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Editorial

Richard Gombrich

In my Editorial to vol. 2, I pointed out that “more than half the pages are written by people who do not hold academic posts.” The same turns out to be true of vol. 4. (I trust that Rey-Sheng Her will forgive me for massaging away the fact that he holds a part-time position at Tzu Chi University: it is not what he mainly does.) Here I wish to draw particular attention to three contributions, all of which say something new and important, making real additions to our knowledge of Buddhism.

I think that any reader can see for themselves that “The Silent Mentors of Tzu Chi” is a remarkable article. It is remarkable firstly in being both a primary and a secondary source. It records the historical background to donating one’s body for dissection by medical students; I should record that I had to shorten this first part of the article. It then gives us a full and vivid account, much enriched by interview material, of how this practice has been developed in Tzu Chi; and the whole is further enhanced by the comments of the author, himself a prominent member of Tzu Chi.

Rey’s article is uplifting. That by Suren Rāghavan is deeply depressing. Here we overlap with journalism – and Suren has indeed worked as a journalist – for he is recording the activities of a new movement which 3 months ago, when he started writing, hardly anyone outside Sri Lanka had heard of, while now more news, much of it lurid, is appearing on the Internet every day. But his article is far from ephemeral. He adds to his report of ongoing events a profound analysis of their background and current context, leading to a chilling warning of where they seem to be heading.

The article by Brett Shults could hardly be more different, for it deals in painstaking detail with facts which have been available for over two thousand years – but not adequately understood. “Hidden in plain sight”, as he says, in a famous text in

the Pali Canon, is evidence that the composer of the text was able to record what two young brahmins said to the Buddha, using technical vocabulary of professional sacrificial priests. On the back cover of my book *What the Buddha Thought* I wrote: "Since many of the Buddha's allusions can only be traced in the Pali versions of surviving texts, the book establishes the importance of the Pali Canon as evidence." Here is as striking and convincing a case as any yet recorded.

Much of my Editorial to the first volume of this journal was devoted to deploring the current lack of scholarly work on the Buddha himself, a lack which is largely due to the dogma that we cannot know anything about him. I explained how stupid this is, and I would urge readers to look again at what I wrote. But I now think that perhaps I understated my case!

I have recently had an article rejected by a well known learned journal on the recommendation of an anonymous reviewer. Standard procedure. I have however been sent the whole of the reviewer's report and it gives high praise to much of the article. It is evident that the recommendation to reject it is mainly based on my assumption that we know what the Buddha taught, for which the reviewer accuses me of presenting no arguments (he/she presents no arguments either), though I do in fact refer the reader to *What the Buddha Thought*.

This lazy, slapdash scepticism has alas become common in Buddhist studies. It has reached the level of censorship: anything that talks about the Buddha's ideas as really his must if possible be denied publication; the contrary evidence is never considered. The many whose minds are closed will not read Brett Shults' article; but this will not prevent its value from being recognized long after we are all dead.

This incident raises even wider issues. In order to gain official recognition (and hence funding), academic journals must now use "double blind refereeing": in theory, both authors and referees are anonymous. Very often it is obvious who has written an article, particularly in a small field like ours, so it is only the referees who are truly anonymous. This demands a high standard of integrity. If a referee misrepresents what is in the article, they can harm the author without fear of redress – for it is most unlikely that anyone will ever check what they have written.

While editors cannot check everything, they too bear a responsibility. If the article is said to have great merits but some flaws, the editor should see what can be done to remedy the flaws, not throw out the baby with the bathwater. But there is also something more fundamental. If it can be seen that the alleged flaws are matters on which scholars disagree, it is the editor's clear duty to publish what the

author wants to say, even if it is not his/her own view, rather than take sides with the reviewer.

Unless unfashionable or unorthodox views can be published where they can be widely read and criticized, a field will stagnate. It will also be extremely dull. Nowadays governments, at least in the West, are constantly cutting support for Buddhist studies, and the field is shrinking so much that it is hard to recruit new blood. Some areas, notably Pali studies, could even be called moribund. Yet intellectual standards are so low that it is hard to argue that they deserve better.

In the unlikely event that I ever have a tombstone, I hope it will read: "The best available hypothesis is that the body of Richard Gombrich lies here, but if anyone has evidence or argument to contest this, let them make it known."

Early Buddhist and Confucian Concepts of Filial Piety: A Comparative Study^{*}

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There are only a few modern scholars who have made comparative studies on Buddhist and Confucian concepts of filial piety. Michihata Ryoshu and Zhong Yulian have done so, but they both discuss the filial concepts of the two schools separately, one after the other. Therefore, in a real sense, theirs are not comparative studies, because they neither discuss the similarities and differences nor analyze the causes behind them. In this paper, I mainly confine myself to the early texts of both schools of thought, in which we can only find the basic definition of the concept of filial piety and how the concept has been developed and changed in later writings. After summarizing and analyzing the concepts of filial piety in both Buddhism and Confucianism, I have found that there are five similarities and three differences between the two schools; furthermore, Confucianism has two aspects which are not shared by Buddhism. The reasons behind these are that filial piety is the foundation as well as the highest norm in Confucian ethics and all morality and civilization come from it. By contrast, filial piety in Buddhism is not the foundation of its ethics, although it is an important ethical teaching of the Buddha. Instead, the concepts of karma and *samsāra* are the bases of Buddhist ethics.

^{*}The Chinese version has been published in the *Universal Gate Buddhist Journal*, No.45 (2008), 169-210. This English translation is a revised and expanded version with additions and corrections. Thanks to the two anonymous reviewers for their comments and valuable suggestions.

1. Introduction

There are only a few modern scholars who have made comparative studies on Buddhist and Confucian concepts of filial piety, such as Michihata Ryoshu and Zhong Yulian. Both Michihata's *Fojiao Yu Rujia Lunli* (*Buddhist and Confucian Ethics*) and Zhong's *Rufu de Xiaodao Shixiang* (*Filial Thought in Confucianism and Buddhism*) discuss the filial concepts of the two schools separately, one after the other. Therefore, in a real sense, theirs are not comparative studies, because they neither discuss the similarities and differences nor analyze the causes behind them. Sun Xiusheng has also written a paper on the issue, entitled "Rushi xiaodaoshuo de bijiao yanjiu" (A comparative study of Confucian and Buddhist concepts of filial piety). But Sun's study is just a simple description of some stories found in the Buddhist literature, and he too has neither summarized the concept of filial piety in Confucianism nor analyzed it in Buddhism. Wang Kaifu has touched upon filial piety in his paper "The Ethical thought in the *Sigalovāda Sūtra* — the similarities and differences of Confucian and Buddhist ethics are also discussed concurrently".

However, Zongmi (780 - 841), an ancient Buddhist scholar in China, made a brief comparative study of filial piety in Buddhism and Confucianism in his commentary to the *Ullambana Sūtra*. But in his discussion Zongmi used mostly Mahāyāna literature as well as the ideas and practices prevalent in his time; as a result, the early Buddhist scriptures such as the *Āgamas* were not utilized, let alone the Pāli *Nikāyas*, though they are basic for the study of both the concept and the practice of filial piety in Buddhism. Thus Zongmi's comparative study is limited in scope. We understand that Zongmi had a strong wish to reconcile the conflict between Confucianism and Buddhism. Therefore in his study he asserted that filial piety is the foundation of both Confucianism and Buddhism. However, karma is the foundation of ethical teaching in Buddhism, although filial piety is also considered important. It is Confucianism that considers filial piety as the foundation of ethics.

In this paper, I mainly confine myself to the early texts of both Buddhism and Confucianism. I use texts such as the *Lunyu* (Analects), the *Shijing* (Book of Poetry), the *Mengzi* (Mencius), the *Liji* (Book of Rites) and the *Xiaojing* (Classic of Filial Piety) etc. for Confucianism and the *Nikāyas*, the *Āgamas*, the *Vinayas* of different schools in Pāli and in Chinese translation for Buddhism. This choice of texts is due to the following two reasons. First, we can only find the basic definition and description of the concept of filial piety in both schools of thought in

their early texts; the concept has been developed and changed in later writings of various masters. The understanding of this basic definition of filial piety in both schools will also help us in the study of the issue in later writings. Second, there are many texts written by later masters of both schools related to the issue which we cannot deal with in this paper and have to leave for another paper.

Some scholars may think that the composition of the *Classic of Filial Piety* is late and the concept of filial piety in it had already developed, so it should be left out if I intend to use only early sources. I take the *Classic* into consideration as one of the early sources of Confucianism because it is the representative work of Confucianism on filial piety and it summarizes the concept as it had developed until then. As a result, this work is included in the thirteen classics of Confucianism. Therefore, not to include the *Classic of Filial Piety* in my study would leave a gap.

2. Similarities between Confucianism and Buddhism

Morality is the foundation of both Buddhism and Confucianism and filial piety is an important ethical teaching in morality. There are five similarities between the schools of thought concerning filial piety.

1) Emphasis on repaying the debts to one's parents

The idea of repaying the debts to one's parents is found in both Buddhism and Confucianism, but the ways of repaying them are different. The ancient text of *Shijing*, which is considered as authoritative by Confucians, teaches the idea of filial piety and repaying debts to parents. Confucian classics often quote from this text as supporting evidence for their ideas. The *Shijing* says,

It is my father that begot me!
It is my mother that fed me!
They kept me, they loved me,
They fed me, they reared me,

They tended me, they shielded me,
Out and in, they cared for me.

It is time that I requited their love,
But it is like great heaven unlimited. (*Shijing*, *Xiaoya*, 2.3)¹

The *Shijing* here describes the toil and difficulties of parents in bringing up their children, so it is said, “It is time that I requited their love, but it is like great Heaven, unlimited.”

In both the Northern and Southern traditions of Buddhism, we find the thought expressed in the *Shijing* about the compassion of parents towards their children. The *Kataññu Sutta* of the *Anguttaranikāya* says,

Monks, one can never repay two persons, I declare. What two? Mother and father. Even if one should carry about his mother on one shoulder and his father on the other, and so doing should live a hundred years, attain a hundred years; and if he should support them, anointing them with unguents, kneading, bathing and rubbing their limbs, and they meanwhile should even void their excrements upon him, – even so could he not repay his parents.

Moreover, monks, if he should establish his parents in supreme authority, in the absolute rule over this mighty earth abounding in the seven treasures, – not even thus could he repay his parents. What is the cause for that? Monks, parents do much for their children: they bring them up, they nourish them, they introduce them to this world.²

From the above quotations it is clear that both Buddhism and Confucianism have the same idea of filial piety with an emphasis on parents’ difficulties.

¹ English translation quoted from *Shijing: The Book of Poetry*, 419-421. Regarding the last sentence in the verse, the original is “But heaven has grabbed them from above” which means that they have died. The translator of *Shijing* adopts Cheng Junying’s interpretation. See Cheng’s *Shijing Xing Zhu* 《詩經新注》 (Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1985) 406. But Zhou Zhenfu interprets it as “It is like the heaven unlimited so it could not be repaid”. See Zhou’s *Shijing Yizhu* 《詩經譯注》 (Beijing Zhonghua Shuju 2002) 327-328. Here I follow Zhou’s interpretation, which is the normal understanding, so I have changed it into “It is like great heaven unlimited”. The *Shijing* (Book of Poetry) is one of the five classics of Confucian tradition. The others are the *Shujing* (Book of Documents), the *Liji* (Book of Rites), the *Yijing* (Book of Changes), and the *Chunqiu* (Spring and Autumn Annals).

² A i 61. The English translation is adopted from *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, i, 56-57. All the English translations are quoted from PTS translations, otherwise translators will be mentioned. The counterpart of this sutta is also found in the Chinese translation of the *Ekottarāgama*, T2, No. 125 (20.11) 600c-601a.

2) Respect and reverence to parents

Both Buddhism and Confucianism speak of respect and reverence for parents, but the latter emphasizes it. The *Lunyu* says, “Nowadays ‘filial’ means simply being able to provide one’s parents with nourishment. But even dogs and horses are provided with nourishment. If you are not respectful, wherein lies the difference?” (*Lunyu* 2.7) So in the Confucian concept of filial piety respect is the root and propriety is the model. The *Liji* also says, “There are three degrees of filial piety. The highest is the honouring of our parents; the second is not disgracing them; and the lowest is being able to support them.” (*Liji* 24.) The *Mengzi* basically continued Confucian thought concerning respect to parents, as it says, “The greatest thing a dutiful son can do is to honour his parents.” (*Mengzi* 9.4)³ “A son of supreme dutifulness (*Daxiao* 大孝) yearns for his parents all his life.” (*Mengzi* 9.1) According to Confucianism, in the practice of filial piety supporting one’s parents is the basic requirement and respect for parents is the highest form. Therefore, “In serving your parents you may gently remonstrate with them. However, once it becomes apparent that they have not taken your criticism to heart you should be respectful and not oppose them, and follow their lead diligently without resentment.” (*Lunyu* 4.18) The importance of respect and reverence in the Confucian practice of filial piety is well demonstrated in these quotations.

Although respect is the core of the Confucian concept of filial piety, in practice one should perform it in accordance with propriety (*Li* 禮) So according to the *Lunyu*, when Meng Yizi asked Confucius about filial piety, the Master said, “It is not being disobedient.” Then Fan Chi further asked the master to clarify it and the Master told him: “When your parents are alive, serve them in accordance with the rites; when they pass away, bury them in accordance with the rites and sacrifice to them in accordance with the rites.” (*Lunyu* 2.5) In other words, in the practice of filial piety one should always follow propriety. But what is propriety in Confucianism? According to the *Xiaojing*, Confucius says,

Ritual propriety is simply a matter of respect (*jing* 敬). Thus, the son finds pleasure in respecting his father; the younger brother finds pleasure in respecting his elder brother; the minister finds pleasure in respecting his lord; and all of the people find pleasure in respecting the Emperor. Those who are respected are few, but those who find

³The translation is adapted from Lau: 193. The Chinese characters and Pinyin are added by the writer.

pleasure in showing this respect are legion. This is what is called the vital way (*dao* 道). (*Xiaojing* 12)⁴

Again, the *Liji* also describes it:

They are the rules of propriety, that furnish the means of determining (the observances towards) relatives, as near and remote; of settling points which may cause suspicion or doubt; of distinguishing where there should be agreement, and where difference; and of making clear what is right and what is wrong. (*Liji* 1.6)

According to those rules, one should not (seek to) please others in an improper way, nor be lavish of his words. According to them, one does not go beyond the definite measure, nor encroach on or despise others, nor is fond of (presuming) familiarities. To cultivate one's person and fulfill one's words is called good conduct. When the conduct is (thus) ordered, and the words are accordant with the (right) course, we have the substance of the rules of propriety. (*Liji* 1.7)

From the above discussion, it is clear that both filial piety and propriety have respect as their core. Filial piety is the natural feeling of a man, while propriety is the rule and model for practice of it. In the Confucian text *Lunyu*, it is said that Zai Wo asked Confucius about the three years' mourning for parents, saying that one year was long enough:

If the gentleman refrains from practising ritual for three years, the rites will surely fall into ruin; if he refrains from music for three years, this will surely be disastrous for music. After the lapse of a year the old grain has been used up, while the new grain has ripened, and the four different types of tinder have all been drilled in order to rekindle the fire. One year is surely long enough.

To this Confucius said,

This shows how lacking in Goodness this Zai Wo is! A child is completely dependent upon the care of his parents for the first three years

⁴ All the English translations of the *Xiaojing* quoted in this paper have been adapted from Henry Rosemount, Jr and Roger T. Ames, 2009. See Bibliography.

of his life—this is why the three year mourning period is common practice throughout the world. Did Zai Wo not receive three years of care from his parents? (*Lunyu* 17.21)⁵

From this dialogue it is clear that according to early Confucian thought, filial piety is a natural feeling of a man towards his parents. The *Xiaojing* clearly defines the practice of filial piety in five ways.

The Master said, “Filial children in serving parents in their daily lives show them real respect (*jing* 敬), in tending to their needs and wants strive to bring them enjoyment (*le* 樂), in caring for them in sickness reveal their apprehension, in mourning for them express their grief, and in sacrificing to them show true veneration. With these five dispositions firmly in place, they are truly able to serve their parents.” (*Xiaojing* 10)

Buddhism also teaches respect and reverence for parents. The *Sabrahma-sutta* (Equal with Brahmā) of the *Āṅguttarānikāya* says,

Monks, those families where mother and father are worshipped in the home are reckoned like unto Brahmā. Those families where mother and father are worshipped in the home are ranked with the teachers of old. Worthy of offerings, monks, are those families where mother and father are worshipped in the home. ‘Brahmā,’ monks, is a term for mother and father. ‘Teachers of old,’ monks, is a term for mother and father. ‘Worthy of offerings,’ monks, is a term for mother and father. Why so? Because mother and father do much to children, they bring them up, nourish and introduce them to the world.⁶

First, parents are respected as Brahmā, the king of all gods. According to Brahmanism, humans are created by Brahmā. Here the Buddha ironically said that

⁵ All the English translations of the *Lunyu* quoted in this paper have been adapted from Edward Slingerland 2003. Please see Bibliography.

⁶ This *sutta* appears twice in the *Āṅguttarānikāya*: A i 132; ii 70. *The Book of Gradual Sayings*, i 114-115; ii 79. *Itivuttaka*, verses 109-111. It is also found in the short version of the Chinese translation of the *Samyuktāgama* (T2, No.100 (88) 404a), although two items are added: (1) parents are also worshipped as Mahādeva and (2) the family is also respected by others if parents are supported with all kinds of material things.

if one respects Brahmā as the creator of humankind, it is better to respect one's parents because the latter is the real creators of you. Second, parents are respected as the early teachers as they educate their children from the time they are born. Third, parents are respected as worthy of offerings and support to provide their basic requirements.

Respect and reverence for parents is also discussed in the *Mahāyañña* (Great Sacrifice) of the *Aṅguttaranikāya*, in which we find a dialogue between the Buddha and a fire worshipping Brahmin about how to perform a sacrifice that involves a lot of killing of cows and other animals. The Buddha advised the fire worshipping Brahmin, in sacrificial terminology, that there are three kinds of fires that should be revered, respected and venerated: parents are the first kind of fire; one's wife and children, employees and dependents are the second; the third fire represents religious persons who have either attained the goal of arahantship or have embarked on a course of training for the elimination of negative mental traits. The Buddha said to the Brahman: "these three fires, when esteemed, revered, venerated, respected, must bring best happiness."⁷ Here parents come first.

These two *suttas* demonstrate the Buddhist teaching of respect and reverence for parents.

3) Unfiliality as one of the five grave crimes

Both Buddhism and Confucianism consider unfiliality as one of the five grave crimes.

Confucianism considers unfiliality as the first of five grave crimes. As the *Xiaojing* says,

The Master said, "The crimes that are addressed by the Five Punishments number some three thousand, and none of them is graver than to be wanting in family reverence." (*Xiaojing* 11)⁸

In the Han dynasty, the idea of "ruling the state by using filial piety" was conceived of and implemented; unfiliality was considered as one of the grave crimes.

⁷A iv 44. This is also found in the Chinese translation of the *Samyuktāgama*, T2, No. 99 (93) 24c; also in the shorter version of the Chinese translation of the *Samyuktāgama*, T2, No.100 (259) 464c.

⁸Here Henry Rosemount and Roger Ames translate "Xiao 孝" as "family reverence" instead of the normal translation "filial piety". It is also reflected in the title of the book they have translated *The Chinese Classics of Family Reverence for the Xiaojing* 《孝經》, instead of the normal translation *The Classic of Filial Piety*.

According to the *Chongqiu Jueyu*, “one who beats his father will be beheaded.” This is the law concerning filial practice in the Han dynasty (206BCE - 220 CE). So from the Three Kingdoms dynasty to the Northern and Southern dynasties the contents of filial piety became more systematic and concrete. It was during Northern Qi (550-577) that the “ten grave crimes” were first established and written in law; unfiliality was number eight. According to the law of the Liu Song dynasty (420-479), “One who is unfilial to his parents will be persecuted and hanged in the market.” (The Biography of Gu Kaizi in the *Song Shu*, the History of the Liu Song Dynasty.) In the Tang dynasty, the “ten evils” appeared in the law books and unfiliality is the seventh of the ten. The *Sui Shu* (History of the Sui Dynasty) says, “Again the ‘ten evils’ were established..... the seventh is unfiliality.” The item of the “ten evils” was in the law books from the Tang until the late Qing dynasty and unfiliality was one of the ten evils. The Tang law system was the most complete one. The punishment for unfiliality is: “One who scolds his parents or grandparents will be hanged, one who beats them will be beheaded.” “Those who report their grandparents and parents (for any wrong deeds) will be hanged.”⁹

According to the Buddhist teaching, killing one’s mother and father are the first two of the five gravest kinds of evil karma. The *Parikuppasutta* of the *Āṅguttaranikāya* says,

Monks, five are the lost in hell who lie festering, incurable. What five? (By him) has his mother been deprived of life; his father; an arahant; (by him), with evil thought, has the Tathāgata’s blood been drawn; (by him) has the Order been embroiled. Verily monks, these are the five lost in hell who lie festering, incurable.¹⁰

According to this *sutta*, one who has killed his mother or father has committed the gravest evil karma so he will be born in hell with immediate effect. This shows the importance of filial piety in Buddhist ethical teaching.

The Chinese translation of the *Ekottarāgama* also tells us that there are eleven kinds of people who cannot attain the path; one of them is one who kills his par-

⁹ All the quotations concerning judiciary are cited from Ma Shaoqing (2006), 122-4.

¹⁰ A iii 146. *The Book of Gradual Sayings*, iii 112. These five gravest kinds of bad karma are mentioned in many places in the Chinese *Āgamas*: the *Samyuktāgama*, T2, No.99 (792), 205a; the *Madhyamāgama*, T1, No.26 (200), 769a, 724a.

ents.¹¹ According to the *Vinaya* of various schools, one who kills his parents will not be admitted into the order of the Saṅgha and if he has entered, he should be expelled.¹²

From the above discussion, it is understood that both Buddhism and Confucianism consider unfiliality as a grave crime, but the latter's punishments for it are much heavier than the former's. According to Confucianism, even if one scolds one's parents one will be hanged, but according to Buddhism one will be born in hell only when one kills a parent.

4) Generalization of filial piety

Both Buddhism and Confucianism generalize the practice of filial piety as the social order and the universal law respectively. According to the *Lunyu*, filial piety is a natural feeling towards one's parents, but this idea has been developed in the *Liji* and it generalizes this morality as the universal law, the eternal and the constant (method) of Heaven and the righteousness of Earth. All human behaviour is connected with filial piety, from war to daily life: in service to the ruler, in dealings with friends. It includes all aspects of human life.

Zengzi said, "The body is that which has been transmitted to us by our parents; dare any one allow himself to be irreverent in the employment of their legacy? If a man in his own house and privacy be not grave, he is not filial; if in serving his ruler, he be not loyal, he is not filial; if in discharging the duties of office, he be not reverent, he is not filial; if with friends he be not sincere, he is not filial; if on the field of battle he be not brave, he is not filial. If he fails in these five things, the evil (of the disgrace) will reach his parents; dare he but reverently attend to them?" (*Liji* 24.26)

¹¹T2, no.125, 800a12. "The Buddha said, there are these eleven kinds of people who will not attain the path. What are the eleven? They are one who commits adultery, one who is of harsh speech, one who is difficult to advise, one who is shameless, one who is hateful, one who kills his parents, one who kills an arahant, one who cuts off the root of good, one who performs bad deeds, one who has the wrong idea of "I", one who has bad thoughts towards the Tathāgata."

¹²Pāli Vinaya, i, 297; the *Sarvāstivāda Vinaya*, T23, no.1435, 397b; the *Dharmaguptakavinaya*, T22, no.1428, 813a; the *Mahāsaṅghikavinaya*, T22, no.1425, 417b; the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, T23, no.1442, 566c; the *Vinaya*, T24, no.1464, 871b.

The *Liji* further generalizes this morality: “To fell a single tree, or kill a single animal, not at the proper season, is contrary to filial piety.” (*Liji* 24.28) Thus filial piety is considered as the universal truth.

Zengzi said, “Set up filial piety, and it will fill the space from earth to heaven; spread it out, and it will extend over all the ground to the four seas; hand it down to future ages, and from morning to evening it will be observed; push it on to the eastern sea, the western sea, the southern sea, and the northern sea, and it will be (everywhere) the law for men, and their obedience to it will be uniform. There will be a fulfilment of the words of the ode (III, i, ode 10, 6), ”From west to east, from south to north, There was no unsubmissive thought.” (*Liji* 24.27)

The Buddhist generalization of filial piety is different from Confucianism. Buddhism considers all kinds of service and help to sentient beings as filial piety. This is because Buddhism does not think of death as the end of life but as a change of form. A human being may be born in heaven to enjoy life or be born in hell to experience suffering. Sentient beings wonder in the realm of *saṃsāra* from the beginningless time till now, so that all other sentient beings may have been one’s parents in past lives. Therefore one should practise filial piety towards all sentient beings. The Buddha says to his disciples in the *Mātu Sutta* of the *Samyuttanikāya*:

Bhikkhus, this *saṃsāra* is without a discoverable beginning... It is not easy, bhikkhus, to find a being who in this long course has not previously been your mother... your father... your sister... your son... your daughter. For what reason? Because bhikkhus, this *saṃsāra* is without discoverable beginning... it is enough to be liberated from them.¹³

Therefore, Mahāyāna followers vow to save all sentient beings because they are possibly their past parents. So the Buddhist practice of filial piety is still within the idea of repaying debts to one’s parents, but Confucianism makes filial piety the universal law.

¹³S ii 189-90. *The Book of Kindred Sayings*, iii 128. This is also found in the Chinese translation of *Samyuktāgama*, T2, No. 99 (942) and the shorter Chinese translation of *Samyuktāgama*, T2, No. 100 (345).

5) The responses to filial piety

Both Buddhism and Confucianism have taught the gods' or heaven's responses to filial piety. Confucianism taught that heaven would respond to a human act of filiality, while Buddhism thought that gods would respond to human filial actions.

The *Xiaojing* says, "Indeed, family reverence (*xiao*) is the constancy of the heavenly cycles, the appropriate responsiveness (*yi*) of the earth, and the proper conduct of the people." (*Xiaojing* 7) So it is natural that heaven will respond to human filial actions. According to the *Xiaojing*:

In such a world, the parents while living enjoyed the comforts that parents deserve, and as spirits after death took pleasure in the sacrificial offerings made to them. Hence, the empire was peaceful (*he*) and free of strife, natural disasters did not occur, and man-made calamities were averted. In this way the enlightened kings used family reverence to bring proper order to the empire. The Book of Songs says, 'So admirable is the excellence (*de*) of his conduct that all of the states in the four quarters repair (*shun*) to him.' (*Xiaojing* 8)

What Confucianism emphasizes here is that peace will prevail when people practise morality. But the *Xiaojing* further interprets this as the response of spirits.

Of old the enlightened kings (*mingwang*) served their fathers with family reverence, and in so doing, served the heavens (*tian*) with acuity (*ming*); they served their mothers with family reverence, and in so doing, served the earth judiciously. With the young in compliance (*shun*) with their elders in this manner, proper order prevailed among those above and those below. With the enlightened kings being acute and judicious in their service to the heavens and to the earth, the gods and spirits sent down their blessings upon them.

Thus, even the Emperor must show reverence—referring here to his father's generation. And must place others before him—referring here to his elder brothers' generation. At the ancestral temple his offering of respect (*jing*) was in remembrance of his parents. He would cultivate his person and be circumspect in his conduct for fear of disgracing those who have come before.

When at the ancestral temple the Emperor offers his respects, the ghosts and spirits acknowledge him with appreciation. When familial and fraternal deference reaches this level, the feeling resonates with the gods and spirits, shines throughout the four corners of the world, and affects everything everywhere. (*Xiaojing* 16)

Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang dynasty explained the sentence in the above quotation “the spiritual intelligences displayed [their retributive power]” (神明彰矣) in *Xiaojing* as “When Heaven and Earth were served with intelligence and discrimination, the spiritual intelligences will know the earnestness [of humans] and bestow good fortune and protection on them. Thus it is said: ‘displayed [their retributive power].’” Xing Bing (932-1010) explained this in his commentary to the *Xiaojing* as “this chapter explains the influence of filial piety and the response to it.” So from the *Xiaojing* to emperor Tang Xuanzhong to the Confucian scholar Xing Bing, all interpreted that the practice of filial piety will influence spirits, who will respond to it. Therefore in the official Chinese history books there are special chapters such as the “Biographies of Confucian Scholars” and “Biographies of Filial Sons” dedicated to recording the stories of response to those who have practised filial piety. The well known stories are like that of the filial son Guo Ju, who because of poverty buried his own son in order to support his mother; he was rewarded with gold by heaven. Wang Xiang to get some fish for his mother, wanted to use his own body to melt ice; because of his filial piety the ice melted itself and two fishes came out as the reward of heaven.¹⁴

Buddhism has a similar thought. Respecting parents is seen as the first principle of ethical conduct, as Dharma, the way things should be, the social order. If parents are not respected, worse things will happen, such as war. This idea is found in many places in the Pali *Aṅguttaranikāya* as well as in the Chinese translations of the *Samyuktāgama*, the *Dirghāgama* and the *Ekottarāgama*.

These texts say that on the eighth day, the fourteenth day and the fifteenth day of each month, the ministers who are councilors of the Four Great Kings, the sons of the Four Great Kings and the Four Great Kings themselves perambulate this world to see whether many folk among men pay reverence to mother and father, to recluses and Brahmins, and show deference to the elders of the clan,

¹⁴These two stories of filial sons are selected in the *Twenty Four Filial Stories*, which was collected and published in the Song Dynasty.

and do good deeds.¹⁵ Then the Four Great Kings report to the ruler of the gods of the Thirty-Three as they sit in the hall of righteousness. If the report is negative, the gods of the Thirty-Three are displeased, saying, “Surely, sirs, the god-hosts will diminish and the *asura*-hosts will increase.” But if the Four Great Kings report in positive terms then the gods of the Thirty-Three are pleased, saying, “Surely, sirs, the god-hosts will increase and the *asura*-hosts will decrease.”

In the Buddhist scriptures, *Asuras* are known for fighting with gods. According to the PTS *Pali-English Dictionary*, “The fight between Gods Asuras is also reflected in the oldest books of the Pāli Canon and occurs in identical description under the title of *devāsura-saṅgāma*” in many places.”¹⁶ By contrast, gods represent righteousness, as the Pāli passage informs us that even the assembly hall of the gods is named Sudhammā, the Hall of Righteousness: “The Four Great Kings report the matter to the Devas of the Thirty-Three, as they sit in conclave in the *Hall of Righteousness (Sudhammā)*, saying ...”¹⁷ This is supported by the Chinese translations of the *Samyuktāgama*, the *Dirghāgama* and the *Ekottarāgama*, according to which the gods assemble in the Hall of Righteousness to discuss matters after they have inspected the world.¹⁸ So the above passage implies that if many folk do not pay reverence to mother and father, to recluses and Brahmins, there will be more fighting, since *asuras* love fighting, whereas gods maintain peace. So according to this passage, whether human folk respect their parents or not is the source of the ethical practices that directly affect the peace of the world.

The *Cakkavatti Sihanāda Sutta*, which is found in the Pāli *Dīghanikāya* and in both Chinese *Dirghāgama* and *Madhyamāgamas*, mentions that whether parents are respected and honoured or not, is one of the factors leading to either increase or decrease of the human lifespan. The text says that when the lifespan of people decreases to two hundred and fifty years, the following things will increase: lack of filial piety to mother and father, lack of religious piety to holy men, lack of regard

¹⁵The *Catummahārāja Sutta* of the *Aṅguttaranikāya* i 142; the *Samyuktāgama*, T2, no.99, 295c-296a; the shorter version of the *Samyuktāgama*, T2, no.100, 389a; the *Dirghāgama*, T1, no.1, 134b-135a and the *Ekottarāgama*, T2, no.125, 624b-625a.

¹⁶PTS *Pali-English Dictionary* (p.89), the fighting of gods with *asuras* is mentioned in the following passages: D ii 285; S i 222 (cp. 216 sq.), iv 201 sq., v 447; M i 253; A iv 432.

¹⁷A i 143. *The Book of Gradual Sayings*, i 126. The italics are mine.

¹⁸The Chinese term found in the *Ekottarāgama* is *Shanfajiang tang*, which means “Good Dharma Teaching Hall” (T2, 624b). The Chinese *Samyuktāgama* mentions only *fatang*, which means “Dharma Hall” (T2, no.125, 295c).

for the head of the clan. So the lifespan decreases to a hundred years.¹⁹

When the lifespan of people is only ten years, “among the humans keen mutual enmity will become the rule, keen ill-will, keen animosity, passionate thoughts even of killing, in a mother towards her child, in a child towards its mother, in a father towards his child, and a child towards its father” etc. What people do is only the ten bad deeds; the ten good deeds are not heard of.²⁰

On the other hand, the lifespan of people increases when they respect their parents, religious men and heads of clans. The Pāli version says that this happens when the lifespan of people is twenty years, and because of the good they do they will increase the length of life; as a result, their sons will live forty years.²¹ So filial piety is even affects the order of nature.

These few examples show that Buddhism too teaches the response of gods to the practice of filial piety, but it is closer to the ideas found in the Confucian text of *Lunyu* and differs much from *Liji*’s account.

3. Differences in Buddhism and Confucianism

As Buddhism and Confucianism are different in their philosophy of life, there are four differences in their concept and practice of filial piety. The Confucian philosophy of life emphasizes the family and social responsibilities of the individual so that one must both be a filial member of the family and actively participate in social service, and aim to cultivate one’s person, regulate one’s family, order well the state, and make peace in the world. This is clearly described in the *Daxue*:

The ancients who wished to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the kingdom first ordered well their own states. Wishing to order well their states, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their persons. Wishing to

¹⁹D iii 70-71. In the Chinese translation of the *Madhyamāgama* (T1, no.26, 523a), it is said when people’s lifespan is five hundred years, these things grow: not respecting parents, *śramaṇas* and Brahmins and not performing meritorious deeds. Thus, the lifespan of their sons decreases to either two hundred and fifty years or two hundred years.

²⁰D iii 71-73. The English translation is adapted from the Rhys Davids’ translation in *Dialogues of the Buddha*, 70. The same description is also found in the Chinese translation of the *Dīrghāgama* (T1, no.1, 41a).

²¹D iii 74-5. But the Chinese translation of the *Madhyamāgama* (T1, no.26, 524b) says when the lifespan of people is forty thousand years, people respect their parents, religious men and heads of clans. As a result of the good they do, the lifespan of people increases to eighty thousand years.

cultivate their persons, they first rectified their hearts. Wishing to rectify their hearts, they first sought to be sincere in their thoughts. Wishing to be sincere in their thoughts, they first extended to the utmost their knowledge. Such extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things. Things being investigated, knowledge became complete. Their knowledge being complete, their thoughts were sincere. Their thoughts being sincere, their hearts were then rectified. Their hearts being rectified, their persons were cultivated. Their persons being cultivated, their families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their states were rightly governed. Their states being rightly governed, the whole kingdom was made tranquil and happy. (*Daxue* 3)²²

As discussed above, filial piety is the root and foundation of Confucian ethics and it is the basis for self-cultivation. But the aim of the Buddhist philosophy of life is to end suffering by getting liberated from the world of desire and attachment, but this does not mean leaving the physical world. Therefore according to the Buddhist teaching, one needs to cultivate morality first and finally achieve moral perfection.

