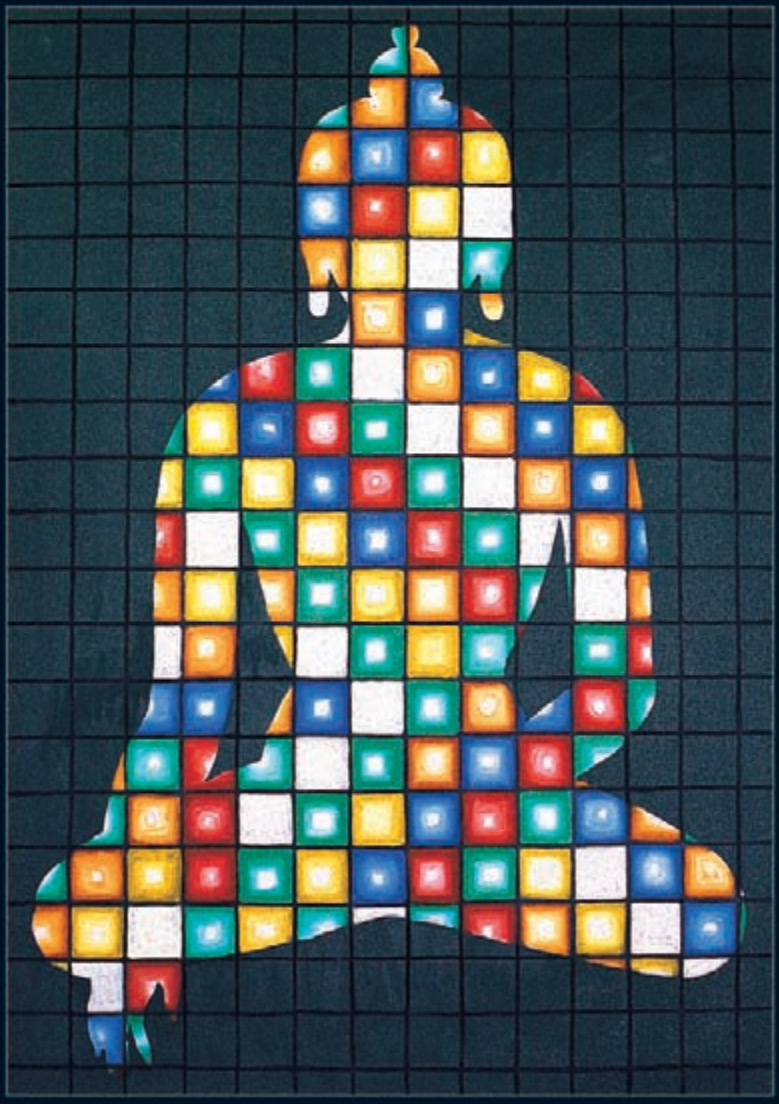
CRITICAL TERMS FOR THE STUDY OF BUDDHISM



EDITED BY DONALD S. LOPEZ JR.

Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism

BUDDHISM AND MODERNITY *A series edited by Donald S. Lopez Jr.*

CRITICAL TERMS *for the* STUDY OF BUDDHISM

Edited by Donald S. Lopez Jr.

The University of Chicago Press *Chicago and London*

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The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 60637
The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London

Printed in the United States of America

14 13 12 11 10 09 08 07 06 05 1 2 3 4 5

ISBN: 0-226-49314-8 (cloth)
ISBN: 0-226-49315-6 (paper)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Critical terms for the study of Buddhism / edited by Donald S. Lopez Jr.
p. cm. — (Buddhism and modernity)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-226-49314-8 (hardcover : alk. paper) —
ISBN 0-226-49315-6 (pbk : alk. paper)
1. Buddhism—Philosophy. 2. Buddhism—Study and teaching. I. Lopez, Donald S., 1952– II. Series.
BQ4040.C75 2005
294.3′07—dc22
2004021020

∞ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1992.

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This ancient faith requires a master-hand to open the abstruse phraseology and figurative language under which its philosophical doctrines lie concealed.
—Edward Upham (1829)

Introduction: Impressions of the Buddha

Donald S. Lopez Jr.

Buddhism, perhaps more than any other "non-Western" religion, has long been an object of fascination, both popular and academic. It has been variously represented as a form of idolatry, as an atheistic religion, as a religion of reason, as a religion of science, and as no religion at all. In the nineteenth century, its portrayal as a religion of the individual, free from the constraints of ritual, institution, and a creator deity, made it fashionable to call oneself a Buddhist in London and in Boston. After the Second World War, a particular version of Zen served as the inspiration for the Beat poets. And during the last decade, Tibetan Buddhism, and its foremost representative, the Dalai Lama, has offered a compelling blend of the spiritual and the political to a growing audience that includes college students and movie stars.

But this fascination is a relatively recent phenomenon. European explorers, missionaries, and soldiers had encountered Buddhists for centu-

ries in all parts of Asia, yet only belatedly came to recognize the religion of these various peoples as somehow the same thing, as something that they would come to call Buddhism. It is the projection of this overarching essence onto various cultural forms ranging across regions, dynasties, and languages that provides a productive entry into questions of how religious identity has been formed by Buddhists and by scholars of Buddhism. The components of this identity are not only points of doctrine but also patrons, places, and portable works of art. The exploration of this identity is one of the aims of the present volume.

Especially over the last century, a particular image of Buddhism took form, one that came to be adopted by Asian Buddhist teachers and their students in the West as well as by some distinguished orientalists. They saw Buddhism as a "world religion" surpassing Christianity in antiquity, number of adherents (whether there were more Christians or Buddhists in the world was a hotly contested issue a century ago) and canonical scriptures, and, according to some, philosophical profundity. This Buddhism has been regarded above all as a religion of reason, dedicated to bringing an end to suffering. It is strongly ethical and is devoted to nonviolence, and as such is a vehicle for social reform. The Buddha himself is represented as the exemplar of these virtues, speaking out against the caste system and the practice of animal sacrifice. It is, however, an atheistic religion because it denies the existence of an omnipotent deity. And because it places a strong emphasis on rational analysis, it is, more than any other religion, compatible with modern science. The essential practice of Buddhism is meditation, with the rituals of consecration, purification, and exorcism so common throughout Asia largely dismissed as late accretions of popular superstition. This Buddhism has been embraced in the West as both an alternative religion and an alternative to religion.

One of the aims of the present volume is to analyze, critique, and explore this image of Buddhism. The essays, ranging widely across geographic regions and historical periods, identify those elements in the history of the development of Buddhism that have lent themselves to persistently being cast as essential to Buddhism, as well as those elements that seem so easily to fade from view despite great historical and social importance. At the same time, each contributor, in his or her own way, signals new directions toward the understanding of Buddhism, taking constructive and sometimes polemical positions in an effort to demonstrate both the shortcomings of widespread assumptions about Buddhism and the potential power of revisioning. The hope is that, by following a variety of disciplinary approaches (including anthropology, literary theory, art history, continental philosophy, and cultural studies) while building upon the philological and archival models that have long been the foundation of the field, this volume will offer resources *for* the study of Buddhism and resources *from* the study of Buddhism.

Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism, then, is intended as an introduction to fundamental categories essential for new and nuanced understandings of the Buddhist traditions. Each of the essays provides an opportunity to consider the ways a particular term illumines the practice of Buddhism, in what might be termed "traditional" Buddhist societies as well as in the realms of **modernity** (terms considered in this volume are in boldface here).

The inhabitants of those worlds include both Buddhists and Buddhologists (as scholars of Buddhism call themselves). One characteristic that these two groups share, especially in the anglophone world, is their tendency not to write for one another. The growing list of publications by Buddhists are often either translations (or retellings) of famous Buddhist texts, or instructions on how to face life, and **death**, from the Buddhist perspective. The authors are sometimes eminent Buddhist teachers (like the Dalai Lama or Thich Nhat Hanh) or recent converts recounting their experience of the dharma. Regardless of their author, the works are aimed generally at **practice** and on the Buddha's (or his successors') **word**. The works of Buddhologists are, obviously, more scholarly in approach, generally seeking to understand a **person**, a text, an **institution**, or a doctrine within the context of its **history**. Buddhists rarely read what Buddhologists write because it seems unnecessarily complicated or disconnected from life's concerns. Buddhologists rarely read what (contemporary) Buddhists write because it seems too simple or too overtly focused upon **pedagogy**.

One of the assumptions, or at least hopes, of the contributors to this volume is that, two hundred years after the word *Boudhism* first appeared in English, a critical moment may have arrived in which a different kind of writing about Buddhism is possible. Has Buddhism become sufficiently engrained in the literary culture that writers can come to terms with it in ways that may in fact be interesting and productive to those who are not (necessarily) Buddhists or Buddhologists? The essayists therefore reflect the audience for which this volume is intended; described in the classic Madhyamaka mode, they include those who are (1) Buddhists and not Buddhologists, (2) Buddhologists and not Buddhists, (3) both Buddhists and Buddhologists, and (4) neither Buddhists nor Buddhologists.

CRITICAL TERMS

The Buddha was apparently very good with words. His voice was endowed with the sixty-four qualities of melodious speech. Such was his **power** as a speaker that when he preached the dharma, it is said that the members of the audience, regardless of their native tongue, heard the Buddha speak to them in their own language. According to other accounts, the Buddha in fact did not say anything more than *a*, the first letter of the Sanskrit alphabet, yet everyone heard a sermon in their own language that spoke

directly to them, appropriate to their particular interests and needs. And still other accounts say that the Buddha did not speak at all, yet each member of the assembly, numbering sometimes in the tens of thousands, heard him speak as if each were sitting alone at the Buddha's feet. His words would continue to be heard, or at least recorded, for centuries after he passed into nirvāṇa, eventually to be collected into thousands of texts in dozens of languages.

The Tibetan king Ral pa can (reigned AD 815–36) is described in Chinese annals as a weak monarch, but is remembered by Tibetan sources as a devout Buddhist and counted as the third and last "dharma king" (*chos rgyal*) of Tibet. His devotion to the dharma was said to be so great that he allowed Buddhist monks to sit upon his long royal locks. Ral pa can also supported the translation of scores of Indian Buddhist texts from Sanskrit into Tibetan. In order to provide some consistency in these translations, he convened a meeting of scholars in 821 and charged them with providing standard Tibetan equivalents for a wide range of terms encountered in Sanskrit Buddhist texts. The result was a Sanskrit-Tibetan lexicon known as the *Mahāvyutpatti* (the term itself does not appear in the lexicon, but *vyutpatti* does, based on which the title might be rendered as "Great Detailed Explanation"). This lexicon, one of many in the Buddhist literatures of Asia, contains 9,565 terms (and the king is said to have instructed the compilers not to include tantric vocabulary). This was only one of Ral pa can's **gifts** to the dharma. So extravagant was his support of Buddhism, it is said, that he bankrupted the **economy** of his kingdom, and was assassinated for doing so.

After almost twelve hundred more years of Buddhist history, not only in Tibet but across Asia, and more recently around the world, how does one go about selecting fifteen critical terms for the study of Buddhism? There are, of course, thousands of terms from Sanskrit, Pāli, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Tibetan, Thai, and other Buddhist languages, living and dead, that might, from one perspective or another, be considered critical in the sense of highly important. Even if one were to confine oneself to Asian-language terms that have found their way into English dictionaries, there are dozens. To limit the list to fifteen for a volume of this size, one might choose *bardo*, *bodhisattva*, *dharma*, *karma*, *koan*, *lama*, *mandala*, *mantra*, *nirvana*, *samadhi*, *samsara*, *sutra*, *stupa*, *tantra*, and *zen*. There is a different set of English terms that are either familiar translations of Buddhist terms or have gained a strong association with Buddhism. Here, one might select *compassion*, *emptiness*, *enlightenment*, *four noble truths*, *insight*, *liberation*, *lineage*, *method*, *middle way*, *monk*, *perfection of wisdom*, *pure land*, *rebirth*, *three jewels*, and *wisdom*.

Neither of these types of terms has been included here, although both figure importantly in the fifteen essays in this volume. To make Asian-language terms the focus of the volume would run the risk of it

becoming an expanded glossary, a kind of encyclopedic dictionary compiling the extensive scholarship that has been produced for each of the terms. As useful as such a text might be, the purpose of *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism* is not primarily to synthesize previous scholarship. Thus, although each of the fifteen Asian-language terms figures in the fifteen essays in this volume, none provides their title. To make the English "Buddhist" terms the focus of the volume would result in a similarly informational work, with the normative tradition, and especially its doctrine, largely determining the content of the chapters. To adopt either approach would be to concede, rather than to consider, the notion that Buddhism is a unitary tradition founded on such terms—apparently transparent translations, for example, from Sanskrit to Chinese to English.

Instead, the volume seeks to come to terms with Buddhism. It is organized (with one exception) around fifteen English words that are not, or at least not especially, associated with Buddhism. Rather than providing a doctrinal exposition or a historical survey, each of the contributors provides a meditation (another Buddhist term not included among the titles) on a term, to demonstrate the critical pertinence of the category for Buddhism as well as to suggest the ways in which the various Buddhist traditions might deepen, expand, and complicate our understanding of the English term.

There are, of course, many other terms that could have been chosen, even using the specific approach adopted here. Fifteen other critical terms that come immediately to mind are *authority*, *body*, *canon*, *causation*, *civilization*, *icon*, *gender*, *manuscript*, *memory*, *philosophy*, *place*, *reason*, *relic*, *state*, and *time*. But those must await another volume.

BUDDHISM

Dwight Eisenhower, a president not particularly remembered for his wit, once remarked that "all isms are wasms." He was presumably referring, rather presciently, to the largely forgotten isms that were once perceived as a threat to truth, justice, and the American way: Marxism, socialism, communism. But Eisenhower's remark points to the vaguely pejorative quality that the suffix *-ism* provides, evoking something that others believe in and that they will eventually abandon when they see the error in their ways. This is perhaps most germane in the realm of religion, in which rivals of the one true faith—Christianity—are isms of one kind or another. In the seventeenth century, only four religions were identified in the world: Christianity, Judaism, Islam (generally called Mohammedism or some variant of the term), and Paganism (also known as Idolatry). The history of the academic study of religion is in one sense a process of replacing Paganism with a larger list of isms: Hinduism, Confucianism, Daoism, Shintoism, Sikhism, and, of course, Buddhism.

Hinduism is a term derived from *hind*, a Persian word for the Indus River valley, an area now located in Pakistan and populated by Muslims. The term has no correlate in Sanskrit, its sacred language. The derivation of *Buddhism* is a somewhat more complicated case. The Buddha is said to have referred to his teachings as the *dharma vinaya*. *Vinaya* refers to the rules of monastic discipline. *Dharma* is more difficult to translate, with one commentary providing ten meanings, from "phenomenon," to "virtue," to "life," to "vow." Nineteenth-century translators commonly translated it as "law." In the context of the term *dharma vinaya*, it might be more accurately translated as "teachings" or "doctrine." The Buddha therefore seemed to regard his teachings as a corpus of doctrines and rules of discipline. And, indeed, when we look up *ism* in *Webster's Third International Dictionary*, we find the third definition to be "doctrine, theory, or cult (Buddh*ism*)." His collected teachings were known in Sanskrit as *buddhadharma*, the teaching or doctrine of the Buddha, and his followers were called *bauddha*, "of the Buddha," hence "Buddhist."

Of course, what counted as Buddhist has been a subject of controversy for many centuries. The Tibetan pilgrim Chag lo tsa ba went to India in 1234 to find the major monasteries and places of pilgrimage either destroyed by Muslim armies or barely under Buddhist control. Even Bodhgayā, the site of the Buddha's enlightenment, was tended by a small band of monks, not from India, but from Sri Lanka, who would periodically retreat into the forest when Muslim troops approached. One might imagine that such circumstances would inspire a certain solidarity among the Buddhists. But as Chag lo tsa ba entered the monastery at Bodhgayā with a copy of the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Stanzas* on his back, he was stopped by a Theravāda monk who said, "You are a good monk; the Mahāyāna text you are carrying on your back is not good. Throw it in the river. This so-called Mahāyāna was not spoken by the Buddha. It was fabricated by a clever man named Nāgārjuna." Thus, although the Sanskrit adjective *bauddha*, meaning "Buddhist," appears commonly in Indian literature, there appears to be some disagreement about what it signified. The next step would be to change the terminal *t* into an *m*.

In Sri Lanka, Buddhism is simply referred to as the *sāsana*, the teaching. In Tibet, it is commonly referred to as *nang pa'i cho*s, the religion of the insiders. In China, it is *fo jiao*, the teaching of the Buddha. In Japan, it is *butsudō*, the way of the Buddha. In the history of the Buddhist traditions of Asia, there has been a consistent recognition of (and nostalgia for) India as the birthplace of the Buddha, embellished by myths that he also visited other lands, like Sri Lanka and Burma. Apart from this, the cognizance and acknowledgment that the various local forms of Buddhism together constitute or derive a single entity called Buddhism has waxed and waned and waxed again over the course of Asian history.

The European identification of Buddhism as a single pan-Asian tradition only began to emerge toward the end of the eighteenth century. The *Oxford English Dictionary* records the use of the term *Boudhism* in 1801, changed to *Buddhism* in 1816. The first English-language book to have *Buddhism* in its title was Edward Upham's *The History and Doctrine of Budhism, Popularly Illustrated* (1829), from which the epigraph for this introduction is drawn. Upham's subtitle gives some sense of his interests in the topic: *With Notices of the Kappooism or Demon Worship and of the Bali or Planetary Incantations of Ceylon, embellished with 43 lithographic prints from the original singalese designs*.

It is with the invention of the category of World Religion, that the term *Buddhism* takes on a further fixity, especially among Buddhists. Yet it is important to recall that in the late nineteenth century, the composition of a book that summarizes the basic beliefs of Buddhism, the suggestion of the design for a Buddhist flag, and the formulation of fourteen "Fundamental Buddhistic Beliefs" were not the work of any Asian Buddhist but of an American, Colonel Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907), cofounder of the Theosophical Society.

Today, we use the term *Buddhism* rather naturally. It figures in the names of college courses and on the covers of books (like this one); in larger bookshops it designates an entire section of their inventory. Our usage of *Buddhism* occurs with little cognizance of its rather late vintage. One of the aims of this volume is to consider why it suddenly (historically speaking) seems so natural.

TERMS

The fifteen essays in this volume do not require introduction, but at least some mention of the contents of a collection of essays is a customary **ritual** of the genre, so let me survey them briefly. The terms the essays address are English words, with one exception. It seemed somehow untoward to publish a book called *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism* without including the term **buddha** in the list. And, regardless of how the term *Buddhism* is understood, most would concede that there could be no Buddhism without the Buddha. The term *buddha* has therefore been included, and the essay about the most famous being to bear that title has been placed at the beginning of the book, violating the order of the alphabet in deference to a different kind of priority. The author of the essay is the editor of the volume; the term fell to him through a process of elimination. *Buddha* is, of course, an impossible term to write about. Rather than trying to explain who the Buddha was or what it was he really taught, I chose to consider what the Buddha looked like—in other words, the image of the Buddha. Even this is a vast topic, and so the essay

focuses on the Buddha's head, specifically the top of his head, the highest point of the being exalted above all gods and humans.

In his essay on **art**, Charles Lachman takes up the question of what makes Buddhist art "Buddhist" and what makes it "art." He does so by providing a cultural history of a famous painting, exploring how a thirteenth-century ink monochrome painting of six persimmons by an obscure Chinese Buddhist monk, Muqi, came in the twentieth century to be regarded as the very essence of Zen (Buddhist) art, an art that is said to represent the ineffable, and iconoclastic, experience of enlightenment like no other. In light of this cautionary tale, Lachman argues for the study of art forms as historically embedded visual components of a specific community, where religious claims about truth and artistic claims about beauty can be evaluated as forms of discourse located in a particular cultural moment.

Jacqueline Stone explores a more traditional Buddhist category, **death**. It was the vision of a corpse being carried to the charnel ground that is said to have inspired Prince Siddhārtha to leave his palace, renounce the world, and set off in search of a state beyond death. Stone explains how the moment of death, variously defined, became a condensation point for all manner of Buddhist concerns. She focuses especially on medieval Japan, which witnessed a ritualization of the moment of death and the attendant production of competing guidebooks offering advice, and priestly service, to the dying. All manner of Buddhist doctrine was drawn to the moment(s) of death. As a consequence, even death became a domain for sectarian polemics.

Gustavo Benavides begins his essay on **economy** with the *Aggañña Sutta*, and the Buddhist myth of the origin of rice, work, and private property. Drawing on a wide range of scholarship, he considers why Buddhism, which in its doctrine so consistently preaches detachment from the world, is also so concerned with labor and its products, which include both monasteries and money. Benavides argues that there is, in fact, a strong affinity between asceticism and accumulation.

Reiko Ohnuma also considers a traditional Buddhist category, the **gift**, and especially what is called the "gift of the body," in which a part of one's anatomy (often an eye, an ounce of flesh, or one's head) or one's very life is offered to another. Ohnuma notes that in Buddhism, gratitude is not the standard response to a gift; instead, that gift and gratitude flow in the same direction, as the layperson is grateful to the monk for providing the opportunity to offer him food and the bodhisattva is grateful to the enemy for providing the opportunity to show patience. It is the possibility and paradox of this unreciprocated gift (which confounded even Marcel Mauss) that Ohnuma explores in her essay.

Timothy Barrett begins by noting that there is no single term in the standard Buddhist vocabularies that might be translated simply as "**history**." This does not mean, of course, that Buddhism lacks history or

historical consciousness; but Barrett ponders how a discussion of various notions of "Buddhism" and various notions of "history" might culminate in the formation of the category Buddhist History. His essay serves as an introduction to a book yet unwritten. What would be at stake if one were to undertake to write a *Cambridge History of Buddhism*? And how might that book be important, not simply as a record of the past, but as a resource for the present?

Timothy Brook argues that Buddhism, so long characterized as otherworldly, has been able to survive for so long because of its institutions. It is the **institution** that gives coherence to Buddhist thought and practice, that, in Brook's words, "make[s] it present in real life." He supports his claim by turning to social history, focusing on some of the constituents of the Buddhist revival that occurred in China during the seventeenth century.

One of the defining categories of the Buddhist traditions of Asia has been that of transmission, the circuits through which teachings are passed from teacher to student; authority and authenticity are often judged by the ability to trace a particular teaching back across time, space, and cultures to the lips of the Buddha himself. Eve Sedgwick explores the spaces that open and close and open again in the relationship between the Asian teacher and the American student at the end of the twentieth century, a relationship that has increasingly occurred on American soil. In the course of her exploration, she raises a crucial question: what (if anything) does the academic study of Buddhism have to do with Buddhist practice? She writes, then, about **pedagogy**, and she does so from the niche of "a nonspecialist educator's five-year engagement with English-language 'Buddhist' literature ranging from mass-market to scholarly."

William Pietz acknowledges that there is perhaps no concept more fundamental to Buddhism than the doctrine of no-self, rendered in Sanskrit as *pudgalanairātmya*, the lack of self in the **person**. But what is the person? And what is at stake in selecting the English term *person* to translate the Sanskrit term *pudgala*? Pietz explores this question not only through the classical texts of Buddhism but those of Europe as well. Whether or not persons exist ultimately, the United Nations declared in 1966 that the foundation of human rights is "the dignity and worth of the person." Rather than regarding the term *person* as having unrelated referents in the Buddhist and human rights contexts, Pietz's essay considers how one might arrive at a meaning of the term that is productive in both domains of discourse.

Craig Reynolds takes up the term **power**. When the Buddha was born, astrologers noted on his body the thirty-two marks of superman, indicating that he would either become a universal emperor or a buddha. These alternative destinies seem to inhabit two ends of a spectrum, with the emperor claiming all power for himself, while the buddha renounces all

power. As Reynolds demonstrates, it is not so simple. Drawing on Southeast Asian Buddhist traditions, and especially Thai and Burmese Buddhism, he examines power as potentiality, as sovereignty, and as a quality of the ascetic body of the monk, thus delineating some of the various ways in which power is accrued through the dharma.

We speak often in English of the **practice** of the dharma. But the term *practice* has no immediate cognate in the Buddhist languages of Asia. In his essay, Carl Bielefeldt ranges across the Buddhist traditions to consider the ways in which the word has come to carry a variety of special connotations in the English lexicon of Buddhism. He considers the different but overlapping Buddhist concepts that the term is meant to encompass, and he identifies the assumptions that follow inevitably from its use as both a transitive verb and as a noun. Such use has become standard in the anglophone discourse of Buddhism, and Bielefeldt reminds us of what is revealed, and what is concealed, by this language.

Since the nineteenth century, the Buddha has been portrayed as a reformer who rejected all priestcraft and forms of ritual in favor of the simple observance of a moral code and the solitary practice of meditation. More recently, scholars have begun to examine **ritual** elements in various Buddhist traditions. But in order to identify these elements, one must first consider what one means by *ritual*. Robert Sharf takes up this vexing term by providing an overview of the leading theories of ritual over the past century and then focusing on what has long been regarded as the least ritualized form of Buddhism: Zen. Drawing on Chinese monastic manuals, he argues that whether or not enlightenment is a form of inner experience, it is constituted in ritual performance, a ritual that remains commensurate with a Buddhist epistemology.

It is clear from Janet Gyatso's essay that if one is interested in learning about **sex** in Buddhism, the first place to turn is the code of monastic conduct, composed and preserved by monks who have taken a lifelong vow of celibacy. Gyatso's focus is not on what has been long regarded as the more liberal Mahāyāna, nor the notoriously licentious tantra, but the Pāli canon itself, and to those texts still regarded by many as closest to the Buddha himself. There she discovers (in texts whose standard English translations have been expurgated and bowdlerized) a fixation on all possible variations on the sex act, many of which, she demonstrates, are intentionally risible. But they are much more than that. Gyatso argues that the often obsessive regulations of so vividly imagined sex have less to do with the control of inner states of desire and more to do with the formation of the identity of the monastic community.

Buddhism has long been regarded as a tradition that, at its highest levels, is the embodiment of silence. Indeed, according to legend, the Buddha was initially reluctant to speak after his enlightenment. Yet Ryūichi Abé begins his essay on **word** by observing that Buddhism is a mass producer

of sacred words. He goes on to consider some of the many ways in which both the limitations of language and the power of the word have been understood in various traditions of Buddhist theory and practice, especially as it pertains to the state of enlightenment itself. In the face of this variety, Abé discovers continuities across readings of a phrase that occurs in three Buddhist traditions: Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and tantric, each of which describe the disciple as "born out of his [the Buddha's] mouth, born of the dharma, arisen from the dharma, heir to the dharma."

With the exception of "Buddha" at the beginning of the book, the chapters proceed in the alphabetical order of the critical terms, from "Art" to "Word," until the end, when the order is again broken. Because *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism* is the inaugural volume of the Buddhism and Modernity series, it seems fitting to have the volume begin with "Buddha" and end with "**Modernity**." For there has been a tendency in European, North American, and much Asian writing during the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries to portray Buddhism as ever modern, in part because of its preternatural anticipation of a latter day Enlightenment, in part because it seems, in whatever age, a preemptive and eternally trenchant critique of the modern. Marilyn Ivy argues in her essay, however, that whether because of its long and continuing association with fantasies of the mystic East or because of the perceived applicability of its teachings in all times and all cultures, Buddhism is "an inescapable constituent of what can be imagined as modernity."

* * *

Places of Buddhist pilgrimage are often marked by footprints, often giant ones, believed to have been left by the Buddha himself. Of such footprints, the Buddha is reported to have said, "In the future, intelligent beings will see the scriptures and understand. Those of less intelligence will wonder whether the Buddha appeared in the world. In order to remove their doubts, I have set my footprints in stone." The essays here do not pretend to provide the means whereby the presence of the Buddha can be inferred from the scriptures attributed to him, or even from the footprints he left behind. Nor do they provide the "master-hand to open the abstruse phraseology and figurative language under which its philosophical doctrines lie concealed" that Edward Upham longed for in 1829. Like the footprints of the Buddha, however, the essays in this volume are impressions of the Buddha. But unlike the footprints, they are not set in stone.

[A]nd here for the present we leave Buddha, *with an intention of returning to him in due time; observing only, that if the learned* Indians *differ so widely in their accounts of the age when their ninth* Avatar *appeared in their country, we may be assured that they have no certain chronology before him, and may suspect the certainty of all relations concerning even* his *appearance*. —Sir William Jones, 1786

BUDDHA

Donald S. Lopez Jr.

In Conrad Rooks's 1972 film of Herman Hesse's novel *Siddhartha*, there is a scene in which the protagonist's search leads him to the Buddha. The filmmaker is faced with a dilemma: how to depict a religious icon in human form. There is, of course, a century-long tradition of actors playing the role of Jesus on film, from Nonguet's *The Life and Passion of Jesus Christ* (1905), to DeMille's silent *King of Kings* (1927), to Pasolini's *Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964), to Scorsese's *Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), to Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), although each was controversial in its own way. Other directors have adopted a more pious approach by depicting Jesus but never showing his face, as in the 1959 version of *Ben-Hur*. And in *Life of Brian* (1979), Jesus is only seen from a great distance, thus exploring the acoustical hermeneutics, as previous biblical films had not, of the Sermon on the Mount. ("I think it was 'Blessed are the cheesemakers.'")

But there has not been a similar genre of Buddha films, so Conrad Rooks had no tradition from which to draw. As Siddhārtha approaches the Buddha, the camera adopts the Buddha's perspective, focusing on the faces of Siddhārtha and the group of monks who sit at the Buddha's feet. Later, Siddhārtha's companion Govinda offers a flower to the Buddha, but all that appears is the Buddha's extended hand; his body is obscured by the trunk of a tree. Later, Siddhārtha explains to the Buddha why he will not be joining his order of monks. The scene again is shot from the Buddha's perspective, with the Buddha's hand again extending, to offer Siddhārtha a flower. Thus Rooks adopts a kind of filmic aniconism, as if the Buddha transcends depiction. To add to the dislocated quality of the scenes with the Buddha, the monks are portrayed not by Indian actors but by Tibetan monks living in India as refugees at the time the film was made. And the Buddha speaks in an upper-class Indian-English voice, electronically enhanced with a slight echo.

Whether Rooks knew it or not, his reluctance to depict the person of the Buddha had an ancient precedent; art historians have argued for decades that in the centuries following the death of the Buddha, there was a prohibition against his representation. They noted that although the Buddha had died in the early fifth century BCE (although recent scholarship suggests that his life of eighty years may have occurred as much as a century later), no images of him appear prior to the first or second century CE, some five hundred years after he passed into nirvāṇa. The earliest Buddhist monuments seem instead to represent the presence of the Buddha by his absence: footprints, an empty throne, a riderless horse. Elsewhere, he appears to be represented by symbols: a lotus for his birth, a tree for his enlightenment, a wheel for his teaching (or "turning the wheel of the dharma"), a stūpa (or reliquary) for his death. Art historians assumed from this absence that the Buddha, or his immediate followers, had forbidden the making or worship of his image. And they speculated that the practice of representing the Buddha in human form had, in fact, been introduced from abroad, specifically by Greeks in the region of Gandhara (in modern Pakistan and Afghanistan).

This story is too lengthy to tell here. It might be noted, however, that the idea that the Buddha prohibited the veneration of his form is consistent with the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century view of the Buddha as a rationalist who never would have condoned idol worship; it could only have entered his tradition as a concession to the masses in the centuries after his passage into nirvāṇa. One might note as well that, a century after the aniconism theory was proposed, no proscriptions against making images of the Buddha have been located in an early Buddhist text, nor have any prescriptions for his representation been found. Yet the debate goes on, with one art historian arguing that in fact there never were such prohibitions; that the carvings do not depict events from

the life of the Buddha but instead show pilgrimages to and worship of important sites from his life, such as the Bodhi tree, or festivals celebrating the key moments in his biography, in which a riderless horse would be led from the city to commemorate his departure from his palace on his loyal steed Kanthaka. But images of the Buddha began to be made, and these became the Buddha that Europeans would encounter.

When Marco Polo arrived in Sri Lanka about 1292, on his return voyage to Venice he described Adam's Peak: "And I tell you they say that on this mountain is the sepulchre of Adam our first parent; at least that is what the Saracens say. But the Idolaters say that it is the sepulchre of SAGAMONI BORCAN, before whose time there were no idols. They hold him to have been the best of men, a great saint in fact, according to their fashion, and the first in whose name idols were made" (Yule [1926] 1986, 2:316–17). Polo, like the travelers who preceded and followed him, never identified the religion he encountered with the name Buddhism, referring to the monks he encountered simply as idolaters.

In his entry on Confucius in his *Dictionarium Sacrum Seu Religiosum: A Dictionary of All Religions, Ancient and Modern, Whether Jewish, Pagan, Christian, or Mahometan*, Daniel Defoe reported that, according to Chinese sources, the Buddha (which he referred to by the Chinese Fe) apparently came from somewhere in the Middle East and introduced idolatry to China.

> [Confucius] openly declar'd he was not the Inventor of this [i.e., "Confucian"] Doctrine, that he only collected it out of his Predecessors Writings, and used to say, there was a very Holy Man in the Western Lands, that he was called, by some *Zeuximgim*, but said no more of him. In the Year 66, after the Incarnation of our Blessed Saviour, the Emperor *Thinti* sent Ambassadors towards the *West*, to seek this Holy Man, but they stopped in an Island near the Red Sea, to consider a famous Idol named *Fe*, representing a Philosopher that lived 500 years before *Confucius*; this Idol they carried back along with them, with Instructions concerning the Worship paid to it and so introduced a Superstition, that in several things abolish'd the Maxims of *Confucius*, who always condemned Atheism and idolatry. (Defoe 1704, s.v. "Confucius")

It was only at the end of the eighteenth century that the conclusion was beginning to be drawn that the religions observed in Burma, Siam, Ceylon, Tartary, Japan, and Cathay were somehow the same, that the idols encountered by travelers—whether it be the Godama of Burma, the Sommona Codom of Siam, the Fo of China, the Khodom of Bali, or the Boodhoo of India—were somehow the same person.

Buddhism had effectively disappeared from India by the fourteenth century, so Buddhists and active Buddhist monasteries and temples were not encountered there by the British (although they were found to the north in Nepal by Brian Houghton Hodgson and to the south in Sri Lanka

by George Turnour). The Hindu scriptures read by scholars of the East India Company listed the Buddha simply as one of the incarnations of the god Viṣṇu (along with Kṛṣṇa and Rāma). Consequently, this is how the Buddha, and his image, were encountered by the company's most prominent Indologist, Sir William Jones (1746–94). Like most scholars of his day, Jones accepted the biblical account of the origin of the world and its peoples, and sought confirmation of the Mosaic chronology in the Hindu scriptures. Finding in the Hindu epics the story of a great flood, he considered it confirmation of the account in Genesis and assumed from it that the nine incarnations of Viṣṇu were historical figures, whom he then sought to assign a date. In an address delivered to the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta on February 2, 1786, he stated that "we may fix the time of *Buddha*, or the *ninth* great incarnation of Vishnu, in the year *one thousand* and *fourteen* before the birth of Christ" (Jones 1801a, 425). But Jones was confused by the attitude of his Hindu informants toward the Buddha. The most pious accepted him as an incarnation of Viṣṇu and honored him for condemning the sacrifice of cattle, as the Vedas had enjoined. Others, however, spoke of the Buddha as a heretic whose followers had been driven from India. Jones attempted to resolve this contradiction by postulating two buddhas: the first, who lived 1014 (or 1027) years before Christ and who was the ninth incarnation of Viṣṇu; and a second, living some thousand years later, who took his name and denounced the brahmins in his teachings (Jones 1801b, 123–26, 145).

Jones felt that the first buddha and his teachings did not originate in India, but had been imported. After speculating at one point that the Buddha was identical to Odin, and that a foreign race had imported the rites of these gods into Scandinavia and India (Jones 1801a, 425), Jones would later abandon this theory in favor of another: "that *Sacya* or *Sisak* [the Buddha], about two hundred years after *Vyasa*, either in person or by a colony from *Egypt*, imported into this country the mild heresy of the ancient *Bauddhas*" (Jones 1801c, 401). Indeed, Jones believed that Ethiopia and India (or Hindustan, as he called it) were colonized by the same race. He noted that the mountain people of the Indian states of Bengal and Bihar had noses and lips that could hardly be distinguished from Abyssinians. They only differed in their hair, but this seemed to be an effect of climate; the "crisp and wooly" hair of the Africans was the natural state. As proof, he pointed to statues of the Buddha: "we frequently see figures of Buddha with curled hair, apparently designed for a representation of it in its natural state" (Jones 1801a, 428).

Complicating his investigation, Jones had no Buddhist texts to read; he had only Hindu texts provided to him by brahmin pundits, and he found the chronology of these sources so outlandish in their cosmic cycles, so at odds with the Mosaic chronology, that he regarded the writings with some skepticism. He quotes a text that had been provided to him which

described the Buddha: "He became visible, the-thousand-and-second-year-of-the-Cali-age being past; his body of-a-colour-between-white-and-ruddy, with-two-arms, without-hair on his head" (Jones 1801b, 122). Not only was this chronology troubling to Jones, the description of the Buddha was contrary to what he had seen for himself. He had visited "a wood near Gaya, where a colossal image of that ancient deity still remains: it seemed to me of black stone; but, as I saw it by torch-light, I cannot be positive as to its colour, which may, indeed, have been changed by time" (ibid., 123).

Over the subsequent decades, the African origins of the Buddha were debated by scholars, with those in favor of the hypothesis noting the flat nose and thick lips of the Buddha images, but especially the hair, described as "wooly," "frizzled," and "crisped." In 1819, the great French Sinologist Jean Pierre Abel-Rémusat (1788–1832) published an article entitled "On Some Descriptive Epithets of Buddha Showing that Buddha Did Not Belong to the Negro Race" (1825). But the African hypothesis was persistent, so much so that it was addressed by such giants of nineteenth-century scholarship as James Cowles Prichard and Eugène Burnouf. In his five-volume *Researches into the Physical History of Mankind* (1844), Prichard devotes six pages to "the hypothesis that the Aborigines of India and of the Himálaya were a race of Negroes," concluding that the hypothesis is false and saying of the images of the Buddha, "it is very probable that the countenance imitated in these figures is the broad face of the Siamese and other Indo-Chinese nations, and not the physiognomy of the African" (Prichard 1844, 233). Burnouf, in an appendix to his translation of the *Lotus Sūtra*, published posthumously in 1852, reports and dismisses the view that the Buddha was an African, citing Abel-Rémusat and Prichard for support, and explaining that the Buddha's hair was not frizzy (*crépus*) but curly (*bouclés*) (Burnouf 1852, 560). The conclusions of these scholars, however, did not divert the orientalists' gaze from the Buddha's hair and the Buddha's head, and specifically from that thing (a term used advisedly here, as will become clear below) atop his head. The remainder of this essay will focus on the Buddha's head, specifically on the top of his head, an ostensibly insignificant (and to some, invisible) detail, which nonetheless provides a pinnacle from which to observe the changing perceptions of the Buddha.

The descriptions by Sir William Jones and others of the Buddha's curly hair derived from the ancient images of the Buddha they saw in situ and in lithographs. European travelers to various Asian lands had long noted the shaven heads of Buddhist monks. The Buddha, therefore, did not look like a Buddhist monk. Scholars turned from image to text in search of a solution, and encountered an even more puzzling question.

Descriptions of the Buddha and accounts of his life appear in a variety of forms. Lives of the Buddha that encompassed the events from his birth

until his passage into nirvāṇa did not begin to appear until the second century of the common era, as many as five centuries after his death. Perhaps the earliest accounts are those found in the collections of sūtras, or discourses traditionally attributed to the Buddha. Here the Buddha autobiographically recounts individual events that occurred from the time he left his father's palace and his life as a prince until he achieved enlightenment six years later. The following account occurs repeatedly: "Later, while still young, a black-haired young man endowed with the blessing of youth, in the prime of life, though my mother and father wished otherwise and wept with tearful faces, I shaved off my hair and beard, put on the yellow robe, and went forth from the home life into homelessness" (Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 1995, 256). This single sentence would eventually be elaborated into a lengthy account that included the four chariot rides beyond the walls of the city, where the prince first encounters an old man, a sick man, a corpse, and a renunciant, and decides that he also must renounce the world and go out in search of a state beyond aging, sickness, and death; the dialogue with his father in which he begs permission to retire from the world; his retirement to his harem, where, as the night wears on, the female dancers and musicians fall asleep in all manner of inelegant postures, causing the prince to declare that women are by nature impure, and to resolve to go forth from the palace; his pausing in his chambers to gaze upon his sleeping wife and infant son, fearing that if he holds his child for one last time, he will lose his resolve; and his triumphant departure from the palace, on his steed Kanthaka with his trusted servant by his side.

None of these famous episodes are mentioned in the Buddha's brief description above. But they are all recounted in a Sinhalese work, the earliest of the Pāli biographies of the Buddha, dating perhaps from as late as the fifth century CE. Entitled the *Nidānakathā*, the "Account of Origins," the narrative is an introduction to a collection of stories of the Buddha's former lives. Here, from Henry Clarke Warren's 1896 translation, is what transpired when the prince cut off his hair and beard:

> Next he thought, "These locks of mine are not suited to a monk; but there is no one fit to cut the hair of a Future Buddha. Therefore I will cut them off myself with my sword." And grasping a scimitar with his right hand, he seized his top-knot with his left hand, and cut it off, together with the diadem. His hair thus became two finger-breadths in length, and curling to the right, lay close to his head. As long as he lived it remained of that length, and the beard was proportionate. And never again did he have to cut either hair or beard.
>
> Then the Future Buddha seized hold of his top-knot and diadem, and threw them into the air, saying, —
>
> "If I am to become a Buddha, let them stay in the sky; but if not, let them fall to the ground."
>
> The top-knot and jewelled turban mounted a distance of a league in the air, and there came to a stop. And Sakka, the king of the gods, perceiving them with

his divine eye, received them in an appropriate jewelled casket, and established it in the Heaven of the Thirty-three as the "Shrine of the Diadem." (Warren 1953, 66)

This account explains why the Buddha has been depicted as having hair on his head, and why that hair is curly. The first book-length biography of the Buddha to be published in English was *The Life, or Legend of Gaudama, the Budha of the Burmese* (first edition, 1859) by the Roman Catholic bishop Paul Ambrose Bigandet. (Extended descriptions of the Buddha's life had appeared in Chester Bennett's "Life of Gaudama," published in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society* in 1852, and in *A Manual of Buddhism, in Its Modern Development* [1853], by the Wesleyan missionary to Ceylon, Robert Spence Hardy.) The biography itself is derived from a translation of an eighteenth-century Burmese work, but Father Bigandet added copious annotations. The story of the cutting of the hair also appears here, leading Bigandet to comment,

This circumstance explains one peculiarity observable in all the statues representing Budha. The head is invariably covered with sharp points, resembling those thorns with which the thick envelope of the durian fruit is armed. Often I had inquired as to the motive that induced native sculptors to leave on the head of all statues, these inverted nails, without ever being able to obtain any satisfactory answer. It was only after having read this passage of the life of Budha, that I was enabled to account for this apparently singular custom, which is designed to remind all Budhists of the ever continued wonder whereby the hairs which remained on Budha's head, never grew longer, from the day he cut them with his sword. (Bigandet 1866, 60n42)

Thus, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the mystery of the Buddha's curly locks seemed to have been solved by recourse to the texts. But the texts mention something else on the Buddha's head, called the *uṣṇīṣa*, a term occurring most commonly in a stock list of thirty-two physical marks (*lakṣana*) of a superman (*mahāpuruṣa*) said to adorn the body of the Buddha. Found in several places in the Pāli canon (and frequently elsewhere in Buddhist literature), the thirty-two elements listed vary somewhat from text to text, especially in their order; the Pāli list proceeds generally from foot to head, while the Sanskrit versions (such as that in the *Lalitavistara*) proceed from head to foot. According to the *Lakkhana Sutta* (Discourse on the Marks), the thirty-two are (1) feet with level tread, (2) the signs of thousand-spoked wheels on the soles of the feet, (3) projecting heels, (4) long fingers and toes, (5) soft and tender hands and feet, (6) netlike hands and feet, (7) prominent ankles, (8) legs like an antelope, (9) while standing up, the ability to touch and rub his knees with either hand without bending forward, (10) penis enclosed in a sheath, (11) gold complexion, (12) delicate and smooth skin, (13) one hair in each follicle,

(14) body hair that grows upward, is blue-black in color, and curls to the right, (15) a body that is perfectly straight, (16) a body with seven convex surfaces (arms, legs, shoulders, and trunk), (17) a chest like a lion, (18) no hollow space between the shoulders, (19) a proportionate body in which arm span is equal to height, (20) an evenly rounded chest, (21) a perfect sense of taste, (22) a jaw like a lion, (23) forty teeth, (24) even teeth, (25) no gaps between teeth, (26) very white canine teeth, (27) a very long tongue, (28) a voice like the god Brahmā, (29) blue eyes, (30), eyelashes like a cow, (31) white and soft hair between his eyes, (32) a head with an *uṣṇīṣa*.

In the *Mahāpadāna Sutta* (Discourse on the Great Lineage) and the *Lakkhana Sutta*, the thirty-two are described as marks observed by astrologers on the body of an infant, indicating that the child is destined to become either a universal monarch (*cakkavattin*) or a buddha. The latter text explains the ethical deeds performed in the past that result in the physical signs of the present. The list occurs a third time in a text called the *Sela Sutta* (Discourse to Sela), in which a brahmin named Sela seeks to determine whether the Buddha possesses all thirty-two of the marks (a similar story is told in the *Brahmāyu Sutta* and in the *Ambaṭṭha Sutta*). He is able to discern all but two: the ensheathed penis and the long tongue (the text does not state how he can see the perfect sense of taste, the forty teeth, and only one body hair per follicle). "Then the Blessed One gave such a demonstration of supernormal power that the brahman Sela saw the Blessed One's ensheathed male organ. Then the Blessed One putting out his tongue licked both his ear-apertures backwards and forwards, [and] covered the whole of his forehead with his tongue" (Norman 1992, p. 64).

With this question answered, there is no apparent confusion concerning the thirty-two marks in Buddhist texts. But among scholars of Buddhism, more than the webbed fingers, more than the length of the arms (which caused Henry Alabaster, Interpreter of Her Majesty's Consulate General in Siam, to remark in his *The Wheel of the Law* [1871], "we cannot help regarding as ungainly a characteristic which reminds us so forcibly of our ancestors, the gorillas and orang-outangs"; p. 247), more than signs of thousand-spoked wheels on the soles of the feet, none of the marks have proved as vexing as the *uṣṇīṣa*.

The second edition of Horace Hayman Wilson's Sanskrit-English dictionary, published in 1832, provides four definitions for *uṣṇīṣa*: "1. A turban. 2. A diadem. 3. A distinguishing cognate mark. 4. The curly hair with which a *Bud'dha* is born, and which indicates his future sanctity" (Wilson 1832, s.v. *uṣṇīṣa*). The first extended discussion of the term in a European language is that of Eugène Burnouf, who devotes 114 pages to the thirty-two marks in an appendix to his translation of the *Lotus Sūtra*, published in 1852. Regarding Wilson's definition, he writes, "But

there is no doubt that the first interpretation would have to be abandoned because to my knowledge there does not exist a single statue or graphic representation of Śākyamuni Buddha that appears bearing any headgear whatsoever" (Burnouf 1852, 558). He notes that Philippe Édouard Foucaux, in his 1847–48 translation of the *Lalitavistara* from the Tibetan, renders the term as "an excrescence that crowns his head," and that Abel-Rémusat describes it as "a fleshy tubercule situated on the crown of the head" (ibid.). After considering the matter for several pages, Burnouf translates the term *uṣṇīṣaśīraskatā* as "his head is crowned with a cranial protuberance" (ibid., 560). How does the term that Wilson translated as "turban" come to carry connotations of an abnormal cranial tumor?

The standard Sanskrit and Pāli dictionaries list "turban" as the first meaning of *uṣṇīṣa* (*uṇhīsa* in Pāli), and the term is used in this way in Buddhist texts; King Bimbisāra sets aside his sword, his parasol, his sandals, and his *uṣṇīṣa* before approaching the Buddha. Etymologically, it means something that provides protection from the heat. But the turban in ancient India is also a sign of royalty. Thus, if the presence of the thirty-two marks on the body of an infant foretell of a future as a universal monarch or a buddha, it would seem fitting that a turban atop the head would be included in the list. Indeed, in the *Nidānakathā* there is an elaborate description of Prince Siddhārtha having a turban of ten thousand layers wound around his head by a deity on the night that he renounced the world (Jayawickrama 1990, 80). One would not expect, however, that a child would be born with a turban on his head, or with forty teeth. Thus, the art historian Ananda Coomaraswamy interpreted the term to mean that such a child was *destined* to have a turban on his head (Coomaraswamy 1928, 831). Yet the infant Buddha was no ordinary child, emerging, as he did, from his mother's right side, immediately walking, with a lotus blossom appearing under his foot with each step, and, at least in the *Lalitavistara*, giving an extended discourse to Ānanda, predicting that there will be fools who will not believe the miracles that attended his birth (and will reject the *Lalitavistara Sūtra*) and will, as a consequence, be reborn in the Avīcī Hell (*Voice of the Buddha* [1983], 1:134–38). It would seem possible, then, that the child could have had a turban on his head and forty teeth, with no gaps.

The great fifth-century commentator Buddhaghosa provided an extended explanation of the term *uṣṇīsa*, noting that it did not mean "turban" but rather a head shaped like a turban. He describes a well-developed forehead in which a mass of flesh extends from the right ear across the entire forehead and ends at the left ear, like the fold of a turban. (It was presumably based on this gloss that Robert Spence Hardy translated the term as "frontlet" in his *A Manual of Buddhism* [1853], choosing a word that can mean both "forehead" and "something worn on the forehead.")

Buddhaghosa goes on to explain that the royal turban was designed to imitate this prominent forehead of great men. Turning to ancient phrenology, he enumerates a number of skull types, including the monkey-type, the fruit-type, and the sloping-type, each of which is inferior to the skull of a great man, which is symmetrical, like a bubble of water (Banerjea 1931, 500–501). Moreover, as the Indian art historian Jitendra Nath Banerjea notes in his 1931 article on the topic, Buddhaghosa makes no mention of a cranial protuberance.

Yet during the same century that Buddhaghosa was composing this description in Sri Lanka, the Chinese monk Faxian was on a pilgrimage to India, where in Haḍḍa (in modern Afghanistan) he visited a shrine where the "uṣṇīṣa-bone" of the Buddha was worshipped as a relic. He described it as four inches across and shaped like a wasp's nest or an arched hand (Watters [1904] 1971, 1:198). Some two centuries later, Xuanzang visited the same shrine, and described it as twelve inches round (Beal 1884, xxxiv, 96–97). The Chinese translations of the Sanskrit *uṣṇīṣa* include *ding xiang* ("mark of the crown of the head"), *rou ji* ("flesh topknot"), *ding gu* ("bone on the crown of the head"), *ding rou ji* ("flesh topknot on the crown of the head"), and *rou ji gu* ("bone of the flesh topknot"). There is no intimation of turbans or prominent foreheads. Indeed, we seem to have returned to the cranial excrescence. Having now read the texts, perhaps it is time to return our gaze to the statues for a moment.

As noted at the outset, physical representations of the person of the Buddha do not begin to appear in India until the first or second century of the common era. In studying the development of the Buddha image, art historians have identified three different styles in the representation of his head, each named after the place where the images seem to have originated. The first, sometimes referred to as Mathurā images of the Kuṣana period, depicts the Buddha with a smooth head crowned with a kind of topknot or twisted lock of hair. Although there was some controversy as to whether the smooth head should be interpreted as a shaved head, the consensus appears to be that, because a clear hairline is represented and the scalp is slightly raised above the forehead, the sculptor was seeking to depict the close-cropped (rather than shaved) head of the Buddha. That the Buddha's head was not completely shaved was further confirmed by the presence of the topknot (Coomarswamy 1928; Banerjea 1930, 1931). The second type was the Gandharan. Here, apparently under Greek influence, the Buddha was depicted with a full head of wavy hair (and sometimes a moustache). The hair was long enough to be gathered at the crown, where it is tied with a cord, forming a chignon atop the head. In the third style, the Buddha's head is covered by tight, discrete curls, sometimes resembling snails; a clearly defined protrusion, also covered with hair, can be seen on the top of the head. This style would succeed and eventually displace the first two, spreading widely across the Indian

Subcontinent and thence to the rest of Asia. Henceforth, the Buddha would be depicted with a bump on his head.

But what was this bump, and what did it signify? For this we must return to the texts. *The Lakkhana Sutta* states, "in whatever former life the Tathāgata [that is, the Buddha] . . . became the foremost in skilled behavior, a leader in right action of body, speech, and thought, in generosity, virtuous conduct, observance of fasts, in honoring father and mother, ascetics and brahmans and the head of the clan, and in various other proper activities . . . on returning to earth he acquired this mark of the Great Man: a head with an uṣṇīṣa" (adapted from Walshe 1987, 455). Similar and less specific statements appear in the *Lalitavistara* and Nāgārjuna's *Ratnāvalī* (Garland of Jewels); the alignment of the thirty-two marks with various virtuous deeds done in the past appears to be largely formulaic and reveals little about origin and significance of the *uṣṇīṣa*. Having examined the texts and examined the images, the inevitable moment has arrived when the relation between the two must be considered.

Yet another of the thirty-two marks of a superman are webbed fingers and toes. Two terms are used in the texts: *jālāṅgulihastapādaḥ* (or *jālahatthopāda* in Pāli), meaning literally "web-fingers-hand-feet," and *jālāvanaddhahastapādaḥ*, which could mean either "hands and feet connected with webs" or "hands and feet covered with webs." Traditionally, the terms had been taken to mean that the Buddha's fingers and toes were webbed, with some texts specifying that this web extends only to the first knuckle. (Some commentators, in order to avoid any amphibian associations, have explained that the webs are composed not of flesh but of light.) The webbed fingers of the Buddha are regularly depicted in Indian statues, especially those of the Gupta period.

Banerjea would have none of this, and in a 1930 article in the *Indian Historical Quarterly*, he proposed an alternative reading of the term. The Sanskrit word *jāla* can mean a web, a net, or a lattice, and Banerjea argued that in the case of the marks of the Buddha's body, it referred to the lines on his palms and soles intersecting at right angles to form a pattern like that of a latticed window. Burnouf had made the same point in the previous century, refusing to consign the Buddha to "la classe des palmipèdes" (Burnouf 1852, p. 574).

How, then, was the term construed to mean that the Buddha's fingers and toes were connected with a membrane of flesh, as one form of the term and numerous descriptions so clearly describe? Banerjea examined a number of Gupta images, especially those in which the Buddha's right hand is raised in the *abhaya mūdrā*, the gesture of offering protection from fear, where the fingers and thumb are spread slightly apart. The statues carved from sandstone indeed often had a thin layer of stone between each of the digits. The statues cast from metal either showed no membrane or a smaller membrane, approximately to the first knuckle (as the

Lalitavistara states). From this, Banerjea concludes that in making webbed fingers, the artists were not seeking to depict one of the thirty-two major marks of the Buddha, but rather were seeking to make durable statues, in which the delicate fingers were less likely to break.

> The fact appears to be that the casters of these metal images relied on the durability of the material in which they worked and had thus no necessity for completely joining the fingers of their image by means of the so-called "web" for their safety. The greyish Chunar sandstone on which the stone artists of the Gupta period worked, was, however, from the point of view of durability, much inferior to metal and thus their choice of the material led them to adopt this peculiar device. (Banerjea 1930, 719)

Banerjea criticizes modern art historians for misreading the Buddhist texts and then finding a confirmation of that misreading in selected statues. But he fails to note that the meaning of the Sanskrit terms is not always ambiguous; there are numerous glosses of this particular mark of the Buddha that clearly state that the fingers and toes are webbed (sometimes even comparing them to the feet of a royal swan). (See Lamotte 1966, 1:273–74n1.)

The Belgian Buddhologist Msgr. Étienne Lamotte went further, arguing that the traditional monastic interpretation of the mark as webs derived not from reading texts but from gazing at statues and describing what was observed. Rather than sculptors setting out to carve a statue of the Buddha, with a list of the thirty-two marks of a buddha at their side for ready reference, Lamotte suggests that it was the sculptor's technique that led to this interpretation of the mark. In other words, text did not precede and produce the image; the image preceded and produced the text. He writes, "The technical process of welding the fingers of statues, the hands of which are separate from the body and extended, with the sole aim of making them more solid, led to the Buddha being given webbed hands and feet, and in the end the texts confirmed that whimsical explanation" (Lamotte 1988, 667).

Could a similar argument be made about the *uṣṇīṣa*, a physical characteristic even more anomalous than webbed fingers and toes, thereby rendering the familiar protrusion on the crown of the Buddha's head simply another instance of Buddhist whimsy? In order to consider this question, it is necessary to return once again to text and to image.

The thirty-two marks of a superman have been consistently described by scholars as one of the many elements of the ancient Indian tradition that the Buddhists adopted to their purposes. Buddhist texts themselves suggest as much. In the *Brahmāyu Sutta*, the brahmin Brahmāyu describes them as having been "handed down in our hymns" (Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 1995, 744). This characterization has served both modern Buddhists and modern scholars of Buddhism well, allowing them to dismiss the more

fanciful elements as so much folklore while retaining others as testimony to the grandeur of the Buddha's person. The Pāli scholar G. P. Malalasekhara wrote of them, "Thus the marks are merely incidental; most of them are so absurd, considered as the marks of a human being, that they are probably mythological in origin, and a few of them seem to belong to solar myths, being adaptations to a man, or poetical epithets applied to the sun or even to the personification of human sacrifice. Some are characteristics of human beauty, and one or two may be reminiscences of personal bodily peculiarities possessed by some great man, such as Gotama himself" (Malalasekhera [1937] 1998, s.v. *mahāpurisa*). Here Malalasekhara is paraphrasing the words of Thomas Rhys Davids, the leading British interpreter of Buddhism of the Victorian period, who, in the preface to his translation of the *Lakkhana Sutta*, links the theory of the superman (*mahāpuruṣa*) to the famous "Hymn to the Person" (Puruṣaśukta) of the *Ṛg Veda*, in which the body of primordial being is sacrificed by the gods. The parts of the person's body then become the constituents of the universe, including, most famously, the four castes (Rhys Davids and Rhys Davids 1957, 132–36). But there is little evidence for such a connection, and Rhys Davids is certainly mistaken when, in discussing the thirty-two marks, he claims, "And as a matter of fact we never hear of them again, as a serious proposition, in all the immense literature of Buddhism throughout the centuries of its development in India, and China, in Ceylon, or in Japan" (ibid., 135). Incidentally, Rhys Davids renders the phrase about the *uṣṇīṣa* as "His head is like a royal turban."

One difficulty with consigning the thirty-two marks to the category of yet another Buddhist appropriation of Brahmanical legend is that the term *uṣṇīṣa* (regardless of what it might mean) does not seem to have a precedent in Indian mythology, nor does it occur among the pre-Buddhist lists of divine and royal cranial marks (*śirolakṣana*), although numerous other terms appear. Thus, the head of a universal monarch is said to resemble the shape of an open umbrella or the breast of a young woman; high and broad foreheads, shaped like the half-moon, are also described as auspicious (Banerjea 1931, 502–3). To further complicate matters is a second Buddhist list of eighty "accompanying" (*anuvyañjana*) signs, often referred to in English as the "minor marks" of the Buddha. Here one finds the characteristics of the Buddha's fingernails, navel, gait, incisors, nose, hair, eyebrows, and, notably, forehead, which is described by two of the signs as being "well formed" (*supariṇata*) and "broad" (*pṛthu*).

If the lists of the major marks and the minor marks were simultaneously known (as they appear to be), Buddhaghosa's gloss of *uṣṇīṣa* as a wide and rounded forehead would seem to be entirely redundant. The Buddha's hair is one of the most carefully described of his attributes; according to some versions, it claims one of the major marks and six of the minor ones. If the *uṣṇīṣa* were indeed simply a topknot, the Buddha's hair

could presumably be described as such. Why would his coiffure be named with the common word for "turban"? Mention of the major marks, including the *uṣṇīṣa*, appears in a number of texts, both in Pāli and in Sanskrit, which according to the scholarly consensus predate the first images.

The issue of the *uṣṇīṣa* particularly exercised the French art historian Alfred Foucher (1865–1952), who discussed it at some length in his magnum opus, *L'Art Gréco-Bouddhique du Gandhâra: Étude sur les origines de l'influence classique dans l'art Bouddhique de l'Inde et de l'Extreme-Orient* (1918). For Foucher, the *uṣṇīṣa*, which he calls "cette grotesque déformation," was the result of an unfortunate choice. The Gandharan sculptors, influenced by a Greek aesthetic, portrayed the hair of the Buddha in a bun, or chignon, on the top of his head. Their concern was with beauty, not orthodoxy: "the artists were working apart from the scholars. Texts and images are still separate from one another" (Foucher 1918, 295). Describing the Gandharan statues of the Buddha, he explains what happened next:

> Soon we will see the graceful and classic undulation of their tresses snapped off and replaced by a series of ringlets, all curling to the right. What happened? It is here that the list [of the thirty-two marks] comes to our rescue. Evidently in the end the faithful were shocked by the most flagrant contradiction between his luxuriant chignon [on the one hand] with the religious state of the Master and the accounts of the texts concerning his tonsure [on the other]. . . . The result of this conflict is, like all things human, a crude compromise. The traditional list of the thirty-two signs which, passed down in the holy scriptures, began to adapt itself to the conception of the Buddha, was going to provide this transaction with a foundation acceptable to the two parties. The donor, whose taste was already Hellenized, disavowed the shaving of the head of the Master according to the Buddhist rule. The sculptor, already strongly Indianized, agreed to give him the second of the thirty-two signs, namely, "curly hair and all turning to the right." In truth, this agreement is rather absurd: it neither satisfies the rule of the order, which requires complete tonsure; and on the other side, his ringlets, natural in a newborn, run the risk in an adult of his being taken for a negro, which occurred. We see what the aesthetic loses; we do not see what the orthodoxy wins. (Ibid., 295–96)

This, Foucher says, is the only possible explanation of what occurred, unless one wishes to return to the "hypothèse africaine" of a black Buddha.

By this point for Foucher, the damage had been done. The silhouette of the head of the Buddha surmounted by a mass of hair was already well known. But the Indian sculptors who imitated the Gandharan style were not content to cover the Buddha's skull with right-turning curls. They redundantly covered the bun atop his head with such curls, giving it the appearance of a cranial protuberance. From this point, other Indian sculptors merely copied it, "with the same servility with which their successors in India and the Far East have reproduced it since the deformity was so produced" (Foucher 1918, 296). Thus, the *uṣṇīṣa* was represented as a

protuberance, and the word, which properly meant "turban," took on a new meaning. He concludes by lamenting the day "when a malefaction by the pale imitators [of the Gandharan sculptors], gave rise on the head of the Master, in place of a chignon, worn like everyone else, a protuberance of abnormal character" (ibid., 297).

Despite Foucher's certainty on the question, the more tentative conclusion of Burnouf, writing in 1852, is perhaps more appropriate. On the question of hairstyle versus cranial protuberance, he wrote of the statues, "it is not always easy to invoke their testimony with any confidence in favor of one interpretation rather than another" (Burnouf 1852, 558). The precise origin of the *uṣṇīṣa* thus remains something of a mystery, both for the textual scholar and for the art historian. Regardless of what the texts meant or the sculptors intended, the *uṣṇīṣa* was depicted not as a turban or as a prominent forehead but as a cranial protuberance. And once there, it did not remain like a bump on the Buddha's head.

Although there is no historical evidence of images of the Buddha being made until centuries after his death, some of the most famous depictions in the Buddhist world derive their sanctity from the belief that the Buddha himself posed for them or personally blessed them. These include the Mahāmuni statue in Burma and the statues of the Buddha in the Jo khang and Ra mo che in Lhasa. There are also stories of the Buddha posing for portraits, although the artists had to work from his reflection because his countenance was too blinding to look upon directly (see Dagyab 1977, 20–24).

Important in the East Asian tradition is the image made for King Udayana of Kauśāmbī. The Buddha's mother had died seven days after his birth and so did not live to hear the dharma. In the seventh year after his enlightenment, he used his magical powers to ascend to the Heaven of the Thirty-Three atop Mount Meru, where his mother had been reborn as a (male) deity. The Buddha spent the three months of the summer rains retreat teaching the dharma to the assembled gods, returning to earth briefly each day to collect alms, pausing to give his disciple Śāriputra a summary of what he had been teaching the gods. King Udayana was devastated when he learned that he would be unable to behold the Buddha for three months and so approached Maudgalyāyana, the monk who surpassed all others in supernormal powers. Maudgalyāyana granted the king's request that he magically transport a five-foot piece of sandalwood and thirty-two artists to the Heaven of the Thirty-Three, where together the craftsmen would carve a statue of the Buddha, with each responsible for depicting one of the thirty-two marks of a superman that adorned the Buddha's body. When the artists had completed their work, the sandalwood statue was brought back to earth. And when the Buddha made his triumphal descent from heaven, the statue rose to meet him, and is therefore a standing image of the Buddha (Carter 1990, 7).

This and other accounts suggest that none of the questions of the relation of text and image pondered above appear to have been of particular significance to Buddhists over the centuries. The *uṣṇīṣa* was thus one of those marks carved from life by the sculptor in the presence of the Buddha himself. Said to be the same statue that stands today in the Seiryōji Temple in Kyoto, the Udayana image has a protrusion on the crown of its head.

For the Buddhist, the question was not when the *uṣṇīṣa* first appeared in sculpture. It had always been there, from the moment of the Buddha's birth, fading only briefly (according to some traditions), along with the other thirty-one marks, during the prince's period of extreme asceticism, and appearing fully when he began to eat again. And once present, the *uṣṇīṣa* created all manner of meanings. For instance, when the Buddha smiled, multicolored rays of light emanated from his mouth. These beams would return and be absorbed into various parts of his body, with the particular location of their return holding great significance. If the person at whom the Buddha smiled was going to be reborn as a god, the light would enter the Buddha's navel; if he or she was going to be reborn as a human, it would enter the Buddha's knees. If, however, the person was destined to achieve buddhahood, the light would be absorbed into the *uṣṇīṣa* (Strong 1983, 59–60).

On other occasions, the *uṣṇīṣa* gave birth to two important goddesses, Uṣṇīṣavijaya, the Victorious Uṣṇīṣa, and Tathāgatoṣṇīṣasitātapatra, She of the White Umbrella [who Arose from] the Tathāgata's Uṣṇīṣa. The latter is described in an Indian Buddhist tantric text as "a goddess white as snow illumined by the sun, with a thousand arms and a thousand eyes [in her hands], well adorned in divine raiments. Her nature is an emanation arising from the *uṣṇīṣa* of the Conqueror, the foundation of all goodness" (Girivata, Tohoku 3111, Derge ed., Rgyud *pu* 206a2). Her popularity is attested by more than a dozen *sādhana*s (ritual manuals) and prayers devoted to her that are preserved in the Tibetan canon and by the large number of copies of these and other texts connected with her cult discovered at the cave complex at Dunhuang. One source describes a two-armed form of the goddess; she holds a vase in her left hand and an *uṣṇīṣa* in her right (Vimalamitra, Tohoku 3112, Derge ed., Rgyud *pu* 208b2). Also found in the Tibetan canon are chapters of two sūtras called *Great Uṣṇīṣa* (*Gtsug gtor chen po*), one of which apparently had ten thousand chapters (Tohoku 236).

The potency of the *uṣṇīṣa* was also known in China. The Chinese monk Dao-an (312–385) received a foreign image of the future buddha Maitreya. Because he did not like the way the *uṣṇīṣa* looked, he ordered a disciple to remove it so that it could be reshaped and then replaced on the head of the bronze image. When the *uṣṇīṣa* was removed, a flame shot from the head, illuminating the room. A relic was later discovered inside the *uṣṇīṣa* (Carter 1990, 11–12).

Tibetan monks have reported that the Buddha's *uṣṇīṣa* is perfectly proportioned to the size of his head, yet its circumference cannot be measured. They also tell of its power. At the age of fifty-five, the Buddha decided to select a single monk as a personal attendant, a role that had been played by a variety of monks to that point. He eventually selected his cousin, Ānanda, for the position, who accepted, but with certain conditions. He asked that the Buddha not pass on to him any of the robes or gifts he received, so that no one could claim that Ānanda was profiting personally from his proximity to the Buddha; he also asked that he be allowed to accept invitations made to the Buddha on the Buddha's behalf. Further (in some versions of the story), he asked that the Buddha not speak the dharma if he (Ānanda), whose task it was to remember everything the Buddha taught, was not present. Ānanda was not present when the Buddha flew to the Heaven of the Thirty-Three to preach to his mother. In recounting this story, a Tibetan monk explained to me that, in order not to break his word to Ānanda, the Buddha spoke not from his mouth but from his *uṣṇīṣa*.

In India, the person of the Buddha became increasingly stylized and stereotyped, seeming at once superhuman and human. He takes occasional walks through the air, but sometimes comes back from his begging round with an empty bowl; he simultaneously shoots fire and water from his body but sometimes has a backache (the result of killing an opponent in the ring during a previous life as a professional wrestler). With the list of the thirty-two marks of a superman, he is not quite human, but instead has the qualities of animals: the eyelashes of a cow, the calves of a gazelle, the jaws of a lion, (and, it would seem) the arms of a monkey, the tongue of a lizard, and hung like a horse, crowned by something possessed by neither animals nor humans, the *uṣṇīṣa*. These are not simply peculiarities of Śākyamuni Buddha but rather the signs that mark him as being just like all the buddhas who have preceded him.

For a great deal of the material found in the "biographies" of the Buddha is not about this buddha, our buddha, but instead recounts the lives of buddhas of past epochs, such as Vipaśyin. Indeed, all the buddhas of the past and future do a great many of the same things. They all sit cross-legged in their mother's womb; they are all born in the "middle country" (*madhyadeśa*) of our continent of Jambudvīpa; immediately after birth they all take seven steps to the north; they all renounce the world after seeing the four sights (an old man, a sick man, a dead man, and a mendicant) and after the birth of a son; they all achieve enlightenment seated upon a bed of grass; they stride first with their right foot when they walk; they never stoop to pass through a door; they all establish a saṅgha (monastic community); they all can live for an aeon; they never die before their teaching is complete; they all die after eating meat. Four sites on the earth are identical for all buddhas: the place of enlightenment, the place of the first

sermon, the place of descending from the Heaven of the Thirty-Three, and the place of the bed in Jetavana monastery. Indeed, buddhas can differ from each other in only eight ways: lifespan, height, caste (either brahmin or *kṣatriya*), the conveyance in which they go forth from the world, the period of time spent in the practice of asceticism prior to their enlightenment, the kind of tree they sit under on the night of their enlightenment, the size of their seat there, and the extent of their aura (Malalasekhara [1937] 1998, 294–305). Just as the body of the Buddha became more standardized, so, too, did his life story.

Thus, as the tradition developed, and more and more teachings were ascribed to the Buddha, his person became less and less particular. One sūtra states that from the night of his enlightenment until the night he passed into nirvāṇa, the Buddha constantly taught the dharma. Another sūtra states that from the night of his enlightenment until the night he passed into nirvāṇa, the Buddha did not utter a single syllable (Lopez 1988, 48). As the body of the Buddha's teachings became more formless, the form of his body became more sharply defined, and he looked just like all the other buddhas of the past.

In Europe, however, the Buddha somehow became an increasingly specific person. The land of his origin was finally identified and archaeological excavations were made in an effort to identify the site of the defining moments in his career: his birth, his enlightenment, his first sermon, his death. He was portrayed, not as yet another in a line of enlightened beings, but as a man who appeared at a specific moment in Indian history to fight the oppression of the priests and their caste system. He was a social reformer and a philosopher whose life and teachings were to be extracted from the myths that encrusted them. This is all quite clear in what appears to be the first academic lecture on Buddhism to be delivered in the United States. It was presented by Edward Eldridge Salisbury—instructor of Sanskrit at Yale and recently returned from study with Burnouf in Paris—at the first annual meeting of the American Oriental Society on May 28, 1844. Addressing the question of the historicity of the Buddha, he said,

> But the superhuman character of Buddha, in the system of Buddhism, as it has now been explained, may have suggested a doubt whether Buddha is not altogether the creation of a philosophical mythology, and not at all a historical personage who originated the Buddhist system. I will therefore ask indulgence here for a few observations, which may lay this radical skepticism: 1. That a plausible foundation of real individuality is discoverable in even the wildest fables which veneration for Buddha has invented; and that the most extravagant have originated out of India, while nearly all agree in making India his native land. 2. That the images of Buddha are not monstrous, but seem to portray real humanity, while those of the old Hindu deities, which are found in Buddhist temples, and of which the design seems to be Buddhistic, since neither temples nor images are mentioned in the ancient Sanskrit classics, are absurdly inhuman. 3. That

considerations of policy would have led the Buddhists to hide their peculiarities under the garb of deduction from the ancient authorities, rather than to give their system the aspect of novelty, by referring it to a new Teacher, who set aside the traditional revelation, and created a new era,—had not the fact of its promulgation by a particular individual been too notorious to be concealed. (Salisbury 1849, 87–88)

What would become essential for Europe and America, then, would be the Buddha's humanity; what once appeared to be the legend of another idol was in fact the portrait of an individual, an individual whose humanity would transcend the confines of ancient India, humanize the continent of Asia, and inspire the world by showing what can be done by a man who is not a god. For the Buddhist traditions of Asia, however, it was his identity with the buddhas of the past, be they five, or seven, or one thousand, that was his essence. But whether the perspective was that of ancient Asia or modern Europe, the Buddha seemed somehow always foreign. He has been condemned, at various points in history, as a foreign god in China, Tibet, and Japan. Sir William Jones and others thought that he must be foreign to India, perhaps an Ethiopian. And he would eventually be foreign even to India, as his teachings, or at least the institutions that supported them, disappeared from their native land. Perhaps it was because he was not "from here" that he could be everywhere.

One of the most famous of all the biographies of the Buddha is the *Lalitavistara*. It was among the first Buddhist texts to be rendered into a European language; a Tibetan version was translated into French by Philippe Édouard Foucaux and published in 1847–48 as *Développement des Jeux*. Composed in Sanskrit as early as the first century of the common era, it is renowned for its ornate style and its exaltation of the person of the Buddha; the Japanese scholar Hajime Nakamura has described it as "permeated with the exuberance of religious emotion" (Nakamura 1987, 131). Yet although the *Lalitavistara* is one of the first dedicated biographies of the Buddha, like so many of the other accounts, it does not recount the events of the Buddha's life from his birth to his passage into nirvāṇa. It begins instead with the Buddha dwelling in Jetavana Grove with twelve thousand monks and thirty-two thousand bodhisattvas. At midnight, he enters *samādhi* (a state of deep contemplation), and a beam of light shoots forth from his *uṣṇīṣa*, illuminating the heavens. Verses radiate from the beam of light, exhorting the gods to come into the presence of the Buddha. The gods come to Jetavana, bow at the Buddha's feet, and ask him to teach the sūtra called *Lalitavistara*. Assenting by his silence to the request of the august assembly, the Buddha narrates the story of his previous life, as a bodhisattva dwelling in the Tuṣita Heaven. He recounts his selection of his place of birth and his descent into his mother's womb, described as an opulent palace.

The remaining chapters of the *Lalitavistara* tell of the Buddha's life as a prince, his renunciation of the world, and his achievement of buddhahood. Before the narrative concludes with his first sermon in the Deer Park at Sarnath, it is repeatedly interrupted with tales of the Buddha's former births and descriptions of the various sites in India where the great deeds of his life and previous lives occurred. Indeed, Étienne Lamotte, noting one of the many purposes served by biographies of the Buddha, called it " an enlarged . . . edition of several pilgrimage guides placed end to end" (Lamotte 1988, 665).

The list of the thirty-two marks of a superman appears twice in the *Lalitavistara*. The first occurrence is in the chapter on the bodhisattva's birth, where the sage Asita enumerates for the king the auspicious signs on the body of his newborn son. There, the first sign is, in Sanskrit, *uṣṇīṣaśīrṣa*, "*uṣṇīṣa*-headed" (Lefmann [1902] 1977, 105)—the standard term for the first (or the last) of the thirty-two signs. The second occurrence is in the final chapter of the sūtra, on the turning of the wheel of the dharma. There, as so often in this text, a long interlude in the narrative praises the Buddha once again. Next, after the Buddha has set forth the four noble truths, the causes of each of the thirty-two marks are explained. In describing the unusual nature of the Buddha's head, the text says that in the past, the bodhisattva had always bowed his head at the feet of his parents, ascetics, and his teachers; he had shaved the heads of monks and offered them fragrant oils, colored powders, and garlands of flowers. But here the term for the bump on the Buddha's head is different. It is the difficult *uṣṇīṣaśīrṣānavalokitamūrdha*, which might be translated as "*uṣṇīṣa*-headed, invisible crown of the head" (ibid., 432; Durt 1972). The tradition in its own way thus seems to anticipate the art historical debate concerning whether there was really anything there atop the Buddha's head: perhaps it was there, but perhaps not visible to all; perhaps the top of his head simply could not be seen, covered by a turban, a chignon, or a fleshy protuberance.

The *uṣṇīṣa*, whatever it may be, thus provides a metonym for the changing visions of the Buddha in both Asia and the West. A bump that arose under uncertain circumstances was soon invested with great power and significance by Buddhist traditions across Asia, where it was regarded as a sign of the Buddha's superhuman nature. Its very existence, however, was suppressed by European scholars, who used their scientific skills to reduce the swelling and rearrange the Buddha's hair in order to make him more human.

But Faxian and Xuanzang saw something remarkable when they passed through Haḍḍa (in modern Afghanistan) long ago. The more detailed description comes from Faxian, in this 1886 translation by James Legge:

> [T]hey wash their hands with scented water and bring out the bone, which they place outside the vihâra, on a lofty platform, where it is supported on a round

pedestal of seven precious substances, and covered with a bell of lapis lazuli, both adorned with rows of pearls. Its colour is of a yellowish white, and it forms an imperfect circle twelve inches round, curving upwards in the centre. Every day, after it has been brought forth, the keepers of the vihâra ascend a high gallery, where they beat great drums, blow conchs, and clash their copper cymbals. When the king hears them, he goes to the vihâra, and makes his offerings of flowers and incense. When this is done, he (and his attendants) in order, one after another, (raise the bone), place it (for a moment) on the top of their heads, and then depart, going out by the door on the west as they entered by that of the east. (Legge [1886] 1965, p. 37)

Haḍḍa, once a great city with a famous monastery, is no longer there. It is now just a desert site, excavated for its Buddhist art (a beautiful head of the Buddha, with a chignon certain to delight Foucher, has been found there). The *uṣṇīṣa* has not been found. But one might imagine that in this war-ravaged land a child digging in the sand might unearth a bell of lapis with a rounded piece of bone inside; that it might be smuggled out and sold in London, where it would be identified by art historians as the *uṣṇīṣa* of the Buddha that Faxian had seen more than fifteen hundred years ago; that it would be put up for auction, with bids coming from the great museums of the world, as well as from wealthy Buddhists, seeking the relic for a new monastery or to legitimize the new rulers of a nation emerging from civil war.

And thus something which may in fact be nothing would generate wealth, political power, charisma, and various forms of meaning. This situation, of course, is not unique; this is in fact the function of relics, whether authentic or false. Mark Twain notes in *Innocents Abroad* that during his visit to Europe and the Holy Land he saw enough true nails of the true cross to fill a keg. The veneration that the *uṣṇīṣa* might receive and the meaning that it might generate would not prove its authenticity. How could one ever know whether the *uṣṇīṣa* was a cranial protuberance, or just a hairstyle?

The Buddha is said to have realized nirvāṇa when he achieved enlightenment at the age of thirty-five. That is, he destroyed the causes of future rebirth. He continued to live, however, for another forty-five years. Upon his death he entered nirvāṇa, never to be reborn again. Thus, the scholastic tradition distinguished between "the nirvāṇa with remainder" (*sopadhiśeṣa nirvāṇa*), the state of nirvāṇa achieved prior to death, where "the remainder" refers to the mind and body of this final existence; and "the nirvāṇa without remainder" (*nirupadhiśeṣa nirvāṇa*), achieved at death, in which the causes of all future existence have been extinguished, bringing to a final termination the chain of causation of both physical form and consciousness. These states were available to all who followed the Buddhist path to its conclusion. In the case of the Buddha, though, something remained even beyond the "nirvāṇa without remainder": the relics.

Thus, for the Buddha alone, one finds reference to a third state, "the nirvāṇa of the relics" (*dhātu nirvāṇa*), the dissolution of the relics of the Buddha. This will only occur when all teachings of the Buddha have disappeared from the world and been forgotten, and it is time for the next buddha to come. Then, all of the relics, even those the size of a mustard seed, will break out of their reliquaries, whether they are in one of the heavens, on earth, or in the depths of the sea, and will travel to Bodhgayā. There they will reassemble in the form of the Buddha's body, seated in the lotus posture, adorned with the thirty-two marks of a superman, emitting an aura of six colors that illumines the ten thousand worlds, and then they will burst into flame. At that time, the piece of bone that Faxian saw, whatever may remain of it, might break loose from wherever it is held—a museum case, a bank vault, a temple treasury, or an unknown and unexcavated site somewhere in Asia—and fly to Bodhgayā, where it would reunite with the other relics and crown the Buddha's skull, to be worshipped by the gods one last time before it, too, ignites. Or it might not.

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ART

Charles Lachman

Over the centuries, the image of the Buddha has undoubtedly become more widely known than the historical Buddha himself. Owing to a combination of factors—among them, an expanding international art market, the development of increasingly sophisticated methods of mechanical reproduction, the rise of global capitalism, and the spread of Buddhism well beyond the borders of Asia—images of buddhas can now readily be found in almost every corner of the world: in monasteries and temples, to be sure, but also in art museums, private collections, and an array of popular commercial settings ranging from restaurants to flea markets. While museumgoers, at least, are usually provided with some explanation of what they are looking at, many of the shoppers at a retail chain store such as Pier One Imports, by contrast, will have little familiarity with the history that might pertain to the shelves full of bronze and wooden buddhas that confront them there.

Historically, images were often the central focus of Buddhist worship and ritual practices. They also played an important role in the growth and propagation of the faith, and figure prominently in various Buddhist narratives. The transmission of Buddhism from India to China, for example, has long been associated with Emperor Ming's famous dream of a "golden man": told that there was a deity in the west named Buddha who fit the description of the figure in his dream, the first-century Han emperor sent a mission to India which is said to have returned with an assortment of texts and an image of the Buddha. Similarly, the official introduction of Buddhism to Japan (through Korea) is connected with a gilt-bronze Buddha image reportedly presented to Emperor Kimmei in 552 CE by the king of Paekche. The founding tales of many temples and shrines often center on images, too. Thus it is claimed, for example, that Kokawa-dera was built on the spot where its principal deity, a sculpture of a thousand-armed Kannon, is recorded to have miraculously materialized in a hunter's rustic hut sometime in the eighth century (Okudaira 1973, 123–27).

