other hand, seems to have a different etymology. In the strict sense, as a depository location for a relic (*dhātu*), it is the equivalent of the Indian *stūpa*, but stylised as a tiered tower with multiple eaves as commonly seen in Nepal, China, Vietnam, Korea, and Japan. It is uncommon in Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and other parts of South or Southeast Asia except, of course, in modern Chinese temples as a product of the Chinese diaspora. The generic term often refers in English to religious complexes in a broader sense although it would not be an accurate word to describe a Buddhist temple or a monastery in Burma (*kyaung*) or in Thailand, Laos or Cambodia (*wat*).

Similarly, the term “votive”, which Béguin uses extensively, as in “votive tablets” (p. 182), seems equally inappropriate. In fact, these Buddhist artifacts bear no comparison to other objects for which the term is commonly used, such as mediaeval Christian tablets (*ex voto*) expressing gratitude to a saint and crowding the walls of European churches. This terminology, which still dominates art historical literature, is most likely (consciously or not) influenced by the great and pioneering work on Buddhist art by the French art historian Alfred Foucher (1865–1952), whose views were profoundly embedded in the Catholic practices and popular traditions of his day. One such view, expressed by Béguin (p. 201), is that these artifacts were possibly manufactured at the great holy Indian sites for pilgrims and act as souvenirs (*memento*), like those acquired at Lourdes in France. As Peter Skilling has recently stressed (2005, 2009), this interpretation has no basis in Buddhist texts or rituals, or in the archaeological record. Although it is impossible to know what they were originally labelled in India, clay moulded miniature Buddhist images are called *tsha tsha* in Tibetan, possibly deriving from the Sanskrit word *sañcaka*. In Thailand today the images are simply named “holy sealings” or “imprints” (*phra phim*), in Cambodia they are similarly qualified as “sacred” (*brah patimā*), while in Burma they are called “sacred terracotta” (*mye-bon-hpaya*). Other terms, such as “clay sealings, stamped images, moulded images” and so on, have also been used. Employing different terms may also encourage readers to reflect upon, and question, the functions of these artifacts.

This leads me to my next point. Since Buddhism is a living tradition, both religiously, textually and artistically, Buddhist art continues to evolve and be produced. While Béguin understandably focuses on antiquities that have achieved worldwide fame, much Buddhist art may remain hidden, because scholars have not yet been sufficiently attuned to the many contemporary expressions of Buddhism taking place throughout the world today. Many of these have already produced, or have the potential to produce, their own artistic language. Here I am thinking, for example, about the long, painted Vessantara scrolls of northeastern Thailand (for example, Lefferts and Cate 2012), as well as other artistic creations taking place outside the focus of most art historians and urban centres. Any “art historian” of Buddhism ought to be sure to draw attention to this constantly emerging work—otherwise readers will always think that “Buddhist art” is only located in the past.

Moreover, for Buddhists across all traditions, a Buddha image is more than just an image, a souvenir, or a piece of art—it is a substitute for the Buddha. In China and Japan, this is nicely recounted by narrative means through the legend of King Udayana, who, in the absence of the Lord, is said to have ordered the carving of the first sandalwood image of the Buddha in his own likeness (p. 282). This legend is also known in Sri Lanka and mainland Southeast Asia, although the frame story differs in many respects and is always associated there with King Pasenadi the Kosalan (Gombrich 1978; Revire 2017). This alone explains how and why these images are treated by Buddhist devotees with utmost reverence as living beings and are worshiped with offerings of flowers, incense, candles, and sometimes clothes, food and water. In their natural settings of monastery, temple or altar in the home, these Buddha images are generally placed above the heads of worshipers on a special pedestal. Consecration ceremonies govern the making of any Buddha images, regardless of their size or the substance from which they are made. This is done prominently by celebrating the “opening of the divinity’s eyes” (p. 35). The same holds true for all Buddhist artifacts or other indexical (non-figurative) signs of the Buddha, such as *stūpas* (and the relics enshrined therein), Bodhi trees, footprints and so on. Although Béguin—an art historian and museum curator—is silent on this matter, it would have been appropriate for him to mention that “consecrated” Buddhist icons should not be kept outside places of worship. For the enjoyment of western tourists or amateurs, and also for security reasons, many foreign museums or art galleries worldwide forbid the *in situ* worship or even physical contact with these displayed icons. They are presented only to please the eyes. These museum practices, however, infringe