1) The ways of repaying debts to parents

The ways of repaying debts to parents differ in Confucianism and Buddhism, as the philosophy of life is different in the two systems of thought. The Confucian classics – the *Lunyu*, the *Liji*, the *Dadai Liji*, the *Mengzi* and the *Xiaojing* etc. – describe in detail the concept and practice of filial piety. The *Lunyu* says, “When your parents are alive, serve them in accordance with the rites; when they pass away, bury them in accordance with the rites and sacrifice to them in accordance with the rites.” (*Lunyu* 2.5) The *Dadai Liji* says, “There are three kinds of filial piety. The greatest is respecting parents, the second is not to disgrace them, the third is supporting them.” (*Dadai Liji* 11.1)²³ The *Xiaojing* summarizes:

Filial children in serving parents in their daily lives show them real respect (*jing*), in tending to their needs and wants strive to bring

²² James Legge's translation.

²³ All the translations from the *Dadai Liji* are mine.

them enjoyment (*le*), in caring for them in sickness reveal their apprehension, in mourning for them express their grief, and in sacrificing to them show true veneration. With these five dispositions firmly in place, they are truly able to serve their parents. (*Xiaojing* 10.1)

Here it is clear that filial piety is divided into two, three and five sections. But this still does not include all aspects of filial piety in Confucianism. Therefore modern scholars have various classifications.²⁴ For convenience of discussion I will classify filial piety in Confucianism into these seven aspects under three headings. First, when parents are alive, they should be (1) respected and revered, (2) made happy with all kinds of support, without worries when ill, (3) advised without being tiresome. Second, when parents are dead, (4) the funeral ceremony should be performed according to propriety, (5) their profession should be carried on so as to make their names known to future generations. Third, (6) keeping one's body intact, and (7) having posterity.

²⁴Yang Guoshu classifies filial piety under fifteen heads: (1) respecting parents, (2) obeying parents, (3) remonstrating with parents (not to let them fall into injustice), (4) serving parents with propriety, (5) inheriting father's profession, (6) making parents' names known in the future, (7) reflecting on the parents' love, (8) making parents happy by skilful means, (9) making parents not to worry, (10) always being prepared to serve parents, (11) supporting parents for their wellbeing both physically and mentally, (12) protection of oneself, (13) having posterity, (14) funeral with propriety, and (15) sacrifice with propriety. But Ge Rongjin classifies filial piety into negative and positive aspects. There are seven items from the negative aspect: (1) "not to disobey" is filial piety, (2) father and son cover up for each other, (3) "one does not travel far away when parents are alive", (4) "There are three things which are unfilial, and to have no posterity is the greatest of them", (5) "Our bodies – down to every hair and bit of skin – are received by us from our parents, and we must not presume to injure or wound them. This is the beginning of filial piety." (6) generous burial and long mourning, (7) the superstition of " [gods'] response to filial piety" and the sense of "fool's filial piety". Five from the positive aspect: (1) look after parents, (2) respect and honour parents, (3) remonstrate with parents, (4) honour elders, (5) combine filial piety with aid to the nation and saving people. Luo Chenglie 駱承烈 classifies filial piety under five heads: (1) supporting parents, (2) honouring parents, (3) respecting parents, (4) having propriety towards parents, (5) making parents well known (through establishing the family character by filial practice, so as to make its name famous in future ages). Cited from Xiao Qunzhong (2002): 271-2. Xiao Qunzhong classifies filial piety in two aspects under six heads: that when parents are alive one should (1) support and respect them, (2) treat them with propriety daily, and look after them with anxiety when they are ill, (3) treat them with obedience and remonstrate with good reasons; and when they are dead one should (4) bury them and offer sacrifice for them with propriety, (5) inherit their aspirations and remember their good works, (6) admire parents for one's whole life. Cited from the same book, 274-286.

Of these, numbers 1 to 5 are found in Buddhism, but numbers 6 and 7 are not.

The Buddhist text named *Sigālovāda Sutta* teaches people to perform five things as the practice of filial piety. A child should minister to his parents by (1) supporting them, (2) performing their duties, (3) keeping the family tradition, (4) making oneself worthy of the inheritance, and (5) offering alms in honor of one's departed relatives.²⁵ These five items are found in the first five aspects of Confucianism, except that the third, to advise them, is discussed in another *sūtra*. Of course, we have to admit that the Confucian description of filial piety has more detail than the Buddhist, because filial piety is the foundation of the entire Confucian teaching.

Both Buddhism and Confucianism advocate the practice of advising parents as a way of repaying one's debts to them, but how to advise them is different in these two schools of thought. According to Confucianism, when advising parents, a son should do it gently with utmost respect. However if the parents do not listen, the son should not be resentful. Thus the *Lunyu* says,

The Master said, "In serving your parents you may gently remonstrate with them. However, once it becomes apparent that they have not taken your criticism to heart you should be respectful and not oppose them, and follow their lead diligently without resentment."
(*Lunyu* 4.18)

It is however the positive duty of a son to advise his parents. The *Xiaojing* clearly states this point when it says that Zengzi asked Confucius, "I would presume to ask whether children can be deemed filial simply by obeying every command of their father." Confucius angrily said,

What on earth are you saying? What on earth are you saying? Of old, an Emperor had seven ministers who would remonstrate with him, so even if he had no vision of the proper way (*dao*), he still did not

²⁵D iii 189. There are five Chinese translations of the *Sigālovāda Sūtra* but only four are extant : (1) An Shigao's independent translation in 148-170 found in T1, no.16, (2) Zhi Fadu's independent translation in 301 found in T1, no.17, (3) Gautama Saṅghadeva's translation found in the *Madhyamāgama* [T2, no.26(135)] in 397-8, and (4) Buddhayaśas's and Zhu Fonian's translation found in the *Dirghāgama* [T1, no.1 (16)] in 413. The five ways a son should minister to his parents are found in all the four extant versions of the *sutta*, although there are some differences in wording as they were translated by different people at different times.

lose the empire. The high nobles had five ministers who would remonstrate with them, so even if they had no vision of the proper way (*dao*), they still did not lose their states. The high officials had three ministers who would remonstrate with them, so even if they had no vision of the proper way (*dao*), they still did not lose their clans. If the lower officials had just one friend who would remonstrate with them, they were still able to preserve their good names (*ming*); if a father has a son who will remonstrate with him, he will not behave reprehensively (*buyi*). Thus, if confronted by reprehensible behavior on his father's part, a son has no choice but to remonstrate with his father, and if confronted by reprehensible behavior on his ruler's part, a minister has no choice but to remonstrate with his ruler. Hence, remonstrance is the only response to immorality. How could simply obeying the commands of one's father be deemed filial? (*Xiaojing* 15)

Here it is quite clear that if one does not advise one's parents if they are liable to do some wrong, it is like making them unrighteous and is considered unfilial. So according to the *Liji*, Confucius said, "To obey (his parents') commands without angry (complaint); to remonstrate with them gently without being weary; and not to murmur against them, though they punish him, may be pronounced filial piety. It is said in the *Book of Poetry* (III, ii, ode 3, 5), 'Your filial son was unceasing in his service.'" (*Liji* 30.18)

The method and attitude to parents in advising them is discussed in the *Dadai Liji* in detail.

Dan Juli asks Zengzi, "Is there a method in service to parents?" Zengzi said, "Yes, love and respect. If the conduct of parents follows the course of moderation, then one should follow them; if not, then one advises them; if the advice is not taken, one should act on their behalf. If one [blindly] follows one's parents without advice or remonstrance, that is not filial piety, but if one only remonstrates but does not follow their orders, that too is not filial piety. The remonstrance of a filial son should aim for good without disputes and quarrels; if a dispute takes place, it will cause chaos. [If a son thinks that] due to his advice his parents become faultless, there is peace, but [if a son thinks that] due to his advice his parents become sages there will be

chaos. A filial son does not have private happiness, he worries about his parents' concerns and enjoys his parents' happiness. If a filial son skillfully changes [his ways of offering advice], his parents become peaceful. If one sits solemnly as if in a sacrificing ceremony, stands straight as if sacrificing grain, does not speak without enquiry, and only speaks according to one's parents' wishes, this makes one a man of good behavior, but it is not the way a man's son should be. (*Dadai Liji* 12.1)

If a parent has a fault, (the son) should with bated breath, and bland aspect, and gentle voice, admonish him. If the admonition does not take effect, he will be the more reverential and the more filial; and when the father seems pleased, he will repeat the admonition. If he should be displeased with this, rather than allow him to commit an offence against anyone in the neighborhood or countryside, (the son) should strongly remonstrate. If the parent be angry and (more) displeased, and beat him till the blood flows, he should not presume to be angry and resentful, but be (still) more reverential and more filial. (*Liji* 12.18)

In the service of his parents a son, if he has thrice remonstrated and is still not listened to, should follow (his remonstrances) with loud crying and tears. (*Liji* 2.113)

The remonstration or advice of a son to his father is described in the *Liji* in detail with more regulations. For instance, a son should advise his parents humbly with a soft voice and pleasant appearance. If his parents are not happy and beat him till he bleeds, a son should not be resentful, but increase his respect and reverence. In advising, one should not dispute with parents, otherwise it is the start of chaos. If parents do not take the advice, one should reflect on how one is offering it to see if there is any shortcoming. This kind of advice should be offered only three times; if the parents still do not listen, then one should listen to one's parents.

What the *Mengzi* says on remonstration is a continuation of what is said in the *Lunyu*:

Not to complain about a major wrong committed by one's parent is to feel insufficient concern; on the other hand, to complain about a

minor wrong is to react too violently. Insufficient concern and too violent a reaction are both actions of a bad son. (*Mengzi* 12.23)²⁶

Buddhism has a similar teaching on advising parents to do good deeds. It says in the *Kataññu Sutta* of the *Aṅguttaranikāya*, mentioned above:

Moreover, monks, whoso incite his unbelieving parents, settles and establishes them in the faith; whoso incite his immoral parents, settles and establishes them in morality; whoso incite his stingy parents, settles and establishes them in liberality; whoso incite his foolish parents, settles and establishes them in wisdom, – such an one, just by so doing, does repay, does more than repay what is due to his parents.²⁷

These four ways of advising parents are discussed in detail in the *Vyagghapajja Sutta*:

Four conditions, Vyagghapajja, conduce to a householder's weal and happiness in his future life. Which four?

The accomplishment of faith, the accomplishment of virtue, the accomplishment of charity and the accomplishment of wisdom.

What is the accomplishment of faith?

Herein a householder is possessed of faith, he believes in the Enlightenment of the Perfect One (Tathāgata): Thus, indeed, is that Blessed One: he is the pure one, fully enlightened, endowed with knowledge and conduct, well-gone, the knower of worlds, the incomparable leader of men to be tamed, the teacher of gods and men, all-knowing and blessed. This is called the accomplishment of faith.

What is the accomplishment of virtue?

Herein a householder abstains from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and from intoxicants that cause infatuation and heedlessness. This is called the accomplishment of virtue.

²⁶ Translation adapted from Lau: 267.

²⁷ A i 61. *The Book of Gradual Sayings*, i 115. We find the four ways of repaying parents' debts in the *Ashuda Jing* (To2, 863b), Xuanzang's translation of the *Benshi Jing* (T17, 682c), Yijing's translation of the *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya* (T23, no.1442, 642b) and the *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya Baisaja* (T24, no.1448, 16a).

What is the accomplishment of charity?

Herein a householder dwells at home with heart free from the stain of avarice, devoted to charity, open-handed, delighting in generosity, attending to the needy, delighting in the distribution of alms. This is called the accomplishment of charity.

What is the accomplishment of wisdom?

Herein a householder is wise: he is endowed with wisdom that understands the arising and cessation (of the five aggregates of existence); he is possessed of the noble penetrating insight that leads to the destruction of suffering. This is called the accomplishment of wisdom.²⁸

According to this *sutta*, if one can advise one's parents in these four ways in a skillful manner, parents will obtain a good life in this world as well as in the world beyond. This is what Buddhists consider the best way of repaying one's debt to one's parents. The *Benshi Jing* translated by Xuanzang also contains a version of this short *sūtra* in which the manner of advising parents is described as skillfully advising and comforting them by way of example and praising good deeds.²⁹

The difference between Buddhism and Confucianism in advising parents is that Buddhism emphasizes advising parents to do more good deeds, for instance to observe the five precepts and to make offerings, while Confucianism emphasizes the ways in which to offer the advice. This is due to deeper differences. According to the Buddhist teaching of karma, it is only when parents perform good deeds that they can enjoy the fruits in this world and the next. But according to Confucian tradition respect is the priority, so the manner of advising becomes of paramount importance: respectful ways make them happy, while bad ways make them unhappy.

Besides, the Buddhist way of advising is more active and positive while the Confucian way is more passive. According to the Buddhist teaching, one should advise one's parents to do good deeds in their daily life while they are healthy and active so that they can enjoy the fruits of their actions both in this life and the

²⁸A iv. 279. *The Book of Gradual Sayings*, iv 187-188. The counterpart of this *sutta* is found in the Chinese *Samyuktāgama*, T2, No.99 (91) 23b-c and also the shorter version of the Chinese *Samyuktāgama*, T2, no.100 (91).

²⁹T17, no.765, 682c.

world beyond. But according to Confucian teaching, it is only when parents are liable to make mistakes that one should advise them.

Confucianism has two more items in the practice of filial piety: keeping one's body intact and having posterity. These two items are not discussed in the Buddhist scriptures because its ideology is different. If we understand "keeping one's body intact" as not harming one's physical body, Buddhism advocates the same thing, but for reasons which have nothing to do with filial piety. Buddhists hold that the physical body should always be maintained in good health as it is an important instrument for a Buddhist to practise the Dharma and to fulfill life's goal. However, Buddhism does not consider the physical body as something sacred, in as much as it is the gift of one's parents, as do Confucians. The *Sīhanādasutta* of the *Aṅguttaranikāya* even states, "Even so, lord, I carry around this body of mine, full of holes and slits, oozing, dripping."³⁰ Hence a Buddhist is allowed to sacrifice his own body to perform a bodhisattva act of saving other sentient beings. In the Buddhist birth stories, we read that in past lives Śākyamuni as a bodhisattva offered his limbs to others and even sacrificed his life for others.

According to the Buddhist teaching of karma, the moral thought is a wholly individual responsibility, so it always speaks of actions and their consequences for an individual. But Confucian moral thought is a family responsibility, so it always talks about the relationship of father and son. Therefore, according to the Buddhist teaching of karma, one can only reap the fruits of one's own deeds, whether good or bad. Children can never do so on behalf of parents. As a result, having posterity has no direct effect on one's parents, but advising them to do good is more beneficial. The idea of having posterity is no part of Buddhist moral thought because it does not concern one's parents and their welfare does not depend on their grandchildren.

2) Filial piety as the highest norm versus karma

Confucianism considers filial piety as the highest norm to be followed by all members of society, while Buddhism considers karma as the basis of ethics, although it also teaches filial piety as the most important ethical conduct. This is because the core teaching of Confucianism is morality which is centred on the family, and filial piety is the foundation of family morality. Otherwise the family will have

³⁰ A iv 375. The translation is adapted from E.M. Hare, PTS iv, 251. This is also referred to in the *Milindapañha*, 74. It is also found in the Chinese translation of the *Madhyamāgama*, T1, no.26, 453c5; the *Ekottarāgama*, T2, no.125, 713a27-28; the *Nāgasena Bhikṣu Sūtra*, T32, no.167ob, 700b.

no foundation. Therefore in Confucianism it is from filial piety that all moral teaching grows. So filial piety became “the constant (method) of Heaven, the righteousness of Earth.” The *Xiaojing* says,

It is family reverence (*xiao*),” said the Master, “that is the root of excellence, and whence education (*jiao*) itself is born. (*Xiaojing* 1)

Zengzi said, “May I presume to ask if there is anything in the excellence (*de*) of the sages that surpasses family reverence?” The Master replied, “Of all the creatures in the world, the human being is the most noble. In human conduct there is nothing more important than family reverence.” (*Xiaojing* 9)

Indeed, family reverence is the constancy of the heavenly cycles, the appropriate responsiveness (*yi*) of the earth, and the proper conduct of the people. (*Xiaojing* 7)

Some modern scholars consider that Ren 仁 (benevolent action or virtue) is the highest form of Confucian morality. But when we examine the concept of Ren in early Confucian texts, we find that the concept of Ren is wider than filial piety but it includes filial piety. The highest form as well as the root of Ren is filial piety. In the *Lunyu*, it is said that You Ruo, the disciple of Confucius said, “Filial piety and fraternal submission, are they not the root of all benevolent actions [Ren]?” (*Lunyu* 1.2) Confucius also said, “When those who are in high stations perform well all their duties to their relations, the people are aroused to virtue [Ren].” (*Lunyu* 8.2) “A youth, when at home, should be filial, and, abroad, respectful to his elders. He should be earnest and truthful. He should overflow in love to all, and cultivate the friendship of the good [Ren].” (*Lunyu* 1.6) “Benevolence [Ren] is the characteristic element of humanity, and the great exercise of it is in loving parents.” (*Liji* 31.19) The *Mengzi* had a similar thought and repeatedly emphasizes that “Loving one’s parents is benevolence [Ren]; respecting one’s elders is rightness.” (*Mengzi* 13.15)³¹ “The content of benevolence [Ren] is the serving of one’s parents; the content of dutifulness is obedience to one’s elder brothers.” (*Mengzi* 7.27)³² From the above quotations, it is clear that filial piety is the root of Ren and Ren has filial piety as the highest form. It is only when a person loves his parents that he can extend this love to other people.

³¹Translation adapted from Lau 291-293. Pinyin added by the writer.

³²Translation adapted from Lau 169. Pinyin added by the writer.

Because filial piety is the highest form of Ren in Confucian ethics, Confucianism had the thought of mutual covering up by father and son. This idea further developed to the extent that revenge out of filial piety was allowed by law but revenge for other reasons was prohibited by law. In ordinary society the former is not condemned but highly praised.³³ In Chinese history, there were people who killed other people to avenge their fathers but were pardoned by the emperors. We shall return to this issue later.

In the Tang dynasty Zongmi (780-841) thought that “filial piety is the foundation of both Buddhism and Confucianism”.³⁴ Zongmi found support for his assertion in the saying that “Filial piety is called precepts and also called restraint” in the *Fanwang Jing* (Sūtra of Brahma Net), which is considered as a text for Bodhisattva precepts.³⁵ However, the *Fanwang Jing* itself is a controversial text, as some scholars think that it is apocryphal.³⁶ Even if the text is a translation from a scripture transmitted from India, the above saying must be an interpolation, as it is out of place. I have discussed this issue in another paper already so I will not discuss it here.³⁷ Looking at it from a historical perspective, Zongmi’s interpretation shows his way of reconciling Buddhism and Confucianism, as he advocated a comprehensive understanding of the two religions.

Although morality is the foundation of Buddhism, its practice and cultivation consist of three steps: morality, concentration and wisdom. It is quite clear that morality comes first. Morality includes all kinds of codes of practice such as the five precepts, ten virtues, and filial piety, but karma is the foundation of Buddhist

³³Please see Wang Rupeng and Jian Wumin, “Filial Piety and Revenge — the Relations between Morals and Legal System in the Han Dynasty.”

³⁴Zongmi’s commentary on the *Ullambana Sūtra*, T39, no.1792, 505b.

³⁵T24, no.1484, 1004a25. See “‘Filial Piety is called Precepts’: Chinese Development on the Buddhist Concept of Filial Piety”, Zong Xing and Dao Jian edd. *Fojiao yu Zhongguo Chuantongwenhua: Yang Zangwen xiansheng qishi zhi shoujing jinian lunwenji* (Buddhism and Chinese Traditional Culture: Celebration of Professor Yang Zengwen’s Seventy Years Birthday). Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2009, 807-825.

³⁶The authenticity of the text has been questioned since ancient times. But in the last century many Japanese and Chinese scholars such as Mochizuki Shinkō 望月信亨, Hodo Ono 大野法道, Tang Yongtong 湯用彤 etc. Modern scholars such Wang Janguang all consider that the text is apocryphal. See WUT Tai Shing, “An Examination on the Factuality of Fang-wang Jing: From the Study of Ancient Classic and Archive”, *Universal Gate Buddhist Journal*, Vol.38 (2007), 177-198.

³⁷See “Filial Piety in Early Buddhism”, *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, (edd. Damien Keown and Charles S. Prebish), Volume 12, 2005, pp.82-106. Journal URL: <http://blogs.dickinson.edu/buddhistethics/files/2010/04/xing1228.pdf>.

ethics. The *Dhanañjanisutta* of the *Majjhimanikāya* tells us that one experiences the result of doing evil karma even if he has done it for the sake of his parents.

What do you think, Dhanañjani? Suppose someone here were to behave contrary to the Dhamma, to behave unrighteously for the sake of his parents, and then because of such behavior the wardens of hell were to drag him off to hell. Would he be able [to free himself by pleading thus]: “It was for the sake of my parents that I behaved contrary to the Dhamma, that I behaved unrighteously, so let not the wardens of hell [drag me off] to hell”? Or would his parents be able [to free him by pleading thus]: “It was for our sake that he behaved contrary to the Dhamma, that he behaved unrighteously, so let not the wardens of hell [drag him off] to hell”?

No, Master Sāriputta. Even while he was crying out, the wardens of hell would fling him into hell.³⁸

So karma is the foundation of Buddhist morality, although filial piety is an important ethical teaching.

3) Filial piety as a one way duty versus a reciprocal way

Confucianism only emphasizes the duty of children towards parents, while Buddhism teaches reciprocity.

In Confucianism there is little or no discussion of the responsibility and service of parents to their children. In other words, the rights of children have not been recognized, so filial piety is one way. Of course, one can argue that the natural feeling and love of parents towards their children are always there, so there is no need to say more.

The teaching of filial piety and the exercise of parental authority to filial piety have been shown to be correlated with children’s rigidity and a lack of cognitive complexity, which is not healthy. A lifetime of accepting the authority of one’s parents leads to both children and adults who are inhibited when it comes to expressing their own opinions, let alone dissent, and this leads to resentment towards parents and bottling up of frustrations. Authoritarianism, as a result, creates rigidity, because people cannot express themselves. Its final result is to stifle

³⁸M ii 186-7. English translation from Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi (1995) 792. This is also found in the Chinese translation of the *Madhyamāgama*, T1, no.26, 456c-457a.

creativity; it leads to conservatism in a society, and conformism on the individual level.

Unlike Confucianism, Buddhism emphasizes reciprocity in relations between parents and children. Children have the responsibility to support and respect their parents, and at the same time they are entitled to good education, inheritance of the family wealth, etc. So both parents and children have to respect each other and benefit from one another. The *Sigālovāda Sutta* teaches that children serve parents in five ways and parents should also care for children in five ways.

And there are five ways in which the parents, so ministered to by their son as the eastern direction, will reciprocate: they will restrain him from evil, support him in doing good, teach him some skill, find him a suitable wife and, in due time, hand over his inheritance to him. In this way the eastern direction is covered, making it at peace and free from fear.³⁹

This scripture is found in both the Southern tradition of Pali literature and the Northern tradition of the Chinese translation of the *Śṛgālavāda Sūtra*. The emphasis on reciprocity is found in all the versions.

4) The power of the father and the virtue of the mother

Confucianism emphasises the power of the father, while Buddhism talks more of the mother's virtues.

The father's power is emphasized in Confucianism and children have to respect and obey their father's orders. But there is little said about respect for the mother. The *Xiaojing* has Confucius say:,

In human conduct there is nothing more important than family reverence; in family reverence there is nothing more important than venerating one's father; in venerating one's father there is nothing more important than placing him on a par with heaven (tian). And the Duke of Zhou was able to do this." (*Xiaojing* 9)

The lower officials drawing upon their devotion to their fathers to serve their mothers, the love (*ai*) they feel toward them is the same;

³⁹D iii 190. English translation adapted from Maurice Walshe (1995) 467. The same is also found in the four extant versions of this *sūtra* in Chinese translation. See footnote 19 above.

drawing upon their devotion to their fathers to serve their lord, the respect (*jing*) they feel for them is the same. While to their mothers love is rendered and to their lord respect is shown, it is only in service to their fathers that both love and respect combine.

Hence, service to the lord with family reverence is loyalty (*zhong*); service to elders with family reverence is compliance (*shun*). With loyalty and compliance being firmly in place in service to those above, they are able to maintain their tenure in office and to continue their ancestral sacrifices. Such, then, is the family reverence of the lower officials. (*Xiaojing* 5)

So the father is to have both “love” and “reverence”, but the mother more love than reverence. The *Liji* for instance tells us That Confucius said, “Therefore a son of all-comprehensive virtue serves his parents as he serves Heaven, and serves Heaven as he serves his parents.’ Hence a filial son does all that can be done for his person.” (*Liji* 27.13) Here service to heaven is reverence. So Confucianism emphasizes the father’s power.

Confucian filial piety has been developed with emphasis on the father’s power. First, in the Han dynasty, Dong Zhongshu advanced the “three bonds and five virtues”; the relationship between father and son became a bond (*gang*). Dong described “the bond between father and son” as “the Father is the heaven of his son”. Here the father is considered superior and the son should obey his father’s orders. This idea has been developed and explained in the *Baihutong* (Comprehensive Discussions of the White Tiger Hall): “What is the relation between father and son? The father is the model with which he teaches his son, and the son is thus free from the consequence of sin.”⁴⁰ Thus, the relationship between father and son changed from a natural love to a power relationship. Confucian filial piety came to mean irrational and total obedience of a son to his father, culminating in such dicta as “If the emperor wishes his ministers to die, they must die, and if the father wishes his son to die, he must die too.”

By contrast, Buddhism emphasizes the great compassion and virtue of parents, especially the mother’s virtue. This is clear from the early Buddhist scriptures.

⁴⁰ Cited from *Baihutong Shuzheng*, 376.

The *Samyuttanikāya* says, “A mother is the friend of one’s own home.”⁴¹ The shorter version of the Chinese translation of the *Samyuktāgama* says, “In one’s home, the mother is the dearest parent.”⁴² In the Pāli language, mother is always placed before father (*mātā-pitaro*) whenever parents are mentioned. People are also named after their mother, such as Sāriputta, which means the son of Sāri. According to the *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*, Sāriputta’s father was a Brahmin named Vanganta and his mother Rūpasāri. It was because of his mother’s name that he came to be called Sāriputta.⁴³

The Mahāyāna version of the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* translated into Chinese by Dharmakṣema in 421 also speaks of the mother’s virtue.

It is like the child who gradually grows up and thinks: “This is the doctor, who knows best about prescriptions and medicines. When I was still in the womb, he gave my mother medicine. As a consequence of this, she was in peace, and by reason of these circumstantial factors, I was out of danger. Oh, how dreadful that my mother had to undergo great pain. For ten months she guarded and carried me. After my birth, she took care that I should not be too dry or too damp, and saw to my excretions; she gave me milk and fed me. For all of this, I must pay her back what I owe her, see to her feelings, be obedient to her and serve her.”⁴⁴

Here a mother’s pain and difficulty in giving birth to and bringing up her child are specially mentioned. The *Dacheng bensheng xindi guan jing*, translated by Prajñā in 790, has a chapter on filial piety and at the end it summarizes a mother’s virtues as ten.

Because of this, a mother has ten virtues: first, the virtue of the great earth, as the mother carries her child in her womb; second, giving birth, as the mother undergoes great pain in giving birth; third, the virtue of care, as the mother takes great care of the child with her own hands; fourth, the virtue of bringing up, as the mother provides for

⁴¹ S i 37.

⁴² T2, no.100, 427b.

⁴³ See the entry “Sāriputta” in the *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*. The *Ratnaketudhāraṇīsūtra* translated into Chinese by Prabhāmitra in 629-630 says, “Upatissa says, ‘Tissa is my father’s name and Sāri is my mother’s name, I am named after my mother, so called Sāriputta.’” T13, no.402, 538c.

⁴⁴ T12, no.374, 419c21-24.

her child the things according to the seasons; fifth, the virtue of wisdom, as the mother skillfully cares for her child with wisdom; sixth, the virtue of ornaments, as the mother decorates her child with beautiful ornaments; seventh, the virtue of refuge, as the mother protects her child with her arms; eighth, the virtue of teaching, as the mother guides her child skillfully; ninth, the virtue of advice, as the mother with skillful words advises her child against bad deeds, and tenth, the virtue of inheritance, as the mother entrusts her child with the family profession.⁴⁵

The Chinese Buddhists composed the well known *Fumu Enzhong Jing* (Sutra on the Great Kindness of Parents) by absorbing the ideas and thoughts discussed in the above texts, and recast An Shigao's translation of *Fumuen nanbao jing* (Sutra on the Difficulties of Repaying the Kindness of Parents). This apocryphal text is found in the eighty-fifth volume of the Taisho edition of the Buddhist Tripiṭaka. It focuses on the description of the ten virtues of a mother. Later there were many revisions and additions and it became one of the most popular Buddhist texts in Chinese society.⁴⁶

4. Three Special Aspects in Confucian Filial Piety

There are three special features of the Confucian concept of filial piety which are not found in Buddhism. The first is the strong political implication, the second is concealment and the third is avenging one's parents.

1) Strong political implication

Confucian filial piety has a strong political implication. When filial piety is applied to rulers it is called loyalty. The *Xiaojing* has a special chapter on "Filial Piety in Government" which discusses the connection between filial piety and politics and emphasizes its political function and operation.

⁴⁵T3, no.158, 297b23-c2. The Tang dynasty Pure Land master Fazhao composed an essay entitled *Fumu enzhong zhanwen* (Essay on parents' great kindness) to praise a mother's virtue. T47, no.1983, 490a.

⁴⁶Please see Cheng Acai (2003). According to this scholar, sixty hand copies of the *Fumu Enzhong Jing* have been found in Dunhuang.

The Master said, “Of old when the enlightened (*ming*) kings used family reverence to bring proper order to the empire, they would not presume to neglect the ministers of the smallest state, how much less so the dukes, earls, and other members of the high nobility. Thus all of the different vassal states participated wholeheartedly in their service to these former kings. Those who would bring proper order to the vassal states would not presume to ignore the most dispossessed, how much less so the lower officials and common people. Thus the various families all participated wholeheartedly in their service to these former lords. Those who would bring proper order to the various families would not presume to overlook their servants and concubines, how much less so their wives and children. Thus all of the people participated wholeheartedly in their service to their parents. In such a world, the parents while living enjoyed the comforts that parents deserve, and as spirits after death took pleasure in the sacrificial offerings made to them. Hence, the empire was peaceful (*he*) and free of strife, natural disasters did not occur, and man-made calamities were averted. In this way the enlightened kings used family reverence to bring proper order to the empire.” The Book of Songs says, “So admirable is the excellence (*de*) of his conduct that all of the states in the four quarters repair (*shun*) to him.” (*Xiaojing* 8)

According to this, “all under heaven peace and harmony may prevail, disasters and calamities will not occur, misfortunes and rebellions may not arise” if the state has been ruled by kings with filial piety. This is because filial piety is the root of *ren* 仁 (benevolence), and if *ren* is established the great Way may prevail. According to the *Lunyu*,

Master You said, “A young person who is filial and respectful of his elders rarely becomes the kind of person who is inclined to defy his superiors, and there has never been a case of one who is disinclined to defy his superiors stirring up rebellion. The gentleman applies himself to the roots. ‘Once the roots are firmly established, the Way will grow.’ Might we not say that filial piety and respect for elders constitute the root of Goodness?” (*Lunyu* 1.2)

So filial piety is the root of benevolence (*ren*) and filial piety should start with the rulers, and it is only if the rulers respect their parents that other people will follow and no one will disrespect his/her parents. So the *Xiaojing* says, “With love and respect being fully expressed in this service to parents, such conduct will educate and transform (*dejiao*) the common people, serving as exemplary in all corners of the world. Such, then, is the family reverence of the Emperor.” (*Xiaojing* 2) It is in such a way that the entire world becomes peaceful. As for the ministers,

Hence, service to the lord with family reverence is loyalty (*zhong*); service to elders with family reverence is compliance (*shun*). With loyalty and compliance being firmly in place in service to those above, they are able to maintain their tenure in office and to continue their ancestral sacrifices. Such, then, is the family reverence of the lower officials. (*Xiaojing* 5)

Therefore, according to Confucianism, “There is a fundamental agreement between a loyal subject in his service to his ruler and a filial son in his service to his parents.” (*Liji* 25.2) According to the *Xiaojing*, Confucius said,

It is only because exemplary persons (*junzi*) serve their parents with family reverence that this same feeling can be extended to their lord as loyalty (*zhong*). It is only because they serve their elder brothers with deference (*ti*) that this same feeling can be extended to all elders as compliance (*shun*). And it is only because they maintain a proper home life that this same sense of organization can be extended as proper order to the offices of government. Thus, when one is successful in what one does at home, a name (*ming*) is established that will be passed on to posterity. (*Xiaojing* 14)

This is why from the Han dynasty onwards, many emperors themselves either explained or wrote commentaries on the *Xiaojing*, because filial piety is closely linked with loyalty. In fact, Confucian scholars argued that filial piety and loyalty are interrelated. Emperor Xiao Wudi of Liu Song (420-479) and Emperor Wudi of Liang explained the *Xiaojing* and Emperor Xuanzhong of Tang wrote a commentary to the *Xiaojing*. As Lo Yuet Keung points out in his paper “On the Dearth of Filial Daughters in Pre-Tang China”, the *Xiaojing* is basically for politic purposes because it divides filial piety into five categories according to social status: the son

of the heaven, the princes of states, high ministers and great officials, inferior officials, and common people. The practice of filial piety in each of these categories is different.⁴⁷ So we may say that filial piety has already been developed from the natural feeling of a person and the relationship between parents and children as discussed in the *Lunyu* to a political tool for the service of rulers in the *Xiaojing*. Therefore, there appeared the theory of “ruling the state with filial piety” in the Han dynasty and it continued into the Northern and Southern dynasties.

The Buddhist concept of filial piety is simply the relationship between parents and children and there is no political involvement at all.

2) Mutual covering up by father and son

Confucius spoke of father and son covering up for each other. This is because Confucian ethics centres upon family morality and in family morality filial piety is the core. If parents and children report each other's misconduct to government officials then filial piety will collapse, and family morality will lose its foundation. When a family is not at peace the entire society is not at peace, because families are the building blocks of a society. Therefore, according to the *Lunyu*, Confucius said, “Among my people, those whom we consider ‘upright’ are different from this: fathers cover up for their sons, and sons cover up for their fathers. ‘Uprightness’ is to be found in this.” (*Lunyu* 13.18) The *Mengzi* also says,

The way lies at hand yet it is sought afar; the thing lies in the easy yet it is sought in the difficult. If only everyone loved his parents and treated his elders with deference, the Empire would be at peace. (*Mengzi* 7.11)⁴⁸

The *Mengzi* states quite clearly that it is only when filial piety exists in a family that peace may prevail in the world.

Some modern scholars criticize Confucius for urging that father and son cover up for each other, calling it corruption and putting blood relations above the law.⁴⁹

⁴⁷Lo (2004), 298-299.