The association of Buddhist images with miraculous powers is a persistent theme in Buddhist literature. Among other things, this serves as a typological link with the "original" image of the Buddha, a sculpture carved from sandalwood that was reportedly commissioned by King Udayana so that he could gaze upon the sacred form of the Buddha while the latter was off preaching to his mother in the heaven of Indra. This popular legend also states that the Buddha's disciple Maudgalyāyana transported thirty-two craftsmen up to the heavenly realm so that they could observe the special marks of the Buddha firsthand, thereby ensuring representational accuracy. When the Buddha eventually returned to the earth, King Udayana's statue rose into the air to greet him of its own accord, and the Buddha proclaimed that the image would one day travel to China to help transmit his teachings (Weidner 1994, 221–25).

Amy McNair has pointed out that the legend of the Udayana Buddha not only served as a later paradigm for the royal patronage of Buddhism, but also helped both to establish the idea of the living Buddha's authentic portrait and to verify "the magical efficacy of images" (quoted in Weidner 1994, 225). Moreover, this "magical efficacy"—thus present from the beginnings of the Buddhist image-making tradition—is a fundamental characteristic of many of the artifacts that are typically grouped under the heading of Buddhist Art (and Religious Art more broadly). In recent years, various scholars have interrogated the implications of removing such animated icons from their ritual context (Freedberg 1989), arguing that this separation inevitably results in distortion and misrepresentation. As Donald McCallum writes in *Zenkōji and Its Icon*,

Throughout this study I refer to art, art history, and art historians, but I must confess great unease with regard to the applicability of the term "art" to the types of

icons with which we are concerned. Of course, this is a broader issue within the study of religious imagery, since obviously aesthetic motivations were not primary in the production of religious paintings and sculptures. . . . In the case of monuments that are universally recognized as "great art," there is an all-but-irresistible tendency to shift the focus from religious to aesthetic factors, to offer explications in terms of "art." The Zenkōji-related icons lack such dramatic aesthetic qualities, and thus more easily accommodate a different approach. However, I would like to generalize this methodology to the degree that we can begin to look at all icons outside of the context of "art" as an aesthetic category. (McCallum 1994, 5–6)

That the concept of the animated Buddhist icon was repressed for so long has been attributed by Bernard Faure to the "modern and Western values of aestheticization, desacralization, and secularization" (Faure 1998, 169). Echoing McCallum, he has also questioned the very notion of "Buddhist art": "Is there a Buddhist 'art,' a subcategory of Asian art, itself a rubric within world art, one among the many rooms in André Malraux's famous 'musée imaginaire'? Or are we not dealing primarily with Buddhist images, whose artistic value is at best derivative?" (ibid., 168) Faure's question is to some extent, of course, rhetorical (as well as deliberately provocative), and I will suggest below that the alternatives he and McCallum frame are somewhat misleading. For the moment, however, I would like to take the question essentially at face value: that is, through an examination of a few highly selective instances of how certain artifacts have been understood and conceptualized in the context of Buddhism, I would like to consider further the process by which "Buddhist art" became (and the extent to which it usefully remains) a category of discourse.

Toward this end, it might be helpful to begin by reflecting briefly on the issue of where to locate "Buddhist art" within the general domain of religious art, as a way of providing a broader context for understanding the behavior of Buddhist icons. As has already been alluded to above, one of the fundamental characteristics of such objects is the ascription to them of miraculous powers, and Buddhist literature preserves a multitude of stories recording their magical feats and apotropaic abilities (Soper 1959). While such accounts tend to concern figural sculptures, other objects, particularly sūtras, are frequently recorded as functioning in similar ways (Campany 1991). When compared, then, with descriptions from the many other religious traditions that similarly focus on what David Freedberg (1989) has labeled "the power of images," the Buddhist conception of icons is not in these respects unique.

The contours of "religious art" can be further illuminated in a somewhat roundabout way by noting the sorts of reactions and behaviors provoked by artworks that have been interpreted as antireligious, such as Andres Serrano's infamous *Piss Christ* (a photograph of a crucifix immersed in urine), to cite a well-known contemporary example. While it is

certainly true that other subcategories of art can also generate strong feelings of disapprobation ("too modern art," for instance—say, Damien Hirst; or "obscene art," better still—think Robert Mapplethorpe), attacks on works viewed as blasphemous tend to be especially venomous. During the national controversy that erupted in 1999 over the Sensation exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum, it was Chris Ofili's *The Holy Virgin Mary* that was singled out time and again by the show's many detractors as the emblem of all things evil in contemporary cultural life. Even as the work's defenders hastened to explain that the use of elephant dung as an artistic medium was associated with sacred art in African cultures, and pointed out that the Anglo-Nigerian Ofili was himself a Catholic and former altar boy, *The Holy Virgin Mary* was smeared with white paint by a seventy-two-year-old man who reportedly found it sacrilegious, and the painting had to be protected from further mayhem by a Plexiglas shield (*New York Times*, December 18, 1999). *The Holy Virgin Mary* was also the only work in the exhibition that ended up with its own personal guard (www.artsjournal.com/Brooklyn.htm).

In the Buddhist context, not surprisingly, the desecration of icons usually provokes comparable community disapproval, not to mention vengeance and retribution of a more cosmic sort. A Chinese collection of miscellaneous anecdotes compiled in the seventh century, for instance, tells of a gang of thieves who pilfered miniature bronze buddhas from local temples. After melting them down to make currency, the thieves died howling, "and their bodies were found to be scorched and split as if they had been burned to death" (Soper 1959, 58). The same collection reports elsewhere that a group of workers, ordered by an official to demolish two life-sized gold and silver images (again to be melted down), was struck with paralysis when they began hammering and cutting. Their bodies then broke out in blue blisters as the men were attacked by vengeful supernatural guardians who beat them to death (ibid., 65). Other sources similarly record the excruciating dermal eruptions and painful deaths visited upon those who mistreated or destroyed Buddhist sūtras (Campany 1991, 41–42).

Against the background of this fundamental Buddhist conception of texts and images as sacred icons, the themes invoked by several widely reproduced Chinese paintings come as something of a shock. The first, attributed to the thirteenth-century painter Liang Kai, executed in monochrome ink in an abbreviated manner, purportedly shows the sixth patriarch Huineng (638–713) tearing up sūtras with apparent gusto and evident glee (Fontein and Hickman 1970, 17–19). The second, by the slightly later (early fourteenth-century) painter Yintuoluo, depicts *The Monk from Danxia Burning a Wooden Image of the Buddha* (ibid., 36–38), a subject identified by the short poetic inscription that is mounted together with the painting. Whereas in the literary sources cited above such acts of

desecration would certainly serve as a prelude to gruesomely detailed punishment, what is so surprising in these two instances is that ripping up a sūtra and burning a wooden statue are presented not as acts of blasphemy but rather as manifestations of spiritual insight.

The philosophical basis for this view, in which sacred and profane are seemingly inverted, is cleverly demonstrated by the fuller literary accounts of the incident that Yintuoluo's painting depicts.

> Once, the monk from Danxia [= Tienran; d. 824] was staying at the Huilin Monastery. The weather was very cold, so the Master took a wooden statue of the Buddha and made a fire with it. When someone criticized him for doing so, the Master said: "I burned it in order to extract the sacred relics (*śarīra*) it contained." The man said: "But how can you extract the sacred relics from an ordinary piece of wood?" The Master replied: "If it is nothing more than an ordinary piece of wood, then why scold me for burning it?" (Based on Fontein and Hickman 1970, 36–37)

As many readers will doubtless have already recognized, this story and these two paintings are frequently adduced examples of the iconoclasm that has long been assigned to the Chan/Zen school of Buddhism. Chan art (or "Chan painting," more particularly, since this is virtually the only artistic medium ever associated with Chan) poses something of an interpretive challenge in that it is typically construed less as a subcategory of Buddhist art than almost as a kind of anti-Buddhist art. But it is for just this reason, in fact, that I would like to trace some of the distinctive features of the discursive practices associated with "Chan painting" as a concept, with the aim of helping to clarify the nature of "Buddhist art."

The term *Chan painting* does not occur in any Tang or Song dynasty texts, and appears not to have been recognized as a category of painting by traditional Chinese writers; nonetheless, various modern scholars have identified certain basic elements as characteristic of "Chan painting." The first of these is related to style and technique, and a typical view is offered by Sherman E. Lee when he contends that "[t]he weight of pictorial evidence seems to clearly support the close association of splashed-ink [*pomo*] works with Chan, and this connection is an essential part of the understanding of Chinese Buddhist painting" (Weidner 1994, 16). Moreover, this characterization of the formal features of Chan style draws an explicit connection with Chan doctrine, linking the alleged spontaneity of execution ("immediate and unconstrained artistic expression" [Brinker 1996, 122]) with the emphasis on intuition, immediacy, and sudden enlightenment that is associated with orthodox Chan teachings.

A second basic element of Chan painting relates to subject matter, and to the view that certain kinds of representations are "typically Chan." Among these would be fairly obvious themes such as Bodhidharma, transmitter of Chan from India to China, the Chan six patriarchs, or the white-robed Guanyin (bodhisattva of mercy), though other less

predictable subjects are included under this rubric as well: animals, flowers, fruits, stones (Brinker 1996, 47). Here, too, a direct link is drawn to Chan doctrine, in particular to the radical nonduality (the identification of nirvāṇa and saṃsāra) claimed as a distinctive trait of Chan. "In this approach, the painting assumes a completely different religious function with much more accessible reference to reality. The Zen (Chan) work of art is largely free of the official character and claim to objectivity in the sense of numinous presence and magic-cultic substance of orthodox Buddhist painting" (ibid.).

Furthermore, these two elements (that is, style and subject matter) represent categories that are fluid, which is to say that a non-Chan subject can be done in a Chan style (or by a Chan painter), while a Chan subject can be done in a non-Chan style (or by a non-Chan painter) (Brinker 1987, 10; Cahill 1996). This paradoxical situation can be contrasted with traditional Buddhist attitudes toward imagery, which are characterized as emphasizing the replication of set iconographical subjects and styles without deviating from some canonical norm. Like claims about the Chan school itself, in other words, Chan painting from this point of view is presented as unfettered by orthodox tradition; consequently, Chan pictures are often "rather difficult to recognise as works of art bearing any religious connotation at all. They have 'open distance—nothing sacred'" (Brinker 1987, 33).

If Chan paintings, then, are purported to *look* very different from other Buddhist artworks, both in terms of *what* they represent and *how* it is represented, a third component of Chan art centers on the fact that such works also *act* differently. Here again, a sharp contrast is drawn with other Buddhist traditions, and a link is forged with Chan doctrine: the contrast focuses on the use of icons, while the link is to the iconoclastic spirit associated with Chan. Brinker writes, "In [Chan /] Zen Buddhism, cult images in the traditional sense play as little a part as classic Mahāyāna sūtras. After all, [Chan /] Zen is looking for 'independence from holy scriptures' and 'a special transmission outside traditional doctrines'" (Brinker 1996, 38). In other words, while "cult images" and "icons" are worshipped by *other* Buddhist practitioners, the Chan practitioner "ridicules the popular worship of relics" (ibid., 39). As evidence of the very literal iconoclasm supposedly championed by Chan, Waley, Munsterberg, Fontein and Hickman, Brinker, and Lee, among others, all introduce Yintuoluo's painting of *The Monk from Danxia Burning a Wooden Image of the Buddha*.

A fourth and final aspect of Chan painting to consider is in some sense so thoroughly embedded in the fabric of the master narrative of Chan art history that, like the *śarīra* of the immolated buddha-image, it is difficult to extract. Essentially, this view posits that Chan paintings, and particularly those done in a cursive, spontaneous manner, embody "Chan content" in a way that transcends issues of subject matter, style, and

function. Thus, because Chan Buddhists allegedly insisted on "direct, intuitive perception of reality, unmediated by intellectual analysis, such paintings must have seemed no more nor less than pictorial realizations of their beliefs" (Cahill 1988, 82–83). Indeed, one might go so far as to say that the "ineffable" quality of such works is nothing less than the embodiment of the enlightened mind of the painter.

> In seeking a technique with which to express the intensity of his intuition, the Chan painter turned to the brush and . . . proceeded to record his own moments of truth. . . . But even to suggest that these paintings have a purpose may be suggesting too much, and we should see them simply as pictorial metaphors for an event, or "happening," in the mind that cannot be described. "Illumination," they seem to say, "is like this." (Sullivan 1984, 148–49)

The painter who is most often used to exemplify this ideal is the thirteenth-century monk Fachang, better known as Muqi, whose *Six Persimmons* is undoubtedly the most frequently reproduced and best-known example of Chan painting.

While Muqi has been repeatedly singled out in twentieth-century art writing as the greatest Chan painter, and *Six Persimmons* has been repeatedly held up as his most quintessentially Chan painting, it turns out upon closer inspection that both of these opinions are of relatively recent vintage. Muqi is completely ignored by contemporary Southern Song (1126–1279) chroniclers, art historians and critics, and what little notice he does receive in subsequent Yuan-period (1279–1368) texts is almost universally negative. A brief entry in a short collection of artists' biographies (dated 1298) characterizes his works as sketchy and unsophisticated and considers them barely suitable for hanging in a monk's residence; a similar text, the slightly later *Precious Mirror of Painting*, by Xia Wenyan (preface dated 1365), dismisses them as coarse and ugly (Cahill 1988, 83).

In Japan, by contrast, Muqi apparently found a more appreciative audience, and his works were avidly collected and taken home by Japanese monks who traveled to China in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. An inventory (dated to 1351) of the important Zen temple Myōshin-ji lists a set of four paintings by Muqi among its possessions, and a similar inventory of a subtemple of the Engaku-ji (compiled in 1365) lists 38 Chinese paintings, among them several by Muqi. By the end of the fifteenth century, Muqi is represented in the catalogue of the collection of the Ashikaga shōgunate by a staggering 103 scrolls (Wey 1974, chap. 3).

But if Muqi is well attested as a general presence in Japan from the early fourteenth century, *Six Persimmons* itself does not enter the historical record until considerably later; in fact, *Six Persimmons* is first mentioned as having been presented as a gift to the Ryōkō-in, a subtemple at Daitoku-ji, when it was established in 1606. From its inception, the Ryōkō-in has been strongly associated with the tea ceremony and "tea

taste," and in subsequent centuries when *Six Persimmons* has seen the light of day it has been almost exclusively in that context.

Although the *Six Persimmons* narrative thus officially begins in the early seventeenth century at the Ryōkō-in, it does not resume, really, until some three hundred years later, when Chinese and Japanese painting in general, and Chan/Zen painting in particular, were gradually introduced to the West through a series of books and articles by an international cast of scholars. The earliest among them, and the first substantial Western publication devoted to East Asian art, was William Anderson's *Descriptive and Historical Catalogue of a Collection of Japanese and Chinese Paintings in the British Museum* (1886), which contains a brief notice of Muqi as follows: "Muh Ki (Mokkei), one of the leading artists of the dynasty. His favorite subjects were dragons, tigers, monkeys, storks, and wild ducks; but he also painted figures and landscapes" (1886, 486–87). Anderson was clearly working from Japanese sources (where else would Muqi be called a "leading artist" of his day?), and there is no mention of either Buddhism or fruit.

Writing some twenty years later, Herbert Giles was still able to describe his *Introduction to the History of Chinese Pictorial Art* (1905) as "the first attempt which has been made so far, in any European language, to deal, even cursorily, with the history of Chinese pictorial art" (v). Although Giles notes that Muqi was a Buddhist monk, and quotes some of the negative assessments of his painting made by Chinese critics, there is still no mention of Chan or Zen, whether as a form of Buddhism or a type of art. Shortly thereafter, however, this silence would be broken with the appearance, in 1906, of Kakuzo Okakura's enormously influential *Book of Tea* (still in print nearly a century later), which contained chapters devoted to Daoism and Zen Buddhism and to art appreciation, and Shaku Sōen's *Sermons of a Buddhist Abbot* (the first book about Zen to be published outside Asia).

Finally, in the early 1920s, there appeared several works that explicitly addressed the issue of Zen painting: Anesaki's *Buddhist Art in Its Relation to Buddhist Ideals* (1922), whose section on Zen art makes no mention of Muqi; Ernst Grosse's *Die Ostasiatische Tuschmalerei* (1923), which contains 160 illustrations (all but a handful from Japanese collections), including among them a dozen works by Muqi, and the first Western reproduction of *Six Persimmons*; and *An Introduction to the Study of Chinese Painting* by Arthur Waley (1923), which contains a revised version of his well-known essay on Zen painting. Grosse's book does not discuss or attempt to explicate *Six Persimmons*, though it was apparently this reproduction of the work that stimulated Waley's subsequent commentary. (Grosse is cited in his bibliography, and since Waley rather famously refused to travel to China or Japan, there is no question of his having seen the work firsthand.) Thus, basing his judgment on nothing more than an indifferent

black-and-white collotype, he nonetheless pronounced that, in *Six Persimmons*, "passion has congealed into a stupendous calm" (Waley 1923, 231)—a resonant judgment that continues to this day to be repeated with approbation, and a clear signal that the apotheosis of *Six Persimmons* had begun in earnest.

Since Arthur Waley's initial endorsement, the reputed artistic value of *Six Persimmons* has risen steadily: the painting has been reproduced countless times, and it has been praised not only as "the supreme example of [Muqi's] genius for investing the simplest things with profound significance" (Sullivan 1984, 170), but also as "one of the greatest Chan paintings ever produced" (LaPlante 1992, 155). In a general sense, the mere fact of the repeated inclusion of *Six Persimmons* in discussions of Chan/Zen art has itself helped to generate worth, but this "famous for being famous" effect only partially accounts for the monumental status eventually achieved by the artwork. Other factors have also played a pivotal role in this process, such as the claim that the act of painting can serve as a form of religious practice, and the related argument, touched on earlier, that the resultant work stands as a record of the painter's spiritual achievement—as a living expression of the painter's "original mind" (Pallis 1992, 44).

Additionally, the deployment of particular modes of representation, both visual and verbal, has helped to reinforce the notion that the "content" of *Six Persimmons* is fundamentally spiritual. Consider, for example, the very nature of the photographic reproductions of this painting. Like most other Chinese and Japanese hanging scrolls, *Six Persimmons* is mounted on layers of silk, though this mounting is almost never shown. Further, from its arrival at the Ryōkō-in, as suggested above, it has always been displayed in conjunction with the tea ceremony in a *tokonoma* alcove, a setting which, again, is rarely illustrated. One effect of these borderless, settingless reproductions is that the viewer has no sense of scale or proportion. More important, perhaps, the painting thus floats freely, unconstrained by physical delimitations, and thereby attains a certain dematerialization and ethereality.

The tendency of commentators to focus on the formal properties of *Six Persimmons* further reinforces the notion that the content or subject of the painting is the enlightened mind of its creator. That is, the subtle tonal gradations of the ink, the precise (yet uncalculated) placement of the individual pieces of fruit, the "empty" space surrounding them, and so on, are repeatedly held up as both manifestation and confirmation of a type of genius that can only result from profound religious realization.

The cumulative effect of decontextualizing the painting in reproduction while stressing its formal features renders *Six Persimmons* empty—free of physicality and, perhaps more important, free of discursive meaning. In the words of a recent Asian art survey, "Analysis is not the key

to [*Six Persimmons*'s] meaning; meditation is (that is, long, long looking until what is looked at is *seen*)" (LaPlante 1992, 155; original emphasis). In short, like the Chan/Zen experience itself, "the work of art which gives expression to that experience is, in the final analysis, indescribable and inexplicable. A Zen work of art *is*: it does not *mean*" (Brinker 1987, 41; original emphasis).

The hermeneutical model evinced by such declarations thus accounts for *Six Persimmons* and Chan painting in general in relation to Chan doctrine, and parallels a broader Chan/Zen discourse begun in the early years of the twentieth century which touted Chan as an iconoclastic and antinomian tradition that rejects scholastic learning in favor of transcendent, unmediated personal experience. Although this popular image of Chan has been almost totally discredited by recent scholarship (Faure 1991; Sharf 1995), the question arises as to why it has proved intractable in relation to Chan painting. I would like to suggest that its particular tenacity in art-historical discussions is partly a function of the powerful pull exerted by the familiar assumptions upon which it is based. That is, such characterizations of Chan/Zen painting clearly reiterate the modernist "'aesthetic attitude' [which] was constructed so as to force the object onto a pedestal of isolation . . . to be contemplated outside history as a symbol of freedom" (Camille 1994, 72).

The appealing conceptualization of Chan painting as modernism *avant la lettre*, so to speak, was certainly reinforced by the sorts of decontextualizations discussed above. Moreover, we should not lose sight (nor underestimate the importance) of the fact that Arthur Waley, the primary creator of "Chan painting" in the West, was a very close friend of the important formalist critics Clive Bell and Roger Fry (who himself wrote on Chinese art), and that Waley's famous pronouncements about *Six Persimmons*, and the progeny they spawned, echo the modernist aesthetic sentiments associated with Fry and the Bloomsbury set, who promoted the idea that art appreciation involves an emotional response to formal qualities ("significant form") independent of subject matter (Spalding 1980). Among other things, the formalist emphasis on the aura and purity of the ideal work of art also had a distinctly "spiritual" dimension, though this aesthetic transcendence was sharply distinguished from traditional religious expression. In many ways, a similar opposition can be detected in the recurring insistence that Chan Buddhism is free of the "magic-cultic" and superstitious ritual worship of icons, and that Chan painting is thus "decidedly different" from conventional Buddhist painting (Seckel 1989, 224–31).

The portrayal of Chan as radically indifferent to sūtras, scholasticism, and discursive reasoning is based on an overly literal interpretation of the famous formulation, attributed to Bodhidharma, of "A special transmission, outside the sūtras/Not dependent on words and letters."

But just as this representation has proved to be largely a fiction, so, too, has the assertion that traditional iconic images have no place in Chan. Rather, as T. Griffith Foulk and Robert H. Sharf have persuasively demonstrated in what is arguably the most important revision of Chan painting claims yet to appear, portraits of Chan abbots (a large and important subset of Chan-associated images) played a significant role in funerary and memorial rituals.

> The portrait of the abbot, like the living abbot on his high seat, is thus properly viewed as a religious icon—it is a manifestation of Buddhahood and a focus for ritual worship. As such, the portrait is functionally equivalent to the mummified remains of the abbot, to the relics of the Buddha, or to a *stūpa*, in that it denotes the Buddha's presence in his very absence. (Foulk and Sharf 1993/94, 210)

It would appear, then, that the popular characterization of Chan/Zen painting (like the popular characterization of Chan/Zen in general) is largely a phantasm. Moreover, if we reconsider Chan painting against the background of recent investigations of Chan institutional history, especially in the Song period, rather than in terms of ideas that gained currency only in the twentieth century, a very different picture emerges. One issue, in particular—the use of images in the Chan tradition—deserves further scrutiny in the light of conclusions that Griffith Foulk has reached about the nature of the Chan monastic experience. Foulk presents considerable evidence to demonstrate that all Song Buddhist monks, regardless of lineage or school affiliation, took part in similar practices and rituals (such as studying and chanting sūtras, engaging in seated meditation) that were essentially part of the very structure of the monastic institution as a whole, and thus did not much vary between designated Chan monasteries and other establishments (Foulk 1999, 220–21). From an art-historical point of view, the relative lack of differentiation in terms of day-to-day activities and procedures between Chan monks and non-Chan monks significantly suggests the likelihood of comparable continuity with regard to the images employed in support of those same activities. It suggests, that is, that "Chan painting" and "Buddhist art," far from constituting inverse categories, should instead be understood as coextensive to a considerable degree.

Other analyses of the institutional development of Chan have focused on the impact of the gradual waning of state support for Buddhist monasteries in the Song. One consequence of this change was that Buddhism looked increasingly to the literati for financial and political support; in turn, this led to increased competition among Buddhist traditions which were vying for the attentions of the same potential patrons (Schlütter 1999, 137). The importance of Chan-literati interaction in the Song was considerable.

> Literati recommended Chan monks to abbacies, they donated money to monasteries, patronized illustrious monks, and wrote epitaphs for them when they passed away. The main audience for the Chan traditions' literary output was the literati, and to be successful the Chan traditions had to have teachings that were attractive to literati. Indeed, most Chan masters probably came from literati families themselves. Song Chan can aptly be described as literati Buddhism. (Ibid., 138)

Although painting is not specifically mentioned here, given the importance of painting within literati culture throughout the Song it seems reasonable to assume that the literati may also have been a primary audience for paintings produced by Chan monks. Indeed, numerous scholars have pointed out that the features most closely allied with Chan/Zen painting—the use of ink monochrome, abbreviated and spontaneous brushwork—can be seen as counterparts of literati preferences, though what few recorded literati reactions to Chan painting survive seem uniformly negative in their appraisals. Cahill (1988, 83) and others have interpreted these disapproving reactions as signs of Confucian-Buddhist antagonism, though they might also be viewed as counterclaims to more positive judgments that have failed to survive: why even bother to characterize Muqi's brushwork as coarse and vulgar, for example, unless there is a competing view to the contrary?

The task of sorting out the relationships between Chan monks and other painters in the Southern Song period is complicated by the records preserved in Xia Wenyan's *Precious Mirror of Painting* (HSCS 1974, vol. 2), a collection of brief biographies of painters (with occasional commentary on their work) that was compiled in the mid-fourteenth century. The fourth chapter, devoted to the Southern Song, includes notices for more than 375 painters, and although the organization of the material is somewhat difficult to categorize, there are essentially three distinct groups of painters represented: literati, members of the imperial painting academy, and Buddhist monks (with a few Daoists thrown in). The subject matter favored by the literati stands out rather forcefully—entry after entry mentions ink bamboo, ink plum, various landscape themes, and so on; generally speaking, there are few surprises here.

With regard to the other groups, however, some seeming anomalies are readily apparent. For example, of the sixteen painters identified as monks (among them Muqi), fourteen are associated with literati-like subjects, such as bamboo, plum, orchids, and landscape; by contrast, almost all of the painters associated with Buddhist subjects are identified as members of the painting academy (among them the artist Liang Kai, whose painting of *The Sixth Patriarch Tearing the Sūtras* was introduced earlier). How, then, are we to account for this curious situation in which "Buddhist" paintings are produced by painters at the imperial court, while Buddhist monks are taking up subjects usually associated with the literati?

More particularly, how is it that Liang Kai, who is not a Chan monk, and Muqi, who paints non-Buddhist subjects, are both held up as exemplars of Chan/Zen painting in modern accounts?

The usual justification is essentially an elaboration of the notion adduced above of painting as the embodiment of enlightenment, and the corollary that an inextricable link exists between style and meaning. Thus, although Muqi's *Six Persimmons* is not an orthodox Chan subject, it nonetheless is endowed with "Chan meaning" because it is an expression of the artist's religious realization (Hisamatsu 1966, 25–28); and while Liang Kai was not a Chan monk, his "style was most acceptable to the intuitive, irrational, and often psychologically shocking practices of the [Chan] sect" (Lee 1959, 241). I would like to propose that the situation presented in *Precious Mirror* can be interpreted without recourse to such dubious claims which are rooted in the modern predisposition to find, or at least to always be looking for, spirituality in "Buddhist art"—dubious because nowhere in surviving Song or Yuan sources does the characterization of painting as the pictorial realization of belief or attainment appear. Thus, with regard to Buddhist images painted at the imperial academy, there is no evidence to suggest that such pictures were produced for use in monasteries, nor that they were ever employed for Buddhist rituals performed at court. Accordingly, *Precious Mirror* seems to allow for the possibility that Buddhist images could sometimes be appreciated outside the confines of worship and ritual, and that their production could be motivated significantly by the pleasures of narrative and visual apprehension.

With regard to the monks who appear in Xia Wenyan's entries, it is worth noting that they are among the very few Buddhist artists of the Song period whose names are preserved. Indeed, the very fact of being deemed worthy of inclusion in such a text suggests a rather elite status, particularly in comparison with the vast numbers of anonymous painters who were responsible for producing wall paintings, banners, and the many other images required by the Buddhist establishment. The important question raised by *Precious Mirror* is that of why—and for whom—these landscapes and paintings of bamboo and plum and orchids and such were being made. Although we are repeatedly told in contemporary accounts that the act of painting, particularly for Chan monks, was viewed as a form of religious expression, and that monks might use "landscapes or simple pictures of plant subjects . . . as visual aids to meditation" (Cahill 1996, ii.a), there is nothing to corroborate that such conceptualizations were known in the Song.

A rather different answer to the question of motivation emerges in part from a consideration of the physical layout of Song monasteries. One fairly constant design feature of these complexes is the inclusion of a large reception hall where the abbot would entertain officials and literati, and where paintings would be used as decoration (Foulk 1993, 182). In this

context, and considering the increased pressures on monasteries to attract private funding, the use and function—indeed, the meaning—of Chan paintings that employ styles and subjects seemingly intended to engage literati preferences and tastes might be seen in a new light: not so much as embodiments of enlightenment, perhaps, as advertisements of enlightened refinement and shared sensibilities.

In short, just as recent critical scholarship has revealed that Chan practitioners shared the basic values, beliefs, and practices of other Buddhists, despite popular rhetorical claims to the contrary, so, too, would it appear that the bulk of images produced by and for the Chan school cannot be differentiated from "Buddhist painting" generally, particularly in terms of ritual use and function. Richard Barnhart has written that while scholars "will argue about the nature of Chan painting, . . . it is likely that the central fact of Buddhist art is its consistent effort to illuminate spiritual values through pictorial images" (Yang et al. 1997, 137); I would, in fact, maintain to the contrary that regardless of the appeal (and the primary audience) of the relatively few images that do depart from Buddhist tradition in style and subject matter, "Chan painting," as it were, was arguably more earthly than spiritual. The truly radical dimension of *Six Persimmons*, particularly in light of the hyperbolic claims that have been made in its behalf over the past seventy-five years, may well be that it was not intended as a religious painting at all.

With this suggestion, we are brought back around to confront what is essentially a mirror image of the opposition encountered at the outset between image as icon (sacred) and image as art (secular). By way of conclusion I would like briefly to consider some of the implications of both of these oppositions, especially as they pertain to an understanding of Buddhist art.

In questioning the treatment of Buddhist images as art, Faure (1998) and McCallum (1994) both object to analyses and interpretations that focus on aesthetic properties and motivations while ignoring the ritual context and functions that may have originally governed the image's production. However justifiable this view may be, some of the assumptions by which it is bolstered need to be examined more closely. For one, stressing the ritualistic to the complete exclusion of the aesthetic is something of an overcompensation, the effect of which is to implicitly claim that a more nuanced and multivalent view of images is somehow a modern prerogative. But why assume either that aesthetic factors play no part in the making of "sacred" images, or that all images made in a religious context are sacred? I have tried to show, with regard to Chan painting, that the latter is not necessarily the case, while examples ranging across Asia—from the sensuous bracket *yakṣi*s (female spirits) of the Great Stūpa at Sanchi, to the scenes of everyday life and illustrations from the *Tale of Genji* that decorate Japanese fans on which chapters from the *Lotus Sūtra* have been

written out (Tanabe 1988, 75)—suggest that Buddhist ritual environments often could accommodate the pleasures of the visual.

In practice, however, the study of Buddhist art has tended to be construed either as a kind of sacred history—a search for spiritual truth—or as an explication of formal purity—a search for aesthetic transcendence; in some instances, such as Chan/Zen painting, the two overlap. But both the belief in Truth and the belief in Beauty, so to speak, are founded on a problematic reification of the sacred and the aesthetic as transhistorical, even transcultural, absolutes. While anyone is free to hold such beliefs, of course, I would argue that they are both essentially manifestations of private preferences and judgments which, as such, ought to have no place in the *critical* (public) study of Buddhism, within which they should be regarded with skepticism. To echo remarks made by Thomas McEvilley in a different context, critical study is marked by analysis, investigation, interpretation, and comparison; it aspires to "sharpen the critical faculty and its practice through all of culture," rather than enforce personal value judgments on others (McEvilley 1991, 177).

By emphasizing a position of skepticism, my intent is to call attention to the fundamentally contingent nature of the sacred and the aesthetic when viewed from outside a position of belief. Ultimately, the issue becomes one of "content"; and to invoke the moral of the story of the monk from Danxia one last time, it seems clear that the content we perceive in icons (or artworks) is not intrinsic to the objects before us. As Keith Moxey writes, "Just as there is no truth to be found in history but only ideologically inflected narratives of one kind or another, so there is no aesthetic value to be found in the work beyond that which we put there ourselves" (Moxey 1994, 37).

The unstable nature of aesthetic value is not difficult to chart. Impressionist painting, which patrons of the latest blockbuster now line up to see at strictly scheduled intervals, was famously ridiculed by press and public alike when first exhibited; once-prominent artists constantly drop from view (Henry Moore), while the works of artists critically scorned for decades are reappraised and suddenly become fashionable (Norman Rockwell). In addition to the waxing and waning of taste and critical fortunes, the very nature of "art" has been similarly in flux at least since Marcel Duchamp purchased a ceramic urinal from a plumbing supplier, signed it (with the pseudonym "R. Mutt"), gave it a title (*Fountain*), and submitted it for exhibition, in 1917. More recently, an exhibition of motorcycles set attendance records at the Guggenheim Museum, while Dangerous Curves: The Art of the Guitar filled the halls at the staid Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

As with aesthetic value, the content of icons also manifests instability. Consider, for example, an indentation at the summit of Adam's Peak in Sri Lanka, which for centuries has been variously claimed as the footprint of

the Buddha by Buddhist worshipers, as the footprint of Śiva by Hindus, and as the footprint of Adam by Muslims (Paranavitana 1958, 11–22). Clearly, "there is no inherent identity of this famous footprint. . . . Rather, its identity, and therefore its significance . . . is supplied by its various viewers" (Kinnard 2000, 56–57). But even in situations in which the identity of an image appears to be clear, there can still be confusion. For instance, it has been convincingly argued that many early representations of the Buddha in China did not actually possess "Buddhist meaning," but rather were understood by contemporary viewers as elements of Daoist worship (Wu 1986, 300).

Although the issue of where to locate religious meaning and aesthetic value is admittedly abstract, it nonetheless has very concrete implications for the way in which Buddhist art history is practiced (and for the potential contribution of Buddhist art to Buddhist studies). That is, those who privilege the manifestation of spiritual truth, as shown in the case of Muqi's *Six Persimmons* and Chan/Zen painting generally, obscure rather than clarify the nature of Chan discourse in the Song, while also serving (however inadvertently) the interests of sectarian apologism. Meanwhile, those in search of some imagined aesthetic purity will define *Buddhist art* in narrow terms that similarly serve as blinders. To cite just one example: J. LeRoy Davidson's well-known study, *The "Lotus Sutra" in Chinese Art* (1954), which remains the only monographic treatment of the subject, does not make a single reference to an actual illustrated sūtra; clearly, these were not, for him, "art." Thus, his heavily iconographic study limits itself to a consideration of painting and sculpture. Indeed, ignoring a considerable body of extant manuscript examples, many of them lavishly illuminated (see Weidner 1994, cat. no. 36), he rather astonishingly laments the fact that the *Lotus Sūtra* "ceased to exist in China as a source of creative inspiration" after the year 1000 (Davidson 1954, 93).

Many critics and art historians (though by no means all) still cling to compatible visions of art history as the study of canonical masterpieces and decry the turn away from notions of Art, and toward a concept of visual culture (or material culture) that largely ignores such hierarchical distinctions, as a lowering of standards and a threat to the very discipline. Others, however, welcome the fresh perspectives provided by the study of "minor" arts and "non" art, such as relics and reliquaries, sūtras, ritual implements, and works previously dismissed for being insufficiently accomplished.

Accordingly, it might be argued that "Buddhist art" should be replaced by the more neutral and transparent "Buddhist material culture," though here, as elsewhere, the meaning is the use. That is to say, it seems to me that the term *Buddhist art* is perfectly functional, so long as it is understood as a convenience, a designation for a category whose borders are ever shifting and whose contents are constantly being renegotiated.

Additionally, if the study of Buddhist art is to play a more significant role as a critical term for Buddhist studies than it has in the past, it must be from a position that recognizes both the conventional nature of the category itself and the necessity for remaining skeptical in the face of claims requiring a leap of faith.

Reflecting on the importance of maintaining a critical attitude, Thomas McEvilley notes that Karl Popper, the philosopher of science, characterizes the scientific approach as one that criticizes everything; for Popper, criticism is the force that enables civilization to advance. Moreover, he writes, "when Nietzsche said that the trained ability to detect the spurious was the beginning of philosophy, he meant that a critical attitude was the foundation of reason. These things," McEvilley concludes, in words that provide an apt conclusion here, these things "are as true in the realm of art as in those of philosophy or politics" (McEvilley 1991, 21).

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DEATH

Jacqueline I. Stone

Death and death-related topics represent a burgeoning research area in Buddhist studies. Meditations on death, the mechanisms of karma and rebirth, and the doctrinal and cosmological assumptions in which they are embedded drew scholarly attention early on. As the field expanded from a chiefly philological and text-centered enterprise to include the methods of social history, anthropology, literary criticism, and other disciplines, approaches to the study of death in specific Buddhist cultures have multiplied. Recent work addresses such issues as the social dimensions of Buddhist funerary rites; Buddhist mortuary practices, including funerary art; death ritual and the construction of gender and family lineage; and the impact of modernization on Buddhist funerals. There has yet to be a detailed study of death-related discourses and practices across Buddhist cultures. Such a project would shed light, for example, on the transformations of Buddhism in different Asian settings and on patterns in its interactions

with local religion. It could also be expected to reveal just how integral death-related matters have been—doctrinally, ritually, institutionally, and socially—to Buddhist traditions.

Two interrelated issues suggest themselves as particularly illuminating angles of approach for such a study. The first is that of control. Buddhism holds out the promise of mastery over death, both in its "official" ideal of liberation from saṃsāra and by claims that its meditative and ritual practices—whether performed by the individuals concerned or by others on their behalf—are sufficiently powerful to intervene to soteriological advantage in the death process. This promise of control over that most mysterious and terrifying realm—death—has been a chief source of Buddhism's attraction as a lived religion, and the perceived possession of such control has been one of its major sources of legitimation.

Legitimation is the second related issue here. The seemingly naïve question so often raised in undergraduate Buddhism courses—How do you know if someone's really enlightened?—has in fact posed a significant problem for Buddhist traditions. Whether or not, or to what extent, any given individual has planted good roots, eradicated the defilements, and acquired liberating insight is not readily obvious to the outside observer. Historically, decisions about which persons should hold religious authority have accordingly been based on a range of outwardly visible indications, which are assumed to reflect the requisite spiritual attainments. These have included possession of special powers; certification from a recognized teacher; mastery of ascetic disciplines; scrupulous observance of monastic rule; extraordinary learning and skill in preaching or debate; or other readily observable criteria, depending upon local norms. Yet perhaps the most pervasive index of spiritual power and authority, throughout the Buddhist world, lies in a perceived mastery over death. Here is where the merit and piety of individual devotees may be proved, the power of Buddhist adepts and thaumaturges established, and the authority of particular monks—or of their specific temples, lineages, rituals, and doctrines—confirmed. This essay will first offer some general reflections on these intertwined issues of control over death and its legitimizing power, and then see how they unfold in a specific case from medieval Japan.

SPIRITUAL ATTAINMENT AND THE CONQUEST OF DEATH

While death as a biological fact is irreducible, people imagine and experience it within the framework of culturally and historically specific ways of thinking. Like other religious systems, Buddhism subsumes death within a larger existential problem, formulated in its own terms, to which it then offers itself as the solution. That problem—exemplified by the four

sufferings of birth, old age, sickness, and death—is saṃsāra, the continued round of painful rebirth driven by ignorance and craving. Pāli sources speak of death both as the end of an individual life span and as occurring at each moment, one set of circumstances passing out of existence even as another arises. In either sense, death is simply part of the law of impermanence. The difficulty, from a Buddhist perspective, is that in our blindness to the shifting, contingent nature of things, we grasp at and cling to possessions, both material and mental, in a deluded attempt to construct a fictive "self" that will be impervious to change. Since all such efforts are doomed to be frustrated, the fact of one's own death becomes a source of suffering. In addition, the very ignorance and craving that prompt one to grasp at insubstantial possessions and satisfactions are what drive rebirth. Thus, as indicated on the wheel of becoming traditionally hung at the entrance to Buddhist monasteries, even death as the end of this life span is not a singular occasion but a recurring suffering that one must undergo repeatedly in the round of transmigration. Ontologically and experientially, death defines the samsaric condition.

And yet precisely because death exemplifies the problem, the sight of death can, it is said, induce in thoughtful persons the reflection and religious aspiration that lead toward a solution. In this sense, death—along with old age and sickness—is sometimes represented as one of three divine messengers (*devadūta*s) who warn of life's brevity and of the need for moral endeavor. Failure to heed its message is the mark of delusion. Thus King Yama, ruler of the dead, addresses the evildoer brought before him:

> "Did you not see among men a woman or man that had been one day dead, or two days dead, or three days dead, and had become swollen, black, and full of putridity? . . . Did it not occur to you, being a person of mature intelligence and years, 'I also am subject to death, and in no way exempt. Come now! I will act nobly with body, voice, and mind'?" He replies, "Lord, I could not. Lord, I did not think." (*Aṅguttara-nikāya*, quoted in Warren [1896] 1982, 257)

In contrast, numerous hagiographies depict right apprehension of death as a crucial turning point in the lives of exemplary Buddhists. The paradigmatic example is, of course, the Buddha-to-be, Prince Gautama, whose encounter on a pleasure outing with a corpse being borne along in a funeral procession awakens in him the resolve to renounce the world and seek liberation. The encounter with death as an occasion for awakening is also poignantly illustrated in the tale of the young mother Kisāgotamī. In her ignorance, she carries her dead child's body about as one would a living infant and begs the Buddha for a remedy to "cure" it. He agrees, instructing her to bring him a handful of mustard seed from a house where no one has ever died. As she goes door to door in her quest, the householders in turn exclaim, "Lady, what is this that you say! The living are few, but the dead are many." Slowly coming to realize that death

is inevitable for all, Kisāgotamī abandons her child's body in the forest and seeks ordination (Buddhaghosa, quoted in Stryk 1968, 173–74).

Precisely because of its potential to engender aspiration for the way, Buddhaghosa, the fifth-century Indian Buddhist monk and scholar, includes "meditation on death"—along with the meditation on friendliness toward all beings—as one of two meditations that can beneficially be practiced by persons of all temperaments (*Visuddhimagga* 3:57–59). Various "death meditations" are found throughout the Buddhist world, aimed at undercutting worldly attachments, promoting zeal in practice, and preparing one for life's end. Such meditations range from simple reflection on the inevitability of death and the uncertainty of its timing, to the elaborate Tibetan tantric "death simulations," in which the adept rehearses in meditation the physiological processes of dissolution. Best known in the southern Buddhist tradition, the contemplation of actual corpses in charnel grounds (or more recently, in morgues or photographs), though technically belonging to the category of meditations for engendering aversion to the body (*asubha-bhāvanā*), in effect becomes a powerful form of death meditation (Boisvert 1996).

If recognition of death is the first step toward liberation, then mastery of death is the mark of one who has achieved it. The Buddha's conquest of Māra on the night of his enlightenment represents his victory, not only over temptation, but over death, which is Māra's domain. "Opened for those who hear are the doors of the Deathless," he declares, when the deity Brahmā implores him to teach (*Majjhima nikāya* 1:169; Horner 1954, 213). So fully is the Buddha's great awakening equated with mastery over death that his own death is depicted as a virtual reenactment of it, as he ascends and descends with perfect mental control through the levels of meditative absorption before entering final nirvāṇa. Other great Buddhist masters have been represented as not "dead" but deep in meditation. The Buddha's disciple Mahākāśyapa is said to be in meditation on Mt. Kukkuṭapāda, awaiting Maitreya's advent; so is the Japanese Shingon master Kūkai (774–835) in his mausoleum on Mt. Kōya.

In fact, one finds a broad tendency across Buddhist traditions to conflate the death of enlightened persons with spiritual attainment, or more precisely, to depict their exit from the world, not as "death" at all but as its conquest. In such cases, even the word *death* is rarely used but is replaced by some special term indicating an escape from the cycle of rebirth, such as "nirvāṇa without remainder" or "going to the pure land." Alternatively, the disappearance of such individuals may be seen as a "skillful means" designed to awaken others. Patrul Rinpoche, in discussing "the impermanence of holy beings," says of Marpa, Milarepa, and other great teachers, not that they died, but that, "in the end, they all chose to demonstrate that everything is impermanent" (Patrul Rinpoche 1994, 43). East Asian theorists posited two distinct modes of rebirth: the samsaric

cycle undergone by the unawakened, driven by ignorance and craving (in Japanese, *bundan shōji*), and the voluntary rebirth of the bodhisattva, who by the power of his compassionate vows is reborn at will in whatever form will be efficacious in benefiting others (*hennyaku shōji*). Strictly speaking, "death" is a problem of the unenlightened; awakened persons have this process under control.

This distinction—between awakening and delusion—has also been mapped onto the deceased's remains. Another staple of Buddhist hagiography is that the body of such-and-such an eminent monk or devout layperson emitted sweet fragrance or did not decompose. Such accounts are not limited to Buddhism's premodern past: The *New York Times* recently reported that the body of the Russian lama Dashi-Dorzho Itigilov (d. 1927) was exhumed some thirty years after his death and found to be "still in the lotus position, still perfectly intact, having defied nature's imperative to decay" (Myers 2002). Even when subjected to extensive mortuary treatment, the bodies of Buddhist sages and adepts behave differently than do those of ordinary people. Again, the Buddha provides the paradigmatic example; his body is said to have produced jewel-like relics (Sanskrit *śarīra*) in the crematory fire, as have the bodies of many subsequent saints and devotees. In his study of the medieval Chinese practice of mummifying by dry-lacquer technique the bodies of deceased abbots of Chan monasteries and enshrining them in the patriarchs' hall, Robert Sharf notes, "It would seem that a successful mummification was rare and difficult to achieve, and required the cooperation of the corporeal remains of the deceased. Thus, even in the case of a lacquered mummy, the transformation of the cadaver into an imperishable icon could be construed as evidence of spiritual attainment" (Sharf 1992, 24). As several recent studies have shown, such remains were believed to retain the charisma of the original living person and could respond to prayers, and, in the case of relics, even multiply and move of their own volition (Trainor 1992; Schopen 1998). The remains of the Buddhist "special dead," in short, behave in a manner quite opposite to the inertness and decay that one expects from an ordinary cadaver—instantiating, as it were, the equation of enlightenment with mastery over death.

THE DEATH PROCESS: STRATEGIES OF CONTROL

Only those with extraordinary powers can "see" causality operating across past, present, and future; the ordinary practitioner must take it on faith, as it were, that meritorious deeds really do lead, after death, to better rebirth, or to freedom from rebirth altogether. Hence the importance to Buddhist cultures of those individuals who, voluntarily or otherwise, "die" and then return to life, reporting that the cosmology is true; that evil

really is punished in nightmarish realms; and that the prayers and offerings of the living do indeed both build merit for themselves and alleviate the sufferings of the deceased. Accounts of such afterworld journeys often gain credibility from the very detailed information they purport to relay about persons known to their hearers. "[I saw that] Aga, the daughter-in-law of the Gyaten family of T'hromt'hog, was in that fordless brown river of the dead, suffering unimaginable pain. This was the end result of her having offered unclean tea to gatherings of many monks. I sang the mani mantra, and Tara saved her, pulling her out of the turbulent brown flood with a beribboned arrow" (Drolma 1995, 41; see also Pommaret 1997). The immense authority accruing to the *delog* (*'das log*) of Tibet and similar "returnees" from the dead in other cultures lies precisely in their apparent validation of Buddhist cosmological, ritual, and moral structures.

Once the afterlife has been ethicized in this way, then all good practices for ordinary times take on a dimension of preparation for death, ensuring that it will mediate the best possible future rebirth. Merit accumulation during life is perhaps the most basic of Buddhist strategies for directing the death process to one's advantage. At the same time, the moment of death itself has been understood as a potent liminal juncture when an individual's own meditative powers—or proper ritual performed on his or her behalf—can exert a salvific influence far surpassing that of good practices conducted at ordinary times. Buddhists hope to die well, not only to appropriate mimetically the ideal death that is the sure sign of an awakened person—although that logic plays a role—but because the liminality of death itself is thought to offer an unparalleled opportunity for liberation.

While the degree of emphasis varies from one tradition to another, Buddhism along with other Indian religions has generally stressed the power of an individual's last thought to condition the next rebirth. Pāli sources attest to the practice of a monk, or fellow lay devotees, visiting laypersons on their deathbed to encourage them in wholesome reflections (*Majjhima nikāya* 3:258–61; *Saṃyutta-nikāya* 5:408–10). In the Pure Land traditions of East Asia, specific deathbed practices were developed to enable the dying to visualize the buddha Amitābha and focus their last thoughts upon him; by producing even ten successive thoughts of Amitābha at the end, it was believed, even an evil person could eradicate the sins of eight billion *kalpa*s (*kalpa* being a vast period of time) and escape saṃsāra, achieving birth in Amitābha's pure land (Stevenson 1995). According to the Unexcelled Yoga Tantra (*anuttarayogatantra*), at the moment of death, the "mind of clear light," the most subtle form of consciousness, surfaces, and the trained yogin can use his death to access that consciousness, immediately achieving liberation (Lopez 1997).

Belief in the soteriological efficacy of practices for the time of death led, in some cases, to the development of techniques for predicting when

death would arrive and thus enabling more effective preparation. In medieval Japan, monks of the Tendai and Zen schools transmitted a secret method, couched in verses attributed to Bodhidharma, for knowing the time of one's death (Faure 1991, 184–87). Among Tibetan tantric adepts, divining the approach of death—through signs involving bodily processes, dreams, and other portents—became an elaborate science (Karma Lingpa, in Mullin 1998, 129–48; Germano 1997, 461–66). Also vital in the deathbed context are the rites performed by specialists for the dying person, to assist his or her transit to a favorable rebirth or exit from saṃsāra altogether. Such practices seem to have begun fairly early on, at least in a monastic context; the vinaya (monastic code) of the Mūlasarvāstivādins specifies that the fellows of a dying monk should for his sake "perform worship to the three precious things" so that he will not fall into an evil realm (Schopen 1995, 495). Rites to assist the dying range from simple support at the deathbed, such as chanting together with the dying person or exhorting him or her in wholesome thoughts, to highly specialized intervention on the individual's behalf by a qualified ritualist. A striking instance of the latter is the consciousness transference (*'pho ba*) practiced in the Tibetan context, by which the adept, trained in recognizing the precisely appropriate moment in the process of dissolution, is said to be able literally to relocate consciousness—his own, or that of another dying person—from the present body to a pure land (Patrul Rinpoche 1994, 351–65; Tsechokling Yeshe Gyaltsen, in Mullin 1998, 171–87).

Closely linked to practices for the dying are those aimed at guiding the newly deceased through an interim period, leading either to the next rebirth or, in some cases, to liberation from rebirth. Buddhist concepts of an interim existence (*antarābhava*) between death and conception may have drawn on Vedic and Upanishadic cosmological elements, assimilating them to a Buddhist interpretive scheme (Cuevas 1996). Among *abhidharma* ("higher dharma," or advanced doctrinal studies) philosophers, the exact nature of interim existence was debated, and some schools, notably the Theravāda, rejected it altogether (Wayman 1974; Kritzer 2000). Doctrinally, theories of the "in-between" were elaborated to answer philosophical questions about how mechanisms of causal continuity operate between lifetimes without the support of a permanent soul or other metaphysical substrate. From a ritual perspective, however, such theories served to extend the liminality of the death moment, opening a prolonged window of opportunity during which ritual performance and merit transference by the living could positively influence the fate of the deceased. Though explanations vary, notions of a forty-nine-day interim period gained wide currency throughout Buddhist Asia. Not coincidentally, this is the same length of time that the Buddha is said to have passed absorbed in meditation following his awakening.

What happened to the deceased during this interval, and what the living should do to aid them, has been variously imagined, often drawing on local religious culture. In China, notions of the interim state were expressed from about the tenth century onward as a "purgatorial" period in which the dead were judged in succession by ten kings, who meted out appropriate rewards and punishments and assigned the dead to their next rebirth. The cosmology of the Ten Kings represented a fusion of Buddhist notions of karmic retribution and merit transference with Chinese bureaucratic and legal procedures (Teiser 1994). Tibetan visions of the interim state (*bar do*), with its overpowering lights, sounds, and manifestations of compassionate and wrathful deities, have been introduced to the West through the so-called *Tibetan Book of the Dead.* The history of the highly complex Tibetan rites for guiding the deceased through the *bar do* and its numerous opportunities to realize liberation—or, failing that, favorable rebirth—is now drawing increasing scholarly attention (Cuevas 2003). Notions that the dead traverse an interim state have also been closely linked to Buddhist funerary and mortuary practices, and to rites for placating unhappy ghosts.

DEATH AND THE RITUAL SPECIALIST

One constant found in Buddhist death-related practices is the prominence of the clergy. To be sure, the laity have often had avenues for directly benefiting the dead themselves, by offering prayers, by copying or reciting sūtras, or by commissioning Buddhist steles, images, or even mortuary temples. But rites for the deceased have usually been considered most efficacious when performed by those purified by ascetic and moral disciplines or by the power of meditative and ritual practice—that is, monks and also other Buddhist adepts and thaumaturges. Thus when Nandasena tries to give food and clothing directly to his deceased wife, who has fallen into the realm of hungry ghosts, she tells him: "What is given by your hand into mine does not profit me. But as regards the monks, who are abounding in the moral precepts, free from passion, and learned, / Regale them with food and drink and transfer to me the benefit of the gift. Then I shall be happy, blest in the fulfillment of all desires" (*Petavatthu*, quoted in Holt 1981, 13). Maudgalyāyana (Chinese Mulian; Japanese Mokuren), the disciple of the Buddha most accomplished in occult powers, makes the same discovery: food that he himself sends magically to his mother in the *preta* realm bursts into flames and scorches her, but his offerings to the community of monks at the end of the rains retreat at once alleviate her suffering. Maudgalyāyana's legend provided the basis, across East Asia, for large-scale annual festivals and memorial observances held to benefit the deceased and cement the ties of mutual obligation and exchange between Buddhist clergy and laity (Teiser 1988). As John Holt has

suggested, the monk is best qualified to mediate offerings of the living for the dead, because he himself is "dead" to the world and embraces a way of life aimed at transcending birth and death (Holt 1981, 19–20).

By a related logic, especially in East Asia, Buddhist rites for the dying and deceased have frequently employed the symbolism of monastic ordination. In the Chan monasteries of China during the Song period (960–1279), precept recitations were conducted as part of monks' funeral observances. "The performance of this ceremony is particularly noteworthy," writes William Bodiford, "because it demonstrates that Chinese Ch'an monks also linked the power of the Buddhist precepts to the future salvation of the deceased" (Bodiford 1993, 188–89). In Japan in the Heian period (794–1185), "deathbed tonsure" was practiced among nobles of the court, in the belief that dying as a monk or nun would positively effect one's postmortem state. The representation of death, properly ritualized, as a form of ordination probably reached its apogee in late medieval and early modern Japan, with the adaptation of Chan-style monastic funerals for the laity. These funerals, many of whose forms persist to this day, entailed posthumous ordination of the deceased and conferral of a posthumous precept name. Such practices were thought to pacify the potentially dangerous and polluted spirits of the dead and dispatch them to the realm of enlightenment. They invested Zen priests with immense ritual authority, promoted the spread of Zen among all social classes, and were eventually adopted by other Buddhist schools as well (Bodiford 1993, 185–208; Williams 2005, 38–58).

Buddhist funerary ritual of this kind in effect collapses the distinction, outlined above, between the "enlightened" death of spiritually cultivated individuals and the samsaric death of ordinary people. By the power of the ritual performance—whether it derives from the officiant's personal attainments, from the authority of his school or lineage, or from the ritual itself—the dying or deceased person is said to be effectively removed from saṃsāra and established in an enlightened realm. This understanding accords well with anthropological models, drawing on the work of Robert Hertz ([1907] 1960), that see funerals as effecting a separation of the dead from living, their purification and transition, and finally, their reincorporation into a new order of the deceased.

Services for the dying and the dead have everywhere constituted a major social role of Buddhist ritualists—monks and also other "unofficial" yogins and adepts—and have provided a chief economic base for Buddhist institutions. The religious legitimation that they entail must in many cases have been self-perpetuating: monks perform death rites because they are the most qualified; at the same time, simply being in the position of presiding at funerary and mortuary rites confers its own authority. Such observations are not intended to deny that death rites may often be performed in the most exemplary spirit of compassion, or that

they provide solace for their sponsors, who, in arranging for them, know that they have done for the deceased all that could be done. This latter point is strikingly evident, for example, in contemporary Buddhist funerals in Japan. Despite the rise of a thriving secular funeral industry, the presence of a priest to recite sūtras—however perfunctory his performance or how tenuous, even nonexistent, his relationship to the deceased—is still deemed indispensable by many.

To further illustrate the issues of perceived control over the death process and the religious legitimation it confers, let us turn now to a work exemplifying several of the points adumbrated above: the *Ichigo taiyō himitsu shū* (Esoteric collection of essentials for a lifetime), a set of deathbed ritual instructions attributed to the Japanese monk Kakuban (1095–1143), revered as the founder of the Shingi ("new doctrine") school of esoteric Buddhism. This work was written at a time of increasing private aristocratic sponsorship of esoteric ritual for both worldly and transcendent aims, as well as a mounting concern, among monastics and educated laypersons, with dying in a state of right mindfulness. Some brief background will help place it in context.

Medieval Japanese interest in ritualized deathbed practice is usually traced to a treatise by the monk Genshin (942–1017) called *Ōjōyōshū* (Essentials of birth in the pure land), which sets forth the forms of practice, including deathbed rites, for achieving birth after death in the pure land of the buddha Amida (Sanskrit Amitābha) (Dobbins 1999). Amida's realm, "Utmost Bliss" (Sanskrit Sukhāvatī; Japanese Gokuraku), was said to lie outside saṃsāra altogether; to be born in Amida's pure land (*ōjō*) was to escape deluded rebirth once and for all and to never again regress on the path of enlightenment. In this treatise, Genshin drew on the work of Chinese predecessors to explain how the dying should be cared for and encouraged in their last reflections. Dying monks are to be removed from their accustomed lodgings to a separate "Hall of Impermanence," where the sight of familiar possessions will not give rise to attachment. There a buddha image should be enshrined, with a five-colored pennant tied at one end to its hand; the dying monk is to hold the other end and thus visualize being drawn into the pure land. Flowers should be scattered and incense burned. Persons who have been drinking wine or eating meat or the five pungent roots should be denied access, lest they disturb the dying person's reflections. Those in attendance are to help the dying person contemplate Amida Buddha's form, especially his radiant, all-embracing light, and visualize his welcoming descent (*raigō*), together with his attendant bodhisattvas, to guide the dying person to the pure land. Above all, they are to assist him in completing the final "ten *nenbutsu*"—ten

consecutive thoughts of the Buddha or invocations of his name, in the formula "namu-Amida-butsu"—deemed necessary for birth in the pure land.

Genshin's prescriptions, and the ideal of a death with right mindfulness, were soon adapted to the specific practices and soteric visions of other Buddhist traditions. Shingon masters such as Kakuban adopted the deathbed *nenbutsu* but reinterpreted "birth in the pure land" to mean, in the deepest sense, a liberative realization in one's last moments of unity with the cosmic Buddha Dainichi (Sanskrit Mahāvairocana). Teachers of the newly emergent Zen school, though often represented as sublimely indifferent to the afterlife, understood well the power of one's final acts to confirm one's spiritual attainments. Spontaneous composition of a death poem, as a proof of one's insight, was especially valued in Zen monastic circles, as was heroic posture at the time of death (Faure 1991, 187–91). Dōgen (1200–1253) asserted that the power of seated Zen meditation would enable one to "die sitting, die standing" (*Fukan zazengi*).

Laypeople, too, sought to die in a state of right mindfulness. Instrumental in the spread of this ideal was the proliferation of *ōjōden*, literally, "accounts of birth in the pure land" (Kotas 1987). *Ōjōden* collections included biographies of monks, nuns, and lay men and women of a range of social classes who were believed to have reached Amida's realm. Typically, *ōjōden* describe the last hours of the individual concerned and thus served as models for what a death with right mindfulness was supposed to look like. The subjects of these accounts are never surprised by death. They foresee it to the day or even to the hour and announce it to disciples or family members. They bathe, put on clean clothes, and sit straight in the posture of meditation or lie down in the "nirvāṇa position," facing west with their head to the north. In most cases, the liberative nature of their death is demonstrated by appropriate signs. Strange music or unearthly fragrance is detected in the death chamber, or five-colored clouds gather in the west, all signs that Amida's welcoming descent has occurred. Or, the bodies of the deceased do not decay but exude fragrance, or retain the posture of meditation even in the crematory fires. Relatives and close associates, at times even strangers, have dreams revealing their birth in Amida's pure land. It is open to question how many people actually did manage to die in so exemplary a fashion. Nonetheless, these hagiographical depictions helped both to establish and to disseminate a normative ideal about how one ought to die, an ideal especially widespread in monastic and aristocratic circles. Court diaries from the eleventh and twelfth centuries onward tell of individuals who died holding cords tied to the hand of a buddha image, or who had a religious advisor in attendance to assist them in their dying hours. The same sources also inform us that surviving family members or associates sought and indeed found auspicious signs of *ōjō* in the death of their contemporaries.

The ideal of right mindfulness at the last moment aimed at utilizing the liminal nature of the death process to achieve liberation. Yet at the same time, it created new problems. Bringing the mind to bear on the Buddha in one's final moments is no easy achievement, especially for those without training in meditation; one may be distracted by fear or by physical pain, or, in many cases, not even conscious. Anxieties about whether one would indeed be able to focus one's thoughts at the end were also exacerbated by a growing sense that death's liminal potency could cut both ways: if right mindfulness at death enabled even a sinful person to achieve the pure land, then, by the same logic, failure to achieve right mindfulness could send the most dedicated practitioner plunging down into the evil realms. Such anxieties were expressed (if not generated) by tales that circulated about the dangers of stray desultory thoughts at the end. In one such story, a devout monk, contrary to all expectation, does not achieve the pure land but is reborn a snake—simply because, even while chanting his last *nenbutsu*, he happens to notice his vinegar jar on the shelf and dies wondering who will inherit it (*Konjaku monogatari shū* 20:23).

The response that emerged from the monastic community was to superimpose another layer of ritual control over a person's last moments, above and beyond his or her own deathbed practice. Thus we see an increasing emphasis on the soteriological value of dying in the company of a *chishiki*, or ritual specialist, who could negotiate on one's behalf the dangers of the liminal last moments. The term *chishiki*, or properly, *zenchishiki* (Sanskrit *kalyāṇamitra*), literally "good friend," broadly denotes a teacher in Buddhist practice or someone who encourages another in the way. In various contexts, it has assumed additional, more specific meanings, including that of someone who attends the dying and aids them in their deathbed practice. Genshin's *Ōjōyōshū* had introduced the recommendation of the Chinese Pure Land teacher Daochuo (562–645) that three to five people of like mind should make a pact in advance to assist one another at the time of death. Over time, however, representations of the *chishiki* in medieval Japan shifted from a mere fellow practitioner who would encourage one's deathbed contemplation to a ritual specialist able to assume full control of the death process if one's own concentration should falter. Kakuban's "esoteric collection" is particularly significant in that it is the first extant text explicitly to address this shift.

The *Ichigo taiyō himitsu shū* is a prescriptive text; here again, one cannot automatically assume that large numbers of people actually died in the highly ritualized manner that Kakuban suggests. To have—as he recommends—several *chishiki* in attendance for "one day, two days, seven days, or until death transpires" would have ruled out the possibility of such a rite for many people on economic grounds alone. Nonetheless, medieval sources suggest that, from Kakuban's time, a growing number of individuals, both clerics and laity, availed themselves in their last

hours of the services of monks or other adepts known for their ritual powers.

KAKUBAN'S "ESOTERIC COLLECTION" FOR THE TIME OF DEATH

Now let us briefly consider some portions of Kakuban's "esoteric collection." The text opens with strong claims for the efficacy of its recommended procedures.

> Birth in the pure land in any of the nine levels depends on right mindfulness at the time of death. Those who seek buddhahood should master this mindfulness, for escape from saṃsāra can be found only in this [final] moment. . . . By correct procedures at the time of death, even monks and nuns who have violated the precepts can achieve birth in the pure land; so too can lay men and women who have done evil. How much more so, those [monastics] of wisdom who uphold the precepts, and lay men and women of virtue! (Miyasaka 1989, 1:157)

Kakuban first addresses the importance of correct judgment about whether or not one's present illness will be fatal, an implicit acknowledgment that—unlike the idealized subjects of *ōjōden* biographies—the practitioner will very likely not know in advance when death is coming. If the illness is not terminal, the sick person should offer prayers, seek medical treatment, and do everything possible to prolong life—not out of attachment to the body, but to strengthen his or her connection to the true vehicle. Should one determine, however, through astrological readings or other forms of divination, that death is imminent, one should at once abandon all other matters and prepare for the end by abiding in right mindfulness. When the illness has advanced to the point where eating and drinking become difficult and medicine has no effect, one should leave his present dwelling and move to a "cloister of impermanence," or—if no such separate place is available—strictly observe the renunciate spirit underlying this injunction. One who stays physically in his present dwelling is likely to remain mentally attached to the realm of birth and death. At this point, a will should already have been made; one should now take leave of family and close associates and entrust oneself solely to the three to five *chishiki* with whom one has made prior arrangement. If one has not done so already, the tonsure should be taken. The move to a place apart physically enacts the mind of renunciation: "It [the change of venue] represents abandoning the defiled Sahā world and achieving birth in the pure land of utmost bliss. . . . It is like the prince [Siddhārtha] leaving [his father's] palace to ascend the peak of the five wisdoms, or the great teacher [Kūkai] entering meditation and obtaining the ghee of the three mysteries." Now is the time to "leave the household life" in both body and mind (Miyasaka 1989, 1:159).

In the "cloister of impermanence," the dying person should be made to lie down facing west and hold one end of either a pennant or five-colored cords tied to the hand of a buddha image. The cords are to have been prepared in advance, under the supervision of someone who has received esoteric initiation. The image may represent whatever buddha or bodhisattva has been that individual's accustomed *honzon*, or personal object of worship. It may face east, toward the dying person (symbolizing the Buddha's welcoming descent to greet the dying), or it may face west (symbolizing the Buddha's leading the dying person to the pure land). Incense should be burned continually. If the dying person has made a particular vow to that effect, Kakuban says, he or she should be allowed to die sitting up, in the posture of meditation. Otherwise, it is best simply to follow the example of Śākyamuni Buddha, who entered nirvāṇa lying with his head to the north, facing west. The dying person should fix his eyes on the buddha image, place his palms together, and take up the five-colored cords. By forming the mudrā associated with that particular buddha or bodhisattva, chanting that deity's mantra, and performing the associated contemplation, he completes the three mysteries of body, speech, and mind, a sign that he is certain to achieve birth in the pure land. As long as he maintains this posture, the *chishiki* are not to admonish him. But if there is some barrier to this practice, it may mean that his mind is distracted.

Kakuban also addresses the specific roles of the attendant *chishiki.* The first should be "a person of wisdom and aspiration for the way," and the dying person "should look upon him as the bodhisattva Kannon [Sanskrit Avalokiteśvara] come to lead him to the pure land" (Miyasaka 1989, 1:173). This individual should sit close by, to the west and slightly south of the dying person, in approximate line with that person's navel, and chant the *nenbutsu* in harmony with the dying person. A second *chishiki*, this one a person of many years' accumulated practice, should stand to the east and slightly north, at an approximate level with the dying person's head. His task, an apotropaic one, is to offer prayers to the wrathful protector deity Fudō Myōō (Acalanātha) and continually recite Fudō's mantra. In this way, malign spirits and other evil influences that might disturb the dying person's thoughts will be banished. This recommendation reflects a growing notion that the liminal quality of the last moment made it not only an ideal opportunity for liberation, but a potentially dangerous juncture when possessing spirits or demonic manifestations might seek to gain advantage. Such perceived dangers argued powerfully for the presence at one's deathbed of a ritual specialist possessing exorcistic capabilities. A third *chishiki* should take up his station to the north; he should chant in a soft or loud voice, following the inclination of the dying person. Others may be on hand for whatever may be necessary. At specific cadences in the chanting, all should join in at the same pitch. This maṇḍala-like

arrangement of the deathbed scene constitutes "the form of death ritual for those who seek the five [buddha] wisdoms" (ibid., 1:173).

The most desirable thing, Kakuban writes, is for the dying person to pass quietly away, as though entering meditation. Unlike earlier works of deathbed instruction, however, his "esoteric collection" specifies what should be done if that doesn't happen—if the dying person should wander mentally, become delirious with pain, or fall unconscious. In such a case, Kakuban says, the *chishiki* are to observe the dying person's breathing carefully and match their breathing to his, chanting the *nenbutsu* together on the outbreath, substituting their chanted *nenbutsu* for his. They are to continue this "for one day, two days, seven days, or until the death transpires. . . . You [the *chishiki*] should be resolved to continue chanting together until the last outbreath." In that way, the person's sins can be extinguished, because the Buddha's original vow will exert its salvific power, working in response to the invocation of his name. Moreover, the *chishiki* should visualize their *nenbutsu*, chanted on the outbreath, as the six Sanskrit letters "na-mo-a-mi-ta-buḥ," entering the dying person's mouth with the inbreath, transforming into six sun disks, and dispelling with their light the darkness of the dying person's sins produced by the six sense faculties. Kakuban observes: " If one could maintain right thoughts [at the last moment], what need would there be for a *chishiki?* But should wrong or [even merely] neutral thoughts arise, at that time, the *chishiki* can [help the dying person and] save him from the suffering [that would otherwise result]" (Miyasaka 1989, 1:173–74).

But this is not the end of the *chishiki*'s task. In his concluding instructions, Kakuban cites from the esoteric Chinese scripture *Shouhu guojiezhu tuoluoni jing* (Sūtra of the *dhāraṇī* for protecting the ruler of the realm) a passage detailing fifteen signs that dying persons will fall into the hells (such as crying aloud, urinating or defecating without awareness, refusing to open the eyes, foul breath, or lying facedown); eight signs of their falling into the realm of hungry ghosts (such as burning with fever or suffering from hunger or thirst); and five signs presaging a descent into the bestial realm (such as contorting of the hands and feet, foaming at the mouth, or sweating from the entire body) (*Taishō* no. 997, 19:574a). He then recommends a number of esoteric rites that the *chishiki* should immediately perform on the dying or newly dead person's behalf, should that person have manifested any of these signs. For example, if there are corporeal indications of a descent into the hells, the *chishiki* must quickly perform the rites of the Buddha Eye or Golden Wheel, or of the bodhisattvas Shō Kannon or Jizō; or he may recite the esoteric scripture *Rishukyō*, the names of the fifty-three buddhas, the *dhāraṇī* of the Augustly Victorious or of the Jeweled Casket, or the Mantra of Radiant Light, or the "Bodhisattva Preaching" chapter of the *Flower Garland Sūtra*, or the *Lotus Sūtra*, and so forth. Other rites are similarly recommended should

indications appear that the dying person will fall into the realms of animals or hungry ghosts. Kakuban requests of his disciples that such rites be carried out in his own case, should some inauspicious sign appear at the time of his death. "Whether out of filiality and loyalty, or in the spirit of compassion, make haste to perform those practices that will plant good roots, quickly conferring [upon me] the fruit of liberating wisdom. . . . Should you thus save me and enable to me to attain the way, I will in turn lead you [to enlightenment] without fail" (Miyasaka 1989, 1:174–76).

Though clearly belonging to a particular school (Shingon) and embedded in the concerns of a specific historical period (medieval Japan), Kakuban's "esoteric collection" participates in the larger themes of control and legitimation that figure in Buddhist approaches to death cross-culturally. The last moment is assumed to be a juncture of immense potency, transcending ordinary moral causality; thus "even men and women who have done evil" can potentially escape saṃsāra at this time. Prognostication is recommended to gauge the crucial moment's approach, and all efforts are bent toward maximizing its liberative possibilities. The instructions that the dying bid farewell to relatives and relocate to a separate place—along with the comparison of this move to the Buddha-to-be leaving the palace or Kūkai entering perpetual *samādhi* (state of deep contemplation)—homologize death to monastic renunciation and to meditation, so that dying itself becomes construed not as a perpetuating of saṃsāra but as a liberative act. The manner of the individual's death, including both his posture and the corporeal signs manifested by his dying, are considered indices to his spiritual condition: as long as he continues chanting, properly holds the cords, and forms the appropriate mudrā, he is assumed to be in a state of right mindfulness; on the contrary, a loss of physical control or other unseemly disturbance of his person points to mental distraction and even to an inauspicious rebirth. Here, as in the larger Buddhist tradition, death at once constitutes an opportunity for spiritual progress and also reveals the spiritual level one has achieved.

Most noteworthy in Kakuban's text is the emergence of the *chishiki* as a ritual specialist, in command of esoteric techniques of visualization and breath meditation, mantras, and apotropaic rites and spells, who by his powers can successfully guide the dying person through the liminal juncture of death when that person is no longer able to exercise control. There is no question about the authority in which the *chishiki* should be held: the dying person is to regard him as no less than Kannon, the right-hand attendant of Amida Buddha. At the same time, the *chishiki* is expected to exercise the compassion proper to one more advanced in practice and understanding. A good death—that is, one in which the ritual forms have been fulfilled—would testify not only to the liberation of the deceased person, but also to the *chishiki*'s personal

attainments and expertise and to the efficacy of the rites transmitted by his lineage.

INTERNAL CRITICISMS

While Buddhist strategies for exerting control over death have been pervasive, this is not to say that all Buddhists have uncritically accepted them. For examples of dissenting voices, let us turn again to medieval Japan and consider a few opinions raised in opposition to the sort of elaborate scripting of the last moment that Kakuban recommends. The Shingon monk Kakukai (1142–1223), who lived somewhat after Kakuban, seems to have regarded the very notion of attempting to exert control over one's postmortem fate as an instance of the pernicious self-attachment that Buddhism seeks to remedy. One who is truly awakened to the emptiness of the dharmas, says Kakukai, "cannot be attached to [Maitreya's] Heaven of Satisfaction, nor to [Amida's pure land of] Utmost Bliss. . . . If we simply purify the mind, we shall not feel pain even if we were to assume the forms of such [lowly] creatures as dragons and *yakṣa*s. . . . Regardless of transmigration, we shall suffer no discomfort" (*Kakukai Hōkyō hōgo*, in Morrell 1987, 99–100, slightly modified). This stance led Kakukai also to criticize the practice of relying in one's last hours on a *zenchishiki*, whose thoughts might not accord with one's own: "I think it quite splendid to die as did the likes of [the recluse] Gochi-bō, abiding in a correct state of mind with his final moments unknown to any others" (ibid., 100). The said Gochi-bō's last moments are indeed unrecorded anywhere. We may thus assume that Kakukai, in valorizing this private death, was willing to sacrifice the legitimation conferred by a more elaborately ritualized death that is witnessed and supervised.

Eisai (a.k.a. Yō̄sai, 1141–1215), who helped establish Zen in Japan, reports that when traveling in Song China, he inquired of a Chan monk in Mingzhou about the authenticity of the verses setting forth "Bodhidharma's [method] for knowing the time of death" and was told that they must be the deluded production of an inferior or diabolical mind: "In our school, going and coming, birth and death, are equal from the outset," the monk declared, thus implying, in a manner similar to Kakukai, that the person awakened to the originally undifferentiated nature of things has no reason to be concerned about death in the first place (*Kōzen gokoku ron* 2, *Taishō* no. 2543, 80:10a). Medieval Japanese Tendai and Zen literature abounds in rhetoric to the effect that "birth and death are the wondrous functions of the one mind," or that, for the enlightened person, "there is no nirvāṇa to seek and no birth and death to abhor." While such rhetoric theoretically denies the problem of death by subsuming it within a nondual cosmic scheme, it has rarely translated into a rejection of death-related practices. Here, however, in Eisai's narrative, it is deployed against the practice of predicting the time of death's arrival.

Shinran (1173–1262), founder of Jōdō Shinshū, the True Pure Land sect, explicitly rejected deathbed practice as antithetical to his conviction that birth in the pure land is achieved only in utterly abandoning all egoistic reliance on one's own efforts and entrusting oneself wholly to the compassionate "Other Power" of Amida. For Shinran, salvation occurs not at death, but at that moment when, abandoning self-effort, one is seized by Amida's compassion, never to be let go, and faith arises in one's heart. Thus he wrote, "When faith is established, one's attainment of the pure land is also established; there is no need for the deathbed rites that prepare one for Amida's coming" (*Mattōshō* 1). In the medieval Shin tradition, one does in fact see a considerable muting of the widespread emphasis on deathbed ritual, and to this day, Shin funerals are explained in terms that do not involve concepts of merit transference or other elements of "self-power."

All these criticisms have in common a rejection of certain specified efforts to direct one's death to soteriological advantage. One might question whether this is in fact a rejection *in toto* of the ideal of achieving mastery over death, or whether it merely relinquishes one mode of control—prognosticatory or deathbed rites—to assert another, namely, the negation of death's significance within a larger soteriological resolution, such as insight into nonduality or the utter abandonment of oneself to Amida's compassion. Certainly such criticisms did little to dislodge the dominant paradigm of a good death as an index to spiritual status. Rather, individuals said to possess such insight or faith have been depicted as displaying an innate, spontaneous mastery over death, without deliberate attempts to manipulate it. Even Shinran's official hagiography says that, at the end, "he lay down on his right side with his head to the north, facing west, and breathed his last, chanting the *nenbutsu*" (*Godenshō* 2:6).

Internal criticisms reveal that, however well entrenched, Buddhist strategies for control over death were never monolithic. At the same time, however, it is useful to note just what is being contested and what is not. The oppositional voices cited above do not in fact seriously challenge the assumptions in which traditional Buddhist death practices were rooted: those of a holistic universe in which outer forms mirror inner realities; where human moral and ritual activity influences cosmic processes; and where the practices of the living can benefit the dead. Thus they differ qualitatively from more recent criticisms of death ritual that have sprung up in association with Buddhist modernism. These latter critiques—expressed in condemnations of elaborate and costly Buddhist funerals as "empty ritual" or in such statements as "Buddhism should be about how to live, not how to die"—grow out of very different epistemological assumptions than those underlying traditional death-related practices. Whether the promise of control over death will continue to exert its attraction and play its legitimating role in the Buddhism of the future

remains to be seen; historically, its significance to the tradition is hard to overstate.

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ECONOMY

Gustavo Benavides

The Buddha explained that long ago, at a time when everything was still blinding darkness and beings were considered simply beings, neither male nor female, some of them, being of a greedy nature, tasted the savory earth that had spread over the waters. This act of greed led to their increasing coarsening and differentiation; a divergence of features developed among them, with some becoming good-looking, others ugly. Eventually, as the good-looking ones became first arrogant and then contemptuous toward the ugly ones, the savory earth disappeared, replaced by a fungus, then by a creeping vine, and finally by rice that was always ripe, ready to be eaten. At this point, male and female sex organs developed among the eaters of this rice, along with sexual attraction, passion, lust, and sexual activity. Building activity developed, too, as these beings constructed dwellings in order to indulge in sexual acts under cover.

At length, it occurred to one of those beings inclined toward laziness that instead of having to gather rice twice a day, he could gather it all at once for both meals; others followed his example, only that instead of gathering enough rice for one day, they gathered a two-, four, or eight-day supply. Once the rice was stored, however, it became enveloped by husk powder and husk, and where it was reaped it did not grow again. With the rice now growing in separate clusters, it became necessary to divide it into fields with boundaries; but when a greedy-natured being took a plot that did not belong to him, it became necessary to appoint a being who, in return for a share of the rice, would keep everybody in place. He was the first king, the one who gladdens others with dharma. Then, having realized that evil had appeared, some of the beings decided to put aside evil and unwholesome things; this they did by meditating in the forest in huts made of leaves. Like the one who gladdens others with dharma, these beings did not feed themselves; they went to villages, towns, or royal residences to gather alms for their meals.

* * *

This is a condensed version of the story about beginnings, as recounted by the Buddha to the brahmin Vāseṭṭha (*Aggañña Sutta*, *Dīgha Nikāya* 27, in Walshe, [1987] 1995, 407–15). We see the unfolding of the process of coarsening and differentiation that produced the world we know: one in which there is greed, matter, unequally endowed bodies, stratification, sex, work, authority, priests. Given its significance, the *Aggañña Sutta* has been discussed more than once. Tambiah (1976, 9–18), for example, stresses its role in explaining the emergence of a social order, the issue of political authority, and the institution of kingship (cf. Przyluski 1937; Green 1990; Pryor 1990; Harvey 2000).

More elementary than the political sphere, however, although inextricably connected with it, is the way in which the Buddha addresses the economic aspect of life. Long before the need arises to divide plots and select a king, there is already unequal access to a desirable good—physical beauty—and the concomitant appearance of arrogance and contempt. Then, when rice appears, and with it sex organs and sexual attraction, explicit references to labor appear as well, for it becomes necessary to build dwellings in order to indulge in sex in private. Once the need for work arises, we witness a peculiar interaction between labor and its avoidance: gathering the primordial rice twice a day constitutes work of sorts, so much so that in order to avoid this labor a being given to laziness engages in the work of storing foodstuff. This, however, is the end of the beginning, for—as with the seagulls in the "Yellow Emperor" chapter of the book of Lieh-tzu (Graham [1960] 1990, 45) or the tiger in one of the epistles of the Ranter Abiezer Coppe ([1649] 1983, 67) thirteen hundred years

later—setting boundaries around that which ought to remain free causes one to lose it forever. For Lieh-tzu it is seagulls; for Coppe, a tiger; for the *Aggañña Sutta*, rice.

What distinguishes the fourth-century Daoist and the seventeenth-century Ranter from the Buddhism of the early collections (*nikāya*), and perhaps also of the Buddha himself, is the concern with the reality of the world, including the merciless reality of work. Once rice for two meals is gathered, there is no way to stop the process, and so the work of gathering increases: laziness begetting work, work causing the scarcity of rice, laziness and work begetting private property, theft, authority, religion. We find, moreover, the recognition that in order to have kings who rule and people who, by meditating, "put aside evil and unwholesome things," it is necessary to produce the surplus that will feed them. Work, then, is both curse and blessing, for without the disturbance brought about by work, it would not have been necessary to have kings and priests; while in order to support them, it is necessary to work even more—the support of the priests being indeed a meritorious act.