on the basic definition of Buddhist art as a sacred and devotional tradition (Skilling 2012). To conclude on a more idealistic note, a new and innovative approach to studying Buddhist art would seek to bridge the gaps between the various disciplines (textual, art, and anthropological studies), and to challenge artificial boundaries or categories, such as “Theravāda” or “Mahāyāna”. As scholars, we should be cautious about imposing “clean” models based on our own backgrounds which push us into thinking that things are simpler than they are. This “new approach” can only be made through the comprehensive study of sites and objects, taking into account their historical, local and cultural contexts. The rich legacy of Buddhist art and architecture produced in one place is inspired by the ritual and veneration of relics and icons. But then art and rituals are often temporally and culturally specific. While the material record is generally the product of ideologies that can be studied through the examination of liturgies, inscriptions and literary narratives, the material object in front of us does not necessarily have a single or static meaning and value. This in turn raises the question as to whether artwork is a text that can be easily “read”. In fact a single image without epigraphic or archaeological context is often difficult for scholars to interpret, but that should be the subject of further consideration.

As regards the structure of the book, some confusion may arise from its admixture of geographical and historical divisions. Why propose separate, very short, chapters on Campā and Śrīvijaya, known as ancient “Indianised kingdoms”, instead of using the modern nation-state designations of Vietnam, Malaysia or Indonesia? (Note that there is already a chapter on Java.) Is there really such a thing as “Śrīvijayan art”? If there is, why not spend more time discussing the archaeological remains or sculptures in the Sumatran heartlands instead of solely focusing on artifacts found in peninsular Thailand (pp. 169–171)? Similarly, why not dedicate an independent chapter to Laos or Lan Xang, which is dealt with much too briefly in the chapter on Thailand? Béguin (p. 188) all too conveniently assumes that Laos has, over the centuries, suffered too much from the effects of its powerful neighbours (that is, the Khmer empire until the mid-fourteenth century, the later Tai or Siamese Lan Na and Ayutthaya kingdoms, and so on) to have developed its own art with individual characteristics. He does, however, pay attention to the original architectural style presented in the Lao *that* (for example, Phra That Luang in Vientiane, illustrated on p. 189, fig. 35). The same could certainly be said about other Tai or Siamese art schools of Sukhothai, Lan Na, Ayutthaya and so on, which drew heavily on various preceding artistic traditions. For example, the eclectic art and architecture of

Ayutthaya is a subtle combination of U Thong, Sukhothai, Lan Na and Khmer arts. Sukhothai art, in turn, owes a considerable amount to Sinhalese traditions gradually introduced into mainland Southeast Asia, beginning in the thirteenth century, possibly through Burma. If modern designations and entities, such as Thailand and Myanmar, supplied the author's rule for the division of the book into chapters, then these should have been applied throughout. Moreover, if the art of Bhutan, which Béguin admits "should really be accorded a distinct place in the Tibetan world" (p. 275), why did he integrate it into the chapter on Tibet and Mongolia?

These few areas for potential discussion or improvement aside, the present volume enriches our understanding of the diverse ways by which Buddhist art developed over the centuries to become, according to the author, a "truly unifying factor" in Asia. Through this English translation, it now becomes accessible to a broad audience and provides a stimulating read with a wealth of colour illustrations. We should be thankful to Gilles Béguin, and to Narisa Chakrabongse, who has made this book widely available.

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