⁴⁸Translation is adapted from Lau: 161.

⁴⁹See Liu Qingping's four papers in Chinese: (1) “Confucian Ethics: Rational Morality or Blood Relation Morality?” *History of Chinese Philosophy*, 1999, No.3; (2) “On the Blood Relation Features of the Philosophy of Confucius and Mengzi” *Philosophy Gate*, edited by Department of Philosophy Peking University, Vol.1, No.1; “Virtue or Corruption? – An Analysis of two cases about Song in the *Mencius*” *Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 2, 2002; and “Unlimited Benevolence – On the Absurdity in the Philosophy of Confucius and Mencius” *Critics in Philosophy*, Vol.1, 2002.

But we cannot isolate the above saying when we discuss its implications, because the *Lunyu* and other Confucian classics such as *Xiaojing*, the books that contain the master's sayings, do not provide us with the context in which the master spoke. So we are liable to make mistakes. We have to examine Confucius' sayings in their context to gain a better understanding.

Concerning the relationship between father and son, there is another important factor. As we have shown above, Confucius spoke of a son's duty to advise and even remonstrate with his parents, not merely always to obey without question. From this it is clear that Confucius emphasized that a son should remonstrate with his parents before saying anything false. But our quotation from *Xiaojing* 15 showed that when parents persist in what is wrong, Confucius emphasized harmony and unity within a family, which means that father and son should conceal each other's wrongdoings, For this will preserve family harmony, which is good for society as a whole.

In Buddhist ethics, covering up by father and son is meaningless, because even if they can escape the punishment of civil law, they cannot escape the law of karma.

3) Avenging Parents

Confucianism considers filial piety as the root of virtue and basis of education, so filial piety becomes the constancy of the heavenly cycles, the appropriate responsiveness of the earth, and the proper conduct of the people. In the practice of filial piety the father is the centre, as the *Xiaojing* says that in human conduct there is nothing more important than filial piety, and in filial piety there is nothing more important than venerating one's father. Thus Confucianism strengthened the idea of avenging father and mother with its emphasis on filial piety. The *Lunyu* says, "Someone asked, 'What do you think of the saying, 'Requite injury with kindness (*de* 德)'?' The Master replied, 'With what, then, would one requite kindness? Requite injury with uprightness, and kindness with kindness.' " (*Lunyu*: 14.34) The *Liji* also says, "With the enemy who has slain his father, one should not live under the same heaven." (*Liji*: 1:70) Zheng Xuan of the Han dynasty explained the above sentence as "His father is the heaven for the son. The son would not be a filial son if he lives under the same heaven with the person who kills his father. So the son should kill that person, and then it stops." Kong Yingda of the Tang dynasty further explained: "Father is the heaven of the son, and if one's father is killed, it is

the killing of the heaven, so one must take revenge to kill that person, as the son cannot live under the same heaven with the killer.”⁵⁰ The *Liji* again says,

Zixia asked Confucius, saying, ‘How should (a son) conduct himself with reference to the man who has killed his father or mother?’ The Master said, ‘He should sleep on straw, with his shield for a pillow; he should not take office; he must be determined not to live with the slayer under the same heaven. If he meets with him in the market-place or the court, he should not have to go back for his weapon, but (instantly) fight with him. (*Liji*: 3.53)

Kong Yingda of the Tang dynasty further explained: “ ‘He should not have to go back for his weapon’ means that he should always bring his weapon with him, so even if he meets the killer in a market place he need not go back and find his weapon, but fights on the spot.”⁵¹ It is quite clear that one should avenge one’s parents and be prepared to fight at any time. The *Dadai Liji* also says, “One should not live in (the same world) together with the killer of one’s parents.” (13.6) All this evidence shows that Confucianism supports the idea of avenging one’s parents, as it is part of filial practice. Although the *Mengzi* says,

Only now do I realize how serious it is to kill a member of the family of another man. If you killed his father, he would kill your father; if you kill his elder brother, he would kill your elder brother. This being the case, though you may not have killed your father and brother with your own hands, it is but one step removed. (14.7)⁵²

But, it was very common to avenge parents and blood relatives in the Han dynasty, as Confucian thought occupied the central place and the Confucian idea of “ruling the state by using filial piety” was implemented.

There is no such idea of revenge in Buddhism, as it contradicts the basic Buddhist principle. The Buddhist idea is to overcome hatred by compassion and loving kindness, as the verse in *Dhammapada* goes: “Hatred never ceases through hatred in this world. Through non-hatred alone does hatred cease. This is an eternal law.” (No.5)

⁵⁰ *Liji Zhengyi*: 84. The translation of both comments of Zheng Xuan and Kong Yingda is mine.

⁵¹ *Liji Zhengyi*: 213. This translation is also mine.

⁵² The translation adapted from Lau: 313.

5. Conclusion

We may come to a tentative conclusion that Confucianism considers filial piety as the highest norm and standard of ethics and as the constant (method) of Heaven, the righteousness of Earth. But karma is the foundation of Buddhist ethics, although filial piety is considered an important moral principle. Therefore, the Confucian analysis of filial piety is far more detailed than that of Buddhism. Just as Confucian scholars point out that the purpose of Confucian ethics is to build family and nation together, so the purpose of Confucian filial piety is to extend the family ethic to the society and state. Therefore the *Lunyu* says,

The *Book of Documents* says, ‘Filial, oh so filial; friendly to one’s elders and juniors; [in this way] exerting an influence upon those who govern.’ Thus, in being a filial son and good brother one is already taking part in government. What need is there, then, to speak of ‘participating in government’? (*Lunyu* 2.21)

But the aim of Buddhist morality is individual personal cultivation so that one becomes a perfect person and finally attains *nirvāṇa*.

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The Silent Mentors of Tzu Chi

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This article tells how donors in Taiwan have contributed their cadavers to teach medical students how to respect and cherish the human body. They have signed a will to give up any progressive treatment and donate their bodies for students to learn surgery on them at the Medical School of Tzu Chi University (TCU). Before dissecting them, students are urged to visit the family of the donor and write the donor's life story. This brings home to them that they are not just dissecting a cadaver but dealing with an altruistic and generous spirit. The donors become known as "silent mentors". Students are requested to bow to the "silent mentor" each time they are about to begin dissection. When they have finished using a body the students sew it together again, stitching inch by inch, to reinstate its appearance; they then dress it, and participate in a memorial ceremony. They thus express their gratitude and say a proper good-bye. Such a programme, which combines medical knowledge with humanity, is a model for modern medical education; it also carries more profound meanings.

Introduction

Tzu Chi's Great Body Donation initiative gives death a new meaning. Dharma Master Cheng Yen changes the conception of death from one of gloom, decay, destruction and abandonment to one of purity and dignity, sanctified beneficence and an enhancement of the value of life by means of helping others. Her establishment of body donation has also changed the feelings of medical students towards

cadavers. Instead of treating cadavers as decaying anonymous objects, which they often treat with frivolity because they are afraid both of so stark a confrontation with death and of having to experience repulsive odours, medical students are taught to see them as selfless family members who should be treated with respect, gratitude and care. This positive attitude towards cadavers, as Professor Nuland of Yale University has put it, will stay with the students throughout their medical careers and play a decisive role in influencing doctors to treat their patients with respect and other positive feelings. (Nuland, 1988/1997: 24)

The Evolution of Views on the Dissection of Human Remains

The Chinese refer to a lifeless body as a “smelly leather sack”, implying that the body has no value. They are pragmatists and do not believe in an immortal soul. But what is it that has no value: the decaying body or death itself?

Primitive cultures vary in their beliefs, but they mostly surround the human body with tabus. Dissection cannot be permitted because of various fears, such as fear of coming into contact with evil spirits. The Chinese practised burial, to allow the body to return to the earth. The oracle bone script character for “healing” in the Shang Dynasty incorporates the character for witchcraft; this implies that the combination of witchcraft and medicine was the social norm at the time. (Li, 2009: 134-135) In the early development of human civilization, to investigate the human body was tabu. However, when the light of civilization gradually drew aside the dark curtain that hung over knowledge, the fear that curiosity would bring disaster began to fade away, and scientific medicine was born. Around 500 BC, Greek medicine began to discard superstition. Illness was no longer caused by demonic or divine forces but by natural factors that could be categorised and analysed. (Nuland, 1988/1997: 7) However, though human anatomy began to be studied and understood, for several centuries dissection was rarely practised on humans.

Human dissection may have been practised earlier in China. During the Western Han Dynasty, Chinese knowledge of anatomy was quite advanced. In the section on Bian Que (the earliest known Chinese physician, according to legend) in the book “Records of the Great Historian (*Shi-ji*)”, there were clear, systematic and well categorised descriptions of human dissection procedures. The famous book on Chinese medicine, “Inner Canon of the Yellow Emperor” (*Huangdi Neijing*), introduced formal written accounts of human anatomy, with detailed records of bone structures, internal organs, blood vessels, etc, giving details on length,

weight, size and capacity. Some of its anatomical terms are still in use today. (Li, 2011: 32, 40-42)

Hua Tuo (141-208 AD), the great physician of the Eastern Han Dynasty, was respected as the originator of surgery also had astonishing achievements (Wang 2000: 250-252). He invented *mafeisan*, a general anaesthetic combining wine with a herbal concoction, and used it in cutting open the arm of Guan Yu, a famous general, to scrape poison from his bones. He also became the first person in the world to use a general anaesthetic for abdominal surgery. But legend has it that his consummate medical skill finally led to his death. He suspected that the chronic headache of the ruler Cao Cao was caused by a brain tumour, and prepared to perform open surgery on his brain; but Cao Cao suspected a murder plot and had him killed. (Li, 2011: 54-58)

Dissection was common in China from the later years of the Eastern Han Dynasty up to the Sung Dynasty, and Wang Mang, a senior official in the Han Dynasty, even performed live body dissection on his political enemies. However, Chinese medical science then shifted its basis to energy movement, pulse diagnosis and body balance, and placed its emphasis on a holistic view of body and mind. It thus failed to establish a primarily anatomy-based medical system like the western world. (Li, 2006: 4-16)

For many centuries the Christian Church regarded human dissection as blasphemy against God. However, during the Black Death the church did allow it. Pope Sixtus IV and Pope Clement VII explicitly permitted the dissection of cadavers. During the Crusades, a lot of warriors cut up and boiled the bodies of their dead comrades to enable them to be sent home for burial. But this practice weakened the fighting morale of the troops, until Pope Boniface VIII forbade it in 1300. Then some over-zealous priests interpreted that as a general prohibition of human dissection. This may have been due to the belief that God created man in his own image, and the body was the home of spirit, so that believers took the view that the dissected would lose the opportunity to go to heaven. (Hagens, 2003: 9-36)

Meanwhile the Arabs, most of whom were Muslims, inherited the essence of Greek and Roman medicine; on the other hand, they brought from China vast medical knowledge and spread it through Europe as their territory expanded through conquest. The 10th century saw the birth in the Persian empire of Ibn Sina (also known as Avicenna), a figure regarded as great as Galen in the history of medicine. By his death in 1037, Ibn Sina was a renowned philosopher, poet

and physician. In his famous work, *The Canon of Medicine*, Ibn Sina for the first time defined medicine as a branch of science. He had an accurate knowledge of many human body parts and their physiological characteristics. (Avicenna, 1999)

Under the impact of medicine from the Muslim world, in the 11th century Medical School (*Schola Medica Salernitana*) at Salerno in Italy was the forerunner of university medical schools. Founded by monks, the school taught basic philosophy and professional medical subjects, and provided a year of internship for its students. From the 12th century onward, universities were gradually established all over Europe. The traditional practice of medicine by monks gradually passed to medical students and graduates. These university medical schools started to provide systematic medical education. (Nuland 1988/1997: 70-80)

During the Renaissance, which in this context can be said to have begun in the 15th century, artists came to believe that understanding the human body meant understanding the architecture of nature. Medicine and art started to interact, producing drawings of human anatomy and descriptions of the dissection process. Dead bodies were acquired by means such as from executed criminals, deceased family members and friends, and tomb-raiding.

Leonardo da Vinci refused to draw the human body in accordance with Greek aesthetics, but tried to bring life into his drawings by depicting the human body in a realistic and natural way. He dissected more than thirty corpses at a hospital in Florence, of varying age, gender, and occupation. He applied stringent scientific rigour in his drawings of the human skeleton, muscles, nerves and other body parts. When 800-odd of his drawings were revealed, people were amazed at the complexity and beauty of the human anatomical structure. He wrote in his notes:

I have dissected over 10 corpses, analysed all types of organ structures, and separated those tiny pieces of flesh surrounding blood vessels. Apart from the insignificant seeping from the capillary vessels, there was almost no bleeding at all. As a corpse cannot be kept for too long, it is often necessary to dissect a few at one time. Only then can I have complete understanding. Let me repeat. I did that to search for differences. Some would say that it would be better to watch an anatomist at work than to look at these drawings. This is correct. If you want to see all the details from a simple drawing, even with a clever brain, you would not be able to see or extract more information than a few blood vessels. (Karger-Decker, 2001/2004: 108)

However, Galen's old medical theories still dominated the field of medical education for a while. Western understanding of bodies was still based on the anatomical knowledge mainly derived c.200 AD by Galen from pigs and monkeys. This began to change in the 16th century, when Andreas Vesalius (1514-64) challenged the work of Galen, and introduced scientific methods of investigation. While a student, he dared to steal a corpse from the gallows. He boiled the skull and bones, cleaned them, then bleached and dried them under the sun. He then reassembled the bones into what would be the first human skeleton model in history. He became professor of anatomy at the University of Padua at the age of 23. Six years later, this Copernicus of the medical world published his book, *De humani corporis fabrica* ("On the construction of the human body") (1543), a revolutionary breakthrough in medicine and human anatomy. The level of precision and detail in his drawings of the human venous system is truly impressive. From then on, human anatomy made steady progress. (Karger-Decker, 2001/2004: 108)

During the Renaissance, knowledge of human anatomy was widely welcomed. King Henry VIII of England ordered the bodies of hanged convicts be given to anatomists. Vesalius was the first to perform public dissections. Such performances were very popular in 16th century Europe. Even the Roman Catholic Church consented to such acts, which enabled people to appreciate the marvels of God's creation.

The Objectification of Cadaver Dissection, and Recent Reactions to it

For centuries Christians believed that to be dissected after death would mean losing the opportunity of going to heaven. But when science flourished, western medicine may have moved too far in the opposite direction, treating the dead body as a mere object. Its sacredness and dignity have gradually been diluted.

The secularization of dissection and de-mystification of corpses reached a kind of climax with the work of Prof. Günther von Hagens of Heidelberg University. Having invented a process called plastination which arrests the decay of corpses, he took an exhibition of corpses round the world in the years bridging the millennium; 25 million people were estimated to have seen it. (Hagens, 2003: 9-36) Then on 20 November, 2002, at 7 pm, in the Old Truman Brewery in London's East End, Prof von Hagens dissected a cadaver before an audience of hundreds and a film crew. Although pre-warned by Channel 4, a lot of spectators were unable to control their agitation and shock when the organs were passed

around for inspection. After editing, the whole process was broadcast at midnight in a two-hour programme by UK's Channel 4 Television.

The Metropolitan police were sent to monitor the show. At the end, von Hagens was charged by the Health Department for violation of the Anatomy Act. He faced a fine and 3 months imprisonment if convicted, but was finally acquitted. (BBC News, 22 Nov 2002) However, after protests in London, early in 2003 the British government banned such exhibitions.

Although Prof. von Hagens said that he was just doing his best to let people witness death and understand the mystery of the human body, he apparently forgot that what people really care about is whether cadavers have been treated with respect. Is it humane to pass round the cadaver's organs for closer view? Though throughout history societies have had different views, attitudes and methods in the treatment of remains, they all seem to show concern that the cadaver should receive care and respect.

Nowadays, it is common for medical students to attend anatomy classes with detached emotions and even in a flippant spirit. Due to this lack of respect, very few people are willing to donate their bodies after death to medical schools for teaching purposes. Most of the cadavers used are unclaimed bodies. For instance, a student may well get the cadaver of a drowned person, with a swollen head which looks repulsive. Under these circumstances, it is difficult for the student to feel respect for the dead body, thus creating a vicious cycle.

But in recent years, western medical education has started to put emphasis on being humane. Many famous universities, like Stanford, New York University and University of California San Francisco campus, have begun to reconsider the process of handling cadavers. They also actively advocate that medical anatomy be conducted with respect and humanity. Professor Sherwin Nuland of Yale University has put forward a critical analysis of contemporary western medicine. In his book, *Doctors: The Biography of Medicine*, he states:

For what I have tried to do in this book is to describe the evolution of the process by which every doctor of today has come to his or her basic suppositions, and the shared theories by which all of us view the process of disease. The story of medicine is therefore the story of my professional life. [...] all physicians who have ever tried to make a diagnosis and then carry out a plan of therapy and attempt a prognosis, are heirs to the same tradition [...] I have come away from examining the lives of my chosen doctors with a renewed optimism

about the future of our civilization. In these days, when it seems unrealistic to predict a future for mankind that is anything but bleak, I find something in this “procession of characters” of mine that gives me hope. The reverence for life, the zeal for learning Nature’s secrets, the willingness to sacrifice for progress [...] are characteristics that I believe are inherent in our species, notwithstanding the mass of self-inflicted tragedies to which our century has been witness. (Nuland, 1988/1997: xiv-xv)

Japan’s White Chrysanthemum Society: Dissection with Donated Bodies

For a long time Japan was behind the West in anatomical science. In the 17th and 18th centuries, human body dissection diagrams were brought from Europe. As Japan’s doctors had no experience of dissection, upon seeing those diagrams they were anxious to observe the reality. In 1754, the Japanese government for the first time granted permission for executed criminals to be dissected. As a result, some Dutch anatomy books were soon translated. In 1870, under the Meiji Restoration, Japan’s medical world decided to adopt Germany’s medical science, including its study of anatomy. From the late 1930s to the 1950s, Japan used “dead travellers”, people who fell sick and died by the roadside, for dissection. Many medical schools were reluctant to rely on such material for the practice of anatomy, as the wishes of the deceased could not be ascertained.

Then in this century, just when the medical world in the West began to consider the issue, Japan too started to adopt “respect for dead bodies” as the core value in anatomy education. The White Chrysanthemum Society (*Shiragikukai*) was established in Japan in 1971, with over 20,000 registered donors/members, who are recruited by appeal through various channels. Professor Tatsuo Sato, a leader of that society, commented on current practice: “They might wish not to be dissected, or on the contrary, they might be willing to. I assume most of them don’t wish so. Though they are just lifeless bodies, they should still be shown respect. Such use would create a bad impression on the students, so this practice is not welcome. It would be hard to teach students ethics with those bodies. The bodies now used have all been willingly donated with the implicit message that ‘this is to help you to become a good doctor, please use my body’. Such message

has a very good influence on the students.”¹

This is how the White Chrysanthemum Society operates. Whenever a member passes away, the family notifies the Anatomy Teaching Department. The professor on duty will then put on a funeral black robe, which is kept on the premises, and rush to the funeral. A token contribution of 20,000 Yen towards the funeral costs will be handed over along with a body donation agreement. After that is signed, the body will be delivered to the medical school for study.

Respect for the donors is emphasised. Before the start of each class, the students must observe a moment of silence as a tribute to the donors’ contribution. In the classes, the teachers and students must hold the donors in high esteem. On the first day of anatomy practice, some of the society’s members are invited to attend and explain why they wish to donate. The students bring a bunch of white chrysanthemums to the first class. White symbolizes mourning, the chrysanthemum denotes nobility. Led by the teaching staff, the students place the flowers at the monument to body donors on the campus. At the beginning and the end of each class, all present must stand in silent tribute. At the completion of the course, each student team places the body they have dissected in a coffin covered with flowers. At some medical schools, the students also help to collect the bones after the cremation. At the end of the course, the students summarise their experience in a book which they send out to the donors’ families and society’s members; they write of their feelings during dissection, whether their attitudes have been changed, etc.

Many of the medical professors in Japan are body donors because they fully understand that they are walking on the path built by previous donors. Mr. Maruyama, a member of White Chrysanthemum, said: “I always tell the students to be a good doctor because we join the society totally free of conditions and rewards. Please use our bodies for practice and learn well. We hope this will help future generations to become good physicians, good scholars.”

In its early days, Japan’s medical community was influenced by the Western way of thinking. Natural science was embraced with the belief that matter was the centre of the universe and that science education was to advocate rationalism. They deeply believed that rationalism in exploring the physical world was the ultimate value in the quest for truth as well as the highest human quality. But by the end of the 20th century, the White Chrysanthemum Society began soul-searching. They proceeded to merge the rational thinking of science with Japan’s

¹ 3rd April, 2007; interview with Professor Tatsuo Sato of Tokyo Medical and Dental University.

traditional etiquette. Gradually, body donation is being accepted as a virtue by Japanese society. But the White Chrysanthemum deliberately removes all religious connotations and bases its belief on science. Its aim is not to help deal with death, nor to provide guidance in overcoming the fear of death. It also does not seem to emphasise the sublimation of grief through the donation process. Instead, its aim to maximise the effective use of bodies is based purely on practicality: in the spirit of Jeremy Bentham, the British founder of utilitarianism, they hold that the aim of all social and political institutions should be the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Not only do the students show respect; through donation the bodies have become objects useful to society.

The Establishment of the Tzu Chi Body Donation Centre

In Chinese society, the practice of Pure Land Buddhism prescribes that the body cannot be moved after death for a certain period so as to allow the spirit to have time to ascend to the Pure Land. This belief not only dominates most Buddhists in Taiwan; even non-Buddhists are influenced, and this limits their acceptance of organ or body donation.

Dharma Master Cheng Yen has said: “This body is not mine, but I will leave my love to this world.” She considers the body as just a means for the practice of dharma; the belief that the spirit needs to stay in the body for a certain time before going to the Pure Land is groundless. After death, the body is just a shell. It is a wise choice in life to put useless matter to good use. Death is not an end, but an extension and expansion of love.

The first step in honouring the silent mentor (a name used in Tzu Chi for body donor) is for the students to know his past history². Before the anatomy programme begins, each medical student is required to visit the silent mentor’s family, to get a feel for his life. When a student starts to know about his past, the relationship with the body changes. What is lying on the operation table is no longer a cold cadaver. The student can recall his witty appearance while alive, his happy laugh and his warm hands. He can no longer treat the mentor like a frog for dissection, but conceives of him as a person with thoughts and life who has with dignity offered his body to the students.

²In the rest of this article donors and students are referred to by the masculine pronoun but may be of either gender.

Before they passed away, what would the mentors have asked our doctors? What would they have expected them to learn? Many medical graduates from Tzu Chi University have reflected that the memory of the anatomy course has affected them deeply. The mentors whom they visited in the hospice ward now lie cold in front of them. In the past, the medical students usually did not know the bodies they dissected. When portions of the body dropped on the students' hair, or on the floor, they just threw them away. But now the students have experienced a change in their lives: unlike students before them, they now know about their mentors.

Dr Chang Ch'un-Ming, a graduate of Tzu Chi University, still has a vivid memory of the anatomy course:

The first cut happened on the first day, after the ceremony. It gave me a very deep impression and I was quite frightened. It was my first experience of standing next to a mentor. I felt oppressed by the horror of standing beside a deceased body. And I still had to make my first cut. The classmates in my group were all trying to pass that task on to someone else. I was really scared, as the silent mentor was nevertheless different from a living person. His body was cold. But I still had to cut a body without any warmth. It was quite a terrified feeling.

But this feeling passed quickly. We were taught that the silent mentor was really a person; he was a teacher, not a cadaver. He was the same as us, had life, and now was just using his body to guide us. We also prayed silently, and followed many rituals which helped us pass this barrier quickly. I think that this is the characteristic which differentiates us from other universities. Our university is full of the spirit of humanity. We were told that the mentor is also a teacher who deserves our respect. He is here to help us cross this psychological barrier quickly, so that we can easily follow the class. In the beginning of the course, what we learnt the most and in the least time was from the silent mentor. Regardless of how attractive the illustrations in the books were, they were flat, printed materials. But the mentor was three-dimensional. He was real: you could touch him. What I remember most is those body structures.³

³ 25th May, 2006; interview with Chun-Ming Chang in *Dalin* Tzu Chi General Hospital.

The environment and atmosphere of the conventional anatomy course follow those of traditional Western medical science, which avoid facing the fact that the cadaver was once alive. The students usually treat the unidentified bodies with a casual attitude. Since the bodies are considered as “objects”, they need have no emotional involvement, nor do they experience the guilt or remorse that might occur if they were dissecting someone they knew. Once, an English medical student who was in the middle of dissecting a body found out that the body belonged to his aunt; he nearly broke down, and could not continue with his medical studies. Not to face the fact that the body was once a living person is an approach inherited from centuries of Western anatomy teaching. The students conduct their work in a mood of hilarity; their demeanour is cold and indifferent, so that they can ignore the unease of dissecting a body which was once alive, as well as their fear of death.

After visiting a Tzu Chi anatomy class, the head of a Finnish medical association commented that she found it incredible that Tzu Chi anatomy education enables students to face the cadavers of people whose past lives they know and proceed in such a dignified and respectful manner. She also told us that some medical students make fun with the organs, tossing them around and saying, “This was your liver and this was your heart.” Western science has treated the cadaver as an object; superficially, this is to protect the students’ minds from being hurt, but in reality, it isolates their minds from the body. Such objectification can have a great impact on the student’s subsequent medical career.

Tzu Chi requires the students to have feelings about the cadaver lying before them, to appreciate that it was once a noble spirit full of love. This not only prevents the body from being looked on as mere matter, but also deepens the students’ respect for life. Dr. Yang Ya Wen has described her feelings when performing dissection on mentors in a Tzu Chi anatomy course:

When I opened her body, my classmate and I found her intestines had unusual mucus and there were also some lumps. We only then realised that those lumps had spread from the lung cancer which caused her death. I felt very sad. In her last days, she must have suffered a lot of pain. I then probed around the intestines, and remembered the pain she suffered. I could feel her pain. I would have liked to ask her if I was being too rough. Though I knew she could

no longer feel, I still worried that I might hurt her, or do something wrong. Then... I really could not express how bad I felt.”⁴

In 1998, a body donor, Mr Lee He Cheng, refused chemotherapy so that he could preserve his body for donation. In a meeting with the students before his death he said:

The pain usually hit at midnight. When a person suffers, his will power may be destroyed. Sometimes I would really like to battle with the illness, take the operation or chemo, and see if it might ease the pain. I am counting my days now. But those treatments would not be of any help to my illness. I only hope to render my body in a perfect form for you to study so that it might be helpful to mankind. It's just my humble wish. The Dharma Master said that a sick body was like a house in need of repairs. Rather than keeping such a house, it would be better to grasp the present moment. I wish to pass away quickly so I can reincarnate soon. Therefore, when you are cutting my body that is also the moment when my wish comes true. You can make wrong cuts ten times, a hundred times, even a thousand times on my body, but in future please don't make even one mistake on your patients. (Yeh, 2004: 182)

Several weeks later, when the students dissected the mentor's body, how could they not be touched by his words still fresh in their minds? How could they fail to dissect his body with seriousness, respect and care? How could they not work diligently to learn the body's secrets so as to accomplish the mentor's wish that they should not make any mistakes on the patients?

Many silent mentors had dedicated their whole lives to Tzu Chi, like the prominent entrepreneur, Mr. Lee Chung Ji; some are acclaimed professionals, and loving Tzu Chi sisters. When the students realise that the donors had devoted themselves to the well-being of society, and offered their bodies for experiment, they come to admire the donors as role models. What the students learn from the mentors is not just medical knowledge; they also acquire a more altruistic character. This is an example of holistic education. What they are expected to learn is the donors' selfless and generous spirit.

⁴2nd June, 2006; interview with Ya-Wen Yang in Hualien, Taiwan.

Medical Students' Feelings Toward Dead Bodies

Dr Sherwin B. Nuland of Yale University once commented: "The impression a medical student has when facing the cadaver for the first time will determine his attitude towards his patients in future." If the student dissects a rotten unidentified corpse, or a criminal's body, the disgust he feels may stay with him and affect his attitude towards patients' bodies in future.

When an anatomy student first sees a dead body, he will naturally feel fearful. To ease such fears, the classroom is designed to be spacious, with no atmosphere of gloom or isolation. The anatomy room at Tzu Chi University was therefore located at level 2, next to the main classroom. In 1994, when the Tzu Chi Body Donation Centre was being set up, Dharma Master Cheng Yen requested the university to provide a bright and comfortable space for the students. She said: "The anatomy course will be on level two of the building, which provides open space and a good view. This is different from the majority of medical schools in Taiwan, which place their anatomy departments in the basement or at the far side of the buildings."

Besides using space to dispel the gloom of death from students' minds, Professor Wang Yue Ran, (Dean of Anatomy at Tzu Chi University), has explained that the deceased's families are also of great help in overcoming their fears.

When the course programme was about to start, we would send an invitation to the deceased's family. The third year medical students are mostly in their twenties; such an age group would still feel apprehensive toward cadavers. Not everyone can hold a scalpel and cut the body. We invite the families to come for two purposes. The first is to notify them of the programme's commencement. And the second is to have their encouragement and support for the students – to encourage them to learn well and not be scared. It is more for interaction between the deceased's families and the students, to achieve a sense of proximity for a normally remote field of medical education.⁵

Dharma Master Cheng Yen's emphasis on respect towards the silent mentors is also shown in the way the dissecting techniques are applied. Tzu Chi University takes great care in handling the donated bodies. After being frozen, they lie peacefully on the beds as if they were asleep. Compared to Western surgery performance of some medical schools in the past, Tzu Chi's attitude towards the ca-

⁵ 20th February, 2005; interview with Yueh-Jan Wang in Tzu Chi University.

davers is strikingly different. Certain medical schools in Germany and the United States hang the cadavers from the ceiling, like cattle in an abattoir. This shows people that the cadavers are just bodies ready to be cut up. In Tzu Chi, they are teachers who, through their own bodies, show the students how to use the scalpels so that they will not harm their future patients. We can foresee that if a student can handle a deceased body respectfully, he will be more respectful towards his future patients.

The “Silent Mentor” Programme

Tzu Chi Medical School in Hualien was founded on 16 Oct 1994, and the faculty immediately needed to acquire cadavers for the anatomy class. In 1995 Master Cheng Yen began to promote body donation as a selfless contribution to human welfare which made meaningful use of the body after one's death.

Professor Tseng Kuo Fan arrived in 1997. He has since been Head of Research and Development at TCU. Being in charge of the scientific processing of donated bodies, he has been working for years on techniques of body preservation and dissection procedures. The aim is to achieve the level of respect for the bodies which is expected by the Dharma Master. He has suggested the use of epidermal injection instead of formalin in order to avoid its odour. He has further observed that traditional preservation techniques cause the breakdown of protein in the body, giving it a totally different feel from that of a living body, thus limiting the connection of basic anatomy with a real clinical environment.

To justify the donors' complete trust in Tzu Chi, Prof. Tseng has continuously conducted research on how to utilize such valuable resources. Upon learning that the Huston Medical Centre in Texas has, due to delays in processing procedures, occasionally frozen unpreserved bodies for future pathological study, he was inspired to broaden the meaning of body donation and introduce the snap-freezing technique. This technique involves sterilizing the body within 8 hours after death and then snap-freezing it at minus 30°C. The body will look as if it is sleeping. After being stored for a few months or even a year, all it needs is defrosting three days prior to use. It can then be used for four days at room temperature. Aside from having no blood flow, heartbeat, pulse, breath or warm body temperature, the cadaver's body structure, organs and elasticity are no different from those of a living body. When the students practise surgical techniques, they can observe the body structure and organs accurately, and simulate clinical treatments and surgical techniques. Professor Tseng once said to his students that he will teach

his last lecture as a body donor lying on the anatomy table for them to conduct the dissection. He hopes that students can fulfil his ultimate wish.

26 May 2002 saw the commencement of ground-breaking “simulated surgery with human bodies” under the co-operation of surgeons and teaching staff in anatomy. Its first incision turned a new page in the history of anatomy teaching in Taiwan, for advances in technology allow the donated bodies to respond like real patients. Just as da Vinci explained the beauty of human bodies with science but demonstrated it through art, anatomical studies now offer the same combination. Dr Chang Ch’un-Ming has recounted his experience of dissecting donated bodies in his 7th year at TCU:

Dissection of donated bodies was the most interesting lecture in my whole Year 7 programme. Why? I find human bodies beautiful. After you open up a body, you can see the organs inside all brightly coloured, saturated and pretty. I treated those bodies as good paintings which offered me dissection opportunities, cutting and mending. As I also like artistic creations, I found that very interesting.⁶

The Influence of Body Donors on the Characters of the Medical Students

This association of art and technology not only allows medical students to have a pleasant memory of their first encounter with human bodies, but also exposes them to noble minds; beyond the bodies were lives of a love that did not expect rewards. In the future, the students will retain this awareness when they treat live patients: the human body is noble; it is beautiful; it is full of love.

After performing dissection, the students must carefully place every organ back in its original position and then sew up the bodies. To show due respect to donors and their families, each stitch must match and be equally spaced. What the students have learned during the year from these teachers is particularly precious. Their first impression of human bodies will last throughout their medical career, reminding them to respect life and handle sick bodies without fear.

Wang Yue Ran of TCU’s Anatomy Department has said,

This is one of the most important steps for the students to show their respect to the body donors. They do not view the bodies as mere objects, because at the end they have to restore the teachers’ faces

⁶See fn.3.

and bodies completely. The restoration is a process of showing appreciation.... When we were studying in earlier times, organs were normally removed and placed in containers. Years later, those organs might still be taken out for teaching purposes. At TCU, we require all such organs be returned to their bodies and even the skin to be sewn up. We consider this a very meaningful act.

When they have sewn up the bodies and seen the appearance of their teachers restored, the students feel relieved. Restoration after dissection is also a relief to the donors' families, because they do not need to worry that the bodies of their loved ones may be broken up and scattered.

After restoring them, the students will wrap the bodies in white cloth, put on white gowns, and then place the bodies in coffins. Seeing this, the donors' families are at ease. It is this sense of trust which leads them to hand over their family members to TCU, and allows its medical students to practice. Consequently, the number of donors is on the rise.⁷

A memorial service, led by nuns from the Jing Si Abode (the Headquarters of Tzu Chi and home to the Master Cheng Yen), is held before the bodies are cremated. The family members assemble with the medical students in front of the Buddha statue while Buddhist music is played. During this ceremony the students frequently burst into tears. They have developed feelings towards those whom they have dissected, and will now always regard them as their teachers. That is why Dharma Master Cheng Yen refers to them as "silent mentors".

To the relatives of the donors, the deceased would normally have been just a memory within the family, a name that would be forgotten after two or three generations. But now that memory is shared with a group of medical students and doctors who will always remember the silent mentors. The family members feel like part of a larger family, and know that it is rare in life to be so dignified and respected by so many.

TCU graduate Yang Ya-Wen said:

That has become a very special and very beautiful memory in our lives. She was an important teacher in my life. She also said that she was so glad she had left behind a group of children like us who

⁷ 20th February, 2005; interview with Yueh-Jan Wang in Tzu Chi University.

accompanied her on her last journey and fulfilled a very important wish of hers.⁸

Life is busy and tough when a medical graduate becomes a resident doctor at the hospital. When Yang first started as a first year resident at TC Hospital, she was on a 24-hour shift every two days. But she still attended every practical session that involved silent mentors in order to hone her skills, so that when she met patients in the future, she could alleviate their pains. To her, such sessions are precious. There was a day she went home and wept because she felt that due to stress she had shown a lack of respect to the silent mentors.