The counterpart of the story told in the *Aggañña Sutta* can be found in the myth of Nang P'à K'osop collected in Laos by Archaimbault ([1959] 1973: [1278–83] 236–41) as well as in similar stories recorded by Tambiah in northeast Thailand (1970, 351–56) and by Porée-Maspero in Cambodia (1962, 21–26). According to the Laotian story, the celestial rice was born at the time of the buddha Kukusanto in the park of a king who had performed numerous meritorious acts. Each grain was one and a half meters long and one meter wide, and white as unalloyed silver, with a taste similar to that of coconut or buffalo milk; it continued to grow as long as Buddhism spread. After the buddha Kukusanto, who lived for forty thousand years, and the buddha Konak'on, who lived for thirty thousand years, an old widow built a granary; but before she had finished it the rice accumulated on the roof, causing her to become angry and hit the rice with a stick. Reduced to powder, the rice floated away and fell upon the forest floor, where it became taro and tubers. After taking the name Nang P'à K'osop, the rice, now a woman, was asked to return to the place where it had grown, because, having been born with Buddhism, it was linked to the religion. But she refused to return. Subsequently, the buddha Kassapa was born, followed by the buddha Gotama. At this point, rice was one-tenth of a meter long. Then, 1,012 years after Gotama's death, a king who did not distinguish between good and evil reigned over the continent of Jambudvīpa. He built granaries and exchanged rice with silver, gold, elephants, horses, and slaves. Angry, Nang K'osop decided to regain her old abode and on the way took refuge with a hermit. After a famine that lasted 320 years, an old slave and his wife were led by a deity to the hermit's place; the hermit tried to persuade Nang K'osop to return, but she refused, complaining about being hit by the old woman and being made the object

of exchange by the king. The hermit, thinking of the future of Buddhism, cut her body into pieces. The fragments became black rice, white rice, rice of Annam, and sticky rice.

In the *Aggañña Sutta* we encountered a story of greed, increasing materiality, sex, and rice; on the other hand, in the Laotian, Thai, and Cambodian versions of the tale, we find that after appearing as the result of meritorious acts, rice grows as long as Buddhism spreads. Despite these differences, the two myths involve a process of degeneration, both in terms of the length of the lives of the buddhas and the size of the grains of rice. We find also that storage and above all exchange—in other words, economic activities—play a role in the disappearance of the rice. Yet in the story of Nang P'à K'osop, violence against the rice is productive, since this leads first to the appearance of taro and tubers and then to the coming into being of the many varieties of rice (the parallels with the mutilation of the Dema divinities studied by Jensen [1966] must be mentioned at this point). Desirable as the varieties of rice are, however, variety means difference, loss of the primordial unity—just as labor, however creative, seeks to compensate for a lack, an absence. The counterpart of this lack is the longing for the primordial unity: not for nirvāṇa—which in any case is not a oneness—but rather the yearning for the time before commercial transactions, for the bliss of leisure, for the abundance of unfragmented rice. This yearning will be satisfied, for when the buddha of the future, Maitreya, appears, abundance and oneness will return, the body of Nang K'osop will recover its original form, and the varieties of rice will be reunited (Zago 1972, 258; Archaimbault [1959] 1973, [1277] 235).

Buddhist societies have lived between myths of loss and discovery for more than two millennia. True, other societies are also perched between fall and redemption, but what is exceptional about Buddhism is the extent to which at both the scriptural and the mythical level, one finds as part of the exploration of the process of detachment a rigorous meditation on the arising of the various components of life: social organization, authority, labor, religion, and even a consideration of the way in which good looks influence people's behavior. How did this happen? How, in other words, did the Buddha and his followers manage to achieve the distance that allowed them to think so clearly about so many aspects of reality? A possible answer can be found in the circumstances of Buddhism's birth, when the social order changed radically. To say that socioeconomic change played a role in the emergence of a religion is at best a commonplace and at worst a tautology, given that change characterizes every aspect of reality, as Buddhists well know. It is the case, nevertheless, that some periods carry more visibly the mark of change than others. Northeastern India in the sixth and fifth centuries before the common era is one such time. About the middle of the first millennium BCE, the old tribal order within which the Buddha himself was born was being replaced by political

centralization, taxation, professional armies, and urbanization (de Jong [1964] 1979; Kosambi 1965, 120–25). Between 600 and 500 BCE, the economic/technological counterpart of these developments involved plow agriculture, possibly with the iron plow; the widespread cultivation of rice; and the introduction of coins (Sharma 1983, 117–18, 162; Heitzman 1984, 123–24).

The role of cities in the life of the Buddha (Chakravarti 1986, 204; Gombrich 1988, 53–59)—for example, Śrāvastī, where he spent 25 of his 45 rainy-season retreats (Gokhale 1982, 12)—is as noteworthy as the role of cities in Pauline Christianity (and of the countryside in the life of Jesus). Unlike the rhythms of the country, linked to agricultural labor and thereby to the seasons, those of cities follow the more abstract logic of commercial exchange and labor specialization. But the same concentration of wealth and people that enabled exchanges and expansion led also to the sense of malaise articulated in the first two noble ruths. Gombrich has pointed out that the morbidity that accompanies urbanization would have been intensified given the ecological conditions in the eastern Gangetic Plain (1988, 58–59). Furthermore, given the deleterious consequences of urbanization on the nutrition of the peasants who fed the population of the cities in preindustrial Europe (Montanari [1993] 1997, 183–84), we should also ask whether analogous developments took place in northern India.

The widespread use of currency in northern India since about 500 BCE—that is, a few decades before the birth of the Buddha, according to the short chronology (Bechert 1988; cf. de Jong 1993, 14)—is equally significant: first, because of the connections between money and abstraction and, second, in terms of the affinities between money and asceticism. In terms of the first, it can be said that insofar as it dissolves qualitative differences into quantitative ones, money contributes to the flattening of reality, even while opening it up to analysis; inasmuch as it serves as the common denominator of aspects of reality that otherwise would be seen as having nothing in common with one another, money contributes to a process of abstraction (the temporal vicinity between the efflorescence of Greek philosophy and the Greek invention of coins about two centuries before their appearance in India is no accident [Müller 1977; cf. Will 1954, 1955 (1977)]).

As to its second significant feature, because money is normally understood as that which makes possible the satisfaction of desire, insofar as it is not spent, money is the condensation of deferred satisfaction. But generally, satisfaction is deferred for the sake of a greater satisfaction, thereby making it possible to understand the connection between money and sacrifice on the one hand (Laum 1924), and money and capital accumulation on the other. It is only as the condensation of work, however, that money can bring about the satisfaction of desire or serve as the

embodiment of its postponement. It is through money that the qualitative differences among tasks and skills can be dissolved into quantity and can be bought and sold as commodities. This process is likely to be regarded as a threat in societies undergoing a process of monetization (cf. Bloch and Parry 1989), but it ought to be remembered that in a society in which certain forms of labor considered degrading are assigned to degraded people (cf. Searle-Chatterjee 1979), this process of commodification can be considered liberating (cf. Simmel [1907] 1989, 446–81)—as liberating as the Buddha's rejection of the mythical validation of social hierarchy. In this respect, the economy of salvation underlying a community of religious virtuosos open in principle to everybody (cf. Gokhale 1965, 395; Chakravarti 1986; [1987] 1996, 122–49), a community in which, individual accomplishment counted more than ancestry, can be regarded as the counterpart of the economy of more tangible goods. (In this respect, too, one can understand Gokhale's suggestion that the Mahāyāna constitutes a "return to villagism" [1982, 19]: indeed, one could regard the reliance on grace and saviors as a movement away from the open market and a return to patronage and hierarchy.)

In principle, early Buddhism can be understood as a meditation on the process of deferral and the new approach to labor; not merely, however, as the justification of the new economy, but also—and perhaps more so—as a critique, and above all as commentary. Just as people called mystics pursue in an excessive—almost caricaturesque—manner the behavior prescribed by a religion; just as they seek to experience the realities postulated by a religion at a level exceeding the experiences of ordinary mortals; so the behavior of the virtuoso followers of the Buddha can be seen as the distillation of the new way of life. It is true that by behaving in this manner the monks explicitly distanced themselves from the economy; but this happened only to a certain extent, inasmuch as they engaged in elaborate ruses in order to participate in the economy without, for example, having to handle coins.

In any case, the very existence of the community of mendicants allowed the new economy to show its strength, for it must be remembered that a degree of abundance is the prerequisite for asceticism. Indeed, a developed level of production was required in order to support not just isolated renouncers, but also groups that were sedentary for part of the year. We have seen that according to the *Aggañña Sutta* it was necessary to produce extra rice in order to feed kings and people who meditated; should we perhaps understand the rule against monks eating after the noon hour as an indication that, given the new wealth, there would have been food available if they had wanted to have one more meal? Most likely, for the Pāli canon refers to "wealthy family" (*mahābhoga kula*), "wealthy" (*sadhana*), and "faring well" (*sugata*); at the same time, as is generally the case in situations of economic expansion, urbanization, and monetization, we find

references to "destitute family" (*daḷidda kula*), "poor" (*adhana*), and "faring poorly" (*duggata*) (Chakravarti 1986, 205). In some cases, both the original injunctions and their abandonment are significant. For example, both the command that monks' robes be made out of patched-together rags, and the eventual acceptance of new robes on the part of the Buddha, presupposes the plentifulness of cloth.

The most important prohibitions from an economic point of view, however, are the ones against handling money and working. As remarked elsewhere (Benavides 1998, 194), we could consider whether these constraints on the monks rendered visible the autonomy of the economic realm, as well as the relatively new reality of money as the embodiment of labor. Were the working conditions prevalent when Buddhism began more oppressive than before? Given the political and economic changes circa 500 BCE, as well as the parallels with other periods of rapid change, the answer must be yes. Is the Buddhist attitude toward money and work analogous to the one that, according to Schipper (1982, 220–21), underlies the Daoist abstinence from cereals, namely the rejection of sedentary life as well as of the peasant condition as such? Only to some extent, for one has to consider the early Buddhist attitude toward usury and commerce in general. It is known that—just like medieval theologians until the thirteenth century (Le Goff 1986 [1999])—brahmins disapproved of usury (Thapar 1975, 121). Buddhists, on the other hand, did not—indeed the Pāli canon extols the virtues of paying off one's debts (Sharma 1983, 124–25, 165). How could Buddhists have condemned one of the practices that made possible the very existence of the Buddha's earliest supporters? Surely it is not a coincidence that the first to offer food to the Buddha after his enlightenment were two merchants, Trapuṣa and Bhallika, both of whom are said to have attained enlightenment, without, it must be noted, having become monks. The Buddha reciprocated their gesture by mentioning a list of constellations and divinities, some of them Hindu, that would protect merchants who undertook long journeys. According to Bareau (1959, 309; cf. Lamotte 1958 [1988], 72–73 [66–67]), that canonic texts place in the mouth of the Buddha an appeal to Hindu divinities indicates the exchanges established between the monks and their wealthy supporters: while the latter furnished the monks with the material goods without which they could not survive, the former had to reciprocate through their command of supernatural means.

Merchant support was indeed crucial for the survival of the Buddhist community. The nature of this support is complex. Besides the kind of interaction between merchants and monks suggested by Bareau and Lamotte, we must consider a contrary reason, namely the affinity between asceticism and accumulation discussed earlier. In addition to the apotheosis of deferral represented by asceticism are the Buddha's misgivings, however ambiguous, toward ritual, magical practices, and materiality in

general, a mistrust which early Buddhism shares with other reform movements (see Benavides 1997, 322–27, Benavides 2005). Rejecting the expenditures associated with ritual activities is significant, for it disenchants time while freeing capital for investment. More generally, an affinity exists between the analytical attitude of early Buddhism and the detachment needed in business transactions. An example of this detachment is precisely the practice of usury, for there is no process more abstract—at least from the point of view of the lender—than that through which money begets money. In contrast, brahmin condemnation of the practice stems from an understanding of human relations analogous to that of medieval Christian theologians, in which subjects and actions are inextricably related, and in which time, rather than being analyzable down to its most minute components, all of which are qualitatively identical, is regarded as subject to the rhythms of the liturgical year, rhythms that choreograph it into qualitatively different seasons.

As we shall see below, for actual Buddhists time is as subject to ritual rhythms as it is for Hindus or medieval Christians. Nonetheless, this reality should not blind us to the fact that what constitutes a reform movement is precisely the rejection—however brief, however restricted to the life of virtuosos, however confined to scriptures held in awe but not followed in practice or even read—of the myths and rituals of a group (Benavides 1997, 320–21; 1998, 187–88, 195). Example of this rejection of ritual and its replacement by an internalized religion can be found in the *Sigālaka Sutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya* 27, in Walshe [1987] 1995, 461–469; cf. Ornatowski 1996; Harvey 2000: 97–100). When the Buddha sees the householder's son, Sigālaka, paying homage to the six directions, he tells him that instead of merely doing what his father had told him to do, he should abandon the four defilements, not commit evil from the four causes, not follow the six ways of wasting one's substance. Avoiding these fourteen evil ways consists essentially of living a disciplined life, away from material and moral dissipation; at the same time, Sigālaka is being asked to move away from ritual and internalize religion. It is true that one finds a similar internalization of ritual/sacrifice in the *Upanishads*, but such internalization does not have as its counterpart the implicit demand to live a life that would necessarily become economically productive.

It has been generally assumed that the merchants (*seṭṭhi*) who supported the early monastic community were primarily urban; however, Chakravarti (1986, 217; [1987] 1996, 65–93, 118–21) has emphasized the role played by the householders (*gahapatis*)—land-based controllers of property, usurers, sources of taxation—who straddled the divide between rural and urban, and between castes. This fact is significant, given the role played by interstitial groups in the genesis of the "world religions." As discussed elsewhere (Benavides 1998, 193–95; 2000a, 308–9), social differentiation, the reconfiguration and questioning of hierarchies, and

inconsistency of status have played a role in the emergence of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam (Meeks 1983, 70, but see Lane Fox 1986, 322; on Islam see Hamilton 1998, 225–37). Much of what has been written about the role of interstitial groups in the eastern Mediterranean world—groups that, no longer anchored by the *polis*, wanted to recreate a sense of cohesion—could be applied to the situation in the eastern Gangetic Plain. Especially important are Mann's (1986) and Kippenberg's (1991) attempts to understand the emergence of Christianity in the context of the problems faced by people who sought to articulate their interstitial social and personal identity in philosophical and religious terms. Both have focused on the role of interstitial trading networks in the expansion of Christianity: trading networks throughout the empire that enabled transactions among autonomous, literate, and highly mobile individuals.

Networks were indeed crucial in the spread of Buddhism (Liu 1996; Sen 2003; Benavides 2004). As Heitzman has shown, merchant groups can be seen as constituting networks—in some cases, literal trade networks—that compensated for the disappearance of the democratic tribal political structures that were being absorbed by the large political entities then emerging in northeastern India. Like Christianity, Buddhism expanded along with empire. In the two centuries preceding the common era, Buddhist site density intensified in north India and spread to Gandhāra in the northwest, to Orissa in the east, and to the Krishnā River in central India (Heitzman 1984, 131). In general, monastic sites overlapped with the extension of Aśoka's empire; later, trade spread in the area dominated by the Kuśānas—and there is no need to insist on Aśoka's role in the expansion of Buddhism beyond the Indian Subcontinent. To be sure, in the process of expansion the connection between empire and Buddhism has not been unidirectional; as O'Connor (1989, 49) has pointed out, referring mainly to Theravāda Southeast Asia, "Buddhism not only made large realms plausible by depicting a world of great kings and glorious cities, it made them possible by eroding localism and providing an ideology and rituals for kingship."

The large ideological realms to which O'Connor refers have been kept in place largely as the result of the presence of Buddhist monasteries. From the vast north Indian complexes destroyed during the Muslim invasions, to the Tibetan monasteries still functioning in the traditional manner when Giuseppe Tucci visited them during the decades preceding the Chinese invasion, to the contemporary small Southeast Asian monastic compounds studied by anthropologists, their sizes, shapes, and functions have been multiple. Among their functions, the economic has been central. For example, Tibetan monasteries operated as moneylenders (Tucci 1970, 178; Goldstein 1973, 454). The same applies *a fortiori* to China (Kieschnick 2003, 185–88), where pawnshops, mutual financing associations, auction sales, and lottery ticket sales originated or had close

connections with monasteries (Yang 1950; Gernet [1956] 1995, 92). Besides purely financial activities, during the Tang dynasty Buddhist monasteries engaged in oil production for cooking and for votive lamps, and in running water-powered grist mills (Twitchet 1957, 533; Ch'en 1976, 220–21). More directly related to economic expansion was the role of monks and monasteries in building bridges (Kieschnick 2003, 203–8) and in bringing new land into cultivation, but also in causing deforestation (Gernet [1956] 1995, 13, 117). More abstract, but potentially more significant in the long run, has been their role in the emergence of an autonomous economic domain as well as that of the corporation, caused by the separation between the wealth of the institution and that of the individual (Silber 1993, 116–17; cf. Gunawardana 1979, 56, 81–82); similarly important was the introduction in China of loan instruments from India. As Gernet has remarked, until the middle of the Tang there were no commercial transactions as such: "purely commercial transactions were unknown. A dependent was not paid for his work but *recompensed*, because his relationship to the employer—one of guest and host—exceeded the narrow economic framework" (Gernet [1956] 1995, 276; original emphasis; cf. 78, 310–11).

What the monasteries have all had in common is their function as spaces for giving and receiving. That this giving and receiving was not always disinterested will be seen soon enough; nevertheless, it must be kept in mind that besides the ideology of detachment and abstraction discussed earlier, what holds Buddhist communities together is the practice of ritual exchanges involving giving and merit making. To be sure, giving of one sort or the other is common to all religions; but, as with much else, it has been in India that giving and receiving have reached their climax. Indeed, according to the etiological myth found in the *Aggañña Sutta*, the activities of a group of meditation specialists were considered so important for the purification of society that, like the king, they were exempt from having to cultivate the rice they ate.

In order truly to give, one has to own what one gives as a gift; and in order truly to own something, one has to have produced it, or acquired it by exchanging the gift-to-be for something that is one's own. The previous sentence could go on, yet the process being described is neither infinite nor circular, for at the beginning there is labor. It should be said, before proceeding, that to solve the mystery of giving and receiving, of sacrifice and asceticism, of work, leisure, and agency, would be to solve the mystery of religion. Such task will not be attempted here; suffice it to say that the role played by labor in the genesis of religion, the transfigured presence of work in the very fabric of ritual activity, the pulsating reality of need, the desire to transcend having to work present at the heart of utopian dreams—as a set of interrelated issues, all of these have received little attention (Benavides 2000b). It might be true that, as Appadurai

advocates, it is necessary to focus "on the *total* trajectory from production, through exchange/distribution, to consumption"; but despite the apparently grave risk of not "breaking significantly with the production-dominated Marxian view of the commodity" (Appadurai 1986, 13; original emphasis), it must be recognized that at a certain point it is impossible to circumvent the need to produce what organisms require in order to survive (for a Tibetan example concerning the problems associated with the redistribution of finite land, see Goldstein 1973, 448–49; for a Burmese case, also involving land, see Aung-Thwin 1985, 27 passim). Work as production is, then, the issue. In order to satisfy a lack, one surrenders leisure, freedom, self-sufficiency, thus creating another lack. Insofar as it is the result of a double lack, therefore, work appears as degrading, as something from which one must distance oneself; and if one cannot distance oneself from it in reality, one must at least cleanse oneself from it as much as one can.

Let us see how Buddhists sought to cleanse themselves from this lack. Trying to explain the puzzling fact that strictly following the five precepts—that is, living the Buddhist life—ranks lowest in the hierarchy of merit making, Tambiah has pointed out that living according to the precepts is not a possibility open to laypeople; indeed, in order for monks to live in the proper manner, laypeople have to break the precepts—for example, they must kill in order to feed the monks meat, and more generally, they must work, an activity forbidden to the monks (Tambiah 1970, 148). Tambiah concludes by saying, "If the villagers thus free the monks for higher pursuits, then their laborings—even though polluting—are positively virtuous, too, and merit is their reward" (ibid., 149). But is it the case that the villagers simply free the monks? Or is it rather that by accepting silently that which they, in theory, have not demanded (but see Mendelson 1975, 136), the monks on the one hand allow the donors to live vicariously a life beyond necessity, and, on the other, consume and thus neutralize the pollution inherent in all work? A parallel can in fact be discerned between the purifying activities of the monks and those of the Mahābrahman priests of Banaras, who, in accepting offerings (*dān*), absorb the moral filth of the donors (Parry 1994, 122–30). There is a crucial difference, however: whereas by accepting *dān* the priest—likened to a sewer or drain (*nali*, *nala*)—becomes hopelessly polluted, the monk, as merit field (*puṇyakṣetra*), allows the donors to obtain merit without becoming polluted himself. What we have here is one more instance of the differing attitudes toward physicality and intentionality in Hinduism and normative Buddhism; for whereas in normative Hinduism acts are believed to have moral—that is, polluting—consequences, regardless of the intentions of the agents, normative Buddhism and Jainism stress intention. But even when ordinary Burmese, simplifying the normative understanding of the relationship between intention and merit (*Dakkhināvibhaṅga Sutta*,

Majjhima Nikāya 142, in Ñānamoli and Bodhi 1995, 1102–6; cf. *Śūraṃgamasamādhisūtra*, in Lamotte 1975, 231–33), believe that "the merit deriving from *dāna* is proportional to *the spiritual quality of the recipient* rather than that of the donor" (Spiro 1970, 107; original emphasis; cf. Gombrich [1971] 1991, 289), the recipients function as purifiers rather than as mere containers of sin. Regarded in the context of Indian speculation, what we also seem to have here is the Buddhist attempt to transcend the theology of the debt (*ṛṇa*), found in India since Vedic times (Malamoud 1989), as well as the vision of the limited good, to be discussed below.

Returning to the description of early Buddhism as a meditation—justification, critique, commentary—on the process of deferral and on the new approach to labor; returning furthermore to the remarks about the behavior of the virtuoso followers of the Buddha being the distillation of the new way of life, we can say that it is also in relation to labor that Buddhism seems to function as the means of transcending the degradation of being subject to need. It is no coincidence that besides abstaining from work, monks are expected to abstain from sex—for is there anything, except perhaps for the brute reality of survival, that reminds us more of our being subject to need than the need for others, whether that need be mediated by the raw reality of lust (*kāma*) or by its sometimes even more intense transfiguration as love (*prema*)? That in order to transcend need one must distance oneself publicly from the discipline of labor by engaging in the sometimes more rigorous, but economically unproductive, discipline of the religious life is a peculiarity of social life that is discussed at length in a book whose significance for the study of religion is largely ignored. Readers of Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class*, published more than a century ago, will gain insight into the convoluted connections among work and leisure, production and waste, desire and renunciation.

We find examples of all these intricacies in the history of Buddhism. At one extreme is the utopian overcoming of a worldview based on the zero-sum game principle. Several decades ago, George Foster characterized the peasants' cognitive orientation, that is, their implicit view of the world, as being built around the "image of limited good." According to Foster's controversial formulation, "all of the desired things in life such as land, wealth, health, power and influence, security and safety, *exist in finite quantity* and *are always in short supply*, insofar as the peasant is concerned. Not only do these and all other 'good things' exist in finite and limited quantities, but in addition *there is no way directly within the peasant power to increase the available quantities*" (Foster 1965, 296; original emphasis). Among the peasants who have constituted the majority of Buddhists since the days of the Tathāgata, the world has indeed functioned as a zero-sum game; however, one of the many peculiarities of Buddhism is its capacity to mediate between the "image of limited good" and an image of infinitely multiplying merit. As we have seen, in order to generate merit one has to

engage in an act of self-denial, in such a way that a direct relation exists between the self-deprivation and the merit created; once merit has been generated, it can be transferred, that is, used for someone else's benefit (in many cases the donor's parents), a practice attested since pre-Mahāyāna days (Schopen [1984] 1997, 1985). Furthermore, anyone can partake of this merit without diminishing it in any way (Gombrich [1971] 1991, 265; Ingersoll 1975, 226, but see Spiro 1970, 106n13)—instead, one's desire to partake of the merit generated by somebody else functions as a multiplier, so that merit seems to expand like the universes described in the Mahāyāna sūtras. Although, as we shall see below, the system functions in this manner only in theory, there is nevertheless a radical difference between this "image of the unlimited good" being continuously produced on earth through human action and the utopian dreams of other religions which require divine intervention in a distant future.

An example of the image of the unlimited good is Anāthapiṇḍada, the exemplary donor, for the more he gives, the richer he becomes (Strong 1990; Falk 1990). Ultimately *dāna* consists in giving oneself, as Aśoka did during the great quinquennial festival (*pañcavārṣika*) (Strong 1983, 87–100; 1990), and as emperor Wu of the Liang did on more than one occasion, to the consternation of the imperial functionaries who had to redeem him at great expense via the imperial treasury (Gernet [1956] 1995, 243; Eichhorn 1973, 195). This brings us back to the pathology of giving, for what emperors and princes gave in their paroxysms of *dāna* was not what they themselves had produced, but what they had taken from others. In this case, instead of functioning as the vehicle for the surrender of oneself, *dāna* served to engage in conspicuous waste, a process whereby wealth and position could be both demonstrated and solidified (Kieschnick 2003, 191–99). It is in China that the consequences of this giving were most damaging; as shown by Gernet, the use of corvée to build extravagant temples inflicted misery on peasants, some of whom were forced to sell their wives and children (Gernet [1956] 1995, 14, 104, 113)—an aspect of sumptuary consumption not considered by Appadurai in his discussion of the effects that the demand for luxury goods has on economic development (Appadurai 1986, 36–41).

Analogous developments took place in Southeast Asia. In Cambodia, rulers, beginning about 800 CE, ordered the building of increasingly larger ceremonial complexes in Angkor, "cité hydraulique" that originally served as a center for the management of irrigation until it reached its saturation point in the thirteenth century (Groslier 1974, 1979; cf. Hagesteijn 1987). In Burma the construction of temples was initiated not just by rulers but also by ordinary people. The effects were similar, however: vast amounts of wealth were diverted from productive to sumptuary uses (Sarkisyanz 1975, 412, 452). While it is true that in Burma those involved in temple construction were paid, yielding positive economic

effects, the tax-exempt status of ever increasing religious property had negative economic consequences (Aung-Thwin 1979; 1985, 26–27, 202–03), as ritual expenditures inhibited the accumulation of capital necessary for development (Pfanner and Ingersoll 1962, 348; cf. Spiro 1966, 1169)—perhaps at this point one should be reminded of the Burmese proverb "The pagoda is finished and the country is ruined" (Woodward and Russell 1989, 9).

Even when it did not reach the excesses of medieval China, Cambodia, or Burma, the ideology of *dāna* has generally had important economic consequences. In Sri Lanka, for example, consumption by monks hampered the process of internal differentiation within the village settlements, because the monasteries that owned irrigation works became loci for the accumulation of agricultural surplus (Gunawardana 1981, 136, 144). According to Zago, the same applies to Laos, where giving to the monks accomplishes a redistribution of wealth. This giving also confers prestige upon the donor while still contributing to the maintenance of a kind of socioeconomic equilibrium (Zago 1972, 361—he adds that the new bourgeoisie seems to be more interested in money, which leads to a loss of this equilibrium), and at the same time channels resources away from more productive investments (Condominas 1968, 100, 107). On the other hand, because in a collective celebration merit is shared but not prestige, the richest families accumulate the most prestige, because they are able to contribute the most.

Therefore, even though from the point of view of merit making (*bet boun*) we encounter a non-zero-sum game situation, in the all-important context of prestige the monastery as recipient of *dāna* legitimizes and renders visible social differences (Hours 1981, 108–9). As Gombrich reports, after saying "that the amount given is irrelevant, it is the effort that counts," a Ceylonese monk told him that "a wealthy person like Mrs. Bandaranaike is lucky because she can give a lot" (Gombrich [1971] 1991, 292). An analogous situation was found by Tambiah and Hanks among Thai peasants. In northeast Thailand, Tambiah found that the two highest forms of merit making (*thambun*), such as financing the construction of a *wat* or becoming a monk, are open only to the rich; for in order to become a monk, besides the ceremonial expenditure, it is necessary to be able to forego income during the ordination time (Tambiah 1970, 143–51). Among the peasants studied by Hanks, it was believed that the *dāna* of a rich person generated greater merit (Hanks 1962, 1248; cf. 1256). Likewise, in Thai-Lao villages Keyes found the belief that with good acts one moves up in the social hierarchy, either in a future life or in this one (Keyes 1990, 175). The economic consequence of this belief is that poor Thai peasants spend a relatively larger portion of their income on merit making—the explanation given by village informants being that "a poor person would likely feel a great deal to make merit in order to offset the previous evil which caused

his poverty" (Pfanner and Ingersoll 1962, 356–57). The same is the case in Burma, where abundant *dāna*, made possible by the wealth earned from merit acquired in this and past lives, in turn assures a favorable birth (Spiro 1970, 110–111; cf. Pfanner and Ingersoll 1962, 345, 348; Ingersoll 1975, 231; Mendelson 1975, 138).

As one would expect, these beliefs do not correspond to the understanding of "purified giving" (*viśuddhadāna*) found for instance in chapters 19 and 45 of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra* of the deutero-Nāgārjuna (*Traité* II:664; IV:1902); nor do they agree with the prescriptive understanding found in Sizemore and Swearer (1990, 14). They correspond instead to the characteristics of impure giving (*aviśuddhadāna*)—the giving that has to do with rivalry, jealousy, pride, and the like. The tension between pure and impure *dāna* roughly corresponds to that between prescriptive and lived religion. As a reaction to positions such as Spiro's (1970), who distinguishes between *nibbanic* and *kammatic* Buddhism, it is customary now to regard *dāna* as the point of articulation between scriptural and lived Buddhism. There is much to be said for that approach, but in the quest to avoid identifying religion with doctrine, it should not be assumed that ordinary practitioners are as a rule oblivious to the distinction between prescriptive and lived religion; for awareness of the tensions can be found not just among well-to-do members of urban religions such as Jainism (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994, 36, 38, passim), but also among ordinary Ceylonese (Gombrich [1971] 1991, 297), Burmese (Spiro 1970, 35; Sarkisyanz 1975, 441), and Thai (Ingersoll 1975, 228, but see 245). Likewise, in the attempt to shun two-tiered models of religion, it should not be forgotten that the religious realm seems to be constituted by the violent oscillation between the embrace and the rejection of the physical; between omnipotence and ataraxia; between the search for rewards and the realization that the goal cannot be anything other than utter self-abandonment. We can hypothesize that "religion" emerges as the result of having to confront those and analogous extremes; that the religious realm is in fact generated as the space within which human beings can explore through speculation and ritual a range of options whose outer limits can be barely conceptualized; that in a diluted form those extremes provide the models for frequently contradictory everyday action (Benavides 2002).

The extremes and the contradictions are inhabited by laypeople as well as by monks. That is why a Thai monk, interviewed by Terwiel in 1968, may engage regularly in gambling, and others may be known as producers of amulets that can be used, among other things, to obtain success in love (Terwiel 1976, 394–95; cf. Tambiah 1984); but that is also why Mongkut, a Thai king who had been a monk from 1824 to 1851, sought to reform the saṅgha (monastic community), purifying it from superstitious practices and promoting scriptural learning (Sarkisyansz 1975, 513–15; Tambiah 1976, 209–12), thus becoming a proponent of

what Schopen ([1991] 1997) would consider, rightly, a "protestant" approach to Buddhism. We find the same "protestant" ethos in the Vietnamese Hoa Hao movement's rejection of wasteful ritual and concomitant internalization of religion (Bezacier 1975, 308). It should not be necessary to belabor the point made by Weber eight decades ago (Weber [1921] 1988; cf. Schluchter 1984), to the effect that in turning against wasteful ritual expenditure, reformist movements prepare the ground for a rational approach to labor, saving, and investment. The parallel between Buddhist reformist movements and the Reformation of the sixteenth century is in fact made explicit by a member of the contemporary Thammakai movement, a Buddhist sect popular among the Thai middle class. He told Edwin Zehner that "Thai Buddhism had been dirtied . . . by popular preoccupation with magic and with the formal aspects of ritual," with the result that the monks had "become *cao phithi* (ritual specialists) instead of teachers of the *thamma* (the Way of the Buddha)" (Zehner 1990, 416–17).

The same oscillation can be seen at work in Burma, where Aung-Thwin (1979; 1985, 27–29, 203–7; cf. Lieberman 1980) has discerned since the days of Aniruddha's reign (1044–77) a rhythm involving increased donations to the saṅgha, followed by a period of monastic wealth and laxity, which leads to reform; this eventually results in a virtuous community worthy of donations, until the wealth and laxness of the monks brings about a new reform (processes that may have also taken place in India at the time of Aśoka, in Sri Lanka, and in Thailand; Aung-Thwin 1985, 207–9; cf. Ishii 1993, 191–92). During its period of economic growth, the Burmese saṅgha finds itself in a situation analogous to the one prevalent in central Sri Lanka, where, in Evers's words, "members of the 'bhikkhu saṅgha,' the 'fraternity of beggars' are among the richest landlords of Central Ceylon, closely tied in with Kandyan aristocratic families" (Evers 1969, 692). Circumventing celibacy, monastic wealth is kept within families through the manipulation of the rule of pupillary succession, according to which a chief monk is succeeded by his senior disciple. Evers found that "when temple property has been inherited or is likely to be transmitted, the relationship between monk-teacher and pupil tends to be patrilateral," the reason for this being that "a monk selects a relative as his pupil only if he controls temple property that the pupil might inherit" (Evers 1967, 706–7; cf. Gombrich [1971] 1991, 369).

Much of this essay has been concerned with the ways in which the characteristics of a given religion color economic behavior as well as with the manner in which a given religion is itself to be understood as an economy of salvation. But—as we saw above in the Laotian story, according to which the celestial rice was born at the time of the buddha Kukusanto in the park of a king who had performed numerous meritorious acts—religions and the economic realm interact also at a more elementary level, whether this happens among Southeast Asian peasants or in an East Asian

industrial society, namely by opening up a space, both symbolic and physical, within which economic activities can take place. In the Buddhist world this has generally involved establishing through ritual means a space protected by Buddhist divinities or by the supernatural beings with whom these divinities coexist. This happened in rural Laos, where after the clearing of land and establishment of rice fields, the creation of a forest monastery (*vat pa*) transformed a group of rice cultivators into a community (Condominas 1968 91, 144–45), while the sanctuary of the village's guardian spirit (*phībān*) represents the productive land (Condominas 1975, 257–58). Besides creating a space for agriculture, ritual resources have to be mobilized in order to ensure the fertility of the land; thus, when Porée-Maspero conducted her research in Cambodia, monks, left unprotected from the sun, performed a ceremony in order to obtain rain; in some cases, the ritual involved coercing the divinities by exposing them to the sun (Porée-Maspero 1962, 257–71), a procedure found as much in Southeast Asia as in non-Buddhist China (Cohen 1978) and medieval Europe (Geary 1979). Practices that mobilize a component of religion generally labeled as "magic" (see Benavides 1997, 2005) can also be found in an industrial society at the other end of the Buddhist world. The "common religion" of Japan, to use Reader and Tanabe's felicitous formulation (1998, 23–32), is concerned above all with "worldly benefits" (*genze riyaku*), whose pursuit involves the mobilization of Buddhist doctrines, images, rituals, and, not least, sacred scriptures such as the *Lotus Sūtra*, the most popular Buddhist scripture in East Asia.

* * *

After this hurried examination of developments over two millennia, we have to ask ourselves whether it is possible to identify an interaction of economic activities and religious representations as being specifically Buddhist. After all, blessing and protecting spaces devoted to production, sacralizing authority, legitimizing relations of dependency, justifying conquest and violence, imagining paradises (sometimes even self-canceling ones), devising the means to get there—all of this can be found elsewhere. Is this specificity to be found in the interplay between wisdom and compassion? Has compassion (*karuṇā*) been at work in Buddhist lands at the heart of the relations that have constituted the backbone of production since the beginning of urbanization, namely the relations between landowner and peasant? Eva Dargyay has argued that in Tibet this relationship has been influenced by the masters' need to be seen as exercising compassion, for otherwise they, whether clerical or not, would not be regarded as having the right to belong to the dominant classes (Dargyay 1978, 82–83). Yet based on a long familiarity with Tibet, Tucci has written that one of the characteristics of Tibetan religiosity has been its lack

of fellow feeling—the pledge to sacrifice oneself for the welfare of all being seldom more than an utterance (Tucci 1970, 232; cf. Benavides 1995, 166n32; see also Gombrich [1971] 1991, 291). Has economic dispossession been intensified because, not unlike Christian clerics, the monks through whom it was channeled seem to have practiced "skillful means" (*upāyakauśalya*) mainly in order to perpetuate themselves (ostensibly because without them salvation would be impossible)? In this regard, insofar as Buddhism, like the other world religions, is inextricably related to state societies, it is difficult not to agree with Bernard Hours, for whom Southeast Asian Buddhist institutions constitute a "système de dépossession régulière," the result of coherent representations and of a singularly efficacious ideological pressure (Hours 1981, 110–11; cf. Durrenberger 1981, 60). But, once again, this is not peculiar to Buddhism, inasmuch as religions are systems involving dispossession and self-dispossession of various types.

A final issue has to do with the specificity of Buddhism as an economy of salvation. Besides the well-known parallels between Buddhist and Christian religious virtuosi involving celibacy, public chastity, misogyny (Faure 1998), and a general unease toward the physicality of the world, we find in medieval Christianity, and in the Roman Church to this day, an understanding of the economy of salvation based on the production, storage, and transference of merit. In the thirteenth century, theologians developed the concept of an inexhaustible "treasure of merit," created by the Passion of Christ and the merits of the saints and administered by the church (Ekelund et al. 1992, 8). There are differences, however, between the Buddhist and the Catholic economies of salvation. Unlike the Christ, the Buddha did not make an original deposit to the fund of merit and therefore there can be no body of sacramental specialists in charge of administering that capital; instead, merit has to be produced constantly. Furthermore, while the monks are indeed "merit fields," merit can be generated—and multiplied—in decentralized ways. Finally, while medieval Christian monasteries functioned as monopoly franchises (Davidson 1995)—this still being the way in which the Roman Church operates—the Buddhist ones have tended to function independently. Therefore, despite the ritual activities of monks in all Buddhist societies, despite the cult of relics, statues, writings, and the like, there seems to be—perhaps not only in normative Buddhism—something that points away from a sacramental and toward a processual understanding of reality.

In the end, what seems to be specific to Buddhism is the extent to which it is concerned with the processes underlying need and desire, production and work, giving and taking, hierarchy and equality, coming into being and dissolution. Their urgency gave rise to practices and speculations which, perhaps beginning with the Buddha himself, subjected the processes

themselves to relentless analysis, yet without being able to escape from their grip.

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GIFT

Reiko Ohnuma

In the *Sivi Jātaka*, the story is told of the king of Kosala, who once provided the saṅgha (monastic community) with alms and other material requisites for a full week, culminating his giving on the seventh day with the ritual offering of a beautiful and expensive robe to the Buddha. When the monks expressed amazement at this "incomparable gift," the Buddha told them the story of one of his previous lives in order to demonstrate the possibility of an even greater gift than that given by the king: Long ago, in his birth as the generous King Sivi, he willingly and gladly had his own eyes removed and gave them to a blind brahmin supplicant. "Thus, monks," the Buddha concluded, "the wise men of old, unsatisfied with the gift of external possessions, even tore out their own eyes and gave them to the supplicants they encountered" (Fausboll 1875–97, 4:412). In other Buddhist texts such as the *Cariyāpiṭaka*, we are further told that King Sivi's gift of his eyes is a paradigmatic example of the bodhisattva's "perfection

of generosity" (Sanskrit *dāna-pāramitā*), one of six or ten "perfections" needed for the attainment of buddhahood (Jayawickrama 1974, 13).

Consider how many different types of Buddhist gift, giving, and generosity—all indicated by the term *dāna* in Sanskrit and Pāli—are either explicit or implied within this single story, and how important each one of them has been in the history of the Buddhist tradition. For explicitly mentioned gifts, we have three: the Buddhist layperson's gift of alms and other material objects to the saṅgha (as represented by the king of Kosala's initial gift), the making of ritual offerings to the Buddha (as represented by the gift of the robe), and the bodhisattva's perfection of generosity through self-sacrifice (as represented by King Sivi's gift of his eyes). But in addition, the story also involves a number of implicit gifts: The monks who listen to the story are gifts made by their parents to the saṅgha (the gift of a son being considered an especially meritorious gift). Yet they themselves have also given what might be described as the ultimate gift—the giving up of the world (thus, in Pāli, "giving" and "renunciation" can both be indicated by the same word, *cāga*). Finally, the story itself is also a gift—the Buddha's gift of the dharma (*dharma-dāna*) to living beings, described in the *Dhammapada* and other texts as the best of all gifts (for example, von Hinuber and Norman 1994, v. 354; Morris 1885–1910, 1:91).

At least six prominent forms of Buddhist giving are thus implied within a single story, and the broad scope of Gift as a category becomes apparent: the gift in Buddhism encompasses laypeople, monastics, and religious virtuosos, and in addition to what we might think of as ordinary gift giving, it involves acts of economic support, ritual offering, renunciation, preaching, and self-sacrifice. *Gift* is also a critical term for connecting the intellectual world of Buddhist discourse to the material conditions of Buddhist history. Gift giving and generosity are highly theorized in Indian Buddhist textual discourse, and *dāna* appears on many different standardized lists of ideal acts and qualities, such as the six or ten "perfections" (*pāramitā*), the three "bases of meritorious action" (*puṇya-kriyā-vastu*), and the four "means of conversion" (*saṃgraha-vastu*). Yet the category of the gift also has a concrete material presence that many other valued categories within Buddhist discourse utterly lack, for most of the physical objects that embody Buddhism in time and space—stūpas, images, paintings, texts, monasteries, and monks—can be identified and conceptualized as gifts. This material and economic aspect of the gift cannot be overemphasized: the very existence of Buddhism as such has been dependent on the gift.

Given the salience of Gift as a category and the wide variety of perspectives from which it might be discussed, my aims in this essay will necessarily be quite narrow and restricted in scope. Limiting myself to Indian Buddhist textual discourse (with some parallels from contemporary Theravāda), I will consider the relationship between gift and reciprocity,

the significance of reciprocated and unreciprocated gifts, and the interplay between detachment and desire characteristic of the Buddhist gift.

* * *

Let me begin with Marcel Mauss's seminal work, *Essai sur le don* (as any discussion of gifts and gift giving must surely begin). Since its original publication in 1925, Mauss's essay on the gift has become something of an ever-productive fountainhead, inspiring streams and streams of subsequent commentary. But perhaps one of the lesser-known of these streams is that which derives from a footnote in the English edition (1990, n61). This is the stream of commentary having to do with India, the role of India within Mauss's argument, and the problem he had with India. In order to understand this problem, let me first review briefly some of the basic arguments of his essay.

At the beginning of the work, Mauss focuses on the practice of gift giving in "primitive" and "archaic" societies (for example, Melanesians, Polynesians, and Native Americans). His primary argument concerning the gift in archaic societies is that although it operates under the *illusion* that it is free, voluntary, and disinterested—qualities inherent in the very definition of *gift*—it is, in fact, obligatory, constrained by social rules, and necessarily reciprocal. Throughout the essay, Mauss emphasizes the reciprocal nature of the archaic gift, not only because he wishes to demonstrate an historical connection between archaic gift giving and modern economic exchange (which is the fundamental thesis of the essay), but also because he wants to argue for the gift's *social* function. It is the gift, according to Mauss, that enables society, for through the constant movement and exchange of goods, honors, and services via the medium of the gift, social networks are established and social ties maintained. Thus, Mauss seeks to demonstrate that gift giving in archaic societies is really *exchange*; that gift giving is always reciprocal; that in addition to the obligation to give and the obligation to receive, there is also an obligation to reciprocate; and that underneath the disinterested idiom of the gift lie the brute social facts of reciprocity and exchange.

But here is where India constitutes a problem. Midway through the book, Mauss turns to the classical Sanskrit literature of India in search of "survivals" of the archaic gift. And while the Brahmanical material Mauss draws on is very useful to him in regard to certain other points he wants to make about the gift, it is not at all useful to him in terms of the obligation to reciprocate. As several Indologists have subsequently noted, the classical Indian theory of *dāna*—whether Hindu, Buddhist, or Jain—departs radically from Mauss on precisely this point, since *dāna*, as a rule, *must never be reciprocated* (Trautmann 1986; Parry 1986; Michaels 1997). Although there are other forms of gift in South Asian discourse that do

involve exchange and reciprocity, the category of *dāna* constitutes a special (and highly valued) case: in Buddhism, as in Hinduism and Jainism, *dāna* is most commonly described as a specifically religious gift directed at particular types of recipients, and as a gift that must never be reciprocated. Having begun his career as an Indologist, Mauss was fully aware of this point, but because it failed to support his general argument, he relegated it to the now-famous and oft-quoted footnote 61. Here, Mauss admits the peculiarity of the Indian gift doctrine and then speculates that the absence of any "obligation to reciprocate" must have stemmed from a "real revolution" that banished the ancient ethic of reciprocity in favor of an asymmetrical, one-way transaction with no expectation of return. The speculation is brief, and Mauss fails to explain how or why such a "revolution" occurred, or the significance of an unreciprocated gift.

Why did the Indian gift of *dāna* fail to cooperate with Mauss? In Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism, the theory of *dāna* works together with the theory of karma and makes use of a basic Indic distinction between seen and unseen fruits (*dṛṣṭa-phala*, *adṛṣṭa-phala*). Any gift that is reciprocated within this world—for example, by a return gift from the recipient—has a seen and visible fruit and thereby loses its ability to result in a transcendent karmic reward. Such a gift belongs wholly to the ordinary social realm and is really no different from barter, sale, or purchase. Only the *un*reciprocated gift that has no visible fruit within this world can be presumed to result in an unseen and transcendent reward in the form of spiritual merit (*puṇya*). The unreciprocated gift thus constitutes an instrument of salvation: the recipient must not reciprocate the gift, because to do so would exhaust its soteriological capacity of resulting in karmic merit for the world to come. The Indian theory thus agrees with Mauss that all ordinary gifts are reciprocal in nature, only to reject such gifts in favor of an asymmetrical, unreciprocated gift that bears fruit in the transcendent future, beyond the present realm of give-and-take. As Trautmann succinctly puts it, the theory of *dāna* includes no obligation to reciprocate because it is "a soteriology, not a sociology" (1981, 279).

This leads us to a basic truism about the gift that has been stated by several scholars, both in relation to South Asia and in more general terms. Speaking of several different types of giving among Theravāda Buddhists in Sri Lanka, Parry states, "The reciprocated gift belongs to the profane world; the unreciprocated gift to a quest for salvation from it" (1986, 462). Likewise, Michaels notes in relation to Hindu *dāna* that since it is "not normal" for gifts not to be reciprocated, the gift given with no expectation of worldly return must be based on "the giver's search for the abnormal, uncommon, supernatural" (1997, 259). More broadly, Parry notes of the world religions in general that wherever there is a notion of salvation that devalues this profane world in favor of a better world (or better life) yet to come, "the unreciprocated gift becomes a liberation from bondage

to [this world], a denial of the profane self, an atonement for sin, and hence a means to salvation" (1986, 468). Here, then, we see one of the fundamental connections between the gift and religion—and an insight that will serve as a basis for the remainder of my discussion: while the ordinary, reciprocated gift stands as a marker of the purely social, the unreciprocated gift often serves to signify the sacred, the salvational, or the soteriological.

* * *

In the Buddhist tradition, the distinction between reciprocated and unreciprocated gifts is highly relevant and can be used to explore a number of different issues. Indian Buddhist discussions of *dāna* take notice of the ordinary, reciprocal gifts described by Mauss, but tend to accord them a very low status. Thus, the gift given "thinking, 'He gave to me'" and the gift given "thinking, 'He will give to me'" are frequently found among a list of seven "impure" (*aviśuddha*) gifts and are contrasted with those gifts that do not involve such reciprocity (for example, Morris 1885–1910, 4:235–36).

One classic example of an unreciprocated gift in Buddhism is the gift of alms. When a layperson gives alms to a monk, the monk constitutes a nontransactional partner who receives and enjoys the alms but is in no way expected to reciprocate. Though it often seems to the outside observer that the monk "repays" the layperson's gift by preaching a sermon or performing a ritual—the gift of alms and the gift of dharma thus constituting a direct and balanced exchange—the Buddhist tradition itself generally holds that the two gifts are independent of each other, and one is in no way a "repayment" for the other (Ames 1966; Strenski 1983; Hibbets 1999). Indeed, in order to preserve the capacity of the layperson's gift to result in transcendent karmic rewards, the monk should *not* reciprocate in any explicit manner. The monk in this one-way transaction serves only as a worthy "field of merit" (*puṇya-kṣetra*)—a rich soil in which to "plant" one's good deed—and the layperson's gift is repaid solely by the impersonal karmic mechanism. It is precisely this *lack* of reciprocity on the human level that defines the gift of alms as a highly valued act of *dāna*—an act set off from the ordinary social world of give-and-take by its soteriological power.

The distance between this gift and the kind of obligatory exchanges described by Mauss becomes apparent when we consider the issue of gratitude. One might suppose that the monk should feel grateful to the layperson for giving him alms, but in fact, since even an expression of gratitude would constitute a form of worldly repayment (and thus nullify the gift's power), the Buddhist monk is not obligated to feel grateful, nor should he express his thanks to the giver (Bunnag 1973, 60; Spiro [1970]

1982, 410). In fact, just the reverse obtains: It is the *layperson* who should be grateful to the *monk* for providing him or her with the opportunity to give an unreciprocated gift. Thus, in a story from the *Divyāvadāna*, when the monk Mahākāśyapa decides to "show favor to the poor," he does so not by giving gifts to them but rather by allowing *them* to give gifts to *him* (Cowell and Neil [1886] 1970, 82). (The magnitude of this favor becomes apparent when a leprous woman's rotting finger falls into his begging bowl and becomes his meal for the day.) Contrary to ordinary expectations, then, both gift and gratitude flow in a single direction—from the giver to the recipient—and even the appearance of reciprocity is avoided. The gift of alms is thus not merely a material or economic transaction that allows the monastic community to survive; it is also a symbolic move by means of which the donor temporarily sets herself apart from ordinary society and expresses her orientation toward the future.

A second example of an unreciprocated gift in Buddhism is the ritual offering made to the Buddha. If the monk constitutes a nontransactional recipient in the sense that he receives alms without reciprocating, the Buddha perhaps brings this nontransactional quality to its highest point of perfection. For the Buddha (at least in theory) is generally understood to be absent in nirvāṇa and unavailable to his worshippers—incapable even of *receiving* gifts, let alone of reciprocating. Contemporary Buddhists in Theravādin Southeast Asia are fairly insistent on this point, even though other aspects of Buddhist ritual (such as relic worship) seem to suggest that the Buddha is alive and present (Gombrich 1971, 117–18; King 1964, 153; Spiro [1970] 1982, 200). In Indian Buddhism, we find something of the same ambiguity. On the one hand, much of the inscriptional evidence suggests that the Buddha was believed to be physically present through his relics and was even conceptualized as a legal owner of property, such that donations made to the Buddha "belonged" to him and were restricted to certain well-defined purposes (Schopen 1987, 1988, 1990). But on the other hand, many Indian Buddhist texts are again quite insistent on the technical point that gifts made "to the Buddha" are not actually received by anyone. In the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (hereafter *Kośa*), for example, this lack of a recipient is emphasized (Pradhan [1967] 1975, chap. 4, v. 121). After telling us that ritual offerings made to the Buddha do indeed result in merit, the text has a hypothetical interlocutor raise an objection: "But if no one receives the gift, then how can there be any merit?" The text answers this objection by stating that merit is not solely dependent on the "favor shown to others"; otherwise, there would be no merit in individual practices such as cultivating meditation or wisdom. Therefore, an actual recipient is not really necessary, and a gift made to the Buddha, "even though he has passed away," still produces merit "through the power of one's intention." One still derives the merit that comes from the "renunciation" (*tyāga*) of the gift—although one does

not derive the merit that comes from the "enjoyment" (*paribhoga*) of the recipient.

Despite significant ambiguity regarding his exact ontological status, then, it is fairly clear that a ritual offering made to the Buddha is absolutely assured of avoiding *any* semblance of worldly quid pro quo, since no one actually receives the gift. Having impugned the social ethic of reciprocity through its notion of the unreciprocated religious gift, the Buddhist tradition now perfects this notion by positing a gift that is given but never received. The orientation of the gift toward the transcendent future could not be more clear: the gift becomes an arrow shot into space that never quite hits its target, symbolically freeing the giver from this world. The gift, as we see in the passages above, is merely one's "intention" of "renunciation."

We can further recognize the significance of the Buddha's nontransactional status if we contrast it with the fully transactional status of other beings. A basic contrast might be drawn here, for example, between Buddhism and Hinduism (Babb 1996; Gombrich 1971, 119–22). Generally speaking (and there are many exceptions), in Buddhism, since food offerings made to the Buddha are not technically received by anyone, after the ritual they are usually thrown away or distributed to beggars and animals. In Hinduism, by contrast, the gods are fully present and constitute fully transactional partners. Therefore, food offerings in Hinduism are understood to be consumed and transformed by the god in question and returned to the worshippers imbued with grace (*prasāda*), to be gratefully consumed by them in turn. Thus, whereas Hindu worship suggests intimate communion, exchange, and consubstantiation with the deity, Buddhist worship is self-reflexive in nature; it is defined by the Buddha's *absence*, and its primary aim is for the worshipper to *emulate* the soteriological orientation of the object of worship itself. In Hinduism, we might say, one feeds the deity and eats his or her leftovers; in Buddhism, one renounces one's worldly attachment to food (and other material offerings) in imitation of the Buddha himself. The first is "giving to," while the second is "giving up." The first involves reciprocity, while the second should not.

Within the Buddhist tradition itself, a similar distinction can also be made between the Buddha and the gods. In the Theravāda Buddhism of Southeast Asia, for example, a basic contrast is drawn between the reciprocal transactions one makes with the gods and the nonreciprocal transactions one makes with the Buddha (Ames 1966; Gombrich 1971, 150–52). The gods are understood to be in charge of worldly goods and benefits. Thus, one gives offerings to the gods *in exchange for* their assistance and protection; one haggles and bargains with the gods, just as one haggles and bargains in the marketplace. The Buddha, on the other hand, does not deal in worldly benefits. Therefore, offerings to the Buddha point beyond the present world and should properly be renunciatory in flavor.

In the language of Theravāda Buddhism, the gods are *laukika*, or "worldly" in nature, whereas the Buddha is *lokottara*—"beyond the world," or transcendent.

The distinction between what is *laukika* and what is *lokottara* is one of the most basic ideological oppositions characteristic of Buddhism as a whole, and, as I have tried to demonstrate, is perhaps most concretely materialized through reciprocated and unreciprocated gifts. Reciprocated gifts in Buddhism are classed with barter, sale, or purchase, as well as with the ordinary social world of give-and-take; they bind one to the world and are thoroughly mundane in nature. Unreciprocated gifts, on the other hand, bear fruit in the transcendent future; they lead one away from this world and toward one's karmic destiny. The impulse suggested by the unreciprocated gift is an impulse to *set oneself apart*, to extricate oneself from the ordinary circuits of exchange, to be temporarily or permanently free from the mundane tyranny of gift and countergift.

* * *

In the discussion above, I have drawn a sharp distinction between the ordinary, reciprocated gift and the unreciprocated gift aimed at transcendent karmic rewards. Nevertheless, it is no doubt true that what I have been referring to as an unreciprocated gift is not wholly unreciprocated. Mundane, social reciprocity might be rejected in favor of what Trautmann calls "transcendental reciprocity" (1981, 281), but reciprocity is involved nonetheless. The layperson who gives alms to a monk or the Buddhist who makes a ritual offering to the Buddha *desires and expects a return* in the form of karmic merit. Though such a gift should ideally be made without focusing on such desires and expectations, everyone knows that giving has its rewards, and Buddhist texts do not shy away from describing these rewards in enormous detail and using them to motivate the giver. To the giver of such "unreciprocated" gifts, every form of future worldly felicity is promised: a pleasurable rebirth among humans or gods along with life, beauty, happiness, strength, intelligence, abundant wealth and riches, the fulfillment of all sensual pleasures, sweet perfumes emanating from the body, and so forth (for example, Rhys Davids and Carpenter 1889–1910, 3:258–60; Morris 1885–1910, 2:62–64, 202–05, 3:32–34, 172–73). "He who gives what is dear to him obtains what is dear to him" many times over, for even a small offering "is worth a thousand times its value" in its eventual reward (Fausboll 1875–97, 4:401; Feer 1884–1904, 1:18). Indeed, generosity is a prudent investment for the future: giving gifts away is like removing one's riches from a burning house in order to save them for later enjoyment (Fausboll 1875–97, 3:471), while that poverty which the miser fears if he gives is exactly what awaits him in the next world if he does not give (Feer 1884–1904, 1:18).

Thus, the "unreciprocated" gift is clearly motivated by self-interest and calculated to result in the greatest possible return—as the precise "merit account books" kept by Burmese villagers so clearly demonstrate (Spiro [1970] 1982, 111–12). This naturally raises the question of the possibility of what anthropologists (following Malinowski) have often referred to as the "pure gift"—that is to say, the completely disinterested gift, the gift given purely out of generosity and altruism, the gift given with no expectation of return of any kind. Much of the theoretical literature on gift giving has been concerned with the question of the pure gift, for this question implicates such fundamental human issues as self-interest versus altruism and the possibility of a truly disinterested human act. Are there any gifts in Buddhism that would qualify as such pure gifts? Is pure generosity even possible?

Given the foregoing discussion, in order to look for pure generosity, we should seek a gift that results in *neither worldly nor transcendent rewards*, a donor who gives even though he or she is *unable to enjoy* any such rewards, or a donor who *explicitly rejects* such rewards. There is ample evidence in Indian Buddhist literature that pure generosity in all three forms was highly valued and that such gifts constitute the most perfect ideal of giving upheld by the Buddhist tradition. However, we will also see that this perfect ideal is characteristic only of Buddhism's most highly exceptional beings.

In the *Dakkhiṇāvibhaṅga Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the Buddha enumerates four types of gifts: those involving a virtuous giver, a virtuous recipient, neither a virtuous giver nor a virtuous recipient, and both a virtuous giver and a virtuous recipient. Of these four, the last gift is clearly the most superior, its highest example being the gift given by one arhat to another: "When a passionless person gives to another passionless person . . . that gift is the best of all material gifts" (Trenckner 1888–1925, 3:257). This statement is repeated in other Buddhist texts; in the *Kośa*, for example, we are told that "among all gifts, the best is the gift given by one liberated person to another liberated person" (Pradhan [1967] 1975, chap. 4, v. 117). An earlier passage in the same text seems to suggest that the reason such a gift is ideal is because the donor is one who can enjoy neither worldly nor karmic rewards—in other words, one who cannot *benefit* in any manner from the giving of the gift. Not only would such a gift lack any worldly rewards—since the recipient is not to reciprocate—but perhaps more important, it also lacks any karmic rewards, for the donor (as a liberated person) has "definitively passed beyond the sphere where the retribution of the gift could have taken place in a later existence" (ibid., chap. 4, v. 114; see also Taylor 1894–97, chap. 17, item 1). Existing outside both mundane and transcendental reciprocity, this gift can only be a pure and disinterested gift. Moreover, by specifying that the recipient, too, is a detached and liberated person, this gift has the added

benefit of assuring that *even the recipient* does not truly "enjoy" the gift (at least in the sense of experiencing attachment or grasping). The ideal gift is not enjoyed or reciprocated by anyone, and nobody enjoys any return, either worldly or transcendent. The ideal gift here stands completely apart, beyond the realm of saṃsāra, passing wordlessly from one liberated person to another.

Jacques Derrida ([1991] 1992) has written eloquently of the *aporia* of the gift. The gift, according to Derrida, is an impossible ideal. As soon as the gift is recognized as such, it is implicated in exchange and reciprocal obligation and thereby ceases to be a gift. The gift can only be a gift *when there is no gift at all*—when it is not recognized as a gift, when there is a radical "forgetting" of it, and no remembrance of the gift or obligation to repay it, for either donor or recipient—and this, Derrida maintains, is impossible. But in the Buddhist tradition, perhaps we find precisely this impossible ideal expressed in the notion of the gift given by one liberated person to another. Here, the wholly detached and liberated mind of one who has attained nirvāṇa might, in some sense, be seen as equivalent to Derrida's radical "forgetting." Having eradicated all desires, interests, and expectations, the liberated mind can give or receive a gift without recognizing it as such, without setting into motion the entire cycle of desires and interests that normally accompany all gifts. Thus, the impossible ideal of the pure gift exists, but is possible only among Buddhism's most highly exceptional beings.

In addition to those who give even though they exist beyond the enjoyment of either worldly or karmic rewards, we also find the Buddhist tradition exalting the gifts made by those who *explicitly reject* such rewards, even if they might be able to enjoy them. Here, I am thinking of the bodhisattva's practice of *dāna*, and especially his "gift of merit." The bodhisattva engages in gifts of all types that produce transcendent karmic rewards, only to reject these rewards for himself and pass them on to other beings through the gift of merit. Again, we find this ideal represented in the *Kośa*'s discussion, for immediately after saying that the best gift of all is that passed between liberated persons, the *Kośa* goes on to say that a bodhisattva's gift—when given "for the benefit of all living beings"—is *also* the very best gift, "even though it is given by one who is unliberated and to one who is unliberated" (Pradhan [1967] 1975, chap. 4, v. 117). In this case, the gift produces karmic rewards that could potentially be enjoyed by the donor, but the bodhisattva—out of pure generosity and compassion—willfully rejects these rewards for himself by making them into further gifts and passing them on to other beings.

In this "hot potato" theory of pure giving, transcendent karmic reciprocity has a decidedly ambiguous status. On the one hand, the bodhisattva must not impugn karmic reciprocity; indeed, his gift depends for its altruism on its capacity to produce karmic rewards for the beneficiary.

But on the other hand, the bodhisattva, as an embodiment of pure, one-sided giving, must also distance himself from the karmic reciprocity entailed by his gift. This double-edged view of reciprocity comes out clearly in an intriguing passage on *dāna* from the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* (hereafter *MSL*). Here, the bodhisattva is first instructed to *encourage* the karmic fruitfulness of his gift by saying directly to it: "I have given this gift, along with its fruit, to living beings because their happiness is my happiness. Be as fruitful for them as you can be, if you feel any obligation towards me!" (Lévi 1907–11, chap. 17, v. 54). At the same time, however, the bodhisattva also seems to exhibit a peculiar *distaste* for the karmic reciprocity represented by the gift, for at one point in the passage, he takes pains to compare his own penchant for one-sided giving with the gift's penchant for "repayment" (*pratikāra*), taunting the gift with the following words: "You do not bear fruit for one who doesn't deal with you. Since you expect repayment, you are not like me! I do not expect repayment; I freely give to others the fruit which comes from you" (ibid., v. 58). The bodhisattva here wants to *out-gift the gift itself*, and he scornfully suggests that even that which we call a "gift" is actually devoid of the pure, one-sided generosity of which only he, the bodhisattva, is capable. The boasting and prideful tone in this passage suggests, once again, that the gift given with no expectation of reward is not only a manifestation of pure generosity, but also an expressive strategy the giver uses to *set himself apart* from others, to turn his back on the world and categorically state, "I expect nothing in return." It is perhaps less about the other than it is about oneself.

The great paradox of the gift of merit, of course, is that giving karmic merit away only results in further karmic merit, which must also be given away, and so on, and so on—so that the advanced bodhisattva becomes a kind of perpetual merit-making machine on behalf of the entire world, yet can still acquire for himself the enormous stores of merit needed for the eventual attainment of buddhahood. The bodhisattva gives all of his merit away, yet he does not thereby lose any of it. The gift of merit thus fulfills the ultimate fantasy of the gift—to give something away without losing it. This is possible, however, only through *ceaseless and relentless giving* and a willful avoidance of its rewards. Indeed, in many passages on the bodhisattva's *dāna*, one can sense a certain fear of accumulation or retention of any kind. Thus, in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, the "pure gift" (*viśuddha-dāna*) of the bodhisattva is described as "unaccumulated" (*asaṃbhṛta*), meaning that the bodhisattva never accumulates or stores up gifts before giving them away, but rather gives them the moment they arise. He cannot see any reason to hang on to any potential gift, and he "cannot bear" (*na utsahate*) to refuse any supplicant (Dutt 1978, 93). The bodhisattva of the *MSL* likewise states that any gift whose fruit is not *immediately rejected* is unsatisfactory, because "to remain without giving for even an instant is to be unsatisfied with the gift" (Lévi 1907–11, chap. 17, v. 57). He realizes

that every gift only brings back to him "more numerous and more wonderful pleasures" in reward, but assures himself, "I don't have to worry about such pleasures, since I also give them away unceasingly" (ibid., v. 55). Paradoxically, then, it is only the relentless and willful *avoidance* of accumulation that results in the huge collection of merit needed for buddhahood. There is something almost frenzied or desperate about this: every gift is like a "hot potato" that must relentlessly be passed on in order to be retained. Thus, whereas the arhat can give a pure gift only by eradicating all desires and expectations, the bodhisattva's pure gift perhaps retains both desire and the expectation of reward, but only at the expense of a certain willful and constant self-denial and a ceaseless movement of goods. It is only in this manner that the pure gift can coexist with giving's abundant rewards.

A similar sense of paradox characterizes my third and final example of a pure gift in Indian Buddhism, which is a gift that produces no rewards of any kind, whether or not a donor can enjoy them. In order to find such a gift, we must take a closer look at the ideology of *dāna* and especially at the doctrine of the worthy recipient (*supātra*). The latter is pan-Indic in nature; Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism all hold that religious gifts should generally be directed upward, toward worthy and superior recipients (such as monks, brahmins, buddhas, and jinas). In fact, the merit accruing from a gift is dependent on the spiritual worth of the recipient: the more worthy the recipient is—or the better "field of merit" he or she constitutes—the more merit the donor will accrue. Thus, in many Buddhist passages, we are given a hierarchy of recipients and a corresponding hierarchy of merit: in the *Dakkhiṇāvibhaṅga Sutta*, the Buddha tells his attendant Ānanda that giving to an animal produces ten times less merit than giving to an evil human being, which itself produces a hundred times less merit than giving to a virtuous human being, and so on—all the way up to arhats, *pratyekabuddha*s (solitary enlightened ones), and buddhas as the most "productive" recipients of all (Trenckner 1888–1925, 3:255). Even better than such gifts made to individuals are gifts made to the saṅgha, since the saṅgha includes all virtuous monks from the past, present, and future. In a stereotyped passage that appears throughout the Pāli Canon, the saṅgha is described as "worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of reverence, the best field of merit in the world" (for example, Feer 1884–1904, 4:304). Religious gifts in Buddhism therefore generally flow upward toward worthy and superior recipients, and the Buddha himself advocates giving "with discrimination" in order to maximize one's eventual reward (for example, ibid., 1:21; Fausboll 1875–97, 3:472).

Correspondingly, it follows that gifts which flow in the *opposite* direction—that is, *downward* toward *unworthy* recipients—are productive of very little merit, since they are planted within a poor-quality "field." In a

passage from the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha says that a gift given to an immoral person bears little fruit, while the *Kośa* states more explicitly that "because of the evil of the field, the result [of such a gift] will be insignificant or nothing at all" (Morris 1885–1910, 1:161; Pradhan [1967] 1975, chap. 4, v. 121). Furthermore, since unworthy recipients (such as animals and beggars) are equally incapable of reciprocating in a worldly sense, gifts directed at them produce neither worldly nor transcendent rewards. Unproductive in any manner, such gifts become the site of pure, unmitigated generosity (Egge 1998; Hibbets 2000).

Indian Buddhist texts are not at all consistent in their emphasis on the doctrine of the worthy recipient. Giving to the sick, for example, is frequently recommended as being especially meritorious, regardless of the spiritual status of the patient. A discussion in the *Kathāvatthu* also suggests that some schools (such as the Uttarāpathakas) were opposed to the worthy-recipient doctrine because of its implication that one person's merit is dependent on the moral qualities of another, thus violating a strict understanding of karma (Taylor 1894–97, chap. 17, item 11). In spite of this inconsistency, however, it remains true of Buddhist literature in general that the *gift given to an unworthy recipient* is usually attributed only to highly exceptional beings and is often used as a marker for pure generosity and altruism. Gifts given upward out of respect and for the sake of merit are thus contrasted with gifts given downward out of compassion and with no expectation of reward.

One prominent example of such a purely generous gift is the bodhisattva's fulfillment of *dāna-pāramitā* (the perfection of generosity) through dramatic deeds of bodily self-sacrifice, such as we find in the *Sivi Jātaka* and many other *jātaka* (previous life) tales (Ohnuma 1997). While the sacrifice of life and limb is clearly an effective way of suggesting pure generosity, perhaps equally important to such stories is the nature of the recipient. For one of the most basic and fundamental conventions of such *jātaka*s is the use of an *unworthy* recipient. The recipient of the bodhisattva's body is usually either someone pitiful (such as hungry animals, thirsty insects, blind beggars) or someone evil (such as evil brahmins, evil kings, evil women)—but in either case, a poor field of merit that will produce little in the way of karmic returns. This is fully intentional, for the unworthy recipient thereby becomes a proof of the pure, disinterested nature of the bodhisattva's bodily gift.

The special status of this gift as pure and disinterested is further borne out when we consider the ritual vows and statements the bodhisattva almost always makes before giving his body away. These are highly formulaic in nature and usually involve an *explicit denial of any desire for karmic rewards* (such as becoming a king, *cakkavattin*, or *deva*, or specific gods like Śakra, Māra, or Brahmā), and an explicit affirmation of the only two motives considered acceptable within the context of such tales: the desire to

help others and the desire to attain buddhahood. Attaining buddhahood, in fact, seems to be the only self-interested motivation that does not compromise the status of the pure gift, since buddhahood—though pertaining to oneself—is desired on behalf of all beings. This is why the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* is able to describe the pure gift (without contradiction) as one given "with no expectation of reward" (*vipāka-anapekṣa*) but made "seeing buddhahood [alone] as a benefit" (*parama-bodhāv anuśaṃsa-darśin*) (Dutt 1978, 93). Once again, then, we encounter a paradox: the gift that neither expects nor produces any reward is made possible only by aiming for the ultimate reward—the attainment of perfect buddhahood. It is only at the level of this purest motivation of all that self-interest (*svārtha*) and other-interest (*parārtha*) finally merge, for the bodhisattva "cannot be happy unless others are happy," and "his own happiness is inseparable from that of others" (Lévi 1907–11, chap. 17, v. 53). Particularly clever in this regard is a statement made by the bodhisattva in the *Vyāghri Jātaka* of the *Jātakamālā* that he gives away his body only *parārthasiddheḥ*, a phrase that can be interpreted as *either* "in order to benefit others" *or* "in order to attain the highest goal [of buddhahood]"—thus suggesting that the two motives are equivalent (Kern 1891, chap. 1, v. 30).

It makes sense, then, that the bodhisattva's gift of his body is so frequently cited as a fulfillment of *dāna-pāramitā*—the perfection of generosity, or the perfect and elusive ideal of the pure gift. In many Mahāyāna Buddhist texts, *dāna-pāramitā* is further described as a gift that is "triply pure," because it is given with no conception whatsoever of donor, gift, or recipient (Lamotte 1944–80, 1, 297n2). Though this is clearly a reference to the fundamental Mahāyāna concept of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), we might again interpret it in line with Derrida's "forgetting": the ideal gift can only exist when the person who gives it identifies his own interests so completely with those of others that the very notions of donor, gift, and recipient are all "forgotten"—he gives without giving, and without expecting anything in return.

The notion of the pure gift clearly exists within Indian Buddhist discourse. However, if we consider the three examples of pure gifts I have given above, we can see that such gifts are possible only for Buddhism's most exceptional beings. While arhats, buddhas, and advanced bodhisattvas exist in a strangely desireless world in which they are capable of giving with no expectation of return, the rest of us are mired within Mauss's social world—wholly driven by desires and interests and governed by unwritten rules of obligation, exchange, and reciprocity. The pure gift, as Michaels states, is always "a sign of the extraordinary" (1997, 259)—or, as Starobinski puts it, only "God, nature and the sun give freely, without asking to be repaid in return" ([1994] 1997, 64). In this sense, perhaps we can agree with Derrida about the paradox and impossibility of the

gift. How can we bring this ethereal ideal back down to earth? How do we rematerialize the pure gift and reconnect it to giving in general?

* * *

Before addressing these questions in relation to Buddhism, it might be useful to first consider them more generally. If we envision the different types of reciprocity that ordinary gift giving might involve, it is possible to distinguish between several major varieties. Marshall Sahlins, attempting to put forth a purely formal typology of exchange, has distinguished between "negative," "balanced," and "generalized" reciprocity ([1978] 1996). In negative reciprocity, each person acts purely in his own self-interest and tries to maximize his own personal gain at the expense of the other—for example, through barter or chicanery. Balanced reciprocity, on the other hand, works on the principle of a direct and equivalent exchange between two parties: A gives to B, and B reciprocates in an equivalent manner within a finite period of time. Finally, generalized reciprocity is indirect and diffuse in nature; here, A gives to B, who gives to C, who gives to D . . . until A is ultimately repaid by someone other than to whom he originally gave. Clearly, Sahlins's categories can be placed along a continuum of reciprocity that begins with utilitarian self-interest and ultimately culminates in the pure gift.

In a similar manner, Lévi-Strauss's work on kinship ([1949] 1969) draws a basic distinction between "restricted" and "generalized" exchange, which are equivalent to the balanced and generalized reciprocity outlined by Sahlins. While restricted exchange involves only two parties who are fully aware of the obligatory nature of their gifts and countergifts, generalized exchange is theoretically open to an indefinite number of parties; the more diffuse and complicated such a network of reciprocity becomes, the closer we move to the pole of pure sacrifice, or the gift given with no expectation of any return (Strenski 1983). In the formulations of both Sahlins and Lévi-Strauss, then, the pure gift represents the idealized end of the continuum of reciprocity—the vanishing point that can never be attained. The pure gift fulfills a purely syntactic function and cannot be realized in any particular instance. It is in this sense that we can agree with Derrida that the gift is an impossible ideal.

And yet . . . many of these reciprocal exchanges *are perceived and experienced as gifts.* This is the genius, the paradox, the sleight of hand enacted by the gift—impossible to realize, on the one hand, yet somehow underlying and informing an entire range of reciprocal exchanges, on the other. This paradox of the gift has been commented upon by many. Lévi-Strauss himself, for example, hints at the paradoxical nature of a system of generalized exchange: in reality, there *is* reciprocity and "payback" within such

a system, yet through the *indirectness* of the returns—which weave their way through a chain of intermediaries not easily observable to the original donor—generalized exchange has the *appearance* of pure sacrifice and is experienced as such by those who partake in it. Once the network of reciprocity is of sufficient complexity, the mechanism of "payback" becomes obscure and impossible to trace, and at least the *illusion* of Derrida's "forgetting" then becomes possible.

Going one step further, much the same can be said even in the case of restricted exchange, where the route of return is completely obvious (A ↔ B). To understand how a direct and obligatory exchange between two parties can nevertheless be *experienced* through the idiom of the pure, disinterested gift, it is helpful to look at Lévi-Strauss's critique of Mauss, and Pierre Bourdieu's subsequent critique of Lévi-Strauss. Mauss's *Essai* split the act of gift exchange into three sequential practices—giving, receiving, and reciprocating—and then wondered what it was that held them together. In his critique of Mauss's argument, Lévi-Strauss accuses Mauss of failing to perceive that "the primary, fundamental phenomenon is exchange itself, which gets split up into discrete operations in social life" ([1950] 1997, 55). In other words, Mauss misses the forest for the trees: instead of examining *exchange as a whole*, he splits this whole up into three sequential parts and must then put the parts back together to reconstruct the phenomenon of exchange. Mauss fails to become a true structuralist; his mistake is to limit himself to an empirically given sequence of discrete events, rather than uncovering the simpler, underlying structure "to which the given owes its whole reality" (ibid., 53).

Pierre Bourdieu, on the other hand, has more recently argued that the underlying structure or "objectivist model" uncovered by Lévi-Strauss does not, in fact, constitute the "whole reality" of gift exchange. What the objectivist model lacks is any appreciation for the properties of gift exchange that result from the fact that "it is constructed in time, that time gives it its form . . . and therefore its direction and meaning" (Bourdieu [1980] 1996, 135). In other words, *time and sequence are everything*, and the fact that giving, receiving, and reciprocating *unfold in succession* cannot be excluded from an account of gift exchange. In particular, Bourdieu emphasizes the crucial importance of the *time lag* between gift and countergift. It is the time lag that most sharply distinguishes gift giving from ordinary barter, and it is the time lag that allows the subjective experience of pure generosity to coexist with the objective truth of exchange: "The lapse of time that separates the gift from the counter-gift is what allows the deliberate oversight, the collectively maintained and approved self-deception, without which the exchange could not function. Gift exchange is one of the social games that cannot be played unless the players refuse to acknowledge the objective truth of the game" (ibid., 142). Though Bourdieu speaks in this and other passages of "denial," "self-deception,"

and the "illusion" of pure generosity allowed for by *time*, he also recognizes that even these labels can only be applied retroactively, *after* the entire sequence has been completed. For *at the time when a gift is given*, it is no illusion to suppose that there may not be any return—the gift, after all, may fall flat. Time, in other words, introduces uncertainty and unpredictability into the mechanical model put forth by Lévi-Strauss, and thus allows for the subjective experience of generosity.

Pure, disinterested generosity therefore coexists with reciprocity and exchange—not only within a complicated network of generalized exchange, but even within the most direct and seemingly transparent relationship of restricted exchange. The continuum of reciprocity outlined above thus collapses, and leads to a paradox in which the pure gift is an impossible ideal—yet all gifts somehow partake of the character of the pure gift. Derrida's "forgetting" may be impossible, yet it is also that which enables all gifts.

If we now return to the case of Buddhism, we can see that much the same paradox can be found within a specifically Buddhist context. While perfect generosity and the pure gift may well be restricted to arhats, bodhisattvas, and buddhas alone, there is also a sense in which the many gifts and offerings made by ordinary Buddhists in exchange for karmic merit equally partake in the ethic of the pure gift. The gift given for the sake of merit clearly involves a *time lag* between the gift and its recompense—in this case, one that frequently extends into a future lifetime (and, in fact, to a "different" person altogether)—again allowing the subjective experience of pure generosity to coexist with the objective truth of exchange. Moreover, as Silber (1995) has argued with respect to religious donations in medieval Christianity, whatever "return" one receives in the form of karmic "merit" is so abstract, intangible, uncertain—and thus inherently unattractive—that it approaches no return at all and thus partakes in the character of the disinterested gift. (After all, it is the very lack of any "seen" reward that one can enjoy here and now that qualifies such gifts as *lokottara* rather than *laukika*.) The gift given in exchange for merit thereby "solves" the problematic of the gift: pure, disinterested generosity and the self-interested expectation of reward are brought together through the inherent uncertainty and intangibility of the nebulous reward called merit. Ordinary Buddhists giving alms and making ritual offerings are thus assimilated to arhats, bodhisattvas, and Buddhas.

To take the argument yet one step further, even those exchanges that are wholly *laukika* in nature—such as offerings made to the gods in exchange for worldly benefits—also share some of the features that allow them to be experienced as pure gifts. The outcome of such a gift is exceedingly uncertain (and the physical presence of the recipient not wholly clear) and once again involves a *time lag* between the gift and its recompense. Time is important in another way, as well, for reciprocal transactions made

with the gods do not occur in isolation but are generally preceded or followed by nonreciprocal transactions made with the Buddha (Ames 1966). The *laukika* and the *lokottara* thus "become complementary rather than opposed" and are "fused into one logical sequence in which the subordination of one to the other is ritually enacted" (ibid., 45). The impossible ideal of the pure gift thus informs even the most crassly self-interested exchanges with the gods through the logic of ritual sequence.

But if pure generosity somehow colors even the most self-interested exchange, by the same token the reverse is perhaps equally true. That is, self-interest or selfhood of the strongest sort seems ultimately to taint the pure gift. For the pure gift, as we have seen, is not only a manifestation of pure generosity; it is also a move that *sets oneself apart* from others in a way that is perhaps inherently aggressive. One need only remember the boastful bodhisattva of the *MSL*, who proudly trumpets his own perfect generosity while scornfully taunting the gift itself. The gift given by the bodhisattva to the "unworthy recipient" also has something of this flavor: compassion for those who are pitiful or unworthy sometimes borders on hateful contempt, as the bodhisattva lords it over those who are clearly inferior (Hibbets 2000). (As Shulman [1993, 121] has remarked in another context, "here, as elsewhere in Indian myth, the coinage of aggression is compassion.") This danger of self-aggrandizement that is perhaps inherent in the pure gift of the bodhisattva is well recognized in Buddhist literature. Thus, the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* says that the pure gift should be an "unarrogant gift," meaning that the bodhisattva is humble while giving, does not give out of rivalry with others, and "does not think that because of that gift he alone is a giver and a master of generosity, while others are not" (Dutt 1978, 94). Similarly, in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Śāntideva reminds the bodhisattva that he is utterly dependent on sentient beings in order to attain buddhahood; therefore, sentient beings are equally deserving of respect as the Buddha himself (Vaidya 1960, chap. 6, vv. 112–13).

Just as the logic of the pure gift informs even the most self-interested exchange, so also the logic of self-interest informs even the purest gift. Indian Buddhism thus confirms one of Mauss's most basic points—that the gift, as a "total phenomenon," is always a complicated combination of interest and disinterest, freedom and constraint.

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HISTORY

Timothy Barrett

Initially, talking about Buddhism and history might seem a straightforward if onerous task. Buddhists have, after all, been practicing historians for centuries—about sixteen centuries in case of the Theravāda tradition, to judge from the celebrated *Dīpavaṃsa*, the earliest work that chronicles the religion in Sri Lanka. Moreover, every part of the Buddhist world, whether in Tibet, Japan, Burma, or anywhere else one cares to look, has produced a great quantity of historical writings, not only in chronicle form but also histories of institutions, individual biographies, and a variety of other genres, yielding data that in many instances have scarcely been tapped and that should keep scholars happily occupied for centuries to come. No one has sat down to provide a quick summary of all this, so why not get on with the task? Yet while a survey of other forms of writing might be possible on this model, such as "Buddhist precepts" or "Buddhist commentary," in these cases it is clear that their forms

date to early Indian examples inherited in some sense by all Buddhists. There is only one type of strictly historical writing of which this is true, and that is the accounts in various languages of genealogies, or lineages, of spiritual authority. But here the pattern is shared not only by Buddhists but also by other, unconnected religions—think of the apostolic succession in Christianity, for instance. And recent discussion of lineages, particularly in relation to Zen, has emphasized just how much their construction owes to specific cultural forces rather than to ancient Buddhist practice.

So if there is something in the production of Buddhist history that all Buddhists tend to share, it is generally not the precise understanding of what historical writing should be so much as something more abstract. Mercifully, not something as abstract as a concept of time itself, though that was a matter of some concern to some early Buddhist schools, and the relationship of the entire Buddhist picture of cosmological time to the larger Indian background is a topic that has attracted some scholarship.

But cosmological or calendrical time, the "straightforward" backdrop of the passage of time against which human history is played out, does not concern us here. Rather, my object is to discuss widely shared patterns of what might be termed "cultural time," that is, the evaluation given to human activity against that backdrop. A non-Buddhist example from our own society would be the application of labels like "traditional" and "modern" in our own writing about Asian societies, dividing their histories in two where it suits us. But that example shows that we tend to take our own notions of cultural time very seriously while demonstrating almost no interest in the cultural time of others. So far as I am aware, there are no comparative books on this topic, and their absence has made the writing of this essay very difficult indeed, even if its starting point has been obvious.