One year seven students of the medicine faculty composed a cello concerto for their teachers, in memory of the teachings they had received. Often in the middle of the night, when they came across learning difficulties, they would play that to express their frustration. There was also a student who sang to a guitar for the silent mentors as if they were still alive. Thus intangible existence becomes tangible. Master Cheng Yen once said, “Utilise impermanence to cultivate the everlasting. Use the tangible body to cultivate a life of wisdom; use a body of limited duration to promote everlasting lives.”

Dr Chang Ch'un-Ming has spoken of the influence of those teachers on his chosen lifelong medical career:

I feel my whole view is probably not just affected by one single session with the silent mentor. Often, it is from practice with patients..... After seeing so many of them, I reflect, just as the Master said, whether there will be a tomorrow, whether death will come unexpectedly. You should follow what she says while you live. You should always try your best, as you don't know how much longer you may live. ... Previously, I was a pessimist, thinking that it might be tomorrow or today that I would not wake up from my sleep. Therefore I have to do everything properly today. I still think like that now. I still do things properly every day, as I might not wake up tomorrow. That is my view on life as well as death. I have never thought about my view on death. But I know that the silent mentors live in our hearts and will do so for the rest of our lives. So I always remember who helped me and allowed me to gain my medical knowledge.⁹

⁸See fn.4.

⁹See fn.3.

Are Emotional Involvement and Medical Professionalism Compatible?

Master Cheng Yen expects that donating one's body will stimulate students to treat patients as relatives, and instill in them the spirit of the benefactors. Nevertheless, certain aspects of this practice are still under debate among medical professionals. If doctors really treat patients as their own relatives, would the emotional involvement hinder their judgment?

How do medical students, residents, chief residents and senior doctors handle such problems? Would a senior doctor, through performing similar operations frequently, treat them mechanically and operate without emotion? Would that indeed be the pinnacle of skill? No: the pinnacle of skill is love.

Dr Li Ming-Che, head of the TC surgical department, who is in charge of organ donation and transplant, has this insightful view on what constitutes surgical skill:

...from your understanding of past lessons on anatomy, you must have already visualised what a normal person's organs look like. Today, his illness causes you to operate from a certain area, so what sort of problems will you be encountering? What you saw before were normal organs. But now you must operate on an abnormal patient. You must remove the root of the problems. You cannot act as you did while still learning, when mistakes did not matter. When you are doing it for real, the first incision has to be the correct one. Just one cut. There is no repetition. You can't go back. I always tell my students that from the moment the surgeon picks up the scalpel, he has already decided on the patient's life or death and determined his fate. The placing of the scalpel, whether it is a clean cut or askew, will also determine whether you will be blamed by your patient when he wakes up.¹⁰

The training in anatomy received by a medical student critically affects his surgical skill. It also affects a patient's rights. Doctors are under extreme pressure, which often affects their attitude towards their patients. Dr Li Ming-Che again:

A surgeon's life is actually very busy. That is why I feel as if it has been 15 years since I was a resident. I have always been enthusiastic

¹⁰ 2nd June, 2006; interview with Ming-Che Li in Hualien Tzu Chi General Hospital.

about working as a surgeon. Why do we need enthusiasm? Because it is really a demanding job: you have to brave long working hours, a heavy workload, and the consequent high pressure. More importantly, the result of the treatment could affect your relationship with the patient and his family. All these factors demand total dedication, or you may not last long in such an environment. Personally, I feel that I like surgery because it is very challenging. From the moment you pick up the scalpel and make the first incision on the patient, you have his fate in your hands. Each and every cut and every stitch may be a factor in deciding his fate – which in this context means to live or die, to live happily or live in pain. All could be set in the blink of an eye. It is this challenge which makes life as a surgeon so engrossing. You feel happy when your patient gets better every day. You start to worry if he doesn't do well. But if he finally gets well, the joy you feel is beyond words. But if his condition suddenly deteriorates, you feel immense sadness, like falling to the bottom of a valley. Maybe I also enjoy these ups and downs, highs and lows. But most of the time I enjoy the happiness I share with my patients. So this is the job I really long for.¹¹

The medical profession has recently been facing a worsening relationship with patients. Surgeons often have to risk being sued. Besides, surgery requires more physical strength than other medical fields. So students often lose interest in it. But from the lectures with the silent mentors, they start to realise the importance of surgery and acquire the courage to face problems. They become more active in seeking to improve the doctor-patient relationship, and help their patients more often.

Dr Chang Ch'un-Ming told of a doctor who was feeling extremely tired during an operation and was considering a break, when the image of a silent mentor flashed into his brain and gave him new energy and the courage to continue.

Let's say you are tired while operating. You might ask, should you continue? Sometimes an operation is not that smooth. Sometimes we have to assess how much we have to do to help. Sometimes, not every time, when you are tired, the image of a silent mentor would

¹¹ Ibid.

flash into your mind, an image of how willingly they helped. You felt refreshed at that moment and continued. Sometimes I summon up a bit of self-encouragement and try to see how much I can do for the patient, and this revitalises me to continue. In other cases...it may be a smooth operation and you may remember that you have come across this condition before. Then you feel glad that you have learnt from the silent mentors. Maybe I shouldn't have said this. What I really mean is that without my thinking hard this just looked familiar to me; it was like the simulated surgery I did in year 3 and year 7, when I came across similar things. That is a pleasant feeling.¹²

Who says that the lives of body donors have ended? They live on in the hearts of every doctor. They live on in every cut made by the doctors. They come back to life in every critically ill patient. Just as Romain Rolland said: "I haven't died. I have only changed residence. I live in your heart, you who weep when you see me. The beloved has become the soul of the one who loves." (Rolland, 1938/1982: 291) The souls of the silent mentors live on in the hearts of their students.

Body Donation and the Displacement of Sorrow

At present, TCU has over 20,000 silent mentors. A big contrast when compared to the olden days, when the medical school found it so hard to get cadavers. Professor Wang Yue Ran of TCU's Anatomy Department recalled the shortage in his days as a student, when the supply was from unclaimed bodies:

Inadequate supply of bodies can be traced back to my student days. Our source came from nameless persons, for instance those found dead by the roadside. If it had been very cold for a few days, there would be deaths from cold. The government proclaimed that such bodies would be sent to medical schools if they remained unclaimed for 6 months. They would then be used by the students for learning purposes. Of course there were few unclaimed roadside deaths.¹³

In the past, many people were reluctant to donate their bodies. Partly that was because they were worried that their bodies might receive undignified treatment.

¹²See fn.3.

¹³See fn.5.

One can imagine the aversion to exposing one's body to a group of frivolously behaved people. But the respectful and grateful attitude of TCU's students and professors has encouraged the donors' desire to leave a legacy of love. The pleasant environment for dissection, coupled with simple but solemn ceremonies, enables the donor and his family to appreciate the sacred nature of the legacy rather than to dwell on death and the horror of dissection.

In many cases of body donation, we have discovered how the solemn dignity of donation could assuage the sorrow of death. In May 2002, Sister Ts'ai Ts'ui-Chin of Changhua got up one morning to prepare breakfast for her daughter. While she was washing her face in the bathroom, the basin unexpectedly cracked and cut the main artery in her neck. She bled to death peacefully and painlessly. As she had signed up as a body donor, her husband (Brother Hsieh Ching-Yun) and three children quickly contacted TCU, even before the sadness sank in. Coincidentally, TCU was having a simulated anatomy session the next day for year 7 students and some specialists. Sister Ts'ai was just in time to be the teachers' teacher.

When the hearse was passing through Hohuan Mountain, Brother Hsieh recalled the scenes of their touring together along the Central-Cross Island Highway. He spoke to her body and recalled merry moments from the past.¹⁴ The journey had delayed the sorrow of the loved one's departure, as if she were still by his side, going to a worthwhile and dignified activity. Sorrow was now displaced by the urgent arrangements required for the donation procedures and the ceremony.

Early the next day, Sister Ts'ai smoothly became the fifth body-teacher of that anatomy session. TC volunteers accompanied brother Hsieh and his three children, caring and comforting the whole way, and offering positive views and strength to deal with death. There was no time for the family members to feel sad for the deceased, as they had to commence the donation procedures with minimum delay.

The sorrow was diverted into expectations of new lives from medical education. A poem by Kung Tzu-Chen of the Ching dynasty would be an appropriate reflection of the spirit of the body-teachers: "Fallen petals are not without use. They mulch in spring and protect the flowers."

In the morning assembly of volunteers three days after the death, brother Hsieh and his son, a high school student, walked on stage and shared their ex-

¹⁴ 24th May, 2006; interview with Ching-Yun Hsieh at Ms. Hsieh's residence in Hsiuhsui village, Chang Hwa.

perience. They contained their sorrow without breaking down. He said his wife was blessed to become a Bodhisattva. The end of a tangible life is the beginning of an intangible, endless life. Death is not the end of life, but its conversion and continuation. We often observe in the relatives of silent mentors this power which transcends death and grief. Her son shared his experience with calm sadness in his voice. He said, “Mum has become a Bodhisattva. I know her body can help many patients. I will look after myself and will not let her worry. Just as the Master said, when the front foot moves, the rear foot has to let go too. I will remember her. I also pray for her to come back soon.”

The relatives of silent mentors cannot follow the social customs of a prompt burial. They also do not conduct the customary ceremonies on the seventh day or the hundredth day, nor do they issue obituary notices for remembrance. Instead, they have learned the lesson that death does not mean extinction. Though the bodies have returned to the void, instead of grieving and weeping, it is better to pray that the deceased will be able to help after their bodily functions have stopped, so that a useless body serves lasting values.

The Experience of Sacrifice and Dignity

Though traditional burials appear to be full of grandeur, in reality the bodies buried in the coffins are attacked by insects and rotted by bacteria. According to custom, after a certain number of years of burial, relatives of the deceased have to relocate their bones. What they usually find then are a spectacle of decay and an unbearable stench. Dharma Master Cheng Yen once mentioned an incident regarding her father. Years after his death, a geomancy master was engaged to relocate his bones. But instead of a skeleton, he found a semi-decomposed body. Consequently, he had to spray it with rice wine and resume the job a week later. At that time, Master Cheng Yen wondered what values were left after death. (Shih 2007: 91)

The rotten stench of decay is partly responsible for people’s negative feelings about death. Donating one’s body has changed that. It has turned the uncertainty and apprehension of death into seeking and realizing everlasting value. This transformation of value is the best way to help people face death and overcome their fear and uncertainty.

Silent mentor Liu Shun-Cheng stayed in the hospice ward of Tzu Chi Dailin Hospital before she passed away. She gave vivid expression to the fear of a person facing imminent death alone:

In these few days, I have learned about life and death. There is nothing wrong in my saying that. Close your eyes and then you are gone, just like falling asleep. But I feel the most terrible part is probably when no one beside you at the last moment. I have seen this in the last few days, this being neglected. When a family member or relative passed away, those who should have been present were absent. The regrets, pains, and loneliness felt by a person on the verge of dying are really frightening. Even in the hospice ward, patients still have moments of emptiness. That is the time when I worry most – worry that I have been discarded....At this time of facing death, you feel like saying who has been kind to you. It is a time when you are most sensitive.¹⁵

In the hospice ward, Liu was accompanied by her family members, especially her sister, and received continuous care from TC volunteers. Her fear of facing the uncertainty of death alone was relieved by this experience of love, and transformed by her wish to donate her body. Fear was replaced by the sensation of following the right course. Loneliness was blown away by the love between her and those around her. She said:

I feel that there is so much love in the hospice ward. My little bit of love can't really compare with all the love flowing from everyone. Really, mine is so tiny that I feel it is hardly noticeable. I am grateful. Grateful for coming to Tzu Chi, which has given me all this appreciation. Really. One day my sister mentioned body donation, and I asked, "After I have donated my body and my cornea have been used, what would I do if I come back but cannot see and cannot find my family?" At that moment I was quite scared. My sister laughed at me for still having such thoughts when I am about to help others.¹⁶

After Liu was notified that her body was suitable for donation, she happily said that she was glad that she finally had permission for her body to help others: "I had been hesitating during that period. But once I had decided, the feeling was different. I felt very proud when I received my donor card, really proud."¹⁷

¹⁵ 27th March, 2006; interview with Shun-Cheng Liu in Dalin Tzu Chi General Hospital.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ 25th May, 2006; interview with Shun-Cheng Liu in Dalin Tzu Chi General Hospital.

Liu was not without fear, not without struggle. But every time, the fear was transformed by the holy sensation of worthiness, of being able to offer positive help to medical students. Due to her resolution and the perceived value of body donation, she felt relieved whenever she had to confront the despair of death. With her struggle transformed into benefaction, when fear turned into love, Liu's mind was filled with dignity. She still had to fight against pain. But those dignified images which appeared even in her sleep relieved the pain of her body and mind.

As soon as I close my eyes, I can now see the god of mercy sitting in front of me, inside a cave with a beam of light shining down. And then the god went up and a light shone back, forming a circle. I then repented in front of him and prayed. I prayed without stopping. As soon as I close my eyes, I have this urge to pray. I then feel soothed, as if I am very close to the land of eternal happiness.

Sometimes when the pains came, I went to the chapel, just sat there and forgot my pain. I have already reached the stage of wanting to live in the chapel and stay there. Strange, often the nurse would have to come looking for me to inject painkiller. She would find me either there or in my room. After all those needles and extractions of samples every day, I am now beyond pains. They don't matter any more. I take it as doing ascetic practices, and don't feel bothered by them. I close my eyes and feel at ease. I go to the chapel and feel peaceful. See my swollen feet. Normally such feet would feel numb, but mine don't. I go to the chapel every morning at 5.30, sit there and don't want to leave. Feel so close to the Buddha. I feel as happy as I believe that you can feel only when you are close to the Buddha. I am very happy that the Buddha has converted me so quickly and allowed me to be so close. It is my fortune that that has happened.¹⁸

Desire to repent comes to everyone who feels he has done wrong. Repent what? Being preoccupied with success? Offering someone insufficient love? Having done so little that was worthwhile? After deciding to donate her body, Liu, who was not a Buddhist, could still feel the presence of the Buddha. After repentance and after making the decision to donate her body, her dignity and sanctity gradually developed, her pain from cancer was eased, and she gained the courage to face her end.

¹⁸Ibid. Shun-Cheng Liu passed away 20 July 2006.

Making Life's Last Episode a Beautiful Experience

After cremation, the ashes of donors are placed in TCU's Hall of Great Sacrifice. They are put inside individual glass boxes. Transparent and carefully designed, they are reverently called Jing Si Abode. This dignified, pure and bright environment has also attracted donors. Imagine burial in a dark and empty cemetery, the grave exposed to the weather, soon forgotten by the world and visited by relatives who come only once a year to remove weeds and dirt. With the passage of time and generations, even the most glamorous graves are covered and forgotten. Compared to that, the placement in crystal-clear, elegant and graceful glass Jing Si Abode has complemented death with a sense of honour, dignity and warmth. Whenever Chang Ch'iu-Lin goes to work at Hualien TC General Hospital as a volunteer, he makes time to go to the Hall at TCU, makes himself a cup of coffee, and speaks to his deceased wife as if she were alive. To him, she has lived on but in a different residence. This has saved the donors from the sordidness usually associated with death.

The English philosopher Francis Bacon said, "The ceremony of death is more frightening than death itself." (Bacon, 1972/2006: 8-13) Traditionally, death implies darkness, horror, filth, rotting, void and abandonment. Master Cheng Yen has turned the journey of death into beauty, dignity, sanctity and grace. Not only is the glass Jing Si Abode their final resting place, the warm Hall of Great Sacrifice will be their home forever. The memorial service is also designed to be warm and dignified. The Master has aimed to minimise all the uncertainties associated with death and turn them into something predictable, allowing everyone to share in the journey.

Master Cheng Yen has created a new dimension and given new meaning to death. The traditional longing for the "land of purity" has now been changed to a wish "pure as crystal glass" in the Hall of Great Sacrifice. The fear of one's bodily death has been replaced by the joy of giving tangible assistance to mankind. A tangible body can cultivate the invisible life of wisdom. According to Master Cheng Yen, this life of wisdom is achieved through the selfless sacrifice of benefaction.

The dignified cleanliness of TCU's Hall of Great Sacrifice does not separate it from the activities of daily life. To a certain degree, this overcomes the despair and sadness of loneliness after death. Loneliness and uncertainty breed fear. For teaching purposes, the Master has combined the anatomy room with a lecture room. The partition between them is glass, so that the students performing anatomy will not feel scared, and the silent mentors will not feel lonely.

Death is no longer treated as an occasion for grief. Before the start of each anatomy session, the students must respectfully greet the silent mentors, their palms pressed together. At the end of the term, when the anatomy course is completed, they must restore and neatly stitch the bodies back together. This is like the finale to a piece of sacred music. The stitching removes any guilt that the students may have felt about invading the bodies, and enables them further to appreciate the consecration of the teachers.

In addition, the donation process diverts the relatives' grief over the departure of their loved ones. Death and life intermingle, as the living give effect to the wishes of the dead to assist others through the honourable notion of student education. Thus the survivors can feel that death can mark the beginning of a new life. Resurrection is no longer a religious myth; it is now an experience with real practical value.

Furthermore, through their interaction, the students, relatives, and volunteer workers have become a big family of love, and this too helps to overcome the loneliness and grief connected with death.

Finally, the instruction given by the silent mentors will always stay with the students. Both the medical knowledge presented through their silent bodies and the spirit of self-sacrifice to help others will remain a fountain of strength to sustain the students at times of irritation and frustration.

Conclusion

Dharma Master Cheng Yen is full of creative wisdom. She turns abstract thoughts and intangible spiritual meanings into tangible and visible forms, features of the real journey through life.

Of this the institution of silent mentors is an example. Immortality is a remote, abstract, mythical concept. But the medical students will forever be influenced and guided by the spirit of sacrifice which informs body donation. It is as if the Bodhisattvas who have bequeathed their bodies to science and to humanity still exist in this universe. Who would say that they have passed away?

Death turns into rebirth, through the patients and students. It is no longer darkness and gloom but crystal-clear and bright. It is no longer loneliness and desolation among weeds but an existence inseparable from relatives. It is no longer the end of a temporary existence but the conversion of that existence into another form.

Rather than clinging to material things and achievements in this world, it is better to indulge in the joy of giving. Rather than looking forward to some remote, nebulous kingdom of heaven, it is better to envisage the continuity of life as helping the sick. Instead of craving to make this body last longer, it is better to use it to train doctors. The more we are preoccupied with ourselves, the more we will be affected by the destructive power of absolute. The less we are concerned with our own lives, the more we can experience the beauty of everlasting life.

Dharma Master Cheng Yen's conception avoids the crisis which turns bodies into mere objects and preserves respect and dignity for the individual. It dilutes the religious myth of the everlasting soul by converting the desire for immortality into tangible acts of generosity. On the one hand, she believes in science and supports research to process bodies with the best technology available, to maintain their cleanliness and dignity. On the other hand, in preaching her ideal of giving, she emphasises "transforming the useless into the useful". This practice allows the donors, their families, students and the public to appreciate that life's value is not extinguished by death. The spirit of wisdom can cut across time and space, transcend the body's physical form and continue to influence and help others.

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In Search of the Khmer *Bhikkhunī*: Reading Between the Lines in Late Classical and Early Middle Cambodia (13th–18th Centuries)

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Was there ever a tradition of *bhikkhunī* in Cambodia? The precincts of *wats*, or Buddhist temples, in modern-day Cambodia usually include a handful of white-clad, shaven-headed women, whose status hovers somewhere between *upāsikā* and novice monk. Yet the inscriptions of the past refer often to a corpus of women as “nuns”. What are we to make of this seeming dichotomy? This paper explores the inscriptions of the 13th to 18th centuries – the period in which Theravada Buddhism became entrenched as the national religion – for an answer.

Introduction

According to most scholars, the *bhikkhunī* tradition either died out in Cambodia long ago, or has never existed.¹ This has not prevented a tradition of female asceticism from continuing, however;² *upāsikā* of advanced precepts, known in Cambodia today as *daun chi* or *yeay chi*, are regular features at *wats* and Buddhist

¹ Ian Harris, *Cambodian Buddhism: History and practice* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), 74; Peter Skilling, ‘Female renunciants (*nang chi*) in Siam according to early travellers’ accounts’, *Journal of the Siam Society* 83, 1–2, 55–61, at 55.

² Elizabeth Guthrie makes this point in her excellent chapter, ‘Khmer Buddhism, female asceticism, and salvation’, in *History, Buddhism, and new religious movements in Cambodia*, ed. John Marston and Elizabeth Guthrie (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), 133–149.

ceremonies. Some are popular healers.³ More than laywomen but less than ordained nuns, they occupy a liminal space that relegates them to a supporting role for male novices and ordained monks, when indeed they are permitted to live at the *wat* at all.⁴ Yet this modern incarnation of *daun chi* is very different from earlier models, and the passivity that they are expected to embrace upon donning the black *sampot*, the traditional length of cloth wrapped around the waist, and white blouse of a five- or eight-precept *yeay chi*, or the white robes of a ten-precept *daun chi*, is a far cry from the agency that women in other periods exhibited in regard to their karmic well-being. In this paper I examine inscriptions in Sanskrit and Old Khmer, ranging from the 13th to the 18th centuries, for evidence of a tradition of Buddhist *bhikkhuni* in Cambodian history – and what the absence of the institution may tell us.

The advent of (state) Buddhism, 12th-13th centuries

Shortly after the most famous of Cambodia's temples, known today as the Angkor Wat, was finished in the middle of the 12th century, the rulers of the Khmer Empire turned to Buddhism. Little is known of the kings who ruled immediately after Sūryavarman II (r. 1113-c.1150), for whom Angkor Wat was built; but there is some evidence to suggest that Dharāṇindravarman II and his successor Yaśovarman II were tolerant of Buddhism – indeed, it would have been peculiar had they not displayed an interest in something other than Śaivism or Vaiṣṇavism, as new forms of religious expression were sweeping the region at the same time.⁵ It was in the reign of Jayavarman VII (r. 1181-c.1220), however, that Buddhism was elevated to the status of state religion, in a form that permitted the inclusion of former brahmanical deities, local spirits, ancestors, and Buddhism that dis-

³ Alexandra Kent, 'The recovery of the king', in *People of virtue: Reconfiguring religion, power and moral order in Cambodia today*, ed. Alexandra Kent and David Chandler (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2008), 109-127.

⁴ Research carried out by the Buddhist Institute in 2006 revealed that most Dhammayut *wats* do not permit *daun chi* to reside there. See *The Situation of Daun Chi in Cambodia* (Phnom Penh: Buddhist Institute/HBF-Asia, 2006).

⁵ See for example Thomas Hunter's exploration of the complexity of politico-religious dynamics at work in maritime Southeast Asia around the same time: 'The body of the king: Reappraising Singhasari period syncretism', *JSEAS* 38, 1 (2007), 27-53.

played Mahayana, Theravada, and Vajrayana elements.⁶ Cambodia is one of the few places where the earth goddess, Preah Neang Dharani, has enjoyed enduring popularity; excised from iconography elsewhere in mainland Southeast Asia, she has maintained a presence from at least the late twelfth century in Cambodia, when the king Jayavarman VII caused her image to be included with other members of the Buddhist pantheon in four of the temples erected during his reign.⁷ Members of the elite had clearly embraced Buddhism prior to Jayavarman VII's reign, as the eulogy of his chief queen, Jayarājadevī, is replete with references to Buddhism. In fact, it is from this Sanskrit inscription that we learn a great deal about the role of women in twelfth-century Buddhism.

Composed by her elder sister, Indradevī, inscription K. 485 reveals that it was the latter who first instructed Jayarājadevī in Buddhist doctrine. Jayarājadevī, separated from her husband while he was in Champā, practised *tapas*, a form of intense meditation sometimes accompanied by acts of mortification. One of these may have been cutting off her hair.⁸ Buddhism, however, provided a steadying influence:

Queen Indradevī having taught her as a disciple, considering the Buddha, the best-beloved, the wisest for achieving fulfillment, he who passed through hell-fires and the ocean of sorrow, Sugata, his path she followed.⁹

After the safe return of her husband, Jayarājadevī performed many pious acts. The inscription relates that “she rained down magnificent gifts” as donations, that “having seen the fruits of Buddhism”, she “caused her dancers to perform the *Jātaka* tales”,¹⁰ and, most significantly:

Having taken as her own daughters a group of poor girls, abandoned by their mothers, she placed them in the village known as Dhar-

⁶This interpretation of Jayavarman VII's adoption of Buddhism was first suggested in 1999 (Trudy Anne Jacobsen, *Buddhist Flesh, Hindu Bones: The Legitimation of Jayavarman VII*, Honours Thesis, University of Queensland, 1999). More recently, Peter D. Sharrock has given a much more sophisticated argument along the same lines, in ‘Garuḍa, Vajrapāṇi and religious change in Jayavarman VII's Angkor’, *JSEAS* 40, 1 (February 2009), 111-151.

⁷Elizabeth Guthrie, ‘Outside the sima’, *Udaya: Journal of Khmer Studies* 2 (2001), pp. 7-18.

⁸K. 485, verses 54-57, in *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, vol. 3 [hereafter *IC* 3], ed. and trans. George Coedès (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1942), 168.

⁹K. 485, verse 59, in *IC* 3, 169.

¹⁰K. 485, verse 73, in *IC* 3, 178.

makīrti, renowned for its virtue, prosperous and enjoying good fortune. And so, she entered into religion, with clothes, goods and prescribed rites, the entire village of Dharmakīrti, celebrated for its learning, always mindful of Dharma.¹¹

After the death of Jayarājadevī, which occurred after 1191 as she made donations of ornaments to the temple Preah Khan,¹² the foundation stele of which bears that date, her elder sister Indradevī was taken by Jayavarman VII as his queen.¹³ He appears to have had a genuine respect for her intellect, as we learn from the inscription that the king placed Indradevī in charge of three centres of Buddhist learning, called Nagendratuṅga, Tilakottara and Narendrāśrama, where she taught audiences of women.¹⁴

What, then, are we to make of the Chinese traveller Zhou Daguan's assertion that despite a year's residence in 1296-7 he saw no Buddhist nuns in Yaśodhara-pura?¹⁵ Ian Harris characterized this omission as "odd",¹⁶ but perhaps it is not unexpected. Zhou complained frequently throughout his account of not being able to observe religious ceremonies or learn more about the intricacies of certain groups of people, including the *banjie*, or *paṇḍita*, about whom he truculently admitted "I don't know what the source of their doctrine is."¹⁷

On the other hand, the religious order to which Zhou referred as *basiwei*, and which Peter Harris (following Cœdès) translated as *tapasvi*,¹⁸ *did* have female

¹¹K. 485, verses 79 and 80, in IC 3, 171. Hema Goonatilake's rendition of the same verses is not correct and seems to be a summary of other translations in French and English rather than a translation of the Sanskrit transliteration ('Rediscovering Cambodian Buddhist women of the past', in *Innovative Buddhist women: Swimming against the stream*, ed. Karma Lekshe Tsomo [Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000], 84-90, at 85).

¹²K. 485, verse 83, IC 3, 179. The "Sugata Śrī Jayaśrī" in this verse is the posthumous name of Jayavarman VII's father, Dharanindravarman II, whose likeness was housed in the temple now known as Preah Khan.

¹³K. 485, verse 95, IC 3, 172. I suspect this was carried out in order to maintain a close alliance with the sisters' family, as the women of the land were believed to be its true guardians. See Trudy Anne Jacobsen, *Lost Goddesses: The denial of female power in Cambodia* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2008), 49-58.

¹⁴K. 485, verses 98 and 99, IC 3, 180.

¹⁵Zhou Daguan, *A record of Cambodia: The land and its people*, trans. Peter Harris (Chiang Mai: Silksworm Books, 2007), 53.

¹⁶Harris, *Cambodian Buddhism*, 25.

¹⁷Zhou Daguan, *A record of Cambodia*, 52.

¹⁸Zhou Daguan, *A record of Cambodia*, 104, note 26.

officiants, although again Zhou was unable to investigate their exact practice.¹⁹ The fact that the word *tapas* appears is indicative of a brahmanical sect (although not necessarily a Śaivite one) – and, as we have learned, only a century earlier Jayarājadevī had been performing *tapas* before her conversion. Additionally, one of the places in which Indradevī taught Buddhist doctrine was Narendrāśrama, literally “the *āśrama* of Narendra”. Although a Sanskrit word usually associated with brahmanical sects, the sense of *āśrama* is a secluded place used specifically for religious instruction. There are two hypotheses to be drawn from this: First, that Zhou confused Buddhist nuns with women who were connected with sects that worshipped brahmanical gods, and second, that the nature of the places in which Buddhist women were occupying at the end of the 13th century precluded Zhou from accessing, or indeed, knowing about, their existence. In any event, we should probably not take Zhou at face value in his dismissal of female Buddhist practitioners, as they appear again in the epigraphic record in the 16th and 17th centuries.

The context of early Middle Cambodia (c. 15th-18th centuries)

Yaśodharapura lost its status as capital of the Khmer Empire in the middle of the 15th century as the Khmer kings moved south of the Tonle Sap.²⁰ Over time, the name of the city evolved into *Mahānagara*, or “great city”. It remained, however, a place of religious significance. Despite a brief backlash against Buddhism at one point in the late classical period, Buddhist motifs were incorporated in the art and architecture of the site, often resulting in hybrid forms that were retained throughout the Middle Period.²¹ Other elements of non-Theravada tradition can also be found; significantly, many concern women. Adhémar Leclère described a very old text he had discovered in a Cambodian pagoda at the end of the nineteenth century that spoke of a female *bodhisattva*, sister of the Buddha Tibangkar, who earned her status by her meritorious acts toward her brother. In his footnotes, he said that this was a tenet peculiar to the Cambodian context; he had never come across such a prediction in any other country or literary tradition. Buddha im-

¹⁹Zhou Daguan, *A record of Cambodia*, 53.

²⁰Harris, *Cambodian Buddhism*, 30.

²¹Pisith Phlong, ‘Prasat Beng Mealea’, Undergraduate thesis, Royal University of Phnom Penh, 2003. The 15th-century carving of the reclining Buddha into the rear wall of the Baphuon temple, originally constructed to contain the *liṅgam* of Udayādityavarman II (r. 1050-1066) is another, albeit later, example.

ages themselves could become infused with ‘femaleness’; a wooden statue of the Buddha, dating to the seventeenth century, was said during the colonial period to have become the dwelling-place of a female *neak tā* or ancestor spirit called *Neang Khmau*, ‘black lady’.²²

Buddhist women in middle Cambodia seem to have been perceived as spiritually equal to their male counterparts. Spouses performed meritorious deeds in tandem, the merit accruing to both or to other persons. One such couple, Naga and Pan, paid for the construction of a temple compound complete with a college for monks. The complex was called *Wat Me Pan* after Pan herself, who was described as ‘a slave’ of Buddhism. Another spousal endowment came from Abhayaraj and his wife Dhamm in 1566. They manufactured images of the Buddha in gold, silver and stone, restored a *chedi*, planted a grove of sacred trees, and commissioned copies of Buddhist texts. It was also common for women to perform good deeds alone.²³ Elite women were particularly zealous in the accomplishment of meritorious acts, undoubtedly due to their greater resources. An inscription dated 1577 was executed at the command of the queen mother:

I here profess my good works ... I, the queen mother Mahākalyāṇa-vattī Śrī Sujātā, princess of noble birth, devout *mahā-upāsikā*. I prostrate myself at the noble lotuses that are the feet of the revered Triple Joy who is our lord, our supreme refuge.... My heart full of *dharma*, I have regularly accomplished many pious acts, up until the present, that is to say the year of the Ox 1499 *śaka*.²⁴

These pious deeds included using her influence to convince her son the king to restore Angkor Wat. Having meditated on the impermanence of existence and the

²² Adhémar Leclère, *Le Bouddhisme au Cambodge* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1889), 223–224, note 6; Ang Chouléan, ‘Le sacré au féminin’, *Seksa Khmer* 10–13 (1987–1990), 7–9.

²³ IMA 11, line 5, in Lewitz, ‘Inscriptions modernes d’Angkor 10–16c’, 224; IMA 17, lines 5–6, in Lewitz, ‘Inscriptions modernes d’Angkor 17–25’, 164; IMA 19, lines 4, 16, in Lewitz, ‘Inscriptions modernes d’Angkor 17–25’, 173–174; IMA 21, lines 14–15, in Lewitz, ‘Inscriptions modernes d’Angkor 17–25’, 179; IMA 29, line 2, in Lewitz, ‘Inscriptions modernes d’Angkor 26–33’, 215; IMA 34, lines 1–5, in Lewitz, ‘Inscriptions modernes d’Angkor 34 et 38’, 284; IMA 37, lines 5–6, in Lewitz, ‘Inscriptions modernes d’Angkor 35, 36, 37 et 39’, 309. This may indicate that Theravada Buddhism in Cambodia reflected very early Buddhist practice in India, when women were not precluded from attaining the highest spiritual level of *arhat*, although in later times rebirth as a woman indicated punishment for bad deeds in the previous life. Barbara Watson Andaya, *The flaming womb: Repositioning women in early modern Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 2008), 76.

²⁴ IMA 2, lines 1–10, French translation, in Lewitz, ‘Textes en kmer moyen: Inscriptions modernes d’Angkor 2 et 3’, 103–104.

physical form, she cut off her ‘luxuriant hair’ and burned it, scattering the ashes over the statues of the Buddha.

The city of Phnom Penh, according to legend, was established as a consequence of an act of Buddhist piety by a woman named Penh, who lived on the banks of the confluence of the Tonlé Sap and Bassac rivers. One day, after the flood-waters had receded, she found four statues of the Buddha and one of Viṣṇu in a *koki* tree. She brought them to her house and established a shrine for them there, exhorting the neighbouring people to construct a small *phnom* (hill) near her house and a sanctuary on top of it. She placed the four Buddha statues in the sanctuary, the statue of Viṣṇu at the foot of the hill, to the east, and invited monks to come and establish a monastery at the foot of the hill on the opposite side.²⁵

Another woman, Neang Paen, had performed good deeds ‘from the age of sixteen to her present age [44]’. These acts included the construction of seventeen statues and one painting of the Buddha in diverse materials; the making of nine banners, three platforms, and an umbrella; the construction of over a thousand stupas; the ordination of nine youths; the production of five religious texts; the offering of five monks’ robes and forty monks’ *vatthabandh*, lengths of cloth worn over the robe; and providing candles and combustible materials for use in temples and monasteries.²⁶ In 1684, a consort of King Jai Jettha III (r. 1677–1702) erected gold, silver and leaden statues of the Buddha, had a banner and a dais made, and caused five manuscripts to be copied, all of which she gave to a monastery. She also gave furniture, clothing, food, and utensils for the monks’ use. The merit of these acts she directed to her husband. As *Cbpab Preah Rajasambhir* stipulated, ‘to form an estimate of a queen, one must look at her pious acts.’²⁷

²⁵ *Chroniques royales du Cambodge*, vol. 1: *Des origines légendaires jusqu’à Paramaraja Ier*, trans. and ed. Mak Phoeun [hereafter *Chroniques 1*], 283; *Chroniques royales du Cambodge*, vol. 2: *De Bona Yat à la prise de Lanvaek (1417–1595)*, trans. and ed. Khin Sok, Paris: École Française d’Extrême-Orient, 1988 [hereafter *Chroniques 2*], 102–105; IMA 4, A, lines 6–15, in Lewitz, ‘Inscriptions modernes d’Angkor 4, 5, 6 et 7’, 108.

²⁶ IMA16a, lines 11–12, in Lewitz, ‘Inscriptions modernes d’Angkor 10–16c’, 236; IMA 35, lines 11–14, in Pou, ‘Inscriptions modernes d’Angkor 35, 36, 37 et 39’, 302; Coedès, ‘La fondation de Phnom Penh’, 8; IMA 26, lines 4–11, in Saveros Lewitz, ‘Inscriptions modernes d’Angkor 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33’, *BEFEO* vol. 60 (1973), 206; Lewitz, ‘Inscriptions modernes d’Angkor 26–33’, 207, n. 17; IMA 28, lines 1–4, in Lewitz, ‘Inscriptions modernes d’Angkor 26–33’, 212; IMA 32, lines 20–27, in Lewitz, ‘Inscriptions modernes d’Angkor 26–33’, 227.

²⁷ IMA 2, lines 3–9, 16–21, in Lewitz, ‘Inscriptions modernes d’Angkor 2 et 3’, 102–103; IMA 30, lines 2, 11–16, in Lewitz, ‘Inscriptions modernes d’Angkor 26–33’, 216–217; *Cbpab Preah Rajasambhir*, verse 37, in Pou and Jenner, ‘Les *cpap*’ ou <codes de conduite> Khmers IV’, 375; Justin

“Entering into religion”

The transference of merit to the karmic bank of others, alive or dead, was a common occurrence, and nothing seems to have incurred more merit than the practice of *puos*. According to the Khmer linguist Saveros Pou, *pos* or *pvas* in the preclassical and classical periods (modern *puos*) meant “to pass from the profane state to the sacred” or “to become a monk, to take the habit”.²⁸ Sometimes it is used in conjunction with object words, as in *pvas jee-a sāmaner*, “performed *puos* to become a novice monk”, found not only in the late classical period, as used in the example given by Pou,²⁹ but also in Middle Cambodian inscriptions.

A series of Old Khmer inscriptions found in Siem Reap, dating to the “middle” period of Cambodian history (16th-18th centuries), refer several times to people voluntarily joining, or causing others to join, a religious order at Mahānagara, the name by which Yaśodharapura became known over time. In most cases, the people who “entered into religion” – men, women, children, slaves, and elite – were “bought out” of the community within days. In 1747 an *oknha*, or court official, named Vaṅsaekkareach,³⁰ was rewarded by the king of Cambodia for having subdued a rebellious princess by being appointed the governor of Kompong Svay. The *oknha* refused, and instead set off for “Preah Bang”, evidently an important site of Buddhist practice at Mahānagara, to perform meritorious acts:

The *oknha* prostrated himself before His Majesty to take his leave... and went to perform good deeds at Preah Bang, causing to *puos* the *jamdev* Ratnakañṇā, who was his maternal aunt; *jamdev* Srīratnakesar, his wife; *neang* Kim, who was his sister-in-law; and his two nieces. All performed *puos* to become *neang chi*. They performed this meritorious act for one day.³¹

This inscription, known as IMA 39, has been the subject of intense discussion due to the reference earlier in the inscription to the princess that raised an army against her own husband. Yet the fact that a group of elite women were apparently

J. Corfield, *The royal family of Cambodia*, Melbourne: The Khmer Language Culture Centre, 1993, 16.

²⁸ Saveros Pou, *Dictionnaire vieux khmer-français-anglais* (Paris: CEDOREK, 1992), 320.

²⁹ Ibid..

³⁰ It is likely that this name, composed of *vaṅsa*, “clan”, *ekka*, “one”, and *reach*, “royal”, indicate a relationship to an earlier king or royal lineage.

³¹ IMA 39, lines 49-52, transliterated in Saveros Pou-Lewitz, ‘Inscriptions modernes d’Angkor 35, 36, 37 et 29’, *Bulletin de l’Ecole Française d’Extrême-Orient* 61 (1974), 301-337, at 320.

ordained as *neang chi* – is hardly less astonishing, as, according to most scholars, Buddhist nuns never existed in Cambodia. What, then, are we to make of the appearance of the term *neang chi* in the middle of the eighteenth century? And under what circumstances were they permitted to become “nuns” for a single day?

The latter question is the easier to answer. The practice of adopting persons so that they could be caused to *puos*, or “enter into religion” temporarily or permanently, became something of a fad in Middle Cambodia. A king (“Chey Chestha”) of the 17th century abdicated four times in order to become a monk; Leclère commented that once “he re-ascended the throne three days after he had descended it; his vocation had spanned 72 hours”.³² Six people, three men and three women, donated one golden and three silver statues of the Buddha and a banner to a temple. Then, ‘filled with sympathy and compassion’, they committed a young slave boy to the monastery. One of the three donors adopted him ‘as if he were a son of her own’. Not only did merit accrue from the act of releasing a slave from bondage; the act of placing the boy in a monastery resulted in significant merit for the adoptive mother. Eleven years later, the same woman travelled across the Tonlé Sap with her family in order to visit relatives living at Mahānagara. In addition to making donations of statues and banners, they placed two more boys in the monastery as novices. *Puos* was a common term in the *Inscriptions modernes d’Angkor* (IMA). The same inscription that contains the term *neang chi* records that the *oknha* Vaṅsaekkareach gave his son Kan to Buddhism through *puos* and then paid for his immediate release. The congregation was asked to record the merit of those that had performed *puos*.³³ Boys in modern Khmer performed *puos* so as to become *sāmaner*; women, apparently, became *neang chi*. What exactly does this phrase mean? Saveros Pou and David Chandler both translated *neang* as ‘nuns’ in their studies of IMA 39; Sok Khin did the same in his analysis of the inscription in relation to the royal chronicles.³⁴ As their focus was on political events and royal alliances, however, none interrogated the meaning of the

³² Adhémar Leclère, *Le Bouddhisme au Cambodge* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1899), 401.

³³ IMA 23, lines 8–12, in Saveros Pou, ‘Inscriptions modernes d’Angkor 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24 et 25’, *BEFEO* 60 (1973), 184; Barbara Watson Andaya, ‘Localising the universal: Women, motherhood and the appeal of early Theravada Buddhism’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 33, 1 (February 2002), 1–30; IMA 12, lines 4–11, in Saveros Pou, ‘Inscriptions modernes d’Angkor 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16a, 16b et 16c’, *BEFEO* 59 (1972), 226; IMA 39, lines 64–70, in Saveros Pou, ‘Inscriptions modernes d’Angkor 35, 36, 37 et 39’, *BEFEO* 61 (1974), 321.

³⁴ Khin Sok, ‘Les chroniques royales et l’inscription modern d’Angkor no. 39’, *BEFEO* 64 (1977), 225–241, at 229.

term *neang chi* itself, or its usage. *Neang* today translates as “miss”, or “young woman”; *daun* is an honorific title given to widows and women past childbearing age. *Daun chi* is the term used to describe the laywomen who renounce secular life and devote themselves to *dhamma*, living either in or out of the *wat* environment. In Middle Cambodia, however, *neang* was a title, meaning “Mistress” or “Lady”, indicating a well-born woman. The Thai chronicles refer to a ‘Nak Chi’ living in Ayutthaya who had originally come from Cambodia at around the same time as the IMA 39 inscription. *Neak* indicated royal descent. These are the only references to *neang* or *neak chi* in the epigraphic record of Cambodia. There are, however, references in Dutch and French records of neighbouring Siam to “*nang chi*” from the 1620s to 1690, including an intriguing mention of a *Wat Nang Chi*, “*wat of the neang chi*” near Ayutthaya.³⁵

The merit that the women received for having spent this time as *neang chi* was transferred to the spiritual benefit of others.³⁶ It does not follow, therefore, that women were believed to have no importance in terms of religious or extra-mundane significance. Similarly, the lack of a *bhikkhunī* tradition should not be read as evidence that women in Cambodian Buddhism, or in terms of spiritual significance, were not as important as men. Indeed, as Peter Skilling remarked regarding the absence of *bhikkhunī* in Siam, although “women could not become nuns in the technical sense (that is to say, as fully ordained *bhikkhunī*), they could still devote themselves to religion as female renunciants (*nang chi* or *mae chi*)”.³⁷ Ashley Thompson has commented that the agents of both supernatural and mundane Middle Cambodia (15th-18th centuries) seem to be distinctly *female* in collective Cambodian cultural memory.³⁸

The folktales and legends of Middle Cambodia, written down for the first time in the late nineteenth or twentieth century, bespeak some agency for women. Legends such as *Rioeng Neang Rasmey Sok* ‘The tale of the young lady of the beautiful hair’ and *Neang Kangrei* ‘Tale of the young lady Kangrei’ tell of female protagonists, including *yakṣiṇī*, female demons, leading their supernatural armies into

³⁵ Skilling, ‘Female renunciants’, 58-59.

³⁶ Andaya, *Flaming womb*, 76-77; David P. Chandler, ‘An eighteenth century inscription from Angkor Wat’, *Journal of the Siam Society* vol. 59, no. 2 (July 1971) 23; Pou, ‘Inscriptions modernes d’Angkor, 35-39’, 324.

³⁷ Skilling, ‘Female renunciants’, 55.

³⁸ Ashley Thompson, ‘Introductory remarks between the lines: Writing histories of Middle Cambodia’, in Barbara Watson Andaya (ed.), *Other pasts: Women, gender and history in early modern Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii at Manoa, 2000), 47.

battle and fighting to the death. In *Rieong Kang Han* ('Tale of Lucky Han'), Han is chased up a tree by a tiger; a coward, he remains there until his wives rescue him, driving the beast away so that he may descend from his undignified roost. In addition to being represented as physically braver, women are often more intelligent and quick-witted than men, whose greed and laziness land them in hot water time and time again.³⁹ The Cambodian *Jātaka*, tales of the Buddha's lives, similarly reflect women as purposeful agents rather than passive.⁴⁰ The presence of Preah Neang Dharani, the Earth Goddess whom Buddha calls forth from the earth to vanquish the armies of the demon Māra is testament to the acceptability of agency for women in Cambodia throughout the premodern period, even within the usually conservative tenets of Buddhism.

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, Adhémard Leclère, then *Résident Supérieur du Cambodge*, saw a woman offer a fresh fish to a flock of birds. He asked her what motivated this act of piety. She replied,

I offer this fish to the birds, who are beings like myself, in the name of my father and mother who are long dead, to my grandparents whom I knew, to my ancestors whom I did not know, that they can be delivered of their sufferings, happier if they are happy in the beyond, for they will come and stay near me so they will protect me.⁴¹

Perhaps, after all, the reason that there was no option for remaining within a Buddhist order for women as a *bhikkhunī* was precisely because of the agency accorded women in premodern Cambodia. The impermanence of *puos* actually enabled more possibilities for making merit – as donatrices, as mothers committing their sons to the religious life, and as *neang chi*.

³⁹ *Rieong maya srei*, in *Kambujasuriya* 7-9 (1938), 327-337; *Rieong Kang Han*, in *Kambujasuriya* 8, 4-6 (1938), 45-53.

⁴⁰ Muriel Paksin Carrison (comp.), *Cambodian folk stories from the Gatiloke*, trans. Kong Chhean (Rutland, Vermont; Tokyo, Japan: Charles E. Tuttle, 1987), 16; Leclère, *Le Bouddhisme au Cambodge*, 223-224, note 6.

⁴¹ Leclère, *Le Bouddhisme au Cambodge*, 386.

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Buddhicizing or Ethnicizing the State: Do the Sinhala Saṅgha Fear Muslims in Sri Lanka?

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Sri Lanka, a predominantly Theravāda state, is recovering from 30 years of civil war between the minority Tamil (largely Hindu) rebels and the State. Yet the recovery is slowed or even reversed by an extreme recentralization of power and an attempt to further 'Buddhicize' socio-politics. Part of this process is the campaign led by the Bodu Bala Sēnā (BBS) - a Saṅgha-led organization calling for severe restriction on the Muslim population and their way of life, including *halāl* food, wearing the *hijab*, and calling to prayers (especially in the early morning and late at night). The Lanka Saṅgha seems to be learning from their counterparts in Burma and Thailand, where there is strong anti-Muslim sentiment. There is evidence that certain political powers are indirectly (and perhaps even directly) supporting this group.

This essay attempts to understand the ideology of the BBS and argue that the modern Saṅgha in a majority Buddhist state such as Lanka are faced with a challenge in the shape of modern democracy and the multinational nature of their society. However, they seem to draw strength from a hegemonic past rather than acknowledge the reality of a multi-faith, multi-cultural world order. It will need a combination of Saṅgha and lay scholars and activists to find answers to allay this political anxiety and avert the carnage it promises to deliver.

Introduction

Buddhism is generally perceived as a religion of peace and non-violence. Yet empirically this hardly describes Buddhism in many countries where it is the state

religion or the religion of the majority. Burma, Cambodia, Sri Lanka and Thailand have produced and/or continue to produce protracted and bloody violence between the Buddhist majority and the ethnic/religious minorities. Even now, Saṅgha-led violence both in Burma¹ and in Sri Lanka is diminishing the hope of democratic recovery. This phenomenon has created a paradoxical paradigm in academic analyses of Buddhism, and is problematic for all who treat Buddhism as a philosophy of *ahiṃsā*, the moral principle of non-violence that is theoretically fundamental to all Buddhist traditions.

In this respect, Buddhism is not unique, for all major religions preach in favour of peace and generally deprecate violence, but tend to behave otherwise. The impact of 9/11, even after a decade, has generated an industry level production of academic material on the theme of religious violence and its socio-political ramifications. The major part of this work produced by Western scholars (and scholars located in the West) has gravitated around Islam and Judaism (Al-Rasheed 2009, Eagleton 2005, Habeck 2006, Juergensmeyer 2011, 2000, Kirsch 2009). This is not surprising, given the level of internal and cross-border conflict seen in countries where Islam is either the state religion or the religion of the majority. The domino effect of the so-called ‘Arab Spring’, the continuing conflict in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Syria, and the possible nuclear programme in Iran are all grist to this mill. So are the Israeli military actions and reactions.

Violence that is promoted by interpretations of a given religion is by no means limited to Islam or Judaism. Hindu-Muslim tension divided India at her independence, and the animosity between these groups still sometimes erupts in serious violence, as happened in Gujarat (Ghassem-Fachandi 2012) and in Delhi over the Babri Mosque (Misra 2012). Sikh political separatism and internal sectarianism have also been very violent (Chima 2010).

At present there appear to be at least three schools of thought concerning the relationship of Buddhism to violence:

1. The present, often violent, revival of Buddhism, especially in the Theravāda states, is largely part of the ‘return of religions’ response to the ill effects of globalization and the cultural hegemony that is being imposed (Berkwitz, 2008, Juergensmeyer 2010, Jerryson 2009, Kippenberg 2011).
2. Some have pointed out that modern Buddhism with all its fluidity and varieties is not a trans-global philosophy but a practice that is fertilized by

¹ See situation report on the Buddhist-Muslim riots: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-21935344>. Accessed on 26 March 2013.

- indigenous cultures, so that it produces local expressions such as Burmese Buddhism, Sinhala Buddhism, Thai Buddhism or Korean Buddhism. Such Buddhism has its own cultural DNA, either legitimizing or opposing violence (Blackburn 2010, Brekke 2013).
3. The third school argues that Buddhism, like other institutionalized religions, has used violence to advance and establish itself. Various arguments based on interpretations of texts such as the Pali Canon and the *Mahāvamsa* have been used to justify such violence. These arguments have given rise to apparent oxymorons such as ‘Buddhist Warfare’ (Jenkins 2010, Maher, 2010 and Jerryson 2010).

There is also a particular debate about Sinhalese Buddhism. This focuses on how violence has been practised and propagated by the Sinhala Saṅgha. Some have argued that Sinhala Buddhism is always a tool of state power legitimization (Bradwell 1978). Thus it has “betrayed” its essentials (Tambiah 1987). This is so because in Lanka, now as well as in the past, the Saṅgha are more than king-makers (Seneviratne 1997). This trajectory has developed a just war ideology in Sinhalese Buddhism (Bartholomeusz 2002), as in Lanka the past is always present (Kemper 1991). While these authors have thrown some new light on the topic, they have not yet been able to reach any overarching or encompassing conclusions which command general acceptance.

This essay is a brief analysis of a new, yet exceptionally vibrant, Buddhist militant agitation against the local Muslim community and how that community identifies itself in trade, politics and even socio-demography in Lanka. The state is currently grappling with the challenge of reconciliation, reconstruction and political justice after thirty years of one of Asia’s most violent civil wars. This new movement offers another window onto a topic still far too little studied: the historical role of the Saṅgha in the society and politics of Si Lanka.

Bodu Bala Sēnā²

Many sections of Sri Lankan civil society have been caught by surprise by the appearance in many parts of the island of a systematic anti-Muslim campaign. This has largely been mobilized by a new organization called the Bodu Bala Sēnā (BBS),

²Most Sinhala names in this article are transliterated according to the traditional philological conventions, but names which in Sri Lanka have a commonly used spelling keep it. The name Gñāṇissara (see below) is a necessary compromise.

“The Army of Buddhist Power”. The BBS is mainly a lay organization, but the leadership is impressive, for it includes several prominent members of the Saṅgha. Ven. Kiraṇa Vimalajōti Thera is chairman; Ven. Galagoḍaattē Gñāṇissara Thera is national secretary and spokesperson (and particularly militant), Ven. Haputalē Paññāsāra Thera and Ven. Vitārandeniyē Nanda Thera are members of the executive committee. All are members of the Amarapura Nikāya. Dilanta Vitānagē, a senior lecturer in history at Sri Jayewardenepura University, has joined them as their theoretician.

The BBS is far better organized than any traditional Saṅgha organization, such as the Siyam or Amarapura Nikāya and their branches. It makes good use of information technology such the worldwide web³ and social networking sites. Its Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Wikipedia pages are more active than many Lankan state agency public profiles. They use Facebook and cell phone texting to organize their violent protest rallies at short notice without attracting the attention of the police. In many ways this neatly fits into what Juergensmeyer has labelled ‘e-mail ethnicity’.⁴

By this display of practical efficiency, so alien to the traditional Saṅgha, the BBS has projected itself as the most potential ethno-religious outfit among those seeking to intervene in the volatile postwar polity of Lanka.

Aims and activities of the BBS

The BBS started its national campaign by demanding reform of, *inter alia*, major centres of Buddhist pilgrimage: the traditional “eight great sites” (*aṭṭa maha sthāna*), including the Bo tree, at Anuradhapura; the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy; Kataragama; Kelaniya Raja Maha Vihāra; and Siripāda (= Adam’s Peak). All have become extremely wealthy down the centuries through the donations of the pious, but their accounts are not audited and they are accountable to no one. This concern seemed to be in commendable contrast to the customary lethargy of other Sinhala Buddhist organizations. However, the BBS soon moved on to rhetoric attacking Christians and, even more, Muslims. What started as a protest against some Muslim traders, who allegedly sold T-shirts and pants carrying the image of the Buddha, soon grew into a national campaign to boycott Muslim trading places and avoid selling land/property to Muslims. It then focussed on

³<http://bodubalasena.org/sinhala/>

⁴Mark Juergensmeyer, *Inside the global rebellion*, 2008: <http://rationalist.org.uk/articles/1811/inside-the-global-rebellion>.

the complex issue of *halal* food certification⁵, demanding that the government completely ban it. By March 2013 over a hundred national producers and some multinational companies had withdrawn their halal certification. The Speaker of the Parliament, Chamal Rajapaksa (elder brother of the President), had ordered the cafeteria in Parliament not merely to remove all halal food but also to sell pork, which till then had been banned out of consideration for the Muslim MPs.⁶

The BBS has also destroyed, or at the very least incited others to destroy, Muslim sites. In Dambulla a crowd attacked and seriously damaged a mosque. There are several amateur videos of this incident posted on YouTube; see for example <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-BEzluoMWMk>. The incumbent of the famous Buddhist temple at Dambulla, Īnāmaluṇe Śrī Sumaṅgala, can be seen inciting the crowd, while police and soldiers are standing around doing nothing, and some Tamil civilians are praying in fear. The monk argues that Dambulla, having an old and famous Buddhist temple, must be reserved entirely for Buddhists. What the film does not show is that the mosque being attacked is a fairly small building down a side street which no visitor would normally notice. Of course, attacking the mosque would be indefensible wherever it stood, but this point illustrates that the anti-Muslim outrages are finding issues where there were none and have to create their own enemies. Comparable incidents have occurred elsewhere. In Colombo (Dehiwala) a crowd led by the BBS entered a mosque by force and removed all the files, computers and documents, claiming that the mosque was supporting terrorism. In Kalutara they moved building material from a site where a mosque was expanding. In Anuradhapura an ancient Sufi centre was destroyed. There is also a clip showing Ven.Gaḷagoḍaattē Gñāṇissara Thera forcing his way into the Government's archaeology department to demand action from the Minister: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJNbKWYNIiE>.

It is evident that the present government has come either to tolerate or even to support the BBS, at least indirectly. The BBS has had private meetings not only with the President and his brother, the powerful Defense Secretary, but also sections of the diplomatic corps, including the Indian, Iranian and US embassies, who apparently fear becoming a target of their campaigns. There have been me-

⁵ *Halal* means "permissible" under Islamic law. In this context it refers to how food should be prepared, and in particular how animals should be slaughtered. Muslims are not supposed to buy meat which is not in some way officially designated as *halal*.

⁶ In Sri Lanka, members of the largest religious communities, Buddhists and Hindus, rarely or never eat pork, though it is not forbidden. The Speaker's action was thus nothing but a gratuitous insult to Muslims.

dia reports that the President has offered ministerial advisory posts to some key monks in the BBS and invited its ideologue Vitānagē to become Secretary of the national Ministry for Buddhist Affairs. Journalists have suspected that this is the handiwork of the war hero brother of the President, Defense Secretary Ghōtābaya Rajapakse, intended to lead up to a launch of a Saṅgha led political party in the 2014-15 presidential elections.

By the end of March 2013, when this is being written, the political power of the BBS has been shown by the way the state has enacted two of their demands. First, the government has declared that it is not necessary for any business entity to apply or accredit Halal certification and it is only the responsibility of Muslims to adhere to such rule.

The impact of the second enactment will be more drastic. It has been decided to ban any hospital, whether state or private, from performing vasectomy or any tubal ligation surgery on a Sinhalese. This is to satisfy the BBS, who are arguing that the growth rate of the Sinhalese is far lower than that of Muslims in Lanka, and every effort must be made to reverse this. However, Lanka's population density is already much higher than that of Brazil, China, Ethiopia, Nigeria or Turkey, which are among the most populous states in the world. This is due to its limited landmass as an island. Lanka has managed to control its birth rate far better than its South Asian neighbours, and thus achieved remarkable standards in education, health, and other features of the social index. Mismanaged population growth only promises further damage to the already fragile economy.

Buoyed by its success, the BBS has launched a campaign to ban the *niqāb* (the veil worn by Muslim women) in public and to restrict the design and the siting of new mosques. They also demand that all Muslim places of worship be monitored by the state. They are said to be hoping to propose a *Bhūmi Putra*⁷ type of special tax on non-Buddhist business projects, and to restrict any land purchase by Muslims in areas such as Anurādhapura, Daṁbulla, Kandy, Kelaniya and Mahiyangana that are considered particularly important parts of the Sinhala cultural heritage. However, the most important political question is why the rulers seem to endorse and even encourage such demands.

⁷ Literally: "Son of the soil" in Sanskrit. This political term for the dominant indigenous population was coined in Malaysia by Tunku Abdul Raman to refer to Malays, and further popularized there by Mahathir Mohamad.

The Muslims of Lanka

Academic studies of the Muslims in Lanka are sparse, and those that exist are mostly anthropological. Little has been done to analyse the role they have played as an ‘in-between’ community during the last 30 years of civil war, or for that matter since Independence. But Muslim identity has been officially represented in the state affairs of Lanka for over a century. In 1889, a Muslim member was appointed to the state assembly as an expansion of the 1833 Colebrooke-Cameron reforms (Nissan and Stirrat 1990). Today there are 14 elected MPs representing two major parties and two Islamic parties. While this under-represents Muslims, in that they are 10

The Muslim-Buddhist relationship has been amicable compared to that between Sinhalese and Tamils. While the origin of the Muslim community in Lanka is still debated, Muslims have been present at least since the 15th CE, as they were first contacted by Portuguese traders round 1450. The recent history of Muslims in Lanka has generally been one of coexistence, though in 1915 there were island-wide anti-Muslim riots (Ali 1981, Kannangara 1984). During the recent civil war the Muslim community suffered huge social and economic damage from the LTTE as well as from state militarization. The LTTE in 1990 expelled some 90,000 Muslims overnight at gunpoint. While there was some element of support for the separatist cause from the Muslim polity, this ethnic expulsion pushed the Muslims to seek security in the state and in return help the state to defeat the LTTE and/or negate the Tamil demand for equality. The state used them as a ‘buffer’ community to gather intelligence or launch military operations. Both these events and increased exposure to Islamic culture via the employment opportunities in the Gulf have made some sections of the Muslims create their own identity-based socio-politics. After the war, this may have irritated the radical monks who desire to hegemonize Buddhism in the state. However, the vast majority of the Muslim community has stood with the Sinhala Buddhists in their fight for the unitary status of Lanka, and in general the Gulf states have backed Lanka when it needed international support at forums such as the UNHRC. Therefore the BBS agitation demands a much wider analysis than a Buddhist-Muslim dichotomy. It appears that the Saṅgha are eager to reposition themselves as ‘State Custodians’ in the aftermath of military victory.

Postwar Buddhist Politics

Even four years after the end of the civil war, divisions in Sri Lanka remain very deep. The wounds of war are still bleeding. There is no attempt to meet the Tamils' democratic demands. Tamils who have returned to their homes in the former war zone have to live in conditions of inhuman poverty. The international community at the UNHRC and in other forums is repeatedly calling for accountability for war crimes. The Sinhalese population, once jubilant over their victory, is frustrated, if not furious, at the abysmal corruption and nepotism. In such an inflammable socio-political situation, what is the need for a well-organized outfit of this nature? Why is the BBS on an anti-Muslim campaign? Is it only a stand-alone organization, or a symptom of a wider political undercurrent which has been developing in Lanka since the war? Why do the Sinhala Saṅgha need to identify an 'enemy' they have to defeat? Are they set to continue the course of violent ethno-religious violent nationalism which they have been pursuing? Or are they turning further inward in an attempt at self-defense against the ever-changing world around them?

In 2009, the modern state of Lanka recentralized her strong Sinhala Buddhist structure. The total defeat of the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) – until then considered one of world's most effective political terror organizations – reaffirmed the political will of the Sinhala elites and their voters. For them, Lanka must forever remain a tightly centralized Sinhala Buddhist state, under a Sinhala Buddhist leader, no matter the democratic/human cost. No account is to be taken of the fact that Lanka is a multicultural island that survives on a dependent economy. There is no doubt that the present Rajapakse government, unlike its predecessors, steadfastly preserved the Sinhala determination to defeat the LTTE irrespective of internal and occasional (often marginal) international pressures. With hindsight we can see that building up a 'just war' ideology to safeguard the territorial integrity of the *Dhammadīpa* ("the Island of Buddhism") and the sovereignty of the Sinhala was facilitated by the Saṅgha. This uncompromising stand and the rhetoric of a minority, the highly mobilized radicalized Sinhala (largely southern) Saṅgha, plus the passive support of the majority of the Saṅgha of all major *nikāyas* across the island, helped to create the military mindset which won the war in 2009. Lanka since then has repeatedly rejected the credible UNHRC allegation of mass civilian killing and other punishable war crimes. Moreover, Lanka has yet to give due credit for her unforgiving victory to the two entities most responsible. The first of these is China, Lanka's regional superpower guardian which underwrote the

victory against the LTTE with weapons and intelligence, and by blocking international pressure (Höglund and Orjuela 2012, Marshall 2010:328). A recent World Bank report says that China has already invested/loaned up to US \$ 40 billion to Lanka. While there has never been public accountability for such massive funds in Lanka, at least China may be enjoying its growing influence in Lanka. The second entity is monastic leaders such as Aturaliyē Ratana, Bengamuve Nālaka and Elle Guṇavaṃsa, who vigorously Buddhicised the war, and the thousands of monks who paraded to demand a military solution. However, it appears that the rulers who have defeated the LTTE have only fulfilled one of the expectations of the militant Saṅgha. Their wider aim to (re-)establish an ethno-religious Sinhala Buddhist state is advancing more slowly than they had hoped. This is the back-drop against which the BBS is coming to the fore.

Sinhala Buddhism and Minorities

The attitude of the Sinhala Saṅgha towards the minority faiths – be they Mahāyāna Buddhists, Catholics, Christians, Hindus or Muslims – has been a flashpoint. The Sinhala Saṅgha are not known for their tolerance of other faiths and practices if they perceive them to be a threat of any kind. This issue is relevant to the broader debate of how minority rights, and even human rights at large, fare within Theravāda Buddhism. Does it support the principle of minority rights, as understood in the liberal Western tradition? The answer is far from clear.

L.P.N. Perera, a Lankan scholar of Pali, has argued that human rights are ‘in complete accord with Buddhist thought, and may be said to be nothing new to Buddhism in conception’ (Perera 1991:21). He believes that one can easily find supportive texts within the Pāli canon for every article of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. On the other hand Peter Junger, a Buddhist and Professor of Law, maintains, “The concept of human rights is not likely to be useful in . . . following the Buddha Dharma” (Junger 1998: 55). The debate here in fact should be not between Buddhism and a liberal version of minority rights, but whether or not Buddhism within its doctrine of individual salvation has enough concern for political debate on such matters. Are such ‘this-worldly’ ‘rights’ helpful in understanding human suffering and its path to nirvāṇa? Discussion of such rights tends to derive from the Abrahamic religious tradition. Further, the modern legal language of rights without doubt is located in Western philosophical views of life and society. Nevertheless, even if its focus is not of this world, can Buddhism afford to dismiss such political issues as irrelevant? And even if Buddhism

supports such concepts as human rights, can the dominant cultural paradigm in which modern Buddhism survives so apply the Pali teachings that they become a practical reality? Damien Keown, after editing a volume on the topic, concludes that the debate is open-ended, because most Buddhist scholars are still far more interested in historical Buddhism than in discussing its relevance in the 21st century (Keown, Prebish, and Rollen 1997). While the scholarship on this is growing (Harding 2007, Hoffman 2008, Mearns 1999, Schmidt-Leukel 2006, 2004, Traer 1988), it may take more vigorous analysis and argument before we can arrive at any common ground – if indeed that will ever be possible. The Sinhala Saṅgha, with their entrenched ethno-religious nationalism as it has operated for more than fifteen centuries since the writing of the *Mahāvamsa*, will need more convincing than by being told what the Western discourse on minority human rights has to offer them.

Trans-localizing Buddhist politics

The intrinsically interwoven relationship between the Theravādin Saṅgha and their states is a well-researched fact in the power politics of South (east) Asia. Its historical dimension is to be found in the influential *Vamsa* literature of Lanka. I have elsewhere contributed to this research to contextualize the modern Saṅgha-state nexus in Lanka.⁸ The post-LTTE resistance by the Sinhala Saṅgha and its political mobilization are grounded on two historical factors. First, the political heritage of Saṅgha genealogy: from the Ven. Mahānāma of the Mahāvihāra, the first author of the *Mahāvamsa*, to the Ven. Gaṅgoḍavīla Sōma, the modern crusader of a semi-urban charismatic Buddhist evangelism, there remains a self-defined cosmological responsibility and a belief that the Saṅgha has uncontested authority to define the Sinhala state. The late Ven. Professor Walpola Rāhula articulated this in his *Bhikṣuvāgē Urumaya* (later *The Heritage of the Bhikkhu*), now in its ninth edition and considered the manifesto for modern Saṅgha politics. Second, the Sinhala Saṅgha have historically adopted, imported and exported an ethno-religious template of interpretation to understand and respond to the changes in their society. They have borrowed and localized concepts and modalities from other Theravādin contemporaries. When challenging the deeply colonized state in the 1800s they worked with the Burmese and Thai Saṅghas. An independent self-rule thesis was then borrowed from their Bengali counterparts. Anagārika

⁸See my thesis, listed in the Bibliography below.

Dharmapāla, while not a monk, projected the influential ‘Protestant Buddhist’ concept of ‘Sinhala Bauddhayā’⁹. Dharmapāla, with the help and advice of American war veteran Colonel Olcott, borrowed his agitation and its models from the Protestant Christian missionaries. Even the media-based Buddhist evangelism of Ven. Sōma, continued by others like the Ven. Īnāmaluven Śrī Sumaṅgala of Rangiri Vihāra of Dambulla, is following in the footsteps of British and American religious preachers who exploit the public space via the modern media, including the worldwide internet. Ann Blackburn, in her *Locating Buddhism* (2010), has investigated this history. Such borrowing is followed by adaptation to local circumstances; for instance, the Amarapura Nikāya, founded by importing ordination traditions from Burma in the early 19th century, broke into segments divided by Sinhala caste identities. The resultant ontological insecurities have been further deepened by forces such as market based liberal democracy, its globalization of western values, the growth of newer religions (especially Pentecostal Christianity) or the rise of a trader class like the Muslims. I argue that concepts such as minority rights and federalism have fallen victims of the Saṅgha internationalization which fuelled not only the just war thesis but also rejected all talk of federalism or power sharing and insisted that the state be recentralized. This Saṅgha worldview has generated both violent and non-violent responses. The BBS appears to have developed in this context.

Building Buddhatva – Buddhism as a Political Entity and Ideology

Scholars agree that nation state formation in South Asia has taken a direction opposite to that which it took in Europe. In South Asia, the struggles for independence from colonization by the West did not aim to build an overarching state led by a civic society with a single ethno-religious cultural identity. The multinational, multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-cultural nature of South Asian societies prevented such uniformity and civic consciousness. The post-colonial struggles for democracy in these states bear witness to the fact that independence was perceived as an opportunity for a particular ethnic group rather than for the entire state. In Lanka, the Sinhala considered independence to be their chance for majority rule. This is proved by many post independent undemocratic acts, such as the disenfranchising of the Indian Tamils, making Sinhala the only offi-

⁹“The Sinhala Buddhist”. This is the name of the newspaper that Dharmapāla founded in 1906. See Gombrich and Obeyesekere, p.207, and the whole of chapter 6 of that book for a historical analysis of “Protestant Buddhism”, a concept invented by Obeyesekere.

cial state language, giving religious supremacy to Buddhism, and discrimination in university admissions. On the other hand, after escaping from colonial rule, the Tamils seem to have dreamed of a largely autonomous, confederated or even independent homeland. Such unfulfilled, diametrically opposed, political ambitions eventually led to the thirty years of civil war.