Nothing better illustrates the distinction between the terminology of Buddhism and of Buddhist studies than an attempt to trace any word for *history* in the extended vocabulary of Buddhist texts. The simplest way to do this is by consulting a Chinese-Sanskrit dictionary, of which we now have a weighty but still decidedly unhelpful example. There, given the strong Chinese penchant for historical studies, we duly find the Chinese word normally translated "history," but although this apparently occurs therefore somewhere in some Buddhist text, the dictionary yields no useful equivalent in an Indian language (Hirakawa 1997, 237). This is not of course to deny the existence of historical writings by Buddhists, but does rather reinforce the point made by many others that even the best-known examples seem to be the result of local circumstances rather than an outcome of the common stock of Buddhist ideas concerning history. Or at any rate, we can say that when Buddhism and history are discussed

together, Buddhist identity tends to yield to national pride (Gurugé 1989, 84–85).

At the same time, there are clearly areas of Buddhist studies where history has been an important element in academic discourse, as in the study of Zen (thus Dumoulin 1969, 269–72). The principal exponent of this view was, moreover, the East Asian Buddhist best known to a Western readership, the ineffable D. T. Suzuki. Yet the most recent scholarship has seen the role of the term *history* in his work as part of a dubiously conceived late nineteenth-century Western dichotomy between history and experience, which must now itself be consigned to history—or put down to experience (Sharf 1998). In short, Suzuki, who spent some of his intellectually formative years in America at a time when the ideas of William James on religious experience were seen as offering a new approach to religion, tended to play up elements in Zen which allowed him to present it as a form of direct access to mystical experience that does not depend on any of the "external" trappings of a "traditional" faith such as Christianity. History thus shows up in Suzuki's polemics as a category from which something called Zen was entirely liberated; today, however, matters seem not quite so simple.

Similar considerations, too, might be said to apply to the search for the "historical" Buddha and indeed for an "original Buddhism," which in light of the history of Buddhist studies themselves appear increasingly to reflect no more than exclusively "Protestant assumptions" about Buddhism of a dubiously Eurocentric nature (Schopen 1997, 1–22). For once again, the tendency has been in some circles to assume that much of what we see in Buddhism today—especially elements that modern Europeans find tedious, such as ritual, or not in accord with the attractively steely intellectualism of the presumed "basic Buddhism" of the canon as preserved in Theravāda lands, such as worship of relics—represents an accretion or even corruption that can be dismissed as due to some "historical" slackening in authentic Buddhist religiosity. The study of epigraphy, as Schopen is concerned to show, tends very much to subvert these assumptions by suggesting that the texts which we take as representing "basic" Buddhism cannot be taken as either a full or an unaltered picture of the religion's pristine state.

We thus arrive at an initial finding that *history* as a term in Buddhist studies has no sanction from the religious tradition studied, and a highly dubious status in recent scholarship as a term of analysis concealing indefensible hidden agendas. But the preceding paragraphs have been aimed precisely at establishing that initial point, so as to kick away immediately the twin supports of European academic tradition and Asian precedent. What follows, therefore, is left without a leg to stand on, and hence has no option but to take flight on the wings of imagination. But there is no

intention here to belittle the status of history, let alone to suggest that it is a concept too fraught with problems to be useful.

Rather, once we start by denying any obligation either toward Buddhist Studies—as the historical outcome of an intellectual world too narrow to encompass through any orientalizing strategy a world just as old and even broader—or toward Buddhism, that other world, which at the very least does not privilege history in any explicit way—we are then free to use the term to negotiate between these two spheres in new ways. Or they may even be old ways, that restore to the term the purely commonsense utility it had before religious and intellectual minds began to worry about the "bad" things that history supposedly does to religious truth. For, to be fair, the beguiling but simplistic notion that the stream is always purer the nearer one approaches its source was not solely the product of the Reformation in Europe.

We must, of course, start from somewhere, an acceptance that beyond the reach of present and remembered individual experience lies a chronological sequence of other experiences, and that this terrain held some significance for Buddhists which made and makes it potentially worth recounting in narrative terms. But as good a strategy as any for surveying that terrain might be to start from the type of analyses of theoretical possibilities used in recent scholarship to map out the meaning not of the past but of the buddha of the future, Maitreya (Nattier 1988). After all, conditioned as all Buddhists were to view their immediate condition as part of a karmic nexus stretching through the "three ages" of past, present, and future, there was never any danger of them becoming merely "backward-looking"; history (at least at the personal level) was and is bound to include the unseen future as well. Obviously, it must be admitted that the theoretical constructions into which it has proved possible for scholars to distribute different versions of the Maitreya myth, namely here/now, here/later, there/now, and there/later, are too specific for our purposes. But what kinds of history might there be, for Buddhists?

If we likewise use four quadrants to divide up the theoretical possibilities, then one strategy to differentiate four contrasting types might be to use the concepts of experience versus imagination, and common versus particular. The former duo, which have separately already intruded into this essay, should be readily intelligible within the Western academic tradition. The latter pair may carry faint overtones of East Asian analyses of types of Buddhist teaching, but to pursue these would lead us astray; here no "particular" technical overtones are intended. We are thus left to consider histories of common experience and of particular experience, of common imagination and of particular imagination,—though as a sorting device this is far neater than the situation which it attempts to summarize, and rather than presenting a rigorous division along clear

axial lines, the reality is much more one of categories shading off into one another.

The first two are easily explained. The history of common experience is what we expect to find if we pick up a volume on the Buddha and about five "after-centuries" of Buddhism, works such as those of Lamotte (1988) or Hirakawa (1990). Thereafter Buddhism starts to break so far beyond its original cultural bounds and diversify to such an extent that there its chroniclers constantly move toward a partial, particular view of its past, depending on whether the person contemplating the experience shared with other Buddhists is situated in Sri Lanka, East Asia, or Tibet. True, there are sometimes glimpses beyond the history of particular experience to be found even at a late stage—Tāranātha, for example, is aware up to a point of the existence of Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. But until the modern era, the history which all Buddhists would have considered common to their experience, no matter which tradition they sprang from, would have ended somewhere between the kings Aśoka and Kaniṣka.

So far, so obvious. For many colleagues, indeed, the history of Buddhism consists of nothing else, and even attempts at moving beyond the common experience are highly suspect in that they deal with ages too far removed from that of the Buddha to offer any hope of providing materials reflecting on the religion itself, as opposed to its assimilation into alien societies. As hinted above, such a severe limitation depends on a conception of Buddhism that others would see as far too essentialistic. Sure, what was considered the message of the Buddha was subject to change in this world, and it is reasonable to assume that it started life a simpler matter than it later became. But, such being the workings of human unenlightenment, the supposedly "authentic" Buddhism that can be recreated once all "accretions" are removed looks suspiciously like a construct answering modern intellectual needs at the expense of ignoring elements that we ourselves find inconvenient.

In this familiar debate, however, the general lines of disagreement are clear enough, if only because religious traditions more familiar to the English-speaking world have already aroused analogous debates—the term "Protestant assumptions" introduced above, following Schopen, points precisely enough to these parallels. By contrast, touching at all on histories of the imagination seems far more intractable, a step away from the well-trodden path of discussion concerning the "unfolding" of religious traditions into a trackless wilderness best left to the speculations of mythographers. Surely we cannot lump together everything that Buddhists imagined they shared and call it history?

Now clearly, even if (to take one example) *jātaka* stories are widely distributed across Asia, they were never considered part of history, but to have taken place *in illo tempore*, somewhere in the vast panorama of Indian

space and time which left plenty of room for mythmaking and which even inveterate recorders of history such as the Chinese never attempted to corral into any precise chronology. And the very fact that such stories observably cross over into the continental, or even global, domain of folklore surely vindicates the Chinese attitude. Even so, there remain cases where equally clearly figures from beyond the realm of historical experience were brought into the arena of historical discourse, perhaps with no precise dates assigned to their names, but with a palpable sense of their presence somewhere on the same chronological continuum as the writer.

One such class of figures would be those whom we might call primal—though given our own obsession with origins, naming them original might be just as good. At first sight, arguments from primal situations might appear to refer to events situated at some light-years' distance *in illo tempore*. Yet the literal-minded, at any rate, seem to have persistently viewed stories such as those in the first book of the Bible quite otherwise. "When Adam delved and Eve span, who then was the gentleman?" runs the medieval English rhyme, with no sense that this was some mythical reference, but rather an extremely pointed and concrete historical example with revolutionary applications to the prevailing hierarchical social order—as a Chinese historiographer would have understood, even if as an imperial employee he would have passed no comment. Indeed, the appeal of primal situations has continued to be felt even by fairly modern minds, as Sigmund Freud's conception of the primal horde also bears witness.

In Buddhism the most important primary figure is probably Mahāsammata, the "Great Elect," the first of rulers, who gained his position by popular acclamation so that he might halt the Hobbesian struggle of neighbor with neighbor. Even the most cursory study finds him turning up in a variety of contexts across the Buddhist world, not only in India and Southeast Asia but also in China and even Mongolia (Collins and Huxley 1996; Barrett 1996). And like delving Adam, he is invoked as someone relevant to the present—though in his case to notions of kingship, not equality—contemporary with the writer.

Nor is the Great Elect the only such example. For one is even tempted to waive all chronological requirements so as to include Dīpaṃkara, the name which stands at the head of lists of buddhas (Gombrich 1982). Although his primal position gives him a personality, and even a place in much later schemes of history plainly lying outside the common Buddhist heritage, he would appear to be just too primal for historical discussion (Naquin 1976, 10–11). What causes one to hesitate before dismissing him entirely from the realms of history, however, is the sporadic Chinese belief in his reappearance, either in an overtly apocalyptic setting or in secret (Barrett 2001, 38–93).

For if some past "alpha point" invited inclusion in history to give a sense of a beginning, after the fashion in which the creation of the world

functions in early Christian writers like Orosius, Buddhists were equally attracted by the sense of an ending provided by an "omega point." More commonly, however, it was not the return of Dīpaṃkara but the appearance of Maitreya which stirred the hopes of the tradition. To be sure, not all the ways of imagining Maitreya that we have already mentioned can be designated as history: some undeniably concern only another place beyond our world, or even inner states. So again, it may be objected that including the future in imagined history is to modify the term as normally used in the English language much too far, though this essay is not the first to introduce a "history of the future" into Buddhist studies (Collins 1998, 355–83).

But once more the matter is far from straightforward. First, the Buddhist word for *prophecy*, a prediction in a religious context, is *vyākaraṇa*, a term regularly rendered into Chinese by one meaning a record, primarily of the historical type. And perhaps more important, it is not possible to grasp what conception of the overall scheme of history may have existed implicitly in Buddhism, either in the common heritage or in particular developments of it, without including the future.

For against those who would see Buddhism as unconcerned with the processes of history, it has recently been strongly argued that a distinctive and powerful historical consciousness may be found at the heart of the tradition (Nattier 1994). From very early times, it now seems, Buddhism incorporated into its outlook not simply conceptions of cycles of time vast enough to relativize radically all human strivings, but also pessimistic notions of the ultimate fate of Buddhist belief in the wake of the Buddha's disappearance from our world. Nor was this simply a matter of tranquil clerical reflection: the popular tendency to hope for the appearance of messiahs—or "omega figures," to use our current terminology—placed a heavy burden on those who expected a fair stretch of reincarnations before the arrival of Maitreya to explain what Buddhists were supposed to do in the meantime, if their cause was already quite hopeless in the medium term.

This burden does not seem to have been felt equally everywhere—for some parts of the Buddhist world it has been argued not that "millennialist" movements did not occur, but that they are not the outcome of Buddhist views of history (Collins 1998, 395–413). But even if we consign this imaginative history to the "particular" sector, it would be unwise to underestimate its significance for certain times and places. In the mid-sixth century, for example, there are signs of a widespread Eurasian or possibly world crisis which has been given climactic explanations ranging from the sober to the sensational; and in China at any rate the consequent mood of pessimism seems to have expressed itself (despite strong Daoist apocalyptic traditions) largely in Buddhist terms (Shaffer 1997, 827–28; Keys 1999). I have argued elsewhere that it was the consequent

imperative to produce something in the here and now which molded the Zen conception of the transmission of truth in seventh-century China; and I am further prepared to argue that the same pressures impelled the rise of printing (Barrett 1990, 2001). Japanese Buddhism of the Kamakura period, too, seems to have been impelled by similar feelings to recapitulate the past, sometimes in highly individual ways (Brown and Ishida 1979).

Admittedly in the former case of Zen, later historical developments concerned with space as much as time radically modified the original impetus of the sect. After the tenth century, China's encirclement by hostile northern neighbors who had inherited the common Buddhist culture of the preceding millennium challenged her thinkers to dig deep and come up with history-denying strategies that located value within their particular region rather than in any common history. This in the case of Zen played down the pseudohistorical link with India in favor of a "rhetoric of immediacy" typically projected onto recent Chinese masters (Barrett 1998).

Indeed, the discovery of such tensions between history as imagined and as experienced might suggest that we should reconsider somewhat the dichotomy between history and experience itself. Even if the language used in respect of Zen in the twentieth century, as suggested above, had inauthentic roots in a Western agenda of religious studies, it may still on reflection have been used to express a problem already present in the sources of the eleventh century onward that predominated in the materials shaping D. T. Suzuki's intellectual formation even before he left for America.

But that is not to concede the validity of his formulation itself: those who deny the value of history explicitly have a way of resorting, even so, to implicit histories of a particularly insidious kind, and Suzuki is in fact a prime example of this vice. The impact of his privileging Japanese Zen by postulating a decline in post-Tang Chinese Buddhism may, as pointed out elsewhere, be seen in most of the most widely circulated books of a generation ago (Barrett 1998), though it should be noted that Alan Watts, while succumbing to his influence, manages to reformulate it quite egregiously. Chinese Zen he sees as staggering on to the Ming before its corruption by Daoism in the shape of the *Secrets of the Golden Flower*—a work not, I think, read in Chinese monasteries. Japanese Zen, he reasons, must have been corrupted at some point, too, because monks meditate—an outward formalism which, due to his implicit trust in the "rhetoric of immediacy," he imagines should have been entirely transcended from the mid-Tang onward. He can only condone it as an ancillary form of communal self-discipline, like the cold baths formerly in vogue in English boarding schools—the only location of any extended monastic experience of his own (Watts 1962, 128, 131).

But we are already sliding away from a discussion of ways in which Buddhism and history may be discussed toward a discussion of Buddhist history, and no doubt that is only right and natural. We may only have provided ourselves with the most rough-hewn of methodological or theoretical tools, but the task is, as we shall see, of such an enormity that further time spent on sharpening precision instruments looks rather like an elegant form of work avoidance. Only at a more advanced stage will it be proper to look back and judge that we have only just moved beyond the mere application of philology alone, which is like scrabbling at the world mountain of Sumeru with one's fingernails—and it has taken us long enough to appreciate that without even philology the task is equivalent to scrabbling at Sumeru without hands.

So let us turn to an entirely concrete matter. As yet, the age lacks a *Cambridge History of Buddhism*, though publications under that well-known imprint already exist for one or two other major religious traditions. For all the difficulties involved, any university press would be well advised to consider seriously the writing of the first comprehensive history of Buddhism, not as a challenging exercise in antiquarian reconstruction but as an increasingly desirable key to grasping current events. One of the most interesting legacies of the creation of Asia—a region which no more exists as a geographic given than Europe or anywhere else (Lewis and Wigen 1997)—by the imperialism of the past couple of centuries has been the emergence of unprecedented forms of self-awareness there, of which twentieth-century nationalism may not be the final form.

For while the impact of globalization actually raises in importance the irreversible differences of the past, of history, as a marker of resistance to homogenization along lines often inimical to the Asian nation-state, the practical needs of cooperation, at least among neighbors, also require the identification of past commonalities, especially "non-Western" ones. Of these, Buddhist culture has had arguably the widest influence, while it possesses—perhaps even more than Islam—the advantage of being non-hegemonic, in the sense that there is no Holy See anywhere in the Buddhist world in any position to oppose or even endorse whatever particular nation-states wish to make of their common Buddhist heritage.

This observation does not by any means amount to a prediction that some reconstructed Buddhist civilizational bloc, in the fashion made familiar by Harvard professor Samuel Huntington, is about to amaze the world. It is precisely because such neat blocs do not exist—nor ever have—that Buddhism, as a broad tradition that has made its presence felt in many lands and in many ways—including forms perfectly at home in modern Western society—is likely to have some role in the future. Indeed, reconsidering the interactions of Asian nations and peoples ever since the first dawning of pan-Asian awareness in the late nineteenth century suggests that this role has been slowly and steadily emerging already.

Since the totality of the Buddhist heritage is playing its part in the development of such awareness, surely it is an urgent task for scholars across the world to put on record their own understanding of how that heritage has unfolded.

There is, in my mind at least, a definite point to having our collective best understanding put on record, so that the reading public, in English and in whatever other languages our work is translated into, may have access to what we know. For if the above scenario is correct, the reading public—and also the viewing public—will need the information we possess in order to distinguish for themselves benign (not necessarily "authentic") uses of the Buddhist heritage from the more blatant and coercive manipulations of politicians. Those who are ignorant of the past are not necessarily condemned to repeat it in some grim karmic cycle, but they are certainly completely unprotected from the irresponsible and ever-popular use of historical or historicist arguments by unscrupulous opportunists. Those who have devoted their energies to Buddhist studies may not have reaped the spiritual rewards that knowledge of a religious tradition appears to offer, but this is one deed of kindness at least that they may be able to offer their fellow citizens in this world.

So, were some august publishing organization prepared to concede a small number of volumes to such a worthy enterprise, what would the eventual product—no doubt the labor of many years of collaborative effort—look like? It is perhaps easiest to start by saying what it might not be. The Cambridge histories, for example, do not foreground doctrinal matters to the same degree as the dominant modes of writing within religious traditions themselves—straight chronological histories of doctrine may have appealed to past readerships, but are an all too risky publishing venture in the twenty-first century. Is this acceptable for Buddhism? Is it even possible to write (in Buddhist terms) a history of the saṅgha, the Buddhist monastic community, without any mention of the dharma, the teachings of the Buddha? Handbooks introducing the range of Buddhist doctrines do of course exist, and will continue to do so. But from the point of view of expedience (to advance another concept well known at least in parts of the Buddhist tradition), little is gained in arranging them chronologically once more than one particular area of the Buddhist world is involved. Even if Paul Williams (1989) on Mahāyāna Buddhism may count as a partial exception, the pattern set by E. Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India* (1962), is more common. Such magisterial surveys of the totality of Buddhist thought as that by H. Ui (1947) in Japanese—to say nothing of other, more traditional summations in other languages at earlier times—tend to be both more thematic and directed toward those already well grounded within the tradition itself, not the outsider. For that outsider, or the less well-informed reader in general, the chronological narrative form, now fairly well known globally, may serve as an expedient introduction;

the problem is to break out of a particular and partial narrative in the same way as the great thematic surveys.

It is not that this has never been attempted in the past. We may, in fact, trace attempts at writing doctrinal history after the manner of Conze and Williams yet further back, to Bu ston, for example. In his account, which covers no more than India and Tibet, it is paradoxically the Chinese device of attributing all doctrinal development to the course of the Buddha's preaching that allows him to legitimate his "three turnings of the Wheel of the Law" and accommodate everything up to the appearance of Yogācāra (Obermiller [1932] 1986, 51). This device of finding all Buddhist history in the personal history of the Buddha, one might add in parenthetical reference to earlier discussion, seems to be but one among many designed to slam on the brakes and stop the total human story from spinning beyond confines found safe by the Buddha's followers. The very idea of the "living Buddha" or *tulku* figure as a constant presence in some forms of Buddhism; the irruption even in the most historically minded Buddhist tradition of the occasional narrative of a transhistorical "communion of saints" (Broughton, 1999:108–9); the amount of time expended by Bu ston on the Great Decease of the Buddha and its consequences—all these clues point perhaps to a total pattern of infelicities and loss that may one day emerge as a counterpoint to the overall structures of Buddhist felicity that have recently preoccupied Steven Collins. But, to revert to the matter at hand, no doctrinal pattern as yet seems fit to serve even as a provisional master narrative of Buddhist history.

At the same time, a collection of regional histories will hardly serve. They may be good enough as accounts of particular Buddhist experiences, but once one concedes that the actors in such histories did not merely have hollow spaces between their ears and allows a role for histories of the imagination, an entirely fragmented approach of this type will not work at all. Even in circumstances far removed in time and space from the common history of the Buddha and those five after-centuries, access to the Buddhist religion usually opened up the possibility of quite remarkable vistas beyond the local that most of the other religious traditions with which it first competed in Asia significantly lacked. One particularly striking example of this may be seen in the maps of India—on which Japan did not even appear—which circulated, apparently as aids to the religious imagination, under the Tokugawa shōgunate well into the nineteenth century (Ayusawa 1953, 124, 128 fig.2).

True, for as long as nationalism is still a potent force, critical regional histories of Buddhism have been and will be important. But examples of imaginative use of the transregional breadth of the Buddhist tradition are plentiful enough—including even discussions of Indian kingship in Japan or the Indian caste system in China from authors who were not themselves Buddhists (Varley 1980, 57, 118; Twitchett 1973, 55)—to suggest

that a more integrated effort at description is intellectually necessary. And the sheer transregional movement of cultural objects—books, translated from language to language, or more significantly, relics of the Buddha—testify to a long history of contacts as firmly established as the great Asian trade routes themselves.

But the first intellectual challenge is surely to find a framework that can encompass the history of Buddhism. Transregional modes of writing go back more than half a millennium, but the best-known form of these, the India-China-Japan form of narrative still used today (even when shorn of the implicit value judgments apparent in the writings of a D. T. Suzuki), nonetheless privileges a selection of regional norms over a fuller account incorporating intermediate points, such as Central Asia or Korea. Even Nakamura Hajime, whose survey of Buddhism across Asia concentrates on nonchronological aspects of its particular regional manifestations, was obliged to add Tibet to the traditional tripartite pattern he had initially employed (Nakamura 1964). Of course, to write a history of Buddhism entirely "from the margins," while a salutary exercise with at least one stimulating model in the writing of recent Asian political history (Christie 1996), would not be a step forward if the major centers of cultural production within the Buddhist tradition were ignored.

Nor should the need to find a broad geographic framework blind us to the fact that in some respects good historiographic practice has been emerging within subregions of the field. The recent formulation of a "Pāli imaginaire," stretching across Southeast Asia up to the eighteenth century, points to important elements of regional and temporal coherence not fully confronted before, and, remarkably, puts the role of imagination firmly in the foreground (Collins 1998). But the stretch of time involved does unintentionally pander somewhat to the view of Asian civilization as static, recalling the impossible extension across the centuries of periods uniformly deemed "feudal," or characterized by "Asiatic modes of production."

Fortunately, one comprehensive attempt at describing Buddhism has already been made, involving at least in outline a judicious compromise between giving due prominence to temporal and spatial factors, even if in a much larger project much of the devil would be in the detail. That description was first published in the *Encyclopedia of Religion* in 1987 by Frank Reynolds and Charles Hallisey, and has subsequently proved worth republishing in an exclusively Buddhist context (Reynolds and Hallisey, 1989). In their essay, these authors divide Buddhism into four phases: sectarian, civilizational, cultural, and modern, while ingeniously weaving in a great deal of information about the religion as it unfolded across time and space in a tour de force of compressed but readily intelligible writing that has not for our current purposes been bettered by any more recent work.

True, they are relieved of the responsibility for dealing historically with the founder of Buddhism in the same essay by the format of the encyclopedia. That task is in itself forbidding enough to convince any persons inclined to believe that history is a category best abandoned in Buddhist studies of the justice of their own views. It would, however, seem at least equally possible to believe that forbidding though it may be, the project of anchoring the Buddha in human history, albeit somewhat loosely, is not entirely beyond the wit of humanity (Ruegg 1999, 86). Once we are dealing with the history of Buddhists, at any rate, even the most dedicated follower of the intrinsically quite reasonable Rashomonesque "we shall never know what really happened" approach to history surely has to admit that a broad-brush account of the main sweep of developments over substantial chunks of time, particularly in those areas where Buddhist materials can be integrated into a strong tradition of secular historiography, is unlikely to prove entirely fantastic.

To take the first chunk of the scheme already outlined, *sectarian Buddhism* is the term that Reynolds and Hallisey use to cover developments up to the time of Aśoka, and this is certainly a term which emphasizes the partial, confined nature of the tradition in its early days when set against the backcloth of Asian or even South Asian history. They do, however, qualify their account of that monarch's reign and the changes in the status of Buddhism which are implicitly taken to have marked it by saying, "Aśoka's actual policies and actions represent only one aspect of his impact in facilitating the transition of Buddhism from a sectarian religion to a civilizational religion." Above I have spoken in much vaguer terms of the first phase of Buddhism ending between the reigns of Aśoka and Kaniṣka, partly to emphasize a more gradual process of change, but mainly to avoid making the former too much of a pivotal figure. For one cannot help but notice that those who have studied his surviving words most closely have the least to say about his impact on Buddhism, though the establishment of an imperial peace is credited with promoting the spread of Buddhism at least indirectly through the spread of trade (Norman 1997, 129).

Shifting the end of the first period of Buddhist history toward the lifetime of the famous Kuśan monarch also allows us not simply about three extra centuries of transition time, but also a perspective on transition that avoids the retrospective use of evaluative religious terminology such as the word *sectarian*—to say nothing of *primitive*, *original*, or even *canonical* and *precanonical*, most of which entangle us again in "Protestant assumptions" or worse. Once Buddhism existed amongst the Kuśans, who were based outside what was commonly considered India both by its inhabitants and by outsiders like the Greeks or Chinese, Buddhism was clearly a "transregional" religion. So before that point surely it may simply and neutrally be termed regional.

If we define the transition from a first phase to a second phase in this way, we may simultaneously pause to consider another shift that has hitherto not received so much attention. During its development as a regional religion, the doctrines of Buddhism seem to have been circulated in oral texts in the various forms of Middle Indo-Aryan speech, which were after all quite closely related. Though multilingualism and the translation of oral literature between quite unrelated language families are of course rather common occurrences, the transfer of complex normative texts between unrelated languages is surely much assisted by the medium of writing, which allows for much more systematic checking and reflection. The beginning of this shift in the possibilities of translation we may already perhaps detect in Aśoka's Greek and Aramaic inscriptions; the end result was the start of translation into Chinese in the second century CE. And writing, it has been pointed out, also seems to have been an important factor in the rise of a new form of Buddhism, the Mahāyāna (Gombrich 1990). Thus perhaps did the key to its victory beyond its regional, linguistic confines also unlock within Buddhism a process leading to the loss, even in India, of some of its hitherto inviolate commonalities of doctrines.

The millennium or so during which Buddhism acted as a fully transregional religion was in any case a deeply impressive era in world history, during which both the religion and the aspects of civilization with which it was associated, as Reynolds and Hallisey highlight, were transmitted with considerable success across daunting geographic and linguistic barriers. Nor did the process of transmission stop at the end of this second era: the urge to spread the Buddha's word remained as dynamic as ever, so that the Mongol canon is a product of the seventeenth century, and the Manchu canon, of the eighteenth, for example. But an important shift did take place gradually over a number of centuries, from (in their view) the fifth century CE onward to the ninth (Reynolds and Hallisey, 1989, 15), or perhaps a little later. Their designation of the shift as one toward "cultural" Buddhism, however, brings out an important aspect of the changes that took place, in that Buddhism now became much more acculturated within the societies to which it had been transmitted.

Wrongly handled, however, such a focus on acculturation may be made to look like adaptation through compromising the integrity of the Buddhist tradition itself, and this is certainly the way in which Christian missionaries, and again especially those writing from a Protestant perspective, tended to typify the Buddhism they discovered in Asia from the time of the first intrusion of Western imperialism in the region onward. For this reason the third term I would prefer to follow *regional* and *transregional* would be *transplanted* Buddhism, emphasizing instead its capacity for independent growth, and interaction across cultural boundaries.

Independent in this case means independent of continued diffusion from a notional Indian center, especially following the destruction of Buddhist sites by Muslim invaders. Buddhism, particularly of the Mahāyāna variety with its concept of emptiness, was by this point so accustomed to a rhetoric of absence that we cannot see these losses as crucial, for Buddhist influences still flowed outward from other centers, such as Sri Lanka, Tibet, or China.

Indeed, in the last-named case, we can even point to a sort of "backwash" effect, as well as simple movement outward, for translations were already being made from Chinese into both Tibetan and Sogdian in the eighth century CE (Utz 1978; Faure 1997, 170). Somewhat later, for that matter, translations from Chinese, Tibetan, and (probably) Sogdian, as well as Sanskrit and Tokharian, all provided materials for the Turkish Buddhism that flourished in Uygur lands from the tenth century until the fourteenth (Elverskog 1997). In the Tibetan case, I have already mentioned the transmission of the Mongol and Manchu canons, while the role of Sri Lanka as a source of Buddhist renewal throughout Southeast Asia is too well known to require comment. Within cultures, too, it is important not to overlook the signs not only of creative acculturation but also of new, critical reflection on the Buddhist tradition, as in the remarkable Sanskrit studies of the Japanese Jion Sonja (1718–1804), an excellent example of the imaginative recreation within Buddhism of the linguistic history of another time and place (Watt 1984, 195); though less well-known figures, such as Gong Zizhen (1792–1842) in China, will one day need to be given their due.

This still continuing process of diffusion and creative change was what Westerners eventually encountered, marking off the fourth phase in the scheme put forward by Reynolds and Hallisey; they further subdivide into a period of first clashes with Christian missions, a colonial period, and a postcolonial period. It would be a bold editor who dared to draw up plans for a survey of history so recent, though the appearance of volumes such as *Curators of the Buddha* (Lopez 1995) are beginning to make sense of some of the consequences of encounter. What makes a clear perspective difficult, however, is the way in which, however postcolonial the current situation, we are still caught up in processes initiated in the two earlier phases of these Hallisey-Reynolds subdivisions. Thus the sequence whereby Buddhist studies extended its knowledge geographically has, of course, had much in itself to do with the progress of colonialism, so that for example Newari Buddhism was for many years much better known than the Buddhism of Korea or even Japan, while to this day the study of Mongol Buddhism, and especially the Buddhism of the Buryats and Tuvans, remains predominantly a Russian-language field.

But few of us can in fact claim to know even the languages necessary for secondary scholarship, let alone the range of languages in which Buddhist materials themselves are written. It may seem more reasonable, therefore, to treat the foregoing description of a possible multivolume history of all Buddhism as no more than an "expedient means." It has, after all, allowed us a degree of discussion of the practical problems of applying the category of History within Buddhist studies; why should it be necessary to go to all the effort of actually putting together a team of experts (in the nature of things, quite a large an unwieldy team) in order to put a more fully evolved plan into effect?

Well, perhaps we should remember that the well-known story of the blind men and the elephant is one of the most telling contributions that the religion has made to world folklore (Grey 2000, 49). Quite apart from its religious meaning, the tale of their various partial encounters with the elephant, so that the man who grasps its tail concludes that an elephant is a rope, and so on, is as good an illustration of the frustrations of historical research as any. It is particularly apt for a situation in which no single researcher is ever likely to do justice to the entire Buddhist experience throughout history. Admittedly we may, if we wish, let the task of trying to capture the whole "story so far" continue to go by default—after all, no one anywhere pays academics on the heroic scale, so why bother to take on such heroic endeavors in the first place? But we do thereby run the risk of constituting a modern and yet more unsuccessful collection of "blind men," solely devoted to sitting around and discussing among themselves the latest systems of optical enhancement. And we may even end up getting trodden on by the elephant—for after all, Buddhism, vast as it is, remains very much a living tradition, bearing its accumulated wisdom into yet another millennium. A friendly beast it may be, but it is one still capable of springing surprises. Or would we prefer to preserve our own, partial illusions of "Trunkism," "Tailism," and so on, for as long as possible? The choice is ours.

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INSTITUTION

Timothy Brook

Glancing through European and American studies of Buddhism that began to appear in the nineteenth century, one could get the impression that Buddhism is something more intense, more spiritualized, and more individual than anything post-Enlightenment Europe had to offer. The apparent lack of an organized church must have seemed refreshingly liberating to Christian observers, whose experience of religion, whether Catholic or Protestant, was so tied to authority, property, and surveillance. Here was a religion that seemed to be relatively free of institutional hierarchies, underburdened by property claims, and almost "modern" in its recognition of the individual as the agent of his own enlightenment. Max Weber, whose comparative insights on religion still cast a long shadow over our unreflective impressions of religion outside industrialized Euro-America, captured aspects of this way of seeing Buddhism in his essay "The General Character of Asiatic Religion." (We will for the moment set

aside the questions of whether there is such a category as Asian religion and whether it can be characterized as anything; Weber, at least, thought so.) The goal of Asian religious practice, including Buddhist, he declared, was to gain knowledge of the "significance" of the world. This knowledge was "attained by an intensive training of body and spirit, either through asceticism or, and as a rule, through strict, methodologically-ruled meditation." The "mystical" knowledge so obtained, being personal and "of the rationally unformed," had "an asocial and apolitical character." The consequence of this asociality and apoliticality was that Asian religion was understood to promote "the devaluation of the world" (Weber 1967, 330–32).

This image of Buddhism as asocial, apolitical, and "otherworldly" has outlasted the colonial era, encouraging many a scholar to go off in search of his or her obscure subject without relying on the dull wattage of the institutions that make it present in real life. Whatever it was that Buddhologists or sociologists of religion wanted to know, it was not usually how Buddhism was practiced and how it survived (or did not) through its institutions. What Weber wanted to know was how its soteriology differed from the Protestantism he knew as a member of the German middle class. Difference was the talisman that would render his findings on Buddhism and every other "world religion" useful for his larger project, which was to isolate and understand the unique religious foundations of the rise of capitalism in the part of the world where he lived. Asia would provide him with negative examples in a comparative project rooted in European problems: too much charisma here, not enough rationality there, and a shortage of this-worldliness all over. The accumulation of differences compounded into what, for Weber, was the fatal personality flaw of Asian religion: it lacked "the conception that through simple behavior addressed to the 'demands of the day,' one may achieve salvation." If you are convinced that this "specifically occidental significance of 'personality' is alien to Asia" (Weber 1967, 342), then institutions can "explain" next to nothing of why "Asians" believe and act religiously as they do. But from institutions there is much to learn, not because they hold the answers to now questionable attempts to characterize all of Buddhism in one throw, but because, more simply, they matter, and have always mattered, to how Buddhists meet what Weber called the "demands of the day"—and which they manage to do without the terrible attenuation of personality that so dismayed him.

Our habit of treating institutions as second-order elements that "mean" less than such first-order categories as doctrine and belief is not purely a Eurocentric imposition, but has been encouraged in part by the discursive frameworks that East Asian Buddhists have formulated to inspire religious effort. An example is the Buddhist notion of the Two Truths. This conception pits the ultimate truth of buddha nature, which

is what the Buddhist must grasp to attain salvation, against the conventional truth that institutions represent (Faure 1991, 18). The Chan religious imagination chose to distinguish the phenomenal realm, where the senses give rise to the illusion of permanence, from the realm of the impermanent and absolute, bracketing the one with the other. Being of the former, institutions are vulnerable to the charge of contributing to the illusion of permanence rather than working to dispel it. Institutions are left to "mean" less than they "are." And yet, institutions—the customs, usages, practices, and organizations that shape the lives of Buddhists—are what provide and perpetuate the very possibility of the Buddhist life, furnishing the rituals, gestures, stories, and training through which people have access to an understanding of the Buddha. (The institution of storytelling as a mode of Buddhist training is mentioned in passing in Hallisey 1995, 61.)

This apparent distinction between the tangible and the ineffable was taken on board by European students of Buddhism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They found this epistemological split familiar. Not only had late-medieval Christianity operated within such a bifurcation, but the new modernist project—in which scholars of "world religions" were unavoidably embedded by the colonialist project of which they were a part—led them to make what Jean-François Lyotard has called the "discovery of the lack of reality in reality" that rests at the heart of the modernist turn. And so they took up "the vocation of the sublime," which drove them to want to disclose the religious "unpresentable" which they knew was outside their own experience (1993, 9–11). Buddhism fit the bill. Assuming that what Buddhism "meant" had to be decoded, they searched for the code not in everyday practices but in esoteric texts, which they had to demystify (and then remystify) into systems of logic and theology. This approach conformed with the practices of biblical exegesis familiar to most of them (Schopen 1997, 11–14), but relied as well on the Protestant conviction that rituals and institutions were enemies of faith. This procedure of basing understanding on texts was more than encouraged by the fact that written texts and votive objects were portable and could be transferred for study elsewhere, as institutions could not. Texts could be studied *ex situ* in district colonial offices or in European libraries well away from temples and *stūpas* and at complete remove from the ritual processions, assemblies of worship, and acts of piety that were happening *in situ* all over those parts of Asia where Buddhism continued in practice. The study of Buddhism outside Asia thus tended to look away from institutions, despite the fact that the vast majority of Buddhist texts outside the canon (and even a good share of those within it) had to do with institutions. The foundational work on Buddhist institutions was left to architects such as Johannes Prip-Møller, anthropologists such as Stanley Tambiah, and social historians such as Jacques Gernet. Buddhologists

concentrated instead on "what the Buddha taught" and what Buddhists thought about that. The Buddhological mainstream was not motivated to study the institutions that made Buddhism as an inheritable practice possible (McMullin 1984, 6).

When the attempt was made, it was often haunted by a desire to bring the unavoidable messiness of real institutions into line with the purity that Buddhism projected. In the case of China, Holmes Welch was one of the early few who chose to study Buddhism by examining its institutions, in part because he actually talked to practicing Buddhists. He brought to the Buddhist monastery the aspiration of his informants, however, which was that the monastery in its ideal form is a totalizing institution in which all activity is bent to the service of the Buddha—a "utopia," in his words (Welch 1967, 3). In the real world of rotting timbers, stolen robes, and thwarted abbatial ambitions, though, the actual always veers away from the ideal. Rather than overlook the tension between doctrine and practice, as Welch ultimately chose to do, we might instead consider the inconsistency and incompleteness of an institution's capacity to exemplify doctrine as actually integral to its functioning, not evidence of deviation from something absent that is "true." Thinking about Buddhist institutions outside their ideality encourages the student of Buddhism to deconstruct the ideological claims that discourses of religious understanding project to obscure the relationships of power among real people, and to realize just how much goes on within the institutional life of Buddhism in addition to the best Buddhist explanations of what is going on. Factoring the concrete sociality of religious life into the study of Buddhism opens the analytical possibility that what goes on is not incidental to Buddhism but constitutive of the historical practices to which we, and those who have done them, assign its name.

There are two questions that will twine through this essay. The first asks about the coherence of belief and practice in Buddhism and where it comes from. For there are many ways to profess Buddhism, and many relationships to its institutions, not just across time and cultures but within the same cultural setting. Clergy and laypeople are positioned differently within the social, political, and economic arrangements that sustain their practices; but so, too, are men and women; and so, too, the rulers and the ruled, the rich and the poor, the elite and ordinary folk. Have Buddhist institutions generated a unitary sense of what constitutes Buddhism? If so, have they worked against difference and dampened alternatives, or have they enabled variants to coexist within Buddhist practice, whether by design or by tacit agreement? A second question asks about the effect institutionalization has had on the vitality of Buddhist practice. Have its institutions played a major role in guaranteeing the perpetuation of Buddhism where it is practiced, or has their presence contributed to its decline? Must

Buddhism defy the power of its own institutions, or can it rely on their success to succeed?

The materials I will use here are drawn from China during the long seventeenth century, stretching across the rupture between the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties. This was a period when Buddhist institutions were undergoing revival at the hands of wealthy and well-educated patrons, who have left a rich body of documents concerning the maintenance and supervision of those institutions. My examples come more particularly from locations along the southern edge of the lower Yangzi Valley, roughly a 600-kilometer belt of commercially prosperous territory stretching from Huizhou prefecture in the west to Ningbo prefecture in the east and centered on Hangzhou. That city's West Lake was ringed with monasteries and other cultural sights, drawing Buddhist pilgrims from all over eastern China. Restricted to this one time and place, this essay will not look far beyond the Chan-Pure Land blend of popular Mahāyāna Buddhism that flourished in China at that time. This restriction limits what I can say about Buddhist institutions; on the other hand, it is only through particularity that we see Buddhism in action, and that is usually the best posture in which to observe it.

* * *

Qiu Lian (1644–1729) was born into a wealthy gentry family in Ningbo. In the second year of his life, his father died in the dynastic overthrow, throwing his branch of the family on hard times and placing him more under the Buddhistic influence of a pious mother (women were the usual keepers of Buddhist rites within the Chinese family). His literary talent enabled him to reverse the family's fortunes, even to the point of winning the attention of the emperor, who took a personal interest in his career—though Qiu remained temperamentally unsuited to passing the civil service examinations until the advanced age of seventy-one. At midlife, however, he was in a position to turn his wealth and literary skills to the service of Buddhism. Living in Ningbo, a natural choice of patronage object was the great monastic complex on Putuo (Potalaka) Island. Putuo was dedicated to Guanyin (Avalokiteśvara), whose manifestations pilgrims regularly sighted there.

The most lasting form Qiu's patronage took was as editor of a monastic gazetteer of the island, a fifteen-chapter chronicle of the places, buildings, persons, tales, and writings associated with Putuo. The book belongs to a genre of local history that became almost universal during the long seventeenth century, when gentry compilers produced well over a thousand such books to celebrate their home counties, their favorite topographical sites, or the institutions they supported. A monastic gazetteer

was a celebration of a particular institution; it was also an investment, designed to protect it against the relentless enemies of embezzlement, encroachment, and physical decay.

At the head of each chapter, Qiu pens a short essay in which he offers his thoughts on the subject to be treated in that chapter. In his short introduction to the ninth chapter, "Dharmic Property," he offers this observation (1704, 9.1a): "[For there to be] religion, [one] must first nourish it; [for there to be] an undertaking, [one] must supply food" (*jiao bi xian yang, shi bi zi si*).

My bracketing flags the awkwardness that occurs when inflating Qiu's terse (but eminently legible) Chinese phrases into English, though the sense is clear enough. Words of ours such as *religion*, *institution*, and even *Buddhism* were not part of Qiu's late-classical vocabulary, which suggests that a consideration of his language might be useful if we are to understand *our* critical terms within *his* field of reference. (Qiu, of course, would have been indifferent to our problems of reading.) The first character, *jiao*, translated as "religion," means "teaching" more broadly. Had Qiu meant "the teaching of the Buddha"—what Buddhists would have called the dharma—he could have used "the three jewels" (*sanbao*, from the Sanskrit *triratna*), the conventional Chinese term for "Buddhism" which combines the dharma with the other two jewels of the Buddha, in whom the faithful seek refuge, and the saṅgha, the community of monks whose work perpetuates the memory of the Buddha's teaching (Gombrich 1988, 2; see also Gernet 1995, 67, on the Chinese rereading of *triratna* as *sanbao*).

But Qiu seems to be opening on a more general plane, not restricting his observation to Buddhism nor seeking to invoke the metaphysical echoes that attach to our concept of "religion," but allowing it to extend over all teachings in the Chinese context, the "Three Teachings" of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism. In doing so, however, he is posing a different challenge to his readers by reminding them that Buddhism is of the same category as Confucianism. Ordinary people would not have minded the association, but it made Confucian conservatives anxious, fearing that this enlargement of *jiao* threatened to colonize their domain of moral and textual authority. Buddhists, even Confucian Buddhists, were content to colonize the lexical landscape wherever spiritual and ritual needs appeared to be otherwise unmet. Commitment to one teaching did not challenge or undermine the institutions of the other; and for Qiu, in fact, they went together, for he observes later in the same text that the moral effect of Buddhist piety "is the same in principle as the charitable giving and relief measures of us Confucians." He could move unhindered between the moral programs and institutional frameworks of both "religions" without registering a loss for either. (Qiu's Confucian rhetoric flashes through again with *yang*, "nourish," reminding his readers of the Confucian duty of parent to child and state to people, and *zi*, "supply,"

echoing the duty of both public and private enterprise to supply people's needs. The latter would be snapped up at the end of the nineteenth century for the neologism "capitalism.")

Qiu's argument, then, is that religion exists only in the presence of materially supported institutions. To make sure that his readers don't miss the point, he then rephrases the argument more explicitly: "Sacrificing to the Buddha and bringing peace to the masses are simply impossible without property." In other words, without land, no income; without income, no institution; without institution, no Buddhism. Qiu's declaration that property provides the base of Buddhism would not have shocked his readers with the realization that the feet of the church were made of clay. Its purpose was far more practical: to warn all comers not to encroach on the property supporting the great monasteries and smaller chapels on Putuo Island. It was a sensible, though nearly unenforcable, injunction in an age of commercial expansion and land pressure, when everyone seemed to be doing their utmost to steal fiduciary property whenever the holders of a land trust had their backs turned, which may be why Qiu ends his introduction to "Dharmic Property" by reminding laity and clergy alike to keep their hands off the property. That members of his class were the typical donors of this property, as well as its willing thieves, does not reduce Qiu's argument to self-interest, but it does remind us that class interest was a significant factor in making monastic Buddhism viable in Chinese society.

The notion that the grand monasteries did not just house Buddhism but embodied it is frequently expressed in texts in monastic gazetteers. According to the somewhat fictional etymology offered by one Hangzhou compiler, the word *monastery* meant "where the three jewels are brought together" (Sun 1672, 2.1a). A Ningbo patron who predates Qiu Lian by a century makes the same identification in a fund-raising appeal for King Aśoka Monastery, just outside their home city. Tu Long (1542–1605), a prominent essayist who moved easily in both Confucian and Buddhist worlds, tells his readers that the reason they should make a donation was that it would "protect the three jewels" (Brook 1993, 272). The point of the appeal was to raise funds for a hall to house a reliquary containing a tiny grain of bone, one of the three or four most famous relics of the Buddha's body in China. The new building at King Aśoka would protect the dharma by publicizing it, and the saṅgha by sheltering it. It would also protect the Buddha in a satisfyingly literal way. Being simultaneously religion and institution, the three jewels concept did useful ideological work for gentry like Tu Long and Qiu Lian. It anointed the Buddhism of King Aśoka and Putuo Island as the sort worthy of their class support. It also strove to communicate more broadly that their monastery-based Buddhism trumped everyone else's Buddhism.

The South Asian king in whose honor Tu Long's monastery was named was the renowned centralizing ruler of the Maurya kingdom in the

third century BCE who mobilized Buddhism "as the most creative and regulating force in the polity" (Tambiah 1976, 62). East Asian Buddhists have often invoked Aśoka as the ideal their own rulers should emulate: just as he protected the dharma, the three jewels would protect their rule. This intra-elite deal was signaled in China and Japan by the practice of designating some institutions as "monasteries that protect the state" (in Chinese, *baoguo si*; in Japanese, *hōkoku ji*). The main monastery on Putuo Island, Eternal Longevity Monastery to Protect the State, was one of these. As it happened, the institution lost that designation in 1699 when Emperor Kangxi (reigned 1662–1721) rebuilt and renamed it as part of a massive investment to revive the coastal regions after the dynastic turnover. The monastery was then known as Universal Succor, a name that happily combined the Buddhist vision of universal salvation with the Confucian concept of deliverance from want.

Chinese rulers, of course, fulfilled the Aśokan ideal of institutional support as rarely as their South Asian counterparts did. In fact, they were just as prone to imagine monasteries as private sites of subversion of state authority, caught in what Welch has called "the unending contradiction between the desires to suppress and to support" (1968, 134). And so between bouts of patronage, they imposed extraordinary measures to clamp down on Buddhist institutions, as they did most strikingly in the 1380s (Brook 1997) and the 1950s (Welch 1972).

Gentry in the long seventeenth century collaborated in the state project to sponsor safe Buddhism, but they were not China's only Buddhists, of course, nor the sole donors to its institutions. People in all sectors of society took refuge in the Buddha. The Buddhism of the grand monasteries was a privileged institutional realm where property, political affiliations, and the commitments of the wealthy and powerful mattered in the constant struggle to claim authority in the public realm. Ordinary folk might visit monasteries such as Universal Succor and King Aśoka as destinations on costly, once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimages, but most demurred from entering these grand and distant sites. Instead they conducted their religious lives through a diffuse array of modest, nonelite institutions: local shrines, village festivals, and networks of itinerant preachers and charismatic leaders. Monks with little training and less ordination might head up such institutions, but not necessarily. In the absence of the sort of global oversight to which, for example, the Catholic Church aspired, local Buddhist temples existed largely as customary institutions, isolated, autonomous, and except in extraordinary moments quite out of the reach of the state (Goossaert 2000, 37).

The mere existence of such institutional spaces in which ordinary people acted out a lay-based Buddhism made elites and the state anxious. They projected onto these common folk a capacity to imagine a different regime of conduct based on millenarian beliefs deemed a threat to the

good order of society and state. As far as they knew, this inverted mirror world thronged with "ignorant men and obstinate women," "the poor and distressed," and "the lowliest vagabonds," which is how Tu Long in another fund-raising appeal for King Aśoka in 1590 disparages the lower classes who fail to take refuge in his Buddha. Only the Buddhism of institutions as "magnificent and famous" as King Aśoka, declared Tu, could subdue these ungovernable social elements—which is why, he darkly explains, his fellow gentry should give generously (Brook 1993, 203). The gentry might hope that the poor and distressed would be transformed into pious Buddhists once they gained sight of a magnificent monastery, but entry was another matter. Some patrons put up signs at the monasteries they patronized declaring that only the gentry or the abbot's guests could enter the grounds. Their Buddhism, like everyone else's, was socially situated, and they arranged institutions in ways that reinforced the contours of social power.

Buddhist institutions could thus differ at the opposite ends of the social structure in which they are embedded. To some extent this bifurcation produces separate communities of believers; and yet the core precepts of the Buddhist life appear to span the spectrum. What people are doing at one end may displease those at the other, yet without being unintelligible to them. Buddhist institutions, not surprisingly, reflect the oppositional tensions that arise in social relations. Whether they manage these tensions well enough to sustain a coherence for Buddhism in a social setting has to do less with Buddhism's capacity to impose a uniformity of ideology or practice than with how social relations are handled elsewhere in society.

* * *

The Eminent Layman considered Buddhism without institutions a nonstarter. The Eminent Monk was cagier. Not a few Buddhist masters of the long seventeenth century, when religious institution-building in China reached a level not seen for seven centuries, entertained the suspicion that institutions might interfere with rather than enhance religious life. Prominent among them was the great monastery-builder and chronicler Zhuhong (1535–1615). Zhuhong entered Buddhist life at a Chan monastery, but would be honored as a Pure Land patriarch for advocating the pietistic recitation of the Buddha's name. In 1571 he undertook to rebuild an abandoned monastery, which he renamed Yunqi (Cloud Perch), in the scenic hills outside the city of Hangzhou and developed it as a major teaching and devotional center until his death in 1615. In the many accounts he wrote of the founding, operation, and discipline of Yunqi Monastery, Zhuhong probed the tension between property and moral training, often invoking the proposition of the Two Truths as a pressing religious

problem. He declared monasteries to be a good thing and assured his many patrons that investing in them garnered them religious merit, but he worried that the work of managing institutions "will cause one who has not attained the Truth never to get there, and one who has attained it to falter midway." Adopting the confessional stance of holding oneself to a higher standard, he judged his project of rebuilding Yunqi Monastery as harmful to his own spiritual cultivation, and made a point of publicizing this as a warning to others (Yü 1981, 19).

Zhuhong chose to manage the tension between institution and religion discursively by constructing his relationship to Yunqi through two institutional foundation stories, both of which involve exchange. The first has him pacifying tigers, which preyed on local people and their livestock and had stymied an earlier attempt to rebuild a monastery that floods had washed away in 1494. The story consciously recalls Zhifeng, a tenth-century Chan master known as Tiger Queller who tamed the tigers on Mount Yunqi and built the original monastery on this site in 967. Tiger Queller belongs to a popular trope in religious foundation stories that dramatizes conquest over local traditions by pitting a powerful monk against a dangerous animal (Faure 1993, 156). Reenacting this foundation tale enables Zhuhong to reappropriate a site that had fallen dormant for Buddhism and to trade his absorption of Tiger Queller's authority for local support—and to do so at the last possible ecological moment, too, as land clearance through the sixteenth century had mostly eliminated tigers from the local ecosystem by 1571.

A second institutional foundation story tells of Zhuhong's unwilling but effective intervention in a drought that struck the area shortly after he arrived. Although he was in religious retreat, he gave in to local pressure and went out into the fields to recite the Buddha's name. "Dharmic rain" instantly fell. As a result of his ability to call down divine help, the harvest was saved, and an exchange became possible: the local villagers vowed to build him a monastery. Here the figurative foundational story becomes literal, for as the foundations of the new buildings are dug, the villagers discover stonework proving that an ancient monastery once stood on the site (Zhuhong [1611] 1899a, 3.16a–24a; Yü 1981, 18–22). The discovery has more than merely symbolic importance, for it gives Zhuhong a legal right to build. Short of an imperial grant, Ming law forbade the founding of new monasteries. No institution could have started more propitiously, and no hagiography of an institutional founder better directed attention away from the business of money, land, and bricks and toward the transformative devotional effects that these made possible.

Zhuhong became something of a prototype of the Buddhist master in the long seventeenth century in that he could not establish a reputation without running a major institution. In most cases this meant installing

a property regime involving fiduciary land and considerable financial commitments from the local elite. As a northern abbot phrased this relationship in 1596, with even less delicacy than Qiu Lian, "Whether the dharma flourishes depends on the age, as it must rely on the wealthy and powerful to sustain it" (Zhencheng [1661] 1755, 5.30b). A few zealous abbots might forbid monks from acquiring "dharma fields" to make them conform to the precept against property, but they were the exception (Brook 1993, 146–47). Zhuhong was uneasy about Yunqi Monastery owning land, and he outright banned its sister convent from setting up a land endowment, fearing that prosperity might dull religious zeal. On the other hand, the first rule in his regulations for monastic personnel orders the grounds prefect to check that "the boundaries of the monastic land are clear" and to take all the monks on an annual tour of the land to make sure that everyone knows exactly what the monastery owns (Yü 1981, 262). His prominence as one of the four great Buddhist masters of his age was due in no small part to the institutional economy on which he built Yunqi Monastery.

For his lay patrons, Zhuhong preferred to euphemize his property relationships behind his religious qualifications, believing that the latter would lend religious and moral force to his appeals. But material and spiritual values were never far apart; in fact, they were convertible, as he explains in his moral guide to lay life. *A Record of Self Knowledge* takes the form of an account book in which precise values and debits are assigned to particular deeds, often calibrated to how much it cost to perform them. Into these rules Zhuhong built the obligation to support Buddhist institutions. The spiritual value of making Buddhist images, building monasteries, buying furnishings and ritual utensils, and donating or redeeming monastic property he set at one merit point per hundred copper cash spent. The more you paid out on material account, the more you gained on spiritual account (Yü 1981, 238). A catty of lamp oil at the time cost about 50 cash, which meant that a donor would have to give two catties of oil to a monastery to earn one merit point. The restoration of a dilapidated monastery could run to 3,000 taels of silver, which at the nominal exchange rate of 1,000 cash per tael produced 30,000 merit points to be shared among the patrons who covered the costs. On the exchange of money for virtue, Zhuhong placed the condition that merit accrued only if payment was made willingly and without ulterior purpose. That remained a matter between the donor and his conscience, not the donor and his object of patronage.

The simple formula that taking refuge in the Buddha entails donation, which models and confirms the relationship between religion and institution, understands religious donation as exchange. At sites where the value of the karmic exchange was regarded as high, institutions on those sites

benefited. An example is Yangshan Monastery in Huizhou prefecture, which was dedicated to the wonder-working monk Baozhi (418–514). Its gazetteer compiler attests to Baozhi's posthumous power to aid the faithful by providing in a set of real-life stories, which he dates between 1567 and 1608. In these stories, Baozhi is credited with curing illnesses, saving sick children, enabling the childless to conceive sons, and sparing a merchant's cargo from shipwreck (Huizhou was the native home of many of China's greatest merchants). Each story narrates the turn of fortune as a debt that the fortunate must repay by making a gift of land or money to Yangshan, which stood in for the long-deceased Baozhi to receive payments due him for services rendered (Cheng 1611, 1.47a–50b). By representing the circuit of exchange as closed, with benefits staying within the family or the family-based corporation, these stories also helped to ease the suspicion on the part of a donor's kin that money going to a monastery was a net drain on family resources. Since exchanges can always go wrong before the transaction is complete, some of the Yangshan stories are plotted as paybacks, with the blessed declaring their faith only after Baozhi has done his work. The gazetteer compiler accepts that some donors might expect Baozhi to provide his services before they paid up: no more than a straight exchange, perhaps, but certainly no less.

This simple theology of giving supported Buddhist institutions in the same way that any other logic of economy could be expected to sustain any other social institution. But monasteries and devotional societies did not acquire wealth only to consume it in the forms of food, clothing, wages, fees, and ritual goods. They stored some of it as an ongoing investment to ensure activity in the future. Their viability as sites of investment depended in turn on the ironic ideology of separation. While receiving the material and spiritual support of donative communities, monasteries were expected to enact a habitus of separation through which they could reassure donors that their gifts were not being disbursed for other than religious gains. Finding the balance between connection and separation was not easy, as the chronicler of a Nanjing monastery indicates when he declares that monasteries are best situated neither in chaotic urban areas nor in desolate "out of the way places," but "between these extremes" (Sheng 1579, 1.14a). He was speaking of physical location, but his concern was broader: how to allow the social interaction essential for encouraging a supportive lay community while at the same time proving that the conduit for support coming in was not also a sluice letting it flow out.

In their effort to construct an ideology of institutional separation, Indian monks compiled monastic codes known collectively as the vinaya. (Hangzhou was the center of vinaya teachings in China.) The vinaya sets standards of behavior that regulate internal institutional affairs, for the most part doing so by telling stories: stories of monks who are faced with

difficult institutional choices and, for the purpose of instruction, usually end up making the wrong one. These early vinaya stories are narratives of great worry, burdening those whose grasp of the subtleties of Buddhist metaphysics was not complete and whose sense of reasonable action was hemmed in by the challenge of living the perfect life, often with the Buddha himself wading in to offer final judgment. The rhetorical force of these stories sometimes has to do with discovering that sensible solutions are no solutions at all. Exemplary in this regard is poor Dhaniya, a potter who retreated to the hills and built what turned into a series of straw huts as fuel gatherers, unimpressed with his claim of separation, kept dismantling his hut and carrying off the straw for fuel whenever he went away. His sensible solution to the problem was to build a mud hut, but the Buddha chastised him (with the reminder that he was merely a potter's son) for causing the deaths of the tiny creatures living in the mud (Horner 1949, 65–68). The Buddha does not solve Dhaniya's housing problem, leaving that to subsequent institution-builders to improvise.

Other vinaya stories take aim at a hopeless literalism that tends to arise when religious followers devise institutions they hope will enable them to live up to the ideals of an absent founder. The threat of literalism is acted out in the story of the monks of Vesālī asking the recluse Migalandika to kill them after the Buddha had told them to rid themselves of the impurity of the body. Again, the Buddha must intervene before many die and declare Migalandika to be a "sham recluse" (Horner 1949, 116–23). The storyteller uses sectarian scorn to condemn the man for taking life, but more important, he alerts Buddhists not to let their rules of conduct come under interpretations from outside. Such stories show that the early process of institutionalization was both competitive and haphazard. As I. B. Horner long ago suggested in her translation of these texts, the process was not laying down rules of conduct to help the religious attain perfection, but figuring out "by a long process of exclusion" what behavior was unsuitable and what was in need of restraint (ibid., ix).

The basic institutional features distinguishing Chinese who were Buddhist monks from those who were not—vegetarianism, teetotalism, sexual abstinence, distinctive clothing, renunciation of personal property—were in place by as early as the third century. Even so, Chinese monks experienced the same anxieties as their Indian brethren about institutionalizing practices they could regard as appropriate to their Buddhist commitments, and they continued to struggle over canonical standards for many centuries. For example, as the eminent monk Huiyuan (334–416) lay dying and his disciples urged on him a series of medicinal drinks, he refused them because they were made from liquor, which the vinaya forbade him from drinking. When he was offered a mixture of honey and water, he wanted a vinaya master to check whether there was canonical au-

thority permitting him to ingest this medicine—and died while the master was reading through his texts (Zürcher [1959] 1972, 253). His diffidence was remembered to be praised.

The same uncertainty lingered three centuries later when Yijing (635–713) traveled to India. His letters home were not about matters of doctrine but about hygiene, decorum, clothing—the daily-life institutional signs that mark separation (Kieschnick 1997, 16, 28). In fact, on his return Yijing devoted most of his time to translating a new vinaya, the Mūlasarvāstivāda, in the hope of creating a stable institutional code for Buddhist clerical life in China. The work continued beyond Yijing, resulting in the Pure Rules of Baizhang (749–814), the Chanyuan Code (1103), and still other major and minor codifications designed to make Buddhist institutions work to improve the willingness of monks and laypersons to take refuge in the Buddha.

The institutional nexus that has most strongly shadowed Buddhism, and not just in China, is the family. How monks have organized resources, imagined alternatives, and recruited members has had everything to do with the family, sometimes as a model, sometimes as a competitor. Although the monk who entered a monastic residence removed himself physically from his family and was expected to follow codes that marked his behavior off from that of his kin, he rarely severed economic and ritual links with his natal family. Indeed, he could still be expected to act in the ritual and material interests of the economic and fiscal unit to which he was attached by birth. However, while becoming formally separated from a kinship-based household freed the monk to engage in religious labor, it also threatened him with social marginality. (Some who became monks did so from initial positions of social disadvantage, being physically handicapped, blind, orphaned, ill, frustrated in their career aspirations, destitute, or too eccentric to live according to the codes of behavior operative in society at large—and often abandoned by their families to monasteries for these very reasons.) For that social marginality, the monastery had to compensate by creating a substitute economic and ritual household. This it did by imposing a range of familylike ties and obligations as well as conferring the familylike privileges of sustenance, property, and disposal of the body at death that held the household together in predictable ways. This is what Master Huanzhu (1203–63) does in his two sets of monastic rules for his Hangzhou monastery, which he literally entitled *Family Instructions* and *Family Customs*. Huanzhu writes as though operating in relation to the same institutional constraints as the family. In *Family Customs*, for instance, he bemoans what he saw as a turn toward luxury in recent years, with monks getting servants to do their work for them and failing to recognize that the daily tasks of living were integral to their training (Guangbin 1806, 6.27a). His lament about the moral decay of the younger generation sounds just like the sort of complaint one can find in

the family admonitions of kin-group elders. The parallel stems not only from the shared genre, but also from the reliance of both on the same principles of social hierarchy and collective property. These principles of institution-maintenance excluded younger members, whether monks or nephews, from decisions regarding access to household resources, however differently they phrased the moral purpose of that exclusion.

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At the start of this essay, I hinted that Max Weber might be leading himself and us astray in wanting to characterize Asian religion. Such a project rests on the conviction that there is a significant difference between the religions inside and outside that category. The problem is not eased by moving down one level of abstraction and deciding that the more important register of difference is between what is and is not Buddhism. In fact, my inclination in this essay has been to veer to the opposite pole, to suggest that Buddhism is much the same as any other religion in its reliance on institutions, however odd or unique some of its institutional arrangements may seem from a comparative perspective. When people organize their daily life through institutions governing kinship and property, it should come as no surprise (except to those caught in the modernist formalism that religion exists apart from daily life) that those who devote their lives to religious cultivation do the same. One might ask whether Buddhist institutions do this better or more poorly than religious institutions in other traditions, but any suggestion on that score would have to take account of the political and economic environment within which the institutions function, rather than any peculiarities one might want to allege of Buddhism.

A more instructive question might be to consider the differential effects of competing institutions within Buddhism. This sort of question turns our attention back to the constant pressure of choice on those who lived within the institutions regarding the wisdom or folly of their actions, which the compilation of vinaya codes was meant to, but could never, resolve. Buddhists in both China and Japan during this period often asked, for example, whether the institutions that succeeded in generating prosperity for the saṅgha contributed to or dulled their religious effort, and it is a question that some scholarship has taken up (Collcutt 1981, 296). I raised this question in a slightly different key at the beginning of this essay: does institutional success promote Buddhist teachings and draw the faithful in ever greater numbers, or must it lead to corruption, clerical disrepute, and the decline of Buddhism, something that only deinstitutionalization can reverse?

Being a successful institution-builder fearful of the dulling effects of material success, Zhuhong combined accommodation in practice with

vigilant rhetoric, suggesting an awareness that institutional success can cut both ways. Buddhology has tended to side more with his rhetoric than with his practice, preferring to slip up to the higher of the Two Truths and suspect spiritual loss where there is material gain. In historical research, this judgment sometimes gets tangled in the logical fallacy of assuming that because institutions never remain in a steady state but exhibit decline after prosperity, prosperity must have caused their decline, and that only a burst of religious zeal can bring Buddhism back into line with the higher Truth. To assert that religion decays when its institutions prosper and flourishes when they collapse is awkward, not least because it assumes that "Buddhism" can be less, or more, or other than, its institutions. When the barometer is property, as it often is, the knives of the zealous tend to come out in ways that overlook the fundamental condition for institutions, which is the means to perpetuate them. This conundrum puzzled Holmes Welch, who found in Buddhist institutions in twentieth-century China "piety, scholarship, and discipline" where earlier observers detected only "commercialism, illiteracy, and vice" (Welch 1967, 408). He marveled that the judgments could diverge so widely—without, perhaps, fully allowing that the institutions themselves could inspire contrary interpretations depending on what face the observer saw.

At the very least, the presence of an institution enables more than does its absence, even if what it enables is not exactly the orthodoxy or orthopraxy Buddhist theologians might hope for. What people do with their institutional capacity is a separate matter from whether they have them, and how they construe what they do, at yet another remove from the conditions that institutional functioning creates. Consider, for instance, the institution of literacy training within Buddhism. From Zhuhong's point of view, this cut both ways. It enabled the faithful to read the words of the Buddha, but it also opened to them other kinds of texts. As he put it, "studying non-Buddhist books and texts is not as good as being illiterate" (Cleary 1994, 31). Similarly, while Zhuhong understood that Yunqi Monastery enabled him to propagate the dharma more effectively than the small retreat he inhabited before the dharmic rain fell, he also knew that people could interact with monasteries in ways he did not like. He would have scorned the popular belief that the bigger the statue to which you prayed, the bigger the favors you would receive, though he would have conceded that the more the statue cost to make, the greater the merit it conferred on the donor. Institutional wealth nonetheless held for him the power to promote delusion. He was particularly suspicious of the prosperity of Putuo Island. Popular belief had it than when the three great calamities of flood, fire, and wind came at the end of the world, only three "mountains" would remain standing, and Putuo was one of them. Qiu Lian would not have been so troubled by such a belief, which might have struck him as mildly heterodox yet feeding the vitality of the institution. But Zhuhong

viewed this sort of literalism with the same dismay as he viewed literacy. The way to avoid the three calamities was not to flee to Putuo, he declared, but to give up the three sins of desire, anger, and attachment. Salvation has to do not with where you are, but what you do, he claimed (Zhuhong [1614]1899b, 14b).

By disconnecting Buddhist understanding from any specific site, Zhuhong reverts to his theological habit of consigning the institution to the second-order level of truth, pitting its unfortunate materiality against the first-order goal of achieving Buddhist enlightenment. The contradiction between enlightenment and institution may have worked to his advantage as a mentor to the Hangzhou elite, but all along the pilgrimage route from Hangzhou to Putuo, ordinary Buddhists burned with beliefs in the starkly tangible outcomes of the dreadful business of living and dying. Institutions meant far more to them, and perhaps even to gentry like Qiu Lian, for they were all that was visible to them and the closest they ever got to the Buddha in this life. Zhuhong was a Buddhist, but so were they. He and they interacted with the Buddhist institutions available to them to carry on the work of their salvation. Buddhist vows were his refuge, Putuo theirs, and Buddhism had the resilience to develop institutions that could accommodate both.

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PEDAGOGY

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick

1

What does it mean when our cats bring small, wounded animals into the house? Most people interpret these deposits as offerings or gifts—however ineptly chosen—meant to please or propitiate us, the cats' humans. But according to the anthropologist Elizabeth Marshall Thomas,

> Cats may be assuming the role of educator when they bring prey indoors to their human owners. . . . A mother cat starts teaching her kittens from the moment they start following her. . . . [L]ater she gives them hands-on practice by flipping victims in their direction, exactly as a cat does in play. Mother cats even bring [wounded] prey back to their nests or dens so that their homebound kittens can practice, especially if the prey is of manageable size. So perhaps cats who release living prey in our houses are trying to give us some practice, to hone our hunting skills. (Thomas 1994, 105)

For persons involved with cats or pedagogy, Thomas's supposition here may be unsettling in several ways. First there is the narcissistic wound.

Where we had thought to be powerful or admired, quasi-parental figures to our cats, we are cast instead in the role of clumsy newborns requiring special education. Worse, we have not even learned from this education. With all the cat's careful stage management, we seem especially stupid in having failed to so much as recognize the scene as one of pedagogy. Is it true that we can learn only when we are aware we are being taught? How have we so confused the illocutionary acts of gift giving and teaching? A further speech-act problem here involves imitation: the cat assumed (but how could we know?) that its own movements were templates for our mimicry, rather than meant to be accommodated or graciously accepted by us. A gesture intended to evoke a symmetrical response has instead evoked a complementary one.

Then again, even if we had recognized the cat's project as pedagogical, it's possible we would not have responded appropriately by "honing our hunting skills" on the broken, twitching prey. Possibly we do not want to learn the lesson our cat is teaching. Here, in an affective register, is another mistake about mimesis: the cat's assumption that we identify with it strongly enough to want to act more like it (e.g., eat live rodents).

For a human educator, the cat's unsuccessful pedagogy resonates with plenty of everyday nightmares. There are students who view their teachers' hard work as a servile offering in their honor—a distasteful one to boot. Or there are students who accept the proffered formulations gratefully, as a gift, but without thinking to mimic the process of their production. No doubt this describes a common impasse faced by psychoanalysts and psychotherapists as well. And in my experience teaching privileged undergraduates, I sometimes had a chilling intimation that while I relied on their wish to mirror me and my skills and knowledge, they were motivated instead by seeing me as a cautionary figure: what might become of them if they weren't cool enough, sleek enough, adaptable enough to escape from the thicket of academia into the corporate world.

Alongside the frustrations of the feline pedagogue are the more sobering ones of the stupid human owner. It's so often too late when we finally recognize the "resistance" (mouse flipping) of a student/patient as a form of pedagogy aimed at us and inviting our mimesis. We may wonder afterward whether and how we could have managed to turn into the particular teacher/therapist needed by each one. Perhaps their implication has been "Try it my way—if you're going to teach me." Or even "I have something more important to teach you than you have to teach me."

II

Among the relations of near-miss pedagogy I'll discuss in this essay, obviously the foundational one transpires between Asia and Euro-America on the subject of Buddhism itself. Over the past two decades, even as the

long-standing presence of Buddhist elements in U.S. culture has become explosively visible, critical scholarship has explored the vast, systemic misunderstandings and cross purposes that seem to underlie this trans-Pacific pedagogy. An "American Buddhist" reader of the critical scholarship might well be chastened to learn in how many crucial, near-invisible ways her access to the Asian texts, practices, and understandings has been compromised by the history of their transmission to the West. Donald Lopez, for example, summarizes his exemplary anthology of critical essays by declaring that what has become available to modern Western readers is only a "hypostatized object, called 'Buddhism,'" which, "because it had been created by Europe, could also be controlled by it" (Lopez 1995, 7). Among the distortions manifest in such hypostatization, as the contributors to that volume show, have been a narrative of decline that delegitimates the modern and the vernacular in Buddhist studies; an eagerness to attribute Western roots to Asian Buddhist representation; histories of complicity with nativist and colonialist projects in Japan as well as fascist ones in Italy; arrogant and ignorant claims, such as Jung's, to speak for an exotic Oriental psyche; and a double-binding enlistment of Asian Buddhists in the incompatible roles of informant and guru to scholars from the West.

What is the force of such very critical findings? How and to whom do they matter? Common sense suggests that their impact will fall on nonacademic students of Buddhism more lightly than on scholars in the field. Not only are these exacting studies (most of them published by university presses) less accessible to nonscholars, but the prime motives for reading them are also likely to differ. To put it crudely, academic scholars of Buddhism are vocationally aimed at finding a path, however asymptotic, toward a knowledge of their subject(s) that would be ever less distorted by ignorance, imperialist presumption, and wishful thinking, or by characteristic thought patterns of Western culture. On the other hand, the attachment of the nonacademic reader to the truth-value of readings on Buddhism may rest on a good deal more pragmatic base. The question, is this [account] accurate or misleading? may give way for these readers to the question, will this [practice] work or won't it?

The historical place and moment in which the latter question is asked are distinctive ones appropriately described in terms of pluralistic, free-market-like forces within essentially secular societies (Berger 1966). More recently, the somewhat stigmatizing rubrics of "self-help," "New Age," and "therapy-like" have suggested an even less respectable market-niche specification for popularized Buddhist teachings aimed at non-Asian consumers. It is from that niche that the present essay emerges, reflecting a nonspecialist educator's five-year engagement with English-language "Buddhist" literature ranging from mass-market to scholarly. My first, self-helping motive for that engagement was frankly soteriologi-

cal, prompted by receiving in middle age a diagnosis of metastatic cancer. As this essay shows, however, my interest in the Buddhist literature of death and dying proved inextricable as well from an identification with pedagogical passions and antinomies that recur throughout the Mahāyāna traditions.

The dominant scholarly topos, and indeed often the self-description, for Western popularizations of Buddhist thought is *adaptation*, whether such adaptation is hailed or decried. It implies that an Asian original is adapting or being adapted for the essentially different habits, sensibilities, weltanschauung of the West. By the same token, a common defense of adaptational practices is that Buddhism has often, historically, been changed by, as much as it has changed, the varied cultures encountered in its peripatetic history.

This essay, by focusing on pedagogy as both topic and relation, attempts something different from such a defense: it will suggest that *adaptation* is not the only model for Western encounters with popularized Buddhist teachings. Adaptation emphasizes how an original is being altered, modified, fitted for a different use; maybe even decentered, drawn out of an earlier orbit by the gravitational pull of an alien body. To a certain degree the aptness of this topos is undeniable. Furthermore, there is plenty of Buddhist scriptural warrant for it: the Pāli canon, sūtras, and *jātaka* stories (tales of previous lives of the Buddha) all contain examples—very privileged ones—of teachings that have been radically adapted to their auditors' varied capacities and frames of reference.

In this essay, however, I want to try out different resources from the great treasury of Buddhist phenomenologies of learning and teaching. What if, for example, an equally canonical topos such as *recognition/realization* describes some dynamics of Western Buddhist popularization better than does the one-directional topos of *adaptation*? Certainly, it is better suited to the subjectivity and the epistemological concerns of those who consume these popularizations.

A subsidiary aim of this essay is to illustrate some consequences of what is by now a truism about Asian religious thought: that it has "arrived" and been influential in Western thought in many forms through many different encounters over many centuries. Thus, by now a Buddhist encounter with "Western culture" must also be understood as an encounter with a palimpsest of Asian currents and influences (as well as vice versa). For example, Americans often shop for Buddhist-influenced books on the Self-Help shelves in popular bookstores. But if the marketing rubric of self-help has an almost alarmingly American sound, isn't that at least in part because it harkens so directly to the early nineteenth-century impulse of Emerson's "Self-Reliance" and Whitman's "Song of Myself"?—an impulse, that is, already consciously involved in direct and indirect interchange with Buddhist and Hindu teaching?

The first book I encountered in my Buddhist exploration, and one that probably, in some unexamined ways, still structures my involvement with Buddhism as a topic, was Sogyal Rinpoche's best-selling popularization, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying.* Constructed as an extended gloss on the so-called Tibetan Book of the Dead, it offers more broadly a beginner's introduction to Tibetan Buddhism and makes the still wider claim (on the back cover of the paperback edition) to be "a manual for life and death. . . the definitive new spiritual classic for our times."

More than Zen Buddhism or Theravāda meditation—other Buddhist traditions that achieved widespread popularity among non-Asian Americans in the twentieth century—Tibetan Buddhism risks seeming inextricable from the cultural circumstances and history of its Asian development. Perhaps the closer focus on meditation in the other traditions gives them an illusion of transparency and universal accessibility that Tibetan Buddhism lacks. Perhaps the relative geographic accessibility of Japan and Southeast Asia leaves Tibetan Buddhism so much the more densely entangled (in Western eyes) with the local; with opacities of language, custom, history; with opacities of "belief"—in short (as the earlier Buddhologists would have it), "superstition." The Dalai Lama regularly avows, all over the world, "My religion is kindness." But to move beyond that seemingly pellucid introduction is promptly to encounter practices and cosmologies whose weirdness—from a Western point of view—can seem nearly irreducible.

How does Sogyal Rinpoche negotiate the danger of losing readers in this cultural gap? The opening paragraph of the preface is arresting.

> I was born in Tibet, and I was six months old when I entered the monastery of my master Jamyang Khyentse Chöki Lodrö, in the province of Kham. In Tibet we have a unique tradition of finding the reincarnations of great masters who have passed away. They are chosen young and given a special education to train them to become the teachers of the future. I was given the name Sogyal, even though it was only later that my master recognized me as the incarnation of Tertön Sogyal, a renowned mystic who was one of his own teachers and a master of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama.
>
> My master, Jamyang Khyentse, was tall for a Tibetan, and he always seemed to stand a good head above others in a crowd. He had silver hair, cut very short, and kind eyes that glowed with humor. His ears were long, like those of the Buddha. (Sogyal 1993, xi)

This fairytale-like opening plunges a reader disorientingly into an unfamiliar system of analogues and incarnations. Strategically, however, the reader's point of view is simultaneously attached to the more radical disorientation of the six-month-old (his parents unmentioned) who "entered

the monastery," acquired a "master," and underwent obscure processes of being found or "chosen" before he could either walk or talk.

The rest of the preface follows a similar strategy of parallel initiations. As readers, we get information like, "In Tibet it was never enough simply to have the name of an incarnation, you always had to earn respect, through your learning and through your spiritual practice" (Sogyal 1993, xi). At the same time, another element of the authorial voice represents a child trying to make sense of its confusing surroundings and status. ("I was a naughty child. . . . The next time I fled to hide, my tutor came into the room, did three prostrations to my master, and dragged me out. I remember thinking, as I was hauled out of the room, how strange it was that he did not seem to be afraid of my master" [ibid., xii].) The strangeness encountered by the child seems to belong both to his unusual *tulku* (incarnate lama) status and, at the same time, to a more general strangeness (or givenness) that a world presents to anyone unversed in it—Western reader or Tibetan child.

Sogyal Rinpoche's preface, then, offers a past tense in which a child is acculturated by fits and starts alongside an implicit present tense in which a reader is. Sogyal's ingenuous diction and sentence structure laminate the two together. But the double initiation also proceeds under two other, overarching aegises. One is a distinctive emotional tonality, that of gratitude mixed with tenderness. The other, to which that tonality attaches, is the continuing influence of "my master." "Everyone called him *Rinpoche*, 'the Precious One,' which is the title given to a master, and when he was present no other teacher would be addressed in that way. His presence was so impressive that many affectionately called him 'the Primordial Buddha'" (Sogyal 1993, xiii). In the narrator's childhood, he is a sensory presence.

> Usually I slept next to my master, on a small bed at the foot of his own. One sound I shall never forget is the clicking of the beads of his *mala*, his Buddhist rosary, as he whispered his prayers. When I went to sleep he would be there, sitting and practicing; and when I awoke in the morning he would already be awake and sitting and practicing again, overflowing with blessing and power. As I opened my eyes and saw him, I would be filled with a warm and cozy happiness. He had such an air of peace about him. (Ibid.)

Equally, extending beyond his death to the present tense of the reader's initiation, "Jamyang Khyentse is the ground of my life, and the inspiration of this book. He was the incarnation of a master who had transformed the practice of Buddhism in our country" (ibid., xi). "I have heard that my master said that I would help continue his work, and certainly he always treated me like his own son. I feel that what I have been able to achieve now in my work, and the audience I have been able to reach, is a ripening

of the blessing he gave me" (ibid., xii). And the preface ends: "I pray this book will transmit something of his great wisdom and compassion to the world, and, through it, you too, wherever you are, can come into the presence of his wisdom mind and find a living connection with him" (ibid., xiv).

While there remain many details in the preface that will puzzle a reader unfamiliar with Tibetan Buddhist traditions, its simple language will already have involved readers in a series of complex, affectively steeped pedagogical relations. The mobility of teacher-student positioning is embodied first in Sogyal himself, who begins the preface as an infant and ends it as a teacher—but without apparent change in the quality of his dependence on his "master." Indeed, along the way he has been "recognized" as an incarnation of his master's own teacher. Which of them, then, will be the reader's master? Apparently some process of ventriloquism/impregnation between them assures that there is no need to choose, indeed no way of discriminating, between Sogyal Rinpoche the student-teacher and that master Rinpoche in whose radiant presence no one else can be one. In fact, "For me he was the Buddha, of that there was no question in my mind. And everyone else recognized it as well" (Sogyal 1993, xiii). This teaching situation, evidently, thrives on personality and intimate emotional relation. At the same time, it functions as a mysteriously powerful solvent of individual identity.

The dissolution of identity is a commonplace about "Buddhism," to be sure. But in fact Sogyal's preface has said little about Buddhism per se and nothing at all about its tenets. Rather than into "Buddhism," a reader who begins this book is, by means of her disorientation, interpellated into a rich yet dissolvent relationality of pedagogy itself. In this world it is as though relation *could only be* pedagogical—and for *that* reason, radically transindividual. "Whenever I share that atmosphere of my master with others, they can sense the same profound feeling it aroused in me. What then did Jamyang Khyentse inspire in me? An unshakable confidence in the teachings, and a conviction in the central and dramatic importance of the master" (Sogyal 1993, xiii).

IV

Admittedly, it's easy to make the case that pedagogical relation is substantively central to Vajrayāna Buddhism—or "lamaism," as nineteenth-century Europe called it, based on the exceptional prominence given to the lama/guru as initiatory teacher. Not only Vajrayāna but the whole of Mahāyāna Buddhism, however, is radically self-defined in pedagogical terms. What the Mahāyāna (greater vehicle) is "greater" than, after all, are the *śrāvaka-yāna* and the *pratyekabuddha-yāna*: the "lesser" vehicles whose perfected beings, the nonteaching *śrāvaka*s (auditors) and *pratyeka-*

*buddha*s (solitary awakened ones), are students or autodidacts only, who achieve nirvāṇa only for their own sake.