The Sinhala Saṅgha in spiritual terms have renounced this world and are helping others to find nirvāṇa. However, they have had a historical socio-political mandate too: to build and maintain a state in which the ethno-religious ideology of Sinhala Buddhism dominates politics and society. Their aim recorded in the *Vaṃsa* literature is political rather than religious, or at least very different from the teachings of the Pāli canonical texts. This political Buddhism is often projected against an identified 'other'. For the Sinhala Saṅgha, Mahāyāna Buddhism, Hinduism, Catholicism, Christian missionaries, Islam, and the peoples of those faiths have often provided such otherness. Some have argued that the Sinhala Saṅgha, through their agitation against the other and their political project of building a Buddhist state, have taken the same path as the Hindu nationalist mobilization for Hindutva:¹⁰ that is, to redesign the state of Lanka from a Sinhala Buddhist perspective. They intend to make every aspect of Lankan society an extended part of Sinhala Buddhism. By this, the Tamils in Lanka are to be Buddhist Tamils; Christians and Muslims are to practise their culture and religion so that it reflects the overarching 'Buddhistness' of Lanka.

There is an extended body of literature on Hindutva, (Kuruvachira 2006, Sarkar 1996) however; in Lanka the Saṅgha's resistance politics is still too little studied. My own research has revealed that many scholars (Gananath Obeyesekere, H. L. Seneviratne, S. J. Tambiah and many western academics) have investigated Sinhala Saṅgha politics from an anthropological perspective, but not through the lens of political science. On the other hand, modern political science has not been good at explaining some of the transformations happening in ethno-religious politics in societies like Lanka. The contemporary Western scholarship that claims to find a 'return of religion' (Appleby 2000, Juergensmeyer 2003) is unconvincing, as religion never left the Sinhala or the polity they produce. Therefore, this is not a return but a reassertion of how deeply Buddhistized Sinhala politics are. Popular Western matrices such as (post)modernism (Abeysekara 2008, 2002) are even less useful for understanding the religious politics of Lanka.

¹⁰Hindutva simply means the Hindu way of life. But this in modern politics (of India) denotes restructuring the state and society on Hindu religious terms.

Are the waves of Saṅgha political resistance in Lanka showing signs of a ‘Buddhist Zionism’? By this I mean to suggest that to the eschatological belief that the Sinhala are a chosen race destined to carry out the redemptive role of Buddhism, with Lanka as their promised land, is attached a new militancy and sense of urgency in fulfilling the mission to protect and defend Buddhist territory, by force if necessary. Historical evidence from the Tamil/Hindu/Indian invasions to the modern LTTE terror campaign is neatly fitted into idiosyncratically selected portions of the *Vaṃsa* literature. Such a mindset will naturally search for every possible sign that the *Mahāvāṃsa* pattern continues, and identify the ‘enemies’ of the *dhamma* and its Sinhala custodians. The Sinhala Saṅgha and their ultra-nationalist lay allies are quick to provide long lists of such ‘enemies’, from the European colonial powers to UN funded INGOs and recently even to the Chief Justice of the supreme court.¹¹

Jonathan Fox, a world authority on ethno-religious violence, has doubted that democracy can take root where religious beliefs justify violence at societal level (Fox 2012a, 2012b). I suspect that 1948 produced two ‘Zionist’ states: one Israel, built on the Judeo-Christian faith, and the other Lanka, very surprisingly based on some interpretation of Buddhism. Defending the purity of their land in both these states is equated to defending their faiths: Israel expands its Biblical boundaries to recreate the Promised Land, while Lanka is seen as the territory of the *Dhammadīpa*, cleansed and given by the Buddha, to be ruled without sharing it, even temporarily, with citizens who are defined as ‘other’. It seems the Sinhala Saṅgha have constructed their socio-politics on a cosmion¹² basis: they perceive their country as a physical metaphor for the eternal resting place and their contemporary political structure as representing the cosmic order. They perceive their political leaders as divinely appointed (or relatives of the Buddha) and their army as sons of eternity engaged in a divine war of Armageddon. The Ven. Elle Guṇavaṃsa’s 50 odd war-songs, written, produced and distributed among the troops during the peak of the war, vividly embody this lurid eschatology.

¹¹ In January 2013, Dr. Shirani Bandaranayake, the first female Chief Justice of Lanka, was sacked by the President for refusing to approve a bill he had presented. The BBS and other pro-regime monks were quick to brand her an agent of Western powers.

¹² This concept is explained and applied in my thesis: see Raghavan pp.201 ff.

Saṅgha-Muslim animosity

It is in this context that we may understand the BBS, whose *raison d'être* is to oppose Muslim growth and expansionism under a corrupt and unfair economic system. It is statistically true that the Muslims in Lanka have grown in population, economic strength and political influence. Their religious identity is the core of their self-definition. Just as the Tamils of Lanka look to their Indian cousins for political and cultural inspiration, Lankan Muslims have looked to the pan-Islamic world for solidarity (McGillivray 2011). This international affiliation has grown stronger in recent decades thanks to the income generated by nearly two million Lankans working in the Gulf region. To this we must add the recent transformation, partly visible and partly suspected, which Muslims in Lanka have attached to their religious identity. A few decades ago, it would have been extremely rare to see a Muslim woman in a black dress with her entire face covered. Now, however, full-length *hijab* with the *niqāb* has not only become common among Muslim women, but in some parts of eastern Lanka where Muslim are the majority it has become compulsory. Islamic trading, which was traditionally focused on areas such as catering, gems, and agencies recruiting labour for the Middle East has also been transformed: today there is open Islamic leadership in sectors such as manufacturing, finance and key commodities.

However, why should such growth be an actual or perceived threat to Sinhala Buddhism? What actions or inactions of the wider Muslim community appear so threatening to the Sinhala mind, and especially to the Saṅgha? Can the Muslims, Christians and Hindus understand these Zionist tendencies in Sinhala Buddhism and deal with them without contributing to the natural desire for retaliatory violence? What should be the role of the government and the cross-ethnic civil society in fostering such an understanding? To answer such fundamental questions is urgent if there is to be any hope of stemming the mistrust, antagonism and rivalry that is being amplified by the BBS. Southeast Asian Theravāda states such as Burma, Thailand and Laos have already developed full-blown Buddhist-Muslim conflicts that are threatening those states. Can Sinhala Buddhism afford to repeat such a Buddhist-Muslim riot as happened a century ago in 1915? Can the Saṅgha in Lanka not find a way to address Muslim fears and concerns by dialogue and negotiation? What can the Muslim elites and trading communities do towards this?

No religious teaching gets into the heart or mind of the believers just as its founder preached it. They select and 'tailor make' its basics. That is how we end up

having Sinhala Buddhism (or Thai Buddhism, Roman Catholicism etc.) instead of the Buddhism found in the Pāli Canon. There again, scholars disagree about the original teaching of Gautama Buddha. However, what is important is not such quibbles about authenticity, but how the religion is applied and practiced now. Does it promote peace and harmony, or violence and hatred?

The role of religion in instigating and promoting violent conflict is not a linear progression, nor is it unique to any one religion. In real life it is contextualized and ‘menu selected,’ and therefore highly emotive and effective. Ethno-religious violence has killed more people than any disease during the last two centuries. Religiously inflected conflict offers avenues into power politics that are wider than others, because it is based on a historicized version of the religion and the cultural heritage of a particular ethnic group. Moreover, while each religion tries to set up universality within its own sphere (Pan-Buddhism: Vishva Paramārtha Bauddha Mārga, Pan-Islamic Brotherhood, Vishva Hindu Parishad, etc.), it also seeks to stake truly universal claims.

The self-interested ideology of powerful elites often provides them with the motive and excuse to use violence in their search for legitimation. In its extreme form this ‘cost effective’ strategy is justified by claims that they are defending themselves against a cosmic war of persecution. In order to hold on to power, they are ready even to resort to war themselves.

Yet the question remains unanswered. How is it that the Sinhala Saṅgha, who have witnessed a non-stop blood bath in their *Dhammadīpa* for the last 60 years, can find the rationale for another stage of such violence? Have we expected too much of the Saṅgha in Sinhala Buddhism, or have the Saṅgha got it wrong from the very beginning?

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Brahmanical Terminology and The Straight Way in the *Tevijja Sutta*

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The *Tevijja Sutta* (DN 13) has long been the subject of multifaceted scholarly debate. In the *sutta* the young Brahmins Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja talk of *brahmasahavyatā*, a term understood by Buddhist tradition to mean ‘companionship with Brahṃā’, the overall theme of the *sutta*. Much of what has been written about the *sutta* concerns the Buddha’s lengthy response to the young Brahmins, but in this paper I would like to contribute to the discussion by focusing on what the *Brahmins* say in the *sutta*. I will argue that hidden in plain sight among the words of Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja there is a remnant of an attested Brahmanical expression, and that this, with other evidence, provides a context for understanding the Brahmins in the *Tevijja Sutta*, and therefore for understanding the Buddha’s teaching in the *sutta*.

Introduction

The *Tevijja Sutta* (DN 13) has been the subject of scholarly debate at least since the days of T. W. Rhys Davids, who supposed the *sutta* to be “the Buddhist answer to the Upanishad theory” (1899, p. 298). To pick just a few voices out of the ensuing debate: E. J. Thomas complained in 1927 that Rhys Davids’ translation “gave a specious resemblance to an allusion to Upanishadic doctrine not elsewhere found in the suttas” (Thomas, p. 125, n. 2), while Chandra invoked the *Tevijja Sutta* in his 1971 paper *Was Early Buddhism Influenced by the Upanisads?* More recently, R. Gombrich (1996, 2009) has found references in the *Tevijja Sutta* to doctrines and even stylistic features found in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* in particular.

Much of what is written about the *sutta* concerns the Buddha's lengthy response to the young Brahmins Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja, who talk of reaching *brahma-sahavyatā*. According to the commentaries and to the etymologies in the PED, this term means 'companionship with Brahmā'. Scholars have debated what this means in the context of the *sutta*, and as we saw above Rhys Davids effectively set the terms for the debate with his words "answer" and "Upanishad". But I will show that among the words of Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja there is a remnant of an attested Brahmanical expression, and I will suggest that on the basis of this expression we should relate the concerns of Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja not primarily to the Upanishads, but to *Brāhmaṇa*-style exposition of ritual paths to a higher world.¹

That is to say, in this paper I would like to contribute to the discussion by focusing on what the *Brahmins* say in the *Tevijja Sutta*. In practical terms this means what Vāseṭṭha says, as he usually speaks for the pair. Before the Buddha's reaction to the words of Vāseṭṭha, there are the words themselves. Before the long pericopes, standardized dialogue, and repetitions, before Vāseṭṭha is reduced to a stock figure agreeing to all that is said, at the beginning of the *Tevijja Sutta* Vāseṭṭha says things that are unusual and deserve our attention. I will argue that these clues provide a context in their own right for understanding Brahmin concerns as portrayed in the *Tevijja Sutta*. Through evidence which I believe has not been brought to bear previously on the question, I will endeavor to show that the words of Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja can be brought into an unexpectedly close relationship to specific Vedic texts. With this comes the possibility for fresh considerations of what *brahma-sahavyatā* might mean to the two Brahmins. Whether these considerations are accepted or rejected, I hope the exercise will at least further the discussion of Brahmanical expressions in Pali texts.

Teachers of Different Paths

In the *Tevijja Sutta* Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja have come to the Buddha for help in resolving a dispute: each believes the 'straight path' (*ujumagga*) taught by his own teacher is the correct one, the one that 'leads out' (*niyyāti*) to the highest religious goal, which they call *brahma-sahavyatā*:

*ayam eva ujumaggo ayam añjasāyano niyyāniko niyyāti takkarassa
brahmasahavyatāya*

¹ "Brāhmaṇa-style" here refers to a style of exegesis, not to the language of Brāhmaṇa texts.

This alone is the straight path, this is the straight way leading out; for one who takes it, it leads out to companionship with Brahmā

As noted above, ‘companionship with Brahmā’ is a standard gloss for *brahma-sahavyatā*; sometimes it is translated as “union with Brahmā”. Further below we will consider this phrase as it is used by the young Brahmins in the *Tevijja Sutta*.

When asked to elaborate on the subject of the dispute, Vāseṭṭha gives a one-word answer: *maggāmagge*, a *dvanda* compound apparently in locative singular meaning ‘about paths and non-paths’ or a similar expression, the total number in question being indeterminate. Vāseṭṭha then names groups of Brahmins who teach ‘different paths’ (*nānāmagge*). All translations I have seen have Vāseṭṭha then ask if the paths taught by the different groups of Brahmins lead to *brahma-sahavyatā*, like the way different paths meet in a village. I think a close reading of the Pali text may show that Vāseṭṭha is actually complaining or expressing incredulous disbelief rather than asking a question (we could even posit *nānā-amagge*: ‘different wrong paths’). But the point is not critical for our purposes. By disputing and using words such *ayam eva* (‘this alone’) and *amagga* (‘non-path’), Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja express doubt about different paths which supposedly lead to *brahma-sahavyatā*.

The identification of the Brahmin groups named in the text has also been a matter of scholarly debate, fueled in part by discrepancies in the editions and available manuscripts of the text. Recent scholarship holds the PTS edition of the text as probably wrong to include *chandāvā brāhmaṇā* in the list of Brahmin groups mentioned (Cone, 2010, p. 182, *chandāva s.v.*),² and also holds the term *addhariya*, the name of the first Brahmin group mentioned, to be the analogue of S. *ādhvarika* (Cone, 2001, p. 83; Bronkhorst, 2007, p. 210) rather than of S. *adhvaryu* as proposed by previous scholarship. With respect to variant readings of the final group mentioned, the new critical edition of the DN being prepared at Wat Phra Dhammakāya identifies the name of the last group as *bavharijā*, a Pali version of S. *bahvr̥ca*, a name for the *hotṛ* priest. This reading is based on Burmese and central Thai manuscripts, and the project’s editors consider discrepant readings in Southeast Asian texts probably to be corruptions of *bavharijā*.³ On the whole these recent findings clarify details even as they uphold a longstanding supposition that three groups of Brahmins named in the text can be identified reli-

² A possibility already raised by Rhys Davids (1899, p. 303, n. 2) when he noted that some manuscripts leave out *chandāvā brāhmaṇā*.

³ I thank an anonymous JOCBS reviewer for information on the reading of *bavharijā*.

ably with the *R̥gveda*, the *Black Yajurveda*, and the *Sāmaveda*. Whether *addhariyā brāhmaṇā* refers to a fourth group remains an open question, previously considered by some scholars in connection with the evident failure of the text to name a group clearly associated with the *White Yajurveda* (see Jayatilleke, 1963, p. 480). If *addhariya* means *adhvaryu* it would seem to be a reference to a *Yajurveda* school, in which case *addhariyā brāhmaṇā* could be in apposition to *tittiriya* (< S. *taittirīya*) *brāhmaṇā*,⁴ or if not in apposition it could refer to a non-*taittirīya* school, perhaps the *White Yajurveda* (Jayatilleke, p. 480). But if the more recent scholarship is correct and *addhariya* is the analogue of S. *ādhvarika*, then *addhariya* means something like ‘pertaining to *adhvara*’, the S. term *adhvara* meaning *soma* ritual or sacrificial ritual in general. According to Bronkhorst (p. 210) the word *addhariya* “shows that the Brahmins concerned were somehow connected with the sacrifice, but does not tell us much more about them”. If *addhariya* means *ādhvarika* but does not tell us much about the Brahmins to which it refers, could it tell us anything about the Brahmin who utters the word?

The word *addhariya* analytically parallels S. *ādhvarika* in that *addhariya* < *addhara* just as S. *ādhvarika* < *adhvara*. For what it is worth, the sub-commentary links *addhariya* to *addhara*, to sacrifice, and to the *Yajurveda* (*yajubbedā*). But apart from commentary, as far as I have been able to determine the word *addhariya* is unique to *Vāseṭṭha* and the *Tevijja Sutta*, and the word *addhara* on which *addhariya* is theoretically based does not seem to have an independent existence in *sutta* texts. The question thus arises if *addhariya* was coined from a Pali/Prakrit version of *adhvara* – a simple matter of making an adjective from a noun – and thereby an analogue of *ādhvarika* was produced unwittingly; or if *addhariya* was translated from *ādhvarika* and a Brahmanical source. Rather than try to answer the question I will suggest that if the latter is a possibility, then an interesting point emerges. For *ādhvarika* is a rare word: as far as I have been able to determine, it occurs only in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (ŚB 13.2.7.1), the *Baudhāyana-Śrautasūtra*, the *Āpastamba-Śrautasūtra*, and the *Kātyāyana-Śrautasūtra*. That is to say, the only attested occurrences of *ādhvarika* of which I am aware come from ritual texts of the *Yajurveda*, in which the term *ādhvarika* appears as a kind of unusual but understandable jargon used by *adhvaryu* priests (by way of comparison we might think of the Colonel in Rudyard Kipling’s *Watches of the Night*: he wanted to seem *horsey*). Since *Vāseṭṭha* here uses a word like nothing attested but

⁴It is not clear to me if this is what Witzel suggests (Witzel, 1997, pp. 331–332).

the jargon of an *adhvaryu*, we are entitled to wonder if he is a Brahmin of the *Yajurveda*.

The S. term *bahvr̥ca*, analogue of Vāseṭṭha's term for the last group of Brahmins, is found in *Brāhmāṇa* texts of the three main Vedas, and in a few other texts, but it has a remarkably high frequency in the texts of the *Yajurveda*, especially in the *Āpastamba-Śrautasūtra* of the *Black Yajurveda*. A somewhat similar pattern applies to S. *chandoga*, analogue to Vāseṭṭha's term *chandoka*, but it has a remarkably high frequency in the *Baudhāyana-Śrautasūtra* of the *Black Yajurveda*. As for Vāseṭṭha's term *tittiriya*, the S. analogue *taittirīya* occurs in the *Baudhāyana-Śrautasūtra* and in what we know as the titles of some *Black Yajurveda* texts (its variants *tittiri* and *taittirya* are found in several texts, including the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* and the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā*). It would thus seem that Vāseṭṭha identifies Brahmins in terms themselves originating in the elaboration of Vedic ritual and in the functional segregation of Brahmins belonging to different Vedic branches. In Pali texts there is nothing else quite like this passage, and Vāseṭṭha stands in marked contrast to the tendency in Pali texts to identify Brahmins on the basis of other considerations, such as geography. It is noteworthy that the Buddhist tradition, which in the production of Pali texts did not make much of an effort to identify Brahmins on the basis of their Vedic affiliation, has Vāseṭṭha speak in terms of this most primary Brahmin identity.

To summarize, the phrase *addhariyā brāhmaṇā* could be a fourth group, it could be in apposition to *tittiriya brāhmaṇā*, or it could be in apposition to all three other groups:

Brahmin Groups Mentioned		
<i>addhariyā brāhmaṇā</i> in apposition to three other groups: the reference is to “sacrificing” i.e. professional priests of the three main Vedas: (Black) Yajurveda, Sāmaveda, Ṛgveda		
	In apposition to <i>tittiriya brāhmaṇā</i>	
	references is to Brahmins of the three main Vedas: (Black) Yajurveda, Sāmaveda, Ṛgveda	
Yajurveda other group		

Unless *addhariya* refers to Brahmins of the *Atharvaveda* or an unaffiliated group, the nearly inescapable conclusion is that Brahmin groups who are the transmitters of the three main Vedas –*Ṛgveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Sāmaveda*– are being named, with one *Yajurveda* school (the *Black*) specified, and possibly another. In

other words, Vāseṭṭha does not say that Brahmins such as himself, a master of the three Vedas, teach different paths. He says that Brahmin groups representing the three main Vedas teach different paths. Yet almost immediately after these groups are named the Buddha will start using the term *tevijjā brāhmaṇā* to refer to Brahmins, whose authority he will undermine and who must be the Brahmins who teach different paths. Elsewhere in Pali texts the phrase *tevijja brāhmaṇa* means a Brahmin who has the three knowledges, i.e. knows the three Vedas. But here, according to the logic of the passage, *tevijjā brāhmaṇā* should refer to Brahmin groups which together represent the three main Vedas.

The passage does something besides contextualize Vāseṭṭha's concerns. Here the *sutta* places the words of Vāseṭṭha in relation to something outside of itself, to a body of literature that can be searched for the 'different paths' of which Vāseṭṭha speaks. This idea is nothing new, and it can be argued that Jayatilleke (pp. 479-480), building upon Weber and Wijesekera, has gone furthest in suggesting just where we should look for these 'different paths': the *Brāhmaṇa* texts. But even Jayatilleke stopped short of venturing to say what 'paths' Vāseṭṭha is referring to – a challenge which in this paper we dare to accept.

Ritual Paths to a Higher World

Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja talk of a 'straight path' (*ujumaggo*) that 'leads out' (*niyyāti*) to *brahma-sahavyatā*. About this K. R. Norman writes (1983, p. 36):

The brahmans with whom the Buddha was conversing had their own idea about union with Brahmā, and here, as commonly, the Buddha was using the brahmanical term Brahmā in a specifically Buddhist sense.

We want to recover, if possible, what *brahma-sahavyatā* and a 'path' to it might have meant to Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja. This does not mean that we accept the pair as historical figures; we work with depictions.

There are references to 'straight paths' in Vedic literature as early as the *Ṛgveda*. However, in the older texts the word *rju* ('straight' = Pali *uju*) is rarely employed as a directional adjective for a path or road, as opposed to its more common meaning as an indeclinable, or signifying what is righteous or correct. There are superlatives built from *rju* applied to paths, and passages which may exploit the ambiguity of what is 'straight' and what is 'correct', but other words for 'straight' are much more frequently used than *rju* in the older Brahmanical texts.

As for the Pali word *magga* (‘path’), the S. equivalent *mārga* (as ‘path’) is scarcely found, if it is found at all, in the pre-*sūtra* layers of Vedic literature. The preferred words for ‘path’ in older Vedic texts are *pānthan* and its variants, and *srutí*. So even though the idea of paths which are *rju* is an old one, when the Brahmins in the *Tevijja Sutta* use the word *ujumagga* they are conforming more to attested Buddhist usage than to anything demonstrably Brahmanical. Indeed the word *ujumagga* (or the uncompounded *uju magga*) is typically used in the early Pali texts – other than the DN – to refer to Buddhist training (e.g. in Th 637). Pending further investigation it is probably right to conclude that by itself *ujumagga* is not a word which we can place in meaningful relation to specific Vedic texts. Similarly unhelpful are the words *niyyānika* and *niyyāti*, which mostly have their S. analogues and relatives (from *nirvyā*) in epic poetry and later works rather than in older Vedic texts. The appearance of *niryā* twice in TS 7.4.8.2 or even *niryānto* in TS 6.2.11.1 is food for thought but does little to show a direct connection with the *Tevijja Sutta*.

He or she who would build a case for what *brahma-sahavyatā* means to the Brahmins in the *Tevijja Sutta* is deprived of a key witness, for evidently no attested linguistic analogue to *brahma-sahavyatā* has been found. Therefore those who are so inclined turn to circumstantial evidence, and to what are really variations on a theme: *brahma-sahavyatā seems to refer to x*. Circumstantial evidence does not necessarily mean a weak case, however, and is certainly worth pursuing. Our own case begins with Jayatilleke, who, himself building a circumstantial evidence case for the *Tevijja Sutta* as a response to “genuine Brāhmaṇical beliefs found in the main stream of the Vedic tradition” (p. 481), states (p. 479):

That the brahmins of the three Vedas pray to... Vedic gods and expect to be born in the highest heaven as a result... is again a common conception of the Brāhmaṇas.

In what follows we will turn to some of these “common conceptions” and the implicit suggestion that the young Brahmins in the *Tevijja Sutta* understand *brahma-sahavyatā* as another way of saying “born in the highest heaven”. Here Jayatilleke is drawing on an image found in KB 20.1, which he cites (pp. 477-478) for evidence of how Brahmins actually thought of the highest celestial level as the *brahma-loka*. In this passage Keith (1920) translates *brahma-loka* as “world of Brahman”, and though the passage is long it may prove interesting to those trying to imagine the ancient world (p. 457):

The year is a revolving wheel of the gods; that is immortality; in it is the there [sic] sixfold proper food, wild animals, domesticated animals, plants, trees, that which goes in the waters and that which swims. Mounted on this the gods move round all the worlds, the world of the gods, the world of the fathers, the world of the living, the world of Agni without water, the world of Vāyu, established in moral order, the world of Indra, unconquerable, the world of Varuṇa over the sky, the world of death the highest sky, the world of Brahman the welkin, the most real of worlds the vault. In that they perform the Abhiplava, verily thus the sacrificers mount on the year; in it they obtain this sixfold proper food, wild animals, domesticated animals, plants, trees, that which goes in the waters and that which swims. Twice they perform the Jyotis (Stoma); thereby they obtain a double portion of proper food, wild animals and domesticated animals. Twice they perform the Go; thereby they obtain a double portion of proper food, plants and trees. Twice they perform the Āyus; thereby they obtain a double portion of proper food, that which goes in the waters and that which swims.

For Jayatilleke what is important in this passage is the location and reality ascribed to the *brahma-loka*. It is indeed the highest level, but for our purposes what is equally important about the passage is that it has to do with the six-day *abhiplava* rite. It is not obvious why the rite is important or that the *abhiplava* is a six-day affair, but the terms *jyotis*, *go*, and *āyus* refer to performances on separate days, three performed twice making six. A few paragraphs later in KB 21.1.3 we learn what is at stake (Keith, 1920, p. 462):

*tatho eva etad yajamānā etena eva abhiplavena abhiplutya mṛtyuṃ
pāpmānam apahatya brahmaṇaḥ salokatām sāyujyam āpnuvanti*
verily thus also the sacrificers approach by the Abhiplava, and having
smitten away death, the evil, obtain identity of world and union with
Brahman.

The *abhiplava* is nothing less than the gateway to immortality and union with *brahman* (or is it *Brahmā*?) – at least according to the Brahmins who composed this part of the KB. Jayatilleke, in accordance with his view of the *Tevijja Sutta* as a response to belief in a personal *Brahmā* (p. 477), tends to read *brahma* as

Brahmā in the Vedic sources where other scholars read *brahman*. This is part of Jayatilleke's effort to bridge the well-known gap between the neuter *brahman* of the earlier Vedic texts and the masculine Brahmā of the Pali texts. But rather than bridge the gap some scholars suggest that it may be more of a problem for modern scholars than for the ancients. McGovern (2012, p. 5) comments:

I think we can agree with Gonda that “Indian thinkers did not draw a hard and fast line between the personal and impersonal”... especially considering that the *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* (KauṣU) describes *brahman* in vividly personal terms

McGovern draws explicitly on Gonda, but other scholars have reached similar conclusions,⁵ and with these in mind we will not so much focus on Brahmā vs. *brahman* in what follows, but rather pursue examples of the way Brahmanical texts express the idea of joining heaven, *brahman*, the gods (including Prajāpati, in some contexts equated with Brahmā), and the ‘worlds’ of these entities.

For example, in JUB 1.36.10 the word *salokatā* is used with *jayati* (‘win, conquer’) in the phrase *sa ya evam etad devatāsu sāmā veda devatānām eva salokatāṃ jayati*. Oertel (1896, p. 114) translates this as: “He who knows thus this *sāman* in the divinities, he conquers a share in the same world with the divinities.” According to Monier-Williams, *salokatā* s.v. means: “the being in the same world or sphere with (gen., instr., or comp.), residence in the same heaven with the personal Deity.” There is nothing really objectionable to Oertel's translation, but perhaps the following would not be far wrong either: *he wins residence in the same world right with the divinities*.

The idea of securing right of abode in a higher world is common enough in *Brāhmaṇa* texts. A similar idea is seen in Pali texts, for example at Sn 24 where we hear of a man called Mātanga. In the translation by Norman (2001, p. 18) this man is “low-caste”, but still “he reached the world of Brahmā. Birth did not keep him from being born in the world of Brahmā” (*brahmalokūpago ahu na naṃ jāti nivāresi brahmalokūpapattiyā*). The emphasis here is on what we might call *place* or *station*: in life it was low, upon rebirth it was high.

The line between the place you are and the company you keep can be a thin one, but it appears as if the authors of Vedic and of Pali texts at times tried to emphasize the one or the other. Jayatilleke draws attention to the word *sāyujya*

⁵See e.g. Gombrich (2009, pp. 40-41, 82-83). See also Nakamura (p. 77).

in TB 3.10.11.5, a passage in which Indra teaches a form of knowledge by which one can become immortal and (Jayatilleke, p. 479) “attain to the companionship of the sun” (*āḍityasya sāyujyam*). According to Jayatilleke, here the meaning of *sāyujya* is “accurately conveyed” by the Pali *sahavyatā*, the two words more or less synonyms meaning “companionship”. Jayatilleke likens the TB passage to a passage in the *Tevijja Sutta* in which it is said that Brahmins worship the moon and sun but do not know the path to the companionship of the moon and sun (*candimasūriyānaṃ sahavyatāya maggaṃ*). Following Jayatilleke’s lead, we find also in the TB (1.4.10.7) it is said that through sacrifice one wins the world in which the moon shines, and obtains companionship (*sāyujya*) of the moon (*etāṃ evā lokāṃ jayati | yāsmiṃś candrāmā vibhāti | candrāmāsa evā sāyujyam upaiti*). Although it could be argued that the sun and moon are places, and notwithstanding the ‘winning’ of what could be called the moon’s world in the latter passage, still both TB passages seem to emphasize the company being kept. Certainly the phrase uttered by the Buddha in the *Tevijja Sutta* emphasizes the company being kept, for it is not simply ‘path to the moon and sun’.

The word *sāyujya* is the same word used above in KB 21.1.3, in a phrase which Keith there translates as “union with Brahman”. Among the definitions *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (1899) gives for *sāyujya* s.v. are “communion with” and “identification”. Among the definitions the so-called “First Edition” of the OED (1893) gives for *communion* s.v. are: “Sharing or holding in common with others; participation; the condition of things so held, community, combination, union” and “Fellowship, association in action or relations; mutual intercourse”. I think many would agree that the translations of *sāyujya* by Keith and by Jayatilleke were and still are reasonable.

In Pali texts the idea of fellowship or communion is surely meant where the term *sahavyatā* is used to express the idea of being reborn (*upapajjati*) to the company (*sahavyatam*) of certain gods in the Buddhist pantheon (*devānaṃ tāvatim-sānaṃ*), as at SN i 232 (*upapajjati devānaṃ tāvatim-sānaṃ sahavyatam*). In Brahmanical texts similar ideas are expressed, for example in JB.1.34.9 where it is said that people ascend to the company of certain gods in the Vedic pantheon, in this case the storm gods (*marutāṃ devānāṃ sāyujyam salokatāṃ samabhyārohati*). In this passage *sāyujya* has been reinforced with its own frequent companion *salokatā*, emphasizing the place as well as the company kept: *residence in the same world as and companionship with the Maruts*.

Yet beyond the dictionary definitions it also clear that the authors of Pali texts understood *sahavyatā* in a way that is far different from the way terms such as *sāyujya* and *salokatā* are in another sense understood in the Brahmanical tradition. Consider ŚB 12.1.3.21-22, a remarkable passage in which groups of people who attain *sāyujya* and *salokatā* with Prajāpati continue to sacrifice to the deity, even as they are liable to be asked *kasyāṃ devatāyāṃ vasatha* (‘In which deity do you dwell?’). The following translation is by Eggeling (1900, p. 143):

And when they enter upon the Mahāvratā they indeed offer sacrifice to the deity Pragâpati: they become the deity Pragâpati, and attain to fellowship and co-existence with Pragâpati.

And when they enter upon the concluding Atirâtra (of the sacrificial session), then, indeed, having gained the Year, they establish themselves in the world of heaven. And were any one to ask them, ‘To what deity are ye offering sacrifice this day? what deity are ye? with what deity do ye dwell?’ let them name of those (deities) the one to whom they may be nearest (in the performance of the Sattra)...

In this passage not only are *sāyujya* (“fellowship”) and *salokatā* (“co-existence”) purely matters of ritual, here is a total breakdown of the separation between present and future as people “establish themselves” in heaven while they are seen offering sacrifices in the ritual arena. In Pali texts the usual sense of going to heaven or to the gods is a matter of rebirth, not a merging of identity as we see in the passage above. I would submit that even if Buddhists understood the type of union being described above, the authors of Pali texts did not necessarily have the vocabulary, or perhaps the will, to always mark out the finer points of Brahmanical doctrine. And yet there are things said in Pali texts that may not be unrelated to ideas in the passage above. I do not wish to push the following point too far, because it is highly speculative, but some such idea as in the above passage may be behind an unusual utterance made by the Buddha to Vāseṭṭha (and Bhāradvāja) at Sn 123. Speaking in verse about what we might call the *true Brahmin*, the Buddha says (Norman, 2001, p. 84): “thus know, Vāseṭṭha, he is Brahmā [and] Sakka to those who know” (*evaṃ vāseṭṭha jānāhi brahmā sakko vijānatam*). We realize the Buddha is talking about *the arahant*, but Vāseṭṭha has been hearing him talk about *the Brahmin*. *He is Brahmā. He is Sakka (Indra). To those who know*. Even if this is only the Buddha’s way of exalting the *true Brahmin*, why should “those who know” think to identify the true Brahmin with famous gods? We know from the

full ŚB passage above that ritualists could take on the identity of gods, but what is also interesting is how the passage goes on to mention initiates who ‘know thus’ (in the context genitive plural: *evāṃ vidūṣāṃ dikṣitānām*). The relationship between the knowing initiates and those who become gods through ritual may be ambiguous, but what the ŚB passage is saying is that there are people who know ritualists, maybe themselves, as famous gods.

Be that as it may, we may wonder how one can be established in the world of heaven while still here on earth. To help enter into the worldview of that faraway time and place, Fujii offers the following (2004, p. 10):

In the ritual symbolism of the Soma sacrifices, the sacrificial place represents the heavenly world in which the main ritual acts are to be performed, and the boundary of the sacrificial place is regarded as that between the heavenly world and this world. As the opening ritual on the main day of the Soma sacrifices, the *bahiṣpavamāna-stotra* consists of several meaningful ritual acts including the creeping northwards by the sacrificer and the priests up to the *cātvāla* pit at the northeastern border of the sacrificial place, which pit is symbolically identified with the sun as the entrance to the heavenly world... Those acts of the *bahiṣpavamāna-stotra* as a whole symbolize the procession to the heavenly world, where the sacrifice of the divine Soma will be held, and where the sacrificer and the priests will partake of the Soma together with the gods.

Fujii is referring to the Soma sacrifice in particular but shedding light on what we might call the sacrificial mindset in general. If we keep the passage above in mind we may hope to approach the following passage (ŚB 11.4.4.7) with a little more understanding of what the now recognizable phrase *brāhmaṇaḥ sāyujyaṃ salokātām jayati* might have meant in all its associations (Eggeling, 1900, p. 67):

And he who offers with well-cooked sacrificial food, enters through the sun-door of the Brahman; and, by entering through the sun-door of the Brahman, he wins his union with, and participation in the world of, the Brahman. This, then, is the successful issue of the sacrificial food...

The text will go on to talk about the “successful issue of the sacrifice” (*yajñāsya sāmrddhiḥ*), and a follow-up paragraph (ŚB 11.4.4.12) elaborates with *ātha yādi*

mānyeta sámpannam me yajñè 'bhūdīti svargyám ma etát svargáloko bhaviṣyāmīti, expounding on the idea of a future heavenly state in terms not far different from those found in Pali texts. In the following translation of this passage, Eggeling (1900, p. 68) renders *sámpannam* (from *sam√pad*) as “perfect”, but per MW it could also mean “turned out well”:

And if he think, ‘There has been that which was perfect in my sacrifice,’ let him believe, ‘That is conducive to heaven for me: I shall become one of those in the heavenly world’. This then is the successful issue of the sacrifice...

This is exactly what happens in the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* (DN 5, i 143) to a Brahmin who offers a *yañña-sampadā*, which the PED (*sampadā* s.v.) defines as a “successful performance of a sacrifice”. In consequence the Brahmin, who is actually the Buddha in a former life, becomes one reborn in the heavenly world (*saggaṃ lokam upapajjitā*). It is true that in this *sutta* the Buddha redefines what a *yañña-sampadā* really is, but the *sutta* can only work because it presupposes something like the way of thinking expressed above in ŚB 11.4.4.12. In Sn 90 a Brahmin asks the Buddha about the successful performance of a sacrifice (*yañña-sampadā*), and ‘with what self does one go to the world of Brahmā?’ (*ken’ attanā gacchati brahmalokam*).⁶ The Brahmin will then simplify his question to ‘how is one reborn in the world of Brahmā’ (*katham upapajjati brahmalokam*), and to this the Buddha will respond by saying that the liberal donor, having sacrificed properly, is reborn in the world of Brahmā (*evam yajitvā sammā yācayogo upapajjati brahmalokam*). These *sutta* passages imply that the *sagga loka* (‘heavenly world’) is the same as the *brahmaloka* (‘world of Brahmā’), reached through proper sacrifice, just as the ŚB passages above imply that one who will be *svargalokaḥ* (“one of those in the heavenly world”) is one who wins *brāhmaṇaḥ śāyujyaṃ salokātām* (“union with and participation in the world of *brahman*”).

If we look for other expressions in Vedic texts where joining heaven is meant, they are not wanting. In RV 10.14.8, for example, the deceased is urged (Sanskrit text and translation per Macdonnell, p. 170):

⁶Note that the Brahmin is interested in sacrifice but also concerned with theories of the self. Cp. *Aitareya Upaniṣad* 3.4 (Olivelle, 1998, p. 322-323) “It is with this self consisting of knowledge that he went up from this world and, having obtained all his desire in the heavenly world up there, became immortal” (*sa etena prajñena ātmanā asmāt lokāt utkramya amuṣmin svarge loke sarvān kāmān āptvā amṛtaḥ*).

*sāṃ gachasva pitṛbhiḥ, sāṃ Yaména, iṣṭāpūrténa paramé víoman.
hitvāyāvadyāṃ pūnar ástam éhi: sāṃ gachasua tanúā suvárcāḥ.*

Unite with the Fathers, unite with Yama, with the reward of thy sacrifices and good works in the highest heaven. Leaving blemish behind go back to thy home; unite with thy body, full of vigour.

Here *sāṃ gachasva* (“unite”) does not imply a loss of one’s individuality to become e.g. Yama, nor does one become a companion, as the word is commonly understood, of one’s own body. The expression simply means ‘join’ (see MW *saṃ√gam* s.v.). In AB 4.30.2 another expression (*saṃgatyai*) derived from *saṃ√gam* is also used. In this passage one repeats certain verses on the first day of a ritual:

svargasya lokasya samaṣṭyai sampattyai saṃgatyai

for the attaining, the securing, the joining of the world of heaven

Even if they fully understood all they heard of Brahmanical doctrines, it would not be surprising if Buddhists, if they wished to refer to these doctrines in for example the Pali *suttas*, streamlined Brahmanical expressions and assimilated them into typically Buddhist expressions, if only for the sake of memorization and oral transmission. Nor would it be surprising if in the process of assimilation some of the original nuance of Brahmanical expressions was lost.⁷ I suspect that some uses of *sahavyatā* in Pali texts are a redactional choice employed for expressions which Brahmins used to talk about reaching higher worlds. According to the PED the word *sahavyatā* (“companionship”) is derived through *sahavya* (“companionship”) from *sahāya* (“companion, friend”). The word *sahavyatā* is thus perfectly suited to express notions of companionship or fellowship with anthropomorphic deities –and at a stretch the moon or sun, deities to some– but it is not so good when talking about association with something that is not a deity and cannot really be a companion or friend.

⁷In Brahmanical texts one is seldom reborn in a higher world; more frequently one wins, reaches, or otherwise attains a place in a higher world, whereas Pali texts often speak explicitly of *rebirth* in a higher world. In the *Tevijja Sutta* the young Brahmins do not speak of *rebirth* in a higher world, but employ terms commensurate with ancient conceptions found in Brahmanical texts and in Indo-European poetry and myth more generally (see West, 2008) of traveling a path or undertaking a journey to a post-mortem destiny. The young Brahmins do not mention a timeframe for reaching the goal, but in his response the Buddha speaks of death, and seems to speak of being *reborn* in the world of Brahmā (*brahmalokaṃ upapanno*).

A curious phrase in DN 19 may be evidence of the kind of substitution which I suspect took place. Here⁸ the Buddha reveals that in a former life he taught *brahma-loka-sahavyatāya maggaṃ*. Bodhi (2012) translates the term *brahma-lokasahavyatā* as “companionship with the brahmā world” (p. 930), and explains by quoting the DN commentary (p. 1762, n. 1362): “He taught the path to disciples for companionship with the brahmā world’: that is, he explained the path to fellowship with Brahmā in the brahmā world (*sāvakānañca brahmalokasahavyatāya maggaṃ desesī ti brahmaloke brahmunā sahabhāvāya maggaṃ kathesi*)”.⁹ Bodhi, reflecting upon his own translation of *brahmalokasahavyatā*, calls the compound “an odd expression” (p. 1762, n. 1362). Can one really be a companion with a world? The tradition had to clarify: no, but one can be a companion of Brahmā in a world. So why the odd wording? I suggest that it is the result of substituting *sahavyatā* for an original expression where ‘joining’ was the operative word, in the sense as we might speak of joining a club, dinner party, hall of fame, or – as we have seen in Brahmanical texts – heaven. The *Tevijja Sutta* itself may offer further evidence of this kind of substitution, when Vāsetṭha says that he has heard that the Buddha knows *brahmānaṃ sahavyatāya maggaṃ*. This could mean ‘the path to the companionship of the Brahmā gods’, but may make better sense with *brahmānaṃ* as a singular accusative: *the path to joining Brahmā*.

In any case, what the above examples show, as do still more examples in *Brāhmaṇa* texts for which there is no room here, is that Brahmins had a variety of expressions for joining heaven, the gods, *brahman*, and the worlds of these entities. I suspect there is a one-to-many relationship to the way the Pali *sahavyatā* is used to express Buddhist ideas of rebirth and Brahmin ideas of reaching a higher world. To what extent the early Buddhists understood and accurately portrayed Brahmanical doctrine in all its details is open to question, and in recognition of this we leave *brahmasahavyatā* untranslated in what follows.

The Straight Way

Whereas *brahmasahavyatā* resembles what a Brahmin might say, *añjasāyana* is a word that reciters of Vedic texts surely *did* say. Recall the words of the Brahmins in the *Tevijja Sutta*:

⁸ At PTS ii 250, replicated at AN iii 371, AN iv 104.

⁹ Bodhi explains his translation in the AN with reference to the DN 19 passage and the DN commentary.

*ayam eva ujumaggo ayam añjasāyano niyyāniko niyyāti takkarassa
brahmasahavyatāya*

This alone is the straight path, this is the straight way leading out; for
one who takes it, it leads out to *brahma-sahavyatā*

It was already stated in 1905 that *añjasāyana* appears in the *Tevijja Sutta* (DN 13), three times in the TS, and once in the AB (Whitney, 1905, p. 844). Knowledge of this seems to have languished, however, perhaps because the statement is buried in a note to an obscure verse of the *Atharvaveda*. The note identifies *añjasāyano* as a synonym of *ujumaggo* in DN 13 but says nothing else about the *sutta*.

Further research reveals that *añjasāyana* appears an additional four times in the TS, and also appears in the JB. As far as I have been able to determine, DN 13, AB, TS, and JB are the only texts apart from commentaries in which the word *añjasāyana* appears – not as analogues but the same word, used in the same way. Note the Vedic distribution:

<i>Ṛgveda</i>	<i>Black Yajurveda</i>	<i>White Yajurveda</i>	<i>Sāmaveda</i>	<i>Atharvaveda</i>
AB 4.17.8	TS 7.2.1.2.7		JB 2.383.10	
	TS 7.3.5.3.7		JB 2.383.11	
	TS 7.3.7.3.11		JB 2.419.11	
	TS 7.3.9.3.10		JB 2.421.7	
	TS 7.4.1.3.3		JB 2.421.8	
	TS 7.4.2.4.10			
	TS 7.4.4.3.4			

The first thing we notice is that the texts which contain *añjasāyana* belong to the Vedic branches clearly identified by Vāsetṭha. At the same time, the use of the word *añjasāyana* is restricted to a stratum of texts that cuts across all three main Vedic branches at approximately the same functional level: the explication of ritual. For *añjasāyana* is only found (or has only been found so far) in *Brāhmaṇa* texts and in the TS, a *saṃhitā* text that is nonetheless a *Brāhmaṇa*-style work in that its sacrificial texts and formulas are “intermingled with the *Brāhmaṇa* or exegetical portion which explains them and teaches their ritual application” (Griffith, 1987, p. ix). In other words, *añjasāyana* is specialized *Brāhmaṇa*-style vocabulary; below we will see just how specialized it is. Vāsetṭha and Bhāradvāja are unusual in that they are evidently the only ones to use this specialized term in the whole of the Pali *suttas*, apart from the Buddha when he repeats what they say.

All instances of *añjasāyana* in the passages of the TS listed above appear in repetitions of the phrase *ete vai yajñasya añjasāyanī srutī*. Keith translates this as

“These indeed are the quick paths of the sacrifice”. As the dual indicates, there are two things being called in the translation by Keith “quick paths” (*añjasāyanī srutī*). These are invariably ‘this *ratham̐tara*’ and ‘that *br̥hat*’, two *sāman* chants which are further identified with earth and sky, as seen in the longer refrain (Keith, 1914):

The Rathantara, is this (earth), the Brhat is yonder (sky); verily with them do they proceed; verily also in them do they find support. These indeed are the quick paths of the sacrifice; verily by them do they proceed to the world of heaven.

From accompanying passages we understand that “they” who by these two paths (*tābhyām*) proceed to the world of heaven (*suvargaṃ lokaṃ yanti*) are people who carry out ritual ‘knowing thus’ (*ya evaṃ vidvāṃsaḥ*) or perform the rite in a certain way. The esoterica known and ritual details change among the TS passages, but in all these ritual settings ‘this *ratham̐tara*’ and ‘that *br̥hat*’ are the paths to heaven.

But are the paths quick or straight? Lanman points out in Whitney (1905, p. 844) that in AB 4.17.8 *añjasāyana* appears as “the exact opposite” of a “round-about” road (*mahāpathaḥ paryāṇaḥ*). According to MW *añjasāyana* means “having a straight course, going straight on”. Some six years after he translated the TS, Keith (1920) translated AB 4.17.8 as follows (p. 210):

sā yathā srutiḥ añjasāyanī evaṃ abhiplavaḥ ṣaḷahaḥ svargasya lokasya atha yathā mahāpathaḥ paryāṇaḥ evaṃ pr̥ṣṭhyaḥ ṣaḷahaḥ svargasya lokasya

The Abhiplava Ṣaḍaha is the path that leads straight to the world of heaven; again the Pr̥ṣṭhya Ṣaḍaha is a great circuitous route to the world of heaven.

I am not an expert on Vedic ritual, but it appears that in this passage the six-day *pr̥ṣṭhya* rite (*pr̥ṣṭhyaḥ ṣaḷahaḥ*) featuring the *pr̥ṣṭha* arrangement of chants, including the *br̥hat* and *ratham̐tara* favored in the TS passages, is being compared somewhat unfavorably (?) to the six-day *abhiplava* rite. Here we may recall what is said above of the *abhiplava* in the KB, another text which, like the AB, belongs to the *Ṛgveda*. In the KB we saw that the *abhiplava* leads to companionship and abode (*sāyujya* and *salokatā*) with *brahman* at the highest heavenly level (*brahma-loka*); in AB 4.17.8 the *abhiplava* leads to the ‘world of heaven’ (*svarga loka*) and is said to be a more direct path than that afforded by other ritual means.

The JB is generally regarded as a problematic text,¹⁰ but it would appear that in JB 2.383.10 the *bṛhat* and the *rathaṃtara*, as in the TS, are straight paths to the heavenly world (*svargasya lokasya me panthāṁ añjasāyanau yad bṛhadrathantare*). In JB 2.383.11 the *sāman* chants *śyaita* and *naudhasa* are straight paths on which, even day by day, people quickly (*añjasā*) reach the heavenly world (*tayor ete 'ñjasāyane yac chyaitanaudhase ahar ahar evaitad añjasā svargaṁ lokam upayanti*). JB 2.421.7 and JB 2.421.8 appear to refer to the *auśana* chant, or the *auśana* and the *kāva* chant, as the straight path(s) to the heavenly world (*atha yad vo 'vocam svargasya sma lokasya patho 'ñjasāyanān metety auśanakāve eva vas tad avocam iti eṣa ha vai svargasya lokasya panthā añjasāyano yad auśankāve*). JB 2.419.11 seems to recall advice given not to leave the straight path to the heavenly world (*svargasya sma lokasya patho 'ñjasāyanān meta*).

It is striking that apart from this last example, which may have a symbolism I have not detected, all uses of *añjasāyana* in Vedic texts which I have been able to find refer to just a few chants and the *abhiplava* rite as straight paths leading to the heavenly world (*suvarga* or *svarga loka*). This leads to the conclusion that *añjasāyana* is very specialized language indeed, used in quite limited circumstances. By referring to *different* 'straight paths' in this way, the AB, TS, and JB provide the only attested context discovered so far to which Vāsetṭha and Bhāradvāja relate themselves by talking of different paths to a higher world and using the word *añjasāyana*.

As for Keith's translations, I can only conjecture that in his earlier work he took *añjasāyana* to be a construction retaining one sense of the indeclinable *añjasā* (MW s.v. "straight on" but also "quickly"). Lanman, and Keith in his latter translation, are no doubt quite correct, and if we amend Keith's 1914 translation of the TS passages accordingly we get:

¹⁰Book two of the JB in Sanskrit (edited and published by Vira) is not available to me, and though the JB is not available to the general public on the TITUS website (see Bibliography), portions of it can be accessed through the site's search function. I acknowledge with thanks the permission to show portions of the JB obtained by search, granted to me by the search results copyright holder Prof. Jost Gippert. Search results are based on the text(s) input by M. Kobayashi (Kyōtō) and G. Ehlers (Berlin). Besides text shown in this paper, search results yielded portions of the "new edition" of the JB, which in this paper are not shown but in some cases inform the reading.

TS

*ete vai yajñasya añjasāyanī srutī
tābhyām eva suvargam lokam yanti*
These indeed are the straight paths
of the sacrifice; verily by them do they
proceed to the world of heaven.

DN 13

*ayam eva ujumaggo ayam añjasāyano niyyāniko
niyyāti takkarassa brahmasahavyatāya*
This alone is the straight path, this is the straight way
leading out; for one who takes it, it
leads out to *brahma-sahavyatā*

Of the examples of *añjasāyana* in the texts which we have surveyed, this is the closest match to the DN 13 passage.¹¹ The DN 13 passage is supposed to represent the words of an educated Brahmin; based on the texts that have come down to us through first oral and now written transmission, the TS passage is what educated Brahmins actually recited.

Further Considerations

A detailed consideration of the Buddha's response to Vāsetṭha in the *Tevijja Sutta* cannot be undertaken here, but it is worth pointing out that the Buddha's talk of Brahmins who worship the moon and the sun, and of the way to companionship with the moon and the sun,¹² and his rendition of how priests call out to gods in the conduct of Vedic ritual – *prima facie* these details add weight to the conclusion that the *Tevijja Sutta* is a response to Vedic ritual culture.

In the *Tevijja Sutta* that culture is personified in Vāsetṭha. A full consideration of all that Vāsetṭha says and does in Pali texts is beyond the scope of this paper, but a few points are worth making here. Vāsetṭha is presented as being highly trained in Vedic lore (Sn 116, DN 13), and he speaks accordingly (DN 13) by using a specialized term (*añjasāyana*) most like the way an *adhvaryu* of the *Black Yajurveda* would use it (TS), and also by using jargon (*addhāriya*) whose analogue is attested in only a few *Yajurveda* ritual texts (ŚB, ĀŚ, BŚ, KŚ). In a passage (Sn 117) somewhat reminiscent of what is said of the moon in DN 13, Vāsetṭha mentions the worship of the new or waxing moon (*candam khayātītam*), a topic of

¹¹ DN 13 probably takes *añjasāyano* as a substantive, but if we wished we could translate *ayam añjasāyano* with the latter as an adjective following MW: *this goes straight on*, or *this is straight*, or *this, going straight on*, etc.

¹² The idea of joining or reaching the moon and/or sun is not only seen in the TB as above, but in other *Brāhmaṇa* texts as well (e.g. JUB 3.27-28; and in the AB and the KB: see Keith, 1920, pp. 164, 486).

some importance in Brahmanical texts (TS, ŚB).¹³ Vāseṭṭha speaks of Brahmins who claim to be *brahmuno mukhato jātā*, ‘born from the mouth of Brahmā’ (DN 27), a conceit remarkably like a claim in the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* of the *Black Yajurveda* (TS 7.1.1.4) – but the myth is also found in other texts including the RV and the *Mahābhārata*.¹⁴ Vāseṭṭha says that Brahmins of different Vedic branches

¹³Note *khayātīta* is another Pali term that apart from commentary is unique to Vāseṭṭha. As befitting in a verse dialogue, *khayātīta* is a poetic way of saying about the moon that it has gone or passed beyond (*atīta*) destruction or wasting (*khaya*). This poetic term does not appear to have a S. analogue **kṣayātīta*, but it is not far different from an expression in KB 3.5.18 (*kṣayaṃ vā atra candro gacchati*) which Keith (1920, p. 360) translates as: “it is because then the moon becomes destroyed”. It is clear in the context of the KB passage that what is being talked about is myth to do with the waning of the moon giving way to waxing. As for Vāseṭṭha, it is not just that *khaya-atīta* is unique to him – I believe that he is the only person in Pali texts to co-locate *canda* and *khaya*, as in the KB passage. Here again Vāseṭṭha speaks like an educated Brahmin.

¹⁴As pointed out by Bronkhorst (2007). But his treatment of this passage is marred by misstatement. According to Bronkhorst (2007, p. 212) the claim that Brahmins are born from the mouth of Brahmā “is made in two different passage [sic] of the Pāli canon by Brahmins keen to convince the Buddha of the superiority of their caste. It is once made by the Brahmin Assalāyana in the Assalāyana Sutta (MN II p. 147 ff.), and once by the Brahmin Vāseṭṭha in the Aggañña Sutta (DN III p. 80 ff.).” In fact there is another passage which mentions this claim, and, as related above, Vāseṭṭha (DN 27) is not making the claim, let alone seeking to convince anyone of its truth, he is reporting what Brahmins in Kosala say. Bronkhorst argues that since the myth to which this passage refers is found in different texts (RV, TS, M, etc.), it is evidence of a widespread circulation and cannot be used to claim that the Buddha or authors of the DN 27 and MN 93 passages were acquainted with a specific version of the myth. It seems to me that whatever its original intent, the argument actually strengthens the case that Vāseṭṭha has been portrayed with some “realism”, for he speaks of Brahmins in Kosala who talk about a widely attested myth. In the TS version of the myth it is Prajāpati (sometimes equated w/ Brahmā) from whose mouth Brahmins are said to issue. Vāseṭṭha is supposed to be in Sāvatthi when he reports the claim (DN 27), and so is Assalāyana (MN 93) when he speaks it. The authors of these texts, then, associate this claim with Kosala. But there is also a third passage at MN 84 (ii 84), not mentioned by Bronkhorst, where King Avantiputta of Madhurā reports that Brahmins make the same claim. Thus Vāseṭṭha, in Sāvatthi at the western edge of Kosala, mentions a myth spoken by Brahmins in Kosala and also by Brahmins further to the (more Vedic?) west. The significance of these geographical details is uncertain. Bronkhorst (p. 354 ff.) makes a strong case for the name Ambaṭṭha (DN 3) as a reference to a western people – the possible connection here is that Ambaṭṭha is another Brahmin who, like Vāseṭṭha, is a student of Pokkharasāti, and there are a number of details that tie these characters together. However, in Bronkhorst’s account, I think it is fair to say that geographic details of this sort are subsumed under questions of chronology in the suggestion that DN 3, DN 13, DN 27, MN 84, MN 93, and MN ii 196 (= Sn 115ff.) “may have been composed at relatively late date” (p. 353). Some points Bronkhorst makes here are convincing, others less so. As for DN 13, no reason is actually given (p. 353ff.) for why it is probably late; the implication seems to be that it has something to do with the groups of Brahmins identified by Vāseṭṭha, and, one supposes, the suggestion by Witzel (1997,

(tantamount to saying different ritual functions) teach different paths leading to companionship with Brahmā (DN 13), which other Brahmins call companionship with *brahman* (ŚB), or with Prajāpati (ŚB), or to what some Brahmins call the heavenly world (AB, TS, JB), or the world of *brahman* (KB, ŚB), or the world of Brahmā (Sn 91, MN 97). Buddhists seem to have supplied their own term *brahmasahavyatā* to the telling of the story (DN 13), ascribing to Vāseṭṭha (and Bhāradvāja) a stereotyped goal that resembles expressions in *Brāhmaṇa* and other Vedic texts. Fortuitously or by design, Vāseṭṭha has been depicted with certain details which enhance his believability as a ritually-oriented Brahmin; his problem seems to be with claims about which rituals or parts of rituals really get the job done. It is almost tempting, though not fully warranted on limited data, to regard Vāseṭṭha as a Brahmin of the *Black Yajurveda*.

If the findings of this paper are valid, Vāseṭṭha and the *Tevijja Sutta* may have further significance. For these artifacts ostensibly represent a phenomenon which is not well understood, and that is the nature and extent of Brahmanical culture encountered by the early Buddhists. In Pali texts, encounters between Buddhists and representatives of Vedic religious culture often have a setting in Kosala at the time of the Buddha (e.g. the *Tevijja Sutta*). Scholars have questioned the geographical and temporal fidelity of these accounts; Bronkhorst (2007), for example, has advanced skeptical arguments which call into question prior notions of the flow of ideas between Buddhists and Brahmins in the early Buddhist period, and which indeed question the value of Pali and late Vedic texts for understanding the chronology of the early Buddhist period. It is notable that Bronkhorst (2007)

p. 334), reported by Bronkhorst earlier in the book (p. 211, n. 12), that this passage may have been composed or altered in a western location when the canon was compiled. If this is the point, it is fair enough – but it is built on only one suggestion by Witzel, whose passage also and *firstly* suggests an accurate reference to “Tittiriya Adhvaryus, who lived in neighboring Kosala”, a suggestion undiminished by the reading of *addhariya* and supported in other passages in which Witzel places a *Black Yajurveda* presence in Kosala. E.g. Witzel, 1997, p. 306, states: “It is significant that a large number of subschools now developed in the Taittiriya tradition... the Baudhāyāniya, must have originated with one of the neighboring tribes... the Baudhāyāniyas [the tribe] come from a border line eastern country, Kosala.” Now Vāseṭṭha always appears in Kosala, and his strange word *addhariya* has its analogue with high frequency – precisely in the *Baudhāyana-Śrautasūtra*. It is the texts involving and related to Vāseṭṭha which Bronkhorst wants to see as –one can say with no disrespect that he *needs* them to be– western, late, somehow other than what they purport to be, accounts of active Vedic ritual culture in Kosala at the time of the Buddha, and Buddhist reactions to that culture.

has very little to say about Kosala,¹⁵ while responses to Bronkhorst (Witzel, 2009; Wynne 2011) make important points – i.e. important in the context of their arguments – about Kosala, Videha, or Videha-Kosala, and that these responses tend to reassert or uphold certain prior ideas of chronology and idea flow attacked by Bronkhorst. In short, these responses see Buddhism as having developed in some sense as a response to developments within Vedic religious culture. How might the understanding of the *Tevijja Sutta* reached above figure in this debate? Want of space precludes a full discussion here, but a few comments on chronology and idea flow may be in order by way of conclusion.

Conclusion

It is implausible that Brahmins borrowed from Buddhists the infrequently encountered terms to do with Vedic ritual which we have examined above, only then to use those terms to identify themselves and explain their own rituals to themselves; or that Buddhists and Brahmins borrowed these terms from another source, only to use them, unknown to one another, in the same limited way. Indeed, if recent scholarly accounts of Brahmanical attitudes towards the inhabitants of the land in which Buddhism and Jainism arose are correct (Bronkhorst, 2007, p. 8; Samuel, 2008, p. 55ff), it would be hard to believe that Brahmins would have taken these terms from the inhabitants of that land and their disagreeable ways of speaking. There may be merit to the idea of a somewhat culturally distinct territory in which Buddhism and Jainism arose,¹⁶ but in a way that is not incompatible with that basic idea, the *Tevijja Sutta* vindicates earlier theories of relative chronology and the flow of terms and ideas, on a limited scale, *from* Brahmins *to* Buddhists. This alone may not help in matters of absolute chronology, which would require recourse to other sources, but it seems to me that the similarities between the DN 13 passage above and the TS passage in particular, and other evidence in the *Tevijja Sutta*, scarcely admit of reasonable doubt that a Buddhist author is responding to a genuine Brahmanical pattern of speech, and a genuine Brahmanical doctrine.

¹⁵Kosala is mentioned only once by Bronkhorst (2007, p. 4), as far as I can tell, and references to Kosala appear only five more times, all in quotations by ancient Brahmanical or modern academic authors who see Kosala (or Kosala-Videha) as worth talking about in its own right.

¹⁶See Samuel (2008) Chapters 1-8 for an even-handed overview of the issues involved.

Epilogue: The Final Goal

Our goal has been to contextualize and understand what the *Brahmins* say in the first portion of the *Tevijja Sutta*, but the Buddha will have the last word. Before he begins to teach the path to the goal sought by Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja, the Buddha, in a simile, speaks of a man born and raised in a nearby village. Vāseṭṭha agrees that all the local paths to the village would be known by the man. The simile could be a response to Vāseṭṭha's comments near the beginning of the *sutta* about different paths with a junction in a village; it reminds one of the way the Buddha speaks (Sn 17) of the *maggajīna*, 'one who knows the path' (see Norman, 2001, pp. 182-183), a term other Buddhists also use (Th 1221, SN i 187), analogous to the *S. mārgajña* of the epic poet (M 12.290.53). But the simile may also be a reaction to the word *añjasāyana*. For this word has one closely related synonym, a "doubtless precisely equivalent" *añjasīna* at RV 10.32.7 (Whitney, 1905, p. 844). In this RV passage we recognize *srutīm añjasīnām* as a variation of what we have seen above (Griffith, 1896):

*ākṣetravit kṣetravidam hí āprāṭ sā prā eti kṣetravidā ānuśiṣṭaḥ
etāt vai bhadram anuśāsanasya utā srutīm vindati añjasīnām*

The stranger asks the way of him who knows it: taught by the skillful guide he travels onward. This is, in truth, the blessing of instruction: he finds the path that leads directly forward.

This passage does more than remind us of the way the Buddha sometimes speaks of himself as a 'guide' and 'one who shows the way',¹⁷ or of the way a Buddhist elder speaks.¹⁸ It invites us to ponder the vectors by which ideas and terminology entered into Buddhist usage. The word *añjasa* ('straight'), related to *añjasīna* and *añjasāyana*, is found in the Pali *Theragāthā* and *Therīgāthā*, and other texts; *añjasā* in the DN commentary (Cone, 2001, p. 44). In Vedic texts *añjasā* ('straight on') occurs in TS 5.2.8.5 in the phrase *yāthā kṣetravid āñjasā náyati* ('just as one familiar with the territory leads straight on'), while in ŚB 13.2.3.2 we find *yathā kṣetrājñāḥ añjasā nayet* ('just as one who knows the territory would lead straight on'); the "leading" in both examples too reminds us of what the Brahmins say in

¹⁷MN iii 6: *samādapetar* and *maggakkhāyin*

¹⁸Th 168: *tvañ ca me maggam akkhāhi añjasaṃ amatogadhami aham monena monissaṃ gaṅgāsoto va sāgaram*. Per Norman (1995, p. 21): "And do you show me the straight path which plunges into the undying. By sage-hood I shall know it, as the stream of Ganges will (eventually) know the sea."

the *Tevijja Sutta*. The term *kṣetrajña*, synonym of *kṣetravid*, occurs frequently in the *Mahābhārata* and in various *sūtra* texts, but also in various *Brāhmaṇa* texts. If Norman (2001, pp. 270-271) is correct, *kṣetrajña* was a Brahmanical term taken into Pali as *khettañina*, used by a Brahmin at Sn 96 and then by the Buddha, evidently as a term for a spiritually advanced person; Norman translates this term as “field-knower”. According to Monier-Williams (*kṣetra* s.v.), one who is *kṣetravid* or *kṣetrajña* is “familiar with localities” or “knowing localities”, respectively, and the villager evoked by the Buddha in his simile is nothing if not *kṣetravid* or *kṣetrajña*. The Buddha, prompted by something that has been said, conjures up a simile that itself evokes a variety of associations which we can see in Brahmanical texts. The listener realizes that the Buddha wants Vāseṭṭha to understand that better than a villager knows the local paths, the Buddha knows the locality and the way to the locality which Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja seek. This is but another way of saying that the composer endowed the *sutta* with some realistic or contextually convincing dialogue. Vāseṭṭha, Bhāradvāja, and the Buddha then finish their talk, and we go our own way to ponder if in Pali texts the term “field-knower” and other terms and similes may also have an origin in *Brāhmaṇa*-style exposition of ritual.

Abbreviations

AB	<i>Aitareya Brāhmaṇa</i>
AN	<i>Aṅguttara Nikāya</i>
ĀŚ	<i>Āpastamba-Śrautasūtra</i>
BŚ	<i>Baudhāyana-Śrautasūtra</i>
CU	<i>Chāndogya Upaniṣad</i>
DN	<i>Dīgha Nikāya</i>
JB	<i>Jaiminīya (Talavakāra) Brāhmaṇa</i>
JUB	<i>Jaiminīya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa</i>
KB	<i>Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa</i>
KŚ	<i>Kātyāyana-Śrautasūtra</i>
M	<i>Mahābhārata</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima Nikāya</i>
MW	A Sanskrit-English Dictionary, by Monier-Williams (2005)
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
PED	Pali English Dictionary
PTS	Pali Text Society
RV	<i>Ṛgveda Saṃhitā</i>
S.	Sanskrit
s.v.	<i>sub voce</i> (under that word)
ŚB	<i>Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (Mādhyandina recension)</i>
SN	<i>Samyutta Nikāya</i>
Sn	<i>Suttanipāta</i> (Sn <i>x</i> means pg. <i>x</i> of the PTS ed. as shown in Norman, 2001)
TB	<i>Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa</i>
Th	<i>Theragāthā</i>
TS	<i>Taittirīya Saṃhitā</i>

Words in parentheses in the indented quotations in this article are the translator's.

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Parmenides and Nāgārjuna: A Buddhist Interpretation of Ancient Greek Philosophy*

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This article compares some principal components of the philosophical thought of the fifth century B.C.E. Greek philosopher Parmenides and the second century C.E. Indian philosopher Nāgārjuna. It argues that there are strong parallels between these two philosophers and the schools associated with them. It suggests a European line of philosophy which independently supports some of the principal insights of Buddhist thought, and which was developed contemporaneously with Buddhism.

Parmenides lived in the Greek city of Elea in southern Italy around the fifth century B.C.E. He is often viewed as pivotal in Ancient Greek philosophy: for some, he was the first person to write about metaphysics, or the first person to use deductive arguments. But despite a broad consensus that he was important, debate continues as to what Parmenides actually had to say. What I propose is a reading of Parmenides which draws out strong parallels between him and the Madhyamaka (middle way) school of Buddhism propounded by its founder Nāgārjuna, who lived in India around the second century C.E. I hope to show that such a reading is plausible and interesting, and the latter for three reasons. First, it renders intelligible and coherent what in Parmenides is often obscure. Second, it holds out the possibility that Parmenides might even have contemporary relevance to the modern reader. Third, and perhaps most interesting of all, it suggests that two important figures from distinct philosophical traditions (as far

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as we know) have arrived at a similar analysis. More specifically, it suggests that what is usually considered as characteristically Buddhist or Indian thought was also being developed independently and contemporaneously in Ancient Greece.

In this article, we shall also take contributions from Heraclitus, who lived in Ephesus in Turkey again around the fifth century B.C.E., and who provides further examples which help elucidate the themes discussed by Parmenides. And we shall start with Zeno, by way of an introduction.

Introduction: Zeno, Nāgārjuna, and paradox

Zeno also lived in Elea around the fifth century B.C.E., and was a follower of Parmenides. In this section, we shall consider a particular paradox which Zeno offers up in defence of Parmenides. The argument underlying that paradox is readily susceptible to a Mādhyamika (of the middle way) reading. This is a promising place to start, for three reasons. First, it provides a suitable context in which to introduce Nāgārjuna's thought.¹ Second, it provides a convenient opportunity to discuss paradox as a philosophical method, a theme which recurs throughout this article. Third, it reinforces the argument, detailed in the sections which follow, that there are parallels between Nāgārjuna and Parmenides, by showing that there are further parallels between Nāgārjuna and Parmenides' follower and defender Zeno.²

Plato's *Parmenides* records a meeting in Athens between Socrates and Zeno and Parmenides. Socrates asks about Zeno's claim that "if the things that are are many, they must be both like and unlike, which is impossible." Zeno confirms that he intends this as a defence of Parmenides' claim that what-is is one, by showing that the plurality advocated by his opponents has "still more ridiculous consequences" (DK 29 A 11, 12).³

Modern authors have attempted to re-create the arguments behind Zeno's claim, but admittedly without success in producing anything worth further thought; the re-created arguments are simply dismissed as bad arguments (e.g., McKira-

¹To keep this manageable, I restrict myself primarily to Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* ("MK") (verses on the middle way).

²Indeed, parallels have already been drawn between Zeno and Nāgārjuna in their discussions on the topic of motion: Siderits and O'Brien 1976; Galloway 1987. For a dissenting view, see: Mabbett 1984.

³The Greek fragments in this article are identified by the standard references in H Diels and W Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*.

han 2010: 177-178; Barnes 1982: 237-238). However, the argument does look interesting when given a Mādhyamika reading: if there are many things, i.e., if there are things that are independent of and different from one another, then all those things would indeed be unlike, because this is what makes them independent and different. And yet they would also be alike in being unlike, and this in two ways. First, one thing on its own cannot be different. It can only be different when compared to a second thing. Two things are thus dependent on each other to show their unalikehood. They are alike in their dependency on each other to show their differing characteristics, indeed to define themselves at all. As Nāgārjuna says, “difference does not exist without the one from which it differs” (MK XIV 6). Second, the way in which they differ from each other is alike: as the one differs from the other, so the other differs from the one in the same way.