The Mahāyāna ideal, by direct contrast, attaches to the bodhisattva, "one who aspires to the attainment of buddhahood and devotes himself to altruistic deeds, especially deeds that cause others to attain enlightenment" (Chang 1983, 471). Thus, like *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s, the bodhisattva, too, remains a student and aspirant, advised to "be the pupil of everyone all the time" (Śāntideva 1995, 40). For the bodhisattva, however, the pedagogical imperative of occasioning others' enlightenment takes priority even over one's own spiritual advancement: a bodhisattva defers entering nirvāṇa until after all other sentient beings have learned to do so. Thomas Cleary's translation of *bodhisattva* as "enlightening being," therefore, with its double reference to enlightening others and growing more enlightened oneself, seems an apt way to express this central condensation, which does more to identify the bodhisattva's positional axes as pedagogical ones than to specify his or her placement on these axes (Cleary 1989, 2). Furthermore, any person's commitment to Mahāyāna Buddhism involves a location in the bodhisattva dimensions; the "bodhisattva path" along the plane formed by these axes is not reserved for the spiritually advanced. As the defining figure of Mahāyāna Buddhism, the bodhisattva in turn is defined almost simply as a being whose commitment to pedagogical relationality approaches the horizon of eternity.

Although (or because) self-evident, it may also be worth emphasizing that like Plato's dialogues, the vastly more voluminous Buddhist sūtras in fact comprise nothing but a series of dramatized scenes of instruction. Further, among the multitudinous forms and levels of beings that populate the sūtras—asuras, bodhisattvas and bodhisattva-*mahāsattva*s, *brahmā*s, *deva*s and *devaputra*s, dragons, *gandharva*s, *garuḍa*s, gods, householders, magically produced beings, monks, non-returners and once-returners, *pratyekabuddha*s, *ṛṣi*s, *śakra*s, *śramaṇa*s and *śrāvaka*s, stream-enterers, *yakṣa*s—none wishes for anything more precious than to receive the dharma. In Mahāyāna scriptures, scenes of teaching and learning are universally desired ends as much as they are instrumental means.

V

In 1844, when Elizabeth Palmer Peabody published in *The Dial* the first translation from a sūtra into the English language, her immediate readership comprised a group of her Boston-area Transcendentalist friends. The selection she chose from Eugène Burnouf's French translation of the *Lotus Sūtra*, while sharing the emphasis of that sūtra on the ultimate unity of Buddhist teachings, nonetheless distinguishes carefully among the vehicles of Buddhism. Her care may rather have mystified her readers, given that at that point the most scholarly among them barely distinguished be-

tween brahmin and Buddhist. Peabody, however, took the trouble of explaining to them in footnotes that, for example, a *pratyekabuddha* "is a kind of selfish Buddha, who possesses science without endeavoring to spread it" (Peabody 1844, 393).

But this discrimination is itself in the service of a paean to the nondiscriminating amplitude of the Buddha's pedagogy. "I explain the law to creatures, after having recognized their inclinations," he says in Peabody's selection. "I proportion my language to the subject and the strength of each."

> It is, O Kaçyapa, as if a cloud, raising itself above the universe, covered it entirely, hiding all the earth. . . . Spreading in an uniform manner an immense mass of water, and resplendent with the lightning which escape from its sides, it makes the earth rejoice. And the medicinal plants which have burst from the surface of this earth, the herbs, the bushes, the kings of the forest, little and great trees; the different seeds, and every thing which makes verdure; all the vegetables which are found in the mountains, in the caverns, and in the groves; the herbs, the bushes, the trees, this cloud fills them with joy, it spreads joy upon the dry earth, and it moistens the medicinal plants; and this homogeneous water of the cloud, the herbs and the bushes pump up, every one according to its force and its object. . . . Absorbing the water of the cloud by their trunks, their twigs, their bark, their branches, their boughs, their leaves, the great medicinal plants put forth flowers and fruits. Each one according to its strength, according to its destination, and conformably to the nature of the germ whence it springs, produces a distinct fruit, and nevertheless there is one homogeneous water like that which fell from the cloud. So, O Kaçyapa, the Buddha comes into the world, like a cloud which covers the universe . . . and teaches the true doctrine to creatures. (Peabody 1844, 398–99)

Presumably the resonance of such a passage for Transcendentalist readers would not come from its promise of "true doctrine," but rather from its focus on a difficult problematic already internal to their Romantic preoccupation with *Bildung*: how a mode of teaching could nurture the individual fates as well as the common needs of those receiving it.

For if ever there was a group as mad for pedagogy as the dramatis personae of the sūtras, it must have been the Transcendentalists. With the exception of Thoreau, each of them seemed to attach her or his most vital hope to some practice of viva voce pedagogy—and in each case to one that, independent of university or church credentialing, actively deprecated the claim of authority in favor of that of experiential demand. Also as in the world of the sūtras, but much more unusual in the West, the range of these practices—from the Temple School to Margaret Fuller's Conversations to the Concord School of Philosophy—involved people from toddlers to the aged, with no particular phase singled out as uniquely appropriate for education. Thus, that aspect of the Mahāyāna ideal that

refused to differentiate at the level of identity between teacher and learner coincided with their ideal. Even when adults taught young children, as Elizabeth Peabody writes in *Record of a School*, a detailed account of Bronson Alcott's short-lived Temple School,

> a teacher never should forget that the mind he is directing, may be on a larger scale than his own; that its sensibilities may be deeper, tenderer, wider; that its imagination may be infinitely more rapid; that its intellectual power of proportioning and reasoning may be more powerful; and he should ever have the humility to feel himself at times in the place of the child, and the magnanimity to teach him how to defend himself against his own (i.e. the teacher's) influence. (Peabody 1835, 19–20)

Bronson Alcott also followed the principle, "To teach, endeavouring to preserve the understanding from implicit belief" (Alcott [1836] 1991, 318). Another of his self-injunctions: "To teach, treating pupils with uniform familiarity, and patience, and with the greatest kindness, tenderness, and respect" (ibid., 319).

In the Transcendentalists' formal and informal educational manifestos, there is no reference to actual Asian practices of teaching; even their basis in a familiarity with Asian scriptures is very attenuated. In the 1830s the Hindu and Buddhist interests of the Transcendentalists were overwhelmingly mediated by those of European Romanticism. Yet the forms taken by German and British scholarly interest in Asia at this period were pedagogically imagined in a different sense. Comparative methods in both philology and religion had resulted in a view of India, in particular, as the maternal origin or "cradle" of Greek, Christian, and indeed all European language and religion (Halbfass 1988, 61).

Thus, Peabody's reference is to orientalist philology as well as domestic sentiment when she writes,

> There is nothing in true education which has not its germ in the maternal sentiment; and every mother would find more of the spiritual philosophy in her own affections, if her mind would but read her heart. . . . [W]hen an inadequate philosophy, long prevailing, has adulterated in many different ways, the natural language of the heart and imagination, it is especially necessary to newly wash, in the "undefiled wells" of feeling and thought, whence language first arose, those strong and forcible mother-words which grew out of the philosophy of innate ideas, and which, since its decline, have been obscured and kicked aside as unregarded "pebbles, in the dusty wheel-ruts of custom." (Peabody 1835, 181–82)

She enacts a similar double narrative of spiritual ontogeny and phylogeny in remarking, "The first stage of true religion, perhaps, is necessarily pantheism. And babyhood is the right time for pantheism. It will die out, and give place to Christian theism, as individuality is realized" (ibid., 183).

Although she conventionally describes contemporary Asia as crushed by superannuated "institutions and idols that have degraded the race below men" (Peabody 1835, 187), and in spite of her more than nominal Christian affiliation, Peabody also, reasoning from "the genius of the primitive languages," saw in Western monotheism a radical fall from the identificatory spiritual idealism of the ancient East. Fortunately, however, there intervened what both she and Alcott viewed as its crucial pedagogical reembodiment in classical Greece.

> The theoretical philosophy of Anaxagoras was the reassertion in Greece, of the religious philosophy of the east. Mind is God, said the great teacher of Pericles and Socrates. And hence sprang up in Athens, the practical philosophy of *know thyself*. If the human being is a generation of that Spirit which preceded the existence of matter, (so reasoned Socrates,) then a consciousness of its own laws, i.e. of itself, must be the point from which all things else are to be viewed; and without affirming any thing, he began to inquire himself, and to lead others to inquire, into the distinction between the accidental and the real. (Ibid., 189)

The view of Christian *Bildung* that Alcott and Peabody, and later Fuller, practiced at the Temple School owed to the eastward-looking Plato more than its Socratically dialogic form—conceiving, in Peabody's words, "that all other souls are potentially what Jesus was actually; that every soul is an incarnation of the infinite; that it never will think clearly till it has mentally transcended time and space; that it never will feel in harmony with itself until its sensibility is commensurate with all beings" (ibid., 191).

VI

Thus, although it was the first sūtra translation in English, by the time *The Dial* published Peabody's pages from the *Lotus Sūtra*—almost a decade after her *Record of a School*—the Transcendentalists were well aware that their exposure to Buddhism was scarcely virginal. They knew that the ancient Greeks as well as the German Romantics, their two main points of identification in "Western" culture, wrote prolifically of Asia as a likely place of intellectual, linguistic, and spiritual origin (Halbfass 1988, 2–23, 69–138). Little as they were in a position to know about Buddhist and Hindu thought, their own thought, as they knew well, was not innocent of but to a great extent already constituted by it. They would even have posited with the midcentury Indologist Max Müller, "We all come from the East—all that we value most has come to us from the East, and in going to the East . . . everybody ought to feel that he is going to his 'old home,' full of memories, if only he can read them" (Müller 1883, 29).

Without dramatizing the Germanic uncanniness of Müller's image, I would like to pause and acknowledge in this New England moment a

very indicative hermeneutic situation. It is, I believe, still that of many Western-raised inquirers who seek encounters with Asian thought, aware at once of both a blanketing ignorance and the always already internal positioning of Asian within "Western" intellectual and spiritual culture.

There is an American brand of popularizing Buddhist audiotapes (Sogyal Rinpoche, Lama Surya Das, meditation music) called "Sounds True." I used to think this an unfortunate choice of name for spiritual teachings, imagining it spoken with a skeptical shrug: "*Sounds* true, but . . ." More recently, though, I've noticed that for all its modesty, "sounds true" is a good description of how it feels to assent to or learn from these teachings. It describes mainly an exchange of recognition—at best, of surprising recognition: as if the template of truth were already there inside the listener, its own lineaments clarified by the encounter with a teaching which it can then apprehend as "true."

As with the Transcendentalists, it's hard to know how to think about this hermeneutic situation. It would be plausible to discredit such "learning" as completely tautological, the projection of Western commonplaces, our already known, onto the glamorizing screen of a fantasized Orient. Or this encounter could be described as a scene of adaptation, where the Western consumer selects from a complex Buddhist tradition only those elements that symmetrically answer to specific situational needs, and arrogantly labels the result Buddhism *tout court*.

Another possibility is that the sense of recognition arises from bringing together with its Buddhist original some historically Buddhist idea now naturalized by its continued usage in Western thought. For example, any emphasis on nondualism is liable to "sound true" to me; and I'm not the first to have tried to trace a tropism toward the nondual historically through, say, deconstruction and its modern predecessors to a series of progressively more speculative Asian contacts extending backward through various Christian heresies, Neoplatonism, Gnosticism, Plato, the pre-Socratics . . .

This genealogical perspective, however, opens onto two kinds of infinite regress. One is historical: at the time of the Transcendentalists as now, there was already a strong tradition (it goes back at least to the Renaissance) of speculative reconstructions that share the same shape and goal. Thus, what begins as an empiricist survey of intellectual history quickly turns to a vertiginous mirror-play of what may be quite phantasmatic historiographies involving hermetic, esoteric, Masonic, theosophical, occult, Rosicrucian, and other such Western-based traditions. At the same time, the perspective of personal history is equally frustrating. If "Sounds True" tapes sound true to me, it can't be simply because they sound like deconstruction; after all, what made deconstruction in turn sound true? As best I can remember (for what that's worth), nondualistic teachings have always sounded truest to me.

A further possibility in this hermeneutic situation is that the teachings one gravitates to sound true because they *are* true; and that certain people, Eastern and Western, simply recognize them as such through some kind of individual access to an ahistorical, world-overarching stratum of the *philosophia perennis*.

Each of these divergent ways of viewing the situation has its own history and scholarship, and each makes very different appeals to the subjective groundings of experience, thought, and politics. They have in common, however, their leaving untouched the apparently tautological nature of the pedagogical scene itself. By the criterion of "sounds true," one can apparently learn only what one already knows—whether one knows it through one's "own" native culture, through long-term cultural introjection of historically foreign ideas, or through direct intuition.

Buddhist pedagogy is hardly the only kind that enters upon this familiar hermeneutic circle. The Heideggerian paradox/impasse/scandal, of being able to learn only versions of what you already know, or find only what you have already learned to look for, is both theoretically and strategically familiar across the disciplines of Western scholarship. Here the hermeneutic tautology is always available as a fulcrum of delegitimization, yet never fully integrated in the practice of any disciplinary protocol—for how could it be? At most it is itself an object of study.

In Buddhist pedagogical thought, however, the apparent tautology of learning what you already know does not seem to constitute a paradox, nor an impasse, nor a scandal. It is not even a problem. If anything, it is a deliberate and defining practice.

When Elizabeth Palmer Peabody one day walked smack into a tree, she was naturally asked if she had not seen it in her path. "I saw it," she became famous for replying, "but I did not *realize* it" (Ronda 1999, 261). If the story points to a certain Transcendental fuzziness, it also indicates her interest in a distinctively Buddhist opening-out of the psychology and phenomenology of knowing. In modern Western common sense, after all, to learn something is to cross a simple threshold; once you've *learned* it you *know* it, and then you will always know it until you *forget* it (or maybe *repress* it). In this model, learning the same thing again makes as much sense as getting the same pizza delivered twice.

Colloquially, though only colloquially, even English differentiates among, say, being exposed to a given idea or proposition, catching on to it, taking it seriously, having it sink in, and wrapping your mind around it. To the degree that these can be differentiated, of course, the problem of tautology disappears. In Buddhist thought, the space of such differences is central rather than epiphenomenal. To go from *knowing* something to *realizing* it, in Peabody's formulation, is seen as a densely processual undertaking that can require years or lifetimes. Even to "tolerate" the incomprehensible idea that all things are unborn, for example—even for a

bodhisattva—involves three separate evolutionary stages of knowing the same thing (Thurman 1976, 5). And one's developing understanding of form passes such distinct milestones as the seeing of form; the seeing of external form via the concept of internal formlessness; the physical realization of liberation from form and its successful consolidation; the full entrance into the infinity of space by transcending all conceptions of matter; the full entrance into the infinity of consciousness, having transcended the sphere of the infinity of space; the full entrance into the infinity of nothingness, having transcended the sphere of the infinity of consciousness; and the full entrance into the sphere of neither consciousness nor unconsciousness, having transcended the sphere of nothingness (ibid., 153).

A likely reason that Buddhism places its rich psychology of learning at front and center in this way, rather than deprecating any apparent circularity, as most Western thought does, is that the fact of recognition itself is an end as well as a means of Buddhist knowing. In many Mahāyāna manifestations especially, *realization* substantively means *recognition*—of the Buddha, the nature of mind, phenomena, the guru, emptiness, apparitions in the *bardo* (the intermediate state, as between death and rebirth)—*as not other than* oneself. Clearly, such recognition can be no perfunctory cognitive event.

A new fold, then, in the Transcendentalists' hermeneutic situation and in some of our own. The Western reader drawn to Buddhist pedagogical thinking may be most at risk of decontextualizing and misrecognizing it, riding roughshod over its cultural difference, even recasting it in her own image—the worst orientalizing vices identified by recent critical scholarship—just to the degree that she can apprehend it through a Buddhist sense of knowing rather than a Western one. But conversely, from within the framework of the Buddhist respect for realization as both dense process and active practice, a theorized scholarly skepticism as to whether Buddhism can be known by Westerners may reveal its own dependence on an eerily thin Western phenomenology of "knowing."

VII

Whenever I want my cat to look at something instructive—a full moon, say, or a photograph of herself—a predictable choreography ensues. I point at the thing I want her to look at, and she, roused to curiosity, fixes her attention on the tip of my extended index finger and begins to explore it with delicate sniffs.

Every time this scene of failed pedagogy gets enacted—and it's frequent, since I am no better at learning not to point than my cat is at learning not to sniff—the two of us are caught in a pedagogical problematic that has fascinated teachers of Buddhism since Śākyamuni. In fact, its

technical name in Buddhist writing is "pointing at the moon," and it opens upon a range of issues about both language and the nonlinguistic that became engaging to Western teachers and learners only in the twentieth century.

It seems likely that to Elizabeth Peabody, Bronson Alcott, and many other nineteenth-century Western teachers, the recognition/realization aspect of Buddhist pedagogy discussed above allowed for significant misrecognition above all in the image of their own hope for a seamless pedagogy of affirmative identification. As Thomas Tweed points out in *The American Encounter with Buddhism: 1844–1912*, even the most interested Americans historically resisted most of the crucially negative aspects of Buddhism. From the beginnings of European Indology, for instance, and despite expressions of the same preference in classical Greece, Western scholarship presented a stony wall of incredulity to both the Hindu and Buddhist assumption that the happiest fate is not to be born (or reborn). Schopenhauer and the later Freud aside, to find a motive in nonbeing was thought, for some reason, to fall outside the definitional bounds of the human. The monism of the Transcendentalists, likewise, quite refused the whole negational turn in Buddhism; the intuition that nature and spirit are one, and solidity an illusion of the senses, never emerged onto a teaching of emptiness.

Similarly, the eager Transcendentalist apprehension of learning as a form of recognition never grappled, as have many Buddhist traditions, with the corresponding question of how—indeed whether—learning might proceed in the absence of spontaneous recognition. The multilayeredness and long duration of bodhisattva pedagogy, after all, point to its difficulty as clearly as narratives of sudden enlightenment point to its great simplicity. Bronson Alcott's sense of mental limits attached exclusively to the difficulty of conceiving anything negative. As Peabody notes, in one lesson "the word *none* was referred to its origin in the words *no-one*. Mr. Alcott asked them if they could think of *nothing at all*, or if they did not think of *some* or *one* in order to be able to get the abstract idea of nothing. . . . Mr. Alcott thinks it wise to let the children learn the limits of the understanding by occasionally feeling them" (Peabody 1835, 29).

For Peabody herself, as for Alcott, the nature of language itself raised few pedagogical problems—if anything, it offered a providentially apt medium for spiritual instruction. "Language," she writes, "being of both natures, spiritual and material, makes an elemental sphere for the intellectual life, beyond the material; in short, makes a metaphysical world, in which the finite and the infinite spirits commune with other finite spirits and the Infinite One" (Peabody 1888, 93). Even less problematized, however, was the theoretical priority of a resort to the nonverbal, ostensive method—essentially, pointing at things. Alcott's General Maxims include the instruction "To teach principally a Knowledge of things, not

of words," and "To teach, illustrating by sensible and tangible objects" (Alcott [1836] 1991, 318). Over the years, and under the increasing influence of the German Romantic educator Froebel, Peabody grew even more emphatic about indicating "things": "It is a first principle that the object, motion, or action, should precede the word that names them. . . . It is the laws of *things* that are the laws of *thought*" (Peabody 1888, 48).

Buddhist pedagogy is far less sanguine about both saying things and pointing to them. As Walter Hsieh summarizes,

> Employing speech as a skillful means, the Buddha spoke many sutras, which should only be taken as "the finger that points to the moon," not the moon itself. The Buddha said, "I have not taught a single word during the forty-nine years of my Dharma preaching." The sutras often admonish us to rely on meaning rather than on mere words. . . . Readers should bear in mind that it is not the words themselves but the attachment to words that is dangerous. The crucial function of the sutras as a finger pointing to the moon should be upheld. (Chang 1983, 23n20)

The implication of the finger/moon image is that pointing may invite less misunderstanding than speech, but that even its nonlinguistic concreteness cannot shield it from the slippery problems that surround reference.

To put the issue another way, the overattached learner—my cat, say—is mistaking the kind of speech act, or we can just say the kind of act, that pointing is: for me the relevant illocution is "to indicate," while for her, it is "to proffer." It is the same kind of mistake that Stephen Batchelor finds in the creedal treatment of the Buddha's four noble truths as parallel, propositional *beliefs* ("'Life is Suffering,' 'The Cause of Suffering Is Craving'—and so on"), rather than as active and performatively differentiated *injunctions* (to "*understanding* anguish, *letting go* of its origins, *realizing* its cessation, and *cultivating* the path") (Batchelor 1997, 4–5).

Perhaps the most distinctive way in which Mahāyāna Buddhism has tried to negotiate the "finger pointing at the moon" issue is through the ostensive language of thusness or suchness (Sanskrit *tathatā*). As Kūkai writes, "The Dharma is beyond speech, but without speech it cannot be revealed. Suchness transcends forms, but without depending on forms it cannot be realized. Though one may at times err by taking the finger pointing at the moon to be the moon itself, the buddha's teachings which guide people are limitless" (Hakeda 1972, 145–46). When a buddha is referred to as the *tathāgata*, or "thus-come" one, or when a twelfth-century Japanese text advises that even momentary contemplation of the "suchness" of ordinary things is a guarantee of speedy enlightenment (Stone 1999, 199), the gesture of indication is being used in at least a double way. It alludes to the supposed self-evidence and immediacy of the phenomenon pointed at, but at the same time to its ineffability, ungraspability, and indeed emptiness of self-nature. "In its dynamic aspect," in W. T. de Bary's formulation, thusness is "manifestation, the phenomenon, the

realm of Facts" (de Bary [1969] 1972, 167). In this sense it could be compared to *hecceity*, Duns Scotus's Latin word for "thusness," which Deleuze borrows to designate the sheer presence or "perfect individuality" of, for example, "an hour, a day, a season . . . a degree of heat, an intensity" (Deleuze 1977, 92). In its "static aspect" in Buddhism, on the other hand, de Bary says, "Suchness is the Void, the noumenon, the realm of Principle" (de Bary [1969] 1972, 167). And in this sense of emptiness, suchness may again correspond to Deleuze's hecceity—as anything that, while evoking perception, involves neither intrinsic identity nor a split between perceiver and perceived.

Thusness seems, then, to compact into a single gesture—the baseline pedagogical recourse of pointing—the double movement of an apperceptive attraction to phenomena in all their immeasurable, inarticulable specificity, and at the same time an evacuation of the apparent ontological grounds of their specificity and, indeed, their being. The endless vibrancy of this resonant double movement suggests what the Dalai Lama may mean when he offers, as an image of emptiness, the inside of a bell (Dalai Lama 1997). *Tathatā*, moreover, besides involving form with emptiness, involves all forms with all others, nondually—"each identical with the totality of all that is and encompassing all others within itself" (Stone 1999, 201).

Hence finally, in the view of thusness, even the distinction between finger and moon dissolves, and with it perhaps the immemorial injunction against confusing them. As a contemporary Zen abbot notes, "The finger pointing to the moon is the moon, and the moon is the finger. . . . [T]hey realize each other" (Loori 1995, 8). A koan commentary elaborates:

> When the monk asked about the meaning of "the moon," the master [Fa Yen] answered "to point at"; when someone else asked about the meaning of "to point at" the master replied "the moon." Why was it so? The deepest reasoning, probably, was in the Enlightened mind of the Ch'an master, where there was no distinction between what the ordinary mind called "to point at" and "the moon." To him, the relation between the two was similar to the relation of an ocean to its waves. (Holstein 1993, 49)

However liberating conceptually, though, the compaction of such complexly realized meaning into *thus* and *such* also indicates a kind of pedagogical irreducibility. It seems to mean that Buddhist pedagogy offers no *more* elementary minim of understanding. When the pointing gesture which is the default for inarticulate teaching already itself comprises the difficult lesson, it may be a case of "if you have to ask, you'll never know." (Not in this life anyway.) In contrast with the democratic optimism of American education in assuming that every lesson can be divided into ever more bite-sized, ever more assimilable bits, the wisdom traditions of Buddhism, because of their holographic structure, have to as-

sume that students have already surmounted a fairly high threshold of recognition.

VIII

In the United States it seems to have fallen to the twentieth-century popularizers of Zen, after World War II, to begin to articulate the centrality in many forms of Buddhism of this radical doubt that a basic realization can be communicated at all. After all, if Zen practice cannot promise to bring one methodically over the high learning threshold of satori, it at least offers distinct practices, such as wrestling with koans, for dramatizing and perhaps exhausting the impossibility of methodical learning. Furthermore, the antischolasticism of Zen and the often anti-intellectualism of the counterculture merged in a durable consciousness of the limits of verbal articulation. The 1960s' heyday of these explorations, even more than the Transcendentalists' heyday, was one in which a critique of academic institutions became the vehicle of almost every form of utopian investment; if Buddhist explorations were peripheral to the student movement, they nonetheless both enabled and were enabled by it.

As this form of negation gained prominence among Zen popularizers, it also made ideas like emptiness more intelligible to Americans than they had been, and showed that their importance was pedagogical as much as metaphysical. The influential and pragmatically detailed *Three Pillars of Zen*, for example, published in 1965 and introducing a wide audience to both the practice and theory of Zen teaching, revolves around advice like that of Rinzai: "There is nothing in particular to realize" (Kapleau 1989, 194). Postwar readers responded with excited recognition to the sense of teaching and learning as (nearly) impossible tasks, lonely where they are not in fact conflictual. As Alan Watts wrote in 1957, "The basic position of Zen is that it has nothing to say, nothing to teach. . . . Therefore the master does not 'help' the student in any way. . . . On the contrary, he goes out of his way to put obstacles and barriers in the student's path" (Watts [1957] 1989, 163). In their pursuit, Zen practitioners of the 1950s and '60s drew upon an ethos of solitary existential heroics of the soul. Kapleau, for instance, quotes Mumon's advice for working on a first koan: "Do not construe Mu as nothingness and do not conceive it in terms of existence or non-existence. [You must reach the point where you feel] as though you had swallowed a red-hot iron ball that you cannot disgorge despite your every effort" (Kapleau 1989, 76). Through much of their tropism toward the negative ran a celebration of "sheer will power" (ibid., 95); to that extent Zen popularizers offered a version of selfhood whose relation to emptiness and nonbeing was hardly clearer than the Transcendentalists' had been.

Both the efflorescence of the 1960s counterculture and the sense of

political discouragement at its collapse were among the conditions for development of the conscious dying movement in England and America after 1980. Closer influences have been the widening Tibetan diaspora, the high-visibility AIDS emergency, and the already ongoing movement for hospice and palliative care. One effect of the sudden appearance of AIDS among young, educated, articulate men (among the many whom it affects)—especially because the disease is both gradual and so far incurable—has been the carving out of a cultural space in the West in which to articulate the subjectivity of the dying. This space, until the 1980s rather imperiously foreclosed by the melodramas of modern medical delivery, has now also become increasingly available to some others facing the likelihood of "premature" death, and indeed to some of the aged. Interestingly, though it has none of the communitarian ambition of some '60s politics, the conscious dying movement has a far greater involvement with the Buddhist pedagogy of nonself.

Perhaps it is not surprising that those of us now moving through this subjectivity have an unusual sense of permission to explore aspects of Buddhism that were most troubling to Americans of the nineteenth century. To be sure, there are still raucous voices adjuring us—*especially* in the name of "East-West mind-body medicine"—that we are the last people who should be allowed to lapse from an unremitting regimen of positive thinking. But when the most damning of the West's historical epithets about Asian negativity—pessimism, quietism, extinction, exhaustion—already form an inescapable part of any given day's stream of consciousness, what sanction remains against exploring more of the vibrant realms of "no" in Buddhist thought?

The *bardo* that extends from diagnosis until death makes some people seek out Buddhist teachings; in many Buddhist teachings, however, it is also itself viewed as an extraordinary pedagogical tool. Perhaps nothing dramatizes the distance between knowledge and realization as efficiently as being diagnosed as having a fatal disease. As advertised, it does concentrate the mind wonderfully (even if by shattering it), and makes inescapably vivid the distance between *knowing* that one will die and *realizing* it. The effect is only heightened by all the very exigent lifelong uses that each of us has had for the idea of dying—whether shaped by depression, hysteria, hypochondria, stoic or existential dramas; these contrast starkly with the seemingly absolute opacity of one's own death to cognitive knowing. A reality index: when I was healthy, I assumed that Pascal's wager could only be seen as something quite ignoble.

The writings and practices surrounding conscious dying seem to bring an aesthetic of rather Zenlike minimalism to the otherwise lush proliferation of Tibetan Buddhist teachings. From Baba Ram Dass's *Be Here Now* in 1971, to Stephen Levine's *Who Dies?* eleven years later, to Sogyal Rinpoche's *Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* eleven years after that, the

account of the *bardo* teachings grows exponentially more detailed and expansive. Yet even Sogyal Rinpoche, as we have seen, keeps his reader grounded in an almost childish rhetorical simplicity; that seems a mode in which the reader can move freely through the severe cultural and ontological dislocations of the journey. To go from Sogyal's book to almost any other Tibetan text in English, moreover—to the many books that are not shaped by this particular Anglo-American-Tibetan conversation about dying—is still to be brought up short by the denseness of an alterity at which even Sogyal had barely hinted.

In calling the aesthetic of these writings Zen-like, I do not refer to their affective tonality. All of them, including Sogyal Rinpoche's, are brimming with emotional expressiveness. The Zen aspect—maybe better called Dao-like—appears instead in the extremely high value placed on economy of means. The Buddha's own "skill in means," which always refers to pedagogical means, can take extravagantly elaborate forms throughout the sūtras. In this modern project for teaching and learning to die, by contrast, quiet action or even negative action seems to represent skill. The attempt is to work as much as possible, in a formulation from *Vimalakīrti*, "by silence, inexpressibility, and unteachability" (Thurman 1976, 86). No one fails to die; at best, one can get out of one's way.

Thus, the instructions for dying are actually the same as the instructions for working with the dying. Both teaching and learning in this situation involve the most passive and minimal of performances. "Opening to" (a person or predicament), "opening around" or "softening around" (a site of pain), *listening*, relaxation, spaciousness, patience in the sense of *pateor*, or lying open, shared breathing: these practices of nondoing, some of them sounding hardly more than New Age commonplaces, seem able to support a magnetic sense of the real far into the threshold of extinguished identity. And it's a surprise, though it shouldn't be, that a nondoing verging on extinction would be the condition of possibility for *companionship* in these realms of unmaking.

As a pedagogical aesthetic, this self-effacing minimalism draws together "Eastern" and "Western" influences in a now familiar historical feedback loop. In 1836, for example, describing her ambition to offer spiritual and political Conversations for adult women in Boston, the Transcendentalist Margaret Fuller was unsure of even being intelligible to her correspondent as she struck a note of self-effacement that was apparently new.

> I know it is very hard [for participants] to lay aside the shelter of vague generalities, the cant of coterie criticism and the delicate disdains of *good society* and fearless meet the light although it flow from the sun of truth. Yet, as without such generous courage nothing can be done, or learned I cannot but hope to see many capable of it. . . . General silence or side talks would paralyze me. I should feel coarse and misplaced if I were to be haranguing too much. In former instances I have been able to make it easy and even pleasant to twenty five out of thirty to

bear their part, to question, to define, to state and examine their opinions. If I could not do as much now I should consider myself unsuccessful and should withdraw. (Kornfeld 1997, 98–99)

By the end of the next century, on the other hand, Robert Thurman's rather similar description of a buddha's own pedagogy of self-effacement in *Essential Tibetan Buddhism* gives the impression of being as rooted in familiarly American cultural forms as are therapy groups or committee facilitators.

Thus a Buddha embodiment was supposed to be a manifestation of compassion with no other purpose than to open people up to their own higher potential. . . . [A] Buddha has no solid sense of center as we do. . . . A Buddha's energy is entirely with and for us when we encounter it; there is in it no energy scoop or surge opposed to our own. . . . Such a being, whatever his or her form, is the focal node of a field in which other beings find maximal opportunities for their own evolutionary advancement, gaining dramatically increased understanding, improved emotions, perceptions, and insights, feeling much better, often rising to the occasion and doing and understanding much better. (Thurman 1995, 21–22)

I don't want to suggest that the American sound of Thurman's writing brands it as either distorting or appropriative. Instead, its very ways of being "Western" locate it in an ongoing, palimpsestic, but very dynamic conversation with, among, even within a variety of Asian teachings.

IX

What can it mean to see the pointing finger and the indicated moon as finally inseparable? I understand this image as part of a continuing Buddhist meditation on how means relate to ends. A nonpedagogic image, such as seeing the journey itself as the destination, makes it easy enough to see means and ends as inseparable. But with an image that necessarily evokes a scene of teaching, and in the context of the long, highly self-conscious tradition of Buddhist hermeneutical thought, it is apparently considered necessary to emphasize routinely the nonidentity of pedagogical means and ends, and only rarely to invoke their inseparability.

The pedagogy of illness and dying, however, as I have already suggested, brings means and ends into unaccustomed relations with each other, and dramatizes how hard it can be to assign the labels of Pupil, Teacher, and Teaching on any stable basis. The invalid Vimalakīrti, for example, is said to "manifest[ ] himself as if sick" "out of [his] very skill in liberative technique" (Thurman 1976, 21). The *bardo* teachings treat death itself as "the key or tool that enables us to discover and recognize [opportunities for liberation], and make the fullest possible use of them" (Sogyal 1993, 104). It is a commonplace in the conscious dying move-

ment—but also more than a commonplace—that, in Cicely Saunders's words, "Sooner or later all who work with dying people know they are receiving [from the dying] more than they are giving" (ibid., 177). In fact, there is a subgenre of popular spiritual books, with titles like *Lessons from the Dying* and *Final Gifts*, about how healthy people can learn from other people's dying. There is even a yearlong self-help program that involves pretending to oneself that one has a fatal disease (Levine 1997).

Thus, while the sickbed or deathbed is continually produced as a privileged scene of teaching, the assignment of pedagogical roles is unstable, and so is the assignment of means and ends. Do illness and death constitute skillful means to some further end, or are they problems to be solved by using (other) skillful means? To practice living as mindfully as if in the constant presence of death; to be able to die as one has lived, with consciousness and dignity; to be able, like Vimalakīrti, to learn or teach about emptiness through proximity to death; to experience the *bardo*s of death and becoming in such a way as to achieve freedom from involuntary rebirth—these goals are not mutually exclusive, but they are certainly distinct. Among them all it is hard to tell what finger is pointing at what moon.

The writing of the entire conscious dying movement—even that of Sogyal Rinpoche—shares a nondenominational commitment designed to make it engaging to readers of various religious affiliations or none. The sense, that is, of the undecidable closeness of ends and means, indeed of their near-inseparability, is a consistent hallmark of this movement—in fact, the most powerful manifestation of its economy of means. What remain irreducible in the Tibetan teachings, however, even in their most Western-friendly versions, are their pragmatic emphasis on rebirth and their confident narrative of the subjective experience of actually dying.

When I talk with healthy people about experiencing illness in the context of this movement, our discussion often breaks crudely on the shoals of reincarnation: do I believe in that? The person with whom I'm speaking says she could never do so. These interlocutions tend to be isolating and defensive on both sides.

From a pedagogical point of view, at any rate, the Tibetan teachings on the *bardo*s and rebirth are irrepressibly rich. The framework of rebirth casts the single human life in the context of a much longer, very complex learning project. Instead of comprising a single, momentous master class graded on a pass/fail basis, like Christianity—or even ungraded, like the secular version—the individual lifetime is more like a year of one's schooling, a year preceded and followed by other school years at the appropriate levels. Reincarnation differs from K–12 or college, however, in some crucial ways. Every summer, almost every student loses almost all memory of who he or she is. Come September, most have forgotten they are even en-

rolled in school. Although in principle there is an orderly sequence of grade levels, very few students move through it in orderly fashion: instead they drop back five grades, graduate directly from kindergarten, or repeat fourth grade several thousand times. (There are no social promotions. But the annual amnesia keeps people from feeling shamed or discouraged by failure.) Students differ, as well, on the purpose of their education. Some just want it to go on forever. Others, disliking it, see it as preparing them to leave school behind for good. Others don't think about a world outside the school, and look forward to going back into their classes in the role of student teacher. In fact, because of the memory problem, many in each grade are left to speculate that they or their classmates already *are* student teachers . . .

At least at present, I can't see what sense it would make either to believe or disbelieve such an account. The most and least I can say is that exposure to it—including less slapstick versions—has rearranged the landscape of consciousness that surrounds, for me, issues of dying. Specifically, the landscape has become a lot more spacious. I remember the very painful epistemological/psychological knots that I used to be able to wriggle into but not out of: Am I really afraid of death, or not? How can I tell the difference between fatigue with living and attraction to dying? How do I know if my confident atheism will wither like a leaf under a hot wind? Do I really, *really* realize, even now, that I'm mortal?

The constricting, obsessional nature of these questions is probably evident enough from their grasp at the first person singular, as though that were a specimen to be immobilized rather than a vagrant placeholder. A worse mark of their unskillfulness is that, while obsessed with them, even I found them numbingly boring.

The question, Do I *really believe* in rebirth? might not work so differently from those or, indeed, be much more interesting. Nor does a modernist agnosticism offer any resolution. Responding to the insistence of scholars like Robert Thurman on rebirth, Stephen Batchelor's 1997 book, *Buddhism Without Beliefs*, tries to articulate a stance of neither believing nor disbelieving. Batchelor argues for a principled agnosticism as the best way of negotiating between "responsibility to the future" on the one hand and "the cliches and dogmas of other epochs" on the other (Batchelor 1997, 113, 104). Yet he depends on an often unquestioned twentieth-century empiricism. Even to speculate about rebirth, he complains, "lead[s] us far from the Buddha's agnostic and pragmatic perspective and into a consideration of metaphysical views that cannot be demonstrated or refuted, proven or disproven" (ibid., 36). "An agnostic Buddhist would not regard the Dharma as a source of 'answers' to questions of where we came from, where we are going, what happens after death. He would seek such knowledge in the appropriate domains: astrophysics, evolutionary biology, neuroscience, etc." (ibid., 18) (Though I am unaware that any of these

disciplines claims to tell what happens after death.) And even at its least programmatic, Batchelor's agnosticism is marked by its unceasing disdain for *consolation.* He deprecates belief in rebirth, for example, as "the luxury of consolation" (ibid., 43).

For all its claim to openness and not-knowing, then, Batchelor's book often shares the feel of those tight, painful psychic knots such as Do I *really realize* . . . ? It isolates and immobilizes the self in a similar way, for example. Despite all his contemptuous usage of the word, I do not suppose that Batchelor, who speaks of "long[ing] to appease the anguish of others," really considers *their* consolation a contemptible thing (Batchelor 1997, 104). Instead, it is evidently himself who must never desire or need consolation. His existential demands on, well, *someone* are unpitying; he expresses contempt for any "failure to summon forth the courage to risk a nondogmatic and nonevasive stance" on "crucial existential matters" (ibid., 38). "Agnosticism is no excuse for indecision," *someone* is sternly reminded. "If anything, it is a catalyst for action" (ibid.). To construct and maintain this morally muscular figure is an expensive undertaking. Among the things sacrificed is that consciousness of impermanence, or even emptiness, by which the figure might recognize itself as not permanently other than the "others" who have a need of more compassionate treatment. In this respect, the continually circulating pedagogy of the conscious dying movement seems more flexible, multidirectional, and effective.

I don't know that multiple samsaric rebirths sound all that consoling anyway. What is more palpable to me is the skillfulness of the Tibetan teachings as a presence in the world of people dealing with mortality. Being and learning to un-be a self are both less smothering in a space that already holds amnesia, metamorphosis, and ever-shifting relationality—indeed, that holds them as the crucible of all phenomena.

Simply to be with this teaching makes far more difference than would either believing or disbelieving it. Take, for example, the game or meditation—so likely to arise with the teaching of rebirth—of picturing your life, even your character, otherwise than as it is. So many questions emerge. Yet their emergence is not into a context of blame or self-blame, nor of will or resolve. The space is more like—what? Wish? Somewhere, at least, liberated by both possibility and impossibility, and especially by the relative untetheredness to self.

Suppose I am thinking about some good things I have never done because of shyness, for instance, or because of being so averse to physical discomfort. I find now that the question, What would have made those qualities different?, askable to the depth of a life history and even beyond, is a surprisingly easy one to generate and follow. Many reflections are able to "open around" it as they have never been before, never when the question was really the shamingly constricted, deontological one about *me.* There

is so much companionable space in the imaginable, tutelary difference of a being whom the present I will never know, and who in turn need never wonder about the thread of hope spun somehow into its own, characteristic courage. Does it make sense to ask whether such teachings concern the present or the future? For at least some people, through a number of histories, conceiving the Buddhist teachings pedagogically has long offered a way to keep recognizing their elusive ends in their skillfully intimate means.

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Wherever a man finds what he calls himself, there, I think, another may say is the same person. It is a forensic term, appropriating actions and their merit; and so belongs only to intelligent agents, capable of a law, and happiness, and misery. —John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1690)

I have come to believe that there is a lack of deep resonance between the strategies of human rights work and the way in which the Cambodian people understand reality. —Beth (Kanji) Goldring, "Leaving the Palace of Justice: Some Problems of Human Rights Work in a Buddhist Setting" (2000)

PERSON

William Pietz

There is perhaps no more fundamental concept in Buddhism than *pudgala-nairātmya*, the selflessness of persons. Because Buddhism is founded on the doctrine of the nonexistence of self (*anātman*), it is easy to focus only on the idea of selflessness (*nairātmya*) without bothering to ask what Buddhists mean by person (*pudgala*). Indeed, while no one would question that *self* is a term of critical importance in Buddhism, the same cannot be said for *person*. There are dozens of terms whose distinctive Buddhist usage deserves careful study. Why include *person* among the handful of critical terms that this volume deems of exceptional interest for twenty-first-century Buddhist studies?

It is true that this term raises a number of important questions. Is the English word *person* an accurate translation for the Sanskrit word *pudgala*? What about the words for "person" in other languages in which authoritative Buddhist works have been composed, such as Chinese? Is Person

useful as an analytic category in social scientific studies of Buddhist cultures and societies? If so, what is the correct anthropological or sociological definition of the category of the person? Is *person* regarded as a term with a precise meaning in Buddhist doctrine? If so, do all Buddhists agree on the doctrinal meaning of this term, or do different schools of Buddhism have different conceptions? What is implied when we assert the fact that someone is a person? What difference does it make to acknowledge the fact of personhood? What idea of the person should be used by contemporary Buddhists wishing to engage non-Buddhists on issues of global concern or by non-Buddhists wishing to engage in meaningful dialogue in Buddhist settings? These are questions of considerable interest, but there are many other terms that raise a similar range of questions.

I suspect that the reason for including an essay on person in this collection is less a matter of the term's historical importance in Buddhist discourse than its contemporary importance in the discourse of global justice. *Person* is a term of vital concern today because it is indispensable in the cause of universal human rights. The term itself is important because the strongest claim to legitimacy for contemporary human rights movements derives from certain texts: the charter, covenants, and conventions of the United Nations. In its charter of 1945, the UN declared one of its founding purposes to be "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person." Three years later, the UN's historic Universal Declaration of Human Rights identified "the dignity and worth of the human person" as the foundation of universal human rights. While this was merely a declaration without the force of law, in 1966 the UN approved two instruments for the actual implementation of these principles, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (for all the documents just cited, see Steiner and Alston 1996, 1148–80). Both treaties state that "these rights derive from the inherent dignity of the human person."

Indeed, the inherent dignity of the human person is the sole basis for universal human rights recognized by the institution that today has the best claim to global legitimacy. Moreover, the multicultural and multilingual nature of the documents that establish the rights of persons as a fact acknowledged by the world's nations makes the contemporary conception of human rights thoroughly dependent on the meaningfulness of the term itself. The cultural diversity of the various signatory nations means that there can be no appeal to any extratextual ground of authority, such as a particular code of law or moral precepts or the principles of any particular philosophy, religion, or worldview. The multilingual nature of international treaties means that there can be no recourse to the lexicon of any one language to construe the precise meaning of the term *person*. Although anyone with unrestricted access to the Internet may read the text

of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in over three hundred languages on the UN's Web site at www.unhchr.ch/, no single language may claim priority as the "original" language of this text. For all these reasons, what many regard as humanity's highest aspiration for peace and justice has been invested in a certain idea of the person that is precariously dependent on the transcultural meaningfulness of the term itself.

In addition to this term's crucial place in human rights discourse, many issues of profound concern are structured today as arguments over the scope of personhood and its rights. If for no other reason, the contemporary significance of this term justifies the inclusion of an essay on person in this volume. Moreover, at least in my view, this also means that it would be irresponsible for this essay not to consider the serious charge made by some influential thinkers (notably Mauss [1985]) that the Buddhist conception of the person, while universal, does not support and is perhaps even antithetical to the idea of persons as the bearers of fundamental rights.

As my epigraph from Goldring (2000, 23) suggests, I do not believe that this latter issue can be decided simply by examining Buddhist doctrine. The significance of the term *person* to name the bearers of moral duties and legal rights depends on the "resonance" it has (or fails to have) as a living idea among people in the world today. Some discuss this as the problem of "human rights culture" (Rorty 1999, 69–70; Sen 1999, 227–48). The authority of the moral and juridical claims implicit in declaring someone a person ultimately depends on how people "understand reality." This is why I have chosen as the other epigraph for this essay a passage from John Locke in which he characterizes *person* as an essentially forensic term. Forensics, taken in its most general sense, refers to any socially sanctioned form of reasoning that "translates" a culture's understanding of causality—that is, of how reality works, how events and actions are made to occur—into its language of moral consequence and personal responsibility (Pietz 2002). As exemplified in debates about the personhood or nonpersonhood of the human fetus (Schroedel 2000), *person* is a term used to identify the subjects of morally accountable actions within a system of justice. It does this by assigning (or, in Locke's usage, "appropriating") the responsibility for consequential actions ("actions and their merit") to agents called persons. From this, Locke draws a conclusion: "and so belongs only to intelligent agents, capable of a law, and happiness, and misery" (Locke [1690] 1959, 467). But is it intelligence, the capacity for happiness and suffering, or the capacity for living under the rule of law that is the decisive factor? Or, as Locke perhaps thought, do all of these necessarily go together? Ethnographic and historical studies show us that different cultures and institutions have very different ways of conceiving these notions. What is meant by the term *person* depends on prevailing conceptions of mind (or agency), happiness, suffering, and justice and the causal relationships that exist among these. The Buddhist notion of the

person must thus be studied in the context of a Buddhist forensics whose logic is premised on distinctive conceptions of karmic causality, dharma, the pernicious illusion of self, and the universal path leading from suffering to liberation.

Although the relation of the Buddhist idea of person to that of person in human rights discourse is the overarching concern of this essay, my subject is, of course, the problem of person as a critical term for Buddhist studies. I approach this term from five angles: as a common word, as a general category, as a doctrinal term, as a social fact, and as a contemporary idea. The essay is accordingly divided into five sections. In the first section I consider whether the ordinary usage of the English word *person* conveys the same basic meaning as the Sanskrit term *pudgala*. Next, turning to Person as a category, I discuss the way in which Buddhism introduced a new and distinctive conception of the person into the culture of its time and into world history. My third section looks at Buddhist debates about the doctrinal meaning of the term *pudgala*. Having examined the meaning of *person* in Buddhism, my fourth section takes a fresh look at the historical development of the rights-bearing person as a social fact in order to see if this is as antithetical to the Buddhist idea of person as some have claimed. My final section discusses some ways in which the modern idea of the person has fallen apart in recent decades and what this may suggest for future directions in Buddhist studies.

WORD: PERSON AND *PUDGALA*

In ordinary language, the word *person* is most commonly used to designate a human individual. But there are many words in English that may be selected to denote an individual human being: *person*, *man*, *human*, *individual*, *subject*, *soul*, and so on. What is the semantic specificity of the word *person* that distinguishes it as a lexical choice from these other words? The more subtle meanings of all these terms can vary significantly depending on the social and theoretical context in which they are used, but the logic underlying the usage of *person* seems especially puzzling. Even the grammar of *person* is more problematic than that of other terms used to denote a human being. For instance, what is the plural of *person*? Grammatically it is *persons*, but in ordinary usage today it is more common to use the etymologically unrelated *people*, a word derived from the Latin word *populus*, not from the Latin word *persona*. Considerable social and, indeed, political history underlies these alternate forms of the plural for *person*. To ask the question, who are these persons? rather than who are these people? smacks of social hierarchy, something an aristocrat might say when pointing at a bunch of commoners. In a phrase like "person or persons"—as in "The police are searching for a person or persons unknown"—one hears the voice of the state. Yet other uses convey the sense of direct and

intimate "person-to-person" contact, as when we say we spoke with someone "in person." This indicates a face-to-face interaction when one is in the perceptual, bodily presence of another. Indeed, most uses of the word foreground the embodied status of an individual, as when we speak of carrying something "on one's person" or when criminal assaults are spoken of as "violations of one's person."

In contrast with terms such as *subject*, *self*, and *soul*, the English word *person* and its cognates in other languages convey the idea of a human as an essentially embodied being. In contrast with the term *individual*, *person* conveys the idea of a human being's social identity and existence within a collective order. While the word *man* (when used in a generic sense) points to one's membership in humankind or in the biological species *homo sapiens*, *person* suggests an individual's concrete bodily presence. Indeed, it is the material condition of living human beings that places us in the direct presence of others, thereby making possible our most meaningful interactions of "personal" intimacy, but that also renders us vulnerable to mortal injury and to such punitive practices as incarceration, whipping, and execution by which we may be subjected to the police powers of the state. Yet the embodied person is not merely a physical body viewed in abstraction from perception, intentionality, and whatever else constitutes the concrete living being. A corpse is a body. It once was a person, but it no longer *is* a person. Perhaps most important, the term *person* expresses our concrete embodiment as itself a moral condition. The agent of moral action is not the body but the embodied person. As is especially evident in usages that characterize acts of violence, such as rape and torture, as violations of the person, it is the embodied vulnerability of ourselves and others that renders us moral agents responsible for the material effects that our actions have on others and that makes all of us vulnerable to the cruelest acts of inhumanity. Among the range of lexical choices to designate individuals, only the term *person* conveys this idea of our embodiment and the moral significance of this condition.

But what do Buddhists mean by the term *person*? Does the Buddhist notion of person also foreground the idea of our material embodiment as itself a social and moral condition? A philological approach cannot answer this question, because there is no cognate of the word *person* in the languages of those societies in which authoritative Buddhist texts and institutions have arisen. If one follows the convention of regarding Sanskrit as the original language of Buddhism, one finds, as in any language, a range of lexical options for denoting a human individual: *pudgala*, *puruṣa*, *manu*, *ātman*, *jīva*, *sattva*, *pṛthagjana*. Translators have at times used *person* to render all these terms into English, depending on the context and their understanding of the intended meaning. But it is the scholarly consensus that *pudgala* is by far the closest in meaning to the English word *person*. Among the various Sanskrit terms used to designate an individual, *pudgala* is

distinguished by its emphasis on the aspect of material form (*rūpa*) by means of which individuals are concretely present to each other. However, as in the case of the word *person*, the *pudgala* may not be reduced to *rūpa*, the physical body. In Buddhist doctrine, the person is specified as a unitary functioning or process composed of five "aggregates" (*skandha*s): the material body, sensory feelings, evaluative perceptions, habitual mental dispositions, and consciousness. The person is the apparent entity that is experienced in the workings of this aggregated process and that appears to others. The Buddhist conception of the person thus does specify an individual's existence within the sphere of everyday materiality. Just as there is a consistent association in Western usage of the term *person* with the embodied condition of living, morally accountable individuals, so in Buddhism even "the early discourses do not speak of a human person without a body or material form (*arūpa*)" (Kalupahana 1992, 71). This is what distinguishes *pudgala* from terms such as *ātman* that posit a world-transcending soul or a self of ultimate being.

The Buddhist denial of the reality of the *ātman*, the eternal "self," does add a special complication to Buddhist usage of the term *pudgala*. The doctrine that self does not truly exist or exists merely as a pernicious delusion also entails a denial of the "ultimate reality" of the person as a substantive entity. This prompted a characteristically Buddhist "taboo on speaking of 'self' or 'person'" (Collins 1982, 71). However, given the common use of these terms in everyday language, this is a rather unworkable taboo if taken to extremes. Instead, as Donald Lopez has discussed, Buddhists have theorized the issue as a hermeneutic problem:

> Perhaps the most commonly cited examples of an apparent contradiction in the Buddha's teachings are his statements in which he makes reference to the self (*ātman*) or the person (*pudgala*). . . . In order to avoid the inconvenience of expunging all nouns such as "I," "myself," "oneself," and "person" from common parlance, Buddhist commentators have traditionally accommodated the provisional use of such terms by the Buddha by classifying them as teachings that require interpretation, while assigning the statements that there is no self to the more exalted category of the definitive. (Lopez 1988, 61)

The word *person* is to be avoided only when its use might impute to the person a mode of existence that is ontologically final or ultimate. The ordinary use of the term to denote an individual human being is not a problem. As Collins (1982, 71) explains, "The linguistic items translated lexically as 'self' and 'person' (in Pāli *atta*, *purisa/puggala*, Sanskrit *ātman*, *puruṣa/pudgala* respectively) are used quite naturally and freely in a number of contexts, without any suggestion that their being so used might conflict with the doctrine of *anatta*." Indeed, even during the historical Buddha's lifetime ordained monks were called *āryapudgala*, "worthy" or "noble persons" (Hirakawa 1990, 31). In early sūtras the historical Buddha

himself was often referred to as a person and was sometimes given the epithet "the supreme person."

The ordinary meaning of the words *person* and *pudgala* do seem to have a common specificity. Both designate a living individual in a way that foregrounds human embodiment as at once a material and a social condition. Buddhist titles such as *āryapudgala*, however, take us beyond the question of basic word usage to the next topic I wish to consider: the use of the term *person* as a social category.

CATEGORY: THE BUDDHIST PERSON AS CULTURAL AND POLITICAL REVOLUTION

Far from extinguishing the idea of the person, the founding of Buddhism upon the doctrines of *anātman*, "no self" or, more generally, "no eternal substance of any sort," and *pratītyasamutpāda*, the "dependent origination" of all beings from causes other than their own nature, introduced a new concept of the person into the culture of its time. The very first story told in the Pāli Vinaya-Piṭaka (I [*Suttavibhaṅga*], 1) concerns a brahmin who runs across the historical Buddha and takes offense when the latter fails to stand up and invite him to sit down. The brahmin regards such a violation of basic rules of courtesy to be blatantly disrespectful. The Buddha's subsequent explanation of who he is that he does not rise in acknowledgment of a social superior is the discourse of a cultural revolution, a radical revaluation of social identities that is anything but the "asocial," "specifically unpolitical and anti-political status religion" in which "salvation is a solely personal act of the single individual" discerned by Weber (1958, 206).

The new order of persons represented by the Buddha entailed a new claim to sovereign authority that was later elaborated as a political ideology (the most influential discussion of this is Tambiah 1976). Established epithets for a good ruler such as *cakravartin* and *dharmarāja* were revalued in Buddhist terms. With the rise of bodhisattva doctrine, the exemplary king was routinely conceived as a future buddha. Historically, Buddhism played an astonishing role in state formation in Asia, from Sri Lanka to Java, Burma, Siam, Cambodia, Tibet, China, Vietnam, Korea, Japan, and a host of now vanished states such as the twelfth-century Buddhist empire of the Kara-Khitai in western Central Asia. The Buddhist role in state formation occurred in various ways, from offering a new focus of rigorous loyalty, as in its adoption by ambitious domestic factions in Korea and Japan, to providing an ideology justifying such bloody conquests as those of Duṭṭhagāmaṇī in Sri Lanka (Harris 1999, 5) and the founder of the Sui dynasty in China (Wright 1971, 67).

In Buddhism's initial establishment of the new institutional identity of the arhat and the Buddhist identities of powerful lay leaders and groups

outside the monastic saṅgha (such as those who owned the land on which retreats and stūpas were built), a new order of value applicable to all persons was introduced into society. This new practical ideal of the person was disseminated in the form of *jātaka*s ("birth stories") about the Buddha's former lives that were recounted in a variety of public settings, from village markets to princely courts. *Jātaka* tales and subsequent biographies of Buddhist saints provide models of exemplary lives to be imitated by others, while the "iconic veneration of an absent Buddha" through relics, stūpas, statues, and paintings "allows the community to participate in his continuing biography" (Schober 1997, ix). Moreover, with the appearance of those writings referred to as the *abhidharma*, there were developed extensive typologies of different sorts of persons according to their capacity for entering upon and advancing along the path of enlightenment (an example is the *Puggala-Paññatti* of the Pāli Abhidamma-Piṭaka). It would be bizarre to deny that such texts represent the articulation of a specifically Buddhist theory of the person.

This Buddhist theory of the person may be best appreciated by turning from person as a sociological category to its meaning as a doctrinal term.

TERM: THE PROBLEM OF THE *PUDGALA* IN BUDDHIST THEORY

The Buddhist problem of the person appears most explicitly in arguments between some schools of Buddhism and other Buddhist schools referred to by their opponents as the Pudgalavāda, the "proponents of the person." Far from a fleeting heresy, these "personalist" schools arose early in the history of Buddhism and remained as prominent as any others during the millennium and a half that Buddhism was a major force in India (Hirakawa 1990, 242). It does seem to be the case, however, that outside the region of brahmanic culture, Pudgalavādin Buddhism did not travel well. The few surviving texts of the Pudgalavādins, along with the refutations of their views in the canons of surviving schools such as the *Kathāvatthu* of the Theravādin Adhidhamma-Piṭaka, have been studied by Thich Thiên Châu (1984, 1987). Thiên Châu argues that "the theory of the *pudgala* represents a reaction against the 'depersonalization' of the *abhidharmika* tradition" (1984, 11). The points in dispute, I believe, support Locke's view that *person* is above all a forensic term. Buddhism has always questioned the existence of the person in two ways: by reducing it analytically in terms of the five aggregates (just as in examining the axle, wheels, and other parts that constitute a chariot, one never finds the part that is the chariot itself); and by denying the existence of any changeless eternal soul-substance such as the *ātman*. But to leave it at this opens Buddhism to the charge of moral nihilism: if there is no person, who is there that can be held responsible for wrongful conduct? In this cultural world, this is

the question of the need for some continuous entity that is the object of karmic accountability. For there to be a morally accountable identity, there must be some acceptable forensic explanation of the following:

> (i) how personal continuity, being an uninterrupted flow of psycho-physical phenomena, not only flows in the present, but has its source in the past and continues to flow into the future, and (ii) how personal karmic responsibility is possible, such that Buddhism is no longer susceptible to the charge that it is nihilistic and immoral. (Ibid.)

In these Indian Buddhist debates, according to Thiên Châu (ibid., 9–11), the problem of the person had three aspects: (1) what to call the karmic unity that endures continuously from conception to death during the lifetime of an individual; (2) what to call the karmic entity that explains transmigration from one living being to its rebirth in another; and (3) whether it is correct to call the *tathāgata* (that is, a realized buddha) or an arhat who has attained nirvāṇa prior to death a person.

The first issue—the use of the term *person* to denote the moral identity of an individual actor, conceived as a unique combination of the five aggregates during the course of a lifetime—was only a problem insofar as its use was tied to the other two problems, karmic transmigration and ultimate being. The latter problems could not be dismissed if only because it would be heretical to challenge either the fact that the attainment of buddhahood entailed remembering all one's past lives or the achievability by a human being of the ultimate identity, *tathāgata*. Given the existence of some sort of karmic continuity across a series of lives, the second problem boils down to whether one should speak of the past lives of a person as the lives of "the same person." The problem of the possible movement of a single personal identity across a series of living beings belongs to the fundamental problem of the person, which is not the abstract problem of instantaneous self-identification but rather the forensic problem of reidentification across time by others (Penelhum 1967, 95). Locke ([1690] 1959, 444–45) was obliged to discuss the issue despite the fact that his culture denied metempsychosis, as was a recent analytic philosopher who examined the meaning of the term *person* (Parfit 1984, 201–17, 289–93). If it is not same "person" who is reborn, what should one call the entity responsible for transpersonal karmic continuity? The principal non-Pugalavādin solution was the notion of the *ālayavijñāna*, the "storehouse-consciousness," conceived as "a neutral mental continuum [that] carries the karmic traces and bridges the gap between death and rebirth" (Dargyay 1987, 61).

The third aspect of the problem of the *pudgala* became partly moot as neither Theravādin arhats nor Mahāyāna bodhisattvas, however advanced along the gradual path to complete enlightenment they might be, claimed to be buddhas. The problem of the possible personhood of the *tathāgata*, at least among Mahāyānist schools, was resolved by the theory of the three

kāyas, "bodies," in which pure beings that might exist in the immediacy of material existence (*rūpakāya*) were conceived as Neoplatonic emanations from a higher dharma body that was not constituted by the five aggregates. Moreover, the potential of ordinary humans (and perhaps other beings) to attain buddhahood was in some schools reconceived in terms of the presence of a separate "buddha nature." This other pure "nature" is in everyone and is distinct from the "own nature" of an individual that prevails within ordinary reality, the sphere of karmically defiled entities. This was theorized by positing an equivalent to the *ālayavijñāna* (the transmigratory "consciousness" that contains the karmic "seeds" of past moral actions) for the pure "buddha nature." This is called the *tathāgatagarbha*, the "womb" or "embryo" of enlightened being (Brown 1991; King 1991; Hubbard and Swanson 1997).

The principal objection to the Pudgalavādin theory of person was its proposal as a definitive category for an entity that falls neither into the category of conditioned existences nor that of the unconditioned. Within the confines of the ontological binary conventional/ultimate, this asserted a mode of being that, by transcending the sphere of "conventional" reality, trespassed upon the sphere of "ultimate" reality. All contemporary schools of Buddhism, I believe, find this unacceptable. Rather, they hold that it is correct to assert that Person is a category proper only to conventional existence, that is, to our embodied existence in the world as we usually live it. Persons do truly exist as real entities subject to moral (karmic) accountability, but only in this sphere, not that of ultimate reality.

The term *pudgala* is understood to be a conventional designation for a unique "aggregated" individual to whom names and social titles as well as actions and their moral consequences accrue (paraphrasing Thiên Châu 1987, 36). The person is not the self, the referent of the term *I*. Buddhism views the self as an illusion, a imagined entity that consciousness projects onto the components of the aggregate person. This self, then, derives not from one's parents but from lifetimes, without beginning, spent in ignorance. In reality, the self never did, does not, and never will exist. Moral autonomy is located not in the imaginary self but in the total concrete person whose own conduct will lead to happy or unhappy rebirths until the absence of the self is recognized and liberation is achieved.

FACT: THE RIGHTS-BEARING PERSON FROM ANCIENT ROME TO MODERNITY

Buddhism regards our identities as persons living in the world of ordinary social existence as "conventionally real." This might seem to accord nicely with the Western notion of *person*, a word derived from the Latin *persona*, "mask," because the term attributes to us a public existence without asserting anything about the ultimate or essential being that might (or

might not) fill the emptiness inside the mask. However, the modern social scientific tradition conceives of person (I believe erroneously) in terms of the "role" one plays in society as distinguished from one's "psychophysical self" (Carrithers 1985, 235–36; Collins 1985, 69), analogous to the awareness actors have that the characters they portray are different from their real selves. Just as many actors might play the role of Hamlet, so various individuals may occupy the job of steelworker or the office of president of the United States, but neither Hamlet nor steelworker constitutes an individual's true "psychophysical" self. This sociological conception of the role-playing "person" as opposed to the "self" is authorized etymologically from the use of *persona* for the theatrical masks worn in ancient Roman and Greek plays. It is then associated with the notion of the equal rights of all "persons" recognized in the laws of modern liberal republics and naturalized as "the rights of man" in human rights discourse. This notion of the person—the generic human individual who, as such, is endowed with a basic set of fundamental rights—seems notably inapplicable to Buddhist cultures. As Rebecca Redwood French (1995, 161) remarks in her study of the traditional Tibetan legal system, "For a Tibetan thinking in Buddhist terms, the Western idea of the 'individual' as a hollow shell, a sort of mask equal to any other regardless of what entity occupies it, is incomprehensible. It is exactly the unique conjunction of circumstances, elements, and karmic seeds that constitutes a human individual, not its absence." What is being responded to here, it seems to me, is less the actual Western notion of the legal-rights-bearing person than its sociological misconception as promulgated in academic social science.

An alternative approach to social facts that might prove more fruitful in conceiving conventional reality entails a closer examination of social fact-making practices. Developed in the field of science studies (Latour and Woolgar 1979; Shapin and Schaffer 1985), this approach has more recently been extended to other forms of social life (Poovey 1998). This focus on concrete fact-making practices is especially helpful when studying a term such as *person*, whose social significance resides in legal discourse. Rather than regarding person as a legal concept to be studied in abstraction from history and material practices, it is more illuminating to regard person as a forensic fact that is not self-evident but that must be ascertained by accepted social practices.

Why are legal rights conditioned on the status of personhood? Historically, the reason may indeed be traced back to the Latin *persona*, "mask." But this has nothing to do with the use of this term to denote the masks worn by actors in plays, nor to the related folk etymology that derives *persona* from *per sonare*, the voice "sounding through" the mask of a play actor. Dumézil (1970, 574) writes of the word *persona* that "its suffix-*na* suggests an Etruscan origin." Indeed, *persona* has been associated with the

Etruscan word *phersu* ever since the discovery in 1958 of a painting on the wall of an Etruscan tomb in which this word is found written beside "masked dancers who are taking part in races or in cruel games which seem to be the distant prototypes of the Roman gladiatorial games" (Bloch 1959, 116, translated in Dumézil 1970, 575). Some have speculated that the Latin *persona*, or perhaps the Etruscan *phersu*, is a "borrowing" from the Greek word for "face" or "visage," *prosopon*. All in all, the philological evidence is so thin that Dumézil simply concludes, "the word has no etymology" (ibid., 574). A study of this historical concept has no choice but to begin by looking at the usage of the Latin term itself.

In Roman society, the masks called *personae* were primarily associated with certain objects belonging to family cults that on occasion entered the sphere of public ritual. By the first century BCE, all patrician families kept in their homes realistic portrait busts of their ancestors. These were carried in public funeral processions. In addition to these busts, when a male member of such a family died, "an impression of his face was taken in wax and was worn in the funeral cortège by another, who practiced imitating the dead person while he was alive" (Jenkins 1994, 166). This was the *persona*, a mask probably molded by direct contact with the face of a member of the older generation and worn by a member of the younger in whom, by this ritual transference of familial identity, the dead one still lived (Bettini 1991, 169–77). The funerary busts of particular individuals were themselves termed *imagines*, not *personae*. These portrait images, like the family itself, had political significance in Roman society. The historian Tactitus recounts that decades after the assassination of Julius Caesar, Longinus was indicted by the Roman senate for keeping an *imago* of the assassin Cassius among the family *imagines* that he venerated (MacMullen 1992, 21). The association of political and legal rights with the term *persona* derives, then, from its relation to the *imagines* and *cognomina* (the names of ancestors memorialized in an *imago*) of Roman society, not to its use to denote theatrical masks. "To the very end," writes Mauss (1985, 17), "the Roman senate thought of itself as being made up of a determinate number of *patres* representing the 'persons,' the 'images' of their ancestors." The public "person" was (while not a reincarnation) the legitimate representative in the current generation of a family line embodied in a series of individuals. As a *persona*, a living individual was the present embodiment of a substantive transgenerational lineage that owned property and privileges. To keep a particular *imago* and to assume a certain name (*cognomen*) was itself a legal right. To usurp one of these was a punishable offense. As Mauss (ibid., 16) also points out, the revolt of the plebes, commoners lacking political standing who successfully demanded citizenship status for the offspring of nonsenatorial families, was a decisive political event in that all Roman freemen, as citizens, now bore a civil *persona* along with the political right of participating in the sovereign whole

that this status entailed. Whether this initially entailed the keeping of ancestral masks, this practice ceased to be essential to one's status as a "person" as the criteria for Roman citizenship were expanded. The apostle Paul was a Roman citizen, but this did not mean he kept such objects in a Roman-style family cult.

The fundamental concept of the Roman *persona* was that of a living individual who embodied a particular transgenerational continuum and was endowed with the public status of one able to own property, sue and be sued, and rightfully participate in the sovereign authority governing society. It is true that subsequent Stoic and Christian uses of the term included significant innovations that shifted the transindividual continuum embodied by living individuals to Nature or Christ. Moreover, those Stoics who advanced their theories in order to radically revalue the social arrangements of the Roman Empire used occasional references to theatrical masks, but these were used as metaphorical illustrations, not as paradigmatic examples upon which Stoic theory was based (see, for example, Epictetus 1926, 1:197–99 [bk. 2, chap. 29, pp. 41–43]; 217 [bk. 2, chap. 1, p. 55]; 2:169 [bk. 3, chap. 22, p. 106]).

More significant than such occasional Stoic invocations of masks was the extension of *persona* to resolve a knotty problem in Christian monotheism. Toward the end of the second century, the Christian theologians Hippolytus and Tertullian began to speak of the eternal Creator (the Father) and Jesus Christ (the Son) as two *personae* of the one true god. This use of the term was quite controversial at the time: most Christians "viewed the new talk of 'Persons' of the Godhead with unconcealed suspicion" (Kelly 1978, 124). It should be emphasized that the reason for this innovative usage was not to conceive the Father and the Son (the Holy Spirit was a later addition) as "masks of God" in the Joseph Campbell sense. Indeed, it was just the opposite: "it connoted the concrete presentation of an individual as such" (ibid., 115). This was the critical aspect of the term that led to its later adoption in the creed of orthodox Christian trinitarianism and Christology: the term *person* was used to assert the concrete individual existence of God the Father, of Christ the Son, and of the Holy Spirit while still affirming the singleness of their divine substance. Similarly, the two "natures" (human and divine) of a single individual (Jesus Christ) could be affirmed by distinguishing these from "the concreteness of his total person both divine and human" (Pelikan 1971, 265). As in the concept of legal persons, this Christian notion of person does not involve "the idea of self-consciousness nowadays associated with 'person' and 'personal'" (Kelly 1978, 115). Rather, it was a way to assert the existential reality of an individual despite the multiplicity of the person's constituent "natures" (just as a Buddhist might believe all persons have both their own karmic aggregate nature and a pure Buddha nature) or the identity of the person's essential being within a more comprehensive

ontological entity (for Buddhists, the transpersonal karmic continuum that exists in conventional reality). Thus the concept of person, both in Buddhism and in the Western tradition (at least, prior to the eighteenth century), denotes a singular individual with a capacity for autonomous moral actions, but it also conceives the unique individual as an aggregate totality made up of many heterogenous components. The exact nature of these components is, of course, conceived very differently, if only because one tradition holds that the most important component is an eternal spiritual substance, the immortal soul created by God and unique to each living individual, while the other was founded on the denial of any such eternal self.

The English word *person* originated from the Latin *persona* when Latin was the language of public administration and of ecclesiastical and civil law. Its importance as an institutional term of church and state led to the vulgarization of the Latin word rather than its translation into an existing Anglo-Saxon word. (The same is the case in German and other non-Romance European languages.) The most significant aspect of this term is found in its use in the tripartite structure of Roman law that was adopted by European states which divided legal matters into the laws of persons, things, and actions. (The latter category, the law of actions, was sometimes referred to as the law of obligations.) While the law of actions concerned crimes and private wrongs committed against other persons, the law of things concerned different types of property that might be owned by persons and the methods of acquiring such property (including the laws of inheritance). The law of persons concerned the rights of individuals in their singular embodied existence and in their particular social status (Watson 1991, 172). The rights of persons included such things as the right to bodily integrity, the capacity to own property, and the standing to sue and be sued.

Not all humans were persons. Personhood is a forensic fact, not a natural one. It is true that from the thirteenth century, Christian theology, and hence European discourse, recognized that all humans were "natural persons." As Christian Europe began to encounter non-monotheistic societies, this notion was applied to members of societies that had yet to hear the gospel; not yet exposed to "revealed" or "divine" law, it was thought that such societies were ordered by a "natural law" that was part of God's Creation. The subjects of this law were characterized as "natural persons." But once such subjects entered into the sphere of a Christian state, their personhood or nonpersonhood was decided by the secular legal system. Only certain members of that society could be persons; aliens from foreign lands were not persons. Nor were all members of society persons. To mention the obvious, by law human slaves were not persons but things, chattel property. Nor were persons always human individuals. Under criminal law in much of medieval Europe, animals could be charged with

crimes and tried as persons, that is, as agents morally accountable for their actions. If convicted, they could be punished and even sentenced to death. In Germany, for instance, roosters might be tried and convicted for "contumacious crowing." Trials and executions of various sorts of animals occurred as late as the mid-eighteenth century in France (Evans [1906] 1998, 150).

Under civil law, *persona* meant an entity capable of owning property, entering into legal relationships, and, in the case of corporate persons such as families, businesses, colleges, and sovereign states, exercising jurisdiction over the objects and individuals belonging within that corporate entity. The person is the agency holding the legal title. As in the case of monastic property owned by a Buddhist saṅgha rather than an individual monk, nonhuman (or perhaps one should say "transhuman" or collective) entities, corporate bodies, were the property-owning persons. When Roman civil law was revived in medieval Europe, certain Christian clerics began to be called *personae*. In English this was vulgarized as "parson," "the legal *persona* who could sue and be sued in respect of the parish" (Onians 1966, 653). The abbot of a monastery or the parson of a parish acts not in his own person but in the person of the corporate entity. Whatever contractual and other obligations are entered into by a particular abbot do not vest in that individual but in the monastic body and remain the obligations of that corporate person even when the abbot dies or moves on to occupy a different ecclesial office.

Such a social logic entails contradictory uses of the term *person*: an individual may act in his "own person," that is, as a unique embodied human being, but may also act "in the person of" other persons, that is, as the agent of other individuals or corporate bodies. It is in this contradictory usage that one may discover the dialectical idea of the person. To illustrate, in medieval and early modern England, a royal official might distinguish utterances that merely expressed his personal opinion from those in which he was speaking "in the person of the king." Here the term *person* refers not to the private individual but to an individual legitimately enacting the powers of a corporate collective. In 1642 a Parliament outraged by eleven years of "personal rule" by Charles I issued a declaration that warned the monarch "that the King is the Fountain of Justice and Protection, but the Acts of Justice and Protection are not exercised in his own Person, nor depend upon his pleasure, but by his Courts and his Ministers who must do their duty therein, *though the King in his own Person should forbid them*" (quoted in Kantorowicz 1957, 21). For the individual who is king to act "in his own person" means that he acts merely as an individual (a mortal human like any other), while to act "in the person of" the sovereign king means that the king himself or indeed any public officer is not acting as an individual or on behalf of the private person who is also the king but as the agent of the king in the sense of the crown, the

sovereign power itself. In this complex usage, *person* refers to unique embodied individuals bearing a certain social status (that of legal persons rather than property, legal things) and able to act as agents legitimately enacting the powers of collective social bodies. Personhood does entail the idea of a unique individuality, but it also entails the idea that individuals are persons only insofar as they embody and enact the rightful powers of an entity—some kinship or spiritual lineage, a sovereignty, corporation, or some other collective reality—whose scope extends beyond the embodied individual and, indeed, beyond life span of that mortal individual.

IDEA: THE RISE AND FALL OF THE MODERN IDEA OF PERSONS

Much of what had been conveyed by the term *person* throughout its history became obscure with the development during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of what may be called the "modern" notion of person, that is, the person as defined biologically—a member of the human species—yet also abstractly as a self-existing individual without any substantive connection to some more extensive familial, social, or moral continuum.

A theoretical context for this radically humanist and individualist conception of the rights-bearing person might be traced to the novel discourse about international law developed by such seventeenth-century writers as Grotius and Pufendorf. The historical context was the colonial expansion of Europe. Traffic with non-European societies demanded new ideas about universal obligations in the treatment of visiting strangers, specifically of European traders in non-European countries that lacked any formalized treaty relationship with the merchant's home nation. The visiting alien was no longer to be regarded as simply a nonperson without rights when in a foreign state; strangers had certain inalienable international rights that existed apart from the rights created by the laws of particular states. In addition, the theorization of the completely autonomous individual, of the person as "sovereign" property owner that complemented the liberal idea of absolute property rights, was also an important factor in the development of the modern idea of person, as was the later shift to a biological definition that asserted the equal personhood of all members of the human species, a hard-won definition that was part of the struggle against race-based oppression and the pseudoscience of race that sought to justify it. It was the antislavery activists and European revolutionaries of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who added the most radical dimension to the new idea of person by forging a discourse about the universal rights of "man" as such, irrespective of social or political status. While there have been different, often highly abstract grounds

proposed for such radical "human rights" claims, the bloody history of the twentieth century suggests that the strongest of these is expressed in the phrase "crimes against humanity." It was horror at the atrocity of the Nazi holocaust that impelled renewed efforts among the winners of the Second World War to establish a meaningful international law by composing and ratifying the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights and instituting a new model of international justice in the Nuremberg trials. (Despite the creation of an International Court of Criminal Justice, this remains an aspiration rather than a reality.) The concrete ground of what might otherwise seem to be a very abstract idea of the universal rights of personhood is found in the discourse and institutions that respond to the most extreme violations of the person. Perhaps perversely, it is through the most violent acts of inhumanity that we have come to grasp the deepest meaning of the term *person*.

Those who study and espouse Buddhism in the twenty-first century will do so effectively only if they take into account this idea of person as the basis of universal human rights. Insofar as the standard for measuring the historical progress of humanity in this regard is "the gradual reduction of cruelty and unmerited suffering" (Ignatieff 2001, 161), it seems that much of Buddhist terminology might be directly useful by foregrounding the connection of human suffering to human rights (Baxi 2002). Some have suggested that such a Buddhist basis for human rights might be found in the Buddhist conception of compassion or in the principle of *ahimsa*, the practice of nonviolence (Taylor 1999). While such investigations at the level of high theory are certainly important, these might overlook the manner in which *person* has itself become a highly problematic term in recent decades.

Three aspects of the current collapse of the modern conception of personhood might merit special attention. First, the modern idea that all human beings are persons with certain fundamental rights was established only through a long struggle against class- and race-based slavery and institutionalized exploitation. Securing the principle that personhood belongs to all biological human beings was an epochal advance for the cause of justice. Yet this very triumph intensified a tendency in the Western tradition that deprives life-forms that are not human of any rights or socially sanctioned protections whatsoever. The idea that animals are in no sense "persons" was already present in the Christian tradition, which held that animals (and, indeed, all sentient beings other than human beings) lacked immortal souls. (The idea that animals might be tried as persons, whose practice in Europe I have mentioned, is not found in Christian legal codes prior to the Middle Ages; rather, this practice was an accommodation made to the cultural sensibilities of European peoples that predated their Christianization.) The extreme "humanism" implicit in modern ideas of both personal rights and property rights draws an absolute line dividing

humans from all other life forms. I suspect this was even further intensified during the nineteenth century as a sort of a defensive reaction to the intellectual revolution of Darwin, whose work proved that humans not only are animals but have evolved from nonhuman species. For many, the idea there we are animals (albeit thinking animals) was experienced as a blow to the dignity of humanity itself. Yet the conceptual basis for this strongly held Western belief in the nonpersonhood of nonhumans is far from clear (apart from the fundamentalist convictions offered by Christian theology). Today, there is no more telling evidence that the modern idea of person is falling apart than the growing strength of the movement for animal rights. Carefully reasoned works such as those of Harvard law professor Steven Wise (2000, 2002) examine one by one the supposedly unique capacities that characterize humans alone. It is noteworthy, however, that the principal forensic tests used to determine nonhuman personhood, such as mirror self-recognition tests, conceive personhood in terms of consciousness of a self. Buddhism's critique of the self and its focus on the sentience rather than the consciousness of life might help undermine the conceptual framework of modern science and law that regards all nonhumans as things without rights.

A second issue arising from the increasingly beleaguered modern idea of person is the assumption that real rights-bearing persons are living human individuals, "natural persons," and that the attribution of personhood to corporations and other collective bodies is merely a convenient legal fiction. In the formulation preferred by Enlightenment jurists such as Blackstone, these are "artificial persons." But as the history of the term itself indicates, this was a radical distortion of the concept. As I have discussed, in earlier usage *person* referred to individuals not in their identity as isolated beings considered in abstraction from society, but rather in their identity as embodiments of a continuing collective life, be it a family line or a religious lineage. Indeed, a closer look at the history of the development of the modern idea of person reveals, not the metaphorical extension of the term from the individual to include collective entities, but rather the extension of the term from the individual within corporate bodies to the individual abstracted from these. This was accomplished as conceiving the property-owning individual as a "corporation sole," the individual person as a corporate entity unto himself.

There is perhaps no more salient example of the breakdown of this abstractly individualist conception of personhood than the ongoing controversy in many countries over the personhood or nonpersonhood of the human fetus. What was once an accepted principle that "birth is necessary to create rights" (Paton 1972, 396) has become a matter of considerable debate. The principal historical reasons for this may be the global movement toward the empowerment of women as the social and political equals of men as well as the enormously enhanced power to control the

human reproductive process through the science of molecular genetics. This has prompted a variety of responses from cultural traditions, including Buddhism. Studies of such novel Buddhist practices as the holding of memorial services for miscarried and aborted fetuses that arose in Japan following the Second World War show us responses to these historical changes within the framework of the Buddhist idea of personhood (Harrison 1999). Further advances in genetic technology will surely not only strengthen the dangerous attraction of eugenics but also provoke further institutional responses from Buddhist and other spiritual traditions. Molecular genetics, through such endeavors as the human genome project, gene therapy, and human cloning, as well as the increasing forensic authority of DNA as the preferred means of establishing individual identity, is recasting the way personhood is conceived in a manner that restores the understanding that individuals exist only as part of some larger social, genetic continuum, an understanding that was occluded by the peculiarly modern individualist conception of the person.

I will conclude by mentioning a final aspect of the collapse of the modern idea of person. This concerns the radical questioning of what it means to call personhood a legal concept. While valuable contributions to our understanding of what it means to be a person may be provided by work in the relatively new field of Buddhist legal studies, to focus exclusively on questions of jurisprudence would be to fall into an "excessive fetishization of the law" (Baxi 1993, 136). The competence of legal institutions to achieve justice should not be overestimated. Legal orders are not self-contained intellectual systems; they are always embedded in specific cultures and societies. Ultimately, as Goldring reminds us, our idea of justice cannot be separated from our understanding of reality. In regard to Buddhism, I would suggest that this means using the human rights notion of the person critically to reexamine a tradition in which monasteries routinely owned slaves, attached entire villages to themselves in perpetual servitude, and not infrequently justified state violence and acts of great atrocity (Schopen 1994; Gernet 1995; Wyatt 1982, 27; Victoria 1997). For all its profound insights and noble ideas, Buddhism has not always been a force for justice in the world. Indeed, such Buddhist activists as Sulak Sivaraksa (1992, 68) have argued that "Buddhism, as practiced in most Asian countries today, serves mainly to legitimize dictatorial regimes and multinational corporations." In this regard, I think what most urgently needs to be examined is the Buddhist idea of "karmic debt." Historically, this idea—perhaps most powerfully institutionalized in Buddhist funeral rites—played a decisive role in establishing Buddhism in diverse societies (for example, in China through the institution of the Ghost Festival—Teiser 1988; Cole 1998). I believe that Western advocates of Buddhism would do well to examine the reasons the great Indian leader and Buddhist convert Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar rejected the doctrine of karma (Queen

1996, 47). One might regard recent reinterpretations of the concept of karmic seeds (Nhat Hanh 1987; Sivaraksa 1992) as efforts to correct a profound problem in the Buddhist tradition, a problem that must be resolved if Buddhism is to become a vital force in the twenty-first century.