For Nāgārjuna, nothing has an independent or inherent nature or value (*svabhāva*). Rather, all things are inter-dependent and indeterminate or empty of inherent nature (*śūnyatā*). Furthermore, “the instruction of the teachings of the buddhas are based on two truths: the truth of common sense conventions about the world, and truth in the higher sense of the word” (MK XXIV 8). So first, there is the conventional truth that we do indeed see a world of different things: a tree, a house, a person. We conceptualize these things as independent. There is nothing wrong with this. To a certain extent, conceptualizing is just what we do, it is a natural function of our brains and an inevitable part of who we are. No doubt it also makes the world easier to navigate. But second, there is the higher truth that these conceptions are just conceptions and have no independent or inherent nature or value. A tree has no essential tree-ness, a house has no essential house-ness, and a person has no essential core or self.⁴ We might have conceptualized a world of independent things, but we must not be deluded by our own creation.

In Buddhism more generally, delusion or ignorance causes suffering. So according to Nāgārjuna more particularly, we must not grasp after illusory inherent nature, vainly seeking from it permanence or satisfaction. We must not think, if only we could obtain that house or car or person, there is something in it, some inherent nature which we could lay hold of, to make us happy. We would be destined for perpetual disappointment. But the good news is that disappointment and suffering are similarly devoid of inherent nature, and so they can lay no per-

⁴Our self is, in Mādhyamika terms, only a conceptualization for a collection of physical parts and mental states which have no enduring or unchanging permanence.

manent claim to us; “neither does desire, hatred or delusion have any inherent nature” (MK XXIII 1, 2).

It is not enough to understand Nāgārjuna’s position intellectually, though that is certainly a valuable preliminary. To be free of existential suffering, it is necessary for the higher truth to be perceived directly and realized as a living truth, what has been called a “cognitive shift” in how we view the world (Westerhoff 2009: 49, 157; Burton 1999: 73-74). How to bring about this cognitive shift? One tool is paradox, probably most associated today with Zen Buddhism, although it does feature in Nāgārjuna’s arguments, as we shall see. By showing the impossible is at the same time possible, the falsity of our conceptions is brought clearly to our minds through their perversity, and in the mental short-circuiting that happens as we accept both sides of the paradox as true simultaneously, it is hoped we might transcend our conceptualizing, and perceive the higher truth directly, without intellectualizing filter.

As for Zeno, in the argument set out at the beginning of this section, he too is using paradox as a tool to reveal the absurdity of what otherwise appears at first sight to be a common sense everyday assumption. Specifically, if the world were to consist of a plurality of independent things, as common sense suggests, then according to Zeno this leads to the paradox that such things would be both like and unlike at the same time and in the same way, thus revealing the absurdity of the original hypothesis. Zeno says this supports Parmenides’ rejection of plurality.⁵ And it also supports Nāgārjuna’s claim that, despite conventional appearances, the world does not consist of a plurality of things with independent and differing natures.

With these introductions complete, we shall now turn to consider in detail the parallels between Parmenides and Nāgārjuna.

Parmenides and Nāgārjuna on false opinion

A goddess teaches Parmenides, and he tells us, about “the unshaken heart of truth,” and also “the opinion of mortals, in which there is no true reliance” (DK 28 B 1). The truth comes first in his account. This is not objectionable. However, the way we get to the truth is often by identifying what is false in the views we currently hold. In this way, analyzing false opinion can be helpful. And indeed,

⁵ Does the rejection of plurality make Parmenides a monist? Some modern authors deny that Parmenides is a monist, e.g., Barnes 1982: 207, while others say that his theory is compatible with plurality after all, e.g., McKirahan 2010: 165, Curd 1998: 4-5, ch. 2. My views are set out below.

the goddess tells Parmenides that it is proper for him to learn both things (DK 28 B 1), so that no mortal judgment may ever overtake him (DK 28 B 8). We shall start with the false opinions, and the instruction which Parmenides receives is strikingly similar to Nāgārjuna's position.

Parmenides is warned to “not let habit, rich in experience” compel him to any false conclusions (DK 28 B 7). In Mādhyamika terms, the conventional truth, however familiar it may seem to us, is merely illusory. The goddess says that people only view the world as a plurality of independent things because they have been “persuaded that they are real,” whereas things are really only “posited” (DK 28 B 8). In Mādhyamika terms, the conventional truth, however convenient or persuasive, is only a conceptual construct. Parmenides is told to “gaze upon things which, although absent, are securely present to the mind” (DK 28 B 4). In Mādhyamika terms, people hold securely to the conventional truth of a world of things with inherent natures, whereas the higher truth is that inherent nature is absent from all things.

Parmenides is warned about following “mortals knowing nothing,” who are “borne along deaf and blind,” who are “two-headed” for thinking what-is “both to be and not to be the same and not the same” (DK 28 B 6). McKirahan interprets this latter statement in the following way: a fig that is green in May ripens and turns black in August, so that it is the same (fig) and not the same (black not green) (McKirahan 2010: 157). Heraclitus makes a similar point. Famously, he says that no person can step into the same river twice (DK 22 B 91).⁶ So if I step into the Ganges today and again tomorrow, what I step in is the same (the Ganges) and not the same (a new flow of water). In Mādhyamika terms, that something can be the same and not the same (as itself) simultaneously should signal to us the falsity of conventional truth; the Ganges is only a name, a river is only a concept – neither have an inherent nature.

The goddess tells Parmenides that ignorant people distinguish things one from another as opposites, the prime example being light and dark (DK 28 B 8). This is another case of people being “two-headed”: people have a dualistic vision that sees the world through pairs of opposites. Certainly the conventional truth is that light and dark are opposites. But they are not independent: light is defined and given meaning by dark. In similar vein, Nāgārjuna says that purity depends on the absence of impurity, while impurity depends on the absence of purity, creating a

⁶There is controversy and considerable debate about whether Heraclitus himself put the point in quite these words. For a sensible overview of the controversy, see Guthrie 1962: 488-492.

cycle of dependence such that neither can exist independently (MK XXIII 10, 11). Hence, according to Parmenides' goddess, while people "established two forms to name in their judgments," such as light and dark, the higher truth is that "it is not right to name one" (DK 28 B 8), because we should appreciate that both are inter-dependent, and neither has an inherent nature. To echo Zeno, opposites are both unlike and like, a paradox signalling their indeterminate and inter-dependent status. And so Parmenides' goddess can declare "it is indifferent where I am to begin from, for that is where I will arrive back again" (DK 28 B 5). In Mādhyamika terms, two conventional opposites are in truth inter-dependent, so that investigating one only leads to the other, and back again. There is nothing to break that cycle because each is empty of any inherent or differing nature.

In addition to the river fragment, and in what McEvilley calls a "striking foreshadowing" of Nāgārjuna (McEvilley 2002: 430-431), Heraclitus is full of statements supportive of the idea that all things are inter-dependent or relative, and that each is both itself and its opposite simultaneously, for example: "the road up and the road down are one and the same" (DK 22 B 60), "day and night are one" (DK 22 B 57). Now Heraclitus has been variously interpreted, for example: the road is about the view-point of an observer (Osborne 2004: 86); day and night are indeed opposites but which combine together to create one stably recurring cycle of measured change (Robinson 1987: 183-184; Kirk, Raven and Schofield 1983: 189); the river is about seeming stability masking constant change (Barnes 1982: 66; Guthrie 1962: 450, 466-467), or stability being dependent upon regular change (McKirahan 2010: 134; Kirk, Raven and Schofield 1983: 197). But as Nāgārjuna says, the claim that "there is permanence in impermanence" has the effect of asserting both the one and its negating opposite, a paradox which indicates that neither has an independent nature (MK XXIII 13, 14). Hölscher says that Heraclitus' "unity of opposites," so presented as a paradox, is not something to be proved, but grasped through intuition (Hölscher 1974: 233), the suggestion again being, like Zeno, that paradox is not just style, but also method. And so, given a Mādhyamika reading, many of Heraclitus' statements show a deep consistency, in themselves and with Parmenides, their goal being to reveal to the reader, through paradox, the inter-dependence of things such that, although conventionally viewed as opposites, when properly considered each leads from one to the other and back again, neither having any independent or inherent value.

Parmenides and Nāgārjuna on causation

In both Parmenides and Nāgārjuna, there is another way of attacking the conventional truth. This other attack does not depend upon the revelatory power of paradox, but upon logical arguments which seek to show that a plurality of independent and differing things could never arise or perish. Again there are strong parallels in how both Parmenides and Nāgārjuna approach this subject.

We start with a summary of Nāgārjuna's views on causation. For Nāgārjuna, having inherent nature (*svabhāva*) means being independent, i.e., not dependent on anything else for its existence (MK I 3, XV 1, 2, XX 21, XXIV 16). But after analysis he rejects the idea that independent things ever come to be. He says they never arise, whether: (i) from themselves, (ii) from others, (iii) from both, or (iv) from no cause (MK I 1; see too MK XXI 13). Rather, all things are caused and inter-dependent, such that nothing has an inherent nature (MK IV 2, XXIV 19, 26).

As for Parmenides, he says that what-is does not arise from what-is-not (DK 28 B 8). This covers origination from something other than itself, and origination from nothing, (ii) and (iv) in Nāgārjuna's scheme, albeit in a more condensed form. Parmenides also says that "it is right either fully to be or not" (DK 28 B 8), which Sedley reads as Parmenides further dismissing the possibility that what-is arose piecemeal, from a combination of both what-is and what-is-not (Sedley 1999: 118), and so covers scenario (iii). So the only question which is not posed in common is (i), omitted by Parmenides. That omission aside, both this structured approach to causation, and the supporting arguments advanced, are similar.

Nāgārjuna says that something cannot arise from nothing. So too, Parmenides says that what-is cannot come from what-is-not (DK 28 B 8). This is reinforced by the following Mādhyamika argument: how could one thing (e.g., what-is-not) produce another thing (e.g., what-is) such that the other has an independently differing inherent nature, even an opposite nature, not found in the one? Furthermore, if something were to come from nothing, continuing the Mādhyamika argument, either it would need a cause, or generation would be spontaneous (MK XXVII 12). But if there is a cause, then what arises is not independent. And if generation is spontaneous, "it would be arisen by being found anywhere" (MK VII 17), which is to say that generation would be continuous and infinite. Parmenides makes the same point when he asks "what need would have roused it to grow later or earlier?" (DK 28 B 8): either there must have been a need (a cause), or again generation would be continuous. As Zeno might say, however implausible we

might find the claim that things are empty of inherent nature, the opposite claim, if it means continuous and infinite generation, is more ridiculous still.

Precisely these same arguments, common to Nāgārjuna and Parmenides when discussing how something cannot arise from nothing, equally dismiss the possibility of something arising from itself, or from something different, or from both, these being the remaining scenarios in Nāgārjuna's scheme. (Readers prepared to accept this point can skip the next paragraph.)

Something cannot arise from itself (MK VII 13). First, it would be no origination if it already existed.⁷ And at any rate, what would cause itself to generate itself? Again, either there would be a cause, or generation would be spontaneous and hence continuous and infinite. Something cannot arise from something different. Again, how could one thing produce another such that the other has an independently differing inherent nature not found in the one, and in such a way without the two things being related (and hence dependent)? And again, what would cause the one to produce the other? Either there would be a cause, or generation would be spontaneous – and this time it is even worse, since it is not just generating itself, but generating something different. So why would it generate one different thing rather than any other different thing? If there is no cause to differentiate between what gets produced, then every thing would produce every other different thing, again continuously and to infinity. And note that self-arising, and arising from another, both assume the existence of the originating thing in the first place. But what produced the originating thing in the first place? And so we get an infinite regress backwards too (MK VII 19). Finally, something cannot arise from a combination of both itself and something else, because the same problems would continue to present.

Having shown that nothing can arise, both Parmenides and Nāgārjuna believe they have shown that neither can anything perish. Parmenides says, “thus generation has been extinguished, and perishing cannot be investigated” (DK 28 B 8), a point similarly made by Nāgārjuna who says, “when events do not arise, cessation does not happen” (MK I 9; see too MK VII 29). As McKirahan says of Parmenides, mirror arguments hold against the possibility of going out of existence as coming into existence (McKirahan 2010: 159), a point also made by Nāgārjuna (MK VII 32). And presumably also because perishing would have to

⁷Note that Nāgārjuna seems not to be saying that something cannot clone a second identical version, so that there are now two. Rather, he seems to be saying that something cannot produce itself, so that there is now still one.

be followed by generation (a possibility already dismissed) if there were anything to remain in the world.

For completeness, it should be noted that Nāgārjuna runs a further argument. Not only are things dependent on their causes, but causes themselves are indeterminate conceptual constructs. Thus all things are, in a sense, doubly dependent, first upon their causes, and second because causes are conceptually dependent (Westerhoff 2009: 124). This is because a cause is only a cause if it has an effect (MK IV 3, XX 22), just as an effect is only an effect if it has a cause (MK IV 2), creating a circularity of dependence. It is not possible to separate out cause and effect; they are inter-dependent (MK XX 19). For a start, an effect cannot be prior to a cause (MK XX 8); even conventionally, that would be illogical. But if a cause comes first, it cannot have stopped prior to the effect, because then it is spent before the effect arises; nor can there be an overlap, because after the effect arises the continuing cause is redundant (MK XX 10). Nor can they arise simultaneously, because that would result in identity of cause and effect (MK XX 7, 20).⁸ Thus “cause and effect do not meaningfully exist” (MK XI 7).

Parmenides’ truth, and its consistency with Nāgārjuna

False opinions have been identified and dismissed, whether through the revelatory power of paradox and “two-headed” thinking, or through the logical arguments relating to causation. So what is the truth left behind?

Parmenides says that what-is is “whole” and “complete” and not divisible but “full of what-is” and “inviolable” (DK 28 B 8). This corresponds with the broader Mādhyamika position that an independent thing cannot be a collection of parts, for then it would be dependent on those parts, and liable to be broken down into its constituent elements (Westerhoff 2009: 36). As Parmenides says, this “would keep it from holding together” (DK 28 B 8). Parmenides also says that what-is is “one,” “ungenerated and imperishable,” “unique” and “steadfast” (DK 28 B 8). Similarly, Heraclitus says that “listening not to me but to the *logos*, it is wise to agree that all things are one” (DK 22 B 50). But there are two ways of taking this.

The first way is not so charitable to Parmenides, but still instructive to the reader. We might say that Parmenides reasons as follows: impermanence (generation and perishing) has been rejected, so what-is must be permanent; plurality

⁸Either that, or you get an effect arising without a prior cause, which is impossible, and the continuing overlap again makes the cause redundant once the effect has arisen.

has been rejected, so what-is must be singular. This might seem a forgivable conclusion were it not for the fact that it falls prey to the habit which Parmenides himself was warned against, of accepting the conventional view that the world consists of opposites. As Heraclitus says, “if a man who had stepped into mud were to wash it off with mud, he would be thought mad if anyone noticed him” (DK 22 B 5). And yet Parmenides, on this interpretation, has done just that, by rejecting as illusory a world of opposites, a world of pluralistic inherent natures, only to adopt its opposite, a monistic inherent nature.

According to Madhyamaka, as its name suggests, the proper conclusion is a middle way (MK V 8, XV 6, 10, XVIII 8, 11, XXI 10). Nothing has an independent or inherent nature; rather all things are inter-dependent and indeterminate. Similarly, Hussey suggests that Heraclitus’ “unity in opposites” might show that there are further solutions than just monism or plurality (Hussey 1999: 98). Nāgārjuna’s task is negative, to destroy ignorance, and not to advance some positive theory which merely replaces one conventional truth with another. Hence he says that “not any doctrine anywhere has been taught to anyone by the Buddha” (MK XXIV 24; see too MK XXIV 12). Thus it is not that all things have an inherent nature of emptiness; rather all things are empty of inherent nature. We should not hold onto or grasp after emptiness (MK IV 9, XIII 8, XXIV 11). Nāgārjuna only uses emptiness as a teaching aid (MK XXII 11). Emptiness is like an antidote (Williams 1989: 62), which uses itself up in overcoming the poison thought of inherent nature so that neither remain. Or, following McCagney, it is like air – there is simply nothing to grasp (McCagney 1997: xx, 25, 33). As Nāgārjuna says, “the one who clings is clinging to what is everywhere open” (MK XXII 10).

This first interpretation of Parmenides’ truth, not charitable to him because it fixes him with the very error he has exhorted others to avoid, is nevertheless instructive in being a final salutary warning, as Nāgārjuna himself makes, not to grasp after any conceptual determinacy (because all concepts are illusory and indeterminate).

There is a second, more charitable interpretation. If Parmenides is rightly a monist of sorts, what is that one thing? Perhaps it is Life (or Being) itself. This does not commit us to the view that Life only manifests itself in one thing, or that all instances of Life are permanent and independent. Rather, it is consistent with Life itself being persistent and ever-present, with manifestations which are inter-dependent and without differing inherent natures. This is not such a lowest common denominator as to be trivial: it has serious implications for cosmogeny

(how the universe came to be); and it has serious implications for ethics, e.g., should we behave virtuously if virtue is itself a mere concept devoid of inherent value?⁹

Adopting this second interpretation, are there still parallels here with Nāgārjuna? Support can be found in Conze. He agrees that for Parmenides the higher truth is a transcendent reality which, to circumvent the difficulties of adequate verbal expression, is hinted at through the use of paradoxes (Conze 1963: 20-21). This Conze compares to the “monistic ontology” of Mahāyāna Buddhism (the branch in which Madhyamaka is found), which he says developed the notion of emptiness as the prime avenue to nirvāṇa, itself the one and single, the ultimate and unconditioned reality (Conze 1963: 10-11). Thus we might say that the higher truth for Parmenides and Nāgārjuna is perhaps a cognitive state which transcends conventional and dualist conceptions (including any meaningful distinction between pluralist and monist), a state principally characterized as nothing more or less than a pure abiding in Life.

A final warning: whatever transcendent state we might hope to experience (e.g., MK XVIII 9), in the meantime nirvāṇa is still only a concept with no inherent difference from, indeed dependent upon, its opposite concept of saṃsāra (the realm of bondage) (MK XXV 19, XVI 10). We must not grasp after nirvāṇa, for it is yet another illusion (MK XXV, 10, 12). As Nāgārjuna says, “for those who say ‘nirvāṇa will be mine,’ their grasping of the non-grasping of freedom is a gigantic grasping” (MK XVI 29).

Conclusion

The strong substantive parallels between Parmenides and Nāgārjuna begin with their rejection of illusory or false opinion. The conventional truth, that there is a plurality of independent things in the world, i.e., a plurality of things with independent and differing inherent natures, is familiar and convenient, but such things are only conceptual constructs which we create, and we should not be blinded or deluded by our creation.

For both Parmenides and Nāgārjuna, two methods in particular are used in support of their case. First, paradox helps signal the falsity of conventional truth.

⁹We might note here that Nāgārjuna continues to put store by self-restraint, kindliness, and friendliness (MK XVII 33), and affirms that Buddha himself taught from compassion (MK XXVII 30).

If we see something as being both the same and not the same as itself simultaneously, or as being itself while at the same time dependent upon its negating opposite in an unbroken cycle of mutual dependency, this should reveal the ignorance of our “two-headed” thinking. Second, they both use arguments designed to show the logical impossibility of a plurality of independent things ever arising. One thing (or nothing) cannot give rise to something of an independently differing nature not found in the one, let alone without a cause to govern or restrict what arises when, without which generation would be infinite and continuous, an absurd proposition.

Setting aside the conventional truth, what comes of the higher truth? If Parmenides is interpreted as a straightforward monist, then here he parts company with Nāgārjuna. For the latter, monism is as empty of inherent worth as pluralism. Instead, Parmenides would stand as a final warning against grasping after conceptual determinacy rather than accepting the middle way of indeterminacy or openness of all phenomena. But an alternative interpretation restores the parallels, whereby the higher truth for both Parmenides and Nāgārjuna is a unitary cognitive state which transcends conventional conceptions, which sees all things as empty of inherent nature, and which is perhaps characterized simply as a pure abiding in Life.

The consequence of all this is to recover the meaning and importance of Parmenides as a philosopher, and to reveal a European line of philosophy which independently supports some of the principal insights of Buddhist thought, and which was developed contemporaneously with Buddhism.

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Book Review

***Reading Buddhist Sanskrit Texts: An Elementary Grammatical Guide.* By K.L. Dhammajoti. Hong Kong: Buddha-dharma Centre of Hong Kong. 2012. vii + 361 pp. ISBN 978-988-16820-1-7.**

The scholar Wendy Doniger once observed that people who take up the study of Sanskrit tend to divide into two camps: those who are interested primarily in Hinduism, and those who are interested primarily in Buddhism.¹

Professor Bhikkhu K. L. Dhammajoti takes up a similar theme in the Preface to *Reading Buddhist Sanskrit Texts*. There are, he explains, many fine books available for those who want to learn Sanskrit, but none of these are written especially for people who want to learn Sanskrit in order to read Buddhist texts. It is for such people that Prof. Dhammajoti has produced this book. His implied aim is to spare prospective readers of Buddhist texts from having “to spend a large amount of effort and time in getting acquainted with those texts which are neither their concern proper nor source of inspiration, mastering their vocabularies and idiomatic expressions, only to find that at the end of a year or so of study, they still need to spend [a] considerable amount of effort to even begin reading the Buddhist sources” (p. v).

Prof. Dhammajoti is the Glorious Sun Professor of Buddhist Studies at the University of Hong Kong, where he regularly teaches the popular course “Readings in Buddhist Sanskrit Texts”. The book *Reading Buddhist Sanskrit Texts* has grown out of that experience in particular, and is essentially a repackaging of course materials Prof. Dhammajoti has developed over the years, with some important additions.

¹ According to Richard Gombrich, personal communication, July 2011.

Prof. Dhammajoti is careful to distinguish between what he calls “Buddhist Sanskrit” and “Hybrid Buddhist Sanskrit” (p. vi). It is the former which is the concern of *Reading Buddhist Sanskrit Texts*. Prof. Dhammajoti describes rather than defines Buddhist Sanskrit texts: generally they “do not violate classical Sanskrit grammar in a fundamental manner, even though they admittedly employ terminologies and expressions not attested in classical Indian non-Buddhist texts” (p. vi). Examples of Buddhist Sanskrit texts identified by Prof. Dhammajoti include the *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā*, popularly known as the “Diamond Sutra”, and other “Perfection of Wisdom” sutras, and it is from these and other Buddhist texts that Prof. Dhammajoti has extracted “all vocabulary, examples, and exercises” (p. vi) found in each lesson (with a few ancillary alterations). The result is that with this book one begins immediately, from the very first lesson and through all subsequent lessons, to learn Sanskrit by studying what is characteristic of, or at least what is found in, Buddhist texts (sandhi is ignored in the first lessons).

In teaching exclusively through examples and exercises taken directly from texts, Prof. Dhammajoti follows the approach taken by A. K. Warder in *Introduction to Pali* (which appears on an included list of Useful References, p. 317). Like *Introduction to Pali*, and like other Sanskrit primers, *Reading Buddhist Sanskrit Texts* consists of lessons which progressively cover more advanced topics, with each lesson containing a vocabulary and exercises. But in the case of *Reading Buddhist Sanskrit Texts*, the exercises consist entirely of translating phrases and sentences from the aforementioned *Vajracchedikā* and other texts from Sanskrit to English. The student who completes all the exercises will have translated a large portion of the *Vajracchedikā*, and many passages from other Buddhist texts as well. Answers to the exercises are not provided, but, as we shall see, the book compensates for this lack in interesting ways.

Readers should be aware that after a most perfunctory discussion of the Sanskrit alphabet and the *devanāgarī* script (pp. 1-2), all examples, exercises, and vocabulary are given in Roman script. Therefore a more descriptive title for the book might be *Reading Buddhist Sanskrit Texts in Roman Script*. But here again we will see that the book has a pleasant surprise in store for those who through other means learn to read *devanāgarī*.

One of the more important parts of the book is a substantial master Sanskrit-English vocabulary (estimated at approximately 1,400 entries). Words are indexed to the lesson in which they are introduced, and as a bonus Prof. Dhammajoti has provided a corresponding Chinese word or expression for many Sanskrit

terms.² It is of course by providing a vocabulary that Prof. Dhammajoti aims to help students understand commonplace Sanskrit words, as well as the special “terminologies and expressions” found in Buddhist Sanskrit texts. Some vocabulary entries will indeed be quite helpful for those new to the material. For example, the entry for *dhātuḥ* (p. 322) points out that while in classical Sanskrit *dhātuḥ* is masculine, in Buddhist texts it is often feminine. Entries which identify a word as the proper name of some entity found in a Buddhist text will also be very helpful for newcomers. Yet, while the master vocabulary is an important and undoubtedly valuable part of the book, it is marred by two major defects. The first is that words appear in the order of the English alphabet, not in their proper Sanskrit order. The second is that the master vocabulary is divided into sections, listed here in the order they appear (pp. 318-357): “Noun”, “Agent nouns”, “Verbs”, “Gerund”, “Infinitives”, “Imperatives”, “Participles”, “Adjectives”, “Indeclinables/Adverbs”, “Pronoun”, and “Numerals”. This division works well enough at the end of each lesson, where new words and types of words are introduced, but it is a poor organizing principal for a master vocabulary. One foresees that time and effort will be wasted in the search for words which a student does not know how to classify according to Prof. Dhammajoti’s categories. This artificial division also impedes, rather than encourages, efforts to first see and then understand words which are related to one another, for example different types of words beginning with a common verbal root.

Complaints more to do with form than substance apply to other parts of the book as well. These complaints are prompted by the conviction that form itself can help or hinder the learning process, especially for a highly systematic language such as Sanskrit in which pattern recognition is vital. One wishes the formatting of the entire book would consistently aid, rather than display indifference toward, the development of this critical skill. Consider for example the book’s many inflectional paradigms. They are shown in a tabular form with centre-aligned columns, whereas the columns ought to be left-aligned, the better to draw attention to the fact that case *endings vary* instead of drawing attention to the irrelevant visual phenomenon whereby columns seem to undulate in *varying width*. Whatever the reason for this particular formatting choice, for the book overall one cannot avoid the impression that word processing software too often has been allowed to dictate what the reader sees and experiences, with many unfortunate results.

² A gesture aimed largely at the majority of Professor Dhammajoti’s students at the University of Hong Kong, but useful for all with an interest in Chinese translations of Sanskrit terms.

This accounts for some of the defects already noted, as well as the book's many inopportune page breaks, including those which prevent an inflectional paradigm from being seen and contemplated as a single unit. It also accounts for the presence of relentlessly hierarchal but futile headings and "numbered" lists, courtesy of which valuable space on the physical page and in the reader's mind is burdened with the distracting display of labels such as "13.1.2.IV.1 Paradigm (a)" and "13.1.2.IV.2 Paradigm (b)", as on pp. 226-227. Closely related is the more general but equally lamentable tendency found throughout the book to overuse, and misuse, bullet points.

The book also has a generous share of typos, mistakes and other irregularities. To point out just a few: Michael Coulson is repeatedly misidentified as "L. S. Coulson" (p. 177 n. 3, p. 178 n. 11); the list of abbreviations (pp. viii-ix) contains duplicate entries for "voc", and nearly duplicate entries for "Vy"; the master vocabulary has *vibhū* for 'lord, king' instead of *vibhu* (p. 333); the explanation of *tathā* on p. 86 has been collapsed into the line devoted to *yathā*; the word "respectively" on p. 86 is misspelled "respective"; an anomalous page-sized "text box" with no internal margins to the left, right, or top awkwardly encompasses all the exercises on p. 175.

How much the book's formatting and mistakes actually degrade "signal" and cause it to be lost amid "noise" is for each reader to decide. Because learning Sanskrit is already challenging for many people, even without distractions, and because there is much to admire in this book, one hopes that a second edition will come forth under the hand of a strong editor.

In terms of content I have emphasized the targeted nature of *Reading Buddhist Sanskrit Texts*, but I do not mean to suggest the book is light in its treatment of classical Sanskrit grammar. Prof. Dhammajoti modestly uses terms such as "elementary" (in the subtitle), "simple" (p. v) and "basic" (p. vi) to hint at the scope of the book, but devotes a full 239 pages, not including the master glossary and certain other supplemental material, to the fundamental points of the language. By comparison, the 2010 edition of Coulson's *Complete Sanskrit* (with approximately similar dimensions but higher data density and a decent treatment of *devanāgarī*) runs to 232 pages, not including the master vocabulary and other supplemental material. *Reading Buddhist Sanskrit Texts* is not meant to be a comprehensive grammar, but it is more than elementary. Perhaps it is fair to say that the book goes into enough grammatical detail for students to start doing what the title suggest they could be doing. Attention to grammatical detail is seen per-

haps most clearly in the book's marked proclivity to push the analysis of forms derived from verbal roots: the symbol $\sqrt{\quad}$ and a selection of quasi-mathematical operators are employed often and to good effect, in the lessons and in the master vocabulary, in what seem to be hundreds of examples.

Indeed there is often a mathematical or formulaic flavour to the book's treatment of Sanskrit grammar. Frequently this is quite effective, given the systematic nature of Sanskrit, but one feels that attempts to figuratively represent the complexity of external sandhi do not really succeed. Prof. Dhammajoti presents an external sandhi grid (p. 316) that is compressed³ and cryptic, employing a symbol and four codes in what appears to be a bold attempt to reduce the vertical dimension of the array. It is doubtful that any benefit is gained through sacrificing resolution in this way, and to me the grid seems over-engineered.

A penchant for the formulaic also comes through in some of the book's prose (p. 188):

An absolutive construction is one in which the participle (p) agrees with a subject (s1) which is different from the subject (sv) of the verb of the sentence. s1 may be either a noun or a pronoun; p may be either a past or present participle.

When both s1 and p are in the loc...

In other cases the prose is more natural, the explanation more nuanced (p. 62):

api and *kim*, when placed in front of a statement, turn the latter into a question. Among the two, *api* is the stronger in tone, soliciting a definite "yes" or "no" response. Sometimes the particle *nu* is added to *kim/api*, which reinforces the tone of the question.

In yet other cases Prof. Dhammajoti is a neutral reporter (p. 42):

To explain this manner of occurrence of *sah/sa*, some grammarians speak of two forms...

³The grid contains 45 discreet entries representing the intersection of permitted finals and initial letters. In comparison, Bucknell's external sandhi grid contains 154 discrete entries (Sanskrit Manual, 2006, p. 74). Even greater resolution is achieved by Coulson, whose external sandhi grid contains 190 discrete entries (Complete Sanskrit, 2010, p. 27).

This latter role is one Prof. Dhammajoti seems to enjoy. Having disclaimed being “a specialist grammarian” (p. v), Prof. Dhammajoti is free to be non-dogmatic with respect to such controversies in Sanskrit grammar as may sometimes surface. For example, in his presentation of *bahuvrihi* compounds, Prof. Dhammajoti states (p. 164): “Generally, its last member is a noun or an adjective used substantively. But there are some exceptions”. The discussion is then taken offline, so to speak, and in a long chapter endnote Prof. Dhammajoti explains that some grammarians, but not all, insist that a *bahuvrihi* necessarily ends in a substantive (p. 177 n. 11). Citations of the works or words of Duroiselle, Warder, Monier-Williams, Whitney, and Coulson follow.

Through notes such as this one, and still other more remarkable notes ranging from commentary on Conze’s translation word choices to the way Pali (as opposed to Sanskrit) texts present a particular passage, one comes to better appreciate Prof. Dhammajoti’s achievement. That is to say, whereas authors such as Warder and Coulson enriched their books on Pali and Sanskrit, respectively, with lines of elegant prose which are often a joy to read, Prof. Dhammajoti has enriched his book with an eclectic assortment of notes that initiate the student into what might be called the joys of textual scholarship. Besides the notes already mentioned, there are notes which deal with doctrinal matters, knowledge of which is necessary for an appreciation of the Sanskrit passage in question. Other notes, and these are many, are entirely in Chinese and deal with Chinese translations of Sanskrit passages, drawing from the work of Xuan Zang, for example, or Kumārajīva. Many of the notes pertain to the exercises; one points out that a particular vocative seems out of place in a text; others suggest English translation choices on the basis of venerable Chinese translations. Taken as a whole, the notes constitute a surprising and valuable part of the book. Above all they reveal to the newcomer that behind the massive facade of rules, the paradigms, the theoretical precision of the Sanskrit language, the texts themselves still hold plenty of mystery and wonder.

I have mentioned the exercises above, but I should point out here that whether they have notes or not, the exercises make up another very valuable part of the book. Most passages which make up the exercises seem to have been chosen with care, not only for their grammatical potential, but also for reasons of doctrinal

interest, or perhaps even for their fame.⁴ Moreover, almost all the passages have been identified (by text and, apparently, the numbering system conventionally used for that text). Students who complete all the exercises will have become acquainted with portions of a dozen texts, and will be able to identify and pursue these texts for further study.

There is one more feature of this book which is particularly noteworthy. Prof. Dhammajoti has performed the thankless task of retranslating the *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā* (i.e. the “Diamond Sutra”) from Conze’s 1957 edition of the Sanskrit text. A formatting triumph has been achieved on pp. 241-310, where the entire Sanskrit text of the *Vajracchedikā* has been reproduced in both Roman and *devanāgarī* script on the left page, with Prof. Dhammajoti’s English translation on the right page, paragraph lined up neatly across from corresponding paragraph. The *devanāgarī* is clear, handsome, and large enough to be read with no trouble. In a few cases Prof. Dhammajoti has emended the text, marking changes in bold type.

As for the translation itself, connoisseurs of English prose may not find parts of it particularly lovely, or even comprehensible (p. 246):

As many, Subhūti, beings as there are, subsumed by the being-subsumption under the being sphere...

Here is the Sanskrit text (p. 245) of the same passage, along with Conze’s translation (Conze, 2001, p. 15):

yāvantah subhūte sattvāḥ sattvadhātau sattvasaṃgrahena saṃgrhītā...

As many beings as there are in the universe of beings, comprehended under the term ‘beings’...

When one compares the translations to the actual Sanskrit text, one sees that Prof. Dhammajoti has tried to stay close to the Sanskrit by including the vocative *subhūte* (“Subhūti”) and communicating a sense of *saṃgrahena saṃgrhītā* (“subsumed by the subsumption”). That is, Prof. Dhammajoti has tried to account for each word, something that Conze is known for not doing. In this example

⁴As Prof. Dhammajoti notes in the Preface, many of his students in Hong Kong have some knowledge of Mahāyāna texts in Chinese. For these students the book sheds light on the Sanskrit version of well-known words and phrases.

Conze's translation is by far the more readable, and surely the one more intelligible to most people. But Prof. Dhammajoti is not writing for most people; he has tried to produce more of a word-for-word translation for the benefit of students new to the study of Sanskrit. Despite misgivings about some of Prof. Dhammajoti's word choices, I am sure that students new to Sanskrit, or new to Buddhist Sanskrit, will profit from the translation as they work through the many exercises drawn from the *Vajracchedikā*, or, finished with lessons, they tackle the entire text on their own. That is what this book holds out the promise of: that one can get to the point where one can read an actual Buddhist Sanskrit text. This book will go a long way towards helping students reach that goal.

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