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POWER

Craig J. Reynolds

Already an old word in the English language by the early fourteenth century, *power* had come to mean the ability to affect something. It referred to control or command over others, and it bore the many meanings associated with government, rule, and domination that are with us today. References to power in association with religion also have a deep history. By the mid-fifteenth century, for example, Satan could be vanquished by the spiritual power of Christ. Cross-cultural explorations of sacred power date at least to the nineteenth century, when scholars of religion pondered the meaning of the Melanesian term *mana*, the sacred power that inhered in all things. If *mana* refers to a positive power in object or symbol or person, *taboo* refers to its opposite: power that must be avoided or neutralized by ritual. The notion of power existing in concentrated form in some objects as well as in some people is germane to any exploration of power as a critical term for Buddhism.

In the twentieth century, *power* was one of those terms whose meanings were transformed and supercharged by developments in science and the technology of warfare. Thermonuclear weapons augmented the power of military establishments, making possible vast destruction in a flash. The term *superpower* came into use as a legacy of World War I, and after the Second World War it came to express the special advantages enjoyed by nation-states in possession of the atomic bomb. Totalitarianism refers to another kind of power, more political than scientific, although it exploited new technologies in its use of force and violence as it was marshaled by regimes to control their populations.

Also in the twentieth century, Marxism supplied many meanings for *power* that we now virtually take for granted in the way we understand the structure of society. In Marxian analysis, power accrues to the social class that controls economic production. The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci wrote prolifically in his prison notebooks and elsewhere of the exercise of power through culture and ideology. He determined that the dominant class holds sway not so much by controlling economic production but by suffusing throughout society its own moral, political, and cultural values. This exercise of power, which entails a fine balance between the use of force and consensus, Gramsci called hegemony.

Such a list of modern configurations of power in the twentieth century would have no claim for consideration without mention of the work of the French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault, whose studies of the technologies of power opened up new avenues of inquiry in the social sciences and humanities. Foucault's various statements about power in his books and interviews are complex and contradictory, and it is neither possible nor appropriate here to try to sort them out. His idea of power as productive acts as a counterpoint to commonsense definitions of the word that stress its negative aspects of repression, censorship, exclusion, or subjugation. Although many of his studies concentrated on power operating through technologies of the self in the prison, the asylum, the school, and the hospital, many Foucault readers acquire the impression that his view of power is monolithic. It would seem that he constructs for us a picture of power as emanating from the omnipotence of modern apparatuses of domination, which is another way of saying totalitarianism.

In any case, whether power gives us any leverage in understanding Buddhism is another matter entirely. In fact it would seem to be arguing against the grain to suggest that power is a useful critical term for Buddhism. The Buddha taught his saving knowledge not as a god, a supreme being, but as a seer. The Buddha image in meditation, in repose, is the essence of quiescence. In the words of S. J. Tambiah, the Buddha's achievement of the four meditative trances "gave him the capacities to detach himself from sensory objects and passions, to reach 'one-pointedness' of mind, calm bliss, and even-mindedness" (Tambiah 1982, 6).

The exercise of power in the sense of control or the use of force would not seem to befit the conduct of the class of ascetics who are the paragons of Buddhist practice. Monks are renunciants who have set themselves apart from the materiality and corruptions of the world. While many remain in urban settings to teach and enable laypeople to make merit, others retreat deep into the forest (Kamala 1997; Tambiah 1984; Taylor 1993). The saints of Buddhism acquire their reputations in part by withdrawing to the most inaccessible regions, as if to make civilization itself an other. The monk abnegates volition on behalf of others, not to control them, and is obliged only to adhere to the disciplinary code. He leaves to laypeople the practice of positive virtues and "confines himself to the passive virtues of renunciation and imperturbability" (Lamotte 1988, 62).

Moreover, the Buddha left the community of monks with no master and no hierarchy. Apart from the abbot of a monastery, who in any case is not really necessary for monastic practice, authority in the community of monks is distinctly absent, because the Buddha made it clear that this community was a leaderless, independent institution (Wijayaratna 1990, 152). There is no central priesthood, no global center around which a clerical bureaucracy might form—no Mecca, no Rome, no Salt Lake City. Even wise and senior monks are not entitled to expel or punish a monk or make legal decisions. In Buddhist practice, one relies on one's own reasoning rather than on the authority of someone else, although teachers are of inestimable assistance.

Yet it would be a mistake to look only to the passive virtues of renunciation and imperturbability. The Buddha was, according to one canonical text, "the supreme self-conqueror . . . the one who has tamed himself" (Wijayaratna 1990, 6). Buddha images themselves have powers, fusing local cults with episodes from the life of the Buddha. One of the most common images of the Buddha in the Theravāda world is "Calling the Earth to Witness." The Sanskrit term for this pose of the Buddha, *vijayamudrā* (*vijaya* means "conquest"), captures with metaphoric force the moment in his life when he defeated Māra, the lord of misfortune, who represents personality traits, evil, and death. When Māra attempted to disrupt the Buddha's concentrations on his way to enlightenment, the earth goddess responded to the Buddha's summons by wringing out her hair and causing a flood that swept the demon's army away, the waters signifying the Buddha's infinite merit. Here Buddhist iconography is not shy about depicting the Buddha's power to vanquish (*vijaya*) enemies. This is the language of war in the service of religious belief.

As this example illustrates, part of the problem, or I should say one of the opportunities, in configuring power in relation to Buddhism has to do with translation. *Power* in this essay is perforce lodged in the English language, with cognates in other European, particularly Romance, languages

(French *pouvoir*, *puissance*; Italian *potenza*; the verb "to be able" in French, Portuguese, Spanish, and Italian). Translating certain terms from Pāli and Sanskrit or from Asian vernaculars will not yield the same semantic fields, however. To get closer to those fields and how they might lead to productive understandings of Buddhism, it may be more illuminating if we steer away from the meanings having to do with domination, command, and control as well as the supercharged meanings of the twentieth century. Instead, we might look to the affiliated semantic fields of *potency* and *potentiality*. As it happens, the latter term proved helpful when *power* was glossed in religion more generally by Alan L. Miller in 1987, although in that context *potential* was expressive of the "inexhaustible source of power." Miller's gloss on *power* was oriented toward the sacred, so it emphasized creation and cosmogonic myths (Eliade 1987).

In the discussion that follows, most of my examples are drawn from the Theravāda world, and specifically in Asia, with only occasional references to Mahāyāna and tantric Buddhism where appropriate. In an academic milieu that strives for difference, pluralism, and heterodoxy, it would be the height of folly to make too much of commonalities and parallelisms across such a huge expanse of the world. Yet in those parts of Asia where the Buddha has left his footprint, I see familiar configurations of religious tenets and cultural practices. The ways in which power is signified, sought after, and manifested in these often very different cultural settings offer opportunities for comparison across Asia. In addition, Buddhism in almost all its manifold cultural settings is an amalgam in which one of the elements bound with it is something called animism, shamanism, or the like (Samuel 1993; Spiro 1982; Tambiah 1970). Similarly, forest renunciants across the region have supplied an important dynamic to Buddhism throughout its history (Ray 1994; Tambiah 1984).

I propose three ways in which the instantiation of power might provide a critical edge for the study of Buddhism: potency and its sibling, potentiality; sovereignty; and the power of the ascetic body.

POTENCY AND POTENTIALITY

Across Asian cultures, one area of commonality lies in the protective or auspicious powers of objects and practices that make it possible for the Buddhist to ward off danger, keep safe from harm, and be protected from malevolent spirits. The objects, which can also promote health or wealth, include amulets, sometimes worn on the body, and figurines or votive tablets representing attitudes and episodes in the life of the Buddha. Nature provides the raw material out of which culture fashions something meaningful for human use: a lump of resin, say, in which the image of the Buddha may be discerned. In the Thai language, these objects are called *saksit* (Sanskrit *śakti* + *siddhi*). As for practices, spells or *mantra* are recited

to elicit beneficial effects, such as protecting oneself or one's family, improving one's health, or increasing one's wealth.

The very notion of auspiciousness has its own power in the Buddhist world. It is a way of nudging history in a favorable direction, whatever that might mean, and it often means in the direction of wealth creation. In Thailand during the economic boom of the 1980s and 1990s, one charismatic figure, Luang Phor Khun (Reverend Father Multiplier), became so well known for the efficacy of his blessings that his amulets fetched huge prices. In what could only be termed the commodification of auspiciousness, batches of his amulets bore such rubrics as "multiplying fortune" and "increasing wealth." Lucky banknotes carrying Luang Phor Khun's image instead of the king's were displayed by street vendors and taxi drivers in order to increase custom. Politicians and businesspeople called upon the folksy monk to bless their home province, the state, the monarchy, and even the national currency (Jackson 1999).

Not all of the verbal formulae or the practices that charge sacred objects are deemed Buddhist, although, as we shall see below, taking a hard line on what is and what is not Buddhist may obscure more than it reveals. Certainly Pāli words or images of the Buddha are frequently involved in many of the rituals that render these objects effective. Specialists who can perform such rites include shamans, magicians, and sorcerers; some of them are former monks. Often they are monks still observing the *vinaya* (monastic code), though their indulgence in these practices may be frowned upon by the ecclesiastical establishment.

Some empowerment practices considered perfectly orthodox involve monks charging objects or images by means of the Pāli words they utter. The Pāli term for this, *paritta*, which means "protection" or "defense," refers to verses or portions of the Buddha's teachings (*sutta*). In Theravāda Thailand, a new Buddha image is given life by monks chanting *paritta*. After one end of a sacred cord is attached to the chief cult image of a monastery, the cord passes along a line of monks, who hold it between their fingers. It then encircles the molds prepared for casting the new images and returns to the chief cult image to complete the circuit. One or more of the monks meditates and sends a "charge" through the circuit that empowers the images-to-be (Tambiah 1984, 230).

In Burma, magicians are called *weikza*, a term derived from the Pāli word for "knowledge" (*vijja*) (Strong 1992, 245–46). The *weikza* claim to have control over rebirth is a claim attributed to only a few monks in all history. In competition with the Burmese *weikza* are masters of various arts, such as lay *saya*—alchemists, curers, diviners, exorcists, astrologers, practitioners of medicine—who meet the expectations of Theravāda Buddhists. Indeed, the powers that accrue to those in possession of these forms of knowledge are directly related to one's progress in becoming a good Buddhist (Ferguson and Mendelson 1981, 63).

The connection between specialized forms of knowledge, spiritual occult, and "powers" is explicit elsewhere in the region. There is a type of knowledge in northern Thai Buddhism expressed by verbal formulae that, if properly manipulated, can make the fighting man invulnerable to weapons (swords, knives, guns). Almost always the preserve of men, this knowledge is codified, is sometimes written down, and has been embodied in the protagonist of an early nineteenth-century Thai poem who was known for his personal charm and powers of invisibility as well as for his powers of invulnerability. Related to these discourses of invulnerability are diagrams called *yantra* that have to be activated by means of invoking the three jewels of Buddhism: the Buddha, the dharma, and the saṅgha (monastic community) (Turton 1991). Such discourses merge with ideas of self, its potentiality and perfectibility, that have parallels with the staged progression taught by the Buddha that leads to mindfulness and enlightenment.

Another example of the powers of protection is the Buddhist saint Upagupta, who is the center of a cult in northern Southeast Asia, though he has his origins in India. There is no mention of Upagupta in the Pāli canon, but this omission does not prevent him from receiving the devotion and homage of Theravāda Buddhist laypeople in Burma, Thailand, and Laos. Upagupta is linked to the *nāga*, mythological serpent divinities representing the autochthonous owners of the land. Some people believe he lives and look to him as a protector and guardian against disorder. As with other Buddhist monks who have attained sainthood, Upagupta offers protection from malignant forces for homes, monasteries, cities, and countries (Strong 1992, 4).

The virtue of invoking these objects and practices as well as the specialists who traffic in them is that in almost all cases they highlight *potency*, one of the words that falls within the penumbra of *power* and is often one of its synonyms. It is with this particular shading of *power* that much of the ethnographic work on Buddhism across Asia can be associated, although I admit this is contested terrain. Some specialists would insist that magic and sorcery fall outside an acceptable definition of Buddhism, while still others would insist just as vehemently that positing a narrow definition of Buddhism would neglect some of the cultural changes wrought by adherence to the Buddha's teachings.

One path into this thicket of debate is to recognize at the outset that three polarities have bedeviled the study of Buddhism in Theravāda societies: that between monks and laypersons, between Buddhism and animism, and between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Of these three the last two may be subsumed under the broader heading of canonical and noncanonical. Each of these polarities has had its own history and fluctuations in the study of Buddhism, but to paraphrase the views of John L. Strong, if we take these polarities too simplistically we will miss many of the

phenomena and practices of Buddhism (Strong 1992, 172–74). For it is the spaces between these polarities, where Buddhism is bound to animism, where orthodoxy crosses into heterodoxy, and where the canonical merges with the noncanonical, that I find the most productive for instantiating power as a critical term for the study of Buddhism. Thus potency (from the Latin *potens*, "powerful" or "able"), however conjured and deployed in a variety of cultural settings, is a fruitful way of investigating how animate as well as inanimate nature and the supernatural can be influenced if not brought under control by human intervention.

To think about the problem in this way raises another issue, however. *Supernatural*, whether in Buddhist texts or practice, is unreliable as a synonym for *power*, because as Durkheim pointed out, it is only a recent conceptual category. *Supernatural* assumes that there exists a knowable "natural" world. Before the empirical sciences, no distinction was made between "normal" (or natural) and "supernormal" (or supernatural). As for incarnation in Buddhism, for example, "this is part of the perfectly natural order of things, the *dhammatā*," even if from a modern academic perspective the activities of *weikza*, *siddha*, or saintly monks, and their working of miracles are quickly relegated to the supernatural (Collins 1998, 412). *Supernatural*, *superhuman*, *supernormal* or *saksit*, for that matter, are all words denoting ineffable power.

This dilemma of finding a vocabulary appropriate to the phenomena comes no closer to resolution as we move into the related trope of potentiality in Buddhism. Topics here include sainthood or, in the terminology of Buddhism, arahantship, spirituality, and perfectibility through religious practice. Even in the canonical materials, the Buddha is given superhuman abilities that are not only a sign of his spiritual achievements but also a recommendation to emulate him. Various events in the Buddha's life trigger cosmic responses such as earthquakes. Sculptures of the Buddha are attributed with radiance and fiery energy that endow the image with a cosmic presence. These are all signs that the Buddha is not an ordinary human being.

He was born a *mahāpurisa*, or great being (the noun form designates a male), and is regarded as a *siddha*. In both orthodox and heterodox Indian tradition, the term "refers to a human being who has attained an apogee of spiritual realization and has, by virtue of that, transcended the ordinary human condition" (Ray 1994, 59). In speaking of the humanity and the divinity of the Buddha, it is important to note that these are not two natures, for to be a human in Buddhism is to have the potential for enlightenment as well as for divinity. The Buddha is both a perfected human being and a manifestation of the transcendent potential of becoming perfected. Here again with the term *potential*, as with *potency*, we are in the semantic field of *power*. In fact, an archaic meaning of *potential* was potency or power, might, strength, command. In this case it is not the inherent property of

an object or agent but the possibility, the becoming, the not-yet-realized that beckons the Buddhist.

The Buddha himself is credited with special powers, *iddhi*, sometimes glossed as potency or psychic powers. He flies up into the sky, touches the sun with his hand, and makes his body into many bodies. He can travel to other realms and converse with the *deva*s that reside there. He can live a long time, and he knows the thoughts of others. The sixteen saints, or arahants, which have attracted cults around them, are also capable of these special *iddhi* powers. They can fly; they can transport themselves to the heavenly realms and take others with them. They have supernatural sight. They anticipate their deaths and die in extraordinary ways.

The anthropologist S. J. Tambiah has teased out an interesting gloss for *iddhi* meaning "kinds of success." *Iddhi* are not bizarre phenomena resulting from the suspension of the law of mind and nature but "by-products of their mastery," the means to an end (Tambiah 1984, 45). Monks in the Thai-Buddhist world are able to achieve mastery of the laws of mind and nature through meditation, an "internal sitting" that enables them to achieve special states. By this means they concentrate power and transfer it to amulets (ibid., 245).

Sainthood is achieved in a step-by-step rise through a spiritual hierarchy, each step representing a more refined and higher degree of spirituality. Textual learning is not necessarily a guide to sanctity, for texts and scholarship can be obstacles in the spiritual life. Parables in the accounts of pilgrims tell of scholars who failed to reach sainthood because of their arrogant attitude toward their own learning (Ray 1994, 192). A monk who boasted of superhuman perfections breached the disciplinary code in the most serious way. Such an offense excluded the culprit from the monastic community (Wijayaratna 1990, 144). The wording of the code indicates, however, that the attainment of these perfections was not prohibited.

Throughout the Buddhist world, canonical and noncanonical scripture as well as historical materials contain various lists of perfections or attainments. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the bodhisattva engages in the practice of the six perfections: giving, morality, patience, vigor, meditation, and wisdom. The systematic stages by which these perfections are reached are detailed in terms of a number of paths (*mārga*) and stages (*bhūmi*). At the end of the first stage the bodhisattva possesses twelve attainments, among them the ability to live for a hundred eons, open a hundred different doors of doctrine, and emanate a hundred of his own body. At the third stage he is said to possess the five faculties of the divine eye, the divine ear, the ability to know the thoughts of others, knowledge of birth and death, and wonder-working powers such as flying (Williams 1989, 205–6). Powers in this system of spiritual attainments would seem to be a way of signifying achievement. The meditator in Tibetan tantric Buddhism, for example, develops "an ability to transform the world, to perform miracles"

(ibid., 186). Miracles or powers of the bodhisattva in the English-language studies of Buddhist doctrine are thus metaphors expressing the mastery of a systematic spiritual progression, the attainment of the perfections (Lopez 1988, 206). But to put the matter this way, to assert that the powers are merely a way of expressing this mastery, is to stand outside the religion.

Realization of the potential for enlightenment comes in many forms, not least important being Maitreya (Pāli Metteya), sometimes described as a future buddha, a messianic figure who lacks the specificity offered in Christian tradition. As a bodhisattva and buddha-to-be, Maitreya lives in the Tuṣita heaven. Those who keep the precepts, give alms, and listen to the last birth-story of the Buddha, the *Vessantara Jātaka*, will see Maitreya, while those who commit certain crimes or create schism in the monastic order, for example, will not (Collins 1998, 375–76).

Maitreya has had a career across most parts of Asia in both Mahāyāna and Theravāda traditions (Sponberg and Hardacre 1988). The plump Buddha that greets visitors to Chinese temples is the Maitreya. In Korea the Maitreya Buddha has been a guardian figure, a warrior, and a future leader of the new society. On the trade and pilgrimage routes from Afghanistan through Central Asia to China, gigantic images of Maitreya were erected; and in China itself the story of Maitreya inspired messianic movements whose leaders claimed to be either prophets or incarnations of Maitreya (Williams 1989, 228, 230). Empress Wu of China in the seventh century was proclaimed by a crafty monk to be a reincarnation of Maitreya. The name of the founder of the last Burman dynasty in the late eighteenth century, Alaungpaya, literally means "embryo Buddha"; and followers of Saya San, who led a popular uprising against British colonial rule, prayed that their leader would become a future Buddha (Adas 1979, 102).

In terms of collective, terrestrial, imminent, and total salvation, beliefs about Maitreya and the movements that flow from those beliefs can rightfully be called millennial. Maitreya can mobilize people for action, and the result of the transformation that is effected by this mobilization is not mere improvement of the human condition but perfection itself (Collins 1998, 410–13).

The prevalence of these different practices and ideal types suggests that Buddhism can offer many ways of conferring charisma, a talent or capacity that is useful in political leadership. But the vocabulary we employ in English to make this distinction—"political leadership" on the one hand, and religion-based "charismatic authority" on the other—divides the terrestrial world from the spiritual world in a way that Buddhist belief does not recognize. The relationship in Buddhism between perfected (or perfectible) beings and territory brings us to the related but distinct topic of sovereignty.

Buddhism, whether in the premodern or modern polity, has often been intertwined with kingship and with political legitimacy. Some Buddhist kings, at least, called themselves or were called bodhisattvas. One of the historical moments that made possible the identification of king-as-buddha occurred in the third century CE, when Emperor Aśoka is given credit for fashioning what Joseph Kitigawa has called the spatialization of the Buddhist world. Comprising Buddhist kingship, the dharma as morality for the common weal, and the political order, this triad was a kind of second order of the three jewels (the Buddha, the dharma, the saṅgha) (Sponberg and Hardacre 1988, 16).

Pāli and Sanskrit texts offered monarchs plenty of semiotic resources for couching an emperor's career in Buddhist terms, so is it is not as if Aśoka had twisted Buddhism to suit ends for which it was not intended. The Buddha's aristocratic birth certainly had consequences for some of the company he kept—kings and other royal patrons—as well as for the success of his movement. A prophecy made at Gautama's birth declared that the thirty-two marks visible on his body made him a "great being" (*mahāpurisa*). The infant boy was thus destined to be either a "wheel-turning king" (*cakravartin*, sometimes translated loosely as "universal monarch") or a buddha. *Wheel* here connotes both the wheel weapon of the warrior king and the wheel of the dharma, which the Buddha set in motion. The same vast amount of merit must accumulate in the previous lives of both beings, and identical miracles attend the birth of each (Collins 1998, 471). The path taken was essentially a career choice.

The either/or nature of the prophecy, in which the wheel-turning king and the buddha are two sides of the same coin, reflects a persisting strain in myth and iconography that sees the Buddha as a world emperor *in potentia*, a sort of photonegative emperor. If the Buddha represents the absence of power, then he leaves a very large black hole that exerts immense gravitational forces on all those in its orbit. This relationship between the two had implications throughout history in the way secular leaders availed themselves of Buddhism's idioms of authority and leadership. The practice of some early Thai kings of abdicating the throne to be ordained as monks, only to resume the throne sometime later, is one such example. And just as the Buddha transcends the profane world, so the monastic order stands apart, its authority grounded in a transcendent order by which secular authority can be judged. Monks may cooperate with secular rulers (the crown, or its modern sovereign descendants), or they can challenge those rulers (Collins 1998, 19).

That the *mahāpurisa* did choose to become a buddha and that there is always the possibility of future buddhas to come left the way open for ambitious monarchs to declare themselves to be wheel-turning kings. The

influx of Buddhist texts and teachings into China caused a sea change in political culture by the late sixth century, making it possible for the founder of the Sui dynasty to cloak his emperorship with the symbolism of the wheel-turning king. Born in a Buddhist temple, Emperor Wen-ti cast himself as such a king, along with defender of the Buddhist faith and a surrogate of the Buddha. Various kings of Burma also availed themselves of the paradigm, as did kings in premodern Siam. Moreover, Buddha images adorned with jewels and a royal crown appear from time to time in the sculpture of the region, and The King Who Rules by Dhamma (*dhammarāja*) is common in the titles of monarchs across mainland Southeast Asia.

The relationship between the *cakravartin* (Buddhist emperor) and the saṅgha (the community of monks) could be filled with tension and competition, even where the saṅgha and the crown were formally aligned. Buddhist kings, while they sought to promulgate the religion and advance their own spiritual state, could come into conflict with senior monks who took issue with the means these monarchs employed to achieve these ends, or with the claims they made. In one celebrated case in late eighteenth-century Siamese history, a king was dethroned and the senior monks in his regime demoted because the incumbent's claims to Buddhist sainthood (*arahant*) did not have the backing of the entire saṅgha. Among those who opposed these claims was a monk elevated in ecclesiastical rank who offered some sage if altogether worldly advice on defending the royal center from attack by the Burmese (Reynolds 1979b).

Monarchs and emperors throughout Buddhist Asia saw patronage of monks and monasteries as both moral duty and advantage. The land, laborers, and artisans given as endowments to the saṅgha were exempted from taxation. The fact that in mainland Southeast Asian Buddhist kingdoms not only agriculturalists but also painters, wood-carvers, gold- and silversmiths, masons, dancers, singers, musicians, scribes, and weavers were presented to monasteries suggests that they were the cultural heart of the kingdom (Reynolds 1979a). Yet the assets enjoyed by monasteries as a result of this patronage could become a liability. The saṅgha in early Burma came into conflict with the crown because of the vast wealth that had been transferred into its hands. Even in its heyday, Buddhism in China was periodically purged until in the ninth century an unsympathetic emperor crushed and humbled it to a level from which it never really recovered. Able-bodied men sought refuge in the saṅgha in order to avoid corvée labor or conscription; and for this reason when occasion demanded, even the most ardent Buddhist kings purified the monkhood by conducting examinations and otherwise ascertaining the worthiness of ordinands. The idea that monks could be a drain on the society's economy was not unthinkable. At the end of the nineteenth century, a particularly hard-headed Siamese minister of finance calculated the production lost to

the kingdom's economy by the large number of men wearing the saffron robe (ibid., 226–27). Cooler heads prevailed; there was no purge. Thus the health of the Buddhist establishment could be both a noble expression of a Buddhist king's sovereign right as well as a means of subverting that right, politically and economically.

The concept of the just war seems apt for many episodes in the history of the region. The early Sinhalese king Duṭṭhagāmaṇī is said to have ridden into battle against the Tamils with a relic of the Buddha on his spear, accompanied by the many monks who had left the saṅgha to join him in battle. Kings displayed images of the Buddha as emblems of their sovereignty, and they would go to war to acquire such images. Certain Buddha images acquired reputations for having intrinsic powers—the supernatural potency called *saksit* in Thai—that were deemed to protect the homeland (Woodward 1997, 506). In the middle of fifteenth century in Siam, the Buddha Jinarāja, the image of the Buddha called the king-conqueror, wept tears of blood at the fate of its city being incorporated into the rising kingdom of Ayudhya. The Emerald Buddha, now housed in its own sanctuary in the old part of Bangkok, is another object on which the safety of a kingdom is believed to depend.

Such objects, whose possession is essential for the protection of the realm or state, are called *palladia*, after the Pallas Athena image on which the safety of ancient Troy was deemed to depend. Just as amulets protect the body, so palladia protect the polity. In ninth-century Ceylon, the recapture of its palladium in the form of a buddha image was celebrated as the restoration of the kingdom's wholeness. It also may be seen as a symbol of the integrity of the Sinhalese polity itself (Davis 1993, 26).

Buddhism in some countries is so widespread today that national politicians hitch their campaigns to its well-being and factor into their policies the political might of its devotees. Whether this phenomenon should be understood as opportunistic exploitation of a religiously inclined populace or as a faint echo of the dharma ruler (*dhammarāja)* is sometimes rather difficult to say. A popular Thai politician who served as governor of Bangkok in the mid-1980s and was both an elite military officer and a pious Buddhist will serve to illustrate the point.

Chamlong Srimuang, born in 1935, came up through the ranks of Thailand's officer corps and achieved the rank of major general at age fifty. He was associated with a military faction known as the Young Turks, who, despite their vision of themselves as "professional soldiers," were probably the most politicized and least professional soldiers in Thai history to that date (McCargo 1997, 44). National politics came next with Chamlong's appointment as secretary-general to the army leader who rose to power in 1980. With much support from commanders of Bangkok-based military units, he succeeded in being elected governor of Bangkok in 1985. By the early 1990s his reputation as a civilian politician, albeit with

strong military credentials, equipped him to stand up against the military strongman who had led a coup d'etat in 1991. In May 1992 the center of Bangkok filled with protestors appealing the strongman's insistence that he be the next prime minister. The denouement of this confrontation was a bloody massacre of unarmed demonstrators by military forces sent to control the disturbance.

Paralleling Chamlong Srimuang's altogether worldly career as a municipal and national politician was his religious life. He was a devout Buddhist who, with his wife Sirilak, joined Santi Asoke, a religious center that demanded a particularly strict regimen. In the center Chamlong demonstrated his humility by willingly taking on menial chores such as cleaning floors and washing dishes. He became known as Maha Chamlong, *maha* being an honorific bestowed on monks who had been successful in the Pāli examinations. The Thai people, impressed by his renunciation of worldly pleasures, spoke of him as "half-man, half-monk." Between 1979 and 1985 he traveled throughout the country, giving sermons to villagers, teachers, students, and other groups. In addition, Chamlong fought against an abortion bill and established the Army of Dharma Foundation, a charitable trust for Santi Asoke activities. In 1984 he founded the Army of Dharma Practitioners Association, whose eight thousand members pledged to keep the five Buddhist precepts (McCargo 1997, 85); a subdivision of the association operated his vegetarian restaurant. He also founded the political party known as the Moral Force party, *dhamma* being the term translated here as "moral."

So, is Chamlong Srimuang an opportunistic politician, a pious Buddhist with a sharp eye on the electorate, or a latter-day incarnation of a would-be wheel-turning ruler? In other words, are we not obliged to reinterpret the first two disciplinary regimes once we are aware of the region's history with the third? I am not suggesting that Chamlong thought of himself as a monarch, an ambition that would deviate too far from the norms that govern contemporary Thai political culture. Rather, I am arguing for a notion of power that draws simultaneously from military, civil, and religious sources. Explaining this power taxes one's talents for English expression, but it helps to remember some history. Chamlong's English-language biographer is a political scientist whose disciplinary focus does not oblige him to look into the distant past, but he does note that the religious and political aspects of Chamlong's ambition are often difficult to disentangle. The "half-man, half-monk" never distinguished between religious pronouncements and political ones (McCargo 1997, 86). While some of Chamlong's behavior certainly seemed calculated to win votes, to say nothing of the heart of his sweetheart, he would not be the first Buddhist leader in the region whose religious virtuosity helped to underwrite political power (ibid., 78). Aśoka, Duṭṭhagāmaṇī, the wheel-turning kings of mainland Southeast Asia, even Saya San, who took on the

British colonial authorities wearing all the signs of a future buddha, prefigure Major General Chamlong Srimuang's remarkable career. He shares with them the multiple sources of his charisma.

THE ASCETIC BODY

Chamlong's career as military officer and devout Buddhist returns us to the somewhat paradoxical topic of how the renunciant, more particularly his or her ascetic body, might be a source of power. In his person Chamlong fused military and monastic regimens. The Buddhist groups that he founded, the Army of Dharma Foundation and the Army of Dharma Practitioners Association, employ a rhetoric of Buddhist morality pursued by force (McCargo 1997, 85). His Moral Force political party employs a similar rhetoric, using the same term for force (*phalang*) that is used to translate "nuclear power" (*phalang paramanu*). Like the Buddha defeating Māra or the king-conqueror image that wept tears of blood, this is the trope of power mobilized for religious ends.

These discursive crossovers from the military to Buddhism and back again offer an opportunity to examine asceticism afresh. Chamlong's ability to live by these disciplinary regimes was the prime source of his electoral success. At the same time, these regimes conjured up a charismatic figure. By practicing varying degrees of Buddhist discipline throughout his life, including ordination as a monk for three months, Chamlong was pursuing a regimen that complemented his military training (McCargo 1997, 79). During his preaching tours, he slept outdoors, protected only by the mosquito-net umbrella of the wandering ascetic (Pāli *dhutanga*), one of the strictest paradigms of monastic conduct. The *dhutanga* practices, which vary between twelve and thirteen and are categorized in terms of robes, food, and shelter, include wearing rags, delighting in whatever scraps turn up in the alms bowl, living in the open air, residing at the foot of a tree or in cremation grounds, and remaining in a sitting posture. Such a way of life is conducive to simplicity of desires, contentment, the expunction of evil, punctiliousness, and the exertion of energy (Ray 1994, 313–14). Charismatic authority adheres to the practitioner of these austerities as a consequence of enduring what is beyond the capacity of most men and women.

Taken together, the *dhutanga* practices mark the extremity of asceticism for Buddhist monks. For all monks the vinaya, one of the three baskets of the Buddhist canon, sets forth a code of conduct in the form of rules that govern diet, exercise, deportment, and exemplary behavior. These rules may be understood as techniques for disengaging from the world and controlling the mind and its physical outlets in the body; adherence to them carries spiritual value in itself. While the community of monks valorizes the way of the vinaya code and, to a certain extent,

monitors its observance and breach, it is up to the individual members to decide the extent of their own adherence. The degree of asceticism can be selected, as it were, although no master or higher authority need pass judgment on the decision, provided the core rules are followed. In Buddhist societies a complicated dynamic is at work that does not so much police these rules as keep them in place by consent and social expectation. Buddhist asceticism is pursued not so much in the direction of morality and ethics as toward self-knowledge, an aim congruent with the themes of potentiality and perfectibility canvassed earlier in this discussion.

Few scholars have ventured to look at the saṅgha in terms of Michel Foucault's concept of micropower and the way in which the ascetic body might be viewed as a conduit of power relations. Ascetic practice could be compared with the regimes of discipline, normalization, and surveillance that Foucault found in the hospital, the asylum, and the prison. As such, the monastic disciplinary code is one of those networks of power on which larger political structures (most often the state in Foucault's writing, though he is hardly ever explicit about this) rest and through which they create their effects (Foucault 1980, 122). These structures can only operate on the basis of other already existing power relations, such as that in the saṅgha even with its nominal authority. In fact, in Buddhist monasteries the abbot is supreme, and the monastic hierarchies and establishments created by monarchies in premodern Asian societies facilitated the extension of monarchical authority through its power of appointment. The humility and deference instilled in a monk by his preceptor valorized a paradigm of loyalty that was useful to sovereign power outside the monastery.

But Foucault's analysis of power relations in carceral institutions (hospitals, asylums, prisons, schools) has a modernist and Western bias. In its crudest applications it too readily creates docile subjects all too willing to do the bidding of a monolithic Power that is never defined or located. Moreover, Foucault's notion of power is about domination rather than capacity. Although he offered the insight that power is productive in its capacity to create subjects and regimes of truth, his notion of power cannot account for the kind that accrues to the meditating monk emerging from the wilderness. There the monk had confronted the dangerous forces of disorder and the raw energies of nature, absorbing them and thus gaining spiritual and magical powers from which ordinary laypeople can benefit.

It could be argued that some of the practices and values discussed above lie beyond what could be reasonably called Buddhist. But if we accept that stricture, then we cannot account for Buddhism's capacity to incorporate or co-opt what is non-Buddhist. As a transcultural religion, it confronted cultures quite different from the one out of which it emerged. By the early centuries of the Christian era it had made its way to Southeast Asia; China and Japan by the sixth century; and Tibet by the seventh.

Yet even in India, where it arose, Buddhism had to navigate between a ritualistic religion in which sacrifice was a central practice and a plethora of regional animistic cults. In fact, virtually everywhere it traveled, it encountered a profusion of local religious groups and practices that tugged and stretched and tested the canonical Buddhism articulated in the texts.

Power is a problematic term for Buddhist studies, because it forces on us the preoccupations of the modern age. At first sight the term seems too burdened with modernist meanings to be of use. Moreover, the message of world renunciation taught by the Buddha would seem to resist the more secular and profane meanings of power. But delving into the Pāli and Sanskrit cognates for *power* and the histories and thought-worlds that localize these cognates takes us into different cultural domains, thereby liberating *power* as a critical term. The career of General Chamlong Srimuang, the kind of person found in many places in the Buddhist world, illuminates the way *power* can be glossed in these other cultural domains in terms of potency, potentiality, sovereignty, and the ascetic body.

In researching and writing this essay, I am indebted to Peter Jackson, John Powers, and Jacob Ramsay for references and relevant discussion.

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PRACTICE

Carl Bielefeldt

In thinking about how the term *practice* might operate in Buddhism and the study of Buddhism, it seems helpful first to sort out the several ways we use the word. I want to use four such ways in particular to organize my essay. One is the *practice* we associate with active engagement or regular participation in a vocation or calling—the sense we may have most in mind when we say that someone is a "practicing Christian" or an "observant Jew"; the sense the Buddhist scholar faces when she is asked, "Do you practice?" A second, closely related sense is the *practice* we contrast with *theory*—practice as what is practical, what is applied; the sense of the term we encounter when we are told by a Buddhist text that the teachings can only be understood through their practice. A third is the *practice* we connect with *proficiency*—practice as preparation for a performance or training in or for a skill, as when we say that "practice makes perfect"; the sense meant when one Buddhist says of another, "He is advanced in his practice."

The last is the *practice* we set over against *principle*—what one does in fact, actual behavior, as opposed to professed ideal; the sense carried when the Buddhist historian observes, "In practice, the monks' ideal of poverty has often been honored more in the breach than in the observance." These different meanings of our term work together with and against each other in complex ways. Depending on which we choose, *practice* can be a marker of authenticity or a signal of suspicion, a sign that the Buddhist is on his way to perfection or a warning that he is not there yet. Though the Asian Buddhist texts may not have a single word that quite matches the full semantic range of our English term, they have words that work in all these ways.

* * *

Let us start here with my first way of using the term, the *practice* that pursues a calling. This sense of *practice* seems a good place to start because it is closely tied to what we mean by *Buddhism* and, hence, how we understand the object of Buddhist studies as a discipline. What is it that defines the practice of Buddhism, such that we can decide who is and is not doing it? For much of its brief history, Buddhist studies has tended to approach this question from what we might loosely call a theological angle. It has assumed that Buddhism is a set of claims about the world and the human condition in the world, together with a more or less systematic program (or set of programs) for some ultimate solution to the human condition—or, in more Buddhist terms, a vehicle (*yāna*) or path (*mārga*) leading to liberation (*mokṣa*) from rebirth, cessation (*nirvāṇa*) of suffering, enlightenment (*bodhi*), and so forth. A practicing Buddhist, then, is one who not only believes the claims but habitually engages in those activities prescribed by the program. In principle, such a definition might well leave open a very wide range of possible activities as candidates for practice; but, in practice, Buddhist studies has long tended to focus on those exercises prescribed by the more technical treatises on the path to the final soteriological goal, exercises based on the ancient Indian ideal of the ascetic (*śramaṇa*). Like these treatises, we have treated Buddhism largely as a system of spiritual discipline (*yoga*) and defined its practice as a kind of training (*śikṣa*)—as in, for example, the venerable formula of the "threefold training" of precepts (*śīla*), meditation (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*prajñā*).

Such a view of Buddhist practice has been widespread not only in our academic literature but in the contemporary popular understanding of the religion, where the question, do you practice? is very often almost synonymous with do you meditate? Put this way, needless to say, the question is an awkward one not only for most Buddhist scholars but for most Buddhists. Put this way, the great majority of Buddhists throughout

history have never practiced their religion. They have been the patrons of, the audience for, at best the auxiliaries to, the relatively small troupe of professionals—those who have "gone forth" (*pravrajita*) from the home—for whom the contemplative life is a vocation. And even among the professionals, much of what they do in the service of their faith—the prayers for their patrons, the ritual performances for their audiences, the writing of their books, the administration of their institutions, and the like—will not, properly speaking, count as practice.

A marked distinction between clerical and lay Buddhism has been fairly standard throughout the history of the religion; and a category of practice (*yoga*, *bhāvanā*, *pratipatti*, *caryā*, etc.) setting off the ascetic and contemplative exercises of the spiritual path is native to the tradition. At the same time, of course, the tradition has always recognized the Buddhist community to be composed of both clergy and laity, and has always provided for both these classes a wide range of options for participation in the religion—from private attitudes of faith, devotion, and repentance; through ritual acts of pilgrimage, prayer, and worship; to social works of teaching, patronage, service, and so on. And it has built capacious theological schemes within which these options can find a place in a soteriological program—not only as merit (*puṇya*), or good karma leading to better circumstances in this world, but often enough as necessary, sometimes even sufficient, means to the final end.

The inclination, therefore, in Buddhist studies and in some modern forms of Buddhism to define *practice* in terms of the contemplative life is not simply a reflex of traditional Buddhist theology but is also itself in effect a theological choice about what Buddhism ought properly to be. The choice was made in the nineteenth century, when Buddhism was being recognized (or, some would say, invented) as an object of the new science of religion. As a proper object capable of comparison with the other great world religions, it was first of all a theology, made up of metaphysical claims and soteriological models, the more sophisticated analogues to primitive religion's myths and rituals. The Buddhist theology of choice turned out to be quite sophisticated indeed. No god, it seemed; no soul. No myths of creation and fall; no guilt and redemption. Hence, no salvation through faith in a redeemer; no absolution through the rites of a church. Just individual human ignorance and the overcoming of ignorance through re-education; just individual ethical error and the correction of error through personal reform. In the hallowed teachings of the four noble truths, Buddhism was first of all about human suffering: what caused it, and how it could be cured. The cause lay in the character of our action and understanding, and the cure in the transformation of that character through ethical, psychological, and intellectual training. For the rest of the religion—the elaborate cosmologies and fantastic pantheons of gods,

saints, and spirits; the mystic rites and magical formulas, the abject repentances and pious supplications—it was adventitious, the accumulated dross of cultural belief and practice picked up from the native soil of Asian societies.

This sort of approach to Buddhism has played an important role in making the religion attractive to modern Western (and Westernized) audiences; but, perhaps in part for that very reason, Buddhist studies in recent years has begun to lose interest in it. Theological questions of what a religion believes about the world and how it explains the nature and cure of the human condition are probably still the questions that most normal people first want to ask about an unfamiliar faith, but people familiar with Buddhism in the academy tend not to ask them so much anymore. In the late twentieth century, by the time Buddhist studies was getting set up in religious studies departments, religious studies was moving out of its old theological home, losing its focus on fixing the world religions as abstract doctrinal systems, and experimenting with new tools of interpretation and new norms of understanding that took into greater account the social histories of its object. Meanwhile, Buddhist studies was greatly expanding the object of its own attentions, moving out of India and Sri Lanka into Southeast Asia, across the Silk Road to East Asia, and over the Himalayas into Tibet.

We now read books that earlier generations did not know, in languages they did not read, from cultures they overlooked, in genres and on topics they might not have recognized as properly Buddhist. And we read them differently, against the grain, as some like to say, looking for their agendas and conscious of our own. In the rush of all this new kind of reading, the Pāli canon has lost its place as the sacred repository of original Buddhism; original Buddhism has lost its status as the arbiter of orthodoxy; orthodoxy has lost its grip on our imagination of what Buddhism might be. The learned Indic treatises on the stages of the Buddhist spiritual path get thrown in a pile along with a Tibetan ritual text, a Thai prayer, a Chinese donor's inscription, a Japanese pilgrim's guide. All these and much more become the sources for thinking of Buddhist practice.

Yet, for all these changes, I think my basic point here still holds: that what counts as Buddhist practice, whether it be narrowly or broadly defined, rests at least as heavily on underlying theological assumptions as on the nature of the activity itself. Put more broadly, practice is always driven by some theory, not just in the sense that theory informs and guides it but in the sense that its very existence as a category is a product of theory. And this seems about equally true whether the theory in question is a theological claim native to the tradition or a theory of religion imposed on the tradition by a scholar. I shall come back to the scholar later on; before that, I want to explore a bit how the tradition itself has dealt with the relationship between its theories and its practices, beginning

with a more general word on the vexed contrast between these two categories.

* * *

In common parlance, the *practice* we set over against *theory* might well refer to what we do, as opposed to what we think. But of course thinking is one of the things we do. Hence, in the practice of thinkers, the word *praxis* has often been used to mean particular kinds of thinking: practical thinking about what we do, normative thinking about what we ought to do, prescriptive thinking about how to go about it—as opposed to our more metaphysical thoughts (sometimes called *theoria*) about the ultimate nature of things and how they operate. Hence, depending on which of these two senses of the term we choose, we can think of Buddhist practice either in contrast with its thought or as a part of it—either as, say, the religion's ethical observances, spiritual exercises, ritual performances, and the like, in contrast with its doctrines; or as those parts of its doctrines that deal with matters ethical, spiritual, ritual, and the like, in contrast with the parts that make claims about how the world is put together and what is really going on here. Talk of practice can be confusing when it slips back and forth across these two meanings, as it often seems to do.

Most of the talk about practice in Buddhist texts (and in much of Buddhist studies) is in a broad sense of the doctrinal kind—that is, talk about what Buddhists ought to do, rather than about what they do. In such normative talk, it is by no means always clear just what practical implications the prescriptions for practice are supposed to have. We see a classic case of this problem in the Buddhist formula of the four noble truths, which appears to consist of three theoretical claims about the human condition, plus the eightfold path, supposed to correct the condition. At first glance, the fourth member here seems merely a prescription for practice, but in fact it is regularly treated as integral to the doctrinal formula, the full understanding of which is considered the goal of the practice. When the Buddha first preached the four noble truths at Sarnath, his audience all became arhats and realized nirvāṇa on the spot, not by engaging in the practices of the eightfold path but by hearing about and understanding them. Here, practice seems not only driven by but wholly subsumed within theory.

Movement in the opposite direction occurs when we subsume theory into some model of practice. Buddhist authors very often begin their books with a bow to the Buddha and his teachings. We need not imagine that this gesture of piety defines the author as a practitioner in any strong sense, let alone that it marks whatever follows as necessarily connected to a spiritual practice. A bow at the beginning is a nod to tradition, a sign of legitimacy, a signal to the reader that the author acknowledges certain

rhetorical conventions, of terminology, argumentation, citation, and the like, appropriate to Buddhist writing. What follows after that has its own rules of genre: ritual manuals have their narrative structures, quite apart from metaphysical theories; philosophical treatises need a kind of intellectual coherence that may have nothing to do with any practice beyond the practice of the writing itself. Still, a bow to the Buddha at the beginning can serve as a reminder that whatever follows is somehow to be understood as religious literature, not merely as metaphysical or ethical kinds of thinking.

In effect, the reminder invokes a broader sense of practice within which thinking takes place. The difference between *theoria* and *praxis* is often put in terms of their respective goals: the former seeks the pure contemplation of the truth; the latter aims at practical consequences in the world of human affairs. But, of course, the truths of theory and their contemplation are not necessarily without their consequences in human affairs, especially when the affairs are religious. Somewhat as Marxists like to say that all serious thinking is ultimately political and therefore is (or, perhaps, should be) a form of praxis, Buddhists will often say that all authentic Buddhist thinking is ultimately what we might loosely call soteriological—in other words, that even Buddhist metaphysical claims are intended not (or not simply) as theoretical accounts of the truth but as practical guides to spiritual goals. Weak versions of this kind of talk will often mean little more than that Buddhist theories are not only true but are also good for people; stronger versions can take more emphatically pragmatist turns, in which theories become merely the tools of practice, to be measured by their spiritual utility.

This rhetoric of practice can occasionally run to silly extremes, as when it is imagined that Buddhism is (or ought to be) somehow theory free. Such a view may be particularly attractive to modern Western audiences suspicious of dogma and reluctant to cast themselves as believers. They can contrast the emphasis on orthodoxy in other religions with what is sometimes called the orthopraxy of Buddhism. They can point to the many passages throughout Buddhist literature warning of the limited validity (and sometimes spiritual utility) of our conceptual constructs (*vikalpa* and so forth). They can quote Zen masters who like to say that Buddhism is about eating the rice cracker, not admiring pictures of it. They can cite the scriptural passage in which the Buddha urges us to pull out the poisoned arrow, rather than speculate about it. They can invoke an image, much favored by the tradition, of the Buddha as physician (or, more recently, therapist) and his four noble truths not as theoretical claims but as diagnosis and prescription. On such a view, the purpose of the first three truths is to prompt us to take the medicine of the fourth. On such a view, my point about theory driving practice has got it just backward.

Not surprisingly, most Buddhist authors locate themselves somewhere in the middle here. Even those practitioners who like to mock the theorists for wasting their time "counting others' money" need their practice to make Buddhist sense, want their practice to flow from some theory that makes it more than merely random behavior; even those theorists who rail against the benighted practitioners for failing to understand what they are doing need to see what they themselves are doing as a kind of Buddhist practice and want the truth of their theories to be validated in the experience of practitioners. Held by this mutual need, theory and practice circle each other throughout Buddhist literature in a complex dance. Books that start off with a strong set of metaphysical truth claims may finish up by emphasizing that such claims lose their ultimate validity in the experience of the enlightened practitioner. Books that begin with the practical problems of the spiritual life will often end by solving them through metaphysical redefinitions of the world. There are styles of Buddhism, like some forms of Zen, that seem to collapse the spiritual life into an act of understanding theoretical claims; styles, like some texts of Vajrayāna, that seem to read theoretical claims as the scripts for spiritual performance; and styles, like some versions of Pure Land, in which both theoretical understanding and spiritual cultivation are seen as obstacles to faith in a saving Buddha. We are dealing here, after all, with religious literature, not with the metaphysical and ethical branches of philosophy.

In philosophy, metaphysics may (or may not) be able to float free from ethics, but religious theories seem peculiarly subject to the very practices they define. In building soteriological frames that justify practice, they enclose themselves in their own structures. Their claims become not only the intellectual assumptions behind but also the objects of practice, in need of verification through practice. This seems especially true in a religion like Buddhism, where the soteriological theories so often put great weight on the salvific role of understanding. Where the cause of the religious problem is defined as ignorance of the way things really are, the goal of the practice becomes, in effect, the verification of the claims of theory, through the experience of things as theory claims they really are. In this experiential verification, the theory is no longer merely a set of claims; it is transformed into the saving knowledge (*jñāna*), or wisdom (*prajñā*).

This transformation of mere theory into saving knowledge is well expressed in the common Buddhist schema that plots the development of Buddhist understanding in three stages: "wisdom derived from hearing [the teachings]," "wisdom derived from thinking [about them]," and "wisdom derived from practice [of them]." The "practice" (*bhāvanā*) of the last stage here is most commonly understood to mean not merely commitment to a Buddhist life and observance of its norms but the investigation and verification of the Buddhist teachings in contemplative practice.

In such a contemplative program, theoretical claims provide the subject matter of the practice, while practice reveals the meaning of the claims; hence, Buddhist authors sometimes like to say that the two work in tandem, like the two wheels of a cart. As we have noticed, however, depending on how the Buddhist author balances the two, the cart can easily lean to one side or the other. Insofar as contemplative experience reveals the meaning of the teachings, theory can be seen merely as a kind of prop, or guide, for the contemplative exercise; insofar as the exercise is directed at understanding the teachings, contemplative technique can be seen simply as a device, or spiritual tool, for studying and verifying the truth of the theory.

Depending on the theory in question, its transformation into saving wisdom can have ironic consequences for both theory and practice, consequences that can tip the cart right off its wheels. If the theory holds (as in common formulations, say, of the perfection of wisdom doctrine) that such wisdom transcends conceptual formulation, its verification can leave the theory empty of real referent and open the door to notions that true Buddhist practice is theory free. If it holds (as, for example, in some radical versions of the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine) that true wisdom is inherent to consciousness and cannot be brought about by artificial means, its verification will have the effect of undercutting practice and reducing it to the act of accepting the theory. Such oddities remind us that, in a formulation like the three kinds of wisdom, the term *practice* works in complex relations not only with the theory that engenders it but also with the ends toward which it is directed. Clearly, we have edged here into my third sense of *practice*, where the term is understood as training toward a goal.

* * *

Though Buddhists may talk of their religion as training, the usual sense of *practice* as activity aimed at proficiency in a skill does not seem to work well with the sort of soteriological models that have dominated much of this talk. In our ordinary parlance, the goal of such practice tends to be continuous with the activity itself: we practice our lines in order to deliver them; we practice our painting to become a painter. To be sure, Buddhists may likewise practice their meditations and rituals to be good at them and their ethics in order to be ethical; but, when they locate these activities within a soteriological model, more often than not they tend to think of the goal less as mastery of the activity than as freedom from it—as if we were to practice piano in order never to have to play the thing again. Put back in terms of the schema of the threefold training, one engages in the ethical, psychological, and intellectual exercises of the religion not for their own sakes but in order to get the saving wisdom at the end. Indeed,

the person who has got to the end is often defined as a "nontrainee" (*aśaikṣa*), one with nothing to learn. If we persist in defining Buddhist practice as spiritual training, the truly wise Buddhist will not practice her religion.

This sharp distinction in kind between the means and ends of the Buddhist religious life is probably a special case of the sort of causal relations seen in the ancient doctrines of karma, where the effect of an act is not another act but an experience of the consequences. We lie in the beds we make; we do not simply keep making beds. Similarly, in the soteriological version of causal relations, the acts of practice as cause (*hetu*) yield not more practiced acts but the experience of the effect (*phala*)—in the best case, the ultimate effect of freedom from action and its effects. This causal model of practice persists throughout Buddhist tradition despite efforts to imagine alternatives. Still, there are such efforts, of which surely the most conspicuous and influential is that associated with the ideal of the bodhisattva. Here, the goal is conceived not only as inner state but as power, not only as freedom from the world but as mastery over it. Here, then, there is more obvious continuity between means and ends, such that the bodhisattva's cultivation of his spiritual powers is directed at perfecting them; his practice of the perfections (*pāramitā*) is in part preparation for his performance as perfected buddha. And once Buddhists, as some of them eventually do, begin imagining themselves as buddhas, their practice becomes the performance itself, no longer a means to an end but the practice of their calling as buddhas.

Both these models of the spiritual life—as means to an end and as practice of calling—find their setting in what is likely the most common image of Buddhist religion: that it represents a path (*mārga*). The travel metaphor is often somewhat unhappily mixed with others—such as a maturation motif seen in the popular agricultural images of roots and fruits, fields of merit, spiritual cultivation, and the like; still, the model of Buddhism as a way to get from here to there is an extremely powerful and enduring one, reflected in other classic images, of rafts, vehicles, caravans, and so on. As a way to get somewhere, practice is clearly put in service to a goal different from itself, is treated not simply as a spiritual way of life to be cultivated but as a journey to some spiritual end that puts an end to practice. Such, at least, is how things look to the ordinary traveler. To the travel guide, whose calling it is to take people along the path, his practice will continue so long as there are travelers.

The image of the path is undoubtedly the dominant motif of Buddhist soteriological thinking and spawns a complex body of doctrinal literature on just how one makes the journey to the goal. Such literature allows the theoreticians to locate the various practices mentioned in Buddhist scripture (or otherwise sanctioned by the community) within a coherent schema and thus to domesticate them into an orthodox setting. A pious

donation to the saṅgha (monastic community) becomes an exercise of the initial stage of the path, on which one collects "provisions" (*saṃbhāra*) of merit for the journey ahead. The ancient ascetic practice of corpse contemplation becomes one of the five antidotal exercises preparatory to the doctrinal meditations that lead to the stage of vision (*darśana*). An ecstatic vision of the emptiness of things becomes the attainment of the stage of nonretrogression (*avaivartya*) and the entrance into the higher grounds (*bhūmi*) of the bodhisattva. A rite of rain-making magic becomes the practice of skill in means (*upāya*) through which the bodhisattva on the higher grounds draws believers to the faith. And so on and so forth, in lavish detail.

Path theory provides a coherent setting not only for diverse practices but also for conflicting teachings. Where scriptural passages contradict each other or doctrinal systems contend with each other, they can be reconciled by assignment to the view of things from differing stages on the path. Such use of the path as metatheory is common throughout the tradition but probably reaches its apotheosis in the theological literature of East Asia known as classifying doctrine (*panjiao*). Here, the most prominent systems of Indian Buddhist thought—Sarvāstivāda, Mādhyamika, Yogācāra, Tathāgatagarba—as well as others developed in China, all find their place in some schema of the path. Since of course each of these systems has its own schema of the path, the whole becomes what might be (but is not) called an *abhimārga*, or "metapath." Since the path culminates in the final wisdom, whichever system comes last has the final word on truth; the rest represent versions accommodated to the relevant stage of the practitioner. There is perhaps no more striking example of my earlier point about the complex interplay between Buddhist theory and practice.

The habit of locating the various versions of Buddhism on a path to the goal, together with the notion that the goal is the end of practice, has curious consequences for soteriological theory. The version of Buddhism that remains standing at the end of the path will be by definition a religion for the one with no further need of training. To the extent, then, that one wants to claim the final, ultimately true version as one's own (as of course theologians tend to do), he will find it awkward to explain what, if any, practice follows from the claim. At this point, most of the theologians simply split their system into theoretical and practical levels of discourse, or what they like to call ultimate (*paramārtha*) and conventional (*saṃvṛti*) truths, such that they can continue to recommend a path of practical, though only pragmatically valid, means to an ultimate theoretical end. But those who resist the split and want to keep the theoretical and practical parts of their system together at the end of the path will have to find new ways of talking about practice as something other than a way to get there from here.

The new ways of talking about practice are usually called in the East Asian literature sudden (*tun*) soteriologies—that is, approaches to the religious life that imagine the practitioner as somehow already at the end of the path. To get the practitioner there, they typically rely not on practice but on some metaphysical doctrine of the universal pervasion of buddhahood, such that everyone comes endowed with what they call the nature of a buddha or the mind of a buddha, or everyone is bathed in the omniscient consciousness of the buddha or grounded in the cosmic body of the buddha. Once they have got everyone there at the end of the path as in some (much debated) sense equivalent to a buddha, they can redefine practice according to their definitions of buddhahood.

The definitions tend to go in two directions. Some will emphasize a buddha's status as "nontrainee," his freedom from the need to improve himself. This type, seen for example in some forms of Zen and Pure Land soteriology, will tend to dismiss all schemes of spiritual training in favor of a leap of insight into or faith in the doctrine of inherent perfection. In the pure form of this "Protestant" type, the effort to practice is a sign that one has missed the point of the teaching or lacks faith in its claims; for those who get the point or abide in faith, if there is anything left to do, it is simply to celebrate one's liberation from the norms of the path. This rhetoric of the religious life as celebration of freedom obviously raises the specter of antinomian, or transgressive, practice. We do in fact occasionally find traces of such practice in the historical record, but most often it occurs in the heresiologies of its orthodox critics. Since the celebrations of choice—like the Zen adept's ritualized spontaneity or the Pure Land devotee's pious recitations—seem relatively innocuous, perhaps the heresy lies less in the nature of the practice itself than in a theory that threatens to disenfranchise the trained professional and blur the distinction between practitioner and patron.

The other approach takes the trained professional more seriously. It focuses on the definition of a buddha not just as one liberated from practice but as perfected practitioner, as final product of the bodhisattva's long course of training, now ready to take up his calling as fully realized saint and supreme exemplar of the spiritual life. In this more "Catholic" type, seen most conspicuously in soteriologies of (or influenced by) Vajrayāna, the buddha is an actor, one who has transmuted the three kinds of human karma (of body, speech, and thought) into the "three mysteries" (*triguhya*) of enlightened action. One's role at the end of path, then, is to perform, to act out, or, perhaps, channel, the mysteries of buddhahood through the physical, verbal, and mental exercises of ritual practice. Here, the mastery of ritual technique becomes not a means to an end but an end in itself. Here, though all of us may be buddhas in theory, only the masters of technique are buddhas in practice, and thus the old distinction between practitioner and patron, performer and audience, remains safely intact.

Though they go at it in different ways, both these styles of sudden soteriology are trying to turn around the standard model of spiritual means and ends, such that the religious life will now flow from rather than toward its goal. Practice here becomes not the cause but an effect of enlightenment. Whatever else we may think of such styles, to their credit they are at least honest on the nasty question that the Buddhist theologians tend to cover over by their familiar metaphor of the path: how exactly the various exercises on the path actually move one beyond it—or, in more starkly Buddhist terms, how the karma of practice actually causes liberation. In these styles, the answer is, practice cannot do it; only theory can do it, through redefinition of our situation. Of course, as we know, such redefinition remains mere theory until it is verified in experience; hence, in practice as a working religion, even the sudden style will have to find its own ways of encouraging its followers to come to terms with their new situation. Hence, we should not be surprised to discover various forms of appeal to the felt needs of the theologians' audience and a wide range of actual religious practices behind the rhetoric of immediacy.

* * *

The notion of actual practice behind the rhetoric brings us to my last sense of our term, the *practice* we contrast with *principle* or *ideal*. In one sense, I suppose, we can treat this contrast as a subset of my earlier distinction between *practice* and *theory*. In introducing the distinction, I warned against confusing the practice of practical thinking and the practice that goes on outside the thinking. The attentive reader will have noticed that, up till now, we have been dealing almost exclusively with the former: what Buddhists think we ought to do. Now, we are shifting over to the latter: what Buddhists do in fact. To make this shift, we need to look differently at the normative texts of the tradition, with an eye now for what they might (or might not) tell us about historical realities. We need to look up from these texts, at the people who wrote and read (and didn't read) them and at the worlds they lived in; we need to look back at the texts as artifacts of these people and their worlds. We want to know now not just what Buddhists have to say in their texts but why they say it, why they write the texts and why the way they do, who reads them and to what effect; how, in short, the representations of Buddhism fit into the lives of Buddhists. Seen in the light of such questions, the normative texts become not (or not only) the arbiters of Buddhist practices but themselves the products of cultural practices—practices of religion, to be sure, but also of language and literature, social organization and custom, politics and economics.

Once we begin to imagine Buddhists not as *śrāvaka*s, *pratyekabuddha*s, and bodhisattvas but as people with lives outside the representations of Buddhist normative texts, the value of these texts for reconstructing

Buddhist practice becomes fairly problematic. To be sure, they tell us that some Buddhists spent their time writing books. Some of these books clearly had a wide readership; others probably did not. Most Buddhists before modern times couldn't read, and even the literate were lucky if they had access to a manuscript or block print. The books themselves were used for practices beyond reading: they were copied out and illuminated; enshrined on altars and worshipped; entombed in stūpas and circumambulated; left in the ground for the future buddha, Maitreya, to dig up; stuffed into statues; carried as talismans; put into potions; and so on. Similarly, the content of the books served a variety of functions beyond intellectual edification and spiritual training: it was memorized and chanted as liturgy and prayer, depicted in art and iconography, cited as authority (or dismissed as heresy) in debate, invoked by kings as justification for their reigns, recited by children as proverb and by storytellers as entertainment.

Given the varied ways that Buddhists have used their texts, one cannot help but wonder to what extent they also practiced what is preached in them. Even a relatively concrete text of instruction on, say, a ritual procedure is not in itself evidence that anyone ever performed the ritual. Even from the detailed rules of a monastic code, we might as easily infer that the monks were not following the rules as that they were; by the same token, the actions proscribed by such rules may have more to do with the monks' imagination than with their behavior. Almost certainly some of the seemingly prescriptive models for mystical visions and supernatural journeys have more to do with the imagination than with a practice, are meant more for inspiration than for emulation. And surely when we come to the larger soteriological frames within which the practices are enjoined and justified, we have to ask how many Buddhists, lay or clergy, actually placed their own lives within those frames: how many, for example, actually organized their daily practices around the goal of extinction in nirvāṇa; how many really saw themselves as "great beings" (*mahāsattva*), on a heroic quest, said to take three incalculable æons, for the supreme, perfect enlightenment (*anuttara-saṃyak-saṃbodhi*) of an omniscient savior figure. If, as we might well suspect, it was a somewhat eccentric minority that took such soteriologies literally as models for their lives, we have to ask what other functions—of imagination, inspiration, advertising, justification, and so on—such doctrines might have served for the majority.

Such questions can be asked the other way around: how much of actual Buddhist practice is preached in the normative texts? When we look up from these texts at the historical record of Buddhist people, we find them doing more or less the sorts of things that other people do, most of which would be difficult to locate on any soteriological map. Of course, we can dismiss these things simply as the human behavior, rather than the religious practice, of Buddhists; but the dismissal becomes more difficult

when we find them done in the name of the religion. Buddhists dupe, curse, seduce, oppress, and kill each other in the name of their religion; they covet, amass, hoard, deal, and display for the sake of the dharma. Buddhists seem expert at finding ways to find the dharma in what they appear to do as a matter of cultural course. If they set up protective shrines at the spooky spots of their neighborhood landscape, they know how to locate the analogues of these spots on the maṇḍalas of the buddha Vairocana's macrocosmic court; if they protect themselves from plague by offerings to a local spirit, they can turn their protector into an avatar of the compassionate bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. Sometimes we can trace what Buddhists do back to some scriptural source, as when they mutilate and immolate themselves in imitation of a sūtra story. Other times, what they do seems clearly to represent the stubborn persistence of cultural practices in spite of orthodox opinion, as when they devise elaborate rites dedicated to the care and feeding of the family dead.

In the anthropology of Buddhist societies, where the writing of books becomes but one cultural practice among many, it is by no means clear that the theories in the books necessarily precede the practices they validate—in other words, that the practices represent the practical application of the theories. To be sure, many surely do; but we may also consider the historical origins of many theories as the response to what was already going on in the Buddhist community—as ad hoc efforts to play doctrinal catch-up with the actual values and practices of the community, in order to define them as Buddhist and integrate them into some orthodox frame (or sometimes to discourage them by labeling them as heterodox). Here, then, we can think of (at least some) theories as driven by practices, much as anthropologists will sometimes say that a people's myths are the rationalizations of, rather than the symbolic sources for, their rituals. Still, the cultural practices of Buddhist societies become Buddhist practice to the extent that some theory, either of Buddhists themselves or of their observers, recognizes them as such. When the theories conflict, Buddhists can sometimes find their practices defined in ways that they themselves may not want to recognize.

When the outside observer—say, a Buddhist studies scholar—introduces, whether implicitly or explicitly, a theory of what constitutes Buddhist practice, she may also open a gap between the normative claims (both theoretical and practical) of the tradition and its actual instantiation in history. Hence, the contrast between *practice* and *ideal* is a bit more than a subset of that between *practice* and *theory*: it connotes not merely what Buddhists do as opposed to what they think but what they really do as opposed to what they profess to do. This opposition of actual and professed, of the real behind the apparent, introduces a certain ethical and epistemological tension into the contrast that gives this use of *practice* a rich semantic life of its own, sometimes with hints of hypocrisy and deception.

Practice in this opposition, far from connoting the application of doctrine, often suggests its violation or subversion and, in the process, its exposure as rhetoric or ideology. Somewhat like the Buddhist theologian's distinction between ultimate and conventional discourse, this usage seems to imply two levels of reality: what appears on the surface and what is really going on beneath. Somewhat like the Buddhist notion that the ultimate is revealed to the wisdom that sees through the concealing (*saṃvṛti*) cover of the conventional, this kind of practice is something that must be uncovered by the enlightened scholar. Somewhat as the Buddhists like to blame Māra, The Evil One, for concealing the truth, this usage often suggests a certain conspiracy of propaganda or silence (either of Buddhists or Buddhology) that hides what it does not want us to see.

Needless to say, this suspicious use of *practice* is rarely found in Buddhists' accounts of their own religion, except of course where they are engaged in polemics against an opponent's position. It is by its nature an outsider's use, requiring a certain critical distance from which to view the gap between the two levels and typically a critical stance that seeks to disclose the secrets of the religion. We find it, say, in the Confucian's critique of Buddhist ethics, where the professed ideal of compassionate service to the world is contrasted with the self-indulgent practice of withdrawal into cloistered indifference. We find it in the Jesuit missionary's disgust with Buddhist morals, where the public posture of monastic celibacy is shown to conceal the debauched practices of the clergy. We find it again in the academic historian's impatience with Buddhist normative literature, seen as a screen behind which the real life of the religion is taking place out of view. The secrets of the religion that get disclosed in the uncovering of practice may or may not themselves be ugly, but their cover-up somehow is. Hence, the urge to uncover can be seen as a healthy, even a moral, one.

The urge to uncover the past in all its complexity is a natural reflex of the historian. The recent turn in Buddhist studies away from what I have loosely called a theological approach toward an interest in the social and cultural practices of Buddhism is a function of the broader shift in academe toward historical approaches to religion—a shift that, in practice, has begun to move our focus not only from timeless norms to temporal realities but also from elite representations to popular expressions. The stories we now want to pick out from (or build up about) past complexities have increasingly to do with the practices of what we might call the Buddhist silent majority: the men and women on the streets and in the rice paddies whose voices speak outside the canon or between the lines of theological system. We can congratulate ourselves for uncovering their stories and recovering their voices, for at last taking Asian Buddhists seriously as real people and acknowledging their religion as their own historical experience, rather than as theological resource for a modern Western academic and spiritual industry. Yet one cannot help but feel the postcolonial ironies

here, as we labor to liberate the Asian masses from the hegemonic discourse of their Buddhist masters. In the midst of these labors, it can be sobering to recall just who is actually speaking here and who is being silenced, and to ask of our own academic orthopraxy some of the same questions we now ask of the Buddhists.

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If you wear Yao's clothes, chant Yao's words, and act as Yao acted, then you are simply Yao. —Mencius

RITUAL

Robert H. Sharf

Rather than opening with a definition of *ritual*—a difficult and contentious task—let's begin by reflecting on the way the term is commonly used. Consider the following four scenarios:

1. A teenage boy comes home from school hungry. He forages through the refrigerator until he finds a slice of leftover pizza, which he quickly devours. He then runs off to play basketball with his friends at the park, as he does, weather permitting, every weekday afternoon.
2. A married couple invites the husband's business associates to a dinner party at their home. On their arrival the guests are welcomed into the living room for cocktails and hors d'oeuvres. After an hour or so the couple ushers the guests into the dining room, where they are seated at an elegantly appointed table and served a multicourse meal accompanied by fine wine.

3. A Catholic priest in formal vestments celebrates the Mass in accordance with the prescribed missal. He consecrates the eucharistic host and wine before an altar adorned with incense and candles, and then invites members of the congregation to receive Holy Communion. The congregants each approach the altar and partake of a small wheat wafer.
4. A Japanese Buddhist priest in ceremonial robes stands in front of an ornate lacquer shrine. The shrine contains an image of the Buddha flanked by wooden ancestral tablets. The priest makes offerings of incense and food to the ancestors while intoning a variety of scriptural passages, prayers, and spells. The recitations are accompanied by formal hand gestures and bows.

We would not normally think of the first case—a teenage boy wolfing down leftovers and then running off to play basketball—as a ritual. It is true that the scenario incorporates certain cultural stereotypes and patterned behaviors, but the same could be said of virtually all intentional human activity: to the extent that an action is recognizably human and meaningful, it is patterned by social conventions and cultural norms. All social phenomena are routinized to at least some extent, and thus there is little heuristic value in considering convention and routine a defining attribute of ritual.

As for the third and fourth cases—the Catholic Mass and the Buddhist ancestral offering—most readers, I suspect, would consider them rituals, however one defines the term. Before investigating what makes them so, let's turn to the second case: the dinner party. Should it be considered a ritual or not?

Formal dinner parties follow elaborate and well-established protocols stipulating the proper behavior of host and guest. The time of the event, the venue, the attire of the attendees, the seating arrangement, the placement and handling of the silverware, and even the appropriate subjects of conversation are all subject to, or at least constrained by, social codes and norms. Many of these norms are prescribed in books on etiquette by authorities such as Emily Post or Amy Vanderbilt; others remain latent or are actively repressed. Analyzing a dinner party under the rubric of ritual draws attention to the more formalized and codified aspects of the event. Such a perspective is valuable insofar as it denaturalizes the dinner and reveals the symbolic codes, performative schemas, and power relations that regulate the behavior of the participants.

Be that as it may, the conventions and protocols that govern a dinner party are normally subsumed under the rubric of Etiquette or Manners rather than ritual per se. The commonplace distinction between etiquette and ritual is warranted: behavior at even the stuffiest dinner party looks

relatively spontaneous in comparison with behavior at a Catholic Mass or a Buddhist ancestral offering. Within the bounds of propriety, the dinner guests enjoy a freedom of self-expression unavailable to those engaging in the Catholic or Buddhist rites; indeed, the participants at the dinner are expected to behave "naturally." (The social and semiotic codes that signal "naturalness" are among the rules that are normally repressed.) Finally, the dinner party is not normally regarded as discontinuous with daily life; the setting (dining room), attire (informal but decorous), food (fine cuisine), implements (silverware and china), modes of speech (friendly but not uncouth banter), and social function (fraternizing with colleagues) are not unique to such occasions. Accordingly, many would consider it a stretch to call the dinner party, no matter how formal or conventionalized, a ritual.

The comparison with the dinner party helps us to appreciate some of the features that mark the Catholic Mass and Buddhist ancestral offerings as rituals proper. For one thing, many aspects seem designed to set these events apart from daily life. Only ordained priests sanctioned by ecclesiastic authority can officiate at such events, and their status is made conspicuous by their vestments—ornate robes reserved for clerical use at sacramental occasions. The venue, be it church sanctuary or temple shrine, is similarly associated with ceremonial occasions; the space is distinguished by architectural and decorative cues on the one hand and by consecration procedures intended to hallow the precincts on the other. Indeed, most of the objects used in these performances—monstrance, censer, chalice, buddha image, ancestral tablets, food offerings, incense, and so on—are "purified" through formal consecrations performed prior to or in conjunction with the event.

This sense of being set apart from the affairs of mundane existence is precisely what constitutes these performances as "sacred" or "holy." In other words, the people, places, liturgies, and ceremonial objects associated with events such as the Mass or the Buddhist ancestral offerings are not intrinsically or inherently holy (whatever that might mean). Rather, holiness is a quality ascribed to them through the symbolic cues and performative strategies that set them apart. The strategies are many: the utterances of the priests, for example, may be in a foreign or classical tongue, rendering their meaning inaccessible to all but a few specialists. (The chants that accompany the ancestral offerings are typical: they consist primarily of Japanese transcriptions of classical Chinese texts and Sanskrit spells [mantra and dhāraṇī], making them incomprehensible to most Japanese.) Moreover, ritual utterances are often intoned or chanted in a manner quite unlike everyday speech or song. Finally, the ritual movements and utterances of the priests are scripted, such that the clerics' actions and utterances are more or less identical from one performance to

the next. The extensive use of scripting, repetition, and highly mannered modes of speech and movement, all of which distinguish an event from the course of daily life, would appear to be central to our conception of ritual.

INVARIANCE AND AUTHORITY

To the extent that ritual speech and action is scripted and repetitive, it would seem to be devoid of new information and thus is not communicative in the usual sense of the word. As scholars of ritual have been quick to point out, this apparent absence of new information is crucial to the authority of ritual. The liturgies of the Mass and the ancestral rites are supposed to be transmitted without alteration from one generation to the next. As a result, the actions and utterances of the Catholic or Buddhist priest are not his own—they originate from another time and place, and it is the priest's task to convey this sense of timelessness to the gathered worshippers. Indeed, ritual authority and efficacy are tied to the priest's skill in effacing his own agency so that he can serve as a conduit for the hoary tradition that speaks through him. This sense of displaced agency—of an unseen but perduring something that communicates through the ritual performance—lends ritual its affective and suasive power, and accounts in large part for the enduring authority and cogency of religious systems (Rappaport 1999).

Of course, the claim of any particular ritual tradition to be invariant—to preserve intact an ancient or primordial archetype—is largely a conceit. As ethnographers and historians have documented, even the most conservative of ritual traditions undergo constant change, whether the practitioners are aware of it or not. Ritualists and their audiences adapt to contingency, but in so doing they must be careful lest they undermine the sense of timelessness and hence the legitimacy of the performance as well as the institutions that countenance it.

Because the authority of ritual rests on maintaining the fiction if not the fact of continuity and invariance, some scholars have argued that ritual is inherently conservative; it serves to maintain, legitimize, and reproduce the dominant social and political order by reference to an unchanging and/or transcendent source (see especially Bloch 1974). In other words, ritual legitimizes local norms and values by casting them as an integral part of the natural order of things. At the same time, ritual represses or channels antisocial impulses such as violence and selfishness that threaten the reigning polity. Ritual naturalizes what are ultimately arbitrary forms of life, but in order to do this effectively the constructed and coercive nature of ritual must remain concealed from view.

There would appear to be an element of systematic deception, coercion, or false consciousness involved in ritual. But to some scholars, such accusations place too much emphasis on cognition. The real work of rit-

ual, they would argue, lies in its ability to mold not the mind so much as the body. Participation in a living ritual tradition reaches beyond the vagaries of the intellect to one's somatic being; ritual habituation indelibly inscribes the self with a set of perceptual orientations, affective dispositions, and autonomic responses that are, in effect, precognitive.

MAGIC, SCIENCE, AND PERFORMANCE

Whether the social goals of ritual are effected through molding conscious belief or shaping unconscious dispositions, ritual seems to evoke a world of mysterious and invisible forces, wherein a simple wafer is transformed into divine flesh, or incense and uncooked rice is consumed by beings long deceased. As a result, ritual often appears to modern, secularized individuals as little more than magic and superstition that betray a fundamental ignorance concerning the laws of nature. In this view ritual is not only coercive but also irrational and benighted.

This is an issue among many anthropologists and scholars of religion; some insist that ritual specialists are perfectly aware of the difference between "instrumental" versus ritual action—between plowing, seeding, and irrigating a field on the one hand, and making a sacrifice to the gods in exchange for a good harvest on the other. Accordingly, some have argued that ritual is not so much bad science as it is myth, theology, or social ideology; it is a symbol system that gives form to and propagates religious ideology and communal values. Ritual action is not intended to alter the natural world as such, but rather to alter our cognitive and affective relationship to that world—our social and psychological being. The real import of a rain dance, then, might not be to bring rain so much as to express and channel collective distress while reaffirming entrenched social hierarchies and corporate norms.

Thus far I have been presenting, in a very simplified form, a précis of a large and sophisticated body of theory about ritual that has developed over the last century. There has never been much in the way of scholarly consensus; debates have raged over the relationship between ritual and myth, ritual and belief, ritual and science, ritual and rationality, and so on. In the last decade, however, scholars have begun to take stock of the field as a whole, turning their critical gaze upon the category Ritual itself. They note, for example, that in order to apply the term *ritual* to a particular form of stylized, rule-governed behavior or action, we must be able to distinguish said action, at least theoretically, from thought, belief, or intention. But at the same time, for scholars to say something meaningful about ritual—to interpret ritual—they seem obliged to imbue ritual actions with significance. There seems to be no choice but to view ritual as some sort of arcane code that could be deciphered by those with the requisite contextual and theoretical expertise. Ritual action always ends up

looking like a "text" that encodes primal myths, kinship systems, social hierarchies, normative dispositions and attitudes, or what have you. The astute scholar can then use ritual as a window to the deeply embedded social systems, collective representations, and even the inner psychic life of foreign cultures.

Catherine Bell has undertaken the most penetrating analysis of the logic of ritual studies to date, focusing on the constitutive role of the thought/action dichotomy. Bell argues that this dichotomy does not emerge from the ethnographic record per se, but rather from the deep-seated assumptions of occidental scholars. According to Bell, "ritual is first differentiated as a discrete object of analysis by means of various dichotomies that are loosely analogous to thought and action; then ritual is subsequently elaborated as the very means by which these dichotomous categories, neither of which could exist without the other, are reintegrated" (Bell 1992, 21). Ritual, in short, is construed as the social mechanism to manage the disjunction, endemic to all human societies, between the ideal world (ideology, thought) and the actual lived world (action). At the same time, ritual serves to bridge the gap between the native ritualist and the outside observer, with the native assuming the role of unthinking actor, and the ethnographer the role of discerning but passive observer. So the prevailing model of ritual may be the result of simple transference: in trying to understand the rituals of others—to bridge the gap between our thinking and their actions—theorists were led to the conclusion that ritual serves to integrate their thinking with their actions.

In response to these and other quandaries, some contemporary scholars—Catherine Bell, Pierre Bourdieu, Ronald Grimes, Richard Schechner, Stanley Tambiah, and Victor Turner, among them—have advocated a performative approach to ritual, in contrast with the interpretative approach associated with earlier anthropological writers (in other words, just about everyone from James George Frazer, Émile Durkheim, and Bronislaw Malinowski to Claude Lévi-Strauss and Clifford Geertz). According to proponents of a performative model, the first question to ask of a ritual event or happening is not "what does it mean?" but rather, "how do the participants come to do what they do?" There is simply no a priori reason to believe that rituals stand in need of interpretation, and thus ritual should not be reduced to something—to anything—other than itself. To approach ritual as a text is tantamount to reducing music to its score, or territory to its map.

While the significance or logic of ritual might, according to this view, be immanent in the event itself, it does not follow that it can be discerned by just anyone. Just as exposure to and training in music is necessary to appreciate musical performance, the appreciation of ritual entails the acquisition of what Bell calls the "ritualized body"—a body "invested with a 'sense' of ritual" (Bell 1992, 98)—or what Bourdieu calls "practical mas-

tery," a skill acquired through early habituation and/or prolonged practice (Bourdieu 1990, 90–91). A performative approach to ritual would then focus on the social institutions and practical training though which ritual mastery is acquired. (Ritual studies morphed into performance studies in part through the collaboration between anthropologists and professional dramatists such as Richard Schechner.) This perspective has considerable intellectual appeal, as it circumvents many of the hermeneutic conundrums attendant upon the textualization of ritual action. It is ethically appealing as well, since it makes the ritual specialist, and not the "objective" ethnographer or theorist, the ultimate source of ritual authority.

Advocates of a performative approach also claim that it resists essentialism or universalism—that it avoids treating ritual as a transhistorical, transcultural phenomenon that exhibits a common underlying morphology and structure, or serves a common social function, wherever and whenever it is found. Scholars have less incentive to argue over the definitive and universal attributes of ritual, with the result that they are less interested in the search for a common definition. Ritual begins to look less like a text and more like music—difficult to describe in words yet readily recognizable. Of course there are bound to be gray areas—phenomena that resist easy classification—but the process of classification is ultimately stipulative rather than descriptive.

The analogy with music is worth pursuing. For ritual is also like music in that it does not exist "out there" in the objective world, nor "inside" the minds of the participants, but somewhere in between. Musical proficiency involves the peculiar feat of hearing sounds as music—as something other than noise—and this entails recognizing sounds as intentional acts. Similarly, ritual accomplishment entails experiencing action as ritual. Yet it seems to elude the capacity of language to articulate exactly what is involved in this experiencing-as. We may talk of musical phenomena as exhibiting "structure," as leading "up" or "down," as "harmonious" or "dissonant," as creating "tension" or "release," and so on, but these are mere metaphors—metaphors of space, of movement, of animation. In the end, music resists any and all attempts to translate its content into another medium for the simple reason that in music, as in the visual arts, form and content are inseparable (Scruton 1997).

Ritual, it seems, is more like music than like language insofar as it is impossible to extract content from form. Moreover, as with music, anyone conversant in a tradition of ritual practice is able to discern the difference between an accomplished performance and a mediocre one. Yet it is often difficult to articulate precisely wherein the difference lies. (One might speak of an adroit musical performance being more "expressive" than a stilted rendition of the same piece, yet one flounders when it comes to saying what exactly is being expressed.) To understand ritual competence,

like musical competence, one must focus not on ritual as a text or code, but rather on the institutions and social processes that engender proficiency. We may speak of "rules" or "syntax" governing ritual—just as some have spoken of "rules" governing music—but such rules are not conventions per se. They are, to adapt a phrase from Roger Scruton, post-facto generalizations from a tradition of ritual practice (Scruton 1997, 210).

If ritual, like music, is a phenomenon in which form and content are one—an activity that can be located neither in the outer "objective" world nor in the "glassy essence" of the mind—then a ritual event is rendered a singularity that cannot be translated into another medium. Accordingly, some scholars have called for a "nonrepresentational" approach to ritual—an approach that resists the reduction of ritual to either its discursive content or its social function. Indeed, ritual has become fashionable of late in the field of religion in part because of its promise to get us closer to things-in-themselves. Ritual becomes a domain of human experience and cultural production that offers a respite from hermeneutic anxiety.

It is one thing to critique representational models of ritual; it is another to articulate precisely what a nonrepresentational approach might look like. The form/content, inner/outer schemas are so deeply ingrained that it is difficult to think outside of them. Many have tried: scholars speak of "the social nature of thought" (Geertz 1973), "thinking with things" (Lévi-Strauss), "distributed agency" (Gell 1998), the "illocutionary force of performatives" (Rappaport 1999, drawing from J. L. Austin 1975), and so on, in order to unsettle the commonplace that inner meaning can be separated from outer form. The problem, however, is that such notions are parasitic upon, and thus ultimately reaffirm, the very dichotomies they try to resolve. Moreover, while performative and nonrepresentational approaches aim to overcome the parochialisms and limitations of Western enlightenment thought, they remain allied with the modernist project insofar as they transform ontological issues into questions of epistemology. In the words of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "The problem remains framed in terms of knowledge even though the answer could be taken to imply that knowledge, let alone the cogito, has little to do with it. Anthropologists persist in thinking that in order to explain a non-Western ontology we must derive it from (or reduce it to) an epistemology" (de Castro 1999, S79). And therein lies the rub, since many native ritualists, *pace* their academic defenders, will claim that their performances are in fact instrumental—that ritual changes not just our view of the world but the world itself.

The so-called performative approaches to ritual offered to date, despite the avowed intentions of their proponents, turn out to be predicated on the very dichotomies they have tried to avoid: distinctions between thought and action, the subjective and the objective, private and public,

and inner and outer. Is it possible to articulate an approach that escapes these problematic moieties? One place to look may be in the existential logic of play.

THE WORK OF PLAY

Gregory Bateson was led to reflect on the nature of play while observing young monkeys in a San Francisco zoo. The monkeys at play were doing the same sorts of things monkeys do when they are fighting, yet it was somehow clear to them, as it was to Bateson, that the activity was indeed recreation and not combat. The monkeys' behavior must contain, reasoned Bateson, cues that allowed them to interpret their actions as play. Logically, such cues are metalinguistic in that they are signs or signals that comment on the status of other signs or signals. These metalinguistic signals, most of which remain implicit, serve to "frame" the activity: they place it within a context that says, "'These actions, in which we now engage, do not denote what would be denoted by those actions which these actions denote.' The playful nip denotes the bite, but it does not denote what would be denoted by the bite" (Bateson 1972, 179–80). This sort of framing is essential to all human communication, since the interpretation of any message entails the ability to distinguish the signifier from the thing signified—to understand, for example, that a map is not the territory it represents. "A message, of whatever kind, does not consist of those objects which it denotes (the word 'cat' cannot scratch us)" (ibid., 180). Frames tell us which signals are to count and which are to be ignored, and they define the context and establish the premises that are used to evaluate them.

Several decades before Bateson's encounter with his monkeys, the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky was led to ponder similar issues while observing young children at his institute in Moscow. Vygotsky was interested in the acquisition of speech and the process by which childhood soliloquizing came to be internalized as thought. He believed that Piaget's theory of childhood development was fundamentally flawed in that it presupposed precisely what was most in need of explanation, namely, the appearance of the inner self, or cogito. Vygotsky's developmental theory gave pride of place to the role of early soliloquizing, or "egocentric speech," that allows the child to become an object to herself and exert control over her actions.

Vygotsky believed that children acquire speech and language through appropriating the responses of others to their own involuntary behavior. The gesture of pointing—one of the earliest communicative acts mastered by the child—can be used to illustrate the process. An infant naturally extends his hand toward an interesting object in an attempt to grasp it. Should the object be beyond the child's reach, his hands remain poised

in the air in the direction of the object. The mother responds to the child's action, placing the object into the child's hand. "Only later, when the child can link his unsuccessful grasping movement to the objective situation as a whole, does he begin to understand this movement as pointing" (Vygotsky 1978, 56). Thus, it is the reaction of others that allows the child to apprehend his own unmediated behavior as a meaningful signal directed not at an object but at another being. Note that at this stage, the child makes no distinction between the action and the sign—the meaning is a natural property of the action. In the child's act of pointing, form and content are as of yet inseparable.

The acquisition of speech, according to Vygotsky, should be understood in the same way. Through the response of others the child comes to regard his own vocalizations as meaningful. But in the early stages of speech acquisition, in which one learns to associate a name with a thing, the child regards the name as intrinsic to the object. Vygotsky's observations led him to conclude that "*it is impossible for very young children to separate the field of meaning from the visual field* because there is such intimate fusion between meaning and what is seen" (Vygotsky 1978, 97; original emphasis). The verbal "sign" cannot be separated or abstracted from the thing signified; the object's name is simply the recognition of the object as figure against a background.

How then does the child learn to distinguish meaning from the perceptual field? This is where play comes in, for play is precisely the arena in which names are first disaggregated from their "natural" referents. "In play thought is separated from objects and action arises from ideas rather than from things: a piece of wood begins to be a doll and a stick becomes a horse. Action according to rules begins to be determined by ideas and not by objects themselves. This is such a reversal of the child's relation to the real, immediate, concrete situation that it is hard to underestimate its full significance" (Vygotsky 1978, 97). Play is the domain in which the young child discovers, through continuous experimentation, that an object's sign can be displaced onto something else, turning a "stick," for example, into a "horse." For the toddler, play is not a retreat from the "real" world of human society; it is, rather, the child's first foray into it.

At this early stage the child cannot use just anything to be a horse; it must be a stick, and this is what makes a child's activity "play" as opposed to "symbolism." The stick, in other words, is not a sign for a horse, since it never ceases to a stick; it is, rather, the meaning of the stick that changes. The stick is now regarded as if it were a horse, thereby serving a conceptual displacement. There is, in other words, still a fusion of form and content; the child still requires a real object that can be apprehended as a horse. Thus one difference between a child's play and the thought of an adult is precisely that mature thought is not constrained by materiality in this way.

> When the stick becomes the pivot for detaching the meanings of "horse" from a real horse, the child makes one object influence another semantically. He cannot detach meaning from an object, or a word from an object, except by finding a pivot in something else. Transfer of meanings is facilitated by the fact that the child accepts a word as the property of a thing; he sees not the word but the thing it designates. For a child, the word "horse" applied to the stick means "there is a horse," because mentally he sees the object standing behind the word. A vital transitional stage toward operating with meanings occurs when a child first acts with meanings as with objects (as when he acts with the stick as though it were a horse). Later he carries out these acts consciously. This change is seen, too, in the fact that before a child has acquired grammatical and written language, he knows how to do things but does not know that he knows. He does not master these activities voluntarily. In play a child spontaneously makes use of his ability to separate meaning from an object without knowing he is doing it. (Vygotsky 1978, 98–99)

Play is thus the situation in which a child first comes to an implicit understanding of the logic of signs; through play the child will come to see that the word *horse* is not the natural property of a particular object in the world, but rather a category of which a particular object may be an instance. Play affords the child his first insight into the relationship between signifier and signified, between map and territory.

A child's play can and often does involve playing at reality. Two children, for example, might make up a game in which one plays the role of the mother and the other the role of the child. The second child is playing at what is in fact the case. Yet we recognize that there is a difference, since the child normally behaves without thinking of herself as a child, yet now she consciously seeks to display herself as a child, constituting herself as an instance of what she already is. It is here that we see the beginnings of the objectification of the self, an objectification necessary to navigate the social terrain.

The apperception of the "self" is thus a by-product of this dialectical process. The interior self emerges as the child's egocentric speech is turned inward; instead of appealing to others the child begins to address himself. "Language thus takes on an *intrapersonal function* in addition to its *interpersonal use*. When children develop a method of behavior for guiding themselves that had previously been used in relation to another person, when they organize their own activities according to a social form of behavior, they succeed in applying a social attitude to themselves" (Vygotsky 1978, 27; original emphasis). Thus Vygotsky's account of the emergence of the self does not presuppose the prior existence of an "intentional subject"—a cogito—that stands apart from, beholds, and acts upon the extended physical world. Rather than being predicated on an ontological divide between mind and body, inside and outside, subject and object,

Vygotsky's analysis renders the phenomenal self an emergent property that arises in the course of social interaction.

It is, therefore, not a coincidence that Bateson should deduce the metalogic of semiotic systems through observing monkeys at play. Play is precisely that activity in which we learn to distinguish action from meaning, form from content. Bateson writes that "play marks a step forward in the evolution of communication—the crucial step in the discovery of map-territory relations. In primary process, map and territory are equated; in secondary process, they can be discriminated. In play, they are both equated and discriminated" (Bateson 1972, 185). Bateson's analysis of play is the phylogenetic counterpart to Vygotsky's ontogenetic theory.

Play is the domain in which one learns to manipulate latent metalinguistic cues in order to construct an *as-if* world. But at the same time, according to Bateson, the metalinguistic frames discerned in play must be present in all social intercourse that involves the use of signs. The *as-if* quality of play is accordingly, as the sociologist Erving Goffman repeatedly points out, an aspect of all socialized human interaction (Goffman 1959, 1967, 1974). Socialization involves apprehending oneself under extrinsic categories—as Man, Woman, Adult, Child, Father, Daughter, Teacher, Student, Attractive, Neurotic, or whatever. But one of the rules governing "normal" social intercourse—its frame, as it were—is that one does not attend to the constituted and thus arbitrary nature of such categories. One does not believe in or acquiesce to the social order any more than one believes in grammar. It is simply the implicit frame without which social intercourse would be impossible.

Ritual might then be viewed as a special form of adult play. It entails the manipulation of metalinguistic framing rules that govern signs and meanings such that a given object or action does not denote what it would normally denote. In doing so, religious rituals may blur the map-territory relation. Bateson comments, "In the dim region where art, magic, and religion meet and overlap, human beings have evolved the 'metaphor that is meant,' the flag which men will die to save, and the sacrament that is felt to be more than 'an outward and visible sign, given unto us.' Here we can recognize an attempt to deny the difference between map and territory, and to get back to the absolute innocence of communication by means of pure mood-signs" (Bateson 1972, 183). Confounding the map-territory relationship results in paradox, since the metalinguistic cues that say "this is more than a sign, this is real" are themselves only intelligible as signs within a ritual frame. In the felicitous diction of Jonathan Z. Smith, ritual entails a "self-conscious category mistake."

In ritual, as in play, it is not the "symbolism" of the object that is altered but rather the apprehension of or orientation to the object itself. One partakes of the wafer *as if* it were the flesh of Christ; one hears the voice of the shaman *as if* it were the voice of an ancestor; one worships the

stone icon *as if* it were the body of a god; one enters the ritual sanctuary *as if* one were entering a buddha land; one sits in *zazen* (seated meditation) *as if* one were an enlightened buddha. One does not believe that the wafer is flesh, nor that the icon is buddha; belief has little to do with it. One simply proceeds as if it were the case. And this is precisely the position of those Catholic theologians who insist that the eucharistic wafer is transformed substantially, and not symbolically, into the flesh of Christ. This transubstantiation of the Host requires an elaborate set of ritual cues, one of which is that the wafer continue to look and taste like a wafer. (Surreptitiously substituting a bit of meat for the wafer would likely disrupt rather than enhance the ritual effect.) Just as the stick is required for the play horse, the wafer is required for the ritual flesh.

Ritual recreates the situation of early childhood play in all its enthralling seriousness and intensity. Through ritual we rediscover a world wherein a stick is a horse, a wafer is divine flesh, a stone image is a god. In ritual the form/content, subject/object, and self/other dichotomies are intentionally confounded, creating a transitional world (to borrow a notion from the psychoanalyst D. E. Winnicott) that is neither inside the "mind" nor outside in the "objective world." Insofar as this is accomplished through manipulation of the metalinguistic cues implicit in all social exchange, and insofar as the emergence of the social self is coincidental to the acquisition of precisely such metalinguistic cues, ritual exposes the transitional nature—the betwixt-and-betweenness—of social reality. The world created in ritual is, according to this analysis, no more "empty" than the world of everyday life. The world of everyday life is no more "real" than the world that emerges in ritual.

And this brings us, at long last, to the question of Buddhist ritual.

BUDDHIST *DARŚAN*

Historians of Buddhism now appreciate that the differences between medieval Indian Buddhism and the non-Buddhist traditions arrayed under the rubric of Hinduism are not as pronounced as was once thought. While there are pointed differences in doctrine, these are foregrounded in part because of conspicuous similarities at the level of practice. Buddhist ritual, both monastic and lay, bears a family resemblance to Hindu *darśan*, wherein the supplicant ritually invokes the presence of a deity, and both supplicant and deity behold one another. *Darśan*, for both Buddhists and Hindus, involved the use of consecrated images that served as the locus of the deity, the focus of veneration, and as a source of the rite's efficacy. The image was viewed not merely as a representation of the deity but as its animate corporeal embodiment (*mūrti*). As such, icons of buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other supernal beings have been central to Buddhist practice throughout history, and virtually all rites of whatever size and

significance are performed in their presence. (Note that, according to tradition, Buddhism was introduced to China, Korea, and Japan via the transmission of sacred icons, and one early and uncontroversial Chinese name for Buddhism was *xiangjiao*, or the "religion of images" [Sharf 2001a].)

The structure of Buddhist invocation rituals harkens back to ancient Vedic prototypes. Initial preparations involve the purification of the practitioner (recalling Vedic *dīkṣā* rites), the sanctuary, and the ritual implements employed during the rite. Thereupon sacred formulae, often mantra, are used to invoke the presence of one or more buddhas, bodhisattvas, and/or other divine beings. With the deity rendered present in the sanctuary, offerings are made through formalized gesture and utterance. The practitioner then makes solicitations to garner the deity's grace (*adhiṣṭhāna*), merit, wisdom, salvation, rebirth in a heaven or pure land, and so on. The underlying narrative structure of Buddhist worship is not unlike that of sacrifice: one conjures the presence of a divinity to whom one makes sacramental offerings in exchange for a preternatural boon.

At the same time, Mahāyāna doctrine holds that the buddha being invoked is none other than the truth that eternally dwells within the practitioner, that notions such as merit, grace, wisdom, and salvation are "skillful means" (*upāya*) empty of any abiding reality, and that the buddha land or pure land is already attained. According to traditional exegesis, Buddhist ritual practice is intended to elicit precisely the understanding that all form is empty—that all theories or views about the world, including Buddhist ones, are contingent. The recognition of this "truth"—namely, that all truth is relative—is precisely the boon bestowed by the buddhas. This fundamental Mahāyāna tenet can be found reiterated again and again in the discursive content of the chants, hymns, and scriptural recitations that comprise Mahāyāna liturgy.

It would seem that Mahāyāna rituals both affirm and confute, often at one and the same time, the reality of the deities that take center stage in the practice. This two-edged structure is readily apparent in the highly elaborated rituals associated with Buddhist tantra. On the one hand, the underlying sacrificial structure of the rite is foregrounded: the god is welcomed into the sanctuary as an "honored guest" by the practitioner, and then feted in an elaborately staged feast involving a complex sequence of offerings. In exchange for this treatment, the practitioner or "host" seeks *siddhi*—thaumaturgical powers and mastery over unseen forces. On the other hand, the liturgy culminates in a deconstruction of the central deity of the rite. In Japanese Esoteric Buddhism (*mikkyō*), this occurs in a sequence known as the "contemplation of the syllable wheel" (*jirinkan*), in which the liturgy leads the practitioner through a dissection of the core mantra of the deity. The practitioner is instructed to break the deity's mantra down into its constituent syllables and to contemplate the root meaning of each syllable in turn. However, the liturgy explicitly states

that since the significance of the syllables can be grasped only in the context of the aggregate, the meaning of the syllables in isolation is "unobtainable" (Sanskrit *anupalabdhi*; Japanese *fukatoku*). And since the individual syllables cannot be grasped, the same is true of the mantric utterance as a whole. The analysis of the mantra thus has the effect of emptying it of its illocutionary significance. Moreover, since the mantra is held to be cosubstantial with the deity—much as the eucharistic wafer is cosubstantial with the flesh of Christ—the syllable-wheel contemplation constitutes the emptying or deconstruction of the deity itself. Yet ironically, the liturgical recitations and visualizations that comprise the syllable-wheel contemplation are said to constitute the final stage in the realization of the "three mysteries" (*sammitsu*, that is, the body, speech, and mind of the Buddha). It is in this ritual sequence that the supplicant is said to realize the identity of his or her own mind and the mind of the Buddha (Sharf 2001b).

The apprehension of the emptiness or constructed nature of the deities being worshipped does not mitigate the contingent reality of said beings, nor does it compromise the transformative power of their grace. Historical and ethnographical evidence indicates that those involved in the performance of such rites, whatever their education or social status, approached the deities as potent spiritual beings with apotropaic and salvific powers. According to traditional exegesis, such deities are no more and no less real than any other phenomenon. At the same time, liberation would not be possible without their compassion and grace.

The logic of Mahāyāna ritual thus implies that the Buddha being invoked (content) is coextensive with the understanding that the Buddha is constituted through ritual performance (form)—the "territory," in this view, is none other than the "map." But this does not compromise the salvific power of the Buddha. It should now be clear why the Chinese phrase "to see the Buddha" (*jianfo*, that is, *darśan*) was used for "final liberation"—to see the Buddha is to realize the constructed, relational, and empty nature of all reality. Commenting on the saying that "a painted rice cake does not satisfy hunger," the Japanese Zen master Dōgen (1200–1253) remarked, "All Buddhas are painted Buddhas; all painted Buddhas are Buddhas. . . . Unsurpassed enlightenment is a painting. The entire phenomenal universe and the empty sky are nothing but a painting. . . . Since this is so, the only way to satisfy hunger is with a painted rice cake" (*Shōbōgenzō*, *Gabyō*).

ZEN ENLIGHTENMENT

The abstract doctrinal analysis of Mahāyāna liturgy presented above may strike some students of Buddhism as somewhat impertinent if not wrongheaded. Many moderns have come to believe that the summum bonum of

the Buddhist path is not the appreciation of the significance of Buddhist ritual or doctrine, however profound such an understanding may be, but rather the personal and transformative experience of awakening. According to this view, the heart of Buddhist *bhāvanā*, or "practice," is not ritual but *dhyāna*, commonly rendered into English as "meditation." Insofar as ritual is understood to refer to outward scripted and stylized activity, ritual would appear to be the very antithesis of meditation.

In English, the term *meditation* denotes a contemplative discipline leading to inner spiritual transformation. Meditation is regarded as a technology intended to free the practitioner from his or her prior cognitive conditioning; the ultimate goal of meditation is the immediate perception of, or unity with, unmediated reality. This would seem to be in marked contrast with ritual, which, as we have seen, is considered a means to instill and reaffirm, rather than transcend, prevailing social norms and attitudes. When one turns to descriptions of Buddhist "meditation" found in traditional *dhyāna* manuals, however, one discovers that terms such as *dhyāna*, *yoga*, *śamatha* (concentration), *vipaśyanā* (liberative insight), and *samādhi* (absorption) refer not simply to states of mind but to highly formalized procedures in which all aspects of a practitioner's physical regimen, behavior, and deportment are prescribed in exacting detail. And while there are literally dozens of indigenous Asian terms for different varieties of Buddhist ceremonies and rites, and many more terms referring to stages on the path, there is no precise Asian Buddhist analogue to our distinction between ritual and meditation. From the perspective of Buddhist epistemology, the distinction itself is suspect: traditional Buddhist exegesis holds that all cognition, including exalted "meditative states of consciousness," is mediated and contingent, since consciousness of any sort arises in codependence with its object. The inner/outer, subject/object dichotomies that underlie our distinction between ritual and meditation might seem to be confuted by indigenous analysis of Buddhist practice.

Take, for example, the Chinese school most famed for its emphasis on meditation, namely the Chan school (Japanese Zen). The term *Chan* is derived, in fact, from the Chinese transliteration of the Sanskrit term *dhyāna*, and according to some popular modern accounts this "meditation school" was vociferous in its rejection of ritual in favor of rigorous contemplative practice leading to enlightenment. Scholars now appreciate that this view of Chan is historically and doctrinally misleading: Chan practice, like Mahāyāna monastic practice throughout Asia, was highly ritualized and involved the veneration and contemplation of sacred realia including consecrated icons (Faure 1991, 1993; Foulk 1993; Sharf 1995b). This has led to somewhat of an impasse in the explication of Chan and Zen: some continue to insist on the reality of a Chan enlightenment experience that transcends contingent institutional and ritual forms, while

others view "enlightenment" as a rhetorical tool wielded in service of institutional legitimacy and power. We are thus presented with a choice: we can approach enlightenment as a subjective event occasioned through meditation and thus impervious to positivist critique, or we can adopt a behaviorist perspective, in which enlightenment is reduced to mere discourse and ritual posturing. In the end, both positions remain wedded to the very distinctions they attempt to resolve—the dichotomies of inner versus outer, subjective versus objective, form versus content. I will suggest below that Chan enlightenment is constituted in and through Chan ritual—itself a form of Buddhist *darśan*—but that this is not tantamount to a behaviorist reduction. An approach to enlightenment under the rubric of Play turns out to be commensurate with indigenous Mahāyāna and Chan exegesis.

While the communal ritual of a Song dynasty (960–1279) Chan monastery was in many respects similar to that of monasteries associated with non-Chan lineages, Chan was unusual in the elevated spiritual status and ritual role accorded to the abbot. The abbot of a Chan monastery was more than a mere senior monk, spiritual friend (Sanskrit *kalyāṇamitra*; Chinese *shanzhishi*), or religious teacher (Sanskrit *ācārya*; Chinese *asheli*). He was regarded as a fully enlightened incarnate buddha. But the abbot's enlightenment was not some nebulous quality abiding in the inner recesses of his mind; it was constituted through complex communal ritual procedures, procedures that instantiated fundamental Mahāyāna doctrines concerning the constructed nature of all phenomena, the identity of form and emptiness, and the original enlightenment of all sentient beings.

The Chan abbot was charged with assuming the role of buddha in both public ceremonies and in private but highly formalized interviews with his disciples. In both cases he literally took the place of a consecrated buddha icon and accepted the offerings and worship of the supplicant(s). Participants in such rites approached the abbot as if they were coming face-to-face with a living buddha. The icon of wood, stone, or metal has been replaced with a living icon of flesh and blood (Foulk and Sharf 1993–94).

One of the earliest statements to this effect is found in the *Regulations for Chan Practice* (*Chanmen guishi*), a "proto-Chan monastic code" appended to the biography of Baizhang (749–814) found in the *Jingde Era Record of the Transmission of the Lamp* (*Jingde chuandeng lu*).

Those endowed with insight into the Way and possessing virtue worthy of respect are called "Elders" [*zhanglao*, a term used specifically for the abbot], just as was true in India of those senior disciples such as Subhūti who were accomplished in the Way. As [the abbot] is the master of instruction, he occupies the small room called the "ten-foot square." This is the same as Vimalakīrti's room, not a private

chamber. Not setting up a Buddha hall but only erecting a dharma hall shows that the Buddhas and patriarchs confer upon the current generation [abbot] the position of "honored one." (*Taishō* no. 2067: 51.251a6–9; see Collcutt 1981, 197; Foulk 1993, 157–58)

In Chinese Buddhist monasteries the Buddha hall was a large structure at the center of the complex that enshrined the central buddha icons. The consecrated icons, known as the "honored ones" (*zun*), served as the central objects of worship both for monks and visiting laypersons. Thus the use of the term *honored one* for the abbot and the statement that the Chan dharma hall came to replace the Buddha hall is most suggestive. As Griffith Foulk has pointed out, this text is the only piece of evidence that indicates that Chan monasteries did away with a Buddha hall and substituted a dharma hall; there is considerable evidence that Buddha halls continued to play an important role in Chan establishments (Foulk 1993). The dubious historical claims of the *Regulations for Chan Practice* need not concern us here. What is significant is that this early Chan document draws an explicit connection between the function of the abbot, occupying the role of "honored one" in the dharma hall, and the function of the icon, enshrined as "honored one" in the Buddha hall.

The abbot of a medieval Chan monastery had numerous administrative responsibilities, which included overseeing a large bureaucratic institution that supported hundreds and sometimes thousands of monks, lobbying government officials, hosting influential patrons, raising funds, and so on. But if we confine our attention to the explicitly religious functions of the abbot, they can be grouped into two categories: (1) providing religious instruction to monks in personal interviews, and (2) delivering formal talks in ceremonies attended by the entire assembly.

The abbot met monks individually in a procedure called "Entering the Chamber" (*rushi*). The resident monks would enter the abbot's quarters one at a time, following an elaborate protocol that included prostrations to the abbot and offering of incense. After the initial formalities, the student takes a position with hands folded reverently at the southwest corner of the abbot's seat. The student then speaks his mind such that he "completely exposes himself." He must avoid any mention of mundane troubles and be as brief as possible out of concern for those waiting in line behind him. The abbot may or may not choose to respond or engage in conversation. The student then withdraws with hands still folded, makes a final set of prostrations, and leaves the room again following a carefully prescribed procedure (Kagamishima et al. 1972, 66–69; Yifa 2002, 132–34). Foulk interprets the interview as "a ritual re-enactment of the encounters between Chan masters and disciples that were contained in the flame histories. The brevity of the flame history anecdotes and the way in which they depict the expression of sacred truths in a few short words were writ-

ten into the ritual procedures" (Foulk 1993, 181). The procedures mandate that the student enter the room as if entering the room of a living buddha, making prostrations, offering incense, and re-enacting the intimate mind-to-mind transmission of the early patriarchs. If the goal of Buddhist practice was to "see the Buddha," then this was realized every time the student engaged in this elaborately choreographed audience with the abbot.

The second category of monastic rites in which the abbot takes center stage is the formal public lecture delivered in a procedure called "Ascending the [Dharma] Hall" (*shangtang*). We saw above that the dharma hall was considered a feature unique to Chan institutions, replacing the normally ubiquitous Buddha hall. A "*dhyāna* chair" (*chanyi*), the ceremonial "throne" of the abbot, was installed on a raised dais in the rear center of the dharma hall facing south, precisely where one would normally expect to find the Buddha icon enshrined on a central altar. The Ascending the Hall ritual was a complex performance in which the abbot ascended the altar, assumed the physical posture of a buddha image, and spoke with the authority of an enlightened patriarch.

The Ascending the Hall ceremony may have been performed daily at some monasteries in the Northern Song, but by the Southern Song it was scheduled approximately every five days (Collcutt 1983, 180–81; Yifa 2002, 266–67n1). The earliest explicit mention of the rite is in the *Regulations for Chan Practice*.

> The entire monastic assembly convened in the morning and gathered again in the evening. The Abbot would enter the hall and ascend his seat. The stewards and the assembly of disciples listened while standing in file at the sides. Questions and answers between "guest" [i.e., interlocutors from the assembly] and "host" [i.e., the Abbot] bore on essential matters of doctrine and showed how to abide in accord with the teachings. (*Taishō* no. 2076: 51.251a15–17; trans. Foulk 1987, 349 with changes)

A more detailed depiction is found at the beginning of fascicle 2 of the *Rules of Purity for Chan Monasteries* (*Chanyuan qinggui*), compiled in 1103, which reads as follows:

> On days when the Abbot is to ascend [his seat in the dharma] hall for a morning convocation, following the morning meal no one may absent themselves from the convocation. After waking at the light of day, the Chief Seat leads the assembly in sitting [meditation] in the [monks] hall. Upon hearing the first round on the drum, the Chief Seat and the entire monastic assembly enter into the dharma hall and line up single file along the sides in order of rank. The position closest to the dharma seat is deemed most senior. The Chief Seat, Secretary, Library Prefect, Guest Prefect, and Bath Prefect take their places in front of the assembly, forming a single row in order of rank, and remain standing there. The remaining

Prefects remain back with the assembly. Should there be retired abbots present, they proceed together to the two positions on either side of the Chief Seat and remain standing there facing south, with their bodies turned slightly toward the front. At the second round on the drum, the four Stewards [i.e., the Comptroller, Rector, Cook and Superintendent] join the assembly, proceeding in order of rank. Approaching the bowing mats by the entrance to the dharma hall on the south side, they stand facing the dharma seat with the Comptroller to the east.

When the novices hear the first round on the drum, they line up in order of rank in front of the administration hall. They then wait for the second round on the drum, whereupon they follow the Stewards in joining the assembly. They then bow to the dharma seat and to the assembly, and then pass over to the eastern side and take their positions facing west. The position to the north is deemed the senior position. (All novices attending the assembly must wear shoes and socks.) At the third round on the drum the acolytes inform the Abbot that it is time for his appearance. The entire assembly bows in unison, and the Abbot ascends the [dharma] seat and stands in front of the dhyāna chair. First, the acolytes bow. (At this time the acolyte carrying the incense ascends the dharma seat on the east side, not too far, and stands to the side facing west.) Then the Chief Seat and the assembly turn their bodies to face the dharma seat, bow, and return to stand in their places. The Stewards then move forward, bow, and stand facing the Chief Seat and the others. [The position closest to the] dharma-seat is deemed the senior one. Thereupon the *śrāmaṇera*s and novices turn their bodies to face the dharma seat, bow, and return to stand in their places. . . . The Guest Prefect then leads the patrons to their place in front of the Stewards [i.e., closer to the dharma seat]. All the above Stewards, along with the assembly, remain lined up in ranks with their bodies turned toward the side and listen [to the Abbot's sermon]. The Abbot then descends from the seat, and the entire assembly bows in unison.

The Chief Seat exits and, [once the monks have gathered in the monks hall], makes a tour of the hall. The assembly of monks remains standing until the Abbot enters the [monks] hall. Then the Stewards make a tour of the hall. If there is tea in the temple, everyone approaches their positions [in front of the platform] and takes their seat, with the Stewards remaining outside the entrance. When the tea is finished, the Abbot rises and the bell to leave the hall is struck. If there are no snacks or tea, the Stewards make a tour of the hall and then depart. [While everyone] waits respectfully, the Abbot bows and retires. Alternatively, following three strikes on the bell the Abbot ascends [the platform] in the hall. Everyone is then released from the assembly, just as ordinarily occurs in the morning, and following the assembly there are no further rounds of the hall.

Once the Abbot has ascended his seat [during the Ascending the Hall ceremony] everyone must be in attendance with the exception of the Assembly-Hall Prefect and the Monks-Hall Monitor. The temple shall punish those who contravene this rule, [and thus this offence] certainly should be avoided. If some unavoidable or urgent business arises and there is no intent to show disrespect, then one may join the service a little late. But if the Abbot has already taken his seat, then one must not enter, and one should avoid catching the Abbot's eye. When the whole assembly is convened don't wear a hat or a hood. (The same holds for the Abbot.) If you hear someone saying something funny, don't disturb the hall by

laughing out loud or breaking into a smile. One must cultivate an attentive and serious demeanor and solemnly listen to the profound voice [of the Abbot]. (Kagamishima et al. 1972, 71–75; sections in parentheses are interlinear notes in the text; cf. Yifa 2002, 135–36)

One is immediately struck by the degree of ritualization seen in the ceremony. Clearly it was more than a simple lecture by the abbot or an opportunity for the congregants to ask questions. Ascending the Hall was an elaborately choreographed event in which the monastic community and visiting patrons came face-to-face with a living buddha. The detailed ceremonial protocol and the semblance of invariance were required to frame the event as a meeting with a living icon; the rite is clearly modeled on the public invocation rites performed in the Buddha hall, except that veneration is now directed toward a flesh-and-blood abbot. The abbot's "script," wherein he lectures the audience and responds to their queries, was, as we will see below, modeled on the patriarchal transmissions depicted in Chan lineage texts, which in turn evoke Indian scriptural prototypes.

The description of the Ascending the Hall rite found in the *Rules of Purity for Chan Monasteries* is rich in "indexical" information bearing on the status of each of the participants. The instructions are primarily concerned with staging: each member of the audience is told exactly when to enter and where to stand in accordance with his rank, following the principle that the higher one's rank, the closer one is to the abbot. The one exception to this rule involves the acolytes: that they are positioned next to the abbot does not reflect their personal status within the monastic organization so much as it stamps them as part of the abbot's personal regalia. The staging should not be viewed as a secondary or accidental aspect of the rite; the status of abbot as "honored one" (*zun*), enlightened patriarch, and living buddha is constituted and manifest precisely through such indices.

The detailed information concerning the choreography of the rite stands in stark contrast with the silence, at least in the *Rules of Purity for Chan Monasteries*, with respect to the nature of the sermon itself. The early monastic codes do not, in general, provide any indication of what the abbot was to say either publicly in the dharma hall or privately in formal interviews. Tradition holds that the abbot's speech in both venues was regarded as the spontaneous, unaffected utterance of a fully enlightened buddha. But again, the speech of the abbot is signified as "spontaneous" only by virtue of the ritual frame.

The "discourse records" (*yulu*) of eminent Chan abbots do contain hundreds if not thousands of examples of sermons delivered from the dharma seat. And there is little evidence of spontaneity; while the abbot may well have spoken extemporaneously, the ceremonial context obliged

him to deliver a talk that was recognizably "Channish," in other words, that followed the rhetorical models laid down in the discourse records of his predecessors. Chan sermons constitute a well-defined genre governed by conventions bearing on content, rhetorical form, and style. The conventions included (1) the frequent and stylized use of dialectical negation drawing on models in Mādhyamika and *prajñāpāramitā* (perfection of wisdom) texts; (2) a marked predilection to interpret any assertion, scriptural or otherwise, as pointing to "true mind" or "buddha-nature"; (3) repetitions of standard Chan injunctions; (4) the use of dramatic elocutionary and physical gestures, including shouts, claps, cuffs, and so on. In short, this was not spontaneous utterance in any literal sense but rather a complex form of oratory that denoted spontaneous utterance. Which is not to say that it isn't "enlightened speech." As the *Heart Sūtra* says, "form is precisely emptiness." Or, as Dōgen put it, "all painted Buddhas are Buddhas. . . . Unsurpassed enlightenment is a painting."

It was no easy thing to deliver such a talk; a candidate for the abbacy had to master a considerable body of canonical literature and internalize the complex rhetorical logic of Buddhist dialectic. Documents such as the *Rules of Purity for Chan Monasteries* reveal that the study of scriptures, including the discourse records of past patriarchs, formed an important part of the monastic curriculum (Foulk 1993, 187). In addition to the study of texts, the monk assimilated Chan discourse through regular exposure to the abbot's example at Ascending the Hall and Entering the Chamber ceremonies. During the latter event, the student was provided the opportunity to hone his or her own rhetorical skills in repartee with the master. These private formal exchanges were explicitly modeled on a literary genre known as "public cases" (*gongan*; Japanese *kōan*)—laconic and often witty exchanges between famous masters of old and their disciples. Such exchanges functioned as model scripts for the enactment of mind-to-mind transmission that took place regularly in the abbot's chamber, and reinforced the sense of Chan as a continuous tradition extending back to Śākyamuni himself.

Years of rigorous training and rehearsal were necessary to master the repertoire before one could do a flawless rendering of enlightened discourse. And the performance must indeed be impeccable lest the metalinguistic frame be ruptured. Thus the goal of Chan monastic practice cannot be reduced to some private "inner transformation" or "mystical experience." It lies rather in the practical mastery of buddhahood—the ability to execute, day in and day out, a compelling rendition of liberated action and speech, and to pass that mastery on to one's disciples.

From this perspective, Chan enlightenment does not entail, in any literal sense, the elimination of passion, fear, doubt, and desire from one's karmic storehouse. The Chan tradition itself would seem to concur: the literature is filled with tales of masters who brazenly express their love of

life, their aversion to death, their moments of doubt and melancholy. Such attitudes are, in the end, simply irrelevant to the process of "ritual transduction" wherein one is transformed into a buddha (see Rappaport 1999, 103).

In arguing that enlightenment is constituted in ritual performance, I do not intend to accuse Chan of bad faith. The Ascending the Hall ceremony is not a sham or a lifeless substitute for the "real thing" but rather a recognition and affirmation that form and content are inseparable. From a Chan perspective, the transformation of the abbot into a living buddha through the manipulation of metalinguistic framing rules is consonant with the appreciation of the intrinsic emptiness of all dependently arisen things. There is, in the end, no fixed or final referent to which terms like *abbot*, *buddha*, or *enlightenment* can obtain—a Buddhist truism that is repeated ad nauseam in the abbot's formal sermons. Chan monastic life may be play, but without such play there would be no transmission of the dharma.

CONCLUSION

I have offered a view of Buddhist enlightenment that renders it a form of *darśan*—enlightenment consists in coming face-to-face with the Buddha. This buddha is neither a mental projection nor something that is ontologically other but rather exists in the betwixt-and-between space of play. Insofar as the ritual constitution of buddhahood in play can be said to have discursive content, it is precisely that all social forms of life are play. Absolute truth is the paradoxical understanding that all truths are contingent.

The approach to the logic of ritual framing explored above is not intended to constitute a universal theory of ritual; nor do I intend to aver to the authority of Buddhism in support of such an approach. Rather, I have sought to formulate a perspective on ritual that is intellectually cogent in its own right and at the same time is commensurate with indigenous Buddhist exegesis. The analysis offered here is in the spirit of other calls for a performative theory of ritual in that it seeks to overcome the intellectual limitations and cultural parochialism that attended earlier "interpretative" models. As such, it seeks to circumvent problematic dichotomies such as thought and action, subject and object, ideal and actual in order to expose the underlying logic of world construction from whence such dichotomies emerge. Finally, the model of ritual as play does not distinguish between elite and lay understandings of, or participation in, ritual. While elite Buddhist monks may possess a sophisticated philosophical appreciation of ritual unavailable to the unlettered masses, the essential effects of ritual are in no way predicated upon such an understanding. Ritual retains its magical power to alter the world through the

modification of metalinguistic framing cues whether one is an illiterate peasant making an offering before a simple stone buddha, an ascetic engaged in a complex monastic invocation procedure, or an enlightened Chan master ascending the dharma seat.

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SEX

Janet Gyatso

However else one wants to read the Pāli vinaya's hyperanalysis of proscribed sex acts—an exercise in scholastic obsession? necessary restrictions for rambunctious monks? fantasies of an oversexed imagination? prudish precaution?—one should not miss the sense of humor. Consider, for example, the case of the monk who asked a woman forbidden questions. He asks about a blanket she is wearing: he asks about her red blanket, about her blanket with the thick short hair, the one with matted hair, her blanket with stiff hair. "Is it yours?" he asks so innocently each time (*Sanghādisesa* 3.4.1–5; this and subsequent citations to *Suttavibhaṅga* refer to Oldenberg [1881] 1984).

It requires no labor to recognize the lewd allusion, for without the double entendre there could be no offense at all in inquiring about the material of a garment. But if monkish readers found here the chance to giggle about the perennially taboo-but-alluring woman, other jokes are more

self-referential. Some of these are also notably revealing about what the problem with sex was for Buddhist monasticism, and this goes far beyond simple schoolboy embarrassment or disgust.

Consider especially *Pārājika* 1.6, which records the occasion when sex with animals was first ruled out. Apparently one monk had lured a female monkey into a sexual relationship. "[The rule] refers to the human woman but not to the female animal," he tried to argue in self-defense. But his depraved arrangement became known to the rest of the order when a group of touring monks happened to pass through, and, embarrassingly, the she-monkey came up and postured before them all. "She shook her hip, she shook her tail; she thrust her hip, she worked her genitals," the text recites with rhythmic relish: "*kaṭiṃ pi cālesi/chappaṃ pi cālesi/kaṭiṃ pi oḍḍi/nimittaṃ pi akāsi.*" Her dance was evidence of her keeper's shameful folly, but what is not mentioned is the obvious fact that the stately visitors before whom she performed were thereby ridiculed as well. The monkey saw the venerable monks as potential lovers—perhaps because with their shaved heads and monk's garb they looked a lot like the lover she already knew? If so, then the joke was surely on them: so much for respectable monkish appearance.

If the early lawmakers were moved to protect the reputation of the saṅgha (monastic community) because of a monkey's mistaken assumptions, another form of this monastic humor drives home the serious message that one is still a monk and subject to vinaya law no matter how he looks. For that is what he learns when he tries to get away with having sex when he's not wearing monk robes. He tries it in the dress of a layman; or again in a grass garment; and again in a bark dress; a garment made of wood shavings; a garment made of hair; or one of horsehair; of owls' feathers; of antelope hide (*Pārājika* 1.10.3). He even tries it naked. But the rule book affirms each time that even if it does not besmirch the reputation of the robe, the act itself still makes the actor subject to penalty. Note, though, that the same point could have been made without so many amusing illustrations of his tries.

In one case, monks' appearance becomes the cause of embarrassment despite their immaculate behavior; in the other, behavior undermines one's monk status no matter what one wears. Appearance in any event is well known to be a critical ingredient in vinaya jurisprudence, given the importance of maintaining the respect of the laity so that they will continue to underwrite the monastic order. Equally key is the often-repeated sentiment that monks are to serve as visible exemplars of the holy life. And yet in the signal episode that at least in one vinaya version introduces the principle of celibacy in the order altogether, the role of appearance, or institutional concerns of any sort, is not immediately evident. But neither are affairs of the heart. Indeed, even if it's no laughing matter, the point of this very central story seems something of a riddle.

The story comes right at the beginning of the Pāli vinaya's investigations into the principle of proscribed sex. Sudinna the Kalandaka (*Pārājika* 1.5) wanted sincerely to "go forth" and lead the pure life in the order. He struggled to convince his parents to allow it, finally succeeding only after he threatened suicide. Later he returns to his ancestral village to beg for food from his wealthy family on behalf of starving fellow monks. He is recognized by one of his family's slaves, but steadfastly demonstrates his purity, refusing his parents' offerings of an evening meal (which would break his vow), refusing their plea to enjoy his family's wealth. But then he does agree to his mother's plea to have sex with his former wife, just this once, so that there would be an heir and the family fortune would not be lost. He leads the woman into the forest on the day she is fertile and has sex with her thrice. The narrative then points out that the monastic rule against sex had not yet been made known. We are also informed that both the child who came to be born and its mother eventually went forth into homelessness and became *arahant*s. But Sudinna feels remorse for having sex anyway despite these laudable ultimate results. His cohorts rebuke him and remind him that the *dhamma* (the Buddha's teachings) has been articulated for the sake of passionlessness. Then he is roundly scolded again by the Buddha himself for his arrogance, his clinging, and other evils. The upshot is the formulation of the severest punishment: Sudinna's episode of sexual intercourse becomes the paradigmatic illustration of the first kind of defeat (*pārājika*): any monk who has sex will no longer be "in communion," no longer a member of the order.

But isn't there a problem in using Sudinna's act as paradigmatic? He is shown as not interested in passion in the slightest. His would seem to be a story about the outside case: sex performed purely for instrumental reasons, reasons that are not his own but entirely of others. And these others are his parents, no less. And the sex actually eventuates in people gaining arahantship. Still, such sex would end a career as a Buddhist renunciant. Surely the reader is forced to ponder: what exactly is it that merits such a strict punishment? It certainly was not passion or desire or attachment, which are what one would have thought would be wrong with sex. Nor does it seem to be about monastic appearances. Sudinna fornicates with his wife in private; later it is he who confesses and brings himself to censure. What was so wrong with his sexual act? What constitutes it as the worst downfall?

SEX IN BUDDHISM

I would argue that the Sudinna story, perplexing as it is, is not only paradigmatic but also simple and lucid in demonstrating exactly what is wrong with sex. But this will take some consideration. The first step is to limit the scope of this point, and indeed this essay as a whole. The Sudinna

story addresses sex specifically for Buddhist monasticism, which is a specialized matter, and not necessarily to be equated with the more general message on sex in, say, the *sutta*s. What sex means for an early example of Buddhist monastic jurisprudential writing, and why its definition is attended with such obsessive analysis, will be the focus of this essay.

This means that I am leaving aside several other critical dimensions of the meaning of sex in Buddhism, including what is suggested by the standard Buddhist word for "the genitals," *nimitta*, which means "mark" or "sign" (to be sure, a felicitous euphemism, indicating how fundamental genital identity is to personal identity). And this is not to mention the homology that often obtains between categories of sex, gender, and the structure of linguistic rationality (this equation is all the more evident in the Sanskrit term for male organ, *liṅga*, "phallus," which also means linguistic gender as well as decisive reason in syllogistic argument). But rather than sex as a fundamental distinguishing feature of identity, in this essay I will be exploring primarily the significance of the other (not entirely unrelated) sense of the English word *sex*, namely, sexual practice.

As for the general view of sexual practice in the Buddhist *sutta*s, at least we can say that it shares with the specialized rule for monastic virtuosi the sense that sex epitomizes the central problematic of Buddhism. The Buddha's four noble truths pinpoint craving and ignorance as the cause for all suffering, and the engine for sex exemplifies ignorant craving quintessentially. In turn, to have sex induces further craving. Sexual pleasure is illusory, as is the partner we desire. Sexual desire traps us; it renders us slaves to pleasure, slaves to our partners, slaves to the body itself. And it never brings satisfaction; rather, sex causes conflict, burns the mind, and brings us into bad company. Perhaps above all, sex is vilified as the ultimate source of saṃsāra, for it is what brought us all into our unhappy existence in the first place.

Buddhist ethics recognizes that lay men and women nonetheless will have sex, which is not forbidden, even while it is regarded with suspicion. But Buddhist literature has little to say about the specifics of lay sexual practice at all. At most, we can find a few guidelines for normal, ethical sexual behavior: sex should be limited to married partners; it should not be performed on religious holidays or in the vicinity of sacred shrines; a few sources also succinctly proscribe several kinds of sexual misdeeds, such as oral or anal sexual intercourse. We find virtually no erotic literature in any Buddhist canonical collection, apart from the tantric tradition, which, however, can hardly be said to represent a celebration of everyday lay sex. Erotic literature does emerge in a variety of later Buddhist literary contexts, but nowhere do we find an early or canonical Buddhist work extolling erotic love in the manner of a Buddhist Song of Songs.

There are only two places where sexual practice is described in detail in canonical or translocal Buddhist literature. One is indeed the vinaya, where sex is forbidden. The other is the tantras, which propose special sexual exercises as an aid to gaining salvific realizations. Although the two seem to stand exactly in opposition to each other, both are produced exclusively for a specialized audience of virtuosi. For both, sex is an enormous issue; in both cases it marks emblematically the very nature of the path these specialists will follow. In this essay I will focus only upon the first, monastic sex, not because it is more important or interesting than tantric sex but rather out of respect for our continuing ignorance about most things tantric.

It is common knowledge that until recently, scholars of Buddhism with very few exceptions bracketed tantrism altogether, the feeling being that it represented such a serious degeneration that it ought not properly be considered Buddhist at all. Yet the forms of sexual repression in the vinaya have barely been studied either. One of the only modern scholars who did so, the redoubtable Isabel B. Horner, translator among many other things of the key early Pāli vinaya sources—and an otherwise most "philological" Buddhist studies worker—quite deliberately fudged the naughty bits so as to spare her audience their "outspokenness and crudeness," for she deemed these especially "unsuitable for incorporation in a translation designed principally for Western readers" (Horner [1938] 1970, 197). Ironically, Horner serviced the intrepid researcher such as myself by providing a handy appendix containing the Pāli for many of these untranslated naughty bits, thereby also clearly laying out just what she thought should be translated and what she deemed "coarse," a distinction deserving a study of its own (ibid., xxxvii).

In what follows I will probably stray more than a few steps from my Buddhological predecessors in thinking about sex in the vinaya. Not only am I among the first to isolate this topic within the monastic code; I have also allowed my own feelings to peek through my treatment of it. The reader will easily discern between the lines of this essay both a certain impatience with the perduring androcentrism and misogyny in Buddhist monasticism, and a dose of irony—the latter no doubt the legacy of growing up in urban America during the sexual revolution. (And I am not even mentioning here the enormous occasion for feminist irritation and irony that is the fate of Buddhist nuns.) But I trust that it will also be evident that I find the idea of using sexuality, via the negative, as a device for defining discipline to be a rich site for thinking about the nature of discipline more generally, not to mention its key role in moral cultivation. The distinctive practice of regulated celibacy, of which Buddhism was a founding author, suggests an array of questions about the relation between mind and body, and the varying ways that relation is mediated by cultivated habit, willful control, and law. To focus on its central role in Buddhist tradition can

serve also to help us think further about specifically Buddhological issues, not only regarding monasticism but also a range of notions concerning personal responsibility, agency, and community.

But it is essential to note that our very limited knowledge about the specific historical and social circumstances of the formation of any of the vinayas means that it is risky to assume that what is written in those texts reflects actual events or practices. In what follows I will consider only what the *view* of sex is, both explicitly and implicitly, with respect to monastic law and as represented in vinaya writing. I will concentrate on one section of one version of the vinaya, the basic law book called *Suttavibhaṅga*, which is an early Pāli elaboration of the *pātimokkha* confession litany, and the very one that I. B. Horner translated. The interest and sheer mass of sexual details in this masterpiece of Buddhist monastic law and narrative will be enough to occupy me for most of this essay, although I could just as well have focused on any number of other sections in the various versions of the vinaya, albeit without the easy access that the Pāli edition affords. None of this is to say that my findings are necessarily only theoretical or textual; certainly ethnographic evidence bears out at least the utter centrality of sexual practice (that is, the lack thereof) in the way that monasticism is viewed in Buddhist communities (see, for example, Spiro 1970, 300). In my brief concluding comments, I will not be able to resist a few comparative and much more general gestures in the direction of tantric sex.

SEX IN THE PĀLI MONASTIC LAW BOOK

There are several easy observations we can make right away. First of all, sex is given striking prominence as the premier downfall (*pārājika*) that ends a monk's or nun's career. Sex is one of four such principal transgressions, the other three being theft, murder, and boasting of superhuman perfections. Rather shockingly, sex is listed first, before theft and even murder. If the order has any significance, and I would argue that it does, then we can venture that sex is the most serious monastic transgression. This is also to presume that murder (which surely must be considered a more serious offense) would rarely be a problem among Buddhist renunciants. So we see in the monastic code that sex, thievery, and murder are placed in the exact reverse order from their position in the more general Buddhist list of the three bodily demeritorious deeds. That discrepancy already prefigures a key point: monastic law operates on different principles than does karmic law. This essay also proposes more specifically that sex was considered the most difficult bodily transgression from which to refrain; for that very reason it was listed first, as the emblematic site of disciplinary regulation.

One is struck by the sheer amount of discussion of sex in comparison with classic Christian monastic manuals such as those by Saint Benedict

or Bernard of Clairvaux, which barely allude to sexual transgression at all. While it would be unfounded to conclude that the plenitude of vinaya attention to sexual regulation means that the Buddhist monastic milieu harbored exceptionally voracious sexual appetites, one is tempted to conclude that anyway. At the very least, the many lusty people and acts depicted in *Suttavibhaṅga* bear witness to a very active sexual imagination. We find monks having sex with fresh corpses, rotting corpses, dolls, dildos, and a plethora of live partners crossing sex, gender, and species lines in every imaginable way. Monks rub against women and hermaphrodites and men and animals, copping a feel; women spot a monk sleeping under a tree and run up to sit on him and rape him; people force a monk to have sex with a woman, pushing their sexual organs together; a woman on the road invites a monk to touch her so as to bring him to orgasm; monks advise devoted laywomen that the best gift to the saṅgha is the gift of sex; prominent laywomen make the same disingenuous proposition to monks.

It is certainly not impossible that some of the rules were formulated in response to things people actually did. But we still have to ask why the law book gives so many illustrations of each kind of transgression. We can't help but imagine the monkish reader, who wrinkles his nose in disgust-cum-fascination at his ridiculous colleague who encouraged a female patron to offer her body for sex as a supreme act of *dāna* (generosity) to the saṅgha, only to turn away, spitting in disgust at her odor, just as he was about to mount her (*Saṅghādisesa* 4.1). For it would be easy enough to prohibit such a dubious kind of offering without the story of her—and his—humiliation. What is more, he is not punished for any of the particular details that the story provides, such as being on the verge of doing it, or for sorely hurting her feelings, both of which would justify telling the story for some edifying reason other than our suspicion that, at least in this case, it is here largely for its gratuitous amusement.

THE RULE

Probably, the catalogue of sexual misfires in the early vinaya edified both the prudish and the prurient, perhaps even in the same reader simultaneously. What is certain in any event is that the catalogue sends the message that there are many ways to read the rule and to try get around it, and that these dodges will not work. This in fact must be the bottom line of the presentation: the multitude of examples is to give the impression that the rule book is comprehensive, or to put it another way, that there are no ways to get around the rule. All possible misreadings and tricks have been anticipated by the elders, and none of them will succeed.

If it was obvious that sex for monastics is wrong, its strict definition was nonetheless elusive. Indeed, all that can be managed as the Buddha's most basic definition of *sex* in this section is simply "that which is not the

dhamma" (*asaddhamma*). His other glosses, here, such as "village dhamma" (*gammadhamma*) or "vile dhamma" (*vasaladhamma*), don't help much either. Perhaps that is why those with less than sterling character are depicted as seeking to exploit the imprecision, in order to find sexual satisfaction without breaking the rule. A woman suggests to a monk that they could have sex whereby he will move, but she won't (alas, the text shows, that results in his downfall anyway). Again, a woman suggests that she will move while he won't (this, too, will merit a downfall). Or she suggests that ejaculating outside her body will make the act not quite sex (no, that won't do either) (*Pārājika* 1.10.12).

Sex is just that which will bring a monk to defeat. After telling the first few stories, the *pārājika* section tries to pin down what that entails. Sexual intercourse occurs whenever the male organ enters the female organ. To make that even more definitive, a minute specification is formulated: if the male member enters the female genitals for the length of the fruit of the sesame plant, sex has occurred. Any such intercourse will disqualify the monk from being a son of the Sakyans; he can no longer be part of the community (*Pārājika* 1.8.5).

But we can already see that it wasn't so easy to articulate an ironclad definition after all. First the passage has to include animals in the list of partners. Then the next passage adds more specifications. There are actually three kinds of females: humans, nonhumans, and animals (*Pārājika* 1.9.1). Nonhumans include various kinds of spirits and ghosts (1.10.14). Not only that, but intercourse with partners other than females also turns out to be sex. The rule book actually comes up with four kinds of partners/sexes/genders: woman (*itthi*), hermaphrodite (*ubhatovyañjanaka*), *paṇḍaka* (which often means someone with minimal or deteriorated genitals), and male (*purisa*). And hermaphrodites, *paṇḍaka*s, and males, too, can be human, nonhuman, or animal.

And not only that. Sex with females can happen not only in one but in any of three orifices—vaginal, anal, and oral—all of which presumably are subject to the one-sesame law. This also is true for hermaphrodites. And just to be complete, it is finally specified that sex with *paṇḍaka*s and males can happen in two orifices, anal and oral. And this is true also for nonhuman *paṇḍaka*s and animal *paṇḍaka*s. And nonhuman males and male animals (*Pārājika* 1.9.1), in case that wasn't already clear.

WOMAN

Appearances of legalistic precision notwithstanding, the principle of what constitutes a sexual downfall is still not fully nailed down. For one thing, it turns out there is yet another forbidden orifice for the monk's organ: the mouth of the monk himself (there was once a monk with a very supple back who could manage such a feat). And then another: an acro-

batic monk who could penetrate his own anus [*Pārājika* 1.10.8]. Putting his organ into those two places also constitutes defeats. But what about other kinds of masturbation? At *Saṅghādisesa* 1.1, masturbation performed with the hand is actually recognized to have health benefits, such as clearing up the complexion and filling out a frail frame. Nonetheless, it is a serious sexual transgression.

Actually, masturbation with the hand only institutes a formal sentencing by the saṅgha; it does not make for a full defeat. The Buddha still lectures the masturbating monk Seyyasaka in terms similar to those with which he lectured Sudinna—didn't he realize that the entire purpose of the dharma was for the sake of stilling passion, and so on? So why the difference in punishment? Why is masturbation with one's mouth worse than with the hand? Isn't sexual pleasure subject to passion and attachment no matter what device was used to cause it? Or is there an important distinction that has to do with the device itself? The only specific problem mentioned about masturbation by hand is that the same hand might also be used to accept offerings from the faithful (*Saṅghādisesa* 1.1.2). Is it that using one's own mouth or anus is somehow a more abhorrent transgression?

The more we work through the *pārājika* section, the less clear what really distinguishes the orifices that make for downfall sex. For example, ejaculating into a sore in the vicinity of the sexual organ on a corpse after inserting and then withdrawing his penis from the sexual organ itself will also constitute downfall (*Pārājika* 1.10.9). (So will the opposite sequence. The case shows that ejaculation is not what counts as sex; rather, it is the entrance into the [dead] woman's organ.) So will intercourse with a relatively fresh corpse (1.10.13). And so will intercourse with the mouth of a decapitated head. These cases are governed by the three-orifice rule, but then other cases show that this rule has still not been pinned down precisely. For one, if his organ enters the mouth of a decapitated head without touching it, it is a lesser transgression: only a "wrong-doing" (1.10.13). So this a further specification: his organ has to touch the mouth, not just enter it. Moreover, there even are kinds of vaginas with which intercourse doesn't make for downfall sex: sexual intercourse with a woman whose body is almost fully decomposed (ibid.) counts only as a "grave offense." If his organ enters the genitals of the collected bones of a woman who had died and her bones scattered, it is only a wrongdoing (ibid.). The same is true of inserting his organ into the genitals of a plaster image or a doll (1.10.10). These latter examples concern his penetration of one of the forbidden orifices, but some yet-to-be-discerned distinction prevents them from creating a downfall. So what is the logic that distinguishes downfall vaginas from other ones, as well as from the other kinds of envelopes that merit lesser punishment, like the masturbating hand—or, in a commentary, even the eye, or nose, or ear, or armpit (Buddhaghosa [1924–] 1975,1:265)? Or is there a logic at all?

Before deciding that, first consider another set of anomalies, this time regarding the proscribed sexual partner. The rule says that sex with animals, hermaphrodites, *paṇḍaka*s, and males makes for a downfall as much as with women. (And as we just saw, the same is true for sex with oneself.) But in the lesser offenses, partner parity disappears. A sexual overture toward a woman earns a heavier punishment than toward any other kind of partner. Rubbing a woman with sex in mind is worse—incurring a sentencing by the saṅgha—than rubbing the body of a *paṇḍaka*, which incurs a lesser offense; or a man or an animal, which merits a lesser offense still. The same is true of mere physical contact (*Saṅghādisesa* 2.2–3).

Another set of rules legislates that touching a sleeping woman will require sentencing by the saṅgha, while touching a dead woman merits a grave offense, and a female animal or a wooden doll only a wrongdoing (*Saṅghādisesa* 2.4.4.). Here the distinction seems to have to do with how close the prospective partner is to a live human woman. The human woman is also considered the most threatening when a monk sits with someone; the ruling is that this may only be deemed suspicious if that someone is a human female, not a female animal or spirit (*Aniyata* 1.2.1).

We find, then, suggestions that the human female is considered the gold standard for sex: the most likely partner for a monk, and the one with whom the monk's behavior is most closely regulated. This hint of preference might in turn explain the distinction between kinds of orifices: perhaps it has to do with how similar the orifice is to the vagina of a woman. On this theory, sex with fleshly orifices in living creatures such as men, *paṇḍaka*s, and animals would be more like the vagina than is a hand, or a detached vagina among a pile of bones or an opening on an inanimate image, even if figured as a vagina.

Later commentarial tradition in Chinese translation suggests that the reason that the female organ is the most restricted is because it is what gives the most pleasure (Bapat 1970, 196; but contrast Buddhaghosa [1924–] 1975, 1:258–59). But pleasure as such does not figure in the root law book, the *Suttavibhaṅga*. Perhaps this reticence reflects a recognition that pleasure makes for a most ambiguous basis of legal definition: surely both masturbation and full intercourse involve pleasure, the relative degree of which would be hard to measure. It is much more plausible that what really made sex with a woman worse than any other kind was its practical upshot: marriage, children, the householder's life; in short, saṃsāra, or what the Buddha calls "village *dhamma*." Maybe that, in the end, is why sex with a woman's vagina is worse than putting your organ into the mouth of a black snake, for it lands you in hell on earth (*Pārājika* 1.5.11).

It is left to address, then, why sex with men, neuters, and other barren partners was also forbidden. Given the evidence in the *Suttavibhaṅga* of so much sex with partners of indeterminate or ambiguous sexual identity, not to mention species-crossing sex, it may not have been obvious how to

define the legal distinction between human women and other partners. Particularly questionable might have been the childbearing capabilities of the hermaphrodite. The variety of contemporary textual passages concerning spontaneous sex change suggests that sexual identity was considered unstable in any case. So even if women were the gold standard, many other kinds of partners had to be ruled out as well, perhaps not only to be legally exhaustive, but also to be safe.

ACT AND INTENTION

The theory that woman as fertile mate (with her particular kind of sexual organ) is the paradigmatic and most proscribed kind of partner already sheds a fair amount of light on the Pāli vinaya's sense of sex. It is certainly pertinent to the puzzlingly strict censure of Sudinna's act. Recall, the story goes out of its way to show that there was not a hint of erotic desire on his part. Rather, when the Buddha rebukes him for not being able to lead the Brahma life, it would seem that what he is guilty of is behavioral only. He did violate the Brahma life—but only in deed. But our theory that it is the human woman partner who makes sex so bad for a monk reminds us that even the mere deed with such a partner has enormous implications: it would produce a child, it would draw him back into the householder's life. No matter, then, that Sudinna's wife and child ended up renouncing the world and becoming *arahant*s. It still is incumbent upon Sudinna, who in his earlier days had been particularly struck by the impossibility of leading the holy life as a householder (*Pārājika* 1.5.1), to confront the brute fact that *he performed householder activity*—no matter what the mitigating circumstances, and no matter what his particular intention or subjective state.

This fundamentally behavioral nature of the rule is one of the key grounds upon which monastic law may be distinguished from karmic law, which in most formulations takes mental attitude into account, even for bodily acts (compare Horner [1938] 1970, ix). If it can be argued that karma is a kind of "natural law," the same cannot be said of monastic law, for it is rather a legalistic construct. This also means that monastic law is not about spiritual attainment or states of enlightenment; it will be far more convincing if, as below, we argue instead that monastic law serves to define a community. The reason that monks must not have sex with women is because of what that act produces, which in turn will destroy the monastic community. This also explains why the rule disregards desire and attachment.

This is not to say that there is no accounting for desire whatsoever in the *Suttavibhaṅga*'s rules on sex. But most of the times that it comes up, desire serves merely to distinguish what otherwise would be innocent and worthy of a lesser, or even no, offense. This explains, I think, the occasional

specification that a monk have the idea of sex (*sevanacitta*) in mind when he commits culpable intercourse. Especially some of the lesser offenses, which are ambiguous as to whether they are sexual or not, will be determined on the grounds of whether being inflamed (*sāratta*) has a role in the act. Otherwise, shaking a bridge upon which a woman stands, or giving her a blow on the shoulder, or pulling on a cord of which a woman holds the other end, or raising his foot, could well be innocent (*Sanghādisesa* 2.4.6–11). There are a few occasions when inflammation does figure in the definition of certain heavier sexual offenses, such as when he has sex with the wooden doll (*Pārājika* 1.10.10). But mentioning this subjective dimension of the act seems to be gratuitous and redundant, since it is not highlighted and the act itself is already so odd that it would be obvious that he did it with passion; otherwise he surely wouldn't do it at all.

Clearly for the *Suttavibhaṅga* itself, the central factor in deciding which sexual activity constitutes downfall is far more about consent and deliberateness than desire or pleasure. Consent is especially germane when sex is initiated by others. It is a recurring refrain: Did a monk consent (*sādiyati*) when a woman sat down on him and had sex with him? If not, no offense. Did he consent when a woman came up to a monk (while paying homage to him) and took his organ in her mouth? Since he didn't, no offense. Other exceptions are also noted on occasion, such as a case where one monk accosts another monk who is sleeping: if the latter is ignorant of the rules, or if he is insane, disturbed, afflicted with pain, or a beginner, he is not held responsible for his part in the sex act (*Pārājika* 1.9.8). These specifications add sanity, attention, deliberateness, and most of all, knowledge of the rules to what consensual sex means for the early law book. And they reinforce my point above: monastic law is not natural law. Indeed, Sudinna is not shown to have been expelled from the *saṅgha* for his act. Even though he had a sense on his own that it was wrong and regretted it afterward, he is not culpable legally, since the law had not been articulated at the time that he committed the deed.

One of the only cases where the *Suttavibhaṅga* does indict desire (*rāga*) as a deciding factor in whether sex is downfall sex serves rather to raise a different, more interesting question. The Buddha exonerates a monk who has literally been raped by a woman sitting down on him. Clearly responding, I think, to the puzzle of how a man can be made to have sex against his will, the Buddha explains that there are five ways that males can get aroused, only one of which is through desire. The others include a waft of wind, the bite of an insect on top of his penis, and two more which are hard to construe (*Pārājika* 1.10.17). What's important is that the Buddha explicitly adjudicates that the monk's erection did not result from desire. In this the Buddha distinguishes desire from the bodily responsiveness of the male organ coming into contact with a mechanically stimulating touch.

The Buddha's treatment of the rape of a male suggests a category of something like "the body acting on its own," that is, without any consent and without conscious decision to act. Another case of autogenous bodily action, it would seem, would be an involuntary nocturnal emission due to a dream, which is immune from any punishment whatsoever (*Sanghādisesa* 1.2, 1.4). This suggests that for the *Suttavibhaṅga*, when the body acts on its own, as an automaton, the person is not responsible.

But does this make sense? Is the body really acting totally involuntarily when there is a nocturnal emission, particularly if it is related to an erotic dream? The idea here seems to be that in such a case, an entirely mental affair (the dream) produces a bodily action, but without deliberate intention or bodily mobilization. The dream does, of course, express sexual desire and even an intention to have an emission *within* the dream. Indeed, in stating that "intentional emission of semen except during a dream is an offence," the law book suggests that nocturnal emission is in fact associated with intention (*sañcetanika*) (*Sanghādisesa* 1.2.1), which would refer to the desire that motivated the dream, as well as to a basic awareness (*sañjanata*) of what one is doing, which several of the *Suttavibhaṅga* rules specify in order to exonerate entirely inadvertent actions. But what I am suggesting is that nocturnal ejaculation is immune from punishment because it lacks a very particular kind of intention: intention directed toward a bodily act in the world of physical reality. It is only this that becomes culpable here. Such a reasoning once again distinguishes monastic law from issues of virtue as such. We can recall the famous argument in early Buddhist polemics that he who has a nocturnal emission is not an arhat; there the presumption seems to be that nocturnal emissions are signs of desire and attachment. Monastic law, in contrast, is not concerned with the state of desire or enlightenment of its subjects, only how to determine if they have broken a law. It is just that which is at stake in determining the nuances of intention and bodily action.

One thing that is clear in *Suttavibhaṅga* is that a solely mental act of sex is not an offense. A monk is shown having sex with his former wife in a dream, presumably with passion, but since no actual physical acts occur, the dream deserves no penalty at all (*Pārājika* 1.10.22).

In short, we have now seen not only that bodily action on its own (for instance, automatic erection) has no penalty; mental activity on its own (dream sex) doesn't either. There has to be some combination: there must be some bodily action for sex to be vinaya-culpable sex, but this action must also be accompanied by something else. What that something else is, is construed variously in the *Suttavibhaṅga*; often it is consent, as already seen, but we can recognize other factors as well. Notably, however, such factors that serve to tip an act into legal culpability can be distinguished

from the more mentalistic intentional states, sometimes called *cetanā*, whose presence became the classic litmus test to determine karmic responsibility, or one of the defilements (*kilesa*), which also in some passages are what make for karmic liability. In contrast, for monastic law the deciding factor somehow has one foot outside the realm of the strictly mental, and over the edge into bodily action. Consent is a good example: it not only betrays a mental attitude or "intention"; it also marks a crossing of the line into actual realization, sort of like a "speech act," albeit not necessarily spoken. Such a category is not thematized per se in the *Suttavibhaṅga*, but I would argue that a lot of the discussion of sexual violation is exactly about trying to determine what functions as such a bridge.

One telling case provides several options for what makes an action culpable. It concerns a monk who rubs someone else sexually. Here three elements are distinguished: wishing for sex, making effort with the body, and making contact (*Saṅghādisesa* 2.3.6). If all three are present, he incurs a meeting of the saṅgha (the contact that occurs in this case never rises to the level of intercourse). If he has the wish and makes exertion, that is, he tries, but he doesn't make contact, then it's just a wrongdoing. And if he has the wish and makes contact but has made no exertion (in other words, he inadvertently touches someone whom he desires) there is no offense whatever. Thus making a move, exerting effort, is the worst, or the most important, factor of all. Making contact is the second worst: if he tries but it doesn't come to pass, it is still an offense, but a lesser one. This means that whether he makes effort is not the only factor to be considered—it is also an issue if it actually happens or not. But if there is only desire, and no effort to make anything happen, then even if something does happen, there is no offense at all.

The case, then, highlights the inception of mobilization—deliberately setting the body into motion. Such effort would seem to be poised even further along the line from the mental into the bodily than is consent. But while there was a need to protect from punishment the body that moves without such deliberate mobilization and entirely automatically, the *Suttavibhaṅga* was concerned that this clemency could be exploited, for again, what does it really mean for the body to act on its own? Another case, about a pact between a monk and a woman who tried to avoid the appearance of mobilization, illustrates the problem. A woman suggested that she do all the work: she would make the effort, while he would not move. She moved, and his body responded; intercourse happened; the judgment is a full downfall (*Pārājika* 1.10.12). Here it wasn't mobilizing his body, "making effort," that got him in trouble, but rather what he allowed another body to do: make sex happen. So here the *Suttavibhaṅga* leans instead again on the factor of consent.

That both consent and deliberate bodily mobilization are hard to observe or measure must explain why the rule book frequently reverts to the

bottom line of whether something actually happened—whether contact was made, a hole penetrated. We have already noticed in the case of Sudinna how this obsession with the physical act as such brings into high relief the disregard of subjective states such as desire or attachment in the *Suttavibhaṅga*. This disregard is made clearer yet in the case of a monk who was unable to feel anything in sex because of impaired faculties. He was nonetheless guilty of a downfall (*Pārājika* 1.10.15). A transgression took place, in actual reality—whether he enjoyed it, or even felt it, or not. And yet the law book's circumscription of sex could not turn entirely on a conception of sex as pure action either. At the extreme, sex that is completely objective and devoid of mental correlate must be free of blame—otherwise, given the ever-present possibility for automatic movement, there could be no definitive law. One could only erect inert, physical barriers, and even those would not stave off involuntary arousals and emissions. Most important, an entirely objectivist law cannot serve as a site for personal cultivation and discipline. Thus the law book must continue to struggle with determining the presence of consent—and the critical moment when the monk actually starts to make something happen.

THE LAW IS THE LAW: SEX AS PURE TRANSGRESSION

Thus does it turn out that for the early monastic code, a desire for sex is not really the problem. The problem is rather the moment of letting or making sex happen. It is the combination of deciding for sex to happen, and then it actually happening, that makes the act complete in the law book's eyes.

Consent, making a decision, mobilization, making effort: all work to bridge desire and physical realization. Such a moment can be active, whereby one makes a determination to have sex and then actually sets the body in motion to do so. Or it can be passive, whereby one perceives that others have set in motion a sexual act, and does nothing to stop it, not because one is unable to stop it, but because one would like the sex to go forward. Either way, there is a conscious decision that stands at the threshold of bodily expression. As such it is a gateway, a last mental act that already is partially through the door into the domain of the body. It connects private mental states or intentions to the world outside.

For these reasons, a bridge moment like consent becomes a red flag for the rule book. One can have infinite desires, imaginations, and thought constructions, but the law book is not interested in legislating these. Those are rather the mental domain of meditative discipline. Instead the vinaya legislates action. The reason is because the vinaya represents not soteriology as such; instead it represents the functioning of a community. It is a legal system and it involves public scrutiny, interrogation, and the

setting of punishments; it is a governing device. But the rule book will take one single step over the line onto the side of the mental, that is, into a moment of mobilization or consent, which is poised at that threshold, in order to locate responsibility. This is because a body that acts entirely reflexively or passively is not responsible under the law, just as purely mental acts are not culpable either.

What consent and its cohorts really represent, then, is the clearinghouse where desires and impulses are reviewed and the decision is made whether to put them into action or not. Indeed, consent occupies the same space as refusal, the place where the obedient and moral monk would indeed decide *not* to do something, *not* to allow something to happen, or to *refrain* from participating in an experience. The domain of consent/refusal is the exactly the site where the laws of the community, the sacred saṅgha's rules of the Buddha, are registered. It is the place where the monk, smitten with desire and a willing partner in front of him, will just say no and turn away. (And the reason that he will say no is that he has checked his desires against the law book.) It is the place where he remembers the law book, and he honors it.

Consent, or its pair, refusal, represents first of all knowledge of the law, and second compliance. It represents denial, or acceptance, of the law book as such. It represents membership, or nonmembership, in the community.

The literal definition of a downfall offense in the *Suttavibhaṅga* is that one ceases to be a member of the community, the community that has been constituted and defined by the very rule that one has just broken. Here we see that "being in communion" (*saṃvāsa*) is, like consent itself, a double-edged sword, which reaches both out into the community and back into the individual. It is the situation wherein the individual participates, upholds, and reflects the structure and rules of the community. It is defined at *Pārājika* 1.8.5 as "one work" (*ekakamma*), "one instruction" (*ekuddeso*), "equal training" (*samasikkhātā*): the monk in communion has the same work, rule, and discipline as everyone in the community. And it is also the place where he interrogates his own memory and accountability. This self-consciousness of violation is then considered available for verbal articulation, which makes manifest to the community the actions of the individual. Like consent or mobilization, such verbal articulation in the confession ritual is a marker that makes public the individual's incorporation of the structure of the community. Verbal articulation similarly will serve as an exit from the community and subjection to its laws. It is the failure to do so before one engages in sex that is what infuriates the law book, inspiring a long diatribe against the Vajjiputtas who frolicked in the park, swimming, eating, and fornicating with each other without disavowing their membership in the community (*Pārājika* 1.7–8).

The vinaya rules are the blueprint for the functioning of a special kind of community, a denatured home for the homeless defined by exceptional commitments to discipline and by renunciation of normal family and social life. Drawing on the ascetic urge that had long been percolating in Indic civilization, Buddhist monasticism circumscribed some activities in order to facilitate others. The growth of the meticulous and detailed legal system of the vinaya reflects a project by which forbidden activities were defined as precisely as possible so as, in turn, to define precisely who was a member of the community. The rule book aspired to definitiveness. The rules would be absolute, and offenses measured by incontrovertible criteria. It needed to be determinable whether the rule was broken or not. If it turned out that the rule could not be specified precisely around the sexual identity of the partner, the framers sought completeness and precision—"these three holes"; "even by the length of a sesame seed"—in a more circumscribed objectivism. The absoluteness of the rule thus established would then mirror the absoluteness of bodily act. Once such an act is performed it can't be undone; once the rule is broken the path of redress was strictly defined.

Hence would the awesome power of the body be restrained by the law book: by laws as obdurate as the unwieldy mass that was their ward. With its perceptibility and definitiveness a bodily act was eminently subject to such circumscription. And yet its ability to exceed its limits, to act stupidly and uncontrollably on its own, needed also to be reckoned with. The most observable and measurable marker by which to scrutinize the discipline of the person, the body was also known to be unmasterable and irresponsible. No matter, then, that the rule turned out ultimately to be undefinable. All the more complete the homology.

The equation between body and rule would allow the boundaries of the community to be defined. And the undeniable fact that in the end the body cannot be limited and controlled so cleanly hardly delegitimized the entire project; quite the contrary, the body's simultaneous markability and dangerous power to elude made it in many ways the ideal site for a line to be drawn in the sand. It is both well suited to legal regulation and its greatest challenge.

These elemental principles are especially pertinent to the sexuality of the body. Sexuality provides the body's greatest temptation, its greatest pleasure. As measurable and therefore regulatable as any bodily act, sex is also the impulse that the body finds most painful to resist. What better place to mark the triumph of the law than in the body's successful subordination to sexual prohibition? Tempting as it is to act upon sexual desire, it is here in that impulse that the law really can plant its flag, assert its suzerainty. And it is precisely for that reason that the rule aspires to be so strict, so absolute, and so well-defined. Sudinna's story thus turns out to

be the best possible illustration of such a rule: even the best of monks, for the best of reasons, must not let sex occur.

Sex provides for a community bound by bodily discipline the quintessential test of its very existence. Not only does the monk's sex break a law, the first rule of the vinaya. Given the way that the rule against sex signifies the very being of the community, to have sex breaks the basis of law itself. It breaks lawness. And the repression of sex by the individual upholds and signals respect for the principle of law *as such*. I have also noted that sex fundamentally threatens the community on practical grounds, too, that is, by threatening the birth of children and the demands of family life. But such a pragmatic reading of the significance of sex fails to appreciate the disciplinary and institutional implications of its surrender, which in symbolic import may well exceed any quotidian gains that the inhibition of sex facilitates. The decision to refuse sex means no less than to honor the rule of monastic law altogether; and therefore consent to, or mobilization of, the act of sex most fundamentally is the same law's most serious transgression.

CODA: TANTRIC SEX IN THE FACE OF THE *VINAYA*

If sex for monastic Buddhism must be a physically observable and measurable act, whose deliberate enactment or lack thereof destroys or demonstrates the preservation of an institution, we will probably want to say, once we have studied it, that tantric sex is all that too. But it will also turn out to be more than that. Tantric sex is often explicitly cast as the intentional violation of monastic inhibition, either merely to distinguish itself from the monastic way, or even, perversely, to claim that tantric sex achieves the aspirations of monastic discipline even better than does mere abstinence (Gyatso, 1998, 186, 195). That is to say, tantra, with its relentless antinomianism, ends up reinscribing the monastic proscription, at least in those tantric traditions where sexual climax is refused (Kvaerne 1975). To bring the body to the brink of sexual pleasure and then to refuse its consummation and rather to reverse the flow of sexual substances back into the body not only reinscribes the old regulation but makes it all the more powerful: again, what better way to swear one's allegiance to the rule than to say no in the face of the fullest, most imminent temptation? Yes, the old sesame-seed rule will have been broken. But it would seem that the line in the sand has simply been defined more precisely, or moved closer in, from penetration to orgasm.

And yet this move would already seem to signal a major sea change, since orgasm is an affair of pleasure and interior experience. This is not to lose sight of the fact that male orgasm, at least, also offers up an outwardly observable and measurable product. Nonetheless, tantric exercise overtly and deliberately engages subjective experience, and this is so not only

for those tantric traditions that do allow ejaculation, but even those that, as just mentioned, do not. For even there, the exercise focuses precisely upon the bliss of arousal, even short of total culmination. To be sure, that experience itself then becomes the site of the inscription of the law, but now it is a different law. It is a law of doctrine, or interpretation: the law that all is empty. What the Buddhist *tāntrika* is supposed to do in sexual yoga across the board is to realize the pleasure *is*—as *is* everything else—empty, that central Buddhist dictum. And the degree of success of this engagement is not entirely measurable; it is an assimilation of something from the outside, but it is the yogin's private affair, in the end.

Another fundamental dimension of tantric sex also militates against the strict physicalistic definition to which vinaya sex could aspire. This is the widespread requirement that the adept visualize his body-in-sex as the body of the buddha-deity. When the adept joins with his consort, he is Hevajra and she Nairātmya, to name one example. Their virtual bodies are inscribed with mantras, luminous channels, *cakras* (psycho-physical nodes) with lotus petals, and maṇḍalas of deities. So it is not the body as body that has tantric sex; rather, the body as overwritten by a set of iconographies. And if these, too, are drawn from a shared lexicon, their actual assimilation and appropriation is not directly observable at large. Rather, it is individually idiosyncratic. The yogin is free in his mind to visualize or not; and he can do so more or less clearly or fully. Simply put, in tantric sex the body is overwritten by the mind, a mind that does not look at the body at face value but rather attempts to reconstrue it according to a plan.

What does the engagement of subjectivity tell about tantric sex, then? Is it more "body-affirming," or less, than in monasticism? Does it allow greater bliss, or does it work to destroy it? I am not able to say. I certainly don't know how to estimate how "repressive" or "liberating" tantric sexual yoga would be. Limit this comment, then, to a first contrast with the salience of sex in monasticism: at least we can see clearly that sex is not, first and foremost, a physical fact in tantra in just the way it was in the vinaya. This is not to disqualify all consideration of outer appearance as we continue to try to understand tantric sex, however, and I would like to project here at least one way that the issue may still turn out to be critical. I am thinking of reputation, of the charisma and power that accrues to the male *tāntrika* who can make claim to prowess in sexual yoga. We see this surely in the Tibetan tantric imagination, in the mythology about Padmasambhava (and even in that of the female adept Yeshe Tsogyal: see Dowman 1984), as well as in the stories told of many historical male *tāntrikas*. The trouble is that we have not more than a bare inkling of the sociology of tantric groups, either in the late Indic Buddhist world or in Tibet, where indeed such communities were to be found at virtually every socioeconomic class, institutional affiliation, and political stature since at least the eleventh century. To say more, we will have to know a lot about

what defines the boundaries of the tantric community, as we do for monasticism. And then there is a particularly thorny problem of gender relations and the status of women in tantra.

But if there is anything we can presume about tantric sex and its inheritances from monastic tradition, it is that it owes much to the monastic recognition of the ethical potential of bodily regulation as such. Even as we discover that early Buddhist monasticism was less worried about desire and more concerned with the physicality of the body than we might have expected, we are probably going to learn as well that tantra is less at ease with the desires of the body than we have wanted to think.

Thanks to Steven Collins, Charles Hallisey, and Andy Rotman for answering various questions about the Pāli vinaya.

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Poetry contemplates itself, fuses with itself, and obliterates itself
in the crystallizations of language.
Apparitions, metamorphoses, volatilizations,
precipitations of presences.
These configurations are crystallized time:
although they are perpetually in motion,
they always point to the same hour—the hour of change.
Each one of them contains all the others, each one is inside the others . . .
—Octavio Paz, from "Monkey Grammarian"

WORD

Ryūichi Abé

Buddhism is arguably the most loquacious religion. Not only are its teachings available in hundreds and thousands of volumes, but its missionaries have worked avidly for centuries to render these scriptures into many Asian languages and wrote numerous commentaries on them in an even greater number of languages. The complete Buddhist canon has survived in Pāli, Tibetan, Chinese, Mongol, and Manchu. Generations of priests, nuns, and lay followers from diverse cultures, races, and social classes have eagerly chanted the words of the scripture as a popular ritual practice, aimed at producing merit. Copying out sacred texts was often considered even more meritorious than chanting and was practiced enthusiastically by rulers, clergy, and commoners. They duplicated the Buddhist scripture not only in diverse languages but also in various writing systems.

It is only natural, then, that Buddhists were keen on taking advantage of the progress in printing technology. In China, for example, in response

to the order by Emperor Sung Taizu (d. 976), the first woodblock print of the entire Buddhist canon, containing five thousand volumes of sacred texts, was completed in 971. Taizu's edition inspired similar printing projects throughout later history in China, Korea, and Japan. In addition to chanting, hand copying, and printing, which all reproduced sacred words in large quantities, Buddhists also invented some "high-tech" duplicating devices, such as ritual chanting of a sūtra title, thereby replacing the reading of the entire text (Stone 1998). Prayer wheels are another popular device—available in hand-held forms, as monuments, or as parts of temple architecture. They are designed to ritually multiply mantras, *dhāraṇī*s, scriptures, or even the entire Buddhist canon, so as to create merit for practitioners at high speed.

Buddhism is, in short, a mass producer of sacred words. It has permeated Asian history with its words in oral, written, and symbolic forms. Through the process of translation, Buddhist words stimulated diverse Asian languages and cultures to interact with one another and decisively shaped and colored their historical developments. In Tibet, it was the need to translate Indian Buddhist texts that is said to have given rise to the formulation of Tibetan grammar and orthography. Thus, the Tibetan language as a whole cannot be fully understood without the influence it received from Buddhism (Verhagen 1994). In China, the translation of Buddhist texts introduced into Chinese thousands of new words, new verse styles, and deviations from native grammatical rules, as well as the use of Chinese characters as phonetic signs to denote the sounds of Indian letters. Moreover, the neologisms in Buddhist texts were adopted in the writing of the literati and encouraged the growth of popular didactic literature. These developments helped close the gap in Chinese between written language and speech and eventually made possible the creation of the national language (Mair 1994). In Japan, the introduction of Esoteric Buddhism and the Sanskrit alphabet encouraged the invention of the native phonetic script and a gamut of new literature written in that script (Abé 1999, 388).

To facilitate their translation activities, Buddhist scholar-priests once produced a large number of concordances, lexicons, dictionaries, and encyclopedias. The words collected in these texts demonstrated not only how Buddhists defined key terms in the scripture but also how they understood the relationship between myriad things, events, and living beings in the world, on the one hand, and their names, on the other. Word entries in these reference books also show how certain things were grouped and classified into distinct categories, thereby engendering and sustaining the social order according to Buddhist cosmology (Chandra 1981). That is, Buddhist lexicographical terms, forming a verbal constellation of their own, reflect within themselves the Buddhist universe.

Translating countless texts was extremely costly and could often be carried out only through the patronage of rulers. In turn, the rulers who

supported translation projects justified their reigns by claiming that they were the protectors of Buddhist scriptures and thus the keepers of Buddhist words. The word *cakravartin*—the ideal Buddhist monarch who rules by the virtue of his or her dharma—was essential in building ideological discourse legitimizing rulership in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Mongolia, China, Japan, and other Asian kingdoms (Smith 1972). Since Buddhist texts have their own ways of describing desirable social actions and ideal class, family, and gender relations, as well as the relationship between the state and the clergy, the authorities were discreet in their control over the scriptures. This was particularly true in areas in which Buddhism confronted rival indigenous ideology, philosophy, and religions. A number of apocryphal texts resulted as a means of compromise between Buddhism and these systems, producing hitherto unknown usages of Buddhist terms. In that sense, Buddhist words—not only their meanings but the way they were handled (for example, translated, preserved, propagandized, regulated, and banned), as well as the manner in which they have been studied by modern scholars—are important depositories in which all sorts of political, social, and intellectual interactions left their traces (Lopez 1995, 2–10). Despite the authorities' effort to control their circulation, these words eventually found their way deeply into the lives of the masses. In cities and villages across vast areas of the Asian continent, names of the same buddhas, bodhisattvas, gods, goddesses, and even demigods, as well as sū̄tras containing these names, were chanted at local prayers, rituals, and festivals. Buddhist words became integral in the people's labor, craft, medicine, art, lore, mythologies, dreams, and unconscious.

ABOUT ENLIGHTENMENT: WORDS OR SILENCE

How, then, did Buddhism begin as a verbal teaching? There is a celebrated episode in the *Mahāvagga* of the vinaya (monastic code) (*Vinaya* 2:1.5.2 [Pāli Text Society edition; hereafter PTS]) in which Brahmā requests the Buddha to preach the dharma. On the bank of the Nairañjanā, under the bodhi tree, soon after his awakening, Śākyamuni remains silent, seated in meditation, and savors the flavor of the dharma. He recognizes that the dharma attained by him is profound, difficult to understand, hard to realize, serene, sublime, beyond discrimination, and subtle. In contrast, worldly people were attached to sensory objects and engrossed in delusions. Would it be possible for them to see the absolute calm attained by him? Śākyamuni did not therefore desire to teach his dharma. Then Brahmā, the Lord of Sahā Realm, observed that the world would perish without Śākyamuni Buddha's preaching of the dharma. Brahmā descended from his celestial abode, appeared before the Buddha and beseeched the Buddha to expound the truth he had realized. The Buddha then looked at the world with his eye of enlightenment. True, there were

many beings who were tainted, blunt, evil. But there were as many pure, intelligent, and good beings who would be saved by the Buddha. Having observed this, the Buddha announced to Brahmā his resolve to expound the dharma, left his seat of enlightenment in Bodhgayā, and went to Mṛgadāva Park at Banaras to deliver his first sermon.

What does this episode tell us about Buddhism and words, and Buddhism and language, in general? The story might suggest that the truth can only be grasped by direct experience, and that language is neither essential for nor conducive to the achievement of enlightenment. This line of reading of the episode is consistent with a view on the Buddhist attitude toward language held by many modern scholars: that Buddhism is generally skeptical about language because it considers that language obscures, rather than stimulates, the awakening experience; and therefore, that the ultimate truth rests in the silence of meditative experience and remains beyond the reach of words, concepts, and logic. Such a view seems to persist despite some important criticism in recent scholarship aimed at delivering a corrective (Faure 1993, 195; Payne 1998, 7–8).

On the other hand, if one looks at Buddhism and language in their cultural, social, and historical aspects, as I did at the beginning of this essay, the implication of the episode of Brahmā and Buddha can be reversed. The meditative silence may indeed have brought the enlightenment experience to Śākyamuni, but it was his words, his act of preaching, that gave rise to the Buddhist religion. In fact, there is a term in the scripture reserved to denote those "awakened ones" who merely attained release from saṃsāra for themselves. Their awakening was not far-reaching enough to give them the power to share their salvation with others. They are called *pratyekabuddha*s, or "solitary buddhas," and are given only peripheral roles in the scriptures. In contrast with these taciturn solitary buddhas, Śākyamuni Buddha and all other renowned buddhas in the scriptures are referred to as *saṃyak-saṃbuddha*, perfectly enlightened ones—those endowed with the eloquence to skillfully preach the dharma. They are also called *tathāgata*, or *ju-lai* in Chinese, those enlightened ones who have returned from thusness—that is, returned to our realm to guide beings here and lead them to the truth. Therefore, words have primacy over silence in enabling us to understand the rise and growth of Buddhism as a religious system.

Furthermore, a careful reading of scriptures suggests that the Buddha was not totally silent throughout the process of his awakening. On the contrary, we can identify some words that seem to be pivotal for his realization of enlightenment. In the same section of the vinaya where the episode of Brahmā and the Buddha occurs, one finds an *udāna*, monologic verses that the Buddha spontaneously uttered as his meditation deepened on the eve of his enlightenment.

When the dharma manifests itself vividly to the practitioner, who avidly exercises meditation, then all his doubts vanish. That is because he has learned the law of dependent co-origination [the first watch of the night].

When the dharma manifests itself vividly to the practitioner, who avidly exercises meditation, then all his doubts vanish. That is because he has learned how to cease all sorts of causes [the second watch of the night].

When the dharma manifests itself vividly to the practitioner, who avidly exercises meditation, he reestablishes himself firmly by crushing Mara's army [the third watch of the night].

Obviously, the verse was uttered by the Buddha not to relate his experience to others but for himself. But for what purpose? Did these words assist Śākyamuni in ascertaining his progress toward perfect enlightenment? If they did, why do we talk about enlightenment and language as if they were two opposing poles?

In chapter 2 of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* (*Taishō* 10, #279: 26b–c), which provides a rare insight into the Buddha's enlightenment experience, the Buddha sits upon his adamantine seat of enlightenment under the tree in Bodhgayā in the kingdom of Magadha. He remains silent but issues forth light from his mouth, beams of light emanating through the interstices between his teeth. Thereupon, a group of advanced bodhisattvas led by Samantabhadra begins its work of interpreting the meaning of the light. They "translate" the beams into human language and tirelessly depict in detail the inner landscape of the realm of enlightenment captured in the beams. These beams generated by the Buddha's mouth are obviously not of silence but the source of countless words. The beams need to be "filtered" through the bodhisattvas' bodies first, before their extremely dense and rich meaning becomes audible to humans. Here the Buddha remains silent precisely because his enlightenment is saturated with words.

It must be noted that there are diverse schools of thought within the Buddhist tradition. To begin with, Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna form three major streams; and in each of these streams many distinct schools can be identified. Even within a single school, such as the Yogācāra, there are significant differences in the ways the school developed in India, Tibet, and China. Despite these variations, can we say something consistent and meaningful about the Buddhist attitude toward words? Is there any particular element shared by all these schools that is responsible for the common misconception of Buddhism as pessimistic toward language's contribution to spiritual awakening and salvation?

In the first collection of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (PTS 1:2.10.18), one finds a strong caveat concerning our everyday use of language.

Those people who only think about things designated by words establish themselves only on things designated by names. If they do not thoroughly understand

[the falsehood of] things designated by names, they will be captured and ruled by death. However, if they thoroughly understand the falsehood of things designated by words and do not think that things designated by words truly exist, then they will not be captured and ruled by death. They become free of things that taint them and harm them.

Here words are linked directly with death and the suffering of saṃsāra, while freedom from words is equated with nirvāṇa, the nondeath. The teaching as such provides grounds for the common misunderstanding of Buddhism as essentially skeptical about language. But what makes words deathly harmful? The *Treatise of Great Perfection of Wisdom*, traditionally attributed to the celebrated Mādhyamika thinker Nāgārjuna, provides the following elucidation:

There are two kinds of name: those that have referents, and those that do not have actuals. Thus, there is a herb that is called "cauri." "Cauri" translates as "thief" in Chinese. The herb does not steal and does not rob. It is really not a thief, yet it is called "thief." Thus further, rabbit horns and tortoise hairs also have names only but do not have actuals. Though cloth is not non-existent like rabbit horns and tortoise hairs, yet it exists because causes and conditions combine and it does not exist because causes and conditions disperse. It is like a forest and like an army, which all have names but do not have actuals. (Robinson 1976, 50)

As these examples of collective nouns show clearly, it is language that makes all things in the world recognizable to and meaningful for human mind, whether or not they are "actuals." From the point of view represented by the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* passage cited earlier, all things are linguistic constructs. Words in everyday use substantiate the concepts that they invoked and give rise to particular objects that concepts isolate from other phenomena. Then these objects become reified and turn themselves into the objects of our desire, enslaving us by our own attachment to them. The world of objects now forms itself as saṃsāra, and therein beings suffer endless re-death. We thus forget that only as a result of our everyday use of language in its most vulgar sense do all things in the world appear to exist as they are, and words appear as mere labels attached to them. In other words, every time we use words, we learn the exact opposite of what Buddhism teaches: things are not empty, they possess intrinsic nature, and they exist independently from other things.

In the *Treatise on the Middle*, Nāgārjuna demonstrates how he uses his words to warn his audience about the danger of relying too heavily on words, ideas, and their objects. "People may grasp the idea, 'I will enter nirvāṇa when free from attachment, then nirvāṇa will be mine.' If so, they will have great grasp on attachment" (*Madhyamakakārikā* 16.9). "You should not say that things are empty. You should not say that things

are non-empty. You should not say that things are both empty and non-empty. You should not say that things are neither empty nor non-empty. That is because all these are stated based on temporary meaning" (ibid., 22.11). Thus, according to Nāgārjuna, all things indicated by words—including emptiness, the Buddhist ultimate truth—are without intrinsic nature, because they are in fact substantiated by the objectifying power of words.

What interests us most here for this study is that these cautions against words were made possible by the very use of words. In fact, Buddhist scriptures are not only liberal but eloquent in their use of words when offering their critique of words. Nāgārjuna's greatest contribution was perhaps his invention of a method to unleash the signifying power of words in order to reverse their illusory function. On the celebrated theory of the two truths, he states, "The buddhas expounded the dharma by means of two truths; the worldly truth [*saṃvṛti satya*] and the supreme truth [*paramārtha satya*]. Those who do not understand the distinction between the two truths do not know the deep reality of the Buddhist teaching. Without reliance on verbal expressions, the supreme cannot be expounded. Without grounding in the supreme, nirvāṇa is not realized" (*Madhyamakakārikā* 24.8–10). At first glance, Nāgārjuna seems simply to contrast the truth expressed by words, the "worldly truth," with the truth beyond the reach of language, the "supreme truth." The worldly linguistic truth may appear inferior to the supreme nonverbal truth. However, as Nāgārjuna makes clear in the statement above, the worldly truth is an integral part of attaining *prajñāpāramitā*, the perfection of wisdom.

Let us not forget that the "worldly truth" and the "supreme truth" are words, the words forming a pair. Therefore, the worldly truth and the supreme truth are not separate, independent entities. On the contrary, they are mutually dependent. The worldly truth is what the supreme truth is not, and vice versa. At the same time, there is no such thing as "worldly truth" unless there is the supreme truth; and no such thing as "supreme truth" without the worldly truth. They are each other's negativity, each other's emptiness. If both truths are emptiness, how can the worldly truth be inferior to the supreme truth? The supreme truth cannot even be known to us, not to mention realized, unless it is first spelled out as words—in the order of the worldly truth.

The foregoing observations urge us to revise the common view regarding Buddhism and language: the enlightenment experience and the ultimate truth grasped by that experience may be beyond the reach of words, but that is true only when words are used in the most trite and vulgar manner—that is, when words are employed as if they were labels attached to already existing objects outside language. However, both within and outside Buddhist traditions, there are many other ways in which we

use words creatively—as in poetry, narratives, liturgy, and ritual dramas. As we see below, in these generative languages, words manifest their full signifying force. There, words are seminal to and integral parts of the enlightenment experience.

A POETICS OF THE DHARMA: WORDS AND POWER

Among many terms that are central to the Buddhist religion, the word *dharma* is probably the most important. Roughly speaking, the following eight common usages of the term in the Buddhist texts can be identified: (1) ultimate reality, (2) the Buddhist teaching, (3) principle, law, standard, (4) morals and ethics, (5) phenomenal existence, (6) attributes, (7) categories of existences, and (8) fundamental elements of existence. In his classic study on the meaning of *dharma*, the Russian scholar Stcherbatsky (1923, 73, 75) concludes, "The conception of a dharma is the central point of the Buddhist doctrine. . . . But its inmost nature remains a riddle. What is dharma? It is inconceivable! It is subtle! No one will ever be able to tell what its real nature [*dharma-svabhāva*] is! It is transcendental!"

While no one many ever succeed in defining what dharma is exactly, it is probably wrong to interpret Stcherbatsky's statement as a mystification or romanticization. In the spirit of Nāgārjuna's two truths, let us remind ourselves that however transcendental it may be, *dharma* is also a word. Whatever the dharma may "really" be, it has to be spelled out as the word *dharma* in order for it to become identifiable to the human mind—that is, by establishing its own identity, *dharma-svabhāva*, as different from any other words, as what all other words are not in the network of our language system. In other words, the word *dharma* is made of, depends on, and is all other words in their negativity, their emptiness. Thus as with all other words and things, it is empty (*śūnya*), without intrinsic nature (*niḥsvabhāva*), and of dependent co-origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*). Dharma is inconceivable, subtle, and transcendental, as Stcherbatsky says. It is naturally so because whenever it is uttered, written, or conceived, the word *dharma*, in its linguistic presence, rather than in its meaning, is already emptiness. But so are all other words.

If words are empty, they are also neutral (*avyākṛta*) in their own nature. They become either good or bad depending on the way they are actually used. Therefore, despite the tendency in our everyday use of them to give rise to views contrary to the Buddhist teaching, words serve important functions in all Buddhist schools in encouraging their followers to attain their goals. But in what way can words be employed for the Buddhists to attain their goals, and how powerful can words be to assist their spiritual pursuit? What do we find as something particularly noteworthy in the actual use of words in Buddhist scriptures?

In the *Aggañña Suttanta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, the Buddha instructs Vāseṭṭha, who though wishing to become the Buddha's disciple, hesitates because by birth he is a brahman, of the highest, priestly class in ancient Indian society, and the Buddha, a *kṣatriya*, of the second class of warriors. The Buddha teaches that any beings out of the four classes who have become *bhikṣu*s, Buddhist clergy, and attained the rank of arhat, those who have reached nirvāṇa, are to be praised as the highest ones. The Buddha continues, "That is because they are the ones who have grasped the dharma. Vaseṭṭha, both in the present and in the future, it is the dharma that is supreme in the human realm. I, as the mendicant Gautama, belonged to the Śākya clan, and all those who belonged to that clan respect King Prasenajit of Kosalā as their ruler. Now, however, King Prasenajit respects me and bows low at my feet." Thus the Buddha demonstrates that his authority as a religious teacher rests on his innate identity with the dharma, and not on such extraneous mundane concerns as race, class, or birth. The Buddha, then, describes the ideal Buddhist practitioner.

> Vaseṭṭha, those whose faith in the Tathāgata is settled, rooted, established, and not shaken by mendicants, brahmans, heavenly beings, Māra, Brahmā, or by anyone in the world may rightly say, "I am the son of the Tathāgata, *born out of his mouth*, *born of the dharma*, *arisen from the dharma*, *heir of the dharma*." Why is it so? Because, Vaseṭṭha, these words are tantamount to the Tathāgata. Thus they are endowed with the body of the dharma, the body of the highest good, they are the ones who become the dharma, who became the highest good. (PTS *Dīgha Nikāya* 3:84)

The expressions "born out of his mouth (*mukhāto jato*)," "born of the dharma (*dhamma-ja*)," "arisen from the dharma (*dhamma-nimita*)," and "heir of the dharma (*dhamma-dāyada*)" are found in a number of scriptures to describe the master-disciple relationship. The significance of these figurative expressions must be immediately clear. Just like the words of the Buddha, those disciples "born out of his mouth" issued from the Buddha's speech act. They result from the power of the Buddha's words, and simultaneously personify that power. They have attained the new life of the enlightened ones congenitally with the words of the Buddha. They have realized release from saṃsāra by learning how the Buddha uses words. They are thus referred to as *śrāvaka*s, "hearers." The passage positions in an appositional relationship and thus equates these enlightened hearers not only with those who are created by the dharma, but also with the Buddha's children, the legitimate heirs of the Buddhist religion.

The previous quotation suggests two points regarding the power of words in the Buddhist scriptures. First, the authority of religious teachers in Buddhism rests ultimately in their ability to verbalize the dharma. Beings recognized as heirs of the dharma are those capable of expounding the

dharma as skillfully as the Buddha. They are "tantamount to the Tathāgata [*tathāgatassa abhivacana*]." Second, the most important goal of the Buddhist teaching appears to be to produce heirs of the dharma, enlightened teachers whose lineage succession assures the sustenance of Buddhism as a living religious tradition. All the words of the Buddhist scriptures can be seen as woven together into texts with this intention. Therefore, in an age when the Buddha is gone, they serve as a replacement for the Buddha, or more precisely, as the Buddha's mouth.

But do these teachers, identified as "heirs of the dharma born out of the Buddha's mouth," actually become *tathāgata*s, perfectly enlightened ones? Are the Buddha's words, and, by extension, the words of the scripture, capable of immediately producing another buddha or buddhas? If they are, why do we need scriptures serving as a simulacrum of the Buddha's mouth? In the *Shi-li-jing* in the Chinese *āgama* canon, Śākyamuni Buddha illustrates the difference between *tathāgata*s, perfectly enlightened ones, and arhats, the enlightened among the hearers.

> A tathāgata, a perfectly enlightened one, is one who awakens to a previously unknown dharma, who attains unsurpassed enlightenment in his present life, and who, reaching an unprecedentedly sublime state, preaches the true dharma to enlighten all śravakas. . . . Having attained dharma yet to be attained by others and mastered a pure practice yet to be mastered by others, having thoroughly understood and skillfully preached the Way to guide people, he causes śrāvakas to successfully follow the Way, to follow the dharma so that they will blissfully observe the great teacher's instructions, and to become well versed in the true dharma. These are the differences between the tathāgata the perfectly enlightened one, and the arhat. (*Taishō* 2, #99: 79c)

A *tathāgata* is therefore unique in his self-awakening ability, the ability to discover the dharma without the help of a teacher. He does so because in his countless previous lives as a bodhisattva, he encountered the buddhas of the distant past, received their teaching, and was given their *vyākaraṇa*, prediction, that the bodhisattva was destined to attain perfect enlightenment and would one day rise as a *tathāgata* called Śākyamuni. In his last transmigratory life, the bodhisattva relies on his extraordinary memory to recall all the knowledge he accumulated in his past lives and prepare himself for the enlightenment experience. Such is an essential premise on which scriptures, such as the *Buddhavaṃsa*, depict the lineage of the buddhas, linking buddhas of past, present, and future aeons by means of their karmic affinity, traversing the vast space of cosmic history.

Therefore, in the Buddha's dialogue with Vaseṭṭha, although these enlightened hearers are described as "tantamount to tathāgata," these words cannot be understood in their literal sense. The Buddha's words here are effective enough to create arhats but not so powerful as to give rise to *tathāgata*s. The arhats are recognized as "heirs of the dharma" because

they serve as vicars of the Buddha, those who maintain the dharma until the arrival of the next Buddha, Maitreya. Thus, in the *āgama* literature, on which the schools of Theravāda Buddhism base themselves, arhats are tantamount to *tathāgata*s in a metaphorical sense, more precisely as a metonymy—a reductive metaphor that figuratively intertwines in the scriptural narrative the lineage of the buddhas in cosmic history and the lineage of arhats in human history, two lineages that in fact belong to disparate orders.

THE BUDDHA'S WORD IN A MAHĀYĀNA SŪTRA

In Mahāyāna literature, we find a variant style in the way the efficacy of the Buddha's words is figured. In the *Lotus Sūtra*, with the time of his death drawing near, Śākyamuni Buddha announces to his audience that he is about to reveal the most advanced teaching called *ekayāna*, the one unifying vehicle, whose goal is to equally guide solitary buddhas and hearers, the followers of Hīnayāna as well as Mahāyāna bodhisattvas, into the path leading to the *tathāgata*s' perfect enlightenment. In chapter 3, Śāriputra, a leading arhat celebrated for his wisdom instantly grasps the gravity of the Buddha's words and declares, "Today, Lord, having been granted your unprecedented teaching, I have dismissed all doubts. Both my body and mind rest in perfect peace and comfort. *I have just realized that I am indeed a child of the Buddha, born out of his mouth, arisen from the dharma, heir to the Buddha's dharma*" (*Taishō* 9, #262: 10c). In response, the Buddha announces his *vyākaraṇa*, his prediction that Śāriputra will be a *tathāgata*: "Śāriputra, in the world of the future, having passed through countless, limitless and unthinkable number of eons, having served and worshiped billions of buddhas to uphold the true dharma, and having completed your bodhisattva practice, you will become a buddha. His name will be Padmaprabha . . . and his Buddha land is called Viraja" (ibid., 11b).

The passage beginning with "I have just realized" in Śāriputra's speech quoted above is almost identical, word for word, with that concerning Vaseṭṭha in the *Aggañña Suttanta*. However, the metaphors in Śāriputra's speech work in a significantly different way. Because of the Buddha's *vyākaraṇa*, it is now evident that, however long it may take in his transmigration, Śāriputra will eventually evolve into a *tathāgata*. Śāriputra is therefore a bodhisattva. His life is now understood as a "childhood stage" in the earlier lives of the future buddha Padmaprabha. Although Śāriputra is not literally tantamount to a *tathāgata* either, there is more truth in the metaphors here than in Vaseṭṭha's story in the way Śāriputra is described as "a child of the Buddha, born out of his mouth, arisen from the dharma, heir to the Buddha's dharma." In other words, through the *vyākaraṇa* as a figurative device, Śāriputra's individual life has become inclusive in the lineage of *tathāgata*s in the cosmic timescale. Figuratively,

therefore, these expressions work as synecdoche, in which those that are "metaphor" and those that are being "metaphored" are placed in the part-whole relationship.

This is a shocking revelation to arhats, who are described in the text as teachers of Hīnayāna, the lesser vehicle, because they are content merely with their own salvation and lack compassion to save others. However, from the arhats' viewpoint, it is utterly impossible and unnecessary for them to receive Śākyamuni Buddha's prediction that any of them will become a *tathāgata* or *tathāgata*s in their future lives. Why? Because, earlier in his teaching career, the same Buddha taught them the path of the arhat as a legitimate Buddhist practice and ascertained their attainment of nirvāṇa. That is, for the arhats there will be no more rebirth. They have reached the end point of their karmic evolution. Śākyamuni Buddha's *ekayāna* simply contradicts his teaching given earlier to them. If *ekayāna* is correct, the teaching of the arhats' path must be judged as a lie. In fact, in the sūtra, the Buddha spends a great deal of time explaining his previous teachings to arhats as not constituting falsehood. The Buddha states that his teaching of the path of arhathood was given as expedient means (*upāya*). That is, unless these *bhikṣu*s first studied the path of the arhat, they would not have a chance to understand *ekayāna*. However, the five thousand *bhikṣu*s disagree, reject *ekayāna*, and leave the assembly.

On the other hand, other followers of Hīnayāna, beginning with Śāriputra, understand the Buddha's true intention and express their resolve to study *ekayāna*. In chapter 6 of the sūtra, the Buddha gives the *vyākaraṇa* of attaining the buddhahood to his four senior hearer disciples, Mahākāśyapa, Mahāmaudgalyāyana, Subhūti, and Mahākātyāyana. In chapter 8, the range of disciples receiving the *vyākaraṇa* is expanded to Pūruṇa, Kaundinya, and five hundred arhats led by them; and in the next chapter to his attendant Ānanda, his son Rāhula, and two thousand hearers who have yet to attain arhathood. Finally, in chapters 12 and 13, the *vyākaraṇa*s are given to Mahāprajāpati, the Buddha's stepmother; Yaśodharā, the Buddha's former wife; and a multitude of nuns led by them. Even Devadatta, the Buddha's archenemy, practicing malice under the guise of a solitary buddha, receives the *vyākaraṇa*. All of them are now identified as buddhas-to-be, that is, bodhisattvas. Thus through the Buddha's words called *vyākaraṇa*, the sūtra texts perform what may be described as a generalization of the bodhisattva's path: that all beings now have the potential to live their lives as bodhisattvas and eventually to attain the rank of *tathāgata*s.

It is often pointed out that in the text of the *Lotus Sūtra*, there is no clear doctrinal exposition of what *ekayāna* is. The word *ekayāna* is mentioned throughout, but unlike typical Mahāyāna sūtras, the Buddha here never attempts to unfold its content in the form of doctrines. We find instead repeated eulogies to countless buddhas in the past, present, and future,

and in numerous world systems in the ten directions of the universe, who preach *ekayāna*, as does Śākyamuni Buddha. Accompanying these praises are various parables narrated as illustrations of the working of *upāya*, expedient means. As discussed above, the expedient means seems to be an indispensable element for the Buddha's teaching of *ekayāna*. Unless the path of the arhat is understood as an expedient, Śāriputra's present life as an arhat and his future life as a *tathāgata* cannot be joined in a synecdoche, a part-whole relationship. The Buddha expounded the *Lotus Sūtra* even at the risk of being accused of being a liar—that is, on the assumption that his expedient means would function properly.

It may be said that the *vyākaraṇa*s, which form the vertical strands linking episodes from one chapter with another, and the parables, the horizontal strands demonstrating the efficacy of the expedient means, are woven with one another to create the body of the sūtra's text. In the parable of the conjured city, for example, the Buddha relates an episode of travelers in search of the city of treasure. They wander into a dense and vast forest filled with dangerous animals. They lose their way and do not know how to advance. Then a wise and experienced guide appears and begins to lead them. But just before reaching their destination, the travelers become totally exhausted and cannot proceed any farther. The guide magically creates a marvelous city there, and thinking that they have already arrived at the city of treasure, the travelers happily rest. When they regain their strength, the guide erases the conjured city and points the travelers to the real city of treasure, which was already within their reach. Then the Buddha explains that the three teachings he delivered separately in the past, the teachings for solitary buddhas, for hearers, and for bodhisattvas, were preached as conjured cities, expedient means guiding practitioners to *ekayāna*, in which all three teachings converge. Obviously, *ekayāna* is considered here as superior to the bodhisattva path, which does not have the power to integrate the two Hīnayāna approaches within itself. Thus, at first glance, schematizing the parable appears quite simple: *ekayāna* is the goal; the three teachings, the means.

But this parable is a metaphor in the form of a story. The guide is at the same time the Buddha; the travelers, the followers of the three separate paths. This is why the Buddha serves as the model for students of the *Lotus Sūtra*. If so, is *ekayāna* also a means, the means to reach the final goal of buddhahood? But, again, the Buddha in the sūtra is not just another buddha. He is the one who excels in his verbal use of expedient means to the extreme, leading to the unfolding of *ekayāna*. Is it not the final goal, then, the expedient means, or more precisely, its mastery? Here the mastery of the expedient means is equated with and stands in place of buddhahood. For the followers of *ekayāna*, what matters most is the Buddha's words that eloquently employ the expedient means—the very words captured in the *Lotus Sūtra* text. That is to say, the text of the

Lotus Sūtra is equal to the Buddha's mouth, and by extension, his living presence, the Buddha's body.

This explains why the sūtra is extremely self-conscious about its textual presence and its preservation. Chanting, memorizing, and copying out the sūtra is encouraged throughout the text. In chapter 17, for example,the Buddha states that those beings who chant, memorize, and copy out the sūtra will generate as much merit as those who serve a living buddha, and greater merit than those who erect Buddhist towers, establish temples, and patronize the clergy. In chapter 10, the Buddha encourages those practitioners of the future, when the Buddha is gone, to worship the stūpas. But instead of enshrining the Buddha's relic there, the Buddha urges practitioners to place the sūtra texts in the stūpas. That is, in the ages following the Buddha's entering into nirvāṇa, his body is preserved *in* and *as* the sacred words demonstrating the expedient means. As a natural outcome of this line of thought, the sūtra describes those practitioners who thoroughly master the scriptural language of the text as powerful and authoritative as *tathāgata*s themselves. In the same chapter, the Buddha provides the following explanation:

> If there are beings who desire to expound the *Lotus Sūtra*, they are the ones who deserve to abide in the house of tathāgatas, dress in the robe of tathāgatas, and settle themselves in the seat of tathāgatas. . . . The house of tathāgatas is the great compassionate mind saving all sentient beings. The robe of tathāgatas means the mind of kindness and perseverance. The seat of tathāgatas is the emptiness of all things. (*Taishō* 9, #262: 31c)

According to the sūtra, those practitioners are as well versed as *tathāgata*s in their eloquent use of expedient means because of their knowledge of the *Lotus Sūtra*. Those who study the sūtra first approach the texts with their own knowledge of Buddhism, the paths of solitary buddhas, hearers, and bodhisattvas. Encouraged by the sūtra's expedient means, they are then guided into the teaching of *ekayāna*. Finally, when they fathom the sūtra's figure of speech through their physical acts of reading, chanting, writing, and studying the text, they gain freedom in their own use of the expedient means. In this scheme, *ekayāna* cannot be verbalized as a doctrinal formula. It represents the actual experience of the practitioners learning the sūtra's figurative language as the sublime display of expedient means—the experiential process through which the words of the scripture sink into the depths of their minds and become part of their bodies. The sūtra does not attempt to logically describe what *ekayāna* is, because that will at best merely explain what *ekayāna* is like to the readers. Instead, the sūtra strives to enable the readers to experience and, eventually, master *ekayāna*—to master the skillful employment of expedient means. It does so by showing how *ekayāna* manifests itself in the sūtra's own words, in the way the sūtra text puts together its words and makes

them work together. That is, the sūtra's text demonstrates how it embodies the utmost Buddhist teaching in its figurative acts and in the performative force of telling stories.

THE BUDDHA'S WORD IN AN ESOTERIC TEXT

Our discussion of the *Lotus Sūtra* suggests that text is a realm in which its words obtain through the practice of reading what may be called their physical or physiological dimensions. The words that came out of the author(s)—or, in the Buddhist scriptures, the words issued from the Buddha's mouth, thus, his life breath—become integral to the readers' beings through their work of studying the text. The body of the Buddha and the bodies of the practitioners coalesce in the body of the text. The text is no longer external to the practitioners; it is both inside and outside their bodies.

The physiology of words manifests itself most vividly in liturgical and ritual texts—the texts whose reading, as exemplified by esoteric Buddhist texts, cannot be complete without physical actions intended by the texts' words. In one such text, entitled *Vajrasattva's Fivefold Secret Meditation*, we find the following passage:

> Rely yourself in Bodhisattva Samantabhadra's samādhi and draw Vajrasattva into your body. Because of the divinity's empowerment, you instantaneously master countless dhāraṇīs and their meditations. By means of the unthinkable power of the dharma, you effortlessly transform your delusive attachment into vast, boundless virtue and wisdom accumulated by bodhisattvas who have traversed countless eons of transmigratory lives. *Then, instantaneously, you are born into the family of the buddhas, born of the mind of all the tathāgatas, born of the Buddha's mouth, born of the dharma, arisen from the dharma, heir of the dharma*. (*Taishō* 20, #1125: p535c)

The goal of this scripture, which is said to be expounded by the cosmic buddha Vairocana, is to teach its readers the ritual and meditative methods of transforming themselves into Vajrasattva, one of the principal esoteric divinities, who personifies the originally enlightened mind shared by all beings. He is the esoteric counterpart of bodhisattva Samantabhadra. But unlike Samantabhadra, who symbolizes the enlightened mind in its potential state, Vajrasattva manifests it as the realized wisdom that, just like the adamantine weapon *vajra*, destroys all sorts of delusions. The *Fivefold Secret* text shows in detail how the reader should imitate Vajrasattva in his "three mysteries": his body, speech, mind—Vajrasattva's physical, verbal, and mental acts. One of the text's sections depicts Vairocana's instruction on the ritual-meditative procedure for completing the practitioner's transformation into the divinity as follows:

> Now visualize yourself as Vajrasattva. See yourself abiding amidst the great full moon and sitting on the great lotus. Wear the jeweled crown of the five buddhas.

Smile brightly and make your body illumine, just like the moon. Now both inside and outside of your moon are bright and clear. Then, generate the great compassion and save all living beings in the countless worlds. Make them all attain the body of Vajrasattva, just like you have done so. . . . You see now that your three mysteries and the living beings' three mysteries intertwine, become perfectly identical, and permeate the space. Then, with your mind concentrated in your visions, utter this mantra: "Vajrasattva *āḥ*." (Ibid., 536c)

Mantras play the pivotal role in esoteric rituals. As the divinities'speech acts, which are also the exercise of body and mind, mantras integrate the physical and mental aspects of the ritual into the meditative practice of the three mysteries. The syllable *āḥ* in the above mantra is the *bīja*, the seed mantra—that is, Vajrasattva's life breath, Vajrasattva manifesting himself linguistically, as the single syllable *āḥ*. Various esoteric scriptures explain that *āḥ* is the fifth form of the vowel *a*, which, as in the prefix *a* in English, is a sonic manifestation of the emptiness as negativity. Thus, *a* is the initial awakening of the practitioner to the truth of emptiness; *ā*, the second form, the training based on that truth; *aṃ*, the third form, the enlightenment; *aḥ*, the fourth form, the attainment of nirvāṇa, the eternal calm; and *āḥ*, the fifth form, contains in itself all the four foregoing forms. *āḥ* thus is the perfect realization of the enlightened mind in which the practitioner attains the complete mastery in employing the expedient means. The five forms of *a* are not ciphers presenting these meanings, but they are understood as sonic manifestation of the force of emptiness in these five stages. As with *āḥ*, Vajrasattva embodies the perfect realization of the enlightened mind. In other words, in the esoteric Buddhist ritual space, the physical presence of mantra syllables is identical with the divinities' bodies.

It appears therefore that the ritual intention of uttering the mantra is twofold. First, the mantra declares the identity the practitioner has attained with Vajrasattva: "I am Vajrasattva-*āḥ*." Led by this declaration, the practitioner performs another meditative sequence in which he/she transforms desire, attachment, love, and pride, the four major constituents of delusion, into the four female divinities accompanying Vajrasattva. They personify the four delusive qualities transfigured—respectively, wisdom, lovingkindness, compassion, and endless effort. Surrounded by these four secret female divinities, the practitioner ritually creates around himself/herself the Vajrasattva maṇḍala of the Fivefold Secrets.

Second, and more radically, the mantra stands as proof of the practitioner's mastery of the three mysteries. Now it is the practitioner who is capable of procreating out of his/her mouth Vajrasattva, because in his mantra ritual, there is no distinction between the word *vajrasattva*, the syllable *āḥ*, and Vajrasattva's body. By exercising the ritual sequence the practitioner has learned, he/she produces countless *vajrasattva*s as the mantra words he/she utters, and turns into enlightened ones all the living

beings he/she saves in his/her meditation. Thus at the end of the ritual sequence, the text provides the practitioner with the highest praise.

> In this very life, you have mastered the buddhas' countless meditations and attained the oneness with the divinity's body. All the tathāgatas [of past, present and future] manifest themselves to you now. . . . O, you, Vajrasattva, are none other than bodhisattva Samantabhadra. You are the beloved child of all the tathāgatas, their enlightened mind. Therefore, you are their original teacher. You are all the tathāgatas. (Ibid., 583a)

Unlike Śāriputra in the *Lotus Sūtra*, the practitioner of *Vajrasattva's Fivefold Secret Meditation* attains immediately the rank of *tathāgata*. Here we need to distinguish the semantics of the passage quoted earlier in this section from its counterpart in the *Lotus Sūtra*. As we recall, in the context of the *Lotus Sūtra*, the expression "*born of the Buddha's mouth*, *born of the dharma*, *arisen from the dharma*, *heir of the dharma*" functions metaphorically. Śāriputra was not *really* born of the Buddha's mouth, of his sacred words. In contrast, the working of the same expression in the *Fivefold Secret Meditation* must be understood literally, or perhaps more appropriately, factually. The practitioner of the meditation, when he/she attains the oneness with Vajrasattva, thus becomes the heir of the dharma, is indeed born of the mantra and born of the buddha Vairocana's mouth that utters the mantra. That is, in the mantric ritual context, words not only denote but create reality. Whatever is said also becomes. The separation between words and events ceases. When you are named Vajrasattva, you become the enlightened one.

It is simple enough for the modern mind, with all the logocentric biases it inherits from the previous centuries, to dismiss such a relationship between words and their referents as merely fictional, and thus having no bearing in the reality of our everyday life. Words and events can be inseparable only in the ritual drama, only in the imagination of those who perform rituals. However, the goal of the esoteric practitioners is for them to imitate and thus *simulate* the body, speech, and mind of the enlightened beings. In the virtual reality of ritual space, they master how to act, speak, and think, just like buddhas and bodhisattvas. Novice students of aviation learn their trade in the flight simulator, without the danger of flying jumbo jets while their skills are immature. In the same manner, the practitioners of esoteric meditation need not be fully enlightened when they train themselves in the three mystery simulator. If aviators can fly real planes after completing their training in the simulator machines, is it not possible to assume that the spiritual skills the esoteric Buddhist trainees attain in their ritual training manifest their power in mundane everyday life as well? That is because not only the words of ritual language but the words of everyday life can and often do engender corresponding reality. We all know that vicious, vitriolic, vindictive, or violent words can

really hurt people. Sagacious words of advice can save people's lives. Then why do we need to prohibit ourselves from imagining the possibility of the words of enlightenment, the words that make people enlightened? This is the line of reasoning along which we read the passage in *Vajrasattva's Fivefold Secret Meditation.* The ritual aims at reconfiguring the practitioners' whole body/being/mind in the ritual language of enlightenment, reconstructing their selves with the Buddha's words. *Thus, instantaneously, you are born into the family of the buddhas, born of the mind of all the tathāgatas, born of the Buddha's mouth, born of the dharma, arisen from the dharma, heir of the dharma.*

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Our study of the identical passages from the *Aggañña Suttanta*, the *Lotus Sūtra*, and the *Fivefold Secret Meditation* indicates that diverse figurative devices available in Buddhist scriptural literature play important roles in these texts in empowering scriptural words, especially those words aimed at turning the readers/practitioners into masters of the dharma. But why do these texts rely on rhetorical, poetic, and ritual devices to achieve such an effect? As described earlier, from the Buddhist viewpoint, words in their everyday use have an inherent tendency to give us false impressions of all sorts of things comprising our world and our perception of them. That is, we use words on the premise that things exist by themselves, words are simply labels given to them, and we occupy a secure place from which to use words as tools for communication. However, when we employ words figuratively, such a premise is immediately challenged. Metaphors point at more than one thing at once; the fictional words of parables signify no external objects, nor do they denote things other than what the words may literally suggest; *vyākaraṇa*s collide events of past and present, or present and future, into a single narrative time; and mantras efface the semiological distance between words and things.

All these remind us of the primordial power within each word; that the act of naming gives rise to myriad things in the universe, and the work of separating and putting together words in our speech gives order to things named. In the same manner, words create our own identities—the order within is consciousness; without it is society. Words at their depth are action, labor, and performance, that is, *poiesis*, "production." As we have seen above, mantra, *dhāraṇī*, and other forms of Buddhist ritual language exemplify this poetic productive force (Padoux 1990, 386–401).

Poetic language splits open our everyday routinized reality by its transgression of grammatical rules, syntactical structure, and dictionary definitions. Through the cleavages it creates in our everyday reality, poetry produces new insights into our world and our selves. There, both objects and self become fluid again, showing that they are mutually

dependent, have no fixed quality, and are empty, only to be linked with each other anew to generate new visions and recreate our life and world (Kristeva 1969, 273–77; 1984, 99). It is at this depth of *poiesis* where words demonstrate their affinity most vividly with the Buddhist theory of emptiness, emptiness as generative and regenerative processes.

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MODERNITY

Marilyn Ivy

I live in rural Leverett, Massachusetts, and from a knoll in back of my house I can just see in the distance the tip of the gilded metalwork flames that crown the New England Peace Pagoda, Leverett's most celebrated site. A hand-lettered sign directs drivers off road and uphill to the pagoda, instantly conjuring images of oriental architectural exotica. Yet the Peace Pagoda is not the tiered tower that we associate with Buddhist temples in Japan and China. Instead, it is another version, more readily classified as a stūpa of South Asian provenance, a squat and enormous dome covered with white paint. Here and there the paint is peeling, yet the structure remains ready for circumambulation, its surface punctuated with alcoves sheltering images of the Buddha in various transhistorical guises. This pagoda is one of the main centers of worship in the United States of the Nipponzan Myōhōji Renge-kyō, a Japanese sect passionately devoted to world peace. Chanting as an homage to the *Lotus Sūtra* is the primary prac-

tice of this sect, but it is not to be confused with the larger and more prosperous mainstream Nichiren groups observing the same tradition. These Leverett adherents are a faithful and sometimes enigmatic presence at peace-work occasions in the United States and worldwide; they form their Buddhism by walking, striking ubiquitous handheld drums, and chanting, finding improbable resonance with native American activists, antinuclear demonstrators, witnesses for peace at Auschwitz. One of their other missions is to build peace pagodas throughout the world using entirely volunteer labor, and they have done so, starting with Japan in the 1950s and ongoing today. Construction in Leverett continues on an inventive temple and monastic quarters for the monks and nuns there, work that began more than ten years ago, after the original Japanese-style temple building mysteriously burned down a few weeks after its dedication in 1987.

I start this essay on modernity and its relationship to the study of Buddhism with the seeming improbability of this structure, these people, this Buddhism in the western Massachusetts hills—not in order to claim, as is all too often the case, that a wild and unreflective eclecticism is the mark of the modern (or of Buddhism). While it is only in the late twentieth century, as it turns out, that a Japanese Buddhist sect could have built a South Asian–inspired stūpa in western Massachusetts with American volunteer labor, a structure bordered on the north by an expatriate Cambodian *wat*, it is not primarily on the scope of the differences displayed there that I want to remark. Rather, I want to remark with some force on the historical relationships that have led to the proliferations of Buddhism and Buddhist thought, such that the relation of modernity to Buddhism is powerfully appropriate, no accident at all. In this case and this place, we have only to think of Japan and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to begin to think about Nipponzan Myōhōji's emergence in the wake of World War II and its relation to American peace activists. And to think about Cambodian *wat*s in the United States is to think first about Vietnam and then to Pol Pot's holocaust and the Cambodian diaspora that followed. Suddenly on a peaceful Leverett hilltop the forces of colonial domination, atomic genocide, and global capitalism emerge as inescapable concomitants of a contemporary Buddhism. These forces and a larger history of modernity shape what we can imagine as Buddhism or enact as Buddhist studies. Even more: to the extent that we can even talk about Buddhism as an ism, to that extent we are already talking about a modern object. Modernity, then, is the very ground and possibility of Buddhism itself. And Buddhism, as this essay aims to show, is also an inescapable constituent of what can be imagined as modernity.

The thought of Buddhism's constitutive modernity might strike many English-language readers as odd. For such readers, Buddhism evokes something that is essentially nonmodern and non-Western, despite its

current efflorescence in North America and Europe. With its oldest originations in India, and thence to the rest of Asia (East, Central, and Southeast), Buddhism—whether Tibetan Tantrism, Japanese Zen, or Thai forest meditation—evokes something at right angles to capitalist modernity. As such, these religious philosophies and technologies of selfhood have long borne the burden of representing the nonmodern in a variety of modern fantasies, colonial and postcolonial: from the American orientalist Lafcadio Hearn's nineteenth-century vision of a Buddhist East to the twentieth-century Tibetan meditation master Chögyam Trungpa's Shambala. In a related modality of appropriation, they have constituted the empty center around which alternative visions of modernity circle; Japanese Zen, for example, has often played the part of the Buddhist avant-garde. In both these modes, particular forms of Buddhism always evoke their primal national-cultural surround, one that is inevitably Asian: Zen is Japanese, Vipassana meditation is Burmese, Tibetan Buddhism is, well, Tibetan. Yet insofar as Buddhism is seen as a religion, it seems to indicate, as all religions do, the ineffable, the transcendent, that which is determinedly *not* reducible to any particular historical milieu or set of conditions. To the extent that the essential core of Buddhism is formed of techniques for quieting the mind and attaining liberation, it would seem to be all the more mobile and fluid, ready for transport to the global markets of enlightenment. Two modes of imagining Buddhism, then, one historically located and one transhistorical: (1) Buddhism as object of modern fantasy and longing, bearing the nostalgic freight of the premodern and the non-Western; (2) Buddhism as a transhistorical religion comprising transcendent technologies of liberation, thus intrinsically empty of historical signification or cultural baggage: the way it is, when- and wherever. This doubled imagining of Buddhism plays out a series of contradictions already implicit in the notion of modernity: modernity as a historical epoch and modernity as demarcating a relationship to temporality not limited by particular chronological boundaries (Osborne 1995).

What, then, is this modernity, that we should be so mindful of it? And what else can we say about its relation to Buddhism (and Buddhist studies?). For again, the ism of Buddhism already suggests a certain consolidation that must subsume what were and are a vast proliferation of practices, beliefs, and experiences. "Buddhism" is no different, in this regard, from other such consolidated categories formed in the wake of nineteenth-century colonialism and the varied post-Enlightenment projects of classification and rational systematization (Mitchell 1988). It is not so different from the formation of the nation-state itself, such that "Japan," for example, came to acquire a timeless and indisputable ethnocultural reality after the Meiji Restoration of 1868, a reality it did not possess before that transformation (Anderson 1991; Sakai 1991). To

understand Buddhism, then, as an object of Buddhist studies—an object made legible by the expansions of European colonialisms in Asia—we must grapple with the very stuff of the modern itself.

In a brief but celebrated essay entitled "Modernity—An Incomplete Project," critical theorist Jürgen Habermas comments on the motility of the notion of modernity. As he states—and has often been restated in various guises—"the term 'modern' again and again expresses the consciousness of an epoch that relates itself to the past of antiquity, in order to view itself as the result of a transition from the old to the new" (Habermas 1983, 3). Thus emerged the Latin notion of *modernus*, already in use during the late fifth century to demarcate the Christian present from the pagan past: epochs as different as the Renaissance, the twelfth century, and the late seventeenth century all considered themselves modern in relation to an antiquity that was often the object of mimetic veneration (Benavides 1998).

This oft-remarked antiquity of the notion of the modern has led many a commentator to argue for the expansion of the category, claiming that there is nothing original about the modernity of the nineteenth century and its aftermath. In this mode of thinking, the Romans, for example, were modern, and the notion of modernity is one that is applicable to any epoch that distinguishes itself from another along the axis of temporality (the new versus the old). Yet the repetitive possibilities of the term—such that the modern designates the same relationship to the world and to temporality wherever it appears—should not be accented to the exclusion of the reality of modern modernity's specific power of rupture. While we can muse on the wonder of ancient Romans calling themselves modern, we should resist the seduction of unmediated identification with them or imagine that their notion of the modern is the same as that which has animated the world most powerfully since the nineteenth century.

The Enlightenment (of the eighteenth-century French variety) transformed the European relationship to the past and to antiquity as model. With the discrediting of superstition (Max Weber's "disenchantment of the world"), the burgeoning belief in scientific progress (and all that implied for the perception of time), and the increasing cognizance of cultural difference after the discovery of the Americas, the past receded as the locus for emulation. A "radicalized consciousness which freed itself from all specific historical ties" emerged (Habermas 1983, 4). That is, modernity became established as a distinct form of temporality, a qualitative category set apart from past attempts to periodize time. Modern temporality came to be generalized as an "abstract temporality of qualitative newness" which could expand endlessly into a future without horizons (Koselleck 1985; Osborne 1995, 11). Thus Theodor Adorno once stated that "[m]odernity is a qualitative, not a chronological category" (Adorno [1951] 1974), and it is this generalized quality of empty, homogeneous time that establishes

modernity as more than a simple category of chronological periodization (Benjamin 1969a).

It is the tension between its vocation as a periodizing category and its status as demarcating a qualitative shift not bound by chronology that marks modernity as a dialectical notion, one that opens up the present to the reflexive time of its classification. It is the generalization of this split consciousness of time that is definitive of the high modernity of the nineteenth century and its aftermath, the epoch of industrial capitalism, the commodity form, mechanical reproduction, the city, and everyday life as a new category of experience (Benjamin 1969b; Harootunian 2000b; Lefebvre [1950] 1971). This experience of the modern was no less modern in Shanghai than in Dresden, in Nairobi than in Buenos Aires. Rather than appeal to a notion of "alternative modernities," this essay insists on a sense of coeval modernity, one which disarms the fetishization of historical and spatial origins (arguably, Europe) as somehow *privileged*; at the same time, a coeval modernity insists that modernity in China, or Sri Lanka, or Myanmar is not alternative but simply and coterminously saturated with the same contradictions and complexities of any modernity whatsoever (Harootunian 2000a, 163; Ivy 1995). What this means is not the flattening of local differences, but rather their proper appreciation in the face of what was and is a globalizing capitalism, precisely *productive* of differences through the engines of so-called uneven development. Thus, different locales had and have their own experiences of modernity, which already presumes temporal differences, revealing what Ernst Bloch once called the "synchronicity of the non-synchronous" (Bloch [1962] 1991).

Still, it is the height of paradox that this "radicalized consciousness which freed itself from all specific historical ties" should itself be so historically (and spatially) specific in its origins. It is the misrecognition of this specificity that allowed such a consciousness to imagine itself as both the desirable and necessary origin and endpoint of all human evolution, the universal subject of history. And it is the misrecognition that also led to the naming of this origin and endpoint as "the West." As Naoki Sakai states,

> [T]here is no inherent reason why the West/non-West opposition should determine the geographic perspective of modernity except for the fact that it definitely serves to establish the putative unity of the West, a nebulous but commanding positivity whose existence we have tended to take for granted. . . . In short, the West must represent the moment of the universal under which particulars are subsumed. Indeed, the West is particular in itself, but it also constitutes the universal point of reference in relation to which others recognize themselves as particularities. And, in this regard, the West thinks itself to be ubiquitous. (Sakai 1989, 94)

This ubiquity of the West is the spatialized universalization of the subject free from specific history. For this putative unity of the West to recognize

itself, a nonmodern (or premodern) spatialized Other was necessary: enter, among others, "the Orient" (closely accompanied by Buddhism).

It is important to stress two dimensions of the epochal novelty of modernity and its spatialization via the West/non-West dichotomy. The first is that of capitalism and the powers of the commodity form. The second is that of colonialism. In the first instance, to write about modernity without writing about the powers of capitalism evacuates the modern of perhaps its defining and definitive matrix: the era of the dominance of the commodity form (Lukács [1968] 1971). The dominance of the commodity in capitalism (again, not just the commodity per se, but the *domination* of commodity logic in all domains of existence) meant that all manner of incommensurable qualities, objects, beings, thought-forms, and worlds were able to be brought into equivalence through their transmutation via exchange. Capitalism—as the immense production, circulation, and consumption of commodities—meant that humans, equally, were turned into exchange values, since the literal selling of one's body as a free laborer formed the foundation of capitalist (and democratic) social relations. Indeed, the split time of the commodity—its specific materialization in use and its generalized dematerialization in exchange—inflects the dialectical temporality that modernity entails. The commodity form impelled the equalization and quantification of the human in ways thitherto unparalleled, enabling the novel transposition of subjects and objects, signs and things (Marx [1867] 1976; Lukács [1968] 1971).

The effort to bring together the logic of the commodity form with the social, to calibrate thought and economy (efforts undertaken differently by Karl Marx and Max Weber), finds its dark apotheosis in Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Beginning with Francis Bacon, the seventeenth-century father of experimental science, Horkheimer and Adorno trace the drive to "subdue the earth," in Bacon's words, to the objectifying logics of modern science, impelled into overdrive by the imperatives of capitalist production and consumption. They ponder the unspeakability of the trajectory from the Enlightenment to the Nazi death camps as "the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant" (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944]1991, 3). How is it that the finest attempts in European thought and philosophy to free mankind from the shackles of illusion should result in the utmost destruction and death? That, indeed, is the "dialectic of enlightenment," such that instrumental, objectifying reason—the reason installed as regnant by experimental science and philosophy, applied as the principle of governance in bureaucracies, and acting as the motive power of capitalism itself—becomes deathly unreason itself. Modernity is revealed as struck through with the very stuff of its antithesis (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 1991).

This imperative to rationalize, objectify, and quantify (reify—"thingify"—is a word that Georg Lukács made famous) also meant the

imperative to imperialize, to extend the subjugation of the world for power, pleasure, and profit in the name of Western civilization (Lukács [1968] 1971). Thus emerged the unity called "the Orient" ("the East") that formed the inferior, exterior alter to the spatiotemporal entity called "the Occident" ("the West"). As Edward Said (1979) and others have shown, the Orient-as-unity became necessary in order to constitute the putative unity and universality of the West. While Said's *Orientalism* explicitly focuses on the Near East as the terrain of Europe's most powerful dreams of the Orient, much of his argument retains its force when we think of the Orient as East Asia. Europeans located the Orient at the limit of universality, troped as eternally Other, projected as exotic and open for a conversion to a civilization that could never be fully achieved through the mimetic efforts of native peoples (Rafael 1993; Bhabha 1984). Knowledge of this Other of the West became the specialized purview of scholars, orientalists who learned the arcane languages and belief systems of the oriental "cultures" or "civilizations" (the realities of the modern nation-state were not allowed to disturb the notion of virtually timeless cultural wholes). The premier prerequisite for attaining the status of orientalist was a knowledge of oriental modes of inscription, fueled by the conviction that the written language supersedes vernacular productions.

Within this global political and economic formation emerged something that came to be known as Buddhism, the object of a nascent discipline that came to be known as Buddhology. Although knowledge of practices and beliefs about the Buddha circulated in Europe as early as the eleventh century, Philip Almond and others argue it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that Buddhism was constituted as a secure object of scholarly contemplation. Indeed, he states that it was at this time that the "term 'Buddhism' first made its appearance in English in the scholarly journals which appeared, in part at least, as a consequence of the developing imperial interests of both England and France in the Orient" (Almond 1988, 7). Approached through translation and decipherment (and thus sequestered as a high textual formation), often imagined as a stand-in for Asia itself, Buddhism became one of the most powerful ways to organize and comprehend the "oriental mind." Textual fetishism meant that the living practitioner was unnecessary: "once the texts have been gathered and the languages deciphered, the native interpreter is superfluous. . . . From that point on, Buddhism could be regarded as a vast but ultimately exhaustible world of texts" (Lopez 1995, 5). Not simply the effect of a preexisting orientalist logic, the constitution and establishment of Buddhism as a pan-Asian religion was also constitutive of an orientalist perspective itself (Almond 1988). In a discursive loop, the drive to "curate the Buddha" increasingly ensured that an object of study known as Buddhism would remain in place to justify this drive (Lopez 1995).

In a variety of ways familiar to those who have pondered the orientalist dialectic (or the paradoxes of anthropological knowledge), an imagined Buddhism became the lavish repository of nonmodern virtues and possibilities, at the same time that its practitioners remained as instances of an ever-regressive Asiatic mentality. Asia, with its text-based high civilizational resources, became a mediating formation between the true primitive (as discovered by the emergent discipline of ethnology in Africa, Melanesia, and the Americas) and the true (Western) modern. The polities of Asia became sites for the civilizing missions of European countries; the rational, classicized antecedents of Buddhism became the hopeful sign of indigenous civilization and pan-Asian rationality for the colonizers. Buddhism thus came to occupy the space of a premodern, non-Western "reason" formed through detached observation and nontheistic, rationalized techniques of tranquility (one thinks of the early Theravāda texts here and the European obsession with the rational purity of "primitive Buddhism"). This kind of rationality could retrospectively be seen to form a kind of preinheritance for modernity with its models of self-regulating rationalism.

In opposing instances, Buddhism occupied the place of magical premodernity; one thinks immediately of Tibetan "Lamaism" (Lopez 1998). Buddhism could be seen as coterminous with a seductive, resistant world of pantheism and superstition, lavish iconography and syncretic folk practices, spirits and ghosts, magic and mystery. These qualities were the components of Victorian visions of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism (virtually the same entity in this mode of thinking), visions attaining true orientalist proportions in their conjoined descriptions of the degenerate, irrational, but always seductive Tibet-as-Buddhist (Lopez 1998). Japan's syncretic mixture of "Shintoism" and "Mahāyāna Buddhism" also called down the ire of religious scholars, including Max Müller, the virtual inventor of religious studies as a discipline (in his fifty-volume work on the religions of the East, only one volume contains Mahāyāna texts) (Ketalaar 1990, 264–65).

In short, in close correspondence with the "Asia" that formed its spatial surround, "Buddhism" named a discursive unity that functioned as a mediation of the modern. Not preliterate, not tribal, but nevertheless partaking of the still-irrational substratum of its Asiatic practitioners, Buddhism gradually took its place as a formation between the truly premodern primitive and the uniquely endowed and ever-modern West, a place that correlated with the status of Asia in social Darwinist world history. An example that reveals this mediating position with stunning spatial clarity is the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893 in Chicago. There, the famous strip of land called the Midway (the word has persisted as designating a site of carnival attractions) displayed the world's cultural and racial profusion in an orderly progressive sequence, one which culminated in the

glorious White City, the Columbian Exposition itself. Entire faux environments sprang up on the Midway, complete with living inhabitants from every corner of the globe. Farthest from the White City were the environments of the "savage races"; closest were the racially "white" settlements of the Germans and Irish. Squarely in the middle, though, were the Far and Near Eastern "villages," the classic terrain of the Orient mediating between the primitive and the modern.

Max Weber, after all, outlined this positional logic in his grand typology of world religions. Weber was obsessed with the powers of religions to motivate or obstruct rationalization toward the modern. His compelling anatomy of the "Protestant ethic" revealed its intimate affinity with capitalism, now rendered strangely spiritual (Weber 1976). Weber opposed what he termed the inner-worldly asceticism of Protestantism to what he considered the extreme version of other-worldly mysticism, that of "early Buddhism" (the four terms of his religious typology could be cross-tabulated to produce the categories of Inner-Worldly Asceticism, Other-Worldly Mysticism, Other-Worldly Asceticism, and Inner-Worldly Mysticism). With other-worldliness, the trajectory moves away from concern with the world, as the "other-worldly mystic seeks to avoid subjective 'desire' because of its interference with the pursuit of salvation, which is defined as involving dissociation from the world and total loss of interest in its concerns" (Parsons 1963, lii). In Weber's typology, only inner-worldly asceticism provides the requisite leverage to establish the revolutionary social change necessary for capitalist takeoff—and thus for modal modernity. In the Weberian theory of modernity and capitalism, Buddhism takes its place as the mystically world-renouncing antithesis to capitalist asceticism, the limit to Western rationality in its own rationalized way. Take this description from Weber:

> At the opposite extreme from systems of religious ethics preoccupied with the control of economic affairs within the world stands the ultimate ethic of world-rejection, the mystical illuminative concentration of authentic ancient Buddhism (naturally not the completely altered manifestations Buddhism assumed in Tibetan, Chinese, and Japanese popular religions). Even this most world-rejecting ethic is "rational," in the sense that it produces a constantly alert control of all natural instinctive drives. . . . There is no path leading from this only really consistent position of world-flight to any economic ethic or to any rational social ethic. (Weber [1922] 1963, 266)

And Weber's sociology of religion situated Buddhism within a pan-Asiatic form of being, albeit with internal differences.

> Only ascetic Protestantism completely eliminated magic and the supernatural quest for salvation, of which the highest form was intellectualist, contemplative illumination. It alone created the religious motivations for seeking salvation primarily through immersion in one's worldly vocation (*Beruf*). . . . For the various

popular religions of Asia, in contrast to ascetic Protestantism, the world remained a great enchanted garden. . . . No path led from the magical religiosity of the non-intellectual classes of Asia to a rational, methodical control of life. Nor did any path lead to that methodical control from the world-accommodation of Confucianism, from the world-rejection of Buddhism, from the world-conquest of Islam, or from the messianic expectations and economic pariah law of Judaism. (Ibid., 269–70)

We can see that in Weber's paradigm of modernization, Buddhism and other Asian religions are a necessary inverse to the process of rationalization, the necessary opposite of the uniqueness of Western (Protestant) modernity with its capitalist spirit. And while "authentic ancient Buddhism" provides the "rational" paradigm of opposition to the spirit of rationalized modernity, its popularized amalgams in Central and East Asia were "naturally not" to be confused with the purity of Buddhist otherworldly mysticism.

The promise of a living, "authentic ancient Buddhism" also animated the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss in the mid-twentieth century, who in the typologizing mode of Weber (now forcefully expanded with structuralist logics) cast Buddhism as a kind of originary point of return for modernity.

Mankind has made three major religious attempts to free itself from persecution by the dead, the malevolence of the Beyond and the anguish of magic. Over intervals of approximately five hundred years, it originated in turn Buddhism, Christianity and Islam; it is a striking fact that each stage, far from constituting an advance on the previous one, should be seen rather as a regression. . . .

What else, indeed, have I learned from the masters who taught me . . . apart from a few scraps of wisdom which, when laid end to end, coincide with the meditation of the Sage at the foot of the tree? Every effort to understand destroys the object studied in favour of another object of a different nature; this second object requires from us a new effort which destroys it in favour of a third, and so on and so forth until we reach the one lasting presence, the point at which the distinction between meaning and the absence of meaning disappears: the same point from which we began. . . .

Buddhism can remain coherent while agreeing to respond to appeals from outside. It may even be that, over a vast area of the world, it has found the link that was missing from the chain. If the last phase of the dialectic leading to illumination is legitimate, then all the others which preceded and resembled it are legitimate too. . . . The final step . . . validates them all retroactively. . . . Between the Marxist critique, which frees man from his initial bondage . . . and the Buddhist critique which completes his liberation, there is neither opposition nor contradiction. Each is doing the same thing as the other, but on a different level. (Lévi-Strauss [1955] 1973, 408–12)

I have quoted Lévi-Strauss at some length here because of the revelatory force of his vision of Buddhism as a culmination of modernity, as a

zero-point of signification denoting the "same point from which we began." It is striking that the preeminent structural anthropologist of the twentieth century should have ended his extended meditation on the fate of the primitive within modernity, his ironically nostalgic homage to colonial travel literature and early ethnology, with a return (departure?) to Buddhism at journey's end. Emblematically, repetitively, a certain Buddhism (and is it irrelevant that this Buddhism was often called primitive Buddhism?) is called in to suture the wounds of the modern, functioning both as an original antithesis and redemptive telos of modernity.

The position of Buddhism within nineteenth- and twentieth-century global modernity, within a capitalizing world order, did not remain simply an externalized, Western discursive formation, however. Its projected capacity to bridge East and West became no less critical for the countries of Asia as for those of Europe. The imperatives of modernity meant that non-Western societies were emplotted within the dialectic of enlightenment, both internally and externally. In a process that both mirrored and exceeded external Westernization, the emerging nation-states of Asia found themselves in complex relations with their indigenous populations, lifeworlds, thought forms, and religions. In an overturning of entire semiotic constellations, extraordinary innovations and interventions in the preexisting discourse of modernity were accomplished (Karatani 1993). These innovations and interventions also included, in many cases, the incorporation of techniques of discipline, standardization, and surveillance established by European countries for the control of both home and colonized populations. Within the process of establishing nation-statehood and unified populations, and within the process of aesthetic and philosophical modernity, Buddhism often became a crucial third term. Nowhere was this mediation more important and emblematic than in Japan, the oft-remarked first non-Western nation-state to achieve the enviable status of modernity (largely secured in the prewar period by its own capital-intensive colonial and military endeavors, including the defeat of Russia in 1904). Within global dreams of crossing the boundaries of West and East, of modernity and premodernity, Buddhism played diametrically shifting roles in the formation of Japanese national identity, just as Japan itself occupied the double position of a non-Western modernity.

Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques* was originally published in France in the 1950s, the same decade that Robert Bellah's *Tokugawa Religion* appeared, a celebrated book devoted to showing how religion during the "early modern" Tokugawa period (1603–1868) was a motivating force in Japan's spectacular and disconcerting modernization. Finding an analog to Weber's Protestant ethic in a Japanese synthesis of Confucianism and Buddhism, an emphasis on practical action and hard work, *Tokugawa Religion* sought to explain the conundrum of Japan's capitalist success within the framework of a Weberian typology of modernization. In that

typology, modernity is and must be Western, so the spectacle of a non-Western modernity could only be accounted for within the parameters of a developmentalist schema that would locate various societies in their trajectories toward the model modernity of the West (in which the United States increasingly substituted for the West, a national entity for a putative geopolitical one). Of course, according to the orientalist double bind, chronologically secondary non-Western modernities could never quite achieve the true and original modernity of the West, and thus the labor of tracking the "convergence or divergence," as the phrase goes, from the West would never end. In Bellah's account, Japanese Buddhism, along with Confucianism, emphasized the "central values of achievement and particularism" that would lay the groundwork for capitalist takeoff in the Meiji period (Bellah 1957, 82). By inhabiting modernization theory as performed by Weber's American epigones (primarily Talcott Parsons), Bellah obscured questions of the critique of industrialism, of instrumental rationality, and of political modernity put forth by Frankfurt School theorists of the modern and as practiced by his contemporaries in Japan, such as Maruyama Masao. What was also obscured was that the very stress on the origin of modernity as western European was a denial of the possibility of coeval modernity, since Japanese modernity (and the modernity of the non-West in general) could only be seen as derivative (Harootunian 2000a).

What Bellah's book overlooked, focused as it was on the premodern precedents that would anticipate Japan's "successful" modernization, was the notoriously complicated relationship of Buddhism to the state and to society in Meiji Japan. With its entry into globally acknowledged nation-statehood, the national government and a range of allied forces sought to purge the body politic of traces of alien superstition and of outmoded religion. Nominally undertaken in the name of a modernizing *bunmei kaika*, or "civilization and enlightenment," the purge centered on Buddhism, which, with its continental provenance and claims of universality, came under profound attack as precisely such an alien formation. Attempts to segregate Buddhist elements from indigenous Shintō ones in the inevitably syncretic fusions of popular religion became a campaign of forcible separation (*shinbutsu bunri*, the "separation of Shintō and Buddhism"). Buddhism was faced with sustained persecution and outright extinction in some instances (Ketalaar 1990, x).

Already in 1854, the Tokugawa shōgunate had announced that "all the bells in temples throughout the land will be refashioned into cannon and rifles" as a response to the increasing pressure of foreign ships in Japanese waters (Ketalaar 1990, 3). Despite vociferous protests from temples and laypeople, the Tokugawa largely succeeded in their quest for metal, although their cannon and rifles could not stop the incursions of the foreign. Later nineteenth-century Buddhism increasingly came to be seen

by a range of Japanese forces as heretical, reactionary, and dangerous, an impediment to the promised illumination of the new age of Meiji (which means "illuminated rule"). This casting of Buddhism as heretical was, however, to be refashioned in later years as the basis for an enduring image of Buddhism as martyred, just as it also led to a future recasting of Buddhism in progressive, reformist terms: a new Buddhism (*shin bukkyō)* for a new age of modernity (Ketelaar 1990). Again, the parameters of Buddhism were calibrated with the sociopolitical matrix of Japan's entry into global modernity.

And global it was (and is). How did it happen that the glories of Buddhism, anciently established, tightly laminated to all that revealed the cultural splendor of Japan, came under such sustained attack in the Meiji period? One response to this question would rather ask a reverse query: how is it that something called Buddhism came to be a metonym for Japan writ large? For it is clear that many in the Meiji period, from government bureaucrats to Shintō priests, from modernizing intellectuals to rural landholders were most assuredly *not* equating Japan with Buddhism. To them, Buddhism (and what counted as Buddhism was precisely at stake here) was alternately degenerate, foreign, nonscientific, parasitic, and seditious: Japan-not. Yet by the 1920s, this image of Buddhism had largely been turned around by a generation of reformists and promulgated throughout the world as the essential religious core of Japanese culture, both a repository of pure national spirit and a thoroughly modern and cosmopolitan religion. Even more: certain putatively core notions of Buddhism, particularly in Zen (such as *mu*, "absolute nothingness"), later came to be transformed into the generative powers of what would be asserted as a pan-modernity of the East, led by Japan as the paragon of Eastern aesthetics, values, and political forms (and military might). Buddhism became *Eastern* Buddhism, the quintessence of the "ideals of the East," as the Japanese cultural ideologue Okakura Kakuzō phrased it.

The World's Parliament of Religions in 1893, held in conjunction with the World's Columbian Exposition, was the first international extravaganza ostensibly devoted to showing the unity of all religions, albeit with the insistent, appropriative gestures of an imperially confident Christianity. Buddhist priests from Japan spoke to eager audiences in Chicago, but their appearances became little more than occasions for the display of oriental splendor (the press remarked repeatedly on their resplendent costumes) and the confused reception of their lectures on the universal powers of Buddhism. But it was at this parliament that the category of Eastern Buddhism (a common typology of nineteenth-century Buddhology consisted of Southern, Northern, and Eastern—that is, Japanese—Buddhism) was recaptured from its earlier Buddhological image as heretical, as a monstrous hybrid of animistic Shintō and bowdlerized Buddhism (not unlike Tibetan "Lamaism," a hideous descendant of "primitive

Buddhism"). Recaptured at least for the sake of Japanese in Japan, where the returning priests were greeted as heroes. Seeking to take the message of a universal, humanistic Buddhism beyond the confines of the archipelago, these priests succeeded perhaps most conspicuously in raising the fortunes of Buddhism at home, freshly articulating the possibilities of a unified and cosmopolitan Buddhism as a world religion appropriate for a world-class power. With Japan's pan-Asian aspirations clearly disclosed in the wake of triumphs in the Sino-Japanese War of 1895 and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904, Buddhism's foreign taint could now be transformed into an asset, the very attribute that spiritually linked the island nation to the rest of (Buddhist) Asia in the cooperatively imagined expansions of empire.

Perhaps the most powerful effect of this reimagining of a modern, universal Eastern Buddhism as the rival to Western Christianity's imperializing mission is the disturbing and revelatory career of Zen. Virtually concocted in the Meiji period as the quintessence of Eastern Buddhism, a condensed summation of Buddhism in its emphasis on unmediated experience, this modernized Zen essentialized the wisdom of the East in an exportable form. What is remarkable is that Zen is the only form of Buddhism that was globally disseminated not through the labors of Western Buddhologists, but rather through the efforts of indigenous proselytizers (what Robert Sharf [1995, 108] has called "Japanese intellectuals and globe-trotting Zen priests"). Part of the long reaction to persecution at home and the resulting imperatives to modernize and internationalize in the name of Japanese nationalism, Zen missionizing sought to portray Zen as a pure, immanent experience of suchness, devoid of intrinsic limitations but *nevertheless* emblematic of a unique Japanese spirit. At the same time that a singular patrimony of *bushidō* ("the way of the warrior"), ceremonialism (as in tea), superhuman discipline, and aesthetic refinement was being produced and promulgated by a creative group of cultural brokers (Okakura Kakuzō and his *Book of Tea*; Nitobe Inazō's *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*, both published in English in 1900), Zen took its place as the empty signifier of last resort, that which would assure the final ineffability of the Japanese sensibility. Perhaps the most consequential effect of this ascension of Zen was the way it became intimately sutured to *bushidō*, as this presumed way of the samurai served as a historical analog for the dark (and soon to be darker) fantasies of twentieth-century Japanese nationalism (Sharf 1995, 112).

The greatest exponent of Zen in the West, the person almost completely responsible for its prominence in contemporary thought, was D. T. Suzuki (1870–1966). Closely affiliated with Paul Carus (1852–1919), a German-American philosopher devoted to establishing the unity of world religions (and particularly devoted to Buddhism), Suzuki had a prolific career in Japan and abroad as a translator, apologist for Mahāyāna

Buddhism, and finally, as the first credible exponent of Zen in English. He was also a friend of the Kyoto philosopher Nishida Kitarō, whose radical amalgam of European philosophy and Buddhist thought was to forge a new insistence on nonduality and "pure experience" (*junsui keiken*). This insistence would be expanded and diversified in the thought of the so-called Kyoto School, the group of philosophers most noted for their theorizing of empire in the midst of World War II. Known for their participation in the notorious 1942 symposia on the philosophy of world history and "overcoming the modern" (*kindai no chōkoku*) held in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, their appeal to a unique Japanese sensibility of empty, nondual experience—of a spiritual transcendence of the technological and capitalist confines of modernity—was tightly interwoven with Heideggerian-inflected defenses of the emperor's will and the space of empire (Heisig and Maraldo 1994). Within these extraordinarily adept rationalizations of imperialism (what some would call fascism), Zen notions, now transfigured, played a profound role.

That the celebrated nonduality of the Zen experience could be appropriated to serve as the empty, potent underpinning of fascist ideology might seem curious, even unthinkable. But the notion of *mu* as absolute nothingness eliminates the I-Thou distinction, the basis for the social, in a dream of unmediated harmony secured, in this case, by the emperor (van Bragt 1994). Such erasure of mediation and of social conflict, of the irreducible singularity and finality of the Other (the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas tirelessly insisted on this finality), while perhaps descriptive of a certain Zen ethic, is also chillingly descriptive of fascist politics. The uses of Zen in Japanese fascism simply point, once again, to the paradoxes of modernity and the impossibility of overcoming these paradoxes while ineluctably enclosed within them. The Japanese philosophers' attempts to get out of this enclosure, to overcome modernity by a leap out of the Weberian "iron cage" of the imperialist West, could be achieved in practice by one thing and one thing only: total war. Philosophical reflections on the unique Japanese sensibility of Zen-inspired nonduality and communalist identification, of harmony and fusion, led straight as an arrow to the logic of total war, epitomized by the slogan *ichioku gyokusai*: the "total suicidal death of one hundred million" (Sakai 1997).

We know the results of this drive toward total war, as we know its relationship to the catastrophes of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. What must not be forgotten in tracing Japan's trajectory toward World War II and its historical relationship to Buddhism is its attempt to escape from Western racial and economic domination and its desire to destroy the dilemma of never being modern enough, of being "overcome by modernity," in H. D. Harootunian's words (Harootunian 2000b). That the methods used to escape such domination were themselves oppressive underscores again the

impossibility of overcoming the modern, even at the price of unimaginable apocalypse.

With the war and its relationship to Zen, we see perhaps the most extreme torque put on the foundationally antithetical tension of Buddhism as formative to modernity, epitomized in the relentless (but not inevitable) historical progression that connects Buddhology to Hiroshima. Not that the relationship of Buddhism and modern politics is confined to Japan; hardly. Because of Japan's long-established status in the West as the single non-Western yet modernized nation-state, the vicissitudes of Buddhism there are perhaps the most starkly revelatory in thinking about modernity for the study of Buddhism. Yet no nation-state with a Buddhist past has been spared the fundamental modern imperative to rationalize, to capitalize, to systematize, all the while with the insistence that Buddhism stand in for the nation-culture and ancient community, for that which would precisely resist or exceed modernization (even if, as in the case of Tibet, the insistence emanates most anxiously from the outside). The Theosophist Colonel Henry Steel Olcott's production of a Buddhist catechism for use by Sri Lankan Buddhists and his position as a patron of "Protestant Buddhism"; Thailand's various amalgams of royalism and Buddhism; Tibet's global function as the once and future Buddhist utopia in the wake of Chinese occupation all point to the fraught crossings of Buddhism and the modern (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988; Lopez 1998; Prothero 1996; Tambiah 1984).

Buddhism in the twenty-first century follows the flow of diasporic communities, commodity desire, and the variable powers of a diacritically mobilized Buddhist imaginary, if one might call it that. Zen didn't end with World War II, for example, but has reincarnated as a method to train corporate executives for the rigors of economic samuraihood and groups of reluctant students for the examination wars. It also has a quieter afterlife, in some places, as the serious lifelong undertaking of *zazen*, seated mediation. Zen resurfaced with promiscuous modernist vigor in the American 1950s with its Beat evocations in Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder, and Allen Ginsberg and its aesthetic appropriation through John Cage and Merce Cunningham, among many others. Zen also named the rigorous practice of sitting for a range of practitioners and practice communities in the United States and elsewhere, led at first by Japanese teachers and then, from the 1960s and 1970s onward, by non-Japanese ones (Philip Kapleau and Robert Aitken are two of that first American generation). The exodus of the Dalai Lama and other Buddhists from Tibet, their relocation to India and dispersal to the United States and Europe, facilitated an explosion of interest in Buddhism (and revealed the extent to which Buddhism could be conflated, yet again, with culture and nation). Buddhism and the practices of Buddhism flourish unabated, the stuff of dreams and the substance of modernity itself.

For to speak of the political valences of Buddhism—such that Zen, for example, provided key resources for the justification of war in Japan—is not to deny the interior experiences that practitioners might have, the sudden enlightenment they might bump into (or that might bump into them), the peace that might pass all understanding after seven days of a silent retreat. Nor is it to belittle such experiences or the fierce desires for them, all the fiercer for their being devalued in a modern capitalist order. But it is to say that to organize such epiphanic moments repetitively as the category of "pure experience," in the manner of Nishida Kitarō, is to make them potentially open to uneasy and dangerous appropriations. To do so is also performatively to contradict Buddhist writings themselves, which would work to undo the very distinction between "pure" and "impure" (and, no less, the distinction between the experiential and the nonexperiential) (Faure 1995, 250). We might be advised to think about the Buddhism effect, reminding us that Buddhism is an effect of historical relations of power, an effect of discourse (Foucault [1966] 1994). And reminding us that an effect is not thereby made powerless, but is precisely made *effective*: it is through being rendered the endpoint in a chain of discursive relations that a notion like Buddhism can produce its own effects in the world (Faure 1995; Sharf 1998). While I have lingered on some of Buddhism's troubling historical legacies within modernity, it has had other political effects. To produce political effects from a standpoint of critical compassion is the unquestionably sincere intention of committed engaged Buddhists today, for example, in their work for peace, economic equity, prison justice, and ecological restoration. Their work has all the more consequence to the extent that it is not equated with any particular national formation, but forms a sense of intentional communality outside the national frame.

For to return to the originary split at the start of this essay, Buddhism is doubled as a discursive object, both putatively transhistorical in its gnostic promises and inevitably historical (and modern) in its forms of social effectivity. Modernity, similarly, cannot be contained as a chronological category, but troubles historical periodization by its reflexive consciousness of temporality as the ever-new. The liberation for which Buddhist practitioners long might be imagined as existing in phantasmatic relation with the Buddhism effect, as pressuring historicity itself. Not unlike Jacques Lacan's notion of the Real—that dimension of experience not explicitly accommodated within the symbolic order but which repeatedly returns, nevertheless, as the lapses, horrors, and excesses of everyday life—the enlightenment that Buddhism proffers is not nonexistent (nor, for that matter, existent). Rather, it subsists in phantasmatic, undecidable relationship to that which would enframe it: modern Buddhism, or Buddhism-as-modern. Enlightenment so-called, *satori* itself, is not necessarily judged spurious by a genealogical critique of Buddhism as a modern

formation. Indeed, at the end (or beginning) of the line, what *is* the sound of one hand clapping, anyway? The sound of that one hand clapping—as clichéd as it must be—hauntingly reverberates inside the labyrinths of modern consciousness. To attempt to fix that sound, to make it echo meaningfully within modern domains of signification, is to repeat the ancient, compulsory, and useless labor of rendering the Real, of attempting to bring into language something ghostlier than the modern invocations of "absolute nothingness" or "pure experience" can indicate. Horkheimer and Adorno ([1944] 1991, 5) characterize modern instrumental rationality by saying, "There is to be no mystery—which means, too, no wish to reveal mystery." The mystifying use of mystery—the *mu* of Nishida, for example—is not the same as the hard mystery of breath and body that ineluctably troubles the dissolvent rationality of modernity, remaining as an element around which its impossibilities are articulated.

When former Zen teacher Toni Packer asks her students to listen to birds outside the practice hall and imitate their cries, where is Buddhism? When the Dalai Lama says, "My religion is kindness," where is Buddhism then? Where is Buddhism in the practice of radical attention proffered by contemporary mindfulness meditation teachers? Perhaps we should talk about post-Buddhism instead, an amalgam of therapy, breath awareness, and mindfulness techniques suited for the inhabitants of postmodernity. Yet as in "post"-anything, the *post* still bears the trace of that which has been superseded: post-Buddhism is still post-*Buddhism*. And postmodernity is still post-*modernity*, still shot through with its constitutive contradictions: modernity as the generalized opening of temporal horizons and modernity as specifying a particular time, the time of now, our times. Modernity and its *post*s will continue to mark and be marked by that difference, and by Buddhism as well. The New England Peace Pagoda's nuns and monks chant *Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō* with American Indian Movement activists in Leverett: Buddhism performs the opening of a transhistorical vision of being, Buddhism enacts the inescapable time of modernity.

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BUDDHISM AND MODERNITY, a series edited by Donald S. Lopez Jr.

Cover illustration: Gonkar Gyatso, *Sobo Buddha*. Oil on canvas. 120 × 75 cm (1997). Used by permission of the artist.

The University of Chicago Press www.press.uchicago.edu

ISBN 0-226-49315-6

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